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## POLAR INTERROGATIVES IN URALIC LANGUAGES A TYPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

**Abstract.** The paper surveys the domain of polar interrogation in the Uralic language family in a typological perspective. An overview of the ways in which polar interrogation is marked in the world's languages is presented and the encoding of the domain in Uralic languages is examined against this background. All the major types of polar interrogative marking are found in the family. Polar interrogatives are then examined more holistically, paying attention to structural differences — asymmetries — between interrogatives and declaratives. The structural asymmetries found in Uralic languages include effects on the marking of focus and loss of TAM distinctions. The functional motivations of these asymmetries are also briefly discussed.

**Keywords:** Uralic languages, typology, polar interrogatives, asymmetry, functional motivation.

### 1. Introduction

This paper reports the results of a typological survey of polar interrogatives in Uralic languages. An overview of our current typological knowledge of the domain is presented and Uralic polar interrogatives are discussed against this typological background.

A polar interrogative (henceforth PI) can be defined as a construction that has the expression of questions eliciting a 'yes' or 'no' answer from the addressee as (one of) its primary function(s). On the basis of this definition, PIs can be identified in different languages. In English (1), for example, the most common PI construction is one in which the auxiliary verb appears in front of the subject as in (1b) (in case the corresponding declarative does not have an auxiliary, the auxiliary *do* is added).

(1) English (Indo-European, United Kingdom; constructed examples)<sup>1</sup>

- a. *King Arthur is barking on the balcony*
- b. *Is King Arthur barking on the balcony?*

<sup>1</sup> The information on language family and country of origin given for non-Uralic languages are taken from The World Atlas of Languages Structures (2005); The World Atlas of Languages Structures Online (2008).

The definition is rather broad, encompassing all interrogatives eliciting yes/no replies, regardless of whether they are neutral or biased towards a positive or negative answer, or whether they have broad sentence focus or a more narrow focus on a particular constituent. Following the definition, I will not take into account interrogatives that do not call for a yes/no reply. This means that information questions (wh-questions), structures dedicated to the expression of rhetorical questions, or alternative questions (other than those where the alternatives are yes or no) are outside the scope of my study.

The purpose of this paper is to provide some typological background for future studies of PIs in Uralic languages. My treatment of the Uralic data is far from definitive. It is mainly based on information found in grammars and other published sources, not on primary fieldwork or corpus analysis by myself. The discussion is intended to serve as a basis for more detailed and comprehensive studies of PIs in Uralic languages in the future, e.g., in the context of the Uralic Typology Database Project.<sup>2</sup>

Section 2 examines the marking of polar interrogation in the world's languages and uses this typological knowledge as a background for an overview of the encoding of the domain in Uralic languages. In Section 3, PIs are examined in a more holistic perspective, looking at their structure beyond the markers of polar interrogation. Section 4 concludes the paper.

Before going into the types of marking, I will mention a few issues that, despite falling at least partly within the scope of the definition, are not addressed in this paper. Negative interrogatives sometimes differ from positive ones, and interesting typological observations may be made of the intersection of these two domains. I have, however, chosen to leave it outside the scope of this paper. The relationship between PIs and content interrogatives, e.g., to what extent the same interrogative markers are used in the two question types, will receive only minor attention in this paper. Finally, I will not discuss in detail the different functions that PIs may serve (neutral, leading, focused, echo), and which kinds of constructions tend to occur in each of these different functions; my primary focus will be on PIs that are as neutral as possible in terms of focus and the answers expected. A comprehensive treatment of PIs should naturally pay attention to all these issues as well.

## **2. Types of marking polar interrogation**

In this section, I will focus on the type of marking encoding polar interrogation. I will first make an overview of the current typological knowledge of the marking of PIs and then look at what Uralic languages look like in this light. In typological studies of the domain (Moravcsik 1971; Ultan 1978; Sadock, Zwicky 1985; Siemund 2001; Dryer 2005a; König, Siemund 2007), the following types of interrogative marking have been identified: intonation, interrogative particles, verbal inflection, disjunction

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<sup>2</sup> The paper was originally presented at the workshop of the Uralic Typology Database Project in Tallinn, November 2009. I wish to thank the participants of the workshop for their comments. Thanks are also due to Riho Grünthal, Eino Koponen, Larisa Leisiö, and Anne Tamm for help with Veps, Skolt Saami, Nganasan, and Estonian, respectively.

(A-not-A), order of constituents and absence of declarative morphemes. Furthermore, Miestamo (2007) has observed that some languages use interrogative auxiliary verbs to mark polar interrogation. These different marking types will now be exemplified in turn.

Coding polar interrogation by mere intonation is illustrated by the Ma'di examples in (2). In Dryer's (2005a) data, 137 out of 842 languages use intonation as the sole means of encoding polar interrogation. Interrogative intonation contours differ from language to language, but rising intonation is the most typical pattern in PIs.

(2) Ma'di (Nilo-Saharan, Uganda; Blackings, Fabb 2003 : 632)

- a. *ní`mū rá*  
 2SG NPST.go AFF  
 'You will definitely go'
- b. *ní`mū rá`?*  
 2SG NPST.go AFF Q  
 'Will you definitely go?'

Interrogative particles are the most common way of marking polar interrogation in the world's languages: 522 out of 842 languages in Dryer's (2005a) data. Note that Dryer does not differentiate between free and clitic particles. An example of this type is provided by Hmong Njua (3), where the interrogative particle *puas* is placed in front of the verb.

(3) Hmong Njua (Hmong-Mien, China; Harriehausen 1990 : 118, 205)

- a. *kuv puv kuv tug pooj yeg tug miv*  
 1SG see 1SG CL friend CL cat  
 'I see my friend's cat'
- b. *kuv puas puv tug miv*  
 1SG Q see CL cat  
 'Do I see a cat?'

Polar interrogation is expressed as part of verbal morphology in Purépecha (4), where the interrogative mood suffix *-ki* replaces the declarative mood suffix *-ti*. Interrogative verb morphology occurs in 154 out of 842 languages in Dryer's (2005a) data.

(4) Purépecha (Tarascan, Mexico; Chamoreau 2000 : 113)

- a. *'pedru i'se-š-ti-Ø 'pablu-ni*  
 Pedro see-AOR-ASS-3SG Pablo-OBJ  
 'Pedro saw Pablo'
- b. *'pedru i'se-š-ki-Ø 'pablu-ni?*  
 Pedro see-AOR-Q-3SG Pablo-OBJ  
 'Did Pedro see Pablo?'

Some languages express polar interrogation with a disjunctive construction where the predicate is followed by its negation; hence the label A-not-A for this type of construction. In Kobon (5) the disjunctive conjunction *aka* may optionally occur between the positive and negative predicates. The A-not-A type of interrogative marking is well-known from Mandarin (Sino-Tibetan, China), but information on its cross-linguistic frequency and areal distribution is not available in Dryer 2005a, where these cases are treated as interrogative particle constructions (see Dryer 2005b for discussion).



and declaratives show no segmental or supra-segmental differences in their structure. Dryer (2005a) mentions one language, Chalcatongo Mixtec, where this is the case, see (9). I have found the same situation obtaining in Gooniyandi (Australian, Australia; see McGregor 1990 : 485, 382–383, 369–371).

(9) Chalcatongo Mixtec (Oto-Manguéan, Mexico; Macaulay 1996 : 126)

a. *ñábaʔa-ró librú-ro(?)*

have-2 book-2

'You have your book / Do you have your book?'

b. *xakú-ro(?)*

laugh-2

'You're laughing / Are you laughing?'

In addition to the type of marking in PIs, attention has also been paid to the position of interrogative particles. Dryer (2005b) finds the following distribution of different positional alternatives in a sample of 777 languages: initial particle in 118 languages, final particle in 273 languages, second position particle in 45 languages, particle in another position in 8 languages, in either of two positions in 24 languages, no question particle in 309 languages.

Having now made an overview of interrogative marking in the world's languages, I will move on to a discussion of Uralic interrogatives in this light. As mentioned in the introduction, the treatment of Uralic PIs is mainly based on published descriptions of these languages. Table 1 shows the languages examined, the abbreviations used for these languages in this paper, and the sources consulted. For some of the languages, experts were also consulted, and their names are indicated at the relevant points in this paper.

*Table 1*

**The Uralic languages examined<sup>3</sup>**

<b>Estonian</b>	Est	Estonian Language 2003; Keevallik 2009; Metslang, Habicht, Pajusalu 2008
<b>Finnish</b>	Fin	Hakulinen, Viikuna, Korhonen, Koivisto, Heinonen, Alho 2004
<b>Veps</b>	Vep	Kettunen 1943, Zaitseva 2001
<b>Votic</b>	Vot	Ariste 1968
<b>Saami (Central-South)</b>	SCS	Bergsland 1994
<b>Saami (Northern)</b>	SNo	Nickel 1994
<b>Saami (Skolt)</b>	SSk	Korhonen, Moshnikoff, Sammallahti 1973; Moshnikoff, Moshnikoff, Koponen 2009; Itkonen 1931
<b>Mari (Hill)</b>	Mar	Alhoniemi 1993; Sebeok, Ingemann 1961
<b>Mordvin (Erzya)</b>	MEr	Bartens 1999
<b>Mordvin (Moksha)</b>	MMo	Bartens 1999
<b>Komi-Zyrian</b>	Kom	Bartens 2000; Rédei 1978
<b>Udmurt</b>	Udm	Bartens 2000; Winkler 2001
<b>Hungarian</b>	Hun	Kenesei, Vago, Fenyvesi 1998
<b>Khanty</b>	Kha	Gulya 1966; Filchenko 2007
<b>Mansi</b>	Man	Honti 1988; Kálmán 1965; Kulonen 2007; Keresztes 1998
<b>Enets</b>	Ene	Künnap 1999a
<b>Kamass</b>	Kam	Künnap 1999b
<b>Nenets</b>	Nen	Hajdú 1988; Décsy 1966; Salminen 1998
<b>Nganasan</b>	Nga	Katzschmann 2008
<b>Selkup</b>	Sel	Helinski 1998

<sup>3</sup> The names of the languages are in the form in which they appear in The World Atlas of Languages Structures 2005; The World Atlas of Language Structures Online 2008.

One immediately observes that the sources are quite different in nature and coverage, and it is obvious that they cannot provide a balanced and complete picture of PIs in these languages. They will however serve the purpose of this paper: they provide data for an overview of the domain in the language family to serve as background for more detailed studies of individual languages, also showing some points where more research is needed. The appendix at the end of this paper gives a short description of PIs in each Uralic language examined. In the following I will discuss and illustrate the types of marking found in the survey. The results are summarized in Table 2 below the discussion.

Polar interrogation may be expressed by mere intonation in the majority of Uralic languages. The following examples (10) are from Hungarian.

(10) Hungarian (Kenesei, Vago, Fenyvesi 1998 : 2)

- a. *Péter beteg volt*  
Peter sick was  
'Peter was sick'
- b. *Péter beteg volt?*  
Peter sick was  
'Was Peter sick?'

Interrogative particles are also commonly found in the languages of the family. Estonian (11) illustrates the use of an initial particle: the particle *kas* appears initially.

(11) Estonian (Erelt 2003 : 108)

- a. *sa tule-d täna meile*  
2SG come-2SG today 1PL.ALL  
'You will come to visit us today'
- b. *kas sa tule-d täna meile?*  
Q 2SG come-2SG today 1PL.ALL  
'Will you come to visit us today?'

A second-position clitic particle is found in Skolt Saami (12): the clitic *-a* occurs after the first constituent of the clause.

(12) Skolt Saami (Korhonen, Moshnikoff, Sammallahti 1973 : 103, 104)

- a. *lie-a suâna kâddam puârast?*  
be.PRES.3PL-Q 3DU.NOM catch.PST.PTCP well  
'Have they caught (fish) well?'
- b. *kâ'l suâna lie miâlggâd puârast kâddam*  
yes 3DU.NOM be.PRES.3PL quite well catch.PST.PTCP  
'Yes, they have caught quite well'

Interrogative verb morphology is found in the Samoyedic branch of Uralic. Example (13) is from Nenets, where the interrogative suffix *-sa* expresses polar interrogation with past time reference.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> In this connection, it is also worth noting that in the Samoyedic languages that use interrogative verb morphology, these forms may also be used in content questions. This is an interesting point of cross-linguistic variation: in some languages the same marking is used in both types of interrogative as in the Samoyedic languages mentioned (e.g., Purépecha), in others different moods are used for polar and content interrogatives (e.g., Epena Pedee; Choco, Colombia; see Harms 1994)



(13) Nenets (Salminen 1998 : 530)

- a. *nú°*  
stand.IND  
'(s)he stands'
- b. *nú-sa*  
stand-Q  
'did (s)he stand?'

Estonian and Finnish also have the option of expressing polar interrogation by modifying the order of constituents, i.e. fronting the verb. In Finnish this option is available in the colloquial language in the case of 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular subjects (14).

(14) Finnish (colloquial; constructed examples)

- a. *sä tuut*  
2SG come.2SG  
'You're coming'
- b. *tuut sä?*  
come.2SG 2SG  
'Are you coming?'

Polar interrogation expressed by the disjunction (A-not-A) type of construction has been found in Skolt Saami and Komi-Zyrian. In Komi-Zyrian, this is reported in (Bartens 2000 : 346), and in Skolt Saami, I have found a few instances in the traditional stories recorded by Itkonen (1931). In the Skolt Saami examples in (15), the negative auxiliary occurs after the main verb inflected for the same person and number. In (15a), the postverbal negative auxiliary is the final element in the clause and it cannot be unequivocally determined whether it forms an A-not-A construction or simply occurs as a final negative tag. In (15b), however, where the object of the verb occurs after the negative auxiliary, it is clear that we are dealing with an A-not-A construction.

(15) Skolt Saami (Itkonen 1931 : 204, 206; spelling as in the original)

- a. *vũđĩñé'k je'k?*  
see.2SG NEG.2SG  
'Did you see?'
- b. *vũđĩñé'k ik pēive?*  
see.2SG NEG.2SG sun.SG.ACC  
'Did you see the sun?'

The marking types found in Uralic languages in the sources consulted were intonation, interrogative particles, interrogative verb morphology, interrogative word order and disjunction. Auxiliary verbs and the absence of declarative morphemes were not found encoding polar interrogation in the Uralic languages included in this survey.

All the languages examined have some way of expressing polar interrogation, and thus the type with no interrogative-declarative distinction

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and in yet others only PIs have morphological marking on the verb and the presence of interrogative words suffice to express content interrogatives (e.g., Tonkawa: Tonkawa, USA; see Hoijer 1933). Interrogative verb morphology is especially interesting in terms of the variation in the use of PI marking in content interrogatives, but the question is relevant with other types of PI marking as well.

was not attested in Uralic languages. It should however be noted that, e.g., in Finnish, declarative sentences without any special intonation may also occur in PI function and context is then the only clue to the interrogative reading of these utterances. The same has been reported from Estonian by Keevallik (2009) and from Veps by Kettunen (1943), and it is to be expected that the same phenomenon occurs in at least some other Uralic languages as well.

Table 2. summarizes the different interrogative marking types found in the Uralic languages examined in this study. Clitics are separated from particles. For particles, three different positional variants are distinguished: initial, preverbal and final. The "clitic" column contains clitics that can appear on the focus of the question in different positions. The "clitic (2<sup>nd</sup>Pos)" column contains cases in which the clitic appears in second position after the focus of the question, which appears in first position (the finite verb in case the question bears no special focus).

Table 2

## Interrogative marking types in the languages examined

	Intonation	Particle (initial)	Particle (preverbal)	Particle (final)	Clitic	Clitic (2 <sup>nd</sup> Pos)	Word order	Affix	A-not-A
Est	×	×		×			×		
Fin				×		×	×		
Vep	×		×		×				
Vot						×			
SCS	×	×							
SNo		×				×			
SSk	×					×			×
Mar				×					
MEr	×								
MMo	×								
Kom	×					×	×		×
Udm	×				×				
Hun	×			×	×				
Kha	×								
Man		×			×				
Ene	×							×	
Kam					×				
Nen	×			×				×	
Nga	×							×	
Sel			×						

The table shows that intonation may be used to express polar interrogation in the majority of Uralic languages. Particles and clitics are also common. The pattern where a 2<sup>nd</sup> position clitic occurs on a fronted constituent is typical of Finnic and Saamic languages and also occurs in Permic. Interrogative verb morphology is found in Samoyedic only. In the sources consulted, the A-not-A pattern was found only in Skolt Saami and Komi.



### 3. Polar interrogative structures in a more holistic perspective

In this section, the structure of Uralic PIs will be examined in a more holistic perspective. The key notion is structural symmetry vs. asymmetry between interrogatives and declaratives, i.e. whether and how the structure of interrogatives differs from the structure of declaratives in addition to the presence of an interrogative marker. I have used these notions in my earlier work on negation (Miestamo 2003; 2005), and in Miestamo 2007 I have shown how they can be applied to the domain of polar interrogation.

In symmetric PIs, the structure of the interrogative does not differ from the structure of the corresponding declarative in any other way than the presence of the interrogative marker(s), whereas in asymmetric interrogatives additional structural differences vis-à-vis declaratives are found. Symmetry and asymmetry can be observed in constructions and paradigms.

An interrogative construction is symmetric if no other structural differences than the presence of an interrogative marker can be observed between an interrogative sentence and its declarative counterpart. Examples of symmetric interrogative constructions have been seen above, e.g., Hmong Njua (3) and Estonian (11). An interrogative construction is asymmetric if the comparison of an interrogative with its declarative counterpart reveals other structural differences than the (mere) presence of an interrogative marker. Examples of asymmetric interrogative constructions have been seen in Halkomelem (8) and Swedish (6) above: in Halkomelem the finiteness of the lexical verb is reduced and the subject person markers appear on the added interrogative auxiliary; in Swedish there is no interrogative marker added but the structure of the sentence changes as the verb is fronted.

In symmetric paradigms, the correspondences between the members of the paradigms used in declaratives and interrogatives is one-to-one; thus, e.g., in English (16) all declaratives have a corresponding interrogative form.

(16) English (Indo-European, United Kingdom; constructed examples)

a.	<i>sing</i> , PRESENT		b.	<i>sing</i> , PAST	
	DECL	Q		DECL	Q
	1SG <i>I sing</i>	<i>do I sing?</i>		<i>I sang</i>	<i>did I sing?</i>
	2SG <i>you sing</i>	<i>do you sing?</i>		<i>you sang</i>	<i>did you sing?</i>
	3SG <i>(s)he sings</i>	<i>does (s)he sing?</i>		<i>(s)he sang</i>	<i>did (s)he sing?</i>
	1PL <i>we sing</i>	<i>do we sing?</i>		<i>we sang</i>	<i>did we sing?</i>
	2PL <i>you sing</i>	<i>do you sing?</i>		<i>you sang</i>	<i>did you sing?</i>
	3PL <i>they sing</i>	<i>do they sing?</i>		<i>they sang</i>	<i>did they sing?</i>

In asymmetric paradigms, the correspondences between the members of the paradigms used in interrogatives and declaratives are not one-to-one. In Awa Pit (17) declaratives can make a distinction between imperfective and perfective aspect (17a vs. b). However, the past interrogative marker appears in the same position as the suffixes responsible for the aspect distinction, and thus precludes their occurrence. In the interrogative paradigm, there is thus only one (aspect-neutral) form corresponding to the two forms in the declarative paradigm, and the paradigm is asymmetric.

(17) Awa Pit (Barbacoan, Colombia; Curnow 1997 : 199, 221, 323)

- a. *nu-na juan-ta pyan-t-zi*  
2SG-TOP Juan-ACC hit-PST-NLCT  
'You hit Juan'
- b. *demetrio a-ka-na kal ki-mtu-ata-w*  
Demetrio come-when-TOP work work-IMPF-PST-LCT  
'When Demetrio came, I was working'
- c. *anshik-na a-ma-s?*  
yesterday-TOP come-Q.PST-LCT  
'Did you come yesterday?'

Cross-cutting the constructional vs. paradigmatic distinction, asymmetric interrogative structures can be divided into subtypes according to the nature of the asymmetry. In my ongoing work (see also Miestamo 2007; 2009),<sup>5</sup> I have found the following types of structural asymmetry between interrogatives and declaratives that seem to recur cross-linguistically and may thus form relevant subtypes of asymmetric interrogatives in a typological classification of PIs: 1. asymmetry in the marking of focus, 2. neutralization of grammatical distinctions, 3. asymmetry in the finiteness of the verb, and 4. other, purely formal, differences in the marking of grammatical categories. In my survey of Uralic PIs, I found instances of all these types except type 3. In the following I will only discuss the cross-linguistic types to the extent they provide parallels to the Uralic structures.

An easily observable structural difference between interrogatives and declaratives in Uralic languages is the change in word order found in Finnic, Saamic and Permic languages. In Finnish, the second-position interrogative clitic *-kO* appears on the first constituent, which is the focus of the question. In questions that are as neutral as possible in terms of focus, the verb is fronted and acts as host for the interrogative clitic (18b).

(18) Finnish (constructed examples)

- a. *King Arthur haukkuu parvekkeella*  
King Arthur bark.3SG balcony.ADE  
'King Arthur is barking on the balcony'
- b. *Haukkuu-ko King Arthur parvekkeella?*  
bark.3SG-Q King Arthur balcony.ADE  
'Is King Arthur barking on the balcony?'
- c. *King Arthur-ko haukkuu parvekkeella?*  
King Arthur-Q bark.3SG balcony.ADE  
'Is it King Arthur that is barking on the balcony?'
- d. *Parvekkeella-ko King Arthur haukkuu?*  
balcony.ADE-Q King Arthur bark.3SG  
'Is it on the balcony that King Arthur is barking?'

<sup>5</sup> The sample on which the generalizations are based, is selected according to the principles outlined in Miestamo (2005). In short, the sampling procedure aims at a balanced representation of the world's linguistic families and areas by including at least one language from every genus listed in Dryer's (2005c) classification; in the revised version of the classification in (The World Atlas of Language Structures Online 2008), there are 477 genera in total. This is work in progress and at the time of writing this article sample size was slightly above 200 languages.

A similar situation is found in a number of Finnic and Saamic languages: Fin, Vot, SNo, SSk (see 12 above), and Kom. Word order changes without an interrogative clitic have been found in Estonian, Finnish (see 14 above), and Komi-Zyrian, as well.

In the Finnish examples (18) and the similar cases in the other languages mentioned, the domain affected by the asymmetry is the marking of focus. Even when one wants to express as neutral an interrogative as possible in terms of focus, on the formal level one element is always expressed as if in focus. In case of neutral sentence focus, this element is the finite verb.

As mentioned above, focus is a domain that is affected in PIs in a number of languages. In Lavukaleve, both focus (19a) and non-focus (19b) constructions are found in declaratives, but the interrogative marker is itself a focus marker and interrogatives are therefore always focus constructions (19c). The distinction between focus and non-focus is lost in the interrogative paradigm.

(19) Lavukaleve (Lavukaleve, Solomon Islands; Terrill 2003 : 38, 316, 452)

- a. *legis e-kae-e o-mi*  
kite(N) 3SG.N.OBJ-put.up-NMLZ 3SG.POSS-special.thing(N)  
*tuna-Ø fi*  
be.really-SG.N 3SG.N.FOC  
'That's the special thing for kite-flying'
- b. *o-na o-re-a tuna-a la*  
3SG.F.OBJ-INCL 3SG.SUBJ-say-SG.F be.really-SG.F SG.F.ART  
'(He took the coconut) To the one she had really said'
- c. *"tuna-Ø mi?" hide a-e-re-ge*  
be.really-SG.N 3SG.N.Q.FOC thus 3SG.M.OBJ-SBRD-say-ANT  
'"Is it really true?" he said'

In Mosestén, we see another example in which PIs are asymmetric vis-à-vis declaratives in that they must use a focus construction. The interrogative marker *-dyaj* occurs on the first constituent of the clause, which is also the focus of the question. Questions focusing on the polarity of the sentence as neutrally as possible, i.e. without any particular constituent in the focus of the question, an emphatic element standing for the whole sentence appears in the beginning and the interrogative marker occurs on this element, thus also marking it as being in the focus of the question (20b). Examples (20c-e) show that whenever focus is on a particular constituent, this constituent is fronted and the interrogative marker occurs on it.

(20) Mosestén (Mosetenan, Bolivia; Sakel 2003 : 309–310)

- a. *mi rai's-e-' khösh-ï-'*  
2SG want-VBLZ-3.F.OBJ sleep-VBLZ-F.SUBJ  
'You want to sleep'
- b. *me'-dyaj mi rai's-e-' khösh-ï-'*  
so-Q 2SG want-VBLZ-3.F.OBJ sleep-VBLZ-F.SUBJ  
'Do you want to sleep?'
- c. *rai's-e-'-dyaj khösh-ï-'-mi?*  
want-VBLZ-3.F.OBJ-Q sleep-VBLZ-F.SUBJ-2SG  
'Do you want to sleep?'

- d. *khösh-ï-'-dyaj*      *rai's-e-'-mi*  
 sleep-VBLZ-F.SUBJ-Q want-VBLZ-F.SUBJ-2SG  
 'Do you want to sleep?'
- e. *mi-dyaj* *rai's-e-'*      *khösh-ï-'*  
 2SG-Q want-VBLZ-3.F.OBJ sleep-VBLZ-F.SUBJ  
 'Do you want to sleep?'

The fact that effects on focus marking recur cross-linguistically allows us to identify focus-related asymmetry as one of the cross-linguistically relevant subtypes of asymmetric interrogatives, and we find representatives of this type in Finnic, Saamic, and Permic languages.

What about the cases where interrogation is expressed by fronting the verb without the addition of an interrogative marker? In example (14b) repeated here as (21a) we see that colloquial Finnish may express polar interrogation by verb fronting with 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular subjects. The construction with the clitic (18) has a colloquial variant in which the person marker is elided (21b).

(21) Finnish (constructed examples)

- a. *tuu-t*      *sä*  
 come-2SG 2SG  
 'Are you coming?'
- b. *tuu-k*      *sä*  
 come-Q 2SG  
 'Are you coming?'
- c. *tule-t-ko*      *sinä*  
 come-2SG-Q 2SG  
 'Are you coming?'

(21c) is the standard Finnish form of the same question. The constructions in (21a) and (21b) may be seen as different diachronic solutions in a situation where more economic expression is aimed at: one may retain the person ending or the interrogative clitic (their cooccurrence becomes especially difficult to pronounce in case the vowel of the interrogative clitic is dropped, which, in fact, happens quite often in spoken Finnish). Note also that in Komi-Zyrian, there is variation between the presence and absence of the PI clitic after the fronted constituent.

The point of the foregoing discussion is to show that a construction expressing polar interrogation by mere verb fronting may develop from a construction exhibiting both verb fronting and a second-position clitic. And since the latter is clearly a case of asymmetry affecting the domain of focus, a connection between focus marking and mere verb fronting can also be established. The verb-fronting constructions are therefore taken to be instances of the focus subtype of asymmetric interrogatives.

Another way in which interrogatives are found to differ structurally from declaratives in Uralic languages is the neutralization of some grammatical distinctions made in the corresponding declarative. This is found in some of the Samoyedic languages examined and is clearly connected to the fact that these languages express polar interrogation in their verbal morphology (interrogative mood). In both Enets and Nenets, the interrogative mood marker, *-sa* in both languages, is attached to the aorist form,

which is unmarked for tense. Past tense marking does not occur with interrogative mood but the time reference of the interrogative verb form is exclusively past, see example (22) from Nenets.

(22) Nenets (Salminen 1998 : 530)

- a. *nú°*  
stand.IND  
'(s)he stands'
- b. *nú-øsy°*  
stand-PST  
'(s)he stood'
- c. *nú-sa*  
stand-Q  
'did (s)he stand?'

The construction in (22c) is symmetric vis-à-vis the unmarked tense form in (22a), but there is paradigmatic asymmetry in the sense that tense distinction between (22a-b) may not be expressed on the verb in the interrogative mood and there is a functional shift in the time reference of the verb. Interrogatives with present or future time reference may be expressed by declarative forms and interrogative intonation. Note also that in Selkup, interrogatives (which are marked by a preverbal particle) tend to use the inferential mood, but this paradigmatic asymmetry is only a preference, not a grammatical restriction. The neutralization in interrogatives of grammatical distinctions available in the declarative occur in a number of non-Uralic languages. An example was seen in Awa Pit (17) above.

In all three Samoyedic languages that use interrogative mood to express polar interrogation, a further paradigmatic asymmetry is found in that interrogative mood marking is incompatible with other moods. The mood systems of these languages are extensive, and there seem to be some exceptions, at least the renarrative in Nganasan, which does have a special interrogative form. Some of these incompatibilities are of course trivial in the sense that the mutually exclusive moods are not semantically compatible in the first place, e.g., interrogative and imperative.

In Nganasan, most of the interrogative mood markers are portmanteau suffixes that express both tense/aspect and interrogative mood. They replace TAM markers used in the indicative, and since the marking of tense and aspect thus differs in the interrogative from their marking in the declarative, the PI constructions are asymmetric (note that there are no clear cases of paradigmatic neutralization of tense or aspect in Nganasan). This sometimes happens in languages that have interrogative mood marking, e.g., in West Greenlandic (Eskimo-Aleut, Greenland; see Fortescue 1984 : 289), the interrogative mood markers are mood-person portmanteau suffixes and the marking of person is thus formally affected by interrogation. These cases are instances of the purely formal type of asymmetry between interrogatives and declaratives mentioned above: the categories that are affected are simply marked differently, but they are functionally the same categories and no distinctions are lost. Thus, in Nganasan, we are dealing with the same tenses and aspects functionally, although their formal expression is different in the interrogative; and similarly, in West Greenlandic, the person

categories are the same and have the same functions in interrogatives and declaratives, although their formal marking is different.

Asymmetry is not very common in PIs: roughly 75 % of the 200 languages examined in my typological survey so far do not show any asymmetry in PIs. As to the proposed subtypes, focus-related asymmetry is found in less than 10 % of the languages examined, neutralization of distinctions is found in less than 15 % of the languages examined (and in most cases, only few categories are lost in interrogatives), and the remaining two types, asymmetry in the finiteness of the verb and purely formal asymmetry, are both found in roughly 5 % of the languages examined.

I will conclude this section by saying a few words about the functional motivations behind the structural asymmetries found. I propose that the notions of language-internal and language-external analogy (cf. Itkonen 2005) may provide explanations for symmetric and asymmetric structures. Symmetric interrogatives are based on language-internal analogy: the structure of the interrogative simply copies the structure of the declarative. Explanations to asymmetric structures may be provided by language-external analogy: interrogatives differ from declaratives in their functional (language-external) characteristics, and the linguistic structure of the interrogative may reflect, by language-external analogy, aspects of this functional-level (language-external) asymmetry. The focus-related asymmetries reflect the functional-level connection between focus and polar interrogation: in their semantics, neutral PIs have their focus on the polarity (truth value) of the sentence. Some languages also show this in the linguistic structure of the interrogative in that there is explicit focus on the item associated with the polarity of the sentence. The neutralization asymmetries can be simply explained by the lower frequency of the marked category without recourse to language-external analogy: interrogatives being far less frequent than declaratives, they do not always make the same amount of grammatical distinctions as declaratives do; this is a general economy explanation for the lower number of distinctions made in marked (vs. unmarked) categories. The remaining two types are so rare that they can simply be seen as results of language-particular developments, without any general functional motivation behind them. General morphological processes such as fusion and erosion may be responsible for some of the cases of purely formal asymmetry.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

In this paper I have provided an overview of PIs in Uralic languages in a typological perspective. I have paid attention to the type of marking expressing polar interrogation and to the structural differences that interrogatives show in comparison to declaratives beyond the mere presence of

<sup>6</sup> In Miestamo 2003; 2005, similar analogy-based functional motivations were proposed for symmetric and asymmetric negatives. The analogical explanations may seem much weaker in the case of polar interrogatives in comparison to the discussion of these types of explanations in the domain of negation. However, there is much less asymmetry in polar interrogatives (vs. declaratives) than in negatives (vs. affirmatives) (with negatives, only 40 % of languages were found to lack asymmetry completely), and there is thus much less cross-linguistic variation to explain in polar interrogatives.



interrogative marking. I will not address the question of which properties of PIs should be taken into account in the Uralic Typology Database and at which level of detail. However, I hope that the discussion in this paper may serve as a useful basis in constructing the database, and in approaching the domain of polar interrogation in Uralic languages more generally.

## **Appendix: Polar interrogatives in the Uralic languages surveyed**

This appendix provides a short description of the main aspects of PIs in all the Uralic languages surveyed. Focus is on the attested forms, and the question how the forms differ functionally within the range of functions covered by the definition of PIs is not systematically treated here. The languages appear in alphabetical order.

**1. Enets.** Polar interrogation can be expressed by mere intonation (Künnap 1999 : 40). There is also an interrogative mood suffix *-sa* that cooccurs with indicative person endings and does not cooccur with tense marking. Formally it is added to the unmarked aorist form but functionally it corresponds to the preterite, i.e. it has past interrogative meaning. (Künnap 1999 : 23, 27, 40). The suffix can be used in content interrogatives as well.

**2. Estonian.** There are alternative ways of forming PIs (Erelt 2003 : 108; Keevallik 2003 : 368–369): the initial question particle *kas*, inversion of subject and verb (= verb fronting), mere intonation, the clause-final particle *või/vä*, and a variety of clause-final tags. These different PI constructions naturally have different functions, but I will not go into that here.

**3. Finnish.** PIs are formed by the 2<sup>nd</sup>-position clitic *-kO* appearing on the element in the focus of the question, which is fronted (as discussed by Hakulinen, Vilkuna, Korhonen, Koivisto, Heinonen, Alho 2004 : 1598–1599, 1997, this is not the only possible focus position in PIs, but there is no need to go into the details here). In neutral PIs the finite verb is in the initial position followed by the clitic. With 2<sup>nd</sup>-person singular subjects, colloquial Finnish and some regional dialects use a construction with subject-verb inversion (verb fronting) without the interrogative clitic. Furthermore, the element *vai* 'or' can be taken as a clause-final PI particle (see also Hakulinen, Vilkuna, Korhonen, Koivisto, Heinonen, Alho 2004 : 1606ff).

**4. Hungarian.** PIs are most commonly formed by mere intonation (Kenesei, Vago, Fenyvesi 1998 : 1–2, 431–435). The question clitic *-e* may also be used (with falling intonation); in the standard language it attaches to the finite verb, but in non-standard varieties it may appear on a preverbal element as well (Kenesei, Vago, Fenyvesi 1998 : 2, 350–351). The tag *úgye* expresses leading questions expecting agreement from the listener (Kenesei, Vago, Fenyvesi 1998 : 3).

**5. Kamass.** PIs are formed by the element *-a* placed at the end of verb (Künnap 1999 : 29, 32, 35). The source calls this element a particle but connects it to the verb with a hyphen. It is treated as a clitic in Table 2 above.

**6. Khanty.** The sources do not say anything explicit about PIs. Gulya (1966 : 93) gives an example of a PI without any overt marking. It seems a probable conclusion that intonation can distinguish declaratives and PIs (this is typologically far more common than the other alternative, the absence



of the declarative-interrogative distinction, see Section 2 above). It also seems plausible to assume that if there was a widely used PI construction other than intonation in the language, Filchenko's (2007) 600-page grammar would have mentioned it.

**7. Komi-Zyrian.** Several ways to express polar interrogation are reported in (Bartens 2000 : 346; Rédei 1978 : 117, 119). It can be expressed by intonation, the intonation peak being on the word that is in the focus of the question. At least in the literary language, the element in the focus of the question usually occurs initially and may carry the PI-clitic *-ö* (or one of its dialectal variants). There is another particle *ömöj*, which behaves in a similar way. Whether one should recognize two different constructions, one where the element in focus is simply fronted and one where it is fronted and carries the question clitic/particle is not clear. In Table 2, both are tentatively recognized. PIs may also be formed by cliticizing a form of the negative auxiliary on the finite verb. This is a PI of type A-not-A (but note that some sources cited by Bartens 2000 : 346 translate the examples of this construction as alternative questions rather than as simple PIs).

**8. Mansi.** Polar interrogation is expressed by the elements *-a* or *-e* (Kálmán 1965 : 46; Keresztes 1998 : 416). The sources call them particles but mark them as bound morphemes with a hyphen. In Table 2 they are treated as clitics. It is not specified in the sources on which elements they may occur. According to Kálmán (1965 : 46) and Keresztes (1998 : 416), the words *man* 'if' and *aman* 'or, whether' may also introduce questions; the functions of these questions are not specified, but given the meanings of the elements, it seems clear that these are polar questions rather than content interrogatives. Examples without marking are also found (Keresztes 1998 : 420, 421; Kulonen 2007 : 206); whether these have a special intonation is not indicated in the source. Word order is reported to be essentially the same in declaratives and interrogatives (Honti 1988 : 165).

**9. Mari (Hill).** The question particle *mo*, developed from the interrogative pronoun *mo* 'what, which', can express polar interrogation, see (Alhoniemi 1993 : 85). In the PI examples it occurs finally. No further PI constructions are reported in the sources.

**10. Mordvin (Erzya).** Polar interrogation is expressed by mere intonation (on the element the interrogation targets) (Bartens 1999 : 176).

**11. Mordvin (Moksha).** Polar interrogation is expressed by mere intonation (on the element the interrogation targets) (Bartens 1999 : 176).

**12. Nenets.** Polar interrogation is expressed by intonation when referring to present or future time and by the interrogative mood when referring to past time. The interrogative mood marker is *-sa*, and as other mood markers, it is followed by indicative personal suffixes. The preterite suffix (the only tense suffix in the language) does not occur in the interrogative, and it does not occur in the imperative or the necessitative either, but does occur in the indicative, conjunctive, imperfective probabilative and narrative. (Salminen 1998 : 530, 531, 533, 544; 1997 : 94, 98, 108–112). The interrogative mood is thus formally unmarked for tense but has past interrogative function. (According to Hajdú 1988 : 18, the time function of the interrogative mood form is perfective aspect rather than past tense.) The interrogative mood is mutually exclusive with other moods. The interrogative mood

may be used in content interrogatives as well. Décsy (1966 : 56) also reports a negative tag: *-xava* 'is it not so?'

**13. Nganasan.** The following summary of the Nganasan polar interrogative system is based on Katzschmann (2008 : 429–431, 448) and on information provided by Larisa Leisiö (p.c.). PIs are expressed by the interrogative mood or by intonation alone. The interrogative mood suffixes are different in different tense-aspect categories (they follow all other verb morphology but the person suffixes). In the present (aorist), the suffix is *-ŋu/-ŋa*, and this suffix replaces the imperfective and perfective aspect suffixes used in the indicative present. However, the aspect suffixes mark aspect only redundantly (and only in the indicative present): the aspect distinction is a lexical one and imperfective and perfective verbs differ in their stems as well (except for a small number of biaspectual stems) — the semantic distinction is thus not lost in the interrogative. In the preterite, the interrogative suffix is *-hu/-ha*, and it replaces the preterite suffix used in the indicative. In the future expressed with *-sutə*, the final vowel of the verb (the *ə* of the future marker or the vowel of the person suffix) is lengthened if the verb is in final position in the interrogative. The interrogative iterative marker is *-kəə*, which differs from the indicative iterative *-kə* by the lengthening of the vowel. The interrogative future may also be expressed by *-ntəŋu/-ntəŋa*, which is a combination of the progressive aspect suffix *-ntə* and the present interrogative suffix *-ŋu/-ŋa*; according to Larisa Leisiö (p.c.), the aorist and future would differ in the progressive interrogative in that the future would contain two instances of the progressive marker, but in actual usage, this repetition often does not happen and the distinction is then not made formally. The interrogative renarrative suffix is *-ha* instead of the indicative renarrative *-hamhu*, i.e. the second syllable of the marker is dropped in the interrogative. Other moods do not take interrogative suffixes, although some of them may be used in polar interrogatives. The remote past and the future-in-the-past are used without interrogative marking in questions. The interrogative mood can also be used in content questions.

**14. Saami (Central-Southern).** Polar interrogation can be expressed by intonation only (Bergsland 1994 : 35). PIs may also be introduced by the initial particles *mah*, *mejtie*, *dagke* or *vuj* 'or' (*dagke* seems to have a function different from a simple PI, translated with 'maybe' or 'so' in the beginning of the question). Word order does not differ from declaratives (Bergsland 1994 : 35, 139).

**15. Saami (North).** Polar interrogation is expressed by the interrogative particle *-go*. PIs normally start with the verb followed by this particle. If another element is in focus, it takes the initial position and is followed by the PI marker. The alternative form *-gos* may also be used; it has a friendlier, more personalizing function (Nickel 1994 : 204–205, 523–524). Nickel (1994 : 209) also reports the use of the disjunctive conjunction *vai* 'or' as an introducer of a PI. An example of a PI with no interrogative marking is found in Nickel 1994 : 526, but the section on intonation (Nickel 1994 : 527ff) does not mention PIs with intonation.

**16. Saami (Skolt).** Polar interrogation is expressed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> position enclitic *-a* (with a slightly different meaning and distribution also *-go*, *-son*, or *-šât*), and in neutral-scope questions the finite verb occurs in the first position

(see Moshnikoff, Moshnikoff, Koponen 2009 : 154–155). A number of examples are found in texts where a sentence that is declarative in form expresses a polar interrogative (see e.g. Itkonen 1931 : 44, 168); according to Eino Koponen (p.c.) intonation distinguishes these from declaratives. There are also a few examples in which polar interrogation is expressed by putting the negative auxiliary after the verb, both inflected for the same person and number (see e.g. Itkonen 1931 : 204, 206). This is an A-not-A construction.

**17. Selkup.** The unstressed pre-verbal particle *qaj* expresses polar interrogation (cf. *qaj* 'what', which is stressed in this function). Interrogatives often use inferential mood. (Helimski 1998 : 576)

**18. Udmurt.** polar interrogation can be expressed by intonation; the peak is on the word that is in the focus of polar interrogation (Bartens 2000 : 345). There is also an enclitic PI particle: *-a* (after vowel also *wa*) according to Bartens, *-a* or *-o* (or *-te*) according to Winkler (2001 : 63, 66–67). The particle occurs on the focus of the PI. According to Bartens (2000 : 345) and Winkler (2001 : 66), the PIs marked with the clitic may have reversed word order, the focused constituent occurring in the beginning, but this is not reported to be the usual or default option as in Komi-Zyrian (cf. Bartens 2000 : 346). An interrogative pronoun may occur after the interrogative particle giving special nuance to the question (Bartens 2000 : 345).

**19. Veps.** The clitic *-k/-ak/-ik* expresses polar interrogation (Kettunen 1943 : 208–210, 532–534; Zaitseva 2001 : 121). In Kettunen's examples it is found on words occurring in different positions and thus cannot be analysed as a second-position clitic. The clitic *l'i*, borrowed from Russian, is occasionally found as well (Kettunen 1943 : 534). PIs are also commonly formed by mere intonation (Kettunen 1943 : 208–210, 534). Furthermore, the particle *vā* (< conjunction 'or') may express polar interrogation (Kettunen 1943 : 531); it occurs preposed to the predicate in the examples, which tend to have a specific meaning ('as if') rather than being neutral PIs. Some other PI particles are also mentioned by Kettunen (1943 : 531), e.g., *jo* and *se*, but it remains unclear what kinds of question functions they convey.

**20. Votic.** The PI marker *-ko* is found in (Ariste 1968 : 108). It appears in second position after an initial verb in the examples. The source calls it an affix, but it will be treated as a clitic here. Intonation is falling in all types of clause (Ariste 1968 : 15).

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#### Abbreviations

1 — first person, 2 — second person, 3 — third person, ABS — absolutive, ACC — accusative, ADE — adessive, AFF — affirmative, ALL — allative, ANT — anterior, AOR — aorist, ART — article, ASS — assertive, CL — classifier, DAT — dative, DECL — declarative, DEF — definite, DU — dual, F — feminine, FOC — focus, IMPF — imperfect

tive, INCL — inclusive, IND — indicative, INDEF — indefinite, LCT — locutor, M — masculine, N — neuter, NEG — negation/negative, NLCT — nonlocutor, NMLZ — nominalizer, NOM — nominative, NPST — nonpast, OBJ — object, OBL — oblique, PERF — perfect, PL — plural, POSS — possessive, PRES — present, PST — past, PTCP — participial, Q — question/interrogative, SBRD — subordinate, SG — singular, SUBJ — subject, TOP — topic, VBLZ — verbalization.

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*МАТТИ МИЭСТАМО* (Хельсинки)

### **ПОЛЯРНЫЕ ВОПРОСЫ В УРАЛЬСКИХ ЯЗЫКАХ ТИПОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ АСПЕКТ**

В статье рассматривается т. н. полярный вопрос (ответом на который может быть только «да» или «нет») в уральских языках с точки зрения типологии. Прежде всего предлагается обзор маркировки таких вопросов в языках мира. На данном фоне анализируются вопросительные предложения уральских языков. В этих языках представлены все обычные способы обозначения полярных вопросов. Анализируя полярный вопрос в целом, автор уделяет особое внимание структурным различиям — асимметриям — между вопросительными и утвердительными предложениями. Структурные асимметрии, которые встречаются в уральских языках, связаны с маркировкой фокуса, а также с мерой и обозначением времени, вида и наклонения в глагольной парадигме. Функциональные мотивации асимметрий излагаются лишь вкратце.