

Predication focus in Gbe

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This paper studies the formal means to express focus on the lexical meaning of the verb as well as on verbal operators (polarity, tense, aspect and mood, cf. the notion of “predication focus” in Güldemann 2002: 330f.) in Gbe languages from a comparative perspective. Although the Gbe languages constitute a clearly defined group of genetically related languages (“dialect continuum”), they nevertheless display micro-variation concerning the means to express information structure. These differences are twofold with regard to predication focus: (i) Only some Ewe dialects make use of a special verb focus marker to focus the predicate in situ, whereas all other languages dispose of only one focus marker which follows the sentence-initial focus constituent. (ii) Whereas all languages allow for verb fronting, they differ with respect to details of this construction, i.e. concerning the kind of predicate which can be focused this way and concerning the question whether the verb can be accompanied by other elements. After having outlined the general strategies to focus the predicate or some verbal operator in Gbe, the paper investigates in a more detailed way the differences mentioned.

It will be shown that focusing the verb or some verbal operator is rarely done overtly. In most cases, there is no marking at all, and it is only the context which accounts for the information-structural content of the utterance and therefore disambiguates between different possible interpretations. But when the verb or some verbal operator has to be marked, the same means as those for term focus are used, except in Ewe.