

# Focus Constructions in Lamnso'

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## 1. Introduction

This paper explores the characteristics and syntactic behavior of focus constructions in Lamnso'. Lamnso', a language with a fairly rigidly SVO order, shows asymmetries in the way verbal arguments are focused. Subjects are focused post-verbally (in-situ) while non-subjects are focused both pre-verbally (ex-situ) and post-verbally (in-situ).

I propose that there are two domains for encoding focus in Lamnso'; post-verbal focusing, which will be argued to be an instance of in-situ focus (inside  $\nu$ P), and pre-verbal focusing, which will be argued to be a high focus position (in the CP periphery). The former is used to encode contrastive focus while the latter is used to mark new information focus. Since wh-elements and focus constructions exhibit the same syntactic properties and follow the same restrictions, this paper also examines the way verbal arguments are questioned.

## 2. Wh-question Formation and Focus Constructions in Lamnso'

In this section, I first examine the positions in which wh-elements can appear in questions and then show how these positions are also used for focused elements. Since there is an asymmetry in the way verbal arguments are questioned and focused, subjects and non-subjects are dealt with in different sections.

### 2.1. In-Situ Wh-questions and In-Situ Focus: Non-subjects

In (1 a, b, c) the direct object, indirect object and adjunct are questioned in-situ respectively.

- (1) a. Silayuv ki-fó ká i Ben jóni  
Silayuv PST-give what to Ben yesterday  
'What did Silayuv give to Ben yesterday?'  
b. Silayuv ki-fó ŋua i lá jóni  
Silayuv PST-give book to who yesterday  
'Who did Silayuv give the book to?'  
c. Silayuv ki-fó ŋua i Ben yanká  
Silayuv PST-give book to Ben when  
'When did Silayuv give the book to Ben?'

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Non-subjects when questioned in-situ, are optionally preceded by the contrastive morpheme *a 'but'*, and the focus marker *dzə 'be'*.

- (2) Silayuv ki-fó [ a dzə **ká**] i Ben jóni  
 Silayuv PST-give but FM what to Ben yesterday  
 'What did Silayuv give to Ben yesterday?'

The same pattern is observed in focus constructions when non-subjects are focused. However, in this case, the focus marker *dzə 'be'*<sup>1</sup> and the contrastive morpheme *a 'but'* obligatorily precede the focused element.

- (3) a. m kój [ a dzə **fər wom**]  
 1sg like but FM sister 1sg  
 'I like MY SISTER.'
- b. m ki-jén wun [ a dzə **lán**]  
 1sg PST-see 3sg but FM today  
 'I saw her TODAY.'

In (3a) and (3b), the object and the adjunct are contrastively focused in the post-verbal position, and they are both associated with the focus marker and the contrastive morpheme *a 'but'*. Notice that there is no apparent change in the word order, the sentence has S-V-O- adjunct order. This type of focusing is not unique to Lamnso' since a number of Bantu languages have been reported to demonstrate the so called immediate after verb (IAV) focus (Hyman 2006). Some scholars have suggested a low FocP under an articulated IP region along the lines of Belletti (2004) for this post-verbal focusing (Aboh 2007). However, the low focus position cannot account for Lamnso' data since we do not get the right word order for indirect objects and adjuncts with that analysis. Instead, I propose that non-subjects (objects and adjuncts) in Lamnso' remain in their merge position to mark contrastive focus. In this case, the copula *dzə 'be'* which has both verbal and focal features<sup>1</sup>, is merged as the head of a functional projection above the non-subject focused element. Therefore, the non-subject focused elements remain in their merge position and receive their focus interpretation from the head of the functional projection in a head-complement relationship. This is shown in the following structure:

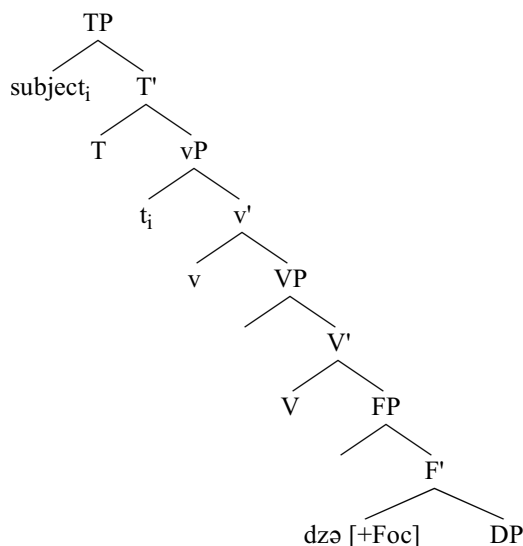
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<sup>1</sup> Based on its distribution, *dzə 'be'* also functions as a copula in the language. However, its occurrence is restricted to nominal predications (i.e. it is only followed by nominal or pronominal constituents). Consider:

- (i)
- a. dzə mo tǽja  
 BE 1sg. Acc teacher  
 'I am **the teacher**.'
- b. fěni lumi  
 here hot  
 'It is hot in here.'
- \*c. fěni dzə lumi  
 here BE hot  
 'It is hot in here.'

(ia) is used in a context where there is an emphasis on the subject of the clause which is the evidence for the emphatic nature of this copula. It is normally used in an answer to a question like 'Who is the teacher of this class?'. Since *dzə 'be'* occurs in both focus constructions and in structures like the one in (ia), I propose that *dzə 'be'* is an emphatic copula which normally functions as a focus marker, and its presence triggers a focus interpretation in this language. Moreover, (ib) and (ic) show that this copula cannot occur in adjectival predications. Its combination is possible with both in-situ and ex-situ focus constituents and wh-elements, and it is not restricted to a particular position as it can occur with ex-situ and in-situ focus.

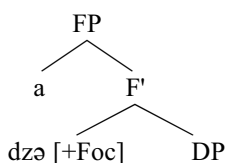
(4)



In the above structure, the DP (i.e., direct object) remains in its merge position (in-situ), and *dzə* ‘be’ which is merged as the head of a FP has an interpretable [+Foc]-feature. Hence, the head and the DP enter into a head-complement relation and the in-situ DP receives its focus interpretation from the head. The same holds for indirect objects and adjuncts. Since this type of focusing encodes contrastive focus, the DP also needs to receive its contrastive interpretation from the head. As will be shown in section (3), the same focus marker is used with ex-situ focus constrictions in sentence initial position to mark new information focus. However, the contrastive morpheme is only used with contrastively in-situ focused elements.

To treat focus in a unified manner in the language, I propose that Lamnso’ uses the same morphology (i.e., *dzə* ‘be’), but distinct functional projections for marking different types of focus. This means that there are two different functional projections encoding focus: one which assigns focus interpretation to in-situ non-subjects, and one which assigns new information focus to the ex-situ non-subjects when they are focused. In the in-situ case, the in-situ head supplements the distinction with other morphology, that is, when non-subjects are contrastively focused, the specific type of focus is signaled by the specifier which is filled by the morpheme *a* ‘but’ as in (5) below. This is a Spec-Head agreement process.

(5)



Therefore, Lamnso’ makes use of the same general morphology (i.e., the use of the copula *dzə* ‘be’) to mark focus. However, its subtypes are indicated by distinct morphology of non heads (i.e., the presence of *a* ‘but’ in the specifier). Hence, when the contrastive head is used, the specifier also appears to signal the contrastive head. As a result of this, the distinction is spelled out on the specifier, because the head does not have distinct morphological realizations for distinct type of focus. Therefore, when the spec is merged, it undergoes an agreement process with the head and receives the contrastive focus features and spells them out. In ex-situ focus (high focus position), the spec of the FocP is filled with the focused element while in in-situ focus the spec of the functional projection above the focused elements is filled with the morpheme *a* ‘but’.

## 2.2. *In-Situ Wh-questions and In-Situ Focus: Subjects*

As well as objects and adjuncts, subjects remain in-situ in Lamnso' when questioned. Consider the following example:

### (6) Subject wh-element

ki-fó      **lá**      ŋua    i    Ben    jóni  
 PST-give who    book to Ben    yesterday  
 'Who gave the book to Ben?'

The same pattern holds for focused subjects. Consider (7):

(7)    ki-fó      **Silayuv**    ŋua    i    Ben  
 PST-give Silayuv    book to Ben  
 'SILAYUV gave the book to Ben.'

In (6) and (7), it seems that the wh-subject is not questioned in the derived subject position (i.e., Spec TP). Instead, the wh-element is in the post-verbal position, which is the non-canonical position for subjects. In order to account for this placement of focused subjects and subject wh-elements in Lamnso', I propose that subjects in Lamnso' remain in their merge position (i.e., Spec  $\nu$ P) when questioned or focused and the VSO order is the result of the V-to-T movement.

(8)                    [ TP [ T' ki-jun<sub>i</sub> [ $\nu$ P **lá** [ $\nu'$  t<sub>i</sub> [ $\nu$ P [ $\nu'$  t<sub>i</sub> ŋua]

In the above structure the wh-element is in the Spec  $\nu$ P, which is the first merge position for subjects. The verb has moved to the head of TP to satisfy the EPP feature.<sup>2</sup> This restriction is not unique to Lamnso' - most of Bantu languages show this restriction. Sabel (2006), in his analysis of wh-questions and focus construction in Zulu, a Bantu language spoken in South Africa, shows that this language has the \**wh-in-Spec TP* restriction. The Lamnso' sentence in (9a) is ungrammatical because of the violation of this restriction.

### (9) a. wh-element in Spec TP

\***lá**      ki-fó      ŋua    i    Ben  
 who    PST-give book to Ben  
 'Who gave the book to Ben?'

### b. Wh-element in first merge position

ki-fó      **lá**      ŋua    i    Ben  
 PST-give    who    book to Ben  
 'Who gave the book to Ben?'

<sup>2</sup> This is similar to an analysis of Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou (1995,1998,1999) who propose that in V-type EPP languages, V-raising (i.e., overt movement of the verb to T) is sufficient to check the EPP feature. Therefore, the post-verbal subject is  $\nu$ P internal and the movement of the verb and VSO order resemble verb raising and subject inversion which is observable in Romance and Germanic languages (Demuth and Harford, 1999). However, in this work, I will be assuming that V-to-T movement is a last resort strategy to save a structure in Lamnso'.

As Sabel argues, the \**Wh-in Spec TP* is a parameterized property, since it is well-known that languages allow for *wh*-elements to appear in *Spec TP*. He further argues that this restriction is operative in languages other than Zulu. For example, *wh*-subjects are excluded from occurring in *Spec TP* in other Bantu languages including Kinyarwanda (Maxwell 1981), Dzamba (Bokamba 1976) and Kitharaka (Muriungi 2003), and also in Austronesian languages such as Malagasy, Tagalog and Javanese, which are optional *wh-in situ* languages like Zulu. The same restriction holds for focused subjects; that is subjects cannot appear in *Spec TP* when focused.

(10) a. Focused subject in *Spec TP*

\***Silayuv** ki-fó    ŋua    i Ben  
 Silayuv PST-give book to Ben  
 ‘SILAYUV gave the book to Ben.’

b. Focused subject in first merge position

ki-fó    **Silayuv** ŋua    i Ben  
 PST-give Silayuv book to Ben  
 ‘SILAYUV gave the book to Ben.’

### 3. Ex-Situ *Wh*-questions and Focus constructions

This section deals with *wh-ex-situ* questions and how they parallel *ex-situ* focus constructions in Lamnso’. As well as being questioned post-verbally, non-subjects (objects and adjuncts) can also be questioned and focused in sentence initial position. However, subjects are never questioned or focused *ex-situ*. In this case, Lamnso’ behaves like an optional fronting language because it allows both *wh-situ* and *wh-fronting* (Cheng, 1991).

The following examples exhibit the occurrence of non-subject *wh*-elements in sentence initial position. Unlike *in-situ* non-subject *wh*-elements that can be optionally preceded by the focus marker, *ex-situ* non-subject *wh*-elements are always associated with the focus marker *dzə*’be’, which appears to the left of the *wh*-element.

(11) a. [dzə **ká**] wo a ki-ji  
 FM what that 2sg PST- eat  
 ‘What did you eat?’

b. [dzə **yanká**] wo a ki-du i waj  
 FM when that 2sg PST- go to market  
 ‘When did you go to the market?’

In (11a), the object is questioned in sentence-initial position, and the focus marker *dzə*’be’ is to the left of the *wh*-element. Both objects and adjuncts can be focused in this position as well, with the focus marker *dzə*’be’ appearing to the left of the focused element. Some examples are given in (12):

(12) a. [dzə **orén**] wo m ki-ji  
 FM orange that 1sg PST- eat  
 I ate the ORANGE

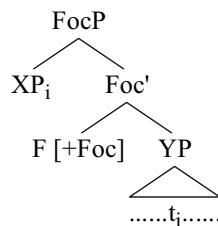
b. [dzə **lán**] wo m ki-du i waj  
 FM today that 1sg PST- go to market  
 I went to the market TODAY.

The fronted object or adjunct in the above focus construction encodes new information focus. For this placement of non-subjects in sentence initial position, I develop an account based on the analysis of the

focus phrase discussed in Kiss (1998), and the treatment of cleft constructions proposed in (Rizzi 1997). I argue that the cleft analysis is not compatible with Lamnso' data. Instead the data clearly support the focus phrase analysis of Kiss (1998).

Adopting Brody's proposal (1990, 1995), based on Hungarian and English data, Kiss argues that identificational (contrastive) focus occupies the specifier position of a functional projection called focus phrase (FocP). The head of the FocP is an abstract functional head, which may have a strong V feature, triggering V-to-F movement. The complement of F is the sentence over which the identificational focus takes scope. The presence of FocP in a clause is constrained by the focus criterion, which requires that the specifier of FocP contain a [+Foc] phrase [an identificational focus], and that all [+Foc] phrases be in the specifier of the projection of an F head.

(13)



Based on Kiss's proposal, I argue for the existence of a focus phrase in the clausal left periphery where non-subject wh-elements and focus constructions can check their [+Foc]-feature in Lamnso'. This focus phrase is located in the CP periphery and its head is obligatorily filled with the copula *dzə*'be', which functions as a focus maker in this language. The uninterpretable [+Foc]-feature on this head is strong and triggers the movement of non-subject wh-elements and focused elements to its specifier (i.e., Spec FocP). Consider the structure in (14) for (12a):

(14)

$$[_{\text{FocP}} \text{or}\acute{\text{e}}\text{n}_k [_{\text{Foc}'} \text{dz}\acute{\text{a}} [_{\text{CP}} [_{\text{C}'} \text{w}\acute{\text{o}} [_{\text{TP}} \text{m}_i [_{\text{T}'} \text{k}\acute{\text{i}} [_{\text{VP}} \text{t}_i [_{\text{V}'} \text{j}\acute{\text{j}}_j [_{\text{VP}} [_{\text{V}'} \text{t}_j \text{t}_k ]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]]$$

In the above structure, *orén* 'orange' the object has moved into the Spec FocP where it can check its [+Foc]-feature against the head of the phrase which is obligatorily filled with the focus marker. This movement is an instance of A-bar movement (i.e., the focused XP is moved from its merge position to the specifier of a focus phrase).<sup>3</sup>

Based on the data so far, it seems Lamnso' is different from Hungarian and English in several ways. First, ex-situ focus in Lamnso' does not encode contrastive focus, but new information focus. Second, in Lamnso' ex-situ focus constituents are obligatorily associated with a focus marker while in Hungarian this is not the case. Third, new information focus in Lamnso' involves the syntactic movement of the focused element to the clausal left periphery while in Hungarian this type of focus is encoded in-situ in the post-verbal position.

As mentioned earlier, there are two types of analyses with regard to this type of movement: a cleft analysis, and a focus phrase analysis (Kiss, 1998). The structure in (15) exhibits Focus phrase movement:

(15)

$$[ \text{FocP} \text{XP}_i \dots [ \text{IP} \dots t_i \dots ] ]$$

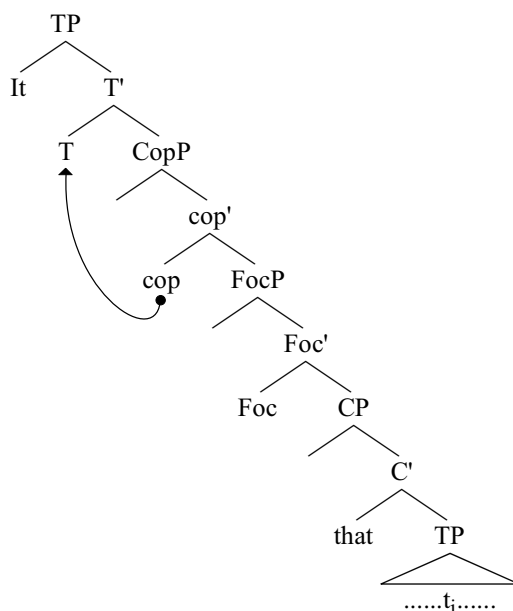
Focus movement

<sup>3</sup> In (14), the focused element precedes the focus marker. I propose that this focus marker is prefixed to the left of the focused element by a post-syntactic operation. The purpose of this prefixation is to get the right word order. Moreover, with this operation, we have the same structure in both in-situ and ex-situ focus constructions, that is the focus marker precedes the focused element.

On the other hand, cleft constructions have a bi-clausal structure<sup>4</sup>. We would have a structure such as in (16) for the English sentence with a cleft in (17):

(16) It was Sarah that won the game.

(17)



Lamnso' data are not compatible with the cleft analysis for the two reasons discussed below. Taking the structure of the ex-situ focus (15) into consideration, we have the following form for ex-situ focus in Lamnso':

(18) Focus Marker > Focused XP > complementizer > clause

As seen above, the structure in Lamnso' is different from that of the cleft construction since the copula in Lamnso' is not preceded by 'it'. It is true that some languages like Irish have so-called reduced clefts (Cheng, 1991), but Irish is a pro-drop language and in reduced clefts both the expletive and the copula are dropped. However, Lamnso' is not a pro-drop language (Mbiydzennyuy Sala1999) and dropping an expletive in Lamnso' leads to ungrammaticality. This is shown in the example below:

(19) a. ki ki? mo Silayuv koŋ Ben  
It seems as/like Silayuv likes Ben  
'It seems that Silayuv likes Ben.'

\*b. ki? mo Silayuv koŋ Ben  
seems as/like Silayuv likes Ben  
'It seems that Silayuv likes Ben.'

Furthermore, Kiss (1998) argues that cleft constructions trigger exhaustivity in most languages, but this is not the case in Lamnso'. Exhaustivity means that the focused element picks out every individual identified with the variable in the open proposition. It is contrasted with new information focus which has no obligatory exhaustivity effect. Unlike most other languages, in Lamnso' the exhaustivity effect is encoded inside  $\nu$ P rather than in the left periphery (CP periphery). It should be mentioned that both cleft constructions and Focus Projections have the same function: to mark a constituent as focused.

<sup>4</sup> There is much debate about the structure of clefts in the literature. However, I adopt the structure proposed in Chung-hye Han & Nancy Hedberg 2008 for the purpose of this work.

In addition to the two differences mentioned above, there is also a restriction on the type of XP that can occupy this high focus position. This position is restricted to referential NPs (i.e., proper names and definite noun phrases) in Lamnso'. Interestingly, Kiss in her analysis of focus phrase movement mentions such a restriction. In her focus phrase analysis restrictions are placed on the constituent that can occupy the focus position (Spec, FocP). This position is restricted to referential NPs, quantificational and predicational NPs. Moreover, that clauses, infinitival clauses, VPs and predicative NPs/AdjPs must also be excluded (Kiss, 1998:261). However, for the cleft analysis, there are fewer restrictions, and almost every XP can be focused in a cleft construction. This restriction also supports the claim for the existence of the high FocP in Lamnso'.

It seems the focus phrase analysis is compatible with the Lamnso' data, whereas a cleft analysis introduces problems. Therefore, I propose that there is a high focus projection (Kiss, 1998) in this language, and the head of this projection is filled by the copula *dzə* 'be', which functions as a focus marker and triggers the movement of the focused XPs in to its Spec.

#### 4. The Interaction between Wh-elements and Focus Constructions

This section discusses the relation between wh-elements and focus constructions in Lamnso. Adopting Sabel's (1998, 2000, 2006) analysis of wh-elements and focus constructions, I propose that the fronting of non-subject wh-elements in Lamnso' is a result of a strong [+Foc]-feature which is located in the head of the Focus P in the CP domain. The central idea of Sabel's analysis is that wh-phrases do not check only [+wh]-features, but also [+focus]-features. Whereas a [+wh]-feature is always located in the position where the wh-phrase takes its scope (i.e. in  $C^0$ ), a [+focus]-feature may occur in  $C^0$ , but also in  $Foc^0$ , the head of a focus phrase FocP, in some languages. Therefore, based on Sabel's analysis, we would have the structure in (20) for (11a).

(20) [<sub>FocP</sub> **ká** [<sub>Foc'</sub> *dzə* [<sub>CP</sub> [<sub>C'</sub> *wo* [<sub>TP</sub> *a<sub>i</sub>* [<sub>T'</sub> *ki* [<sub>VP</sub> *t<sub>i</sub>* [<sub>V'</sub> *j<sub>j</sub>* [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>V'</sub> *t<sub>j</sub>* *t<sub>k</sub>*]]]]]]]]]]]]]

Sabel also argues that the position of wh-words is universally determined by properties of the [+wh]- and the [+focus]-features and that typological variation with respect to wh-questions in the languages of the world is determined by two parameters: (i) which of the two features ( [+wh] or [+focus] ) is strong and hence triggers wh-movement in a language, and (ii) which specifier (Spec CP or Spec FocP) serves as the position in which a strong [+focus]-feature would be checked in a language. Furthermore, the possibility of having both wh-ex situ and wh- in situ in a language can be explained by the assumption that the strong feature which triggers wh- movement is optionally selected for by the numeration.

The way parameter (i) is set in a language can be determined by examining the properties of embedded questions, where  $C^0$  carries a [+wh]-feature due to the selectional properties of the matrix verb. Moreover, if a language has a strong [+wh]-feature, this feature is obligatorily selected by the matrix verb in an embedded question, even if the strong [+wh]-feature is otherwise optional. Therefore, if a language has wh-in situ in embedded questions (Type-A language), this means that the [+wh]-feature is always weak in this language, and hence need not be checked. In contrast, if wh-in situ is *not* possible in embedded questions (as in Type B-languages), then it follows that the [+wh]-feature is strong and therefore requires a wh-phrase in Spec CP in order to be checked. Consider (21):

(21)      *a    kwa    wo    Silayuv    ki-fó    ká    i    Ben    jóni*  
           2sg think that Silayuv PST-give what to Ben yesterday  
           'What do you think Silayuv gave to Ben yesterday?'

As shown in (21), Lamnso' allows for wh-in situ in embedded questions. Hence, based on Sabel's distinction, Lamnso' is a Type-A Language, and the [+wh]-feature in this language is weak. Since Lamnso' exhibits wh-ex situ as well, this alternative must be triggered by an optionally realized strong [+focus]-feature.



As a general conclusion, we note that Lamnso' fits well into the typological class of optional wh-movement languages such as Babine-Witsuwit'en, Iraqi Arabic, and Malagasy (Sabel 2006), which all construct wh-ex-situ as a result of checking a strong [+focus]-feature. Lamnso' also provides further evidence for the claim that typological variation with respect to wh-questions in the languages of the world is determined by two parameters: (i) which of the two features ([+wh] or [+focus]) triggers wh-movement in a language, and (ii) which specifier (Spec CP or Spec FocP) serves as the position in which a strong [+focus]-feature would be checked in a language.

## 5. Focused Wh-phrases

The interaction between wh-elements and focus constructions can also be accounted for with regard to Aboh's analysis of wh-phrases. Aboh (2004) argues that there are two types of wh-phrases cross-linguistically: focused wh-elements versus non-focused wh-elements. He defines the focused wh-elements as those wh-phrases which are displaced to a designated focus position where they may co-occur with a focus marker. Non-focused wh-phrases, on the other hand, represent wh-phrases that occur in positions other than the focus position. With regard to the syntax, Aboh suggests that focused wh-phrases and non-focused wh-phrases require different formal licensing conditions, and therefore target different structural positions. Therefore, wh-elements of different types require different information structures. In question-answer pairs, for instance, focused wh-phrases require an answer containing a focus marked constituent, unlike non-focused wh-phrases, which do not seem to impose such a restriction on the information for which the comment holds. Adopting the distinction in (Aboh 2006) of the two types of wh-phases, and considering the data discussed so far, it seems wh-elements in Lamnso' are focused wh-phrases and they always require a focused element in the answer. This is exemplified in (22):

(22) Question: a. dzə lá wo a kóŋ-i  
 FM who that 2sg like-ASP  
 'WHO do you like?'

Response: b. dzə Ben wo m kóŋ-i  
 FM Ben that 1sg like-ASP  
 'I like BEN.'

In (22a), the wh-elements occur in a focus position. (22b) is the only possible answer to (22a). This clearly shows that a focused wh-phrase requires a focused element in the answer.

In this section, I showed the relation between wh-phrases and focused elements in Lamnso'. I showed that wh-phrases in Lamnso' are focused wh-phrases and trigger a focused element in their answers.

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edited by Bruce Connell  
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