

Building Topics in Guiziga: A Cartographic Perspective

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Abstract—This article attempts to provide a description of topic constructions in the Guiziga language within the cartographic framework. Data for this work were collected using both the primary and secondary source. The analyses reveal that this language does not select topicalizers as it is the case in other Chadic languages (Bebey 2015 and 2018). It also demonstrates that the topicalized constituents undergo an upward movement to land in the Spec,Top, while it leaves an empty trace in the original position. The language tolerates multiple Topic Phrases (TopP) in the sentence left periphery. Also, it is demonstrated that the subject –NP involves the apparition of the presumptive pronoun given the prominence of the latter. At the semantic level, the article indicates that topics in Guiziga are revelations about old information, rather than simple old information.

Index Terms—topicalization, upward movement, left periphery, multiple topics, revelation

I. INTRODUCTION

Topicality is a property of the nominal participants (referents), most commonly subject as objects of clauses, propositional information which are coded in state or event clauses. Some topical participant(s) in the state events are subject, direct object or indirect object of the clause. Typically, they are noun phrases (entities) rather than verbs (events) or adjectives (states). Whole events or states are always nominalised when they are made topical. In spite of being grammatically manifest at the clausal level, topicality is not a clause dependent property of referent, but a discourse well-coded clause of context. Otherwise, what makes participants topical is not the fact that they are grammatically coded as topical (subject, object) in the self-contained clause across a certain span of multi-clausal discourse, it is their status of being recurrent referents in the discourse.

The present article intends to describe the concept of topics in Guiziga, a Chadic language spoken in the Far-North region of Cameroon. The article is made up of nine sections.

II. THE LANGUAGE CLASSIFICATION AND WORD ORDER

A. The Language Classification

According to *Ethnologies*, Guiziga is classified under the Afro-Asiatic phylum, Chadic family and Biu-Mandara branch. The speakers inhabit primarily in the northern part of Cameroon and the south-western Chad. There are approximately 100,000 Guiziga native speakers. The basic word order in Guiziga is strictly SVO as illustrated in the example below:

- a) Zrey á kíǎ́m ballon ngi heney mutsohom
Children SM.3pl play football Det. week past
The children played football last week.

The direct complement must occur after the verb and be adjacent to it. Although in some Mandara languages, the subject NP can either appear in preverbal or post verbal position, in Guiziga, it is preferred in the preverbal position. The subject marker is positioned between the subject NP and the verb.

B. Guiziga: A Null Subject Language

Thematic subjects can be freely omitted in the language. As it is the case in Muyang and Mada (Bebey 2010 and 2015, Russel 2017 and Biloa 2019), Guiziga is said to be a null subject or pro-drop language. In other words, an empty category called pro is licensed in the language thematic subject position. So, if the NP subject “zrey” in (a) is dropped in the sentence (b) below, it will still be grammatically correct.

- b) **Pro** á kíǎ́m ballon ngi heney mutsohom
SM.3pl play football Det. week past
They played football last week.

III. TONES

On the surface form, Guiziga has High, Low, Middle tones. While HL falling tones do occur, LH rising tones are much rarer and appear never to occur on a single vowel. Our different examples such as sentences (a) and (b) of the preceding sections reveal that only vowels can carry tones in Guiziga.

IV. THE GUIZIGA SENTENCE PROJECTION

This section deals with the description of the Guiziga sentence. It analyzes its projection with a special focus on the different constituents.

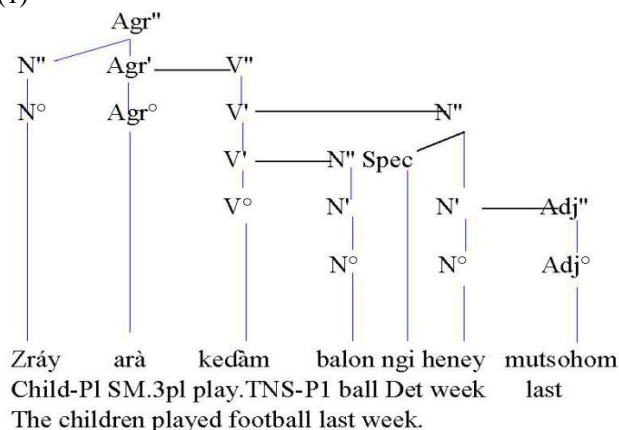
A. The Guiziga Sentence: A Projection of the Agreement Phrase

Given the selection of the lexical item between the NP subject and the verb that bear their agreement features, Bebey (2015) proposes that the majority of Chadic languages are projections of the Agreement Phrase whose head is filled by the agreement or subject marker in the sense of Jean-Yves Pollock (1989) and subsequent works. Let us consider the following paradigm to see how the Guiziga sentence is structured.

- a) Zr áy ar à ked àm balon ngi heney mutsohom l è
Child-P1 SM.3pl play.TNS-P1 ball Det week last TNS.P1
The children played football last week.
- b) *Zr áy ked àm balon ngi heney mutsohom l è
Child-P1 play.TNS-P1 ball Det week last TNS.P1
The children played football last week.
- c) Peter à zub à Suzan l è
Peter SM.3ps marry.TNS.P1 Suzan TNS.P1
Peter married Suzan.
- d) *Peter zub à Suzan l è
Peter marry.TNS.P1 Suzan TNS.P1
Peter married Suzan.
- e) John à vul à dáf da Mary ana hay ngi ngadama
John SM.3sg give.TNS-P1 food to Mary at house Def today
John gave food to Mary in the house today.
- f) À vul à dáf da Mary ana hay ngi ngadama
SM.3sg give.TNS-P1 food to Mary at house Def today
He gave food to Mary in the house today.
- g) Mary à zùm pan ngi hay ngi dubum meprik
Mary SM.3sg eat.TNS-P1 bread Det house Det learning morning
Mary ate bread in school this morning.
- h) À zùm pan ngi hay ngi dubum meprik
SM.3sg eat.TNS-P1 bread Det house Det learning morning
She ate bread in school this morning.

A sight at the structures of sentences (a), (c), (e) and (g) reveals that there is a lexically realised morpheme that occurs between the NP subject and the verb and bears their agreement features. In the absence of the subject nouns, as it is the case in (f) and (h), one realises that the constructions always remain acceptable. However, the language does not tolerate sentences without this lexical element like in sentences (b) and (d). Such an observation indicates those elements which mark subject or agreement properties are obligatory in Guiziga like in many Chadic languages (Bebey 2015, Biloa 2019), an analysis that comforts the assumptions that the Guiziga-type languages are projections of Agreement Phrase (AgrP). Thus, the agreement marker (the subject marker) fills the maximal projection of the AgrP that takes the NP subject as specifier and the verb as complement as illustrated in the familiar fashion:

(1)



When the tense is marked by tones, it is attached to the VP for the Economy Principle. The latter is projected when it is overt.

B. The Tense Phrase (TP)

In Guiziga, tense can be overtly marked and, of course, have a maximal projection occupied by a lexically realized tense marker.

1. Morphology

Richards and al. (1985) consider tense as the relationship between the phonetic form of the verb and the time of the action or state it describes. For Comrie (1986), it is a grammaticalized location in time. In Guiziga, tense is marked by tones and lexically realized morphemes. The past tense for instance is morphologically marked by the association of a Low Tone on the subject marker and the ultimate vowel of the verb and the morpheme *l'é*. The constituent *rá* is used to mark the present progressive tense, while *-s á* is used for the simple future. Consider the examples below:

- a) Ndur ì zum àm l'é tá
We SM.1pl eat.TNS.TNS.P1 Neg
We did not eat.
- b) Ndur ì tuwám l'é tá
We SM.1pl cry.TNS.TNS.P1 Neg
We did not cry.

One notices that when the sentence is negative, the tense marker is placed between the verb the negative marker at the terminal position.

2. The syntactic cartography of TP

In general, tense, particularly the simple past tense (P1), is overtly marked in Guiziga. Apart from the Low Tone on the subject marker and the verb last vowel, there is a lexically realized morpheme *l'è* that occurs in the sentence final position. Let us look at the following sentences:

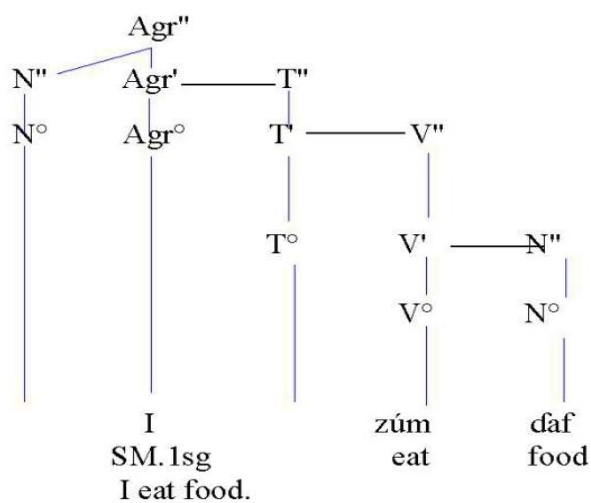
- a) Seini à zub à Suzan l'è
Seini SM.3sg marry Suzan TNS.P1
Seini married Suzan.
- b) Ndra ì zum àm dáf l'è
We SM.1pl eat.TNS-P1 food TNS-P1
We ate food.
- c) Guizigahay à huv àm daw l'è
Guiziga-P1 SM.3pl cultivate millet TNS-P1
The Guiziga people cultivated millet.
- d) Guizigahay à huv àm daw
Guiziga-P1 SM.3pl cultivate millet
The Guiziga people cultivated millet.
- e) I rá zúm dáf
SM.1sg go eat food
I will eat food.

A remark is relevant when one considers the paradigm above: tense can be marked prosodically, lexically or by an adjacent occurrence of finite verbs. Questions that arise from this observation are the following:

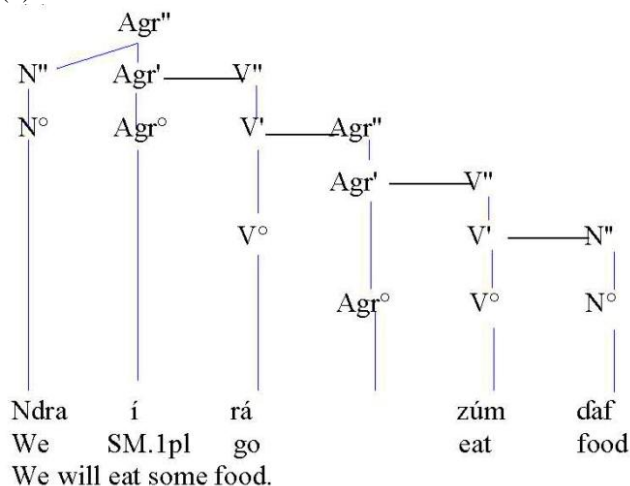
- Does the Guiziga TP conform the Chomsky X-bar theory?
- Does Guiziga allow lowering?
- What accounts for the sentence linear order?

To answer those questions, let us assume that, for the Economy Principle as mentioned in the preceding section, the TP is attached to the VP when it is prosodically marked; it requires the projections of two Agreement Phrases when it is materialized by adjacent finite verbs as illustrated by the tree diagram below.

(2)

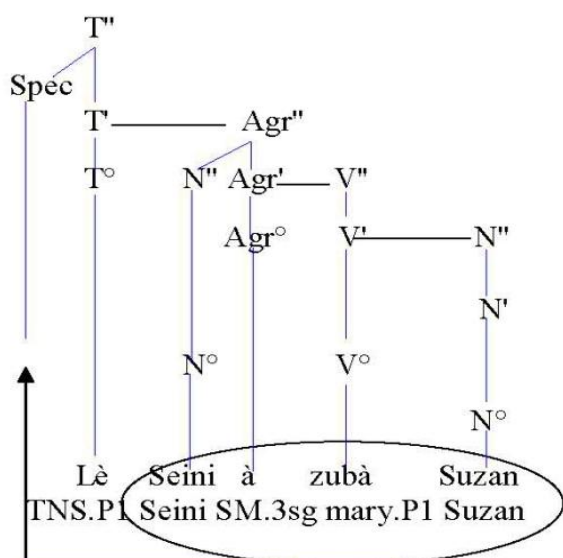


(3)



The sentence-final-position tense marking assumes that Guiziga is an example of languages that range higher constituents in the right periphery. Reasoning in the sense of Kayne (1994)'s LCA approach, a such construction supposes that the TP scopes over the sentence, then, the entire Agreement Phrase is piedpiped to the Spec,T in order to suit the language word order. The tree diagram that follows is more illustrative of such an analysis:

(4)



C. The Negation Phrase

Negation is very complex in African languages (Tamanji and Mutaka 2000). While it appears in duplicated morphemes with one copy occurring at the sentence final position in some languages, it is placed in the sentence beginning in others.

1. The negative sentence formation

Contrary to some Chadic languages which select numerous markers, Guiziga uses *tá* as the morpheme sentential negation. Let us consider the examples below:

- a) Dada á zúm tá
Mother SM.3sg eat Neg
Mother is not eating.
- b) Anta á rám tá
They SM.3pl go Neg
They are not going.
- c) Nang à zúm tá
He SM.3sg eat Neg
He has not eaten.
- d) John à kidà Suzan lé tá
John SM.3sg beat.TNS Suzan TNS.P1 Neg
John did not beat Suzan.
- e) Ndra ì zumàm lé tá
We SM.1pl eat.TNS TNS.P1 Neg
We did not eat.
- f) Ndra ì tuwám lé tá
We SM.1pl cry.TNS TNS.P1 Neg
We did not cry.

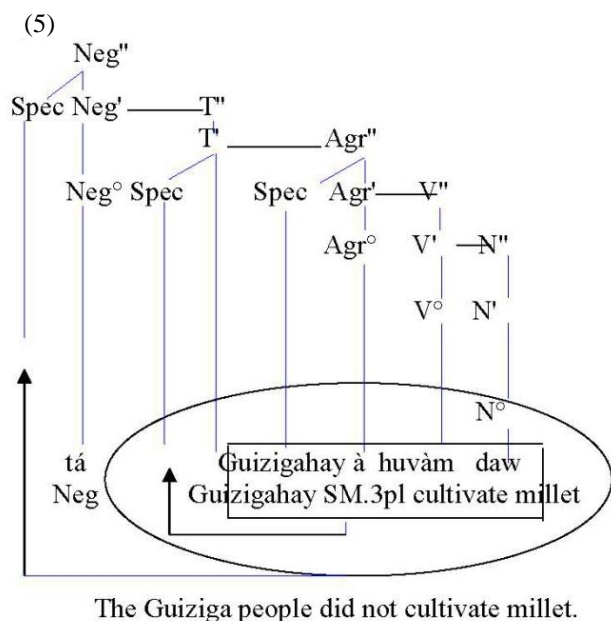
Here, one notices that the distribution of the unique negation morpheme *tá* is fixed: it is based in the sentence final position, after the tense morpheme when the latter is overt. However, one should note that in Guiziga, the sentential negation marker is not different from adverbs of negations.

2. The structure of NegP

Let us observe the structure of the Guiziga negative sentences that follow:

- a) Seini à zubà Suzan tá
Seini SM.3sg marry.TNS-P1 Suzan Neg
Seini did not marry Suzan.
- b) Ndra ì zumàm đaf tá
We SM.1pl eat-TNS.P1 food Neg
We did not eat food.
- c) Guizigahay à huvàm daw tá
Guizigahay SM.3pl cultivate millet Neg
The Guiziga people did not cultivate millet.
- d) *Guizigahay à huvàm daw lè tá
Guizigahay SM.3pl cultivate millet TNS.P1 Neg
The Guiziga people did not cultivate millet.

Sentences above show that the negation marker stands in the sentence final position. Also, one notices that it competes with the overt tense marker in (d). It is the low tone bore by both the agreement marker and the verb ultimate vowel that indicates tense. This remark reveals that piedpiping and remnant movement are operational, in the sense of Kayne (1994), Nkemnji (1995) and Bebey (2015), to account for the linear order of the language, meaning that the Negation Phrase (NegP) dominates the entire sentence which shifts to Spec,T and from TP to Spec, Neg as we can see on the following tree marker.



V. TOPIC MORPHOLOGY

Let us consider the following sentences.

- a) Maï, ----- á s á zladibis é ant á
Princess SM.3sg fut sing song
The princess, she will sing a song.
- b) Ballon, zrey à kid'am ----- ngi heney mutsohom
Football, children SM.3pl play-TNS.P1 Det. week last
Football, the children played last week

Sentences (a) and (b) above show that in Guiziga, each time there is topicalization, the target constituent moves upward to occupy a pre-predicative (sentence initial) position. It is separated from the corresponding predicative by punctuation. Contrary to Muyang (Bebey 2015 and 2018), Mandara, Mada, Zulgo, etc. which are biu-mandara Chadic languages, topicalizers are not attested in Guiziga. Moreover, the topicalized constituents do not occur in the sentence final position like other C-constituents such as interrogatives and focused elements that characterize Chadic languages. In fact, topicalization is not lexically indicated. This remark is an indication that this syntactic operation is one of the most complex in the study of the morphology and the syntax of the sentence left periphery in Guiziga's phylum and no generalization of analyses could account for the structures of all the languages.

VI. TOPIC EXTRACTION AND COREFERENCE

Some Chadic languages require lexical items to mark topicalization. Contrary to interrogation and focalization that shift the target constituents, they are placed in sentence initial each time there is topicalization as demonstrated in Bebey (2015 and 2018). Let us consider the following sentences to see how it occurs in Guiziga:

- a) Zrey à kid'am ballon ngi heney mutsohom
Children SM.3pl play-TNS.P1 football Det week past
The children played football last week"
- b) Zrey, tang à kid'am ballon ngi heney mutsohom
Children they SM.3pl play-TNS.P1 football Det week last
Children, they played football last week.
- c) Ballon, zrey à kid'am ----- ngi heney mutsohom
Football, children SM.3pl play-TNS.P1 Det week last
Football, the children played last week.
- d) Ngì heney mutsohom, zrey n à kid'à-ka ballon -----
Ngì heney mutsohom, zrey n à kid'àk à ballon
Det week last children SM.3pl play-TNS.P2 football
Last week, the children have played football.
- e) Peter à zub à Susan
Peter SM.3sg marry-TNS.P1 Susan
Peter married Susan
- f) Peter, nang à zub à-m-vule ái Susan

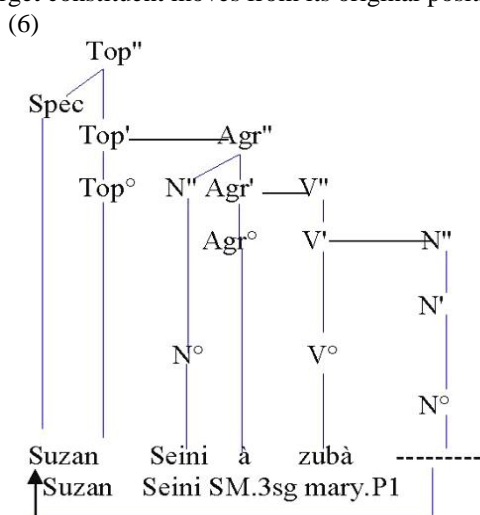
- Peter, nang à zubamvul è áí Susan
 Peter, he SM.3sg marry-TNS.P1-Rec with Susan
 Peter, he got marry to Susan.
- g) John à vul à dáf da Aplamvu arhay ngi di dáf ngadama
 John SM.3sg give-TNS.P1. food to Aplamvu house Det of food today
 John gave food to Aplamvu in the kitchen today.
- h) John, nang à vul à dáf da Aplamvu arhay ngi di dáf ngadama
 John he SM.3sg give-TNS.P1. food to Aplamvu house Det of food today
 John, he gave food to Aplamvu in the kitchen today.
- i) Daf, John à vul à ----- da Aplamvu arhay ngi di ngadama
 Food John SM.3sg give-TNS.P1. to Aplamvu house Det of today
 Some food, John gave to Aplamvu in the kitchen today.
- j) Ngadama John à vul à dáf da Aplamvu arhay ngi di dáf-----
 Today John SM.3sg give-TNS.P1. food to Aplamvu house Det of food
 Today, John gave food to Aplamvu in the kitchen today.
- k) Arhay ngi di dáf, John à vul à dáf da Aplamvu ----- ngadama
 House Det of food John SM.3sg give-TNS.P1. food to Aplamvu today
 In the kitchen, John gave food to Aplamvu today.

A sight at the paradigm above reveals that each time the NP-Subject is topicalized, it shifts from its original position to the sentence left periphery. While doing so, a lexically materialised personal pronoun which bears the same grammatical references occupies its trace. This rule does not apply to the other grammatical functions: direct object, indirect object, circumstantial complements of time, place, etc. When the latter are topicalized, the target elements also move to the sentence left periphery, but there is no pronoun occurrence at the non lexical empty trace created at their originate position.

The above remark raises the question to know what accounts for the grammaticality of the Guiziga-type sentences that tolerates NP-subject and Subject-pronoun to coconstrue, for such sentences would sound ungrammatical given the government and C-command principles. In fact, the Subject-Pronoun that appears between the potential c-commander and its trace would prevent any relationship between the two constituents in the sense of Rizzi (2001).

According to Bebey (2015), subjects are prominent in some syntactic transformations such as topicalization in Chadic languages. Their movement requires the occurrence of a personal pronoun that bears the same agreement features with the NP-topicalized subject. In sentence (h) for instance, “John” and “nang” are both 3rd singular person. Their coconstruction supposes that government and c-commands have taken place before the appearance of the subject-pronoun.

The absence of topicalizers is an indication that the maximal projection of the Topic Phrase is empty in Guiziga. The target constituent moves from its original position to the Spec,Top as illustrated in the familiar fashion:



Suzan, Seini married her.

VII. MULTIPLE TOPICS

Guiziga tolerates multiple constituents to be topicalized within the same syntactic construction. Sentences (a), (c) and (d) below give more illustrations.

- a) John, ngadama, arhay ngi di dáf, nang à vul à dáf, da Aplamvu --- -----
 John, today, house Det of food, he SM.3sg give-TNS.P1 food to Aplamvu

- John, today, in the kitchen, gave food to Mary"
- b) Nguakay à zùm p án ngi hay ngi dubum ngi meprik
Nguakay SM.3sg eat-TNS.P1 bread house Det learn Det morning
Nguakay ate bread in school this morning.
- c) Ngi hay ngi dubum, ngi meprik, Nguakay à zùm p án -----, -----
Det house of knowledge, Det morning, Nguakay SM.3sg eat.TNS.P1 bread
In school, this morning, Nguakay ate bread.
- d) Zrey, ngi hiney, mutsohom, tang à kid'à-ka -----
Zrey, ngi hiney, mutsohom, tang à kidàk à
Children Det week last they SM.3pl play-TNS.P2
The children, last week, played football.

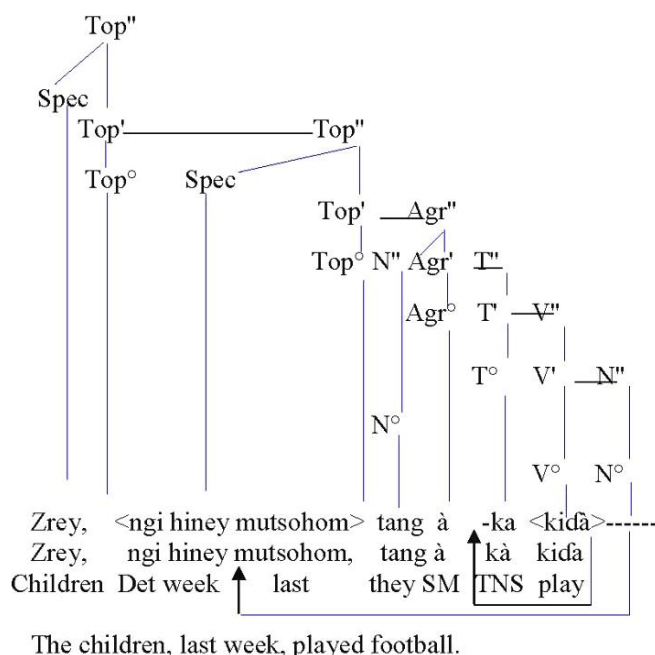
An observation of the sentences (a-d) shows that when there is a number of important information to convey within the same discourse, the speaker can topicalize two or many syntactic constituents in Guiziga. All the target elements are extracted out to the sentence beginning position leaving multiple empty traces in their respective original positions. Their order in the sentence left periphery depends on the relevance of information expressed by each constituent. In fact, the most relevant information stands higher than the less relevant information. In other languages such as Muya (Bebey 2018), this range implies the use of special topicalizers that precise the kind and semantic value of the information: extraordinary, dangerous, important, etc.

The analysis above assumes that there are multiple Topic Heads in the Guiziga sentence beginning position. Given the reasoning in the preceding section related to the emptiness of the maximal projection of TopP, it supposes that each target constituent moves to Spec,Top and individually governs and c-commands its trace. The ungrammaticality of the following sentences is more illustrative of that analysis:

- e) *Ngi hay ngi dubum, ngi meprik, Nguakay à zùm p án ----, ngadama
Det house of knowledge, Det morning, Nguakay SM.3sg eat.TNS.P1 bread today
*In school, this morning, Nguakay ate bread today.

In (e), “ngadama” (today) circumstantial complement of time prevents “ngi meprik” (this morning) to properly govern and c-command its trace. The two constituents have the same grammatical references.

(7)



The movement of the topicalized subject in (7) is not visible because it is deleted by the apparition of the resumptive pronoun “tang” (they). Let us look at the following sentence for further illustrations:

- f) John, ngadama, arhay ngi di dāf, nang á vū á dāf da Mary
John, today, house Det. of food, he SM.3sg give food to Mary
"John, today, in the kitchen, he gives food to Mary"

One realises that superposed topics are prosodically punctuated according to the syntactic adequacy of the information structure in relation to the specific interactional context. Sentence (f) above demonstrates that a pitch progression of the topicalized “John”, “ngadama”, “arhay ngi di dāf” supposes that the same level marks not only that they are connected in terms of intonation but even in terms of information: all of them are introduced into the interlocution for the first time and consequently, bring along relatively salient content. Equally important is the fact that

their information load is of the same impotence. Moreover, the privileged intonation-information structure of these topics is also consolidated by their close intensity values.

VIII. SEMANTIC PERCEPTION OF TOPICS

In Guiziga, topics are old but pertinent information whose comment provides precision, details, etc. Let us consider the meaning of topics in the following sentence:

Daf, John à vulà ----- da Aplamvu arhay ngi di ngadama
Food John SM.3sg give-TNS.P1. to Aplamvu house Det of today
Some food, John gave to Aplamvu in the kitchen today.

Although “daf” is an old information in the syntactic construction above, it seems to bring a new information that the listener has been ignoring. Its left hand extraction makes it particularly extraordinary. The target element is perceived as known information that requires all attentions to which the speaker invites his interlocutor who is supposed to learn more than he knew before.

Contrary to literatures on topicalization, the above definition assumes that topics in languages like Guiziga are not only old information, but a revelation about old information. The remnant sentence, which is the comment of the topic, becomes additional information that gives details and precision about it. In fact, one resorts to topicalization when there is extraordinary and special old information.

IX. CONCLUSION

One set out in this work to discuss topics in Guiziga using a cartographic perspective and came out with the conclusion that, first, it is a null-subject language, a projection of the Agreement Phrase that hosts agreement or subject markers. Then, it is noticed that topics in the language are not lexically marked like it is the case with most Chadic languages. It was also analyzed in the sense of Kayne (1994) that negation and overt tense scope over the Guiziga sentence to suit the language linear order. Concerning topicalization, analyses revealed that the language, which does not select topicalizers, shifts the target constituents to the sentence left periphery where they occupy the Spec, Top. Finally, one discovered that Guiziga tolerates the coconstruction of topicalised multiple constituents within the same syntactic constructions. As far as topics’ semantic value is concerned, one discovered that in this Chadic language, topicalization gives more than simple old information.

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