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10. Interrogative clauses

In this chapter I analyse the morphological, syntactic and lexical properties of polar interrogatives. I also describe tag questions and content questions.

10.1. Polar interrogatives

Polar questions which elicit ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers are marked by lengthening a final *o* or *a* of the questioned word or by adding the suffix *-e* when a final constituent in a sentence has a final *-i* or a consonant. They are also characterised by having a rising intonation. When a sentence final nominal ends in a long vowel, polar interrogatives are marked only by the rising intonation (Black 1973; Ongaye 2000). The polar interrogatives in (1) are formed from single nouns, those in (2) are formed from proper names, and those in (3) are formed from cardinal numerals.

(1a) **tikaa**
tika-a
house-Q
‘Is it a house?’

(1b) **piḥaa**
piḥaa-a
water-Q
‘Is it water?’

(2a) **Orḥaytoo**
Orḥayto-o
Orḥayto-Q
‘Is it Orḥayto?’

(2b) **ḥasootee**
ḥasoote-e
ḥasoote-Q
‘Is it ḥasoote?’

(2c) **Okittaa**
Okitta-a
Okitta-Q
‘Is it Okitta?’

(3a) **ken-e**
five-Q
‘Is it five?’

- (3b) **lakkee**
lakki-e
 two-Q
 ‘Is it two?’

The following are sentential examples. The examples in (4) are affirmative declarative sentences while those in (5) are their polar interrogative counterparts.

- (4a) **Antut tikupa ideya**
Antu-ʔ tika-opa i=dɛy-a
 Anto-NOM house-to 3 = come-IPF.FUT
 ‘Anto will come home.’
- (4b) **χormasiʔ ʔikatamay**
χorma-siʔ i=kat-am-ay
 ox-DEF.M/F 3 = sell-PAS-PF[3M]
 ‘The ox was sold.’
- (5a) **Antut tikupa ʔideyaa**
Antu-ʔ tika-opa i=dɛy-a-a
 Anto-NOM house-to 3 = come-IPF.FUT-Q
 ‘Will Anto come home?’
- (5b) **χormasiʔ ʔikatamaye**
χorma-siʔ i=kat-am-ay-e
 ox-DEF.M/F 3 = sell-PAS-PF[3M]-Q
 ‘Was the ox sold?’

As can be seen from the examples in (4) and (5), polar interrogatives are formed from declaratives either by lengthening the final vowel (in this case, vowel a) of the declarative as in (5a) or by adding the suffix -e when the declarative has a final consonant as in (5b). The following are additional sentential interrogative examples with the suffix -e:

- (6a) **hellaasiniʔ ʔideʔnee**
hella-siniʔ i=dɛy-ni-e
 children-DEF.P 3 = come-IPF.PRES-Q
 ‘Are the children coming?’ or
 ‘Do the children come?’
- (6b) **namasiʔ ʔideree**
nama-siʔ i=dɛr-i-e
 person-DEF.M/F 3 = be.tall-PF-Q
 ‘Is the person tall?’

Responses to polar interrogative may be *aa* ‘yes’ or *inna?*(a) ‘no’, as illustrated respectively in (7b) and (7c), which are responses to (7a). The ‘yes’ or ‘no’ responses may be followed by explanatory sentences.

- (7a) *antut tikupa ideyaa*
antu-? *tika-opa* *i = dey-a-a*
 ?anto-NOM house-to 3 = come-IPF.FUT-Q
 ‘Will ?anto come home?’
- (7b) *aa* (*i = dey-a*)
 yes (3 = come-IPF.FUT)
 ‘Yes. (He will come.)’
- (7c) *inna?*(a) (*in = dey-u*)
 no (3NEG = come-NEG.IPF.FUT)
 ‘No. (He will not come.)’

Polar interrogatives are also very common in conversational discourse and are mostly found in greetings (see also Section 13.3). The following are illustrative examples.

- (8a) *nakaytaa*
nakayta-a
 health-Q
 ‘How are you?’
- (8b) *iffapaannee*
i? = fapaad-ni-e
 2 = be.strong-IPF.PRES-Q
 ‘Are you getting strong?’

Note that confirmation or echo-questions are also formed by lengthening the final vowel *o* or *a* of the declarative or by adding suffix *-e* when the final constituent of a sentence has a final *-i* or a consonant. The following are illustrative examples.

- (9a) *aynoo*
ayno-o
 who-Q
 ‘Who(, did you say)?’
- 9b) *anaa*
ana-a
 1SG.PRO.OBJ-Q
 ‘(Did you mean) me?’

(9c) **ayno-o kal-ay-e**
 who-Q come.home-PF-Q
 ‘Who came(, did you say)?’

(9d) **a de?too**
?a de?-t-u-u
 PT come-3F-OPT-Q
 ‘Let her come(, did you say)?’

10.2. Tag questions

Tag questions are marked by suffix **-n(n)**. This suffix appears single when a consonant follows it as in (10a) or as a geminate when followed by a vowel as in (10b). Sometimes, tag questions appear with the verb root **kid-** ‘say’.

(10a) **inantasi? ?ide?tin kid-a**
inanta-si? i = dey-t-i-n kid-a
 girl-DEF.M/F 3 = come-3F-PF-TAG say-IPF.FUT
 ‘The girl came, didn’t she?’

(10b) **ikalayinne**
i = kal-ay-nn-e
 3 = return.home-PF-TAG-Q
 ‘He returned home, didn’t he?’

The suffixes that mark tag question and the instrumental (see Section 3.2.4) are homophonous. The rules that apply to add single **(-n)** or geminate **(-nn)** are also identical in these two cases.

10.3. Content questions

In (11), I list the content question words.

(11)	maana	‘what?’
	aytam(u)	‘when?’
	aynu	‘who?’
	ayjaa	‘where?’
	meeɕaa	‘how many?’
	atta	‘how?’
	maana?i	‘why?’
	maana malla	‘why?/for what reason?’
	a ?aynu	‘whose?’
	aɕaamu	‘which one?’
	?aɕaamane?	‘which ones?’

In the above list, the content question word **maana?i** ‘why?’ is formed from **maana** ‘what?’ and the dative suffix **-?i**. In fast utterances, **maana?i** ‘why?’ is

also pronounced as *maani?* ‘why?’. The content question word *a aynu* ‘whose?’ is formed from the genitive particle *a* and *aynu* ‘who?’. It seems that the content question words *axaamu* and *axaamane?* are formed by the same strategy, but *xaamu* and *xaamane?* do not exist on their own.

The following are examples containing content questions.

- (12a) *aytamud de?ti*
aytamu = i? *dey-t-i*
 when = 2 come-2-PF
 ‘When did you (SG) come?’
- (12b) *Apittu? ?ayfaa ca*
Apittu-? *ayfaa = i* *kiy-a*
 Apitto-NOM where = 3 be-IPF-FUT
 ‘Where is Apitto?’
- (12c) *orrasi? ?attaa karmaasi? ?iffay*
orra-si? *?atta = i* *karmaa-si?* *iff-ay*
 people-DEF.M/F how = 3 lion-DEF.M/F kill[SG]-PF[3M]
 ‘How did the people kill the lion?’
- (12d) *maana? = in* *dey-a*
 why = 1 come-IPF.FUT
 ‘Why should I come?’

The associative particle *opa* occurs with the content question word *aynu* ‘who?’ to mark a plural subject. This is demonstrated in (13).

- (13) *opa aynoo deyay*
opa aynu-o dey-ay
 ASS who-Q come-PF[3M]
 ‘Who (and their associates) came?’

The content question word for ‘how much?’ is formed from the particle *a*, the content question word *atta* ‘how’ and the verb root *kit-* ‘to be’. Gender is marked on the verb root. The following are illustrative examples.

- (14a) *aannaa a atta caa?ih heenta*
aannaa a atta kiy-aa? = i? *heent-a*
 milk GEN how be-P = 2 want-IPF.FUT
 ‘How much milk do you (SG) want?’

- (14b) *daammaa a atta coo pidfiti*
daammaa a atta kiy-o=i pidf-t-i
 flour REL how be-3M=3 buy[SG]-3F-PF
 ‘How much flour did she buy?’
- (14c) *alleetaasid dooGgita a atta kitto pirta*
alleeta-asi? dooGgita a atta kit-t-o
 hut-DEM.M/F mud which how be-3F-IPF.FUT
pir-t-a
 finish-3F-IPF.FUT
 ‘How much mud will this hut consume (to build it)?’

The dative suffix is attached to *aynu* ‘who?’ to express an indirect object. With *meeGfaa* ‘how many?’, the dative suffix shows a specific amount/number. With *aytam(u)* ‘when’, it marks a specific temporal adverb. The following are illustrative examples.

- (15a) *aynu-? = in daaf-a*
 who-DAT = 1 give-IPF.FUT
 ‘Who shall I give (it) to?’
- (15b) *meeGfaa?in xormasik kanna*
meeGfaa-? = in xorma-si? kat-n-a
 how.many-DAT = 1 ox-DEF.M/F sell-1PL-IPF.FUT
 ‘For how much (money) shall we sell the ox?’
- (15c) *aytamu?e xooraa Gapti*
aytamu-? = i xooraa Gap-t-i
 when-DAT = 3 appointment hold-3F-PF
 ‘For when did she arrange an appointment?’

From the question word *ayfaa* ‘where?’, it is possible to form questions that elicit a person’s place of birth/residence or nationality. Such questions are derived by the singulative suffixes *-itta* for masculine (16a), *-itteeta* for feminine (16b) and *-ta* for plural (16c).

- (16a) *ayfitta*
ayfaa-itta
 where-M
 ‘Where is he from?’
- (16b) *ayfritteeta*
ayfaa-itta
 where-F
 ‘Where is she from?’

- (16c) *ayfaa-ta*
 where-P
 ‘Where are they from?’

In the following examples, the subjects are first person (17) and second person (18). In these cases subject clitics *an=* for first person and *aʔ=* for second person are required.

- (17a) *anʔayfitta*
an = ʔayfaa-itta
 1 = where-M
 ‘Where am I from?’
- (17b) *anʔayfiteeta*
an = ʔayfaa-iteeta
 1 = where-F
 ‘Where am I from?’
- (18a) *aʔʔayfitta*
aʔ = ʔayfaa-itta
 2 = where-M
 ‘Where are you (SGM) from?’
- (18b) *aʔʔayfiteeta*
aʔ = ʔayfaa-iteeta
 2 = where-F
 ‘Where are you (SGF) from?’

First and second person plurals require independent personal pronouns, (19).

- (19a) *inon ayfaata*
inu-ʔ = ʔan *ayfaa-ta*
 1PL.PRO-NOM = 1 where-P
 ‘Where are we from?’
- (19b) *ifinnaʔ ʔayfaata*
ifinna-ʔ = aʔ *ayfaa-ta*
 2PL.PRO-NOM = 2 where-P
 ‘Where are you (PL) from?’

The ordinal suffix *-atta* is added to the content question word *meeɕaa* ‘how many?’ to elicit information about the rank of someone in a group. This can be seen from the example in (20).

- (20) *meeɣattaa sookti*
meeɣaa-atta=i sook-t-i
 how.many-ORD=3 exit-3F-PF
 ‘What did she rank?’

The genitive particle *a* occurs with question words and assigns various meanings: with *meeɣaa* ‘how many?’, it yields a specific quantity (21).

- (21) *faɣaa a meeɣaaʔin pidɗa*
faɣaa a meeɣaaʔ=in pidɗ-a
 local.beer GEN how.many-GEN=1 buy[SG]-IPF.FUT
 ‘How many birrs worth of local beer should I buy?’

In the examples that we have seen so far, there is only one question word per sentence. However, it is possible to have two or more question words in the same sentence when the speaker misses the information provided by other speech participants. For instance, each of the following sentences has two question words.

- (22a) *ayno-o maana pidɗ-ay*
 who-CLF what buy-PF[3M]
 ‘Who bought what?’
- (22b) *ayno-o aynu ɣid-ay*
 who-CLF who.OBJ beat-PF[3M]
 ‘Who beat whom?’
- (22c) *aynoo aynuɣ ɣiday*
ayno-o aynu-ʔ ɣid-ay
 who-CLF.OBJ who-NOM beat-PF[3M]
 ‘Who beat whom?’
 (lit., ‘Who is it that who beat?’)

Each of the following examples contains three question words.

- (23a) *ayoo aynum maana ɗaaɣay*
ayo-o aynu-ʔ maana ɗaaɣ-ay
 who-CLF who-DAT what give-PF[3M]
 ‘Who gave what to whom?’
- (23b) *ayoo ayɣam maana akkay*
ayo-o ayɣa-ʔ maana akk-ay
 who-CLF where-LOC what see-PF
 ‘Who saw what where?’