Sources for question particles

Formal approaches to grammaticalization (Roberts & Roussou 2003; van Gelderen 2004, 2009, 2011) have enabled us to draw robust generalizations about the types of representation that are likely to serve as the input to grammaticalization for the child language acquirer. This paper examines question particles – defined as heads in the C-domain that occur systematically in unembedded interrogative clauses – through the lens of these formal approaches, proposing a limited number of source representations. The developments proposed are compatible with Roberts & Roussou's generalization that grammaticalization involves upward reanalysis.

Data is drawn from a typological sample of question particles for which information about their diachrony is available: at present, this comprises 55 particles from 41 languages, more than half of which are non-Indo-European. Four types of source can be identified:

i) Disjunction. In this scenario, alternative questions of the type *X or Y?* or *X or not?* are reanalysed as syntactically a single interrogative clause, with the *or Y?* or *or not?* component becoming a question particle. This scenario is instantiated in the history of Chinese, where the particle *ma* derives from a negative existential in a second disjunct (Aldridge 2011).

(1)　　秋　　寒　　有　　酒　　無?
　　　　Qiu　　han　　you　　jiu　　**wu**?
　　　　autumn cold　have　liquor　not.have
　　　　'In the autumn cold, is there any liquor?' (*Bai Juyi*, 9th century)

Aldridge proposes that material in the second conjunct is reanalysed upwards as the head of &P, with this low & head later reanalysed as a C head. This scenario also accounts for Niuean *nakai*, originally a negator (Starks & Massam 2015), and for tag questions that become question particles, as in varieties of English in which *innit* has been reanalysed as a question particle, e.g. (2), from Sailor (2011).

(2)　　Tom's the one who likes that Swedish death-metal shite, **innit**?

We assume that tag questions are best analysed as silently coordinated with their host clauses (cf. McCawley 1988). Finally, this scenario also accounts for examples in which the *first* disjunct has been elided, yielding initial question particles like Latvian *vai* (Raukko & Östman 1994: 48), originally 'or', as in (3).

(3)　　**Vai**　jūs　　runājat　　　angliski?
　　　　Q　　　you.PL speak:2PL　　　English
　　　　'Do you speak English?'

ii) Markers of epistemic modality. In this scenario, adverbial or head elements in the TP-domain are reanalysed as C-domain heads. Examples include Central Basque *al* (Monforte 2018), as in (4), from a modal particle *ahal*, and Niuean *ka*, from a discourse particle *kaha* 'that's right'.

(4)　　Inor　　　　ikusi　**al**　　dezu?
　　　　anybody　　see　　Q　　　AUX
　　　　'Did you see anybody?' (Central Basque; Monforte 2018: 31)

iii) *Wh*-words. Here, a *wh*-question containing a semantically-bleached *wh*-element is reanalysed as a polar question marked by a question marker in C (cf. van Gelderen 2009, Walkden 2013). An example is the second-position marker *ha* in Tümpisa Shoshone (Dayley 1989); see (5).

(5)   Usu **ha** tokwi?
        'Is that right?' (Dayley 1989: 15)

As moved elements reanalysed as first Merged in a higher position, these are prime examples of upward reanalysis.
        iv) Subordinators. This source subsumes cases of insubordination, in which, diachronically, a subordinator comes to be a main-clause C head via a stage of left-edge deletion or ellipsis, as with Rapa Nui *hoki* (Du Feu 1996), originally a general-purpose clausal embedder.

(6)   **Hoki** ko   rohi   rohi   'a   koe?
        Q   PFT   tired   DUP   RES   2SG
        'You must be tired?'

It also includes cases in which a whole embedding proposition is reanalysed as a main-clause C head, e.g. French /ɛskə/ < *est-ce que* 'is it (the case) that' (Druetta 2003, Elsig 2009). These developments have in common that they reduce biclausal structures to monoclausal structures.
        A final important question concerns the role of meaning. We hypothesize – based on a detailed qualitative case study of the Old English question particle *hwæþer* and its uses in Boethius – that new question particles always emerge through a 'non-canonical', i.e. non-information-seeking, stage: Old English *hwæþer* in Boethius always introduces 'pedagogical' polar questions in which the asker does not need to be informed of the correct answer, unlike the more neutral verb-initial polar questions. This proposal is consistent with the observation in the grammaticalization literature that it is common for grammaticalized elements to be semantically bleached and to broaden their applicability to a wider range of contexts over time.

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