Prosodic Focus Marking in Ewe?

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1. Introduction
   1.1 Structure of the Talk
   1.2 Motivation
   1.3 Focus Expressions in Ewe

2. Methods
   2.1 Materials
   2.2 Recording Procedure
   2.3 Acoustic Analysis

3. Data
   3.1 Duration
   3.2 F0

4. Conclusions
“Different languages employ different means for the formal expression of focus.

Thus focus may be signaled **prosodically** by stress as is the case in **English**.

Some languages express focus **morphologically** by means of special morphemes and particles. This is the situation in many African languages including **Ewe** and **Akan**.”

(Ameka 1992: 3)
Questions:

- Does Ewe also use prosodic means to express focus?
- If yes, which kinds of prosodic means are used?
Hints for prosodic focus marking in the literature:

1. Möhlig (1971)
   Ewe uses „expressives prosodemes“: one of them, for instance, serves to emphasize a word or phrase by a higher realization of all high tones in the respective phrase.

2. Lefebvre/Brousseau (2002:154) (on Fon)
   If the focussed element “is linked to the direct object position of the verb[. T] there is a short pause after [the focus marker] wè…” But if the focussed element “is linked to the subject position of the verb. (…), there is no pause between wè and the verb,…”
Questions:

Does Ewe use prosodic means to express focus?

- maybe?!

If yes, which kinds of prosodic means are used?

- F0-modulation
- phrasing (pauses, lengthening etc.)
Based on the literature, it seems that the pragmatic category ‘focus’ is mostly expressed by morpho-syntactic means. (e.g. Ameka, 1992)

Focus on the subject

\[ [S-\acute{e}]_{Foc} \ V \ O \]

Focus on the object

\[ S \ V \ [O]_{Foc} \]
\[ [O-\acute{e}]_{Foc} \ S \ V \]
1. 
woman know person
‘A/the woman knows the/a person.’

2. 
woman know way.DEF
‘A/the woman knows the way.’

3. 
grandma know way.DEF
‘A/the grandmother knows the way.’
4. nonH #    H H
woman eat    thing.pl
‘A/the woman has eaten things.’

5. nonH nonH #    nonH #    nonH nonH
person eat    life
‘A/the person has enjoyed life.’

6. nonH H    #    nonH #    nonH nonH
grandma eat    life
‘A/the grandmother has enjoyed life.’
1. **Focus on the subject** (42 utterances)
   
   Q: Who knows the person?

   A: $S + FM \quad V \quad O$

   

2. **Focus on the object (ex-situ)** (39 utterances)

   Q: Whom does the woman know?

   A: $O + FM \quad S \quad V$

3. **Focus on the object (in-situ)** (36 utterances)

   Q: Whom does the woman know?

   A: $S \quad V \quad O$
Recordings were made:
- in a sound attenuated recording booth
- with one male educated speaker of Aᵦ●❶
- at 44Khz in digital format
- reading lists (question-answer paradigms): recorded (at least) five times, each time in a different randomized order → at least five tokens per sentence type

6 sentences x 3 conditions x at least 5 repetitions > 90
For these utterances
- the speech stream was annotated phonemically in Praat
- the duration of each phoneme was calculated via a script
- the F0 was calculated and time-normalized via a script
Sample of Praat Labeling file:

Sound pressure wave form

Spectrogram with overlaid fundamental frequency (F0) contour

segmentation window with transcription
Duration – object focus in-situ

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

6. 

- subject
- verb
- object
- final phone

Subject
Verb
Object
Final phone

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

36th CALL, Leiden 28-30 August 2006
1. [n=8]

2. [n=6]

3. [n=7]

- **subject**
- **FOC marker**
- **verb**
- **object**
- **final phone**
Duration – **Subject vs. Object** ex-situ Focus

1. [n=8]

2. [n=6]

3. [n=7]

- **FOC marker**
- **subject**
- **verb**
- **final phone**

- **object**

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36th CALL, Leiden 28-30 August 2006
Duration – **Subject vs. Object** ex-situ Focus

4. [Graph with data points]

5. [Graph with data points]

6. [Graph with data points]
A *Linear Mixed Effects Model Anova* on the duration of the Focus Marker in S+FM versus O+FM shows a significant effect:

\[ p.< .05, \text{df}=1, F=15.77 \]
The focus marker in the ex-situ object $O+FM$ is produced reliably longer by this speaker than in the $S+FM$ condition.

S-Foc: lengthening as indicator for focus

O-Foc: lengthening as indicator for clausal boundary and focus (compounding effect)
Time-normalized F0 contours

Subject Focus (with FM)

Object Focus (no Marking)
F0 – Comparison: O-Foc in-situ vs. S-Foc
F0 – Comparison: O-Foc in-situ vs. S-Foc
Overlay of neutral reading & Object focus in-situ for six sentence types
F0 – Comparison: O-Foc in-situ vs. S-Foc
Does Ewe also use prosodic means to express focus?

Yes!

There is evidence for duration (lengthening of FM) to play a (tertiary) role, supporting syntactic structure.

\[
S_{\text{Foc}} \mid V \ O \\
O_{\text{Foc}} \mid S \ V
\]

There is evidence for F0 (compression of postfocal material) to play a (secondary or tertiary) role.
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## Summary

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Thank you!
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