

*THE FOCUS SYSTEM IN CUSHITIC LANGUAGES.
A COMPARATIVE-TYPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS*

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0. Introduction

In recent years considerable work has been concerned with the analysis of Focus constructions, trying to provide a comprehensive explanation for their syntactic structures, their interpretation and the various morpho-syntactic phenomena associated with them.

In this paper we approach these problems – focusing on Cushitic languages – with the aim to provide a typological analysis which can both explain the morphosyntactic effects determined by Focus in some languages (i.e., the “antiagreement” phenomena, see below) and predict the realisation of Focus structures, only based on two universal and independently motivated parameters, namely:

- a) *polysynthesis*, i.e., the parameter which distinguishes those languages in which clitics only are visible for θ -role assignment through incorporation onto the verbal head (cf. Baker 1996), and
- b) *pro-drop*, i.e., the capacity of a language to allow Null Subjects (e.g., Italian vs. English).

The paper is organised as follows. Section 1 presents the basic point of the present analysis – concerning the etymology of Focus Markers – and in Section 2 the Focus system of Somali is illustrated, also discussing some problems left open by previous analyses. The present proposal will be set out in Sections 3 and 4 on the basis of Somali data and, then, implemented

on Dabarre, Rendille and Afar in Section 5. Section 6 is dedicated to conclusive remarks.

1. *The etymology of Focus Markers*

The syntax of many Cushitic languages is characterized by the presence of certain "particles", which are inserted in the main sentence in order to draw attention to a determined part of the utterance. We refer to these "particles" as *Focus Markers* (FM), as in use in current literature (cf., among others, Kiss ed. 1995).

We draw from Lamberti's (1983) paper the assumption that FMs in Somali dialects derive from an original copular form, which includes a 3rd person Subject clitic, as shown in (1):¹

- (1) *ak + y + aa
 be 3SGM PRES

The Cushitic word *ak has then given rise to two suppletive roots, namely, *aw- and *ah-, yielding the reconstructed forms shown in (2):

- (2) a. *ayaa (mainly in the South).
 b. *awaa (mainly in the North).

These two forms gave rise, in turn, to the different FMs which are now present in the Cushitic languages which include such an element.

In particular, according to Lamberti's analysis, Somali FMs derive from both the forms given in (2) and, specifically, the form in (2a) has given rise to the nominal FM *ayaa*, while *baa* and *waa* (see Section 2 for details) both derive from (2b).

Lamberti suggests that *baa* is derived from *awaa through a simple phonological rule, supposed to be operative in the North, namely:

- (3) [w] → [b] / V _ V

¹ The list of the abbreviations used in the glosses is the following:

F	=	feminine	PL	=	plural
FM	=	focus marker	PRES	=	present tense
M	=	masculine	PROG	=	progressive
NOM	=	nominative case	REP	=	restricted paradigm
OCL	=	object clitic	SCL	=	subject clitic
PAST	=	past tense	SG	=	singular

(4) a. *waa*: **awaa* VC_{Focus} } RULE (3) → *awaa* VC_{Focus}
 b. *baa*: DP_{Focus} **awaa* } → DP_{Focus} *abaa* → Focus *abaa*

A detailed account of the diachronic derivation of these forms is beyond the purposes of the present work (the interested reader can refer to Lamberti 1983). For the sake of synchronic discussion, however, consider the evidence provided by the derivation of Verbal Nouns (VN) from Thematic Nouns (TN) in Somali (cf., for details, Puglielli 1984). As shown in (5) below, TNs can form VNs through the addition of the suffix *-id* and this operation does not generally affect the ending part of a radical TN:

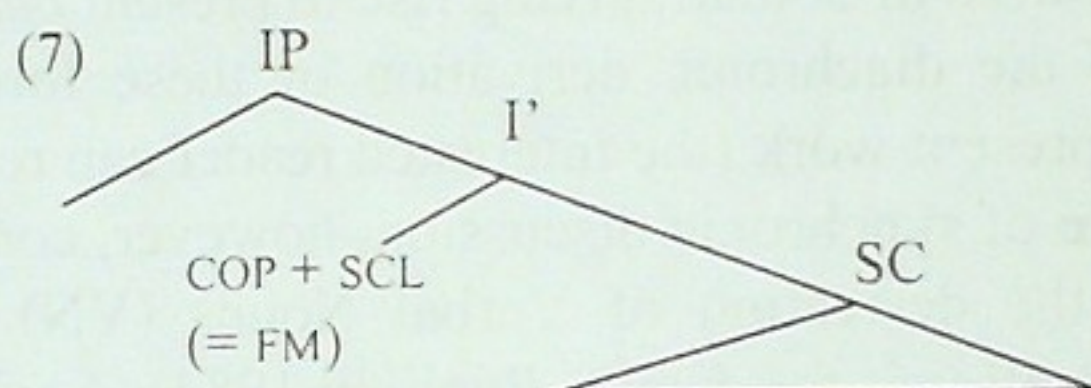
(5)	VERB		RADICAL TN		VN
	<i>duul</i>	"to fly"	→ <i>duul(ka)</i>	→	<i>duulid(da)</i>
	<i>goob</i>	"to search"	→ <i>goob(ka)</i>	→	<i>goobid(da)</i>
	<i>abuur</i>	"to sow"	→ <i>abuur(ka)</i>	→	<i>abuurid(da)</i>

(6) *duq* → *duqow(ga)* → *duqoobid(da)* "getting old"
cevr → *cevrov(ga)* → *cevroobid(da)* "getting poor"

² A deeper analysis is needed, however, to investigate the phonological nature of the alternation [w] \approx [b] and explore the validity of Rule (3). The change of a glide into a stop, in fact, does not represent a natural process. Moreover, if we consider phonological alternations in Somali, we find that stops generally alternate in intervocalic position with fricative segments (cf. singular/plural alternations as in: *lug* / *luɣo* 'leg', *sab* / *saβo* 'outcast', etc.). The relevant alternation could be thus interpreted in the opposite direction, namely,

Given their etymology, the (original) meaning of FMs is therefore that of a copular phrase, whose meaning can be compared to the English “*it is*” or French “*c’est*”. This analysis has crucial consequences from a syntactic point of view, because it leads to the conclusion that Focus constructions in which a FM is present cannot be considered as simple sentences; on the contrary, a FM must be considered as the “first part” of a *complex structure* comparable to present *cleft constructions*.

Working within the Generative framework of grammar, this amounts to saying that Focus constructions in which a FM is present are structures in which the (original) *matrix copula* (the present FM) *governs a subordinate verbless clause* (i.e., what is currently defined a “Small Clause”), as shown in diagram (7):³



Before discussing the present proposal, we will illustrate the Somali Focus system and consider some problems associated with its analysis.

2. Somali Focus system

The Focus system of Somali has been extensively illustrated and analysed in Andrzejewski (1975), Antinucci (1981), Puglielli (1981a) and Svolacchia, Mereu and Puglielli (1995). For reasons of space we thus provide only the information which is necessary for the ongoing discussion and refer to these authors for an exhaustive treatment of the relevant constructions.

In Somali every main declarative sentence must contain one and only one Focus constituent. In particular, two main types of Focus structures

with [b] as the underlying form and a rule which changed the stop into the glide, if located at the right edge of the syllable.

This is a very interesting question, whose solution, however, does not affect the main point of the present analysis – the common origin of FMs from an original copular phrase. We thus leave the phonological issue for future research.

³ The internal structure of the relevant Small Clause will be discussed in Section 3.

can be found: nominal Focus, realised by means of the FM *baa/ayaa*,⁴ and verb Focus, marked by the presence of *waa*:⁵

- (8) *Shalay CALI baa/ayaa yimid*.⁶
 yesterday Cali FM come.PAST.3SGM.REP
 'CALI came yesterday.'
- (9) *Shalay Cali waa YIMID*.
 yesterday Cali FM come.PAST.3SGM
 'Cali CAME, yesterday.'

- (10) **Shalay Cali yimid*.

As shown, FMs must be immediately adjacent to the focused constituent. Specifically, a nominal constituent marked for Focus (*CALI*, in (8)) must be left-adjacent to the FM *baa*, whereas, when new information is represented by the Verbal Complex (VC), it must immediately follow *waa*. Different locations or intervening DPs yield ungrammatical results:

- (11) a. **CALI shalay baa yimid*.
 b. **Shalay baa CALI yimid*.
 c. **Shalay baa yimid CALI*.
- (12) a. **Shalay waa Cali YIMID*.
 b. **Cali waa shalay YIMID*.
 c. **Shalay Cali YIMID waa*.

Moreover, when the focused constituent is (interpreted as) the Subject (as in (8)), nominal Focus involves a different type of verbal form. Specifically, it triggers the presence of the so-called "Restricted Paradigm" (REP), in which agreement is reduced⁷ and the verb is marked by a stress of its own. The extensive paradigm (cf. (9)), on the other hand, is characterized by low tones and is not stressed (see Andrzejewski 1975, Hyman 1981). According to the etymological analysis assumed for FMs, *baa* and *waa* both derive from the same copular form. The question is, therefore, how

⁴ The nominal FMs *baa* and *ayaa* are held to be wholly equivalent (apart from regional characterisation and some stylistic differences; for details, cf. Puglielli 1981a).

⁵ Somali Focus system, one of the richest among Cushitic languages, also disposes of a third construction to realise Focus, i.e., the so-called "heralding construction". This will not be treated in the present paper (cf., Andrzejewski 1975, Antinucci 1981, Saeed 1998 and, for a recent analysis in the spirit of the present paper, Frascarelli forthcoming b).

⁶ Focus constituent is capitalized, as in standard use.

⁷ The restricted paradigm has three forms: one for 3SGF, one for 1PL and one for all other persons (cf. Puglielli 1981a).

can we explain their different syntactic behaviour *in a synchronic perspective*? Consider, for example, the following asymmetries:

- (13) a. *CALIbaa Soomali ah / *yahay.*
 Cali FM Somali be.PRES.REP be.PRES.3SGM
 ‘‘CALI is Somali.’’
- b. **Cali waa SOOMALI ah / yahay.*
- c. *Cali waa SOOMALI.*
- d. *Cali soomali waa YAHAY.*

Thus, when the Subject is focused, the verb cannot show full agreement,⁸ while this is never the case in verb Focus constructions, in which either a predicative noun (*Soomali* in (13b)) or the full form of the verb (as in (13c)) must follow *waa*.

Given the common origin of FMs, this contrast provides a real puzzle for syntactic analysis. In fact, the *prima facie* difference between the two relevant constructions seems only to be the different location of the Focus constituent with respect to the FM. A deeper investigation is therefore needed.

Recent analyses within a syntactic perspective have agreed with the conclusion that *nominal Focus constituents are Quantifier-like elements*, which must assume scope and select an individual from a given set (cf., among others, Horvath 1995, Rizzi 1997, Frascarelli 2000a). As a consequence, a Focus constituent must be considered an *Operator* and, as such, it is submitted to wh-movement (either in syntax or in Logical Form) and binds a trace (a *Variable*), which is left in the position of lexical insertion. The syntax of Foci is thus comparable to that of wh-constituents, as shown in the following examples:

- (14) $[_{CP} JOHN_k [_{IP} I \text{ saw } t_k]]$

- (15) $[_{CP} Whom_k \text{ did } [_{IP} \text{you see } t_k?]]$

Wh-movement thus determines the location of Focus in a position higher than the sentence (i.e., higher than the IP node) and, in particular, the final target is identified in the Spec position of the Complementizer

⁸ Subject focusing also triggers the non-realization of NOM Case. See section 4.2 below.

Phrase (CP).⁹ Wh-movement, on the other hand, is not present when the Focus of the sentence is the VC (as in (9)), which presumably remains within the IP node.

Wh-movement *per se*, however, cannot explain the presence of a reduced form of agreement in nominal Focus constructions, especially because this effect only arises in some languages, while wh-movement is a cross-linguistic (presumably universal) operation.

Additional problems arise from the fact that, as pointed out by many scholars, there is a *correlation between relativization and nominal focalization* (cf. Schachter 1973, Oomen 1977, Antinucci and Puglielli 1980, Appleyard 1989, Ouhalla 1999), which has often led the authors to derive one construction from the other. Nonetheless, to connect focalization and relativization meets semantic problems insofar as the nominal head of a relative clause is generally “given” information (cf. Kuno 1976), contrary to what is commonly meant by a *Focus* constituent.

As a matter of fact, the specific type of verb used in nominal Focus constructions is the same as that which is found in relative sentences, both in Somali and in other Cushitic languages (cf. in particular Appleyard 1989). Compare, for example, the following Somali data:

(16) *CALI baa Soomali ah.* (= 13a)

(17) *Ninka Soomali ah waa Cali.*
 man-the Somali be.PRES.REP FM Cali
 “The man who is Somali is Cali.”

As we will see, the present analysis can provide a comprehensive explanation to these problems in a cross-linguistic perspective.

3. The syntactic proposal

3.1. A Small Clause analysis

In recent years, a SC analysis has been adopted to explain the syntax of copular sentences (cf., among others, Cardinaletti and Guasti eds. 1995, Moro 1997), so that a sentence like *John is a doctor* is derived as illustrated in (18) below:

⁹ In a “split-CP analysis” the Focus constituent is actually not supposed to reach the CP node, but one of the several functional projections which compose the “Comp area”, namely, the *Focus Phrase* (cf., among others, Rizzi 1997, Ouhalla 1999, Frascarelli 2000a). This aspect, though not trivial, does not affect the issues of present analysis.

- (18) a. is [_{SC} [_{DP} *John*]] [_{DP} *a doctor*]] →
 b. [_{DP} *John_i*] is [_{SC} *t_i* [_{DP} *a doctor*]]

As shown, the two elements of the equative relation are independent constituents within a SC which is governed by a matrix copula. Then, either constituent moves to matrix position, according to the different type of copular sentence.¹⁰

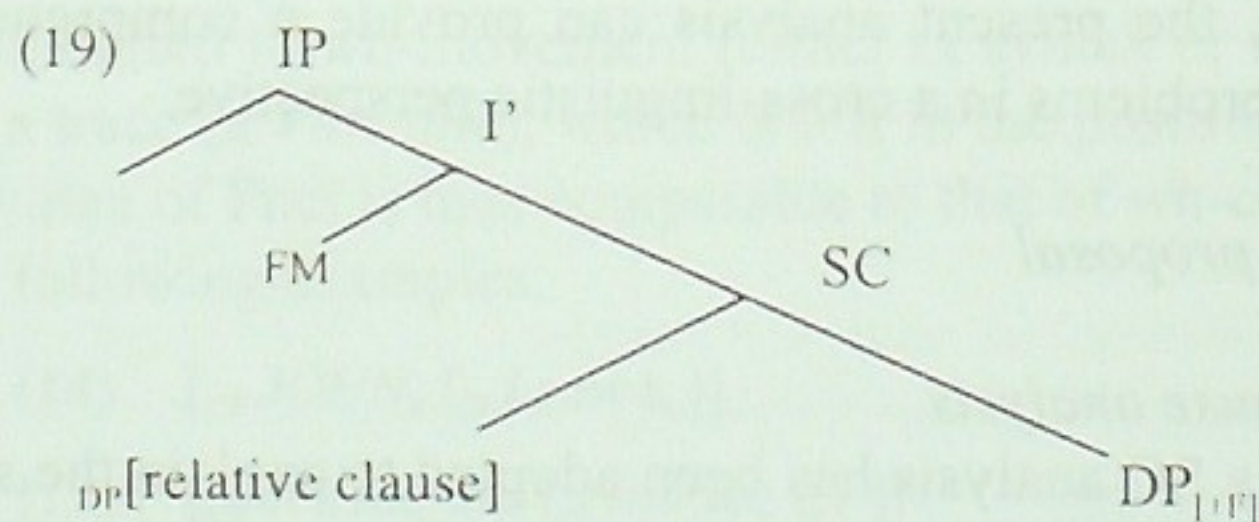
This is basically the same structure that we assume to explain the syntax of cleft sentences (as a special type of copular construction¹¹). The structure and derivation of cleft constructions is, in fact, a vexed issue in generative linguistics and no clear consensus has been reached about the constituency status of the string formed by the Focus and the subordinate/relative clause (cf., among others, Chomsky 1977, Kayne 1994, Heggie 1993, Heycock and Kroch 1999). Nonetheless, considerable syntactic and semantic evidence has led us to support a SC analysis to account for them (cf. Frascarelli 2000b for details).

As FMs are formed from original copular phrases, we thus conclude that the SC format is the structure to be assumed to explain the syntax and interpretation of Focus constructions in which a FM is present.

3.2 Nominal Focus Constructions

As anticipated in diagram (7) above, we assume for Focus constructions a complex structure in which a matrix copula governs a subordinate SC.

We can now analyse the internal composition of the relevant SC in more detail. Consider (19) below:



¹⁰ In particular we can have “canonical” copular sentences, as the one shown in (18b), or “inverse” copular sentences, obtained through the raising of the predicative DP to matrix position (as in “*a doctor is John*”, derived from (18a); cf. Moro 1997 for details and discussion).

¹¹ In particular, cleft and pseudocleft constructions have been analysed as predicative copular sentences (cf. Longobardi 1985), specificational copular sentences (cf. Higgins 1973) or equative copular sentences (cf. Heycock and Kroch 1999). Semantic analysis and implications are far beyond the purposes of the present paper.

As shown, the focused DP and the relative clause (also a DP, as it is headed by a noun) are inserted as independent constituents within the SC. This amounts to saying that relativization is indeed involved in this kind of nominal Focus constructions but – crucially – the Focus constituent *is not* the head of the relevant relative clause.

In particular, according to the analysis we propose, the relative clause is the *Subject* of the relevant SC. The relative clause is, indeed, the *thematic part* of a cleft construction, that part of information we give as presupposed.¹² Moreover, it is a *free relative*, that is to say, a relative clause *headed by a Null NP* (cf., among others, Groos and van Riemsdijk, 1981) which is both a *syntactic Operator*¹³ and a *semantic Variable*. This Null Operator is, in fact, that piece of information we lack and that we are going to provide in the predication (i.e., the rhematic part of the sentence). The *predication*, on the other hand, is necessarily *the Focus* constituent, which is therefore inserted as the predicate of the relevant SC.

In other words, a sentence such as (13a) above (repeated below as (20)), means that there is “a universe” of Somali people (i.e., [e] *Soomali ah* “[someone] is Somali”) and, within this universe, we identify a specific individual, that is to say, *Cali*. The relation between the relative clause and the Focus is therefore a *functional* one. The Focus constituent is interpreted as a part of the relative clause not because it is generated within it (consistent with its semantic and pragmatic properties), but because it provides a value to the empty Variable that heads the relative clause itself. *Nominal Focalization is thus an identificational process* (see also Kiss 1999, Ouhalla 1999).

Given this analysis, the wh-movement of the Focus constituent is necessary to assume scope over the SC and *identify* the empty Operator (OP) through government (or the OP remains uninterpreted; cf. Stowell 1985). This operation is illustrated in (21a-b):

¹² Consider, for instance, the logico-semantic role of the relative clause in a cleft sentence like “it is MARY that went to the cinema”.

¹³ As known, according to recent analyses (cf., in particular, Kayne 1994), the nominal head of a relative clause is generated within the clause and then submitted to wh-movement, as follows:

(i) *The girl that I know.*

[_{DP} the [_{CP} [_C that [_{IP} I know girl]]] →

[_{DP} the [_{CP} girl_k [_C that [_{IP} I know t_k]]]

The nominal head of a relative clause is therefore an Operator, as Foci are (cf. (14)), while the Determiner is inserted in the D⁰ position which “opens” the whole structure.

(20) *CALI baa Soomali ah.*

(21) a. \uparrow *baa* [_{SC} [_{DP} OP [_{CP} *e* *Soomali ah*]]] [_{DP} *CALI*]]

b. [_{CP} *CALI*_k [_C *baa*_i [_{IP} [_{I'} *t*_i [_{SC} [_{DP} **OP** [_{CP} *e* *Soomali ah*]]] [_{DP} *t*_k]]]]]]

As we can see, the focused DP (*CALI*) raises to Spec,CP through wh-movement (as is commonly assumed, cf. exs. (14)-(15)) and is followed by *baa*, located in the C° head (on the movement of *baa*, cf. Lecarme 1991).¹⁴ In that position the Focus governs the whole structure and therefore it can identify (i.e., provide an interpretation for) the Null OP within the SC. This amounts to saying that *CALI* in (21) has *never* been the Subject of the (reduced) verb in the relative clause (which is headed by the Null OP). The Focus constituent is only *reinterpreted* as the Subject of the main clause, in virtue of its identificational role with respect to the Null OP.

3.3 Verb Focus and Equative Constructions

Contrary to nominal Focus, verb Focus constructions and equative sentences do not involve either a Quantification or a functional relation between an OP and a free relative clause. Quantifying implies, in fact, a partitioning of the universe and this operation only pertains to nominal elements.

Verb Focus constructions are simply existential statements used to give salience to an in situ predicative sentence. In other words, a sentence like (22) below can be paraphrased as “(the fact) is that I ATE”, in which the predicate *ATE* is not correlated to and does not identify any semantic variable:

(22) *Waan CUNAY.*
“I ATE.”

(23)

waa

SC

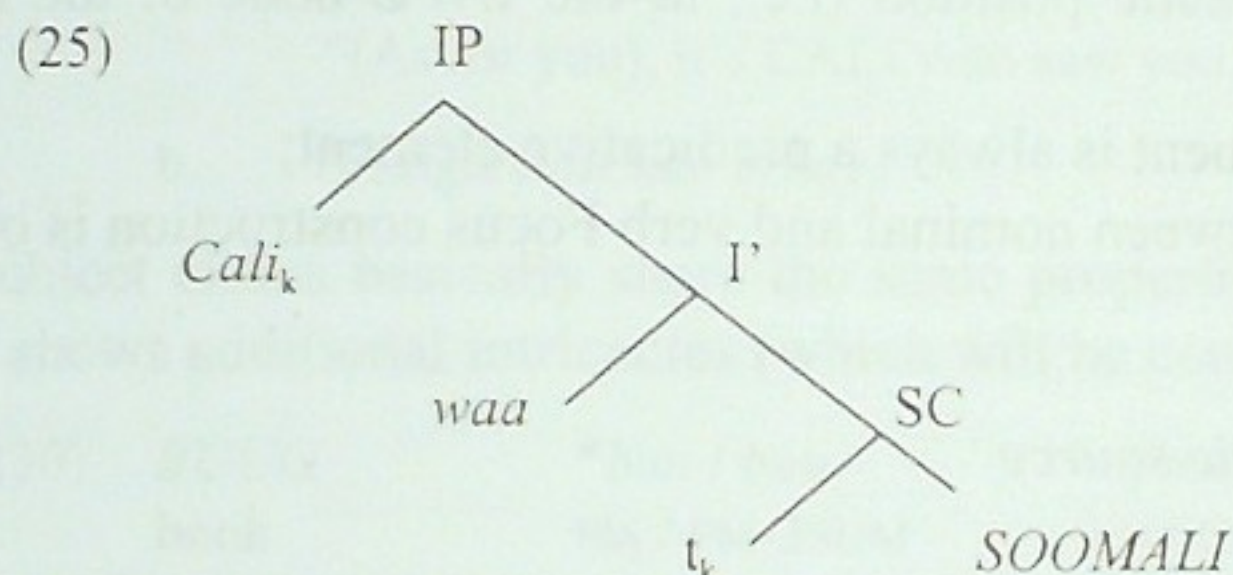
[_{CP} [_{IP} *aan CUNAY*]]

¹⁴ We will not enter the syntactic details of the analysis proposed, as the main purpose of this paper is to focus on its explanatory power and typological extent.

So, even though both nominal and verb Focus constructions are analysed in the light of the SC format, their derivations differ in crucial aspects.¹⁵

Equative sentences are analysed according to the same kind of structural representation and derivation. Consequently, in a sentence like (24) below, *SOOMALI* (the new information) is the predicative DP, while the DP preceding *waa* (*Cali*) represents the rhematic part of the sentence and, as such, it is inserted in Subject position within the SC. However, the Subject DP cannot remain within the SC because *one and only one* constituent can follow *waa* and receive Focus: the predicative DP/CP. After Subject raising, the sentence is thus correctly interpreted:

- (24) *Cali waa SOOMALI.*
 "Cali is Somali."



We are now in a position to explain the (apparent) inconsistencies observed in (13) above. Consider the derivations illustrated in (26) and (27) below:

- (26) a. *CALIk baa* [_{SC} [_{DP} OP *Soomali ah*] [_{DP} *t_k*]]
 b. **CALIk baa* [_{SC} [_{DP} *Soomali yahay*] [_{DP} *t_k*]]
- (27) a. *Cali_k waa* [_{SC} [_{DP} *t_k*] [_{DP} *SOOMALI*]]
 b. **Cali_k waa* [_{SC} [_{DP} *t_k*] [_{DP} OP *SOOMALI ah*]]
 c. **Cali_k waa* [_{SC} [_{DP} *t_k*] [_{DP} *SOOMALI yahay*]]

The FMs *baa* and *waa* cannot be followed by the same phrasal types because the two Focus structures involve different syntactic operations.

Nominal Focus is an identificational element and, as such, it triggers the presence of a relative clause headed by a Null OP. If the Null OP is the Subject of the relative clause, antiagreement (i.e., the REP) arises. This explains the agrammaticality of (26b).

¹⁵ Also notice that the configuration proposed for verb Focus constructions immediately accounts for the fact that they are "all new sentences", since the whole sentence (*aan cunay*) occupies the predicative part of the SC.

Verb focusing, on the other hand, excludes an identificational process since the focused predicate is marked by *waa* in its in situ position. This means that an empty OP could not be interpreted and that only one predicative constituent can be found within the SC (hence excluding (27b) and (27c), respectively).

The present proposal allows a uniform and comprehensive analysis of nominal and verb Focus constructions, whose syntax is accounted for on the basis of a reduced set of generalizations, which are assumed to be cross-linguistically valid, namely:

- a) Focus constructions in which a FM is present involve a cleft-like complex structure, in which a matrix FM governs a subordinate SC;
- b) FMs – independently of the specific kind of focalization – are located in the same syntactic position (i.e., in the INFL node of the matrix clause);
- c) The Focus constituent is always a predicative element;
- d) The difference between nominal and verb Focus construction is only derivational.

4. *The parametric source*

In this paragraph we face a crucial question raised by the analysis proposed, namely, why should a language require such a complex structure to realise Focus? And, why is this structure needed in a language like Somali, while other languages (like English or Italian) can obtain Focus interpretation within a simple sentence (cf. (14))?

In a Generative perspective, different syntactic behaviours are the consequence of parametric variation. It is therefore necessary to analyse the basic properties of Somali and consider their consequences, in order to find out the source of the variation at issue.

4.1 *Polysynthesis and pro-drop*

In a recent paper, Svolacchia and Puglielli (1999) have provided sound evidence that Somali is a polysynthetic language. This condition entails that argument roles (also, “ θ -roles”) are only assigned through *incorporation onto the verbal head* (the so-called “Morphological Visibility Condition”; cf. Baker 1996). This amounts to saying that in Somali the argument structure of a verb is only realised by means of *clitic pronouns*, which are disposed in a templatic structure within the VC (cf. Puglielli 1981a for details). A number of facts support this argument, so we will

provide here only some short illustrations and refer to Svolacchia and Puglielli's paper for a full account.

Major evidence supporting polysynthesis in Somali lies in the *obligatoriness of clitics*. Object clitics, in particular, can never be omitted, independently of the presence of coindexed full DPs and of its being either a Focus or a Topic. This is shown respectively in (28) and (29):

- (28) a. *Cali ADIGA buu ku arkay.*
 C. you FM-SCL3SG OCL2SG saw.PAST.3SGM
 'As for Cali, he saw YOU.'
- b. **Cali adiga buu arkay.*
- (29) a. *(Adiga) CALI baa ku arkay.*
 you Cali FM OCL2SG saw.PAST.3SGM
 '((As for you), it's CALI who saw you).'
- b. **Adiga Cali baa arkay.*

Subject clitics basically share the same properties even though their syntax shows additional intricacies (which will be considered in 4.2):

- (30) *BUUG *baa / buu qoray.*
 book FM / FM-3SGM write.PAST.3SGM
 'He is writing a BOOK.'
- (31) *Waad /*waa i ARAGTAY.*
 FM-2SG /FM OCL1SG see.PAST.2SG
 'You SAW me.'

Strong evidence in favour of a polysynthetic analysis is also provided by the *absence of non-finite clauses*:

- (32) *Waxay doonaysaa*
 thing-the.SCL3SGF want.PRES.SCL3SG
 inay bisha dambe seexdo
 that-SCL3SG month-the next leave.SUBJ.3SG
 'She wants to leave next month.'

As shown, a finite verb must be present in the subordinate clause and this restriction is a typical property of polysynthetic languages owing to the fact that Subject agreement is obligatory to obtain argument visibility.

Additional evidence is provided by the *absence of multiple-wh questions*, a possible option in other languages – like Italian or English – when one of the two *wh*-constituents is realized in situ (i.e., in the position

determined by argument structure). Compare the following agrammatical Somali sentence with grammatical Italian and English translations:

- (33) **Yaa* *yimid* *xaggee?*
 who came-PAST.RED where
 ‘Who came where?’
 ‘Chi è venuto dove?’

This clearly leads to the conclusion that DPs in Somali are not located in situ or, rather, that they *cannot* be located in situ because they *never have an argument role*.

Polysynthesis thus requires the presence of clitic pronouns to realise θ -roles. Clitic elements, however, cannot be either focused or topicalised, so that full DPs are, in turn, necessary to meet discourse-pragmatic needs (i.e., the necessity of giving salience to an element of the sentence other than the verb). A crucial consequence of this parameter is, therefore, that *DPs are never focused in situ*, which is instead the unmarked way to realise Focus in a non-polysynthetic language (as in ‘I saw JOHN’).

A second basic property of Somali concerns the Null Subject parameter (cf. Jaeggli and Safir eds. 1989). In fact, not only must arguments be realised by means of clitics, but they must also be *overtly* realised in the sentence. This means that Somali is *not* a pro-drop language.

So, as shown in (34) and (35) below, Subject clitics must always be expressed to obtain grammaticality,¹⁶ independently of the presence of a coindexed full DP (in Topic position):

- (34) (Cali) BUUG *buu* / **baa* *qoray* (Cali).
 Cali book FM-3SGM FM write.PAST.3SGM Cali
 ‘(Cali)/he wrote a BOOK.’
- (35) (Adiga) *waad* /**waa* *i* ARAGTAY.
 you FM-2SG / FM OCL1SG see.PAST.2SG
 ‘You SAW me.’

We can now provide an answer to our previous questions saying that the *copular structure is necessary as a consequence of polysynthesis*, while the reduced verb agreement in nominal Focus constructions is dependent on the Null Subject parameter.

Argumentation proceeds as follows. In a polysynthetic language DPs are not inserted in an argument position so, if present, they are extrasen-

¹⁶ Except when the Subject is an Operator (see 4.2 below).

tential and play a specific discourse-pragmatic role. However, Focus and Topic constituents cannot be assumed to have the same nature and derivation, because their syntactic properties are basically different. In particular, Topics are generally assumed to be generated in extrasentential position, while Foci are Operators (cf. discussion in Section 2), hence they *move* from inside IP to an extrasentential position.¹⁷ So, in a polysynthetic language, a Focus DP must necessarily be generated as the Complement of an element which cannot assign an argument role.

We have thus reached the point. A copular structure is needed to realise Focus in polysynthetic languages because in that configuration the Focus DP is inserted within the sentence *but* as the Complement of an expletive verbal form – the copula. It thus escapes θ -role assignment.

This analysis can provide a comprehensive explanation of Somali data and solve a number of problems left unsolved by previous analyses, mainly connected with the focalization of Subject constituents.

4.2 The Focalization of Subject constituents

Let us explain, first of all, the antiagreement phenomena, which we have seen to be connected to the pro-drop parameter. Consider the following:

- (36) *Hilib NIMANKAAS baa cunayá.*
 meat men-those.ABS FM eat.PRES.PROG.RED
 “THOSE MEN are eating meat.”

- (37) a. **Hilib NIMANKAASU baa cunayá.*
 b. **Hilib NIMANKAAS bay cunayá.*
 c. **Hilib NIMANKAAS baa cunayaan.*

As shown in (37a-c) respectively, a focused Subject cannot show NOM Case, SCL pronouns cannot be realized (while they are obligatory in all other cases, cf. (34)-(35)) and the verb must appear in a reduced form of agreement.

According to the present analysis, the Focus DP is not generated within the relative clause, but as the predicate of a subordinate SC. This means that when a nominal Focus is *interpreted* as the Subject of the relative clause (as in (36)), this interpretation is actually a consequence of the fact that the Focus is coindexed with a Null OP, which is the real Subject of the relevant relative clause. Sentence (36) is thus derived as follows:

¹⁷ The reader can see Svolacchia, Mereu and Puglielli (1995) and Frascarelli (forthcoming a) for Somali, and Kiss ed. (1995) and Rizzi (1997), for a cross-linguistic overview.

- (38) $baa \quad [_{SC} [_{DP} OP \text{ cunayá }]] \quad [_{DP} \text{ nimankaas }]]$
 $\text{nimankaas}_k \text{ baa } [_{SC} [_{DP} OP \text{ cunayá }]] \quad [_{DP} t_k]]$ \longrightarrow

Antiagreement effects are thus immediately explained:

- i) *Non-subject Case* is due to the fact that the Focus (*NIMANKAAS* in (36)) is *not* a syntactic Subject, at any point of the derivation. It is a predicative DP and, as such it is marked for Absolutive Case.
- ii) A SCL pronoun cannot be inserted because the verb (*cunayá*) already has a Subject: it is the empty OP heading the relative clause. Therefore, a coindexation between the OP and a SCL would determine a violation of Binding principles:

- (39) $\text{nimankaas}_k \text{ baa } [_{SC} [_{DP} OP \text{ *ay}_k \text{ cunayá }]] \quad [_{DP} t_k]]$

- iii) Finally, the reduced form of agreement is a consequence of the pro-drop parameter insofar as a Null Subject Operator is present in a language which does *not* allow Null subjects!

The verb in the relative clause must then be considered a sort of *participial form*, which is *controlled by the first accessible Subject*, that is to say, by the 3rd person Subject clitic **y* which is part of the original copular form (cf. **ak+y+aa* in (1)):¹⁸

- (40) $\text{nimankaas}_k \text{ baa}_{3sg} [_{SC} [_{DP} [_{CP} OP [_{IP} \text{ e}_{3sg} \text{ cunayá }]]] \quad [_{DP} t_k]]$

In conclusion, the Focus DP is only *reinterpreted* as the Subject of the relative clause. This reinterpretation, however, is only allowed when the phi-features (gender, number, person) of the relevant Focus DP are compatible with those which are included in the FM, that is to say, *only when the Focus is a 3rd person*. This can explain other (apparent) idiosyncrasies, such as the following:

- (41) $(\text{Libaaxa}) \quad \text{NINKA} \quad \text{baa} \quad \text{dilay} \quad (\text{libaaxa}).$
 lion-the man-the FM kill.PAST.REDP lion-the
 "THE MAN killed the lion."

In this sentence, whatever the position of *libaaxa*, the DP *ninka* is interpreted as the Subject of *dilay*.

¹⁸ Gender and plural distinctions, which are maintained in the reduced paradigm (cf. note 7) seem to support the participial hypothesis, even though plural distinction is only expressed for the 1st person. This aspect needs further investigation, also in a typological perspective.

However, if *libaaxa* is an “internal Topic” (i.e., between the FM and the verb), the sentence has an ambiguous interpretation. *Libaaxa* can thus be interpreted as the Subject of *dilay* and the Focus *NINKA* as the Object:

- (42) *NINKA* *baa* *libaaxa* *dilay*.
 man-the FM lion-the kill.PAST.RED
 “The lion killed THE MAN.”
 “THE MAN killed the lion.”

Our analysis can explain this double reading. The DP *libaaxa* in (42) is a Topic and, syntactically, it qualifies as *the first accessible Subject* for the verb in the relative clause. Consequently, it creates “opacity” effects and, as it is a 3rd person, it can be reinterpreted as the Subject of the relative clause (instead of the focused DP):

- (43) *NINKA_k baa_{3sg} [SC [DP [TOPP *libaaxa* [CP OP [IP *e_{3sg} cunayá*]]]] [DP *t_k*]]*

The presence of an empty Subject within the relative clause also explains 3rd vs. 1st and 2nd person asymmetries. Consider, for instance:

- (44) a. *MOOS* *baa* *Cali* *cunay*.
 banana FM C. kill.PAST.3SGM
 “Cali ate a BANANA.”
- b. *MOOS* **baa* / *baad* *adigu* *cuntay*.
 banana FM/ FM-SCL2SG you kill.PAST.2SGM
 “You ate a BANANA.”

As shown in (44a), a 3rd person DP can be placed between the FM and the verb (as an internal Topic) and be reinterpreted as the Subject. On the contrary, 1st and 2nd persons cannot be placed in that position unless a Subject clitic is present on the FM (as in (44b)). The reason is now clear: 1st and 2nd persons are not allowed because *they are not accessible Subjects for the empty category* in the relative clause. Their features determine, in fact, a mismatch with the 3rd person feature included within *baa*:

- (45) *MOOS_k baa_{3sg} [SC [DP [TOPP **adigu_{2sg}* [CP OP [IP *e_{3sg} cuntay*]]]] [DP *t_k*]]*

To conclude, in the light of the present analysis Focus constructions and their effects in Somali are fully explained on the basis of three independently motivated assumptions, namely:

- ETYMOLOGICAL: FMs are copular forms;
- REPRESENTATIONAL: FMs entail the presence of a copular construction;
- DERIVATIONAL: Focus constituents are predicative elements. Nominal Foci only are identificational Operators.

We have also identified the parametric source of cross-linguistic variation for Focus constructions, namely:

- a) Polysynthesis requires copular constructions to express Focus;
- b) In copular Focus constructions the non pro-drop property determines antiagreement effects.

If our analysis is correct, it represents an important issue for typological research, because it allows strong predictions about the syntax of Focus constructions in a cross-linguistic perspective. Therefore, in the following section we are going to test its validity in three other Cushitic languages, namely, Rendille, Dabarre and Afar.¹⁹

5. The Focus System of Rendille, Dabarre and Afar

5.1 Rendille²⁰

On the basis of available data, Rendille syntax presents the same main properties found in Somali. Consequently, it must be also considered a polysynthetic, non pro-drop language.

Examples (46)-(48) below show, in fact, that arguments are realised as clitic pronouns within the VC and that their presence is obligatory, independent of the role of coindexed DPs:

- (46) a. *Uus ÁTTI-Ø ki-doona.*
 he you-FM OCL2SG-like.PRES.3SGM
 ‘‘He likes YOU.’’

- b. **Uus ÁTTI-Ø doona.*

- (47) *Chirri (*uús) doono.*
 if he like.PRES.3SGM
 ‘‘if he likes him/her/them.’’

- (48) *Ínam inám ti (*uús) khoona siiche Ø-irete.*
 boy girl the he nut give.PAST.3SGM FM-leave. PAST.3SGF
 ‘‘The girl to whom the boy gave a nut has left.’’

On the basis of the present analysis, we thus predict that Rendille will conform the typology of Focus constructions found in Somali. Specifically, as Rendille is a polysynthetic language, we predict that the realisa-

¹⁹ For reason of space, we will limit the analysis to the consideration of the two parameters defined as the source of variation and check their consequences.

²⁰ Data and examples offered in this section are taken from Oomen (1977) and Hudson (1978).

tion of Focus is obligatory (in main declarative sentences) and formed by means of FMs (i.e., through a copular construction).

This prediction is correct: Focus is obligatory and formed by means of two FMs: *-è* for nominal Focus and *a-* for verb Focus:

- (49) a. *Uús MAKHÁABAL-é doona.*
 he man-FM like.PRES.3SGM
 "It is A MAN that he likes."
- b. *Uús makháabal a-DOONA.*
 he man FM-like.PRES.3SGM
 "He LIKES a man."
- c. **Uús makháabal doona.*

Secondly, as Rendille is not a pro-drop language, we expect anti-agreement effects in the case of Subject focalization. This prediction is confirmed as well (cf. also Puglielli 1997):

- (50) *gogág ÁNÚHÀN. vs. GOGÁGÉ núhà.*
 camelskins FM-smell.PRES.3PL camelskins-FM smell.PRES.3SG
- (51) *komboró ÁYÉYÉBÌN. vs. KOMBORÓ yéyébé.*
 stools FM-break.PAST.3PL stools-FM break.PAST.3PL

5.2 Dabarre²¹

Dabarre is also a polysynthetic language since, like in Somali and Rendille, arguments are realised as clitic forms and their presence is obligatory:

- (52) a. *Alej IDee kə fededooheshtə.*
 Ali you-FM OCL.2SG look for.PRES.PROG.3SGM
 "Ali is looking for YOU."
- b. **Alej idee fededooheshtə.*

We thus expect that DPs can be only focused by means of FMs (i.e., through a copular construction).

This prediction is correct. In Dabarre *nominal Focus* is obligatorily marked by the FM *woo* (*-eel/-oo*) and, when no FM is found, verb Focus is intended (which represents therefore the pragmatically and morphologically unmarked option):

²¹ Dabarre data are in part original and in part from Gebert and Mansur (1983).

- (53) *ALEYoo* *sə kassə.*
 Ali-FM PRES know.3SGM
 "ALI knows him/her/them."

- (54) *Alə* *sə* *KASSə.*
 Ali PRES know.3SGM
 "Ali KNOWS him/her/them."

Additional evidence for the presence of a copular structure is provided by Internal Topics. Data shows that, like in Somali, if a 3rd person DP is located between the Focus and the verb it determines an ambiguous reading:

- (55) *ALEY_koo* [_{sc} [_{CP} *ussə* OP [_{IP} *e* *sə* *kassə*]]] [_{DP} *t_k*]]
 Ali-FM he PRES know.3SGM
 "He knows ALI."
 "ALI knows him/her/them."

As already argued, this phenomenon is the consequence of a reinterpretation process: the relevant DP proposes as the first accessible Subject for the empty category in the relative clause.

As far as the pro-drop parameter is concerned, differently from Somali and Rendille, Dabarre allows Null subjects, independently of their number or gender:

- (56) (*idə*) *MIDDee* *feddi*
 you.SG knife-FM want.PAST.2SG
 "You wanted a KNIFE."
- (57) (*issin*) *ALEYoo* *sə* *kastaan*
 you.PL Ali-FM PRES know.2PL
 "You know ALI."

Therefore, our analysis predicts that no reduced verbal form will be found in nominal Focus constructions. That is precisely the case:

- (58) a. *IDee* *rootə* *unti.*
 you-FM bread ate.2SG
 "YOU ate the bread."
- b. *Idə* *rootə* *UNTI.*
 you bread ate.2SG
 "You ATE the bread."

As shown, verb paradigm does not change in Dabarre according to the different kind of Focus, which is instead a major property of Somali. Compare (58) to (59) below:

- (59) a. *Adigu waad rooti CUNTAY.* (= (58a))
 b. *ADIGA baa rooti cunay.* (= (58b))

This is strong evidence that antiagreement is strictly connected to the pro-drop parameter, providing crucial support to the present analysis.

5.3 Afar²²

Differently from Somali, Dabarre and Rendille, Afar does not have clitic pronouns and does not show a VC, so that neither Subject nor Object DPs are ever resumed in the sentence:

- (60) *amoy'ti 'sara daa'me*
 the-chief clothes buy.3SGM.PERF
 "The chief bought clothes."

Afar has independent personal pronouns which are disposed in the sentence according to the general SOV order and, when a PP is present, pronouns can be located as the Object of a Postposition (as full DPs are):

- (61) *(a'nu) 'kaa 'ko-h ruu'b-e.*
 I him you-to send.1SG.PERF
 "I sent him to you."
- (62) *(na'nu) 'ken 'sin 'cari-l hay-'n-a.*
 we them your(PL) house-in put.1PL.PERF
 "We put them in your house."

This data shows that argument roles are realised through full DPs in Afar which, consequently, does *not* qualify as a polysynthetic language. As far as the pro-drop parameter is concerned, sentences (61)-(62) show that Subject DPs can be freely omitted, hence Afar is a Null Subject language.

So, after Rendille, whose Focus system has shown the same basic properties as Somali, and Dabarre, which is only partly similar, Afar presents a completely different situation. In the light of the present proposal, we thus predict that Afar will show a completely different syntactic behaviour in the realisation of Focus. In particular, we expect that in Afar the realisation of nominal Focus does not rely on copular construc-

²² Afar data taken from Bliese (1981) and Simeone-Senelle, Vanhove and Houmedgaba (2000).

tions: since arguments can be realised by means of full DPs, the in situ option must be available. Moreover, as it is a pro-drop language, we do not expect antiagreement effects.

Our predictions are confirmed also in this case. Available data show that FMs are not present in Afar and DPs are generally focused in situ, or else, "they may be moved to or toward the front of the sentence to give emphasis" (Bliese, 1981: 102):

- (63) 'A KIRAB 'oson 'ma-fad-aa'na.
 this book they neg-want-they-IMPF-3PL
 "They don't want THIS BOOK."

Finally, verb inflection is not affected by Subject focalization, as shown by the following wh-question (focused on the wh-Subject 'iyyi):

- (64) 'IYYI y-emeete (-eè)
 who 3SG-come
 "Who comes?"

Afar Focus system is thus very different from the other Cushitic languages examined, and differences are wholly expected (hence, explained) on the basis of the analysis proposed.

6. Conclusions

As shown, the present analysis can account for empirical data and predict the syntax of Focus constructions only considering two universal and independently motivated parameters, namely, *polysynthesis* and *pro-drop*.

The following Table can provide an immediate and clear illustration of the strict connection between these two parameters and their effects. In particular, polysynthesis is directly connected with the presence of a nominal FM, while *pro-drop* languages exclude antiagreement effects:

	polysynthesis	nominal FM	pro-drop	anti-agreement	verbal FM
Somali	+	+	-	+	+
Rendille	+	+	-	+	+
Dabarre	+	+	+	-	-
Afar	-	-	+	-	-

Table 1

The presence of verbal FMs is also dependent on polysynthesis, but can be dispensed with in virtue of its "unmarked character" (as in Dabarre).

The languages examined have thus fully confirmed the validity of the present proposal. Future research will be dedicated to provide further support to this analysis in a typological perspective having these two parameters as the logical antecedents for the effects examined. This would represent a fundamental issue in the understanding of Focus systems.

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