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Wh- questions in Shona

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Abstract

This paper tries an explication of wh-questions, also referred to as interrogatives, in Shona. A number of languages, including English, French and Buli, just to mention a few, have been noted to deal with question words differently. Shona belongs to the Bantu family and there are also studies that have so far been carried out on wh-question in other African languages (Igbo, Swahili and Sisotho) but a snap investigation of Shona has revealed that it deals with this aspect differently. I shall argue in this paper that when it comes to questions and question formation Shona has wh-movement, wh- in situ and it also has an enclitic, which functions in the same way as the Chinese question particle 'ma.' This paper seeks to analyze movement in direct questions as well as embedded wh-questions. The nature and reasons for movement are dealt with in this discussion. The results of this study go against the generalizations that wh-movement is binary therefore rendering this proposition untenable.

Keywords: Wh-movement, Wh-in situ, Question formation, Embedded clause

1. Introduction

The term Shona is used to indicate a definite language cluster belonging to the Bantu family. According to Guthrie's (1967) zonal classification of Bantu languages it is indigenous to the people of Zimbabwe but is also found in certain clusters in neighbouring countries namely, Botswana, Zambia, Mozambique and also as far as Malawi. This is zone S10 in which Shona also share a number of features with other languages of like nature (Ikalanga in Botswana and also Tawara and Tewe in Mozambique). Typologically Shona is an agglutinative language, which means that it uses a complex system of rules to morphologically add affixes to a base form each with a distinct meaning. For example:

1) famba (walk)

2) famb-is-a (cause to walk)

3) a-famba (someone walked)

4) a-ka-famba Someone walked in the past)

It is also important to note that this language has rich agreement marking which is influenced by the Noun classification system. The nouns in Shona (and other Bantu languages) are classified into 21 classes and this is based principally on meaning, singular-plural combination and agreement. In sentences verbs and adjectives have to agree with class prefix of the relevant noun and each class has its own concords which are attached to other words for agreement. Class examples are given here showing their prefixes and the nouns they include;

5) Class 1: mu- mukadzi, murume, mukomana (woman, man, boy)

   Class 2: va- vakadzi, varume, vakomana (women, men, boys)

6) Class 9: i- mbudzi, nyoka, imba (goat, snake, house)

   Class 10: dzi- mbudzi, nyoka, dzimba (houses, snakes, houses)

In example 5, Class 1 and 2 are based on meaning of the words which are nouns referring to people. The prefixes have control over the agreement when these nouns are used in a sentence as below; (I will here stick to Agreement Marker (AM) rather than the traditional distinction of Subject Marker (SM) and Object Marker (OM) to avoid unnecessary confusion).

7) **Mu**kadzi **a** – ka – on - a mombe.

   1woman AM Pst-see TV 10cattle

   'The woman saw cattle.'

8) **Va**kadzi **va** – ka – on - a mombe.

   2women AM- Pst - see TV 10cattle

   'The women saw cattle.'

The same is true for class 9/10 as shown in the example below;

9) Mbudzi **ya** – mw - a mvura.

9goat AM-drink-TV 9water

'The goat drank water.'

10) Mbudzi **dza** – nw – a mvura.

10goats AM-drink TV 9water

'The goats drank water.'

2. *Wh*-questions

A *wh*-question is basically a content question, as opposed to a 'yes/no' question. Borsley (1991) defines *wh*-question as a question involving a question word (or a *wh*-word) of some kind and required a more specific answer than just 'yes/no.' Radford (2004) notes that *wh*-questions or expressions are those that contain an interrogative word beginning with *wh*-like *what, which, where, when, who* and *why.* To this list *how* is also included based on the fact that it exhibits the same syntactic behavior as interrogative words beginning with *wh*-(Radford 2004:188). The whole concept of *wh-questions* is more regular than not dealt with in the description of *wh-movement* which refers to complex movement of the *wh*-word to the spec, CP within a clause. Radford (1997:18) defines this concept as a 'parameter which determines whether expressions can be fronted (i.e moved to the front position of the overall interrogative structure containing them) or not.' This is allowed and at times obligatory in English interrogative structures. As the examples below show, there is consistent fronting of the *wh*- structures.

(11) a. She saw Mary

b. She saw who?

c. Who did she see?

(12) a. She went to town.

b. She went where?

c. Where did she go?

It is clear that *who* and *where,* which replaced the verb complements in the echo questions in 11b and 12b, moved to the front of the interrogatives in the final structures 11c and 12c. Radford (2004) argues that the in situ questions in 11b and 12b are treated primarily as echo questions, to 'echo and question something previously said by someone else' (p.189).

It is important to clearly outline that there are also other *wh*-phrases which should not be confused with *wh*-questions. As Borsley (1991) notes the *wh*-phrases can be easily confused with other categories. The examples below show how the *wh*-phrases can function as other categories in English.

(13) a. [Which man] did you talk to? NP

b. [To which man] did you talk? PP

c. [How ill] has she been? AP

d. [How frequent] did she see you? AdvP

No attempt is made here to explain these cases for they are not really the core of the present discussion but they are just worth mentioning to avoid confusion in latter reference. Similar controversy also surrounds the treatment of "*that"* in some structures where it can substitute *wh*-words.

3. Question formation in Shona

Before I give examples of questions and probably a description of how they are formed, below is a list of the common question words in Shona.

ani	who
kupi	where
sei	how (and can also means why when fronted)
chipi	which
chii	what
rini	when
-i	why (enclitic)
here	a question particle (similar to the Chinese *'ma'* but only used in yes/no questions)

Before looking at the syntax of *wh*-questions it is also important to briefly look at the yes/no questions in Shona since they are known to preserve the canonical word order typical of declarative sentences (Ferreira and Ko 2003). Examples of yes/no questions are given below.[1]

(14) a. Wa – end – a kumba **here**?[2]

2singPst go TV 17home Q

'Did you go home?'

b. Wa - on - a mwana **here**?

2singPst see TV 1child Q

'Did you see the child.'

[1] As I have already noted Shona is agglutinative and as a result certain morphemes may represent two or more meaning in one reading. *Wa-* carries both past tense and the second person singular meaning. 2sing = second person singular; Pst= past tense; TV=terminal vowel; numbers before nouns represent noun classes;Q=question word;COP=copulative prefix.

[2] All the question words are going to be underlined and appear in bold throughout this account.

c. U - no - mu - d - a **here**?

2sing hab. AM love TV Q

'Do you love him/her?'

The above questions are not asking for a mouthful of detail and as such will just get a yes/no answer under normal circumstances. It is also clear from these examples that the canonical SVO word order of Shona is preserved. In this case Shona shows features similar to the Chinese way of marking questions. The examples in 14 above will be as 15 below in Chinese;

(15) a. Ni hui jia le ma?

2 return home pst Q

'Did you go home?'

b. Ni kan le haizi ma?

2 see pst child Q

'Did you see the child.'

c. Ni xihuan ta ma?

2 like him/her Q

'Do you like him/her?'

Now let me turn to the *wh*-questions. Below are examples of simple questions which involve a *wh*- word in Shona.

(16) Wa - on - a **ani**?

2singPst see TV who

'Who did you see?

17) Wa - on - a **chii**?

2singPst see TV what

'What did you see?'

18) Wa - end - a **kupi**?

2singPst go TV where

'Where did you go?'

19) Wa - end – a **sei**?

2singPst go TV how

'How did you go?'

20) Wa - on - a **chipi**?

2singPst see TV which

'Which one did you see?'

21) Wa - end - a **rini**?

2singPst go TV when

'When did you go?'

22) Wa - end - er -e - **i**?

2singPst go AppEx TV enclitic

'Why did you go?[3]

23) **Ndi - ani** wa - wa - on - a?

COP who Pst 2sing see TV

'Who did you see?'[4]

24) **Chii** cha - wa - on - a?

What AM 2singPst see TV

'What did you see?'

25) **Nde – kupi** kwa - wa – end - a?

COP where AM 2singPst go TV

'Where did you go?'

26) **Nde - chipi** cha - wa – on - a?

COP which AM 2singPst see TV

'Which one did you see?'

27) **Ndi – rini** kwa - wa- ka - end - a?

COP when AM 2sing Pst go TV

'When did you go?'

28) **Ne - mhaka yei** wa - end - a?

By reason what 2singPst go TV

'Why did you go?'

[3] AppEx=applied extension. Verbs in Shona can be extended by inserting morphemes between the verb root and the terminal vowel thereby deriving a new meaning to the root (Mkanganwi 2002).

[4] Note that in this case the 2sing and the Pst are separated though they are represented by the same morpheme *wa-*.

The above examples are different and they represent how Shona type its questions apart from the use of the particle or enlitic in the yes/no questions. Examples 16-22 are clear instances of *wh-in situ* while those from 23-28 show *wh*-movement. These two concepts are illustrated separately beginning with the *wh-in situ*. From examples 16-22 it is apparent that there is no movement of the question word from the NP position to which the question is referring. This is even clearer if a comparison is made between the declarative sentences and the interrogatives which are formed from them. I am here going to give the declarative sentence and its interrogative counterpart as (a) and (b) respectively. Examples 16-22 are repeated here as 29-35 for easy of reference. The underlined parts in (a) shows the place of what is being asked by the question word in the interrogative (b).

(29) a. Nda - on - a **John**

1singPst see TV 1aJohn

'I saw John.

b. Wa – on - a **ani?**

2singPst see TV who

'Who did you see?'

(30)a. Nda - on - a **munhu.**

1singPst see TV 1person

'I saw a person?'

b. Wa – on – a **chii?**

2singPst see TV what

'What did you see?'

(31) a. Nda - end - a **kumba.**

1singPst go TV 17home

'I went home.'

b. Wa - end - a **kupi?**

2singPst go TV where

'Where did you go?'

(32) a. Nda - end - a **ne - tsoka.**

1singPst go TV by 9foot

'I went on foot.'

b. Wa - end - a **sei?**

2singPst go TV how

'How did you go?'

(33) a. Nda - on - a chimwe **chinhu.**

1singPst see TV another 7thing

'I saw another thing.'

b. Wa - on - a **chipi?**

2singPst see TV which

'Which one did you see?'

(34) a. Nda - end – a **makuseni.**

1singPst go TV morning

'I went in the morning.'

b. Wa – end - a **rini?**

2singPst go TV when

'When did you go.'

(35) a. Nda - end – er - a **chikwereti.**

1singPst go AppEx TV 7debt

'I went for a debt.'

b. Wa - end - er - e - **i?**

2singPst go AppEx TV enclitic

'Why did you go?'

All these cases are simple interrogatives in Shona where the *wh-* word remain *in situ* in the DP position of the VP (which is the object position) and the canonical SVO word order of Shona is preserved in the interrogatives. These are also referred to as direct questions (Uwalaka 1990). Here Shona is in line with other languages like Chinese and Japanese which are said to have Logical form (LF) movement but no syntactic movement. LF, as outlined by Chomsky (1986), Lasnik and Uriagereka (1988), is similar to *wh-in situ* and they assume that all languages have LF movement. I am however, not going to dwell on LF here.

Radford (1997), referring to *wh*-movement, notes that this parameter appears to be one which is binary in nature, in that it allows for only two possibilities. That is, a language either allows or does not allow *wh*-movement. This has been noted to be true in English, only if echo questions are not treated as instances of *wh*-movement due to the fact that they are follow-up

questions. This claim seems not to be accurate with Shona interrogatives and also other Bantu languages of like nature. A closer look at the examples 23-28 given above with their declarative counterparts will shed some light. The examples are repeated here for clarity. The underlining shows where the *wh*-word is moving from in (a) and its destination in (b).

(36) a. Nda - on – a **John**

1singPst see TV 1aJohn

'I saw John.

b. **Ndi - ani** wa - wa - on - a?

COP who Pst 2sing see TV

'Who did you see?'

(37) a. Nda - on - a **munhu.**

1singPst see TV 1person

'I saw a person?'

b. **Chii** cha - wa - on - a?

What AM 2singPst see TV

'What did you see?'

(38) a. Nda - end - a **kumba.**

1singPst go TV 17home

"I went home.'

b. **Nde – kupi** kwa - wa – end - a?

COP where AM 2singPst go TV

'Where did you go?'

(39) a. Nda - end - a **ne - tsoka.**

1singPst go TV by 9foot

'I went on foot.'

b. **Sei** wa – end - a?

why 2singPst go TV

'Why did you go?'[5]

[5] It is not a mistake that when the *how* question word is fronted it becomes *why,* the issue will be taken up later in this discussion.

(40) a. Nda - on - a chimwe **chinhu.**

1singPst see TV another 7thing

'I saw another thing.'

b. **Nde - chipi** cha - wa – on - a?

COP which AM 2singPst see TV

'Which one did you see?'

(41) a. Nda - end – a **makuseni.**

1singPst go TV morning

'I went in the morning.'

b. **Ndi – rini** kwa - wa- ka - end - a?

COP when AM 2sing Pst go TV

'When did you go?'

(42) a. Nda - end – er - a **chikwereti.**

1singPst go AppEx TV 7debt

'I went for a debt.'

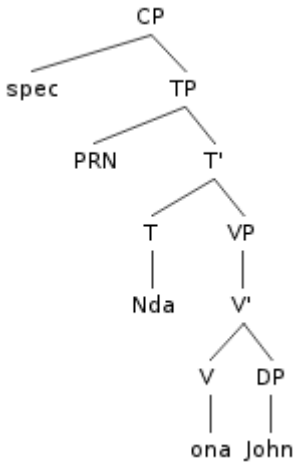
b. **Ne - mhaka yei** wa - end - a?

By reason what 2singPst go TV

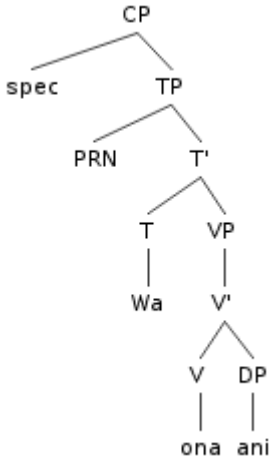
'Why did you go?'

If we are to compare this set of examples and that in 29-35 it is striking that the meanings are the same but there is a difference in syntactic structure. In all the examples from 36-42 there is evidence of movement of the *wh-* word. This movement is also called fronting because the word moves to the front of the structure in the interrogative sentence (Sun 2010:124). Contrary to Radford's claim about binarity, Shona allows for both possibilities of the *wh-* expressions. As I have noted, there is *wh-in situ* and now we have also seen there is *wh-*movement again. In movement of the *wh-* words it is clear that they leave their canonical position in the declarative to occupy a designated structural position for question words. The position they move to occupy is the Spec,CP in the interrogative. This can be diagramatically illustrated if we draw the three trees showing the declarative sentence, the *wh-in situ* and the one with a moved *wh-* word. Example 36 given above will be used here.

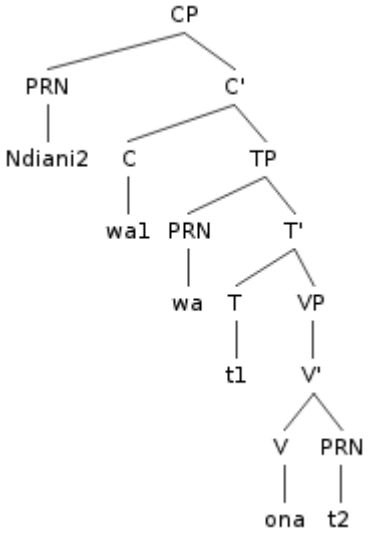
36a. Ndaona John.



36b. Waona **ani**?

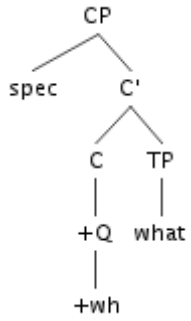


36c. **Ndiani** wawaona?



There is nothing much worth mentioning about 36a and 36b except that they show how the SVO word order of Shona is preserved when the *wh*- word remains *in situ*. However, 36c shows that there are two movements as marked by the traces in the tree. First, it is the T-to-C movement (which we are not going to focus on) and the second is the *wh*-movement. The T-to-C movement is represented by the first trace (t_1). The *wh*- word moves from the PRN position in the VP (marked by the trace t_2) all the way to the Spec, CP position (where it becomes *ndiani*). A question arising now is, what triggers or motivates such a movement and why is spec,CP the landing position. There are quite a number of explanations for this. According to Rizzi (1990) and Ning (1993) the head C in the declarative clause is featured [-wh] while that in the interrogative clause is characterized with the feature [+wh]. So simply, it is the [+wh] featured C which attracts the *wh*-phrase to move in interrogatives. In other words the *wh*-word is just moving to the nearest position to the C which has [+wh] feature and that position happens to be the spec, CP.

Wen (2002:232) notes that there are a number of reasons for this kind of movement. The first is that the spec, CP is a vacant holder generated by the X-bar schema for the moved element. The second reason is that spec,CP is a higher node in the structure to dominate the chain formed with the *wh*-phrase and its traces. The simplified tree below shows this.



As I have noted above the spec,CP is higher than the TP hence all the traces which the *wh*-word would have made can be dominated by this node. Spec,CP is also the nearest position in the structure to C which has the [+Q, +wh] features, thus it becomes the most favorable landing place for the moved element.

There is also very interesting phenomenon exhibited by the *wh*-word 'how' in Shona. If we compare examples 32a and 39a given above, we see that meaning changes when the question word is moved and the meaning becomes that of the '*why'* question word. The two sentences are repeated here for easy reference.

(43) a. Nda - end - a **ne - tsoka.**

1singPst go TV by 9foot

'I went on foot.'

b. Wa - end - a **sei?**

2singPst go TV how

'How did you go?'

(44) a. Nda - end - a **ne - tsoka.**

1singPst go TV by 9foot

'I went on foot.'

b. **Sei** wa - end - a?

why 2singPst go TV

'Why did you go?'

When the question word is in situ as in 43b there is no problem but when it is moved, in a similar fashion of the rest of the *wh*-words in Shona, there is a total change of meaning. The sentence remains an interrogative but it takes the meaning of the *'why'* question type as shown in 44b. We can thus conclude here that in Shona there is *wh*-movement of all other question words with the exception of *how* which can only occur *in situ*. This also means the *how* question word is ambiguous between the *how* and *why* meanings when it occurs in situ and fronted in Shona.

Another important point noted about Shona is that it also use an enclitic to type the *'why'* question *in situ*. The enclitic is an *-i* added at the end of the verb rendering it a *'why'* question. It has also been noted to work typically with applied extended verbs in this language. Sentences like the examples below show how the enclitic works to form the *'why'* questions.

(45) a. Nda - end - er – a mabhuku.

1singPst go AppEx TV 2books

'I went for the books.'

b. Wa - end - er - e - **i?**

2singPst go AppEx TV enclitic

'Why did you go?'

(46) a. Nda – dy – ir – a nzara.

1singPst eat AppEx V 9hunger

'I ate because I was hungry.'

b. Wa - dy - ir - e - **i**?

2singPst eat AppEx TV enclitic

'Why did you eat?'

There is also a process of vowel harmony taking place to change the original terminal vowels of the verbs in the declaratives. Of importance to note is also that when the *'why enclitic' (-i)* is moved or fronted to the beginning of the interrogative structure it changes into a question

phrase *nemhaka yei* 'for what reason' and the verb also drops the applied extension. The reason is simply that an enclitic cannot be formed at word initial position. Examples below show how 45b and 46b look like after *wh-* enclitic is fronted. The meaning is exactly the same (it is difference of the syntactic structure but the logical form is the same).

45c. **Ne - mhaka yei** wa - end - a?
By reason what 2singPst go TV
'Why did you go?'

46c. **Ne - mhaka yei** wa - dy - a?
By reason what 2singPst eat TV
'Why did you eat?'

3.1 Embedded wh-questions.

47a. Mukomana a – ri – kubvunza wa – on - a **ani.**
1boy AM Prog ask 2singPst see TV who
'The boy is asking who you saw.'

b. Mukomana a – ri - kubvunza **ndi - ani** wa - wa – on – a.
1boy AM Prog ask COP who Pst 2sing see TV
'The boy is asking who you saw.'

48a. Mukomana a – ri – kubvunza wa – end – a **kupi**.
1boy AM Prog ask 2singPst go TV where
'The boy is asking where you went.'

b. Mukomana a – ri - kubvunza **nde – kupi** kwa – wa – end – a.
1boy AM Prog ask COP where AM 2singPst go TV
'The boy is asking where you went.

49a. Ndi - no - d – a kuziva wa – it - a **chii**.
1sing Prog like TV know 2singPst do TV what
'I want to know what you did.'

b. Ndi – no – d - a kuziva **chii** cha - wa - ita.
1sing Prog like TV know what AM 2singPst do
'I want to know what you did.'

50a. Ndi - no - d – a kuziva wa – end – a **rini.**

1sing Prog like TV know 2singPst go when

'I want to know when you went.

b. Ndi – no – d - a kuziva **ndi – rini** kwa – wa – end - a.

1sing Prog like TV know COP when AM 2singPst go

'I want to know when you went.'

The above are examples of embedded clauses with *wh*-structure. The paired sentences have (a) as the in situ and (b) as the *wh*-movement representations. This kind of structure is also similar to others like cleft construction and relative clauses. So what do the *wh*- constructions in these structures tell us about movement constraints? Evidenced by these examples, we can say that the *wh*-word only moves within the embedded clause and cannot move to the initial position of the whole structure. Such a movement renders the sentence ungrammatical and unacceptable. 47b and 48b are repeated here to illustrate this point. 47c and 48c show that the long distance movement is impossible. The source and landing positions are shown by traces.

(47)b. Mukomana arikubvunza **ndiani**$_i$ wawaona t_i

'The boy is asking who you saw.'

b. ***Ndiani**$_i$ mukomana arikubvunza wawaona t_i

'Who boy is asking you saw.'

(48)b. Mukomana arikubvunza **ndekupi**$_i$ kwawaenda t_i

'The boy is asking where you went.'

c. ***Ndekupi**$_i$ mukomana arikubvunza kwawaenda t_i.

'Where the boy is asking you went.'

Movement is only allowed in the embedded clause. It is impossible to move the *wh*- from the embedded clause to the front of the embedding clause. In this case we can tentatively conclude that Shona supports short as opposed to long movement (Sun 2002:127). This could be a typical African languages phenomenon as it was also noted to apply to Tumbuka in Malawi (Kimper 2006) and Igbo in Nigeria (Uwalaka 1990).

4. Conclusion

A number of issues have been raised in this discussion which have implications for both Shona and the notion of *wh*-movement. As is expected with any language, Shona has yes/no questions which it marks using a question word *here*. We have also noted and proved beyond any reasonable doubt that this language has both *wh-in situ* and also *wh-movement* (fronting). This is a very important finding since it goes against what is in literature, particularly the claim by Radford (1997) that this parameter is binary. This claim is also refuted in another work carried out in Igbo, an African language of West Africa (Uwalaka 1988). Uwalaka notes that Igbo has both LF *wh*-movement and syntactic *wh*-movement. These two concepts are

like *wh-in situ* and *wh*-movement respectively. It was also found out in this analysis that the Shona 'how' word does not move. This discussion has also tried to explain what triggers the *wh*-movement, what the landing position is and how *wh*-words behave in embedded clauses. It is in this attempt that it was discovered that movement is restricted to the embedded clause. Thus we can conclude that Shona is a Short distance *wh*-movement language as opposed to Long distance *wh*-movement. This discussion is not exhaustive hence there is no doubt that further research in considered necessary on this aspect. This snap analysis of *wh*-movement in Shona is by no means exhaustive. There are still certain aspects that need to be looked into.this include a deeper research into the relationship between *wh*-words and their existence in other categories like NPs, AdvP and AP. There also need to say more on the T-to-C movement that we have not discussed in this paper.

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