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The Role of Chapter-Final Interrogatives in Lao Primary Textbooks: A Syntactic and Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This qualitative document analysis aims to analyze the linguistic features of end-of-chapter questions in the newly revised Lao language textbooks for primary education. The sample for analysis comprised 98 end-of-chapter questions selected through purposive sampling from the grade 3, grade 4, and grade 5 textbooks in Lao. The research instrument was a linguistic feature analysis form developed by the researchers based on Lao grammatical theory and linguistic principles, designed to classify word types (e.g., interrogative words, verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs) and sentence structures. The findings indicate that the linguistic features of the questions exhibit a systematic progression across grade levels. In Grade 3, the questions predominantly use foundational language, featuring concrete vocabulary and simple sentence structures to solicit basic information ("Nyang" (what), "Sai" (where), "Phai" (who), "Nyon Nyang" (why), "Naeo Dai" (how)). In grade 4, there is an initial introduction of abstract language and more formal imperative language. By grade 5, there is a clear use of analytical and formal language, employing terms such as "main concept," "objective," and "relate," along with more complex sentence structures designed to stimulate higher-order thinking skills. This variation in vocabulary and sentence structure reflects a curriculum design strategy that aims to progressively develop students' linguistic and cognitive skills in a scaffolded manner, moving from a foundational to a more complex level.

1. Introduction
1.1 Introduction
The development of human resources is a key factor in the socio-economic development of a nation. The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) has set a vision to create high-quality human resources capable of utilizing modern science and technology and possessing strong language skills (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2018) [7]. The Lao language, as the national language, serves as an indispensable foundational tool for thinking, communication, and knowledge transmission (Thongmixay *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, the teaching and learning of the Lao language at the primary level are of paramount importance in establishing a solid linguistic and cognitive foundation for students.

A crucial tool widely used for assessment and stimulating learning in the classroom is the "interrogative sentence," particularly the end-of-chapter questions in textbooks. The linguistic features employed in these questions—be it the choice of vocabulary, word class, or sentence structure—all have a direct impact on students' comprehension and cognitive level. Questions that use simple, clear language consistent with the learners' level will help students understand the query and respond correctly. Conversely, if the language used in the questions is overly complex or inappropriate for the students' grade level, it can become an obstacle to learning and lead to imprecise assessments (Pei & Ismail, 2025).

However, a preliminary survey indicates that there has been no systematic study analyzing the "linguistic features" of end-of-chapter questions in Lao language textbooks for primary education. Most studies tend to focus on the content or difficulty level of the questions, but lack a deep linguistic analysis of the vocabulary and sentence structures chosen by textbook authors, how they develop across grade levels, and how they promote language acquisition. Therefore, this study is necessary to build an understanding of the linguistic features used in these questions, which will provide valuable data for developing and improving

the quality and effectiveness of textbooks.

1.2 Research questions
What are the linguistic features (vocabulary and structure) of the end-of-chapter interrogative sentences in the Lao language textbooks for primary education (Grades 3-5)?

1.3 Significance of the study
Based on the research questions and objectives above, this study aims to analyze the vocabulary and linguistic structures used in the end-of-chapter interrogative sentences of the Lao language textbooks for primary education (Grades 3-5).

2. Material and Method
2.1 Research Design
This study employed a Qualitative Document Analysis methodology to analyze the linguistic features used in end-of-chapter interrogative sentences.

2.2 Samples/Participants
All end-of-chapter questions appearing in the three newly revised Lao language textbooks for primary education. A total of 98 end-of-chapter questions, such as: grade 3, there are 58 questions, grade 4, there are 17 questions, and grade 5, there are 23 questions, were used in the sample according to purposive random sampling by selecting all questions located at the end of the main reading passages.

2.3 Instruments
The research instrument was a linguistic feature analysis form, which it created by the researchers. There are 3 components, namely: 1. Question number and content that is used to record the question exactly as it appears in the textbook. 2. Lexical analysis was used for identifying the interrogative word, key nouns, and key verbs. And, 3. Structural analysis for classifying the sentence type (Simple, Compound, Complex) (Barton & Woolley, 2017) [2]. A linguistic feature analysis form was verified the content validity by five specialists, with the index of item objective congruence (IOC) of each item ranging between 0.60 to 1.00, indicating that they could pass the qualitative criteria of validity with an IOC of more than 0.50. Meanwhile, the instrument's suitability was rated as 4.80, the highest level (Phanakij & Nillapun (2016); Srisa-art, 2022; Vathanavong et al., 2024) [11, 16, 17].

2.4 Data Collection
The researcher conducted data collection through the following procedures:
1. The researcher studied three Lao language textbooks for early primary education: Grade *3 (*Outhaivanh *et al*., *202*1*)* [9], Grade 4 *(*Sysoutham *et al*., *202*2*)* [13], and Grade *5 (*Thavysouk *et al*., *202*3*)* [14].
2. The researcher selected activity-based questions and end-of-chapter exercises from the textbooks. These data were collected manually by reading and recording relevant information into a data recording form specifically developed for this research.
3. All the data were documented according to the research data recording form for subsequent analysis. The recorded information was then reviewed and verified to ensure the highest level of accuracy and reliability.

4. The collected data were synthesized, and key points were summarized to highlight the most essential and beneficial aspects. These findings were used not only to present accurate information but also to identify areas for potential refinement and ensure the collected data reflect the reality as precisely as possible.

2.5 Data analysis
The researchers followed these steps:
1. Data Compilation: A total of 98 questions were selected from the three Lao language textbooks.
2. Data Analysis: Each question was analyzed linguistically based on the framework outlined in the "Analysis Recording Form." The vocabulary types and syntactic structures of each question were identified and classified.
3. Synthesis and Presentation of Findings: The results of the analysis were grouped according to word types and sentence structures. Frequency counts and percentages were calculated to illustrate the overall patterns of language usage in each grade level. The findings were presented in tabular form accompanied by narrative explanations, with clear examples provided to support the interpretations.

3. Results And Discussion
3.1 Results
In this section, the researchers present the results of the linguistic analysis of the 98 questions, categorized into four main language groups based on complexity and usage characteristics.

3.1.1 Analysis of the Linguistic Features of the Questions
A. Group 1: Foundational Language
This group consists of everyday vocabulary that is easy to understand and focuses on soliciting concrete information. It is most prevalent in the Grade 3 questions.
- Interrogative Words: "Nyang" (what), "Sai" (where), "Phai" (who), "Nyon Nyang" (why), "Naeo Dai" (how).
- Nouns: Characters like (tao (turtle) or maew (cat)); objects like (sodam (pencil) or ahan (food)); places like (na (rice field) or ban (village)).
- Verbs: het (do), pen (be), mi (have), kin (eat), pai (go), ma (come), husuek (feel).
- Example: "Why did the turtle reach the finish line before the rabbit?" (G3, Q8). This question uses entirely foundational vocabulary.

B. Group 2: Imperative Language
This is language used to instruct students to perform a task. The level of formality increases with the grade level.
- Grade 3: Uses simple commands like "Find..." or "Tell...". Example: "Find the verbs that express opinions..." (G3, Q3).
- Grades 4-5: Uses more formal and complex commands like "State...", "Explain...", or "Have the students think of...".
Example: "Is the mouse a small, weak animal? Explain." (G4, Q71).

C. Group 3: Abstract Language
This group includes vocabulary referring to ideas, values, and relationships. It is found frequently in Grades 4 and 5.
- Nouns: khounpanyot (benefits), khuamsamkhan (importance), naewkhit (concept/idea), banha

(problem), chutpasong (objective), kanphatthana (development), botbat (role).

- Verbs:khitva(think that),phouaphan (relate to), sanapsanoun (support), saksuan (persuade). Example: "How is a clock important and beneficial to us?" (G4, Q63). This question requires students to think about abstract values.

D. Group 4: Analytical and Formal Language

These are words used specifically for structural or literary analysis, or in formal contexts. They are most common in Grade 5.

- Nouns: vakton (paragraph/section), poedhualueang (introduction), nuealueang (body), saloupleueang (conclusion,phu lao (narrator), sumson (community), sangkhom (society).
- Verbs: pakopmi (consist of), pokpakhaksa (protect), titphankap (be associated with), khonphop (discover).
- Hypothetical Structures: "If you were...".
- Example: "What does the conclusion of the story mention? And how does it relate to the story?" (G5, Q85). This question uses formal terminology and an analytical verb.

Overall Summary of the Analysis:

The choice of language demonstrates a systematic development from foundational vocabulary in Grade 3 to complex analytical language in Grade 5. Sentence structures also develop from simple sentences to more complex ones.

3.2 Discussion

The analysis reveals a clear and systematic development of linguistic features across grade levels:

- Vocabulary: There is a shift from foundational and concrete vocabulary (e.g., maew [cat], het [do]) in Grade 3 to abstract and analytical vocabulary (e.g., khuamsamkhan [importance], phouaphan [relate]) in Grades 4 and 5.
- Sentence Structure: The structure develops from simple sentences in Grade 3 to compound or complex sentences in Grades 4 and 5, demanding more complex thinking.
- Overall Picture: The linguistic design reflects a scaffolding instructional strategy, promoting the simultaneous development of students' linguistic and cognitive skills.

However, the analysis reflects a clear Curriculum Design Strategy. The textbook designers have "scaffolded language" for students in a step-by-step manner.

- Laying the Linguistic Foundation: In Grade 3, the use of foundational language builds familiarity and confidence.
- Expanding the Lexical Repertoire: The gradual introduction of abstract and formal vocabulary in Grades 4 and 5 expands the students' lexical repertoire.
- Language as a Tool for Thinking: The linguistic shift from asking "what" to "what is the main idea" demonstrates that language is being used as a tool to elevate the level of thinking.

In addition, this pattern reflects a deliberate scaffolding strategy by textbook developers, consistent with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where instructional language gradually becomes more challenging to promote higher-order thinking. The linguistic progression also aligns with Cummins' theory of cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), which emphasizes the importance of academic language development for success in higher education.

Internationally, similar linguistic scaffolding strategies have been observed in curriculum designs. For example, Fang and Schleppegrell (2018) noted in U.S. science textbooks that interrogative questions evolve in complexity to challenge students' reasoning and interpretative abilities. Fellowers and Oakley (2017) [6]; Likewise, Christie and Derewianka (2018) identified developmental trends in sentence complexity and lexical density in English-language textbooks in Australia, paralleling the findings in the Lao context. These studies confirm that well-designed educational materials use language as a vehicle not only for knowledge transfer but also for cognitive development.

The Lao textbooks show that language is purposefully employed to transition students from basic comprehension ("what" questions) to more critical thinking tasks ("what is the main idea"), underscoring the role of interrogative language as a tool for reasoning. This approach fosters both linguistic proficiency and intellectual engagement, which are critical for preparing students for secondary education and lifelong learning (Brown & Lee, 2015; Nuannavong et al., 2024) [1, 8].

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, the study affirms that the Lao language textbooks effectively integrate linguistic and cognitive scaffolding strategies. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on language-in-education policies and curriculum design in multilingual and developing contexts. Future research might expand this analysis by incorporating classroom discourse or comparing student outcomes, thereby strengthening the link between textbook language and educational achievement.

5. Recommendations
5.1 Policy Recommendations

- Maintain and Develop the Strategy: The Ministry of Education and Sports should maintain this standard of tiered linguistic design and use it as a framework for other subjects.
- Create a Guide for Textbook Authors: A manual on selecting language for questions at each grade level should be created.

5.2 Recommendations for Practice

- Teacher Professional Development: Training should be organized for teachers on the importance of language in questioning to enable them to adapt and create high-quality questions.

5.2.1 Recommendations for Future Research

- Experimental Research: Studies should be conducted to compare student comprehension of questions using different linguistic styles.
- Pragmatic Studies: Research could investigate how teachers and students interpret the intent of these questions in classroom discourse.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

- Scope of Research: This study focused solely on document analysis and did not study how students interpret this language in a classroom context.

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- Language Categorization: The classification of language into four groups was for analytical convenience; some words may have overlapping characteristics.

6. Acknowledgments

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