92. Position of Polar Question Particles

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1.   Defining the values

This map shows the position of question particles in polar questions. Polar questions are ones that elicit the equivalent of a 'yes' or 'no' response. This map does not include interrogative affixes on verbs, although it should be noted that the distinction between interrogative affixes and separate interrogative particles is often hard to make. The map treats interrogative clitics that can attach to words of different categories as question particles. Map 116 shows the distribution of different ways to signal polar questions, including question particles, but does not show their position in the sentence. A number of languages shown on Map 116 as having question particles are not shown on this map because their position is not clear from available materials.

@	1.	Question particle at beginning of sentence	118
@	2.	Question particle at end of sentence	272
@	3.	Question particle in second position in sentence	45
@	4.	Question particle with other position	8
@	5.	Question particle in either of two positions	24
@	6.	No question particle	310
			total 777

In some languages, the question particle occurs **at the beginning of the sentence**, as in (1) from !Xóõ (Southern Khoisan; Botswana).

(1)   !Xóõ (Traill 1994: 18)

lú   tûu   à   sîi

Q   people TNS   come

'Did the people come?'

The French expression *est-ce que*, illustrated in (2), though originally a verb plus demonstrative plus complementizer, can be considered to have become grammaticized as a question particle; French is thus treated here as a language with an initial question particle.

(2)   French (Harris 1988: 237)

   Est-ce que   *le*   *président*   *vient?*

   Q   the   president   come.PRES.3SG

   'Is the president coming?'

In other languages, the question particle occurs **at the end of the sentence**, as in (3) from Hatam (West Papuan; Indonesia).

(3)   Hatam (Reesink 1999: 69)

   a-yai   *bi-dani*   *mem*   *di-ngat*   ***i***

   2SG-get   to-me   for   1SG-see   **Q**

   'Would you give it to me so that I can see it?'

Sentence-final question particles often cliticize onto the last word in the sentence, as in (4) from Majang (Surmic, Nilo-Saharan; Ethiopia).

(4)   Majang (Unseth 1989: 126)

     dɛn-ɛ   *daaki*   *tolay=ŋ*

     see-3SG   Daaki   Tolay**=Q**

     'Did Daaki see Tolay?'

Occasionally a question particle will code other grammatical features of the clause. For example, in Aghu (Trans-New Guinea; Papua, Indonesia), the question particles also code tense (Boelaars 1950: 152).

A third common position for question particles is **second position in the sentence**, following the first word or constituent, as in (5) from Yurok (Algic; California).

(5)   Yurok (Robins 1958: 139)

     kic   **hes**   *nesk^{w}ec-ok̓^{w}*   *ku*   *wʔ ys*

     PST   **Q**   come-3SG   DEF   girl

'Has the girl come back yet?'

Second position question particles very often encliticize onto the first constituent, as in the example in (6) from Mono (Uto-Aztecan; California).

(6)   Mono (Norris 1986: 44)

    Charley=w̃aʔ   *mia-pɨ*

    Charley=Q   go-PERF

    'Has Charley left?'

The fourth type shown on the map consists of languages in which there is a question particle with a specific position within the clause that is something **other than initial position, second position, or final position**. For example, in Hmong Njua (Hmong-Mien; China), the question particle occurs after the subject and before the verb, as in (7).

(7)   Hmong Njua (Harriehausen 1990: 205)

    kuv   *cov*   *nyaaj*   **puas**   *nyam*   *hoob*   *pee*

1SG	MEAS	aunt	**Q**	like	sing	song

'Do my aunts like to sing?'

In Niuean (Oceanic; Niue Island, Pacific), which is VSO, the question particle immediately follows the verb, as in (8).

(8)   Niuean (Seiter 1980: 25)

foaki	*age*	***nakai***	*e*	*koe*	*e*	*fakamailoga*
give	DIRL	**Q**	ERG	you	ABS	prize

ki	*ataha*
to	PERS someone

'Did you give the prize to someone?'

The fifth type shown on the map is languages in which question particles can occur in **two of the positions** represented by the first four types, without one position being dominant. This includes languages where question particles occur either at the beginning or at the end of the sentence. An example of such a language is Koyraboro Senni (Songhay; Mali), in which the question particle is the same as the word meaning 'or' (Heath

1999a: 225). This type also includes languages with two different question particles that occur in different positions. An example of such a language is Hunde (Bantu; Democratic Republic of Congo), in which one question particle occurs sentence-initially, as in (9a), and the other sentence-finally, as in (9b).

(9)   Hunde (Kahombo 1992: 171)

a.   *mbéni*   *ámukátsí*   *mu-lómbe*

Q   woman   NC-lazy

'Is the woman lazy?'

b.   *ámukátsí*   *mu-lómbe*   *hé*

woman   NC-lazy   Q

'Is the woman lazy?'

This type also includes languages in which question particles occur either in initial position or in second position, as in Ngiti (Nilo-Saharan; Democratic Republic of Congo), where there are two distinct question particles, each associated with one of these two positions (Kutsch Lojenga 1994: 379). If one position can be considered dominant, then the language is coded according to that

dominant position. For example, in Abun (West Papuan; Indonesia), there is an optional sentence-initial particle *te* and an obligatory sentence-final particle *e*, as illustrated in (10).

(10)   Abun   (Berry and Berry 1999: 102)

(te)	*nan*	*nai*	*nan*	*bi*	*suk*	*it*	*e*
(**Q**)	2SG	get	2SG	POSS	thing	COMP	**Q**

'Have you got your things?'

Because all polar questions contain a sentence-final particle, but not all contain a sentence-initial one, Abun is treated here as a language with a sentence-final question particle.

The final type shown on the map consists of languages without question particles. This includes a number of subtypes which are not distinguished on this map but are distinguished on Map 116. It includes languages which have interrogative affixes on verbs, languages which code polar questions by a different word order, and languages in which interrogative sentences differ from declarative sentences only in intonation. Note that in some languages with question particles, it is more common not to use

these particles; a language is coded here as lacking a question particle only if there is no evidence that a question particle is ever used.

In a number of languages, the position of question particles is variable. In such languages, the position of the question particle often depends on what is the focus of the question. In most if not all such languages, however, there is one position which is associated with a more neutral question, where the truth of the entire sentence is being questioned without one constituent being the focus of the question. In such cases the language is coded for this map on the basis of the position of the question particle in such neutral questions. In Imbabura Quechua (Ecuador), for example, there is an interrogative clitic that is attached after the constituent which is the focus of the question, as in (11a), where the focus of the question is *wasi-man* 'to the house'; if the sentence is a neutral question, with no specific constituent as the focus, the interrogative clitic occurs on the verb, as in (11b).

(11)   Imbabura Quechua (Cole 1982: 15)

     a.   *wasi-man=chu*   *ri-ju-ngui*

house-to**=Q**   go-PROG-2

'Are you going TO THE HOUSE?'

b.   *wasi-man*   *ri-ju-ngui=**chu***

house-to   go-PROG-2**=Q**

'Are you going to the house?'

Since the question particle attaches to the verb in polar questions with no constituent in focus in Imbabura Quechua, and since the normal word order in this language is verb-final, it is coded on the map as a language with a sentence-final question particle. In Syrian Arabic, which is not verb-final, the neutral position for the question particle is sentence-final (Cowell 1964: 378).

In the example in (12) from Kobon (Trans-New Guinea; Papua New Guinea), the question is signalled by an expression that involves (optionally) the word meaning 'or' plus a negated form of the verb of the sentence.

(12) Kobon (Davies 1981: 5)

*ne kaj ap   mɨd-öp   **(aka)   mɨd-ag-öp***

2SG pig INDEF be-PERF.3SG **(or)   be-NEG-PERF.3SG**

'Have you any meat?'

For the purposes of this map (and Map 116), such negative expressions are not distinguished from question particles. Such multi-word expressions for forming questions are primarily found in sentence-final position.

Many languages have question particles or expressions that indicate that the question is a **leading question**, one where the speaker has an expectation as to what the answer will be. English, for example, employs what are called "tag-questions" for this purpose, illustrated in (13a), which differ from the **neutral question** form illustrated in (13b) in that their form indicates that the speaker expects a 'yes' answer.

(13)   a.   *You're planning to go to the beach, aren't you?*

       b.   *Are you planning to go to the beach?*

Similarly, Hixkaryana (Carib; Brazil) has a particle *hampe*, illustrated in (14), which signals doubt, and when used in sentences

with interrogative intonation, suggests that the speaker expects the answer to be 'no'.

(14)   Hixkaryana (Derbyshire 1979: 5)

    ɨhme   *menahno*   *hampe*

    egg   2>3.eat.PST   DOUBT

    'Did you really eat the egg?'

A neutral question in Hixkaryana, however, differs from the corresponding declarative sentence only in intonation. The map restricts attention to the expression of neutral questions, so Hixkaryana is shown on the map as only employing intonation to signal questions.

There are two ways in which a language can be coded as having a question particle at the beginning of a sentence. First, the particle may always occur at the beginning of a sentence, regardless of the word order elsewhere in the clause. Second, it may immediately precede the verb, and the dominant word order in the language may be verb-initial so that the normal position of the question particle is sentence-initial – even though if some other

constituent precedes the verb, it will also precede the question particle. These two types of languages are not distinguished on the map. Similar comments apply to question particles at the end of sentences.

2. Geographical distribution

Apart from languages lacking question particles altogether, the most common type shown on the map is languages in which the question particle occurs in sentence-final position. Note, however, that the majority of languages with question particles fall into three areas: (i) a belt stretching across Africa from western Africa to central eastern Africa; (ii) an area within Asia including mainland Southeast Asia and extending west into India and north through China to Japan and eastern Siberia; and (iii) New Guinea. Within these areas, sentence-final particles outnumber all other types. Outside these three areas, however, final particles are no more common than initial or second position particles. The largest area in which final particles are absent is Europe and North Africa.

Both initial particles and second position particles are widespread, although they are uncommon within the three areas mentioned above in which final particles predominate. Initial particles are most common in (i) Europe and North Africa; and (ii) North America, including Mesoamerica. Second position particles are most common in North America. Languages lacking question particles are fairly evenly distributed throughout the world.