

Case study: Asante Twi Kobele and Torrence (2006)

☞ Next Monday: English intervention (Kotek 2014, ch. 4; Pesetsky 2000, ch. 5).

1 Background

Asante Twi is a Kwa language of Ghana. It is SVO and head-initial.

(1) Simple matrix clauses in Asante Twi¹

a. Kofi bɔɔ Ama
Kofi hit.past Ama

'Kofi hit Ama'

√bɔ

b. Kofi huu Ama
Kofi see.past Ama

'Kofi saw Ama'

√hu

c. Kofi ambɔ Ama
Kofi past.neg.hit Ama
'Kofi didn't hit Ama'

The negative morpheme in (1c) is a homorganic nasal -N. This nasal c-commands the object position and e.g. licenses NPIs.

(2) The negative morpheme c-commands the object

Kofi a-*(m)-bɔ hwee
Kofi a-past.neg-hit anything

'Kofi didn't hit anything'

Focus is morphosyntactically marked by the presence of *na* in the left periphery of the clause, immediately following the focused element:

(3) Edge of focused constituent marked with *na*

a. (ɛ-yɛ) Kofi na *(o)-bɔɔ Ama (no)
it-is Kofi na 3sg-hit.past Ama det

'It is Kofi who hit Ama'

subject focus

¹Tone markings omitted. The tone on the verb in the affirmative and the negative sentence differs, but this won't be important for our purposes.

- b. (ε-yε) Ama **na** Kofi bɔɔ (no) (no)²
 it-is Ama *na* Kofi hit.past det det
 ‘It is Ama who Kofi hit’ direct object focus
- c. (ε-yε) bɔ **na** Kofi bɔɔ Ama
 it-is hit *na* Kofi hit.past Ama
 ‘Hit is what Kofi did to Ama’ predicate focus
- d. (ε-yε) εnnra **na** Kofi bɔɔ Ama
 it-is yesterday *na* Kofi hit.past Ama
 ‘It’s yesterday that Kofi hit Ama’ adverb focus

Kobele and Torrence (2006) argue that this is a cleft construction. The optional ε-yε also appears in presentational copular clauses.

(4) **ε-yε constructions are clefts**

ε-yε me
 it-is me
 ‘It’s me

Templatically, focus clauses can be represented as:

(5) **The structure of clefted constructions**
 (ε-yε) [Focused XP] **na** [_{TP} S V O] (no)

2 Questions in Asante Twi

Asante Twi has two ways of forming *wh*-questions:

(6) **Two ways of forming questions in Asante Twi**

- a. Kofi bɔɔ Ama
 Kofi hit.past Ama
 ‘Kofi hit Ama’ baseline
- b. Kofi bɔɔ *hena*
 Kofi hit.past who
 ‘Who did Kofi hit?’ in-situ strategy
- c. *hena na* Kofi bɔɔ (no)
 who *na* Kofi hit.past 3sg
 ‘Who is it that Kofi hit?’ cleft strategy³

²Kobele and Torrence (2006) have two optional *no*'s with the gloss “det” (as opposed to “3sg” later on) in this example, without any note or explanation. This may be a typo.

³Maybe this is a bad term. The paper calls this the “focus” strategy and says in a footnote that it involves movement (instead of e.g. base-generation of a high *wh* that is co-indexed with a low pronoun), but no

Subject questions can't use the in-situ strategy:⁴

(7) **Subject question has to use the movement strategy**

- a. * *hena* bɔɔ Ama
who hit.past Ama
'Who hit Ama?' in-situ strategy
- b. *hena na* o-bɔɔ Ama
who *na* 3sg-hit.past Ama
'Who is it that hit Ama?' cleft strategy

3 Asante Twi is subject to intervention effects

Although questions normally have both the in-situ and the cleft strategies available to them, in some cases only the cleft strategy is possible:

(8) **Negative questions require clefting**

- a. * Kofi a-m-bɔ *hena*
Kofi past-neg-hit who
'Who didn't Kofi hit?' neg > *wh*
- b. ✓ *hena na* Kofi a-m-bɔ (no)
who *na* Kofi past-neg-hit 3sg
'Who is it that Kofi didn't hit?'
(≈ 'Which person is such that Kofi did not hit that person?') *wh* > neg

The same pattern holds with *only* and with *even* phrases:

(9) **Only and even require clefting**

- a. * Kofi nko-ara bɔɔ *hena*
Kofi only-emph hit.past who
'Who did only Kofi hit?'
- b. ✓ *hena na* Kofi nko-ara bɔɔ (no)
who *na* Kofi only-emph hit.past 3sg
'Who is it that only Kofi hit?'
- (10) a. * Kofi mpo bɔɔ *hena*
Kofi even hit.past who
'Who did even Kofi hit?'

evidence is provided for this claim.

⁴For this reason, the paper concentrates on non-subjects, which allow comparison of the two strategies.

- b. ✓ *hena* na Kofi mpo bɔɔ (no)
 who na Kofi even hit.past 3sg
 ‘Who is it that even Kofi hit?’

We have a class of elements that a *wh* cannot appear below at LF: negation, *only*, and *even*. This pattern is reminiscent of the pattern of *intervention effects* observed e.g. in German and Korean, with a set of interveners that indeed appears to be focus-sensitive (Beck, 2006).

(Note that we don’t get intervention in multiple questions; in (11), negation can c-command the in-situ *wh*.⁵)

(11) **No intervention in a multiple question**

- ✓ *hena*₁ na o-a-m-bɔ *hena*₂
 who na 3sg-past-neg-hit who
 ‘Who is it that did not hit who?’

4 Asante Twi interveners in a cross-linguistic context

Some interveners in German are not interveners in Asante Twi. The in-situ strategy is possible with universal quantifiers:

(12) **In-situ strategy possible with universal quantifier**

- a. ✓ *osuani bi-ara* bɔɔ *hena*
 student some-emph hit.past who
 ‘Who did every student hit?’
- b. ✓ *hena* na *osuani bi-ara* bɔɔ (no)
 who na student some-emph hit.past 3sg
 ‘Who is it that every student hit?’

Though this may not be surprising, for two reasons.

First, we already know that not all universal quantifiers intervene. For example, the Japanese *subete-no gakusee-wa* and Korean *motun haksayng-un*, ‘all students-top.’⁶

Second, we know that universal quantifier can scope out of the question, so we’d also need answered is what scope *every* can take in (12).

⁵This is the only example of a multiple question with an intervener we have in Kobele and Torrence (2006) A footnote gives one example of what appears to be a superiority violating question, but without an intervener.

⁶Which, coincidentally, take the topic marking *-wa/-un* (Tomioka, 2007).

Asante Twi separation constructions are also not sensitive to intervention effects.

(13) **No intervention in separation construction**

- a. ✓ *den na Kofi a-n-di no nyinaa*
 what *na* Kofi past-neg-eat 3sg all
 ‘What all did Kofi not eat?’ stranding
 (≈ ‘What are all of the things that have the property that Kofi did not eat them?’)
- b. ✓ *den nyinaa na Kofi a-n-di*
 what all *na* Kofi past-neg-eat
 ‘What all did Kofi not eat?’ pied-piping
 (≈ ‘What are all of the things that have the property that Kofi did not eat them?’)

Two relevant facts:

- The in-situ strategy requires a resumptive pronoun: *no*, which we have seen otherwise appears to be optional.
- The universal in (13a) must take wide scope with respect to negation. Therefore, although it is pronounced in-situ, it take scope in a position above the intervener.

5 Embeddings in Asante Twi

Certain embedded clauses do not allow the *wh* to be below the complementizer *sɛ*:

(14) **Certain question embeddings require long-distance clefting**

- a. * *wo dwene* [_{CP} (*sɛ*) *Kofi bɔɔ hena*]
 you think C Kofi hit.past who
 ‘Who do you think that Kofi hit?’
- b. * *wo dwene* [_{CP} (*sɛ*) *hena na Kofi bɔɔ (no)*]
 you think C who *na* Kofi hit.past 3sg
 ‘Who do you think that it is that Kofi hit?’
- c. ✓ *hena na wo dwene* [_{CP} *sɛ Kofi bɔɔ (no)*]
 who *na* you think C Kofi hit.past 3sg
 ‘Who is it that you think that Kofi hit?’

In contrast, in some cases, where the complementizer is *ma* (which introduces factive clauses), an embedded *wh*-phrase is fine:

(15) **Certain embeddings require long-distance clefting**

- a. ✓ *yɛ-hyee* Kofi [_{CP} **ma** ne *nuaa den*]
we-force.past Kofi C 3sg cook.past what
'What did we force Kofi to cook?'
- b. ✓ *den na yɛ-hyee* Kofi [_{CP} **ma** ne *nuaae*]
what *na* we-force.past Kofi C 3sg cook.past
'What is it that we forced Kofi to cook?'

- (16) a. ✓ *wu bisaa* Kofi [_{CP} **ma** ne *nuaa den*]
you ask.past Kofi C 3sg cook.past what
'What did you ask Kofi to cook (that he did in fact cook)?'
- b. ✓ *den na wu bisaa* Kofi [_{CP} **ma** ne *nuaae*]
what *na* you ask.past Kofi C 3sg cook.past
'What is it that you asked Kofi to cook (that he did in fact cook)?'

Kobele and Torrence (2006) say the facts in (14) show an intervention effect, but there is no clear answer to why (15)-(16) is good.

They compare this pattern to the behavior of embedded questions in French: *wh*-in-situ is only good with a null complementizer, but not with overtly pronounced ones.

(17) **No *wh*-in-situ with *que* (French)**

- a. * *pierre pense* [_{CP} **que** Jean a mangé *quoi*]
Pierre think that Jean has eaten what
'What does Pierre think that Jean ate?'
- b. ✓ *qu'est-ce* [_{CP} **que** Pierre pense que Jean a mangé]
what-is-it that Pierre thinks that Jean has eaten
'What is it that Pierre thinks that Jean ate?'

(18) **No *wh*-in-situ with *de* (French)**

- a. * *Jean a décidé* [_{CP} **de** faire *quoi*]
Jean has decided C to.do what
'What has Jean decided to do?'
- b. ✓ *qu'est-ce que Jean a décidé* [_{CP} **de** faire *t*]
what-is-it that Jean has decided C to.do
'What-is-it that Jean has decided to do?'

(19) ***Wh*-in-situ possible with null complementizer (French)**

- ✓ *Jean a pensé* [_{CP} faire *quoi*]
Jean has thought to.do what
'What did Jean think about doing?'

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