

# Three subject asymmetries in Limbum

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# Structure of the talk

- ❖ (Very) short background on Limbum
- ❖ An apparent Anti-Agreement effect
- ❖ Pronouns, resumption, and agreement
- ❖ Focus and movement
- ❖ Conclusion

# Background on Limbum

- ❖ Grassfields Bantu (Niger-Congo) language spoken in the North Western region of Cameroon.
- ❖ About 73 000–90 000 (Fransen 1995: 21) / 130 000 (according to a 2005 census, Eberhard et al. 2019).
- ❖ There are three level tones: H, M, L (1)

(1)	H:	mí	‘in’, ‘on’
	M:	tū	‘head’
	L:	rò	‘stream’

and five contour tones: HL, ML, LL (low falling), HM, LM (Fransen 1995: 73)<sup>1</sup>

(2)	HL:	shwâ	‘weaver’
	ML:	bz̩	‘co-wife’
	LL:	ɲkf̩	‘bachelor’
	HM:	kúū	‘funnel’
	LM:	sòō	‘basket’

<sup>1</sup>HM and LM only occur on syllables with long vowels.

# Limbum syntax

- ❖ Limbum's basic word order is S-TAM-V-O-Adv (3)

(3) Njínwè fō à mū yē bó fō nìnkòr.<sup>2</sup>  
 woman DET SM PST2 see children DET yesterday  
 'The woman saw the children yesterday.'

- ❖ Adverbs and (question) particles are always clause-final.
- ❖ DPs are head-final.
- ❖ The subject is doubled by a subject marker (SM) immediately preceding the TAM-element in some TAMs (e.g. all three past tenses; present progressive).

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# The Anti-Agreement Effect (AAE)

- ❖ Regular subject agreement-marking (typically on a verbal element) is lost when the subject is questioned, relativized, or otherwise  $\bar{A}$ -moved (Ouhalla 1993, 2005). The verbal element appears in a special/reduced/bare form.



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- (4) a. man tamghart ay **yzrin** (\*t-zra) Mohand.  
 which woman COMP see.PTCP (\*3FEM.SG-saw) Mohand  
 ‘Which woman saw Mohand.’
- b. tamghart nni **yzrin** (\*t-zra) Mohand.  
 woman COMP see.PTCP (\*3FEM.SG-saw) Mohand  
 ‘The woman who sw Mohand.’
- c. tamghart-a ay **yzrin** (\*t-zra) Mohand.  
 woman-this COMP see.PTCP (\*3FEM.SG-saw) Mohand  
 ‘It was this woman who saw Mohand.’ (Berber, Ouhalla 1993: 479)

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- ❖ More recently, this agreement-loss has been shown to be neither related to  $\bar{A}$ -movement nor restricted to subject-marking (see Baier 2018).

# Apparent AAE in Limbum

- ❖ The subject marker  $\grave{a}$  (5a) is dropped in  $\bar{A}$ -movement contexts such as focalization (5b), wh-questions (5c), and relativization (5d), where a resumptive pronoun  $\acute{i}$  occurs.<sup>3</sup>

- (5) a. Nfór  $\grave{a}$  mū zhé bzhí.  
 Nfor SM PST2 eat food  
 ‘Nfor ate food.’
- b. Á Nfór<sub>1</sub> cí  $\acute{i}$ <sub>1</sub>  $\emptyset$  mū zhé bzhí.  
 FOC Nfor COMP 3SG.RP PST2 eat food  
 ‘Nfor<sub>F</sub> ate food.’ (new information focus)
- c. Á ndá<sub>1</sub> cí  $\acute{i}$ <sub>1</sub>  $\emptyset$  mū zhé bzhí (à).  
 FOC who COMP 3SG.RP PST2 eat food Q  
 ‘Who ate food?’
- d. Mè rìj njínwè<sub>1</sub> [ zhì  $\acute{i}$ <sub>1</sub>  $\emptyset$  cí yē ŋgwē fō ]  
 1SG know woman REL 3SG.RP PROG see dog DEF  
 ‘I know the woman who is seeing the dog.’

<sup>3</sup>See Becker et al. (to appear) for arguments that the  $\acute{a}$  construction is not a biclausal cleft but rather involves a monoclausal movement structure.

# AAE in Bantu languages

- ❖ AAE in Limbum, a Grassfields Bantu language, would not come as a huge surprise, as quite a few Bantu languages have been reported to exhibit an AAE (e.g. Bemba, Cheng 2006; Kinande, Schneider-Zioga 2007; Dzamba, Henderson 2013, Lubukusu, Diercks 2010).
- (6) a. Umulumendo **a**-ka-belenga ibuku.  
 1boy                    1SM-FUT-read 5book  
 ‘The boy will read the book.’
- b. Umulumendo ú-**u**/\***a**-ka-belenga                    ibuku  
 1boy                    1REL-AAE/\*1SM-FUT-read 5book  
 ‘the boy who will read the book’                    (*Bemba*, Cheng 2006: 197)
- (7) a. Kambale **a**-alangira Marya.  
 Kambale AGR-saw    Mary  
 ‘Kambale saw Mary.’
- b. Iyondi yo **u**/\***a**-alangira Marya?  
 who    that AAE/\*AGR-saw Mary  
 ‘Who saw Mary?’                    (*Kinande*, Schneider-Zioga 2007: 404)

# An immediate problem for Ouhalla's (1993) analysis

- ❖ Ouhalla (1993): Agreement identifies a pro in the subject gap. → Pro is bound by subject in SpecCP, violating Aoun and Li's (1990)  $\bar{A}$ -disjointness requirement<sup>4</sup>  
→ agreement drops to not identify pro.

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<sup>4</sup>A pronoun must be  $\bar{A}$ -free (cannot be bound by an antecedent in an  $\bar{A}$ -position) in the smallest Complete Functional Complex which contains it.

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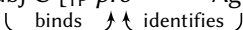
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- (8) a. [CP Subj C [TP *pro* Agr-T VP ]] violates  $\bar{A}$ -disjointness  
           └── binds ─┘ └── identifies ─┘
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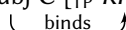
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b. [CP Subj C [TP *t*  $\emptyset$ -T VP ]] no violation of  $\bar{A}$ -disjointness

- ❖ **Problem:** There is an overt pronoun *í* that is bound by the subject. Agreement is not the reason for identifying a pronoun in SpecTP. Nonetheless, agreement is dropped.

(9) [CP Subj C [TP *RP*  $\emptyset$ -T VP ]] violates  $\bar{A}$ -disjointness  


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# Long-distance displacements

- ❖ The effect also occurs in long-distance dependencies.

- (10) a. Mūnjē fō à mū lā [CP í-nē njínwè fō à mū yē  
 girl DET SM PST2 say 3SG-COMP woman DET SM PST2 see  
 bō fō].  
 children DET  
 ‘The girl said that the woman saw the children.’
- b. Á ndá cí mūnjē fō à mū lā [CP í-nē í ∅ mū  
 FOC who COMP girl DET SM PST2 say 3SG-COMP 3SG.RP PST2  
 yē bō fō à ]?  
 see children DET Q  
 ‘Who did the girl say saw the children.’
- c. Á njínwè fō cí mūnjē fō à mū lā [CP í-nē í  
 FOC woman DET COMP girl DET SM PST2 say 3SG-COMP 3SG.RP  
 ∅ mū yē bō fō.  
 PST2 see children DET  
 ‘The woman<sub>F</sub>, the girl said saw the children.’



# Pronouns

- ❖ Some support for analyzing *í* as a resumptive pronoun: It also serves as a regular 3rd singular animate subject pronoun.
- ❖ The marker *à* doesn't occur in the pronominal paradigm.

(11) Subject (resumptive) pronouns

	SG	PL
1	mè	wèr
1incl	–	sì
2	wè	yì
3anim	í	wōyè
3inan		bv̄f̄

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- ❖ Question: If **à** and **í** are different kinds of things, why do they not cooccur in the examples we've seen so far?

# Subject marking with NPs and pronouns

- ❖ In fact, singular pronouns never cooccur with the subject marker à (12a), only local person plural pronouns (12b) and singular NPs do (12c).

- (12) a. Mè/wè/í (\*à) mū fàʔ.  
 1SG/2SG/3SG (\*SM) PST2 work  
 I/you(sg.)/(s)he worked.
- b. Wèr/sì/yì \*(à) mū fàʔ.  
 1PL.E/1PL.I/2PL \*(SM) PST2 work  
 ‘We(exc)/we(inc)/you(pl) worked.’
- c. Nfor \*(à) mū fàʔ.  
 Nfor \*(SM) PST2 work  
 ‘Nfor worked.’

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- (13) Subject marking paradigm

	sg	pl
Pronouns	1 ∅ à	2 ∅ à
	3 ∅	
NPs	à	

# Subject marking with NPs and pronouns (cont'd)

- ❖ 3rd plural pronouns and NPs occur with an exclusive plural subject marker **ó**.

- (14) a. Wōyè **\*(ó)** mū fà?  
 3PL \*(SM) PST2 work  
 'They worked.'
- b. Bō fō **\*(ó)** mū zhé bzhí.  
 children DET \*(SM) PST2 eat food  
 'The children ate food.'

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- (15) Subject marking paradigm

	sg	pl
Pronouns	1	∅ à
	2	∅ à
	3	∅ ó
NPs	à	ó

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(15) Subject marking paradigm

	sg	pl
Pronouns	1	∅ à
	2	∅ à
	3	∅ ó
NPs	à	ó

- (16) a. /∅/ ↔ [pron, sg]  
 b. /ó/ ↔ [3pl]  
 c. /à/ ↔ [ ]

# The apparent AAE explained

- ❖ If movement leaves an overt (resumptive) pronoun in the base position and this pronoun independently cannot cooccur with a subject marker, the latter's lack under movement is expected.

(17)  $\hat{A}$  Nfor<sub>1</sub> cí í<sub>1</sub>  $\emptyset$  mū zhé bzhí.  
 FOC Nfor COMP 3SG.RP PST2 eat food  
 'Nfor<sub>F</sub> ate food.'



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- ❖ If a pronoun itself is moved it also leaves a resumptive pronoun behind which behaves as expected: SG pronouns lack SM (18a), PL local person pronouns show it (18b).

(18) a.  $\hat{A}$  mè/wè/í cí mè/wè/í (\*à) mū fà?  
 FOC 1SG/2SG/3SG COMP 1SG/2SG/3SG (\*SM) PST2 work  
 'I/you(sg)/(s)he<sub>F</sub> worked.'

b.  $\hat{A}$  wèr/sì/yì cí wèr/sì/yì \*(à) mū fà?  
 FOC 1PL.EXC/1PL.INC/2PL COMP 1PL.EXC/1PL.INC/2PL \*(SM) PST2 work  
 'We(exc)/we(inc)/you(pl)<sub>F</sub> worked.'

# A further asymmetry

- ❖ When a plural NP or 3rd plural pronoun undergo movement, however, no resumptive pronoun is left behind, only the subject marker **ó** is stranded.

- (19) a. *Á bō fō cí Nfor à mū lā í-nē \*wōyè/ó mū zhé bzhí.*  
 FOC children DET C Nfor SM PST2 say 3SG-C \*3PL.RP/SM PST2 eat food  
 ‘The children<sub>F</sub>, Nfor said, ate food.’
- b. *Á wōyè cí Nfor à mū lā í-nē \*wōyè/ó mū zhé bzhí.*  
 FOC 3PL C Nfor SM PST2 say 3SG-C 3PL.RP/SM PST2 eat food  
 ‘They<sub>F</sub>, Nfor said, ate food.’

# The pattern resulting from movement

(20)

subject person/number	resumptive pronoun	subject marker
singular	✓	—
1st & 2nd plural	✓	✓
3rd plural	—	✓

# Coordination

- ❖ How does the subject marker react to coordinated subject and appositives?

(21) *NP-pronoun coordinations: Resolved agreement*

[ŋwè rlo fɔ́ bá wè]<sub>2pl</sub> à mū zhé ba.  
 person prayer the and you(sg.) 3SG.SM PST2 eat fufu  
 ‘The reverend and you ate fufu.’

(22) *Pronoun-pronoun coordinations: Resolved agreement*

[Wè bá mɛ́]<sub>1pl</sub> à mū zhé ba.  
 2SG and 1SG SM PST2 eat fufu  
 ‘You(sg.) and I ate fufu.’

(23) *NP-NP coordinations: Resolved agreement*

[ŋwè rlo bá yà bàá]<sub>3pl</sub> ó mū zhé ba.  
 person prayer and my father SM PST2 eat fufu  
 ‘The reverend and my father ate fufu.’

# Appositives

- (24) Mè, ñwè m-lí, à mū yε'ni n-lí nfi.  
 I person PL-language, 3SG.SM PST2 learn SG-language new  
 'I, a linguist, learned a new language.'
- (25) a. Mè zhi mè rìj à tá bɔr kaʔ, mè ∅ mū maʔ ñkwa ñìkòr.  
 1SG REL 1SG know to play ball not 1SG PST2 shoot net yesterday  
 'I, who is a really bad football player, shot a goal yesterday.'
- b. Wèr zhi wèr rìj à tá bɔr kaʔ, wèr à mū so mbàñ  
 1PL.EXC REL 1PL.EXC know to play ball not 1PL.EXC SM PST2 win game  
 ñìkòr.  
 yesterday  
 'We, who are really bad football players, won the match yesterday.'

# Agree?

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Recently, Weisser (to appear) has proposed a number of tentative diagnostics to tease agreement apart from allomorphy.

- ❖ **Trigger:** Agreement targets elements with certain features (e.g. case, polarity); Allomorphy triggered by positions (linear or structural)
- ❖ **Adjacency:** plays a role for allomorphy but not so much for agreement
- ❖ **Inventory of alternating forms:** is higher in agreement paradigms but restricted to two or three for allomorphy
- ❖ **Features:** Agreement alternations governed by features relevant to the syntactic head, Allomorphy alternations governed by features not immediately relevant (e.g. categorial features)
- ❖ **Interactions:** Agreement should be unaffected by post-syntactic operations like ellipsis, Allomorphy is bled by ellipsis of the trigger
- ❖ **Generalizations** about agreement

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- ❖ **Features:** Pronoun vs. full NP/DP plays a role. Is that a categorial distinction? Or one of  $\phi$ -features?
- ❖ **Interactions:** There is no subject-drop/ellipsis
- ❖ **Generalizations:** Afaik, there is no other domain of purported agreement.

# Interaction of *cí* and *à/í*

❖ Consider the following paradigm.

- (26) a. Nfor \**í/à*            *mū fà?*  
 Nfor \*3SG.RP/SM PST2 work  
 ‘Nfor worked.’
- b. *Á* Nfor *í/à*            *mū fà?*  
 FOC Nfor 3SG.RP/SM PST2 work  
 ‘Nfor<sub>F</sub> worked.’
- c. *Á* Nfor *cí*    *í/\*à*            *mū fà?*  
 FOC Nfor COMP 3SG.RP/\*SM PST2 work  
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 Nfor \*3SG.RP/SM PST2 work  
 ‘Nfor worked.’
- b. *Á* Nfor *í/à*            *mū fàʔ*.  
 FOC Nfor 3SG.RP/SM PST2 work  
 ‘Nfor<sub>F</sub> worked.’
- c. *Á* Nfor *cí*    *í/\*à*            *mū fàʔ*.  
 FOC Nfor COMP 3SG.RP/\*SM PST2 work  
 ‘Nfor<sub>F</sub> worked.’

(27)

	FOCUS	<i>cí</i>	SM/RP
	—	—	<i>à</i>
	✓	—	<i>à, í</i>
	✓	✓	<i>í</i>



# Analysis

- ❖ *í* is the result of movement of the subject.
- ❖ *cí* is an optionally overt realization of a Foc head (Becker et al. to appear) or presence of a Foc head is optional
- ❖ *à* is the subject marker when the subject stays in situ.

# Analysis (cont'd)

Putting it together:

- ❖ (27a): Subject stays in situ → à; \*í because there is no movement

(27a) [CP [TP Nfor à mū [VP fà? ]]]

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(27a) [CP [TP Nfor à mū [VP fàʔ ]]]

- ❖ (27c): Subject moves to SpecFocP → í; \*à b/c movement indicated by cí

(27c) [CP [FocP á Nfor cí [TP í ∅ mū [VP fàʔ ]]]]

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- ❖ (27c): Subject moves to SpecFocP → í; \*à b/c movement indicated by cí

(27c) [CP [FocP á Nfor cí [TP í ∅ mū [VP fàʔ ]]]]

- ❖ (27b): Ambiguous structure: (i) Foc-marked subject stays in situ → à

(27b-i) [CP [TP á Nfor à mū [VP fàʔ ]]]

# Analysis (cont'd)

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- ❖ (27a): Subject stays in situ → à; \*í because there is no movement

(27a) [CP [TP Nfor à mū [VP fà? ]]]

- ❖ (27c): Subject moves to SpecFocP → í; \*à b/c movement indicated by cí

(27c) [CP [FocP á Nfor cí [TP í ∅ mū [VP fà? ]]]]

- ❖ (27b): Ambiguous structure: (i) Foc-marked subject stays in situ → à

(27b-i) [CP [TP á Nfor à mū [VP fà? ]]]

(ii) Foc-marked subject moves but Foc remains unrealized → í

(27b-ii) [CP [FocP á Nfor [TP í ∅ mū [VP fà? ]]]]

# Consequences

Focus-marking can take place in situ (for (27b)) with movement into SpecFocP being optional.

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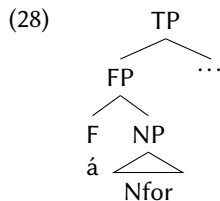
Focus-marking can take place in situ (for (27b)) with movement into SpecFocP being optional.

- ❖ incompatible with approaches where focus-marking is tied to movement to a particular position in the left periphery (Rizzi 1997; Cinque 1999, and others).

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- ❖ corroborates a proposal by Becker et al. (to appear): Foc-particle head F combines with the focussed constituent in situ (see also question particles in Japanese, Sinhala, and Tlingit Hagstrom 1998; Kishimoto 2005; Cable 2010; and focus fronting in Hungarian Horvath 2007, 2010, 2013).

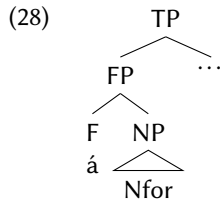




# Consequences

Focus-marking can take place in situ (for (27b)) with movement into SpecFocP being optional.

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- ❖ pace Becker et al. (to appear), movement of FP/presence of Foc head must be optional

# Conclusion

- ❖ I presented three asymmetries within subjects in Limbum.
- ❖ Singular pronouns show no overt subject marker whereas singular NPs and plural pronouns and NPs do.
- ❖ Extraction of the subject usually leaves a resumptive pronoun except in case it is 3rd person plural.
- ❖ Focus marked subjects may occur with either the resumptive pronoun *í* or the subject marker *à* while non-focussed subjects only allow for *à* and focussed subjects with *cí* only allow for *í*.

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