

INTERROGATIVE PROJECTIONS IN YORUBOID LANGUAGES

Folurunso Ilori

University of Lagos, Nigeria

filori@unilag.edu.ng

Abstract

Studies on split-CP hypothesis and the role of information structure in the syntax of the left periphery have broadened understanding of the CP layer and the various structural projections available there (Rizzi 1997, 2001; Benincà 2001, 2002; Bošković 2002; Aboh 2004, 2007; etc). However, the question of the fine details of how these structures project in particular languages and language groups/families still remains debatable particularly in the context of question formation strategies and the scope and meaning interaction of focus and interrogative marking elements employed to encode such information. This paper examines the projections of interrogative constructions in Yoruboid* languages, a subgroup of Defoid-Kwa languages spoken in Central and Southern Nigeria comprising Yorùbá, Ígálà and Itshekiri (Akinkugbe 1976, 1978; Omamor 1976; Ilori 2010; Omachonu 2007, 2011; among others). It provides syntactic and semantic evidence to show that focus and interrogative (Inter) heads though somehow knitted in these languages are separately projected and differentiable. It shows that the somewhat knitted interaction of focus and Inter in content question is better understood in the light of the more structurally explicit polar and non-operator based content questions found in the languages. The paper concludes that content question operators are not interrogative heads but some kind of nominal words that interpret the focus of the interrogative force.

Keywords: left periphery; interrogative; focus; syntactic projection; Yoruboid.

1. Introduction

Two types of interrogative clauses, polar and content questions, are identified in natural language syntax. Our concern in this paper is not only to identify Yoruboid interrogative heads but also to propose how such functional heads project interrogative clauses and pinpoint the attendant implications of such proposals for UG. Issues addressed in the study include the exact landing site of content question operators and the interaction of the operators with focus markers, e.g. Yoruba **ni**, which obligatorily shows up immediately after content question operators and optionally occurs in polar questions. Are such focus markers interrogative heads or is it that focus and interrogative force are fused in such elements? The paper is organized in four sections: sections two and three are devoted to description and discussion of syntactic projections of polar questions; section four takes on the issue of operator and non-operator based content questions; and section five is the concluding remark.

* Yoruboid, a group of SVO languages, is a sub-branch in Defoid, which itself is a branch in Benue-Congo/Niger-Congo family. The term *Yoruboid* was coined by Williamson (1973) to differentiate the group from Yoruba, which is just a member language of the group. The term *Defoid* first occurred in Capo (1989:275) as ‘a non-transparent coinage based on **èdè** + **ifẹ** + **oid**. ... **èdè** is the standard Yorùbá term for ‘language’, **ifẹ** refers to the presumed cradle, and **-oid** is the group suffix conventionally used ...’ after it was suggested at the 8th annual conference of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria in 1987. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoruboid_languages & http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defoid_languages for more information.

2. Polar Questions and Its Types in Yoruboid

Three structural types of polar questions can be easily identified in Yoruboid languages¹. These are the clause-final type, discrete question word type, and the supra-segmental marked type.

2.1. Clause-final Syllable Type

The first type which appears to be exclusive to Ígálà converts declarative sentences to interrogatives simply by adding a mid-toned clause-final element which superficially looks like a lengthening of the vowel of the final syllable of the final word of the declarative clauses, irrespective of the tone carried by such word-final vowel². This is illustrated in examples (1) to (5).

1a. Ì tákpa mẹ.

3sg finish perf
'It has finished.'

b. Ì tákpa mẹ ẹ ?

3sg finish perf Inter
'Has it finished?'

2a. Aládi wá èmi.

Aladi come here
'S/he came here.'

b. Aládi wá èmi i ?

Aladi come here Inter
'(Did) Aladi come here?'

3a. Wẹ hi óbóbó lẹ.

2sg cook soup the
'You cooked the soup.'

b. Wẹ hi óbóbó lẹ ẹ ?

2sg cook soup the Inter
'(Did) you cook the soup?'

4a. Áúdù du nwú ma.

Audu take give 3pl
'Audu gave it to them.'

b. Áúdù du nwú ma a ?

Audu take give 3pl Inter
'(Did) Audu give it to them?'

5a. Ì á ló.

3sg prog go
'S/he is going.'

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² A closely related phenomenon is reported in Aboh & Pfau (2011) for Gungbe, Nweh (Bantu), and Lele (Chadic). See also Nkemnji (1995).

- b. Ì á ló o ?
 3sg prog go Inter
 'Is s/he going?'

As evident in (1-5), the only difference between the declarative sentences and their interrogative counterparts is the presence of the clause final mid-toned copy of the final vowel of any clause-final word in the declarative sentence (cf. Omachonu 2007).

A similar type of this construction is found in Itshekiri where interrogation appears to be marked by a low-toned copy of the final vowel of the last word in polar questions, as in examples (6) and (7). This low-toned item is however regarded as a functional interrogative head in this study.

- 6a. Òrìtsẹ̀-ẹ́ kọ orin.
 Oritse-Fin sing song
 'Oritse sang.'
- b. Òrìtsẹ̀-ẹ́ kọ orin ɪn ?
 Òrìtsẹ̀-Fin sing song Inter
 'Did Òrìtsẹ̀ sing?'
- c. Orin wé òun Òrìtsẹ̀-ẹ́ kọ ọ ?
 Song this Foc Oritse-Fin sing Inter
 'Is it THIS SONG that Oritse sang?'
- d. Sé orin wé òun Òrìtsẹ̀-ẹ́ kọ ọ ?
 Inter song this Foc Oritse-Fin sing Inter
 'Is it THIS SONG that Oritse sang?'
- 7a. Ọmáwùmí rùlẹ́kọ́ (← Ọmawùmí rẹ ulẹ́kọ́).
 Ọmawumi-Fin go-school
 'Ọmawumi went to school.'
- b. (Sẹ) Ọmáwùmí rùlẹ́kọ́ ọ ?
 Inter Ọmawùmí-Fin go-school Inter
 '(Did) Ọmawumi went to school?'

2.2. Discrete Question Word Type

The second type of yes-no questions in Yoruboid is found in Yoruba and Itshekiri. This type generates polar questions from declaratives by attaching discrete question words or particles to the beginning or end of a declarative sentence. The question particles used for this type of derivation in Yoruba are Ñjẹ/şé/àbí and bí. While Ñjẹ and şé are exclusively used clause-initially and bí with its dialectal variants (ndan (Ọyó) and na (Ègbá)) are used only in clause-final position, àbí is optionally employed in both positions, as illustrated in examples (8) and (9).

- 8a. Ñjẹ/şé/àbí Ayọ-ọ fọ aşọ ?
 Inter Ayọ-HTS wash cloth
 'Did Ayọ wash clothes?'
- b. Ayọ-ọ fọ aşọ àbí/ *ñjẹ/ *şé ?
 Ayọ-HTS wash cloth Inter
 'Did Ayọ wash clothes?'

9a. **Olú lọ bí (/ndan/na)?**

Olú-Fin go Inter

‘Did olú go?’

b. ***bí (/ndan/na) Olú lọ?**

Inter Olú-HTS go

‘Did olú go?’

Interestingly, **bí** can optionally co-occur with **ñjẹ/şé** but it cannot be used with **àbí**, as evident in (10a & 10b).

10a. **Ñjẹ/Şé / *àbí Ayọ-ọ lọ bí ?**

Inter Ayọ-HTS go Inter

‘Did Ayọ go?’

b. **Ñjẹ /Şé/ *àbí o lọ bí ? → Ñjó/Şó o lọ bí ?**

Inter 2sg go Inter

‘Did you go?’

This may not be unconnected with the fact that **bí** and **à-bí** are morphologically related. As such, using the two of them in the same clause would create the kind of redundancy noted in (10).

As evident in example (6d) and (7b), **şé** (a cognate of Yoruba **şé**) is optionally employed alongside the final low-toned vowel to mark polar questions in Itshekiri. That explains why (6c) and (6d) have the same logical interpretation.

1.2.1. **ni** as Polar Question Marker in Yoruba

One other item often said to signal yes-no question in Yoruba is **ni** (e.g. Yusuf 1990 and Adeşola 2015), as used in (11).

11. **Olú ra ìwé ni ?**

Olu-HTS buy book ?Inter

‘Did Olu buy a book?’

Contrary to such claim, however, examples like (12a-d) clearly show that **ni** in expressions like (11) and (12a,c, & d) is not an interrogative marker but an occurrence of the Yorùbá invariant focus marker **ni**.

12a. **Şé/àbí Olú ra ìwé ni ?**

Inter Olu-HTS buy book ?Inter

‘Did Olu buy a book?’

b. **sáré lọ ni.**

run go Foc

‘Make sure you go running.’

c. **O sáré lọ ni ?**

2sg run go Foc

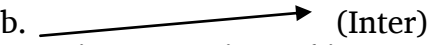
‘Did you go running?’

- d. *Şé/àbí o sàré ló ní ?*
 Inter 2sg run go Foc
 ‘Did you go running?’

Our view is that the actual interrogative marker in such contexts is *şé/àbí* which is simply muted in (11). A more technical way of saying this is that the Interrogative marker has a null spell-out there.

2.3. Supra-segmental Marked Type

The third type of yes/no question construction in Yoruboid languages uses supra-segmental interrogative marker. This interrogative marker is a high pitch intonation which scopes over the whole of a declarative sentence to derive a polar question clause. This generally occurs in Yoruba and Itshekiri. In (13b), the arrow indicates the high pitch intonation scoping over the declarative sentence in (13a) to derive a polar question in Yoruba³. Note that this high pitch interrogative marker contrasts with *ńjé/şé/àbí* as in (13c).

- 13a. *Wọn ti dé.*
 3pl-HTS Perf arrive
 ‘They have arrived.’
- b.  (Inter)
Wọn ti dé ?
 3pl-HTS Perf arrive
 ‘Have they arrived?’
- c. *Şé/ńjé/àbí wọn ti dé?*
 Inter 3pl-HTS Perf arrive
 ‘Have they arrived?’

3. Projection of Polar Questions

A careful look at the examples of polar questions in (1) to (13) and other relevant data in Yoruboid languages seems to suggest that the interrogative markers in the syntax of this type of question get merged to convergent declarative sentences either clause-initially or clause-finally. One is however of the opinion that the merging process in this derivation is only of the clause-initial type. This is evident in the data as none of the interrogative markers can make any meaning independently of convergent declarative clauses. This is more evident in Ígálà and Itshekiri polar question markers which appear only identifiable, superficially, as some form of phonologically conditioned vocalic spread (but) with clear semantic denotation and syntactic function. Therefore, if one considers the polar question markers as syntactic heads that project question constructions, it logically follows that their accompanying

³ This is comparable to English polar questions where intonation is employed to emphasize and question a phrase, e.g. *you are going to the MARKET?* See Cheng (1991) and Cheng and Rooryck (2000) for proposal on prosody as an activator of interrogative force.

declarative clauses function as complement with which they project the interrogative constructions.

Yoruba polar question markers generally occur to the left of the IP. The behaviour of **(à-)bí** which optionally shows up clause-initially or clause-finally is indication that the IP optionally raises across the polar question markers. We therefore propose that the polar question markers in Yoruboid languages identified in this study are interrogative function heads that select declarative clauses as complement to project and express their interrogative information. In line with Rizzi's (1997) split-CP hypothesis and the cartographic approach, as in Aboh (2004) and Aboh & Pfau (2011), we propose that Yoruboid polar interrogative force is a functional specification label-able as *Inter*^o which encodes the interrogative feature that selects IP (= FinP) to project maximally, and that this projection is below ForceP. This implies that polar questions where the interrogative head occurs clause-finally are spell-out manifestations of FinP movement to spec-InterP. For polar question projections where *Inter*^o has clause-initial spell-out, we assume that the interrogative marker/head simply remains in-situ. This view is sketched out in the configuration in (14) and figures 1, 2 and 3. (14a) is the base where *Inter* takes IP/FinP as complement while (14b) is the derived form after IP/FinP has been moved to Spec-InterP. Figures 1 and 2 are tree diagrams that illustrate this syntactic projection using specific language data from Ígála and Itshekiri.

14a. [_{InterP} [_{Inter} [**FinP/IP**]]]

↓

b. [_{InterP} [_{Spec-InterP} **FinP** [_{Inter} **mid/low-tone** [< **FinP** >]]]]

Figure 1: (Ígála & Itshekiri)

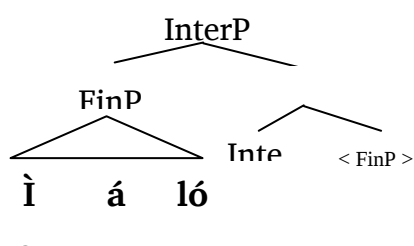
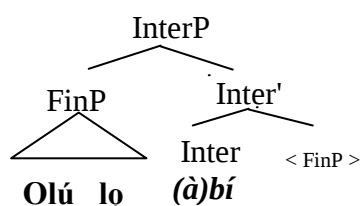
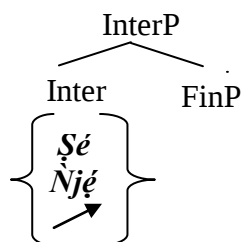


Figure 2: (Yorùbá)

a.



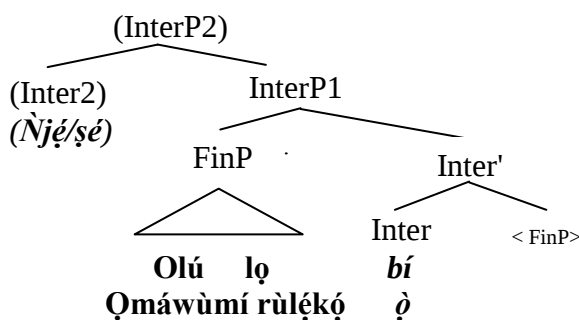
b.



While figures 1 and 2 straightforwardly account for the Igálà, Itsèkiri and Yoruba polar questions in (1- 5), 6-7), and (8, 9, and 13) respectively, the double interrogative headed polar questions in Yoruba and Itsèkiri examples in (6d, 7b, and 10) are yet to be worked out. We propose that such are projected within the grammar in the manner illustrated with the configuration in figure 3.

Figure 3: Projection of double interrogative headed questions

a.



b.

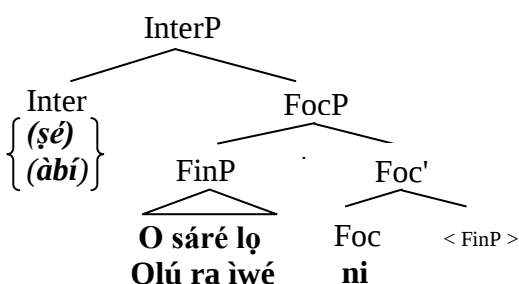


Figure 3a shows that Yoruboid polar questions like those in (6d, 7b, and 10) have a structure where there are two interrogative projections in which the first and obligatory InterP1 is merged with an optional InterP2. FinP/IP, the complement of Inter is then raised to the specifier position of InterP1. Figure 3b on the other hand illustrates the Yoruba examples in (12a) and (12d) to show that such polar questions are constructions where the interrogative marker, *şé/àbí*, which optionally has a null spell-out, scopes over a focused clause projection thereby making the focus marker *ni* in the context look like a clause-final question element.

The implication of this is that Yoruba polar question markers can scope over a proposition whose content is focused, either in part or in whole. For instance, in (15b & 15c), the question marker *şé* scopes over both a focused part and the whole content of the proposition **Wón *ń* bá *ìwọ̀/ìrẹ̀* *wí*** ‘They are talking to you’.

- 15a. [_{FocP} *ìwọ̀/ìrẹ̀* *ní* [_{FinP} *wón* *ń* *bá* _{<ìwọ̀/ìrẹ̀>} *wí*]]
 2sg Foc 3pl-Fin prog meet talk
 ‘They are talking to YOU.’
- b. [_{InterP} (*Şé*) [_{FocP} *ìwọ̀/ìrẹ̀* *ní* [_{FinP} *wón* *ń* *bá* _{<ìwọ̀/ìrẹ̀>} *wí*]]] ?
 Inter 2sg Foc 3pl-Fin prog meet talk
 ‘Are they talking to YOU?’
- c. [_{InterP} (*Şé*) [_{FocP2} [_{FocP1} *ìwọ̀/ìrẹ̀* *ní* [*wón* *ń* *bá* _{<ìwọ̀/ìrẹ̀>} *wí*]] *ní* [_{<ìwọ̀/ìrẹ̀ ní wón ń bá <ìwọ̀/ìrẹ̀> wí >}]]] ?
 Inter FocP2 2sg Foc₁ 3pl-Fin prog meet talk Foc₂
 ‘ARE THEY TALKING TO YOU?’

So, (15c) involves double focusing: the first targets the 2sg *ìwọ̀/ìrẹ̀* while the second targets the whole of the first focused construction in (15a) *ìwọ̀/ìrẹ̀ ní wón ń bá wí*. This shows that Inter occurs higher above focus, which in turn directly scopes over IP.

One other interesting thing in the cartography of these constructions is that focused items can be negated in spec-FocP within InterP in Yoruboid. This is evident in the Yoruba examples in (16c & d).

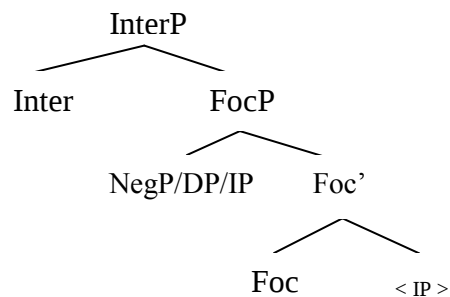
- 16a. **Obámà-á pa Osama Bin Laden.**
 Obama-Fin kill Osama Bin Laden
 ‘Obama killed Osama Bin Laden.’
- b. [**Obama**] *ní* *ó* **pa Osama Bin Laden.**
 Obama Foc Fin kill Osama Bin Laden
 ‘OBAMA killed Osama Bin Laden.’
- c. [**Obama** *kó*] *ní* *ó* **pa Osama Bin Laden.**
 Obama Neg Foc Fin kill Osama Bin Laden
 ‘It is NOT OBAMA who killed Osama Bin Laden.’
- d. (*Ñjẹ* / *Şé*) [**Obama** *kó*] *ní* *ó* **pa Osama Bin Laden?**
 Inter Obama Neg Foc Fin kill Osama Bin Laden
 ‘Is it NOT OBAMA who killed Osama Bin Laden?’
- e. **Àbú bi mí pé şé Obama kó ní ó pa Osama Bin Laden?**
 Abu ask 1sg Force Inter Obama Neg Foc Fin kill Osama Bin Laden
 ‘Abu asked me that is it NOT OBAMA who killed Osama Bin Laden?’
- f. ***Àbú bi mí şé pé ní Obama kó ó pa Osama Bin Laden?**
 Abu ask 1sg Inter Force Foc Obama Neg Fin kill Osama Bin Laden
 ‘Abu asked me that is it NOT OBAMA who killed Osama Bin Laden?’

Similarly in Igàlà, Force is realized above Inter which in turn dominates NegP and FocP in that order, as evident in (17e-g).

- 17a. **Ù kpa éja.**
1sg kill fish
'I caught fish.'
- b. **Ù kpa éja a?**
1sg kill fish Inter
'Did I catch fish?'
- c. **Eja Ø ù kpa.**
fish Foc 1sg kill
'I caught FISH.'
(Cleft: 'It is FISH that I caught?')
- d. **Eja Ø ù kpa a?**
fish Foc 1sg kill Inter
'Did I catch FISH?'
(Cleft: 'Is it FISH that I caught?')
- e. **Ù kà kí eja Ø ù kpa.**
1sg say Force fish Foc 1sg kill
'I said that I catch FISH.'
(Cleft: 'I said that it is FISH I caught?')
- f. **Ù kà kí [_{FocP} eja Ø [ù kpa _{< eja >}] a ?**
1sg say Force fish Foc 1sg kill Inter
'I said did I catch FISH?'
- g. **Ù kà kí [í che [eja n] Ø ù kpa a ?**
1sg say Force it-neg be fish neg Foc 1sg kill Inter
'Did I say that it is not FISH I catch?'

It would therefore be plausible to propose that the Yoruboid InterP projection for polar questions is of the type in figure 4.

Figure 4: Yoruboid Polar InterP Projection



4. Content Questions

Yoruboid content questions are of two types; the operator based type which requires the presence of question operators similar to *wh*-words in English and the non-operator type which does not involve such words.

4.1. Operator Based Content-Questions

Igálà and Yoruba are *wh*-movement languages which front content-question operators to a position within the left periphery as focus of interrogation, leaving the IP from which the operator was extracted as comment/presupposition of the interrogation in the overt syntax (cf. Rizzi 1997:286 and Erteschik-Shir 2007:89). For instance, in Yoruba content questions in (18) below, moved question operators are obligatorily and immediately followed by the invariant standard focus marker **ni** in the CP. Although this is a bit complicated in Igálà, e.g. (19), because the focus marker there is a phonetically null item (cf. 17c-g), question operators in the language still behave like focused phrases in the CP.

Yoruba

- 18a. [**kí** /**ta** /**èwo**] **ni** **o** **rí** < **kí/ta/èwo** > ?
 what/who/which Foc 2sg see
 ‘What/who/which did you see?’

- b. [(**ní**) **ibo**] **ni** **o** **ń** **gbé** < (**ní**) **ibo** > ?
 Loc where Foc 2sg prog live
 ‘Where do you live?’

Ígálà

- 19a. **Énwú** Ø [**è** **é** **che** < **énwú** >] ?
 What Foc 2sg prog do
 ‘What are you doing?’

- b. **Éné** Ø [< **éné** > **neke** **dòhì**] ?
 What Foc can answer
 ‘Who can answer?’

- c. **Ábú** Ø **è** **é** **hì** **óbóbó** < **ábú** > ?
 How Foc 2sg prog cook soup
 ‘How do you cook soup?’

- d. **Úgbó** Ø **ényí** **kì** **á** **wọ** **ẹ** **dé** < **úgbó** > ?
 Which/where Foc tooth that-3sg prog pain 2sg be
 ‘Which tooth is painning you?’ / ‘Where is the tooth that pains you?’

This would imply that content question operators move to the specifier of topic/focus projection as proposed in Rizzi (2001) and Aboh (2004). This, no doubt, is a paradox for the strong cartographic approach as two functional heads – Foc and Inter – appear to encode a single discourse information, i.e. interrogative force (Aboh & Pfau 2011:96). We shall however show in this paper that these assumedly fused functional

heads are separately coded in the base syntax of content questions in Yoruboid languages.

4.1.1. Telling apart Focus and Content-Question Operator Movements

Generally speaking, apart from the type of operators attracted to spec-FocP, which unlike content question operators, are not inherently interrogative⁴, it appears structurally difficult to separate the structure of focus projections from that of content-question clauses in Yoruboid languages⁵. In fact, answers to content-questions in these languages are not different from focus constructions. For instance, the answer to (20a) which targets the (actor/agent) subject in Yoruba requires new information coded as a topic in (20b).

20a. **Ta ni** [_{<Ta>} **ó ra aṣọ yìí**] ? (Content-question)
 Who Foc Fin buy cloth this
 ‘WHO bought this cloth?’

b. **Adé ni** [_{<Adé>} **ó ra aṣọ yìí**]. (Focus construction)
 Ade Foc Fin buy cloth this
 ‘ADE bought this cloth?’
 (Cleft: ‘It was ADE who bought this cloth?’)

21a. **Mo sọ pe ta ni** [_{<ta>} **ó ra aṣọ yìí**] ?
 1sg say Force who Foc Fin buy cloth this
 ‘I said WHO bought this cloth?’ (Embedded wh-question)

b. **Mo sọ pé Adé ni** [_{<Adé>} **ó ra aṣọ yìí**].
 1sg say Force Ade Foc Fin buy cloth this
 ‘I said ADE bought this cloth?’ (Embedded focus const.)
 (Cleft: ‘I said it was ADE who bought this cloth’)

A cursory look at (20a&b) and (21a&b) shows that Yoruba content-question operators and focused items are mutually exclusive both in matrix and embedded clauses. Interestingly, Data from Ígálà also present similar scenario, as evident in (22).

22a. **Énwú Ø** [**ù kpa** _{<énwú>} **étí òhìmìnì**] ?
 What Foc 1sg kill side river
 ‘WHAT did I kill at the river bank?’

b. **Éja Ø** [**ù kpa** _{<éja>} **étí òhìmìnì**].
 Fish Foc 1sg kill side river
 ‘I killed FISH at the river bank.’
 (Cleft: ‘It is FISH that I killed at the river bank.’)

⁴ Aboh and Pfau (2011) have argued that wh-operators do not really clause type wh-questions.

⁵ This may be a general structural trait in Kwa. See Ameka (1992, 2010), Agbedor (1995), Aboh (2004), and Aboh & Pfau (2011) for similar focus and wh-question structures in Ewe, Akan, Gbè, and Nweh.

Itshekiri too has some interesting data that shed light on this issue. In the data set elicited for content questions in the language, there is a clause final mid-toned vowel that takes the phonetic shape of the final vowel of the word that immediately precedes it in a similar manner to what obtains in Igala polar questions. This mid-toned clause-final vowel constantly shows up as a matter of obligation in every Itshekiri content question clause construction, as illustrated in (23).

Itshekiri

23ai. Question: **Lè sí é rè oko o ?**
 Who Foc Fin go farm Inter
 ‘Who went to the farm?’

aii. Answer: **Òritsè (òun) r(è)-é rè oko.**
 Oritse Foc Foc-Fin go farm
 ‘ÒRITSÈ went to the farm.’

bi. Question: **Bò-kó (ò)un/ọ Òritsèé rè e ?**
 Place-Foc Foc Oritse-Fin go Inter
 ‘Where did Òritsè go?’

bii. Echo Qst: **Òritsèé rè bò-kó ọ ?**
 Oritse-Fin go place-Foc Inter
 ‘Òritsè go where?’

biii. Answer: **Oko òun Òritsèé rè.**
 Farm Foc Òritsè-Fin go
 ‘Where did Òritsè go?’

ci. Question: **Lè sí é kọ orin in ?**
 Who Foc Fin sing song Inter
 ‘Who sang?’

cii. Answer: **Ọmawùmí (ò)un é kọ orin.**
 Ọmawumi Foc Fin sing song
 ‘Ọmawumi sang.’

di. Question: **Rì-kó Ọmawùmí kọ ọ ?**
 What-Foc Ọmawumi sing Inter
 ‘What did Ọmawumi sing?’

dii. Answer: **Orin òun Ọmawùmí kọ.**
 Song Foc Ọmawumi sing
 ‘Omawumi sang SONGS.’

In these Itshekiri examples, it is evident that the interrogative marker is a mid-toned clause-final morpheme which assimilates the vocalic shape of the immediate preceding syllable. It is also evident that the language has about three/four focus

marking items⁶ – **sí**, **òun**, **kó**, and **ʔrè** (e.g. 23aii) – which are clearly different in terms of distribution and function from the interrogative morpheme.

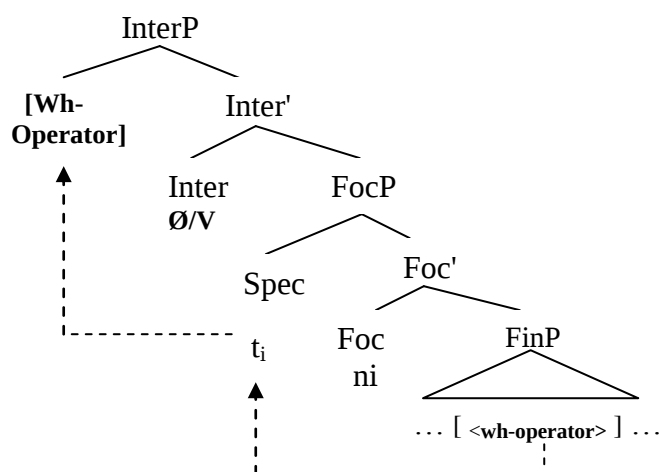
Given these insights, one is compelled to tow the line of Ilori (2010) and Aboh & Pfau's (2011) that the interrogative force in Yoruboid content questions is neither driven by the content question operators nor the focus marker but by a question marking particle which is outside the domain/scope of the two. According to Aboh & Pfau (2011:102), the presence of this item is a null morpheme which '... often correlates with intonation change cross linguistically ...'. It therefore logically follows to conclude here that Yoruboid content questions are projected by an Inter head which may optionally have a phonetically null spell-out (e.g. in Yoruba and Igala) or be segmentally marked, as in Itshẹ̀kiri. This Inter head obligatorily selects FocP as complement to project its syntax. By implication, the Yoruboid content question Inter⁰ is directly merged to a convergent FocP containing a question operator, as sketched out in the configuration in (24).

24. [_{InterP} [_{Inter} Ø/Vowel [_{FocP} wh-op [_{Foc} ni/sí/Ø [_{FinP} ... <wh-op> ...]]]]]

4.1.2. Deriving Yoruboid Content-Questions

Given the insights gained from the data sets investigated so far in this study, there are about three or four possible ways of deriving convergent content questions from the structural base template proposed in (24). One option is to assume as done in Ilori (2010:258) that the already raised question-operator in spec-FocP is attracted by Inter⁰ to Spec-InterP to check off the strong feature of Inter⁰ as illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5:



⁶ These have to be properly sorted out in terms of specific distribution and function in a more detailed future study of Itshẹ̀kiri focus constructions.

The second possibility is to assume as in Aboh & Pfau (2011:104) that it is the whole of FocP functioning as complement of Inter⁰ that gets attracted and raised to spec-InterP, as illustrated in figure 6, and not just the question/wh-operator.

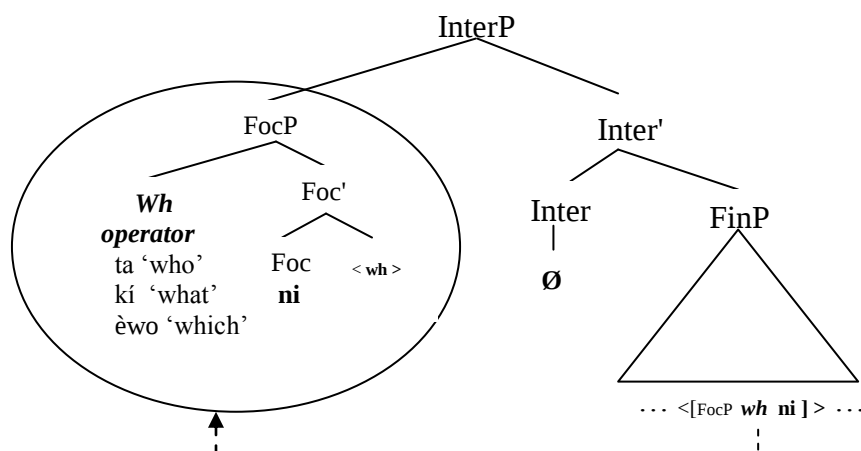
Figure 6.

```
graph TD
    InterP --> FocP
    InterP --> Inter_prime[Inter']
    FocP --> wh_operator[wh-operator]
    FocP --> Foc_prime[Foc']
    Foc_prime --> Foc["Foc<br/>ni/si/ø"]
    Foc_prime --> FinP
    FinP --> Triangle
    subgraph Triangle
        direction TB
        Dots1[...] --> WhOp["<wh-operator>"] --> Dots2[...]
    end
    Inter_prime --> Inter["Inter<br/>ø/vowel"]
    Inter_prime --> Foc_angle["<Foc>"]
```

[illegible]

One other possible derivation option which appears to be supported by Yoruba language-specific evidence is to assume that content question/wh operators are pre-focused inside the matrix clause such that FocP (containing both the operator and the focus marker) is raised as a single constituent to Spec-InterP. This implies that as soon as Inter^o is merged to a convergent FinP containing a content-question operator, being the focus of the interrogative information/force, the operator is targeted and focused in-situ thereby projecting a FocP inside the FinP. This FocP containing the moved operator constituent could be projected in any of the syntactic positions – subject, direct object, etc. - inside the FinP. This FinP-internal FocP (=interrogative focus) containing both the operator and the focus marker is then attracted to spec-InterP with the FinP functioning as comment of the interrogative information. This projection is as illustrated in figure 7.

Figure 7:



Evidence in support of this position could be seen in echo forms of some Yoruba content questions where the question operator must be focused in-situ before movement, as presented below in examples (26) to (28).

26a. **Tómi-í pàdé [Akin] ní Leiden.**

Tomi-Fin meet Akin Loc Leiden

‘Tomi met Akin in Leiden.’



b. **Tómi-í pàdé [ta ní / *ta] ní Leiden?**

Tomi-Fin meet [who Foc / who] Loc Leiden

‘Tomi met WHO in Leiden?’



c. **[Ta ní / *Ta] Tómi-í pàdé <ta ní> ní Leiden ?**

who Foc/ who Tomi-Fin meet Loc Leiden

‘WHO did Tomi meet in Leiden?’



d. **[Akin ní / *Akin] Tómi-í pàdé <Akin> ní Leiden.**

Akin Foc/ Akin Tomi-Fin meet Loc Leiden

‘Tomi met AKIN in Leiden.’

(Cleft: ‘It was AKIN that Tomi met in Leiden.’)

27a. **Şayò-ó ti rí [owó náà].**

Sayo-Fin Perf see money def

‘Sayo has found the money.’



b. **Şayò-ó ti rí [kí ní / *kí] ?**

Sayo-Fin Perf see what Foc / what

‘Sayo has found WHAT?’



c. **[kí ní] / [*kí] Şayò-ó ti rí <[kí ní] / [*kí] > ?**

what Foc/ what Sayo-Fin Perf see

‘WHAT has Sayo found?’



d. **[owó náà ní] / [*owó náà] Şayò-ó ti rí <owó náà> .**

money def Foc/ money def Sayo-Fin Perf see

‘Sayo has found THE MONEY.’

28a. **O gbọ [kí ni] ?**

2sg hear what Foc

‘You heard what?’

↓

b. **Kí ni o gbọ <kí ni> ?**

What Foc 2sg hear

‘What did you hear?’

c. **Báwo ni ibi tí ẹ lọ <bawo> ?**

How Foc place Rel 2pl go

‘How is the place you went?’

d. **Ibi tí ẹ lọ, báwo ni / *báwo ?**

place Rel 2pl go, how Foc / how

‘The place you went, how was it?’

Unfortunately, it is not all Yoruba content question operators that behave in this manner. Most of them, especially those translatable as ‘where, which, how-much, how-many, and when’, particularly in PP adjunct position, do not obligatorily require the in-situ **ni**-focus, as evident in (29).

29ai. **(Ní) ibo ni Tomi-í ti rí Akin <ní ibo> ?**

Loc where Foc Tomi-Fin perf see Akin

‘Where did Tomi see Akin?’

↑

aii. **Tomi-í ti rí Akin ní ibo ?**

Tomi-Fin Perf see Akin Loc where

‘Akin saw Ade where?’

bi. **Èwo ni ẹ fẹ <èwo> níbè?**

Which Foc 2pl want Loc-there

‘Which one do you want out of them?’

↑

bii. **Ẹ fẹ [èwo / *èwo ni] níbè ?**

2pl want which / which Foc Loc-there

‘You want which one of them?’

ci. **Èlọ ni mo gbà <èlọ> ?**

How-much Foc 1sg take

‘How much did I collect?’

cii. **Mo gba [èlọ / *èlọ ni] ?**

1sg take how-much / how-much Foc

‘I collected how much?’

di. **Mélóó ni wọn rà <mélóó> ?**

How-many Foc 3pl-Fin buy

‘How many did they buy?’

- dii. **Wọn** **rà** [**mélòó** / ***mélòó** **ní**] ?
 3pl-Fin buy how-many / how-many Foc
 ‘They bought how many?’

- ei. **(Ní)** **ìgbà** **wo** **ní** **o** **máa** **wá** ^{<ní ìgbà wo>} ?
 Loc period which Foc 2sg fut come
 ‘When are you coming?’

- eii. **O** **máa** **wá** [↑] **ní** **ìgbà** **wo** **(ní)?**
 2sg Fut come at period which Foc
 ‘You are coming when?’

This view is also not verifiable in Igálà. The fact that Igálà focus head does not have a phonetic spell-out form makes it difficult to say whether or not there is such pied-piping of the focus marker with content question operators in the language. This observation however merits further research not only in Yoruboid but also in other Kwa languages for useful lessons and clues. We shall therefore conclude this subsection by assuming that the derivation proposed in figures 6 captures the syntactic projection and information structure of content question constructions in Yoruboid languages better than the ones in figures 5 and 7.

4.2. Non-operator Based Content Questions

Yorùbá and Igálà share another type of content question expressions which do not involve content-question operators. The question markers **dà**, **ńkọ** (Yorùbá) and **hà** (Igálà) in the interrogative expressions are traditionally analyzed as verbs because every single question they project literally sounds and looks like a sentence, e.g. (30) and (31).

Igálà

- 30a. **Àbó** **wẹ** **hà** ?
 Folk your Inter
 ‘How are your folks?’
- b. ***Àbó** **wẹ** **á** /**gbédò** **hà** ?
 Folk your fut/must Inter
- c. **ẹ̀dà** **lẹ** **hà** ?
 shoe def Inter
 ‘How/where is your shoe?’
- d. ***ẹ̀dà** **lẹ** **hà** **ń** ?
 shoe-neg def Inter neg

Yoruba

- 31a. **Ìwé** **mi** **dà** ?
 Book 1sg-acc Inter

‘Where is my book?’

b. ***Ìwé** **mi-í** **máa /gbòdò** **dà ?**
 Book my-Fin fut / must Inter

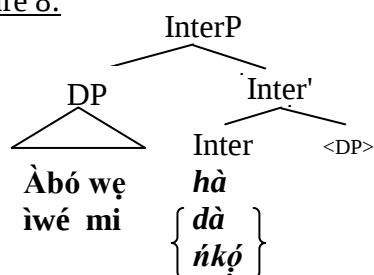
c. **Aṣọ** **wa** **ńkọ?**
 Cloth 1pl-acc Inter
 ‘Where are our clothes?’

d. ***Ọmọ** **nàà-án** **yóò/ti** **ńkọ?**
 Child def -Fin fut/perf Inter

However, there appears to be no syntactic justification for analyzing these interrogative elements as verbs. First, they lack verbal properties and do not have syntactic distributions of verbs in these languages. For instance, unlike verbs, they cannot co-occur with Infl elements like tense, aspect, negation, modal, etc. That explains why (30c&d) and (31c&d) are simply meaningless. They cannot be nominalized unlike other verbs in these languages. For instance, gerund nouns are derived in Igálà by prefixing *é-* to verbs, e.g. *ló* ‘go’ → *é-ló* ‘going’, *gwẹ* ‘wash’ → *é-gwẹ* ‘washing’. However, following the same process, morphological derivations like **é-hà* is unthinkable in Igálà. Similarly, while Yorùbá uses partial reduplication for similar V→N derivation, as in *sè* ‘to cook’ → *sísè* ‘cooking’, *ga* ‘tall’ → *gíga* ‘being tall’, etc., morphological derivations like *dí-dà* and *ńkí-ńkọ* are simply out of order in the language.

The inability of these assumed interrogative words to interact with Infl elements simply implies that the question expressions they project are not clauses. The fact that their topic of interrogation is always the noun phrase suggests they are interrogative heads which require nominal phrase complement. It is therefore logical to propose that they project InterP by simply attracting their nominal phrase complement to spec-InterP, as illustrated in figure 8.

Figure 8:



Although this projection is similar to those proposed for polar questions in figure (2a & b), it is radically different from them because of the type of topic and comment it selects. While the polar Interrogative heads select FinP or FocP (in figure 3), this content-question head selects DP. One interesting thing about this interrogative head in Yoruba is that it can select wh-phrase as complement/topic and such wh-phrase can be substituted by any nominal phrase in that position as illustrated in (32a-c) and (32d), respectively.

- 32a. [**kí** **ni** / ***kí**] **dà?**
 what Foc / what Inter
 ‘Where is WHAT?’
- b. [**ta** **ni** / ***ta**] **dà/ńkọ?**
 who Foc / who Inter
 ‘Where is WHO?’
- c. [**èwo**] **dà/ ńkọ?**
 which Inter
 ‘Where is which?’
- d. [**owó** / **omọ**] **dà/ńkọ ?**
 money/ child Inter
 ‘Where is the money/child?’

This clearly supports our earlier claim following Aboh & Pfau (2011) that content-question/wh operators are not the Inter(rogative) heads that clause-type content questions. The interrogative head in content questions is a separate functional item which selects nominal phrase, e.g. a content question operator alias wh-phrase, or FocP containing a wh-phrase as complement/focus that interprets the interrogative force/information. It is this targeted phrase (DP or FocP) that is attracted to the specifier position of the Inter(rogative) head to derive convergent content questions.

5. Conclusion

This article has shown with evidence from Yoruboid languages (Yorùbá, Ígálà, and Itshekiri) that interrogative markers are functional heads with phonetic content (mostly in polar questions) or optionally without phonetic content (in content questions) which project separate syntactic information distinct from focus in the left periphery. The syntactic and semantic interactions of question operators and focus in content questions result from the fact that the interrogative head selects FocP as complement in which content question operators function as the topic of focus. As a result, whether such FocP is attracted to spec-InterP ([_{InterP} [wh Foc] Inter⁰_{<wh Foc>}]) or remains in the complement position of Inter⁰ ([_{InterP} Inter⁰ [wh Focus]]), the three elements - question operator, Foc, and Inter⁰ - are not mediated by any other item in the linear order inside the convergent content question clause. The paper showed that evidence from non-operator based content questions where the interrogative head can also select focused question operators as complement which must be attracted to spec-InterP is far more telling on this scenario than the more transparent parallel structures of polar question projections.

Abbreviations

UG--Universal Grammar; HTS--High Tone Syllable; Infl--Inflection; Fin--Finiteness head; Inter--Interrogative; 1sg--1st Person Singular; 2sg--2nd Person Singular; 3sg--3rd Person Singular; 1pl--1st Person Plural; 2pl--2nd Person Plural; 3pl--3rd Person plural; Gen--Genitive; Acc--Accusative; Neg--Negation; Foc--Focus; Fut--Future; Spec--Specifier; Perf--Perfective; def--definite; Prog--Progressive; T--Tense; Subj--Subject; Loc--Locative.

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