A photograph of several clownfish swimming in a purple anemone. The scene is dimly lit, with a dark blue background. A solid purple rectangle is visible in the top right corner.

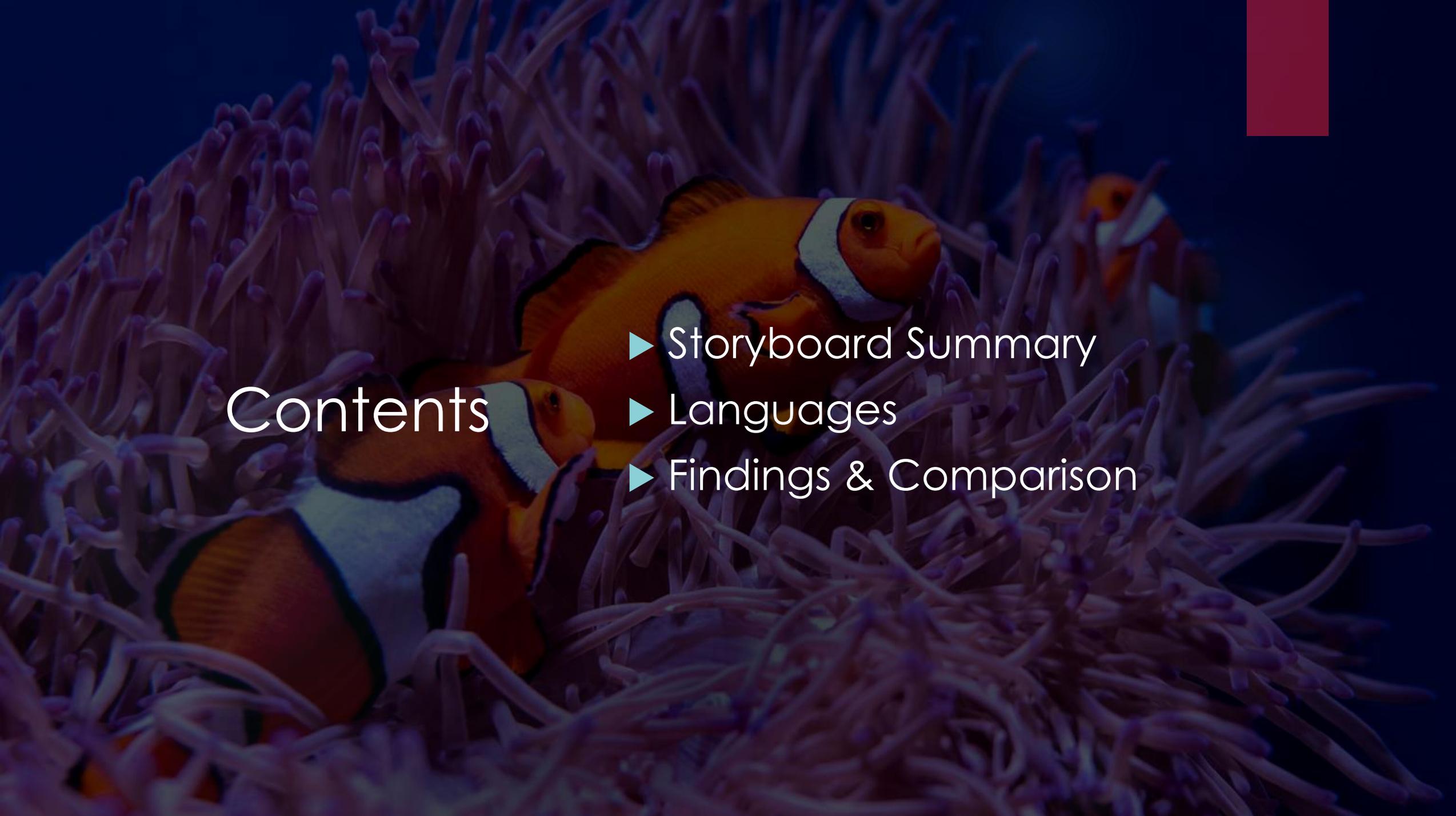
Baby Fish's Surprise Party

How do languages form questions?

JULIET WHITEHOUSE

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ZIYUE XU

A photograph of several clownfish swimming in a sea anemone. The anemone has long, thin, pinkish-purple tentacles. The clownfish are orange with white stripes and black outlines. The background is a dark blue gradient. A solid red rectangle is in the top right corner.

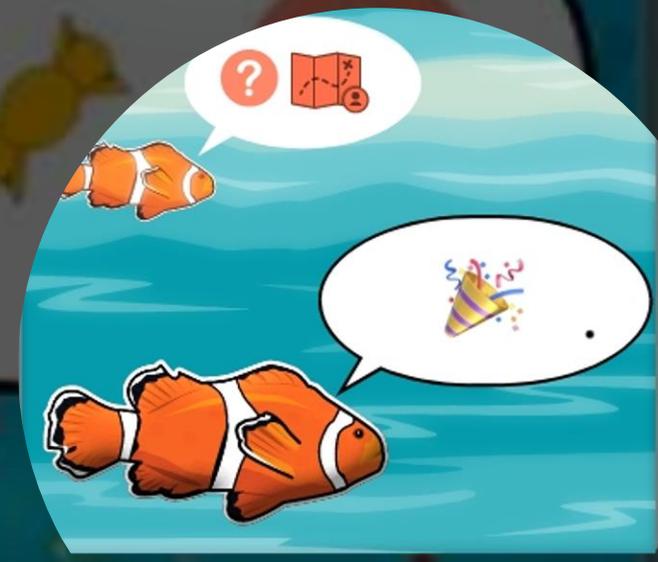
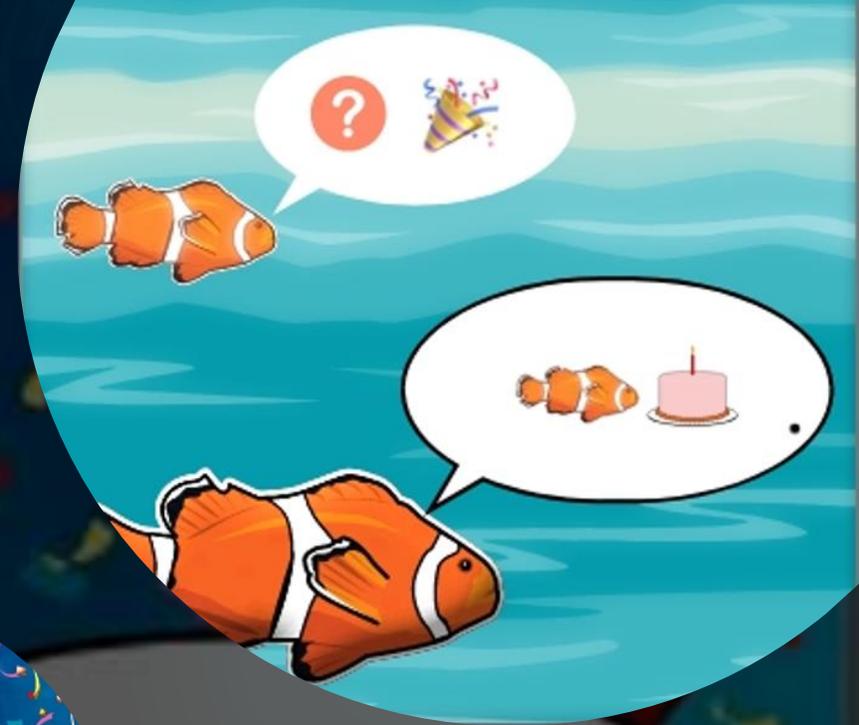
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- ▶ Storyboard Summary
- ▶ Languages
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Baby Fish's Surprise Party

Storyboard Summary:

"Today is a baby fish's birthday. His mom wants to give her baby a surprise. So, she is taking him to a birthday party. On the way, the baby keeps asking questions."



Languages

- ▶ Mandarin *2
- ▶ Cantonese *2
- ▶ Sichuanese (a dialect in southwest China) *1
- ▶ Wenzhounese (a dialect in eastern China) *1
- ▶ Japanese *1
- ▶ Hindi *1
- ▶ Gujarati *2
- ▶ Italian *1
- ▶ French *1
- ▶ Portuguese *1
- ▶ Lithuanian *1



Findings & Comparison

11 LANGUAGES, 14 PARTICIPANTS

Comparison across:

Mandarin,
Cantonese,
Sichuanese,
Wenzhounese

Similarities

- ▶ Same constituent order for questions and declarative sentences
- ▶ No auxiliary for questions
- ▶ Use of modal particles at the end of the sentence (choice of particles differ across dialects)
- ▶ Position of wh- words
 - ▶ 'who' and 'why': usually at the beginning of the sentence
 - ▶ 'where' 'which', and 'how': in the middle or at the end of the sentences

Comparison across:

Mandarin,
Cantonese,
Sichuanese,
Wenzhounese

Differences

- ▶ Compatibility of 2 Wh- words in one question
 - ▶ Generally incompatible in Cantonese which prefers a split into two sentences
- ▶ Choices listed before polar questions
 - ▶ Flexible In Sichuanese
 - ▶ Required in Wenzhounese

Japanese

- ▶ Basic constituent order: SOV
- ▶ Subject – interrogative word – verb
- ▶ Omission of subject (not only in questions) when the context is clear
- ▶ "What is" question expressed in quotation
- ▶ Double wh- questions acceptable, and follow basic order

Hindi

- ▶ Follows basic constituent order SOV
- ▶ Generally no omission of subject allowed
- ▶ Use of 'what' in polar questions

Findings: Gujarati

- ▶ Formal vs Informal (Slang terms)
- ▶ Generational differences
- ▶ 'Which one' question, direct translation less natural
- ▶ Options reformulated in separate verb phrases
- ▶ Younger speakers- more natural to have the closer, direct translation
- ▶ Use of subjects necessary to direct question
- ▶ 'Because it is your birthday...'
- ▶ Object- birthday came before the verb
- ▶ Multiple w/w question, version 1 with more direct translation involving 'who' at the start sounds less natural

Findings: French and Italian

Similarities

- ▶ Use of relative prepositions to connect phrases, 'in cui' to replace 'when' or 'which'
- ▶ Able to invert subject and verb

Differences

- ▶ Need for subject pronouns
- ▶ Est-ce que formation to indicate yes/no response
- ▶ Italian more context heavy

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Thank you!