

Focusing complex predicates^{1*}

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1 Introduction

+ complex predicates: 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

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

- coverb constructions in Ama and Amharic (both SOV)

complex predicate = coverb + finite verb

- phrasal verbs in Gbe and Hausa (both SOV)

complex predicate = finite verb + complement

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

- state-of-affairs focus (SoA focus) = focus on the lexical semantics of the predicate (simplex or complex)

- is part of the wider category “predicate-centered focus” which embraces also focus on the truth value of an utterance and on tense, aspect and mood (which is in the center of attention in our project)

+ in complex predicates the lexical information is split off into two parts → what are the consequences of this structural factorization of the state of affairs for the expression of state-of-affairs focus?

+ marked focus strategies are in the centre of this talk: besides this, all languages treated here make also use of an *in-situ* strategy, e.g. semantic focus on the state of affairs can be expressed by the canonical sentence structure

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2 SoA focus in complex predicates

2.1 Coverb constructions

2.1.1 Ama

+ Nilo-Saharan, Eastern Sudanic, Nyimang

- spoken in the Mandal hills west of Dilling in the Kordofan province of Sudan

- basic word order: SOV

+ coverb construction in Ama: finite verb (here: *ɲón* ‘take’) plus a preceding non-finite element with nominal characteristics (here: *bōrgəl-éi* ‘as a thief’)

(1) ɲá nē wóŋ sá bōrgəl-éi ɲón 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 *ɲón* ‘take’ as simplex predicate

á-ɖù midr-ɔ ɲón ...
1S-? stone-ACC take.PFV

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

+ non-subject focus with simplex predicate

(3a) cleft-like construction

àfúl (bā) nê ín ṭâl.
beans PRT FOC 3S eat.PFV

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

(3b) elliptical construction

àfúl-ō bā ṭâl.
beans-ACC PRT eat.PFV

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

(3c) cf. the categorical sentence

kér bā fúl-ō ṭâl.
woman PRT bean-ACC eat.PFV

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

(8a) ē kër túwā ḡàḡā nyón / jíè á.
 SUB woman bag how take.PFV/ do.PFV Q
 How did the woman take / do the bag?

(8b) bórgǎléī bā nyón.
 thief-CASE PRT take.PFV
 She stole it. (Fiedler, field notes)

(9) What did the woman do with the bag?
 She took (it).
 * She stole (it). (Fiedler, field notes)

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

2.1.2 Amharic

- + Amharic (Afro-Asiatic, Ethiosemitic)
- national language in Ethiopia
- basic word order: SOV

- + has two coverb constructions, depending on the light verb involved: ‘say’ and ‘do / make’ which behave differently in focus contexts (Amberber 2010: 304f.)
- with ‘say’: the coverb cannot be questioned or clefted
- with ‘do/make’: questioning the coverb *in-situ* (10b), or clefting it (together with the object) is possible (10c)

+ complex predicate with ‘do/make’

(10a) aster k’ibe-w-n k’illf’t’ adərrəg-əčč-ɪw declarative
 PN butter-DEF-ACC melt.CV.INT do.PERF-3FS-3MO
 Aster melted the butter. (Amberber 2010: 305)

(10b) aster k’ibe-w-n mɪn adərrəg-əčč-ɪw wh-question
 PN butter-DEF-ACC what do.PERF-3FS-3M:O
 WHAT did Aster do to the butter? (Amberber 2010: 305)

(10c) (k’ibe-w-n) k’illf’t’ nəw ya-dərrəg-əčč-ɪw SoA focus
 (butter-DEF-ACC) melt.CV.INT COP.3MS REL-do.PERF-3FS-3M:O
 He MELTed (it). (Henok Wondimu, p.c.)

cf. expression of term focus: cleft-construction

- (11) əhət-e n-at təlantənnə yä-mät't'a-čč-əw
sister-1S.POSS COP-3FS yesterday REL-come.PFV-3FS-DEF²
MY SISTER came yesterday. (Leslau 1995: 106, in Wetter 2012)

→ Amharic LVC's with 'do/make' use a typical term focus strategy, parallel to Ama, by clefting of the coverb

2.2.1 Phrasal verbs

2.2.1 Gbe

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

- spoken along the coastal line from Nigeria to Ghana

- basic word order: SVO

+ in Gbe languages, the majority of verbs take obligatory complements (Ameka 2002)

"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.)

(12) Ewe: cognate object construction

Kofi fi *(fi).
PN steal theft
Kofi stole. (Essegbey 1999: 11)

+ term focus is expressed by a cleft-like construction

- (13) Aja
āyú (yí) é d̀ù
bean FOC 3S eat
{What did the woman eat?} She ate BEANS. (Fiedler, field notes)

² Both sources differ in the way of glossing – I therefore maintain the original glossing wherever I am not sure about it.

+ 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 (14), or (ii) by inserting the predicate-focusing particle *dè* in some Ewe dialects (no example)

(14) Fɔn

..., yɔ́ wè é yɔ́-è.
 call FOC 3S call-3S

{The woman hit Peter.} (She did not hit him,) she CALLED him. (Fiedler 2012)

+ with phrasal verbs, SoA focus can be expressed either by focus fronting of the verb or by focus fronting of the complement

- complement focus fronting is the preferred option for an idiomatic verb (b), besides the default sentence structure (a)

(15a) Aja

é d̀ù jí
 3S eat top

(15b) èjí yí é d̀ù.

top FOC 3S eat

{Did he win or lose the game?} He WON. (Fiedler 2012)

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

(16) Aja

óò, ēt̄ō d̀ēké ní 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

(17a) é k̀ù èh̀ùn.

3S pilot vehicle

He drove (a car).

(17b) óò, èh̀ùn (yí) é k̀ù =

no vehicle (FOC) 3S pilot

(17c) óò, k̀ù (yí) é k̀ù h̀ùn

no pilot (FOC) 3S pilot vehicle

- (i) {He was walking.} No, he DROVE.
 (in the sense of a generic way of movement, contrasting 'walking' with 'driving')
- (ii) {He was riding a motorbike.} No, he drove a CAR. (Fiedler, field notes)
 (only possible for (b))

- this is especially observable in cognate object constructions

Aja

(18a) é ɖɔ́ ɖyìɖɔ́
 3S urinate urine
 He urinated.

(18b) óò, ɖyìɖɔ́ (yí) é ɖɔ́ =
 no urine (FOC) 3S urinate

(18c) óò, ɖɔ́ (yí) é ɖɔ́ ɖyìɖɔ́
 no urinate (FOC) 3S urinate urine

- (i) {He dumped the waste.} No, he URINATED.
- (ii) {He urinated blood.} ?No, he urinated URINE. (Fiedler, field notes) (for the b-example)

→ preferred option for focusing a phrasal verb in Gbe (except Ewe) is to front the 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

2.2.2 Hausa

+ Hausa: Afro-Asiatic, Chadic

- basic word order: SVO

+ Hausa has idiomatic verbs, i.e. "fixed verb-object collocations that have a special idiomatic meaning that is not immediately deducible from its parts" (Newman 2000: 260)

- complement focus fronting for SoA focus

(19) kùra-ĩ-kà ya rainà.
 dust-GEN.F-2MS.POSS 3MS.PFV.DEP despise
 He is CONTEMPTUOUS of you. (lit. dust.of.your he despise)
 (<rainà kùra-ĩ X 'be contemptuous of) (Newman 2000: 261)

cf. term focus construction:

(20) wáakè née tá cì
beans FOC 3FS.PFV.DEP eat
{What did the woman eat?} She ate BEANS. (Fiedler, field notes)

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

3 Conditions influencing the expression of SoA focus

+ the structural expression of the state of affairs in a simplex or a complex predicate has implications for the marking of state-of-affairs focus

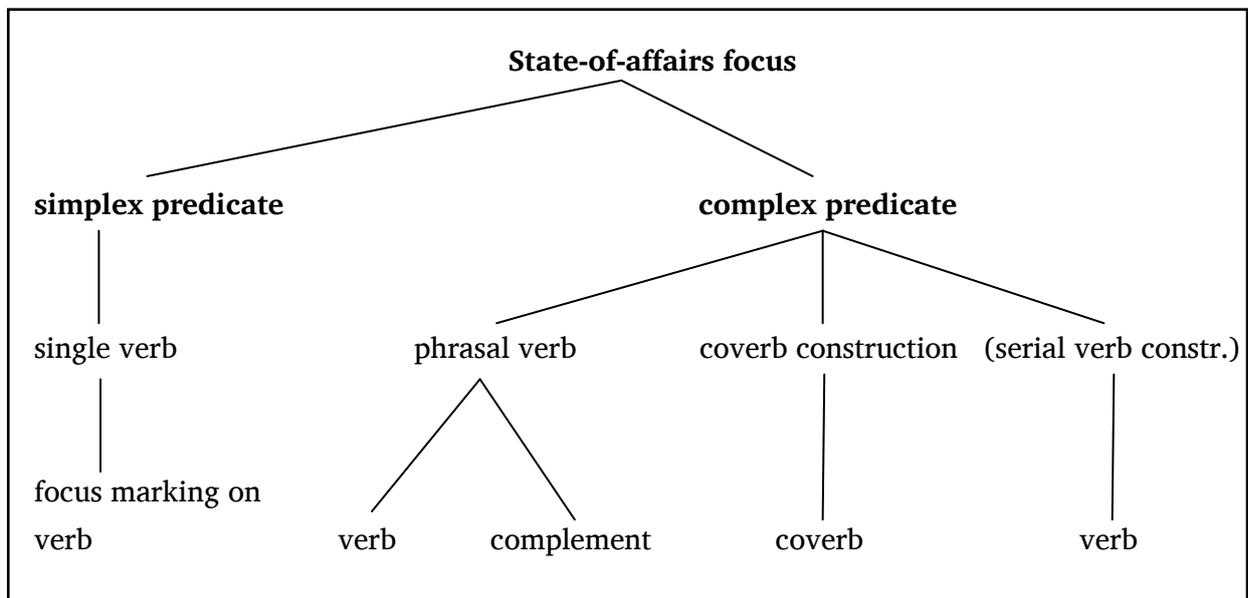


Figure 1: Expression of state-of-affairs focus in simplex and complex predicates

- + three possible explanations for the facts observed here
- semantic: specificity of verb and coverb influence the choice of the strategy
- information-structural: complement of phrasal verbs fills in the default focus position in the sentence
- structural: phrasal verbs are VP's

3.1 Specificity constraint

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

- the elements building together the coverb construction in Ama and Amharic resp. coming together in the phrasal verb constructions 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. *φú* ‘move.limbs’) require complements with specific semantics (e.g. *tsi* ‘water’). Few verbs (e.g. *fī* ‘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. *ḡu nū* ‘eat thing’).” (Ameka 2007: 126)

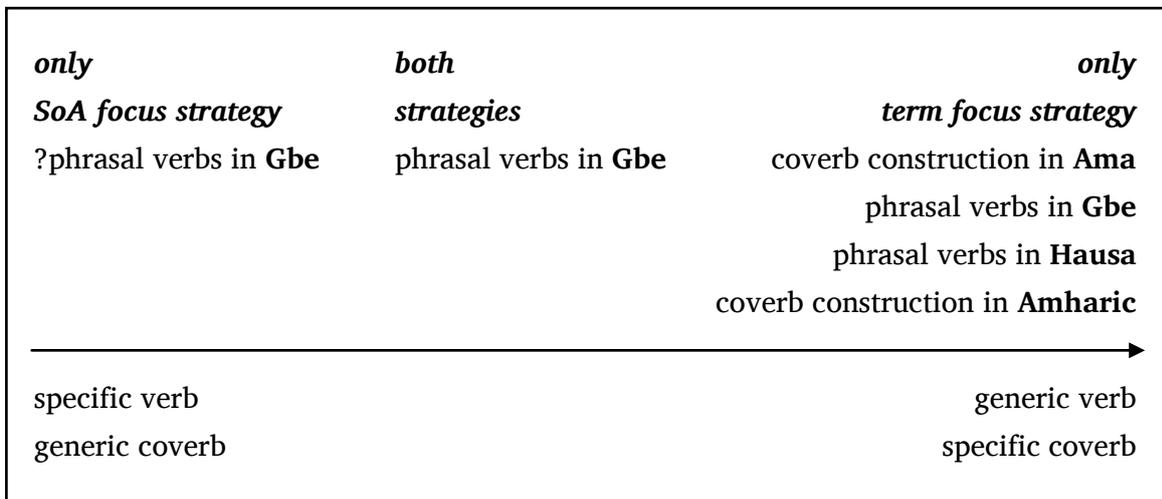


Figure 2: Specificity scale of coverb/ and verb

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

3.2 Information-structural constraints

- Bond & Anderson (Ms.) argue that the development of cognate object constructions is due to the information-structural requirement to have one focus per sentence, i.e. the object position of intransitive predicates has to be filled by a cognate object (when no other object is available)

“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)

- this unmarked structure can be changed into a more marked one – 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
- the interpretation of this term focus strategy as SoA focus (and not object focus) is triggered by the non-referentiality of coverb/complement (see next paragraph) – this excludes its possibility for building alternative sets, its focus fronting therefore does not fill in the gap in an open proposition to a question like “What did Subject Verb” (object question), but serves to fill in the gap in an open proposition to a question like “What did Subject do with Object?” (SoA question)

+ some authors claim, wrt. VP focus, a particular attitude of the speaker towards the utterance: 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)

3.3 State-of-affairs focus of phrasal verbs as VP focus?

+ phrasal verbs are structurally simple V + complement constructions (= VP), the complement just filling the open argument position of the verb

+ this structural identity of phrasal verbs to simple VP's finds its equivalent also in the focus marking strategies used for predicate focus (viz. VP focus), i.e. focus on the lexical content of the verb plus the complement (e.g. German, Somali, Haitian Creole, Yoruba)

(21) Aja – complement focus fronting for predicate focus

èshí yí wó nù.

water FOC 3P drink

{They ate the beans.} No, they DRANK WATER. (Fiedler, field notes)

(22a) Haitian Creole – verb fronting for predicate focus

Se kuit m ap kuit poul

FOC cook 1S PRES.PROG cook chicken

(22b) Haitian Creole – complement fronting for predicate focus

Se poul m ap kuit

FOC chicken 1S PRES.PROG cook

{What are you doing there?} I am cooking chicken. (Cozier, unpubl.

manuscript, cited in: Fanselow & Lenertova 2010: 194)

- (23) Yoruba – predicate focus by focus fronting of verb and complement
fífún mi ni Tolú fún mí ní igba
NOM:give 1S NI PN give.PFV 1S OBL calabash
Tolu GAVE ME the calabash. (Dekydspotter 1992: 121)

+ these examples present VP focus with the object either being generic (as in 21, 22) or clearly not focused, as the pronoun in (23)

- + What about VP focus with more specific complements?
- no evidence for this behavior in my data
- has to be checked again in the literature; examples from Somali and German

- (24a) Somali – predicate focus by *in-situ* marking of the complement
Cali Maryan buu dilay.
PN PN FOC-he beat

- (24b) Maryan buu dilay Cali.
PN FOC-he beat PN
{What did Ali do?} Ali BEAT MARYAN. (Svollaracchia et al. 1995: 73)

- (25) German – complement focus fronting for predicate focus
Einen Hasen habe ich gefangen.
IDEF.ACC rabbit.ACC AUX 1S catch.PTCP
{What did you do?} I CAUGHT A RABBIT. (Fanselow & Lenertova 2010: 174)

→ marking of semantic predicate focus by a term focus strategy can be observed in a number of languages – with generic complements, but as well with more specific complements

- this strategy can be found regularly with phrasal predicates, but seems to be more restricted with 'normal' predicates (at least in German)

→ SoA focus of phrasal verbs is therefore one instance of structural VP focus and semantic predicate focus (in the sense of Lambrecht 1994: 226ff.)

BUT: it presents a special case of it, as the complements of phrasal verbs in Gbe or Hausa lack some of the argument-like properties; the same holds for the coverb in Ama and Amharic.

> **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. (26)) or exchanged – is then no longer non-referential, the specific reading of the collocation gets lost

(26) Ewe

É-le tsi ɸoɖi ɸú-m.

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. by adding the question particle *ka* to the specific complement (Essegbey 1999: 118f.) – the resulting question refers only to the complement, not the state of affairs as a whole

(27) du ka Kofi 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 (are dependent verb forms)

- the coverb in Ama can get some adverbial case (comitative/instrumental or locative case), but never accusative case (cf. the case marking *-êi* on the coverb *bórgàl* ‘thief’ in (28) which reflects something like ‘comitative’, and is not licenced by the verb)

(28) A: ìn bá né jún sá **bórgàl-êi** jón.

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

HE stole your watch!

B: yì bá né jón.

2S PRT FOC take.PFV

YOU stole it. (Fiedler, field notes)

→ coverbs in Ama and Amharic cannot be analyzed as arguments of the verb

→ complements in Gbe and Hausa phrasal verbs seem to behave like ordinary objects, but have to be non-referential when used in this construction to get the intended (idiomatic or generic) reading

→ the complement focus fronting strategy allows for focus projection from the marked complement onto the whole VP; because of the special properties of the complement in phrasal verbs, the resulting interpretation is focus on the state of affairs

4 Summary

The observation that SoA focus in coverb 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:

- the 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
- 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
- the coverb/complement might correspond to, in terms of information structure, the most important part of the information
- in the languages treated here (and perhaps in most languages with predominant pragmatic control of focus marking) focusing nouns occurs statistically more often than focusing verbs (because of the referential properties of nouns vs. predicates) – this preference for nominal focusing might also support the choice of the complement fronting strategy for SoA focus

Abbreviations

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

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