Topic and focus asymmetries in Yorùbá

DANIEL AREMU (GOETHE-UNIVERSITÄT FRANKFURT)

1 Introduction

Topic and focus are two information structural notions that share a lot of similarities as well as differences, cross-linguistically. Although both are A'-dependencies, cross-linguistic studies have shown that languages use different strategies to realize them. The goal of this paper is to (a) describe the asymmetries between topic and focus constructions in Yorùbá, and (b) propose an analysis that accounts for both the asymmetries and the realization of both in the language.

   While focus has received a reasonable amount of attention in the language, as far as I know, there is no study or analysis on the Yorùbá topic construction which uses the recent theoretical tools.[1] Earlier studies on focus construction in the language can be classified into two groups, based on their data description and proposed analysis. The first group assumes that focus construction in Yorùbá follows from what is commonly observed in West African languages, where the focus constituent is fronted to the left periphery followed by the dedicated focus marker *ni* which heads the Focus Phrase (FocP). This analysis assumes a mono-clausal structure for focus in the language (see a.o, Awóbùlúyì 1987, 2008, Ilori 2010, Aremu 2021) (1-a). The other group argues for what seems to be a biclausal cleft-like structure where the focus marker *ni* is assumed to be a copula (cf. Bisang and Sonaiya 2000, Adesola 2005). For example, Adesola (2005) assumes that the focus constituent itself does not move to the left periphery, it is base-generated there. Instead, it is a null operator that moves to Spec,CP. The CP is then dominated by a PredP which is headed by the focus marker (1-b). In this paper, I will adopt the former approach to focus construction in Yorùbá, i.e. (1-a). This is because it is more popular, and fits well with the analysis in this paper.

---

[1] See Ilori (2010) Section 4.4.1.2 for a brief description of (aboutness) topic construction in Yorùbá. See also Awóyalé (1995).

(1)   a. $[_{FocP}\ XP_i\ [_{Foc'}[_{Foc}\ \textbf{ni}]\ [_{TP}...\ t_i]]]$

        b. $[_{PredP}\ XP_i\ [_{Pred'}[_{Pred}\ \textbf{ni}][_{CP}\ Op_i\ [_{C'}[_C\ \varnothing][_{TP}...\ t_i]]]]]$

The remaining part of the paper is structured with the following sections. Section 2 introduces the description of how topic and focus are realized in the language. In Section 3, I apply some movement tests to show that while topics are base-generated in the left periphery, focus involves A'-movement to the left periphery. Toward the end of the section, I claim that subject focus on the other hand does not involve movement but base-generation. In Section 4, I propose a syntactic analysis based on the criterial approach to movement. I argue that the presence of both the topic and the focus constituents in the left periphery is as a result of the necessity to meet distinct criteria in that position, and at the same time they get their discourse interpretation. This also helps us account for the presence or absence of resumptive pronouns when a constituent is fronted. Finally, Section 5 provides a summary and concludes the paper.

2 Topic and focus construction

I will begin with a description of topic construction in the language, and afterwards I will discuss focus construction.

2.1 Topic

Yorùbá realizes both Aboutness Topic (henceforth AT) and Contrastive Topic (henceforth CT) distinctly. The difference between CT and AT is that while the former presupposes the presence of at least one alternative, the latter does not (Büring 2016).[2] Beginning with AT, in Yorùbá, the subject aboutness topic is realized at the left periphery of the clause, followed by a resumptive pronoun (henceforth RP) in the canonical subject position (2-b).

(2)   a.   So fún mi   nípa Adé.

               tell give 1SG.ACC about Adé

               'Tell me (something) about Adé.'

        b.   **Adé**, ó   pa eku náà.

               Adé 3SG kill rat DEF

               'Adé, he killed the rat.'

Object AT are also realized at the left-periphery, leaving an RP in their canonical complement of VP position (3). However, these RPs usually as-

---

[2]Some studies have argued that both contrastive topic and contrastive focus are the same partly because both trigger the presence of a set of alternatives (cf. Titov 2013). However, this claim seems too strong because unlike contrastive focus, the alternatives in contrastive topic are not excluded or used for exhaustification

similate to the final vowel of the preceding verb. Compare (3-a) with (3-b) below.[3]

(3)   a.   **Aṣọ**, Adé rà   á.
            cloth Adé buy 3SG
            'Cloth, Adé bought it.'
       b.   **Aṣọ**, Adé fò   ó.
            cloth Adé wash 3SG
            'Cloth, Adé washed it.'

Contrastive topics, on the other hand, usually begin with *ní ti* ('EXPL for') followed by the topic constituent.[4] CTs are also resumed in there canonical position. If we take the question in (4-a) as a context for example, the sentence (4-b) has a contrastive topic in addition to the focus answer that the question requires. *Bọ́la* is a contrastive topic because it is contrasted with the other set of children that was mentioned already in the background (4-a). So, this could mean that the speaker does not know what the other children ate, but he knows that as for *Bọ́la*, she ate rice. It could also be that each child ate a different food. Thus, the conversation could continue with ... but as for Délé, he ate beans, and so on.

(4)   a.   Kí   ni   àwọn ọmọ náà jẹ?
            what FOC PL   child DEF eat
            'What did the children eat?'
       b.   Ní   ti   **Bọ́la**, ó   jẹ ìrẹsì.
            EXPL for Bọ́la 3SG eat rice
            'As for Bọ́la, she ate rice.'

Just like object AT, object CT are also realized in the clause-initial position. Similarly, the RP assimilates to the final vowel of the preceding verb as in (5-a).

(5)   a.   Ní   ti   **èwà**   náà, Délé jẹ é.
            EXPL for beans DEF Délé eat 3SG
            'As for the beans, Délé ate it.'

Looking at the property of topic construction in Yorùbá, we can say that it behaves like the Hanging Topic Left Dislocation (HTLD) phenomenon that has been proposed in the literature (cf. Rizzi 1997, 2013, Anagnostopoulou

---

[3]See Adesola (2005) for *agreeing* and *non-agreeing* resumptive pronouns in Yorùbá

[4]Yorùbá is unlike some other West African languages like Gungbe (Aboh 2004) and Likpakpaanl where topics are morphologically marked. In other words, these languages have a dedicated topic marker, just like focus. In fact, Likpakpaanl has distinct topic markers for both AT and CT (see Acheampong and Aremu 2023).

1997, Cinque 1977, Gregory and Michaelis 2001, Frey 2004).[5]

2.2 Focus

Building on a body of focus literature (see a.o, Owólabí 1987, Bisang and
Sonaiya 2000, Adesola 2005, Ilori 2010), focus construction in Yorùbá can be
realized both in an in-situ or ex-situ position.[6] Subject focus, however, are
always realized in an ex-situ position. The example in (6-b) shows subject
focus which is followed by the focus marker *ni*, and is resumed in its last A-
position.[7]

(6) a.   Ta **ni** ó   pa eku náà?
          who FOC 3SG kill rat DEF
          'Who killed the rat?'
     b.   [Adé]$_F$ **ni** ó   pa   eku náà.
          A.   FOC 3SG kill.PFV rat DEF
          'ADÉ killed the rat.'

Non-subject focus (like object, adjunct and predicate focus), on the other
hand, can both be in-situ and ex-situ, and they do not require a resumption.
Beginning with object focus, when a patient argument is focused as in (7), it
can remain in its base or theta position (7-b), or it can be fronted to the clause-
initial position (7-c). In the case of the in-situ focus, the focus marker is absent.
Thus, the context of the utterance would have to be resorted to, in order to know
what is in focus; in this case, the *wh*-question.

(7) a.   Kí **ni** Adé pa?
          what FOC Adé kill
          'What did Adé kill?'
     b.   Adé pa   [eku]$_F$ (***ni**).
          A. kill.PFV rat   FOC
          'Adé killed A RAT.'

---

[5]I want to thank Luigi Rizzi for a discussion on this part and for bringing my attention to this.

[6]I will use boldface for the focus marker **ni**, and represent the focus constituent with [XP]$_F$.
 The focus constituent will be in UPPER CASE in the English translation. Although both the
 wh-question and the focus answer behave the same way in Yorùbá, my analysis would be based
 on the latter. I will only use the former as a mechanism to realize the focus.

[7]Non-local subject focus behaves the same way. I will not discuss this because of space.

(i)   [Adé]$_F$ **ni** Tolú mò   wípé ó   pa   eku náá.
      A.   FOC T.   know COMP 3SG kill.PFV rat DEF
      'Tolú knew that ADÉ killed the rat.'

    c.   [Eku]$_F$ **ni** Adé pa   (*a).
           rat   FOC A.   kill.PFV 3SG
           'Adé killed A RAT.'

Similarly, an adverbial focus can be in-situ (8-b) or ex-situ (8-c).

(8)   a.   Ìgbàwo **ni** Adé pa eku?
          when   FOC Adé kill rat
          'When did Adé killed a rat?'

    b.   Adé pa   eku ní [àná]$_F$.
          Adé kill.PFV rat LOC yesterday
          'Adé killed a rat YESTERDAY.'

    c.   [Àná]$_F$ **ni** Adé pa   eku __.
          yesterday FOC Adé kill.PFV rat
          'Adé killed a rat YESTERDAY.'

Verb or verb phrase focus can as well be realized both in an in-situ and an ex-situ positions. If we consider the *wh*-questions in (9-a) and (10-a), both require a verb focus and VP focus respectively. Examples (9-b) and (10-b) are in-situ V(P)focus answers to these questions, while (9-c) and (10-c) are ex-situ answers. As shown in the data, ex-situ V(P) focus involve nominalization. In both cases, the ex-situ verbal copy is nominalized.[8]

(9)   a.   Kí **ni** Adé se si ewúrẹ́ náà?
          what FOC Adé do to goat   DEF
          'What did Adé do to the goat?'

    b.   Adé [na]$_F$ ewúrẹ́ náà.
          Adé beat   goat   DEF
          'Adé BEAT the goat.'

    c.   [Ní-nà]$_F$ **ni** Adé na   ewúrẹ́ náà.
          NMLZ-beat FOC Adé beat goat   DEF
          'It was BEATING that Adé beat the goat.'

(10)   a.   Kí **ni** Adé se?
          what FOC Adé do
          'What did Adé do?'

    b.   Adé [ra àga]$_F$.
          Adé buy chair
          'Adé BOUGHT A CHAIR.'

    c.   [Rí-ra   àga]$_F$ **ni** Adé ra àga.
          NMLZ-buy chair FOC Adé buy chair
          'It was BUYING A CHAIR that Adé bought a chair.'

---

[8]This is a common strategy for V(P) focus in many West African languages (cf. Hein 2017, 2020, 2021, Aremu 2021).

Summarizing this section, I have briefly described the different realizations of topic and focus in Yorùbá. Although both A'-dependencies can be realized in an ex-situ position, focus can also remain in-situ. Since the common property between the two A'-dependencies is their ex-situ nature, I will only use this as the basis for comparison. In other words, the in-situ focus construction will not be of much importance to us here. In the next section, I will provide evidence to support my claim that while topics, generally, are base-generated in the left periphery, ex-situ focus undergo movement to the left periphery. In addition, I will show that not all ex-situ focus undergo such movement; subject focus does not. Just like topic, it is also base-generated in the left periphery of the clause.

3 Base-generation and movement

In order to decide whether either of the A'-dependencies undergoes A'-movement to their surface position, or are base-generated there, we would have to apply movement tests. I will use two diagnostics for movement: *reconstruction for Principle A* and *adjunct island*.[9] The following are the predictions. In reconstruction, a displaced constituent behaves as though it is still occupying its base position. The prediction therefore is that if a constituent did not, at any point in time, occupy a given base position, it does not reflect the property of that position. This means that such constituent is base-generated in its surface position. However, if a constituent can be reconstructed, it is traditionally assumed to have undergone movement to it surface position. With regard to island, on the other hand, a sentence should be ungrammatical if an ex-situ constituent undergoes movement from an island. If, however, the ex-situ constituent does not originate from an island, then we expect the sentence to be grammatical.

3.1 Reconstruction test

Because of space, I will only present reconstruction effect for binding Principle A. In (11-a), the reflexive pronoun inside the complex DP object is c-commanded by its antecedent *Ayọ̀*. If the object DP with the reflexive is topicalized as in (11-b), the structure is ungrammatical, based on the established

[9]There are some independent studies which argue against reconstruction as a diagnostic for movement. For example, Salzmann (2017) claims that reconstruction does not directly diagnose movement in relative clauses, and cannot be seen as a reliable movement test (see also Salzmann 2019, Wurmbrand 2018, Šimík and Demian 2020). A similar claim has been made for islands by Adger and Ramchand (2005). However, their analysis was only based on successive-cyclic movement, and so is the claim. Nevertheless, I will use the two tests since they are still popular diagnostic for movement in the field.

bound reading. This is regardless of the presence of the resumptive pronoun. Considering our prediction, this means that the topic is base-generated in the left periphery of the clause, and was never in the c-command domain of the antecedent in order to establish a binding relation. If, on the other hand, the object DP is focalized as in (11-c), the sentence remains grammatical on a bound reading. The antecedent still binds the reflexive anaphor. This means that the focalized constituent reconstructs at LF in order to establish the condition necessary for binding.

(11)   *Reconstruction for binding Principle A:*

    a.   Adé$_i$ ka iwe nipa ara re$_i$.
            Adé read book about body self
            'Adé read a book about himself.'

    b.   *(Ni ti) [iwe nipa **ara re**$_i$] Adé$_i$ ka   (a$_i$).
            as for book about body self Adé read 3SG
            'As for the book about himself, Adé read it.'   (Topic)

    c.   [Iwe nipa ara re$_i$]$_F$ **ni** Adé$_i$ ka   __$_i$.
            book about body self FOC Adé read
            'Adé read A BOOK ABOUT HIMSELF.'   (Focus)

3.2 Island test

Movement out of an adjunct clause is prohibited because it constitutes an island. Here, I will use temporal and reason adjunct clauses to support my claim. The example in (12-b) shows that topicalization does not violate the temporal clause adjunct island. The presence of the resumptive pronoun obviates the island violation. (12-c) is ungrammatical because the focus constituent has been extracted from the object position of the temporal clause.

(12)   *Temporal clause adjunct island:*

    a.   Adé jẹ ìrẹ [kí   Bọ́lá tó jẹ ẹ̀wà].
            Adé eat rice before Bọ́lá PRT eat beans
            'Adé ate rice before Bọ́lá ate beans.'

    b.   (Ní ti) **ẹ̀wà**$_i$, Adé jẹ ìrẹ [kí   Bọ́lá tó jẹ *(**ẹ́**)$_i$].
            as for beans Adé eat rice before Bọ́lá PRT eat 3SG
            'As for the beans, Adé ate rice before Bọ́lá ate it.'   (Topic)

    c.   *[Ẹ̀wà$_i$]$_F$ **ni** Adé jẹ ìrẹ [kí   Bọ́lá tó jẹ ___$_i$].
            beans   FOC Adé eat rice before Bọ́lá PRT eat
            'Adé ate rice before Bọ́lá ate BEANS.'   (Focus)

    The same result is gotten with reason clause adjunct island (13). While topic does not violate the island, focus does.

(13)   *Reason clause adjunct island:*

    a.   Adé bínú [nítorípé Bọ́lá jẹ ẹ̀wà].
           Adé angry because Bọ́lá eat beans
           'Adé got angry because Bọ́lá ate beans.'

    b.   (Ní ti) **ẹ̀wà**, Adé bínú [nítorípé Bọ́lá jẹ **ẹ́**].
           as for beans Adé angry because Bọ́lá eat 3SG
           'As for beans, Adé got angry because Bọ́lá ate it.'   (Topic)

    c.   *[Ẹ̀wà$_i$]$_F$ **ni**   Adé bínú [nítorípé Bọ́lá jẹ ___$_i$].
           beans   FOC Adé angry because Bọ́lá eat
           'Adé got angry because Bọ́lá ate BEANS.'   (Focus)

In summary, the result of these tests show that topics are base-generated in the language, while focus constituents undergo A'-movement. As stated earlier, subject focus behave differently from non-subject focus. I turn to this in the subsection.

3.3 Subject focus revisited

Similar to topic, subject focus does not violate islands. In contrast to what we see for object focus above, subject focus behaves differently to islands. Considering the Complex Noun Phrase in (14) and the reason adjunct clause in (15), what looks like subject extraction from these constructions is indeed base-generation which involves resumption, because it does not violate the islands. If movement really took place, we would expect a violation of the islands.

(14)   *Conplex Noun Phrase Constraint:*

    a.   Adé jẹ oúnje tí   Bọ́lá ra
           A. eat food REL B.   buy
           'Adé ate the food that Bọ́lá bought.'

    b.   [Bọ́lá]$_F$ **ni** Adé jẹ oúnje tí   *(**ó**) ra
           Bọ́lá   FOC A. eat food REL 3SG buy
           Lit: 'BỌ́LÁ, Adé ate the food that bought.'

(15)   *Reason clause adjunct island:*

    a.   Adé bínú [nítorípé Bọ́lá jẹ ẹ̀wà].
           Adé angry because Bọ́lá eat beans
           'Adé got angry because Bọ́lá ate beans.'

    b.   [Bọ́lá]$_F$ **ni** Adé bínú [nítorípé *(**ó**) jẹ ẹ̀wà].
           Bọ́lá   FOC Adé angry because 3SG eat beans
           Lit: 'BỌ́LÁ, Adé got angry because ate beans.'

One final point that is worth discussing is the status of the subject focus resumption in the literature. Researchers like Awóbùlúyì (1978, 1992, 2008) and Ilori (2010) have argued that "the 3sG non-emphatic subject pronoun is phonetically realized as ∅ in Standard Yorùbá, for some yet unidentified reasons" (Ilori 2010: fn. 94).[10] The claim is that what is usually seen as a subject resumptive pronoun, is a High Tone Syllable (HTS) which is used for 'non-future' tense marking in the language, while the subject resumptive pronoun itself is covert (cf. (16-a)).[11] It seems that this only applies to singular subject focus because when the subject focus is plural, we get an overt resumptive pronoun which agrees with their antecedent in number and person feature, as in (16-b). There are many issues with this claim. While it is true that there seems to be a high tonal syllable/reflex with regard to subject and tense, the claim that examples like (16-a) involve null resumption is problematic. The first question is why is the resumptive pronoun of singular subject focus covert while that of the plural subject focus is overt? Secondly, how do we account for the obligatory status of *ó* in focus context, and its optionality in non-focus context? For instance, in a non-focus sentence, the high tone can cliticize to the final syllable of the preceding subject. Compare (17-a) with (17-b) with a special focus on the tone of the last syllable of the subject.[12]

(16) Adapted from (Ilori 2010: 240)

    a. Olùkó$_i$ **ni** [∅$_i$] ó nà Akin.
        teacher FOC 3sG HTS beat Akin
        'It was the teacher that beats Akin.'

    b. [Olùkó àti Akòwé]$_i$ **ni** [∅$_i$/wón]$_i$ ó nà Akin.
        teacher and secretary FOC 3sG/3PL HTS beat Akin
        'It was the teacher and the secretary that beat Akin.'

(17) a. **Akin ni** ó je ișu.
        Akin FOC 3sG eat yam
        'AKIN ate yam.'

    b. **Akín** je ișu.
        Akin eat yam
        'Akin ate yam.'

A third challenge to this claim is that when the focus constituent is any of the other persons (1/2), and not a third person, having the so-called HTS *ó* is

---

[10]See Bámgbóșé (1967), Fresco (1970), Oyelaran (1970), Stahlke (1974) for different views of what the HTS is.

[11]See Ilori (2010) for an overview of the different claims about the HTS, including literature. Also see Ilori (2010) for arguments in support of the HTS as a 'non-future' tense marker.

[12]In fact, other researchers who have worked on the focus of the language, analyse *ó* as a resumptive pronoun (cf. Adesola 2005).

dispreferred (18).

(18)   a.   [Ìwọ]$_F$ **ni** o/?ó   jẹ iṣu náà.
            2SG.EMPH FOC 2SG/HTS eat yam DEF
            'YOU ate the yam.'
      b.   [Èmi]$_F$ **ni** mo/?ó jẹ iṣu náà.
            1SG.EMPH FOC 1SG/HTS eat yam DEF
            'I ate the yam.'

My proposal is that since the high tone seems to float and associate to contiguous elements like the subject, it must have done so to the resumptive pronoun too. In fact, cases where the resumptive pronoun are claimed to be null is not true. The tone on the 3SG happens to be the same as the floating high tone which is claimed to mark non-future tense. So, what happens is only a tonal sandhi. This also accounts for the cases where the high tone is realized on the final syllable of a preceding subject (see (17) above)

We are left with one scenario, however, where *ó* is present in a non-focus sentence like (19). This can straightforwardly be explained if we believe that subjects are usually topics.[13] In this case, the so-called HTS is actually a resumptive pronoun that has undergone a tonal sandhi with the floating high tone; in line with the described topic data above.[14]

(19)   **Adé**, ó pa eku náà.
       Adé 3SG kill rat DEF
       'Adé, he killed the rat.'

We now turn to the proposed analysis which captures both the observed asymmetries and the data in general.

4 Towards a criterial analysis

In the previous section, I showed that both topic and focus are realized in the left periphery of the clause by different means; base-generation vs. movement. They are not only different with regard to the means by which they are realized in the left periphery, but also with the use of resumption. Table 1 below presents a summary of the asymmetries. The aim of this section is to propose a syntactic analysis for the observed asymmetries between the two A'-dependencies; having in mind that subject focus behave similarly to topics. However, the difference between topic and subject focus are the distinct positions that they occupy, and the discourse features that they possess.

---

[13]Although, this is not always the case.

[14]I must admit that more research needs to be done on this phenomenon.

	Movement	Resumption
Topic (subject/object)	–	+
Subject focus	–	+
Non-subject focus	+	–

Table 1: Topic-focus asymmetries

In order to provide an analysis that captures both the left peripheral nature and the use of resumption of these dependencies, I will adopt the *Criterial approach* (cf. Rizzi 1997, 2006, Rizzi and Shlonsky 2007, Shlonsky 2014). One of the major principles which guides the introduction and development of the criterial approach is *movement as a last resort operation* (cf. Chomsky 1986, Fox 1995, Reinhart 1997). This means that movement is neither free nor optional. If by any means movement occurs, it must be due to some interface requirement; Case-related or interpretation-related. The latter requirement is of importance to us here. In Yorùbá, such movement is considered to be discourse-related. Under the Criteria approach, movement is assumed to be triggered by the need for feature matching. It is argued that a head X, with a feature F, probes for a goal Y(P), specified with the same feature F, in its c-command domain.[15] The established link then requires that Y(P) must be in the immediate environment of X. The goal can either be a head Y or an entire phrase YP which has the matching feature on its head. The former is used for head movement, while the latter is a case of phrasal movement to Spec,XP. A slightly revised version of Rizzi's 2006 formal definition is given in (20) below (adapted from Rizzi 2006: 99).

(20) X_F ..... Y_F ..... $= YP/Y_F \ X_F$ ..... t .....

Extending these assumptions to information structure, Rizzi (2006) proposes that both topic and focus heads have topic criterion and focus criterion. These criterial heads are responsible for the realization of the topic and focus constituents in their respective specifiers in the left periphery; criterial positions. This is how both the discourse-related meaning and its scope are interpreted at the interface level. Therefore, when a phrase moves to a criterial position after meeting a criterion (topic or focus criterion in this case), it is frozen in that position, and cannot move any further (cf. (21)).[16]

---

[15]Following Aboh (2010), I assume that the matching features on the topic or focus constituents are added at the numeration. Thus, the features are not added from the lexicon (see also Cruschina 2009)

[16]Although the long-distance movement data is not included here, it works the same way. The only question is that how can the criterial freezing analysis account for the intermediate movement step(s) assumed for long-distance movement? As a solution, Rizzi (2006, 2009) assumes a dis-

(21)   **Criterial Freezing:**
        a phrase meeting a criterion is frozen in place, and its chain cannot
        extend further (Rizzi 2006:97).

Also within the criterial approach, Rizzi (2006) proposes what he calls the
Subject Criterion (see also Rizzi and Shlonsky 2007, Rizzi 2009, Shlonsky
2014). Firstly, the subject criterion is analogous to Chomsky's traditional EPP
requirement which demands that all clauses must have a subject. Secondly,
Rizzi (2006, 2009) uses it to reanalyse the subject/object asymmetries that is
traditionally associated with the Empty Category Principle (ECP) (cf. Chom-
sky 1982). The ECP prevents subject from moving out of the embedded clause
subject position. If this happens, it results in an ungrammatical sentence as in
*Who do you think that t ate the sausage?. This is popularly known as the
that-trace effect (cf. Chomsky and Lasnik 1977). However, with long-distance
object movement, the sentence is grammatical: *What do you think that Adam
ate t?*. As a result, there is subject criterion, but no object criterion.[17] In short,
the EPP and the ECP are reduced to a criterial feature (subject criterion) which
must be checked, and which freezes the constituent that meets the criterion.

However, cross-linguistic studies have shown that languages use different
means to skip the criterial subject position in order to avoid being frozen. There
are also cases where there is no movement to begin with, but languages develop
different strategies to satisfy the Subject Criterion. One of such strategies in-
volves the use of resumption (cf. Rizzi and Shlonsky 2007, Shlonsky 2014).
This is the strategy that Yorùbá employs, as we will see below.

4.1 Focus analysis

Beginning with focus, (22) is a structural representation of the subject focus
example in (6-b) above. Recall that subject focus does not involve movement;
it is base-generated in Spec,FocP where it directly satisfies the focus criterion
[Foc] on the Foc head; as in a Spec-head agreement fashion.

---

tinction between Substantive Criterial Features (SCFs) and Formal Criterial Features (FCFs)
(cf. McCloskey 2002). Since movement is feature-driven, the FCFs are responsible for the
intermediate movement steps which satisfy locality requirements (in the style of Chomsky's
2001, 2008 phase edge and edge features). It is at this position that the relevant XP becomes
accessible for feature matching with and movement to a higher position with an SFC.

[17]Chomsky's 1982 own solution to this asymmetry was based on (proper) government of move-
ment traces. While the trace of the fronted object is properly governed by the lexical verb,
that of the subject is ungoverned. Hence, the ungrammaticality. However, some issues were
raised on the ECP approach. For example, the *that-trace effect* is repaired in the presence of
intervening materials, e.g. *Who do you think that, after cooking, ate the food?* (for some of
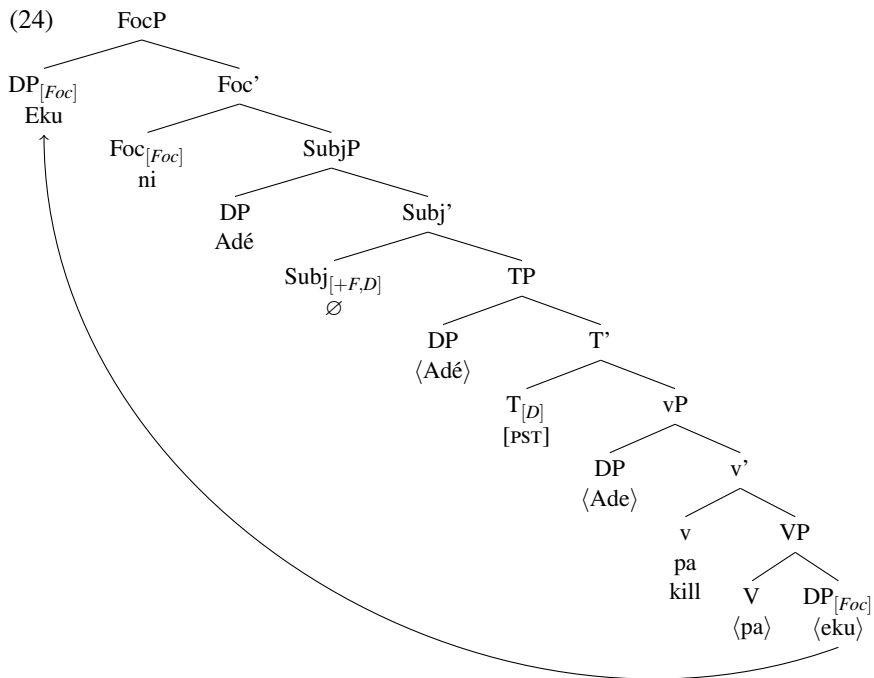the issues raised, see Rizzi and Shlonsky 2007, Bayer and Salzmann 2013).

(22)
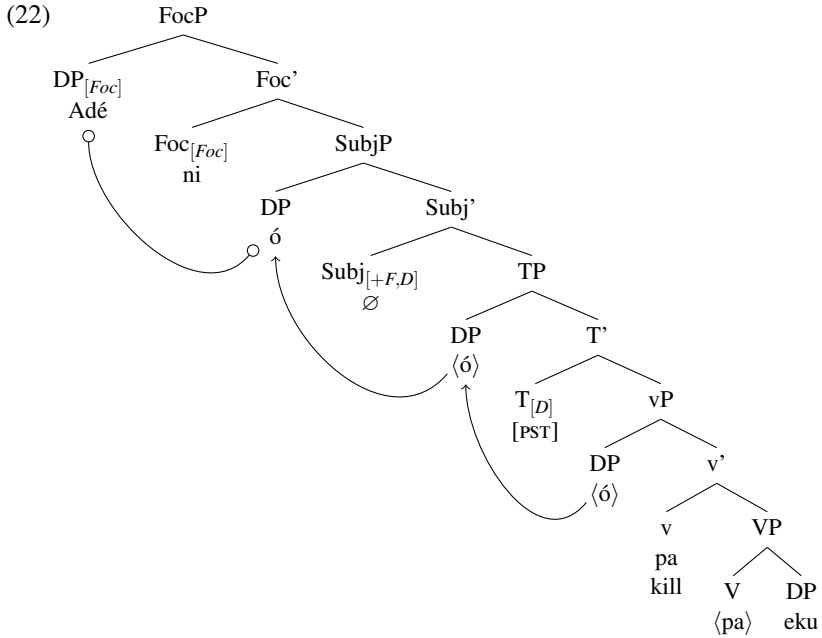
The presence of a resumptive pronoun is accounted for by the *Subject Criterion*. This is the case with the subject focus in (22). The subject does not undergo A'-movement, but it is externally merged at Spec,FocP. This leaves the Subject Criterion unsatisfied. The language therefore employs the resumption strategy. The resumptive pronoun originates from Spec,vP, and moves to Spec,SubjP. The TP serves as an intermediate landing site for the resumptive pronoun (à la Shlonsky 2014) (23). Having the EPP on T in this case would be redundant, and at the same time T is not a criterial head. So, what other role does T play apart from serving as an intermediate movement site? Shlonsky (2014) argues that person and number features are associated with different but adjacent heads: Subj and T. While Subj is specified for person feature [D_{person}], T is specified for number feature [D_{number}]. So for full agreement to take place, both heads must be projected (see Shlonsky 2014: for some supporting arguments). Thus, T does not only serve as an intermediate landing site, but also probes for number feature. When the resumptive pronoun is in Spec,TP, it becomes directly accessible to Subj where it both satisfies the subject criterion (and is frozen) and agrees with it in person feature.

(23)   **Spec,TP intermediate movement generalization**
   (Shlonsky 2014: 77)
        XP movement through Spec,TP is only possible *en route* to some criterial position.

Object focus, on the other hand involves movement with no resumption. This is expected since there is no object criterion which would have required a resumption if the object focus was base-generated. In (24), the direct object moves to Spec,FocP in order to satisfy the focus criterion. Again, the subject moves through Spec,TP en route to Spec,SubjP where it satisfies the subject criterion and gets frozen, i.e. no further movement is allowed. I want to point out here that unlike focus movement which is an A'-movement, movement to Spec,SubjP is an A-movement.

(24)

```
                        FocP
                       /    \
              DP[Foc]        Foc'
              Eku           /    \
                      Foc[Foc]    SubjP
                      ni         /     \
                              DP         Subj'
                              Adé       /      \
                                 Subj[+F,D]     TP
                                   ∅          /    \
                                           DP        T'
                                          ⟨Adé⟩     /   \
                                               T[D]      vP
                                               [PST]    /   \
                                                     DP       v'
                                                    ⟨Ade⟩    /   \
                                                           v      VP
                                                          pa     /   \
                                                         kill   V      DP[Foc]
                                                              ⟨pa⟩    ⟨eku⟩
```
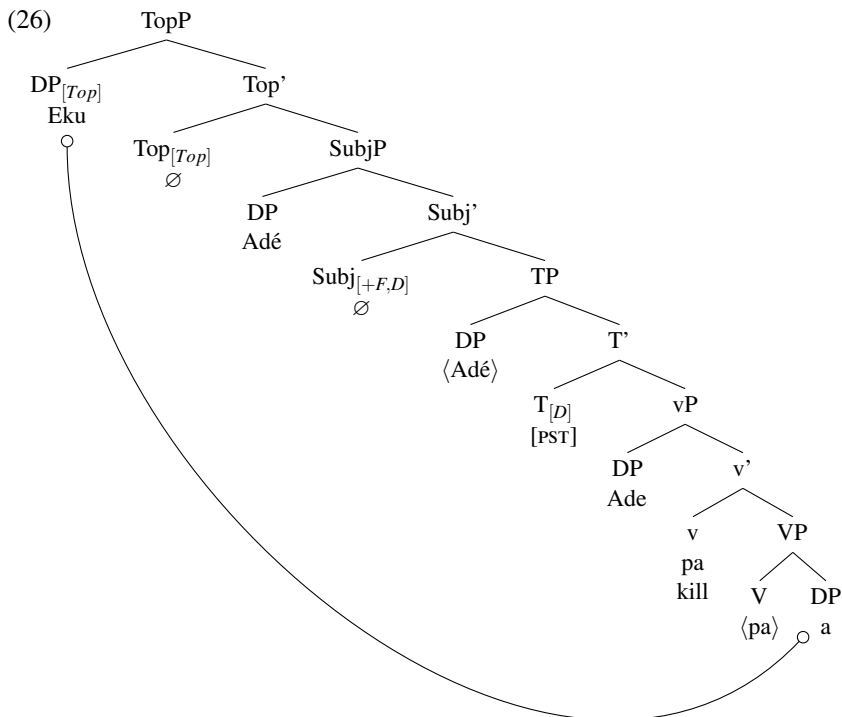
4.2 Topic analysis

The analysis for subject topic is similar to that of the subject focus above. The only difference here is that the subject topic is base-generated in Spec,TopP where it satisfies the topic criterion [Top] (cf. (25)).

(25)
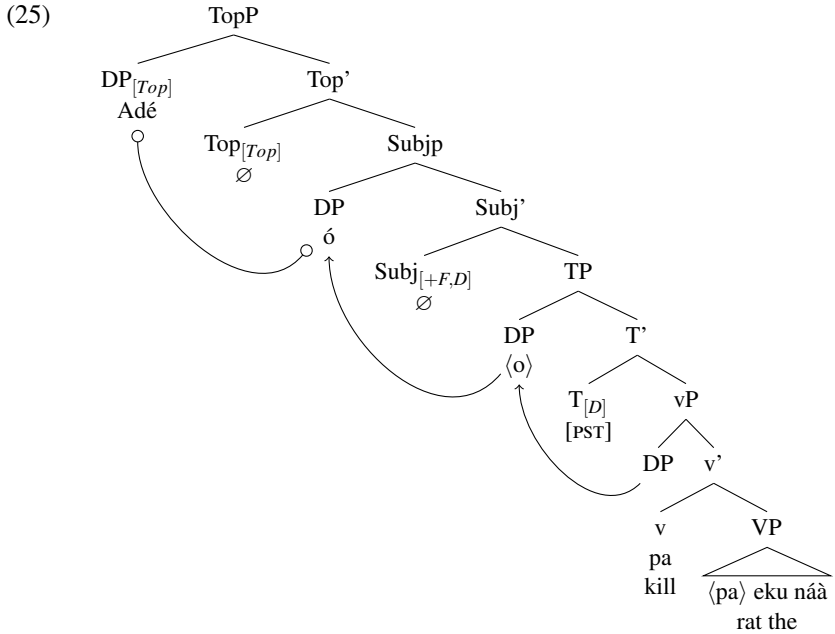
The object topic is also base-generated in Spec,TopP, and has a resumptive pronoun in its thematic position; complement of the verb (26). Since there is no object criterion, at first sight, it seems that the presence of a resumptive pronoun in the thematic object position constitutes a challenge for the criterial freezing approach. However, this is not case if we understand the underlying principle of the criterial analysis. This is captured in the definition given in (21). We have the subject criterion which causes a phrase (subject) to freeze in Spec,SubjP, but can be substituted by a resumptive pronoun when it is dislocated due to an A'-requirement. When an object has a resumptive pronoun, the prediction is that the latter is not frozen in place if there is no object criterion. Although, we do not have any data to support this prediction in Yorùbá, in Hebrew however, the prediction is borne out.

(26)

```
                    TopP
          ┌──────────┴──────────┐
      DP[Top]                 Top'
      Eku          ┌───────────┴───────────┐
       ○       Top[Top]                  SubjP
                   ∅            ┌───────────┴──────────┐
                               DP                    Subj'
                               Adé          ┌──────────┴──────────┐
                                        Subj[+F,D]               TP
                                            ∅         ┌───────────┴──────────┐
                                                     DP                     T'
                                                    ⟨Adé⟩           ┌────────┴────────┐
                                                               T[D]                  vP
                                                               [PST]        ┌────────┴────────┐
                                                                           DP               v'
                                                                           Ade      ┌────────┴────────┐
                                                                                    v               VP
                                                                                    pa       ┌───────┴──────┐
                                                                                    kill      V            DP
                                                                                            ⟨pa⟩   ○        a
```

In Hebrew, there is a subject-object asymmetry in restrictive relative clauses with regard to resumptive pronouns. Consider the examples in (27) and (28) below from Rizzi and Shlonsky (2007: 119-120) who also cited Borer (1984: 249-250).[18] The resumptive pronoun of the object relative in (27) can successively be fronted to a topic or topic-like positions in the iterated embedded CP/ForceP peripheries Rizzi (1997).[19] This is possible because there is no object criterion to freeze the resumptive pronoun. The case is entirely different for subject relative resumptive pronouns (28). Once the resumptive pronoun has satisfied the subject criterion as in (28-a), it is frozen. Thus, the examples (28-b) and (28-c) are ungrammatical.

---

[18]Few adjustments were made to the glossing of the data.

[19]This has also been used as evidence for a successive cyclic movement of *wh*-phrases (cf. Borer 1984).

(27)   a.   Kaniti   et   ha-šulxan še   xana   amra še   dalya
            (I).bought ACC DEF-table COMP Hannah said COMP Dalya
            ma'amina še   Kobi raca   **oto**.
            believes   COMP Kobi wanted him
            'I bought the table that Hannah said that Dalya believes that Kobi
            wanted.'
       b.   Kaniti   et   ha-šulxan še   xana   amra še   dalya
            (I).bought ACC DEF-table COMP Hannah said COMP Dalya
            ma'amina še   **oto** Kobi raca   ___.
            believes   COMP him Kobi wanted
            'I bought the table that Hannah said that Dalya believes that Kobi
            wanted.'
       c.   Kaniti   et   ha-šulxan še   xana   amra še   **oto** dalya
            (I).bought ACC DEF-table COMP Hannah said COMP him Dalya
            ma'amina še   ___ Kobi raca   ___.
            believes   COMP   Kobi wanted
            'I bought the table that Hannah said that Dalya believes that Kobi
            wanted.'

(28)   a.   Kaniti   et   ha-šulxan še   xana   amra še   dalya
            (I).bought ACC DEF-table COMP Hannah said COMP Dalya
            ta'ana   še   **hu** ya'ale   harbe kesef.
            claimed that he FUT.cost a lot   money
            'I bought the table that Hannah said that Dalya claimed that will
            cost a lot of money.'
       b.   *Kaniti   et   ha-šulxan še   xana   amra še   **hu** dalya
            (I).bought ACC DEF-table COMP Hannah said COMP he Dalya
            ta'ana   še   ___ ya'ale   harbe kesef.
            claimed that   FUT.cost a lot   money
            'I bought the table that Hannah said that Dalya claimed that will
            cost a lot of money.'
       c.   *Kaniti   et   ha-šulxan še   **hu** xana   amra še   ___
            (I).bought ACC DEF-table COMP he Hannah said COMP
            dalya ta'ana   še   ___ ya'ale   harbe kesef.
            Dalya claimed that   FUT.cost a lot   money
            'I bought the table that Hannah said that Dalya claimed that will
            cost a lot of money.'

Therefore, the object topic resumption in Yorùbá still falls in place with the
criterial approach.

5 Conclusion

This paper set out to describe and provide an analysis for the asymmetries that exist between topic and focus realization in Yorùbá. I showed that both A'-dependencies use different strategies for left dislocation. While topic, whether aboutness or contrastive, is base-generated in the left periphery of the clause, focus undergoes A'-movement to the left periphery. In contrast, I argued that subject focus does not undergo A'-movement. It is also base-generated like the topic constituent. The base-generated constituents are co-referenced with resumptive pronouns that occupy their canonical positions. I went further to propose an analysis that is based on the criterial approach, which coalesces both the dislocation strategies and the absence/presence of a resumptive pronoun. I argue that the topic and focus constituents occupy the Spec of two distinct criterial heads: Top and Foc. Each head has a criterion that must be satisfied under a Spec-head relationship. For the case of the subject topic and subject focus resumption, I propose that this is due to the subject criterion which requires that a subject cannot move further, having satisfied the subject criterion. However, in A'-dependency context, the canonical subject can be realized in the left periphery which means that the subject criterion would be unsatisfied. To satisfy the criterion, a resumptive pronoun is used, which is a cross-linguistic means to allow a well-formed A'-construction. The immovability of subjects does not apply to objects because there is no object criterion. So whether the object is resumed (object topic) or not (object focus), it does not matter.

References

Aboh, E. (2004). *The morphosyntax of complement-head sequences: Clause structure and word order patterns in Kwa*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Aboh, E. O. (2010). Information structuring begins with the numeration. *Iberia: An International Journal of Theoretical Linguistics 2*(1), 12–42.

Acheampong, S. O. and D. Aremu (2023). Aboutness and contrastive topics in Likpakpaanl. Paper presented at the 'Topic, Focus, and Subject' (TFS) Conference, University of Osnabrück, September 2023.

Adesola, O. (2005). *Pronouns and null operators: A-bar dependencies and relations in Yoruba*. Ph. D. thesis, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J.

Adger, D. and G. Ramchand (2005). Merge and move: Wh-dependencies revisited. *Linguistic Inquiry 36*(2), 161–193.

Anagnostopoulou, E. (1997). Clitic left dislocation and contrastive left dislocation. In E. Anagnostopoulou, H. van Riemsdijk, and F. Zwarts (Eds.), *Materials on left dislocation*. Benjamins.

Aremu, D. (2021). Focus realization in Ìkálè and Àkúrẹ́: A micro-variation approach. MA Thesis. Goethe-Universität Frankfurt.

Awóbùlúyì, O. (1978). *Essentials of Yorùbá grammar*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press.

Awóbùlúyì, O. (1987). Focus constructions as noun phrases: A reply. *Yoruba New Series 1*, 73–87.

Awóbùlúyì, O. (1992). Aspects of contemporary standard Yoruba in dialectological perspective. In A. Ìṣòlá (Ed.), *New findings in Yorùbá studies*, pp. 1–76. Ibadan: J.F. Odunjo Memorial Lectures Series.

Awóbùlúyì, O. (2008). *Èkó Ìṣèda-Òrò Yorùbá*. Àkéré: Montem Paperbacks.

Awóyalé, Y. (1995). The role of functional categories in syntax: The Yoruba case. In K. Owolabi (Ed.), *Language in Nigeria: Essays in honour of Ayo Bamgbose*, pp. 113–127. Ibadan: Group Publishers.

Bayer, J. and M. Salzmann (2013). That-trace effects and resumption: How improper movement can be repaired. In P. Brandt and E. Fuß (Eds.), *Repairs: The added value of being wrong*, pp. 275–334. New York: De Gruyter.

Bisang, W. and R. Sonaiya (2000). Information-structuring in Yoruba. *Linguistics 38*(1), 169–197.

Borer, H. (1984). Restrictive relatives in modern Hebrew. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory 2*(2), 219–260.

Bámgbóṣé, A. (1967). *A short Yoruba grammar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Büring, D. (2016). (Contrastive) topic. In C. Féry and S. Ishihara (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of information structure*, pp. 64–85. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chomsky, N. (1982). *Some concepts and consequences of the Theory of Government and Binding*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Chomsky, N. (1986). *Knowledge of language*. New York: Praeger.

Chomsky, N. (2001). Derivation by phase. In M. Kenstowicz (Ed.), *Ken Hale: A life in language*, pp. 1–52. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Chomsky, N. (2008). On phases. In R. Freidin, C. Otero, and M.-L. Zubizarreta (Eds.), *Foundational issues in linguistic theory*, pp. 133–166. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Chomsky, N. and H. Lasnik (1977). Filters and control. *Linguistic Inquiry 8*(3), 425–504.

Cinque, G. (1977). The movement nature of left dislocation. *Linguistic Inquiry 8*(2), 397–412.

Cruschina, S. (2009). The syntactic role of discourse-related features. *Cambridge Occasional Papers 5*, 15–30.

Fox, D. (1995). Economy and scope. *Natural Language Semantics 3*, 283–341.

Fresco, E. M. (1970). *Tones in Yoruba dialect phonology*. Ph. D. thesis, University of California.

Frey, W. (2004). Notes on the syntax and the pragmatics of German left dislocation. In H. Lohnstein and S. Trissler (Eds.), *The syntax and semantics of the left periphery*. De Gruyter Mouton.

Gregory, M. L. and L. A. Michaelis (2001). Topicalization and left-dislocation: A functional opposition revisited. *Journal of Pragmatics 33*, 1665–1706.

Hein, J. (2017). Doubling and do-support in verbal fronting: Towards a typology of repair operations. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics 2*(1).

Hein, J. (2020). *Verb doubling and dummy verb: Gap avoidance strategies in verbal fronting*. De Gruyter.

Hein, J. (2021). V(P)-fronting in Asante Twi and Limbum. In V. Lee-Schoenfeld and D. Ott (Eds.), *Parameters of predicate fronting: A crosslinguistic look at V(P)-initial constructions*, pp. 96–130. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ilori, J. F. (2010). *Nominal constructions in Igálà and Yorùbá*. Ph. D. thesis, Postgraduate School of Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko.

McCloskey, J. (2002). Resumption, successive cyclicity, and the locality of operations. In S. Epstein and T. Seely (Eds.), *Derivation and explanation in the minimalist program*, pp. 184–226. Oxford: Blackwell.

Owólabí, D. K. O. (1987). Focus construction as NP: A critique. *Yoruba New Series 1*, 45–62.

Oyelaran, O. (1970). Phonetic realization of phonological tone register. *Tone in Generative Phonology Research Notes 3*(2/3), 59–76.

Reinhart, T. (1997). Wh-in-situ in the framework of the minimalist program. *Natural Language Semantics 6*, 29–56.

Rizzi, L. (1997). The fine structure of the left periphery. In L. Haegeman (Ed.), *Elements of grammar: Handbook in generative syntax*, pp. 281–337. Springer.

Rizzi, L. (2006). On the form of chains: Criterial positions and ECP effects. In L. L.-S. Cheng and N. Corver (Eds.), *Wh-movement: Moving on*, pp. 97–133. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Rizzi, L. (2009). Movement and concepts of locality. In M. Piattelli-Palmarini, J. Uriagereka, and P. Salaburu (Eds.), *Of minds and language: A dialogue with Noam Chomsky in the Basque Country*, pp. 155–168. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

Rizzi, L. (2013). Locality. *Lingua 130*, 169–186.

Rizzi, L. and U. Shlonsky (2007). Strategies of subject extraction. In H.-M. Gärtner and U. Sauerland (Eds.), *Interfaces + recursion = language?*, pp. 115–160. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Salzmann, M. (2017). Reconstruction and resumption in indirect A´-dependencies: On the syntax of prolepsis. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory 35*(4), 915–963.

Salzmann, M. (2019). Prolepsis and reconstruction in indirect A′-dependencies: The origin and development of promissive blades. *Probus 31*(2), 261–308.

Shlonsky, U. (2014). Subject positions, subject extraction, EPP and the subject criterion. In E. O. Aboh, M. T. Guasti, and I. Roberts (Eds.), *Locality*, pp. 58–86. New York: Oxford University Press.

Šimík, R. and C. Demian (2020). Domains of interpretation: Novel perspectives on reconstruction. *Linguistic Inquiry 51*(2), 269–282.

Stahlke, H. W. J. (1974). Pronouns and islands in Yoruba. *Studies in African Linguistics 5*, 171–204.

Titov, E. (2013). Do contrastive topics exist? *Journal of Linguistics 49*(2), 413–454.

Wurmbrand, S. (2018). The cost of raising quantifiers. *Glossa: A Journal of General Linguistics 3*(1).