

English and Romanian Echo Questions and Islands: an Empirical Study

Abstract

The present paper constitutes an analysis of two linguistic phenomena, namely *echo questions* and *islands*. This work provides a descriptive analysis of these phenomena in two languages, Romanian and English, which present similarities as well as differences. Echo questions are traditionally described in the literature as questions in which part or all of what was uttered in a previous utterance is repeated. Cross-linguistically, echo questions have been treated as a marginal phenomenon due to the features that distinguish them from their non-echo question counterparts. Islands, as the second phenomenon considered here, are found in two main varieties, namely *weak* and *strong islands*, and are generally described as being domains which do not allow extraction at all, or allow extraction of some phrases but not of others. One common feature of non-echo questions in Romanian and English is that they present wh-movement, which is subject to island constraint, while in-situ wh-phrases in echo-questions are not subject to this phenomenon. The main goal of the present paper is to demonstrate empirically Comorovski's (1996) theory, according to which in-situ echo wh-phrases are acceptable in both Romanian strong and weak islands, whereas ex-situ echo wh-phrases are acceptable only in weak islands.

Experiment

A sample item is illustrated below:

Item 1

(4) a. Strong islands (CNPC) → echo wh extraction

A1: Mi- a relatat faptul ca Mihai a dat- o afara pe
[me-DAT past. 3S related fact-the that Mihai past.3S threw her-Acc out on
noua secretara
new secretary-the]

“ She told/related to me that Mihai threw out the new secretary.”

B1: *Pe care secretara ti- a relatat faptul ca Mihai a dat-
[on which secretary he-DAT past.3S related fact-the that Mihai past.3S threw
-o afara.
her-Acc out]
“Which secretary did she tell you that he threw out?”

b. Strong islands (CNPC) →echo wh in-situ

A1: Mi- a relatat faptul ca Mihai a dat- o afara pe
[me-DAT past. 3S related fact-the that Mihai past.3S threw her-Acc out on
noua secretara
new secretary-the]
“ She told/related to me that Mihai threw out the new secretary.”

B2: Ti- a relatat faptul ca Mihai a dat- o afara pe
[you-DAT past.3S related fact-the that Mihai past. 3S threw her-Acc out on
care secretara?
which secretary?]
“She told you that Mihai threw out which secretary?”

c. Weak islands (wh-island) →echo wh extraction

A3: Am aflat cine a dat- o afara pe noua secretara.
[past.1S found out who past.3S threw her-Acc out on new secretary]
“I found out who threw out the new secretary.”

B3: Pe care secreatra ai aflat cine a dat- o afara?
[on which secretary have.you found out who past.3S threw her-Acc out?]
“Which secretary did you find out was thrown out?”

d. Weak islands (wh-island) → echo wh in-situ

A4: Am aflat cine a dat- o afara pe noua secretara.
[past.1S found out who past.3S threw her-Acc out on new secretary]
“I found out who threw out the new secretary.”

B4: Ai aflat cine a dat- o afara pe care secretara?
[past.2S found out who past.3S threw her-Acc out on which secretary?]
“Did you find out who threw out which secretary?”

Filler items:

Filler item “perfect”

(5) A1: A inteles ca Ana nu se mai intoarce in acel mediu.
[past.3S understood that Ana not REFLX anymore return to that place]
“She understood that Ana will not return to that place anymore.”

B1: A inteles ca Ana nu se mai intoarce unde?
[past.3S understood that Ana not REFLX anymore return where]
“She understood that Ana will not return where?”

Filler item “wrong”

(6) A1: A plecat cine nu a crezut in potentialul fetei.
[past.3S gone who not past.3S believed in potential-the girl’s]
“Those who did not believe in the girl’s potential went”

B1: In a cui potential a plecat cine n- a crezut?
[in whose potential past.3S gone who not- past.3S believed]
“In whose potential went those who did not believe?”

Filler item “ok”

(7) A1: Regreta cine l- a ignorat pe dirijorul englez.

[regrets who he-Acc past.3S ignored on conductor-the English]
“Those who ignored the English director had regrets.”

B1: Pe care dirijor regreta cine l- a ignorat?
[on which conductor regret.3S who he-Acc past.3S ignored]
“Who regrets having ignored which conductor?”

Overall picture of the results:

