

Predicate focus in embedded clauses in Kisubi¹

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1. Introduction

- Information structure is often constrained by syntactic contexts: we often find that subordinate clauses restrict which information structure configurations are permitted inside of the clause (Kiparsky & Kiparsky, 1971; Hooper and Thompson, 1973).
- We'll discuss today one such case in Kisubi, a Bantu language of Northern Tanzania.
- We'll begin with a description of the distribution of *ni* in Kisubi, which is a general-purpose focus marker, associating with the predicate, or something inside of the predicate.
- We then look at focus in subordinate clauses, showing that certain selected embedded clauses ban *predicate* focus marking, while other selected embedded clauses don't.
- We ultimately conclude something about the *complementizers* that head those clauses, arguing that they restrict predicate focus because of the particular meaning associated with those complementizers.

2. Background on Kisubi

- Kisubi is listed in Maho 2009 as JD64, however, as noted in The Language Project of Tanzania (2009), Kisubi is more closely related to languages in JE20. It is mutually intelligible with Kinyambo and Kihaya, sharing phonological, lexical, and morpho-syntactic similarities with these languages (Vumilia and Gluckman, in progress).
- All the data collected here are from the second author's own judgments.

3. Distribution of *ni*

- Like other Bantu languages, the morpheme *ni* is multifunctional, though we will ultimately argue that all of its functions relate to focus marking (cf, Güldemann, 2003).

a. Focus

- In general, focus constructions in Kisubi utilize the marker *ni*. An example is a pseudo-cleft construction shown in (1):

- (1) *ni Majaliwa winyenda*
 ni Majaliwa wi-ny-enda
 FOC Majaliwa 1RP-1sg.SM-want
 'It's Mary who I love.'

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- Additionally, like what is reported in the closely related Runyambo (Rugemalira, 2008) and Kihaya (Rubanza, 1988), (as well as more distantly related languages like Kikuyu; Schwarz 2003) *ni* is also a verbal prefix.
- In its preverbal position, it can be associated with predicate internal focus. For instance, *wh*-questions are predominantly *in situ*, in which case *ni* appears prefixed to the verb.

- (2)
- Maria nayend'ohi*
Maria **ni-a-yenda-ohi**
Mary FOC-1SM-love-who
'Who does Mary love?'
 - nibhalyaki*
ni-bha-lya-ki
FOC-2SM-eat-what
'What are they eating / do they eat?'
 - nitulyama nkahi*
ni-tu-lyama nkahi
FOC-1pl.SM-sleep where?
'Where are we sleeping' (Where are we to sleep?)
 - Majaliwa naiza lyali*
Majaliwa **ni-a-iza lyali**
Majaliwa FOC-1SM-come when
'When is Majaliwa coming?'
 - Majaliwa naiza ata*
Majaliwa **ni-a-iza a-ta**
Majaliwa FOC-1SM-come 1SM-how
'How is Majaliwa coming?'
 - Majaliwa naiza ahakubhaki*
Majaliwa **ni-a-iza ahakubhaki**
Majaliwa FOC-1SM-come why
'Why is Majaliwa coming?'
 - Majaliwa nayenda omwegesa ohi*
Majaliwa **ni-a-enda omwegesa ohi**
Majaliwa FOC-1SM-want 1NC.teacher who
'Which teacher does Majaliwa love?'

- *In situ* constituent focus is also possible, with the same strategy of marking the verb with *ni*.

- (3)
- Majaliwa namwenda Maria wenka*
Majaliwa **ni-a-mw-enda Maria** wenka
Majaliwa FOC-1SM-OSM-go Maria only
'Majaliwa only loves MARY.'
 - Majaliwa namwenda na Maria*
Majaliwa **ni-a-mw-enda na Maria**

Majaliwa FOC-1SM-1OM-go CONJ Mary
 ‘Majaliwa also loves MARY.’

- As the examples above suggest, *ni* does not distinguish between exclusive or inclusive focus.
- Finally, *ni* may also be used to mark pure predicate focus.

- (4) a. *narwara*
ni-a-rwara
 FOC-1SM-be.sick
 ‘He’s sick.’ (Answer to: What’s up with Majaliwa?)
 b. *Nituzina*
ni-tu-zina
 FOC-1pl.SM-dance
 ‘We’re dancing.’ (Answer to: What are we going to do today?)

- This includes *verum focus* readings:

- (5) *Mahi, namwenda*
 mahi, **ni**-a-mw-enda
 NEG, FOC-1SM-1OM-love
 ‘No, he DOES love her.’ (Response to “Majaliwa doesn’t love Mary.”)

b. Aspectual uses

- As is reported for a number of Bantu languages *ni* also has an aspectual component (Hyman & Watter, 1984; Güldemann, 2003).
- This meaning is typically associated with *present progressive* aspect.²
- Thus, activity verbs like *kuzina* ‘dance’ preferably get a present progressive reading when marked with *ni*.

- (6) *Nituzina*
ni-tu-zina
 FOC-1pl.SM-dance
 ‘We are dancing’ or ‘We DANCE.’

- We can mostly control for the Aspectual use by employing stative verbs, which are not easily coerced into progressive meanings.

- (7) *Majaliwa narwara*
 Majaliwa ni-a-rwar-a

² Rugemalira (2005) calls this form “Continuous” in Runyambo (JE21). In Haya, Rubanza (1988) suggests that *ni* marks “present universal habitual” tense.

Majaliwa FOC-1SM-be.sick-FV

‘Majaliwa is sick’ (Not: ‘??Majaliwa is being sick.’)

b. *nitumwenda Maria*

ni-tu-mw-end-a Maria

FOC-1pl.SM-1OM-love-FV Maria

‘We love Maria.’ (Not: ‘??We are loving Maria.’)

c. *Majaliwa namanya n’ikwo*

Majaliwa ni-a-many-a ni=ikwo

Majaliwa FOC-1SM-know-FV COP-DEM

‘Majaliwa knows so.’ (Not: ‘??Majaliwa is knowing so.’)

- However, because of this multifunctionality, *ni* (focus and progressive) is restricted to present tense, affirmative contexts (cf, Kîtharaka; Abels & Muriungi 2008).

(8) *(*ni)bhakalyaki?* (Past)

(*ni-)bha-ka-lya=ki

FOC-2SM-PAST-eat-what

‘What did they eat?’

(9) *(*ni)tibhalya enfi* (Negative)

(*ni-)ti-bha-lya enfi

FOC-NEG-2SM-eat fish

‘They don’t eat fish.’

c. Predicative uses

- Again, like other Bantu languages, *ni* in Kisubi has a copular function (Gibson et al, 2018).

(10) a. *Majaliwa n’omwegesa*
Majaliwa ni omwegesa
Majaliwa FOC 1NC.teacher
‘Majaliwa is a teacher.’ (Predicational -- DP)

b. *Majaliwa ni muzima*

Majaliwa ni mu-zima

Majaliwa FOC 1AGR.good

‘Majaliwa is fine.’ (Predicational -- Adj)

c. *Omwegesa ni Majaliwa*

omwegesa ni Majaliwa

1NC.teacher FOC Majaliwa

‘The teacher is Majaliwa’ (Specificational)

d. *ogu ni Majaliwa*

ogu ni Majaliwa

1NC.DEM FOC Majaliwa

‘That’s Majaliwa.’ (Identificational)

- The only predicative environment where *ni* is not permitted is in locative predications (cf, Kinyarwanda; Jerro 2014), in which case a form of the inflecting copula *kubha* is used.

(11) *Majaliwa ali omunzu*
 Majaliwa a-li omu-nzu
 Majaliwa 1SM-COP 18NC-house
 ‘Majaliwa is in the house.’

- But *kubha* is not used for (present tense) DP/AP predications.

(12) a. **Majaliwa ali omwegesa*
 Majaliwa a-li omwegesa
 Majaliwa 1SM-COP 1NC.teacher
 Intended: ‘Majaliwa is a teacher.’
 b. **Majaliwa ali muzima*
 Majaliwa a-li mu-zima
 Majaliwa 1SM-COP 1AGR-good
 Intended: ‘Majaliwa is fine.’

4. Summary

- *Ni* is used to mark focus in both clefts and as a preverbal focus marker.
- It marks both constituent and predicate focus.
- It marks “present progressive” aspect
- It serves a copula function, again only in the present tense.
- It is likely that all of these functions can be linked to focus.
 - It is argued in Hyman and Watters (1983) and Güldemann (2003) that the present progressive function of *ni* stems from the idea that this aspectual category is linked to the “here-and-now,” i.e., the *current situation*.
- Likewise, copulas are often associated with focus constructions (e.g., Mikkelsen 2005). We submit that copular *ni* is identical to the present progressive use: it is linked to the current situation as well.
- This is supported by the idea that *ni* is restricted to the present tense.

(13) *Majaliwa akabha ali omwegesa*
 Majaliwa a-ka-bha a-li omwegesa
 Majaliwa 1SM-PAST-COP 1SM-COP 1NC.teacher
 ‘Majaliwa was a teacher.’

5. Focus in subordinate clauses

- In this section, we’ll investigate selected subordinate clauses, showing that under the complementizer *nkikwo* predicate focus is restricted.

- For simplicity, we'll compare here just *nkikwo* and *ngu*, which contrast in permitting predicate focus.³
- (14) a. *namanya nkikwo Majaliwa ali kurwara*
 ni-a-manyanya **nkikwo** Majaliwa **a-li ku-rwara**
 FOC-1SM-know COMP Majaliwa 1SM-COP INF-be.sick
 'S/he knows that Majaliwa is sick.'
 b. *Namanya ngu Majaliwa narwara*
 ni-a-manyanya **ngu** Majaliwa **ni-a-rwara**
 FOC-1SM-know COMP Majaliwa FOC-1SM-be.sick
 'S/he knows that Majaliwa is sick (but s/he might be wrong).'
- (15) a. *namanya nkikwo Majaliwa ali oMusubi*
 ni-a-manyanya **nkikwo** Majaliwa **a-li** Musubi
 FOC-1SM-know COMP Majaliwa 1SM-COP Musubi
 'S/he knows that Majaliwa is Musubi.'
 b. *namanya ngu Majaliwa n' oMusubi*
 ni-a-manyanya **ngu** Majaliwa **ni** oMusubi
 FOC-1SM-know COMP Majaliwa FOC Musubi
 'S/he knows that Majaliwa is Musubi (but s/he might be wrong).'
- This pattern is not affected by the embedding verb---though the embedding verb does impact whether *nkikwo* or *ngu* is available as a complementizer.
- (16) *akangambira nkikwo Majaliwa ali oMusubi*
 a-ka-n-gamb-ir-a nkikwo Majaliwa a-li oMusubi
 1SM-PAST-1sg.OM-say-APPL-FV COMP Majaliwa 1SM-COP Musubi
 'S/he told me that Majaliwa is Musubi'
- (17) *akangambira ngu Majaliwa n' oMusubi*
 a-ka-n-gamb-ir-a nkikwo Majaliwa ni oMusubi
 1SM-PAST-1sg.OM-say-APPL-FV COMP Majaliwa FOC Musubi
 'S/he told me that Majaliwa is Musubi'
- Note that *ex situ* DP-focus does *not* alternate in the same environments.
- (18) *Namanya nkikwo / ngu ni Maria wiyamwenda Majaliwa*
 ni-a-manyanya **nkikwo** / **ngu ni** Maria wi-ya-mw-enda Majaliwa
 FOC-1SM-know COMP COMP FOC Maria 1RP-1SM-1OM-love Majaliwa
 S/he knows that it's Mary who Majaliwa loves.
- Likewise, clause-internal *in situ wh*-questions are also not affected by the complementizer choice.

³ Of the other complementizers, *kubha* and *-ti* both permit predicate focus marking, while the complementizer *ki* does not. See Appendix 1.

- (19) *Majaliwa akangambira nkikwo / ngu nibhalyaki?*
 Majaliwa a-ka-n-gamb-ir-a nkikwo ni-bha-lya=ki
 Majaliwa 1SM-PAST-1sg.OM-say-APPL-FV COMP COMP FOC-2SM-eat=what
 ‘What did Majaliwa tell me that they’re eating?’
- Still, when focus is on the predicate in the embedded clause, *ni* is not possible as the focus strategy in this context.
- (20) *Majaliwa akangambira nkikwo bhalya enfi (tibhazirobha)*
 Majaliwa a-ka-n-gamb-ir-a nkikwo bha-lya enfi,
 Majaliwa 1SM-PAST-1sg.OM-say-APPL-FV COMP 2SM-eat 10NC.fish
 ti-bha-zi-robha
 NEG-2SM-10OM-fish
 ‘Majaliwa told me that they EAT fish, they don’t catch them.’
- Summarizing, under *nkikwo*, marking of predicate focus---and predicate focus alone---is different from that in main-clauses, and under *ngu*.

6. Analysis

- Though similar patterns in other Bantu languages are well-known, there is no consistent explanation (though see Van Der Wal, 2014).
- The analysis we will sketch below will try to harness the meaningful aspects of the alternation, in particular drawing on work on complementizer meaning.
- Our understanding of the restriction under *nkikwo* starts from the observation that *nkikwo* is a demonstrative pronoun, specifically, a *discourse deictic demonstrative*.
- Evidence for the demonstrative status comes from three sources.
 - First, morphologically, *nkikwo* fits the pattern for *discourse demonstratives*, used to refer to a previously introduced referent (which is currently far from us).

Class	Prox. Disc. N-Agr.RED	Dist. Disc. N-Agr.RED-o	Emph. Dem n'DEM
Class 1	ngugu	ngugwo	n'ogwo
Class 2	nbhaba	nbhabho	n'abho
Class 3	ngugu	ngugwo	n'ogwo
Class 4	nzizi	nzizo	n'eyo
Class 5	ndili	ndilyo	n'elyo
Class 6	ngaga	ngago	n'ago
Class 7	nkiki	nkicho	n'icho
Class 8	nbhibhi	nbhibhyo	n'ibho
Class 9	ngigi	ngigyoy	n'iyoy
Class 10	nzizi	nzizo	n'ezo
Class 11	ndulu	ndulwo	n'olwo
Class 12	nkaka	nkako	n'ako
Class 13	ntutu	ntutwo	n'otwo
Class 14	mbhubhu	mbhubhwo	n'obhwo
Class 15	nkuku	nkukwo	n'okwo
Class 16	mpaha	mpaho	n'aho
Class 17	nkuku	nkukwo	n'okwo
Class 18	mbumu	mbumwo	n'omo
Class ??	--	nkikwo ⁴	n'ikwo

- Second, as shown in the table, *nkikwo* alternates with a clear demonstrative form *n'ikwo*.

- (21)
- a. *Majaliwa yangambira n'ikwo*
Majaliwa ya-n-gamb-ir-a ni ikwo
Majaliwa 1SM-1sg.OM-say-APPL-FV FOC DEM
'Majaliwa told me so.'
- b. *Majaliwa namanya n'ikwo*
Majaliwa ni-a-manyanya ni okwo
Majaliwa FOC-1SM-know FOC DEM
'Majaliwa knows so.'

- And third, underscoring the above parallel, *nkikwo* may be used independently as a manner deictic.

- (22)
- a. *ohandike nkikwo*
o-handik-e nkikwo
2sg.SM-write-SBJV DEM
'Write that way [how I showed you]!'
- b. *nkora nkikwo*

⁴ Note that the reduplication pattern doesn't quite work. Based on the other forms in the table, we expect *nkicho*. However, there may be some pressure to differentiate *nkikwo* from the Class 7 form *nkicho*.

n-kora nkikwo
 1sg.SM-do DEM
 ‘I’m doing it that way [as you instructed]’

- The function of the discourse demonstrative in Kisubi is to refer to a discourse given element.

(23) a. *Omusho ngugwo*
 omusho n-gugu-o
 3NC.knife DEM-3AGR.RED.DEM
 ‘There’s the knife (that we’re talking about).’

b. *Omwana ngugu*
 omwana n-gugu
 1NC.child DEM-1AGR.RED.DEM
 ‘Here’s the child (that we’ve been discussed).’

- When used (23a), the use of *nkikwo* signifies that there is discourse relevant *situation* (rather than an individual) in which, e.g., the speaker demonstrated how to write, and the speaker is requesting that the address make the current situation similar to that one.⁵
- But because *nkikwo* references something that is not the current situation, it is at odds with *ni*. Schematically,

(24) [... [V ... [**nkikwo**_{s1} [... **ni**_{s*}-V ...]]]]

- That is, *nkikwo* and *ni* conflict in which situation the embedded clause is about. *Nkikwo* says it’s about a previous situation, while *ni* says it’s about the current situation.
- This is why *nkikwo* doesn’t interact with DP focus: *ni* associates with an individual, not a situation.

(25) [... [V ... [**nkiwko**_{s1} [... **ni**_x-V ...]]]]

- And *ngu* imposes no such constraint because it says nothing about any situation.

(26) [... [V ... [ngu [... **ni**_{x/s*}-V ...]]]]

7. Conclusion

⁵ In this way, *nkikwo* is similar to a *manner deictic*. We believe the difference is that true manner deictics refer to *kinds*, while the discourse deictic can refer to specific individuals (Landman & Morzycki, 2004). We note that there are two “true” manner demonstratives in Kisubi which do not have a discourse antecedent, but are purely locational: *-ti* (proximal) and *-tyo* (distal). For additional (non-discourse dependent) demonstrative forms, see Vumilia (2016).

- The analysis we suggest is close to what offered in Van der Wal (2014) for similar patterns in Makhuwa. In Makhuwa, focus constructions are

8. References

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Appendix 1: Situative clauses

- So-called *situative* adverbial clauses,⁶ too, bear focus marking. Since situative clauses introduce a “logical or temporal precondition” (Van der Wal, 2009, citing Katupha 1983), we expect them to interact with predicate focus marking.

⁶ This kind of dependent clause is also called *circumstantial* (Creissels 2006, Creissels 2021).

(A1) *Majaliwa (*ni)karwara, Maria amuteekera*
 Majaliwa (*ni-)ki-a-rwara, Maria a-mu-teek-er-a
 Majaliwa FOC-SIT-1SM-be.sick Mary 1SM-1OM-cook-APPL-FV
 ‘When Majaliwa is sick, Mary cooks for him.’

- However, *while*-clauses are obligatorily *ni*-marked.

(A2) *Majaliwa akechemura nayegeza*
 Majaliwa a-ka-echemura ni-a-yegeza
 Majaliwa 1SM-PAST-sneeze FOC-1SM-teach
 ‘Maria sneezed while he was teaching.’

- This seems to be at odds with the general requirement for *ni* to be anchored to the here-and-now, so we’re not entirely sure how to handle these.

Appendix 2: Relative clauses

- Relative clauses also prohibit *ni*. However, in this case *all* instances of *ni* are banned, not just those associated with predicate focus.

(A3) *nkabhona omusahiza ali omwegesa / muzima*
 Ni-ka-bhona omusahiza a-li omwegesa / muzima
 1sg.SM-PAST see 1NC.man 1SM-COP 1NC.teacher / 1AGR.good
 ‘I saw the man who’s a teacher / well.’

(A4) *nkabhona omusahiza ali kumwenda Maria*
 Ni-ka-bhona omusahiza a-li ku-mw-enda Maria
 1sg.SM-PAST-see man 1SM-COP 15NC-1OM-want Mary
 ‘I saw the man who loves Mary.’

- We assume that this is just a case of the inherent focus properties of relative clauses affecting the distribution of *ni* as a focus marker.

Appendix 3: The other complementizers

- Kisubi has a number of complementation strategies, including *kubha*, *-ti*, and *ki-/ka-*. Only *ki-/ka-* is impossible with *ni*.

(A4) a. *akangambira kubha Majaliwa narwara*
 a-ka-n-gamb-ir-a kubha Majaliwa ni-a-rwara
 1SM-PAST-1sg.OM-say-APPL-FV COMP Majaliwa FOC-1SM-be.sick
 ‘S/he said that Majaliwa is sick.’
 b. *akangambira ati Majaliwa narwara*
 a-ka-n-gamb-ir-a a-ti Majaliwa ni-a-rwara
 1SM-PAST-1sg.OM-say-APPL-FV 1SM-COMP Majaliwa FOC-1SM-be.sick
 ‘S/he said “Majaliwa is sick”.’

c. *akangambira Majaliwa kali kulwara*
a-ka-n-gamb-ir-a Majaliwa ka-a-li kulwara
1SM-PAST-1sg.OM-say-APPL-FV Majaliwa COMP-1SM-COP INF.be.sick
'S/he said that Majaliwa is sick.'