Contrastive marking of anthroponyms and common nouns in object and subject argument slots in Nuasúɛ (A.62A)

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This paper tackles the contrastive marking of common nouns and anthroponyms in subject and object slots in Nuasúɛ, a Bantu Mbam language spoken in Cameroon. The study is twofold, i.e. descriptive and explicative. Firstly, I show that a special category is only overtly encoded on proper nouns. Indeed, a common noun in subject or (first) object functions does not entail any special marking (1) while anthroponyms carry the enclitic particle =à in two specific contexts. Whereas in non-past narrative tenses, anthroponyms allow this particle only in object argument slot as in (2), in the past narrative, both in the subject and the object functions, they maintain the particle =à, supplemented by the coexistence of the subject and its anaphoric marker (SM) as in (3). After this description, the coexistence of PN and SM will be explained as well as the grammatical function of this particle will be determined in Nuasúɛ, a language with no morphological case marking. Far from considering enclitic =à as a case marker, I suggest that anthroponym marking in Nuasúɛ is the expression of the interactions between their lexical properties and informational structure in sentences. In that case, enclitic =à appears as the morphological marker of the inherent topicality (definiteness) of anthroponyms when used in focalized syntactic slots (Bébiné, f.c.).

(1)  à-pyónyí  kà-yòòsôn  àŋ-ònyóní  c1-disciple  F2-look.at  CL1-master  à-pyónyí  kà-yòòsôn  àŋ-ònyóní  c1-disciple  F2-look.at  CL1-master  ‘The disciple will look at the master.’

(2)  Simon  kà-yòòsôn  Yésus=à  Simon  F2-look.at  Jésus=TOP  ‘Simon will look at Jesus.’

(3)  Ŝimún=à  ū-à-sàǹjûnà  Yèsús=à  kî-yôn  kî-tâtû  Ŝimún=à  ū-à-sàǹjûnà  Yèsús=à  kî-yôn  kî-tâtû  Simon=TOP  1SM-NARR-deny  Jesus=TOP  CL7-fois  7-trois  ‘Simon denied Jesus thrice.’