

# Merge of Topic and Pronominal Apposition Construction in AAVE\*

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**Im, Chegyong. 2011. Merge of Topic and Pronominal Apposition Construction in AAVE.** *Linguistic Research* 28(1), 37-51. This paper is an attempt to explain the pronominal apposition construction in AAVE based on the Multiple Sphere Hypothesis suggested in Im (2004, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009) as well as the Merge principle suggested in van Gelderen (2006). We argue that the noun phrase followed by the pronominal subject is not moved from inside the sentence but base-generated as a topic by 3D-Merge in  $\Omega$ -sphere and the Specifier Incorporation Principle. The simultaneous Merge in three spheres guarantees the licensing of the topic phrase and the pronominal subject without causing the locality problem. (Daegu Arts University)

**Key Words** pronominal apposition construction, Specifier Incorporation Principle, Multiple Sphere Hypothesis, 3 dimension Merge, locality

## 1. Introduction

Givón (1979) suggested that loose, paratactic, pragmatic discourse structures develop into tight, grammaticalized syntactic structures. Syntactic structure in time erodes via processes of morphologization and lexicalization in a cyclic wave as follows:

(1) discourse --> syntax --> morphology --> morphophonemics --> zero

One of his examples is the relation between the discourse-functional notion of topic and the syntactic-grammatical notion of subject. He pointed out that grammatical agreement on the verb is fundamentally a topic property and that it arises diachronically via the reanalysis of topic into subject and - simultaneously- of an anaphoric pronoun into a agreement morpheme. (Givon 1979: 84)

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- (2) My ol' man, he rides with Angels  $\Rightarrow$  My ol' man he-rides with the Angels.

As proposed in Van Valin and LaPolla (1997: 331), there is a possibility that pronominal affixes on verbs are the normal expression of pronominal subjects for some languages, and that the affixes themselves are the real subjects of the clause, even in clauses in which there is a separate nominal subject. Under this view, the separate nominal are not really subjects, but noun phrases in apposition to the nominal affix on the verb<sup>1</sup>.

One of the distinguished features of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) or Black English is pronominal apposition (PrA), i.e., repetition of noun subject with pronoun, repeating the subject for emphasis as in (3).

- (3) My father, he was poor.

As defined by many linguists, AAVE is a hybrid language, containing elements of Euro-American English (“standard English”) and elements of West African Languages (surviving Africanisms from Yoruba, Ibo, Ewe, etc.). PrA is common in Yoruba.

- (4) Eya me, ot cu.  
‘My mother, she has died.’

PrA in (3) is different from topicalization (TOP) construction as in (5a), or resumptive pronoun (ReP) construction as in (5b)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> In this view, the Pro Drop parameter manifested in Chomsky (1981) is a distinction between languages in which subject pronouns are required and those in which they are not. However, given the fact that languages that require a pronoun in subject position are fairly infrequent, there is a danger of such approach being Anglo-centric, treating other languages as being underlyingly like English despite their superficial difference. According to Dryer et al (2005)'s survey, the English type languages where pronominal subjects are expressed by pronouns in subject position that are normally if not obligatorily present were 77 out of the total 674 languages. On the other hand, the number of languages where pronominal subjects are expressed by affixes on verbs is 409. For more detail, see Dryer et al. (2005)'s World Atlas.

<sup>2</sup> My English informant who is aware of the notions such as topicalization and resumptive pronouns reports that (5a) is grammatically OK but very awkward and that she would prefer (5b) in speech in spite of its marginality.

- (5) a. My father, I love *t*  
 b. My father, I love him

Traditionally in GB theories, it has been suggested that *my father* in (5a) moves to SpecCP position by the operation called topicalization, a type of A'-movement. The trace is supposed to be interpreted by the operator-variable binding. There's a little controversy for the construction (5b). English marginally allows pronouns in place of gaps (what Sells 1984 refers to as "intrusive pronouns") in islands<sup>34</sup>. In (3), however, the subject position is filled with a pronoun preceded by a full noun, which has no syntactic source in the following sentence.

The purpose of this paper is to attempt to explain the PrA construction based on the Multiple Sphere Hypothesis suggested in Im (2004, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009) as well as the Merge principle suggested in van Gelderen (2006). Chapter 2 will show the cross-linguistic distribution of topic constructions, trying to explain the structure based on one of the economy principles of van Gelderen; Specifier Incorporation Principle. In chapter 3, the notion of 3D- Merge will be employed to explain the pragmatic Merge of the separate nominal, followed by the pronominal apposition. Some consequences will be suggested in chapter 4.

<sup>3</sup> Resumptive pronouns are often found in relative clauses. In (i) *him* is a resumptive pronoun bound by *who* and interpreted as a bound variable.

- (i) I wonder [who<sub>i</sub> they think [that [if Mary marries him<sub>i</sub> ] then everybody will be happy]]

The appearance of resumptive pronouns is marginal in standard English, but quite acceptable in French and colloquial English. Theoretically, the construction is exceptional as well. Since the *if*-clause creates an Adjunct Island, extraction of *who* out of the object position is ungrammatical, as shown in (ii):

- (ii) \* I wonder [who<sub>i</sub> they think [that [if Mary marries e<sub>i</sub> ] then everybody will be happy]]

The resulting chain presumably violates subadjacency. In (i), on the other hand, *who* has not been moved. But being an operator, it must bind a variable, in this case the resumptive pronoun *him*.

<sup>4</sup> Shlonsky (1992) hypothesizes that ReP are never freely generated, with their distribution always regulated by last resort considerations.

- (i) a. the book that Mary likes (\*him)  
 b. the book that I wondered if I would get \*(it) in the mail

Last resort strategy is employed when movement is preempted. In more modern terms (Chomsky 1995), this means that a derivation with a ReP is allowed if the derivation with movement crashes. (Grolla 2003: 73)

## 2. Merge of Topic and Van Gelderen's Economy Principle

Traditionally, the topic phrase *this book* in (6a) is supposed to be moved from its original position in (6b) (Ross 1967; 209).

- (6) a. This book, I really like.  
b. I really like this book.

Topicalization has been assumed to be a way of focalizing a phrase by chopping and fronting it<sup>5</sup>. Chomsky (1977:90) once assumed that topicalization is similar to left dislocation and that (6a) is derived from (6b) by way of (7), where *what* is obligatorily deleted.

- (7) [TOP this book] [COMP what] [I really like]]]

It can be observed that the typical movement analysis always leaves a trace from whose position the topicalized element starts.

Some topic constructions in English, however, contain an element occupying the position which is supposed to be empty.

- (8) a. Those girls, they giggle when they see me.  
b. Cigarettes, you couldn't pay me to smoke them.

The optional appearance of the pronoun *them* in (8b) allows us to classify it as a resumptive pronoun or an intrusive pronoun (Sells 1984). The mandatory appearance of *they* in (8a), however, raises a problem.

We believe the problem is due to the fact that English has just a few instances of the structure like (8a) (some people reject the structure.). Cross linguistically, however, the structure can be found in many languages, especially in topic-prominent

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<sup>5</sup> Ross found that it is a kind of reordering transformation which obeys the constraints like complex NP constraint, sentential subject constraint, left branching constraint but disobeys the upward bound constraint.

(i) \*This hat, I believe the claim that he was wearing  
(ii) Beans, I don't think you will be able to convince me Harry has ever tasted in his life

languages<sup>6</sup>. Some examples from Korean and Vietnamese are provided below:

- (9) a. Saram-tul-un      ø/ku-tul-i/caki-tul-i      mitgo-sip-un  
 People-PL-TOP    ø/he-PL-NOM/self-PL-NOM    believe-want-COM  
 ket-man      mit-nunta  
 thing-DEL    believe-DEC  
 'People believe (only) what they want to do so.'
- b. (Còn) tôi (thì) (tôi) hoàn-toàn tán-thành.  
 (as for) I (TOP) I completely approve  
 '(As for) me, I fully approve (of it).'
- (Nguyen K. T. 1975: 201, cited in Clark 1992)

The above Korean and Vietnamese data show that the topic can be an entity separated from the embedded/main clause where the subject position is occupied by another NP (whether it is null or not).

Barbosa (2000: 69) analyses the structure (10) in Italian as an instance of Clitic Left Dislocation (CLLD). He argues that the DP *a Maria* is base-generated in the front of the clause, not moved from argument position and is licensed by predication via an open position inside the clause, supplied by *pro*, which bears the theta-role, occupying the subject position<sup>7</sup>.

- (10) a. A Maria    telefonou.  
           the M      called  
 b. [[A Maria<sub>i</sub>] [IP telefonou *pro*<sub>i</sub> ]]

<sup>6</sup> The difference between topic-prominent languages and non-topic-prominent languages is that topic marking is done systematically in the former, while the latter resort to various idiosyncratic means for topicalization. Examples of topic-prominent languages are East Asian languages such as the Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Malay, Indonesian, Hungarian and some Amerindian languages. (Li 1976: 475)

<sup>7</sup> Some argue that the pre-verbal subject in (10a) has been A-moved to SpecIP. (See Burzio 1986, Rizzi 1990, Belletti 1994 for the discussion.) Such a movement, however, raises a problem for the principle of economy of the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995). Since the post-verbal subject in (11) is checked for Case, there's no hypothetical reason for raising to SpecIP. The movement would be superfluous under economy considerations. Some other studies (Calabrese 1991, Pinto 1994, Samek-Lodovici 1994, Belletti and Shlonsky 1995, among others) note that the pre-verbal subject in (10a) has different discourse properties from the post-verbal subject in (10b): pre-verbal subjects are topics whereas post-verbal subjects are foci. Based on these observations, Pinto 1994, Grimshaw & Samek-Lodovici 1995, Costa 1996 propose that overt movement to SpecIP is triggered by some 'topic' feature.

*Pro* in (10b) is occupying the post-verbal subject position as evidenced in (11), which has been assumed to be the default structure in the literature. (See Rizzi 1982, among others.)

- (11) Telefonou a Maria  
called the M

Barbosa (2000) concludes that topics constructed with subjects are unambiguously analyzed as instances of CLLD (base-generated not topicalized), with topic base-generated in the front of the clause and doubled by *pro* in subject position.

Based on the observations thus far, we assert that the following construction is possible in some languages such as AAVE, Korean and Vietnamese at least.

- (12) [[NP1<sub>TOP</sub>]i, [[NP2<sub>SUBJ</sub>]i ... ]]

In order to maintain why (12) is the proper construction where movement of TOP is impossible, we resort to the Economy principles suggested in van Gelderen (2004, 2006).

She argues that the emergence of merge will have the effect of incorporating the pragmatic material into a syntactic structure. There are also a number of changes where a new element comes from outside of the sentence. Van Gelderen (2006: 15) suggests the following principle to encompass the cases such as a special pronoun being incorporated into the CP to indicate subordination, and an emphatic topic pronoun becoming the subject (in SpecTP).

- (13) Specifier Incorporation Principle (SIP)

When possible, be a specifier rather than an adjunct.

The first case of special pronoun being incorporated into the CP can be found in the introduction of *wh*-pronoun. By later Middle English, the complementizer *þat* or *þe* is competing with the *wh*-pronoun which was influenced by Latin and French (Rydén 1983). Some instances of early *wh*-complementizer can be found in the collections of letters from the 15thC as in (14) and (15).

- (14) *a laide de Dieu notre Seigneur, Qui vous douit bonne vie et longue*  
 with the-help of God our lord, who us gives good life and long  
 'With the help of God, our Lord, who gives us a good and long life'  
 (Bekynton, cited in Rydén 1983: 131)
- (15) *be the grace of God, who haue yow in kepying*  
 'by the grace of God, who keeps you' (Paston Letters 410).

The wh-pronoun in the specifier position tells us that speakers start to use the specifier for creative reasons when Merging new elements.

Adopting the principle (13), we argue that [NP1<sub>TOP</sub>] in (12) comes into the structure occupying a specifier position. That is, *my father* in (16=3) comes into the structure/is Merged occupying a specifier position.

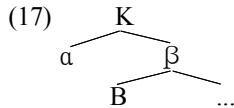
- (16=3) My father, he was poor.

Recall that [NP1] *my father* cannot be moved from the subject position since [NP2] *he* is not a resumptive pronoun (cf) Chapt. 4). We argue that [NP2] is a subject as can be identified in (8a) and (9). Now the question is: what kind of specifier position does [NP1] occupy and what type of head is it?

### 3. Cartography and Merge in Spheres

Chomsky (1998: 27) asserts that “[r]elations that enter into C<sub>HL</sub> either (i) are imposed by legibility conditions, or (ii) fall out in some natural way from the computational processes.” As for the condition (ii), he suggests that Merge yields two relations for “free”, Sister and Immediately Contain (Chomsky 1998: 31).

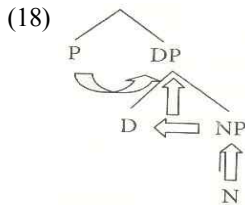
Assuming this, Grohmann (2003b) suggests the following “Natural Relation” employing the two primitive relations.



To establish the possible checking configurations in the course of derivation, he asserts, the most natural extension of the two primitive relations is the single application of composition to these two relations only, resulting in the structure (17) with at most one specifier. He argues that if features are checked in very local relationships, then head-complement, specifier-head, and head-head configurations are the only possible relations.

In compliance with Grohmann's "Natural Relations" which exclude the possibility of movement of adjuncts, we suggest that [NP1] in (3) and (12) is not the result of movement but of base generation. But how and where is it base-generated when we don't assume anything beyond the endocentric projection of (17)?

To answer the question, we can resort to the cartography suggested in Rizzi (1997), which is a reflect of Grimshaw (1991)'s idea of extended projection. She claimed that in addition to their own features, functional elements has a categorial feature matching that of the lexical projection they embed. For example, D is specified as [+N], since it takes an NP complement. Since D bears the feature [+N], so does DP (cited in Boeckx 2008: 14).



This notion of extended projection is stretched in the phrase structure as a proliferation of ever-more fine grained functional categories. The best known is the cartographical proposal of Rizzi (1997), in which he has argued that CP is a rich functional domain consisting of four projections in (19).

$$(19) \text{ CP} = [\text{ForceP} [\text{TopP} [\text{FocP} [\text{FinitenessP}]]]]$$

By extending left periphery of the clause, information is passed up from projection to projection in a strictly local fashion all the way up to the topmost projection, ForceP<sup>8</sup>.

Now, to solve the locality problem without abandoning the cartographic



distribution of TopicP or FocusP, the idea of Merge in Multiple Spheres suggested in Im (2004, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010) can be employed.

The most fundamental hypothesis Multiple Sphere Hypothesis (MSH) assumes is that the process of derivation is not cyclic, but simultaneous. L contains operations that determine the phonological value as well as the semantic value of each syntactic object by selecting the features from the lexicon that pervasively exists in three spheres:  $\Theta$ -sphere,  $\Phi$ -sphere and  $\Omega$ -sphere. Revising Grohmann (2003a:74), we believe that the contextual information would be clausal tripartition into three spheres.

(20) Tripartition of Contextual Information

- i.  $\Theta$ -sphere: part of the derivation where thematic relations are created
- ii.  $\Phi$ -sphere: part of the derivation where agreement properties are licensed
- iii.  $\Omega$ -sphere: part of the derivation where discourse information is established

Our MSH, however, differs from Grohmann's in that we assume single Spell-Out instead of Multiple Spell-Out by Domain. While he suggests that once a Prolific Domain is complete, it spells out, we argue that an SO spells out when all the features in the spheres are specified<sup>9</sup>.

We have proposed in Im (2004, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009), that when syntactic objects  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  come into numeration by Merge, they assume inherent discourse features (of information like topic, focus . . .) as well as inherent syntactic features ( $\Phi$ -features, for instance) and thematic features. The parametric variation of word order among languages is determined by the features in each sphere. As is well-known, Merge is a set operation that imposes no intrinsic ordering among its

<sup>8</sup> As is pointed out in Boeckx (2008), Rizzi's decomposition of CP is not without a problem. It is unclear how [+wh] information is passed onto Topic phrase, given that [wh] marks new information, and [Topic] old information; a semantic clash occurs when [wh] feature of FocusP is passed onto TopicP.

(i) [VP [ForceP [TopicP [FocusP [FinitenessP]]]]]

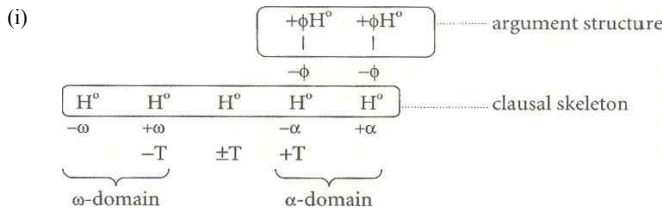
<sup>9</sup> Multiple spell-out by phase or domain (Uriagereka 1999) would yield the stacking of outputs or cascades. The outputs have to wait to be interpreted at the interfaces till the end of the derivation.

members. In order for a Merger set to be linearized into strings of words at PF, we have to wait until all the features of three spheres are specified. MSH also assumes that the operation called “Transfer” caused by discourse properties of TH/EX or Foc/Top is derived by the features in the  $\Omega$ -sphere<sup>10</sup>.

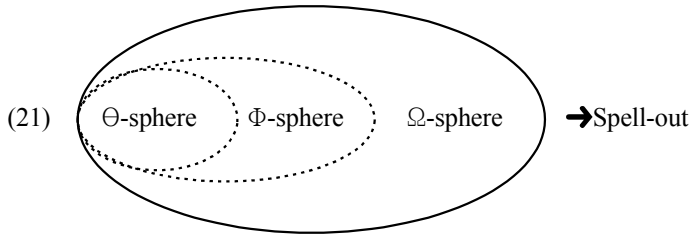
Now, armed with these notions, let's tackle the problem of the structure in (12) or (16). We propose, first, that [NP1] in (12) or (16) is a Topic phrase which comes into syntax by the principle and (13) of van Gelderen (2006). It occupies the SpecTop described in (19) of Rizzi (1997), e.i., it is not moved from any position of the sentence but base-generated by the principle (13) since the endocentric projection of Grohmann's Natural Relations disallows the stacking of specifiers.

Second, As argued in Boeckx (2008), an argument with  $\Omega$ -features is merged from a different sphere or domain. The diagram of (21) shows how a Topic phrase can be merged without disobeying the locality condition. We suggest that [NP1] in (12) and (16) is Merged in  $\alpha$ -domain (or VP,  $\nu$ P) and it is also Merged in  $\Omega$ -sphere (or ForceP). Both Merge is the result of Probe-Goal relation of features in each sphere (e.g., thematic relations in  $\Theta$ -sphere, Case feature in  $\Phi$ -sphere, and Top feature in  $\Omega$ -sphere).

<sup>10</sup> Similar ideas are found in Boeckx (2008). He argues for an unambiguous Merge, such that the Merge produces a vector, or that the output of Merge operation is vectorial in character. Vectors are objects that have both a magnitude, and an orientation. They are like arrows; they have a clear point of origin and an end point. The second suggestion in his theory of Merge is that the clause skeleton is composed of three distinct domains like  $\omega$ -domains (CP-domains, the same notion in Grohmann 2003a), T-domains and  $\alpha$ -domains (thematic domains), T-domains functioning as a linker, whose shape looks like the following (Boeckx 2008; 152);



He further asserts that the presence of  $\phi$ -features and T-features allow an  $\alpha$ -element to expand in two directions/dimensions:  $\phi$ -features allow  $\alpha$ -elements to connect to DPs (arguments), and T-features ultimately allow the  $\alpha$ -domain to be connected to the  $\omega$ -domain.



The syntactic objects in the sphere assume the features and Merge each other in each sphere, ready for Spell-out. When Merge is over, they spell out by a concatenation (e.g., the cartography of Rizzi (1997)). There arises no locality problem of 2-dimension since NP1 in (12) or (16) floats in spheres Merging for featural reason.

Third, the 3D-Merge guarantees the creation of a set of instructions with unambiguous “dual” semantic information: a predicative domain ( $\alpha$ -sphere) and a propositional domain ( $\Omega$ -sphere); alternatively, an A- and A'-domain. The concatenation of the structure is guaranteed since only the highest occurrence in the cartography is manifested at PHON and interpreted at SEM.

Fourth, [NP2] in (12) and (16), occupying the subject position, is licensed by  $\phi$ -features (e.g., Case) in  $\alpha$ -sphere and  $\Phi$ -sphere. We believe it is a sort of intrusive pronoun (Sells 1984), sometimes pronounced (as in English) or sometimes null (as in Korean or Vietnamese). We also believe that [NP1] and [NP2] compose a chain. The chain is not syntactic but semantic/referential one since we do not assume any syntactic movement.

#### 4. Consequences and Implications

Based on the diachronic observations in van Gelderen (2006), we can predict that [NP2] in AAVE will go through the change of becoming cliticized first (just as in Pidgin) and then the change of becoming null. The last step is; [NP1] will replace [NP2]. This implies that the null subject of [NP2] in Korean or Vietnamese, one of the characteristics of topic prominent languages is the result of the cycle suggested in Givón (1979). (See footnote 8.)

[NP2] is not a resumptive pronoun which occupies the empty position left by a

moved element. A resumptive pronoun should be interpreted as a variable just like a wh-variable while an intrusive pronoun is not. Compare an English structure (22) with a Hebrew one (23).

(22) I just saw a girl who Long John's claim that she was a Venusian made all the headlines. (Ross 1967; 6.154a, cited in Sells 1984; 5)

(23) ze ha'iš še oto ra'iti etmol  
this-is the man that him I-saw yesterday  
'This is the man that I saw yesterday.'  
(Chomsky 1977; 80, cited in Sells 1984; 7)

Pronouns may be linked with their antecedents in two ways; (24) is ambiguous.

(24) Only John likes the girl he is dancing with.

In one, the pronoun *he* is interpreted as a variable bound to the meaning of the NP *John* as indicated in (25a). In the other interpretation, the pronoun *he* is understood as referring to the individual *John*, just as the name *John* refers to that person as indicated in (25b) (Sells 1984; 8).

- (25) a. Only John is an x such that x likes the girl that x is dancing with.  
(bound variable)  
b. Only John is an x such that x likes the girl that John is dancing with.  
(referential)

These two interpretations differ in truth condition; for example, if there are only two men around, Bill and John, and Bill doesn't like his dancing partner but does like John's dancing partner, then (25a) is true, and (25b) is false<sup>11</sup>. In accordance,

<sup>11</sup> *Only* is a well-known disambiguator. (Reinhart 2006; 168)

- (i) a. Only Lucie respects her husband.  
b. Binding  
Only Lucie ( $\lambda x$  (x respects x's husband))  
c. Covaluation  
Only Lucie ( $\lambda x$  (x respects her husband) & her=Lucie)

based on these observations, it can be predicted that while the gap in topicalized construction in (5a) should be interpreted as a bound variable the intrusive pronoun in (5b) should be interpreted as referential.

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Representation (ib) entails that unlike *Lucie*, other women do not respect her husband while (ic) entails that other women do not respect *Lucie's* husband. So the two construals are truth-conditionally distinct.

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