Not all specificational sentences are reversible

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Specificational sentences, both copular (here NP-Pred) clauses and pseudoclefts, have long been attracting the attention of researchers, due to their syntactic, semantic and pragmatic characteristics. In this squib I address one property that is claimed to be the hallmark of both specificational NP-Pred sentences (*His most important quality is his honesty*) and specificational pseudoclefts (*What is most important about him is his honesty*) – the reversibility of their two constituents around the copula. The fact that in both clause types the two main constituents seem to be able to surface in either order is often taken to be evidence for *predicate inversion/raising*, the raising of an underlying predicate to the structural subject position (or possibly a higher projection). I here present data from Wolof NP-Pred clauses and pseudoclefts that speak in favor of inversion, but only for specificational pseudoclefts. Specificational NP-Pred clauses are identical to predicational sentences in the relevant respect, which supports a non-inversion analysis for this clause type.

1 A′-movement in Wolof NP-Pred clauses and pseudoclefts

All non-verbal sentences in Wolof are A′-movement constructions, and they always contain an overt complementizer, *(l)a*. In most A′-movement clauses, the complementizer exhibits a subject/non-subject asymmetry – it surfaces as *a* in local subject extraction, and as *la* in the extraction of any other constituent, as in subject and object Exhaustive Identification (EI) examples in (1). In Wolof, an EI-ed constituent is obligatorily moved to Spec,CP, though this position can be occupied by non-EI-ed elements as well.[1]

(1)　*Subject/non-subject asymmetry in Wolof Exhaustive Identification*

    a.　Usmaan　**a** lekk maafe.
        Oussman C eat　mafe
        "*It's Oussman who ate mafe.*"

    b.　Maafe **l-a** Usmaan　lekk
        mafe　*l*-C Oussman eat
        "*It's mafe that Oussman ate.*"

NP-Pred sentences in Wolof are *wh*-movement constructions, and the ones that concern us in this squib do not contain an overt copula. In predicational sentences (where a property expressed by the NP is predicated of the subject), as in (2), the nominal predicate (*sàcc* 'thief') is A′-moved to Spec,CP , and the clause-internal subject is obligatorily a clitic (*ñu*). A non-clitic subject (*xale yi* 'the

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children') can only be left dislocated.[2] Since a non-subject occupies Spec,CP, the complementizer can only surface as *la*.[3]

(2) *An NP-Pred sentence in Wolof*
Xale yi   sàcc l-a-ñu.
child the.PL thief *l*-C-SCL.3PL
"The children are thieves."

Pseudoclefts are classified as a type of a copular sentence, with a free relative (FR) as one of the constituents, and a DP as the other. A parallel is commonly drawn between specificational copular sentences, as in (3), and specificational pseudoclefts, as in (4), and they are usually considered to be structurally and derivationally equivalent (e.g. Higgins 1973, 1979; den Dikken 2001).

(3) *Specificational copular sentence in English*
[$_{DP}$ My most valued possession] is [$_{DP}$ this book].

(4) *Specificational pseudocleft in English*
[$_{FR}$ What I value most] is [$_{DP}$ this book].

Since Higgins' seminal work on this topic, both clause-types are usually defined as having a constituent that contains a *variable* (the pre-copular constituent in the above examples), and a constituent that exhaustively identifies the *value* of the variable (the post-copular, EI-ed/focused, constituent) (Blom and Daalder 1977; Akmajian 1979; Higgins 1973, 1979; Declerck 1988).[4]

Specificational NP-Pred sentences (in (5)) and pseudoclefts (in (6)) in Wolof also seem to have almost identical syntactic structures. They both contain an EI-ed/focused constituent, which must end up in Spec,CP. The other constituent (a DP in specificational sentences and a FR in pseudoclefts) is obligatorily to the left of the CP, presumably topicalized/left dislocated. There is, however, an important difference between (5) and (6). Specificational copular sentences, like predicational sentences, exhibit the subject/non-subject asymmetry, with C always surfacing as *la*, indicating that a non-subject is in Spec,CP. In pseudoclefts, the asymmetry is absent, and the complementizer can have either form.[5]

(5) A/la *asymmetry present in specificational NP-Pred sentences*
[$_{DP}$ Sàcc yi   ] [$_{DP}$ xale yi   ] {**l-a**/***a**}-ñu.
[$_{DP}$ thief the.PL] [$_{DP}$ child the.PL] {*l*-C/C}-SCL.3PL
"The thieves are the children."

(6) A/la *asymmetry absent in specificational pseudoclefts*
[$_{FR}$ Ñ-i   sàcc tangal yi   ] [$_{DP}$ xale yi   ] {**l-a/a**}-***ñu.
[$_{FR}$ the.PL-C steal sweets the.PL] [$_{DP}$ child the.PL] {*l*-C/C}-*SCL.3PL

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[2]The syntactic details behind this structure are irrelevant for the present purposes. For more information, see Author 2015, 2016; Author et al. to appear.

[3]In this squib I equate *being a subject* with *occupying Spec,TP at some point in the derivation*, therefore the subject/non-subject asymmetry here is tied to the position from which an element is extracted. This is enough to account for the data presented in this squib. In Author 2015 I consider this to be a more complex issue, having to do with features that participate in the checking of the nominative case.

[4]For a detailed overview of the properties and different analyses of pseudoclefts, see den Dikken 2001.

[5]Another difference is the absence of the subject clitic following *(l)a* in pseudoclefts. It is possible that the subject clitic is present and that it is always 3*rd* person singular, because it resumes the free relative, which is, for example, always 3*rd* person singular. The 3*rd* person singular subject clitic in Wolof is null when it follows *(l)a*.

"Who(pl) stole the sweets were the children."

The difference in the possible form of the complementizer between NP-Pred sentences and pseudoclefts means that the DP in Spec,CP in specificational NP-Pred sentences can only have been extracted from a structural non-subject position, whereas the DP in Spec,CP in specificational pseudoclefts could have been either a structural subject (the complementizer being *a*), or a non-subject (the complementizer being *la*). The Wolof data therefore point to a fundamental difference between specificational pseudoclefts and specificational NP-Pred clauses, and, for that matter, all other types of copular sentences. In the following paragraphs I address the importance that the Wolof data have for the analysis of specificational sentences in general.

2   Reversibility in specificational pseudoclefts in Wolof

A popular analysis of specificational sentences states that they involve *predicate inversion* or *raising* – a process in which the underlying predicate of the sentence ends up in the position usually occupied by the subject, or in a position higher than the subject (for different versions of this analysis see Williams 1983; Heggie 1988; Heycock 1991, 1992; den Dikken 1995; Moro 1997; Mikkelsen 2005; den Dikken 2006). Reversibility of the two constituents around the copula in languages such as English is meant to be one argument in favor of this approach, suggesting that either of the two underlying constituents can be raised to or over the subject position, with some additional requirements that yield the difference in meaning between predicational and specificational sentences, depending on the analysis. Reversibility in English NP-Pred sentences and pseudoclefts is illustrated in (7) and (8).

(7)   *Reversibility in specificational NP-Pred sentences*
    a.   [$_{DP}$ My most valued possession] is [$_{DP}$ this book].
    b.   [$_{DP}$ This book] is [$_{DP}$ my most valued possession].

(8)   *Reversibility in specificational pseudoclefts*
    a.   [$_{FR}$ What I value most] is [$_{DP}$ this book].
    b.   [$_{DP}$ This book] is [$_{FR}$ what I value most].

Many arguments have been put forth for inversion, and many against. I shall not be concerned with the details of this discussion here. What I aim to show in this squib is that the Wolof data support an analysis according to which specificational pseudoclefts do allow either the DP or the FR to be raised to the structural subject position. Specificational NP-Pred clauses, on the other hand, do not.

In Wolof, both major constituents in NP-Pred clauses and in specificational pseudoclefts are in the left periphery. In both clause-types, the Exhaustively Identified element (the *value*) must be in Spec,CP, and the other constituent (the subject DP in NP-Pred clauses and the FR in pseudoclefts) is left-dislocated.[6] There is also no overt copula, and the English-type reversibility does not exist. I argue, however, that the absence of the *a/la* asymmetry in specificational pseudoclefts proves that

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[6]For an analysis of NP-Pred sentences and the syntactic reason behind the left-dislocation of subjects in that clause-type, see Author 2015, Chapter 6. The left-dislocation of the FR is also obligatory, though a more detailed syntactic investigation of all types of copular sentences is needed in order to determine if this is due to the same syntactic requirements as in NP-Pred clauses. Whatever the cause, it is not directly related to the point made in this squib and the analysis presented here does not hinge on the left-dislocation of the FR.

the two constituents in those clauses are indeed reversible, and that this straightforwardly follows from an analysis which allows either the DP or the FR to move to Spec,TP. At the same time, the absence of this effect in specificational NP-Pred sentences is an argument against inversion in those clause-types. In the remainder of this section, I present the analysis.

I propose that the two major constituents in a specificational pseudocleft—the FR and the DP— are contained in a symmetrical small clause, as in (9), and that neither constituent is predicated of the other (Akmajian 1979; Heycock and Kroch 1999).

(9)   *Small clause in a pseudocleft*

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        SC
       /  \
     DP    FR
   [Foc⁺]
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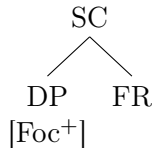
A symmetrical small clause ensures that both the DP and the FR are equidistant from Spec,TP and can be attracted there to, by hypothesis, check the EPP feature on T,[7] without violating Minimality, which would prevent any constituent that can check the EPP but the closest one from moving to Spec,TP. Additionally, I capture the fact that the DP is Exhaustively Identified with a Foc⁺-feature for sake of simplicity.[8]

The derivation of specificational pseudoclefts in (6) proceeds as follows (functional projections not relevant for the analysis are omitted from the derivations). When T is merged, it needs to have its EPP feature checked. Since both the DP and the FR are equidistant from it, either of the two phrases can move to Spec,TP for this purpose. This yields the two structures in (10) and (11).
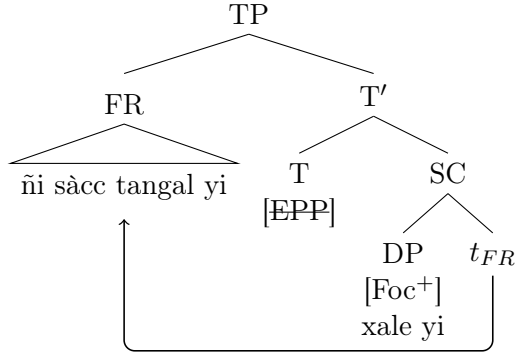
(10)   *DP checks EPP in Spec,TP*

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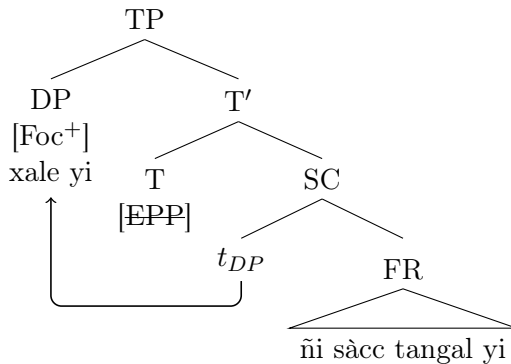
[7]Wolof does not have subject-verb agreement in φ-features, so I assume subject movement out of Spec,vP to be triggered by an EPP-like feature in T. For more details on the clause structure of Wolof, see Author 2015.
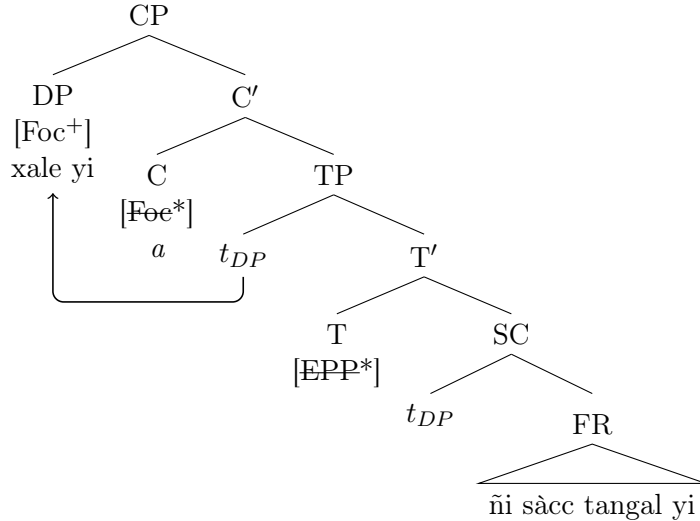[8]I mark unvalued features that need to be checked with an asterisk (F*), and valued features that perform the checking with a plus sign (F⁺).

(11)   *FR checks EPP in Spec,TP*

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                    TP
          ┌─────────┴─────────┐
         FR                   T′
    ┌─────┴─────┐        ┌─────┴─────┐
  ñi sàcc tangal yi      T           SC
                       [E̶P̶P̶]      ┌────┴────┐
                                   DP      t_FR
                                 [Foc⁺]
                                 xale yi
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If the derivation ended here, Wolof specificational pseudoclefts would show surface reversibility, as English ones do. There are, however, additional requirements placed on the two constituents of the pseudocleft in Wolof. First, the DP is EI-ed, which in Wolof means that it must move to Spec,CP. The form of the complementizer depends on where the DP is moving from. If the DP is the element that moved to Spec,TP, as in (10), it is in the structural subject position and its movement to Spec,CP will result in the complementizer surfacing as *a*, illustrated in (12). If the FR is in the structural subject position, as in (11), the movement of the DP to Spec,CP constitutes non-subject extraction, and the complementizer will surface as *la*, shown in (13).

(12)   *DP moves from subject position*

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                 CP
        ┌────────┴────────┐
       DP                 C′
     [Foc⁺]          ┌────┴────┐
     xale yi         C         TP
                   [F̶o̶c̶*]   ┌───┴───┐
                     a    t_DP      T′
                                ┌───┴───┐
                                T       SC
                             [E̶P̶P̶*]  ┌───┴───┐
                                    t_DP     FR
                                          ┌───┴───┐
                                        ñi sàcc tangal yi
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(13) *DP moves from non-subject position*
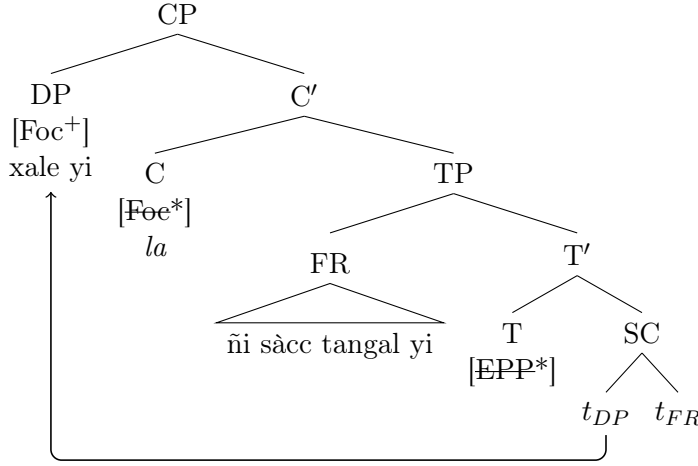
The final requirement for both derivations is that the FR ends up in a left-dislocated position. This gives us the surface order FR DP *la/a*, repeated in (14).

(14) *Wolof specificational pseudoclefts*
[$_{FR}$ Ñ-i   sàcc tangal yi   ] [$_{DP}$ xale yi   ] {**l-a/a**}.
[$_{FR}$ the.PL-C steal sweets the.PL] [$_{DP}$ child the.PL] {*l*-C/C}
"Who(pl) stole the sweets were the children."

The proposed analysis captures the lack of the subject/non-subject asymmetry in Wolof specificational pseudoclefts and relates it to a known property of this sentence type – the reversibility of the order of its two constituents, the DP and the FR. Because of the particularities of Wolof syntax—that EI-ed constituents must occupy Spec,CP—and this clause-type—that the FR must be left-dislocated—we do not observe English-type reversibility, where the surface order of the two constituents in the sentence can change. We know, however, that the EI-ed constituent can occupy two different positions in the clause, based on the form of the complementizer, which tracks the grammatical relation of the element in Spec,CP. This means that either the DP moves to Spec,TP, or the FR does. Wolof therefore presents an interesting case, in which the surface order of constituents in the pseudocleft is fixed, but the form of the complementizer uncovers the same type of reversibility of the constituent order during the derivation as in English specificational pseudoclefts.

Before turning to specificational NP-Pred clauses in the following section, it is important to note than fragment answers in Wolof also exhibit a lack of the subject/non-subject asymmetry. The questions *"Who saw Moussa?"* and *"Who did Moussa see?"* can both have the answer in (15), with either variant of C.

(15) *Fragment answers in Wolof*
Usmaan   **l-a/a**.
Oussman *l*-C/C
"Oussman."

Merchant (2004) analyzes fragments as sentences with full sentential syntactic structures subject to ellipsis (specifically, sluicing), in order to account for their semantically propositional character, and

the presence of C in fragments in Wolof supports this. Various structures have been claimed to be the source of fragments, for example clefts in Japanese (Merchant 1998), and Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese (Rodrigues et al. 2009). In Wolof, given the parallelism between fragment answers and pseudoclefts, it is reasonable to argue that the fragments are pseudoclefts in which the FR is elided.

3 Specificational NP-Pred sentences in Wolof

A *predicate inversion* analysis has been proposed for specificational sentences in large part because of the semantic properties of the two definite DPs. Consider the sentence in (16).

(16)   *Specificational NP-Pred sentence in English*
[$_{DP}$ My favorite writer] is [$_{DP}$ Julian Barnes].

It has been convincingly shown that the pre-copular DP (*my favorite writer*) is not referential, whereas the post-copular one (*Julian Barnes*) obviously is (for extensive evidence for this see Mikkelsen 2005). Since the pre-copular constituent has predicate-like properties, and the post-copular constituent subject-like properties, it has been argued that the same underlying structure can be assumed for the specificational sentence in (16) and for a predicational sentence as, for example, (17), where the post-copular DP is clearly predicated of the pre-copular subject. In both (16) and (17) there would be a referential subject and a predicate; the difference would be in which element was raised to the structural subject position. In predicational sentences it would be the subject DP, and in specificational the predicate DP.

(17)   *Predicational NP-Pred sentence in English*
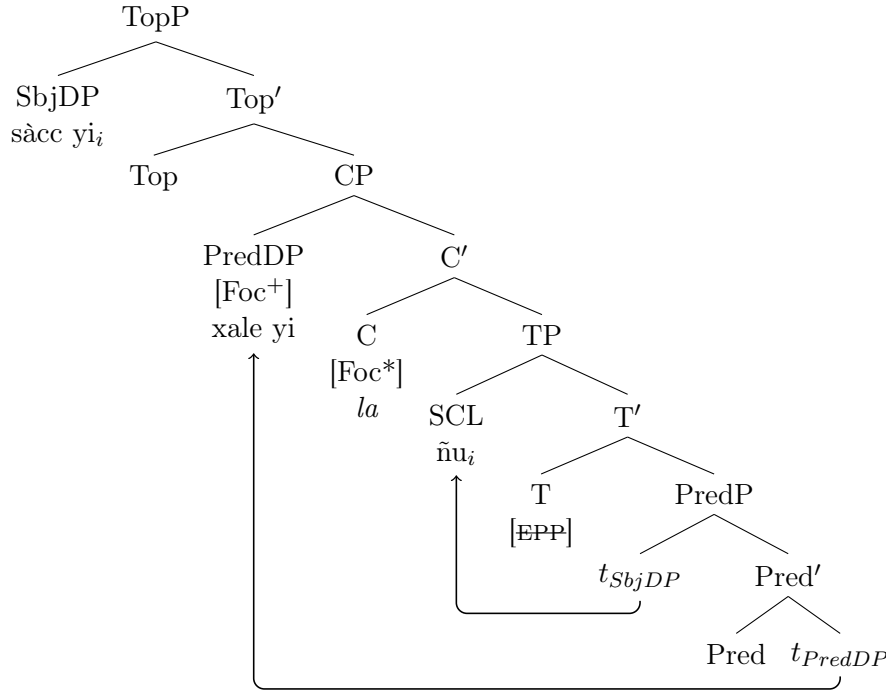[$_{DP}$ Julian Barnes] is [$_{DP}$ a great writer].

I do not get into the arguments for and against *predicate raising* in this squib. I have shown that specificational pseudoclefts in Wolof can plausibly be claimed to be generated by a type of inversion, whereby either of the two constituents can be raised to the structural subject position. All I wish to show here is that the same cannot be said for specificational NP-Pred sentences.

Specificational NP-Pred sentences in Wolof do not exhibit the absence of the subject/non-subject asymmetry as pseudoclefts do. The complementizer only surfaces as *la*, meaning that the Exhaustively Identified DP cannot have, at any point in the derivation, been the structural subject. The relevant example is repeated in (18).

(18)   A/la *asymmetry present in specificational NP-Pred sentences*
[$_{DP}$ Sàcc yi   ] [$_{DP}$ xale yi   ] {**l-a**/*****a**}-ñu.
[$_{DP}$ thief the.PL] [$_{DP}$ child the.PL] {*l*-C/C}-SCL.3PL
"The thieves are the children."

A possible derivation that yields (18) is given in the tree in (19).

(19)   *The derivation of a specificational NP-Pred sentence*

TopP
SbjDP
sàcc yi$_i$
Top′
Top
CP
PredDP
[Foc$^+$]
xale yi
C′
C
[Foc*]
la
TP
SCL
ñu$_i$
T′
T
[~~EPP~~]
PredP
t_{SbjDP}
Pred′
Pred t_{PredDP}

Since only the referential DP can be raised to Spec,TP, I propose that the two DPs are not generated in the same type of a symmetrical small clause as is the case with the two constituents in specificational pseudoclefts, but in an asymmetrical predicative clause.[9] Since the two DPs are not equidistant from Spec,TP in this case, only the closer one can check EPP on T. As in specificational pseudoclefts, the referential DP is Exhaustively Identified, and therefore must move to Spec,CP, and the subject DP is ultimately left-dislocated and doubled by a clitic.[10]

The data from specificational pseudoclefts and NP-Pred sentences in Wolof presented in this squib suggest that the two sentence types are not identical with respect to their underlying and derivational structure. This suggests that the reversibility that is claimed to be a property of specificational NP-Pred sentences is only apparent, and that the two sentences in (20) and (21) are actually two different clause types – the first one a predicational sentence, and the second one a specificational.

(20)   *Predicational NP-Pred sentence*
       Julian Barnes is the writer.

(21)   *Specificational NP-Pred sentence*
       The writer is Julian Barnes.

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[9]In Author 2015, I propose a slightly different predicative small clause, as I there address a much wider range of data that require a more complex approach. What is common in the two analyses is that predicational and specificational NP-Pred clauses are treated identically, as having an asymmetrical small clause, and crucially differently from specificational pseudoclefts, which have a symmetrical small clause.

[10]The subject clitic eventually ends up a little higher in the tree, cliticized to C together with any other clitics that may occur in the clause (object or locative).

The question of the type of DPs in specificational sentences is not addressed here, but the proposal I make is consistent with analyses such as the one in Romero (2005), for whom specificational subjects are individual concepts, and with the claim made in Wedgwood (2003), É. Kiss (2006), Author 2015, and Author et al. to appear, that Exhaustive Identification is a type of predication, which helps make sense of the fact that an EI-ed referential DP can be a predicate.

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