An interface account of focus realization in Ngamo (West Chadic)

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This talk discusses the realization of focus in Ngamo (West Chadic), in which focused subjects appear inverted in the post-VP domain, while focused non-subjects typically remain in-situ. We present evidence against purely syntactic analyses of focus marking in terms of designated focus positions (FocP) or pseudoclefting. We argue for an interface account on which information structural prominence of a constituent is matched by its realization in a position with (relative) prosodical prominence at the right edge of vP.
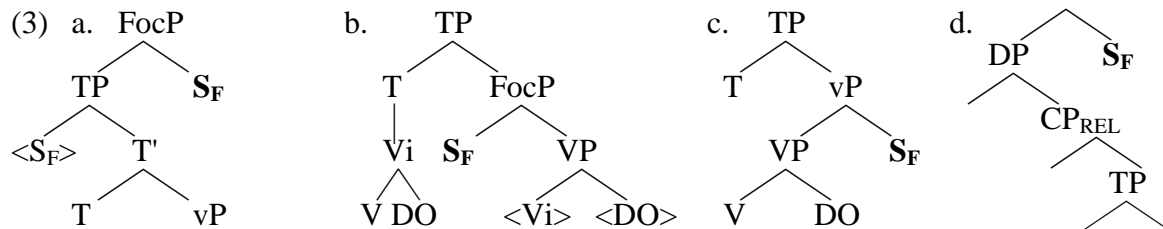
BACKGROUND: The canonical word order in Ngamo is **SVOX**. Questioned/focused subjects are inverted to the post-VP domain and obligatorily preceded by the background marker *-i*.

(1) Salko (* **-i lo**) bano (**-ilo**) a Nigeria (**-i lo**) mano (**-i lo**) ?
     built - BM who house - BM who in Nigeria - BM who last-year - BM who
     'Who built a house in Nigeria last year?'

Focused non-subjects typically occur in canonical position, background marking is optional.

(2) Q: Shuwa esha (**-i**) **lo** yam?   A: Shuwa esha (**-i**) **Jajei** yam.
         Sh. called - BM who loudly   Sh. called - BM J. loudly
         'Who did Shuwa call loudly?'   'Shuwa called JAJEI$_F$ loudly.'

DATA: There exist no previous syntactic analyses of Ngamo focus constructions, but we can draw on several proposals for similar patterns in Tangale, also West Chadic. Focused constituents have been proposed to move to Spec,CP, or a high FocP (3a) (Kenstowicz 1987), and Tuller (1992) proposed an additional low FocP to the left of VP (3b). Her analysis requires the DO to N-incorporate into V whenever another constituent is in focus. Two further analyses are base-generation of the subject in a rightward spec,vP, suggesting that all focused constituents remain in situ (3c), and a pseudocleft analysis based on a relative clause (3d).

(3) a. FocP   b. TP   c. TP   d. [DP S$_F$ / CP$_{REL}$ / TP]

DISCUSSION: We argue against the above analyses, based on data from ongoing field research:
(i) *Word order*: Focused subjects do not remain in their vP-internal base-position (3c) since they must follow the negation marker, which is located at the right edge of vP (Herburger 2002), and they can follow temporal adjuncts.

(4) Q: Esha Jajei yam ***bu* -i lo** ki ton bano?
         called J. loudly NEG - BM who from in house
         'Who didn't call Jajei loudly from inside the house?'

     A: Esha Jajei (***-i ne'e**) yam (***-i ne'e**) *bu* (**-ine'e**) ki ton bano (**-i ne'e**).
         called J. -BM 1SG loudly - BM 1SG NEG -BM 1SG from in house - BM 1SG
         'I$_F$ didn't call Jajei loudly from inside the house.'

(ii) *Non-agreement*: Subject-verb agreement (5a) is absent with inverted subjects (5c), providing evidence against movement to Spec,CP/FocP via Spec, TP (3a).

(5) a. Mu lap**an**ko   b. Lapko **- i lo**? c. Lapko **- i muni**
        1PL answered. PL   answered.SG - BM who   answered.SG - BM 1PL
        'We answered.'   'Who answered?'   'WE$_F$ answered.'

(iii) *In-situ focused non-subjects*: Focused non-subjects typically occur in their canonical position. This suggests that they remain in-situ, challenging analyses involving feature-triggered movement to a focus position (3b). Although Tuller's analysis can accommodate the preference for canonical word orders with non-subjects$_F$, the fact that 'low' focused subjects can be preceded by DOs with full DP status casts doubt on her N-incorporation analysis.

(6) a. Tamko ***ko   gorzo -i   yo   yiya -i lo*** ki kanni?
       showed even man -LINK -LINK which -BM who to 3SG.REFL
       'Who showed every man to himself?'

   b. Tamko ***ko   gorzo -i   yo   yiya -i ne'e*** ki kanni.
       showed even man -LINK -LINK which -BM 1SG to 3SG.REFL
       'I$_F$ showed every man to himself.'

(iv) *Against pseudoclefting*: Subjects can invert in relative clauses (7) and imperatives, where imperative mood marking is found on the lexical verb (8), whereas overt pseudo-clefts are disallowed in both environments (Schuh 1972).

(7)   Ne moiko ngo   -i (****ngo   -i***)   esha si   **-i Lakka**
       1SG saw   person- BM person -BM called 3SG.M -BM Lakka
       'I saw the man that LAKKA called.'

(8)   A: Lapi!   B: O'o, (****ngo   -i***)   lapi   -i   shi!
          answer.IMP   No, person - BM   answer. IMP - BM 2SG.F
          'Answer!'   'No, YOU answer!'

ANALYSIS: We propose that focused subjects invert in order to be in a prosodically prominent position at the right edge of a major prosodic phrase, say iP, which corresponds to the right edge of a syntactic vP (Zubizarreta 1998, Zimmermann 2006, Samek-Lodovici 2005). This explains (i) the variable position of focused subjects in the post-verbal domain (9a); (ii) that only focused subjects must invert, because their base position is not at the right edge of vP/iP (9b); and (iii) that subjects must not intervene between V and O, which form a phonological phrase corresponding to VP (9c).

(9) a. [V (FOC)]$_{vP}$ (FOC)]$_{vP}$ (FOC)]$_{vP}$ b. *[S$_F$ V XP]$_{vP}$ $\Rightarrow$ [V XP]$_{vP}$ S$_F$]$_{vP}$ c. *[V S$_{FOC}$ O]$_{VP}$

     (   )$_{iP}$)$_{iP}$)$_{iP}$ (   )$_{iP}$ (   )$_{iP}$ (   )$_{pP}$

CONSEQUENCES & OUTLOOK: We argue that an interface account of focus realization in terms of prosody-IS matching is superior to syntax-driven approaches when it comes to explaining the behaviour of focused elements in Ngamo. We suggest that the inversion of focused subjects is driven by the need to occur in a position with relative prosodic prominence at the right edge of the verbal complex, similar to what was observed for Romance intonation languages with subject inversion. The pattern of focus realization presented in this talk thus seems to be a robust cross-linguistic pattern observed in both intonation and tone languages.

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