

When verbal predicates go fronting*

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This paper demonstrates that there are no empirical and theoretical motivations for regarding verbal predicate focus constructions as (diachronically) derived from cleft constructions. Instead, it is argued that predicate fronting for the purpose of focus or topic is comparable to verb (phrase) fronting structures in other languages (e.g., Germanic). The proposed analysis further indicates that related doubling strategies observed in certain languages are the consequences of parallel chains that license the fronted verb (phrase) in the left periphery, and the Agree-tense-aspect features inside the proposition.

1 Introduction

In the 80s, many linguists working on certain West African languages (e.g., Kwa, Kru) and Atlantic creole languages observed that sentences involving verb doubling, for the purposes of focusing or topicalisation, represented a challenge for GB-type theories of movement and phrase structure (Koopman 1984, 2000, Lumsden & Lefebvre 1990, Manfredi 1993). The examples in (1) to (5) represent instances of verb doubling in various languages.

The Gungbe sentence in (1a) is typical of such structures: the fronted verbal category is a bare (non-finite) verb that leaves a copy inside the clause, as schematized in (1b).

* Parts of this paper were presented at the International Conference on Focus, Berlin. I thank the organisers of this conference for inviting me there and the audience for its comments. I am also grateful to an anonymous reviewer whose questions and comments help improve this version. The following abbreviations are used: Acc= accusative; Agr= agreement; Asp= aspect; Comp= complementizer; Coord= coordination; CL= clitic; COP= copula; Decl= declarative; Dem= demonstrative; Det= determiner; Foc= focus; Fut= future; Hab= habitual; Inf= infinitive; Neg= negative; Nom= nominative; NR= nominalizer; Part= particle; Pl= plural; Poss= possessive; Prep= preposition; Prog= progressive; Pst= past; Top= topic; RED; reduplication; Rel= relative; sg= singular; SM= subject marker.

- (1) a. % [Dù] wè Séna [dù] blédì ló
 eat Foc Sena eat bread Det
 ‘Sena ATE the bread!’ (Gungbe (Kwa), Aboh 2004)

- b. [CP V_[Focus] [IP ... V.....]]

While examples such as (1a) are often discussed in studies on verb focusing with doubling, the literature also contains more intricate sequences such as (2a), the Ewegbe variant of (1a).¹ In such constructions, the fronted verbal category reduplicates but leaves a non-reduplicated doublet inside the clause. This is illustrated in (2b).

- (2) a. fo-fo é wò fo é
 RED-beat Foc 3sg beat 3sg
 ‘BEATING s/he beat him/her.’ (Ewegbe (Kwa), Ameka 1992: 12)

- b. [CP V-V_[Focus] [IP ... V...]]

Given that reduplication often correlates with nominalisation in these languages, cases like (2) are commonly grouped with the strategies in (3a) and (3b), where a verb form showing nominal or non-finite morphology is fronted, leaving a doublet (i.e. a finite form) inside the clause, as represented in (3c).

- (3) a. O-suwa owu Puta a-mu-suwa tsono raa
 Inf-wash Foc Puta SM-1sg-wash clothes her
 ‘Puta WASHED her clothes.’ (Tuki (Bantu), Biloa 1997: 110)

- b. (ká) dē-kā àtì Àtìm dē mango-kǔ d̄iem
 Foc eat-NR Comp Atim eat mango-Def yesterday
 ‘IT IS EATING the mango that Àtìm ate yesterday.’ (Buli (Gur), Hiraiwa 2005: 6)

- c. [CP INFINITIVE/NOMINALIZER-V_[Focus] [IP ... V_{FINITE} ...]]

In (4a), we find a similar strategy in Haitian Creole: The fronted verb is associated with a copula-like element, but leaves a bare root in the clause, as illustrated in (4b).

¹ The diacritic “%” indicates that speakers vary as to the realisation of the focus marker in such constructions.

- (4) a. Se vòlè Bouki vòlè lajan leta
 SE steal Bouki steal money state
 ‘Bouki STOLE state money.’ (Haitian Creole, DeGraff 1996: 74)

- b. [CP COP-V_[Focus] [IP ...V...]]

The Yoruba example under (5) represents an interesting but rare case: The fronted verb phrase is contained in a larger aspect phrase which is repeated in the clause. This pattern is schematized in (5b), see Manfredi (1993) for discussion.

- (5) a. Mí-máa-ra-ìwé ni Ajé máa-ra-ìwé
 NR -Prog-buy-book ni Aje Prog-buy-book
 ‘IT IS CONTINUOUS BOOK BUYING that Aje does/did [i.e., not just occasionally].’ (Yoruba (Kwa), Manfredi 1993:20)

- b. [CP NR-AspP_[Focus] [IP AspP]]

Example (6) is a Gungbe variant of the Yoruba example (5a), but the fronted category including the verb phrase is not repeated in the sentence. This strategy is represented under (6b).

- (6) a. [Wémà ĺ x̄ ná Kòfí] Séná tè
 book Det buy for Kofi-NR Sena Prog
 ‘Sena is BUYING THE BOOK FOR KOFI’ (Gungbe (Kwa), Aboh 2004a)

- b. [CP NomP_[Focus] [IP Asp_[+agr] gap]]

The various strategies illustrated in these examples indicate that the typology of predicate fronting (with doubling) involves more variation than is often assumed in the literature.² While the sentences in (1), (2), and (3) through (5) exhibit various forms of doubling, the Gungbe example in (6) excludes doubling. Aboh (2003a, 2004a) argues that this variation reduces to VO versus OV alternation, which itself relates to aspect specification (e.g. perfective versus imperfective) in the Gbe languages. This would mean that doubling in verb focusing constructions is sensitive to the expression of aspect in these languages.³

² The term predicate fronting is meant to cover cases of predicative adjectives which in certain languages manifest doubling structures similar to verb focus (e.g. Saramaccan, Byrne 1987).

³ A reviewer suggests that this description could be wrong because the superficial S-aux-OV structures could be reanalysed as simple SVO constructions where “the so-called

In this regard, examples (1) and (5-6) further indicate that the size of the fronted verbal element may also vary due to aspect specification. Note that the example in (1a) includes a perfective aspect while those in (5-6) involve a progressive aspect, see Aboh (2004a) and references cited there for discussion on aspect marking in Gbe.

Finally, the examples in (1) to (4) show that the fronted verbal element varies in form: it may be bare (1a), reduplicated (2a), or specified by a nominal or non-finite morpheme (3a, b) and (4a). With regard to these examples, it is worth noting that Gungbe somehow stands apart from other languages discussed here because it represents the only case where the fronted category appears in a bare non-finite form identical to the copy inside the proposition. Other languages use various morpho-phonological processes to distinguish between the two verb forms. I conclude from this observation that even though Gungbe resorts to a bare non-finite verb form in cases like (1a), this is by no means a nominalised verb. Partial evidence for this reasoning is that in Gungbe, as in most Gbe, verb nominalization often correlates with reduplication. Consider the following examples.

- (7) a. Nú **qùqù** ló má nyón
 thing eat.eat Det Neg good
 'The food is not good.'
- b. Nú **qùqù** má nyón
 thing eat.eat Neg good
 'Eating is not good.'

In example (7a) where the sequence NP-VV is followed by a determiner, it is treated as a normal noun phrase meaning '*food*', but in (7b) where the same sequence occurs without determiner and requires a generic meaning, we obtain a gerund-like meaning denoting an event. Since this type of reduplication is excluded in verb focus constructions in Gungbe, I conclude that the fronted category is not a nominalised verb, but a simple bare non-finite form.

aspectual marker *tè/tò* is a locative verb used in the progressive to build a periphrastic construction [where] this OV structure [...] simply constitutes the complement of the verb *tè/tò*." I have shown elsewhere (Aboh 2004a) that *tò/tè* has none of the verb properties Gungbe verbs display. One such property to the point is that it cannot be focused similarly to lexical verbs and it cannot be reduplicated. Under the reviewer's generalised SVO analysis therefore examples (1a) and (5) still differ in that the former allows fronting of the head of predicate (i.e., the verb), while the latter displays fronting of its complement. Yet, both strategies create the same semantic/pragmatic focus effect. Clearly, the generalisation remains unchanged: predicate fronting is sensitive to aspectual or lexical properties of the focused verb. See also Aboh (2003b, 2005) for discussion on OV structures in Gbe.

These details and their relations to morphosyntax are rarely discussed in the literature because most studies treat the sentences in (1) through (5) under the common umbrella of ‘predicate cleft’, and mainly focus on two theoretical questions.⁴

- (8) a. What parameter is responsible for verbal ‘predicate cleft’?
- b. What principle of grammar accounts for verbal predicate doubling?

In addressing these questions, a scenario that is entertained in the literature is that the structures in (1) to (5) are verbal counterparts of nominal focus constructions, as well as wh-questions with whom they sometimes share the same focus marker. Compare for instance, the Gungbe example (1a) with the nominal focus (9a), the wh-question (9b), the predicative adjective focus (9c), and adverb focus (9d), which involve the focus marker *wè*.

- (9) a. Séná wè qù bléqì lís
 eat Foc eat bread Det
 ‘SENA ate the bread!’
- b. Ménù wè qù bléqì lís?
 who Foc eat bread Det
 ‘Who ate the bread?’
- c. Kpéví wè Kófi tè bó yì yòvótòmè
 small Foc Kofi be and go Europe
 ‘Kofi was SMALL when he went to Europe.’
- d. Bléún wè Kófi yì yòvótòmè
 quickly Foc Kofi go Europe
 ‘Kofi quickly went to Europe.’

These examples indicate that focusing in Gungbe holds across lexical categories and does not require the fronted element to be a nominal. Therefore, the generalisation is that languages like Gungbe display a focus strategy where the focused element must front to the position left adjacent to a focus marker.

⁴ In section 3.2, I tentatively interpret these morphosyntactic differences in terms of verb topic versus verb focus distinction. See also Aboh (2003a, 2004a) for a description of the various verb focus strategies found across Kwa.

While this generalisation is correct, things are a little bit more intricate when comparing such languages to typologically different ones. An obvious observation, for instance, is that the Gungbe-type focus sentences often appear semantically and pragmatically close to clefts constructions in other languages. Consider, for example, the following English clefts (10a-b), which appear to encode emphasis/contrast and wh-question similarly to their Gungbe counterparts in (9a-b).

- (10) a. It is John who ate the bread
 b. Who is it that ate the bread?

Such parallels would therefore suggest that the focus constructions and wh-questions under (9) as well as the verbal focus sentences in (1-5) are akin to clefts in other languages. An illustration of this rationale could be that the English example (11a) would correspond to the Gungbe sentence (12a), while (11b) would be on a par with (12b).

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| (11) a. It is John who came | (12) a. Ján wè wá |
| | John Foc come |
| | ‘JOHN came’ |
| b. *It is eating that John did | b. Dù wè Ján qù nú |
| | eat Foc John eat thing |
| | ‘John ATE’ |

One could follow this line of thinking and further suggest that the Gungbe examples (12a-b) are hidden (or grammaticalised) cleft constructions, where a former copula grammaticalised into a focus marker. For instance, under the assumption that the Yoruba element *ni* (5) is a copula, Dekydtspotter (1992), cited in Ndayragije (1993: 119-120), proposed a unified analysis for Yoruba (predicate) clefts and English clefts, where the two languages only differ with regard to the position of the clefted element. In English the clefted noun phrase follows the copula as in the following structure [_{IP} it is XP_i [_{CP} OP_i [_{IP}....t_i....]]]. In Yoruba, however, the clefted element (nominal or verbal) precedes the copula as follows [_{IP} XP_i ni [_{CP} OP_i [_{IP}....t_i....]]]. See also Lefebvre & Brousseau (2002) for treating Fongbe equivalents of the Gungbe example (1) as clefts.⁵

Since the English example (11b) is ungrammatical, unlike its Gungbe equivalent (12b), one may conclude from Dekydtspotter’s (1992) analysis that Universal Grammar (UG) embeds a ‘predicate cleft’ parameter that is set

⁵ Fongbe is a closely related language to Gungbe (Capo 1991).

positively in Gungbe-type languages but negatively in English-type languages. This assumption, in turn, would suggest that English-type languages have nominal clefts only while Gungbe-type languages have nominal, adjectival, adverbial predicate, and verbal ‘predicate clefts’. The relevant parameter for ‘predicate cleft’ could therefore be a property of the lexicon (e.g. lack of clear distinction between lexical categories: verbs vs. nouns; adjectives vs. adverbs).⁶

With such a treatment of (8a), the question under (8b) boils down to what property of grammar (syntax vs. phonology) produces doublets in ‘predicate clefts’. Various analyses have been proposed in terms of movement of the focused verb (or its cognate object denoting event) sentence-initially (e.g. Koopman 1984, 2000, Manfredi 1993, Aboh 2003, 2004a) or else base generation of the fronted verbal category in sentence-initial position (e.g. Lumsden & Lefebvre 1990). Though authors differ as to the category of the fronted verb and its relation to the apparent doublet in IP-internal position, the consensus in recent generative works has been to assume that the two elements belong to a chain created by movement and instantiate phonetic realization of multiple copies (Abel 2001, Nunes 2004).

This paper first takes issue with the analysis of verbal focusing in terms of ‘predicate clefts’. In section 2, I show on pragmatic and structural grounds that the term ‘predicate cleft’ is a misnomer for a class of phenomena that are not necessarily linked to focusing and that display various properties atypical of cleft constructions (e.g. in Germanic and Romance). I conclude from this that structures involving predicate fronting cannot be equated to ‘clefts’ on any possible account. The moral of this section is that the term ‘predicate cleft’ should be avoided unless empirically motivated and formally argued for.

Section 3 shows that verb focusing in Kwa is comparable to VP-fronting under focus or topic in other languages; the only difference being that not all languages display a doublet of the fronted category inside the clause.

Building on this, section 4 briefly discusses the issue of predicate doubling. Following Chomsky’s (2005) hypothesis on parallel chains, I claim that what looks superficially like an instance of phonetic realization of multiple copies, is actually an instantiation of insertion of a pleonastic element, such as *do*-support in English, to encode Agree-tense-aspect features. Building on Aboh & Dyakonova (2006), it is shown that such pleonastic verbs are not part of the same chain as the one involving the displaced predicate. Put differently, the fronted predicate and what appears to be its copy inside the IP head different chains that target distinct positions in the clause. Section 5 concludes the paper.

⁶ I show in section 2 and subsequently that this characterisation cannot be maintained.

2 ‘Predicate cleft’: a misnomer

As mentioned in previous paragraphs, verb focusing (e.g. in Kwa) shows structural, semantic, and pragmatic parallels with nominal focus constructions. The latter appear close to cleft constructions in typologically different languages (e.g. Romance, Germanic). *A priori*, the characterization of the (Kwa) focus constructions in terms of clefts therefore seems reasonable. There are, however, several reasons to believe that an analysis along this line is misleading. The following section deals with structural mismatches between the two types of constructions.

2.1 *On the missing cleft structural properties*

The examples under (13a-b) illustrate cleft sentences in English and in French.⁷

(13) a. It is John that I saw yesterday

- b. C'est Jean que j'ai vu hier
 ce.be John that 1sg.have see yesterday

On the surface of it, such constructions involve a pronominal expletive element in sentence initial position, a copula of the *be*-type, and a relative pronoun (or complementizer). In addition, cleft structures such as (13) are typically bi-clausal and involve two tensed elements: the copula in the clefted part and the lexical verb in what can be described as the ‘subordinate’ part.

Now let us compare these examples to their Gungbe counterpart in (14).

- (14) Ján wè ùn mòn tò sò
 John Foc 1sg see at yesterday
 ‘I saw JOHN yesterday’

Example (14) clearly shows that Gungbe focus construction lacks all the surface properties of clefts in Romance and Germanic: the sentence does not involve an expletive pronoun, there is no *be*-type copula, and no relative pronoun (or complementizer) occurs. In this regard, it is important to observe that relative clauses require the presence of the relative marker *dě* as in (15).

⁷ In this section, I limit myself to very general properties of clefts in English (Germanic) and French (Romance), but see Kiss (1998) and references cited there for a more detailed analysis.

- (15) Dáwè dě ùn mɔ̃n tò sà wá
 man Rel 1sg see at yesterday come
 ‘The man that I saw yesterday came.’

This is piece of evidence that example (14) cannot involve a hidden relative clause including a zero relative marker.

Another piece of evidence that constructions like (14) are not clefts, or some bi-clausal structure containing a hidden relative clause is that the focus marker in Gungbe has no verbal usage: It never shows tense or aspect specification, and cannot be claimed to be a grammaticalised form of an original *be*-type copula.⁸ In addition, a Gungbe focused phrase can occur inside a relative clause (16a), but an English cleft cannot (16b).

- (16) a. Có à má sá flín Súrù wá?
 Part 2sg Neg again remember Suru Part
 ‘Oh, don’t you even remember Suru?’
- Ví énè dě [jè có sín xó] wè é nɔ́ sè!
 Child DemRel 2sg only Poss word Foc 3sg Hab listen
 That child who ONLY YOUR WORDS he would listened to!’
- b. *The man who it is only one novel (that) he wrote

Just as Gungbe nominal focus constructions lack all surface properties of clefts, so do the so-called ‘predicate clefts’. They lack a pronominal expletive, and there is no copula or relative pronoun involved, as one could expect from a Germanic or Romance perspective.

In this regard, the data discussed thus far, actually point to a different direction. We can see from the interpretation of sentences such as (14) that these are comparable to English focus constructions like (17a) where the focused element has been fronted, or (17b) where focus is assigned in-situ under appropriate circumstances.

- (17) a. JOHN I saw yesterday
 b. I saw JOHN yesterday

⁸ To my knowledge no diachronic study has ever shown this for most of the Gbe (and Kwa) languages. The same holds of the majority of West African languages for which we still lack detailed diachronic studies of these discourse morphemes.

Under the assumption that the computation driving the Gungbe example (14) and its English counterpart (17a) is basically the same, it is quite interesting to observe that the English sentence in (17a) is itself comparable to the English verbal focus in (18a). This structure is to some extent similar to the Gungbe focus sentence (18b): in both examples a verbal element or phrase is fronted in a position preceding the canonical subject.

(18) a. I asked John to cook the rice, and [cook the rice] he did

- b. Ùn zón lésì Séná bò [dìà] é dìà lésì ló ná mì¹
 1sg order rice Sena Coord cook 3sg cook rice Det Prep 1sg
 ‘I ordered Sena some rice and he COOKED the rice for me.’

The parallel between English VP-fronting and verb focusing as in (18) is even stronger when one considers verb focus in OV constructions in Gbe. As the progressive counterpart of example (18b) shows, such sequences do not involve doubling. Instead, the IP-internal position contains only the subject and the progressive marker *tò* that has changed into *tè*, due to the fronting of its complement (see Aboh 2004a for discussion).

(19) Ùn zón lésì Séná bò [lésì ló dìà ná mì] wè é tè
 1sg order rice Sena Coord rice Det cook Prep 1sg Foc 3sg Prog
 ‘I ordered Sena some rice and he IS COOKING THE RICE FOR ME.’

The striking parallels between example (19) and English VP-fronting structures as in (18a) further suggest that there is no empirical ground for relating the Gbe verbal focus constructions to clefts. This makes the term ‘predicate cleft’ unfortunate. After all, no one has ever treated the English (and related Germanic) verbal focus structures involving VP-fronting as ‘predicate clefts’.

2.2 *On the pragmatic mismatches*

If we accept the view that the semantic (or pragmatic) properties of cleft structures have something to do with their internal syntactic structure (Kiss 1998, and much related work), then the discourse properties of (verb) focus constructions in Gbe (Kwa) further support our conclusion that these have nothing in common with clefts. Kiss’ (1998) work on focus suggests that English clefts encode exhaustive or identificational focus, which “represents a subset of the set of contextually or situationally given elements for which the predicate phrase can potentially hold; it is identified as the exhaustive subset of this set for which the predicate phrase actually holds” (Kiss 1998: 1). Under

such view, clefts, which often embed contrast, cannot be used to encode new information focus which expresses *nonpresupposed information*.

Interestingly, such distinction does not seem to hold for the Gungbe-type focus constructions because they can be used for new information focus, presentational focus, and contrastive focus. The dialogue in (20a-b) illustrates new information focus. Observe from the (c) examples that the English counterparts of the Gungbe sentences are ungrammatical or infelicitous in the same contexts.⁹

- (20) a. Été wè jɔ?
 what Foc happen
 ‘What happened?’
- b. Súrù wè kù móto bíɔ àximè bò hù mè
 Suru Foc drive car enter market and kill person
 ‘SURU drove a car in the market and killed some people.’
- c. *It is John who drove a car into the market and killed some people

The sentences under (21a-b) are instances of scene-setting and presentational focus, which typically introduce a discussion/debate or a narrative. Observe from this usage that the focused constituents encode existential reading. As the ungrammatical English example (21c) shows, clefts typically exclude such a reading.

- (21) a. Nú qé wè xá mì
 thing Det Foc happen 1sg
 ‘SOMETHING happened to me,
 bɔ ùn qɔ má wá zé dó xíá wè
 and 1sg say 1sg.Fut come take plant show 2sg
 and I told myself I should come and tell you.’

⁹ A reviewer noted that pragmatically speaking, example (20b) implies focus on the sentence. However, the interesting thing about Gungbe and similar languages is that focus on the sentence would require the sentence (as a whole) to occur to the left of the focus marker, which will then surface sentence-finally. This is additional evidence for distinguishing the Gungbe sentences from typical English or French clefts, which cannot target the clause as a whole.

- b. Dáwè dé wè tín bò jró ná dà àxɔví
 man Det Foc exist and want Prep marry Princess
 ‘There was A MAN who wanted to marry a princess.’

- c. *It is something that happened to me that I would like to tell you

Finally, the question-answer pair in (22) illustrates contrastive focus.

- (22) a. Ménù lé wè ká wá àgɔ lɔ tèn-mè ?
 Who Pl Foc at.least come celebration Det place-in
 ‘Who are the people who came to the celebration?’
- b. Súrù có wè wá, nɔví étɔn díè lé kpɔ wè gɔn
 Suru only Foc come brother Poss other Pl all Foc miss
 ‘ONLY SURU came, ALL HIS OTHER BROTHERS didn’t.’

We observe from this last example that *Suru* being modified by *có* (only) is interpreted contrastively to his brothers, yet the two constituents *Súrù* and *nɔví étɔn díè lé kpɔ* are focus marked by the marker *wè*. Even though English clefts may encode contrast as in (23a), it is worth noticing that a cleft counterpart of the Gungbe example (22b) is excluded, as shown in (23b).

- (23) a. It is only John who came, none of his other brothers did
 b. *It is only John who came, and it is all his other brothers who didn’t

The generalisation here seems that English (and most Germanic/Romance) allows one clefted constituent only per sentence. The Gungbe (and Gbe) focus constructions, however, do not obey this constraint and may contain more than one focused constituent in the sentence. In these languages, each clause may license its own focus constituent and therefore contain the focus marker (see Aboh 2004a for discussion).

Given these differences between Gungbe-type nominal focus constructions and cleft constructions in other languages, it is no surprise that the so-called ‘predicate clefts’, supposedly verbal counterparts of nominal clefts, also display pragmatic properties that are unexpected if those were verbal counterparts of nominal clefts.

In the context of the question (20a), for instance, the sentence under (24) represents an appropriate answer. In this case, verb focus seems to express causative meaning, that is, the husband is angry because his wife *Dosi* went out.

- (24) Tóñ Dòsi tón zámè bò àsú étɔn bé tuklá
 go.out Dosi go.out night and husband Poss start trouble
 ‘Dosi went out in the night and her husband started making trouble.’

While an English cleft would be possible in a context like (25a-b),

- (25) a. Is it because Mary wants to divorce her husband that he is angry?
 b. No, it is because she went out so late that he is angry.

the same is impossible in a question-answer pair like (26a-b) which parallels the Gungbe question-answer pair (20a) and (24a).

- (26) a. What happened?
 b. *It is because Mary went out so late that her husband is angry.

The Gungbe sentences under (27) further indicate that a question as in (27a) can be answered by sentence (27b). Here, verb focus puts emphasis on the fact that the Event happened at a moment when *Bòkɔ* stood up/woke up.

- (27) a. Été wè wà Bòkɔ?
 what Foc happen Boko
 ‘What happened to Boko?’
- b. Fón é fón bò dò émì ná yì l’awú
 stand 3sg stand and say 3sg-Log Fut go wash
 ‘He STOOD UP/WOKE UP and was about to take a shower
 bò nú jè é jì.
 and thing fall 3sg on
 when he had a stroke.’

Put together, all these facts strongly suggest to me that the traditional characterization of the Gungbe-type nominal and verbal focus in terms of clefts has nothing to offer as to their structural make-up and the rather unexpected distributive and pragmatic properties that they exhibit.

Being aware of this state of affairs, some scholars use the term ‘cleft’ in a loose sense to mean that focus constructions involve two identifiable parts: the focused element and the rest. Put another way, the term ‘cleft’ would then simply reflect the commonly assumed focus versus presupposition/background partition, which itself could suggest a (reduced) bi-clausal structure. While one

may be satisfied with this shift in meaning, it is worth noting that this view is also misleading for two main reasons.

First, verb focusing does not always force fronting of the verb in sentence-initial position as suggested in previous discussion. In Nweh, an SVO Grassfield Bantu language, verb focusing (28a) generates the sequence in (28b), with the focused verbal form in sentence-final position.

- (28) a. Atem a kè? nčúū akendɔŋ čúū
Atem Agr Pst₁ boil plantains Ø-boil
'Atem BOILED plantains' (Nweh, Nkemnji 1995: 138)
- b. Subject.....V.....O.....V_[Focus]

Under the biclausal nature of verb focus constructions, one could describe example (28) as involving inverse cleft.¹⁰ But if so, it is not clear to me why two SVO languages (Gungbe and Nweh) will show such an asymmetry where Gungbe is of the type focus-[background], while Nweh is [background]-focus. Word order aside, the translation of (28a) and that of its Gungbe counterpart (29) indeed show that the two constructions are related.

- (29) Dà Súrù dà tèví
cook Suru cook yam
'Suru COOKED yam'

Assuming that Bantu speakers and Kwa speakers have access to the same computational apparatus, I conclude that it cannot be the case that (29) with a verb-initial focus is a cleft (e.g. English-type cleft, Dekydtspotter 1992), while (28b) with a verb-final focus implies a different structure. A more natural approach would be to assume that these two examples involve the same computation, even though they differ with regard to word order.

Second, a more general question that is never addressed in the literature on the so-called 'predicate-clefts' is their relation to other constructions in the languages where they are found. As discussed in Aboh (2004a, b), an outstanding property of the Gbe languages is that they display focus-marked constructions alongside with topic-marked constructions. Consider the parallels in (30) where (30b) is the topic counterpart of the focus construction in (30a).

¹⁰ I thank a reviewer for pointing this to me.

- (30) a. [Súrù wè] kù móto yì yòvó tò mè
 Suru Foc drive car go white country in
 ‘SURU drove a car to Europe.’
- b. [Súrù yà], é kù móto yì yòvó tò mè
 Suru Top 3sg drive car go white country in
 ‘As for Suru, he drove a car to Europe.’

Leaving aside structural differences between focus and topic constructions, it is quite obvious that the leftmost parts of these two sentences (within brackets) parallel in a striking way.¹¹ Both focus and topic markers require that the element under their scope surface in a left adjacent position. The generalisation therefore appears that languages of the Gungbe-type are discourse configurational languages involving discourse markers (e.g. focus, topic, interrogative) which systematically take scope over the element immediately to their left (Aboh 2004a, b). Be it so, singling out focus constructions like (30a) or (29) and labelling them clefts on a part with Romance and Germanic clefts appears an empirical and methodological fallacy.¹²

In this regard, the following section presents additional cross-linguistic data indicating that the so-called ‘predicate cleft’ is not restricted to African or creole languages. It further appears that the construction is akin to VP-fronting and may encode topic specification in some languages.

3 Against verb (phrase) fronting exceptionalism

Once we allow ourselves to look at verb focus constructions as banal predicate or verb (phrase) fronting for the purpose of some discourse-related property, such as focus or topic, we realize that the phenomenon occurs beyond African, creole, or other ‘exotic’ languages.

3.1 Verb (phrase) fronting: a common phenomenon

While the literature is rich of examples of VP-fronting similar to the English constructions exemplified in (18a), not much is said of VP-fronting structures involving doubling as the one discussed thus far. Yet, the following examples provide snippets of current literature on predicate focusing with doubling. This

¹¹ Topic constructions involve a resumptive pronoun unlike focus constructions (see Aboh 2004a for discussion).

¹² By arguing against the cleft analysis, I implicitly reject a bi-clausal approach to these constructions. Space limitations prevent me from discussing this issue here, but the presented examples speak for themselves.

list of typologically unrelated languages clearly indicates that verbal phrase fronting with doubling is more common than often assumed.

- (31) a. **Essen est** Maks fish
 to-eat eats Max fish
 ‘*As for eating, Max eats fish.*’
- b. [**Essen fish**] **est** Maks
 to-eat fish eats Max
 ‘*As for eating fish, Max eats them.*’ (Yiddish, Cable 2004: 2)
- (32) a. **Comprar**, Juan ha **comprado** un libro (aunque luego no lo ha leido)
 buy.Inf John has bought a book but later not CL has read
 ‘*As for buying, Juan has bought a book, although he didn’t read it later.*’
- b. [**Comprar** un libro], Juan lo ha **comprado**
 buy.Inf a book John CL has bought
 ‘*As for buying a book, Juan has bought it.*’ (Spanish, Vicente 2005: 44)
- (33) a. **Temperar** o cozinheiro **temperou** o peixe.
 to-season the cook seasoned the fish
 ‘*As for seasoning, the cook seasoned the fish.*’
- b. [**Temperar** o peixe] o cozinheiro **temperou**.
 to-season the fish the cook seasoned
 ‘*As for seasoning the fish, the cook seasoned it.*’ (Brazilian Portuguese, Cable 2004: 21)
- (34) a. **Tzelovatj**-to my ešče ne **Tzelovalisj**.
 kiss.Inf-Top we.Nom yet not kiss.Pst.Pl.
 ‘*As to kissing, we HAVE NOT kissed yet.*’
- b. ?[**Pomnitj**-to ih] ja **pomnju**.
 remember.Inf-Top them.Acc I.Nom remember
 ‘*As to remembering them, I DO remember.*’ (Russian, Dyakonova 2005)
- (35) a. **Liknot**, hi **kanta** et ha-praxim.
 To-buy she bought Acc. the-flowers
 ‘*As for buying, she bought the flowers.*’

- b. [Liknot et ha-praxim], hi **kanta**
 to-buy Acc. the-flowers, she bought
 ‘As for buying the flowers, she bought.’ (Hebrew, Landau 2006: 37)

All the languages listed here display some form of verbal predicate fronting with doubling that is similar to the cases discussed thus far for African languages. As these new comparative data appear in the literature, we observe another point that undermines the cleft analysis or description, while shedding some light on predicate doubling structures. Indeed, a close look at these examples compared to the previous examples under (1) to (6) reveals an intriguing difference in terms of information structure. All examples from (1) to (6) encode some type of emphasis or focus on the verb (phrase) while all examples from (31) to (35) involve some sort of topic reading on the verb (phrase). In addition, all the (b) examples in (31-35) indicate that, in languages that allow the topic reading, the fronted verb may pied-pipe an internal argument. I assume that the topic versus focus partition between examples (1-6) and (31-35) cannot be accidental.

A possibility that immediately comes to mind is that the focus flavour of the constructions in (1) to (6) derives from the fact that verbal predicate fronting in those languages is often regarded as a means for encoding contrast. But, since contrast per se does not suffice to identify a focus construction, we cannot exclude the possibility that some constructions in (1) to (6) derive from topicalisation of the verbal predicate as well.

Even though this view awaits further confirmation as of Kwa and Bantu languages, it is striking that all the examples in (31) to (35) involve a non-finite verb in sentence-initial position. As can be seen from the provided translations, such non-finite verb forms are often interpreted as nominalised verbs (or gerund). This is not surprising though: The relation between nominals and non-finite verbal forms is rather intricate. In (non-)standard French, for instance, certain non-finite verbs can be used as nouns that take the determiner. An illustration of this is given in (36).

- (36) Avoir → l'avoir; manger → le manger; boire → le boire; coucher → le coucher; lever → le lever; dire → les dires.

Let us assume therefore that verbal non-finite affixes may encode nominal features. This would mean that the non-finite verbal forms in (31-35) are to some extent comparable to the verb forms in (2), (3), and (5) which appear nominalised or exhibit non-finite morphology. These facts in turn raise the

question of why the fronted verbal element must be nominalised or non-finite in some languages.¹³

As things stand, it seems reasonable to assume that nominalisation of the verb is not a syntactic requirement on the fronting operation itself. Put more specifically, it does not seem plausible that the verb must nominalise (or get a non-finite affix, presumably in the morphological component) before it moves in syntax. Instead, I take the focus versus topic partition observed here seriously, and propose, for all the relevant cases, that the nominal morphology on the fronted verbal element is a morphological requirement of the topic head that attracts the verb phrase. This is so because:

- (37) Topics must be referential, but focus need not.

3.2 *Verb (phrase) fronting: a topic versus focus asymmetry*

Based on the description in (37), I claim that verbal predicate fronting generally involves two classes of phenomena: verbal predicate topicalisation versus verbal predicate focusing. The former is referential but not the latter.¹⁴ An immediate consequence of such a typology is that the topic verbal element, being a referential expression, is likely to behave like simple topic DPs.

Interestingly enough, a set of properties often associated with fronted nominalised or non-finite verbal elements appears parallel with certain properties which topic DPs exhibit.

For instance, Landau (2006) shows that Hebrew verbal predicate fronting with doubling displays similar properties with DP topics because it is unbounded (see also Cinque 1990). This is illustrated in (38) where the topic verbal phrase is moved across an intervening complementizer (Landau 2006: 42).

- (38) a. La'azor le-Rina, eyn li safek
to-help to-Rina there-isn't to-me doubt
še-Gil hivtiax še-hu ya'azor
that-Gil promised that-he will-help
'As for helping Rina, I have no doubt that Gil promised he would help.'

¹³ See Manfredi (1993) for discussion.

¹⁴ This characterisation also undermines the cleft approach to verb focusing or topicalisation.

- b. La'azor, eyn li safek
 to-help there to-me doubt
- še-Gil hivtxax še-hu ya'azor le-Rina
 that-Gil promised that-he will-help to-Rina
 'As for helping, I have no doubt that Gil promised he would help Rina.'

Yet, Hebrew predicate fronting with doubling exhibits island effects. The following examples show that extraction from a wh-island is prohibited (Landau 2006: 43).

- (39) a. ??Likro et ha-safer, ša'alti matay Gil kvar kara
 to-read Acc the-book asked.1sg when Gil already read
 'As for reading the book, I asked when Gil had already read.'
- b. ??Likro, ša'alti matay Gil kvar kara et ha-safer
 to-read asked.1sg when Gil already read Acc the-book
 'As for reading the book, I asked when Gil had already read.'

On the other hand, Aboh (2003a, 2004a) discusses certain facts about verbal predicate fronting in Kwa languages, where constructions involving a bare verb form are clause-bound and show sensitivity to negation while constructions involving a nominalised verb form are unbounded and may cross negation. For instance, the Gungbe sentences under (40) indicate that the focused verb cannot be extracted out of the embedded clause.

- (40) a. *Gbá ùn sè dà Séná [gbá]_i xwé ló ná Kòfí
 build 1sg hear that Sena build house Det for Kofi
 'I heard that Sena BUILT the house for Kofi.'
- b. Ùn sè dà [gbá]_i Séná [gbá]_i xwé ló ná Kòfí
 1sg hear that build Sena build house Det for Kofi
 'I heard that Sena BUILT the house for Kofi.'

Example (41) further shows that V-focusing in Gungbe is sensitive to negative islands because the focused verb cannot move across the sentence negative head.

- (41) *[Gbá]_i Séná má [gbá]_i xwé ló ná Kòfí
 build Sena Neg build house Det for Kofi
 'Sena did not BUILD the house for Kofi.'

Contrary to Gungbe, the Yoruba fronted VV-form, which is commonly analysed as a nominalised form of the verb, allows for long extraction because the fronted reduplicated verb can move across the overtly realised complementizer *pé*, as in Hebrew.

- (42) Rírà ni mo wí pé Ajé ra ìwé [Aboh 2004a: 275]
 RED-buy ni 1sg say that Ajé buy book
 ‘I said that Ajé BOUGHT a book.’

In addition, fronting of the reduplicated verb shows an interesting behaviour when it comes to negation. Yoruba displays two negative particles: the argument negation particle *kó* that negates (nominal) arguments, and the negation particle *kò* that functions as sentential negation. Interestingly, the fronted reduplicated verb only selects argument negation, but excludes sentential negation as illustrated in (43a-b). This asymmetry further points to the nominal status of the fronted reduplicated verbal element in Yoruba (see Aboh 2004a and references cited there for discussion).

- (43) a. Rírà kó ni Ajé ra ìwé
 RED -buy Neg ni Ajé buy book
 ‘Ajé BOUGHT not a book.’
- b. *Rírà kò ni Ajé ra ìwé
 RED -buy Neg ni Ajé buy book
 ‘Ajé did not BUY a book.’

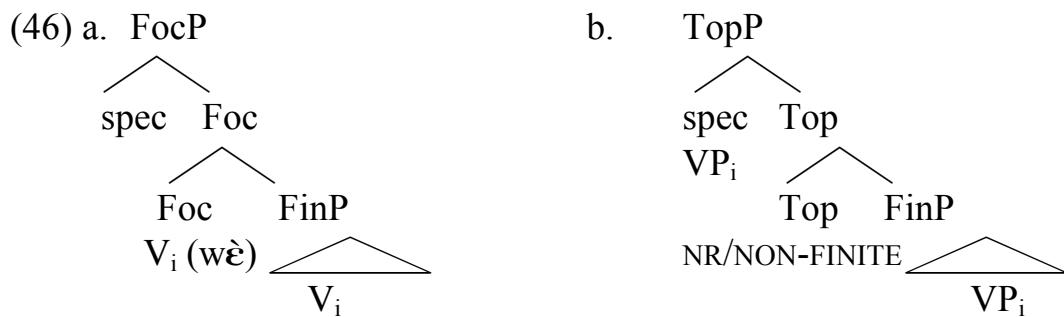
Under the present focus versus topic partition, the Gungbe examples involve verb focusing while the Yoruba sentences behave like verbal topicalisation. The topic versus focus characterisation finds support in typologically different languages. The Russian sentence under (44a) indicates that the non-finite fronted verbal element may include a particle (e.g., *-to*) that is sensitive to referentiality or topicality. Example (44b) shows that the same holds of Korean.

- (44) a. Tzelovatj-to my ešče ne Tzelovalisj.
 kiss.Inf-to we.Nom yet not kiss.Pst.Pl.
 ‘As to kissing, we HAVEN’T kissed yet.’ (Russian, Dyakonova 20059)
- b. ilk-ki-nun Chelswu-ka chayk-ul ilk-ess-ta
 read-ki-topic Chelswu-Nom book-Acc ilk-Past-Decl
 ‘Read the book, Chelswu does.’ (Korean; Hagstrom 1995: 38)

These facts contrast with the Gungbe focus example under (45a) which may require the focus marker, but excludes the topic marker (45b).

- (45) a. %[Gbá] wè Séna [gbá]_i xwé ló ná Kòfí
 build Foc Sena build house Det for Kofi
 ‘Sena BUILT the house for Kofi.’
- b. *[Gbá] yà Séna [gbá]_i xwé ló ná Kòfí
 build Top Sena build house Det for Kofi
 ‘As for building, Sena BUILT the house for Kofi.’

I tentatively conclude from this that the nominal (or non-finite) morpheme assigned to the fronted verb in certain languages is an expression of the feature [referential/topic] that is anchored on the topic head. Following current approaches to topic and focus constructions (e.g. Rizzi 1997), this would mean that focused verbal predicates and topicalised verbal predicates target different positions in syntax. Adopting the cartography approach and building on previous work on verb focusing (Aboh 2003, 2004a), I conclude that bare verbal predicate fronting of the Gungbe-type targets (or adjoins to) the focus head, as in (46a) while verbal predicate topicalisation involves movement of a phrase to [spec TopP], as sketched in (46b). I assume that the nominalizer morpheme or the non-finite morpheme is an expression of the topic head (just as the focus marker is an expression of the focus head).



It also appears from these representations that verb focusing may involve the verb (or some larger constituent), while verb topicalisation minimally requires that the verb phrase be fronted. This correlates with the observation made earlier that languages that allow topic reading, also permit pied-piping of the verb with its internal argument.

In addition, the structures in (46) lead us to conclude that language variation with regard to predicate fronting reduces to topic versus focus opposition. Accordingly, the answer to question (8a) above is that there is no parameter in UG that would explain the existence of the so-called ‘predicate

cleft' in some languages. Given this, we can now turn to question (8b), repeated here as (47), for convenience.

(47) What principle of grammar accounts for verbal predicate doubling?

The next section briefly discusses this issue and proposes that predicate fronting involves verbal doubling only apparently.

4 Predicate fronting and the realisation of multiple chains

There have been several attempts to account for the syntactic properties that permit doubling of the focused or topicalised verbal predicate, as illustrated in previous examples. With Chomsky's revival of the copy-theory of movement, recent works on verb focusing with doubling analyse these structures as instances of multiple spell-out of copies. Under such views, verb focusing with doubling represents strong empirical support for the analysis of traces as genuine copies of the displaced element (e.g. Abel 2001, Nunes 2004, Landau 2006).

Even though existing analyses shed some light on the syntax of verbal predicate fronting with doubling to various degrees, it is fair to say that they fail to accommodate the fact that the verb form occurring inside the proposition is the one that expresses the semantic content of the predicate. The fronted verbal element or phrase, on the other hand, only encodes the focus or topic feature. In a resumptive V-type approach to predicate doubling, this would lead to the counter-intuitive situation where the resumptive verb is the one that bears the semantic content identifying the c-commanding antecedent. Similarly, in a copy approach, the lower copy is more contentful than the higher one, but the theory has no way of explaining this semantic discrepancy.

Finally, previous analyses are at odds with the fact that predicate fronting with doubling is sensitive to aspect licensing. Recall from previous discussion that the Gbe languages involve a perfective VO versus imperfective OV asymmetry where predicate fronting in VO structures result in verb phrase doubling as in (48a). On the other hand, OV structures, often introduced by an aspectual verb or auxiliary, exclude verb phrase doubling (48b-c).

- (48) a. Sà (wè) Séná sà wémà ló ná Kòfí]
 sell Foc Sena sell book Det Prep Kofi
 ‘Sena SOLD the book to Kofi.’

- b. [Wémà ló sà ná Kòfí] wè Séna tè
book Det sell Prep Kofi-NR Foc Sena Prog
'Sena is SELLING THE BOOK TO KOFI.'
- c. *Sà Séna tò wémà ló sà ná Kòfí
sell Sena Prog book Det sell for Kofi-NR
'Sena is SELLING THE BOOK TO KOFI.'

In what follows, I briefly sketch a new proposal made in Aboh & Dyakonova (2006) who see these facts as evidence that the two apparent doublets are actually involved in different chains. Adopting the copy theory of movement along the lines of Chomsky (1995), Nunes (2004), and much related work, Aboh & Dyakonova (2006) propose that predicate fronting with doubling are instances of parallel chains in the sense of Chomsky (2005).

This view, which appears compatible with Koopman's (1984) characterisation of verb focus in Vata and Gbadi, suggests that verb movement for the purpose of tense requirements and verb movement for focus or (topic) are triggered in parallel by an active phase head located within the clausal left periphery. This amounts to saying that the traditional A' versus A distinction with regard to phrasal movement translates into V' versus V movement with respect to head movement, where a V' position (e.g. Foc, Top) equals one that is activated by an edge feature of a phase head while a V position (e.g. T) is sensitive to the Agree-tense-aspect features of a phase head (e.g. finiteness under Rizzi 1997). Under this formulation, verb movement to (Foc, Top) for focusing or topicalisation, and verb movement to (T, Asp) for tense or aspect licensing are triggered in parallel.¹⁵

Applying this analysis to verb focusing in Gungbe VO sentences, we reach the conclusion that a sentence like (49a) has the derivation in (49b).

- (49) a. [Xíá] Séna nò [xíá] wémà ná Kòfí
read Sena Hab read book for Kofi
'Sena habitually READS books for Kofi!'
- b. [FocP [Foc xíá_[F]] [TP Séna [T [AspP [Asp nò [AspP [Asp xíá_[Asp] [vP [VP xíá wémà ná Kòfí]]]]]]]]]]

In representation (49b), the discourse-related focus features of Foc° (or Top for that matter) attract V triggering the V'-chain involving the fronted verb and the

¹⁵ See Aboh (2004a) for details of the clause structure in Gbe (Kwa) and arguments in favour to V-to-Asp movement in these languages.

copy in the base position while the Agree-tense-aspect-features of Asp attract V to Asp, creating the V-chain that consists of the raised verb under Asp and the lower copy in the VP.¹⁶ These movement operations result in two chain links ($x_{\text{íá}}_{[\text{F}]}$, $x_{\text{íá}}$) and ($x_{\text{íá}}_{[\text{Asp}]}$, $x_{\text{íá}}$), with no direct relation between ($x_{\text{íá}}_{[\text{F}]}$) and ($x_{\text{íá}}_{[\text{Asp}]}$). Under current minimalist assumptions the copy internal to the lower phase vP is recoverable at the phase level memory and is deleted accordingly (Chomsky 2005). The two higher copies, however, must remain because they head different chains. This analysis shows that what previous works regard as links of the same chain are actually part of two distinct chains. Put another way, apparent doubling in predicate fronting for focus or topic is a side effect of parallel chains.

This new approach to predicate fronting with doubling accounts for the absence of intervention effects between the fronted verb and the elements of the IP-domain in a straightforward manner. For instance, the fronted verb can cross various tense and aspect markers as in (50), even though it is sensitive to negation as previously shown by example (41).

- (50) [X $\ddot{\alpha}$] Séná ná n $\ddot{\alpha}$ [x $\ddot{\alpha}$] wémà ná Kòfí
 buy Sena Fut Hab buy book for Kofi
 ‘Sena will habitually BUY a book for Kofi.’

In addition, an approach to predicate fronting in terms of parallel chains accounts for the impossibility of the fronted verb to successively adjoin to the intervening tense and aspect morphemes on its way to Foc°, as indicated by the ungrammatical sequence (51) (see Koopman 1984, Aboh 2003, 2004a).

- (51) *[x $\ddot{\alpha}$]-n $\ddot{\alpha}$ -ná Séná [x $\ddot{\alpha}$] wémà ná Kòfí
 buy-Hab-Fut Sena buy book for Kofi

In previous works, these facts were interpreted as instances of long head movement, but no such stipulation is needed in the current account. Head movement to Foc° (i.e. in one fell swoop) is made possible here because the phase head triggers all operations and its edge features as well as the Agree-tense-aspect features are valued simultaneously. The facts in (51) are therefore correctly ruled out because unmotivated (see Aboh & Dyakonova 2006 for discussion).

In a similar vein, the proposed analysis is compatible with the fact that in cases like (48) where the edge features of C under (Foc) and the Agree-tense-aspect features attract two distinct heads, namely the lexical verb and the

¹⁶ Under the split-C and the split-I hypotheses (Pollock 1989, Rizzi 1997, Cinque 1999) it is arguable that T and Asp belong to a domain such that the tense-aspect features inherited from C can be transmitted to T and Asp.

auxiliary (here the progressive), no doubling is allowed. Under this view, a Gungbe sentence like (48b) would have the derivation in (52), irrelevant projections ignored.

- (52) [FocP [Wémà ló sà ná Kòfí]_[F] [Foc wè_[F] [TP Séná [T [AspP
[Asp tè [vP [VP wémà ló — sà ná Kòfí]]]]]]]]]]]

The argument goes as follows: the discourse-related focus features of Foc^o attract the phrase including the verb phrase to [spec FocP] as an instance of Generalized Pied-piping (Chomsky 1995, Aboh 2004b, c). On the other hand, the Agree-tense-aspect features of Asp attracted by the phase head are expressed by the progressive marker *tò/tè*. Accordingly, the only chain link formed is the one between the fronted focused constituent and its copy in the base position. The latter is deleted under normal economy considerations.¹⁷

Russian provides further illustration of the absence of doubling in cases where the edge features of C under (Foc, Top) and the Agree-tense-aspect features attract two distinct heads. As already discussed in the literature, doubling is prohibited in Russian predicate fronting structures involving an auxiliary. This is shown by examples under (53) which involve the future auxiliary, see Abel (2001), Dyakonova (2005) and references cited there for discussion.

- (53) a. On budet čitat'
he will read
- b. *čitat' (-to) on budet čitat'
read Part he will read
- c. čitat' (-to) on budet
read Part he will
'He will read'

The observations in Gungbe and Russian lead me to further conclude that verbal predicate with doubling may not exist in languages with an auxiliary (or verbal) element that can license T (or Asp) while the verb (phrase) is being attracted to the left periphery (i.e. to Foc or Top in the higher phase). The impossibility of VP-fronting with doubling in English, and the obligatory application of *do*-support in this language clearly support this view. Under this analysis, English *do* in (54a), does the same job as *tò/tè* in (52) in the sense that it realises T while the verb phrase is attracted to [spec FocP] as represented in (54b).

¹⁷ See Aboh & Dyakonova (2006) for discussion on how deletion is licensed in these cases.

- (54) a. I told John to wash the car and wash the car he did

- b. ...and [_{FocP} [wash the car]_[F] [_{Foc} [_{TP} he [_T did [_{vP} [_{VP} ~~wash the car~~]]]]]]]]

This analysis suggests that the real parameter distinguishing between Gungbe-type languages and English-type languages boils down to the types of elements that can function as pleonastic auxiliary/verb in the clause. Comparing the Gungbe representations in (49b) and (52) to the English case (54b), it should be noted that while the IP-internal verb in Gungbe-type languages expresses the semantic content of the predicate, English *do* does not play the same function. Instead, the latter licenses a null category (i.e. a non-pronounced VP) expressing this semantic content. I consider this asymmetry to derive from the syntax of lexical verbs versus that of auxiliaries or modals in English (Haegeman 1994, Aboh 2006).

5 Conclusion

This paper proposes that the term ‘predicate cleft’ is a misnomer for different construction types that encode predicate focus or topic cross-linguistically. In terms of the proposed approach, linguistic variations may result from the topic or focus nature of the fronted predicate: topic predicates are referential and behave like topic DPs, unlike focus predicates. This would mean that there is no ‘predicate cleft parameter’.

With regard to the syntax, I propose that verb focusing or topicalisation may trigger predicate fronting with insertion of a pleonastic verb (e.g. English *do*) or else a doublet is merged within IP that recalls the fronted predicate. Assuming parallel chains, the proposed analysis concludes that the fronted verb (phrase) and the V-doublets (or pleonastic verb) do not form a uniform chain. Instead, the fronted verb (phrase) and the doublet head two parallel chains (Chomsky 2005). The relevant parameter distinguishing between languages (e.g. English vs. Gungbe) therefore reduces to the presence or absence of a pleonastic auxiliary/verb that would head the V-chain licensing tense/aspect while the focused or topicalised lexical verb is being attracted to the clausal left periphery.

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