Pragmatic demarking of clefts: When and where?

Corinna Handschuh
(based on joined research with Christian Rapold)

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Some old news
The grammaticalization of clefts to basic declarative clauses

predicate nominal (copula) + relative clause
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[Diagram]

cleft + subordinate clause
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- Predicate nominal (copula) + Relative clause
- Cleft + Subordinate clause
- Pragmatically marked clause
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- predicate nominal (copula) + relative clause
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- Predicate nominal (copula) + Relative clause
  → Cleft + Subordinate clause
  → Pragmatically marked clause
  → Basic declarative clause
Outline

1. Introduction
2. Agar Dinka
3. Evidence from other languages
4. Conclusion
preposed nominals (with case identical to predicate nominal) are an pragmatically marked option in a number of (otherwise) verb-initial languages (Handschoh 2014: Chapter 5)

tendency for alternative word-orders in verb-initial languages is well-known (eg. Payne 1990: 11)
explanations are often based on (synchronic) pragmatics (e.g. “old information precedes new information”)
we propose a diachronic explanation via the grammaticalization of clefts
pragmatically marked cleft constructions may even develop further to unmarked sentences (Rapold 2007)
Demarking of clefts
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From pragmatically marked to unmarked
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Two clause types in Agar Dinka (Nilotic)
Where is the relative clause?

(1) a. jóŋá cè mét câam
    dog.CASE1 PRF child eat:NFIN

    b. jó á=cè mét câam
    dog.CASE2 ?=PRF child eat:NFIN

Andersen (1991: 289)
Two clause types in Agar Dinka (Nilotic)
Where is the relative clause?

(1)  a. jón cè mèt cåam
dog.ANTGEN PRF child eat:NFIN
‘the dog which has bitten the child’

b. jó à=cè mèt cåam
dog.ZERO DECL=PRF child eat:NFIN
‘The dog has bitten the child.’

Andersen (1991: 289)
Demarking of clefts
Agar Dinka

Structure of declarative clauses

Template of simple declarative clauses:

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<th>$V_{fin}$</th>
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(adapted from Andersen 2007: 91)

- declarative clauses are topic-initial, non-declarative (imperatives and interrogatives) and subordinate clauses are usually verb-initial
- declarative marker (DECL) agrees with the topic in number
- topics are in the zero-coded case (Absolutive), any argument/adjunct can be topic (omitted from usual position)
- finite verb agrees with the (non-topical) subject in person and number
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Agreement with topic and subject

(2) a. \( \tilde{a}=\tilde{c} \tilde{a} \tilde{l} \) \( \tilde{m} \tilde{e} \tilde{t} \) \\
DECL=call child \\
‘He/she is calling the child.’

b. \( \tilde{a}a=\tilde{c} \tilde{a} \tilde{l} \) \( \tilde{m} \tilde{e} \tilde{t} \) \\
DECL.PL=call child \\
‘They are calling the child.’

c. \( \tilde{m} \tilde{e} \tilde{t} \) \( \tilde{a}=\tilde{c} \tilde{a} \tilde{a} \tilde{a} \) \\
child DECL=call.1SG \\
‘I am calling the child.’

d. \( \tilde{m} \tilde{e} \tilde{t} \) \( \tilde{a}=\tilde{c} \tilde{a} \tilde{l} \)-k`u \\
child DECL=call-1PL \\
‘We are calling the child.’

Andersen (1991: 274, 275)
The copula as possible source for DECL

\[(3) \quad \text{a. } \text{cóol } \text{èe } \text{mòc.} \\
\quad \text{Chol DECL.be man} \\
\quad \text{‘Chol is a man.’} \\
\text{b. } \text{cóol } \text{à=cé } \text{àa } \text{mòc.} \\
\quad \text{Chol DECL=PRF be.NFIN man} \\
\quad \text{‘Chol has become a man.’} \\
\text{c. } \text{ôok } \text{àa } \text{ròor} \\
\quad \text{1PL DECL.PL.be man.PL} \\
\quad \text{‘We are men.’} \]

From cleft to declarative clause
points supporting the analysis for Dinka

- case-form of topic = nominal predicate (Absolutive/Zero)
- declarative clauses = relative clauses + declarative marker
- topic-initial word-order appears to be an innovation based on the following evidence

**language internal:** other clause types (imperatives, interrogatives, subordinate) are usually verb-initial, Gjerlow-Johnson & Ayom (1986: 172) argue for VSO as underlying word order in Bor variety

**comparative:** verb-initial word order has been suggested for Proto-Nilotic (Rottland 1979, Vossen 1983), but see also Nyombe (1996)

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Demonstrative to agreement in Benchnon (Omotic)

- Rapold (2007) argues that the “indicative final” agreement markers originate in a (distal) demonstrative pronoun via a cleft structure.
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I this man (who) saw the child.
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II man who saw the child.
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Demarking of clefts
Evidence from other languages

Other languages discussed in Rapold (2007)

Tamazight (Berber): cleft-demarking started
Amharic (Ethio-Semitic): still pragmatically marked, textual frequency is rapidly increasing
Breton (Celtic): argued to have changes basic word order through demarking of clefts
Northern Swahili (Bantu): restricted to ‘to come’ and ‘to go’ (marking new ‘present continuous’ tense)
Ngazija (Bantu): evolved into present tense (applicable to activity verbs only)
Wolof (Atlantic): perfect tense is hypothesized to derive from cleft construction
Kinyamwezi (Bantu): most past and perfective tenses derived from relative verb forms (probably through clefts)
Japanese: non-past verbs are derived from cleft construction
Pathways from pragmatically marked to unmarked
Final remarks and open questions

- grammaticalization of standard declarative sentences from a pragmatically marked cleft structure is plausible for Agar Dinka, Benchnon, and other languages
- loss of emphatic power is well attested for negation (cf. research on the “Jespersen Cycle”, Jespersen 1917)
- tendency of emphatic power to be lost can also be explained along the lines of the invisible hand theory (Keller 1994) and the maxims of extravagance and conformity (Haspelmath 1999: 1005)
- the data suggest a loss of pragmatically marked status is particularly common in tenses/aspects that are linked to the present moment, the present/non-past tense and perfect respectively
Demarking of clefts

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