Bàtɔ̀nū Dative Constructions: A Problem for the Case Theory

By

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Abstract: **Bàtɔ̀nū, a Gur (Voltaic) language, exhibits SOV word order in its basic clause structure. It is a functional noun class language. The language has ditransitive verbs and dative constructions are permissible in its syntax. However, unlike English where 'Dative Shift', as in 'John gave Mary the book' (i.e. double-object construction), is derivable from prepositional dative construction - 'John gave the book to Mary'; Bàtɔ̀nū has no dative prepositions and dative shift is not allowed in its syntax. The problem of abstract Case-marking in double object constructions is cross-linguistic. Despite various attempts by linguists to solve the problem in the past, there remain gaps as well as unresolved issues. The problem appears more pronounced in Bàtɔ̀nū Dative Constructions. The dative NP's in the language lack overt Case assigners and therefore fail to receive abstract Case. As a further consequence, all such constructions in the language, on the face of it, violate the Case Filter and, by implication, the Theta Criterion. In an attempt to solve the problem within the framework of Principles and Parameters (P&P) theory, this paper proposes a unified approach that merges Larson's (1988) notions of V^1-Reanalysis and Complex Predicate Raising with Baker's (1985, 1988) notions of Abstract Noun Incorporation (ANI) and Government Transparency Corollary (GTC). In this approach, ditransitive verbs are shown to reanalyze with their direct-object NP's to form complex predicates. Such complex predicates inherit the Case-assigning properties of their main verbs (via GTC) and thereby govern and assign the required structural accusative Case to the hitherto ungoverned and Caseless dative NP's. This proposal appears to completely obviate the problem of adjacency between the main verbs and their dative NP's in Bàtɔ̀nū Dative Constructions.**

1.0 Introduction

Case Theory recognizes two types of Case (i.e., inherent case and abstract/structural Case). While inherent case is determined or assigned at D-Structure level and involves a thematic relation between the assigner and the assignee, structural Case is assigned at S-Structure level and does not necessarily involve any thematic relation between the assigner and the assignee.

According to Chomsky (1981), abstract Case is assigned under government. Case-assigners are usually the heads of syntactic categories. In other words, it is assumed within the framework of Government and Binding (GB) theory that abstract Case is assigned to NP's by Case assigners like verbs, prepositions, postpositions, and tensed INFL. While verbs and prepositions/postpositions assign accusative Case to the object- NP's, tensed INFL assigns nominative Case to the subject- NP's.

Contrary to what obtains in GB analysis, it is assumed under the Minimalist Program (MP) that lexical items carry their features with them rather than being assigned their features. For instance, it is assumed that nouns carry Case with them, and that their Case is "*checked*" when they are in SPEC position of AGRs or AGRo, which subsequently disappears. (Chomsky 1995).

1.1   The Grammatical Need for Case

The need for Case is conditioned by the requirement that only argument NP's with structural Case are licensed to appear in argument position (A-position). That is, the appearance of a particular argument NP in a particular syntactic position depends on whether or not the presence of that NP is licensed by Case.

Case Theory, as one of the modules of grammar within the GB theory, is concerned with the distribution of NP's within grammatical sentences. Thus, whenever an argument NP fails to receive abstract Case, it is considered to have violated the Case Filter. And by the requirement of the Case Theory, such an NP must be forced to move to a syntactic position where it can be properly Case-marked, otherwise it must be filtered out. (Chomsky 1981:49, Haegman 1991:180 and Ouhalla 1994). Therefore, it could be said that essentially, Case-marking is a device for ensuring that every overt NP occupies a syntactic position within a grammatical sentence, where it ensures well-formedness. Thus, Case Filter prevents NP's from appearing in arbitrary syntactic positions in which they cannot be suitably interpreted.

Following Haegeman (1991:173), 'Visibility Hypothesis' also requires that an NP must have Case before it can become visible for theta role assignment. This implies that any overt NP that is caseless will violate both the *Case Filter* and *Theta Criterion*.

According to Chomsky (1981:49), Case Filter can be formally defined as in (1) and can be schematically represented as in (2) respectively:

(1) *NP if NP has phonetic content and has no Case

(2)   * $\begin{pmatrix} \textbf{NP} \\ \textbf{+Lexical} \\ \textbf{-Case} \end{pmatrix}$

As presented in (5) below, empirical evidence from Bàtɔ̀nū Dative Constructions shows a violation of the Case Filter. For instance, in a given Bàtɔ̀nū Dative Construction, a ditransitive verb assigns accusative Case to the Direct-Object NP that is adjacent to it, while the Indirect-Object NP lacks any overt Case-assigner and therefore receives no Case.

The structure therefore violates the Case Filter. It is this problem that the present paper is out to address.

1.2   Bàtɔ̀nū and Its Speakers

Bàtɔ̀nū is popularly known among the non-native speakers as "Bàrìbá" or "Bàrùbá". It is genetically classified as a language of the Gur (Voltaic) subgroup of the Niger-Congo family (Welmers (1952:82), Comrie (1987:965) and Sanusi (2002). Bàtɔ̀nū is a noun class language with seven prominent noun classes. Unlike Kiswahili and other Bantu languages, the language uses suffix noun class markers rather than prefix markers. The noun class markers (CM) in the language include: **-wí, -té, -mɛ́, -ní, -yé, -gé** and **–sí** (see Sanusi (2002, 2003))[1].

The language is spoken as a first language or mother-tongue in two adjacent countries in West Africa – Nigeria and the Republic of Benin. The major areas in which Bàtɔ̀nū is spoken in Nigeria include Kosubosu, Okuta, Gwanara, Yashikira, Ilesha, Chikanda, etc., all in the Baruten Local Government Area of Kwara State. The Bàtɔ̀nū-speaking areas in the Republic of Benin include Parakou, Nikki, Kandi, Natitingou, etc. The Nikki dialect of Bàtɔ̀nū, which is considered to be the standard form of the language, is used for our analysis in this paper.

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[1] Nouns in each of the seven prominent noun classes and their class-markers can be exemplified as follows:

Class 1: [bìì – wí]   'The child'
          child CM

Class 2: [tire – té]   'The book'
          book CM

Class 3: [ním - mɛ]   'The water'
          water CM

Class 4: [bōō - gé]   'The goat'
          goat   CM

Class 5: [dɛkā - yé]   'The stick'
          stick CM

Class 6: [gbèré – ní]   'The maize'
          maize CM

Class 7: [yàkà – sí]   'The grass'
          Grass CM

2.0 Ditransitive Verbs and Dative Constructions

In a language like English 'ditransitive verbs' that take double objects will also tolerate a paraphrase involving a direct object plus a prepositional phrase. Examples of such constructions are presented in Moravcsik (2006:229) and repeated here as (3) below:

(3) (a) Sue gave a silver tray **to her church**.

  (b) Sue gave **her church** a silver tray.

  (a) Bill told the news **to his friend.**

  (b) Bill told **his friend** the news.

  (a) Felix showed his thesis **to his adviser**.

  (b) Felix showed **his adviser** his thesis.

  (a) Paula baked a pudding **for her dolls.**

  (b) Paula baked **her dolls** a pudding

However, English does not allow the form in (4).

(4) *** John gave a book Mary.**

The ungrammaticality of the form in (4) above resulted from the fact that the indirect-object NP (Mary) lacks any overt Case-assigner, and therefore it is neither governed nor received abstract Case in that context. Within the framework of GB Theory, such Determiner Phrase (DP) is considered to have violated the Case Filter, as well as the Theta Criterion.

2.1 Dative Construction in Bàtɔ̀nū

For the purpose of our analysis of Bàtɔ̀nū Dative Construction in this paper, we present samples of such constructions in (5) below:

(5)(a) Wòrú$_i$ ū$_i$ Bàké tire - rū wɛ̄n.
     Wòrú Agr-S   Bàké book-Det. give
     Subj.   IO   DO   V
     'Wòrú gave Bàké a book'.

  (b) Bàké$_i$ ū$_i$ mán tire -té sɔ̃́ɔ́sì
      Bake Agr-S me   book CM show
      Subj.   IO   DO   V
      'Bàké showed me the book'.

  (c) Ná Sàbī yōrùtū-gé dwū - ā
      1Sg. Sàbī pen CM buy Past

Subj. IO   DO   V

'I bought Sàbī a pen'.

  (d) Bá nùń nāā- yé dɔr -ā
      3Pl. him cow CM   buy Past
      Subj. IO DO   V
      'They sold him the cow'.

  (e) Bíɔ́$_i$ ū$_i$ nɛ́m bàà -wí wasika-yé yōrùwà
       Biɔ Agr-S Poss.father CM letter CM write
      Subj.   IO   DO   V
       'Biɔ wrote my father the letter'.

  (f) Mohammed$_i$ ū$_i$ mán góbí -yé mɔrísìá
      Moh.   Agr-S me   money CM send
      Subj.   IO   DO   V
      'Mohammed sent me some money'.

  (g) Ná nɛ́m mérō -wí ɲɛ̄nū -gé bã̄nā
      1Sg Poss. mother CM house CM build
      Subj.   IO   DO   V
      'I built my mother a house'.

  (h) Àlí$_i$ ū$_i$ Bàké dèmúnù-yé dwū -ā
      Ali Agr-S Bàké orange CM   buy Past
      Subj. IO   DO   V
      'Ali bought Bàké some oranges.'

As could be observed in (5) above, in a given Bàtɔ̀nū dative construction, the VP subcategorizes for two complement DP's in the following canonical order:

$$[DP_2 \ DP_1 \ V_{VP}]$$

In that order, only the direct object DP (i.e. DP_1), which immediately precedes the main verb receives structural Case from the verb, while the indirect object DP (i.e. DP_2) is neither governed nor receive any structural Case in that syntactic position. In other words, indirect object DP's in such constructions lack overt postpositions that are equivalent to the English dative prepositions like **'to'** and **'for'**.

2.2 Earlier Assumptions about Dative Case

As a basis for our proposal in this paper, we shall adopt Kayne's (1984) assumption, as discussed in Haegeman (1991:176), that English has lost **inherent dative** Case and that the indirect object DP **John** as

in *'I gave John a book'*, is assigned a structural accusative Case through the intermediary of the main verb (Hudson, 1992, Allen 1999 and references cited therein). For instance, Allen (1999:292) reports that Dative Case marking was lexically assigned in Old English (OE), while overt Case marking was lacking in Middle English (ME).

Given the assumption that DP's receive abstract Case at the S-Structure, we shall explain and illustrate in 3.0. below the way and manner the Caseless dative argument DP's in Bàtɔ̀nū dative constructions receive abstract accusative Case to avoid a violation of the Case Filter in such constructions.

3.0 Proposal

In this paper, effort is made to propose a new theoretical approach towards solving the problem of abstract Case-assignment in Bàtɔ̀nū Dative Constructions. In this attempt, we invoke the notion – '*Abstract Noun Incorporation*' (**ANI**), by assuming that each of the DO DP's in Bàtɔ̀nū dative constructions reanalyzes with its ditransitive verb to form a **complex predicate**. In such constructions, the derived complex predicates are in turn assumed to govern and assign structural accusative Case to the hitherto ungoverned and Caseless dative argument DP's in the language.

Given the notion ANI that says '**incorporation'** is derived from the theory of Government (a sub-theory of GB theory) and that the complements of the moved word are governed by the **complex word** that is formed by incorporation (**via Government Transparency Corollary (GTC))**[2]. (see Baker 1988:64-65)

Our new proposal is described as a **unified approach** because it is conjointly derived from Larson's (1988) notion of **V[1]-Reanalysis** and Baker's (1985, 1988) notions of **ANI** and **GTC**.
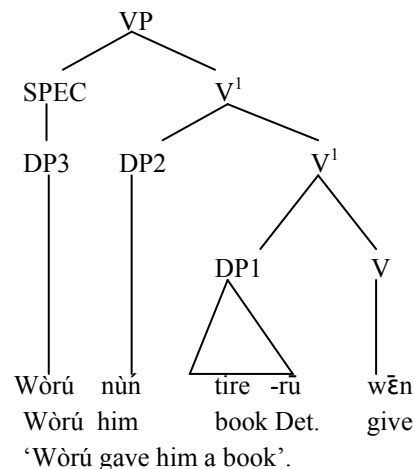
The new proposal is therefore considered as an amalgam of two different approaches. However, it should be noted that even though our new proposal is

inspired by the two approaches (i.e., Baker (1985, 1988) and Larson (1988), it does not attempt to be entirely dependent on either of them.

In this new attempt at solving the problem of Case assignment in dative constructions, we assume that there is virtual or abstract incorporation of direct object DP's into their main verbs, via a technical process called 'syntactic reanalysis' or 'restructuring'[3], in such constructions in Bàtɔ̀nū. The constituent that is derived from such reanalysis is considered to be a complex predicate that is capable of governing and assigning accusative Case via **GTC** to the hitherto ungoverned and Caseless indirect object dative DP's in double object constructions. In other words, the concepts of C-command, Government, and Adjacency are subscribed to in this proposal.
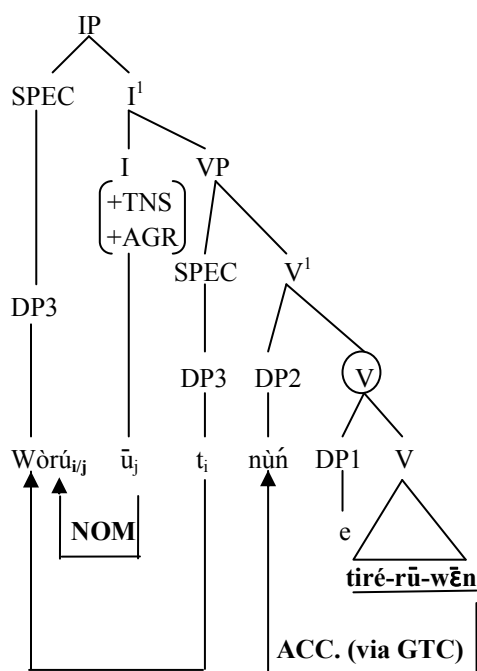
Using the notion '**VP-Internal Subject Hypothesis'**, we can depict both the D-Structure and the S-Structure of Bàtɔ̀nū dative constructions in (5), as in (6a) and (6b) respectively:

(6)a. **D-Structure**

```
                    VP
                   /  \
               SPEC    V¹
                |     /  \
               DP3  DP2    V¹
                |    |    /  \
                |    |  DP1    V
                |    |   /\     |
              Wòrú nùn tire -ru  wɛ̄n
              Wòrú him  book Det. give
```
'Wòrú gave him a book'.

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[2] Baker (1988:64) defines **GTC** as follows: "A lexical category which has an item incorporated into it governs in its original structural positions". According to Mallén (1990:252, fn.13), the notion of GTC could be extended to functional categories like Noun Incorporation as well. See also Ouhalla (1994:295).

[3] In using GB or Principles and Parameters theory, linguists like Stowel (1981), Baker (1988), Larson (1988), Kayne (1984), Spencer (1995a, 1995b, Millar (2007) among others), also subscribe to the notion of **Reanalysis** as a way of rescuing any overt Caseless argument DP's which otherwise would have been filtered out in any construction in which such DP's are found.
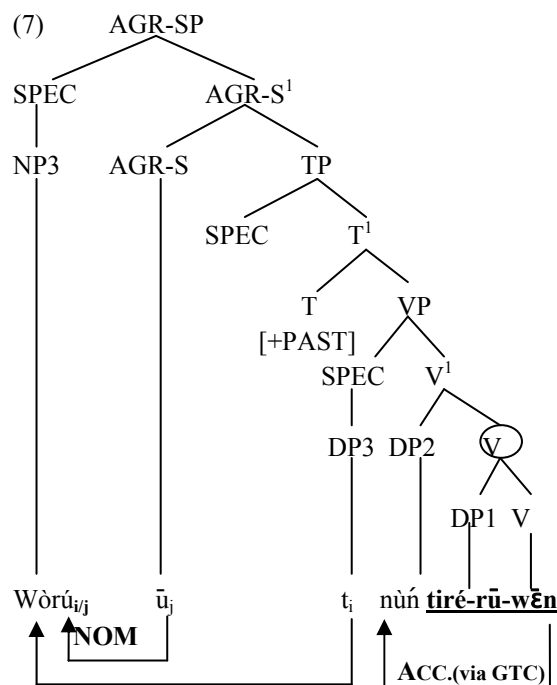
(6)b.   S-Structure

```
                    IP
                 /     \
             SPEC       I¹
              |        /   \
              |       I     VP
              |    ⎛+TNS⎞  /  \
              |    ⎝+AGR⎠ SPEC  V¹
             DP3            |   /  \
              |            DP3 DP2   V
              |             |   |   / \
         Wòrúᵢ/ⱼ   ūⱼ   tᵢ  nùń DP1  V
              ↑    ↑         |    |   /\
              NOM            |    e  tiré-rū-wɛ̄n
                                    ACC. (via GTC)
```

As indicated in (6b) above, the circled **V** node is the reanalyzed **V¹** node of (6a). It is through this process of syntactic reanalysis (ANI) that we are able to derive the complex predicate- **tiré-rū-wɛn** (i.e. 'give-a-book') as illustrated in (6b) above.

As shown in (6b), both the main Verb- **wɛ̄n** 'give' and the abstractly incorporated direct object DP1- **tiré-rū** ('a book') compositionally governed and assigned the required abstract accusative Case to the DP2- **nùń** 'him' (via **GTC**) in that context. This makes it possible for the hitherto ungoverned and Caseless indirect object DP2 (the dative argument NP) to escape apparent violation of both the Case Filter and the Theta Criterion.

Notice that Bàtɔ̀nū exhibits recapitulatory pronouns that function as subject concord (or agreement markers). Such agreement markers, as exemplified in (5) above, are always co-referential with their subject-DP's within grammatical sentences in the language. Therefore, in order to depict the exact clause structure of Bàtɔ̀nū dative constructions, it is empirically imperative to embed the Larsonian VP shell configuration in (6b) above into a Subject Agreement phrase structure. (namely Agr-SP), as described in Pollock's (1989) **Split-INFL**

Hypothesis and in other relevant subsequent works. This Subject -Agreement Phrase Structure, as shown in (7) below, adequately takes care of the subject-agreement markers (Agr-S) which are empirically attested within Bàtɔ̀nū clause structure.

```
(7)            AGR-SP
            /          \
         SPEC          AGR-S¹
          |           /      \
         NP3       AGR-S      TP
          |                  /  \
          |               SPEC   T¹
          |                     /  \
          |                    T    VP
          |                [+PAST] /  \
          |                     SPEC  V¹
          |                      |   /  \
          |                    DP3 DP2   V
          |                     |   |   / \
      Wòrúᵢ/ⱼ   ūⱼ      tᵢ   nùń tiré-rū-wɛ̄n
          ↑    ↑                    DP1 V
          NOM                      ACC.(via GTC)
```

4.   Conclusion

As shown in (6) and (7) above, the circled **V-node** indicates a syntactic reanalysis of the **V¹ node** that dominates both the ditransitive verb- **wɛ̄n** 'give' and its direct- object DP - **tire-rū** 'a book'.

That process of 'reanalysis' produced the complex predicate: **tire-rū-wɛ̄n** 'give-a-book' which in turn governs and assigns the required abstract accusative Case to the Caseless dative argument DP **nùń** 'him' in (6) and (7) above. This eventually solves the problem of the apparent violation of both the Case Filter and the Theta Criterion in Bàtɔ̀nū Dative Constructions.

While emphasizing the importance of syntactic reanalysis or restructuring, in the analysis of abstract Case assignment in double object constructions, Larson (1988:386) says that "**V¹-Reanalysis** plays an important part in the analysis of Case assignment with double objects".

As could be observed from the Bàtɔ̀nū dative constructions in (5) above, empirical evidence has shown that there is lack of **adjacency** between ditransitive verbs and their indirect object DP's. However, it is our view that the new proposal as in (6) and (7) completely eliminates the problem of 'lack of adjacency' between the main verbs and their Caseless dative argument DP's in such constructions.

The new proposal invokes the power of **GTC** to ensure that the lexical properties of the main verb which are inherited by the derived complex predicate are made available through a transparent abstractly incorporated direct object DP. It is the transparency of that DP that ensures proper government across the incorporated direct object DP that would have otherwise constituted a **Blocking Category** (BC) in that context.

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