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A grammar of Sandawe : a Khoisan language of Tanzania

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Chapter 8

Interrogatives

Two types of questions are treated in the following sections: question word questions and yes/no-questions. Question word questions are characterized by a question word and, optionally, the general question marker =ná (see section 5.5 for more information on this clitic). Questions of state have a different structure: they are characterized by a question marker –xè, which is suffixed to the questioned element. The general question marker is obligatory in these questions. Yes/no-questions may be marked morphologically, by the yes/no-question marker =nè (see also section 5.4), or prosodically. The general question marker =ná can also occur in this type of question.

8.1. Question word questions

Question word questions are characterized by the presence of a question word. The following question words are treated in terms:

- hó ‘who?’
- hótò, hóbè ‘what?’
- hótò-mèé, hòsì, hèn ‘why?’
- hákù, há- ‘where?’
- há?àsù ‘when, what time?’
- híkí ‘how?’
- hà- ‘which?’
- hánè- ‘how many?’
- the question marker –xè for questions of state.

Question word questions may be accompanied by the general question marker =ná, a clitic which can be attached to the questioned element, the question word, or at the end of the clause. Note that the clitic is attached after the subject modality clitic and that it is not necessarily part of the clitic complex. For more information see sections 5.5 and 5.7.

mátò-ŋ=ná hákù
gourd-DEF-Q where?
Where is the gourd?

hákw=i=ná ‘ŋiyé-wà
where?=2SG=Q SV.stay:SG-PL2
Where do you live?

mátô-ŋ hákù ɲ||èé-ká-á-pò=ná
 gourd-DEF where? enter-COM-3O-2SG:NR=Q
 The gourd, where will you enter with it?

hó ‘who?’ is used to question humans and to ask for someone’s name.

hàáw=ná hó
 DEM2.m=Q who?
 Who is that one?

hàpú ʔ||wá hó
 you POSS.name who?
 What is your name?

When the question word refers to multiple human beings, the plural suffix **-kó** is added.⁷⁹

hàásò=ná hó-kó
 DEM2.PL-Q who?-PL
 Who are those?

In order to question about a group of persons the collective suffix **-x̣** is used. Note that it co-occurs with the plural suffix **-kó**.

wàròngèé hó-kó-x̣=à ɲ|ú-ʔúwá-á
 God who?-PL-COLL=3 create-PL1-3O
 The group consisting of whom did God create?

hó occurs both as subject and non-subject argument. As a subject argument, **hó** hosts the subject focus marker **-aa**.

hó-áá n|òmósò-n-sò ɲ|wéé-ʔiŋ
 who?-SFOC people:PL-DEF-PL create-3PL
 Who has created Mankind? (lit. the people)

When **hó** questions the object argument, it can serve as the host for the subject/modality clitic.

wàròngèé hó=à ɲ|úʔiyá-á
 God who?=3 create-3O
 Whom did God create?

⁷⁹ This suffix further occurs only as a plural marker in **ɲ||ákòsò** ‘certain people’ and **ɲ||ókó** ‘children’ (see section 3.3).

Questions about non-human objects are marked by **hótsò** or **hóbè**, which are used interchangeably. **hótsò** / **hóbè** is used independently, or as modifier which precedes the noun.

hèéw=ná	hótsò	or:	hèéw=ná	hóbè
DEM1.m=Q	what?		DEM1.m=Q	what?
What is this?			What is this?	

When the question word modifies a noun, the question concerns the kind of, or type of that particular object, e.g.:

hótsò **nán=a?à** **thímé-x-’pó**
 what? side_dish=3PL cook-BEN-2SG
 What kind of side dish did they cook for you?

Three question words are used to ask for a reason: **hótsò-mèé**, **hòsì**, and **hên**. All are translated by ‘why?’, the semantic nuances between the three were not investigated. Our impression is that **hótsò-mèé** is a neutral way of asking for a reason, while **hòsì** and **hên** have a negative connotation.

hótsò-mèé consists of the question word **hótsò** ‘what?’ and the postposition **-mèé** ‘sake’ (cf. **hèwé-mèé** ‘therefore’). **hóbè-mèé** may be used as an alternative, but is rare.

ʔútè **’hótsò-mèé=ì** **|í-’pó**⁸⁰
 yesterday what?-sake=2SG come:SG-NEG:2SG
 Why didn’t you come yesterday?

ʔàfà **hòsì**
 Afa why?
 Why, Afa?

hênɡ=ì **bìkhé-é**
 why?=2SG leave-3O
 Why did you leave it (stop doing)?

háku and **há-** ‘where?’ are locative question words. **háku** is an independent question word. It may be extended with the directional postposition **-nà**: **háku-nà** ‘where to?’,⁸¹

⁸⁰ Question words may be realized at a pitch level which is higher than the pitch level of the adjacent constituents. This is marked by **ʔ**. For more information see 2.4.4.

⁸¹ **kù** is probably a frozen postposition. It has one other occurrence, where it is in complementary distribution with the directional postposition **-nà**: **ts’áákù** ‘at home’ vs. **ts’áá-nà** ‘(to the) home’. **ts’áá** cannot occur in isolation.

ŋlŋ-xê-n=ná hákù
 meat-COLL-DEF=Q where?
 Where is the meat?

hákw=a?à nèé
 where?=3PL stay:PL
 Where are they?

hákw-nì=ì hík'ŋ
 where?-DIR=2SG go:SG
 Where do you go?

há- cannot be used independently, it requires an extension with at least a directional postposition: **há-nà** ‘where to’. Another extension is formed by a combination of postpositions: **há-?á-tè-nà** ‘where to? (vague location)’. See also section 3.6.3 on postpositions.

há-nì=ì hík'ŋ
 where?-DIR=2SG go:SG
 Where do you go?

háásò mànàá-sí-sò há-?á-tè-n=ò níŋ
 DEM2.PL know-BE-3PL where?-LOC-area-DIR=1PL go:PL
 Those have knowledge about where we go.

há?ásù is used in questions of time. As times of the day are expressed by reference to the position of the sun (**||'ákásù** (f.)), the question word is analyzed as consisting of the question word **há-** ‘when?’, a locative postposition, and a gender marker **-sù** ‘3fSG’.

há-?á-sù |í-pò
 where?-LOC-3fSG come:SG-2SG:NR
 When/what time will you come?

||'ákásw-àà ʔíyè-ŋ tû-sí |í-sì
 sun-SFOC stay:SG-VL come_out-REL come:SG-1SG:NR
 I will come when the sun is rising.

The sentences below illustrate the use of **híkí** ‘how?’:

híkí !'ámé=sùn-ná
 how? shape.IT=1PL:NR-Q
 How shall we construct (them)?

híkí mánàá=sò-ná

how? know=3PL:NR-Q

How will they know?

hàpú=sì?í=ná híkí=ì |àn

you=TOP2=Q how?=2SG see

And you, how do you see (the case)?

hà- ‘which one(s)?’ has four forms that depend on gender and number of the questioned element. The forms consist of the interrogative element **hà**, a marker that codes gender or number, and the definiteness marker. The 3fSG and 3PL definiteness markers contain an additional gender/number marker.

hàwêŋ	‘which one?’ (m.)	hà-wé-`ŋ
hàsûnsù	‘which one?’ (f.)	hà-sú-`nsù
hàsônsò	‘which ones?’ (human plural)	hà-só-`nsò
hàxêŋ	‘which ones?’ (collective or non-human plural)	hà-xé-`ŋ

The forms can be used as independent forms, or as dependent elements that modify a noun. They correspond in this respect to other modifying elements that can be used independently with a definiteness marker. Compare the following examples:

hàwêŋ	or:	hàwêŋ	kitabu
which_one?.m		which_one?.m	book
Which one?		Which book?	

bútí'í-ŋ	or:	bútí'í-ŋ	kitabu
red-DEF		red-DEF	book
The red one		The red one of the books	

Questions concerning the quantity of humans and non-humans (animates and things) are marked by **hánè-sò** (PL) and **hánè-xì** (COLL) respectively. The dependent forms follow the noun they qualify.

ŋ|òmósò hánè-sò
 person.PL how_many?-PL
 How many people?

rògò hánè-x=ì ŋ!wáné
 knife how_many?-COLL=2SG ask_for
 How many knives do you want?

hùmbù hánè-xì !é-?éwá-á-pò
 cow how_many?-COLL accompany-PL1-3O-2SG:NR
 How many cows will you bring?

Questions of state are characterized by the question marker **-xè**. The occurrence of these questions is restricted to greetings. They inquire about the current state or condition of the questioned element: a particular time, place, or object. The question marker **-xè** is obligatorily followed by the general question marker **=ná**.

tɪ'íkʔ-xè=ná

morning-QS=Q

How is the morning?

kʔimèntè-xè=ná

afternoon-QS=Q

How is the afternoon?/Good afternoon

dòdómà-xè=ná

Dodoma-QS=Q

How about Dodoma?

yáʔábò-xè=ná

work-QS=Q

How is work?

The standard reply to these questions is **phútɪ'úmà gâʔə** 'There is peace.'

8.2. Yes/no-questions

Most yes/no-questions are characterized by the question marker **=nè** (section 5.4). The clitic belongs to the group of mediative clitics, which are part of the clitic complex (see section 5.7). After the clitic, a subject/modality marker can occur and/or the general question marker **=ná**.

|í=nè=ʔə

come:SG=Y/NQ=1SG:OPT

Should I come?

phútɪ'úmà=nè[=ná]

peace=Y/NQ[=Q]

Is there peace?

Alternatively, a yes/no-question is marked by prosodic means only. Examples of this type are frequently-used utterances in greetings. The typical pitch pattern of the prosodically-marked question is an utterance-final extra high-low contour, regardless of the original final tone of the utterance. The onset of the contour is realized on a higher pitch than any preceding high tone. After the onset, the pitch drops to the normal low pitch. This contour is marked as an upstepped falling tone.

íáá-ʔpô

good-2SG

Are you fine?

In the following examples the same pitch pattern is used in the morphologically-marked yes/no-question too:

phútʔ'ú'mâ

peace

There is peace (isn't there)?

phútʔ'ú'mâ=nè

peace=Y/NQ

There is peace (isn't there)?

Yes/no-questions ask for a reply from the listener to the speaker's proposition. The response may be just **ʔèèè** 'yes' or **ʔàʔá** 'no', or a more elaborate positive or negative answer.

nù-ŋ káʔá hétʔ'ŋ ŋ||èé-ká-á=nè=è

CNJ-CL that there enter-COM-3O=Y/NQ=2PL

And he asked: "Did you bring him in there?"

sì kì-sì káʔá ||òóxì ŋ||èé-ká-á='tshún

CNJ2.1SG TOP=1SG that yet enter-COM-3O=NEG1.1PL

And I said "We didn't bring him in yet".

Positive replies may be accompanied by the confirmative clitic =**gá**. Note that yes/no-questions that are used in greetings can also be described as rhetorical questions, as a standard, positive answer is expected.

phútʔ'ú'mâ=nè

peace=Y/NQ

Is there peace?

ʔèèè, phútʔ'ú'mâ=gâʔà

yes peace=CONF1

Yes, there is peace (indeed)

íáá-ʔpô

good-2SG

You are fine, aren't you?

íáá-sì=gâʔà

good-1SG=CONF1

I'm fine.

