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Interrogatives with *wh*-pronouns in Kokborok and English

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Abstract
For an effective teaching of a second language to the *mature* learners a Comparative Grammar Teaching model (CGT) is effective, advisable but long awaited. Born of this strong conviction and of my three decades of English language teaching experience at the tertiary level an attempt has been made here to project a model of CGT. The paper, an offshoot of an ongoing study, compares the *wh*-questions in Kokborok (a Tibeto Burman language spoken in Tripura, India) and English. Within its limited scope the study attempts to bring out the dissimilarities (with implicit similarities) between the interrogative constructions with *wh*-pronominals in the two languages. The quintessence of the findings presented in tabular form in conclusion promises to be extremely useful for all concerned with second language pedagogy, especially in the context stated above.

Keywords: Comparative grammar teaching, Kokborok

1. Introduction
In Das (2011) I have discussed the major characteristics of the *yes-no* questions in Kokborok (KB) spoken in Tripura and compared them with the word order phenomenon in English. But for a comprehensive picture of the interrogative structures in KB one must also look at the other type of question formation. In the present paper I therefore look at *wh*-questions in KB with interrogative pronouns and compare them with those of English. In the process we expect to get some crucial insights into the word order phenomena in the two languages which promise to be useful for the purpose of more effective teaching of English as a second language to the KB speaking students of Tripura.

It is discovered that there is no use of *de* in *wh*-questions in KB unlike in *yes-no* questions. The rising or High tone however continues to play its role as an accompaniment of interrogative constructions. The major aspect of interest in *wh*-questions is the involvement of no movement of any item in KB compared to English. The *wh*-item remains in situ and the overall word order sequence is the same as in declarative sentences. Mandatory absence of *be* verb in the present indefinite tense in copular constructions is another significant aspect of distinction between KB and English interrogatives and declaratives. The differences between KB and English in respect of their interrogatives and declaratives are given in a tabular form. Keeping in mind the points of differences mentioned in the table will definitely help everybody concerned to approach the issue of English language teaching to the KB speaking students (ethnic tribes) of Tripura in a more systematic, scientific and fruitful manner. This is because the teacher can now trace the systematicity of the errors committed by the learners and will be able to explain the mistakes in terms of the word order disparity between the two systems.

The picture of *wh*-question formation in KB is certainly not so complicated. But it has its own characteristic features. As a point of departure let us have a look at the relevant KB data. There are at least ten *wh*-interrogatives in KB. They are divided into three groups: a) interrogative pronouns, b) interrogative adverbs and c) interrogative determiners. Although it sometimes becomes impossible to find an exact replica of this classification for English *wh*-words in KB, because of certain cases of overlapping, cautions have been taken to observe

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the classification as much as possible. In course of our survey certain interesting differences emerge not only in word order but also in the complement structures of certain categories. We shall point out these at appropriate junctures. As of now, only *wh*-constructions with interrogative pronouns are addressed.

1.1 *wh*-questions with interrogative pronouns: sabo, tamo, sabono

1.1.1 sabo 'who'
1. KB: S P[WH] (V)

nwng	sabo?
2SG-NOM	WH-NOM
NP	NP
S	P¹
You	who

'Who are you?'

ENG: S[WH] V P

Who	are	you?
WH-NOM	mVt (be)	2SG-NOM
NP	VP	NP
S[WH]	V	P

2. KB: S[WH] O V

sabo	a-no	chuba-nai
WH-NOM	1SG-DAT	help-FT
NP	NP-DAT	mVt²
who	me	help-will
S	O	V

'Who will help me?'

ENG: S[WH] V O

Who	will	help	me?
WH-NOM	VP [AUX-FT	mV]	1SG-DAT
[WH]S	V		O

3. KB: S[WH] O O V

sabo	no-no	o	bijap	rw-kha?
WH-NOM	2SG-DAT	[DET	book-AC]	give-PT
NP	NP		NP	mVt
S	IO³		DO	V
who	you		this book	gave

'Who gave you this book?'

ENG: S[WH] V O O

Who	gave	you	this book?
WH-NOM	V-PT	2SG-DAT	DET book
NP	VP	NP	NP
S[WH]	V	IO	DO

4. KB: (ADV) S[WH]V

a-ni	logi	sabo	thang-nai?
1SG-GEN	P	WH-NOM	go-FT
[[NP]	PP]	NP	mVt
	ADV	S	V
me	with	who	go-will

'Who will go with me?'

ENG: S[WH] V (ADV)

Who	will	go	with	me?
WH-NOM	[AUX-FT	mV]	P	1SG-OBLQ⁴
NP	VP		PP	
S	V			ADV

5. KB: O S[WH] V

'Rajmala'	bijap	sabo	swi-kha?
[Rajmala	3SG-AC]	WH-NOM	write-PT
	NP	NP	mVt
	O	S	V
Rajmala	book	who	wrote

'Who wrote the book 'Rajmala'?'

ENG: S[WH] V O

Who	wrote	the book 'Rajmala'?	
WH-NOM	mVt	[DET	book Rajmala-AC]
NP	V	NP	
S	V	O	

A fourfold comparison helps us understand the distinctions better. The comparison on the one hand is between the KB-I or KB interrogative sentences and KB-D or KB declarative type of sentences; and on the other hand between their English counter parts. We present the summary of the *sabo* 'who' type *wh*-interrogatives in the two languages in (6-7) below.

6a. KB-I   **6b. KB-D**
  S P[WH] (V)   S P (V)
  S[WH] O V   S O V
  S[WH] O O V   S O O V
  (ADV) S[WH] V   (ADV) S V
  O S[WH] V   S O V [no movement]

7a. ENG-I   **7b. ENG-D**
  S[WH] V P   S V P
  S[WH] V O   S V O
  S[WH] V O O   S V O O
  S[WH] V (ADV)   S V (ADV)
  S[WH] V O   S V O

In KB the *wh*-word can remain in situ or its place of origination. This is unlike English where the *wh*-word obligatorily moves to the initial position of the sentence. Another interesting feature of KB syntax of both *wh*-words and declarative sentences is that in the third person singular/plural in present tense the *be*-verb can be dropped. This phenomenon of phonetically unrealized *be*-verb in KB is also shared by TB (Tripura Bangla) and SCB (Standard Colloquial Bangla). For example, consider the following:

8a. KB Interrogative

nini	para	boro
your	village	where

'Where is your village?'

8b. KB Declarative

ani	para	oro
my	village	here

'My village is here.'

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1 P is the abbreviated form for PREDICATIVE which is found in copular constructions, unless otherwise specified. The latter situation may arise when P stands for Preposition/Post position in a PP.
² mVt stands for the main verb which also carries tense.
³ IO = Indirect Object, DO = Direct Object.

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4 OBLQ = Oblique Case, which is the default case for the PP-internal Object NP in English.

9a. TB Interrogative

tomar   bari   koi
your   house/village   where
'Where is your house/village?'

9b. TB Declarative

amar   bari   eikhane
my   house/village   here
'My house/village is here.'

10a. SCB Interrogative

tomar   gram   kothay
your   village   where
'Where is your village?'

10b. Declarative

amar   gram   ekhane
my   house   here
'My house/village is here.'

While it is mandatory for the English version of these sentences to have an overt *be*-verb *is*, in KB, TB and SCB the *be*-verb can remain covert. However, that the *be*-verb form is underlyingly there in such copular constructions in the latter can be proved by the surfacing of the *be*-verb in other tense forms. (cf. 11).

11a. KB: ani para oro *tongmani* 'My village here was.'
11b. TB: amar bari eikhane *asilo* 'My house here was.'
11c. SCB: amar baDi ekhane *chilo* 'My house here was.'

For all these sentences in (11) the English version is 'My village/house was here.'

1.1.2 tamo 'what'

12. **KB: S P[WH] (V)**

nini   mung   tamo?
2SG-GEN   NP-NOM   WH-NOM
[DET   N]   NP
NP   NP
S   P
Your name   what
'What is your name?'

ENG: S[WH] V P

What   is   your   name?
WH-NOM   be-3SG-PRES   [DET-GEN   N]
NP   VP   NP
S[WH]   V   P

13. **KB: S O [WH] V AUX**

nwng   tamo   khlai-wi   tong?
2SG   WH-AC   do-PROG   exist V
NP   NP   [mV   tV]
S   O   V   AUX
You   what   do-ing   exist
'What are you doing?'

ENG: O[WH] AUX S V

What   are   you   doing?
WH-AC   be-3SG-PRES   2SG-NOM   do-PROG
NP   tV   NP   mV
O   AUX   S   V

In English the presence of an AUX+T is obligatory in most of the *wh*-constructions except when information is sought about the subject of the sentence. The AUX in English when present bears the Agreement or AGR features while the main verb either appears in bare form or participial form: *will go*, *have gone* or *is going* etc. In KB a similar phenomenon is observed not only in interrogative but also in declarative sentences. This is noted in particular in progressive tense constructions. To be specific, the verbal form is split up between mV+PROG and an existential verb which bears AGR feature which we designate as tV or verb with tense. The existential verb lends a sense of continuousness to the expression. In (13) above, we notice an illustration of this in *khlai-wi tong* translated as *do-PROG exist V* meaning 'are/is doing'. One feels tempted to invite a comparison with Bangla compound verbs live *kaj korche* 'work doing' = doing. But the latter is obviously not a case of split up VP. The KB phenomenon resembles the English type AUX+T mV construction. Notice, in KB also the main verb takes the participial suffix –*wi* equivalent to English –*ing*. More research is needed in the morphological, syntactic and semantic aspects of such constructions!

14. **KB: S O WH[O] V AUX**

nwng   a-no   tamo   sa-wi   tong?
2SG   1SG-AC   WH-AC   tell-PROG   exist
NP   NP-AC   NP-AC   [mV   tV]
S   O   O   V   AUX
'What are you telling me?'

ENG: [WH]O AUX S V O

What   are   you   telling   me?
WH-ACbe-3SG-PRES   2SG-NOM   tell-PROG   1SG-AC
NP   tV   NP   mV   NP
(D)O   AUX   S   V   (I)O

Once again we summarize the contrastive picture prevailing in KB and English through a four-fold comparison.

15a. KB-I   **15b. KB-D**

S WH[PRD] (V)   S P (V)
S WH[O] (V)   S O (V)
S O WH[O] V   S O O V

16a. ENG-I   **16b. ENG-D**

S[WH] V P   S V P
O[WH] AUX S V   S AUX V O
O[WH] AUX S V O   S AUX V O O

1.1.3 sabono 'whom'

17. **KB: S WH[O] V**

nwng   sabo-no   suri?
2SG   WH-AC   worship
NP   NP-AC   mVt
S   O   V
You   whom   worship
'Whom do you worship?'

ENG: O[WH] AUX S V

Whom   do   you   worship?
WH-AC   AUX PRES   2SG   mV
NP-AC   AUX   NP   mV
O   tV   S   V

18. KB: S WH[O] V-INF (V)

nwng   sabo-no   nai-na-ni   muchung[5]?
2SG[NOM]   WH-AC   see-INF   desirous

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5 The semantics of muchung is a problematic one. This word can be used also as a verb as in muchung-kha. This is however not our concern here.

NP	NP-AC	V-INF-GEN	AP
S	O	V-INF-GEN	A
You	whom	of seeing	desirous

'Who are you desirous of seeing?'

ENG: O[WH] V S A PP

Who	are		you	desirous	of seeing?
WH-AC	AUX	PRES	2SG/PL	A	P N
NP	VP		NP	AP	PP
O	V		S	A	PP

The SOV structure of KB simple declarative sentences obtains even in *wh*-constructions. The only difference is that the *wh*-word can take appropriate morphemes to signify its case feature. So *sabo-no* = who to = 'whom' i.e. who-AC[cusative]. That movement of *wh*-items is redundant in KB is perhaps because KB is still predominantly a synthetic language where post positions are yet to take over en masse the role of syntactic relations between words. Case markers (read suffixes) signify the inflections. The following summary in abstract forms of functional categories substantiates our observations.

19a. KB-I   **19b. KB-D**
S WH[O] V   S O V
S WH[O] V-INF (V)   S O V-INF A (V)

20a. ENG-I   **20b. ENG-D**
O[WH] AUX S V   S V O
O[WH] V S A PP   S V A PP O

2. Conclusion

In this article we have surveyed the syntax of *wh*-interrogatives with *wh*-pronouns in KB and English. This has given us a comprehensive picture of the word order differences in the two languages. Das (2011) has noted the major differences in respect of *yes-no* questions and their implications for English language pedagogy in Tripura particularly concerning a more effective teaching of English to the KB speaking students at various levels. The same holds good for the present study too. The major points having emerged here are.

a. KB and English belong to two totally different families of languages: Sino-Tibetan and Indo-European respectively. The KB students learning English find various problems in coping with the latter.

b. It is a truism in second language research that the first language grammar plays a significant role, mostly as a hindrance, in cases where the two systems i.e. the first language and second language, are radically at variance with each other.

c. Through this comparative study it has been established that KB is a HEAD LAST language while English is a HEAD FIRST language.

d. This parametric variation is largely responsible for the word order differences noted in the two languages.

e. The morphological property of VP determines the phenomena of Tense and AGR representation in both the languages.

f. In English AUX is mandatory in non-copular structure of such interrogatives. KB fulfils this demand of the interrogative formation by optionally introducing a non-morphemic element *de*, in addition to a rising (High) tone in *wh*-questions (also in *yes-no* type questions).

g. The formation of the VPs gets complicated in accordance with the need to represent the complex concepts of the time continuum of the two languages.

h. Use of an additional verbal item renders the KB VP look like [(O) mV tV], where mV stands for main verb, and tV for the Tensed Verb.

i. No verbal movement is necessary in KB, unlike in English. (Only *de* moves around the VP without affecting the semantic value of the sentence concerned.)

The entire picture of differences between KB and English in respect of their respective interrogative formations with *wh*-pronominals and also in respect of formation of declaratives is given in (21). Keeping these points of comparisons and differences in mind will definitely help everybody concerned to approach the issue of English language teaching to the KB speaking students of Tripura in a more systematic, scientific and fruitful manner. This is because the teacher can now trace the systematicity of the errors committed by the learners and will be able to explain them in terms *mainly of the word order disparity* between the two systems.

21.

wh-item	KB-I(nterrogative)	KB-D(eclarative)	ENG-I	ENG-D
1. sabo 'who'	S P[WH] (V)	S P (V)	S[WH] V P	S V P
	S[WH] O V	S O V	S[WH] V O	S V O
	S[WH] O O V	S O O V	S[WH] V O O	S V O O
	(ADV) S[WH] V	(ADV) S V	S[WH] V (ADV)	S V (ADV)
	O S[WH] V	S O V	S[WH] V O	S V O
2. tamo 'what'	S WH[PRD] (V)	S P (V)	S[WH] V P	S V P
	S WH[O] (V)	S O (V)	O[WH] AUX S V	S AUX V O
	S O WH[O] V	S O O V	O[WH] AUX S V O	S AUX V O O
3. sabono 'whom'	S WH[O] V	S O V	O[WH] AUX S V	S V O
	S WH[O] V-INF (V)	S O VINF A (V)	O[WH] V S A PP	S V A PP O

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