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## 11 Interrogative clauses

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Interrogative clauses are marked by special verbal inflections and are signaled by a raising pitch. There is a basic difference between content and polar questions: in content questions verbal inflections distinguish only present tense and past tense; in polar questions, several interrogative paradigms corresponding to those illustrated in chapter 6 have been attested, and there are no polar question particles. Focused content questions are discussed together with content questions in 11.1, and section 11.1.1 is dedicated to question words. Polar questions are discussed in 11.2 and include interrogative copula and existential constructions.

### 11.1 Content questions

Content questions are morphologically marked on verbs and are signaled by the presence of question words and by a distinctive pattern of rising intonation. Verbal inflections in content questions mark either past or present tense, and the latter is used for present and future reference. Past interrogative is marked by *-á*, present interrogative is marked by *-é*; pronominal subject marking is obligatory on interrogative verbs, and independent pronouns can co-occur with clitic pronouns. Question words cannot be combined with the interrogative paradigms described in 11.2.3.

(1a) **hamó ki = yi?-á?**  
 where.NSP 3 = go-PAST.INT  
 where did he go?/ where did they go?

(1b) **har ha = zag-é?**  
 what 2SG = want-PRES.INT  
 what do you want?

The copula is omitted in content questions, and the verbal inflections *-á* and *-é* are suffixed directly to the question word:

(2a) **agá har-á?**  
 DEM2.M what-PAST.INT  
 what was that?

(2b) **har-é?**  
 what-PRES.INT  
 what is (it)?

If the question word is focused, a cleft construction is used. The main verb is nominalized into a relative verb and precedes the question word:

(3a) **han = is-óno har?**  
 2SG = eat-REL.PAST.F what  
what (F) did you eat? (lit. what (F) you ate, what is it?)

(3b) **baq-óno har-é?**  
 fall-REL.PAST.F what-PRES.INT  
what fell? (lit. the thing that fell (F), what is it?)

### 11.1.1 Question words

Questions words in Hamar constitute a closed class, however they are heterogeneous with respect to their morphological make up and syntactic behavior. Except for the question word ‘how many?’, all the others begin in *ha-*. Some of them are unanalyzable words, others can be either inflected and/or marked for case. A list of basic content question words is given in table 11.1.

Table 11.1: Basic question words

who	háibene, háine
which	hamá
where	hamó, hamá
what	har
how	hátti
why	hárna
when	haa
how many	mee máine ~ mei máine

It is surprising to find the copula *-ne* suffixed to the question word *háibene* or *háine* ‘who?’ and in the expression *mee máine* ‘how many?’, since *-ne* is the affirmative copula and its interrogative counterpart is *-u*. *hai-* is the base to which case suffixes are attached and it can never occur bare.

Similar to personal pronouns, the question word for ‘who’ has a subject and object form and it can take case suffixes depending on the syntactic role. It does not inflect for gender or number, however gender and number are expressed on the relativized verb or noun preceding it.

The following excerpt illustrates the use of *háine* and *háidan* in the same conversation, in the function of subject and object (A and B stand for different speakers):

- (4) A: **boráana eel-idí**  
 Boráana call-PF  
 the Boráana called  
 B: **eel-â háine?**  
 call-REL.PAST.M who  
 who called? (lit. who is the one (M) who called?)  
 A: **eel-ána boráana**  
 call-REL.PAST.PL Boráana  
 the Boráana called (lit. those (PL) who called are the Boráana)  
 B: **háí-đan?**  
 who-ACC  
 whom (did they call)?  
 A: **t'álian-đan!**  
 Italians-ACC  
 the Italians!

The form *háibene* is a variant of *háine*, and probably it is formed by the comitative case *-be*:

- (5) **kidí háibene? / kidí háine?**  
 3 who 3 who  
 who is he? who is he?

The comitative form of the question word *háine* is *háibet*, i.e. the comitative case *-bet* is suffixed to the base *hai-* :

- (6) **háí-bet ki = kaam-á?**  
 who-COM 3 = meet-PAST.INT  
 with whom did he meet?

The question 'what's your name' is formulated with *háine*:

- (7) **námmo hánno háine?**  
 name:F.S 2SG:F who  
 What's your name?

The question word for 'which' can be considered a full-fledged (pro)nominal form since it can be inflected for masculine and feminine gender or plural number depending on the noun it modifies. The following excerpt illustrates the agreement pattern of *hamá*, which inflects like declension 2 nouns.

- (8a) **hamâ ukulê?**  
 which:M donkey:M?  
 which donkey (M)?
- (8b) **hammó wóngo?**  
 which:F.S cow:F.S  
 which cow (F)?
- (8c) **hammá qullá?**  
 which:PL goat:PL  
 which goats?

The citation form *hamá* is homophonous with the deictic interrogative word ‘where’ *hamá*, and the two are probably related:

- (9a) **kidí goitê hamá-xa ki = ni?-é?**  
 3 way:M which:M-INS 3 = come-PRES.INT  
 through which path do they come? (which is the exact path they come through?)
- (9b) A: **álpa í = na imá!**  
 knife 1SG = DAT give.IMP.2SG  
 pass me a knife  
 B: **hamá?**  
 which  
 which one?  
 A: **agá-sh**  
 DEM2.M-PRS  
 that one!

The locative interrogative words *hamá/hamó* were already introduced in chapter 5. Specific and non-specific location is expressed respectively by the vowels *-a* and *-o* (cf. chapter 5). Several locative cases can be suffixed to the interrogative words *hamá* and *hamó* (10), depending on whether they refer to location or movement. See section 11.2.2 below for further details on interrogative locational predication.

- (10a) **yaatâ yáan-sa hamá-bar ki = dáa?**  
 goat:M goat.F.OBL-GEN where.SP-AD 3 = exist.INT  
 Where exactly is the male goat with respect to the female goat?

- (10b) **yáa hamó-te adǎ-á?**  
 2SG where.NSP-LOC be.born-PAST.INT  
 Where were you born?
- (10c) **yáa waakí gǎá-ise hamó-xa yi?-é?**  
 2SG cow hit-CNV1 where.NSP-INS go-PRES.INT  
 (through) where are you going to herd the cattle?
- (10d) **yáa hamó-rra ni?-é?**  
 2SG where.NSP-ABL come-PRES.INT  
 where are you coming from?
- (10e) **hamá-xa ki = yi?-á?**  
 where.SP-INS 3 = go-PAST.INT  
 (through) where exactly did he pass?

The question word *har* ‘what’ and *hátti* ‘how’ can have overlapping meanings:

- (11a) **har ko = ham-á?**  
 what 3F = say-PAST.INT  
 what did she say?
- (11b) **hátti ko = ham-á?**  
 what 3F = say-PAST.INT  
 what did she say? / how did she say?
- (11c) **kidí har ki = ashk-é?**  
 3 what 3 = make-PRES.INT  
 what will he make?

The question word *har* translates as ‘how’ when it is marked by the instrumental case *-ka*:

- (12a) **qultá hár-ka ki = di-á?**  
 goat:M what-INS 3 = die-PAST.INT  
 how did the goat die?
- (12b) **hár-ka = ki yé = ǎan qan-é?, hár-ka = ki**  
 what-INS = 3 2PL = ACC hit-PRES.INT what-INS = 3  
**yéɛn dees-é?**  
 2PL:ACC kill-PRES.INT  
 how do they fight you? how do they kill you?

- (12c) **yáa hár-ka sag-á?**  
 2SG what-INS cross-PAST.INT  
 how did you cross?

The question word *hátti* has the variant form *hátta* which has been attested in combination with the converb marker *-ise*:

- (13) **gudirí í=ɗan hattá-ise bag-é?**  
 hyena 1SG=ACC how-CNV1 tease-PRES.INT  
 how dare Hyena tease me?

The question words for ‘why’, ‘when’ and ‘how many’ are invariable and cannot be suffixed with case markers:

- (14) **yedí kínka hárna woc'im-á?**  
 2PL together why argue-PAST.INT  
 why did you argue?

- (15) **kodí haa kemɓ-é?**  
 3F when get.married-PRES.INT  
 when will she get married?

- (16) **birr mei máine ki=zag-é?**  
 birr how.many 3=want-PRES.INT  
 how much does he want?

## 11.2 Polar questions

Polar questions prompt ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers and are signaled by interrogative verbal inflections and rising intonation on the verb. Word order is not altered in polar questions. In the following sections the interrogative copula and locational predication are discussed first (11.2.1, 11.2.2) followed by interrogative verbal paradigms and disjunctive questions (11.2.3, 11.2.4).

### 11.2.1 Interrogative copula

The interrogative copula is *-u*, and it is suffixed, as its affirmative counterpart, to the nominal predicate. It does not distinguish tense, aspect, nor person.

- (17a) **koró onnó-u?**  
 DEM1.F house:F.S-INT.COP  
 is this the house?

- (17b) **paráni-n pée-no fegé-u?**  
 foreigner-F.OBL land-F.S far-INT.COP  
 is the country of the foreigners far?

The standard Hamar greeting consists of an interrogative nominal clause (18a). The answer is the equivalent affirmative nominal clause (18b):

- (18a) **payá-u?**  
 good-INT.COP  
 how are you? (li. is it good?)

- (18b) **payá-ne**  
 good-COP  
 I am fine (li. it is good)

The interrogative copula *-u* is found on some interrogative verbal paradigms, see the next sections.

### 11.2.2 Interrogative existential

Existential predication in interrogative clauses varies depending on whether the predication expresses locational or existential meaning (cf. chapter 9).

For locational predication, the suppletive stem of the existential predicator *dáa* is used. The suppletive stem *qóle* (4a) can be substituted for the question word *hamó* ‘where’ followed by the perfective interrogative form of the predicator (4b): recall that locational predication is always marked by the perfective aspect (chapter 9, section 9.3). The two constructions co-exist and do not differ semantically.

- (19a) **galá-no qóle?**  
 food-F.S exist.INT  
 where is the food?

- (19b) **ári hamó-te ko = dáa?**  
 Aari wher.NSP-LOC 3F = exist.INT  
 where is Aari?

See next section for an overview of interrogative paradigms.

For existential predication, the general interrogative form of the existential predicator *dáa* is used. This requires the suffixation of the interrogative copula *-u* to the General Declarative of *dáa* (see also next section).

(20a) **noqó dá-u?**  
 water exist-INT.COP  
 is there water?

(20b) **dáa**  
 exist  
 there is (response to 20a)

Recall that the General Declarative of *dáa* does not require repetition of the stem (see chapter 9).

### 11.2.3 Interrogative paradigms

The interrogative paradigms are available for the affirmative paradigms listed in table 11.2.

Table 11.2: Interrogative paradigms

General Declarative
Perfect
Present and Future
Present Progressive
Perfective

Apart from the perfective, the interrogative paradigms listed in table 11.2 cannot be combined with the question words discussed in 11.1.

The interrogative equivalent of the General Declarative is formed by suffixing the interrogative copula *-u* to the stem of the verb ending in *-á*. Different from the General Declarative in affirmative-declarative clauses, the stem is not reduplicated in the interrogative paradigm, cf. (21a) and (21b).

(21a) **kodí aapó-n desá-u?**  
 3F mouth-F.OBL know-INT.COP  
 does she know the languages?

(21b) **ĩi, kodí desá~desá**  
 yes 3F know~know  
 yes, she knows (response to 21a)

When used in the first person singular, the general interrogative has permissive interpretation:

(22a) **háan kalshá-u?**  
 2SG help-INT.COP  
 may I help you?

(22b) **ábi giá-u?**  
 another tell-INT.COP  
 shall I say another one?

(22c) **ni?á-u?**  
 come-INT.COP  
 shall I come?

The interrogative copula is used to form the interrogative perfect. The *-idí* inflection of the affirmative paradigm is substituted for *-idú*:

(23a) **yáa í = ďan bag-idú ?**  
 2SG 1SG = ACC tease-PF.INT  
 have you made fun of me?

(23b) **kodí kemĹ-idú ?**  
 3F marry:PASS-PF.INT  
 is she married?

(23b) **isín-no ush-idú ?**  
 sorghum-F.S be.ripe-PF.INT  
 is the sorghum ripe?

The present and the future interrogative are formed by substituting the final vowel *-é* of the corresponding declarative form (cf. chapter 9, section 9.1.3), with the vowel *-ó*. The aspectual marker *-da*, which in the affirmative-declarative paradigm is marked on each person except for the third persons (cf. table 9.3 in chapter 9), is marked only on the first persons in the interrogative paradigm. For the morpho-phonological changes occurring in the future interrogative paradigm, see phonological rule P6 and morpho-phonological rule MP2 in chapter 2.

Table 11.3: Interrogative present and future conjugation

	Present	Future
1SG	i = da- <b>wuc'</b> -ó?	<b>wuc'</b> á = i = da <b>wuc'</b> -ó?
2SG	ha = <b>wuc'</b> -ó?	<b>wuc'</b> á = ha <b>wuc'</b> -ó? [wutʃ'á wutʃ'ó]
3M/3PL	ki = <b>wuc'</b> -ó?	<b>wuc'</b> á ki = <b>wuc'</b> -ó?
3F	ko = <b>wuc'</b> -ó?	<b>wuc'</b> á ko = <b>wuc'</b> -ó?
1PL	wo = da- <b>wuc'</b> -ó?	<b>wuc'</b> á = wo = da <b>wuc'</b> -ó? [wutʃ'óda wutʃ'ó]
2PL	ye = <b>wuc'</b> -ó?	<b>wuc'</b> á = ye <b>wuc'</b> -ó? [wutʃ'é wutʃ'ó]

The interrogative paradigm corresponding to the perfective is obtained by omitting the aspectual marker which is obligatory in the declarative form (cf. chapter 9, section 9.1.5). A similar morpho-syntactic strategy (referred to as ‘reductive morphology’ by Azeb 2012a) is used to contrast polar interrogatives and declaratives in other Omotic languages such as Dime, Sheko and Zargulla (Azeb 2012a:494).

(24a) **náa galá i = bax-á?**  
 yesterday food 1SG = cook-PAST.INT  
 did I cook food yesterday?

(24b) **náa galá i = baxá-de**  
 yesterday food 1SG = cook-PFV  
 yesterday I cooked food (response to 24a)

The aspectual marker is omitted also in the interrogative existential construction used in the present progressive:

(25a) **ári baxá-te ko = dáa ?**  
 Aari cook-SE 3F = exist.INT  
 Is Aari cooking?

(25b) **ári baxá-te ko = dáa-de**  
 Aari cook-SE 3F = exist-PFV  
 Aari is cooking (response to 25a).

#### 11.2.4 Disjunctive questions

The disjunctive marker was introduced in chapter 8 (section 8.5), where it was shown that disjunctive coordination is monosyndetic. Disjunctive questions are formed by suffixing the disjunctive marker *-mo*<sup>54</sup> to one of the two verbs:

(26) **naasâ daq-idí-mo, naasâ di-idú?**  
 child:M survive-PF-DISJ child:M die-PF.INT  
 has the child survived or has he died?

Only the final verb gets the interrogative inflection. The disjunctive suffix has been sporadically reported in interrogative sentences of the type shown in (27), where the second option is omitted:

<sup>54</sup> The same disjunctive suffix exists in Maale, cf. Azeb 2001:219-221.

(27a) **ínta lum-ánna i = dáa-mo?**  
1SG feel.unwell-OPT 1SG = exist-DISJ  
am I about to get sick or what?

(27b) **ush-idí-mo?**  
be.ripe-PF-DISJ  
is it ripe or what?

