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Interrogative construction in Úwù

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ABSTRACT

Question formation is a universal phenomenon; it is indeed an integral part of the universal grammar. Every native speaker of a language has a way of making enquiries on issues that bother them. In this study, I examine the syntax of interrogative constructions in Úwù. I show that there are two types of interrogative constructions in the language namely polar and content question. I establish that polar question is derived through **Inter^o** which select **IP/FinP** as its complement to project maximally. I also show that the **head** of the content interrogative sentence is null like many Defoid – Kwa languages where **content Inter^o** head selects **FocP** as its complement. It is established in this study that unlike other Defoid –Kwa languages, Úwù **content Inter^o** head selects **TopP** as its direct complement. The study adopts the split CP hypothesis and the catographic analysis of Rizzi (1997 & 2001) for its analysis.

Keywords: Interrogative head, Úwù, polar question, content question, Topical phrase, Wh- operator

1. INTRODUCTION

Úwù is one of the endangered languages spoken in Nigeria. The language is spoken in Àyèré Community in Ìjùmú Local Government of Kogi State (see Abiodun 2007). The structure of the language has not enjoyed much scholarly research. There is a controversy among scholars as to whether it is a distinct language or a dialect of Yorùbá but that is not the focus of this paper.

This focus of this present paper, however, is to document an aspect of the syntax of the Úwù through a detailed description of its question formation. Question formation is a universal property of all languages and every native speaker has a way of making enquiry on issues that bothers them.

Question in languages are generally divided into two: Polar and Content questions. Languages of the world use different mechanisms in deriving these structures. English for instance, has no designated morpheme for polar question. It adopts the use of auxiliary verbs such as: *will, can, do* and this is done through subject auxiliary inversion which involves the movement of the auxiliary verb from I to C node outside the IP. The content question word in English is rather called WH-question.

It is also derived through the movement of the question words from the base to sentence initial position. A number of Benue-Congo languages also adopt different mechanisms in achieving this same ends. Igbo for instance has no designated morpheme for deriving polar question. It uses low tone to differentiate declarative from polar question. The low tone is attached to the first tone bearing unit in the sentence. Consider this example:

- | | | | |
|----|--|-----|--|
| 1. | I gàrà áhíá.
You go-pst market
You went to the market | 1b. | Ì gàrà áhíá?
You go-past market
Did you go to the market? |
|----|--|-----|--|

(cf. Ileonu 2010)

The content question on the other hand, is derived through both logical and syntactic movements (see Uwalaka 1982, Maduagwu 2012). As shown in 2 below:

- | | | | |
|----|--|-----|---|
| 2. | D-Structure
Aha gị bù gini?
Name you (sg) is what?
What is your name? | 2b. | S- Structure
Gini ì bù aha gị t_i?
What is name you
What is your name? |
|----|--|-----|---|

(cf. Maduagwu 2012)

Furthermore, Urhobo also derives its polar interrogative sentence from a declarative sentence through the addition of a low tone to a declarative sentence after the last tone bearing unit. The low tone question morpheme attaches to the final vowel of the sentence, making it to end with a low tone but there is no lengthening of this vowel. The low tone only aligns with the high tone at final position. This is exemplified in 3a.

- 3(a). **Mi kpó írúó`** **→** **mì kpírúô**
I went work Q Didn't I go to work?

The content question is derived from declarative sentence. The questioned words are moved to sentence initial position and the pronoun *óyèn* is inserted after the question word. In addition, a low is added at the final position and the subject NP in the declarative sentence bears a high tone in the interrogative. The realization of the content interrogative is demonstrated in 3b.

- 3(b). **Díé (òyè̀n) Ésé dèrè?** What did Ese buy?
 Bró(òyè̀n) Ese dẹ àmwâ ? How much did Ese buy the?

(cf. Aziza 2010)

However, Yorùbá derives its polar question through the use of designated word such *şé, şèbí, òjé, ha, bí*. These polar question words occur at sentence initial, medial and final position. Moreover, *şé, şèbí, òjé*, are restricted to sentence initial position, *ha* occurs at sentence medial position while *bí* is restricted to sentence final position. The formation of polar question in Yoruba is illustrated in 4a.

4. **Şé Ade jẹ isu ?**
 Qw NP eat yam
 Did Adé ate yam?

(cf. Ajiboye 2013)

The content interrogative sentences are derived through the movement of the content question words such as *kí*, (what) *ta*, (who) *ìgbà wo*, (when) *níbo* (where) to sentence initial position and it is accompanied by a focus marker *ni*. This is exemplified in 5a and b below:

- 5 (a). **Adé gbó òrò.** Declarative
 NP hear word
 Ade heard a word
- 5 (b). **Kí ni Adé gbó?** Interrogative
 Qw foc. NP hear
 What did Ade hear?

(cf. Yusuf 2010)

Having explained the various mechanisms used by the Benue- Congo languages stated above, it is imperative to examine the methods Úwù adopt in deriving its polar and content interrogative sentences. However, this study will serve as a documentation of the interrogative construction in Úwù.

2. POLAR QUESTIONS IN ÚWÙ

In Úwù, there are dedicated words for asking yes/no questions which are: *Şé, Şèbí*, and *àbí*. These words are found at the initial position of a sentence. However, based on the interaction of the question words with other lexical categories, I divide polar interrogative sentence in Úwù into two. They are verbal clause and non-verbal clause.

2. 1. POLAR QUESTION IN VERBAL CLAUSE

Verbal clauses are clauses that have finite verb as their governing node and make a complete sense. In a nutshell, a verbal clause can either be a basic clause or complex sentence. Ajiboye (2013) notes that verbal clause question implies that the yes/no question has a full

sentence. This type of question is widely attested in everyday usage among the Úwù speakers. This is shown in 6 below:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>6 (i). Adé á di bàtà
NP TNS buy shoe
Ade bought a shoe.</p> <p>(ii). Şé Adé á di bàtà?
Qw Ade TNS buy shoe
Did Adé buy a shoe?</p> <p>(iii). Şèbí Adé á di bàtà?
Qw Adé TNS buy shoe
Ade bought a shoe ,didn't he?</p> <p>(iv).* Àbí Adé á di bàtà?
Qw Ade TNS buy shoe
Did Ade buy a shoe?</p> | <p>1b(i) Adé ka di bàtà.
NP TNS buy shoe.
Ade is buying a shoe</p> <p>ii Şé Adé ka di bàtà?
Qw Ade TNS buy shoe
Is Ade buying a shoe?</p> <p>iii Şèbí Adé ka di bàtà?
Qw Ade TNS buy shoe
Ade is buying a shoe, isn't it?</p> <p>iv * Àbí Adé ka di bàtà?
Qw Ade TNS buy shoe
Did Ade buy a shoe?</p> |
|--|---|

As revealed in (6), there are three interrogative words for yes/no question formation in Úwù, and they are not divided in terms of their distributions, the three of them (şé, şèbí, *àbí) occur at sentence initial position. Moreover, *á* marks past tense while *ka* marks present/progressive tense in Úwù.

2. 2. NON-VERBAL CLAUSE POLAR QUESTION

Non-verbal clauses are nominal clauses. The governing node of such clauses is not a verb but a noun with its modifiers or a prepositional phrase. Ajiboye (2013) asserts that a non-verbal clause polar question includes a noun and its modifiers or a prepositional phrase. This type of question occurs in restricted context. This is exemplified in 7 below:

7. (i) **Şé Adé ě?**
Qw NP Emp.
Is this Adé?
- (ii). **Şèbí Adé ě?**
Qw NP Emp
This is Ade, isn't it?
- (iii).* **Àbí Adé ě?**
Qw NP Emp
Is this Ade?

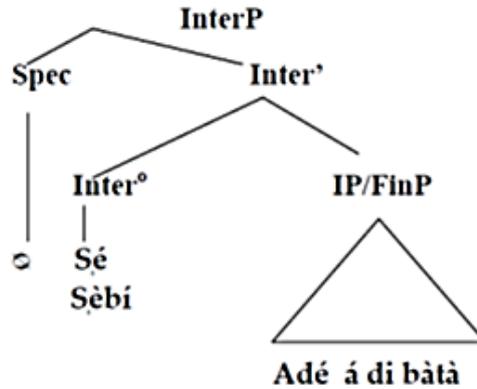
In examples in 7 above, the question words occur at sentence initial position. We also observe the presence of *ě* that occurs immediately after the NPs in the examples. The word is an emphatic marker in the language because it emphasizes the NP that occurs before it. It must be stated here that non verbal clauses are reduced form of **IP**, in this case the *Inter^o* takes DP at its complement. With respect to *àbí* that is used as polar question word in both verbal and non- verbal polar interrogative sentences above, Adeoye (2017) argues that the word is a conjunction in all its position of occurrence in Yorùbá. The scholar claims that

where the word *àbí* occurs at sentence initial position a whole IP has been ellipse before it. However, Ilori (2017) asserts that the word is polar question that is derived through prefixation: *à* + *bí*. We disagree with Ilori's claim because it is only nouns that are derived through nominal prefix. Based on this fact, the derived *àbí* is noun, as a result it cannot stand as *Inter^o* head. Based on this argument, we shall treat *àbí* as a conjunction bearing in mind that it is borrowed from Yorùbá to Úwù (see Adeoye 2017).

2. 3. DERIVATION OF POLAR INTERROGATIVE SENTENCES

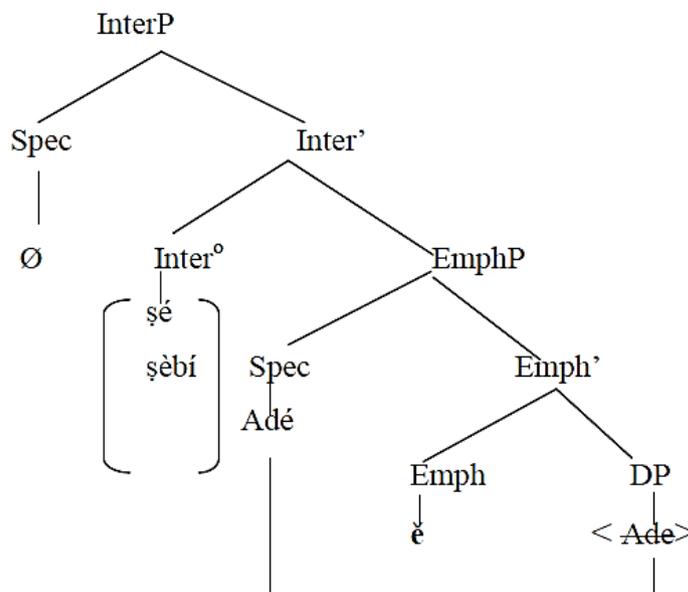
From the insights obtained from the data presented in Úwù , the derivation of the verbal polar interrogative sentence in line with Rizzi's (1997) split CP hypothesis and the cartographic approach and Aboh & Pfau (2011), will show an InterP where the Spec InterP is null and *Inter^o* selects IP/FinP to project maximally. The tree diagram below represents the proposed structure.

8. Figure 1.



2.3.1. DERIVATION OF NON -VERBAL POLAR QUESTION

9. Figure 2



The derivation of non-verbal polar interrogative emanates from **Emph**⁰ which externally merges with **DP** to satisfy the C-selection requirement thereby projecting into **Emph**'. The **Emph**⁰ has an **EPP** feature which makes it projects into **EmphP** thereby licensing the pied piping of **DP** to Spec **EmphP** to enhance the correct word order. The **Inter**⁰ externally merges with **EmphP**, and it in turn projects to **Inter**' which later projects into **InterP**. The schema is represented below:

3. CONTENT QUESTION IN ÚWÙ

Content question is a question that demands more than “yes or no” as an answer. It is a kind of question in which the speaker asks the hearer to supply specific information either about participants, settings, events, places or situations. According to Payne (1997) a content question requires more than the response of affirmation or disaffirmation. The import of this is that a content question demands full sentence answers as opposed to a “yes or no” question. Languages of the world differ in terms of the placement of content question words in sentences. Akrofi-Ansah (2010:99) notes, among other things, that:

Constituent words or phrases may be put obligatorily in clausal-initial position; they may occupy the same position as the constituent questioned or they may occupy either of these two positions in which case the language accepts both positions.

From the assertion above, we can deduce that each language has a peculiar way of showing the distribution of its content question words. For instance, Yorùbá content question words occur in two positions in interrogative sentences: clause initial and final positions.

This is shown in 10 below:

- 10 (i). **Adé rí Òjó**
NP see O.
Ade saw Ojo.
- (ii). **Adé rí ta ni ?**
NP see who foc
Ade saw who?
- (iii). **Ta_i ni Adé rí t_i?**
Qw foc. NP see
Who did Ade see?

In the examples in (10) above, the question word occurs at clause initial and final positions. The example in (10 ii) is regarded as echo question or the base where the NP object of the verb is turned to a question word while (10 iii) is the surface where the question word is moved from its extraction site to clause initial position. The constituent (the question word) leaves a trace at its extraction site that is co-indexed with the question word at the clause initial position (landing site).

However, on the account of the occurrences of content question words in interrogative sentences in languages, Siemund (2001) notes, among other things, that language can be

3. 1. 2. *NPÈÈ* CONTENT QUESTION WORD

Npèè is used to question entities that have the feature [\pm animate]. It is used to inquire about entities other than those that have [+human] feature.

Consider the examples below:

12. (i). **Bólá á ɕe èsé .**
B. TNS eat yam
Bólá ate yam.
- (ii). **Bólá á ɕi npèè?**
Bólá TNS eat Qw
Bólá ate what?
- (iii). **Npèè_i Ø Bólá kè ɕe t_i?**
Qw Top. NP OQM eat
What did Bola eat?

In 12, it is observed that the object of the transitive verb is turned to a question word and it is moved to sentence initial position. The moved constituent leaves a trace at its extraction site and verb is left stranded.

3. 1. 3. *ÓWÈÈ* CONTENT QUESTION WORD

This content question word is used to make enquiries about the location of a particular entity which may either be a person or an object. The content question word is normally used to talk about the precise position or location of a person or thing.

See the following examples:

13. (i) **Wálé á dá Èkò.**
Wale. TNS go Lagos.
Wálé went to Lagos.
- (ii) **Wálé á dá ówèè?**
W. TNS go Qw
Wale went where?
- (iii) **Ówèè_i Ø Wálé kè dá t_i?**
Qw Top NP OQM. go
Where did Wale go?

In 13, the adverb of place is turned to a question word and it moved to clause initial position, the constituent leaves a trace at its extraction site.

3. 1. 4. *ÒLÚ* CONTENT QUESTION WORD

This content question word is used to inquire about the price and quantity of an item. The context of use normally determines whether the word is used to inquire about the price or the quantity of an item. In the examples below the price will be looked at:

14. (i) **Kúnlé á da àki lẹ náirà igwá**
 K. TNS buy cloth PossP. Naira. ten
 Kúnlé bought his cloth for ten naira.
- (ii) **Kúnlé á da àki lẹ òlú?**
 K. TNS buy cloth PossP. Qw
 Kunle bought his cloth for how much?
- (iii) **Òlú_i Ø Kúnlé kẹ da àkì lẹ t_i?**
 Qw Top. K. OQM. buy cloth PossP. .
 How much did Kúnlé buy his cloth?

In 14, the price of the quantity is turned to a question word and it is moved to sentence initial position while it leaves a trace at its extraction site.

3. 1. 5. *KÓNI* CONTENT QUESTION WORD

This content question word is used to seek information on the identification of something amongst a group of entity. It shows that a group of items exists and one seeks or makes enquiry on a particular member of the group. This is done for clarification purposes and this question word is used to make specification of one thing or person from a set of persons or things. The manifestation of the question word is shown in 15 below:

15. (i) **Olú á hi èşé énjú.**
 Olu. TNS cook Yam. black
 Olú cooked a black yam.
- (ii) **Olú á hi èşé kónií?**
 Olu. TNS cook yam Qw
 Olu cooked which yam?
- iii. **Kóni èşé_i ø Olú kẹ hi t_i?**
 Qw Yam. Top. Olu. OQM. cook
 Which yam did Olú cook?

In 15, NP qualifier is turned to a question word at the base before it is moved to sentence initial position. One also observes that when the question word is moved it is accompanied by the NP it qualifies. The constituent leaves a trace at its extraction site while the verb is left stranded. This phenomenon is not strange, it is reported in the Yoruba language where the question word *wo* is used. Consider these Yoruba examples:

- 16 a. **Mo ra iwé funfun** I bought white book
 b. **Ìwé wo ni mo rà** Which book did I buy?

3. 1. 6. *KÉNGẸLÈ* CONTENT QUESTION WORD

This content question word is used to enquire about the time or period that a particular event takes place or will take place. It is interesting to note that in some Benue-Congo languages, this question word is in form of a phrase. See the examples below:

17. i. **Kúnlé á ri ọwà ọ́ọ́nà.**
 K. TNS go farm yesterday
 Kunle went to the farm yesterday
- ii. **Kúnlé á ri ọwà kẹ́ngẹ̀lẹ̀?**
 K. TNS go farm Qw
 Kunle went to the farm when?
- iii. **Kẹ́ngẹ̀nì Ø Kúnlé kẹ̀ ri ọwà tì?**
 Qw Top. K. OQM. go farm
 When did Kunle go to the farm?

In 17, time adverb *ọ́ọ́nà* is turned to a question word at the base before it is moved to sentence initial position, but one notices that the shape of last syllable of the word changes from *l*→*n* at the landing site. The moved constituent like other question word in the language leaves a trace at its extraction site.

3. 1. 7. *ÌTLÁGONÍNPÈÈ* CONTENT QUESTION WORD

This content question word is unique it is a product of compounding; it is pre-occupied with the discussion of the cause of an event. Moreover, the interrogative word often times indicates reason for an action or the cause of an action. Consider these examples:

18. i. **Ìtlágonínpèè; Ø ọ̀ kẹ̀ gbà dá tì?**
 Qw Top 2sg. OQM pre-verb go
 Because of what did you(sg) go?
- ii. **Ìtlágonínpèè; Ø ẹ̀mẹ̀ kẹ̀ gbà síṣọ̀lá tì?**
 Qw Top 2pl OQM pre-verb fight
 Because of what did you (pl) fought?
- iii. **Awa á dá ìtlágonínpèè?**
 1pl pst go Qw
 We went because of what?
- iv. **Ama á ri ọwà ìtlágonínpèè?**
 3pl. Pst go farm Qw
 They went to farm because of what?

In 18, adverb of reason is moved to sentence initial position but in this situation the adverb *Ìtlágoní* is concatenated with the question word *ńpẹ̀è* to form the question phrase.

3. 1. 8. *KÍ* CONTENT QUESTION WORD

This interrogative word is used to make enquiries about the welfare of a person or an object. This is referred to as verb question word. See the examples below:

19. i. **Kó Olú?**
 Qw NP
 How is Olu?

- ii. **Kí mama?**
Qw NP
How is mama?
- iii. **Kọ ọma lẹ?**
Qw NP possP.
How are your children?

In 19, the basic question word is *kí* which assimilates the feature of the vowel that occurs after it. It is assumed that the question word moves to the initial position of the noun phrase just the previously discussed question words. One needs to note that this interrogative form is a reduced **IP**.

From the data presented above, we can conclude that all the content question words occur at sentence initial position via movement from the base position. The occurrences of the content question word at final position are instances of echo question. We also observe that when the question words that are noun qualifier are moved to sentence initial position they leave resumptive pronoun (RP) at their extraction sites while others that are nominal leave a trace at their extraction site.

We further observe that when the question words are moved to sentence initial position particle *kè* normally surfaces between the subject NP and the verb.

3. 2. CONTENT QUESTION WORD OCCURRING AT SENTENCE FINAL POSITION

3. 2. 1. *ŞIGAÉ / KÚNÌŞIDÈ* CONTENT QUESTION WORD

These question words are used predominantly to ask about the welfare of the person such questions are posed to. They may also be used to make enquiries from a member of a family on the welfare of his/her relatives. In some instances, such word is used as a greeting form rather than a question. Consider these examples:

- 20.i **Ájọ lẹ şigaé?**
NP possP. Qw
How is work?
- ii. **Àjá lẹ şigaé?**
NP possP. Qw
How is your house?
- iii. **Olùkù lẹ şigaé?**
NP possP. Qw
How is/are your friend(s)?
- iv. * **Sigae olùkù lẹ ?**
Qw NP possP.
How is your friend(s)
- v. **Olú á nşí kúnşidè?**
NP TNS. sleep Qw
How did Olu sleep?

- vi. **Ama á dá kúnìsidè?**
 3pl TNS. go Qw
 How did they go?
- vii.* **kúnìsidè ama á dá?**
 Qw 3pl TNS go
 How did they go?

In examples in 20, the question word occurs at the final position. We assume that the situation here is a case of echo question because all the previous content question words occur at sentence initial. However, the semantics of the two question words seem different. For example, *šigaé*, as used in the sentences in 20(i-iii), is a form of greetings, used to make enquiries about the welfare of the person in question. The use of *kúnìsidè* in 20(v-vi) makes enquiries on the manner at which a particular thing or event takes place. Moreover, examples 20 (iv and vii) are ill-formed because the question word (*šigaé/kúnìsidè*) cannot occur at sentence initial position. This phenomenon discussed here is not unusual, the same situation is observed by Issah (2013) in Dagbani. Consider the examples below:

21. i **Yí bì-hí máá bé wúlà?**
 2PLU child PLU DEF be how
 How are your children?
- ii **á bà bé wúlà?**
 1SG father be how
 How is your father?

The question word *wúlà* in (21) is just like Úwù's *šigaé/kúnìsidè* is hosted at the right periphery of clause structure. As explained in Issah (2013) the question is a case of phatic usage of language (greetings).

3. 3. THE DISTRIBUTIONS OF CONTENT QUESTION WORDS IN ÚWÙ

After examining the question words in Úwù, it is important to show the distribution or position of occurrence of the words. This is exemplified in **Table 1** below:

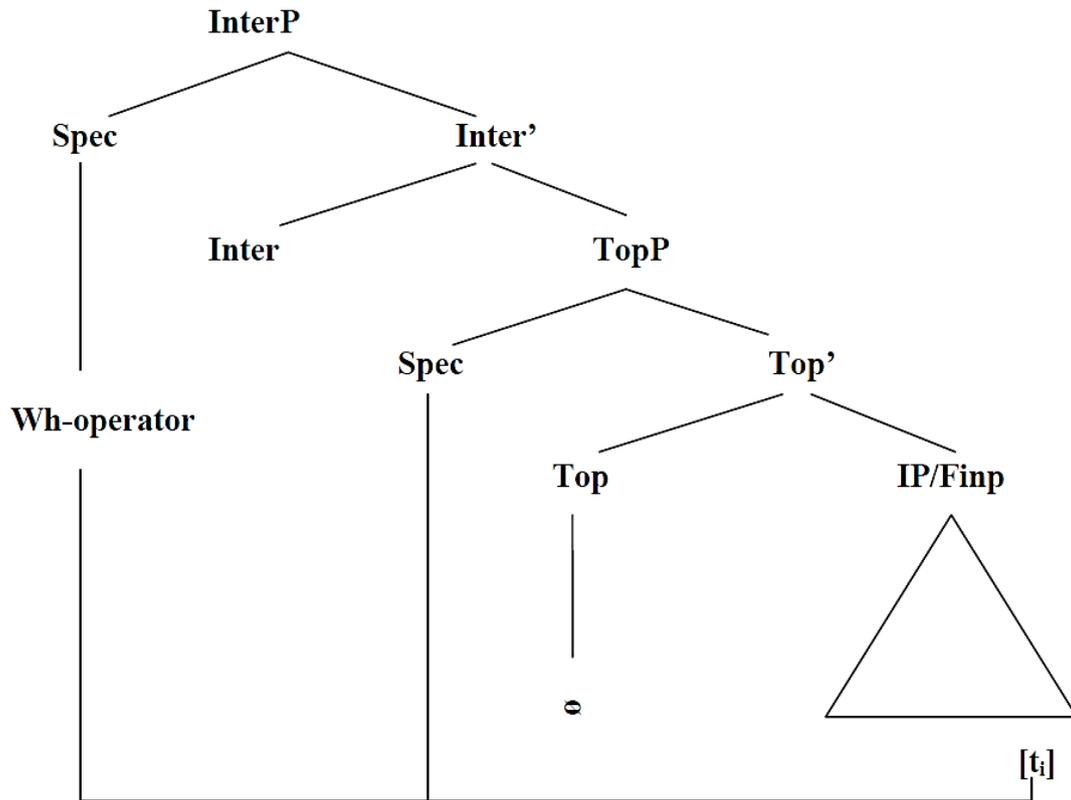
CONTENT QUESTION WORD		POSITION OF OCCURRENCE	
		INITIAL	FINAL
1	Ñkèé	√	
2	Ñpèé	√	
3	Ówèé	√	
4	Òlú	√	

5	Kóni	√	
6	Kéngelè	√	
7	Ìtlágonínpèé	√	
8	Kí	√	
9	Şigaé / kúnişidè		√

The table above shows the distribution of the content question words in *Úwù*. It is indicated in the table that all the question words occupy initial position except for only one that is restricted to the final position alone. From the data presented and the table above, we can deduce that *Úwù* has ten content question words as exemplified in data and each of these words can be used in various contexts in the language.

3. 4. THE DERIVATION OF CONTENT INTERROGATIVE SENTENCE IN ÚWÙ

(22) Figure 3

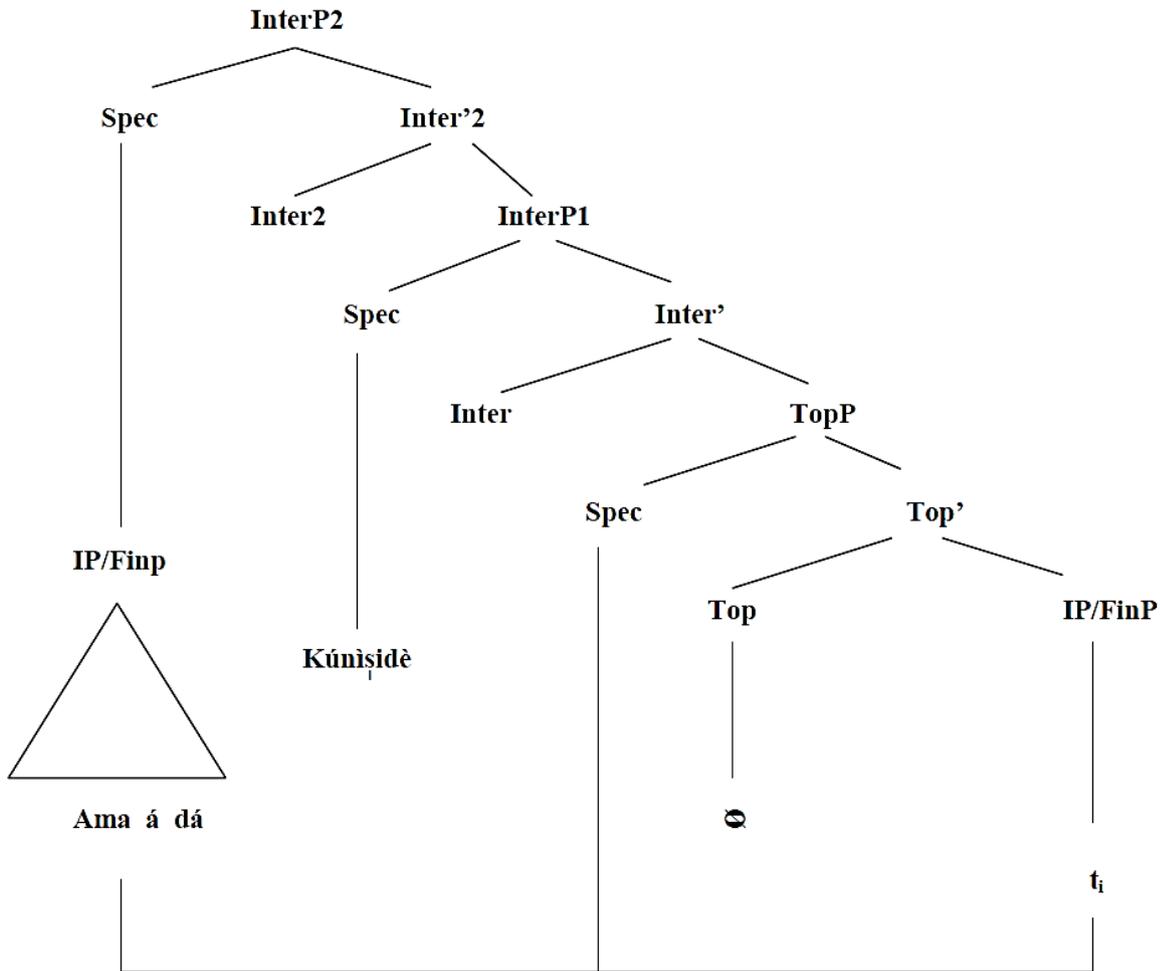


From the data presented, the derivation of the content interrogative sentence involves the movement of the Wh -operator to Spec **InterP** at the clause initial position. The head of the question projection is evidently null, because there is no phonetically visible functional item that immediately follows the moved Wh-operator in **InterP**. Thus, we proposed **Inter** head of content question selects **TopP** as it direct complement because **Top** is an empty category. Based on this fact, Wh-operator moves through Spec **TopP** to Spec **InterP**. The assumption here is represented with the schema below in (22).

3. 4. 1. DERIVATION OF CONTENT INTERROGATIVE SENTENCES WITH CONTENT QUESTION WORD AT FINAL POSITION

In accounting for interrogative sentences with their content question at the final position, I assumed that the content question word occurs at the initial position. As a result, I proposed a multiple InterP layers where the IP/FinP is move to Spec InterP2 and the Wh – operator occupies the Spec InterP1 (see Rizzi 1997, 2001). The structure below is a representative of interrogative sentence where the content question word occurs at sentence final position. See (23) below:

(23) Figure 4



4. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we have examined the syntax of interrogative construction in *Úwù*. We have established that the polar interrogative sentence is derived through Inter^0 which selects IP/ FinP as its complement. It is argued that Wh- operators are moved to Spec InterP at the initial position of the sentence and it is established that the Inter^0 head of content question selects **TopP** as its direct complement. It is further shown that the movement of the Wh-operator to Spec InterP triggered the occurrence of particle **kè** between the subject DP and the verb. We demonstrated that the cases of **Kúnìsidè/Sigaé** that occur at sentence final position are also instances of echo question. We demonstrated that the content question words occur at sentence initial position and proposed a multiple **InterP** layers in line with Rizzi 1997; 2001, where Spec **InterP2** is the probe that triggers the movement of the IP/FinP which is the goal to satisfy its EPP feature and to derive the correct word order.

Note: There is another *kè* in the language which is a negative marker. This word is a homonym of the OQM (object question marker), where the two occur simultaneously in a sentence homonymy avoidance principle is invoked. The shape of the negative marker changes to *é/ú*, before OQM.

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