

Preverbal focus in Kĩtharaka revisited

Jenneke van der Wal (Leiden University) & Patrick N. Kanampiu (Tharaka University College)

Term focus in Kĩtharaka (Bantu E54, Kenya) can be expressed by marking the focused constituent by *ni* (*n'* prevocally and *i* preconsonantly) and placing it in clause-initial position, as illustrated in (1) for the question word *ûû* 'who'.

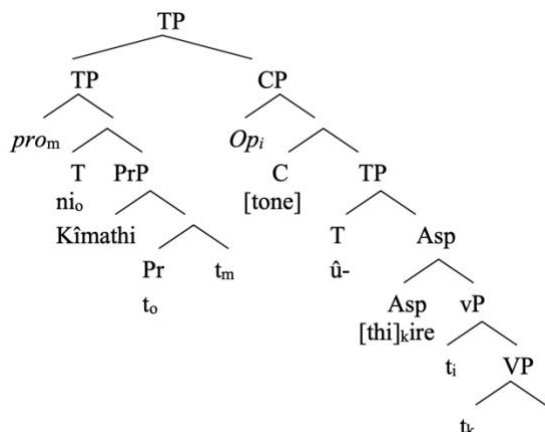
- (1) N'ûû agûpéere rûûtha rwa gûtaa rûûyî?
 ni ûû a-kû-pa-îre rûûtha rû-a kû-ta-a rû-ûyî?
 FOC/COP 1.who 1SM-PRS-give-PFV 11.permission 11-CONN 15-fetch 11-water?
 'Who gave you permission to fetch water?'

This initial focus construction has been analysed in two ways: Harford (1997) proposes an analysis as a biclausal cleft, while Muriungi (2005) and Abels and Muriungi (2008) argue that the structure is a monoclausal focus construction and propose a Focus projection in the left periphery. New data force us to revisit these analyses, with interesting comparative insights.

Data check. We systematically check a larger range of properties of the copula/focus marker, relative marking, scope interpretations, and movement diagnostics of this construction, summarised in the table:

		FocP	cleft	Kĩtharaka initial focus
copula/focus	used in predication	not necessarily	yes	yes
	change for tense	no	yes	no
	change for negation	no	yes	yes
	marker used in fragment	yes	only when elided cleft	only oblig as answer to cleft question
	marker used for any focus in any position	not necessarily	no	no
relative marking	relative subject marker	no	yes	optional
	relative pronoun	no	yes/as in relative	yes/optional
	relative tone	no	yes	yes
interpretation	reconstruction in negation	yes	no	no
	reconstruction in binding	yes	no	no
	exhaustive meaning	not necessarily	yes	yes
	use in thetics	possible	no	yes?
movement	island sensitivity	yes	no	yes
	cyclicity	yes	no (but)	yes

Proposal. The overview shows that the initial focus construction is clearly undergoing change but not to the extent Abels and Muriungi (2008, henceforth A&M) propose. Instead, we propose a reduced cleft analysis:



This accounts for the facts that *ni* behaves as a copula, the presence of relative marking on the verb but absence of a relative pronoun, the reduced left periphery of the CP (lack of topicalisation), the extraction restrictions, and the fact that the material in the relative clause cannot scope over or bind constituents in the predicative clause – see example (2), showing that there is no reconstruction of the pronoun under the quantifier and hence no A-bar movement. All predictions of the proposed structure are substantiated in the presentation.

- (2) I kaána gaake tûrátûmánííre w' ûûrá mûciári.
 ni ka-ana ka-ake tû-ra-tûmi-an-i-ire w-aûra mû-ciari
 FOC 12-child 12-POSS.1 1PL.SM-YPST-send-RECP-IC-PFV 1-each 1-parent
 'It's his/her/*i child that we sent to [each parent]i.' (only non-distributive)

Preverbal *ni*-. Our proposal also necessitates a revision of the connection between *ni* in the initial focus construction and preverbal *ni*-. Some conjugations have an “optional” *ni*- preceding the inflected verb, as in (3).

- (3) Bakîthikîiria béegua nthîgûrû n' îkûruruma.
 ba-kî-thikîiri-a ba-îgua n-thîgûrû ni î-kû-rurum-a
 2SM-DEP-listen-FV 2SM-hear 9-earth FOC 9SM-PRS-shake-FV
 'When they listened, they felt that the earth was shaking.'

A&M propose that *ni* in (1) and (3) is the same element. In our analysis, these must be different, and indeed A&M's arguments to treat them the same either do not hold up or can be reinterpreted. For example, we disprove their generalisation that the present tense allomorphy *rî-/kû-* in both its preverbal and initial focus use is determined by the presence/absence of *ni*-, as well as their claim that both morphemes require ϕ adjacency – they do not.

Instead, we draw the comparison with the conjoint/disjoint alternation in other eastern Bantu languages, inspired by Morimoto (2017): verbs without *ni*- function like the conjoint verb form in 1) not being allowed clause-finally, 2) associating with a postverbal focus, 3) being used in relative clauses, whereas the verbs with *ni*- are the parallel of the disjoint form in 1) having no clause-final restrictions, 2) being used for predicate-centred focus, 3) incompatibility with relatives. This comparative perspective helps us to understand not just the interpretational differences of preverbal *ni*- but also what was previously interpreted as cyclicity effects (Muriungi 2005).

Summary. The newly-discovered syntactic properties of the Kîtharaka initial focus construction, together with the comparative Bantu view on verbal alternations, require a revision of the synchronic analysis of this construction as a reduced cleft.

Selected references: * Abels, Klaus & Peter Muriungi. 2008. The focus marker in Kîtharaka: Syntax and semantics. *Lingua* 118(5). 687–731. * Harford, Carolyn. 1997. Empty operator raising in Kitharaka. *Studies in African Linguistics* 26(2). 111–130. * Morimoto, Yukiko. 2017. The Kikuyu focus marker *nî*: formal and functional similarities to the conjoint/disjoint alternation. In Jenneke van der Wal & Larry M. Hyman (eds.), *The conjoint/disjoint alternation in Bantu*, 147–174. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. * Muriungi, Peter. 2005. Wh-questions in Kitharaka. *Studies in African Linguistics* 34(1). 43–104.