

Focus or Narrative Constructions?

Morphosyntactically Marked Focus Constructions in some Gur and Kwa Languages

Ines Fiedler & Anne Schwarz
sfb632.b1@rz.hu-berlin.de
www.sfb632.uni-potsdam.de (Project B1)

0. Introduction

1. Observations concerning the structure of morphosyntactically marked focus constructions
 - 1.1 First observation: SF vs. NSF asymmetry
 - 1.2 Second observation: NSF-NAR parallelism
 - 1.3 Affirmative ex-situ focus constructions (SF, NSF), and narrative clauses (NAR)
 2. Grammaticalization
 - 2.1 Cleft hypothesis
 - 2.2 Movement hypothesis
 - 2.3 Narrative hypothesis
 - 2.3.1 Back- or Foregrounding?
 - 2.3.2 Converse directionality of FM and conjunction
 3. Language specific analysis
 4. Conclusionary remarks
- References

0. Introduction

We concentrate on pragmatically marked constituent focus structures which are coded by the following features:

- first, syntactically, so that the focused argument stands at the left periphery of the sentence (ex-situ)
- by coding of the out-of focus part as dependent predication
- focused argument optionally coded by a FM
- pragmatically, they seem to convey a contrastive reading in most of the cases; in some languages they are only marginally used in answering to a wh-question, in others they convey more regularly simply new information.

1. Observations concerning the structure of morphosyntactically marked focus constructions

1.1 First observation: SF vs. NSF asymmetry

There is an asymmetry found between subject und non-subject focus constructions.

1.1.1 Evidence for this asymmetry

This structural asymmetry shows up in several ways in the selected languages: it concerns the focus marker and TAM morphology including tone.

(a) Akan

Both subject and non-subject focus are characterized by:

- same obligatory FM *nà*
- “link tone” in the out of focus part of both constructions (Bearth, 2002)

- a DEPENDENT construction marker may occur in both
- difference consists of an “underspecified” subject pronoun for 3rd person referents restricted to subject focus constructions (Bearth, 2002).

SF

- (1) èyè àbrèwá nó **nà** èdíí àdùá nò.
it.is old.woman DEF FM 3sg.eat.PAST beans DEF
It is THE OLD WOMAN who has eaten the beans.

NSF

- (2) *The woman kissed Kofi.*
dàabí, kwámè ànó **nà** òfé yē.
no Kwame mouth FM 3sg.kiss.PF DEP
No, she kissed KWAME.

(b) Ewe

The characteristics of focus constructions in Ewe are as follows:

- F can be additionally marked by a FM, which is obligatory for subject focus and optional for non-subject focus
- special pronominal forms for the second and third person singular in non-subject focus constructions

SF

- (3) nítǔ-á-é tǔ-è.
man-DEF-FM take-3sg
THE MAN took it [watch]. (not the woman)

NSF

- (4) *Did he win or lose the game?*
èdǔ(-é) wò dǔ.
top-(FM) 3sg.DEP eat
He was on TOP. (i.e., He WON the game.)

(c) Lelemi

subject focus construction is characterized by:

- “relative tenses” (Allan 1973)

non-subject focus construction is characterized by:

- “simple tenses” (Allan 1973)
- FM *nà*

SF

- (5a) ònàabì ùmwì pé **mò-dí** kùtú. [ò-đí]
boy one only DEP.CONT-eat orange
ONLY ONE BOY is eating an orange.

(5b) ònàabì ùmwí **ñ-ñ** ùlòkúbì. [ù-ñ]
boy one DEP.STAT-carry girl
ONE BOY was carrying a girl.

(5c) lóólì ínyó **ná-sà**. [lè-sà]
lorry two DEP.PAST-meet
TWO LORRIES collided.

NSF

(6) àkábí áwōdí (**nà**) ùlòkū ómò òdí.
beans raw (FM) woman DEM 3sg.PAST.eat
The woman ate RAW BEANS.

(d) Buli

subject focus construction is characterized by:

- conjunction *lē*
- special verb tone paradigm (B)

non-subject focus construction is characterized by:

- conjunction *tè*
- special verb tone paradigm (C)

SF

(7) (**ká**) wá **lē** tʃèŋ. ...*TE ... paradigm B
(FM) 3sg:DISJ CNJ go
HE went. ~ It is HE who went. (not you)

NSF

(8) (**ká**) sándēm **tè** wà tʃèŋ. rare: ...LE ... paradigm C
(FM) Sandema CNJ 3sg go
It is SANDEMA where he went. (not Navrongo)

(e) Dagbani

subject focus construction is characterized by:

- “emphatic marker” *N* (Olawsky, 1999) (in interrogation alternatively: *léé*)
- existence of a special verb tone paradigm not clear

non-subject focus construction is characterized by:

- conjunction *ka*
- existence of a special verb tone paradigm not clear

SF

(9) b́í-póʔám-b́íl máà ɲ́ ká ɲ́árìm māā nì.
girl DEF EMPH NEG.be:LOC boat DEF in
THE GIRL is not in the boat. (but someone else is)

(10) ɲwùn léé dī tỳjà māà. (almost restricted to interrogation)
3sg:E EMPH eat.PF beans DEF
WHO has eaten the beans?

NSF

(11) jíló máá nì kō-ò dì.
house DEF in FM-3sg eat.PF
IN THE HOUSE she ate.

1.2 Second observation: NSF-NAR parallelism

There is a formal parallelism between ex-situ non-subject-focus constructions (NSF) and narrative clauses (NAR).

Under NAR we understand with Labov (1972) event clauses which report “what happened”. “Each clause then describes an event that is understood to shift reference time, i.e. it follows the event immediately preceding it, and precedes the event immediately following it.” (1972, cited in Schiffrin 1994: 284). Hence, NAR are characterized by succession of events, and serve for the elaboration of the main story line.

1.2.1 Evidence for this parallelism

The formal parallel shows up in several ways in the selected languages: it concerns the focus marker, TAM morphology including tone, and special pronominal forms.

(a) Akan

- clausal sequential conjunction *nà* with the meaning “and (then)” (Bearth 2002) which is identical with the FM
- difference to focus constructions: in narration, there is commonly no tonal marking and no verb final DEPENDENT construction marker

NSF

(12=2) *The woman kissed Kofi.*

dàabí, kwámè ànó nà òfé yē.
no Kwame mouth FM 3sg.kiss.PF DEP
No, she kissed KWAME.

NAR

(13) m̀è-bìsá-à nò m̀pr̀ènu nà ò-bùá-è.
I-ask-PAST 3sg twice CNJ 3sg-respond-PAST-DETRANS
I asked him twice and he responded. (Bearth 2002)

(b) Ewe

- dependent pronoun in both constructions
- similarity of the FM with a clause coordinating conjunction *éye* “and (then)”

NSF

(14=4) *Did he win or lose the game?*

èdʒì(-é) wò d̀ù.
top-(FM) 3sg.DEP eat
He was on TOP. (i.e., He WON the game.)

NAR

(15) *The dog is pushing the boy down ...*

éyē wò lē é d̀ùm̄.
CNJ 3sg.DEP PROG 3sg bite.PROG
and is biting him.

(c) Lelemi

- FM is homophone with the narrative conjunction “and (then)”
- use of the “simple tenses” (Allan 1973)

NSF

(16=6) àkábí áwōdí nà ùlōkū ómò ɔ́d̄i.
beans raw FM woman DEM 3sg.PAST.eat
The woman ate RAW BEANS.

NAR

(17) *The boy was carrying the girl...*

nà bēnyē.
CNJ 3sg.STAT.stand
and they were standing.

(d) Buli

- identical clausal conjunction *tè* “and (then)”
- identical verb paradigm (C)

NSF

(18a) ñ kòwā tè ñ sùùrì tè.
1sg father.DEF CNJ 1sg wash give
For MY FATHER I washed [it].

(18b=8)

(ká) sándēm tè wà tʃèŋ.
(FM) Sandema CNJ 3sg go
It is SANDEMA where he went. (not Navrongo)

NAR

(19) *and his mother was happy with him*

tè bà dìg dzèntàṅā ...

CNJ 3pl cook soup.DEF

and (then) they cooked the soup ...

(e) Dagbani

- homophone clausal conjunction *ka* “and (then)”
- if the subject of the narrative clause is coreferent with the subject of the preceding clause, it has to be elided after *ka* (cf. Olawsky 1999)

NSF

(20=11) jíló máá nì kō-ò dì.

house DEF in FM-3sg eat

IN THE HOUSE she ate.

NAR

(21a) *and the mother sent the youngest child*

kà bīi sán máá tʃàṅ ...

CNJ child ? DEF go.PF

and the child went ...

(21b) páʔá máá dāā-là pètèr ká ṅmē-ò.

woman DEF push.PF-FM Peter CNJ hit.PF-3sg

The woman pushed and hit Peter.

not: ... ká *o ṅmē-ò.

1.3 Affirmative ex-situ focus constructions (SF, NSF), and narrative clauses (NAR)

(22) Summary

	Akan	Ewe	Lelemi	Buli	Dagbani
SF	F nà + tone (+ yɛ)	F (y)é	F + rel. tense	(ká) F lē + tone B	F N + tone? F léé + tone?
NSF	F nà + tone (+ yɛ)	F (y)é (+ dep. pron.)	F nà + simple tense	(ká) F tē + tone C	F ka + tone?
NAR	... nà	... éyē (+ dep. pron.)	... nà + simple tense	... tē + tone C	... ka + tone?

2. Grammaticalization

2.1 Cleft hypothesis

2.2 Movement hypothesis

2.3 Narrative hypothesis

- focus constructions represent a biclausal construction developed out of two coordinated clauses where the first one is reduced to a one argument clause and the second one shows a special narrative morphology
- this approach brings us however in a twofold conflict:

2.3.1 Back- or Foregrounding?

ex-situ construction: Focus – Background

narrative clause: Foreground – Foreground

2.3.2 Converse directionality of FM and conjunction

3. Language specific analysis

The narrative hypothesis can be applied to all languages considered.

4. Conclusionary remarks

In all the languages concerned here, the (N)SF-NAR parallelism can be accounted for due to grammaticalization of a narrative clause including a narrative conjunction. A corresponding grammaticalization chaine from conjunction via FM to copula has been noticed by Stassen (1997: 85).

In dealing with Cameroon languages from the Niger-Congo and Chadic language families, Frajzyngier emphasis: „these types of clauses [i.e. specific interrogative clauses, comment-on-focus clauses, relative clauses, sequential clauses, temporal or conditional protasis or apodosis, and negative clauses, I.F./A.S.] share a pragmatic status in that they must be interpreted in connection with another proposition or event.” (2004:55) He calls them therefore pragmatically dependent.

References

- Aboh, Enoch O. 2003. Focus constructions across Kwa. In *Trends in African Linguistics 5*, eds. Cege Githiora, Heather Littlefield and Victor Manfredi. Trenton New Jersey: Africa World Press.
- Allan, Edward Jay. 1973. A grammar of Buem: The Lelemi language, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London: PhD Thesis.
- Ameka, Felix. 1992. Focus constructions in Ewe und Akan: A comparative perspective. In *Proceedings of the Kwa comparative syntax workshop M.I.T.*, eds. Chris Collins and Victor Manfredi, 1-15. Cambridge.
- Ameka, Felix. 2003. “Today is far”: Situational anaphors in overlapping clause constructions in Ewe. In *Legon-Trondheim Linguistics Project Colloquium 2002*, eds. M. E. Kropp Dakubu and K. Osam, 9-22. Legon: Linguistics Department.
- Bearth, Thomas, et al. 2002. Ali Akan. Version 56. CD-ROM.
- Bearth, Thomas. 1993. Satztyp und Situation in einigen Sprachen Westafrikas. In *Beiträge zur afrikanischen Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. W.J.G. Möhlig, 91-104. Köln.
- Bearth, Thomas. 2002. Fokus im Akan - Outline. Handout of a presentation at the Ling. Colloquium of the Seminar of African Studies at the Humboldt-University, 28.05.2002.
- Blench, Roger. 2001. Comparative Central Togo: what have we learnt since Heine? Paper presented at *32nd Annual Conference on African Linguistics*, Cambridge.
- Creissels, Denis. 1991. *Description des langues négro-africaines et théorie syntaxique*. Grenoble: Ellug.
- Duthie, A. S. 1996. *Introducing Ewe linguistic patterns*. Accra: Ghana University Press.
- Elders, Stefan. 2003. Grammatische Phänomene in Bezug auf Informationsstruktur im Kulango. Handout of a presentation at the Humboldt-University of Berlin SFB 632 / IAA, 27.10.03.
- Elders, Stefan. 2003. The Dependent Conjunction in Kulango. In *Legon-Trondheim Linguistics Project Colloquium 2002*, eds. M. E. Kropp Dakubu and K. Osam, 43-60. Legon: Linguistics Department.
- Frajzyngier, Zygmunt. 2004. Tense and aspect as coding means for information structure: a potential areal feature. *Journal of West African Languages* 30:53-67.

- Givón, Talmy. 1990. *Syntax. A functional-typological introduction*. vol. 2. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Higdon, Lee M. 1998. The line of importance in Gangam narrative discourse. *Gur Papers / Cahiers Voltaïques* 3:45-53.
- Hiraiwa, Ken. 2003. Relativization in Buli. In *Studies in Buli Grammar. Working Papers on Endangered and Less Familiar Languages*, ed. Michael Kenstowicz, 45-84: MIT Working Papers in Linguistics.
- Hopper, Paul J. 1979. Some observations on the typology of focus and aspect in narrative language. *Studies in Language* 3:37-64.
- Kangni, Atah-Ekoué. 1989. *La syntax du Ge. Etude syntaxique d'un parler GBE (EWE): le Ge du Sud-Togo*. Frankfurt a. M., Bern, New York, Paris: Peter Lang.
- Labov, Wilhelm. 1972. The transformation of experience in narrative syntax. In *Language in the Inner City*, 354-96. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press.
- Lambrecht, Knud. 2001. A framework for the analysis of cleft constructions. *Linguistics* 39:463-516.
- Lefebvre, Claire, and Brousseau, Anne-Marie. 2002. *A Grammar of Fongbe*. Berlin; New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Lewis, Marshall. 1999. From switch reference to recessive subject marking. Third person subject pronoun patterns in Gen, Ewe and Fon., ed. 30th Annual Conference on African Linguistics. University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.
- Olawsky, Knut J. 1999. *Aspects of Dagbani grammar. With special emphasis on phonology and morphology*: LINCOM studies in African linguistics; 41. München, Newcastle: Lincom.
- Rongier, Jacques. 1997. Langues autonomes du Togo, entre Gur et Kwa?, Ms.
- Schachter, Paul. 1973. Focus and relativization. *Language* 49.
- Schiffrin, Deborah. 1994. *Approaches to Discourse*: Blackwell Textbooks in Linguistics. Oxford UK Cambridge USA: Blackwell.
- Stassen, Leon. 1997. *Intransitive predication*: Oxford studies in typology and linguistic theory. Oxford u.a.: Clarendon Press.
- Tchitchi, Toussaint Y. 1984. Systématique de l'Ajagbe, Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris III: Thèse pour le doctorat de 3ème cycle.
- Westermann, D. 1930. *A study of the Ewe language*. London: Oxford University Press.

Abbreviations:

CNJ	conjunction
CONT	continuous
DEF	definite marker
DEM	demonstrative (pronoun)
DEP	dependent marker
DETRANS	detransitive marker
DISJ	disjunctive (pronoun)
EMPH	emphatic marker
F	focus constituent
FM	focus marker
IPF	imperfective
NAR	narrative (clause)
NSF	non-subject focus (construction)
PF	perfective
PROG	progressive marker
REL	relative (clause / construction)
SF	subject focus (construction)
STAT	stative
SUB	subordination marker