Inversion and reversibility in copular sentences: A view from Wolof

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Outline

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Wolof: basic properties

- SVO language
- Rich left periphery for topic and focus (exhaustivity)
- No agreement, optional tense (Bochnak and Martinović 2019)

Wolof: basic properties

Top-heavy finite sentences with an overt CP-layer (*sentence particles*; Dunigan 1994)

- DPs to the left of sentence particles behave as if they were in the left periphery
  - they must be resumed, or
  - they pass A′-movement tests

(1) Xale yi   lekk na=ñu gato bi.
     child the.PL eat C=3PL cake the.SG
     'The children ate the cake.'

(2) Xale yi   da=ñu   lekk gato bi.
     child the.PL do.C=3PL eat   cake the.SG
     'The children ate the cake.'

(Martinović 2015, 2021)

Two clause-types in Wolof

In Martinović 2015, 2021, I argue that there are syntactically two kinds of finite indicative clauses in Wolof:

1. V-to-C with the subject in the left periphery and obligatorily resumed

    (3)   Xale yi   lekk na=ñu gato bi.
          child the.PL eat   C=3PL cake the.SG
          'The children ate the cake.'

    (4)   Xale yi   da=ñu   lekk gato bi.
          child the.PL do.C=3PL eat   cake the.SG
          'The children ate the cake.'

2. A′-movement structures, with no V-to-C and the subject below C

    (5)   Gato bi   l-a {xale yi}/{ñu}   lekk.
          cake the.SG l-C child the.PL/3PL eat
          'It's the cake that {the children}/{they} ate.'

Copular sentences

Copular sentences are A′-movement constructions, but with obligatorily left dislocated subjects[1]

(6)   Xale yi   sàcc l-a=ñu.
       child the.PL thief *l*-C=3PL.S
       'The children are thieves.'   PREDICATIONAL

(7)   Sàcc bi   Sàmba l-a=∅.
       thief the.SG Samba *l*-C=3SG.S
       'The thief is Samba'   SPECIFICATIONAL

Structure of copula-less sentences with non-verbal predicates:

(8)   [$_{Top}$ NP1$_i$ [$_{CP}$ NP2$_j$ l-a [$_{IP}$ SCL$_i$ ... [t_i ... t_j]]]]

   - NP1 is left-dislocated and resumed (SCL)
   - NP2 A′-moves to Spec,CP

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[1]If negation or future are expressed, copular sentences occur in V-to-C configurations.

Outline

A′-movement

- Obligatory wh-movement language, with an overt A′-complementizer
- These structures pass all the standard A′-movement tests—crossover, reconstruction, islands (Torrence 2005, 2012)
- Subject/non-subject asymmetry in A′-extraction:

(9)   Usmaan   a   lekk maafe.
      Oussman C eat   mafe
      "It's Oussman who ate mafe."   Subject extraction

(10)   Maafe l-a Usmaan   lekk
       mafe   *l*-C Oussman eat
       "It's mafe that Oussman ate."   Non-subject extraction

Long-distance A′-movement

- The A′-movement complementizer *(l)a* is obligatory in long-distance extraction

(11) a. Xalaat na=∅   ni   xale yi   lekk na=ñu gato bi.
          think   C=3sg that child the.pl eat   C=3pl cake the.sg
          'S/he thinks that the children ate the cake.'

     b. Lan l-a=∅   xalaat ni   l-a xale yi   lekk?
         what *l*-C=3sg think that *l*-C child the.pl eat
         'What does s/he think that the children ate?'

     c. *Lan l-a=∅   xalaat ni   xale yi   lekk na=ñu?
         what *l*-C=3sg think that child the.pl eat   C=3pl

NP2 is A′-moved to Spec,CP

Copular wh-questions appear to have identical structure to declaratives:

(12) a. Idy ⌈sàcc⌉ l-a=∅.
          Idy thief   *l*-C=3sg
          'Idy is a thief.'   PREDICATIONAL
      b. Idy ⌈lan⌉ l-a=∅?
          Idy lan   *l*-C=3sg
          'What is Idy?'

(13) a. Sàcc bi   ⌈Idy⌉ l-a=∅.
          thief the.sg Idy   *l*-C=3sg
          'The thief is Idy'.   SPECIFICATIONAL
      b. Sàcc bi   ⌈kan⌉ l-a=∅?
          thief the.sg who   *l*-C=3sg.s
          'Who is the thief?'

Long-distance extraction

Copular sentences can be extracted out of long distance:

(14)   a.   Musaa xalaat na=∅   ni   xale yi | sàcc | l-a=ñu.
            Moussa believe C=3sg that child the.sg thief   *l*-C=3pl

            'Moussa believes that the children are thieves.'
       b. | Lan | l-a Musaa xalaat ni   xale yi   *t* l-a=ñu?
            what   *l*-C Moussa believe that child the.pl *t* *l*-C=3pl.s

            'What does Moussa believe the children are?

(15)   a.   Musaa xalaat na=∅   ni   waaykat bi | Yusu Nduur | l-a=∅.
            Moussa believe C=3sg that singer   the.sg Youssou N'Dour *l*-C=3sg

            'Moussa believes the singer is Youssou N'Dour.'
       b. % | Kan | l-a Musaa xalaat ni   waaykat bi   *t* l-a=∅?
            who   *l*-C Moussa believe that singer   the.sg *t* *l*-C=3sg.s

            'Who does Moussa believe the singer is?'

NP1 is left-dislocated

NP1 in copular sentences cannot be a bare quantifier, which suggests it is a topic (Rizzi 1997):

(16) *Kenn   sàcc l-a=∅.
       someone thief *l*-C=3SG.S
       intended: 'Someone is a thief.'

NP1 is left-dislocated

The subject clitic resumes NP1, not NP2:

Context: In a school play, children are dressed into animal costumes. The speaker's younger siblings are all in one big cow costume:

(17) [Samay   rakk]$_i$ (ab)   nakk l-a=ñu$_i$/*∅.
      poss.1pl younger.sibling indef.sg cow *l*-C=3pl.s/3sg.s
      'My younger siblings are a cow.'

Context: The school has a committee whose members change every year. This year, Moussa and Fatou are on the committee.

(18) Kurél   bi   {Musaa ak Faatu}/{ñoom} l-a=∅/*ñu.
      committee the.sg {Moussa and Fatou}/{they} *l*-C=3sg.s/*3pl.s
      'The committee is Moussa and Fatou/them.'

Structure of copular sentences
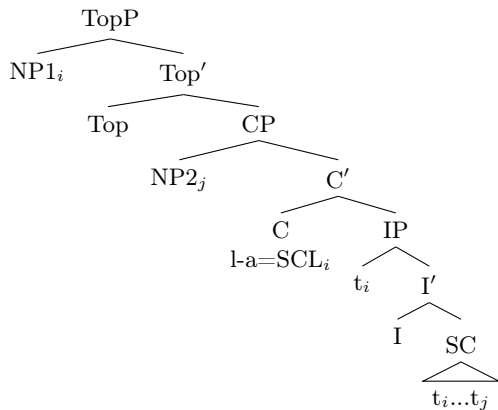
Additional evidence from tense

Optional tense morphology is located below C in A′-movement constructions:

(19)   Demba l-a=a   gis-oon.
         Demba *l*-C=1SG see-PST
         'It's Demba that I saw.'

Tense is also below C in copular sentences:

(20)   Idy sàcc l-a=∅   woon.
         Idy thief *l*-C=3SG PST
         'Idy was a thief.'

(Predicate) inversion

A number of arguments have been given for some sort of syntactic inversion in specificational sentences:

- the specificational subject is not referential
- agreement in some languages is with the post-copular NP
- reversibility

Reversibility is the most shaky of the arguments, but that's the one I'm going to talk about (Martinović 2022).

- Specificational pseudoclefts appear to exhibit syntactic reversibility – either the free relative or the NP can raise to the subject position
- Specificational copular sentences do not exhibit the same kind of reversibility

Outline

Structure of pseudoclefts

(21)   [$_{NP1}$ My most valued possession] is [$_{NP2}$ THIS BOOK]   Copular sentence

(22)   [$_{FR1}$ What I value most] is [$_{NP2}$ THIS BOOK]   Pseudocleft

- There are a number of differences between specificational copular sentences and pseudoclefts, so they are generally not considered to necessarily have the same syntax (Higgins 1979; den Dikken et al. 2000; den Dikken 2006a)

Subject/non-subject asymmetry in specificational sentences

C in specificational pseudoclefts can surface either as *la* or *a*:

(23)   [FR Ñi sàcc gato bi]   [NP SÀMBA AK MUSAA] {l-a=∅/a}.
              C steal cake the.SG   Samba and Moussa {*l*-C=3SG.s/C}
         'Who stole the cake were SAMBA and MOUSSA.'

C in specificational copular sentences can only surface as *la*:

(24)   [NP Sàcc yi]   [NP SÀMBA AK MUSAA] {l-a=ñu/*a}.
              thief the.PL   Samba and Moussa {*l*-C=3PL.s/C}
         'The thieves are SAMBA and MOUSSA.'

Specificational pseudoclefts exhibit a type of reversibility not found in specificational copular sentences.

Reversibility

The term *reversibility* is used in at least two ways:

1. The reversal of the surface order of constituents around the copula.
2. Some sort of syntactic inversion.

Reversibility in pseudoclefts

Den Dikken et al. (2000)

- Type A pseudocleft: wh-clause > NP; question-answer pair in a topic-comment configuration

  (25)   What I value most is THIS BOOK.

- Type B pseudocleft: NP > wh-clause; regular copular sentence

  (26)   THIS BOOK is what I value most.

The two structures are not derivationally related. There is no inversion of any kind in the syntax of pseudoclefts.

Reversibility in copular sentences

Commonly accepted analysis of specificational copular sentences: *predicate inversion*

(27) a. Youssou N'Dour is a/the singer.   PREDICATIONAL
      b. The singer is Youssou N'Dour.   SPECIFICATIONAL
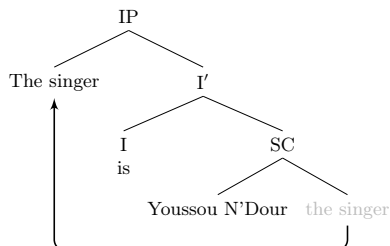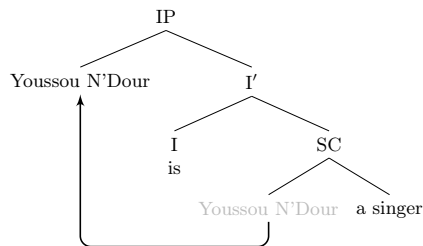
(Heggie 1988; Moro 1997; Heycock 1994; Mikkelsen 2005; den Dikken 2006b)

Predicational and specificational sentences are derivationally related. There is inversion in the syntax.

Main claims

- Wolof pseudoclefts *do* involve reversibility in the syntax.
- Specificational copular sentence do not exhibit the same kind of reversibility.

Reversibility in specificational pseudoclefts

The Wolof A′-movement complementizer *(l)a* tells us whether an element has been extracted from the local subject position (Spec,IP) or from elsewhere.

- *a* = local subject
- *la* = everything else

(28) Usmaan a lekk maafe.
      Oussman C eat mafe
      "It's Oussman who ate mafe."
      Subject extraction

(29) Maafe l-a Usmaan lekk
      mafe   *l*-C Oussman eat
      "It's mafe that Oussman ate."
      Non-subject extraction

(30) Xale yi   l-a xalaat ni   ñu-a lekk gato bi?
      child the.PL *l*-C think that 3PL-C child the.PL eat
      'It's the children that s/he think ate the cake.'

When C surfaces as *a*, something must have moved from the local subject position.

No subject/non-subject asymmetry in pseudoclefts

(31) [$_{FR}$ Ñi   sàcc tangal yi]   [$_{NP}$ XALE YI]   {l-a=∅/a}.
         C$_{FR.PL}$ steal sweets the.PL   child the.PL {l-C=3SG.S/C}
      'Who stole the sweets were THE CHILDREN.'
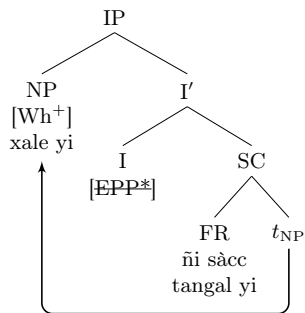
- C can surface as either *a* or *la*
⇒ the pivot moved to Spec,CP either from Spec,IP, or from elsewhere
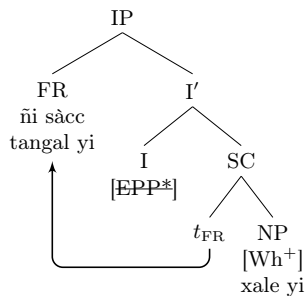
PROPOSAL:

- Either the pivot or the free relative can move to Spec,IP.
- Pseudoclefts in Wolof do exhibit syntactic reversibility, contra den Dikken et al. (2000).

Pseudocleft reversibility
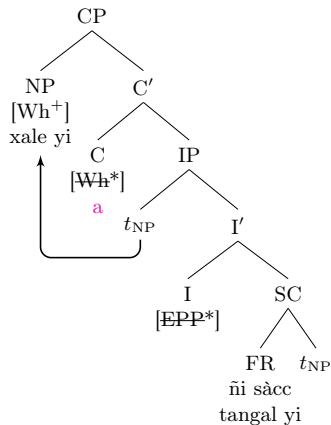
(32)   NP moves to Spec,IP

```
                IP
          ┌─────┴─────┐
         NP            I′
        [Wh⁺]     ┌────┴────┐
        xale yi   I         SC
                [EPP*]   ┌───┴───┐
                        FR      t_NP
                     ñi sàcc
                     tangal yi
```

(33)   FR moves to Spec,IP

```
                IP
          ┌─────┴─────┐
         FR            I′
       ñi sàcc    ┌────┴────┐
       tangal yi  I         SC
                [EPP*]   ┌───┴───┐
                       t_FR      NP
                               [Wh⁺]
                               xale yi
```
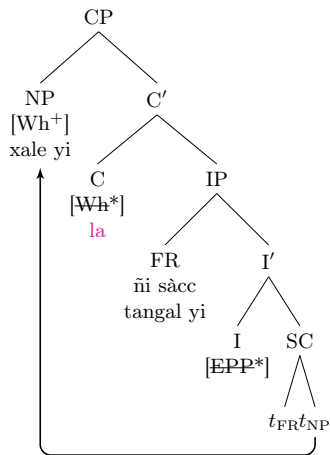
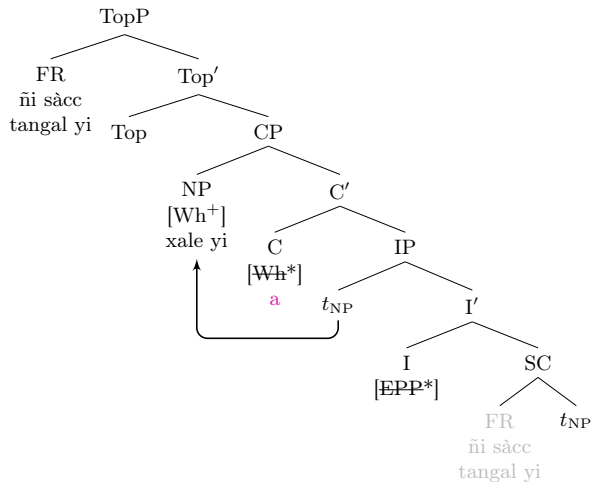Pseudocleft reversibility

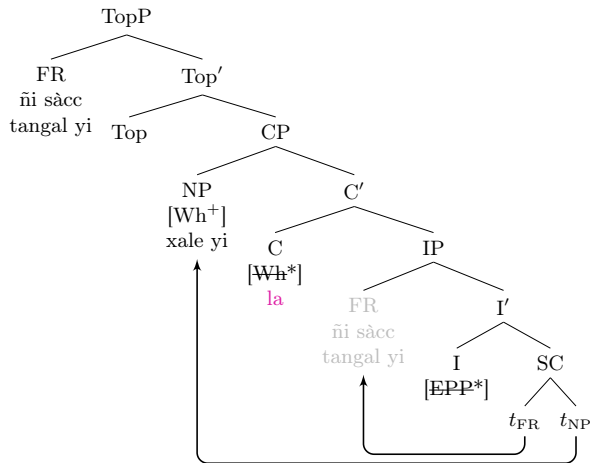(34)   NP was in Spec,IP

(35)   NP was not in Spec,IP

Pseudocleft reversibility

Left-dislocation of the FR

No subject/non-subject asymmetry in pseudoclefts

Left-dislocation of the FR

Interim summary

Wolof pseudoclefts do not show surface reversibility in the order of the two constituents because of syntactic requirements placed on this construction:

- the 'pivot' must A′-move to Spec,CP
- the free relative must be topicalized

However, syntactic reversibility is seen in the absence of the subject/non-subject asymmetry in the A′-extraction complementizer *(l)a*.
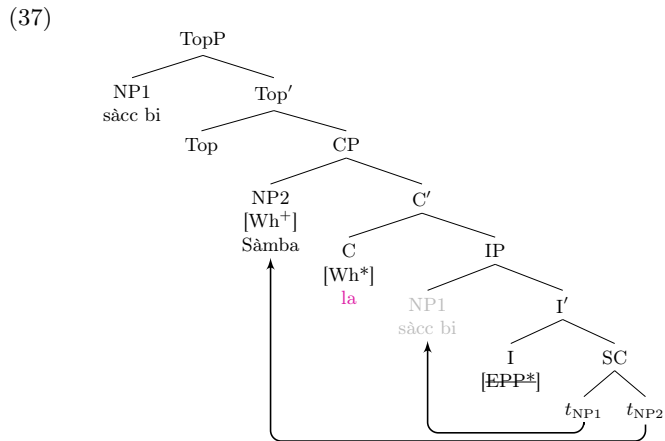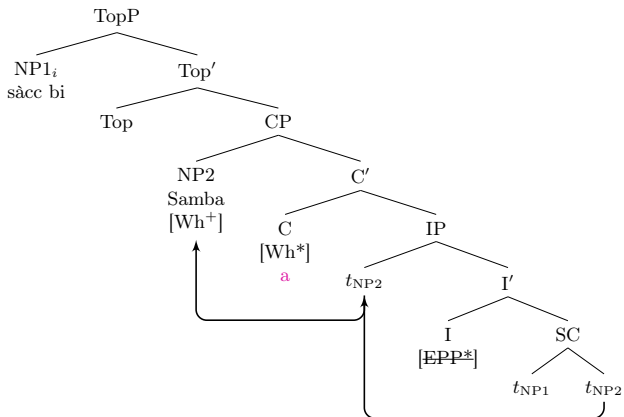
Outline

Copular sentences

C in a specificational copular sentence can only surface as *la*

(36)   Sàcc bi   SÀMBA l-a=∅/*a.
         thief the.sg Samba *l*-C=3sg.s/C
         'The thief is SAMBA'

(37)

The referential NP cannot move to the subject position before moving to Spec,CP. This derivation appears to be available in pseudoclefts.

(38)   *

Focused subjects in specificational copular sentences

When a subject of a copular sentence is focused, the predicate cannot be left-dislocated. A structure with copula must be used.

(39)   SÀMBA a di (>Sàmbay) sàcc bi.
        Samba C COP   thief the.SG
        'It's Samba who is the thief.'

There is a fundamental difference between specificational copular sentences and pseudoclefts.

Predicational copular sentence

PREDICATIONAL SENTENCE: the subject raises to Spec,IP, and is left-dislocated. The predicate A′-moves to Spec,CP. C surfaces as *la*.
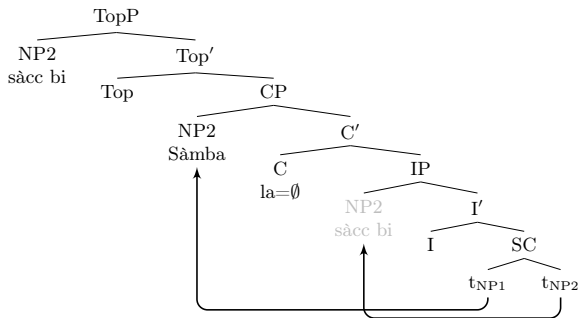
(40)   Sàmba sàcc l-a=∅.
        Samba thief *l*-C=3sg
        'Samba is a thief.'
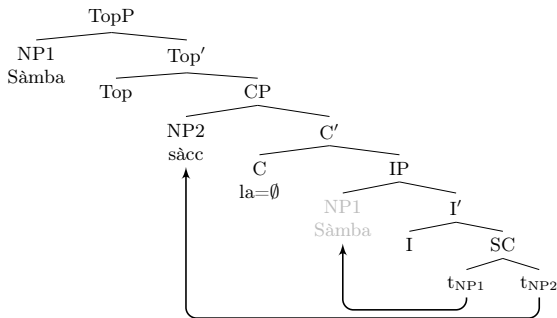
Predicate Inversion

SPECIFICATIONAL SENTENCE: The predicate raises to Spec,IP (predicate inversion) and is left-dislocated, and the subject moves directly to Spec,CP. C surfaces as *la*.
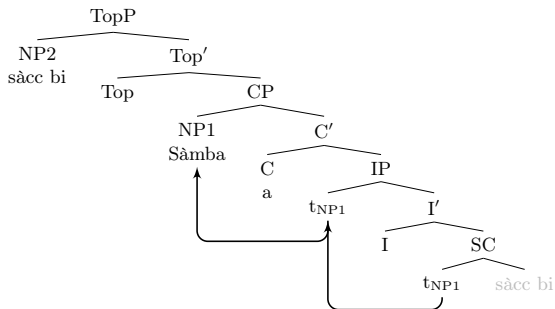
(41) Sàcc bi   Sàmba l-a=∅.
      thief the.SG Samba *l*-C=3SG
      'The thief is SAMBA.'

Predicate Inversion

Not allowed: The subject raises to Spec,IP and to Spec,CP, and the predicate is left-dislocated. C surfaces as *a*.

(42)   *Sàcc bi   SÀMBA a.
        thief the.sg Samba C
        intended: 'The thief is SAMBA.'

This is allowed in specificational pseudoclefts.

No Predicate Inversion

We can understand the data if there is no predicate inversion.

- Predicational sentences are derived as previously shown.
- Specificational sentences have a subject that's an individual concept (of type $< s, et >$), Romero 2005; Arregi et al. 2020), and a predicate that's a property of individuals concepts.
- $\Rightarrow$ Specificational sentences are not just inverted predicational sentences.

Specificational sentences with no inversion

(43)   Sàcc bi   Sàmba l-a=∅.
       thief the.sg Samba *l*-C=3sg
       'The thief is Samba.'
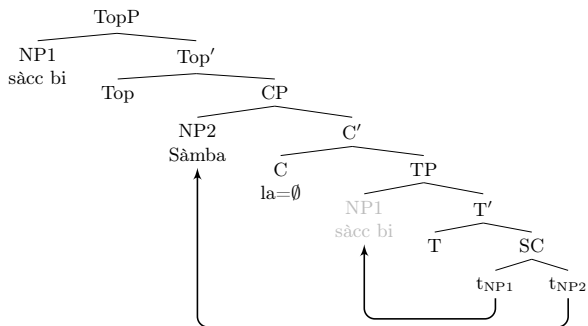
Alternative that preserves a type of inversion

Perhaps nothing must move to Spec,IP

- the referential NP moves to Spec,CP, and the non-referential NP is left-dislocated from its base position
- the non-referential NP then did not move to the subject position, and its left dislocation is irrelevant for the reversibility question

Preserving inversion

The tree diagram shows:

TopP
- NP1 (sàcc bi)
- Top′
  - Top
  - CP
    - NP2 (Sàmba)
    - C′
      - C (la=∅)
      - IP
        - I′
          - I
          - SC
            - t_{NP2}
            - t_{NP1}
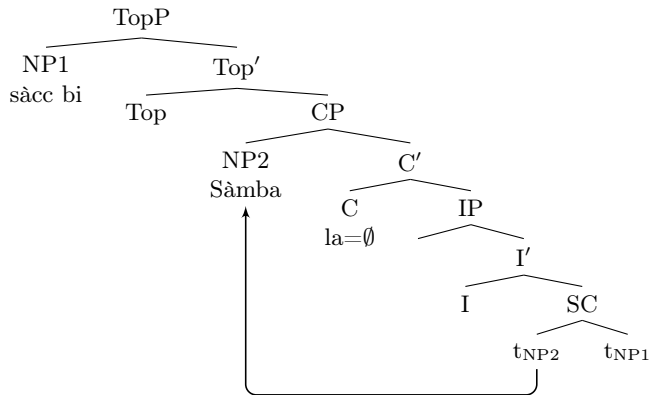
EPP is active in Wolof

The EPP appears to be active in Wolof:

- the subject must always precede elements usually taken to occur at the VP-edge (low adverbs)
- the verb always precedes these elements as well, and raises either to I or to C

Pronominalization patterns

Subject 3sg resumptive:

(44)   Xale bi$_j$,   gato$_i$ la=$\emptyset_j$ lekk t_i.
       child the.sg, cake C=3sg.s eat
       '(As for) the child, it's cake that s/he ate.'

Object 3sg resumptive:

(45)   Gato bi$_j$, démb   la=**ko**$_j$ xale yi   lekk.
       cake the.sg yesterday C=3sg.o child the.sg eat
       '(As for) the cake, it's yesterday that the child ate it.'

Predicate 3sg resumptive:

(46)   Faatu ndongo la=$\emptyset$,   Musaa nekk-u(l)=$\emptyset$=**ko**.
       Fatou student C=3sg.s, Moussa be-neg.C=3sg.s=3sg.o
       'Fatou is a student, Musaa isn't (it).'

Potential additional evidence

Definite descriptions cannot be predicates in the *NP NP la* configuration

(47)   *Yusu   Nduur   waykat bi   l-a=∅.
         Youssou N'Dour singer   the.sg   *l*-C=3sg
         'Youssou N'Dour is the singer.'

If it turns out that definite descriptions cannot be predicates in Wolof (or in general), then the predicate inversion analysis would be out, and we could understand why *a* is not possible in specificational sentences.

Restrictions in copular sentences

Additional restriction: both NPs cannot be referential:

(48)   *Clark Kent Superman l-a=∅.
        Clark Kent Superman *l*-C=3sg
        'Clark Kent is Superman.'

This can be expressed in the structure where only the subject raises to Spec,CP

(49)   Clark Kent-a di   Superman.
        Clark Kent-C cop Superman
        ' Clark Kent is Superman.'

Outline

Spec,CP: exhaustivity

A′-movement to the specifier of *(l)a* normally results in exhaustivity (Horvath 2007)

(50) Exhaustive Identification in Wolof
      Ceeb la Ayda di   lekk. #Daf-a=∅-y   lekk pataas itam.
      rice C Ayda IPFV eat   do-C=3SG-IPFV eat yam also
      'It's rice that Ayda eats. #She also eats yams.'

- In the literature, this is commonly captured via an information-structural feature on a head which triggers movement of the EI-ed constituent (such as a focus feature in Horvath 1986, 1995; Brody 1990, 1995 or the EI operator in Horvath 2007)
- A more detailed look at such languages reveals that elements that are not EI-ed can occupy the EI position.

Nominal predicates in 'focus' positions

Hausa (Green 2007; Hartmann and Zimmermann 2007):

(51)   *Exhaustive identification in Hausa* (Green 2007)
   a.   Yârā̂   sun   sàyi àbinci
        children 3PL.PF buy food
        'The children bought food.'
   b.   Abinci$_i$ (**nè**) yârā̂   sukà   sàyā̄ t$_i$
        food   FM.M children 3PL.FOC.PF buy
        'It's food that the children bought.'

(52)   *Predicational copular sentence in Hausa* (Green 2007)
       Audù ɗālìbī̄   **nè**
       Audu student.M FM.M
       'Audu is a student.'

- Green (2007) shows that nominal predicates are in the same left-peripheral positions as EI-ed elements, and that the subject has properties of a topic.
- There is no exhaustivity related to the predicate in examples such as (52).

Nominal predicates in 'focus' positions

- Hungarian famously has a pre-verbal EI position (Horvath 2007), which can be occupied by a single argument or adjunct.
- This position is 'shared' with a verbal particle; there is no information-structural effect in that case.

(53) *The preverbal position in Hungarian* (É. Kiss 2006)

   a. Péter **szét** tépte a   levelet.
       Peter apart tore   the letter
       'Peter tore the letter apart.'

   b. Péter **a   levelet**   tépte szét.
       Peter the letter.ACC tore apart
       'It was the letter that Peter tore apart.'

- This position is a left-peripheral, A′-position (Brody 1995; É. Kiss 1998; Puskás 2000; Horvath 2007)

(54) *Hungarian nominal predicate* (Hegedűs 2013, 61)
      János **orvos** lesz.
      John doctor will.be
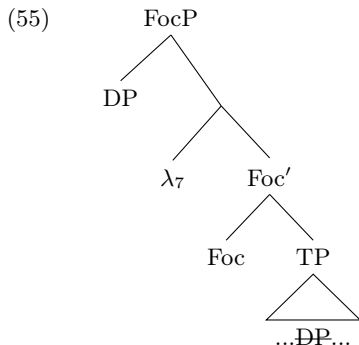   *"John will be a doctor."*

Same position or different positions?

A couple of attempts in the literature to treat the pre-verbal field as one position:

- É. Kiss (2005, 2006): exhaustivity is not encoded in the grammar, but is the result of *specificational predication* – the exhaustive reading arises when a constituent raised to the predicate position is a definite or a specific indefinite noun phrase (Huber 2000: in specificational sentences the predicate implies that its specification of the individuals that make up the set denoted by the subject is exhaustive)

- Wedgwood (2003): the position immediately preceding the tensed verb is the position of *main predication*; exhaustivity is a pragmatic effect.

Klecha and Martinović (2015)

- We aim to give a unified analysis for movement to Spec,CP that results in exhaustivity, and movement to Spec,CP of nominal predicates that does not.
- Problem:
    - In Heim & Kratzer style semantics, the head that triggers movement does no work; strictly speaking, it doesn't even take the moved element as its semantic argument, as in (55)
    - In a discourse-configurational language, it seems that we would want to give meaning to the attracting head

(55)

```
              FocP
             /    \
           DP      \
                  /  \
                λ₇    Foc'
                     /    \
                   Foc     TP
                           /\
                          /  \
                        ...DP...
```

Compositional approach to movement

- Our solution is to follow a compositional approach to movement (Sternefeld 2001; Kobele 2010; Kennedy 2014), and treat assignment functions as part of the model, which allows attracting heads to bind the traces of movement to their specifiers

- We give a particular semantics to the attracting head *la*, so that exhaustivity does not result from making the extracted phrase exhaustive, but in making the complement of the attracting head unique.

- The C hosting *la* has semantics whereby the unique individual satisfying the property denoted by its complement (the CP containing the trace of movement) has the property denoted by its specifier (the moved nominal). EI results from the moved nominal being a referential expression.

- Exhaustivity is neutralized in cases like predication, because the remnant of movement already denotes a singleton; thus making it unique is not informative.

Exhaustivity & predication

- This analysis translates (56) and (57) as (58) and (59), respectively.

(56) *Exhaustive Identification*
Musaa la=ñu   gis.
Moussa C$_{Wh}$=3PL see
"It's Moussa that they saw."

(57) *Nominal predication*
Jangalëkat la=ñu.
teacher   C$_{Wh}$=3PL
"They are teachers."

(58) The unique individual they saw has the property of being Moussa.

(59) The unique individual identical to them has the property of being a teacher.

Exhaustivity & predication

This analysis puts the burden onto the attracting head and its special semantics – this is not the happiest solution. Stay tuned.

Outline

Conclusion

Wolof specificational sentences don't show surface reversibility

- The pivot is always in Spec,CP
- The non-referential expression is always topicalized

Syntactic reversibility is present in pseudoclefts, as evidenced by the form of the complementizer.

- Either the pivot or the FR can raise to Spec,IP
- Contra den Dikken et al. (2000)

The absence of a similar effect in copular sentences can be explained under a non-inversion analysis.

Conclusion

In 'discourse-configurational' languages, A′-movement to a particular left-peripheral position usually involves exhaustivity, but nominal predicates occupy the same position.

Why is this available in Wolof, Hungarian, Hausa, but not in English? (I.e. what is the source of this variation, and can we predict it based on independent properties of a language, or is it just a variation in the lexicon?)

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