
Focus movement and criterial freezing in copular clauses in Bantu

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We discuss a case of criterial freezing that arises in particular inverse copular clauses using *that-like* complementizers in the Bantu languages Basaá and Mmaala as shown in the question-answer pairs in (1) and (2).

- (1) a. liwándá_i dʒóŋ (lĩ-jé) lĕ ndʒéé t_i Basaá
 5friend 5your 5SM-be.PRS that 1 who
 ‘Who is your friend?’ Lit. ‘*Your friend is that who?’
 b. liwándá_i dʒém (lĩ-jé) lĕ Konde t_i Basaá
 5friend 5my 5SM-be.PRS that 1Konye
 ‘My friend is KONDE.’ Lit. ‘*My friend is that Konde.’
- (2) a. ʒfēn_i wóú *(ú_i) *(n) áá aŋa t_i Mmaala.
 name your 3SG be.PRS that who
 ‘What’s your name?’ Lit. ‘*Your name is that who?’
 b. ʒfēn_i wam ú_i *(n) áá Bekem t_i Mmaala
 friend my 3SG be.PRS that Bekem
 ‘My name is BEKEM.’ Lit. ‘*My name is that Bekem.’

In (1), the copula is optional. In (2), the copula *ne* ‘be’ and the resumptive pronoun *ú* ‘s/he’ are not. The constituents following the complementizers in the inverse forms in (1)–(2) are focal. However, the canonical forms of (1)–(2) are illicit (5).

- (5) a. *ndʒéé_i (a-je) lĕ t_i liwándá dʒóŋ Basaá
 1who 1SM-be.PRS that 5friend 5your
 b. *Bekem ú_i n áá t_i ʒfēn wam Mmaala
 Bekem 3SG be.PRS that friend my

We propose that (1) and (2) are derived from a symmetric configuration in a small clause which is syntactically unstable (Moro 2000). This configuration has to be asymmetrised by focus movement of the small clause subject to a low FocP position (Belletti 2004). Assuming cartographic syntax (Rizzi 1997) and the (non)-null subjecthood of Mmaala and Basaá, low focus movement is followed by: (i) External merge of a pronominal element in the subject position (SubjP) (Cardinaletti 2004), (ii) movement of the remnant small clause to a left peripheral topic position, yielding the grammatical forms in (1) and (2). FocP being a criterial position (Rizzi 2010), further extraction of the focalised subject of the small clause violates the freezing principle, hence the low *that*-trace effects observed in (5).

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