ENCODING POLAR QUESTIONS IN DHOLUO

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Most languages have both content questions and polar questions (Dryer 2005a). Previous studies on Dholuo have considered content questions in detail (cf. Okoth 1997; Omondi 1982, 1993). However, research on the nature of polar questions in Dholuo remains inconclusive. Omondi (1993) identifies a few particles in polar interrogatives but does not offer the full range of possible pragmatic interpretations beyond the structural function of these words. Onyoyo (2001) also outlines some particles in interrogatives of Dholuo, but does not place them in context and simply states that such particles provide more meaning. In this paper, I present descriptive data to illustrate the semantic, syntactic and pragmatic properties of polar questions in Dholuo. The two main strategies considered here are interrogative uses of question particles and affixations to the verb.

1. Introduction.

1.1. The language of study. Dholuo is a Western Nilotic language spoken in Kenya (Tucker 1993). The word order in this language is predominantly S-V-O (Payne 2002). However, due to movement of certain constituents to express focus, free word order occurs within the clause, giving rise to O-S-V patterns in declaratives. Okoth (1997) analyses such constituent order variations in detail, while Ojwang (1998) discusses the pragmatics of focus in Dholuo. Example (1) below illustrates this free movement.

- (1) a. Otieno kelo paka
 Otieno bring-PROG cat
 ‘Otieno is bringing the cat’
- b. Paka Otieno kelo
 cat Otieno bring-PROG
 ‘*Otieno* is bringing the cat’

Example (1a) shows the unmarked order of constituents in a declarative while (1b) in which the object is fronted, is the marked order. The arguments in such declaratives can be questioned in different ways, and this paper examines the formation of questions that elicit either a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer. In Dholuo, content questions are formed using a set of words equivalent to English *wh*-words. These have been described in Okoth (1997) and Omondi (1982).

2. The Role of Particles in Dholuo Polar Questions.

According to Radford (1997: 267), particles are constituents which “are invariable in form and which don’t fit easily into traditional systems of grammatical categories.” Dryer (2005a) identifies the use of question particles as a widespread strategy for forming polar questions, and concludes that the majority of languages with question particles fall into three areas, one of which is a belt stretching across Africa from Western Africa to central eastern Africa. This geographical range covers the area where Dholuo is spoken.

There is ample evidence of particles that encode polar questions in Dholuo. However, Okoth (1997) lists only three such particles: *bende*, *donge* and *koso*, but one should note that Okoth’s objective was to illustrate constituent order in Dholuo syntax in general. Omondi (1993) also considers only three particles: *ni*, *kare*, and *koso*, with the aim of illustrating how they are to be understood as Q-words in a transformational framework, while Tucker (1993: 294-295) classifies *donge* as an interrogative conjunction, *koso* as an interrogative form and *ni* as a particle. In the works cited, there is no conclusive classification and analysis of question-forming particles in Dholuo. It should also be noted that these authors were concerned with the structural rather than the pragmatic and semantic properties of Dholuo particles. Each of the questions in the forthcoming data can either be answered in the affirmative, using the word *ee*, or in the negative, using *ooyo*. We now turn to the data.

2.1. *be* / *be(nde)* particle. The word *bende* takes the variant form *be* in less emphatic speech. The word *be* is apparently a dummy. According to Radford (1997: 258), “a dummy is a word that has no intrinsic semantic content but which is used to satisfy a structural requirement that a position be filled.” The particle *be* can occupy three different structural positions in the interrogative clause. Although *be* and *bende* have the same function, the shortened form *be* is more common, while *bende* is used in slow emphatic speech. In (2a) and (2b), the speaker simply wants to know the true state of affairs without any additional intentions. In comparison, examples (3a) and (3b) are probable in a context where the speaker did not expect Arum to run and is in fact surprised that Arum is doing so.

- (2) a. Be Arum ringo?
 Q Arum run-PROG
 ‘Is Arum running?’
- b. Bende Arum ringo
 Q Arum run-PROG
 ‘Is Arum running?’

In all cases, there is no ambiguity when *be* or *bende* occur sentence initially, since they only have an interrogative reading. However, when *be* or *bende* occur in medial position, a declarative reading of (3a) and (3b) is possible, i.e. ‘Arum too is running’ as in (3c), but a declarative reading requires a preposed element that makes it unambiguously a statement. The modification takes the form of a disjunct for example *parie ni*, as indicated in (3c).

- (3) a. Arum be ringo
 Arum Q run-PROG
 ‘Is Arum running?’; ‘Arum too is running.’
- b. Arum bende ringo
 Arum Q run-PROG
 ‘Is Arum running?’; ‘Arum too is running.’
- c. (Parie ni) Arum be/bende ringo.
 Arum too run-PROG
 ‘(Imagine) Arum too is running.’

In some contexts, only *be* is used, as shown in (4a). Here, the speaker doubts whether Arum has even started the activity of running.

- (4) a. Arum ringo *be*?
 Arum run-PROG Q
 ‘Is Arum (really) running?’
- b. *Arum ringo *bende*?
 Arum run-PROG Q
 ‘Is Arum running?’

The word *be* in (4a) encodes a challenge. The speaker is challenging the addressee to ensure that the former’s expectation is met. The speaker expects Arum to be running and seeks confirmation from the addressee. Utterance (4a) implies that some unspecified action may be taken by the speaker if it turns out in the response that Arum is not running. This is probable in a context where the speaker is in a position of authority and is able to enforce an order, for example, if Arum were an athlete and the speaker, his trainer.

In sentence final position, *be* becomes ambiguous when we question the object, as shown in (5). In such a case, *be* has two functions: one as a question particle, and the other as an adverb meaning ‘also’ or ‘in addition.’ The alternative readings confirm our earlier contention that the interrogative use of *be* is the result of grammaticalisation of an otherwise independent lexical item.

- (5) Tom mako rech *be*
 S catch PRES O Q/ADV
 ‘Does Tom catch fish (as the others are doing)?’; ‘Does Tom catch fish (in addition to other things)?’; ‘Tom catches fish too.’

If we prepose *be* to the beginning of the sentence, the adverbial function becomes more explicit, as seen in (6), where the preposed word functions as the Q-word, while the sentence-final one has an adverbial function without any redundancy. Whereas (6b) is ambiguous between a question and a declarative reading, (6c) has only a declarative reading since, pragmatically, it is not possible for the speaker to pose a question to himself. This shows that the context of the utterance and the perspective of the speaker, as well as the semantic requirements of the verb, determine whether the particle takes a declarative or interrogative reading.

- (6) a. Be Tom dwaro rech be ?
 Q Tom want PRES fish ADV
 ‘Does Tom want fish in addition?’
- b. Tom be dwaro rech
 Tom Q want PRES fish
 ‘Does Tom also want fish?’; ‘Tom also wants fish.’
- c. An be a- dwaro rech
 S ADV 1SG want PRES fish
 ‘I also want fish.’

The different positions occupied by *be* confirm the contention of Omondi (1993: 230) that “many of the particles can be moved around within the sentence for various effects”. We shall argue that the various effects that Omondi refers to in her work include the subtle pragmatic notions that we identify in this paper.

2.2. *donge* particle. The word *donge* also seems to have been grammaticalised into a question particle. Evidence for this claim is that the word also occurs in declaratives, especially in conversational contexts where it is used as a discourse signal to indicate concurrence or agreement with what has been said by an interlocutor. In declaratives, *donge* means ‘I confirm that it is true’. Compare (7a) and (7b) below.

- (7) a. Mary timo ang’o? (Interrogative)
 Mary do-PROG what
 ‘What is Mary doing?’
- b. Donge Mary nindo. (Declarative response)
 Mary sleep-PROG
 ‘(I confirm that) Mary is sleeping.’

In contrast, *donge* as a question particle implies that the speaker is making a suggestion in addition to, or apart from, merely asking the addressee to do something. It could also mean that the speaker has some prior information or strongly believes in a certain position and is seeking the addressee’s opinion. For example, in (8), the speaker believes that Kamau is expected. Therefore, in this usage, *donge* means ‘is it not true that’.

- (8) a. Donge Kamau biro?
 Q Kamau come-PROG
 ‘Is it not true that Kamau is coming?’
- b. Kamau biro, donge?
 Kamau come-PROG Q
 ‘Kamau is coming, is that not true?’

A declarative reading of (8a) is possible, but not of (8b). However, a declarative reading of (8a) has to be in a context where the speaker has confirmed Kamau’s intention or has even seen Kamau on his way, hence gives an assurance to the addressee, as in (9).

- (9) Donge Kamau biro
 Part. Kamau come-PROG.
 ‘Kamau is coming indeed’; ‘(Take it from me that) Kamau is coming’

The context of the utterance is crucial, so (8a) is likely if the referent, Kamau, is expected or presumed to be on his way to the place, while (9) assures the addressee not to worry about the absence of the referent, as he is strongly expected to arrive soon. Therefore, in the above cases, it is apparent that structural position does not always determine the function of the question particles.

In (10) below, where *donge* follows the subject, the speaker strongly suspects or has reason to believe that the dog might bite. This notion of seeking confirmation of suspicion applies both to the sentence initial and mid-sentence usages of *donge*, and applies to both positive and negative sentences.

- (10) a. Guok donge kayo ji?
 dog Q bite people
 ‘Is it not true that the dog bites people?’
- b. Donge guok kayo ji?
 Q dog bite people
 ‘Is it not true that the dog bites people?’
- c. Donge guok ok ka ji?
 Q dog NEG. bite people
 ‘Doesn’t the dog bite people?’

In Dholuo polar questions, *donge* is the particle that is used to form tag questions as seen in (11)-(13) below. A question tag is an interrogative clause added to the end of a statement to invite agreement. In our data, the element that functions as a question tag is the particle *donge*. In this usage, *donge* is placed after a statement in order to request confirmation of the proposition. Often, when used as a tag, *donge* expresses a degree of bias of the speaker toward one answer, usually a positive answer. The tag is usually added to positive statements. This implies that the speaker has already adopted a positive or optimistic stand. It should be noted that as a tag, there is a pause preceding *donge*. This is indicated by a comma in the examples that follow:

- (11) a. Chaye liet, *donge*?
 Tea hot Q
 ‘The tea is hot, isn’t it?’
- b. Chaye ok liet, *donge*?
 Tea NEG. hot Q
 ‘The tea is not hot, is it?’
- (12) Otipō biro kelo ring’o, *donge*?
 Otipō FUT bring meat Q
 ‘Otipō will bring meat, won’t he?’
- (13) Dhiang’ nyalo bet, *donge*?
 Cow AUX sit Q
 ‘The cow can sit, can’t it?’

Although Tucker (1993: 294) envisages only an interrogative conjunction function for *donge*, our examples (8a)-(13) show that the word has three distinct structural positions and diverse pragmatic implications.

2.3. Combinations of the particles *be(nde)* + *donge*, *donge* + *bende*. It is possible to combine sequences of some of the Q-particles. This yields various pragmatic and semantic effects. Let us consider:

- (14) Nyako be *donge* idho yien?
 Girl Q Q climb PRES tree
 ‘Is it not true that the girl also climbs the tree?’

- (15) Onyoso donge be o- hero tugo?
 Onyoso Q Q 3SG like playing
 ‘Is it not true that Onyoso too likes playing?’
- (16) a. *Waseka nyalo ywak donge bende?
 Waseka ADV cry PRES Q Q
 ‘Waseka can cry, is it not true also?’
- b. *Waseka nyalo ywak donge be?
 Waseka ADV. cry Q Q
 ‘Waseka can cry also, is it not true?’
- c. Waseka nyalo ywak be, donge?
 Waseka ADV. cry Q Q
 ‘Waseka can also cry, can’t she?’
- d. Waseka nyalo ywak bende, donge?
 Waseka ADV. cry Q Q
 ‘Waseka can also cry, can’t she?’

In sentence final position, the combination of polar question markers is disallowed if the word *be* or *bende* occurs last, as in (16a-b), while the combination is possible wherever *donge* occurs word-finally, as in (16c-d). Compare this with the word order illustrated in example (4a-b).

2.4. The particles *di*, *dang*’, *diwang*’. These particles express possibility and doubt. Pragmatically, *di* implies a supposition involving a limitless possibility or a hypothetical situation, *dang*’ implies present possibility while *diwang*’ implies future possibility. The particles *di*, *dang*’ and *diwang*’ are restricted to sentence-initial position and the position immediately after the subject. Thus they cannot occur sentence-finally, as seen in various starred forms below. We begin with *di* in (17).

- (17) a. Di ji cham gweno?
 Q people eat chicken
 ‘Could people eat chicken?’
- b. Ji di cham gweno?
 people Q eat chicken
 ‘Could people eat chicken?’
- c. *Ji cham gweno di?
 people eat chicken Q
 ‘Could people eat chicken?’

Example (17a) implies both possibility and availability. In the possibility reading, the speaker is not sure whether there is chicken or not while in the availability reading, the speaker has confirmed that there is chicken and is simply seeking permission to act. Declarative readings of (17a) and (17b) are possible with modifications. For that to happen, we need to introduce one of the adverbs *mano*, *kare* or *ndi* which indicate that the speaker concurs with the interlocutor as follows:

- (18) Mano di ji cham gweno.
 ADV Part. people eat chicken
 ‘In that case people could eat chicken.’
- (19) Kare ji di cham gweno.
 ADV people Part. eat chicken
 ‘Then people are likely to eat chicken.’
- (20) Di ji cham gweno ndi.
 Part. people eat chicken ADV
 ‘People can eat chicken seriously.’

With the inclusion of the adverbs in (18)-(20), the sentences are unambiguously declarative both structurally and semantically.

Let us now turn to the usage of *dang*’ using examples (21a)-(21c):

- (21) a. Dang' Aloo kel pi?
 Q Aloo bring water
 'Can Aloo bring water?'
 b. Aloo dang' kel pi?
 Aloo Q bring water
 'Can Aloo bring water?'
 c. *Aloo kel pi dang'?
 Aloo bring water Q
 'Can Aloo bring water?'

Example (21a) can have three interrogative readings: 'Is Aloo able to bring water?' 'Will Aloo bring water?' and 'Is Aloo allowed to bring water?' This indicates that the word *dang'* is context dependent for its appropriate interpretation. The first reading simply questions Aloo's ability and predisposition to perform the task. The second reading doubts the probability of Aloo acting in the desired manner, while the third reading comes from the perspective that the speaker seeks the addressee's consent before Aloo can act. A declarative reading of (21a) and (21b) is also not possible unless we introduce additional constituents as follows.

- (22) (A- ng'eyo ni) Aloo dang' kel pi.
 1SG know ADV S Part. bring water
 'I know that Aloo can bring water.'

We can draw a parallel between (22) and (3c). In both cases, the parenthesized disjuncts indicate that the speaker makes it clear that the facts have been ascertained.

The word *diwang'* shares some features with *dang'*, except that it implies a futurity more distant than *dang'*.

- (23) a. Diwang' Ogalo ndiki?
 Q S write
 'Can Ogalo write later?'
- b. Ogalo diwang' ndiki?
 S Q write
 'Can Ogalo write later?'
- c. *Ogalo ndiki diwang'?
 S write Q
 'Can Ogalo write later?'

A declarative reading is marginally possible for (23a) and (23b) with modification. For example, we may have (24).

- (24) (Samoro) diwang' Ogalo ndiki.
 ADV. Part. S write
 'Maybe Ogalo will write.'

2.5. The use of *be + di / dang' / diwang'*. When a question is introduced by these combinations, the contextual reality obtaining is that the one posing the question has doubts about the addressee or about a situation, and anticipates a negative rather than a positive response.

- (25) Be di Oluru miel thum?
 Q Q Oluru dance music
 'Can Oluru really dance (to music)?'
- (26) Be dang nyathi ting' kom?
 Q Q baby carry chair
 'Can the baby really carry the chair?'
- (27) Be diwang Munini chur adier?
 Q Q Munini groan ADV
 'Will Munini really groan?'

In (25)-(27), no declarative reading is possible even if we include the particles which would otherwise call for a declarative reading in the manner of (18) and (19). For example, by modifying (27) using *mano*, it remains an interrogative.

- (28) *Mano be diwang Munini chur adier?*
 ADV Q Q Munini groan ADV
 ‘In that case will Munini really groan?’

Strong doubt is expressed by using *adier* ‘is it true’ as shown in (27) above, while stronger doubt can be formulated by placing the Q word after the adverb of doubt as in (29).

- (29) *Diwang’ Sifuma nind adier be?*
 Q Sifuma sleep ADV Q
 ‘Are you sure that Sifuma will really sleep?’

All three combinations in 2.5 can also follow the subject, but cannot occur sentence finally. So, (25) can be reformulated as (30a) but not as (30b):

- (30) a. *Oluru be di miel thum?*
 Oluru Q Q dance music
 ‘Can Oluru really dance (to music)?’
 b. **Oluru miel thum be di?*
 Oluru dance music Q Q
 ‘Can Oluru really dance (to music)?’

2.6. The use of *donge* + *di* / *dang*’ / *diwang*’. This pattern is used when it is believed that an envisaged situation can be realized. The pragmatics of *donge+di* contrasts in presuppositions with *be+di*, in that *donge* retains the presupposition of truth and certainty noted in uses such as (8)-(13), whereas *be+di* seems to have a presupposition of non-truth or doubt. However, the speaker still expresses confidence that things can turn out as desired, as in the following.

- (31) Donge di Tabu riemb mtoka ?
 Q Q Tabu drive car
 ‘Is it not possible for Tabu to drive a car?’
 ‘Can’t Tabu drive a car?’
- (32) Donge dang’ a- som?
 Q Q 1SG read
 ‘Is it not possible for me to read?’
- (33) a. Osiep-ni donge diwang’ nen-i ?
 Friend 2SG. POSS Q Q see 2SG.
 ‘Is it not possible for your friend to see you later?’
- b. *Osiep-ni nen-i donge diwang’
 Friend 2SG.POSS. see 2SG Q Q
 ‘Is it not possible for your friend to see you later?’

I have included (33b) to show that just as in the patterns seen in section 2.4, the sentence final position is not possible with some of these particles, so we cannot reformulate (33a) as (33b).

We cannot drop *di* from (31) because that would leave a wrong structure in the form of (34) below.

- (34) *Donge Tabu riemb mtoka
 Q Tabu drive car
 ‘Is it not possible for Tabu to drive a car?’

2.7. The use of *to*. As a question particle, *to* means that the questioner reminds the addressee about another possible alternative in the circumstances. For example, (35) is probable in a context where the listener is reluctant to make a choice. In order to use the word *to* in a complete sentence, it has to occur as part of a disjunct to another main clause. In (35a) and (36), I show a contextualized usage of *to*, while in (35b) the antecedent clause has been omitted. It should however be noted that although (35b) seems to be structurally incomplete, it is meaningful in itself, in a context where the interlocutors share some common knowledge about the referents.

- (35) a. I- kawo diel; to bando?
 2SG take goat Q maize
 ‘You have taken the goat; what about the maize?’
- b. To bando Ø Ø?
 Q maize
 ‘And the maize?’

The particle *to* can also occur after the subject.

- (36) Opuk wuotho; punda to?
 Opuk walk-PROG donkey Q
 ‘The tortoise is walking; what about the donkey?’

Sometimes *to* is stated twice in the same utterance. This is not for mere emphasis. Pragmatically, there are two conceivable implications. Firstly, the illocutionary force is that the speaker is undecided and does not know what step to take next or how to handle a situation, hence the repetition is a form of prodding for the addressee to guide the speaker’s next action as in (37a). Secondly, the speaker may express surprise that an expected action did not take place as in (37b).

- (37) a. A- kelo kom; to mesa to?
 1SG bring chair Q table Q
 ‘I have brought the chair; what about the table?’
- b. Aloo tedo rech to ochele to?
 Aloo cook-PROG fish Q rice Q
 ‘Aloo is cooking fish; what about the rice?’

The use of *to* in declaratives is represented by the following examples. Items (38) to (40) represent a form of *to* which is just a homograph of the question particle but functions as a conjunction or adverb.

- (38) Botiato to ok nyal
 Botiato Part. NEG manage
 ‘As for Botiato, she cannot manage.’

- (39) A- kwero Gongo to o- dagi
 1SG tell off Gongo ADV 3SG refuse
 ‘I told Gongo off but she refused.’
- (40) Ka Ongalo ok dwar to o- we
 ADV Ongalo NEG want ADV 3SG leave
 ‘If Ongalo doesn’t want (to do X) then she should leave.’

2.8. The use of *ni*. This particle is used if the speaker has been informed about a situation and is simply counterchecking with the addressee for the truth value of the utterance. There is also an element of surprise in this type of polar question, in the sense that the speaker expresses his or her consternation to the addressee and indicates that the news was unexpected or is unbelievable given the facts that the interlocutors already know about the referent. In all cases, this particle occupies only the sentence initial position, and (41b) and (42b) are not possible patterns.

- (41) a. Ni Osiato jakuo?
 Q Osiato thief
 ‘Is it true that Osiato is a thief?’
- b. *Osiato ni jakuo
 Osiato Q thief
 ‘Is it true that Osiato is a thief?’
- (42) a. Ni Apelo luoko-re?
 Q Apelo bathe REFL.
 ‘Is it true that Apelo is bathing?’
- b. *Apelo luoko-re ni
 Apelo bathe REFL. Q
 ‘Is it true that Apelo is bathing?’

If a structure begins with *ni*, it can be preposed with a disjunct to convert it into a declarative as in (43).

- (43) Orudo wacho ni Achieng’ chotne
 Orudo say CONJ Achieng’ friend
 ‘Orudo says that Achieng is his girlfriend.’

If we again prepose the above sentence with *ni*, it reverts to a question as in (44).

- (44) Ni Orudo wacho ni Achieng' chotne
 Q Orudo say CONJ Achieng' friend
 'Is it true that Orudo says that Achieng' is his girlfriend?'

2.9. The use of *koso*. Tucker (1993: 295) describes this form as "introducing a choice of alternatives." However, we identify additional functions for it as in (45) which expresses both the notions of possibility and suggestion.

- (45) O- ng'iewo ring'o koso?
 3SG buy meat Q
 'Does he buy meat?'

Questions such as (45) can be answered felicitously by an elaboration in order for the answer to be complete, particularly if the response is negative. Therefore, the response to (45) may be 'No, he buys fruits' or 'No, he sells meat' depending on the contextual realities. Similarly, the answer to (46a) can either be a single word, or an elaborate one. In a context where the speaker has confirmed what the child really wants, the answer can be a simple 'yes' or 'no' but where the fact is not known, it is felicitous for one to respond with the words *samoro* (maybe) or *akia* (I don't know).

- (46) a. Koso nyathi dwaro chak?
 Q child want milk
 'Could it be that the child wants milk?'
 b. A- kel buk koso Ø?
 1SG bring book or Q?
 'Do I bring a book or not?'; 'Do I bring a book or something else?'

The two interpretations of (46b) show that the use of *koso* in sentence-final position leaves an empty slot which may be recovered in two ways. In the first reading, the speaker is cautious and doubts whether the addressee approves of an intended action, while in the second, the speaker has a suggestion and just falls

short of mentioning the actual available alternative. There is no declarative reading of (45) or (46) that we can envisage.

2.10. The use of *kare*. This particle means ‘so’. When used to form a polar question, it implies the speaker’s surprise at an action, situation or an unexpected turn of events. For example, in (47), the implication is that the speaker has already confirmed that Apul is a liar, contrary to what was believed earlier.

(47) Kare Apul riambo?

Q Apul lie PRES

‘So Apul is lying?’

Another position for this particle is immediately after the subject, as in (48), while the sentence-final position is also possible, but it is rare and marked, as in (49) below.

(48) Nyako kare ler?

S Q clean

‘So the girl is clean?’

(49) Nyako duong’ kare?

S big Q

‘So the girl is big?’

Although Cowper (1987: 139) says that “elements which are restricted to second position are verbs, auxiliaries, clitics and particles of various sorts,” the foregoing illustrations agree more with Dryer (2005b) who proposes a criterion of classifying question particles and says that their position is variable in some languages, and that in such languages:

the position of the question particle often depends on what is the focus of the question. In most if not all such languages, however, there is one position which is associated with a more neutral question, where the truth of the entire sentence is being questioned without one constituent being the focus of the question. [p. 239]

On the basis of our data, we conclude that the neutral position for question particles in Dholuo is sentence initial. Secondly, our descriptions agree with the ob-

servation that “polar questions universally bear various illocutionary forces which enhance the cooperative principle” (Levinson 1983: 100-103). This would be at variance with Lyons (1977: 753-768) who suggests that interrogatives simply “grammaticalize the feature of doubt.”

It has been observed by Boelaars (1950: 152) that “occasionally, a question particle will code other grammatical features of the clause. For example in Aghu, the question particles also code tense”. In Dholuo, the question particles do not indicate any other grammatical information apart from their syntactic role of forming interrogatives. In terms of meaning of question particles, I agree with Omondi (1993: 229) who argues that “each of the lexical items has an idiosyncratic semantic content and / or function which determines its use.” These idiosyncrasies can be attributed to the different communicative contexts that call for use of specific question particles that speakers select so as to express certain wishes and expectations.

3. A Note on the Role of Tone.

Omondi (1982) and Owino (2003) conclude that Dholuo has only two significant tones, High (H) and Low (L). A third tone, downstepped high, is derived in particular environments (Okoth 1982, Tucker 1993). In this paper, I refer only to High and Low tones. Owino (2003) notes that tone is phonemic in Dholuo and is not marked in the orthography. The most important grammatical function of tone in Dholuo is in marking perfective and imperfective aspectual distinctions. In terms of mood, one has to look out for patterns of combinations of tones. Therefore, the use of intonation has been observed as one other major strategy for polar questions (cf. Okoth 1997: 71-72). This forms polar questions by simply expanding the tonal register by having higher realizations of pitch. Omondi (1993: 43) also avers that “the yes-no type of question [in Dholuo] is formed reasonably freely from the basic declarative sentence by changing the intonation.” In this paper, the focus is on lexical markers of polar questions rather than the general conversion of declaratives into interrogatives by expanding the tonal register.

The strategy of intonation results in polar questions without recourse to any of the lexical elements that we have discussed in the preceding sections. The use of tonal variation can be illustrated by comparing the intonation contours on a declarative which can be transformed into an interrogative by varying the pitch values as in (50) versus (51). In this paper, I use H for high or rising tone and L for low or falling tone.

- (50) Munini dwàrò lùth. (LLL: Declarative)
 Munini want pole
 ‘Munini wants a pole’
- (51) Munini dwáró lúth? (HHH: Interrogative)
 Munini want pole
 ‘Does Munini want a pole?’

However, intonationally indicated interrogatives are prone to misconstrual. In less emphatic speech, one may not easily distinguish a declarative from an interrogative through intonation alone. Contextual realities during an interaction also enable the interlocutor to detect questions. Apparently, intonation is not absolutely crucial in Dholuo polar questions. The use of particles seems to take priority as a syntactic means of signaling polar questions. Even utterance (51) can correctly be preposed with the particle *koso* which has an automatically interrogative function as seen in section 2.9 hence relegating intonation. As Tucker (1993: 43) observes, “it must be admitted that the Dholuo tonal values are not clear cut and are often too hard to catch”. Tones in Dholuo are also not marked in the orthography so far. I have revisited the issue of tone here only because I shall refer to its role occasionally in the next section, which mainly involves affixation and variations of verb forms to produce polar questions.

4. Polar Questions Involving Inflections on the Verb.

In this section, I show how inflections on Dholuo verbs are used to formulate polar questions. I first introduce the possible inflectional forms that Dholuo verbs take generally then proceed to illustrate their role in questions.

4.1. Dholuo verbal inflections in brief. Dholuo uses a combination of affixation and adverbial support to the verb to yield functionally different verb forms. A major feature of Dholuo verbs is that all finite forms take the suffix *-o*. The main verb changes involving morphological modifications are outlined in (52).

(52) <i>Infinitive and Imperative</i>	<i>Simple Present</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Future time</i>
nind 'sleep'	nind-o 'sleeps'	ne nind-o 'slept'	biro nind-o 'will sleep'
go 'beat'	go-yo 'beats'	ne go-yo 'beat'	biro go-yo 'will beat'
yud 'get'	yud-o 'gets'	ne yud-o 'got'	biro yud-o 'will get'
her 'love'	her-o 'loves'	ne her-o 'loved'	biro her-o 'will love'
mi 'give'	mi-yo 'gives'	ne mi-yo 'gave'	biro mi-yo 'will give'

In (53), I provide complete sentences to show how tense and number are marked on Dholuo verbs.

(53) a. <i>1sg</i>	<i>1pl</i>
A-nind-o 'I sleep'	Wa-nind-o 'We sleep'
A-ring-o 'I am running'	Wa-ring-o 'We are running'
b. <i>2sg</i>	<i>2pl</i>
I-go-yo 'You beat'	U-go-yo 'You beat'
I-her-o 'You are loving'	U-her-o 'You are loving'
c. <i>3sg</i>	<i>3pl</i>
Ne o-nind-o 'She slept'	Ne gi-nind-o 'They slept'
Otieno tim-o 'Otieno is doing'	Otieno gini tim-o 'Otieno and others are doing'

The second important distinction is between perfective, imperfective (progressive) and habitual aspects which are represented by the following patterns.

	<i>Progressive</i>	<i>Perfective</i>	<i>Habitual</i>
(54) a.	rwak-o 'wearing'	o-se-rwak-o 'has worn'	rwak-o-ga 'wears'
b.	tiek-o 'finishing'	o-se-tiek-o 'has finished'	tiek-o-ga 'finishes'
c.	tim-o 'doing'	o-se-tim-o 'has done'	tim-o-ga 'does'
d.	yok-o 'hitting'	o-se-yok-o 'has hit'	yok-o-ga 'hits'
e.	ol-o 'pouring'	o-se-ol-o 'has poured'	ol-o-ga 'pours'

To change an infinitive form into a progressive, *-o* is affixed to all verbs; when the stem ends with a vowel, a palatal glide is inserted.

- (55) $ka + o \rightarrow ka-o \rightarrow ka-y-o$
 bite -PROG.
 'biting'

4.2. The role of affixation in forming polar questions. We can identify cases in which the prefixation of a subject marker, particularly the first person pronoun marker, onto a verb root gives it the value of a polar question. In this case, the addressee is understood to be present and the speaker is seeking confirmation before undertaking an intended action. Dholuo does not have contrastive vowel length in its sound system. However, question forms are subject to a kind of non-contrastive prosodic elongation. There is an element of lengthening of the vowel of the final syllable in the prefixed interrogative forms, as shown in the third column in (56a-e). This is perhaps a pragmatic indicator of the speaker's hesitancy.

	<i>Infinitive: pronoun marker:</i>	<i>Progressive:</i>	<i>Question form with subject:</i>
(56) a.	gwe 'kick'	gwey- o 'kicking'	a - gwe: 'Do I kick?'
b.	lor 'close'	lor - o 'closing'	a- lo:r 'Do I close?'
c.	gum 'bend'	gum - o 'bending'	a- gu:m 'Do I bend?'
d.	meny 'flash'	meny - o 'flashing'	a - me:ny 'Do I flash?'
e.	tong' 'cut'	tong'- o 'cutting'	a - to:ng' 'Do I cut?'

In (57a-e), no significant lengthening occurs. The politeness marker *-e* designates the forms in the second column as question forms.

	<i>Infinitive: marker:</i>	<i>Question form suffixed with politeness marker:</i>
(57) a.	gwe 'kick'	a - gwe-(y)e 'May I kick?'
b.	lor 'close'	a - lor - e 'May I close?'
c.	gum 'bend'	a - gum - e 'May I bend?'
d.	meny 'flash'	a - meny - e 'May I flash?'
e.	tong' 'cut'	a - tong - e 'May I cut?'

There are a couple of ways of asking questions with personal pronouns in subject position. Therefore, other person and number categories represented in (58) below also participate in forming polar questions with a few exceptions.

- (58)
a. 1SG Prefix:	a-gwe:	a-gu:m
	‘Do I kick?’	‘Do I bend?’
b. 1PL Prefix:	wa-gwe:	wa-gu:m
	‘Do we kick?’	‘Do we bend?’
c. 2SG Prefix:	i-gwe:	i-gu:m
	‘Do you kick?’	‘Do you bend?’
d. 2 PL Prefix:	u-gwe:	u-gu:m
	‘Do you kick?’	‘Do you bend?’
e. 3SG Prefix:	o-gwe:	o-gu:m
	‘Does he kick?’	‘Does he bend?’
f. 3PL Prefix:	gi-gwe:	gi-gu:m
	‘Do they kick?’	‘Do they bend?’

When we use the words prefixed with a pronoun marker, the resulting utterance is inherently a polar question. The word forms outlined above do not take suffixes in ordinary polar questions but are suffixed with ‘-e’ if there is an additional pragmatic need to sound polite as in the second column of (57a-e). The usage of the third-column forms in (56a-e) can further be exemplified by introducing an object.

- (59) A- gwe: mpira?
 1SG kick ball
 ‘Do I kick the ball?’

The comparable declarative will invariably take the inflected progressive forms as follows.

- (60) A- gwe - yo mpira.
 1SG kick-PROG ball
 'I am kicking the ball.'

In comparison, the imperative takes the same lexical form and tone level as the interrogative form, and this is additional evidence for the conclusion that tone does not play a role in this kind of pattern. One can compare the three clause types where the verb has the same tone level as in (61).

(61) a. Imperative:	b. Declarative:	c. Interrogative:
Ø lór dhot	Obbo lóró dhot	a-lór (dhot?)
Close door	Obbo close door	1SG door
'Close the door'	'Obbo closes the door'	'Do I close the door?'

Another point to note is that this question pattern is only possible with the first and third person subject markers. The speaker is either asking for confirmation about what he intends to do, or this confirmation comes from the addressee who is the second person. Using the second person form yields an inherently incomplete but meaningful question. However, there is a pragmatic implicature of impoliteness because such an utterance does not give the speaker an option to act differently. It also sounds like an urgent prescription to the speaker as in (62).

- (62) I - gum?
 2SG bend
 'You bend?'

For (62) to be transformed into a complete question, a particle must be introduced as follows:

- (63) Dang' i - gum?
 Q 2SG bend
 'Is it possible for you to bend?'

Further evidence for our claim about the use of prefixed verb forms in question formation is a comparison of (64) and (65) below. In (64), it is the speaker giving an instruction, while in (64) the addressee seeks a confirmation before executing the desired act. The difference in structure between the interrogative and imperative utterances is only the prefix *a-*.

- (64) Ø tong' yien ni (Imperative)
 cut tree DEM
 'Cut this tree.'
- (65) A- tong' yien ni? (Interrogative)
 1SG cut tree DEM
 'Do I cut this tree?'

With the third person subject marker *-o*, we also have a correct polar interrogative as follows.

- (66) Onyango o- um gweno?
 Onyango 3SG cover hen
 'Should Onyango cover the hen?'

If we were to use the inflected progressive form of the verb, then the utterance would be open to two readings; one as a question and another as a declarative with tone making the distinction.

- (67) Onyango úm-ò gweno (HL: Declarative)
 Onyango cover-PROG hen
 'Onyango is covering the hen.'
- (68) Onyango úm-ó gweno? (HH: Interrogative)
 Onyango cover-PROG hen
 'Is Onyango covering the hen?'

Note that that the *-o* suffix in (68) is not a counterexample to the preceding pattern in which *-o* is only used in declaratives. Rather, it has a different function here, that of marking the progressive aspect.

Usually, it is superfluous to use the prefixed verb forms alongside the vocative interrogative word *apenji* unless the addressee is inattentive. Therefore, (69a) is a rare utterance. However, a Q-phrase (wh-word) may be used with the prefixed verb forms as shown in (69b) and (69c). Even if we drop the Q-phrase as in (69d), the result is still a correct question form. The only difference is that in (69b) and (69c), the Q-phrase is necessitated by the fact that the speaker is not certain about what to do and needs further clarification. If the speaker already

knows what is to be brought, then (69d) would be a sufficient question in the circumstances.

- (69) a. A- penj-i, a - nind ka?
 1SG Q 2SG 1SG sleep here.
 ‘I am asking you, do I sleep here?’
- b. A- kel ang’o?
 1SG bring Q
 ‘What do I bring?’
- c. A- ol kanye ?
 1SG pour where
 ‘Where do I pour?’
- d. A- kel ?
 1SG bring
 ‘Do I bring?’

However, where the speaker needs confirmation in the form of the addressee’s approval of the action, a particle may be used with these verb forms.

- (70) dongewa- ne bug-i ?
 Q 3PL see book POSS
 ‘Is it not true that we can see your book?’

Suffixing a verb with an object marker opens up the utterance to two readings, depending on the tone realization of the verb.

- (71) Japuonj ó- hér- wà (HHL: Declarative)
 Japuonj 3SG love 1SG
 ‘Teacher should love us.’
- (72) Japuonj ó- hér - wá? (HHH: Interrogative)
 Japuonj 3SG love 1SG
 ‘Should teacher love us?’

Even if a suffixed verb form has a first person subject marker prefixed to it as in (73), the utterance is restricted to a declarative reading. This is logical because it is not usual for one to confirm from an addressee what one is doing personally unless the speaker is calling for some form of evaluation of a certain action. So, an interrogative reading of (73) is untenable.

- (73) *A -om -o pi?
 1SG fetch-PROG water
 ‘Am I fetching water?’

However, if the prefix is the second or third person subject marker, both interrogative and declarative readings are possible.

- (74) Í - mák - ó dhiang’? (HHH: Interrogative)
 2SG catch-PROG cow
 ‘Have you caught the cow?’

- (75) Í - màk - ò dhiang’ (HLL: Declarative)
 2SG catch-PROG cow
 ‘You have caught the cow.’

Column two of examples (57a-e) represents verb forms that function like subjunctives. In a sense, the speaker uses such words to express a wish that the permission or confirmation sought be granted. There is a regular pattern whereby the verbs are suffixed with the vowel ‘-e’ to express this notion. These constructions are inherently yes-no questions. They are also prefixed with a subject marker in their question forms. In sentences with objects, they are exemplified by (76).

- (76) A - kaw - e kom?
 1SG take chair
 ‘(Please) may I take the chair?’

To further qualify (76) as a question, we show that it is equivalent in meaning to (77) below.

- (77) I - yie a- kaw kom?
 2SG accept 1SG take chair
 'Do you accept that I take the chair?'

However, if we drop the subject marker from (76), it is rendered imperative.

- (78) Ø kaw - e kom.
 take chair
 'Please take the chair.'

Pragmatically, all our examples of verb roots that are prefixed with pronoun markers, as outlined in section 5, indicate the speakers' intention to do something and that the addressee is in a position to confirm such a move. The speaker believes that by going ahead with the action, the addressee will be affected in a way either positively or negatively; therefore there is need to seek a confirmation which may be an approval of the action or its rejection. For example, (79) is analogous to the declarative (80).

- (79) A- donj ot?
 1SG enter house
 'Shall I enter the house?'

- (80) A- dwaro donjo ot
 1SG want/intend enter house
 'I want/ intend to enter the house.'

Both (79) and (80) will elicit similar responses, either granting permission or disapproving the intention of the speaker. In addition to intention, there is the politeness nuance in which the speaker implicitly states that he or she will not go ahead with the intended action unless permission is granted by a 'yes' answer.

- (81) O- ndik-e gi kalamb-i?
 3SG write with pen 2SG
 'May she write with your pen?'

Sentence (81) indicates that the speaker implores or prods the addressee and is desperate for a 'yes' answer. The illustrations presented in this paper reveal that

confirmation-seeking is the major illocutionary force encoded by posing polar questions. However, the diverse states of affairs and contexts of utterance are found to determine the choice of the specific strategy used. This enables us to recognize different nuances and various speech acts however slight the distinctions may be.

5. Conclusion.

The illustrations and discussion in this paper have shown that there are diverse ways of forming polar questions in Dholuo. The strategies that we have considered here perform complementary communicative goals of the speaker. Particles in interrogatives were found to occupy three distinct syntactic positions, with the sentence initial position being the commonest and unmarked form. The particles occur after the subject if there is a pragmatic reason to put them in that position. Therefore, the formulation of polar questions in Dholuo, using particles and affixation strategies, is determined mainly by pragmatic factors. The selection and positioning of question particles particularly requires further investigation in other related languages for comparative and typological purposes.

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