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The Somali system: A typological perspective

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"Somali Studies"

...from data to theory...

- Working within a framework that assumes **universal principles of grammar**, the description of a language is the first step of linguistic investigation.
- Then, morpho-syntactic and intonational properties has been considered **from a comparative perspective**, in order to reach a **comprehensive analysis** of the structure and functioning of languages.
- The aim of this presentation is to offer a short but, hopefully, significant overview of this analytical approach.

1. Morphological classification

According to their morphological properties, languages of the world can be classified as

- inflectional,
- agglutinative,
- polysynthetic,
- isolating.

(cf. Comrie 1981, Croft 1991).

Somali

→ *Inflectional language*, as is shown by its verbal system.
Consider a verb like *sheeg* ('to say'):

	present	present progressive	past
1sg	<i>sheegaa</i>	<i>sheegayaa</i>	<i>sheegay</i>
2sg	<i>sheegtaa</i>	<i>sheegaysaa</i>	<i>sheegtay</i>
3sgm	<i>sheegaa</i>	<i>sheegayaa</i>	<i>sheegay</i>
3sf	<i>sheegtaa</i>	<i>sheegaysaa</i>	<i>sheegtay</i>
1pl	<i>sheegnaa</i>	<i>sheegaynaa</i>	<i>sheegnay</i>
2pl	<i>sheegtaan</i>	<i>sheegaynaan</i>	<i>sheegteen</i>
3pl	<i>sheegaan</i>	<i>sheegayaan</i>	<i>sheegeen</i>

➤ However, *incorporating properties* can also be found:

a) In the so-called **Verbal Complex (VC)**

[Imp.Scl /a - 1 Ocl - Preps (max 2) - Ocl (poss) - *soo/sii* - V]

(2) *Axmed baa guri-gii* [*nooga (∅-na-u-∅-ka)*] *qaaday*
Axmed FM home-An.Det Ocl.3-Ocl.1pl-for-Ocl.3-from take.PST
'Axmed took it from home for us'
(lit.: Ahmed (Focus), home (given), it for us from it took)

(3) *Cali baa* [*igu (i+ku)*] *kaa* *aamintay*
Cali FM Ocl.1sg- to Ocl.2sg (lit.: your) entrust.PST
'Cali entrusted me to you'

b) In the **Noun Phrase (DP)**

- (4) **Wiil-kaa-gan-u** *waa* *fiican*
boy-poss.2sg-Dem-NOM DECL.M nice
'That boy of yours is nice'

Cf. **polysyntetic languages** (Jelinek 1984, Mithum 1987, Baker 1996)

- (5) *E-s-kakhe-hona'tá-yethw-ahs* (Cayuga, from Evans & Sasse 2002)
FUT-ITER-Scl.1sg/Ocl.3pl-potato-plant-PERF
'I will plant potatoes again for them'

...not only:

agglutinative properties can also be found in the **VP**

→ Variation in the argument structure realized by means of affixes in the verbal root.

Ex: *buux* ('to be full') = intransitive-stative one-argument V

(6) *Koob-ku* *waa* *buuxay*
glass-Det.NOM DECL be full.PST.3sgm
'The glass was full'

+ *causative infix -i(s)-* → *buuxis* = transitive-dynamic two-argument V

(7) *Calí* *koob-ka* *waa* *buux-i-yay*
Ali.NOM glass-Det DECL be full-caus-PST.3sgm
'Ali had the glass full'

buuxis + *-am-* → unaccusative one-argument V

(8) *Koob-ku* *waa* *buuxsamay* (*buux-is-am-ay*)
glass-DET.NOM DECL be full-caus-stat-PST.3sgm
'The glass was filled in (*by me)'

→ **Somali: morphologically a mixed language**
(cf. Svolacchia & Puglielli 1999)

2. Syntactic classification

According to word order languages of the world can be classified w.r.t the position of the **S**ubject, the **O**bject and the **V**erb:

- SVO (42%, e.g., French, English, Finnish, Indonesia, Zulu)
- SOV (47,5%, e.g. Turkish, Japanese, Quechua, Basque)
- VSO (8%, e.g. Standard Arabic, Welsh, Niuean)
- VOS (2,1%, e.g. Malagasy, Tzotzil)
- OVS (0.9%, e.g. Hixkaryana (Carib), Mangarrayi)
- OSV (0.3%, 4 languages - uncertain)

[WALS edition 2011]

- (9) a. *Shalay jamacadda Cali baan ku arkay*
yesterday university-det Cali FM.scl1sg to see.pst.1sg
- b. *Shalay Cali baan ku arkay, jamacadda*
- c. *Cali baan ku arkay jamacadda shalay*
'Yesterday I saw CALI at the university'

In Somali DPs can be apparently arranged in any order

➤ **Is Somali a non-configurational language?**

The answer is negative:

- (9) a. *Shalay* (TOP) *jamacadda* (TOP) *CALI* (FOC) *baan* *ku arkay*
 yesterday university-det Cali FM.scl1sg to see.pst.1sg
 'Yesterday I saw CALI at the university'
- b. *Shalay* (TOP) *CALI* (FOC) *baan ku arkay*, *jamacadda* (TOP)
- c. *CALI* (FOC) *baan ku arkay* *jamacadda* (TOP) *shalay* (TOP)
- d. **CALI* (FOC) *jamacadda* (TOP) *baan ku arkay* *shalay* (TOP)

→ Somali is a "Discourse-configurational" language (Kiss 1995)

Full DPs are arranged on either side of the VC and their order structurally depends on their **discourse function** as Focus or Topic (Svolacchia, Mereu, Puglielli 1995)

Verbal Complex (VC)

[Imp.Scl /a - 1 Ocl - Preps (max 2) - Ocl (poss) - *soo/sii* - V]

- The VC can be considered a "microstructure" of the whole sentence (Puglielli 1981).
- It offers a **template** for the verb and its arguments (in the form of clitics) → **Somali as a SOV language**

In Dependence marking languages...

- ...the relevant marking is realized **on the NP-head** and/or on **its modifiers**.
- ...both coinjoined phrases can be marked in **coordinated structures** :

(12) [*al-lugha* *al-arabiyya*] *sa'abah*
 (Arabic)

 Det-language.**NOM** Det-Arabic.**NOM**
difficult

'Arabic language is difficult.'

(13) *Ahmet* [*uskumru-yu te istakoz-u*] *pişir-*
 di (Turkish)

Ahmet noun **ACC** and **lehaber** **ACC** cook

➤ *What about Somali?*

In Somali conjoined structures only the *rightmost phrase is marked*, that is to say, the *most embedded* syntactic constituent in a Coordinative phrase (CoordP):

- (14) [*qalin-ka/*ku iyo buggag-gu*] *miis-ka* *way* *saran yihiin*
pencil-Det and book.pl-Det.**NOM** table-Det DECL.Scl3pl stay.PRS.3pl
'The pencil and the books are on the table.'

- ❖ In a formal framework this property
 - a) allows for a **clear identification** of the right boundary of a NP and
 - b) shows the **validity** of a structural analysis in which **the second conjunct is more embedded** than the first.



4. Relative clauses

Relative clauses in Somali are

- a) neither introduced by **Complementizers** (as in Italian, cf. (15a)),
- b) nor by **relative pronouns** (as in Russian, cf. (15b)), and
- c) the NP heading the clause is **not resumed by a pronoun** within the sentence (as is the case in Persian, cf. (15c)).

(15) a. *Il ragazzo che hai incontrato è mio fratello*
Det boy that have.2sg met is my brother
'The boy (that) you met is my brother'

b. *Devuška [kotor-uju videla] maja sestra*
girl.nom relpron-3sgf.acc see.pst.sgf poss.1sg.f sister
'The girl (that) she saw is my sister'

c. *Man zan-i-ra [ke Hasan be u]*
pro.s.1sg woman-det-ACC that Hasan to pro.Obj.3sg
jije-ra dad] mišenasad
chicken-acc give.pst.3sg know.pres.3sg
'I know the woman to whom Hasan gave a chicken' [from Comrie 1981]

→ Somali belongs to the so-called *Head deletion type*

(16) *Wiil-ku* [*Maryan la hadlayá*] *waa walaal-kay*
boy-det.m.NOM Maryan with talk.pres.prog.red DECL brother-poss.1sg
'The boy speaking with Maryan is my brother'

RCs in Somali are characterized by

Antiagreement effects

when the NP-head has a subject role in the RC →
'reduced' AGR (independent of its role in the main clause)

(17) *Wiil-ku* [*Maryan la hadlayá / *hadlayaa*] *waa walaal-kay*
NOM talk.pres.prog.RED / talk.pres.prog.3sgm

(18) *Wiil-ka* [*af talyaani-ga hadlayá / *hadlayaa*] *baan jeclahay*
boy-Det.nonNOM talk.pres.prog.RED / talk.pres.prog.3sgm
'I love the boy that is talking Italian'

5. Subordinate clauses

Subordinate clauses in Somali present the morpho-syntactic properties of relative clauses (Frascarelli & Puglielli 2005) and, as such, they show

Antiagreement effects

when the NP-head has a subject role within the subordinate clause:

- (19) *gabar-tii oo [mar-kaas guri-ga gashay] baan arkay*
girl-An.Det ASS time-Dem home-Det go in.PST.RED FM.Scl.1sg see.PST.1sg
'I saw the (relevant) girl, *after* her entering the house'
(lit.: 'the girl, *the time* she went in the house, I saw her')

Embedded clauses in Somali show the formal properties of *nominal subordination*

Working hypothesis:

Complement clauses originate from NP subordination cross-linguistically

Subordination and nominalization

Subordinate clauses are realized as **nominalized structures** in a number of typologically different languages (cf. Puglielli & Frascarelli 2011), e.g.:

Turkish (Kornfilt 1997)

(20) *Müdür* [*tatil-e* *çik-tiğ-i* *zaman*] *ofis* *kapa-n-ir*
boss holiday-DAT go-NOMIN-3sg.poss time office close-REFL-HAB
'When the boss is on holiday, the office is closed'
(lit.: the boss, the time of his going on holiday, the office is closed')

Maori (Bauer 1993)

(21) a. [*kia* *tae* *mai* *koe*] *ka* *kai* *taatou*
time coming here you T/ASP eat we.incl
'When you arrive here, we will eat'
(lit. the time of your arriving here, we eat)

b. *I* *hoki* *maatou* *ki* *te* *kaainga* [*i* *te* *mea* *e* *ua* *ana*]
T/ASP return we.escl to Det home from Det thing T/ASP rain pst
'We went back home *because* it was raining'
(lit.: [...] from the thing that rained)

Finnish (Di Santo 2015)

(22) *Maria näk-i* [Peka-n sovitta-va-n takki-a]
Maria see-PST.3sg Pekka-gen try on-PRT.PRS.ACC jacket-PARTITIVE
'Maria saw that Pekka tried on the jacket'
(lit.: Maria saw Pekka's trying jacket')

Afar (Puglielli & Frascarelli 2011)

(23) [*Ged'de-m*] ob'be.
go.2sg-NOMIN.ACC hear.PST.1sg
'I heard you left.'

Tagalog (Frascarelli 2010)

(24) [*bago natulog*] ang mga bata uminom ng gatas
previous ACT.sleep trigger PL child ACT.drink.pst DIR milk
'Before sleeping, the children drank some milk.'

...based on cross-linguistic evidence, it can be suggested that :

→ **Wh-phrases** introducing subordinate clauses originate from a generic NP (as 'time', 'place', etc.) heading a RC:

(25) a. [*when* you arrive], we will be happy ←

b. [_{NP} *the moment* [_{CP} that [_{IP} you arrive]]], we will be happy

(26) a. [*from how* he greeted me], I understood there was a problem ←

b. [_{NP} *the way* [_{CP} [_{IP} he greeted me]]], I understood...

(27) a. I remember [*that* you behaved badly at the party] ←

b. I remember [_{NP} *the fact* [_{CP} *that* [_{IP} you behaved badly....]]]

6. The syntax-discourse interface: Focus

- Somali is a *Focus prominent language*: one constituent (DP) must be marked as the Focus of the sentence.
- Specifically, the Focus is identified by means of:
 - (a) **syntactic position** (necessarily before the VC), and
 - (b) **Focus marker** (*baa*) immediately following the Focus.

(28) Q: Who did you see yesterday?

A: *Shalay jamacadda CALI baan ku arkay*
yesterday university-Det Cali FM.Scl1sg to see.PST.1sg
'Yesterday I saw CALI at the university'

A crucial connection between Focus and RCs

The sentence following the Focus shows the morphosyntactic properties of a relative clause:

- (a) *Antiagreement effects* when the Focus is *interpreted* as the subject of the following sentence;
- (b) *Non-nominative* Case marking of the Focus, independent of its role.

(29) NIMANKAAS /*U baa /*buu hilibka cunayá.
men-Dem / .NOM FM FM.3sgm meat.Det eat.prog.RED
'THESE MEN are eating meat.'

→ *RCs are part of Focus constructions*
(Frascarelli & Puglielli 2005, 2007).

- ❖ The *connection* between *Focus and Relative clauses* in a *copular construction* is a well-attested cross-linguistic phenomenon (Frascarelli 2010).

(TIGRINYA, Appleyard 1989)

(30) *nKssu* (FOC) *'Kyyu* *waga* *'ab* *kätäma* *zäxKbbKr*
 pron.3sgm *cop.3sgm* price in town raise.REL
 'It's HIM who raises the prices in the city'

(WOLOF, Kihm 1999)

(31) *Fas* *wi* (FOC) *la* *jaaykat* *bi* *jënd*
 horse Det cop.3sg merchant Det but.pst.REL
 'The merchant has bought A HORSE'

(BYALI, Reineke 2004)

(32) *Bii-g* (FOC) *è* *ù* *n* *yi* *yambK* *kK*
 child-Ocl cop SUBJ.pron.3sgf REL pst see.perf Ocl
 'She had seen THE CHILD'

(BERBER, Ouhalla 1999)

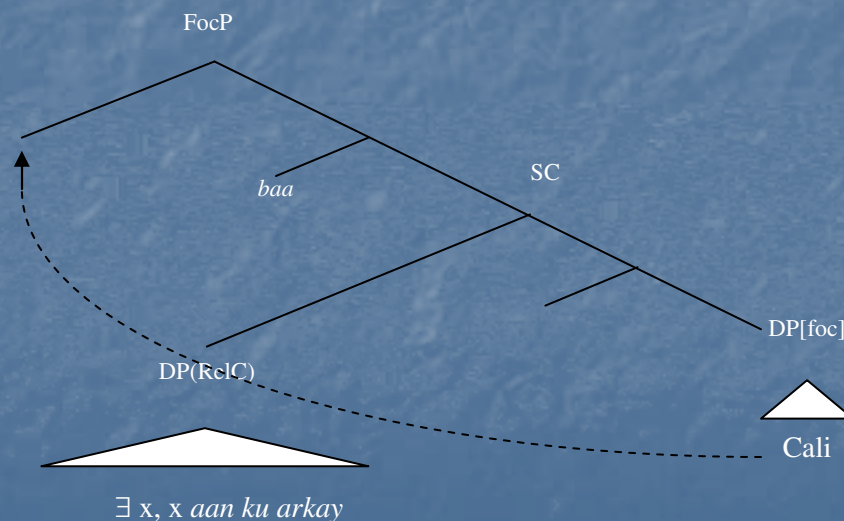
(33) *Tamghart-a* (FOC) *ay* *yzrin* *Mohand*
 woman-dem pron.indef see-PRT Mohand
 'Mohand saw THIS WOMAN'

Besides “in situ” and “ex situ” focalization...

Languages like Somali provide evidence for the existence of an alternative Focus strategy: the cleft-like strategy

This *Focus strategy* implies the presence of a *Small Clause* (SC), in which:

- the Focus is inserted as a *predicate*
- the Presupposition is a (free) relative clause, inserted as the *subject*
- the FM (when realized) is an original copular form:



The Focus DP is NOT an argument (for details, cf. Frascarelli 2010)

- This proposal was discussed in several works, from different approaches and perspectives (cf. Higgins 1973, Szabolcsi 1981, Heine and Reh 1984, Kiss 1999, Huber 2000).
- Chomsky (1971: 72): "the focused constituent is the predicate of a *dominant sentence*".

Empirical advantages:

This explanation can account for the phenomena illustrated before (*Antiagreement, non-NOM Case, etc.*), which characterize Focus as a *nominal predicate*.

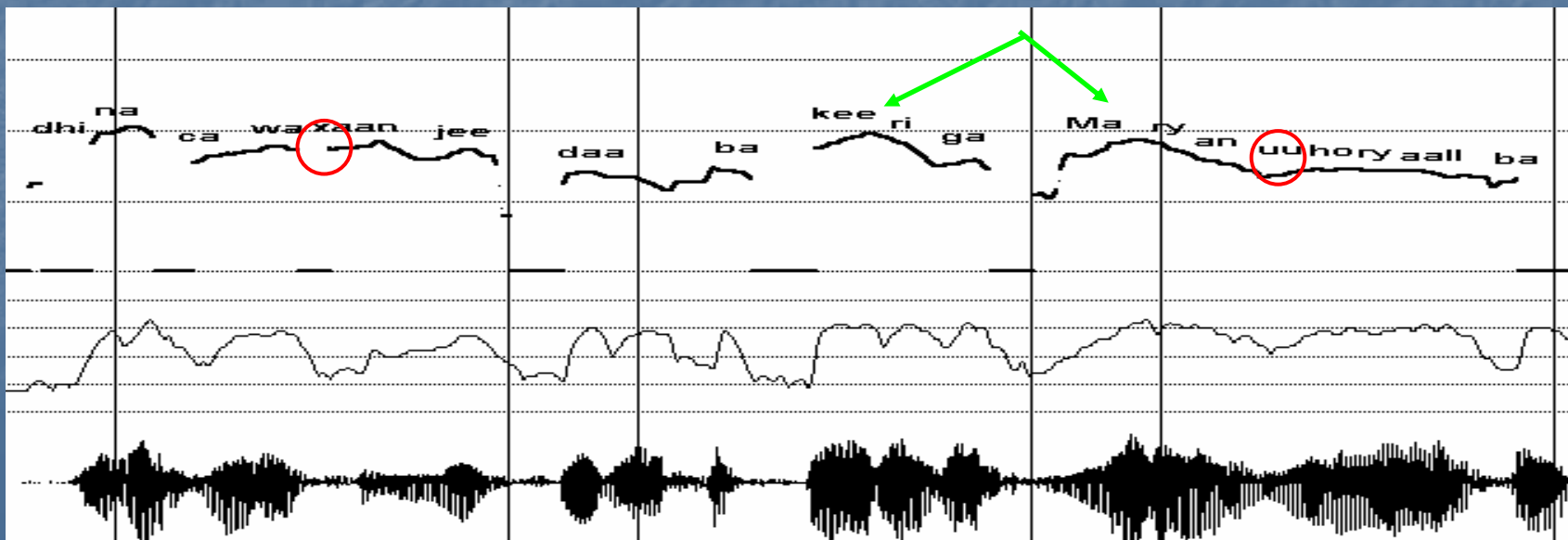
Theoretical importance:

The interface perspective
Grammaticalization of an original copular construction for
discourse grammar requirements.

7. IS and prosodic analysis: Focus

- **Focus** in Somali is marked by a *pitch* (H^*), consistent with cross-linguistical studies.
- The FM is accent-less, as is expected for an (original) functional element like a copula.

(34) *Dhinaca waxaan* (wax-baa-aan) *jeedaa* **BAKEERIGA**
 side FM.Scl1sg thing-FM-Scl1sg see.pres.1sg glass.Det
MARYANuu (M.+buu) *horyalla*
 Maryan.FM.scl3sgm be-in-front-of.pres.3sgm
 'On a side, what I see is a GLASS (and) it is in front of MARYAN'



8. IS and prosodic analysis: Topic

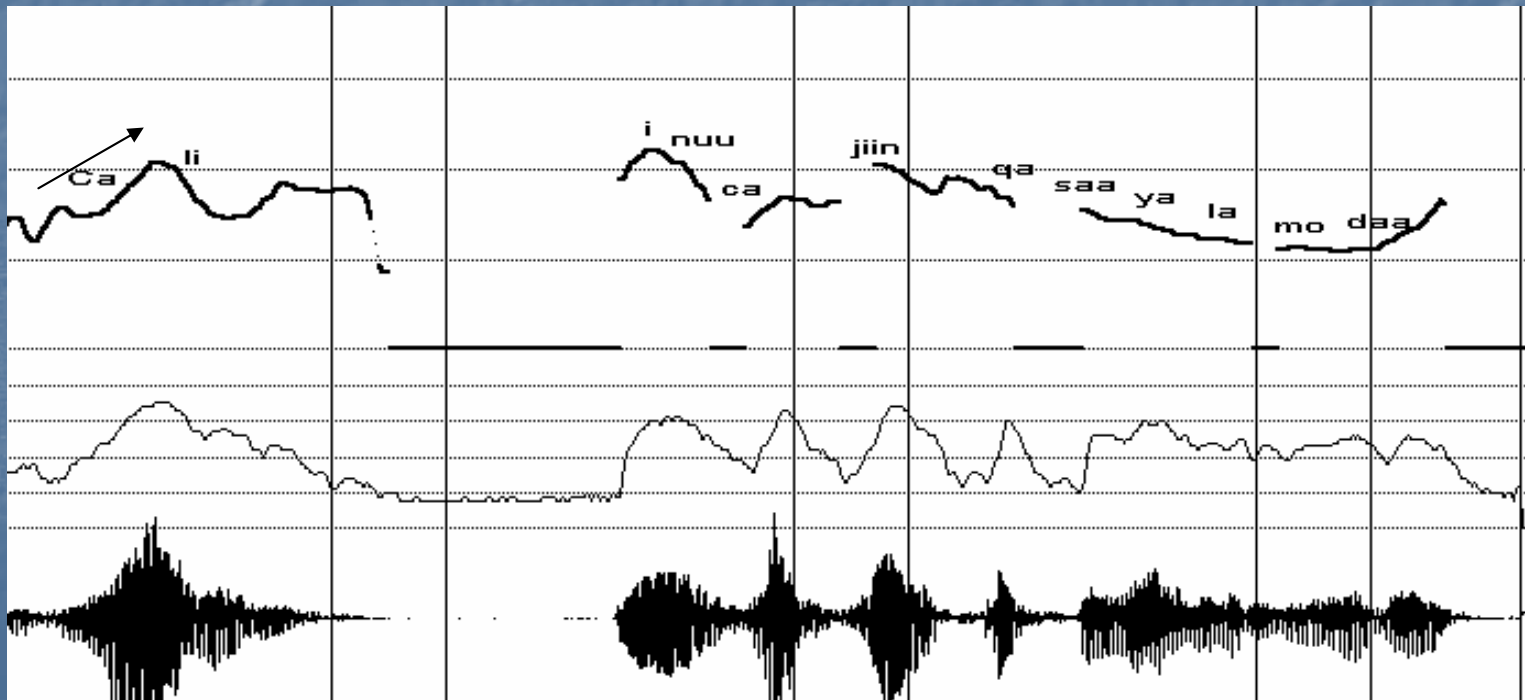
- Different types of Topics have been distinguished and analysed in the literature, for typologically different languages.
- Specifically, a systematic connection has been proved between discourse functions, syntactic position and prosodic properties of different types of Topics (cf. Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007).
- Interface analysis of spoken corpora attested this distinction in Somali as well (cf. Frascarelli & Puglielli 2009).

Aboutness-shift Topic (A-Topic)

- The A-Topic connects Reinhart's (1981) *aboutness* ("what the sentence is about") with the prop

A-Topic

(35) Waxay i-la tahay Cali_k (L*+H) in-uu_k
 FM.3sgf me-impers seem.3sgf Cali.NOM that-3sgm
cajiin qasayaa la moodaa
 pasta make.3sgm.DEP impers seem.pres.3sgm
 'It seems to me that Cali, he is making pasta, I think'

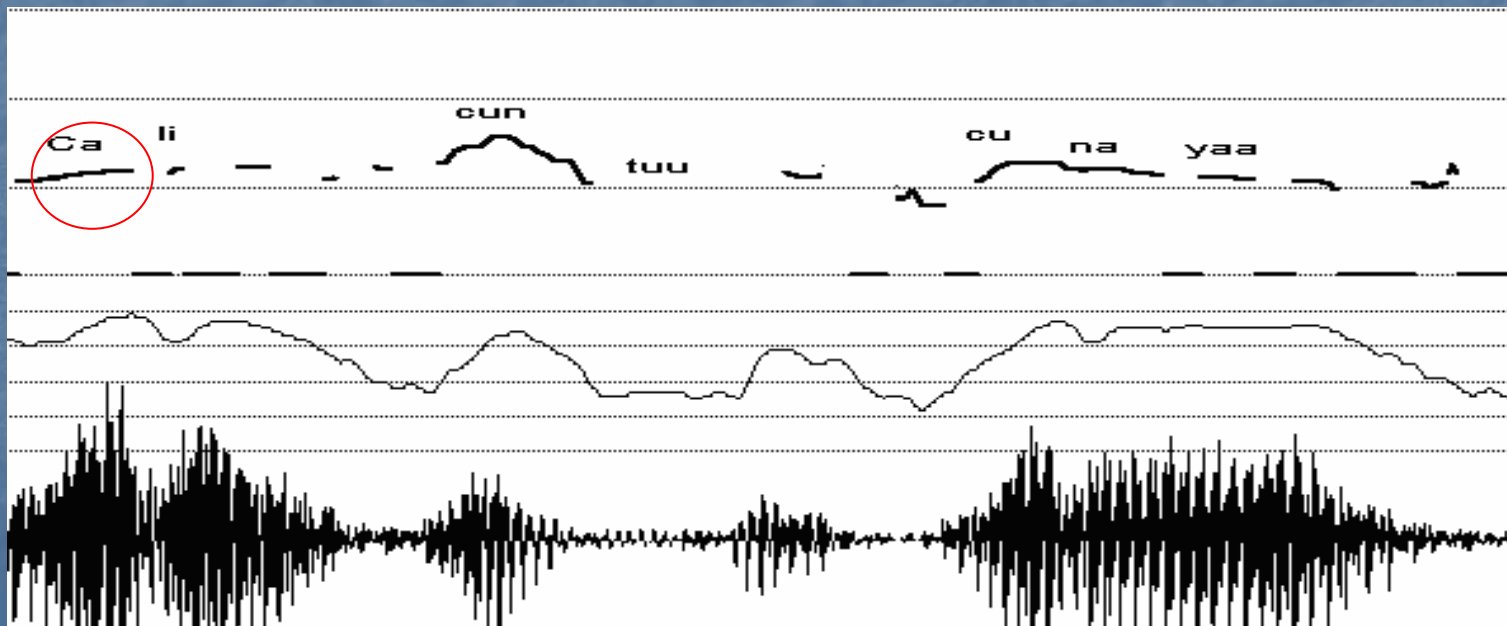


Familiar/Given Topic (G-Topic)

- The G-Topic refers to *given* information in the discourse: it is a D-linked constituent, either in a strong (Heim 1981) or in a weak sense (Roberts 2003).
- G-Topics are used:
 - (i) for *continuity* w.r.t. the current A-Topic, or
 - (ii) to provide *background* information.
- The G-Topic can be realized either in the left or in the right periphery of the sentence (Rizzi 1997) and is associated with the *L* tone* (Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007).
- Also this kind of Topic is *part of the Somali system*:

G-Topic

(36) *Maryan Cali u baaqi mayso*
Maryan Cali to give a sign neg.pres.3sgf
Cali [+given] *cuntuu* *cunayaa*
Cali.NOM food.det.fm.3sgm eat.pres.red
'Maryan is not giving a sign to Cali, Cali is eating his food'

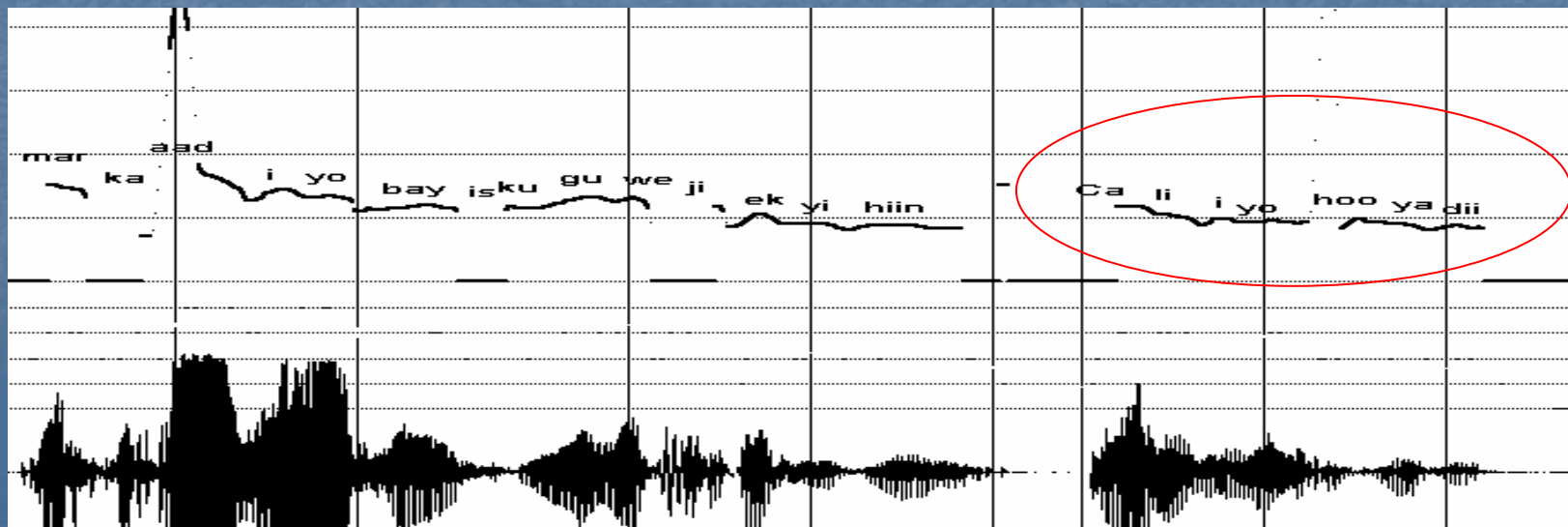


➤ **Right-hand Topics can only be G-Topics cross-linguistically** (shift/contrast not allowed in final position).

→ Somali is consistent with this generalization:

(37) *Cali Maryan way u-∅ ektahay, waa*
 Cali Maryan DECL.3sgf to-ocl.3sg be similar.pres.3sgf DECL.M
hooyadiis waayo [...] wejigoodaa is-ku eg
 mother.poss.3sg because [...] face.poss.3pl.FM refl-to be similar.RED
waa inankeed-ii marka aad iyo (aad) bay is-ku
 DECL.M son.poss.3sg-an so much and much FM.3sgf refl-to
weji ekyihiin, Cali iyo hooyadiis
 face be similar.PRS.3pl Cali and mother.poss.3sg

'As for Cali, he looks like Maryan, she is his mother because their faces are very similar, he is her son, so their look like each other a lot, **Cali and his mother**'



Thanks!!

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