# Information Packaging – Focus Marking and Focus Constructions in Leteh (Larteh)

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes focus marking phenomenon in Leteh[1] (Kwa: South Guan), and the formation of four focus constructions in the language. The study is informed by tenets of Basic Linguistic Theory (Dixon 1997; Dryer 2006). Non-subjects are obligatorily focus marked with a dedicated morpheme *né,* and a clause-final definiteness marker *a*, whereas subject focus marking is by a clause-final definiteness marker *a* only. Constituents that are focused represent the most salient information in the discourse. The occurrence of gaps is contingent on the lexical category of the focused constituent. Data are sourced from recorded Leteh folktales and constructed discourse. The paper adds new data on focus constructions in Kwa languages.

***Keywords****: focus marker; resumptive pronoun; anaphoric pronoun; subject focus marking; non-subject focus marking.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of this paper is two-fold: to describe the phenomenon of focus marking in Leteh (Kwa: South Guan) and to discuss four types of focus constructions in the language. In the linguistic literature, the term 'focus' has been variously defined. Among the diverse definitions are those offered by the following: Dik 1978: 19; Dik 1989: 226; Lambrecht 2001: 227ff; Aboh 2007: 1; Halliday 1985: 227. The definition adopted for this paper is what Aboh (2007: 1) put forward: "Focus refers to that part of the clause that provides the most relevant or most salient information in a given discourse situation." From a pragmatic viewpoint, focus is a choice made by the speaker as to the piece of information that he/she wants to present to the addressee as the most salient (Ameka 1992: 2).

Focus may be typologized based on the function of the focused element in the discourse or communicative situation. The function of the focused element may thus be presentational; informative or completive; or contrastive (Cullicover and Rochemont 1983; Dik et al 1981). The function is described as presentational when it seeks to introduce a new participant into the discourse, and informative or completive when it functions to inform or fill in a gap in the knowledge of a communication participant. With the contrastive type, the focus information is

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[1]    Leteh is the spelling adopted for the name of the language under discussion. Elsewhere in the literature, various spellings such as Lɛtɛ and Larteh are also used. All of these spellings refer to the same language.

presented to be different from an assumption that may be made in the communicative context.

The discussion in this paper, however is not strictly informed by the functional typology of focus, but as the data will illustrate, focused constituents could serve any of the functions described. Focus constructions which this paper discusses fit into Drubig and Schaffer (2001: 1079)'s definition of a focus construction: "[A] type of sentence that serves to promote a specified constituent, its focus, to a position of particular prominence by setting it off from the rest of the sentence in one way or another."

The study makes use of narratives in Leteh which form part of a larger Leteh corpus and constructed data in Leteh and Akan. The discussion is informed by tenets of Basic Linguistic Theory (Dryer 2006: 210–211; Dixon 1997: 128), a cumulative framework which suits the description of grammars, especially those of languages that are less-studied. As per the tenets of the framework, the discussion in this paper will describe the phenomenon of focus marking in Leteh and focus constructions in its own terms, different from what exists in European languages[2].

The paper will proceed as follows: in the second section, some grammatical information on Leteh is given. This is followed by a section which discusses the phenomenon of focus marking in Leteh and some Kwa languages. The three sections (sections 4–6) that follow will treat four types of focus constructions in Leteh. In the final part, section 7, conclusions are drawn.

## 2. SOME GRAMMATICAL FEATURES OF LETEH

The present section discusses grammatical features of Leteh that relate to the discussion in this paper.

Leteh is a South Guan (Kwa, Niger-Congo) language (Lewis 2009) spoken in southeastern Ghana, West Africa by about 8, 310 people (2000 Population and Housing Census of Ghana). The Leteh language has no official orthography, hence here and elsewhere in Leteh literature, the Akan orthography is used. This is made possible, because of the phonological congruence that exists between Leteh and Akan.

Similar to most African languages, Leteh is tonal with two level tones: high and low. The morphology is largely agglutinating. Tense[3] and aspectual distinctions are marked by tone and verbal prefixes.

In Leteh, grammatical relations are determined by constituent order, and akin to many African languages, the language has a basic constituent order that is fixed; the subject and object occur in a fixed position in relation to the verb in the

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2    See Rochemont, Michael S. and Peter W. Culicover on English Focus Constructions for instance.

3    In this paper, verbs are tonally marked to indicate tense and aspectual distinctions.

basic word order. The unmarked monotransitive clause in (1) exemplifies the basic constituent order of Leteh, which is SVO.

1.  Ananse   dɔ̀          [fɔ́    a]ₙₚ     ntente.
    S         V          O                (ADV)
    Name      PST.climb   barn   DEF      quickly

    'Ananse climbed the barn quickly'

There are also less common word orders used for specialized functions, such as that of a focus construction. Generally, when a non-subject constituent in a sentence is made the focus of that sentence, it is fronted, leading to a change in the canonical word order. Furthermore, when an interrogative word/phrase is focused ex-situ, there is a change in the constituent order (see Akrofi Ansah 2010).

Three types of verbal clauses operate in Leteh: intransitive (2), monotransitive (3) and ditransitive ((4) and (5)) clauses.

2.  *Kofi*      *bè-sú.*
    Name        FUT-cry

    'Kofi will cry.'

The intransitive clause has one core argument, the subject, which may be a full NP (2) or a pronominal. The monotransitive clause (3) has one direct object which is directly involved in an action or process, which again may be a noun phrase or a pronominal.

3.  *Ananse*    *bóro`*      *oyi*      *a.*
    Ananse      PST.beat     tree       DEF

    'Ananse beat the tree.'

Leteh has two types of ditransitive constructions: a double object construction (4a), and an indirect construction (4b).

4a. *Ananse*    *nɛ́*        *Nkɔnɔre*   *eteeni*
    A                       R           T
    *Ananse*    PST.give    *Nkɔnɔre*   money

    'Ananse gave Nkɔnɔre money'.

The indirect construction (4b) differs from the double object construction in terms of the reverse order of the R-argument and the T-argument. Moreover in the indirect construction, the R-argument is marked by an adposition. It is interesting

to note that in Leteh, similar to some Kwa languages like Akan (Osam 1994), it can be demonstrated that serial verbs like *nέ* has (4b) grammaticalized into a preposition (Akrofi Ansah 2009).

4b.    *Ananse*    *bétè*    *eteeni*    *nέ*    *Nkɔnɔre.*
      *Ananse*    PST.take    money    ADP    *Nkɔnɔre.*

      'Ananse gave money to Nkɔnɔre.'

All Leteh personal pronouns are free forms, except the non-emphatic variant of the first person singular pronoun which is represented by a syllabic nasal which must always be cliticized to the verb. The first person plural has two forms, the inclusive and the exclusive forms. Whereas the inclusive form stands for the speaker and the addressee, the exclusive form refers to the speaker and others, minus the addressee. The independent/emphatic forms of the personal pronouns are akin to the object forms.

    The Leteh personal pronominal system is illustrated in table 1.

**Table 1**. *The Personal Pronoun paradigm of Leteh.*

| Person/Number | 1SG | 2SG | 3SG | 1PL | 2PL | 3PL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subject | *Me/N* Emphatic/non-emphatic | *wo* | *a* | *ɛne/ɛye* incl./excl. | *wonɛ* | *amo* |
| Object | *me* | *wo* | *mo* | *ɛne/ɛye* incl./excl. | *wonɛ* | *amo* |

It must however be pointed out that comparable to Akan (Saah, 2002: 215), the overt object pronoun is normally used for animate referents only (5a) and (5b) while null object pronouns are used for inanimate entities (6a) and (6b). The construction in (6c) is therefore inappropriate.

5a.    *Kofi*    *bè-sú*    *Ama.*
      Kofi    FUT-send    Ama

      'Kofi will send Ama'.

b.    *Kofi*    *bè-sú*    *mo.*
      Kofi    FUT-send    3SG

      'Kofi will send her'.

6a.  *Kofi    sɔ̀         tsa.*
     Kofi    PST.buy     house

     'Kofi bought a house'.

b.   *Kofi    sɔ̀         ∅.*
     *Kofi*   PST.buy

     'Kofi bought (it).

c.   *\*Kofi    sɔ̀         mo.*
     *Kofi*    PST.buy     3SG

     'Kofi bought it'.

Some Leteh action verbs may be nominalised to perform some morphosyntactic functions of prototypical nouns, for example, nominalised action verbs can receive focus marking. The process involves a tone pattern change[4], where high tones become low, and low tones become high (7a-7d). The same tone pattern change goes for all other verb structures[5] except monosyllabic action verbs which undergo nominalization differently. The syntactic function of a nominalized action verb is illustrated in (8a) and (8b).

7.   Verb            Nominal      Gloss
a.   *màsé*      →   *másè*       'laughter'
b.   *fo`kyé*    →   *fókyè*      'sweeping'
c.   *kpo`ràkyé* →   *kpórákyè*   'vomitus'

8a.  *Kofi    bé-kyìrɛ̀          fókyè.*
     *Kofi*   NEG-PRES.like     sweeping

     'Kofi does not like sweeping'

b.   *Abue     a        gyì       kpórákyè*
     animal    DEF      PST.eat   vomitus

     'The animal ate vomitus.

In Leteh, property concepts are expressed by thirteen monomorphemic lexemes (table 2) which do not originate from any word class. In addition, some nouns and

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4    In Leteh, the tone pattern of the imperative form of the verb represents its uninflected form.
5    The segmental shapes of verb roots in Leteh are made up of from one to four syllables. Monosyllabic verb roots constitute the largest group while the four-syllable root is the least common.

verbal adjectives ((9) and (10)) are used to connote property concepts. Adjectives that can receive focus marking are the thirteen underived adjectives and verbal adjectives.

**Table 2**. *Underived adjectives in Leteh.*

| DIMENSION | | COLOR | | AGE | | VALUE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *atimi* | 'short' | *ofufuru* | 'white' | *ohue* | 'new' | *okosɛ* | 'good' |
| *ɔtɔntɔ* | 'tall' | *obibi* | 'black' | *ɔdedɛ* | 'old' | *ɔkpamkpa* | 'bad' |
| *akitibi* | 'small' | *ɔhɛ* | 'red' | | | *efɛ* | 'true' |
| *ɔkpɔmkpɔ* | 'big' | | | | | *enufu* | 'false' |

9. *maane*     'bad'

10. *kpa*       'long/tall'

## 3. FOCUS MARKING IN LETEH AND SOME KWA LANGUAGES

Languages differ with regard to strategies they utilize to indicate which part of the information in an utterance is most relevant or salient. This section will address one of the two concerns of this paper by giving an overview of focus marking in Leteh. The description of the phenomenon is done in relation to its operation in three Kwa languages: Akan, Ewe and Ga.

Generally, focus marking in Leteh involves the use of a special morpheme, *né*, and the definiteness marker *a*. Subject argument focus marking in Leteh differs from non-subject focus marking in many respects. Whereas the latter involves fronting the focus element, subject arguments remain in their default positions. Again, with non-subject focus marking, a clausal constituent which is fronted is followed by a special morpheme, *né* and terminated by *a,* whereas in the case of a subject, there is only an obligatory clause final definiteness marker, *a*.

When a non-subject constituent *sika* 'money' in (11a) is to be focus marked, it is fronted and followed by a special morpheme, the focus marker, *né* (11b). There is no resumptive pronoun unless the focused element is animate; the construction ends with the definiteness marker, *a*. The marked constituent, *sika* 'money' is portrayed as the most salient or the most relevant information in the discourse. In other words, the speaker in (11b) makes a choice as to the piece of information he/she wants to present to the addressee as the most relevant.

11a.  Speaker: *Ananse    bè-wúrì    sika.*
              *Ananse*    FUT-steal    money

        'Ananse will steal money.'

b.    Speaker:    *Sika      né       Ananse   bèwúrì      a.*
                  money    FOC    *Ananse*   FUT-steal   DEF

'Ananse will steal MONEY.'

On the contrary, when the subject argument is focused, it remains in its default position, and the clause ends with the definiteness marker, a. (compare the canonical sentence in (12a) with (12b) where subject is focused).

12a.   *Ananse    wùrí        sika.*
       *Ananse*   PST.steal   money

'Ananse stole money.'

b.     *Ananse    wùrí        sika      a.*
       *Ananse*   PST.steal   money   DEF

'ANANSE stole money.'

In focus marking, changes occur in the out-of-focus parts of the clause. The changes that take place will be fully explained when the various focus constructions are described in the subsequent sections.

Ameka (2010) reports that a majority of Kwa languages such as Akan, Ewe and Ga employ dedicated morphemes and particles to indicate focus. Akan and Ga operate with one focus marker, whilst Ewe indicates focus with two different morphemes: the argument focus marker which is used to signal focus on fronted nominals and adverbials, and the predicate focus marker. In all three languages, the placement of a focus marker is obligatory. It has also been noted that there is a definiteness marker which occurs clause-finally in Ga and Akan marked focus constructions, but which is non-existent in Ewe.

There are also some constructions which are described as in-situ, because the focused element remains in its default position. Focused constituents in an in-situ construction may be marked as in Akan or unmarked as in Ewe.

The changes that occur in the rest of the clause when a constituent is fronted for focusing vary in Kwa languages. To a large extent, the changes depend on the grammatical function of the focused constituent. Common constituents that may be focused in Akan, Ewe and Ga are arguments, predicates and adjuncts. It has further been observed that predicative adjective focusing takes place in Akan, but has not been ascertained for Ewe and Ga.

There are reports that prosody also plays some role in focus marking. Dakubu (2005) for example demonstrates that in Akan, tone pattern changes occur in a marked construction. This observation is also true of Leteh action verbs which undergo nominalization. The nominalized verbs could then be fronted and marked for focus.

In the subsequent sections, four focus constructions are described. The paper will describe the strategies that are employed in marking the subject, object, predicate and the predicative adjective in the constructions.

## 4. LETEH SUBJECT AND NON-SUBJECT FOCUS CONSTRUCTIONS

A number of studies conducted with regard to focus marking strategies indicate that many languages display an asymmetry between subjects and non-subjects. Fiedler et al (2010) for example, report on the disparity in some Kwa (Aja, Akan, Efutu, Ewe, Fon, Foodo, Lelemi); Gur (Buli, Byali, Dagbani, Ditammari, Gurene, Konkomba, Konni, Nateni, Yom) and Chadic (Hausa, Tangale, Bole, Guruntum, Ngizim, Bade, Duwai) languages.

The subject/non-subject asymmetry observed is of two types: marking asymmetry and structural asymmetry. Marking asymmetry has to do with whether focus is obligatorily marked or not, whereas structural asymmetry deals with the often two different ways of marking subject and non-subject focus. In Ewe for instance, focus marking is obligatory for subject focus and optional for non-subject focus. There are also special pronominal forms for the second and third person singular in non-subject focus constructions. Dagbani's subject focus constructions are characterized by an emphatic marker *'N'*, whereas the non-subject focus constructions are characterized by a conjunction *ká*. Likewise, Hartmann and Zimmermann's (2012) study on 'Focus marking in Bura …" reveals a similar trend. It is observed that in a Bura (Central Chadic) clause with a focused subject, the latter occurs in its canonical sentence-initial position, followed by a focus copula. Conversely, syntactically focused non-subjects are fronted and appear in a bi-clausal cleft structure that contains the focus copula and a relative cleft-remnant. A generalization made is that, information focus on non-subjects is generally unmarked in the majority of West African languages, but subject focus must be grammatically marked regardless of whether it is used contrastively or as new information.

Fiedler et al (2010) account for the asymmetry in focus marking of subjects and non-subjects in West African languages by suggesting that, subjects need to be marked in a remarkable way to avoid the canonical interpretation of subject as topic.

## 4.1 LETEH SUBJECT FOCUS CONSTRUCTIONS

Subject focus constructions refer to those structures that involve some mechanisms for indicating that the subject is in focus, and that the latter is the most salient part of the discourse. The obligatory requirement on the marking of subject focus in many West African languages also applies in Leteh. The subject is focus marked by a clause-final definiteness marker a.

From examples 13–16, the subjects of various clause types are focus marked: intransitive ((13b, 14b)[6]); monotransitive (15b); ditransitive (16).

13a. *Ntikuma    bὲ-dáńsὲ.*
     *Ntikuma*    FUT.fall

‘Ntikuma will fall.’

b.    *Ntikuma    bὲ-dáńsὲ        a.*
      *Ntikuma*    FUT-fall        DEF

‘NTIKUMA will fall.’

14a. *Ama        dé-kpo` ràkyὲ.*
     *Ama*        PROG-vomit

‘Ama is vomiting’.

b.    *Ama        dé-kpo` ràkyὲ    a*
      *Ama*        PROG-vomi        DEF

‘AMA is vomiting’.

15a. *Ananse    sútὲ        ɔhɛ        pɛɛ.*
     *Ananse*    PST.burn    wisdom    all

‘Ananse burnt all wisdom’.

b.    *Ananse    sútὲ        ɔhɛ        pɛɛ        a*
      *Ananse*    PST.burn    wisdom    all        DEF

‘ANANSE burnt all wisdom.’

16.   *Ananse    nɛ́        Nkɔnɔre    sika        a*
      Ananse    PST.give    Nkɔnɔre    money        DEF

‘ANANSE gave Nkɔnɔre money.’

In the above constructions, 13–16, it is understood that the subject is the most relevant or salient piece of information.

The presence of a definiteness marker has also been attested for both Ga and Akan, but it is non-obligatory in the two languages. In Leteh, the obligatory definiteness marker in this construction helps to highlight the focused constituent,

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6    Wherever examples are in two parts (a) and (b), the (a) part represents the canonical clause while the (b) is the focused construction.

similar to Dakubu (2005) suggestion, that in both Ga and Akan, the definiteness marker connotes an affirmation or reality of the event expressed.

The pronominal subject argument may also be marked for focus.The pronominal subjects of an intransive clause, a monotransitive clause and a ditransitive clause are treated similarly to the nominal subjects (see (17) as an example of a focused construction where the pronominal subject of a monotransitive clause is marked). In all three instances, it is the subject form of the pronominal that is focused except when the subject is the third person singular (3SG). When the focussed subject argument is the 3SG, it is rather the independent[7] form which is used (18). The example in (19) is therefore ungrammatical.

17.  *Amo     sútὲ        ɔhɛ      pɛɛ     a.*
     3PL     PST.burn    wisdom   all     DEF

     'THEY burnt all (the) wisdom.'


18.  *Mo           né      bè-bìrí      a.*
     3SG.OBJ      FOC     FUT-speak    DEF

     'HE/SHE will speak.'


19.  *＊A          né      bè-bìrí      a.*
     3SG.SUBJ    FOC     FUT-speak    DEF

+    'HE/SHE will speak.'


The phenomenon in (18) is also observed in a related language, Ga (Dakubu 2005), but unlike Leteh, the focus marker that occurs after the independent pronominal form is optional in Ga.

Generally in Leteh, subject focus marking is not done with the dedicated morpheme *né*, but with a clause-final definiteness marker, *a*. This is comparable to Lelemi (Buem) which has a term focus marking particle, but which is not used in subject focus constructions (Ameka 2010). Data presented on subject focus constructions indicate that the focussed subject is not recapitulated in the rest of the clause by a pronoun.


## 4.2   OBJECT FOCUS CONSTRUCTIONS

These are structures which have their arguments, other than subjects, focus marked by some morphosyntactic means. Clausal elements which are marked this

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[7]   The independent pronominal form *mo* is similar to the 3SG object form.

way represent the most salient piece of information. In contrast with the generalization made for West African languages (Zimmermann and Fery 2010; Hartmann and Zimmermann 2012), during focus marking, non-subjects functioning as objects in Leteh monotransitive clauses are fronted and obligatorily marked for focus (20b). When the object is focused, there is an obligatory definiteness marker at the end of the clause. In this construction, there is no gap in the rest of the clause when the focused item is animate (compare (20b) with (21b)). This is similar to the case of Akan where an anaphoric pronoun occurs in the rest of the clause when a fronted nominal is animate. In the case of Ewe, Ameka (1991) reports that a primary object that is fronted binds a gap, and that the resumptive pronoun which fills the slot is identical with the third person singular object pronoun.

20a. *Nkɔnɔre    kyìrɛ̀        sika.*
     Nkɔnɔre    PRES.want   money

     'Nkɔnɔre wants money.'

b. *Sika        né      Nkɔnɔre  kyìrɛ̀        a*
    money      FOC   Nkɔnɔre  PRES.want   DEF

    'Nkɔnɔre wants MONEY.'

21a. Kofi   kyìrɛ̀                Ama.
     Kofi   PRES.love/want   Ama.

     'Kofi loves Ama.'

b. *Ama   né      Kofi   kyìrɛ̀                mo          a*
    Ama   FOC   Kofi   PRES.love/want   3SG.OBJ   DEF

    'Kofi loves AMA.'

Likewise, arguments in ditransitive constructions may be marked for focus in separate clauses. In a canonical double object clause as illustrated in (22), the recipient (R) and the theme (T) arguments may be focused in separate constructions. In each instance, the argument is fronted and obligatorily followed by the focus marker, *né*, and the construction ends with the definiteness marker. Example (23) illustrates a recipient focus construction whereas (24), is a theme focus construction.

22. *Ananse       nɛ́          Nkɔnɔre   sika*
     Ananse       PST.give   Nkɔnɔre   money

     'Ananse gave Nkɔnɔre  money.'

23.   *Nkɔnɔre*    *né*    *Ananse*    *nɛ́*    *mo*    *sika*    *a*
       Nkɔnɔre    FOC    Ananse    PST.give    3SG.OBJ    money    DEF

       'Ananse gave NKƆNƆRE money'.

24.   *Sika*    *né*    *Ananse*    *nɛ́*    *Nkɔnɔre*    *a*
       Money    FOC    Ananse    PST.give    Nkɔnɔre    DEF

       'Ananse gave Nkɔnɔre MONEY'.

When the recipient, which is animate is focused (23), a resumptive pronoun, *mo* '3SG.OBJ', which is coreferenced to the recipient is introduced to fill the slot of the recipient argument. In the theme focus construction (24), there is no resumptive pronoun as previously explained.

In a typical indirect ditransitive clause (25), the theme occurs before the recipient argument which is signaled by an adposition. Each of these arguments may also be marked for focus in separate constructions as in (26) and (27).

25.   *Ntikuma*    *bé-fúrì*    *n-lobi*    *nɛ́*    *Ananse.*
       Ntikuma    FUT-collect    PL-pot    ADP    Ananse.

       'Ntikuma will collect pots for Ananse'.

26.   *N-lobi*    *né*    *Ntikuma*    *bé-fúrì*    *nɛ́*    *Ananse*    *a*
       PL-pot    FOC    Ntikuma    FUT-collect    ADP    Ananse    DEF

       'Ntikuma will collect POTS for Ananse.'

27.   *Ananse*    *né*    *Ntikuma*    *bé-fúrì*    *n-lobi*    *nɛ́*    *mo*    *a.*
       Ananse    FOC    Ntikuma    FUT-collect    PL-pot    ADP    3SG.OBJ    DEF

       'Ntikuma will collect pots for ANANSE'.

When the recipient argument is focused (27), an anaphoric pronoun *mo*, which is coreferential with the recipient, is introduced in the rest of the clause.

It has been demonstrated that objects are fronted and marked for focus; object focus cannot be marked in-situ in a canonical clause.

## 5. PREDICATE FOCUS CONSTRUCTIONS

Kwa languages employ various strategies for focus marking verbs. Ameka (2010: 157) identifies two main strategies as: 'verb copy strategy' and 'nominalized verb strategy'. With the former strategy, a copy of the verb is fronted and marked with

a focus particle. The second method involves the nominalization of the verb; the nominalized verb is placed in core clause initial position and marked with a focus particle.

Predicate focus in Leteh involves both strategies, where a verb is nominalized, fronted and a copy retained in the construction. A similar phenomenon is reported in Akan where a verb is nominalized, fronted and marked with the focus particle with a copy of the verb in the rest of the clause (Boadi 1974; 1990; Ameka 2010). Ewe is reported as having a focus marker dedicated to predicate focus marking (Ameka 1991; 2010). In Ga and Akan however, the same focus particles are used in all focus constructions.

It is observed that in Leteh, the nominalization of a verb involves a change in the tonal pattern; low tones are raised, whereas high tones are lowered (Akrofi Ansah 2009). The nominalized verb is fronted and followed by the focus particle *né*. Again, the definiteness marker *a* occurs clause-finally and a copy of the verb is retained in the rest of the clause. Compare the canonical clauses in (28a) and (29a) to the verb focus constructions in (28b) and (29b). In each instance, the most salient piece of information is focused.

28a.  *Ama     fòkyè          daa*
      *Ama*     PRES.sweep     everyday

    'Ama sweeps everyday.'

b.     *Fókyè        né      Ama      fòkyè         daa         a*
     Sweeping     FOC     Ama      PRES.sweep    everyday    DEF

    'Ama SWEEPS everyday'.

29a.  Nkɔnɔre    dé-kpo`ràkyè.
      Nkɔnɔre    PROG-vomit

    'Nkɔnɔre is vomiting.'

b.     Kpórákyé     né       Nkɔnɔre     dé-kpo`ràkyè    a
     Vomiting      FOC      Nkɔnɔre     PROG-vomit      DEF

    'Nkɔnɔre is VOMITING.'

## 6. PREDICATIVE ADJECTIVE FOCUS CONSTRUCTIONS

It has been observed that it is usually predicative adjectives which can be fronted and marked for focus (Ameka 2010). Boadi (1974) reports that Akan predicative adjectives may be fronted and marked for focus. In such a construction, a copy of

the adjective may or may not be left in its default position. Focussing of adjectives does not occur in Ewe, because the language does not have predicative adjectives (Ameka 2010).

In addition to the thirteen underived Leteh adjectives that may be focused, verbal adjectives may also be focussed. When an underived adjective is fronted and focus marked, no copy is left in its default position (30b); the construction in (30c) is therefore ungrammatical. This is in contrast with verbal adjectives that are focused (30b), where such an adjective is left in the default position in the remaining part of the clause.

Unlike verbs that are focused, focused adjectives do not undergo tone pattern changes.

30a.   *Ama*    *gyí*    *ɔ̀tɔ́ńtɔ́.*
    Ama    COP.be   tall

   'Ama is tall'.

b.    *ɔ̀tɔ́ńtɔ́*    *né*   *Ama*   *gyí*    *ɔ̀tɔ́ńtɔ́*   *a*
    tall     FOC   Ama   COP.be   tall    DEF

   'Ama is TALL.'

*c.    *ɔ̀tɔ́ńtɔ́*   *né*    *Ama*   *gyí*    *ɔ̀tɔ́ńtɔ́*   *a*
    Tall    FOC    Ama   COP.be   tall    DEF

   'Ama is TALL.'

31a.   *Ama*   *kpà.*
    Ama   tall

   'Ama is tall.'

b.    *Kpà*   *né*   *Ama*   *kpà*   *a*
    Tall   FOC   Ama   tall   DEF

   'Ama is TALL.'

## 7. CONCLUSION

The paper has discussed the phenomenon of focus marking in Leteh, and the formation of four focus constructions. Akin to what has been observed in related languages, subject arguments and non-subject constituents are focus-marked differently. Whereas the former is not fronted, non-subject constituents are fronted to clause-initial position and marked with the focus marker, *né,* and

terminated with a clause-final definiteness marker *a*. Focus subject arguments on the other hand are marked differently, by a clause-final definiteness marker *a,* which is also obligatory in every Leteh focus construction. The presence or absence of gaps in a focus construction depends on the category of the focused constituent. In Leteh, a constituent which is focus-marked represents the most salient or relevant piece of information in a given discourse.

Studies done on other West African languages (see Ameka 2010 on Akan, Attie, Ewe, Ga, Gbe, Yoruba) demonstrate that in languages like Yoruba and Gbe, non-subject focus marking is obligatory during focalization, an observation which is corroborated by this paper. This paper is therefore of the opinion that previous conclusions reached on the subject/non-subject asymmetry in West African languages may have been over-generalized. Further research which involves a larger language sample will be necessary to arrive at a more plausible conclusion.

## ABBREVIATIONS

| | | | |
|------|---------------------|------|---------------------|
| ADP  | Adposition          | PL   | Plural              |
| ADV  | Adverb              | PST  | Past                |
| AVO  | Agent Verb Object   | R    | Recipient           |
| COP  | Copula              | ResPr| Resumptive pronoun  |
| CFP  | Clause Final Particle | SG | Singular            |
| DEF  | Definite            | SUBJ | Subject             |
| FOC  | Focus               | SV   | Subject Verb        |
| FUT  | Future              | T    | Theme               |
| IW   | Interrogative Word  | 1SG  | 1 Singular          |
| OBJ  | Object              | 2SG  | 2 Singular          |
| PROG | Progressive         | 3SG  | 3 Singular          |

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