

Chapter 6

Little words – big consequences

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This paper investigates the interaction of E-language and I-language within the context of the macro- vs. micro-parameter debate. It presents a case study of variation found in the focus construction in Western Malayo-Polynesian languages, Tagalog, and three dialects of Malagasy – Merina, Bezanozano, and Betsimisaraka. The grammatical role of the functional element that appears directly after the focused element, which is only subtly indicated in the E-language, turns out to be crucial as its role can have significant repercussions in the I-language. More specifically, depending on whether this element is a determiner, a relativizer, or a complementizer, the construction itself can vary between a pseudo-cleft construction and a cleft construction. The hypothesis is made that the shift from the pseudo-cleft to the cleft construction opens the door to a possible reanalysis of these verb-initial languages as having SVO word order.

1 Introduction

... study of the principles of syntax is not and cannot be a separate enterprise from study of the parameters. (Kayne 2005: 9)

It is hard to separate the study of syntax from the study of parameters. In the 80s and 90s, interest was in macro-parameters such as bounding (Rizzi 1982), pro-drop (e.g. Chomsky 1981), and word order. More recently, interest has turned to Kayne (2005). In a system that recognizes I(nternal)-language and E(xternal) language, we find a tension is created between macro-parameters and micro-parameters. Macro-parameters are best suited to explain the speed of language acquisition. Acquiring one smaller language detail will entail that many other language facts will follow because one parameter will account for a cluster of



language-specific phenomena. If one were to design the perfect I-language system, a system of macro-parameters would appear to be the most efficient way to go. However, we know that language changes gradually given that the E-language between two generations on the chain of language change will have to be mutually intelligible. So as far as E-language goes, a system of micro-parameters would appear to be the right way to go.

In this paper I argue that a small surface difference in the E-language might well indicate a large difference in the I-language. This would allow shifts in a macro-parameter that could well not interfere with mutual intelligibility. The particular change that I will be investigating is a hypothesized change from VOS to SVO in Austronesian. I will look at a focus construction in three dialects of Malagasy¹ – Merina, Bezanozano, and Betsimisaraka – and compare this to its Austronesian cousin, Tagalog. The claim will be that while Tagalog and Bezanozano, the most conservative Malagasy dialect of the three, can be argued to use pseudo-clefting for their focus construction, both Merina and Betsimisaraka appear to have moved to a cleft construction, which I argue makes them closer to becoming SVO languages. The important part of this proposal is that this shift all rests on the analysis of one functional category – a very small surface difference that points to a substantial underlying difference.

2 Clefts and pseudo-clefts

In this section I give some background data on the relevant construction and I introduce the issue of distinguishing between pseudo-clefts and clefts in predicate-initial languages that lack copulas and expletives. I will argue that it is lack of transparency in these constructions that leads to reanalysis and language change. All of the languages/dialects under investigation are predicate-initial, but all have a focus construction in which a designated DP, which some analyses label the subject, appears sentence-initially. My argument will be that it is this construction that can eventually undergo reanalysis as a pure SVO structure. Whether or not it is susceptible to reanalysis will depend on how salient the signs are in this construction that the language remains predicate-initial. If the construction is clearly marked as a pseudo-cleft, its predicate-initial status will be clear. If the construction is a cleft construction, it will be subject to reanalysis. Why this is so will be explained in this section.

¹Malagasy is the name of a variety of dialects spoken in Madagascar by about 18 million people.

2.1 Background data

Tagalog, the most well-documented language spoken in the Philippines, is clearly verb-initial with variable word order following the verb. As I will be comparing Tagalog to the Malagasy dialects, I give a brief overview of its focus construction here. In the Tagalog clause, there is a designated argument that I will call the Pivot, that is marked by the particle *ang*.² In (1) below, we see that the sentence begins with the verb *bumili* ‘buy’ and that the Agent, acting as the Pivot, appears with the particle *ang*.

- (1) Tagalog
 Bumili ng bigas **ang** babae
 AT.buy ACC rice NOM woman
 ‘The woman bought rice.’

In order to create the focus construction, the *ang* DP is fronted and that fronted DP is followed by another particle *ang*.³

- (2) Tagalog
Ang babae ang bumili ng bigas
 NOM woman NOM AT.BUY ACC rice
 ‘It is the woman who bought rice.’

The Merina dialect of Malagasy⁴ also has a Pivot DP, in this case indicated by its sentence-final position.

- (3) Merina
 Manasa ny lambanay **Rakoto**
 PRS.AT.wash DET clothes.1PL.EXCL Rakoto
 ‘Rakoto is washing our clothes.’

In a focus construction, this Pivot DP appears sentence-initially and is followed by the particle *no*.

²There are debates about the syntactic status of the *ang* DP, whether it is the subject, the topic, or the absolutive marked argument. In a parallel fashion, there is a debate about what the particle *ang* is – nominative case, default case, or absolutive case. What is important for the purpose of this paper is that it is a functional category that is part of the nominal extended projection.

³I will be using boxes to highlight the “little words” referred to in the title of this chapter at relevant points.

⁴Merina is the main dialect, very close to what is called Official Malagasy, and is spoken in the capital region.

- (4) Merina
Rakoto no manasa ny lambanay
Rakoto *no* PRS.AT.wash DET clothes.1PL.EXCL
'It is Rakoto who is washing our clothes.'

The focus of this paper will be this construction and more specifically the role of the particle that follows the focussed DP. I will argue that this particle can be a nominal functional category (as we will see for Tagalog) or a verbal functional category (as we will see for the Merina dialect of Malagasy) and that the former indicates a pseudo-cleft construction while the latter indicates a cleft construction. We will see that in the pseudo-cleft construction, the clause remains firmly predicate-initial, while in the cleft construction, the word order within the clause is less obvious and therefore susceptible to reanalysis.

2.2 Discovering (pseudo)-clefts

The first goal of the paper is to show that these constructions are clefts of some form. In order to do this, I follow arguments taken from the literature on Malagasy (e.g. Keenan 1976; Paul 2001; Pearson 2009; Potsdam 2006; Law 2007). The first task is to show that the sentence-initial DP is preceded by a (silent) verb. Using examples from Merina, we can see below that both negation (5) and the raising predicate *toa* 'seems' (6) can precede the DP. Since both negation and raising predicates select verbal projections and not DPs, the conclusion has been made that there is a covert copula preceding the focussed DPs.

- (5) Merina
Tsy Rakoto no manasa ny lambanay
NEG Rakoto *no* PRS.AT.wash DET clothes.1PL.EXCL
'It isn't Rakoto who is washing our clothes.'
- (6) Merina
Toa Rakoto no manasa ny lambanay
Seems Rakoto *no* PRS.AT.wash DET clothes.1PL.EXCL
'It seems to be Rakoto who is washing our clothes.'

While remaining silent on what the structure is that follows the DP as this is the topic of the paper, we know that the first part of the construction contains an unrealized verb.

- (7) [Neg/RaisingV [_V <COP>] DP ...]

Now we take a brief excursion to discuss the distinction between clefts and pseudo-clefts in predicate-initial languages, why the distinction is very subtle, and why this distinction is important to the issue at hand. We start with an English cleft where an object, (8a), or a subject, (8b), has been extracted. Eventually we will look only at subject extraction so I have put that example in bold.

(8) Cleft

- a. It is a small dog that the child saw.
- b. **It is a small dog that saw the child.**

Now we look at pseudo-cleft (9a). In order to create a structure that works well with subject extraction which is crucial in our discussion of the change in word order from VOS to SVO, I change the construction slightly in (9b) by substituting *what* with *the thing*. I am assuming that this change does not make any relevant difference in the structure itself. Finally we see this structure with subject extraction in (9c) as this is what we will be comparing with the Malagasy structure.

(9) Pseudo-cleft

- a. **What** the child saw is a small dog.
- b. **The thing** that the child saw is a small dog.
- c. **The thing that saw the child is a small dog.**

In this exercise we will compare only the subject clefts (8b) and pseudo-clefts (9c) since these are the two constructions resembling most closely the Tagalog/Malagasy structures that we will encounter. In these languages, extraction is for the most part restricted to the Pivot DP. In order to simplify the discussion, we will start by focusing our attention only on sentences where the Agent is the Pivot.

Step 1: Our first task in understanding what our expectations are for clefts and pseudo-clefts in Malagasy and Tagalog, both predicate-initial languages, is to determine what we expect the order of elements to be. In order to do that, we first separate predicate from subject in clefts (10a) and pseudo-clefts (11a) and then front the predicates in the English examples (10b) and (11b).⁵

(10) Cleft

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| a. <i>It is a small dog that saw the child</i> | Subj Pred |
| b. <i>is a small dog that saw the child</i> it | Pred Subj |

⁵In examples (10–14), subjects are in bold-face, predicates are in italics. In examples (10–15), unpronounced material is set in angled brackets.

(11) Pseudo-cleft

- | | | |
|--|--|-----------|
| | a. The thing that saw the child <i>is a small dog</i> | Subj Pred |
| | b. <i>Is a small dog</i> the thing that saw the child | Pred Subj |

Step 2: Because we know that these languages do not have overt copulas, we can take these out of our expected structures.

- | | | |
|------|--|--------------|
| (12) | a. <i><is> a small dog that saw the child</i> it | CLEFT |
| | b. <i><is> a small dog</i> the thing that saw the child | PSEUDO-CLEFT |

Step 3: Because we know that these languages do not have expletive subjects, we can take these out of the relevant expected structures (i.e. the cleft).

- | | | |
|------|---|--------------|
| (13) | a. <i><is> a small dog that saw the child</i> <i><it></i> | CLEFT |
| | b. <i><is> a small dog</i> the thing that saw the child | PSEUDO-CLEFT |

Step 4: Because we know that these languages have headless relatives, we can take the head of the relative out of the relevant structure (i.e. the pseudo-cleft).

- | | | |
|------|--|--------------|
| (14) | a. <i><is> a small dog that saw the child</i> <i><it></i> | CLEFT |
| | b. <i><is> a small dog</i> the <thing> that saw the child | PSEUDO-CLEFT |

When we put the remaining pieces of the cleft and the pseudo-cleft side by side, we can now see (a) how minimally different these are on the surface yet (b) how dissimilar they are in the underlying structure. Both begin with a DP followed by some functional material and it is within this functional material that we get the only clues as to whether we are dealing with a cleft (C) or a pseudo-cleft (PC) construction. The only distinguishing elements are, in English, the complementizer *that* for the cleft and the determiner *the* and the relativizer *that* for the pseudo-cleft. Yet structurally these two constructions are very different with the cleft construction having the predicate *e the small dog that saw the child* and no pronounced subject while the pseudo-cleft has the predicate *e the small dog* and the subject *the e that saw the child*.

- | | | |
|------|--|--|
| (15) | C: [<i><is> a small dog</i> that <i>saw the child</i>] [<i><it></i>] | |
| | PC: [<i><is> a small dog</i>] [the <i><thing></i> that <i>saw the child</i>] | |

Now the question is why this is so important. I will argue that this distinction is crucial in the shift from a VOS language to an SVO language. Notice that only in the pseudo-cleft do we get information on where the subject is, and this information confirms that the language is predicate-initial (subject-final). In the cleft

structure, since the (expletive) subject is not pronounced, we have no indication as to whether the structure is SVO or VOS. Note also if, for some reason, the functional category is not realized, we are left with the remaining elements *the small dog saw the child*, in other words a simple SVO sentence. The lack of information of the cleft construction and the fragility of these functional categories will become important later in the paper when I speculate on how languages move from a VOS word order to an SVO word order.

Having derived some word order expectations from this exercise, we return to the issue of the languages/dialects under study. Since the functional words that follow the sentence-initial DP are crucial in determining whether the focus constructions are clefts or pseudo-clefts, they will become the target of the investigation. To not prejudge the questions, I will for now just call these functional words particles. The question will be whether these particles are part of the nominal extended projection or the verbal extended projection. I will end up classifying them into three types deriving from the three functional elements we find in (15) – the nominal particles (such as *the*), the relativizing particles (such as *that*), and the complementizer particles (such as *that*). To make it even clearer how difficult this is, we can think of English and the demonstrative *that*, the relativizer *that*, and the complementizer *that*. Very slight differences in pronunciation (where the relativizer and the complementizer *that* but not the demonstrative *that* may have a reduced vowel) and position can indicate quite different structures.

3 Tagalog and the Malagasy dialects

In this section I will be comparing the different particles that we find in the focus constructions in Tagalog and three Malagasy dialects – Merina (Official Malagasy), Bezanozano, and Betsimisaraka. By seeing how they behave in other parts of the grammar, I hope to determine whether they are part of the nominal extended projection, a relativizer, or a complementizer (a part of the verbal functional projection).

3.1 Tagalog

Tagalog immediately makes it fairly clear which particle we find following the focussed DP. We do not have to look very far to see that the particle *ang* is used as a nominal marker.⁶ Below I have repeated our basic Tagalog sentence from above,

⁶For more details on Tagalog see Aldridge (2013), Kroeger (1993), Richards (1998), and for Polynesian languages, Potsdam and Polinsky (2011).

as well as the focus construction. In the basic clause (16a) we see *ang* appearing as a nominal marker on the Pivot DP. In (16b), *ang* appears twice, once before the now focussed and fronted Pivot DP, and once following this DP acting as the focussing particle.

(16) Tagalog

- a. Bumili ng bigas **ang** babae
AT.buy ACC rice NOM woman
'The woman bought rice.'
- b. **Ang** babae ang bumili ng bigas
NOM woman NOM AT.BUY ACC rice
'It is the woman who bought rice.'

There have been a variety of analyses of *ang* which co-vary with the analysis of the syntactic structure of Tagalog clauses. However, whether it is nominative case marker, an absolutive case marker, a Topic marker, or a determiner, it is a functional head along the extended projection of the noun. As for its other uses in the grammar, we can see below that when it precedes a predicate that is missing its Pivot DP, it creates a DP which refers to the missing argument. In (17) below we see the predicate *bumili ng bigas* 'buy rice' preceded by *ang* and it means something like 'the one who bought rice' or 'the rice-buyer'.

(17) Tagalog

- Pagod **ang** bumili ng bigas
tired NOM AT.buy ACC rice
'The one who bought rice is tired.'

The verb can appear in a different form (the Theme Topic form) changing the Pivot from the Agent to the Theme as in (18a). When this form of the predicate is preceded by *ang*, it now means something like 'the thing that was bought by the woman' or 'the woman's bought thing'.

(18) Tagalog

- a. binili ng babae ang bigas
TT.buy GEN woman NOM rice
'The rice was bought by the woman.'
- b. mahal **ang** binili ng babae
expensive NOM TT.buy GEN woman
'The thing bought by the woman is expensive.'

While one of the translations given above is a headless relative, we know that *ang* is not the relativizer itself. When we do have a relative clause, the *ang* appears before the head of the relative, and the relativizer has a different form, either *ng* or *na*. This form, sometimes called a LINKER, is also used between a nominal head and an adjective (see 19c and 19d).

(19) Tagalog

- a. Pagod *ang* babaeng bumili ng bigas
tired NOM woman-REL AT.buy ACC rice
'The woman who bought rice is tired.'
- b. mahal *ang* bigas *na* binili ng babae
expensive NOM bigas REL TT.buy GEN woman
'The rice bought by the woman is expensive.'
- c. mahirap *ang* babaeng pagod.
poor NOM woman-LNK tired
'The tired woman is poor.'
- d. malasa *ang* bigas *na* mahal
tasty NOM rice LNK expensive
'The expensive rice is tasty.'

A plausible analysis for the focus construction, then, is one where the material following the focus particle is some sort of nominal that I will translate as 'the x that ...' – the translation that I have given to the pseudo-cleft in (9c) above. I repeat our Tagalog focus construction below and give it now a pseudo-cleft translation.

(20) Tagalog

- Ang** babae ang bumili ng bigas
NOM woman NOM AT.BUY ACC rice
'The one who bought rice is the woman.'

The predicate of the clause is an unpronounced copula followed by the DP *ang babae* 'the woman', and the subject of the clause is *ang bumili ng bigas* 'the one who bought rice'.

A construction that will become important in our determination of the nature of the focus particle is the focussed PP construction. Tagalog and all of the three Malagasy dialects that we are comparing allow PPs to be fronted and focussed. We see the Tagalog PP Focus below. Note that when the focussed constituent is a PP, the focus particle *ang* is disallowed.

(21) Tagalog

Sa palengke (*ang) bumili ng bigas ang babae
PREP market (NOM) AT.buy ACC rice NOM woman
'It was at the market that the woman bought rice.'

In fact, the inability to have a nominal functional category in this position makes sense because it is not clear what this nominal phrase would refer to. There is no missing Pivot in the material following the focussed element. What is missing is a PP but this is not nominal. Looking at English clefts and pseudo-clefts, we can see that with clefted PPs, it is sufficient to just have the complementizer *that*. However, with pseudo-clefts, we need to have the relevant WH-word to give the PP meaning. Notice that with a relative clause in English, we cannot drop the WH-word the same way that we can with DP arguments.

- (22) a. It was at the market **that** I bought rice.
b. *Where* I bought rice was at the market.
c. That is rice *which/that* the woman bought.
d. That is the woman *who/that* bought rice.
e. That is the market *where/*that* the woman bought rice.

Likewise in Tagalog, a DP relative clause head that would originate within a PP in the embedded clause needs to be followed by a complementizer and a contentful WH-word (here *kung saan* 'if where'). It cannot simply be followed by the linker as was the case in the relative clause constructions given in (19).

(23) Tagalog

Malayo ang palengke-*ng / kung saan bumili ng bigas
far NOM market-LNK if where AT.buy ACC rice
'The market where the woman bought rice is far.'

I would argue, then, that in Tagalog, when the Pivot is focussed, we have a pseudo-cleft construction signaled by the nominal functional category *ang*. When the PP is focussed, however, we have a cleft construction. What is important for the purpose of this paper, however, is that there is no mistaking a focus construction as having an SVO word order. If a DP Pivot appears sentence-initially, it is clearly followed by a DP signalled by the presence of *ang*.

3.2 Merina (Official Malagasy)

Now we turn to Merina, the most documented dialect of Malagasy. Since I will be comparing it to other dialects of Malagasy, I will identify it as Merina. We see below that the focus particle is *no*. This particle is much more difficult to categorize.

- (24) Merina
Rakoto no manasa ny lambanay
 Rakoto *no* PRS.AT.wash DET clothes.1PL.EXCL
 ‘It is Rakoto who is washing our clothes.’

Unlike *ang* in Tagalog, the particle *no* in Merina is not used as a nominal functional category. We can see below that while the determiner, *ny*, is very similar in form, *no* cannot be used in its place.

- (25) Merina
 mangatsika **ny**/***no** tranoko
 cold DET house.1SG.GEN
 ‘My house is cold.’

Given this, it is not surprising that *no can* be used with focussed PPs.

- (26) Merina
 Amin’ny penina **no** manorotra aho
 with.GEN.DET pen *no* PRS.AT.write 1SG.NOM
 ‘It’s with a pen that I am writing.’

The fact that it can be used with a focussed PP correlates with what we have seen in Tagalog. I argued that *ang* couldn’t appear with a focussed PP precisely because it was a nominal functional category. Since we have seen that Merina *no* is not nominal, we would expect no clash with the PP.

Having seen that *no* is not nominal, we now can see that it is also not a relativizer. The relativizer in Merina is *izay*.

- (27) Merina
 vizaka ny lehilahy (**izay**)*no manasa ny lambanay
 tired DET man REL PRS.AT.wash DET clothes.1PL.EXCL
 ‘The man who is washing our clothes is tired.’

The question arises, however, where else the particle *no* can appear. Interestingly, it is used to link two clauses together with a variety of effects (see Pearson 2009 for details). Below we have two clauses that are temporally connected and it is the particle *no* that creates the link.

- (28) Merina
 Natory Rakoto **no** naneno ny telefona
 PST.AT.sleep Rakoto *no* PST.AT.ring DET telephone
 ‘Rakoto was sleeping when the phone rang.’

While *no* is not used as a complementizer (the most commonly used complementizer is *fa*), examples such as (28) above suggest that it is a particle that is part of the verbal extended projection. This makes it very different from *ang* in Tagalog, suggesting that the focus construction has a distinct underlying analysis. More specifically, I will argue that while DPs in Tagalog are focussed through a pseudo-cleft construction, they are focussed in Merina through a cleft construction.

3.3 Bezanozano

Now we turn to Bezanozano, a more conservative dialect of Malagasy (see Ralaoherivony et al. 2015 and Ranaivoson 2015 for more on Bezanozano). Not surprisingly, perhaps, it patterns more like Tagalog, which represents a more conservative form of Western Malayo-Polynesian sentence structure and morphology. Bezanozano has an interesting twist, however, that indicates a stage somewhere between Tagalog and Merina. We start with a basic sentence in Bezanozano that is not very different from what we have seen for Merina. The main difference is that the determiner, rather than being *ny*, is *i*.

- (29) Bezanozano
 Manasa **i** lambanay Rakoto
 PRS.AT.wash DET clothes.1PL.EXCL Rakoto
 ‘Rakoto is washing our clothes.’

Turning now to the focus construction, we see that instead of the particle *no*, we find *i*.

- (30) Bezanozano
 Rakoto i manasa **i** lambanay
 Rakoto DET PRS.AT.wash DET clothes.1PL.EXCL
 ‘It is Rakoto who is washing our clothes.’

The similarity with Tagalog now is clear. The focussing particle is the same as the nominal functional category, most likely a determiner. What confirms this identity is the fact that the determiner *i* and the particle *i* show the same allomorphic variation, sometimes appearing as *ni* and sometimes as *i*. Given the fact that both Bezanozano and Tagalog use nominal functional categories in the focus constructions, we would expect distribution of these particles to work the same way in both languages. This is where the twist comes. In Tagalog, we saw that focussed PPs could not be followed by the nominal *ang*. We can see below, however, that focussed PPs in Bezanozano can optionally be followed by the nominal *i*.

(31) Bezanozano

Amin'i penin-janako (i) manorotra aho
 with.GEN.DET pen-child.1SG.GEN DET PRS.AT.write 1SG.NOM
 'It's with my child's pen that I am writing.'

Just as we were not surprised at the fact that in Tagalog *ang* could not follow PPs, we should be surprised that *i* can follow PPs in Bezanozano. One small consolation is that the *i* which follows the PP is not identical with the *i* that follows DPs in that the former is optional while the latter is not. Preliminary work on this dialect has not provided any more information on the distribution of this optional *i*, but given its distribution, I tentatively propose that obligatory *i* is a nominal functional head and optional *i* is a verbal functional head (though I have not yet found it in any other construction).

Important for the line of argumentation in this paper is that Bezanozano lies somewhere between Tagalog and Merina. Focussed DP constructions are pseudo-cleft constructions where the particle is actually a determiner signalling that the construction is still subject-final. But with the appearance of a homophonous particle that is not nominal in nature following the PP, there is a possibility of reanalyzing this particle as necessarily not being nominal (since it can follow a PP) allowing for a reanalysis of the DP-initial structures as clefts rather than pseudo-clefts. This would lead to a status such as that of Merina.

3.4 Betsimisaraka

While Bezanozano is more conservative than Merina, I will argue that Betsimisaraka is more innovative. My work on this dialect is quite preliminary, but I have elicited the following constructions. Starting again with the basic sentence, we can see that it is quite similar to the other two dialects.

- (32) Betsimisaraka
manasa lamba Rakoto
PRS.AT.wash clothes Rakoto
'Rakoto is washing clothes.'

Some differences start appearing, however, in the focus construction, precisely in the choice of the material that follows the focussed constituent. Below we first have a Merina example for comparison. This Merina construction shows that the same focus construction is used to form WH-questions. This example is followed by two examples from Betsimisaraka, one where a DP WH-word is in the focus position and one where a PP WH-word is in the focus position.

- (33) a. Merina
Iza **no** manasa lamba
who *no* PRS.AT.wash clothes
'Who is washing clothes?'
- b. Betsimisaraka
Zovy (**my/sy**) manasa lamba
who *my/sy* PRS.AT.wash clothes
'Who is washing clothes?'
- c. Betsimisaraka
Akeza (**my/sy**) manasa lamba Rakoto
where *my/sy* PRS.AT.wash clothes Rakoto
'Where is Rakoto washing clothes?'

This preliminary work on Betsimisaraka shows that either nothing or one of two different elements can be found in the position following the sentence-initial constituent. The two elements that may appear are very dissimilar from the particles we find in Merina and Bezanozano. Further, they don't have a nominal function along the lines of the particle in Bezanozano, nor a clausal function along the lines of the particle in Merina. It turns out that they are adverbs that carry the parts of the meaning of a (pseudo)-cleft construction – where pseudo-clefts have a meaning of focus and of exhaustivity. The adverb *sy* in Betsimisaraka (*mihitsy* in Merina) means something like 'indeed' and the adverb *my* in Betsimisaraka (*ihany* in Merina) means 'only'. Technically, then, Betsimisaraka has no focus particle but when pressed to place something in this position, the choice is to put adverbs that lend the same flavour as a cleft. The position of these adverbs is not surprising as adverbs are often found together with the particle *no* in Merina.

(34) Betsimisaraka

- a. *tsy ny olona mihitsy* no *tokony hiaro*
 NEG DET people indeed *no* should FUT-AT.protect
an'Andriamanitra
 ACC-God

'It isn't in fact the people who should protect God.'

(from <https://www.facebook.com/notes/ravonihanitra-lydia/sainam-pirenena-malagasy/10152939742301218/>)

- b. 15%*n'ny Malagasy ihany* no *manana jiro*
 15%-GEN Malagasy only *no* PRS.AT.have electricity

'It is only 15% of Malagasy that have electricity.'

(from <http://www.sobikamada.com/index.php/vaovao/item/9918-jirama-15-n%E2%80%99ny-malagasy-ihany-no-manana-jiro.html>)

Now we have a dialect that has no particle following the focussed phrase, basically resulting in SVO. Work needs to be done to determine in what situations this structure can be used, and with what restrictions. In other words, it remains to be determined what information a language learner will be exposed to that would indicate that this is not the basic word order of Betsimisaraka. But it is clear that the indications that this is **not** a basic word order become less and less accessible as we move from Tagalog to Bezanozano to Merina to Betsimisaraka and it all turns on the existence and function of the focussing particle.

4 Summary

Moving then from Tagalog, to Bezanozano, to Merina, to Betsimisaraka, we see a slow chipping away at the information given to the language learner by the focus particle. I am assuming that in all of these languages/dialects, the focussed XP is within a predicate headed by an unpronounced copula. I gave the tests for this for Merina in (5) and (6). In these examples, negation and a raising verb respectively precede the focussed element, thereby indicating the presence of a verbal element.

Turning now to the particle that follows the focussed XP, we have seen that in Tagalog, the particle *ang* clearly marks the left edge of a nominal indicating that the material following the focussed element is a DP and the subject of the clause.

(35) Tagalog: Focussed DP = Pseudo-cleft (there is a nominal marker *ang*)

- a. **Ang babae** ang *bumili ng bigas*
 NOM woman NOM AT.BUY ACC rice
 ‘[DP The <one who> *bought rice*] [VP <is> **the woman**]’
- b. [VP <COP> **DP**] [DP ang VO]
 PREDICATE SUBJECT

The Tagalog focussed PP, in contrast, is found in a cleft construction. There is no *ang* to indicate a nominal phrase, therefore the material following the focussed constituent will not be interpreted as the subject of the clause. The subject of the clause, then, is an unpronounced expletive.

(36) Tagalog: Focussed PP = Cleft (there is no *ang*)

- a. **Sa palengke** *bumili ng bigas ang babae*
 PREP market AT.buy ACC rice NOM woman
 ‘[VP <was> **at the market** <that> the woman bought rice.] [DP <It>]’
- b. [VP <COP> PP [CP V O S]] <Expletive>
 PREDICATE SUBJECT

Bezanozano is similar to Tagalog in that it uses a clear nominal functional category for the DP focussed construction. This nominal functional category gives the language learner a clear indication that the language is VOS since the predicate, which contains the unpronounced copula and the focussed DP, is followed by the nominal phrase indicated by nominal functional category *i*.

(37) Bezanozano: Focussed DP = Pseudo-cleft (there is a nominal marker *i*)

- a. **Rakoto** i *manasa i lambanay*
 Rakoto DET PRS.AT.wash DET clothes.1PL.EXCL
 ‘[DP The <one who> *is washing our clothes*] [VP <is> **Rakoto**]’
- b. [VP <COP> **DP**] [DP i VO]
 PREDICATE SUBJECT

The way the Bezanozano differs from Tagalog, however, is that there is a particle that is used optionally within the PP focussed construction. For now I’m going to assume that the fact that it is optional while the one that is used in the DP focussed construction indicates a structural difference of some type that allows this construction to be a cleft rather than a pseudo-cleft.

(38) Bezanozano: Focussed PP = Cleft (there is an optional *i*)

- a. Amin'i penin-janako [i] manorotra aho
 with.GEN.DET pen-child.1SG.GEN *i* PRS.AT.write 1SG.NOM
 '[VP <was> with my child's pen (that) I am writing.] [DP <It>]'
- b. [VP <COP> PP [CP [i] V S]] <Expletive>
 PREDICATE SUBJECT

What is interesting is that this is the same particle that is used for the DP focussed construction. When it is not used, then, it falls into the Tagalog pattern where there is a particle in the DP focussed construction and no particle in the PP focussed construction. When it is used, it falls into the Merina pattern which uses the same particle for both the DP and the PP focussed construction. The thought is that these mixed messages allowed for reanalysis that eventually leads to the Merina pattern.

Merina uses the same particle for both the DP and the PP focussed constructions and this particle is used elsewhere to link clauses. This suggests that the particle is part of the verbal extended projection, and both types of the focus constructions are clefts. Since the expletive subject of a cleft is not pronounced, with these constructions, there are fewer signals as to the VOS order. In the DP focussed construction, since the surface order is S *no* VO, and since the *no* is not a nominal marker, it could be susceptible for reanalysis.

(39) Merina: Focussed DP = Cleft (there is a clausal marker *no*)

- a. Rakoto [no] manasa ny lambanay
 Rakoto *no* PRS.AT.wash DET clothes.1PL.EXCL
 'It is Rakoto who is washing our clothes.'
 '[VP <was> Rakoto that is washing our clothes.] [DP <It>]'
- b. [VP <COP> DP [CP [no] V S]] <Expletive>
 PREDICATE SUBJECT

(40) Merina

- a. Amin'ny penina [no] manorotra aho
 with.GEN.DET pen *no* PRS.AT.write 1SG.NOM
 '[VP <was> with my child's pen that I am writing.] [DP <It>]'
- b. [VP <COP> PP [CP [no] V S]] <Expletive>
 PREDICATE SUBJECT

In the last stage, we see that the identifying focus particle is dropped completely. Adverbs can appear in this position, but these adverbs can also appear in the Merina and Bezanozano construction. So now without any particle, a simple SVO order surfaces.

- (41) Betsimisaraka
Rakoto manasa lamba.
Rakoto PRS.AT.wash clothes
'It is Rakoto who is washing clothes.'

The task remains, however, to determine the status of this order in the language. We know that it can be given the cleft interpretation. We also know that it co-exists with the VOS word order. Whether or not the transition to SVO can be argued to be complete, it is at least imaginable how it can happen. It is also clear that the change turns on the reanalysis of small functional words that play central structural roles.

5 Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to show first that small surface differences in closely related languages can point to large underlying differences. It also shows how functional words are signposts to structure and that the multiple roles that they play both within the extended projection of one category and across different categorial projections can increase the flexibility of structures as well as increase the possibilities of reanalysis.

Abbreviations

1	first person	NEG	negation
ACC	accusative	NOM	nominative
AT	actor topic	PL	plural
COP	copula	PREP	preposition
DET	determiner	PRS	present
EXCL	exclusive	PST	past
FUT	future	REL	relative
GEN	genitive	SG	singular
LNK	linker	TT	theme topic

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