

The Syntax of Question Formation in Ikpe

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Abstract:

This study examines the Question formation in Ìkpè, one of the speech forms of Akoko spoken in Akoko South East Local Government Area of Ondo state, Nigeria. The study adopts Chomsky's (1995) Minimalist Program for its analysis. The data for this research were gathered from informants whose age ranges between 50 and 70, these informants happen to be native speakers of the language and have a vast knowledge about the speech form. Findings reveal that question formation in the speech form is divided into two types; content question and polar question. It was discovered in the study that the speech form employed interrogative particles in forming a polar question in the speech form. Also, findings reveal that the process of content question involves the movement of the constituent from the extraction site to the landing site. This research serves as a part of the documentation of the syntax of Ìkpè.

Keywords:

Polar Question; Content Question; Interrogative

I. Introduction

Ìkpè is a speech form spoken in Ìkpè Akoko in the Akoko South East Local Government Area of Ondo state, Nigeria. It belongs to the Edoid group of languages it is part of the larger Niger-Congo language family. The name Ìkpè Akoko serves as the name of the speech form and the inhabitants of the speech community. Thus, this research provides a descriptive analysis of question formation in the speech form under study (Ìkpè- Àkókó). Elugbe (1989) divided the Edoid languages into four sub-groups. They are the Delta Edoid, South-Western Edoid, North Central Edoid and North Western Edoid. The North Western Edoid is further divided into two: the Southern North Western Edoid and the Osse. The languages under the southern NWE include (1) Opke-Idesa (2) Oloma (3) Emhalhe (somorika) and (4) Okpamheri. The languages under the Osse (a name after the river separating them from Southern NWE) are Uhanmì (Ìsua), Ehunen (Ekpimin) and Ùkue (Ìkpè).

The existing works on the speech forms are basically on the lexicostatistics of the cognate words in the speech form to aid the classification of the speech form genetically. This present research is an effort to fill the gap which is present in the grammar of the language and it is prompted by Crystal's (2000) clarion call that linguists should explore endangered languages for documentation before the languages go into extinction.

II. Review of Literature

The Minimalist Program (henceforth MP) is the latest version of the transformational generative grammar. The program is developed on the economy of principles and derivations. The Minimalist Program is structured around three systems namely: the lexicon,

computational system, LF and PF. The mechanisms of operation of the Minimalist are select, merge and agree. MP assumes that the lexicon expresses items that have semantic, syntactic and phonetic features. Derivation in MP starts from the lexicon where items are selected directly through a numeration system called merge. Merge combines items in a pair wise manner. Merge is divided into two external merge and internal merge. External merge selects and combines items directly from the lexicon through numeration while internal merge applies to a merge operation that affects syntactic elements that are introduced into already derived convergent. Agree is an operation that establishes between two elements if they share certain grammatical features (Kremers 2003: 6). The operation consists of two elements probe and goal. The probe, in order to be able to enter into an agree relation must be active. It can be active if and only if it has unvalued feature so that it can value its feature by probing for an active goal that has the same matching features but valued (Al-Horas 2013). Probe is the functional element which serves as the highest head with [-interpretable] features while the goal is a lexical element with [+ interpretable] feature.

III. Results and Discussion

3.1 Previous Works on Question Formation

Question formation has widely been discussed by Ajiboye (2006), Ademiluyi (2005) Lamidi (2000) Yusuf (1998), Adeoye (2019) among others. Yusuf (1998) asserts that it is quite obvious that in question formation, there exists a transformational relationship between a declarative and the corresponding statement be it Yes/No or Wh-question. He further opines that the simple sentence could perform various functions like declaration; imperativization or interrogation as one makes a statement, gives orders or asks questions.

Ajiboye (2006) asserts that the standard Yoruba has the following question words: Njé, bí, Šé, Šebí /sebí, àbí / tàbí, ɓe and ha. The interrogative markers Njé and Šé occur at the initial position, àbí / tà bí can occur at both the initial and medial position, while ɓe and bi are added at the final position. Some of the polar questions in Yoruba are illustrated below:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1a. Adé ti lọ sí ìta
Adé Perf go Prep out
Adé gone outside Has | b. Šé Adé ti lọ sí ilé?
Qw Adé Perf go Perf house
Adé gone outside? |
| 2a. Adé ti lọ
Adé Perf go
Adé has gone | b. Njé Adé ti lọ?
Qw Adé Perf go
Has Adé gone? |

He claims further that Yoruba has the following content question words: kí 'what', ta 'who', èlò 'how much' ibo 'where', è kelóó 'which one' mé loó 'how many' ewo 'where' n kọ 'where'. He explains that the question words occur at the sentence's initial position except for dá 'where' n kọ occurs at the final position. See the examples below:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1a. Kí ni wọ n je?
Qw foc 3pl eat
What did they eat? | b. Ta ni o rí?
Qw foc 2sg see
Who did you see? |
| 2a. Olu dá? | b. Olu n kọ? |

Olú Qw
Where is Olú?

Olú Qw
How is Olú?

Adeoye (2020) provided a detailed description of interrogative construction in the Ondo dialect of Yoruba. He asserts that Ondo dialect adopts two mechanisms in forming its polar questions,

- (i) the use of interrogative particles such as *ṣé* and *dà ...í /ín*
- (ii) raising of voice on declarative sentences.

He explains further that there are five basic content question words in the Ondo dialect while the others are derived through *kí-* prefixation. He establishes that content interrogative sentences are derived through the movement of the content question word to the sentence's initial position. It is also shown that when the content question phrases are moved, they are not accompanied by a focus marker. Some of the content question words in the Ondo dialect are *Kí* 'What', *Èsí* 'Who', *Èlú* 'How many', *kíbè* 'Where', *Kíghi* 'When'.

Judging with the foregoing, there is no existing works on the syntax of interrogatives in the speech form under study (*Ìkpè*). Thus, the vacuum present in the aspect of the grammar triggers this study.

3.2 Polar Interrogative Sentences in *Ìkpè*

Polar interrogative sentences are questions whose expected response could be either *yes/no*. Konig and Siemund (2007: 271) assert that "polar interrogatives are typically used to inquire about the truth and falsity of the propositions they express". They note further that different strategies are adopted by languages in forming polar interrogative sentences. They mention six methods that have been established typologically in forming polar interrogatives in languages. They are:

- i. the use of interrogative particles
- ii. a change of relative word order
- iii. the use of special intonation patterns
- iv. the addition of special tags
- v. the use of disjunctive – negative structures
- vi. the use of particular verbal inflection.

However, cross linguistic evidence has shown that languages differ in terms of the mechanism or strategies used in deriving polar interrogatives. Some languages such as Igbo and Urhobo use tone to derive their polar questions (see Ileonu 2010 and Aziza 2010) while some others e.g. Yoruba and Dagbani use designated question words and raising of pitch. In this present study, *Ìkpè* adopt one mechanism in forming its polar questions, the one mechanism is: the use of interrogative particles such as *ṣé*

1a. Ade ru iwèlè
NP eat yam
"Ade ate yam"

1b. Sé Ade ru iwèlè
QM NP eat yam
"Did Ade eat yam?"

2a. Ade o de
NP FUT. come
"Ade is coming"

2b. Sé Ade o de
QM NP FUT. come
"Is Ade coming?"

3a. Olú ò rú ora

b. Sé Olú ò rú ora

NP Perf. eat food
“Olu has eaten food?”

QM NP Perf. eat food
“Has Olu eaten food?”

4a. Akin gbò ófí
NP kill rat
“Akin killed a rat”

4b. Sé Akin gbò ófí
QM Akin kill rat
“Did Akin kill a rat?”

5a. Bàbá di àti
NP buy car
“Dad bought a car”

5b. Sé Bàbá di àti
QM NP buy a car
“Did father buy a car?”

From the examples (1-5) above, examples (1a-5a) are declarative sentences to which (1b-5b) are derived. It is present that the language under analysis used interrogative marker as its marker “sé”. The interrogative marker occurs structurally at the initial position thereby changing the declarative sentence to an interrogative sentence. The response to the questions in (1-5) may either be hin “Yes” or eyé “No” depending on whether the statement is true or false.

3.3 Polar Question in Focus Construction in Ìkpè

Abdullahi (2023) asserts that Focus is a syntactic phenomenon all languages have a way distinct way of focusing. This concept has been thoroughly described by scholars in different languages of the world; the works include Yusuf (1989), Aarts (2001), Olaogun (2016), and Adeoye (2019) among others. In Ìkpè, the constituent focus can be questioned with the polar question words. See the examples below:

1a. Adéí òhi tí ru ìwèlè.
NP Foc. eat yam
“Ade was the person that ate yam”
b. Sé Adéí òhi tí ru ìwèlè.
QM NP foc. eat yam
“Was Ade the person that eat yam?”

2a. Adei òhi tí o de
NP Foc. FUT. come
“Ade was the person that was coming”
b. Sé Adei òhi tí o de
QM NP Foc. FUT. come
“Was Ade the person that is coming”

3a. Olúí òhi tí ò ru òrà
NP Foc. Perf. eat food
“Ade was the person that ate the food”
b. Sé Olúí òhi tí ò ru òrà
QM NP Foc. Perf. eat food
“Was Ade the person that ate the food?”

4a. Akini òhi tí gbo ófí
NP Foc. kill rat
“Akin was the person that killed the rat”

b. Sé Akini òhi ti gbo ófí
 QM NP Foc. kill rat
 “Was Akin the person that killed the rat?”

5a. Bàbái òhi ti di àti
 NP Foc. buy car
 “Dad was the person that buy the car”

b. Sé Bàbái òhi ti di àti
 QM NP Foc. buy car
 “Was Akin the person that killed the rat?”

In the examples (1-5) above, it is present that when the subject of the sentence is focused, it is moved from its original position to the Spec FP position thereby leaving a trace at the extraction site and it's accompanied by the focus marker òhi. It should be noted that the moved element is co-indexed with the tracing element to reveal the movement. However, when a focused constituent is focused on the language as present in the examples it follows the same process as the declarative explained above.

3.4 Content question words in Ìkpè speech form

Ìkpè speech form is an interrogative constituent fronting language where various question words are used in different contexts in the dialect. However, we need to point out that the speech form has seven (7) content question words which are listed below:

What	‘emí’
Where	‘ori’
How	‘egbí’
Which	‘òti’
Who	‘òsìòni’
When	‘òkíerè’
Why	‘èmíselè’

These content question words vary in Ìkpè speech form. Some of the interrogative words have both syntactic and semantic distinctions. The table below illustrates the inventory of the interrogative markers in the speech form.

INTERROGATIVE WORD	CONTENT / SEMANTIC DISTINCTION	GLOSS
òsìòni	[+ human]	Who
emí	[+animate]	What
egbí	[+enumeration]	How (many / much)
òkíerè	[+location]	Where
ori	[+time]	When
òti	[+Object]	Which
èmíselè	[+enumeration]	Why

Each of the question words listed in the Table above is used for a specific purpose, ranging from enumeration to location period among others. Moreover, the question words occupy two positions in interrogative sentences: clause-initial and clause-final.

a. Òsìòni ‘who’ content question word.

Òsìòni is a content question word that is used to make inquiries about NP that has the feature (human). It has a semantic property in it that restricts its use only to entities that possess the feature (human). Consider the following examples are;

6a. Kúnlé gbi Sade
NP beat Sade
“Kúnlé beat Sade”

6b. Kúnlé gbi òsìòni?
NP beat QW
“Kúnlé beat who”?

6c. òsìòni Kúnlé gbi t_i?
Qw NP saw
“Who did Kúnlé beat”?

b. Ori “where” content question word.

Where “ori” is one of the WH question makers that seek to know ‘location’. Examples in basic sentences are;

7a. Kúnlé yúà hi ehì
Kúnlé go to market
“Kúnlé went to market”

7b. Kúnlé yúà hi ori
Kúnlé went to QW
Kúnlé went to where?

7c. ori Kúnlé yúà hi
QW Kúnlé go to
“Where did Kúnlé go?”

In the examples presented above in Ìkpè speech form, ‘ori’ occurs at sentence initial and final position. We observe that ‘ori’ occurs at the final position in (ii) and the question word is formed with a preposition as Loc+ QW. Also, we notice that ‘ori’ occurs at the sentence initial position after movement in example (iii). One would observe that when the question word is moved to sentence-initial position, the preposition precedes it is not always deleted in the speech form.

c. Emí “what” content question word

Emí is used to question entities that have the feature (animate). It is used to inquire about entities other than those that have (human) features. Consider the following example presented below in Ìkpè speech form;

8a. Adé fi àrà
NP wash cloth
Ade washed cloth?

8b. Ade fi emí
NP wash QW
“Ade washed what?”

8c. emí Adé fi t_i
QW Ade wash
“What did Ade wash?”

In the data above, we observe that emí; like other question words, occupies the initial and final positions of an interrogative sentence. Sentence (1a-2a) is the basic words to which the echo questions in (1b-2b) are derived while movement of the question marker to the sentence's initial position changes it to a content question.

d. Egbí “how” and “how much/many” content question word

This content question word is used to inquire about the quantity of an item. The context of use normally determines whether the word is used to inquire about the quantity of an item. In the example below, the quantity will be looked at:

i. Bólá san egbègùá naira
NP pay hundred naira
“Bola paid hundred naira”

- ii. Bólá san egbí
 NP pay QW
 “Bola paid how much?”
- iii. egbí_i Bólá san t_i
 QW NP pay
 “How much did Bola pay??”

Example 2:

- i. Akin ra àra ida?
 NP buy cloth two
 “Akin bought two clothes”
- ii. Akin ra àra egbí
 NP buy cloth QW
 “Akin bought how many clothes?”
- iii. egbí_i Akin ra aso t_i
 QW NP pay cloth
 “How much did Bola pay??”

In examples presented above in Ìkpè speech form, one observes that the question words occur at the initial and final positions. It must be noted that the occurrence of the content question word at the final position. One needs to note that the instances of the question words occurring at the final position are cases of echo questions.

e. ÒTI “Which” Content Question Word

This content question word is used to seek information on the identification of something amongst a group of things. Given options, to seek or to know a particular thing or person in a sentence i.e. specification. It questions the subject NP of a sentence. It shows that a group of items exists and one seeks or makes engaging on a particular member of the group. This is done for clarification purposes and this question word is used to make specification of one thing or person from a set of persons or things. The manifestation of the question word in Ìkpè's speech form is shown in the example below;

- a) Olú rà asi ihòho
 NP buy horse white
 “Olu bought white horse”
- b) Olú ra asi òti?
 NP buy horse QW
 “Olu bought which horse”?
- c) òti_i asi Olú ra t_i
 Qw horse O. buy
 “Which horse did Olu buy”?

In the example above, the NP qualifier is turned to a question word at the base in example (b) before it is moved to a sentence-initial position in example (c). We also observed that when the question word is moved, it is accomplished by the NP it qualifies. The constituent leaves a trace at its extraction site while the verb is left stranded.

f. Òkìrè “when” Content Question Word.

This content question word is used to enquire about the time or period that a particular event took place or will take place. Examples are;

- i. Bọ́lá di o òyòyè
NP come in the morning
“Bola came in the morning”
- ii. Bọ́lá di òkíerè
Bọ́lá come QW?
“Bọ́lá came when?”
- iii. òkíerè_i Bọ́lá di t_i
Qw Bọ́lá wet Ibadan
“When did Bọ́lá come?”

In the examples presented above, òkíerè occurs at two different positions in the sentences, that is, the final and initial positions. Example (ii) is regarded as an echo question or the base where the question word resides before movement takes place while (iii) is derived when the question word moves from its extraction site to the clause's initial position.

g. Èmíselè “why” Content Question Word.

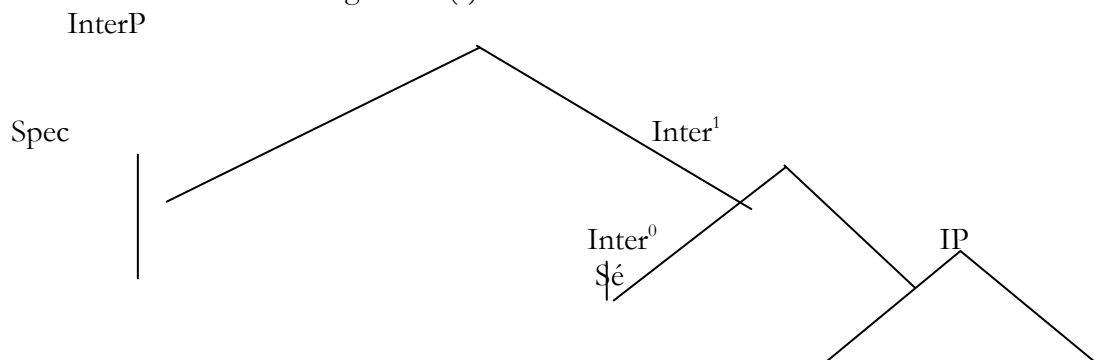
Èmíselè explained the reason behind a particular event or circumstance. It is preoccupied with the discussion of the cause of an event. Consider the example below:

- (a). Adé gbi Sadé ruwon ida
NP beat Sade because money
“Ade beat Sade because of money”
- (b). Adé gbi Sadé èmíselè
NP beat Sade QW
“Ade beat Sade why?”
- (c). èmíselè_i Adé gbi Sadé t_i
QW NP beat NP
“Why did Ade beat Sade?”

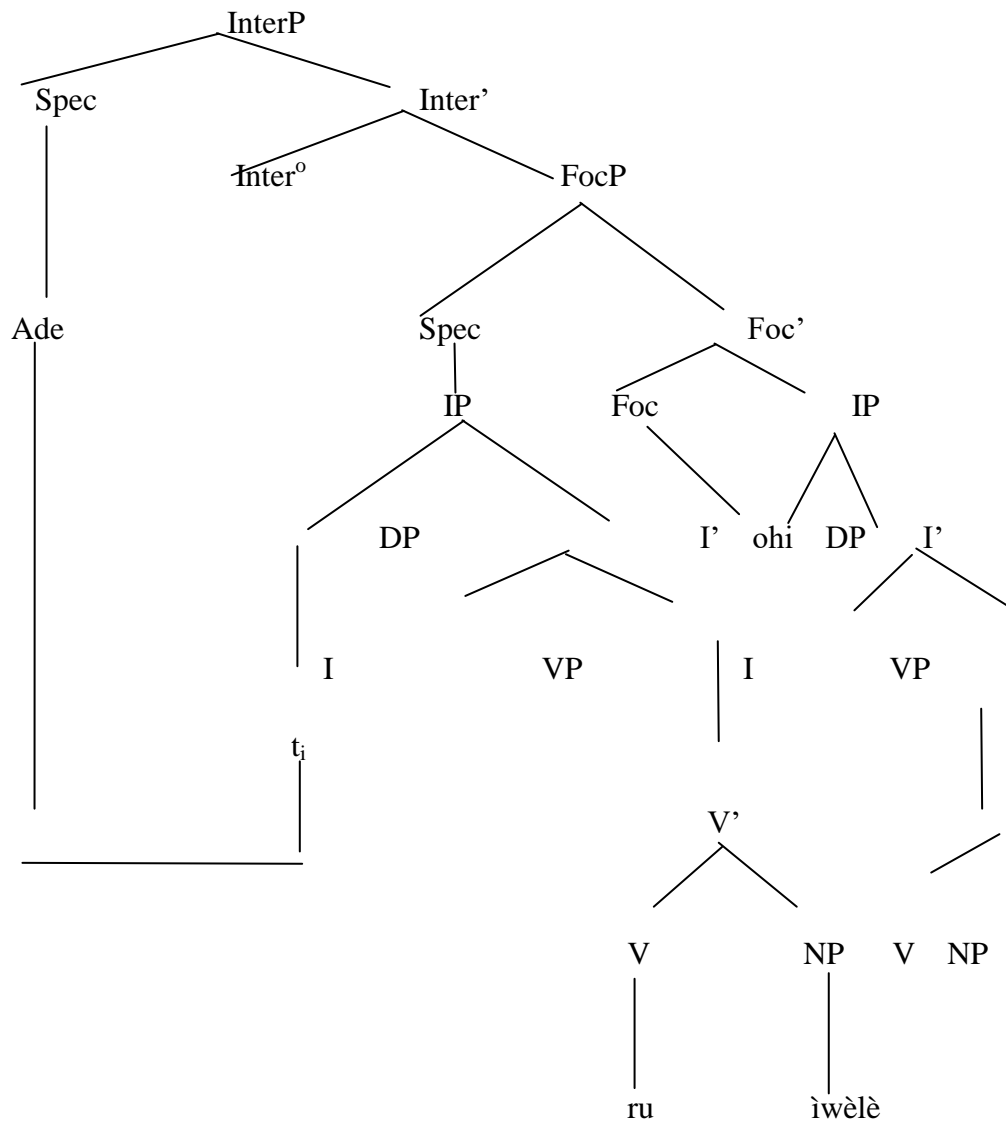
In the data above, it was observed that èmíselè; like other question words, occupies the initial and final positions of an interrogative sentence.

3.5 Derivation of Polar Interrogative sentences in Ìkpè speech form

In deriving the polar interrogative sentence in Ìkpè, we proposed Inter head that selects Fin/IP to project maximally below ForceP. We observe that polar interrogative sentences where the polar interrogative marker is spelled-out at clause initial position; the marker/head remain in-situ. See the tree diagram in (a) for the illustration:

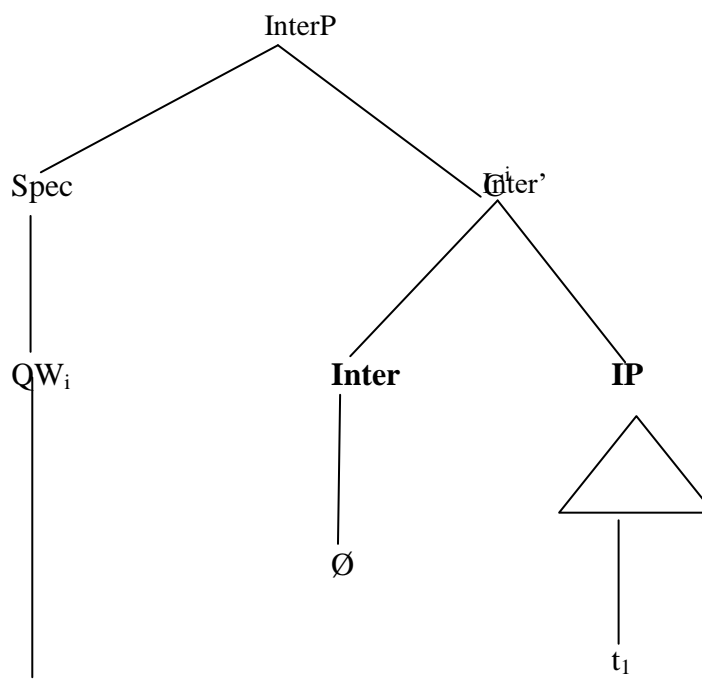


However, for polar interrogative sentences where the polar question marker is spelled-out at the medial position with a focus marker at the final position; it is argued that both the Inter head and the focus marker occur at the sentence initial position, that is, the left periphery of the IP. Thus, we propose multiple CP layers above IP which are InterP and FocP. In this case, it logically follows that Foc head externally merges with Fin/IP which projects into Foc' and FocP. Thus, the Foc head becomes the probe which attracts the Fin/IP which is the active goal to Spec FocP. The Fin/IP moves to Spec FocP to satisfy the EPP feature. Moreover, the Inter head externally merges with FocP, the Inter head becomes the probe which attracts the subject DP at the Spec IP which is the active goal to Spec InterP to satisfy the EPP feature. The tree diagram in (b) illustrates the syntactic projection.



3.6 Derivation of Content Question in Ìkpè Speech Form

In the derivation of content interrogative sentences in Ìkpè, I adopted the movement analysis approach bearing in mind that the content question word head has a strong feature which must be checked before spell-out within the minimalist framework. Thus, the Wh-operators head feature must check the **Feature question (FQst)** to eliminate the strong feature of the **Question (Qst)** (Chomsky 1995:289). Given this fact, I proposed an **Interrogative Phrase (InterP)** where the content question phrase (Content Question Word operator) is raised to **Spec InterP**, the **Inter** head position is phonetically empty and it selects **IP** as its complement. The structural derivation is presented in (C).



IV. Conclusion

In this study, we have examined question formations in Ikpe, the structures and their derivations. We observed that the polar question word is Šé and the mechanism of derivation follows the same pattern of the Yoruba. We established that there are seven content question markers in the speech form. We established that content interrogative sentences are derived through the movement of the content question word to the sentence initial position. It is also shown that when the content question phrases are moved, they are not accompanied by focus marker.

Abbreviations

- InterP Interrogative Phrase
- Inter o Interrogative head
- FocP Focus Phrase
- Foc Focus
- IP Inflectional Phrase
- I Inflection.

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