The Syntax of Questions in Moro

Hannah Rohde

hannah@ling.ucsd.edu / UC San Diego

In previously undocumented syntactic data from the Kordofanian language, Moro (Sudan), we find two question formation strategies: *in situ* wh-questions (1) and fronted wh-constructions (2). This combination poses a challenge to the constraint against optional wh-movement (Cheng 1997). Closer analysis reveals that the apparent "fronting" involves a cleft structure with a headless relative clause, not a movement structure.

(1) udʒi ga.tað.o   edʒaŋgano
     man 3SG.abandon.perf who$_{IN\ SITU}$
     The man abandoned who?

(2) [$_{PredP}$ ŋwədʒeki] [$_{DP}$ ∅ [$_{CP}$ **n**.udʒi **nə**.g<u>e</u>.tað.o.**ŋo**]]
         who.is   SUB.man SUB.3SG.abandon.PERF.3SG
     Who did the man abandon?

We propose that the wh-word is base-generated as the predicate phrase of the question and takes a headless relative clause as its subject (cf. Potsdam 2005 for a similar analysis of Malagasy). This account captures the morphological similarity between questions and other cleft constructions, and explains the verbal vowel change and subordinate-clause marking found both in questions and object relative clauses. The subordinating marker **nə-** appears in object wh- questions, where it marks syntactic heads (verb, subject, and sentential adverbs) occuring between the wh- word and the gap. We further compare Moro's clause marking to similar strategies seen in the VP-marking of Irish (McCloskey 1979) and the CP-marking of Chamorro (Chung 1994).

References

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