

The relation between predicate operator focus and theticity: How preverbal clause operators in Bantu betray functional affinity

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1 Basic assumptions about information structure

+ functional approach, e.g., Chafe (1976, 1987), Dik et al. (1981), Dik (1997), Hyman and Watters (1984), Lambrecht (1994), Sasse (1987)

(1) Structure-function independence

- language specific constructions must be conceptually separated from cross-linguistically relevant information structure configurations (henceforth just "configuration")
- > bilateral one-to-many relation possible: one underspecified construction can encode different configurations; and vice-versa, one configuration can be encoded by different constructions; but existence of default/preferred/more frequent interpretations
- > major question: how are configurations distributed over a given set of constructions?

(2) Value asymmetry

- "opposed" values~parameters of different configurations are not symmetrical in terms of discourse-functional and hence formal markedness, rather default values > see below

(3) Default values in default structure

- "normal" discursive progression of information flow by asserting one new piece of information (= focus) based on activated/given information (= background) (cf., e.g., Chafe 1976, 1987; Pawley and Snyder 2000)
 - > "lack of focus" more marked than background~topic-focus structure
 - > multiple foci more marked than single focus
 - > contrast more marked than plain assertion
 - > subject focus more marked than non-subject focus

(4) Illocution dependence

- information structure intimately tied to illocutionary force of speech act type, and predicate normally instantiates/hosts the illocution
 - > predicate (operators) by default in the scope of focus

(5) Referentiality of information

- entities/referents are better topics and foci than states of affairs etc.
 - > verb focus more marked than term focus
 - > predicate focus more marked than term focus

(6) "Conservative" focus concept

- focus conceived of as a clause-level phenomenon: "sentence focus" (cf. Lambrecht 1987, 1994) viewed alternatively as "thetic statement" (cf. Sasse 1987)
- opposed to "categorical statement" in which a focus-background structure holds at least between a predication and a predication base, normally the subject
- > thetic statement as compact information unit, neutralizing/canceling the sentence-internal focus-background configuration induced by the default interpretation of a particular morpho-syntactic construction > typical discourse contexts - Figure 1

1. EXISTENTIAL STATEMENTS (in a wider sense; presence, appearance, continuation, etc., positively and negatively)
2. EXPLANATIONS (with or without preceding questions such as 'what happened?', 'why did it happen?', etc.)
3. SURPRISING OR UNEXPECTED EVENTS
4. GENERAL STATEMENTS (aphorisms, etc.)
5. BACKGROUND DESCRIPTIONS (local, temporal, etc., setting)
6. WEATHER EXPRESSIONS
7. STATEMENTS RELATING TO BODY PARTS

Figure 1: Diagnostic contexts for thetic statements (Sasse 1987: 566-7)

(7) Default structure

- language-specific "unmarked clause type" conveys UNMARKED (?or LEAST MARKED) configuration, and is thus a central construction regarding information structure
- > mostly "categorical statement" in which a nominal subject is the background:
 - assertive focus on non-subject term or on predicate+non-subject term (~ "verb phrase")
- > tripartite salience hierarchy with highest position for non-subject, even if predicate is new

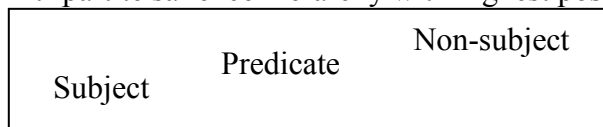


Figure 2: Default salience hierarchy (exemplified with simple SV(O) clause)

2 Predicate operator focus

- + predicate is host of two major functions:
 - (a) instantiates illocutionary act
 - (b) identifies/selects a state of affairs
- > multiple import for information structure - ?intended meaning of ambiguous term "predicate focus", terminological precision must disambiguate between:
 - (a) verb/predicate operator focus (includes truth~"verum" focus)
 - (b) verb (lexeme) focus
- + different morphosyntactic host compared to term focus
- > implies overall different encoding (cf. WORKSHOP Q2)
- + both focus types with just one marking locus in simplex predicate
 - > potential formal affinity (cf. WORKSHOP Q3)
 - > possible cover term "predication focus" (Güldemann 1996, 2003), if a given language does not disambiguate both types by distinct constructions
 - complex predicate may dissociate these two functions in two separate constituents
 - > has consequences for their possible formal encoding
- + illocution entails assertion and normally a verb
 - > no "extra" obligatory marking (cf. WORKSHOP Q1), possibly no contrastive variant
- + rest of paper dedicated to WORKSHOP Q4: "Some languages mark predicate focus and all-new/thetic utterances in the same way: What is the semantic connection between theticity and predicate focus?" - specifically predicate operator focus (see Güldemann (1996: 159-229) for a more detailed discussion)

3 Preverbal *ni(-)* in Kenyan Bantu

3.1 Kikuyu (E51)

+ most conjugational paradigms occur in three basic predicate types, two of which are relevant for the information structure in main clauses:

The first of the three for Affirmative verbs is the **Focussing** Form. This differs from the other forms in tone, in most cases. At one point we would have called it 'Independent', but no Kikuyu Affirmative verb is truly independent. This requires a following noun, adverb, or other modifier; it cannot be the only nor the last word in the sentence. To have the equivalent of an **'independent'** Affirmative verb, we have to take the Non-Subject Relative, preceded by (and dependent upon) *ny*. (Bennett et al. 1985: 147-8, emphasis mine)

With a following Subjunctive, it simply emphasizes:

- (1) a. *ny tw-dhiy* contrasted with b. *tw-dhiy*
 PF 1P-go:SUBJ 1P-go:SUBJ
 let's GO! let's go!

Immediately preceding an Affirmative verb, not a Subjunctive, it permits the verb to stand alone:

- (2) a. *n-gàà-rùgá nhàmà* but b. *ny n-gàà-rúgă*
 1S-FUT-cook meat PF 1S-FUT-cook^{DEP}
 I will cook meat I will cook

The Focussing form of the first [i.e. left] example cannot be used without a following word.

... Its use followed by the verb should not be confused with its use when separated from the verb by another element, when it is **emphasizing** the element in question. (Bennett et al. 1985: 158)

- (3) a. *ma-kũ-heire kĩ* or
 2-2S-give:HOD.PST what
 b. *nĩ-kĩ ma-kũ-heire*
 TF-what 2-2S-give:HOD.PST^{DEP}
 What did they give you? (Myers 1971: 12)

Morphosyntax	Bennett's term	Configuration	Examples
(I) Predicate + Term	"focussing"	assertive term focus	(2)a., (3)a.
(II) <i>ny</i> + Term + Dependent predicate	"emphasizing"	contrastive term focus	(3)b.
(III) <i>ny</i> + (Dependent) pred. + (Term)	"independent"	pred. operator focus ²	(1)a., (2)b.

Table 1: Three focus-sensitive clause types in Kikuyu

+ "independent" form elevates predicate in saliency vis-à-vis postverbal term

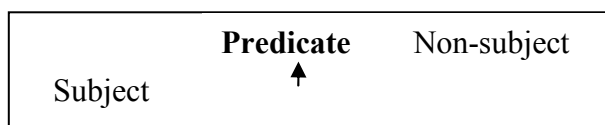


Figure 3: Saliency hierarchy in predicate operator focus (cf. Figure 2)

¹ The forms *ny* and *nĩ* reflect alternative orthographic representations of the same element.

² Pace Schwarz (2007: 148), who miscites Güldemann (1996: 160-3).

- (4) *rĩu nĩ ũũĩ kw-andĩka #*
 now PF 2S:PRS:know^{DEP} INF-write
nĩ njũũĩ kw-andĩka o na gũ-thooma Gĩkũyũ
 PF 1S:PRS:know^{DEP} INF-write as well as INF-read Kikuyu
 Do you know how to write now? - I know how to write as well as to read Kikuyu.
 (Bennett et al. 1985: 257)
- (5) *thikũ ici ũtooĩ Gĩthũngũ na mathabu*
 days these 2S:NEG:know^{DEP} English COM maths
ndũ-ngĩ-andĩk-wo ũ-karani #
 NEG:2S-POT-write-PASS ABSTR-clerk
nĩ njũũĩ Gĩthũngũ o na mathabu mũno
 PF 1S:PRS:know^{DEP} English as well as maths well
 These days if you don't know English and math you can't get hired as a clerk. - I (do)
 know both math and English well. (ibid.: 261)

3.2 The origin of proclitic *ni-*

- + *ni widely attested in Bantu as an identificational marker/copula with scope over nominals
- > regular development to predicator/focus marker in cleft-like constructions, see (3)b.
- in preverbal function with scope over (dependent) predicate, oscillates morphologically between particle and "preinitial" verb prefix (= before the "initial" subject cross-reference)
- > formal and functional counterpart of preinitial meta-pragmatic negative (Güldemann 1999):

Thus it will be seen that the effect of *nĩ* is to give positiveness or emphasis to the word or phrase it precedes. Preceding a verb, it conveys a definiteness, an assertiveness, which the verb would not otherwise possess. (Barlow 1927: 224-5)

3.3 *Gusii* (E42)

- + most conjugational paradigms distinguish two forms, one with and one without preinitial *n-*; element cognate with above proclitic *ni-*, but seems to have a different function:

The most important distinction between the two forms is that the *n-*forms introduce a new point or theme; either by starting a conversation, or continuing a conversation in a new topic. By the same token, *n-*less forms continue a discussion already in progress. ...

- (6) *n-aa-minyoka goika akarosa* vs. *igo kwa-minyoka goika kwarosa*
 ?-1:PST-run until he was tired ? 2S:PST-run until you were tired
 He ran until he was exhausted. So you ran until you were exhausted.
 A new topic, to be enlarged on later. This presumes an earlier reference to your running.
- (7) *n-kwa-many-ire go-soma* vs. *kwa-many-ire go-soma*
 ?-2S:REM-know-ISTA INF-read 2S:REM-know-ISTA INF-read
 Do you know how to read? Do you know how to read then?
 On first discovering the fact. After talking about the availability of books for those who can read, the question is asked casually.
- (8) *no-gend-e Kisimu ankio* vs. *yaaya igo n-daa-gend-e ankiende*
 ?-2S-go-FUT Kisimu tomorrow No! ? 1S-POT-go-FUT after.tom.
 Will you go to Kisumu to-morrow? No, I'll go the day after.

Closely bound up with this phenomenon are the items 'igo' and 'nigo' which may be heard at the beginning of sentences and phrases. Where a new topic is introduced by a n-form it is not preceded by 'igo', where the conversation is continued by a n-less form it often is preceded by 'igo'. [cf. (6), (8)] ... (Whiteley 1965: 93)

- n-form also at the beginning of discourse providing setting:

- (9) *Bwana D.O. na-ba-chiig-ete aba-nto*
 1.Mr. D.O. ?:1-2-advice-PRS.PROG 2-Mensch
buna baranyaare koba na obochenu
 how to have health
 The D.O. is advising people how to improve their villages (how to have health). ...
 (ebd.:95,112)

+ little and thus insufficient data for conclusive analysis, but hypothesis: distinction functions on higher level than clause-internal information structure

n-form	n-less form (with or without (<i>n</i>)igo)
new discourse topic	topic continuity
markedthetic statement	unmarked categorical statement
no focus-background	focus-background

Table 2: The distinction between two major clause types in Gusii

... a fundamental difference between utterances which are logically analyzed into two successive mutually related judgements, one naming an individual and one naming an event (categorical statements), and utterances in which the logical relations between various parts of the communicated state of affairs remain unanalyzed (thetic statements). (Sasse 1987: 554)

The thetic statement forms a unit with respect to what it contributes to the discourse at a given point. It expresses a pragmatically unanalyzed state of affairs and presents it as a piece of complex information. ... Thetic statements are thus uttered at those points of the discourse when compact information is required. This is not the case with the categorical statement. It presents a state of affairs as something analyzed, dissected into different information units. It selects one of the participants of the state of affairs in order to present it as a predication base and arranges the rest in such a way that it forms the predication about the selected predication base. We thus utter categorical statements at those points of the discourse when information is built up in successive bits. (Sasse 1987: 558)

- + n-form cancels the canonical categorical interpretation of an unmarked predicate by disrupting the link between it and the subject topic
- n- is historically a marked illocutionary operator with scope over an (originally non-assertive dependent) predicate

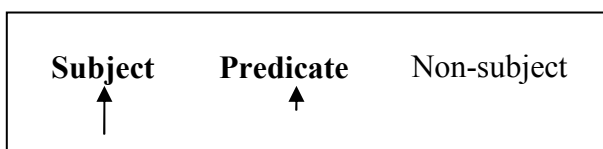


Figure 4: Salience hierarchy in thetic statement (cf. Figure 2)

- + *n*-form with affinity to other "split-structures" (Sasse 1987), but different scope of *n*-correlates with subtle functional distinction - **event-central**thetic statement

As a terminological prerequisite we will introduce the distinction between **entity-central** and **event-central thetic expressions**. Both share the property of 'positing' something ..., but they differ crucially as to what is posited: an entity-central thetic statement is a type of utterance stating the existence of an entity, while an event-central thetic statement is one which states the existence of an event. (Sasse 1987: 526, emphasis mine)

- > apparently corroborated by available data: statements with *n*-forms orient not just towards new entities but entire state of affairs

4 Preverbal *ka*- in Central Bantu

4.1 Chokwe (K11): "emphatic tense adjunct"

- + preinitial "emphatic tense adjunct" *ku*- marks predicate/truth focus - Atkins (1955: 264):³

- (i) Assertion, affirmation, intensification; 'certainly', 'definitely' ...
 (ii) Mild contrast or contradiction; 'but yes', 'surely', 'after all', 'on the other hand' (cf. the German *doch* which covers all these meanings).

- (10) *ku-ma-fua*
 PF-FUT:1-die
 he will surely die (Atkins 1955: 271)
- (11) *ku-ngu-na-ku-zange*
 PF-1S-PRS-2S-love
 amo-te [I love you, ?!"emphatic" ☺] (Diarra 1990: 44)

4.2 The origin of preinitial *ka*-

- + *ka*- in Chokwe related to a particle/proclitic in other Bantu languages which is used in contexts of focus, presentation, and exclamation; all from *(n)ka(-) '(t)here is'

- (12) Shi (J53)
ká ba-shákule
 PF 2-pound:SUBJ
 Let them pound! [unemphatic without *ká*] (Polak-Bynon 1975: 313)
- (13) Luba-Lulua (L31)
 a. *ka di-kela diadia*
 PRES 5-egg 5:DIST.DEM
 there is the egg
 b. *mu-ntu ka-yeu*
 1-person PRES-1:DEM
 here is the man
 c. *ka-tu-ye*
 PRES-1P-go:SUBJ
 let us go (Morrison 1930: 57-8)

³ cf. also Eynde (1960: 110) "konfirmatief" and Diarra (1990: 44) "confirmativo"

(14) Umbundu (R11)

a. *onjo y-a-nge hayi*
 9:Haus 9-GEN-1S.POSS PRES:9:DEM
 look here, this is my house (Schadeberg 1990: 20)

b. *hamala va-lya apako*
 PRES:2:child 2:REL:PST-eat Früchte
 it is because of the children who ate the fruits (Schadeberg 1990: 55)

c. *kandimba hati ha-a*
 1:hare PRES:1:QUOT No!
 Mr. Hare said: "No." (Schadeberg 1990: 48)

(15) Shona (S10)

akawana a! hoko ku-kura (*hoko* < ***ha**-uko)
 he found Oh! PRES:15:DEM 15INF-grow
 He found, ah! There that is, a growth; viz. that's a growth for you (Fortune 1955: 387)

> innovation in Central Bantu: *ka-* regularly has scope over an inflected verb (historically a dependent form) and fuses with it, thus developing to a preinitial verb prefix - parallel to *ni(-)* in Kenyan Bantu

4.3 Chokwe (K11): "primary [subject] prefixes"

+ 3rd-person subject prefixes distinguish between "primary" set (singular *ka-*/plural *kaa-*) and "secondary" set (singular *a-*/plural *aa-*); "primary" possibly only for referents high on animacy hierarchy (marked on the verb by agreement class pair 1/2)

The terms 'primary' and 'secondary' do not refer to statistical frequency, but rather to position and function in the sentence.

The primary prefix is used when the verbal heads the sentence. It also occurs when only a simple subject such as a personal name, a single nominal or a nominal group precedes the verbal.

The secondary prefix seems to be obligatory in the second part of a complex sentence, that is to say whenever a whole clause precedes the verbal.

A secondary prefix sometimes occurs in primary position, but only when the subject to which the prefix refers has been clearly specified in the preceding narrative. This seems to be a stylistic device rather than an inviolable rule of grammar.

These remarks are far from giving a complete account of primary and secondary prefix behavior. The matter would have to be studied in a greater variety of situations than it was possible to examine in the short time available. (Atkins 1955: 266)

+ analysis of textual occurrences of "primary prefixes" yields the following contexts:

- (a) Setting at the beginning of narrative (16)
- (b) Unexpected states of affairs (17)
- (c) Background information, explanations
- (d) Weather expressions
- (e) General statements (18)

> no access to subject-topic or unity of subject and predicate as compact information unit

> "primary prefix"-form encodes event-centralthetic statement

- (16) *ka-pwile* *Mwanangana umuwika dzina ly-enyi Mwinyikanyoka*
 ?:1:PST-be 1.chief 5.name 5-his 1.PN
 Er was eens een groote chef, zijn naam was Mwinyikanyoka [There was a big chief,
 his name was Mwinyikanyoka], *ka-shahile kashitudzina ly-enyi tshihenge*
 ?:1:PST-kill animal 5.name 5-his Chihenge
 hij doodde een beest met name tshihenge [he killed an animal called Chihenge].
tshihenge awɔ ka-kwete ma-zɔ a-nene a-tɔma
 1.Chihenge 1:DEM ?:1-have 6-tooth 6-long 6-white
 Die tshihenge heeft groote witte tanden [This Chihenge has long white teeth]. *mba*
Mwinyikanyoka yanda li-zɔ ly-a tshihenge
 now 1.PN NAR:1:take 5-tooth 5-GEN Chihenge
 Mwinyikanyoka nu, nam een tand van de tshihenge [Now, Mwinyikanyoka took one
 tooth of the Chihenge] ...
 (Delille/Burssens 1935/6: 54-5)
- (17) *ami ha tanda na-katuk-anga ya naye ya Kalunga ka-na-fu*
 I ADE Tanda 1S:PST-come.from VOC 1.God's mother ?:1-ISTA-die
 Ik ben weggegaan van "de tanda" [place of mourning over a death] van de moeder van
 God die stierf [I am mourning. Friend! God's mother is dead!]; ... (Delille/Burssens
 1935/6: 48-9)
- (18) *mu-thu u-li nyi mwono ka-li nyi utwaminyino*
 1-person 1:REL-be COM life ?:1-be COM hope
 que tem vida, tem a esperança (Who is alive has hopes) (Diarra 1990: 48)

+ "emphatic tense adjunct" *ku-* and *k-* of "primary prefixes" are complementary
 - respective forms identical > derived from the same morpheme complex *ka-Subject prefix
 > ?thetic-focus distinction of *ka-* not available for speech-act participants (see §4.4 below)

Person-number	"Emphatic tense adjunct"	"Primary (subject) prefix"	Original
1S	<i>kun(gu)-</i>	-	*ka-ngu-
2S	<i>ku-</i>	-	*ka-u
3S = Class 1	<i>ka-</i>	<i>ka-</i>	*ka-a
1P	<i>kutu-</i>	-	*ka-tu
2P	<i>kunu-</i>	-	*ka-nu
3P = Class 2	<i>kaa-</i>	<i>kaa-</i>	*ka-ba

Table 3: The formal relation of the preinitials for predicate focus and theticity

4.4 Lamba (M54)

+ so-called "historic tenses" with preinitial *ka-* similar to "primary prefix"-form in Chokwe:

- Imperfective states of affairs ~ background information (19)
- Setting at the beginning of narrative (20)
- Unexpected states of affairs with non-topical subjects (21)
- Specialized exclamatory question (22)

- (19) *pa-ku-fika a wa-ntu ka-n-ci-lya*
 16TIME-INF-arrive 2-person ?-1S-PRST-eat
 When the people came I was still eating. (Doke 1938: 270)

(20) *aka-ntu ka-ka-ya ne muvyakwe mu-mpanga*
 13-Mensch ?-13-go COM his.companion INE-forest
 A man went with a companion into the forest, ... (Madan 1908: 62)

(21) *uyo muvyakwe ne-kunwa-po # ati a-nw-e-po #*
 1:DEM 1.his.companion SEQ-drink-ADE when 1-drink-ANT-ADE
ichiso ka-li-shyala pa menda
 5:Auge ?-5-stay ADE water
 And the man drank it. When he had drunk, one of his eyes remained in the water.
 (Madan 1908: 62)

(22) *ka-fi-wama*
 ?-8-be.nice
 D'you suppose they'd be nice? (indicates sarcasm and incredulity) (Doke 1938: 447)

5 The relationship of predicate operator focus and theticity

+ formal affinity between theticity and focus is not restricted to predicate focus

> instead specific pairing of focus-theticity subtypes:

Thetic statement	Categorical statement
(a) event-central	vs. predicate operator focus (Güldemann 1996 ~ here)
(b) entity-central	vs. term focus (Sasse 1987, Güldemann forthcoming)

+ relationship mediated in both cases by the same factor: absence/presence of clause-internal focus-background configuration ~ status of subject-topic

- recall apparent restriction of "primary prefixes" to 3rd-persons in Chokwe, implying lack of distinction for speech-act participants - not fully conclusive, e.g., (11) actually ambiguous
 - but in principle motivated: non-3rd persons inherently given and thus topical (otherwise contrastive focus) > "variant on a universal theme" - distinction less relevant

+ specific common denominator for thetic-focus-pair under (a)

- sentence with predicate operator focus is a categorical statement in which the assertion operator is highlighted within the clause in particular on the cost of the non-subject (which, arguably, is by default higher in saliency)

- levelling of clause-internal configuration in thetic statement - assertion operator has scope over entire proposition

> focus operator with original scope over the central clause element, the predicate, is, so-to-speak, "raised" to the higher level of inter-clausal saliency relations; cf. traditional term "sentence focus" (only possible meaning "focus against discourse background" like another less salient sentence)

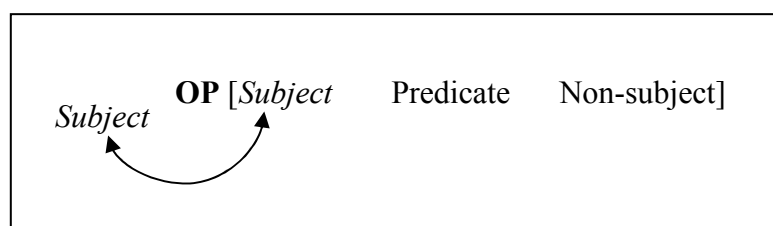


Figure 5: Scope of assertion operator excluding (~ focus) or including (~ thetic) subject

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Abbreviations

Arabic numbers: if followed by S or P - person
 otherwise - nominal agreement class

ABSTR abstract, ADE Adessive, ANT Anteriority, COM Comitative, DEM Demonstrative, DEP Dependent clause, DIST distal, FUT Future, GEN Genitive, HOD hodiernal, INE Inessive, INF Infinitive, ISTA inchoative-stative, NAR Narrative, NEG Negative, P Plural, PASS Passive, PF Predication focus, PN Proper name, POSS Possessive, POT Potential, PRES Presentative, PROG Progressive, PRS Present, PRST Persistent, PST Past, QUOT quotative, REL Relative, REM Remote, S Singular, SEQ Sequential, SUBJ Subjunctive, TF Term focus, VOC vocative