

The Inventory of Polar Question Types in Dschang

This talk presents the first description polar questions in Bamileke-Dschang, an SVO (1) Grassfields language of Cameroon. Languages like Dschang are of cross-linguistic interest because they deploy a large inventory of morphosyntactic means to encode different types of polar questions (that involve varying degrees of bias). We show that Dschang employs six different strategies in the formation of polar questions. Specifically, the talk (i) lays out the morphological, syntactic, and phonological differences between the various polar question types and (ii) describes the different contexts where each question type occurs.

- (1) u lè li-ì zo
 2SG DIST.PST sleep-S.CONC yesterday
 ‘You fried the meat yesterday.’

There are three ways of forming “neutral” (i.e., unbiased) questions. One strategy involves a right-edge low tone moraic question particle, which may induce vowel lengthening on the rightmost constituent in the clause, “zo” in (2):

- (2) u lè li-ì zoò NeutralQuestion
 2SG DIST.PST sleep-S.CONC yesterday+Q
 ‘Did you fry the meat?’

A second type of neutral polar question is marked by the presence of both the right edge tonal question particle and a left edge (“te”) question particle:

- (3) tè u lè li-ì zoò Neutral Question
 Q 2SG DIST.PST sleep-S.CONC yesterday+Q
 ‘Did you sleep yesterday?’

A third neutral question strategy employs a segmental question particle, *lé*, on the right edge, which also induces vowel lengthening on a preceding constituent:

- (4) ú lè lí-ì zóó lé Neutral Question
 2SG DIST.PST sleep-S.CONC yesterday Q
 ‘Did you sleep yesterday?’

A ‘disbelieving’ question, where the asker doubts that the questioned proposition is true, involves a focused wh-item, and multiple left and right edge question particles in a potentially biclausal structure:

- (5) á kɛ lè, tè sh'úfò w'èè ŋ-k'áb ú Disbelieving Question
 FOC what Q Q shufo have CL-money Q
 ‘What? Shufo has money?’

A ‘confirmation’ question, where the asker seeks to confirm her bias that the questioned proposition is true, involves a possibly biclausal structure containing a right edge question particle and the string ‘pup’ of unclear meaning:

- (6) w'ò 'ŋkà lè tók-ɔ sùkùù á pùp ú Confirmation Question
 children DIST.PST pass-O.CONC school 3SG ? Q
 ‘The children passed the test, right?’

