

ON THE NATURE OF WH-QUESTIONS IN ECHIE

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In this article we make use of the theoretical framework known as the Minimalist Program¹ proposed by Chomsky (1993) to examine the behavior of question-word questions (alias wh-questions) in Echic. The article is divided into three major parts. Part one is the introduction, part two discusses the uses of QWs in Echic, while part three examines the various types of question-word questions (QWQ) and the nature of wh-fronting (if any) with the aim of determining whether the language exhibits certain possibilities for a universal analysis.

Dans cette étude, nous nous servons d'un modèle théorique dit 'Programme minimaliste', proposé par Chomsky (1993), pour examiner le fonctionnement des types d'interrogation dits mots-questions (question words) dans la langue echic. L'étude comprend trois parties. Après l'introduction la deuxième partie traite de l'emploi des mot-questions en echic. La troisième partie examine les divers types de mot-questions et de la nature du "wh-fronting" afin de déterminer si la langue offre des possibilités pour une analyse universelle.

0. INTRODUCTION

It is argued in the literature that a wh-question word in sentence-initial position is not in its original home (cf. Chomsky 1977; Radford 1988). The implication of the above statement is that a wh-question word in sentence-initial position must have originated internally within the sentence.

Wh-movement or QW-movement is a well-attested syntactic process in the grammar of some languages of the world. For instance, in English it is generally believed that wh-phrases must obligatorily undergo both syntactic and Logical Form movement. The LF² movement of a wh-phrase is to be conceived in terms of quantifier raising. The implication here is that every wh-phrase in English, for instance, must be raised into a higher clause from where it binds its coindexed trace or variable which now occupies its original position at the extraction site. The raised wh-phrase enters into a θ -(theta) chain with its trace at the extraction site. The raised wh-phrase and its ghost copy at the original extraction site are then assigned a unique subscript by virtue of shared grammatical features.³

¹ The Minimalist Program grew out of Chomsky's (1991) work in which he proposes that syntactic derivations are constrained by the principle of Economy of Derivation. Like its forerunners, the Minimalist Program is an approach to syntactic analysis which seeks to describe the nature of Universal Grammar (UG), and to account for certain specific parameterized variations of that system occasioned by investigations into Core Grammars (i.e., grammars of individual languages). The Minimalist approach proposes general principles of economy which require syntactic derivations and representations to be minimal in cost. The following quotation from Chomsky (1993:4) lends credence to the assertion that the whole essence of the Minimalist Program is to achieve some economy in derivation.

"UG provides a fixed system of principles and a finite array of finitely valued parameters. The language-specific rules reduce to choice of values for these parameters. The notion of grammatical construction is eliminated, and with it, construction-particular rules."

² The abbreviations used in the article are: AGR-S'' = agreement of subject double bar; BEN = benefactive; CMP = complementizer; CH = chain; CP = complementizer projection; FACT = factative; LF = logical form; OVS = open vowel suffix; PART = particle; PE = pronominal element; [SPEC, AGR-S''] = specifier position dominated by agreement of subject double bar (i.e., the subject position of the sentence); [SPEC, CMP] = specifier position dominated by complementizer projection.

³ It should be mentioned that the raised wh-phrase does not acquire new grammatical features such as θ -role or case in its new home, rather the grammatical features that are associated with the preposed constituent in its original home are transmitted to it via a movement chain in accordance with 'Chain Transmission Principle', which states that "grammatical properties are freely transmitted between an antecedent and its trace" (Ndimele 1993:18).

Our aim in this article⁴ is find out whether Echie⁵ question-words (QWs) truly undergo an obligatory syntactic movement in the manner that is presented above or whether there are specific modifications of Universal Grammar (UG) that may be necessitated by our investigation into Echie wh-questions.

1. USES OF QUESTION-WORDS

A QWQ refers to a class of questions in which a query is focussed on a particular syntactic constituent. When a questioner uses a QWQ, he seeks information from his questionee regarding the identity of a particular entity or phenomenon. The QWs in Echie can be analyzed as the interrogative substitutes for nominals in the language which express such notions as temporal, locative, manner, degree, intensity, enumerative, frequency, reason, activity, quantity, and identity.

The clear-cut cases of QWs in Echie are *ɔnye* 'who', *nnɪ* 'what', and *ile* 'how many'. *ɔle* and *ɛdɪ* can combine with certain generic nominals to form QW-phrases in Echie. *ɔle* is, however, more restricted than *ɛdɪ* in its occurrence with the generic nominals, as can be seen in the table in (1).⁶

(1) QW-phrases with <i>ɛdɪ</i>	QW-phrases with <i>ɔle</i>
<i>ɛdɪ be</i> which place?	<i>be ɔle</i> which place?
<i>ɛdɪ ɛshɪ</i> which day?	<i>ɛshɪ ɔle</i> which day?
<i>ɛdɪ kwɔ</i> how/in what manner?	<i>kwɔ ɔle</i> how/in what manner?
<i>ɛdɪ ɛgbɛ</i> which time?	<i>ɛgbɛ ɔle</i> which time?
<i>ɛdɪ kɛ</i> which one?	<i>kɛ ɔle</i> which one?
<i>ɛdɪ onye</i> which person?	<i>onye ɔle</i> which person?
<i>ɛdɪ nde</i> which people?	<i>nde ɔle</i> which people?
<i>ɛdɪ hne</i> which thing?	<i>*hne ɔle</i>

From the table, we can observe that whereas *ɛdɪ* occurs before the generic nominals, *ɔle* occurs after. The reason why *ɔle* cannot occur with *hne* 'thing' is not yet known.

QWs or QW-phrases can be used for a variety of purposes as we will see below.

1.1 QUESTIONING OF LOCATION AND DIRECTION

The following QWs *ɛdɪ be* / *be ɔle* 'which place' and *nnɪ* 'what' can be used to query the location or direction of an entity or phenomenon, and they appear to be freely interchangeable for this purpose, as in (2)–(4).

- (2) *Uchɛ ɔ jhɛ be ɔle*
Uche he go where
 Where is Uche going to?

⁴ I am grateful to an anonymous JWAL reviewer for the valuable and inspiring comments on an earlier version of this paper.

⁵ Echie is one of the major languages spoken in Rivers State, Nigeria. There are also some speakers of Echie presently in Abia State, Nigeria. Echie's closest relative is Igbo. Both Echie and Igbo belong to the Igboid group of languages under the (New) Benue-Congo family. The (New) Benue-Congo, according to Williamson (1989:2f), is co-ordinate with Kru, (New) Kwa, Dogon, and North Volta-Congo. From the 1963 census projection figures, Echie is spoken by well over 350,000 people.

It is generally believed that Echie has five major varieties. They are Ozuza, Omuja, Central Echie, Umuoye and Obite/Ighodho. Ndimie (1987:2) observes that differences among these varieties of Echie "abound at the level of phonology, especially in tonal assignment to units; no major syntactic difference has yet been recorded". The variety of Echie from which we draw most of our data for this paper is the Central dialect.

⁶ Echie is essentially a register tone language with two level tonemes, i.e., high and low. There is also a tonal phenomenon often referred to as downstep. This downstep is a synchronic merger of two level tones where one of them no longer has any overt moraic support. The moraic support for one of the autosegments may have been lost in the course of derivation and/or history. We have deliberately left high tones unmarked in this paper.

- (3) Uchè ò jhè nnĩ
Uche he go what
Where is Uche going to?
- (4) CH = [be, t]
ñdĩĩ bej Uche jhe tj
which place Uche go
Where is Uche going to?

In (4), the queried locative nominal is replaced by *be* 'place'. Since *be* is not a QW, it obligatorily moves into the complementizer position (which is a position to the immediate right of the interrogative operator ñdĩĩ). When *be* is extracted, it leaves behind a coindexed trace of its original copy at the extraction site. We have symbolized the trace element (i.e., the empty category) as *tj*. This trace element is properly governed in fulfilment of the Empty Category Principle. The generic nominal *be* now serves as the antecedent of the trace element. The antecedent and the trace are in a 'Head-Tail' CH (chain) relationship necessitated by Move- α .⁷ Neither the principle of 'Relativized Minimality' nor the 'Shortest Movement Condition' is violated by the movement of *be* from the complement position of the verb into CMP (complementizer position).

1.2 QUESTIONING OF TIME

In Echie, ñdĩĩ / mgbè òle 'which time' and èshì òle / ñdĩĩ èshì 'which day' are used to question temporal nominals such as those in (5).

- | | | | | |
|-----|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| (5) | gbu | now | thaā | today |
| | èchĩĩle | tomorrow | ùtùtù | morning |
| | àbàĩ | night | ànyaàsù | evening |
| | àkhalĩle | last year | izùm thaà | next year |

Let us consider the phrases in (6)–(9).

- (6) Uchè ò gà-ìbĩa mgbè òle
Uche he FUT-to[^]come time when
When will Uche come?
- (7) CH = [mgbè, t]
ñdĩĩ mgbèj Uchē gà-ìbĩa-nĩ tj
which time Uche FUT-to[^]come-PART
When will Uche come?
- (8) Uchè ò gà-ìbĩa èshì òle
Which day will Uche come?
- (9) CH = [èshì, t]
ñdĩĩ èshìj Uchē gà-ìbĩa-nĩ tj
Which day will Uche come?

We observe that *mgbè* 'time' and *èshì* 'day' which replace the nominals in (7) and (9) respectively are moved to the immediate right of the QW ñdĩĩ. The reason for this movement is to give them a wh-interpretation. We also observe in (7)–(9) the presence of the particle *nĩ* after the infinitive phrase *ìbĩa* 'to come'. Ndimele (1987) claims that the presence of this particle in constructions expressing futurity is obligatory, especially for those marked by the future auxiliary *ga*, if there is no overt

⁷ The type of CHAIN LINK existing between an operator and its variable is specified thus: CH = (H₁..., t) where H is the head of the chain. The composed chain then "enters into head- α relations" (Chomsky 1993:10), where α is any category (preferably a variable).

complement of the infinitive phrase. The absence of the particle **nj** accounts for the ungrammaticality of (10a) and (12a).

- (10) CH = [mgbè, t]
 a. *ndj[mgbèj Uchē gā-irī t_j
 which time Uche FUT-to[^]eat
 b. ndj[mgbèj Uchē gā-irī hnè t_j
 which time Uche FUT-to[^]eat thing
 When is it that Uche will eat some food?
- (11) CH = [mgbè, t]
 ndj[mgbèj Uchē gā-irī-nj t_j
 which time Uche FUT-to[^]eat-PART
 When is it that Uche will eat?
- (12) CH = [èshì, t]
 a. *ndj[èshìj Uchē gā-ibjā t_j
 which day Uche FUT-to[^]come
 b. ndj[èshìj Uchē gā-ibjā naa t_j
 which day Uche FUT-to[^]come here
 Which day is it that Uche will come here?
- (13) CH = [èshì, t]
 ndj[èshìj Uchē gā-ibjā-nj t_j
 which day Uche FUT-to[^]come-PART
 Which day is it that Uche will come?

Ndimele (1987), however, observes that (10a) and (12a) are acceptable in some Igbolects, especially Ngwa.

1.3 QUESTIONING OF ACTION

It is possible to query an observable physical action performed by an agent. This is achieved through the use of the QW **nnj** 'what'.

- (14) o rīrī jī
 he eat-FACT yam
 He ate some yam.
- (15) ò mèrnè nnj
 he do-FACT what
 What did he do?
- (16) o zūru oshī
 he steal-FACT theft
 He stole.
- (17) ò mèrnè nnj
 he do-FACT what
 What did he do?
- (18) o gbāra oso
 he run-FACT race
 He ran.
- (19) ò mèrnè nnj
 What did he do?

From the foregoing, we observe that when the main verb of the sentence is of the type that obligatorily requires an inherent complement, the verb **me** 'do' takes the place of the main verb when the nominal is queried (cf. (17) and (19)).

1.4 QUESTIONING OF HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN REFERENTS

Some questions often require the questionee to identify the entity or concept that is queried. The entity to be identified may be [$\pm$ human]. If it is [+human], it is replaced or queried by the QW *ònye* 'who' for singular and *nde òle* for plural. But if the entity or concept is [-human], the queried nominal is replaced by *nnĩ* 'what'. The queried nominal may either be a subject or the complement of a verb.

- (20) *Uchè ò sì nnĩ*
 Uche he say what
 What did Uche say?
- (21) a. *nnĩ rĩri ji ò*
 what eat-FACT yam that
 What ate that yam?
- b. *ònye rĩri ji ò*
 who eat-FACT yam that
 Who ate that yam?
- c. *nde òle rĩri ji ò*
 people which eat-FACT yam that
 Which people ate that yam?
- (22) a. *ì gbùrù nnĩ*
 you kill-FACT what
 What did you kill?
- b. *ì gbùrù ònye*
 you kill-FACT who
 Who did you kill?
- c. *ì gbùrù nde òle*
 you kill-FACT people which
 Which people did you kill?

1.5 QUESTIONING OF QUANTITY/FREQUENCY

The quantity of an entity or the frequency of an event or action is queried when a numeral is replaced by the QW *ìle* 'how many'. For the frequency questions, the QW which replaces the numeral that is queried is obligatorily preceded by the frequency marker *mgbalĩ* or *ùgbòrò*, as in (23)–(25).

- (23) a. *ò rěre ji ìse*
 he sell-FACT yam five
 He sold five tubers of yam.
- b. *ò rẹrẹ ji ìle*
 he sell-FACT yam how^many
 How many tubers of yam did he sell?
- (24) a. *ì gbùru egbu ìri*
 you kill-FACT goat ten
 You killed ten goats.
- b. *ì gbùrù egbu ìle*
 you kill-FACT goat how^many
 How many goats did you kill?
- (25) a. *ọ ghhũrũ yǎ ùgbòrò ìri*
 he count-FACT it FREQ ten
 He counted it ten times.

- b. ọ ghghùrù yà ùgbòrò ile
 he count-FACT it FREQ how^many
 How many times did he count it?

1.6 QUESTIONING OF PURPOSE OR REASON

The purpose or reason for which an action was carried out can be queried by the use of **ndjĩ hne** 'which thing' or **nnĩ** 'what'. The ideal position for these QWs is sentence-initial.

- (26) **ndjĩ hne kpàtara(-nĩ)/mèrne(-nĩ)** i jĩri kuọ yā hnè
 what thing cause-PART you hold^FACT beat^OVS him thing
 Why did you beat him?
- (27) **nnĩ mèrne(-nĩ)/kpàtara(-nĩ)** i jĩri ree ji òh
 what cause-PART you hold^FACT sell^OVS yam that
 Why did you sell that yam?

From the above examples, we observe that in the questioning of purpose or reason, a causative verb **kpàtara** or **mèrne** must be present in the matrix clause that hosts any of the two question markers. It should be mentioned that the verb **mèrne** in (26) and (27) is different from that in (17). Whereas **mèrne** in (17) translates as 'did', the one in (26) and (27) translates as 'cause to bring about'. This explains why this latter **mèrne** can be replaced by another causative verb **kpàtara** without any significant change in meaning. It is also interesting to note that the main verb in the embedded clause in either (26) or (27) takes the open vowel suffix (OVS).⁸

1.7 QUESTIONING OF CHOICE

Certain questions might require the questionee to make a choice from a list of possible alternatives. The choice to be made may be a physical entity or a state-of-affairs. The QW-phrase which is used to achieve this purpose is either **ke òle** or **ndjĩ ke** meaning 'which one', as in (28).

- (28) a. ị chọrọ ke òle
 you want^FACT which^one
 Which one do you want?

CH = [kè, t]

- b. **ndjĩ kēj ị chọrọ tj**
 which one you want^FACT
 Which one is it that you want?

We can observe that the same range of meaning is conveyed by the QW-phrases **ke òle** and **ndjĩ ke**, though (28b) is more emphatic than (28a). The slight semantic difference between (28a) and (28b) may be due to fact that **ke** in (28b) has been focalized, thereby making it assume additional communicative prominence over any other constituent in the sentence. The generic nominal **ke** in (28b) originated internally within the sentence and later got moved into the focal position where it receives a wh-interpretation due to its association with the QW **ndjĩ**.

⁸ The semantico-syntactic import of the OVS in these sentences is not known, save to say that it is obligatory in these sentences in order to prevent unwanted constructions. In fact Ndimele (forthcoming) has described the OVS as a saving device in Igbo morphosyntax in order to avoid ungrammaticality. The OVS has four realizations: *e/a* (for front vowels) and *o/o* (for back vowels). The choice of any of them is determined not only by the degree of backness of the vowel of the root, but also by the Advanced Tongue Root quality of the vowel of the verb root.

⁹ There is a general tendency for focus markers in all natural languages to occur in sentence-initial position. The reason for this may be that sentence-position often coincides with the position of prominence.

- (32) a. Uchè jhèrè ahja
 Uche go^{FACT} market
 Uche went to the market.
- b. Uchè ò jhèrè beòle
 Uche he go^{FACT} where
 Where did Uche go to?
- (33) a. Uchè wètàrà àtọ
 Uche bring^{FACT} three
 Uche brought three.
- b. Uchè ò wètàrà ile
 Uche he bring^{FACT} how^{many}
 How many did Uche bring?

From (30b)–(33b) we observe that the QW-phrases occupy the same syntactic environment as the nominals they are used to query. For this reason, we argue that the QW-phrases are base-generated in the positions they are found, and that none of them has undergone any syntactic wh-movement. We also observe that in each of the (b) sentences in (30)–(33), the subject NP is left-dislocated giving rise to the presence of a resumptive pronoun with a low tone at the immediate right of the original subject. Another interesting issue we want to raise is that Echie predicate in-situ wh-questions are not the equivalent of English predicate in-situ wh-questions which have marked echoic intonation.

In English, both sentences in (34) are ill-formed unless they are conceived as statement echo wh-questions. But this is not so in Echie.

- (34) Uche ate WHAT?
 Uche went WHERE?

It is important to mention that a QW in complement position does not have to move to the left of CMP for the sentence to be grammatical. The reason for this may be that the [SPEC, CMP] position already contains an operator which causes the [SPEC, AGR-S'] (i.e., subject position) to be a pronominal variable.

The Resumptive Pronoun Strategy

Ndimele (1987, 1991) has pointed out that in Echie as well as in many other Igbolects, yes-no questions and predicate in-situ wh-questions are characterized by the presence of a pronominal element (PE) with a low tone. This low tone PE occurs immediately after the original subject noun phrase. The PE which is being referred to is always in apposition to the NP that precedes it, and therefore both of them agree in all grammatical features such as number, case, and person.

The origin and status of this PE with a low tone has been a most fascinating and controversial issue in Igbolect studies. The PE has variously been described as a 'reduplicated subject' (Carrell 1970; Oluikpe 1979), 'pronominal copy' or 'inserted pronoun' (Emenanjo 1979), 'returning pronoun' (Goldsmith 1981), question marker (Ikekeonwu 1987), 'overt trace' (Nwachukwu 1988) and 'pronominal trace' (Anunobi 1989). We are, however, not interested in the intricacies of the debates. We shall simply state here that predicate in-situ wh-questions with full-fledged nouns as subject do require their subject to be left-dislocated in order for a resumptive pronoun to surface.¹⁰ We argue that the presence of the resumptive pronoun in the pre-verbal position of a predicate in-situ wh-question is due to the presence of an abstract

¹⁰ It is, however, plausible to consider the PE that occurs immediately after the original subject in these questions as a part of the verb phrase, stemming from the period when the verbs had bound subject markers. This diachronic account has some implication at least for certain Igbolects where PE is invariable irrespective of number of the subject. See Emenanjo (1979) for further details.

Q-morpheme. In our analysis, the Q-morpheme is accorded a feature status,¹¹ hence we associate it with a floating low tone, as in the configuration in (35).

- (35)  (where L = floating tone associated with Q; H = high tone; PE = pronominal element; the unbroken line indicates pre-linking, while the broken one shows the establishment of a fresh link)

The low tone which is overtly marked on the PE in pre-verbal position is the phonetic realization of Q. The non-segmental low tone associated with Q displaces the high tone associated with the resumptive pronoun which now occupies the [SPEC, AGR-S'] position; as a consequence, the high tone is delinked.

The resumptive pronoun found in the subject position in sentences (30b)–(33b) plays a crucial role in the formation of predicate in-situ wh-questions. Without this resumptive pronoun, the suprasegmental feature (i.e., floating low tone) associated with the Q-morpheme would remain unattached. In essence, left-dislocation in (30b)–(33b) is necessitated by the presence of the Q-morpheme. Since the Q-morpheme inherently houses a low tone which must be docked on to the PE in [SPEC, AGR-S'] position, a noun in the original subject must be left-dislocated.

We must mention that the rule of left-dislocation applies vacuously for predicate in-situ wh-questions introduced by a pronoun in subject position. What happens in this case is that the low tone associated with the Q-morpheme is docked on to this pronoun.

2.2 SUBJECT IN-SITU WH-QUESTIONS

Of all the QWs identified in Echie, only *ònye* 'who', *nnĩ* 'what', and *ìle* 'how many' can be base-generated in sentence-initial position.

- (36) a. **Uchè zàrà ụlọ**
Uche sweep^{FACT} house
Uche swept the house.
- b. **ònye zàrà ụlọ**
who sweep^{FACT} house
Who swept the house.
- (37) a. **agwọ tǎra Ezè**
snake bite^{FACT} Eze
A snake bit Eze.
- b. **nnĩ tǎra Ezè**
what bite^{FACT} Eze
What bit Eze?
- (38) a. **àtọ dhàrà**
three fall^{FACT}
Three of them fell down.
- b. **ìle dhàrà**
how^{many} fall^{FACT}
How many of them fell down?

Each of the (b) sentences in (36)–(38) queries the identity of the subject. The QWs in these same (b) sentences occupy the same syntactic position as *Uchè*, *agwọ*

¹¹ Ndimiele (1991) posits a pre-sentential abstract Q-morpheme in the sense of Katz and Postal (1964) for every simple yes/no question or predicate in-situ wh-question in Echie. Contrary to Emenanjo's (1979) position, Ndimiele (1991) accords the Q-morpheme a feature status rather than a segmental status. According to Ndimiele, it is only the low tone (rather than the PE plus its associated low tone) that is the phonetic realization of Q.

'snake' and *àtə* 'three', respectively. We argue that the QWs in (36b)–(38b) have not undergone any syntactic wh-movement for the following reasons:

- a) The QWs are directly assigned θ -roles by their respective verbs in the same manner as their nominal counterparts in subject position in (36a)–(38a).
- b) The QWs occupy a θ -position in their respective sentences. This is a position in which they can be visible for case checking. Their case properties are not due to inheritance from any coindexed position of some sort.
- c) Since the QWs occupy the Argument position, no trace of any kind is created.
- d) There is no presence of an empty category in either (36b), (37b), or (38b), hence no overt syntactic movement of the QWs has taken place. The absence of syntactic movement does not necessarily suggest that LF movement in the form of quantifier raising cannot apply.¹²

It is interesting to note that subject in-situ wh-questions do not show any evidence of left-dislocation. For this reason, there is no resumptive pronoun in such questions. An obvious implication of this observation is that subject in-situ wh-questions obliterate the occurrence of the Q-morpheme which characterizes yes-no questions and predicate in-situ wh-questions in Echie.

There are two basic questions that we need to address here:

- a) why is there no left-dislocation in subject in-situ wh-questions, and
- b) why is the Q-morpheme which characterizes yes-no questions and predicate in-situ wh-questions absent in subject in-situ wh-questions?

Two possible explanations may be provided here in response to the above questions:

i) A QW in sentence-initial position is incompatible with a Q (where C which is the head of CP equals Q), since the CP contains an operator which must have the [SPEC, AGR-S'] position as an LF variable. What is implied here, is that the [SPEC, AGR-S'] position will be bound at LF by two operators, namely, an empty operator (EO) in the [SPEC, AGR-S'] position which has Q as the head of that CP, and the QW itself which obligatorily raises into another [SPEC, CMP] at LF. In this situation, two operators will bind the variable in the [SPEC, AGR-S'] position in violation of the Bijection Principle which states that there is a one-to-one relation between operators and their variables.

ii) A QW in the [SPEC, AGR-S'] position already incorporates the notion of Q, hence Q is obliterated in this position. If Q is absent, then left-dislocation is no longer necessary.

We, however, wish to uphold the second explanation because of the complications inherent in the first one. The first explanation assumes that a subject in-situ wh-question must of necessity exhibit a complex CP configuration where one of the CPs that houses the Q-morpheme is dominated by another larger CP. The problem with this position is that it is not clear why the EO needs to be postulated and what its role is in the derivation. Again, it is not clear where the substantive operator (i.e., the QW-phrase in the ultimate landing site in CP) originates from. If it is argued that the QW-phrase originates from [SPEC, AGR-S'] thereby crossing an intervening CP which has Q as its head and the EO as its specifier, some problems are bound to arise: the domain of movement of the QW-phrase is not 'local' enough, hence it violates the requirements of the Shortest Movement Condition,¹³ but if the QW-phrase passes (in cyclic fashion) through an intermediate landing site (which is the position already

¹² Let us mention here that Cole and Hermon (1994) are sceptical as regards the universality of an obligatory LF wh-movement, especially for languages that have in-situ wh-questions.

¹³ Chomsky (1993:15) has, however, observed that there is "a conflict between two natural notions of economy: shortest move versus fewest steps in a derivation. If a derivation keeps to shortest moves, it will have more steps; if it reduces the number of steps, it will have longer moves".

occupied by the EO) before reaching its ultimate landing site, there is bound to be the problem of 'crash landing'. So movement of the QW-phrase in the manner proposed by the first explanation will be frozen, because of the two reasons we presented above. In effect, the first explanation is rejected.

2.3 ñdĩĩ QUESTIONS

ñdĩĩ questions (or QW-clefts) are so-called because they are generally introduced by the QW ñdĩĩ. ñdĩĩ questions raise some interesting issues which we wish to address here.

Earlier on we had said that ñdĩĩ is different from other QWs in Echie because of its peculiar behavior. It differs from the other QWs in the following ways:

- a) It is the only QW which is restricted to the sentence-initial position.
- b) It cannot occur in a minimal QW-phrase without being accompanied by certain generic nominals. The generic nominals must occur in its immediate right position.
- c) It serves as a focus marker specifying a position to its immediate right as the landing site for a preposed constituent.

(39) ñdĩĩ onyej t_j rĩri jì ñ
 which person eat^{FACT} yam that
 Who was the one that ate that yam?

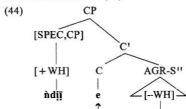
(40) ñdĩĩ hnej t_j t̃ara Uch̃e
 what thing bite^{FACT} Uche
 What was the thing that bit Uche?

(41) ñdĩĩ bej Uch̃e zh̃à t_j
 which place Uche lie
 Where is Uche sleeping?

(42) ñdĩĩ ñgbèj Ez̃e b̃à t_j
 which time Eze come
 When is it that Uche will come?

(43) ñdĩĩ k̃ej Uch̃e weere t_j
 which one Uche take^{FACT}BEN
 Which one did Uche take?

We argue that ñdĩĩ is base-generated in the [SPEC, CMP] position in the above sentences as a wh-operator. From this position, ñdĩĩ performs the role of a movement trigger thereby attracting the generic nominals from the lower clause into a position which is immediately to its right. Since the generic nominals are not specified as interrogatives, they are moved into CMP (i.e., the head of CP) rather than into the [SPEC, CMP] position which is already occupied by the wh-operator. This is a way to avoid 'crash landing'. The configuration involving the movement of the generic nominal is schematized in (44).



In the above configuration, [SPEC, CMP] is the wh-operator position in which *ndj* or any other QW-phrase can be found, while [-wh] is a generic nominal generated internally within the lower clause. The presence of the wh-operator *ndj* in the appropriate position necessitates the movement of the generic nominal into CMP. *ndj* has the same status as the general focus marker *o bu* 'it be' in Echie whose role is to initiate the movement of constituents towards it. Our claim that *ndj* is a type of focus marker is supported by the fact that a sentence introduced by *ndj* cannot at the same time permit the presence of the general focus marker. This accounts for the ungrammaticality of (46) and (48).

(45) CH = [onye, t]

- a. *o bu onyej tj riri ede*
it be who eat-FACT cocoyam
Who was it that ate cocoyam?
- b. **o bu ndj onyej tj riri ede*
it be which person eat-FACT cocoyam
Who was it that ate cocoyam?

CH = [onye, t]

- c. *ndj onyej tj riri ede*
which person eat-FACT cocoyam
Who was it that ate cocoyam?
- (46) a. *o bu mgbe olej bu mgbej Ezē bja tj*
it be time which be time Eze come
When is it that Eze will come?
- b. **o bu ndj mgbej Ezē bja tj*
it be which time Eze come
When is it that Eze will come?
- c. *ndj mgbej Ezē bja tj*
which time Eze come
When is it that Eze will come?

Another explanation for the ungrammaticality of (45b) and (46b) could be that only one type of movement operator or trigger can be utilized at a time. The choice of any of them is, however, determined by the nature of the construction.

In (41)–(43), it is the complement of the verb that is moved into CMP, while it is the subject that is moved in (39) and (40). The trace element in each of the examples is coindexed with the extracted NP, and not with the sequence *ndj* + nominal. The extracted constituents in (39)–(43) are not specified as [+wh]. For this reason, we cannot describe their fronting in terms of syntactic wh-movement in the traditional sense. They are mere generic nominals. Unlike the QWs which receive wh-interpretation whether they occur outside the minimal sentence or not, these nominals that are specified as [-wh] cannot receive wh-interpretation in their base-generated positions. In order for them to receive wh-interpretation, they must obligatorily raise into the CMP position of the higher clause. They are given wh-interpretation at the landing site because of their association with the interrogative operator *ndj* which is basically [+wh].

3. CONCLUSION

We have been discussing the behavior of wh-questions in Echie. With a sizeable amount of data, we have argued that QW-phrases in Echie can be base-generated in either predicate or subject position, and that these QW-phrases do not have to undergo any overt syntactic movement for their respective sentences to be well-formed. The

implications of this are that there is no obligatory syntactic wh-movement in Echie, and that a QW in sentence-initial position may not be due to any overt syntactic movement.

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