Subject encoding in Limbum*

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Abstract
This paper presents novel data from the understudied Grassfields Bantu language Limbum (Cameroon) showing three interrelated asymmetries within the realm of subject marking. The first is a dependency of overt subject marking on number and category of the subject. The second concerns the apparent absence of subject resumption for third person plural while subject resumption is otherwise obligatory. The third asymmetry is found with focus-marked subjects where subject marking is dependent on the type of focus-marking.

1 Introduction

It is well known that syntactic operations and processes do not necessarily have to be applicable to all kinds of arguments, nor does one and the same syntactic operation/process have to have the same effect on different kinds of arguments. In fact, examples of asymmetric behaviour of distinct kinds of arguments are abundant. There are subject object asymmetries with regard to inter alia *that*-trace effects (Perlmutter 1971), sub-extraction (Huang 1982), resumption (Koopman 1983; McCloskey 1990), and many more. Direct and indirect objects behave differently with respect to scope and binding (Barss and Lasnik 1986; Larson 1990), resumption (Stewart 2001), and extraction (Bresnan and Moshi 1990; Holmberg et al. to appear). There are also asymmetries between arguments and non-arguments for island sensitivity and weak islands (Huang 1982; Engdahl 1986) and reconstruction (Freidin 1986; Lebeaux 1988)

Less well known is the fact that there can be asymmetric behaviour within one kind of argument. Thus, with focus marking, matrix sujects show one kind of encoding while embedded subjects employ a different focus marking strategy in Dagbani (Issah and Smith 2018) and in Igbo (Amaechi and Georgi 2019). The most well known case of such internal asymmetry is possibly differential object marking, where objects show a different morphological encoding depending

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in some inherent (and sometimes also external) properties. In the realm of subjects, the most prominent asymmetry is probably the so-called antiagreement effect (Ouhalla 1993, 2005, see also Baier 2018 for a recent overview and discussion) which distinguishes subjects that have undergone extraction from in situ subjects by a loss of agreement on the verb (antiagreement) or a different morphological encoding on the verb (alternative agreement).

In this paper, I will present and discuss three subject-internal asymmetries in Limbum, a Grassfields Bantu language spoken in North Western Cameroon, that are to some degree interdependent. First, Limbum shows an asymmetry in the presence of a subject marker. While this marker is obligatory for full NP and plural pronominal subjects it has to be absent when the subject is a singular pronoun. Coupled with the fact that Limbum requires a resumptive pronoun to occur in the base position of a subject $\bar{A}$-dependency, this leads to an apparent anti-agreement effect (cf. Ouhalla 1993; Baier 2018). Second, there is an asymmetry of third person plural subjects vs. all other person-number combinations with regard to resumption. While, generally, subject extraction leaves a resumptive pronoun that is identical in form to the regular personal pronoun, extraction of third person plural subjects leaves a gap. However, this gap is only apparent, because, as I argue, the third person plural is the only one that has a weak pronoun variant which is null. A third asymmetry concerns the interaction of the particle *cí*, which occurs in focus constructions and the choice of subject marker. It is shown that when *cí* is overt, there has to be a resumptive pronoun *í*, while there is optionality between the resumptive and the subject marker *à* when *cí* is absent. This optionality is analysed as stemming from a structural ambiguity between a movement and a non-movement configuration.

2 Subject agreement

Limbum, a Grassfields Bantu language (Niger-Congo) is spoken by about 73 000–90 000 (Fransen 1995: 21) to 130 000 speakers (according to a 2005 census, Eberhard et al. 2019) in the Northwest Region of Cameroon. Its basic word order is SVO with tense-aspect markers appearing between the subject and the verb. Adverbs always take the clause-final position (1).

(1) Njíŋwɛ̀ fɔ̄ à mū yɛ̄ bō fɔ̄ nìŋkòr.
woman DET SM PST2 see children DET yesterday
'The woman saw the children yesterday.'

2.1 The data

In some tenses and aspects (all three past tenses and, optionally, in the progressive aspect), a subject marker *à* obligatorily occurs with the subject (2).

(2) a. Nfòr **à** mū zhé bzhɨ́.
Nfor SM PST2 eat food
'Nfor ate food.'

b. Nfòr **à** cɨ́ zhé bzhɨ́.
Nfor SM PROG eat food
'Nfor is eating food.'

In other tenses and aspects, like the future (3a) or the habitual (3b), no such subject marker occurs. In fact, the presence of a subject marker renders the sentence ungrammatical.

(3) a. Nfòr (*à) bí zhé bzhɨ́.
Nfor SM FUT eat food
'Nfor will eat food.'

b. Nfòr (*à) kɨ́ zhé bzhɨ́.
Nfor SM HAB eat food
'Nfor regularly eats food.'

In this paper, I will focus on the tenses and aspects in which the subject marker is found. Interestingly, the subject marker only occurs with full NP subjects (2) and plural pronouns (4).

(4) a. Wɛ̀r ***(à)** mū fàʔ.
1PL.EXCL *(SM) PST2 work
'We(excl) worked.'

b. Sì ***(à)** mū fàʔ.
1PL.INCL *(SM) PST2 work
'We(incl) worked.'

c. Yì ***(à)** mū fàʔ.
2PL *(SM) PST2 work
'You(pl) worked.'

For third person plural subjects, both pronouns and full NPs, the subject marker appears in an exclusively plural form *ó* (5).

(5) a. Wōyè ***(ó)** mū fàʔ.
3PL *(3PL.SM) PST2 work
'They worked.'

b. Bō fɔ̄ ***(ó)** mū zhé bzhɨ́.
children DET *(3PL.SM) PST2 eat food
'The children ate food.'

However, when the subject is a 1st, 2nd, or 3rd person singular pronoun, the subject marker *à* is ungrammatical (6). Thus, singular pronouns and *à* never cooccur in a clause.

(6) a. Mɛ̀ **(*à)** mū fàʔ.
1SG (*SM) PST2 work
'I worked.'

b. Wɛ̀ **(*à)** mū fàʔ.
2SG (*SM) PST2 work
'You(sg) worked.'

c. Í **(*à)** mū fàʔ.
3SG (*SM) PST2 work
'(S)he worked.'

Concerning the tenses that do not show any subject markers for full NPs, these also lack a subject marker if the subject is a pronoun (singular or plural). Some examples in the future tense are given in (7).

(7) a. Wɛ̀r (*à) bí fàʔ.
1PL.EXCL SM FUT work
'We(excl) will work.'

b. Mɛ̀ (*à) bí fàʔ.
1SG SM FUT work
'I will work.'

c. Wōyè (*ó) bí fàʔ.
3PL 3PL.SM FUT work
'They will work.'

In summary, the distribution of subject markers is quite asymmetric in Limbum. First, they only occur in a selection of tenses and aspects. Second, singular NPs and local person plural pronouns pattern together in requiring the presence of the *à* marker while singular pronominal subjects demand its absence. Third person plural subjects obligatorily appear with the exclusive *ó* marker. The overall pattern is given in the table in (8).

(8) *Distribution of subject markers in Limbum past tenses and progressive aspect*

		sg		pl	
Pronouns	1.excl	mɛ̀	∅	wɛ̀r	à
	1.incl			sì	à
	2	wɛ̀	∅	yì	à
	3	í	∅	wōyè	ó
NPs			à		ó

2.2 Why is agreement absent for singular pronouns?

There are some possibilities for why agreement is impossible with singular pronouns. First, for Celtic languages, it has been argued that what looks like an agreement marker is really a pronominal argument cliticized onto the verb. Thus, in Breton, full DP subjects never trigger agreement (9a), but pronominal subject are obligatorily dropped with "agreement" showing up on the verb (9b).

(9) a. Gant o mamm e karf-ent/*karf-e *pro* bezañ.
with their mother R would.love-3PL/*would.love-3SG 3PL be.INF
'They would like to be with their mother.'

b. Gant o mamm e karf-e/*karf-ent Azenor ha Iona bezañ.
with their mother R would.love-3SG/*would.love-3PL Azenor and Iona be.INF
'Azenor and Iona would like to be with their mother.'

(Jouitteau and Řezáč 2006: 1916)

This complementarity effect has been taken as evidence that, in fact, there is no ϕ-agreement between subject and verb. If the subject is a pronoun, which is weak enough to cliticize onto the verb, it only appears as though the verb inflects (see Anderson 1982; see also Stump 1984 who rejects this analysis in favour of an agreement analysis). The facts are almost identical and have received an identical analysis in Irish (Pranka 1983; Doron 1988; Ackema and Neeleman 2003) and Scottish Gaelic (Adger 2000). Under such an approach, the Limbum subject markers, would be weak pronouns cliticizing to the verb. Their absence with pronominal subjects is then due to the fact that these subjects must be strong pronouns that cannot cliticize onto the verb. In contrast to the Celtic languages mentioned above, however, Limbum allows the subject marker to cooccur with a full NP subject. If the subject marker is indeed a pronoun, one could argue that it is the actual subject, taking the subject's argument position and theta role, similar to what has been argued to be the case for polysynthetic non-configurational languages (see Jelinek 1984; Baker 1996). What appears to be the full NP subject, then is actually just an adjoined phrase that is somehow linked to the respective pronominal argument.

However, this analysis would leave unexplained the occurrence of the subject marker with plural pronominal subjects. In this part of the paradigm, Limbum behaves more like Welsh, where a (postverbal) pronominal subject agrees with the verb (10) while a (postverbal) full DP subject does not (11).

(10) a. Gwelodd e/hi ddraig.
see.PST.3SG he/she dragon
'He saw a dragon.'

b. Gwelon nhw ddraig.
see.PST.3PL they dragon
'They saw a dragon.' (Borsley 2009: 227)

(11) a. Gwelodd y bachgen/bechgyn ddraig.
see.PST.3SG the boy/boys dragon
'The boy/boys saw a dragon.'

b. *Gwelon y bechgyn ddraig.
see.PST.3PL the boys dragon

(Borsley 2009: 227)

Thus, an account of the absence of the subject marker with singular pronominal subjects that derives it as a type of complementarity effect, as found in many Celtic languages, is not feasible.

A second possible explanation is, that the subject agreement paradigm simply contains three markers *à*, *ó*, and ∅ which are specified such that the zero marker realizes 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person singular. However, in this scenario, the zero marker would have to explicitly make reference to the (categorial) status of the subject as a pronoun (12).

(12) *Vocabulary entries for agreement markers*

a. /ó/ ↔ [−1,−2,−sg]

b. /∅/ ↔ [pron, +sg]

c. /à/ ↔ [ ]

Now, this requires that subject-verb argeement not only leads to ϕ-features being present on the verb/T, but also the categorial feature of the subject. Agreement for category, however, is a very uncommon feature in natural languages (cf. Weisser 2019).

A third option is that the subject marker is not an agreement marker but a specific past tense marker that displays subject-sensitive allomorphy. As allomorphy rules are generally able to refer to the category of an allomorphy-trigger, the fact that pronouns in the singular require the zero allomorph is easily captured (13).

(13) *Allomorphs of the subject marker*

a. *ó* / [3pl]_

b. ∅ / [pron, sg]_

c. *à*

Allomorphy is usually triggered under linear adjacency. Thus, when material linearly intervenes between the subject and the subject marker, we would expect that the default allomorph *à* appears. Unfortunately, adverbs in Limbum always occur clause-finally making them unusable for testing this prediction. However, we can employ coordinations where each conjunct requires a different allomorph. What we find is that the subject marker apparently references the whole conjunction. Thus, in (14a), the conjunction of a full NP *ŋwè rlɔ fɔ̄* 'the reverend' and the pronoun *wɛ̀* 'you (sg.)', which together resolves into a 2nd person plural subject, triggers the subject marker *à* despite the singular pronoun *wɛ̀* being linearly adjacent. Example (14b) shows the coordination of two different pronominal subjects *wɛ̀* 'you (sg.)' and *mɛ̀* 'I' each independently requiring the zero form of the subject marker. However, again *à* appears, as the whole coordination is a first person plural pronominal subject. Lastly, (14c) gives the coordination of two singular NPs each requiring the subject marker *à* in isolation. Instead, the plural marker *ó* occurs.

(14) a. [Ŋwè rlɔ̄ fɔ̄ bá wɛ̀]$_{2pl}$ à mū zhé bā.
person prayer the and you(sg.) 3SG.SM PST2 eat fufu
'The reverend and you ate fufu.'

b. [Wɛ̀ bá mɛ̀]$_{1pl}$ à mū zhé bā.
2SG and 1SG SM PST2 eat fufu
'You(sg.) and I ate fufu.'

[Ŋwɛ̀ rlɔ̄ bá yà bàá]$_{3pl}$ ó mū zhé bā.
person prayer and my father SM PST2 eat fufu
'The reverend and my father ate fufu.'

In sum, the examples in (14) behave as if resolved agreement takes place with coordinations. Allomorphy alone can therefore not account for the pattern of subject marking. In addition, the allomorphy rule would have to make reference to the feature [pron]. While it is possible for allomorphy to refer to category features, the general perspective on pronouns since Postal (1969) and Abney (1987) is that they are elements of category D, i.e. that there is no dedicated category Pron comprising pronominal elements.

It is thus unclear how to formally analyze the Limbum subject agreement pattern. From a functional perspective, it looks like an instance of complex differential subject marking (DSM, de Hoop and Malchukov 2008). In analogy to differential object marking (DOM), DSM occurs when the morphological encoding of subjects varies depending on some properties of the subject with less likely subjects (according to some hierarchy such as referentiality, definiteness, or person, Hale 1972; Silverstein 1976) being more marked than more likely subjects. In the Limbum case, the relevant property is a combination of definiteness and number. The definiteness and number scales are given in (15) and (16).

(15) *Definiteness scale*
Pro(noun) > Name (PN) > Def(inite) > Indefinite Specific (Spec) > NonSpecific (NSpec)

(16) *Number scale*
Plural > Singular

In effect, when considering these scales for subjects, a pronominal element turns out to be a more likely/expected subject than a proper name. The latter, in turn, is a more likely subject than a definite element, and so on. Now, Limbum draws the line between Pro and PN on the scale, separating pronouns from all other types of subjects. Combining the definiteness with the number scale, Limbum further distinguishes between singular pronominal subjects and plural pronominal subjects with the former being the most likely/expected subjects. As such, these do not have to be marked overtly (by an overt subject marker). In contrast, any subject deviating from the expectation (i.e. singular pronoun) has to receive a specific encoding in the form of an overt subject marker. The fact that the Limbum subject marker is absent with singular pronominal subjects only thus results from functional considerations where expectations as to what constitutes a prototypical/likely subject play a role for the morphological encoding. This, of course, leaves open the question of why the subject marker only occurs in a handful of tenses/aspect.

2.3 An apparent anti-agreement effect

The different behaviour of singular NPs and singular pronouns with regard to subject agreement gives rise to an interesting effect when the subject has undergone some form of displacement. When the subject is questioned (17a), focussed[1] (17b), or relativized (17c), the *à* marker that usually appears with full NP subjects disappears. Instead, there is a different marker *í* occuring in the clause.[2]

(17) a. Á ndá$_1$ cí **í**$_1$ mū zhé bzhɨ́ (à).
FOC who COMP 3SG.RP PST2 eat food Q
'Who ate food?'

[1]The focus marked by the particle *á* here is new information focus. There is at least one other focus marking strategy with a particle *bá* which encodes contrastive/exhaustive focus (Becker et al. 2019; Driemel and Nformi 2018). As the latter does not involve displacement to the left periphery, it is of no interest here.

[2]See Becker et al. (2019) for arguments that the *á* construction is not a biclausal cleft but rather involves a monoclausal movement structure.

b. Á Nfòr$_1$ cí **í$_1$** mū zhé bzhɨ́.
FOC Nfor COMP 3SG.RP PST2 eat food
'Nfor$_F$ ate food.' (new information focus)

c. Mɛ̀ rɨŋ njíŋwɛ̀$_1$ [zhɨ **í$_1$** cɨ́ yɛ̄ ŋgwē fɔ̄]
1SG know woman REL 3SG.RP PROG see dog DEF
'I know the woman who is seeing the dog.'

This marker *í* is in fact the regular third person singular pronoun as in (18).

(18) Í cɨ́ fàʔ mí ŋkàʔ.
S/He PROG work in garden
'S/He is working in the garden.'

In light of (18), it is plausible to treat the occuring *í*-marker in (17) as a resumptive pronoun taking the place of the displaced subject. Now at first glance, it appears as though the *à* marker has gone missing in (17) as a consequence of full NP subject displacement. This is reminiscent of the so-called anti-agreement effect (Ouhalla 1993; Baier 2018), where subject agreement is suppressed when the subject undergoes displacement. In Limbum, however, the pronoun independently cannot cooccur with the subject marker *à*, which therefore is absent from the sentence.

That one is not dealing with an anti-agreement effect can immediately been shown by comparing extraction of singular NP subjects with extraction of (local) plural pronominal subjects. Both kinds of subjects obligatorily require the subject marker *à* when in situ (19).

(19) a. Nfòr ***(à)** mū zhé bzhɨ́.
Nfor SM PST2 eat food
'Nfor ate food.'

b. Wɛ̀r/sì/yì ***(à)** mū fàʔ.
1PL.E/1PL.I/2PL *(SM) PST2 work
'We(exc)/we(inc)/you(pl) worked.'

Now, when the singular subject of (19a) is extracted, it leaves a singular resumptive pronoun *í* which independently disallows *à*. Consequently, *à* is absent (20).

(20) Á Nfòr$_1$ cí **í$_1$** mū zhé bzhɨ́.
FOC Nfor COMP 3SG.RP PST2 eat food
'Nfor$_F$ ate food.'

On the other hand, extraction of the subject in (19b) should leave a plural resumptive pronoun, which requires the presence of *à*. We would thus expect that no "antiagreement" effect will be observed. As (21) confirms, this is indeed the case.

(21) Á wɛ̀r/sì/yì cí **wɛ̀r/sì/yì** ***(à)** mū fàʔ.
FOC 1PL.EXC/1PL.INC/2PL COMP 1PL.EXC/1PL.INC/2PL *(SM) PST2 work
'We(exc)/we(inc)/you(pl)$_F$ worked.'

With extraction of singular pronominal subjects, we would expect a resumptive pronoun to occur but the marker *à* to be absent as these pronouns never cooccur with *à* (6c). This expectation is also fulfilled (22).

(22) Á mɛ̀/wɛ̀/í cí **mɛ̀/wɛ̀/í** **(*à)** mū fàʔ.
FOC 1SG/2SG/3SG COMP 1SG/2SG/3SG (*SM) PST2 work
'I/you(sg)/(s)he$_F$ worked.'

Third person plural subjects, in contrast, behave in a surprising way giving rise to yet another asymmetry between different kinds of subjects. Under the approach sketched so far, we would expect them to pattern with local person plural subjects, i.e. leaving a resumptive pronoun plus subject marker, with the difference that this subject marker is *ó*, not *à*. This is, because like the latter, a pronominal third plural subject requires the presence of a subject marker when in situ (26a). However, this is not what we find. When a third person plural subject is extracted it obligatorily leaves a gap with the presence of the subject marker being unaffected by extraction (23).

(23) a. Á bō fɔ̄ cí Nfòr à mū lā í-nɛ̄ (***wōyè**) **ó** mū zhé bzhɨ́.
FOC children DET C Nfor SM PST2 say 3SG-C *3PL.RP 3PL.SM PST2 eat food
'The children$_F$, Nfor said, ate food.'

b. Á wōyè cí Nfòr à mū lā í-nɛ̄ (***wōyè**) **ó** mū zhé bzhɨ́.
FOC 3PL C Nfor SM PST2 say 3SG-C 3PL.RP SM PST2 eat food
'They$_F$, Nfor said, ate food.'

The pattern of resumption and subject marking under extraction is given in table (24). As can be seen, to the exception of third person plural, it reflects the pattern of pronominal in situ subjects and subject markers in (25).

(24) *Resumptive pronouns (RP) and SM*

subject	RP	SM
singular	✓	—
1st & 2nd plural	✓	✓
3rd plural	—	✓

(25) *Regular pronouns and SM*

subject	RP	SM
singular	✓	—
1st & 2nd plural	✓	✓
3rd plural	✓	✓

With the exception of third person plural, it is thus the interaction between the pattern of agreement on one side and the requirement of subject displacements to have a resumptive pronoun in their base position on the other side that gives the impression of an anti-agreement effect for singular NP subjects.

3 The third person plural

Turning back to third person plural subjects, recall that they behave like local person plural pronominal subjects in that they obligatorily require a cooccuring subject marker when in situ

(26) but differ from these in that they leave a gap rather than a resumptive pronoun when they are extracted (27).

(26) a. Wōyè ***(ó)** mū fàʔ.
3PL *(SM) PST2 work
'They worked.'

b. Bō fɔ̄ ***(ó)** mū zhé bzhɨ́.
children DET *(SM) PST2 eat food
'The children ate food.'

(27) a. Á bō fɔ̄ cí Nfòr à mū lā í-nɛ̄ ***wōyè/ó** mū zhé bzhɨ́.
FOC children DET C Nfor SM PST2 say 3SG-C *3PL.RP/SM PST2 eat food
'The children$_F$, Nfor said, ate food.'

b. Á wōyè cí Nfòr à mū lā í-nɛ̄ ***wōyè/ó** mū zhé bzhɨ́.
FOC 3PL C Nfor SM PST2 say 3SG-C 3PL.RP/SM PST2 eat food
'They$_F$, Nfor said, ate food.'

Given that examples like the ones in (27) parallel examples of extraction of other pronominal subjects like in (21) and (22), this suggests that the resumptive pronoun counterpart to the third person plural pronoun is simply null. The resumptive versions of all other pronouns, in contrast, are form-identical to the ones used in non-resumptive contexts (28).

(28) *Regular and resumptive pronouns*

	regular		resumptive	
	sg	pl	sg	pl
1.exc	mɛ̀	wɛ̀r	mɛ̀	wɛ̀r
1.inc	–	sì	–	sì
2	wɛ̀	yì	wɛ̀	yì
3.anim	í	wōyè	í	∅
3.inan	í	bvɨ̄	í	bvɨ̄

Support for this line of analysis comes from subject extraction out of islands. The island-obviating effect of resumptive pronouns is well-known by now (McCloskey 1979; Borer 1984). As subject extraction of non-third person plural subject leaves an overt resumptive pronoun, islands should not have any degrading effect. Indeed, this is what we find. Examples of subject extraction from a complex NP island are given in (29a) for a second person plural subject and (29b) for a third person singular subject.

(29) a. Á yì (cí) mɛ̀ mū yōʔ nsūŋ zhɨ̌-nɛ̄ yì à mū fàʔ.
FOC 2PL C I PST3 hear rumour 3SG.INAN-C 2PL SM PST3 work
'I have heard the rumour that you(pl) have worked.'

b. Á Nfòr (cí) mɛ̀ mū yōʔ nsūŋ zhɨ̌-nɛ̄ í mū fàʔ.
FOC Nfor C I PST3 hear rumour 3SG.INAN-C 3SG PST3 work
'I have heard the rumour that Nfor has worked.'

Importantly, the island-obviating effect is also found with extraction of a third person plural subject despite the lack of an overt resumptive pronoun (30).

(30) Á wōyè (cí) mɛ̀ mū yōʔ nsūŋ zhǐ-nɛ̄ (*wōyè) ó mū fàʔ.
FOC 3PL C I PST3 hear rumour 3SG.INAN-C (3PL) 3PL.SM PST3 work
'I have heard the rumour that they have worked.'

This parallel behaviour with regard to island-sensitivity suggests that there is a silent resumptive pronoun present in (30).[3]

If this line of reasoning is correct, Limbum goes against the cross-linguistically largely valid generalization that the forms of resumptive pronouns are generally drawn from the set of regular (personal) pronouns (Asudeh 2011, 2012; Salzmann 2017; McCloskey 2017, though see Adger 2011 for counter-examples).

However, there is a further qualification to be made. As Salzmann (2017: 187) points out, "[r]esumptives are usually drawn from the unmarked series of the personal pronoun paradigm, thus usually the weak/clitic forms". Now, there is no distinction between strong and weak pronouns in non-third person contexts. First, in the various examples throughout this paper the focussed pronoun, which is arguably strong, has the same form as the arguably weak resumptive. Second, in a weak pronominal context, such as discourse anaphora (31), the anaphoric pronoun is not

[3] It should be mentioned that this argument loses some of its strength as islands in Limbum seem to be quite liberal in general. In contrast to subject extraction, object extraction always leaves a gap in the extraction site rather than a resumptive pronoun, no matter whether it takes place out of a regular embedded clause (i), or from a complex NP (ii) or an adjunct clause (iii).

(i) Á wōyè/mɛ̀/yì (cí) Nfòr à mū lìb *wōyè/*ó/*mɛ̀/*yì/___.
FOC 3PL/1SG/2PL C Nfor SM PST3 beat 3PL.RP/3PL.SM/1SG/2PL/
'Them/me/you(pl.), Nfor has hit.'

(ii) a. Á ndāp (cí) mɛ̀ mū yōʔ nsūŋ zhǐ-nɛ̄ Nfòr à mū bō *zhī/___.
FOC house C I PST3 hear rumour 3SG.INAN-C Nfor SM PST3 build 3SG.INAN.OBJ/
'I have heard a rumour that a house Nfor has built.'
b. ?Á wōyè (cí) mɛ̀ mū yōʔ nsūŋ zhǐ-nɛ̄ Nfòr à mū kɔ̄nī *ó/*wōyè/___.
FOC 3PL C I PST3 hear rumour 3SG.INAN-C Nfor SM PST3 meet 3PL.SM/3PL/
'I have heard a rumour that them Nfor has met.'

(iii) Á wōyè/mɛ̀/yì (cí) Nfòr à mū būmī káʔ ànjɔ́ʔ í mū lìb *ó/*wōyè/*mɛ̀/*yì/___.
FOC 3PL/1SG/2PL C Nfor SM PST3 sleep NEG because 3SG PST3 beat 3PL.SM/3PL/1SG/2PL/
'Nfor didn't sleep because them/me/you(pl.) he hit.'

On the other hand, extraction of a verbal constituent, either the verb or the verb phrase, out of an island such as a complex NP is impossible, even though arguably, the verb copy in (iva) and the dummy verb in (ivb) could be regarded as resumptive elements. This indicates that islands still exist in the language and that the insensitivity of objects towards them might have a different source.

(iv) a. *Á r-**bò** (cí) mɛ̀ mū yōʔ [nsūŋ zǐ-nɛ̄ Nfòr bí **bō** ndāp]
FOC 5-build COMP 1SG PST2 hear news 3SG-COMP Nfor FUT1 build house
'I heard a rumour that Nfor will BUILD a house.'
b. *Á r-[**bò** ndāp] (cí) mɛ̀ mū yōʔ [nsūŋ zǐ-nɛ̄ Nfòr bí **gī**]
FOC 5-build house COMP 1SG PST2 hear news 3SG-COMP Nfor FUT1 do
'I heard a rumour that Nfor will BUILD A HOUSE.'

different from either the supposedly strong pronoun in focus contexts or the resumptive pronoun as in (21).

(31) a. Mɛ̀ bá yà bàá à níŋī. *(Wɛ̀r) à bā kɔ̄nī Nfòr à ŋgàbtfəʔ.
I and my father SM arrive 1PL.EX SM PST1 meet Nfor in morning
'Me and my father have arrived. We met Nfor in the morning.'

b. Wɛ̀ bá yà bàá à níŋī. *(Yí) à bā kɔ̄nī Nfòr à ŋgàbtfəʔ.
you and my father SM arrive 2PL SM PST1 meet Nfor in morning
'You and my father have arrived. You met Nfor in the morning.'

However, the situation is different with third person subjects. First, if a third person singular pronominal subject is focussed (32a), it takes the form of the third person object pronoun (32b).

(32) a. Á yé (cí) Nfòr à mū lā í-nɛ̄ í mū fàʔ.
FOC 3SG C Nfor SM PST3 say 3SG-COMP 3SG PST3 work
'Nfor said that s/he has worked.'

b. Nfòr à níŋī. Mɛ̀ bā yɛ̄ yē à ŋgàbtfəʔ.
Nfor SM arrive I PST1 see 3SG.OBJ in morning
'Nfor has arrived. I saw him in the morning.'

If we regard the object form *ye* of the third singular pronoun to be the strong form then, surely, the subject/resumptive form should be treated as the weak form. In this case, there would be a strong/weak distinction for third person singular.

Turning to the third person plural, the case is even clearer. Both in resumption (33a) and in discourse anaphoric use (33b) the form of the pronoun is null. The only element that appears before the TAM-marker is the subject marker *ó* in both cases.

(33) a. Á bō (cí) Nfòr à mū lā í-nɛ̄ (*wōyè) ó mū zhé bzhɨ́.
FOC children C Nfor SM PST3 say 3SG-COMP 3PL 3PL.SM PST3 eat food
'The children$_F$, Nfor said, ate food.'

b. Bfər ó níŋī. (*Wōyè) Ó kɛ̄ʔ ā mū̄ʔshɨ̄ mŋkòb.
relatives 3PL.SM arrive 3PL 3PL.SM start to open suitcases
'The relatives have arrived. (They) have already started unpacking their suitcases.'

This suggests that there is a special weak version of the third person plural pronoun, which has a null realization.[4]

Note that pro-drop is not an option in Limbum neither in subject position (34) nor in object position (35).

(34) a. Nfòr à níŋī. *(Í) bā kɔ̄nī wɛ̀r à ŋgàbtfəʔ.
Nfor SM arrive 3SG PST1 meet us in morning
'Nfor has arrived. He met us in the morning.'

[4]There is, of course, a very obvious functional explanation for the fact that it is just the third person plural which shows a null pronoun. In contrast to all other person-number combinations, it has a unique subject marker *ó*, which is able to unambiguously identify the subject as a third person plural in the absence of an overt realization of the subject. The other subject markers ∅ and *à* are ambiguous between 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person singular and 1st, 2nd person plural as well as 3rd singular NP, respectively.

b. Mɛ̀ bá yà bàá à níŋī. *(Wɛ̀r) à bā kɔ̄nī Nfòr à ŋgàbtfəʔ.
I and my father SM arrive 1PL.EX SM PST1 meet Nfor in morning.
'Me and my father have arrived. We met Nfor in the morning.'

(35) a. Nfòr à níŋī. Mɛ̀ bā yɛ̄ *(yē) à ŋgàbtfəʔ.
Nfor SM arrive I PST1 see him in morning
'Nfor has arrived. I saw him in the morning.'

b. Bfər ó níŋī. Mɛ̀ bā yɛ̄ *(wō) à ŋgàbtfəʔ.
relatives 3PL.SM arrive I PST1 see them in morning
'The relatives have arrived. I saw them in the morning.'

The only case in which it looks like the pronoun has been dropped is when it is a third person plural subject (36).

(36) Bfər ó níŋī. Ó kɛ̄ʔ ā mū̄ʔshī mŋkòb.
relatives 3PL.SM arrive 3PL.SM start to open suitcases
'The relatives have arrived. (They) have already started unpacking their suitcases.'

Pro-drop is usually not confined exclusively to one specific person-number combination. Rather, in specific environments all pronominal elements, independent of their person-number specifications, are dropped. Thus, I argue that what is special about the third person is that it is the only person-number combination in Limbum for which there are distinct strong and weak pronouns. In particular, the weak form for the third person plural is null, which gives rise to the apparent surface asymmetry regarding resumption.

4 Focus marking

Let me turn to a third asymmetry: focus marking. So far, in examples with a focussed constituent marked by *á*, this constituent has consistently been followed by an overt element *cí*, preliminarily glossed as COMP.[5] This element, however, is in fact optional. Interestingly, it interacts with the subject marker *à* and the resumptive pronouns *í* in the following way. In a regular declarative focus-less sentence, only *à* is possible and *cí* has to be absent (37a). In a sentence where a focussed subject is followed by *cí*, only *í* is licit, while the presence of *à* renders the sentence ungrammatical (37c). However, if the focussed subject is not followed by *cí*, both *í* or *à* may occur (37b).

(37) a. Nfòr ***í/à*** mū fàʔ.
Nfor *3SG.RP/SM PST2 work
'Nfor worked.'

[5]This element is very similar to the relative marker *zhɨ̀* used to introduce relative clauses such as (i).

(i) Mɛ̀ rɨ̀ŋ njíŋwɛ̀ [zhɨ̀ í cí yɛ̄ ŋgwē fɔ̄].
1SG know woman REL.P 3SG PROG see dog DEF
'I know the woman who is seeing the dog.'

However, they are not identical. The relative marker's consonant is pronounced [ʒ] while *cí* is pronounced with a [ʧ]. Also, the former is low toned while the latter bears a high tone. It should thus be clear that focus constructions do not involve a relative clause.

b. Á Nfòr cí **í/*à** mū fàʔ.
FOC Nfor COMP 3SG.RP/*SM PST2 work
'Nfor$_F$ worked.'

c. Á Nfòr **í/à** mū fàʔ.
FOC Nfor 3SG.RP/SM PST2 work
'Nfor$_F$ worked.'

The pattern is summarized in the table in (38).

(38)

FOCUS	*cí*	SM/RP
—	—	à
✓	—	à, í
✓	✓	í

We have already seen that, as a resumptive pronoun, *í* only occurs when the subject has been displaced. In contrast, *á* is only licit when the subject adjacent to it is not a singular pronoun. If we now assume that *cí* is the optional overt realization of the head to whose specifier the focussed subject is displaced, the pattern in (38) falls out straighforwardly.

In (37a), the subject is not focussed and not displaced. As it is a third person singular NP, it triggers the presence of the subject marker *à*. The structure of (37a) is sketched in (39).

(39) [$_{CP}$ [$_{TP}$ Nfòr **à** mū [$_{VP}$ fàʔ]]]

In (37b), in contrast, the subject is focussed, as indicated by it being preceded by the focus particle *á*. Additionally, the concomitant displacement is indicated by overt material intervening between the subject and its base position, namely *cí*. As the subject is unambiguously displaced, the only material that can appear directly preceding the tense marker *mū* is the resumptive pronoun *í*. The element *cí* could either be a realization of the C head, under the assumption that focus displacement targets SpecCP. It could also be regarded as a realization of the Focus head, as argued by Becker et al. (2019), with the focus particle *á* heading its own FP projection (Horvath 2007, 2010, 2013; Cable 2010: see also). These structures of (37b) are sketched in (40).

(40) a. [$_{CP}$ á Nfòr cí [$_{TP}$ **í** ∅ mū [$_{VP}$ fàʔ]]]
b. [$_{CP}$ [$_{FocP}$ [$_{FP}$ á Nfòr] cí [$_{TP}$ **í** ∅ mū [$_{VP}$ fàʔ]]]]

Turning to the case of optionality, I argue that this is structurally ambiguous bewteen an in-situ (39) and a displacement structure (40). In one case, the subject is focus marked by the particle *á* but stays in situ in SpecTP (41). Here, it is not possible for *cí* to occur inbetween the subject and the subject marker simply because the head which it realizes precedes the subject. The subject marker *à* occurs as the subject is not displaced.

(41) [$_{CP}$ [$_{TP}$ á Nfòr **à** mū [$_{VP}$ fàʔ]]]

In the other case, the subject is focus marked by *á* and displaced to SpecCP or SpecFocP just as in (40). However, the C or Foc head is not overtly realized. Therefore, there is no overt

(configurational) indication of displacement (42). The resumptive pronoun *í* occurs because the subject is not in its base position.

(42) a. [$_{CP}$ á Nfòr $C_{\varnothing}$ [$_{TP}$ **í** ∅ mū [$_{VP}$ fàʔ]]]
b. [$_{CP}$ [$_{FocP}$ [$_{FP}$ á Nfòr] $Foc_{\varnothing}$ [$_{TP}$ **í** ∅ mū [$_{VP}$ fàʔ]]]]

Both structures (41) and (42) result in the same surface string with the only difference being that (41) features the subject marker *à* and (42) contains the resumptive pronoun *í* instead.

An indication that the absence of *cí* is not equivalent to the absence of displacement or the absence of the head that hosts *cí* comes from object focus. When an object undergoes focus fronting, *cí* is equally optional as with subject focussing (43).

(43) Á Ngàlá (cí) mɛ̀ bí kɔ̄nī.
FOC Ngala COMP I FUT1 meet
'I will meet $Ngala_F$.' (Becker and Nformi 2016: 60)

The object in (43) clearly appears outside of its base position. Therefore, there must be a head that provides a specifier to host it whether *cí* is overt or not. Thus, displacement in (42) is a valid possibility despite the lack of *cí*.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, I showcased three subject-internal asymmetries in Limbum. The first asymmetry is between singular pronominal subjects and singular full NP/plural pronominal subjects. It's interaction with subject resumption gives rise to what looks like an antiagreement effect on the surface. As this effect is a direct result of the interaction, this might lend some support to approaches to antiagreement effects that attribute it to language-specific properties (Fominyam and Georgi 2019; van Alem 2019) rather than some cross-linguistic general antiagreement rule/mechanism/operation (e.g. antilocality or $\overline{\text{A}}$-triggered impoverishment).

The second asymmetry obtains between third person plural vs. everything else with regard to resumption. Again, the gap left by third person plural subject extraction is only apparent, as it is the only person/number combination for which there is a weak vs. strong distinction in pronouns as evidenced by discourse anaphoricity. The weak version of the third person plural pronoun used in resumption contexts is simply null and therefore gives the impression of a gap.

The last asymmetry concerns the cooccurrence of focus marking and the subject marker/resumptive pronoun. It was shown that the absence of focus marking is paired with the subject marker, while the presence of full focus marking with *á* and *cí* requires the resumptive pronoun. Focus marking with only *á* allows for subject marker or resumptive pronoun to be present. This optionality has been interpreted as an underlying structural ambiguity in interaction with the optionality of overt *cí*.

Overall, the three subject asymmetries have been argued to be the result of language-specific peculiarities (i.e. weak-strong distinction for third person plural pronouns only, optional overtness

of *cí*, absence of subject marker with singular pronouns) and their interaction with other properties of the language (e.g. obligatory subject resumption, focus movement).

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