Two types of focus in Limbum

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Goals of this talk

- Limbum (Grassfields Bantu, Cameroon) has two focus constructions that involve two different markers and positions in the clause:

  (1) *á* **ndúr wà** *(cí)* *m̀ bí lɔ̀rī*
  FOC **brother my** (COMP) I FUT1 pick.up
  'I will pick up MY BROTHER.'

  (2) *m̀ bí lɔ̀r* *bá* **ndúr wà**
  I FUT1 pick.up FOC **brother my**
  'It is my brother whom I will pick up.'

1. How do the two focus markers differ in their usage?
2. How are the two focus markers represented syntactically?

Some notes on focus

What is focus?

- "a classical semantic notion expressing that a focused linguistic constituent is selected from a set of alternatives"

  (Zimmermann & Féry 2010: 2)

- "relatively the most important or salient information in the given communicative setting, and considered by S to be most essential for A to integrate into his pragmatic information" (add OR replace some piece of information) (Dik 1997: 326)

Examples:

(3) A: Who stole the cookie?
    B: [PEter]$_F$ stole the cookie. *Q-A congruence*

(4) A: Mary stole the cookie.
    B: (No,) [PEter]$_F$ stole the cookie. *correction*

(5) An [AMErican]$_F$ farmer talked to a [CaNAdian]$_F$ farmer. *contrast*

Focus types

In this talk, we are looking at two different focus types:

1. **information focus** signals the presence of contextual alternatives, often introduces new information, e.g. as answers to questions

2. **contrastive focus** adds semantic and/or pragmatic conditions on the alternatives

   contrast explicit alternative present (often within the same utterance)

   correction explicit alternative in a previous utterance rejected

   selection explicit alternative set present

   exhaustivity non-selected alternatives are false (Szabolcsi 1981; É. Kiss 1998; Vallduví & Vilkuna 1998; Horvath 2010, 2013)

   exclusivity at least one non-selected alternative is false (van der Wal 2011, 2014), or only stronger alternatives on some scale are false (Beaver & Clark 2008; Orenstein & Greenberg 2013)

unexpectedness, emphasis selected alternative stands out (Zimmermann 2008; Hartmann 2008; Skopeteas & Fanselow 2009, 2011; Frey 2010; Zimmermann & Onea 2011)

Some notes on Limbum

- Grassfields Bantu, Cameroon
- basic word order: SVO
- TAM marking auxiliaries precede the verb

  (6) *ŋwὲ fɔ́ àm tíh ŋgū*
      man DET PST3 cut wood
      The man cut the wood.'

- adverbials can occur in the following positions

  (7) *(àyàŋsὲ) mὲ bí dò (àyàŋsὲ) mà ntā (àyàŋsὲ)*
      tomorrow I FUT2 go tomorrow down market tomorrow
      'I will go (down) to the market tomorrow.'

Focus in Limbum: Interpretation

(i) Context tests

New Information

Context
Tata and Yaah are talking on the phone, the connection is really bad. Yaah was telling Tata that she was going to meet someone, but Tata could not understand the person's name. Tata asks Yaah to repeat whom she is going to meet.

Yaah: *á*   ***Ngàlá*** *(cí)*   *mὲ bí*   *kɔ̄nī*
       FOC **Ngala** (COMP) I   FUT1 meet
       'I will meet NGALA.'

Yaah: *#mὲ bí*   *kɔnī*   *bá*   ***Ngàlá***
       I   FUT1 meet FOC **Ngala**
       'It is Ngala whom I will meet.'

Correction

Context
Tata and Yaah are talking on the phone, the connection is really bad. Yaah tells Tata that she is going to meet Ngala, but since it is Tanko's birthday tomorrow, Tata assumes that Yaah is going to meet Tanko. Tata is confused and asks Yaah if it isn't Tanko that she is going to meet.

Yaah: # *á*   ***Ngàlá*** *(cí)*   *mɛ̀ bí   kɔ̄nī*
       FOC **Ngala** (COMP) I   FUT1 meet
       'I will meet NGALA.'

Yaah: *mɛ̀ bí   kɔnī   bá* ***Ngàlá***
       I   FUT1 meet FOC **Ngala**
       'It is Ngala whom I will meet.'

Contrast

The expression of contrast does not necessarily involve a focus marker:

(8) *mí Cameroon bì   ó   kí   zhé **bāā**, cí zhé **burger** ní America*
     in Cameroon people 3PL HAB eat **fufu** but eat **burgers** in America
     'In Cameroon people eat fufu, but they eat burgers in America.'

However, the only focus marker felicitous here is *bá*.

(9) *mí Cameroon bì   ó   kí   zhé bāā, cí zhé bá **burger** ní*
     in Cameroon people 3PL HAB eat fufu but eat FOC **burgers** in
     America
     America
     'In Cameroon people eat fufu, but they eat burgers in America.'

Contrast and unexpectedness

If the contrast does not reflect information from world knowledge or involves unexpected information, the focus marker *bá* becomes obligatory:

(10) *Tánkó kí nɔ̄* **mndzīp,** *Ngàlá cí nɔ̄* **(bá)* **blēē**
      Tanko HAB drink **water**   Ngala but drink FOC **blood**
      'Tanko drinks water but Ngala drinks blood.'

This is not the case with contrasted but probable (based on world knowledge or context) alternatives:

(11) *Tánkó kí nɔ̄* **mndzīp,** *Ngàlá cí nɔ̄* *(bá)* **mbròʔmbvʉ́**
      Tanko HAB drink **water**   Ngala but drink FOC **palm.wine**
      'Tanko drinks water but Ngala drinks palm wine.'

Selection

Shey is about to cook dinner and asks Yaah whether she wants to eat fufu or yams.

Shey: *à   bí   zhē bāā kɛ̀ mbrɛ̀ʔ à*
         you FUT2 eat fufu or yams Q
         'Will you eat fufu or yams?'

Yaah: # *á   mbrɛ̀ʔ (cí)   mɛ̀ bí   zhē*
         FOC **yams** (COMP) I FUT2 eat
         'I will eat yams.'

Yaah: *mɛ̀ bí   zhē bá mbrɛ̀ʔ*
         I   FUT2 eat FOC **yams**
         'I will eat yams.'

Focus in Limbum: Interpretation

(ii) Exhaustivity effects

Also-phrases

(12) *á* **Nfò** *(cí)* *í* *bā* *zhē bāā (bá* **Tánkó** *fɔ́ŋ)*
      FOC **Nfor** (COMP) 3SG PST1 eat fufu (and **Tanko also**)
      'NFOR ate fufu (and so did Tanko).'

(13) *á* **Ngàlá** *(cí)* *mὲ bí* *kɔ̄nī (bá* **ŋgwá zhì** *fɔ́ŋ)*
      FOC **Ngala** (COMP) I FUT1 meet (and **wife his also**)
      'I will meet NGALA (and also his wife).'

(14) *á* **àyàŋsè** *(cí)* *sì* *bífū yɛ́ Shey (bá* **mínjì behind**
      FOC tomorrow (COMP) we.INCL FUT2 see Shey (and **behind**
      àyàŋsè *fɔ́ŋ)*
      tomorrow also)
      'We will see Shey TOMORROW (and also the day after tomorrow).'

(15) *á* **mà ntāā** *(cí)* *yà táā* *à* *m̀* *dò (bá* **mà rfà**
      FOC **PREP market** (COMP) my father 3SG PST3 go (and **PREP work**
      fɔ́ŋ)
      also)
      'My father went TO THE MARKET (and also to work).'

Also-phrases

(16) *à   bā   zhē bá **Nfò** bāā (#bá Tánkó fɔ́ŋ)*
EXPL PST1 eat FOC **Nfor** fufu (and Tanko also)
'It is Nfor who ate fufu (#and so did Tanko).'

(17) *mɛ̀ bí   kɔnī   bá **Ngàlá** (#bá ŋgwá zhì fɔ́ŋ)*
I   FUT1 meet FOC **Ngala** (and wife his also)
'It is Ngala (#and also his wife) whom I will meet.'

(18) *sì   bífū yɛ́ Shey bá **àyàŋsè** (#bá mínjì àyàŋsè fɔ́ŋ)*
we.INCL FUT2 see Shey FOC **tomorrow** (and behind tomorrow also)
'It is tomorrow (#and also the day after tomorrow) that we will see
Shey.'

(19) *yà táā à   m̀   dò bá **mà ntāā** (#bá mà rfà fɔ́ŋ)*
my father 3SG PST3 go FOC **PREP market** (and PREP work also)
'It is to the market (#and also to work) that my father went.'

Universal quantifiers

(20) á **ŋwɛ̀ nsìp** *(cí)* í bā zhē bāā
FOC **person all** (COMP) 3SG PST1 eat fufu
'EVERYBODY ate fufu.'

(21) á **ŋwɛ̀ nsìp** *(cí)* mɛ̀ bí kɔ̄nī
FOC **person all** (COMP) I FUT1 meet
'I will meet EVERYBODY.'

(22) á **nɔ̀ŋ nsìp** *(cí)* sì cī yɛ́ Shey
FOC **day all** (COMP) we.INCL PROG see Shey
'We will be seeing Shey EVERYDAY.'

(23) á **à bdìʔ sìp** *(cí)* yà táā à m̀ dɔ̀
FOC **PREP place all** (COMP) my father 3SG PST3 go
'My father went EVERYWHERE.'

Universal quantifiers

(24) **à   bā   zhē bá **ŋwɛ̀   nsìp** bāā*
      EXPL PST1 eat FOC **person all** fufu
      'It is everybody who ate fufu.'

(25) **mɛ̀ bí   kɔnī bá **ŋwɛ̀   nsìp***
      I   FUT1 meet FOC **person all**
      'It is everybody that I will meet.'

(26) **sì   cī   yɛ́ Shey bá **n̂ɔŋ nsìp***
      we.INCL PROG see Shey FOC **day all**
      'It is everyday that we will be seeing Shey.'

(27) **yà táā   à   m̀   dò bá à **bdì̧ʔ sìp***
      my father 3SG PST3 go FOC **PREP place all**
      'It is everywhere that my father went.'

Summary

diagnostics	∅	*á*	*bá*
new information	✓	✓	✗
correction	✗	✗	✓
contrast	✓	✗	✓
contrast + unexpectedness	✗	✗	✓
selection	✓	✗	✓
selection + unexpectedness	✗	✗	✓
also continuation	✓	✓	✗
universal quantifiers	✓	✓	✗

Conclusions:

1. **information focus** is encoded by *á*
2. **contrastive focus** is encoded by *bá*, sufficient conditions:
   - unexpectedness
   - exhaustivity

Open issues: *even* and *only*

Focus in Limbum: Syntax

(i) The left peripheral focus marker *á*

The left peripheral focus marker *á*

The focused constituents are preceded by the focus marker *á* and they obligatorily occur clause-initially.

Subject focus:

(28) | á | **Nfò** *(cí)* | í | bā | zhē bāā |
      FOC **Nfor** (COMP) 3SG PST1 eat fufu
      'NFOR ate fufu.'

Object focus:

(29) | á | **Ngàlá** *(cí)* | mὲ bí | kɔ̄nī |
      FOC **Ngala** (COMP) I FUT1 meet
      'I will meet NGALA.'

Adverbial focus:

(30) | á | **àyàŋsè** *(cí)* | sì | bífū yɛ́ Shey |
      FOC **tomorrow** (COMP) we.INCL FUT2 see Shey
      'We will see Shey TOMORROW.'

The Left peripheral focus marker *á*

Like in many other West African languages (Koopman 1984; Ameka 1992; Manfredi 1997; Biloa 1997; Aboh 1998, 2006), verb focus in Limbum is realized by doubling of the verb. Note that the higher copy of the verb is no longer a verbal root but marked by an infinitive prefix.

(31)   *á*   **r-cāŋ**   *(cí)*   ŋgwá wò   à   mū   **cāŋī**
        FOC **INF-run** (COMP) wife your.SG 3SG PST **run**
        'My wife RAN.'

(32)   *á*   **r-gwè**   *(cí)*   ndāp fɔ̄ à   ∅   **gwè**
        FOC **INF-fall** (COMP) house DET 3SG PERF **fall**
        'The house FELL.'

(33)   *á*   **r-yū**   *(cí)*   njíŋwè fɔ̄ bí   **yū** msāŋ
        FOC **INF-buy** (COMP) woman DET FUT1 **buy** rice
        'The woman will BUY rice.'

The status of *á*

The focus marker is identical in form to what could be the copula, see also Fransen (1995: 265):

(34)   *á rtēē*
     it.is palm.tree
     'It is a palm tree.'

However, it cannot take a tense marker, so that e.g. a past counterpart of (34) is expressed by a somewhat different, more complex construction involving an expletive.

(35)   *à mū bā rtēē*
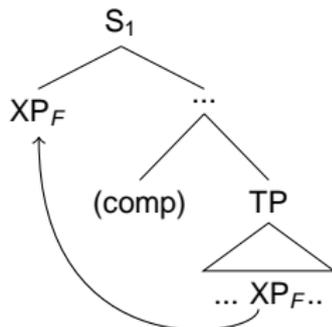   EXPL PST2 to.be palm.tree
     'It was a palm tree'

Note that the expletive is identical in form with the subject marker for 3SG, which might constitute a potentially different analysis of *à*.
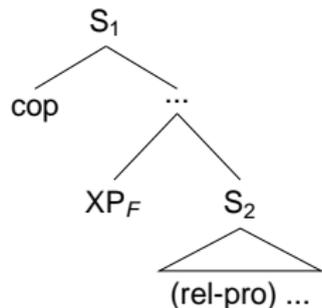
Monoclausal vs. biclausal structure

Do the focus constructions constitute biclausal cleft structures in which *á* simply spells out the copula?

2 options for the analysis:

(36) <u>focus movement</u>:   (37) <u>cleft structure</u>:

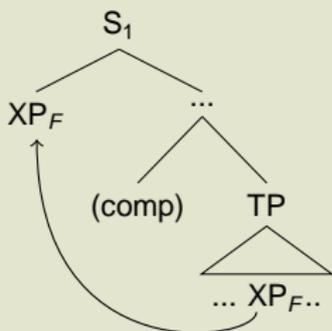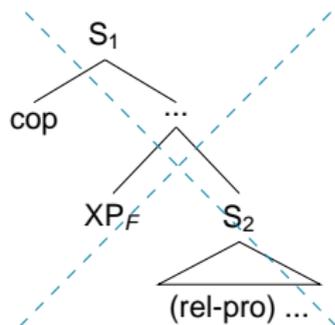# Against a cleft structure

We argue against an underlying cleft structure based on:

(i)   the lack of tense marking on *á*

(ii) *cí*, which optionally follows XP$_F$, patterns with complementizers, not with relative pronouns

(iii) the demonstrative relative clause marker *nà* is not licensed in focus structures with *á*

Against a cleft structure
(i) copula sentences

As shown above, copula sentences show up with an expletive and require a verb, different from *á*, if preceded by a tense marker.

(40) *à   mū   bā   rtēē*
      EXPL PST2 to.be palm.tree
      'It was a palm tree'

Thus, we would expect that the focus marker *á* cannot co-occur with a tense marker:

(41) *(*bā)* *á* *(*bā)* **Nfò** *à   mū   zhē bāā*
      (PST1)   FOC (PST1)   **Nfor** 3SG PST2 eat fufu
      'NFOR ate fufu.'

The only way to safe the structure is by adding an expletive.

(42) *à   mū   bā   bāā* **Nfò** *à   mū   zhē*
      EXPL PST2 to.be fufu **Nfor** 3SG PST2 eat
      'It was a fufu that Nfor ate.'

Against a cleft structure
(ii) the complementizer *cí*

Focus structures with the initial focus marker can optionally occur with *cí*:

(43)   *á*   **Ngàlá** *(cí)*   *m̀ bí   kɔ̄nī*
         FOC **Ngala** (COMP) I FUT1 meet
         'I will meet NGALA.'

cí cannot function as a relative pronoun:

(44)   a.   **mū* **cí** *í   mū   zhéé mŋgɔ̀mbé*
              child **REL** 3SG PST2 eat   plaintains
         b.   *mū* **zhǐ** *í   mū   zhéé mŋgɔ̀mbé*
              child **REL** 3SG PST2 eat   plaintains
              'the child who ate plantains'

Against a cleft structure
(iii) REL clauses

Relative clause in Limbum can be closed with the demontrative marker *nà*, see also Fransen (1995: 257), Mpoche (1993: 49):

(45) *mū zhǐ í   mū   zhéé mŋgɔ̀mbé (**nà**)*
      child REL 3SG PST2 eat   plaintains **DEM**
      'the child who ate plantains'

This marker cannot show up with focus structures:

(46)   *á* **ŋ𝑘fúú** *(cí)   mɛ̀ bí   kɔ̄nī (****nà**)*
       FOC **chief** (COMP) I   FUT1 meet **DEM**
       'I will meet the CHIEF.'

Focus movement: Analysis

Assumptions:

- The focus sensitive particle *á* merges with the focus-containing constituent; following recent proposals by Cable (2010) and Horvath (2007, 2010, 2013)

- together they undergo movement to the left periphery, triggered by a feature of the C head (optionally spelled out as *cí*)

- *á* can only select for XPs, hence verb focus can only succeed if the verb is nominalized
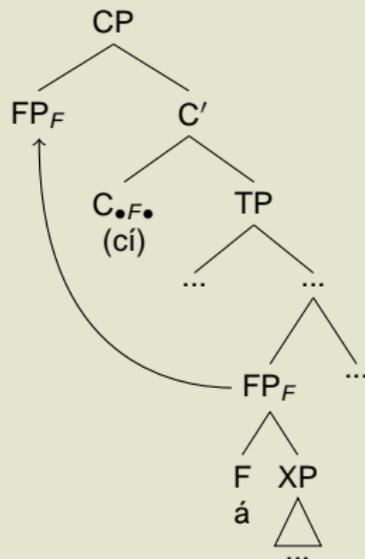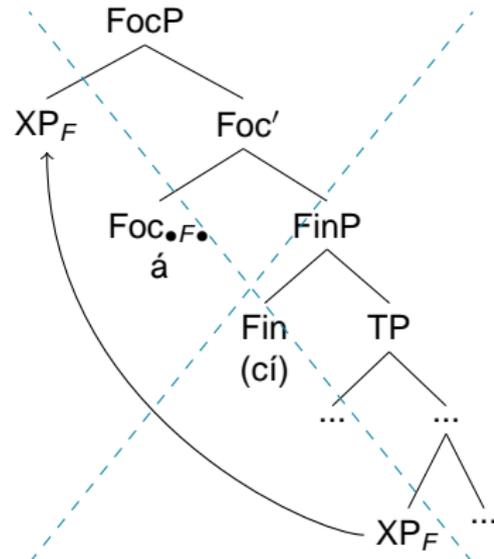
(47)
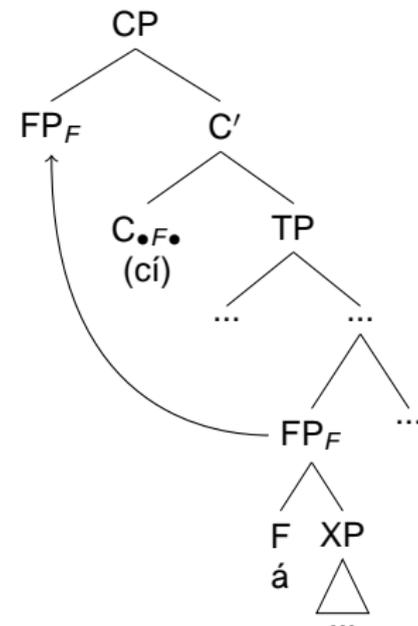
Focus movement: Analysis

We would like to argue against a split-CP (Rizzi 1997) domain which might provide an alternative analysis, see (55), where the focus marker is the head of FocP and thus attracts XP into its specifier.

(48)   Simple CP analysis:

(49)   Split-CP analysis:

Focus movement
(i) Evidence from the linear order

Under the split-CP analysis, one has to make additional assumptions in order to explain why the focus marker always precedes the focused constituent. An additional ForceP layer could provide a suitable landing site, see (50).

(50)   [*ForceP* [*Force* á$_1$] [*FocP* XP [*Foc* t$_1$] [*FinP* [*Fin* cí] ..] ..] ..]

Even if the rather ad-hoc character of this movement step can be justified on independent grounds, the analysis furthermore seems to be incompatible with wh-questions which can show a sentence final question particle. This question particle can reasonably be argued to occupy the Force head, thus predicting focus particle movement to be blocked, contrary to fact:

(51)   *á   ndā (cí)   í   mū zhē zhɨ́ bzhɨ́ à*
         FOC who COMP 3SG PST eat his food Q
         'Who ate his food?'

Focus movement
(ii) Evidence from fronted topics

Moreover, a simple CP analysis might be more suitable because, although topics front (52), they cannot co-occur with a focus constituent (53):

(52)   **mbǎ fɔ̌**, *wōyè ó* ∅ *fā zhí nì yē wéé*
     money DET they   3PL PERF give it   PREP him/her already
     'As for the money, they already gave it to him/her.'

(53)   ***mbǎ fɔ̌**, **á** **nì** **yē** *wōyè ó* ∅ *fā zhí*
     money DET FOC **PREP him/her** they   3PL PERF give it
     'As for the money, they gave it TO HIM/HER.'

This suggests that there is only one position available in the left periphery, i.e. the specifier of CP.

Focus movement
(iii) Evidence from pied-piping

Further evidence for the simple CP analysis comes from pied-piping: the non-focused material cannot be stranded (as in B').

A heard B telling C on the phone that B would pick someone's brother from the bus station. A couldn't properly understand whose brother B will pick up.

- A: **á** *ndúr ndā (cí)   à   bí   lɔ̀rī*
      FOC brother who (COMP) you FUT1 pick.up
      'Whose brother will you pick up?'
- B: **á** ***ndúr wà** (cí)   m̀ bí   lɔ̀rī*
      FOC **brother my** (COMP) I FUT1 pick.up
- B': * **á** ***wà** (cí)   m̀ bí   lɔ̀rī   **ndúr***
      FOC **my** (COMP) I FUT1 pick.up **brother**
      'I will pick up MY brother.'

Focus movement
(iii) Evidence from pied-piping

The same holds for NP possessors.

A heard B telling C on the phone that B would pick someone's brother from the bus station. A couldn't properly understand whose brother B will pick up.

- A: *á ndúr ndā (cí) à bí lòrī*
  FOC brother who (COMP) you FUT1 pick.up
  'Whose brother will you pick up?'
- B: *á **ndúr** Tánkó (cí) m̀ bí lòrī*
  FOC **brother** Tanko (COMP) I FUT1 pick.up
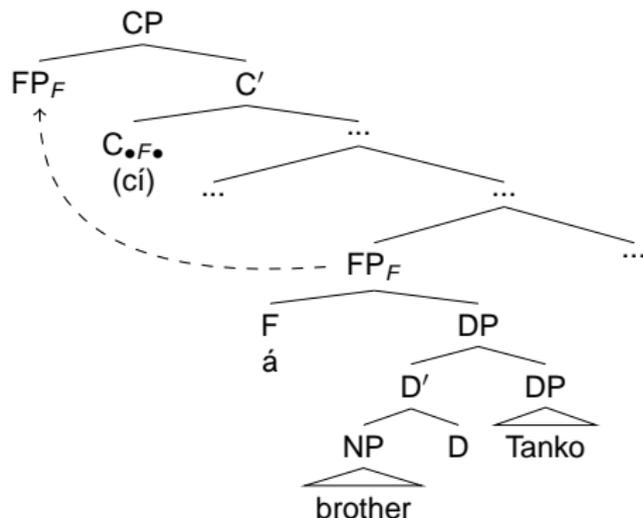- B': * *á **Tánkó** (cí) m̀ bí lòrī **ndúr***
  FOC **Tanko** (COMP) I FUT1 pick.up **brother**
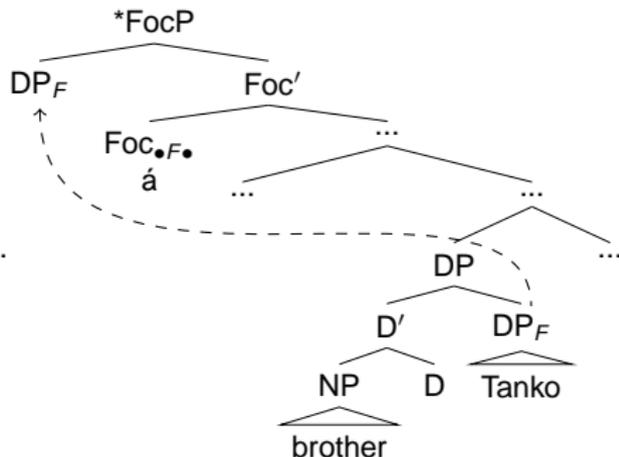 'I will pick up TANKO's brother.'

Focus movement
(iii) Evidence from pied-piping

Accounts without the low FP cannot derive pied piping of non-focused constituents. A split-CP account must add an assumption that explains how the non-focused constituent "inherits" the f-property of the possessor (Cable 2010; Horvath 2010, 2013).

(54)   Simple CP analysis:

```
              CP
        ┌──────┴──────┐
      FP_F           C′
       ↑        ┌─────┴─────┐
       ┆     C_•F•         ...
       ┆      (cí)    ┌─────┴─────┐
       ┆             ...         ...
       ┆          ┌───┴───┐
       ┆        FP_F      ...
       └ ─ ─ ┌───┴───┐
             F        DP
             á    ┌───┴───┐
                 D′        DP
              ┌──┴──┐     Tanko
             NP     D
           brother
```

(55)   Split-CP analysis:

```
              *FocP
        ┌──────┴──────┐
      DP_F           Foc′
       ↑        ┌─────┴─────┐
       ┆     Foc_•F•        ...
       ┆       á       ┌─────┴─────┐
       ┆              ...         ...
       ┆           ┌───┴───┐
       ┆          DP       ...
       └ ─ ─ ┌───┴───┐
            D′       DP_F
         ┌──┴──┐    Tanko
        NP     D
      brother
```

Concluding remarks

Interpretation

- We showed for Limbum that the two focus strategies of the language pattern with two different focus functions:
  - **á** : non-exhaustive, new information
  - **bá** : exhaustive, unexpected

Syntax

- We argued for a monoclausal, non-cartographic approach for the high focus marked by *á*, based on:
  - the lack of tense marking on copulas, the complementizer *cí*, and the ban on right peripheral demonstrative markers
  - linearity considerations, co-occurrence restrictions of topics and foci, and pied-piping

- The left peripheral focus marker provides a novel argument against *Strong Modularity* (Reinhart 2006; Neeleman & van de Koot 2008; Horvath 2010) after which information structure and syntax are strictly separated and discourse features are not predicted to have a consistent effect on syntactic configurations.

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Focus in Limbum: Interpretation

(ii) Open issues: *even* and *only*

Even-phrases

The focus sensitive marker *ká?* 'even' seems to be able to select for the focused constituent withou a focus marker being present.

(56) **ká? Nfò** *à   bā   zhē bāā*
     even Nfor 3SG PST1 eat fufu
     'Even NFOR ate fufu.'

(57) **ká? Ngàlá** *mὲ bí   kɔ̄nī*
     even Ngala I   FUT1 meet
     'I will meet even NGALA.'

(58) **ká? àyàŋsè** *sì   bífū yὲ Shey*
     even tomorrow we.INCL FUT2 see Shey
     'We will see Shey even TOMORROW.'

(59) **ká? mà ntāā** *yà táā   à   m̀ dò*
     even PREP market my father 3SG PST3 go
     'My father went even TO THE MARKET.'

Even-phrases

káʔ 'even' is incompatible with a low focus position, possibly due to the exhaustivity requirement.

(60) **à   bā   zhē **káʔ Nfò** bāā*
     EXPL PST1 eat **even Nfor** fufu
     'It is even Nfor who ate fufu.'

(61) **mὲ bí   kɔnī **káʔ Ngàlá***
     I FUT1 meet **even Ngala**
     'It is even Ngala whom I will meet.'

(62) *?sì   bífū yὲ́ Shey **káʔ àyàŋsὲ***
     we.INCL FUT2 see Shey **even tomorrow**
     'It is even tomorrow that we will see Shey.'

(63) *?yà táā   à   m̀   dò **káʔ mà ntāā***
     my father 3SG PST3 go **even PREP market**
     'It is even to the market that my father went.'

Only-phrases and argument focus

The focus sensitive marker *càʔcàʔ* 'only' selects for XPs only and is compatible with both focus strategies.

Context
Shey is looking for Ngala and Tanko who are supposed to be at the market. Shey tells Yaah to go find Ngala and Tanko and bring them back.

A. Yaah comes back with Ngala.

Y: *á* **Ngàlá** *càʔcàʔ (cí)* *mɛ̀*
  FOC **Ngala** only COMP I
  ∅ *kɔ́ní*
  PERF find
  'I found Ngala only.'

Y: *mɛ̀ ∅* *kɔ́ní* **Ngàlá** *càʔcàʔ*
  I PERF find **Ngala** only
  'I only found Ngala.'

B. Yaah comes back with Njobe.

Y: *mɛ̀ ∅* *kɔ́ní bá* **Njobe**
  I PERF find FOC **Njobe**
  càʔcàʔ
  only
  'I only found Njobe.'

Only-phrases and verb focus

Limbum provides a different focus sensitive marker, *kū* 'only', for verbs:

(64) *wɛ̀r à* **kū lā** *bzhī̄* **lá**
we 1PL only **cook** food **cook**
'It is only cooking that we did to the food.'

(65) ***kū r-lā** *(cí) wɛ̀r à* **lá** *bzhī̄*
only INF-cook COMP we 1PL **cook** food
'We only COOKED the food.'

(66) *á* **r-lā** *càʔcàʔ (cí) wɛ̀r à* **lá** *bzhī̄*
FOC **INF-cook only** COMP we 1PL **cook** food
'We only COOKED the food.'

Focus in Limbum: Syntax

(ii) Focus marker *bá*

Focus marker *bá*

The focused constituents are preceded by the focus marker *bá*.

Subject focus:

(67) à   bā   zhē *bá* **Nfò** bāā
      EXPL PST1 eat FOC **Nfor** fufu
      'It is Nfor who has eaten fufu.'

Object focus:

(68) mὲ bí   kɔ̄nī   *bá* **Ngàlá**
      I FUT1 meet FOC **Ngala**
      'It is Ngala whom I will meet.'

Adverbial focus:

(69) sì   bífū yέ Shey *bá* **àyàŋsὲ**
      we.INCL FUT2 see Shey FOC **tomorrow**
      'It is tomorrow that we will see Shey.'

At first glance, it looks like *bá* simply merges with the constituent in focus, in analogy to the focus marker *á*.

Focus marker *bá*
The subject – non-subject asymmetry

Note, however, that a focused subject cannot precede the verb, see (70-b).
This restriction cannot be found with the focus marker *á*, see (71).

(70) a. *à   bā   zhē   bá* ***Nfò*** *bāā*
          EXPL PST1 eat FOC **Nfor** fufu

      b. * *bá* ***Nfò*** *bā   zhē bāā*
          FOC **Nfor** PST1 eat fufu
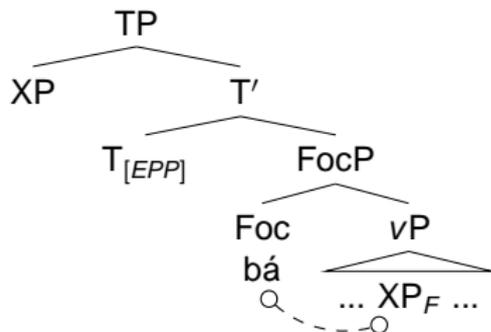   'It is Nfor who has eaten fufu.'

(71) *á   **Nfò** (cí)   í   bā   zhē bāā*
      FOC **Nfor** (COMP) 3SG PST1 eat fufu
      'NFOR ate fufu.'

Another important difference: the subject agreement marker only occurs if the
subject precedes the verb.

A preliminiary analysis for the focus marker *bá*

This subject asymmetry has been observed in other Grassfields Bantu languages such as Aghem (Aboh 2007; Hyman & Polinsky 2010) and Awing (Fominyam & Šimík to appear). For now, we would like to propose a focus projection immediately above the *v*P layer, following Aboh (2007). See also Belletti (2004) for Romance languages.

(72)   Low focus phrase:

```
              TP
           ／    ＼
          XP      T′
              ／    ＼
          T[EPP]     FocP
                  ／    ＼
               Foc      vP
               bá    ／   ＼
               ○ ⌐ ⌐ ⌐ ... XPF ...
                           ○
```

The Foc head licenses the focused constituent under c-command. The verb undergoes head movement to T. Thus, a subject cannot move to Spec,TP so that the EPP feature on T triggers the occurence of an expletive.

Verb focus with *bá*
Evidence for low focus

This low focus position becomes visible with respect to verb focus which, again, results from doubling but does not require the focus marker *bá*.

(73) *ŋgwá wò   à   mū **cā̄ŋ** **cā̄ŋī***
    wife your.SG 3SG PST run run
    'It is running that your wife did.'

(74) *ndāp fɔ̄ à   ∅   **gwè** **gwè***
    house DET 3SG PERF **fall** **fall**
    'It was falling that the house did.'

(75) *njíŋwɛ̀ fɔ̄ bí   **yū** msāŋ **yú***
    woman DET FUT1 **buy** rice **buy**
    'It is buying that the woman will do to the rice.'

Verb focus with *bá*

The verb undergoes head movement to Foc, followed by remnant VP movement to spec,FocP. Both copies of the verb get spelled out.

(76)   Low verb focus:
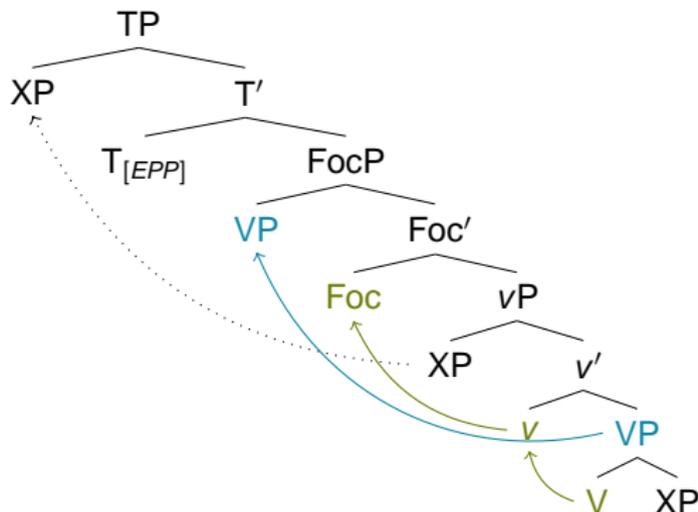
The absence of *bá* might be due to head movement which could potentially block the spell out of Foc.