MIANMIN[1] INTERROGATIVES

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0   INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to examine the area of interrogatives in Mianmin. Questions are indicated by the use of interrogative mood markers whose function I have analyzed in the first section of this paper, and by interrogative words which feature in the second section.

1   INTERROGATIVE MOOD MARKERS

There are three interrogative mood markers -a̱, -e̱ and -o̱, which occur paragraph finally.[2]

1.1   Interrogative mood marker -a is used when asking for information
without the use of an interrogative word, that is, in questions re-
quiring a yes/no answer, with or without amplification.

> e.g. (1)   Q   imen-a
> food-int
>
> 'Is it food?'
>
> R   imem-o-be
> food-stat-ind
>
> 'It's food.'
>
> (2)   Q   ob   faninwali sinanggwano balu-tem
> your ancestors long-ago   aeroplane-in
>
> ha-bin-ib-bu-a
> go.around-pcont-3.p-pt-int
>
> 'Long ago, did your ancestors go around in
> aeroplanes?'
>
> R   yeye baluo   blim-o-be   sib-tem
> no   aeroplanes not-stat-ind ship-in
>
> ha-bin-ib-bio-be
> go.around-pcont-3.p-pt-ind
>
> 'No, there were no aeroplanes. They went around
> in ships.'

1.2   When interrogative words and mo 'abilitative' are used, -e is the
interrogative mood marker.

> e.g. (3)   Q   obo fatnamin dim o -ta Kelefolam
> you which   time it-foc Telefomin
>
> un-amab-eb-e
> go-f.sg-2.sg-int
>
> 'When will you go to Telefomin?'
>
> R   Desemba e-ta   un-amab-i-be
> December it-foc go-f.sg-1.sg-ind
>
> 'I will go in December.'
>
> (4)   Q   Mesen obo imen we-m-in   baan-dimo mo
> Mesen you food buy-cont-cust area-on   abil

om-b-eb-e
go-pt-2.sg-int

'Mesen, were you able to go the market?/

Did you go to the market?'

R   ae   om-b-i-be
yes go-pt-1.sg-ind

'Yes, I went.'

1.3   The interrogative mood marker -o has a particularly distinctive
intonation pattern - very high falling to low.   It is used in two
positions.

(a)   It is used in a quote when an interrogative word is not
used.

e.g.   (5) Q   e   kil baa-ba-n-e-a   kobo Gode
he ask said-to.him-ss-3.sg.m.-co-ord you   God's

miin-o   kobo Klaist Gode   dabaka-m-in
son-int you   Christ God's sent-cont-cust

naka keb-ti-o   ge-s-e-a ...
man   you-foc-int thus.said-dss-3.sg.m-co-ord

'He asked Him, "Are you God's son? Are you

Christ, the Messiah?" he said and ...'

R   Yesuse baa-ba-n-e-a   ae   ne
Jesus   said-to.him-ss-3.sg.m-co-ord yes I

Klaist ne-ta-bo   ge-s-e-a ...
Christ I-foc-emp thus.said-dss-3.sg.m-co-ord

'Jesus said to him, "Yes, I am the Christ,"

He said and ...'

(b)   It is also used as a vocative interrogative. This is em-
ployed when the person of whom the question is asked is far
off, or quite close but moving away, and the speaker calls
out to him.

e.g.   (6) Q   ne-ti-o
I-foc-int

'Did you mean me?'

R   ae   keb-ta-be
yes you-foc-ind

'Yes, you.'

(7) Q   <u>kobo</u> <u>sesa</u> <u>un-amab-eb-o</u>
           you bush go-f.sg-2.sg-int

          'Are you going to the bush?'

     R   <u>ae</u> <u>sesa</u> <u>un-amab-i-be</u>
           yes bush go-f.sg-1.sg-ind

          'Yes, I'm going to the bush.'

2 INTERROGATIVE WORDS

There are four basic interrogative words: <u>fatnamin</u> 'how/which,
<u>nimin</u> 'what' (<u>niminsabmin</u> 'what kind of'), <u>wan=</u> 'who', <u>fab</u> 'where'.
Each of these can combine with various other parts of speech to form
phrases and clauses. The final interrogative mood marker <u>-e</u> always
concludes a clause with an interrogative word.

2.1 The interrogative word <u>fatnamin</u> 'how/which' is expressed in three
different ways. In its customary form <u>fatnamin</u> fills modifying tag-
memes on the phrase level.

(a) Following the noun it modifies, <u>fatnamin</u> means 'how many/
     how much'.

e.g. (8) Q   <u>Salieno</u> <u>malasino</u> <u>wem-b</u>   o <u>monio</u> <u>fatnamin</u>
                Salien medicine drink-pt it money how much

                <u>walo-b-on-e</u>
                buy-pt-3.sg.fe-int

                'How much money was the medicine that Salien
                drank?'

           R   o   <u>tu</u> <u>kina</u> <u>walo-b-o-be</u>
                she two kina buy-pt-3.sg.fe-ind

                'She bought it for two kina.'

     (9) Q   <u>e</u> <u>meleli</u>   <u>fatnamine-e</u> <u>homon</u> <u>bleka</u> <u>elekiem-a</u>
                his children how many-int many or   one.only-int

                'How many children does he have? Many or only
                one?'

           R   <u>e</u> <u>meleli</u>   <u>asu-be</u>
                his children two-ind

                'He has two children.'

(b) Preceding the noun it modifies, <u>fatnamin</u> means 'what kind of/which' and can be interchanged with <u>nimin</u> 'what (thing)' and <u>niminsabmin</u> 'what kind of (thing)' in the same position.

e.g. (10) Q   <u>nibo</u>   <u>fatnamin</u> <u>dim</u> <u>o -ta</u> <u>Kainantu</u>
             we.incl which   time it-foc Kainantu

             <u>un-omab-bu-e</u>
             go-fp-1.p-int

             'Which time (when) will we go to Kainantu?'

       R   <u>sande</u> <u>make</u> <u>dim</u> <u>e-ta</u> <u>un-omab-bio-be</u>
           week other time it-foc go-f.p-1.p-ind

           'We will go next week.'

(11) Q   <u>ob</u> <u>faninwali</u> <u>sino</u>   <u>fatnamin</u>   <u>kukub</u>
             your ancestors before what.kind.of customs

             <u>wa-fu-bin-ib-bu-e</u>
             them-held-p.cont-3.p-pt-int

             'In the past, what kind of customs did your ancestors have?'

       R   <u>i</u>   <u>awa</u>   <u>gem-biaa-n-ib-a</u>   <u>am</u>
           they enemy fight-cont-ss-3.p-link house

           <u>kweisam</u>   <u>gem-biaa-n</u>   <u>bin-ib-bio-be</u>
           spirit.house build-cont-ss were-3.p-pt-ind

           'They used to fight and build spirit houses.'

(c) The interrogative word <u>fatnamin</u> may be suffixed for aspect and person and functions as a verb in a sentence level construction. When functioning as a verb in the first clause and occuring with verbs 'to do' in the second clause it means 'what-do'. The link connecting the clauses is obligatorily <u>-ta</u>. If suffixed for person, the same subject marker <u>-n-</u> must also occur.

e.g. (12) Q   <u>unang</u> <u>a</u> <u>nakai</u> <u>a</u> <u>i</u>   <u>ibo</u> <u>fat-na-n-ib-ta</u>
             women and men   and they you what-do-ss-3.p-seq.
                                         foc

             <u>na-ib-e</u>   <u>ge-s-ib-a</u> ...
             do-3.p-int thus.say-dss-3.p-co-ord

             'The people said "What did you do?" thus they

said and ...'

R   ni baa-be-n-ob-a   ni ano
    we say-to.them-ss-1.p-link we arrows

klaa-b-uo-bo   ge baa-be-b-uo-be
make-pt-1.p-emp thus say-to.them-pt-1.p-ind

'We said to them "We made arrows," thus we

said to them.'

(13) Q   ne ob bibam-o   okok a   tekein ke-m-in
        I your home-poss work and know   do-cont-cust

a · o na-m   tl-ib-bu   o
and it do-cont come-3.p-ts it

fat-na-biaa-n-ib-ta   okoko ke-m
what-do-cont-ss-3.p-seq.foc work do-cont

tl-ib-bu-e
come-3.p-pt-int

'What was the work and knowledge of your home

area that they did and came?'

R   i   gwaab tekein ke-b-ib-a   bifolo
    they small know   do-cont-3.p-co-ord year

homono bliman   bliman-bi-o-ta
many   finished finished-is-3.sg.fe-seq.foc

tekein ke-biaa-n-ta   okok ke-m
know   do-cont-ss-seq.foc work do-cont

tl-ib-bio-be
come-3.p-pt-ind

'They knew a little and after many years, they

knew and did work and came.'

When fatnamin functions as a verb in the first clause and verbs
other than 'do' verbs occur in the second clause, it means 'how-do'.

e.g. (14) Q   i   meno   fat-na-n-ib-ta
          they string.bags how-do-ss-3.p-seq.foc

ha-b-ib-e
weave-cont-3.p-int

'How do they weave string bags?'

R   kaket bu-biaa-n-ta
     finger wind.around-cont-ss-seq.foc

     ha-b-io-be
     weave-cont-3.p-ind

     'Winding it around their fingers, they weave.'

(15) Q   kobo fat-na-n-eb-ta
          you how-do-ss-2.sg-seq.foc

          ayam dola-b-eb-e
          well write-cont-2.sg-int

          'How do you write well?'

     R   ne fiab beteng   dola-b-i-be
          I slowly carefully write-cont-1.sg-ind

          'I write carefully.'

2.2 The second basic interrogative word is fab 'where'. It is a
filler of a clause level tagmeme, and may be followed by locative
prepositions -da 'from', -tem 'in', or -dim 'on'. Focus pronouns ota
and eta or just the focus morpheme -ta may also be suffixed to this
interrogative word, making it specific. The final consonant is sub-
ject to morphophonemic changes e.g. when contiguous with another con-
sonant, it assimilates to the same point of articulation as the fol-
lowing consonant. See example (17). In rapid speech fab can become
fa as in example (18).

e.g. (16) Q   eka ib   amo   fab -o -ta
               and your house where-it-foc

               aala-m-omab-ib-e
               sleep-cont-f.p-2.p-int

               'And where will you sleep?'

     R   ni amo   aala-m-omab-ob   o mo
          our house sleep-cont-f.p-1.p it abil

          tekein ke-b-i-ba-be
          know   do-cont-1.sg-not-ind

          'I don't know where we'll be able to sleep.'

(17) Q   eka ib   bibamo fat-da-ta tl-ib-bu-e
          and your home   where-from-foc come-3.p-pt-int

          'And where do you come from?'

      R   ne Austlelia-da   tl-i-a   Salieno
           I Australia-from come-1.sg-co-ord Salieno

           Kanala-da   te   na-o-bio-be
           Canada-from come together-3.sg.fe-pt-ind

           'I came from Australia and Salien came from

           Canada.'

(18) Q   fa   un-amab-eb-e
          where go-f.sg.2.sg-int

          'Where are you going?'

      R   ne damib un-amab-i-be
           I garden go-f.sg-1.sg-ind

           'I am going to the garden.'

2.3   The interrogative word nimin 'what' is used in four different
ways:

   (a)   It may occur in phrase level constructions either as the
       head, see example (19) or as a modifier, see example (20).
       In these positions, it is interchangeable with niminsabmin
       'what kind of'.

e.g. (19) Q   nimin dum ha-b-eb-e
               what inst weave-cont-2.sg-int

               "With what do you weave?"

         R   ne sil   dum ha-b-i-be
               I needle inst weave-cont-1.sg-ind

             'I weave with a needle.'

     (20) Q   niminsabmin am   ge-ib-bio-t-e
               what kind of house build-3.p-pt-seq.foc-int

               'What kind of house did they build?'

         R   tul   asu am   ge-ib-bio-ta-be
               fireplace two house build-3.p-pt-seq.foc-ind

             'They built a two-fireplace house.'

   (b)   These two interrogatives may also occur as fillers of
       clause level tagmemes.

e.g. (21) Q   kobo nimin ke-b-eb-e
                you what do-cont-2.sg-int

                'What are you doing?'

        R   ne aso wi-b-i-be
             I tree chop-cont-1.sg-ind

             'I am chopping a tree.'

     (22) Q   olo niminsabmin-e
               this what.kind.of.thing-int

             'What kind of a thing is this?'

        R   olo toom sum-o-be
             this stone big-stat-ind

             'This is a big stone.'

Sometimes nimin occurs as the only exponent of an utterance.

e.g. (23) Q   nimin-e
                what -int

             'What/What is it?'

        R   eil-o-be
             pig-stat-ind

             'It's a pig.'

(c) When nimin co-occurs with ke- 'do', it conveys the meaning
     of 'why/for what reason'. This combination nimin ke-
     (literally 'what-do') is used in a sentence level construc-
     tion. Suffixation for same subject -n- always occurs or is
     understood, focus sequence -ta is obligatory, and then
     follows another verb which is the event in question.

e.g. (24) Q   kobo nimin ke-n-eb-ta   dime
                you what do-ss-2.sg-seq.foc skin

             teb-eb-n-eb-ta   me-m
             it-bring-ss-2.sg-seq.foc cry-cont

             te-b-eb-e   ge-s-o-a ...
             come-cont-2.sg-int thus.day-dss-3.sg.fe-co-ord

             '"Why do you bring the skin and come crying?"
             she said and ...'

R   e baa-n-e-a   ne bobol-temo
      he say-ss-3.sg.m-co-ord I heart-in

      funa-i-o   bainie kaa-eb-o-bo
      think-1.sg-ppu true   die-2.sg.ppu-emp

      ge-n-i-ta-bo
      thus.say-ss-1.sg-seq.foc-emp

      ge-n-e-bio-be
      thus.say-pu-3.sg.m-pt-ind

      'He said, "I thought in my heart that you'd

      truly died," he said.'

(25) Q   e nimin ke-ta   falo
      he what do-seq.foc ground.oven

      ga-b-en-e
      fasten-cont-3.sg.m-int

      'Why is he having a feast?'

R   Sokateni tl-ib-bio-ta   falo
      Sokamins come-3.p-ts-seq.foc ground.oven i

      ga-b-e-be
      fasten-cont-3.sg.m-ind

      'The Sokamins came and he is having a feast.'

(26) Q nimin ke-ta   me-b-eb-e
      what do-seq.foc cry-cont-2.sg-int

      'Why are you crying?'

R   ne nen-a-s-o-ta   me-b-ib-e
      I me-hit-dss-it-seq.foc cry-cont-1.sg-ind

      'I fell and I'm crying/I'm crying because I

      fell down.'

(27) Q ibo nimin ke-n-ib-ta   Nugunio
      you what do-ss-3.p-seq.foc New Guinea

      tl-ib-bu-e
      come-2.p-pt-int

      'Why did you come to New Guinea?'

R   Gode baa-tne-n-e-a   obo Nuguniseli
      God say-to.me-ss-3.sg.m-link you New Guineans

      daa-be-n-al-e   ge-n-e-ta
      help-them-pu-2.sg-imp thus.say-ss-3.sg.m-seq.foc

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                    nem-an-e          tl-i-bio-be
                    me-send-3.sg.m    come-1.sg-pt-ind
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'God said to me, "Help the New Guineans!"

thus He said and He sent me and I came.'

(d) The noun phrase nimin deib 'why/for what thing' (literally
     'what road') fills the object slot in a clause. This con-
     struction is used when a person wants to get some material
     object. It most frequently occurs with motion verbs but can
     also occur with other verbs such as the verb 'to cry'.

e.g. (28) Q   kobo nimin deib tl-eb-e
                 you what road come-2.sg-int

                 'Why have you come?/What have you come for?'

      R   imen deib tl-i-be
           food road come-1.sg-ind

           'I've come for food.'

(29) Q   mene nimin deib me-b-en-e
           baby what road cry-cont-3.sg.m-int

           'Why is the baby crying?/What is the baby crying
           for?'

      R   moi deib me-b-e-be
           milk road cry-cont-3.sg.m-ind

           'He's crying for milk.'

2.4 The interrogative word wan- 'who/what (animate)' is suffixed by
two bound pronoun sets:

(a) The bound focus pronoun set ⟨-keb-ta⟩ (signifying person and
     focus) 'who/whom' may occur with wan- 'who'. If this set
     occurs sentence finally, -ta changes to -t and is followed
     by -e, the interrogative mood marker that occurs with
     interrogative words.

Since the pronoun sets are bound to wan-, the initial consonant
of the first singular -ne- and the first plural -ni- 'exclusive'
and -nib- 'inclusive' is elided.

e.g.   wan-ne-ta   becomes   wan-e-ta
                  ‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾   ‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾
                  who-I -foc   who-I-foc

                  'Who am I?'   'Who am I?'

Therefore first singular 'Who am I?' and third singular

wan-e-ta   'Who is he?' are the same; likewise 'Who are we/you/they?'
‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾
who-he-foc
are wan-i-ta. The context signals which meaning is intended and in
    ‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾
fact, the first person singular and plural are rarely used.

'Who' with the ⟨-keb-ta⟩ pronominal set occurs mostly in the
subject slot of the clause but can also occur in the object slot, or
as the only exponent of an utterance.

e.g. (30) Q   wan-i-ta   keb-sinwal n-in-e
                 ‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾   ‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾ ‾‾‾‾‾‾
                 who-3.p-foc you-with   be-3.p-int

                 'Who will be with you?'

            R   nelekiem bia-amab-i   -be
                 ‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾ ‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾
                 I.only   be -f.sg-1.sg-ind

                 'I will be by myself.'

      (31) Q   wan-keb-t-e
                 ‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾
                 who-you-foc-int

                 'Who are you?/Who's there?'

            R   Mesen ne-ta-be
                 ‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾
                 Mesen I-foc-ind

                 'I am Mesen.'

      (32) Q   kobo wan-e-ta   a-na-eb-e
                 ‾‾‾‾ ‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾   ‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾
                 you who-he-foc   him-hit-2.sg-int

                 'Whom did you hit?'

            R   Yalas e-ta   a-na-i-o-be
                 ‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾   ‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾
                 Yalas he-foc   him-hit-1.sg-ppu-ind

                 'I hit Yalas.'

      (33) Q   wan-e-ta   te-n-e-ta
                 ‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾   ‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾
                 who-he-foc   come-ss-3.sg.m-seq.foc

                 wan-e-ta a-na-n-en-e
                 ‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾ ‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾‾
                 who-he-foc him-hit-pu-3.sg.m-int

                 'Who came and hit whom?/Who hit whom?'

R Nemsinab e-ta te-n-e-ta
   Nemsinab he-foc come-ss-3.sg.m-seq.foc

   Fasime a-na-n-e-be
   Fasim him-hit-pu-e.sg.m-ind

   'Nemsinab came and hit Fasim./Nemsinab hit

   Fasim.'

This set may also fill a modifying slot in a noun phrase:

e.g. (34) Q nakae wan-e-ta eile a-na-n-en-e
      man who-he-foc pig him-hit-pu-3.sg.m-intt

      'Which man killed the pig?'

    R naka emwale bi ele-ta
      man over.there he.only-foc

      a-na-n-e-be
      him-hit-pu-3.sg.m-ind

      'The man over there killed the pig.'

(b) The bound possessive pronoun set ⟨-keb-mi⟩ also occurs with
wan- 'who'. When wan- -keb-mi precedes the word it modifies
in a possessive noun phrase, the suffix -mi 'possessive' is
dropped and the possessive pronoun -e remains affixed to wan-.
When wan- is in this position and when no noun is stated, it
must be preceded by a demonstrative pronoun.

e.g. (35) Q ele wan-e an-e
      this who-his arrow-int

      'Whose arrow is this?'

    R Nemsinab e -mi -o -be
      Nemsinab he-poss-stat-ind

      'It is Nemsinab's.'

  (36) Q yo wan-e-mi-e
      those who-he-poss-int

      'Whose are those?'

    R ne-mi-o-be
      I-poss-stat-ind

      'They are mine.'

ABBREVIATIONS

1	first person	int	interrogative
2	second person	m	masculine
3	third person	pcont	past continuative
abil	abilitative	ppu	past punctiliar
cont	continuative	pt	past tense
co-ord	co-ordinate	p	plural
cust	customary	poss	possessive
dss	different subject sequence	pu	punctiliar
emph	emphatic	Q	Question
fe	feminine	R	Reply
foc	focus	seq	sequence
f	future	sg	singular
incl	inclusive	ss	same subject following
ind	indicative	stat	stative
imp	imperative	ts	time span
inst	instrument		

NOTES

1. The Mianmin language is a non-Austronesian language of the Ok Family of languages of the West Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea. (Healey, A. 1964 *The Ok Language Family in New Guinea*. Australian National University.) There are approximately 1500 Mianmin speakers. The phonemes of Mianmin are b, t, d, k, g, m, n, ng [ŋ], l, f, s, w, y, h, i, e, a, o, u, ei, ai, au, ou. There are four emic tones ╱, ╲, ʌ, and ᵛ. Tone is unmarked.

Data presented here are based on several years spent in the South Mianmin area between 1967 and 1975. This paper was written at a workshop held at Ukarumpa, Papua New Guinea in 1975. I wish to express thanks to Velma Foreman for help given during the analysis and presentation of this paper, and to Mainmin language speaker Daning Mutumab for helping me to understand his language.

2. Mood is an affix on the verb, but has been analysed as a feature of the paragraph level. The sentence boundary occurs at a different subject marker.