Information structure
Section 14

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1   This section gives a preliminary overview of the ways to express information structure in Beng. I do not attempt to undertake a proper semantic analysis of the constructions in question, only providing their rough equivalents in English.

2   Usually, a constituent F marked for its information structure status is located before the rest of the sentence S. If F is a verb phrase, which has to take the form of nominalization when topicalized or focalized, compare (266), F is replaced in the main clause S by the verb *wō* 'to do' in the appropriate form with a 3SG pronoun as a direct object. If F is a nominal or an adverbial constituent, the position that the constituent F would have occupied in a communicatively neutral sentence S' is left filled by a coreferent personal pronoun, except for the secondary object position from which personal pronouns are banned. Examples:

(266a)	ₜₒₚ[*Sàāŋ*	*yrí*	*lὲ]ᵢ*	ꜰₒꜱ[*bàāŋ*	*wó]ₖ*	*ɲὲ̰*	[*ò*ᵢ	*bà Ø*ₖ]	*ὲ̄.*
	saang	tree	DEF	dry.season	IN	FOC	3SG:HAB+	yield:L	FOC
	'It's during the dry season that the sàāŋ tree yields fruit'.								

(266b)	[*P̰ìŋ́*	*ćḭ-lέ]ᵢ*	*ɲὲ̰*	[*ó*	*à* ᵢ	*wò]*	*ὲ̄.*
	grass	cut-NMLZ	FOC	3SG:PST+	3SG	do:L	FOC
	'It's mow that he did'.						

3   The case described above, where the pragmatically marked constituent F can be inserted into a vacant position in the sentence S, is typical but far from universal. In

reality many examples would not support such insertion. Sometimes the position in S is filled by a full-fledged syntactic constituent coreferent to F[1]:

(267)	*[Zrɛ̈*	*fɛ̰̈*	*mṵ̄-ó*	*à*	*yé]ᵢ*	*mḭ̀*	*mṵ̄*	*[zrɛ̈*	*bì-ɛ̀]ᵢ*	*yā.*
	road	Rel	2SG-ST+	3SG	mouth	2SG:HAB+	2SG	road	this-DEF	walk
	'The road you stand on, walk this road'.									

4 Second, the position F can host a whole clause that cannot be substituted for any constituent in S, compare a typical folktale ending:

(268)	*[Nà̰*	*gā̰mlà̰*	*ò*	*nṵ̄*	*gṵ̄à̰*	*klɛ́ŋ́*	*wó*	*ná̰]ₜₒₚ*
	for.to	chimpanzee	3SG:HAB+	come	stay	forest	IN	TOP

[à	*dḭ́-lɛ*	*ó*	*bɔ́*	*kpìŋ́*	*mà̰]ғₒᴄ*
3SG	cause-DEF	3SG:PST+	come.from:L	door	CONT

ɲɛ̰̈	*gā̰mlà̰*	*ó*	*gṵ́à̰*	*klɛ́ŋ́*	*wó*	*ɛ̄.*
FOC	chimpanzee	3SG:PST+	stay:L	forest	IN	FOC

5 'So Chimpanzee stayed in the forest because of the story with the door' (literally: topic 'For Chimpanzee to come and stay in the forest', focus 'the reason for this comes from the door', main clause '(that) Chimpanzee stayed in the forest').

6 Example (268) is quite typical: the content of a sentence can be divided entirely into the topic and the focus; the topic and the focus (expressed here as full clauses) are marked appropriately, followed by a syntactically obligatory but semantically redundant main clause that basically repeats the topic.

14.1. Topic

7 Let us now turn to specific information structure marking constructions of Beng. The first one, topic, is expressed by particle *ná̰* placed after the topicalized phrase F that precedes the main clause S.

8 Information structure notions are notoriously hard to characterize precisely. The topicalized phrase F in Beng signals the theme of utterance, its 'aboutness'. In English, one analog of the Beng topic is the sentence-initial position of sentential modifiers as in *At the lab we conducted a few experiments* (as opposed to the more neutral *We conducted a few experiments at the lab*). Examples of topics:

(269)	*[Gblē*	*nǎ́]*	*tòŋòbî*	*plāŋ*	*ŋó*	*pá*	*cēŋ*	*mà̰.*
	yesterday	TOP	car	two	3PL:PST+	hit:L	each.other	CONT
	'Yesterday two cars collided'.							

(270)	*[ŋ̄*	*drɔ̀ɲḭ́*	*púú*	*lɛ̀]ᵢ*	*gblí*	*dṵ̄-nā̰*	*à̰ᵢ*	*wó.*
	1SG	shirt	white	DEF	dirt	get.in-PRF	3SG	IN
	'My white shirt got dirty'. (lit.: 'My white shirt, dirt got in it'.)							

9   As (270) shows, the topic marker *nǎ́* is sometimes omitted. Conditioning factors for its omission are yet to be studied. I observe preliminarily that topicalized noun phrases tend to be unmarked, while other types of constituents, in particular adverbial phrases (including temporal and locative) tend to have an overt topic marker.

14.2. Contrastive topic

10   The contrasted NP, which can be doubled by personal pronouns following general rules, occupies the possessor position of the vacuous noun *pɔ̄* 'thing' which is followed either by the definite article *lɛ̀* or by *drɛ̄ nǎ́* and the main clause S. Contrastive topics do not have to be full NPs but can also be pronominal; combinations of personal pronouns with *pɔ̄* 'thing' are possessive pronouns, in which the final /ŋ/ obligatorily (1SG) or optionally (1PL) fuses with the initial /p/ (*mɔ̄, ā̰ŋpɔ̄//ā̰mɔ̄*). *pɔ̄ lɛ̀* can be translated 'as for'; *pɔ̄ drɛ̄ nǎ́* marks contrastive change of topic, translated roughly 'and as for':

(271)	*Mɔ̄*	*lɛ̀*	*ŋ́*	*nṵ̄-nā̰.*
	1SG:POS	DEF	1SG:PST+	come-PRF
	'As for me, I have come'.			

(272)	*Dóbǎ*	*pɔ̄*	*lɛ̀*	*wà*	*fa̰*	*gblɛ̰̌-ɛ̀n*
	monkey	POS	DEF	3SG:HAB+3	crack:L	squirrel-DEF

pɔ̄	*drɛ̄*	*nǎ́*	*wà*	*sò*	*lóló*	*wē.*
POS	EMPH	TOP	3SG:HAB+3	chew:L	on.TOP	there
{in a discussion of animals that steal corn} 'Monkeys tear it apart and squirrels eat it on trees'.						

14.3. Focus construction

11   The focused constituent F is marked by a postposed particle *ɲɛ̄* and the main sentence S is followed by particle *ɛ̄* or *nâ̰*, so the two markers of focus embrace the main sentence. Analogs of focus construction in English are sentence-level pitch accent and it-clefts. Example of a focus structure:

(273)	*[Gbè*	*bɛ́~bɛ̄*	*ŋò*	*yé]ᵢ*	*ná̰*	*[síéɲá̰á̰ɲtī̄ī*
	village	big~PL	3PL	mouth	TOP	coal

lō]ⱼ	*ɲɛ̄*	*[ŋò*	*síé*	*tù Øⱼ Øᵢ]*	*ɛ̄,*
with	FOC	3PL:HAB+	fire	plant:L	FOC

[gbè	*plé~plé*	*ɛ̀*	*ŋò*	*yé]ᵢ*	*ná̰*	*[wlàŋ*
village	small~PL	DEF	3PL	mouth	TOP	wood

lō]ⱼ	*ɲɛ̄*	*[ŋò*	*síé*	*tù Øⱼ Øᵢ]*	*ɛ̄.*
with	FOC	3PL:HAB+	fire	plant:L	FOC
'In towns, they make fire with coal; in villages, they make fire with wood'.					

12   The focused construction accompanied by preposed *sá̰pē̄* 'except' expresses the meaning of 'only' in Beng:

(274)	*Sá̰pē̄*	*wálɛ́*	*ɲɛ̄*	*mà̰*	*blɛ̀*	*ɛ̄.*
	except	yam	FOC	1SG:HAB+3	eat:L	FOC
	'I eat only yams'.					

14.4. Non-syntactic expression of emphasis

13   The semantic effect comparable to that of topicalization and focalization can also be achieved by other means, in particular, by independent personal pronouns (pronouns of the focus series) *in situ*, i.e. in a regular NP position rather than in a topicalized or focalized position. Independent pronouns in NP positions are accompanied in NP positions by pronoun doubling, compare:

(275)	*Sēsē*	*ò*	*mḭ̄ā̰*	*mḭ̄*	*sò.*
	every	3SG:HAB+	2SG:EMPH	2SG	chew:L
	'You, everyone bites'. or 'It's you that everyone bites'.				

(276)	*Mḭ̄ā̰*	*mḭ́*	*nṵ̄-nā̰.*
	2SG:EMPH	2SG:PST+	come-PRF
	'You, you came'.		

(277)	*À̰ɲā̰*	*ó*	*nṵ̄-nā̰.*
	3SG:EMPH	3SG:PST+	come-PRF
	'Him, he came' or 'It is him who came'.		

14 Exceptions to overt pronoun doubling are 1SG and 3SG pronouns that are not doubled by overt non-subject series of pronouns, apparently for phonological reasons.

15 The dectic marker *blɔ̄* 'right here', 'right there' used after a locative phrase has a similar effect to focusing the locative phrase:

(278)	*Lɔ́mléŋ*	*nùŋ̀*	*ŋó*	*kpɛ̰́*	*ɲémán*	*blɔ̄*	*gblē.*
	children	PL	3PL:PST+	play:L	1SG:before	there.FOC	yesterday
	'Children played right in front of my door yesterday'.						

(279)	*Ŋ̀ò*	*klá*	*mḭ̄*	*ɗḭ̄*	*blɔ̄.*
	3PL	put	2SG	APUD	here.FOC
	'Put them right in front of you'.				

(280)	*Kàlà*	*bɛ́ɛ̄*	*lɛ̀*	*ò-ó*	*blɔ̄.*
	old	big	DEF	3SG-ST+	there.FOC
	'The elder is right there', compare				

(281)	*Kàlà*	*bɛ́ɛ̄*	*lɛ̀*	*ò-ó*	*wē.*
	old	big	DEF	3SG-ST+	there

	'The elder is there'.

NOTES

1. An anonymous reviewer notes that example 267 might not illustrate topicalization but a special correlative construction. Indeed, as discussed in 13.6 above, fronted relative constructions in Beng can have special properties, such as availability of complementizer *dɛ́ɛ̄* 'if' and possibility of head-internal structure. These properties can be seen as manifesting an independent correlative construction. On the other hand, in most cases correlatives are indistinguishable from the topicalization of an NP with a relative clause, and even, as argued in 13.6, the main relativization strategy probably arose in Beng through a reinterpretation of the correlative construction as a topicalized NP with a relative clause.

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