

Title: Locality and restricted A'-probing among the Mabia languages

Abstract: The idea of restricted A'-probing for the closest DP was originally proposed for “absolute-only” extraction cases in Ergative-Absolute languages (syntactic ergativity) by Aldridge (2004, 2008, 2017), and other subsequent studies. However, recently, the same extraction restrictions have been argued to be present in non-ergative languages such as Turkish and Rejang (see Branan & Erlewine 2024, and some references therein). In other words, the idea of A'-probing for the closest DP should not be uniquely associated with ergative languages but should be seen as a general property of language.

In this study, I present novel data from two Mabia (formerly, Gur) languages, Kusaal and Gurene (spoken mainly in Northern Ghana), that exhibit an extraction asymmetry between local subject focus on the one hand, and non-subject focus (both local & non-local) plus non-local subject focus on the other. I argue that (a) such extraction asymmetry can be attributed to restricted A'-probing for the closest DP, and that (b) the extraction asymmetry is reflected by a distinction in morphological focus marking. I further consider three alternative approaches and argue that only one of these approaches appears promising, yet is different from my analysis. The other two are faced with some challenges, which I will discuss. The general implication of the study is that it supports the need for cross-linguistic investigation in making empirically adequate generalizations.