UNIVERSITÉ DE GENÈVE
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
Department of Linguistics

THE MORPHOSYNTAX OF SENTENTIAL COMPLEMENTATION IN TIGRINYA: SUBORDINATION AS RELATIVIZATION

Gioia Cacchioli & Ur Shlonsky

MAIN IDEA

It has been proposed that **subordination is a form of relativization** (Aboh 2005, Kayne 2008, 2010, Manzini & Roussou 2020 a.o.). Arsenijević (2009), for example, argues that (1a) has the structure in (1b), where *claim* is a (nominal) realization of a force feature moved from Spec,ForceP of the embedded clause and subsequently incorporated into the verb *claim*.

(1)   a. John claimed that Mary came late. (adapted from Arsenijević 2009: 43, 8)
       b. John [VP made [DP the [NP claim [CP that Mary came late]]]]

incorporation   *A'-movement*

We bring morphosyntactic evidence from Tigrinya in favor of the idea that "complement clauses" are relative clauses with a relativized nominal head. We argue that this nominal, EVENT, is the argument of the complement of the verb moved from a TP-internal position to the embedded CP.

We claim that **kɛmzi** is bimorphemic,
consisting of the independent particles **kɛm** and **zi** which
come together and precede the verb as a result of
syntactic operations, giving the impression that they are prefixes.

TIGRINYA : NEW DATA

Tigrinya is a fairly rigid head-final language, yet it manifests a range of prefixes on verbs. Among them is *kɛmzi-*, which appears immediately to the left of the embedded lexical verb of a subordinate finite clause and is described in the literature as a subordinating particle (Leslau 1941, Kogan 1997, Overfelt 2009, Spadine 2020, a.o.). Compare the root clauses in the (a) examples with the subordinate clauses in the (b) examples.

(2)   a. ʔiti   tɛmaharay dɛbdabɛ tsʼɛħifu
         DET.3ms student   letter   write.PFV.3ms
         'The student wrote a letter.'

      b. ʔiti mɛmhɨr n-ɨti   tɛmaharay dɛbdabɛ **kɛm-zi**-tsʼɛħafɛ rɛʔay-o
         DET.3ms teacher.ms OM-DET.3ms student letter KƐM-ZƗ-write.PFV.3ms see.PFV.1s-ms
         'The teacher saw that the student wrote a letter.'

(3)   a. nsa   kɛlbi gɛziʔa
         she   dog   buy.PFV.3fs
         'She bought a dog.'

      b. ʔanɛ nsa kɛlbi **kɛm-zi**-gɛzʔɛt   ji-fɛlɔtʼ   (ʔijɛ)
         I   she   dog   KƐM-ZƗ-buy.PFV.3fs 1s-know.IMPF COP.PFV.1s
         'I know that she bought a dog.'

THE Zi- PREFIX

Cacchioli (to appear) proposes that *zi-* is a morphological reflex of successive-cyclic movement of the relative head (McCloskey 2002, Van Urk 2015, a.o.). It is found in relative and comparative clauses.

(4)   ʔita   nsxa   **zi**-habka-ni   mɛtsʼħaf
      DET.3fs   you.ms   ZƗ-give.PFV.2ms-POSS.1s book.fs

      ʔatfiʔi-ja
      lose.PFV.1s-2fs
      'I lost the book that you gave me.'

(5)   Tɛsfay kab-ti   ʔanɛ   **zi**-hasɨbɛxu-wo
      Tɛsfay.ms PREP-DEM.ms I   ZƗ-think.PFV.1s-ms

      ji-ʕabi
      3ms-'be tall'.IMPF
      'Tɛsfay is taller than I thought.'

It heads a TP-internal projection through which A'-movement proceeds. *zi-* surfaces immediately to the left of V because it is merged right above AspectP, with which (the remnant) VP merges, moving to its specifier, as in (6). This is why *zi-* looks like a prefix.

(6)   *zi* [AsppfvP VP [Asppfv' [VoiceP EA [Voice' [vP IA [v' tVP]]]]]]

CONCLUSION

Our analysis shows that the surface order of elements does not mirror their external merge position, as it is derived by a series of movement operations from an underlying head-initial structure, in line with Kayne's (1994) antisymmetric approach.

Although appearing as prefixes, the functional particles which precede the verb result in preverbal position because of syntactic operations and thus the problematic case of prefixes in a strict head-final language dissolves.
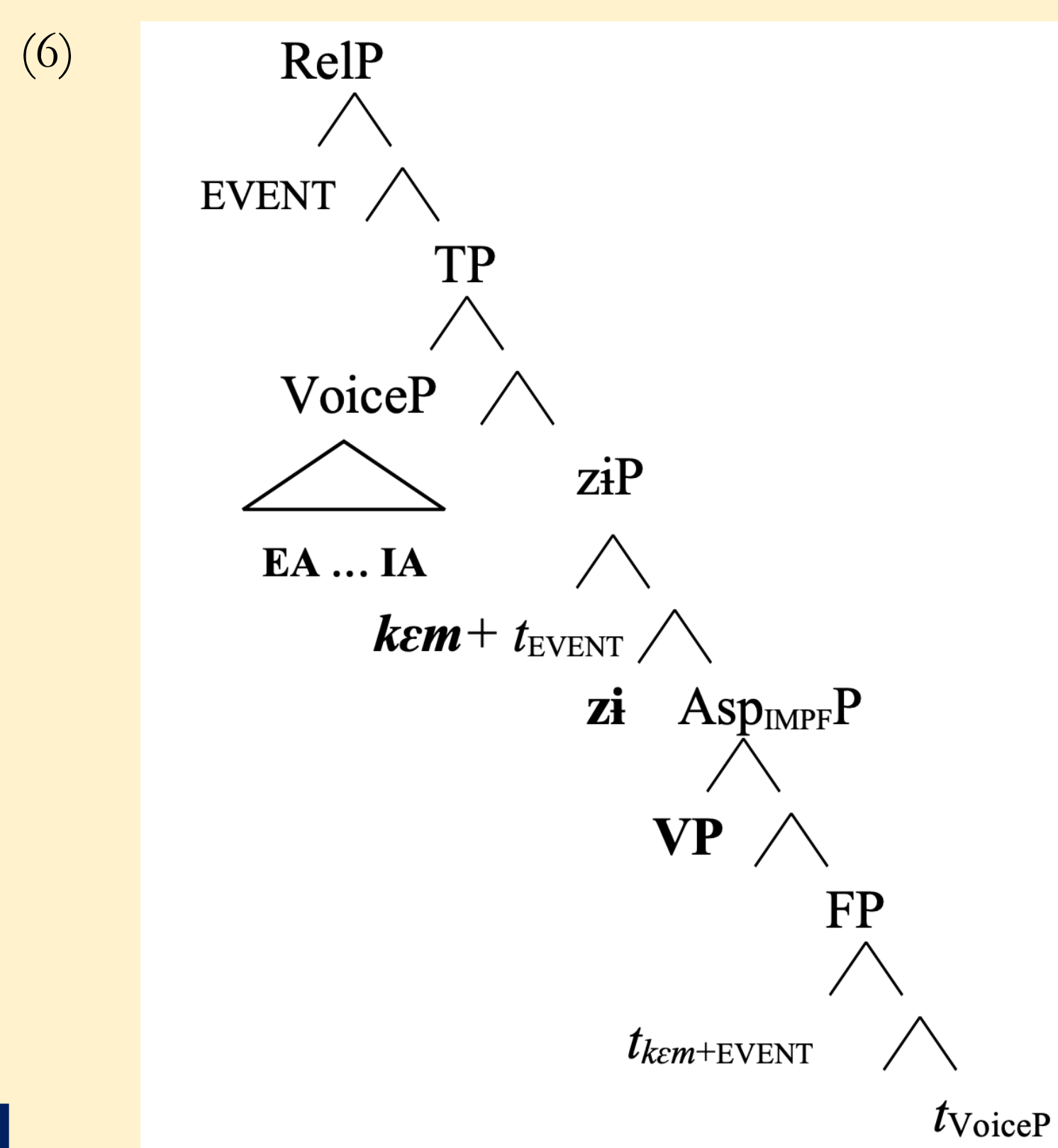
THE PROPOSAL

Since the subordinate clauses (2b) and (3b) manifest *zi*, it follows that some element undergoes A'-movement.

We argue that the relativized element in this case is a phonologically null argument, EVENT, that undergoes A'-movement to Spec,RelP, transiting through the specifier of *zi*.

kɛm is etymologically akin to 'about/like' in many other Semitic languages. We argue that it is merged together with EVENT so that (2b) should be more appropriately glossed/translated as 'The teacher had a visual perception of/about the event of the student's writing the letter'.

The derivation takes place in the following steps, recapitulated in the tree in (6):

(6)

RelP
  EVENT
         TP
  VoiceP
            ziP
  EA ... IA
          kɛm+ *t*EVENT
              zi AspIMPFP
                   VP
                        FP
      *t*kɛm+EVENT
                     *t*VoiceP

I.   *kɛm*+EVENT is merged in a specifier position of a projection above VoiceP.

II. A'-movement targets [kɛm+EVENT], which moves to Spec,ziP.

III. As argued in Cacchioli (to appear), VoiceP, which includes the EA and the IA, raises to Spec,TP.

IV. Finally, the nominal EVENT splits from [kɛm+EVENT] in Spec,ziP and moves to SpecRelP (only DPs can be relativized), stranding *kɛm*.

The word order that emerges from this series of operations is S-O-*kɛm-zi*-V which is exactly what we see in the subordinate clause in (2b) and (3b).

Further Research

Our analysis of the complement clause of *see* in (2b) as a relative clause predicts that A'-movement of an argument to the matrix should be impossible, as it would violate the (island) condition banning movement out of relative clauses. However, relativization from an an embedded clause is perfectly fine:

(7)   ʔiti   ʔanɛ Tɛsfay **kɛm-zi**-gɛziʔ-o   z-hasb-o   kɛlbi wɨdɨddɨr   tɛʕawitu
      DET.3ms   I   Tɛsfay.ms KƐM-ZƗ-write.PFV.3ms-ms ZƗ-think.PFV.3ms-ms dog   competition win.PFV.3ms
      'The dog that I think Tɛsfay bought won the competition.'

We argue that the pronominal suffix on the embedded verb is a resumptive pronoun, that serves to overcome the island violation. Other questions will be answered in further research.

Contact:
gioia.cacchioli@unige.ch
ur.shlonsky@unige.ch
Université de Genève

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