1. Introduction

Largely couched within the minimalist framework (Chomsky 1995, et seq.), this dissertation investigates the mapping between syntax and semantics, in the context of two types of (Modern Greek) wh-constructions, i.e., questions and sluicing. As presently understood, wh-constructions are sentences that feature a wh-word or phrase, such as pjos (‘who’) or pjo (‘which’) + NP, etc. Questions are fully fleshed-out wh-constructions that may come with either a fronting version, as in (1), or an in situ version, as in (2):

(1) Pjon sinantise i Anna?
who-ACC met-3SG the Anna-NOM
“Who did Anna meet?”

(2) I Anna sinantise pjon?
the Anna-NOM met-3SG who-ACC
“Anna met who?”

Sluicing represents elliptical wh-constructions, which seem to attest the in situ version of (2), as in (3), yet they yield a meaning that resembles the fully articulated, fronting version of (1), as in (4):

(3) I Anna sinantise kapjon ala dhen ipe pjon
the Anna-Nom met-3SG someone-ACC but NEG say-3SG who-ACC
“Anna met someone, but she didn’t say who.”

(4) I Anna sinantise kapjon ala dhen ipe pjon sinantise
the Anna-NOM met-3SG someone-ACC but NEG say who-ACC met-3SG
“Anna met someone, but she didn’t say who she met.”

From a theoretical standpoint, a fundamental assumption of the minimalist framework is that each syntactic structure corresponds to two representations, at the phonological (PF) and the semantics (LF) interface respectively. So, the two interfaces, which do not interact with each other, decode the output of
syntax. Within this framework, we may expect that the mapping from syntax to semantics is 1:1, in that each structure is associated with one meaning. If so, then the syntax-semantics mapping is transparent. Concentrating on (Modern Greek) wh-questions and sluicing, this dissertation shows that, in the case of wh-questions, either a fronting (cf., (1)) or an in situ (cf., (2)) structure may each yield two meanings, while, with regard to sluicing (cf. (3)), the relevant structure is virtually “less” than the corresponding meaning (cf., (4)). Given this empirical evidence, it is argued that the association between syntax and semantics may not always be transparent, i.e. for the data under consideration, there is certain semantic information that is not registered in the syntactic structure or, in other words, is “missing”, so to speak. This “missing” information is directly supplied by the interfaces. Specifically, for wh-questions, the disambiguation of meaning happens at PF, while for sluicing, the recovery of meaning occurs at LF. And given that PF contributes to meaning (concerning wh-questions), the two interfaces “see” each other.

The dissertation consists of 6 chapters and gives equal attention to the topics under discussion. More precisely, Chapters 2 and 3 consider wh-questions, Chapters 4 and 5 concentrate on sluicing, and Chapters 1 and 6 introduce and conclude the relevant issues respectively. A summary of the discussion is provided below.

2. The Study

It is generally assumed that the fronted version in (1) corresponds to a “true question”, where the speaker requires a value for the wh-pronoun, seeking new information. Yet, the in situ version in (2) has an “echo-reading”, where the speaker asks for a confirmation of something that has been already said. In this sense, the syntax-semantics mapping is 1:1, i.e., wh-fronting: true question vs. wh-in situ: echo question. In principle, Chapter 2 shows that, given the proper intonation, wh-fronting may correspond to either a true or an echo question, and the same is true with in situ structures. So, the relevant pattern of mapping does not appear to be 1:1. Furthermore, this Chapter compares fronting and in situ wh-questions in terms of distribution, interpretation and intonation. As regards distribution, either true or echo, wh-fronting exhibits blocking-effects (islands), while wh-in situ does not. Concerning true-question interpretation, wh-fronting has “non-exhaustive quantification”, that is, the wh-variable may draw from an infinite set of possible values, while wh-in situ has “exhaustive quantification”, meaning that the wh-variable may draw from a finite set of possible values. With respect to echo-question interpretation, both fronting and in situ correspond to an “individual reading”, in the sense that the wh-variable may only get a value that is already given in the immediate linguistic environment.