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Exhaustivity in Wh-questions in Turkish

Abstract: This paper is concerned with the phenomenon known as exhaustivity in wh-questions in Turkish. It addresses the single question how the exhaustive reading in wh-questions is achieved in the language. Based on new data on the issue at hand, it will be shown that it is the presence of the plural marker *-lar* on the wh-phrase itself that gives rise to the specifically exhaustive reading whereas this is not necessarily the case with non-plural-marked wh-phrases. Therefore, it is argued that plural marking itself acts as the presuppositional exhaustivity marker since it evokes an exhaustivity requirement on the answer itself. This, nevertheless, is limited to single wh-questions only in the language since multiple wh-questions generally require exhaustive answers. The findings of the current study have certain implications for theories of exhaustive interpretations of wh-questions and is in agreement with the findings of those analyses where wh-questions are regarded as not inherently exhaustive.

Keywords: exhaustivity, wh-questions, plural marking, presuppositionality, Turkish

1 Introduction

It is well-attested in previous work on exhaustivity that a wh-question has an exhaustive reading if the answer lists or exhausts the set of all the relevant answers satisfying the predicate in a given situation (Zimmermann 2007; Xiang 2016; Fekete et al. 2018).¹ This is exemplified in (1).

¹ The exhaustive reading is also known as the *universal* or *maximal* reading (see e.g. Caponigro et al. 2012).

(1) A: Who is eating an apple?

B: Ahmet, Mehmet and Ayşe (are eating an apple).

B': #Ahmet (is eating an apple).

What is important in (1) is that in a situation where Ahmet, Mehmet and Ayşe are eating an apple, the answer to the question in (1A) needs to be the one in (1B) where all the relevant answers are given. The answer in (1B'), on the other hand, is not felicitous since it only provides a partial list and does not satisfy the background predicate. In that respect, the exhaustive reading is also referred to as mention-all reading in the relevant work.

Although exhaustivity is argued to be a universal property of wh-questions and rules for their interpretation are constant (Schulz 2015), languages still seem to employ different strategies to exclusively mark exhaustivity. For instance, the presence of the q-(uestion) particle in languages like Japanese affects the meaning of the wh-question (Miyagawa 2019, in press). This is shown in (2) and (3).²

(2) Anata-wa pikunikku-ni nani-o motekkuru no?

you-TOP picnic-to what-ACC bring Q

'What will you bring to the picnic?'

(3) Anata-wa pikunikku-ni nani-o motekkuru?

you-TOP picnic-to what-ACC bring

'What will you bring to the picnic?'

Miyagawa (2020) argues that the presence of the q-particle in (2) indicates that the speaker is expecting an answer that would exhaustively list the items that the hearer will bring to the picnic (e.g. chicken pie, ice-cream and salad). On the other hand, the omission of the q-particle in (3) shows that the speaker is not necessarily expecting an exhaustive answer. A partial list would satisfy as an answer (e.g. chicken pie), even though it does not necessarily exclude providing an exhaustive answer. Note that Japanese is not the only language that marks exhaustivity in wh-questions. German (Indo-European), Hausa (Afro-Asiatic) and

² The abbreviations in the glosses: 2 = second person; 3 = third person; ABL = ablative case; ACC = accusative case; DAT = dative case; EXH = exhaustivity marker; FNOM = factive nominal marker; FUT = future marker; LOC = locative case; M = masculine; PAST = past tense; PERF = perfect aspect; PL = plural; POSS = possessive marker; PROG = progressive aspect; Q = question particle; REL = relative tense; REL.CL = relative clitic; SG = singular; TOP = topic marker

Mandarin (Chinese) are three typologically different languages in which one can find an exhaustivity marker in wh-questions, as exemplified below (Zimmermann, 2007; Hartmann and Zimmermann 2007; Dong 2008; Xiang 2016).

(4) a. Wer hat bei SuB11 vorgetragen? (German)

who has at SuB11 presented

‘Who presented at SuB11?’

b. Wer hat *alles* bei SuB11 vorgetragen?

who has all at SuB11 presented

‘Who-ALL presented at SuB11?’

(5) a. Wàanee ya zoo? (Hausa)

who 3SG.M.PERF.REL come

‘Who came?’

b. Wàanee-*nèe* ya zoo?

who-EXH 3SG.M.PERF.REL come

‘Who all came?’

(6) a. Shui keyi jiao yuyanxue jichu? (Mandarin)

who can teach linguistics introduction

‘Who can teach Introduction to Linguistics?’

b. *Dou* shui keyi jiao yuyanxue jichu?

all who can teach linguistics introduction

‘Who all can teach Introduction to Linguistics?’

The questions in (4a), (5a) and (6a) are ordinary wh-questions where exhaustivity are not overtly marked. In that sense, they do not necessarily have the exhaustive reading. On the other hand, the presence of the so called quantifying question particle *alles* ‘all’ in German, as in (4b), the exhaustive marker *-nèe* in Hausa, as in (5b), and the pre-exhaustification marker *dou* in Mandarin, as in (6b), yields the exhaustive reading in that the answers to these questions need to provide a complete list of individuals. Any other answer that is not exhaustive will not be felicitous in these cases.

Note, however, that not all languages seem to employ similar strategies to mark exhaustivity in wh-questions. For instance, there is no question particle or a dedicated marker in Turkish

wh-questions for exhaustivity. The question that arises is how exhaustive reading is achieved, if it could be achieved at all in wh-questions. Is there a way to indicate exhaustivity in the absence of these markers? In the next section, I will address these questions and show how exhaustivity is marked in the language.

2 Exhaustivity in Turkish wh-questions

It was noted in the previous section that there is no q-particle in wh-questions in Turkish although there is one in yes/no questions, as exemplified in (7) and (8).

(7) Ahmet kim-i gör-dü?
Ahmet who-ACC see-PAST
'Who did Ahmet see?'

(8) Ahmet Mehmet-i gör-dü mü?
Ahmet Mehmet-ACC see-PAST Q
'Did Ahmet see Mehmet?'

Turkish and Japanese are similar in the sense that they are both head-final languages and have the same word order. However, the absence of q-particle in Turkish wh-questions would indicate that exhaustivity must be marked in a way different from Japanese in questions.³ Note also that there is no quantifying q-particle as in German, nor is there a dedicated exhaustivity marker as in Hausa. However, in the absence of these elements, it is possible to pluralize wh-phrases in Turkish without giving rise to ungrammaticality. It appears that wh-questions with plural-marked wh-phrases seem to have the exhaustive reading in Turkish. More specifically, the presence of the plural marker on the wh-phrase itself changes the meaning of the wh-question in terms of exhaustivity. Consider the contrast between (9) and (10) below.

³ The only way a question particle appears in Turkish wh-questions is when the question is an echo question, as exemplified by the exchange between A and B.

(i) A: Ahmet kim-i gör-dü?
Ahmet who-ACC see-PAST
'Who did Ahmet see?'
B: Ahmet kimi mi gör-dü?
Ahmet who-ACC Q see-PAST
'Ahmet saw WHO?'

- (9) a. *Pikniğ-e ne getir-ecek-sin?*
 picnic-DAT what bring-FUT-2SG
 ‘What are you going to bring to the picnic?’
- b. *Pikniğ-e kim gel-iyor?*
 picnic-DAT who come-PROG
 ‘Who is coming to the picnic?’

- (10) a. *Pikniğ-e ne-ler getir-ecek-sin?*
 picnic-DAT what-PL bring-FUT-2SG
 ‘What are you going to bring to the picnic?’
- b. *Pikniğ-e kim-ler gel-iyor?*
 picnic-DAT who-PL come-PROG
 ‘Who is coming to the picnic?’

What is important in (9a) and (9b) is that a single answer or a partial list will satisfy as an answer even though these questions do not necessarily exclude providing an exhaustive answer. On the other hand, the addition of the plural marker to the wh-phrases in (10a) and (10b) indicates that a single answer or a partial list will not be pragmatically felicitous. In other words, a complete list of answers need to be provided in these cases.⁴

Note that this is also true in partitive constructions where the wh-phrase *hangi* ‘which’ is specified for number, as in (11) and (12).

- (11) A: *Öğrenci-ler-den hangi-si sınıf-ta kal-dı?*
 student-PL-ABL which-3SG class-LOC fail-PAST
 ‘Which of the students failed the class?’

B: Ahmet.
 ‘Ahmet.’

- (12) A: *Öğrenci-ler-den hangi-ler-i sınıf-ta kal-dı?*
 student-PL-ABL which-PL-3PL class-LOC fail-PAST
 ‘Which students failed the class?’

⁴ The plural marker –lar can only be used in questions with ‘kim’ *who*, ‘ne’ *what* and ‘nereye’ *where*, but not in questions with ‘nasıl’ *how* and ‘niçin/neden’ *why*. This distinction appears to be related to the general argument-adjunct asymmetry observed across languages (see Dong 2009).

B: #Ahmet.

Ahmet

B': Ahmet, Mehmet, Ayşe ve Ali.

Ahmet Mehmet Ayşe and Ali

In (11), there is no plural marking on the wh-phrase itself and a single (i.e. non-exhaustive) answer is felicitous. On the other hand, the wh-phrase in (12) is plural-marked and here an exhaustive answer is required.⁵

One last environment in which plural-marked wh-phrases encode exhaustivity in indirect questions. Consider (13) and (14).

(13) Ahmet *kim-in* gel-diğ-i-ni bil-iyor.
Ahmet who-GEN come-FNOM-3SG-ACC know-PROG
'Ahmet knows who came.'

(14) Ahmet *kim-ler-in* gel-diğ-i-ni bil-iyor.
Ahmet who-PL-GEN come-FNOM-3SG-ACC know-PROG
'Ahmet knows who came.'

As the grammaticality of (14) shows, plural marked wh-phrases can appear in indirect questions. This indicates that this is not only a matrix or root question phenomenon in the language. The indirect question in (13) can be followed by both an exhaustive and non-exhaustive answers (e.g. Ahmet or Ahmet and Mehmet). However, this is not the case for (14) where only an exhaustive answer is possible (e.g. Ahmet, Mehmet, ...).

Recall that *-lar* is the marker of plurality in the language; however, its function seems to be different in wh-questions. Therefore, I propose that exhaustivity is achieved by way of plural marking in Turkish wh-questions. The crucial difference between regular wh-phrases and plural-marked wh-phrases then is that the latter yields the exhaustive reading. In the next section, I will propose a novel account of exhaustivity in wh-questions.

⁵ # marks an infelicitous answer.

3 A novel account

It has been known since at least Hamblin (1958, 1973) that knowing the meaning of a question is analogous to knowing what constitutes as an answer. The question that arises then is how one would derive an exhaustive or a non-exhaustive answer. When we consider earlier work, we observe that there are various analyses that have attempted to account for exhaustive and non-exhaustive readings in *wh*-questions. Some have argued that the main distinction lies in the semantics (Reich 1997; Beck and Rullmann 1999; Schulz and Roeper 2011), while other have proposed that the difference is pragmatically motivated (van Rooy 2003, 2004, Zimmermann 2007; Hartmann and Zimmermann 2007). Semantic accounts center around the assumption that *wh*-questions are ambiguous between the exhaustive and non-exhaustive reading as they are assigned different interpretations because of different underlying representations. This should account for the reason why different languages refer to strategies to mark exhaustivity.⁶ On the other hand, pragmatic analyses have entertained the idea that *wh*-questions are underspecified in terms of (non)-exhaustivity. The inherent meaning of *wh*-questions does not specify one particular reading as default. It is in fact exhaustivity markers themselves that give the exhaustive reading to *wh*-questions. In other words, *wh*-questions are not inherently exhaustive in the absence of these markers.

Based on the discussion and findings in the previous section, I argue that *wh*-questions in Turkish are underspecified for exhaustivity. This specification is achieved by way of overt plural marking. Consider the pair in (15) and (16).

(15) Orada *kim-i* gör-dü-n?
there who-ACC see-PAST-2SG
'Who did you see there?'

(16) Orada *kim-ler-i* gör-dü-n?
there who-PL-ACC go-PAST-2SG
'Who did you see there?'

⁶ An alternative, primarily semantic, analysis would postulate that exhaustive *wh*-questions covertly involve universal quantification whereas non-exhaustive *wh*-questions contain existential quantification (Nelken and Shan 2004). In that theory, one would argue for the idea that *-lAr* is an overt realization of the universal quantifier, giving rise to the exhaustive reading. I do not entertain that idea here and leave it for further research.

The bare wh-question without plural marking in (15) has a meaning that has an underspecified meaning in terms of its semantics. The wh-phrase ‘*kimi*’ *who-ACC* is unmarked for number and exhaustivity. On the other hand, the wh-question in (16) is different in that the wh-phrase is overtly marked for plurality. Its semantics differs from the previous one since it is seeking an exhaustive answer. Therefore, the plural marker that is attached to wh-phrases is functioning as the marker of exhaustivity as well as plurality. More specifically, it functions as a presuppositional exhaustivity marker in that the questioner presupposes or assumes that there is an exhaustive list of answers to the wh-question and that the hearer is able to provide the answer. This idea could be better illustrated by a question-answer pair, as in (17).

- (17) A: Bölüm-de *kim-ler* sözdizimi ders-i ver-iyor?
 department-LOC who-PL syntax class-3SG give-PROG
 ‘Who is teaching syntax in the department?’
- B: #Ahmet.
 ‘Ahmet.’
- B’: Ahmet, Mehmet ve Ayşe.
 Ahmet Mehmet and Ayşe
 ‘Ahmet, Mehmet and Ayşe.’

Basically, a plural-marked wh-phrase in a wh-question comes with two requirements. First, the answer needs to be non-atomic, namely no single/singleton answer is expected. Second, the answer has to be exhaustive in the sense that all the relevant answers need to be provided. By asking the question in (17A), the questioner presupposes that the answer will be non-atomic as well as exhaustive. Thus a single answer as in (17B) will not be felicitous. On the other hand, the answer in (17B’) meets both requirements since it is felicitous and exhaustive. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that the semantics of plural marking is equivalent to that of exhaustive markers in other languages like German and Chinese. One significant distinction is that while exhaustive markers in those languages are generally free morphemes such as ‘alles’ in German and ‘dou’ in Mandarin, it is morphologically different in Turkish in that it is a bound morpheme that needs to be attached to the wh-phrase.

Following Zimmermann (2007), I argue that the plurality and exhaustivity effects that arise as a result of the presence of plural marking are presuppositional. In other words, the plural marker on the wh-phrase guarantees that the question receives the exhaustive reading thereby satisfying the questioner’s objective. This can be evidenced by the fact that the exhaustivity

requirement on the answer can be cancelled by such elements as ‘sadece’ *only*, ‘yalnız’ *only* and ‘tek başına’ *alone* as in (18B) and (18B’) without giving rise to the answer being infelicitous.

(18) A: Bölüm-de kim-ler sözdizimi ders-i ver-iyor?
department-LOC who-PL syntax class-3SG give-PROG
‘Who is teaching syntax in the department?’

B: Sadece/Yalnız Ahmet.

only Ahmet
‘Only Ahmet.’

B’: Ahmet tek baş-ın-a ver-iyor.
Ahmet single head-3SG-DAT give-PROG
‘Ahmet is teaching (it) alone.’

It should be noted that there is another piece of evidence that wh-questions with pluralized wh-phrases are exhaustive. It appears that embedded wh-questions that include plural-marked wh-phrases do not easily occur along with non-exhaustive matrix verbs in Turkish. This is exemplified in (19).

(19) Ali [parti-de kim-ler-le konuş-tuğ-un-a dair] (??eksik) bir liste yap-tı.
Ali party-LOC who-PL-with talk-FNOM-3SG-DAT about incomplete a list make-PAST
‘Ali made an incomplete list of who he talked to at the party.’

In the next sub-section, I will discuss exhaustivity in multiple wh-questions in the language.

4 Exhaustivity in multiple wh-questions

It is well-attested in previous work that not all languages allow multiple wh-questions.

Whereas it is possible to form multiple wh-questions in language like English, German and Russian, this is not the case in Italian and Irish (Dayal 2005). In those languages where it is possible to ask multiple wh-questions, two readings were shown to be possible. These are pair list (PL) reading and single pair (SP) reading (Hagstrom 1998; Krifka 2001; Bošković 2003, among others). However, this is also subject to cross-linguistic variation since some languages such as Japanese and Serbo-Croatian allow both the PL and SP readings while

others like English, Bulgarian, German and Russian only allow a PL reading (Bošković 2003). For instance, multiple wh-questions in languages like English presuppose that there is more than one answer and a SP answer is not felicitous. This is exemplified in the sentence below.

(20) A: Who bought what?

B: #Joan bought a house.

B': Joan bought a house, Mike bought a car and Kate bought a bike.

In a situation where Joan, Mike and Kate each bought something, the question in (20A) needs an exhaustive PL answer as in (20B'). The question that arises is whether multiple wh-questions are possible in Turkish. If that is the case, what readings are allowed in the language? Consider the example in (21).

(21) A: *Kim ne-yi ye-di?*

who what-ACC eat-PAST

'Who ate what?'

B: #Ahmet elma-yı ye-di.

Ahmet apple-ACC eat-PAST

'Ahmet ate the apple.'

B': Ahmet elma-yı, Mehmet armut-u, Ayşe de eriğ-i ye-di.

Ahmet apple-ACC Mehmet pear-ACC Ayşe also plum-ACC eat-PAST

'Ahmet ate the apple, Mehmet ate the pear and Ayşe ate the plum.'

The grammaticality of the question in (21A) indicates that multiple wh-questions are possible in Turkish. The infelicity of the answer (21B) shows that the SP readings are ruled out. The answer in (21B'), on the other hand, illustrates that an exhaustive PL answer is definitely required in multiple wh-questions. This raises the question whether it is possible to have plural-marked wh-phrases in multiple wh-questions, given that regular multiple wh-questions already require exhaustive pair list answers. Consider (22).

(22) A: *Kim-ler ne-ler-i ye-di?*

who-PL what-PL-ACC eat-PAST

'Who ate what?'

B: #Ahmet elma-yı ye-di.

Ahmet apple-ACC eat-PAST

'Ahmet ate the apple.'

B': Ahmet elma-yı, Mehmet armut-u, Ayşe de eriğ-i ye-di.

Ahmet apple-ACC Mehmet pear-ACC Ayşe also plum-ACC eat-PAST

'Ahmet ate the apple, Mehmet ate the pear and Ayşe ate the plum.'

B'': Ahmet ve Mehmet elma-yı ve şeker-i, Ayşe ve Meryem de armut-u

Ahmet and Mehmet apple-ACC and candy-ACC Ayşe and Meryem also pear-ACC

ve kurabiye-yi ye-di.

and cookie-ACC eat-PAST

'Ahmet and Mehmet ate the apple and the candy, Ayşe and Meryem ate the pear and the cookie.'

As can be observed from the question in (22A), it is possible to ask a multiple wh-question that includes the exhaustivity marker. However, it is not possible to have a single pair answer, as the infelicity of the answer in (22B) indicates. As expected, only exhaustive pair list answers are possible as in (22B') and (22B''). In that sense, there is not much difference in terms of the answer type between multiple wh-questions with and without exhaustivity. To recap, it was proposed in this section that the exhaustive reading in wh-questions is achieved by way of an exhaustive marker that also functions as the plural marker in Turkish. In that sense, it argues against those analyses that maintain the idea that wh-questions are inherently exhaustive (Groenendijk and Stokhof 1982, 1984). It was shown that there are certain particles such as 'alles' *all* in German (Reis 1992, Zimmermann 2007), '-nèè' in Hausa, 'allemaal' *all* in Dutch (Beck and Rullmann 1999) 'all' in Irish (McCloskey 2000) that function specifically as exhaustive markers. In that sense, the current work is in agreement with the analyses that entertain the idea that wh-questions are not inherently exhaustive (Beck and Rullmann 1999; Zimmermann 2007, among others). In the absence of these dedicated particles in other languages, Turkish was shown to employ plural marking as the marker of exhaustivity that is an element with multiple functions in the language.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, I investigated the phenomenon known as exhaustivity in Turkish wh-questions. I showed that in the absence of a q-particle and any other specific marker in the language,

exhaustivity is achieved by way of plural marking on wh-phrases themselves. Thus the plural marker itself was analyzed as the exhaustivity marker in Turkish. It was also shown that there is not a noticeable difference in terms of exhaustivity in multiple wh-questions. Further work will surely shed more light on the phenomenon and the ways it is marked across languages.

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