

## Focus Fronting in Zarma

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### Abstract

Like it is with other languages, focus plays a significant role in the syntax and semantics of Zarma language. However, the discussion of focus in Zarma is hitherto under-reported in the literature. This is because the syntactic properties of focus in terms of their relatedness or otherwise to those of wh-questions and negation (constituent) where focus fronting is involved have not been fully examined (Sibomana 1995). This paper therefore investigates the expression of focus vis-a-vis its semantic function and architecture in the grammar of Zarma by providing a theoretical analysis of its morpho-syntax. The analysis will draw on language specific as well as cross linguistic evidence. The study adopts the restrictive theory of the Minimalist Program. Primary data for this study came from structured interviews conducted with five purposively selected native speakers of Zarma from Niamey, Niger Republic while secondary data were derived from published works. The data were subjected to inter-linear glossing and qualitative analyses. The study recognizes *nò* as the head of the Focus Phrase in Zarma, whose strong feature necessitates the movement of any focused item to its specifier position. It argues for some structural identities between focus strategy and constructions such as wh-questions and relative clauses but maintains that in each case different formal licensing is required. The Minimalist Program employed in this paper provides an empirical account for the presence of focused-words at the clause initial position which accords with the EPP feature requirement of the focus head *nò*. This speculation seems to show why focus fronting, which is feature induced, should be discriminated from case checking.

**Keywords:** *focus phrase, wh-question, case checking, EPP feature, Zarma.*

### Introduction

Focus marking, a strategy used in language to give prominence to an element or part of a sentence, is achieved by different intonational or special grammatical means, subject to cross-linguistic variation. Zarma<sup>11</sup>, a Songhai language of the Nilo-Saharan family, like many other African languages, makes abundant use of movement rule i.e. fronting rule for the purpose of focus. Sibomana (1995) following Hamani (1981) and Oumarou (1993) brings to the fore the formal and unclear structural identities between focus constructions and the other related clause types, such as wh-questions, which he recognizes as interrogative focus and relative clauses, described as relative subordination. This paper will respond to the perceived descriptive inadequacy contained in Sibomana's discussion by showing that focus constructions and wh-questions are particularly not syntactically identical; each of them requires a different formal licensing.

The definition of focus by Aboh, et al (2007:1) as a pragmatic category that interacts with grammar where a part of the clause provides the most relevant or most salient information in a given discourse situation; appears to capture the situation in Zarma. In this connection, the focus phrase is considered as having a strong feature in the head *nò* which triggers the movement of an XP bearing a focus feature to the specifier of the focus phrase. The behaviour of focus in

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<sup>11</sup>Zarma is a cross-border language spoken predominantly in Niger Republic; several places in northwestern parts of Nigeria and few places in Benin Republic, Burkina Faso and Mali. It has an orthography that was adopted at the 1966 UNESCO meeting at Bamako, Mali; the orthography is a modified version of the Roman alphabet. Zarma is a register tone language with two phonemic level tones - High and Low and, Fall and Rise but it is not known whether tone plays any role at any stage of its grammar other than the lexical function it performs.

this case is described as an *ex-situ strategy* which according to Ameka (1992), Newman (2000) among others is associated with some specific African language families, such as Kwa, Bantu, and Chadic. However, the fact of Zarma, a Nilo-Saharan language, which also marks focus syntactically by means of focus fronting, suggests that the scope of the strategy in question is not limited to the already identified language families. This is illustrated with the data below.

- 1a. Kadi nò <Kadi><sup>12</sup> ná dùndú dùmá  
K FM K Perf yam plant 'KADI planted yam'
- b. Mòó nò írì gà dé <mòó>  
rice FM 1pl Fut buy rice 'We will buy RICE'

The example sentences in the data above capture the description that has been provided for focus as cited in Aboh et al (2007:1); it is given as follows: '*Focus* refers to that part of the clause that provides the most relevant or most salient information in a given discourse situation.'

We notice from the glosses of the examples in (1a and b) that an expression is most relevant or most salient because it is either new or contrasted with another element in the preceding or subsequent discourse. Cross linguistically, this is the basis of focus which is to mark a preceding or following discourse as salient. This immediately preceding claim explains why it is odd to focus a constituent at the inception of a discourse (Awobuluyi 2013:177-178). From the Zarma examples in (1a and b), focus is capable of producing different word orders depending on the constituent that is focused. For instance, examples (1c and 1d) below represent the neutral/basic counterparts of (1a and 1b) respectively.

- 1c. Kadi ná dùndú dùmá  
K Perf yam plant 'Kadi planted yam'
- d. Írì gà dé mòó  
1pl Fut buy rice 'We will buy rice'

Examples (1c and d) appear to suggest that Zarma is not a configurational language because it superficially spots SOV and SVO respectively in its basic clause which may be realized as S-FM-OV when the subject is focused as in (1a) or as O-FM-SV when we have object focus as in (1b). From the foregoing, it is apparent that focus constructions in Zarma show a difference in word order with their neutral or declarative counterparts similar to the situation in the Kwa language family (Ameka 1992 and Newman 2000).

In the remainder of this article, we present the method used in the analysis of the data collected for this study in section 2 and identify different lexical items that can serve as the targets for focus in section 3. Section 4 examines the relationship between focus and some related constructions while sections 5 and 6 discuss the association of focus with case and the minimalist account of focus respectively. Section 7 concludes the article.

### Theoretical Framework

The data for this study are analysed using the Minimalist Program (MP henceforth) proposed in (Chomsky 1993, 1995, 2000; Collins 2013, etc.). The major operations used in MP to build

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<sup>12</sup> The use of angle brackets follows from the dictate of the copy theory of movement to show that the material or constituent in the brackets has been moved. It should be noted that the Spell-Out of Occurrences stipulates that whenever an XP undergoes movement, only the last occurrence created is spelled-out and pronounced in the PF component.

syntactic structures is *merge* - a mathematical operation that combines selected lexical items from the set in a numeration subject to the binary principle. When merge applies on already formed syntactic objects to derive larger units from the existing ones, we have a clear case of movement otherwise known as *internal merge*, which is subject to Minimal Link Condition or Attract Closest Principle. Another relevant aspect of the MP which is germane to our discussion in this paper is the copy theory of movement which maintains that a moved constituent leaves behind a copy of itself when it moves and the copy's phonetic features are deleted and so become null in line with the spell-out of occurrences condition.

Of importance to our analysis is the Split-CP Hypothesis, which according to Rizzi (1997, 2001 and 2003) assumes that the CP should be split into a number of projections. The introduction of the Split-CP Hypothesis handles the claim that the CP houses various constituents that independently project a phrase position at the left periphery of clauses i.e. Force Phrase (ForceP) Focus Phrase (FP), Topic Phrase (TopP), Relative Phrase (RelP), etc.

### Constituents that can be focused

As it is with other languages, the constituents of focus in Zarma are the elements that are accessible to focus. When the elements become focused, they provide new and salient information. The focused constituents in Zarma may involve elements of different category types. Thus, the targets of movement in focus can be DPs which may appear as subject, object, or object of postposition. Focusing in Zarma may also involve complementizer phrase (otherwise recognised as Force Phrase), adverb (adjunct) but not verbal categories.

### Focusing from Subject Position

When the DP that functions as the subject of a sentence is focused, it appears in the clause initial position immediately followed by the focus marker *nò*. This causes a change in the word order because the focus marker now intervenes between the subject DP and the verbal particles. The difference between the two is shown in the examples below.

- 2a. Kadi ná dùndú zèi  
K Perf yam steal 'Kadi has stolen yam'
- b. Kadi nò <Kadi> ná dùndú zèi  
K FM K Perf yam steal 'KADI stole yam'
- 3a. Sheu kà né  
S come here 'Sheu came here'
- b. Sheu nò <Sheu> kà né  
S FM S come here 'SHEU came here'

As suggested by the examples in (2b, 3b), when the subject is moved via focus, there is a gap that shows up at the movement site and no other constituent(s) can be found in the position of the focused subject DP. The gap in this case is represented by the silent copy of the moved DP; showing the difference between the neutral/non-focus sentences in (2a, 3a) and those in (2b & 3b) whose subject DPs are focused. The foregoing is clause structure evidence of the claim that the subjects DPs in (2b & 3b) are actually the targets of focus: the two occurrences of each of the focused constituents is a genuine pointer to the fact that movement has taken place. This is so if we consider the examples (2a & 3a) where *Kadi* and *Sheu* respectively precede the verbal

particles whereas each of them appears at the beginning of the clauses in (2b & 3b) before the focus marker *nò*. Also implied in the examples in (2b & 3b) is semantic or information structure evidence that the subjects are actually focused. For instance, we consider the focused constituent in (2b) as conveying the most salient information in the sentence because the individual who utters it is understood as responding to a wh-question about the subject DP in (2a). The discourse participants are aware that in (2a) an individual planted yam which provides or constitutes the background or existential presupposition of the sentence. Essentially, the intention of the speaker is to provide new information to the hearer that it was *Kadi* that planted yam and not somebody else. The semantic or information structure evidence which we have just provided corroborates Awobuluyi's (2013) claim; earlier mentioned in the introductory part of this article that it is odd to focus a constituent at the inception of a discourse.

### **Focusing from Object Position**

The non-configurational nature of Zarma makes the prediction about where the object of a verb originates difficult because it is possible to have verb object and object verb orders in the basic clauses of Zarma. This is clear from the examples below where in the mono-argument verb; the object can follow or precede the verb. However, Jayeola (In progress) claims that the VP in Zarma displays head-complement order in its canonical form and that the alternations in word order seen at the superficial level in (1c and 1d) are caused by movement<sup>13</sup>. In essence, focus construction as earlier indicated is a movement transformation that will be useful in the identification of object position in Zarma because it is capable of producing OV structures in the language, Jayeola (2007, 2009). In this case, the object of the verb which naturally follows the verb at the point of merge (external) is made to move via internal merge to the spec of FocP. Example (4a) is a neutral sentence which shows that the object of the verb *dù má* 'to plant' occurs to its left even when it is not focused. According to Jayeola (In progress), the presence of *dùndú* 'yam' before the verb is the effect of the object which checks its accusative case overtly. Thus, the internal argument of a mono-transitive verb in the following examples in (4&5) can be focused such that a copy of itself is left behind with a null phonetic spell-out.

- 4a.     Sheu    nà       dùndú    dù má  
           S       Perf     yam       plant "Sheu has planted yam"
- b.       Dùndú   nò       Sheu    nà <dùndú>   dù má  
           yam    FM       S       Perf yam       plant "Sheu planted YAM"
- 5a.     Ní       gòò   hàán       sigári  
           2sg/pl   Cont smoke     cigarette "You are smoking cigarette"
- b.       Sigári     nò   ní gòò   hàán <sigari>  
           cigarette FM     2sg/pl Cont smoke cigarette "You are smoking CIGARETTE"

Examples in (4a, 5a) are neutral sentences while the (b) examples are focused expressions. From the glosses provided for (4a, 5a), *nó* in the (b) examples is treated as a functional element that projects focus expression and the focused DP object moves to the specifier position of the FocP, leaving a copy of itself at the extraction site. For ditransitive verbs, it is also possible for each of

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<sup>13</sup> Jayeola (In progress) maintains that Zarma is not a regular sov language if compared with languages like Izon (Kwokwo, 2012) and Batonu (Sanusi, 2001).

the object DPs of a three place argument verb to be the target of focus. This is exemplified in (6, 7).

- 6a. Hama Sheu      nó      sigári  
       H      S      give      cigarette “Hama gave Sheu a stick of cigarette/gave cigarette to Sheu”
- b. Hama      sigári      nó      Sheu  
       H      cigarette      give      S “Hama gave Sheu cigarette/gave cigarette to Sheu”
- 7a. Sheu nó      Hama      <Sheu> nó sigári  
       S      FM      H      S give      cigarette “Hama gave SHEU a stick of cigarette”
- b. Sigári      nó      Hama      <sigári>      nó      Sheu  
       cigarette FM      H      cigarette      give      S “Hama gave Sheu a stick of CIGARETTE”

The data in (6&7) indicate that each of the indirect and direct objects is accessible to focus movement where they both have their phonetically null copies to the left of the verb. The manner of word order found in the data is quite puzzling, it is clear that any of the two DP objects (IO/DO) can precede or follow the verb that governs them when a focus induced movement is yet to take place. However, the pre-verbal position is assumed to be the position from which the focused element has moved if we consider the examples below.

- 8a. \*Sheunò      Hama      **sigári**      nó  
       S      Foc      H      cigarette      give(Intended meaning “Hama gave SHEU a stick of cigarette”)
- b. \*Sigári      nó      Hama      **Sheu**      nó  
       cigarette FM      H      S      give (Intended meaning “Hama gave Sheu a stick of CIGARETTE”)

The non-convergent of the expressions in (8) is not tied to the focused object DPs – IO/DO but may be linked to the syntactic position which the unfocused objects (bold faced) now occupy; that is the preverbal position. We analyse the ungrammaticality of the sentences in (8) as a violation of the Economy Principle of Attract Closest Principle. The theoretical explanation which we intend to provide in this case is based on the assumption that the focused DP that replicates internal merge to FP originates from a preverbal position to satisfy the Economy Principle of Attract Closest Principle which requires that the (EPP) features of Foc should attract the closest DP to move to Spec-FP. This argument clearly and unambiguously explains why the sentences in (7) fail to converge.

Whether in mono-transitive or di-transitive verb, the syntactic process that applies to object DP focus is similar to the situation relating to the subject DP focus where the focused element is preposed to the spec of FocP. Other than the phonetically null copy of the focused constituent that is left at the extraction site, no anaphoric item/material is licensed in that position. We know that it is the object DPs that are focused in (4b, 5b & 7) because the object DPs that are base generated either to the left or right of their respective verbs in (4a, 5a and 6) now show up at the clause initial position immediately followed by the focus marker. The semantic evidence that can be motivated in this regard is similar to the one given for the subject focus except that here, the speaker(s) who make(s) the utterances in (4b, 5b & 7) is/are responding to wh-questions about the object DPs in the said sentences.

### **Genitive DP Focus**

In Zarma genitive constructions, where its constituent nouns never refer to the same person or thing but are associated with each other in different ways i.e. they express a possessive relationship; it is possible to move the entire genitive DP via focus. When this happens, a silent

copy of the focused genitive DP is left behind. This possibility is illustrated in the examples below.

- 9a. Kadi dé Garba fùù  
 K buy G house ‘Kadi bought Garba’s house’
- b. Garba fùù nò Kadi dé <Garba fùù>  
 G house FM K buy G house ‘Kadi bought GARBA’s HOUSE’
- 10a. Kadi baba dé mótà  
 K father buy motor car ‘Kadi’s father bought a car’
- b. Kadi baba nó <Kadi baba> ná mótà dé  
 K father FM K father Perf motor car buy ‘KADI’s FATHER bought a car’

As shown by the examples in (9-10), the entire genitive DPs can occur in object position as in (9) and subject position as in (10) and whenever any of them is focused, it gets raised to Spec-FocP and a phonetically null copy is left at the extraction site. It is observed that in noun-noun genitive, the possessor and the possessed are lexical nouns and the possessor precedes the possessed without any overt item intervening between them. Following Jayeola (In progress), we propose that the genitive marker is a covert element that does not have PF representation but can be interpreted appropriately at the LF. It is possible for the possessor alone to be fronted and focus-marked in Zarma. The constituent that possesses the other is the item that is focused in this case leaving the possessed item behind at the base generated position. Consider the example sentences below.

- 11a. Kadi baba dé zààrà  
 K father buy cloth ‘Kadi’s father bought a piece of cloth’
- b. Kadi nò <Kadi> baba dé zààrà  
 Kadi FM K father buy cloth ‘KADI’s father bought a piece of cloth’
- c. Kadi dé Garba fùù  
 K buy G house ‘Kadi bought Garba’s house’
- d. Garba nò Kadi dé <Garba> fùù  
 G FM K buy house ‘Kadi bought GARBA’s house’

As indicated by the example sentences above (11b & d), the movement of possessor DP via focus fronting does not induce the occurrence of a resumptive pronoun; what is noticed in the Zarma example is the presence of a silent copy of the focused possessor DP. However, when the possessor is a pronoun and it gets focused to Spec FocP something intriguing appears in such situation. This is the case with the example sentences below.

- 12a. áí dí ní fùù  
 1sg see 2sg/pl house ‘I saw your house’
- b. Ní nò áí dí ní fùù  
 2sg/pl FM 1sg see 2sg/pl house ‘I saw YOUR house’
- 13a. Áí baba kà  
 1sg father come ‘My father came’

- b.        *Áí nò áí baba kà*  
           1sg FM 1sg father come 'MY father came'

As suggested by examples (12b & 13b) above, when a possessor DP that is headed by a pronoun is focused in Zarma, two occurrences of the focused pronouns which show agreement in number and person are noticed at the PF spell out. This is similar to what has been recognized as a case of resumptive pronoun. The morphological shape as well as semantic feature of the pronouns is clearly identical, making them to be co-referential. As indicated in (12b, 13b), angle brackets are not used for the lower occurrences of the moved item because the two occurrences of the moved items are spelt out and pronounced. We then speculate that the differences between the examples in (a) and those in (b) can be explained as the consequence of forming them from different numerations.

### **Postposition DP Focus**

Zarma has been described as a language that superficially spots postposition *Jayeola* (In progress). In relation to focus, the whole PP can be focused to create pied piping, while for some postpositional elements, stranding is permissible. In this case, the focused DP or the entire PP gets raised to the specifier position of the FocP. This is shown in the examples below.

- 14a.    *Áí dí Kadi hábú ó rá*  
           1sg see K market Def P 'I saw Kadi inside the market'
- b.        *Hábú ó rá nò áí dí Kadi < hábú ó rá >*  
           market Def P FM 1sg see K market Def P 'I saw Kadi INSIDE THE MARKET'
- 15a.    *Áí dí Kadi hábú*  
           1sg see K market 'I saw Kadi in the market'
- b.        *Hábú nò áí dí Kadi < hábú >*  
           market FM 1sg see K market 'I saw Kadi in the MARKET'
- 16a.    *Ní dè sààrà Quadri sè*  
           2sg/pl buy cloth Q P 'You bought the cloth for Quadri'
- b.        *Quadri nò ní dè sààrà <Quadri> sè*  
           Q FM 2sg/pl buy cloth Q P 'You bought the cloth for QUADRI'
- 17a.    *Abou dàùn gùlésè tábùló chírè*  
           A put cup table.Def P 'Abou put the cup under the table'
- b.        *\*Tábùló nò Abou dàùn gùlésè <tábùló> chírè*  
           table.Def FM A put cup table.Def P (intended meaning 'Abou put the cup under the table')
- c.        *tábùló chírè nò Abou dàùn gùlésè <tábùló chírè >*  
           table.Def P FM A put cup table.Def P  
           'Abou put the cup UNDER THE TABLE'

In (14b), the whole PP is focused making it to occupy the spec of FocP. The example in (15b) seems to suggest a covert P because the neutral sentence in (15a) does not contain an overt P and the sentence is convergent; we understand the fact that the verb *dí* 'see' is not a typical

ditransitive verb. Example (16b) shows that stranding is possible as the DP object of postposition is the only item that moves to the spec of FocP. The example sentence in (17b) does not converge because the postposition *chirè* ‘under’ appears not to allow stranding; the postposition must move along with its DP complement explaining why example (17c) is well-formed.

**Personal Pronoun Focus**

Traditionally, pronouns perform the same syntactic function as nouns in sentences cross linguistically. In most languages where case is structural rather than morphological, pronouns often show changes in their case forms. This possibility explains the rationale for the division that has been made in the literature between short and long/emphatic pronouns. This for instance is the situation in Yorùbá where only the emphatic forms of the pronouns are licit for focus in spec-FocP (Ilori 2010: 241). This is not the case in Zarma where case is essentially structural and there is virtually no division between long and short pronouns. Interestingly, there is no morphological difference between pronouns used in neutral sentences and those that are targets of focus. Consider the examples below.

- 18a.    Áí dé sààrà  
          1sg buy cloth ‘I bought a/the cloth’
- b.    Áí nò <áí> dé sààrà  
          1sg FM 1sg buy cloth ‘I bought a/the cloth’
  
- 19a.    Alli dí írì  
          A see 1pl ‘Alli saw us’
- b.    Írì nò Alli dí <írì>  
          1pl FM A see 1pl ‘Alli saw US’
  
- 20a.    Ní dí á  
          2sg/pl see 3sg ‘You saw him/her’
- b.    Á nò ní dí <á>  
          3sg FM 2sg see 3sg ‘You saw HIM/HER’

In (18a) the first person singular pronoun *áí* ‘I’ serves as the subject of the neutral sentence and when it becomes the target of focus, its form does not change. The evidence of focus shows up in the movement which the pronoun undergoes making it to occupy the specifier position of the FocP. The same strategy applies to the other pronouns in the sentences in (19, 20).

**Adverbial Phrase Focus**

Items that function as modifiers of verbs in sentences can also be focused in Zarma. The same strategy is employed; the adverbial element is moved to the specifier position of the FocP. Consider the examples below.

- 21a.    Áí dí Zainabou bìi  
          1sg see Z yesterday ‘I saw Zainabou yesterday’
- b.    Bíí nò áí dí Zainabou <bíí>  
          yesterday Foc 1sg see Z yesterday ‘I saw Zainabou YESTERDAY’



22a. Usman kà né  
 U come here 'Usman came here'

b. Né nò Usman kà <né>  
 here Foc U come here 'Usman came HERE'

From the examples in (21, 22) above, *bii* 'yesterday' and *ne* 'here' are adverbial elements that fall under the adjunct category whose movement as indicated in the (b) examples, causes a different interpretation from those in the (a) examples. The different interpretation is caused by the presence of the focus marker *nò* in the derivation because it is possible for the adverbial particle to occur in the sentence initial position and the construction will still have the same interpretation with those of the (a) examples above. Examine the following examples.

23a. Súsúbèi kúlù ìrì gá ñwá  
 morning every 3pl Hab eat 'We eat every morning'

b. Hànù kúlù à gá zùrú kói hábù  
 time/day every 3sg Hab run go market 'S/he runs to the market every day'

A comparison of examples in (21a & 22a) with those of (23) confirms the age-long claim about the mobility of the adverbial phrase. This probably explains why adverbial phrase position is understood as an un-subcategorized position and the copy strategy as our data suggest, does not seem to be at play. Nonetheless, the movement of an adverbial phrase through focus can be from any position allowed within the sentence to the spec of the FocP where the material *nò* is the head.

#### **Complementizer Phrase/Force Phrase Focus**

The whole complementizer phrase which within the CP-Split Hypothesis is recognised as a Force Phrase (ForceP) can be the target of focus in Zarma. The force phrase in this case could be the complement of the main clause whose verb subcategorizes for a ForceP or an adverbial clause that modifies the matrix clause. This is shown in the examples below.

24a. Usman gá búi Kadi kà  
 U Affirm know K come 'Usman knew that Kadi came'

b. Kadi kà nò Usman gá búi <Kadi kà>  
 Kadi come Foc Usman Affirm know K come  
 'Usman knew THAT KADI CAME'

25a. Írì gá búi Usman dé sààrà  
 1pl Affirm know U buy cloth 'We knew that Usman bought a/the cloth'

b. Usman dé sààrà nò ìrì gá búi <Usman dé sààrà>  
 U buy cloth Foc 1pl Affirm know U buy cloth  
 'We knew THAT USMAN BOUGHT A/THE CLOTH'

26a. Áí ná fú ò dábù wàtiká Kadi fátá  
 1sg Perf door Def close when K leave 'I closed the door when Kadi left'

b. Wàtiká Kadi fátá nò áí ná fú ò dábù <wàtiká Kadi fátá>  
 when K leave Foc 1sg Perf door Def close when K leave  
 'I closed the door WHEN KADI LEFT'

In (24b & 25b) it is the complement of the verb *béí* ‘know’ that constitutes the target of focus. In (26b) it is the adverbial clause *wàtiká Kadi fáta* ‘when Kadi left’ that is focused. The syntactic difference between the example in (25b) and what is understood as a periodic sentence is the presence of the focus marker *nò* before the matrix clause which results into the emphasis that is now placed on the dependent clause. Structurally, we observe in (24 & 25) that there is no particle or element that functions as a complement head while *wàtiká* ‘when’ stands in the complement head in (26). The phonological appearance of the complement head in one situation and its absence in another may lead us to postulate a null complement head for those examples where overt complement heads are missing. The silent copies of the focused expressions in (24b, 25b & 26b) are clear indications that these types of FocPs are products of movement of the focused items into spec-FocP.

### **Focus and Related Constructions**

In this section we shall make attempt to keep the notion of focus marking, which refers to the overt realization of focus by special grammatical means, apart from other related clause types, such as wh-questions and relative clauses, where movement to the left periphery occurs and, negation (constituent) which contains an overtly marked focus expression. The constructions are in turn discussed in the following subsections.

### **Focus and Relative Clauses**

A relative clause is another kind of subordinate clause where we have a CP, which within the Split-CP hypothesis is understood as a RelP. This phrase in terms of its defined syntactic position is a modifier to a Noun that is relativized. Zarma data show that a RelP can be focused just as it is with the force phrase. Consider the examples below.

- 27a.    *hinchini* *kà*    *Sheu* *dé* ~~*hinchini*~~ *á*    *bú*  
           goat    RelM    *Sheu*    buy    goat    Agr    die ‘The goat which Sheu bought died’
- b.        *hinchini* *kà*    *Sheu* *dé* ~~*hinchini*~~ *nò* <*hinchini* *kà* *Sheu* *dé* ~~*hinchini*~~> *á*    *bú*  
           goat    RelM    S    buy    goat    FM    goat    RelM    S    buy    goat    Agr    die  
           ‘THE GOAT WHICH SHEU BOUGHT died’
- 28a.    *ái* *dè* *fùù* *kà*    *Usman* *cíná* ~~*fùù*~~  
           1sg    see    house    RelM    *Usman*    build    house    ‘I saw the house which Usman built’
- b.        *fùù* *kà*    *Usman* *cíná* ~~*fùù*~~ *nò* *ái* *dè* <*fùù* *kà* *Usman* *cíná* ~~*fùù*~~>  
           house RelM *Usman* build house FM 1sg buy house RelM    U    build house  
           ‘I saw the house WHICH USMAN BUILT’

A close look at the example sentences above suggests that some amount of movement to the left periphery of the clauses in question is involved in the derivation of the relative clause; we notice that the examples contain what is called a ‘gap’ or a place where some part of the clause is missing. This is indicated by the use of strikethrough. In (27a & 28a), the relativized NPs *hinchini* ‘goat’ and *fùù* ‘house’ originate within the *kà* clauses as the direct objects of the verbs *dé* ‘buy’ and *cíná* ‘build’ respectively and later raise to the pre-*kà* clause position. When the relative phrase in (27b) goes through focus; the entire phrase moves to occupy the spec of FocP, leaving a phonetically null copy behind at the subject position of the main clause. In (28b), the

relative phrase stands in the direct object position of the verb *dè* ‘buy’ in the main clause and when it is focused; it gets preposed to the spec FocP leaving a silent copy behind.

The descriptions that we have provided for relative clauses and focus constructions present the two construction types as identical in terms of having to displace elements to the left periphery of their respective clauses. However, they differ as to what licences the movement or displacement and the internal structures of each of them.

### **Focus and Wh-questions**

In the majority of West African languages that belong to different language families i.e. Afro-Asiatic, Niger Congo and Nilo-Saharan, there appears to be an intricate relationship between focus and wh-questions because there is movement to the left peripheral position: the spec of FocP (cf. Aboh 2004, Aboh & Pfau 2011, Ilori 2010, a.o.). The situation in Zarma, a Nilo-Saharan language is not different as the examples below suggest.

- 29a.   Akeem gà   dí   mái  
Akeem   Fut   see   who ‘Akeem will see who?’
- b.   Mái   nò   Akeem   gà   dí <mái>  
      who FM   Akeem   Fut   see   who ‘Who will Akeem see?’
- 30a.   Kadi ñwá   ńfò  
Kadi   eat   what ‘Kadi ate what?’
- b.   Ñfò   nò   Kadi ñwá <ńfò>  
      what FM   kadi   eat   what ‘What did Kadi eat?’

It is discernable from the examples above that wh-question in Zarma shares marked similarity with the focus construction; the wh-operator expression raises to the clause initial position and is immediately followed by the focus marker *nò*. The example sentences in (29, 30) confirm the prediction that wh-questions bear extensive structural similarities to focus constructions. This situation suggests that wh-phrases and focused phrases belong to the same class of elements; this probably explains why Sibomana (1995) recognises the category of the sentences in (29b, 30b) as interrogative focus. However, it is a fact that the information conveyed by focus is not the same as wh-question; thus there should be a way of showing the syntactic and semantic differences inherent in the two construction types<sup>14</sup>.

### **Focus and Negation**

Within the minimalist assumption, negation and focus are two different constructions that independently project. Negation asserts that something is not the case while focus as earlier mentioned suggests that an element or part of a sentence is given prominence. Similar to the situation in most African languages (cf. Agbedor 1995 Èvè, Ajongolo 2005 Yoruba), when a constituent or part of a sentence is negated in Zarma, the strategy of focus is invoked. This is the case with the examples below.

- 31a.   Kadi kà   né  
      K   come here ‘Kadi came here’

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<sup>14</sup> See Jayeola (2015) for the distinction between focus and wh-question in Zarma.

- b. Mási né nò Kadi kà <mási né>  
 Neg here FM K come Neg here ‘It was not here that Kadi came’
- 32a. Kadi ná sòkòrà dùrù  
 K Perf pounded yam pound ‘Kadi pounded the yam’
- b. Mási Kadi nò <mási Kadi> ná sòkòrà dùrù  
 Neg K FM Neg K Perf pounded yam pound ‘It was not Kadi that pounded the yam’
- In the examples above, a part or constituent of the simple/matrix clauses and not the entire proposition is negated thus; the negated constituent is raised to the specifier position of the FocP. In (31b), *né* glossed as ‘here’ is the negated constituent that gets preposed to the spec FocP while in (32b); *Kadi* the subject of the sentence is the entity that is denied which gets attracted to the spec FocP. It is also possible for the focus marker to appear in a biclausal sentence when a whole Force Phrase (ForceP) which forms part of the larger sentence is negated. In this regard, the entire Force Phrase moves to the spec FocP. Consider the following examples.
- 33a. Usman gá búi [ Kadi kà ]  
 U Affirm know K come  
 ‘Usman knew that Kadi came’
- b. Mási Kadi kà nò Usman gá búi <mási Kadi kà>  
 Neg Kadi come FM Usman Affirm know Neg K come  
 ‘It was not that Kadi came that Usman knew’
- 34a. Abou gá búi [ Usman dé sààrà ]  
 A Affirm know U buy cloth  
 ‘I knew that Usman bought a/the cloth’
- b. Mási Usman dé sààrà nò Abou gá búi <mási Usman dé sààrà>  
 Neg U buy cloth FM A Affirm know Neg U buy cloth  
 ‘It was not that Usman bought a/the cloth that Abou knew’
- 35a. Áí ná fú ò dábù [ wàtiká Kadi kói ]  
 1sg Perf door Def close when K go  
 ‘I closed the door when Kadi left’
- b. Mási wàtiká Kadi kói nò áí ná fú ò dábù <mási wàtiká Kadi kói>  
 Neg when K go FM 1sg Perf door Def close Neg when K go  
 ‘It was not when Kadi left that I closed the door’

Each of the ForcePs in (33 & 34) has a phonetically null head and serves as a complement to the matrix clause. In (35), the ForceP functions as an adjunct to the main clause and is headed by *wàtiká* ‘when’. In each of the (b) examples in (33-35); the negation marker appears in clause initial position immediately followed by the constituent that bears the negative feature<sup>15</sup>.

The two cases of constituent negation show that the particle *mási* glossed as ‘not’ occurs before the constituent that is negated. Syntactically, each of the negated constituents

<sup>15</sup> A detailed discussion of the interaction between focus and negation in Zarma can be found in Jayeola (in press).

raises from its base and is internally merged to the Spec- FocP for the derivation to converge. This is the case with each of the (b) examples in (31-35) where *màsí* gets attached to the constituent in question and the negated constituent is in turn fronted through focusing. Theoretically, we consider the negative marker as part of the numeration that enters into the derivation via external merge. It consequently gets merged with the constituent which is the target of the negative element and for the derivation to converge; the constituent alongside its negative feature must be focused.

Finally, from our discussions of the different constituents of focus and other related constructions; we observe two pieces of evidence that support the claim for focus in each of the examples so far discussed- mono- and bi-clausal sentences. Syntactically, there are two occurrences of each of the focused constituents which predict that movement has taken place. In semantic terms, the focused elements provide new or salient information.

### Case Theory and Focus Constructions in Zarma

Following Chomsky (1995); Rizzi (1997, 2001, 2003); among others, we adopt the Split-CP Hypothesis and go by the provision of Focus Phrase (FocP) proposed by Awoyale (1995), Jayaseelan (2004), Ajongolo (2005) and Ilori (2010). Focus in this case involves the movement of the external/internal argument to the front of the overall sentence into the Spec-FocP to satisfy the strong (EPP) feature of the head of the FocP. Similarly in the spirit of Awoyale (1995); Aboh (2004); Ajongolo (2005); Ilori (2010); among others, we accept the idea that focus marker *nò* in Zarma is a functional head that instantiates the Split-CP Hypothesis (cf. Rizzi 1997, 2001; Radford 2004). However, contrary to the account that we have given of focus projection, Awoyale (1995), Akinola (2003) and Arokoyo (2013) among others regard the head of the FocP as possessing case feature which the focused or moved item checks. In this connection, Arokoyo (ibid) proposes the Emphatic Case. We disagree with this account based on some inadequacies associated with the analysis. In the first place, it is true that A-movement is motivated by the need for case such that the moved or raised item will occur in a position where its case feature can be checked at PF level whereas its silent copy cannot. This condition explains why the sentence in (36) is grammatical.

36. The lion<sub>i</sub> was killed t<sub>i</sub> by a hunter

According to Burzio (1986), predicates which do not assign a thematic role to their external argument cannot assign case to their complement(s). This is why ‘the lion’ in (36) must move because the predicate ‘was killed’ has been disrobed and the complement position has lost its case value; consequently, whether covertly or overtly, no argument can check its case in that position.

However, a cursory look at some of the sentences already examined does not make the above prediction possible in Zarma. This is because the kind of the example in (36) is not possible in Zarma; thus it is unlikely that a focused item moves to check its case feature. In this regard, consider the example below.

37. Sigári nò ní gòò hàán <sigári>  
cigarette FM 2sg/pl Cont smoke cigarette “You are smoking CIGARETTE”

In (37), *sigári* ‘cigarette’ which occupies the spec-FocP originates as the direct object of the verb *hàán* ‘smoke’ and the object position that is now filled by its silent copy is very much accessible to case and so the moved DP which is now in the Spec-FocP could not have been raised to check

a focus case in the Spec of FocP. The first and the second occurrences of the focused DP form a chain and only one case is available to a chain. Second, the movement of the object DP to the Spec FocP is a type of A-bar movement since it is a movement to the left periphery same as the RelP, TopP, ForceP, CompP, etc., which are not case driven. This position accords with the one expressed in Aboh (2004) who asserts that the position i.e. spec-FocP is not specified for a unique type of constituent; it can host any focused XP. Therefore, it is not involved in case assignment (see Aboh 2004:241-242, and references cited there).

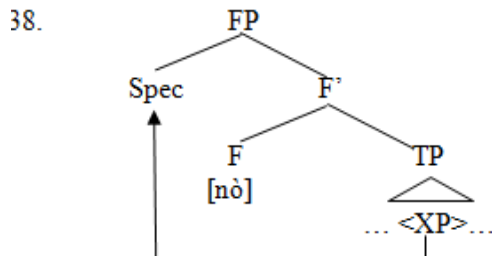
Having provided empirical evidence against the position that the functional head of the FocP attracts DP for case checking purpose, we want to hypothesize that, focus projection represents an instance of reconstruction raising which presupposes that an element is interpreted at the base/ source position and not in the position to which it is raised (see Zeijlstra 2013). In this connection therefore, our structure in (37) indicates that the moved DP is interpreted at the position where we have its silent copy and not the position of its second occurrence (Spec- FocP). This means that focusing shows tangible reconstruction effects. In the spirit of Comrie (1989); Oduntan (2001); among others, we would like to claim that *nò*, head of the FocP does not bear case which needs to be checked, rather it has a pragmatic role of marking its Spec- position as new information or showing the item for emphasis. In the light of the foregoing, we present a minimalist account of focus in the section that follows.

### The Syntax of Focus in Zarma

So far we have taken steps to provide a descriptive account of focus constructions in Zarma. In what follows, we will give a theory-based analysis of focus constructions in the language using the minimalist program. Regardless of the different categories of elements that can serve as targets of focus, one uniform account will suffice for all of them. Without going into the details of operation merge, it is assumed that the focus marker *nò* enters the derivation through external merge while the constituents that are focused enter the derivation via internal merge. This follows from the requirement that all the  $\phi$ -features of the constituents that are accessible to focus must be valued and deleted appropriately so that the movement of such items can take place. This being the case, the situation in Zarma is in strict compliance with what is considered as *focus constituent condition* which specifies that:

all the  $\phi$ -features of a potential focus constituent must be valued within  
the TP (that is the minimal/simplex sentence that contains it)

As previously assumed, focused items in Zarma enter into the derivation by internal merge, which is an instance of operation move. This corroborates our earlier stance that Zarma employs the Ex-situ focus type. In line with the foregoing assumption we present the derivation of focus constructions as follows.

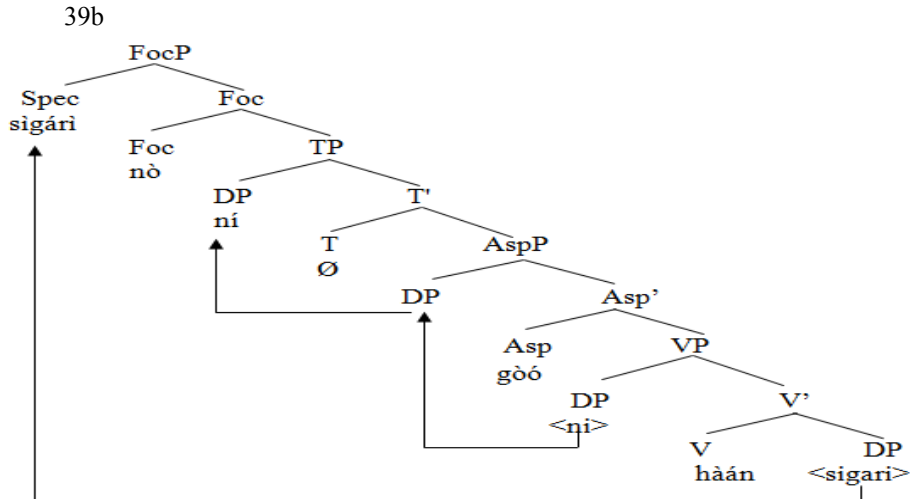


The schema in (38) presents a uniform characterization of focus constructions in Zarma by correctly predicting that when a constituent is focused, it raises/moves to the Spec-FocP in order to fulfill the EPP feature requirement of the Foc head *nò*. The constituent labeled as XP which is a constituent of TP could be any of the targets of focus discussed in section (3) i.e. subject, object, postposition etc.

The syntax of focus projections as observed from the P-marker in (38) involves only one probe: foc, an item that is capable of provoking a movement operation. This is the case with the example in (39a).

- 39a. Sigàrì nò ní gòò hàán <sigàrì>  
 cigarette FM 2sg/pl Cont smoke cigarette ‘You are/were smoking CIGARETTE’

The sentence above, drawing on the minimalist assumption, is derived by first merging the verb *hàán* ‘smoke’ with its complement *sigàrì* ‘cigarette’ for it to satisfy its c-selection requirement. The subject DP *ní* ‘you’ is thereafter merged with the same verb in the Spec-VP in conformity with VP-internal Subject Hypothesis; which is meant to satisfy the EPP requirement of the head verb. This analysis follows from the assumption that the external argument receives its theta role at the point of merge in the spec-VP. The VP is then merged with the aspectual element *gòò* to form Asp’ and the Asp’ merges with a null specifier to form the AspP. The AspP later combines /merges with the null auxiliary to form the T-bar which is also merged with the null subject to form the TP. The resulting TP is merged with the focus marker *nò* to form a Foc’ and the Foc’ is then merged with a null specifier to project a FocP. This is schematically represented in (39b).



Following the assumption that arguments check their case features outside their theta domains; the subject DP *ní* ‘you’ raises to the Spec-TP through the Spec-AspP to check its nominative case where it is licensed. Similarly, the introduction of focus marker *nò* into the numeration projects or derives FocP that contains a convergent TP. The said FocP has a strong head whose specifier feature must be checked in order that the FocP is convergent. It is therefore the strong feature of *nò* that attracts the object DP *sigàrì* to the Spec Foc. This idea is similar to the one conceived by Adesola (2005: 67) who argues that the strong feature that requires checking does not reside in the moved element. The configuration in (39) seems to show the focused DP as moving over too long a distance contrary to the prediction of economy condition of least effort.

However, there are no intervening projections making it possible for the derivation to converge because minimality is respected.

### Conclusion

In this article, we examine the various constituents or materials that can be focused in Zarma by describing the different constituents that may be accessible to focus in the language. The descriptions consist of the idiosyncrasies of each of the items that are targets of focus as well as changes in word order which are triggered by the strong specifier feature of the focus marker *nò*. The paper argues that only the last occurrence of a focused item is spelt-out and pronounced at the PF. However, a case of resumptive pronoun appears when a possessor DP that is headed by a pronoun is focused in Zarma; two occurrences of the focused pronouns which show agreement in number and person are noticed at the PF spell out. When object DP of postposition is focused, the postpositional head may be stranded or pied-piped depending on the idiosyncrasy of the postposition in question. The paper examines and keeps the notion of focus marking apart from other related clause types, such as wh-questions and relative clauses, where movement to the left periphery occurs and, negation (constituent) which contains an overtly marked focus expression. The article argues against the proposal for Emphatic Case (Arokoyo 2013) and posits that focus clauses in Zarma show tangible reconstruction effects because *nò*, head of the FocP does not bear case which needs to be checked. The paper concludes that the appearance of focused constituent at the Spec-FocP in all instances is meant to satisfy the EPP feature requirement of the focus head *nò*.

### Abbreviations

Affirm	Affirmative	MP	Minimalist Program
Agr	Agreement Marker	Neg	Negative Marker / Negation
Asp	Aspect	P	Postposition
Cont	Continuous Aspect	Perf	Perfective Aspect
CP	Complementizer Phrase	PF	Phonetic Form
D, Det	Determiner	Pl	Plural
Def	Definite Marker	RelM	Relative Clause marker
DO	Direct Object	RelP	Relative Clause Phrase
DP	Determiner Phrase	Sg	Singular
EPP	Extended Projection Principle	SOV	Subject Object Verb
FM	Focus Marker	Spec	Specifier
Foc,	Focus	SVO	Subject Verb Object
FocP, FP	Focus Phrase	T	Tense
ForceP	Force Phrase	TopicP	Topic Phrase
Fut	Future tense	TP	Tense Phrase
Hab	Habitual Aspect	1	First Person
IO	Indirect Object	2	Second Person
LF	Logical Form	3	Third Person

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