

## Focus (non-)realization in Ngamo (West Chadic)

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This talk discusses an aspect of the focus realization of Ngamo, a West Chadic language spoken in North-East Nigeria. In Ngamo, focused subjects are syntactically marked, whereas focused non-subjects can remain unmarked. We discuss the (absence of) prosodic marking in the case of focused non-subjects and what this might mean for a general theory of focus.

**BACKGROUND:** Ngamo exhibits a subject/non-subject asymmetry with respect to focus marking: Focused non-subjects remain in the canonical SVOX word order (1), whereas focused subjects invert to the post-VP domain (2). Backgrounded material is morphologically marked by a background marker *-i/ye*, which is optional in the case of non-subject focus, so that non-subject focus is usually neither syntactically nor morphologically marked.

- (1) Q: Shuwa esha (-i) lo yam? A: Shuwa esha (-i) **Jajei** yam.  
Sh. call.PFV - BM who loudly Sh. call.PFV - BM J. loudly  
'Who did Shuwa call loudly?' 'Shuwa called JAJEI<sub>F</sub> loudly.'
- (2) Q: Esha Jajei yam ye lo? A: Esha Jajei yam ye **Shuwa**.  
call.PFV Jajei loudly BM who call.PFV Jajei loudly BM Shuwa  
'Who called Jajei loudly?' 'SHUWA<sub>F</sub> called Jajei loudly.'

Up to now, there has been no systematic investigation of the prosody of syntactically and morphologically unmarked foci in Ngamo, but there are descriptions of the related languages Bole (Gimba & Schuh 2005) and Tangale (Kidda 1993). The authors identify a blocked tone sandhi process as the only prosodic marking of focus (cf. Schuh 2010). This blocking in turn is taken to result from a prosodic boundary insertion to the left of the focused element, cf. syntactic theories of focus marking in Tangale by Tuller (1992) and Kenstowicz (1987) based on this observation. In contrast, it was also argued that this is not a consistent marker of focus: The tone sandhi process does not consistently take place in all-new cases (e.g. Gimba & Schuh 2005 for Bole), nor is it consistently blocked preceding a focused element (Hartmann & Zimmermann 2007 for Tangale).

**GOALS:** In this talk, we will address the following two questions for Ngamo: (Q1) Is non-subject focus marked by a preceding prosodic boundary? (Q2) If not, does the focus status of these elements have no effect on their grammatical realization at all?

In order to answer these questions, we first investigate whether in-situ non-subject focus in Ngamo is prosodically marked, specifically whether focused non-subjects exhibit a prosodic boundary on the left, like in Bole and Tangale. As indicators for a possible boundary we will not only explore a possible blocking of the sandhi process under focus, but also downstep, final lengthening, and other indicators of phrase boundaries (see Frota 2000). Our data consists of pairs of two sentences without syntactic or morphological information structure marking, one all-new (3a), and one containing a narrow corrective focus (3b).

- (3a) [**Kule salko bano mano**]<sub>F</sub>  
Kule build-PFV house last-year  
'Kule built a house.'

- (3b) A: Kule salko karampe mano. B: O,o, Kule salko [**bano**]<sub>F</sub> mano.  
Kule build-PFV granary last.year No Kule build-PFV house last.year  
'Kule built a granary last year.' 'No, Kule built a HOUSE last year.'

In addition, we test for a prosodic boundary at the previously neglected right edge of the focused constituent. There is reason to believe that focus is consistently marked by being located in a position *preceding* a prosodic phrase boundary ( $\phi$ ). Evidence comes from the behaviour of focused subjects, which invert to the right edge of the VP (cf. (2)). They cannot be realized in a preverbal position, since it is disallowed to insert a phrase boundary of the required type between verb and subject (cf. (4a)). Instead, the requirement that the focused constituent must immediately precede a phrase boundary forces subjects to invert. They can precede an adjunct (4b), if there is a  $\phi$  boundary at this position, or follow it (4c).

- (4) a. \*(SUBJ<sub>F</sub>) $\phi$  (V OBJ ADJ) b. (V OBJ) (SUBJ<sub>F</sub>) $\phi$  (ADJ) c. (V OBJ ADJ) (SUBJ<sub>F</sub>) $\phi$

To test this we also apply the above mentioned methods for boundary detection to the right edge of the contrastively focused element (3b) in comparison to the all-new baseline (3a).

There is independent evidence for a phrase boundary at the right edge of VP in these languages: (i) There is a partial resetting of downstepped pitch (Gimba 2000), (ii) High tone ideophones are realized with an extra high tone at the edge of VP (cf. (5)), which according to Schuh (2010) is an indication of a strong phrase boundary typical for these kinds of ideophones, and (iii) there are some functional elements (e.g. determiners, pronouns) which have a “long” and a “short” form, depending on prosodic environment, which are realized in their long form at the right edge of VP when focused (cf. (6)).

- (5) zōri ɓotū      ɗot      gā      gā      bōzò  
 rope break. PFV    snap    at      inside well  
 “the rope broke snappo inside the well.”

- (6)a. Ne(\*'e) tamko ngo yi yake k(i) kanni.    b. Tamko ngo yi yake -i ne'e ki kanni.  
 1SG show-PFV man “every” to himself    show-PFV man “every”-BM 1SG to himself  
 “I showed every man to himself.”      “I<sub>F</sub> showed every man to himself.”

Thus when an element which already is right-aligned to an  $\phi$  boundary (e.g. DOs, IOs, ADJs) is focused, there is no need for any extra focus marking apart from being at this position.

**CONSEQUENCES AND OUTLOOK:** Based on the observable asymmetry between focused subjects and non-subjects in Bole, Tangale and Ngamo, we suggest that in all three languages, it is the postfocal (right edge) boundary which is relevant for focus marking, whereas the prosodic boundary to the left of the focused element is due to independent factors (syntactic construction, speech rate, speech style...). This allows us to formulate a unified account of non-subject and subject focus: Focused constituents need to be at a prosodically prominent position at the right edge of a prosodic phrase (cf. e.g. Zubizarreta 1998). This explains not only the inversion of focused subjects, but also the non-movement of other focused elements, since there are such phrase boundaries at the edge of VP, and is thus a simple unified account of focus realization in Ngamo. The impression that focus is often not marked in Ngamo is due to the fact that – in contrast to intonation languages - the prosodic prominence of the focused constituent in Ngamo is a relative, not an absolute prominence.

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