

# LCRC WORKSHOP 2020 – POSITION PAPER

## 27 QUESTIONS [truncated]

from Dixon, *Basic Linguistic Theory*, Vol. 3, *Further Grammatical Topics*, 2012. OUP.

There is a correspondence between types of speech act and grammatical means of expressing them:

SPEECH ACT	GRAMMATICAL CATEGORY (MOOD)
statement	declarative (or indicative)
command	imperative
question	interrogative

There are a few examples of non-canonical correspondences between the two columns. For instance, *Could you please close the window?* (said with a friendly intonation) shows interrogative form but has the pragmatic function of a polite command. And *Will you be quiet!*, said in a harsh and annoyed tone, also has interrogative form but is very much a command (which is why I have written it with an exclamation mark rather than a question mark.) If I ask something and you reply *Who knows?*, spreading your hands in a gesture of despair, this has interrogative form but the pragmatic status of a statement (meaning 'Nobody knows'). If it does not expect an answer, it is not a true question.

### 27.1 Confirmation or information — polar and content questions

A person poses a question because they want to know something. This can happen in one of two ways. The person can have an idea of what may or may not pertain, and seeks **confirmation** (or disavowal) of it, as in *Did John resign?* Or they may focus on a particular argument, enquiring whether (as has been rumoured) John was the person involved. The argument *John* may then be stressed (underline is used to indicate that an item is stressed), saying *Did John resign?* Or this could be phrased *Was it John who resigned?*

Alternatively, a person may have limited knowledge of some activity or state, and seek **information** to complete the picture. They may want to know the identity of an argument; for example, *Someone resigned, who was it?* or else just *Who resigned?* Or they may require to know the nature of the predicate, as in *John did something, what was it?* or, more succinctly, *What did John do?*

A question seeking confirmation is sometimes called a 'yes/no question', but this is not appropriate as a general label since some languages lack words 'yes' and 'no'. **Polar question** is the preferred label. However, it should not be taken to imply that there are only two possible answers to a question seeking confirmation, these being polar opposites. In fact, there is a range of perfectly legitimate and commonly occurring answers, including 'not really', 'so they say', 'I believe so', and 'it's not clear'.

A question seeking information is generally called a **content question**. Some languages employ a **interrogative word** (alternatively called a 'content question word') to fill an argument slot or the predicate slot — in English: *who*, *what*, *where* and so on. Other languages have, instead, what we can call **indefinite/interrogative words**. They specify that the referent of a particular argument slot is, in the present state of knowledge, unknown, and may simultaneously enquire as to its identity

## 27.2 Two sample languages

Before investigating the parameters which underlie cross-linguistic variation in the structure of questions, it will be useful to summarize the techniques employed in two well-described languages.

(a) **Huallaga Quechua** (Weber 1989: 325-33, 39-40). This language is like many others in employing quite different marking for polar and content questions.

**Polar questions** are shown by suffix *-chu*. For a general polar question, *-chu* is added to the verb. For a focus polar question, it is added to the constituent in focus, as in:

- (6) Hwan-ta-chu                      rika-sha?  
 John-ACCUSATIVE-POLAR.Q    see-PRESENT.PERFECT:3.A:3.O  
 Did he see John? (i.e. Was it John — and not someone else — that he saw?)

Note that the focussed constituent may occur sentence-initially, as in (6), but does not have to; it can be retained at its normal position in ordering.

Another option is to add topic suffix *-qa* to the constituent in focus and place *-chu* on the verb:

- (7) Hwan-ta-qa                      rika-sha-chu?  
 John-ACCUSATIVE-TOPIC    see-PRESENT.PERFECT:3.A:3.O-POLAR.Q  
 Did he see John?

A polar question can also be formed by adding tag *aw* 'yes' to a declarative sentence:

- (8) Pillku-ta aywa-yka-nki, aw?  
 Pillku-DIRECT go-IMPERFECTIVE-2sg.S YES  
 You are going to Pillku, right?

An 'alternative question' has *-chu* on each of the contrasted constituents, linked by *o* 'or' (a loan from Spanish):

- (9) qam-chu o noqa-chu aywa-shun?  
 2sg-POLAR.Q OR 1sg-POLAR.Q go-FUTURE:1inc.S  
 Should you or I go?

Turning now to **content questions**, these require both an interrogative word and a suffixal question marker. The interrogative words are:

- (10) ima 'what' pi 'who'  
 imay 'when' may 'where'  
 imanir 'why (motive)' mayqan 'which'  
 ayka 'how much/many'

The similarities of form between some of these words are fascinating. We find *ima* as the whole word for 'what' and as the first part of 'when' and 'why (motive)'; *may* is 'where' and also the last part of 'when'; 'which' appears to have *-qan* added to *may* 'where'. Yet none of the forms can be analysed morphologically. That is, there are no other instances of *-y*, *-nir*, *i-* or *-qan*.

In most — but not all — other languages, a similar situation prevails. That is, there are striking similarities between the forms of interrogative words yet these cannot be analysed into meaningful morphemic elements. (This may have been possible at some time in the past, but diachronic changes have fused forms and obscured history.)

An interrogative word generally occurs sentence initially and it must take one of two suffixes:

- *-taq* is used when the speaker assumes that the addressee knows the answer to the question
- *-raq* implies no such assumption

Consider:

- (11) imay o:ra-na-taq?  
 WHEN time-NOW-CONTENT.Q  
 What time is it?

One might address this to a person who is wearing a watch. However, *-raq* would be



(15)	ná:si	'what'	ná:si	'something'
	naksó	'who'	naksó, á:ti	'someone'
	naksofá	'which'	—	
	naksofón, naksó:n	'where'	naksofá	'somewhere'
			naksofón, naksó:n	'to somewhere'
	naksofó:kon	'when'	—	

It can be seen that 'what' and 'something', 'who' and 'someone', 'where' and 'to somewhere' have identical forms. They take on an interrogative meaning —and form a **content question** — in a sentence whose the verb has undergone the interrogative process, as in (16), and otherwise have an indefinite sense, as in (17). *Naksofá* 'which' and *naksofá* 'where' are distinguished in a similar way. (There appears to be no indefinite sense associated with *naksofó:kon* 'when'.)

(16)	ná:s-oks	na:hó-ʔ-sá	ó:la-fa?
	WHAT-SUBJECT.FOCUS	exist:PAST<Q.INFIX>	town-IN
	What is there in town?		

(17)	ná:s-ono	hí:ca:k
	SOMETHING-OBJECT.FOCUS	see-SUBJUNCTIVE
	When it sees something (it catches and eats it).	

Forms in the lower five rows of (15) all begin with *nakso*, which is the word for 'what' (leaving aside its high tone). However — similar to the situation in Huallaga Quechua — they cannot be segmented since the final portions do not occur elsewhere.

Koasati also has a number of questions marked by tags, each of which appears to have undergone the interrogative process. These include the plain tag question marker *-óʔí*, tag *óʔó* for when a statement is hesitantly questioned by the speaker (as in 'You're eating, aren't you?'), the rather rare desiderative tag marker *-Vʔwí* ('Do you want to eat it?') and the rhetorical question tag *-háʔwá*, used when the speaker is wondering out loud and does not expect a reply ('Where indeed has he gone off to?').

There are also interrogative words which are verbs, including *námpó* 'be how many' (related to *námpon* 'to be so many'), and *(nak)sáʔmí* 'be how'.

### 27.3 Interrogative mood inflection

Languages with a synthetic profile typically include an inflectional system of case on nouns, and an inflectional system on verbs which may combine information about tense, aspect, modality, etc. In contrast, an inflectional system marking mood — with declarative, interrogative and imperative values — is rather rare.

Eskimo languages provide a clear illustration of an inflectional system of mood. In West Greenlandic (Sadock 1984; Fortesue 1984: 4-24, 23-4, 287-91) we get:

- |      |                  |   |
|------|------------------|---|
| (18) | STATEMENT        | neri-vutit<br>eat-DECLARATIVE:2sg<br>You ate                                  |
| (19) | POLAR QUESTION   | neri-vit?<br>eat-INTERROGATIVE:2sg<br>Did you eat?                            |
| (20) | CONTENT QUESTION | su-mik      neri-vit?<br>WHAT-INST eat-INTERROGATIVE:2sg<br>What did you eat? |
| (21) | COMMAND          | neri-git!<br>eat-IMPERATIVE:2sg<br>(You) eat!                                 |

It will be seen that each sentence includes a suffix which combines information about mood and person/number of S, or of A and O. There are in fact seven terms in this inflectional system — the three independent moods just illustrated, plus subordinate clause markers conditional ('if'), causal ('because') and contemporative ('while'), and a participial ending.

In fact, the interrogative suffix differs from declarative only when the S or A argument is 2nd person or when S, or both A and O, are 3rd person. Note that interrogative mood endings are required in both polar and content questions (which involve an interrogative word such as *su-* 'what' or *ki-* 'who').

In a statement, the last three vowel moras 'are respectively high, non-high and high in pitch'. In a polar question 'this pattern is shifted one mora to the left, so that it is the penultimate mora that bears high pitch, while the last mora is low'. Content questions are like polar questions in that both take interrogative mood inflection, but differ in that content questions typically have the same intonation pattern as statements.

Jarawara, from southern Amazonia (Dixon 2004: 233-4, 402-16), has an extensive system of mood suffixes. It includes declarative, four imperatives (positive and negative of

immediate and distant), and three interrogatives (each in both feminine and masculine form, agreeing with the gender of the pivot argument). Quoting feminine forms, a general polar interrogative bears suffix *-ini* on the verb, a future polar interrogative uses *-ibana*, and a content interrogative has *-ri*. Compare, with transitive verb *-kaba-* 'eat' (all pronouns take feminine agreement):

- (25) abao ti-kab-ini?  
 fish 2sg-eat-POLAR.INTERROGATIVE:FEM  
 Did you eat fish?
- (26) abao ti-kab-ibana?  
 fish 2sg-eat-FUTURE:POLAR.INTERROGATIVE:FEM  
 Will you eat fish?
- (27) himatao ti-kaba-ri?  
 WHAT 2sg-eat-CONTENT.INTERROGATIVE:FEM  
 What did you eat?

Note that the content interrogative mood suffix is very occasionally omitted.

In a declarative sentence (and in a content question) the final syllable of the main clause is said on rising intonation. A polar question has rising intonation on the penultimate syllable, followed by a fall.

If there is an inflection for interrogative mood, this is likely to be obligatory for polar questions. Indeed, it may be the only way of marking a polar questions. The inflection may be not quite obligatory in the case of content questions, which are in any case shown to be such by the inclusion of an interrogative word,

#### 27.4 Similar marking for polar and content questions

As stated in §27.1, a person asks a question because they want to know something. Polar questions and content questions are two ways of seeking to satisfy this want. In some languages, the two kinds of questions are marked in similar fashion which recognizes them as facets of the overarching category 'question'. In other languages, there is no formal feature common to polar and content questions, the only link between them being pragmatic.

Many grammars state that polar questions have a distinctive intonation (most often, final rising) but say nothing about the intonation of content questions. Others do also deal with the intonation of content questions. There is an exemplary account for Tamambo (Austronesian, Vanuatu; Jauncey 1997a: 48): 'With all questions, both polar and information-seeking [i.e. content], the pitch rises sharply to a peak on the ante-penultimate syllable, and then falls sharply on the penultimate (usually stressed) syllable.'

## 27.5 Polar questions

A true question — as opposed to a rhetorical question, or a command in interrogative form — expects an answer. An appropriate response may be vocal, or it may consist simply of a culturally-appropriate gesture. This could be a nod or a shake of the head, or the spreading of arms and palms to imply ignorance.

A question can itself be without words. In 'The silence', a short story by Luigi Pirandello, the principal of an Academy calls Cesarino Brei from class with sad news concerning his mother:

'Dear Brei,' he said to him, unexpectedly putting a hand on the boy's shoulder, 'You know that your Mother . . .'

'Is she worse?' interrupted Cesarino immediately, raising his eyes to look at him, almost in terror; his school cap dropped from his hand.

'Yes, my boy, it would appear so. You must go home at once.'

Cesarino remained looking at him, in his suppliant eyes a question his lips dared not utter.

'I'm not very sure,' said the principal, understanding the unuttered question.

The question that the boy was not able to say, but was understood by the principal, was whether his mother was already dead. (In fact she was.)

### 27.5.1 Marking

Languages vary greatly in how they mark a polar question. It may be by intonation or pitch, or by a distinctive constituent order, or by a tag, or by a polar question particle, or by some special morphological or phonological feature, by mood, or — very often — by a combination of several of these measures. Each of them has been exemplified in the discussion above. It will now be useful to list and discuss them.

**(a) Mood** — where there is an inflectional system of mood, including terms for declarative, interrogative and imperative. This was exemplified in §27.3 for West Greenlandic.

**(b) Special phonological or morphological feature.** Koasati (§27.2) has a glottal stop infix into the verb just for interrogatives.

**(c) Polar question particle.** In Slave (Athapaskan; Rice 1989: 1123-38), a general polar question bears a special particle in initial position. The form of the particle varies with dialect. It is *hi* in the Mountain dialect:



Many languages do have some variety of rising intonation for questions, combining this with another mechanism. Those described above include English, which also has distinctive constituent order, Quechua, which also uses interrogative suffix *-chu*; West Greenlandic, Tariana and Jarawara, which also have interrogative mood; and Japanese, which also has a sentence-final particle.

And there are languages for which intonation is the main (often the only) marking of a polar question

Intonational marking for polar questions does vary a considerable amount. The constant is that there is **always a rise**, somewhere towards the end of the sentence. Some examples are:

- Hixkaryana (Derbyshire 1985: 56-7): 'rising pitch through the sentence, reaching high on the penultimate syllable, which is stressed, and then falling sharply on the final syllable'.
- Jarawara (§27.3) is unusual in that in a statement, and in a content question, the final syllable of the main clause is said on a rising intonation. A polar question has rising intonation on the penultimate syllable, followed by a fall (Dixon 2004: 410, 530).

In a similar fashion to some spoken languages indicating polar questions entirely by intonation, there are a number of sign languages which show polar questions solely by non-manual means. 'The marking typically involves a combination of several of the following features:

- eyebrows raise
- eyes wide open
- eye contact with the addressee
- head forward position
- forward body posture.'

In a reported question, there is generally lack of eye contact with the addressee. (Zeshan 2004b: 19-20, and see Zeshan 2006a.)

There is no doubt that some of these gestures also play a role in the asking of polar questions in spoken languages.

### **27.5.2 Polar question with focus**

The focus technique is likely to be found in a language where a polar question is shown by a particle, or an interrogative affix. We saw in §27.2 that in Huallaga Quechua, suffix *-chu* is added to the verb in a general polar question, and in a focus question to the constituent in focus; this does not have to be fronted.

### 27.5.3 Types of polar question

Many times, when someone asks a question they have an expectation of what the answer might be. *Do you think it will rain today?* Or else a hope of what they would like it to be. *We have a picnic planned — do you really think it's going to rain?*

Some languages have a number of types of polar question. These can relate to the kind of answer that is expected, or to the attitude of the questioner or of the questioned.

In the Papuan language Amele (Roberts 1987: 17-21), final *fo* on a polar question indicates an expectation that the addressee will agree with the supposition and final *fa* carries an expectation of disagreement (this applies whether the question is phrased as positive or as negative).

(46) [dana eu]o f-ag-a fo?  
 man THAT see-2sgA-TODAY.PAST POLAR.QUESTION  
 Did you see that man? [Expects answer: '(Yes,) I saw that man']

(47) ijas qila [cabi na] nu-ig-en fa?  
 1sg now garden TO go-1sgA-FUTURE POLAR.QUESTION  
 Should I go to the garden now? [Expects answer: 'You shouldn't go']

A neutral polar question (with no expectation concerning the answer) has an 'alternative question' structure, with the supposition followed by '*fo* NOT *fo*':

(48) qila Madang nu-eg-en fo qee fo?  
 today Masang go-2sgA-FUTURE POLAR.Q NOT POLAR.Q  
 Are you going to Madang today or not?

### 27.5.4 Alternative questions

In some languages, alternative questions loom large in the grammatical panoply, and come in various types. In others they do not exist at all.

In §27.2, an 'alternative question' was quoted from Huallaga Quechua:

(9) qam-chu o noqa-chu aywa-shun?  
 2sg-POLAR.Q OR 1sg-POLAR.Q go-FUTURE:1inc.S  
 Should you or I go?

This could be regarded as a shortening of the disjunction of two simple questions, 'Should you go?' or 'Should I go?', with the pronoun in focus (and marked by *-chu*) in each. The constituent clauses are polar questions, which would be answered by 'yes' or 'no'. The alternative question, (9), is not a polar question and should be answered 'you' or 'me' (with appropriate shift in pronominal reference).

In Dhimal (Tibeto-Burman, Nepal; King 2009: 283) a normal structure of polar questions

involves 'X not-X'. For example:

- (51) ta:-hi                ma-ta:-hi?  
 be.tasty-PAST    NEGATIVE-be.tasty-PAST  
 Is it tasty? (lit. Is it tasty or not tasty?)

Although this has alternative form, it functions as a polar question.

Spaulding and Spaulding (1994: 139) quote an even more striking series of polar question constructions in Nankina, a language from the Papuan region. First, we can have a regular alternative question:

- (56) kwip-ka            Gwarawon ku-sie            bo ma    ku-sie?  
 tomorrow-ASP    Gwarawon go-INDEF:2sg    OR NOT    go-INDEF:2sg  
 Tomorrow, will you go to Gwarawon or will you not go?

The second clause may be reduced to a simple negation:

- (56') kwip-ka            Gwarawon ku-sie            bo woni?  
 tomorrow-ASP    Gwarawon go-INDEF:2sgS    OR NO  
 Tomorrow, will you go to Gwarawon or not?

Note that *ma* in (56) is the regular clause negator. In (56') it is replaced by *woni* which functions both as the independent polarity from 'no' and also as a negative modifier within an NP (for example, 'no (*woni*) betel-nut').

A polar question can be further reduced:

- (56'') kwip-ka            Gwarawon ku-sie            bo?  
 tomorrow-ASP    Gwarawon go-INDEF:2sgS    OR  
 Tomorrow, will you go to Gwarawon?

The only mark of this being a polar question is the final element, *bo* 'or'.

## 27.6 Content questions

A content question includes an interrogative word (or an indefinite/interrogative word) — this is its defining feature. Other facets tend to be viewed as secondary, and are sometimes scarcely noted. For example, one often finds an account of the intonation tune of a polar question, but no mention of what happens with a content question.

We saw in §27.3 that content questions take the same mood marking as polar questions in West Greenlandic (but content questions typically have the same intonation tune as statements in West Greenlandic).

In some languages all types of questions have a similar intonation tune — for example,

Tamambo, described in §27.4. In others there are differences — Huallaga Quechua shows rising pitch only in polar questions (and, as described in §27.2, quite different suffixes are used in the two varieties of question).

### 27.6.1 Indefinites and interrogatives

It is not at all uncommon to find that, in a given language, some or all interrogative words also have an indefinite sense, or that indefinites can be formed from interrogatives by adding an affix.

The first point to note is that the label 'indefinite' is used for two rather different things. Consider:

(57) Someone in the inner office has the key to the safe

*Someone* (an alternative is *somebody*) relates to a specific person, but the speaker does not know their identity. This can conveniently be termed a **specific indefinite**.

Compare this with:

(58) Anyone could solve that puzzle

This means that each person in the world has the ability to solve that puzzle. It could be restricted a bit; for example: *Anyone with a bit of brain . . .*, or *Anyone who has studied algebra . . .* The label **general indefinite** can be used for *anyone* (or *anybody*); it refers to a general population, of unknown size. (*Everyone* and *everybody* are a slightly different kind of general indefinite.)

In English, interrogatives have different form from specific and general indefinites

For Tunica, an isolate from Louisiana, Haas (1941: 83) states that 'the interrogative-indefinite stem *ka'* has the meaning "what, any, some".' That is, it has interrogative, specific indefinite and general indefinite senses. Four interrogative/indefinite words are build on this stem:

(59) ka'ku        'who, someone, anyone'  
       ka'nahku    'what, something, anything'  
       ka'ʔaš      'when, sometime, anytime'  
       ka'ta        'where, somewhere, anywhere'

Differing opinions have been provided concerning what the prior sense is for interrogative/indefinites. Within a general survey volume, Haspelmath (1997a: 177) says '**one thing we know for sure**: the interrogative function is always primary, and the indefinite function secondary'. In contrast, Enfield (2007a: 86) — in his study of Lao — considers that





And there are languages with a small number of forms, on which all interrogative words are based. Consider the Papuan language Abun (Berry and Berry 1999: 109):

- (77) *u*, 'which' (as modifier to the head noun in an NP)
- je* ('person') *u*, 'who'
  - mo* (locative preposition) *u*, 'where'
  - sa* ('like') *u*, 'how'
  - wa* ('for') *sa* ('like') *u*, 'why'
  - kap* ('time') *u*, 'when'
  - suma*, 'what'
  - wa* ('for') *suma*, 'why'
  - ot*, 'how many' (following noun plus appropriate classifier)
  - kap* ('time') *ot*, 'when'

Ewe (Kwa family, Ghana; Ameka 1991: 53-4, and personal communication) has the most spartan — perhaps one should say: the most streamlined — way of creating content questions. One simply places *ka* at the end of an NP and it becomes interrogative. Thus 'person *ka*' is 'who', 'thing *ka*' is 'what', 'place *ka*' is 'where', and so on. Note that any noun can take *ka*, so that 'garment *ka*' ('which garment') is of equal status with 'person *ka*' ('which person', 'who'). And there is *néne* 'how many' which may also be placed after any noun. (Ewe has a quite different marker for polar questions; it is particle *à*, at the end of a clause.)

#### 27.6.4 Types of interrogative word

In many languages, each interrogative word is associated with a different word class. In addition to this, the interrogative words are linked together as another kind of class, which is overlaid across the basic set of word classes (a sort-of pan-basic-word-classes word class). That is, the interrogative words share one or more properties. This may be simply that they convert a statement into a content question. But there is usually more — some specific grammatical property or properties that they share.

This can be illustrated for Fijian. The interrogative words comprise:

- (a) *cei* 'who', is related to the class of pronouns.
- (b) *cava* 'what, which' is related to the class of nouns.
- (c) *vei* 'where' is a locational word..
- (d) *vica* 'how many / how much, some' is the only interrogative word in Fijian to also have an indefinite sense. It clearly relates to the class of lexical numbers.

(e) *'uca(-ta'ini)* 'do what (to)' has the morphological and syntactic profile of a verb; see (92) below.

There are two grammatical properties which link these interrogative words. The first is that modifier *soti* 'a lot, all' may only be used with a negator (which in Fijian are verbs) or with an interrogative word. Thus *o cei soti* 'who are all of them', *a cava soti* 'what are all of them' and, with *vei* 'where':

- (78) [i vei soti a vanua] o na la'o 'ina?  
 AT WHERE ALL ART place 2sgS FUTURE GO PREP:3sg  
 Where are all the places you are going to?

The default marker of a complement clause is *ni* 'that'. But if a complement clause is formed from a polar or a content question, then *ni* must be replaced by *se*. This is the second property common to interrogative words: if one of them occurs in a complement clause, the clause must be marked by *se*.

### (I) 'who', 'what', and 'which'

Languages may have one, two, three (or more) words corresponding to English *what*, *which* and *who*.

A fair number of languages have three interrogative words that roughly correspond to *who*, *what* and *which* in English. For example, Huallaga Quechua and Koasati — see (10) and (15) in §27.2 — Japanese — see the table and (76) in §27.6.3 — Abun — in (77) — and many European languages. However, the meanings and function of the three interrogative words do vary a good deal between languages and require careful study on a language-specific basis.

In contrast, there are languages with a single interrogative carrying all three meanings. Consider the following sentences involving *yangki* 'who, what, which' in Yawuru, from north-west Australia (Hosokawa 1991: 337):

- (83) [yangki maya] dyunggarra i-nga-rn?  
 WHO/WHAT/WHICH house 2du:GENITIVE 3sg-be-IMPERFECTIVE  
 Which house is yours (dual)?
- (84) yangki mi-nga-ny-ngany dyuyu-ni?  
 WHO/WHAT/WHICH 2sg-be-IMPERFECTIVE-COM 2sg-ERGATIVE  
 What are you (sg) holding?
- (85) yangki-ni nyamba i-na-ka-nda-dyiya?  
 WHO/WHAT/WHICH-ERG THIS 3sg-TR-carry-PERFECTIVE-2sg:DAT  
 Who brought this to you (sg)?

In (83), *yangki* occurs in an NP with *maya* 'house' and thus means 'which'. The interpretations 'what' in (84) and 'who' in (85) are inferred from the meaning of the sentences — it is people, not things. who bring something, and a person is more likely to hold something than someone. But the sense of *yangki* can be indeterminate, and ambiguity is then likely to be resolved by pragmatic factors.

## (II) 'how many' and 'how much'

Some languages have distinct interrogative forms for 'how many', referring to countables, and 'how much', for non-countables (and sometimes more besides). For example:

- Thai *kii* 'how many', *thâwrày* 'how much' (Iwasaki and Ingkaphirom 2005: 291).
- Tagalog: *ilan* 'how many', *gaano* 'how much (quantity)', *magkano* 'how much (price)' (Schachter and Otnes 1972: 506).

There are many languages in which a single form is used for both 'how many' and 'how much', including: Huallaga Quechua (see (10) in §27.2).

In a few languages, 'how many, how much' is a verb; for instance, *námpó* 'be how many' in Koasati (§27.2). The general interrogative verb *ee(-na-)* 'what about' in Jarawara can be taken to mean 'be how many' in appropriate circumstances.

English is rather unusual in not having a straightforward interrogative word referring to quantity. In place of this, it employs a construction which can combine *how* with virtually any adjective, including *many* and *much* (and *few* and *little*). Alongside *how many* and *how much*, one can also enquire *how big*, *how hot*, *how old*, *how clever*, *how likely*, and so on. It is surely related to the fact that English does not have a single word meaning 'how many'..

## (III) 'why' and 'how'

Mandarin Chinese is unusual in that one interrogative, *zěnme*, can mean either 'how' or 'why'. The following sentence is ambiguous:

- (86) nǐA zěnme xiě xiǎshuō?  
 2sg HOW/WHY write novel  
 EITHER How do you write novels? OR Why do you write novels?

Li and Thompson (1981: 522-4) explain that 'how' is a manner adverbial ('pertaining to the manner in which the action of the verb is carried out'), which can only occur before the verb, whereas 'why' is a sentential adverbial ('requesting the respondent to provide a semantic frame for the entire sentence'), which can occur either before the verb or sentence-initially. Thus, if *zěnme* is moved to the beginning of the sentence, only the 'why' interpretation is possible.

Most languages have quite different ways of expressing 'why' and 'how'.

#### (IV) 'where' and 'when'

In the Papuan language Amele (Roberts 1987: 21), *ai* is used for 'which' and also for 'where', 'when the location is proximal, i.e. within view', with *ana* being used for 'where' when 'the location is not proximal, i.e. not necessarily within view'.

'Where' and 'when' may have different forms, as in Japanese — see the table in 7.6.3 and (76) — and in Tunica — see (59). We saw in (15) that, for Koasati, *naksofó:kon* 'when' appears to be based on *naksofón* ~ *naksó:n* 'where', which in turn appears to be based on *naksó* 'who' (although these forms are not morphologically segmentable).

There are languages which have no general word 'when'. It is, however, always possible to enquire about time. In Jarawara, a question relating to today ('When will you eat?') is phrased in terms of the position of the sun; literally, 'At where will the sun be sitting in the sky, will you eat?' Questions about time outside today may involve 'how many' plus 'days' (literally 'sleeps') or 'months' ('moons') or 'years' ('wet seasons').

#### (V) Interrogative verbs

Just about every language allows one to ask about a person or a thing, a place or a time, but rather few have an interrogative verb — to query an action or state. (I don't know why this is so.)

Fijian is like English in that it is a straightforward matter to question an argument — for example, *Whos laughed?*, *Who<sub>A</sub> hit you<sub>O</sub>?* and *Who<sub>O</sub> did Harry<sub>A</sub> hit?* It differs in that it also has an interrogative verb, intransitive form '*uca* 'do what' and transitive form '*uca-ta'ini* 'do what to', as in (Dixon 1988: 174):

- (92) [e    *uca-ta'ini*                    i'o]PREDICATE   [o            Ari]<sub>A</sub>?  
       3sgA DO.WHAT-TRANSITIVE 2sgO               ARTICLE Harry  
       What did Harry do to you? (lit. Harry did what to you?)

There are languages in which an interrogative verb is formed from an interrogative nominal by regular process of derivation.

There can be just one interrogative verb with a wide range of meaning. Intransitive *ee* (-*na-*) in Jarawara can, according to context, be taken to mean 'where' or 'how many' or 'how are (you)' or 'is there any X'. The general meaning of 'X *ee*?' is 'what about X?'. One day I was helping two Jarawara men scoop out an itaúba tree to make a dug-out canoe. A third man came into the clearing and asked (Dixon 2004: 407):



and plural forms just for 'who' (with no number distinction for 'what, something') in Comanche.

When there is a number system applying to interrogatives, it may differ from the number system on pronouns.

**(d) Tense and aspect** can interrelate with questions in several ways. They may determine the type of interrogative marking. In Ika (Chibchan, Colombia; Frank 1990: 79) both polar and content questions are marked by a verb-phrase-final suffix or particle, with *-e* being employed for a question referring to recent past time, and *-o* or *no* for one referring to the present, future or distant past.

Secondly, there may be a reduced number of tense and/or aspect and/or modality choices in questions. In Hua (Papuan region; Haiman 1980: 165) the distinction between future indicative and subjunctive is neutralized in both polar and content questions

**(e) Evidentiality** may involve a system with fewer choices in questions than in statements. For instance, Tucano has a four-term system, {visual, non-visual sensory, inferred, reported}, in statements but there is no 'reported' term in the three-term system employed in questions. There is ample exemplification for this and other languages in Aikhenvald (2004: 72, 82, 85, 97-8, 103, 242-49, 255, and see further references therein).

When a statement with evidentiality specified is questioned, languages vary as to whether the information source is questioned from the point of view of the speaker or of the addressee (see Aikhenvald 2004: 242-9).

**(f) Gender, noun classes and classifiers** may relate to questions in a number of ways..

Since 'who' has human reference, it is more likely than 'what' to have distinct masculine and feminine forms. Jarawara provides an instance of this — we have feminine *hibaka* and masculine *hibeke* for 'who', but gender-unspecified *himata* for 'what'.

In languages where a noun class system is marked on a number of word classes by affixation, some interrogatives may be included in the web. An interrogative 'how many' generally relates to the class of lexical number words. In languages where these must be accompanied by a 'numeral classifier', this also applies for 'how many'

**(g) Case inflection** on interrogatives is usually parallel to that on the word classes they correspond to. But interrogatives may show less, or else more, case distinctions. In Georgian, nouns have a six-term inflectional system — nominative, ergative, dative, genitive, instrumental and adverbial. 'What' accords with this pattern. In contrast, 'who' has only two forms, one covering both nominative and ergative, and the other both dative and genitive

(with nothing for instrumental or adverbial). Note that the 1sg pronoun has a single form for nominative, ergative and dative, and a different one for genitive (Vogt 1971: 17-45).

**(h) Imperative** may be in a mood system with interrogative (the two terms being complementary)..

Tags are prototypically used in questions but English also has a kind of same-polarity tag which can be added to a command and keeps it as a command; it uses auxiliary *will*, as in *Go away, will you!* (see Aikhenvald 2010: 67-8, 284-5). Also, an interrogative construction can be used as a type of command; for example *Why don't you shut up!*

## 27.8 Pragmatic aspects

Questions — like commands — involve much more than segmental elements of speech. Nuances of intensity, rhythm, and timbre provide colour to a question, making it gentle or peremptory, perhaps expecting confirmation or denial. And in addition to actual sounds, one should pay attention to facial expression, direction of eye gaze, bodily gesture (such as splaying of the hands), and suchlike. Many factors need to be studied for a full understanding of the practical intent and effect of a question.

Communities with a strong politeness parameter in their culture, and thus in the grammar of their language, naturally extend this to questions. For example, in Japanese (Hinds 1984: 157) 'questions are either polite or nonpolite. In polite questions the morpheme *-masu* or *desu* is attached to a verbal, and the question particle *ka* follows. In nonpolite questions, the plain form of the verbal occurs, followed by the particle *ka*.' Under (a) in §27.7, we mentioned languages in which it is most polite to cast a polar question in the negative.

Greetings frequently have interrogative form, but are rhetorical in nature, expecting a phatic response rather than any informative answer. The greeting in English *How are you?* should be accorded a conventional response along the lines of *Pretty good, how are you?* (One would not, in normal circumstances, launch into an account of one's minor ailments.).

Questions should always be employed judiciously. To bombard someone with questions may be disconcerting, and sometimes appear to be threatening or even accusatory. Most people prefer to give out information at their own pace, rather than on demand. For example, in some Australian Aboriginal societies the conventional way to elicit information from another person is to first provide that information about oneself. Rather than enquire 'Where are you from?', one would say 'I'm from Biliyana', and the other person would naturally reply 'I'm from Labalaba'.

**References** - see BLT3