

Gapping in Yorùbá and why it licenses non-canonical word order

Overview: In this talk, we study the properties of Gapping in Yorùbá and defend the following claims: ❶ In contrast to claims in the literature, we show that Yorùbá does indeed have Gapping, just not in configurations using the regular coordinator *sì* ('and') but in those involving *sùgbón* ('but') or *tabi* ('or'). ❷ We show that the reason for this surprising asymmetry is that *sì* has the selectional requirement that it only conjoins CPs but Gapping configurations must involve vP-coordination (Johnson 2009). Evidence for this comes from the scope of functional projections such as tense or negation as well as from the incompatibility of Gapping structures with material in the left periphery of the Yorùbá clause. ❸ Unlike languages like English, Yorùbá allows for the remnants of Gapping to appear in non-canonical word order that is not attested in regular clauses. We show that this assumption arises as a direct consequence of (i) the vP-size of the conjuncts, (ii) the inability of the subject to move to SpecTP and (iii) the existence of a low focus position in the Yorùbá middle field as argued for by Amaechi (2024).

Argumentation: Based on examples like (1), Lawal (1985) put forward the claim that Yorùbá does not exhibit Gapping. However, as we show, this depends on the coordinator *sì* in (1) as others such as *sùgbón* (2) allow for the verb in the 2nd conjunct to be dropped.

- (1) Tolú jẹ ịsụ Bólá *sì* *(jẹ) èwà (2) Tolú jẹ ịsụ *sùgbón* Bólá (jẹ) èwà.
 Tolu eat yam Bola and eat beans Tolu eat yam but Bola eat bean
 'Tolu ate yam and Bola ate beans.' 'Tolu ate yam but Bola _ beans.'

We show that the construction in (2) exhibits all the hallmark properties of Gapping in Johnson (2014) e.g. (i) in that it is restricted to coordination and (ii) that deletion must apply in the 2nd conjunct and (iii) it only targets the highest verb in that conjunct (3):

- (3) *Tolú ra àwọn àga náà, sùgbón mo rò wípé Bólá ____ àwọn tábilì.
 Tolú buy PL chair DET but 1SG think COMP Bólá PL table
 *Tolú bought the chairs but I think that Bólá ____ the tables.

We go on to show that Gapping only applies in coordination of vP-sized conjuncts as evidenced by the fact that the 2nd conjunct cannot contain its own tense specification or negation. Rather, we find that both negation (4) and tense (5) from the 1st conjunct take scope over the 2nd. Further evidence comes from the fact the subject of the 1st conjunct can bind into the 2nd conjunct and that material from the left periphery of the clause like the focus marker *nì* cannot appear in the 2nd conjunct when Gapping applies (6):

- (4) Tolú ò jẹ ịsụ sùgbón Bólá ____ èwà. (5) Tolú yóò jẹ ịsụ sùgbón Bólá ____ èwà.
 Tolú NEG eat yam but Bólá beans Tolú FUT eat yam BUT Bola beans
 'T. didn't eat yam but B. didn't eat beans.' 'Tolú will eat yam or B. will eat beans.'
- (6) *Aṣọ nì mo rà sùgbón bàtà nì Olá rà.
 clothes FOC I buy but shoes FOC Ola buy
 'I bought CLOTHES but Ola bought SHOES.'

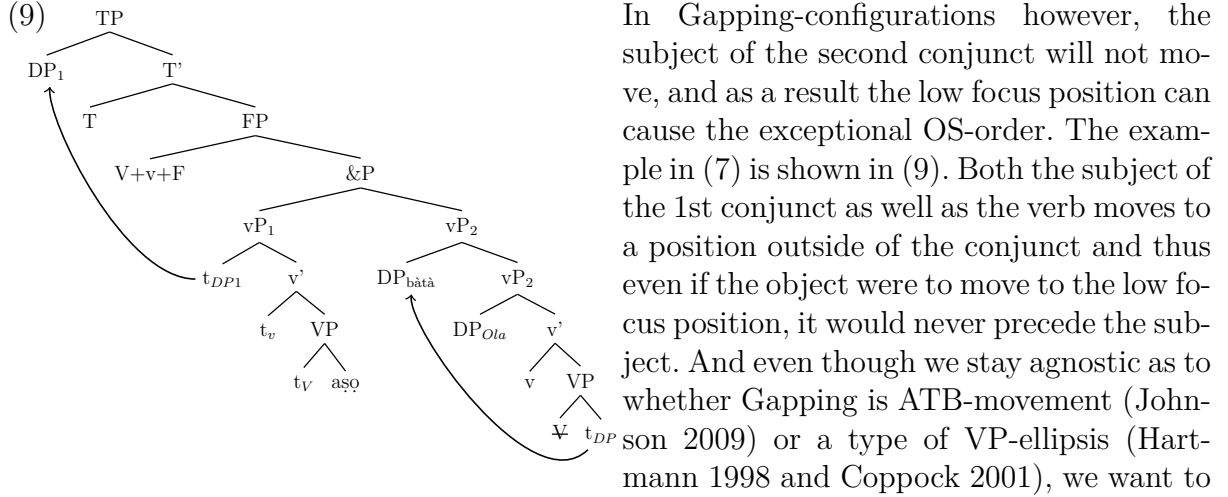
That the conjuncts must be smaller than TPs explains why regular *sì*-coordination does not combine with Gapping. Unlike *sùgbón*, *sì* only conjoins full CPs. We follow Aremu & Weisser (2024) in assuming that this is due to the fact that *sì* does not appear between the clauses but needs to appear after the first prosodic phrase of the intonation phrase that is the 2nd conjunct (cf. its placement in (1)), and only CPs map to intonation phrases. We thus conclude that Yorùbá allows for Gapping and the fact that Gapping in (1) is ungrammatical is due to a lexical specification of the neutral coordinator *sì*.

Modelling: Gapping in Yorùbá involves vP-coordination. This creates a problem as all subjects in Yorùbá must move to SpecTP. In Yorùbá, we see evidence for one of the

crucial assumptions in Siegel (1987) and Johnson (2009), namely that the subject of the 1st conjunct moves out of the coordination to SpecTP (in violation of the Coordinate Structure Constraint) whereas the subject of the 2nd conjunct stays in SpecvP. The evidence comes from the fact that unlike English, Yorùbá allows for the remnants of Gapping to appear in OS-order (7), an order not allowed without Gapping (8).

- (7) Mo rà aṣọ sùgbón bàtà Olá. (8) *Mo rà aṣọ sùgbón bàtà Olá rà.
 I buy clothes but shoes Ola I buy clothes but shoes Ola buy
 ‘I bought clothes but Ola bought SHOES.’ ‘I bought clothes but Ola bought SHOES.’

This, at first sight, creates a puzzle as it is a direct counterexample to the claim made in Johnson (2009:314) that “Gapping never produces word orders that aren’t otherwise attested”. But we show that the model we entertain has this property fall out of the system without construction-specific assumptions. We assume that V head-moves to a functional projection (FP) above the vP (e.g. Asp in Bode 2000). Further, we follow Ameachi (2024) in that Yorùbá has a low focus position at the edge of vP. In regular clauses, this will not lead to the object preceding the subject as it has moved to SpecTP.



point out that the result is a good one for both approaches because, as pointed out in Johnson (2009), both approaches struggle to derive that remnants in English must appear in their “base” order. What our study shows is that this requirement is not a general property of Gapping but might stem from independent factors such as *Shape Conservation* constraints (Müller 2000, Williams 2003, Takahashi 2004).

Outlook: We show that Gapping can be used as a diagnostic to inform us about other constructions like serial verb construction (SVC) (10), where we note that all verbs have to gap at the same time. Given that Gapping in Yorùbá obeys the No-Embedding constraint (cf. 3), (10) suggests that this kind of SVCs do not involve an embedding structure. There are other types of SVCs in Yorùbá with different gapping patterns and we go through them and discuss the implications for the analyses of Gapping and the syntax of SVCs.

- (10) Bólá mú ịṣu jẹ sùgbón Dàpọ mú ẹwà jẹ.
 Bólá take yam eat but Dàpọ beans
 ‘Bólá ate yam but Dàpọ beans.’

Bigger Picture: The present study is, to our knowledge, the first in-depth study of Gapping in the languages of West Africa and, more generally, one of the first outside of Europe. As such, it broadens our picture of the phenomenon as a whole by providing evidence for specific theoretical implementations and, in addition it further informs us about the intricacies of the clause structure of Yorùbá and related languages. And, finally, it can inform many longstanding debates about other phenomena, such as SVCs.

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