AN APPLICATION OF CHOMSKY'S MOVEMENT CONDITIONS ON LAALI (B73B) LANGUAGE: A CASE STUDY OF NOUN PHRASE MOVEMENT

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Abstract:

This paper scrutinizes the generative conditions of movement in Laali, a Bantu language spoken in the Sothern part of Congo Brazzaville. Its main aim is to find out whether what Chomsky postulates as language movement conditions are applicable to Laali noun phrase. Through the analysis of primary data, collected from everyday speeches from Laali speakers thanks observation and interviewing tools, this study shows that Laali violates most of Chomsky's movement conditions. Indeed, out of the Head movement Constraint and the Cyclicity Principle, Laali almost violates all Chomsky's movement conditions. Principles like the Antilocality condition, Functional Head Movement Constraint, Constraint on Extracted Domain, Preposing Condition and Focusing Condition are highly violated in Laali. Accordingly, what Chomsky views as principles of movement are in fact parameters of variations as their realization are language idiosyncratic.

Key-words: *movement conditions, Laali, parameters of variations, noun phrase*

Résumé

Cet article examine les conditions génératives du mouvement en laali, une langue bantoue parlée dans la partie sud du Congo Brazzaville. Son principal objectif est de monter l'applicabilité de ces conditions sur le syntagme nominal laali. Grâce à l'analyse des données primaires, recueillies à partir de discours quotidiens de locuteurs laali grâce à des outils d'observation et d'interview, cette étude montre que le laali viole la plupart des conditions Chomskyennes du mouvement. En effet, en dehors de la Contrainte de mouvement de la Tête et du Principe de Cyclicité, le laali viole presque toutes les conditions de mouvement mises en place par Chomsky. Des principes tels que la Condition d'Antilocalité, la Contrainte de Mouvement Fonctionnel de la Tête, la Contrainte sur le Domain d'Extraction, la Condition de Préposition et la Condition de Focalisation sont fortement violés en laali. En conséquence, ce que Chomsky considère comme des principes de mouvement sont en réalité des paramètres de variations car leur réalisation relève de l'idiosyncrasie langagière.

Mots-clés : *conditions du mouvement, Laali, variations paramétriques, syntagme nominal*

Introduction:

The issue of movement has abundantly been dealt in linguistics, more specifically in generative syntax on the basis of both theoretical and practical points of views. In transformational grammar, movement is counted as one of the transformational rules along with *substitution*, *addition* and *deletion* that helps turn an underlying structure into a surface one (Bolinger, 1968:159). Accordingly, this work aims at strengthening the literature on that concept, with a particular emphasis on Laali (B73), a Bantu language spoken in the South-west of Congo Brazzaville. Indeed, following the generativist thinking, movement takes place according to certain conditions or constraints that allow derived structures not do be dragged into a kind of ungrammaticality or crash. Additionally, generativists claim movement conditions to be part of common principles universally attested in world languages. Put otherwise, "all movement rules in all languages may actually be reflexes of one universal movement metarule, which Chomsky terms α-movement (alpha-movement)" (Adha and Langsa, 2017:53). Correspondingly, movement operation in languages seems to emanate from one basic rule. Furthermore, "there must be a set of universal or language-specific principles which determine why it is not possible to move certain constituents into certain other positions" (Adha and Langsa, 2017:54). As such, some move conditions are part of universals whereas others vary cross linguistically. For that purpose, this work aims at scrutinizing the possible movement constraints attested in Laali and those that are not. From the definitional point of view, movement is perceived as an operation which consists in moving elements from their basic position other position known as '*landing sites*'. It is also referred to as move alpha or alpha movement (α) i.e. move everything (including a minimal projection (word) or a maximal projection (phrase)) everywhere (Crystal, 2008: 317). In Minimalist Programme, move operation is viewed as a twin brother of merger operation whose part is to construct possible well-formed structures of a language. In this regard, movement is also referred to as 'internal merge' (Crystal, 2008: 301). At issue are the following questions: What are the possible constraints governing the NP movement in Laali? Does Laali violate the generativists' movement conditions? Are movement conditions really principles or parameters of variations? The work is structured as follows: Section (1) deals with the

presentation of the term movement. Section (2) deals with the application of movement conditions in Laali with a specific emphasis on the NP-movement. The conclusion presents the main results of the paper.

1. Movement: background information

This section is concerned with presenting an overview of the term movement. As stated earlier, the notion of movement has largely attracted the attention of generativist linguists (Carnie, 2001; Arts, 2001; Newson et al., 2006; Radford, 2009; Mberi Ngakala, 2014; Berthelo, 2017). Accordingly, "movement is often used within the framework of transformational grammar to refer to a basic kind of transformational operation" (Crystal, 2008: 317). Crystal mainly identifies two types of movement operations namely WH-movement and NP-movement. These are respectively referred to as A-bar movement and A-movement. (Radford, 2004: 432, 434). Movement implies the Empty Category Principle (ECP) i.e., if an element is moved, its vacated position is indicated by a trace labeled as *t* (Li 1990:83).

Adha and Langsa (2017) deal with aspects of movement in English constructions laying emphasis on notions such as affix hopping, auxiliary raising, wh-movement, passive transformation, dative movement, Topicalization among others. Accordingly, affix hopping refers to the lowering of the affix from its underlying position under the T node to its following adjacent V node at Phonetic Form. Auxiliary raising is the movement of the auxiliary from T to the specifier position of Complementizer Phrase in yes-no interrogative structures. Wh-movement is the movement of wh-words from the complement position of the verb within the Verb phrase to the specifier position of the Complementizer Phrase in wh-questions. Passive transformation refers to the promotion of the object to the subject position and the demotion of the subject to the oblique complement i.e., appearing in a by-phrase (**Paul** *eats* **meat** *vs* **Meat** *is eaten by* **Paul**). Dative movement is the movement of the indirect object from the position after the preposition to the one near the verb thanks to the deletion of the preposition. It is also referred to as the applicative construction (e.g. *I give a toy to* **you** vs *I give* **you** *a toy*.). Topicalization is about moving an NP from its

complement position to the initial position of the sentence for emphasis reasons (e.g **Paul** *eats* **meat** vs **Meat, Paul** *eats*).

Nyanchama et al (2015) focus on one of the four empty categories namely NP trace in Ekegusii, a Bantu language spoken in Kenya. Based on Chomsky's (1981), they broadly group noun phrases in two sets namely overt NPs including anaphors, pronouns and referring expressions and covert NPs notably NP-trace, Wh-trace, PRO and null pro (Nyanchama et al., 2015:103-104). Regarding the NP trace, they opine that it refers to the vacuum created by the overt moved NP to another site in the structure. Accordingly, a NP trace is syntactically co-indexed to the moved element in the same way as anaphors (reflexives and reciprocals) are co-referential to their binders in the same clause. Additionally, they insist that NP trace involves A-movement as its moved congener always occupies an argument position. Finally, they conclude that NP trace in Ekegusii is driven by syntactic processes namely passivization, applicative, causative and raising.

Ekori (2022) is concerned with NP movement in passive structures in Mbéré. He presents a totally counter argument with regard to the emptiness category of the moved element. According to Ekori, the moved NP in Mbéré passive structures does not leave an NP trace in its extracted site. It rather leaves a pronoun-like word which refers back to the move NP as shown below

(1) **a-** Bɔ   adzé   biela   **Active**
           Them   eat   food
           "They ate food"

     b- **Biela*i*** madzé   **dzɔ*i*** bɔ   **Passive**
           Food   eat   it   them
           "Food was eaten by them."

     c- Tara   atwé   ndzɔ   **Active**
           Father   build   house
           "Father built a house."

     d- **Ndzɔ*i*** atwé   **yɔ*i***   tara   **Passive**
           House   build   it   father
           "The house was build by father"

It comes out that Mbéré totally violates the generative convention stating that "a moved constituent can only be substituted for an empty category" (Adha and Langsa 2017:55). In fact, data in Mbéré show that the moved element does not trigger an empty NP; it creates a pronoun bound by the moved element instead. Consequently, in addition to the promotion of the object and the demotion of the subject, Mbéré implies the substitution of the moved NP by a pronominal.

Newson et al. (2006) emphasize fronting movements including Focus fronting, Topicalization and Negative fronting. To start with, the movement of a phrase from its post verbal position to the initial position of the sentence may contextually express Focus or Topic function. The former refers to when the speaker moves a phrase to express information as new to the addressee. The latter, however, looks at how the displaced post verbal phrase to the front position of the sentence indicates information as old the addressee. Two main cues distinguish the two functions (Focus and Topic) namely the *use of a comma* (,) and *the intonational pattern*. In fact, with Topic, the moved phrase is usually followed by a comma (,), in addition to be highly intonated. Unlike, with Focus the moved phrase is not followed by a comma as illustrated in the following examples:

(2) a- *an Arsenal supporter*, I wouldn't trust.
    b- *an Arsenal supporter* I wouldn't trust.
                (Newson et al., 2006:272)

In these sentences, the italicized phrase in (2a) is Topic as it is followed by a comma. However, in (2b), the italicized phrase is Focus because it is not followed by a comma. Negative fronting refers to the placement of the negative marker in the initial position of the derived sentence as in **Never** *in my life have I been so embarrassed* (Newson et al., 2006:273), **Not** *only he is clever, he is also wise.*

1.2. Laali NP movement

This section scrutinizes the syntax of NP movement in Laali. As matter of fact, "movement is an operation by which (a copy of) a constituent is displaced from one position in a given structure and comes to occupy another position in the structure" (Radford 2009:467). Radford's

assertion points out that when movement is applied, a constituent leaves its canonical position to set in another one. As regards NP movement, it looks at all possible PF positions that the NP can is prone to thanks to such syntactic processes as passivization, topicalization, focus, questions (yes/no, Wh) to name but these. Following the Generative tradition, "there are UG principles which constrain the way in which movement operations may apply" (Radford 2009: 20). Actually, movement is usually conditioned by a given number of principles or constraints summarized in terms of *Antilocality Principle and Locality Principle*. What follows will show whether these principles are applicable to Laali or not. Put otherwise, we want to find out whether movement conditions proposed by Chomsky are really principles or parameters of variation.

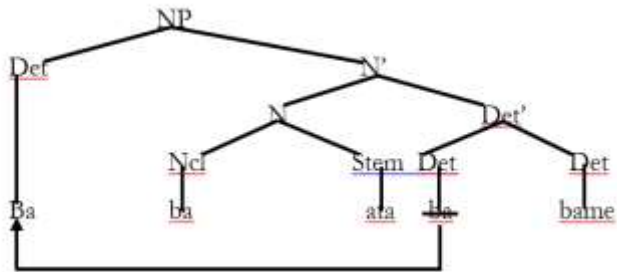### 1.2.1. Laali NP movement and antilocality principle

This part discusses about whether what Chomsky postulates as Antilocality Principle is attested in Laali. Indeed, Antilocality Principle is a principle of grammar stating that movement internally within a phrase is not possible. In other words, "movement internal to a projection counts as too local, and is banned" (Radford 2009: 432). In fact, because of the nearness of elements within the same phrase, movement is barred whence impossible to apply among them. However, let us consider the following Laali examples:

(3) a- *Mwa*   **maamba**
Some   water
"Some water"

b- **Mamba**   *mwa*
Water   Little
"Water is little"

c- **Ndaamba**   *nyama*
Little   meat
"Little meat"

d- *Nyama*   **ndaamba**
Meat   little
"Meat is little"

e- **Bantaba** *bame* *ba*
Goats   poss.   these
"These goats of mine"

f- *Ba* **bantaba** *bame*
These   goats   poss.
"These are goats of mine"

g- **Bantaba** *bamè*
Goats   poss.
"Goats of mine"

h- *Bamè* **bantaba**
Poss.   goats
" Mines are goats"

i- *Mwa* **mounto** *wunuu*
Little   person   that
"That little person"

j- *Wunuu* *mwa* **mounto**
That   little   person
"That is a little person"

k- **Bantaba** *bamè* *bavululo* *bana*
Goats   poss.   several   those
"Those several goats of mine"

l- *Bavululo* *bana* **bantaba** *bamè*
Several   those   goats   poss.
"Those are several goats of mine"

In bold printed are head nouns and in italic determiners. What is to be specified is that (3a), (3c), (3e), (3g), (3i), (3k) are LF structures and (3b), (3d), (3f), (3h), (3j) and (3l) are PF structures. In fact, PF structures are results of movement occurring inside NPs. In these PF structures, the basic order between predeterminers and head nouns has been reversed giving rise to what is referred to as verbless or small clauses[1]. Owing to that fact, Laali can be admitted to violate Antilocality Constraint which states movement not to occur internally within a phrase. The following tree diagram shows the Laali determiner movement from the post nominal position to its pre nominal one.

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[1] A verbless or small clause is a clause whose verb is covert i.e, it does not appear in the spell-out.

(4)

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                            NP
              ┌──────────────┴──────┐
            Det                     N'
              │              ┌───────┴────────┐
              │              N               Det'
              │         ┌────┴────┐        ┌───┴───┐
              │        Ncl      Stem  Det  Det
              │         │        │     │    │
             Ba        ba       ata   ba   bame
```
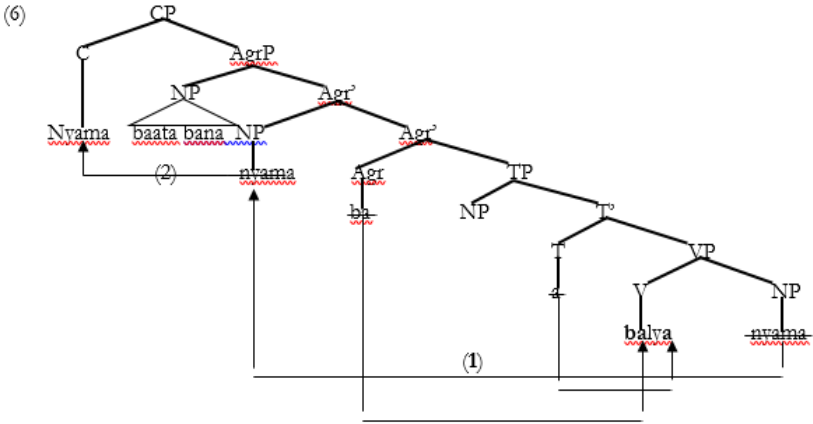
1.2.2. Laali NP movement and locality principles:
Locality Principle asserts that every grammatical operation is local in the sense that it affects the closest constituent of the relevant type (Radford, 2009: 21, 31). Locality Principle is said to be clause based. Put otherwise, "movement rules move things around in the sentence (Carnie, 2001:189). Consequently, movement operation occurs within the same clause or sentence thanks. Locality Principle includes conditions like Preposing Condition, Focus condition, Functional Head Condition, Condition on Extraction Domains and Head Movement Condition. The following illustrate examples based on Locality Principle:

(5)
a- **Baata bana balya nyama**
People four they-eat meat
"Four people ate meat."

b- *Nyama balya kwa baata bana*
Meat they-eat by people four
"Meat was eaten by four people."

c- **Baata bana** *nyama* **balya**
People four meat they-eat
"What four people ate is meat"

d- *Nyama baata bana balya*
Meat people four they-eat
"Meat, four people ate"

e- **Bana balya** *nyama* **baata**
Four they-eat meat people
"The four who ate meat are people."

f- **Baata balya** *nyama* **bana**
People they-eat meat four
"The people who ate meat are four."

g- Balya *nyama* **baata bana**
they-eat meat people four
"Those who ate meat are four people."

h- *Nyama balya* **baata bana**
Meat they-eat people four
"Meat, four people ate."

i- **Bana baata balya** *nyama*
Four people they-eat meat
"Four are people who eat meat"

j- *Nyama* **bana baata** balya
Meat four people they-eat

k- * **Baata** *nyama* **bana** balya
people meat four they-eat

In the above examples, (5a) is the LF and the remaining the PF as they have undergone movement. Also, movement in PF structures is local because it is operated in the same clause. Yet, unlike conditions that Chomsky advances about movement, the reality in Laali seems to be different. Indeed, if (5b) and (5d) corroborate Chomsky's movement conditions because resulting from the passivization and fronting processes respectively and respecting one of the conditions namely *Head Movement Constraint/HMC*;[2] and (5c) and (5d) refer to his **Cyclicity Principle**, the other PF structures violate Chomsky's movement conditions. To start with (5a), (5c) and (5d), the noun phrase **nyama** undergoes a cyclic movement i.e., movement occurring in terms of steps or cycles. In (5a), **nyama** appears as the internal argument of **–lya** (eat). In (5c), it occurs as its external argument and is known as to be in island position[3]. Finally, in (5d) it ends up as the head of the complementizer and appears on its landing site. The following tree diagram illustrates the fact.

[2] Head Movement Constraint/HMC is a principle of Universal Grammar which specifies that movement between one head position and another is only possible between the head of a given structure and the head of its complement. (Radford: 157, 176)
[3] The Island is the intermidiate position before the landing site.

(6)

CP
C — Nyama
AgrP
NP — baata bana
(2)
Agr'
Agr
ba
Agr'
NP — nyama
TP
NP
T'
T
t
VP
V — balya
NP — nyama
(1)

(5e) and (5f) violate Functional Head Constraint/FHC to the extent that the noun **baata** has been separated from its determiner **bana**. Constraint on Extraction Domains/CED is also violated in that Laali allows elements to be moved out of its specifiers. In fact, in the specifier **baata bana** in (5e) and (5f), **baata** has been moved far from its dependent determiner **bana**. (5e) and (5f) also violate both the Preposing and the Focus Conditions which state that only a maximal projections can be preposed and focused. In (5e) **bana** is preposed and focused and so is **baata** in (5e), knowing that none of them is a maximal projection on its own. In (5g) the overall VP **balaya nyama** is moved without inserting anything as it is the case in English and French. In (5h) the complement of the verb is moved without its specific head verb. What is also worthy of mentioning at this level is that in Laali, the head verb and its internal argument can be reversed. However this reverse order must occur adjacently. In other words, the internal argument leaves its basic post verbal position as signaled out in (5a) to appear immediately in the external like argument position as in (5c). In this context, no additional element must intervene between the head verb and its NP complement in the process of movement. Due to the fact that the head verb **–lya** and its complement **nyama** in (5i) and (5j) are far from each other in the movement process, the latters are said to crash in Laali.

227

Conclusion:

This study has dealt with conditions of movement on Laali NP. It has resulted that Laali does not attest the majority of what Chomsky and his associates advocate as conditions of movement. Indeed, unlike the Head movement Constraint and the Cyclicity Principle, Laali tends to violate Chomsky's movement conditions. To start with, it violates Antilocality Principle because movement within a Laali noun phrase is possible. Next, Functional Head Movement Constraint and Constraint on Extracted Domain are violated because in Laali the noun can be moved alone without its adjacent determiner, and also Laali allows movement within the specifier (subject). Furthermore, Laali violate the Preposing and Focusing Conditions because in that language non maximal elements can be preposed and focused. Consequently, movement is a pure issue of language specificity.

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