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Foreword

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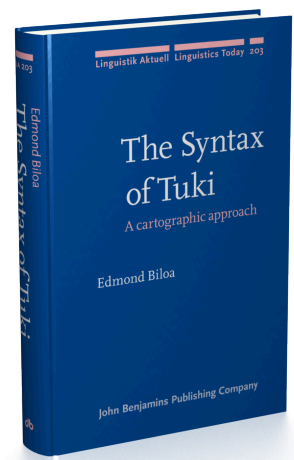

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The Syntax of Tuki: A cartographic approach
Edmond Biloa
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Foreword

On cartographic studies

Around the late 1980's, the descriptive and explanatory success of Pollock's (1989) Split-Infl approach gave rise to a rich research path aiming at identifying finer and finer constituents of the inflectional space. This trend raised much interest and excitement, and led to a radical rethinking of the relation between morphology and syntax. It also raised controversy, and questions: where would the splitting process stop? When and how could one identify the ultimate atoms of syntax?

In this context, cartographic studies were introduced (Rizzi 1997; Cinque 1999). A prominent motivation was that one could look at the problem of the proliferation of syntactic heads from a new angle: rather than introducing functional heads as an ancillary hypothesis in the context of the study of some other problem (the case-agreement system, locality, word order, the study of ellipsis, and the like), one could focus directly on the functional structure of the clause as a primary object of inquiry, acknowledge that there are rich and complex functional sequences, and try to draw maps as precise as possible of the maximal expansions of the different zones of the syntactic tree. The hope was that this way of proceeding would give a realistic picture of the array of syntactic atoms that enter into linguistic computations, and of the shape and properties of linguistic molecules that atoms can be assembled into; moreover, such detailed maps would interact in interesting ways with fundamental principles of linguistic computations, thus enhancing the possibilities of principled explanations, and perhaps would offer a solid basis for applications of various sorts, as precise maps often do in different domains, from geographic explorations to the study of DNA.

While the cartographic study of the IP immediately took a large cross-linguistic perspective with Cinque 1999, the study of the left periphery initially took a different path, focusing on the analysis of a small sample of Romance and Germanic systems (Rizzi 1997). Nevertheless, the Split-C approach progressively showed its general dimension, and analyses quickly multiplied also outside the Indoeuropean family, with important work on Finno-Ugric, Semitic, and then African and East-Asian, American Indian, Austronesian and Australian languages, among others. Whatever zone of the tree we look at through the cartographic lens, it is clear that we must combine a microparametric perspective (Kayne 2000), to get the fundamental parametrisation right, with a macroparametric perspective, in order to always have the grand picture in sight.

The role of African languages in this rapid development was important, particularly in connection with Enoch Aboh's detailed cartographic analysis of Gungbe, in comparison with other Gbe languages, and also with the earlier results on Romance and Germanic (Aboh 2004). One property that made these African languages particularly significant for the cartographic analysis of the left periphery was the systematic presence of overt topic and focus particles. The existence of such particles in many languages from different families was well-known from previous descriptions, but under the cartographic analysis the phenomenon acquired the role of a pivotal syntactic property, at the crossroads with morphology, phonology and semantic/pragmatic interpretation.

The idea of criteria was crucial here: the left periphery of the clause is populated of functional heads such as Top, Foc. Q, Rel, etc. which have a dual function: syntactically, they attract a phrase with matching features to their Spec's; at the interfaces with sound and meaning, they trigger interpretive routines for the proper assignment of such interpretive articulations as topic – comment, focus – presupposition, operator – scope domain, and for the assignment of the appropriate pitch contours. Interpretive articulations are thus transparently expressed in the syntax by tripartite schemata Specifier – head – complement created by external and internal merge of criterial heads with other phrases. Such uniform schemata were sometimes said to "syntacticize" scope-discourse semantics (Cinque & Rizzi 2010), by producing fully transparent representations at the interface levels for the assignment of interpretive properties of topicality, focus, operator scope and the like.

The existence of many languages with overt topic and focus particles, now analyzed as criteria heads, thus provided crucial evidence for this structural view on the expression of scope-discourse properties: under natural assumptions of uniformity, a guiding principle for comparative syntax (Chomsky 2001), one could think that all languages possess such a system, except that the overt morphophonological realization of the criteria heads may vary, a rather trivial spell-out parameter. Clearly, other and more complex types of parametrisation must be assumed to capture the cross-linguistic variation in the expression of scope-discourse properties (e.g. to express the possibility that Top may be recursive or not, that a low topic position may be licensed under Foc or not, that different kinds of wh-elements may occupy distinct positions in the C-space or not, etc. not to speak of the possible use of *in situ* strategies which varies significantly across languages, and of co-occurrence restrictions resulting from V-2 phenomena). Nevertheless it looked empirically sustainable to stick to fundamental uniformity guidelines here, and assume that a structural conception of the mechanisms underlying scope-discourse properties had a general validity. In this conception, scope-discourse interpretation is cast in the same mold as thematic interpretation: they both crucially exploit local relations created by merge, with heads triggering the attribution of the relevant properties (theta roles, and scope-discourse

roles) to their immediate dependents, complements and specifiers. Except that there is a division of labor between external and internal merge here, with external merge involved in creating structures for the assignment of argumental semantic properties, and internal merge primarily involved in the assignment of scope-discourse properties.

The comparative considerations just made in the context of the left periphery have, in fact, a general validity: under uniformity assumptions, we may expect that the functional structure will vary primarily in connection with the overt or covert realization of the functional system. Therefore, one important goal of the comparative cartographic study is to validate the abstract postulation of a functional head in a certain grammatical systems by observing its overt realization in another system. In this respect, the study of different families of African languages has contributed a lot to cartographic research, and undoubtedly it will continue in the future.

In this volume Edmond Biloa offers a comprehensive cartographic analysis of the Bantu language Tuki. The detailed study of the structural maps of the IP system, of the DP, and of the left periphery, including predicate fronting processes, is enriched by an in-depth discussion of core theoretical topics such as the licensing of null pronominals in subject and object position, locality effects, the study of referential dependencies. As is expected under cartographic guidelines, the study of maps interacts profoundly with fundamental principles of syntactic computations, providing novel paths to explanatory analyses. Biloa's volume offers an important contribution to the cartographic endeavor, confirming previously observed generalizations and uncovering new patterns through the specificities of Tuki. It also provides an impressive model for the theory-guided study of Bantu syntax.

Paris, November 28, 2012 Luigi Rizzi