Some preliminary remarks

Focus is regarded as pragmatic category “which is relatively the most important or salient in the given communicative setting, and considered by S to be most essential for A to integrate into his pragmatic information.” (DIK 1997:326).

2 Matching of the Yom data to our general observations on focus expressions in Gur

2.1 Means to express focus

Focus can be expressed either in-situ or ex-situ. Both syntactic constructions can further be characterized by morphological means; at least in the ex-situ case, phonological marking is attested, too.

focus unmarked sentence structure

(1a) à 

(1b) à

CL retourner.PF  maison     CL retourner.PF-COMPL

He went home.      He went back. (Beacham 1991:43)

2.1.1 Subject focus

- subject is obligatorily marked with the FM -ra
- after the subject NP + FM -ra, a coreferent anaphoric pronoun has to be used
- the out-of-focus-part shows a special tonal pattern

(2)

question: question word obligatorily marked by FM

W 

é 

à

CL retourner.PF  derrière?

QUI est arrivé en retard?

(answer: subject obligatorily marked by FM)

D

c

- à

CL retourner.PF  derrière

C'est L'HOMME LA qui a été en retard.

2.1.2 Non-Subject Focus

in-situ: no morphological, and, to the best of my knowledge, no phonological marking

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2.1.3 Predicate Focus

**In-situ:**
- FM –ra always occurs at the end of the transitive clause, i.e. after the object, never directly after the verb in focus (4a).
- In sentences with an intransitive verb or when the object of the transitive verb is not spelled out, something has to intervene between verb and FM. This is either the "completion particle" (5a) or the so-called "syntactic marker" (6b) or both (7b).

**Ex-situ:**
- nominalized verb at the beginning of the sentence followed by the FM
- a copy of the verb holding its canonical position (ex. 4b)

(4) statement: not focus marked:
La femme a tapé Woru.
(4a) reaction: FM at the end of the sentence
(4b) reaction: nominalized verb + FM

(5) yes-no-question: no focus marking:
Es-tu allé nager et manger?
(5a) answer: focus marking following the first verb + COMPL

(6) non, CL appeler.PF CL-FM
Non, elle L'A APPELEE.
(6b) non, c'est l'APPELER qu'elle a fait.

(7) non, 1sg aller-COMPL-FM CNJ nager.SER
Non, je SUIS SEULEMENT ALLE nager.
Focus Expressions in Yom

2.1.4 Sentence Focus

- primary expression for marking sentence focus: focus marking on subject (8)

(8) d'abord elle a parlé. 

- same construction can be seen as stage-setting device

(9) mais elle a aussi mangé.

- secondary strategy: use of the marked in-situ predicate focus form, i.e. the whole sentence can be marked with FM –ra at its end (10).

(10) après ils ont mangé.

Summary:

Focus expressions in Yom are characterized by the following features:

1. we can differentiate between ex-situ and in-situ focus constructions

2. ex-situ constructions have the following characteristics:
   - the constituent in focus is placed at the beginning of the sentence
   - there exist one single overall FM –rà, which is sentence-mentally identical with a so-called identifier and which is postponed after the constituent or sentence which lies in the scope of focus
   - FM is obligatory in nearly all occurrences of ex-situ, i.e. in affirmative and negative sentences – but is excluded from sentence focus constructions in subjunctive mood
   - there are special tonal patterns of the predicate in the out-of-focus part of the SF-construction.

3. in-situ constructions on the other hand can be characterized by the following features:
   - only object and predicate focus can be expressed in-situ
     - whereas object in-situ focus is not marked at all,
     - predicate in-situ focus is marked with FM –ra at the end of the whole sentence
   - to the best of my knowledge, there is no phonological marking of in-situ constructions.
Up to now we have observed that Yom knows *ex-situ* and *in-situ* focus constructions. It deviates from the "Gur pattern" in so far as we do not seem to find object *in-situ* focus constructions with morphological marking and no morphological markers which can directly clitized to the predicate to mark verb focus.

2.2 Asymmetry between SF and NSF

There is an asymmetry found between constructions that focus subjects and non-subjects.

(a) Subjects are generally only focused via *ex-situ* constructions, non-subjects can be focused *ex-situ* as well as *in-situ*.

(b) In SF, the use of the morphological marking (focus marker, special out-of-focus verbal morphology) is obligatory, in NSF morphological marking is in some languages optional.

(c) In SF, the double subject constraint, which disallows a subject pronoun that is coreferent with the focus constituent, is in many languages active.

Yom displays the same asymmetries like other Gur languages treated by us. It deviates only with respect to her focus marker which is obligatory in all instances of *ex-situ* constructions.

2.3 Markedness of Focus and Focus ambiguities

We find focus ambiguities in the following ways:

(a) SF and sentence focus are often coded in the same way.

(b) The focus on a NP can have scope over the whole NP or only over part of it.

Yom follows the "Gur" way of dealing with focus expressions insofar as (1) constructions with the subject marked for focus can be used not only for subject focus, but for sentence focus too and (2) it shows up ambiguities concerning the scope of focus if a complex NP is marked with FM -ra.

(11) example for the ambiguity between complex NP or only part of it:

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garçon     pantalon-FM       CL  déchirer.PF-COMPL
Le pantalon DU GARÇON a été déchiré.
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2.4 Out-of-Focus marking has relative clause-like morphological features

There are three possible ways to analyze *ex-situ* constructions (cf. BR)

(a) as simple extraction, without the characteristics of a cleft (monoclausal)

(b) as cleft (biclausal)

(c) as narrative clause (biclausal).

- no relation to narrative structures

- but: striking similarities in the marking of the out-of-focus part of SF and relative clauses and homophony between FM and predications containing only one argument

It is not identical with the 'be'-verb in Yom expressing qualificative / identificational /classificational and locative meaning.
Ex-situ focus constructions in Yom can therefore due to their similarities to relative clauses be regarded as structurally comparable to clefts and a grammaticalization path from clefts to focus constructions is therefore not unlikely.4

3 Conclusions

To sum up, so far we have seen that Yom displays typical features of focus constructions found in other languages of our language sample: It shares with the other languages the following features:

- it makes use of a FM which shows on one hand similarities to a predicator, but not to the copula verb like in Byali and which is on the other hand homophonous with the completion particle of the perfective aspect.
- it displays a special tonal pattern of the verb in the out-of-focus part of ex-situ constructions comparable to all other languages under study by us – here the same picture shows up as in Byali in using relative-like structures
- it shows the well-known asymmetry between SF and NSF
- it employs the subject focus construction to mark sentence focus (i.e. thetic statements)
- the cleft strategy seems to be relevant for the development of the ex-situ constructions, like in Byali.

It does not share the following features:

- there seems to exist only one overall used FM, the other languages use more than one.
- it displays, like Bantu languages, two different verb forms: these were explained by Beacham in syntactic terms, but it is also possible to relate them to pragmatics, i.e. to

4 There is a difference in the use of the verb form, and in the existence / non-existence of FM resp. relative pronoun + subordinating particle in each of the compared constructions.
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predicate focus marking – this is a question for further research, but could explain why
Yom doesn't have special morphological markers for object in-situ
and why there are no special particles to mark predicate focus.

- Yom doesn't accept the double subject constraint, and even opposite to this, it asks
  obligatorily for an anaphoric / resumptive subject clitic in the out-of-focus part of
  the construction.

Despite of these peculiarities of the language, Yom focus constructions behave much like
other Gur languages. At the same time, these special features in Yom ask for a clarification in
order to know how they can fit into the Gur language group or in the wider Niger-Congo
language group.

References


Abbreviations:

CL class pronoun   NEG negation
CNJ conjunction    PF perfective
COMPL completion particle   Q question marker
DEM demonstrative pronoun   REL relative (pronoun)
FM focus marker    SER verb in serial verb form
FUT future     SUB subordinating particle
INF infinitive    SUM "syntactic unit marker"
IPF imperfective