NÈ...BA MARKING IN LELE:

A CLEFT CONSTRUCTION?*

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Nè...ba marking in Lele is used for contrastive emphasis and
generally the emphasized constituent is fronted when the nè...ba
is used. Sentences with a fronted nè...ba can be syntactically
demonstrated to be cleft, and, as expected, pseudo-clefts are
also possible in Lele. This paper discusses the use and analysis
of this nè...ba marking.

0. Introduction

Lele is an East Chadic A language [Newman 1977] spoken south of Kelo, Pré-
fecture de la Tandjilé, Republic of Chad. It is not listed by Greenberg [1963]
but is mentioned by Baumann and Westermann [1957] and Hoffman [1971]. It is
closely related to Nancere and so falls clearly into Newman's [1977] East Chadic
A Nancere subgroup. Hoffman [1971] points out the great similarity between Nan-
cere and Greenberg's [1963] languages, classified as 9b, including Lele.

The nè...ba marking is used for contrastive emphasis in Lele and in
this paper I will argue for the hypothesis that this construction in Lele can
be demonstrated syntactically to be a cleft construction, despite the occasional
absence of the nè or ba . I will first demonstrate the support for calling
nè...ba a cleft construction, along with the use of the nè...ba , then discuss
alternative orderings and an alternative analysis.

Section 1 discusses contrastive emphasis as cleft in general and the use
of nè...ba , while section 2 presents the nè...ba construction and the spe-
cific elements of a cleft, such as a copula and a relative clause. Section 3
shows the nè...ba as it is used in WH questions, and section 4 pseudo-clefts.

These first four sections are mainly descriptive, while in the last two sec-
tions, some problems are presented. In section 5 alternative orderings are
shown, and in section 6 an alternative analysis of the initial grammatical re-
lations involved in the nè...ba sentences is discussed.

1.   Contrastive Emphasis as Cleft and its Use in Lele

      The use of the nè...ba marking, as I have mentioned, is for contras-
tive emphasis. For example,[1]

(1) nè dày   ba jè -oji -ni   dà màní
     be he:emp emp asp-help-1pp:ex loc there
     'it's he who is helping us there' (not someone else)

Harries-Delisle [1978] hypothesizes that such contrastively emphasized constitu-
ents are derived from cleft constructions. While she argues for such a deriva-
tion no matter what the surface realization of the contrastive emphasis, a hy-
pothesis I do not intend to defend, her work clearly should steer an investiga-
tor to consider an analysis of Lele nè...ba as a cleft construction. In ad-
dition, Maxwell [1981] calls very similar constructions cleft in Kinyarwanda,
a Bantu language.

      The nè...ba marking can be used to front and emphasize any nominal in a
sentence and is surprisingly like English clefts in several formal respects.

1.1 Clefted subject. Examples (1) above and (2) show clefted subject.

(2) nè nòju go Kumno ba oóm   ná íníŋ
     be love gen God   emp catches with me
     'it's God's love which is with me'

cf. nòju go Kumno oóm   ná íníŋ
     love gen God   catches with me
     'God's love is with me'

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      [1]I have taken most examples from Lele texts which come from a variety of
sources, but some examples have been specifically elicited from Lele speakers.
High (´) and low (`) tones are marked with mid tone unmarked.

1.2 Clefted direct object.

(3) nè tu háàŋ ba Umage dìgrì
     be goat this emp U.   killed
     'it's this goat which Umage killed'

cf. Umage dìgrì tu háàŋ
     Umage killed goat this
     'Umage killed this goat'

(4) nè kàrè háàŋ ba ge -léè
     be sauce this emp they-will:eat
     'it's this sauce they will eat'

Note that when a direct object is clefted as in (3) and (4) the demonstrative
háàŋ 'this' is used. It is necessary to use some sort of determiner when em-
phasizing something that could be non-specific, such as a goat.

1.3 Clefted indirect object and benefactive.

(5) nè dày   ba Jean bè -y   maktub
     be he:emp emp John gave-him book
     'it's he who John gave the book to'

cf. Jean bè -y   maktub
     J.   gave-him book
     'John gave him (a) book'

(6) nè kara   háàŋ ba Jean dèr bé-gè gùnyé
     be people this emp John told to-them folk:stories
     'it's these people that John told folk stories to'

(7) nè dày   ba Jean nè gùyé béè-y
     be he:emp emp John make work for-him
     'it's he who John works for'

I have grouped indirect objects and benefactives together as they are formally
identical, i.e. they both use the marker bé 'to, for'.

1.4 Clefted instrument.

(8) nè sìbì háàŋ ba Jean wàl ná tòrò
     be knife this emp John cut with chicken
     'it's this knife that John cut the chicken with'

cf. Jean wàl tòrò   ná sìbì háàŋ
     John cut chicken with knife this
     'John cut chicken with this knife'

(9) nè sìbré   ba kara nè gèylí-gé ná
     be green:leaf emp people make life -they with
     'it's green leaf which people live on'

Note that in Lele there is no resumptive pronoun for 'it'; rather, ná 'with'

occurs alone.

1.5 Clefted locative.

(10) nè hìdà háàŋ ba tidi jèn dà mání
      be tree this emp bird stay loc there
      'it's in this tree that the bird lives'

cf. tidi jèn dà hìdà háàŋ ni
     bird stay loc tree this loc
     'the bird lives in this tree'

(11) nè kúní háàŋ ba ŋ-wòl dà mání
      be house this emp I-sleep loc there
      'it's in this house that I sleep'

A clefted locative takes a resumptive pronoun mání 'there' as in the above

two examples.

1.6 Clefted time.

(12) a. nè gìdìrè go tùmbó nè -gé ná sòŋgò
         be moon   rel bees make-they with honey
         'it's during (this) moon (and not another) that bees make honey'

     b. nè gìdìrè go kara hab -gé hòmnyá nèény
         be moon   rel people find-they sickness much
         'it's during (this) moon (and not another) that many people get sick'

(13) a. nè gìdìrè koloŋ ba...
         be moon   that emp
         'it's during that moon (and not another)...'

     b. nè gìdìrè kormo ba...
         be moon boy emp
         'it's during the boy moon (and not another)...' [2]

Notice that in contrastively emphasized time phrases either ba or go can

occur, but not both. The go is used when the time noun has no accompanying

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[2] The Leles divide the year into twelve moons each with their own name,
such as "boy moon", "masculine moon", or the name of a particular plant that
grows well during that moon.

determiner, and the ba cannot be used there. This is the only place where
nè occurs with go .

1.7 Clefted reason. The nè...ba can also be used to emphasize a reason and
can be used to sum up an explanation or a whole story.
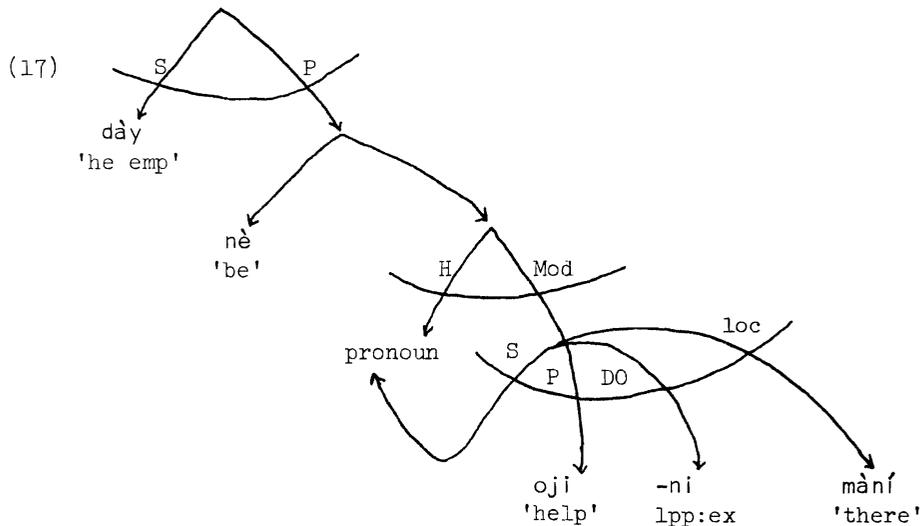
(14)   nè tamá dàgè ná gìrà kolo kègè ba kara   ped nè   yagi   -gé
       be woman they with dog word their emp people all make cultivate-they

       ná   kasa
       with grain
       'it's (because of) a woman's and a dog's words that all people have to
       cultivate grain'

(15)   nè máàní ba tamá lèé ɓòdu ɗé   àlè
       be thus emp woman eat monkey negation completely
       'it's (because of) this that women don't eat monkey'

(16)   nè máàní ba ŋ-nè íle ná ɓey
       be thus emp I-make cry with still
       'it's (because of) this I am still crying'

Example (14) comes from a story of a woman and a dog who complain to God and
make him angry enough to take away all the grain that grew freely on earth.
Example (15) is preceded by a story of how a monkey helped a woman, and (16) is
preceded by an explanation of why a woman was crying. The nè...ba may be used
here as contrastive emphasis on 'reason'; note, however, that there is no ex-
plicit marker in either the emphasized phrase or the main clause, such as the
conjunction kolo 'because', to mark the syntactic function of the emphasized
phrase.

2. Nè...ba and the Elements of a Cleft

       To begin, I should clarify what I mean by the term "cleft". Rather than
attempting any kind of semantic or pragmatic definition, I am following a sug-
gestion by Don Frantz [1982] that so-called cleft and pseudo-cleft constructions
involve relational networks which include an identificational predicate that
equates two nominals, at least one of which includes a relative clause. Thus
the *initial* relations for a sentence such as (1) would be something like the
following:

(17)


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        S              P
      dà y
     'he emp'

              nè
             'be'

                        H        Mod

                                              loc
          pronoun    S
                        P    DO


                    oji      -ni        mà ní
                   'help'   1pp:ex     'there'
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Thus, if the   nè...ba   marking is part of a cleft construction, it is to be ex-
pected that certain elements should be found, such as a copula and a modifying
relative clause. Both are found in Lele. nè clearly acts as a copula in other
sentences.

(18)   tu   nè Kali kèy
       goat be K.   his
       'the goat is Kali's'

(19)   a.   dàdù nè wey gà?
            she be who question
            'who is she?'

       b.   dàdù nè Tese
            she be Tese
            'she's Tese'

(20)   nè   cà   gùmnyá ná   nè tùmadù
       make head big   topic be death
       'to be proud is death'

(21)   kirwe   nè kìrga go dòje   sí ɗé
       panther be animal rel ferocious very
       'the panther is a very ferocious animal'

(22)   a.   háàŋ nè me   gà?
            this be what question
            'what is this?'

       b.   nè maktub
            be book
            'it's a book'

The copula does not behave like a true verb. It doesn't take object pronouns or any tense or aspect markings. (This distinguishes it from a homophonous form, nè 'make'.)[3]

   The nè copula, however, is optional when it occurs initially in a nè...ba sentence. Considering that some languages (Hindi, for example) have only an emphatic marker to mark contrastive emphasis and that it is uncommon to find both the emphatic marker and a copula in Lele, it is not surprising that the nè can be omitted. Lele clefts also have a relative-like construction which is introduced by the "emphatic marker" ba , called an "emphatic marker" to distinguish it from the nè and the true relative marker. Relative clauses in Lele are normally marked with go (masculine or plural antecedent) or do (feminine singular antecedent) as the following examples show:

(23) dày   go sí sùbi jèn ná gèylé ɗè
      he:emp rel believe stay with life already
      'he who believes has life'

(24) tormo do   nè gùyé béè báydíngà
      girl rel:f make work for father:our:incl
      '(a) girl who works for our father'

However, in certain "reduced" relative clauses, i.e. a noun plus a simple qualifier, the go is optional.

(25) a. kúní gùmnyá   'big house'
          house big-sg.

      b. kara gòmnyé   'big people (leaders)'
          people big-pl.

      c. bay go gùmnyá   'big man (leader)'
          man rel big-sg.

(26) a. gìdìrè ba   ná kara goól-gé lagra...
          moon   masculine topic people see -they spider:webs
          'during the masculine moon, people see spider webs...'

      b. gìdìrè go ba   ná hòmnyá   go jàlwá...
          moon   rel masculine topic sickness rel cold
          'during the masculine moon, chills and fever...'

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[3]The nè in Lele has some interesting comparisons with the ne in Hausa, another Chadic language. The ne in Hausa also acts in emphatic constructions and, at times, like a copula. See Schachter [1966].

In addition, there is another optional element in both the relative and the "reduced" relative clause. The subordinator na[4] 'that' is optional as shown in the following examples. A use of na outside the relative clause is shown in example (29).

(27) a. kanya kúrá
          thing good

      b. kanya go kúrá
          thing rel good

      c. kanya go na kúrá   'good thing'
          thing rel that good

      d. *kanya na kúrá
           thing that good

(28) a. dày   go (na) dìgrì tu
          he:emp rel that killed goat
          'he who killed (the) goat'

      b. tu   go (na) dày   dìgrì
          goat rel that he:emp killed
          '(the) goat which he killed'

(29) dày   yàá bé-gè   na   dàdù   èje
      he:emp said to-them that she:emp came
      'he said to them that she came'

Examples (27) and (28) show that na can optionally follow go but doesn't occur in the go relative clause position without go.

In the modifying clause which follows the ba in a nè...ba sentence, the go never occurs (except in a contrastively emphasized time phrase as in 1.6 above), but I have analyzed it as a relative-like construction for several reasons. First of all, we have noticed in examples (25) and (26) above that the go is optional in certain cases, showing that there are relative clauses without an overt go. Secondly, the nè...ba sentences take an optional na like the relative clauses do.[5] Note the following examples:

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[4]This na is to be distinguished from ná, which serves as a preposition and topic marker, among other things.

[5]It may be significant that when nè...ba sentences are translated into French by Leles the relative pronouns qui and que are used, even though the relative marker go is not present in the Lele.

(30) nè nòju go Kumno ba (na) oóm   ná íníŋ
      be love gen God   emp that catches with me
      'it's God's love which is with me'

(31) nè tu hááŋ ba (na) Umage dìgrì
      be goat this emp that U.   killed
      'it's this goat that Umage killed'

Thirdly, as noted in section 1.6 above, the ba and go do not co-occur, but
when the ba is not present, the go is. It is also interesting to note
that the masculine relative marker in Kera, another East Chadic A language,
is bà [Ebert 1979:257].

3. Nè...ba and WH Question

     It has also been noted by Harries-Delisle [1978], Robinson [1974], and
others that there are syntactic and semantic similarities between emphatic
constructions and WH (or information) questions. Without a detailed analysis,
it suffices for my purpose to note that the nè...ba marking is also used to
mark questions where the interrogative occurs sentence initially.

(32) a. dày   nè wey gà?
          he:emp be who question
          'who is he?'

      b. nè wey ba dìgrì tu gà?
          be who emp killed goat question
          'who killed the goat?'

(33) a. gi -nè me gà?
          2ps:m-make what question
          'what are you making?'

      b. nè me ba gi -nè gà?
          be what emp 2ps:m-make question
          'what are you making?'

(34) a. wìngì jè -yí   ná tòrò dà kama ni kolo me gà?
          frog asp-place with end:her loc water loc why what question
          'why does the frog live in water?'

      b. nè kolo me ba wìngì jè -yí   ná tòrò   dà kama ni gà?
          be why what emp frog asp-place with end:her loc water loc question
          'why does the frog live in the water?'

The answers to (32b), (33b), and (34b) all start with a nè...ba as well,
clearly demonstrating the focus function of the nè...ba.

4. Pseudo-clefts

     If nè...ba is a cleft construction, one could hope to find what has
been called a pseudo-cleft as well. Many writers have commented on this rela-
tionship, among them Harries-Delisle [1978] and Akmajian [1970]. While the
nè...ba construction occurs far more frequently, as in English, pseudo-clefts
(the one who...is X) and what I call "reversed" pseudo-clefts (X is the one
who...) are possible. Both use the copula nè and have a modifying relative
clause as expected. The pseudo-cleft structure is less frequent than the "re-
versed" pseudo-cleft. Note that the analysis in (17) has initial relations
parallel to a "reversed" pseudo-cleft. The following examples demonstrate
both pseudo-clefts (39) and the more frequent "reversed" pseudo-clefts (35)-
(38).

(35)   Abraham nè bayndí go jè -wàl kanya kùbàrò
       Abraham be person rel asp-cut thing blood
       'Abraham was the one who sacrificed'

(36)   dày   nè bayndí go nè   kanya ná   dùrò
       he:emp be person rel make thing with straight
       'he is the one who did the right thing'

(37)   kùdùrò   Lot pìnyà nè bayndí go nè   kanya ná   kìrè gàndì
       husband:her Lot even be person rel make thing with road foot:his
       'her husband, Lot, even was the one who did righteous things'

(38)   nè Badering ba nè bayndí go jè -bòy sùgo   kasire
       be Badering emp be person rel asp-pour spears poison
       'it's Badering who's the one who put poison on the spears'

(39)   bayndí go oóm   Kumno dà kulendi   ni nè Abraham
       person rel catches God   loc stomach:his loc be Abraham
       'the one who worships God is Abraham'

Example (38) is interesting in that there is added contrastive emphasis on
Badering. If nè...ba is a cleft, then a cleft can be embedded in a pseudo-
cleft.

5. Alternative Order

     Up until this point all emphasized constituents marked with nè...ba
have occurred sentence-initially. Even when an oblique or object is being
emphasized, it can occur in this position as in sections 1.2 through 1.7
above. However, the emphasized constituent, if an object, locative or instru-

ment oblique can come in its normal position after the verb as in examples
(40)-(46).

(40) kara   wàl-gé   nè kasa go an   dà cáàní ba dì -gé
     people cut-they be grain rel grew loc bush emp ate-they
     'the people cut the grain which grew in the bush (and not something
      else) which they ate'

(41) Umage dìgrì nè tu   háàŋ
     Umage killed be goat this
     'Umage killed this goat (not another one)'

(42) tidi jèn dà nè hìdà háàŋ ni
     bird stay loc be tree this loc
     '(the) bird lives in this tree (not another)'

(43) dày   èje hab -du dà nè túgní
     he:emp come find-her loc be home
     'he comes and finds her at home (not somewhere else)'

(44) Jean wàl tòrò   ná nè sìbì háàŋ
     John cut chicken with be knife this
     'John cut (the) chicken with this knife (not another)'

(45) day   dèr gùnyé   bé nè kara
     he:emp told folk:stories to be people
     'he told folk stories to (these) people'

(46) ŋ-nè gùyé bé nè kara
     I-make work for be people
     'I work for (these) people'

Notice that the ba is present in (40) but not in (41) through (46). This is
because the ba cannot occur sentence finally. If an additional phrase is
added onto these sentences, then the ba is present. Notice example (47),
which adds on to example (41), and (48), which adds on to (42):

(47) Umage dìgrì nè tu   háàŋ ba béè kara
     Umage killed be goat this emp for people
     'Umage killed this goat for the people'

(48) tidi jèn dà nè hìdà háàŋ ni ba kolo óóme gúùgú
     bird stay loc be tree this loc emp to catch crickets
   '(the) bird is in the tree in order to catch crickets'

At present I don't have a good explanation as to why it is possible to embed
an emphasized constituent in this fashion. There doesn't seem to be any
great semantic difference between a sentence with an initial nè...ba and
one that occurs within the clause. The initial nè...ba is used in the re-
sponse to a question with nè...ba , as I have mentioned in section 3 above.

Perhaps further study in discourse will uncover pragmatic differences between the two. In the meantime, it seems that the nè...ba used for clefting can also be used to focus on almost any constituent in the sentence without fronting it.

6. Alternative Analysis

There is an alternative analysis possible in which the constituent that is emphasized by the nè...ba is not the initial subject, but rather, the relative clause is the initial subject, as shown in (49). The initial relations for this analysis are as follows (again diagramming (1)):

(49)
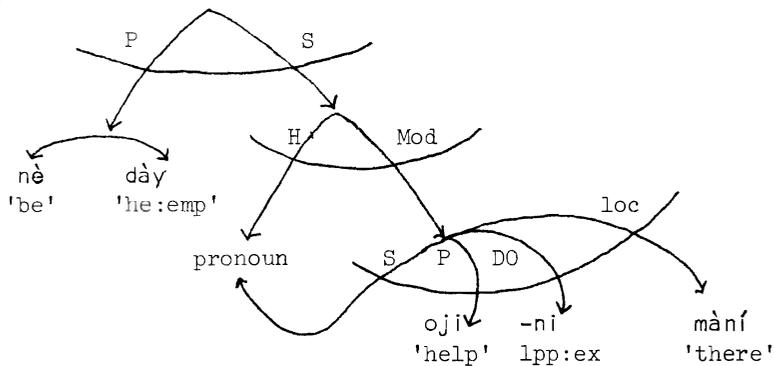
This analysis has the advantage that, unlike (17), there are no discontinuous constituents. Note that in (17) the dày 'he' is not a constituent of the predicate, yet occurs between two elements of the predicate in the surface structure. The diagram in (49) also has initial relations parallel to those of the following sentence:

(50) (nè) kanya kúrá go (na) gi -èje
      be thing good rel that 2ps:m-come
      'it's good that you came'

Notice that in (50) the sentence initial nè is optional as in the nè...ba sentences and the na is also optional (probably due to the relative clause marker), as in the nè...ba sentences. At this moment, I don't have any more evidence to support either analysis. Perhaps in the future it will be possible for one analysis to cover all four sentences in Lele: the nè...ba , pseudo-clefts, "reversed" pseudo-clefts, and sentences like (50).

7. Summary

The nè...ba marking in Lele can be used to front any nominal in the
sentence (subject, direct object, indirect object, etc.) and can be syntactic-
ally demonstrated to be cleft with a copula and modifying relative clause.
The nè...ba also marks certain questions and their answers, as well as mark-
ing almost any nominal *within* the sentence without fronting it. Relationships
between the nè...ba , pseudo-clefts and "reversed" pseudo-clefts have been
noted, but there is room for more work in this area, as well as exploring the
discourse functions of nè...ba as it occurs initially and within the sentence.

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