

# Contrastive Topic and Predicate Doubling in Bantu

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**BaSIS**  
Bantu Syntax & Information Structure



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## Overview

- Topic doubling (a subtype of predicate doubling) in Bantu has four readings: verum focus, contrastive topic (CT), intensive, and depreciative – see (1) below.
- Topic doubling marks congruence to a discourse strategy (Büring 2003, 2016) which answers a relevant Question Under Discussion (QUD; Roberts 1996), with verum readings involve focus on a polarity head (Muñoz-Pérez and Verdecchia 2022).
- We propose that intensive and depreciative readings arise when the proposition is contrasted with alternative ways of enacting that eventuality, and linking this to a conversational implicature arising from the scalar nature of the alternative set of propositions.

1. INTRODUCTION

## Topic Doubling

- Topic doubling has a topical infinitive in the left periphery, followed by an inflected form of the same verb.
  - Four readings have been described for topic doubling in the Bantuist literature (Meeussen 1967, Gunnink 2019, Güldemann & Fiedler to appear): (Rukiga; database Asiiimwe & Van der Wal + p.c.)
- (1) O-ku-hinga tu-hing-ire.  
AUG-INF-dig-FV1PL.SM-dig-PFV
- 'The ploughing we did (, but...)' **Contrastive Topic; CT**  
[We were expected to dig and feed the animals]
  - '(Yes,) We did actually plough.' **Verum**  
[There is doubt as to whether we did the ploughing]
  - 'We ploughed a lot!' **Intensive**  
[We were expected to do one part, but we did the whole field]
  - 'Well, we ploughed.' **Depreciative**  
[It's planting season but there is no rain]
- The infinitive is a topic like any other (NP) topic.

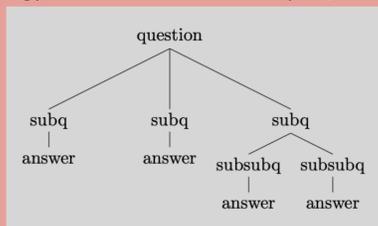
## The Languages of this Study

Within the BaSIS project, data for Topic Doubling were collected for the Bantu languages Rukiga (Uganda), Kĩĩtharaka (Kenya), Kirundi (Burundi), Kinyakyusa (Tanzania), Makhuwa (Mozambique), and Copi (Mozambique).



## Contrastive Topic

- We treat CT as a special case of focus (Büring 2006, 2014; Constant 2014), and predicate doubling evokes a set of alternative questions (Hamblin 1973; Rooth 1985, 1992) to the QUD stack (van Kuppevelt 1995, 1996; Roberts 1996).
- Thus, CT is a strategy in a discourse tree of super-/sub-questions.



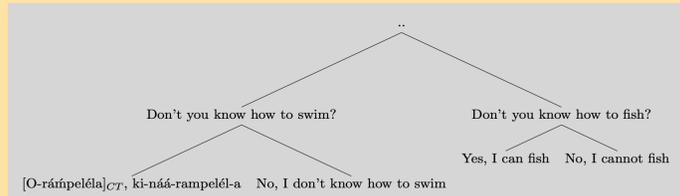
- Büring proposes the following meaning, which when applied to a declarative sentence  $\alpha$  yields a CT value, which is a set of question meanings.
- (2)  $[[A]]^{ct}$  equals
- $\{D_{type(A)}\}$ , if A is F marked, otherwise
  - $\{\{\alpha\} \mid \alpha \in D_{type(A)}\}$ , if A is CT marked, otherwise
  - $\{\{[[A]]^o\}\}$ , if A is a terminal, otherwise
  - $[[B]]^{ct}$ , if A = [B], otherwise
  - $\{\beta \mid \exists b, c [b \in [[B]]^{ct} \& c \in [[C]]^{ct} \& \beta = \{\alpha \mid \exists b', c' [b' \in b \& c' \in c \& a = b' + c']\}\}$ , if A = [B C] (Büring 2003:539)
- This definition is coupled with a CT Congruence:
- (3) An utterance  $U$  containing a contrastive topic can map onto a move  $M_U$  within a d-tree  $D$  only if  $U$  indicates a strategy around  $M_U$  in  $D$ , [where]  $U$  indicates a strategy around  $M_U$  iff there is a non-singleton set  $Q'$  of questions such that for each  $Q \in Q'$ , (i)  $Q$  is identical to or a sister of the question that immediately dominates  $M_U$ , and (ii)  $[[Q]]^o \in [[U]]^{ct}$  (Büring 2003:520)
- Thus, a CT-marked sentence should only be able to occur in a strategy whose sub-questions are drawn from the set of questions generated in (2b).
- For example, the CT reading in (4) answers subquestions in a discourse where the superquestion is something like 'what will you have?'. (Kirundi; database Nshemezimana & Van der Wal)

(4) [Ku-ryá]<sub>CT</sub> [n-dy-a i-nyama]<sub>F</sub> [ku-nywá]<sub>CT</sub> [n-yw-a i-fanta]<sub>F</sub>.  
INF-eat 1SG.SM-eat-FV AUG-9.meat INF-drink 1SG.SM-drink-FV AUG-9.fanta  
'For eating, I eat meat; for drinking, I drink fanta.'

2. CONTRASTIVE TOPIC

## Verum in Predicate Doubling

- We argue that the other three readings which arise with topic doubling build on the analysis proposed by Büring for CT.
  - First, we address the question of the verum focus reading: (Makhuwa; database Van der Wal)
- (5) [Don't you know how to swim?]  
O-rámpeléla, ki-náá-rampelél-a.  
INF-swim 1SG.SM-PRS.DJ-swim-FV  
'I do know how to swim.'
- Muñoz Pérez & Verdecchia (2022:20) expand Büring's approach and treat the verum reading of topic doubling in Spanish as focus marking of a polarity head  $\Sigma$  (Laka 1990, Holmberg 2016).
  - Thus, the alternative set to  $p$  is its negation  $\neg p$ , as part of a sub-QUD:



## Contrast

- Vicente (2007:64-65) distinguishes contradictory and non-contradictory verum:
  - **Contradictory:**  $\neg p$  (contrasted between  $p$  and  $\neg p$ )
  - **Non-contradictory:**  $\neg p \wedge q \neq p$  (contrast between  $p$  and  $q$ , where  $q \neq p$ )
- These fit in the CT analysis of Topic Doubling:
  - replace the focus by a variable and open a set of alternatives: [orámpeléla]  $\Sigma$  -> *Do you swim?*
  - convert the question into a set of questions:
    - Contradictory:  $\{Do\ you\ P?,\ Do\ you\ not\ P?,\ \dots\}$
    - Non-contradictory: *Do you P?* ->  $\{Do\ you\ laugh?,\ Do\ you\ walk?,\ \dots\}$
- We propose that a third kind of verum contrast is necessary to capture the intensive and depreciative readings.
- This 'relational' contrast conjures a set of alternative ways to do  $p$ :
  - **Relational:**  $p \neq p \wedge p' \neq p$  (contrast between  $p$  and alternative ways to do  $p$ )
- The relational verum contrast gives rise to the depreciative and intensive readings when linked with a theory of scalar implicature.

3. VERUM AND BEYOND

## Relational Contrast and Scales

- For relational contrast, a set of possible questions for (5) would be:  $\{Do\ you\ swim\ well?,\ Do\ you\ swim\ poorly?,\ Do\ you\ swim\ like\ an\ Olympian?,\ \dots\}$
- The alternatives forms a partially-ordered set of related propositions (Hirschberg 1985; Ward and Hirschberg 1985; Ward 1991; Beaver & Clark 2008; *inter alia*).
- We assume that the lowest point on a scale of relational alternatives is to do nothing but with an intention – cf. zero-result non-culmination readings (Koenig & Muansuwan 2000; Tatevosov 2008; Martin & Schäfer 2017; Beavers & Lee 2020).

## Intensive and Depreciative Readings

- We propose that a conversational implicature arises with relational alternatives which conveys that the asserted proposition is stronger than a contextually-determined expected alternative to  $p$ .
  - Intensive and depreciative readings arise from this:
    - Intensive:** the assertion exceeds an expected weaker alternative  $p'$
- zero-result < sing poorly < sing mediocre < sing well < sing like Aretha  
[expectation] assertion
- Depreciative: the assertion exceeds the zero-result
- zero-result < sing poorly < sing mediocre < sing well < sing like Aretha  
[expectation] assertion
- Both readings are observed in context: (Kĩĩtharaka; database Kanampiu & Van der Wal)
- (6) Kúííná n' áííniré bai!  
INF-sing FOC 1SM-sing-PFV friend  
Intensive: 'Boy did she sing!' [we never knew she had such a good voice]  
Depreciative: 'Well at least she sang...' [try to see the positive side]

## Questions for Future Work

- The intensive and depreciative readings are not readily available in Spanish (Carlos Muñoz Pérez and Matías Verdecchia p.c.). What cross-linguistic factors condition the observed variation across languages with topic doubling, such as Russian, Gungbe, Japanese, Yiddish and others (Davis & Prince 1986; Aboh & Dyakonova 2009; Ishihara 2010)?
- In which other contexts is topic doubling used, e.g. TAM focus, and how can our account capture that?

4. CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURE

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