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**Author:** Petrollino, S.
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11 Interrogative clauses

Interrogative clauses are marked by special verbal inflections and are signaled by a raising pitch. There is a basic difference between content and polar questions: in content questions verbal inflections distinguish only present tense and past tense; in polar questions, several interrogative paradigms corresponding to those illustrated in chapter 6 have been attested, and there are no polar question particles. Focused content questions are discussed together with content questions in 11.1, and section 11.1.1 is dedicated to question words. Polar questions are discussed in 11.2 and include interrogative copula and existential constructions.

11.1 Content questions

Content questions are morphologically marked on verbs and are signaled by the presence of question words and by a distinctive pattern of rising intonation. Verbal inflections in content questions mark either past or present tense, and the latter is used for present and future reference. Past interrogative is marked by -á, present interrogative is marked by -ë, pronominal subject marking is obligatory on interrogative verbs, and independent pronouns can co-occur with clitic pronouns. Question words cannot be combined with the interrogative paradigms described in 11.2.3.

(1a) hamó ki=yiʔ-á?
    where.NSP 3=go-PAST.INT
    where did he go?/where did they go?

(1b) har ha=zag-ë?
    what 2SG=want-PRES.INT
    what do you want?

The copula is omitted in content questions, and the verbal inflections -á and -ë are suffixed directly to the question word:

(2a) agá har-á?
    DEM2.M what-PAST.INT
    what was that?

(2b) har-ë?
    what-PRES.INT
    what is (it)?
If the question word is focused, a cleft construction is used. The main verb is nominalized into a relative verb and precedes the question word:

(3a) \( \text{han} = \text{is-óno} \quad \text{har?} \)
2SG = eat-REL.PAST.F what

what (F) did you eat? (lit. what (F) you ate, what is it?)

(3b) \( \text{baq-óno} \quad \text{har-é?} \)
fall-REL.PAST.F what-PRES.INT

what fell? (lit. the thing that fell (F), what is it?)

11.1.1 Question words

Questions words in Hamar constitute a closed class, however they are heterogeneous with respect to their morphological make up and syntactic behavior. Except for the question word ‘how many?’, all the others begin in ha-. Some of them are unanalyzable words, others can be either inflected and/or marked for case. A list of basic content question words is given in table 11.1.

Table 11.1: Basic question words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>who</th>
<th>háibene, háine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>which</td>
<td>hamá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>where</td>
<td>hamó, hamá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>what</td>
<td>har</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how</td>
<td>hátti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>why</td>
<td>hárna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>when</td>
<td>haa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how many</td>
<td>mee máine ~ mei máine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is surprising to find the copula \(-ne\) suffixed to the question word háibene or háine ‘who?’ and in the expression mee máine ‘how many?’, since \(-ne\) is the affirmative copula and its interrogative counterpart is \(-u. \\ hai\) is the base to which case suffixes are attached and it can never occur bare.

Similar to personal pronouns, the question word for ‘who’ has a subject and object form and it can take case suffixes depending on the syntactic role. It does not inflect for gender or number, however gender and number are expressed on the relativized verb or noun preceding it.

The following excerpt illustrates the use of háine and háidan in the same conversation, in the function of subject and object (A and B stand for different speakers):
(4)  
A: **boraána** eel-idí  
Boráana  call-PF  
the Boráana called  
B: **eel-ā**  háine?  
call-REL.PAST.M  who  
who called? (lit. who is the one (M) who called?)  
A: **eel-ána**  boráana  
call-REL.PAST.PL  Boráana  
the Boráana called (lit. those (PL) who called are the Boráana)  
B: **hái-dan**?  
who-ACC  
whom (did they call)?  
A: **t’álian-dan**!  
Italians-ACC  
the Italians!  

The form **háibene** is a variant of **háine**, and probably it is formed by the comitative case -be:  

(5)  
**kidí**  háibene? /  **kidí**  háine?  
3  who  3  who  
who is he?  who is he?  

The comitative form of the question word **háine** is **háibet**, i.e. the comitative case -bet is suffixed to the base *hai*:  

(6)  
**hái-bet**  ki=kaam-ā?  
who-COM  3=meet-PAST.INT  
with whom did he meet?  

The question 'what's your name' is formulated with **háine**:  

(7)  
**námno**  hánnno  háine?  
names:F.S  2SG:F  who  
What's your name?  

The question word for 'which' can be considered a full-fledged (pro)nominal form since it can be inflected for masculine and feminine gender or plural number depending on the noun it modifies. The following excerpt illustrates the agreement pattern of **hamá**, which inflects like declension 2 nouns.
(8a) **hamâ ukulê?**
    which:M donkey:M?
    which donkey (M)?

(8b) **hammó wóngo?**
    which:F.S cow:F.S
    which cow (F)?

(8c) **hammá qullá?**
    which:PL goat:PL
    which goats?

The citation form *hamâ* is homophonous with the deictic interrogative word ‘where’ *hamá*, and the two are probably related:

(9a) **kidí goitê hamá-xa ki=níʔ-é?**
    3 way:M which:M-INS 3=come-PRES.INT
    through which path do they come? (which is the exact path they come through?)

(9b) **A:** álpa í=na imá!
    knife 1SG=DAT give.IMP.2SG
    pass me a knife

**B:** **hamâ?**
    which
    which which one?

**A:** **agá-sh**
    DEM2.M-PRES
    that one!

The locative interrogative words *hamá/hamó* were already introduced in chapter 5. Specific and non-specific location is expressed respectively by the vowels -a and -o (cf. chapter 5). Several locative cases can be suffixed to the interrogative words *hamá* and *hamó* (10), depending on whether they refer to location or movement. See section 11.2.2 below for further details on interrogative locational predication.

(10a) **yaatâ yáan-sa hamá-bar ki=dáa?**
    goat:M goat.F.OBL-GEN where.SP-AD 3=exist.INT
    Where exactly is the male goat with respect to the female goat?
(10b) yáa hamó-te add-á?
2SG where.NSP-LOC be.born-PAST.INT
Where were you born?

(10c) yáa waakí għé-ise hamó-xa yi?-é?
2SG cow hit-CNV1 where.NSP-INS go-PRES.INT
(through) where are you going to herd the cattle?

(10d) yáa hamó-rra ni?-é?
2SG where.NSP-ABL come-PRES.INT
where are you coming from?

(10e) hamá-xa ki=yi?-á?
where.SP 3=go-PAST.INT
(through) where exactly did he pass?

The question word har ‘what’ and hátti ‘how’ can have overlapping meanings:

(11a) har ko=ham-á?
what 3F=say-PAST.INT
what did she say?

(11b) hátti ko=ham-á?
what 3F=say-PAST.INT
what did she say? / how did she say?

(11c) kidí har ki=ashk-é?
3 what 3=make-PRES.INT
what will he make?

The question word har translates as ‘how’ when it is marked by the instrumental case -ka:

(12a) qultâ hár-ka ki=di-á?
goat:M what-INS 3=die-PAST.INT
how did the goat die?

(12b) hár-ka=ki yé=dan qan-é?, hár-ka=ki
what-INS=3 2PL=ACC hit-PRES.INT what-INS=3
yén dees-é?
2PL:ACC kill-PRES.INT
how do they fight you? how do they kill you?
The question word hátti has the variant form háttta which has been attested in combination with the conjunctive marker -ise:

(13) gudirí í=dan hattá-ise bag-é?
    hyena 1SG=ACC how-CNV1 tease-PRES.INT
    how dare Hyena tease me?

The question words for ‘why’, ‘when’ and ‘how many’ are invariable and cannot be suffixed with case markers:

(14) yedí kínka hárna woc'im-á?
    2PL together why argue-PAST.INT
    why did you argue?

(15) kodí haa kembé-é?
    3F when get.married-PRES.INT
    when will she get married?

(16) birr mei máine ki=zag-é?
    birr how.many 3.want-PRES.INT
    how much does he want?

11.2 Polar questions

Polar questions prompt ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers and are signaled by interrogative verbal inflections and rising intonation on the verb. Word order is not altered in polar questions. In the following sections the interrogative copula and locational predication are discussed first (11.2.1, 11.2.2) followed by interrogative verbal paradigms and disjunctive questions (11.2.3, 11.2.4).

11.2.1 Interrogative copula

The interrogative copula is -u, and it is suffixed, as its affirmative counterpart, to the nominal predicate. It does not distinguish tense, aspect, nor person.

(17a) koró onnó-u?
    DEM1.F house:F.S-INT.COP
    is this the house?
The standard Hamar greeting consists of an interrogative nominal clause (18a). The answer is the equivalent affirmative nominal clause (18b):

(18a)  payá-u?  
good-INT.COP  
how are you? (li. is it good?)

(18b)  payá-ne  
good-COP  
I am fine (li. it is good)

The interrogative copula -u is found on some interrogative verbal paradigms, see the next sections.

### 11.2.2 Interrogative existential

Existential predication in interrogative clauses varies depending on whether the predication expresses locational or existential meaning (cf. chapter 9). For locational predication, the suppletive stem of the existential predicator dáa is used. The suppletive stem qóle (4a) can be substituted for the question word hamó ‘where’ followed by the perfective interrogative form of the predicator (4b): recall that locational predication is always marked by the perfective aspect (chapter 9, section 9.3). The two constructions co-exist and do not differ semantically.

(19a)  galá-no qóle?  
food-F.S exist.INT  
where is the food?

(19b)  áari hamó-te ko = dáa?  
Aari wher.NSP-LOC 3F = exist.INT  
where is Aari?

See next section for an overview of interrogative paradigms.

For existential predication, the general interrogative form of the existential predicator dáa is used. This requires the suffixation of the interrogative copula -u to the General Declarative of dáa (see also next section).
Recall that the General Declarative of *dáa* does not require repetition of the stem (see chapter 9).

### 11.2.3 Interrogative paradigms

The interrogative paradigms are available for the affirmative paradigms listed in table 11.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Declarative</th>
<th>Perfect</th>
<th>Present and Future</th>
<th>Present Progressive</th>
<th>Perfective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Apart from the perfective, the interrogative paradigms listed in table 11.2 cannot be combined with the question words discussed in 11.1.

The interrogative equivalent of the General Declarative is formed by suffixing the interrogative copula *-u* to the stem of the verb ending in -á. Different from the General Declarative in affirmative-declarative clauses, the stem is not reduplicated in the interrogative paradigm, cf. (21a) and (21b).

(21a) noqó dá-u?

water exist-INT.COP

is there water?

(20b) dáa

exist

there is (response to 20a)

When used in the first person singular, the general interrogative has permissive interpretation:
(22a) háan kalshá-u?
2SG help-INT.COP
may I help you?

(22b) ábi giá-u?
another tell-INT.COP
shall I say another one?

(22c) nižá-u?
come-INT.COP
shall I come?

The interrogative copula is used to form the interrogative perfect. The -idí inflection of the affirmative paradigm is substituted for -idú:

(23a) yáa i = dán bag-idú?
2SG 1SG = ACC tease-PF.INT
have you made fun of me?

(23b) kodí kemb-idú?
3F marry:PASS-PF.INT
is she married?

(23b) isín-no ush-idú?
sorghum-F.S be.ripe-PF.INT
is the sorghum ripe?

The present and the future interrogative are formed by substituting the final vowel -é of the corresponding declarative form (cf. chapter 9, section 9.1.3), with the vowel -ó. The aspectual marker -da, which in the affirmative-declarative paradigm is marked on each person except for the third persons (cf. table 9.3 in chapter 9), is marked only on the first persons in the interrogative paradigm. For the morpho-phonological changes occurring in the future interrogative paradigm, see phonological rule P6 and morpho-phonological rule MP2 in chapter 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1SG</td>
<td>i = da-wuc' -ó?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2SG</td>
<td>ha = wuc' -ó?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3M/3PL</td>
<td>ki = wuc' -ó?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3F</td>
<td>ko = wuc' -ó?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1PL</td>
<td>wo = da-wuc' -ó?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2PL</td>
<td>ye = wuc' -ó?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The interrogative paradigm corresponding to the perfective is obtained by omitting the aspectual marker which is obligatory in the declarative form (cf. chapter 9, section 9.1.5). A similar morpho-syntactic strategy (referred to as ‘reductive morphology’ by Azeb 2012a) is used to contrast polar interrogatives and declaratives in other Omotic languages such as Dime, Sheko and Zargulla (Azeb 2012a:494).

(24a) náa galá i=bax-á?
yesterday food 1SG=cook-PAST.INT
did I cook food yesterday?

(24b) náa galá i=baxá-de
yesterday food 1SG=cook-PFV
yesterday I cooked food (response to 24a)

The aspectual marker is omitted also in the interrogative existential construction used in the present progressive:

(25a) áari baxá-te ko=dáa ?
Aari cook-SE 3F=exist.INT
Is Aari cooking?

(25b) áari baxá-te ko=dáa-de
Aari cook-SE 3F=exist-PFV
Aari is cooking (response to 25a).

11.2.4 Disjunctive questions

The disjunctive marker was introduced in chapter 8 (section 8.5), where it was shown that disjunctive coordination is monosyndetic. Disjunctive questions are formed by suffixing the disjunctive marker -mo54 to one of the two verbs:

(26) naasâ daq-idí-mo, naasâ di-idú?
child:M survive-PF-DISJ child:M die-PF.INT
has the child survived or has he died?

Only the final verb gets the interrogative inflection. The disjunctive suffix has been sporadically reported in interrogative sentences of the type shown in (27), where the second option is omitted:

(27a) ínta lum-áñna i = dáa-mo?
    1SG feel.unwell-OPT 1SG = exist-DISJ
    am I about to get sick or what?

(27b) ush-idí-mo?
    be.ripe-PF-DISJ
    is it ripe or what?