

# FOCALIZATION PARTICLES IN BAMBARA<sup>1</sup>

*Kirill Prokhorov*  
*Humboldt Universität zu Berlin*

There are two particles in Bambara sharing a similar phonological form: *dè* (“focus particle”<sup>2</sup>), which follows the element under its scope and *dé* (“exclamative particle”<sup>3</sup>) occurring clause-finally. In this paper I will argue that (1) the two particles are both used as focalization devices; (2) the two particles are used to mark two different types of focus: *dè* is used for *constituent focus* and while *dé* is the marker of *operator focus* (Watters 2010); (3) this distinction is mirrored in differences in syntax of the two particles: *dè* follows the focalized constituent, while the clause-final position of *dé* signals that this particle has a scope over a clause-level operator.

Watters (2010) following (Watters 1979, Dik 1980) suggests a typology of the scope of focus that includes the basic distinction between the *constituent focus* and *operator focus*. In constituent focus “the scope of focus ranges over the lexical constituents” (Watters 2010: 355) while in operator focus “the scope of the focus ranges over any sentential operator” (ibid.). Among “sentential operators” are truth-value or polarity, tense, aspect and mood. As for lexical constituent types, the basic distinction may be drawn between ‘terms’ (including NP’s, PP’s and adverbs) and ‘predicates’ (verbs and other kinds of predicates). Terms can be further classified according to their syntactic role in the clause (e.g. subject, direct object etc.) Focus-marking systems vary cross-linguistically in the way the language-internal morphosyntactic categories are mapped to these focus types. In many languages, for example, in the term focus domain there is a basic distinction between the subject and non-subject focus<sup>4</sup>. That is there is a separate construction to mark focus on the subject, while another construction is used to focalize all the other constituent types. Languages may also differ in the treatment of lexical verb focus. Since in many languages finite verbs host polarity and TAM morphemes corresponding to clause-level operators, frequently focus on the lexical verb is marked together with operator focus.

Bambara is typologically peculiar for (1) lacking any distinction within the term focus domain, (2) using the same construction for lexical verb focus and term focus. In Bambara particle *dè* equally follows any focalized constituent, be it a subject, a direct object, a postverbal dative, an oblique or a verb. On the other hand, as argued in the paper, the clause-final particle *dé* can be analyzed as a contrastive operator focus marker.

Syntactically the two particles can be described as scope-taking elements. As other elements taking a scope over constituents (e.g. relativizer *mín*) particle *dè* immediately follows the element under the scope, ignoring several types of syntactic boundaries. For example it can occur between a postposition and its complement, between a noun and the following numeral and between conjoint NP’s, exactly as other scope-taking elements do. The clause-final slot on the other hand is occupied by particles that take a scope over clause-level operators (e.g. interrogative particle *wà*) and the occurrence of particle *dé* in that position is in accordance with this general pattern.

## References:

---

<sup>1</sup> The study was undertaken as a part of project B7 «Predicate-centered focus types: A sample-based typological study in African languages» ([http://www2.hu-berlin.de/predicate\\_focus\\_africa/en/index.php](http://www2.hu-berlin.de/predicate_focus_africa/en/index.php)) of the Collaborative Research Centre 632 “Information structure: the linguistic means for structuring utterances, sentences and texts” funded by the German Science foundation (DFG).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. terms ‘particule de mise en relief’ (Bailleul 2007), ‘particule de focalization’ (Dumestre 1987; Masiuk 1986)

<sup>3</sup> Cf. terms ‘particule exclamative’ (Dumestre 1987), ‘exclamation d’intensité’, ‘exclamation d’interpellation’ (Bailleul 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Among those are languages neighboring to Bambara: Koyraboro Senni (Songhay; Heath 1999) and Dogon languages (Heath 2008, Prokhorov 2010).

- Bailleul Charles. 2007. Dictionnaire Bambara-Français. 3e édition. Bamako : Donniya Dumestre, Gérard. 1987. Le bambara du Mali : Essai de description linguistique. Paris: INALCO. Thèse de Doctorat d'Etat.
- Heath, Jeffrey. 1999. A Grammar of Koyraboro (Koroboro) Senni: the Songhay of Gao, Mali – Köln : Köppe Verlag.
- Heath, Jeffrey. 2008. A Grammar of Jamsay. (Mouton Grammar Library.) Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Masiuk, Nadine.1986. La particule de focalisation "dè" du bambara. In: Mandenkan n° 11, pp 75-88
- Prokhorov, Kirill. 2010. Grammaticheskiye otnosheniya i informatsionnaya struktura v yazykakh dogon (Grammatical Relations and Information Structure in Dogon languages). In: Acta Linguistica Petropolitana. V. VI-3, Nestor-Istoriya, St. Petersburg., pp 141-148.
- Watters, John R. 2010. Focus and the Ejagham verb system. In: Fiedler, Innes. and Anne Schwarz (ed). 2010 . The Expression of Information Structure: a documentation of its diversity across Africa. Typological Studies in Language, 91. John Benjamins, Amsterdam, Netherlands, pp 348-375.