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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) pifaa
    pifaa-a
    water-Q
    ‘Is it water?’

(2a) Orχaytoo
    Orχayto-o
    Orχayto-Q
    ‘Is it Orχayto?’

(2b) χasootee
    χasoot-e
    χasoo-Q
    ‘Is it χasoot?’

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

(3a) ken-e
    five-Q
    ‘Is it five?’
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 iɗeya
\[ Antu-ʔ \ tika-opa \ i=ɗey-a \]
Anto-NOM house-to 3 = come-IPF.FUT
‘Anto will come home.’

(4b) χormasiʔ ?ikatamay
\[ χorma-siʔ \ i=kat-am-ay \]
ox-DEF.M/F 3 = sell-PAS-PF[3M]
‘The ox was sold.’

(5a) Antut tikupa ?iɗeyaa
\[ Antu-ʔ \ tika-opa \ i=ɗey-a-a \]
Anto-NOM house-to 3 = come-IPF.FUT-Q
‘Will Anto come home?’

(5b) χormasiʔ ?ikatamaye
\[ χorma-siʔ \ i=kat-am-ay-e \]
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 ?ideʔnee
\[ hellaa-siniʔ \ i=ɗey-ni-e \]
children-DEF.P 3 = come-IPF.PRES-Q
‘Are the children coming?’ or
‘Do the children come?’

(6b) namasiʔ ?iđereee
\[ nama-siʔ \ i=der-i-e \]
person-DEF.M/F 3 = be.tall-PF.Q
‘Is the person tall?’
Responses to polar interrogative may be aa ‘yes’ or innaʔ(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) \[ \text{antut tikupa ideyaa} \]
    \[\text{antu-ʔ} \quad \text{tika-opa} \quad i=d̠ey-a-a\]
    \text{ʔanto-NOM house-to 3=come-IPF.FUT-Q}
    ‘Will ʔanto come home?’

(7b) \[ \text{aa} \quad (i=d̠ey-a) \]
    \text{yes} \quad (3=come-IPF.FUT)
    ‘Yes. (He will come.)’

(7c) \[ \text{innaʔ(a)} \quad (in=d̠ey-u) \]
    \text{no} \quad (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) \[ \text{nakaytaa} \]
    \[\text{nakayta-a} \]
    \text{health-Q}
    ‘How are you?’

(8b) \[ \text{iffaapannee} \]
    \[i?=f̱apaad-ni-e\]
    \text{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) \[ \text{aynoo} \]
    \[\text{ayno-o} \]
    \text{who-Q}
    ‘Who(, did you say)?’

(9b) \[ \text{anaa} \]
    \[\text{ana-a} \]
    \text{1SG.PRO.OBJ-Q}
    ‘(Did you mean) me?’
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) inantasiʔ ʔiɗeʔtin kid-a
    inanta-siʔ =ɗey-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?’  
      ayfaa ‘where?’  
      meecfaa ‘how many?’  
      ata ‘how?’  
      maanaʔi ‘why?’  
      maana malla ‘why?/for what reason?’  
      aʔaynu ‘whose?’  
      aɛaamu ‘which one?’  
      aʔaamaneʔ ‘which ones?’

In the above list, the content question word maanaʔi ‘why?’ is formed from maana ‘what?’ and the dative suffix -ʔ. In fast utterances, maanaʔi ‘why?’ is
also pronounced as **maaniʔ** ‘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 **ayʔaamu** and **ayʔaamaneʔ** are formed by the same strategy, but **χaamu** and **χaamaneʔ** do not exist on their own.

The following are examples containing content questions.

(12a) **aytamud deʔti**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{aytamu} = i & \quad \text{d}ey-t-i \\
\text{when} = 2 & \quad \text{come}-2-\text{PF}
\end{align*}
\]

‘When did you (SG) come?’

(12b) **Apittuʔ ?ayʃaa ca**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Apittu}-? & \quad \text{ayʃaa} = i & \quad \text{kiy-a} \\
\text{Apitto-NOM} & \quad \text{where} = 3 & \quad \text{be-IPF-FUT}
\end{align*}
\]

‘Where is Apitto?’

(12c) **orrasiʔ ?attaa karmaasiʔ ?iʃʃay**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{orra-siʔ} & \quad \text{ʔattaa} = i & \quad \text{karmaa-siʔ} & \quad \text{iʃʃ-ay} \\
\text{people-DEF.M/F} & \quad \text{how} = 3 & \quad \text{lion-DEF.M/F} & \quad \text{kill}[\text{SG}]-\text{PF}[3M]
\end{align*}
\]

‘How did the people kill the lion?’

(12d) **maanaʔ=in dey-a**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{why} = 1 & \quad \text{come-IPF.FUT}
\end{align*}
\]

‘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**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{opa} & \quad \text{aynu-o} & \quad \text{dey-ay} \\
\text{ASS} & \quad \text{who-Q} & \quad \text{come-IPF[3M]}
\end{align*}
\]

‘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 caaʔih heenta**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{aannaa} & \quad a & \quad \text{atta} & \quad \text{kiy-aa?=i} & \quad \text{heent-a} \\
\text{milk} & \quad \text{GEN} & \quad \text{how} & \quad \text{be}-P=2 & \quad \text{want-IPF.FUT}
\end{align*}
\]

‘How much milk do you (SG) want?’
(14b)  \[\text{daammaa a atta coo pidditi} \]
\[\text{daammaa} \quad \text{a} \quad \text{atta} \quad \text{kiy-}o=i \quad \text{pidd-t-i} \]
flour REL how be-3M=3 buy[SG]-3F-PF
‘How much flour did she buy?’

(14c)  \[\text{alleetaasid dooctita a atta kitto pirta} \]
\[\text{alleeta-asit} \quad \text{dooctita} \quad \text{a} \quad \text{atta} \quad \text{kit-t-o} \]
hut-DEM.M/F mud which how be-3F-IPF.FUT
\[\text{pir-t-a} \]
finish-3F-IPF.FUT
‘How much mud will this hut consume (to build it)?’

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

(15a)  \[\text{aynu-}i=in \quad \text{daaf-a} \]
who-DAT=1 give-IPF.FUT
‘Who shall I give (it) to?’

(15b)  \[\text{meeccaa} \text{in} \chiormasik kanna} \]
\[\text{meeccaa-}i=in \chiorma-siʔ \quad \text{kat-n-a} \]
how.many-DAT=1 ox-DEF.M/F sell-1PL-IPF.FUT
‘For how much (money) shall we sell the ox?’

(15c)  \[\text{aytamuʔe} \chiooraa dapti} \]
\[\text{aytamu-}i\chiooraa \quad \text{dap-t-i} \]
when-DAT=3 appointment hold-3F-PF
‘For when did she arrange an appointment?’

From the question word \text{ayfa} ‘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 -\text{itta} for masculine (16a), -\text{itteeta} for feminine (16b) and -\text{ta} for plural (16c).

(16a)  \[\text{ayfitta} \]
\[\text{ayfaa-itta} \]
where-M
‘Where is he from?’

(16b)  \[\text{ayfitteeta} \]
\[\text{ayfaa-itta} \]
where-F
‘Where is she from?’
(16c)  
ayʃaa-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)  
anʔayʃitta  
an = ?ayʃaa-itta  
1 = where-M  
‘Where am I from?’

(17b)  
anʔayʃitteeta  
an = ?ayʃaa-itteeta  
1 = where-F  
‘Where am I from?’

(18a)  
aʔʔayʃitta  
aʔ = ?ayʃaa-itta  
2 = where-M  
‘Where are you (SGM) from?’

(18b)  
aʔʔayʃitteeta  
aʔ = ?ayʃaa-itteeta  
2 = where-F  
‘Where are you (SGF) from?’

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

(19a)  
inon ayʃaata  
inuʔ = ?an  
1PL.PRO-NOM = 1  
ayʃaa-ta  
where-P  
‘Where are we from?’

(19b)  
ifinnaʔ ?ayʃaata  
ifinnaʔ = aʔ  
2PL.PRO-NOM = 2  
ayʃaa-ta  
where-P  
‘Where are you (PL) from?’

The ordinal suffix -atta is added to the content question word mecəa ‘how many?’ to elicit information about the rank of someone in a group. This can be seen from the example in (20).
(20) meeʛattaa sookti
meeʛaa-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 meeʛaa ‘how many?’, it yields a specific quantity (21).

(21) fačaa a meeʛaaʔin pidda
fačaa a meeʛaaʔ=in pidd-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) ayn-o maana pidd-ay
who-CLF what buy-PF[3M]
‘Who bought what?’

(22b) ayn-o aynu ʛiɗ-ay
who-CLF who.OBJ beat-PF[3M]
‘Who beat whom?’

(22c) aȳoo aȳnuʔ ʛiɗay
aȳoo-ó aynuʔ ʛiɗ-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) aȳoo aynum maana daaʃ-ay
aȳo-o aynuʔ maana daaʃ-ay
who-CLF who-DAT what give-PF[3M]
‘Who gave what to whom?’

(23b) aȳoo aȳʃam maana akk-ay
aȳo-o aȳʃaʔ maana akk-ay
who-CLF where-LOC what see-PF
‘Who saw what where?’