

Contrastive focus and low verb doubling in Dzə
Philip T. Duncan, Peace Benson, & John Gluckman
University of Kansas

Constructions involving verb doubling are prolific in many African languages across the Sudanic Belt, though they are diverse in form and function. Even ones across languages that share formal and functional affinity—e.g., contrastive verb focus with doubling—are claimed to differ in their underlying structures, landing site(s) of focused verbal constituents, and derivational paths leading to doubled verbs. Thus, it remains an open question and must be determined on an individual-language basis: (a) where focused verbs are located on the clausal spine and (b) how multiple copies are generated. In this paper, we present novel data from the Adamawan language Dzə (Niger-Congo; Northern Nigeria) to show that (a) contrastive verb focus is low, occurring in the middle field, and (b) the derivational path for verb doubling cannot be straightforwardly accounted for under existing accounts. Dzə furnishes further evidence for the existence of a low, TP-internal focus position near the upper edge of vP (Belletti 2004, Aboh 2007), which is associated with (contrastive) verb focus (Duncan 2016) and distinct from a high focus layer (Becker & Nformi 2016, Duncan et al. 2018), and it suggests the need to expand our understanding of the repertoire of syntactic operations that yield doubled verbs.

Data. Dzə exhibits SVO order in neutral transitive clauses and head-finality in DP (1a). It lacks overt tense marking, and has minimal aspectual distinctions. Though nominal focused constituents (e.g., wh-expressions) can occur at the left edge, contrastive verb focus involves two copies of the verb, as in (1b), neither of which seems left-peripheral. This produces SVOV order. Both the first and the second copy of the verb in (1b) can be identified as occurring low. We present three pieces of evidence illustrating the low position for verb-doubling. First, verb doubling is permitted in complement clauses, including nonfinite complements (2) that lack functional layers associated with the (high) left periphery. Second, verb doubling occurs inside of VP-modifiers, like the PP *lomwe* ‘at the market’ in (3). Third, the low focus position and high (left-peripheral) focus layers can be activated independently, and simultaneously. Verbs are exhaustively focused in Dzə via a predicate cleft construction, as in (4a). This involves nominalization with *-li* and displacement to a high focus position, the focus marker *di* preceding the focused constituent, and a remnant copy of the verb. Crucially for our discussion, this does not preclude contrastive verb focus with doubling from occurring inside a predicate cleft (4b), which provides the input to exhaustive verb focus.

Analysis. In addition to motivating the existence of a low focus layer in Dzə that houses contrastively focused verbs, we also provide evidence from Dzə that complicates current approaches regarding how verb doubling is derived. Whether the landing site of a focused verb is high (e.g., Aboh 2006, Hein 2021) or low (e.g., Aboh 2007, Duncan 2016), analyses of verb doubling generally rely on a combination of V/VP fronting plus a mechanism for retaining a lower copy. The Grassfields Bantu language Limbum has a verb doubling construction that, like Dzə, yields SVOV order; Becker & Nformi (2016) analyze this as involving V-to-Foc followed by VP movement to a TP-internal Spec,FocP. While this could account for the Dzə data in (1b), (2), and (4), example (5) presents a challenge for their analysis. Here, SVOV obtains, but what is surprising is that the quantifier *hê* ‘all’, which modifies the object DP, surfaces after the second copy of the verb instead of before it. In fact, Becker & Nformi (2016: 80) make the prediction “that no other constituent can follow the focused copy of the verb.” Since this prediction is not borne out for Dzə (see (3) and (5)) we propose that the steps in Becker & Nformi’s analysis are necessary but not sufficient. Moreover, we find a restriction in Dzə contrastive verb focus that points to something special about objects in such constructions: Verbs with inherent complements (ICVs) disallow verb doubling (6), forcing the use of *di* postverbally.

To account for Dzə, we consider an analysis where the status of objects either feeds or bleeds syntactic processes that generate verb doubling in contrastive verb focus. Following Anyanwu & Udoudom (2022) for Ibibio, we take it that inherent complements of ICVs are not “true” objects in Dzə. For Dzə contrastive verb focus, “true” objects vacate VP prior to the twofold movement proposed by Becker & Nformi (2016), which sets up the possibility of quantifier stranding. In this scenario, the VP movement step in Dzə amounts

to VP-remnant movement, and the landing site in the middle field is higher than that of low adverbs. ICV objects behave differently, forcing a secondary strategy absent verb doubling.

- (1) a. Nlabefi dʒə dəro de
Nlabefi buy book the
'Nlabefi bought the book.'
- b. Nlabefi **dʒə** dəro de **dʒə**
Nlabefi buy book the buy
'Nlabefi BOUGHT the book.'
- (2) Obefi jidi pi **dʒə** dəro de **dʒə**
Obefi want COMP buy book the buy
'Obefi wanted to BUY the book.'
- (3) Kanmila **dʒə** ningjasi de **dʒə** lomwe.
Kanmila buy cloth the buy market
'Kanmila BOUGHT cloth at the market.'
- (4) a. Di dʒə-li a dəro bi Fila dʒə
FOC buy-PART LNK book COMP Fila buy
'It's BUYING THE BOOK that Fila did.' (not any other thing)
- b. Di **dʒə** a dəro **dʒə**-li bi Fila dʒə
FOC buy LNK book buy-PART COMP Fila buy
'It's BUYING THE BOOK that Fila did.'
- (5) Nlabefi **dʒə** dəro de **dʒə hē**
Nlabefi buy book the buy all
'Nlabefi BOUGHT all the books.'
- (6) Fijamilo bwə *(di) də (*bwə) o le *(di) be (*le) lo
Fijamilo dance FOC dance dance 3SG sing FOC song sing NEG
'Fijamilo DANCED, they didn't SING.'

References. ABOH, Enoch Oladé. (2006). When verbal predicates go fronting. In I. Fiedler & A. Schwarz (eds.), *Papers on information structure in African languages*, 21–48. ABOH, Enoch Oladé. (2007). Leftward Focus versus Rightward Focus: the Kwa-Bantu Conspiracy. *SOAS Working Papers in Linguistics*, 15, 81–104. ANYANWU, Ogbonna, & UDOUDOM, Juliet. (2022). Inherent complement verbs in Ibibio. In M. E. Ekpenyong & I. I. Udoh (eds.), *Current Issues in Descriptive Linguistics and Digital Humanities*, 71-86. BECKER, Laura, & NFORMI, Jude. (2016). Focus and verb doubling in Limbum. *Replicative Processes in Grammar*, 57–84. BELLETTI, Adriana. (2004). Aspects of the low IP area. In L. Rizzi (ed.), *The Structure of IP and CP: The Cartography of Syntactic Structures, Vol. 2*, 16–51. DUNCAN, Philip T. (2016). Parallel chain formation in Ibibio contrastive verb focus. *Proceedings of the Forty-second Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, 87-106. DUNCAN, Philip T., MAJOR, Travis, & UDOINYANG, Mfon. (2018). Searching high and low for focus in Ibibio. *African Linguistics on the Prairie*, 269-288. HEIN, Johannes. (2021). V(P)-fronting in Asante Twi and Limbum. In V. Lee-Schoenfeld & D. Ott (eds.), *Parameters of predicate fronting: A crosslinguistic look at V(P)-initial constructions*.