Focusing complex predicates[*]

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1   Introduction

+ complex predicates are understood here as instantiations of predicates consisting of two or more elements that act as a single predicate semantically and syntactically in a monoclausal structure

- each element in a complex predicate contributes to the meaning of the predicate - how far this meaning is predictable from the meaning of the single elements is language and construction specific

+ two types of complex predicates which differ structurally are investigated more closely:

- light verb constructions in Ama and Amharic

- inherent complement verbs in Gbe together with idiomatic verbs in Hausa

+ state-of-affairs = actions, events, states expressed either by a simplex or complex predicate

- state-of-affairs-focus = equivalent to focus on the semantic meaning of the verb (simplex or complex)

 - is part of the wider category "predicate-centered focus" which embraces also focus on the truth vaue of an utterance and on tense, aspect and mood
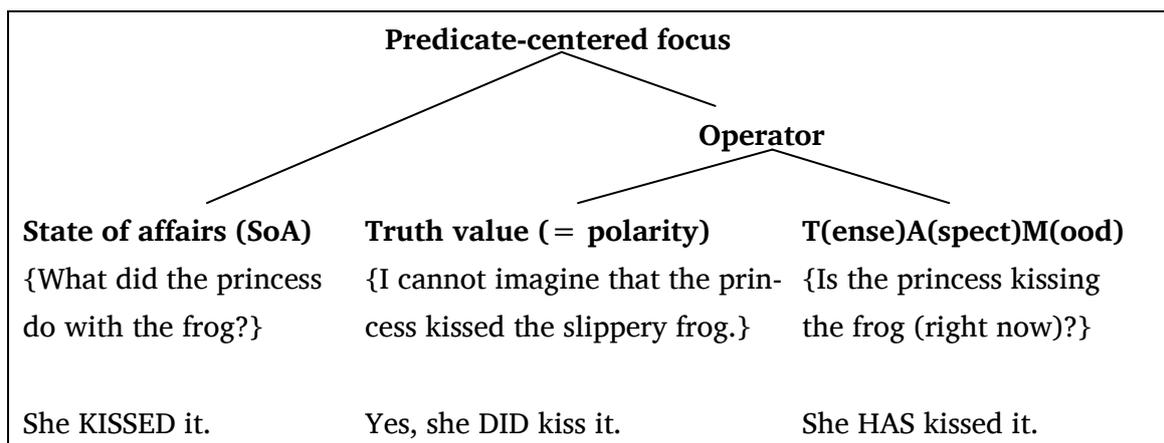

Figure 1: Basic subclassification of predicate-centered focus types (Güldemann 2009)

+ in all languages treated here, the nonverbal element (coverb, complement) normally occupies the default focus position (= object position) – besides this, they make use of a marked focus strategy which is in the center of this talk

2 SoA focus in complex predicates

2.1 Light verb constructions

2.1.1 Ama

+ Nilo-Saharan, Eastern Sudanic, Nyimang, spoken in the Mandal hills west of Dilling in the Kordofan province of Sudan

+ coverb construction in Ama: finite verb (here: *ɲɔ́n* 'take') plus a preceding non-finite element with nominal characteristics (here: *bɔ̄rgə̀l-ɛ́ì* 'as a thief')

| (1) | ŋá | nɛ̄ | wɔ́ŋ | sá | **bɔ̄rgə̀l-ɛ́ì** | **ɲɔ́n** | á? |
| | who | FOC | 1S.POSS | watch | thief-CASE | take.PFV | Q |

Who has stolen my watch? (lit.: Who has taken my watch as a thief?) (Fiedler, to appear)

(2) cf. categorical sentence with *ɲɔ́n* 'take' as simplex predicate

| á-ḏʊ̀ | midr-ɔ | **ɲɔ̂n** ... |
| 1S-? | stone-ACC | take.PFV |

I took a stone (and …). (Fiedler, to appear)

+ non-subject focus with simplex predicate

(3a) cleft-like construction (= preferred)

| àlfúl | **(bá)** | **nɛ̂** | ín | ṭâl. |
| beans | PRT | FOC | 3S | eat.PFV |

{What did the woman eat?} She ate BEANS. (Fiedler, field notes)

(3b) elliptical construction (less typical):

| àlfúlo | **bá** | ṭâl. |
| beans | PRT | eat.PFV |

{What did the woman eat?} She ate BEANS. (Fiedler, field notes)

(3c) cf. the categorical sentence

| kɛ́r | **bá** | fúl-ō | **ṭâl.** |
| woman | PRT | bean-ACC | eat.PFV |

A/The woman ATE (THE) BEANS. (Fiedler, field notes)

+ SoA focus with simplex predicate: particle *kāà* in slot directly before the verb, all unnecessary information is dropped

(4)   bwêr,   **kāà**   tíɾē.   *bwêr, kɛ́r kàmál-ʊ́ŋ **kāà** tíɾē.

            no   SoA.FOC   call.PFV

            {The woman hit Kamal.} No, (she) CALLED (him). (Fiedler, field notes)

+ SoA focus in complex predicates: particle *kāà* not allowed, but the less typical term focus construction, i.e. the fronted element followed by the particle *bá* (cf. 3b)

(5)   A: What is the girl doing?

        B: Oh, the girl is jumping, she is JUMPING!

        C: **sùléì**   **bá**   **mùʃèg**,   fífîr   há   múì.

            running   PRT move.IPFV jumping NEG rise.IPFV

            She is RUNNING, not JUMPING. (Fiedler, to appear)

→ SoA focus in the Ama light verb construction is encoded by formal means which are also used to focus on terms, i.e. by fronting the coverb and placing the emphatic particle *bá* after it

- the dedicated and expected predicate-centered focus marking particle *kaà* is not allowed with complex predicates

- the cleft-like term focus construction is also not available to focus a coverb construction by marking of its non-finite part

2.1.2 Amharic

+ Amharic (Afro-Asiatic) has two light verb constructions, depending on the light verb involved: 'say' and 'do, make' which behave differently in focus contexts (Amberber 2010: 304f.)

- LVC's with 'say': the coverb cannot be questioned or clefted

- LVS's with 'do/make': questioning the coverb in situ (6b), or clefting it (together with the object) is possible (6c)

- complex predicate with 'do/make'

(6a)   aster   k'ɨbe-w-n   k'ɨllɨ't't'   adərrəg-əčč-ɨw

         PN   butter-DEF-ACC melt.CV.INT   do.PERF-3F-3MO

         Aster melted the butter. (Amberber 2010: 305)

(6b)   aster   k'ɨbe-w-n   mɨn   adərrəg-əčč-ɨw

         PN   butter-DEF-ACC what   do.PERF-3F-3MO

         WHAT did Aster do to the butter? (Amberber 2010: 305)

(6c) (k'ɨbe-w-n)   k'ɨllɨ't't'   nəw   ya-dərrəg-əčč-ɨw

butter-DEF-ACC   melt.CV.INT   COP   3F-do.PERF-3F-3MO

He MELTed (it). (Henok Wondimu, p.c.)

→ Amharic LVC's with 'do/make' use a typical term focus strategy

2.2.1 Phrasal verbs

2.2.1 Inherent complement verbs in Gbe

+ Gbe (New Kwa, Volta Congo, Niger-Congo) - five dialect groups (Capo 1991): **Ewe** (Vhe) (Western), Gɛn (Gen) (Western), **Aja** (Central), **Fɔn** (Fon) (Eastern), Phla-Phera (Eastern)

+ in Gbe languages, the majority of verbs take obligatory complements (Ameka 2002) (called inherent complements by Essegbey 1999, term which is used here)

> "Many states of affairs which are viewed as involving more than one participant are coded in transitive clauses. Ewe has no verbs equivalent to some of the so-called canonical intransitive verbs such as 'run', 'jump' or 'swim' (cf. Dixon 1994: 124). The equivalents of these are expressed by transitive or two-place constructions and the verbs involved in such constructions must obligatorily take two arguments (cf. Clements 1972; Ameka 1994; Essegbey 1999, 2000)." (Ameka 2002: 131f.)

(7)   Ewe: cognate object construction
       Kofi fi   *(fi).
       PN   steal   theft
       Kofi stole. (Essegbey 1999: 11)[1]

+ in simplex verb constructions, SoA focus is mostly not marked at all, but can be marked (i) by focus fronting the bare verb in Fɔn and Aja (8), or (ii) by inserting the predicate-focusing particle *ɖè* in some Ewe dialects

Fɔn

(8)   ..., ylɔ́   wὲ   é   ylɔ́-ὲ.
             call   FOC   3S   call-3S

       {The woman hit Peter.} (She did not hit him,) she CALLED him. (Fiedler, in press)

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[1] The complement can be exchanged with a semantically appropriate complement – then, we won't speak anymore of an inherent complement construction.

(7')   Ewe
       Kofi fi   agbalē.
       PN   steal   book
       Kofi stole a book. (Essegbey 1999: 11)

+ SoA focus by complement focus fronting

- is the preferred option for an idiom (=special kind of the inherent complement construction; fixed collocation of generic verb + specific complement) (b) besides the default sentence structure (a)

Aja

(9a)   é   ɖù   jí

       3S   eat   top

(9b)   èjí   yí   é   ɖù.

       top   FOC 3S   eat

       {Did he win or lose the game?} He WON. (Fiedler, in press)

- in some examples with a more generic verb, focus fronting of the inherent complement seems to be the only way to encode SoA focus

Aja

(10)   óò,   ētɔ̄   ɖēkɛ́   ń   yì   lìn.

      no,   body_of_water only 1S   go   move

      {Did you go swimming and did you eat a banana?}

      No, I only went SWIMMING. (Fiedler, field notes)

+ when both the verb and the complement are equally specific/generic, SoA focus is encoded by complement focus fronting (b) or by verb focus fronting (c)

Aja

(11a) é   kù   èhùn.

       3S   pilot   vehicle

       He drove (a car).

(11b) óò, èhùn   (yí)   é   kù ²   =

       no   vehicle (FOC) 3S   pilot

(11c) óò, kù   (yí)   é   kù   hùn

       no   pilot   (FOC) 3S   pilot   vehicle

       {He was marching.} No, he DROVE (a car). (Fiedler, field notes)

Aja - cognate object construction

(12a) é   ɖɔ́   ɖyìɖɔ́

       3S   urinate urine

       He urinated.

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² This example can get an interpretation as focusing the complement: {He was riding a motorbike.} No, he drove a CAR.

(12b) óò, ɖyìɖɔ́ (yí) é ɖɔ̄ =

        no urine (FOC) 3S urinate

(12c) óò, ɖɔ́ (yí) é ɖɔ́ ɖyìɖɔ́

        no urinate (FOC) 3S urinate urine

        {He dumped the waste.} No, he URINATED. (Fiedler, field notes)

→ preferred option for focusing an inherent complement verb in Gbe (except Ewe) is to front the inherent complement, parallel to focus fronting of the coverb in Ama
- this strategy is identical to a normal term focus construction
- the other possibility goes back to SoA focus proper, i.e. the bare verb can be focus-fronted (or the predicate focus marker is used)

2.2.2 Idiomatic verbs in Hausa

- idiomatic verbs are phrasal verbs, i.e. "fixed verb-object collocations that have a special idiomatic meaning that is not immediately deducible from its parts" (Newman 2000: 260)
- objects can be fronted for focus

(13) ƙừra-r̃-kà ya rainằ.

      dust-GEN.F-2MS 3MS.PFV.DEP despise

      He is CONTEMPTUOUS of you. (lit. dust.of.your he despise)

      (< rainằ ƙừra-r̃ X 'be contemptuous of) (Newman 2000: 261)

→ not the verb, but the inherent complement plus the logical direct object which is encoded as possessor of the complement are fronted for SoA focus

3 Conclusion

+ in all languages treated here, a marked term focus construction is used to express SoA focus, sometimes besides a SoA focus strategy proper
- the light construction in Ama makes use of the less typical term focus strategy (coverb fronting), but cannot use the SoA focus or the cleft-like term focus strategies
- Amharic uses the cleft strategy which is also used for term focus
- inherent (cognate) complement verbs in Gbe and idiomatic verbs in Hausa employ preferably the complement fronting construction
- the use of the term focus strategy in Hausa and Amharic is combined with pied-piping effects on the logical object

+ this reminds of the facts related to VP focus in other languages (e.g. German, Somali, Haitian Creole; cf. (Svollacchia et al. 1995: 73f.; Fanselow & Lenertova 2010)) which can be expressed either by focus fronting of the verb (a) or of the object (b)

Haitian Creole (Cozier, unpubl. manuscript, cited in: Fanselow & Lenertova 2010: 194): VP focus {What are you doing there?}

(14a)	Se	kuit	m	ap	kuit	poul
	FOC	cook	1S	PRES.PROG	cook	chicken
(14b)	Se	poul	m	ap	kuit	
	FOC	chicken	1S	PRES.PROG	cook	
	I am cooking chicken.					

+ three competing explanations for the facts observed here
- transitivity requirement
- specificity scale
- information-structural requirement

3.1   Transitivity requirement

- most of the complex predicates investigated here resemble structurally simple V + complement constructions (=VP), the complement just filling the open argument position of the verb
- they do not represent a compound even though coverb / complement are building a semantic unit with the verb: the verb is not invariant, verb and complement can be separated by inserting other elements, and the complement can be fronted for focus, topic or relativization
+ therefore, Essegbey (1999: 114) analyzes inherent complement verb constructions in Gbe as involving a head-complement relation (as transitive verbs do), i.e. the nominal is treated as true complement of the verbal head by him

BUT: coverbs in Ama and Amharic and inherent complements in Gbe or Hausa lack some of the argument-like properties, thus they do not behave like in a canonical head-complement structure

> **argumenthood of the coverb / complement**

+ coverb /complement are non-referential in these constructions

- coverb in Ama and Amharic cannot be pronominalized, modified or exchanged without changing the meaning → is clearly non-referential

- complement in Gbe inherent complement constructions can be pronominalized, modified (e.g. by an adjective, cf. (15)) or exchanged, but is then no longer non-referential, and changes to a referential element, thus to a full complement

(15)   Ewe

      É-le   tsi   ɸoɖi   ɸú-ḿ.

      3S-PRES water dirty   move-PROG

      S/he is swimming in a dirty body of water. (Essegbey 1999: 8)

- the inherent complement in Gbe can be wh-questioned only in a restricted way, i.e. only by adding the question particle *ka* to the specific complement (Essegbey 1999: 118f.) – the resulting question then concerns only the complement, not the state of affairs as a whole

(16)   du   ka   Kofí ɸú?

      race which PN   move.limbs

      What race did Kofi run? (Essegbey 1999: 118f.)

> **case marking of coverb / complement**

- complements in Gbe and Hausa seem to behave like accusative objects – no case marking observable

- coverbs in Amharic are never marked for case

- the coverb in Ama can get some adverbial case (comitative/instrumental or locative case), but never accusative case (cf. the case marking *-έì* on the coverb *bɔ́rgɔ̀l* 'thief' in (17) which reflects something like 'comitative', and is thus not licenced by the verb)

(17)   A: ìn   bá   nέ   ɲún   sá   **bɔ́rgɔ̀l-έì**   ɲɔ́n.

          3S   PRT FOC 2S.POSS watch thief-CASE   take.PFV

          HE stole your watch!

      B: yì   bá   nέ   **ɲɔ̂n.**

          2S   PRT FOC take.PFV

          YOU stole it.

→ coverbs in Ama and Amharic cannot be analyzed as arguments of the verb, but shows nevertheless a stronger relation to the verb

→ complements in Gbe and Hausa phrasal verbs behave like ordinary objects, but have to be non-referential when used in this construction

3.2   Specificity scale

> **specificity of coverb / complement and verb**

- the elements building together the coverb construction in Ama resp. coming together in the inherent complement verb construction in Gbe and Hausa contribute to a different degree to the overall semantics of the predicate:

> "There is a balance between the semantic specificity of the verb vis-à-vis that of the complement (Essegbey 1999). Some verbs with general semantics (e.g. *ɸú* 'move.limbs') require complements with specific semantics (e.g. *tsi* 'water'). Few verbs (e.g. *fi* 'steal') require a cognate object to reiterate their semantics without which they cannot form a grammatical expression. Other verbs require a complement that is a basic level term (e.g. *ɖu nú* 'eat thing')." (Ameka 2007: 126)

only *SoA focus strategy*	*both* *strategies*	*only* *term focus strategy*
?inherent complement verbs in **Gbe**	inherent complement verbs in **Gbe**	coverb construction in **Ama** inherent compl. verbs in **Gbe** idiomatic verbs in **Hausa** light verb constructions in **Amharic**

→

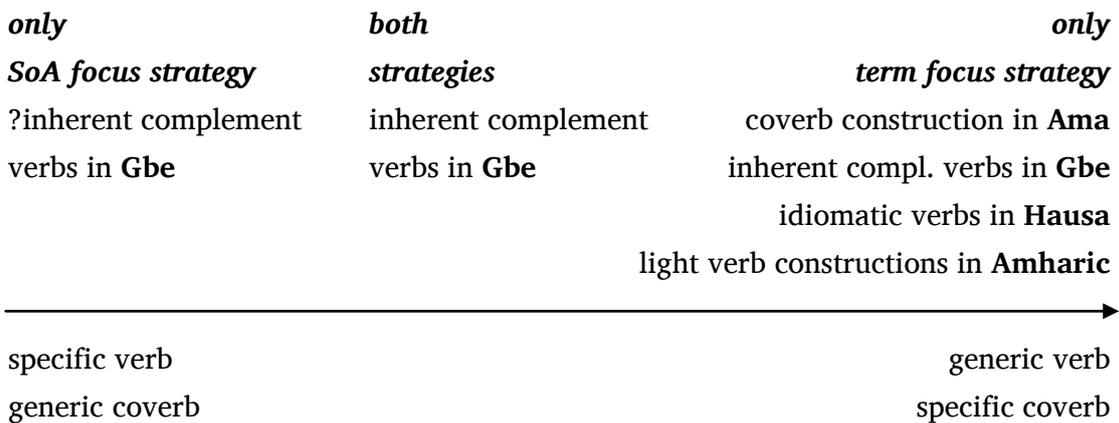| specific verb	generic verb
generic coverb	specific coverb

Figure 2: Specificity scale of coverb and verb

→ **specificity of coverb and verb influences choice of the strategy used to encode SoA focus**

+ in the constructions in Ama and Amharic:

      finite verb = light verb with generic meaning,

      coverb = specific meaning

      → term focus strategy

+ inherent complement verbs (Gbe): both strategies are available, depending on the concrete semantic configuration

- in idiomatic expressions (also Hausa):

      complement = most specific element → term focus strategy

- when: verb = specific

  complement = generic (e.g. *ɖu nú* 'eat thing')

  → SoA focus strategy expected

- cognate object construction: both elements are equally specific → both strategies exist side by side

3.3 *Information-structural requirements*

- information-structural requirement

> "We argue that the focal prominence afforded to sentence final or preverbal position in clause structure may motivate (or at least account for) the use of deverbal nouns as focus marking devices when CNs [cognate nouns, IF] remain in situ, and through cleft-structures in which deverbal items are 'relativised' on." Bond & Anderson, Ms., p. 29)

- when used *in situ*, inherent or cognate objects fulfill the information-structural requirement of one focus per sentence, i.e. the default focus position (= the object position) in a sentence is filled by them

- this unmarked structure can be changed into a more marked one – most naturally in complex predicate structures, the default nominal focus element is fronted and gets the interpretation of focus on the semantic content of the state of affairs, not on the complement alone

- as VP focus in some languages might also be encoded by fronting the complement (see example (14)), this might explain that the term focus construction is most often used for expressing state-of-affairs focus in complex predicates

+ the interpretation of the term focus strategy as SoA focus is triggered by the non-referentiality of coverb / complement – this excludes its possibility for building alternative sets, its focus fronting therefore does not fill in the gap in an open proposition like "What did Subject Verb" (object question), but serves to fill in the gap in an open proposition like "What did Subject do?" (SoA question)

+ some authors claim a particular attitude of the speaker: the most exciting or surprising part of the information, the more important or more relevant information (particular salience) is focus fronted, irrespective of the focus-background structure imposed by the context (Hartmann & Zimmermann 2007; cf. also Xu (2004) for Chinese)

→ To sum up:

The observation that SoA focus in light verb constructions in Ama and Amharic and in phrasal verbs in Gbe and Hausa is mostly expressed by using a dedicated term focus strategy can be traced back to the following:

- coverb / complement does not represent a real argument of the verb: non-referentiality, restrictions on case-marking

- specificity of coverb / complement and verb influence the choice of strategy

- coverb / complement fills in the open focus position in unmarked sentences, thus allowing also their fronting for the purpose of SoA focus – this conclusion does not seem to hold for the coverb construction in Ama which is mainly a strategy to enlarge the verbal lexicon of the language

- the non-referentiality of coverb / complement enables the SoA focus reading, maybe together with the fact that the coverb / complement might correspond to, in terms of information structure, the most important part of the information

Abbreviations

ACC	Accusative	O	Object
CNJ	Conjunction	P	Plural
COP	Copula	PERF	Perfect
CV	Coverb	PFV	Perfective
DEF	Definite	PN	Proper name
DEM	Demonstrative	POSS	Possessive
DEP	Dependent auxiliary	PRES	Present
F	Feminine	PROG	Progressive
FOC	Generic focus	PRT	Particle
INT	Intensive	RED	Reduplication
IPFV	Imperfective	Q	Question
M	Masculine	S	Singular
NEG	Negative	SoA	State of affair

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