THE SEMANTICS OF FOCUS CONSTRUCTIONS IN AKOOSE

Michael E. Apuge
University of Maroua, Cameroon
apugelombe@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the semantics of focus constructions, with data drawn from Akoose. Each time a wh-phrase is used in the language, some material in the discourse is necessarily focused. Focusing in the language is complex, and two major types of focus phrases identified are those in which the wh-item moves to an XP containing a morphological focus marker on the one hand, and those in which an extracted wh-item moves to a matrix position where no focus morpheme is attested on the other. Given that the two constructions can be present in the same sentence, it becomes compelling to propose an empirical explanation of the phenomenon, with respect to the possible variance in the semantics of the structures. An issue of great concern that the paper attempts to bring to the fore, is that focus constructions have embedded semantic features that require sufficient empirical attention. Assuming the approaches adopted in Jackendoff (1972), Krifka (1992), Biloa (1992), *E. Kiss (1998) and Aboh (2006), this paper re-orients discussions about the debate on focus constructions and meaning. It is argued that from a semantic point of view, Akoose differentiates two categories of Wh-fronting: topic focus and contrastive focus. The analysis also points to the finding that the feature specifications of these operations are different: while contrastive focus conveys independent presuppositions, topic focus does not. Even though the analysis has established a semantic dichotomy between the two operations, a theoretical insight of these phenomena predicts a uniform account. This is because the driving force for both types of constructions is to establish agreement relations between the probe and its goal, and*

thus satisfy feature valuation in minimalist terms. The paper concludes on the note that wh-expressions in Akoose denote different levels of focus operations, which have a distinct semantic bearing on the syntax of the language.

Keywords

Wh-Phrases, Topic Focus, Contrastive Focus, Meaning, Minimalism

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1. Introduction

This paper examines focus constructions and data used in the analysis is drawn from previous works on Akoose, notably theses and articles. Akoose is a Northwest A10 Bantu language spoken in Cameroon (Hedinger, 2008). It is important to note that this language exhibits a range of wh-expressions with very complex characteristics. It is argued that wh-expressions in Akoose involve simple structures, complex structures, multiple fronting, as well as in-situ structures (Apuge, 1998, 2010 and 2012). There is also the possibility to have both extracted as well as in-situ wh-items in the same construction. It is against this complex background that the paper discusses two types of focus constructions, notably the one marked by a focus marker, and the other without any morphological marker.

The syntactic operation 'Focus' has been viewed differently by various authors. Bearth (1999: 124) says it is "a wide range of techniques a language disposes of, in order to mark a given sentence-constituent as being in focus, providing new asserted information and conversely to mark the rest of the sentence as containing given presupposed information". Mutaka and Tamanji (1995) view focus construction as a situation whereby the speaker brings some information into communicative prominence by laying emphasis and manipulating the constituents of an utterance. Both views are crucial to the interpretation of the data presented in this paper.

The way languages across the world employ focus has generated a lot of opposing arguments in the literature. For purposes of this paper, three different positions are presented. The first position involves scholars who argue against a movement operation or an additional semantic bearing of focus in the syntax. For instance, Jackendoff (1972) argued against a movement analysis in focus constructions. Also, while Krifka (1992) opined that the analysis of focus does not obey syntactic constraints, Vallduví's (1992) focus interpretation theory maintained that focus is always in-situ and it is non focal material that is moved; hence focusing never affects the truth conditions of a sentence. This presupposes that focusing only figures in the information packaged without any additional content unto the sentence. According to

Chomsky (1977), focus involves LF-movement where co-reference between a pronoun and an NP in focus seems to obey the same restrictions as co-reference between a pronoun and a quantified NP.

Another group of linguists argued in favour of a movement operation within focus constructions. Following their stance, identificational (contrastive) focus occupies the specifier position of a functional projection called focus head, which may have a strong V-feature, triggering V-to F movement (Body, 1990, 1995, Biloa, 1992, & E. Kiss, 1998). In particular, E. Kiss (1998:249) further assumes that identificational focus represents a subset of the set of contextually or situationally given elements for which the predicate phrase can potentially hold. He further asserts that identificational focus is identified as the exhaustive subset of this set for which the predicate phrase actually holds.

The third position has to do with Aboh (2006) and Krifka (1992). According to the former, the notion of focus constructions is based on focused and non-focused wh-items. Aboh (2006) further assumes that while focused wh-elements are those wh-phrases that are displaced to a designated focus position where they may co-occur with a focus marker, non-focused wh-elements are those that occur in positions other than the focus position. On his part, Krifka (1992) assumed that focusing is an operation performed on a set of comparable entities given the context or situation.

Whereas the approach adopted in this paper incorporates movement within focus constructions, the characterization adopted in Aboh (2006) and the semantic approach in Krifka (1992) are particularly crucial for Akoose. These approaches notwithstanding, the complex data used in this paper necessitate deeper reflection and profound analysis, in order to extend the previous analyses in a significant way. Compelling evidence that lends credence to the stance upheld in this paper is that the previous studies seemed to be based on limited data. The present study presents comprehensive and complex data, from a Bantu language that exhibits intriguing divergence in its morphological and syntactic structures (Apuge, 2012). In essence, it is assumed that earlier studies on focus have not sufficiently dwelled on the embedded semantic properties inherent in wh- constructions. Therefore, this paper attempts to fill the gap.

The paper is divided into six sections: section 1 introduces the entire paper. In section 2, the typology of wh-words in Akoose is presented before considering the various focus phrases that the language attests. While section 3 handles contrastive focus operations in the language, section 4 examines focus constructions and meaning. In section 5, the implication of syntactic theory on focus constructions is discussed. Section 6 discusses some salient findings before

concluding the paper. Having presented the introduction already, the task in the next section is to discuss the various wh-expressions attested in the language.

2. Types of WH- Phrases in Akoose

The language makes use of nine wh-items, which are categorized as arguments and adjuncts. This classification follows from Aoun's (1986) proposal. The different Wh- items can be used to form various questions in the language, as the data clearly bear out.

Table 1: *Typology of Wh-words in Akoose*

Arguments	Referential Adjuncts	Non- referential Adjuncts
(i)Nzee "who/whom"	(i) Híí "where"	(i) Chán "how"
(ii) Chyě "what"	(ii) Sútén "when"	(ii) Nechán "why"
		(iii) ayóle-chán "why"
		(iv) Chyěkóŋ "why"

2.1 Wh- Topic Questions

In framing content questions in the language, wh-words may either be fronted or left in their original positions. It should be noted that a maximum of three Wh-words can be used in a given sentence. Irrespective of the number of wh-words in a structure and notwithstanding whether the wh-word(s) remain(s) in-situ or move(s) to the sentence initial position, intelligibility is not blurred among Akoose speakers. Usually, in instances where the wh-phrase has not undergone movement, the scope of the phrase is interpreted in-situ.

Conversely, what happens when a wh-phrase is fronted in a given structure is that the latter is interpreted with the sentence meaning abstracted over the gap. This presupposes that whether a wh-phrase is fronted or left in-situ, the scope reading is attributed to the relevant wh-word. This therefore means that in both in-situ and ex-situ Wh-structures, the notion of focus is involved; however, whereas constituent structures containing fronted wh-phrases denote both syntactic and semantic focusing, those containing in-situ wh-words denote semantic focusing only. This assertion is buttressed by data on both in-situ and fronted Wh-questions presented in the sub sections that follow.

2.2 Topic Focus with In-situ Wh-Questions

In-situ Wh-questions are positioned post-verbally and such structures can either be simple or complex, given that Akoose allows for multiple wh-phrases within the same structure. In the data

below, whereas (1a, b) show simple structures with wh-in-situ, (1c) constitutes a complex structure involving two wh-phrases.

(1) a.   Etuge   a - n - nlúm   **nzee**
    Etuge Agr P1 send   who
    "Who did Etuge send?"

   b.   Akume a - n - pál   be - sabé **sútén**?
    Akume Agr P1   harvest pl   orange when
    "When did Akume harvest oranges?"

   c.   Akume a - n   sedi a - ken **nzee** a - wídé **híí**
    Akume Agr P1 ask SM that who SM die where
    "Akume asked where who died?"

Now consider the situation involving wh-fronting in the following subsection.

2.3 Topic Focus with Ex-situ Wh-Questions

    Akoose permits extracted Wh-questions in simple and in embedded contexts. The data in (2-3) illustrate a single wh-fronting. The gaps (t_1) observed in the examples show the movement of the various wh-items. Note that there is a final vowel suffixed to the verb. This is attested only in the structures where wh-fronting has taken place.

(2) a.   **nzee$_1$**   akan   a n bel-e t_1
    who something Agr p1 happen
    "who did something happen to?"

   b. [CP **nzee$_1$** [AgrP akan   a   bel −e t_1]]
     who   something Agr happen

The example in (2) can be represented diagrammatically as follows.
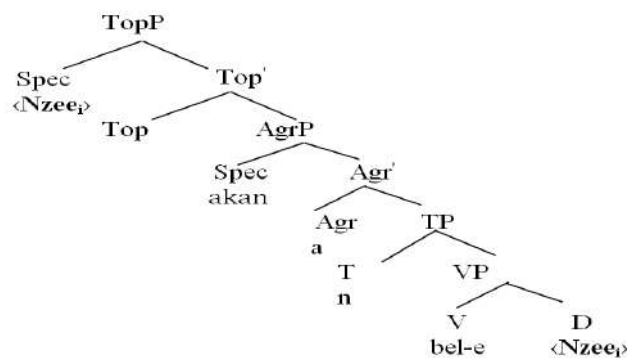

Figure3.

Consider instances of ~~multiple wh-phrases. Note that while the examples in (4)~~ exhibit two wh-phrases both of which are fronted, the ones in (5) involve three wh-phrases, two of which are fronted.

(4) b. **nzee   chye**   e   n - bel-e

who   what Agr p1 happen
"who did what happened to?"

c. [CP **nzee₁** [CP **chye₂** [AgrP t₂ e   n bel –e   t₁]]]
    who   what   Agr p1 happen

(5) a. **nzee   chye**   e   n   bel-e   **hii**
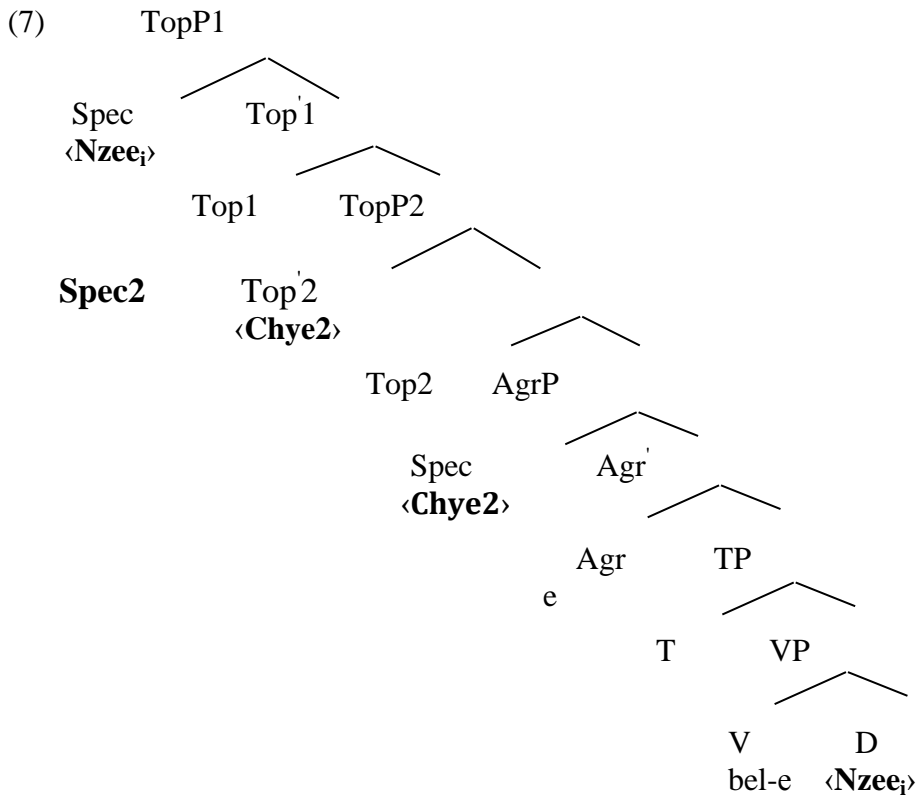   what   who Agr p1 happen where
    "where has who done what?"

b.   [CP **nzee₁** [CP **chye₂** [AgrPP t₂   e   n   bel-e t₁   **hii**]]]
      What   who   Agr p1   done   where

Any attempt to front all three wh-phrases renders the structure ungrammatical, as shown in (6).

 (6) *[CP **hii**₃   [**chye₁** [CP **nzee₂** [IP t₂   e   n   bel-e t₁ **t₃**]]]]
      where What   who   Agr p1 done

A representation of example (5) on a phrase marker is given in (7). Note that there is order in the

fronting of the two wh-phrases, as they get hosted in the matrix positions of TopP1 and TopP2.

(7)   TopP1

   Spec   Top'1
   ‹**Nzeeᵢ**›

           Top1   TopP2

   Spec2   Top'2
              ‹**Chye2**›

                   Top2   AgrP

                      Spec   Agr'
                   ‹**Chye2**›

                           Agr   TP
                            e

                                 T   VP

                                    V   D
                                    bel-e   ‹**Nzeeᵢ**›

A theoretical account of the operations taking place in this phrase marker is offered in section

(5.0). In the next section, Contrastive Focus is treated.

3. Contrastive/Identificational Focus

According to Bearth (1999:124), focusing presupposes various techniques that a language explores to distinguish focused syntactic unit and new information from the rest of the structure containing some implied information. There are three morphological focus markers in Akoose, and the choice for a given marker is crucially dependent upon the corresponding class of the focused (Wh-) element. This means that there is an agreement relation between the wh-element and the focus marker, much the same as in the Spec-Head Agreement relation propounded in Chomsky (1986:24).

The phenomenon of focusing in Akoose is strictly optional, depending on whether the focus element is present in the construction or not. When the morpheme marking focus is not present in a sentence, the latter is interpreted as an ordinary, simple wh-question, but when the focus marker is attested in the structure, it is construed with a presupposed interpretation. Before providing concrete examples to support that standpoint, the various question-words (henceforth QW) and the corresponding focus markers are presented in table two below.

Table 2: *Wh-words and Their Corresponding Focus Markers*

QW-Word	Corresponding focus marker	Noun class reference
nzee "who"	**mě**	Humans
chyě "what"	**chě**	Non-humans
híí "where"	**dě**	Adjuncts
sútén "when"	**dě**	
chán "how"	**dě**	
nechán "why"	**dě**	

The data in (8-10) show that arguments, referential and non-referential adjuncts in Table 2 can be focused in the language. The wh-words in the respective structures originate from the post-verbal position; whereas the ex-situ arguments are directly selected by their verbs in (8a,b), the ex-situ adjuncts in (9) and (10) originate from the indirect position of their respective verbs.

(8) a.   **nzee$_i$ mě** Ntube a – n – lum-e **t$_i$**
    Who FOC Ntube Agr P1 send
    "It is whom that Ntube sent?"
    b.   **chye$_i$ chě** Ntube a   hed-e **t$_i$**
    What FOC Ntube Agr seeks
    "It is what that Ntube is looking for?"

(9) a.   **hii$_i$**   **dě** Ntube a – n   lum-e mwan **t$_i$**

where FOC Ntube Agr P1   send   child
"Where is it that Ntube   sent the child?"

b. **sútén$_i$ dě**   Ntube   a – n – lum-e mwan **t$_i$**
when FOC Ntube Agr P1 send   child
"It is when that Ntube   sent the child?"

(10) a. **chán$_i$ dě** Ntube a   hob-e akan **t$_i$**
how   FOC Ntube Agr say   something
"It is how that Ntube   has said something?"

b. **nechán$_i$ dě**   Ntube   a   hob-e akan **t$_i$**
why   FOC Ntube Agr say   something
"Why is that Ntube   has said something?"

Having presented the data, it is expedient to consider the syntax of focus structures in the language.

3.1 The Structure of Focus Constructions in Akoose

Usually, the focus element is used for emphatic purposes, and it only shows up in wh-questions when there is movement. Therefore, following Brody (1990) and Biloa (1992), Akoose has a focus phrase (FP), and fronted wh-element in this constituent structure end up in Spec FP. The structure of the focus phrase in Akoose is shown in the following schema.
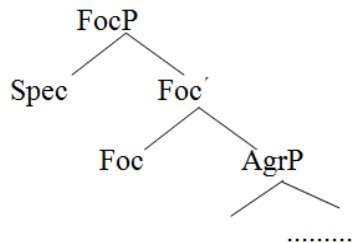

Figure11

The focus item that is invariably preceded by the focused element can never occur in sentence final position, hence the justification that FOC appears in Wh-expressions only when there is movement in the syntax, which is a position consistent with the idea that fronting is functionally related to focus, whether FOC is present or not. The phrase marker in (12) illustrates that the FP constituent in Akoosé obligatorily hosts a pair of elements – the focused element and the focus marker. It should be noted that the selection of elements that comprise the pair is not made at random. Rather, the choice of the focus marker is pre-determined by the choice of the focused element as shown in Table 2 above.

(12)   FP

Spec   F'

  F   AgrP

   Spec Agr'

   Agr   TP

      T   VP

       V D

Nzee$_i$ **mě** nyol e n kwal- t$_i$
Who **Foc** snake Agr P1 bite

Having examined Wh-structures that do not exhibit the focus morpheme on the one hand and those that attest this morpheme on the other, the crucial task now is to advance an argument that will handle the following pre-occupation in (13):

(13) What is the empirical evidence to advance in favour of the assumption that Topic

   Focus and Identificational Focus are separate operations in Akoose?

This pre-occupation is indeed at the core of this article, and it is hoped that the analysis adopted here contribute to the ongoing debate on focus constructions. The following section attempts to provide answers to the preoccupation raised in (13).

4. Focus and Meaning in Akoose

This section seeks to probe into the deeper meaning of Focus constructions, notably Topic Focus and Contrastive Focus. It is assumed that a characterization of these syntactic operations is crucial to the development of the semantic framework in focus studies (Krifka 1992). As a result, the semantics of topic focus and contrastive focus are discussed separately in the following sub-sections.

4.1. Topic Focus and Meaning

Topic focus is present in every sentence, irrespective of whether it is a statement or question. A structure containing a topic phrase can either be a simple sentence or a simple question involving an in-situ or an ex-situ operator. Such a structure conveys just a basic message – expressing a given topic. In this type of phrase, understanding is simplified, since it is based on a single possible option of comprehension – the ordinary, non-complex, and non-

comparative sense of a statement or question, and without any presuppositions. Whereas the topic reading of *statements* is flat (except in cases where portions of a sentence are intentionally accented, much the same as in sentence stress in English), the topic reading of simple *questions* (irrespective of whether they are fronted or not) is inherently focused, albeit non-contrastive. Topic focus is illustrated in the following examples in (14).

(14) a. nyol   e-   n   kwal   **mwan** (statement)
    snake   agr   P1   bite   child
    "A snake bit a child"

    b. nyol   e-   n   kwăl   **nzee** (question with wh- in-situ)
    snake   agr   P1   bite   who
    " who did a snake bite?"

    c. **nzeeᵢ** nyol e-   n   kwăl-ə tᵢ   (question with a fronted wh-phrase)
    who snake   agr   P1   bite
    "who did a snake bite?"

Note that the structure in (14a) neither involves extraction nor focusing. However, if the subject **nyol** "snake" in this structure is questioned or fronted, the result is (14b), but if it is the object **mwan** "child" that is fronted the outcome is (14c).

Topic Focus exhibits unique characteristics and feature specifications as shown below.

Table 3: *Characteristics and Feature Specifications of Topic Focus*

	Characteristics	ture specifications
Topic Focus	a) simple sentences b) ex-situ wh-structures c) in-situ wh-structures	- Focus marker +Topic - Contrastive ± Interrogative

Note that while in-situ wh-phrases in Akoose depict rightward topic focus, ex-situ ones trigger leftward topic focus. This is observed in (15) and (16), where some sort of high pitch is felt on the question words, **nzee** "who" and **Chye** "what", respectively. .

(15) Nyol e -   n   kwal **nzee?**
    snake agr   P1   bite who
    "A snake bit a child"

(16) **Chye**   e – n   kwal mwan?
  What   agr P1 bite   child
  "What bit the child?"

Assuming that the question words in (15) and (16) exhibit prominence, the only difference between the two structures is that whereas a high pitch is felt in the lower clause of the former,

the latter contains a prominent focus in the matrix clause. This reasoning is captured in the topic criterion in (17).

(17) The Topic Criterion

For every syntactic expression, there is a topic whose semantic contents bear more on the interpretability of the given structure. The presence of a topic requires an abstract Top head in fronted Wh-expressions; the specifier of TopP itself contains [+Topic] and [- Contrastive] features. In-situ phrases and statements exhibit abstract TopP projections that also contain [+topic] and [- contrastive] features.

Having discussed Topic Focus and meaning, the next section examines contrastive focus and meaning. It is expected that insight from the foregone discussion as well as the next section will determining whether or not the two syntactic operations are similar in the language. The outcome will also determine the theoretical standpoint that will definitely bear on the findings.

4.2 Contrastive Focus and Meaning

Admitted that the various wh-phrases can co-occur with their corresponding focus markers, it is important to argue that focused wh-phrases are at variance with their non-focused counterparts. The fundamental difference between the two syntactic operations is rooted in the responses to, and the nature of question asked. This is illustrated by logically providing a statement as a platform from which Topic and Contrastive structures derive. Turn to examples (18), (19) and (20). Note that while (18) is a statement, (19) and (20) are wh-questions. Also observe that whereas (19) is a simple wh-fronting, (20) involves a focused fronting due to the presence of a focus marker in the structure.

Statement

(18)   Nyol   e - n kwal mwan
      snake   agr P1 bite child
      "A snake bit a child"

Topic-focused Question:

(19) a. **Chye**   e – n   bel mwan
   what agr P1 do   child
   "What happened to the child?"

Contrastive-Focused Question

(20) **Chye   chě**   e   n   běl mwan
  what   Foc   agr P1 do   child
   "What is it that happened to the child?"

In example (20), it is assumed that something happened to a child, but the thing that actually happened to the child is yet to be established. This is because the verb in (20) is a sort of dummy

verb in Akoose, since it does not precisely tell what happened to the child. Therefore, considering the possibility of different things that could happen to the child (see the responses in (21) for example where **Kúb** "fowl" in (21c) replaces *Nyol* "snake" in (21b) as the focused Topic), an appropriate response to any question must be focused correctly. This reasoning is sustained in (22), where the dummy verb is replaced in the response in (23a). The specified verb in the response features with full semantic contents that contribute in providing the contrastive information required by the questioner.

Contrastive **question**:

(21) a. **Chye   chě**   e   n   bĕl mwan
     what   Foc   agr   P1   do   child
         "What is it that happened to the child?"

Contrastive **Response**:

   b. *Nyol*   **chě**   e - n   *kwǎl*   mwan
      snake   Foc   agr   P1   bite   child
      "It is a snake that bit the child"

As opposed to a possible contrary response in (c):

   c. **Kúb**   **chě**   e - n   *sɔ́m*   mwan
      fowl   Foc   agr   P1   bite   child
      "It is a snake that bit the child"

Focused Question with multiple (2) wh-items

(22) a. **Chye   chě**   e   n   bĕl   mwan **híí?**
     what   Foc   agr   P1   do   child   where
         "What is it that happened to the child where?"

Focused Responses:

(23) a. *nyol*   **chě**   e   n   *kwal*   mwan   *a-hin*
        snake   Foc   agr   p1   bite   child   Loc   bush
        "It is a snake that bit the child in the bush

   b. **kúb*   **chě**   e   n   *sɔ́m   mwan   a- ndáb*
      fowl   Foc   agr   p1   pricked   child   Loc   house
      "It is a fowl that bit the child in the house"

   c. **a-hin*   **dě**   *nyol*   e   n   *kwal*   mwan
      Loc   bush   Foc   snake   agr   p1   bite   child
      "It is in the bush that a snake bit the child

   Whereas (23a) is a grammatical response to (22), (23b, c) are not. In (23b), the focused subject and the verb are completely changed from what was originally stated in the question in (22). The problem with (23c) is in wrongly fronting and attributing contrastive focus to *a-hin* "Loc- bush" instead of the subject *nyol* "snake".

The next example contains three wh-phrases, with two of them fronted while the third is left in-situ. An appropriate response to this complex question must satisfy all the embedded queries. Whereas (24b) satisfies these queries, (24c) does not. The latter leaves out **híí** "where", which constitutes contrastive Focus in the structure. Invariably, a great deal of relevant semantic content is missing in the response. This therefore explains why (24c) runs afoul, since it cannot stand as a correct response to the given question.

(24) a. **híí   dě   Chye**   e   n **bĕl-*é* nzɛ́ɛ́?**
     Where Foc   what agr P1 do who
        "Where is it that something happened to whom?"

   b. *A-hin*   **dě**   *nyol*   e   n *kwal-e* mwan
      Loc bush Foc snake agr p1 bite   child
      "It is in the bush that a snake bit the child

   c. **nyol*   **chĕ** e   n   *kwal* mwan
      snake Foc agr p1 bite   child
      "It is a snake that bit the child"

The following example in (25) is illicit because it is not possible to have double contrastive focus in one structure, even though the language permits multiple questions.

 (25) **híí   dě   chye chĕ   e n bĕl-é nzɛ́ɛ́?**
    Where Foc   what Foc agr P1 do   who

In multiple wh-expressions in the language, each question contains a certain number of potential syntactic content topics (henceforth SCTs), depending on how complex it is. Responses to such questions must not only address the various SCTs, but must also do so in the hierarchical order imposed by the structures. For example, the question in (22) warrants responses on three SCTs, namely the contrastive wh-phrase (**Chye),** the verb (**bĕl-*é***) and the in-situ Topic phrase (**híí**). In the same token, the question in (24) requires responses on four SCTs, namely the contrastive wh- phrase (**híí),** the topic wh-phrase (**Chye**), the dummy verb (**bĕl-é**) and the direct object *nzɛ́ɛ́* "who". Speakers of Akoose produce and expect appropriate responses in the required order of SCTs contained in the questions. Any deviance from this norm rules out the structures as ungrammatical. Before stating the feature specifications of contrastive focus, consider the contrastive criterion in (26).

 (26) Contrastive Focus Criterion`

The presence of a ConFP in a clause requires that the specifier of ConFP contain a [+f] (Contrastive focus) marker, and all [+f] phrases be in the speicifier of the projection of a Focus head.

   Table 4*: Characteristics and Feature Specifications of Contrastive Focus*

	Characteristics	Feature specifications
Topic Focus	statements ex-situ wh-structures	$\begin{bmatrix} + \text{Focus marker} \\ + \text{Contrastive} \\ \pm \text{Interrogative} \\ \pm \text{Fronting} \end{bmatrix}$

So far, topic focus and Contrastive focus have been presented independently on phrase markers. Since Akoose permits double wh-fronting, (with the possibility of having both Topic Focus and Contrastive Focus in the same structure), it is important to show how both syntactic operations can co-occur in a phrase marker. Consider the examples below.

(27) **híí$_i$ dě Chye** e n **bĕl-é** mwan **t$_i$?**
  Where Foc   what agr P1 do   child
    "*Where is it that what happened to the child?"

(28) ConFP

Hii$_i$ dě chye$_j$ e   n   t$_j$ bel-e mwan   t$_i$
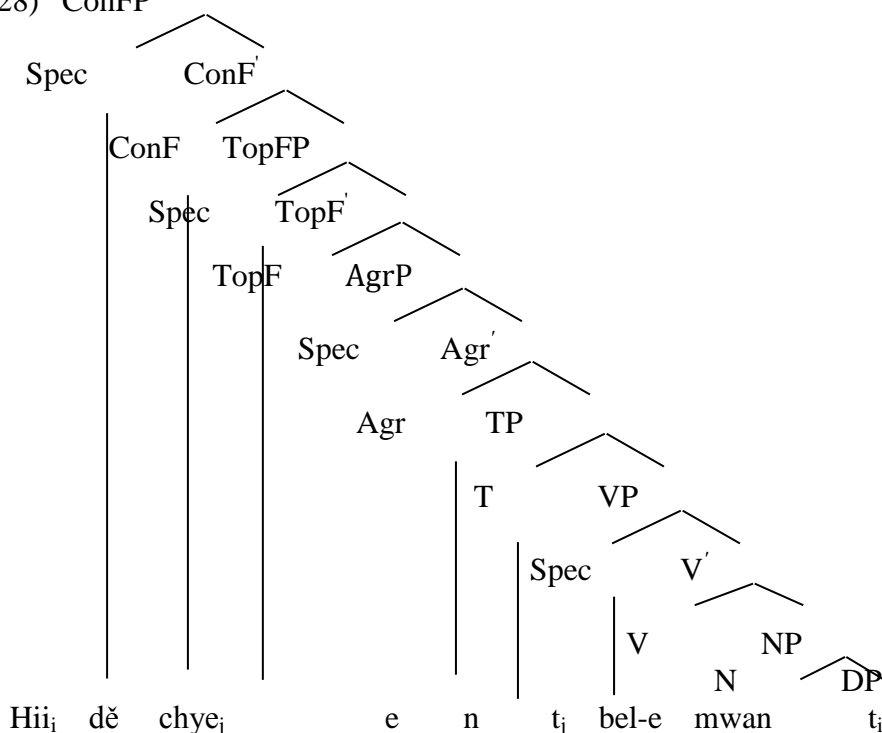
This structure involves the fronting of two wh-phrases. In the section that follows, theoretical insights are provided in order to appraise the structures examined on empirical grounds.

5. Focus Constructions and Theoretical Implication

In line with developments in generative theory, and following the proposal of Brody (1990, 1995), it is asserted that ConFocus is hosted in the focus phrase (FP) projection. The head of FP

(FP is a lexical functional head, whose features are strong; it is also assumed that the complement of F is the predicate part over which the ConFocus takes scope. According to E. Kiss (1998), the presence of an FP in a clause is constrained by the specifier of FP contain in +f phrase (a ConFocus). In the same token, therefore, it is assumed that in (29), the +F (focus feature) in ComF attracts a contrastive wh-feature in the wh-element, moving it into a relation where feature valuation can take place. Movement of the wh-phrase is possible because ConF is a strong head, and also because the features of the focused wh-word are interpretable.
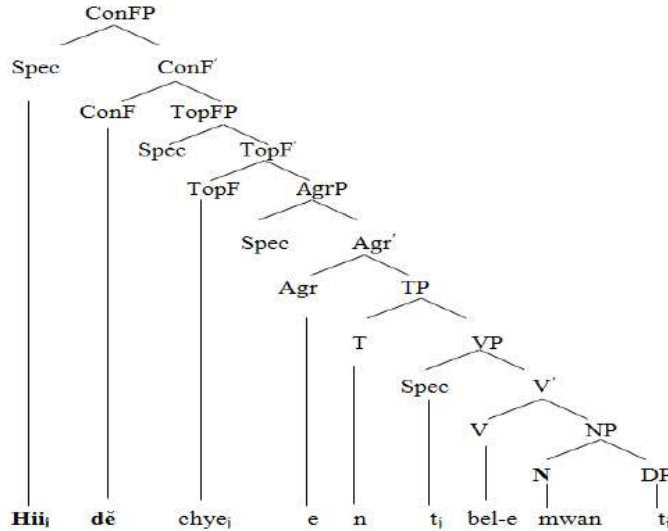
Figure29

Note however that the structure in (29) contains two wh-phrases; whereas **Hii** "where" is a case of contrastive focus, **chye** "what" is Topic focus.

In a situation where only a single wh-phrase is extracted, it is assumed that the Q (question) feature in ConFP attracts a wh-feature in the wh-element, moving the wh-element into a relation where feature valuation can take place. Movement of the wh-phrase is possible because Foc is a strong head, and also because the features of the wh-word are interpretable.

In instances of multiple wh-movements, further theoretical insight is required to render the analysis more plausible. In terms of feature valuation in Akoose multiple wh-fronting, therefore, the logic is as follows: each fronted wh-item contains a strong question feature in Foc that needs to be valued for purposes of convergence. Recall that the analysis adopted here supports multiple specifiers, hence multiple feature valuation is allowed. This reasoning follows from Japanese multiple specifiers and wh-cluster formation (Grewendorf, 1999:158). Note that multiple wh-fronting in the language is cyclic, and the strong focus or topic features in each head are valued as the various constituents are derived. This line of thinking follows from Rizzi's (1990, 2001b, 2003) arguments in favour of a split CP - an analysis widely referred to as the Split CP Hypothesis, wherein the CP is split into a number of different projections. According to Rizzi,

given that complementisers specify whether a given clause is declarative, interrogative, imperative, or exclamatory in force, they should be analysed as force markers heading a Force Phrase (ForceP) projection, and that focused constituents should be analysed as contained within a Focus Phrase (FocP) headed by a Foc constituent.

However, only Topic focus and Contrastive focus are crucial in this paper. From the perspective of Grewendorf's (1999:158) analysis of multiple specifiers and wh-cluster formation in Japanese, multiple movement operations in Akoose can be accounted for. For instance, in the example seen in (29), the focused wh-word vacates the sentence final position to the matrix of the clause, crossing over all other projections. In the first movement operation, the extracted wh-item **Hii$_i$** "where" is hosted in the specifier position of the (ConFP), where it is in Spec-Head agreement relation with the morphological focus marker "**dě**". Feature valuation then takes place in this relation since the wh-phrase carries interpretable features. In the second movement operation, **chye** "what" is extracted from the VP-internal position to the Topic phrase constituent. This movement is made possible by the abstract strong topic features in TopP, for purposes of feature valuation. Note that if both syntactic operations must occur in one structure, Contrastive focus must precede Topic focus, but the reverse is not true, since the derivation will lead to an ungrammatical structure.

Notwithstanding the foregoing discussion, wh-in-situ phrases still need to be accounted for. Following Huang (1982), this study proposes that wh-elements located in-situ undergo LF movement. It is also noted that LF movement is compatible with the economy principle of the Minimalist Program, given that it is not subject to the subjacency conditions of overt wh-movement. Although a wh-phrase may remain in-situ in Akoose, it nevertheless provides important information in the understanding of the overall expression. The scope of understanding as well as the LF interpretation of such a wh- item lies with a certain maximal projection, which contains some discourse-oriented features that require decoding at the LF component. It is further assumed that such a projection contains uninterpretable features that must be valued. In a construction like (30) where Contrastive focus, Topic focus and Wh-in-situ are all present, LF movement is preceded by category movement. This suggests that there is strict ordering in movement operations in Akoose.

(30) a. **híí   dě   Chye**   e   n   **bɛ̌l-$é$ nzɛ́ɛ́?**
　　　Where Foc   what agr P1 do who
　　　　"Where is it that something happened to whom?"

　b. 　　　[ConFP **híí$_1$** [TopFP **chye$_2$** [AgrPP t$_2$ [t$_2$　e　n　bel-e　**nzɛ́ɛ́** t$_1$　]]]]
　　　　　where　　　What　　　　　Agr p1　done　who

In (30b), whereas **híí₁** and **chye₂** have undergone fronting, **nzɛ́ɛ́** is left in-situ. However, following Huang (1982), **nzɛ́ɛ́** also moves at LF to optimise convergence. Before concluding the paper, some salient facts are discussed in the section that follows.

6. Findings and Discussion

The data used for this study demonstrates that Akoose fits into the typological class of optional wh-movement languages. Being able to distinguish topic focus from contrastive focus in the syntax, in addition to permitting a maximum of three different wh-phrases in a given structure with the possibility of fronting two of them, probably constitute characteristics that make Akoose stand out.

Clearly, this paper distinguishes between contrastive and topic focus – a distinction determined by the presence or absence of a morphological focus marker in a given construction. Whereas Topic focus conveys just a basic message – expressing a given topic with the ordinary, non-complex, and non-comparative sense of a statement or question, Contrastive focus or identificational focus conveys independent/evaluative presuppositions. In a multiple wh-expression comprising morphological focus, abstract focus and in-situ focus operators there is a preferred order of extraction in the language. This incontrovertibly imposes ranking in the process of fronting or scope interpretation, in the order outlined below:

a) Identificational or contrastive focus – morphological focus marking

b) Topic Focus 1- wh- fronting (non- morphological marking)

c) Topic Focus 2 – in-situ wh-operators

The analysis has shown that such ranking is inviolable, otherwise the derivation becomes deviant. It has also been argued that responses to complex questions must follow a logical sequence in order not to blur and/or mar meaning. For example, in an instance where there are different SCTs in a given expression, the focused SCT in the question must correspond to the focused SCT in the response.

Following Chomsky's (1995) Minimalist Program, it is assumed that in an instance where a single wh-phrase is fronted, the Q (question) feature in COMP (in this case the Contrastive focus feature in ConFP) attracts a wh-feature in the wh-element, moving it into a relation where feature valuation can take place. Movement of the wh-phrase is possible because the Focus head is strong, and also because the features of the wh-word are interpretable. In multiple wh-fronting, the same process applies in a cyclical manner and in strict application of the ranked order of fronting. This argument is also in line with Grewendorf's (1999:158) analysis of multiple specifiers and wh-cluster formation in Japanese.

From the foregoing analyses, it is apparent that languages distinguish minute semantic details in the way they employ morphological and/or syntactic linguistic units. Theorists sometimes generalise or rather capitalise on an unnecessary narrow detail, failing to perceive the fineness of the semantics that native speakers express and understand with great ease. Since the introduction of Generative Grammar, beginning with the seminal Transformational Grammar (Chomsky, 1957, 1965, 1986), syntactic theory in general has had a main preoccupation of determining *what* moves *where*, *how* and *why*? Even the Minimalist Program tends to focus more on structural economy than on meaning. The elegance of this framework probably lies more in the economy of its architectural apparatus and in projecting the trigger for movement.

It is therefore not surprising to note that most previous works tango between studies that argue in favour of the existence of movement within focus constructions and those that do not associate focus with movement on the one hand. This paper proposes that the semantic component should be given more value in the interpretation of syntactic structure, especially in instances where morphological features carry inherent semantic clues. If a language can afford to distinguish between structures like contrastive and topic focus, such a distinction should not be valued only in terms of its syntactic elegance, but also its semantic importance.

In an attempt to account for the complex focus structures in Akoose within the ambits of the Minimalist Program, Rizzi's (1990) Split CP Hypothesis becomes very crucial. It is assumed that various projections are not only necessary for formal syntactic elegance, but they also convey salient semantic features necessary for the convergence of utterances. Therefore, it is assumed that contrastive projections and topic projections should be listed in the numeration as syntactic units with distinct semantic features and whenever either of them is used in a construction, the features of that projection will bear on the meaning of the utterance.

6.1 Conclusion

It has been argued in this paper that wh-expressions are classified under two separate syntactic operations, namely *Contrastive Focus* and *Topic Focus,* because every constituent structure in Akoose carries inherent focus features that take different syntactic and morphological forms. It is found that whereas a Wh-phrase involving a focus marker denotes *Contrastive focus*, the one without a focus maker denotes *Topic focus*. This distinction is buttressed by the difference in the characteristics and distinctive features attested in the different operations. In complex structures, focusing is done in a hierarchical fashion. In other words, proper ordering of fronted wh-phrases is crucial in the derivation of questions with multiple fronting. This therefore imposes a non-violable hierarchical order of fronting in the language. A

significant finding in this paper is the rich semantic properties characterised in focus constructions. The unquestionable semantic presuppositions observed on Akoose wh-expressions suggest an interesting domain for further research in other languages. Doubtlessly, if similar studies are carried out, empirical literature on focus constructions and meaning will be enriched.

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