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?’
- hótsò, hóbè ‘what?’
- hótsò–mèè, hósì, hëŋ ‘why?’
- hákụ, hà– ‘where?’
- háʔgsù ‘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.

má tô–ŋ=ná hákụ
gourd-DEF-Q where?
Where is the gourd?

hákw–飏=ná ‘ʔyé–wà
where?!=2SG=Q sv.stay:SG-pl.2
Where do you live?
The gourd, where will you enter with it?

The gourd, where will you enter with it?

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

ó who?

Who is that one?

What is your name?

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

Who are those?

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

Who has created Mankind? (lit. the people)

Whom did God create?

This suffix further occurs only as a plural marker in ókòsò ‘certain people’ and ókó ‘children’ (see section 3.3).
Questions about non-human objects are marked by ʰótsʰ or ʰóbɛ, which are used interchangeably. ʰótsʰ / ʰóbɛ is used independently, or as modifier which precedes the noun.

ʰɛɛʷ=ná ʰótsʰ or: ʰɛɛʷ=ná ʰóbɛ
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.:

ʰótsʰ nán=ʔalq thímɛ-x-ʰpó
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: ʰótsʰ-mɛɛ, ʰoʃɨ, and ʰɛn. All are translated by ‘why?’, the semantic nuances between the three were not investigated. Our impression is that ʰótsʰ-mɛɛ is a neutral way of asking for a reason, while ʰoʃɨ and ʰɛn have a negative connotation.

ʰótsʰ-mɛɛ consists of the question word ʰótsʰ ‘what?’ and the postposition -mɛɛ ‘sake’ (cf. ʰɛɛɛ-mɛɛ ‘therefore’). ʰóbɛ-mɛɛ may be used as an alternative, but is rare.

ʔutɛ ʰótsʰ-mɛɛ-ʔalq ʰɛɛɛ-ʰpó
yesterday what?-sake=2SG come:SG-NEG:2SG

Why didn’t you come yesterday?

ʔaʃa ʰoʃɨ
Afa why?
Why, Afa?

ʰɛn-ʔal bikhɛ-ɛ
why?=SG leave-3O

Why did you leave it (stop doing)?

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

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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 $. For more information see 2.4.4.
81 ʰkɨ is probably a frozen postposition. It has one other occurrence, where it is in complementary distribution with the directional postposition -nà: ʰsʰákɨ ‘at home’ vs. ʰsʰàá-nà ‘(to the) home’. ʰsʰàá cannot occur in isolation.
Meat?
Where is the meat?

Where are they?

Where do you go?

Where do you go?

Those have knowledge about where we go.

When/what time will you come?

I will come when the sun is rising.

How shall we construct (them)?
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:

**hâwêŋ**  
which_one?-.m  
Which one?

**hâwêŋ**  
which_one?-.m  
Which book?

**bûuf*-ŋ**  
red-DEF  
The red one

**bûuf*-ŋ**  
red-DEF  
The red one of the books

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

**ŋdômsô**  
hândè-sô  
person.PL  
how_many?-.PL  
How many people?

**rôgô**  
hândè-x̖-i  
ŋ!wâné  
knife  
how_many?-.COLL=2SG  
ask_for  
How many knifes do you want?

**hûmbû**  
hândè-ç̬  
!g̪-?ewâ-â-pô  
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.

\[\text{tì’ik’–xè=ná}\]
\text{morning–QS=Q}
How is the morning?

\[\text{k’imèntè–xè=ná}\]
\text{afternoon–QS=Q}
How is the afternoon?!/Good afternoon

\[\text{dòdòmà–xè=ná}\]
\text{Dodoma–QS=Q}
How about Dodoma?

\[\text{yà?ábò–xè=ná}\]
\text{work–QS=Q}
How is work?

The standard reply to these questions is \text{phùtt’ùmà gà?à} ‘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.

\[\text{[i=nè=?è]}\]
\text{come:SG=Y/NQ=1SG:OPT}
Should I come?

\[\text{phùtt’ùmà=nè=[ná]}\]
\text{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.
Are you fine?

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

**phūṭ’ū’mā**
peace
There is peace (isn’t there)?

**phūṭ’ū’mā=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 *?èèè ‘yes’ or ?àrà ‘no’, or a more elaborate positive or negative answer.

**mü–ŋ káʔŋ hēttŋ ŋ||bè–ká–á=nè=e**
CNJ-CL that there enter-COM-3O=Y/NQ=2PL
And he asked: “Did you bring him in there?”.

**sù ki=ŋ káʔŋ ||dóxŋ ŋ||bè–ká–á–tshūŋ**
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 =gā. Note that yes/no-questions that are used in greetings can also be described as rhetorical questions, as a standard, positive answer is expected.

**phūṭ’ū’mà=nè**
peace=Y/NQ
Is there peace?

**?èèè, phūṭ’ū’mà=gāʔq**
yes peace=CONF1
Yes, there is peace (indeed)

**tàà–pò**
good-2SG
You are fine, aren’t you?

**tàà–ŋ=gāʔq**
good-1SG=CONF1
I’m fine.