The coming apart of case and focus in Bantu

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Abstract

The paper presents an argument for structural case in a Bantu language, Ndebele. Bantu languages notoriously lack typical signs of case licensing, which led to many to propose they lack case altogether. A recent claim to the contrary, put forth in Halpert 2012, 2015, has been challenged by Carstens & Mletshe (2015a), who argue that the patterns Halpert describes fall under the umbrella of focus licensing, thus undermining the need for an independent case licensing mechanism. Ndebele data invalidate this challenge, revealing a purely syntactic nature of the phenomenon in question.

1 Introduction

The existence of case phenomena in Bantu languages has been a long standing debate. One reason is the absence of morphological marking that could be straightforwardly interpreted as case morphology. The other reason is the notorious absence of the kind of restrictions on the distribution of nominals that have been attributed to Abstract Case since Vergnaud 1977. In light of these facts, it has been proposed that Bantu languages lack case altogether or that its effects are largely vacuous and can be observed only in a few narrow corners in the grammar. Contrary to this claim, Halpert (2012, 2015) argues that Zulu exhibits structural case, pointing out two reasons why the patterns in question were not previously analyzed as case. First, not all DPs are subject to structural case licensing; rather, only DPs with special morphology – the lack of *the augment* – require structural case. Second, structural case in Zulu is not licensed in the same configurations as in better studied case systems; in particular, Zulu exhibits only vP internal case licensing, and there is no structural case associated with T. Once we recognize these two peculiarities of Zulu, a robust pattern of restrictions on nominal distribution follows from the proposed structural case system.

However, Halpert's claim has been recently challenged by Carstens & Mletshe (2015a), who argue that the hypothesized structural case positions are in fact focus positions, and what Halpert characterized as case licensing is in fact focus licensing. In their view, augmentless nominals are a type of focus phrase and their distribution falls out from an independently needed mechanism of focus licensing. If true, such redundancy casts serious doubt over the structural case hypothesis for Zulu, bringing us back to the world in which evidence for case in Bantu is weak at best and extremely scarce. In this paper, I provide evidence against reducing augmentless nominal licensing to focus licensing. The evidence comes from Northern Ndebele, a close relative of Zulu with the same restrictions on augmentless nominals. I show that, even though augmentless and focused phrases have partly overlapping distributions, there are positions that allow one but not the other. This leads us to conclude that the distributional restrictions on augmentless nominals cannot be reduced to focus licensing. Moreover, I show that the non-overlapping contexts, in which an augmentless noun is impossible despite being in a licit focus position, follow if augmentless nominals are indeed structurally case-marked.

2 Case in Bantu – a brief recap of the debate

The goal of this section is to i) highlight some representative arguments given in the literature against case in Bantu languages, ii) present Halpert's arguments for structural case in Zulu and iii) describe the challenge for this claim posed by Carstens & Mletshe's findings.[1]

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[1] Due to space limitations, this section cannot do justice to all existing claims about potential case phenomena in Bantu languages. For a more detailed overview see Halpert 2015, Diercks & Carstens to appear.

First, DPs in Bantu languages bear no case morphology. Consider the DP *umama* 'mother' in (1), which has the same form when appearing as a subject (1-a), direct object (1-b) and indirect object (1-c).

(1) a. U-mama   u-pheké   i-suphu.   Ndebele
         1aug-1mother 1s-cook.PST 5aug-5soup
         'Mother cooked soup'

     b. Ngi-boné   u-mama.
         1sg.s-see.PST 1aug-1mother
         'I saw mother'

     c. Ngi-niké   u-mama   a-maluba.
         1sg.s-give.PST 1aug-1mother 6aug-6flower
         'I gave mother flowers'

Moreover, Bantu languages lack the kind of restrictions on the distribution of DPs that have been attributed to Abstract Case since Vergnaud 1977. First, as observed by Harford Perez 1985 for Shona, subjects of passive sentences need not move to Spec,IP, where they would receive nominative case (2). Since the passive verb is, in GB terms, not a case assigner, the subject is in a caseless position, in violation of the Case Filter.

(2) Kw-á-uray-iw-a   mu-rúmé né-shumba ku-ru-kova
     17s-PST-kill-PASS-FV 1-man   by-9lion   17-11-river
     'There was a man killed by a lion at the river.'   (Harford Perez 1985, Shona)

The lack of A-movement in (2) continued to be problematic in the Minimalist theory of case, in which case licensing was implemented as a "side effect" of agreement (Chomsky 1995 *et seq*). Notice that the in-situ subject in (2) does not control agreement on the verb (instead, the verb appears with class 17 agreement morphology, widely considered the default agreement exponent in Bantu languages). In the absence of an Agree relation, the subject's uninterpretable case feature cannot be checked and the derivation is expected to crash.

Further, we find that non-finite clauses in Bantu languages may have overt subjects, as in the following Swahili sentence:

(3) I-na-wezakana   (*kwa) Maiko ku-m-pig-i-a   Tegani simu
     9s-PRS-possible (*for) Michael INF-1o-beat-APPL-FV Tegan phone
     'It's possible for Michael to call Tegan.'   (Diercks 2012, Swahili)

In GB, the non-finite I^0 is not a case licensor. In Minimalism, a DP in this position cannot receive case since it does not control agreement (on T or any other head). Nonetheless, an overt subject in (3) is licit, without controlling agreement or being licensed by a preposition.

Finally, many Bantu languages exhibit hyperraising, i.e. raising of a subject out of a finite clause:

(4) a. [IP proEXPL Zví-no-fungir-wa   [CP kuti [IP **mbavhá** y-aka-vánd-á   mú-bako]]].
             8EXPL 8s-PRS-suspect-PASS   that   9thief   9s-FAR.PST-hide-FV 18-cave
         'It is suspected that the thief is hidden in the cave.'

     b. [IP **Mbavhá$_i$** i-no-fungir-wa   [CP kuti [IP t_i y-aka-vánd-á   mú-bako]]].
             9thief   9s-PRT-suspect-PASS   that   9s-FAR.PST-hide-FV 18-cave
         'The thief is suspected to be hidden in the cave.'   (Harford Perez 1985, Shona)

Hyperraising is unexpected due to the role that uninterpretable Case features play in agreement under Minimalist assumptions. Specifically, a DP must have an unchecked uCase feature in order to enter in an Agree

relation. Since the subject in (4-a) controls agreement on the embedded T, its uCase feature is checked in the embedded clause, rendering the DP inactive for further agreement and raising.

These facts gave rise to the idea that Bantu languages lack case licensing altogether (Harford Perez 1985; Diercks 2012; Diercks & Carstens 2013). If existent, such licensing would have no connection to finiteness or agreement. Indeed, another interpretation of the problematic facts above is that Bantu DPs do have uCase but the checking of this feature is not tied to agreement and finiteness the way it has been claimed for e.g. Indo-European languages (i.a.Ndayiragije 1999; Baker 2003, 2008; Carstens 2005, 2010, 2011; Carstens & Mletshe 2015b). In effect, it is impossible to detect case through its interaction with agreement and finiteness.[2]

It is important to note that the connection between case and agreement posited in Minimalism has been increasingly called into question, for reasons extending far beyond the Bantu language family (Bittner & Hale 1996; Bobaljik 2008; Preminger 2014; Kornfilt & Preminger 2015). In this light, the facts in (2)-(4) can no longer be taken as evidence for the absence of case. However, given the absence of morphological case marking, *positive* evidence for case licensing in Bantu languages remains extremely scarce, if present at all. Indeed, the discussion of case in the Bantu literature focuses on case as the explanandum, not the explanans. That is, it attempts to explain why case effects are not observed in this language family, rather than using case licensing as an explanation of an empirical puzzle. Instances of the latter type of discussion include Baker 2003 and Carstens & Mletshe 2015b. Baker proposes that postverbal subjects in Kinande must be augmentless because they are not in a case position. Unlike DPs with an augment, augmentless nouns do not require case[3]. Similarly, Carstens & Mletshe argue that case is responsible for ruling out Xhosa VSO sentences in which V is a psych-verb and the object has an augment. They attribute this to a constraint banning two inherent cases on a single DP – a constraint that would be violated by the object in such a configuration. Despite using case as an explanation for an empirical puzzle, the restrictions these authors aim to derive are not robust patterns of DP distribution. Rather, they are specific to a single position and/or construction. The general picture, then, appears to be that case effects are either absent in Bantu languages or, due to the nature of case licensing in these languages, they surface only in a few narrow corners of the grammar.

In contrast, Halpert 2012, 2015 argues that Zulu DPs are structurally licensed and that the licensing gives rise to easily observable restrictions on the distribution of nominals. Crucially, however, case licensing is not a requirement for all DPs; only DPs without the so called *augment prefix* must receive structural case. The augment has the form of a vowel and it covaries with noun class (5).

(5) a. *Augmented DP:*   (6) a. *Augmentess DP:*
         u-muntu   muntu
         1aug-1person   1person
     b. **i**-nja   b. nja
         9aug-9dog   9dog

Every DP in Zulu (and in Ndebele, the language analyzed here) exhibits the alternation between (5) and (6). In Zulu and Ndebele, augmentless DPs must either be a wh-item (7) or appear in a negative sentence (8). Note that dropping the augment is always optional.

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[2] Van der Wal 2015 argues that Matengo and Makhuwa are languages with abstract Case. Crucially, however, evidence for this claim comes from the fact that the two languages show the familiar abstract case phenomena that most other Bantu languages famously lack.

[3] It is worth noting that, under this view, augmentless nouns are expected to have a wider distribution than augmented ones, which does not appear to be the case, in Kinande or other Bantu languages. For instance, Baker incorrectly predicts that -Aug nouns should be licit in Spec,TP since that position is caseless in his analysis.

(7) a. Ba-bona **u**-bani?   b. Ba-bona bani?   Ndebele
         2s-see   1aug-who   2s-see   who
         'Who do they see?'   'Who do they see?'

(8) a. A-ba-boni **u**-mfana.   b. A-ba-boni mfana.
         NEG-2s-see 1aug-boy   NEG-2s-see boy
         'They don't see a/the boy'   'They don't see a(ny) boy'

     c. Ba-bona **u**-muntu.   d. *Ba-bona muntu.
         2s-see   1aug-boy   2s-see   boy
         'They see a/the boy'   ('They see a/the boy')

The absence of an augment in Bantu languages typically correlates with certain interpretive effects – most notably with focus, indefiniteness or NPI-hood. This can be seen in the negative sentences in (8), in which the augmentless object is interpreted as a narrow scoping indefinite, i.e. it has the interpretation of an NPI. The most salient interpretation of an augmented object in that position is that of a definite or a wide scope indefinite (8-a). Due to these interpretive effects, the augment (or its absence) had previously been treated as morphology reflecting (in)definiteness and/or NPI-hood (Progovac 1993; Ziervogel 1967; von Staden 1973; Giusti 1997; de Dreu 2008; Visser 2008; Taraldsen 2010; Buell & de Dreu 2013; Carstens & Mletshe 2015a), rather than as case-related morphology. It is worth noting, however, that the lack of augment is not systematically associated with indefiniteness. Proper names, which are unambiguously definite, can be augmentless in Ndebele as long as they appear in a negative sentence:

(9) A-ba-boni (**u**)-Zodwa.
     NEG-2s-see (1aug)-1Zodwa
     'They don't see Zodwa'

The availability of augment drop on wh-items further shows that augmentless DPs are not always NPIs, either – recall that wh-items do not require negation in order to be augmentless. Importantly, augmentless wh-items are restricted to the same structural positions as other augmentless DPs. The only difference is that they need not appear in a negative sentence. Halpert proposes that negative polarity and wh-hood are independent licensing requirements for augmentless DPs, which can be thought of as semantic preconditions on their appearance. The distribution of augmentless DPs is *additionally* regulated by purely syntactic factors, and her theory is a theory of the structural (not the semantic) licensing conditions.

Building on observations in previous literature, Halpert proposes that there is no case associated with T or the Spec,TP position in Zulu, and that case licensing is not linked to movement or agreement. Rather, a single licensor, located right above vP, assigns structural case to the highest DP in its c-command domain (i.e. inside the vP). In an SVO sentence, such as (10), the object is the only, and thus the highest, DP inside the vP. It may therefore be licensed as augmentless.

(10) *(U)-Zodwa a-ka-pheki   (**i**)-suphu.
       1aug-Zodwa NEG-1s-coook 5aug-5soup
       'Zodwa didn't cook soup'

4
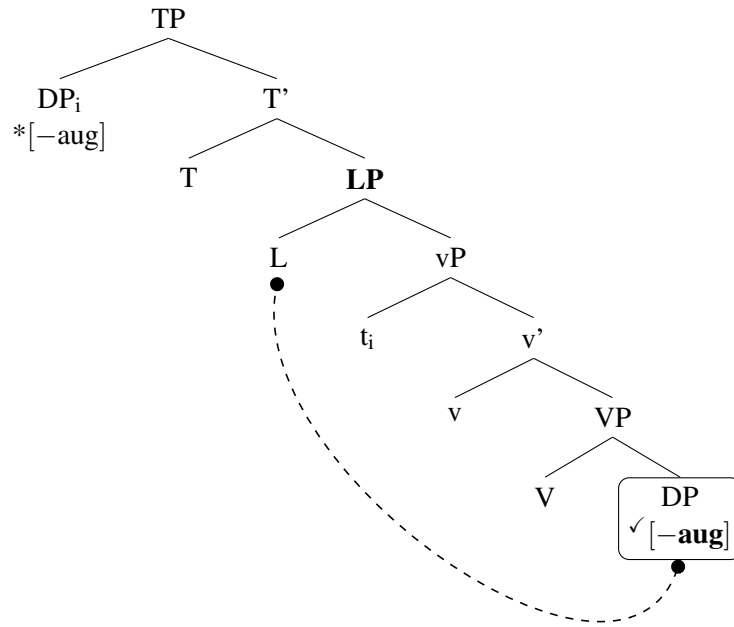
The subject, having undergone movement to Spec,TP, is outside of the licensor's domain and consequently may not be augmentless.

The licensing pattern changes if the subject remains in-situ, as in the Transitive Expletive Construction in (11). Here, the subject is licensed (augmentless) as it is the highest DP in the vP. This, in turn, blocks the licensing of the object, which now must have an augment.

(11)   A-ku-pheki   (**u**)-Zodwa   *(i)-suphu.
        NEG-17s-coook 1aug-Zodwa 5aug-5soup
        'Zodwa$_{Foc}$ didn't cook soup'
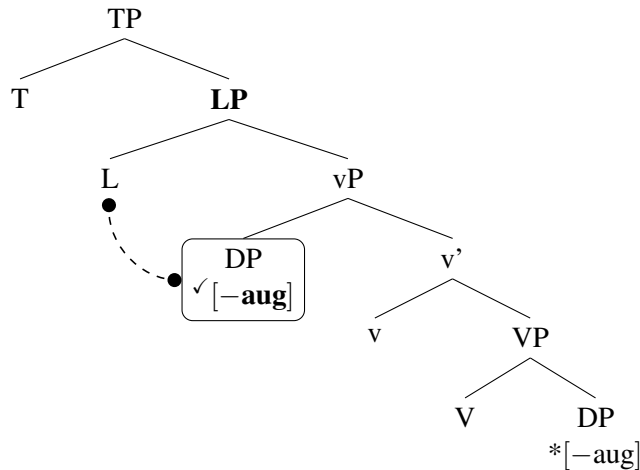
The third pattern of licensing is an SVO sentence with object agreement. Agreed-with objects in Zulu and Ndebele may not be augmentless (12).

(12)   *(U)-Zodwa   a-ka-**yi**-pheki   *(i)-nyama.   Ndebele
        1aug-Zodwa NEG-1s-9o-coook 9aug-9meat
        'Zodwa didn't cook meat'

5

Halpert explains this restriction by an independently motivated claim that agreed-with objects are always dislocated (i.a. Van der Spuy 1993; Buell 2005, 2006; Cheng & Downing 2009; Adams 2010). Object dislocation is evident from the obligatory placement of the object to the right of a vP-level adverb, as in the Ndebele sentence in (13).[4]

(13) U-Zodwa   u-ya-**yi**-pheka   {✓kahle} i-nyama   {*kahle}.   Ndebele
      1aug-Zodwa 1s-DSJ-9o-coook   well   9aug-9meat   well
      'Zodwa cooks meat well'

Dislocation brings the objects outside of the vP and thus outside of the c-command domain of the licensor. Following Van der Spuy 1993; Buell 2005, I analyze right dislocated objects as adjoined to TP.

(14)
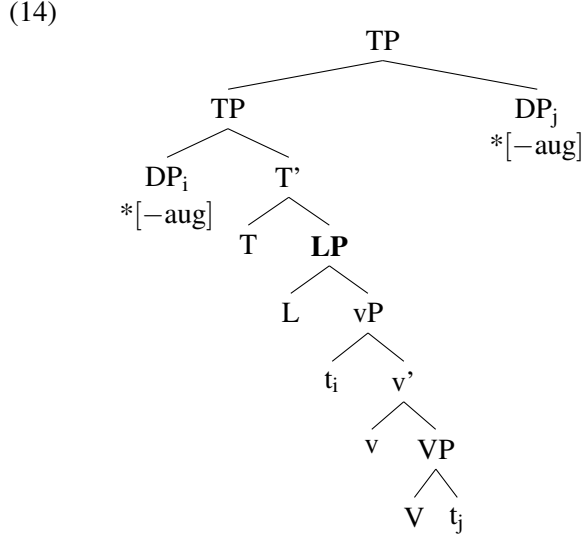
In the structure above, there is no DP left inside the vP, and so no DP receives structural case. Consequently, both the subject and the object must have an augment.

To summarize, we've seen three patterns[5] of augment distribution in transitive sentences: SVO with an in-situ object, VSO and SVO with a dislocated object (diagnosed by the presence of object agreement) (15).

(15)

	Subject	Object	
SV [$_{vP}$ O]	*[−Aug]	✓[−**Aug**]	*object may be augmentless, subject cannot*
V [$_{vP}$ SO]	✓[−**Aug**]	*[−Aug]	*subject may be augmentless, object cannot*
SV [$_{vP}$] O	*[−Aug]	*[−Aug]	*neither subject nor object may be augmentless*

The distribution [−Aug] nominals presented in (15) is captured by Halpert's proposal, in which an augmentless DP must be the highest DP inside the vP. Augmented DPs occur elsewhere.

In this theory, DPs *with* an augment still raise the familiar questions about case discussed above – structural restrictions on their distribution are extremely difficult to find. Thus, previously proposed theories of case in Bantu, which explain the (apparent) absence of case phenomena in those languages, might indeed be

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[4] An additional diagnostic for the dislocated position of the object in (13) is the so called *disjoint* form of the verb (the prefix *ya.* Disjoint forms appear when there is no phrasal material left in the vP. Negative forms of the verb do not have a separate disjoint form, however.

[5] Zulu has a fourth context: in expletive ditransitives (V-S-IO-DO), the indirect object cannot be augmentless or narrowly focused (Halpert 2012, 2015; Carstens & Mletshe 2015a). I do not consider this configuration since Ndebele speakers find expletive ditransitive constructions significantly degraded, irrespective of focus/augment. Regardless, the present goal is to show that there exist positions in which [−Aug] and focus do *not* overlap. Another instance of an overlapping distribution does not change this fact.

needed, but only pertaining to augmented DPs. Halpert's own proposal for augmented DPs is that they are inherently case-marked (by the augment) and are therefore not limited to specific structural positions. An important discovery in Halpert's work, and the one that's relevant here, is that, if we set augmented DPs aside and look exclusively at augmentless DPs, we find what has been thought to be absent in Bantu languages: generalizations about the distribution of nominals, observed in a variety of syntactic contexts, captured by a simple mechanism of structural case licensing.

The case-based analysis of augmentless DPs in Zulu has been challenged by Carstens & Mletshe (2015a), who argue that their distribution is governed by focus, not case. Zulu and related Bantu languages exhibit a high level of discourse-configurationality – there are designated focus and topic positions. Focus positions are diagnosed e.g. by the possibility of modifying a DP with the focus particle *kuphela* 'only'. The key empirical argument Carstens & Mletshe (2015a) present is that augmentless DPs have the same distribution as DPs modified by 'only'. Thus, *only*-DPs are impossible in Spec,TP (16-a), but are licit as in-situ subjects (16-b).

(16) a. *[**U-Zodwa**   **kuphela**] u-pheka i-nyama.   cf. (10)
          1aug-1Zodwa only   1s-cook 9aug-9meat
          Intended:'Only Zodwa cooks meat'

      b. Kupheka [**u-Zodwa**   **kuphela**] i-nyama.   cf. (11)
          17s-cook 1aug-1Zodwa only   9aug-9meat
          'Only Zodwa cooks meat'

They may be objects of SVO sentences but not of VSO sentences:

(17) a. U-Zodwa   u-pheka [**i-nyama**   **kuphela**] .   cf. (10)
          1aug-1Zodwa 1s-cook   9aug-9meat only
          'Zodwa cooks only meat'

      b. *Kupheka u-Zodwa   [**i-nyama**   **kuphela**]**.**   cf. (11)
          17s-cook 1aug-1Zodwa   9aug-9meat only
          Intended: 'Zodwa cooks only meat'

Finally, *only*-DPs are impossible as dislocated objects:

(18) a. *U-Zodwa   u-ya-**yi**-pheka [**i-nyama**   **kuphela**] .   cf. (12)
          1aug-1Zodwa 1s-DSJ-9o-cook   9aug-9meat only
          Intended: 'Zodwa cooks only meat'

Another type of focused DP discussed by Carstens & Mletshe are interrogative pronouns. They have the same distribution as DPs modified by *only*, which the authors explain by treating wh-items as inherently focused. Thus, wh-items cannot be preverbal subjects but they can be subjects in VSO constructions (19); they can be objects in SVO but not in VSO (20); and they cannot be dislocated (21).

(19) a. * **U-bani**   ubone u-Florence.   b. Kubone **u-bani**   u-Florence?
          1aug-1who saw   1aug-Florence   saw   1aug-1who 1aug-Florence
          ('Who saw Florence?')   'Who saw Florence?'

(20) a. U-Zodwa   ubone **u-bani**.   b. *Kubone u-Zodwa   **u-bani**?
          1aug-Zodwa saw   aug-1who   saw   1aug-Zodwa 1aug-1who
          'Who did Zodwa see?'   ('Who did Zodwa see?')

(21)   *U-Zodwa   u-**m**-bonile **u-bani**?
        1aug-Zodwa 1s-1o-saw   1aug-1who
        ('Who did Zodwa see?')

The overlapping distribution of focused DPs and augmentless DPs is summarized in (22)-(23).

(22)

	Subject	Object
SV [$_{vP}$ O]	*[−**Aug**]	✓[−**Aug**]
V [$_{vP}$ SO]	✓[−**Aug**]	*[−**Aug**]
SV [$_{vP}$] O	*[−**Aug**]	*[−**Aug**]

(23)

	Subject	Object
SV [$_{vP}$ O]	*[Foc]	✓[**Foc**]
V [$_{vP}$ SO]	✓[**Foc**]	*[Foc]
SV [$_{vP}$] O	*[Foc]	*[Foc]

Crucial to Carstens & Mletshe's argument is the observation that focused DPs need not be augmentless. In (16-a)-(18-a), all DPs modified by *only* have an augment.[6] Since Halpert's theory is specific to [−Aug] DPs, it cannot derive the parallel between (22) and (23). An independent mechanism would be needed to derive licit focus positions, incidentally outputting the same set of position as the case-licensing mechanism. Carstens & Mletshe argue, reasonably, that missing the obvious parallelism is undesired. Instead, they propose that (22) is really a subcase of (23). They take [−Aug] DPs to be NPIs and assume that NPIs bear a [+Foc] feature. This feature is also present on DPs modified by *only* and on wh-phrases. Under this view, there is no need for a separate case licensing mechanism deriving the distribution of augmentless DPs. Their distribution falls out from a more general distribution of focused DPs.[7]

While Carstens & Mletshe's argument is convincing, it turns out to be empirically incorrect when confronted with a broader set of facts. Based on Ndebele data, I show in the next section that the distribution of focused DPs and [−Aug] DPs is not fully overlapping. Moreover, the non-overlapping set of contexts is predicted by Halpert's case-licensing theory. I illustrate this with wh-items, but the same facts can be reproduced with *only*-modified DPs.

3   Evidence against reducing [−**Aug**] licensing to focus

Recall that, unlike other DPs, wh-items need not cooccur with negation to be augmentless. The configurational constraints discussed above are all that governs the distribution of augmentless wh-items. According to Carstens & Mletshe 2015a, an augmentless DP is a type of focused DP. Thus, any position in which focused DPs are allowed is a position in which augmentless DPs are allowed. The consequence for wh-items, which are invariably focused, is that they can always be augmentless. This is indeed what Carstens & Mletshe show is true in Zulu and Xhosa, and the facts they give as illustration can be reproduced in Ndebele. As shown below, as long as the wh-item appears in a licit focus position, it can be augmentless (24-b), (25-a). Similarly, non-focus positions are incompatible with wh-items, whether the wh-phrase has an augment or not ((24-a), (25-b) and (26)).

(24)   a.   * **(U)-bani**   ubone u-Florence.   b.   Kubone **(u)-bani**   u-Florence?
             1aug-1who saw   1aug-Florence   saw   1aug-1who 1aug-Florence
             ('Who saw Florence?')   'Who saw Florence?'

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[6] In fact, the augment is obligatory there since the sentences lack negation (and they are not wh-items).

[7] Carstens & Mletshe briefly discuss one potential problem for their claim, also observed in Buell 2009; Halpert 2012. While objects in VSO sentences cannot be augmentless, they can, at least for some speakers, be wh-items. Halpert interprets this asymmetry as evidence that [−Aug] DPs do not have the distribution of focused DPs. Carstens & Mletshe view it as weak evidence since the speakers who accept wh-items in this position report an emphatic/echo reading of such as wh-question. They tentatively assume that wh-items in echo questions do not have a focus feature, and thus don't constitute counterevidence to their claim that augmentless DPs are a type of focused DPs.

(25) a. U-Zodwa   ubone **(u)-bani**.   b. *Kubone u-Zodwa   **(u)-bani**?
          1aug-Zodwa saw   aug-1who   saw   1aug-Zodwa 1aug-1who
          'Who did Zodwa see?'   ('Who did Zodwa see?')

(26) *U-Zodwa   u-**m**-bonile **(u)-bani**?
      1aug-Zodwa 1s-1o-saw   1aug-1who
      ('Who did Zodwa see?')

 Carstens & Mletshe's prediction that wh-items can always be augmentless breaks down when we consider a broader range of facts. The counterexamples come from the distribution of preverbal subjects in Ndebele. Recall that the preverbal subjection position is not a focus position – both in the languages analyzed by Carstens & Mletshe (Zulu and Xhosa) and in Ndebele. However, we have only considered one clause type – matrix indicative clauses. It turns out that preverbal subjects may be focused in other clause types in Ndebele: i) subjunctive clauses (28), ii) relative clauses (29) and iii) participial clauses (30). Embedded indicative clauses are like matrix clauses in that their preverbal subjects cannot be focused DPs (27).

(27) *U-cabanga [ukuthi **u-bani**   u-za-buya]?   *indicative clause*
      2sg-think   COMP 1aug-1who 1s-FUT-come
      Indended: 'Who do you think will come?'

(28) U-funa   [ukuthi **u-bani**   a-buye]?   *subjunctive clause*
      2sg-want   COMP 1aug-1who 1s-come.SBJV
      'Who do you want to come?'

(29) U-zwe   ingoma [**u-bani**   a-yi-hlabelileyo]?   *relative clause*
      2sg-heard 9song   1aug-1who 1s-9o-sing.PST
      'Who is such that you heard the song that they sang?'

(30) U-za-pheka   [**u-bani**   e-nga-ka-fiki]?   *participial clause*
      2sg-FUT-cook   1aug-1who 1s-NEG-yet-arrive
      'Who is such that you will cook before they arrive?'
      (lit. You will cook who not having arrived yet?)

This asymmetry between root(-like) indicative clauses and other clause types is not itself problematic for Carstens & Mletshe's idea to assimilate [−Aug] to focus (and it's a pattern that has been observed in other Bantu languages, e.g. Schneider-Zioga 2007 for Kinande, and partially by Carstens & Zeller (to appear) for Zulu). The problem lies in the fact that the licit focus positions in (28)-(30) are not licit [−Aug] positions:

(31) *U-funa   [ukuthi **bani** a-buye]?   *subjunctive clause*
      2sg-want   COMP 1who 1s-come.SBJV
      Indended: 'Who do you want to come?'

(32) *U-zwe   ingoma [**bani** a-yi-hlabelileyo]?   *relative clause*
      2sg-heard 9song   1who 1s-9o-sing.PST
      Indended: 'Who is such that you heard the song that they sang?'

(33) *U-za-pheka   [**bani** e-nga-ka-fiki]?   *participial clause*
      2sg-FUT-cook   1who 1s-NEG-yet-arrive
      Indended: 'Who is such that you will cook before they arrive?'

The data in (28)-(33) are a clear case of dissociation of [−Aug] and focus, falsifying the claim that licensing of [−Aug] DPs can be subsumed under an independently needed theory of focus licensing. Carstens & Mletshe

do not consider the contexts in (28)-(30), and so it is unclear if Zulu and Xhosa differ from Ndebele in this respect (see, however, later work by Carstens & Zeller (to appear), who report that the preverbal subject position of subjunctive and relative clauses is for some speakers of Zulu a licit focus position).

This asymmetry between indicative clauses and other clause types disappears if the subject remains in situ, in which case the subject can be focused and [−Aug] (the paradigm does not contain a relative clause due to an independent ban on relativization across an in-situ subject).

(34) U-cabanga [ukuthi ku-za-buya **bani**]?   *indicative clause*
      2sg-think   COMP 17s-FUT-come 1who
      'Who do you thing will come?'

(35) U-funa   [ukuthi ku-buye   **bani**]?   *subjunctive clause*
      2sg-want   COMP 17s-come.SBJV 1who
      'Who do you want to come?'

(36) U-za-pheka   [ku-nga-ka-fiki   **bani**]?   *participial clause*
      2sg-FUT-cook   17s-NEG-yet-arrive 1who
      'Who is such that you will cook before they arrive?'

We thus arrive at the following distribution of subject DPs ("regular DP" in the table below refers to a non-focused [+Aug] DP).
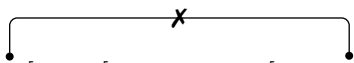
(37)

	regular DP	focused DP	[−Aug] DP
SV (indicative)	✓	✗	✗
SV (subjunctive)	✓	✓	✗
SV (relative clause)	✓	✓	✗
SV (participle)	✓	✓	✗
VS (any clause type)	✓	✓	✓

The conclusion from (37) is straightforward: whatever [−Aug] licensing is, it is not the same mechanism as focus licensing. In the next section, I show that the last column in (37) is predicted by Halpert's case licensing analysis. I then sketch an analysis deriving the middle column – the unavailability of focused preverbal subjects only in indicative clauses.

4   Deriving the imperfect correlation between focus and [−**Aug**]

4.1   [−**Aug**] subject positions

The impossibility [−Aug] licensing in the new contexts discussed above can be straightforwardly accounted for by Halpert 2012's structural case theory, in which structural case is assigned to the highest nominal in the vP and is spelled out as an augmentless DP. Assuming that case licensing is clause-bound, preverbal subjects cannot be reached by the matrix licensor due to an intervening clausal boundary:

(38) $[_{TP} [_{LP} \text{L} [_{VP} ... [_{\textbf{clause boundary}} [_{TP} \textit{subject} [_{LP} \text{L} ...]]]]]]$

This is true for preverbal subjects of indicative, subjunctive and relative clauses alike.

The case of participial adjunct clauses, such as (39) (repeated from (30)), is less transparent – they have no complementizer or other ostensibly left peripheral material.

10

(39) U-za-pheka [**u-bani** e-nga-ka-fiki]? *participial clause*
      2sg-FUT-cook 1aug-1who 1s-NEG-yet-arrive
      'Who is such that you will cook before they arrive?'
      (lit. You will cook who not having arrived yet?)

It is less obvious, then, that the category of the adjunct is itself opaque for case licensing. What I believe is crucial, however, is the hight of adjunction relative to the licensor. It appears that the adjunct clause attaches outside of the c-command domain of the licensor, as shown in (40). This is perhaps not surprising given that the events expressed by the matrix clause and the adjunct are ordered temporally with one another, suggesting an adjunction site within the tense domain.

(40)
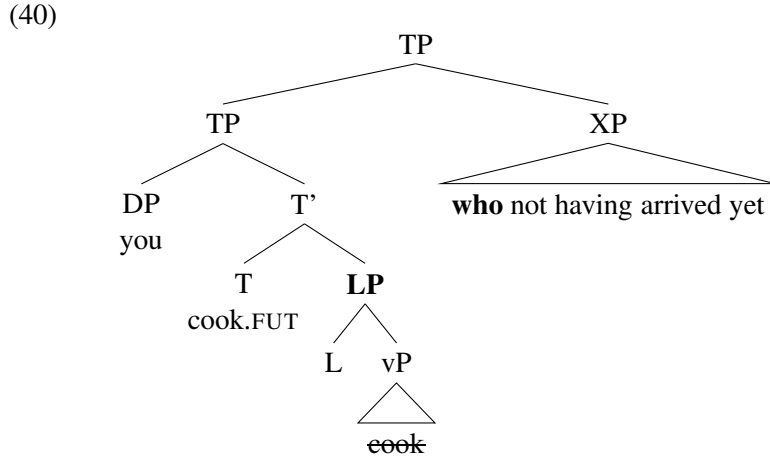
Recall that all clause types allow an augmentless subject as long as it remains inside the vP. This is expected since, in this position, the subject is locally c-commanded by the embedded licensor. Thus, Halpert's case licensing theory correctly derives the attested distribution of $[-\text{Aug}]$ subjects – the last column in (41).

(41)   DPs types in various subject positions

	regular DP	focus DP	$[-\text{Aug}]$ DP
SV (indicative)	✓	✗	✗
SV (subjunctive)	✓	✓	✗
SV (relative clause)	✓	✓	✗
SV (participle)	✓	✓	✗
VS (any clause type)	✓	✓	✓

4.2 Focused subject positions

Carstens & Mletshe 2015a, following Sabel & Zeller 2006; Zeller 2008, account for the topical nature of preverbal subjects by assigning an anti-focus status to that position. Recall that they consider only indicative clauses. In order to account for the difference between indicative and other clause types in the middle column of (41), their analysis would have to stipulate that Spec,TP is an anti-focus position only in indicative clauses.

A different way to implement this distinction is to posit that the preverbal subject position in indicative clauses is not Spec,TP (unlike in the other clause types). Rather, it's a higher position – call it Spec,TopP, following previous literature on the topical nature of preverbal subjects (Bresnan & Mchombo 1987; Letsholo 2002; Baker 2003; Henderson 2006; Schneider-Zioga 2000, 2007; Bliss & Storoshenko 2009; Pietraszko 2017; Carstens & Zeller to appear, among others). By hypothesis, narrowly focused phrases cannot be peripheral and must instead appear within the TP.

I propose that the indicative periphery in Ndebele has the shape in (42)-a. Subjunctive clauses are smaller, as shown in (42)-b.

(42)   a. Indicative: [$_{\text{ForceP}}$ *Comp* [$_{\text{TopP}}$ *subject* [$_{\Sigma\text{P}}$ [$_{\text{FinP}_{\text{Ind}}}$ [$_{\text{TP}}$]]]]]]
           b. Subjunctive: [$_{\text{FinP}_{\text{Sbjv}}}$ *Comp* [$_{\text{TP}}$ *subject*]]]]]]

In the absence of ForceP, I assume that the complementizer is located in Fin in subjunctive clauses. The two are illustrated in (43), which also shows the asymmetry between them in allowing preverbal focus:

(43)   a.   Ngi-cabaga [$_{\text{ForceP}}$ ukuthi a-bafana   (*kuphela) ba-za-pheka.]   *indicative*
           1sg-think   COMP 2aug-2boys (*only)   2s-FUT-cook
           'I think that (*only) the boys will cook.'

        b.   Ngi-funa [$_{\text{FinP}}$ ukuthi a-bafana   kuphela ba-pheke.]   *subjunctive*
           1sg-want   COMP 2aug-2boys only   2s-cook.SBJV
           'I want it to be the case that only the boys will cook.'

Subjunctive clauses lack TopP, the only preverbal subject position being Spec,TP. Unlike Spec,TopP, Spec,TP is a position compatible with focus, deriving the contrast in the availability of *only* in (43).[8]

Independent evidence for the reduced periphery of subjunctive clauses comes from negation marking. Negation in indicative clauses is expressed by a prefix on the entire verbal complex, including the subject agreement prefix (44).

(44)   Ngi-cabaga ukuthi a-bafana   **a**-ba-pheki.   *indicative*
        1sg-think   COMP 2aug-2boys NEG-2s-cook
        'I think that the boys do not cook.'

I assume that this prefix is an exponent of Σ – the head of a left-peripheral polarity phrase, shown in (42)-a. The high negation marker is unavailable in subjunctive clauses (45-a), revealing the lack ΣP. Instead, negative morphology in this clause type appears below the agreement-hosting category (45-b).

(45)   a.   *Ngi-funa ukuthi a-bafana   **a**-ba-pheki.   *subjunctive*
           1sg-want COMP 2aug-2boys NEG-2s-cook
           Indended: 'I want it to be the case that only the boys will cook.'

        b.   Ngi-funa ukuthi a-bafana   ba-**nga**-pheki.
           1sg-want COMP 2aug-2boys 2s-NEG-cook
           'I want it to be the case that only the boys will cook.'

Relative and participial clauses show the same reduced-size effects: in addition to allowing focused subjects, negation is obligatorily marked by the low negative prefix (46)-(47).

(46)   a.   U-za-pheka   [ngi-**nga**-ka-fiki   ]   *participial clause*
           2sg-FUT-cook   1sg-NEG-yet-arrive
           'You will cook before I arrive."

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[8] The topicality of preverbal subjects in Bantu has been shown to be different than the topicality of unambiguously dislocated phrases (including dislocated subjects). For instance, Halpert 2012; Van der Wal 2009 show (for Zulu and Makhuwa, respectively) that quantified DPs can appear as preverbal subjects, but cannot be dislocated. This is true in Ndebele as well. Preverbal subjects in these languages are then perhaps better characterized as resisting narrow focus (cf. Zeller (2008)'s antifocus feature). This means that Spec,TopP, the subject position in indicative clauses, is not a dislocated position. It's a positions that always attracts the subject DP, bringing it out of the focus field. See Bliss & Storoshenko 2009; Pietraszko 2017 for an analysis of Top^0 as an agreement probe which, due to locality, always attracts the subject to its specifier.

    b. *U-za-pheka   [**a**-ngi-(ka)-fiki   ]
       2sg-FUT-cook   NEG-1sg-(yet)-arrive
       Indended: 'You will cook before I arrive.'

(47) a. U-a-hlabela i-ngoma [e-ngi-**nga**-yi-thandayo.]   *relative clause*
       2sg-PST-sing 9aug-9song REL-1sg-NEG-9o-like
       'You sang the song that I don't like'

    b. *U-a-hlabela i-ngoma [{**a**}-e-{**a**}-ngi-yi-thandayo.   ]
       2sg-PST-sing 9aug-9song {NEG}-REL-{NEG}-1sg-9o-like
       Intended: 'You sang the song that I don't like'

It is possible that relative and participial clauses are even smaller than subjunctive clauses as they lack an overt complementizer.[9] Their exact category is not crucial, however. What matters is that their periphery is at least as reduced as that of subjunctive clauses, with the consequence that preverbal subjects appear in Spec,TP – a focus-compatible position.

Finally, since in-situ subjects are not in Spec,TopP, they may be in focus. We then arrive at the distribution of focused subjects in (41) (middle column), i.e. where the ban on focused subjects holds only for preverbal subjects of indicative clauses.

We have seen in this section that the non-overlapping set of contexts for [−Aug] and focused DPs follow from Halpert's case licensing theory for [−Aug] nominals and a fairly straightforward view of the left periphery in various clause types. It is important to keep in mind that the main claim, i.e. that [−Aug] cannot be reduced to focus, holds irrespective of what analysis we adopt to derive licit focus positions.

5 Conclusion

I demonstrated that reducing [−Aug] licensing in Ndebele to focus licensing is impossible. I further showed that the case-theoretic approach to augmentless nouns proposed in Halpert 2012, 2015 predicts exactly the contexts in which [−Aug] and focus come apart – preverbal subjects of clauses which don't require their subjects to be topical (all but declarative indicative clauses). Importantly, [−Aug] cannot be reduced to other semantic categories, either: augmentless nouns are not systematically NPIs (wh-items don't need negation to be augmentless), nor are they invariably indefinites (proper names can be augmentless, as well). This means that, despite their frequent interpretation as NPIs, indefinites and focused DPs, augmentless nominals are coextensive with none of them.

The question remains why the lack of augment so systematically correlates with indefiniteness, NPI-hood and focus. While a more insightful answer is likely possible, it is not uncommon for case to correlate with such interpretive effects (differential argument marking, Genitive of Negation in Russian). Moreover, it is not my conclusion that [−Aug] licensing is structural case in all Bantu languages. What I do conclude is that Ndebele is a Bantu language in which nominals with special morphology are restricted to a structurally predicable set of positions, and that this distribution is not coextensive with the distribution of any semantically defined class of DPs. This I consider compelling evidence for structural case in the language.

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[9] The relative marker *a* (and its class-covarying variants) has been analyzed as the relative complementizer (Khumalo 1992; Demuth & Harford 1999; Zeller 2004, 2006; Cheng 2006; Henderson 2006, 2007, among others). For a different treatment of the *a* marker, namely as a nominal linker, see Pietraszko 2019. This analytical choice is not crucial here.

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