

## Analysing discontinuous DPs in Tunen: Contiguity violations not driven by IS?

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**Introduction.** A principle proposed to hold crosslinguistically is the Contiguity Principle, otherwise formulated as the principle of iconic distance, which states that material that belongs together semantically will be contiguous across the syntactic derivation (Behagel 1932; Fanselow and Ćavar 2002; Schultze-Berndt 2022). Interesting (apparent) violations of this principle are discontinuous noun phrases, where a nominal modifier (e.g. numeral, adjective) is split from the head noun by other material (such as a verb). Such discontinuous DPs are reported to be a low-frequency strategy in the world's languages (e.g. 1-5% of noun phrases in Louagie and Verstraete 2016:51's overview of 3 Australian languages), restricted to a particular information structure (IS) context of contrastive focus.

**Tunen.** In this talk I present a generative analysis of discontinuous DPs in Tunen, a Northwestern Bantu language (Guthrie no. A44, Cameroon) which is remarkable for two reasons: (i) the canonical word order is SOV, not SVO (Dugast 1971; Mous 1997, 2003), and (ii) nominal modifiers are commonly discontinuous across discourse contexts, with S-O-V-Mod a frequent pattern not limited to contrastive focus on the modifier alone (1). **Methodology.** I present new elicitation data investigating the interaction of IS and discontinuity, in addition to the analysis of newly-collected natural speech data and of the Dugast (1975) text corpus (building on earlier work by Mous (1997, 2005) and Isaac (2007)).

(1) a. *'How many birds do you see?'* (focus=Mod)

b. *'What do you see?'* (focus=whole DP)

méndɔ́ tunoní sínə tólál.

/mɛ-<sup>H</sup>ndɔ́ tɔ-noní sínə tɔ-<sup>H</sup>lál/

SM.1SG-PRS 13-bird see 13-three

'I see three birds.'

**Research question.** The main research question of this talk is: What is the underlying syntactic structure of sentences like (1)? **Analysis.** I consider the two main analyses in the literature on discontinuous DPs: (a) discontinuity is only apparent; the modifier is either adverbial or part of an independently generated DP, and (b) discontinuity is real, arising through subextraction/copy+deletion. I present syntactic and morphological evidence against the first type of analysis and in favour of the second. I show how raising the Tunen object via formal movement to a low vP-internal position (below T and Neg) can leave the modifier stranded in the base-generated postverbal position. Tunen discontinuous DPs therefore differ from the better-studied type derived via IS-driven A'-movement to the left periphery – resulting in a Top...Foc or Foc...Given structure – as found in languages such as German, Croatian (Fanselow and Ćavar 2002; Fanselow and Féry 2006), and Yucatec Maya (Skopoteas et al. 2020).

**Implications.** The syntactic treatment of discontinuity has implications for understanding OV syntax in a VO family, specifically the nature of formally-conditioned object movement. Secondly, the compatibility between discontinuity and different discourse contexts in Tunen gives further support to Schultze-Berndt (2022)'s proposal that discontinuous DPs are not limited to contrastive focus contexts. At the same time, I show that Schultze-Berndt (2022)'s theticity explanation does not account for all the Tunen examples. The Tunen data thus further call into question the robustness of the commonly-made argument that deviations from the Contiguity Principle are driven by IS.

## References

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## Glosses and abbreviations

1SG = 1st person singular, 13 = Bantu noun class (plural of class 19 in Tunen), A'-movement = movement to a non-argument position, DP = determiner phrase, Foc = focus, IS = information structure, <sup>H</sup> = floating high tone, Mod = modifier, Neg = negation head, O = object, PRS = present, S = subject, SM = subject marker, T = tense head, Top = topic, V = verb, vP = highest verbal projection.