

THE FORMS AND FUNCTIONS OF QUESTIONS IN DENYA

Samson N. Abangma
Linguistic Programme, English Department
University of Buea, Cameroon

This article sets out to describe the forms and functions of questions in Denya. It demonstrates that the functions questions perform in Denya are similar to, if not exactly the same as, those they perform in English and other languages. However, the devices Denya uses to encode these question types are different. In Yes/No questions, Denya uses tone change, a high-low on the last syllable of the sentence. This device is quite different from what happens in English. In this type of question, English uses distinctive word order (auxiliary inversion) and a distinctive intonation pattern (rising).

In alternative questions, for example, Denya uses an interrogative particle, *wá*, which functions like the English disjunct, *or*.

As regards question-word questions, this article establishes that Denya, like English and other languages, has a set of question-words. But they are used differently in the language. For example, English has a fixed position in front of the clause/sentence for those words, but Denya has a variable position for them. They either remain in the same position as the NP which they substitute for, or they are moved to clause-initial position. The reasons for this are pragmatic.

Of special note is the verbal suffix */-ge ~ -me ~ -ne/* which marks a clause where the question word occurs in clause-initial position, and where the same type of direct question is made direct by embedding.

La présente étude vise à décrire les formes et les fonctions des questions en denya. Elle démontre qu'en denya, les questions ont quasiment, sinon exactement, ou les mêmes fonctions qu'en anglais ou en toute autre langue. Toutefois, l'encodage des catégories de questions diffère en denya. Ainsi, les questions à caractère Oui/Non en denya emploient une variation tonale, un ton haut-bas sur la dernière syllabe de la phrase. Tel n'est pas du tout le cas en anglais. Car dans ce type de question, l'anglais fait recours à une structure phrastique bien définie (inversion de l'auxiliaire) et à une intonation particulière (montante).

S'agissant des questions alternatives, par exemple, le denya se sert d'une particule interrogative, *wá*, qui joue un rôle analogue à celui de la disjonction, *or*, en anglais.

Quant aux questions à mots interrogatifs, la présente étude prouve qu'à l'instar d'autres langues, le denya regorge de mots interrogatifs. Cependant, l'on note une différence dans l'emploi de ces derniers. A titre d'exemple, l'anglais les place au début de la phrase contrairement au denya où leur position est variable. Ils occupent soit la place du SN qu'ils représentent, soit la place en tête de proposition à laquelle on les a transférés. Les raisons pour ces différences sont purement pragmatiques.

Notons particulièrement le suffixe verbal */-ge ~ -me ~ -ne/* qui marque une proposition où un mot interrogatif figure en position initiale, et où une question directe de ce même schéma s'est transformée en indirecte par emboîtement.

0. INTRODUCTION

It is well-known that languages have different morphosyntactic devices to express what kind of speech act is being performed (Searle, 1970; Aqvist, 1965; Bach, 1971; Baker, 1970; Hudson, 1975; Hull, 1975; Keenan and Hull, 1973; etc.) Some languages use intonation or tone, distinctive word order or a particle to signal that a particular utterance is to be understood as a request for information rather than assertion, for example. The terms *interrogative* and *question* are often used interchangeably in the literature. Such usage is confusing and is avoided here. In this article we shall use the term *interrogative* to refer to a clause or sentence type functioning as a question, which exhibits certain morphosyntactic features that contrast with other clause or sentence types, such as declarative and imperative. The term *question* is reserved for the speech act or the function which one of the subtypes listed below performs in a given language or context.

So far as questions are concerned, different subtypes exist. The commonest ones amongst languages of the world are:

1. Yes/No or Polar questions.

2. Question-word or WH-word (information, content or constituent) questions.
3. Alternative questions.
4. Indirect questions.
5. Tagged questions (these will not be dealt with in this article).

After these preliminary remarks, the twofold purpose of this article may be stated. Firstly, it is shown here that the broad classification of questions into the above types is relevant to Denya.¹ This involves a detailed description of each type. Secondly, the functions of the different types of questions are illustrated in particular contexts. Throughout the article, effort will be made to point out similarities or differences between questions in Denya, and those in English or other languages, especially African ones.

The article may be summarised as follows: In Section 1, Yes/No questions will be considered. In §1.1, the form such questions take will be described, while in §1.2 their functions will be outlined and illustrated. Section 2 deals with question-word questions. Here, the set of question-words in the language is identified and described. Sections 3 and 4 will handle alternative and indirect questions, respectively. The paper ends with a summary and conclusion in Section 5.

1. YES/NO (ɛɛ, mm/mgba) / POLAR QUESTIONS IN DENYA

As noted earlier, Denya not only has information-seeking questions, but various kinds of rhetorical and didactic questions (Lyons 1977:755). Let us start with the so-called Yes/No questions.²

1.1 THE FORM OF YES/NO QUESTIONS

Yes/No Questions are questions to which we respond appropriately with the words *Yes* or *No* in English, or with **ɛɛ/mm** or **mgba** in Denya and their equivalents in other languages. Watters (2000) notes that in African languages, Yes/No questions most commonly involve only a question marker or morpheme at the end or beginning of the sentence. He cites the case of Linda³ (Cloarec-Heiss 1986:464), typical of many Niger-Congo languages that use question markers at the end of the sentence. The question marker **-a** is simply added.

- | | | |
|-----|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| (1) | a. <i>Assertion</i> | b. <i>Question</i> |
| | cè gú | cè gú à |
| | he/she arrived | he/she arrive QM ⁴ |
| | She arrived. | Did she/he arrive? |

Some languages use a rise in intonation⁵ at the end of the sentence, or a particle, also at the end of the sentence. In Denya, a Yes/No (**ɛɛ/mgba**) question is marked by

¹ Denya is an Ekoid Bantu language spoken in Akwaya Subdivision in Manyu Division of the South West Province of Cameroon. Often referred to in the literature as Anyang (see Grimes 1984: 146). Denya is a tone language with two register tones, high /' and low /`. Only high /' is marked. Combinations of these are marked /^ or /`. Denya is an SVO language with no subject-verb inversion.

² Jespersen's (1933:305) term for Yes/No questions is *nexus* questions. Cf. also Katz (1972:207).

³ Linda, Banda, Adamawa-Ubangi, Niger-Congo.

⁴ For the meaning of abbreviations used in examples, see the list on page 62.

⁵ In Hausa, the use of sentence final question markers requires intonation (Caron, 1991:34).

a change in tone. The question marker (QM) is a high-low (^) tone on the last syllable of the sentence. Consider the following sentences:

- (2) a. *Assertion (sentence ends with high tone)*

eva a-nyú-Ø

Eva 3sg-drink-PF

Eva drank.

- b. *Question*

eva a-nyû

Eva 3sg-drink.PF.QM

Did Eva drink?

- (3) a. *Assertion (sentence ends with low tone)*

eva a-nyu-u

Eva 3sg-drink-IMPF

Eva is drinking / Eva drinks.

- b. *Question*

eva a-nyu-û

Eva 3sg-drink-IMPF.QM

Is Eva drinking? / Does Eva drink?

- (4) a. *Assertion*

eva a-na-me nyié ndeé fí

Eva 3sg-buy-IMPF soon cloth today

Eva will buy cloth today.

- b. *Question*

eva a-na-me nyie ndeé fî

Eva 3sg-buy-IMPF soon cloth today.QM

Will Eva buy cloth today?

Notice that in all the (b) examples, the word order in the (a) examples is maintained. The difference between assertion and a question is clearly the tone change. This form for Yes/No questions is invariant.

1.2. THE FUNCTION OF YES/NO QUESTIONS

Many functions which Yes/No questions are attested to perform in English and other languages are found to be true of Denya. Some of these are described here.

1.2.1 To solicit information

This is the basic function and use of this type of question. Consider example (5) below.

- (5) a. **ǝ-na ndeê**

2sg-buy.PF cloth.QM

Have you bought cloth?

In this example, the speaker seeks to know if the addressee has performed a certain action. In other words, in this type of question, the speaker also seeks a comment on the degree of truth of the questioned proposition.

1.2.2 To request action

Negative Yes/No questions in Denya may be uttered where a request for action is what the speaker intends. Consider a situation where the speaker and the addressee are about to step out of the house to go to the market. The speaker asks the addressee the following question:

- (6) **ǔ-fé-né fǔ gepû**
 2sg-lock-IMPF NEG house.QM
 Will you not lock the house?

Although the addressee may answer by saying:

- (7) **εε, n-fé-ne**
 yes 1sg-lock-IMPF
 Yes, I am locking.

The question will generally be understood as a request for action. The Yes answer will be followed by the action of the locking of the house.

1.2.3 For rhetorical effect

Rhetorical questions usually do not require an answer. Consider a situation where two speakers A and B are involved in a conversation. After listening to A's story about his friend, B rhetorically asks him (8).

- (8) **mbə ne ji á-lû**
 like that him 3sg-is.QM
 Is that how he is?

Because A interprets this as a rhetorical question, he will continue to tell the story without bothering to say Yes or No (**εε** or **mgbā**).

1.2.4 To confirm information already possessed by the speaker

This is another context in which the purpose of a Yes/No question in Denya is not to seek new information. It may rather be interpreted as seeking confirmation of information already possessed by the speaker. Consider a situation where the speaker sees a friend cracking palm kernels, and asks him the question in (9).

- (9) **ɔ-te-ne amâ**
 2sg-crack-IMPF kernels.QM
 Are you cracking kernels?

Here, the question serves two purposes. The speaker clearly knows that the addressee is cracking kernels but he goes ahead and asks this question. What he expects as an answer is confirmation of the information he already has. This question may also serve as a type of greeting. In fact, greetings such as 'good morning', 'welcome' and 'goodnight' are usually expressed in the form of a Yes/No question. Consider the following examples:

- (10) a. *Assertion*
bií ú-giá
 day SP-dawn/break
 The day is dawning.
- b. *Greeting/Interrogation*
ú-giá
 SP-dawn.QM
 Is it dawning? *I.e.*, Good morning.
- c. **mm ú-giá ntô**
 yes SP-break/dawn also.QM
 Yes, is it dawning also for you?

When an Anyang person meets a stranger or a fellow villager coming from his farm, he must greet him.⁶ This is usually in the form of the following Yes/No question:

- d. **ś-cwś**
 2sg-come.PF.QM
 You come?
 Have you come? *I.e.*, Welcome.

Although it is a question which requires the answer **mm** ('yes'), it is interpreted as a greeting. Where there is such a situation and the exchange does not take place, it will be interpreted as an act of bad faith on the part of the person who ought to have greeted (that is, the man in the village, not the stranger or the person from the farm).

1.2.5 For emphasis or intensification

Another context in which questions in Denya do not serve mainly to give information is when they occur in certain texts, like narratives and procedurals. Consider the following text from Abangma (1987:98). The text from which it is taken is entitled "How Nkpéé Prevented His Divorce". This is a folktale, and the principal characters are Nkpéé and his wife, Anyi. He had lived as bachelor for a long time. When he finally got married, he decided to give certain laws⁷ to his wife. We are in that part of the story where Nkpéé is handing down the laws and frequently uses Yes/No questions, whose function is not soliciting information but rather for emphasis or intensification. Consider the following extract.

⁶ Greetings are a very important aspect of socialising among the Anyang people. They can be very tedious and demanding on both the speaker and the addressee. If you are a stranger or someone from the farm and pass in front of twenty or more people, each is expected to greet you and you are expected to answer every greeting.

⁷ The purpose of the laws was to prevent his wife from knowing his defect. Nkpéé has red buttocks and wants to conceal this fact from his wife. However, his drunkenness and his wife's forgetfulness caused her to learn the truth. She threatens divorce, but Nkpéé's cleverness outwits her and the divorce is called off. She is made to believe that all men have red buttocks, so there is no good trying to leave her husband for a man without red buttocks.

- (11) a. **ú-jíá**
 SP-dawns
 It is dawning
 One day
- b. **a-cwə-fye mende wuú mabé**
 SP-come-put.PF wife his laws
 he gave his wife some laws.
- c. **a-ké**
 SP-said
 He said,
- d. **émá m-belégé géjá né maa gepu wa**
 one SP-sleep.COND sleep in small house my
 Whenever I am sleeping in my room,
- e. **ə-ké**
 SP-said
 and you decide
- f. **ə-kpɛ-ne wíe**
 SP-enter-IMPF there
 to come in,
- g. **do menombi**
 knock.IMP door
 do knock at the door.
- h. **pó ɔ-wû**
 insist SP-hear.QM
 Have you heard?
- (12) a. **mende a-kame**
 wife SP-answered/agreed
 The wife agreed.
- b. **a-ma-fye ewi fó**
 SP-RA-put.PF another one
 He gave another law
- c. **a-ké**
 SP-said.PF
 and said,
- d. **jyɛ́ ne utuú ne ŋ-ké**
 even at night that SM-said.PF
 Even at night when I decide
- e. **m-bele-ge**
 SP-sleep-IMPF
 to sleep,

- f. **ɔ-ké**
 SP-said.PF
 and you decide
- g. **ɔ-cwɔ-kpɛ maá gepú wa**
 SP-come-enter small house my
 to come into my room,
- h. **ś-lwɛ-gé mewɛ ś-cwś ne éwú**
 SP-light-IMP.NEG lamp/fire SP-come.PF with it
 do not carry a lamp along.
- i. **pś ś-wû**
 insist SP-hear.QM
 Have you heard?

In the above extract, note that interrogative sentences are used in (11h) and (12i): **pś ś-wû**? The Yes/No question is prefixed by the insistence particle **pś**. The answer invariably will be **ɛɛ/mm** ('yes'). Nkpéé uses these questions to emphasise his point and to be answered by his wife that she has clearly understood the importance what he is saying. A detailed study of several texts will reveal subtle ways in which Yes/No questions function in the language. For the moment, we leave any further investigation of these issues for another study.

2. QUESTION-WORD/WH-WORD (INFORMATION, CONTENT OR CONSTITUENT) QUESTIONS IN DENYA

2.1 THE FORM

Question-word questions⁸ are those that expect a 'more elaborate response than simply an affirmation or disaffirmation' (Payne 1997:298). It has also been noted that most languages, if not all, have a set of special words that occur in question-word questions⁹. In English, for example, these words are often similar or identical to a set of pronouns used to refer to non-specific, non-identified entities.¹⁰

Denya also has these interrogative words, as the examples in (13), with their English equivalents, illustrate.

⁸ These types of questions are also known as WH-questions. This term reflects the fact that in written English the question-words nearly all begin with *wh* (Payne 1997:299).

⁹ A few languages (e.g. Hopi) might lack information questions entirely.

¹⁰ *Question Words* *Relative Pronouns*

who	who
whom	whom
what	—
where	where
why	why
when	when
which	which

(13)	<i>Category</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Denya</i>
	Pronoun	who	waá
	Preposition + pronoun	to whom	eta wá
	Nominal modifier	what	ndé
	Pro-adverb	why	ula únó
		where	éfó
	Pro-numeral/quantifier	how many	ú-níí
	Nominal modifier + noun	when/what time	ndé gébé

From (13), it is clear that Denya uses pronominal interrogatives like **waá**, **ndé**, as well as pro-adverbial interrogatives such as **éfó** ‘where’, **ula únó** ‘why’, and **ndé gébé** ‘when’. Denya also has an interrogative pro-numeral or quantifier **ú-níí**, ‘how many’.

Consider the following sentences containing **ú-níí**:

- (14) a. **bóó á-níí á-cwó-ó**
 person SP-how.many SP-come-PF
 How many people came?
- b. **á-níí á-cwó-ó**
 SP-how.many SP-come-QM
 How many (people) came?
- (15) a. **upú ú-kwé ú-níí**
 houses SP-fall SP-how.many
 How many houses collapsed?
- b. **ú-níí ú-kwe-né**
 SP-how.many SP-fall-QM
 How many collapsed?
- c. ***ge-pú ge-níí**
 house SP-how.many
 *How many house?
- d. ***muú á-níí**
 person SP-how.many
 *How many person?

It should be noted that **ú-níí** / **a-níí** can only be used with quantifiable plural nouns, never with singular forms or mass nouns. As illustrated above, (15c) and (15d) are both ungrammatical. Notice (15a) and (15b): in (15b) where **ú-níí** is front-shifted, the suffix **-né** is attached to the verb stem.

It is worth noting that **ndé**, ‘what’, as a nominal modifier, can be used in questions seeking information that involve periphrasis, as the following examples illustrate.

- (16) a. **ndé gébé / bí / ɲmɛ** what time / day / year
- b. **ndé mú** who
- c. **ndé mechó /genó** what (problem/thing)

From these examples (16a–c), Denya illustrates the claim often made that theoretically a language can get by with a single morpheme for questions seeking information.

If we return to the question-words listed above and consider these questions in the sentence cross-linguistically, we realise that languages fall into three broad categories. In English, we place the question-words *who*, *what*, *which*, etc. at the beginning of the sentence. In most African languages, Watters (2000) noted that these question-words remain in their subject or object (other) position in the basic word order, rather than being placed at the beginning of the sentence. In French (Kayne 1984), the question-word can be placed either at the beginning of the sentence or left in its basic position. In this connection, Denya is like French. In other words, in Denya, the placing of question-words at the beginning of sentences is an optional process, as it is in French. Consider the following sentences.

- (17) a. **eva a-gé waá**
 Eva SP-see who
 Who did Eva see?
- b. **waá eva á-gé-né**
 who Eva SP-see-QM
 Who did Eva see?

In Denya, these two sentences are interpreted as direct questions with more or less the same meaning. As mentioned earlier, the fronting of a question-word indicates that it is marked for focus. This is reflected in the form of the verb. Usually, the verb takes a suffix, which may be one of the following: *-ne* or *-me* if the verb stem is monosyllabic; and *-ge* if the verb stem is disyllabic.

Let us consider the English examples in (18).

- (18) a. John has seen whom?
 b. Whom has John seen?

In English, (18b) is a natural form question. The other, (18a), if interpreted as a question seeking information, is ill-formed as a surface form, but well-formed as the underlying form, since the word order is the same as in a declarative sentence. As a surface form it is well-formed as an echo or incredulity question requesting a repetition of the information given (see Permuter and Soames 1979:255). But questions requesting information must have the question-word front-shifted.

Bloomfield (1933) noted that in some languages, the placing of a question-word at the beginning of a sentence triggers morphophonological changes involving tone and affixation in verb morphology. This is true of Denya, whilst not being true of many other West African languages or of English. Examine the following sentences where the verb form in (19a), the declarative form, is identical with those in (19b-d) where the question word has not been front-shifted.

- (19) a. **eva a-na moto**
 Eva SP-buy.PF vehicle
 Eva bought a vehicle
- b. **eva a-na ndé**
 Eva SP-buy.PF what
 What did Eva buy?

c. **eva a-na waá moto**
 Eva SP-buy.PF who vehicle
 Who did Eva buy a vehicle for?

d. **eva a-na moto éfó**
 Eva SP-buy.PF vehicle where
 Where did Eva buy the vehicle?

Now note that in (20a–c), where the question word is front-shifted, the morpheme **-mé** is suffixed to the verb. We shall interpret this as a question marker that obligatorily appears in addition to the question word.

- (20) a. **waá á-na-mé moto**
 who SP-buy-QM vehicle
 Who bought a vehicle?
- b. **ndé eva á-na-mé**
 what Eva SP-buy-QM
 What did Eva buy?
- c. **éfó eva á-na-mé móto**
 where Eva SP-buy-QM vehicle
 Where did Eva buy a vehicle?

From the above examples note that the tonal pattern in (19b–d) is different from that in (20a–c).

In sentences where the interrogative word is not clause-initial, the tone on the subject prefix is low and therefore not marked. The main verb in its perfective form is identical to the stem. There are no affixes attached. That is why the verb forms in (19b–d) are the same as in (19a), a declarative sentence. Now, consider the sentences in (20a–c). All of these have the question-word phrase moved to the front of the sentence. Notice that the subject concord prefix (SP) has a high tone /**á**/ and the verb stem receives the suffix /-**mé**/.

2.2. FUNCTION OF QUESTION-WORD QUESTIONS

In Denya, as in other languages, question-words perform two essential functions:

1. They mark the clause/sentence as a question.
2. They indicate the type of information being requested.

Consider the following sentences.

- (21) a. **eva á-na nte wuú moto**
 Eva SP-buy father his vehicle
 Eva bought his father a car/vehicle.
- b. **waá á-na-mé nte wuú moto**
 who SP-buy-QM father his vehicle
 Who bought his father a car/vehicle?
- c. **ndé eva á-na-mé nte wuú**
 what Eva SP-buy-QM father his
 What did Eva buy for his father?

d. **waá eva á-na-mé moto eta wuú**
 who Eva SP-buy-QM vehicle for him
 For whom did Eva buy a car/vehicle?

e. **ula áno eva á-na-mé nte wuú moto**
 why Eva SP-buy-QM father his vehicle
 Why did Eva buy his father a car/vehicle?

Sentences (21b–e) are questions formed from the declarative sentence in (21a). Here, as in English, the presence of a question-word marks the clause as a question. In English, as noted earlier, such a word must occur obligatorily at the beginning of the clause, unless it is requesting a repeat of information. In Denya, the mere presence of a question-word marks the clause or sentence as a question. Consider the examples in (21b–e), and note that information questions present the rest of the proposition as old or presupposed information. If we take (21b), for example, we notice that it presupposes that someone gave his father a car, and we request the addressee to identify that person. Similarly, (21c) presupposes that Eva bought something for his father. The addressee is requested to identify the thing given. Thus, in each case, the new information is the request for the identity of the interrogated part of the sentence.¹¹ In Denya, when the question-word is clause-initial, it marks it for focus and topic. When the question-word remains in its normal position, then it marks topic only. Information questions in Denya behave just as in other languages by specifying a range in which the answer is to be found. In (21b–c), the interrogative words indicate which parts of the proposition the speaker is interested in knowing about. In other words, they help to determine whether it is the subject, object, verb or some other element of the proposition that the addressee is requested to supply so as to give a true proposition.

3. ALTERNATIVE QUESTIONS IN DENYA

These are questions which provide a list from which the speaker suggests the right answer might be drawn. In Denya, as in English, such a list may consist only of a proposition and its negation.

- (22) a. **ɔ-cwɔ-ɔ ne esé wá ʒ-cwɔ-ɔ**
 SP-come-IMPF with us or SP-come-IMPF.NEG
 Are you coming with us or you are not coming?
- b. **manaá a-kwé rafye wá ʒ-kwe wó**
 rain SP-fall outside or SP-fall NEG
 Did it rain outside or didn't it?
- c. **eva a-na nwe wá ʒ-na wó**
 Eva SP-buy book or SP-buy NEG
 Did Eva buy a book or not?

Notice the alternative marker, **wá**, which corresponds to the English conjoint *or*.

¹¹ The interrogated part of the sentence is often referred to as the FOCUS of the sentence. Since this is also what the sentence is about, the term TOPIC is applied to it as well (see Sadock et al., 1985: 185).

In the following example (25), the alternatives involve distinct predicates, which the speaker assumes are mutually exclusive.

- (23) a. **manaá a-kwe-ne wá ɲomeé ne é-tyee**
 rain SP-fall-IMPF *or* sun that shine
 Is it raining *or* is the sun shining?
- b. **eva ne á-nye-é wá éno**
 Eva that SP-eat-PF *or* Eno
 Is it Eva who ate *or* it is Eno?
- c. **eva a-fé wa a-jwólé ka**
 Eva SP-go.PF *or* SP-sit down
 Did Eva go *or* did he stay/remain?

In the propositions expressed by the sentences in (23a–b), the alternatives differ in one argument only. However, in each case, the idea of mutual exclusivity is definitely there. Notice that in (23a) and (23b) the complementizer **ne** differs from the QM in that the complementizer is a free morpheme while the QM, **-ne**, is a bound morpheme suffixed to the verb stem.

4. INDIRECT QUESTIONS IN DENYA

As can be seen in the examples below, Denya, like English, uses direct question words to embed direct questions as indirect questions¹² in a relative clause. Also, a generic noun followed by a complementizer is used as the head of the relative clause.

Compare the English examples in (24) and the Denya ones in (25).

- (24) a. What did Mary buy?
 b. Please tell me what Mary bought.
 c. He asked what Mary bought.
- (25) a. **ndé eva á-na-mé**
 What Eva SP-buy-QM
 What did Eva buy?
- b. **gáré me genó yi-gé eva á-na-mé**
 tell.IMP me thing that Eva SP-buy-QM
 Tell me what Eva bought.
- c. **a-giú me genó yi-gé eva á-na-mé**
 SP-ask me thing that Eva SP-buy-QM
 He asked me what Eva bought.
- d. **eno a-giú waá á-na-mé moto**
 Eno SP-ask who SP-buy-QM car
 Eno asked who bought a car.

¹² Also referred to as dependent interrogatives formed mainly in dependent clauses. They function as complements of the verbs of asking.

e. **eno a-gií éfó eva á-na-mé moto**

Eno SP-ask where Eva SP-buy-QM car

Eno asked where Eva bought a car.

f. **eno a-gií ndé gébé eva á-na-mé moto**

Eno SP-ask what time Eva SP-buy-QM car

Eno asked when Eva bought the car.

In (24a–c), the interrogative question word ‘what’ is used to gloss the three sentences. It occurs at the beginning of the embedded clause in (24b–c) as well as at the beginning of (24a).

Denya, unlike many other African languages,¹³ may or may not use the interrogative word in indirect questions. In (25b–c) one notes instead that, like English, a relative clause is used to embed the original direct question; but unlike English, a generic head noun **genó** ‘thing’ with the complementizer **yi-gé** is used to head the relative clause. Thus (25a) contrasts with (25b).

In (25b) and (25c), if **ndé** (‘what’) is substituted for the head of the relative clause, the sentence will not be grammatical. In examples (25d–f), the interrogative question words are used in indirect questions. What is important to note, both when **ndé** is used and when it is not, is that the verb suffix **/-ge ~ -me ~ -ne/** is retained to mark the fact that the generic head noun takes up the same clause-initial position as does a question word in a direct question.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

This paper has been a descriptive statement of the forms and functions of interrogative clauses in Denya. We have shown that these clauses principally perform the speech act of questioning. We have also been able to show that Denya has some grammaticalised means of specifying that a particular utterance is to be understood as a request for information rather than an assertion.

Two principal subtypes have been described in detail. These are the Yes/No questions and the question-word questions. As regards the former, we have shown that Denya is unlike English and many other languages. Intonation, word order, interrogative particles, etc., which are quite common in many languages, are not found to be important markers of Yes/No questions in this language. We demonstrated, however, that in Denya, a Yes/No (**εε / mgbá**) question is marked by a change in tone. The question marker is a high-low (^) tone on the last syllable of the sentence. The SVO structure of a declarative sentence is not affected.

As regards the functions of Yes/No questions in Denya, we noted that the many functions of Yes/No questions attested in other languages are found to be true of this language. Some of these include (a) soliciting information; (b) requesting action; (c) achieving certain rhetorical effects; (d) confirming information already possessed by the speaker; (e) greeting; and (f) adding emphasis or intensification. As regards the

¹³ Watters (2000:205) records that in East Africa a Bantu language like Swahili, an Ethio-Semitic language like Amharic and various Eastern Sudanese languages, such as Turkwa, use interrogative words in indirect questions.

last point, we illustrated from a text based on folklore. A study of texts is quite revealing so far as the use of language in discourse is concerned.

Turning to the other major question type, question-word questions, we demonstrated that Denya, like most languages, has a set of special words that occur in question-word questions. We showed that these words include pronominal interrogatives, pro-adverbial interrogatives, a nominal modifier and an interrogative pro-numeral. As regards the position of these words in the sentence, we showed that Denya is unlike English. English requires the question-word to be fronted obligatorily. Denya permits the fronting of question words as an optional process, pragmatically determined. We were able to illustrate that the placing of a question word in front of a clause triggers morphophonological reflexes in the verb piece, namely the addition of a suffix /-ge ~ -me ~ -ne/. This also occurs in Indirect Questions. WH-fronting is therefore not only attested, as with many other languages, but the addition of this morpheme seems to be an additional morphological change for Denya.

As regards the function of question-words questions, we stated that there are two principal ones. First, the question word marks a sentence as a question and secondly it marks the type of information requested. We claimed that in Denya, when the question is clause initial, it marks the information for topic and focus. However, when the question word remains in its normal position, it marks for topic only.

Another type of question which is very common in the language is the alternative question, which provides a list from which the addressee is to select the right answer. Denya uses *wa* as the marker of the alternative question. We have also illustrated that Denya, like most languages, has indirect question-words. Like English, the indirect question uses the interrogative word. However, it also uses a generic head noun qualified by a relative clause. This relative clause, like English, embeds the original direct question. More importantly, it should be noted that the verb suffix /-ge ~ -me ~ -ne/ is retained to mark the clause initial position of that head noun.

ABBREVIATIONS USED

COND	conditional
SP	subject concord prefix
IMP	imperative
IMPF	imperfective
NEG	negative
PF	perfective
QM	question marker
1sg	first person singular
2sg	second person singular
3sg	third person singular

REFERENCES

- Abangma, S. N. 1987. *Modes in Denya discourse*. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics and the University of Texas at Arlington.
- Aqvist, L. 1965. A new approach to the logic of questions: A philosophical study. University of Uppsala.
- Bach, E. 1971. Questions. *Linguistic Inquiry* 2:153–66.
- Baker, C.L. 1970. Notes on the description of English questions. *Foundations of Language* 6:197–219.

- Bloomfield, L. 1933. *Language*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Caron, B. 1991. *Le haoussa de l'Ader*. Berlin: Reimer.
- Cloarec-Heiss, F. 1986. *Dynamique et équilibre d'une syntaxe: le Bandalinda de Centrafrique*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Paris: Edition de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme for the Centre national de la Recherche scientifique (SELAF).
- Grimes, Barbara F. 1984. *Ethnologue: Languages of the world*. 10th ed. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- Hudson, R. A. 1975. The meaning of questions. *Language* 51:1-31.
- Hull, R. 1975. A semantics for superficial and embedded questions in natural language. In E. L. Keenan (ed.), *Formal semantics of natural language*, 35-45. London and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Keenan, E. L. and R. Hull. 1973. The logical presuppositions of questions. In Franck, D. & Petöfi (eds.), *Präsuppositionen in der linguistik und der philosophie*, 348-71. Frankfurt: Athenäum.
- Jespersen, O. 1933. *Essentials of English grammar*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Katz, J. J. 1972. *Semantic theory*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Kayne, R. S. 1984. *Connectedness and binary branching*. Dordrecht: Foris.
- Lyons, J. 1977. *Semantics 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Payne, T. E. 1997. *Describing morphosyntax: A guide for field linguists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Perlmutter, D. & S. Soames. 1979. *Syntactic argumentation and the structure of English*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.
- Sadock, Jerrold M. and Arnold M. Zwicky. 1985. Speech acts distinctions in syntax. In Timothy Shopen (ed.), *Language typology and syntactic description I: Clause structure*, 155-196. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Searle, J. 1970. *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Watters, J. R. 1979. Focus in Aghem: A study of its formal correlates and typology. In Larry M. Hyman (ed.), *Aghem Grammatical Structure. Occasional papers in Linguistics 7*. Los Angeles: University of South California.
- . 2000. Syntax. In Bernd Heine and Derek Nurse (eds.), *African languages: An introduction*, 194-230. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.