
Wh-Question Formation in Ékìd

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ABSTRACT

*This paper aimed at examining the basic sentence structure and question-word questions in Ékìd, by determining the sentence patterns and syntactic analysis of question-word questions in Ékìd. A descriptive research design was adopted for the study; and the X-bar theory was deployed as the theoretical framework for data analysis. Data for the analysis were drawn from the central Ékìd via elicitation. Analysis reveals that, question-word questions in Ékìd are commonly derived from declaratives by replacing the subject or object of the declarative constructions with appropriate question-words. In addition, analysis reveals that, in the case of wh-movement (i.e. interrogative word movement or movement of a question word), the interrogative word can be base-generated at the subject position which requires no movement; but another instance where the interrogative word is base-generated at the object position, it can be moved to the left periphery of the sentence; and once it is moved, it is obligatorily followed by the marker ké 'did' (verb to **DO**), and also leaves a gap (t_i) on its base-generated position. the question-word of a subject question-word question requires no fronting. This work serves as a tool for further research on the aspect of syntax in Ékìd.*

KEYWORDS: Language, Wh-Question and Wh-fronting

Introduction

Language is seen as a basic tool for communication. The use of language for communication determines how information is transferred from one person to another. In the study of language, the information is structurally arranged and semantically classified based on the meanings they convey. In other words, the information comprises different linguistic features which include sounds, morphemes, words, phrases, clauses and sentences. in the aspect of information as a sentence constructed and conveyed according to the grammar of a language, it is therefore structurally

constructed with meanings; and it may thus contain phrase and/or clause. Sentences are structurally governed by the rules of the languages being spoken.

Structurally, a sentence may comprise one or more clause and may be divided into simple, compound or complex forms, based on the number of clauses it contains; also, sentences can be classified into basic types according to their meanings and functions in discourse which traditionally include the four major types – statements, questions, commands (directive sentences) and exclamations (Leech, 2006, p.104, 105). The statements are declarative clauses; the commands are imperative clauses; the questions are interrogative clauses; and the exclamations are exclamative clauses (Leech, 2006, p.106). In the aspect of questions, which are described as interrogatives, an interrogative construction is the one in which the hearer is requested to provide information about something. In other words, interrogative constructions are expressions which are used in asking questions (cf. Ndimele 2003, p.183).

A question is a type of sentence or clause which has an information gap (for example, in *when did you post the letter?*, the information gap is the time at which the stated event occurred) (Leech, 2006: p.97). Questions are of major types which are: *s*-questions, yes-no questions and alternative questions. Hence, this paper examines the sentence structure and *wh*-questions (question-word questions) in Ékɪd.

Linguistic Classification of Ékɪd

Ékɪd is the name of a language likewise the name of the speakers of the language (cf. Adiakpan, 2006, p.96). Ékɪd is spoken as the main and dominant local language in Eket Local Government Area (LGA) (likewise in Esit Eket LGA) of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, which occupies the South Central portion of Akwa Ibom State, by a population of about 172, 557 (male: 88,635; female: 83,922) according to the 2006 result of the National Population Census. Ékɪd language is closely related to Ibibio, Efik, Anaang, Oro and Ibuno languages. It has dialectal differences with Ibibio and other Lower Cross languages, and there is unidirectional intelligibility between Ékɪd and Ibibio. Ékɪd language has two varieties: Ékɪd and Esɪd Ékɪd, spoken in Eket and Esit Eket LGAs respectively.

Genetically, according to the linguistic classification of languages, Ékɪd belongs to the Lower Cross subgroup family of the Delta group of the Cross River sub-branch of the New Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo sub-family (Williamson, 1989). According to Connel (1994), the Lower Cross group spans three Nigerian states in this coastal region - Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Cross River, as well as the international frontier to the Isangele sub-division of South-Western Cameroon. More recent classification has placed Ékɪd in the Lower Cross group of the Cross River sub-branch of proto Benue-Congo of the Niger-Congo phylum (Williamson and Blench 2000).

Research Methodology/Theoretical Framework

This research adopted the qualitative research design which involves the use of both primary and secondary sources. The primary source involves collection of data by elicitation method from six competent adult (three men and three women, between the ages of 50 and 65) native speakers of Èkìd, who have resided in Èkìd all their lives; while the secondary sources comprise relevant textbooks, journals, related research projects and articles from the internet and library for effective literature review.

The theoretical framework adopted in this work is Government and Binding (GB) theory of syntax. The GB theory is a theory of syntax in the tradition of transformational grammar propounded by Noam Chomsky in the 1980s, and was later revised in the Minimalist program (1995). The 'GB' refers to the two central sub-theories of the theory: government (G), which is an abstract syntactic relation; and binding (B), which deals with the referential expressions (Haegeman, 1994). According to Haegeman (1994), GB was the first theory to be based on the principles and parameters model of language, which also underlies the later development of the minimalist program. The GB model of analysis has two levels of representation which assume different statuses: the deep structure (D-structure) and the surface structure (S-structure). The D-structure is where all elements in the sentence are in their original location, while the S-structure refers to the point indicated by trace (t_1). The GB theory as a system of principles comprises some sub-theories which are: Government Theory, Binding Theory, Bounding Theory, Control Theory, Case Theory, Theta Theory and X-bar Theory. This research adopts the X-bar theory for analysis because of its relevance to this work.

Wh-Question (WHOs)

A *wh*-question is a question that contains interrogative pro-form (a pro-form that is used in questions to stand for the item questioned); and it is also known as content question, question-word question and information question (cf. Crystal 1980: p.294, 383).

Wh-questions, are questions which are used to elicit information, using *wh*-words (question words) without asking for yes or no response and are often called open questions because they leave room for a description or opinion and are more useful in eliciting information. In English for instance, there are eight *wh*-words which include: what, when, where, which, who, whom, whose and why and to these eight *wh*-words, „how“ is being added because it also elicits a particular kind of information without demanding for yes or no response (cf. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1999: p.240, 241, 248 & 249).

The fact that „how“ is also added to the eight *wh*-words in English, Radford (1981, p.146) verified the issue by stating that, „...despite the fact that *wh*-questions involve

the use of interrogative words beginning with *wh*; *what*, *who*, etc; *how*, can also be classified as a form of *wh*-questions since it exhibits the same syntactic behaviour as other members of this class”.

Wh-questions focus on particular parts of sentences (not generally on the whole sentence), either on the subject or predicate. *Wh*-questions come in two basic varieties: those where the information gap is in the predicate; and those where it is in the subject (e.g. *what is that?* and, *who are you?* respectively). With a predicate information gap, the word order becomes Object-Verb-Subject (OVS) whereas in a subject information gap, the Standard English word order, Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) remains intact (cf. <http://www.glossary.sil.org/term/whquestion>; Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999: 240 - 242).

***Wh*-Questions about a Subject (*Wh*-Subject Questions)**

These are WHQs that ask about the subject of a sentence and are commonly derived from declarative sentences. When the subject of a declarative sentence is questioned, no fronting or inversion rule applies (because it has already been fronted) and the subject is simply converted or replaced with the appropriate *wh*-word (cf. Crystal, 1997, p.143 – 241; Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p.243 - 245). For example, we have:

- 1 (a) Someone needs a lift. (declarative)
- (b) Who needs a lift? (interrogative)

From the above example, it is observed that (1a) is a subject question because it seeks for the subject of the sentence in (1b). It is derived from sentence (1a), and it is formed by replacing the subject “someone” with the appropriate *wh*-word “who”, therefore questioning the subject of the sentence. Other examples of *wh*-subject questions are:

2. Who killed the dog?
3. Which of the animals was killed in the movie?
4. What occurred in the church yesterday? (cf. Udoeyo, Offiong & Awonuga, 2018)

***Wh*-Questions about an Object (*Wh*-Object Questions)**

These are questions that ask for the object of the verb in a sentence. They are commonly derived from declarative sentences and are formed by replacing the object with appropriate *wh*-word (cf. Crystal 1987,1p.43241; Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p.243-245). For example, we have:

5 (a) She gave a bag to John (declarative)

(b) She gave what to John? (interrogative)

(c) She gave a bag to who? (interrogative)

From the above example, it is observed that example (5b) is an object question which is derived from example (5a) and the *wh*-word “what” replaces the object “a bag”, occurring internally at the direct object position of the sentence, therefore asking for the object of the verb. Also, in example (5c), the indirect object, “John” is replaced or substituted by an appropriate *wh*-word „who”, which therefore asks about the indirect object of the sentence “John” (cf. Udoeyo, Offiong, and Awonuga, 2018).

According to Radford (1988), “a *wh*-word which originates internally within a sentence must be moved into the left position of the complementizer”. Thus, it has to do with the *wh*-fronting which is discussed in the next sub-heading.

***Wh*-Fronting (*Wh*-Movement) In *Wh*-Questions**

A *wh*-fronting (*wh*-movement), is a syntactic phenomenon found in many languages around the world in which interrogative words (sometimes called *wh*-words) or phrases show a special word order. Unlike ordinary phrases, such *wh*-words appear at the beginning of an interrogative clause. The term „*wh*-movement” is used because most English interrogative words start with *wh*-, for example: who, whom, whose, what, which, when, where, why, etc (though „how” is an exception) (cf. Celce-Murcia and LarsenFreeman, 1999, p.246). According to Cook (1988, p.125), the movement in *wh*-questions occurs from one position to the other, that is, the deep structure where the movement has not taken place and the surface structure where the movement has taken place.

For example, let’s reconsider example (5b) “She gave what to John?”, where the movement (of the *wh*-word) has not taken place, and see its transformation by the *wh*-movement as the examples below show:

6 (a) She gave what to John? (deep structure).

(b) What did she give to John? (surface structure).

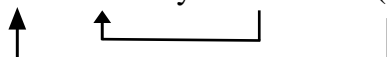
From the above examples, in (6a), it is observed that the *wh*-movement is in operation. That is, the *wh*-word ***what***, which occurred internally in (6a) (the deep structure), has been moved to the front of the sentence in (6b) (the surface structure). Also, it is observed that in the movement process, the DO-support is introduced, which is an obligatory syntactic process which introduces an appropriate form of the auxiliary verb to DO (=do, does, did) into the sentence at the later stage of derivation.

This occurs as the result of no overt auxiliary verb in the deep structure of the transformation (Ndimele 1999, p.220,221).

It is also important to note that the *wh*-fronting in a *wh*-question triggers the inversion of the auxiliary verb (modal auxiliary) when the *wh*-question contains such auxiliary verb (Ndimele, 1999, p.220, 221 & 222). Radford (1988) argues that, “the inverted auxiliary verb in a *wh*-question, moves into the complementizer position”. Consider the example below:

7 (a) Mary will drink what? (deep structure).

(b) What_i will_i Mary t_i drink t_i ? (surface structure).



From the example above, it is observed that the movement of the *wh*-word triggers the inversion of the modal auxiliary verb „will“ into the position of the complementizer projection.

Multiple *Wh*-Questions (MWHQs)

According to Hiz (1978:x), MWHQs, “are questions with more than one interrogative variable in the interrogative operator”. Thus, there is a possibility for more than one *wh*-phrase to occur in a question. For this to happen, it forms what is known as “multiple *wh*-question”. MWHQs in English are characterized by the presence of two or more *wh*-phrases where only one appears in clause-initial position, while the other *wh*-phrase(s) stays or stay in-situ (i.e. within the clause). The *wh*-phrase that occurs clause-initially is the *wh*-phrase whose associated constituent gap is closest to its associated gap, as the following examples show:

8 (a) Mary asked who to read what?

(b) Who_i did John persuade t_i to read what?

In the above examples, it is observed that there exists more than one *wh*-phrase; and the clause-initial *wh*-phrases are closer to their associated gaps.

Embedded *Wh*-Questions (EWHQs)

Embedded *wh*-questions are also known as indirect questions, which are part of a larger matrix sentence (possibly a question itself), and are generally used to report about direct questions that are not associated with a special intonation. They are normally formed within a question as the example below shows:

9 (a) What time is it?

(b) Do you know what time it is?

It is important to note that in embedded *wh*-question, there is a syntactic subordination where a clause is embedded within another. The embedded clause is known as “lower clause”, while the clause that houses the lower clause is known as “matrix or higher clause”. In English, the classes of verbs that can take WHQs as complements include *ask*. Examples are:

- 10 (a) How are you?
 (b) She asked how I was.
- 11 (a) Where are you going?
 (b) She asked where I was going.

Wh-Questions (Question-Word Question (QWQs)) in Èkɪd

In this section, we analyze question-word questions in Èkɪd. This is also known as *wh*-questions in English. But in Èkɪd, these questions are so called *Question-Word Questions (QWQs)* because, the question words in Èkɪd, do not begin with *Wh-* as in English.

QWQs in Èkɪd are commonly derived from declarative sentences where the subjects or objects of the sentences are really replaced or substituted by the appropriate question-words listed below: (cf. Udoeyo, 2018, p.121):

i.	ànié	‘who/whose’	} interrogatives
ii.	̀nsě	‘what’	
iii.	inìákě	‘when’	
iv.	̀̀nkím/̀̀atòókě	‘where’	
v.	ákě	‘which’	
vi.	̀̀ntághà	‘why’	
vii.	dìghé	‘how’	

In Èkɪd, QWQs include QWQs based on the syntactic position: *question-word subject questions*, *question-word object questions*; embedded question-word questions (EQWQs), and multiple question-word questions (MQWQs), as discussed below.

Question-Word Subject Questions: These are questions that ask for the subjects of sentences, and are commonly derived from declarative sentences. In Èkɪd, these questions are formed by replacing the subject of the sentence with an appropriate question word; thus, no fronting or inversion rule is applied (cf. Crystal, 2003). Consider the example below:

- (12) a. Èmèm á- ké- búñ m̀kpóitìghé ànim (declarative)
 N 3sg.cl pst break chair det
 ‘Emem broke this chair’.

b. ànié í- kí- búñ m̀kpóitìghé ànim? (interrogative)
 who cl pst break chair Det
 ‘Who broke this chair?’

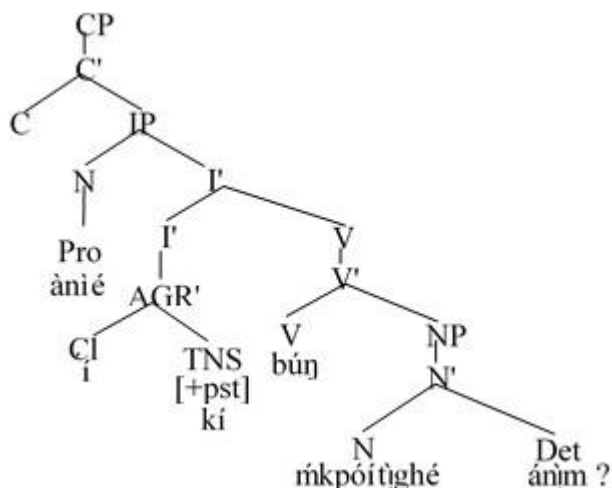


Figure 1: Illustration of an interrogative sentence structure in Èkìd. (Udoeyo, 2018, p.122)

In example (12), it is observed that sentence (13b) is a question-word subject question which is derived from sentence (12a), and it is formed by replacing the subject *Èmèm* with an appropriate question-word (interrogative) *ànié*. Also, it is obvious that no fronting rule is applied (because the question word has already been fronted), and no inversion rule is applied.

Question-word Object Questions: These are questions that ask for the object of a sentence. They are commonly derived from declarative sentences. In Èkìd, these questions are formed by replacing appropriate question-words, and then manipulated the word order by moving the question-word to the beginning of the sentence. Question-word object questions in Èkìd, are of two types:

- (i) Question-word object questions which include main verb, and
- (ii) Question-word object questions with copular verbs.

• **Question-Word Object Questions with Main Verbs:** Consider the example below:

(13) a. Ènò á- ké- dià àdèsì mé àkónòjì (declarative)
 N 3sg.cl pst eat rice at night
 ‘Eno ate rice at night’

b. Ènò á- ké- díá òsě mé àkónòjì ? (interrogative)
 N 3sg.cl pst eat what at night
 ‘Eno ate what at night?’

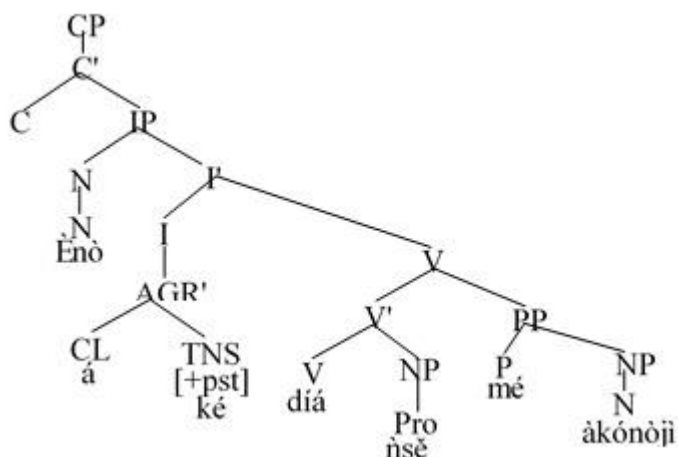


Figure 2: Illustration of QWQ with main verb in Èkìd. (Udoeyo, 2018, p.123)

c. nsě́ ké Ènò á- ké- díá tᵢ mé àkónòjì (interrogative)
 what_i did N 3sg.cl pst eat tᵢ at night
 ‘what_i did Eno eat tᵢ at night?’

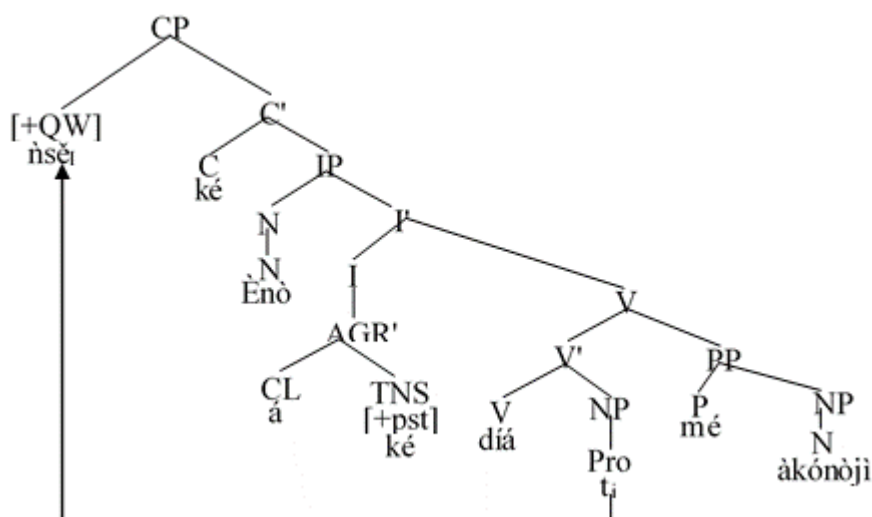


Figure 3: Illustration of question word movement in Èkìd. Source: (Udoeyo, 2018, p.123)

In example (13), it is observed that example (13b) is an object question which is derived from sentence (13a); and example (13c) is the surface structure in which the word order is therefore manipulated by the rule of transformation known as ‘question word movement’, where the question word *nsě́* ‘what’ is moved to the initial position of the sentence and thus triggers the ‘Do support’ rule, i.e. the inversion of the auxiliary verb to **DO** *ké* ‘did’ which therefore occupies the C position (cf. Radford, 1988).

- Question Word Object Questions with Copula Verb

These are questions that require the object of a sentence with the use of copula verb to BE in their formation, without the main verb. Examples are:

- (14) àfè à- déànié ?
you 2sg.cl be who
you are who'?
- (15) àfè à- bá mé ñkìm/àtòókě ?
you 2sg. cl be at where
'you are at where?'

In example (14 and 15), it is observed that the questions involve copula verbs to *BE* (is, and are) without a main verb; still using question-word (at the object position) to ask for the object of the verb. They question-word can be moved to the initial position of the sentence as seen in the examples below.

- (16) ànié_i ké àfè à- déti ?
Who FM you 2sg.cl be
Who are you?
- (17) ñkìm/àtòókě_i ké àfè à- bá ti ?
where FM you 2sg. cl be
Where are you?

Embedded Question Word Questions (EQWQs)

These are also known as indirect questions which are formed within a question. Examples are:

- (18) a. ànié í-kí- bí ñdídíá àm̀ì ?
Who cl.pst take food my
'who took my food?'
- b. àfè à- kpàá- ñtìí m̀ì ànié í-kí- bí ñdídíá àm̀ì ?
you 2sg.cl can-. tell me who cl-pst take food my)
'Can you tell me who took my food?'
- (19) a. ñsí sí ídé ?
What is wrong
'What is wrong?'
- b. àfè à- kpàá- ñtìí mí ñsí sí ídé ?
you 2sg.cl can-. tell me What is wrong
'Can you tell me what is wrong?'

Multiple Question Word Questions (MQWQs)

These are questions with more than one interrogative variable in the interrogative operator (cf. Hiz, 1978). In Ékɪd, we have the following examples:

(20) inàkě ké àfè à- di d̄i, m̀m̀m̀ ànié?
when are you 2sg.cl Incpt come, conj. Who
‘when are you coming, with who?’

(21) àfè à- bá m̀m̀m̀ ànié, mé ñk̄im?
You 2sg.cl be with who, at where
‘You are with who, at where?’

Conclusion

This research has provided the aspects of Ékɪd grammar – the basic sentence structure and question-word questions in Ékɪd, which can be found in other languages. In the analysis of basic sentences in Ékɪd, it has been noted that the typical structure or pattern of Ékɪd basic sentences is **SVO**, in which the object is a direct object; but in the case where two objects occur in an **SVO** construction, the objects are both a direct and an indirect object. The objects can be accompanied by complements or adverbials in the construction.

Analysis also reveals that, question-word questions in Ékɪd are commonly derived from declarative constructions and are formed by the replacement of the subject or object of the declarative constructions with appropriate question-words. In the case of *wh*-movement (i.e. interrogative word movement or movement of a question word), the interrogative word can be base-generated at the subject position which requires no movement; but another instance where the interrogative word is base-generated at the object position, it can be moved to the left periphery of the sentence; and once it is moved, it is obligatorily followed by the marker *ké* ‘did’ (verb to **DO**), and also leaves a gap (t_i) on its base-generated position. the question-word of a subject question-word question requires no fronting. This work serves as a tool for further research on the aspect of syntax in Ékɪd.

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