

## A CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF QUESTION FORMATION IN ENGLISH AND MWAGHAVUL

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### ABSTRACT

This research is a contrastive study of question formation process of English and Mwaghavul. Mwaghavul is a major language in Plateau State, Nigeria. It is a Chadic language while English is a Germanic language. The study describes the methods of question formation and the transformational processes of the structures of both languages. The main question this research answers is how similar or different is the process of question formation in English and Mwaghavul. An eclectic approach of the frameworks of Government and Binding and the Transformational Generative Grammar approach as provided by Aarts (2001) and Carnie (2007) are adapted for the analysis in this study. Twenty three sentences were obtained and modified (adapted) from Lamidi (2000), Aarts (2001) and Carnie (2007) and used for analysis. It is obvious from this study that there are similarities and also differences in terms of question formation in English and Mwaghavul. Some of such are that the basic forms of question formation in Mwaghavul are the yes/no (polar) question and wh- (content word) questions which are same in English language. Also, in Wh-question, the NP position at the right hand of the sentence is left empty after transformation takes place in both English and Mwaghavul sentences. It is also evident from the study that in Mwaghavul, yes/no question has two overt question morphemes, àà and ye while wh-question has a final question morpheme ye. In yes/no question, movement is hardly involved except in yes/no question with adjunction where the subject in 'focus' position is usually taken over by the pronoun. In Mwaghavul, yes/no question derivation (that involves NP movement) has to do with NP movement from sentence final

position to sentence initial position. It is also important to note that, in Mwaghavul language, one of the most commonly used forms of yes/no question is as a result of a rise in tone of the final syllable and the corresponding length of the final vowel sound. Summarily, yes/no question has three forms in Mwaghavul namely; yes/no question formation by adjunction, a rise in tone which occurs by lengthening the final vowel of the last syllable of a word, and yes/no question by NP movement. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a transformational relationship between the statements and their corresponding interrogative sentences in Mwaghavul language as exist in English. Contrastive studies like this are vital in language development and ensuring that endangered languages do not go into extinction. It is discovered that Mwaghavul and English have common transformational processes.

**Keywords:** Question formation, Mwaghavul, lengthening, transformation, polar question, wh-question.

## 1.0 BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Question formation is a type of a process of transformation. According to works of scholars like Lamidi, it is obvious that in question formation, there is a transformational relationship between a statement and the corresponding question, be it yes/no question or wh-question. Omachonu (1), citing Yusuf 2007 asserts that the simple sentence could perform various functions like declaration, interrogation etc. and that these sentences are similar in many ways; that despite the seeming structural differences, they are underlyingly related. The declarative sentence, according to him, is primary while the others are derived from it and that the process by which one sentence generates another type is called transformation.

The motivation for this study is hinged on the need to study the similarities and differences in the processes of question formation of the English language and the Mwaghavul language.

Mwaghavul is a relatively large West Chadic language spoken in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria, with an estimated population of 150,000 speakers. Their two main towns are Mangu and Panyam. The Mwaghavul are also known as 'Sura'. Mwaghavul is bordered by Plateau (i.e. Benue-Congo) languages to the north and west, conspicuously Berom and Izere (Daapya, 2014). Mwaghavul is also known as Sura; an Afro-Asiatic language. English on the other hand belongs to the class of Germanic languages, while the Germanic languages are in turn contained in the higher grouping of Indo-European. This is because English shares innovations with other Germanic languages such as Dutch, German and Swedish which shows that the three languages descended from single common ancestor called Proto-Germanic.

Various languages present different syntactic mechanisms of expressing questions. Some languages, like English and German, demand that the interrogative element comes in front of the sentence as well as the inversion of the (auxiliary) verb and the subject in case of Wh-questions. Basically, there are two major types of question formation namely, the yes/no (polar) question and the wh- (content-word) question.

Quite a number of studies have been done on question formation in English and other Nigerian languages (Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, Igala etc) but that of Mwaghavul is at present difficult to access. This study investigates and describes question formation of Mwaghavul and English,

uncovering their similarities and also contrasting their transformation processes in question formation.

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

Twenty three sentences were obtained and modified (adapted) from Lamidi (2000), Aarts (2001) and Carnie (2007) and used for analysis. The direct translation and word –for- word glossing for the words from Mwaghavul language to English is done before the literal translation. Thereafter, three diagrams are used to represent the sentences.

## 3.0 FRAMEWORK

The framework of Government and Binding (GB) is adopted for the analysis in this study. GB assumes that a large portion of the grammar of any particular language is common to all languages and is therefore part of a universal grammar. According to GB, Universal Grammar can be broken down into two main components: levels of representation and system of constraints. Government and binding assumes a derivational model consisting of four levels of representation. The lexicon lists the idiosyncratic properties of lexical items which constitute the atomic units of the syntax. These properties include what arguments the item subcategorises for.... Lexical items are combined together at D-structure (underlying structure) The D-structure is mapped into S-structure which is the syntactic representation that most closely reflects the surface order of sentences. According to Black, the S-structure is not directly interpreted itself but factored into Phonological Form (PF) and Logical Form (LF). PF is the interface with the phonology where shapes, sounds and groupings of items are directly represented. LF is the interface with the Semantics (1998:p2). These levels are related to one another by rules. For the purpose of this study, the analysis will be limited to the D-structure and S-structure levels of representation, excluding other stylistic and phonological rules.

This framework of Government and Binding is adopted because it is very efficient and apt for this study. Also, the tree diagrams by Aarts (2001) and Carnie (2007) are adopted for the analysis.

## 4.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### Surface and Deep structures

Deep structures relate to meaning while surface structures relate to order of elements. Deep structure is the underlying structure while the surface structure is the superficial structure. Hence, with one deep structure, two different surface structures can be realised. In Standard Theory, the deep structure determines meaning. That is why even when transformation takes place, (transformation rules are applied to a structure), the meaning still remains the same.

Example:

1.(a) Daniel beats Mary (active sentence)

(b) Mary was beaten by Daniel (passive sentence)

From the example above, despite the application of the passive transformation, the meanings of the two sentences (active and passive) still remain the same.

2 (a) He took off his shirt.

(b) He took his shirt off.

Both sentences have different surface structures but the same deep structure.

### Transformations

Transformation is very vital in grammar. A transformation refers to a device that is used to change the form of one linguistic structure to another. A declarative sentence can be changed to a question, an active sentence changed to a passive etc. and all these are done through transformation. Basically, transformations perform four major functions. They are:

i. to delete formatives that had earlier on occurred at the deep structure of the sentence.

a. This is also known as ‘gapping’. Example:

b. 3 (a) Mary cooked the beans and Mary ate it

ii. Mary cooked the beans and  $\emptyset$  ate it.

a. After the deletion, the second position becomes null (is left empty).

iii. Transformations help in substitution: here, a word replaces another in the context of occurrence. Example:

4. (a) Mary loves Mary

(b) Mary loves herself

If the two Marys are co-referential, the substitution transformation can apply and the reflexive pronoun ‘herself’ can be used but if the second Mary refers to someone else, the pronoun ‘her’ can be used to replace the second Mary.

iv. to insert new words (elements) into a structure. A negative element ‘not’ for example can be added in a positive sentence. Example:

5. (a) Nankyer is a man

(b) Nankyer is not a man

‘Not’ has been added or inserted through negative transformation in the second sentence, making it negative.

iv. Transformations also move elements from one position to the other in a sentence. For a declarative sentence to be changed to a Yes/No question for instance, the auxiliary verb will definitely be moved to the sentence initial position. Example:

6. (a) Mary can dance

(b) Can Mary  $\emptyset$  dance

### 5.0 QUESTION FORMATION AND TRANSFORMATIONAL RULES IN ENGLISH

Fowler (88-97) summarizes formation of questions into four:

- i. 'Do' beginning the sentence. This is known as 'do-support'.
- ii. Modals beginning the sentence. Here, modals like perfect or progressive aspects for example, have or be move to the beginning of the sentence e.g. Will Mary open the door?
  - i. Has Mary slept?
- iii. Rising intonation. Example: You haven't been to Jos before?
- iv. 'Wh' questions. These words are five in number. They are: who, what, why, which and how

Lamidi (119-29) proposes two ways of formation of questions, They are:

(i) Yes/no questions. This is also known as polar questions. They are questions which require a yes/no answer. For polar questions, Umar (72) as cited by Lamidi (120) gives a rule that the NP subject in a declarative sentence swaps positions with the INFL elements of ASGR. Tense and Modal or Aspect. X in the rule is a variable that represents other constituents of the sentence. The product of this swap is a yes/no question. Example: Mary can sing= Can Mary sing?

Deep structure- Mary / AGR Pres Can/ sing

NP	<u>AGR</u>	<u>Tns</u>	<u>M</u>	X
1		2		3

Aux-NP Inversion- AGR Pres Can/ Mary sing?

<u>/AGR</u>	<u>Tns</u>	<u>M</u>	NP	X
	2		1	3

From the example above, it is obvious that there is a swapping of NP/Aux as some form of auxiliary movement which causes a... of an additional node to the original sentence in a sister adjunction. The INFL node is therefore, left empty since its element (Pres and Can) are moved to the beginning of the sentence.

It is vital to note that with yes/no questions with only two elements, (INF items, Agr and Tense), instead of three, if AUX-NP inversion Rule is applied, we are not likely to arrive at a correct structure. Here, a dummy verb ‘do’ is inserted under the INFL node together with ASGR and Tense which all move to the COMP. position.

Example: 7.(a) Mary love rice (deep structure)

Apply Affix Hopping Rule: do + Pres + AGR (does)

(b) Does Mary love rice?

The insertion of ‘do’ to facilitate the question formation where only AGR and Tense occur at the INFL is called ‘do-support’. Where the only verb in the sentence is the verb ‘be’ which is a copular verb, then ‘do-support’ is no needed. Such a verb can be moved with the Tense and AGR for example: Daniel is my love

Deep structure- Daniel / AGR Pres is/ my love

NP	<u>AGR</u>	Tns	Be	X
1		2		3

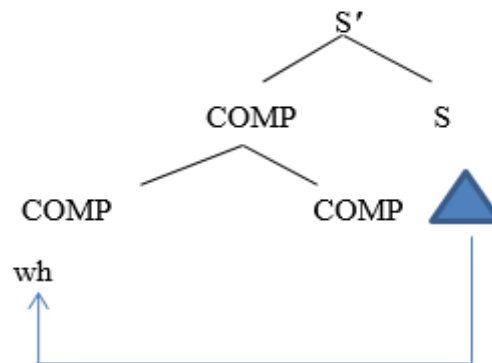
Derived surface structure- AGR Pres Be/ Daniel my love?

	<u>/ AGR</u>	Tns	Be	NP	X
		2		1	3

Here, AGR, Tense and Verb ‘be’ are moved to the COMP. When Affix Hopping Rule is applied, the question derived is grammatical.

(ii) WH questions- they have ‘wh’ words as questions or interrogative markers. Two movements are very important in WH questions derivation from a declaratory sentence. They are: (a) Application of Aux-NP inversion Rule

(b) Move- $\alpha$  Rule. This involves the movement of a wh-word from its original position within the declarative sentence to the pre-sentential position in what is termed movement into COMP. Here, both INFL items and the wh-word will be moved into the same COMP. The COMP is then split into two in order to avoid a clash such that there will be separate nodes for the INFL elements and the wh-word but their nodes branch from the same parent COMP. This is often called ‘Chomsky adjunction’. The scheme can be seen below:



(Adapted from Lamidi , 26)

In the scheme above, the wh-word will be extracted from the sentence and deposited at the wh-node under COMP.(126). The INFL elements on the other hand will therefore, occupy the adjacent COMP which is ...to it. **Example:**

8.(a) You can bake what for me

(b) What can you bake for me?

The movement is in the object position

In the case of movement from the subject position, like who killed Jessy? AUX-NP inversion Rule does not apply. This is because there are not enough INFL elements to be moved. We also need no 'do-support' because there is no need applying the rule. We then go for an alternative analysis in which there is no movement of wh-word at all called 'wh-in situ' like in the example above. Affix hopping rule- kill + past is applied to give us killed.

For structures with adverbial wh words, the wh-word (where) originating from the VP of the declarative P-marker is moved to the COMP position in the derived P-marker, thereby leaving a trace with an index at the extraction site. AGR, Tense and Modal move to COMP nearest to the NP in line with AUX-NP inversion Rule.

## 6.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### Question Formation and Transformational Rules in Mwaghavul

Mwaghavul, like any other language has its syntactic mechanisms for expressing questions. Basically, there are two major ways of question formation in Mwaghavul. They are: Wh-questions and Polar (Yes/No) questions.

#### Yes/no question in Mwaghavul

Longtau (63), citing Sibomana (1981) says yes/no questions are 'decision questions'. Yes/no question in Mwaghavul requires no content words or additional information but only yes or no as response just like in English. Yes/no question in Mwaghavul has two overt final question morphemes, 'àà' and 'ye' Example:





the pronoun. It is important to note that while the absence of 'do' in English questions makes the question ungrammatical that of Mwaghavul is optional. This implies that one could have a grammatically correct question with or without the do, 'di' for example, di la kira ji ye or di la kira ji ye but for either, the question morpheme, 'y' will definitely end the question.

### Wh-question in Mwaghavul

Longtau (64) calls wh-questions 'explanation questions'. This question requires content-words answers or new information. They require transformational movement of wh-elements. In Mwaghavul, all forms that correspond to wh-questions in English end with the particle, 'ye' (in addition to other question words). The contracted form, 'é' can also be used.

The words 'aráng ye?' can be used to ask the questions why and how.

Example for what, 'amé:

13.(a) **Declarative:** sum fwaga a Nanle

Name you be Nanle

Your name is Nanle

(b) **Question:** (use wh-morpheme, 'amé' for Nanle and apply transformational wh-movement and subj-verb inversion rule

amé a sum fuga ye

What be name your ?

What is your name?

This wh-word, **amé (what)** can take dual positions and still remain grammatical in Mwaghavul but can only take the initial position in English. Example,

Sum fuga amé

Name your what

What is your name?

14.(a) **Example for who. 'awe': Statement:** Nankyer dom so

Nankyer want go

Nankyer wants to go

(b) **Question:** (use wh-morpheme, 'awe' for Nankyer and apply transformational wh-movement and subj-verb inversion rule)

Awe dom so ye

Who want go?

Who wants to go?

15.(a) **Example for where, ‘ane’:** Statement: Nigin ra son shiit

Mother your go grind

Your mother went to grind

Note: for the question, where in Mwaghavul, there is no wh-movement. The wh-word ‘ane’ has to be added to form question but remains at the end of the sentence.

(b) **Question:** nigin son ane

Mother go where ?

Where did you mother go to?

**Example for why, ‘aràng ye’?**

16.(a) **Statement:** a wal (you cry)

(b) **Question:** a wal aràng ye

You cry why ?

Why did you cry ?

In the example above, wh-movement is possible but an adjunct ‘dàng’, meaning then, needs to be added and the question morpheme, ‘ye’ has to remain at the sentence final position

Aràng dàng a wal ye

Why then you cry Q

why did you cry ?

Example for how (aràng ye?) 17.(a) **Statement:** yi wul peni (you get there)

(b) **Question:** Yi wul peni aràng ye

You get there how ?

How did you get there ?

Note: The wh-morpheme for how, ‘aràng ye’ is added at the end to get the question.

NB: movement can take place but the question morpheme has to remain at the end. Example:

Aràng yi wul peni ye

How you get there Q

How did you get there?

**Example for when, (perang ye?) 18.(a) Statement:** a ji (you come)

(b) Question: A ji perang ye

You come when ?

When did you come ?

Note: The wh-morpheme for when, ‘perang ye’ is added at the sentence final position to get the question but movement cannot take place.

From the examples above, it is clear that some wh-elements always move to the sentence initial position to indicate question except in the case of when, how and where, where the wh-element remains at the final position. This is not the case in English; all wh-elements move.

Note: The wh-morpheme for when, ‘perang ye’ is added at the sentence final position to get the question but movement can take place, leaving the question morpheme at the final position.

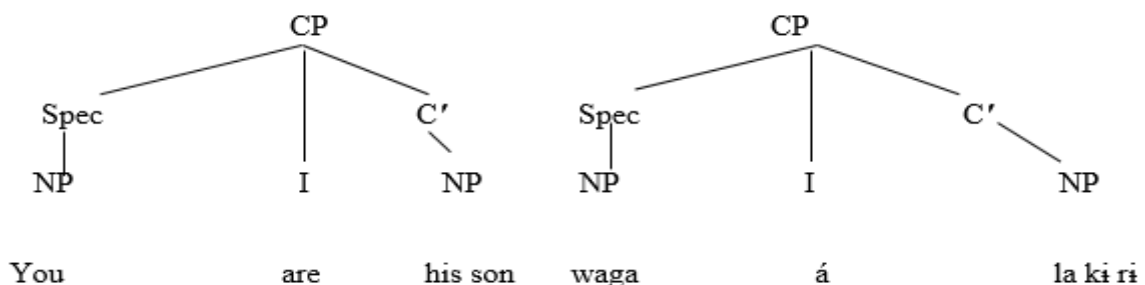
Example: Perang a ji ye = when did you come?

### Contrastive Analysis Using Tree Diagrams

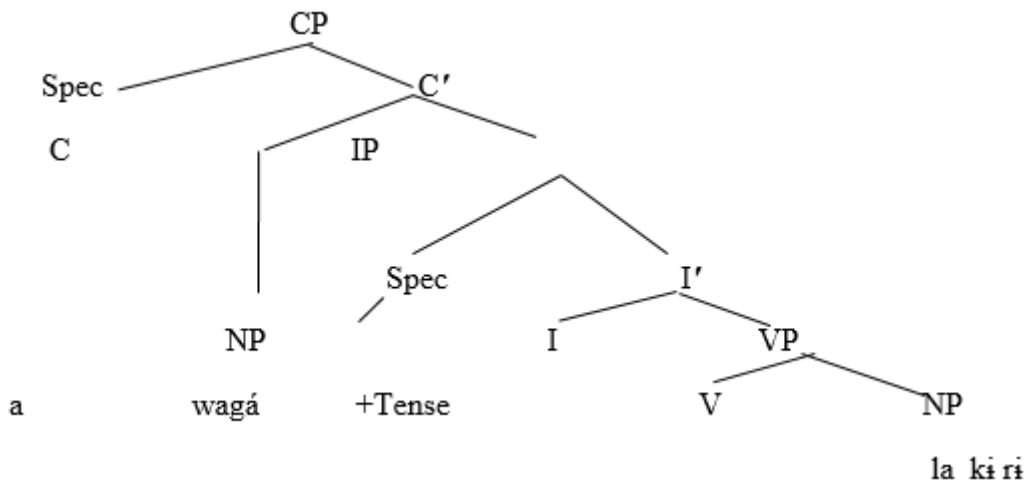
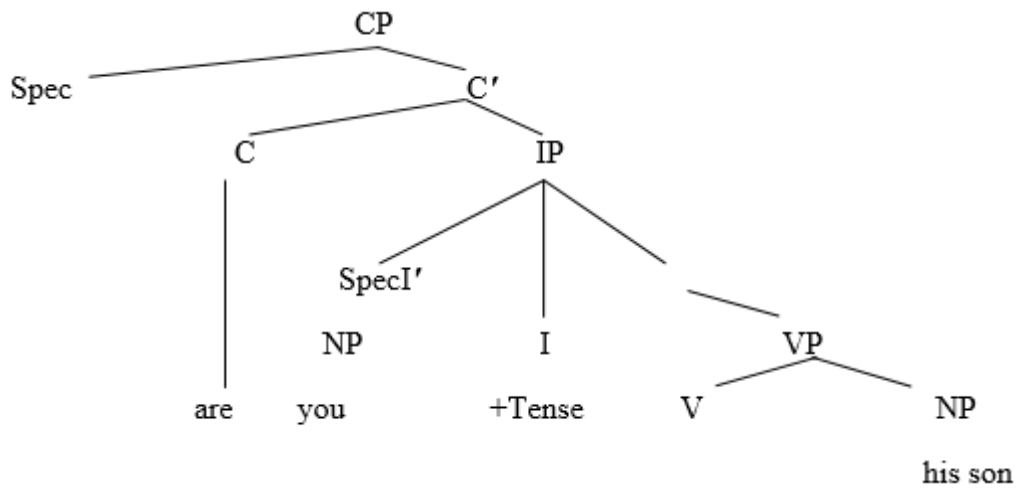
Below are examples of analysis using tree diagrams.

Yes/no question in English and Mwaghavul

Basic structure:19(a)



**Derived structure:19 (b)**



It is obvious that the verb ‘a’ can begin the sentence like in English. This will make the sentence ungrammatical and unacceptable.

Wagá á la kî rî ye

You are son of him ?

Are you his son?

We can have ‘waga á la kî rî ye?’ or ‘a waga á la kî rî?’ in Mwaghavul which are both grammatical but that of English can only be ‘are you his son’ and not ‘you are his son’. However, the latter is also used in informal settings in English. The particles, ‘ye’ and ‘àà’ are overt yes/no question morphemes.

**20. Another example is:** Sum kî yil diisi ni a Jos àà

Name of land this it is Jos ?

This place is called Jos?

Is this place called Jos?

From the example above, it can be observed that ‘àà’ is also an overt yes/no question morphemes. It implies ‘is it so? It is a sentence final question morpheme, used when the response echoes a statement in Mwaghavul.

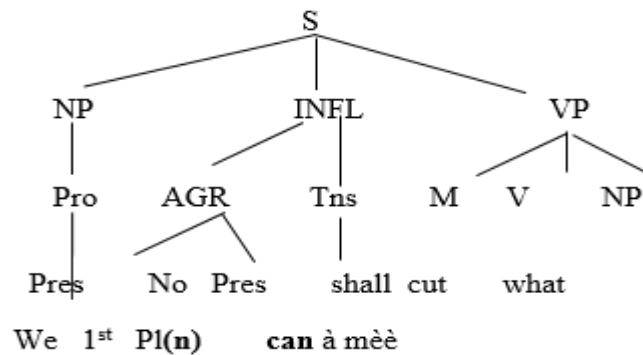
**21. Example:** A shwaa àm àà?

You drink water Q

Do you drink water?

**4.2Wh-questions in English and Mwaghavul**

**Basic structure:22.(a)**



(Mu)

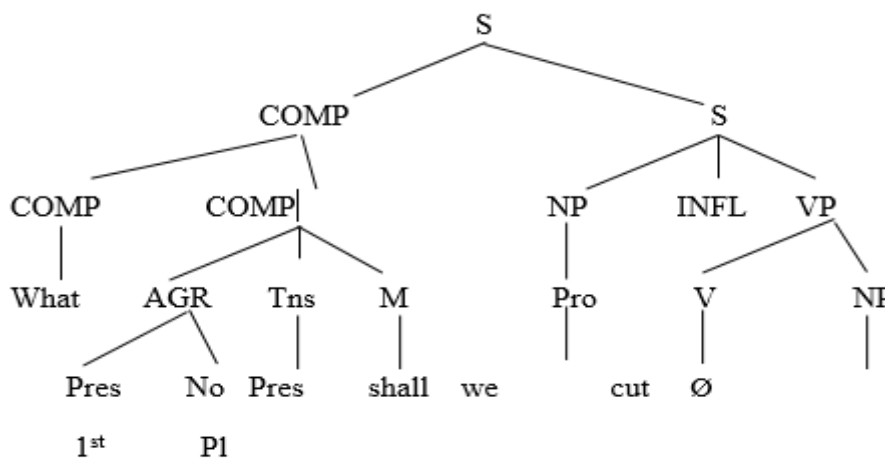
Mu n-can à mède

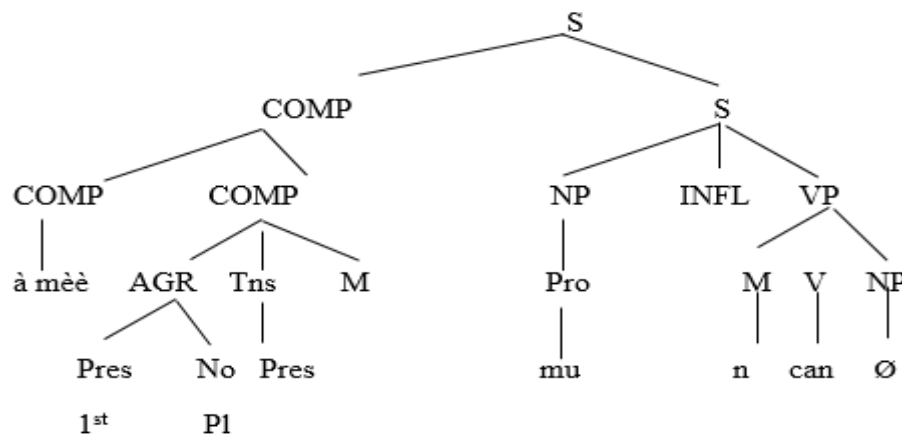
We shall cut what?

What shall we cut?

The basic structure in English is ungrammatical while that of Mwaghavul is grammatical and accepted. The future modal ‘shall’ is marked by the prenasal morpheme /n/, in Mwaghavul.

**Derived structure: (b)**





à mèmè mu n-can?

What we shall cut?

What shall we cut?

The derived structure of the English sentence above is grammatically accepted while that of Mwaghavul is unaccepted and ungrammatical even though it is the direct translation from English to Mwaghavul. It is also clear from the structure above that the modal auxiliary ‘shall’ is represented by the prenasal ‘n’ in Mwaghavul which is at the right side of the structure not the left as that of English language. This is because the modal auxiliary in Mwaghavul goes hand-in-hand with the main verb ‘can’ as in the example above.

**Another example is:**

23. a pet a ògùrùm kong mo ye  
 you call you people how many pl. ?  
 How many people did you call?

**7.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

From the study, it is obvious that there are peculiar similarities and also differences in question formation in English and that of Mwaghavul. They can be summarised thus:

1. The basic forms of question formation in Mwaghavul are the polar questions and wh-questions which are also similar to that of English.
2. Also, the NP position at the right hand of the sentence is left empty after transformation has taken place in both English and Mwaghavul sentences. This implies that the space is left null at the extraction site.
3. A sharp contrast between wh-questions in English and Mwaghavul is that while the derived structure of a sentence is correct and acceptable in English, the basic structure is accepted as grammatical in Mwaghavul, as seen in the structures above.

4. It is also obvious from the study that in Mwaghavul, yes/no question has two overt question morphemes, àà and ye while wh-question has a final question morpheme ye. English language has no such.
5. In Mwaghavul yes/no question, movement is hardly involved except in yes/no question with adjunction where the subject in 'focus' position is usually taken over by the pronoun.
6. It is vital to note that generally, in yes/no question in Mwaghavul, no movement is involved but there are rare cases where movement can be involved like those that involve NP movement from sentence final position to sentence initial position which is same in English.
7. It is also important to note that, in Mwaghavul language, one of the most commonly used form of yes/no question is as a result of a rise on the intonation of the final syllable and the corresponding elongation of the final vowel sound.
8. In yes-no question forms with adjunctions in Mwaghavul, the subjects show agreement in person and number and also, the subject in 'focus' position is usually taken over by the pronoun as in the case in English.
9. It is clear that in wh-question in Mwaghavul, some wh-elements always move to the sentence initial position to indicate question like awe,(who) others remain at the final position like ané, (where), pérang yé (when), while others occupy dual positions like amé (what), arangyé, (why) and arangyé (how). This is not the case in English, where all wh-elements move.
10. Summarily, yes/no question have three forms in Mwaghavul namely; yes/no question formation by adjunction, a rise in intonation which occurs by elongating the final vowel of the last syllable of an utterance, and yes/no question by NP movement. The second basic type of question formation in Mwaghavul language is the wh-question. This can be through the use of interrogative pronouns or question morphemes mostly beginning on a high tone except aráng[... ]yé, the morphemes for 'how' and 'why'.
11. Finally, there exist a transformational relationship between the statements and their corresponding interrogative sentences in Mwaghavul language as exist in English.

## 8.0 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is very relevant because it studies the differences in question formation of English and Mwaghavul. Contrastive studies of languages aid students of English and Linguistics to better understand the English Language. This is because it takes one with a good mastery of his/her mother tongue to better understand a second language. The study also unveils the similarities that exist in the formation of questions in English and Mwaghavul. The Mwaghavul language is one of the languages that are likely to go into extinction if care is not taken. Thus is because the language is not well spoken nor documented by the speakers. Daapiya in his preface laments thus:

The Mwaghavul language, I must say falls into the group of endangered languages where if care is not taken will die a natural death. This is due to the simple fact that those of us who are supposed to speak and promote the use of the language do not speak it, neither do we encourage

our young ones. We tend to speak more Hausa and our children seem to speak more Hausa than the Hausa man, (ii).

This study will therefore serve as a relevant document for the speakers of Mwaghavul and even other interested scholars. It will also serve as a good guide for linguists interested in contrastive study of English and other languages, because it explores how questions are formed in English, in contrast to that of. Mwaghavul.

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