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FOCUS ON INTERROGATIVES IN OBOLO

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ABSTRACT

Every language is dynamic in its nature and structure. This includes how interrogative constructions are formed in the language. The Obolo language has various ways of realising interrogative constructions. In connection with this, this study examined the various interrogatives with more focus on polar interrogatives. The main emphasis here was on the formation of such interrogatives from their underlying declarative and imperative constructions. To realise this, data were elicited from Ataba dialect of the Obolo language through interviews, observation and personal intuition about the formation of interrogatives in the language. The findings of this study reveal three methods of realising polar interrogatives in the Obolo language. Namely: (a) using interrogative intonation marker (b) using interrogative particles and (c) using tag questions. The findings also revealed specifically that there are interrogatives with interrogative particles such as: **ìrè, kémbè and**Ó**-nọ́/ó-tét/ó-kpèbé**–*types as well as tag interrogatives using* 'ìrè/kémbè ì-kâ' *and* 'Ìrè/kémbè ìkárè ìkâ'.

KEYWORDS: Interrogatives, polar interrogatives, interrogative particles, tag questions

Introduction

Interrogatives or questions are utterances that are addressed to a listener/reader and ask for an expression of fact, opinion, belief, etc. It is observed that in English, questions may be formed: '*(a)* by the use of a question word, such as *who, what, where, when, why, how, which (b)* by the use of an operator, as in *Can...?, Do...?, (c)* through the use of intonation, as in *Ready?* (with rising intonation) *(d)* by the use of a question tagsuch as *isn't it, is it, can he, won't she,* etc.' (Richards & Schmidt, 2010; pp. 476-477).

They play a basic in our day to day interactions with each other and one another. When we ask questions, we seek for information that may help to shapen our understanding of concepts or situations that we are faced with. Little wonder, different languages have forms, ways, methods or strategies for asking or forming interrogatives. Owing to its importance, interrogative strategies have become the point of interest of a lot of

strategies that mark them (Dryer, 2005; König & Seimund, 2007; Emenanjo; 2015).

In this paper, therefore, the various interrogatives in the Obolo language are examined, with particular interest on polar questions. The emphasis here is on formation of such questions from their underlying imperative and declarative constructions. It however does not give prominence to the parallelism between focus construction and interrogative ones. This is because "focusing in polar question is only a stylistic device for bringing a constituent being questioned into prominence" (Omoruyi, 1989, p. 289). There is yet no attempt to the best of my knowledge, to give such description in the Obolo language. This is the vacuum this paper seeks to fill. The findings from this study have the potential of contributing to the typology of this phenomenon, especially when viewed alongside other related languages.

The Obolo language is spoken by people numbering about 100,000 (Aaron, 2000). The language is used extensively by the people in the day-to-day running of their affairs. But, the English language and Nigerian Pidgin are also widely used by the Obolo people. Among the older folks Igbo and Ibibio are used for the purposes of trade and religious activities. This may not be divorced from the presence of many Igbo and Ibibio women who were brought into Obolo land through marriage. Consequent upon the introduction of western education and the opening up of the area, a disturbing trend has emerged, where Nigerian Standard English and Nigerian Pidgin are being used even at home and in gatherings involving only the Obolo people. The data for this study were gathered using Ataba dialect of the language. Ataba is a clan situated in the western-most end of the Obolo land. The Ataba dialect is one of the three major dialects of Obolo. This study mainly focuses on Obolo interrogatives. Based on this, the objectives of the study shall be to: find out the various interrogatives in Obolo language; and ascertain the various ways polar questions can be derived in Obolo.

In this study, a few abbreviations and symbols are used; hence, the need to explain them below. INTERROG P. – Interrogative particle, DET – Determiner, NEG – Negative, D-FUT – Definite Future, SCL – Subject Clitic TQ – Tag Questions, 2/3sg – 2nd/3rd person singular, [⬉] – falling tone and [⬈] – rising tone.

Interrogatives (Inter, Interrog)

Are terms used in the grammatical classification of sentence types, and usually seen in contrast to declarative. According to Crystal (2008), it refers to verb forms or sentence/clause types typically used in the expression of questions, e.g. the inverted order of *is he coming?*, or the use of an interrogative word(or simply 'interrogative'), often sub classified as interrogative adjectives (e.g. *which*), adverbs (e.g. *why*) and pronouns (e.g. *who*). See also wh-. König and Seimund (2007) aver that it is 'conventionally associated with the speech act of requesting information' (p.291). In Faucher's (2009) view, 'the question is often regarded by common sense as simply an unfinished process of knowledge where the solution is considered the finitude of knowledge' (p. 23).

Interrogatives are typically used to elicit information or a response, and defined sometimes on grammatical and sometimes on semantic or sociolinguistic grounds (Crystal, 2008, p. 400). He further states that syntactically, in English, a question is a sentence with inversion of the subject and first verb in the verb phrase (yes–no questions, such as: *Is he going?*), commencing with a question word (*WH*-questions, such as *Where is he*?), orending with a question tag (e.g. *He's going, isn't he?*). Some would include the use of sentences with a rising intonation to be a class of question. Semantically, questions express a desire for more information, usually requesting a reply from the listener (exceptions include rhetorical questions (e.g. *Isn't that awful?*). The term is usually contrasted with three other major sentence functions: statement, command and exclamation. In grammatical discussion, questions are usually referred to as interrogative in form. Sentences which contain a subordinate clause which is interrogative in form are sometimes called indirect questions (or embedded questions), as in: *They asked what they should do*.

Formation of Interrogatives

In English, interrogatives may be formed:

- by the use of a question word, such as *who, what, where, when, why, how, which*

- by the use of an operator, as in *Can she come?, Do you want to leave?* quantifier

- through the use of intonation, as in *Ready?* (with rising intonation)

- by the use of a question tag such as *isn't it, is it, can he, won't she, do you*, etc. For example: *Patricia is a student isn't she?*

According to Richards and Schmidt (2010), different types of interrogatives have characteristic intonation contours and request different types of responses from a listener:

1 A **yes–no question –** formed using a modal verb or an auxiliary verb, exhibits rising intonation and requests that an interlocutor respond "yes" or "no."

2 A **wh-question –** begins with a question word, exhibits subject-verb inversion, has a rise-fall intonation contour (similar to declarative sentences), and requests specific information in the response, for example, *When did you go to the movies last?*

3 A **closed-choice question –** has list intonation and requires the interlocutor to respond with one of a closed series of choices, for example, *Would you rather see Star Wars again or a new film?*

4 A **tag question –** consists of a declarative sentence followed by a tag question. When there is rising intonation on the tag, this question type requests confirmation (e.g. *He's happy, isn't he?*) but when the tag has rise–fall intonation this indicates that the speaker believes the proposition to be true and is merely requesting agreement (*He's happy, isn't he?*).

5 An **echo question –** the same structure as a declarative sentence, has rising intonation, and may request confirmation or repetition from the interlocutor or simply express disbelief in what the previous speaker has said, for example:

a. They went out together last week
b. They went out together? (echo-question)
c. Yes, they did.

Alternative Question – behaves like the yes – no question because it has all the forms of yes – no question. However, Elerechi (2009) observes that the *yes – no question differs from alternative question by the addition of the alternative marker* **sV** *ọ̀* **bụ** *whose English equivalent is 'or it be'* (p. 90). She adds that the **sV** refers to the consonant **s** plus a **vowel**.

Interrogative Techniques

The different procedures teachers use in asking questions and the different kinds of questions they ask. Since questioning is one of the most frequently used teaching techniques, the study of teachers' questions and questioning behaviours has been an important issue in classroom research in both first

and second language classrooms (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). According to him, among the factors which have been examined are:

- the frequency of low-level versus high-level questions
- the degree to which students are encouraged to ask questions
- the amount of wait-time teachers allow after a question
- the choice of convergent or divergent questions
- how often teachers answer their own questions.

Polar Interrogatives

These are questions that require a confirmation or disconfirmation response. In polar interrogatives there are two options: that a proposition is either true or untrue. This would mean that any proposition expressed requires only a yes or no response. No wonder they can also be referred to as yes or no questions. The two types are yes or no echo questions and yes or no non-echo questions (Walter-Amadi, 2017). The former adopts a distinct intonation pattern while the latter adopts the use of interrogative element, change in word order, alternative structures and tag questions.

Polar Interrogatives in Obolo

Polar interrogatives are if not language universal almost language universal feature. Hence, the Obolo language has its presence in the language and it adopts several methods in the formation of polar interrogatives. They include: (a) interrogative intonation marking (b) interrogative elements and (c) tag questions.

➢ **Interrogative with Intonation Markers**

This method involves using the same morphemes, words and word order as the corresponding declarative sentence, but with a distinct intonation in the interrogative construction. Alerechi (2007) affirms that intonation is also present in some tonal languages such as Ikwere, contrary to earlier studies. In Obolo, the only difference between interrogative the declarative and interrogative constructions is the intonation that occurs at the end of the interrogative counterpart. Below are some examples:

1) a. Ǹsàbán mê újí   [↘]
      SBJ AUX canoe
      'There are children in the canoe'.

   b. Ǹsàbán mê újí   [↗]
      SBJ AUX canoe
      'Are there children in the canoe?'

2) a. Mi-ìsùlú gúñyâ   [↘]
   3SG SCL-beat child DET
   'They have beaten the child'

   b. Mi-ìsùlú gúñyâ   [↗]
      3SG SCL-beat child DET
      'Have they beaten the child?'

3) a.   Òwò írê Òwàjì   [↘]
       2SG AUX god
       'You are God'

   b. Òwò írê Òwàjì   [↗]
       2SG AUX god
       'Are you God?'

The examples above show that in each of the sets of sentences, the (a) and (b) are the same but for the difference in intonation. While (a) has falling tone (b) has rising tone. By Implication, to form interrogative constructions in Obolo, one of the ways is to use rising intonation.

In negative sentences, the rising intonation also differentiates the polar interrogatives from the declarative constructions as shown below:

4) a. Ì-ká-ríeínóríeyâ   [↘]
       3SG SCL-NEG-eat food DET
       'S/he did not eat the food'.

   b. Ì-ká-ríe ínóríeyâ   [↗]
       3SG SCL-NEG-eat food DET
       'Didn't s/he eat the food?'

5) a. Ènyìkpĕ-tétírìñyâ [↘]
       2PL NEG-catch fish DET
       'You (pl) did not catch the fish'

   b. Ènyì kpĕ-tétírìñyâ   [↗]
       2PL NEG-catch fish DET
       'You (pl) did not catch the fish?'

   ➤ **Interrogative with Particles**

Interrogative particles/elements are linguistic elements that exist in questions in order to make them interrogative in nature. They are usually not obligatorily in sentence-final. In Obolo, there are several interrogative elements used to form polar interrogatives. They are as follow:

Ìrè– Type

In Obolo, polar interrogatives can be realised by introducing *ìrè* at the initial position of a declarative construction. The following are examples:

6) a. Í-sì úwó ìkpá
      3SG SCL-house book
      'S/he has gone to school'.

   b. Ìrè í-sì úwó ìkpá
      INTERROG P. 3sg SCL-house book
      'Has s/he gone to school?'

7) a. (Onirọ) í-takaírîñ
      Name 3sg SCL-eat fish
      'Onirọ has eaten fish'.

   b. Ìrè (Onirọ) í-takaírîñ
      INTERROG PN 3sg SCL-eat fish
      'Has Onirọ eaten fish?'

The presence of *ìrè* in the above data changes a declarative sentence to polar interrogative. From the data above, the interrogative element *ìrè* only occurs at the pre-subject position. Hence, it will be ungrammatical for it to occur in any other position. As can be observed in the above constructions, upon the introduction of an interrogative element a declarative construction becomes and interrogative one (with or without intonation).

Kémbè-type

The introduction of *kémbè* in a declarative sentence is another way of forming polar interrogatives in Obolo. *Kémbè* is interpreted; 'I supposed' or 'I think?' below are examples:

8) a. Tété yâí-jě
       Old man DET 3gs SCL - go
       'the old man has gone'

   b. Kémbètété yâí-jě?
       INTERROG P. old man DET 3SG SCL- go
       'I supposed the old man has gone?'

9) a. (Úgém) i-riè ùsùñ
       Name 3SG SCL –eat soup
       'Úgém has eaten soup'.

b. Kémbè (Úgém) i-riè ùsùñ.
   INTERROG P. Name 3SG SCL –eat soup
   'I supposed Úgém has eaten soup?'

The data above show that the interrogative element *kémbè* changes declarative structures to interrogative ones in (b). It is also possible to have the interrogative element *kémbè* occur at the clause-final, but the meaning remains the same as in (b) where it occurs at the pre-subject position. Therefore, in Obolo, whether *kémbè* occurs at the pre-subject position or at the clause-final position it is grammatical. Also, just like *Ìrè*-type, the construction with *kémbè* interrogative element is usually not affected by tone mark variation.

Ó-nọ́/ó-tét/ó-kpèbé - Type

These interrogative elements can be used to convert a declarative sentence to an interrogative one. The three interrogative elements can be used interchangeably. They are glossed thus:

Ó-nọ́   'you hear?'
ó-tét   'you understand/'
ó-kpébé   'you get?'

See examples below:

10)   *a.* Sí gwèn ógọ́tna, ó-nọ́?
         Go call him come, INTERROG P.
         'Go and call him to come, did you hear?'

       b. Gwọ́kékwútkû, ó-nọ́?
         wash wrapper Pro, INTERROG P.
         Wash your wrapper, did you hear?'

11)   *a.* Èjì é-síbì óyêt, ó-tét?
         2PL SCL-go outside
         'We should go outside, do you understand?'

       b. Úgbáná ì-rìeúkwá, ó-kpèbé?
         PS SCL-eat yam. INTERROG P.
         Ugbana has eaten yam, do you understand?'

From the above data, one of the ways of forming polar interrogatives is by introducing interrogative particles after a declarative sentence. One can use any of the three interrogative particles due to their paradigmatic relationship that exists among them. Although, there seems to be slight

meaning variation between *ó-nǫ́* and the other two *ó-tét* and *ó-kpèbé*. See the gloss before the examples given above.

➢ Tag Interrogatives (Questions)

Question tags are or tag questions interrogative clauses added as a supplement to declarative sentences. Richards and Schmidt (2010) state thus:

> A tag question consists of a declarative sentence followed by a question tag. When there is rising intonation on the tag, this question type requests confirmation (e.g. *He's happy*, *isn't he?*) but when the tag has rise–fall intonation this indicates that the speaker believes the proposition to be true and is merely requesting agreement (*He's happy*, *isn't he?*) (p. 477).

In English, 'tag questions consist of a verb+ modal or primary auxiliary + pronoun, attached to the end of a statement in order to convey a positive or negative orientation' (Crystal, 2008, p. 476). It may be invariable or variable depending. By this, they are obligatorily positioned at the end of a sentence, quite independent of basic word order. He adds that 'in English, in addition to this, the polarity of the tag is usually the reverse of that found in the main clause: a positive clause takes a negative tag, and vice versa, e.g. *she's leaving, isn't she/she isn't leaving, is she*.

In Obolo, tag questions can be grouped into two. They are words or group of words that come at the end of a statement and grammatically function as tag questions TQs. Nevertheless, in both groups, the TQs begin with either *ìrè* or *kémbè*. That is to say that the earlier stated interrogative particles are the first constituents of a tag question. *Ìrè* and *kémbè* can be used interchangeably since they have paradigmatic relation. In this paper, the *ìrè/kémbè*...tags will be treated.

Ìrè/kémbè...tags

In Obolo, polar interrogatives can be formed upon the introduction of **ìrè**...tag or **kémbè**...tags, clause-finally. Both tags have negative and non-negative markers. They are *Ìrè/kémbèì-kâ?* 'is it so' and *Ìrè/kémbèìkárèìkâ?* 'Is it not so'. However, in this paper, we will take them to mean 'is it?' and 'isn't it?'

12)   *a.* Ǹkéré ó-bô-temùsùñ. Ìrè/kémbèìkárèìkâ?
        PN SCL-DFUT-cook soup. TQ
        'Ǹkéré will cook the soup. Isn't it?'

    b. Nkerekpô-temùsùñ. Ìrè/kémbèì-kâ?
       PN –NEG- cook soup. TQ
       'Nkere will not cook the soup. Is it?'

13)   *a.* Ò-mô-sí íkwàñ. Ìrè/kémbèìkárèìkâ?
        3SG SCL-FUT-go work TQ
        'S/he will go to work. Isn't it?

    b. Ò-wò kpó-sì íkwàñ. Ìrè/kémbèì-kâ?
       2SG SCL-NEG-go work TQ
       'You will not go to work. Is it?'

From the data above, one of the ways of forming polar interrogatives is by introducing tag questions as: '*ìrè/kémbè ì-kâ'* and *'Ìrè/kémbè ìkárè ìkâ'.* This is possible in two ways. The first is when the construction is without a negative marker, the tag that follows is negative as seen in (a) structures. But when the sentence is a negative one, the following tag does not negate the marker as can be seen in (b) sentences.

Discussion

This paper has shown polar interrogatives in Obolo. It has been able to show the various ways of forming polar interrogatives in the Obolo language. It has been shown that intonation markers (falling and rising intonations) can be used to form interrogatives in the Obolo language. One peculiar feature of this method is that it does not change the word order; neither does it change the tonal structure of the declarative underlying form. It only allows for a tag question as in: *ìrè/kémbè ì-kâ'* and *'Ìrè/kémbè ìkárè ìkâ*to be attached to the declarative or imperative underlying structure to realise a statement with a tag question.

Most times, interrogative particles or tag questions are used along with a rising intonation. As shown in the data, polar interrogatives with interrogative particles may take either a falling or a rising intonation in the Obolo language. No wonder, as soon as interrogative particles are introduced in declarative constructions such constructions immediately become interrogatives no matter the intonation they carry.

Conclusion

It is no gainsaying that every language has its forms or methods of introducing interrogatives; just as it does in realising polar questions. For the Obolo language, this study reveals three methods of realising polar interrogatives the Obolo language. Namely: (a) interrogatives formed using intonation marker (b) interrogatives formed using interrogative particles

and (c) interrogative formed tag questions. The findings also reveal specifically that there are interrogative with intonation markers and interrogative particles such as: *ìrè*, kébĕ and *Ó-nó/ó-tét/ó-kpĕbĕ* -types.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that further studies be conducted to determine other ways of expressing interrogatives in other dialects of Obolo. Further studies should also be carried out to analyse the semantics and pragmatics of the overt interrogative markers in Obolo.

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