

*WHAT DID WHO SAY ABOUT AVATIME?

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This research investigates multiple WH-questions; in-situ/ex-situ variation and the syntactic/semantics implications in Avatime, a Ghana-Togo-Mountain (GTM) language. By far, there is minimal to no work on multiple wh-constructions in the language. The goal of this study is to combine empirical and theoretical methods to establish the structure of multiple wh-questions, movement conditions, superiority and prosodic effects.

Multiple wh-questions are an instance of many:1 form meaning mismatch. According to Devlin et al. (2021), in Avatime, single wh-questions can either remain in-situ (1a) or move to the specifier of CP (1b).

- (1) a. *Etornam e-kusi nyawè?*
Etornam AGR-beat Eyrām
'Who did Etornam beat?
b. *Nyawé Etornam e-kusi?*
who Etornam AGR-beat
'Who did Etornam beat?

Multiple wh-elements also exhibit this optional movement as shown in (2a) where the wh-subj and wh-obj remain in their canonical position but in (2b), wh-obj moves to the left periphery. Pilot fieldwork results show a relationship between ordering preferences observed in declaratives and those that we find in interrogatives. While the basic word order is SVO, the object can be preposed giving the sequence OSV. Typically, the type of movement in (2b) is blocked by superiority effects but Avatime seems to violate this rule as common with Kwa languages.

- (2) a. *nyawé ki-dzi egè?*
who AGR-cut what
'Who cut what?
b. *Egé nyawè ki-dzi?*
what who AGR-cut
'What did who cut?

We also observe a shift from low to high tone when the wh-element moved. Whether this shift is a result of intonation or a case of lengthening which checks +focus because there is no overt focus marker is still under investigation. This has led to the hypothesis that the interpretation of scope and focus is determined by prosody and discourse context rather than syntactic hierarchy.

Research questions: The preliminary data gave rise to these questions that the research aims to resolve.

- i. What determines the ordering of multiple wh-elements?
- ii. How do information structural properties like being focal vs. topic affect ordering preferences and which role does contrast play?
- iii. What exactly is the role of prosody in the amelioration in superiority effects?

References:

Devlin, K., Lehman, B., Major, T., & Torrence, H. (2021). *A note on wh-questions in Avatime*. Celebrating 50 years of ACAL, 55.