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in Secoya**

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Proceedings of Conference on
Language Documentation and Linguistic Theory 4

Edited by Aicha Belkadi, Kakia Chatsiou and Kirsty Rowan

7-8 December 2013, School of Oriental and African Studies, University
of London

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This publication can be cited as:

Anne Schwarz. 2014. ‘From where or what?’ – Constituent interrogatives in Secoya. In, Aicha Belkadi, Kakia Chatsiou and Kirsty Rowan (eds.). *Proceedings of Conference on Language Documentation and Linguistic Theory 4*. London: SOAS. www.hrelp.org/eprints/ldlt4_15.pdf

‘Where from or what?’ – Constituent Interrogatives in Secoya

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1. INTRODUCTION¹

It is widely assumed that every human language provides question words (Ullan 1978, Siemund 2001) as a morphosyntactic response to the requirement to perform the ‘basic type of speech act essential for human communication’ (Krifka 2011: 1742). Questioning is regarded here as a social act which gives rise to a number of more precise speech acts (cf. König & Siemund 2007: 277). Requesting information from others means that the speaker deliberately retracts from an overtly active and authoritative stance at a certain point of discourse by offering a proposition that remains in some respect incomplete or open. The reason and intention behind the speaker’s retraction can range from the genuine desire to learn about missing information from others to strategically leaving room for the active mental and/or verbal engagement of the addressees. There are two major and cross-linguistically formally reflected question types: content questions and polar questions (cf. Krifka 2011). Of interest here is the first type, as it is the prototypical content question that contains a question word which indicates to which part of the incomplete proposition the query refers.

The number of constituent interrogatives varies considerably across different languages and different modalities (Zeshan 2004, Pfau et al. 2012: 237, Idiatov 2007). A large set of lexically specialized interrogatives enables the speaker to optimally guide the addressee to deliver the information concerning the desired variable. Languages with very few question words employ contextual disambiguation (Diessel 2003: 641). An extreme case with just a single underspecified interrogative constituent has been reported for Asheninka Campa (Givón 1990: 797f.). Cysouw (2007) suggests to better analyze the single recurrent element *tsika* as based on the interrogative ‘where’ which is then further specified by different verbs (2007: 156). He also notes that there are a number of other South American languages with interrogative inventories based on the root ‘where’ (2007: 158).

What looks like question words is cross-linguistically not necessarily restricted to occur in question sentence types. Well-known is the relationship between interrogatives and indefinites which is common in Indo-European languages and beyond (Haspelmath 1997, 2013, Bhat 2000), including sign languages (Pfau et al. 2012: 237f.). In some languages interrogatives and indefinites are formally identical but differ in prosody or syntax depending on their function (Krifka 2011: 1771),

¹ The reported research was funded by ELDP Grant MDP0262, an award by the Firebird Foundation for Anthropological Research, a JCU FAESS grant, and an ARC Grant DP0770115. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for valuable comments that greatly improved the manuscript. I also thank Constanze Schmalting for discussion and my Secoya consultants for their help. All errors are mine.

while in others the indefinites correspond to morphologically expanded interrogatives. Diachronically, interrogatives are analyzed as the source of indefinites (Haspelmath 1997: 176; 2013). Synchronically, Krifka argues that a basic form (such as *where*) shared by an interrogative and an indefinite (*somewhere* etc.) ‘is not an interrogative yet, but just a variable; it becomes one only by association with an interrogative operator by movement or focus’ (2011: 1773). With regard to some Australian languages with formally identical interrogatives and indefinites it has been proposed that interrogatives and indefinites share the general meaning of ‘lack of information’ and receive the specific interpretation as indefinite or interrogative from the larger construction or from the context in which they occur (Haspelmath 2013 referring to the analysis of Bhat 2000, Mushin 1995).

Diessel (2003) points out that interrogatives and demonstratives are commonly marked for the same semantic features ‘person, thing, place, direction, time, manner, and amount’ and explains this by functional parallels between interrogatives and demonstratives: ‘In their basic uses, they focus the hearer’s attention on new elements, either in the surrounding situation or in the hearer’s knowledge store’ (2003: 648). He considers interrogatives and demonstratives a special class of linguistic expressions which ‘emerged very early in the evolution of language and is now part of the basic vocabulary of every language’ (2003: 649). Historically, demonstratives and interrogatives are regarded to be cross-linguistically unrelated (2003: 636).

Secoya adds a new dimension of variety to the commonalities that interrogatives crosslinguistically share with indefinites and with demonstratives. Secoya question words do not only share their inflection with demonstratives, but the root of some of the interrogatives is also identical with the deictic morpheme in distal demonstratives. Two alternative analyses are briefly discussed here: (i) a locative interrogative origin both for the spatial deictic and for the interrogative root in non-locative question words, and (ii) pro-forms that are referentially vague expressions from the speaker’s perspective and receive their interrogative and non-interrogative interpretation only secondarily.

2. CONSTITUENT INTERROGATIVES IN ECUADORIAN SECOYA

In this section I am going to provide an overview on the common constituent interrogatives² in Ecuadorian Secoya. Secoya (West Tucanoan) is an underdescribed (Johnson & Levinsohn 1990) and endangered language spoken by around 1000-1200 speakers in Ecuador and Peru. The research reported here focuses on the Ecuadorian varieties (< 400 speakers) which comprise an upriver dialect that is considerably influenced by the related contact language Siona as well as downriver varieties which retain more conservative features that are also found in Peruvian Secoya. The empirical basis considered here includes the first 25 hours recordings recently collected in Ecuador and the border to Peru and adds to a minor

² Considered here are the most common constituent interrogatives. Rare forms, such as an interrogative with root *ne* (probably from the verb ‘do, produce’), are ignored for the purpose of this paper.

body of data from my previous research. In the course of now establishing a large digital corpus together with community documenters, we also conducted a number of interviews, where the incidence of question words is naturally high. The new data thus allows us to study the interrogatives in this language on the basis of largely natural discourse. The interrogatives obtained from the corpus can be categorized into three groups according to their root morpheme.³

2.1 The *ke*-interrogatives

The *ke*-interrogatives are common in natural discourse⁴, occur adnominally (‘which’, ‘what’, ‘whose’) and pronominally (‘who’, ‘what’, contextually also ‘why’), and optionally begin with the pronominal root *i* (/~i/) or dialect variant *ë* (/~i/), which is used in some Peruvian varieties.

Table 1
ke-interrogatives

Pronominal root	Root	Gender	Animate plural	Case ⁵
<i>i</i> / <i>ë</i>	<i>ke</i>	- <i>i</i> (M) - <i>o</i> (F)	+ <i>wa'i</i>	= <i>pi</i> (NOM) = <i>re</i> (ACC) = <i>ni</i> (DAT) = <i>na</i> (ALL)

³ The abbreviations used in this paper are ACC = accusative, AN = animate, ALL = allative, CL = classifier, CE = counterexpectative, COND = conditional, COP = copula, DAT = dative, EV = evidential, EXPL = explanatory, F = feminine, G = general, INAN = inanimate, IPFV = Imperfective, LOC = locative, M = masculine, N = non-, NMLZ = nominalizer, NOM = nominative, PFV = Perfective, PL = plural, PRN = pronominal, PROB = Probability, RES = resultative, SG = singular, SS = same subject. Secoya has prosodic nasalization, prosodic glottalization as well as laryngealized consonants, and the transcription here mostly follows orthographic practice including the following locally common graphemic correspondences: *j* = /h/, *y* = /j/, *ë* = /i/, *V'* = *V*?. Laryngealized consonants are marked by an immediately following apostrophe (C'), only two have their own graphemes *d* = /tʰ/, *ts* = /sʰ/. Nasalization of a morpheme is indicated by underlining its first vowel, whenever the nasal feature is not signalled by a nasal consonant in the first syllable. The examples for illustration here come from Upriver (UP) and Downriver (DO) varieties, which do not differ in respect to the basic interrogative features reported here (except where mentioned).

⁴ Strangely enough, no *ke*-interrogative is provided in the short notes on interrogatives in Johnson & Levinsohn (1990: 51, 52f.).

⁵ Case marking depends on a number of semantic/pragmatic features and is not just triggered by the constituent’s syntactic function. Note that the case labels are simplified here: the case marker labelled ‘Nominative’ is not just used with differential subjects, but also with instruments and locative sources, and in addition to differential objects the ‘Accusative’ also marks locatives that function as spatial ground.

When functioning as question words for humans and certain animals, the *ke*-interrogatives are marked for gender (1) and, where applicable, for animate plural⁶. Question words that refer to most other animals and to inanimates lack gender and animate plural marking (2)–(3). When used as selectional interrogative (‘which’), the bare adnominal root precedes the noun (2). All interrogatives that function as head of the phrase may be case marked (3), parallel to the differential case marking that applies to non-interrogative constituents.

- (1) *Më ñekwë p'anita'a kei ja'ne ai de'ou'ni?*
 më ñekwë p'anita'a ke -i ja'ne ai de'o -ë -'ni
 2SG gr.father:M or who -Mwith old turn_into -PFV/2.3SG.M -PROB
 ‘Did you grow up with your grandfather or with whom?’ (DO)
- (2) *Ke kokase'e më'ë asakëa'ni?*
 ke koka -se'e më'ë asa -kë =a -'ni
 what speech -only 2SG hear -NMLZ.IPFV.SG.M =COP -PROB
 ‘Which language do you speak?’ (DO)
- (3) *Yo'oni yure kere kaye?*
 yo'o -ni yure ke =re ka -ye
 do -SS now what =ACC say -IPFV.N2/3SG
 ‘Now what are we talking about?’ (UP)

If a *ke*-interrogative occurs in a question without a lexical verb, it is often equipped with a feminine gender marker even when the question refers to an inanimate entity. The gender suffix here supplants the particle copula =*a* which otherwise commonly emerges with predicative nouns.

- (4) *Ikeo'ni?*
 i +ke -o -'ni
 PRN what -F -PROB
 ‘What is it/this?’, ‘Who is it/this?’ (UP)

Summarizing the occurrences of *ke*-interrogatives, these are question words that are particularly applied to core arguments in Actor and Undergoer macroroles (Foley & Van Valin 1984). Questioning for other than core arguments is restricted, but possible through metaphorical extensions.

There is a presumably cognate interrogative root *ke* in the closely related contact language Siona, though the question words in which it is used are different from the interrogatives in Ecuadorian Secoya: *ke-aka?* ‘how?’, *ke-jeito* ‘when?’ (adapted from Wheeler 1987: 67). In addition, Siona employs a deictic root *ke* in distal demonstratives: e.g. *ke-ru* ‘that place’ (visible, but far; ex. adapted from Wheeler 1987: 67). The existence of homophone roots in interrogatives and demonstratives

⁶ The gender suffix before the nominal animate plural marker is always feminine.

in Siona is noteworthy because we find a similar situation in Secoya when it comes to the *je*-interrogatives.

2.2 The *je*-interrogatives

Formally, the *je* ([hɛ]) interrogatives differ in their root consonant and other morphosyntactic features from the question words described above. They are not compatible with the additional root of a pronoun and, also in gradual contrast to the *ke*-interrogatives, when they do not modify another noun, they are more regularly accompanied by gender or classifier morphemes. The gender suffixes applied here are *-kë* and *-ko* (compare the vocalic suffixes at *ke*-interrogatives). Many animals and inanimates unspecified for number are referrable by an interrogative marked as feminine (*jeko*). When asking about inanimates of a particular form or semantics, noun classifiers can instead be affixed to the interrogative root, and, where applicable, get extended by the inanimate plural suffix. The root also combines with a number of other morphemes with specific semantics and can modify any noun in selectional function, parallel to the *ke*-interrogatives.

Table 2
je-interrogatives

Root	Gender / Classifier / Others	Animate / Inanimate plural	Case
<i>je</i>	<i>-kë</i> (M)	+ <i>wa'i</i> (AN)	= <i>pi</i> (NOM)
	<i>-ko</i> (F)		= <i>re</i> (ACC)
	<i>-me</i> (THREAD; thin)	- <i>ǵ</i> (INAN)	= <i>ni</i> (DAT)
	<i>-mo</i> (LIANE; thick)		= <i>na</i> (ALL)
	<i>-ro</i> (PLACE)		
+ <i>ja'ye</i> (PROXIMATY)			
+ <i>sq</i> (QUANTITY), etc			

The *je*-interrogatives comprise not only core question words for animates (*jekë*, *jeko*, *jekowa'i* ‘who’) and inanimates (*jeko*, less common also *je* ‘what’), but – in the very common combination of the root *je* with a classifier or with another lexeme – also local, temporal, and several other lexical meanings: *jero* ‘where’, *jesq* ‘how many’, *jeyëwa* ‘when’, *jeja'ye* ‘how near, how much’, etc, yielding a flexible and principally open interrogative set. In combination with the case markers that allow a local interpretation, the interrogative *jero* can be further specified: *jeropi* ‘from where’, *jerona* ‘where to’, etc. Examples for some of the question words from the *je*-set are given in (5)–(8).

- (5) **Jero** *ako* *p'a'a'ko'ni* *më ja'ko?*
je *-ro* *a* *-ko* *p'a'i* *+ǵ'ko* *-ni* *më* *ja'* *-ko*
 where -CL belong -F be_LOC EV.PAST:2/3SG.F -PROB 2SG mother -F
 ‘From which place was your mother?’ (UP)

- (6) ... *jekoni* *asaye'ni?*
 je -ko =ni asa -ye -'ni
 who -F =DAT hear -IPFV.N2/3SG -PROB
 ‘... who will they listen to?’ (UP)
- (7) ... *jekë* *aio,* *je* *tsëkapë?*
 je -kë ai -o je tsëka -pë
 DIST -M old -F which family -CL
 ‘... (where from was she) that man’s mother, from which family?’ (DO)
- (8) *Më'ëta'a* *jeyëwa* *daiko?*
 më'ë -ta'a je +yëwa dai -ko
 2SG -CE when time:CL come -IPFV.2/3SG.F
 ‘And you, when are you coming home?’ (UP)

Crucially, there is also a demonstrative root *je* (cf. also the first word in ex. 7 above). The *je*-demonstrative represents the distal member within a three-term spatial-deictic paradigm. The deictic range comprises (a) *i* (PROXIMAL), (b) *ja* (MEDIO-DISTAL), and (c) *je* (DISTAL), as shown, among others, in the place adverbials *i-ño* ‘here’, *ja+maka* ‘there’, *je-to* ‘over there’. That *je* is a well-established distal deictic element can also be concluded from its presence in lexemes that involve some spatial distance, such as *je-të'wi* ‘the other side (typically: of the river)’, *je-repa* ‘more, less’ (comparative particle referring beyond the standard of comparison), *je-te* ‘back’ (body part).

Je-interrogatives and distal demonstratives are sometimes morphologically indistinguishable (in particular *jekë*, *jeko*, *jekowa'i*), and sometimes they are formally different, such as in the case of interrogative *jero* ‘where’ vs. distal demonstrative *jeto*⁷ ‘over there’. There is no general morphosyntactic way to distinguish between adnominal distal demonstratives (for instance, *je du'ru* ‘that front over there (of a building)’) and *je*-interrogatives (cf. *je tsëkapë* in ex. 7). Pronominal and adverbial *je*-interrogatives tend to prefer the clause-initial position while the corresponding distal demonstratives are syntactically more flexible, but this tendency is not a safe criteria to distinguish the two. Certain lexicalised forms are readily identified as interrogatives (*jeyëwa* ‘when’, *jeso* ‘how many’, *jeja'ye* ‘how near, how much’). For less lexicalized phrases the interpretation as interrogative or demonstrative seems to depend on contextual factors, on sentence intonation, and probably also on gestural features, all aspects that need further investigation.

We can summarize that there is a suspicious root homophony between *je*-interrogatives and distal demonstratives and that the proper interpretation of the constituent as interrogative or distal demonstrative sometimes requires the addressee to consider the utterance level and to identify the assumed speech act.

⁷ Note that some bound morphemes in Secoya display allomorphic variation between *-rV* and *-tV*.

interrogative counterparts identified for the previously discussed question words, it is tempting to assume that the non-interrogative enclitic =*me* in such subordinated clauses is not just an accidental formal reflection of the *me*-interrogative. One might further speculate that there is a historical link to the synchronic noun classifier =*me* used for reference to long thin and flexible objects (cf. table 2). The use of a filiform classifier with subordinated circumstantial-explanatory clauses could be based on a local variety of the metaphor we know as ‘golden thread’. Unfortunately, however, the formal parallels the interrogative *me*, on the one hand, and, the non-interrogative nominal classifier and the clausal binder, on the other, end when turning to Peruvian Secoya. Our primary data from some Peruvian speakers reveals the same filiform classifier and subordinate clause marker as in Ecuadorian Secoya, but the manner interrogative here is *maje*, probably segmentable into a root *ma* and the topicalizing enclitic =*je* ‘also, too’. It is possible that this bisyllabic interrogative eroded to monosyllabic *me* in Ecuadorian Secoya and that the eroded interrogative *me* resembles the dependent clause marker =*me* and the filiform classifier just by chance, but this remains subject to further investigation.

3. DISCUSSION

One of the properties of interrogatives in Secoya discussed before is that many of them have non-interrogative counterparts, and this is most unambiguously the case with the *je*-interrogatives. The systematic correspondences in this set of interrogatives raise the questions (i) whether they are the result of a diachronic development in which one of the forms was the source for the other (e.g., *je*-interrogative to distal demonstrative, or vice versa), or (ii) whether the homophonous interrogatives and demonstratives are based on (historically) undifferentiated items that operate across different speech acts and sentence types.

With respect to question (i), the reported cross-linguistic interrogative origin of indefinites comes to mind. However, although they include functions similar to free-choice indefinite pronouns in other languages, the discussed non-interrogative *je*-counterparts in Secoya are not just indefinites, since the meaning of non-interrogative root *je* also includes a particular spatial configuration: the speaker refers with it to rather distant entities. Language-internally, it is therefore easier to argue for a diachronic relationship between the *je*-interrogatives and their non-interrogative counterparts that began with pro-forms conveying nothing else than referentially vague semantics⁹. This would suggest a positive answer to question (ii) above and line up with the ‘variable’ and ‘lack of information’ conceptions proposed for interrogatives and their non-interrogative (indefinite) counterparts in some other languages (see section 1). Accordingly, while some of the referentially vague pro-forms have developed into either interrogatives or demonstratives, other pro-forms would then be better described as polysemous, receiving their

⁹ Referential vagueness is here understood as lack of a concrete semantic extension. Cf. Kempson concerning this notion: ‘where the meaning of the lexical item is in principle clear enough, but it may be hard to decide whether or not the item can be applied to certain objects’ (1977: 124).

interrogative or non-interrogative reading through contextual information. Most challenging for this hypothesis is probably the idea that the distal spatial semantics found in non-interrogative contexts is thus not a primary semantic property of the root. Given the observation that it is not uncommon in South America for locative question words to form the basis for other interrogatives (see section 1) one could also consider an interrogative origin of the distal deictic root *je* (from interrogative *je-ro* to demonstrative *je-to*). If the root gets established within the spatial paradigm as distal demonstrative root, and spreads at the same time within the interrogative domain (substituting the classifier *-ro* by other grammatical or lexical material to form interrogatives of other semantics), a formally similar demonstrative and interrogative set which both use root *je* may develop. To pursue this scenario more data from related languages should also be taken into account. Supportive for any of these hypotheses is the pervasive evidential system of the language¹⁰. The compulsory evidential marking by means of inflectional verb morphology (ex. 12 vs. 13) yields a formal opposition that is mainly based on the speaker's epistemic-evidential stance¹¹ and has direct consequences for the assertive force and speech act function of the respective clause (Schwarz 2013).

(12) *Ja'kë tɨtapi.*
 ja' -kë tɨta -pi
 father -M reach_and_remain -PFV.3SG.M
 'Father has come.' (UP)

(13) *Ja'kë tɨtaë*
 ja' -kë tɨta -ë
 father -M reach_and_remain -PFV.2/3SG.M
 'Father might have come' (as soliloquy), or: 'Has Father come?' (UP)

Most question types refrain from a strong epistemic-evidential stance on the speaker's side. Accordingly, a typical question in Secoya involves a main verb that is marked for a less than optimal epistemic-evidential ground on the side of the speaker (13), even though the speaker can supplementarily optimize her stance by adding a Probability marker *-ni* (14). This speaker-based epistemic marker increases the assertive force of a question and is particularly common with content questions (Schwarz 2013).

(14) *Jerona saikë('ni)?*
 je -ro =na sai -kë -'ni
 where -CL =ALL go -IPFV.2/3SG.M -PROB
 'Where are you going?' (UP)

¹⁰ Cf. also Bruil 2011 on a similar system in related Ecuadorian Siona.

¹¹ Except in a minor part of the paradigm where the perspective switches to the addressee.

Conceptually, the question could be represented as ‘(I believe) you are going to a [referentially vague] place^{12?}’ with the implicature¹³ ‘You being a cooperative interlocutor (Grice 1975) I expect you to complete the proposition concerning the referentially vague part by sharing your knowledge with me’. I also assume that the frequent presence of the epistemic marker in content questions as well as in rhetorical questions of any type increases the pressure on the addressee to cooperate and contribute her share. In sum, the specific design of the epistemic-evidential system in the language and the implicatures built on it are particularly supportive of the exploitation of a (historically) undifferentiated set of *je*-expressions. Even in the case that *je* originated from the root of a locative interrogative that entered the demonstrative domain and also spread among the question words, the evidential-epistemic marking and its speech act effects on the utterance level are relevant for the interpretation of those *je*-pro-forms which have identical synchronic counterparts among the distal demonstratives: *jekë, jeko, jekowa’i*.

4. CONCLUSION

This initial study on interrogatives in Secoya further supports the idea of close communicative parallels between interrogatives and demonstratives and indicates that the puzzle about interrogatives and their non-interrogative counterparts goes beyond the more familiar indefinites in other languages where no spatial specification is involved. Two hypotheses have been offered for the synchronic interrogative vs. non-interrogative counterparts in Secoya which both relate to the epistemic-evidential system that influences the speech act potential of the utterance. It is hoped that the growing empirical basis in Secoya and related languages will help to answer the question on the history and synchronic status of the expressions discussed in future.

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¹² Functionally, the referentially vague expression corresponds here to an indefinite.

¹³ Idiatov & van der Auwera (2008:45f.) also suggest an implicature concerning questions in Secoya and related languages.

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