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

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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:
Ä nà-nà dé.
3S come-PFV.INTR OP.FOC
{Amadu didn’t come.} (No) He did come. (Prokhorov 2013: 7)

(1b) Intensification in BAMBARA:
Ä 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):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predicate-centered focus</th>
<th>Operator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State of affairs (SoA)</td>
<td>T(empus)A(spect)M(odal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(What did the princess do with the frog?)</td>
<td>(I cannot imagine that the princess kissed the slippery frog.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She KISSED him.</td>
<td>Yes, she DID kiss him.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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


- 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 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:

\[
\text{… nà } \text{nduso}_2 \text{ la nduso } \text{yé.} \\
\text{but INF.be.worm.eaten G.FOC 3S.be.worm.eaten BG} \\
\{V_{\text{FIN}} \} [V_{\text{INF}}]
\]

\{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 BAGIRM – for marking SoA focus:

\[
\text{Boukar tâd djùm têŋ tâdà.} \\
\text{PN PFV.do gruel millet INF.do} \\
\{SBJ V_{\text{FIN}} OBJ \} [V_{\text{INF}}]
\]

\{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)

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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](image)

+ 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) Tèj̀̀ ní-tèn dá yikə́́ ni yiƙə́ dá.
    honey DEM BG INF.be.sweet that 3S.be.sweet BG
    [SBJ dá]TOP [VINF] [ni VFIN 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 màjà́́ ni màjà́ dá.
    motorcycle BG INF.be.good that 3S.be.good BG
    [SBJ dá]TOP [VINF] [ni VFIN 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) bògò ń à bògò 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 kàsò 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” and can be sub-divided into
  object quantity (He steals a considerable amount) and
  event quantity (He steals intensively)

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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 kó màjə sà àí.
eggplant BG be.bitter INF-be.bitter that be.good eat NEG
[SUB dá V_FIN] [V_INF] [kó 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 màŋó sà kó 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] [kó 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 màjò ta màjò.
    boule POSS-3S be.good just INF.be.good
    [SBJ VFIN] [ta] [VINF]

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-mí ta nan-mí ...
    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 *kòon*, *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) Ndii èdò ta k-èdò.
    water 3S.fall just INF-fall
    [SBJ VFIN] [ta] [VINF]

It does nothing but rain. (Keegan 1997: 147)

(10b) Ày kàsò ta k-ày.
    3S.drink alcohol just INF-drink
    [VFIN OBJ] [ta] [VINF]

(S/he) does nothing but drink. (Keegan 1997: 147)
+ the examples show **intensification**

- 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

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

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**
- whereas all stative verbs express qualitative intensification,
- active verbs always refer to quantitative intensification

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

+ 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative intensification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative intensification of the event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative intensification of the object</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 këë, ...
INF.cultiver 2S:FUT cultiver FOC
[V_INF] [V_AUX V_FIN këë]
Tu as beaucoup labouré ... (Neukom 2010: 261)
(You have much cultivated ... – PJ)
```
verb preposing for marking intensification (event/object quantity) in SAR:

\[ \text{ɓògə́ lábə́ ɓògə́ ngáý.} \]

INF.steal PN 3S.steal much

\([V_{\text{INF}}] [\text{SBJ } V_{\text{FIN}} \text{ 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-incidence 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>high level</td>
<td>excessive level</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>minus</th>
<th>plus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative</td>
<td>positive</td>
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</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADV</td>
<td>Adverbial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BG</td>
<td>Background</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEM</td>
<td>Demonstrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIN</td>
<td>Finite</td>
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<td>FOC</td>
<td>Focus</td>
</tr>
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<td>Future</td>
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<td>Identificational</td>
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References


