

Closely related languages, different focus architectures

Overview

My goals for this talk are the following: (i) to illustrate the focus architecture of *Jula of Tougan*, an undocumented variety of Jula (Manding subgroup); (ii) to compare it with that of Bambara, also a Manding language; (iii) to reflect on how closely related languages differ when it comes to organizing their focus space.

Bambara (BAM)

BAM has several particles associated with focus (see Prokhorov 2014): high-tone *de*, which immediately follows a constituent in narrow focus, irrespectively of whether this is a subject, an object, the verb or an adjunct (1). Low-tone *dε* (2), which appears sentence-finally and places emphasis on the truth of a sentence. Finally, sentence-final *kε* (3), often used in answers to polarity questions to mark the answer as obvious. I take *dε* and *kε* to be markers of polarity focus.

- 1) A ye saga de faga
 He ASP sheep PRT slaughter
- 2) A ka jan dε!
 He ASP tall PRT
- 3) N- b=a fe kε!
 I-ASP=it want PRT

Jula

The variety of Jula (JUL) I describe is spoken around Tougan (North-West of Burkina Faso). While BAM is a *wh*-in-situ language, in JUL *wh*- phrases may either front or remain in situ. If the former, they are followed by the particle *lo* (4). *lo* is not peculiar to *wh*- questions: it also appears in presentational focus constructions, for instance in answers to *wh*- questions (5). Note that in the same environment, BAM uses *don* (6). Finally, in JUL *lo* is also used to mark term focus (7); recall that in those same environments, BAM uses *de*. Just like BAM, on the other hand, JUL uses the particles *kε* and *dε* to mark polarity focus.

- 4) Mu lo i ka dumu?
 What PRT you ASP eat?
- 5) A: Who is it?
 B: Drabo lo
 ‘It’s Drabo’
- 6) Drabo don
- 7) A ye saga lo faga
 He ASP sheep PRT slaughter

What is *lo*?

Similarly to Schwarz (2007) and his analysis of the particle *ne* in Kikuyu, I take *lo* to be a focus marker rather than the sentence’s copula. This is on the basis of the existence of a dedicated way of realizing copular structures in JUL, illustrated in (8); in (8), the copula (*yi*) fully inflects for number and tense. A “*lo*” structure may be used in place of (8) only if the event expressed is in the present tense, exactly like in Kikuyu. I equally reject a cleft marker analysis of *lo* (à la Bergvall 1987), since “*lo*” structures lack all markings of bi-clausal structures (compare for example with Nguni, Sabel & Zeller 2006).

- 8) Seydou yi tche ye
 Seydou COP man PRT
 ‘Seydou is a man’

Different Focus Spaces

BAM and JUL are mutually intelligible and part of the same linguistic subgroup, yet they organize their focus spaces differently. While BAM has a dedicated focus marker for presentational foci, JUL resorts to a unique particle to express both presentational and information/corrective focus.

In both BAM and JUL, the main distinction is that between term and polarity focus; neither language has a dedicated focus strategy to mark corrective vs information term focus, as it is the case in other languages (Bianchi, Bocci and Cruschina 2015). Jula's more minimal focus space further emphasizes this distinction by resorting to a single particle to mark *all* types of term focus.

Selected References

- Bergvall, V. (1987) *Focus in Kikuyu and universal grammar*. Ph.D. diss., Harvard University.
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- Sabel, J., & Zeller, J. (2006). Wh-question formation in Nguni. *Selected proceedings of the 35th annual conference on African linguistics* (pp. 271-283). Somerville: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.
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