Wh-Question Formation in Kenyan Bantu Languages: The Case of Kitharaka, Gichuka, Kikuyu, Kiembu and Kikamba

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Abstract: *This paper addresses strategies of wh-question formation in Kitharaka (E54), Gichuka (E54I), Kikuyu (E51), Kiembu (E52), and Kikamba (E55). The study demonstrates that these Bantu Languages form wh-questions using four strategies, namely: wh- in situ (except for subjects), full wh-movement, partial wh-movement, and intermediate strategy. In wh- in situ, the wh-phrase does not move. In full wh-movement, the wh-phrase moves to the beginning of the sentence. In partial wh-movement, the wh-phrase moves to an intermediate Focus Phrase. In the intermediate strategy, the wh-phrase moves to an intermediate Focus Phrase, or a Specifier of the matrix Focus Phrase, followed by movement of another argument to a position above Focus Phrase, a Topic position. The analysis of questions is done within the framework of Minimalism (Chomsky 1995), and within a system assuming that the CP layer of phrasal architecture is split (Rizzi, 1997, Puskas, 1997; Sabel & Jochen, 2004). The study shows that the theoretical techniques used in the analysis of the syntax of other languages can also be applied to Bantu Languages. The study contributes to understanding the typology and constraints of question formation in Bantu Languages.*

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a linguistic universal that all languages have strategies for forming questions (Fromkin, Rodman, Hultin & Logan, 2001). The Strategies for forming questions are varied and include *wh in situ,* full *wh*-movement, intermediate strategy and partial *wh*-movement. This study investigated the strategies used by the five Kenyan Bantu languages. The study established that the five languages use four strategies, namely, *Whin situ;* full *wh*-movement, intermediate strategy and partial *wh*-movement.

2. WH IN SITU

In wh *in situ,* the *wh*-phrase does not move. Consider the Kikuyu sentences in (1):

(1)   (a) Kamau onire nyoka

        Kamau saw   snake

        'Kamau saw a snake.'

     (b) Kamau onire **nduĩ?**

        Kamau saw   what?

        'What did Kamau see?'   (Kikuyu; Clements, 1984)

Wh *in situ* is possible for all categories of *wh*-phrases (objects and adjuncts) except subjects. Wh *in situ* is allowed in mono-clausal and multi-clausal sentences. Note that in wh-*in situ* the *wh*-phrase appears in its bare form without a particle. Wh *in situ* is possible in many other languages (Dholuo; Anisa, 2009; Zulu; Zeller, 1998 & Babine-Witsuwiten; Kristin, 2000).

3. FULL WH-MOVEMENT

In full *wh*-movement, the *wh*-phrase moves from the underlying (canonical) position to the beginning of the sentence. This is possible in all the five languages. Consider the example in (2) from Gichuka:

(2)   **Ni mbi** kairitu karugire?

       f-what girl   cooked

       `What did the girl cook?'   (Gichuka; Kathomi, 2014)

Observe that when a *wh*-phrase moves, it acquires a particle (*ni* in Gichuka). This particles is called a focus marker (f). The particle is *ni* in Gichuka, *ni/i* in Kiitharaka, *ne in* Kikuyu and Kiembu and Kikamba. The focus marker *ni* is therefore diagnostic of syntactic movement in these languages.

Observe that a subject *wh*-phrase cannot appear in its bare form without the focus marker (3).

(3)   a. ***Uu** arugire irio?

      who cooked food.

     'Who cooked the food?'

    b. √**(N)uu** arugire irio?

    f-**who** cooked food.

    'Who cooked the food?'   (Gichuka; Kathomi, 2014)

Subject *wh*-phrases must therefore always be moved and marked with a focus marker.This is true for all the five Kenyan Languages. There are various accounts of this restriction in the literature. A popular notion is that subjects are typically topics, and a *wh*-phrase, which is typically a focus requiring new information cannot occupy a topic position associated with old information. Muriungi (2011) provides a syntactic account based on an anti-locality restriction arguing that a *wh*-phrase phrase cannot be so close to its binder in Spec FocP. This restriction builds on the old anti-locality restriction on the binding of pronouns (Binding Principle B).

4. INTERMEDIATE STRATEGY

In the intermediate strategy, a *wh*-phrase moves to a Spec Foc, followed by topicalization of another argument. Consider (4) from Kiitharaka.

4   (a) Mwari   **i-mbi**   arugire

     Girl   **f-what**   cooked

    `What did the girl cook?'

   (b) John augire Kairitu   **nimbi**   karugire

    John said   girl   **f-what**   cooked

    `What did John say the girl cooked?'   (Gichuka; Kathomi, 2014)

This construction is possible in the five Kenyan languages.

5. PARTIAL WH-MOVEMENT

In partial *wh*-movement, a *wh*-phrase moves an intermediate Spec, FocP. This however is not followed by topicalization of another constituent, (5):

(5)   John anaisye **ni-kyau**   Mary unathoie
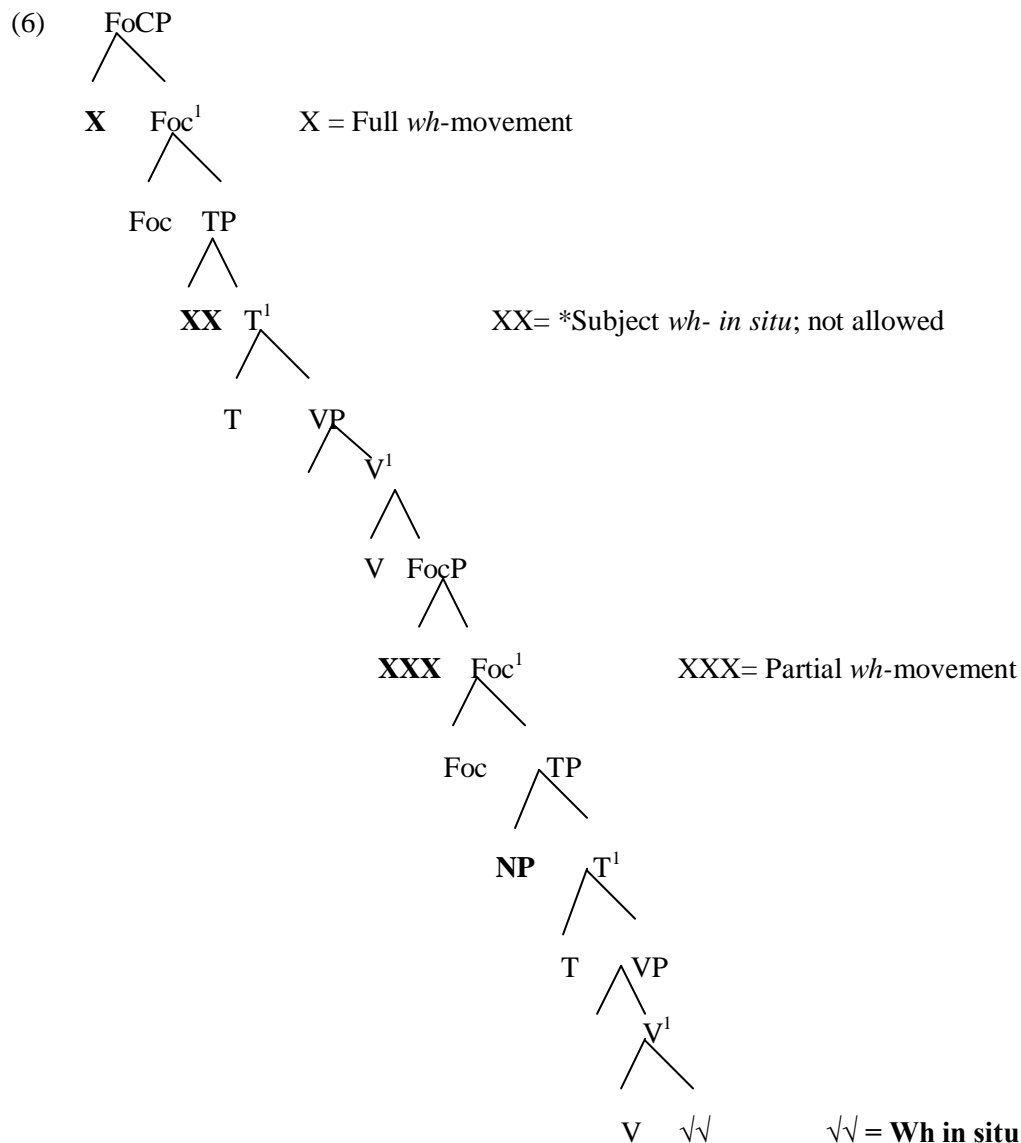
    John said   Foc-what   Mary bought

    'What did John say Mary bought?'   (Kikamba; Ann p.c)

The other five Bantu Languages allow this construction.

6. POSSIBLE STRUCTURAL POSITIONS FOR KENYAN BANTU LANGUAGES

The various structural positions allowed by the five languages are given in the syntactic tree in (6)

(6)   FoCP

X   Foc^1 X = Full *wh*-movement

Foc   TP

XX   T^1 XX= *Subject *wh- in situ*; not allowed

T   VP

V^1

V   FocP

XXX   Foc^1 XXX= Partial *wh*-movement

Foc   TP

NP   T^1

T   VP

V^1

V   √√   √√ = **Wh in situ**

7. SUMMARY

This paper has demonstrated that the five Kenyan Bantu languages form *wh*-questions by use of *wh- in situ,* full *wh*-movement, intermediate strategy and partial *wh-movement*. The paper has also demonstrated that all the five languages have a restriction that subject *wh*-phrases cannot be *in situ,* due to an anti-locality restriction.

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