

Focus movement and criterial freezing in copular clauses in Bantu

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We discuss a particular case of criterial freezing that arises in copular clauses in the Bantu languages Basaá and Mmaala. In these languages, the declarative complementizers used in embedded clauses (1) also occur in inverse copular constructions as shown in (2)–(3).¹

- (1) a. *malêt a-ŋ-kal lē ɓaúdú ɓá-ŋ-kē* Basaá
 1teacher 1SM-PRS-say that 2students 2SM-PST1-go
 ‘The teacher says that the students have left.’
 b. *in gu-bida-ga (k)áá agánd má-namb inko* Mmaala
 1SG PRS-think-PROG that woman PST1-cook chicken
 ‘I think that the woman cooked chicken.’
- (2) a. *liwándá_i dzóŋ (lí-jé) lē ndzée t_i* Basaá
 5friend 5your 5SM-be.PRS that 1who
 ‘Who is your friend?’
 b. *liwándá_i dzém (lí-jé) lē Konde t_i* Basaá
 5friend 5my 5SM-be.PRS that 1Konye
 ‘My friend is KONDE.’
- (3) a. *ɔfen_i wóú *(ú_i) *(ŋ)-áá aŋa t_i* Mmaala
 name your 3SG be.PRS-that who
 ‘What’s your name?’
 b. *ɔfen_i wam *(ú_i) *(ŋ)-áá Bekem t_i* Mmaala
 name my 3SG be.PRS-that Bekem
 ‘My name is BEKEM.’

Basaá is a null subject language while Mmaala is not. In Basaá (2), the copula is optional. In Mmaala (3), the copula *ŋe* ‘be’ (realised as *ŋ*) and the resumptive pronoun *ú* ‘s/he’ co-indexed with the fronted constituent *ɔfen wam* ‘my name’ are obligatory. The postcopular constituents in the inverse copular structures in (2b) and (3b) represent new information and are interpreted as focused.² The canonical forms of (2) and (3) are illicit as illustrated in (4) and (5).

¹ In Mmaala, the declarative complementizer can be fully realised as *gáá/káá*, with /g/ and /k/ being in free variation. It can be shortened as *áá* depending on its phonological environment. This morphological change does not alter the meaning.

Note that (2) and (3) are the constructions that interest us here. (2) and (3) are not the only way to form *wh*-questions and answers. Consider (i) for Basaá and (ii) for Mmaala.

- (i) A. *ndzée a-bí-til-á ɓíkaat* B. *hilóyá *(hjó-n) hí-bí-til-á gwó*
 1who 1SM-PST-write-fv 8letters 19boy 19-FOC 19SM-PST2-write-FV 8them
 ‘Who wrote the letters?’ ‘The BOY wrote them.’
 (ii) A. *giag Ambassa mó-nu-ón* B. *Ambassa mó-ón inok*
 what Ambassa PST1-PRT-kill Ambassa PST1-kill snake
 ‘What did Ambassa kill?’ ‘Ambassa/he killed a SNAKE.’

² The term inverse copular is due to Moro (1997) and related work. We are dealing with constructions akin to the English pair in (i). The copular clause in (ia) exhibits the canonical/direct form in which the nominal subject *John* linearly precedes the nominal predicate *my friend*. (ib) is the inverse form where the predicate precedes the subject.

- (i) a. John is my neighbour Canonical/direct form (subject-predicate).
 b. My neighbour is John Inverse form (predicate-subject).

- (4) a. **ndʒéé*_i *pro*_i (a-je) *lé* *t*_i *liwándá* *dʒóŋ* Basaá
 1who 1SM-be.PRS that 5friend 5your
 b. **Konde*_i *pro*_i (a-je) *lé* *t*_i *liwándá* *dʒêm* Basaá
 1Konye 1SM-be.PRS that 5friend 5my
- (5) a. **ana*_i *ú*_i *ŋ-áá* *t*_i *ɔfen* *wóú* Mmaala
 who 3SG be.PRS-that name your
 b. **Bekem* *ú*_i *ŋ-áá* *t*_i *ɔfen* *wam* Mmaala
 Bekem 3SG be.PRS-that name my

We show that (2) and (3) are derived from a small clause configuration, namely a predicative phrase (Bowers 1993). Considering the Basaá sentence in (2b), the original predicative phrase (PredP) in (6a) is altered by moving the small clause subject to a low focus position (Belletti 2004). Focus movement is followed by remnant movement of the entire PredP containing the small clause predicate to a topic position in the left periphery, across the (null) pronominal element externally merged in Spec-SubjP. The function of this pronominal is to satisfy the subject-criterion (Rizzi 2005, Shlonsky & Rizzi 2018), yielding (6a). FocP being a criterial position, further extraction of the subject violates the freezing principle, displaying the ‘low’ *that*-trace sequence observed in (4) and (5) and derived in (6b) for Basaá.

- (6) a. [_{TopP} [_{liwándá} _{dʒêm}]] [_{Top} [_{SubjP} _{pro}_i [_{Sub} *lí* [_{TP} [_T *jé* [_{FP} [_F *lé* [_{FocP} *Konde*_i [_{Foc} [_{PredP} *t*_i [_{Pred} *ɔ* [_{liwándá} _{dʒêm}]]]]]]]]]]]]]
 5friend 5my 5SM be.PRS that Konde
- b. *[[_{TopP} [_{Konde}_i]]] [_{Top} [_{SubjP} _{pro}_i [_{Sub} *a* [_{TP} [_T *je* [_{FP} [_F *lé* [_{FocP} *Konde*_i [_{Foc} [_{PredP} *t*_i [_{Pred} *ɔ* [_{liwándá} _{dʒêm}]]]]]]]]]]]]]
 1Konde 1SM be.PRS that
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