

# The syntax of information structures in Lamaholot

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Lamaholot

Austronesian (Central Mayayo-Polynesian), spoken in eastern Indonesia in eastern Flores and surrounding islands by 150,00~200,00 speakers

30 or so dialects. This paper is on the Lewoing dialect (Nishiyama and Kelen (2007)).

## 1. Relative clausers and cleft sentences

(1) aho yang gike go me'en belv      'The dog that bit me was big.'  
dog that bite me    the    big

(2) aho yang go bvrin me'eng kvnen    'The dog that I hit was small.'  
dog that    I    hit    the    small

No passive, no subject requirement in relativization, as observed in Indonesian and Tagalog.

(3) atadikvn yang oto-ka ra tvmaka pe'en svga  
man      that car-3pl they steal the    came    'The people whose cars were stolen came.'

(4) go mi'invn yang k-oi      jawaban na'en    'It is me who know the answer.'  
I this      that 1sg-know answer    its

(5) mo me'envn yang go persaya      'It is you that I trust.'  
you the      that    I    trust

No expletive subject or copula corresponding to English 'it is..',

(6) Bala yang lango na'en go hone      'Bala, I built his house.'  
B.    that    house his    I build

(7) ?Bala na'en yang go hone lango  
B.    his    that    I    build house

In (6), *Bala* is focused, and in (7), *Bala na'en* is focused.

## 2. Focus fronting

Focus fronting typically happens to an object.

(8) wata, go kan      'Rice, I ate.'

Without detailed analysis of texts, I tentatively refer to this construction as "focus fronting". But it can also feature a *topic*:

- (9) nolo pe'en tahan tite gvta hala' 'In the early time, we didn't harvest rice.'  
 past that rice 1pl.in harvest not

This is the first sentence of a narrative on rice, introducing the topic. The best I can say is that the sentence has a *marked information structure*.

- (10) nvkvn a yang vrv'vn me ra akui hala'  
 but what that good that they acknowledge not  
 'But they never acknowledge good things.'

Adverbs and preposition phrases can also be fronted.

- (11) pe lango, go kan wata 'In the house, I ate rice.'  
 bera, go kan wata 'Quickly, I ate rice.'

Fronting must be to the position before the subject. Thus, *\*go wata kan* 'I rice eat' is ungrammatical. A similar focus meaning is obtained by clefting, as in (12a, b), but not with adverbs for some speakers, as in (12c).

- (12) a. wata yang go kan 'It is rice I ate.'  
 b. pe lango yang go kan wata 'It is in the house that I ate rice.'  
 c. ?bera yang go kang wata 'It is quickly that I ate rice.'

Focus fronting can happen from an embedded clause to the front of the matrix subject. (*go persaya* means 'I believe'.)

- (13) pe lango, go persaya na gan wata 'In the house, I believe he ate rice.'  
 ?bera, go persaya na gan wata 'Quickly, I believe he ate rice.'

Here, fronting of the adverb is a little marginal. Nominal predicates can be fronted if it is definite, yielding what might be analyzed as inverse copular sentences:

- (14) buku go'en pi'invn 'This is my book.'  
 book my this

- (15) buku me'envn pi'invn 'This is the book.'  
 book the this

Similarly, verbal predicates can be fronted.

- (16) svga urin, na 'Come late, he did.'  
 come late he

- (17) nvwan pao aya', na 'Get a lot of mangos, he did.'  
 get mango many he

- (19) ?svga urin, go persaya na 'Come late, I think he did.'
- (20) nvwan pao aya', go persaya Bala 'Get a lot of mangos, I think Bala did.'
- (21) pana pe lango ne'en nai, go persaya na 'Walk to his house, I think he did.'  
 walk to house his go I think he

### 3. Focus Particle *-ke*

This particle attaches to the focused element, and no fronting is necessary. It can attach to a pronoun or a demonstrative accompanying a pronoun.

- (22) go-ke (yang) hope buku pi'in 'It is me who bought this book.'  
 I-Foc that buy book this
- (23) go pi'in-ke (yang) hope buku pi'in 'It is me who bought this book.'  
 I this-Foc that buy book this

*-ke* can also focus the verb.

- (24) go hope-ke buku pi'in 'I BOUGHT this book.'

*-ke* also attaches to common nouns or common nouns with a demonstrative.

- (25) ono go'en buku-ke 'I want BOOK.'  
 inside my book-foc
- (26) go hope buku pi'in-ke 'I bought THIS BOOK.'

In (25), the stress is on *buku*. Since *-ke* also functions as the second person plural suffix, the sentence also means 'I want your book.' With this meaning, there is no stress on *buku*. In (26), the common noun is accompanied by a demonstrative, and the focus particle *-ke* must attach to the demonstrative. In contrast to (26), *buku-ke pi'in* cannot be a focus and only means 'this book of yours.'

When a noun is modified by a relative clause, *-ke* can attach to either the head noun or the relative clause.

- (27) buku-ke yang go hope pe'envn welin 'The BOOK that I bought is expensive.'  
 book-Foc that I buy the expensive
- (28) buku yang go hope pe'envn-ke welin 'The book that I BOUGHT is expensive.'

As shown in the translation above, the focused parts are different.

## 4. Questions

### 4.1. Yes-No Questions

Yes-no questions are indicated by rising intonation.

- (29) mo svga?      'Are you coming?'  
      hv'vn            'Yes.'  
      hala'/take'    'No.'

### 4.2. Wh-Questions

#### 4.2.1. General Properties of Wh-Questions and Subject and Object Questions

Three strategies in forming wh-questions: (i) wh-word in the original position, (ii) focus fronting, and (iii) clefting. Thus, 'What did he eat?' can be expressed as follows.

- (30) a.    na gan a?      'He ate what?'  
          he eat what
- b.    a na gan?            'What, he ate?'
- c.    a    yang na gan? 'What is it that he ate?'  
          what that he ate

When the subject or the object is a human, the question is as follows.

- (31) hege (yang) biho pi rvma'an? 'Who will cook tonight?'  
      who    that cook at night

- (32) Bala bvrin hege?            'Who did Bala hit?'  
      B. hit    who

- (33) hege (yang) Bala bvrin    'Who did Bala hit?'

*a/a'a* and *hege* can be used to modify a noun, corresponding to English 'which'.

- (34) a    wua'an    mo gon?            'Which fruit did you eat?'  
      what fruit    you eat

- (35) inamvlake hege yang mo bvrin    'Which man did you hit?'  
      man            who that you hit

For humans *a* cannot be used for 'which', but *ga'e* 'where' can be used instead of *hege* for this meaning. For inanimate objects, *ga'e* only means 'where'. So *a wua'an ga'e mo gon* means 'Where was the fruit that you ate?'

It is often observed in languages with agreement (e.g., in Chamorro) that wh-questions have

different sets of agreement. But this is not the case in Lamaholot.

- (36) a. ana' inamvlake ga'e yang n-enun?  
child man which that 3sg-drink 'Which boy drank?'  
b. ana' inamvlake-inamvlake ga'e yang r-enun?  
child man-Red which that 3pl-drink 'Which boys drank?'
- (37) a. ana' inamvlake ga'e yang mo marin (na) n-enun?  
child man which that you say he 3sg-drink  
'Which boy did you say drank?'  
b. ana' inamvlake-inamvlake ga'e yang mo marin (ra) r-enun?  
child man-Red which that you say they 3pl-drink  
'Which boys did you say drank?'

Whether the *wh*-word is from the matrix sentence or the embedded sentence, it triggers ordinary agreement on the verb. (37) contain a resumptive pronoun, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

#### 4.2.2. Locative and Temporal Questions

The *wh*-word for the locative is *ga'e*.

- (38) ra r-a'i-ka ga'e? Where do they go?  
they 3pl-go-3pl where

- (39) ga'e ra r-a'i-ka? Where do they go?

There are two *wh*-words for the temporal expressions. *vrvn pvwia* is used for the past, and *vrvn pira* for the future.

- (39) mo svga vrvn pvwia? When did you come?  
(40) ra svga vrvn pira? When will they come?

Although *wia* means 'yesterday' and *pira* means 'how many/much', *vrvn pvwia* and *vrvn pira* seem to be a fixed phrase and not to be decomposed further. To ask about the time of a habitual activity, *jam pira* 'what time' is used.

- (41) mo turu-ko jam pira 'What time/when do you go to bed?'  
you sleep-2sg o'clock how.much

The answer to the above question can of course be *jam pulo* '10 o'clock,' but is not limited to a clock time but can be broader, as *rvma tukan* 'night middle (midnight).' Thus, the following conversation is natural.

- (42) a. jam pira mo belajar 'When do you study?'  
 b. go belajar pe gv hulvn 'I study in the morning.'  
 I study in morning

*yang* cannot be used for locative and temporal questions.

#### 4.2.3. Manner, Degree, and Reason Questions

The manner question word 'how' is expressed by *nvnvn ga'e*. *ga'e* itself is 'where' but *nvnvn ga'e* jointly means 'how'.

- (43) *nvnvn ga'e mo biho a'a pi'in* 'How do you cook this food?'  
 how you cook thing this

An alternative expression for 'how' is *nvnvn gvnai*. Sometimes *nvnvn ga'e* shows agreement with the subject.

- (44) *tite t-a'an t-vnvn ga'e?* 'What should we do?'  
 1pl.in 1pl.in-make 1pl.in-how

*nvnvn ga'e* can also be a greeting expression.

- (45) *nvnvn ga'e?* 'How are you?'  
*vre'en* 'Fine.'

Indonesian *keadaan* 'situation' can also be used for 'How are you?', as *nvnvn ga'e keadaan?* The degree 'how (many/much)' is expressed by *pira*. There are several ways to express 'how old are you' and 'how much is this car'.

- (46) *sun pira kae mo* 'How old are you?'  
 year how.much already you

- (47) *(mo) sun-ko pira kae* 'How old are you?'  
 you year-2sg how.much already

- (48) *sun mo'en pira kae* 'How old are you?'  
 year your how.much already

- (49) *hope pira oto pi'in* 'How much is this car?'  
 price how.much car this

- (50) *hope m-a'an pira oto pi'in* 'How much is this car?'  
 buy 2sg-make how.much car this

(51) oto pi'in welin(-vn) pira                    'How much is this car?'  
car this expensive-def how.much

(52) mo hi'in ia'-ko    tvpihin lvron pira  
you will stay-2sg here    day    how.many    'How many days will you stay here?'

*hope* 'buy' in (49) is used as a noun, and it can be replaced by Indonesian *harga* 'price'. In (50), the second person singular marker refers to the purchaser.

The degree can be asked by nominalizing the adjective. Adjectives can be nominalized by adding a suffix or a genitive pronoun. When nominalization happens, *nvvn ga'e* is used for a degree question.

(53) bvlola-nvn nvvn ga'e? 'How tall is he?'  
tall-3sg            how

(54) man mo'en doan na'en nvvn ga'e dari tvpihin  
field your far its how from here  
'How far is your rice field from here? (lit. your field, its farness is how far from here?)'

In (54), *bua* can replace *nvvn*. *bua ga'e* can also be used for asking locations. Reason question 'why' is as follows.

(55) na tanin dari a?                    'Why is he crying?'  
he cry from what

*dari a* literally means 'from what'. *dari* can be replaced by *pukvn* 'reason, tree stem'. *dari a* can be fronted to yield *dari a na tanin*, or only *a* can be fronted, as in *a na tannin dari*. Another way of asking for a reason is using a causative.

(56) a na'an na tani                    'What made him cry?'  
what make him cry

#### 4.2.4. Possessive Questions

The possessor can be expressed either by a suffix or by a genitive pronoun. Since they have singular/ plural distinction, there are four ways to express 'Whose house is this?'

(57) a. lango hege na'en pi'in?                    'Whose house is this?'  
house who his this

b. hege lango-nvn pi'in?                    'Whose house is this?'  
who house-3sg this

c. lango' hege ra'en pi'in?                    'Whose house is this?'  
house who their this

- d. hege lango-ka pi'in?                    'Whose house is this?'  
     who house-3pl this

(57a, b) presupposes that the house belongs to a single person, and (57c, d) that it belong to several people. Note that the English translation cannot make such a distinction.

- (58) a. hege na'en lango pi'in?            'Whose is this house?'  
         who his     house this

- b. lango pi'in Bala na'en                'This house is Bala's'

### 4.3. Embedded Questions

Just like matrix questions we have seen so far, embedded questions have a choice of moving a wh-word or leaving it in the original position.

- (59) go k-o'i   hala' a   yang na gang 'I don't know what he ate.'  
       I 1sg-know not what that he eat

- (60) go k-o'i hala' na gang a            'I don't know what he ate.'

When *pikir* 'think' take an embedded sentence containing a wh-word, the meaning is either a matrix wh-question or a yes-no question with an indefinite pronoun.

- (61) mo pikir hege yang svgga  
       you think who that come  
       'Who do you think will come?' (matrix wh-question, with a flat intonation)  
       'Are you thinking about someone who will come?' (yes-no question, with a rising intonation)

The second interpretation is due to the fact that *hege* 'who' can also function as an indefinite pronoun. The sentence does not mean the statement 'You think someone will come.'

The sentence usually does not have the embedded question meaning 'You wonder who came,' either, although this interpretation sometimes seems to be possible. The notion of 'wonder' is paraphrased by 'want to know,' as follows.

- (62) ono go'en (hi'in) k-oi    hege yang svgga   'I want to know who came.'  
       inside my   want 1sg-know who that come

If the embedded question is a yes-no question 'whether', *le take* 'or not' is used.

- (63) ono tite'en hi'in    t-oi        na biho wata le take'  
       inside our want 1pl.in-know he cook rice or not.'  
       'We want to know whether he cooked rice or not.'



(64) go pikir na gang le take ‘I wonder whether they ate or not.’  
I think he eat or not

Note that in the last sentence, *pikir* can be used for an embedded question.

## 5. Resumptive Pronouns

(X): X is optional (i.e., one can have X, but does not have to).

\*(X): X is obligatory (i.e., one must have X).

(\*X): X is prohibited (i.e., one cannot have X).

*The highest subject restriction* (McCloskey 1990: 210)

There cannot be a resumptive pronoun in the matrix subject position but there can be one in the object and the embedded subject positions.

This is observed in Irish (McCloskey 1990), Hebrew and Northern Palestinian Arabic (Shlonsky 1992). The following sentences show that this also holds in Lamaholot resumptive pronouns.

(65) Bala yang (\*na) bvrin go ‘It is Bala that hit me.’  
B. that he hit me

(66) Bala yang go persaya (na) bvrin go ‘It is Bala that I believe hit me.’  
B. that I believe he hit me

(67) Bala, go bvrin (na) ‘Bala, I hit (him).’  
B. I hit him

(68) Bala yang go bvrin (na) ‘It is Bala that I hit (him).’  
B. that I hit him

Some speakers prefer the clitic *ro* to *na* in the last two sentences. When the matrix object is inanimate, resumptive pronouns are not possible.

(69) wata, na biho (\*na) ‘Rice, he cooked (it).’  
rice he cook it

wata yang na biho (\*na) ‘It is rice that he cooked (it).’  
rice that he cook it

This is related to the fact that the pronoun *na* is usually limited to animates. We will see below that despite this restriction, a resumptive pronoun sometimes appears when an inanimate thing is dislocated from the embedded object position. The following is an exception to the highest subject restriction.

(70) ?Bala, na bvrin go                    ‘Bala, he hit me.’  
       B. he hit me

This is a focus fronting sentence and the matrix subject is dislocated. Unlike what we saw above for a cleft sentence with a dislocated subject, resumptive pronoun emerges here. But for some speakers, the sentence is not a topicalization, and *Bala* is vocative (*Hey, Bala!*) and *na* does not refer to Bala.

It is often claimed (at least for Hebrew, but apparently not for Irish) that resumptive pronouns can appear in a wh-question only if the wh-word is ‘which’ (Sharvit (1999: 591)). This is the case in Lamaholot as well.

(71) hege yang Bala bvrin (\*na)            ‘Who did Bala hit?’  
       who that B. hit him

(72) inamvlake ga’e yang Bala bvrin (na)    ‘Which man did Bala hit?’  
       man which that B. hit him

*hege* ‘who’ does not allow resumption, while *inamvlake ga’e* ‘which man’ does. (Some speakers can use *ro* for *na* in (71).)

When the ‘which’ word is the subject, a resumptive pronoun appears when it originates in the embedded sentence, but not in the matrix sentence.

(73) ana’ inamvlake ga’e yang (\*na) n-enun?            ‘Which boy drank?’  
       child man which that he 3sg-drink

(74) ana’ inamvlake ga’e yang mo marin (na) n-enun?    ‘Which boy did you say (he)  
       drank?’  
       child man which that you say he 3sg-drink

Resumptive pronouns can be sensitive to the plurality of the fronted element.

(75) ana’ inamvlake-inamvlake ga’e yang mo marin (ra) r-enun?  
       child man-Red which that you say they 3pl-drink  
       ‘Which boys did you say drank?’

The indirect object of a ditransitive verb can also have a resumptive pronoun.

(76) inawae me’envn, go nein (na) bunga tov            ‘The girl, I give (her) a flower.’  
       woman the I give (her) flower a

(77) inawae yang go nein (na) bunga me’envn bvlola  
       woman that I give (her) flower the tall  
       ‘The woman who I gave the flower (to) was tall.’

(78) hege yang mio nein (na) bunga me'envn?  
 who that you give (her) flower the 'Who did you give the flower (to)?'

The indirect objects in the above sentences are recipients. When the indirect object is benefactive, resumption is obligatory.

(79) inamvlake me'en, go biho \*(ro) wata  
 man the I cook (him) rice 'The man, I cook (him) rice.'

In the above sentence, the object clitic *ro* must be used, rather than the pronominal *na*. When the indirect object is a preposition phrase, resumption is again obligatory.

(80) a. inawae me'en, go nein bunga to'u [pe \*(na)]  
 woman the I give flower a to (her) 'The woman, I give a flower to (her).'

b. inawae me'en, go nein [pe \*(na)] bunga to'u

The above sentences use *pe* 'to', and the resumptive pronoun is obligatory, whether the preposition phrase (indicated by brackets) is before or after the direct object. A similar constraint is observed in Hebrew (Sharvit 1999: 590). When the preposition is *nein* 'for', the situation is a little different.

(81) a. inamvlake me'en, go biho wata [nein (na)]  
 man the I cook rice for (him) 'The man, I cook rice for him.'

b. inamvlake me'en, go biho [nein \*(na)] wata

This is related to the fact that *nein* also functions as a verb 'give' in other contexts. Probably in (81a), *biho wata nein* as a whole is functioning as a verb, making the sentence a simple transitive sentence and making the resumption optional.

A complex sentence with 'seem' involve a resumptive pronoun.

(82) dos pe'en tvngv-na hama **na** ba'a 'The box looks as if it is heavy.'  
 box the see-3sg same **it** heavy

This is an exception to the animacy condition of *na*.

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