

## A PRELIMINARY DESCRIPTION OF THE SYNTAX AND MORPHOLOGY OF INTERROGATIVES IN THE SHONA LANGUAGE

Francis Matambirofa\*  
University of Zimbabwe

### Abstract

*This article describes some idiosyncratic properties of interrogative particles in the Shona language from the view point of their morphological and syntactic behaviour. This arises out of the observation that in syntactic structure, there are instances in which interrogatives can substitute for the nouns about whose enquiry they are made. It would make an interesting study to determine the extent to which interrogatives can stand as surrogate nouns. Shona marks for interrogatives using both segmental and supra-segmental strategies. The following are examples of segmental interrogative markers: sei 'why', ko? 'Why/how come', saka? 'so?', -ei? 'why?', chii? 'what?', ani? 'who?', -i? 'what/when/which?', ngani? 'How many?'. Supra-segmentals generally use the strategy of placing high tone marking on specific segments. Moreover certain interrogatives can simultaneously combine within the same interrogative sentence, chiefly for emphasis. At the same time, there are some interrogatives that are not compatible with each other. In addition, interrogatives seem to have semantic features that are generally associated with [ $\pm$ Human], [ $\pm$ Count], [ $\pm$ Affirmation], etc., in addition to the common feature [ $+$ Interrogative]. This paper sought to examine how these features influence the syntax of interrogative sentences in terms of the compatibility and incompatibility properties of certain interrogative particles as well as determine how the same features pro-actively and 'intelligently' select the range of potential answers in the Shona language.*

### Introduction

This article analyses some general properties of Shona interrogative particles and/or formatives from the view point of their morpho-syntactic behaviour. As the nomenclature already suggests, interrogatives are concerned with word forms that any language uses to mark or indicate a question. This is corroborated

---

\*Francis Matambirofa teaches language-based courses at the University of Zimbabwe graduate and postgraduate levels. He has had research and teaching fellowships in the United States at the University of Pennsylvania and Bryn Mawr College, Switzerland, Norway and Mozambique, among other countries. His research interests are in the areas of Theoretical Linguistics, African Literature, Lexicography and Current Affairs. Currently, he is a Research Fellow at the University of South Africa. E-mail: [fmambirofa@gmail.com](mailto:fmambirofa@gmail.com)

by Mpofu-Hamadziripi, Ngunga, Mberi and Matambirofa (2013, p. 98) when they remark as follows: "...interrogatives are words or formatives that are used to ask questions". It is important to point out that in Shona, questions are formed using both segmental and supra-segmental markers, with the latter relying on tonal or phonological variation. The following are examples of segmental interrogatives that are used in the language: *sei* 'why', *ko?* 'why/how come', *saka?* 'so?', *-ei?* 'why?', *chii?* 'what?', *ani?* 'who?', *-i?* 'what/when/which?', *ngani?* 'how many'. An example of a supra-segmental interrogative would be such as the following: *madyá?* 'have you eaten?' whose declarative alternation is *madya* 'you have eaten'. In this case, a supra-segmental high tone has been placed on the syllable *-dyá* which, in the declarative voice, is contrastively assigned a low tone. Supra-segmentals essentially thus relay on the alterations of tone, stress and pitch in order to form questions. The tonal, pitch and stress inflections are most evident between interrogative clauses and their declarative counterparts. Both techniques, that is, the segmental and the supra-segmental interrogative marking can occur in combination. This article will draw attention to segmental interrogatives and not supra-segmental interrogatives whose study strays more into the phonological domain in sharp contrast to the morpho-syntactic concern of the present analysis.

In Shona, the spectrum of interrogative markers is relatively huge. It would therefore not be possible to exhaust their morpho-syntactic behaviours in this article alone. Suffice to indicate that our focal concern is a broad-based, descriptive analysis of interrogatives' participation in both Shona morphological and syntactic structures. The motivation for the current analysis is partly triggered by the realization that certain types of interrogatives can substitute for the nouns about whose enquiry they are made – a phenomenon referred to as *who-in situ* (Mukaro, 2012, p.227). To this end, it would then be instructive to examine the constraints that lead to *who-in situ* interrogative structures. The main thrust of the study is not however determined by individual or groups of related interrogatives to the extent that it seeks only to establish a generalized behavioural pattern of the category as a whole.

Stemming from the chief concern of the article to interrogate Shona interrogative constructions, this study also aims to examine how interrogatives interact and combine in Shona. This is of academic interest given the observation that a number of interrogatives, sometimes up to four, can simultaneously be used within a single interrogative sentence. The structures that follow serve as a brief demonstration of this phenomenon:

- |    |                                     |                                    |
|----|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| a. | <b>Ko sei</b> maita zvakadainhai?   | 'Why have you done such things?'   |
|    | <b>Ko nhai</b> maita zvakadai sei?  | 'Why have you done such things?'   |
|    | <b>Ko asi</b> maita zvakadai seiko? | 'Why have you done such things?'   |
|    | <b>Ko</b> maita zvakadai?           | 'Did you do such things?'          |
|    | <b>Saka asi sei</b> maita zvakadai? | 'Why did you do such a thing?'     |
|    | <b>*Sei</b> maita zvakadai ko?      | <i>Not translatable into Shona</i> |

In 1(a-f) above, several segmental interrogative markers: **ko?**, **seiko?**, **nhai?**, **asi?** and **sei?** are shown exchanging both the left and the right peripheral syntactic slots, while in 1(d), **ko?** appears alone to demonstrate that an interrogative marker can still stand unaided by another question-marking morphemes. Above, 1(f) is ill-formed because of the interrogatives **sei?** and **ko?**, which are incompatible with the semantic and syntactic structure they are simultaneously participating in. The apparently itinerant exchange of syntactic slots of interrogatives, which is commonly referred to as *why*-movement in the literature (Radford, 1981) is a phenomenon that will receive close investigation in this study.

### Overview of Interrogatives in Shona

This section lists and examines segmental interrogatives in Shona with a view to coming up with a general description of their characteristics. Below is a small inventory of closely related interrogatives:

2.	a.	-i?	'what? 'Sadza riri pai?	'where is the sadza (food)?'
	b.	-ei?	'what? 'Wamudzei?	'what did you tell him/her?'
	c.	-pi?	'which? 'Vanhu vapi?	'Which people are they?'

Crucial observations can be made in regard to the above cluster of interrogatives. One of the observations is that all the interrogatives exemplified occur morphemically in bound form. This nature of occurrence differs with forms such as **ko?** 'why', **nhai?** 'but?', **asi?** 'but?', and **sei?** 'why' which were provided earlier on. It is also intriguing that the terminal vowel for this and many other interrogatives is **-i?** The same vowel is seen to occur in the same morphological slot in interrogatives such as **chii?** 'what?', **mui?** 'in what?', **asi?** 'but?', **ani?** 'who?', **riini?** 'when?', **nguvai?** 'what time?', and **sei?** 'why/by what means?', etc. There is no question however that this similarity only obtains on this less consequential level of phonological shape and it is certainly non-significant any further than that. It is not immediately clear whether or not this ubiquitous occurrence of **-i?** is just a coincidence or it is something that may have a historical explanation. For now, it is incontrovertible that the sound represented by the vowel 'i' appears in the vast majority of cases to be the pivot upon which question-marking is leveraged in the Shona language. The frequent appearance of the vowel '-i' in the vast majority of interrogatives in Shona bears testimony to the pivotal function that we are making reference to. However, to pursue a study of '-i' on its own would detract from the current primary focus on Shona interrogatives in general.

The other observation which will be supported by the sheer number of illustrations to be provided in the course of this article pertains to the wide scope of other interrogative morphemes which play host to **'-i'**. The fecund productivity of **'-i'** is exemplified by Mpofu-Hamadziripi, et. al. (2013, p.105) in regard to **-pi?** 'which?' where they cite the whole Shona noun class system as compatible with it, examples of which are provided in 3 below:

3.	a.	upi?	e.g. munhu upi?	'which person?'	cl. 1
	b.	vapi?	e.g. vanhu vapi?	'which people?'	cl. 2
	c.	upi?	e.g. muti upi?	'which tree?'	cl. 3
	d.	ipi?	e.g. miti ipi?	'which trees?'	cl. 4
	e.	ripi?	e.g. gudo ripi?	'which baboon?'	cl. 5
	f.	api?	e.g. makudo api?	'which baboons?'	cl. 6

Thus, from the illustrations provided above, it already shows that the interrogative affixes, respectively u-, va-, u-, i-, ri- and a- are copies of agreement affixes of classes 1 through to 6 and they agree with these classes in regard to number, gender and person. Following the Shona noun class system, it therefore follows that these types of interrogatives' construction also runs parallel to that of classes 1 to 21 in regard to their interrogative affixes. This by itself has far reaching implications regarding the participation of both interrogatives and nouns in Shona syntactic and morphological structures. In this attested phenomenon resides further evidence suggestive of the fact that certain types of interrogatives have a potential for paralleling the sub-categorisation frames of nouns. This phenomenon will receive further investigation in this analysis, building on the evidence from Dembetembe's (1981) hypothesis of syntactic noun features. The last critical issue that needs comment with regards to examples in (1) and (2) above is that interestingly, these same interrogative markers occur both syntactically and morphologically on the extreme periphery of the words or clauses with which they are bound. Other types of interrogatives, different from the ones provided above tend to behave in a similar manner. In addition, it can also be observed that the favourite slots of bound interrogatives are either the left or the right periphery positions. The examples given in (4) below demonstrate this claim. This is particularly true for unmarked structures as opposed to expressive, marked sentences.

The other types of interrogatives that occur in Shona are what we may refer to as free interrogatives. Free interrogatives enjoy a comparative numerical superiority over the bound types given earlier. Provided below are examples of free interrogatives together with some of their combinatorial permutations:

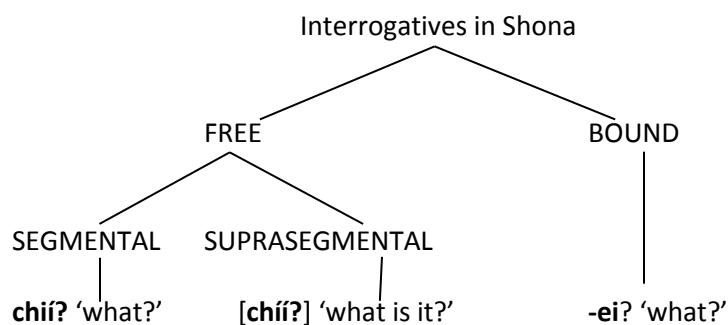
4.	a.	ko?	'which/what/how?'	<b>Ko</b> waitei?	'What have you done?'
	b.	here?	'have you...?'	<i>Ko</i> munomwa <b>here</b> ?	'Do you drink?'
	c.	sei?	'why?'	<i>Ko</i> <b>sei</b> uchiseka?	'Why are you laughing?'
	d.	chii?	'what?'	Waona <b>chii</b> ko?	'What did you see?'
	e.	nguvai	'what time?'	<i>Ko</i> vadya <b>nguvai</b> ?	'What time did they eat?'
	f.	ani?	'who?'	<i>Ko</i> mwana <b>wani</b> ko?	'Whose child is s/he?'

In the above illustrations, two related demonstrations have simultaneously been made. The first demonstration relates to an illustration of free interrogative morphemes such as: **ko** 'what/which /why?', **chii** 'what?', **nguvai** 'what time', **here** 'have you?', etc. The other demonstration relates to what we have referred to as the combinatorial permutations of interrogatives. Such combinatorial possibilities allow or block

certain interrogatives from partnering within the same interrogative utterance. The reason for being able to combine or not resides in the interrogative features that are shown in Fig. 2 below.

From the set of illustrative sentences provided in (4) above, it is evident that this combination has largely been performed using the free and ‘ubiquitous’ interrogative form, **ko?** ‘what/which/why?’. We shall return to interrogative markers’ combinations and permutations later when we specifically examine constraints that govern this phenomenon. This phenomenon is dealt with in detail in the penultimate section of this article. Suffice it to say at the moment that interrogatives can work together in as much as they can also stand in commutation of each other.

The general information given in regard to the occurrence of interrogatives can be summarized in Fig. 1 provided below:



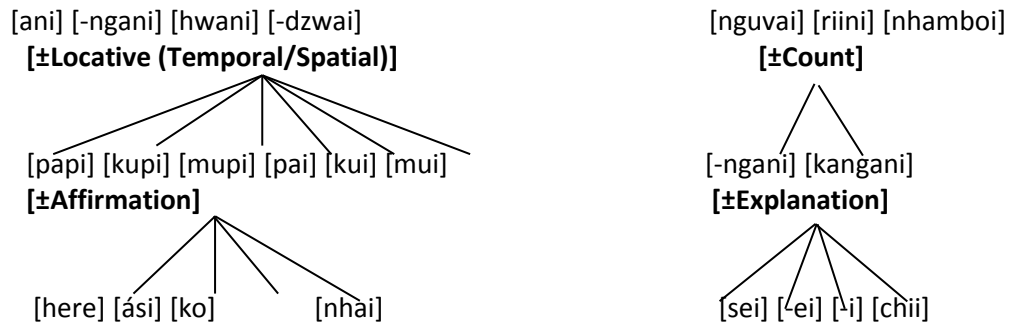
**Fig. 1: Subcategorisation of Shona Interrogatives**

### Interrogative Features

From the general behaviour of interrogatives, there is a strong suggestion that they do possess subcategorisation features that critically influence their participation in syntax. Following Dembetembe (1981), we may roughly define a feature as a peculiarity or a special property that a category subcategorises for. In view of the subject at hand, we may make reference to interrogative features as occurring within the matrix of the lexicon. To this end, all interrogatives will redundantly be argued to have lexical entries that give them a positive setting for the feature interrogative which may formally be schematized as follows: [+Interrogative] in addition to other sub-categorisation frames that specify for the following [±Human], [±Count], [±Locative], [±Affirmation], [±Explanation] and [±Time]. These sub-categorisation features are critical in the selection of an interrogative marker that is deployed in the formulation of an interrogative structure or sentence.

The sub-categorisation features of interrogatives according to the frames proposed above may be represented as follows:





**Fig. 2: Interrogative Classificatory Features**

In this preliminary study, interrogative features' classification provided in Figure 2 should presently be regarded as a working hypothesis. As earlier indicated, this classification has been arrived at on the inspiration of Dembetembe's (1981) article on syntactic noun features as well as the more recent observations by Mpofu-Hamadziripi et al. (2013). The principal logic for this proposal derives from the interrogative phenomenon of *wh-in situ* as it is demonstrated in (5) and (6) and presented in Table 1. below. If interrogatives and NPs can syntactically substitute for each other, it follows that there are certain aspects of each category that are found in the other. If Dembetembe's (1981) theory of syntactic noun features is tenable, our proposal is that one of the common denominators obtaining between interrogatives and NPs is the concept of sub-categorisation which has crucial selectional implications for syntax.

In Fig. 2 above, it can be noted that except for the last two features: [±Affirmation] and [±Explanation], all the other interrogative features generally derive from the nominal category. Interrogatives with a positive setting for the features: [±Affirmation] and [±Explanation] participate in the formation of what is referred to as a *why*-question. Mukaro (2012, p.222) defines a *why*-question as being "basically a content question, as opposed to a 'yes/no' question." In elaboration of this point Mukaro (2012, p.222) quotes from Borsely (1991) who defines a *why*-question as "a question involving a question word (or a *who*-word) of some kind and requires a more specific answer than just 'yes/no'".

What is however most significant for our current purposes is the fact that the syntax of interrogative structures will subsequently be examined taking into account some of these critical observations and claims. And it is to this behaviour of interrogatives in syntactic structure that we now turn our attention.

### **Interrogative and NP Correlations**

The illustrative interrogative structures in (5) below attempt to demonstrate the relationship that obtains between nouns and interrogatives as well as how their respective sub-categorisation frames select appropriate interrogatives and vice versa:

5. a. Mai vaona **ani**? 'Who has mother seen?'

- |    |                              |  |
|----|------------------------------|--|
| b. | Mune mbudzi <b>ngani?</b>    | 'How many goats do you have?           |
| c. | Munonamata <b>nguvai?</b>    | 'What time do you pray?'               |
| d. | Sekuru munogara <b>kupi?</b> | 'Uncle where do you stay?'             |
| e. | Madira pendi <b>mui?</b>     | 'You have poured the paint into what?' |
| f. | Baba vadya <b>here?</b>      | 'Has father eaten?'                    |
| g. | Vakomana munoda <b>chii?</b> | 'Boys what do you want?'               |

From (5) it can be observed that the choice of an interrogative marker, whether it is ani? 'who?', ngani? 'how many?', mui? 'where?' etc., is a function of the potential or anticipated lexical and semantic features borne by the object of enquiry. Thus, if for instance, the complement about whom the question is generated is expected to be human (cf. 5a.), the interrogative scheme selects a marker that has the feature [+Human], such as ani? 'who?'. The opposite is true for a complement that is anticipated to carry the feature [-Human] (cf. 5g), which selects chii? 'what?' for its interrogative marker. Thus in (6), an attempt is made to corroborate this observation by providing possible answers to questions that have been posed in (5):

- |    |    |                              |   |
|----|----|------------------------------|---|
| 6. | a. | Mai vaona <b>baba.</b>       | 'Mother has seen father'                |
|    | b. | Tine mbudzi <b>shanu.</b>    | 'We have five goats'                    |
|    | c. | Tinonamata <b>natuu.</b>     | 'We pray at two o'clock'                |
|    | d. | Ndinogara <b>kuTafara.</b>   | 'I stay in Tafara.'                     |
|    | e. | Ndadira pendi <b>mugaba.</b> | 'I have poured the paint into the tin.' |
|    | f. | Hongu, baba vadya.           | 'Yes, father has eaten.'                |
|    | g. | Tinoda <b>mapadza.</b>       | 'We want hoes.'                         |

The relationship between the questions and answers respectively asked in (5) and answered in (6) is demonstrated by juxtaposing the interrogative markers with the resultant answers. Refer to Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Correspondence Between Interrogatives and their Answer**

Interrogative Marker	Feature	Nominal	Feature
ani?	[+Human]	Baba	[+Human]
ngani?	[-Human]	Shanu	[-Human]
nguvai?	[+Time]	Tuu	[+Time]
kupi?	[+Locative]	kuTafara cl. 17	[+Locative]
mui?	[+Locative]	mugaba cl.18	[+Locative]
here?	[?+Interrogative]	Hongu	[+Affirmation]
chii?	[-Human]	Mapadza	[-Human]

The data captured in Table 1 above show, in part, that there is a high feature correlation between any given interrogative marker and its corresponding answer. There is evidence to suggest that interrogatives can be further subcategorized into nominal and non-nominal based types. In elaboration, members of the nominal category select interrogative markers that show features that correlate with them such as the following: [ $\pm$ Human], [ $\pm$ Count], etc. This correlation is given further credence by Matambirofa (2012, p.163) who, following Dembetembe (1976), points out that nominal answers to interrogative pro-forms *ani?* ‘who’, and *chii?* ‘what’ substitute for the same forms and that they also function as objects. This is different from non-nominal based interrogatives which are [ $\pm$ Affirmation] and [ $\pm$ Explanation] whose answers require the cause or the reason for doing something. The interrogative structure 5(f) and its corresponding affirmative and/or declarative answer in 6(f) demonstrates a case where the feature [ $\pm$ Affirmation] is at play. In other words, the non-nominal interrogatives are those that require straight yes/no answers or explanations that are delivered by rather lengthy sentential structures.

### The Syntax of Interrogatives

This section seeks to further examine the characteristics of interrogative sentences’ syntax following some behavioural similarities that have already been argued in support of when in this account we examined interrogative features using the following stencil [ $\pm$  X] which is common to both nouns and certain types of interrogatives. It is perhaps, first and foremost, important to indicate that Shona is a configurational language whose syntactic template typologically fits in with the following grammatical functions structure: Subject + Verb + Object (SVO) linear order of precedence (Matambirofa, 2010). This fact is stated in order to determine the degree, if any, that the syntax of interrogative structures deviates from the canon. Consider once more some of the structures given earlier in (5) which for ease of reference will now be reconstituted as (7):

- |    |    |                                  |  |
|----|----|----------------------------------|--|
| 7. | a. | Mai vaona <b>ani</b> ?           | ‘Who has mother seen?’                 |
|    |    | Ndiani wavaona mai?              | ‘Who mother has seen?’                 |
|    |    | Ndiani aonekwa namai?            | ‘Who has been seen by mother?’         |
|    | b. | Mune mbudzi <b>ngani</b> ?       | ‘How many goats to you have?’          |
|    |    | Imbudzi <b>ngani</b> dzamunadzo? | ‘It is how many goats that you have?’  |
|    |    | <b>Ingani</b> mbudzi dzamunadzo? | ‘It is how many goats that you have?’  |
|    | c. | Munonamata <b>nguvai</b> ?       | ‘What time do you pray?’               |
|    |    | <b>Inguvai</b> yamunonamata?     | ‘It is what time that you pray?’       |
|    | d. | Sekuru munogara <b>kupi</b> ?    | ‘Uncle where do you stay?’             |
|    |    | Ndekupi kwamunogara sekuru?      | ‘It is where that you stay uncle?’     |
|    | e. | Madira pendi <b>mui</b> ?        | ‘You have poured the paint into what?’ |
|    |    | <b>Mui</b> mamadira pendi?       | ‘Into what have you poured the paint?’ |



From (7) it can be argued that interrogative structures, to quite a great extent, preserve the canonical SVO structure of the Shona language since in the structures above the interrogatives are successfully functioning respectively as direct objects and subjects while sandwiching the verbal complex between them. It is equally important to note that they are syntactically slotted in the extreme right and left peripheral positions of the alternate structures in which they participate – positions that are reserved for NPs in simple principal statements. This syntactic behaviour of interrogatives further confirms the argument raised earlier as demonstrated in (5) and (6) which Mukaro (2012) describes as *wh-in situ*. This is the same argument which we earlier advanced when we described interrogatives and nouns as being able to stand in commutation of each other. Crucially, evidence in Table 1 above gives further testimony to this claim.

In alternate structures that are given in (7) above, it can further be observed that when interrogatives are fronted through *why*-movement or *why*-fronting, following Radford (1981), the interrogatives invariably get inflected by a copulative such as **ndi-** ‘it is’, **i-** ‘it is’ or just the high tone, as is the case with 7(e), Mui mamadira pendi? ‘Where have you poured the paint?/Into what have you poured the paint?’ From this point of analysis we wish to submit that these interrogatives are still functionally *wh-in situ*. We thus tend to disagree with Mukaro’s (2012) proposal which argues that the first clauses of these interrogative structures in (7) demonstrate *why-in situ* while by implication the alternate clauses do not. By the same token, we however concede that in the alternative renditions where interrogatives are fronted, they can only successfully stand as copulativised subject NPs. The importance of the copulative inflection is critical in this case as an ill-formed structure would occur without its mediation. Refer to (8) below, which is adopted from (7a):

8. a. Mai vaona ani? ‘Who did mother see?’  
\*Ani avaona mai?  
\*Ani aonekwa namai?

Since the point has already been made, we will not dwell much on this other prominent aspect of the syntax of interrogative sentences as they relate to their non-interrogative counterparts. The claim being made here is that any interrogative structure necessarily derives from its declarative counterpart. Strong evidence for this emanates in part from the architecture of echo questions. Radford (1981, p.47) defines such questions as follows: “*Echo questions* are so-called because they involve one person echoing the speech of another ...” Example (9) below is of an echo question taken from Radford (1981, p. 152):

9. SPEAKER A: My father will put the Mercedes in the garage  
SPEAKER B: Your father will put *which car* in the garage?  
SPEAKER A: Will my father put the Mercedes in the garage?  
SPEAKER B: Will your father put *which car* in the garage?

From (9) it will be observed that it is from the very first declarative statement that all the other three echo questions are derived. The same would equally apply for the Shona language as illustrated in the relationship between (5) and (6) above as well as (10) provided below:

10. a. Mbuya vadya *magake*.  
'Grandmother has eaten cucumbers.'
- b. Mbuya vadya *chii?*  
'What has grandmother eaten?'
- c. Sekuru vabata *shuro*.  
'Grandfather has caught a rabbit.'
- d. Sekuru vabata *chii?*  
'What has grandfather caught?'

Depending on the extent to which one subscribes to the linguistic notion of transformations, it could be argued that an interrogative sentence is the surface structure (s-structure) of its declarative deep structure (d-structure) alternation following the mediation of the interrogative transformation. Regarding the interrogative, Matthews (1981, p.286) describes its transformation role as mapping it to a corresponding structure "with *Q* deleted and other elements appropriately reordered." If granted, a question is simply therefore the alternative of its declarative structure or at least non-question counterpart.

#### **Interrogative (In)compatibility**

In this last section of the discussion we broadly examine as well as try and account for the compatibility or non-compatibility of interrogatives when they are used in the same sentence. As earlier indicated, up to a total of four different interrogatives can participate in the same sentence but not all interrogatives are compatible with each other. Examine the interrogative sentences that follow:

11. a. ***Ko sei*** muchikara kudai ***nhai?***  
'Why are you so greedy?'
- b. ***Ko saka*** wamuda pachokwadi ***sei?***  
'So why have you truly loved him?'
- c. ***Kanganiko*** ndichikupa mari ***nhai?***  
'How many times have I given you money?'
- d. ***\*Inguvai*** yandichakuona ***here?***  
'\*So it will be what will I see you?'
- e. ***\*Asi*** kupiko kwaenda ***chii?***  
'\*So is it where what has gone?'

In the grammatical structures above, that is, 11(a) to 11(c), there is proof of compatibility of interrogatives even when in each individual case up to three different interrogative markers are deployed. The same cannot be said of the balance of the structures occurring in 11(d) to 11(e) which are all ill-formed owing to the incompatibility of the interrogative markers used. This scenario, first and foremost clearly brings home the critical fact that interrogative forms have sub-categorisation features into which are embedded

selectional properties with render them compatible or non-compatible with each other. We here argue that their selectional properties, out of which the notion of compatibility derives is a function of their sub-categorisation frames as they have been demonstrated in Fig. 2 above.

In elaboration of the point being made above, if interrogative forms belong to the category of *wh*-questions such as **sei?** ‘how/why’, **chii?** ‘why/which’, **-ei?** ‘what for’, etc., they display a high level of compatibility with each other depending also on the meaning and context of the question. The same would equally be true for *yes-no* questions. Interrogative markers demanding *yes-no* answers such as **here?** ‘is that so’, **asi** ‘is it that’ etc., are generally likely to be compatible with each other. In short, it can be argued that generally speaking, interrogatives demanding *yes-no* answers and *why*-questions which Mukaro (2012, p. 222) calls ‘content questions’ cannot be compatible with each other. In addition, incompatibility also arises when interrogatives that demand for answers associated with time, location or quantities, respectively bearing the features [+Time], [+Locative] and [+Count] are combined with say *yes-no* questions or *why*-questions.

Based on the semantics of interrogative features, the schema in (12) gives two sample scenarios demonstrating interrogative compatibility and incompatibility.

12. a. [+Human] + [+Locative] [+Count]  
Vanhu vagani vapinda mui?  
‘How many people have entered where?’  
b. [+Affirmation] + [+Explanation] + [+Time]  
\*Ko sei waenda riini here?  
\*‘So why did you go what time?’

As already alluded to, (12) does not lay down rules of interrogative compatibility and incompatibility as such. It simply is an attempt to provide cases by way of illustrating interrogative features that can be said to be compatible and those that are not. It is clear that different configurations along the same lines as (12) can be drawn.

An analysis of the compatibility or otherwise of interrogative markers can constitute a full length article on its own, suffice it to point out that in this closing section, we have demonstrated a few basic facts; firstly that in Shona two or more interrogative markers can be hosted by one sentence – a phenomenon that we have referred to as interrogative compatibility; and secondly, it has been noted that there are some interrogatives that are incompatible with each other. With regards to interrogative compatibility and incompatibility, it has been argued that the semantic features of interrogatives apart from their sub-types play a crucial role in determining this phenomenon.

## Conclusion

This article has attempted to describe and account for the morphological and syntactic behaviour of interrogatives in Shona. It has done this from a general and non-theoretic point of view. Apart from providing a sample inventory of this category in the language, a number of salient points regarding interrogatives have been advanced. It has been argued that both syntactically and morphologically, interrogative markers tend to favour peripheral slots. In syntax, interrogatives occupy both the left and the right peripheral slots. However, in morphology, interrogatives occupy only the right slot of the word forms that host them. Closely relating to this point is the fact that interrogatives occur both as free and bound forms. Forms such as -i, -ei, -su, etc. are bound morphemes, while markers such as ko, nhai, here, etc. occur as free morphemes. In addition, the canonical categories of *why*-questions and *why-in situ* have also been attested for Shona. The article, following Dembetembe's (1981) theory of syntactic noun features, has also argued for a parallel theory of syntactic interrogative features. It has loosely been established that there is a high correlation between certain types of interrogatives and nouns to the extent that most answers, except *yes-no* situations or *explanatory* answers, are preponderantly from the nominal category. A tentative assignment of features has been proposed much as we feel that more research might be needed to fine-tune the theory developed here. The fact that interrogatives and nouns occupy the same subject and direct object slots in syntax further buttresses our argument for the feature proposal. From the view point of syntax, we have also agreed with Mukaro's (2012) argument that interrogative structures preserve the canonical SVO configuration of the Shona language when used in an unmarked word order. The article has examined the notion of interrogative compatibility and incompatibility and it has arrived at the conclusion that this phenomenon is generally a function of the features that the interrogatives carry as part of their semantic properties.

## References

- Dembetembe, N.C. (1976). *The syntax of sentential complementation in Shona*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of London.
- Dembetembe, N.C. (1981). Remarks on some syntactic noun features in Shona. *Zambezia Journal of Humanities*, 9(2), 103-117.
- Matambirofa, F. (2010). *The syntax of applicative and causative constructions in Shona: An LFG/LMT theoretical account*. Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Matthews, P.H. (1981). *Syntax*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mpofu-Hamadziripi, N., Ngunga, A., Mberi, E.N., & Matambirofa, F. (2013). *A descriptive grammar of Shona*. Harare, Zimbabwe: Sable Press.
- Mukaro, L. (2012). *Why*-questions in Shona. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 4(1), 220-236.

Matambirofa: *A preliminary description of the syntax and morphology of interrogatives in the Shona language*

Radford, A. (1981). *Transformational syntax: A student's guide to Chomsky's Extended Standard Theory*.  
Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.