

Information Structure in Gĩkũyũ

Claudius P. Kihara
Chuka University

This study deals with information structure in Gĩkũyũ (E51), a Bantu language spoken in central Kenya. Previous studies of focus in the language e.g. Clements (1984), Bergvall (1987) and Schwartz (2003) dealt with focus in Gĩkũyũ simple questions, and they were all based on variant generative grammar approaches. The present study is based on a Role and Reference Grammar [RRG], a structural-functional theory of language. Particularly, this paper looks at the different foci types as explicated in RRG in simple sentences, including bound focus previously ignored in earlier studies. Further, issues of focus and topics in complex sentences e.g. conditional clauses are described. Finally, I analyze tail-head linkage constructions in narratives for givenness, definiteness and referent-tracking. Example focus data includes that in (1).

- (1) a. *M-wana a-a-re-ir-ε kee ?* = *a-a-re-ir-ε NYAMA.*
1-child 1-PST- eat-ASP-FV what ? 1-PST- eat-ASP-FV 9.meat
'What did the child eat?' 'S/he ate MEAT'
- b. *M-wana ne kee a-a-re-ir-ε ?* = *ne NYAMA a-a-re-ir-ε*
1-child FM-what 1- PST-eat- ASP-FV
'What is it that the child ate?' 'It is MEAT s/he ate.'
- c. *Ne kee m-wana a-a-re-ir-ε ?* = *ne NYAMA (m-wana) a-a-re-ir-ε*
FM-what 1-child 1- PST-eat- ASP-FV 'It is a MEAT (the child) s/he ate.'
'What did the child eat?'

The simple question in (1a) has a wh-question in-situ. The focal constituent, *nyama* 'meat' is also in the same position occupied by the question it answers. In (1b) the wh-word is partially displaced with an obligatory focus marker (*ne*). The focused constituent and the subject argument, *mwana* 'child', must be structurally accounted for. Example (1c) shows an ex-situ wh-word and an ex-situ focused element in the answer. Contrary to Clements (1984) and Schwartz (2003), I argue for a cleft analysis for such constructions.

The study show how the different focus types fit in the RRG typology of focus (Van Valin 1999, 2005). Further I will show how different types of topics in Gĩkũyũ are accounted for in RRG's layered structure of the clause.

Bantu languages including Gĩkũyũ present flexible word orders which influence information structure (Downing & Marten 2019). On the interaction of focus and syntax, the paper concludes that the flexible Gĩkũyũ syntax contrasts with a rigid focus structure in the language (cf. Van Valin (1999).

As for information structure in Gĩkũyũ complex sentences, I show that conditional clauses have topic features (cf. Haiman 1978), in addition to the fact that they allow some main (root) clause phenomena (cf. Danckaert & Haegeman 2012).

References

- Bergvall, V.L. (1987). *Focus in Kikuyu and Universal Grammar*. Doctoral dissertation. Harvard.
- Clements, G. N. (1984): Binding Domains in Kikuyu. *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences*, 14, 37-56.
- Danckaert, L. & Haegeman, L. (2012). Conditional clauses, Main Clause Phenomena and the syntax of polarity emphasis. In Ackema, P. et al. (Eds.). *Comparative Germanic syntax: the state of the art*, pp.133-167, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Downing, L.J. & Marten, M. (2019). Clausal morphosyntax and information structure. In Van de Velde, Mark, Koen Bostoen, Derek Nurse, & Gérard Philippson. (Eds.). *The Bantu languages* (2nd edn.), pp. 270-307. New York: Routledge.
- Haiman, J. (1978). Conditionals are topics. *Language* 54: 565–589.
- Schwarz, F. (2003). Focus marking in Kikuyu In Eckardt, R. (ed) *Question and focus: ZAS papers in linguistics*, 30, 2003. (pp 41-119) Retrieved from:www.zas.gwz-berlin.de/fileadmin/material/ZAsPIL_volltexte/zp_30/zaspil30.pdf .
- Van Valin, R. D., Jr. (1999). A Typology of the Interaction of Focus Structure and Syntax. In E. Raxilina & J. Testelec, (Eds.). *Typology and the theory of language: From description to explanation*. 511-524. Moscow: Languages of Russian Culture.
- Van Valin, R. D., Jr. (2005). *Exploring the syntax-semantics interface*. Cambridge: CUP.