

The influence of #ǀkxoe Hai//om culture on questioning strategies

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This talk will be concerned with the questioning strategies shown by speaker of #ǀkxoe Hai//om, a Khoisan language spoken by a hunter-gatherer community in northern Namibia. My data consists of question answer sequences collected from video recordings of natural conversations. I will discuss the way questions are posed in natural conversation, the interactional functions the questions are used for and the manner in which the questions are responded to. The main finding concerns #ǀkxoe question distribution which is markedly different to that of other languages that participated in the Max-Planck-Institute's Questions Project. Where #ǀkxoe speakers rely most heavily on content questions, speakers of the other nine languages that participated (American English, Danish, Dutch, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Lao, Tzeltal and Yéllí Dnye) all show a higher use of polar questions. I will argue that the explanation for this difference lies in the interplay of the grammatical form of a question and its interactional function. Speakers of #ǀkxoe perform different social actions than the speakers of the other languages. I also find that speakers of #ǀkxoe Hai//om address fewer questions to a specific individual than would be expected from prior research on Indo European languages. Finally I will discuss some possible explanations for both these findings which I propose can be found in the culture of the speakers.