Focus sensitivity and the Antisymmetry theory of syntax in Kusaal

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Introduction: The premise upon which the association between a focus sensitive particle (FSP) and its focus associate is established is usually c-command (Büring & Hartmann 2001, Beaver & Clark 2008, König 1991, Tancredi 1990, Erlewine 2014). This has been called the *Principle of Lexical Association (PLA)* by Tancredi (1990). PLA says that "an operator like *only* must be associated with a lexical constituent in its c-command domain." (Tancredi 1990:30) (see also Büirng & Hartmann's (2001) *Particle Theory*). Kayne's (1994) *Linear Correspondence Axiom* (LCA) proposes a correspondence between syntactic hierarchy and linear order of words. PLA coupled with Kayne's (1994) antisymmetry theory of syntax require that the FSP asymmetrically c-commands its focus associate. This is typical for languages like English and German where the FSP *only* precedes the focus associate. However, in many African languages, the FSP *only* follows the focus associate that it c-commands (in a phrase-final position). Take for instance, the Kusaal example in (1). The exclusive particle *ma'aa* associates with its focus associate to its left. This poses a challenge for the antisymmetry theory of syntax which wants the c-commander to be to the left of what is c-commanded. Therefore, the goal of my talk is to propose a syntactic analysis that seeks to solve the challenge posed by association with focus in Kusaal to the antisymmetry theory of syntax.

Data and observation: To begin with, Kusaal (Mabia) marks focus morphosyntactically. The focused constituent can be realized either in an in-situ position or an ex-situ. Each of these positions has a dedicated morphological focus marker when a non-subject is focused. In (2a) for instance, the direct object focus is dislocated to the left periphery followed by the ex-situ focus marker *ka*. (2b) on the other hand, shows that the direct object can remain in-situ, with a different (optional) focus marker *nɛ* affixed to the main verb.

In an association with focus context, the FSP *ma'aa* immediately follows an argument focus associate. This can be in an in-situ position (3a) or an ex-situ position (3b). The presence and position of the FSP *ma'aa* give an exclusive reading where out of all the contextually salient alternatives triggered by the focus, the proposition is only true iff what Adam slaughtered is a fowl, and nothing else. The question, however, is how the association is realized. This is usually via c-command. The data, however, show that *ma'aa* does not seem to c-command its focus associate; at least asymmetrically.

The position of the in-situ focus marker is of particular interest to the theme of the workshop because the focus marker is suffixed to the verb. In such a case, the in-situ constituent is marked as focus by *nɛ* on the verb. I assume that this takes place via agreement. There are two focus projections (FocPs). One is in the left periphery, and the other is realized in the clause-internal periphery. While ex-situ focus Agrees and then moves to the specifier of the former (due to the presence of an EPP feature), in-situ focus only serves as the agreement goal of Foc (the probe, with no EPP feature). This is how the focus semantic value of the focused constituent is realized. It can then serve as an associate to the FSP.

Analysis and discussion: Different possibilities have been proposed to account for such surface right-headed or right adjoined particles. One possibility is to assume that the FSP does not need c-command the focus associate at all. Another possibility is to associate through reconstruction. This is what is found in topicalization in German and Dutch, for example (cf. Erlewine 2014, Barbiers 1995 and Jacobs 1983). Thus, the FSP can c-command the lower copy of a moved focus associate (cf. Carsten & Zeller 2020). I argue that non of the listed possibilities suffices for association with focus in Kusaal. Beginning with the second possibility, the strong version of the PLA requires that the FSP c-commands the highest copy of the focus associate in the case where there are multiple copies of the latter (Erlewine 2014:115, Carsten & Zeller 2020:207). Thus, the highest copy of the focus associate in Kusaal is still to the left of the FSP, and the challenge to antisymmetry theory remains unresolved. Similarly, unlike German and Dutch, the FSP cannot be stranded within the clause while the focus

associate moves to the left periphery. For example, the sentence in (4) is ungrammatical because the focus associate *nua* has been moved to the left periphery while the FSP *ma'aa* remains in-situ. In fact, this is not possible because both the FSP and the focus associate form a constituent in what is an adnominal adjunction of the FSP to the associate, and must always move together (compare 3b and 4). Although the first possibility might not be a challenge for antisymmetry theory, it leaves the question of how association with focus is defined or realized between the FSP and the focus associate.

The solution that I propose is that *ma'aa* is a particle that is not constrained by the LCA. In other words, the right-adjoined particle is an adjunct that can c-command its focus associate to its left. In fact, this is similar to what Carstens & Zeller (2020) assume for Zulu and Xhosa particles *kuphela/qha* ('only'). Also, Takano (2003) argues that some cases of rightward positioning of adjuncts in English evade antisymmetric view of syntax. Not only FSP *ma'aa*, but also postnominal adjectival modifiers, demonstratives and definite article seems to be base-generated to the right of the nominals that they modify. This shows that adjuncts and/or modifiers are not generally attached to the left of the constituents that they c-command. The association with verb focus in (5) is another evidence for a right adjoined position because Kusaal is an SVO language with the verb canonically to the left of *ma'aa*. It could not have been a complement of *ma'aa* that has moved to a higher position to the left of the FSP. **Conclusion:**The FSP *ma'aa* in Kusaal behaves like adjuncts that have been reported to not be constrained by the LCA. In fact, Kayne (1994: 15), himself, says that "specifiers and adjoined phrases appear to have no place in the theory (of LCA)." Such is the case of *ma'aa* with regards to antisymmetry syntax. It can c-command the focus associate to its left. Thus, this empirical finding contributes to the body of research that shows the non-universality of the antisymmetry syntax.

(1) *Adam kɔdig-nɛ* ***nua ma'aa***.
A. kill.PFV-FOC fowl only
'Adam only slaughtered A FOWL.'

(2) a. *Nua ka Adam kɔdig.*
fowl FOC Adam slaughter
'Adam slaughtered a FOWL.'

b. *Adam kɔdig-(nɛ) nua.*
Adam slaughter-FOC fowl
'Adam slaughtered a FOWL.'

(3) a. *Adam kɔdig-nɛ* ***nua ma'aa***.
A. kill.PFV-FOC fowl only
'Adam only slaughtered A FOWL.'

b. ***Nua ma'aa*** **(ka) Adam kɔdig.*
fowl only FOC A. kill
'Adam only slaughtered A FOWL.'

(4) ****Nua*** *ka Adam kɔdig* ***ma'aa***.
fowl FOC A. kill only
'Adam only slaughtered A FOWL.'

(5) *Adam sa* ***tʊm****-mɛ* ***ma'aa*** *(su'os).*
A. HEST.PST work-FOC only yesterday
'Adam only WORKED yesterday.'

Selected references: —Erlewine, Michael Yoshitaka. 2014. Movement out of focus. Doctoral dissertation, MIT, Cambridge, MA. —Takano, Yuji. 2003. How antisymmetric is syntax? Linguistic Inquiry 34(3). 516–526. —Tancredi, Christopher D. 1990. Not only EVEN, but even ONLY. Manuscript, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA. —Kayne, Richard. 1994. The antisymmetry of syntax. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. —Carstens, Vicki & Jochen Zeller. 2020. 'only'in nguni: a phrase-final particle meets antisymmetry theory. Linguistic Inquiry 51(2). 199–235.