

Unexpected consequences of *v* as a secondary Case-licenser in Lobi

Shweta Akolkar, Sansan Claude Hien & Kang Franco Liu (UC Berkeley)

Puzzle. In Lobi (Mabia/Gur; Côte d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso), the same verb form alternation is observed in two seemingly unrelated syntactic contexts. First, the alternation tracks the (non-)coreference of embedded and matrix subjects (i.e. switch reference; SR). We refer to the two verb forms as FORM A and FORM B:

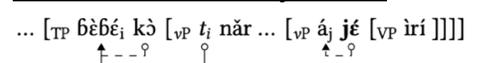
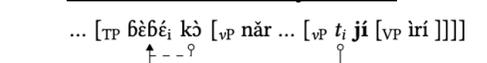
- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>(1) <u>Form A occurs in different-subject (DS) contexts:</u>
 bɛ̀bɛ̀ɛ̀i kò nǎ-r [á_{i/j} (*kò) jé/*jí irí]
 Bebe PST want.B-RE 3SG PST see.A Iri
 ‘Bebe_i wanted him/her_{i/j} to see Iri.’</p> | <p>(2) <u>Form B occurs in same-subject (SS) contexts:</u>
 bɛ̀bɛ̀ɛ̀i kò nǎ-r [á_{i/j} (*kò) jí/*jé irí]
 Bebe PST want.B-RE 3SG PST see.B Iri
 ‘Bebe_i wanted (himself_i) to see Iri.’</p> |
|---|--|

Second, subject focus triggers Form A, but fronting non-subject XPs triggers Form B. The fronted element bears the focus suffix *-ré*.

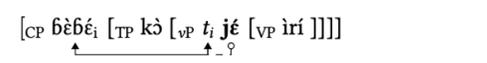
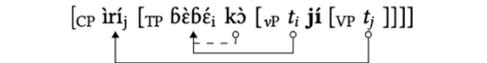
- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>(3) <u>Form A occurs with subject focus fronting:</u>
 fí-ré kò jé/*jí mì
 2SG-RE PST see.A 1SG
 ‘It is YOU who saw me.’</p> | <p>(4) <u>Form B occurs with object focus fronting:</u>
 mì-ré fí kò jí/*jé
 1SG-RE 2SG PST see.B
 ‘It’s ME that you saw.’</p> |
|--|---|

Proposal. We provide a unified analysis of the observed verb alternations across SR and focus fronting contexts that hinges on two ways of Case-licensing subject DPs in Lobi: Form B correlates with canonical Case-licensing via T, whereas Form A identifies *v* as the secondary licenser merged when needed to avoid derivational crash.

Application to SR. We take complement clauses that exhibit SR marking to be *v*Ps. They lack TP and higher projections, as evidenced by the ban on tense auxiliaries (cf. (1) and (2)). Assuming T is a nominal licenser in Lobi, we propose that in SS contexts (i.e. (2)), a single subject DP A-moves from embedded Spec,*v*P to matrix Spec,TP to be Case-licensed by T (following Georgi 2012); this subject movement derives obligatory subject coreference, with both copies pronounced. In DS contexts (i.e. (1)), there are two non-coreferent subject DPs in the numeration. The embedded subject cannot receive Case from matrix T as T must license the upstairs subject; it is instead licensed by a Case-assigning flavor of *v* which merges only when needed for the derivation to converge (see Kalin 2018, among others, for similar analyses). Form A reflects the presence of said Case-licensing *v*. Both derivations are schematized below (solid arrows = movement, dashed arrows = licensing):

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>(5) a. <u>Embedded <i>v</i> licenses subject in DS:</u> ⇒ Form A
 ... [TP bɛ̀bɛ̀ɛ̀i kò [_{VP} t_i nǎr ... [_{VP} á_j jé [_{VP} irí]]]]
 </p> | <p>b. <u>Matrix T licenses subject in SS:</u> ⇒ Form B
 ... [TP bɛ̀bɛ̀ɛ̀i kò [_{VP} nǎr ... [_{VP} t_i jí [_{VP} irí]]]]
 </p> |
|---|---|

Application to focus fronting. We adopt a monoclausal \bar{A} -movement analysis for Lobi focus fronting where the focused XP moves to Spec,CP. Recall that in information-structurally neutral CPs, Lobi subjects are licensed in Spec,TP. When the subject is focused (i.e. (3)), it, however, cannot move from its licensing position to Spec,CP because this short movement is banned under the Spec-to-Spec Anti-Locality Constraint (Erlewine, 2016). As a repair strategy, the Case-licensing *v* is merged to license the subject in Spec,*v*P, triggering Form A and allowing the focused subject to skip Spec,TP. By contrast, when a non-subject XP is focus-fronted in (4), T Case-licenses the subject since there is no anti-locality violation to obviate, realizing Form B verbal morphology.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>(6) a. <u><i>v</i> licenses focused subject:</u> ⇒ Form A
 [_{CP} bɛ̀bɛ̀ɛ̀i [_{TP} kò [_{VP} t_i jí [_{VP} irí]]]]
 </p> | <p>b. <u>T licenses non-focused subject:</u> ⇒ Form B
 [_{CP} irí_j [_{TP} bɛ̀bɛ̀ɛ̀i kò [_{VP} t_i jí [_{VP} t_j]]]]
 </p> |
|---|---|

Implications. Drawing on novel data from an underdocumented Mabia/Gur language, we propose that Lobi merges a secondary Case-licenser, *v*, to avoid derivational crash in two syntactic contexts involving Form A verbs: DS marking in *v*P complement clauses (absence of the primary Case-licenser T) and subject focus fronting (unavailability of licensing via T due to anti-locality). Empirically, our description of Lobi’s SR system challenges the widely assumed generalization that (West) Africa is not typically identified with verbal SR marking (Comrie, 2003). Lobi also shows no clause-size asymmetry between SS and DS-marking clauses, contra the cross-linguistic SR profiles reported in Georgi (2012).

References. Comrie, B. 2003. West African logophorics and the typology of reference-tracking. *Journal of West African Languages* 30(2). Erlewine, M. Y. 2016. Anti-locality and optimality in Kaqchikel Agent Focus. *NLLT* 34(2). Georgi, D. 2012. Switch-reference by movement. *Perspectives on switch-reference*. Kalin, L. 2018. Licensing and Differential Object Marking: The view from Neo-Aramaic. *Syntax* 21(2).