NE...BA MARKING IN LELE:
A CLEFT CONSTRUCTION?*

Pamela Simons
The Evangelical Alliance Mission (Chad)

NE...ba marking in Lele is used for contrastive emphasis and generally the emphasize constituent is fronted when the ne...ba is used. Sentences with a fronted ne...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 ne...ba marking.

0. Introduction


The ne...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 ne or ba. I will first demonstrate the support for calling ne...ba a cleft construction, along with the use of the ne...ba, then discuss alternative orderings and an alternative analysis.

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

*Many thanks to Don Frantz and Russell Schuh for their advice, encouragement and editorial help.
These first four sections are mainly descriptive, while in the last two sections, some problems are presented. In section 5 alternative orderings are shown, and in section 6 an alternative analysis of the initial grammatical relations involved in the *né...ba* sentences is discussed.

1. **Contrastive Emphasis as Cleft and its Use in Lele**

   The use of the *né...ba* marking, as I have mentioned, is for contrastive emphasis. For example,¹

   (1) *né dàdy ba jè-øjì -ni dà mânl*
   
   *be he:emp emp asp-help-lpp:ex loc there*
   
   'it's he who is helping us there' (not someone else)

   Harries-Delisle [1978] hypothesizes that such contrastively emphasized constituents are derived from cleft constructions. While she argues for such a derivation no matter what the surface realization of the contrastive emphasis, a hypothesis I do not intend to defend, her work clearly should steer an investigator to consider an analysis of Lele *né...ba* as a cleft construction. In addition, Maxwell [1981] calls very similar constructions cleft in Kinyarwanda, a Bantu language.

   The *né...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) *né nóju go Kumno ba oöm nà ínìg*
   
   *be love gen God emp catches with me*
   
   'it's God's love which is with me'

   cf. *nóju go Kumno oöm nà ínìg*
   
   *love gen God catches with me*
   
   'God's love is with me'

---

¹I 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 hànn ba Umage dìgrì
be goat this emp U. killed
'it's this goat which Umage killed'

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

(4) nè kàrè hànn ba ge -lëè
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 hànn 'this' is used. It is necessary to use some sort of determiner when emphasizing 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 kàra hànn ba Jean dèr bé-gè gûnyé
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 gûyé bëè-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 bè 'to, for'.

1.4 Clefted instrument.

(8) nè sìbì hànn ba Jean wål nà tòrò
be knife this emp John cut with chicken
'it's this knife that John cut the chicken with'

cf. Jean wål tòrò nà sìbì hànn
John cut chicken with knife this
'John cut chicken with this knife'
(9) nè sibré ba kara nè géyli-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 hidà háaŋ ba tidi jën dá màní
be tree this emp bird stay loc there
"it's in this tree that the bird lives"

cf. tidi jën dá hidà háaŋ ni
bird stay loc tree this loc
"the bird lives in this tree"

(11) nè küní háaŋ ba ƞ-wól dá màní
be house this emp I-sleep loc there
"it's in this house that I sleep"

A clefted locative takes a resumptive pronoun màní 'there' as in the above two examples.

1.6 Clefted time.

(12) a. nè gidrê go tumbó nè -gé ná sóngò
be moon rel bees make-they with honey
"it's during (this) moon (and not another) that bees make honey"

b. nè gidrê go kara hāb -gé hōmnyá nêény
be moon rel people find-they sickness much
"it's during (this) moon (and not another) that many people get sick"

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

b. nè gidrê kormo ba...
be moon boy emp
"it's during the boy moon (and not another)...

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

---

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.
1.7 Clefted reason. The \( \text{nè...ba} \) can also be used to emphasize a reason and can be used to sum up an explanation or a whole story.

(14) \( \text{né tamá đàgè ná gírà kòlo kêgè ba kara ped nè yagi } -\text{gé} \)  
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) \( \text{nè mànní ba tamá lèè bòdu dè àlè} \)  
be thus emp woman eat monkey negation completely  
'it's (because of) this that women don't eat monkey'

(16) \( \text{nè mànní ba } \eta-nè íle ná ñey} \)  
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 \( \text{nè...ba} \) may be used here as contrastive emphasis on 'reason'; note, however, that there is no explicit marker in either the emphasized phrase or the main clause, such as the conjunction \( \text{kòlo} \) 'because', to mark the syntactic function of the emphasized phrase.

2. \( \text{nè...ba} \) 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 suggestion 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:
Thus, if the nè...ba marking is part of a cleft construction, it is to be expected 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 key
goat be K. his 'the goat is Kali's'

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

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

(20) nè cà gùmnyâ nè nè tûmadû
make head big topic be death 'to be proud is death'

(21) kirwe nè kìrga go dôje sì dé
panther be animal rel ferocious very 'the panther is a very ferocious animal'

(22) a. háng nè me gâ?
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:

\[(23)\] day go sì sùbi jèn nà gèylé dè he:emp rel believe stay with life already 'he who believes has life'

\[(24)\] tormo do nè gùyé bëè båydìngå 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.

\[(25a)\] kúñí gùmnyá 'big house'

house big-sg.

\[(25b)\] kara gùmnyé 'big people (leaders)'

people big-pl.

\[(25c)\] båy go gùmnyá 'big man (leader)'

man rel big-sg.

\[(26a)\] gîlîrè ba nà kara goóí-gé lagra...

moon masculine topic people see -they spider:webs 'during the masculine moon, people see spider webs...'

\[(26b)\] gîlîrè go ba nà hîmnyá go jàlwå...

moon rel masculine topic sickness rel cold 'during the masculine moon, chills and fever...'

---

\(^3\) 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 '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
    thing rel that good
  d. *kanya na kúrá
    thing that good

(28) a. dày go (na) d'grl tu
    he:emp rel that killed goat
    'he who killed (the) goat'
  b. tu go (na) d'grl
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.\footnote{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.} Note the following examples:

\footnote{This na is to be distinguished from ná, which serves as a preposition and topic marker, among other things.}
(30) nè nòju go Kumno ba (na) o'óm ná ìní́́́
be love gen God emp that catches with me
'it's God's love which is with me'

(31) nè tu hánn ba (na) Umage digrí́
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 ba [Ebert 1979:257].

3. Nè...ba and WH Question

It has also been noted by Harries-Delisle [1978J, Robinson [1974J, 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. dàuy nè wey gà?
he:emp be who question
'who is he?'

b. nè wey ba digrí́ 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. wìngl jè -yif 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 wìngl jè -yif 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 relationship, 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 "reversed" 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 dùró
    he:emp be person rel make thing with straight
    'he is the one who did the right thing'

(37) kùdùró Lot pinyà nè bayndí go nè kanya ná kírè gândi
    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 sugo 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 ku lèndi 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-
Ne...ba Marking in Lele

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

(40) kara wål-gé nè kesa go an dà cáâní ba d’-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 d’grl nè tu háăng
Umage killed be goat this
'Umage killed this goat (not another one)'

(42) tidi jën dà nè hídà háăng ni
bird stay loc be tree this loc
'(the) bird lives in this tree (not another)'

(43) dày âje 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 írò dà nè sìlî háăng
John cut chicken with be knife this
'John cut (the) chicken with this knife (not another)'

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

(46) ñ-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 d’grl nè tu háăng ba béè kara
Umage killed be goat this emp for people
'Umage killed this goat for the people'

(48) tidi jën dà nè hídà háăng ni ba koko dàmë guggú
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 response 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 kûrà go (nà) 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 syntactically demonstrated to be cleft with a copula and modifying relative clause. The nè...ba also marks certain questions and their answers, as well as marking 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.

REFERENCES


