

Subject Focus in West African Languages*

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1. Introduction

The chapter provides an overview of how the information-structural category of focus is grammatically marked in three West African language groups, namely Gur, Kwa, and (West) Chadic. The languages under discussion display a wide variety of grammatical focus-marking strategies, both within and across language groups. Some languages mark focus syntactically, for instance as clefts, or by means of focus movement. Others mark focus morphologically, where the morphological markers come from different categories, such as for instance copulas, functional heads, or affixes (see also section 2). Yet others mark focus by prosodic means, e.g. by prosodic phrasing. The primary goal of this chapter is to provide a comparison of the realization of subject focus from a cross-linguistic (West African) perspective. In doing so, we will mostly eschew a specific theoretical analysis of the focus marking devices employed in the various languages. For instance, in section 2.2 on syntactic focus marking, we remain neutral on the question of whether the positioning of the focus constituent in the left periphery of a clause is the result of clefting, focus movement, or whether it involves some other syntactic configuration. A choice between the various analytical options would require a careful investigation of the syntactic structures involved (cf. Adger & Ramchand 2005 for an illustrative discussion of this point in Scottish Gaelic and Irish), and thus be well beyond the scope of the chapter.

Despite the observed differences in the realization of focus, the languages under discussion show a surprising degree of similarity at a more abstract level: The large majority of them displays a subject/non-subject asymmetry when it comes to focus marking, irrespective of which language group they belong to. As will emerge, subject focus always requires a special linguistic coding, which either indicates the focus status of the subject directly, or else marks the entire clause containing the focused subject as *thetic*. Non-subject focus, in contrast, can often be unmarked (*marking asymmetry*). In addition, focused subjects are marked differently from focused non-subjects in many languages (*structural asymmetry*). In our view, the reason for the observed asymmetries is as follows: Focused subjects must be marked, often in a special way, in order to avoid a default-interpretation of grammatical (preverbal) subjects as topics. This strict requirement on the marking of subject focus manifests itself differently in the languages under discussion, which show an interesting typological variation with regard to how structures with focus subjects are realized grammatically.

The geographic distribution of the three language groups is as follows: Kwa languages are found in Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, and Ivory Coast. Gur languages are spoken in Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, and Mali. Chadic languages, at last, are spoken in the areas surrounding Lake Chad in Northern Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad. The discussion here is based on a language sample comprising the languages in (1)¹:

- (1) a. Kwa: Aja, Akan, Awutu-Efutu, Ewe, Fɔ̀n, Foodo, Lelemi
- b. Gur: Buli, Byali, Dagbani, Ditammari, Gurene, Konkomba, Kɔ̀nni, Nateni, Yom

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¹ For most of the languages we rely on data elicited by ourselves during field research. For reasons of space, not all languages are equally represented.

All languages in the sample are tone languages, with tone taking over both lexical and grammatical functions. The basic word order of all languages is SVO with full NPs and there is no morphological case marking.

The chapter is organized as follows: Section 2 introduces in exemplary fashion the different grammatical means for marking non-verbal focus that are employed by the languages in the sample. Section 3 discusses the two kinds of subject/non-subject asymmetry, namely the marking asymmetry and the structural asymmetry. Section 4 discusses the special status of focused subjects in more detail, and shows that there is a major typological split in our language sample concerning the way of how a focused subject is marked. While one sub-group (West Chadic) treats focused subjects on a par with other focus constituents, there is another sub-group (within the Oti-Volta branch of Gur) that realizes sentences with focused subjects asthetic utterances with special structural properties. Section 5 concludes.

2. Linguistic means of expressing non-subject focus

This section introduces the various grammatical means of marking focus employed by the West African languages under consideration. For ease of exposition, the discussion is based on examples involving non-subject term focus (henceforth: NSF), i.e. focus on nominal arguments and adjuncts. Before we turn to the different linguistic ways of coding focus, however, a few remarks are in order concerning our understanding of the notion of *focus*.

We understand *focus* in a very general sense, namely as that information-structural component of a clause that is most important or salient relative to a given discourse situation, see e.g. Dik (1997), Jackendoff (1972). Relative importance or salience can be achieved in various ways, e.g. by introducing new information into the discourse (*information focus*), or by standing in explicit or implicit contrast to a set of comparable alternatives (*contrastive focus*) (Rochemont 1986, Rooth 1985). *Focus marking*, then, implies the linguistic realization of the information-structural category *focus* by way of special grammatical means. Notice that the term *focus marking*, when used in this general way, does not imply that the formal devices employed in the marking of focus are exclusively found in focus constructions. In many cases, the *focus marker* may serve other grammatical functions as well, cf. sections 2.1 and 2.2 for relevant discussion.

Even though we concentrate on instances of explicit focus marking in what follows, it is worth pointing out that NSF need not be marked at all in many languages in the sample. All of the Kwa languages (Aja, Akan, Awutu-Efutu, Ewe, Fɔ̀n, Foodo, Lelemi – see also Fiedler 2007, Schwarz 2008d, Fiedler & Schwarz, to appear) as well as some of the Chadic languages (Bole, Hausa, see also Zimmermann 2006) can express NSF focus simply by using the canonical word order SVO (*in-situ focus*)² and without making use of special prosodic patterns or special morphological markers. To give a concrete example from Fɔ̀n, an appropriate reply to the object question in (2Q), in fact the most common reply, is the answer in (2A) with canonical word order and without any additional morphological or prosodic marking. The focus constituent is set in bold face in the target language; in the English

² Of course, it is also fine to answer the given questions with just a noun phrase, which can also be accompanied by a morphological focus marker in some languages. Also notice that the marking of multiple foci within one sentence is generally impossible in the languages under discussion.

translation, it appears in small capitals. For reasons of space the focus triggering questions appear in English throughout.

(2) Fɔn (Kwa, Gbe)³

Q: What did the woman eat?

A: é ɖù àyìkún.

3SG eat bean

‘She ate BEANS.’

We take such data to indicate that the post-verbal position of a canonical SVO sentence constitutes the default position for NSF in these languages, making additional focus marking by syntactic movement and/or morphological marking and/or prosodic marking superfluous. Furthermore, as will emerge, the preverbal subject position in canonical SVO clauses is often associated with a default topic interpretation in these languages, so that such sentences are normally interpreted as categorical statements with a topic-comment structure.

Nonetheless, whenever NSF is overtly marked, we find a wide variety of focus marking devices that are not necessarily expressed on the focus constituent itself (*in-focus part*), but may (also) occur in other parts of the clause (*out-of-focus part*), for instance in form of special aspect markers on the verb. In the following sub-sections, we introduce the various strategies of grammatical focus marking in turn.

2.1 Morphological focus marking of non-subjects

Morphological focus marking without any additional syntactic changes in the canonical SVO order is found in several West African languages, in particular in the Gur group, but also in some Chadic languages: It is reported for Buli, Byali, Dagbani, Ditammari, Gurene, Kɔnni (Gur), as well as for Bole and Guruntum (Chadic). The morphological focus markers in these languages precede the focus constituent in some of the languages while they follow it in others. As mentioned in the introduction, the class of morphological focus markers is not homogeneous but comprises at least the following list of formal elements, many of which also occur independently in non-focus contexts: (i) invariant information-structural particles; (ii) particles agreeing in gender with the focused NP/DP; (iii) copulas; and (iv) nominal affixes.

In the Gur language Buli in (3), the focus marker is the morpheme *ká*, which precedes the focus constituent under certain conditions⁴. It can change its surface tone because of Low-tone-spreading, and it may be subject to heavy segmental erosion when – as is possible in some environments – it cliticizes phonologically on the preceding word (Schwarz 2005, 2008a, 2008d).

³ We use the following abbreviations: ASS – assertion marker, AUX – auxiliary, CL – class marker, CNJ – conjunction, DEF – definite marker, DET – determiner, F – feminine, FM – focus marker, IPF – imperfective, IS – information structure, M – masculine, PERF – perfective, PRT – particle, REL – relative form, TAM – tempus/aspect/modality.

⁴ In subjunctive and under negation, the focus marker is less regularly applied. Furthermore, it can not precede the focal verb (cf. Schwarz, to appear and 2008c).

(3) Buli (Gur, Oti-Volta, Buli-Kɔnni)

Q: What did the woman eat?

A: ɔ̃=ɲɔ̃b **kà** **túé.**
3SG=eat FM bean:PL
'She ate BEANS.'

In parallel fashion, the morphologically invariant focus marker *a* precedes the focus constituent in the West Chadic language Guruntum, cf. (4) (Hartmann & Zimmermann 2006).

(4) Guruntum (West Chadic)

Q: What is he chewing?

A: Tí bà wúm **á** **kwálingála.**
3SG IPF chew FM colanut
'He is chewing COLANUT.'

In the Gur language Ditammari in (5), in contrast, the focus marker, which appears in the morphologically complex form *N-CL* with instances of NSF, follows the focus constituent and displays gender agreement (Reineke 2006a).

(5) Ditammari (Gur, Oti-Volta, Eastern)

Q: What did the woman eat?

A: ɔ̃ dī **yātũrà** **nyā.**
3SG eat PL:bean:PL FM:CL
'She ate BEANS.'

The fact that the languages discussed require a pre- or postfocal marker with instances of NSF while the focus constituent is placed in the post-verbal default position for NSF suggests that morphological focus marking forms an integral part of their grammar.

2.2 Syntactic focus marking of non-subjects

Syntactic focus marking refers to the fact that a focus constituent is reordered relative to the other elements in the clause. This effects a deviation from the canonical word order such that the focus constituent is no longer realized in its base position (*ex-situ strategy*). There are two sub-cases depending on whether there are additional changes in the out-of-focus part of the clause (2.2.1) or not (2.2.2). This difference aside, an additional focus marker must precede or follow the focus constituent in some of the languages, while this is just optional in others.

2.2.1 *Ex-situ strategy without additional out-of-focus marking*

(Aja, Fɔ̃n, Foodo, Lelemi (all Kwa), Konkomba (Gur))

The Fɔ̃n example in (6) exemplifies the *ex-situ* strategy without additional marking on the out-of-focus part of the clause. The focus constituent is compatible with the same information question as in (2), but, unlike in (2), it is placed in left-peripheral position and is optionally marked by focus marker *wè* (cf. also Ameka 1992, Höftmann 1993, Fiedler 1998, 2008, Lefebvre & Brousseau 2002, Aboh 2004 for discussion of this phenomenon in various Gbe languages).

(6) Fɔ̀n (Kwa, Gbe)

Q: What did the woman eat?

A: **àyìkún (wè)** é qù.
 bean (FM) 3SG eat
 ‘She ate BEANS.’ OR: ‘It is BEANS what she ate.’

Notice that the answer in (6) is not necessarily interpreted contrastively. Nor is its counterpart in (2) used uniquely for information focus. This shows that there is no strict 1:1-correlation between the syntactic realization of a focus and its interpretation in this language.

2.2.2. *Ex-situ strategy with additional out-of-focus marking*

(Buli, Byali, Dagbani, Ditammari, Kɔ̀nni, Nateni, Yom (all Gur)⁵, Akan (Kwa), Hausa (Chadic))

The Ditammari example in (7) represents the *ex-situ* variant of the *in-situ* strategy from (5) above, which exemplified morphological focus marking. In (7), the focus constituent is fronted to the left-peripheral position and is followed by the FM *nyā*, which was also present in (5). Notice that an additional morpheme *mā*, which is not found in (5), is required in the out-of-focus part of the clause in sentence-final position.

(7) Ditammari (Gur, Oti-Volta, Eastern)

Q: What did the woman eat?

A: **yātũrà** **nyā** ò dī *(**ma**).
 PL:bean:PL FM:CL 3SG eat MA
 ‘She ate BEANS.’ ~ ‘It is beans what she ate.’

In (8) from Hausa (Chadic), the focus constituent is also fronted to the left-peripheral position, where it is optionally followed by a gender-agreeing particle *nee/cee*.⁶ In addition to focus fronting, the person-aspect-marker must appear in a special relative form (*tá-kee*), which is also observed with other kinds of A-bar-fronting, such as *wh*-question formation and relativization (Tuller 1986, Newman 2000, Hartmann & Zimmermann 2007a).⁷

(8) Hausa (West Chadic)

Q: What is Kande cooking?

A: **Kúfí** (nee) Kande tá-kee dáfaawáa.
 fish (FM.M) Kande 3SG.F-IPF.REL cooking
 ‘Kande is cooking FISH.’

Finally, in the Buli example in (9), the NP *tú-màntàṅā* (‘the red beans’), which contains a pragmatically focal adjective, is located in the left-peripheral position of the clause, where it is optionally preceded by the focus marker *ká*. The characteristic out-of-focus features in this construction are (i.) the clause-initial conjunction *tè* (*àtè* after a prosodic break),⁸ and (ii.) a

⁵ See also Fiedler (2006) for instances of this kind in Yom.

⁶ This particle is analyzed as a focus-sensitive exhaustivity marker in Hartmann & Zimmermann (2007c).

⁷ The occurrence of special forms of the person-aspect-marker is restricted to the perfective and imperfective aspects (Newman 2000). Furthermore, left dislocation of the object NP in the imperfective clause in (8) also affects the shape of the verb, with *dáfaawaa* replacing the short form *dáfaa*. See fn. 10 for more discussion.

⁸ The following example illustrates that *tè* functions as a clausal conjunction marker in non-focus contexts:

predicate that blocks certain verb tone patterns and morphemes, such as the verbal suffix *-ya*, and the focus marker *ká* (Schwarz & Fiedler 2007, Fiedler & Schwarz 2005, Schwarz 2008a).

(9) Buli (Gur, Oti-Volta, Buli-Konni)

S: The woman ate the black beans.

A: (**ká**) **tú-màntàṅā** tè wà=ṅòb.

(FM) bean-red:PL:DEF CNJ 3SG=eat

‘She ate the RED beans.’ OR: ‘The RED beans is what she ate.’

Finally, syntactic focus marking is often optional in the sense that it is not automatically triggered by a *wh*-question, which induces information focus in the answer. Rather, it seems that the application of the *ex-situ* strategy is restricted to specific contexts and often – though not necessarily – involves an element of contrast, unexpectedness etc. In many languages, then, the *ex-situ* strategy exists next to an *in-situ* strategy, where the first shows a tendency to realize contrastivity, and the second to realize information focus (cf. É. Kiss 1998), without there being a strict 1:1-correlation, see, for instance, (2) and (6) from above, as well as Hartmann & Zimmermann (2007a) and Zimmermann (2007) for discussion. Some languages in our sample, namely Buli, Konni, and Dagbani, do not even exhibit such a tendency. In these languages, *ex-situ* focus is not correlated with a special pragmatic interpretation at all.

2.3 Prosodic focus marking of non-subjects

Apart from morphological and syntactic focus marking, there is also prosodic focus marking in form of prosodic boundaries. In example (10) from Tangale (West Chadic), a phonological phrase (ϕ)-boundary is inserted before the focus constituent. The presence of the ϕ -boundary results in the blocking of certain prosodic processes, such as e.g. *vowel elision* (VE), which would otherwise apply. The non-application of VE prevents the derivation of the canonical surface form *way-ug* from underlying *wai-gó* (Kenstowicz 1985, Tuller 1992, Hartmann & Zimmermann 2007b).⁹

(10) Tangale (West Chadic)

Q: What did Laku sell?

A: (Lak wai-gó) ϕ **lánda** vs. Lak way-ug lánda. (all-new)

Laku sell-PERF dress Laku sell-PERF dress

‘Laku sold a DRESS.’

‘LAKU SOLD A DRESS.’

Even though a prosodic strategy proper is only attested in Tangale (and more marginally in Bole, see Zimmermann 2006, see also Schwarz 2008a concerning its absence in Buli), it

(i) Context: A dog is chasing a man.

àtè nùrùwá=á chālī, àtè bīāká=á ví=wà, àtè tìsàṅā à yāā chòḡsì mííká ...

CNJ person:DEF=IPF run CNJ person:DEF=IPF follow=3SG CNJ tree:pl:def then grasp rope:DEF

‘and the man is running, and the dog is chasing him, and then the trees held the rope ...’

⁹ The presence of a prosodic boundary between a verb and a focused object following it is reminiscent of the widespread conjoint/disjoint distinction found in many Bantu languages, cf. Creissels (1996). The presence of a prosodic boundary between the focus and the rest of the sentence is also in line with recent analyses on a number of non-African languages, see, e.g. Kenesei and Vogel (1990) for Hungarian and English, Kenstowicz and Sohn (1996) for Korean, and Frascarelli (2000) for Italian. We would like to thank two reviewers for bringing these points to our attention.

completes our overview on how NSF focus is marked in the West African languages discussed.

2.4 Conclusions

From the findings so far, we draw the following conclusions:

- i. The languages under discussion show considerable variation with respect to how focus is marked (even within one and the same language group).
- ii. All languages looked at exhibit *in-situ* focus (either unmarked or morphologically marked) in postverbal position. We consider this configuration to constitute the default configuration for NSF.
- iii. Nearly all of the languages in the sample exhibit *ex-situ* focus constructions as well. In many languages (but not all!), the *ex-situ* focus gives rise to additional semanto-pragmatic effects such as emphasis, contrast, or exhaustivity.
- iv. The focus marking systems of Gur and Kwa differ typologically: The primarily agglutinating Gur languages tend to exploit morphology to a higher degree (cf. verb morphology and tone) than the more isolating Kwa languages.

Having shown the basic strategies of marking NSF in the languages under discussion, we now turn to the marking of subject focus (SF).

3. Asymmetries between subject focus and non-subject focus

This section investigates the grammatical marking of subject focus in West African languages. The main result of this study is summarized as follows: All languages under discussion exhibit at least one of two kinds of asymmetries, or both, between the marking of subject focus (SF) and non-subject focus (NSF). We distinguish two kinds of asymmetries: (i.) a *marking asymmetry*, which pertains to the fact that SF must be marked whereas NSF need not, or even cannot be marked (section 3.1); (ii.) a *structural asymmetry*, which pertains to the fact that SF is often marked differently from NSF (section 3.2).

3.1 Marking asymmetry

All languages in the sample exhibit a marking asymmetry, at least what concerns the syntactic marking of focus:

(11) *Marking asymmetry*:

- i. NSF cannot or need not be marked syntactically.
 - a. NSF is restricted to *in-situ* positions (Bole, Duwai, Bade, Ngamo (all Chadic))
 - b. NSF is not restricted to *in-situ* positions (Gur; Kwa; Hausa (Chadic))
- ii. SF must be marked.

Condition (11i) concerns the syntactic marking of NSF and divides into two separate sub-clauses: Languages satisfying condition (ia) never mark NSF syntactically. Furthermore, with the exception of Bole, NSF is not marked by alternative, e.g. prosodic or morphological means in these languages either (Schuh 1982, p.c.). In languages satisfying condition (ib), syntactic marking of NSF is optional, as illustrated for Hausa in (12). Condition (11ii) is even more general and holds for all languages under discussion. It says that SF is special in that it must be grammatically marked, be it by syntactic and/or morphological means.

The marking asymmetry is illustrated by means of the Hausa examples in (12) and (13). (12) shows that NSF can be realized either *in-situ*, i.e. syntactically unmarked (12a), or *ex-situ* (12b). As a matter of fact, Zimmermann (2006) and Hartmann & Zimmermann (2007a) show that *in-situ* NSF in Hausa is not marked prosodically either. Thus, (12aA) is fully identical to the canonical sentence:

(12) a. Hausa (West Chadic), *optional object marking*

Q: What is Kande cooking?

A: Kándé tá-naa dáfa kííffí. *unmarked NSF*
 Kande 3SG.F-IPF cooking fish
 ‘Kande is cooking (A) FISH.’

b. A: Kande is cooking meat.

B: Kííffí (nee) Kándé tá-kee dáfaawáa.¹⁰ *marked NSF*
 fish (FM.M) Kande 3SG.F-IPF.REL cooking
 ‘It is (A) FISH that Kande is cooking.’

SF, in contrast, must be marked in Hausa by vacuous syntactic movement of the subject to a left-peripheral focus position. SF movement in Hausa is witnessed by the special relative form of the person-aspect-marker *tá-kee*. In contrast, the canonical sentence in (13A’) with the person-aspect-marker *tá-naa* is infelicitous as an answer to (13Q):

(13) Hausa (West Chadic), *obligatory SF-marking*:

Q: Who is cooking (the) fish?

A: Kándé tá-kee dáfa kííffí. *marked SF*
 Kande 3SG.F-IPF.REL cooking fish
 ‘KANDE is cooking (the) fish.’

A’: #Kándé tá-naa dáfa kííffí.

While the marking asymmetry is quite robust from a typological point of view, as either (11ia) or (11ib), and (11ii) hold for all of the languages discussed, it is considerably weakened by the restriction of condition (11i) to instances of syntactic focus marking. Nonetheless, even though languages with morphological focus marking, such as several of the Gur languages in the sample, do not show a marking asymmetry in the strict sense, as both SF and NSF are obligatorily marked, they show a *structural asymmetry* when it comes to how focus on SF and NSF is marked.

3.2 Structural asymmetry

The structural devices for marking SF and NSF differ in many languages. Crucially, these differences show up even if we compare sentence-initial instances of SF and NSF. Our

¹⁰ Notice that left dislocation of the object NP in the imperfective clause in (12b) has a reflex on the shape of the verb, with *dáfaawaa* replacing the short form *dáfaa*. The descriptive generalization is that the long form occurs in the imperfective aspect when there is no overt object NP following the verb, e.g. after left dislocation (Newman 2000). We will have to leave it open whether the *waa*-extension indicates a verbal gerund (Tuller 1986), or whether it is a resumptive pronoun marking the base position of the dislocated object.

language sample is heterogeneous with respect to the observed differences, but nevertheless, the languages can be organized on a scale of increasing complexity depending on quantity and quality of the structural differences between SF- and NSF-marking. At one extreme of the scale, there are languages with no structural differences between SF-marking and *ex-situ* NSF-marking (Guruntum, Byali, cf. Reineke 2007). At the other end of the scale, we find languages, in which SF-marking and NSF-marking differ in several respects, or are even marked in a totally different fashion (Buli, Dagbani, Ditammari, Gurene, Kɔnni, Lelemi). In intermediate positions on the scale, there are languages that show only minor structural differences in the realization of SF- and NSF-marking (Aja, Akan, Awutu-Efutu, Ewe, Fɔn, Foodo, cf. Fiedler (2007), Konkomba¹¹, Nateni, Yom, Bole, Hausa). Often, these minor differences concern the presence of the focus marker with instances of NSF-marking.

A representative example of such an intermediate language is Fɔn (Kwa). Comparing the *ex-situ* focus structures for SF and NSF in (14ab), the only discernible difference consists in the occurrence of the focus marker: It is obligatory with SF, which would otherwise be formally indistinguishable from the canonical sentence, but it is optional with NSF. There are no further differences in the out-of-focus part of the clause¹².

(14) Fɔn (Kwa, Gbe)

- a. Q: Who ate the beans? SF:
 A: **nyɔ̀nú** **ɔ́** ***(wɛ̀)** **dù** **à̀yíkún**. obligatory FM *wɛ̀*
 woman DEF FM eat bean
 ‘THE WOMAN ate the beans.’
- b. Q: What did the woman eat? NSF:
 A: **à̀yíkún** **(wɛ̀)** **nyɔ̀nú** **ɔ́** **dù**. fronting + optional FM *wɛ̀*
 bean (FM) woman DEF eat
 ‘The woman ate BEANS.’

The Chadic language Bole exhibits an additional complexity in the marking of SF and NSF. As in Fɔn, the IS-particle *ye* is optionally inserted with instances of NSF, cf. (15b), but it is obligatory with SF (at least with transitive verbs), cf. (15a). In addition, the realization of SF in (15a) involves reordering of the subject to a postverbal position (cf. section 4.2):

(15) Bole (West Chadic)

- a. Q: Who is planting the millet? SF:
 A: (An) **jìi** **kàppà** **mòrdó** ***(yé)** **Léngì**. inversion + particle *yé*
 (3SG) IPF planting millet PRT Lengi
 ‘LENGI is planting the millet.’

¹¹ In Konkomba, the encoding of focus depends on the position of the focus constituent within the sentence, rather than being directly determined by its grammatical status as subject or non-subject (cf. Schwarz 2007, 2008b).

¹² Thus, Fɔn differs from the closely related Ewe which displays a special pronominal form in the out-of-focus part of the sentence after focal non-subjects (cf. Fiedler & Schwarz 2005: 114f, Schwarz & Fiedler 2007).

b. Q: What is Lengi planting?

NSF:

A: Léngì à jìi kàppà (yé) mòrdó. optional particle yé
 Lengi AUX IPF planting (PRT) millet
 ‘Lengi is planting MILLET.’

As for the languages at the top end of the scale, which exhibit a high degree of structural asymmetry in the realization of SF and NSF, we find that it is mostly Gur languages that belong to this group. Consider the following examples from Buli in (16ab):

(16) Buli (Gur, Oti-Volta, Buli-Konni) (cf. 9)

a. Q: Who ate the beans?

A: (ká) Mary àlē ḡḡbī.
 (FM) Mary LE¹³ eat.ASS
 ‘MARY ate them.’

SF:

optional FM *ká*,
 morpheme *lē*, verb₁

b. S: The woman ate black beans.

A: (ká) tú-màntàṅā tè wà=ḡḡb.
 (FM) bean-red:PL:DEF CNJ 3SG=eat
 ‘She ate the RED beans.
 ~ The RED beans is what she ate.’

NSF:

optional FM *ká*
 conjunction *tè*, verb₂

In Buli, the proposed focus marker (*ká*) is neither obligatory with left-peripheral SF nor with *ex-situ* NSF-marking. The two kinds of focus marking exhibit more fundamental differences, though, which concern (i.) the category of the morpheme introducing the out-of-focus part, i.e. the particle *lē* with SF¹⁴, and the conjunction *tè* with NSF; and (ii.) the predicate. After *tè*, the sentence-final verb cannot take the assertive suffix *-ya*, while it tolerates the suffix in reduced form. After *lē*, it displays tonal peculiarities under certain conditions.

The only Kwa language in the sample that can be considered as representing a high degree of structural asymmetry is Lelemi. In Lelemi, the realization of SF, cf. (17a), requires the use of a special verb form of the ‘Marked Paradigm’, which lacks the verb-internal subject agreement marker required elsewhere (cf. Schwarz 2008d). This form is also called *relative form* by Allan (1973). Instances of NSF, on the other hand, co-occur with the regular verb form, which follows the conjunction *nà* and is not found with SF, cf. (17b).

(17) Lelemi (Kwa, Na-Togo)

a. Q: Are the boys eating oranges?

A: ḡnàabì ùmwì pé mḡ-dí kùtú.
 boy one only REL.IPF-eat orange
 ‘Only ONE boy is eating an orange.’

SF:

special verb form

¹³ The particle *lē* (allomorph *nē*, with initial vowel, *àlē*, after a prosodic break) represents a connective preposition related to the preposition *lè* ‘with, and’. It is restricted to occur with predicative constituents, such as, e.g., VPs and predicative NP/DPs (cf. Schwarz 2008c), as illustrated in (i):

(i) wá lē nààwā.
 3sg.DJ LE chief:DEF
 ‘He is the chief.’

¹⁴ Notice that the asymmetry in Buli is not absolute, as this particle is obligatory after focal subjects while rare, but not completely excluded to occur after sentence-initial focal non-subjects (cf. Fiedler & Schwarz 2005: 119)

b. S: The boy is eating a banana.

A: **kùtú** **nà** ònàabì ómò òṣ-dì.
 orange CNJ boy DEM 3SG.IPF-eat
 ‘The boy is eating AN ORANGE.’

NSF:
 conjunction *nà* and
 regular verb form


From a more abstract perspective, we find a general tendency for languages that do not exhibit a marking asymmetry in the strict sense (see section 3.1) to be located at the top end of the structural asymmetry scale (see table 1).¹⁵ SF is singled out by the grammatical systems of most languages as being peculiar, or special in some way. In section 4, we turn to the reason behind the special status of subject focus. Before we do so, we provide a schematic summary of the asymmetries observed in the languages used for illustration.

3.3 Summary

While the marking asymmetry is a general feature of our language sample, possibly with cross-linguistic implications for a wider range of languages, the structural asymmetry has language-specific traits. Table 1 gives an exemplary overview of the realization of SF/NSF in the languages discussed in this section, where the arrow on the right indicates an increasing degree of difference in the formal realization of SF and NSF. Table 1 also shows that NSF may be realized *in-situ* or *ex-situ* in most languages. The Chadic languages Bole and Tangale are the only languages in which non-subjects must be realized *in-situ*. In Fõn, Lelemi (Kwa) and Hausa (Chadic), *in-situ* NSF is not marked by additional means, contrary to several Gur and Chadic languages. The comparison between the default *in-situ* strategy for NSF in column (2a) and the various marking strategies for SF in column (3) shows that *in-situ* NSF is generally less marked than SF.

¹⁵ This is only a tendency, and not a correlation, as witnessed by the fact that the morphologically focus-marking languages Guruntum (Chadic) and Byali (Gur) exhibit no structural asymmetries, cf. table 1.

Table 1: Overview over the realization of SF and NSF in the languages illustrated

1. Language	2. NSF (term focus)		3. SF	
	2a. NSF <i>in-situ</i>	2b. NSF <i>ex-situ</i>		
Byali (Gur)	FM <i>le</i>	FM <i>le</i> + out-of-focus relative form	FM <i>le</i> + out-of-focus relative form	no difference 
Guruntum (Chadic)	FM <i>á</i>	FM <i>á</i>	FM <i>á</i>	
Hausa (Chadic)	<i>no marking</i>	optional FM <i>nee/cee</i> + relative TAM	optional FM <i>nee /cee</i> + relative TAM	
Fon (Kwa)		optional FM <i>wè</i>	FM <i>wè</i>	
Tangale (Chadic)	phrase boundary	<i>not applicable</i>	subject inversion + phrase boundary	
Bole (Chadic)	optional FM <i>yé</i>		subject inversion + FM <i>yé</i>	
Lelemi (Kwa)	<i>no marking</i>	optional CNJ <i>nà</i>	relative TAM	
Buli (Gur)	FM <i>ká</i>	optional FM <i>ká</i> + out-of-focus conjunction <i>tè</i> + verb ₂ ¹⁶	optional FM <i>ká</i> + out-of-focus <i>lè</i> + verb ₁	
Ditammari (Gur)	FM <i>N-CL₁</i>	FM <i>N-CL₁</i> + out-of-focus PRT <i>mà</i> ¹⁷	FM <i>CL₂</i>	
Konni (Gur)	FM <i>-wÁ</i>	out-of-focus PRT <i>di</i> resp. special pronoun + tone	out-of-focus verb suffix <i>-nÀ</i> + tone	high degree of structural difference

4. On the special status of focused subjects

Having established that there is a robust asymmetry between subject and non-subject focus marking in a variety of West-African languages (for a subgroup of Gur and Kwa languages, cf. also Fiedler and Schwarz 2005, Schwarz and Fiedler 2007), we now discuss the possible reasons behind this asymmetry. The guiding hypothesis is that the special status of focused subjects is conditioned by information-structural factors: We assume that subjects in their canonical sentence-initial position are prototypically interpreted as topics (cf. Li & Thompson 1976) in our language sample. Consequently, if the context establishes a subject as focus, this conflicts with its primary information-structural function as non-focal topic. In order to resolve this conflict, the focused subject will have to be realized in a non-canonical structure, for instance, by means of special morphological markers and/or syntactic reorganization.

In our sample, we find at least three different strategies for a subject to eschew the canonical interpretation as topic that it would receive in a canonical sentence with topic-

¹⁶ In Buli, different verb forms due to affixes and tone (discriminable only under certain conditions) in NSF *ex-situ* and SF constructions are here labelled as verb₁ and verb₂, respectively.

¹⁷ In Ditammari, the focus marker for NSF *ex-situ* constructions consists of N + Class marker of set 1, whereas for SF the focus marker only consists of the class marker of set 2 (cf. Reineke 2006b).

comment structure (Lambrecht 1994: 132). The first strategy is found among the Gur languages and consists in the formal concatenation of subject and predicate, which is the hallmark of thetic statements in these languages (section 4.1). A second strategy of subject inversion is found in some of the West Chadic languages (section 4.2). Finally there is a third strategy, which is found in many Kwa languages, where focused subjects remain in their canonical preverbal position and are marked for focus by a morphological focus marker

4.1 Marked subject-predicate concatenation in thetic statement

The investigation of the marking of subject focus in Gur gives rise to the empirical generalization in (18), which holds for a sub-group of Gur languages of the Western Oti-Volta branch (Buli, Kɔnni, Dagbani, Gurene).

(18) *Empirical Generalization I (sub-group in Gur):*

Whenever a subject is not to be interpreted as topic, but as focus, it occurs in a special construction, in which subject and predicate are concatenated in a special way and form a single unit from the semanto-pragmatic perspective (Sasse 1995). The concatenated structure serves to express an internally unstructured thetic statement.

While there is a clear grammatical focus strategy for non-subjects, which are morphologically marked in their default (postverbal) focus position in canonical categorical utterances, at least in the affirmative indicative, this strategy is unavailable for focused subjects, which obligatorily occur in preverbal position. They are thus excluded from the default postverbal focus position. Instead, sentences with a focused subject always take the form of a thetic statement, which is expressed by a special construction. In this *thetic construction*, the topic-comment split is voided by the formal concatenation of subject and predicate (see below). As a result of concatenation, subject and predicate are assigned an equal pragmatic status without putting the predicative nature of the verb at risk. In all the languages cited above, the thetic construction is expressed on the predicate, albeit in different ways. Kɔnni, for instance, employs a verbal suffix *-nÀ* (*-nà*, *-nè* due to vowel harmony, cf. Cahill 2007), which triggers a special tone pattern on the verb. This is illustrated in the following examples, where (19a) illustrates a categorical statement with object focus and with no concatenation features on the verb. (19b) illustrates subject focus with the concatenation features on the verb.

(19) Kɔnni (Gur, Oti-Volta, Buli-Kɔnni)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>a. ù=nìgì-wá ù=búà.
 3SG=hit-FM 3SG=child
 ‘She hit HER CHILD.’</p> | <p><i>Object Focus:</i>
 canonical verb + FM</p> |
| <p>b. Q: Who hit Peter?</p> | |
| <p>A: Mary nígí-nà wà.
 Mary hit-NA 3SG
 ‘MARY hit him.’</p> | <p><i>Subject Focus:</i>
 suffix <i>-nÀ</i> + special verb tone</p> |

In the other languages, the concatenation of subject and predicate in the thetic construction is expressed by means of preverbal elements. This is illustrated for Buli in (20), where – in contrast to the categorical statement in (20a) – the answer in (20b) contains the preverbal particle *lē* (cf. Schwarz 2008c, and fn. 13).

(20) Buli (Gur, Oti-Volta, Buli-Kɔnni)

- a. nípōōwá **fɔb kà Peter.**
 woman:DEF slap FM Peter
 ‘The woman hit PETER.’

Object Focus:
 canonical verb + FM

- b. Q: Who hit Peter?

- A: (ká) **Mary àlē fɔb=wā.**
 (FM) Mary LE slap=3SG
 ‘MARY hit him.’

Subject Focus:
 particle *lē* + special verb tone

The claim that subject focus constructions with the formal concatenation of subject and predicate, such as (19b) and (20b), actually represent *thetic* statements in this language group is supported by occurrence of sentences with the same structural features in environments in which pragmatically unstructured *thetic* statements can be expected.

First, utterances with focus on the whole sentence are expressed in the same way as subject foci. There is thus an isomorphism between sentences with subject focus and sentences in which the entire clause is focused, resulting in focus ambiguity in the absence of context. This isomorphism is fairly widespread within the Gur languages and illustrated in (21) for Kɔnni. Apparently, the lack of any sentence-internal topic-comment structure serves the expression of sentence focus in the same way as subject focus and is therefore also typically employed with event reporting sentences.

(21) Kɔnni (Gur, Oti-Volta, Buli-Kɔnni)

- a. Q: Who hit Peter?

- A: **Mary nígí-nà wà.**
 Mary hit-NA 3SG
 ‘MARY hit him.’ (= 19b)

Subject Focus:
 special verb tone + suffix *-nà*

- b. Q: What happened?

- A: **Mary nígí-nà Peter.**
 Mary hit-NA Peter
 ‘MARY HIT PETER.’

Sentence Focus:
 special verb tone + suffix *-nà*

Certain peculiarities are observed with pronominal subjects in *thetic* statements, as briefly illustrated in the following for Kɔnni. In case of sentence focus, a conflict may arise when the *thetic* encoding of subject and predicate requires a (pronominal) subject expression that typically refers to topical entities. This situation is not uncommon in languages without passive constructions, where a passive sentence like *A child was born* must be expressed actively by using a 3rd person plural class pronoun as dummy subject.

(22) Kɔnni (Gur, Oti-Volta, Buli-Kɔnni)

- Q: What happened?

- A: **bà=mìrì-wá bùyànyààlín.**
 3PL=give.birth-FM baby:CL
 ‘A CHILD WAS BORN.’ (lit.: ‘They gave birth to a child.’)

If uttered as a reply to the question *What happened?*, as in (22), the whole sentence can be taken to be in focus from a semanto-pragmatic point of view. Consequently, one would expect it to be realized by athetic construction with suffix *-nÀ*, as was observed with other instances of sentence-focus, such as (21b) from above. The use of the disjunctive subject pronoun *bámíŋ* ‘they’ is impossible, however, as this would immediately yield a referential reading implying focus on the subject rather than on the entire sentence (*#bámíŋ bà=miiri-na* ‘THEY gave birth to the child.’¹⁸). On the other hand, the use of the common proclitic subject in combination with the *nÀ*-marked verb would result in the formation of a backgrounding clause that needs to be followed up by a main clause (*#bà miiri-na bùànyààlín* ... ‘When they gave birth to the child, ...’). Hence, even though the answer in the Kɔnni example in (22) expresses a sentence focus pragmatically, thethetic encoding cannot apply and the entire clause has to be construed as a categorical statement with topic-comment structure.

The second argument supporting thethetic analysis is based on the fact that this construction is typically found in text-initial position. Text-initially, discourse topics are rare or even absent and have to be first introduced, e.g. by means of athetic statement, before any topic-comment structuring can apply. Generally, such text-initialthetic statements locate an entity in time or space, as illustrated in (23), again for Kɔnni.

(23) Kɔnni (Gur, Oti-Volta, Buli-Kɔnni)

gbáníŋ **díísí-nè** tébùlì-ké síkpèŋ.
 book lie-NA table-DEF top
 ‘There is a book on the table.’

Parallel findings showing the use ofthetic statements under similar focus conditions are also reported for some European and other languages (cf. Sasse 1987, 1995). They corroborate our analysis of the subject and sentence focus constructions as based on a pragmatically unstructuredthetic utterance in which subject and predicate are pragmatically equal. It can therefore be concluded that, in these languages, the unmarked topical status of the subject in canonical categorical statements blocks its focalization. If the subject represents the topic, focus remains within the comment. If the focus is however not restricted to the comment, but concerns either just the subject or the whole sentence (cf. also Schwarz 2007: 135), a topicless (thetic) construction is used. Thethetic construction involves a marked concatenation of subject and predicate and is realized in different ways in each of the languages concerned. Common to all languages, however, is the formal manipulation of the predicate in such a way that it is inseparably linked to the subject from a semanto-pragmatic point of view.

4.2 Subject inversion

Another strategy to strip the subject off its default topic interpretation is exhibited by a subgroup of geographically related West Chadic SVO languages that mark narrow subject focus by means of subject inversion (Bole, Tangale, Bade, Ngizim, Duwai): The focused subject does not occur in its canonical preverbal position, where it would be interpreted as a topic, but

¹⁸ Though this is still a matter of investigation, the available data suggests that a disjunctive pronoun like *bámíŋ* cannot immediately function as subject of the *-nÀ*-marked verb form and is therefore supported by a verb-initial proclitic subject, here *bà=*.

is placed in the postverbal domain in which focus is typically realized.¹⁹ In other words, focused subjects and non-subjects behave alike from a structural point of view. Example (24), repeated from (15), illustrates subject inversion in Bole. Recall that the inverted subject must be preceded by the particle *yé* in Bole. Example (25) from Tangale shows that the positional restriction on focused subjects extends to *wh*-subjects, which must also appear postverbally.²⁰

(24) Bole (West Chadic)

Q: Who is planting the millet?

A: (An) jìi kàppà mòrdó yé Léngì.
 (one) IPF planting millet PRT Lengi
 ‘LENGI is planting the millet.’

(25) Tangale (West Chadic)

(Way-ug land-í)_φ nón ?
 sell-PERF dress-DEF who
 ‘WHO sold the dress?’

At first sight, the sentences in (24) and (25) appear to resemble predicate inversion structures as found in the English sentence [*The one planting the millet*] *is* *Lengi*, where the DP containing an (empty-headed) relative clause is the predicate that moves across the subject of the predication (cf. e.g. Frascarelli (2007) for a recent analysis along these lines). However, the following data show that an analysis of SF in Bole and Tangale in terms of predicate inversion (or pseudoclefting) cannot be correct. First, the particle *yé* in Bole is not identical to the relative marker *la*, which furthermore precedes the relative clause. This is shown in (26):

(26) Bole (West Chadic)

In gomu ga memu [**la** Bamoi essungo yê].
 1sg met with man REL Bamoi called DEF
 ‘I met the person that Bamoi called.’

We conclude that there is no empty-headed relative clause in (24). Second, the inverted subject in postverbal position can be followed by additional background material in both languages. This is shown for Tangale in (27a), and for Bole in (27b):

¹⁹ Unlike in Aghem (Hyman & Polinsky, this volume) and other Bantu languages, focused subjects in Bole and Tangale are not placed immediately after the transitive verb but the direct object frequently intervenes between the verb and the focused subject, as in (24) (cf. Tuller 1992). Nor are postverbal focused subjects restricted to sentence-final position. This is shown in examples (27ab), where the postverbal focused subjects are followed by a temporal and a locative adjunct, respectively. For this reason, we tentatively propose to identify the postverbal focus position of objects and subjects with the right edge of VP.

²⁰ In (25), subject inversion is accompanied by the insertion of a prosodic phrase boundary before the inverted subject. In contrast to (10), the underlying verbal form *wai-go* surfaces as *way-ug* because of the application of two segmental processes, vowel elision (VE) and [u]-epenthesis. Recall from the discussion of (10) that these processes apply within the phonological phrase (φ) only, which shows that verb and object must form a prosodic unit in (25). The existence of a φ-boundary before the inverted subject is evidenced by the non-application of *left line delinking* (LLD), cf. Kidda (1993:118), another tonal process that does not apply across φ-boundaries. LLD dissociates tonemes from their original tone bearing units (TBUs) after rightward spreading onto the following TBU. In (25), the presence of the high tone on the second vowel of *landí* shows that LLD is blocked, thus indicating the existence of a φ-boundary that separates the object from the inverted *wh*-subject.

(27) a. Tangale (West Chadic)

wa patu ayaba **nuŋ** ta luumo dooji. [Tuller 1992: 307, ex. (4b)]
 FUT buy banana who at market tomorrow
 ‘Who will buy bananas at the market tomorrow?’

b. Bole (West Chadic)

Q: Who is planting the millet at the farm?

A: An jìi kàppà mòrdó **yé Léngì** ga ga kori *(yê).
 3sg IPF plant millet PRT Lengi in inside farm PRT
 ‘LENGI is planting the millet at the farm?’

The fact that backgrounded material can both precede and follow the SF in (27ab) provides further evidence against an analysis of subject inversion in terms of a predicative cleft-like construction in which the backgrounded material forms a single constituent, e.g. a relative clause.²¹

The behaviour of focused subjects in this sub-group of West Chadic is captured in form of the empirical generalization in (28):

(28) *Empirical Generalization II:*

Whenever a subject is not to be interpreted as topic, but as focus, it must occur in the prototypical focus position, i.e. in a postverbal position at the right edge of VP.

The generalization in (28) does not only hold for some West Chadic languages. A similar requirement has been observed for some Romance languages, including Italian (Frascarelli 2000, Samek-Lodovici 2005) and Spanish (Zubizarreta 1998), for Old High German (Hinterhölzl, this volume), as well as for Bantu (Demuth & Mmusi 1997, Hyman & Polisnky, this volume). It has been argued that some languages have a fixed position to which nuclear stress is assigned. As focused constituents must associate with main stress, they must appear in this position. In case of focused subjects, this requirement thus triggers prosodically motivated movement. To illustrate, consider the Spanish example in (29) (Zubizarreta 1998:125f). The non-canonical VOS order is only compatible with an information focus interpretation of the subject.²²

(29) Spanish (Romance)

²¹ Taking up a discussion from section 3, the obligatory occurrence of a second instance of *yé* (+ final low tone) in final position suggests that these particles should not be treated as genuine focus markers, but as background markers that mark the material to their left as presupposed (Schuh 2005). Given the observable tendency for focus constituents in Bole and Tangale to occur at the right periphery of the clause, background marking on postfocal material is obligatory.

²² Contrastive focus on the subject is realized clause initially in Spanish:

(i) **María** me regaló la botella de vino, no Juan.
 Maria to.me give.PERF the bottle of wine not Juan
 ‘MARIA gave me the bottle of wine, not JUAN.’

The asymmetry between information focus and contrastive focus has two interesting implications. First, it shows that the postverbal position is not the unique stress position in Spanish. Second, information focus and contrastive focus on subjects are realized differently, which corroborates arguments to the effect that elements in clause initial position often receive a special pragmatic interpretation (e.g. Zimmermann 2007).

Q: Who gave you the bottle of wine?

A: [Me regaló la botella de vino]_i **María** t₁.
to.me give.PERF the bottle of wine Maria
'MARIA gave me the bottle of wine.'

Zubizarreta (1998:127) analyzes (29) in terms of leftward adjunction of the complex phrase originating immediately below the subject. Since leftward adjunction is motivated by the need to place the subject in the stress position, movement in (29) is prosodically driven.

The Romance data, as well as the Chadic data, suggest that there is a strong requirement for *all* focus constituents, and not only non-subjects, to be placed in a prototypical, and in some sense prominent, focus position behind the verb. The marking of SF in this group of subject-inverting languages is thus subject to a stronger requirement than the mere need to mark a subject as non-topic, as postulated in the initial hypothesis: In these languages, focused subjects need not only be marked as non-topics, but they must also be marked as focus.

This conclusion has three immediate consequences for the discussion of focus in West Chadic: First, there is a structural analogy between SF and NSF as both must be in the same linear relation with the verb. Second, the obligatory placement of focused subjects in the proto-typical focus position at the right edge of the VP shows that focus IS coded in the grammatical system of these languages after all, in spite of the fact that explicit focus marking is optional with non-subjects (see section 2). Third, sentence focus cannot be expressed by means of inversion in these languages, as it is impossible for the entire focused clause to occur in the prototypical postverbal focus position. There is thus no isomorphism of structures with subject focus and sentence focus in the West Chadic languages, unlike in the Gur languages discussed in 4.1. Instead, sentence focus is realized in the canonical SVO-order with no additional marking. As a result, the realization of sentence-focus is formally identical to information focus on non-subjects in the West Chadic languages. Interestingly, an analogous isomorphism is found in many intonation languages, such as English or German, where focus is marked prosodically by a pitch accent on the focused constituent. (30a) illustrates information focus on the direct object, (30b) is an instance of all-new or sentence focus. In both cases, the main accent is realized on the direct object.

(30) a. To which country did the president travel?

The president travelled **to BHUtan**.

b. What happened?

The president travelled to BHUtan.

To summarize, this section discussed two different strategies for focused subjects to escape their canonical interpretation as topic, which are employed by subgroups of the Gur and West Chadic languages, respectively. In a subgroup of the Gur languages, SF is not marked by a specific linguistic encoding on the focused subject alone. Rather, sentences with subject focus behave on a par with all otherthetic sentences, which are characterized by the concatenation of subject and predicate. In such cases, the subject remains in preverbal position, but the clausal construction changes, resulting in an isomorphism between subject focus and sentence focus. In contrast, in the West Chadic languages discussed here, focused subjects do not appear in their canonical preverbal position, but must invert to the postverbal default focus position at the right edge of VP.

5. Conclusion

The following points emerge from the present discussion of (term) focus marking in a range of West African languages of the Kwa, Gur and (West) Chadic group:

First, focus in these tone languages is realized in a variety of grammatical ways, i.e. by syntactic, morphological, or prosodic means. Second, the majority of the languages in the sample show a subject vs. non-subject asymmetry when it comes to the realization of focus. Third, the special status of focused subjects in Kwa, Gur, and (West) Chadic follows from the cross-linguistically well-attested fact that the subject in sentence-initial position is assigned a default interpretation as unmarked topic. Fourth, if there is no match between subject and topic, for instance, if only the subject is focused, the languages of our sample show parametric variation with respect to the grammatical realization of subject focus: (i.) Some languages (among Gur) concatenate subject and predicate to mark theticity. This encoding is prerequisite for any additional focus marking on the subject; (ii.) Some languages (many West Chadic) mark non-topical, focused subjects by placing them in the prototypical postverbal focus position. (iii.) A third group of languages (many Kwa) simply puts a focus marker on the non-topical subject, which remains in its prototypical sentence-initial position.

Further research on focus in non-European languages will show whether these properties are peculiar to the focus marking systems of West African languages, or whether they reflect more general properties of the languages of the world when it comes to the marking of focus.

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