

Morphological focus in Kakabe: Focus Domain Contraction

Abstract

The present study investigates the question of whether a morphological marker follows the same or different principles of realization as NS, on the example of Kakabe (Western Mande) language. In particular, it is concerned with the contexts of broad focus that are decisive for the investigation of the principles underlying the realization of focus marking. The studies of the realization of morphological focus markers are, first, scarce, and, second, rarely provide information about the effect of the focus scope on its realization. I propose an account of morphological focus marking based on the distinction between two levels of representation of focused constituents with the preservation of the edge-marking assignment of the focus particle.

1. Introduction

In languages that signal focus by Nuclear Stress (NS), the latter must fall within the Focus constituent; this is, roughly speaking, the essence of Focus Prominence principle (Jackendoff 1972), commonly admitted in the literature. The Default Prominence, on the other hand, defines where exactly NS falls within the Focus constituent, an issue particularly important in the case of broad focus, such as VP and Sentence focus. As opposed to NS as focus marker, detailed discussions of morphological focus markers are rare. In particular, the question of how they behave in broad focus context, in contrast to narrow focus, is hardly ever approached.

The present study proposes an answer to the question that has not been treated so far but which is important for the understanding of the expression of focus: whereas the default host for NS is defined by Default Prominence, what is the counterpart of this principle for the morphological markers of focus? The few studies that discuss morphological marking of focus represent the latter as edge-marking (the focus marker appears at the right or at the left boundary of the focused constituent), e.g. Buring (2010) and Féry (2013). The present study provides an analysis of the assignment of focus particle in contexts of varying scope of focus on the examples of Kakabe, a Western Mande language¹. The study is based on the corpus of 12 hours of conversations and storytelling recorded, transcribed and annotated with the Kakabe speakers during the fieldtrips from 2009 to 2016. The corpus is available in the ELAR corpus in the Kakabe collection.² The corpus contains in total 2843 occurrences of the *lè* focus marker.³ The examples are accompanied by the reference that allows to find them in the corpus.

This evidence shows that the edge-marking representation gives wrong predictions for broad focus context unless one explicitly opposes the level of spell-out and the level of pragmatic articulation. In line with the logic of the F-projection theory for NS where the spell-out focus can

¹ Kakabe shows the typical for Mande languages rigid S (aux)-O-V-X word order where X stands for any adjunct.

(i)	Sbj	Aux	DO	V	IO	pp
	<i>à</i>	<i>sí</i>	<i>nìngéé</i>	<i>sàn</i>	<i>mànsáà</i>	<i>yèn</i>
	3SG	POT	cow.ART	buy	chief-ART	BNF

He will buy a cow for the chief.

Kakabe is a little-known Mande languages spoken in the Republic of Guinea by approximately 50 000 speakers. Kakabe is a tonal language, with H and L, floating L tones and (non-automatic) downstep.

² <https://elar.soas.ac.uk/Collection/MPI43300>

³ Apart from sentence with *lè* used for focalization proper, this number contains also occurrences of *lè* in non-verbal identity and class-membership constructions, which can be estimated at about 200 sentences.

- a. *No, the boss gave Kim a [RAISE]_F.*
 b. *No, the boss [gave Kim a RAISE]_F.*
 c. *No, [the boss gave Kim a RAISE]_F.*

The principle referred to as Default Prominence since Jackendoff (1972) is destined to define the position of NS, in particular, within broader focus domains. Default Prominence operates independently of focus articulation, and the identity of this mechanism is subject to debate. In what can be referred to as prosody-oriented approaches, to mention some earlier works, Jackendoff (1972); Selkirk 1984), NS is assigned on prosodic structure. On the other hand, for such authors as Cinque (1993); Zubizarreta (1998); Kahnemuyipour (2009), NS is assigned though Default Prominence directly on syntactic structure.

The present study investigates the question of whether a morphological marker follows the same or different principles of realization as NS, in particular, in the context of broad focus. The context of broad focus is decisive for the investigation of the principles underlying the realization of focus marker. Nevertheless, the studies of the realization of morphological focus markers are, first, scarce, and, second, rarely provide information about the effect of the focus scope on its realization. As Buring (2009: 26) points out, examples of languages that mark the focused constituent by a special morpheme “are ubiquitous, though detailed descriptions are rare”. The few studies that approach this question represent focus particles, as well as other types of segmental focus markers, as edge-marking devices that signal the boundary of the focus constituent.

3. Focus Domain Contraction in Kakabe

As already shown in Example (2), in Kakabe, the focus marker appears at the right boundary of the focused constituent in the case of narrow focus. But when focus is broader, *lè* can be placed to the right of a DP within the constituent corresponding to the focus of the utterance. Therefore, linearly, focus particle can be found inside the constituent corresponding to what is in focus; see *lè* inside the two focused VPs in (4).

- (4) *wò í [gítâr lè fɔ̀-là]_F wò ní wó dòn*
 2PL be guitar.ART FP say-GER 2PL POT 2PL dance
- káá wò í [bólótásúmúnè lè kè-là]_F wò ní wó dòn?*
 or.Q 2PL be clapping.ART FP do-GER 2PL POT 2PL dance
 Do you [play the guitar]_F when you dance or do you [clap your hands]_F when you dance?
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See also (5) with a ditransitive verb where *lè* appears on DO, the linearly first DP in the focus domain:

- (5) *à ka [nìngéè lè dí mànsáà bòlò]_F*
 3SG PFV.TR cow.ART FP give chief.ART to
 [What did he do?] He gave a cow to the chief.

This shows that edge-marking representation of morphological focus marker runs into problems when applied to broad focus contexts in a straightforward way. A solution proposed in this study is to distinguish between two levels of representation of the focused constituent: 1) the Underlying Focus Domain, the constituent that corresponds to the content pragmatically articulated as focus and 2) the Surface, or spell-out Focus Domain, the constituent treated as focused at the spell-out level at which the focus marker is assigned. The mechanism that mediates between Initial FD and Surface FD in my proposal is the Contraction of Focus Domain:

- (6) **Focus Domain Contraction:** contraction of Underlying FD to the DP inside it (Surface FD).

The distinction between the underlying and spell-out focus domains follows the logic of the Focus Projection theory (Selkirk 1984; 1995; von Stechow and Uhmman 1986). In this approach, the computation proceeds from pitch accents or NS, to the correct semantic interpretation. NS, “an

accented word” makes it F-marked following the Basic F-rule “An accented word is F-marked” (Selkirk 1995: 555). Further, depending on the role of the F-marked word in the argument structure, it can project F-marking on larger constituent, whereby the latter becomes F-marked as well.

(7) F-projection rules (Selkirk 1995: 555)

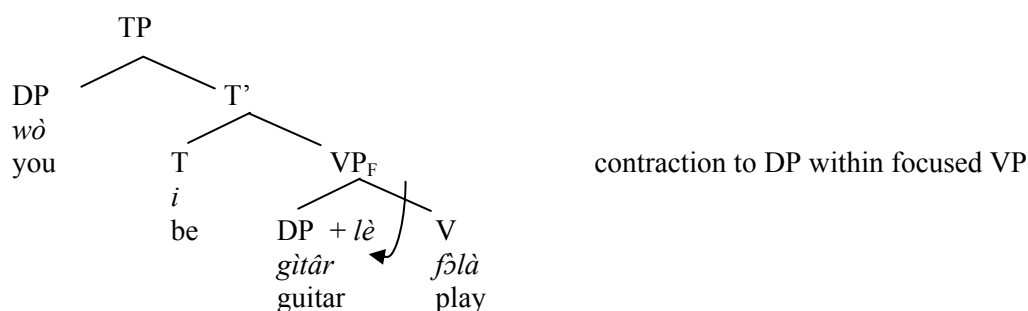
- a. F-marking of the head of a phrase licenses the F-marking of the phrase
- b. F-marking of an internal argument of a head licenses the F-marking of the head.

In my analysis, the implementation of focus articulation proceeds rather from the semantic, or rather, pragmatic articulation, to the spell-out. A constituent articulated as focused (F-marked in Selkirk’s terms) at the pragmatic level, is contracted, if a number of conditions is met, to its daughter DP at the level of spell-out where the focus marker is assigned. Nevertheless, the general logic is the same in that the spell-out Focus Domain (the constituent F-marked by NS or by focus particle, in my case) can be a subconstituent of the pragmatic Focus domain. In (8) are formulated the conditions of implementation of FD contraction that apply in Kakabe:

(8) **FD Contraction and focus marking in Kakabe:**

- a) Underlying FD is contracted to the DP inside it when two conditions hold: 1) the FD contains a DP; 2) the DP is non-given.
- b) In an Underlying FD with more than one DP, the former is contracted to the **left-most** non-branching DP.
- c) *lè* appears at the right edge of FD after contraction.

Crucially, when the surface FD does not match the underlying FD, it always corresponds to a DP. For example, in (4) given earlier, the underlying FD is the VP *gìtâr lè fɔ̀là* ‘play guitar’ and the surface FD is *gìtâr* ‘the guitar’. Thus, in the focus domain VP_F is contracted to the non-given DP as represented below:

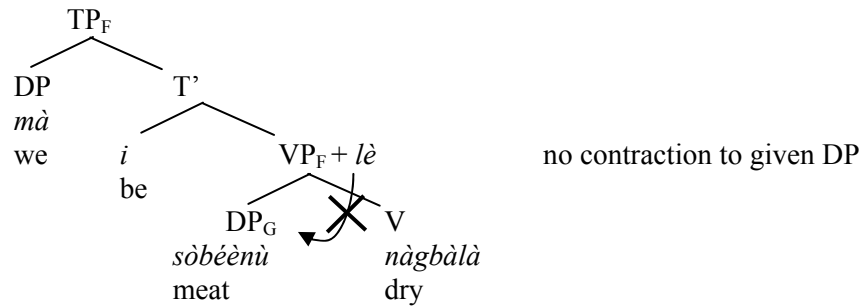


The contraction approach, as formulated in (8), is, in principle, compatible with the cartographic framework in which focus is associated with a particular position within CP (Rizzi 1997; 2004, and (Aboh 2004; 2007 on morphological focus). Yet, for the reasons of space, it is not possible to discuss this potential coexistence of the focus domain contraction and Focus as a feature associated with a particular syntactic position.

3.1. FD contraction and Givenness

Next, the givenness condition in (8a) blocks the contraction of the underlying FD to a DP if the latter is given. It is illustrated in (8): since FD *sòbéènù nàgbálálá* ‘dry the meat’ contains no other DP, the surface FD remains coextensive with the underlying FD, and *lè* appears at its right boundary.

- (8) *mà i sòbéènù nà-gbálá-lá lè* [DP_G V]_F
 1PL be meat-ART-PL CAUS-dry-GER FP
 [There is so much meat, we can eat it so that we fatten. She said, so, what
 should we do?] We should dry the meat. kankaya_AB_2008_033

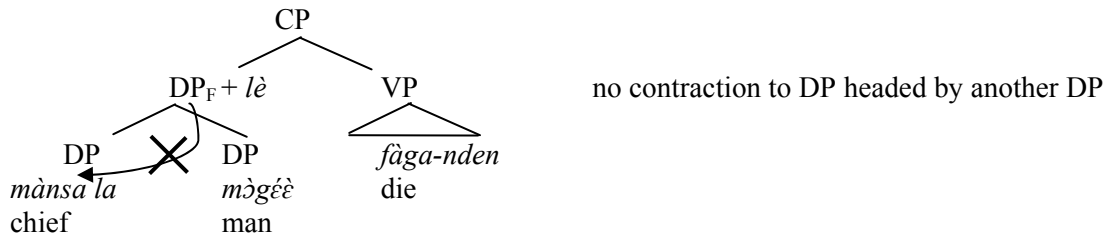


3.2 FD contraction and branching DPs

Example (9) illustrates the principle according to which contraction happens with respect to the first **non-branching** DP and not simply the first DP within the FD (8b)

- (9) *[mànsàà là m̀̀g̀̀éé]_F lè f̀̀g̀̀à-ndèn*
 chief.ART POSS man.ART FP die-PC.ST
 [Who died?] The [chief's man]_F died.
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#*[m̀̀nsàà lè là m̀̀g̀̀éé]_F f̀̀g̀̀à-ndèn*
 chief-ART FP POSS man-ART die-PC.ST



3.3. Leftmost DP: Sentence focus and ditransitive predicates

Crucially, there are contexts where *lè* differs from NS. In intonational languages as in English, NS falls on the rightmost constituent, e.g. on DO in Sentence focus context as in (10a) or, when the focus domain includes a ditransitive predicate, on the indirect object (10b).

- (10) a. *(What happened?) [Bill bought a CAR]_F* Sentence focus
 b. *What did Peter do? He [gave a book to MARY]_F* ditransitive VP focus

In contrast to that, in Kakabe *lè* appears on the leftmost DP, hence *lè* after the Subject in (11) and on the DO in focus domain with a ditransitive predicate illustrated by (4) that was given earlier.

- (11) *s̀̀íkùlè lè k̀̀á-á là k̀̀érè-nú j̀̀ígá*
 goat.ART FP PFV.TR-3SG POSS hoe.ART-PL take
 (What happened?) The goat took its hoes [and went to the smith's].
 numu_SNKeita_2009_009

4. Conclusion

The assignment of the focus particle *lè* in Kakabe patterns with NS in two respects. First, in the way it privileges term over predicates (focus marker is preferably placed on the argument and not on predicate). Second, it displays the same sensitivity to the activation status of arguments. As NS, the *lè* focus marker does not appear on given arguments. Yet, the assignment of the focus particle differs from NS in that the former appears on the leftmost DP, whereas NS it is hosted by the rightmost DP

(Féry 2011; Kratzer and Selkirk 2018) or the most deeply embedded DP in line with the syntactically-oriented approaches (*inter alia*, and Cinque 1993, Zubizarreta 2016).

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