Two types of focus in Limbum
48th Annual Conference on African Linguistics

Laura Becker & Imke Driemel & Jude Nformi Awasom

Leipzig University

April 1st, 2017
1 Introduction

2 Focus in Limbum: Interpretation
   - Context tests
   - Exhaustivity effects

3 Focus in Limbum: Syntax
   - Left peripheral focus marker á

4 Concluding remarks
Goals of this talk

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

  (1) \( \text{á ndúr wà (cí) m̀ bì lôrī} \)
      
      FOC brother my (COMP) I FUT1 pick.up
      
      ‘I will pick up MY BROTHER.’

  (2) \( m̀ bì lôr bá ndúr wà \)
      
      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. \hspace{1cm} Q-A congruence

(4) A: Mary stole the cookie.
    B: (No,) [PEter]$_F$ stole the cookie. \hspace{1cm} correction

(5) An [AMErican]$_F$ farmer talked to a [CaNAdian]$_F$ farmer. \hspace{1cm} contrast
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) \( \eta wè fõ \ àm \ tìh \ \eta gû \)
man DET PST3 cut wood
The man cut the wood.’

- adverbials can occur in the following positions

(7) (\( \text{àyàŋsè} \)) \( mè \ \text{bí} \ \text{dò} (\( \text{àyàŋsè} \)) \text{mà ntà} (\( \text{àyàŋsè} \))
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) mè bí kōnī
FOC **Ngala** (COMP) I FUT1 meet
‘I will meet NGALA.’

Yaah: #mè bí kōnī **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)  mè bí  kōnī  
FOC Ngala (COMP)  I  FUT1 meet  
‘I will meet NGALA.’

Yaah:  mè bí  kɔnĩ  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 America
in Cameroon people 3PL HAB eat fufu but eat FOC burgers in 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 nō mndzīp, Ngàlá cí nō *(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 nō mndzīp, Ngàlá cí nō *(bá) mbrò?mbvú*
    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 kè mbrè? à
    you FUT2 eat fufu or yams Q
    ‘Will you eat fufu or yams?’

Yaah: # á mbrè? (cí) mè bí zhē
    FOC yams (COMP) I FUT2 eat
    ‘I will eat yams.’

Yaah: mè bí zhē bá mbrè?
    I FUT2 eat FOC yams
    ‘I will eat yams.’
Focus in Limbum: Interpretation

(ii) Exhaustivity effects
Also-phrases

(12) á *NFɔ̀ (cí) í bā zhē bāā (bá Tānkò főŋ)*

FOC Nfor (COMP) 3SG PST1 eat fufu (and Tanko also)
‘NFOR ate fufu (and so did Tanko).’

(13) á *Ngàlá (cí) mè bí kōnĩ (bá ñgwá zì főŋ) *

FOC Ngala (COMP) I FUT1 meet (and wife his also)
‘I will meet NGALA (and also his wife).’

(14) á *àỳàŋsè (cí) sì bìfǔ yé Shey (bá mìnjì*

FOC tomorrow (COMP) we.INCL FUT2 see Shey (and behind
àỳàŋsè főŋ)
tomorrow also)
‘We will see Shey TOMORROW (and also the day after tomorrow).’

(15) á *mà ntǎā (cí) yà tàā à m dò (bá mà rfà*

FOC PREP market (COMP) my father 3SG PST3 go (and PREP work
főŋ)
also)
‘My father went TO THE MARKET (and also to work).’
Also-phrases

(16) à bā zhe bá Nfò bāā (#bá Tánkó főj)  
EXPL PST1 eat FOC Nfor fufu (and Tanko also)  
‘It is Nfor who ate fufu (#and so did Tanko).’

(17) mè bì kōnī bá Ngálá (#bá ñgwá zhì főj)  
I FUT1 meet FOC Ngala (and wife his also)  
‘It is Ngala (#and also his wife) whom I will meet.’

(18) sì bifū yé Shey bá àyànsè (#bá mínjì àyànsè főj)  
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 ṃ dó bá mà ntāā (#bá mà rfà főj)  
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 ŋwè nsìp (cí) í bā zhē bāā
FOC person all (COMP) PST1 3SG 1SG eat fufu
‘EVERYBODY ate fufu.’

(21) á ŋwè nsìp (cí) mè bí kōnī
FOC person all (COMP) FUT1 meet
‘I will meet EVERYBODY.’

(22) á nɔŋ nsìp (cí) sì cī yé Shey
FOC day all (COMP) we. INCL PROG see Shey
‘We will be seeing Shey EVERYDAY.’

(23) á à bdì? sìp (cí) yà tāā à m̀ dò
FOC PREP place all (COMP) PST3 3SG 1SG go
‘My father went EVERYWHERE.’
Universal quantifiers

(24) *à bā zhē bā ñwè nsìp bāā
EXPL PST1 eat FOC person all fufu
‘It is everybody who ate fufu.’

(25) *mè bí kɔnĩ bā ñwè nsìp
I FUT1 meet FOC person all
‘It is everybody that I will meet.’

(26) *sì cĩ yé Shey bā mɔn̩ nsìp
we.INCL PROG see Shey FOC day all
‘It is everyday that we will be seeing Shey.’

(27) *yà táā à m̀ dò bā à bdì? sìp
my father 3SG PST3 go FOC PREP place all
‘It is everywhere that my father went.’
## Summary

### 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) mè bí kōnī
FOC Ngala (COMP) I FUT1 meet
‘I will meet NGALA.’

**Adverbial focus:**

(30) á ́ àyàŋsè (cí) sì bífū yĕ 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) \[ \text{á } r-cāŋ (cǐ) \text{ } ŋg\varacute{w}á \text{ } wò \text{ } à \text{ } mū \text{ } cāŋī ]

FOC INF-run (COMP) wife your.SG 3SG PST run

‘My wife RAN.’

(32) \[ \text{á } r-gwè (cǐ) \text{ } ndāp \text{ } fō \text{ } à \text{ } 0 \text{ } gwè ]

FOC INF-fall (COMP) house DET 3SG PERF fall

‘The house FELL.’

(33) \[ \text{á } r-yū (cǐ) \text{ } njīŋwè \text{ } fō \text{ } bǐ \text{ } yū \text{ } 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.
Do the focus constructions constitute biclausal cleft structures in which á simply spells out the copula?

2 options for the analysis:

(36) focus movement:

(S1)

XP_F

... (comp) TP

... XP_F...

(37) cleft structure:

(S1)
cop

... XP_F

S2

... (rel-pro) ...
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 $X_{PF}$, patterns with complementizers, not with relative pronouns
(iii) the demonstrative relative clause marker nà is not licensed in focus structures with á

(38) focus movement:

(39) cleft structure:
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.

\[(40) \quad \text{à mū bā rtēē} \quad \text{EXPL PST2 to.be palm.tree} \quad \text{‘It was a palm tree’} \]

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

\[(41) \quad (*bā) \quad \text{á} \quad (*bā) \quad \text{Nfò à mū zhē bāā} \quad \text{(PST1) FOC (PST1) Nfor 3SG PST2 eat fufu} \quad \text{‘NFOR ate fufu.’} \]

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

\[(42) \quad \text{à mū bā bāā Nfò à mū zhē} \quad \text{EXPL PST2 to.be fufu Nfor 3SG PST2 eat} \quad \text{‘It was a fufu that Nfor ate.’} \]
Against a cleft structure
(ii) the complementizer cí

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

(43) á Ngálá (cí) mbí kōnī

FOC Ngala (COMP) I FUT1 meet
‘I will meet NGALA.’

cí cannot function as a relative pronoun:

(44) a. *mū cí í mū zhéé mŋgɔmbHé
child REL 3SG PST2 eat plaintains

b. mū zhí í mū zhéé mŋgɔmbHé
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 demonstrative marker *nà*, see also Fransen (1995: 257), Mpoche (1993: 49):

(45)  mū zhě í mū zhée mŋ̂omɓé (*nà*)
      child REL 3SG PST2 eat  plantains DEM
      ‘the child who ate plantains’

This marker cannot show up with focus structures:

(46)  á  njfúú (cí) mè bí kînî (*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).

\[
\text{(50) } \text{[}\text{ForceP [Force á₁ ] [FocP XP [Foc t₁ ] [FinP [Fin cí ] ..] ..] ..]}\text{]}
\]

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:

\[
\text{á ndā (cí) í mū zhē zhī bzhí à Q}
\]

FOC who COMP 3SG PST eat his food

‘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)  
\[\text{mb\dhat{a}} \ f\dhat{5}, \ w\dhat{o}y\dhat{\text{e}} \ o \ \emptyset \ f\dhat{\text{a}} \ zh\dhat{\text{i}} \ n\dhat{i} \ y\dhat{\text{e}} \ w\dhat{\text{e}} \text{é money DET they 3PL PERF give it PREP him/her already} 'As for the money, they already gave it to him/her.'

(53)  
\[\text{*mb\dhat{a}} \ f\dhat{5}, \ \text{á n\dhat{i} y\dhat{\text{e}}} \ w\dhat{o}y\dhat{\text{e}} \ o \ \emptyset \ f\dhat{\text{a}} \ zh\dhat{\text{i}} \text{ 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: \[ \text{á } \textit{ndúr ndā (cí) à bí lòrī} \]
   FOC brother who (COMP) you FUT1 pick.up
   ‘Whose brother will you pick up?’

B: \[ \text{á } \textit{ndúr wà (cí) m bí lòrī} \]
   FOC brother my (COMP) I FUT1 pick.up

B’: * \[ \text{á } \textit{wà (cí) m bí lòrī ndúr} \]
   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) m bí lòrī
FOC brother Tanko (COMP) I FUT1 pick.up

B’: *á Tánkó (cí) m 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:

(55) Split-CP analysis:
Concluding remarks

Interpretation

- We showed for Limbum that the two focus strategies of the language pattern with two different focus functions:
  
  \( \text{á} \): non-exhaustive, new information  
  \( \text{bá} \): exhaustive, unexpected

Syntax

- We argued for a monoclausal, non-cartographic approach for the high focus marked by \( \text{á} \), based on:
  
  - the lack of tense marking on copulas, the complementizer \( \text{cí} \), 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 \textit{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.
References I

References II


Fominyam, Henry & Radek Šimík (forthcoming): ‘The morphosyntax of exhaustive focus: A view from Awing (Grassfields Bantu)’, *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*.


References IV


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 without a focus marker being present.

(56)  
\[
\begin{align*}
&ká? \ Nfò \ à \ bā \ zhē \ bāā \\
&\text{even } Nfor \ 3SG \ PST1 \ eat \ fufu \\
&\text{‘Even NFOR ate fufu.’}
\end{align*}
\]

(57)  
\[
\begin{align*}
&ká? \ Ngàlá \ mè \ bí \ \kōnī \\
&\text{even } Ngala \ I \ FUT1 \ meet \\
&\text{‘I will meet even NGALALA.’}
\end{align*}
\]

(58)  
\[
\begin{align*}
&ká? \ àyàŋsè \ sì \ bífū \ yé \ Shey \\
&\text{even } \text{tomorrow} \ \text{we.INCL} \ FUT2 \ see \ Shey \\
&\text{‘We will see Shey even TOMORROW.’}
\end{align*}
\]

(59)  
\[
\begin{align*}
&ká? \ mà \ ntāā \ yà \ tāā \ à \ m \ dò \\
&\text{even } \text{PREP} \ \text{market} \ \text{my} \ \text{father} \ 3SG \ PST3 \ \text{go} \\
&\text{‘My father went even TO THE MARKET.’}
\end{align*}
\]
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)  *mè bí kɔnī káʔ Ngàlá*
   I FUT1 meet even Ngala
   ‘It is even Ngala whom I will meet.’

(62)  *sì bífū yè Shey káʔ àyàŋsè*
   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 \( cà?cà? \) ‘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.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Y: } & \quad á \quad \text{Ngàlá} \ atas \ cà?cà? \ (cí) \quad mè \\
& \quad \text{FOC Ngala} \quad \text{only} \quad \text{COMP} \quad \text{I} \\
& \quad \varnothing \quad \text{kóní} \\
& \quad \text{PERF} \quad \text{find} \\
& \quad \text{‘I found Ngala only.’}
\end{align*}
\]

**B.** Yaah comes back with Njobe.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Y: } & \quad mè \varnothing \quad \text{kóní bá \ Njobe} \\
& \quad \text{I} \quad \text{PERF} \quad \text{find} \quad \text{FOC \ Njobe} \\
& \quad cà?cà? \quad \text{only} \\
& \quad \text{‘I only found Njobe.’}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Y: } & \quad mè \varnothing \quad \text{kóní \ Ngàlá} \ atas \ cà?cà? \\
& \quad \text{I} \quad \text{PERF} \quad \text{find} \quad \text{Ngala} \quad \text{only} \\
& \quad \text{‘I only found Ngala.’}
\end{align*}
\]
Limbum provides a different focus sensitive marker, *kū* ‘only’, for verbs:

(64)  
\begin{verbatim}
we 1PL only cook food cook
'It is only cooking that we did to the food.'
\end{verbatim}

(65)  
\begin{verbatim}
only INF-cook COMP we 1PL cook food
'We only COOKED the food.'
\end{verbatim}

(66)  
\begin{verbatim}
FOC INF-cook only COMP we 1PL cook food
'We only COOKED the food.'
\end{verbatim}
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 bà zhē *bá* Nfò bāā
EXPL PST1 eat FOC Nfor fufu
‘It is Nfor who has eaten fufu.’

**Object focus:**

(68)  mè bí kōnī *bá* Ngālá
I FUT1 meet FOC Ngala
‘It is Ngala whom I will meet.’

**Adverbial focus:**

(69)  sì bifū yé Shey *bá* àyànsè
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 preliminary 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 vP layer, following Aboh (2007). See also Belletti (2004) for Romance languages.

(72) Low focus phrase:

```
TP
  \------
XP     T'
     \------
  T_{EPP} FocP
    \------
      \------
        Foc vP
          \------
            bá ... XP_{F} ...
```

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 occurrence 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 cāŋ cāŋī
cwife your.SG PST run run
‘It is running that your wife did.’

(74) ndăp fő à ə gwè gwè
chouse DET 3SG PERF fall fall
‘It was falling that the house did.’

(75) njīŋwè fő bí yū msāŋ yū
çwoman 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.