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## Chapter 14

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### Questions

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Nchane interrogative constructions may be categorized into two types: polar questions (sometimes referred to as yes-no questions) and content questions. Polar questions are formed by a low tone enclitic, while content questions utilize one of several question words, most of which behave like interrogative pronouns, taking the place of the constituent being questioned. The different types of interrogative constructions, and the question element associated with them, are summarized in Table 14.1.

<b>Tone/word</b>	<b>Gloss</b>	<b>Type of interrogative</b>
L tone enclitic	QP	polar
<b>lá/-lá</b>	Q	general
<b>yēŋ</b>	who	person
<b>fānē</b>	where	place
<b>-mē:</b>	how many	number
<b>nē:</b>	how	manner/quantity

Table 14.1 Summary of Nchane question types.

Section 14.1 describes polar questions, which also includes a short description of tag questions, a subtype of polar question. Section 14.2 treats content questions.

Note that rhetorical questions appear to be formally identical to non-rhetorical questions, with context indicating which type it is. These are therefore not covered explicitly in this chapter. Embedded questions also do not appear here, since they occur infrequently in the corpus and little is known about their form and function. See §7.6 for limited examples.

### 14.1 Polar Questions

Polar questions are those for which a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response is appropriate. In Nchane, these clauses are differentiated from their declarative counterparts by a floating low tone enclitic “QP” (an abbreviation for Question-Polar), which is most often realized as a falling tone on the final syllable of the clause. This is illustrated in the example set given in (14.1), where a. is a declarative clause, and b. is its polar question counterpart.

(14.1) a. w̄ jí-í Ø-bèlèkāŋ  
2SG eat-PROG c1-papaya

*‘You are eating papaya.’*

b. w̄ jí-í Ø-bèlèkāŋ  
2SG eat-PROG c1-papaya.QP

*‘Are you eating papaya?’*

The falling realization of the enclitic can be mitigated or neutralized in some circumstances. Such appears to be the case in (14.2), where the length of the utterance is so long that downdrift and lack of air support results in the polar question enclitic being realized as low rather than falling. Note that the applicative marker usually has a mid tone.

(14.2) n̄sā y-ē bí: wù lē, lā: k̄-nf̄:  
c9.friend c9-3SG.POSS ask 3SG APPL Q.COMP c7-blind.man

k̄-nē tó k̄ t̄-ò yànè té lè  
c7-PROX HAB c7 come-PROG here also APPL.QP

*‘Her friend asked her, “Is this blind man always coming here too?”’*

What-goes-around.2.2

Example (14.3) shows further that the enclitic is neutralized when the word it cliticizes already has a falling tone. The word for “thing” normally is pronounced with a ML fall in utterance final position.

- (14.3) wǒ jí wā fy-ē:  
2SG eat already c19-thing.QP

*'Have you already eaten something?'*

What-goes-around.4.5

Note that this example also shows what appears to be question intonation, with the mid-toned 2SG pronoun having a SH tone and the word for “already”, which normally has a HL tone, is realized with a M tone. Question intonation as seen here is sometimes observed in Content questions as well, but its realization appears to be optional.

Tag questions are a special type of polar question consisting of an assertive declarative statement, followed by a short polar question, requesting affirmation or disaffirmation of the assumption asserted in the declarative statement. Example (14.4) demonstrates that the tag in Nchane tag questions takes the form of the short phrase **lé jíchē**: ‘it is true’, with the polar question tone enclitic realized on the final word of the tag. The form for ‘true’ without the L enclitic is normally **jíchē**:

- (14.4) wò ké-é lē mw-ē: mū-nē  
2SG know-PROG COMP c18a-thing c18a-PROX

sān-é mē nē, lé jíchē:  
smell-PROG 1SG.PRO like.this COP true.QP

*'You know that these things are offensive to me (lit. smelling me), right?'*

Inheritance.4

An important aspect of tag question formation to typological studies is whether the assertion and the tag have the same polarity. The assertion and tag have opposite polarity in many languages. This is not the case for Nchane; the tag is invariably positive, regardless of the polarity of the assertive statement, as illustrated in (14.5). The polarity of the assertive statement is positive in a. and negative in b. Nevertheless, the tag portion of the question remains positive in each case.

- (14.5) a. jìjì gēn-é ā-bèŋ, lé jíchē:  
N. go-PROG c18-B. COP true.QP

*'Nji is going to Bem, true?'*

- b. á jìjì gēn-è ā-bèŋ gè, lé jíchē:  
NEG1 N. go-PROG c18-B. NEG2 COP true.QP

*'Nji is not going to Bem, true?'*

## 14.2 Content questions

Content questions are those which seek the identity of some unknown constituent. These questions in Nchane utilize one of several question words, which correspond to the type of constituent that is unknown by the questioner. The question word typically is coreferential with the unknown constituent (i.e., they are interrogative pronouns), occurring in the same clausal position as that constituent in a declarative clause.

The question word **mē̃**: ‘how.many’ is an interrogative nominal modifier which follows a noun. It stands in the place of the number in declarative sentences and is appropriately marked with an agreement prefix. So, although it is not itself pronominal, it is replacive.

Although question words are considered as inherently focused, the interrogative clause may explicitly mark the question word as in focus, either through a cleft construction or postverbal focus. Each of the interrogative words is treated in the following sections, where they appear bolded.

### 14.2.1 The interrogative pronoun **lá** ‘Q’

The form **lá** is productive as an interrogative marker and is observed in three different types of syntactic constructions. In the first, **lá** takes the place of the constituent in question. The resulting question can often be translated with the question word ‘what’. The examples presented in (14.6) represent two different syntactic strategies for the common question, “What is this?”.

- (14.6) a. **fī-nē**      **lé**    **lá**  
                   c19-PROX    COP    Q

*‘What is this?’*

- b. **lé**      **lá**    **fī-nè**  
           COP    Q    c19-PROX

*‘What is this?’ (lit. it is what, this)*

Note that non clause-final occurrences of **lá** are usually realized with a super high tone when preceded by the copula, as in (14.6)b. This super high tone is likely the result of question intonation associated with this particular type of question construction.

In both examples, the interrogative pronoun occurs in the postverbal focus position. But example (14.6)b is a copula clause with a right-dislocated subject, marking it explicitly as Topic.

Examples (14.7) and (14.8) illustrate questions with an object and subject interrogative respectively. Example (14.7) utilizes a cleft construction to mark the

questioned constituent as in focus. In addition, it demonstrates that **lá** is treated as belonging to class 19, as evidenced by the corresponding class 19 relativizer.

(14.7) wù bí: bṵ: bā-ā lé là:  
3SG ask c2.child c2-ANA2 APPL Q.COMP

lé **lá** fī bēŋ bé jî  
COP Q c19REL 2PL P1 eat

*'...he asked those children, "What is it that you ate?".'*

What-goes-around.9.8

The syntactic analysis of example (14.8) is unclear, but it demonstrates that the interrogative pronoun can occur clause initially. The high tone on the subject marker suggests that it is really a relativizer, which then hints at this clause being a type of cleft construction (but lacking a copula). Another possibility is that the tone reflects pragmatic concerns. Regardless, this example is important for establishing the different clausal positions available for the interrogative pronoun.

(14.8) **lá** fī yí wò  
Q c19REL pain 2SG

*'What is hurting you?'*

The question word **lá** can sometimes be used to elicit the reason for an action or state, with the translation appropriately using the word "why", as illustrated in example (14.9). In the sentence which follows this example, the wife explains the reason for her crying.

(14.9) Ø-jwē: bí: là: lé **lá**  
c1-husband.3SG.POSS ask Q.COMP COP Q

fī wò bēd-é là  
c19REL 2SG cry-PROG CE

*'Her husband asked, "So, why are you crying?".'* (lit. *it is what that you are crying*)

What-goes-around.9.12

As was stated in §9.5, this example might actually present a type of rhetorical question, where the presence of the Counter-expectation adverb indicates that the speaker somehow does not believe that there is a valid reason for her crying.

The second type of syntactic construction involves **lá** and an adverbial word of some kind. In (14.10) and (14.11) **lá** follows the time word **ségé** and the reason clause introducer **jǐjē** respectively. In both cases, the interrogative pronoun is replacing the elements given in the response, which follow the adverb. For example,

the response to the question in (14.11) could be **ɲjɛ̄ n-tɛ̄mɛ̄ gɛ̄** ‘because I am not well (lit. strong)’. The adverbial introducer is maintained in the response.

(14.10) Ø-ɲfɔ̄ŋ tó ségɛ́ **lá**  
c1-chief come when Q

‘When will the chief come?’

(14.11) wò bá: jɔ̄ kɔ̄-dɛ̄ gɛ̄ ɲjɛ̄ **lá**  
2SG still c9.water catch-COMPL NEG2 reason Q

‘Why have you not carried water?’

Finally, **lá** can appear in a noun phrase, where it takes an agreement prefix corresponding to the head noun. The resulting form can be translated as “which”. The agreement prefix is realized with a H tone. Examples (14.12) and (14.13) are given to illustrate.

(14.12) lé Ø-mwā **wú-lá** wú jí bvù-lɛ̄:  
COP c1-child c1-Q c1REL eat c14-fufu

‘Which child ate fufu?’

(14.13) Ø-ɲfɔ̄ŋ tó Ø-jú **chí-lá**  
c1-chief come c5-day c5-Q

‘When will the chief come?’ (lit. the chief comes which day)

### 14.2.2 The interrogative pronoun **yɛ̄ŋ** ‘who’

The interrogative word **yɛ̄ŋ** ‘who’ is pronominal, taking the place of the unknown referent, which is usually a human, as in (14.14).

(14.14) wū-nɛ̄ lé **yɛ̄ŋ**  
c1-PROX COP who

‘Who is this?’

Unknown possessors are usually encoded with **yɛ̄ŋ**, with the accompanying translation of “whose”, as illustrated in (14.15). The pronoun **yɛ̄ŋ** is coreferential with the possessor, whether expressed as a possessive pronoun or the N<sub>2</sub> of an associative noun phrase. (As stated in §5.3, omission of the associative noun marker for class 1 and class 9 head nominals has been reported for Noni and is likely for Nchane as well. Thus, the syntax of this interrogative could be comparable to either type of genitive construction.)



- (14.15) lé Ø-mwā yéŋ wú jí bvù-lɛ:  
 COP c1-child who c1REL eat c14-fufu

*'Whose child ate fufu?'*

Example (14.16) shows **yéŋ** again appearing in an associative noun phrase. But in this case, it is not expressing the notion of possession, but is best translated as “which”. This question could be asked in the context of buying a hoe from a vendor at the market who has several hoes to choose from.

- (14.16) wò gón-ě jì yī yéŋ  
 2SG want-PROG c9.hoe c9AM who

*'Which hoe do you want?'*

### 14.2.3 The interrogative pronoun **fànē** ‘where’

‘Where’ questions utilize the interrogative pronoun **fànē**, as in (14.17) and (14.18).

- (14.17) wò gēn-é fànē  
 2SG go-PROG where

*'Where are you going?'*

- (14.18) Ø-chijò lé fànē  
 c1-father.2SG.POSS COP where

*'Where is your father?'*

Example (14.19) presents the locative interrogative pronoun co-occurring with an Object. The interrogative pronoun appears in the immediately-after-verb Focus position, with the Object following, suggesting that this is normative for the interrogative locative pronoun. This is particularly noteworthy since focus-marked Locative Obliques are unattested in the immediately-after-verb position.

- (14.19) nò Ø-jwē: shil-é fè-kū:,  
 like.that c1-husband.3SG.POSS sit-PROG c16-down

wù mō wù bí: lē wō jó fànē m-bà  
 3SG RES 3SG ask COMP 2SG take where c6a-soup

*'As her husband was sitting down, then he asked "Where will you get soup?"'*  
 Jealous Husband.10

#### 14.2.4 The interrogative nominal modifier **mê:** ‘how.many’

The unknown quantity of countable items is expressed through the interrogative nominal modifier **mê:**, which is marked by a noun class agreement prefix corresponding to the item in question. It follows the noun that it modifies, as illustrated in (14.20) and (14.21).

- (14.20) wō lé b'é bō: **bā-mê:**  
2SG COP with c2.child c2-how.many

*‘How many children do you have?’*

- (14.21) lé bī-gè **bī-mê:**  
COP c8-teeth c8-how.many

*‘How much does it cost?’*

#### 14.2.5 The interrogative adverbial pronoun **nê:** ‘how’

The interrogative adverbial pronoun **nê:** is utilized in forming manner questions, as demonstrated in example (14.22). The pronoun occurs at the right edge of the clause and is coreferential with the propositional response.

- (14.22) bā fê-dē Ø-ŋkāŋ **nê:**  
they make-COMPL c1-beer how

*‘How do they make corn beer?’*

A second function of **nê:** is in forming questions seeking the unknown quantity of uncountable (or mass) nouns. In (14.23) the interrogative pronoun follows the uncountable noun in question, while in (14.24) it follows the main verb.

- (14.23) wò kēm-é Ø-ŋkāŋ **nê:**  
2SG have-PROG c1-sha how

*‘How much sha (i.e., corn beer) do you have?’*

- (14.24) jò lé yī shē **nê:** ā shā lē  
c9.water COP c9 remain how in c9.pot APPL

*‘How much water is remaining in the pot?’ (lit. the water remains how in the pot)*

In this second example, the uncountable noun appears to be topical, as it occurs in the preverbal position associated with Topics. It is possible then that this accounts for the differing clause position of the interrogative pronoun.

This interrogative pronoun also appears in questions requesting the degree of certain quality nouns attributed to some nominal constituent. In this context, the interrogative pronoun follows a prepositional phrase in which the quality noun is the prepositional complement, as (14.25) and (14.26) illustrate.

- (14.25) bī        y-ò                lé    yē    bvū-tādē    lē    **nē:**  
 c9.goat    c9-2SG.POSS    COP    on    c14-grow    APPL    how

*‘How big is your goat?’ (lit. your goat is on growth how)*

- (14.26) Ø-mwā    w-ò                lé    yē    bvū-jūnē    lē    **nē:**  
 c1-child    c1-2SG.POSS    COP    on    c14-be.old    APPL    how

*‘How old is your child?’ (lit. your child is on oldness how)*

It can be observed that the interrogative adverbial pronoun **nē:** is similar in form to the interrogative nominal modifier **mē:** treated in §14.2.4. Both have the shape **Nē:** and are marked with a ML falling tone. Furthermore, there is partial overlap in the semantics expressed by both words—both encoding measurement of quantity. Therefore, it is possible that they share a common source. One candidate for that source is the **né** ‘GEST’ treated in §8.5.

