Focus in Gur and Kwa

INES FIEDLER

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1 Investigation and language sample

The project investigates focus phenomena in the two genetically related West African Gur and Kwa language groups of the Niger-Congo phylum. Most of its members are tone languages, they are similar with respect to word order typology (all are SVO languages), but of divergent morphological type (agglutinating Gur versus isolating Kwa).

A major contribution of the project within the SFB 632 consists of supplying information and analysis on focus expressions from the perspective of typologically divergent non-European tone languages. The studies concern among others the following fields of tasks out of which the poster displays some selected results:

- Range of interferences between grammatical structure and focus strategies on the basis of language typological comparison
- Analysis of focus   marking from a diachronic per-spective

GUR

KWA

Research in most of the languages is done by the members of the project directly in the field, so far with several Gur and Kwa languages spoken in Ghana and Benin.

2 Typological influence

While all languages studied provide syntactically unmarked focus strategies for verb and / or postverbal complements, there is a difference whether morphological marking is involved. The sample languages vary according to their morphological type: agglutinating Gur languages often use morphological focus markers (underlined), isolating Kwa languages don't. The following data from several languages illustrating this influence represent the appropriate reply on both questions:

What did the woman eat? She ate BEANS.
What did the woman do?   She ATE BEANS.

KWA

Efutu
mú-dì èdùbá.

Ewe
é ɖù àyī.

Fon
é ɖù àyìkún.

Lelemi
ɔ́-dì àkábí.

Foodo
ɔ́ɔ́ wí ácɛ́ɛ̀.

Akan
ɔ̀-dìì àdùá.

GUR

Byali
ù hwábɔ́ tūnā è̱.

Ditammari
ò dī yātṹrà ṉ̱yā̱.

Konkomba
ù ŋmá ŋētṹṹn la̱.

Dagbani
ò ŋùbì-lá tùyà.

Buli
ò ŋɔb kà túé.

Konni
ù ŋɔ̀bì-wá túò̱.

3 Extra-clausal focus constructions

Constructions including a clause-boundary between focus constituent and out-of-focus part are widely attested within Gur and Kwa.

- cleft constructions
- narrative constructions

Apart from the well-known cleft construction containing a relative clause we meet a recurrent clause-external "narrative" pattern that has not been recognized as such before and will be regarded here. Many Gur and Kwa languages display striking similarities between the out-of-focus part of *ex-situ* term focus constructions and

narrative clauses, irrespective of the language specific structural properties: clause-initial conjunction, special pronominal forms, verb suffixes, tone, etc.

Dagbani (Gur) displays conjunction *kà* in part of the constructions with sentence-initial focus constituent (illustrated with a WH-question) and the grammatical verb tone pattern corresponds with that in narrative contexts.

In Ewe focus constructions (Kwa), the clause-initial conjunction *(é)yé* is common-ly eroded and left-binding and therefore already interpreted as focus marker. Like in

narrative contexts, special "dependent" pronominal forms (2nd and 3rd person) are required.

This parallelism is due to the systematic use of a construction containing a narrative clause following the focus constituent, though the distribution of the narrative structures within sentence-initial term focus constructions differs within our sample: in many Gur languages, the narrative pattern is only found with non-subject focus (NSF), but never with subject focus (SF) construc-tions, while such restriction seems less common in Kwa languages.

GUR

Dagbani focus construction

yà   kà   pá'ɔ́   !máá   chàŋ.
where CNJ woman DEF   go
WHERE did the woman go?

Dagbani narrative construction

... the mother sent the youngest child

kà   bíí   má!á   chàŋ ...
CNJ child DEF   go
and the child went ...

KWA

Ewe focus construction

èdzì (-é) wò-   ɖù.
top(-FM)   DEP:3sg eat
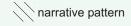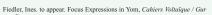He WON. (He was on TOP.)

Ewe narrative construction

The child agreed

éyé wò   dzè   mɔ́.
CNJ DEP:3sg arrive path
and started the journey.

Akan, Ewe, ...

SF

NSF

Dagbani, Buli, ...

SF

NSF

narrative pattern

(c) Project B1 (Anne Schwarz) May 2006

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