

FOCUS AND QUESTION FORMATION IN EDO*

Thomas O. Omoṛuyi
University of Benin

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relations that hold between sentence constituents in focus constructions and the derivation of questions which involve focussing. We observe that word-order change plays a fundamental part in focussing as the elements in focus are moved to a sentence-initial position. As a result, these elements which are spoken about, questioned, or negated are made explicit. We examine the syntactic operations which occur when subject nouns, direct and indirect object nouns, genitival constructions, beneficiaries, locations, instruments and manner are focalized. Finally, we examine the derivational processes for polar and non-polar questions and the role focussing plays in eliciting appropriate responses from the hearers.

1. Introduction

Focussing is a widespread phenomenon in Edo.¹ It involves a reordering of some sentence constituents with a view to bringing them into prominence, hence such sentences are labelled emphatic sentences. In stress-timed languages such as English, an emphatic stress on constituents of a sentence usually brings such constituents into focus, but in syllable-timed and tone languages, emphatic stresses

* I would like to thank Professor J.S. Gruber and Mr. Matt Aikhionbare for their valuable comments on the ideas put forward in this paper. I am greatly indebted to Professor Russell G. Schuh who revealed to me several errors in an earlier draft. None of these people are responsible for any error that may still exist. This paper builds on an earlier work, Omoṛuyi [in press]. The syntactic processes for the formation of focus constructions and how they relate to question formation were not fully investigated in that paper because of the limitation of space.

¹Edo (also called Bini) is the main language of the ancient Kingdom of Benin in Nigeria. It is classified by Elugbe [1979] as a member of the Edoid group of languages within the Kwa subgroup of Niger-Congo languages. The data for this study have come largely from our native speaker competence in the language. We, however, consulted many informants whenever we had reasons to distrust our intuition.

and tone do not appear to be productive devices for focalization because every syllable corresponds to a unit of stress and tone.

Passivization, which serves as a device for bringing some nouns into prominence in some languages, does not occur in Edo, but the prevalence of focussing compensates for the nonoccurrence of this device. Focussing also functions as a means of introducing new arguments or information into a discourse and also for correcting false information. As Welmers [1973:43] rightly observes, it is in topicalized or focus constructions that the full forms of Edo verbs are realized. The final vowels and suffixes of verbs are not elided in object-focus constructions in which the verbs occur sentence-finally. And finally, we observe that elements about which a questioner seeks information are clearly identified in question-types which involve focussing. This is particularly helpful to the hearer in the choice of appropriate responses to questions.

First, we shall examine the syntactic processes for the formation of focus constructions and their semantic interpretations in Edo. We shall then proceed to examine how focus constructions, question formation, relativization, and so on, commonly operate together.

2. Focus in Declarative Sentences

Edo focus constructions are synonymous with English cleft sentences [Schachter 1973]. According to Quirk et al [1972:951] a cleft sentence is

"...a special construction which gives both thematic and focal prominence to a particular element of the clause in the cleft sentence, so called because it divides a single clause into two separate sections, each with its own verb."

Edo is basically an SVO language, and it is from this structure that focus constructions are derived. The element in focus occurs sentence-initially, and it is followed by a focus marker which consists of a third person singular pronoun *ɛ* or *ò* and the copula *ré*. Other syntactic processes, which we shall examine shortly, occur depending on the element that is focalized.

2.1. Subject focus. Subject nouns occur sentence-initially in non-focus constructions as follows:²

²All examples are cited in the Edo orthography proposed by Amayo and Elugbe [1983]. The oral vowels *i*, *e*, *ɛ*, *a*, *o*, and *u* correspond approximately to /i/, /e/, /ɛ/, /a/, /ɔ/, /o/ and /u/ respectively. Nasalized vowels are marked by a following nasal consonant as follows: *in* = /ɪ/, *ɛn* = /ɛ/, *an* = /a/, *on* = /ɔ/ and *un* = /u/. When a nasal consonant precedes a nasalized vowel, it is unmarked by *n*. Digraphs are used as follows: *vb* = /v/, *mɰ* = /m/, *rx* = /r/, *rh* = /r/, *kp* = /kɸ/, *kh* = /x/, *gh* = /ɣ/, and *gb* = /gɸ/.

- (1) *Ósàrọ́ bọ́ òwá* 'Osaro built a house'
 Osaro build house

A leftward movement of the subject noun occurs when it is brought into focus and it is optionally followed by the focus marker *ẹ̀ rẹ́* or *ò rẹ́* 'it be'. Finally, the third person singular pronoun *ọ́* 'he/she/it' fills the gap from which the subject noun has been moved. Following these processes, (1) will be realized as (2) below:

- (2) *Ósàrọ́ (ẹ̀ rẹ́) ọ́ bọ́ òwá* 'it is Osaro who built a house'
 Osaro it be PRO build house

When the focus marker is deleted as is often the case in rapid speech, it is the occurrence of the third person singular pronoun, which we call PRO below, that indicates that the subject noun is focalized. This pronoun is always *ọ́* regardless of the number, gender, and person of the subject noun in focus.

The occurrence of a slot filling third person pronoun in a subject focus sentence has also been attested in Yoruba. According to Bamgboṣe [1967:37], "when the subject is moved to the initial position of the clause, a third person pronoun must be substituted for it." It is, however, an invariable pronoun in the case of Edo subject focus constructions. As a result, the following are grammatical focus constructions even though the pronouns in focus do not share the same person and number features as the PRO.

- (3) a. *írà̀n (ẹ̀ rẹ́) ọ́ bọ́ òwá* 'it is they that built a house'
 they it be PRO build house
- b. *wẹ̀ (ẹ̀ rẹ́) ọ́ dẹ́ íkẹ̀kẹ́* 'it is you that bought a bicycle'
 you(sg) it be PRO buy bicycle

Amayo [1975] calls this third person singular pronoun which occurs in subject focus sentences a "subject concord marker". He argues further that subject concord markers (SCM) and auxiliary markers (AM) are inherent parts of Edo verbal constructions (VC). Among others, he illustrates with the following sentence (= (23) in Amayo [1975]) in which the focus marker is deleted:

- (4) *írà̀ ọ́ ghá rre* 'it is they who would have come'
 they SCM AM come

Amayo may have come to this conclusion because what appears to be SCM's have been attested in some Edoid languages. However, their syntactic behaviour in

these languages is different from the Edo case. Consider the following non-focus constructions in Yekhee (Etsako):³

- (5) a. *Ọgèlẹ ọ dẹ ùkpò*
 Ogele PRO buy cloth
 'Ogele bought a piece of cloth'
- b. *Ọgèlẹ làgì Àdàmú é dẹ ìkpò*
 Ogele and Adamu PRO buy clothes
 'Ogele and Adamu bought pieces of cloth'

The pronouns *ọ* in (5a) and *é* in (5b) agree in number with the subject nouns. When these nouns are brought into focus, the result is as follows:

- (6) a. *Ọgèlẹ lí ọ dẹ ùkpò*
 Ogele it-be PRO buy cloth
 'it is Ogele who bought a piece of cloth'
- b. *Ọgèlẹ làgì Àdàmú lí é dẹ ìkpò*
 Ogele and Adamu it-be PRO buy clothes
 'it is Ogele and Adamu who bought pieces of cloth'

Sentence (5a) is a non-focus construction which is similar to Edo focus constructions when the focus marker *ẹ rẹ* 'it be' is deleted. The pronoun (PRO) does not occur in Edo non-focus constructions. Therefore, its occurrence must be attributed to subject focus. As it does not often manifest any concord and agreement with the antecedent noun, we feel that it is a misnomer to call it a subject concord marker. Subject concord marking is commonly associated with noun class languages and Edo does not belong to this category.

Following Awoyale [1985], we shall call this third person pronoun a "pro-copy". He observes in the Yoruba case that when a subject noun "is shifted to the front...a pro-copy is left in its place". This is an adequate description of the syntactic process in Edo. However, it should be noted that the pro-copy may not possess the features of the antecedent noun in terms of number and person. Gender does not play any role in Edo pronominalization processes.

2.2. Object and genitive focus. Whenever a direct object of a monotransitive verb is focalized, it occurs at a sentence-initial position, and then it is op-

³I am grateful to Mrs. Grace Masagbor for the data on Yekhee (Etsako).

tionally followed by the focus marker. Unlike the subject focus case discussed above, no pro-copy fills the place from which the direct object is moved. For example, (1) will be realized as follows:

- (7) *òwá (ẹ rẹ) Ọsàrọ bọrẹ* 'it is a house Osaro built'
 house it be Osaro build+Past

The simple past suffix *-rẹ* and its phonologically conditioned variants (see Qmqrui [1986a]) do not occur when a verb is directly followed by an object noun. The noun *òwá* 'house' in (7) now assumes the grammatical status of a subject noun. This new grammatical function is aptly demonstrated when an object pronoun is focalized; it obligatorily changes to its subject pronoun counterpart.⁴ Consider the changes that occur in the following non-focus and focus constructions:

- (8) a. *Ọsàgié tiè rùẹ* 'Osagie called you'
 Osagie call you (sg.)
 b. *wẹ (ẹ rẹ) Ọsàgié tiérẹ* 'it is you that Osagie called'
 you(sg) it be Osagie call+Past

The object pronoun *rùẹ* in (8a) obligatorily becomes *wẹ* in (8b) as it is now a subject pronoun. Since it is the noun or pronoun in focus that the speaker is actually talking about, it assumes the role of a subject noun or pronoun. The transitivity of the verb, however, gives clues that it is a direct object that "is transposed to the beginning of the sentence and the verb appears in sentence-final position" [Welmers 1973:43].

When direct and indirect object nouns of ditransitive verbs are brought into focus, a resumptive pronoun *ẹrẹ* 'him/her/it' fills the gap created by the movement of these nouns.⁵ For example:

- (9) a. *íràn má Ọsàgié ègiè* 'they made Osagie a king'
 they make Osagie king
 b. *Ọsàgié (ẹ rẹ) íràn má ẹrẹ ègiè* 'it is Osagie they made a king'
 Osagie it be they make PRO king

⁴A full description of Edo subject and object pronouns occurs in Qmqrui [1986b]. Object pronouns are also used in genitival constructions.

⁵See Safir [1986] for a discussion of how resumptive pronouns are bound in sentence structures.

- c. *ègiè (è ré) íràn má Ósàgié ẹ̀rè* 'it is a king they made Osagie'
king it be they make Osagie PRO

The focalized nouns are coindexed with the resumptive pronoun *ẹ̀rè*. A similar pronoun occurs in genitival constructions. A possessed noun usually occurs before the possessor and the two can be moved together to a sentence-initial position. However, if the possessed noun or the possessor alone is focalized the pronoun *ẹ̀rè* or its variant *ọ̀rè* must occur in the second part of the clause. For example:

- (10) a. *íràn guòghọ́ íkẹ̀kẹ́ Ósàrọ́*
they destroy bicycle Osaro
'they destroyed Osaro's bicycle'
- b. *íkẹ̀kẹ́ Ósàrọ́ (è ré) íràn guòghọ́rè*
bicycle Osaro it be they destroy+Past
'it is Osaro's bicycle that they destroyed'
- c. *Ósàrọ́ (è ré) íràn guòghọ́ íkẹ̀kẹ́ ẹ̀rè*
Osaro it be they destroy bicycle PRO
'it is Osaro whose bicycle they destroyed'
- d. *íkẹ̀kẹ́ (è ré) íràn guòghọ́ Ósàrọ́ ẹ̀rè*
bicycle it be they destroy Osaro PRO
'it is a bicycle belonging to Osaro that they destroyed'

The word *ẹ̀rè* which occurs in (10c) and (10d) functions as a possessive pronoun. Object pronouns also perform this function in Edo.

2.3. Focus on objects of prepositions. Some syntactic changes occur when a noun preceded by a preposition is focalized. Consider the predicate of the following non-focus sentence:

- (11) *Ózọ́ kùuẹ̀rè vbè ẹ̀zẹ̀*
Ozo bathe+Past in river
'Ozo had a bath in the river'

Because *ẹ̀zẹ̀* 'river' is not directly dominated by the verb, it is possible for the simple past suffix *-rè* to occur. Therefore, *ẹ̀zẹ̀* is the object of the locative

preposition *vbè* 'in'. Of course, it is also possible for a direct object of a verb to be followed by a prepositional phrase as follows:

- (12) *íràn rí èvbàré vbè úwú òwá*
 they eat food in inside house
 'they ate food inside the house'

When stationary or specific locations such as *vbè èzè* in (11) and *vbè úwú òwá* in (12) are focalized, the preposition *vbè* is deleted and a locative marker (LOC) *ná* obligatorily precedes the verb. The occurrence of the simple past suffix is then blocked. Thus, (11) and (12) will be realized as (13a) and (13b) respectively.

- (13) a. *èzè (è ré) Ózò ná khué*
 river it be Ozo LOC bathe
 'it is in the river that Ozo had a bath'
- b. *úwú òwá (è ré) íràn ná rí èvbàré*
 inside house it be they LOC eat food
 'it is inside the house that they ate food'

However, if the location is not specific *vbè* and *ná* can co-occur. For example:

- (14) a. *Íyáyì dé éwù vbè òdè*
 Iyayi buy shirt on way
 'Iyayi bought a shirt on the way'
- b. *vbè òdè (è ré) Íyáyì ná dé éwù*
 on way it be Iyayi LOC buy shirt
 'it is on the way that Iyayi bought a shirt'

In another sense, *vbè* marks the time of an event and when the event is brought into focus a sequence marker (SQM) *ná* occurs in the second clause. For example:

- (15) a. *Ózò dé vbè ò khué*
 Ozo fall while he bathe
 'Ozo fell while bathing'

- b. *vbè ò khuẹ (ẹ rẹ) Òzó ná dé*
 while he bathe it be Ozo SQM fall
 'it was while bathing that Ozo fell'

In other locative focus constructions, *yè* becomes *yì* when its object is focalized and the preposition occurs sentence-finally.

- (16) a. *Òzó tótà yè ágá*
 Ozo sit on chair
 'Ozo sat on a chair'
- b. *ágá (ẹ rẹ) Òzó tótà yì*
 chair it be Ozo sit on
 'it is a chair Ozo sat on'

Similarly, the preposition *nè* becomes *nà* when a beneficiary is brought into focus and the preposition occurs sentence-finally.

- (17) a. *Òsàgié bọ òwá nè Òsàrọ*
 Osagie build house for Osaro
 'Osagie built a house for Osaro'
- b. *Òsàrọ (ẹ rẹ) Òsàgié bọ òwá ná*
 Osaro it be Osagie build house for
 'it is Osaro who Osagie built a house for'

However, focus on instrument and manner follows similar processes of direct objects of monotransitive verbs described above. No pro-copy or resumptive pronoun occurs after focalization. For example:

- (18) a. *íràn yá ísánhẹn kiè ẹkhù*
 they use key open door
 'they used a key to open the door'
- b. *ísánhẹn (ẹ rẹ) íràn yá kiè ẹkhù*
 key it be they use open door
 'it is a key they used in opening the door'

- (19) a. *Ódẹ yá òhù gbé òmọ níí*
 Ode use anger beat child that
 ‘Ode beat that child in anger’
- b. *òhù (ẹ rẹ) Ódẹ yá gbé òmọ níí*
 anger it be Ode use beat child that
 ‘it is in anger that Ode beat that child’
- (20) a. *Ózọ khián zàizài*
 Ozo walk briskly
 ‘Ozo walks briskly’
- b. *zàizài (ẹ rẹ) Ózọ khián*
 briskly it be Ozo walk
 ‘it is in a brisk manner that Ozo walks’

2.4. Verb focus. Verbs cannot be focalized directly like subject and object nouns. In order to focalize an action or state expressed by a verb, a nominal must first be derived from it. The derived nominal is moved to the front and the verb occurs in the second part of the sentence.

All Edo nouns begin and end with vowels while verbs begin with consonants and end with vowels. Two methods are employed in the derivation of nominals from verbs. The first method is by the prefixation of oral vowels to verb stems. There are no phonological rules for the choice of vowel prefixes. For example:

| | | | | |
|------|-----------------|---------------|------------------|----------------|
| (21) | <i>khián</i> | ‘to walk’ | <i>òkhián</i> | ‘walk’ |
| | <i>giẹ</i> | ‘to laugh’ | <i>ògiẹ</i> | ‘laughter’ |
| | <i>tuẹ</i> | ‘to greet’ | <i>òtuẹ</i> | ‘greeting’ |
| | <i>hiọ</i> | ‘to urinate’ | <i>àhiọ</i> | ‘urine’ |
| | <i>fọ</i> | ‘to perspire’ | <i>ọfọ</i> | ‘perspiration’ |
| | <i>khuẹ</i> | ‘to bathe’ | <i>àkhuẹ</i> | ‘bath’ |
| | <i>m wẹm wẹ</i> | ‘to be mad’ | <i>ẹm wẹm wẹ</i> | ‘madness’ |

The second method involves the affixation of the discontinuous morpheme *ù-m wẹ* to a verb stem. For example:

| | | | | |
|------|------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
| (22) | <i>fò</i> | ‘to end’ | <i>ùfóm wẹ</i> | ‘ending’ |
| | <i>gbè</i> | ‘to beat’ | <i>ùgbém wẹ</i> | ‘beating’ |
| | <i>gò</i> | ‘to shout’ | <i>ùgóm wẹ</i> | ‘shouting’ |

| | | | |
|--------------|--------------|-------------------|-----------|
| <i>tàn</i> | 'to be long' | <i>ùtánmwè</i> | 'length' |
| <i>kpòlò</i> | 'to be big' | <i>ùkpòlòm wè</i> | 'bigness' |

The (b) sentences below are focus constructions which are derived from the (a) sentences.

(23) a. *Òzò tuè mwè*
Ozo greet me
'Ozo greeted me'

b. *òtué (è ré) Òzò tuè mwè*
greeting it be Ozo greet me
'it is greeting that Ozo greeted me'

(24) a. *íràn gá Òsànbuà*
they serve God
'they serve God'

b. *ùgámwè (è ré) íràn gá Òsànbuà*
serving it be they serve God
'it is serving that they serve God'

We observe, however, that not all verbs can be brought into focus through a nominalization process. For example, the verbs *mwè* 'have' and *ré* 'be' cannot be nominalized. As we shall discover later, there are other problems when we attempt to focalize and question a verb.

2.5. Negative focus construction. In all the affirmative focus constructions we have examined so far, we observed that the occurrence of the focus marker *èré* or *ò ré* is optional. In negative focus constructions its occurrence is obligatory. The negative particle *í* is cliticized to the pronoun *è*; the variant *ò* never occurs with the negative particle. The element in focus which is also now negated occurs after the copula *ré* and this places it within the scope of negation. For example, a negation of (2) which we repeat here as (25a) will result in (25b).

(25) a. *Òsàrò (è ré) ó bó òwá*
Osaro it be PRO build house
'it is Osaro who built a house'

- b. *ẹ́í ré Ọ̀sàrọ́ ọ́ bọ́ ọ̀wá*
 it-NEG be Osaro PRO build house
 'it is not Osaro who built a house'

A negation of the object focus sentence in (7) which we repeat here as (26a) will result in (26b).

- (26) a. *ọ̀wá (ẹ́ ré) Ọ̀sàrọ́ bọ̀rẹ̀*
 house it be Osaro build+Past
 'it is a house Osaro built'
- b. *ẹ́í ré ọ̀wá Ọ̀sàrọ́ bọ̀rẹ̀*
 it-NEG be house Osaro build+Past
 'it is not a house Osaro built'

All elements that can be focalized can also be negated through this process.

3. Relationship Between Focus and Question Formation

In this article, we shall restrict ourselves to the so-called yes/no and WH-questions. Following Emenajọ [1979], we shall call yes/no questions polar questions and WH-questions non-polar questions. It is the way these questions are asked that determines felicitous responses. We shall argue that focussing obligatorily occurs in non-polar questions, so natural responses must also be in the form of focus constructions. We shall first examine polar questions in which focussing is optional.

3.1. Polar questions. Our data suggest that there are three principal methods of forming polar questions in Edo. A natural response to them must commence with *ẹ́ẹ́n* 'yes' or *ẹ́ọ* 'no' and these may be followed by the appropriate information required by the questioner.

Focussing in a polar question is only a stylistic device for bringing a constituent being questioned into prominence. However, if the questioner decides to bring any constituent into focus, the hearer must reply in a focus construction.

3.1.1. Raised pitch. Statements can be changed to questions when the pitch, especially on the final syllable, is raised. Such questions also usually commence with a high tone which is traceable to the emphatic particle *té*. It occurs sentence-initially and Agheyisi [1986] translates it as 'it is the case that ...' but in a question formation it can be translated 'is it the case that ...?' In our literal translation we shall simply call it EMPH (emphasizer). The pitch differences between a

statement and a question, which coincides with the tonal level, can be represented as follows:

- (27) a. [— — — — — —]
té *Òsàsẹ̀rẹ̀* *khuẹ̀*
 EMPH Osasere bathe
 'it is the case that Osasere is bathing'
- b. [— — — — — —]
té *Òsàsẹ̀rẹ̀* *khuẹ̀?*
 EMPH Osasere bathe
 'is it the case that Osasere is bathing?'

If the emphasizer is deleted, the following pitch changes can occur:

- (28) a. [— — — — —]
ùwà *rrié* *úgbó*
 you(pl) go farm
 'you are going to the farm'
- b. [— — — — —]
ùwà *rrié* *úgbó?*
 you(pl) go farm
 'are you going to the farm?'

We can begin the translation of (28b) with 'is it the case that ...?'. This is because *ùwà* 'you(pl)' normally bears two low tones but if *té* is deleted sentence-initially, the floating high tone left behind displaces the initial low tone in *ùwà*.

As a sentence emphasizer, *té* can only occur in the basic SVO sentence-pattern. If any element is already in focus *té* cannot occur. For example, the following sentence which is derived from (28a) is ungrammatical:

- (29) **té* *ùwà* (*ẹ̀ ré*) *ọ* *rrié* *úgbó*
 EMPH you(pl) it be PRO go farm
 'it is the case that it is you going to the farm'

The ungrammaticality of (29) is due to the fact that it is illogical or self-contradictory to emphasize a sentence constituent by focussing it and at the same time

emphasize the whole sentence. However, if a sentence is negated, the focus marker and the negator can co-occur with *té*. When this happens, it is the whole sentence that is in focus. No movement occurs so neither a procopy nor a resumptive pronoun replaces any element. For example:

- (30) *èí ré té ùwà rrié úgbó?*
 it-NEG be EMPH you(pl) go farm
 'is it not the case that you are going to the farm?'

Finally, we observe that statements turned into questions by a raised pitch are commonly accompanied by some paralinguistic features which make it clearer to the hearer that some information is sought from him.

3.1.2. Formation with *yí*. Again, a statement can be turned into a question by placing the tag *yí* at the end of it. It has no meaning of its own; it only functions as a question marker so we shall gloss it as Q in the following example:

- (31) *íràn tié èbé yí?* 'are they reading a book?'
 they read book Q

An emphatic sentence which begins with *té* can also be changed into a question when *yí* is placed at the end of it. For example:

- (32) *té Ózò íé èvbàré yí?* 'is it the case that Ozo is cooking?'
 EMPH Ozo cook food Q

The question particle *yí* can occur in all focus constructions. For example, the object noun is focussed and questioned in the following sentence:

- (33) *èbé (è ré) íràn tié yí?* 'is it a book that they are reading?'
 book it be they read Q

As earlier observed (see 29), *té* cannot occur in this sentence structure. An appropriate response must also bring the object noun into focus. For example, an affirmative response will be as follows:

- (34) *één, èbé (è ré) íràn tié* 'yes, it is a book that they are reading'
 yes book it be they read

The following response will be inappropriate:

- (35) *éḡn, íràn tié èbé* 'yes, they are reading a book'
 yes they read book

The information provided in (35) is about what the subject noun is doing but the information sought in (33) is about *èbé* 'book'. The unacceptability of (35) arises from the fact that Edo does not permit the placement of emphatic stresses on elements with a view to bringing them into focus.

3.1.3. Alternative question formation. Alternative questions are formed by conjoining two or more sentences by the alternative conjunction *rà* 'or'. One sentence contains an assertion and the other negates it or contains a different assertion.

- (36) *Ìvié kùú rà ó vié?* 'is Ivie playing or is she crying?'
 Ivie play or-Q she cry

In (36) the conjunction *rà* is glossed as 'or-Q' because it performs a dual role of conjoining two sentences and question marking. However, the second sentence is commonly deleted and in such cases the question ends with *rà*. It then functions as a tag and it is in this form that we can rightly call this question-type a polar question. The tag functions as the only question marker (Q) in the following example:

- (37) *Úyì ghá kpè ókpán rà?* 'should Uyi wash the plate?'
 Uyi AM wash plate Q

Although *yí* and *rà* are both tag question formatives, they elicit slightly different responses. Respondents are only expected to agree or disagree with the assertion contained in the formation with *yí* but in the case of questions formed with *rà*, apart from agreeing or disagreeing with the assertion of the questioner, the respondent can make an alternative assertion. If focussing occurs the respondent is further required to respond in a focus construction. For example, if the subject noun of (37) is in focus it will become:

- (38) *Úyì (è ré) ó ghá kpè ókpán rà?*
 Uyi it be PRO AM wash plate Q
 'is it Uyi that should wash the plate?'

An appropriate negative reply will be as follows:

- (39) *éó, èí ré Úyi ó ghá kpè ókpán*
 no it-NEG be Uyi PRO AM wash plate
 'no, it is not Uyi that should wash the plate'

Focussing, as we have seen so far in polar questions, is an optional device for bringing some constituents into prominence. It determines the natural response of hearers. However, focussing is obligatory in the non-polar questions we shall now examine.

3.2. Non-Polar questions. There are about six methods of forming non-polar questions in Edo. The division is based on the types of question words that occur in them. However, as we shall discover shortly, some of these methods are only alternative ways of asking for the same information. The question particle *yí* (see 3.1.2. above) optionally occurs sentence-finally in all non-polar questions and in such cases, interrogation is doubly marked. We shall, however, ignore this particle here because it adds nothing to the semantic interpretation of such questions.

3.2.1. *dè* + NP + S formation. All Edo noun phrases including independent pronouns can be questioned by preposing the question particle *dè* to them, and then the information sought about the noun phrases is contained in relative clauses that follow them. *Dè* translates as 'what', 'which', 'who', 'when', 'where', and so on, depending on the context of use and the noun phrase that follows it. For example:

- (40) a. *dè èhé...?* 'where?'
 what place
- b. *dè èghè...?* 'when?'
 what time
- c. *dè èm wí...?* 'what (thing)?'
 what thing
- d. *dè òm wá...?* 'who (sg.)?'
 what person
- e. *dè èm wá...?* 'who (pl.)?'
 what persons

Relative clauses which obligatorily follow *dè* and the noun phrase are formed in the same manner focus constructions are formed. Schachter [1973] observes

that there are striking similarities between focus constructions and relativization in a number of unrelated languages.

In the formation of Edo relative clauses, noun phrases are moved leftward and they are followed by the relativizer (REL) *nè* which introduces the clauses. If a subject noun is moved, a pro-copy obligatorily fills the extraction site but if an object noun is moved no pro-copy occurs. For example, from the simple declarative sentence in (41a) below, the relative clauses in (41b) and (41c) can be derived.

- (41) a. *Òsàzẹ́ bọ́ òwá* 'Osaze built a house'
 Osaze build house
- b. *Òsàzẹ́ nè ọ́ bọ́ òwá...* 'Osaze who built a house ...'
 Osaze REL PRO build house
- c. *òwá nè Òsàzẹ́ bọ́rè...* 'a house which Osaze built...'
 house REL Osaze build+Past

Of course, (41b) and (41c) do not make complete sense; in fact, they are complex noun phrases. When *dè* is preposed to them, they are transformed into meaningful questions as follows:

- (42) a. *dè Òsàzẹ́ nè ọ́ bọ́ òwá?*
 which Osaze REL PRO build house
 'which Osaze built a house?'
- b. *dè òwá nè Òsàzẹ́ bọ́rè?*
 which house REL Osaze build+Past
 'which house did Osaze build?'

A natural response to these questions must be in focus constructions. For example, (43a) and (43b) below are appropriate responses to (42a) and (42b) respectively.

- (43) a. *Òsàzẹ́ nè ọ̀sẹ̀ mwẹ́ (ẹ̀ rẹ́) ọ́ bọ́ òwá*
 Osaze REL friend my it be PRO build house
 'it is Osaze who is my friend that built a house'

- b. *òwá nà (è ré) Òsàzẹ̀ bọ̀rẹ̀*
 house this it be Osaze build+Past
 'it is this house that Osaze built'

3.2.2. *ávbá* + S formation. Plural human nouns are questioned by the use of *ávbá* 'who (pl.)' or *ávbá* as the young generation of Edo speakers often say. There are syntactic correlations between the use of *ávbé* as a pluralizer and *ávbá* as an interrogative pronoun.⁶

We call it an interrogative pronoun because unlike *dè* which is preposed to the noun questioned, *ávbá* or *ávbá* is a pronominal replacive for the persons questioned. It is an alternative way of saying *dè èmwá* 'what persons' or 'who (pl.)' which occurs in (40e) above.

Focussing is overt when *ávbá* or *ávbá* is used in questioning. In fact, the focus marker *è ré* or *ò ré* can optionally occur after this interrogative pronoun. For example:

- (44) a. *ávbá (è ré) ò kpòlò?* 'who is sweeping?'
 who (pl.) it be PRO sweep
- b. *ávbá (è ré) Òzò tiè?* 'who is Ozo calling?'
 who (pl.) it be Ozo call

The pro-copy occurs in (44a) because a subject noun is questioned, but it does not occur in (44b) because an object noun is questioned.

3.2.3. *vbè* + S formation. A variety of questions can be formed by the use of *vbè* which translates as 'what', 'where', 'why' and so on, depending on the context of use. It is used for asking questions about events, activities, conditions, reasons, locations, and so on.

An aspectual marker *a* usually occurs in this question-type and it is the tone this marker bears that determines the aspect. A high tone marks the progressive and habitual aspects while a low tone marks the past. It occurs after the subject noun of the sentence that follows *vbè*. However, when *ò* 'he/she/it' occurs as the subject pronoun, this aspectual marker assimilates to *ò*. For example,

- (45) a. *vbè ù á ré?* 'what are you eating?'
 what you(sg) ASM eat

⁶For a detailed discussion of the use of *ávbé* as a pluralizer, see Omoṣuyi [1986c]. We have now realized that what we call a pro-copy in this paper cannot be derived from the focus marker *ò ré* 'it be' as we suggested in that paper.

- b. *vbè Òsàró à ré?* 'what did Osaro eat?'
 what Osaro ASM eat
- c. *vbè ò ó ré?* 'what is he eating?'
 what he ASM eat
- d. *vbè ò ò ré?* 'what did he eat?'
 what he ASM eat

Adjectival or quality verbs are usually questioned by the following sentence:

- (46) *vbè ò ó yé hẹ́ẹ́?* 'how is it like?'
 how it ASM be Q

Focussing appears to have occurred in this question-type because *vbè* is an interrogative pronoun which replaces something or someone about which information is sought by the questioner. This thing or someone is brought into focus in a sentence-initial position. A more appropriate response to (45a), for example, will be (47a) below, while (47b) will be inappropriate even though it is grammatical.

- (47) a. *ì yán (ẹ́ ré) ì ré* 'it is yam that I am eating'
 yam it be I eat
- b. *ì rri ì yán* 'I am eating yam'
 I eat yam

Note that the verb *rri* 'eat' is realized as *ré* 'eat' when it is not followed by a direct object.

3.2.4. *ghá* + S formation. The interrogative pronoun *ghá* 'who' questions singular and plural human nouns. It therefore combines the questioning roles of *dè òmwá* and *dè èmwá* in (40d) and (40e) respectively, and also *ávbáó* which is discussed in 3.2.2. above. This means that whenever a questioner employs *ghá* 'who', he is either requesting information about one person or more than one person, or he is not sure about the number of persons. For example:

- (48) *ghá ó tótà yè ágá?* 'who sat on the chair?'
 who PRO sit on chair

⁷The particle *hẹ́ẹ́* is a question marker which accompanies *vbè* when it denotes 'how'.

- (52) a. *ìvbí rué vbòó?* 'where/how are your children?'
 children your where/how
- b. *né èbé vbòó?* 'where/how is the book?'
 ART book where/how

In fact, (52a) commonly occurs in Èdo greetings and the following responses are both appropriate:

- (53) a. *íràn rré òwá* 'they are at home'
 they be house
- b. *ègbé rhàán íràn* 'they are well'
 body well them

If the questioner specifically wishes to know the location and exclude information about the well-being of the questioned noun phrase, the *dè* + NP + S formation is adopted as follows:

- (54) *dè èhé nè ìvbí rué yé?* 'where are your children?'
 what place REL children your be

Only (53a), for example, will be an appropriate response to (54). It is in this question-type that the interrogative adverb of 'where' as in English is unambiguously expressed in Èdo. Focussing can only be said to have occurred in (52) because the element about which information is sought occurs sentence-initially.

4. Conclusion

Focussing plays a significant role in determining the information a speaker wants to give or elicit from the hearer. This is achieved in Èdo by bringing some sentence constituents into prominence. Other syntactic changes which occur have been examined.

Through focus constructions, Èdo speakers are able to form different questions in such a manner that the specific information they wish to elicit from the hearer closely follows the constituent in focus. The derivational processes of these questions and their semantic interpretations have been carefully examined.

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