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Typology of Constituent Focus in a West African Language: A Minimalist Analysis

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Abstract

This paper investigated the syntax of focus constructions in Yorùbá detailing the strategy, devices and methods employed for them. Ten (10) native speakers aged 60 and above were purposively selected for structured oral interview based on their proficiency. Data were subjected to syntactic analysis using Rizzi's Split CP Hypothesis of the Minimalist Program. Yorùbá operates *ex-situ* strategy as the syntactic device to form its focus constructions. A focused constituent is copied to the specifier position of the focus phrase (spec FocP) to

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check the [+focus, EF] on the Foc⁰. A focused constituent is obligatorily followed by the focus marker *ni*. Argument positions accessible to focusing in the language are subject DP, object DP, preposition DP and genitive DP while accessible non-argument positions are predicate/verb and adjuncts or post modifiers. Focusing a VP/predicate, the language operates two methods: it either lexicalises the [+nominal] feature copied from the main verb at the clause left peripheral position or externally merges the nominalised form of a verb as the specifier of the FocP. Only a constituent specified with [+nominal] feature can be hosted at the specifier position of a focus phrase in Yorùbá.

Keywords: focus phrase, focus feature, argument position, Minimalist Program, Yorùbá

1. Introduction

Focus refers to the part of a clause which provides the most relevant or salient information in a given discourse situation. It consists of the new information at the centre of a discourse (Crystal 1980). Jones (2006) refers to focus as a grammatical way of marking the organisation of information in a discourse. According to her, focus is not abstract. Languages can mark focus syntactically, prosodically and morphologically, or use the combination of these grammatical means. To her, Yorùbá focus does not trigger existence presuppositions, and it does not have obligatory exhaustivity effects. Expression of focus, according to Gussenhoven (2007), reflects three linguistic devices: one, syntax; this has to do with the position of the focus constituent in a syntactic structure and the focus particle; two, morphology; under this, we have affixation; three, phonology; this has to do with the presence of pitch, type of pitch accent and prosodic phrasing. Following Carlos' view above, Yorùbá operates syntactic

strategy to form its focus constructions. Movement is feature-driven in MP¹, therefore, the strong feature on the Foc-head F⁰ triggers the movement of the constituent bearing a focus feature from within the vP domain to the spec FocP where it subsequently has its features checked through specifier and head agreement (Schwars 2007).

Based on the functions that focus constructions are employed for, they can be classified into identificational focus, information focus and contrastive focus (Arókoyò 2013, Oláògún 2016, Oláńrewájú 2022a). This paper has four sections. Section 1 discusses the introductory part. In Section 2, the existing literature, particularly on the categorial status of relative and focus constructions in Yorùbá, are discussed. A detailed analysis on the syntax of focus constructions is done in Section 3 while the concluding remarks are done in Section 4.

2. On the Categorial Status of Focus Constructions in Yorùbá

There are two different opinions on the categorial status of focus constructions in Yorùbá. Awóbùlúyì (1978, 1987, 1992, 2013) classifies them as noun phrases while extant works like Bámgbóşé (1990), Owólabí (1983, 1987, 1989), Yusuf (1990), Adéwołé (1991), Oláńrewájú (2008, 2022b) and so on classify them as sentences. Awobùlúyì's principal point in support of his argument is based on

¹ The following abbreviations are used in this paper: DP (determiner phrase), EF (edge feature), FOC (focus marker), FocP (focus phrase), GER (gerund), MP (Minimalist Program), MTS (mid-tone syllable), NEG (negative marker), NOM (nominalisation), PRM (pre-modifier), PROG (progressive aspect marker), PSM (post-modifier), REL (relative marker), RES (resumptive pronoun), TP (tense phrase), VP (verb phrase), vP (light verb phrase).

the occurrence of both focus and relative constructions as complements of the verb *şe*, as shown in the examples below:

- (1) a. Kìí şe ìwé ni mo rà.
 NEG be book FOC I buy
 ‘It was not a book I bought.’
- b. Kìí şe ìwé tí mo rà.
 NEG be book REL I buy
 ‘It was not the book I bought.’

Several extant works upholding the opposing view to Awóbùlúyì’s position have supported their claims with many facts drawn from the language (Owólabí 1983, 1987, 1989; Adéwoḷé 1991; Oḷáńrewájú 2008, 2022a and so on). Based on this, this paper discusses some other underlying technicalities that factor the occurrence of both *ìwé ni mo rà* and *ìwé tí mo rà* in (1a, b) above as complements of the verb *şe*. It is discovered that apart from *şe* ‘be’ identified by Awóbùlúyì, *jé* ‘be’ is another lexical verb that exhibits this similar syntactic behaviour in Yorùbá as depicted in the examples below:

- (2) a. Bì ó bá şe ìwé ni o rà ...
 if it PRM be book FOC you buy
 ‘If it was a BOOK you bought...’
- b. Bì ó bá jé ìwé ni o rà ...
 if it PRM be book FOC you buy
 If it was a BOOK you bought ...

Ontologically, *şe* ‘be’, *jé* ‘be’ and the copula *ni* ‘be’ are closely

related. Therefore, it is not impossible to assume that this permits *şe* and *jé* to subcategorise focus constructions as clausal complements. In line with the existing literature disregarding focus constructions as noun phrases, below are some other syntactic evidence corroborating the fact that both relative clauses and focus constructions have different categorial status.

A focus construction cannot accommodate an overt subject unlike its relative construction counterpart when occurring as a complement of *şe* as shown in the examples below:

- (3) a. *Èyí kii şe iwé ni mo rà.
 this NEG be book FOC I buy
- b. Èyí kii şe iwé tí mo rà.
 this NEG be book REL I buy
 ‘This was not the book I bought.’
- c. ?Èyí kii şe pé iwé ni mo rà.
 this NEG be that book FOC I buy
- d. *Èyí kii şe pé iwé ti mo rà.
 this NEG be that book REL I buy
- e. *Èyí kii şe pé iwé wọn.
 this NEG be that book they
- f. Èyí kii şe iwé wọn.
 this NEG be book they
 ‘This is not their book.’

The verb *şe* sub-categorises a clausal complement in (3a),

consequently, the example is ill-formed. Examples (3b), (3f) are grammatical, *şe* in this environment takes a DP complement. Also, (3c) is acceptable because the clausal complement has been nominalised by *pé*, while (3d)–(3e) are ill-formed (cf. Olanrewaju 2022a). The implication borne out of this is that whenever the spec TP is overtly realised, *şe* as a predicate never sub-categorises a clausal complement, otherwise, the embedded clause is nominalised by a complementiser. A clause like (4) below is ill-formed in Yorùbá.

- (4) *Oyè gbà [TP Adé lọ].
Oyè accept Adé go

The restricting clause in (4) above can only be licensed by nominalising it using the complementiser *pé/kí* as depicted in (5) below:

- (5) Oyè gbà pé/kí Adé lọ.
Oyè accept that Adé go
'Oyè accepted that Adé left/Oyè agreed that Adé should go.'

Stacking of a relative construction with other qualifiers is another empirical evidence that depicts a structural difference between relative and focus constructions (Owólabí 1987, 1989). Let us consider (6) below:

- (6) a. Ìwé títun tí ó rà yí kan náà ni o n kà.
book new that he buy this one the FOC he be read
'He was reading the same new book he bought.'
- b. *Ìwé títun ni ó rà yí kan náà ti o n kà.
book new FOC he buy this one the that he be read

A sentence like (6b) above is never operated by Yorùbá speakers. Occurrence of *ni ó rà* with other qualifiers causes the ill-formedness of (6a) above, *ni ó rà* never functions as a qualifier.

A clausal complement can be nominalised unlike a relative clause. Let us consider the examples below:

- (7) a. Gbogbo wón mò pé iwé ni mo rà.
 all they know that book FOC I buy
 ‘They all knew I bought a book.’
- b. Gbogbo wón gbà pe Olú ti lọ.
 all they accept that Olú have go
 ‘They all accepted that Olú has left.’
- c. *Gbogbo wón gbà pe Olú ti ó lọ.
 all they accept that Olú that he go
- d. *Gbogbo wón mò pé iwé ti mo rà.
 all they know that book that I buy
- e. Gbogbo wón mò iwé ti mo rà.
 all they know book that I buy
 ‘They all knew the book I bought.’

Only (7c)–(7e) have embedded relative clauses in the examples above. Examples (7c) and (7d) above are ill-formed because a complementiser does not collocate with a DP; instead, it nominalises a higher category like a sentence. The restricting clauses, that is, the clausal complements are all nominalised in each of (7a) and (7b); a focus construction is nominalised in (7a) while simple affirmative

sentence is nominalised in (7b). The implication borne out of these examples is that a relative clause is a DP unlike its focus construction counterpart. Yusuf (1990) rightly remarks that Awóbùlúyì's works on this particular position are survey of limited data. Consequent upon this, he was unable to adequately discuss the underlying technicalities on the issue. This same school of thought still needs to account for the reasons why a focus construction cannot occur as a clausal complement of other verbs in Yorùbá. For instance, the verbs *mọ̀* 'know' and *gbà* 'accept', never subcategorise focus constructions as clausal complements as shown in (8) below:

- (8) a. *Wọ̀n mọ̀ iwé **ni** mo rà.
 they know book FOC I buy
- b. Wọ̀n mọ̀ iwé **tí** mo rà.
 they know book that I buy
 'They knew the book I bought.'
- c. *Wọ̀n kò gba ọ̀rọ̀ **ni** mo sọ.
 they NEG accept word FOC I say
- d. Wọ̀n kò gba ọ̀rọ̀ **ti** mo sọ.
 they NEG accept word that I say
 'They did not accept what I said.'

The lexical verb *mọ̀* 'know' and *gbà* 'accept/take' subcategorise relative constructions as their complements in (8b) and (8d) unlike their focus construction counterparts in (8a) and (8c).

3. Minimalist Analysis of Focus Constructions in Yorùbá

Yorùbá employs syntactic device, a process whereby the focus constituent is copied to the clause left peripheral position to check the [+focus] feature on the Foc^0 through specifier and head agreement. This is also referred to as *ex-situ* strategies in some literature.

3.1. Positions Accessible to Focus in Yorùbá

Argument positions accessible to focus in Yorùbá are Subject DP, Object DP, Preposition DP and Genitive DP while accessible non-argument positions are predicate/verb and Adjuncts or post modifiers. A clause can also be focused in the language *iff* it undergoes nominalisation, and it is base-generated in an argument position. In Yorùbá, only a constituent with [+nominal] feature can be hosted at the spec FocP (Ìlòrí 2010, Arókoyò 2013, Oládògún 2016, Oláńrewájú 2022b). Now, let us consider the positions one after the other for the purpose of explanatory adequacy.

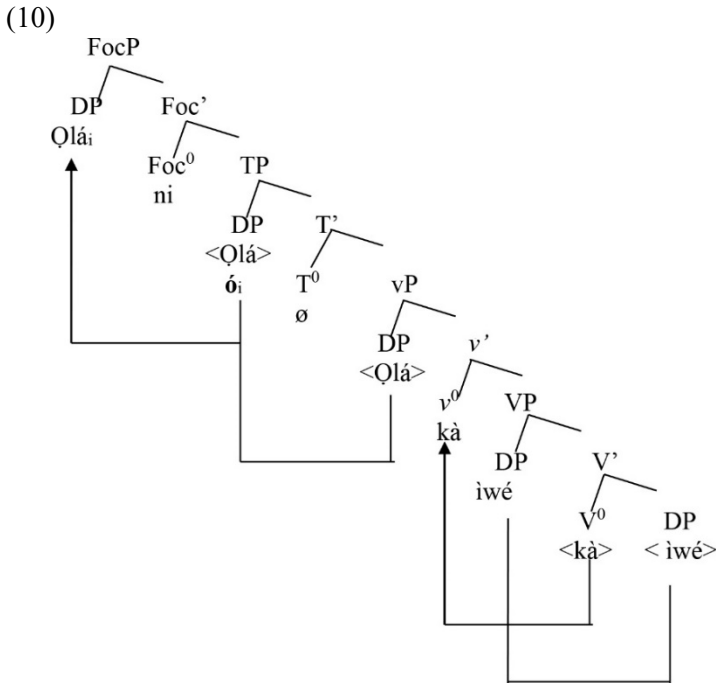
3.1.1. Subject DP Focusing

Similar to some other languages, in Yorùbá, a subject DP performs the action or acts upon the verb in a clause. Let us consider the following examples:

- (9) a. Olá ni ó kà ìwé.
 Olá FOC RES read book
 ‘OLÁ read a book.’

- b. Oyè ni ó ní gbàdùrà.
 Oyè FOC RES PROG take-prayer
 ‘OYÈ was praying.’

The subject DP in each of the examples in (9a) and (9b) are copied from the subject canonical position to the clause left periphery. The resumptive pronoun is inserted at the subject position to save the derivation from a crash after *Operation Copy and Delete* had been applied on the spec TP. The focus construction in (9a) above is phrase-marked as (10) below.



In the derivation above, the verb *kà* ‘read’ merges with the DP *ìwé* ‘book’ which is the object of the transitive verb. Then, the direct object DP *ìwé* ‘book’ is copied to the specifier position of the verb phrase (spec VP) to have its case feature checked through specifier and head agreement. The derivation proceeds by merging the null performative light verb v^0 with the VP to project the v -bar. The strong vF on the light v^0 attracts the lexical verb *kà* ‘read’ to adjoin to itself. The subject DP *Ọlá* is externally merged with the V-bar *ka ìwé* ‘read book’ to project *Ọlá ka ìwé* ‘Ọlá read book’ in line the Predicate-Internal Subject Hypothesis (PISH) which requires the subject of a sentence to be base-generated within the VP. The derivation proceeds by merging the T^0 to project the T-bar. The T^0 as a probe at this point selects the subject DP *Ọlá* (being an active goal within its c-command domain) and attracts it to the spec TP to value its unvalued [+EPP, case] feature. The derivation proceeds by externally merging the Foc^0 *ni* with the TP to project the Foc-bar while the Foc^0 as a probe searches its c-command domain for a matching goal *Ọlá*, which is attracted to the spec FocP to have its [+Foc] feature checked. Therefore, *Operation Copy and Delete* is applied on the subject DP *Ọlá*. Consequently, it is deleted both at the PF and LF levels. The spec TP must be visible to the PF interface (in (10)) above. Therefore, a resumptive pronoun *ó* is inserted at the spec TP to save the derivation from a crash.

3.1.2. Object DP Focusing

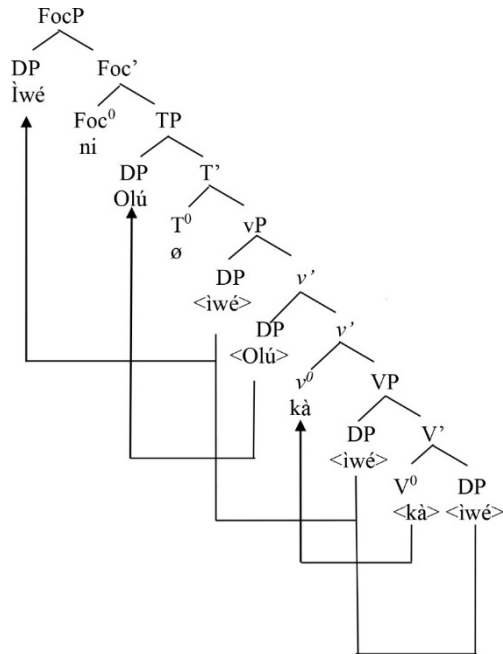
A direct DP object of a transitive verb in Yorùbá is a DP that receives the action performed by the subject of a clause. Let us consider the examples below:

(11) a. Owó ni mo rí.
 money FOC I see
 ‘I got MONEY.’

b. Ìwé ni Olú kà.
 book FOC Olú read
 ‘Olú read A BOOK.’

Object DPs are attracted to the spec FocP in each of (19a) and (19b) above, and hence, cause the main verbs (boldly printed) to be stranded. Example (11b) is phrase-marked as (12) below for a better illustration.

(12)



The derivation above goes thus: The verb *kà* ‘count’ first merges with the DP *ìwé* ‘book’ to satisfy the c-selection requirement of the verb *kà*, and to form the V-bar. After this, the DP *ìwé* ‘book’ is internally merged at the spec VP by *Operation Copy and Delete* so as to check its case feature. The derivation proceeds by merging the null performative light v^0 with the VP to project the v -bar. The strong $v\bar{F}$ on the light v^0 attracts the lexical verb *kà* ‘count’ to adjoin to itself. The DP *Olú* is externally merged as the inner spec $v\bar{P}$ to satisfy the PISH which requires the subject of a sentence to be base-generated within the predicate. The DP *ìwé* ‘book’ is attracted to the outer spec $v\bar{P}$, an escape hatch which licenses it from the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC). Consequently, this allows the DP *ìwé* ‘book’ to be visible for subsequent operations. After this, the abstract T^0 is selected from the numeration and merged with the light verb phrase ($v\bar{P}$) to project the T-bar while the T^0 probes *Olú* to the specifier position of the tense phrase (TP) to have its [+case, EPP] feature checked. After this, the Foc^0 *ni* is selected from the numeration and merged with the TP to project the Foc-bar, while the Foc^0 as a probe searches and attracts the DP *ìwé* ‘book’ to the spec FocP to check its [+focus, EF] feature through specifier and head agreement.

3.1.3. An Object DP in Double Complement Constructions

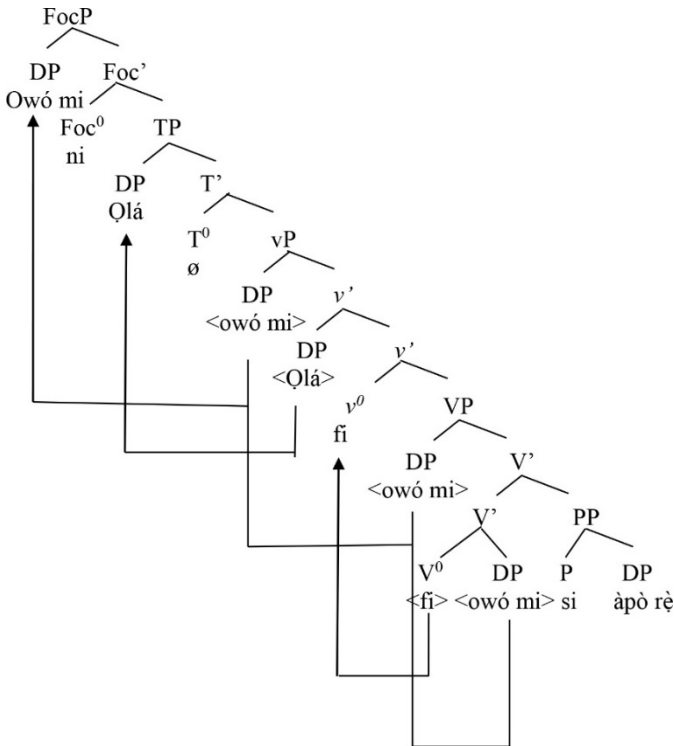
A direct object DP can still be focused in a clause where a transitive verb subcategorises double complements: a direct DP and PP complements. Let us consider the data below:

- (13) a. Owó mi ni Ọlá fí sí àpò rẹ.
 money me FOC Ọlá put to pocket his
 ‘Ọlá put MY MONEY in his pocket.’

- b. Aşò ní Táyò ra ni ilú Òyó.
 cloth FOC Táyò buy at town Òyó
 ‘Táyò bought A CLOTH at Òyó town.’

The direct DP object complements *owó* ‘money’ and *aşò* ‘cloth’ in (13a) and (13b) are attracted to the clause left periphery for focusing respectively. Example (13b) is represented in the syntax tree below:

(14)



The derivation in (14) above goes thus: The main verb *fi* ‘put’ merges with the direct object DP *owó mi* ‘my money’ to project the lower V-bar and also to satisfy the c-selection requirement of the lexical verb *fi*. Meanwhile, the lower V-bar merges with the PP *si àpò rẹ̀* ‘to his pocket’ to project the higher V-bar. The direct object DP *owó mi* ‘my money’ is internally merged at the spec VP to have its case feature checked. The derivation proceeds by merging the null performative light verb v^0 with the VP to project the v -bar. The strong vF on the light v^0 attracts the lexical verb *fi* to adjoin to itself. The subject DP *Ọlá* is externally merged at the inner spec vP to satisfy the PISH. The direct object DP *owó mi* ‘my money’ is copied to the outer spec vP to avoid being frozen within the vP phase, also, to be licensed for subsequent syntactic operations. The derivation proceeds by merging the abstract T^0 to project the T-bar. The abstract T^0 as a probe searches through its c-command domain and attracts *Ọlá* to the spec TP to check its [+EPP, case] feature. The derivation still proceeds by externally merging the Foc^0 *li* with the TP to project the Foc-bar. The Foc^0 as a probe also searches through its c-command domain to attract the direct object DP *owó* from the outer spec vP (the escape hatch from the PIC) to the spec FocP where it values its [+focus, EF].

3.1.4. Prepositional Object DP Focusing

A DP complement of a preposition can be focused in Yorùbá as considered in (15) below:

- (15) a. Orí ẹní ni Ọ́jó sùn sí.
 head mat FOC Ọ́jó sleep to
 ‘Ọ́jó slept on a MAT.’

bi. Ilé ni Òjọ wà.
 house FOC Òjọ exist
 ‘Òjọ was at HOME.’

bii. Ní ilé ni Òjọ wà.
 at house FOC Òjọ exist
 ‘Òjọ was at HOME.’

The DP complements of the prepositions *sí* ‘to’ (*orí ení*) and *ní* ‘at’ (*ilé*) are focused in (15a)–(15bii) above. The PP head (*sí*) is left orphaned in (15a) unlike the PP head *ní* deleted in (15bi). It is discovered that preposition stranding is predicated on two factors: one, the types of PP head used, and two, nominalisation strategies. Let us discuss how preposition stranding is affected by the types of prepositions before we return to explain how it is motivated by nominalisation strategies in Yorùbá. Unlike prepositions *ní* ‘in/at’, preposition *sí* ‘to’ is never pied-piped along with a DP complement in Yorùbá. The same thing is applicable to *tí* ‘from’. The examples below elucidate better on this.

(16) a. Ọré Adé ni Olú ju ọwọ sí.
 friend Adé FOC Olú throw hand to
 ‘Olú waved HIS FRIEND.’

b. *Sí Ọré Adé ni Olú ju ọwọ.
 to friend Adé FOC Olú throw hand

(17) a. Ilé-ẹ̀kọ́ ni Oyè ti ____ dé.
 house-learning FOC Oyè have arrive
 ‘Oyè has arrived from THE SCHOOL.’

b. *Ti Ilé-ẹ̀kọ́ ni Oyè ti ____ dé.
 from house-learning FOC Oyè have arrive

(18) a. Ilé-ẹ̀kọ́ ni wọ́n wà.
 house-learning FOC they exist
 ‘They were at THE SCHOOL.’

b. Ní ilé ni ó wà.
 at house FOC he exist
 ‘He was at HOME.’

As depicted in (16a) above, the PP head *sí* ‘to’ is left orphaned after its DP complement had been attracted to the clause left periphery. The ill-formedness of (16b) is consequent upon the pied-piping of the preposition *si* ‘to’ alongside the DP. In (17a) the preposition *ti* ‘from’ is deleted. It never remains stranded. Example (17b) crashes because the preposition *ti* ‘from’ is pied-piped along with its complement *ilé* ‘house’. In (18a), the preposition *ni* ‘at/in’ undergoes deletion, while it is pied-piped in (18b). The conclusion borne out of this is that, preposition stranding in Yorùbá is factored by the particular prepositions used in focus constructions.

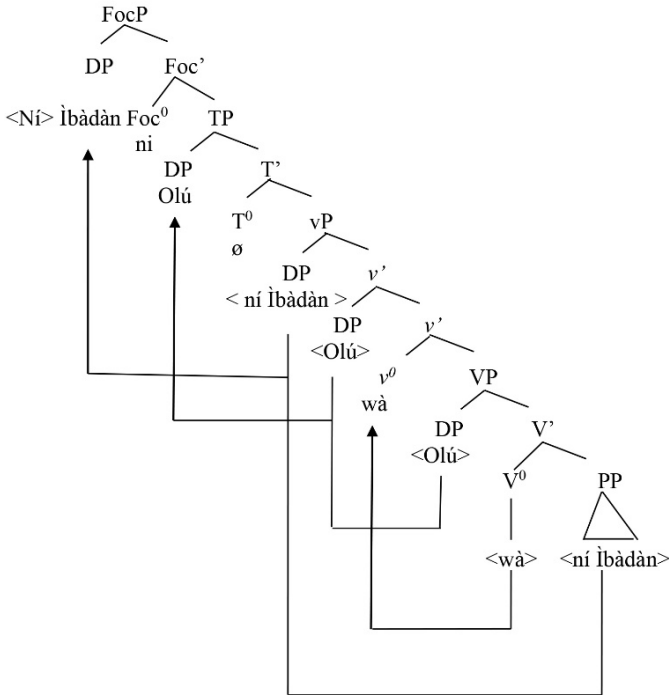
Now, on the second factor, that is how nominalisation strategies affect preposition deletion, let us consider the examples below:

(19) a. Ìbàdàn ni Olú wà.
 Ìbàdàn FOC Olú exist
 ‘Olú stays in ÌBÀDÀN.’

b. Ní ìbàdàn ni Olú wà.
 at Ìbàdàn FOC Olú exist
 ‘Olú stays in ÌBÀDÀN.’

In (19a) above, the PP head *ní* is deleted both at the PF and LF interfaces before the spell-out while the same is only visible to the PF interface in (19b) after the derivation had reached its spell-out. Consequent upon this, the process does not affect the LF interface. The PP head is dropped in line with nominalisation (strategy). Only nominal items are hosted at the spec FocP. However, it is not impossible to assume that a PP is also hosted at the spec FocP in Yorùbá (Ìlòrí 2010, Qláògún 2016, Qláńrewájú 2022b), but one still needs to investigate why this is possible *iff* *ní* is used as a PP head. The phrase-marker below better illustrates how (19) is derived.

(20)



The derivation in (20) above goes thus: The lexical verb *wà* ‘exist’ is merged with the PP complement *ní Ìbàdàn* ‘in Ìbàdàn’ to project the V-bar, while the subject DP *Olú* merges with the V-bar so as to conform to the PISH. After this, the derivation proceeds by merging the null performative light verb v^0 with the VP to project the v -bar. The strong vF on the light performative verb v^0 attracts the lexical verb *wà* ‘exist’ to adjoin to itself. Also, the subject DP *Olú* is attracted to the inner spec vP in line with the PISH while the PP *ní Ìbàdàn* occupies the outer spec vP as an escape hatch from the PIC. The derivation proceeds by merging the abstract T^0 to project the T-bar. The T^0 as a probe searches its c-command domain and attracts the subject DP *Olú* to the spec TP to check its [+EPP, case] feature. The derivation proceeds by externally merging the focus marker *ní* with the TP to project the Foc-bar. The Foc^0 as a potential probe searches its c-command domain and probes the PP *ní Ìbàdàn* ‘at Ìbàdàn’ to the specifier position of the focus phrase (FocP) to check its [+focus, EF]. At this point, the derivation is spelled out as a focus construction. After the spell-out, the preposition *ní* ‘at’ undergoes a phonological process (deletion) only at the PF level, not LF interface, because the two interfaces are already split.

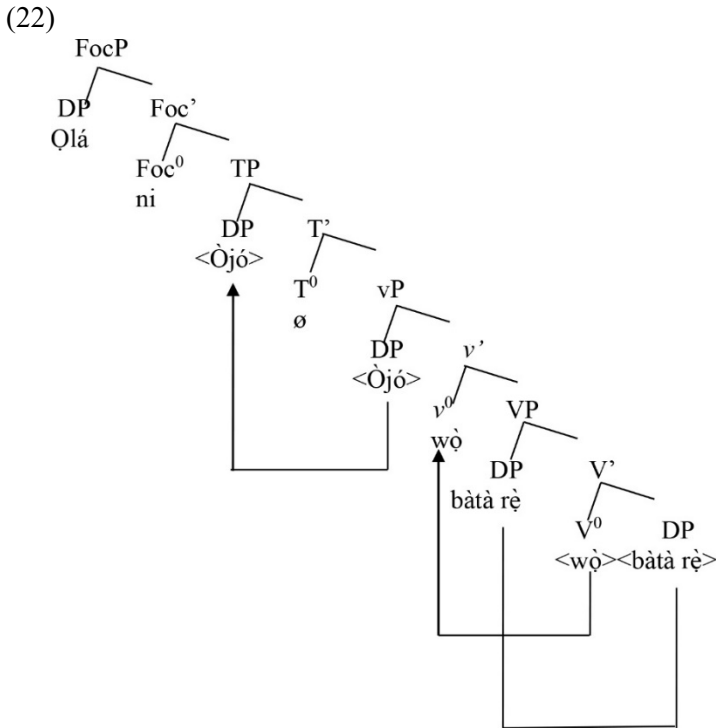
3.1.5. Genitive DP Focusing

Genitive DPs are DPs that are specified with feature properties mainly used to show possession in the grammar of a language. These types can also be focused in Yorùbá as shown in the examples below:

- (21) a. Ìyábò ni bàbá rẹ jẹ ọ̀ṣu.
 Ìyábò FOC father her eat yam
 ‘Ìyábò is the one whose father ate yam.’

- b. Ọlá ni Ọjó wọ bàtà rẹ.
 Ọlá FOC Ọjó wear shoe his
 ‘Ọlá is the one whose shoes Ọjó put on.’

The genitive DP *Íyábò* is focused in (21a) while the possessive DP *Ọlá* is focused in (21b). Under minimalist assumption, (21b) can be accounted for as shown in (22) below:


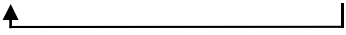



The focus construction in (22) above is derived thus: The lexical verb *wọ* ‘wear’ merges with the DP *bàtà rẹ* ‘his shoe’ to project the V-bar. Later, the object DP *bàtà rẹ* ‘his shoe’ is externally merged at

the spec VP to have its case feature checked through specifier and head agreement. The derivation proceeds by merging the null performative light verb v^0 with the verb phrase (VP) to project the v -bar while the strong vF on the light verb v^0 attracts the main verb $w\grave{o}$ ‘wear’ to adjoin to itself. After this, the subject DP $\acute{O}j\acute{o}$ merges at the specifier position of the light verb phrase (vP) to conform to the PISH. The derivation proceeds by merging the abstract T^0 with the light verb phrase (vP) to project the T-bar, while the T^0 probes the DP $\acute{O}j\acute{o}$, an active and visible goal to the spec TP to check its [+EPP, case] feature. The derivation still proceeds by externally merging the focus marker *ni* (the Foc^0) to project the Foc-bar. Once the numeration is yet to be exhausted, *Olá* is externally merged at the spec FocP to check the [+focus, EF] through specifier and head agreement.

3.1.6. VP/Predicate Focusing

In Aboh (2004), three strategies involved in verb focus constructions are proposed as shown in (23) below:

- (23) a. $[_{FocP} \quad [_{Foc^0} \quad V_i] \quad [_{IP} \quad \text{---}V_i\text{---} \quad]]]$

- b. $[_{FocP} [_{Nom} \quad GER-V]_i [_{Foc^0} \quad] \quad [_{IP} \quad \text{---}V_i\text{---} \quad]]]$

- c. $[_{FocP} \quad [_{\Sigma P} \quad VP]_i \quad [_{Foc^0} \quad] \quad [_{IP} \quad \text{---}([_{\Sigma P} \quad VP])_i\text{---} \quad]]]$


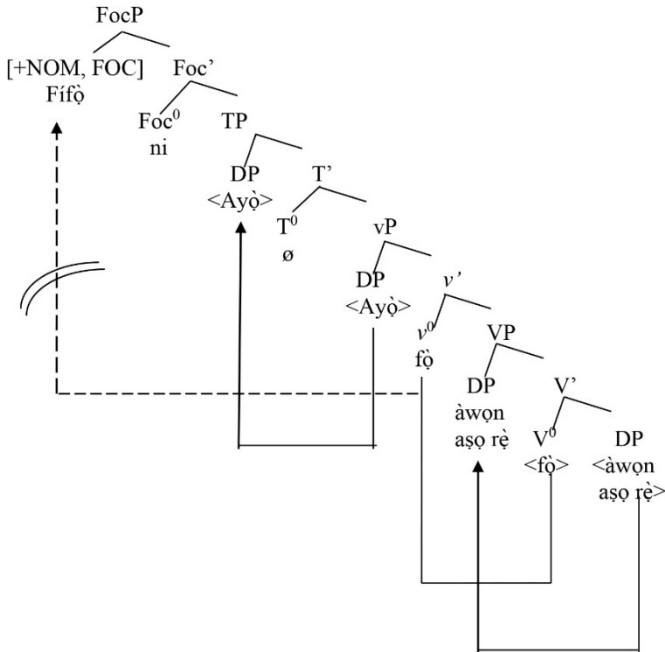
(Aboh 2004: 12)

In (23a), the preposed constituent is a verb, a nominalised/reduplicated/gerundive verb in (23b), and a nominalised sequence in Σ P containing a full verb phrase with or without a trace in (23c). The types (23a) and (23b) are referred to as verb copying and nominalised verb strategies (Ansah 2014). Yorùbá VP/predicate focusing is closely related to the strategy in (23b). Let us consider the examples below:

- (24) a. Fífò ni Ayò fọ àwọn aṣọ rẹ.
 NOM FOC Ayò wash they cloth his
 ‘Ayò WASHED his cloth.’
- b. Şíṣe ni Ọlá ẹ işé ẹ rẹ.
 NOM FOC Ọlá do work-MTS his
 ‘Ọlá DID his work’

There are two ways of deriving each of the the examples in (24a) and (24b) above. The first method is to assume that the [+nominal] feature on the verb is copied and lexicalised as a nominal/gerundive form at the spec FocP as shown below:

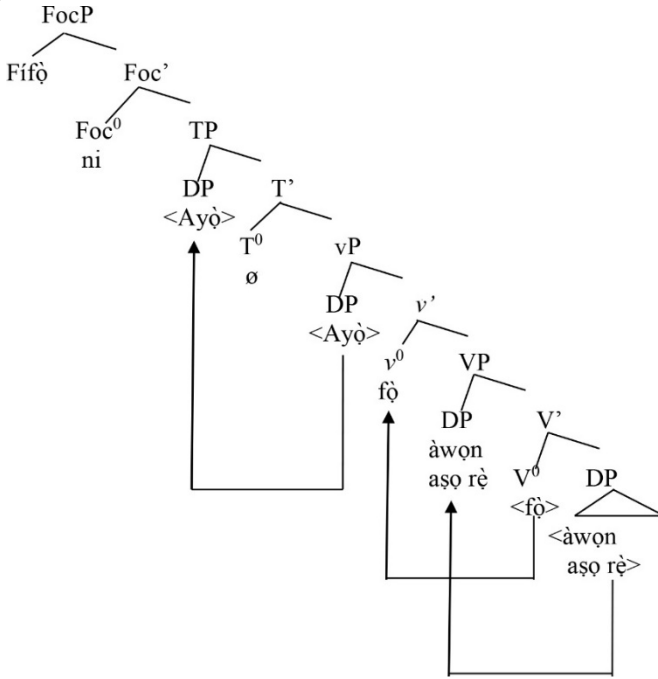
(25)



The derivation in (25) above goes as follows: The lexical verb *fò* ‘wash’ merges with the DP *àwọn așò rẹ̀* ‘his clothes’ to satisfy the c-selection requirement of the verb, and hence projects the v-bar *fò àwọn așò rẹ̀* ‘wash his clothes’. After this, the same object DP *àwọn așò rẹ̀* ‘his clothes’ is copied to the spec VP for feature valuation where its [+case] feature is checked. The derivation proceeds by selecting the null performative light verb v^0 and merging it with the verb phrase (VP) to project the v-bar, while the strong vF on light verb v^0 attracts the main verb *fò* ‘wash’ to adjoin to itself. Also, the DP *Ayò* externally merges as the specifier of the light verb phrase (vP) in line with the PISH. The derivation proceeds by merging the abstract T^0 with the vP to project the T-bar. The T^0 as a probe searches its c-

command domain and attracts the subject DP *Ayò* to the spec TP to check its [+EPP, case] feature. Consequently, it is valued a nominative case. The derivation still proceeds by externally merging the focus marker *ni* (the Foc^0) to project the Foc-bar. *Operation Copy and Delete* only applies on the strong [+nominal] feature on the verb *fò* ‘wash’, the lexical verb in the νP domain. Oḷáògún (2016: 171), following Chomsky (1995) on feature specification, claims that “every verb in languages is specified [+nominal] feature which is not lexicalised, except at the FocP in languages that operate strong [+nominal] such as Yorùbá”. Therefore, the Foc^0 *ni* as a probe in (22) attracts only the [+nominal] feature on *fò* ‘wash’ to the spec FocP where it is lexicalised as *fífò* ‘washing’ (a gerundive/nominal form) to be able to value the unvalued [+focus, EF] on the Foc^0 through specifier and head agreement. It is equally important to note that the operation above is not in perfect compliance with the PIC. This may be factored by the legibility of the original copy of the verb (in the νP domain) to PF interface. Also, the process of copying the [+nominal] feature from the ν^0 to the spec FocP, a non-head position violates Head Movement Constraints (Radford 2009, Oḷánrewájú 2022a). Therefore, these inadequacies are obviated by the second method depicted in the phrase marker (26) below:

(26)



The assumption on (26) is that *fífò*, the nominalised/gerundive form of the verb is formed in the numeration. Therefore, it is externally merged at the spec FocP for feature valuation. Unlike the first method, this second method preserves economy of efforts.

3.1.7. Focusing of (Post) Adverbs/Adverbials (Post-Modifiers)

Awóbùlúyì (2013: 14) takes a radical departure from the traditional position by identifying words like *kíá-kíá* ‘quickly’, *wéré-wéré* ‘quickly’, *jéjéjé* ‘easily’, *diè-diè* ‘gradually/easily’ and so on as nouns and not adverbs in Yorùbá. This paper picks examples of adverbs from

nominalised idophones in Yorùbá. Let us consider the examples below:

- (27) a. [_{FocP} *Túú* [_{Foc'} *ni* [_{TP} *Bámidélé dide*]]].
 NOM FOC *Bámidélé* stand
 ‘*Bámidélé* stood QUIETLY.’
- b. [_{FocP} *Şìì* [_{Foc'} *ni* [_{TP} *òkò náà dùró*]]].
 NOM FOC lorry the stop
 ‘The lorry stopped SUDDENLY.’

The focused constituents *túú* and *şìì* in (27) above are merged at the spec FocP to check the [+Foc, EF] feature on the Foc⁰ through specifier and head agreement. They are nominalised constituents with different feature properties from their adverbial counterparts in (28) below. This licenses them to be hosted at the spec FocP where they check the [+Foc] feature on the Foc-head.

- (28) a. [_{TP} *Bámidélé dide túú*].
 Bámidélé stand PSM
 ‘*Bámidélé* stood quietly.’
- b. [_{TP} *Òkò náà dùró şìì*].
 lorry the stop PSM
 ‘The lorry stopped suddenly.’

3.1.8. Focusing of Long Pronouns

Long pronouns are also referred to as pronominals in Yorùbá. Let us consider the examples below on how the language places prominence on long pronouns.

- (29) a. [_{FocP} Èmi [_{Foc'} ni [_{EmphP} <èmi> [_{Emph'} Ø [_{TP} mo pe iyá mi]]]]].
 I Foc I call mother me
 'I was the one that called my mother.'
- b. [_{FocP} Èmi ni [_{EmphP} <èmi> [_{TP} bàbá [_{vP} <èmi> [_{v'} <bàbá> pè
 I FOC father call
 [_{VP} <èmi> <pè> <èmi>]]]]]]].
 'Father called ME.'

In (29a) the long pronoun *èmi* 'I' enters the derivation at the pragmatic domain (the spec EmphP, it later moves to the spec FocP). Unlike (29a) and (29b) has a different derivation. In (29b), the long pronoun *èmi* 'me' enters the derivation at the VP domain before it moves through the outer spec vP to the spec EmphP where the unvalued [+emphasis] feature on the Emph-head is checked before it is later attracted to the spec FocP to check the [+EF, Foc] feature on the Foc^0 through specifier and head agreement.

3.1.9. Complementiser Phrase Focusing

A complementiser phrase or a sentence can be moved to the clause left peripheral position for the purpose of focusing as shown in the examples below:

- (30) [_{FocP} Ki ẹ wá gan-an [_{Foc'} ni [_{TP} mo [_{vP} <kí ẹ wá
 that you come exactly FOC I
 gan-an> [_{v'} <mo> [_{v⁰} fẹ [_{FinP} <kí ẹ wá gan-an>]]]]]]].
 want
 'I want you to come exactly.'

The nominalised clause is the clausal complement of the lexical

verb *fé* ‘like’. It is base-generated within the vP domain, it is moved to the spec FocP through the spec vP to check the [+ Foc, EF] on the Foc⁰.

4. Conclusion

Focus constructions unlike relative clauses have different categorial status in Yorùbá, although they are derived through the same process under minimalist assumption within the generative syntax. Yorùbá operates syntactic strategy, a process whereby focused constituents are copied to the clause left peripheral position, to form its focus constructions. The focus constituents must be followed by the focus marker *ni*. The focus marker *ni* in the language has different feature properties with its copula counterpart (*ni*). Although they are homonyms, they still function differently in the grammar of the language. Argument and non-argument positions accessible to focusing in Yorùbá were thoroughly discussed in the paper. Similarly to some other languages under Kwa, Yorùbá only allows a constituent specified [+nominal] feature to be hosted at the spec FocP to check the [+focus] feature on the Foc⁰. In line with this, a spec FocP hosts a nominalised verb/predicate.

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