Term focus in Fulfulde
Arguments for a grammaticalization of former cleft constructions
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1 Basic information on Fulfulde

- **Classification:** Niger-Congo > Atlantic-Congo > Atlantic > Northern > Senegambian > Fulani-Wolof > Fula > West Central (Lewis 2009)
- **ISO 693-3:** fuf
- Fulfulde is spoken in 18 countries from Western to Central Africa by around 18 million people (Gajdos 2004: 9-11)
- There are around 3 million speakers of the Fuuta Jaloo dialect in Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Sierra Leone (Lewis 2009)

1.1 Basic morphosyntax

- SVO
- Head-initial
- 24 agreement classes: Agreement between the noun and definite articles, demonstratives, adjectives, numerals and pronouns
- Verbal morphology:

  (1) stem–(derivational suffix)–TAM–(subject pronoun)–(IO pronoun)–(DO pronoun)

- Verb paradigms:
  - Three perfective paradigms vs. five imperfective paradigms
  - In each paradigm the verbs are classified in three voices: active, middle, passive
  - As in many Atlantic languages, the TAM-markers merge tense, aspect, voice and focus (cf. Robert 2010)

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1 This work is based on my PhD research on Information Structure in Fulfulde, which is realized in affiliation to the Integrated Graduate School in the SFB 632 ‘Information Structure’ and is funded by the DFG.


3 The asymmetry of 3 vs. 5 paradigms is due to the fact that in the traditional Fulfulde literature, moods as imperative and subjunctive are part of the imperfective paradigm.
Relevant for term focus constructions are two paradigms which I call PERFECTIVE and IMPERFECTIVE BACKGROUND (BG) because they occur in background clauses:

- **PFV.BG**: term focus, relative clauses, interrogatives, temporal clauses
- **IPFV.BG**: term focus, relative clauses, interrogatives, temporal clauses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice</th>
<th>PERFECTIVE BACKGROUND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACTIVE</td>
<td>-⟨(u)⟩₅-mi (1s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-⟨(u)⟩₆-daa (2s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-⟨(u)⟩₆-den (1P.INCL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-⟨(u)⟩₆-don (2p)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1**: The PERFECTIVE BACKGROUND in active voice

- In both verb forms, the subject pronoun of 1s, 2s, 1P.INCL and 2p clitisizes to the verb:


  TF yesterday 3s write-A.PFV.BG TF yesterday write-A.PFV.BG-1s
  ‘S/he wrote YESTERDAY.’       ‘I wrote YESTERDAY.’


# 2 Term focus in Fulfulde

**DEFINITION OF FOCUS:**

“A focal information in a linguistic expression is that information which is relatively the most important or salient information in the given communicative setting, and considered by S [the speaker] to be most essential for A [the addressee] to integrate into his pragmatic information.”

(Dik 1997: 326)

**PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF FOCUS:**

Closing an information gap (completive/assertive focus); Rejecting, replacing, expanding, restricting, selecting information (contrastive focus)

**TERM FOCUS** comprises here focus on the **subject**, the **object**, **adverb**, **prepositional phrase**

(no sentence or predicate-centered focus)

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4 The verb form PFV.BG is also used in narrated utterances and in stative and durative expressions.

5 The TAM-suffix -u- is deleted after a derivational suffix.

6 The following example shows contrastive (replacing) focus on the object:

  A: John bought apples.
  B: No, he bought BANANAS.        [Dik 1997: 333]
2.1 The construction

The most frequent construction for term focus\(^7\) is the ex-situ construction \([Ko X]_{\text{Foc}} S V Z\)

- The verb needs to be either in PFV.BG or in IPFV.BG
- When a pronoun is in focus, it must be the emphatic pronoun

(3) ADVERB FOCUS:

A: \begin{center}
\text{Ko} \quad \text{honde tuma} \quad \text{yah-u-daa} \quad \text{ka maakiti?}
\end{center}
\begin{center}
\text{TF} \quad \text{when} \quad \text{go-A.PFV.BG-2S} \quad \text{PREP} \quad \text{market.1}
\end{center}

‘WHEN did you go to the market?’

B: \begin{center}
\text{Ko} \quad \text{hande} \quad (\text{mi yah-i} \quad \text{ka maakiti}).
\end{center}
\begin{center}
\text{TF} \quad \text{today} \quad \text{1S} \quad \text{go-A.PFV.BG} \quad \text{PREP} \quad \text{market.1}
\end{center}

‘(I went) TODAY (to the market).’ [cf. Baldé, Caudill & Diallo 2000: 36]

Summary of the pattern:

(4) \begin{align*}
[Ko \text{ nominal subject/emphatic pronoun}]_{\text{Foc}} V_{\text{BG}} Z & \quad \text{SUBJECT FOCUS} \\
[Ko \text{ nominal object/emphatic pronoun}]_{\text{Foc}} S V_{\text{BG(S)}} Z & \quad \text{OBJECT FOCUS} \\
[Ko X]_{\text{Foc}} S V_{(S)} Z & \quad \text{OTHER TERM FOCUS}
\end{align*}

- Syntactic marking by using the sentence-initial position
- Morphological marking by the focus marker
- The focus can be on a question word, a subject, an object, an adverb or a prepositional phrase
- Only one element can be focalized in a clause
- Both assertive and contrastive focus can be expressed
- In the out-of-focus clause no negated verb is allowed
- On the surface these constructions look like ‘It is X …’ constructions, with X the element in focus and a background clause following

2.2 The cleft hypothesis

Sylla (1993) claims for the Senegalese dialect that term focus constructions are cleft sentences (‘clivés’), which are closely related to his so-called pseudo-clefs, interrogatives, relative and temporal sentences; Indeed, they look similar to their Guinean counterpart:

\[^7\text{In-situ focus is also attested, but seems to be quite rare.}\]
DEFINITION OF A PROTOTYPICAL CLEFT:

“A CLEFT CONSTRUCTION (CC) is a complex sentence structure consisting of a matrix clause headed by a copula and a relative or relative-like clause whose relativized argument is coindexed with the predicative argument of the copula. Taken together, the matrix and the relative express a logically simple proposition, which can also be expressed in the form of a single clause without a change in truth conditions.”

(Lambrecht 2001: 467)

Prototypical cleft sentences are formed using a relative marker; This is not the case in term focus constructions, although “normal” relative clauses do have such a marker:

(6) OBJECT RELATIVE:

Gerto-gal [ngal be hirs-i hanki]_{rel} ngal ...
chicken-11 REL.11 3P slaughter-A.PFV.BG yesterday DEF.11

‘The chicken [that they slaughtered yesterday], ….’


⇒ As at this point term focus constructions look like clefts, with the restriction that no relative marker is needed, I would call them therefore rather cleft-like

2.3 The grammaticalization hypothesis

As for other languages (e.g. Kikuyu, Niger-Congo > Bantu, cf. Heine & Reh 1984: 151f.), it can be assumed that the term focus construction is derived from a cleft construction, where the relative marker has been deleted and the copula grammaticalized to a term focus marker (Heine & Reh 1984: 174 describe that the latter happened e.g. in Somali, Afro-Asiatic). Since cleft sentences inherently promote the clefted element, this construction became used only for term focus:
2.3.1 In favor of the grammaticalization hypothesis: The identificational clause (in-focus part)

- Ko is used as a copula (with an identifying meaning):

  (8) Klaus [ko almanjo.]_{foc}  
  Klaus COP German  
  ‘Klaus is a German.’ \[Diallo forth.: 44\]

- Ko is also used as an identificational marker in presentational sentences in order to highlight/identify the following element:

  (9) [Ko kot-o an]_{foc} ni.  
  ID older.brother-1 1s.POSS PRES  
  ‘That’s my older brother.’ \[Baldé, Caudill & Diallo 2000: 15\]

- In term focus constructions, ko grammaticalized to a term focus marker, still identifying the focused element:

  (10) [Ko janngo]_{foc} o yah-ata.  
  TF tomorrow 3s go-A.IPFV.BG  
  ‘S/he will go TOMORROW.’

- Apart from the hypothesis that the term focus marker grammaticalized from a copula, it is also possible that the identificational marker developed to a copula

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9 The asterisk denotes that this form is not attested today.

10 Examples without any references are made up by myself with native speakers in Berlin.
2.3.2 In favor of the grammaticalization hypothesis: The background clause (out-of-focus part)

- The same verb paradigms (PFV.BG and IPFV.BG) are used as well in (subject and object) relative clauses for backgrounding the relative clause towards the matrix clause:

(11) Rewɓe [ɓe mi taw-i doo]_{Rel} ben kan-aa.
    women-2 REL.2 1S find-A.PFV.BG-1S here DEF.2 be.ugly-A.PFV.NEG

   ‘The women [that I found here] are not ugly.’

- This general background function is therefor also used in term focus constructions, still backgrounding the out-of-focus part and thus foregrounding the in-focus part:

(12) Ko honde tuma yah-u-daak ka maakitti?
    ID when go A PFV.BG-2S PREP market.1

   ‘WHEN did you go to the market?’

- In the Malian dialect the verb form is reanalyzed as focus marking: Focus does not need to be marked morphologically (the focus marker can be dropped), the syntactic fronting as well as the verb form are sufficient:

(13) Segu njipp-ii-mi. (Mali)
    Ko Segu mi cipp-ii. (Guinea)

   ‘I got out (of the car) at SEGU.’ [Gajdos 2004: 108]

- The deletion of the relative marker is not unusual and can be historically explained. E.g. in the Malian and in the Senegalese dialect the relative marker is already optionally deletable in relative clauses (whereas it is still obligatory in the Guinean dialect):

(14) Rewɓe [(ɓe taw-ɓi mi do)]_{Rel} ɓe ko yontaaɓe. (Senegal)
    Rewɓe [ ɓe mi taw-i doo]_{Rel} ɓen no labaa. (Guinea)

   women-2 REL.2 1S find-A.PFV.BG-1S here DEF.2 AUX be.beautiful

   ‘The women [that I found here] are beautiful.’ [Sylla 1982: 174]
3 Summary

⇒ Following Heine & Reh (1984: 156), a cleft may be seen as the source of the ex-situ focus strategy (in what they call ‘weakly grammaticalized systems’); This is why the out-of-focus part shows resemblances to relative clauses

⇒ The term focus construction in Fulfulde may thus be derived from a former cleft sentence:

(15) a. Fatu [yah-u-do ka maakiti]_{Rel} no welt-ii. RELATIVE
    Fatu go-A.PFV.BG-REL.1 PREP market.1 AUX be.happy-M.PFV.BG
    ‘Fatu [who went to the market] is happy.’

b. *Ko Fatu [yah-u-do ka maakiti]_{Rel,} *FORMER CLEFT
    COP Fatu go-A.PFV.BG-REL.1 PREP market.1
    ‘It is Fatu [who went to the market].’

c. Ko Fatu yah-i ka maakiti. TERM FOCUS
    TF Fatu go-A.PFV.BG PREP market.1
    ‘FATU went to the market.’

4 Abbreviations

* not attested today
A active voice
AUX auxiliary
BG background
CC cleft construction
COP copula
DEF definite
DO direct object
FOC focus
ID identificational marker
INCL inclusive
IO indirect object
IPFV imperfective
M middle voice
n number of elements
NEG negation
P plural
PFV perfective
POSS possessive pronoun
PREP preposition
PRES presentational marker
REL relative marker
Rel relative clause
S singular
S subject
-S suffixed subject pronoun
TAM tense-aspect-mood
TF term focus marker
V verb
X focused element
Z other elements of a clause (adverbs, prepositional phrases etc.)
5 References


