

## On Luganda preverbal focus and morphological marking

Jenneke van der Wal (University of Cambridge) and Saudah Namyalo (Makerere University)

In Luganda (Uganda, JE15), nominal referents can be focused in the preverbal domain when an agreeing morpheme *px-e* precedes the verb, as illustrated in (1).

- (1) a. M-mése o-mu-sóta **gy-e** gw-a-kuttê.  
9PX-rat 3A-3PX-snake 9-e 3SM-PAST-catch.PERF  
'It's a rat that the snake caught.'
- b. Mu-sóta **gw-e** gw-á-lya e-m-mése.  
3PX-snake 3-e 3SM-PAST-eat 9A-9PX-rat  
'It's a/the snake that ate the rat.'

This construction arguably originated as a cleft construction, where the focused element is predicative and the *-e* marker is a relative complementiser. However, a question is whether this is synchronically still a cleft, or a monoclausal focus construction with *-e* being a focus marker on the verb.

Arguments for the cleft analysis can be found in similarities between the *-e* construction and predicate and relative marking. First, an object relative clause takes exactly the same marker *-e*, albeit with a different tonal and intonational pattern (2).

- (2) E-m-mése o-mu-sóta gy-e gw-á-kúttê y-a-fuddê.  
9PX-rat 3A-3PX-snake 9-e 3SM-PAST-catch.PERF 9SM-PAST-die.PERF  
'The rat that the snake caught died.'

Second, a negative verb in this construction takes the post-initial negator (3a), as in the relative, rather than the pre-initial one (3b).

- (3) a. Mu-sóta gw-e gu-tá-á-lya m-mése.  
3PX-snake 3-e 3SM-NEG-PAST-eat 9PX-rat  
'It's a/the snake that didn't eat the rat.'
- b. O-mu-sota **te**-gw-a-lya m-mese.  
3A-3PX-snake NEG-3SM-PAST-eat 9PX-rat  
'The snake didn't eat the rat.'

Third, the absence of the augment can be used to make a noun into a predicate (though note the different tone pattern), suggesting that the focused S/O in (1) is also predicative.

- (4) **omusóta** 'snake'  
musotâ 'it is a snake'

However, the construction can also be used when the focused noun does carry an augment and is therefore arguably not predicative, as shown in (5).

- (5) E-m-mése o-mu-sóta gy-e gw-a-kuttê.  
9A-9PX-rat 3A-3PX-snake 9-e 3SM-PAST-catch.PERF  
'It's a rat that the snake caught.'

Indeed, the focused DP does not need to be marked as a nominal predicate in the *-e* construction, i.e. the copula is not used, unlike in pseudoclefts and reversed pseudoclefts:

- (6) a. Gw-e mu-sotâ o-gw-á-lya e-m-mése.  
 3-COP 3PX-snake 3REL-3SM-PAST-eat 9A-9PX-rat  
 ‘It’s the snake that ate the rat.’
- b. E-ky-á-lya e-m-mése gw-á-lí mú-sotâ.  
 7REL-7SM-PAST-eat 9A-9PX-rat 3SM-PAST-be 3PX-snake  
 ‘What ate the rat was the snake.’

Furthermore, unlike the similarity between object focus and relativisation in (2), subject relativisation does not use the same *-e* marker, but instead has an additional vowel prefix, agreeing in noun class with the relativised verb (compare (1b) to (7)). This is unexpected if the construction is formed of a predicative noun and a relative clause.

- (7) O-mu-sóta o-gw-á-lya e-m-mése mu-néne.  
 3A-3PX-snake 3REL-3SM-PAST-eat 9A-9PX-rat 3-big  
 ‘The snake that ate the rat is big.’

Other striking properties are the strict adjacency between the *-e* marker and the verb (although *-e* is still phonologically independent), and the flexible word order of left-dislocated and focused elements, as in (8). These properties can be analysed as a morphological term-focus marker on the verb combined with various positions in the left periphery of a monoclausal construction, but are more difficult to account for in a biclausal cleft analysis.

- (8) a. Mark abaana essuuka z-e y-a-ba-gul-ir-a.  
 1.Mark 2.children 10.bedsheets 10-e 1SM-PAST-2OM-buy-APPL-FS  
 ‘It’s bedsheets that Mark bought the children.’
- b. Mark essuuka abaana ze yabagulira.  
 c. essuuka Mark abaana ze yabagulira.  
 d. essuuka abaana Mark ze yabagulira.  
 e. abaana Mark essuuka ze yabagulira.  
 f. abaana essuuka Mark ze yabagulira.

In this work-in-progress report our primary goal is to compare the alternative syntactic analyses of this construction, paying special attention to possible subject/object asymmetries. A second goal is to show that the construction does not simply express underspecified ‘focus’ but rather ‘identification’. A third point of discussion is the interaction between the *-e* focus construction and the presence/absence of the augment, which we argue indicates exclusive focus.