

Interrogative Expressions in Ọ̀họ̀rí

Ọ̀laide Akinwande* 

University of Lagos, Nigeria

oaakinwande@unilag.edu.ng

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**Corresponding author*

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ABSTRACT: *Interrogative expressions are tools and resources that have been widely discussed in the literature. Though, a lot of scholarly works have been carried out on question expressions in Standard Yorùbá and its dialects, there is dearth of research reports on the truism of interrogative constructions in Ọ̀họ̀rí. Therefore, this study examines the structure of interrogative expressions in Ọ̀họ̀rí. The data used in this study were drawn from 14 adult native speakers of Ọ̀họ̀rí in Kétu, Ègùwá, Asá, Ìpòbẹ̀, Òńbẹ̀, Ìjòùn, and Ọ̀jà-Ọ̀dàn located in Yewa North Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria via structured interviews using a digital recording device. The study employs Minimalist Program of Chomsky (1995, 1998, and 2002) with an incorporation of Split-CP hypothesis of Rizzi (1997 and 2001) for data analysis. Findings of the study show that Ọ̀họ̀rí has three structural forms of polar questions in their speech form. The paper shows that two phonological processes, deletion and assimilation, obligatorily occur in Ọ̀họ̀rí content questions and that two functional heads - Foc and Inter, contribute to the content question expressions in Ọ̀họ̀rí. The study discusses the projection of interrogative constructions in Ọ̀họ̀rí, showing that while Inter head is overtly present in polar questions, the Inter head is phonetically null in content questions.*

KEYWORDS: Minimalist Program, Ọ̀họ̀rí, Phonological Rules, Question, Speech Form

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1. Introduction

Interrogation is a speech-act employed by humans in their speech communities to elicit information, either known or unknown to the speaker/interrogator from another speaker of the same language who stands in the position of hearer/respondent. Thus, interrogation is a vital tool used in natural language expressions. Interrogation is a quintessential interface phenomenon (Dayal, 2016:1). It can be studied from the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic approach. Two interrogative types: polar and content questions, have been reported in the literature. While the former interrogates a full clause, the latter inquires a constituent (Ajiboye 2013; Adeoye 2018, among others). It has also been reported in the literature that there is manifestation of focus marker in content questions in most Kwa languages (Aboh & Pfau 2011; Ilòrí 2017; Olaogun 2018), etc. A logical question to raise then is that, is the claim available in Ọ̀hòrí? If answer is yes, what determines the presence of focus marker in Ọ̀hòrí content questions? Can content question reading be realised in Ọ̀hòrí without focus marker? Does content question construction rely on the presence of focus marker in Ọ̀hòrí? These are part of the questions that this paper empirically and theoretically addresses, using data evidence in Ọ̀hòrí to solidify how questions (polar and content question) are constructed and projected in the language. However, Olawuwo (2021) did comparative work on Ọ̀hòrí question expressions with Standard Yorùbá but there are gaps in the study. For instance, Olawuwo (2021) reported two structural types of polar questions but this present study discovered three. Olawuwo (2021) did not discuss structural projections of polar questions in Ọ̀hòrí but this current study discussed it. There are attempts where Olawuwo (2021) referred to content question phrases as interrogative markers and functional heads. Following established works (Aboh & Pfau 2011, Ilòrí 2017, Olaogun 2018), etc., this present study disclaims Olawuwo's reports that content question phrases are not interrogative markers/functional heads. Lastly, the current study extensively discusses content question projections in Ọ̀hòrí, which Olawuwo (2021) ignored but only showed the tree diagram.

2. Historical and Linguistic Background of Ọ̀hòrí

Ọ̀hòrí is a sublanguage of Yorùbá, spoken in west Yorùbá (Oyelaran 1976; Adeniyi 2000) area of Ogun State, Nigeria. Ọ̀hòrí native speakers are mostly found in Kétu and its surrounding communities in Yewa North Local Government Area of Ọ̀gùn State, Nigeria. Ọ̀hòrí people are sometimes called Ìjé. Ìjé is a local speech form spoken among Ọ̀hòrí people, which is known as Èdè Ìjé 'Ìjé Language', and it is mutually intelligible to speakers of other dialectal forms of Yorùbá. According to Ethnologue (closely related languages), Èdè Ìjé 'Ìjé Language' has a lexical similarity with Èdè Nàgó and similarity with the Yorùbá dialect spoken in Àjàsé/Port-Novo geographically located in the Republic of Benin. Furthermore, Ọ̀hòrí is a subgroup of the people of Yewa North in Ogun State, Nigeria. However, history holds that the local domain of Ọ̀hòrí is Southeastern Benin North of Pobè town but expanded to Westward of Yorùbá. According to the Nigeria population census (2013), the population of Ọ̀hòrí is about two hundred thousand (200,000). In addition, the Ọ̀hòrí environment is naturally swampy/marshy waterlogged depression with what could be described as adverse physical conditions; therefore, the area had historically been a safe haven for people fleeing persecution from the larger entities of Kétu, Ọ̀yó, and others. Ọ̀hòrí people are considered by their neighbours to be among the most conservative Yorùbá because of their relative inaccessibility during raining season and their speech is quite distinct. Most Ọ̀hòrí people practice Christianity while some are traditional worshippers and they worship a deity called Àtàrá. Majority of the native speakers of Ọ̀hòrí are farmers by profession.

The favourite food of Ọ̀họ̀rí is pap and that is why corn is one of the major crops they plant. It should be stated that the grammar of Ọ̀họ̀rí has not enjoyed much scholarly research. Hence, Ọ̀họ̀rí is an endangered language that must be documented, preserved, and conserved through robust research work to prevent the disappearance or loss of the language.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach, providing an overview of interrogative expressions and examining the constructions and projections of Ọ̀họ̀rí questioning. It is assumed that qualitative method of research can best handle the interrogative expressions effectively. However, the Ọ̀họ̀rí data used in this study were elicited from 14 native-speaker consultants (7 males and 7 females) of Ọ̀họ̀rí in Kétu, Ègùwá, Asá, Ìpòbẹ́, Òńbẹ́, Ìjòùn, and Ọ̀jà-Ọ̀dàn in Yewa North Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. Schedule-controlled technique was employed to ascertain the quality and accuracy of the sentences constructed in Yorùbá, which were used to elicit equivalent speech samples in Ọ̀họ̀rí. To achieve this, adult native speakers of Ọ̀họ̀rí whose age range is between 40 and 70 years and have full command of the linguistic competence of their language were selected. One-on-one structured interviews were conducted with the language consultants to ascertain how interrogative expressions investigated are constructed in the language. Each consultant was allotted a dedicated session of 30 minutes for the interview using digital recording device. Each of the prompt sentences in Yorùbá was read out to the consultant who rendered the same in Ọ̀họ̀rí for three consecutive times: in a stretch of the normal speech speed; slowed-down form of the normal speech; and more slowly/dragging form of the normal speech. These three forms of data samples are crucial to the study because they helped to identify and confirm in clear terms about all the structural uniformity of word items and grammatical elements involved in the structures of the interrogative expressions being investigated. Thereafter, the elicited data were transliterated and appropriately glossed using the two tiers of literal/grammatical and logical translations in line with Leipzig glossing rules' standards. The grammatical glossing was done morpheme-by-morpheme. Orthographic conventions were followed. Tone is represented as high (´), low (`), and mid (unmarked). The data were later analysed using Minimalist Program (MP) of Chomsky (1995, 1998, and 2002) with an incorporation of Split-CP hypothesis of Rizzi (1997 and 2001). The adoption of MP captures the analyses of the study, most especially with the merge operation commonly used in the study. Though, other dictates of MP, such as operation select, operation agree, interface conditions, etc. are relevant to the study but operation merge is mostly used on the assumption that it is capable of combining a probe (functional head, e.g., Inter) and goal (basic clauses/already built syntactic constructions, e.g., TP) to construct other or higher expressions. Therefore, for example in Ọ̀họ̀rí, if Inter head is merged with TP/proposition, the resulting phrase is interrogative phrase (InterP). With this, for the avoidance of redundancy, other dictates of MP are not articulated in the study unlike merge operation, though they silently participated in the course of the analyses. The Split-CP hypothesis consists of phrases, such as focus phrase (FocP), interrogative phrase (InterP), etc., which are used for the analysis.

4. Polar Questions in Ọ̀họ̀rí

Polar question is a question that is conventionally associated with the speech act of requesting information and many languages form it from declarative sentences by adding a question particle or a tag (Konig & Siemund, 2007:291). Huddleston and Pullum (2002:896) describes polar

questions as expressions that require appropriate responses in the form of either a positive or negative answer. However, a number of Benue-Congo languages adopt different mechanisms to form polar questions. Some languages express their polar questions using prosodic approach, e.g., Igbo (Adeoye, 2018:226), while some languages explore syntactic paradigm, e.g., Yorùbá (Awobuluyi 1978, Radford 1988, Bamgboṣe 1990, Yusuf 1992, Ajiboye 2013, Ilòrí 2010 & 2017; Olaogun 2018, Ladipo 2023, among others). In Ọ̀hòrí, polar question is syntactically formed by merging a question marker to a convergent declarative clause. However, in line with the data obtained, three structural forms of polar questions are available in Ọ̀hòrí, which are discussed in the following subsection.

4.1. Pre-Clausal-Marked Polar Questions

The first form of polar question which appears to be exclusive to Ọ̀hòrí converts declarative clauses to interrogative expressions simply by adjoining a question marker to the beginning of a declarative clause. The question markers employed for this type of polar question in Ọ̀hòrí are *nbó/nbí*, *òó*, and *ṣé*, as exemplified in (1).

- 1a. O tin kpon omin ye
 2SG PERF fetch water DEM
 ‘You have fetched the water.’
- b. Nbí/nbó o tin kpon omin ye?
 Inter 2SG PERF fetch water DEM
 ‘Have you fetched the water?’
- 2a. Ṣadé tin jẹ̀n
 Sade PERF eat
 ‘Ṣade has eaten’
- b. Òó Ṣadé tin jẹ̀n?
 Inter Sade PERF eat
 ‘Has Sade eaten?’
- 3a. Báyo tin sù
 Bayo PERF sleep
 ‘Bayo has slept?’
- b. Ṣé Báyo tin sù
 Inter Bayo PERF sleep
 ‘Has Bayo slept?’

Nbó/nbí polar question marker is used interchangeably in Ọ̀hòrí. It is a bisyllabic polar question marker which has mid and high tones. *Òó* is another bisyllabic polar question marker which has low and high tones. *Ṣé* is a monosyllabic polar question marker. The examples in (1a, 2a & 3a) are declarative clauses while (1b, 2b & 3b) are polar interrogative counterparts.

4.2. Clause-Final-Marked Polar Questions

This form of polar question is realised by attaching a question marker to the tail-end part of a convergent declarative clause. The polar question marker that transforms declarative clause to interrogative clause is **dan**, as illustrated in (4) and (5).

- 4a. Ìlú nọ̀/kaẹ̀ rọ̀rùn.
Town DEF peaceful
'The town is peaceful.'
- b. Ìlú nọ̀/kaẹ̀ rọ̀rùn dan?
Town DEF comfortable Inter
'Is the town comfortable (to live)?'
- 5a. Àyínlá kọ̀ nọ̀ sọ̀jàà.
Ayinla NEG go LOC-market
'Ayinla did not go to the market.'
- b. Àyínlá kọ̀ nọ̀ sọ̀jàà dan?
Ayinla NEG go LOC-market Inter
'Did Ayinla not go to the market?'

The declarative clauses in (4a) and (5a) are converted to polar interrogative expressions in (4b) and (5b) by attaching the question marker **dan** to the tail-end of (4a) and (5a).

4.3. Split-Head-Marked Polar Question

This polar question in Ọhọ́rí consists of two question markers that are simultaneously attached to both the beginning and the end of a convergent declarative clause. The question markers employed for this form of polar questions in Ọhọ́rí are discontinuous markers just like split verbs in Yorùbá. They are **ńjẹ...lọ́dán** and **àbí...lọ́**. The first and the second pairs are bisyllabic items. This is illustrated in (6) to (9).

- 6a. Olú tin jẹ̀n.
Olu PERF eat
'Olu has eaten'
- b. Ẹ̀jẹ̀ Olú tin jẹ̀n lọ́dán?
Inter Olu PERF eat Inter
'Has Olu eaten?'
- 7a. Olú kọ̀ jẹ̀n.
Olu NEG eat
'Olu did not eat.'
- b. Ẹ̀jẹ̀ Olú kọ̀ jẹ̀n lọ́dán?
Inter Olu NEG eat Inter
'Did Olu not eat?'

- 8a. O fẹ fọ.
2SG want talk
'You want to talk.'
- b. Àbí o fẹ fọ lọ́?
Inter 2SG want talk Inter
'Did you want to talk?'
- 9a. Bọsẹ kọ sù
Bọsẹ NEG sleep
'Bọsẹ did not sleep.'
- b. Àbí Bọsẹ kọ sù lọ́?
Inter Bọsẹ NEG sleep Inter
'Did Bọsẹ not sleep?'

(6a-9a) are declarative clauses while (6b-9b) are polar interrogative constructions. The polar interrogative markers simultaneously appear in pre-clausal and clause-final positions in (6b-9b). However, *ńjẹ* and *àbí* cannot occur independently in Ọ̀họ̀rí. They must be accompanied with *lọ́dán* and *lọ́* respectively in clause-final position, as illustrated in (6-9) above. An attempt to decompose them will yield ill-formed constructions in Ọ̀họ̀rí, as shown in (10).

- 10a. Olú tin jẹ̀n
Olu PERF eat
'Olu has eaten.'
- b. *Njẹ Olú tin jẹ̀n?
Inter Olu PERF eat
- c. *Olú kọ jẹ̀n lọ́dán?
Olu NEG eat Inter
- d. *Àbí o tin dé?
Inter 2SG PERF arrive
- e. *Olú tin jẹ̀n lọ́?
Olu PERF eat Inter

Nevertheless, in Standard Yorùbá (SY), *ńjẹ* and *àbí* can independently express polar questions, as demonstrated in (11).

- SY**
- 11a. Ìgè n kàwé.
Ige PROG read-book
'Ige is reading (the book).'
- b. Njẹ Ìgè n kàwé?
Inter Ige PROG read-book
'Is Ige reading (the book)?'
- c. Àbí Ìgè n kàwé?

Inter Ige PROG read-book
'Is Ige reading (the book)?'

The data in (11b-c) show that *ńjẹ* and *àbí* expressed polar questions in SY but Ọ̀họ̀rí examples (10b-e) are ill-formed because the second pair/half of the polar interrogative markers, *lọ́ọ́dan* and *lọ́ọ́*, is absent there. From all indications above, it can be established that, there are six polar question markers in Ọ̀họ̀rí, which are *nbó/nbí*, *òó*, *sé*; *dan*; *àbí...lọ́ọ́*, and *ńjẹ ... lọ́ọ́dan*.

4.4. Co-occurrence of the Polar Question Markers in Ọ̀họ̀rí

The polar question markers that have so far been identified and illustrated can co-occur in Ọ̀họ̀rí speech acts. *Àbí ... lọ́ọ́* and *ńjẹ ... lọ́ọ́dan* cannot co-exist with pre-clausal and clause-final polar question markers since the first and second parts occupy the same syntactic domain with the pre-clausal and clause-final polar question markers. Pre-clausal polar question markers, e.g., *nbó/nbí* and clause-final polar question markers, *dan*, can collocate. The reason being that *nbó/nbí* occurs in pre-clause position, while *dan* features in clause-final position. This is illustrated in (12 & 13).

- 12a. Ọmọ tin sọ̀rọ̀.
Child PERF talk
'The child has talked.'
- b. Nbó/nbí/òó/sé ọmọ tin sọ̀rọ̀ dan?
Inter child PERF talk Inter
'Has the child talked?'
- 13a. Ojò kpò.
Rain heavy/much
'The rain is heavy/much.'
- b. Nbó/nbí/òó/sé ojò kpò dan?
Inter rain heavy/much Inter
'Is the rain heavy/much?'

Apparently in (12b & 13b), pre-clausal polar question markers co-occurred with clause-final polar question marker because they occupied different syntactic positions.

4.5. Structural Projections of Polar Questions in Ọ̀họ̀rí

Following the MP with an incorporation of Split-CP hypothesis of Rizzi (1997 and 2001), we assume that the projection of polar interrogative expressions is headed by an *Inter* which merges with tense phrase (TP) as complement to project interrogative phrase. The projection process of each of the polar question types in Ọ̀họ̀rí is discussed below.

4.5.1. The Projection of Pre-Clausal Marked Polar Questions

The analysis of pre-clausal marked polar questions shows that the polar interrogative head, *Inter*⁰, which is instantiated by the functional words *nbó/nbí*, *òó*, and *sé*, is externally merged with TP, which serves as its complement, to project this interrogative clause type, i.e., Merge (*Inter*⁰, TP) = [*Inter*P [*Inter* [TP]]]. The process does not involve any movement or internal merge. The structure of such polar question expressions in Ọ̀họ̀rí can therefore be captured in figure 1.

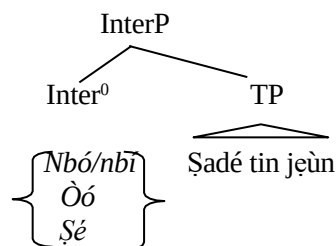


Figure 1: Tree Diagram Illustrating the Projection of Pre-Clausal Marked Polar Questions

4.5.2. The Projection of Clause-Final Marked Polar Questions

The analysis of the projection of clause-final marked polar questions shows that the functional head of the clause-final marked polar question merges with the TP which serves as its complement. However, it is observed that for **dan** as Inter head to check its specifier feature, it requires that the TP complement obligatorily raised to the specifier position of InterP to check specifier-head feature agreement, such that the TP will no longer be phonetically realised in its extraction site. This raising allows the Inter head, **dan**, to appear at the clause-final position as phonetic form of the polar interrogative expression. The raising of the TP is necessary to derive a well-formed clause-final polar question expression in Ọ̀họ̀rí. The Ọ̀họ̀rí Inter head, **dan**, linearly occurs after the basic clause/TP whenever it is used. If **dan** occurs before the TP, polar interrogative sense can never be realised in the language. Hence, it is expedient that the TP complement must raise to clause-initial position of InterP in order to derive a logical question construction in Ọ̀họ̀rí. The configuration below in figure 2 illustrates the syntactic projection.

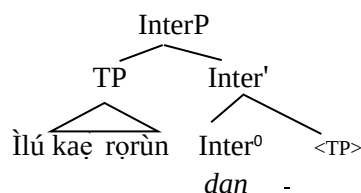


Figure 2: Tree Diagram Illustrating the Projection of Clausal-final Marked Polar Questions

4.5.3. The Projection of Split-Head-Marked Polar Questions

For the projection and analysis of split-head-marked polar questions, we assume, given the form and structural behaviour of the markers that, each of such interrogative expressions in Ọ̀họ̀rí is projected by a single but complex interrogative functional head which takes a negative clause expression (NegP) as complement. The complex Inter head in the process of its full projection splits into two-halves to sandwich its NegP complement for the intended question expression to converge, otherwise, the derived expression would crash. Given the complexity of the Inter head and the need to raise the NegP complement to the specifier position of InterP (i.e., Spec-InterP) to generate the question expression, the study proposed a complex InterP projection in which Inter projects a single but complex InterP, which splits and creates a specifier position in the lower half end of the split Inter head. This specifier relates as sister to Inter' of the lower Inter⁰ and doubles as landing site for the NegP complement when it moves. The configuration creates a Spec-Head

syntactic relation between Inter^0 and the specifier position which is required for feature checking in MP. Additionally, the single but complex Inter head proposal is syntactically conditioned in such a way that, each of the two-halves cannot independently project InterP in the language, neither can they occur side-by-side in clause-initial or clause-final position in Ọ̀họ̀rí logical interrogative expressions but must be splitted (such that one occurs in clause-initial position and the other in clause-final position of their complement) to project a single interrogative construction. The single but complex Inter head proposed here is similar to Yorùbá split verbs, e.g., *bà...jé* ‘to spoil/destroy’, *gbà...gbó* ‘to believe’, *tàn...jẹ* ‘to deceive’, etc. where the two-halves function as single verb in clause expressions. Besides, the *third factor principle* (TFP) in MP which suggests that beyond theoretical approach, innate linguistic knowledge, cognitive, and physical principles help in language processing supports the explanation of the structure proposed for split-head-marked polar questions in Ọ̀họ̀rí. The syntactic projection of split-head-marked polar questions in Ọ̀họ̀rí is therefore conceived as presented below in figure 3.

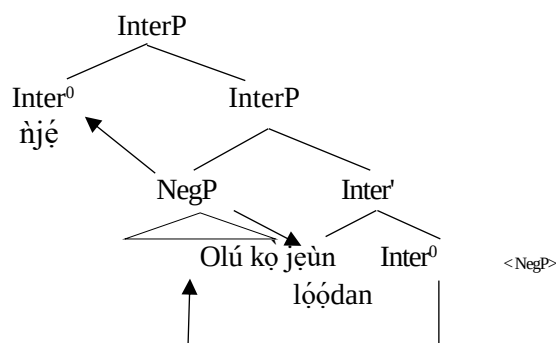


Figure 3: Tree Diagram Illustrating the Projection of Split-Head-Marked Polar Questions

In the tree diagram, the two arrows pointing at the two halves of the split Inter sub-heads indicate feature checking between the raised NegP occupying Spec-InterP and Inter^0 . The derivation converges since there is no feature mismatch as the output, *òjẹ Olú kọ jẹ̀n lóṣṣán*, is adjudged a well-formed question expression by Ọ̀họ̀rí native speakers.

5. Content Questions in Ọ̀họ̀rí

This section is set out to discuss content questions in Ọ̀họ̀rí. Therefore, content question also known as *wh-question*, is a type of question expression that requires full, detailed, and explicit response. Content question is a question that demands more than the response of affirmative or disaffirmative (Payne, 1997:342). In content question, a particular constituent is questioned, unlike in polar question where a whole basic clause or phrase is interrogated. Cross-linguistically, some phrases express content questions. These phrases are also available in Ọ̀họ̀rí, as discussed below.

5.1. Content Question Phrases/Words in Ọ̀họ̀rí

Like other languages of the world, most especially Kwa languages, content questions equally have designated operators (Ajiboye 2004; Adesola 2005; Ilorí 2017) in Ọ̀họ̀rí which express and

interpret such questions. The operators/phrases/words include *kó/ké* ‘what’, *lò/lè* ‘who’, *ìyẹ* ‘which’, *bó* ‘how’, *ìbì* ‘where’, etc., as exemplified below.

- 14a. Dàda rhí ewúẹ
Dàda see goat
‘Dada saw goat.’
- b. **Kó/ké** li Dàda rhí <kó/ké>
What FOC Dàda see
‘What did Dada see?’
- 15a. Ó jẹ iṣu min.
3SG eat yam 1SG-GEN
‘Sh/e ate my yam.’
- b. **Lò/Lè** li ó jẹ iṣu min <lò/lè>
Who FOC 3SG eat yam 1SG-GEN
‘Who ate my yam?’
- 16a. Kò ò jẹ eija abórhí.
NEG PROG eat fish heady
‘S/he does not eat heady fish.’
- b. **Ìyẹ** sí kò ò jẹ <ìyẹ>
Which FOC NEG PROG eat
‘Which one s/he is not eating?’
- 17a. Kò ò ẹ itjẹ́ lile.
NEG PROG to-do work hard
‘S/he does not do hard work.’
- b. Itjẹ́ **ì** sí kò ò ẹ <ìyẹ>
Work which FOC NEG PROG do
‘Which work is he/she not doing?’
- 18a. O wáné.
2SG come-home
‘You came home.’
- b. **Bó** li o ẹ wáné <bó>
How FOC 2SG do come-home
‘How did you come home?’
- 19a. Àṣàbí fi owó ẹ sínó àpò
Aṣabi put money 3SG-GEN LOC-inside bag
‘Aṣabi put/dropped her money in a/the bag.’
- b. **Ibì** sí Àṣàbí fi owó ẹ sí <ìbì>
Where FOC Aṣabi put money 3SG-GEN LOC
‘Where did Aṣabi put/drop her money?’

20a. Mò rha ẹiran.
1SG buy meat
'I bought the meat.'

b. **Eélo** li ẹ rha ẹiran <eélo>?
How-much FOC 2PL buy meat
'How-much did you buy the meat?'

21a. Ẹ jẹ ẹkpà méjì.
2PL eat yam two
'You ate two groundnuts.'

b. Ẹkpà **mélo** li ẹ jẹ <mélo>?
Groundnut how-much FOC 2PL eat
'How-many groundnuts did you eat?'

22a. Mò rha ẹija.
1SG buy fish
'I bought fish.'

b. Ẹija **kélo** li ọ rhà?
Fish how-many FOC 2SG buy
'How-many fish did you buy?'

23a. Ìwé min/ini wà nínọ àpò nné-ìwé.
Book 1SG-GEN is LOC-inside bag house-book
'My book is inside my school bag.'

b. Ìwé ẹ **fe?**
Book 2SG-GEN is
'Where is your book?'

24a. Ọmu ẹ nọ gbá bọ̀òlù
Child 2SG-GEN go kick ball
'Your child went to play ball.'

b. Ọmu ẹ **dà?**
Child 2SG-GEN is
'Where is your child?'

From the examples above, (14a-22a) are basic clauses from which (14b-22b) are derived. The content question phrase in (14b & 15b) has variants. The native speakers of Ọ̀họ̀rí use the two (**kó/ké** and **lò/lè**) alternatively. While focus marker **li** mostly followed other content question phrases above, content question phrases **ìyé** 'which' and **ibi** 'where' in (16b) & (19b) have distinct focus marker **sí** following them. It also appears in (16b) that Ọ̀họ̀rí employs content question phrase **ìyé** 'which' when there is no nominal item preceding it but when nominal item occurs before **ìyé**

‘which’, the native speakers of Ọ̀hòrí alternatively use *ìí* ‘which’ in (17b), which is realised via two phonological processes, deletion and assimilation, as shown below.

Base	Deletion	Assimilation	Output
ìyẹ́	ìyẹ́	ìé	ìí

The process shows that the voiced palatal approximant [j] in *ìyẹ́* ‘which’ is deleted. Thereafter, the vowel [é] is assimilated to the vowel [i], which later results to *ìí* ‘which’. As it appears in (14-22), the content question phrases originally found in-situ, after which they are raised from clause-final position to the left periphery position of the content questions. The content question phrases occurring in clause-final position as indicated above still express and interpret question reading in Ọ̀hòrí. This has been reported as echo form of question in the literature, which is equally available in Ọ̀hòrí. In terms of movement languages, if Ọ̀hòrí content question phrases are raised to ex-situ as shown in (14-22), it is obligatory that focus marker *lí* or *sí* must follow them to derive a convergent question expression that aligns with the word order in Ọ̀hòrí. If focus marker *lí* or *sí* does not directly follow content question phrases after raising to the leftward position, the question expressions will be ill-formed in Ọ̀hòrí. The implication of the content question phrases raising to the specifier position is that two syntactic heads: Foc and Inter, encode interrogative force (Aboh & Pfau 2011:96). However, contrary to Olumuyiwa (2015), Akanbi (2016), Omolewu (2017), Ojo (2022) and Olawuwo (2021), among others, content question phrases as shown in (14-22) are not interrogative markers/heads but nominal phrases/determiner phrases (Ilòrí, 2017:18-19) that syntactically and semantically express and interpret such expressions as questions. However, in universal grammar, determiner phrases (DPs) belong to the class of nominals and every nominal word (excluding short pronouns) can be focused in Ọ̀hòrí. The functional head of focus phrase in Ọ̀hòrí is *lí*. The *lí* head linearly follows focused phrase (nominal), as demonstrated in (25).

- 25a. Ọláewé rha ẹija
 Ọlaewe buy fish
 ‘Ọlaewe bought the fish.’
- b. [Ẹija] [lí [Ọláewé rhà <ẹija>]]
 Fish FOC Ọlaewe buy
 ‘Ọlaewe bought the FISH.’

The focused nominal phrase in (25b) is ẹija ‘fish’ which is raised from clause-final position to clause-initial position and directly followed by the focus marker *lí*. The same focus marker *lí* in (25b) equally occurs immediately after the content question phrases above (14b-15b & 20b-22b). This suggests that if the same focus marker *lí* directly follows the nominal phrase in (25b) to express focus construction, it translates that content question phrases linearly followed by the focus marker *lí* are nominal phrases and nominal phrases are DPs (Abney 1989). Besides, in question and answer approach, the focused phrase and content question phrases (DPs) occupy the same syntactic position in Ọ̀hòrí, as exemplified in (26).

- 26a. [Kó] li Ẹgbẹ́dá jẹ̀? [Content Question]
What FOC Ẹgbẹ́dá eat
'What did Ẹgbẹ́dá eat?'
- b. [Ẹija] li Ẹgbẹ́dá jẹ̀ [Answer/Focus Construction]
Fish FOC Ẹgbẹ́dá eat
'Ẹgbẹ́dá ate the FISH.'

The mapped content question phrase and focused phrase in (26a&b) respectively occur in clause-initial position and immediately followed by the focus marker *li*, which further establishes that content question phrases are DPs (Olaogun, 2018:8). Following this revelation, content question phrases are not interrogative heads in Ọ̀hòrí but nominal phrases (DPs) that interpret the constructions as interrogative. The question that quickly comes to mind then is that, where is the interrogative particle that instantiates and projects content questions in Ọ̀hòrí? This study claims that the interrogative particle/head that expresses and projects content question in the language is null/covert. Overt or null head is a universal idea in human language processing. Unlike Gungbe (Aboh 1998; Aboh & Pfau 2011), Njò-kóo (Olaogun 2018), etc., which have overt particle/head (apart from content question phrases) in their content question constructions, Ọ̀hòrí, like Igàlà (Ilorí 2017), Yorùbá, and other similar languages, operates null particle/head (aside from content question phrases) in their content question projection. This shows that while the content question phrases occupy the Spec-InterP and obligatorily take the focus head *li*, the null Inter head which projects InterP is above the focus head. If the focus head *li* which projects focus phrase (FocP) is absent in Ọ̀hòrí content question projection, the projection will crash. This simply implies that the Foc *li* and Inter (null) heads are crucial in expressing and projecting a single interrogative force in Ọ̀hòrí.

5.2. Phonological Rules in Ọ̀hòrí Content Questions

The data collected show that when Ọ̀hòrí is on normal speech rate, two phonological rules, deletion and assimilation, obligatorily apply on the focus marker *li* that occurs in Ọ̀hòrí content questions. Therefore, the consonant of the focus marker is elided and the remaining vowel /i/ is assimilated to the vowel of the content question phrases. For instance, the examples in (14b, 15b & 18b) above would be rendered in Ọ̀hòrí, as shown below in (27b-29b).

- Cf.27a. Dàda rhí ewúẹ
Dàda see goat
'Dada saw goat.'
- b. Kó o Dàda rhí?
What FOC Dàda see
'What did Dada see?'
- c. Ké e Dàda rhí?
What FOC Dàda see
'What did Dada see?'

Cf. 28a. Ó jẹ iṣu min.
3SG eat yam 1SG-GEN
'Sh/e ate my yam.'

b. Lò o ó jẹ iṣu min?
Who FOC 3SG eat yam 1SG-GEN
'Who ate my yam?'

c. Lẹ e ó jẹ iṣu min?
Who FOC 3SG eat yam 1SG-GEN
'Who ate my yam?'

Cf. 29a. O wáné.
2SG come-home
'You came home.'

b. Bó o o se wáné.
How FOC 2SG do come-home
'How did you come home?'

The focus marker *li* in (14b, 15b & 18b) changed and took the property of *o/e* in (27b-29b) after the two phonological rules.

5.3. Focus Markers in Ọ̀họ̀rí Content Questions

This section briefly clarifies the likely misconception about the number of focus markers in Ọ̀họ̀rí content questions. From the data presented in (14) to (29), it could be assumed that Ọ̀họ̀rí has three focus markers: *li*, *o/e*, and *sí*, in their content question expressions but the focus markers are just two, i.e., *li* and *sí*. We have established it in our explanations above that the underlying focus marker in Ọ̀họ̀rí content questions is *li*, but turns to *o/e* via phonological rules. The same *li* [+FOC] is employed in Ọ̀họ̀rí focus constructions (25b&26b). This means that *li* and *sí* are the focus markers in Ọ̀họ̀rí content questions.

6. Projections of Content Questions in Ọ̀họ̀rí

The projection of content question shows that since there is no visible/overt question marking particle in this type of question expression beside the operators which have been identified as DPs, we assume that the question marker in this kind of expressions in Ọ̀họ̀rí i.e., Inter⁰, is phonetically null. It is also assumed following works such as Aboh and Pfau (2011), Ilori (2017), Olaogun (2018), etc., that content question operators are not the function words that clause-type and project content question expressions in Ọ̀họ̀rí. The role of content question operators in the projection is that they are used to create a variable that ranges over a set of possible answers to such questions by being raised to specifier position of focus phrase (Spec-FocP) which in turn is raised to specifier position of InterP (Spec-InterP) via internal merge.

Following the data presented in (14-22) above, two possible syntactic processing can be employed to derive the projection of content question expressions in Ọ̀họ̀rí. In the first process, we assume that verb (V) merges with the content question operator that functions as object

complement of V to project verb phrase (VP). The derivation continues with the null T head merging with VP complement to project TP. Foc then merges with TP to project FocP. The derivation proceeds with Inter head, which has a null phonetic representation merging with FocP as its complement to project InterP. FocP is then internally merged (raised) to Spec-InterP to derive the convergent content question expression. The syntactic configuration of this derivation is illustrated below in figure 4.

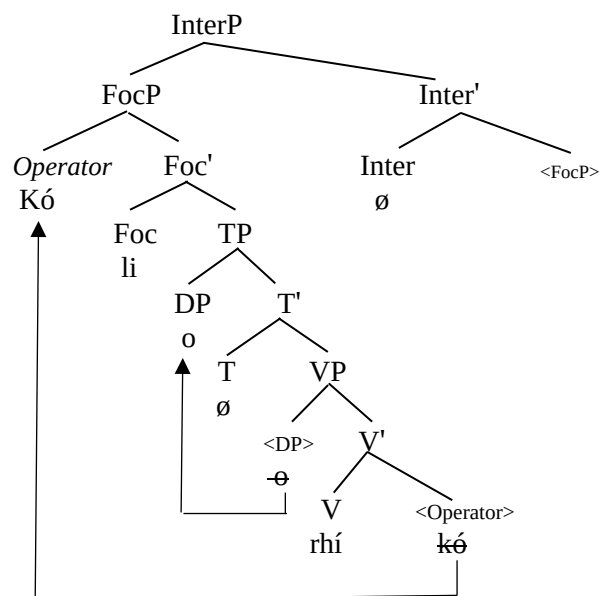


Figure 4: Tree Diagram Illustrating the Projection of Content Question

The second process which caters for the content question operators in clause-final position assumes that content question operators are pre-focused inside the matrix clause, i.e., FocP. Thereafter, V merges with the FocP serving as its complement to project a VP. The projection proceeds with FocP (containing both the content question operator and focus marking head) raised as a single constituent to Spec-InterP for Spec-Head feature checking. Thereafter, the null T merges with the VP serving as its complement to project TP. Inter, which has null phonetic representation, merges with the convergent TP to project InterP. Inter⁰ then attracts FocP to Spec-InterP to project the convergent question expression. This syntactic projection is illustrated in figure 5.

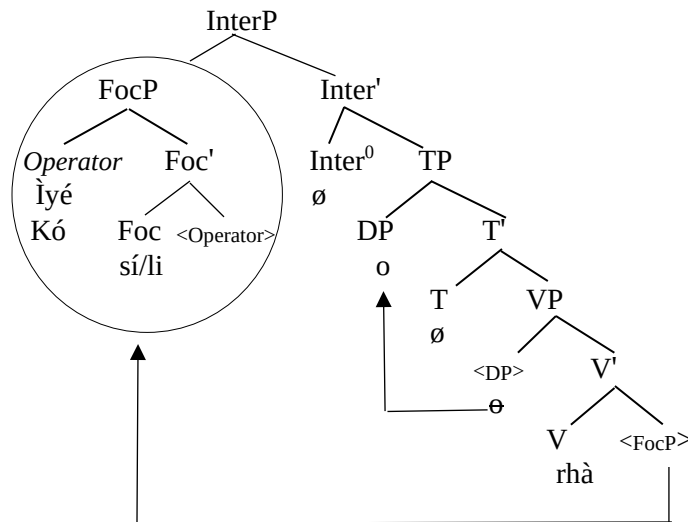


Figure 5: Tree Diagram Illustrating the Projection of Content Question

As diagrammatically shown in the two derivation possibilities presented in figures 4 and 5, content question operators/phrases only occupy Spec-InterP via raising/movement to contribute to the interpretation of the semantic content of questions. These derivational possibilities call Ọ̀lawuwo's (2021) claim, that question operators project content questions in Ọ̀hòrí, to question.

7. Conclusion

This study has critically discussed the two major question types - polar and content questions in Ọ̀hòrí. It claimed that there are three forms of polar question constructions in Ọ̀hòrí: pre-clausal, clause-final, and split-head. It showed that pre-clausal and clause-final polar question markers collocate in Ọ̀hòrí because they occupied different syntactic regions. It thereafter discussed the structural projections of the three polar question forms in Ọ̀hòrí. The article further examined content questions in Ọ̀hòrí. It argued that when Ọ̀hòrí is on normal speech rate, two phonological rules: deletion and assimilation, obligatorily apply on the focus marker *li* in Ọ̀hòrí content questions. It carefully examined focus markers in Ọ̀hòrí content questions and clarified that there are two focus markers available in the content questions of the language. The paper discussed the structural projections of content questions in Ọ̀hòrí and reaffirmed that content question phrases/operators/DPs are not Inter head/question markers but only filled the position of Spec-InterP in Ọ̀hòrí.

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