

The Syntactic Ecology of Afrikaaps: an initial exploration

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Background: This paper focuses on an understudied variety of Afrikaans, which has been referred to i.a. as *Cape (Vernacular) Afrikaans*, *Kaaps* (Ponelis 1998:5; Hendricks 2016:3) and *Afrikaaps*, the latter a more recent endonym (Le Cordeur 2011:763-6). Afrikaaps is a heavily contact-influenced matriclectal variety of Afrikaans spoken by many members of the working class on the Cape Peninsula. Despite the fact that Afrikaaps has never been the subject of detailed formal investigation, it is typically described as a heavily English-influenced variety (Ponelis 2009, Blignaut 2014, Hendricks 2016), and widely thought to have undergone fundamental changes under English influence. Where other matriclectal Afrikaans varieties have retained the characteristic West Germanic Verb Second (V2) and OV ordering, Afrikaaps has, for example, been said to have adopted English SVO. Our investigation of modern-day Afrikaaps, however, produces a quite different picture, in which the role of English is mostly more superficial than it initially seems, while two other considerations emerge as centrally significant: what Adger (2017) calls the ‘syntactic ecology’ of a system (see also Biberauer & Roberts 2008, Guardiano et al. 2016) on the one hand, and the way in which acquirers extend and regularise patterns in the input (Biberauer 2017) on the other. Our purpose is to present some key findings from the initial stages of a larger research project, aimed at deepening our understanding of Afrikaaps syntax.

Data: Our study is based on (i) a systematic investigation of the stories and columns of Nathan Trantraal, a 35 year-old whose vernacular writing is acknowledged by fellow speakers to be an authentic reflection of modern-day Afrikaaps, and (ii) native-speaker (age 35-65) judgements.

Findings: *I. Afrikaaps is robustly V2.* As in other varieties, surface SVO occurs where a simple-tense V2 clause is subject-initial. The frequency of this SVO option is, however, elevated owing to the readiness with which subordinating *dat* (‘that’) - which, when present, requires OV - is dropped (cf. (2) below). The very widespread dropability of *dat* is a noteworthy property, given that Dutch completely bars this option (Zwart 1997), and it is frequently - and plausibly - attributed to English influence. Afrikaaps goes further than other varieties in permitting structures like (1), though. Crucially, these structures are necessarily discourse-marked, and represent an extension of an extraposition pattern also available in other varieties. Other varieties, however, require an overt preverbal O-element (cf. (1’), and also *iets* in (2)). We will show that Afrikaaps *dit>it* reduction (see below) and its wider range of object-drop possibilities are key in understanding this expansion pattern.

- (1) *Hulle het gesteel my skoene.* (Blignaut 2014:55)
they have stolen my shoes = ‘They have stolen my shoes.’
- (1’) *Hulle het dit/hulle gesteel, my skoene!*
they have it them stolen, my shoes = ‘They have stolen them, my shoes!’

II. OV is strongly preserved in Afrikaaps. However, V need not be rigidly final, due i.a. to robust use of particle verbs (including “mixed” forms like *ytwear*=out.wear=‘wear out’) and P-stranding. As in other colloquial Afrikaanses, “leaking” is common (2), extending beyond CPs, PPs, and R-pronouns to quantifiers and low adverbs (3). The latter are not generally strandable in OV Germanic. (English borrowings: **bold**; objects: **bold-underline**; extraposed elements: underline).

- (2) ... *ek is certain [hy het een kee iets gesê oo ties en colonialism*
I am certain he have one time something said about ties and colonialism
in dieselle sin]
in the same sentence
‘... I am certain he (=Nelson Mandela) once said something about ties and colonialism
in the same sentence.’ (Trantraal 2018:10)

- (3) ... *gan jy my vra of ek **dai boek** gelies et al.*
 go you me ask if I that book read have already
 ‘... you will ask me if I have already read that book.’ (Trantraal 2018:118)

III. V3 patterns are also possible in Afrikaaps. Interestingly, this takes two forms, neither of which corresponds to the FrameAdv-S-V pattern identified in urban multi-ethnolects and West Flemish (Walkden 2017 and Haegeman & Greco 2018). Instead, Afrikaaps V3 involves what appears to be double adverbial-fronting (4) and resumptive topicalisation (5), which both have counterparts in non-contact Germanic (Müller 2005, Salvesen 2016). In this, Afrikaaps’ status as the oldest variety of Afrikaans (van Rensburg 2016) seems to shine through.

- (4) [*Altyd*] [*as ek innie bank staan,*] *wonne ek hoekom kom ekkie meer bank toe nie.*
 always when I in.the bank stand wonder I why come I.not more bank to POL
 ‘Always, when I’m inside the bank, I wonder why I don’t come to the bank more.’
- (5) [*Die next dag*][*toe*] *maak die persoon [...]* ‘*n announcement ...*
 the next day then make the person an announcement
 ‘The next day, this person made an announcement...’ (Trantraal 2018:10 & 61)

IV. Afrikaaps superficially permits V1 patterns.

- (6) *Is stil innie voorhys virre oomblik* (Trantraal 2018:33)
 is quiet in.the front.room for.a moment = ‘It’s quiet in the front room for a moment.’

These, in contrast to the V3 patterns, are strikingly innovative, and cannot be interpreted as reflexes of the narrative V1 found elsewhere in Germanic (Sigurðsson 1990). They are fully-fledged V2-structures featuring Afrikaaps’ characteristic reduced form of the standard Afrikaans *dis*, a contraction of *dit is* (‘it/this is’). *Dit* (‘it’) is more generally reduced to *it*, pronounced [ət] with the Afrikaans *i* as opposed to the *i* in Afrikaaps borrowings of English, which is [i]. These reduced forms contrast with *d*-initial forms like *dai* (<*daardie* = there.the = ‘that’), which also occur in other colloquial Afrikaanses, but serve a distinctive extended information-structure role in Afrikaaps. *Dis*-reduction in Afrikaaps represents an innovation that itself builds on an innovation. *Dis* in standard Afrikaans is a novel extension of the enclitic copula/auxiliary reduction pattern also seen in *hy’s/sy’s/ hulle’t* (he’s, she’s, they’ve). This pattern mirrors English, but contrasts sharply with Dutch, where the pronoun, not the copula/auxiliary, may reduce. This change results from verbal deflection *plus* bleaching of strong pronominal forms, with concomitant loss of Afrikaans clitic pronouns, and in turn has consequences for the nature of Afrikaans V2, which we will consider, also in view of the significance of the Afrikaaps reduction facts in this wider context.

V. Afrikaaps has innovated inflectional morphology. Afrikaans is typically described as a maximally inflectionally impoverished language. In Afrikaaps, however, we observe a clear alternation between a “full” and reduced form of past-tense *het* (‘have’). (3) illustrates the characteristically *h*-less form of the latter, which is also frequently combined with the associated participle, from which it may never be separated, in writing (e.g. *verloorit* < *verloor het* = lost have, i.e. ‘have lost’). Thus, in addition to enclitic copula and auxiliary forms, Afrikaaps features an innovative inflectional tense marker, the endpoint of a grammaticalisation process that evidently has not run its full course in other Afrikaans varieties (cf. Conradie 2006 on Afrikaans *het* more generally).

Conclusion: The interest that Afrikaaps holds as a contact variety clearly extends well beyond the contact-driven “mixing” that we readily observe. More fine-grained investigation reveals properties, such as those highlighted here, which underline the importance in contact studies of taking into account a grammar’s syntactic ecology - its underlying formal make-up - which serves as the basis on which acquirers regularise and extend patterns in the input.