

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF WH-QUESTION IN MÀRGÍ

HANNATU MAI GADZAMA, PHILIP MANDA IMO H Ph.D & YAKUBU JACOB UMARU Ph.D

Abstract

This study examines Wh-questions in Màrgí. Màrgí belongs to Afro-Asiatic under the sub-family of the Chadic language and it is spoken in Nigeria and Cameroon. The study which is a syntactic analysis of the Màrgí wh-questions is essential in view of the role that questions play in the language. The data for this study were collected using interview, checklist and Màrgí language books such as the Màrgí Bible, Hoffman (1963), Dlibugunaya (1989, 1999, 2004) and Tranel (1992/94). The descriptive method of analysis was adopted in analyzing the collected data. The analysis of the data shows that, there are two types of wh-questions in Màrgí language which are the simple and the complex wh-questions. It has been revealed that wh-questions are formed in this language through the use of wh-question markers such as *wà* 'who', *mì* 'what', *úmàrí* 'where', *látú-*

màrí 'when', *àbàrí* 'how', *màrí* 'which' and *wàn* 'whom'. In the formation of the simple wh-question, the question markers can be moved from the object position in an anecho question to the spec position or before the auxiliary verb. In the formation of the complex wh-question, the Màrgí language exhibits pied-piping as its features as the wh-operator always move with the head of the phrase. This kind of movement is only permitted in the language within the embedded clause but not outside the clause. The study has uncovered the idiosyncrasy of Marga question formation processes and has also made its contribution to the on-going research on endangered languages in Nigeria, and the linguistic literature.

Keywords: Descriptive study, Marga language, movement, Wh-question and syntactic analysis

List of Abbreviations

X-Abstract symbol, PL-Plural, AGR-Agreement, ART-Article, 2SG-Second person singular, 3SG-Third person singular, PERF- Perfective, PST-Past tense, SPEC-Specifier, C-complement, CP-Complement Phrase, INTRROG-Interrogation, PRO-Pronoun, NP-Noun phrase, PP-Prepositional phrase, VP-Verb phrase, ADVP-Adverbial phrase, AUX-Auxiliaries, AGR-Agreement, TNS-Tense

Introduction

Greenberg's (1963) classification of African languages groups all the languages of Africa into four phyla, namely: Afro-Asiatic, Niger-Kordofanian, Nilo-Saharan and Khoisan. Màrgí

belongs to Afro-Asiatic under the Chadic sub-family of languages and is spoken in Nigeria and Cameroon (Williamson; 2002). It belongs to the minority language group spoken by approximately 303,000 speakers, which is critically endangered. The language is also highly under-described. The area of coverage has been limited to the Màrgí Babal dialect of the language spoken within Askira/Uba Local Government Area. This is because, the dialect is used as the standard variety of the language. This study serves to answer the question: "How are Wh-questions formed in Màrgí: *insitu* or *exitu*?" The study attempts to answer the question: "How are wh-questions formed in Marga language?"

Review of Related Literature Question

Question is a type of sentence used to elicit information or a response, and defined on three grounds of grammar, semantics and sociolinguistics. According to Crystal (2007), syntactically, in English, a question is a sentence with inversion of the subject and first verb is the verb phrase, for yes/ no such as

Kayjah International School, Abuja Email: hannatugadzama@gmail.com, Department of Languages and Linguistics Nasarawa State University, Keffi Email: philipimoh@gmail.com, Department of Languages and Linguistics Nasarawa State University, Keffi Email: umaruyakubu@nsuk.edu.ng

Corresponding Author
HANNATU MAI GADZAMA
E-mail: hannatugadzama@gmail.com

1. Is he going?
Commencing with a question word;
2. Where is he?
Or ending a question tag, for example;
3. He is going, isn't he?

Some would include the use of sentences with a raising intonation to be a class of question. Semantically, a question expresses a desire for more information usually requesting a reply from listener except rhetorical questions.

Aarts (2008) proposes that questions need not always be syntactically interrogative. This, according to her may not be for a question type that demands a yes/no response, because such question type is an utterance that has the force of a question and elicits yes/no response. Its syntactic form, according to Aarts (2008), can, but need not to be interrogative. Be that as it may, Aarts (2008) mentions that open questions are utterances that have the force of questions which elicit potentially infinite variety of answers. This, she exemplifies in the following data (4)

4. My auntlikes what?

Example (4) might be uttered in disbelief of someone.

One other type of question is what Aarts (2008) refers to as alternative question which is syntactically declarative. To her ((Aarts) 2008), it could be used in a situation in which a person hasn't quite heard what another person has said.

Another form of interrogative is the content word question popularly known as the Wh-question (Radford, 1988; Tallerman, 2005; Carnie 2007; and Yusuf, 2007). Radford (1988), Tallerman (2005), Carnie (2007) and Yusuf (2007) hold that Wh- questions are so called because in English, they begin with wh- word such as *what*, *who*, *where*, *which*, *why*, *when*, and also *how*. *How* is also classified as a **wh**-word because it exhibits the same syntactic characteristic as other members of the class. We use the names even for languages that do not have WH- because they use similar formats to derive the sentence type (S-type). The S-type simply codes the unknown information sentence- initially; *who* for person, *what* for thing, *when* for time, *why* for some reason, *how* for manner (Yusuf, 2008:118).

One way of thinking about Wh-question,

according to Tallerman (2007:218) is as follows:

- i. The phrase about which we are asking a question is first replaced by a suitable wh-word of wh-phrase.
- ii. That wh- word or phrase moves to a special clause – initial position leaving behind it a gap in the clause structure.

What constitutes a suitable wh- word, in the words of Tallerman (2007:218) depends on the category and properties of the original phrase. To her, an NP such as

5. that girl with a long scarf (a dependent clause) is replaced with *who* or *which* girl; an NP headed by an inanimate noun such as
6. that wonderful hand built bike(a dependent clause) or a non-human noun such as
7. the fearful dog. would be replaced by *what*, or *which* X

Many other languages, even those entirely unrelated to English also move wh-words and phrases to a similar clause initial position are given by Tallerman (2007:218) from Koromfe, Gur or Voltaic language of Burkina Faso as follows.

- 8 i. Alama pa vagakona mui?
Who: PL give dog the ART rice
'Who (PL) gave the dog rice?'
- ii. Sefudana a mane heí ?
when he see ART money the
'when did he find the money?'

However, while there is a permutation of content word sentence initially in many languages, there is no observation of the subject- Aux inversion as English does (Yusuf, 2007). Margi is not left out in the way and manner wh-questions are arranged.

Akinola (2003:754) reports that more of this type is attested in Yoruba, which moves a wh-constituent into S¹ followed by a focus maker but not a modal auxiliary as in the case of English. Examples:

- 9 i. Akin ni Bola ri?
what FOC Bola see
'It is Akin that Bola saw'
- ii Ta ní Sola fún?

who FOC Sola give
'Who did Sola give?'

interrogative such as **wà** 'who', **m̀ì** 'what', **m̀àrì** 'which', **l̀átù-m̀àrì** 'when', **ù-m̀àrì** 'where', and **à-b̀àrì** 'how'.

The Interrogative Operator *Wà*

Wà 'who' is an interrogative pronoun asking for [+human] nouns. The same form may be used for both nominative or accusative cases or as a qualifying noun in a genitive construction or after a qualifying noun or after prepositions. It may be pluralized by attaching the suffix **-yàr** (**wà-yàr**) when interrogating a plural number. This is exemplified in the following examples (12) below.

12 a. **Wà nduwà?**

say who

'Who said so?'

b. **Wàyàrngə?**

who be 3PL?

'Who are they?'

From the data above (12), it is evident that **wà** in M̀àrgí can come before and after the verb positions as seen in (12b): **Wà yàrngí?** 'Who are they?'

13 a. **Nàjà lár G̀àdzámá**

3SG see.PST G̀àdzámá

'S/he saw G̀àdzámá'.

b. **Wà lár Nàjà?**

who see. PST 3SG

'Who did s/he see?'

The process in (13) is further illustrated in fig (1) below.

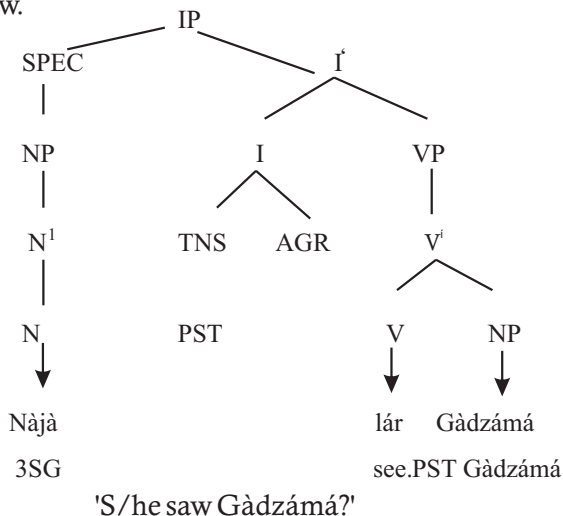
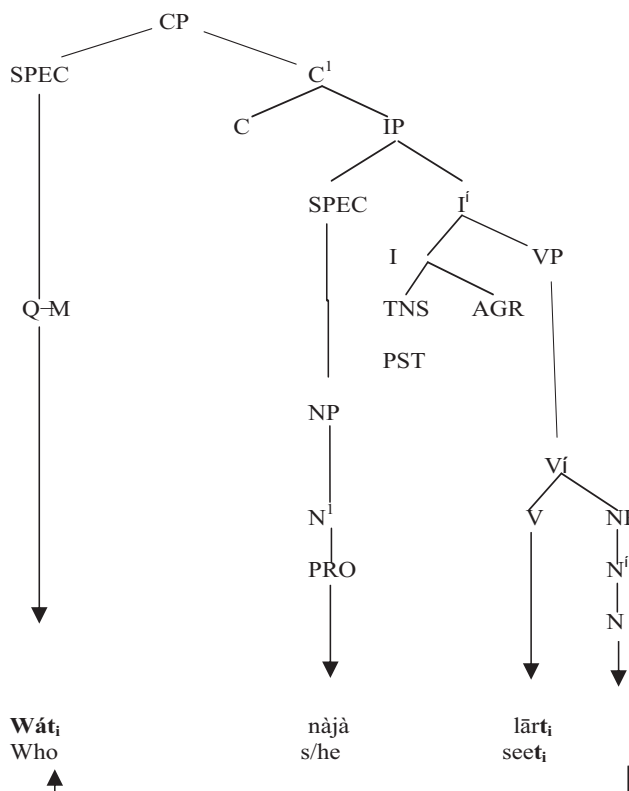


Fig 1 'S/He saw G̀àdzámá?'

The basic sentence in Fig 1 can be interrogated as exemplified in Fig. 2 below.



'Who did s/he see?'

Fig. 2 Who did he see?

Figure (2) **nàjà lár G̀àdzámá** 'S/he saw G̀àdzámá?' and (4.2) **Wà lár Nàjà?** 'Who did he see?' above show that there is movement of wh-element **Wà** 'who' from the NP position within IP to SPEC. In figure (2), **Wà** 'who' which is positioned within the NP within IP has been moved to the SPEC position under CP. The moved wh-word **Wà** 'who' leaves a trace (t_i) as shown in figure (2) above.

The Interrogative Maker *M̀ì*

M̀ì in M̀àrgí is an interrogative pronoun, asking for a thing (- animate noun). It may be used as a subject or object, as a qualifying noun in a genitive construction or after prepositions. Examples: (14).

a. **M̀ìn d̀əgə?**

what say.PST 2SG

'What did you say?'

b. **Nàjà gə m̀írá?**

2SG look.PST INTERROG
'What are you looking for?'

- c Nàjà à írmírá?
3SG do.PST INTERROG
'What did he do?'

(15)

- a Ápəgú dílbá **múntsú**
Ápəgú buy.PST hoe-PL
'Ápəgú bought hoes'

- b. MìÁpəgúdílbá?
what Apagu buy.PST
'What did Apagu buy?'

To show the presence of wh-movement as illustrated in (14 & 15) in the language, they are further diagrammatically represented in fig (3) and (4) below.

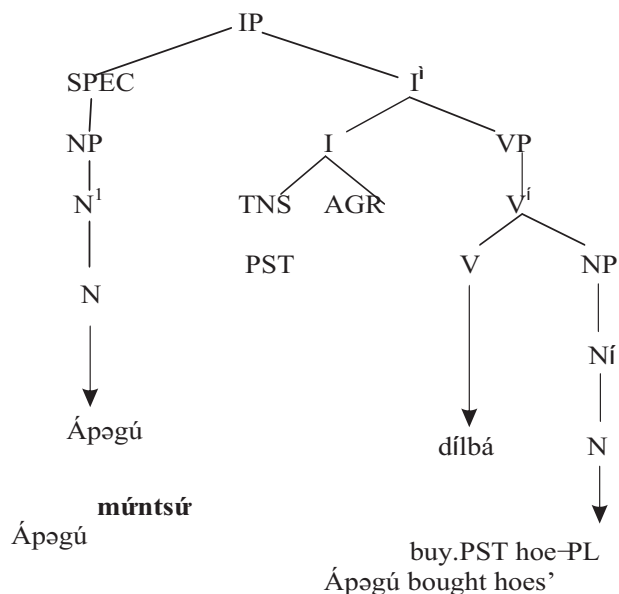


Fig.3 'Ápí gú bought hoes'

Figure (3) *Ápəgúdílbámúntsú* 'Ápəgú bought hoes' and (4) *MìÁpəgúdílbá?* 'What did Apagu buy?' The above data show that there is movement of wh-element *Mì* 'what' from the NP position within IP to SPEC. In figure (4), *Mì* 'what' which is positioned within the NP under IP has been moved to the SPEC position under CP.

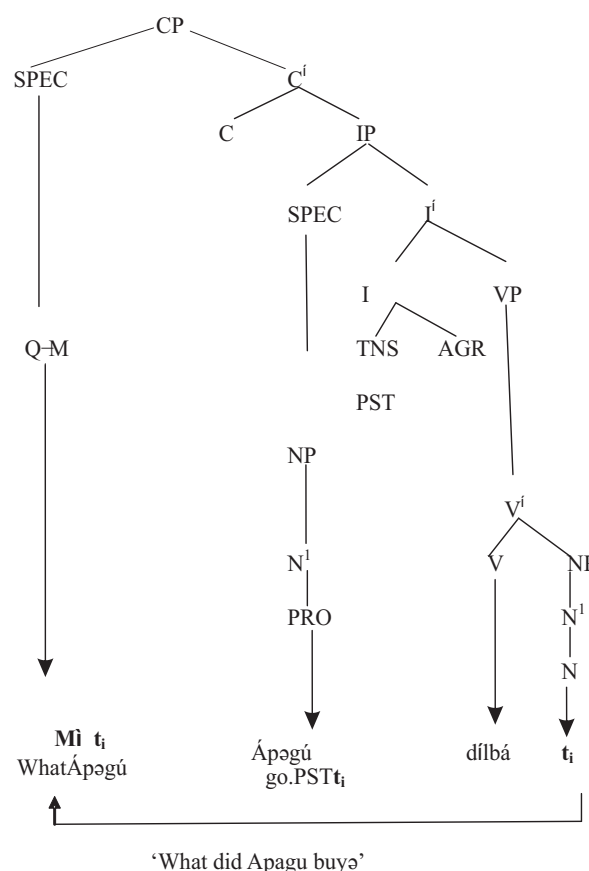


Fig.4 'What did Apagu buy?'

The Interrogative Marker *Màri*

The interrogative *màri* is either used as a pronoun 'which one' or as an adjective after a noun. The non-final form of *màri* is *màr*. Examples like *wà* and *mi, màri* require a relative clause with *dà* if it appears initially. Although, normally, it occurs after the predicate, examples are seen in (16a) and (17b) below.

(16)

- a. **Màri** naja yərá?
which 2SG want INTERROG
'Which one do you want?'

- b. *Màlà màr* naja yərá?
woman which 2SG want INTERROG
'Which woman do you want?'

(17)

- a. *Síbiâm lár kúr*
Sibiam see.PST goat
'Sibiam saw the goat'

- b. **Màri** Sibiám lár?
 which Sibiam see.PST
 'Which did Sibiam see?'

To show the presence of movement in the language, the following examples will be diagrammatically represented in figure 5.

Figure (6) *Sibiámlárkúr* 'Sibiam saw the goat' and (6) *Màri Sibiámlár?* 'Which did Sibiam see?' above show that there is movement of wh-element **Màri** 'which' from the NP position within to outside SPEC. In figure (6), **Màri** 'which,' is positioned within the NP within IP has been moved to the SPEC.

The Interrogative Marker *Látúr-màri*?

The word **látúr** (time) and **màri** (which) in Màrgí are the usual way to express 'when' which is an interrogative marker asking for the time. Examples to show the presence of movement in the language are diagrammatically represented in figure 7 & 8 below.

- (18)
- a. Nàjà mái **nàjà**
 3SG go.PST yesterday
 'He/She went yesterday'
- b. **Látúr-màri** Nàjàmái?
 when go.PST 3SG
 'When did she go?'

Fig.8 When did she go?

Figure (1.7) *Nàjà mái nana* 'S/he went yesterday?' and (1.8) *Látúr- màri Nàjà mái?* 'When did h/she go?' above show that there is movement of Wh-element **Látúr-màri** 'when' from the NP position within IP to SPEC. In figure (1.8), **Látúr-màri** 'when' which is positioned within the NP within the IP has been moved to the SPEC position under CP.

The Interrogative Marker *Úmá(w)ri*?

Úmári is an interrogative adverb meaning 'where' (position or destination) or from where? Its non-final form is **umwàr**. Consider the following examples (19a & b).

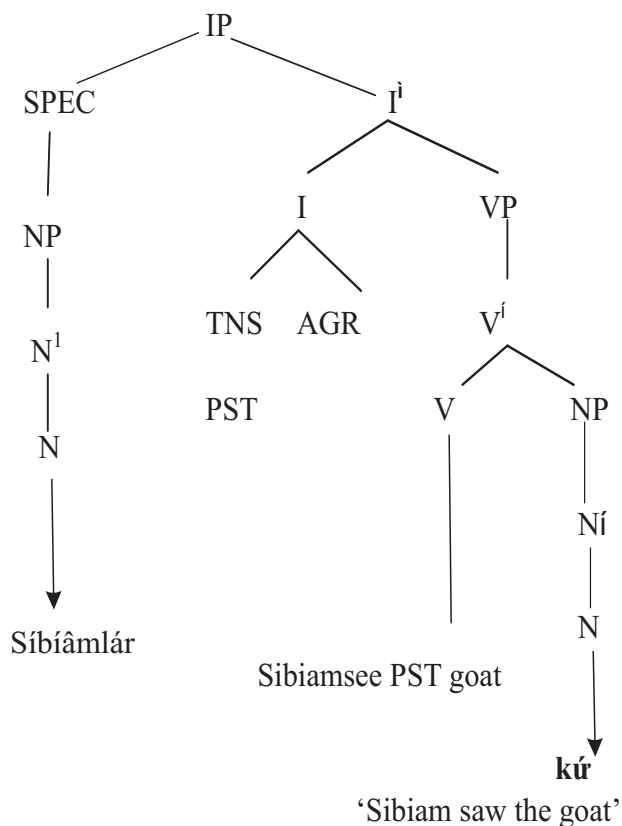


Fig. 5 'Sibiam saw the goat'

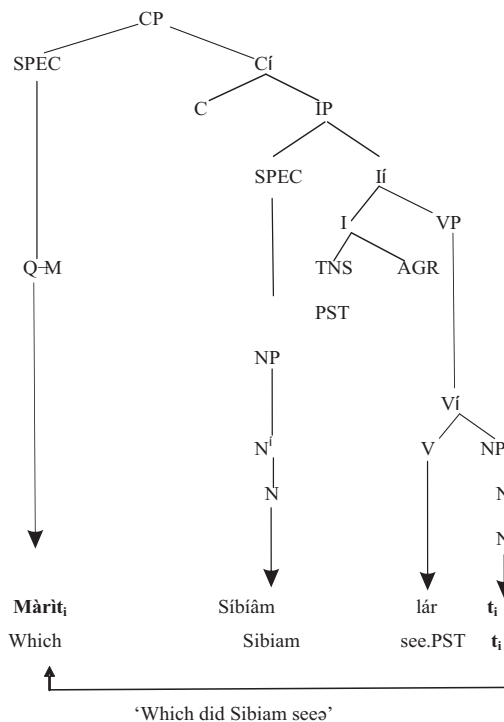


Fig.6 'Which did Sibiam see?'

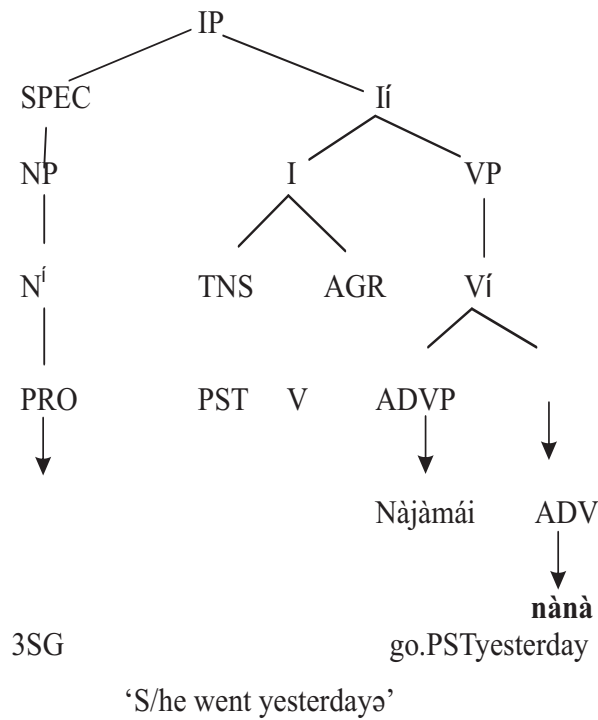


Fig.7 S/he went yesterday?

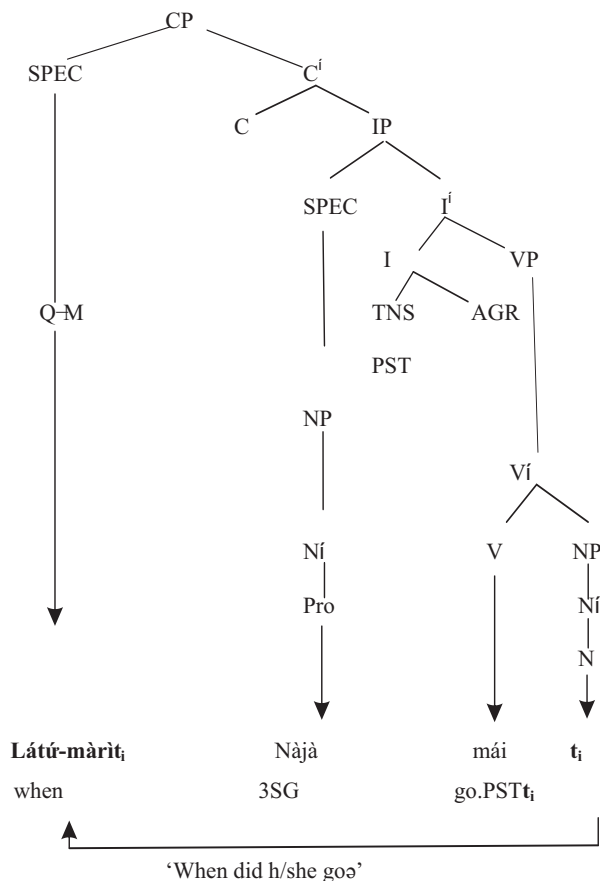


Fig.8 When did she go?

(19)

a. Úmáí?

where

'where?'

b. Úmáírmjìyàrrá?

where 3PL DEM INTERROG

'Where are they?'

(20)

a. Jàkráí à máídəməkàrantà

Jàkráí s/he go.PST to school

'Jàkráí went to school'

b. ÚmáíJàkráí à máí?

where Jàkráí s/he go

where did Jàkráí go?

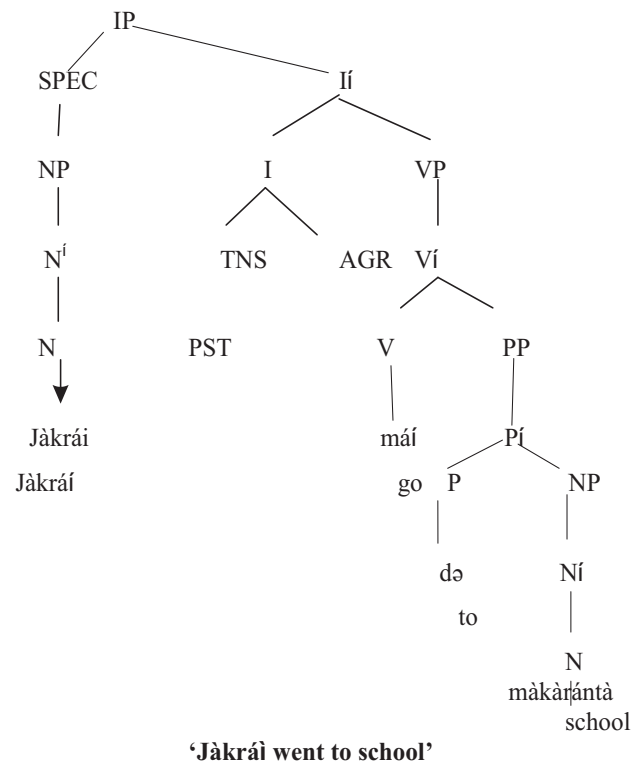


Fig.9 Jàkráí went to school

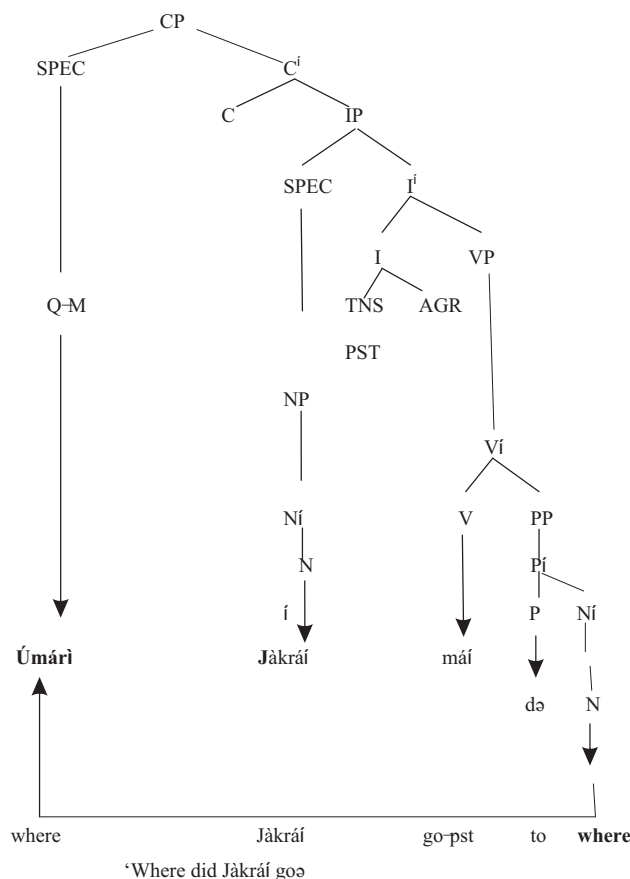


Fig. 10 'Where did Jàkrài go?'

Figure (10) *Jàkrál à máldurmàkàràntà* 'Jàkrál went to school' and (10) *Ūmàrí Jàkrál àmál?* 'where did Jàkrál go?' above show that there is a movement of Wh-element *Ūmàrí* 'where' from the NP position within to outside SPEC. In figure (10), *Ūmàrí* 'where' which is positioned within the NP under the IP has been moved to the SPEC position under CP.

1.8 The Interrogative Adverb *Àbàrí?*

Àbárí? is an interrogative adverb 'how'. Its non-final form is **àbár**. It is treated in a similar way with the other interrogatives. This is exemplified in the following data 21 & 22.

(21)

- a .Àbàrí dà?
how 3PL
'How are you?'

b. Àbárkyí?

how house
'How is the family?'

(22)

- a. Jápárisínýákàkàì ú
Jápárieat.PST quickly
'Jápárieat hurriedly'
- b. ÀbàrìJápárisínýá?
how Jápárieat.PST
'How did Jápárieat?'

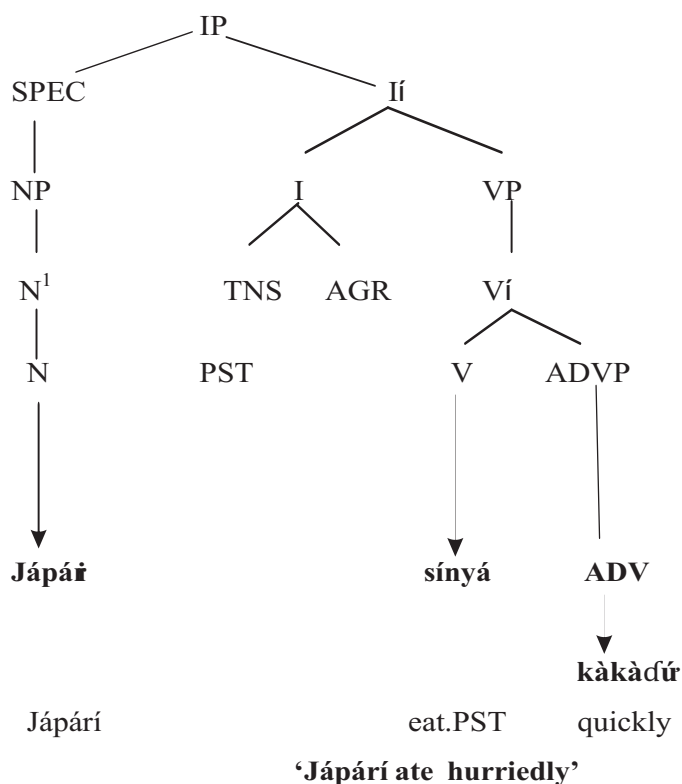


Fig.11 Jápári ate hurriedly

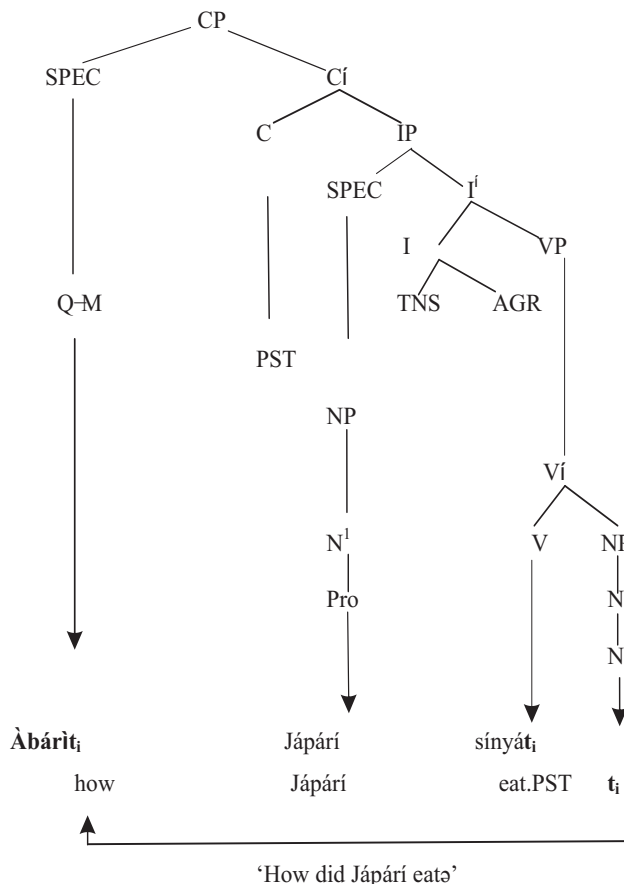


Fig.12 How did Jápári eat?

Figure (12) *Jápári sínyá kàkàì ú* 'Jápári ate hurriedly' and (12) *Àbàrí Jápári sínyá?* 'How did Jápári eat?' above show that there is movement of wh-element *Àbàrí* 'how' from IP to SPEC. In figure (12), *Àbàrí* 'how' which is positioned within IP has been moved to the SPEC position.

The Complex Wh-Type

This type of Wh-movement involves the combination of the Wh-word and other lexical items which constitute part of the wh-constituent as the head of the sentence to have what is called the wh-sentence. Structural examples of wh-phrases in Màrgí include N + mí, N + wà, N+ màrì. Examples of complex Wh-question types are shown below.

- (23) [Máwímàrì]_i gàtsíyát_i? (NP)
 animal which 2SG kill
 'Which animal did you kill?'

- (24) [Látúmàrì],dítìláráshìlìt? (NP)
time what king AUX come

'What time will the King come?'

- (25) [Anúdúmàrì]_inyùrándírì? (PP)
to man which 2SG talk
To which man did you talk?

- (26) [Glàngààbàri] _i Pálmátà _t? (Adv. P)
 ill how is Pálmátà
 How ill is Palmata'

From the above data (23-26), wh-movement in wh-questions is linked to the presence of a wh-word. In Mārgí, it is natural that what moves or what triggers the movement is the wh-word. In complex wh-type, when the wh-phrase moves, it moves the whole phrase as seen in examples 21-24 above. However, to show clarity in this movement, a trace has been left to show the extraction and the landing sites. The above is similar to what Koopman, Sportiche and Stabler (2011) refer to as *pied-piping* where something bigger than the element triggers movement. That is, the wh-word alone cannot move without the larger phrase moving. This is also common in Mārgíwh-possessive question formation as shown in (27) as follows:

- (27)
- a. Mádù bilná **ntámguwà**?
Mádù break.PST pot whose
'Whose pot did Madu break?'
- b. **Ntámgu wà** du Madu bilná?
pot whose did Madu break
'Whose pot did Madu break?'

Also, under this type of wh-question in Màrgí are embedded structures with wh-words known as the embedded wh-questions. Examples of the embedded wh-questions in Màrgí language are furnished with examples 28-29 below.

- (28)
- a. Nàjà yúkùjàdzání **mì** ,nàgàddbát.
- 3SG want to know what you buy. PST
'He/she wants to know what you bought'

- b. Nàjàyúkùjàdzánìnàgàdìlbámì
3SG want to know 2SGbuy.PST what
'He/she wants to know what you bought.'

(29)

- a. Síbiamájáwìlátú-màrì,nàgàmáit,
Sibiam AUX ask.PRESS when 2SG
leave.PST
'Sibiam is asking when you left'
- b. Síbiamájáwìnàgàmáilátú-màrì
Sibiam AUX ask 2SG leave when
'Sibiam is asking when you left'

Examples 28 & 29 are instances of embedded clauses with wh-structure. The paired sentences have (28.a.) **Nàjàyúkùjàdzánì m̀ì, nàgàdìlbátì**, 'He wants to know what you bought?' as the wh-movement and (28b) **Nàjàyúkùjàdzánìnàgàdìlbámì** 'He wants to know what you bought' as the in-situ. It is evident from the examples above that the M̀argi language embedded wh-structure exhibits a short distance movement as the wh-word does not move outside the embedded clause; **nàgàdìlbámì** to have **m̀ìnàgàdìlbá** hence we can say that the wh-word only moves within the embedded clause and cannot move to the initial position of the whole structure to derive an interrogative. Any such movement renders the sentence ungrammatical and unacceptable. To prove this claim, the sentences have been repeated to show that long distance movement is impossible. The launching and the landing positions are shown by traces.

Discussion of Findings

This paper has presented a syntactic analysis of wh-questions in M̀argi. M̀argi wh-question markers are introduced by the wh-question markers **wà** 'who', **m̀ì** 'what', **úmárí** 'where', **látú-màrì** 'when' **àbàrí** 'how' and **wàn** 'whom'. Non-echo questions in M̀argi are the basics of which the surface structure is formed through transformational processes. Wh-questions are formed in this language through the use of transformational processes such as the movement of the wh-question markers or operators. It is clear that the wh-question formation in M̀argi involves transformational movement that leaves a trace. The movement in this case involves the wh-question markers moving to the front

(fronting), that is SPEC, CP in the interrogative. The result also reveals that wh-questions in M̀argi are of two (2) types; the simple type which are **m̀ì** 'what', **wà** 'who', **úmárí** 'where', **látú-màrì** 'when', **àbàrí** 'how', **màrì** 'which', **wàn** 'whom' and the complex type which involves the combination of the wh-word and other lexical items and serves as the head of the phrase called the wh-phrase. Also established is the fact that pied-piping which is a feature of the complex wh-type exists in M̀argi as the wh-operator always moves with the head of the phrase, it has been clearly seen that, if the wh-operator moves without the head, it leads to violation of the chain uniformity principle (a chain must be uniform with regard to phrase structure status).

In wh-questions, two movement principles have been observed in the language for derivation of interrogatives from declarative sentence, these principles are the Aux-N inversion rule and the second is the application of the wh-movement rule that moves an interrogative constituent from its base position to string initial position of a sentence. It has also been seen that every wh-question in M̀argi must have a wh-question marker irrespective of their positions (in-situ or subject) must occupy the specific position as seen in the diagrams. This research also points to the fact that M̀argi has two interrogative sentences, the word questions and sentence questions. In word questions **wà** 'who' **m̀ì** 'what' **màrì** 'which' are interrogative pronouns asking for a + human. They can be used as a subject or object, as a qualifying noun in a genitive construction or after a qualifying noun in genitive constructive, **màrì** 'which' however is used for a pronoun 'which one' or as an adjective after a noun for instance, **Kàkàdúmárí** book which 'which book?' while **úmárí** and **látú-màrì** are adverbs of time and place respectively.

It is noteworthy that in M̀argi, all the wh-question markers appear in the same position in the surface structure, that is, before and after the VP respectively. The researchers also attest to the fact that M̀argi wh-question markers are fronted because the wh-word moves to SPEC to interrogate a sentence. It also shows the extraction and the landing sites of wh-question markers in M̀argi. The launching site represents the canonical position of the wh-word before its movement to occupy a

designated structural position for question words. The position they move to is SPEC, CP in the derived interrogative structure.

References

- Aarts, B (2008). *English syntax and argumentation*. England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Akinola, B. (2003). more on Wh-questions in Yoruba: A GB approach. In Ndimele, O.M. (Ed) *Four decades in the study of linguistics in Nigeria, a festschrift for Kay Williamson*. 743-760. NINLAN.
- Carnie, A. (2007). *Syntax: A generative introduction*. Oxford: Willie Blackwell
- Crystal, D (2007). *A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics*. UK. Blackwell
- Dlibugunaya, A. (1989). A comparative study of the verbal systems of Hausa and M̀àrgí. Unpublished M.A. Thesis. Department of Languages and linguistics, University of Maiduguri.
- Dlibugunaya, A. (1999). Towards the standardization of M̀àrgí language: *Maiduguri Journal of Linguistics and Literary Studies Vol. I*
- Dlibugunaya, A. (2004). Some aspects of M̀àrgí phonology: A non-linear approach to the analysis of M̀àrgí Dzakwa dialect. Unpublished Ph.D dissertation. Department of Languages and linguistics, university of Maiduguri.
- Greenberg, J. H. (1963). *The languages of Africa*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Hoffmann, C. (1963) *A grammar of the M̀àrgí language*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Radford, A. (1988). *Transformational grammar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tallerman, M. (2005). *Understanding syntax*. England: Hodder Education
- Yusuf, O. (2007). Syntax . In Yusuf, O (Ed). *Basic linguistics for Nigeria languages teachers*. 95-130. Port Harcourt: M & J Grand Orbit communication Ltd.