

# Exploring Expressions of Focus in Ewe

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## ABSTRACT

In this article we investigate various focus constructions in Ewe. The contribution of this paper is two-fold: First, it presents new evidence that focus fronting in Ewe is simply movement to a focus phrase in left periphery of the clause, and, secondly, it presents an analysis of the focus *dè* construction in which little previous work has been conducted. In the first part of the paper we investigate the pragmatic uses of the particle *yé*, which we analyse as the head of a focus projection that does not encode a specific kind of focus, but can host elements expressing a range of focal interpretations. In the second part of the paper we argue that the *dè* construction used in one form of predicate focus is not a focus particle of the same class as *yé*, but rather an overt focus operator located in the C domain.

*Keywords:* focus, syntax, pragmatics, Ewe.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ewe is a language of the Gbe sub-group of Kwa, spoken primarily in Ghana and Togo. This paper examines various focus-related phenomena in this language, all involving the left periphery. The basic word order in Ewe is SVO, as shown in (1).

- (1) Kòfí d̀ù máṅgò-nyè-wó.  
Kofi eat mango-1SG-PL  
'Kofi ate my mangos.'

However, in spite of this basic word order, a variety of topicalized and focused elements can appear in left-peripheral positions, as illustrated with a focused direct object in (2). As can be seen, a focused element can be followed by the particle *yé/é*, which in many contexts is optional.

- (2) Máṅgò-nyè-wó (yé) Kòfí d̀ù.  
mango-1SG-PL FOC Kofi eat  
'Kofi ate MY MANGOES.'

In this article we investigate various focus constructions in Ewe, proposing a unified syntactic analysis exploiting the FocP projection of the articulated complementizer domain (C domain) hosting left-peripheral focused phrases (Rizzi, 1997). The contribution of this paper is two-fold: First, it presents new evidence that focus fronting in Ewe is simply movement to a FocP phrase in left periphery of the clause, and second it presents an analysis of a focus construction (the *dè* construction) on which little previous work has been conducted. The paper is organized as follows. In section 2 we investigate the pragmatic uses of focus particle *yé* and analyze it as the head of a FocP. Section 3 discusses a type of predicate focus in Ewe. We argue that the particle *dè* used in one form of predicate focus is not a focus particle in the same class as *yé*, but rather an overt focus operator in the CP area. Section 4 concludes the article.

## 2. THE FOCUS PARTICLE *YÉ*

The particle *yé*, often pronounced *é*, is sometimes referred to as the “emphatic particle” (see Ameka, 1992; Warburton et al., 1968). In the standard orthography, the variant *yé* is written as a separate word, while the variant *é* is written as part of the preceding word.<sup>1</sup>

*Yé* can follow a constituent such as a DP that is preposed to the beginning of the sentence and, as we will show, it does not indicate any particular type of focus reading. Although its presence is optional in most environments, in certain specific syntactic contexts it is either required or prohibited. Familiarity with *yé* is important for understanding the other issues discussed later in the paper.

### 2.1 PRAGMATIC USES OF THE FOCUS PARTICLE *YÉ* IN EWE

We begin by examining the different pragmatic contexts in which *yé* can appear. Since both topics and foci can occur in the left periphery in Ewe, it is perhaps useful to note that two simple and robust morphosyntactic phenomena distinguish these two pragmatic categories. First, in a simple sentence consisting of a single clause with a single object, a topicalized object must be resumed with an object clitic, while a focused object cannot. In analogous clauses with a fronted DP that is questioned or focused, there is no resumption of that element with a clitic (Ameka, 2010).<sup>2</sup> In (3a) the fronted element is focused, as can be seen by the presence of the focus particle *yé*, and by the ungrammaticality of

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<sup>1</sup> One form of the 3rd person singular subject clitic is *é-*, and there is sometimes orthographic confusion as to whether an “*é*” between a(n arguable) subject and the verb is the subject marker *é-* or the focus marker *-é*.

<sup>2</sup> In certain more complex environments, focus may either permit or require a resumptive clitic Ameka (1992).

resumption with the object clitic *-ì* is ungrammatical. In contrast, (3b) shows that a fronted topic, here followed by the particle *yá*, requires such a resumptive clitic.

- (3) a. Mólú-é            míá-dù-(\*ì).  
           rice-FOC        1PL-eat-it  
           ‘THE RICE we ate.’
- b. Mólú yá        míá-dù-\*(ì).  
           rice TOP      1PL-eat-it  
           ‘As for the rice, we ate it.’

The second phenomenon distinguishing focus and topicalization involves clauses in which a 3rd person singular subject is represented only by a subject clitic, as in (4a). If in such a sentence the verb is preceded by a focused element, the subject clitic takes the special form *wǒ-* as in (4b). When the object is topicalized, the 3rd person singular subject clitic retains its usual form *é-* (4c).

- (4) a. É-nò            bíyà    sìà.  
           3SG-drink beer this  
           ‘He drank this beer.’
- b. Bíyà sìà-é        wǒ-nò.  
           beer this-FOC 3SG-drink  
           ‘It’s this beer that he drank.’
- c. Bíyà sìà    yá        é-nò-è.  
           beer this TOP 3SG-drink-3SG  
           ‘This beer he drank.’

In the environments we will now examine – contrastive focus, informational focus, and with *wh* items – if *yé* can be omitted, the type of sentence in question can be determined to employ focus rather than topicalization, not only on the basis of the discourse context, but also on the basis of these two phenomena.

Pragmatically speaking, contrastive focus expresses a correction contradicting something asserted in a previous clause. Example (5) shows that fronting in Ewe, with or without *yé*, is compatible with contrastive focus, as described by Zimmermann (2007: 147).

- (5) A: Mè-xlẽ    bé        àgbledèlá-wó    dè-nà            àgbèli-gblè    lè Ámériká.  
           1SG-read that farmer-PL cultivate-HAB cassava-field at America  
           ‘I read that farmers grow cassava in the US.’

- B1: Àò, wó-dè-nà blǐ-ghlè.  
no 3PL-cultivate-HAB maize-field
- B2: Àò, blǐ-ghlè (yé) wó-dè-nà.  
no maize-field FOC 3PL-cultivate-HAB  
'No, they grew MAIZE.'

In the answer in (5B2) the focused element 'field of maize' fronted to the left of the subject is highlighted as the new information, which stands in contrast to the assertion expressed by speaker A. The presence of *yé* to the right of the fronted object in this context is optional, without any apparent change in the interpretation.

Example (6) below shows that fronting, whether with or without *yé*, is also compatible with informational focus, by which is meant a focus that simply provides the new information in a clause. In an answer to a *wh* question, the focused constituent may be fronted and can appear either with or without *yé*, as in (6A1). Example (6A2) shows that *yé* can also be used in an analogous short answer, in which all material following the focus is elided.

- (6) Q: Àfikà nè-tsô?  
where 2SG-come.from  
'Where are you from?'
- A1: Ghǎnà (yé) m̀è-tsó.  
Ghana FOC 1SG-come.from  
'I come from Ghana.'
- A2: Ghǎnà (yé).  
Ghana FOC
- A3: M̀è-tsó Ghǎnà.  
1SG-come.from Ghana

As in many other languages (e.g., English, Mandarin, French), in the answer to a question like (6) the focused constituent may alternatively be left in situ (6A3), and this is in fact a very natural way to answer such a question in Ewe.<sup>3</sup> This last focus strategy does not hold for subjects since, as will be shown, when a subject constitutes the focused information, it requires *yé* to be present.

*Wh* questions in Ewe fronting of the questioned constituent, and the focus particle *yé* can be present, as illustrated in (7).

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<sup>3</sup> See Aboh (2007) for an analysis of the fronted and in situ answer strategies in terms of focused and unfocused *wh*-questions.

- (7) a. Àmékà-é nè-kpô?  
 who-FOC 2SG-see  
 ‘Who did you see?’
- b. \*E-kpɔ ameka?  
 2SG-see who  
 (Acceptable as an echo question.)

In the literature, *wh* elements are often analysed as occupying a syntactic focus position and as having undergone focus movement, triggered by the need to check focus features (Horvath, 1986; Grewendorf, 2001). So, the fact that the focus particle *yé* can follow a *wh* phrase is not surprising. While *yé* is possible with *wh* fronting, its presence is not obligatory (Ameka, 1992), as shown in the adjunct question above in (6).

In connection with the optionality of *yé* in *wh* questions, Aboh (2007) notes that those speakers of closely related Gungbe who allow omission of the focus particle (not all speakers do) have two different interpretations depending on whether the particle is present. When present, the constituent is D-linked (linked to the discourse), a property which is absent when the particle is omitted. That is, presence of the particle indicates that the speaker is asking a question with reference to a discourse-salient set of possible choices. Attempts to apply this idea to the Ewe focus particle *yé* in D-linked and non-D-linked contexts failed. The focus particle proved to always be optional for non-subjects. Therefore, it appears that the presence versus the absence of the Ewe particle *yé* is not related to the D-linked or non-D-linked contexts, as shown in examples (8) through (10). The questioned element in the questions in (8) and (9) are not D-linked, because ‘what’ and ‘when’ in the context constitute open questions. In (10), in contrast, the element ‘which one’ is a question over the set of two discourse-defined pineapples. As can be seen, the focus particle is optional regardless of the D-linked status of the questioned element.

- (8) Né gà frâ milyɔn dɛkà lè àsí-wò dé,  
 if money franc million one be.at hand-2sg top  
 núkà-(é) n-ǎ-wò-è?  
 what-FOC 2SG-FUT-do-3SG  
 ‘If you had a million francs, what would you do with it?’
- (9) Yèyiyika-(é) n-ǎ-wòdǔ-wò vò?  
 when-FOC 2SG-FUT-do work-2SG finish  
 ‘When will you finish your work?’

- (10) Àtótó èvèsìà yé lè àsí-nyè. Ékà-(é) n-à-tsô?  
 pineapple twothis FOC be.at hand-1SG which-FOC 2SG-fut-take  
 ‘I have these two pineapples. Which one do you want?’

While the focus particle is not obligatory following a fronted *wh* phrase in the general case, there is a known asymmetry between subjects and non-subjects in Gbe languages. Aboh (2007) notes that while some speakers of these languages accept *wh* fronting without a concomitant focus particle in the general case, the particle is still obligatory in subject questions, as our own data also shows in (11).

- (11) Àmékà \* (yé) yì àfútà?  
 who FOC go beach  
 ‘Who went to the beach?’

This fact extends to subjects modified by *kò* ‘only’, which when followed by *yé* surfaces as *kòé*. When a fronted non-subject is modified by ‘only’, it may be followed by either *kò* or *kòé*, as shown in (12a). In contrast, when a subject is modified by ‘only’, the composite form is the only possibility, as shown in (13).

- (12) a. Àgbàlě sìà kò-(é) Yàwò xlě.  
 book this only-FOC Yawo read  
 b. Yàwò xlě àgbàlě sia kò.  
 Yawo read book this only  
 ‘Yawo read only a book.’

- (13) a. Fòfó-nyè kò-\*(é) dó àgbèlì.  
 father-1SGonly- FOC cultivate cassava  
 ‘Only my father grows cassava.’

One special case was found in which *yé* was not obligatory in subject questions, namely rhetorical subject questions like in the first utterance in (14B), in which *àmékà* ‘who’ is not followed by the particle:

- (14) A: Vĩ-wò-wó á-té ñú á-yò dò ná wò  
 child-2SG-pl FUT-can can FUT-care sickness to 2SG  
 né è-dzè dò.  
 if 2SG-suffer sickness  
 ‘You children can take care of you if you become ill.’

B: Àmékà á-yò d̀ò ná-m?!  
 who FUT-care sickness to-1SG  
 Wó-mé-vá kpó-m dá g̀ò há ò!  
 3PL-NEG-come see-1SG come even also NEG

‘Who’s going to take care of me?! They don’t even come visit me!’

If we consider *yé* to be the head encoding focus as the new information, here the *wh* in the rhetorical question does not require new information. Rhetorical questions, in fact, do not need to be answered with new information. The fact that a subjects in an ironic question does not require *yé* seems best accounted for by assuming that such questions are actually echo questions, since the subject of the sentence that it echoes also lacks the focus particle. The exchange in (15), with *núkà* ‘what’ in situ, shows that non-subject echo questions can be used ironically (in the same way as in English):

(15) A: M̀è-l̀è míé-fé áfé dzrà gé.  
 1SG-be.at 1PL-POSS house sell PROSP  
 ‘I’m going to sell our house.’

B: Ǹè-l̀è núkà ẁò g̀ê? M̀è-dí bé m-á-ǹò àfísià!  
 2SG-be.at what do PROSP 1SG-want that 1SG-FUT-be.at here  
 ‘You going to do what? I want to stay here!’

Descriptively speaking, we can conclude that *yé* is used with a variety of focus interpretations. However, even if it does not encode a particular type of focus, when it is optional, our speakers’ own explanations suggest that its presence accentuates the new and relevant information in the sentence. *Yé* is used in conjunction with another phenomenon – fronting – which is also used for different types of focus. However, it will be noted that the distribution of these two phenomena is distinct. While *wh* questioning requires fronting (unlike other types of focus examined), it does not usually require the use of *yé*.

## 2.2 YÉ AS THE HEAD OF A FOC P

Having discussed some of the most essential pragmatic and syntactic properties of focus in Ewe, we can now approach the particle *yé* from a structural point of view.

Aboh (2004) has proposed that the analogous focus particle *wé* in Gungbe heads a FocP in the CP field. This section will present two facts not previously discussed which support a similar analysis of Ewe *yé*. The proposed structure is

depicted in (16), in which the DP in the specifier of *yé* is the fronted focused noun phrase.

(16) [FocP DP [Foc' *yé* ... [TP ... [VP ... ] ] ] ]

One of the reasons why this issue is of particular importance is that certain other discourse-related particles can occur inside the DP. This is shown in (17), in which the particles *lá/a* and *yá* can appear in sentence-medial positions.

(17) a. Mè-lè [ mólù lá ] dù-m.  
1SG-be.at rice DET eat-PROG

‘I’m eating the rice.’

b. Mè-lè [ mólù yá ] dù-m.  
1SG-be.at rice top eat-PROG

‘I’m eating rice (as opposed to other things).’

Our first fact supporting the idea that *yé* is a Foc<sup>0</sup> head is that it cannot appear medially in a post-verbal position. This fact is shown here in four ways by focusing an object. First, in (18) the object has been moved to precede the lexical verb, as is required in progressive aspect (Aboh, 2004, chapter 6). Second, in (19) the object is followed by a locative adjunct. Third, in (20) the object appears between two verbs in a serial verb construction. And fourth, in (21) the direct object precedes the indirect object in a double object construction. (The most unmarked word order in a double object construction is V DO IO (Essegbey, 2003).)

(18) Kòfí lè ñùtí (\*yé) dù-m.  
Kofi be.at orange FOC eat-PROG

‘Kofi is eating an orange.’

(19) Mè-kpó Kòfí (\*yé) lè àsìmè.  
1SG-see Kofi FOC be.at market

‘I saw Kofi at the market.’

(20) Kòfí dà mólì \*(yé) dù.  
Kofi give rice FOC eat

‘Kofi made some rice and ate it.’

(21) Kòfí ná àgbàlé sìa (\*yé) Yàwò.  
Kofi give book this FOC Yawo

‘Kofi gave Yawo a book.’



This type of data supports an analysis in which *yé* is a  $\text{Foc}^0$  head in the complementizer field, because we would expect medial *yé* of the type in (18) through (21) to be grammatical only if *yé* actually headed some lower position, either along the main line of projection or contained in the same constituent as the focused element.

The second new fact supporting the idea that *yé* is a  $\text{Foc}^0$  head is that *yé* cannot appear after a postverbal constituent (such as an object) to focus that constituent, even though (in other discourse contexts) the focused element may appear in situ without the particle. This is shown in (22c).

(22) Nyè-mé-xlě nyàdzòdzògbàlě ò.  
 1SG-NEG-read newspaper NEG  
 context: ‘I didn’t read the newspaper.’

a. Àgbàlě sia yé mè-xlě.  
 book this FOC 1SG-read  
 ‘I read this book.’

b. Mè-xlě àgbàlě sià.  
 1SG-read book this  
 ‘I read this book.’

c. #Mè-xlě àgbàlě sia yé.  
 1SG-read book this FOC

While (22c) is grammatical, it does not have the intended interpretation, but rather one in which the entire clause is in focus. This is compatible with Aboh’s (2004) analysis of Gungbe, which assumes that in such a case the entire clause has moved to the specifier of  $\text{FocP}$  in CP. A more illustrative example of such whole-clause focus is given in (23A2), which shows that the embedding complementizer and the focus particle are both possible, while neither is required. (Not all speakers allow the complementizer *bé* in sentences like (23A2).) The proposed structure for (23A2) is schematized in (24).

(23) Q: Núkà Kòfì gblò ná-wò?  
 what Kofi say to-2SG  
 Context: ‘What did Kofi tell you?’

A1: É-gblò bé wó-tú sùkû lá.  
 3SG-say that 3PL-close school DET  
 ‘He said that the school has been closed.’

A2: (%Bé) wó-tú sùkû lá (yé.)  
 that 3PL-close school DET FOC

‘That the school has been closed.’

(24) [<sub>FocP</sub> [ *Bé wótú sùkû lá* ]<sub>i</sub> [<sub>Foc'</sub> *yé t<sub>i</sub>* ] ]

On the basis of both the fact that *yé* cannot appear in a medial post-verbal position and the nature of its interpretation when it is sentence-final, we conclude that *yé* is a head in the CP field in Ewe, along the lines proposed by Aboh (2004) for the focus particle in Gungbe.

Analysing *yé* as a focus head has a consequence for subjects in Ewe. Recall that when the subject is in focus, such as when it is questioned or modified by ‘only’, *yé* is obligatory. If *yé* is a Foc<sup>0</sup> head that this means that the subject, unlike other constituent, obligatorily moves to spec-FocP when focused, as in the diagram in (25).

(25) [<sub>FocP</sub> *Àmékà<sub>i</sub>* [<sub>Foc'</sub> *yé* [<sub>IP</sub> *t<sub>i</sub> yì* *àfútà?* ] ] ]  
 who FOC go beach

‘Who went to the beach?’

### 3. PREDICATE F: TWO STRATEGIES

Ewe has two strategies for focusing a predicate. The first strategy is the so-called verb fronting construction (not available in all dialects) and the second is the *dè* construction. The two strategies have different interpretations: in verb fronting structures, focus has narrow scope, only on the verb itself, while in the *dè* construction, focus scopes over the whole event. We will now examine these two constructions and analyse them both in a way that, like structures employing the focus particle *yé*, makes use of the left-peripheral FocP projection.

#### 3.1 THE VERB FRONTING CONSTRUCTION

In the verb fronting construction, illustrated in (26), a reduplicated form of the verb appears at beginning of the sentence, optionally followed by the focus particle *yé*. A non-reduplicated doublet of the verb remains lower in the clause.

(26) Fò-fò-é wò-fò dèví-á.  
 RED-hit-FOC 3SG-hit child-DEF  
 literally ‘Beating, he beat the child.’  
 ‘He gave the child a thorough beating.’  
 (Ameka, 2010)

This strategy obeys a common generalization given by Manfredi (1993): the verbal constituent in spec-FocP must be nominalized.

As Aboh (2006) notes, verb reduplication in Ewe gives a gerund-like interpretation denoting an event, and it often corresponds to nominalization in other African languages (see also Aboh & Dyakorova, 2009 for Gungbe). The reduplicated verb does not bear any kind of aspectual or inflectional morphology. Rather, the verb appears in its non-finite form which is simply reduplicated. Moreover, the optional focus marker *yé* that can follow the reduplicated verb in Ewe, as in (26), is the same focus marker appearing after a focused noun. We explain the necessity of the doubling of the verb with the fact that, the verb in FocP is some sort of nominalization. For this reason, it cannot appear in that position with the aspectual marker, which is proper of a verbal item.

### 3.2 THE *ÐÈ* CONSTRUCTION

The second strategy for focused predicates in Ewe employs the particle *ɖè* to the left of the predicate:

- (27)      *Ðè*      *wò-dzè*      *ànyí*.  
             *ɖe*      3SG-fall      ground.  
             ‘She/he fell down. / Fall down, he/she did.’  
             (Ameke 1992: 2)

The particle *ɖè* appears at or near the beginning of the sentence and focuses the whole predicate. As we will see in detail, differently from the verb fronting construction illustrated in the previous section, *ɖè* doesn’t just focus the lexical verb. Rather, it has scope over the whole proposition.

The subject in the *ɖè* construction is subject to some restrictions. First, it must precede *ɖè*, as shown in (28).<sup>4</sup>

- (28) a. *Ðèví-wó ɖè wó-fé-ná*.  
           child-PL *ɖe*      3PL-play-HAB  
           ‘Children do play.’  
       b. \**Ðè ɖèví-wó wó-fé-ná*.  
           *ɖe*      child-PL      3PL-play-HAB

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<sup>4</sup> This is the judgement reported by Felix Ameke (1992), which was confirmed to us by James Essegbey, who checked it with three other speakers of the Anglo dialect. However, two of our own speakers actually preferred pre-subject *ɖe* in certain instances.

This subject can be followed by the topic particle *yá* or be separated from the rest of the sentence with a pause:

- (29) a. Kòfí yá dè wò-dzè ànyí.  
Kofi TOP *de* 3SG-fall ground.  
'(As for) Kofi, he fell down.' / '(As for) Kofi, fall down, he did.'
- b. Kòfí, dè wò-dzè ànyí.  
Kofi, *de* 3SG-fall ground.  
'(As for) Kofi, he fell down. / (As for) Kofi, fall down, he did.'
- c. Ètsò lá,<sup>5</sup> dè miè-lè fò-fó gé kábá.  
tomorrow TOP *de* 2PL-PRES wake-wake INGR early  
'Tomorrow, you will get up early.'  
(Ameka 1992: 30)

Second, the subject cannot be followed by the focus particle *yé*, which clearly shows that the subject itself does not occupy spec-FocP in this construction:

- (30) Dèví-wó (\*yé) dè wó-fé-ná.  
child-PL FOC *de* 3PL-play-HAB  
'Children do play.'

Third, regardless of whether or not there is full lexical subject is overt, a corresponding clitic pronoun must be attached to the main verb in the IP.

- (31) a. Amá dè wò-ḍa fúfú ò.  
Ama *de* 3SG-cook fufu eat  
'Ama did cook fufu and ate.'  
(Ameka 1992: 32)
- b. Dè wó-fé-ná.  
*de* 3PL-play-HAB  
'They are playing' / 'They do play.'  
(Ameka 1992: 29, slightly modified)

*Dè* is not linked to a specific tense. The predicate that follows *dè* can take any aspectual suffix (32a) and can be part of a serial verb construction (32b). In the latter case, there is still only one occurrence of the particle *dè* immediately to the left of the subject clitic on the first verb.

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<sup>5</sup> Ameka (1992) analyses *lá* as a topic particle.

- (32) a. *Ðè wó-fé-ná.*  
*dè* 3PL-play-HAB  
 ‘They are playing.’ / ‘They do play.’  
 (Ameka 1992: 29, slightly modified)
- b. *Ámà dè wò-dà fufú dù.*  
 Ama *dè* 3SG-cook fufu eat  
 ‘Ama did cook fufu and ate.’  
 (Ameka 1992: 32, slightly modified)

*Ðé* does not display any kind of inflectional property. It remains invariable in form by its inability to bear the habitual affix *-na*:

- (33) \**Ðè-ná wó-fé-ná.*  
*dè* HAB 3PL-play-HAB  
 ‘They are playing.’ / ‘They do play.’  
 (Ameka 1992: 29, slightly modified)

Like the subject itself (as shown in (34)), the particle *dè* cannot be followed by a focus marker:

- (34) *Ðèví-wó dè (\*yé) wó-fé-ná.*  
 child-PL *dè* FOC 3PL-play-HAB  
 ‘Children do play.’

The particle *dè* shows affinities with the nearly homophonous emphatic propositional question introducer in (35a), with the interrogative final question particle<sup>6</sup> in (35b), and with a counterfactual conditional marker in (35c). Ameka (1992) proposes that these are distinct particles and that the connections between these functions can be easily established on the basis of typological polysemy.

- (35) a. *Ðé nè-gà-tró gbò-nà lóò?*  
 Q 2SG-REP-turn come-HAB DISJ-Q  
 ‘Are you coming back or?’  
 (Ameka 1992: 33)

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<sup>6</sup> “By using *dè* [as an interrogative final question particle] the speaker is alluding to the pertinent set of contextual assumptions considered to be mutually manifest to the interactants.” (Fretheim, Boateng and Vaskó 2003: 68)

- b. Nyónù-à      dè?  
 woman-ART Q  
 ‘What about the woman?’
- c. Dé      m̀è-gà      d̀e      afɔ      d̀èkà      dó      d̀e      ɲgɔ      lá      né  
 COND 1SG-REP take foot one send to front TOP then  
 m̀è-gé      dzè      do-a      m̀è.  
 1SG-fall land hole-DEF in  
 ‘Had I taken another step forward, I would have fallen into the pit.’  
 (Ameka 1992: 35)

We agree with Ameka in considering the homophonous particles in the examples (35) to be distinct particles. To support this idea, we can add that, differently from the *d̀e* in the *d̀e* construction, the counterfactual conditional marker *d̀é* can be followed by a lexical subject, as in (36). This might also mean that the counterfactual conditional marker *d̀é* occupies a different position in the structure from the *d̀e* of the *d̀e* construction.

- (36) Dé Kòfí gblò ná-m̀ bé ỳè-m-â-nò              vòvò m̀è  
*d̀é* Kofi say to-1SG that LOG-NEG-FUT-be.at free inside  
 égbè ò lá, d̀é m-à-vá ètsò s̀ì vá ỳì.  
 today NEG ART *d̀é* 1SG-FUT-come tomorrow REL come go  
 ‘If Kofi had told me you were busy today, I would have come yesterday.’

Moreover, differently again from the *d̀e* construction, after the counterfactual *d̀é* particle, the third person singular clitic can appear not only in the special form *wò-/wǒ-* (as in the *d̀e* construction, see (32a)), but also in its “regular” form *é-*:

- (37) a. Dé wǒ-gblò ná-m̀ bé....  
*d̀é* 3SG-say to-1SG that  
 ‘If he had told me that....’
- b. Dé é-gblò ná-m̀ bé....  
*d̀é* 3SG-say to-1SG that

**Previous analyses.** The verb fronting focus strategy has been studied extensively in the literature on Gbe languages (Ameka, 1992, 2010; Aboh, 1997, 2006; Aboh and Dyakorova, 2009, Fiedler, in press), whereas very little work has been done on the *d̀e* construction. Ameka analyses *d̀e* as a focus marker on par with *ỳé*, and Aboh analyses it as the focus head of a focus projection. *D̀è* encodes a predicate focus: the scope of *d̀e* is over the predication that it introduces, as exemplified in (38).

- (38)      Ðè      mè-dɛ̀,      mé-nyé      dɛ̀      mè-mè-è      ò.  
             dɛ̀      1SG-cook:3SGNEG-be      dɛ̀      1SG-roast-3SGNEG  
             ‘I cooked it, it is not that I roasted it.’  
             (Ameka 1992: 31)

If we follow Ameka and Aboh in characterizing *dɛ̀* as a focus marker, *dɛ̀*'s behaviour should correspond to that of *yé*, the head of a focus projection, whose specifier is a constituent in focus. However, *dɛ̀* does not seem to belong either to the same class of elements as the focus particle *yé* or to the specificity/topicality-related particles *lá/á* and *yá*. In contrast to these particles, *dɛ̀* does not have scope over the element to its left. Instead, it focuses the whole predicate to its right. In this paper, we therefore pursue a different line of thought and do not analyze *dɛ̀* as a focus particle on par with *yé*.

**Interpretation.** *Ðè* is commonly called a predicate focus marker, because it focuses only on the predication (see Fiedler, in press). The example in (39), in fact, shows that it cannot be used as an answer to a *wh* sub-constituent of the predicate:

- (39)    Q:    Àfíkà      wò-lè?  
             where      3S-stay  
             ‘Where does he live?’ / ‘Where is he?’  
             A:    # Ðè      wòlè      Tógó.  
             dɛ̀      1SG-be.in Togo

As mentioned above the verb fronting construction and the *dɛ̀* construction have different interpretations. While the verb fronting strategy has narrow scope, only on the lexical verb itself, the *dɛ̀* construction, focuses the whole predication. Consider, for example, the question-answer pair in (40): since the question requires an answer with a focus on the whole event, the verb fronting strategy in (40A1) is infelicitous. The verb fronting strategy focuses only on the verb ‘beating’, in contrast to another possible action against the child. In other words, everything except the verb is known information. It is only the verb which fills the information gap and is thus at the center of attention. In contrast, the answer with the *dɛ̀* construction in (40A2) is appropriate, since the new information is the whole proposition, the event of ‘beating a child’.

(40) Q: Núkà-é lè é-wò-m̂? Èdzì mé-lè é-dzò-m̂ ò.  
 what-FOC be.at 3SG-do-PROGheart NEG-be.at 3SG-please-PROG NEG  
 ‘What’s wrong with him? He’s not happy.’

A1: \*Fò-fò-é wò-fò dèví-á.  
 red-hit-FOC 3SG-hit child-DEF  
 literally ‘Beating, he beat the child.’

A2: Dé wǒ-fò dèví-á.  
*dè* 3SG-hit child-DEF  
 ‘He did beat the child.’

A remarkable fact in support of the claim that *dè* focuses only the event is the obligatory attachment of the subject clitic to the main verb. As Ameka (1992, 2010) notes, a lexical subject can only appear to the left of *dè*, and it can be followed by a topic marker (or can be separated by the rest of the sentence by a pause). When the lexical subject is absent, it must be realized as a clitic pronoun whose referent can be understood from the discourse context. In the literature, in fact, the subject in the initial *dè* construction is interpreted as a topic and the initial *dè* construction is characterized as a “comment only sentence”. That is, it is the comment on a topic. Moreover, recall the fact that *dè* cannot be preceded by a subject followed by a focus marker (see example (30)), and therefore cannot co-occur with another focused element in the same clause. Ameka (1992) notes that the fact that a full pronoun can never appear between *dè* and the main verb, but can appear only in its clitic form, indicates that the subject is out of the scope of focus (Ameka 2010: 326). Further, Ameka (2010) points out that the *dè* construction can be used to answer questions like *What did X do? What happened to X?*, which designate X as the topic of discourse. Therefore, the *dè* construction marks an answer to a question about the predicate and forces an interpretation in which the subject is interpreted as the topic. In other words, the scope of focus given by *dè* is only the event, the comment of the topic, since the subject is always interpreted as already “given” or “mentioned” in the context. Note further that the *dè* construction cannot be used in an answer where the focus is the subject, as shown in response to a *wh* question in (41) and in the corrective contrast in (42).

(41) Q: Àmékà yé yì àfútà?  
 who FOC go beach  
 ‘Who went to the beach?’

A: \*Kofi dè yì àfútà



- (42) A:    Ámà       fò       Kòfí.  
           Ama       hit       Kofi  
           ‘Ama hit Kofi.’
- B1:    À̀ò,    Kòkú-é           fò-è.  
           no    Koku- FOC       hit-3SG  
           ‘No, Koku hit him.’
- B2:    #À̀ò, Kòkú       dè       wǒ-fò-è.  
           no    Koku       de       3SG -hit-3SG

The formal explanation that we propose for this intuition is in line with the topic versus focus distinction in Ewe: topicalization leaves a resumptive clitic, whereas in the simplest cases focus does not, as was shown in (3). Thus, we assume that the obligatory presence of the clitic and the impossibility of a full pronoun following *dè* indicate that the subject occupies a topic position and binds a resumptive clitic within the IP.

Finally, as Ameka (1992: 5) claims, the sentences with *dè* can receive a contrastive reading, as is also suggested by the use of the English emphatic *do*-support in translations, and in fact, certain parallels can be drawn between *dè* and *do*. Consider the Ewe sentence in (43a) and the English sentence in (43b):

- (43) a.    Đé mè-dà-è.  
           DE 1SG-cook:3SG  
           ‘I did cook it.’
- b.    I did cook it.

Both (43a) and (43b) can have a contrastive meaning. They can be used as a correction of an assumption made explicitly or merely implied in the context, as shown in the following:

- (44) a.    Đè    me- ɖa,       mé-nyé           dè    me-me-é       o.  
           DE    1SG-cook:3SG NEG:3SG-be    DE    1SG-roast-3SG    NEG  
           ‘I cooked it, it is not that I roasted it.’  
           (Ameka 1992: 31)
- b.    I DID cook it, I didn’t roast it.

However, both emphatic *do*-support and *dè* can also be used to simply assert or emphasize the proposition, to stress the reality of the verbal action or state, or

perhaps rather, to remove any doubt as to the reality of the action on state (Ard, 1982; Ellegard, 1953).<sup>7</sup>

As we illustrated above, *dè* can introduce sentences to answer a question like *What happened to X?*, as in (45):

(45) Q: Núkàé dzò dè édzî?  
‘What’s happened to him?’

A: Dè wò-dze anyí.  
*dè* 3SG-fall ground.

‘She/he fell down. / Fall down, he/she did.’

(Ameka 1992: 2)

In this case, the *dè* construction doesn’t seem to express any contrast. However, the Ewe speakers we have consulted indicate two things. First, the answer to (45Q) can be realized as a simple sentence without *dè*, but with a difference: the answer with *dè* is much more emphasized, in the sense that, adding *dè*, the speaker wants to stress the assertion and the reality of the event. Second, if considered in isolation, *dè* is sometimes translated by the Ewe speakers with *c’est que...* in French and with *it’s that...* in English (see also Warburton 1968: 235). This kind of emphasis is parallel to the emphasis given by the English *do*-support when used non-contrastively (see Quirk et al. 1985: 1371 for examples).

**Syntax.** *Dè* does not seem to belong either to the same class of elements as the focus particle *yé* or to the specificity/topicality-related particles *lá/á* and *yá*. In contrast to these particles, *dè* does not have scope over the element to its left, but rather it focuses the whole predicate to its right. Therefore, we argue that *dè* does not head a focus projection on par with *yé* for the focus fronting for the noun phrase. If *dè* is not a focus head, no element needs to move to its specifier. We propose that *dè* is an overt verum focus operator positioned in the CP area. Specifically, we argue that *dè* occupies a complementizer position.

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<sup>7</sup> Note also that other unrelated languages like Korean and Central Western Basque require a sort of *do*-support in certain marked environment (e.g., negation in Korean and verb focus in Basque), i.e., when the predicate is in some way focused.

(i) Chelswu-ka chayk-ul ilk-ci ani ha-ess-ta. Korean  
Chelswu-NOM book-ACC read-CL NEG do-PST-DECL

‘Chelswu DID NOT read the book.’

(from Hagstrom 1996: 2)

(ii) Ines etorri egin da. Basque  
Ines come do AUX

‘Ines has COME.’

(from Haddican 2007: 1–2)

In the literature it has been shown that there is a hierarchy consisting of multiple positions for different types of complementizers. Haegeman (2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2006) has introduced a distinction between the functional head that ensures speaker anchoring, which she labeled as Force, and the head hosting the subordinating conjunction (Sub), which serves to subordinate the clause. She develops her hypothesis on the lines of Roussou's (2000) analysis of the CP area in Greek, which is based on the observation that in many languages it is possible to have multiple complementizers in a sequence. The availability of sequences of complementizers in certain languages has been accounted for in terms of CP recursion (see, for example, Authier, 1992; Rizzi, 1997). C is split into two basic heads: Force and Finiteness. The higher C is Force, which carries clause-typing properties, while the lower C is Fin, which carries information about finiteness. Force and Fin can be separated by the interpolation of Topic and Focus. Roussou (2000) considers Finiteness to be a cover term that subsumes a cluster of inflectional properties associated with verbal paradigms, including modality. She thus proposes three central C positions, each specified for different features of complementizer-related elements:

- (46) [C [Topic/Focus [C<sub>OP</sub> [Neg [ C<sub>M</sub> [I clitic+V]]]]]]<sup>8</sup>  
 (slightly modified from Roussou 2000:79)

The higher C gives us subordination, the middle C clause-typing, and the lower C modality.<sup>9</sup> The Neg projection is between the latter two complementizers.

We argue, then, that *dè* is a focus operator that occupies the lowest complementizer position. As mentioned above, *dè* cannot be the head of a FocP projection like *yé* is, since it takes scope over the predication to its right. The subject is always excluded from the scope of *dè*: it always appears to *dè*'s left, it can be followed by a topic particle or a pause. The clitic is obligatory in the IP. This indicates that the subject occupies a topic position and is bound to the clitic in the IP. Moreover, the subject is always part of the background of the speakers involved in the conversation and is never in focus. Accordingly, we argue that *dè* occupies the lower C, from where it has scope over the predicate, emphasizing the truth of the proposition. As in the CP structure in (46) proposed by Roussou, negation is between the lower two complementizers. If *dè* is in the position of the lowest complementizer, it shouldn't be able to have scope over a negated verb. And that is exactly what we find: *dè* cannot precede a negated verb, as in (47).

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<sup>8</sup> C: complementizer; C<sub>OP</sub>: complementizer operator; C<sub>M</sub>: complementizer modality; I: inflection.

<sup>9</sup> Haegeman (2006: 17) replaces C by the label Sub, (because this is the position that hosts the subordinating conjunction), C<sub>OP</sub> by the label Force, and C<sub>M</sub> by Fin:

(i) [Sub [Topic/Focus [Force [ Fin [I clitic+V]]]]]

(47) a. \*Kòfí dè (mé)-dzè ànyí ò.  
 Kofi dè NEG-fall ground NEG  
 intended: ‘Kofi did not fall down.’

b. \*Kòfí dè wò-mé-dzè ànyí ò.  
 Kofi dè 3SG-NEG-fall ground NEG

The idea that *dè* occupies the lowest C position in a hierarchy consisting of multiple C projections is also supported by the fact that *dè*-construction is not an exclusively root phenomenon. It can occur in subordinate clauses and it can be preceded by another complementizer. In fact, if *dè* is an overt operator in the lowest complementizer position, one can expect that after verbs of saying or feeling, a sequence of two complementizers may occur. One is a complementizer of verbs like ‘hearing’ or ‘saying’, while the other codes another complementizer, the lowest one. This is exactly what we obtain in Ewe:

(48) a. Mè-sè bé Kòfí dè wò-dzè ànyí.<sup>10</sup>  
 I-hear that Kofi dè 3SG-fall ground  
 ‘I heard that he fell down.’

b. Ámà gblò nám bé Kòfí dè wò-dzè ànyí.  
 Ama sayto- 1SG that Kofi dè 3SG-fall ground  
 ‘Ama said that Kofi fell down.’

In our analysis, the subordinating conjunction *bé* occupies the highest C, i.e., the subordinating position (Sub, in Haegeman’s (2006) terms), the subject is in Topic position binding the corresponding subject clitic (in its special form) in IP, while *dè* is in the lowest C:

(49) ...[<sub>C</sub> be [<sub>Top</sub> Kofi [<sub>C</sub> dè [<sub>I</sub> wò-dze ànyí]]]]

Finally, recall that, as mentioned before, that *dè* can be translated ‘it’s that...’, that is, by means of a complementizer. From the complementizer position, *dè* scopes over elements to its right focusing the truth of the predication.

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<sup>10</sup> Frajzyngier (1995) shows a similar structure in some data from Mupun. In Mupun *páa* is an epistemic modality marker: it marks doubt in the truth of something. Like *dè* in Ewe, it must be preceded by the subject:

(i) A sat ne wu paa mbe yo muan.  
 2M say COMP 3M doubt FUT go.trip

‘You said that he will go on a trip (but he may or may not go).’  
 (from Frajzyngier 1995: 62)

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we examined various focus-related phenomena in Ewe, all involving the FocP projection in the left periphery. The focus particle *yé*, which we analyse as the head of FocP, does not encode a specific kind of focus, but can host elements with a range of focal interpretations. All elements that move to its specifier are focused and constitute the prominent information in the sentence.

The most intriguing focus strategy is the *dè* construction. Contrary to the analysis found in the current literature, we view *dè* as not belonging to same class of elements as the focus particle *yé* or to the topicality-related particle *yá*. Therefore, we argue that *dè* is not a focus head of a focus projection. We propose that *dè* occupies a complementizer position C from where it has scope on the predicate on its right, emphasizing the truth of the proposition.

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