

Question Formation in Eha-Amufu

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Abstract

Question is a universal phenomenon; every language in the world has a strategy for asking questions. Two main types of questions ‘Yes/No’ (Polar questions) and Wh-questions (content questions) have been identified for the world languages. However, the structure for the content questions is not uniform across languages. While some languages operate the syntactic wh-structure others operate the LF wh-structure. Also, the question word or trigger for ‘yes/no’ (polar) questions is not the same for the languages and dialects; the Igbo language inclusive. This paper therefore, looks at question formation in Eha-Amufu dialect of Igbo with the aim of finding the type of wh- structure present in the dialect as well as the question trigger for other question forms present in the dialect using the descriptive method. This study shows that both the syntactic and the LF wh-structure are present in the dialect. Additionally, the trigger for ‘Yes/No’ question in the dialect is identified as Vowel Lengthening. The last vowel of the last word in the sentence irrespective of the word category is lengthened to indicate polar question in the dialect.

Keywords: *Polar questions, Content questions, Vowel lengthening, Dialect.*

Introduction

The Igbo language is a Nigerian language spoken by the Igbo. The Igbo are found in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. The language consists of many distinct dialects. However, the dialectal distinctions notwithstanding, some levels of mutual intelligibility exist among the speakers of the different dialects. Hence, the assertion of Emenanjo (2015:2) that:

Since all Igbo dialects derive from one proto-Igbo language, they share lots of grammatical, lexical and phonological features in common. Yet, as would be expected, they do differ in certain grammatical, lexical and phonological details. But these differences do not inhibit effective communication or mutual intelligibility.

Emenanjo’s explanation implies that the many dialects of Igbo do not hinder the Igbo from communicating effectively.

The Igbo language operates the SVO structure as its basic word-order pattern. Any variation in word-order pattern found in the language is still derived from the basic word-order pattern. One unique feature of the Igbo language is the interrogative feature. That is its capability to ask questions using different patterns. Thus, the interest of this study is interrogation in a dialect of Igbo.

Question sentence also called interrogative sentence is a sentence that asks question which requires an answer. Cobbina (2013: 1) defines question sentence as “the type of sentence used to elicit information that may or may not be known and to seek for clarification of what has already been uttered”. The definition implies that the answers to interrogative sentences may be known or unknown to the interrogator. Interrogative sentence equally gives one the opportunity to get clarification in obscure cases.

Question is a universal feature in all languages. Scholars like (Radford, 1988, Uwalaka, 1991, Emenanjo, 2015) classify questions into two types based on the expected answers.

- i. Yes-No question

ii. Wh- question.

These question types have universal principles (features) that cut across languages and parametric features that are language specific. The issue of question formation has attracted the attention of linguists over the years especially as regards the “question trigger” or the ‘question words’, because different languages have unique ways of expressing questions, though the structure may not vary so much.

Tone plays a very vital semantic role in Igbo questions. Uwalaka(1991: 188) avers that all the wh-words in Igbo except ‘gini’ have initial basic low tone. In Yes/No question, a low tone resumptive pronoun is inserted to mark an interrogative sentence. Oha (2015) in his study of interrogatives in Mgbidi dialect of Igbo identifies a clitic ‘O’ similar to the 3rd person subject pronominal clitic with a contrasting tone to that of the last syllable of a preceding verb as the question trigger.

This work looks at question formation in Eha-Amufu dialect of Igbo. Nwaozuzu (2008) classifies Eha-Amufu dialect under the Northern Group of Dialects (NGD). The Eha-Amufu dialect is unique because it has some features that are not present in the Standard Igbo (SI). For instance, Eha-Amufu has the front spread half-open vowel /ɛ/ as the ninth vowel. This vowel sound is absent in the standard Igbo. Looking at the consonants, the voiced velar fricative /ɣ/ which is present in the standard Igbo is absent in the Eha-Amufu dialect. The dialect also has some specific linguistic parameters one of which is prominent in the way it forms questions. This study therefore aims at identifying the type of wh-structure present in the dialect, the question trigger for different forms of polar questions in the dialect as well as the role of tone in the Eha-Amufu question forms. All these will add to and enrich greatly the available data and literature as regards questions in Igbo.

An Overview of Question(s)/Interrogatives

The content and polar question forms have their own characteristic features with which they are described in different languages. The Yes/No hereafter ‘polar’ questions are questions that among other responses accept ‘yes’ or ‘no’ as answers. Cobbina (2013: 21) asserts that ‘polar questions’ are questions that look at responses from the perspective of a polar continuum with the opposite ends being ‘yes’ or ‘no’. He maintains that polar questions are question types that require the confirmation or the denial of a proposition using a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers. However, Dixon (2012: 425) argues that the term Yes/No question is inappropriate. For him, some languages lack the term ‘yes’ and ‘no’. He therefore, defines ‘Yes/No’ type of question as “question inquiring whether or not a proffered statement is correct”. He cites an instance from an Australian language called ‘Yidin’, which requires ‘a full clause, with predicate and appropriate core arguments’ as a response to polar questions.

Several languages have different ways of forming their polar questions. Dixon (2012) cited in Cabbina (2013: 29) has it that “the strategies for forming polar questions in languages are numerous and can be broadly grouped into intonation, introduction of a question particle, word order and a combination of these strategies”. However, there could be more to the above listed strategies. Also worthy of note is the fact that polar questions are derived from their declarative counterparts.

Concerning the wh- questions, the wh- questions have variously been called content questions, Q-word questions, *kedu* questions, and Nominal-Answer questions by different scholars at different times. (Nwachukwu, 1987, Maduagwu, 2012, Angitso & Anurudu, 2012). Radford (1988: 462-463) defines wh- questions as items that start with ‘wh’. He also notes that

'how' is also included as it behaves in the same manner as the wh-words. Dixon (2012: 37) sees the wh- question as a 'question seeking information'. For Cobbina (2013: 81), content questions are the type of questions that do not just seek confirmation but seek a piece of information from the addressee which will fill a gap in communication. He further notes that for content question, the replacement of a regular constitutes in a particular functional slot with an interrogative word is what makes the difference between a statement and a content question.

Though the content question is recognized across languages, different languages have equivalent words or structures with which they represent the question words. In several languages, the Q-words undergo movement and this is described by the transformational Grammar (TG). This work does not intend to go into transformational grammar. The work is limited to a descriptive analysis of polar questions. The wh-elements are said to be in their natural position when they are at the right-position or in-situ position in sentences. There are however cases where the wh-elements occupy the left most position or non-in-situ position. This is also referred to as the syntactic Wh- form. The principle of move –a takes care of all kinds of sentential movement involved because it allows anything to be moved to anywhere in the sentence.

Previous Works

Across languages, several researches have been done on the nature and behaviour of interrogatives (questions). This work reviews the works of few scholars like, Uwalaka, 1991; Ndimele and Efere 2003; Ndimele 2003, Maduagwu 2012, Angitso and Anurudu 2012 and Oha (2015). In her work on wh-movement in Igbo, Uwalaka, (1991), observes that move-wh is evident in Igbo. She notes that Igbo has both the syntactic wh-movement and the logical form (LF) wh-movement structures. As such, Igbo cannot be classified with English that has the syntactic wh-movement structure. The syntactic wh-movement structure places the wh-word at the sentence initial position. Likewise, Igbo cannot be classified with Chinese and Japanese that has the LF wh-movement structure. LF wh-movement structure is the structure that places the wh-word at sentence final position. This is because the Igbo language operates both structures.

Uwalaka therefore, suggests a third type of the move-wh languages as against the the two already identified. She then represents the three types as:

- + syntactic wh-movement (Igbo-French languages)
- + syntactic wh-movement (English-type languages)
- + syntactic wh-movement (Chinese-Japanese languages)

This is because the Igbo-French type shares some but not all the properties of each of the former set. Ndimele and Efere (2003) observe in their work that there are three ways of expressing wh-questions in Bùmq̣-Iẓon. One of such ways is to allow the interrogative words to remain in their base-generated position; the second is to optimally move them into the specifier of C° in clause –peripheral position, and the other one is to move interrogative phrase to the right of the verb. They conclude that any of these options is grammatical, and that they are all normal ways of forming wh- questions in Bùmq̣-Iẓon. Again, Ndimele (2003) in a work he did on the Wh-Parameter observes that the wide view that the occurrence of a wh-phrase at the left most edge of a sentence is a result of an obligatory overt wh-movement is not completely so with African languages. He therefore suggests that the wh-parameter must not be conceived in terms of binary choice. This is because there is no sharp distinction between wh-in-situ and non-wh-in-situ languages. The implication of the above is that beyond the wh-in-situ and non-wh-in-situ languages, there are more forms of the wh-parameter. For instance, languages like Igbo and

French cannot be termed in-situ or non-in-situ languages as both parameters are grammatical in the languages. Likewise, in the Eha-Amufu dialect, both parameters are grammatical as shall be seen later in the work. Maduagwu (2012) affirms that wh-movement exists in Igbo and that both the syntactic wh-movement and the logical form (LF) wh-movement occur in Igbo. The syntactic wh-movement refers to structures where the wh-words occur at the sentence initial position (non-in-situ). On the other hand, LF wh-movement refers to structures where the wh-words occur at the sentence final position (in-situ). Maduagwu, hereby, supports the view that the Igbo language operates both forms - syntactic wh-movement and (LF) wh-movement.

Looking at the interrogative structure in Mgbidi dialect of Igbo, Oha (2015) notes the existence of a post verbal 'O' host enclitic observing the phonotactic constraint of vowel harmony on the preceding vowel which bears a tone that contrasts with the tone of the same preceding syllable to complement the proclitic tone. He therefore, established that the Mgbidi question formation for this group of interrogatives can be formulated as a split-clitic formation.

Wh-Question

The wh-question unlike the 'yes/no' question that demands or accepts a 'yes' or 'no' as appropriate answer, expects information or explanation. The content question elements in Igbo have both the standard and dialectal variants. Some little variations exist between the standard and dialectal wh question elements as demonstrated below. The wh-elements for the Igbo language include the following:

English	Standard Igbo	Dialectal variants	Eha-Amufu variants
Who	- ònyé	ònyé	ònyé
Which	- ñké ólé	ñké óné	Ọhú ólé/ ñnyá ólé
Why	- màkà gíní	àgá, àghá,	màkà gúnú
How	- ètú ólé/ànáá	Ọlịá	gÉÉ ólé
what	- gíní	kíí, gúnū	gúnú
When	- mgbé ólé	mgbé óné	mgbé ólé
Where	- èbéé	nnéé	wéé

Question Morphemes/Words in Eha-Amufu

The analysis of questions in Eha-Amufu will be carried out under the following two headings: wh- questions and polar questions.

Wh- Questions

The wh-question elements or Q-words for Eha-Amufu are as follows:

What - gúnú	Where - wéé	Who - ònyé
Which - Ọhú ólé/ ñnyá ólé	Why - màkà gúnú	How - gÉÉ ólé
When - mgbé ólé		

These elements occur in the in-situ position as well as the non-in-situ position. In the in-situ position, the question element is the complement of the verb. But in the non-in-situ position, the question element is the subject. In the non-in-situ position, the wh-word is moved to the subject position but leaves a trace that can be co-indexed with the subject. See examples below:

- Ì bù ònyé? - You are who?
 Ònyé bù Ì bù? - Who are you?
- Ì rùrù gúnú? - You worked what?
 Gúnú bù Ì rùrù? - What did you work?

3. Ì jèrù wéè? - You went where?
 Wéè bù í jèrù? - where did You go to?
4. Ì shirù òhù ólè? - You cooked which one?
 Òhù ólè bù í shirù? - which one did you cook?
5. Ñgózí bìàrù ògbé ólè? - Ngozi came when
 Ògbé ólè bù Ñgózí bìàrù? - When did Ngozi come
6. Ñgózí kwàrù ékwà màkà gúnū? - Ngozi cried because of what
 Màkà gúnū bù Ñgózí jì kwà ékwā? – because of what did Ngozi cry

From the above given examples, some variations are observed between the Eha-Amufu question words and those of the standard variety. However, the difference lies in the question words. This is because the operation of wh- question(s) in the standard Igbo is the same with thing with the Eha-Amufu dialect. The major difference in Eha-Amufu question operation is seen in the polar question construction undertaken in the next section.

Polar Questions

The question marker for the polar questions in the Eha-Amufu dialect is vowel lengthening. Eha-Amufu does not have a specific question particle or element but lengthens the last vowel in the last word of the sentence to mark interrogation. To turn any declarative statement to a polar question in the dialect, the question word/trigger occurs as the very last element in the structure irrespective of the word category that comes last. The last vowel is lengthened. This is not the same with some dialects of Igbo. Emenanjo (2015:269- 270) from his examination of polar questions in some Igbo dialects (lects) like Ohuhu, Aguata, Njikoka, Idemili and Izii notes that both the low tone pronoun in apposition to the NP as well as the low tone (Polar Question Marker) PQM are used to mark polar questions in some Igbo lects.

The analysis of the polar questions will be done under the following headings: Positive Polar Questions, Negative Polar Questions, Perfective Questions, Progressive Interrogative and Future Interrogative. It is pertinent to note that the identified question trigger in Eha-Amufu which is vowel lengthening does not operate in 'tag question(s)' in the dialect. Tag questions are formed just as it is done in the standard Igbo.

In this study, instances of where the question element or morpheme occurred after a verb, adverbs, adjectives, noun and pronoun will be shown. It will be observed that no specific vowel is used to mark polar questions in the dialect. Rather, any vowel can be used as long as it comes last in the structure. Therefore, the question operator is different from what obtains in the standard Igbo as well as most dialects of Igbo. Uwalaka notes that in the standard variety it is the pronoun on low tone that occurs in apposition to the noun subject NP that effects the needed question structure but it is not so in the Eha-Amufu dialect. It is also different from what obtains in the Mgbidi dialect where Oha identifies the question morpheme to be an 'O' clitic which occurs after the verb. In the case of Eha-Amufu the Q-word is unique as it is the very last element in the sentence.

Syntactic Positions

Verb

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------|---|---------------------|
| 7. | Àdá nò ó? | - | Is Ada in? |
| 8. | Ụnụ bjàrù ụ? | - | did you (pl.) come? |
| 9. | Ngózi jèrù ú | - | Did Ngozi go? |
| 10. | Ụnụ rirù ụ? | - | Did you (pl.) eat? |
| 11. | Ị mégbúwó òó? | - | Have you finished |

Adverb

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| 12. | Nwókè nù lè-èmé ọ́sịsò ọ? | - | Is that man doing fast? |
| 13. | ụnụ là-àbịá ùhūnā àá? | - | Are you coming immediately? |

Adjective

- | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------|---|----------------------------|
| 14. | Nwókè nù dù ọ́jì íí? | - | Is that man dark? |
| 15. | Jī gū dù ọ́gólógó òó? | - | Is your husband tall? |
| 16. | Ngózi dù ihómá àá? | - | Is Ngozi pretty/beautiful? |
| 17. | Ézè dù njò ọ́ọ? | - | Is Eze bad? |

Noun

- | | | | |
|-----|-------------------|---|---------------------------|
| 18. | Ụnụ jèrù áhíá àá? | - | Did you go to the market? |
| 19. | Ị gbùrù éwú ùú? | - | did you kill a goat? |
| 20. | Ị chùrù Ékù ụ? | - | Did you wash cloth? |

Pronoun

- | | | | |
|-----|--------------------|---|--------------------------|
| 21. | Ị chùrù Ékù gú ùú? | - | Did you wash your cloth? |
| 22. | Ngózi nọ be ụnụ ụ? | - | Is Ngozi in your house? |
| 23. | Ị jì ụmā ānyī ìí? | - | Are you with our knife? |

Positive Polar Questions

In this section, the data on positive polar questions are presented and analysed.

- | | | |
|-----|--|--|
| 24. | Ngózi sàrú itè é? | |
| | Ngozi wash (pst) pot QM 'Did Ngozi wash the pot?' | |
| 25. | Ụnụ shirù níí íí? | |
| | You(pl) cook(pst) food QM . 'Did you cook food?' | |
| 26. | Ị kwòrù éká àá? | |
| | You(sg) wash(pst) hand QM 'Did you wash your hand?' | |
| 27. | Ọ chùrù Ékù ụ? | |
| | He/she wash(pst) cloth QM 'Did he/she wash the cloth?' | |
| 28. | Ụnụ jèrù Ékwó ọ́ọ? | |
| | You(pl) go(pst) school QM 'Did you go to school?' | |
| 29. | Ị chirù óchì í? | |
| | You(sg) laugh(pst) laugh QM 'Did you laugh?' | |

Visibly on the surface to a non-Eha-Amufu speaker, the above examples on positive polar questions look like affirmative or declarative sentences. This is because there is no question element in operation in the sentences according to the standard Igbo operation. In the first sentence under the positive polar which is “**Ngózi sàrú itè é?**” there is no low tone pronoun which is used to marks the polar questions in Standard Igbo (SI) as in **Ngózi ọ sàrú itè?** The pronominal element that marks polar questions comes before the verb in (SI) but in the examples it is completely absent. Therefore, one looking at this will be forced to ask: what then triggers

the question here? However, the fact remains that Eha-Amufu does not need any pronoun to mark its interrogative like the standard Igbo and some other Igbo dialects. Eha-Amufu only requires to lengthen the last vowel in the last word in a sentence to mark a structure question. In operation, we find a solitary high tone element after the last word (the lengthened element) that triggers the question in the sentence. It is this lengthened element that transforms the sentence to a question. Without the lengthening of the last sound in Eha-Amufu, we have an affirmative or declarative sentence thus:

 Ńgózí sàrú ìtè
 Ngozi wash(pst)pot 'Ngozi washed the pot' (Affirmative)

 Ńgózí sàrú ìtè é?
 Ngozi wash(pst)pot QM 'Did Ngozi wash the pot?' (Question)

The data above also show that the interrogative marker operates with various vowel sounds (e, i, a, u, o, i). In example 24 to 29 the last vowel in the all the sentences were lengthened to mark the interrogative. Also observed from the data above is the fact that the length of the vowels involved are not the same. For instance, in example 24 and 25, the length is not the same. The length of the vowel in 24 is not as long as the length of the vowel in 25. The discrepancy in the length of the vowel is the effect of stress and emphasis.

Negative Polar Question

For the negative polar questions, the negative morpheme *gu/gù* in accordance with the vowel harmony rule is attached to the verb to form negation. Instances of Negative Polar Questions are given below from examples 30 - 36

30. Ńgózí ásàgù ìtè é?
 Ngozi wash(neg) pot QM 'Did Ngozi not wash the pot?'
31. Ûnú éshīgū ñrī ìí?
 You(pl) cook (neg) food QM 'Did you not cook food?'
32. Í kwōgū Ékā àá?
 You(sg) wash (neg) hand QM 'Did you not wash your hand?'
33. Í chùgú Ékù ú?
 You(sg) wash (neg) cloth QM 'Did you not wash the cloth?'
34. Ûnú ējēgú Ékwuò òò?
 You(pl) (prf) go (neg) school QM 'Did you not go to school?'
35. Ì chīgù óchì í
 You(sg) laugh (neg) laugh QM 'Did you not laugh?'
36. Í bìàgù ú?
 You (sg) come (neg) QM 'Did you not come?'

As in the positive polar questions, the operation of the negative polar question is the same. The only difference is that here, the negative morpheme *gu/gù* is added to the structure. Again, in the example 36, because the Neg. element *gù* ends the sentence, it is therefore the vowel of the Neg. that is lengthened to trigger the interrogative. Also, as noted in the positive polar, the length on

the lengthened element is not the same. Some are longer than others. The difference in the length of the vowels is as a result of stress and emphasis.

Perfective Question/Interrogative

37. Ọ bíáwọ ọ́ọ?
He/she (sg) come (PERF-M) QM 'Has he/she come?'
38. Ị shíwọ ńrì í?
He/she (sg) cook (PERF-M) food QM 'Have you cooked food?'
39. Í zàwọ úlọ ó?
You(sg) sweep (PERF-M) house QM 'Have you swept the house?'
40. Ẹ́nú ẹ́ríwọ ńrì í?
You(pl) prf eat (PERF-M) food QM 'Have you eaten?'
41. Ẹ́nú àgúwọ Ẹ́kwọ ọ́ọ?
You(pl) prf read (PERF-M) book QM 'Have you read?'
42. Ị jéwọ ọ́ọ?
You(sg) go (PERF-M) QM 'Have you gone?'

Here also, the perfective marker 'wo/wọ' according to vowel harmony is added to the verb root to mark a perfective tense. The question word here retains its operation of high tone on a lengthened vowel.

Progressive Interrogative

43. Ẹ́gọ́zì lẹ́-ẹ́rí ńrì í?
Ngozi be-prf eat food QM 'Is Ngozi eating?'
44. Ẹ́gọ́zì lẹ́-ẹ́jé Ẹ́kwọ ọ́ọ?
Ngozi be-prf go school QM 'Is Ngozi going to school?'
45. Ị là-àrú úlọ ó?
I(sg) be-prf build house QM 'Are you building a house?'
46. Ị là-àchù Ẹ́kù ú?
You(sg) be-prf wash cloth QM 'Are you washing cloth?'

Future Interrogative

47. Ẹ́gọ́zì lẹ́-ẹ́rí ńrì í?
You(sg) FUT-prf eat food QM 'Will you eat food?'
48. Ẹ́gọ́zì lẹ́-ẹ́jé Ẹ́kwọ ọ́ọ?
Ngozi FUT-prf go school QM 'Will Ngozi go to school?'
49. Ị là-àrú úlọ ó?
You(sg) FUT-prf build house QM 'Will you build house?'
50. Ị là-àchù Ẹ́kù ú?
You(sg) FUT-prf wash cloth QM 'Will you wash cloth?'

Looking at the progressive and future interrogative, it is observed that in Eha-Amufu both the progressive and the future are marked with la/le in accordance with the vowel harmony feature. In the progressive sentences, the auxiliary la/le bears the low tone while in the future sentences the auxiliary la/le bears the high tone. The tone of the question morpheme for both of the feature and the progressive question forms remain a high tone.

Conclusion

This work has looked at the wh- questions and the polar questions in Eha-Amufu. In doing this, it is discovered that the question trigger or morpheme for polar questions in Eha-Amufu is a lengthened vowel particle that occurs at the sentence final position. The question trigger is not restricted to any specific vowel rather, any vowel that comes word/sentence final is used. It was also discovered that unlike in the standardized Igbo where the Polar question is triggered by a low tone resumptive pronoun, the polar question trigger in the dialect from all the instances given are on the high tone. Also discovered is the fact that the progressive and future structures are marked with the same element la/le in the dialect in accordance with the vowel harmony feature. But the tone on the element (la/le) when in a progressive structure is on low tone but on high tone for future structures.

However, the wh- question form in Eha-Amufu dialect is the same as in the standard Igbo. The question trigger for this kind of question is the wh-elements as identified in the dialect. They occur both at the in-situ position and non-in-situ position in the dialect.

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