

Focus in Ewe*

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The basic word order in Ewe is SVO, as shown in (1).

- (1) Kòfí ɖ̀ù mángò-nyè-wó.
Kofi eat mango-1S-PL
'Kofi ate my mangoes.' (2009-10-01)

Topicalised and focalised elements can appear in left-peripheral positions, with and without associated particles:

- (2) Mángò-nyè-wó (yá) Kòfí ɖ̀ù.
mango-1S-PL TOP Kofi eat-3P
'As for my mangoes, Kofi ate them.' (2009-10-01)
- (3) Mángò-nyè-wó (yé) Kòfí ɖ̀ù.
mango-1S-PL FOC Kofi eat
'Kofi ate MY MANGOES.' (2009-10-01)

A variety of uses. Focus fronting, with and without an accompanying focus particle, can be used in a variety of contexts.

- Cleft:

- (4) Mé-nyé núfíálá yé Kòmlá nyé ò.
NEG-be teacher FOC Kòmlā be NEG
'It's not a teacher that Kòmlā is.'

- *Wh* focus:

- (5) Núkà-é wó-dzrá-à lè fiásé lá mè?
what-FOC 3P-sell-HAB in shop DET at
'What do they sell in this shop?' (BC, p. 54)

- Nominal predicate focus:

- (6) Wǒ sùkûví-é Kòmlá nyé-à?
2S child-FOC Kòmlā be-Q
'Is Kòmlā your student?' (BC, p. 41)

*We would like to express our thanks to our informant Jeannette Enaku, and to Enoch Aboh and Félix Ameka. References to Warburton et al. (1968) are indicated as 'BC'.

- Contrastive focus:

- (7) A: Mè-xlě bé àgblèdèlá-wó dè-nà àgbèli-gblè lè Ámériká.
 1S-read tat farmer-PL cultivate-HAB cassava-field at America
 ‘I read that farmers grow cassava in America.’
 B: Àò, blĩ-gblè wó-dè-nà.
 no maize-field 3P-cultivate-HAB
 ‘No, they grow maize.’ (2010-01-20)

No resumption. In clauses with a fronted questioned or focused DP, there is no resumption of that element with a clitic:

- (8) a. Núkà-é nè-dũ-(*i)?
 what-FOC 2S-eat-3S
 ‘What did you eat?’
 b. Mángò-é mè-dũ-(*i).
 mango-FOC 1S-eat-3S
 ‘It’s a mango that I ate.’
 (9) a. Àmékà yé nè-gblò ✓nâ / *nê?
 who FOC 2S-speak to / to:3S
 ‘Who did you talk to?’
 b. Yàwò yé mè-gblò ✓nâ / *nê.
 Yawo FOC 1S-speak to / to:3S
 ‘It’s Yawo that I talked to.’

Questions:

- Under what conditions is focus fronting possible or required?
- What is the distribution of the focus particle $(y)é$?
- Is the focus particle a head in the complementiser domain (Foc^0) or DP-internal?
- How does focus in Ewe relate to the left periphery of other languages?

Our informant. Monolingual speaker from Kpalimé, Togo. Judgements may deviate from Standard Ewe. For example, in our speakers dialect, topicalised elements are not generally resumed with a clitic.

1 Focus fronting

Under what conditions is focus fronting possible or required?

Wh questions. *Wh* questions in Ewe require fronting, as shown in (10) and (11).

- (10) a. Àfikàtɔ́(-é) nèn-nyê?
citizen.of.where-FOC 2S-be
‘Where are you from?’ (2009-08-24)
- b. * È-nyê àfikàtɔ́?
2S-be citizen.of.where
- (11) a. Àmékà-é nèn-kpɔ́?
who-FOC 2S-see
‘Who did you see?’ (2009-08-24)
- b. * E-kpɔ́ ameka?
2S-see who
(Acceptable as an echo question.)

Responses to *wh* questions do not always require focus fronting:

- (12) a. Àfikàtɔ́-é nènnyê? Mèn-nyé Ámèrikàtɔ́.
citizen.of.where-FOC 2S-be 1S-be American
b. Àfikàtɔ́-é nènnyê? Ámèrikàtɔ́-é mèn-nyé .
citizen.of.where-FOC 2S-be American-FOC 1S-be
‘Where are you from? I’m (an) American.’ (2009-08-17)

Exhaustive focus. Fronting is possible with exhaustive focus, but not obligatory:

- (13) a. Kòfí d̀ù-nà àkòd̀ù-wó kò.
Kofi eat-HAB banana-PL only
b. Àkòd̀ù-wó kò (yé) Kòfí d̀ù-nà.
banana-PL only FOC Kofi eat-HAB
c. ‘Kofi only eats bananas.’ (2010-01-20)

Contrastive focus. Fronting is possible with contrastive focus, but not obligatory:

- (14) A: Mèn-xlè bé àgblèdèlá-wó dè-nà àgbèli-gblè lè Ámèrikà.
1S-read that farmer-PL cultivate-HAB cassava-field at America
‘I read that farmers grow cassava in the US.’
- B1: Àò, wó-dè-nà blĩ-gblè.
no 3P-cultivate-HAB wheat-field
B2: Àò, blĩ-gblè (yé) wó-dè-nà.
no wheat-field FOC 3P-cultivate-HAB
‘No, they grow wheat.’ (2010-01-20)

Choice questions. Fronting is possible with choice questions, but not obligatory:

- (15) a. Kòfí dè-nà àgbèli-gblè àló àzĩ-gblè à?
Kofi cultivate-HAB cassava-field or wheat-field Q
b. Àgbèli-gblè àló àzĩ-gblè Kòfí dè-nà?
cassava-field or wheat-field Kofi cultivate-HAB
‘Does Kofi grow cassava or wheat?’ (2010-01-20)

Conclusion. Focus fronting in Ewe *wh* questions is obligatory. The patterns in Ewe and English in this respect are parallel:

- (16) Q: What_i did you eat *t_i*?
 A: I ate [your chocolates.]

With all other types of focus, fronting is optional.

Fronting of focused items other than *wh* phrases is allowed with focus types which in English only allow fronting in the guise of a cleft:

- (17) a. It's only bananas that John likes.
 b. *?Only bananas does John like.
 c. ?Only bananas John likes.
- (18) I read that farmers grow cassava in the US.
 a. No, it's wheat that they grow.
 b. *No, wheat they grow.
- (19) a. Is it cassava or wheat that John grows?
 b. *Cassava or wheat does John grow?

2 The focus particle *yé*

When is the focus particle *yé* obligatory?

Particle dependent on fronting. As shown in (20), *yé* cannot appear after a postverbal constituent such as an object to focus that constituent.

- (20) Nyémé-*xlě* nyàdzòdzògbàlě ò...
 1S:NEG-read newspaper NEG
 Context: 'I didn't read the newspaper.' (2009-08-24)
 a. Àgbàlě sia *yé* mè-*xlě*.
 book this FOC 1S-read
 'I didn't read the newspaper.' (2009-08-24)
 b. # Mè-*xlě* àgbàlě sia *yé*.
 1S-read book this FOC

However, *yé* is not always required for this *wh* fronting.

- (21) Àfikà nè-tsô?
 who 2S-come.from
 'Where do you come from?' (EweBS, p. 30)
- (22) Àmékà gbó Sényó dzè?
 who at Senyo lodge
 'At whose place is Senyo lodging?' (EweBS, p. 55)

- (23) Núkà-wó nè-flè lè fiásé lá mè?
 what-PL 2S-buy in shop the at
 ‘What (things) did you buy at the shop?’ (BS, p. 55)

Similarly, the short answers to such questions do not require *yé* after the fronted focused item either:

- (24) Àfikà nè-tsô? Ghánà-(yé).
 who 2S-come.from Ghana-FOC
 ‘Where are you from? Ghana.’ (2009-08-17)

Clefts. We will make the assumption that one of the defining characteristics of a cleft in Ewe is that the focused element is accompanied by a copular element. Negative clefts are readily available:

- (25) Mé-nyé núfiálá yé Kòmlā nyé ò.
 NEG-be teacher FOC Kòmlā be NEG
 ‘It’s not a teacher that Kòmlā is.’

A straightforward affirmative cleft is unavailable:

- (26) a. Dòyòlá yé wò-nyé.
 doctor FOC 3S-be
 ‘He’s a doctor.’ (2009-08-07)
 b. *É-nyé dòyòlá yé (wò-nyé.)
 3S-be doctor FOC 3S-be

Félix Ameka (p.c.) reports that an affirmative cleft does exist in Ewe, exemplified in (27c), but our speaker rejects these:

- (27) a. Mè-dù àkòdù.
 1S-eat banana
 ‘I ate a banana.’
 b. Àkòdù-é mè-dù.
 banana-FOC 1S-eat
 ‘I ate a BANANA.’
 c. Àkòdù-é wò-nyé mè-dù.
 banana-FOC 3S-COP 1S-eat
 ‘It’s a banana that I ate.’ (Félix Ameka, p.c.)

There seems to be a distinct preference to include the focus marker *yé* in a negative cleft, but here too, its inclusion seems to be optional:

- (28) Mé-nyé núfiálá (yé) Kòmlā nyé ò.
 NEG-COP teacher FOC Kòmlā COP NEG
 ‘Kòmlā is a teacher.’ (2009-10-01)

- (29) Q: Àmékà nè-kpó lè àsimè?
 who 2S-see in market
 ‘Who did you see at the market?’
 A: Mé-nyé àmè dèké (yé) mè-kpó ò.
 NEG-be person any FOC 1S-see NEG-Q
 ‘I didn’t see anyone.’ (2009-08-17)

Subject/non-subject asymmetry. Aboh (2007) notes that while some speakers of Gbe languages accept *wh* fronting without a concomitant focus particle in the general case, the particle is still obligatory in subject questions.

- (30) a. Àmékà yé yì àfútà?
 who FOC go beach
 ‘Who went to the beach?’
 b. ?? Àmékà yì àfútà?

However, our informant also allows the focus particle to be omitted in other contexts where the subject is something other than *àmékà* ‘who’:

- (31) Núkà (yé) dzò dé dzí wò?
 what FOC fall at on you
 ‘What happened?’ 2009-10-07
 (32) Àmékà-wó (yé) yì dé dǝwǝfé lá?
 who-PL FOC go ? workplace DET
 ‘Who has gone to work?’ *Shouldn't final syllable be falling?*
 (33) Àgbàlè kà (yé) gédé ànyígbâ?
 book which FOC fall ground
 ‘Which book fell on the floor?’

Exhaustive focus. The particle *kò/kòé* ‘only’ is normally placed after the DP it restricts, as in (34).

- (34) Míawó kòé vá.
 1P only come
 ‘Only we came.’ (2009-07-16)

Kòé is relevant to the distribution of the focus particle, because it might include *yé*:

- (35) $kò + yé \rightarrow kòé$

‘Only’ has two forms: *kò* and *kòé*. The form *kòé* is required after a subject immediately preceding the verb.

- (36) Àgbèlì yá fǝfǝ-nyè *kò/✓kòé dǝ.
 cassava TOP father-1S only cultivate
 ‘Only my father grows cassava.’
 (37) Ame to so *kò/✓kòé vá.
 person only come
 ‘Only three people came.’ 0

The direct object in Ewe can be preposed in sentence initial position, In this initial position, it can be followed by either *kó* or *kóé*.

- (38) Àgbàlè kò/kòé Yàwò xlè.
 book only Yawo read
 ‘Yawo read only a book.’

Kòé and *yé* can't cooccur.

- Conclusion.** The only contexts in which $(y)\acute{e}$ is obligatory involve subject focus:

- What the particle $y\acute{e}$ contributes to the clause can be described as follows:

- ### 3 The syntactic analysis of the focus particle *yé*

(40) a.



Clause-final *yé*. It was shown that a focused DP cannot be followed by *yé* to the right of the verb. However, *yé* can appear clause-finally to focus the entire clause, as shown in (41b).

- (41) Núkà Kòfí gblò ná-wò?
 what Kofi say to-2S
 Context: ‘What did Kofi tell you?’ (2009-??-??)
 a. É-gblò bé wó-tú sùkù lá.
 3S-say that 3P-close school DET
 ‘He said that the school has been closed.’
 b. (Bé) wó-tú sùkù lá (yé.)
 that 3P-close school DET FOC
 ‘That the school has been closed.’

This suggests that *yé* is in the complementiser domain:



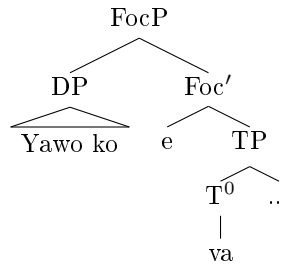
Medial *yé*. We assume that *yé* is not available medially, as in these two as yet untested sentences:

- (43) Kòfí lè òtí (*yé) ò-m.
 Kofi at orange FOC eat-PROG
 ‘Kofi is eating an orange.’
 (44) Mè-kpó Kòfí (*yé) lè àsìmè.
 1S-see Kofi FOC at market
 ‘I saw Kofi at the market.’

Left-peripheral *kò/kòé*. Recall that subjects must be followed by the form *kòé* ‘only’, which we have given this tentative analysis:

- (45) $kò + yé \rightarrow kòé$

- (46) a. Yàwò kòé vá.
 Yawo only come
 ‘Only Yawo came.’
 b.



The impossibility of *kò* with subject focus is then reduced to the strong preference for *yé* with focused subject which we already observed for subject *wh* questions.

***Kò/kòé* in the right periphery** *Kò* and *kòé* can also follow the object with any kind of modifier in its canonical postverbal position. In the following examples, the object is followed by the demonstrative *sia* ‘this’ or even by the article *lá* ‘the’:

- (47) Yàwò xlě àgbàlě lá kò/kòé.
 Yawo read book DET only
 ‘Yawo only read the book.’

Medial *kò/kòé* ‘only’.

- (48) Mè-kpó [Kòfí kò/kòé]_{DP} [lè àsìmè.]_{PP}
 1S-see Kofi only at market
 ‘I saw only Kofi at the market.’ (2010-01-20)
- (49) Progressive: Sbj lè Obj V-*m*
 Kòfí lè [ɲùtí kò/kòé]_{DP} ḍù-m̄.
 Kofi at orange only eat-PROG
 ‘Kofi is eating only an orange.’ (2010-01-20)

Number effects with *kó/kòé*.

- (50) a. Àgbàlě ✓kò/✓kòé Yàwò xlě.
 book only Yawo read
 ‘Yawo read only the book.’
 b. Àgbàlě-wó *kò/✓kòé Yàwò xlě.
 book-PL only Yawo read
 ‘Yawo read only the books.’ (2009-08-17, 2009-10-01)
- (51) a. Mè-kpó Yàwò ✓kò/*kòé.
 1S-see Yawo only
 ‘I saw only Yawo.’ (2009-08-10)
 b. Mè-kpó Yàwò kplé Kwàsí ✓kò/✓kòé.
 1S-see Yawo and Kwasi only
 ‘I saw only Yawo.’ (2009-08-10, 2009-10-01)

Conclusion. Ignoring *kò/kòé*, on the basis of medial DPs, it appears that *yí* is not DP-internal. This makes the Foc⁰ head analysis most likely.

Sketch of an analysis of *kò/kòé*:

- *Kòé* is derived from *kò+yé* only in left-peripheral positions.
- *kò/kòé* are also independently distinct forms of ‘only’ and of ‘alone’. Number effects (not discussed here) restricting the appearance of the form *kòé* is related to the adverb/adjective distinction.

4 The structure of the left periphery

How does focus in Ewe relate to the left periphery of other languages?

***Foc > Top.** No type of focus can be followed by a topic.

Recall that there is also topic fronting, with an optional accompanying particle:

- (52) Mángò-nyè-wó (yá) Kòfí d̀ù.
 mango-1S-PL TOP Kofi eat-3P
 ‘As for my mangoes, Kofi ate them.’ (2009-10-01)

A topic must precede a plain focused phrase:

- (53) a. Fùfù-é mè-d̀ù. Kòfí yá mólì yé wǒ-d̀ù.
 fufu-E 1S-eat Kofi TOP rice FOC 3S-prepare
 ‘I ate the fufu. As for Kofi, it’s rice that he ate.’ (2008-08-17)
 b. *Fùfù-é mè-d̀ù. Mólì yé Kòfí yá wǒ-d̀ù.
 fufu-E 1S-eat rice FOC Kofi TOP 3S-prepare

The sentences in (54a) and (54b) show that a *wh* phrase and a topicalised phrase may cooccur, but that the topic must precede the *wh* phrase.

- (54) Mé-nyá bé nè-flè àmàgbé-wó lè fiásé mè,
 1S-know that 2S-buy vegetable-PL in shop at
 ‘I know that you bought some vegetables at the shop,’
 a. gàké lè àsìmè yá núkà-é nè-flè?
 but in market TOP what-FOC 2Sobuy
 ‘but what did you buy at the market?’ (2009-08-07)
 b. *gàké núkà-é àsìmè yá nè-flè?
 but what-FOC market TOP 2Sobuy

Similarly, a topic cannot be followed by a subject modified by *kò(é)* ‘only’.

- (55) a. Fòfó-nyè kòé dó àgbèlì.
 father-1S only cultivate cassava
 ‘Only my father grows cassava.’ (2009-08-17)
 b. Àgbèlì yá fòfó-nyè dó.
 cassava TOP father-1S cultivate
 ‘Cassava, my father grows it.’
 c. *Àgbèlì yá fòfó-nyè kòé dó.
 cassava TOP father-1S only cultivate
 intended: ‘Cassava, only my father grows it.’

Multiple topics. A topicalised subject preceding a topicalised object is generally deemed ungrammatical, as in (56).

- (56) a. [Nyě àgbàlè] yá Yàwò xlě.
 1S book TOP Yawo read
 ‘My book Yawo read.’ (2009-08-17)
 b. *Yàwò [nyě àgbàlè] yá wǒ-xlě.
 Yawo 1S book TOP 3S-read
 (57) * Kòfí d̀ù mólì sià, v̀à Yàwò (yá) mólì sià mé-d̀ù-ì ò.
 Kofi eat rice this but Yawo TOP rice this NEG-eat-3S NEG
 Intended: ‘Kofi ate this rice, but Yawo didn’t eat this rice.’ (2009-08-17)

With the order OSV, the subject itself may be followed by *yà*, as in (58).

- (58) Kòfí d̀ù mólì sià, v̀àà mólì sià Yàwò (yá) méd̀ù-ì ò.
 Kofi eat rice this but rice this Yawo TOP NEG-eat-3S NEG
 ‘Kofi ate this rice, but Yawo didn’t eat this rice.’ (2009-08-17)

Conclusion.

- We prepose that the left periphery in Ewe is organised as follows:

(59) Topic > Focus/*Wh* > IP

- While multiple topics are possible, there are ordering restrictions between them.

This conclusion is dependent on the assumption that *yá* is a topic marker. Note also that it is not clear whether the subject followed by *yá* in (58) is in spec-IP or in spec-TopP.

5 Conclusions

Fronting.

- Topicalised and focused elements can appear in left-peripheral positions in Ewe.
- Fronting is possible under the following conditions: *wh*-questions, Informational Focus, Exhaustive Focus, Contrastive Focus, and choice questions.
- Fronting is never obligatory, except in *wh* questions. (However, it is not clear whether subjects are fronted when followed by focus particle *yé* or by *kòé* ‘only’.)

The focus particle *yé*.

- The particle *yé* appears only to the right of an element fronted to the left periphery. It can never appear within the IP. Only when the whole clause is focused can it be followed by *yé*.
- *Yé* does not encode a particular type of focus.
- The particle *yé* is obligatory only in subject questions (on the right of *àmékà* ‘who’).

Kò/kòé ‘only’.

- The particle meaning ‘only’ has two forms: *kò* and *kò+yé→kòé*.
- *Kòé* is always required on the right of the subject ‘only’ phrases (like the focus particle *yé*).
- Number effects in the distribution of *kò* and *kòé* may be due to the existence of two difference lexical items, one meaning ‘only’ and the other meaning ‘alone’.

The structure of the left periphery.

- The structure of the left periphery in Ewe is as follows:

(60) Topic > Focus/*Wh* > IP

- While multiple topics are possible, there are ordering restrictions between them.

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