<div align="center">

A Rizzian approach to the left periphery of Mende
ACAL 2022

</div>

In this paper I provide the first description and analisys of the left periphery of Mende (ISO 639-2 *men*), a Mande language spoken in Sierra Leone. I argue that Mende provides cross-linguistic support for Rizzi's (1997, 2001) proposed structure for the left periperhy (1).

(1) Force {Top*} Int {Top*} Foc {Top*} Fin IP/TP

Mende is canonically SOV, and all Mende plural non-pronoun subjects obligatorily have a plural pronoun, which I call a subject pronoun. I propose that SpecTP is occupied by the subject pronoun, while the subject is in a higher position, SpecFinP, which delineates the lower edge of the left periphery (2). Singular subjects have a null subject pronoun (3).

(2) **FinP**   [$_{TP}$ **S O**   **V]**
    nyapu-i-sia   *(ti) Peter nike-i   lɔ-nga
    girl-DEF-PL   3PL Peter cow-DEF.SG see-PRF
    'The girls have seen Peter's cow.'

(3) **FinP**   [$_{TP}$ **S   O**   **V]**
    nyapu-i   Ø   Peter nike-i-sia   lɔ-nga
    girl-DEF.SG 3SG Peter cow-DEF-PL see-PRF
    'The girl has seen Peter's cows.'

Focus-fronted constituents, including wh-words, move into SpecFocP, leaving a resumptive pronoun in its canonical position (4).

(4) **FocP   Foc^0 Fin**   [$_{TP}$ **S   O   V]**
    gbɛ-nga mia   nyapu-i   ø   ti   lɔ-nga
    what-PL FOC   girl-DEF.SG   3SG 3PL see-PRF
    'What (PL) has the girl seen?'

In (4) the plural-marked question *gbɛ-nga* 'what' moves from its pre-verbal position into SpecFocP, headed by *mia*, leaving the 3rd person plural resumptive pronoun *ti* in the canonical object position.

Topicalized consituents can both precede and follow focused constituents, as seen in (5) where the topic *Peter va* 'as for Peter' precedes the wh-expression in FocP, which precedes the second topic *ngi nikeisia* 'his cows.'

(5) **TopP   FocP Foc^0 TopP   Fin   [$_{TP}$S   O   V   X]**
    Peter va, mindo mia, ngi nike-i-sia,   nyapu-i   ø   ti   lɔ-nga na
    Peter for, where FOC   3SG cow-DEF-PL girl-DEF.SG   3SG 3PL see-PRF LOC
    'As for Peter, where is it, his cows, the girl has seen them?'

Interrogative also precedes focus in Mende, as seen in the embedded question in (6), where *ina* 'whether' precedes the focused constituent.

(6)   **IntP FocP   Foc^0 FinP   [$_{TP}$ S   O   V]**
    ngi mɔli-nga ina   nike-i-sia   mia nyapu-i   ø   ti   lɔ-nga
    1SG ask-PRF if   cow-DEF-PL FOC girl-DEF.SG   3SG 3PL see-PRF
    'I had asked if it is the cows that the girl had seen.'

Finally, force precedes Int, as seen in (7) where the complementizer *kɛ* precedes interrogative *ina*.

(7) **ForceP IntP FocP   Foc⁰ FinP   [$_{TP}$ S   O   V]**
ngi mɔli-nga kɛ   ina nike-i-sia mia nyapu-i   ø ti lɔ-nga]
1SG ask-PRF C   if   cow-DEF-PL FOC girl-DEF.SG 3SG 3PL see-PRF
'I had asked if it is the cows that the girl had seen.'

Based on fieldwork with native speakers in Bo, Sierra Leone, this data provides important support for Rizzi's analysis. To my knowledge this is the first generative syntax analysis of the left periphery of a language in the Mande family. As such it provides an important contribution to the understanding of information structure and provides a baseline for future research on Mande languages.

References

Güldemann, T. S. Zerbian, and M. Zimmerman. 2015. Variation in Information Structure with Special Reference to Africa. *Annual Review of Linguistics(1)*: 1, pp. 155-178.

Rizzi, L. 1997. The fine structure of the left periphery. In *Elements of Grammar.* ed. By L. Haegmen. pp. 281-337. Dordrecht: Kluwer Publications.

Rizzi, L., 2001. On the position "Int (errogative)" in the left periphery of the clause. *Current studies in Italian syntax: Essays offered to Lorenzo Renzi*, *59*, pp.287-296. Oxford: Elsevier.