

Review of *A Minimalist analysis of constituent question forms in Yoruba*

A. Overview and decision

The paper seeks to provide a minimalist syntax account of content questions in Yoruba. The authors identify two question verbs (QV): *dà* and *ńkọ́*, which may mean 'where/when'; six question nouns (QN): *tá* 'who', *kí* 'what', *èwo* 'which', *ìkèlòó* 'what number/frequency', *mélòó* 'how many', *èlò* 'how much'; and two interrogative qualifiers (QM): *wo*, *kèlòó* which may mean '[which, what, how, when]' XP. The QV particles are so-identified because they have predicative interpretation, they are in complementary distribution with lexical verbs in the language, and they may also select prepositional complements, like other verbs in the language.

Given the framework adopted, the generalization then is that all these interrogative lexico-grammatical elements have a question, i.e., [+Q] feature. In the specific case of QNs, the authors argue, based on independent and language-internal evidence, that there is also a focus, i.e., [+focus] which drives their dislocation to the left edge of the clauses in which they occur. Thus, the authors try to account for how these Q-feature-endowed elements drive the derivation of content questions in the Yoruba.

The proposed analysis and discussion, however, leave too many questions unanswered, and for which reason it is recommended the paper be rejected with a window for resubmission, if the following issues are adequately addressed by the authors.

B. Major Comments

1. The authors present no evidence whatsoever to show any precise interpretation for any of the two QVs identified and to account for their restricted distribution, if any. In ex. 2c, for instance, *dà* is interpreted as 'when' while in all other instances where QVs are used, both are interpreted as 'where'. Yet, the authors say nothing about whether the two particles are free variants or allomorphs. A similar comment seems to hold for the two QMs, e.g. ex. 37; it is not obvious as to which of them instantiate which interpretation. The authors needed to clarify or comment on this.

2. There are instances where the authors make a claim and try to provide empirical arguments in support of it. However, they use data patterns or seemingly minimal pairs that are not transparently linked to the points under contention. For example, in an argument about the non-question status of the particle *da* as presented in ex. 1a, the further empirical insights that are presented in ex. 2 show, what seems to be an allomorph of *da*, i.e. *di*, without any express alert to the reader that the two forms are related.

3. It would be useful for the authors to provide a brief general background on Yoruba morphosyntax, as well as quick overview of the framework adopted - the so-called Phase Theory (of the Minimalist Program) and how directly relevant these are for adequately accounting for Yoruba content question patterns beyond what the extant

literature offers. It is apparent that the authors assume that the general readership of the GJL is theoretically oriented towards Chomskyan syntax, which may actually not be the case. So there is the need to walk the reader through some basic tenets of the framework based on which analysis is fashioned, e.g. what are the underlying assumptions as far as clausal structure is concerned, and how these are independently motivated for Yoruba. Related to these is the need to clarify terms such as Copy and Delete, Predicate-Internal Subject Hypothesis (PISH, Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC) in p10, among others. Curiously, there is no mention of the Phase Theory or any of its tenets in sections of the paper where details of the analysis are presented.

4. Related to (3) above is the seemingly misunderstood use of the term: **Explanatory Adequacy** by the authors, especially relative to ex. 5 on p3 and ex. 22 on p9. While in (Chomskyan) generative grammar, this expression relates to an aspiration to understand child language acquisition processes through an understanding of human language grammar in general, the authors seem to have a totally different appreciation of this.

5. On p15, the authors say that some QNs in Yoruba are base-generated in their canonical position. There is the need to show precise examples and illustrate how the interrogative properties of such QNs are realized.

6. The proposed analysis suggests that the subject DPs of QVs get attracted to a higher specifier, apparently motivated by an abstract focus feature (see p14, ex. 32). It remains to be clarified by the authors how a DP without [+Q] in the language is attracted to the left periphery. If this is driven by the need to check [+focus], the authors still need to adduce independent evidence to motivate the derivation. For instance, does a focus marker (or understanding) emerge in the responses to such questions? On the hand, the authors need to comment on the exact role of the [+Q] feature of the QVs *da* and *nko*.

7. The paper seems to largely overlook a detailed analysis of interrogative qualifiers. However, it is important to clarify how exactly their [+Q] feature percolates in the derivation, as claimed by the authors (see p17). Furthermore, how do we arrive at their “what”, “which”, “when”, and “how” interpretations, e.g. ex 37a, given examples like 38b, where QN seem to derive structures with related interpretations?

C. Minor comment

1. The authors refer to the ifè dialect of Yoruba with specific reference to the analysis of ex. 22. It would be useful to clarify as to which dialect(s) of Yoruba that is presented and analysed in other instances in the paper in general.

2. What is meant by ile ‘house’ and iwe ‘book’ as question markers, when in the relevant examples, i.e. ex 26, *ki* and *meloo* are glossed as QM (cf footnote on p1)?

D. Typos

There are several typos in the manuscript. The following were obvious:

1. 6b, there is NOT in the interlinear glossing, but not in the translation
2. P2, first paragraph: conserved => considered
3. Free translation lines of ex. 2
4. *wo* in ex. 24 is glossed as QM, but in ex. 25, it's QP
5. Ex. 11b
6. Ex. 13 "friend"
7. Last paragraph of p12, "requirement"

E. References

1. Bocci, Blanchi & Cruschina (2021) (p1) - not in References
2. Bocci G. et al 2021. Focus in Wh-Question Evidence from Italian in Natural Language and Linguistic Theory. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11049-020-09483-x> - not found in the main work Citko, B. 2014. Phase Theory: An Introduction. Cambridge University Press. - not found in the main work
3. Chomsky, N. (1995). The Minimalist Program. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press - not found
4. Táíwò & Abímbólá (2014) - p13 but it is Abímbólá & Táíwò (2014) on p3