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The closeness constraint on focus association and the syntax of Q-particles

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Abstract. While in some languages focus association at a distance is possible, in some languages, focus particles must be as close to their associates as possible. In this paper, I argue that the closeness constraint is attested also in *wh*-questions. The evidence comes from Sinhala (Indo-Aryan) *wh*-questions, in which the Q-particle is restricted to positions that are as close to the *wh*-word as possible. I show that this constraint poses challenges for the existing analyses of Sinhala *wh*-questions, and present a new account under which the Q-particle undergoes phase-constrained overt movement.

Keywords. Sinhala; focus; *wh*-questions; Q-particles; degree questions; phase

1. Introduction. It is well-known that in some languages, focus association at a distance is possible (Taglicht 1984, Rooth 1985, Quek & Hirsch 2017, among many others). For instance, it is possible for English *only* to surface separately from its associate, as in (1):

(1) a. I **only** baked [a PIE]$_F$ for Mary.
b. I **only** baked a pie [for MARY]$_F$.

However, in some languages, focus particles are subject to a constraint in that they must surface as close to their associates as possible (e.g. Zanon 2018 for Russian; Erlewine 2017 for Vietnamese; Erlewine 2016, Zanon & Hsu 2019 for Mandarin). This is exemplified by (2), where Russian *tol'ko* 'only' is required to immediately precede the focused direct object:

(2) a. *Andrej* ***tol'ko*** *[PIROG]$_F$ ispek dlja sestry.*
Andrey only pie baked for sister
b. **Andrej* ***tol'ko*** *ispek [PIROG]$_F$ dlja sestry.*
Andrey only baked pie for sister
c. ****Tol'ko*** *Andrej ispek [PIROG]$_F$ dlja sestry.*
only Andrey baked pie for sister
'Andrey only baked [a PIE]$_F$ for his sister.' (Adapted from Zanon 2018: 420 (5))

Tol'ko sometimes cannot be immediately adjacent to its associate for independent reasons, but the closeness constraint is attested even in those cases. For instance, (3) shows that the NP 'fresh Ceylon tea' is an extraction island. (4a)–(4b) show that to associate with *tsejlonskij* 'Ceylon', *tol'ko* cannot appear inside the island, but can appear immediately adjacent to the island that contains its associate. Furthermore, *tol'ko* cannot be separated farther away from the island, as in (4c), indicating that the closeness constraint is in effect here, too.

(3) ?**Anna [TSEJLONSKIJ]$_F$ podaet [svežij t čaj].*
Anna Ceylon serves fresh tea
'Anna serves fresh [CEYLON]$_F$ tea.' (Zanon 2018: 434 (33c))

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(4) a. **Anna podaet [svežij **tol'ko** [TSEJLONSKIJ]$_F$ čaj].*
Anna serves fresh only Ceylon tea
b. *?Anna podaet **tol'ko** [svežij [TSEJLONSKIJ]$_F$ čaj].*
Anna serves only fresh Ceylon tea
c. ****Tol'ko** Anna podaet [svežij [TSEJLONSKIJ]$_F$ čaj].*
only Anna serves fresh Ceylon tea
'Anna serves only fresh [CEYLON]$_F$ tea.' (Adapted from Zanon 2018: 434 (33))

In this paper, I show that the closeness constraint is also attested in *wh*-questions. The evidence comes from Sinhala (Indo-Aryan), where *wh*-questions are formed with the Q-particle *də*, as in (5):

(5) *Chitra kohe* ***də*** *giyee?*
Chitra where Q go.PST.FOC
'Where did Chitra go?'

I establish a new generalization that similarly to Russian *tol'ko* 'only', *də* needs to be as close to its associate—namely the *wh*-word—as possible. To see this, first note that *də* is sometimes allowed to appear sentence-finally, as in (6):

(6) *siŋhələ kochchərə dannəwa* ***də****?*
Sinhala how.much know.NPST.FIN Q
'How much Sinhala do you know?'

However, in cases like (5), *də* is not allowed to appear sentence-finally. Compare (7) with (5):

(7) **Chitra kohe giyaa* ***də****?*
Chitra where go.PST.FIN Q
'Where did Chitra go?'

I show that (7) is ungrammatical because the position of *də* in (5)—where *də* is immediately adjacent to the *wh*-word—is available. In other words, the availability of the *wh*-adjacent *də* in (5) blocks the sentence-final *də* in (7). As for why the sentence-final *də* is possible in (6), I show that it is because the variant of (6) with a *wh*-adjacent *də* is banned by an independent constraint on degree expressions, including the *wh*-word *kochchərə* 'how much'. Hence, *də* in (6) is in its closest possible position to the *wh*-word already.

This paper is structured as follows. Sec 2 establishes the above mentioned generalization, and points out the challenge that this generalization poses for the previous accounts of Sinhala *wh*-questions. Sec 3 presents a new analysis, which derives the distribution of *də* based on phase-constrained movement. Sec 4 concludes the paper.

2. Establishing the closeness constraint. In this section, I first observe two independent properties of Sinhala *wh*-questions, one concerning the locality-sensitivity of *də*, and the other concerning the interaction between *də* and degree expressions (Sec 2.1). I then examine the interaction of these two properties, from which the closeness constraint of *də* will follow (Sec 2.2). I then discuss the limitations of the previous accounts of Sinhala *wh*-questions in capturing the closeness constraint (Sec 2.3).

2.1. BASIC PARADIGM. Sinhala has a series of focus particles that require the verb to be inflected with the focus suffix *-e* (Gair & Sumangala 1991, Sumangala 1992, Chandralal 2010,

among many others). For instance, cleft constructions are formed with the particle *tamay*. As shown in (8), the focus suffix *-e*, but not the default suffix *-a*, is allowed on the verb.

(8) *Chitra [ee potə]* ***tamay*** {*kieuwe / *kieuwa*}.
Chitra that book TAMAY read.PST.FOC read.PST.FIN
'It was that book that Chitra read.' (Kishimoto 2018: 2)

The Q-particle *də* in *wh*-questions is another instantiation of focus particles. For instance, in the *where*-question in (5), repeated in (9), the verb 'give' needs to be inflected with the focus suffix *-e*; it cannot be inflected with the non-focus verbal suffix *-a*:

(9) *Chitra kohe* ***də*** {*giyee / *giyaa*}*?*
Chitra where Q go.PST.FOC go.PST.FIN
'Where did Chitra go?'

Additional examples illustrating this are provided by the subject question (10), the object question (11) and the *how*-question (12).

(10) *kau* ***də*** *aawe?*
who Q come.PST.FOC
'Who came?'

(11) *Chitra monəwa* ***də*** *gatte?*
Chitra what Q buy.PST.FOC
'What did Chitra buy?'

(12) *Ranjit kohomə* ***də*** *kaa-ekə hadanne?*
Ranjit how Q car-INDEF fix.NPST.FOC
'How is Ranjit going to fix the car?'

In all the examples given in (9)-(12), *də* appears immediately adjacent to the *wh*-words. Such adjacency is impossible in some cases, which I will turn to in the following.

2.1.1. LOCALITY. Previous works on Sinhala *wh*-questions have noted that *də* is island-sensitive. Specifically, it has been observed that when *wh*-words appear inside the following types of elements, *də* must appear adjacent to these elements, instead of adjacent directly to the *wh*-words: relative clauses, clausal complements of nouns, adjunct islands and *wh*-islands (Gair & Sumangala 1991; Sumangala 1992; Kishimoto 1992, 2005; Hagstrom 1998, 2004). (13) provides an example where a *wh*-word appears inside a relative clause:

(13) a. **[monəwa* ***də*** *gattə kenaa] aawe?*
what Q buy.PST.INF person come.PST.FOC
b. *[monəwa gattə kenaa]* ***də*** *aawe?*
what buy.PST.INF person Q come.PST.FOC
lit. 'What did a person [that bought t] came?'

All the cases noted above involved islands. But the effect is not limited to islands; specifically, it is also attested in long-distance questions. As shown in (14), when a *wh*-word occurs inside an embedded non-interrogative clause, *də* must appear to the right of the complementizer.[1]

[1] Note that some authors give examples similar to (14a) as acceptable, in particular, Sumangala (1992) and Kishimoto (1992, 2005) (but see Kishimoto 1992, 2005 for complications regarding embedding predicates; i.e. according to Kishimoto, with non-bridge verbs like *kendiruwe* 'whispered', *wh*-adjacent *də* as in (14a) is impossible, whereas lower-CP-adjacent *də* as in (14b) is acceptable). I will leave investigation of potential speaker variation in such cases to future work.

(14) a. *[Ranjit monəwa **də** gatta kiyəla] kiuwe?
Ranjit what Q buy.PST.FIN C say.PST.FOC
b. [Ranjit monəwa gatta kiyəla] **də** kiuwe?
Ranjit what buy.PST.FIN C Q say.PST.FOC
'What did you say [that Ranjit bought t]?'

Note that this effect does not obtain if the relevant clause is interpreted as an indirect question (i.e. when the *wh*-word takes scope in the clause):

(15) [kau **də** aawe kijəla] maŋ da-nn-e næ.
who Q come.PST.FOC C I know.NPST.FOC NEG
'I don't know who came.'

The locality-sensitivity of *də* illustrated by the above examples is summarized in (16):

(16) **Locality-sensitivity:** When the *wh*-word occurs inside an NP or a CP that is not the intended interrogative scope, *də* must occur immediately to the right of the NP/CP.

2.1.2. DEGREE QUESTIONS. Independently of the locality-sensitivity of *də*, Sinhala focus particles are subject to the constraint in (17) ('adjacency' refers to linear order):

(17) **Ban on focus-degree adjacency:** A focus particle cannot be adjacent to degree expressions in Sinhala.

Let us first consider an illustration of (17) in non-interrogative sentences. Recall that in (8), we have seen that cleft constructions are formed with the focus particle *tamay*. Compare (8) with (18) below, which shows that cleft constructions are disallowed when a degree expression is clefted:

(18) ??John siŋhələ ʧikak **tamay** danne.
John Sinhala a.little TAMAY know.NPST.FOC
Intended: 'It is a little that John knows Sinhala.'

Similarly, in degree questions, *də* cannot appear adjacent to the degree *wh*-word *kochchərə* 'how much', as shown in (19a). Instead, *də* is required to appear sentence-finally, and the verb needs to be inflected with the non-focus suffix *-a* instead of the focus suffix *-e*, as in (19b).

(19) a. *siŋhələ kochchərə **də** danne?
Sinhala how.much Q know.NPST.FOC
b. siŋhələ kochchərə dannəwa **də**? =(6)
Sinhala how.much know.NPST.FIN Q
'How much Sinhala do you know?'

2.2. COMPETITION BETWEEN DIFFERENT POSITIONS OF *də*. The locality-sensitivity of *də* (16) and the ban on focus-degree adjacency (17) interact in an interesting way. Consider (20), where the degree *wh*-word *kochchərə* 'how much' appears inside a relative clause. Given our observation regarding (19b), one might expect (20a) to be acceptable. However, here, *də* is required to appear immediately to the right of the relative clause, as in (20b).

(20) a. *[siŋhələ kochchərə dannə laməj-ek] aawa **də**?
Sinhala how.much know.NPST.INF child-INDEF come.PST.FIN Q

b. *[siŋhələ kochchərə dannə laməj-ek]* ***də*** *aawe?*
Sinhala how.much know.NPST.INF child-INDEF Q come.PST.FOC
'How much did [a child that knows Sinhala t] come?'

Likewise, in long-distance questions with *kochchərə* in the embedded CP, *də* must appear immediately to the right of the lower CP, rather than in the sentence-final position:

(21) a. **Ranjit [John siŋhələ kochchərə dannəwa kijəla] kiuwa* ***də****?*
Ranjit John Sinhala how.much know.NPST.FIN C say.NPST.FIN Q

b. *Ranjit [John siŋhələ kochchərə dannəwa kijəla]* ***də*** *kiuwe?*
Ranjit John Sinhala how.much know.NPST.FIN C Q say.PST.FOC
'How much did Ranjit say [John knows Sinhala t]?'

What we have seen is the following. As stated in (17), *de* cannot appear next to *kochchərə* 'how much'. In the simple degree questions observed in (19), this restriction is obviated by placing *də* in the sentence-final position; however, when locality becomes relevant, as observed in (20) and (21), the restriction is obviated by placing *də* next to the relevant NP and CP, with the sentence-final *də* being unavailable.

Based on the contrast between (19) and (20)/(21), I propose that Sinhala *də* is subject to the following closeness constraint:

(22) **Closeness constraint:** Sinhala *də* is restricted to positions that are as close to the *wh*-word as possible.

For instance, the long-distance degree question (21) is an instantiation of (22): although the ban on *də* next to *kochchərə* 'how much' is obviated in both (21a) and (21b), the placement of *də* next to the embedded CP is closer to the *wh*-word than the sentence-final *də* is; hence, (21b) is acceptable, whereas (21a) is not (the same reasoning applies to (20)). As for the simple degree question (19), the only way to avoid the adjacency between *də* and *kochchərə* is to place *də* sentence-finally. In other words, the sentence-final *də* in (19b) is in its closest possible position to the *wh*-word.

More generally, the closeness constraint (22) amounts to the following prediction. Whenever *də* is allowed to appear in both a non-sentence-final and a sentence-final position (in the sense that neither (16) nor (17) is violated), the sentence-final position should always be blocked by the availability of its non-sentence-final counterpart, since *də* is closer to the *wh*-word in non-sentence-final than in sentence-final positions.[2] Apart from the degree questions in (20) and (21), this prediction is also borne out in simple non-degree questions, as shown in (23):

[2] However, there are two types of questions where the closeness constraint does not seem to hold. The first concerns quantity questions, as shown in (i):

(i) a. *Chitra pot kiiyak* ***də*** *kieuwe?*
Chitra book how.many.INANIM Q read.PST.FOC

b. *Chitra pot kiiyak kieuwa* ***də****?*
Chitra book how.many.INANIM read.PST.FIN Q
'How many books did Chitra read?'

The other case are embedded questions. As shown in (ii), *də* can show up immediately adjacent to the *wh*-word or at the end of the embedded clause:

(ii) a. *[kau* ***də*** *aawe kijəla] maŋ danne nææ.* =(15)
who Q come.PST.FOC C I know.NPST.FOC NEG

(23) a. *Chitra kohe* ***də*** *giyee?* =(5)
Chitra where Q went.FOC
'Where did Chitra go?'

b. **Chitra kohe giyaa* ***də****?*
Chitra where went.FIN Q
'Where did Chitra go?'

In view of the locality-sensitivity of *də* (16) and the ban on focus-degree adjacency (17), both the *wh*-adjacent and the sentence-final positions of *də* should in principle be available in (23). The closeness constraint of *də* predicts the sentence-final position to be blocked by the *wh*-adjacent one, which is indeed the case.

2.3. PREVIOUS ACCOUNTS. Existing analyses of Sinhala *wh*-questions have all observed that *də* cannot appear inside islands (cf. (13a)), and took this observation as an indication of movement. Specifically, they assumed that *də* undergoes covert movement to interrogative C: in (13a), the movement crosses an island boundary, thus rendering its ungrammaticality; in contrast, in (13b), *də* moves from a position outside the island, which is acceptable (Gair & Sumangala 1991, Sumangala 1992, Kishimoto 1992, 2005, Hagstrom 1998, 2004, Cable 2010, Morita 2019, among many others). As for why *də* can surface sentence-finally (cf. (19)), some assume that it is because *də* can also move overtly to interrogative C (Hagstrom 1998, Kishimoto 2005), others assume that it is because *də* can be base-generated sentence-finally (Morita 2019).

These approaches have difficulty in capturing the data presented in this section in the following two respects. First, we have seen above that islandhood does not suffice to characterize the locality-sensitivity of *də*, because the separation between *wh*-words and *də* is also obligatory in long-distance questions, where there is no island. Therefore, the assumption of the previous analyses that non-sentence-final *də* undergoes covert movement to C would be unable to capture the observation in (16); more specifically, it would be unable to rule out the long-distance question in (14a).

The second problem, and one that is more relevant to the interests of this paper, is that the existing analyses do not capture the closeness constraint established in (22).[3] For instance, to capture the competition between the long-distance degree questions in (21a) and (21b), one would need to argue that the operation that derives (21b) blocks the operation that derives (21a). However, for the analysis under which (21b) is derived via covert movement and (21a) via overt movement of *də* to C, it is unclear how one operation should be banned by another. Likewise, for the analysis that derives (21a) by base-generating *də* sentence-finally, it remains unclear why this operation should be blocked by the operation that derives (21b), i.e. covert movement of *də* to C.

In the following, I propose a new account of Sinhala *wh*-questions that derives the dis-

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b. *[kauru aawa* ***də*** *kijəla] maŋ danne nææ.*
who come.PST.FIN Q C I know.NPST.FOC NEG
'I don't know who came.'

However, it does not seem to be the case that we are dealing with true optionality here, where everything else except the position of *də* is equivalent. For instance, for quantity questions, it has been argued that the variant with *wh*-adjacent *də* in (ia) comes with the presupposition that Chitra did read some book(s), whereas (ib) lacks this presupposition (Hagstrom 2004, Kishimoto 2005), i.e. the two constructions differ semantically. I leave the semantic contribution of *də* in quantity and embedded questions to future research.

[3] See Cable (2013) for languages where the closeness constraint does not hold; e.g. in Tlingit, long-distance questions allow the Q-particle to be immediately adjacent either to the *wh*-word or to the embedded clause.

tribution of *də* in a uniform fashion; that is, the account does not posit different syntactic operations or the the covert/overt distinction for the different positions of *də*. Furthermore, the closeness constraint will fall out naturally from the proposed derivations.

3. Analysis. In this section, I propose a phase-based movement account of Sinhala *wh*-questions. Sec 3.1 introduces the three key ingredients of the proposed analysis. Sec 3.2 illustrates how the ingredients derive the data presented in Sec 2.

3.1. INGREDIENTS. First, I propose that the Q-particle *də* is merged with the *wh*-word if it can; if not, it is merged with the lowest maximal projection containing the *wh*-word. This ingredient implements the constraint observed in Sec 2.1.2 that *də* cannot appear adjacent to the degree *wh*-word *kochchərə* 'how much'. Hence, in the degree question (6)/(19), *də* is base-generated by adjoining to *v*P, as shown in (24a). In non-degree questions like (5)/(23), *də* directly merges with the *wh*-word, as shown in (24b).

(24) a. $[_{vP}\ [_{vP}\ pro\ [_{v'}$ how much $[_{VP}$ Sinhala know]]] ***də***] e.g. (6)/(19)
b. $[_{NP}\ [_{NP}$ where] ***də***] e.g. (5)/(23)

Second, I propose that *də* carries an uninterpretable focus feature [uFoc] that is checked off by the head of FocP—which I take to be where the focus verbal suffix *-e* is generated—via Agree. I adopt the assumption that syntactic structures are built in a bottom-up, phase-based fashion, as in Chomsky (2000). As usual, I assume that phases—NPs[4], *v*Ps and CPs—become inaccessible to further syntactic operations upon their completion (Phase Impenetrability Condition, henceforth PIC), and only elements at the edge of a phase can participate in operations that involve elements in phases higher than their own phase. The consequence of these assumptions is that *də* undergoes overt movement that is motivated by its own formal inadequacy. Specifically, upon the completion of each phase, the uninterpretable feature of *də* forces *də* to move to the phasal edge to be accessible to a potential feature-checker, since otherwise its feature would never get checked, leading to an inevitable crash (in line with Bošković 2007's statement of Last Resort, i.e. movement satisfies Last Resort if without the movement a crash occurs). To illustrate, suppose XP is a phase that contains *də*, and Foc^0 has not entered the derivation. In the configuration in (25a), *də* does not move; as a result, its uninterpretable feature will never get checked, leading to an inevitable crash. (25b) avoids the crash, since at the edge of XP, *də* has access to its potential feature-checker.

(25) a. $[_{XP}\ [_{YP}\ \ldots$ [where $də_{[uFoc]}$] ...] X] (✗ derivation crashes inevitably)
b. $[_{XP}\ [_{XP}\ [_{YP}\ \ldots$ [where t] ...] X] $də_{[uFoc]}$] (✓ derivation can proceed)

It should be easy to see that the locality constraint that *də* must not appear inside an NP or a CP (i.e. the badness of (13a) and (14a)) falls out as a consequence of the proposed feature-checking requirement of *də*. Specifically, when *də* occurs inside an NP or a CP (i.e. the configuration in (25a), where XP is an NP or a CP), the NP/CP phase will prevent *də* from establishing an Agree relation with its potential feature-checker. As a result, *də*'s uninterpretable feature would never be checked off, rendering (13a) and (14a) unacceptable. The derivation of these examples will be provided in more detail in Sec 3.2; in particular, after introducing all the ingredients of the proposal, it will become clear why *də* in these examples has to appear

[4] I will follow Bošković (2014) and assume that article-less languages like Sinhala do not have DP, but the choice between NP and DP is inconsequential for our purposes.

immediately adjacent to the NP (i.e. (13b)) and the CP (i.e. (14b)).

Before introducing the last ingredient of my proposal, it is worth emphasizing that the mechanism of *də*'s movement proposed here differs significantly from that proposed by Hagstrom (1998) and Kishimoto (2005). Under their proposal, *də* undergoes (covert or overt) movement to check off an uninterpretable feature on interrogative C. In contrast, under the current proposal, *də* is never 'attracted' by any element in the higher structure; rather, it is *də*'s own formal inadequacy that forces *də* to move. As we will see shortly, this allows us to derive the different positions of *də*—including the non-sentence-final and the sentence-final ones—in a uniform fashion. Hence, we need not assume that the relevant feature driving the movement can be either weak or strong, an ambiguity that was crucial in Hagstrom's and Kishimoto's proposal to ensure that *də* can surface non-sentence-finally (resulting from *də*'s covert movement, driven by a weak feature on C) or sentence-finally (resulting from *də*'s overt movement, driven by a strong feature on C).

At this point, the reader might have noticed the following question that immediately arises out of the current proposal: if NP and CP prevent *də* from establishing an Agree relation with a potential feature-checker, why does *v*P, which is also a phase, not prevent *də* from doing so? For instance, consider again the *where*-question, repeated below. Under the current phase-based account, one might expect (26) to be unacceptable just like (13b) and (14a): since *də* is in a position lower than *v*,[5] the boundary of the *v*P phase should prevent *də* from accessing its feature-checker, leading to an inevitable crash of the derivation. However, (26) is acceptable.

(26) *Chitra kohe* ***də*** *giyee?* =(5)/(23)
Chitra where Q go.PST.FOC
'Where did Chitra go?'

To resolve this issue, I adopt Chomsky (2001)'s definition of the PIC, where the PIC effect for a phase XP kicks in only after a higher phasal head Z enters the structure.[6] This essentially amounts to XP becoming a phase only after Z enters the structure, which is what I will assume below. Additionally, I adopt Bošković (2014)'s contextual approach to phasehood, where the highest phrase in a phasal domain is a phase; e.g. in split CP, the highest phrase in

[5] One might wonder where the verb in (26) is; if it is in T, *də* in (26) may in fact be higher than *v* (e.g. *də* may be at the edge of *v*P, thus being unaffected by the PIC effect of the *v*P phase). However, the assumption that the verb in (26) is in T does not seem plausible, which can be shown by the (non-)volitionality reflected in verbal morphology. In Sinhala, (non-)volitionality is expressed by verb stem alternation (Inman 1994; Beavers & Zubair 2013; Chou & Hettiarachchi 2016, among others); for instance, for its non-past basic forms, the verb 'dance' can be formed as *natə-nəwa* for volitional and *næte-nəwa* for non-volitional. In simple matrix *wh*-questions, *də* appears immediately next to the *wh*-words, regardless of the (non-)volitionality of the verb, as shown below (non-volitional verbs also require non-nominative case on the agents, which for 'dance' is dative, cf. Chou & Hettiarachchi 2016).

(i) a. *kau* ***də*** *natanne?*
who Q dance.NPST.FOC
'Who dances (actively)?'

b. *kaa-ʈə* ***də*** *nætenne?*
who-DAT Q dance.INVOL.NPST.FOC
'Who dances involuntarily?'

If the source of information on verbs regarding (non-)volitionality is within the *v*P-domain, the fact that *də* appears to the left of the verbs in (i) indicates that *də* is in a position lower than *v*.

[6] Alternatively, if *v*P is not a phase, as argued recently by Keine & Zeijlstra (2021), either Chomsky (2000)'s or Chomsky (2001)'s approach to the PIC would work.

the split CP is then a phase.

This has consequences for the phasal status of *v*P in Sinhala in that the PIC effect for the *v*P phase kicks in only when the highest phrase in the CP domain is merged. But which phrase is it? As argued by Kishimoto (2005, 2018), Sinhala has split CP, with a projection higher than FocP in the CP domain, namely ComplP, which is headed by the complementizer *kijəla*. One piece of evidence of this effect comes from embedded questions, in which *kijəla* is realized above the focus verbal suffix, as in (27):

(27) *[kau də aawe* ***kijəla****] maŋ da-nn-e* *næ.* =(15)
who Q come.PST.FOC C I know.NPST.FOC NEG
'I don't know who came.'

As a result, in Sinhala, the phasal head in the CP domain is the complementizer, rather than Foc^0. This has a consequence for *v*P, namely the phasal status of *v*P gets activated only when the complementizer enters the structure. To illustrate, consider the three different points of the derivation given in (28a)-(28c). (28a) is a configuration where *v* has just entered the structure. According to the current analysis, *v*P is not yet a phase at this point; in other words, the PIC effect does not kick in at this point. As a result, in (28b), when Foc^0 is merged, elements within VP are still accessible to Foc^0. It is only when Compl^0 enters the structure that the *v*P becomes a phase (i.e. the PIC effect kicks in), as in (28c).

(28) a. $[_{vP}$ VP *v*]
b. $[_{FocP}$ $[_{TP}$ $[_{vP}$ VP *v*] T] Foc]
c. $[_{ComplP}$ $[_{FocP}$ $[_{TP}$ $[_{vP}$ VP *v*] T] Foc] Compl]

This approach to phasehood allows us to account for the fact that *v*P, unlike NP and CP, does not block the Agree relation between *də* and Foc^0. The reason is that when Foc^0 is merged, *v*P is essentially not yet a phase and thus does not trigger a PIC effect; as a result, an Agree relation between *də* and Foc^0 can be established. In other words, the uninterpretable feature of *də* can be checked before *v*P gets activated as a phase. Let us now walk through three examples to see how the ingredients introduced here capture the data presented earlier.

3.2. ILLUSTRATIONS OF DERIVATIONS. First, consider the simple *where*-question (29a), with its derivation given in (29b).

(29) a. *Chitra kohe* ***də*** *giyee?* =(5)/(23)/(26)
Chitra where Q go.PST.FOC
'Where did Chitra go?'
b. $[_{FocP}$ $[_{TP}$ $[_{vP}$ Chitra $[_{VP}$ $[_{NP}$ where *də*$_{[uFoc]}$] go]] T] $[_{Foc}$ -*e*$_{[iFoc]}$]]
Agree

Since nothing prevents *də* from merging with the non-degree *wh*-word, *də* is base-generated by adjoining to the *wh*-word. As discussed in (28b), when Foc^0 enters the structure, *v*P will not induce a phase-blocking effect. Hence, *də* is able to Agree with Foc^0, with the uninterpretable feature of *də* being checked off successfully in its base-generated position. Moreover, this derivation correctly predicts the counterpart of (29a) with sentence-final *də* (i.e. (23b)) to be unacceptable. The reason is that the feature-checking requirement of *də* can already be satisfied in its base-generated position, and moving it further would be a superfluous operation. In other words, the current account captures the fact that the *wh*-adjacent position of *də* blocks its

sentence-final position in simple non-degree questions like (29a).

Simple degree questions like (30a) are derived similarly, except for the base-generated position of *də*. See (30b) for the derivation of (30a).

(30) a. *siŋhələ kochchərə dannəwa* ***də****?* =(6)/(19)
Sinhala how.much know.NPST.FIN Q
'How much Sinhala do you know?'

b. $[_{FocP}\ [_{TP}\ [_{vP}\ [_{vP}$ *pro* $[_{v'}$ how much $[_{VP}$ Sinhala know]]] $də_{[uFoc]}$] T] $[_{Foc}$ $\text{-}e_{[iFoc]}$]]
Agree

As discussed in (24a), in degree questions, *də* does not adjoin directly to the degree *wh*-word, but rather to the *v*P that contains the degree *wh*-word. There is no phasal boundary between the base-generated position of *də* and Foc^0, and the feature-checking requirement can thus be satisfied without movement. As for why the verb takes the non-focus suffix *-a* rather than the focus suffix *-e* in (30a), I assume that this is because *də* disrupts the suffixation of *-e* on the verb stem. Specifically, *də* is an enclitic; since enclitics are not allowed in between a stem and a suffix, verbal complexes of the form [stem + *də* + suffix] are not allowed. As a result, in (30b), the focus suffix *-e* that is generated in Foc^0 cannot be realized. I assume that in such cases, the non-focus morphology *-a* gets realized as the default option, thus giving rise to the non-focus verbal form *dannəwa* 'know' in (30a).

Finally, let us turn to cases where the *wh*-words occur inside an NP or a CP. Below, I use long-distance questions for illustration; the reader can verify that the proposed derivation also works for cases where the *wh*-words are in a relative clause.

(31) *[Ranjit monəwa gatta kiyəla]* ***də*** *kiuwe?* =(14b)
Ranjit what buy.PST.FIN C Q say.PST.FOC
'What did you say [that Ranjit bought t]?'

For clarity, let us see the derivation of (31) incrementally, starting from the embedded clause. Since the *wh*-word of (31) is not a degree expression, *də* is base-generated by adjoining to the *wh*-word, as shown in (32a); at this point, *v*P is not yet a phase (given that XP becomes a phase only after a higher phasal head enters the structure). (32b) shows the configuration where the complementizer of the embedded clause has entered the structure. As discussed earlier, the complementizer is a phasal head, and thus activates the phasal status of the *v*P; *də* then moves to the edge of the *v*P phase to make sure that it has access to a potential feature-checker higher up (in the spirit of Bošković 2007). Note here that in the spirit of Chomsky (2008)'s proposal regarding cyclicity, I assume that some acyclicity is allowed in a phase-based derivation. Specifically, the cycle effect kicks in and bans access to a lower phase only after a higher phase is activated. Since ComplP is not yet activated as a phase at the point of (32b), the cycle effect does not kick in, and movement to *v*P is still possible. Hence, I assume that in (32b), *də* moves to the edge of *v*P to ensure that it has access to a potential feature-checker.

(32) a. $[_{vP}$ Ranjit $[_{VP}\ [_{NP}$ what $də_{[uFoc]}$] buy]]

b. $[_{ComplP}\ [_{TP}\ [_{vP}\ [_{vP}$ Ranjit $[_{VP}\ [_{NP}$ what t] buy]] $də_{[uFoc]}$] T] Compl]

The rest of the derivation proceeds similarly to what we have already seen. When the ma-

trix *v* enters the structure, as in (33a), the ComplP gets activated as a phase, and *də* moves to the edge of ComplP accordingly (assuming that acyclicity is allowed in the sense discussed above). Finally, when Foc^0 enters the derivation, as in (33b), there is no phasal boundary between the position of *də* (i.e. the edge of ComplP) and Foc^0, since the matrix *v*P is not yet activated as a phase. Therefore, *də* can check off its uninterpretable feature at the edge of ComplP.

(33) a. $[_{vP}$ pro $[_{VP}$ $[_{ComplP}$ $[_{ComplP}$ $[_{TP}$ $[_{vP}$ $[_{vP}$ . . .] t] T] Compl] *də*$_{[uFoc]}$] say]]

b. $[_{FocP}$ $[_{TP}$ $[_{vP}$ pro $[_{VP}$ $[_{ComplP}$ $[_{ComplP}$ . . . Compl] *də*$_{[uFoc]}$] say]] T] $[_{Foc}$ -*e*$_{[iFoc]}$]]

Agree

Now, it should be easy to see why in the long-distance degree question in (34a), *də* appears adjacent to the lower CP rather than sentence-finally. The derivation of (34a) is given in (34b) (irrelevant projections like TP are omitted).

(34) a. *Ranjit [John siŋhələ kochchərə dannəwa kijəla]* ***də*** *kiuwe?* =(21)
Ranjit John Sinhala how.much know.NPST.FIN C Q say.PST.FOC
'How much did Ranjit say [John knows Sinhala t]?'

b. $[_{FocP}[_{vP}[_{ComplP}[_{ComplP}[_{vP}[_{vP}$. . . how.much. . .] t] Compl] *də*$_{[uFoc]}$] say] $[_{Foc}$ -*e*$_{[iFoc]}$]]

Agree

Since the *wh*-word of (34a) is a degree expression, *də* is base-generated by adjoining to the embedded *v*P rather than to the *wh*-word. The rest of the derivation proceeds similarly to the derivation of (31). When the matrix *v* enters the structure, the embedded ComplP gets activated as a phase, and *də* moves to the edge of ComplP accordingly. From there, *də* is able to Agree with Foc^0, thereby checking off its uninterpretable feature. Since the feature-checking requirement of *də* is already satisfied in the configuration in (34b), *də* is not allowed to undergo further movement. Therefore, we correctly predict the variant of (34a) with sentence-final *də* (i.e. (21a)) to be unacceptable.

To sum up, due to the uninterpretable feature of *də*, *də* surfaces in positions from which Agree with Foc^0 is possible. The bottom-up fashion of structure-building ensures that the uninterpretable feature of *də* gets checked as soon as it can be, that is, as soon as Foc^0 enters the structure. This leads to the closeness constraint observed in (22): as long as the feature-checking requirement of *də* is satisfied in a lower position, *də* will not move to a higher position. In other words, the placement of *də* in a non-sentence-final position blocks the placement of *də* sentence-finally.

4. Conclusion. I have examined the distribution of Sinhala Q-particle *də* and observed that *də* must be as close to the *wh*-word as possible. I have argued that (i) *də* is generated by adjoining to the *wh*-word if it can, and (ii) *də* undergoes overt movement that is driven by the need to check off an uninterpretable feature that it carries (with no movement of *də* allowed if *də* is in the relevant feature-checking relation). This account captured the complex patterns of degree questions, long-distance questions, and questions with a *wh*-word within an NP. It also captured what looks like a competition between the different positions of *də*, i.e. the availability of a non-sentence-final position of *də* blocks the availability of a sentence-final one. Besides the open questions that have already been discussed, a direction for future work is to investigate whether the proposed account can be extended to languages where a similar locality constraint

is found in focus constructions (e.g. Mandarin, cf. Erlewine 2016, Zanon & Hsu 2019; Vietnamese, cf. Erlewine 2017).

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