Marked topics and contrast in Avatime

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Avatime

- Niger-Congo – Kwa – Ghana-Togo Mountain
- Spoken in Ghana
- Tone language, three level tones (L, M, H)
- Noun class system
- Obligatory subject marking on verb
- SVO word order
- Optional focus marking by fronting + focus marker (high tone)
- Left dislocation is frequent
Contrastive topics

**Topic**: What the sentence is about. (eg. Reinhard 1982)

**Contrastive topic**:  
- A topic that evokes alternative topics. (eg. Krifka 2007; Büring 2003; Vallduvi & Vilkuna 1998)

- Prince (1998: 290-291): "contrast is not a primitive notion but rather arises when alternate members of some salient set are evoked and, most importantly, when there is felt to be a salient opposition in what is predicated of them".
Contrastive topics

(1)  A: What do your siblings do?  
     B: My SISTER studies MEDICINE, and my BROTHER is working on a FREIGHT SHIP.

Contrastive topics: sister vs. brother
Opposition in what is predicated of them (their different occupations)
Avatime particles

1. Contrastive *kɔ ‘as for’ (CTR1)
2. Additive *tsyɛ ‘also/too’ (ADD)

- Follow associate
- Associate usually NP, most often subject or left dislocated
- tsyɛ can be used clause-finally (not discussed here)
The particle ᵈₖ

(2) Context: three brothers are sleeping when their house catches fire. The first two do not notice the fire and stay asleep.

\[ \text{Config: third-DEF, CON, C}_1\text{S-be, C}_1\text{S-young.man-DEF, last-CM} \]

\[ \text{ye, } \text{kọ, } a-yọ \]

"The third one who was the last young man, as for him, he stood up."

(FinSto_100614_WE 24)

Alternatives: third brother vs. other two brothers
Opposition: standing up vs. sleeping
The particle ko

(3) o kîle gi agi ɔ-katsie xunyô e-tsêe
    oh how CON C1S-old.man CTR2 C1S-die
xé ɔ-fetê-ne ɔ-dó ye mè
and C2S-spirit-DEF C2S-move.out:LOC C1S inside
ko àtrodzê ko ɔ-î-tse
so spider CTR1 C1S-NEG-NEG-die

‘Oh, how the old man died and his spirit left him. As for spider, he didn’t die.’

(Kadzidiza_110406_QM 89)

• Alternative topics: spider vs. old man
• Opposition: did not die vs. died
The particle ko

• Marks a topic as contrastive in the sense of Prince?
  1. There is an **alternative** to the topic
  2. What is predicated about the topic is **opposite** to what is predicated or presupposed about the alternative

• Accounts for the majority of cases (45 out of 64)
The particle ko

Other cases

• Opposition, no alternative to topic (8 cases)
  - Opposition with hypothetical situation involving the same topic.

• Alternative to topic but no opposition (11 cases)
  - Contrastive topic in the broad sense / topic switch?
(4) Context: when a person dies, some relatives will sit next to the body and people will come and donate money, which these relatives will receive.

a. le lósè ko-ki-bó ló ko ba kí-ne
so C₄S-money DIST CTR1 C₁P C₄S-POSM
bá-tá-ko e-kpé àdákae mè
C₁P.NEG-INT-take SVM-put:LOC coffin inside
'So that money is theirs, they don't put it in the coffin.'

b. pò bi-bite nyí sì le nyàfè oniyé ló gi e-tsée
but C₄P.SBJ-do appear COMP ? maybe person DIST CON C₁S-die = CM
yè be-kọ
C₁S:FOC C₁P-give
'But it should be as if they are giving it to the person who is dead.'

(funeral_100531_MM-EM 122)
The particle kə - no alternative

(5) a-mu-nà    li-wè-le    kə    bê-tá-ba    tôô
C₃P-rice-DEF  C₃S-day-DEF  CTR1  C₁P.NEG-INT-come  anymore
xé   gi   sì    ba-kú-kpe    trousers-ye
if  CON  COMP  C₁P-PROH-put  trousers-DEF

‘As for the rice festival, they will not come anymore, if it is said that they should not wear trousers.'

(tribunal_100513_4 27)

• No “two sets of money” (4)
• No alternative festivals (5)
• Opposition between alternative “realities”
The particle ko – no opposition

(6) a. a-na kù-do mè a-tsani ʃ-dzewí-tɔ
   C₁S-reach C₅S-road inside C₁S-meet C₁S-girl-INDF
   'On the road he met a girl.'

b. ye ko a-kpe à-wù-la a-bìte si-yà-se
   C₁S CTR1 C₁S-wear C₃P-clothing-DEF C₁S-do C₇-hair-DEF
   wáà-må sì sukuvi
   2S.POT-see COMP student
   'As for her, she wore her clothes and did her hair, you can see she is a student.'

- Alternative topic ‘he’ (main protagonist)
- No opposition between ‘him’ and the girl
- “Topic switch”
The particle tseyɛ

- Translated as ‘also/too’
- Can be used as focus particle

(8) Context: Q: How many grandchildren do you have?

be-sèbi-à ... be-sè ... mà-ze be-sèbesèbi tseyɛ be-sè

C₁P-grandchild-DEF C₁P-plenty 1S-receive C₁P-grandchild.RED ADD C₁P-plenty

'Grandchildren... they are plenty... I have great-grandchildren too, they are plenty.'

(rice_100613_EN-MM 115)
The particle *tsye*

- Mostly used with topics

(9) Context: two other people have jumped from a burning house and were caught by the firefighters. Then the firefighters went to the third person.

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a-ye ye tsysë be-sóli ye
C₁S-jump C₁S ADD C₁P-catch C₁S
''He jumped, he too, they caught him.''
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- Comments on alternative topics are identical
- This represents the majority of cases
The particle tseyɛ

(10) Context: a man comes home after being in prison for a long time

a. ye-dze  ā-ko  tsey  ye  kile  gi  a-bite  petee
   C₁S.POS-wife  C₁S-take  forgive  C₁S  how  CON  C₁S-do  all
   ‘His wife forgave him everything he did.’

b. loso  ye-bie  tseye  a-ē-tsì  e-dzi  o-yāsowí
   so  C₁S.POS-child  ADD  C₁S-VEN-grow  C₁S-become  C₁S-young.man
   ‘So his child (too) has grown up and has become a young man.’

(famprob_110401_MeD-BeK_story 84)

- Alternative topics: his wife vs. his child
- No identical predicates
The particle tsey

- tsey marks contrastive topics in the broader sense: indicating that there is an alternative topic about which something is also said.
- But there is more: in the majority of cases predicates are identical (9)
- No strict identity condition as for English ‘too’ (10)
- Condition of coherence in the broader sense?
  - In (10) both predicates describe something that happened while the man was in prison
The particle tseyε - no identity

(11) Context: The organizing committee of the upcoming Avatime rice festival wants to invite the president of Ghana and they have asked the paramount chief to do so. The chairman of the committee is relating this.

a. bļo kù-sùsu-yo kui-kò le bâsi ye
1P C₅S-mind-DEF 1P-take C₃S how him
'That is our mind, we showed it to him (the chief).'  
b. yे tseyε ə-ze le
C₁S ADD C₁S-accept C₃S
'He (too) accepted it.'  (chiefs-meeting03 52-53, VC)

- Showing / giving and accepting are two sides of the same event.
The particle tsyɛ - no identity

(12) a. àtrodze e-tsyidzyi sì yi-ze-hali lì-fifli-ne
spider C₁S-impatient COMP LOG:C₁S-IT-gather C₃S-t.o.porridge-DEF
‘Spider was impatient to go and collect the porridge.’
b. lulu tseye e-vu ye sì xín-tre
small.ant ADD C₁S-hold C₁S COMP C₁S-PROH-go
‘Small ant (too) was holding him so that he wouldn't go.’

(Kadzidiza_110406_QM 89)

• Two sides of the same event
The particle tsyɛ - no identity

(13) a.  be-dziní  feke  trojó  gàso-ye  abà  kí  ye
   C₁P-return  lift.up  put:LOC  bicycle-DEF  on  give  C₁S
   'They put it on the bicycle for him'

b.  xé  ye  tɔye  èè-tutru  gàso-ye
   then  C₁S  ADD  C₁S.PROG-push  bicycle-DEF
   'and he (too) was pushing the bicycle.'

• Predicates connected, following from each other?
• Topic switch?
Conclusion

• Both markers can indicate that there is an alternative to the topic
• Neither is exclusively used for this purpose
• Conditions on comment
  – қә – comments have to be opposite
  – түү – comments have to be identical, similar or related
• Functions converge as indicator of ‘topic switch’ (examples (6), (7) and (13))
• Pre-existing information structure categories do not map nicely onto these particles
References

Thank you!