

FOCUSING IN KWA: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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The Kwa languages display distinct strategies depending on whether a focused element is a non-verbal category (i.e., a noun, an adjective, an adverb) or a verbal element (i.e., a verb, or a phrase containing the verb).

Focusing a non-verbal category generally involves fronting the target element to a position that is left-adjacent to a focus marker (e.g., *w* “*ni*” in Gungbe, *ni* in Yoruba, *na* in Akan) that occurs to the left edge of the clause (i.e., within CP). The focused element leaves a gap inside the clause (i.e., within IP).

(1) [CP Non-verbal focused category [Focus particle [IP ... gap.....]]]

Granted that wh-questions manifest a similar pattern, I further propose that wh-question words and focused non-verbal phrases target the same position. In addition, I show that focus- and wh-sentences are not instances of cleft constructions where the focus particle is a copula. Instead, these are better analysed as focus-movement constructions whereby the focused category (or the question word) is fronted to the specifier position of a focus phrase whose head is indicated by the focus marker.

On the other hand, verbal element focusing is not a uniform phenomenon across Kwa. These languages manifest the following strategies with regard to verbal focusing. The focused verbal category is: A bare verb that leaves a copy in the sentence-internal position,

(2) [CP Bare verb [Focus particle [IP ... bare verb.....]]]

a reduplicated (or nominalized) verb that leaves a copy (i.e., a bare verb) inside the clause,

(3) [CP Nominalized verb [Focus particle [IP ... bare verb.....]]]

a nominalised verb (or aspect) phrase that leaves a copy (i.e., a verb phrase) within the clause,

(4) [CP Nominalized verb phrase [Focus particle [IP ... verb phrase.....]]]

or, finally, a nominalised verbal phrase that leaves a gap inside the clause.

(5) [CP Nominalized verb phrase [Focus particle [IP ... gap...]]]

In some cases, these strategies are subject to aspect licensing. For instance, verbal focusing in non-imperfective VO constructions involves strategies (2) and (3) in Gungbe and Ewegbe, respectively. Yet, all the Gbe languages uniformly adopt strategy (5) in the case of verbal focusing in imperfective and aspectually determined OV constructions. In this talk, I discuss the verbal focusing strategies in (2–5) and propose a unified analysis that accounts for the variations across Kwa. Finally, I discuss the discourse/pragmatic properties of focus and show that the single focus position found across Kwa may express different types of focus.