

AN INITIAL STUDY OF
PROMINENCE
IN BASSAR DISCOURSE

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An Initial Study of Prominence in Bassar¹

1. Introduction

This paper did not start out to be a study of prominence. Having lived with the Bassar people and their language for a number of years, I was puzzled by certain particles whose presence were essential to correct speech, but whose precise meaning I could not identify. When I tried to make a word-for-word translation of Bassar texts, I was embarrassed by the number of different words I could only gloss as ‘emphatic’. This paper is the result of an initial study of some of these particles, and an attempt to find out their function in Bassar discourse. Such particles do not yield their secrets easily; this study is just the first stage of what must be a longer period of research to build up a picture of the devices Bassar speakers use to organise their communication.

1.1 It appears that the three particles to be discussed in this paper are all features of *Prominence*. K Callow defines prominence as follows: ‘The term *prominence* ... refers to any device whatever which gives certain events, participants, or objects more significance than others in the same context.’ (1974:50). She observes at the beginning of her chapter on Prominence: ‘A story in which every character was equally important and every event equally significant can hardly be imagined. Even the simplest story has at least a central character and a plot, and this means one character is more important than the others, and certain events likewise. Human beings cannot observe events simply as happenings; they observe them as related and significant happenings, and they report them as such.’ (op.cit.:49). Callow draws her definition of prominence from that of Halliday, who says: ‘I have used the term prominence as a general name for the phenomenon of linguistic highlighting, whereby some feature of the language of a text stands out in some way.’ (1969:8, see Callow op.cit. 50). Grimes describes prominence in terms of *staging*: ‘It is as though stage directions were given to the spotlight handler in a theater to single out a particular individual or an action, or as though one actor were placed close to the audience and another off to the side. In fact, staging metaphors appear to be highly appropriate for the marked varieties of a whole range of linguistic phenomena that have a long history of being hard to handle.’ (1975:327). The role of the particles to be discussed is one of staging – to highlight certain parts of what is being communicated against others. Not only is it necessary to consider what is prominent in a construction, but also what is not prominent, or backgrounded.

1.2 It is important to consider the *domain* for which a prominence feature is relevant. Halliday (1967) describes discourse as organised into a series of information units (200) with the clause as the point of origin (201). ‘The information unit is what the speaker chooses to encode as a unit of discourse ... At the same time

¹ Bassar is a member of the Gourma sub-group of the Gur language-group, and is spoken by about 25,000 people in the Préfecture de Bassar, Republic of Togo, and by an equivalent number in Ghana, West Africa.

the information unit is the point of origin for further options regarding the status of its components: for the selection of points of information focus which indicate what new information is being contributed. The distribution into information units thus determines how many points of information focus are to be accommodated, and specifies the possible limits within which each may be accommodated' (202). The domain of the features of prominence in Bassar to be discussed in this paper fall within the clause or sentence either on the subject or the predicate, although their reference can extend beyond it.

1.3 *Information focus* is one aspect of the thematic organisation of discourse which was brought out by linguists of the Prague tradition. V Mathesius (1882-1945) analysed the sentence into its functional elements, and from his work Firbas developed the theory of **F**unctional **S**entence **P**erspective (FSP) (Firbas 1964a:117, quoted by DGJ Panhuis 1982:9). The theory of FSP concentrates on the sentence, and its fundamental concept is that of **C**ommunicative **D**ynamism (CD). 'By the degree of CD carried by a linguistic element is meant the extent to which the element contributes to the development of communication, to which, as it were, it "pushes the communication forward"' (Firbas and Pala 1971:92). Firbas views the sentence as being divided into three parts: at one end of the scale, the element carrying the highest degree of CD in the sentence (i.e. conveying the greatest amount of information) is the *rheme*, while that carrying the lowest degree of CD is the *theme*. In between these two poles, other elements carry more or less CD and are 'transition' elements. (Firbas 1968:13, see Levinsohn 1975:13-14). Firbas considers this basic distribution of CD to be a factor in determining FSP which is universal (loc. cit.). The theory of FSP has been useful in the study of word order, particularly for European languages (e.g. Mathesius 1929, Firbas 1958, 1959, 1964; Beneš 1964, 1967, quoted by Kirkwood 1969: 88; Panhuis 1982:161,163-4), but also for a non-European language (Levinsohn 1975). The way in which word order can be manipulated to conform to the speaker's intention varies from language to language. Each language has its own means of assigning degrees of CD to different elements of a sentence. There is a basic or unmarked distribution of CD, a conspicuous deviation from which renders the sentence emotive. (Firbas 1964a:117ff, 1971: 140-141. See Panhuis 1982:14). In the Bassar language, word order is relatively fixed with an SVO structure. There is some front-shifting, which will be discussed in Section 3.12. One of the means Bassar has of assigning CD in a sentence is by particles which focus on different elements. It is with three of those particles that this paper is concerned.

1.4 Since '*focus*' and '*emphasis*' seem relevant terms by which to describe the function of these particles, some further definitions are necessary. In his 1967 article, Halliday said: 'Information focus reflects the speaker's decision as to where the main burden of the message lies. It is one of the many diverse phenomena referred to by speakers of English as 'emphasis', the term used to cover most of the types of prominence discussed in these sections. Information focus is one kind of emphasis, that whereby the speaker marks out a part (which may be the whole) of a message block which he wishes to be interpreted as informative.' (204). Callow discerns three main values in prominence in discourse: theme, focus and emphasis. 'Prominence that occurs with *thematic* significance is, in effect, saying to the hearer, 'This is what I am talking about'. Such information is prominent in the discourse

because it carries the discourse forward... Prominence that occurs with *focus* significance is saying to the hearer 'This is important, listen'. Prominence that occurs with *emphatic* significance normally involves the speaker-hearer relationship in some way. It says to the hearer either 'You didn't expect that, did you?' or 'Now I feel strongly about this' (1974:52). These definitions suggested by Callow are helpful in understanding how the three particles to be discussed in this paper function. Bassar speakers use particles to assign focus to the part of their communication which they consider important and to which they want their hearers to pay particular attention. On Callow's definition, the particles to be discussed have principally a *focus* significance.

The three particles to be discussed are *di*, which is a focus marker on the *subject* of a clause (Section 2), *ni* which functions as a focus marker in and between *predicates* (Section 3), and *nin* which is a marker of *anaphoric* predicate focus (Section 4). I aim to show the distribution and function of these particles by examining examples taken from Bassar texts.

2. *Di*: a marker of Subject Focus

Di is the particle which marks focus on the subject of a sentence. The sentence may consist of one clause, or one main clause with embedded subordinate clauses. *Di* marks a 'stressed focus' (Prince, 1978:896-904), making the subject a marked subject. Sentences with marked subject focus are very similar in meaning to it-clefts in English, and it is interesting to note that as in English, it-clefts can be divided into two types: stressed focus and informative presupposition, so the Bassar particle *di* performs the same function. The use of *di* in focus and presupposition will be discussed under Section 2.1.

At the beginning of a story, the participant who initiates the action of the story is introduced by the particle *di*. Within the story, a new participant will be introduced by *di* if it is his person who is significant rather than his action. The use of *di* in Unknown Subject Focus will be discussed under Section 2.2.

2.1 *Di* in focus and presupposition

The function of *di* in a Bassar sentence is analysable in terms of *Focus* and *Presupposition* (see Chomsky 1972:89ff), where the focus item, in this case the subject of the sentence, is marked by *di*. A comparison with the use of it-clefts in English will be useful in clarifying how Bassar uses *di* to focus on the subject of a sentence. E Prince (1978) has distinguished two types of it-cleft in English: the **Stressed Focus (SF)** it-cleft and the **Informative Presupposition (IP)** it-cleft. She says: 'The two types of it-cleft ... are (a) the stressed focus it-cleft, in which the focus represents new information, and the *that*-clause represents information which is often, though not always, known from the context; and (b) the informative presupposition it-cleft, in which the focus usually contains an anaphoric item, and the *that*-clause contains the 'message' – but marked as a known fact, not as the speaker's assessment.' (1978:904). The difference between an unmarked informative sentence in English such as 'John built the house' and a cleft sentence

such as ‘*It was John who built the house*’ is that in the second sentence *John* has stressed focus, and the relative clause contains presupposed information. ‘*It was John who built the house*’ presupposes the question ‘*Who built the house?*’ The existence of the house is presupposed; the focus is on *John*. In Bassar, the equivalent of ‘*It was John who built the house*’ would be

Gbati *di* máń kudii.

Gbati *sf*² built house.

It was Gbati who built the house.

In Bassar, *Gbati* remains the subject of the sentence and *di* gives him stressed focus. The predicate - *máń kudii* ‘built house’ is presupposition. The focus item is the one which carries the new information and the highest degree of CD. The presupposition represents known or old information (Prince, op.cit. 896). I will discuss examples taken from Bassar texts of stressed focus on the subject, analogous to stressed focus it-clefts in English, in Section 2.11.

Prince points out that ‘Informative presupposition it-clefts are formally and unambiguously identifiable. First, unlike stressed-focus it-clefts, they have normally (vs. weakly) stressed *that*-clauses. Second, they have generally short anaphoric focus ... Their function, or at least one of their functions is *to mark a piece of information as fact*, known to some people although not yet known to the intended hearer.’ (op.cit. 899). In SF clefts, the information is a known fact but is new to the hearer and has high CD. In SF clefts the message is contained in the relative clause and the focus is in the anaphoric item. For example, in the following English sentence, ‘*It was then that the talks broke down*’, the focus is on the anaphoric adverbial *then*, but the message is contained in the relative clause ‘*that the talks broke down*’. Similarly in Bassar, a typical ending to a story would be

An *di* sá Bikootib kòó³ usiibo.

That *sf* is Bikootib-people taboo rat

It is for that reason that the rat is taboo for the people of Bikootib.

In this example, the particle *di* is focussing on the anaphoric demonstrative *An* ‘that’, which is subject of the sentence and refers to the whole of the preceding story. The message, however, is contained in the rest of the sentence: ‘the rat is taboo for the people of Bikootib’, information which is a known fact (to the people of the clan of Bikootib) but unknown to the hearers of the story. Further examples of *di* used in informative presupposition sentences will be discussed in Section 2.12.

² A key to the abbreviations used in the English glosses will be found on p.58.

³ ‘to be taboo for’ in Bassar is an active verb.

2.11 Examples of *di* marking Stressed Focus

In each of these examples, the element receiving stressed focus is the subject of the sentence.

Example 1

(129) His father asked him:

(130) 'Kin ηma *di* dākāń-si dee?'

 FOCUS Presupposition

 Q who sf showed-ds-you pr

'Who brought you here then?'

(131) He replied:

(132) 'M-bɔɔ ubɔ *di* dākāń-m doo.'

 FOCUS Presupposition

 My-friend one sf showed-ds-me here

'It was one of my friends who brought me here.'

T5.129-132

In line 130, the presupposition is that since the child is standing there in front of his father, someone must have shown him the way home. The focus is on the question word '*Who?*'. Similarly, in line 132, the focus is on the new information *M-bɔɔ ubɔ* 'One of my friends' in answer to the question '*Who?*'. The new information in the FOCUS carries the highest level of CD (Prince 1978: 896-7, quoting Firbas 1964:270). The presupposition *dākāń-m doo* 'brought me here' carries very low CD.

Example 2

(23) The panther-cub asked the child:

(24) 'My friend, what are you doing here?'

(25) The child answered him:

(26) 'Man *nì* m-na di bàà bí doo,

 FOCUS Presupposition

 I-em and my-mother sf et were here

'It was my mother and I who were here earlier,

(27) but I haven't seen my mother since yesterday.'

(28) The panther-cub replied:

(29) 'M-bɔɔ, man na *di* kũũ sii na.

 FOCUS Presupposition

 My-friend, my-em mother sf killed your-em mother

'My friend, *it was my mother* who killed your mother.

(30) So I will kill my mother for you,

T3.23-30

Since the panther-cub has found the human child and they are talking together, the presence of the child in that spot is expressed in the presupposition *bàà bí doo* 'were here earlier'. The focus item is that the child *and his mother*, as opposed to the child alone, were there earlier. In line 29, the panther-cub presupposes that the absence of the child's mother means that someone has killed her. The focus item is that it was *his mother* who had killed her, as opposed to anyone else.

Example 3

(21) On the day when he would have gone without,

(22) while he was just sitting there,

(23) someone sent his child with some meat, saying:

(24) u-baa *di túnní-u*,

FOCUS Presupposition

his-father *sf* sent-ds-him,

it was his father who had sent him,

(25) to bring the meat to him.

T5.21-25

Since the child had arrived with the meat for the hero, it is presupposed that someone sent him. (In Bassar culture, it is more usual to send a younger person with a gift than go yourself.) The focus item is the fact that it was *his father* who had sent him, and not anyone else.

Example 4

(101) So the chief said if that was the case,

(102) they should break the egg and see.

(103) When they broke the egg,

(104) ukoodaan biyaam di *kā* poon.

FOCUS Presupposition

flea children *sf* sitting inside

it was the flea's children who were inside.

T6.101-104

When the egg was broken, something would be found inside. *kā poon* 'were inside' is the presupposition in line 104. The focus item is *ukoodaan biyaam* 'the flea's children'. The flea's children are focussed because if the hen had been telling the truth, one would have expected to find a chick.

Example 5

- (87) Saa nyí yii ηjal ηun tàntēe,
You-not know cit hand rel stretches-out-top,
Don't you know that the hand which stretches out,
- (88) ηún di gūkuntáaa?
FOCUS Presupposition
it-em *sf* comes-back-q
that is the one that receives in return?

T5.87-88

This example is a little different in that it is a metaphor and not an event. The presupposition is based on common experience: that if you stretch out your hand, it is the same hand which is brought back again. The focus item is the fact that it is the same *hand* which comes back. If you stretch out your hand to give to other people, you yourself will receive from them in return. The hero had used his *hand* to give to people, and had received in return, whereas his friend who had not shared his meat had not received anything.

2.12 Examples of *di* marking Informative Presupposition

In all these examples, *di* focusses an anaphoric element which is the subject, and the 'message' is in the predicate.

Example 6

- An *di* sá bin kaa jīn ugbiiyee.
That *sf* is rel not eat panther-top
That is why some people do not eat the panther.

T3.179

In this example, *di* is focussing on the anaphoric pronoun *an* 'that' which refers back to the whole of the preceding discourse, and is the explanation for the message contained in the predicate: 'those who do not eat the panther'.

Example 7

- (115) Well, if there is trouble like that,
(116) and you have been to the sub-chiefs and they have not been able to deal with it,
(117) the chief of Bassar should be able to solve it.
(118) U nín làá ηmā puee *di* sá kii ún cáá seeliyee.
He apf fut able r-top *sf* is like he-em has witness-top.
The reason he is able to solve cases is that he has witnesses.

In line 118, *di* is focussing the informative presupposition contained in the clause *u nín làá ñmā puee* ‘the reason he is able to solve cases’, which refers directly back to the information in line 117. The ‘message’ is contained in *úh cáá seeliyee* ‘he has witnesses’, and so he is able to solve cases.

Example 8

- (67) Akpati nín yáfi ki sītì dibɔ́bilin puee,
 Monkeys apf picked-up ref poured hole-in r-top
 The reason the monkeys picked it up and poured it into the water-hole
- (68) *di* sá ñíh ní bi kūū ki ká animil.
 sf were them-em fg they killed ref got money
 is that they were the ones who were killed for the money.

T2.67-68

This example contains all three of the focus particles to be discussed in this paper, and so it will occur under each section. *di* is focussing on the presupposition contained in line 67: the monkeys and their action at the water-hole. The monkeys and what they did had been mentioned several times in the story: lines 23-25, 45-46 and 62. The message is contained in the identification (line 68) ‘they were the ones who were killed for the money’.

2.2 *Di* in Unknown Subject Focus

The subject of a sentence is usually considered to have less CD than the predicate (Firbas 1966:240). DGJ Panhuis quotes the explanation given by Dwight Bolinger (1954-5:47), that if an action is performed, someone has to perform it, whence subjects are presupposed. (Panhuis, 1982:12). But the situation at the beginning of a story is rather different. The participant who initiates the action of the story is very important. Panhuis goes on to say (loc.cit): ‘However, subjects expressing a person or a thing existing or appearing on the scene seem to attract the listener’s or reader’s attention much more than the verb that expresses such an existence or appearance. So ‘if ... it is contextually independent, the subject will carry a higher degree of CD than the verb. This is (so) because, communicatively speaking, an unknown person or thing appearing on the scene is found to be more important than the fact of existence or the act of appearing itself.’ (Firbas 1971:137) In Bassar stories, the participant who initiates the action of the story is always subject of the first sentence and is marked with the focus particle *di*, as is illustrated in the following examples:

Example 9

- Unimbɔ́ti *di* bí, ní ki cáá kibiki.
 God sf was, fg ref had child

God was there, and he had a child.

or

Once upon a time, there was God, and he had a child.

T2.1

God is the initiating participant in this story, in that he has a child and the child then wants to take over the running of the world. The story consists of God's demonstration to his child that he is not ready to take over yet.

Example 10

Uɓɓti *di* bí, ní ki cáá binimpoob tikpil.

Chief *sf* was, fg ref had wives many

There was once a chief, and he had many wives.

T3.1

The chief is the initiator of the events in this story, in that he had the strange habit of sending his wives back to their own families in order to give birth. This is contrary to the normal practice of Bassar families, where a wife normally gives birth to her child in her husband's family. One of his wives happened to be an orphan, so she went to the bush to give birth to her child – from whence the story proceeds.

Within the story, a new participant will be marked with *di* only if his person is in focus rather than his action. In the story of the events which took place at the water-hole, a succession of new participants enter and leave the stage: a Hausa, monkeys, a girl and a blind man (T2.18-35). None of them are introduced by *di*. In Text 5, the story of the riddle of the cow which was eaten for five years, when the hero's friend 'comes onto the stage' for the first time (line 47), he is introduced simply as *U-bɔɔ ubɔ bālfɪ-u yii ...* 'One of his friends asked him...'. But in Text 3, when the panther-cub has gone to lie in wait by the high road, and when a Hausa passes by and the cub attacks him, the Hausa is introduced by *di*:

Example 11

(84) The panther-cub said that

(85) and got up and went and lay in wait by the highroad,

(86) and while he was sitting there,

(87) ujangbeeja *di* jītée,

Hausa *sf* passing-top,

a Hausa passed by,

T3.84-88

I would explain this by the fact that in the examples just cited from Texts 2 and 5 what the new participants *did* was more important than who they were. In the

example from Text 3, the Hausa as a *person* was important, because Hausas in West Africa are traders and travel widely, so he was likely to be carrying the things the cub wanted to steal. Thus the fact that a *Hausa* passed by was more important than just anyone passing by. Hence the Hausa in this instance receives subject focus.

3. *Ní*: a foregrounding particle which functions in or between predicates

Ní is the particle which has the widest distribution as a marker of prominence in Bassar discourse. It has two main functions: first, it is a marker of predicate focus, where in practice, by Firbas' FRA partner principle (see Section 3.11 p 12), predicate is the verb or the verbal complement. *Ní* therefore contrasts with *dí*, which is the marker of subject focus (see Section 2). When it is functioning as predicate focus, *ní* follows immediately after the element it is focussing. Second, in narrative discourse, *ní* focusses on the *development* of one predication from another, and is the signal for one type of Development Unit (DU) (Levinsohn 1980) in the discourse. When *ní* is foregrounding a DU, it occurs clause-initial. In Section 3.1 I discuss how *ní* functions as a marker of Predicate Focus, and in Section 3.2 how *ní* focusses on the development of one predication from another.

3.1 *Ní* as a focus marker within the Predicate

'... the subject of a predication names the thing about which something is said, and the predicate is that part of the sentence which says something about the thing named by the subject.' (Lyons, 1968:11). As *dí* is a focus marker for the subject of a sentence, *ní* functions as a focus marker in the predicate. The predicate here is taken to mean the verb and its adjuncts (cf Pike 1967:250). The obligatory element of the predicate in Bassar is the verb. Bassar has two degrees of marked focus in the predicate: in the first degree of markedness, *ní* focusses the verb or the verbal complement clause-final (Section 3.11), and in the second degree of markedness, the verbal complement is frontshifted and focussed with *ní* (Section 3.12).

3.11 *Ní*: a marked focus of the Predicate clause-final

According to the theory of FSP, Firbas has observed: 'There is a tendency to arrange the elements within a sentence into a sequence starting with the element carrying the lowest degree of CD and gradually proceeding to the element carrying the highest degree of CD; this sequence displays what may be termed the *basic* distribution of CD.' (Firbas and Pala 1971:98, italics mine). In an earlier work, Firbas stated: 'The elements carrying the lowest degrees of CD constitute the theme, those carrying the highest degrees, the rheme, the element carrying the lowest degree of CD functioning as theme proper, the one carrying the very highest degree of CD as the rheme proper.' (1966:240, quoted by Panhuis 1982:9-10). As in English, so in Bassar, in the unmarked sentence, there is a theme-rheme⁴ pattern with the element carrying the highest degree of CD at the end (cf Firbas, 1966:115). Firbas

⁴ The terms 'topic' and 'comment' are used by American linguists for 'theme' and 'rheme' respectively (cf Hockett 1958:191).

also developed the theory of the **First Rank Amplicative** (FRA partner) of the verb, which he calls ‘an absolutely essential amplification of the meaning of the verbal form.’ (Firbas 1959:47ff, quoted by Kirkwood 1969:92). He says: ‘A contextually independent object carries a higher degree of CD than the verb, because from the point of view of the development of communication an unknown goal (outcome) of an action appears to be more important than the action aiming at reaching (effecting) that goal (outcome).’ (Firbas and Pala 1971:95-6). Bassar uses *ní* to focus on the verb or the FRA partner of the verb, thus making the rheme a marked rheme and increasing the level of CD at the end of the clause or sentence. In Section 3.111 I discuss *ní* when it focusses the verb in final position in the clause, and in Section 3.112 *ní* as it focusses on the FRA partner of the verb will be discussed.

3.111 *Ní* focusses the verb in clause-final position

In the following examples, the predicates consist of one or more than one verb. The final verb represents the goal of the predication (see Section 3.21), and is focussed by *ní*.

Example 12

In Text 4, after the child has broken the panther cub’s taboo for the third time, the cub exclaims:

‘Āa áa! M-bɔɔ, a kíh̄n̄ ki là kí kpi ní!
 Aha! My-friend, you began ref want ref go-home *fg*
 ‘Aha! My friend, you have begun to want to go home!’

T3.109

The verbs *kíh̄n̄* ‘began’ and *là* ‘want’ are leading up to *kpi* ‘go home’, which carries the highest degree of CD in this sentence, and so receives the focus marker *ní*. The information in this sentence is not just a statement of fact, but highly emotive, hence the presence of *ní*.

Example 13

(90) An kaa sá yii m kũũ ki yóòn̄ ki gífíi ñmóò,
 It not is cit I killed ref put-aside ref cut-ref eat,
 I didn’t mean that I killed it, put it aside and cut bits off and ate it,
 (91) m dũu yākatì ki pú ní!
 I brought-ref shared ref gave *fg*
 I divided it up and gave it away!

T5.90-91

In this example from Text 5, the story of the cow which was eaten for three years, we have the solution to the riddle. In line 90, the hero presents the information negatively, and in line 91 he presents it positively. The bringing (*dũ*) and sharing

(yākatì) lead up to the goal of giving (pú). This is the information the hero wants his friend to take notice of, so he emphasizes it with *ní*.

Example 14

(82) ucaan kùh̄n ní,
visitor goes-home *fg*

a visitor goes home,

(83) waa gítíí.

he-not comes-back-ds.

he does not come back.

T1.82-83

At the conclusion of Text 1, the story of God's visit to earth to test people's hospitality, the narrator draws the moral that a visitor should always be well looked after. He ends with the conclusion quoted above, which picks up the title of the story: *Ucaan kùh̄n, waa gítíí* 'A visitor goes home, he does not come back'. It is interesting to note that in the title there is no focus marker. The statement has more force at the end of the story, the purpose of which has been to demonstrate why visitors should be well received. To emphasize his point that a visitor goes home (and doesn't stay for ever), the narrator adds the focus marker *ní*.

3.112 *Ní* focusses the FRA partner in clause-final position

In the following examples, the FRA partner of the verb carries the highest degree of CD in the sentence and is focussed by *ní*. The FRA partner can be a complement (examples 15 and 16), an object (example 17), a location (examples 18 and 19) or an adverbial (examples 20 and 21).

Example 15

Text 3 begins with an account of the strange behaviour of a certain chief who sent his wives home to their own families for their confinements. The story narrows to one particular wife, and true to form, the chief sends her away too. Then we have the statement in line 10:

Too, unimpu gbanti sá maacaadaan *ní*,

Well, wife that was orphan *fg*

Well, that wife was an orphan.

T3.10

The fact of the wife being an orphan is new and startling information, and is focussed with *ní*. Because she was an orphan, she had no home to go to, as the other wives did, and so she was obliged to have her baby in the bush. It is from this event that the story proceeds.

Example 16

Towards the end of Text 4, when the child wants to go home to his family compound, he protests that he does not know where his home is. His friend the panther-cub says that he knows the child's home and who his father is:

A-baa sá ubɔti ní.

Your-father is chief *fg*

Your father is a chief.

T3.114

This is new and significant information for the child, so the cub puts it into focus by adding *ní*.

Example 17

In Text 3, the panther-cub has forbidden the child to sigh, but the child breaks the cub's taboo. The cub decides that the reason for the child's dissatisfaction is that if he had been at home, he would have had pants to wear:

a bàà cáámaan salaal ní.

you CF had-em pants *fg*.

you would have had pants.

T3.49

The object 'pants' is in focus here, as opposed to some other object the child might have wanted, so *salaal* 'pants' receives the focus marker *ní*. The presence of the verbal emphasis suffix *-maan* in *cáámaan* 'have (emphatic)' is an additional means of highlighting the information in the clause. It is interesting to note that in a parallel incident, when the child sighs for the second time, both *ní* and *-maan* are absent:

a bàà cáá ipiin ní dibaatandi.

you CF had arrows and quiver.

you would have had a quiver and some arrows.

T3.96-98

A possible reason for this is that the first time the child sighs and breaks the cub's taboo, the cub's reaction is more startling than when it happens the second time.

Example 18

As the panther-cub and the child reach within sight of the child's family compound, the panther-cub says:

(118) M-ɓɔɔ, man dàá gbintí abulijkpanni doo ní,

My-friend, I-em fut stay long-grass-in here *fg*,

My friend, I will stay here in the long grass,

(119) sii ní nīn cá.
you-em unr cont go
you go on.

T3.118-119

In this example, the decision of the panther-cub to stay in the tall grass rather than accompany his friend all the way home is new and contrastive information. The *tall grass* is focussed by *ní*, not only because it is a contrastive location, but also because it is by staying in the tall grass that the panther puts the child's loyalty to the test, which is the next episode in the story.

Example 19

In the story of the quarrel between a flea and a hen over an egg, the flea says:

‘Too, tibotee, ti làá cù ibɔsoon ní.’
Well, business-top we fut go court *fg*.
‘Well, for this affair, we shall go to court.’

T6.26

At this point in the story, the flea introduces a new suggestion. The highlighting of the suggestion by *ní* indicates the seriousness with which the flea regards the matter.

Example 20

In Text 5, after the hero has claimed that he killed a cow and ate the meat for three years, his friends are incredulous and ask the hero to repeat what he said, because:

an yaa yî, baa gbîl̄ tiŋan ní.
it cond refused, they-not heard well *fg*
perhaps they had not heard him correctly.

T5. 38-39

In this example, the focus marker *ní* comes after the adverbial *tiŋan* ‘well, correctly’, which has the highest degree of CD in this sentence. The friends imagine that if they had heard the hero's words correctly, they would have heard another message.

Example 21

Bi péē ŋáań mìn ní.
They just doing like-that *fg*
This is the way they carried on.

T3.6

This sentence is a summary-conclusion statement at the end of the first section of the story in Text 3 about the friendship between the panther-cub and the human

child. The first section of the story is a general introduction, setting the scene for the rest of the story. *Míh* 'like that' represents all the information in the section, and so receives the focus marker *ní*.

3.12 *Ní* focusses a front-shifted FRA partner of the verb

A stronger degree of markedness can be obtained by a Bassar speaker by *frontshifting* the FRA partner of the verb to initial position in the clause or sentence. 'Communication normally develops from what is known to the speaker or listener, or what may be inferred from the context, to what is unknown, to the new information to be conveyed. This is the 'basic distribution of communicative dynamism' (Firbas 1959:42). From this basis or point of departure the utterance is developed by way of transitional elements to the communicative core. This is the sequence characteristic of relaxed speech *In emotive speech this order may be reversed, the communicative core may be placed first in a position of emphasis.*' (Kirkwood 1969:88, italics mine). When the FRA partner of the verb is fronted to initial position in the clause or sentence, it is obligatorily followed by the focus particle *ní*. This greater degree of markedness can be described as *pinpointing*. As in Section 2.1, sentences where the FRA partner has been frontshifted can be analysed in terms of *focus* and *presupposition*. The frontshifted FRA partner (object or adverbial) is the focussed element, and the rest of the sentence is presupposition. As in Section 2.1 where the subject focus particle *di* was seen to operate in stressed focus and informative presupposition clauses, *ní* functions in the same way when it is focussing an initial element in the clause. Stressed Focus examples will be discussed in Section 3.121 and Informative Presupposition examples in Section 3.122.

3.121 *Ní* as a marker of Stressed Focus

In the following examples, the item which receives the stressed focus is the FRA partner fronted to initial position and marked with *ní*. The rest of the clause is presupposition.

Example 22

- (67) Akpati nín yáfi ki sītì dibòbilin puee,
 monkeys apf picked-up ref poured hole-in r-top,
 The reason the monkeys picked it up and poured it into the water-hole
- (68) di sá ñíh ní bi kūū ki ká animil.
 FOCUS Presupposition
 sf were them-em fg they killed ref got money.
 is that they were the ones who were killed for the money.

T2.67-68

In this example, the presupposition *bi kūū ki ká animil* 'they killed for the money' is known information from lines 62-63. The emphatic pronoun *ñíh* (referring to the monkeys in line 67) is the *object* of the verb *kūū* 'killed' and has been fronted to the

focal position clause-initial and highlighted with the particle *ní*. The monkeys thus have the highest CD in the clause.

Example 23

- (63) ‘Kéè, doo *ní* a bí yii m yaa nyá ki tīlèè,
 FOCUS Presupposition
 Q here *fg* you said cit I cond pressed ref slit-top,
 ‘Wasn’t it here that you said that if I pressed and slit,
 (64) udaan kúùyeeyaa?’
 person dies-top-q
 the person would die?’

T3.63-64

This example comes from where the mother panther is showing her cub how to kill game. The cub is practising on his mother, and with his claws on his mother’s neck asks whether he is pressing on the right place. The focus is on the locative doo ‘here’ which has been fronted, since this is the information the cub is seeking. The rest of the information in the clause is presupposition, derivable from the context.

Example 24

- (48) ‘Tijman *ní* a lafun kūū unaa ki ηmó-u,
 FOCUS Presupposition
 Truly *fg* you really killed cow ref ate-it,
 "Did you really kill a cow and eat it,"
 (49) u tin bàñ abin ataaa?
 it aft lasted years three-q
 and it lasted for three years?

T5 48-49

In this example, the focus is on the *adverbial tijman* ‘truly’ which has been fronted to initial position. The rest of the sentence is presupposed, known information, because it is the riddle which is the discourse theme of the story (cf Callow 1974:53-57).

Example 25

- Dijindi pu *ní* ti jáà.
 FOCUS Presupposition
 Egg r *fg* we fight
 It is about an egg that we are fighting.

T6.90

Since the two protagonists, the hen and the flea, had come before the Paramount Chief of Bassar, it is presupposed that they are quarrelling about something. The focus item which has been fronted is the *reason* for their quarrel: the egg.

Example 26

- (106) They were sitting one day,
 (107) and he again sighed.
 (108) Niin ní ugbii biki bí yii
 FOCUS Presupposition
 Thereupon *fg* panther child said cit
 Thereupon the panther cub said:
 (109) ‘Aha! My friend, you have begun to want to go home!’
 (110) Niin ní unil biki bālfī u-bɔɔ yii
 FOCUS Presupposition
 Thereupon *fg* human child asked his-friend cit
 Thereupon the child asked his friend:
 (111) ‘Do I know where my home is?’

T3.106-111

In unmarked position after the verb, *niin* can mean both logical consequence, as in

A-na nín màT̄-see,
 Your-mother apf bore-you-top,
 When your mother bore you,
 a bū̀n yéè *niin*?
 you were-sick like-that *then*
 were you sick like that then?

T1.26-27

and ‘there, in that thing’ as in

Ní bi mun bí yii ú nyò *niin*.
fg they also said cit he drink *in-that-(one)*
 They also said that he should drink from that one.

T1.68

When *niin* is fronted, it takes a logical, sequential meaning: ‘thereupon’. In lines 108 and 110, the focus is on the consequential adverb *niin* ‘thereupon’, which is emphasizing the logical *consequence*, first of the panther-cub’s reaction in line 109 to the child’s sighing, and then of the child’s feeling of hopelessness, expressed in line 111, to the cub’s suggestion that he would like to go home. As with all fronted

elements, *níin* is focussed with *ní*. The rest of lines 108 and 110 are speech introducers and carry very low CD.

3.122 *Ní* as a marker of Informative Presupposition

In Informative Presupposition clauses, the focus is on an anaphoric element, in this case the emphatic pronoun *míh* 'like that', which refers back to the immediately preceding information. *Míh* has been fronted to initial position in the clause, and takes the focus article *ní*. The 'message' is contained in the rest of the clause.

Example 27

- (3) U nín nìn cáá tiwan puee,
He apf rt had things r-top,
Because he was wealthy,
- (4) míh ní u nìn ḡááń cɔkɔta mun.
like-that fg he rt doing benevolence also.
he was always giving things away.

T5. 3-4

In this example, the pronoun *míh* 'like-that' is referring back to the information in line 3, which is the reason for the statement in line 4. The focus is on the informative presupposition in line 3 which *míh* represents, emphasizing the reason for the hero's generosity, which is the new information contained in the rest of line 4.

Example 28

- (62) It was the grandfather of the child who picked up the money who killed the monkeys
- (63) and got the money,
- (64) and lost it,
- (65) and a Hausa found it.
- (66) Míh pu ní kibikee píí ki-naanja wanti.
Like-that r fg child-top picked-up her-grandfather things
It was for that reason that the child picked up what belonged to her grandfather.

T2.62-66

In this example, the pronoun *míh* 'like that' plus the reason particle *pu* are referring back to the information contained in lines 62-65. The message is contained in the rest of line 66: 'the child picked up what belonged to her grandfather'. The focus is on the informative presupposition, the reason for the message.

3.13 *Ní*: a marked focus in Informative Questions

The possibilities for focus in informative questions pattern in a similar way to the predicates just described in Sections 3.1 and 3.2. In informative questions the focus is normally on the question word. The unmarked order of elements in an informative question in Bassar is S V q, as in the following examples:

Dijindi bí *la*?

Egg is *where*?

S V q

Where is the egg?

T6.75

M-bɔɔ, a nyààb̃ *ba* doo?

S V q

My-friend, you seek *what* here?

My friend, what are you seeking (doing) here?

T3.24

This accords with the tendency for the newest information in an unmarked sentence to occur last (Halliday 1967:205). An informative question word can receive increased focus by the addition of the focus particle *ní*, in a similar way to the FRA partner described in Section 3.12. A greater degree of focus can be achieved by fronting the question word, as can be done with the FRA partner (cf section 3.12). The question word, when fronted, is obligatorily followed by *ní*. Examples of marked focus on the question word in final position will be discussed in Section 3.131, and examples of marked focus on the question word in fronted position will be discussed in Section 3.132.

3.131 *Ní* focusses the Question word in final position

In the following examples, a question with unmarked focus is compared with a question with marked focus signalled by *ní* in final position:

Example 29

a) *Unmarked focus*

A nyààb̃ *ba* doo?

You seek *what* here?

What are you seeking (doing) here?

T3.24

b) *Marked focus*

A-bɔɔ gbanti jìh̃ *ba ní*?

Your-friend that eats *what fg*?

What does that friend of yours eat?

In a), the panther-cub has just met the human child in the bush and asks him a simple informative question: 'What are you doing here?' The focus is normal and unmarked. In b), the child has just asked his father for something to give his friend as a present. The most usual presents are presents of food, particularly meat. So in asking the child what his friend eats, he puts particular focus on the question word *ba* 'what?' by adding the particle *ní*.

Example 30

In a story which explains why the lion does not eat a certain wild cat, the narrator relates that the animals had forgotten to ask God what food they should eat. The narrator asks:

- a) *Unmarked focus*
 bi làá ɲá *mana*?
 they fut do *how*?
 What should they do?

He then answers his own question, stating what the animals did, all except the lion. In Text 2, God's child is about to tell his father about the strange events which took place at the water-hole. The child begins with a judgment on the action of the Hausa. God asks the following question:

- b) *Marked focus*
 'U ɲá *mana ní*?
 He did *how fg*?
 'What did he do?'

T2.43

The question word is more significant in the light of the child's judgment on the Hausa's conduct, and so is focussed with *ní*.

3.132 *Ní* focusses the question word in frontshifted position

Just as a locative can be moved from its unmarked position after the verb to the marked position clause-initial and focussed with *ní*, so also can the question word. In the focus position clause initial, the question word receives increased prominence, as the following example from a Bassar Christian hymn shows:

Example 31

- (1) *La ní mmɔn bée?*
 FOCUS Presupposition
Where fg happiness is-top?

Where is happiness to be found?

(2) *Unimbɔti dumpu ní mmɔn bée.*

FOCUS Presupposition

God home fg happiness is-top

It is in heaven that happiness is to be found.

The hymn presupposes the search for happiness as a fundamental human desire. The intensity of that search is conveyed by fronting the question word and its focus particle *ní*.

There does not seem to be ‘poetic licence’ with word order in Bassar poetry and songs as there is frequently in English. The following examples taken from another Bassar story illustrate the same point:

Example 32

In this story, a child’s desire to know the meaning of suffering has led him into many adventures far from home, among the wild animals. One day, he notices that two animals have caught a hen and a guinea-fowl, which are domestic animals. Realising this could indicate where his home is, he asks:

a) Q. *‘La ní a nìn cúúń ukɔlee?’*

FOCUS Presupposition

Where fg you rt caught-ds hen-top?

‘Where was it that you caught that hen?’

A. *‘A-baa mɔŋkiŋu ní m nìn cúúń ukɔl.’*

FOCUS Presupposition

Your-father compound fg I rt caught-ds hen

‘It was in your father’s compound that I caught the hen.’

b) Q. *‘La ní sii ún cúúń ukpàan ní?’*

FOCUS Presupposition

Where fg you-em he-em caught-ds g.fowl fg?

‘Where was it that you caught the guinea-fowl?’

A. *‘Mmɔŋki caŋin ní m nìn cúúń ukpàan.’*

FOCUS Presupposition

Compound near fg I rt caught g.fowl

‘It was near the compound that I caught the guinea-fowl.’

The intensity of the child’s desire to know where the hen and the guinea-fowl were caught, so that he could find his way home, is captured by fronting the question

word and its focus particle *ní*. Note that the Presupposition can also have its focal elements, as the use of the double emphatic pronoun shows in b) Q.

3.2 *Ní* as a marker of a Development Unit

The **Development Unit (DU)** is essentially a unit of information. 'Any text ... is organised into what may be called 'information units'. The distribution of the discourse into information units is obligatory in the sense that the text must consist of a sequence of such units. But it is optional in the sense that the speaker is free to decide where each information unit begins and ends, and how it is organised internally; this is not determined for him by its constituent structure. Rather it could be said that the distribution of information specifies a distinct constituent structure on a different plane; this 'information structure' is then mapped on to the constituent structure as specified in terms of sentences, clauses and so forth, neither determining the other ... the information unit may be less than a clause or more than a clause or any combination of these.' (Halliday 1967:200-1).

Halliday goes on to talk specifically about information units within the clause, but others have considered units of information over larger spans of discourse. Soviet linguists have investigated the possibility of establishing 'Suprasentential Entities' (SEs): 'a 'readily surveyable' i.e. relatively small unit ... intermediate between a single sentence and the whole text or such large units of text structure as, say, a chapter or a part.' (Gindin 1978:264). They suggest that a SE can be distinguished by its semantic 'autonomy and (the) completeness it preserves out of context' (see Levinsohn 1980:432), and 'the presence of a special 'micro-theme' which sets apart a SE because of the difference of its meaning from that of the adjoining SEs.' (Smirnov, quoted by Gindin, op.cit.265). They also discuss the nature of the links between elements of SEs, but conclude that the presence of connectors do not 'guarantee regular identification of SEs' (Gindin, loc. cit.).

Levinsohn (1980) adapts and refines the concept of a SE into that of a DU, which he describes in terms of distinctive information representing a new development in the story. He says: '... although a constraint on the boundaries of DUs is that it must present distinctive information, the actual units reflect steps in the fulfilment of his (the author's) purpose ... DUs may be thought of as the building blocks of the text, fulfilling its purpose.' (1980:445). Levinsohn also suggests: 'it may be possible to define DUs basically in terms of the distribution of conjunctions, not only in the Greek of Acts, but also in other languages.' (1980:432). Levinsohn's thesis is an analysis of the use of Greek conjunctions to mark units of development in the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles. He has defined the DU in Acts basically in terms of the distribution of conjunctions (cf 1981:33), and the presentation of distinctive information: 'Each DU ... represents for Luke a 'new development' in the story, with respect to the previous DU. This is first of all because each DU represents 'distinctive' information (cf Winer 1882:552). 'Distinctiveness' most commonly involves a change of temporal setting ... or a change of subject.' (1981:3). He goes on to say: 'Nevertheless the boundaries of DUs are not characterised by the presence of the distinctive factor alone, the distinctive information must also represent a *development* which furthers the author's purpose.' (loc. cit., italics mine.)

What evidence can be discerned for DUs in Bassar texts? If we consider first the distribution of conjunctions, it is very obvious from Bassar texts, or just listening to conversation, that the most common connective is *ní*, occurring clause-initial. Is it simply an additive 'and', or does it have a more significant part to play in Bassar discourse?

In order to understand the function of *ní* as a clause-initial connective, it is important to see it in the context of the Development Unit. Levinsohn notes an important feature of DUs which requires that they must develop from some other unit (1980:36). This invokes the principle of cohesion – relating a sentence to its context. 'One form of cohesion with the context is achieved by beginning the sentence with what Kirkwood 89 (following Beneš 6) calls the 'basis' or point of departure. This indicates that the sentence is to be related to past sentences by the replacement of a corresponding element.' (Levinsohn 1980:158). The division of a sentence into 'theme' and 'rheme' whereby '... *theme* is that part of the utterance which refers to a fact or facts already known from the preceding context, or to facts that may be taken for granted ... the *rheme* contains the actual new information' (Vachek 1966:89) was first suggested by the Czech linguist Mathesius, and his ideas have been developed by members of the Linguistic School of Prague eg. Daneš and Firbas. Other linguists such as Halliday have come to conclusions similar to those of the Prague School: 'The theme is what is being talked about, the point of departure for the clause as a message; a speaker has within certain limits the option of selecting any element in a clause as thematic.' (1967:212). 'Basically, the theme is what comes first in the clause.' (Halliday, loc. cit.)

Beneš was the first to distinguish between *theme* and *basis* as the initial element of the sentence (1962 and 1964), and his ideas were taken up by Kirkwood (1969). Kirkwood sets out three terms with which to operate: 'the *basis*, or sentence opening the natural point of departure of the utterance ... the *theme* or thematic elements, elements in low communicative value, and the *rheme*, the actual communicative core.' (1969:89 italics mine). Levinsohn (1980) develops the idea of a 'replacement basis' for relating a sentence to context. He says: 'The majority of references to time or place which begin a sentence provide the 'basis' (Beneš 6, Kirkwood 89) for relating the sentence to its context. As well as establishing the spatiotemporal setting for the next events to be described, they also replace the setting for the previous events.' (15). Levinsohn's analysis of the 'replacement basis' into temporal, spatial and thematic points of departure (PODs) for relating a sentence to its context by replacement works very well for Bassar. Bassar has a clitic *-ee* which is attached to the final word of a NP, clause or clause series which functions as a replacement basis at the beginning of a DU. For example, *Ku wúntèe* 'the next day' establishes a new point of reference in time for the next event which replaces the temporal setting of the last events presented. *U bàñee* 'When he arrived' is a spatio-temporal replacement basis, indicating not only progression in time but a different location for the next action. *U yíkì kī kāl utaam puee* 'He got up and sat on his horse' (T2.20) is a thematic replacement basis from a situation where the Hausa was washing his horse to his remounting it. The act of remounting was a POD for what happened next: money fell out of his pocket. Levinsohn suggests that a further basis is the conditional: the new condition replaces the previous one. Haiman

(1978:564ff) has argued that conditionals are topics (themes), and evidence from Bassar supports his contention, because conditionals can also be marked with *-ee*. In Bassar, the characteristic way to begin a DU is with a POD marked with *-ee* final, and these ‘push the story forward’ (Firbas and Pala 1971:92).

If the POD marked with *-ee* final introduces the DU, how does *ní* function in relation to it? I am suggesting that there may be a hierarchy of DUs in which the POD marks the major Development Unit, and *ní* marks development *within* the DU. My tentative initial analysis of *ní* clause-initial is that it functions as a marker of an internal DU – internal to the larger DU marked by a POD with *-ee* final. The form of the internal DU will be discussed in Section 3.21. In Section 3.22 I will discuss how *ní* marks the development from one macro-action to another within the larger DU, and in Section 3.23 how the absence of *ní* indicates that the action is new.

3.21 The form of the internal DU introduced by *ní*

The internal development unit can be described in terms of a macro-action (cf van Dijk 1977 ch.6) composed of a series of actions by the same subject. The last action is usually some sort of goal. The link between the actions is the co-referential pronoun *ki/kí* (high tone if the verb which follows it is in unrealised mood). The following are examples of individual macro-actions introduced by *ní* and joined internally by *ki/kí*:

- (a) *Ní* unimpu kó *ki* dū kuyukpuŋ *ki* jōō
fg woman entered *ref* brought gourd-old *ref* dipped
 nnyim *ki* cáań *ki* tīi-u
 water *ref* brought *ref* gave-him

The woman entered (the house) and took an old gourd and dipped some water and brought it to him.

T1.48

In this macro-action, the goal could be said to be the *giving* of the drink of water.

- (b) *Ní* ukoodaan ń sāh *kí* jà ukɔl *kí* fōō ajin
fg flea unr run *ref* chase hen *ref* take eggs

The flea comes and chases the hen away in order to take the eggs.

T6.113

In this example, the goal is the taking of the eggs.

3.22 *Ní* marks the development from one macro-action to another within the larger DU

In a sequence of events, the development can take the form of a change of participant, either as actor or speaker, and is signalled by *ní*. In a series of actions, a significant new action which develops from the previous ones is also marked by *ní*.

Example 38

- (28) U búntèe, POD

- He departed-top,
 When he had gone,
 (29) *ní* akpati bāań ki ká animil nì kifɔŋ,
fg monkeys arrived ref found money and purse
 some monkeys arrived, saw the money and the purse,
 (30) *ní* ki cúū cáti ki sītì dibɔbilin,
fg ref caught-ref tore ref poured hole-in
 took it, tore it and poured the money into the (water)-hole,
 (31) *ní* ki búntì.
fg ref departed
 and went away.

T2.22-25

In this example, the POD in line 22 removes the previous participant from the stage so that the new participants can enter. The arrival of the monkeys in line 23 is introduced by *ní* as the next development in the story. Their action of tearing the purse and pouring the money into the water-hole (line 24) is a significant action which develops from their finding the purse in line 23. Their departure from the scene in line 25 is the next development, marked by *ní*.

Example 39

The larger DU for this example begins in line 36 with a temporal replacement basis: *Nyunti bàńee* ‘When the time came ...’ The story is taken from line 44, where the child is relating to his father what he saw at the water-hole:

- (44) Yii: ‘U-nimiliŋ líti,
 cit: His-money fell
 ‘His money fell out,
 (45) *ní* akpati dómíń ki yáfi ki ńá dibɔbilin
fg monkeys came ref picked-up ref put hole-in
 and some monkeys came and picked it up and threw it into the water-hole,
 (46) *ní* ki kíń ki bíl,
fg ref left ref placed,
 and left it there,
 (47) *ní* kisapɔmbiki kiba dómíń ki píí nín kùń.
fg girl one came ref picked-up cont went-home.
 and a girl came, picked it up and went home.
 (48) *Ní* uɔɔfu mun bāań ki bí lúù,

- fg* blind-man also arrived ref pres drawing-water
 Then a blind man also came and was drawing water,
- (49) *ní* ujangbeeja fātii bāań,
fg Hausa returned-ref arrived,
 when the Hausa came back again,
- (50) *ní* ki bí yii ú cáań ún̄ nimiliŋ.
fg ref said cit he bring his-em money
 and said that he should give him back his money.
- (51) *Ní* u bí yii
fg he said cit
 But he said:
- (52) ‘Maa ká a-wanti.’
 I-not saw your-thing
 ‘I have not seen it.’
- (53) *Ní* u fífi takoobii ki kũũ-u.
fg he drew sword ref killed-him.
 and he (the Hausa) drew his sword and killed him.

T2.44-53

The *ní* in line 45 marks a development from the event of the money falling (from the Hausa’s pocket) to the monkeys coming and finding it and throwing it in the water-hole. In line 46, the next development is that they left it there (monkeys departure implied). Lines 47, 48 and 49 all mark the arrival of a new participant on the stage. In line 50, *ní* marks a change from action to speech. In line 51, *ní* marks a change of speaker from the Hausa to the blind man, and in line 53 *ní* marks a change of actor from the blind man back to the Hausa. In English, it would be necessary to clarify some of these switches by giving the name of the participant. In Bassar, *ní* makes it quite clear that a change has taken place and there is no confusion. Each development, whether of one macro-action to another, one participant to another, or one speaker to another, is marked by *ní*. Continuity of subject is maintained by the co-referential pronoun *ki/ki*. A break in the action would require the personal pronoun or noun as subject, and *ní* would be absent.

Example 40

The following example is part of a quarrel between a hen and a flea which involves their taking their case before several clan chiefs:

- (48) U dūu bāań Ukootiboti cee.
She brought-ref arrived Bikootib-chief at.
She (flea) arrived at (the court of) the chief of Bikootib.
- (49) *Ní* u bí yii: ‘Ba ńá ní?’
fg he said cit: ‘What happened *fg*?’
He (chief) said: ‘What’s the matter?’
- (50) *Ní* u bí yii, kpèè, ún jindi din pu bi
fg she said cit: look, her-em egg rel r they
kpákèè sèé.
quarrelling-top is-top
She (flea) said, look, this is her egg about which they are quarrelling.
- (51) *Ní* ukɔl bí yii ún jindi sèé,
fg hen said cit her-em egg is-top,
The hen said it was her egg,
- (52) ukoodaan yal sèé.
flea one is-top.
that one was the flea’s egg.
- (53) *Ní* u bí yii: ‘Njma yì yéè? Kijinjwaai nee?’
fg he said cit: ‘Who owns here? Egg-small this?’
He (chief) said: ‘Who owns this one? This small egg?’
- (54) *Ní* u bí yii ún di yì ukpaan nee.
fg she said cit she-em sf own big this
She (flea) replied that it was she who owned the big one.
- (55) *Ní* u bí yii: ‘Àaaa! Cáámaan ni-cooi kí cù!’
fg he said cit: ‘Ah! Take-em your-shame ref go!’
He (chief) said: ‘Ah! Take your shameful business and go!’

T6.47-55

Line 48 begins a new section as the flea arrives at the court of the chief of Bikootib to state her case. In line 49, *ní* marks a change of speaker from the flea to the chief (mentioned in line 48). Bassar has one third person singular pronoun, but *ní* in line 50 makes it clear that the flea is now the speaker. In line 51, the hen, as a third party, is mentioned by name. *Ní* at the beginning of line 53 marks the change of speaker back to the chief, who turns to the flea and says: ‘Who owns this one? This small one?’ Again, *ní* in line 54 indicates that it is the flea who replies that (on the contrary) it is she who owns the big egg. Then in line 55, *ní* marks a switch back to

the chief, and so the story continues. It is interesting to note that *ní* makes it quite clear who is speaking, although the same third person pronoun is used throughout.

3.23 Absence of *ní* indicates that the action is new

If *ní* marks the *development* of one action from another, the absence of *ní* shows that there is no development: the next action is completely new, as the next examples show:

Example 41

This example is taken from Text 1, where God, disguised as a leper, is visiting a family on earth. God has suggested that because of his sickness, he should not wash in the same bucket that everyone else uses:

(37) *Ní unimpuee bí yii: 'Kpataaa!'*

fg woman-top said cit: 'Never!'

But the woman said: 'Never!'

(38) *Ú fàl̄ tiwamm̄ntiilin.*

He wash good-thing-in.

He must wash in the nice one.

(39) *ní u fũ̄.*

fg he washed.

So he washed (in it).

(40) *Bi n̄á t̄ijin mm̄ntiim ki t̄ī-u u j̄íh,*

They made food well ref gave-him he ate,

They made a lot of good food for him which he ate,

(41) *ki d̄àk̄ā-u ndoo laŋki*

ref showed-him sleeping place

and they showed him the bedroom

(42) *ní u d̄ōòh̄.*

fg he lay-down.

where he lay down.

T1.37-42

Whereas there is a clear development from the woman's insistence in line 38 that God should wash in the good bucket to his actually washing in it, making food in line 40 is a new subject. There is no development from washing to eating. On the other hand, there is development from the family showing God where to sleep and his lying down, so the development is marked with *ní*.

A shift from narration to a conclusion or an evaluation is a break in continuity, and will not be marked by *ní*:

Example 42

The beginning of this example includes the end of a narration of events which took place during God's visit to a third family. This is followed by concluding remarks summarising his visits. The story then moves to the beginning of the evaluation or moral:

- (71) *ní* bi ḡá tijn,
fg they made food,
and they made food,
- (72) *ní* bi-kɔkɔ jíń,
fg they-all ate,
and they all ate together.
- (73) *Binib gbanti fōō-u kunicaḡu tiḡan.*
People those received-him hospitality well
Those people received him with much hospitality.
- (74) *U nìn yìiñ ki kántì binib bin cáá ilandɔkɔee,*
He rt wandered ref saw people rel had thoughts-top,
He went from place to place and found people who were thoughtful,
- (75) *ní* ki fātii gítì u-dumpu.
fg ref returned-ref went-back his-home
and then he returned home.
- (76) *Bin ḡá-u tiḡanee ká tiḡan paatii.*
rel did-him good-top saw goodness reward
Those who did good to him received the reward of their goodness.
- (77) *Bin ḡá-u ikpítee ká bi-kpitii paatii.*
Rel did-him evil-top saw their-sins reward
Those who did him evil received the reward of their evil deeds.

T1.71-77

The narration of events ends with line 72, and 73 is an evaluation of that visit. Since there is a break in continuity, there is no *ní*. Lines 74-75 are a summary-conclusion of all the visits God made. There is no development from the evaluation of line 73 to the summary-conclusion of line 74, but there is a development from God's journeying to his return home, so that is marked by *ní* in line 75. The shift to the moral-evaluation of the whole story is also a new section, so there is no developmental link with *ní*. This evidence indicates that *ní* is used principally for developments in narrative, but not in argument. Text 5, the riddle of the cow which

was eaten for three years, consists largely of argument, and in those sections *ní* is almost entirely absent.

If there is an absence of *ní* where one would normally expect *ní* to be there, the effect is to make the hearer/reader aware of a new twist to the story:

Example 43

In Text 3, the story of the friendship between the panther-cub and the human child, lines 37-77 are an account of how the panther-cub gets his mother to show him how to kill game, and then he kills her:

- (63) 'Kéè, doo ní a bí yii m yaa nyá ki tīlee,
Q, here fg you said cit I cond press ref slit-top,
'Wasn't it here that you said that if I pressed and slit,
- (64) udaan kúùyeeyaa?'
person dies-top-q
the person would die?'
- (65) *Ní* u kii.
fg she agreed.
She said 'Yes'.
- (66) *Kibiki bí yii:*
Child said cit:
The cub said:
- (67) 'M-na, gítī còom kí cù kí fàtīn.'
My-mother, again walk ref go ref return-ds
'Mother, go over there again and come back.'
- (68) *U-na ti cūti ki fātīnee,*
His-mother again went ref returned-ds-top,
His mother went again, and as she was coming back,
- (69) *ní* u tēén ki tin kāl u-na pu ki nyá
fg he roared ref aft sat his-mother on ref pressed
ki tīl ...
ref slit ...
he roared and pounced on his mother, and pressed and slit ...

T3.63-69

Throughout the narration of the mother-panther's demonstration and the cub's 'mock' killing of his mother, each development in terms of the next significant event or change of speaker has been introduced by *ní*. In line 66, there is a change of speaker from the mother-panther to the child, but it is not signalled by *ní*. The

absence of *ní* alerts the hearer/reader that something startling is about to take place.

In the course of this episode, there are embedded DUs introduced by PODs, but because they are all part of the overall development of the plot of the episode (see lines 55 and 59 in the attached Text 3), these PODs are introduced by *ní*. But in line 68 above, there is no *ní* linking the POD to the previous line, although there is a clear development (cf lines 54-55 and 58-59). Again, the explanation is that the absence of *ní* draws the reader's attention to the startling nature of the event that follows: the cub kills his mother.

In the organisation of Bassar discourse, there seem to be two systems which interface: the Development Unit which is introduced by the POD, and that which is introduced by *ní*. The relationship between the two systems, based on a study of the function of the Development Unit in Bassar discourse, should be a subject of further research.

4. *Nín*: a marker of Anaphoric Predicate Focus

The particle *nín* also functions as a focus marker in the predicate, but it has the additional semantic component of anaphora. *Nín* focusses on the information contained in the verbal element of the clause, but it is also saying that the significance of that focus is drawn from the preceding context. In this way *nín* has a cohesive function in Bassar discourse. 'Cohesion refers to the range of possibilities that exist for linking something with what has gone before.' (Halliday and Hasan 1976:10). They go on to say: '... the concept of cohesion accounts for the essential semantic relations whereby any passage of speech or writing is enabled to function as text. We can systematize this concept by classifying it into a small number of distinct categories – reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion; ... each of these categories is represented in the text by particular features – repetitions, omissions, occurrences of certain words and constructions – which have in common the property of signalling that the interpretation of the passage in question depends on something else. If that 'something else' is verbally explicit, then there is cohesion ... The simplest form of cohesion is that in which the presupposed element is verbally explicit and found in the preceding sentence... There are two kinds of departure from this norm. First, the presupposed element may be located elsewhere, in an earlier sentence, ... secondly, it may not be found in the text at all.' (op. cit.:13-14). Halliday and Hasan were writing about cohesion in English, but the same principles apply to Bassar. *Nín* has anaphoric reference in that it points to something in the previous context. When *nín* is present as a focus particle in the predicate, that clause cannot stand on its own. The *nín* requires the hearer to interpret that clause in the light of what precedes it. In Section 4.1 I will discuss *nín* when it occurs in a clause which is a point of departure (POD), and in Section 4.2 when *nín* gives prominence to clause 2 in relation to clause 1. Section 4.3 deals with *nín* as it focusses a goal or intention in relation to a precondition.

The *nín* which functions as an anaphoric predicate focus particle is to be distinguished from *nín – nīn – níñ*, which is an attributive in the Verb Phrase meaning ‘continuous action’.

The following sentence taken from a child health booklet illustrates the several ways *nín* can be used:

Tùkù-m m *nín* máaà ki *nīn* ñáaá pu m-biki

Tell-me I *apf* must ref *cont* doing how my-child

ń *nīn* *nín* cáá laafiyeé.

unr *cont* *apf* have health-top.

‘Tell me what I must do in order that my child should be healthy.’

4.1 ***Nín* marks given information in a POD as relevant for the main predication**

The function of the POD has been discussed in Section 3 pp 25-26. PODs can have anaphoric or non-anaphoric reference. Non-anaphoric PODs can be described as replacement bases (Beneš 6, Kirkwood 89) indicating a change of spatio-temporal or thematic setting. Anaphoric PODs mark continuity of setting – there is a link with the previous context. *Nín* can only occur in PODs with anaphoric reference, giving prominence to the given information they contain, making the POD a *marked* POD for the main predication. The categories of *given* and *new* information originated in the Prague School, and were taken up by Halliday (1967). *Given* information is that which the speaker believes is known to the addressee (either because it is physically present in the context or because it has already been mentioned in the discourse). *New* information is what the speaker believes is not known to the addressee. Halliday’s concern was to analyse the structure of the clause as a basic unit, and he speaks of the ‘partial congruence of the clause and the information unit’ and ‘a tendency towards a left to right form of organisation in the information unit with given, if present, preceding new.’ (1967:205). Since Halliday defined the terms ‘given’ and ‘new’, his ideas have been considerably developed by other linguists, e.g. Chafe, Clark and Haviland, Kuno, Prince, and the terms, particularly that of ‘given’ have been given wider scope. An anaphoric POD is given information which is made a basis for the new information to come. The function of *nín* in the POD is to focus that given information as particularly relevant to the message, or new information contained in the main predication. *Nín* focusses on the verbal element in the POD, and is saying ‘this information comes from the previous context and is relevant for the next piece of information’. The focus can be analysed in terms of Stressed Focus and Informative Presupposition focus (cf *di* in Section 2.1 pp 5-10 and *ní* in Section 3.1 pp 12-24), as described by Prince (1978). In Section 4.11 I will discuss examples where *nín* focusses on an informative presupposition, and in Section 4.12 an example where *nín* marks a stressed focus. In Section 4.13, I discuss how the presence or absence of *nín* can alter the focus of a clause.

4.11 *Nín* as a marker of anaphoric information focus

The following examples show how *nín* marks information which has been taken from the preceding context and focusses it as relevant for the message in the main clause.

Example 44

At the beginning of Text 2, God's child asks his father if he can take over the running of the world, to which God replies:

(6) 'You are not able to look after everything on earth.'

(7) The child answered:

(8) 'If that is the case,

(9) doooo sii *nín* péē kpèé tikɔkɔ
long-time you-em *apf* just look-after everything

pu nee, POD

r this,

since you have been looking after the world for such a long time,

(10) an kaa cáá-si digíndaáa?

it not have-you tiredness-q

doesn't it make you tired?

T2.6-10

The information contained in line 9, 'looking after everything' has been derived from God's statement in line 6. *Nín* focusses this information as relevant in the POD for the message contained in line 10: 'doesn't it make you tired?'

Example 45

(1) There was once a man and his family, and they were very rich.

(2) His compound was full of domestic animals.

(3) U *nín* nìn cáá tiwan puee, POD

He *apf* rt had things r-top,

Because he was wealthy,

(4) míñ ní u nìn ñááñ cɔkɔta mun.

like-that fg he rt doing benevolence also.

he was always giving things away.

T5.1-4

The information in line 3 'he was wealthy' is given information from lines 1 and 2, where it is stated that he had many 'things', and these 'things' were domestic animals. *Nín* focusses this information as relevant in a point of departure for the message in line 4: 'he was always giving things away'.

Example 46

- (89) M *nín* kūū unaa ki lī yii m ηmó-u abin ata
I *apf* killed cow ref said cit I ate-it years three
When I killed a cow and said I had eaten it for three years
ní kpákañ-mee, POD
you argued-me-top,
and you argued with me,
- (90) An kaa sá yii m kūū ki yóon ki gífii ηmóò,
It not was cit I killed ref put-aside ref cutting-ref eating,
it was not that I killed it, put it aside and cut bits off and ate it,
- (91) m dūu yākatì ki pú ní!
I brought-ref shared ref gave fg!
I divided it up and gave it away!

T5.89-91

The information which is foregrounded by *nín* in line 89 – the killing of the cow and eating it for three years, and the argument concerning it – is all retrievable from the previous context, because it is the discourse theme of the whole story (Callow 1974:52). The speaker uses *nín* to focus this information relevant in the POD for the message he wants to give: the solution to the riddle contained in lines 90-91.

Example 47

- (67) Akpati mun *nín* yáfi ki sītì dibòbilin puee
Monkeys also *apf* picked-up ref poured hole-in r-top
The reason the monkeys picked it up and poured it into the water-hole
- (68) di sá ηìñ ní bi kūū ki ká animil.
sf were them-em fg they killed ref got money
is that they were the ones who were killed for the money.

The information in line 67, the monkeys' action in picking up the money and throwing it into the water-hole is given information in that it refers back to the account of the event in lines 23-24. *Nín* brings this event into focus and marks it as relevant for the message contained in line 68: the identification of those same monkeys with the ones who were killed for the money.

Example 48

- (115) Well, if there is trouble like that,
(116) and you have been to the sub-chiefs and they have not been able to deal with it,

(117) the chief of Bassar should be able to solve it.

(118) U *nín* làá ñmā puee di sá kii ún cáá seeliyee.

He *apf* fut able r-top sf is like he-em has witness-top

The reason he is able to solve cases is that he has witnesses.

T6.115-118

The information in the first part of line 118: ‘the reason he is able (to solve cases)’ refers back directly to line 117, where the narrator has stated that the Paramount Chief is able to solve cases. *Nín* focusses that information as relevant for his explanation: ‘he has witnesses’.

4.12 *Nín* as a marker of Anaphoric Stressed Focus

In the example which follows, the *message* is in the clause marked with *nín*, and the rest of the sentence contains given information. *Nín* is marking a stressed focus.

Example 49

(26) ‘A-na *nín* màl-see,
Your-mother *apf* bore-you-top,
‘When your mother bore you,

(27) a bũh yèè niin?’
you were-sick like-that then?
were you sick like that?’

T1.26-27

The context of this example is a discussion between God (disguised as a leper) and a woman as to which gourd he should drink from. God has protested that because he has sores on his hands, he should not drink from the family’s best gourd. The woman’s reply is quoted above. Her question ‘were you sick like that?’ is given information, in that God has been talking about it in lines 22-24, and his appearance confirms it. The woman introduces a completely different situation as a basis for her question: ‘When your mother *bore* you ...’ The woman uses *nín* to focus that information which she brings into her addressee’s consciousness (Chafe 1976:30). Since the leper (God) is sitting before her, the fact of his birth sometime in the past is assumed from the situation (‘situationally evoked’: Prince 1981)⁵,

4.13 How the presence or absence of *nín* can alter the focus of a clause

A clause which is an anaphoric POD picks up information from the previous span of discourse in order to introduce the next DU (see Section 3.2). It is a linkage device,

⁵ Chafe and Prince would differ concerning the status of the information in line 1.26. We are concerned here with the *focus* of that information.

off the main event-line⁶ of the story. When *nín* is present in the POD, it marks that information as significant for what comes next in the discourse. The following examples compare PODs in which *nín* is present with those in which *nín* is absent.

Example 50

A.(71) M *nín* lī puee,

I *apf* said r-top,

Because I said this, or

What I have said,

(72) a gbīl taapuɔɔ?

you heard under-q

have you understood?

T2.71-72

In line 71, God is referring to his explanation of the strange events which took place at the water-hole, lines 61-70. His use of *nín* in line 71 focusses on what he *said* as significant for his question in line 72: 'have you understood?'

B.(37) U lī *mim mee*,

He said like-that-top,

When he had said that,

(38) *ní* ki *nín* kùh ...

fg ref cont go-home

he went home ...

T3.37-38

In this example, the panther-cub has just declared that he is able to kill his mother to provide food for the human child. *U lī mim mee* 'When he had said that' is a linkage device, introducing the next stage of the story, and carries no special focus.

Example 51

(8) U péē bīl yìh ki tin kó ubo ní u-nimpuu pu.

He just pres wandering ref aft entered one and his-wife at

He was going from place to place and entered the home of a certain man and his wife.

(9) U *kó ee*,

He entered-top,

⁶ The Hartford School originated the term 'event-line' or 'time-line' to refer to those parts of a narrative which carry the plot forward. See Pickering 1980:42.

He entered,
 (10) ki cū̀tì ki kāl̀ ɲkpaanceeti.
 ref went ref sat side
 and went and sat to one side.

T1.8-10

In this example, *U kóee* ‘he entered’ links the information in line 10 with that in line 8 and begins a new DU in the story. The significant information is in line 10: that he went and sat to one side instead of sitting near his hosts to greet them. If *nín* had been present in line 9: *U nín kóee*, the focus would have been on his *entering* the compound, rather than his going and sitting to one side.

Example 52

Bi gbìl̃ u fātì ki téè̀n mimmee,
 They heard he returned ref repeated like-that-top
 When they heard him repeat the same thing,

T5.43

In this example, the hero has just repeated his claim that he had killed a cow and eaten it for three years, although his friends thought they had misheard him. The clause quoted above introduces a new DU which describes how the friends became very angry with the hero. The clause as it stands is a linkage POD with no special focus. If *nín* were present, the focus in the clause would change:

(a) Bi *nín* gbìl̃ u fātì ki téè̀n mimmee
 would focus on ‘when they *heard* him repeat the same thing’.

(b) Bi gbìl̃ u *nín* fātì ki téè̀n mimmee
 would focus on ‘when they heard him *repeat* the same thing’.

4.2 *Nín* gives prominence to Clause 2 in relation to Clause 1

In all the following examples, *nín* marks stressed focus on the second or last clause, but the significance of the focus is in its relation to the previous clause(s).

Example 53

Unil ɲā̀n ki kèetì, (1)
 Person is-good ref helps
 People are kind and helpful,
 an kaa *nín* sá bi-kɔ̀kɔ̀. (2)
 it not apf is they-all.
 but not everybody.

This example is the title of a story. The information in the second clause limits that of the first clause. The information in the second clause is significant *in the light of* the general statement in the first clause.

Example 54

- (4) Ukəl tòó ajin pìl̄ tɔb, (1)
 Hen lays eggs are-near each-other,
 Hens lay their eggs close to one another,
- (5) an kaa *nín* sá dibɔbaantiil. (2)
 it not *apf* is same-place
 but not in the same place.

T6.4-5

In this example, the information in the second clause clarifies or reinforces that of the first. Line 4 has stated that the hen lays her eggs near to one another. Line 5 stresses the importance of the fact that they are not laid in the same place. The particle *nín* is used to focus the fact in the second clause in relation to the first.

Example 55

- An bàñ ⁽¹⁾ uŋmal ki dāā *nín* là ⁽²⁾ dibindi gbaaa?
 It lasted month ref aft *apf* want year even-q
 Would it last a month, let alone a year?

T5.86

In this example, *nín* is focussing the information in the second clause – that the meat from a cow could not last for a year – because it is more preposterous even than the possibility of its lasting a month – the information in the first clause. The information in the second clause receives stressed focus *in relation to* that in the first clause. The second clause is more heavily weighted by comparison,

Example 56

- (21) ‘Kin m̄ kpèè m-ba kí kpèè m-jin̄jee, (1)
 Q I look-at myself ref look-at my-eggs-top,
 ‘(You say) I should look at myself and look at my eggs,
- (22) man mun *nín* tó ŋin-ee deeyaa!’ (2)
 I-em also *apf* laid rel-top pr-q
 those are the ones I laid!’

T6.21-22

In the story of the quarrel between the hen and the flea over the ownership of a large egg, the hen has challenged the flea to consider her small size in relation to the

large eggs: she could not possibly have laid them. The flea strongly asserts that she did lay the large eggs. The *nín* in line 22 puts marked focus on the fact that she did lay the large eggs. The flea's assertion is focussed in relation to the hen's taunt, which the flea uses as a point of departure (line 21).

In the two examples which follow, *nín* focusses on the information in a single clause, but the focus presupposes that the previous context is the grounds for the conclusion expressed in that clause.

Example 57

M-bɔɔ, díh̃ ní man péē *nín* ká sii nyimɔni!

My-friend, today fg I-em just *apf* saw your-em lying

My friend, today I have really seen that you are a liar!

T5.54

This sentence comes at the end of an argument in which the hero's friend believes he has established that the hero is a liar. The *nín* which focusses on the proof, or conclusion, expressed in the sentence quoted above, presupposes the argument which has taken place in the previous six lines (48-53).

Example 58

In another story, the chief character, Spider, wants to dam a stream in order to catch fish. He is looking for a foolish person to help him in the work so that he can outwit that person and have the maximum profit for the least amount of work. He finds a Senegal Roller (a bird) in a tree and calls to him:

(1) 'M-bɔɔ, m yìh̃ kí nyààb̃ ugbaan ní!

My-friend, I wandering ref seek fool fg

'My friend, I am going around looking for a fool!'

(2) Let's go and cut grass for a fish-trap.'

(3) The Senegal Roller replied: 'Gaaa!'

(4) Spider said: 'Let's go and cut grass for a fish-trap!'

(5) The Senegal Roller again answered: 'Gaaa!'

(6) So the Spider said:

(7) 'Aa! Díh̃ ní man péē *nín* ká ugbaan páaa!'

Ah! Today fg I-em just *apf* saw fool indeed (ideophone)

'Ah! Today I have really found a fool!'

In this example, Spider concludes in line 7 that at last he has found the fool he was looking for. His conclusion, marked with *nín*, presupposes that there are some grounds for his conclusion. The grounds are found in the previous conversation, in which the Senegal Roller's squawking *Gaaa!* leads the Spider to conclude that the

Senegal Roller has no intelligence. Note that in line 1, where Spider simply states what he is looking for, there is no *nín*.

The following example illustrates the two uses of *nín* described in Sections 4.1 and 4.2:

Example 59

(a) Kin man *nín* kũũ m-yɔu

Q I-em *apf* killed my-one

(b) an kaa kpààà bàñ uŋmal ki sũũ,

it not included lasted month ref rotted,

(c) ki dāā *nín* là dibindee?

ref aft *apf* want year-top?

How is it that I killed mine and it didn't last a month before going bad, let alone a year?

T5.75

This sentence is in the form of a rhetorical question. The information in (a) 'I killed my one (cow)' can be retrieved from lines 61-68, where the narrator relates that the hero's friend did just that. The hero's friend uses *nín* to make this information relevant in relation to his complaint that the meat did not last a month before going bad (b). The information in (c), the fact that the meat would not last a year, is focused because it carries the stronger weight of comparison in relation to the information in (b): the possibility of the meat lasting a month.

4.3 *Nín* focusses a goal or intention in relation to a precondition

In the following examples, *nín* focusses a goal or intention which requires the fulfilment of a precondition. The precondition is expressed in the first clause, and the goal in the second. *Nín* focusses the goal in respect of that precondition. In the first example, the condition is expressed in a conditional clause (example 60). The second example (example 61) consists of four proverb-type sayings in which the precondition is in the form of a general statement or an imperative.

Example 60

This example is taken from Text 1, where God, disguised as a leper, is visiting a third family to test their hospitality. He enters the compound, sits to one side away from his hosts and begins to greet them, but they tell him to stop –

(61) u yaa nyũñee,

he cond drank-top,

when he had had a drink,

(62) ú *nín* jāam̃.

he *apf* greet
then he should greet.

T1.61-62

In this example, the intention of greeting comes into focus only when the precondition of his having a drink first has been fulfilled.

Example 61

In the following proverbial-type sayings, the focus on the verb in the second clause depends on the fulfilment of the precondition expressed in the verb in the first clause. The slash shows the division between the two clauses.

- (a) Bi ɲàtī / ní ki *nín* dòõñ.
They sweep / fg ref *apf* lie-down
One should sweep before lying down.
- (b) Bi tūh̄ / ní ki *nín* jī.
They work / fg ref *apf* eat
One must work before one can eat.
- (c) A cútí kudii ɓɔŋɔ / ní ki *nín* mā-ku.
You catch house power / fg ref *apf* build-it.
You should count the cost before building a house.
- (d) Bàlfi / ní kí *nín* gbá.
Ask / fg ref *apf* hit
Ask (whether you are related to the person) before you hit him.

The analysis of the sentences in these examples is only provisional. Further research is necessary to determine why the focus markers are in the second clause when semantically one might expect the focus to be on the first clause.

5. Conclusion

In this paper I have sought to demonstrate how three particles *di*, *ní* and *nín* function in the distribution of Communicative Dynamism in a Bassar sentence. What governs their distribution is the speaker/author's purpose (cf Levinsohn 1980:445), the part of his message he chooses to make prominent in relation to what is background. If the focus is on the *subject*, *di* will be used to give the subject prominence. If the focus lies within or between *predicates*, *ní* is used to mark that focus. If the focus in the predicate has reference to something in the preceding context, *nín* will be used. By no means has the last word been said on the function of these particles. A full analysis of the Development Unit (Section 3.2) would form the topic of a paper in itself. More research is needed on *nín* before its function becomes really clear.

The particles discussed in this paper are not the only means which Bassar speakers use to give prominence to what they consider important in their communication.

There are some sentences quoted in this paper where nearly every item receives some kind of prominence (e.g. T2.67-68, T6.118). The use of emphatic pronouns will be an important area of future research. Another particle, *dee*, which I am provisionally calling 'presentative', would need to be included, also the verbal emphatic suffix *-maan*. Prosodic features of intonation would also need to be considered, even though Bassar, which is a tone language, has virtually no tone perturbation. All these areas, and probably some others, will need to be studied in order to gain a full picture of prominence in Bassar discourse.

Key to the English gloss of the Bassar text

Nearly all the examples in this paper are taken from five Bassar folk-tales, and are written in the orthography currently being used. Bassar has three register tones: ´ high, ¯ mid, ` low. The tone-bearing unit is the mora. Tone is written on all verbs and most grammatical particles. Occasionally, lexical tone also needs to be written.

Key

aft	afterward
apf	anaphoric predicate focus
CF	contrafactual
cit	citation
cond	conditional
cont	continuous particle
ds	distance suffix
em	emphatic
et	earlier time
fg	foregrounding particle, in or between predicates
fut	future
pr	presentative
pres	present continuous
Q, q	question
r	reason
ref	co-referential pronoun
rel	relative pronoun
rt	remote time
sf	subject focus
top	topicalising clitic
tr	transitivising suffix
unr	particle introducing unrealised mood

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