

INTERROGATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS: A CASE FOR CONTENT QUESTIONS IN ÌGBÒ

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Abstract

This study investigates Ìgbò content questions, also referred to as Wh-questions, with a view to establishing the type of Wh-movement, if any, that operates in Ìgbò. The work reveals the existence of Wh-movement in Ìgbò. It reveals that both the Syntactic Wh-movement and LF Wh-movement occur in Ìgbò, contrary to some earlier views that all languages have LF Wh-movement. The two types of structures in Ìgbò are similar semantically and pragmatically. Furthermore, the study reveals that multiple Wh-questions can remain in-situ in Ìgbò interrogatives contrary to English-type languages. Ìgbò is different from languages like English and Yoruba which have obligatory Syntactic Wh-movement. It is also different from languages like Japanese and Chinese which have only LF Wh-movement. This study shows that Ìgbò shares properties of the two types of Wh-movement.

Conventions and Abbreviations

| | | |
|----------|---|-----------------------|
| V | = | Verb |
| IP | = | Inflection phrase |
| NP | = | Noun phrase |
| AGR | = | Agreement |
| COMP | = | Complimentizer |
| QPS | = | Question particles |
| CP | = | Complimentizer phrase |
| VP | = | Verb phrase |
| TNS | = | Tense |
| Spec | = | Specifier |
| -rV(pst) | = | -rV past tense marker |
| ‘ ‘ | = | Low tone |
| ‘ - ’ | = | Downstep tone |
| Unmarked | = | High tone |

Content questions are also referred to as Wh-questions or Question-word questions. They differ from polar or Yes – No questions because they require specific answers other than Yes – or – No.

Wh-questions according to Radford (1988) are items that start with Wh. They include who, when, what, why, where. All these are English Wh-question formatives. Many other languages like French, Chinese, Yoruba and Ìgbò have their own peculiar interrogative or question words. Languages, therefore vary in their grammatical structures. Linguists have continued to assert that any instance of a Wh-phrase at the left-most edge of a sentence is as a result of overt Wh-movement occasioned by the rule Move – a. In syntax, movement operations are some of the operations or transformations used to derive syntactic structures. ‘Movement’ is a term used within the framework of transformational grammar (TG) to refer to a basic kind of transformational operation. Movement transformations have the effect of moving constituents from one part of a phrase-marker to another (the landing site). Following the Government and Binding (GB) theory, all specific movement rules have been collapsed into a single universal rule called move –a. This rule permits the movement of a constituent from one part of a sentence to another. The move-a operation is instantiated by different types of movement transformations which include operator movement of which Wh-movement is an aspect of.

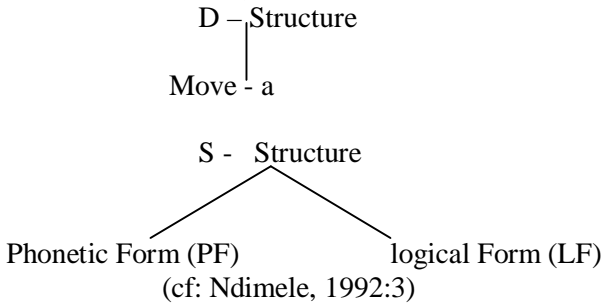
According to Ndimele (1992), Chomsky (1986b) recognizes two types of Wh-Movement, Syntactic Wh-Movement and LF Wh-movement. English type languages for instance operate Syntactic Wh-movement whereas Chinese – Japanese languages operate LF Wh-movement, Watambe (2003).

This study discusses the existence and operation of both the Syntactic Wh-movement and LF Wh-movement in Ìgbò. The postulation that all languages have LF Wh-movement (Chomsky, 1986 and Lasnik and Uriagereka, 1988) will therefore enable the study to give an illuminating analysis of the two types of structures attestable for Ìgbò Wh-questions, to counter that claim. In line with the Ìgbò examples, Goldsmith (1981) affirms that the two types of structures are the same semantically and pragmatically.

The striking difference regarding the behaviour of interrogative words in world languages, according to Ndimele (1992), has led linguists working within the Principles and Parameters framework to propose the Wh-structure. “As we talk of optionality of Wh-movement in Ìgbò – French type languages, Yoruba on the other hand displays obligatory syntactic Wh-movement as evident in English type Wh-questions”, Sonaiya (1989:10). Ìgbò – French interrogative words can therefore be said to be in equilibrium because whether in the Syntactic or LF form, the same semantic interpretation is obtained.

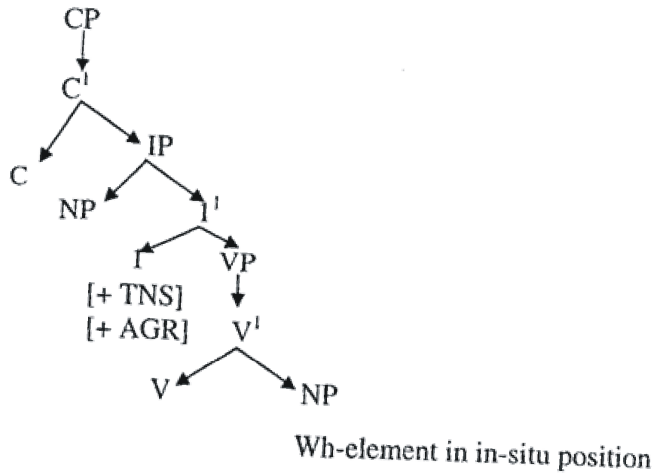
Government and Binding (GB) Theory – An Overview

Organization of GB Theory (A Sketch):

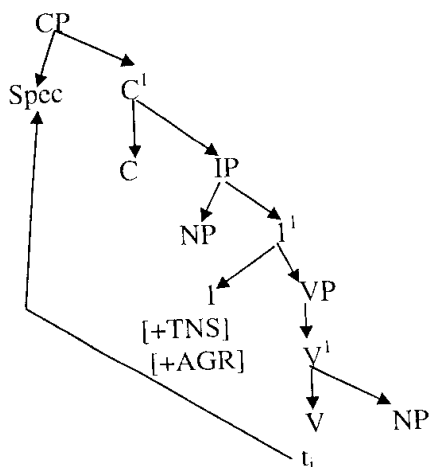


The theoretical framework adopted for this work is Government and Binding modular model theory of syntax propounded by Chomsky and his associates in (1977) in his lecture on Government and Binding (GB) Theory. GB was introduced when Chomsky proposed some major revisions in the Extended Standard Theory. GB theory accounts for all rules that involve movement with a universal transformational rule called move-a (move-alpha). The rule is bound by Subjacency condition in all languages, (Radford 1988, Ndimiele 1992). The Extended projection principle (EPP), will be used for the phrase marker (tree diagram) example:

D-Structure (extraction site)



S-Structure (landing site)



Movement of Wh-element from in-situ to over clause position

Definitions of Certain Terms

Trace Movement Theory The theory came into existence when Chomsky made a modification on the Extended Standard Theory which is called the Revised Extended Standard Theory (REST.) It is concerned with the notion of trace theory of movement rules. Haegeman (1991) views trace as an empty category which encodes the base-position of a moved constituent. It can be indicated by “t”, Ndimele (1992) views it as a ‘ghost copy’ of the moved element while Lamidi (2008) refers to it as a shadow which can be used as an indicator that an element has moved out of that position.

Trace Movement Principle According to Ndimele (1992) “movement of a linguistic unit is subject to the availability of landing site so that the moved element does not crash-land on another linguistic unit at the targeted position”. The only available landing site for wh-element is the Spec-CP node which is for empty categories which functions as location in the structure of a phrase. These are filled into by actual syntactic categories in the process of application of movement rules. Apart from Spec-CP node, which is for Wh-element any other landing site is not allowed. Another important principle about trace movement is that all moved constituents must carry along with them the grammatical properties associated with them at their original extraction site (Ndimele 1991). A moved element must enter into a bound with its trace at the original extraction site. This is necessary so that inherent grammatical features can be easily transmitted between the moved element and its trace. This means that the moved Wh-element and its trace must be co-indexed.

Subjacency Condition According to Haegeman (1991) Wh-element is subjected to the Subjacency condition. Subjacency condition says that movement cannot cross more than a bounding node. Haegeman (1991) points out that bounding nodes are

subject to parametric variation. For instance in English, IP and NP are bounding nodes while in Italian, CP and NP are bounding nodes.

Extraction/Landing Site Extraction site is the original position of the moved element before it is moved while landing site is the exact position the moved element will stay finally. Trace is realized at the S-structure phenomenon.

Property of Wh-Movement The property of a phrase is determined by the property of the head. If a head of a phrase is specified as [+wh], the phrase will also be specified as [+wh]. The wh-feature according to Haegeman, percolates from the head of the phrase to the maximal projection. Also, the feature of the specifier also determines the feature of the entire phrase.

Wh-Question Words in Ìgbò

The Wh-question words in Ìgbò include gini ‘what/why’, ònye ‘who’, èbee/òlee ‘where’, òle ‘how much/many’, òlemṣṓgbe ‘when’ kèdu ‘how/what’ Goldsmith (1981), Uwalaka (1981), Nwachukwu (1990) and Ndimele (1992). The content questions exhibit the optionality of being introduced by Wh-question words or otherwise. However, the Wh-question word kèdu ‘how’ is not covered by the optionality of Wh-movement in Ìgbò. The others are, as shown in examples (1) through (3). Gini ‘what’ is significantly different from other Wh-words in Ìgbò. In an interrogative sentence in Ìgbò language ‘gini’ replaces the noun phrase being questioned. For example, ì★ chòrò gini? ‘what do you want?’. ‘Gini’ replaces the noun phrase, anụ ewū ‘goat meat’ as seen in the reply: Achòrò m anụ ewū ‘I want goat meat’.

NP

There have been some controversies as to the origin of gini. For instance Goldsmith (1981) claims that gini is borrowed from Yoruba since it has a similar question word, kini which has the same meaning ‘what’ like that of Ìgbò. Nwachukwu (1990) as cited in Uwalaka (1991) is of the view that both gini and kini come from a common source since Ìgbò and Yoruba belong to the same language family – Kwa group of the West African languages. By implication, gini is suspected to be the only residue of the proto-Kwa question word remaining in Ìgbò. Uwalaka (1997) has a neutral view

It is likely that the gini is borrowed from Yoruba since Yoruba has a similar question word kini ‘what’. It is also possible that both gini and kini have come from a common source, that is new Benue-Congo since Ìgbò and Yoruba belong to the same language family, that is, the Kwa group of West African languages.

In this paper, it will be shown that Ìgbò operates both Syntactic Wh-movement and Logical Form (LF) Wh-movement. Consider the examples below:

D-Structure

- 1a. Aha gị bụ gini?
'name you be what?
'What is your name?'

S-Structure

- b. Gini bụ aha gị?
What be name you (sg)?
'What is your name?'

D-Structure

- 2a. Ọṣṣ lètàrà òlè mṣṣgbè?
He return -rV(pst) when
"When did he return?"

S-Structure

- b. Òlè mṣṣgbè ọ lètàrà?
When he return -rV(pst)
'When did he return?'

Other examples of Wh-element in Standard Ìgbò include èbee 'where'. Example:

D-Structure

- 3a. *Umụ gị m̀k̀k̀ k̀̀du?
*Children you about how?

S-Structure

- b. K̀̀du m̀k̀k̀ ụmụ gị?
How about children you
'How about your children?'

With the exception of k̀̀du 'how/what', the other interrogative Wh-words are unbounded, that is, they can be moved and are treated as instances of move-a. K̀̀du can only be generated in the main clause. The ungrammaticality of example (3a) gives credence to the assertion. In examples (1) and (2) above, the (b) examples are instances where Wh-phrases are moved to clause initial position while the (a) examples indicate the options in which the Wh-phrases remain in-situ.

Wh-Movement in Ìgbò

The name Wh-movement comes from analyses in Generative Grammar where a Wh-word at the D-structure begins at the final clause position and moves to the initial/overt clause position. Wh-movement can also be referred to as Wh-fronting or Wh-extraction. The term Wh-movement is used because most English interrogative words start with wh-form: what, when, where. Wh-movement is one of the

parameters of the Principles and Parameters which seeks to account for differences between languages relating to whether or not they move in wh-phrase in simple wh-questions.

For the sentence, to be grammatical, k̀̀du does not remain in-situ, rather it must be moved from in-situ i.e final clause position to the overt clause position i.e the initial clause position. The final clause position of Wh-phrase is referred to as the D-structure while the initial clause position of Wh-phrase is being referred to as the S-structure. Another issue to highlight in the movement of Wh-phrase in ̀gb̀ is the issue of trace. The condition of the trace movement principle which says:

If a linguistic unit is moved from its original position to a new position, it must leave behind a ghost copy of itself at the original position. The ghost copy is called a trace (Ndimele 1992).

Is satisfied in the ̀gb̀ Wh-movement account highlighted in this study. The wh-elements actually moved from the extraction site to the landing site leaving behind traces which are represented as “t” exactly at the position of the moved wh-phrase. Below are some examples where the wh-phrases are moved and the extraction sites are replaced with trace.

D-Structure

- 4a. Aha g̀i b̀i g̀ni?
Name you (sg) is what?
‘What is your name?’
[cp[lp Aha g̀i b̀i g̀ni]]

S-Structure

- b. Gini b̀i aha g̀i ti
What is name you
‘What is your name?’
[Cp gini [ip b̀i aha g̀i ti]] (Subjacency condition)



Furthermore, in the analysis so far, the wh-element gini at the D-structure (4a) is at the final clause position which is the extraction site. It then moved from the final clause position to the initial clause position of the sentence (4b) leaving a trace which is being represented by ‘t’ in the sentences (4a & b) above. However, both accounts satisfied the condition which says that movement of a linguistic unit is subject to the availability of landing site so that the moved element does not crash-land on another linguistic unit at the targeted position. This is because the only available landing site for wh-element is the spec-cp node which is for empty categories which function as location in the structure of a phrase. These are being

filled into by actual syntactic categories in the process of application of movement rules. This condition can be seen from the above sentences where the wh-element gini moved from the clause final position to occupy the position of spec-cp position. This account also satisfies the Subjacency condition which says:

Movement cannot cross more than bounding node, (Haegeman 1991)

Bounding nodes according to Haegeman (1991) are subjected to parametric variation. In English and some African languages like Ìgbò Ip and Np are bounding nodes. In the above sentences, only one bounding node (Ip-NP) is crossed to the spec-cp node. In this account, the wh-element and its trace are co-indexed with each other. These are shown in the above examples. Both of them also c-command each other.

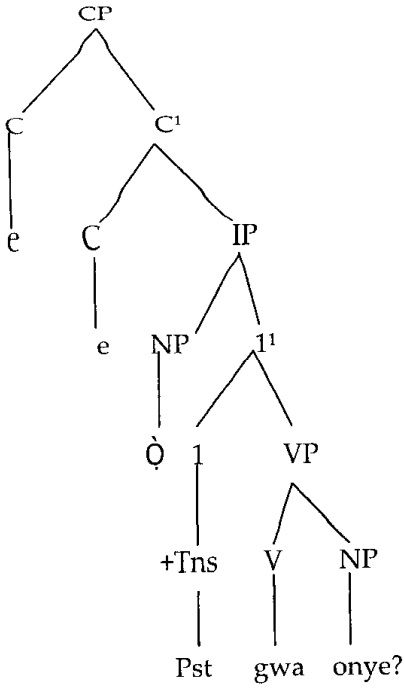
kà ‘that’ Complementizer Insertion

Consider the following examples:

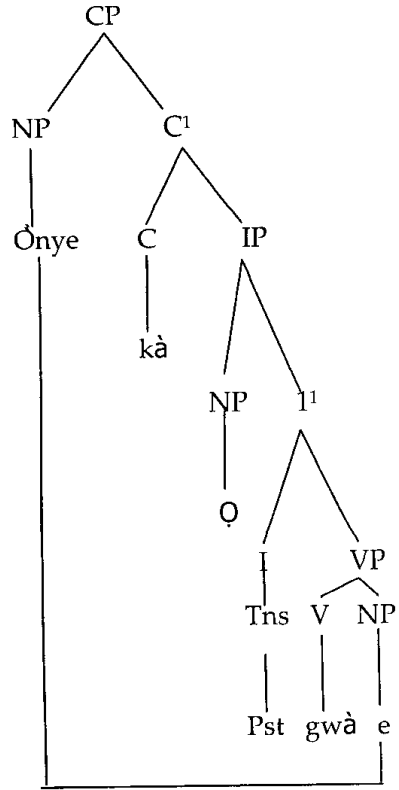
- 5a. Ò gwàrà ònye?
 He tell -rV (pst) who
 ‘Whom did he tell?’
- b. Ònye kà ò gwàrà?
 Who that he tell rV (pst)
 ‘Whom did he tell?’
- 6a. Ọṙà gàrà èbee?
 He go -rV (pst) where
- b. Èbee kà ò gàrà?
 Where that he go rV (pst)
 ‘Where did he go?’

In examples (5) and (6) above, it is observed that the element ‘kà’ is compulsorily introduced in (7a) examples to break the sequence of two. NPs. This is illustrated in examples (7a) and (7b) below:

7a. Ọ̀ gwàrà ọ̀nye?



7b. Ọ̀nye kà ọ gwàrà?

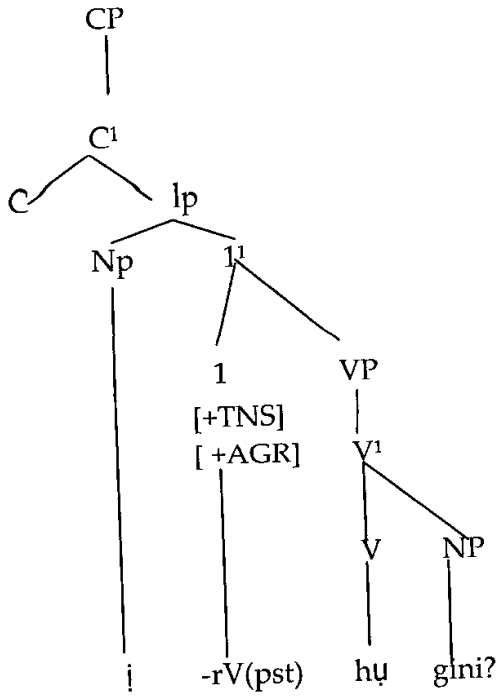


In (7a), there is no Syntactic movement, whereas in (7b) the Wh-phrase. Ọ̀nye 'Who' has undergone move-a leaving its extraction site to comp initial position. Consider also the following examples, illustrating kà 'that' insertion:

D-Structure

8a ị hụrụ gini?
 You (sg) see – rV (pst) what
 'What did you see?'

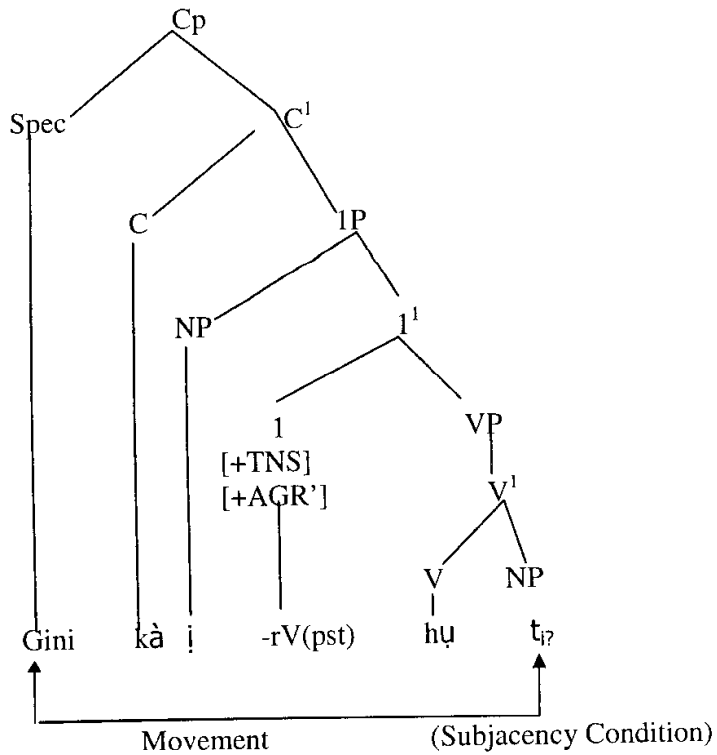
8a.



S-Structure

- 8b. Gini kà i hụ t_i?
 What that you (sg) see - rV (pst)
 What did you see?

8b.

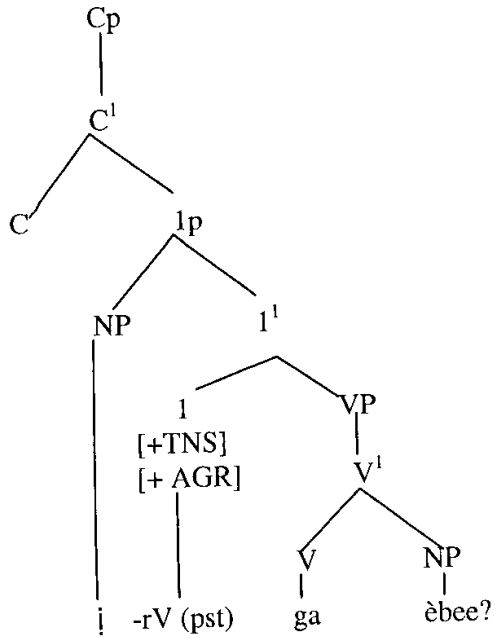


The movement of èbee ‘where’ – phrase does not remain in-situ rather it must obligatorily move from in-situ position to overt clause position for it to have meaning while the òlẹ̀m̀gbè ‘when’-phrase can either remain in-situ or move from in-situ to overt clause position and the meaning will still remain the same. Examples are shown below:

D-Structure

- 9a. ìḱḱ gàrà èbee
 You go -rV(pst) which place?
 ‘Where did you go?’

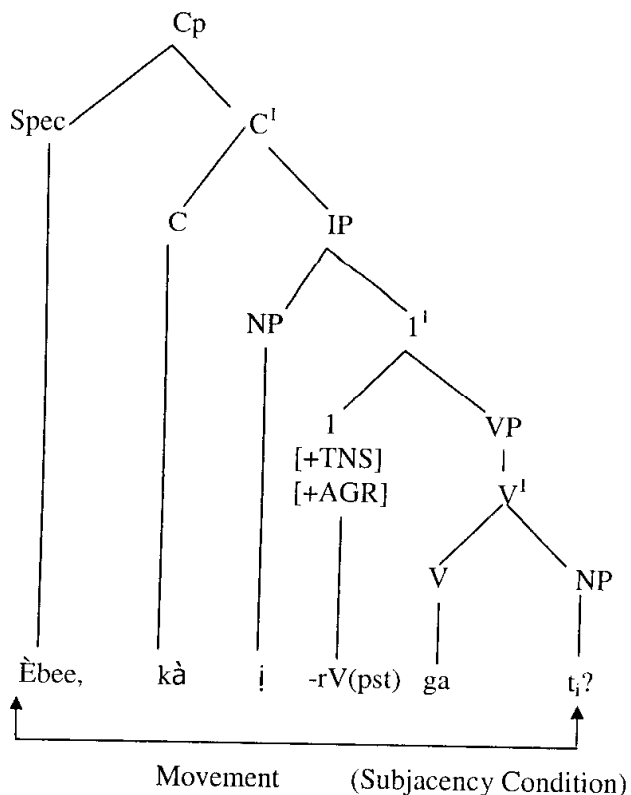
9a.



S-Structure

- 9b. Èbee, kà ì gara tì?
 Which place, that you (sg) go -rV(pst) tì?
 'Where, did + you go tì?'

9b.



Multiple Wh-Questions

Igbo has multiple Wh-questions in which only one Wh-phrase occurs in the comp position as exemplified in (10a) below.

- 10a. Ònye mètèrè gini?
Who do-rV (pst) what
'Who did what?'
- b. Ì nyètèrè ònye òle akwùkwò
You give who which book
'Whom did you give which book?'
- 11. *Ònye gini mètèrè?
Who what do-rV (pst)
- 12. *Ònye òle akwùkwò kà I nyètèrè
Who which book that you give

Examples (11) and (12) are ruled out because they have violated a basic constraint in grammar known as 'Comp Overcrowding, Filter' Ndimele (1990). In other words, more than one Wh-phrase is moved into comp position.

However, Ìgbò permits more than one. Wh-element to remain in-situ in multiple questions, a structure which is not available to English type languages as shown in example (10b) above.

Embedded Wh-Questions

Some examples are:

13. Ò nà-àjù ebe ì gàrà.
 He ask WE where you go-rV (pst)
14. Ò nà-àjù onye m hùrù.
 He ask WE prog who I see-rV (pst)
 ‘He is asking whom I saw’.

The embedded Wh-questions in examples (13) and (14) above (the underlined clauses) are introduced by the Wh-question words ebe ‘where’ and onye ‘who’ respectively. The tonal changes of these question words here are observed. Each of them no longer bears the original initial low tone but now bears high tone. This could have been caused by tonal assimilation whereby the high tone of the preceding vowel ù in the word ajù has assimilated the initial low tone of the vowel of the Wh-question word.

Relative Wh-Constructions

Below are some examples:

15. Egò mààrà ebe Izū gàrà t
 where
 Egò know – rV (pst) where Izū go – rV(pst)
 ‘Egò knew where Izū went’.
16. Ò bù ìhe amaka mètè t
 what
 It be what Amaka do –rV (pst)
 ‘It is what Amaka did’.

Examples (15) and (16) above show that relative Wh-constructions and embedded Wh-questions exhibit similar characteristics. This is shown in the high tone alternate of the preposed Wh-phrase:

17. Àda, [nà- àjù [Onye, ì hùrù t]
 Who

Àda ask WE (prog) you see – rV (pst)
‘Àda is asking who you saw’.

In example (17) above, there is no doubt that Wh-movement has moved the relevant Wh-phrase ònye ‘who’ into the initial position of the embedded clause, i.e. into comp position which is a non-argument position. A co-indexed trace is left

behind at the extraction site. Therefore the Wh-phrase ‘Ònye’ i.e. the Wh-operator is licensed by binding or variable (Chomsky 1988). Since the wh-phrase is in a non-argument position, it lacks Case and can only get Case transferred to it through its co-indexed trace, otherwise the Case Filter will be violated. Similarly, the trace of ‘Ònye’ is fully licensed. The verb huru ‘saw’ is subcategorized to both a subject and object NP. The Projection Principle requires that a trace appears in the object position from which the Wh-phrase has been moved. The verb huru ‘saw’ has an object role to assign and there must be an argument that can receive it. It follows then that the trace in the object position is theta-marked by the verb. Thus the trace is lexically governed by the verb. In addition, it is antecedent, governed by the operator in comp. Therefore, ECP is satisfied on all counts.

Conclusion

This study is an illumination into the existence, characteristics and operations of Ìgbò content questions, otherwise known as Wh-questions. All the Wh-question words in Ìgbò with the exception of gini ‘what/why’ bear initial low tone when isolation. There have been controversies as to the origin of gini which some school of thought claim to have been borrowed from the Yoruba language. The emphasis in this work is on Wh-movement. Having investigated different Ìgbò interrogative constructions, this work, therefore, from empirical evidence concludes that Wh-movement exists in Ìgbò and also that both the Syntactic Wh-movement and LF Wh-movement occur in Ìgbò. The two types of structures are similar semantically and pragmatically. Furthermore, it is shown in this work that multiple Wh-questions can remain in-situ in Ìgbò interrogatives contrary to English-type languages.

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