

# The Syntax of Verb Focus in Kabiye

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## 1. Introduction

In the Kewé dialect<sup>1</sup> of Kabiye (a Gur language spoken in Togo), a copy of the verb (in the infinitive) may be placed at the end of the verb phrase following the particle glossed *kí*. This construction has two main uses: a verb focus use, serving to create an interpretation of contrastive focus (1), and a temporal use (2).<sup>2</sup> We will often use either ‘just’, ‘only’ or capital letters (indicating focus intonation) in the English translations to convey the intended interpretation, or explicitly give a contrasting verb in a continuation (as in “I don’t speak it” in (1) below).

- (1)    ma-ní-ɔ                      kabiye   kí   ní-ɔ                      ma-a    yɔɔd-ɔ                      kú  
1SG-understand-IMPF    Kabiye KI   understand-INF 1SG-NEG speak-IMPF    it  
‘I only understand Kabiye. I don’t speak it.’<sup>3</sup>
- (2)    mɪŋ-kɔm-á                      kú    kɔm                      yɔ  
1SG-arrive-PERF    KI<sup>4</sup>   arrive-INF   PRT  
‘I have just arrived.’

In (2), if *yɔ* is deleted, there is no longer a temporal interpretation. Rather, the sentence would mean something like ‘I have just come to say hello (there is no other reason for my visit)’.

These examples often appear in natural speech, as the following examples from Essizewa (2007) show. Example (3) is from an interview with a 50-year old man in Pude, responding to a question about how much Ewe he spoke:

- (3)    ma-ní-ɔ                      ahoná   kí   ní-ɔ,                      ma-a    yɔɔd-ɔ                      kú    siɪŋ ...  
1SG-understand-INF   Ewe   FOC understand-INF   I-NEG speak    it   well  
‘I only understand Ewe, I do not speak it well ...’

In the next example, a child was overheard yelling. When asked what was going on, a witness to the event replied:

- (4)    ɛ-ɔɔɔ    ɛ-ɛ-makí-ɪ                      kí    mab-ɔ,    ɛ-léyú    nɛ-ɪ                      kí    léy-ú  
his-sister 3SG-NEG-beat-him FOC beat-INF, she-play with-him FOC play-INF  
‘His sister is not BEATING him, she’s just playing with him.’

In this paper we will investigate the contrastive focus interpretation. Our basic proposal is that verb focus involves copying the verb and moving it into the specifier of a clause internal focus projection (FOCP) immediately dominating the verb phrase (VP).

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<sup>1</sup> The Kewé dialect of Kabiye is spoken in and around Piya. The feature of verb focus is understood by speakers of all dialects. All the data in this paper is from Komlan Essizewa and Kossivi Awui, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> We are not assuming that there are two functions for *kí*. Rather, *kí* plays a role in verb copying, which can be used with a contrastive or temporal interpretation. How these different interpretations are derived is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>3</sup> The abbreviations in this paper are as follows: IMPF imperfective, PRF perfective, INF infinitive, PRT particle, FOC focus, SG singular, PL plural, NEG negative, Q question, REL relative.

<sup>4</sup> *kí* becomes *kú* under vowel harmony (see Lébikaza 1999: 68).

## 2. Basic syntax

Kabiye is an SVO language, where the auxiliary comes between the subject and the verb, as in [S Aux V O]. The language has two tones, a high tone (marked by an acute accent), and a low tone (unmarked). The following example illustrates a sentence without focus:

- (5)      ma-ní-ʊ                      kabiye  
           1SG-understand-IMPF      Kabiye  
           ‘I understand Kabiye.’

As Lévikaza (1999: 303) notes, the infinitive in Kabiye is formed with the suffix [-ʊ] which has a high-low tone. Some examples from Lévikaza are given in (6). As shown in (6c), under some conditions the infinitival suffix is not realized phonetically.

- (6)      a.    se                      séʊ                      ‘to run’  
           b.    lub                      lúbʊ                      ‘to forge’  
           c.    dɔm                      dɔm                      ‘to walk’  
           d.    sidi                      sidúu                      ‘to mix’  
           e.    pilimi                      pilimúu                      ‘to roll’

In the rest of this section, we present the basic syntax of the verb focus construction. As (7) shows, the verb copy in verb focus is formed with the infinitive suffix [-ʊ].<sup>5</sup>

- (7)      εsɔ́      yá-kɪ                      kékési      kí    yáb-ʊ  
           Eso      buy-IMPF<sup>6</sup>    bean cakes    KI    buy-INF  
           ‘Eso is just buying bean cakes.’

The verb following KI must be a copy of the main clause verb. This fact is illustrated in (8) through (10). The examples in (9) and (10) show that even a verb that is a close synonym of the main verb cannot be used as the verb copy in the focus construction:

- (8)      a.    εsɔ́                      yɔɔd-ʊ                      kí    yɔɔd-ʊ  
           Eso                      speak-IMPF                      KI    speak-INF  
           ‘Eso is just speaking.’  
           b.    \*εsɔ́                      yɔɔd-ʊ                      kí    kál-ʊ  
           Eso                      speak-IMPF                      KI    yell-INF  
           c.    \*εsɔ́                      yɔɔd-ʊ                      kí    hɔŋ-u  
           Eso                      speak-IMPF                      KI    laugh-INF
- (9)      a.    cíca                      mab-á                      εsɔ́      kí    máb-ʊ    (\*kí    lú-u)  
           teacher                      hit-PERF    Eso      KI    hit-INF    KI    hit-INF  
           ‘The teacher only hit Eso.’  
           b.    cíca                      lú                      εsɔ́      kí    lú-u    (\*kí    máb-ʊ)  
           teacher                      hit.PERF    Eso      KI    hit-INF    KI    hit-INF  
           ‘The teacher only hit Eso.’

<sup>5</sup> The tone of the verb copy is sometimes different from the tone of the infinitive, but the discussion of tone is beyond the scope of this paper. The [b] that appears with *yabu* ‘to buy’ in (7) is an underlying segment of the word that is deleted in various contexts (see Lévikaza 1999).

<sup>6</sup> *KI* is an allomorph of the imperfective used when the verb has the form CVb (see Lévikaza 1999: 330).

- (10) a.  $\epsilon s\acute{o}$        $c\acute{e}t-u$        $k\acute{i}$   $c\acute{e}t-u$        $(*k\acute{i}$   $f\acute{e}b-u)$   
 Ezzo      lie-IMPF      KI lie-INF      KI lie-INF  
 ‘He is just telling a lie.’
- b.  $\epsilon s\acute{o}$        $f\acute{e}-k\acute{i}$        $k\acute{i}$   $f\acute{e}b-u$        $(*k\acute{i}$   $c\acute{e}t-u)$   
 Ezzo      lie-IMPF      KI lie-INF      KI lie-INF  
 ‘He is just telling a lie.’

On the basis of these examples, we postulate that verb focus involves a copy operation, copying the main verb. The copy of the main verb moves to Spec FOCp, as discussed in section 3. We assume that the reason the copy is put into the infinitive is because it is impossible (outside of the imperative) to have a bare verb in Kabiye (see Hiraiwa 2005 for a specific analysis of how copying works in predicate cleft sentences).

In other dialects of Kabiye (Lamatəm), verb focus can be expressed without a verb copy, by placing the focus particle *kɛnɛ* following the verb phrase (see Lébikaza 1999: 508):

- (11)  $piya$        $lééyi-\text{ʁ}$        $kɛnɛ$   
 Children      play-IMPF      FOC  
 ‘The children are only playing.’

### 3. Subject focus and object focus

In this section, we will discuss object focus and subject focus, and show how they are different from verb focus. In object focus, the focused object may appear after the verb, as shown in (12a); or in the clause initial position, as shown in (12b). When the focused object is in clause initial position, it cannot be followed by *na*.

- (12) a.  $ma-n\acute{i}-u$        $kabiye$        $(\text{ɖeké})$   $na$   
 1SG-understand-IMPF      Kabiye      only      FOC  
 ‘I understand (only) Kabiye.’
- b.  $kabiye-\epsilon$        $(*na)$        $má-n\acute{i}-u$   
 Kabiye-FOC      FOC      1SG-understand-IMPF  
 ‘I understand Kabiye.’  
 (reply to: ‘What language do you understand?’)
- c.  $kabiye$        $\text{ɖeké}$        $(*na)$        $má-n\acute{i}-u$   
 Kabiye      only      FOC      1SG-understand-IMPF  
 ‘Only Kabiye, I understand.’
- (13) a.  $m\acute{o}-\text{ɖ}\acute{o}u$        $sul\acute{o}m$   
 1SG-drink      beverage (alcoholic)  
 ‘I am drinking (an alcoholic beverage).’
- b.  $sul\acute{o}m-m$        $m\acute{o}-\text{ɖ}\acute{o}u$   
 beverage (alcoholic)-FOC      1SG-drink  
 ‘I am drinking (an alcoholic beverage).’  
 (reply to: ‘What are you drinking?’)

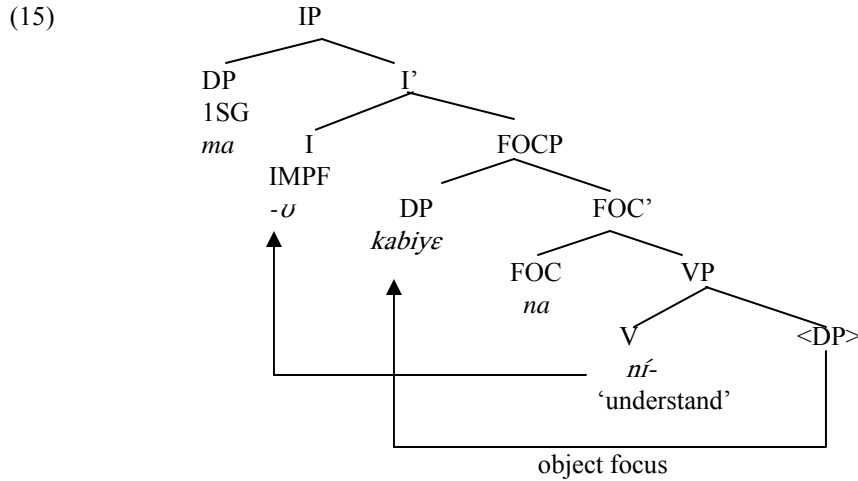
We propose that the final lengthening found in focus in (12b) and (13b) is due to the presence of a focus head following the initial constituent. The only word final consonants in Kabiye are nasal, and these are lengthened in focus contexts as well. In some Kabiye dialects, this lengthening alternates

with the morpheme *kɛ* (Lébikaza 1999: 505)<sup>7</sup>, which we take to be the head of a focus phrase (FOCP).<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the example in (12b) would have the following structure, where FOC is responsible for the lengthening of the final vowel of the DP in Spec FOCP.

(14) [<sub>FoCP</sub> [<sub>DP</sub> kabiye] [<sub>FoC</sub> FOC IP ]]

The focus marker *na* is excluded from (12b) because the focus head is already realized as lengthening. In other words, Kabiye has two realizations of the focus head: lengthening (or *kɛ* for some dialects) clause initially, and *na* otherwise.

The FOCP that is headed by *na* must be low enough in the structure that it follows the main verb (see Belletti 2004, Jayaseelen 2001, and Kayne 1998 for low focus positions). We propose that the clause internal FOCP immediately dominates VP. Therefore, a partial structure of (12a) is given below:



In this structure, the DP *kabiye* is in the Spec of FOCP headed by *na*. We assume that the verb comes to occupy a position to the left of the focused phrase by verb movement to I (also called INFL), which is higher than the clause internal FOCP.

In subject focus, illustrated below, the verb is followed by the particle *na*:

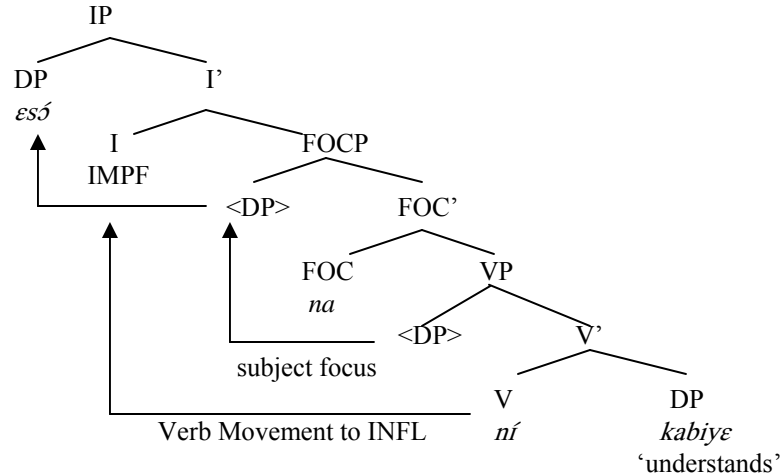
- (16) a. *ɛsɔ ní-u na kabiye*  
 Esso understand-IMPF FOC Kabiye  
 'Esso understands Kabiye.' (reply to 'Who understands Kabiye?')
- b. *ɛsɔ ɖɛkɛ ní-u na kabiye*  
 Esso only understand-IMPF FOC Kabiye  
 'Only Esso understands Kabiye.'

We propose that the subject rises from Spec VP (the predicate internal subject) to Spec FOCP (headed by *na*) and from there moves onto Spec IP. This gives rise to a stranded FOC head following the verb. The verb moves to I (INFL) placing it to the left of the focus head. The resulting structure is shown below:

<sup>7</sup> Note the similarity between *kɛ* (immediately following the clause initial focused constituent) and *kɛnɛ* (as a clause final verbal focus particle, see (11)). We leave this for further research.

<sup>8</sup> See Essizewa (2007) on Ewe and Kabiye, Aboh (2004) who analyzes Gungbe in Rizzi's (1997) system, and also Cattaneo (2005) for an extensive investigation of questions in Kabiye. See also Collins (1994).

(17)



The vowel lengthening type of focus is not available for subject focus, as shown below. This indicates that subjects do not move to the specifier of the focus phrase dominating IP in focus constructions.

- (18)    \*εσό    ní-υ                    (na)    kabiye  
           Esso   understand-IMPF    FOC    Kabiye

An alternative analysis of the focus marker *na* would be that it forms a constituent with the focused element: [DP *na*], where *na* would be a focus determiner. There are a number of reasons to reject this. First, for clause initial focused elements, the standard analysis (Rizzi 1997) is that they head a FOCp projection, and that the focused element moves into the specifier of that projection. The minimal assumption is that such an analysis would hold for clause internal focus as well. Second, if [DP *na*] were the correct constituent structure, it is unclear why [DP *na*] would not be permitted in clause initial position (see (12b)). The constituent [DP *na*] would simply move to the clause initial position. Under our analysis, *na* and vowel lengthening are in complementary distribution, both heading FOCp. *Na* is used with clause internal focus (FOCP takes a VP complement), and vowel lengthening is used with clause initial focus (FOCP takes an IP complement). Third, the constituent structure [DP *na*] would be difficult to reconcile with the fact that the focus marker *na* appears post-verbally in subject focus (see (16)). There is no other case of a DP moving away from a determiner in Kabiye. Under our analysis, (16) is simply a case of successive cyclic movement from one specifier (SPEC FOCp) to another (SPEC IP).

#### 4. Syntactic analysis of verb focus

In verb focus, we have seen that the verb copy must appear at the end of the verb phrase. It is impossible for it to appear clause initially, as shown in (19) and (20).

- (19) a.    \*kí    ní-υ                    ma-ní-υ                    kabiye  
           KI   understand-INF    1SG-understand-IMPF    Kabiye  
           ‘I only understand Kabiye.’
- b.    \*ní-υ                    ma-ní-υ                    kabiye  
           understand-INF    1SG-understand-IMPF    Kabiye
- (20) a.    \*kí    yóɔd-ú                    εσό    yóɔd-υ  
           KI   speak-INF    Esso    speak-IMPF

- b. \*yɔɔdú      ɛsɔ      yɔɔd-u  
           speak-INF    Eso      speak-IMPF

The examples are not made better if the final vowel of the fronted verb is lengthened. These examples show that the clause initial focus position is not available for verb focus. In this way, verb focus is like subject focus (where clause initial focus with vowel lengthening is not possible) and unlike object focus (where both clause initial and clause internal focus are possible).

It is possible (sometimes marginally) for the verb copy to be followed by *na* (note that *na* is obligatory for subject and object focus, but optional for verb focus):

- (21) a. ma-ní-u                      kabiye      kí      ní-u                      (?na)  
           1SG-understand-IMPF    Kabiye    KI      understand-inf    FOC  
           ‘I only understand Kabiye.’
- b. píya      lééy-u      kí      leey-ú      (na)  
           children    play-IMPF    KI    play-INF    FOC  
           ‘The children are only playing.’

Therefore, we postulate that once the verb is copied (and put into the infinitive) it moves into the low Spec FOCp, the head of which is optionally realized as *na*. Note that in the temporal verb copy construction, no *na* is possible, which supports our claim that *na* is a focus particle. Sentence (22) below is repeated from (2) above.

- (22) mɪŋ-kɔm-á                      kú      kɔm                      (\*na)      yɔ  
           1SG-arrive-PERF      KI    arrive-INF    FOC      PRT  
           ‘I have just arrived.’

Analyzing verb focus as movement to a low focus position also allows us to distinguish Kabiye from languages such as Vata (Koopman 1984), Buli (Hiraiwa 2005), and Gungbe (Aboh 2004) that have predicate cleft constructions where the focused verb appears in the clause initial position. These languages use a clause initial focus position rather than a clause internal focus position.

Why is verb focus the only type of focus that involves copying? Following Chomsky (1995), we assume that all types of movement involve copying. Copying results in two occurrences of the moved element, a higher one and a lower one. We assume the following economy condition: Spell-Out the fewest number of occurrences possible. We furthermore assume that if some element has phonetic features it must be spelled-out (at least once). Putting these constraints together, after movement, only one occurrence is spelled-out. We do not discuss why the highest occurrence (rather than the lowest) is normally spelled-out. We indicate the lower occurrence with the <...> notation. Therefore, movement in the passive has the following analysis:

- (23) a. was read the book  
       b. the book was read <the book>      (by Movement/Internal Merge)  
       c. the book was read <the book>      (Spell-Out at PF-interface)

The difference between verb focus and other types of focus is that once the verb is copied, the lower occurrence (as well as the highest occurrence) is spelled-out. Koopman (1984: 171) refers to the lower occurrence as a resumptive verb, and proposes that it is realized overtly because of the Empty Category Principle (ECP): ‘An empty verbal category is subject to the ECP.’ We retain from Koopman the idea that the lower occurrence is a resumptive verb, but we propose that it is spelled-out in the case of verb focus because the lower occurrence is needed to satisfy the morphological requirements of INFL (which is affixal in Kabiye). In other words, INFL is a bound morpheme that needs to be attached to a phonologically overt verb. In the case of object and subject focus, the lower occurrence does not need to be overt in order to satisfy the morphological requirements of any functional head. In

other words, there are no bound morphemes that need to be attached to the subject or object. In this way, verb focus in Kabiye gives support to the copy theory of movement.

Koopman (1984: 171) herself entertains the possibility that the copy theory of movement accounts for copying in predicate cleft constructions: ‘. . . since an empty category is excluded by the ECP, the deletion part of movement is blocked, and the clause therefore contains a copy of an identical verb.’ She abandons such an approach based on the fact that it would yield no simple account of resumptive pronouns. The question is why a resumptive pronoun is used instead of a full copy of the DP that undergoes movement. We assume that this asymmetry between verb copy-movement and resumptive pronouns is also due to economy: Spell-Out the fewest number of occurrences possible, and minimize spell-out of each occurrence. If a lower occurrence must be spelled-out, it is spelled-out minimally. In the case of a moved DP, only the phi-features (person and number features) are spelled-out as pronouns. In the case of verb copy, the whole verb is spelled-out, presumably because there are no verbal pro-forms.

It is impossible to drop the particle *kí* in verb focus, as the examples below show.

- (24) a. \*ma-ní-ú                      kabiye              ní-ú  
           1SG-understand-IMPF   Kabiye              understand-INF
- b. \*εśó    yód-d-ú              yód-d-ú  
           Eso    speak-IMPF        speak-INF

The exact function of the particle *kí* is not completely clear. It appears to be homophonous with the adjectivizing prefix discussed in Lébikaza (1999: 68, 399), who states “its function is to form an adjectival base with the radical.” Whereas *kí* is obligatory with verb focus, note that neither the subject nor the object can follow *kí*, as shown in (25) for the object, and in (26) for the subject.

- (25)    \*ma- ní-ú                      (ku)        kí    kabiye    (na)  
           1SG-understand-IMPF        3SG        KI    Kabiye    FOC
- (26)    \*ε-ní-ú                      / \*ní-ú    kabiye              kí    εśó        (na)  
           3SG-understand-IMPF              Kabiye              KI    Eso        FOC

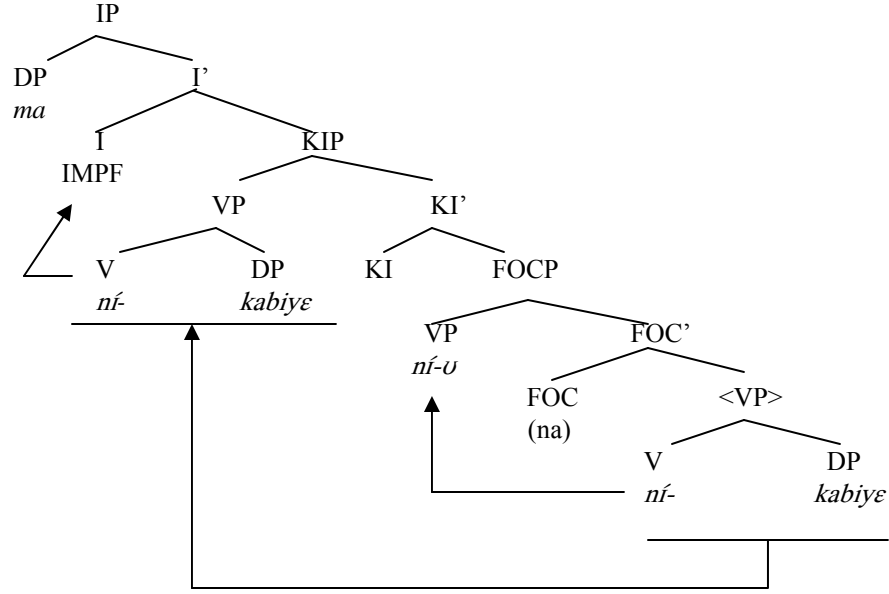
It would be easy to attribute the presence of *kí* in the verb focus construction to morphological subcategorization. *Kí* would subcategorize for a focused verb (as in the case of the adjectivizing use of *kí*). But it is possible that the presence of *kí* is due to deeper reasons. Consider the configuration formed after verb focus (see example (21b)):

- (27)            INFL            leey-ú            (na)        leey-  
                                   play-INF        FOC        play

The verb *leey-* ‘play’ needs to rise to INFL over the focused verb in SPEC FOC. This creates a situation which is ruled out by Relativized Minimality (which in this case entails that a verb cannot undergo movement over a closer verb). In order to avoid this problem, we propose that the VP is moved into Spec *kí*.

Putting the above assumptions together, we have the following analysis for the sentence in (21a) (leaving out the VP internal subject for simplicity):

(28)



Lastly, in verb focus the verb copy cannot be followed by *ɖeke* ‘only’, as shown in (29).

- (29) a. ma-ní-u                      kabiye      kí      ní-u                      (\* ɖeké)  
           1SG-understand-IMPF   Kabiye      KI      understand-INF      only
- b. ma-ní-u                      kabiye      kí      ní-u                      (\* ɖeké na)  
           1SG-understand-IMPF   Kabiye      KI      understand-INF      only      FOC

We suggest that this fact follows from a restriction on *ɖeké* ‘only’ that it only modify DPs, and not verbs or other grammatical categories. Evidently the infinitive in verb focus is not acting as a noun, and therefore it cannot be modified by *ɖeké* ‘only’.

## 5. Restrictions on verb focus

Verb focus can occur in a wide variety of contexts, including with negation (as shown in (30)), in the imperative (as shown in (31) and (32)), with yes-no questions (as shown in (33) and (34)), and in relative clauses (as shown in (35) and (36)).

- (30)    εsɔ            εε-yɔɔd-u                      kí    yɔɔd-ú  
           Esso        NEG-speak-IMPF      KI    speak-INF  
           ‘Esso is not speaking.’ (...he is laughing)
- (31)    ɖɛ            kí    ɖɛ-u            mɛ            sínj            da  
           leave      KI    leave-INF    1SG        face        in  
           ‘Get out of my face!’
- (32)    la                      tumíye                      kí            láb-u  
           work(Verb)    work(Noun)            KI            work-INF  
           ‘Instead of playing, talking, do the work!’
- (33)    a.    εsɔ            lá-kí            tumíye            kí            láb-u            yawé  
               Esso        work-IMPF    work            KI            work-INF      Q  
               ‘Is Esso working?’ (as opposed to playing)



- b. \*εσό lá-κ1 tumíγε yawé kí láb-u  
Esso work-IMPF work Q KI work-INF
- (34) a. εσό yábí kékési kí yáb-u yawé  
Esso bought-PERF<sup>9</sup> bean.cakes KI buy-INF Q  
'Did Esso buy bean cakes?' (instead of being given them)
- b. \*εσό yábí kékési yawé kí yáb-u  
Esso bought bean.cakes Q KI buy-INF
- (35) éyú wéi ε-yabá kékési kí yáb-u yɔ  
person who 3SG-buy bean cakes KI buy-INF REL  
'the person who bought bean cakes'  
(\*... yɔ kí yáb-u)
- (36) kékési ηzí εσό yab-á kí yáb-u yɔ  
bean cakes which Esso bought-PERF KI buy-INF REL  
'the bean cakes Esso bought'  
(\*... yɔ kí yáb-u)

Note in particular that the verb copy must precede the clause final question marker *yawé* and the clause final relative clause marker *yɔ*. If the clause final question marker and relative clause marker take as sisters the IP ([IP *yàwé*]), the fact that verb focus must precede these markers follows from the assumption that verb focus is internal to the IP.

Consider more closely the fact that verb focus can appear with the imperative. Clause internal object focus can also appear with the imperative, as shown below:

- (37) a. ya kékési ɖeké na!  
buy bean.cakes only FOC  
'Buy only bean cakes!'
- b. ya kékési kí yáb-u!  
buy bean.cakes KI buy-INF  
'BUY bean cakes.' (as opposed to stealing them)

However, it is impossible for the left peripheral focus position to be used in the imperative, as the following example of object focus shows:

- (38) a. \*kékési ɖeké ya!  
bean.cakes only buy
- b. \*kékési-1 ya!  
bean.cakes-FOC buy

These facts strongly distinguish clause initial focus from clause internal focus. We can explain them in the following way. Imperatives are reduced in many ways, for example, there are no temporal distinctions in the imperative. Suppose, furthermore, that imperatives simply lack most of the left periphery (in the sense of Rizzi 1997). In other words, imperatives do not have the functional projections dominating IP that other clause types have. It follows that there will be no FOC in the left periphery (dominating IP) and so focus movement to a clause initial position will not be possible. On

<sup>9</sup> *Yábí* 'bought' is the "linked" form of the perfective, which means that it appears before a direct object. The *-a* suffix is deleted, and an epenthetic vowel *i* is inserted (see Lébikaza 1999).

the other hand, there is no reason to expect the clause internal focus position to be absent in imperatives.

While verb focus can appear in the above contexts, there are two general environments where it is impossible: in a sentence involving a constituent question, and in a sentence involving some other focus. Subject questions are illustrated in (39) and (40), object questions in (41) and (42), object focus in (43) and subject focus in (44):

- (39) a. á yáb-á kékésı (\*kí yáb-u)  
 who bought-PERF bean.cakes KI buy-INF  
 ‘Who bought the bean cakes?’
- b. ání yáb-á kékésı (\*kí yáb-u)  
 who bought-PERF bean.cakes KI buy-INF
- (40) a. á lá-kı tımíye (\*kı láb-u)  
 who work-IMPF work KI work-INF  
 ‘Who is working?’
- b. ání lá-kı tımíye (\*kı láb-u)  
 who work-IMPF work KI work-INF  
 ‘Who is working?’
- (41) abε(ε) εsó yáb-á (\*kí yáb-u)  
 what Esso bought-PERF KI buy-INF  
 ‘What did Esso buy?’
- (42) abε(ε) η-lá-kı (\*kí láb-u)  
 what 2SG-do-IMPF KI do-INF  
 ‘What are you doing?’
- (43) a. kabıyeε má ní-u (\*kí ní-u)  
 Kabiye 1SG understand-IMPF KI understand-INF
- b. kabıye deké má ní-u (\*kí ní-u)  
 Kabiye only 1SG understand-IMPF KI understand-INF  
 ‘I understand only Kabiye.’
- (44) εsó (deké) ya-na-m (\*kí yá-u)  
 Esso only call-FOC-1SG KI call-INF  
 ‘(Only) Esso called me.’

The impossibility of subject focus and verb focus in (44) follows naturally if we assume that there is only one clause internal focus position. In other words, there is one FOCP dominating VP. The uniqueness of FOCP dominating VP is identical to the uniqueness of FOCP dominating IP discussed by Rizzi (1997).

The impossibility of object focus with verb focus in (43) would follow if there can only be one FOCP per clause. Therefore, either FOCP dominates IP (in left periphery), or FOCP dominates VP, but not both.

The impossibility of subject and object questions with verb focus (39-42) follows on the assumption that questions involve focus, and therefore question words land in SPEC FOCP. Even though question formation does not require *na* or vowel lengthening, vowel lengthening is possible in the case of object questions, as shown in (41) and (42), indicating movement to SPEC FOCP. We assume that when there is no *na* or vowel lengthening in object questions, there has still been movement to SPEC FOCP (on questions and focus see Rizzi 1997: 298).

## 6. Order of the verb copy and complements

The most natural position for the verb copy is following verbal complements, as shown in (45). However, under a certain interpretation, the verb copy can immediately follow the verb (preceding complements), as shown in (46).

- (45)    εσό      yá-kɪ      kékési      kí yáb-u      (na)  
           Esso    buy-IMPF    bean.cakes    KI buy-INF    FOC  
           ‘Eso is just buying bean cakes.’

          ε-tɪ-lá                      sɪ  
           3SG-NEG-do.PERF    3PL  
           ‘He didn’t make them.’

- (46)    εσό      yá-kɪ      kí yáb-u      kékési  
           Esso    buy-IMPF    KI buy-INF    bean.cakes  
           ‘Esso is just buying bean cakes.’

          ε-tɪ-má                      púa    ŋgá  
           3SG-NEG-beat.PERF    child    that  
           ‘He didn’t hit that child.’

Sentence (45) is the most natural. It can be said in the following situation: when I see Esso eating bean cakes, I wonder whether he made them himself, or bought them. When I asked somebody about this, the person I ask uses (45) to clarify that Esso is BUYING the bean cakes. In this example, it is clearly the verb alone (excluding the complements) that is focused. Esso is BUYING the cakes, he did not make them himself.

On the other hand, sentence (46) can be used in the following situation: my child is selling the bean cakes and I see her crying. When I look over at her, I see Esso near her. I wonder if Esso did something to my child to make her cry. A witness to the event clarifies the situation in saying (46). In this case, the focus is clearly the VP. Esso is BUYING BEAN CAKES, he did nothing else.

The distinction above corresponds to the distinction between verb focusing and VP focusing. In the example where the verb is focused, only the verb copy follows *kí*. In the example where the VP is focused, the verb copy and its complement follow *kí*. These facts suggest that what follows *kí* is focused. In terms of the analysis outlined in section 3, either a verb alone or a verb with its complement may be moved to Spec FOCF (headed by *na*).

The analysis is confirmed by the fact that it is impossible for a pronoun to follow the verb copy:

- (47) a.    εσό      yá-kɪ      sɪ      kí yáb-u  
               Esso    buy-IMPF    3PL    KI buy-INF
- b.    \*εσό      yá-kɪ      kí      yáb-u      sɪ  
               Esso buy-IMPF    KI      buy-INF      3PL

The facts can be explained in the following way. In (47a), only the verb is focused. The English paraphrase would be ‘Esso is only BUYING them’. Now, since the pronoun follows the verb copy in (47b), there is VP focus. VP focus conflicts with the presence of the object pronoun which forces a verb focus interpretation, where the verb and not the object, is being contrasted to some other verb.

We note here that (46) does not allow the optional *na* that we have found with other cases of verb focus. Therefore, it is hard to see on the surface whether V-INF by itself or the VP including the DP complement is in SPEC FOCF. We assume the latter, but leave it for further research.

Another issue is why the object is not copied with the verb, as shown in the following example:

- (48) \*esó yá-ki kékési kí yáb-u kékési  
 Esso buy-IMPF bean.cakes KI buy-INF bean.cakes  
 ‘Esso is just buying bean cakes.’

We assume the reason for this is due to the principle discussed above: Spell-Out the fewest number of occurrences possible, and minimize spell-out of each occurrence. Since the occurrence in SPEC FOCF (following KI) contains the overtly spelled out object, there is no reason to spell-out the object in the other occurrence (immediately following the finite verb).

Although the judgments in (45) and (46) are clear, much more investigation is needed to be sure that the contrast should be described in terms of V-focus versus VP-focus. We look forward to furthering our investigation of this contrast in future work.

## 7. Conclusion

We have discussed the basic syntax and semantics of the verb focus construction in Kabiye, and sketched a syntactic analysis. The analysis is summarized below:

- (49) a. A copy of the verb, in infinitival form, is created.  
 b. V-INF does not move to a clause initial focus position, rather to a clause internal position. The clause internal focus position is the specifier of a FOCF dominating VP.  
 c. Because of the morphological requirements of INFL, the lower occurrence of the verb is spelled-out overtly.  
 d. The head of the lower FOCF is realized as *na*.  
 e. The VP moves to the specifier of KI.

The only other example that we have found of verb focus where the verb copy follows the verb phrase was described in Koopman (2000) for Nweh, a Grassfield Bantu language spoken in Cameroon. Due to limitations of space, we will not be able to discuss the differences between Kabiye and Nweh. For example, in Nweh, as opposed to Kabiye, subject questions are compatible with verb focus.<sup>10</sup>

Theoretically, our proposal provides support for Chomsky’s (1995) copy theory of movement. Our proposal also provides support for the idea that there are two different focus positions in the clause, a clause initial position (high focus) and a clause internal position (low focus) (Belletti 2004, Jayaseelan 2001). Our data provides direct evidence for a lower focus head, since the head is realized overtly in Kabiye as *na*.

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<sup>10</sup> Kandybowicz (2006) describes a verbal repetition construction in Nupe that bears some resemblance to verb focus in Kabiye.

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