

Research Statement

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1. INTRODUCTION

The model of linguistic theory that I work within assumes that much of cross-linguistic variation has a common underlying structure. One of the overarching objectives of my research is determining what these structures are. As such, my research often has a cross-linguistic perspective. I have published/ presented research on English, Tamil, Hindi, Lubukusu, Kirundi, Tagalog, and Singapore Malay among others.

These are some of the various empirical/ theoretical domains that my research is based in:

- agreement
- semantics of copular clauses
- tough constructions
- anaphoric dependencies
- voice systems
- intervention

In this research statement, I discuss one of my previously developed research projects which is still ongoing and another project which is currently taking shape.

2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH PROJECT

The main portion of my research in the past four to five years emerged from my dissertation where I investigate a particular type of copular clause and the implications it has for various aspects of grammar. My dissertation entitled ‘Inversion in copular clauses and its consequences’ discusses some of these implications, one of which is discussed here.

Implications for how pronominal dependencies are established.

The licensing conditions for how dependencies between pronoun elements and their antecedents like in *Every boy likes himself* has been the subject of much debate. In my dissertation and subsequent work, I investigate much less discussed copular clause examples such as *The one that every boy likes is himself* in order to shed light on these licensing conditions.

In my research, I have argued that the answer to these puzzles require a deeper understanding of the derivations involved in these copular clauses as well as the lexical semantics of the anaphor and pronoun. This research forms an important chapter of my dissertation. I have also presented offshoots from this work at CLS 51, the 2015 FASAL in Yale, NELS 47, GLOW 40 and WCCFL 35.

While the bulk of this work has used English and Tamil data, I am currently investigating Scandinavian languages like Icelandic which serve as good testing grounds for certain predictions that are made by my theory on how these antecedent-pronominal dependencies are established in the grammar in the context of copular clauses and beyond.

3. CURRENT RESEARCH PROJECT

The core of my current research lies in the cross-linguistic documentation and investigation of *tough constructions* (TC, henceforth) shown below in English.

- 1) John was tough to please.

There has been renewed interest in TCs because recent research has shown that TCs can inform several central theoretical questions pertaining to the voice system (Wurmbrand & Shimimura 2017) among others.

Wurmbrand (2001) proposes that TCs in certain languages like German are part of a larger phenomenon of restructuring which she analyzes as instances where the voice system is suppressed. Among other things, this is used to explain why the embedded clause of a TC does not have an embedded subject even covertly. However, Wurmbrand & Shimimura (2017) look at TCs in languages with rich voice morphology and find that voice morphology is preserved even in TCs, which indicates that voice is not suppressed in TCs after all. They then propose how the voice system interacts with TC formation.

In my current research, I am investigating Singapore Malay and Tagalog, Austronesian languages with rich voice systems. Through my own fieldwork, I have found that TCs in these languages must realize their voice morphology indicating that voice and TCs are compatible. In addition, I have found that the way voice morphology is realized in these languages challenges Wurmbrand & Shimimura's model of the interaction between the voice system and TC formation. I have presented some of this work as Selvanathan (2018) and also have a manuscript under review at the *Journal of East Asian Linguistics*.

You can find out more about this project here: <https://toughconstructions.weebly.com/>

4. FUTURE PLANS

I plan to continue this research into how TCs are formed in languages with rich voice systems with a focus on the Austronesian languages. This involves further investigation into Singapore Malay, Tagalog, and Indonesian. Other such languages will be added as the research progresses. This project is expected to branch off into a longer-term goal of a more general investigation of voice systems cross-linguistically.

In addition, I also aim to provide an online searchable database resource for researchers who are interested in TCs in the same vein as other databases such as the AFRANAPH project (<https://www.africanaphora.rutgers.edu/>). Despite the fact that TCs were first discussed in Chomsky (1964), systematic cross-linguistic documentation of this phenomenon has been lacking. Documenting this phenomenon in more languages and language families and providing this data as an online resource for other researchers is my long-term goal.

These research plans I have outlined here together with various other minor research questions I have not discussed here form my main research plans for the next 3-4 years.

REFERENCES

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