

Content Word Question Formation in Bātònū

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Abstract

The derivation of wh-questions in English takes a different approach in terms of its realization in Africa languages hence the change in its syntactic reference; content word question (henceforth, CWQ). This does not only affect the name but also its syntactic derivation across languages. So, this paper attempts an analysis of CWQ constructions in Bātònū. Data for this study were elicited from competent speakers of Bātònū in Ilesha-Ibaruba and Okuta through interview and observation. The data were then subjected to qualitative analysis using Government and Binding Theory (henceforth, GB) and Split INFL hypothesis as theoretical tools. We observed an inseparable interaction between content words (henceforth, CW) ex situ and the focus marker in the language. This led to a change in the forms of the CWQs in which the final vowels of the CW assimilate completely the features of focus mark á ex-situ. We equally found out that CW constructions in Bātònū are interrogative focus constructions in that the CWs also carry an interrogative force when realized ex-situ. In other word, Bātònū attests both content question in situ and ex-situ. Finally, since focus marker plays a significant role especially when a CW is derived ex-situ, it then becomes necessary to attempt a simple illustration of the phonemic function of tones in the formation of syntactic markers such as: class markers and focus markers through a syntagmatic displacement. This in-situ and ex-situ observation made us to run a response test through which it is observed that CWQ in Bātònū can be answered with a focused construction, a truncated focused construction or a simple NP.

Keywords: *Wh- question, Content Word Question, Bātònū, GB, Split INFL Hypothesis.*

Introduction

Languages without wh-words or phrases as in English employ the term CWQ in order to account for the syntactic formation of their constituent interrogative construction. It is worthy of note that there is uniqueness as far as the derivations of these constructions are concerned cross linguistically. In some languages, CWs are base generated in situ while in others reverse is the case. Cole and Hermon (1994) demonstrate this in languages in which constituent questions are never formed by movement of wh-phrases but rather remain in-situ. This is shown by Chinese example in (1):

- (1) Meige rendou maile shenme (-ne)?
everyone all buy what PARTICLE “What did everyone buy?” [Cole and Hermon (1994)]

Shenme remains in situ, but there is the possibility of using the particle **ne** which indicates that we are dealing with an interrogative. In the languages in which the content question words are fronted to derive constituent interrogative construction, there is a movement which is equivalent to English’s wh-movement in which the question word is fronted to the sentence initial position. Bayer (2004) establishes that in most of the languages of Indo-European origin, constituent

questions are formed by fronting an interrogative pronoun or a phrase which is headed by an interrogative determiner. Following the common usage, he refers to these as "wh-pronouns" and "wh-phrases", and to the transformational process of constituent question formation as "wh-movement". There are languages in which displacement of wh-phrases can actually not be detected on the surface etc. The wh-phrase leaves a trace (t). The chain which is formed by wh-movement has roughly the following characteristics: If the wh-phrase corresponds to an argument, the trace is in an A (r)gument position, while the wh-phrase itself is in a non-A, or A'-position. The wh-phrase is semantically an operator which binds the trace, which in turn is interpreted like a logical variable.

This study is an introductory study of the syntax of CW questions formation in Bàtònu. It is introductory because complex content questions, multiple movement derivations, cases of islanding and cyclic etc. are not treated in this paper. This study focuses on the fact that CWQ in Bàtònu can be realized both in-situ and ex-situ. When realized ex-situ, there is a structural transformation of the words in which the focus marker –á contracted with the CW, hence, our assumption that the realisation of CWQ ex-situ is a focus interrogative construction as established in Aboh (2007). As we have established earlier, the elicited data were analysed within the theoretical requirements of Government and Binding Theory (GB) as well as Split INFL hypothesis to vividly account for the content question structures in the language.

Literature Review

Several works have been carried out on the syntax of interrogative cross linguistically. We will just mention few of these works as bases for our analysis of CWQs in Bàtònu. Lamidi and Akinmurele (2016) establish that wh-questions query specific information; and because of the variety inherent in what specific information can be queried with wh-questions, their formation is not universal. Olabode and Olaogun (2016) while attempting a unified analysis of Iyino interrogatives posit that simplex sentences containing question verbs do activate interrogative force just like the content word and polar questions. According to Karttunen (1977), a constituent question is taken to be the set of true propositions expressed by [... x ...], where the variable x is restricted in the familiar ways. Strictly speaking, the feature [wh] is not itself an operator that could bind a variable. As Chomsky (1977) has shown, wh-movement is only one manifestation of a larger class of movements which comprises topicalization, relativization, clefting, comparative formation etc. In most of the languages of Indo-European origin, constituent questions are formed by fronting an interrogative pronoun or a phrase which is headed by an interrogative determiner. The movement is shown in (2).

2. [CP wh-phrase1 [C' C [IP [VP ... t1 ...]]]] (Bayer and Cheng 2004)

This displacement leaves a gap, and this gap corresponds to the wh-phrase. Black (1995) explains that a content question has the same subject/ Auxiliary inversion as Yes/ No questions in that the same head movement of the highest auxiliary to I0 and on to ([+q]) applies. She argues further that the difference between Yes/ No questions and content questions is that an additional movement takes place in content questions in which a [+wh] phrase moves to the front. For example:

3. What did Olu buy?

Cheng (1991) maintains that there is no language with optional movement of wh-words and that movement of wh-words is sufficient to type a clause as a wh-question. Ouhalla (1999) argues that the traces of wh-phrases (wh-trace) have the status of logical variables. Logical

variables can generally be assigned a value, i.e they can be translated as referential expression in a given domain of discourse. So this present paper seeks to describe the syntax of CWQs in Bâtõnu within the lens of the Government and Binding theory as well as Split INFL hypothesis.

Theoretical Frameworks

The theory of GB was developed in Chomsky (1981, 1982). The various transformational rules in TG were collapsed to a single rule of move alpha (henceforth move- α) which means move anything anywhere leaving a trace of the movement at the extraction site. It mapped the D and S - Structures together. Ndimele (1992: 19) posits that: GB accounts for all rules that involve permutation with a uniform transformational rule known as move α (move-Alpha) which is bound by the same condition (Subjacency) in all languages.

The levels of representation in the ST have different terminologies in the GB. D - Structure and S - Structure surface to replace the standard's Deep Structure and Surface Structure respectively. The phonological and semantic components of the ST were also replaced with Phonetic Form and Logical Form.

In this theoretical perspective, the grammar is modular, each module having its own properties. The modules are: government theory, case theory, theta theory, X- bar theory, control theory, binding theory and bounding theory. Meanwhile, the Split INFL hypothesis originated from the work of Pollock (1989), and it has become an important topic of discussion within linguistic and language acquisition theories. The basic idea is that the functional category INFL should not be considered as one category with more than one set of feature (such as \pm Tense, \pm Agr) but that instead, each of these sets of features forms the syntactic head of a maximal projection for example TP, AgrP, AspP etc.

Pollock argues that IP must be split into several separate functional projections to account for the difference between French and English. He also claimed that the difference between finite and non-finite clauses is either the presence of a Tense Phrase (=TP) in finite clauses only, or that movement cannot occur to TP in non-finite clauses. Several works have been attempted on the structural organization of the projections in the tree representation such as Spencer (1995).

Content Word Formation in Bâtõnu.

In Bâtõnu, CWQs are formed through CWs fronting equivalent to English wh- phrases which assimilated the feature of the focus marker –á completely. The so-called bare forms remain the CW form in-situ as shown below:

Table 1: Interaction between Focus Marker and Content Question Words.

S/N	CQ Words (in-situ)	Seg Del	Foc M Contact	Ex-situ	Gloss
i.	Wúré	wúr()	wúr(× á)	wúrá	who
ii.	sákáyèrè	sákáyér()	sákáyér(× á)	sákáyérá	When
iii.	yéńyèrè	yéńyér()	yéńyér(× á)	yéńyérá	which
iv.	mána	mán()	mán(× á)	máná	Where
v.	ámóna	ámón()	ámón(× á)	ámónà	why
vi.	Bà	bà()	bà(× á)	Báá	What

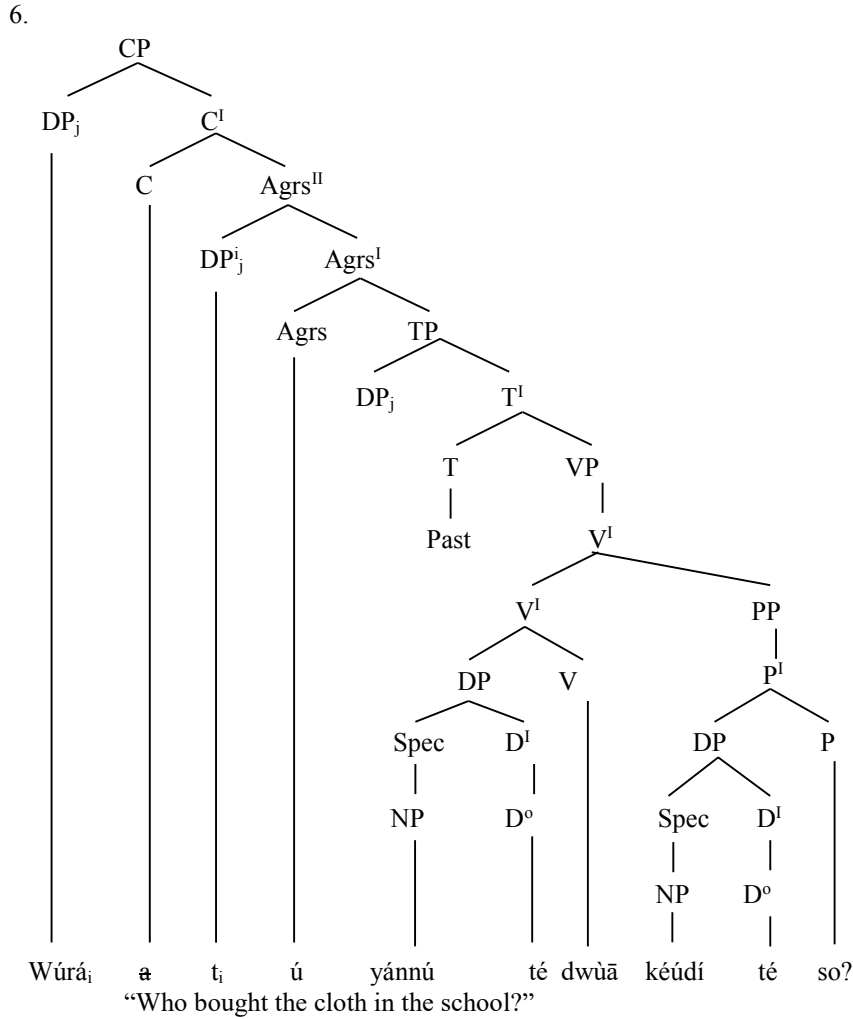
Key: CQ- Content Question, Seg Del- Segmental Deletion, Foc M- Focus Marker.

From table 1 above, high tone focus marker constantly displaces high segment as in (i), low segment as in (ii) and (iii), mid segment as in (iv) and (v) and zero segment as in (vi). So, we assume a strict and inseparable interaction between content question words and the focus marker in the language.

CWQ movement which will eventually generate CWQ can target various constituents of the sentences such as: NPs, AdvPs, PPs, APs, etc. A similar claim was made for Wh- questions in English as in (Haegeman 1991). Our position on the derivation of CWQs in-situ and ex-situ in Bàtònū is illustrated in (4) and (5) respectively:

- 4a. Na wúre wa?
 1sg who seePast "I saw who?"
- b. MÉRISIÒ – wí ū bà dwuā kéùdì - té so?
 teacher CM Agrs what buy/Past school CM in "The teacher bought what in the school?"
- c. Na ba dwua gian?
 1sg what buyPast Yesterday "I bought what yesterday?" etc
- d. mÉRISIÒ – wí ū yánnú dwuā mána
 teacher CM Agrs cloth CM buy Past where "The teacher bought the cloth where?"
- e. Sadé ū yánnú dwuā sákáyéré?
 Sade Agrs cloth buyPast when "Sade bought the cloth when?"
- f. Bio u womu kua sakayere.
 Bio Agr song singPast When "Bio sang a song when?"
- g. Sadé ū yényérè yánnú dwuā?
 Sadé Agrs which cloth buyPast. "Sadé bought which cloth?"
- 5a. Wúrá; t_i ū yánnú – té dwuā kéùdì - té so?
 Who Agrs cloth CM buy Past school CM in? "Who bought the cloth in the school?"
- b. Báá; MÉRISIÒ – wí ū t_i dwuā kéùdì - té so?
 What teacher CM Agrs buy/Past school CM in "What did the teacher buy in the school?"
- c. Máná; mÉRISIÒ – wí ū yánnú dwuā t_i
 Where teacher CM Agrs cloth CM buy Past "Where did the teacher buy the cloth?"
- d. Sákáyérá Sadé ū yánnú dwuā t_i?
 When/FOC Sade Agrs cloth buyPast "When did Sade buy the cloth?"
- e. Yényérá Sadé ū t_i yánnú dwuā?
 Which Sadé Agrs cloth buyPast. "Which cloth did Sadé buy?"

As previously established in table (1), the distinction in the shape of the CWs in-situ and ex-situ as in (5) and (6) respectively is triggered by the CWQ movement in which the final vowels of the CWs assimilates completely the feature of the focus marker **-á** and contracted. The CW is then adjoined at the [SPEC, CP] position as shown in (6) below:



Since the final vowels of the CWs have overtly assimilated the feature of the focus marker and contracted as in (6) above, the copy at the [C, CP] position of the sentence is then covertly given a null - spell out. The so-called assimilation and contraction of the focus marker -á and the CWs are similar to the phono-syntactic way by which the focus marker variants were realised in the language. The final vowel of the class markers (henceforth, CMs) is deleted leaving the tone. The high tone focus morpheme then contracted with the relic of the CM to derive focus marker variants in the language as illustrated in the table (2):

Table 2: Syntactic Derivation of Focus Marker Variants in Bātōnū.

S/NO	Underlying Form (UF)	UF + HT=CM	CM – FV × FM = FMV			
			CM	Seg del(v)	Relic ×FM(á)	FMV
1.	wí	wí	wí	w(´)	w() × (á)	wá
2.	me	mé	mé	m(´)	m() × (á)	má
3.	ge	gé	gé	g(´)	g() × (á)	gá
4.	te	té	té	t(´)	t() × (á)	tá
5.	ye	yé	yé	y(´)	y() × (á)	yá
6.	ní	ní	ní	n(´)	n() × (á)	ná
7.	sí	Sí	sí	s(´)	s() × (á)	sá

Keys: UF- Underlying Form, HT- High Tone, CM- Class Marker, FV- Final Vowel, V- Vowel, FM- Focus Marker, FMV- Focus Marker Variants.

It is worthy of note that the focus marker variants realised above can not pattern the same way - á functions by assimilating and contracting with the CWs in the language.

The interrogative focus claim made for CWQ in Bātōnū is similar to what Arokoyo (2017) establishes about Owé. She says in interrogative cleft sentences, the focus marker serves as the question marker. So, in Owé dialect, the focus marker is used for both CWQ (WH-Questions) and YES/NO Questions. Drubig (2000:3) is also of the opinion that a focused question always requires a focused answer. This view of Drubig (2000:3) is quite essential to actually determine the information structure of CWQ in Bātōnū alongside Aboh (2007). We found out that answering a CWQ such as (5) requires a focused construction such as (7) or a truncated focused construction such as (8):

7. Mérisiò wá ū yánnú – té dwuā kéùdì - té so
 Teacher Foc Agr cloth CM buy/Past school CM in
 “It is the teacher that bought the cloth in the school”

8. Mérisiò wá
 Teacher Foc “It is the teacher”

Atimes, it can be answered using ordinary the name of the person that performed the questioned action such as **Mérisiò** “teacher” in (7). This is quite similar to what is attested in other languages such as Yoruba etc. The same interrogative force prominently triggered by (5) is affirmatively triggered by (4). This is exemplified in other African languages such as Dagbani which has both focused and non-focused interrogative words. According to Samuel (2013) constituent interrogativization and focus play out in Dagbani, a Gur (Niger-Congo) language. He shows that in the formation of constituent interrogatives, the interrogative word enters into a syntactic configuration with the focus markers **kà** or **n** depending on the grammatical role of the argument that an interrogative word substitutes for. This involves putting the interrogative word clause initially, and immediately following it with the appropriate focus marker as in (9) and (10)

9 Kpè **kà** be bù-rí bi-hí
 Here FM 3SG kill.IMPERF child.PLU ‘It is here that they beat children

10. Chéntiwúni **n** tú-Ø biá máá
 Chentiwuni FM insult.PERF child DEF ‘It is Chentiwuni who has insulted the child’

And the movement of the CWs to the sentence initial position is out of a base generated IP to the [SPEC, CP] position. This position is structurally inaccessible to syntactic roles. Black (1998:26) argues that since there is an open specifier position in the CP_[+q], the wh-phrase can move to that position. This movement is called A^L-movement (where the bar in this case is set complement notation), which is movement to a non-argument position. Other instances of A^L-movement involve focus, negation, and quantifier constructions, all of which are semantic operators. Even though Awoyale (1990) argues that since the functional categories serve as heads in a CP structure, they can also assigned case roles just like their lexical counterparts. So, a focus marker can assign focus case etc. Therefore, questioning elements of a sentence as a result of the explicit movement of the constituent leave at the extraction site a null - element occupy by a co-indexed ‘t_i’ The trace being a S-Structure element is case marked while the head is not since it occupies a position that is not structurally accessible to case role. The trace is not theta marked because it is not a D-Structure phenomenon, for theta role is assigned at the D-Structure, thereby forming an A^L-chain.

So, when an NP with a CW qualifier such as **yényérá yánú** “which book” is CWQ fronted as a content question target as in (5e) repeated as (11)

11. Yényérá Sadé ū ti yánú dwuā?
 Which Sadé Agrs cloth buyPast. “Which cloth did Sadé buy?”

only the qualifier CW is fronted to the [SPEC, CP] position of the clause i.e the NP is stranded at the extraction site. The CW does not need to pie pipe the qualified NP as the case is in English . For example,

12. The man bought which book?

The NP **which book** can be grammatically pie piped to the [SPEC,CP] position but fronting the qualifier **which** and stranding the head NP **book** will generate ungrammaticality as in the grammaticality of (13) and the ungrammaticality of (14) respectively:

13. Which book did the man buy?

14. *Which did the man buy book?

The assumption of a strict and inseparable interaction between these CWs and focus marker will definitely give our analysis of the derivation of content questions in Bâtònu a different assumption realized through movement operations all through as in (15).

15a. [CP Báá_i [C **æ** [IP Méri_siò – wí ū [VP t_òndùrò-wí t_i s_óósi kéùdi - té so]]]
 “What did the teacher show the man in the school?”

b. [CP Máná [C **æ** [IP Bí_ó ū [VP t_òndùrò-wí t_iré-ru s_óósi]]]
 “Where did Bí_ó show the man a book?”

This is contrary to Sanusi’s (2001) view that questioning of the subject NP in Bâtònu does not involve movement operation as in (5a)

So, in the light of this, Tella (2014) proposes a movement operation of the content question words to the [Spec,CP] positions while the [C, CP] position is occupied by the focus marker with a null spell out in the case of subject NP questioning as in (6). In other to validate the authenticity of our assumption, Ndimele (1998: 111) posits that occurrence of Wh - word in sentence - initial position results from the Wh - movement, because underlying, any Wh - phrase in sentence - initial position is not in the real position. In the same spirit, Radford (1988:466) asserts that clause - initial Wh - phrase, cannot originate inside S. Wh - phrase cannot originate in their superficial position as the leftmost constituent or S - bar, but rather must originate inside 'S'.

Findings and Conclusion

So far, we have been able to briefly attempt the syntax of CWQs in Bātōnū. We showed from our analysis that CWQs can be realized in-situ with an affirmative interrogation and also ex-situ with focus interrogative force alongside Aboh (2007) and Samuel (2013). We also found out that CWQ formation Bātōnū involves a movement transformation even when a subject NP is targeted as in (6) contrary to Sanusi (2001). We equally observed that, when an NP with a CW qualifier such as **yényérá yánńú** "which book" as in (11) is involved, only the qualifier CW is fronted to the [SPEC, CP] position of the clause i.e the NP is stranded at the extraction site. An observation that is contrary to a similar derivation of this in English. Also, the morphological transformation of the CWs from in-situ to ex-situ triggered the effort to actually examine the derivation of the focus marker variants in the language. Finally, we observed that CWQ in Bātōnū requires a focused construction such as (7), a truncated focused construction such as (8) and a simple NP such as **Mérisiò** "teacher".

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