

Ihafa: A Journal of African Studies 7: 1  
December 2015, 86-116

## Content Questions in Zarma

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### Abstract

While attempts to account for the internal structure of wh-question constructions have been on for several decades, very little or no information is available on Zarma. Relying on minimalist program model, this paper investigates the syntax of Zarma wh-questions. It identifies the items employed as wh-words and shows the strategies involved in the derivation of wh-question constructions in the language. It argues that wh-in-situ strategy is not allowed in the language and that Zarma wh-questions have a covert head. The use of *mòtè* in a question type without the focus marker *nò* is recognised as a pseudo-wh-question. The structure of wh-question furthermore shows that an economy principle is at work when Zarma wh-words move from the embedded clause to the initial position of the main clause.

**Keywords:** wh-operator; focus; question; movement; Zarma.

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### 1. Introduction

Zarma is a Songhai language of the Nilo-Saharan family (Greenberg 1963, Mikkola 1999, Bender 2000, Ehret 2001, Dimmendaal 2008) spoken majorly in Republic of Niger and some states in the north-western part of Nigeria, as well as villages in the north-eastern part of Republic of Benin. Zarma in these areas is spoken alongside two other prominent languages, namely Hausa and Fulfude<sup>1</sup>. Alternate names for Zarma are Dyerma, Zarbarma, Adzerma, Dyarma, Djerma. However, native speakers of the language simply refer to themselves and their language as Zarma.

Although, Zarma has been well described in ethnographic literature, sparing linguistic attention has been paid to the language structure (Jayeola 2007). Grammatical evidence in existing literature suggests a diverse word order for the language<sup>2</sup>. Like many other African languages, Zarma is a register tone language with two phonemic level tones, i.e. High and Low (Tersis 1972). Word formation in Zarma is mainly achieved through affixation, mostly by suffixes. The language does not mark gender while its pronouns and nouns do not reflect case. In Zarma genitive constructions, the possessor linearly occurs before the possessed. To further expand the scope of the syntactic structure information available on the language, this paper examines the peculiarity of Zarma content questions. It identifies her WH-words and situates the strategies involved in the derivation of wh-question constructions which appears

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<sup>1</sup> The language is spoken as one of the major languages in Niger Republic and as native in several places in Sokoto, Kebbi and Zamfara states. In Nigeria, native speakers of Zarma also inhabit several villages north of Nguru town in Yobe state, (Jayeola 2007).

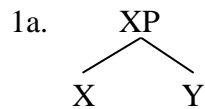
<sup>2</sup> Zarma displays in its superficial syntax mixed word orders - SVO and SOV. However, it has been analysed as a canonical SVO language where movement can produce SOV (Jayeola 20015).

parallel to the ones employed in focus constructions in the language.

The paper is organised as follows: section 2 is a brief discussion of the theoretical framework adopted for the study; sections 3 among others provides information on the characteristic features of wh-movement, behaviour of wh-questions in matrix clauses, differences between real wh- and pseudo-wh-questions, and the landing site of wh-items in Zarma. Section 4 concludes the paper.

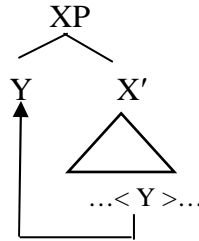
## 2. Theoretical framework

This study adopts minimalist program (MP) framework as proposed in Chomsky (1993) and enriched in various later works within the same tradition (Chomsky 1995, 1999, 2002; Collins 2013; etc.). The computational operations employed in the system for the processing of syntactic structures are *select*, *merge*, and *move*. Operation *select* picks items one after the other from the lexical resources of L (language) and introduces them into a derivation. Operation *merge* on the other hand combines selected word items in a pair wise fashion to form larger units called syntactic objects; for instance, merge (X,Y) will derive {X,Y} in which the item that projects out of the two nodes determines the label of the newly formed syntactic object, as illustrated in (1a) where X heads projects the newly derived XP.



Y is the complement of X in this instance. When *merge* applies on already constructed units of syntactic objects to form larger units out of those already constructed as illustrated in (1b), it is considered a case of internal merge in the literature.

1b.



Internal merge as exemplified in (1b) is an instance of a single syntactic constituent (a phrase or lexical item) being associated with two or more syntactic positions (Collins 2013). Internal merge is clearly an instance of movement which does not cancel the binary branching and endocentricity properties of merge.

The movement operations assumed in MP are basically two; Move-F(eature) which is known as feature checking theory of movement and O(perator) movement which subsumes A(rgument) and Non-argument (A-bar) movement. Relevant to our discussion in this paper is the Operator movement which moves an operator expression into the specifier position within CP. A-movement occurs when a nominal expression moves from one argument position to another specifically within the same sentence structure, e.g. as in passive constructions in English. A-bar movement on the other hand is the syntactic movement of a nominal expression from an argument or theta-marked position to a non-argument position like Spec-CP. This captures wh-question and focus constructions.

Movement, particularly A-bar, is subject to Minimal Link Condition or Attract Closest Principle because Spec-CP is the smallest or shortest minimal link that the operator expression can form a chain with. Thus, successive cyclic movement which occurs in long-distance movement ensures that the smallest constituent is moved within the smallest distance possible. Also relevant to our discussion in this paper is the copy theory of

movement which maintains that a moved constituent leaves behind a copy of itself when it moves and the copy's phonetic features are deleted such that it becomes null in line with the spell-out of occurrences condition. By implication, there are two sub-components of this theory, namely: copying and deletion.

Other major assumptions in the structural build-up of the minimalist program relevant to this paper are VP-Internal Subject Hypothesis and Split-CP Hypothesis. VP-Internal Subject Hypothesis holds that Spec-TP position occupied by subjects of clauses at spell-out is not a theta marked position. Thus, subjects are said to be base-generated in Spec-VP while the feature checking configuration raises them to Spec-TP. On its part, Split-CP Hypothesis assumes that the CP should be split into a number of separate projections. According to Rizzi (1997, 2001 and 2004), the CP houses various constituents that independently project a phrase position at the left periphery of clauses.

### **3. Characteristics of wh-movement in Zarma**

One fact that appears to have emerged from the structure of wh-constructions in Zarma is the similarity it shares with focus constructions. In this instance, wh-operator expression is preposed clause initially and is immediately followed by the focus marker *nò* thereby effecting a change in the word order. This phenomenon is not peculiar to Zarma because in many languages, wh-questions bear extensive structural similarities to focus constructions- a situation which seems to suggest that wh-phrases and focused phrases belong to the same class of elements. However, any argument along this line will fail to bring out the syntactic and semantic differences inherent in the two construction types. Thus, we shall argue for a covert wh-question head because the wh-words do not by themselves clause-type sentences as interrogatives (Aboh & Pfau 2011).

Language internal evidence comes from the examples in (2) where *wàtiká* ‘when’ is present in the numeration but the derived expression is not interrogative.

2a. Írì ñwá [wàtiká ní ðirà]  
 1pl eat when you leave  
 ‘We ate when you left.’

b. Ì dí à [wàtiká à ká né]  
 3pl see 3sg when 3sg come here  
 ‘They saw him when he came here.’

In addition to this, the movement of wh-elements from any of the subject, object, and adjunct positions of the lower (embedded) clause to the Spec-FP of the main clause applies in successive-cyclic fashion, i.e. in a way that only the closest wh-expression get moved. This is in line with the Economy Principle of MP. In all instances, only one wh-phrase is required in Spec-FP<sup>3</sup>.

### 3.1. Wh-phrases in Zarma

As we shall see below, a well-formed content question requires raising the wh-item to sentence-initial position to produce an information question. Based on the author’s native speakers intuition and available data, the lexical items identified as wh-expressions in Zarma do not bear any uniform or special phonological/morphological characteristics or features. However, they are considered as having semantic function of interrogative operators. We therefore tentatively assume in this study that clauses in this case are FPs where each FP comprises a head F position filled by the item *nò* and that the preposed wh-

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<sup>3</sup> Zarma does not permit multiple fronting of wh-phrases.

operator moves into pre-head position within FP. Consider in this connection the following examples in (3) to (17) where the wh-operators which may start out as the subject or complement within the clause as indicated in the (a) forms do not produce well-formed wh-questions unless the wh-items are focused as done in the (b) forms.

Human NP is questioned with *mái* ‘who’

3a.<sup>24</sup> *Mái* fúnnù káoyè?  
 who leave farm  
 ‘Who left the farm?’

b. *Mái* nò fúnnù káoyè?  
 who Foc leave farm  
 ‘Who left the farm?’

4a. <sup>?</sup>Kadi gà dí *mái*?  
 Kadi Fut see who  
 Kadi will see who?’

b. *Mái* nò Kadi gà dí?  
 who Foc Kadi Fut see  
 ‘Who will Kadi see?’

Non-human NP is questioned using *ńfò* ‘what’:

5a. <sup>?</sup>Tandja ñwá *ńfò*?  
 Tandja eat what  
 ‘Tandja ate what?’

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<sup>4</sup> The use of question mark (?) before an example indicates that the expressions is marginal, i.e. not considered a well-formed wh-question.

b. *Ŋfò* no Tandja *ŋwá*?  
 what Foc Tandja eat  
 ‘What did Tandja eat?’

6a. <sup>?</sup>*Bòrá* dè *ŋfò* Musa sè?  
 man buy what Musa P  
 ‘The man bought what for Musa?’

b. *Ŋfò* nò *bòrá* dè Musa sè?  
 what Foc man buy Musa P  
 ‘What did the man buy for Musa?’

Quantity and price are questioned using *mòrijé* ‘how many/how much’.

7a. <sup>?</sup>*Ní* dè [*bònkàrè mòrijé*]?  
 you buy cloth how many  
 ‘You bought how many clothes?’

b. [*Bònkàrè mòrijé*] nò *ní* dè?  
 cloth how many Foc you buy  
 ‘How many clothes did you buy?’

8a. <sup>?</sup>*Ní* *dí* *mòrijé*?  
 you see how many  
 ‘You saw how many?’

b. *Mòrijé* nò *ní* *dí*?  
 how many Foc you see  
 ‘How many did you see?’

9a. <sup>?</sup>*Ní* dè *sààrà* *mòrijé*?  
 you buy cloth how much  
 ‘You bought the cloth how much?’



- b. *Mòrìjé* nò ní dè sààrà?  
how much Foc you buy cloth  
'How much did you buy the cloth?'

Time is questioned as *wátíḡò/wátíkà* 'when'.

- 10a. <sup>?</sup>Ní gà kà *wátíḡò*?  
you Fut come when  
'You will come when?'

- b. *Wátíḡò* nò ní gà kà?  
when Foc you Fut come  
'Which time/when will you come?'

- 11a. <sup>?</sup>Áí dè mótà wò *wátíkà*?  
I buy motor this when  
'I bought this motor when?'

- b. *Wátíkà* nò âi dè mótà wò?  
when Foc I buy motor this  
'When did I buy this motor?'

Place or Location is questioned using *mónígá* 'where'.

- 12a. <sup>?</sup>Kadi kóí *mónígá*?  
Kadi go where  
'Kadi went where?'

- b. *Mónígá* nò Kadi kóí?  
where Foc Kadi go  
'Where did Kadi go?'

13a. <sup>?</sup>Ní dè sààrà wò *mónígá*?  
you buy cloth this where  
‘You bought this cloth where?’

b. *Mónígá* nò ní dè sààrà wò?  
where Foc you buy cloth this  
‘Where did you buy this cloth?’

Any NP can generally be questioned with *wófò* ‘which’.

14a. <sup>?</sup>Ní kà [*jìrì wófò*]?  
you come year which  
‘You came which year?’

b. *Jìrì wófò*] nò ní kà?  
year which Foc you come  
‘Which year did you come?’

15a. <sup>?</sup>Ní dàùn [*bònkàrè wófò dúmí*]?  
you wear cloth which type/kind  
‘You wore/put on which type of cloth?’

b. [*Bònkàrè wófò dúmí*] nò ní dàùn?  
cloth which type/kind Foc you wear  
‘Which type of cloth did you wear/put on?’

Manner adverbial can be questioned or indicated with *mótè* ‘how’.

16a. <sup>?</sup>Ní nà féjó wí *mótè*?  
You Perf sheep kill how  
‘You killed the sheep how?’

b. *Mótè* nò ní nà féjó wíí?  
 how Foc you Perf sheep kill  
 ‘How did you kill the sheep?’

17a. <sup>?</sup>Áí gòó ní fú b́í *mótè*?  
 I Imperf you house know how  
 ‘I know your house how?’

b. *Mótè* nò áí gòó ní fú b́í?  
 how Foc I Imperf you house know  
 ‘How do I know your house?’

### 3.2. Wh-movement Operation in Zarma

As previously mentioned, two traditional accounts have been provided for the treatment of Wh-question: there are those in which the wh-expression must obligatorily occur at the left-most edge of the sentence as in English language, and wh- in- situ languages-Chinese and Japanese where wh-operators remain in-situ, i.e. in the canonical position associated with its grammatical function as subject or complement of V/P in a sentence. In line with this assumption, Lasnik and Uriagereka (1988) claim that all languages are construed as having LF- wh-movement; meaning that there is an underlying wh-word in every declarative sentence and that each language chooses between moving such “word” to sentence initial position or allowing it to remain-in-situ i.e. allowing the wh-phrases to occur in other positions than the focus position (Aboh 2007). Although cross-linguistic evidence indicates that wh-phrases do not always occur in a focus position (see Cheng 1991, Aboh 2007, Aboh & Pfau 2011); as observed from the example sentences in (3-17), Zarma permits focused wh-phrases which do not clause-type the sentence as interrogative. Thus, drawing on cross-linguistic

evidence, we shall address the issue of what constitutes the question particle in Zarma wh-question in section (3.6.).

An examination of the configurational relationships between the antecedent of Wh-expression and the copy it leaves behind reveals that C- commanding relation holds between them. The copy of moved Wh-word in Zarma is understood as having its antecedent, which appears to raise into Spec- FP in an A-bar position (a position to which neither case nor theta-role is assignable). Following from the Copy Theory of Movement, it is assumed that the moved wh-phrase leaves behind a copy at its extraction site which is given a null phonetic spell-out. This is the case because only the last occurrence created is spelled-out.

### 3.3. Wh-movement in Simple/Matrix Clause

Direct questions are considered as those in which the interrogative structure is an independent sentence where an appropriate reply would be a word, phrase, or sentence containing the requisite information (Radford 1988:463). In a simple declarative sentence, wh-questions are formed in Zarma as in (18) and (19).

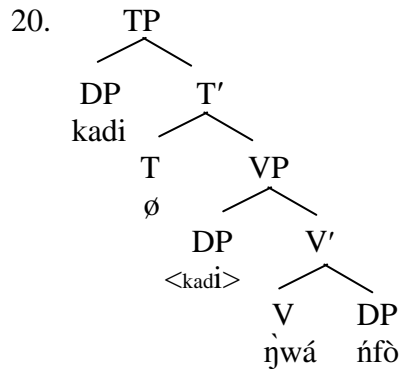
18a. <sup>?</sup>Akeem gà dí *mái*?  
 Akeem Fut see who  
 'Akeem will see who?'

b. *Mái* nò Akeem gà dí?  
 who Foc Akeem Fut see  
 'Who will Akeem see?'

19a. <sup>?</sup>Kadi ñwá *ńfò*?  
 Kadi eat what  
 'Kadi ate what?'

- b. *ńfò* nò Kadi ñwá?  
 what Foc Kadi eat  
 ‘What did Kadi eat?’

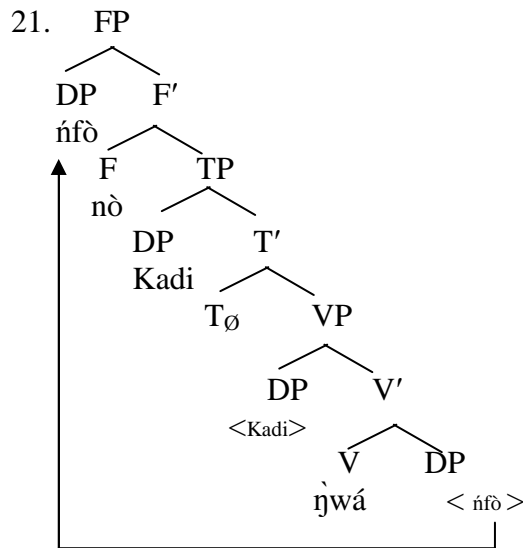
Constructions of the type in (18a) and (19a) are seen as paraphrases of those in (18b) and (19b) which show the source positions of the wh-words *máí* ‘who’ and *ńfò* ‘what’. The (a) examples are not well-formed wh-questions, providing evidence for wh-movement or focused wh-phrases which are shown in (b). Example sentences in (18b) and (19b) are typical or true wh-questions where the bold-face constituents are preposed to the Spec-FP although each of them still functions as the complement of its respective verb at the end of the sentence. This is schematically represented in (20) and (21).



Following the dictates of the VP Subject Internal Hypothesis, *Kadi* the subject of the clause originates VP internally but moves to the Spec of TP to check its nominative case in Spec-head relationship. The wh-word *ńfò* on its part still remains in its base position as the complement of the verb *ñwá* ‘eat’ making the expression to brandish an echoic character. However, the

formation of wh-question would seem to require the movement of the wh-word *ńfò* to the Spec of FP immediately followed by the focus marker *nò*. This is similar to the situation in Yoruba as reported by Carstens (1985:39) that ‘wh-questions are formed by obligatory usage of the focus format.’ The same has also been reported for Ọwọ̀n Njọ-kóo language (Olaogun 2015)<sup>5</sup>.

In (21), *ńfò* has two occurrences or copies, one in Spec-FP and the other in the complement position of *ńwá*. However, the spell-out of occurrences suppose that when *ńfò* undergoes movement, only the last occurrence created is spelled-out to show how internal merge operates.



Apart from what we already observed above, which is a clear case of a mono-transitive verb, when a wh-item is used as the

<sup>5</sup> According to Olaogun (2015), Ọwọ̀n Njọ-Kóo is spoken in the North-western part of Akoko in Ondo State.

object of a postposition<sup>6</sup> in a ditransitive construction, the whole postpositional phrase can undergo wh-movement. This is the case with the postposition *sè* ‘for’ as illustrated in (22), which can be dragged along with the wh-word *mái* ‘who’ which serves as its complement.

- 22a. <sup>?</sup>Ní dè sààrà mái sè?  
 you buy cloth who P  
 ‘You bought cloth for whom?’
- b. [mái sè] nò ní dè sààrà ~~mái~~ sè?  
 who P Foc you buy cloth who P  
 ‘Whom did you buy the cloth for?’

The rule can equally apply to prepose just the wh-expression leaving out the head of the PP to strand. This explains the well-formedness of the example in (22c).

- 22c. [mái] nò ní dè sààrà ~~mái~~ sè?  
 who Foc you buy cloth who P  
 ‘Whom did you buy the cloth for?’

However, it is not the same with the postposition *rá* ‘in’ which does not seem to allow for stranding to take place because the postposition must move along with its wh-word complement to the clause initial position as illustrated in (23a). (23b) fails to converge because the postposition ‘*rá*’ cannot be stranded.

- 23a. [ńfò rá] nò ní dàùn gúlèsé ~~ńfò~~ rá?

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<sup>6</sup> Zarma spots postposition in superficial syntax, however, Jayeola (forthcoming) argues for preposition whose complement checks its oblique case in a spec-head relation.

what P Foc you put cup what P  
 ‘Where did you put the cup?’

b. \*[ńfò] nò ní dàùn gúlèsé-~~ńfò~~ rá?  
 what Foc you put cup what P  
 ‘Where did you put the cup?’

In each case, a phonetically null copy of the moved item is left at the movement site. From the foregoing (22-23), it appears that the possibility of moving a postposition along with its wh-word complement clause-initially viz pied-piping or fronting only the wh-item, leaving behind the postposition to strand is dependent on the syntactic property of the postposition in question.

In the same vein, the assumption that preposed wh-expressions leave a copy behind can be argued on an empirical ground; that no other overt category other than the moved element can fill the gap left behind. This explains the ungrammaticality of (24a and b).

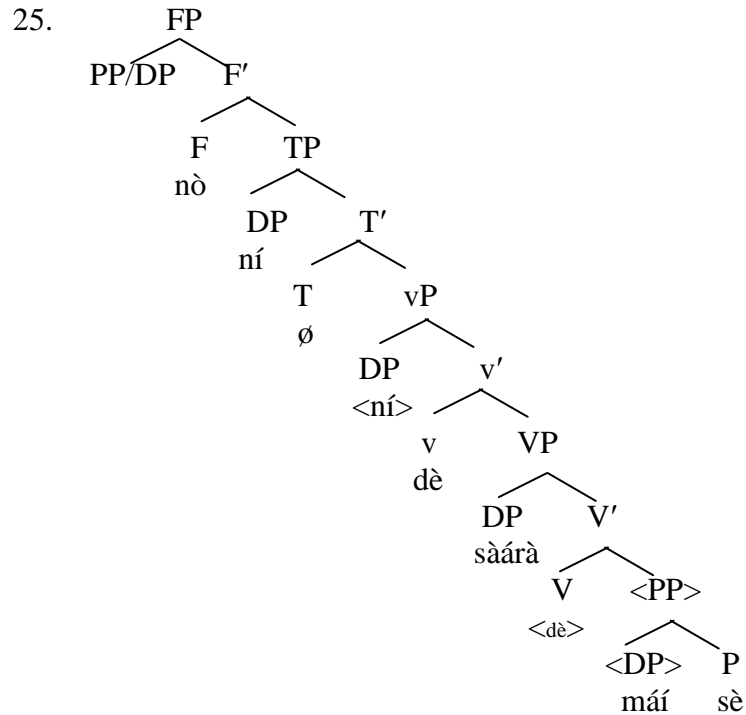
24a. máí sè nò ní dè sààrà (\*Kadi sè)?  
 who P Foc you buy cloth (\*Kadi P)  
 ‘For whom did you buy the cloth?’

b. máí nò ní dè sààrà (\*Kadi) sè?  
 who Foc you buy cloth (\*Kadi) P  
 ‘Who did you buy the cloth for?’

In (24a) the PP, *Kadi sè* ‘for Kadi’ is bad in that position; same as the DP *Kadi* in (b) because the position that each of the PP and the DP occupies is supposed to contain the silent copy of the moved XP in line with the Spell-Out of Occurrences which presupposes that only the last occurrence created of a moved



phrase is spelled-out. The derivation is captured in (25).



In (25), the movement of *ní* ‘you’ to Spec-TP is to check its nominative case, while the movement of the DP *máí* ‘who’ alone or the entire PP *máí sè* ‘for who’ to the Spec-FP, is a choice between stranding the postposition and pied-piping it which *sè* allows. Given what we have observed in (25) for instance, wh-movement rule does not appear to be optional. The situation in Zarma is much the same as the situation in English as evident in Ndimele (2003:840) who notes that ‘any sentence in English in which the wh-phrase remains in-situ is ungrammatical unless the interrogative construction is conceived in its echoic sense’. This

statement explains why wh-phrases at spell-out superficially occur at the left-most edge of the sentence leaving behind a copy of itself at the extraction site.

### 3.4. Movement of Wh-elements in Embedded Clauses

The behaviour of wh-element in complex sentences is the focus of this section. One major way of forming complex sentences is through embedding, which subsumes the occurrence of at least two clauses that are fused into a single sentence. The main sentence is the matrix clause and the embedded one is the insert. Consequently, we examine the way in which wh-movement operates in embedded clauses. Consider in this connection the following examples (26-29 are considered for this paper).

26a. Sheu gòó gàhán ní dí mái  
 Sheu Imperf ask you see who  
 ‘Sheu is asking who you saw’

b. Sheu gòó gàhán mái nò ní dí mái?  
 Sheu Imperf ask who Foc you see  
 ‘Sheu is asking who you saw?’

27a. Sheu gòó gàhán ài kóí móníga  
 Sheu Imperf ask I go where  
 ‘Sheu is asking where I went’

b. Sheu gòó gàhán móníga nò áí kóí móníga?  
 Sheu Imperf ask where Foc I go  
 ‘Sheu is asking where I went?’

28a. Sheu gòó gàhán ì té nífò  
 Sheu Imperf ask they do what  
 ‘Sheu is asking what they did’

b. Sheu gòó gàhán *ńfò* nò ì té *ńfò*?  
 Sheu Imperf ask what Foc they do  
 ‘Sheu is asking what they did?’

29a. Sheu gòó gàhán írì ñwá mòó wátífò  
 Sheu Imperf ask we eat rice when  
 ‘Sheu is asking when we ate rice’

b. Sheu gòó gàhán *wátífò* nò írì ñwá mòó *wátífò*?  
 Sheu Imperf ask when Foc we eat rice  
 ‘Sheu is asking when we ate rice?’

As observed in examples (26b and 28b), the bold-face wh-phrase items: *mái* ‘who’, and *ńfò* ‘what’ get preposed to the Spec FP whose head position is filled by the focus marker *nò*. Each of them originally occurs as the complement of some verb in the lower (embedded) clause and their movement through internal merge necessitates the presence of a silent/deleted copy at the extraction site. This is understood from the echo-question paraphrases in (26a) and (28a) respectively. Wh-phrases/items which perform the function of an adverb can equally undergo similar movement. This is illustrated in examples (27) and (29).

The situation in (26) through (29) is in order as focus marker has the potential to attract the closest wh-word so as to satisfy its EPP feature. Instances also abound where wh-elements move from subject, object, or adjunct position of the embedded clause to what seems like the Spec-FP of the matrix clause as shown in examples (30) to (32).

30a. Wasiu dí kà Musa nà *ńfò* zèì?  
 Wasiu see that Musa Perf what steal

‘Wasiu saw that Musa had stolen what?’

- b. *Ŋfò* nò Wasiu dí kà Musa nà ~~í~~ zèi?  
 what Foc Wasiu see that Musa Perf steal  
 ‘What did Wasiu see that Musa had stolen?’

- 31a. Ade dí sààrà kà Olu nà zèi mónígá?  
 Ade see cloth that Olu Perf steal where  
 ‘Ade saw the cloth that Olu had stolen where?’

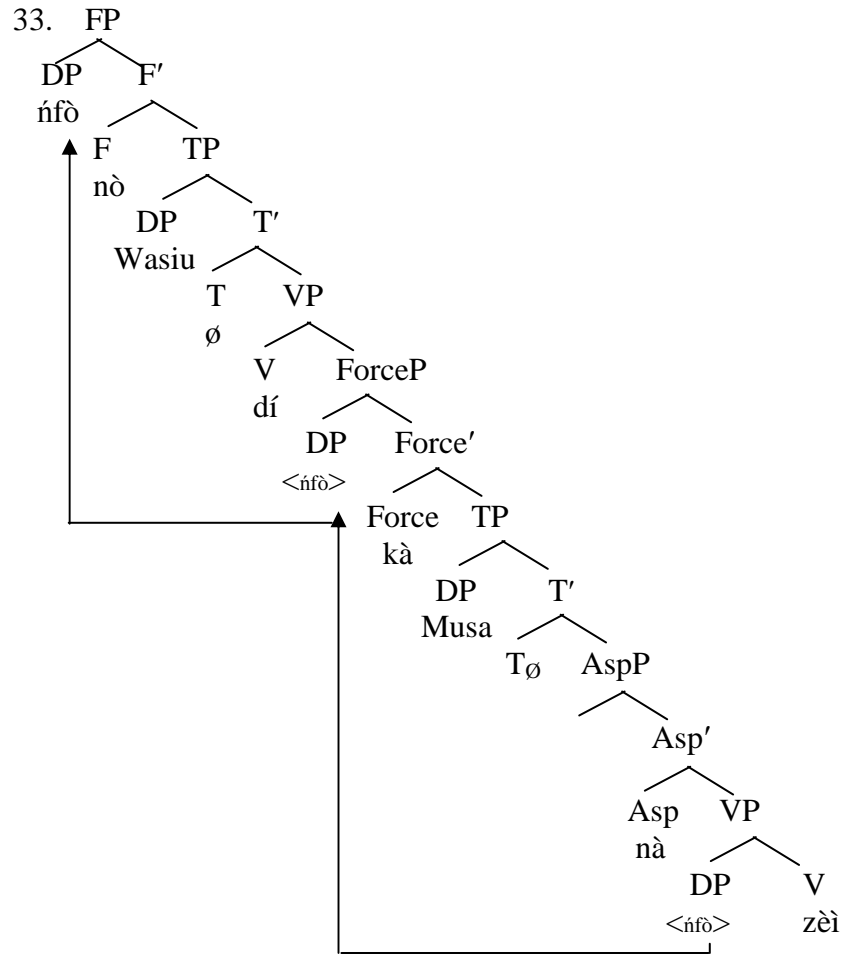
- b. *Mónígá* nò Ade dí sààrà kà Olu nà zèi ~~mónígá~~?  
 Where Foc Ade see cloth that Olu Perf steal  
 ‘Where did Ade see the cloth that Olu stole?’

- 32a. Ade dí kà mání nà sààrà zèi?  
 Ade see that who Perf cloth steal  
 ‘Ade saw that who had stolen the cloth’

- b. *Mání* nò Ade dí kà ~~mání~~ nà sààrà zèi?  
 who Foc Ade see that Perf cloth steal  
 ‘Who did Ade see that stole the cloth?’

In (30b), the object of the verb *zèi* ‘steal’ in the embedded clause is preposed to the sentence initial position. In (31b), it is the adverbial element *mónígá* ‘where’, while in (32b), it is *mání* ‘who’ which functions as the subject of the embedded clause that undergoes similar movement. We observe that the syntactic constructions in (30b, 31b, and 32b) exhibit a phenomenon of long-distance wh-movement since the affected wh-items move out of the embedded clauses to the initial positions of the main clauses. In each case, a silent copy of the moved wh-word is deemed to have been left at the extraction site. As the analysis in (33) will suggest, there is an intermediate landing position to

which the wh-items move from the embedded clause. Following (Aboh 2004), we assume the position to be the specifier position of the complementizer, [spec ForceP] headed by *ká* 'that'. It therefore means that long-distance wh-movement involves movement of wh-expression via the Spec-ForceP. In line with Minimalist assumptions, we would in the meantime suppose that the head F of FP, i.e. *nò* 'focus marker', carries [WH, EPP] features which trigger the movement of the wh-item from either the subject, object or adjunct position of the embedded clause through the Spec-ForceP before its subsequent movement into the main clause Spec-FocP. The analysis is diagrammatically captured in (33).



It is important to mention that the italicized copies of *nfò* ‘what’ at the extraction site inside VP and Spec-ForceP position get deleted in the PF component resulting in null spell-out. The derivation in (33) is well-formed despite the long wh-extraction because the spec ForceP is used as an escape hatch; making it

impossible to violate bounding, (Chomsky (1981, 1986) and Haegeman (1991)).

So far, we have shown the claim that a wh-phrase which occurs internally within a sentence, either as subject, object or adjunct must move to the left periphery of the minimal clause from where it originates in both simple and embedded clauses. This claim implies that any sentence in Zarma in which wh-phrase remains in-situ would not be ungrammatical but it would not be a well-formed wh-question.

### 3.5. Real versus Pseudo wh-questions in Zarma

The implication of our analysis so far is that, at spell-out, wh-movement applies when any DP within a declarative sentence (simple/complex) that specifies for [+wh] moves to spec FocP, making the wh-item to enter into a spec-head relation with the head Foc *nò*. The wh-operators can move from subject, object or adjunct position to the clause initial position i.e. spec FocP which is headed by *nò*. Apart from the foregoing, we also find a good example of what shows up as an inverse predication, proposed by (Dechaine 2002) and (Jones 2006), in Zarma as can be understood from the use of *mótè* ‘how’ in the following examples.

- 34a. ?Ní yàn móte?  
you(r) mother how  
‘Your mother be how?’
- b. Mótè ní yàn?  
how you(r) mother  
‘How is your mother?’
- c. Mótè hábú?  
how market  
‘How is business?’

- d. *Mótè ní góí?*  
 how you(r) work  
 ‘How is your work?’

As earlier claimed in (16) to (17), manner adverbial in Zarma is questioned by the use of *mótè* ‘how’. The recognition of the particle *mótè* as having a unit of meaning is based on distribution because it occurs in focus contexts such as (16b) and (17b) like others in (3) to (15). However, the constructions in (34) are not the same as the ones in (16) and (17): the focus marker *nò* is not found and no verbal element is present. In spite of the noticeable differences, we recognise (34b) as a question derived through inverse predication, if we consider its paraphrase in (34a) where the operator expression *mótè* ‘how’ follows *yàn* ‘mother’ to produce what we can refer to as an echo question or a non-focused wh-phrase. If the glosses provided for the constructions in (34) are apt, then it is the case that some Zarma expressions tolerate zero copula. The absence of *nò* in (34b, c, and d) does not stop the sentences from being interpreted as interrogative, implying that the focus marker is not ambiguous i.e. it does not also function as a question head. Following the differences which we have cited, the expressions in (34) seem to fit into what has been described in the literature as pseudo-wh-questions (Matthews 2007).

### 3.6. Landing Site of Wh-phrases in Zarma

The examples which we have recognised as real wh-questions show that wh-items in all instances are preposed to the immediate left of *nò*; suggesting that wh-phrases and focus phrases target the same position. The presence of the focus marker is considered as a product of external merge and not a process of insertion or head-to-head movement because the



particle *nò* is part of the numeration from the onset<sup>7</sup>. This prediction has a close relationship with (Awoyale, 1985; Bisang and Sonaiya 2000; Aboh, 2003) where focus was analysed as a variety of  $\bar{A}$ -movement in which the focused XP is moved from its canonical position to the specifier of a focus phrase which is not involved in case assignment. Using Gungbe as his point of reference, Aboh (2004:280-281) argues that *wh*-phrases and focused elements occur in the same position because they are said to be mutually exclusive in terms of distribution. This claim may in part explain why the sentence in (35) is ungrammatical.

35. \**Máí Kadi* ~~*nò Kadi*~~ *dí* *kà* ~~*máí*~~ *nà* *sààrà* *zèi*  
 who Kadi Foc see that Perf cloth steal  
 ‘Who did Ade see that stole the cloth?’

Example sentence in (35) appears to suggest that *máí* ‘who’ and *Kadi* ‘the focused item’ compete for the same position, spec FocP because the absence of either of the two from that position produces a convergent expression. Regardless of whether the focused item (*Kadi*) precedes or follows the *wh*-phrase (*máí*), the example sentence in (35) remains illicit. Similarly, it is not logical to see the situation as an instance of substitution since each of them tends to form a different construction type from the other i.e. they do not encode the same discourse information. This prediction supports the claim made by Aboh & Pfau (2011:3) that the head focus is not inherently interrogative because it attracts both *wh*-operators and focused constituents.

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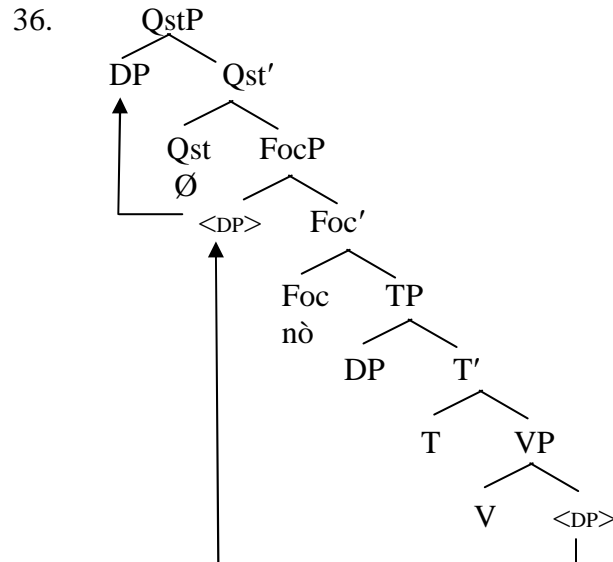
<sup>7</sup> The view expressed by Awobuluyi (2013) contradicts the one assumed in this paper. Awobuluyi’s position could be attributed to the descriptive approach used in his work, which still recognises the deep and surface structures already dropped in the minimalist program.

Thus, the raising of *wh*-phrases to the left periphery of the clause would be seen to be under the scope of some functional element other than *nò*. We find a language internal support for our proposal in (34b) where *nò* is missing and the sentence is logically interrogative. However, we restate the commitment that *wh*-phrases only help to interpret the content of the questions; they do not clause-type sentences as interrogative. Aboh and Pfau (2011:13) citing Frajzyngier (2001), report that “Lele<sup>8</sup> *wh*-questions involve a *wh*-phrase combined with the sentence final question marker *gà*”. From the foregoing, we subscribe to Aboh and Pfau’s claim that interrogative force requires the presence of Inter cross-linguistically. It therefore means that *nò* ‘the focus marker’ in Zarma is not ambiguous; suggesting that Zarma has a covert *wh*-question head which has a strong uninterpretable feature that need to be checked before spell-out.

Thus, following Ilori (2010), we adopt the claim that the introduction of *nò* into a numeration necessarily projects FocP which has a strong head with a specifier feature that must be checked for the purpose of convergent. This in effect means that *wh*-question of the type in (33) has a phonetically null question head which selects a FocP complement for convergent purpose. This is not the case with (34), labeled as pseudo-*wh*-question. The null question head selects FocP as its complement and raises the *wh*-element through Spec-FocP to Spec-QstP to satisfy both the Head-to-Head Constraint and the Shortest Move Principle. It should be noted that only the last occurrence of the *wh*-operator is phonetically spelled-out. The derivation is shown in (36).

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<sup>8</sup> Readers are advised to see Aboh and Pfau (2011) and references cited there for the description of Lele, a Chadic language with SVO word order.



Following from (36), we propose that focused element and wh-item cannot co-occur or do not compete for the same position as the example in (35) shows. The sentence in (35) does not converge because the spec FocP which is supposed to serve as an escape hatch for the wh-item has been filled by the focused element *Kadi*, making the movement of the wh-item *mái* to the spec QstP illicit.

### 5. Conclusion

This paper has examined the idiosyncrasies of wh-movement in Zarma and noted *inter alia*; that the appearance of wh-question operators; *mái* ‘who’, *ńfò* ‘what’, *mòrìjé* ‘how many’ *wátífò/wátíká* ‘when’, *mónígá* ‘where’, *wófò* ‘which’, and *mótè* ‘how’ at the clause initial position results from movement of the operators from some positions within the matrix/embedded clause. Following from some cross-linguistic evidence, we

argued that the movement of the operators in this case is to the sentence initial position where the Qst head is null and the wh-word serves as its specifier. The paper argued that at each instance of movement, a silent copy of the preposed wh-word is left behind and only the last occurrence created is spelled-out in line with the copy theory of movement. The paper also opines that real QstP with a phonetically null head requires FocP as its complement for convergent purpose. Consequently, the paper adopts the idea that Zarma is a non-wh-in-situ language and that the presence of wh- phrase at the Spec- Qst position is justified on the basis of the strong uninterpretable feature which the wh-question head has and which must be checked before spell-out. The study has also shown that postpositions may be pied-piped along with their wh-object complements. Finally, the study gives a systematic explanation on the role of focus in Zarma wh-questions and gave a principled account of the operation of successive cyclic movement in line with Head-to-Head Movement Constraint and the Shortest Movement Principle.

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