Question Formation in the Igala Language

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Introduction
Question formation is a transformational process. It is quite obvious that in question formation, there exists a transformational relationship between a statement and the corresponding question be it yes/no or wh-question (Nwachukwu, 1989; 1995a&amp;b; Yusuf, 1992; 1998; Lamidi, 2000). Yusuf (2007:115) asserts that the simple sentence could perform various functions like declaration, imperativization or interrogation as one makes plain statements, gives orders or asks questions. He argues further that sentences are similar in many ways, in that, in spite of the seeming structural differences, they are related underlyingly. The declarative, according to him, is primary whereas the others are derived and that the process by which one sentence generates another type is simply tagged transformation.

A lot has been done on question formation in English and African languages, including some Nigerian languages, especially the three majors, but one hardly finds such descriptions on the Igala language at present. Against this background, the thrust of this paper is first, to undertake a descriptive study of question formation in Igala and to equally investigate the extent to which transformations are involved in question formation in the language. Therefore in what follows, we shall undertake a critical review on question formation and transformations in English, then major Nigerian languages before the specific application to the Igala language which is our focus.

Question Formation in English
Generally, there are two major question types namely, the yes/no (polar) question and the content-word (wh-)question. The polar (yes/no) question forms are derived in English using the following rules (See Lamidi, 2000; Mbah 2006; Yusuf 2007):

i. Subject-Aux inversion (the auxiliary verb and the subject swap positions).
1. Ex: Declarative: The teacher will come.
   Subject Aux
   Question: Will the teacher come?
   Aux Subject

ii. Do-support or insertion (required when tense is stranded)
2a. Statement: You know his name
   Transformation: [Do] you know his name
   Question form: Do you know his name?

b. Statement: The hunter killed a lion.
   Transformation: [Do+pst] the hunter kill a lion
   Question form: Did the hunter kill a lion?
Content Word or Wh- Questions
According to Yusuf (2007), this is so called, especially in English where most of the content words start with a wh:- who, what, when, why, where and even how. Besides, we use that name for languages that do not have the wh-forms because they use similar formats to derive this sentence type. He explains further (p. 117): “The S-type simply codes the unknown information sentence initially; who for a person, what for a thing, when for time, why for some reason, how for manner …”

3a. I saw GIDEON
    I saw WHO?
    Who did I see?

b. She saw the man (SOME) WHERE
    She saw the man WHERE?
    Where did she see the man?

c. The students are here FOR A REASON
    The students are here WHY?
    Why are the students here?

The above illustrations agree largely with Ndimele (1999) who argues that a wh-word in sentence-initial position in, especially English is not in its original position. The explanation is that every wh-word in sentence-initial position must have originated internally within the sentence. This in turn agrees with Radford’s (1988) earlier argument that a wh-word which originates internally within a sentence must be moved into the left position of the complementizer, as illustrated below:

4. \[
\begin{array}{c}
    \text{C''} \\
    \text{[e]} \\
    \text{C'} \\
    \text{C} \\
    \text{S} \\
    \text{Wh-x}
\end{array}
\]

_In the above diagram as adapted from Ndimele (1999:211), whereas wh-x represents the wh-word, [e] represents the empty position where the wh-word moves into and the symbol C is the complementizer node into which a preposed auxiliary verb moves for the derivation of a wh-question._

Question Formation in Major Nigerian Languages
In many Nigerian languages, especially the three majors, tone and intonation, apart from movement, may have parts to play in the derivation of Yes-No questions. According to Yusuf (2007:116), “Hausa raises the tone of the last syllable while Igbo uses low tone on subject agreement in the sentence”; an equivalent of what Nwachukwu (1995a:35) refers to as “low-tone question prefix” in Igbo. Yusuf gave the following example for Hausa:
5a. Zá kà zó  
Fut AGR come →  
‘You will come’  
\(\text{Zá kà }\downarrow\text{zó}?\)  
\(\text{Fut AGR come}\)  
\(\text{‘You will come’}\) 

He explains further that in Hausa there might be the option of adding the morpheme ‘\text{ko}’ either at beginning or end of the statement for yes/no question formation:

5b. Ko zá kà zó?  
\(\text{Zá kà zó ko}\) 

In the Yoruba language, Yusuf argues that it would appear that “a lengthening of the last vowel in the sentence, among other strategies, would effect the transformation”; changing a declarative statement into a Yes-No question. He equally gave the following examples for Yoruba:

6a. Ò ŋ bô?  
You Asp come  
‘You are coming’  
\(\text{Ó ŋ bô-ô}?\)  
\(\text{You ASP come-Q}\)  
\(\text{‘Are you coming?’}\) 

b. Ó má a wá?  
3sg will come  
‘He will come’  
\(\text{Ó má a wá-á}?\)  
\(\text{3sg will come-Q}\)  
\(\text{‘Will he come?’}\) 

He, however, argues that like the case of Hausa, the standard and most common strategy for Yoruba Yes/No question formation is to add the question morphemes \(\text{ṣé}\) or ‘\(\text{njé}\)’ (with \(\text{ṣé}\) more commonly used) sentence-initially to the declarative statement as shown below:

7. Ò ŋ bô → \(\text{ṣé}\)  
\(\text{Ò ŋ bô}\)  
\(\text{‘Will he come?’}\)  
\(\text{ṣé}\)  
\(\text{‘Are you coming?’}\)  

On Igbo specifically, Mbah (2006:66) argues that the three kinds of question: \(\text{wh}\)-, yes/no and tag questions involve movement. The tag question, he explains, “involves the movement of the entire question form to the end of the tag question”, as in:

8. Okeke byara, Ò bụkwa ya?  
“Okeke came; is it not true?”

Also in yes/no as well as \(\text{wh}\)-question, there is movement as in:

9a. Okeke gara ahya.  
“Okeke went to the market” 

b. Okeke ọ gara ahya.  
“Okeke did he go to the market?”  

10a. Okeke lere onye anya?  
“Okeke looked at whom?”  

b. Onye ka Okeke lere anya?  
“At whom did Okeke look?”  

According to Mbah, in the question form in (9b) above, the subject of the sentence, Okeke is moved into the SPEC position, thus yielding a resumptive pronoun in its former/original position, while in (10b), the object of the sentence is focused, and
therefore moved into the grammatical subject position. Thus, he argues convincingly that in both situations, movement is involved.

All said, it may still be plausible to argue that even though the review of literature on question formation in English and other languages so far has shown clear evidence of transformations in one form or the other, parametric variations exist in that the mode of operation or application of the rules is not exactly the same in all the languages. For instance, Yusuf (2007:118) asserts: “… while there is a permutation of the content word sentence-initially in many Nigerian languages, there is no observation of the subject-AUX inversion as English does.” This speaks of such superficial variations that exist among languages in this regard as well as other domains or levels of linguistic analysis.

Questions in Igala
Yes/No Question
This kind of question does not require a contents-word answer or new information. It is as well-known as polar question as it requires only Yes or No response.

11a. Declarative: `Uwę che ójó’ 2sg be God
a’. Question: `Uwę chę ójó́? 2sg be God ‘Are you God?’

b. `Uwę che ójó báá? 2sg be God ?? ‘You are God báá?’

12a. Declarative: E̩ fu ęun ję . You have smth eat
a’. Question: E̩ fu ęun ję́? ‘Have you eaten?’

b. E̩ fu ęun ję męę? Have you eaten already?

c. E̩ fu ęun ję baa? Have you eaten baa?

13a. Declarative: ‘I né ádù. 3sg carry load
a’. Question: ‘I né ádùù? 3sg carry load ‘Is he carrying a load?’

b. ‘I né ádù báá? ‘He is carrying a load báá?’

Notice that unlike the Yoruba ‘ṣe’ or ‘njé (question morphemes) and Hausa ‘ko’ (question morpheme), Igala yes/no question has no overt question morpheme, and as shown in the above examples, and no movement is involved. A rising intonation on the final syllable and the corresponding lengthening or elongation of the final vowel sound produce yes/no question in Igala. Besides, even the use of ‘ba’ (a seeming question morpheme) at the end of an utterance (as exemplified in 11b, 12c, and 13b) to signal yes/no question formation is alien to the language. One suspects, it is borrowed from
Pidgin English into the Igala language. This is because ‘ba’, originally has no semantic significance in the language. However, apart from the form(s) of yes/no question shown above, there may be other forms of yes/no question in Igala with evidence of adjunction and extraposition.

Yes/no Question and adjunction

Adjunction, in the words of Mbah (2006:68), “is type of transformation that inserts elements, which were not originally at the deep structure to the surface structure level”. Do-support, There-insertion and the adding of be, -en and by in passive constructions are instances of adjunction. Let’s consider the examples below:

14a. Declarative: Akwu nē amoma. ‘Akwu has children’
   a’. Question: Akwu i-nē amomaa. ‘Does Akwu have children?’

b. Omi wa unyi we. ‘I came to your house’
   b’. Question: Omi u-wa unyi wē(e)? ‘Did I come to your house?’

c. Abo me wa people you come ‘Your people came’
   c’. Question: Abo me ma-wa people you 2plCl-come ‘Did your people come?’

We note that besides the form and features of yes/no question discussed earlier, the above examples have added adjunction or copying through the use of resumptive pronouns. Also, we note that the subjects show agreement in grammatical features, especially in number and person with the displaced subjects whose position is taken over by the resumptive pronoun.

Yes/No Question involving extraposition

15a. Statement: Uwe, che ojo 2sg be God ‘You are God’
   a’. Question: Ojo e che? God 2sg be ‘Are you God?’

b. Statement: Omi che one 1sg be person ‘I am somebody’
   b’. Question: One e chee? person 2sg be ‘Are you a person/somebody?’

c. Statement: Ma kpa ela 3pl kill animal ‘They killed an animal’
   c’. Question: ela ma kpa? animal 3pl kill ‘Is it animal they killed?’

The yes/no question derivation as demonstrated above involves NP movement in form of extraposition as the NP moves from sentence final position to sentence initial.
**Wh-Question in Igala**

Unlike the yes/no question, the *wh*-question requires content-word answer or new information and some transformational movement of the *wh*-elements. The following are the major Igala *wh*-question morphemes and phrases as well as their occurrences in interrogative sentences:

16a. Odu we che Audu
   name 2sg be Audu
   ‘Your name is Audu’

b. Odu we che eun
   name 2sg be what
   ‘What is your name?’ [in-situ question word]

c. Eun che odu we
   what be name 2sg
   ‘What is your name?’ [leftward extraction & subj-verb inversion]

17a. Ada tene elo
   Ada want go-incep
   ‘Ada wants to go.’

b. Ene tene elo
   who want go-incep
   ‘Who wants to go?’ [leftward extraction]

18a. Ata we nyi oko
   father 2sg go farm
   ‘Your father went to the farm.’

b. Ata we nyi ugbo
   ‘Father you go where?’ [in-situ question word]

c. Ugbo ata we nyi?
   where father 2sg go
   ‘Where did your father go?’ [leftward extraction]

**Cleft Questions in Igala**

This is another form of *wh*-question in a more emphatic form. It is characterized with a re-occurrence of the question word or morpheme in this language, as could be seen in the examples below:

19a. Ene che ene ki wa emi?
    who he who that come here
    ‘Who is it that came here?’

b. eun che eun ki je?
   what be what 3sg eat
   ‘What is it that he ate?’

c. Ugbo che ugbo ki le?
   where be where 3sg go
   ‘Where is it that he went?’
Summary and Conclusion
So far, we have identified the forms of questions that exist in Igala: yes/no questions and wh-questions. We have also observed that the yes/no question takes three forms in the language namely; a rise in intonation syllable finally by lengthening the final vowel of the last syllable of an utterance, yes/no question formation by adjunction and yes/no question by NP movement.

The second major form of question formation identified in the language is the wh-question which for now, we have been able to identify only two forms: wh-question through the use of interrogative pronouns or question morphemes mostly beginning on a high tone except Ikò/ègbà ‘when’ and ònú ‘how much’, and the wh-cleft question.

We discover that although some of the questions do not involve movement, most, involve transformational process of one kind or the other, while others involve overt NP and wh-movement. Besides, a close look at the yes/no questions under adjunction, indicates that modals are transformationally inserted. Finally, we are to add that generally, it is plausible to conclude that there exists a transformational link or relationship between the statements and their corresponding interrogative sentences in the Igala language.

References: