

Interrogatives at the interface: sentential mood marking in Sm'alg yax

Colin Brown – UCLA Linguistics

Background and questions: This presentation explores the syntax, semantics, and pragmatics of questions, with a focus on the overt marking of interrogatives in Sm'alg yax (or Coast Tsimshian), a critically endangered Tsimshianic language spoken in the Northwest Coast of British Columbia and Southeast Alaska.

Canonical, information-seeking *wh*-questions in Sm'alg yax are characterised by \bar{A} -movement of a *wh*-word or phrase to a left-peripheral position, and the appearance of a particle =*u* (often realised as =*yu* due to phonological processes):

- (1) Goo=**yu** nah niisd-n?
what=Q PERF see-2SUBJ
'What did you see?'

This particle only appears in *wh*-questions which have the force of a question. It does not appear in other instances of \bar{A} -movement, such as focus movement or relative clauses, alongside non-question uses of *wh*-words such as *wh*-indefinites or free-relative constructions, and can not be embedded under *know*-type predicates or *ask/wonder*-type predicates. Below we see a question embedded under the predicate *güüdax* 'to ask', which obligatorily lacks the particle =*u*:

- (2) Context: Clarence calls home to ask his wife what she wants from the store. Their son answers, and passes the question along to his mother:
Ba'a gwa'a. Yagwa güüdax-t a [goo(*=**yu**) dm hasag-a-n a galm wa'at]
dad DEM IPFV ask-3SUBJ PREP what(*=Q) PROSP want-TR-2SUBJ PREP store
'It's dad. He's asking what you want from the store.'

Despite lacking this component of a canonical question, a felicitous response to the speaker's utterance in (2) is an answer to the embedded question. Based on this distribution I put forth the following questions: (i) what is =*u*? and (ii) why can it not be embedded?

Analysis: I argue that the facts outlined above show that =*u* should not be analysed as a Q-particle as described by the Hagstrom (1998); Cable (2010); Kotek (2010) family of analyses, whose role is to take the focus-semantic value of its sister as its argument and output an ordinary-semantic value. These analyses do not account for why =*u* cannot be embedded, or why bare-*wh*-words in non-interrogative contexts are licit in Sm'alg yax.

I instead analyse =*u* as an illocutionary mood marker which encodes the clause with an interrogative force, not unlike the silent speech-act operators posited in Krifka (2001). I suggest that this manifests as a syntactically projected interrogative head, roughly equivalent to the Force head argued for by Rizzi (1997). Farkas and Bruce (2010), after Krifka (2001), give a formulation of illocutionary mood in which a sentence is selected as an argument, with the output being a function from input to output context states. The appearance of =*u* in root clauses and its absence in embedded ones can thus be explained syntactically if embedding verbs do not select for complements of the type ForceP, or semantically if predicates cannot select for the output of illocutionary moods as an argument.

This proposal, which relies on the ability for syntax and morphology to interface with pragmatics, has implications for previous accounts of the syntax and pragmatics of questions. For instance, indirect questions such as (2) are analysed by Dayal and Grimshaw (2009) as being 'discourse-dynamic', thus placing a question on the table, and inviting a cooperative hearer to treat the embedded question as discourse active. However, the absence of =*u* in this indirect question shows that interrogative mood marking in Sm'alg yax is restricted to direct questions, and indirect questions are interpreted as such via pragmatics alone.

References

- Cable, S. (2010). Against the existence of pied-piping: evidence from Tlingit. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 41(4):563–594.
Farkas, D. and Bruce, K. (2010). On reacting to assertions and polar questions. *Journal of Semantics*, 27:81–118.
Krifka, M. (2001). Quantification into question acts. *Natural Language Semantics*, 9(1):1–40.
Rizzi, L. (1997). The fine structure of the left periphery. In Haegeman, L., editor, *Elements of Grammar*. Kluwer International Handbooks of Linguistics. Springer, Dordrecht.