

The expression of intensification and its relation to predicate-centered focus*

Peggy Jacob (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Preface

+ the expression of intensification is often encoded by information-structural means
 - in BAMBARA (Mande), the marker *dé* indicates polarity focus, as in (1a), and intensification, as in (1b), as well

(1a) Polarity focus in BAMBARA:

À nà-nà **dé.**
 3S come-PFV.INTR OP.FOC

{Amadu didn't come.} (No) He did come. (Prokhorov 2013: 7)

(1b) Intensification in BAMBARA:

À ká júgu **dé!**
 3S QUAL nasty OP.FOC

He is very nasty! (Dumestre 2003: 321 < Prokhorov 2013: 6)

Hypothesis: the formal parallel between intensification and predicate-centered focus result from functional similarities of both categories

+ topic of the talk: the analysis of the interaction of intensification and predicate-centered focus on the basis of data from Sara-Bagirmi

+ structure of the talk:

- section 1 introduces theoretical issues on information structure, the language family and the concept of intensification
- section 2 presents examples from one Sara-Bagirmi language (MBAY) for illustrating the structural and functional variety of intensification
- section 3 discusses the relation between intensification and predicate-centered focus

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1 General remarks

1.1 The identification of predicate-centered focus types

+ **information structure** is the structuring of linguistic information, typically in order to optimize information transfer within discourse (Chafe 1976, Krifka 2007)

- I will mainly resort to two information-structural categories: focus and background

focus is the most important or salient information (Dik 1997), while **background** refers to the presupposed or given parts of the sentence

- depending on the scope of the element in focus one can differentiate **term focus** and **predicate-centered focus** (PCF) (Güldemann 2009):

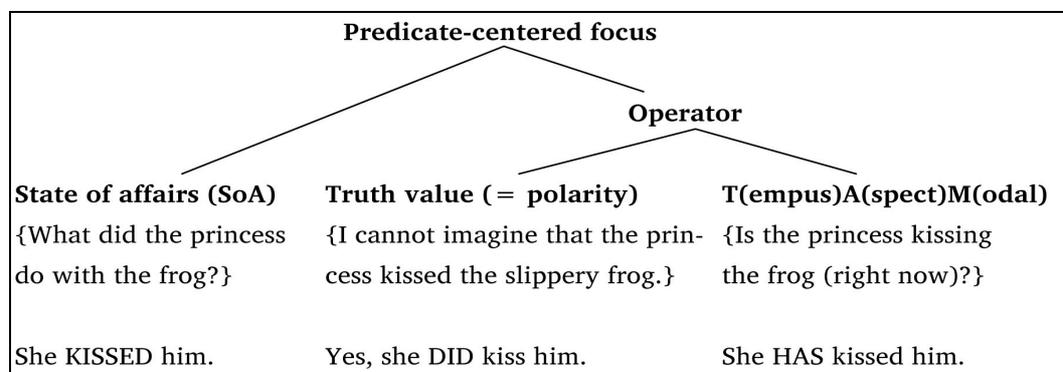


Figure 1: Basic sub-classification of PCF by Güldemann (2009)

+ structural encoding of predicate-centered focus:

- prosodic strategies: stress on the lexical verb, the auxiliary, the complementizer, ...

- morphological strategies: focus markers, special verb morphology, conjoint/disjoint distinction, lexical material, ...

- syntactic strategies: *do*-support, *tun*-periphrasis, verbal iteration, ...

1.2 General and grammatical remarks to Sara-Bagirmi languages

+ genetic affiliation: Nilo-Saharan > Central Sudanic > West > Bongo-Bagirmi > Sara-Bagirmi (classification after Lewis et al. 2013, Boyeldieu 2006, p.c.)

+ typological information: predominantly agglutinative languages

- all languages have S(ubject)V(erb)O(bject) word order

- all languages are tone languages with three level tones (high: á, middle: a, low: à)¹

¹ In the literature for some languages all tones are marked (á, ā and à). For consistency reason (with other Sara-Bagirmi languages), I will abstain here to the explicit marking of middle tones.

- + predicate-centered focus is expressed by **verbal iteration**
- “verbal iteration” is used here as a **cover term** for the constructions analyzed here
- in these constructions, two lexically identical verb forms co-occur in one sentence
- the verb forms can be differentiated w.r.t. the **degree of finiteness**: one of the verb forms is finite and the other one is non-finite
- depending on the position of the non-finite verb form, one can distinguish **preposing structures**, as shown in (2a), and **in-situ doubling**, as shown in (2b)

(2a) verb preposing in MBAY – for marking SoA focus:

...	nà	ndusə ²	la	ndusə	yé.
	but	INF.be.worm.eaten	G.FOC	3S.be.worm.eaten	BG
	[V _{INF}]	[V _{FIN}]

{Your wood is bad. – No, the wood is fine;} it’s just that it’s WORM-EATEN. (Keegan 1997: 148)

(2b) in-situ doubling in BAGIRMI – for marking SoA focus:

Boukar	táď	djùm	téh	táďà.
PN	PFV.do	gruel	millet	INF.do
[SBJ	V _{FIN}	OBJ]	[V _{INF}]

{Did Boukar cook millet gruel or did he eat it? –}Boukar COOKED millet gruel.

(Jacob 2010: 129)

- + both strategies of verbal iteration can be used for marking intensification as well
- the following presentation concentrates on examples with intensification from the Sara-Bagirmi language MBAY – the data based on the grammar (Keegan 1997)

1.3 The concept of intensification

+ definition: “Intensification is a direct indication of a speaker’s desire to use and exploit the expression of **hyperbole** [...] it is a vehicle for impressing, praising, persuading, insulting, and generally influencing the listener’s reception of the message” (Partington 1993: 178)

- it signals personal commitment, **truth and value judgments**, and belongs to the functional category of **epistemic modality** (Lorenz 1999: 24)

² Glossing and analysis of the verb forms are based on the description of Keegan (1997). Both verb forms can be differentiated by infinitive prefix *k-*, which occurs in some verb classes only.

- it is always linked to the notion of **scalarity** or **degree of modification** (figure 2):
intensification usually refers to a high degree or a high level on a scale (3b) and can even reach the endpoint of the scale (3c)

- (3a) Normal level: The princess is beautiful.
(3b) High level: The princess is so beautiful.
(3c) Excessive level: The princess is the fairest of all.

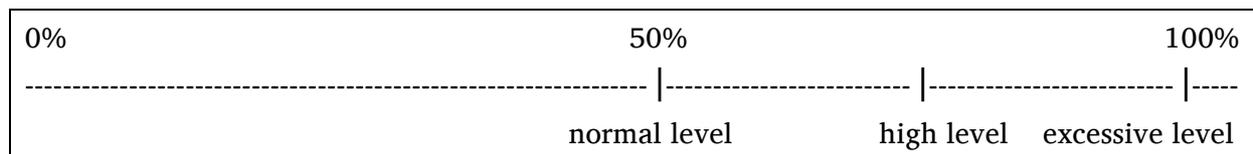


Figure 2: The scale of modification

- + structural encoding of intensification:
- often expressed by (**adverbial**) **intensifiers** with the meaning of *very, much, often, ...*
(Traugott 2006, Kennedy/McNally 2005)
- some languages use special constructions, e.g. verbal iteration in Sara-Bagirmi

2 Intensification marking in MBAY

2.1 Verb preposing

- (4a) Tèjè ñ-tèn dá **yikə** ñ **yikə** dá.
honey DEM BG INF.be.sweet that 3S.be.sweet BG
[SBJ dá]_{TOP} [V_{INF}] [ñ V_{FIN}] dá]

This honey is very sweet. (Keegan 1997: 151)

(lit. As for the honey, it is sweet that it is sweet. – PJ)

- (4b) Mótò dá **màjè** ñ **màjè** dá.
motorcycle BG INF.be.good that 3S.be.good BG
[SBJ dá]_{TOP} [V_{INF}] [ñ V_{FIN}] dá]

This motorcycle is terrific!³ (Keegan 1997: 151)

(lit. As for the motorcycle, it is good that it is good. – PJ)

- + the examples can be interpreted as indicating **intensification**:
 {All honey is sweet, but} this honey is VERY sweet.
 {All motorcycles are good, but} this motorcycle is TERRIFIC.

³ Intensification and exclamation often refer to the same structural encoding (Prokhorov, 2013).

- + the intensification in (4) refers to an increase of the (inherent) verbal property
- this kind of intensification will be called here “**qualitative intensification**”

- + the examples in (5) show the same structure as in (4), but with active verbs

(5a) **ḃògè** **ń** **à⁴** **ḃògè** **dá.**
 INF.steal that IPFV 3S.steal BG
 [V_{INF}] [ń TAM V_{FIN} dá]
 He really steals a lot. (Keegan 1997: 151)

(5b) Ngon **ń-tèn** **dá** **k-ày** **kàsè** **ń** **à** **ày** **dá.**
 child DEM BG INF-drink alcohol that IPFV 3S.drink BG
 [SBJ dá]_{TOP} [V_{INF} OBJ] [ń TAM V_{FIN} dá]
 This boy really drinks a lot! (Keegan 1997: 151)

- + the examples could be interpreted in different ways

- on the one hand, as expressing **polarity focus**:

{I don't believe that he steals so much. -} He REALLY/INDEED steals a lot.

{I don't believe that he drinks so much. -} He REALLY/INDEED drinks a lot.

- on the other hand, as marking **intensification**

{He doesn't steal just a few things} he really steals A LOT (OF THINGS).

{He doesn't drink just one or two beer} he really drinks A LOT (OF BEER).

{He doesn't steal just occasionally} he really steals A LOT/INTENSIVELY.

{He doesn't drink just occasionally} he really drinks A LOT/INTENSIVELY.

- + the intensification in (5) is to be linked to a (more or less) countable value

- this kind of intensification will be called here “**quantitative intensification**”⁵ and can be sub-divided into

object quantity (He steals a considerable amount) and

event quantity⁶ (He steals intensively)

⁴ Keegan (1997: 70f.) classifies *à* as habitual marker. It doesn't occur with “adjectival verbs”. The combination of these verbs and the marker expresses inchoative reading (Keegan 1997: 75). Because the function of this marker is not restricted to the habitualis, I gloss it as imperfective.

⁵ Bond & Anderson (2013: 8f.) describe this structure as indicating “event frequency”. As I have shown, this structure is not (primarily) used to express frequency, but it expresses quantitative intensification (which includes the frequency of the event).

⁶ For the nature of event quantification and plurality see Ferreira (2005).

2.2 *In-situ doubling structures*

+ this construction type refers to verbal iteration structures, where the non-finite verb form follows the finite verb form

- in MBAY, in-situ doubling **always occurs in combination with other elements**
- these co-occurrences influence the particular function

2.2.1 In-situ doubling with complementizer *ká*

- (6) Njòr dá àtə k-àtə ká màjə sà àí.
 eggplant BG be.bitter INF-be.bitter that be.good eat NEG
 [SUB dá V_{FIN}] [V_{INF}] [ká V_{FIN} V_{INF} NEG]
- The eggplant was so bitter that it wasn't good to eat. (Keegan 1997: 150)

- + example (6) shows in-situ doubling and contains a complement clause as well
- the complement clause is introduced by complementizer *ká*
- Keegan (1997: 129 f.) describes *ká* as an element which expresses ‘to such a degree that’

- + all examples with complement clauses introduced by *ká* show verbal iteration
- I assume that the iteration could be partly **structurally required** for a non-finite verb or a (verbal) noun to host the complementizer *ká*
- > **the combination** of verbal iteration and the complement clause introduced by complementizer *ká* expresses intensification

- + the example in (6) implies **qualitative intensification** (on an excessive degree)

- + the same structure can be used with dynamic verbs

- (7) Ngon sà mángò sà ká lòo-tii-á kàm-á too-á ngáy.
 child eat mango INF.eat that tomorrow stomach-3S hurt-3S much
 [SUB V_{FIN} OBJ] [V_{INF}] [ká ADV SBJ V_{FIN} ADV]
- The child ate so much mango that the next day his stomach hurts a lot.
 (Keegan 1997: 150)

- + the example in (7) marks **intensification** with reference to **object quantity**

2.2.2 In-situ doubling with particle *ta*

- (8) Mbùr lò-á mājè ta mājè.
 boule POSS-3S be.good just INF.be.good
 [SBJ V_{FIN}] [ta] [V_{INF}]
 Her ‘boule’ is very good. (Keegan 1997: 147)
 (lit. Her ‘boule’ is good – just good. – PJ)

+ the particle *ta* always occurs **in between the two relevant elements** and

- appears also with doubled nouns

- (9) Súu ì nan-ń ta nan-ń ...
 PN ID uncle-POSS.1S just uncle-POSS.1S
 Suu is only my uncle {, he’s not my father}. (Keegan 1997: 147)

+ Keegan (2009: 535) translates *ta* as ‘only’ or ‘doing nothing but’

- here, it is glossed as ‘just’ (Güldemann p.c.), because particle *ta* is not restricted to the function as ‘only’:

1. *ta* is not primarily used for expressing exclusivity and/or restriction – this function is realized in the texts (Keegan 1999) by the particles *kòóní*, *bè* or *kàri*, but never by *ta*

2. *ta* seems to express some meanings of ENGLISH *just* (König 1991: 121 < Cohen 1969)

- ‘only’: I just want two apples.
 ‘simply/emphasis’: That’s just marvelous.
 ‘barely’: He just made it by the skin of his teeth.

+ the example in (8) expresses **qualitative intensification**

+ in-situ doubling with particle *ta* is also possible with dynamic verbs

- (10a) Ndiì èdè ta k-èdè.
 water 3S.fall just INF-fall
 [SBJ V_{FIN}] [ta] [V_{INF}]
 It does nothing but rain. (Keegan 1997: 147)
- (10b) Ày kàsè ta k-ày.
 3S.drink alcohol just INF-drink
 [V_{FIN} OBJ] [ta] [V_{INF}]
 (S/he) does nothing but drink. (Keegan 1997: 147)

- + the examples show **intensification**⁷
- in (10a) with reference to **event quantity**: It rains all the time. / It rains a lot.
- in (10b), with reference to **event quantity** or to the **affected object**:
S/he drinks all the time. / S/he drinks a lot of alcohol.

2.3 Summary

Ex.	Glosses	Construction	Verb semantics	Intensification
4a	Be sweet	Verb preposing	Stative	Quality
4b	Be good	Verb preposing	Stative	Quality
5a	Steal	Verb preposing	Active/(in)transitive ⁸	Quantity (event + object)
5b	Drink alcohol	Verb preposing	Active/transitive	Quantity (event + object)
6	Be bitter	In-situ doubling + ká	Stative	Quality
7	Eat mango	In-situ doubling + ká	Active/transitive	Quantity (object)
8	Be good	In-situ doubling + ta	Stative	Quality
10a	Fall (rain)	In-situ doubling + ta	Active/intransitive	Quantity (event)
10b	Drink alcohol	In-situ doubling + ta	Active/transitive	Quantity (event + object)

Table 1: Constructions with verbal iteration for expressing intensification

- + the data from Sara-Bagirmi shows that intensification can be expressed
 1. by **verbal iteration itself** in verb preposing structures, as in (4) and (5), or
 2. by constructions which show a **combination of verbal iteration and the use of an intensifying element** in in-situ doubling structures, as in (6), (7), (8) and (10)

- + the explicit interpretation of intensification depends on **verb semantics**⁹
- whereas all stative verbs express qualitative intensification,
- active verbs always refer to quantitative intensification

⁷ Bond & Anderson (2013: 26f.) classify this structure as “exclusive situation focus”. I argue that this interpretation is misleading because the exclusivity/restriction is triggered by the translation of *ta* as ‘only’. The examples don’t refer to exclusive focus in the traditional sense, i.e. there is no restriction to the event of drinking: ‘he does nothing but drink’ implies that someone drinks all the time or that he drinks a lot, but it doesn’t imply that he doesn’t do other things beyond the drinking, like eating, sleeping, speaking, going to the bathroom, ...

⁸ In example (5a), the verb ‘steal’ lacks an object, but nevertheless it behaves (with the reference to an – inherently existing – affected object) like a transitive verb.

⁹ The classification is based on Vendler (1957), who subdivided verbs in activities [+dynamic, +durative, -telic], states [-dynamic, +durative, -telic], achievements [-dynamic, -durative, +telic], and accomplishments [+dynamic, -durative, +telic].

- intensified **stative verbs** refer to the (unexpected) high **quality of the state**

(11) The princess was very beautiful.

- intensified **intransitive active verbs** refer to the (unexpected) high **quantity of the event**

(12) The frog croaked very much.

- intensified **transitive verbs** can either refer to a high **quantity of the event** or to a high **quantity of the affected object**

(13a) The princess kissed the frog intensively. Event quantity

(13b) The princess kissed a lot of frogs. Object quantity

+ for establishing a (general) “**hierarchy of intensifiability**”, I assume that

- stative verbs are most accessible to an interpretation as marking intensification, directly followed by active verbs, which refer to event quantity

- the indication of object quantity depends on the properties of the affected entity (cumulativity, genericity, quantifiability), and the relation between verb and object

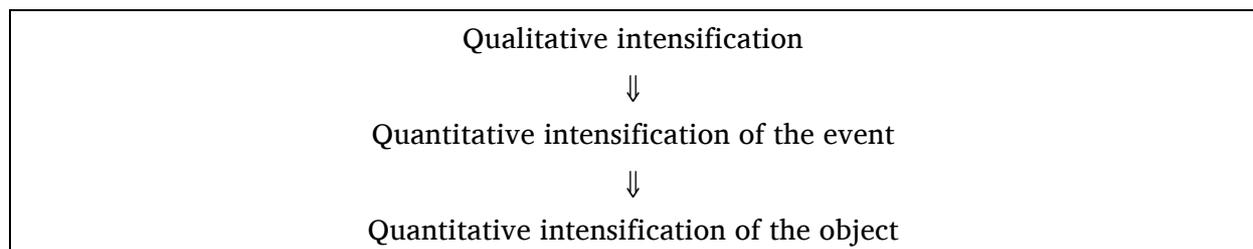


Figure 3: Hierarchy of the intensifiability of predicates

3 Discussion

+ in MBAY, intensification is expressed by **verbal iteration structures**

- this function is realized in other Sara-Bagirmi languages by the same means

(14a) verb preposing for marking intensification (event quantity) in KENGA:

Kúrsù	e	kúrs	kéè,	...
INF.cultiver	2S:FUT	cultiver	FOC	
[V _{INF}]	[V _{AUX}]	V _{FIN}	kéè]	

Tu as beaucoup labouré ... (Neukom 2010: 261)

(You have much cultivated ... – PJ)

(14b) verb preposing for marking intensification (event/object quantity) in SAR:

ɓògə̀	lábə̀	ɓògə̀	ngáý.
INF.steal	PN	3S.steal	much
[V _{INF}]	[SBJ	V _{FIN}	ADV]

Pour ce qui est de voler, Labe vole beaucoup. (Palayer 1989: 274)

(As for stealing, Labe steals a lot. – PJ)

- + intensification is marked by the same means as predicate-centered focus
- the formal co-occurrence of intensification and predicate-centered focus types could be an indication of the **functional similarities** of both categories

- + intensification shows many properties of **focus**
- it is used to express **emphasis** and **saliency** (according to Dik 1997) and
- it reflects the **speaker’s attitude**
- it can be used, as many (other) focal categories, for marking **counter-expectation**

(15a) Normal/expected level: The frog is ugly.

(15b) High/unexpected level: The frog is VERY ugly.

- + polarity focus and intensification share the expression of **epistemic modality**
- they are used to signal **personal commitment** and **truth and value judgments**
- they focus the **sentential operator**, which takes scope over the mood of the sentence
- but they differ in semantic interpretation

- intensification can be located on a more or less **fine-grained scale**: the activating of any point in the scope between high and excessive level refers to intensification

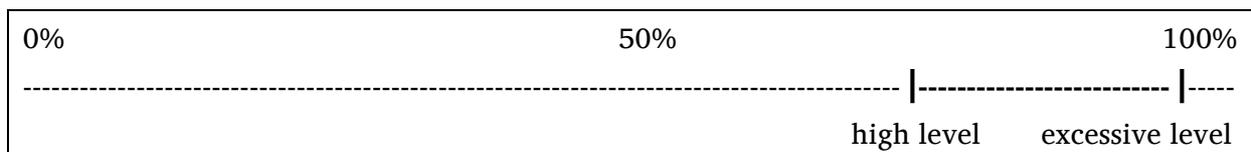


Figure 4: The scalar interpretation of intensification

- polarity focus refers to a strong **binary configuration**: negative polarity is located on the minus pole and positive polarity is located on the plus pole

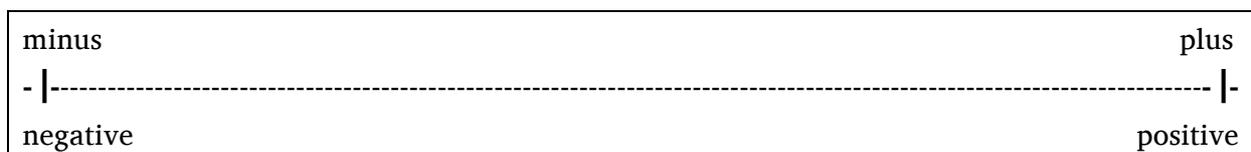


Figure 5: The binary interpretation of polarity focus

+ based on these findings, I would propose to **integrate intensification into the system of predicate-centered focus types**, therefore,

- operator focus should be split into mood and tense/aspect and

- the modal part can be further subdivided in polarity and intensification

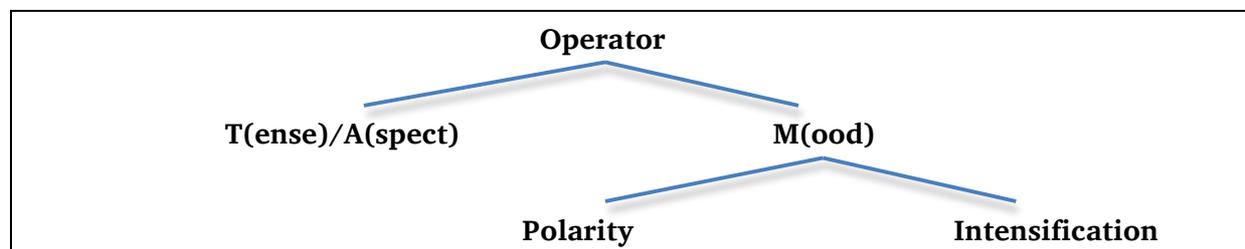


Figure 6: Changed basic sub-classification of PCF (adapted from Güldemann 2009)

Abbreviations

ADV	Adverbial	OP	Operator
BG	Background	PCF	Predicate-centered focus
DEM	Demonstrative	PFV	Perfective
FIN	Finite	PN	Proper name
FOC	Focus	POSS	Possessive
FUT	Future	QUAL	Qualificational
ID	Identificational	S	Singular
INF	Infinitive/Non-finite	SBJ	Subject
IPFV	Imperfective	SUB	Subordination
ITR	Intransitive	TAM	Tempus/Aspect/Mood
NEG	Negative	TOP	Topic(al)
OBJ	Object	V	Verb(al)

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