

## Language Documentation & Linguistic Theory 2

**Gender and person markers in Cicipu discourse: 'non-topical' and 'topical' anaphoric agreement**

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## Gender and person markers in Cicipu discourse: “non-topical” and “topical” anaphoric agreement

The Cicipu language (Kainji, Benue-Congo) of northwest Nigeria has the kind of robust noun class system characteristic of Benue-Congo languages – gender agreement is found on a great many agreement targets inside and outside the noun phrase. For a number of these targets in Cicipu (and other Kainji and Plateau languages), gender agreement is in competition with a separate paradigm, that of person agreement. Example (a) shows class 1 *gender* agreement on the verb, while (b) shows gender-neutral *person* agreement.

- (a) kà-ràkúmí, k̀d̀-̀d̀ohò                      or (b) kà-ràkúmí, ù-̀d̀ohò  
NC1-camel    AG1-disappear\RLS<sup>1</sup>                      NC1-camel    3S-disappear\RLS  
*the camel, it disappeared*

This paper focuses on the distribution of this alternation with respect to subject prefixes and pronouns, based on a corpus of 12,000 clauses of spoken Cicipu.

The alternation proves to be complex to describe, involving a constellation of lexical, phonological, morphosyntactic, semantic and discourse-pragmatic factors. In particular, both animacy and topicality are CONDITIONS (Corbett 2006) on agreement. While inanimate or animal participants normally trigger gender agreement, if they are topics then they may trigger person agreement. Likewise while human nouns typically trigger person agreement, this is not always the case, and gender agreement is more likely if the referent is of incidental importance to the discourse. Furthermore it is argued that this alternation is sensitive to *discourse* topic (e.g. Dooley 2007) rather than sentence topic (e.g. Lambrecht 1994).

Both gender and person subject prefixes are ambiguous agreement markers according to the typology of Bresnan and Mchombo (1987) and Siewierska (1999), since both can take part in grammatical or anaphoric agreement. Thus the Cicipu data supports Culy's (2000) contention that topicality is an independent dimension for the classification of agreement markers, rather than derivative of the grammatical vs. anaphoric agreement distinction, and leads us to re-evaluate the common assumption that dependent person markers cannot vary with respect to their discourse function (e.g. Siewierska 2004: 67).

Bresnan, Joan & Sam A. Mchombo. 1987. Topic, pronoun, and agreement in Chichewa. *Language* 63(4), 741-82.

Corbett, Greville G. 2006. *Agreement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Culy, Christopher. 2000. An incorporated topic marker in Takelma. In Miriam Butt & Tracy Holloway King (eds.), *Proceedings of the LFG 00 Conference, University of California, Berkeley*, 63-81. Stanford: CSLI Publications.

Dooley, Robert A. 2007. Explorations in discourse topicality. *SIL Electronic Working Papers*. <http://www.sil.org/silewp/2007/silewp2007-010.pdf>

Lambrecht, Knud. 1994. *Information structure and sentence form*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Siewierska, Anna. 1999. From anaphoric pronoun to grammatical agreement marker: why objects don't make it. In Greville G. Corbett (ed.), *Agreement (Special Issue of Folia Linguistica 33/2)*, 225-51. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

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1 3S = third-person singular, AG1 = class 1 agreement, NC1 = class 1 noun prefix, RLS = realis.

Siewierska, Anna. 2004. *Person*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.