

## Statement of Research Interests

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I am primarily a syntactician with a sub-specialty in semantics.

Much of my research is situated within the context of Chomsky's Minimalist Program. Some of my work helps support certain predictions made by the Minimalist Program but most of my other work is relatively theory neutral. In such cases, the choice of theory is less crucial than determining what the right characterization of the facts are. My ultimate goal is uncovering the algorithms of human language, as it can reveal what makes humans, well, human.

My research, more often than not, has a cross-linguistic focus, as I use a lot of data from Tamil (Dravidian), English, and the Bantu languages, such as Kirundi and Lubukusu.

Below, I have described three of my current research threads. As you can see, my research topics involve important several topics in syntactic and linguistic theory. This ranges from anaphoric dependencies, argument structure, case theory, and structure building.

### *Tough* predicates and *tough* movement

In this research thread, I investigate adjectival predicates and their clausal arguments. My entry into this area of research deals with *tough* predicates and what is known as *tough* movement. Such constructions have remained a puzzle for generative linguists because they have apparently contradictory properties.

- 1a) It is **difficult** to please John.
- 1b) John is **difficult** to please.

*Difficult* is an example of a *tough* predicate and such predicates are interesting because they allow either a semantically vacuous *it* as a subject as in (1a) or a contentful subject that appears to be interpreted as the object of the embedded clause as shown in (1b). The question surrounding these constructions is whether (1a) is related to (1b) at some abstract level or whether they are different predicates with different argument structures.

I provide a novel account of such constructions which avoids the problems of previous approaches and shows that the alternation seen in (1) can be best explained by an independently required syntactic principle interacting with the argument structure of a predicate like *difficult*.

My investigation of such predicates reveals that there is much similarity between predicates that take clausal arguments but there are crucial differences as well. A manuscript dealing with these issues is currently under circulation and is being prepped for publication.

### Reflexives and Quantifier Binding

In my dissertation, I investigate the conditions under which reflexives and bound pronouns are licensed in a relatively novel linguistic environment; the copular clause.

- 2a) The person that John likes is himself.
- 2b) The person that every boy likes is his brother.

In (2), the meanings of *himself* and *his* is dependent on the subjects *John* and *every boy*. Such constructions are relatively neglected in the discussion of how reflexives and bound pronouns are licensed, and in my research, I have uncovered several novel generalizations regarding this phenomenon.

By looking at Tamil constructions, I show that whether the reflexive and bound readings are possible in a copular clause like (2) is dependent on two different factors. The first has to do with the type of derivation that these constructions have. The second has to do with the semantic meaning of the bound element.

Such an analysis is shown to account for the complicated Tamil data and also account for the differences between Tamil and English, which are significant but systematic.

In ongoing work, I am investigating reflexives and bound pronouns in Scandinavian languages which have a rich system of pronominal/ reflexive forms. This research adds a novel dimension to the discussion of how reflexives and bound pronouns are distributed, a topic that has been the subject of significant interest in the syntactic and semantic literature.

I have presented work stemming from this research at various venues. This includes the annual meeting of the Chicago Linguistics Society, the Formal Approaches to South Asian Languages conference as well as at NELS. Offshoots from this research have also been presented at the GLOW conference in Leiden, Netherlands and WCCFL at Calgary, Canada in 2017.

### Inversion, Structure Building and Case

Another line of research I am actively involved in has to do with inversion structures, several of which abound in a number of Bantu languages of West Africa. I investigate such constructions in Lubukusu and Kirundi, with the help of my language consultants Justine Sikuku (Lubukusu) and Ernest Nshemezimana (Kirundi).

Such constructions are interesting because they invert the normal order of subject and object which raises questions about nominal licensing (i.e. case theory) and structure building.

3a)	Abâna children 'Children drank milk'	ba-á-ra-nyôye 3P-PST-F-drink:PERF	amata. milk	SVO
3b)	Amata. milk 'Children (not parents) drank milk.'	y-á-nyôye 3S-PST-drink:PERF	abâna. children	OVS

(3) shows a typical inversion pattern in Kirundi. (3a) shows the canonical, discourse neutral SVO order and (3b) shows an OVS order. Note that the logical subject and logical object is the same in both sentences. But OVS inversion is accompanied by distinct pragmatic information.

In my research, I show how pragmatic requirements (such as topichood and focus) can influence syntactic structure in a significant way and can override otherwise required structure building and nominal licensing conditions. I also argue that such inversion structures reveal a type of movement dependency that cannot be accounted for by standard theories that seek to explain such dependencies.

I have presented research on these topics in the LSA (Linguistic Society of America) annual meetings as well as in various ACAL (Annual Conference of African Linguistics) meetings. I also have a paper under review dealing with these issues.

In summary, I have a varied research interest and the research topics that I am actively involved in deals with several questions that are at the forefront of linguistic and syntactic research. While attempting to solve old puzzles, my research objective lies in uncovering new ones. My ultimate aim is to lead us to a better understanding of the structural and semantic aspects of the human language.