

# The Syntax of Non-focalized Wh-questions in Cameroon English



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# Outline



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# Introduction



- Each language has a stock of meaning-bearing elements (lexemes) and different ways of combining them (structures) to express different meanings, and these ways of combining them are themselves meaningful (Van Valin (2004:1).

E.G. 1,

- a. Please, roll up the carpet (i.e., to fold the carpet around itself to make it short)
  - b. Please, roll the carpet up (i.e., to fold the carpet around itself by lifting or raising it)
- These expressions contain exactly the same meaning-bearing elements but they do not have the same meaning. The difference in meaning is brought about by the syntactic paradigm.

## Introduction (cont.)



- E.G. 2,
  - a. Where are you?
  - b. You are Where?

These two English wh-questions contain exactly the same meaning-bearing elements; that is, words, but the words are combined differently in them. Consequently, the two sentences differ not in terms of the words in them but rather in terms of their syntax

NB: 'I saw her duck' versus 'I saw her duck ↑'.

# 1. Aim



- ❑ The aim is to explore the syntactic structure of the non-focalized wh-questions in the grammar of the L2 learners/speakers of English in Cameroon, to show how they indigenize and domesticate these wh-questions.
- ✓ How are non-focalized wh-questions formed in CamE.?
- ✓ What are the distinctive forms of non-focalized wh-questions in CamE.?

## 2. Clarification of concepts



### 2.1 Syntax

“...the branch of grammar which deals with the ways in which words, with or without appropriate inflections, are arranged to show connections of meaning within the sentence” (Matthews,1982:1).

### 2.2 Interrogatives

They are of two types: closed and opened. The former shows subject-auxiliary inversion(e.g., Does Mary speak German?) and the latter shows fronting of the non-subject interrogative phrase. It also triggers subject-auxiliary inversion and the occurrence of wh-movement (e.g., What are you eating?) (Radford *et al.*, 2009)

## 2.3 Wh-Questions in human languages



Wh-questions are formed in human languages either through the movement of the wh-phrase from the D-structure, where it is generated, to the S-structure (wh-movement) or by allowing the wh-question to remain in the D-structure, where it is generated (wh-in-situ) (Ambar, 2000; Ambar and Veloso, 2001) .

E.G.3,      a. **Wh-in-situ (Chinese)**

Hufei chi-le shenme (ne)?

Hufei eat-ASP what

‘What did Hufei eat?’

b. **Wh-movement (English)**

What<sub>i</sub> did David eat t<sub>i</sub>? (Gao, 2009)

In (a), the Chinese wh-phrase *shenme* “what” remains in the base location. In the English example (b), the wh-phrase leaves a trace in its original position and moves towards the clause initial position.

## 2.4 Wh-questions in English



- There are two types of wh-questions: focalized and non-focalized.
- Focalized wh-questions are used to question a piece of previously heard information, when the listener did not hear it clearly or understand it.

A: Mary ate *kaatikaati*.

B: Mary ate WHAT ↑?

Focalized wh-questions are considered to have the following properties: (i) are non-interrogative, and (ii) have a wh-phrase that receives rising intonation and focal stress (Ambar and Veloso, 2001).

- Non-focalized wh-questions are questions which begin with a wh-word (What has Mary eaten?). They are interrogative.



### 3. Theoretical premise

- The Principles & Parameters Theory holds that grammar consists of a lexicon, D-structure, S-structure, and two interpretative components: Phonetic Form (PF) and Logical Form (LF).

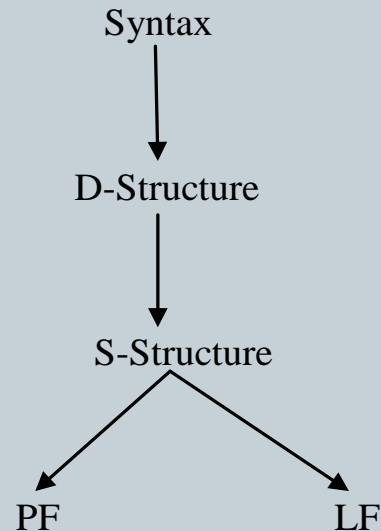


Fig 1. Syntactic Representation of a Lexicon (Chomsky, 1981:17)

## 3.1 D-structure



- D-structure is the level at which theta position must be filled by the lexical material. The verb must be associated with the correct number of arguments.
- Theta role = e.g., the verb *give* assigns three theta roles: AGENT, PATIENT and GOAL

Yvonne gave the book back to Mabel.

**AGENT**

**THEME**

**GOAL**

- Argument = e.g., the verb *embrace* calls for two arguments: External & Internal

John and Paul embraced each other.

**Ext. ARGUMENT**

**Int. ARGUMENT**

- Each argument of the verb receives one and only one theta role, and each theta role is assigned to one and only one argument.

## 3.2 D-structure and wh-question



(3) a. SS: What did Paul kill in this room?

b. DS: [Q [Paul killed what in this room?]]

(3a) has the D-Structure representation shown in (3b) wherein the argument NP *Paul* in the subject position, is the entity that is the AGENT of the activity of *killing*. That is, the entity that performs the action of *killing*.

## 3.3 S-structure



S-structure is derived from D-structure by movement of syntactic categories. It is the level where various modules are said to apply such as the Binding theory, Case theory, the PRO module.

(4)a. Paul coerced Mary to talk about *herself*.

b. SS: Paul coerced Mary [<sub>PRO</sub> to talk about *herself*].



(4a) has the S-Structure representation shown in (4b) which includes *Mary* co-indexed with the null subject *PRO* of the root clause. The antecedent of the anaphor *herself* in the lower clause is *PRO*. Since *PRO* is controlled from outside the lower clause by *Mary*, the anaphor *herself* is bound by *Mary*, the object of the sentence.

## 3.4 Phonetic and Logical forms



- ❑ Phonetic Form denotes the properties that ensure well-formedness as far as sound is concerned and accounts for speech perception and pronunciation. Thus, it is the level at which phonological structures are directly expressed.
- ❑ Logical Form denotes semantic properties that ensure meaning. It is the level where the semantic properties of the syntactic structure are represented (Chomsky, 1980).

## 3.5 Movement in the interface between language form and meaning



When an element moves from its original position in the D-structure to a new position in the S-structure, a trace  $t$  remains behind to illustrate where the element had been in the original D-structure sentence.

(5) a. Who<sub>i</sub> are<sub>j</sub> you t<sub>j</sub> looking for t<sub>i</sub> here? (S-structure)



b. You are<sub>j</sub> looking for who<sub>i</sub> here? (D-structure)

The derivation will have to converge both at LF and PF in order to be acceptable.

## 3.5 Non-focalised wh-questions within the PPT



In English, the wh-word undergoes a movement in the process of forming non-focalized wh-question. This is a process by which a wh-word such as “who” or “what” moves into the specifier position within a complement phrase (CP) (Radford 2009:183).

(6) What<sub>i</sub> did<sub>j</sub> John<sub>j</sub> eat<sub>i</sub>? (S-structure)



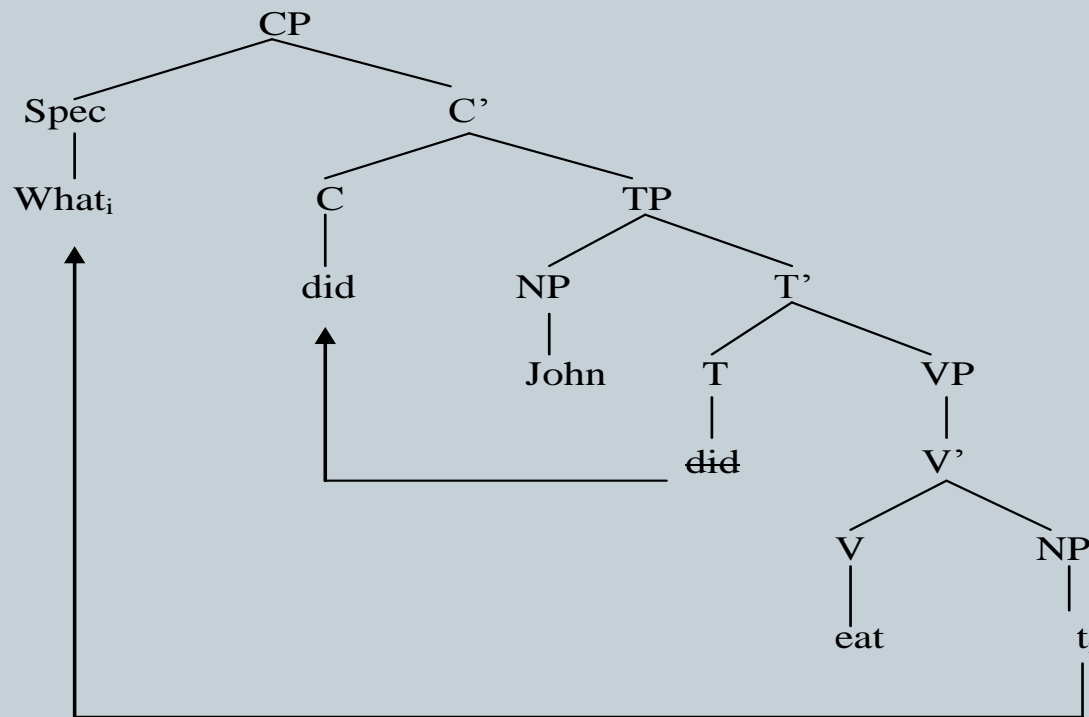
(b) John did<sub>j</sub> eat what<sub>i</sub>? (D-structure)

(7) a. Who<sub>i</sub> are<sub>j</sub> you<sub>t<sub>j</sub></sub> looking for<sub>t<sub>i</sub></sub> here? (S-structure)



b. You are<sub>j</sub> looking for who<sub>i</sub> here? (D-structure)

## 3.5 Non-focalised wh-questions within the PPT (cont.)

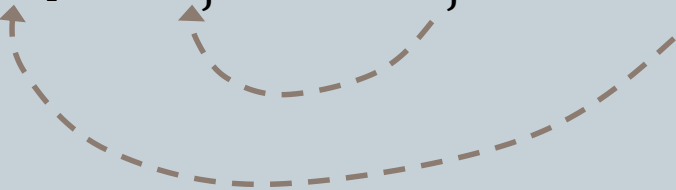




## 3.6 Constituents of a Complementiser phrase in Wh-questions

- Given that specifiers are positioned before heads, preposed wh-expressions move to become the specifier of C (i.e. move into spec-C) in non-focused wh-questions.

(8) what languages<sub>i</sub> can<sub>j</sub> Lionel<sub>j</sub> speak<sub>i</sub>?



This involves the arrowed movement operations shown in (8) whereby “what languages” has been assigned to the category NP.

## 4.Data and methodology

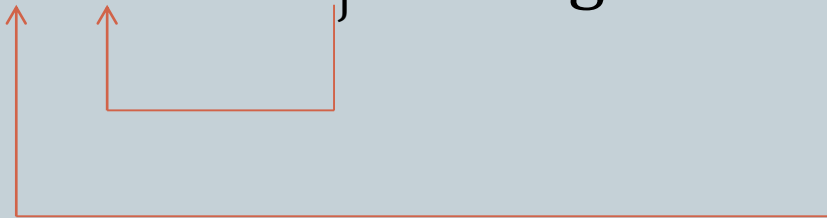


- ❑ The data was collected through participant observation, and recording of conversations. The recordings involved mainly the formal and informal conversations of university students, as well as educated speakers of Cameroon English, at different social events, conferences, and seminars.
- ❑ Some of the data were also drawn from radio and television discussions.
- ❑ A total of 553 instances of non-focalized *in situ* wh-questions were collected.
- ❑ The syntax of these questions were examined and an extended discussion has been provided to illustrate how they have been contextualized in the Cameroonian context.

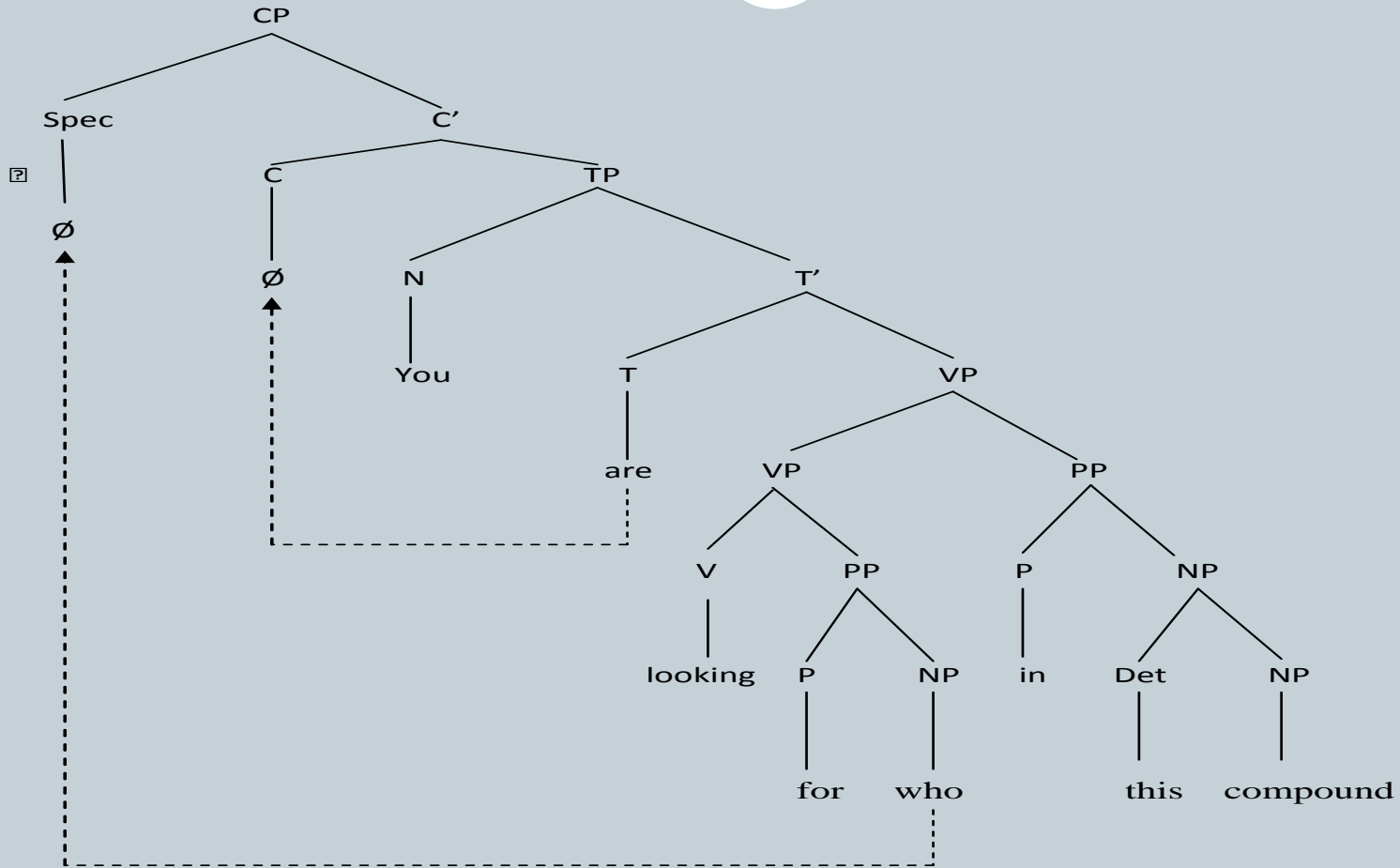
## 5. Findings

□ Non-focalized wh-questions in CamE are formed by leaving the wh-phrase *in situ*. There is no movement or transformation in the interface between language form and meaning. Consequently, D-structure is not manipulated to an apparent S-structure through movement of the wh-phrase to the operator position.

(9)  $\emptyset$   $\emptyset$  You are<sub>j</sub> looking for who<sub>i</sub> in this compound?



# 5. Findings (cont.)



## 5. Findings (cont.)



- Further evidence: a conversational excerpt between an Errand Boy and a Service Head, in one of our ministries.

**Errand Boy:** Good Morning Madam.

**Lady:** Good Morning.

**Errand Boy:** Here is a file for you, madam.

**Lady:** *The file is from who?*

**Errand Boy:** From the Sub-Director .

(The lady realized that the treatment of the file is not within her competence)

**Lady:** *This man sends this type of file to me to do what?*

As can be inferred in this conversational excerpt, the sentences highlighted in red are wh-questions with the wh-word *in-situ*.

## 5. Findings (cont.)



- Other examples of evidence involve situations whereby the addressor is trying to find out:
  - i) the person to whom something is given  
Catherine gave the school fee receipt to who?
  - ii) a place someone is going (You are going to where?)
  - iii) an item on the menu (We will have what for lunch today?)
  - iv) the whereabouts of someone (You are where? )
  - v) a reason for doing something (You are beating that woman that she has done what?)

## 5. Findings (cont.)



□ Another common characteristic feature, which is feasible in CamE, is that wh-words can also optionally take a sentence final *naah*.

-This document is from where *naah*?

-These children are going to eat what *naah*?

-People are embezzling billions CFA francs to do what *naah*?

## 5. Findings (cont.)



- ❑ In addition, the wh-phrases, in indirect questions and in object complement, occur at the sentence absolute final position.
  - He thinks we are doing what?
  - The police are harassing innocent citizens that they have done what?
- ❑ In mono-clausal wh-questions, the wh-phrase occurs as:
  - a direct object of the verb
    - We are eating what today?
    - The president is arriving when?
  - an indirect object
    - The Prime Minister gave the flag to who?;
    - Mabel gave those tickets for the concert to who?)



## 6. Conclusion



- ❑ The variety of English spoken in Cameroon exhibits a substantial amount of linguistic and structural variation as a result of the complex multilingual and multicultural nature of the Cameroon linguistic ecology.
- ❑ Non-focalized *wh*-questions are formed in CamE by using *wh*-in-situ phrases; and they take a sentence final *naah*.
- ❑ The *wh*-phrase in CamE occurs as the direct object of the verb in monoclausal non-focalized *wh*-questions, and in the right periphery, in the object complement position, in complex *wh*-questions.
- ❑ The changes inscribed in the way non-focalized *wh*-questions are constructed in CamE corroborate the issue of indigenization as a functional and prevailing pattern to combat cultural imperialism and preserve the Cameroon linguistic ecology. This thinking is grounded on the belief that Cameroonian learners of the English language are likely to pursue communication and integration first with the Cameroonian folk before any other group of people.

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**END**



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