

Predicate Clefting in Afro-European Creoles\*

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1. Introduction

- (1) Iz tok a tokin tu o|yu, lisan tu mi na. (Trinidadian)

The above sentence is a good example of a type of clefting which is common to most, if not all, of the Afro-European Creole languages, and which is found in many Niger-Congo languages. It is not, however, found in any of the European languages which are lexically related to these Creoles. In this paper we will examine this structure comparatively in greater detail.

2. Predicate clefting

One sentence as it occurs in a representative sampling of Creoles, as well as in three Niger-Congo languages (each from a different sub-family), is:

- |        |                            |                   |
|--------|----------------------------|-------------------|
| (2) a. | Iz wak i wakın.            | (Trinidadian)     |
| b.     | Iz wak im a wak.           | (Jamaican)        |
| c.     | Na wok i de wok (so).      | (Krio)            |
| d.     | Se travay l(i)ap travay.   | (Haitian)         |
| e.     | Ta traha e ta traha.       | (Papiamentu)      |
| f.     | Kɪbulɔ kɔmɔ bulɔ (yaŋ).    | (Temne)           |
| g.     | Iṣẹ l'ò nṣẹ.               | (Yoruba)          |
| h.     | Na wak i de wak.           | (Nigerian Pidgin) |
| i.     | Ne koruta ekoruta (we:ra). | (Kikuyu)          |

The nearest English equivalent to which would be:

'He's *really*, or, he's *actually* working.'

There are two things to be noted about these structures: the pragmatics of their use and their syntax. Pragmatically, these sentences are a type of emphatic. They underline the fact that the subject is actually performing the action mentioned, or is performing it to a marked degree. They are frequently used as exclamations of wonder or astonishment. They are not primarily

intended to focus on the action of the verb or to differentiate it from that of some other possible verb as in English sentences of the type:

- (3) What he is doing is working, not sleeping.<sup>1</sup>

With respect to the syntax, the first thing which should be noted is that in all the languages from which we have cited examples, the structure is essentially the same. There is a copying of the verb from its normal sentence position to the left, and the verb is preceded in most cases by what appears to be a copula-like element. In each case this copula-like element is one of limited distribution in its own language. Even those Ka-type languages<sup>2</sup> which always require that verbs in sentences of real predication be accompanied by a tense/aspect marker, only use the bare verb stem in the leftward copy.

As one could predict, exactly the same structure is found with adjectives:

- (4) a. Iz tɔl i tɔl. (Trinidadian)  
 b. Iz tal im a tal. (Jamaican)  
 c. Na langa i langa so. (Krio)  
 d. Se ro li ro. (Haitian)  
 e. Kɔl k(a) ɔbɔl yɑŋ. (Temne)  
 f. Gíga l'ó ga. (Yoruba)<sup>3</sup>

What this means is that he is tall, that he is not wearing high heels. It is clear that these sentences are emphatic and not simply declarative.

In addition to the predicate clefts which we have already described, Creoles also possess typical NP focus clefting:

- (5) a. i. Iz Jan dat dɪd kɪk Miəri. (Trinidadian)  
 'It's John who kicked Mary.'  
 ii. Iz Miəri Jan dɪd kɪk.  
 'It's Mary who John kicked.'  
 b. i. Na Olu na im Mériam bɪn slap. (Krio)  
 'It's Olu that Mary slapped.'  
 ii. Na Mériam na im bɪn slap Olu.  
 'It's Mary that slapped Olu.'  
 c. i. Se zamili Piɛ rɛme. (Haitian)  
 'It's his friend that Peter likes.'  
 ii. Se Piɛ ki rɛme zamili.  
 'It's Peter that likes his friend.'  
 d. i. Mayaŋ kɔnɔ Amɛŋ sap. (Temne)  
 'It's Maya that Amy beat.'  
 ii. Amɛŋ kɔnɔ sap Mayaŋ.  
 'It's Amy that beat Maya.'

What is noteworthy here is that the structure of the focusing cleft varies between languages. In fact, VP focus clefting, of the type:

- (6) What he did was write the paper.

cannot even occur in the Niger-Congo languages which we have checked; in addition, these sorts of clefts vary in structure among the various Creoles. This is in decided contrast to the emphatic type of predicate clefting which we were discussing earlier which shows a singular uniformity of structure throughout Creole-dom.

Clearly, focus clefting and emphatic clefting differ not only pragmatically but also in their syntax. The sentences given in (5) are rather complex so that it is difficult to see what is happening, but if we look at the simplest type of NP focus clefting:

- (7) a. Iz a tiča i iz. (Trinidadian)  
 b. Na tiča i bi. (Krio)  
 c. Se profesε li ye. (Haitian)  
 'What he is is a teacher.'

we can see the syntactic difference: focus clefting involves a chopping transformation, and not the copying transformation of the emphatic cleft, that is, we do not find:

- (8) a. \*Iz a tiča i iz a tiča.  
 b. \*Na tiča i bi tiča.  
 c. \*Se profesε li ye profesε.

In this paper we are not discussing focusing clefts as in (5) and (7), but rather the emphatic clefts where we find a uniform structure in all the Creole and Niger-Congo languages which we have checked. An interesting condition on this type of emphatic clefting is that it can only occur on the verb of the main S. Thus one cannot get:

- (9) \*Na wok a se i de wok. (Krio)

as an emphatic cleft. In order to emphasize the verb of the lower S it is necessary to do the emphatic cleft on the verb of the higher S. Thus we do get:

- (10) Na se a se i de wok. (Krio)  
 'I said that he is really working.'

It should be observed here that even though (9) is starred as an emphatic, it does have a reading in that it is in itself an emphatic movement transformation from:

- (9) a. A se "Na wok i de wok."

That this is the correct analysis is shown by the fact that no sentences parallel to (9a) can be found with verbs like 'know' or 'believe'.

Now, what remains to be determined is the syntax of these sentences. The first question which must be answered is: What is the copula-like form which introduces the copied element, that is, the verb or adjective. If one examines the other sentences in

which this form is used in the various languages, it is clear that its primary function is to serve as a Noun Phrase Introducer. Thus it is also found in NP-be-NP sentences of the type:

- (11) a. Mi frɛn ɪz a dokta. (Trinidadian)  
 b. Mi frem na dakta. (Krio)  
 c. Zami mwə se daktɛ. (Haitian)

That is, the sentence-type which establishes class-membership and the predication of identity:

- (12) a. Da man de ɪz mi papa. (Trinidadian)  
 b. Da man de na mi papa. (Krio)  
 c. Moun sa-a se papa mwə. (Haitian)

The Krio 'na' which appears here is not to be confused with the preposition 'na' which occurs in most of the Creole languages. Here are some examples of its use.

- (13) a. i de na im rum. (Krio)  
 b. Li na cham ni. (Haitian)  
 'He is in his room.'

The first thing to be noticed then, about the syntax of the emphatic cleft is that the copy of the verb base has lost its verbal nature, that is, has ceased to be a verb. This is shown by the fact that the copied form can never co-occur with a tense/aspect marker. Thus in Trinidadian you get (14a) and not (14b).

- (14) a. ɪz wək i wəkɪn.  
 b. \*ɪz wəkɪn i wəkɪn.

If the verb is transitive the copy cannot co-occur with the object. Thus we find, also in Trinidadian (15a), but not (15b).

- (15) a. ɪz lʌv Jɔn lʌv Miɛri.  
 b. \*ɪz lʌv miɛri Jɔn luv Miɛri.

Since the copy has lost its verbal nature and is introduced by a form which otherwise only serves to introduce NP's, the only possible conclusion is that the copy has become nominalized.

Any attempt to provide a detailed, formal description of the syntactic processes involved in the derivation of these emphatic clefts runs into the morass of conflicting theories about the derivation of clefts in general. Even though these are not equivalent to either the English clefts or pseudo-clefts, they are nevertheless a type of cleft and their analysis must of necessity be informed by the problems inherent in all analyses of general clefting processes. This means that a simple solution which merely extracts a copy of the verb and moves it to sentence initial position is necessarily unsatisfactory. Such a solution would

fail to provide any explanation for the nominalization of the verbal copy and the obligatory introduction of what we have termed the nominal introducer, *-iz*, *na*, *sɛ*, etc.

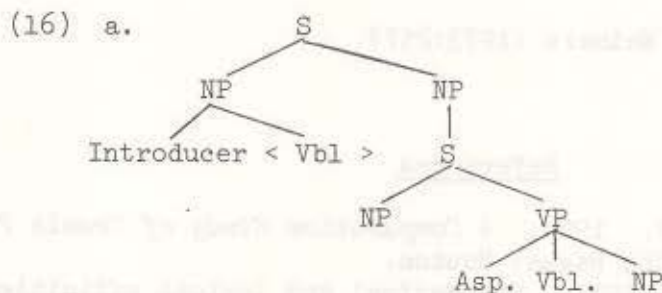
In the underlying representation of the emphatic cleft there must be more structure, of some sort, present than there is in the corresponding simple unemphatic sentence.

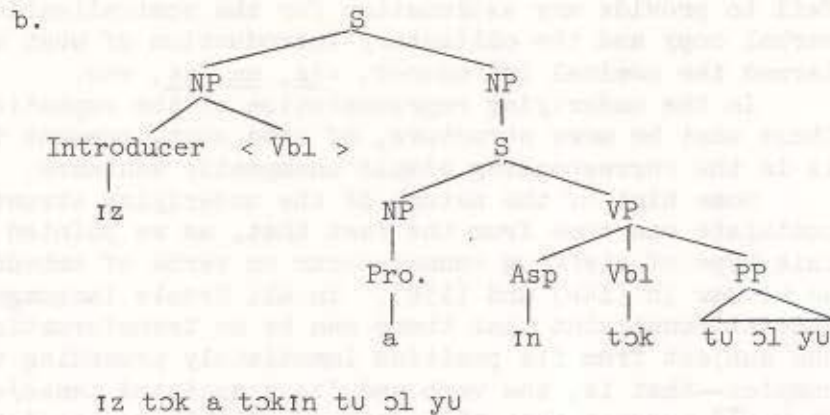
Some hint of the nature of the underlying structure one must postulate can come from the fact that, as we pointed out before, this type of clefting cannot occur on verbs of embedded sentences as we saw in (14b) and (15b). In all Creole languages there is a general constraint that there can be no transformation which moves the subject from its position immediately preceding the verbal complex--that is, the verb and its associated tense/aspect markers. We would suggest that the converse of this constraint, in a somewhat weaker form, accounts for the fact that the emphatic cleft cannot be performed on the verb of the embedded sentence. That is, just as the subject cannot be moved away from its verb, so too the verb, or its copy, cannot be moved very far from its subject. If one were to cleft on the verb of the embedded sentence, thus moving it to sentence initial position, then the NP immediately following would not be the underlying subject of the clefted verb and hence the sentence could not be interpreted, a major constraint of these languages having been violated.

### 3. Conclusion

Since we have shown that the copy of the verb is a nominalization and hence dominated by an NP, and since the simplex sentence in itself is embedded in the major sentence which is the emphatic cleft, then the logical conclusion is that the emphatic cleft is itself a nominal sentence.

Although this analysis necessitates the generation of an unfilled node, this poses no problem since the node can only be filled by the verb or predicate adjective of the simplex sentence and therefore there is no need for the element being copied to be marked or indexed in any way. Therefore the underlying structure which we would propose for the Creole emphatic clefts, exemplified by our opening clause, is:





### Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup>One notable exception to this is in Trinidadian where both uses are equally accepted.

<sup>2</sup>We are extending the term Ka-type languages, proposed by Goodman (1964:17 and 83 ff.) as a primary division of the French-based Creoles, to the general domain of Afro-European creole languages, cf. Taylor 1971, where this distinction is implicit. Basically, the Ka-type languages are those like the French Creole of the Lesser Antilles and French Guiana, Papiamentu, Krio and the Virgin Islands Dutch Creole which usually do not make a distinction between the present progressive and the simple present and which usually have an auxiliary-like element associated with all present tense verbs. In the French-based Creoles of the Lesser Antilles this particle is *ka*, hence Goodman's and our designation. By non-Ka Creoles, we mean languages such as Haitian and Trinidadian which have a distinction between present progressive and habitual present and do not normally have an auxiliary particle in the habitual present.

<sup>3</sup>Cited from Welmers (1973:257).

### References

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