

## Verb doubling at the interfaces

Paul Roger Bassong, Collège de France & University of Yaounde 1

Edmond Ossoko, University of Yaounde 1

Jeff Sterling Ngami, University of Yaounde 1

Cross-linguistically, constructions in which an inflected verb is preceded by a morphologically (non)identical verb form are usually interpreted as contrastive focus<sup>1</sup> or topic of the verb (phrase). This is the case in (1) for focalisation in Gungbe (Kwa) and (2) for topicalization in Russian.

- (1) **Dù** (%wè) Séná **dù** blédi ló  
eat FOC Sena eat bread DET  
'Sena ATE the bread.'

Gungbe (Aboh & Dyakonova 2009: 1044).

- (2) **Videt(-to)** ja ee davno ne **videla**,...  
see.INF(-PTCL) I.NOM her.ACC long NEG see.PST.FEM.S  
'As for seeing her, it's been a long time since I saw her,...'

Russian (Aboh & Dyakonova 2009: 1039).

This phenomenon is widely spread across the Niger-Congo language family and has been referred to as *advance verb construction* (Meeussen 1967), *predicate cleft* (Koopman (1984, 1997; Nkemnji 1995), *predicate-centred focus* (Fiedler 2010; Güldemann et al. 2014; Güldemann & Fiedler 2022) etc. As mentioned above, this construction generally associates with the discourse-pragmatic meaning of contrastive focus or topic. However, cross-linguistically, besides the patterns in (1) and (2) where the non-finite verbal token in the left periphery precedes its finite counterpart, verb doubling in other languages can delineate another structural distribution where the non-finite copy is clause final. This happens in the Bantu languages Basaá (3), Mòdúmbà (4) and Mmaala (5).

- (3) A. Why are you looking so sad?/You're looking so sad!  
B. Honba a-m-**ḥḥ** líwandá dʒéé m-**ḥḥ-ḥk** (\*líwandá dʒéé)  
1Honba 1SM-PST-do 5friend 5POSS.3SG 3NMLZ-do-NMLZ 5friend 5POSS.3SG  
'Honba DID it to his friend!' (Honba did something bad to his friend!).  
C. m-**ḥḥ-ḥk** wó-n Honba a-m-**ḥḥ** líwandá dʒéé  
3NMLZ-do-NMLZ 3-FOC 1Honba 1SM-PST-do 5friend 5POSS.3SG  
'Honba DID it to his friend!' (Honba did something bad to his friend!).
- (4) A. Have you beaten the child?  
B. Mə ná'-**tfúptá** mén á (ndǎ') nà'-**tfúptá**(\*mén)  
I PST5-scold child FOC only INF-scold child  
'I SCOLDED the child (I have not beaten him).'  
C. á (ndǎ') nà'-**tfúptá** mə **tfúptá** mén  
FOC only INF-scold I scold.PST6 child  
'I SCOLDED the child (I have not beaten him).'
- (5) A. Why are you shouting? / What happened?  
B. mɔɔn mɔ-**ɔn** Ambassa **gu-ɔn** (\*Ambassa)  
child PST1-kill Ambassa INF-kill Ambassa  
Lit. 'The child KILLED Ambassa (he poured oil on my white clothes!)'.<sup>2</sup>  
C. **gu-ɔn** mɔɔn mɔ-nu-**ɔn** Ambassa  
INF-kill child PST1-PRT-kill Ambassa  
Lit. 'The child KILLED me!' (he poured oil on my white clothes!).'

In (3)–(5), the non-finite verbal token can occur in two positions irrespective of the context. It can be fronted to the left periphery or can be placed postverbally after the postverbal object. Furthermore, the non-finite copy is a nominalised verbal form. Nominalisation is realised

<sup>1</sup>Focus is indicated by capitals.

<sup>2</sup> Note that the verb *gu-ɔn* in (5) is used metaphorically. It describes the damaging effects of oil on white fabric.

through prefixation and suffixation in Basaá (3) while in Mèdúmbà (4) and Mmaala (5), it realised through prefixation by an infinitive particle. (3) and (5) are instances of mirative focus constructions and (4) instantiates contrastive focus. Focus fronting in the left periphery in Basaá (3)C requires a focus marker after the nominalised verb while what looks like in-situ focalisation does not use a focus marker (3)B. In Mèdúmbà (4), the nominalised verb is preceded by a focus marker in both strategies. In Mmaala (5)C there is no morphological focus marking on the postverbal nominalised verb. However, A-bar movement of the nominalised verb triggers morphological change in the verbal complex as indicated by the particle *nu* sandwiched between the past tense morpheme *mə* and the verb *ən* ‘kill’. These ‘in-situ’ and ex-situ focus strategies are the same in non-verbal focalisation in each language.

- (6) a. What did the woman kill?
- |    |                             |               |             |         |
|----|-----------------------------|---------------|-------------|---------|
| A. | Mudaá                       | a-n-nól       | <b>tóle</b> | Basaá   |
|    | 1woman                      | 1SM-PST1-kill | 1mouse      |         |
|    | ‘The woman killed a MOUSE.’ |               |             |         |
| B. | Agánd                       | mə-ən         | <b>mbwá</b> | Mmaala  |
|    | woman                       | PST1-kill     | dog         |         |
|    | ‘The woman killed a DOG.’   |               |             |         |
| C. | məndwí                      | zwí           | á <b>pú</b> | Mèdúmbà |
|    | woman                       | kill.PST      | FOC snake   |         |
|    | ‘The woman killed a SNAKE.’ |               |             |         |
- (7) b. Did the woman kill a cat?
- |    |   |             |        |                     |         |
|----|---|-------------|--------|---------------------|---------|
| A. | <b>tóle</b>                             | pé-n        | Mudaá  | a-n-nól             | Basaá   |
|    | 1mouse                                  | 1-FOC       | 1woman | 1SM-PST1-kill       |         |
|    | ‘The woman killed a MOUSE (not a cat).’ |             |        |                     |         |
| B. | (bu pú)                                 | <b>mbwá</b> | agánd  | mə- <b>nu</b> -ən   | Mmaala  |
|    | dog                                     | be          | dog    | woman PST1-PRT-kill |         |
|    | ‘The woman killed a DOG (not a cat).’   |             |        |                     |         |
| C. | á                                       | <b>pú</b>   | məndwí | zwí                 | Mèdúmbà |
|    | FOC                                     | snake       | woman  | kill.PST            |         |
|    | ‘The woman killed a SNAKE (not a cat).’ |             |        |                     |         |

We show that (3)–(5) in their various forms encode two types of narrow focus with distinct interpretative effects, namely mirativity and contrast (Cruschina 2012; Bianchi et al. 2016). The semantic interpretation of focus is not dependent on the structural position of the nominalised verb. In verb doubling constructions, the nominalised token functions like a phrasal category akin to the focalised objects in (6) and (7). Nominalisation is realised pre-syntactically and the nominalised verb, once introduced in the syntax can target either the low focus field following Belletti (2001, 2004) in the case of the B’s answers or the left periphery (Rizzi 1997) in the case of the C’s answers.

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