

Declarative versus interrogative constructions in Dime

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Abstract

Dime interrogatives can be categorized into two types: polar interrogative that involve a “yes” or “no” answer and non-polar interrogatives, which involve content question words. An interesting phenomenon in Dime polar interrogatives is in the affirmative-declarative clauses, the verb is obligatorily marked with subject-agreement morphemes, while in the corresponding interrogative clauses the subject-agreement marker **-t** and **-n** must be deleted. If the construction is negative, the suffix **-áá** is added to the verb following the negative marker for all persons. It is attached to all negative interrogative verbs irrespective of the person of the subject and the aspect of the verb, while the suffix **-áá** is used only with second person subjects in affirmative interrogatives.

The only difference between polar and non polar interrogative clauses is the presence or absence of a content question word. In the perfective, however, polar and non-polar interrogatives are different. In polar interrogatives the person marker is deleted which was existed in declarative constructions and high tone is added to the perfective aspect marker. In contrast, in non polar interrogatives both the person and aspect marker are totally deleted in contrast to declarative sentence. All content question words seem to have the same base form with out a few exceptions. In nominal clauses the morpheme **-i** is a perfective aspect marker which is used in first and third person interrogative, while the vocalic element **-áá** is

an interrogative marker for the second person both in affirmative and negative interrogative clauses.

1 Introduction

Dime is an endangered Omotic language which is spoken in the southern region of Ethiopia by a population of 5,400 (1994 census). The Dime communities are permanent settlers and horticulturalists. Two mutually intelligible dialects have been identified in Dime, *Us'a* and *Gerfa*. Data in this paper are mainly from the *Us'a* dialect.

Dime indicates interrogatives by dropping morphological element from the declarative counter part. It is a similar phenomenon in Zayse and Sheko (cf. Hayward 1990, Hellenthal 2005).

In Omotic there are also other different systems to distinguish interrogative constructions. Some are presented by adding an invariable verb-final particle (cf. Azeb, 2001:155-156) while others used special interrogative verb inflection (cf. Bender 1991: 99-100, Hayward 1995).

2 Declarative versus interrogative constructions in Dime

In affirmative-declarative clauses the verb is marked with subject-agreement morphemes however the corresponding polar interrogative clauses the subject-agreement marker must be dropped. First and third person informative polar interrogative sentences are signalled by dropping the subject agreement marker (-n or -t) from the verb, while the second person form in contrast to the first and second person forms, is marked for the interrogative by -áá. This reduction of the person marker applies both in the perfective and imperfective aspect.

On the other hand in the perfective non-polar interrogative construction, both the person and aspect marker are deleted.

2.1 Polar interrogatives versus declaratives

In the following two paradigms, the imperfective declarative and imperfective interrogative can be compared. This shows that the major distinction between the two constructions is the absence of person marker -n or -t in the interrogative structures.

1. **Imperfective declarative**

ʔaté	tín-déé-t	'I will go.'
wótú	tín-déé-t	'We will go.'
nú	tín-déé-n	'He will go.'
ná	tín-déé-n	'She will go.'
kété	tín-déé-n	'They will go.'
yá	tín-déé-n	'You (S) will go.'
yesé	tín-déé-n	'You (PL) will go.'

Imperfective interrogative

ʔaté	tín-déé	'Shall I go?'
wótú	tín-déé	'Shall we go?'
nú	tín-déé	'Will he go?'
ná	tín-déé	'Will she go?'
kété	tín-déé	'Will they go?'
yá	tín-déé-y-áá	'Will you (S) go?'
yesé	tín-déé-y-áá	'Will you (PL) go?'

As we observe from the above examples, the second person form, in contrast to the first and second person forms, is marked for the interrogative by **-áá**. There is a **-y-** preceding the interrogative marker because of a regular glide insertion rule in the language when a sequence of more than two vowels occurs.

Fleming (1990: 537-541) reports that Dime interrogative verbs drop the final person marking suffix **-n** or **-t** and substitute it by **-aa** or **-ee**. In this study **-aa** corresponds to the interrogative marker **-áá** while **-ee**, seems to be a variant of the imperfective marker **-déé**, which loses its initial consonant when preceded by another consonant. In general in Dime there are two ways of forming the interrogative:

- a. By using the interrogative morpheme **-áá**.
- b. By adding high tone on the vowel of the aspect marker and omitting the person marker from verb final position¹.

Interestingly, interrogative and declarative clauses differ in the way they treat subject agreements. Interrogative clauses treat the second person subject as distinct from first and third persons while, in contrast, affirmative declarative clauses treat the first person subject differently from second and third person subject.

The full paradigm of perfective declarative and perfective interrogative is provided below:

2a. Perfective declarative

ʔaté	tíŋ-i-t	'I went.'
wótú	tíŋ-i-t	'We went.'
nú	tíŋ-i-n	'He went.'
ná	tíŋ-i-n	'She went.'
kété	tíŋ-i-n	'They went.'
yá	tíŋ-i-n	'You (S) went.'
yesé	tíŋ-i-n	'You (PL) went.'

Perfective interrogative

ʔaté	tíŋ-í	'Did I go?'
wótú	tíŋ-í	'Did we go?'
nú	tíŋ-í	'Did he go?'
ná	tíŋ-í	'Did she go?'
kété	tíŋ-í	'Did they go?'

¹ Givon (1990: 786) pointed out that cross-linguistically different languages have different systems of polar interrogative marking. For instance, only intonation is used in Israeli Hebrew, both morphological marking and intonation in Swahili, both word order and intonation in German, and some languages combine all the three devices: morphology, word order and intonation as in present day English.

yá	tíŋ-áá	‘Did you (S) go?’
yesé	tíŋ-áá	‘Did you (PL) go?’

Interestingly, contrasting with the affirmative form both negative declarative and polar negative interrogatives are not marked for aspect and person.

2b. Polar negative interrogatives

ʔaté	tíŋ-k’áy-áá	‘Didn’t I go?’
wótú	tíŋ-k’áy-áá	‘Didn’t we go?’
nú	tíŋ-k’áy-áá	‘Didn’t he go?’
ná	tíŋ-k’áy-áá	‘Didn’t she go?’
kété	tíŋ-k’áy-áá	‘Didn’t they go?’
yá	tíŋ-k’áy-áá	‘Didn’t you (S) go?’
yesé	tíŋ-k’áy-áá	‘Didn’t you (PL) go?’

Negative declaratives

ʔaté	tíŋ-k’áy	‘I didn’t go.’
wótú	tíŋ-k’áy	‘We didn’t go.’
nú	tíŋ-k’áy	‘He didn’t go.’
ná	tíŋ-k’áy	‘She didn’t go.’
kété	tíŋ-k’áy	‘They didn’t go.’
yá	tíŋ-k’áy	‘You (S) didn’t go.’
yesé	tíŋ-k’áy	‘You (PL) didn’t go.’

Here we discuss tag/confirmation questions. This is a type of yes/no question that consists of a declarative clause followed by a “tag” that requests confirmation or rejection of the declarative clause (cf. Payne 1997). Examples:

3. **yá kín-im yéf-káy, (yá)yéf-áá**
 2S.SUBJ 3MS.OBJ-ACC see-NEG, see-PF:Q
 ‘You did not see him, did you?’
4. **šiftaye t’úlim šál-káy, (nú) šál-déé**
 šiftaye swim can-NEG, 3MS.SUBJ can-IPF:Q
 ‘Šiftaye can not swim, can he?’
5. **šiftaye t’úl-im šál-káy, (nú) šál-í**
 šiftaye swim-ACC can-NEG, 3MS.SUBJ can-PF:Q
 ‘Šiftaye could not swim, could he?’

The structure of the verb in the “tag” question is the same as that in regular interrogative clauses.

Confirmation questions after affirmative statements are expressed by a copy of the verb followed by the negation marker **-káy**. The suffix **-áá** is added to the verb following the negative marker for all persons. Here the interrogative marker **-áá** which is used only with second person subjects in affirmative interrogatives is attached to all negative interrogative verbs irrespective of the person of the subject and the aspect of the verb. Example:

6. **p’et’ros yín-im madd-i-n, (nú) mad-káy-áá?**
 Peter 2S.OBJ-ACC help-PF-3 (3MS) help-NEG-Q
 ‘Peter helped you, didn’t he?’

2.2 Non-polar interrogatives versus declaratives

The word order of declarative and non-polar interrogatives is the same except the presence or absence of content question word. In non-polar interrogatives the content word replaced the noun that expressed by it.

- 7a. **?ámz-ís ?amó-de**
 woman-DEF where-ABL?
 ‘Where is the woman from.’

- 7b. **ʔámz-ís jinká-de**
 woman-DEF jinka-ABL?
 ‘The woman is from jinka’

In the imperfective aspect, polar and non polar interrogative clauses have a similar structure (cf. Mulugeta 2008). Their main difference is the presence or absence of a content question word. The two interrogative clauses mark the verb for imperfective aspect in the same way as (8a) and (8b) below:

- 8a. **ná ʔamóid dime-n tíŋ-déé?**
 3SF.SUBJ when dime-DAT go-IPF:Q
 ‘When does she go to Dime?’

- 8b. **ná dime-n tíŋ-déé?**
 3SF.SUBJ dime-DAT go-IPF-:Q
 ‘Will she go to Dime?’

- 8c. **ná dime-n tíŋ-déén**
 3SF.SUBJ dime-DAT go-IPF-3P
 ‘She will go to Dime/ she goes to Dime.’

In the perfective, however, polar and non-polar interrogatives are different. In non polar interrogatives both the person and aspect marker are deleted as shown in (9b).

- 9a. **níts-af-is ʔád-í**
 child-PL-DEF come-PF:Q
 ‘Did the children come?’

- 9b. **ʔameh-id níts-af ʔád**
 how-many-PL child-PL come:PF:Q
 ‘How many children came?’

- 9c. **níts-af-is** **?ád-i-n**
 child-PL-DEF come-PF:Q
 ‘The children come?’

A list of perfective content question forms using the verb **kóxú** ‘love’ and various subjects is given in (10).

- | | | | | |
|------|-------------|---------------|------------|---------------------------|
| 10c. | ?até | ?áy-im | kóx | ‘Whom did I love?’ |
| | wótú | ?áy-im | kóx | ‘Whom did we love?’ |
| | nú | ?áy-im | kóx | ‘Whom did she love?’ |
| | ná | ?áy-im | kóx | ‘Whom did he love?’ |
| | kété | ?áy-im | kóx | ‘Whom did they love?’ |
| | yá | ?áy-im | kóx | ‘Whom did you (S) love?’ |
| | yesé | ?áy-im | kóx | ‘Whom did you (PL) love?’ |

More than one content question word may occur in a sentence as in (11a-b).

- 11a. **?áyí** **?áy-im** **deis**
 who who-ACC kill:PF:Q
 ‘Who killed whom?’

- 11b. **?áyí** **?áy-im** **deis-téé**
 who who-ACC kill-IPF:Q
 ‘Who kills whom?’

- 11c. **ná** **kín-im** **deis-téé-n**
 she 3M-ACC kill-IPF-3P
 ‘She kills him.’

Different types of question words can also occur in the same sentence, one as a subject and the other as an object. The object is always marked with the accusative marker as in (12) and (13).

12. **ʔáyi wúy-ím wúč'**
 Who what-ACC drink:PF:Q
 'Who drank what?'

13. **ʔáyi wúy-ím wúč'-déé**
 Who what-ACC drink-IPF:Q
 'Who drinks what?'

As examined above, it is possible to use multiple content question words in the same sentence. As Wachowicz (1975) typological observation correctly indicates multiple content words are used when the speaker misses the information provided by other speech participants, specifically when preceding statements/comments are about several parallel events.

The content question words of Dime may be marked by the dative, ablative or other peripheral cases as shown below:

14a. **ʔáy-ká déén nú ʔíts-int'**
 who-INST exist 3SM eat-PAS:Q
 'By whom was it eaten?'

14b. **nú náy-ka ʔíts-int'-i-n**
 3SM hyena-INST eat-PAS-PF-3P
 'It was eaten by hyena?'

15a. **yá ʔáy-in məs'af-is-im ʔím**
 2S.SUBJ who-DAT book-DEF-ACC gave:Q
 'To whom did you give the book?'

15b. **yá maikro-n məs'af-is-im ʔím-i-n**
 2S.SUBJ maikro-DAT book-DEF-ACC gave-PF-2P
 'You gave the book to Maikro.'

Negative interrogative clauses with content question words are suffixed with the negative marker **-k'áy** (cf. Mulugeta 2009). In these cases aspect or tense distinction is not marked on the verb as in (16) and (17):

16a. ná ʔamóid dime-n tɪŋ-k'áy
 3SF.SUBJ when dime-DAT go-NEG
 'When is it that she does not go to Dime?'

17. ʔameh-id nɪts-af ʔád-k'áy
 how-many-PL child-PL come-NEG
 'How many of the children are not coming?'

2.3 Interrogatives versus declarative constructions in nominal clauses

The interrogative marker in nominal clauses is **-áá** for second person singular and plural, both in perfective and imperfective aspects. For the other persons, the interrogative in nominal clauses is indicated prosodically, through a high tone on the final vowel of the aspect marker. The interrogative in nominal clauses is similar to that in verbal clauses. That is, a question marker **-áá** is suffixed to the copula when the subject is second person. Consider the following examples:

18a. yá wúdúr dán-áá
 you girl COP-Q:2S
 'Are you a girl?'

18b. yá wúdúr dán
 you girlCOP
 'You are a girl.'

19a. ná ʔáy dá-déé
 she who COP-IPF:Q
 'Who is she?'

19b. ná Almaz dán
 she Almaz COP
 'She is Almaz.'

20a. yín-ko kané déé-y-í
 you-GEN sister COP-y-PF:Q
 'Did you have a sister?'

20b. **yín-ko kané déé-tub**
 you-GEN sister COP-IPF:2P
 ‘you will have a sister.’

21a. **yá ?astemar-éé-y-áá**
 you teacher-COP-y-Q:2S
 ‘Are you a teacher?’

21b. **yá ?astemar-éé**
 you teacher-COP
 ‘You are a teacher.’

The morpheme **-i** is a perfective aspect marker which is used in first and third person interrogative, while the vocalic element **-áá** is an interrogative marker for the second person both in affirmative and negative interrogative nominal clauses.

To sum up, in Dime the interrogatives are characterized by a high tone in clause final position following the deletion of person marker. The morpheme **-áá** is a verbal interrogative marker. In affirmative clause it is affixed to the verb when the subject of the interrogative clause is second person. In negative tag/confirmation questions the interrogative is marked by **-áá** for all persons. In non-polar interrogative clauses, the perfective aspect is not marked morphologically on the verb, while the imperfective aspect is marked morphologically both in polar and non-polar interrogative clauses. In both perfective and imperfective negative polar and non-polar interrogatives, the negative marker **-k’áy** suffixed to the verb.

The morpheme **-áá** is an interrogative marker in nominal clauses for second person singular and plural, both in perfective and imperfective aspects while the other persons, the interrogative in nominal clauses is indicated prosodically.

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