

Wh-movement, Remnant movement and Clause typing in Mèdâmbà

Hermann Keupdjio

Department of Linguistics, University of British Columbia

Abstract

Mèdâmbà is a Grassfield's Bantu language spoken in the Western region of Cameroon, Central Africa. The word order in the language is SVO and the standard analysis places the subject in Spec, TP. There is no verb movement to T as this head is occupied by the tense marker. This paper sets out to investigate how left edge wh-phrases are derived in this language. The assumption underlying this analysis is that, in wh-movement languages, the wh-phrase must front to a position within the CP domain in overt syntax (Rizzi 1997, Cheng 2009). But, contrary to English-type languages in which the wh-phrase moves to Spec, CP, the wh-phrase in Mèdâmbà occurs to the right of the complementizer *mbù* (that) above TP. It is also noticed, the obligatory presence of the question morpheme at the sentence final position. This is a prima facie evidence that wh-phrases in Mèdâmbà do not move to Spec, CP and that they might be a position between CP and TP that hosts the moved wh-phrase in the language as shown in the examples below based on my introspective judgement as a native speaker:

- (1) a. Nana tʃub *mbù* a *kù* Numi fə ʒun a?
Nana say that foc WH Numi P4¹ buy QM
“Nana said that what did Numi buy?”
- b. *Nana tʃub mbù a kù Numi fə ʒun?²
Nana say that foc WH Numi P4 buy

In order to account for this situation, the analysis proposed in this paper is based on the following theoretical assumptions:

a. Chomsky (2000): Agree

Under the Agree principle proposed in Chomsky (2000), feature checking is established under a *probe – goal* relation. A probe is a head with uninterpretable features searching for a goal in its c-commanding domain. The goal is that c-commanded constituent having matching feature with the probe. When these two elements enter the derivation, their matching uninterpretable features are checked under agree and no movement is required. But, a head with a strong feature must have that feature checked in overt syntax immediately after that head is introduced in the structure. Consequently, a category B is displaced from its based position if and only if it is attracted by the strong feature of a c-commanding category A.

¹ P4 marked by the morpheme (fə) is known as yesterday past in the language.

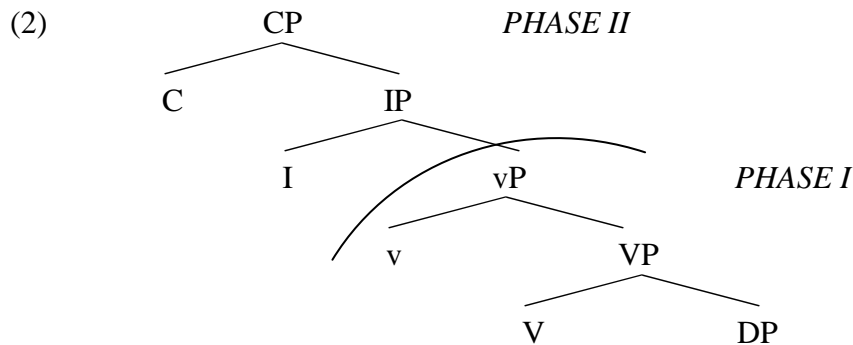
² The absence of the Question Morpheme makes the construction ungrammatical.

b. Chomsky (2001): Derivation by phase

Derivation by phase is an economy principle proposed by Chomsky (2001). In order to solve derivational complexities, this principle requires that derivations proceed by phases. A phase is a domain within which all derivations operate at the same time and where all features are checked. It is constituted of the phase head and the phase domain. When any derivation reaches a phase and all the features are checked, the phase domain (complement) is spelt-out and is invisible to further computations. Therefore, any movement must obey the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC) as stated by Chomsky (2001):

The domain of H is not accessible to operations outside HP. Only H and its edge are accessible to such operations (Chomsky 2001:13).

Chomsky in his analysis argues that CP and vP should be considered as phases as illustrated below in (2):

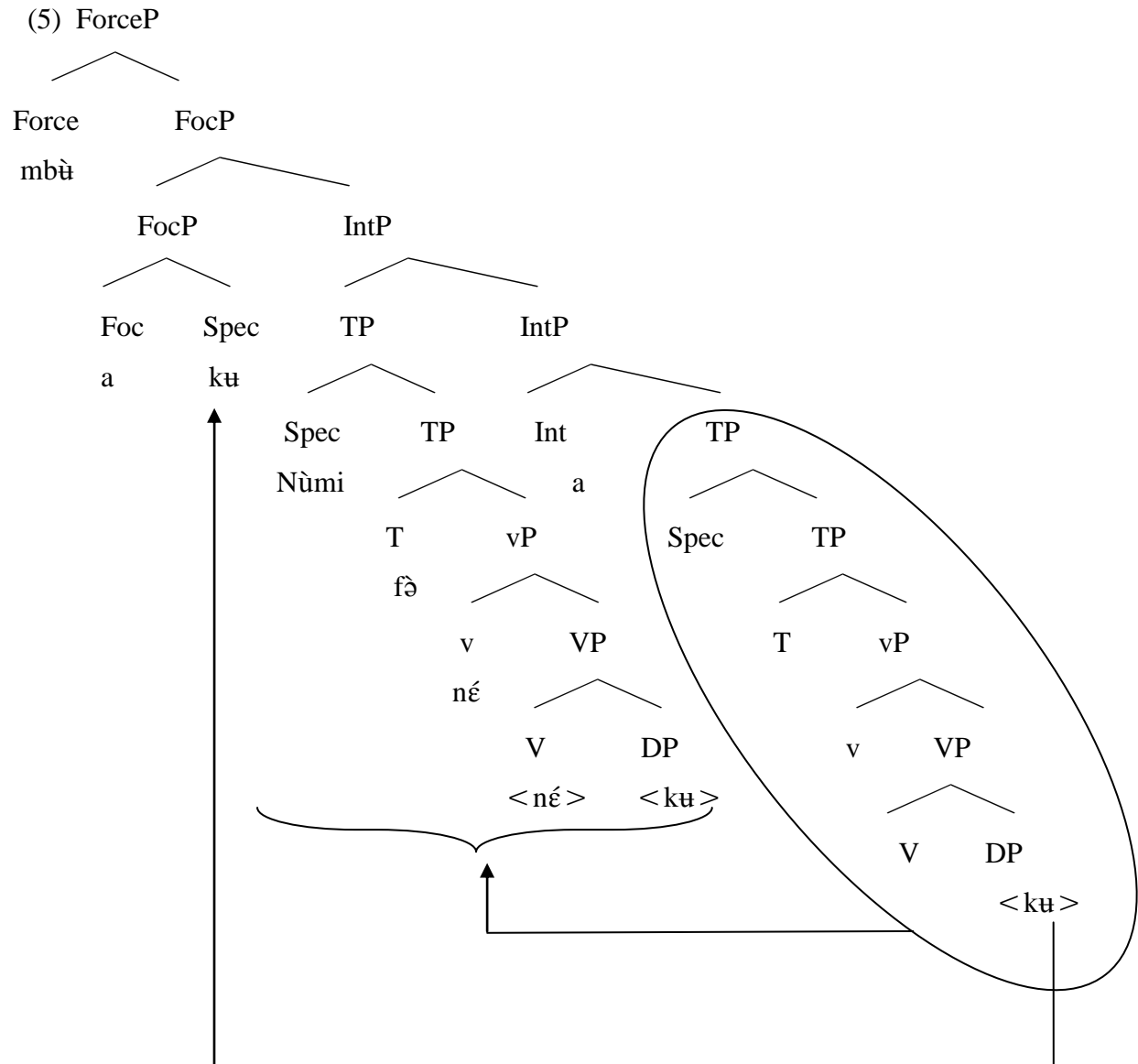


As far as the derivation of the left edge wh-phrase is concerned in Mèdûmbà, I first adopt the adjunction analysis by creating another CP slot below the one headed by the complementizer. Although this analysis correctly accounts for the linear order of constituent (such as topic and moved wh-phrases) in the CP domains, it fails to account for the word order restriction in this domain. For instance, the order Topic – Wh-P is licit whereas the order Wh-P – Topic is illicit in the language as illustrated by the ungrammaticality of the sentence in (3b) below:

- (3) a. Nana tʃub **mbù** **Numi ki a kɛ** à fɛ ʒun a?
 Nana say that Numi Top Foc WH Pro P4 buy QM
 “Nana said that as for Numi, what did he buy?”

- b. *Nana tʃub mbù a kɛ Numi ki à fɛ ʒun a?
 Nana say that foc WH Numi Top Pro P4 buy QM

Then, I follow Rizzi (1997, 2004) Split-CP Hypothesis. Rizzi proposes that the CP should split into different functional projections such as Force Phrase, Topic Phrase and Focus Phrase and Finiteness Phrase. He argues that the Force Phrase by virtue of carrying the illocutionary force of the clause specifies if the latter is interrogative or declarative in force and therefore hosts the complementizer. Along the line of the preceding theoretical assumptions, it has been proposed



It follows from this analysis that the focus head in Mə̀dũ̀mbà is associated with a strong Focus feature which triggers movement of the wh-phrase to the Spec, FocP. Also, it is argued that wh-movement in Mə̀dũ̀mbà does not type the clause as interrogative. The interrogative force is assigned to the clause by the question morpheme as one can see from the ungrammaticality of the construction without the question morpheme in (1b). ForceP and vP are assumed to be strong phases in Mə̀dũ̀mbà. The resulting outputs also provide strong evidence in favor of the need of splitting the complementizer system. This approach is more suitable to provide an elegant account of the derivation of the left edge wh-phrases in Mə̀dũ̀mbà.

References

- Aboh, E.O.** (2004). *The Morphosyntax of Complement-Head Sequences: Clause Structure and Word Order Patterns in Kwa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Biloa, E.** (2013). *The Syntax of Tuki. A cartographic approach*. John Benjamins publishing company.
- Cheng, L.** (2009) Wh-in-situ, from the 1980s to Now. In *Language and Linguistics Compass* 3/3, pp. 767-791.
- Chomsky, N.** (2000). Minimalist inquiries. The framework. In: Martin, R., et al. (Eds.), *Step by Step. Essays on Minimalist Syntax in Honor of Howard Lasnik*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, pp. 89–155.
- Chomsky, N.** (2001). Derivation by phase. In: Kenstowicz, M. (Ed.), *Ken Hale: A Life in Language*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, pp. 1–52.
- Rizzi, L.** (1997). The fine structure of the left periphery. In L. Haegeman (ed.), *Elements of Grammar. Handbook in Generative Syntax*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 281-337.
- Rizzi, L.** (2001). On the position of Interrogative in the left periphery of the clause. In *Current studies in Italian syntax. essays offered to Lorenzo Renzi*, ed. Guglielmo Cinque and G. P. Salvi. Oxford: Elsevier North-Holland.
- Rizzi, L., ed.** (2004). *The structure of CP and IP - the cartography of syntactic structures. Volume 2 of Oxford studies in comparative syntax The cartography of syntactic structures*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.