

Focus Marking in Kikuyu (E51)

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Aim of this talk: provide some new data on term focus and ‘predicate-centered focus’ in Kikuyu.

Notion of focus—here a functional approach—e.g. Chafe (1976), Dik (1997), Hyman and Watters (1984), Lambrecht (1994):

- The focal information: considered by the speaker to be the most important or salient information for the addressee to integrate into his pragmatic information in the given communicative setting;
- The focal information can be: a non-presupposed) new/added piece of information—*assertive focus*, or replacement of some piece of information X already assumed by the addressee—*contrastive focus* (Dik 1997:326).

1 Nĩ Marking in Kikuyu

Focus constructions involving the proclitic *nĩ* are reported in Kikuyu (E51, Bergvall 1987, Schwarz 2003) and closely related languages—e.g., Vunjo (E62) (Dalgish 1979, Moshi 1988), Kuria (E43) (Cammenga 2004), Kamba (E55) (Ndumbu and Whiteley 1962).

- *nĩ* is used as an identificational copula.

- (1) a. Peter nĩ mwarímũ.
PN ID teacher.
‘Peter is a teacher.’
- b. morothi nĩ nyámũ.
lion ID animal.
‘Lion is an animal.’

- Mugane (1997): the particle *nĩ* is optional in any given utterance.

- Armstrong (1940:169-170): utterances with the *ne*-particle are emphatic— they express (i) certainty, (ii) determination, defiance, or challenge (to the hearer), and (iii) contradictions.
- Schwarz (2003): *nĩ* marks focus. There are ex-situ and in-situ focus constructions. Structural parallels between questions and answers are preferred.

Generalizations about the use of ex-situ and in-situ structures (Schwarz 2003):

- Only the ex-situ structure is available for subjects (2).
- Both ex-situ and in-situ structures are available for objects (both primary and secondary) (3)-(4) and locative and temporal adverbials (5)-(6).
- Only the in-situ structure is available for manner and instrumental adverbials.
- These generalizations hold for wh-questions and answers ('term focus').

- (2) Subject wh-question (Schwarz 2003:57 (29))
- a. **n-oo** o-ðom-aɣ-er-a¹ mw-ana i-βuku? ex-situ Q w/ *ne*
 F-who 1-read-HAB-APPL-FV 1-child 5-book
 'Who (usually) reads a/the book to the child?'
- b. **ne Abdule** o-ðom-aɣ-er-a mw-ana i-βuku. ex-situ A w/ *ne*
 Lit. 'It is Abdule who reads a/the book to the child.'
- c. *oo a-ðom-aɣ-er-a mw-ana i-βuku? *"in-situ" Q w/o *ne*
- d. #[Abdul]_F a-ðom-aɣ-er-a mw-ana i-βuku. #"in-situ" A w/o *ne*

- (3) Ex-situ object question (Schwarz 2003:54 (20))
- a. ne-kee Abdul a-ra-nyu-ir-e? [AM: √]
 F-what PN 1-PST-drink-ASP-FV
 'What did Abdul drink?'
- b. ne ma-e Abdul a-ra-nyu-ir-e. [AM: √]
 F 6-water PN 1-PST-drink-ASP-FV
 Lit. 'It is water that Abdul drank.'
- c. ne ma-e. [example added] [AM: *]

- For examples (3)(8)(7), my speaker (AM)'s judgments diverge from that of Schwarz.

¹ The subject prefix in (2) does not appear in its usual form *a-* but rather as *o-*. The *o-* subject prefix also appears inside relative clauses and with the demonstrative *-rea*, as in *mw-ana o-rea* 'this child' (Schwarz 2003:58).

- (4) In-situ object question (Schwarz 2003:55 (23)-(24))
- a. Abdul a-ra-nyu-ir-e kee? [AM: *]
 PN 1-PST-drink-ASP-FV what
- b. Abdul a-ra-nyu-ir-e ma-e. [AM: √]
 PN 1-PST-drink-ASP-FV water
 ‘Abdul drank water.’
- (5) Locative adverbial (Schwarz 2003:56-57 (27))
- a. ne-ko Abdul a-ra-edirie ye-tonga nyomba? [AM: √]
 F-where PN 1-PST.sell.ASP.FV 7-rich.man 9.house
 ‘Where did Abdul sell the house to the rich man?’
- b. ne Nairobi Abdul a-ra-edirie ye-tonga nyomba [AM: *]
 F PN PN 1-PST.sell.ASP.FV 7-rich.man 9.house
 Lit. ‘It’s in Nairobi that Abdul sold the house to the rich man.’
- c. Abdul a-ra-edirie ye-tonga nyomba ko? [AM: ?]
 PN 1-PST.sell.ASP.FV 7-rich.man 9.house where
- d. Abdul a-ra-edirie yetonga nyomba **Nairobi**. [AM: √]
- (6) Temporal adverbial (Schwarz 2003:57 (28))
- a. ne-re Abdul a-ra-edirie ye-tonga nyomba? [AM: √]
 F-when PN 1-PST.sell.ASP.FV 7-rich.man 9.house
 ‘When did Abdul sell the house to the rich man?’
- b. ne ira Abdul a-ra-edirie ye-tonga nyomba. [AM: *]
 Lit. ‘It was yesterday that Abdul sold the house to the rich man.’
- c. Abdul a-ra-edirie yetonga nyomba re? [AM: *]
- d. Abdul a-ra-edirie yetonga nyomba **ira**. [AM: √]
- (7) Manner adverbial (Schwarz 2003:58 (31))
- a. *ne atea Abdul a-ra-edirie nyomba? [AM: √]
 F how PN 1-PST.sell.ASP.FV 9.house
 ‘How did Abdul sell the house?’
- b. *ne na-rua Abdul a-ra-edirie nyomba. [AM: *]
 F quickly PN 1-PST.sell.ASP.FV 9.house
 ‘Abdul sold the house QUICKLY.’
- c. Abdul a-ra-edirie nyomba atea? [AM: √]
- d. Abdul a-ra-edirie nyomba **na-rua**. [AM: √]

- (8) Instrumental adverbial (Schwarz 2003:58 (32))
- a. *ne na kee Abdul a-ra-hor-a funda? [AM: *]
 F with what PN 1-PST-beat-FV 9.donkey
 ‘With what did Abdul beat the donkey?’
- b. *ne na mo-te Abdul a-ra-hor-a funda. [AM: *]
 F with 3-stick PN 1-PST-beat-FV 9.donkey
 ‘With a/the stick Abdul beat the donkey.’
- c. Abdul arahora funda na kee? [AM: √]
- d. Abdul arahora funda na mote. [AM: √]

2 New Facts on Term Focus

- With the exception of the instrument, fronting (ex-situ with *nĩ*) is generally preferred for all types of wh-questions.
- For non-subject focus (answers to wh-questions), the in-situ structure is preferred or obligatory.
- Thus there is no free choice between ex-situ and in-situ structures. The choice seems to depend on the semantic role of the focus.
- When both ex-situ and in-situ structures are possible, there is preference to have a parallel structure (i.e. for the temporal adverbial).
- Subject/non-subject asymmetry: only the subject can be answered by *nĩ* (unless there is no verb following the *nĩ*-marked focus—see table 1).
- The Ex-situ structure is marginally accepted

Speaker AM	Exs	Ex-situ Q	Ex-situ A	In-situ Q	In-situ A
SUBJ	(2)	√	√	*	*
OBJ 1	(3)-(4)	√	* ?√ + verb	*	√
OBJ 2		√	* *√ + verb	√	√
LOC	(5)	√	* ??√ + verb	?√	√
TEMP	(6)	√	√ √ + verb	√	√
MAN	(7)	√	*	√	√
INSTR	(8)	*	*	√	√

Table 1: Speaker (AM's) judgments on Ex-situ/in-situ structures

- (9) Subject question (animate subject)
- a. **nĩ** **oráreiré²** **mbóso?**
 F.who 1.PST.eat.ASP.FV beans
 ‘Who ate the beans?’
- b. **nĩ** **mútumía** √nĩ + SUBJ
 F 1woman
 ‘A/the woman (ate them).’
- c. **nĩ** **mútumía** **a-ra-sí-re-ir-é.**
 F 1woman 1-PST-OM-eat-ASP-FV
- (10) a. **nĩ-ké** **kegetínia** **ngúo éno?** (inanimate subject)
 F-what cut.FV cloth this
 ‘What can cut this cloth?’
- b. **nĩ** **káhiyo** **gá:ká** (**kagétinia** **nguo eno**)
 F knife this cut.FV cloth this
 ‘this knife (can cut this cloth)’
- (11) Object question
- a. **níké** **mútumía** **a-ra-ri:ré**
 F.what 1woman 1-PST-eat.ASP.FV
 ‘What did the woman eat?’
- b. (**arári:ré**) **mbóso.**
 1.PST.eat.ASP.FV beans
 ‘(she ate) beans’
- c. ***nĩ bóso** *nĩ + OBJ
- (12) Locative question
- a. **níkó** **mutumía** **aráthí:re?** ex-situ
 F.where 1woman 1.PST.go.ASP.FV
 ‘Where did the woman go?’
- b. **mutumía** **aráthí:re** **ko?** in-situ
 1woman 1.PST.go.ASP.FV where?
- c. (***nĩ**) Europe. *nĩ + LOC
- d. **arathi:re** (***nĩ**) Europe, ti Asia. *nĩ + LOC contrastive
 1.PST.go.ASP.FV E NEG A
 ‘She went to Europe, not to Asia.’

² cf. *aráreiré: see footnote 1.

(13) Contrastive subject focus

nĩ mwaná wétóro, tí ngúí. √nĩ + SUBJ contrastive
F 1.baby 1.be.asleep NEG 9dog
'It's the baby who's asleep, not the dog.'

(14) Contrastive non-subject focus

- a. mutumía aráreya mbóso, tí nyámá.
1woman 1.PROG.eat.FV beans NEG meat
- b. tí nyámá mutumía aráreya, ní mbóso √nĩ + OBJ contrastive
NEG meat 1woman1.PROG.eat.FV F beans
'It's the beans the woman is eating, not the meat.'

Summary:

- SUBJ FOC = always marked by *nĩ*, whether assertive or contrastive.
- OBJ FOC = marked only when contrastive.
- Others (oblique, adjuncts) = not marked at all.
- There is no structural parallel observed between wh-questions and answers.

3 Predicate-Centered Focus

Preidicate-centered focus refers to focus on the non-nominal, predicative element of the clause:

(i) State-of-affairs (SoA) focus: narrow focus on the lexical content of the predicate

Q: What did the princess do with the frong?

A: She KISSED him.

(ii) Operator focus: focus on sentence operators such as TAM and polarity.

a. TAM focus: narrow scope over the finite element of the predication

Q: Is the princess kissing the frog (right now)?

A: She HAS kissed him.

b. Polarity focus: narrow scope over the truth-value of the utterance

Q: I cannot believe the princess kissed the slippery frog.

A: Yes, she DID kiss him.

3.1 Operator Focus

Polarity focus in Kikuyu is expressed by placing the proclitic *nĩ* in front of the canonical V(O) structure.³ For truth-value focus, *nĩ* always appears in H tone, showing that truth-value focus is additionally prosodically marked on the clitic *nĩ*.

(15) Polarity question & answer

a. *mutumía nĩ arí:ré mbóso?*

1.woman F 1.eat.ASP.FV 6.bean

‘Did the woman eat the beans?’

b. *ee, nĩ arí:re (mbóso).*

yes F 1.eat.ASP.FV 6.bean

‘Yes, she did (eat the beans).’

(16) Corrective assertion

Q: ‘They didn’t steal it (did they?)’

a. *Neguó, nĩ má:re.*

true F 2.steal.ASP.FV

‘Yes, they did steal it.’

b. *#neguó, má:re.* [not emphasizing the positive polarity]

TAM focus is also expressed by *nĩ* in front of the finite predicate. The focus particle *nĩ*, however, has L tone.

(17) a. *nĩ kúreya aráreya mbóso kana nĩ asíreire?*

F INF.eat.FV 1.PROG.eat.FV 6.bean or F 1.OM.eat.ASP.FV

‘Is she still eating the beans or has she eaten them already?’

b. *nĩ asíreire.*

F 1.OM.eat.ASP.FV

‘He has eaten (them).’

A similar focus marking is reported in Mbala (K51) with a pre-initial marker *mu-* (discussed by Güldemann 2003:341). This resembles the conjoint/disjoint distinction in other Bantu languages: an unmarked verb for term focus, marked verb for PCF.

³ It has been claimed (cf. Güldemann 1996, 1999) that the predicate following *nĩ* has the dependent verb form. In my data, however, there was no tonal or morphological evidence that the *nĩ*-marked verb in question is dependent.

(18) Mbala (K51, Ndolo 1972:40)

- a. *gá-gòsuna ga-ga-loombulula gilùungu.* OBJ = focus
12-woman 12-FUT-demand.back calabash
'The woman will ask for [the calabash] back.'
- b. *gá-gòsuna mu-ga-ga-lóombulula gilùungu.* truth-value focus
12-woman PCF-12-FUT-demand.back calabash
'The woman [will] ask for the calabash back.' (cf. Ndolo 1972:40)

A specific type of TAM focus is also expressed by a construction using an auxiliary-like element *kora* 'come upon', which can be interpreted as 'arriving at/reaching' in temporal space.

- In the form of [(r)*a-kor-wo* 'PAST-come.upon-PASSIVE' + main VERB], it expresses perfect 'has/have JUST VERB-ed', where the completion of the action (as in 'just' in the English translation) is in focus.
- Crucially, this construction is incompatible with the presence of *nĩ* anywhere in the utterance; the complex predicate construction already has a focal component.

(19) {talking about the rice in the kitchen} Have the children just eaten or did they eat (some time ago/yesterday)?

- a. *si-áa-kor-wó si-áa-rĩya.*
3pl-PST-come.upon-PASS 3pl-PST-eat.FV
'They've JUST eaten.'
- b. **nĩ si-áa-kor-wó si-áa-reya.*
- c. **si-áa-kor-wó nĩ si-áa-reya.*

This construction can be used in different tenses but always hold a close temporal relation to the prior event.

(20) *hedereya orokire⁴ musie ira,*
when 2.PST.come.ASP.FV home yesterday
dĩ-ra-kor-ir-wo dĩa-ra-rĩya.
1sg-y.PST-come.upon-ASP-PASS 1sg-y.PST-eat.FV
'When you came home yesterday, I had JUST eaten.'

⁴ *orokire* > *o-ra-okire*: /a-o/ > [o] (cf. Clements 1984:41)

- (21) hedereya **wookire**⁵ Kenya,
 when 2.PST.come.ASP.FV K
 dī-aa-kor-ir-wo dī-áa-rekiya thukúru.
 1sg-PST-come.upon-ASP-PASS 1sg-PST-finish school
 ‘When you came to Kenya, I had JUST finished school.’

3.2 State-of-Affairs Focus

A constructional difference is observed between non-contrastive vs. contrastive state-of-affairs (SoA) focus.

- Non-contrastive SoA focus is expressed by a canonical structure with *nĩ* in front of the predicate. As with TAM focus, *nĩ* has L tone.
- Contrastive SoA is expressed by the *verb doubling* construction: [*nĩ* + non-finite V + finite V]. The subject, when present, is positioned before the doubling.

- (22) Non-contrastive SoA focus nĩ + verb
 {Audu loves his car. Yesterday he took care of it. What exactly did he do with the car?}
nĩ araméthodékire.
 F 1.PST.9.fix.ASP.FV
 ‘He FIXED it.’

- (23) Selective SoA focus nĩ + verb doubling
 {Audu loves his car. Yesterday he took care of it. Did he wash or fix it?}
 a. *nĩ gũthodéka araméthodékire.*
 F INF.fix.FV 1.PST.9.fix.ASP.FV
 ‘He FIXED it.’
 b. #*nĩ araméthodékire.* [not selective]

- (24) Corrective SoA focus nĩ + verb doubling
 {The woman hit Peter.}
 a. *nĩ kúmuigatá amuigátíre.*
 F INF.chase.FV 1.1OM.hit.ASP.FV
 ‘She CHASED him away.’
 b. #*nĩ amuigátíre.*

⁵ wookire > o-aa-okire: /o-a/ > [w], /a-o/ > [o] (cf. Clements 1984:41)

- The fronted verb doubling constructions are also observed in the languages of zones B and H (Hadermann 1996).
- *Focus preposing* (VERB-ing X VERBs) often expresses SoA focus (Cf. Güldemann 2003:335).

(25) Suundi (H13b, Hadermann 1996:161)

- a. **ndyèká-tá:ngà.**
1S.FUT-read
'je vais lire.'
- b. **kù-tá:ngà ndyèká-tá:ngà.**
INF-read 1S.FUT-read
'je vais [lire]_{FOC}.'

Expression of present progressive

The progressive morpheme in Kikuyu is **-raa (-ra:)**. The progressivity can also be expressed by verb doubling.

- (26) a. **mwaná á-ra:-reyá mbó:so.**
1child 1-PROG-eat.FV 6.bean
'The child is eating beans.'
- b. **mwaná nĩ kúreya ará:reyá mbó:so.**
1child F INF.eat.FV 1-PROG-eat.FV 6.bean
'The child is eating beans.'
- c. ***mwaná ára:reyá.**
- d. **mwaná nĩ kúreya ará:reyá.**
- (27) **Fafa wanyú nĩ gũkinyá ará:kinya (reu).**
father your F INF.arrive.FV 1.PROG.arrive.FV now
'Your father is arriving (now) [as we speak].'

De Kind et. al (2013) present similar data from Kikongo (28). In Kikongo, no progressive marker is used; the doubling alone provides the progressive reading.

(28) Kikongo (H16, De Kind et. al 2013)

- a. **Ø-sónik-a káka ba-sónikéni.** SoA focus
15-write-FV only 2-write-PERF
'They only WROTE (a report).'

- b. **I-búlu** **∅-zawúl-a** **ci-zawul-a.** Progressive
 7-cattle 15-run-FV 7-run-FV
 'The cattle is running.' (de Kind et. al 2013)

Güldemann (2003:341 (34)-(35)) reports that in Yao (P21), a geographic neighbor of Ndendeule, the dummy verb construction with *-tenda* is used to express progressive.

Yao (P21, Hetherwick 1902:51, 52)

(29) a. n-gu-tawa.

1sg-PRS-bind

'I bind.'

b. **n-denda ku-tawa.**

1S-do INF-bind

'I am in the act of binding.'

(30) **si-tenda ku-wola.** (Sanderson 1922:108)

10-do INF-rot

'They are getting rotten.'

There data support the idea explored by Güldemann (2003) that there is a formal parallel between marking devices for predicate-centered focus and progressive. In some Bantu languages, there is evidence that PCF markers have been grammaticized to progressive markers (see Güldemann 2003).

The use of verb doubling constructions to express SoA focus and progressive is also attested in other African languages outside Bantu, such as Kenga (Sara-Bagirmi) (Jacob 2014).

Complementary distribution with persistive no

The particle *no* 'still' marks persistive, and is in complementary distribution with *nĩ*.

(31) a. **no** **kúreya** **aráareya** **mbóso** **kana nĩ** **asírire?**

still INF.eat 1.PROG.eat.FV beans or F 1.OM.eat.ASP.FV

'Is she still eating beans or has she (already) eaten?'

b. **no** **kúreya** **aráareya.**

'She's still eating.'

c. ***nĩ no** **kúreya** **aráareya.**

- Hyman & Watters (1984): progressive and persistive are inherently focal category, so they do not have a ‘focal’ counterpart.

Thus, progressive is the form used for predicate-centered focus (26)-(27); persistive does not allow extra marking of focus marked by *nĩ*.

Syntactic restriction parallel to that observed in the CJ/DJ alternation

The *nĩ* marked predicate can be clause-final, but the unmarked predicate can never be clause-final (also Güldemann 2008).

- (32) a. *mwaná nĩ á-rá-reiré mbó:so.*
 1.child F 1-PST-eat.ASP.FV 6.bean
 ‘The child ate the beans.’
- b. *mwaná á-rá-reiré mbó:so.*
- c. *mwaná nĩ á-rá-reiré.*
 1.child F 1-PST-eat.ASP.FV
 ‘The child ate (them).’
- d. **mwaná á-rá-reiré.*

4 Summary and Remarks

Use of nĩ in Kikuyu:

The proclitic *nĩ*, which is also used as an identificational copula, figures centrally in the grammar of focus in Kikuyu and closely related languages.

- Term focus: subject focus is marked by *nĩ*; object focus marked by *nĩ* only when it is contrastive. Locatives appear without *nĩ*.
- Truth-value focus is expressed by H-toned *nĩ* in front of the predicate.
- TAM focused is expressed by L-toned *nĩ* in front of the predicate.
- Non-contrastive SoA focus is expressed by L-toned *nĩ* in front of the predicate.
- Contrastive SoA focus is expressed by L-toned *nĩ* with focus-preposing doubling.
- The verb doubling construction used for contrastive SoA focus also express progressive.
- The scope of *nĩ*: only the following element.

	Assertive	Contrastive
Term Focus		
Subject	nĩ + SUBJ (9)-(10)	nĩ + SUBJ (13)
Object	(V) OBJ (11)	(V) OBJ, nĩ + OBJ (14)
Locative	(V) LOC (12)c	(V) LOC (12)d
Operator Focus	né + PRED (15)/(17)	né + PRED (16)
SoA Focus	ne + PRED (22)	ne + INF.V + FIN.V (23)-(24)

Table 2: summary of focus expressions

Complex predicates for TAM focus: a sequence of two inflected verbs—the aux-like verb meaning ‘to have come upon’ (“just”??) and an inflected content verb—expresses perfect, focusing on the completion of the action in relation to another reference point.

Grammaticalization path

- SoA focus → progressive
- Operator focus → perfect marker

The data on SoA focus and expression of progressive in Kikuyu provide further support to the directional grammaticalization from predicate-centered focus towards progressive (Güldemann 2003).

On the other hand, there is evidence from Sara-Bagirmi languages that operator focus is often marked by using perfect structures (e.g. by adding perfect suffixes—Jacob (2014)).

Parallelism with the conjoint/disjoint morphology?

nĩ is cross-categorial proclitic while the conjoint/disjoint morphology is a verbal affix. Despite this distributional difference, the formal and functional characteristics of *nĩ*-marked elements seem to parallel those of the conjoint/disjoint morphology more than previously recognized.

- Non-subject term focus is expressed by the unmarked structure without *nĩ* marking, just as it is expressed by the unmarked conjoint form in several languages (cf. van der Wal 2013).
- Predicate-centered focus is expressed by the *nĩ*-marked predicate, just as it is expressed by the marked disjoint verb form (Güldemann 1996, 2003).

- There is a robust syntactic requirement that the unmarked conjoint verb form must have a following element, while the marked disjoint form has no such restriction. The same holds for the unmarked (*nĩ*-less) verb and *nĩ*-marked verb.

Abbreviations: 1S ‘first person singular’, ASP ‘aspect’, F ‘focus (marker)’, FUT ‘future’, FV ‘final vowel’, HAB ‘habitual’, ID ‘identificational copula’, INF ‘infinitive’, INSTR ‘instrument’, LOC ‘locative’, MAN ‘manner’, NEG ‘negative (marker)’, OBJ ‘object’, OM ‘object marker’, PASS ‘passive’, PCF ‘predicate-centered focus’, PERF ‘perfect’, PN ‘proper name’, PROG ‘progressive’, PRS ‘present’, PST ‘past’, SoA ‘state-of-affairs’ SUBJ ‘subject’, TEMP ‘temporal’

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