CHAPTER III

ECHO QUESTIONS AND GRAMMATICAL CONSTRAINTS

1. WH-FRONTING IN ROMANIAN

Romanian constituent questions, whether standard or echo, are formed by fronting all the wh-phrases in the sentence. The only difference between standard wh-questions and echo wh-questions lies in their intonation. Roughly, the former have a falling contour, whereas the latter have a rising contour. ¹

There are two classes of exceptions to the obligatory fronting rule. One class involves echo wh-questions. This class divides in two: echo wh-questions in which the echo wh-phrase is in an extraction island and echo wh-questions formed on standard wh-questions (what Karttunen (1977: fn. 7) calls "second order questions"). With both kinds of questions, the echo wh-expression has to remain in situ. Both will be discussed later in the chapter.

A second class of questions that allow wh-in-situ involves wh-questions that do not constitute a sentence on their own. The questions in (1) come from Dascălu (1980: 165-166):

(1) Ca să facem ce?
    in order to do-1p.pl. what
    'In order to do what?'

¹ For a detailed description of the intonation of Romanian echo-questions, see Dascălu (1979a); for standard questions, see Dascălu (1979b, 1980).
None of the questions above can initiate a discourse. Note that the questions in (1)-(2) are incomplete sentences, formed of just a purpose clause. They are appropriately asked only if the context furnishes a main clause which the purpose clause can be understood as being subordinated to. Note also that the question in (2) is introduced by the coordinating conjunction și ('and'), as if it were coordinated across discourse with a sentence previously uttered by another participant in the conversation. Thus, neither of the questions in (1)-(2) are sentences in their own right. Note also that (3) can only be used as a rhetorical question.

Why do the interrogations in (1)-(2) allow wh-in-situ? A possible explanation may turn around the peculiar fact that a stretch of a dialogue forms a single sentence. This "sentence" has rather extraordinary properties: in (1)-(2), the first part of the sentence is a declarative clause whose verb need not subcategorize for an interrogative, yet the last part of the sentence is an interrogative; in (3), the first conjunct is a declarative, whereas the second is an interrogative. In all of (1)-(3), the fact that the wh-phrase stays in situ instead of being fronted in the interrogative clauses ensures that these clauses have not only declarative denotation, but also declarative syntax, even though they do contain an interrogative word and have interrogative intonation.  

Questions of this sort start on a medium pitch, which is preserved up to the syllable that precedes the wh-phrase, when the pitch rises abruptly, and then falls abruptly on the interrogative word. In contrast, declarative clauses start on a medium pitch which they maintain close to the end, when the pitch falls.

For a detailed description of the intonation of Romanian questions with wh-in-