

The Ex-situ Focus Construction in Gĩkũyũ: Structure and Motivations

Abstract

Gĩkũyũ has in-situ and ex-situ focus marking strategies. In the in-situ strategy, focus is marked on a constituent in its default syntactic position whereas a constituent occurs at the front of a clause and gets attached to the morphemes *nĩ/ti* in ex-situ focus marking. This makes the morphemes *nĩ/ti* obligatory in ex-situ focus but their role and mode of action remain contentious. While some authorities such as Clements (1984) see *nĩ* as focus marking, Bergvall (1987) sees it as an assertion marker. Consequently, two theoretical approaches compete in explaining the structure of the ex-situ construction. The Focus Phrase Approach (Clements 1984) treats it as mono-clausal while the Cleft Analysis (Bergvall 1987) treats it as a bi-clausal construction. The literature also does not explain the motivation behind the ex-situ construction particularly where in-situ focus marking is also possible. Consequently, the structure and the motivations behind ex-situ focus in Gĩkũyũ remain an open topic hence the interest of this paper. Analysing data from sermons done by three preachers in Gĩkũyũ and using the tools provided by the Prominence Theory of Focus marking (Büiring 2010), this study found out that the ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ is bi-clausal. Further, the study demonstrated that the morphemes *nĩ/ti* are copula verbs which facilitate focus marking by availing a focus sensitive position immediately after them. It also established that the preference for ex-situ focus is motivated by the search for maximal prominence and that the Prominence Theory of Focus realization is in need of parameterization in order to account for ex-situ focus.

Key words: Ex-situ focus, prominence, copula construction, focalization

1. Introduction

This paper concerns the structure of and the motivations behind the ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ. Focus is here understood this way:

The FOCUS of a sentence S= the (intension of a) constituent c of S which the speaker intends to direct the attention of his/her hearer(s) to, by uttering S.
Erteschik-Shir (2007:38).

This definition treats focus marking as both syntactic (marked on a constituent) and pragmatic (bears the intention of a speaker to direct audience attention to particular constituents). Such constituents contain information the speaker considers important and for Stevens (2017:1); such information is marked as so via some linguistic means. Focus marking has received substantial scholarly attention (Rooth 1992; Lambrecht 1994; van Dijk 1998; Gundel 1999; Schwarz 2007; Erteschik-Shir 2007; Büiring 2008;2010 and Wilbur, 2012) to mention a few.

The literature classifies focus through its scope or function (Wilbur 2012:466) leading to such classes as broad, narrow and contrastive focus. Broad focus is marked on several constituents in a clause whereas narrow focus is marked on “...one...clausal constituent¹,” (Gundel 1999:57). Contrastive focus is employed by a speaker who intends to correct some previous information or to highlight the choice of a constituent from a reservoir of alternatives.²

¹ Also called term focus (Guillemann 2003), argument focus (Lambrecht 1994) or contrastive focus (Kroeger 2004). This paper calls it ‘constituent’ focus.

² Exhaustive focus is a sub-type of contrastive focus.

This paper studies narrow focus in Gĩkũyũ³ a Bantu language classified as E51 by Guthrie (1967). Following Wachera (2008:1), the language has five mutually intelligible and syntactically⁴ similar dialects namely the Northern, Kĩ-Ndia, Kĩ-mathĩra, Gĩ-gĩchũgũ and the Southern dialects.

In Gĩkũyũ, constituent focus is marked in two ways: in situ and ex-situ. In in-situ focus marking, a constituent remains in its default syntactic distribution whereas in ex-situ, the focused constituent is fronted and obligatorily attached to the particle *nĩ* /ne/ or *ti* /ti/⁵. The particle *nĩ*/*ti* therefore becomes indispensable in ex-situ focus constructions prompting Schwarz's (2003) contention that "...virtually all discussions of focus...concentrate on the particle..." (Schwarz 2003:54). In the literature, two theoretical formalism compete in accounting for the role and distribution of the morpheme *nĩ*/*ti* in focus constructions namely the 'Focus Phrase Analysis (Clements 1984; Schwarz 2003, 2007) and the Cleft Analysis (Bergvall 1987).

The Focus Phrase Analysis (FPA) is a mono-clausal approach which claims that *nĩ* is focus marking in all its distributions. It also contends that *nĩ* heads a focus phrase which occurs within an extended CP (Rizzi 1997). Further, FPA notes that the focus phrase has a fixed syntactic position hence the various distributions of *nĩ* are contingent on the constituents which move into its scope. Constituent movement into the focus phrase is triggered by the focus feature carried by *nĩ* which attracts a constituent that carries focus⁶. Copula clauses are treated as cases of preverbal *nĩ* with a null verbal head whereas the restriction of one *nĩ* per clause follows the restriction of the focus phrase to only one in a clause. Conversely, the absence of a focus phrase in relative clauses means that *nĩ* does not occur in relative clauses.

FPA however inadequately accounts for the complementarity between *nĩ* and the negative morpheme *ti*. In offering a response, Schwarz (2007) speculates that "perhaps...the negative head is capable of checking the focus feature on the fronted element..." (Schwarz 2007:8). Should this be the case, the negative morpheme is also focus marking which complicates matters for the theory. For instance, would the theory treat the negative marker 'ti' as a head to the focus phrase as well? If so, can one phrase bear two heads? Thus, FPA in its current conceptualization does not account for the relation between *nĩ* and *ti* in Gĩkũyũ ex-situ focus constructions. Further the formalism does not satisfactorily account for narrow verb focus⁷ concerning which Schwarz (2007) says "...has to await another occasion," (Schwarz 2007:10). Also, the formalism does not explain why preverbal *nĩ* marks the entire verb phrase as focused. The restriction to the present is explained via the absence of an overt verb which would carry tense yet no explanation is offered on what hosts the present tense in the ex-situ construction. Besides, it is not clear how the theory would account for other distributions of the morpheme *nĩ* as in prepositional phrases. The theory opposes a cleft analysis of ex-situ constructions in Gĩkũyũ yet more recent research has confirmed that subject ex-situ focus in Gĩkũyũ is a cleft construction (Morimoto 2014).

The Cleft Analysis rejects the view that *nĩ* is a focus marker instead treating it as a marker of assertion just like Armstrong (1940); Barlow (1951); Güldemann (2008) and Kihara (2017). Like with FPA, the Cleft Analysis takes copula clauses as unique cases of the preverbal *nĩ* with a null copula verb. In accounting for ex-situ structures, the formalism notes

³ According to the 2019 Population and Housing census report, the population of the Agĩkũyũ is 8.1 million.

⁴ Differs in vocabulary and pronunciation

⁵ The presence of *nĩ*/*ti* differentiates ex-situ constructions from topicalization which also fronts constituents but attaches them to *-rĩ* 'as for.'

⁶ Yuan (2016) counterargues that movement into the focus phrase is triggered by a +Q feature carried by *nĩ*.

⁷ Aboh (2006) calls it predicate cleft while Heins (2017) calls it verb fronting.

that the verb in the ex-situ structure is null as is the subject. This way, the ex-situ is a case of a cleft construction in which *nĩ* marks assertion.

Taking *nĩ* as an assertion marker accounts for its distribution in Gĩkũyũ clauses. Independent clauses only make one assertion hence one *nĩ* per clause whereas relative clauses, due to their presupposed information, lack assertions so cannot host *nĩ*. Also, both *nĩ* and *ti* are assertive therefore in complementary distribution. These observations notwithstanding, the approach struggles to explain the use of *nĩ* in non-assertive environments such as in questions besides being challenged by the possibility of hosting topics before the ex-situ focus construction. The theory also assumes that all ex-situ constructions are clefts and does not explain the obligatoriness of *nĩ* in intransitive constructions.

Thus, the two formalisms make important claims concerning ex-situ focus structures in Gĩkũyũ but also show that the debate on the ex-situ focus in Gĩkũyũ remains an open topic. For example, Morimoto (2014) and Kihara (2017; 2021) accept that subject ex-situ focus is a cleft. Yuan (2017) on the other hand contends that *nĩ* motivates movement for it carries a question feature. Whereas this may be the case in *wh*- constructions, it cannot be related to non-question ex-situ focus. With this in mind, this paper contributes to this debate by proposing an alternative approach with the hope of explaining the structure of and the motivations behind the ex-situ structure. The next section presents the data and the theory; section 3 discusses the structure of the ex-situ construction while section 4 focuses on the attractiveness of the ex-situ position to focus marking before section 5 concludes the paper.

2. The Data and the Theory

The data for this paper came from publicly availed sermons preached in the Gĩkũyũ language by three purposefully sampled televangelists. The televangelists were given the codes KenG1, KenG2 and KenG3. Their inclusion in the sample was informed by several factors including that they preach using Gĩkũyũ as the primary language; to a ‘sit in’ audience and that they distribute their sermons through the television and/or YouTube platforms. All the three preachers run churches where they record the sermons they share via YouTube and for KenG1 and KenG3 via the television as well. Sermons preached between June and December 2017 were considered for sampling. Eighteen sermons were included in the final sample⁸ with those bought from the church outlets labelled ‘T’ and those downloaded from YouTube labelled ‘Y.’ The sermons were transcribed leading to a corpus of 45,930 words which was manually analysed for ex-situ focus constructions. The examples used in this paper were drawn from all the sermons and where need be; examples were modified to highlight a phenomenon under discussion. In the discussion, the position of focus marking in a sermon is shown using line numbers which are attached to the previously discussed label via a colon. The data was then discussed in the light of the Prominence Theory of Focus Realization (Büring 2010).

The Prominence Theory of Focus Realization (PTF) Büring (2010) is a cross-linguistic theory of focus realization motivated by the realization that all languages, mark for focus. Büring (2010) identifies pitch, prosodic phrasing, constituent order variations or a mixture of all these as common mechanisms of focus marking (Büring 2010:178). Since the different mechanisms address the same phenomenon; their differences ‘... are...pragmatic not grammatical,’ (Büring 2010:179) hence the need for a common formalism.

Developing Truckenbrodt (1995) concept of ‘Prosodic Prominence,’ PTF contends that focus in all languages is ‘realized by structural prominence’ (Büring 2010:177). Further, the

⁸ The sermon topic was not a parameter in sampling.

theory posits that focus interacts with clause structure through the ‘Focus Prominence,’ which states:

Focus needs to be maximally prominent

Büding (2010:178).

To account for syntactic focus marking, PTF parameterizes the ‘focus prominence’ constraint in terms of the hierarchical relations below.

- a. Focus position > *Prom* rest
- b. rest > *Prom* subject

Büding (2010:204).

The constraint above shows that the focus position is more prominent than the rest of the clause. In the ‘rest’ of the clause, the subject is the least prominent. This hierarchy is the default order of prominence relations in a clause so if any part of the clause is more prominent than the focus position, then it must be overtly marked as so⁹.

3. The Structure of the Ex-situ Construction in Gĩkũyũ

The data in this study shows a similarity between ex-situ focus constructions and copula clauses in Gĩkũyũ. Consequently, this section starts with a discussion on the Gĩkũyũ copula construction.

3.1. Copula Clauses in Gĩkũyũ

According to Dixon (2010), a copula clause is a sentential construction which has a copula verb as its predicate and “...two core arguments, Copula Subject (CS) and Copula Complement (CC),” (Dixon 2010:159). The copula verb creates a relation between the CS and the CC and for this reason, it has been viewed as semantically vacuous (Hengeveld 1992; Stassen 1997; den Dikken (2006); Gibson & Marten, 2019 and Jin & Chen 2022). The kind of relation is contingent on the CC following the copula verb though Dixon (2010) avows that copula constructions show identity, attribution, possession, location and benefaction, (Dixon 2010:159).¹⁰ Further, Dixon (2010) implies that in a copula clause, the CC,¹¹ is obligatory and must be overt.

The research data reveals the use of three morphemes as copula verbs in Gĩkũyũ namely *nĩ/ti* ‘is,’ *-rĩ* ‘am, are, were, was’ and *-uma* ‘were, was.’ The three morphemes have different occurrences conditioned by tense and the person of the subject as illustrated in example (1)¹².

(1a)	Ndeto icio nĩ njega			KenG2-T1:4-5
	Ndeto	icio	nĩ	njega
	News	DEM (those)	COP	good

⁹ This occurs when a non-focused constituent is in a focus position, or a focused constituent occurs in a non-focus position.

¹⁰ For Higgins(1973), copula clauses classify into equatives, identificational, specificational and predicational

¹¹ A CS +COP is not a copula clause. (See Dixon 2010:159).

¹² The following glossing is used in the paper. 1SG/PL-1st person singular/plural; 2SG/PL- 2nd person singular/plural; AC-Class agreement marker; ASSOC-Associative; CAUS-Causative; COMPL-Completive aspect; COP-Copula; DEM-Demonstrative; FOC-Focus particle; FUT-Future tense, FV-Final vowel; HAB-Habitual aspect; NC-Noun class marker; PRS-Present tense; PST-Past tense; REL-Relativizer; SM-Subject Marker, BRP-Bounded Recent Past.

Those¹³ news are good.

(1b) **Goliathũ arĩ¹⁴ issue** KenG3-Y3:87

...Goliath **a** **a-** **ĩ-** **issue**
 ...Goliath AC.1 TNS (pst) COP issue
 ...Goliath was an issue.

(1c) **Mwatũka ũrĩa u-uma ho...** KenG1-Y3:117

Mũ -atũka ũ -rĩa u -uma ho...
 NC3-crack AC3 -REL SM3 COP.BRP 16.there...
 The crack which was there...

In example (1a), the NP ‘ndeto icio’ (those news) is the CS that is linked to the CC ‘njega’ (good) by the morpheme *nĩ* which therefore functions as a copula verb. Substituting ‘*nĩ*’ with ‘*ti*’ makes example (1a) negative leading to *ndeto icio ti njega* ‘those news are not good’. The NP *Goliathũ* ‘Goliath’, functions as the CS in example (1b) whereas the NP *issue* functions as the CC. Thus, the word *-a-ĩ* ‘was’ and not the morpheme *nĩ/ti* functions as its copula verb. Example (1b) is in the past tense; implying a change from the present to the past tense in copula clauses motivates a corresponding change in the form of the copula. If sentence (1b) was in the present tense, it would have read as *Goliathũ nĩ issue*, ‘Goliath is an issue’ again showing the application of *nĩ*¹⁵ as the copula verb. In Gĩkũyũ, tense is marked via the attachment of an affix to the verb root such as *a* for the remote past, *ra* for the recent past and *kũ* for the current future.¹⁶ Thus, for the copula verb in (1b) to mark the past tense, the past tense morpheme *a* is attached to it leading to *a-ĩ* (pst+cop). Further, the verb in Gĩkũyũ carries the agreement markers of its subject hence the subject marker (SM) of the subject NP ‘Goliath’ must also reflect in the verb. This way, the SM *a* for the NP ‘Goliath’ and the past tense affix *a* are attached to *-ĩ* to form *a-a-ĩ* ‘he was’. If the sentence was in the near past, then the near past morpheme *ra* would be attached to the copula *-ĩ* to form the clause *Goliathũ a-ra-ĩ issue* ‘Goliath was an issue.’¹⁷ In example (1c), the NP *mwatũka* ‘crack’ is the CS while the pronoun *ho* ‘there’ is the CC. The copula verb is *uma* which is the form of the copula Gĩkũyũ uses for the recent past usually termed “...bounded recent past¹⁸ tense,” (Englebretson 2015:82). Thus, Gĩkũyũ forms copula clauses in the past, the near past, the bounded recent past and the present tenses. No examples in the future tense were found in the data.

¹³ Gĩkũyũ has a plural for ‘news’ hence the plural demonstrative.

¹⁴ The morpheme varies dependent on the person and number of the subject for example ‘*ndĩ*’ for the first person singular and *ĩ* ‘are’ for the second person singular.

¹⁵ The negative copula *ti* is also acceptable here.

¹⁶ Gĩkũyũ has a split tense system; the future for example has the current which uses the morpheme *kũ*; the near *ĩ* and the remote *kaa*.

¹⁷ Not too long ago.

¹⁸ Shows that the action happened ‘not more than a day’ ago

In this paper, the interest rests on the use of the *nĩ* and *ti* morphemes in copula constructions for they are also used in ex-situ focus constructions. The data shows that contingent on the type of the CC, the *nĩ*/*ti* copula clauses serve different functions in Gĩkũyũ. In example (1a) above, the CC serves as an attribute of the NP *ndeto icio* ‘those news;’ that ‘they are good’ hence an attributive copula. A different usage is seen in example (2) below which comes from sermon KenG1-Y2 in which the speaker argues that tithes offer protection.

(2) **Gĩcunjĩ gĩa ikũmi¹⁹ nĩ rūgiri** KenG1-Y2:74

Gĩcunjĩ	gĩ-	a	ikũmi	nĩ	rūgiri
NC7. Part	AC7	ASSOC.	ten	COP	fence

The ten percent is a fence.

In (2), the CS *gĩcunjĩ gĩa ikũmi* ‘ten percent’ is linked to the CC *rūgiri* ‘fence’ which identifies the ten percent as a fence. This makes the copula in (2) identificational: a copula in which the CC gives or denies the identity of its CS. If the speaker in (2) wished to deny the identity of its CS, he would substitute *nĩ* with *ti* leading to *gĩcunjĩ gĩa ikũmi ti rūgiri* ‘the ten percent is not a fence.’ In this usage, the morpheme *ti* is a copula verb just like *nĩ* but with a negative polarity. Unlike *-rĩ* and *-uma* which take agreement markers, *nĩ* and *ti* are invariable. This agrees with Meeussen (1967) assertion that the invariable copula for all Eastern Bantu languages “...reconstructs to the affirmative ‘ni’ and its negative counterpart ‘ti,’” (Meeussen 1967:115). So, the invariable copula verb in Gĩkũyũ is not semantically vacuous for unlike in English, the copula morphemes *nĩ* and *ti* contribute either the affirmative or negative senses to their constructions.

The discussion in this part shows that Gĩkũyũ has both an invariable copula verb *nĩ*/*ti* and the variable copula verbs *-rĩ* and *-uma*. Existence of the variable copula motivates the literature to argue that *nĩ* is not the copula verb but it suppresses the copula verb *-rĩ* (e.g. Schwarz 2007:4). Cross-linguistic studies have however confirmed that Bantu languages have both an invariable and a variable copula verb. Gĩkũyũ shares this feature with other Bantu languages such as Makhuwa (van der Wal 2009); Digo (Nicolle 2013); Kinyarwanda (Jerro 2015) and Kiswahili (Gibson & Marten 2019).

3.2 The Syntax of the Ex-Situ Focus Construction

The following discussion departs from the hypothesis that ex-situ focus constructions provoke a bi-clausal structure. For discussion purposes, the first clause is here called the upper clause and the second one the lower clause. The example provided in (3) below comes from a continuation of the discourse in example (2). The speaker in the sermon claims that tithes protect whatever remains after tithing therefore says:

(3) **Tithe nĩ rūthingo rwa kũirigĩra kĩrĩa gĩa tigwo.** KenG1-Y2:75.

Tithe	nĩ	rũ	-thingo	rũ	-a	kũ	-irig-	ĩr	a
Tithe	COP	NC11-wall	AC11-	ASSOC.	INF	-fence-	COMPL	FV	

kĩrĩa	kĩ-a	tigwo
7.what	7.ASSOC.	left.

¹⁹ A periphrastic phrase for ‘a tithe’

Tithe is a wall for/of protecting whatever has been left.

Example (3) is not an ex-situ construction but it offers a foundation for debating the features of ex-situ constructions in Gĩkũyũ. The first part of (3) is a copula construction where ‘nĩ’ equates the CS ‘tithe’ to the CC *rũthingo* ‘wall.’ The second part is an adverbial clause giving the purpose of the copula CC *rũthingo*. Let us modify example (3) into (4).

(4) **Tithe nĩ rūthingo (rũrĩa) rūirigagĩra kĩrĩa gĩa tigwo.** KenG1-Y2:75(modified).

Tithe	nĩ	rũ	-thingo	rũ	-rĩa	rũ	-irig-	ag	ĩr-	a
Tithe	COP	NC11-wall	AC11	-REL	AC11-fence-	HAB	COMPL	FV		

kĩrĩa	kĩ-a	tigwo
what	7.ASSOC.	left.

Tithe is a wall which protects whatever has been left.

Example (4) is an ex-situ construction. Its upper clause remains a copula clause with the NP ‘tithe’ functioning as its CS and *rũthingo* ‘wall’ as its CC just as in (3). Thus, the morpheme *nĩ* functions as its copula verb rather than as a focus particle (Clements 1984; Schwarz 2003, 2007; Morimoto 2014). As a verb, *nĩ* allows other constituents to be fixed before it for example the CS ‘tithe’ in (4). Unlike in (3), the lower clause in (4) is a relative clause joined to the upper clause via the relativizer *rũ-rĩa* ‘which.’ Therefore, the lower clause talks about the upper clause CC *rũthingo* ‘wall.’ Here, the relative pronoun *rũ-rĩa* ‘which’ can be omitted since the agreement marker for class NC11 (AC11) (*rũ*) can function as a resumptive pronoun referring to the CC *rũthingo* ‘wall.’

While forming a case against the Cleft Approach (Bergvall 1987), Schwarz (2007) contends that the approach “...cannot account for topics preceding ex-situ constructions,” (Schwarz 2007:14). This is so since in Bergvall (1987), *nĩ* is taken as an assertion marker. In taking *nĩ* as a copula verb, the current paper demonstrates the existence of a CS position in the ex-situ constructions which may itself host a topic as in (4) or may accommodate other constituents in its pre-CS position.

Another type of the ex-situ construction is given in example (5). It comes from sermon KenG1-Y4 where the speaker teaches that an altar is important in helping the audience to access the spiritual realm and wealth. He says:

(5) **Nĩ kīgongona tu gĩteithagia mūdũ...** KenG1-Y4:6

Nĩ	kīgongona	tu	gĩ	-te-	ith-	ag-	i-	a
?	NC7 altar	only	SM ₇	-help	-CAUS	-HAB	-TRNS-	FV

mũ- ndũ...

NC -person.

It is the altar only which helps a person.

The example in (5) is an ex-situ construction in which the NP *kīgongona tu* ‘altar only’ is made prominent. Its CC is the NP *kīgongona tu* ‘altar only’ while its copula verb is *nĩ* but it lacks an overt CS. Nevertheless, a common behaviour in Gĩkũyũ clauses (Schwarz 2007) and

other Bantu languages (Zeller 2008 for Zulu and Lunyangapuo 2016 for Lubukusu) is that they allow for the dropping of the subject argument. Following this tradition, this paper postulates that the CS for *nĩ* in (5) has been dropped. However, in a pro-drop language, the subject theta roles are assigned to a pronoun or subject marker integrated into the verb complex²⁰. That means that the semantic content of the dropped subject is realized in a different way in the sentence. In explaining how the contents of the dropped upper clause CS in ex-situ construction are recovered, this paper notes the impossibility of dropping the CS of an non ex-situ copula construction as demonstrated next.

(6) ~~Tithe~~ *nĩ rũthingo...*

KenG1-Y2:75(modified).

* ~~Tithe~~ *Nĩ rũ -thingo...*

* ~~Tithe~~ *COP NC11-wall...*

* ~~Tithe~~ *Is a wall...*

The copula clause in example (6) is unacceptable because the CC *rũthingo* ‘wall’ lacks a CS for it to identify. What this suggests is that the ability to drop the CS in ex-situ constructions is related to their lower clauses. Example (6) can be made acceptable by attaching a lower clause to it thereby making it a cleft construction²¹. Following this observation, this paper argues that the contents of the upper clause CS in ex-situ constructions are recovered from the contents of the lower clause (see Jin & Chen 2022 for a similar argument for Chinese). For example, sentence (6) can re-write as:

(7) *Kĩrĩa gĩteithagia mũndũ... Nĩkĩgongona tu.*

KenG1-Y4:60 (modified)

<i>Kĩrĩa</i>	<i>gĩ</i>	<i>-te-</i>	<i>ith-</i>	<i>ag-</i>	<i>i-</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>mũ-</i>	<i>ndũ...</i>	<i>nĩ</i>
7.what	SM ₇	-help-	CAUS	- HAB-	TRNS-	FV	NC ₁	-person	COP

<i>kĩ-</i>	<i>gongona</i>	<i>tu</i>
NC7-	altar	only

What helps a person...is an altar only.

The sentence in (7) is a pseudo-cleft with its subject (Wh-) pronoun *kĩrĩa* ‘what’ coinciding with the CC of the following copula ‘*kĩgongona tu*’ (altar only). The copula CS is the entire phrase *kĩrĩa gĩteithagia mũndũ...* ‘what helps a person...’ which provides the variable specified by the CC *kĩgongona tu* ‘altar only.’ So in making an ex-situ construction, the copula verb and its copula CC are fronted. For example, in changing (7) above into an ex-situ construction, the verb phrase *nĩ kĩgongona tu* ‘is an altar only’ is moved to before the wh-pronoun *kĩrĩa* ‘what’ with the subsequent dropping of the wh-pronoun in favour of one which agrees with the CC in the case of a cleft or nothing in the case of focalization (discussed below).

This holds even in Wh- ex-situ constructions as in example (8). The example comes from sermon KenG2-T2 at the point where the speaker gives a hypothetical example of his wife having a bad day hence annoyed even with the husband. The speaker asks:

²⁰ This satisfies the Null Operator Generalization, (Hedberg 1990).

²¹ For example *nĩ rũthingo rũrĩa rũerũ*, ‘it is the wall which is new.’

(8) **Nĩ ũrandakarĩra kĩĩ? Nĩ kĩĩ tũrorania?** Keng2-T2:15-16

Nĩ ũ ra N rakar ĩr a kĩĩ? Nĩ kĩĩ tũ
1.sg I 2.you TNS(Prs) 1.sm annoy APP FV what? FOC what 1.pl

ra ũr an i a?
TNS(Prs) ask RECP TRNS FV.

Why are you getting annoyed with me? What are we asking each other/quarrelling about?

The second clause in (8) is an ex-situ construction. Following the arguments advanced here, it can also re-write into *kĩĩra tũrorania nĩ kĩĩ?* ‘What we are quarrelling about is what?’ A similar observation is made for verb ex-situ focus where a grammatical constituent, usually the subject NP of the lower clause, may occupy the pre-subject position of the upper clause as illustrated in example (9). The example taken from sermon KenG1-Y1 shows how lazy people bear many unfulfilled desires which lead them to desolation.

(9) ‘...merirĩria make nĩ kũmũũraga mamũragaga.’ KenG1-Y1:181

‘...ma ĩrirĩria ma- ake nĩ kũ -mũ- ũraga ma-mũ- ũrag
Ac6 desire AC6 -his COP INF - him kill AC6-him -kill

-ag- a.’

-HAB- FV.

His desires, it is killing him, they kill him.

The NP *merirĩria make* ‘his desires’ is the subject NP of the lower clause hence the clause can re-write as *...merirĩria make nĩ mamũragaga* ‘his desires kill him.’ When verb focus takes place, a gerundival copy of the lower verb *-ũrag-* ‘kill’ is added and for it to gain focus, it must be immediately after the copula verb *nĩ*. The resultant copula takes the proposition of the lower clause as its implied CS as confirmed by the underlying pseudo cleft *kiria meririria make mekaga nĩ kũmũũraga* ‘what his desires do is to kill him.’ By being the lexical subject, the NP *meriria make* ‘his desires’ is optional and enjoys a relaxed syntactic distribution even in the pseudo cleft. This confirms the possibility of re-writing ex-situ constructions in Gĩkũyũ into pseudo-clefts and further affirms that underlying ex-situ constructions are copula²² clauses which take pseudo-clefts as their CSs. Thus, despite having two clauses, ex-situ constructions have the single proposition of their underlying copula clauses.

The examples above lead to the conclusion that the upper clause in an ex-situ construction in Gĩkũyũ is a copula construction. Precisely, the copula is either identificational (Dixon 2010) where the bear the equative formula ‘A is B’ as in *tithe nĩ ruthingo* ‘a tithe is a wall.’

²² Ex-situ constructions in Gĩkũyũ can be re-written as such copulas but due to constraints on the CC, not all clauses can be changed into ex-situ constructions.

They can also be specificational (Den Dikken 2013) in which case they assume the formula ‘x is...’ where ‘x’ is a variable in need of specification. An example is *kĩrĩa abatarĩte hĩndĩ ĩyo ti mbia; kĩrĩa abatarĩte hĩndĩ ĩyo nĩ o mũgate* ‘what he needed at that time was not money; what he needed at that time was bread only’ (KenG1-T1:33-34). In this example, the pseudo cleft CS is the ‘x’ and the CCs ‘money’ and ‘bread only’ specify its value by giving what the person needed at that time. In this work, specificational copulas are treated as subtypes of identificational copulas since in specifying a CS, they give them identity. In Gĩkũyũ, identity is marked via the nominal group.

Further, it has already been shown that a pseudo cleft underlies Gĩkũyũ ex-situ constructions. The subject of the pseudo cleft is a wh-pronoun which draws its reference from the upper clause CC. For instance, the pronoun *kĩrĩa* ‘what’ in example (7) refers to the CC *kĩgongona tu* ‘altar only.’ Like in English, pronouns in Gĩkũyũ refer to or replace nouns in clauses. Therefore, the CC referred to by the pseudo cleft wh- subject is by default nominal²³. This explains the mandatory copying and transforming a verb into a gerund in verb ex-situ focus. In turn, this observation explains Abels & Mũriũki’s (2008) observation that *nĩ* in focus constructions in Kĩĩtharaka only attaches to the infinitival form of the verb or words with nominal features. Moreover, the nominal nature of the CC in the ex-situ construction is constrained by the lower clause. In clefted ex-situ constructions, the upper clause CC is followed by a relative clause which may or may not be introduced by an overt relative pronoun or a resumptive pronoun. These pronouns take the upper clause CC as their antecedents²⁴. Like in English, relative clauses in Gĩkũyũ are clausal NP post modifiers so their overt antecedents must be NPs.

Constrained by these two parameters, the CC in Gĩkũyũ ex-situ constructions is nominal. Consequently, adverbs of manner, which cannot be nominalized in Gĩkũyũ, do not function as CCs in Gĩkũyũ ex-situ constructions. Another observation concerning the Gĩkũyũ ex-situ construction is that the focused constituent is always to the right of the morpheme *nĩ/ti*. Taking the morpheme *nĩ/ti* as a copula verb, as advanced here, easily accounts for this. In Gĩkũyũ, like in some other Bantu languages (Buell 2009, Zulu; Yoneda 2011, Matengo; and van der Wal et al 2016, Luganda), there is a default focus location immediately after the verb. It is this constraint that restricts a constituent in need of prominence to the position following the copula verb. Thus, like with the other Gĩkũyũ verbs, the copula *nĩ/ti* provides a [+focus] syntactic position for the constituent one wishes to make prominent.

Lastly, the copula verb in the upper clause of an ex-situ construction is in the present tense. In the preceding paragraphs, it has been shown that the subject of the copula is null but its contents are recovered from the lower clause. This restricts the copula verb to the invariable *nĩ/ti* since it does not inflect to show the features of its subject which may make the subject overt. For instance, the variable copula *-rĩ*, would demand for the features of its subject in order to provide the corresponding noun class markers to agree with *-rĩ*. This would mean that the CS cannot again take the contents of the lower clause as its semantic base. Further the overt CS would restrict the CCs, that is, some CSs may not work with certain CCs which would reduce the power of the ex-situ to mark constituents as focused.

3.3. The Relation between the Upper and the Lower Clauses

This part investigates the relation between the upper and the lower clauses in ex-situ constructions. For a start, the subject ex-situ structure in example (5) here repeated as (10) is used for a discussion.

²³ Pronouns cannot only draw their reference from nominal and nominalized classes.

²⁴ Some antecedents are not overt leading to headless relative clauses.

(10) Nĩ kīgongona tu gĩteithagia mūdũ...

KenG1-Y4:60

Ø Nĩ kĩ- gongona tu gĩ -te- ith- ag- i- a
S COP NC7-altar only SM₇ -help- CAUS - HAB- TRNS- FV

mũ- ndũ...

NC₁ - person.

It is the altar only which helps a person.

Following Hartmann et al (2013) parameters, the ex-situ construction in example (10) is a cleft construction. First, the structure is bi-clausal with *nĩ kīgongona tu...* ‘it is only the altar’ as its upper clause and *...gĩteithagia mūdũ...* ‘...which helps a person...’ as its lower clause. It also bears the proposition of a single clause here interpreted as ‘the altar helps a person....’ Hartmann et al (2013) further note that in English, the upper clause in a cleft has a subject pronoun, a copula verb and a cleft phrase. Likewise, example (10), has *nĩ* as the copula verb and *kīgongona tu* ‘altar only’ as the cleft phrase. Nevertheless, the structure lacks a pronoun akin to the ‘it’ in English clefts. This is typical of Gĩkũyũ ex-situ constructions.

Further, a cleft sentence takes a relative clause (RC) as its lower clause. The RC is linked to the upper clause CC via an overt or covert relative pronoun. The relative pronoun in Gĩkũyũ is constructed using the relativizer *-rĩa/ria*²⁵ and a corresponding noun class (NC) marker of the antecedent. For example *mūdũ ũ-ria* ‘the man who’ and *ng’ombe ĩ-rĩa* ‘the cow which...’ The relative clause can also be formed using the NC agreement markers of the antecedent which act as resumptive pronouns as in example (10) where the NC7 marker ‘kĩ’ refers back to the NP *kīgongona tu*. Hartmann et al (2013) further contend that the relative pronoun is followed by a verb phrase which again holds for example (10) since the resumptive pronoun *kĩ* is followed by the verb *-te-* (help). Thus, the ex-situ construction in (10) is a cleft construction in the active voice²⁶.

Now consider the ex-situ construction presented in example (11). It comes from sermon KenG2-T2 where the speaker talks of happiness which he illustrates with the example of a husband and the wife preparing a meal. Concerning the wife he says:

(11) Nĩ nyeni ũ rakera...

KenG2-T2:17-18

Ø Nĩ nyeni ũ ra ker a
S COP kales 2.SG TNS(prs) dice FV.

It is kales you are dicing

The construction above is also bi-clausal. At the surface, it bears the same structure as example (10). Deeper scrutiny however reveals that the lower clause does not modify the copula CC *nyeni* ‘kales.’ For example, the CC is in NC8 whereas the pronoun introducing the lower clause is in NC2²⁷. Thus, the pronoun *ũ* ‘you’ is not resumptive; instead, it refers to the

²⁵ The choice here is dependent on the word the morpheme is attached to.

²⁶ Clefts are also found in the passive voice.

²⁷ Note also that the NP ‘nyeni’ (kales) is in plural whereas the lower pronoun is in the singular. Its plural form is ‘mũ-’ (you.).

person who is dicing the kales. Besides, the lower clause is not introduced by a corresponding relativizer which could have been *i-ria* ‘which.’ In lacking a relative clause as its lower clauses, example (11) is not a cleft construction. It is however an ex-situ construction since the object NP *nyeni* ‘kales’ is fronted from its after the verb position²⁸ and made the CC of the copula verb *nĩ*.

Such is a common structure in Gĩkũyũ especially involving object -wh- and verb ex-situ constructions. An example of a wh-question is presented in example (12) taken from sermon KenG1-T1 where the speaker persuades his audience to heed to God’s words only. He notes that house-helpers can also get their own homes and remarks that those in doubt would ask him:

(12) *Nĩ kĩĩ ũraerĩra airitu a wira?* KenG1-T1:18

Ø Nĩ kĩĩ ũ –ra –ĩr- ĩr- a a irĩtu a wĩra
S COP what 2SG -PRS - promise APP. FV NC₁ girls ASSOC work

What are you promising the house-maids.²⁹

The sentence in (12) has the features of a cleft clause except for the lack of a relative clause. The lower clause is introduced by the pronoun ‘*ũ*’ ‘you’ which does not take the upper clause CC *kĩĩ*³⁰ ‘what’ as its antecedent. Instead, it replaces the noun identifying the person making promises to the house-maids. Nevertheless, example (12) is an ex-situ construction since the NP *kĩĩ* has been fronted. The same structure is evident in verb focus as in *nĩ gĩtunya atunyaga* ‘it is taking by force, he takes by force’ where the pronoun *a* introducing the lower clause refers to the implied agent rather than to the CC *gĩtunya* ‘taking by force.’ This ex-situ structure therefore demands for an alternative explanation.

Looking at example (12), one observes that the CC does not function as the subject of the lower clause via a resumptive pronoun or a relativizer. This may prompt one to conclude that the upper clause is not related to the lower clause. A keen look however reveals that the CC *nyeni* ‘kales’ in the upper clause is also the object of the lower clause. That is proven via removing the upper clause from (11) which leads to example (13).

(13) * *ũ rakera* KenG2-T2:17-18 (modified)

ũ ra ker a...
2.SG TNS(prs) dice FV.

*You are dicing.

Two reasons make example (13) unacceptable. The verb -*ker*- is a transitive verb which requires two arguments but as is presented in (13) has only the subject argument pronoun *ũ* ‘you.’ Its lack of an object leads to another problem: it lacks a focused constituent since as argued in § 3.2, Gĩkũyũ follows the immediately after the verb (IAV) hypothesis (Watters 1979) where in the absence of marked focus, the constituent after the verb bears the default focus. Since every clause must have a focused constituent, (Erteschik-Shir 2007; Carlson 2014), then the lack of an object or marked focus makes example (13) unacceptable. Marking focus on any of its constituents redeems the clause. For instance, introducing the morpheme *nĩ* leads to *nĩ ũrakera* ‘you are dicing’ which is acceptable even without the object NP. The

²⁸ Gĩkũyũ is an SVO language.

²⁹ This is a lowly job for ladies.

³⁰ It is possible to make a cleft with this pronoun for example *nĩ kĩĩ gĩa tuma ...* ‘what has made...’ where the AC7 marker ‘*kĩ*’ pronounced as ‘*gĩ*’ /*ɣe* / refers back to the NP *kĩĩ* ‘what.’

reason is that the copula verb *nĩ* takes the clause *ũrakera* ‘you are dicing’ in its IAV position thereby assigning it verum focus. This observation explains the obligatoriness of *nĩ* in intransitive constructions without which they would not have focus.

That the ex-situ construction in (11) is acceptable implies that its CC not only carries its focus, but also functions as its object. This suggests that the NP *nyeni* ‘kales’ was fronted from the after the verb object position and attached to the copula verb *nĩ* hence an ex-situ construction. On being extracted, the object NP did not leave its pronoun in its former locus.³¹ Therefore, this fronting is a special type of topicalization which not only makes the lower clause object a CC in the upper clause but also lacks the expected Gĩkũyũ topicalizer -*rĩ* ‘as for.’ As with topicalization, this process makes the CC a new topic, that is, what the sentence is about (Stalnaker 1999; Matic, 2015; Fery et al, 2016) adds a new topic to the second person pronoun *ũ* ‘you’ functioning as the topic of the lower clause. This is possible in Gĩkũyũ which according to Mchombo et al (2004) has I(ternal) and E(xternal) topics³². The I-topic corresponds to the logical argument of a clause, *ũ* ‘you’ in this case, whereas the E-topic is whatever else the clause is about. This parallels Kihara’s (2019) dichotomy of subject (clausal) topics and discourse (sentence) topics in Gĩkũyũ where ‘...clausal topics are lexical subject RPs (NPs) and the discourse topics are the dislocated elements,’ (Kihara 2019:32). Thus, the pronoun ‘ũ’ (you) in (13) remains the clause topic whereas the CC (the object NP *kales*) functions as its discourse topic.

Arguing that the NP *nyeni* ‘kales’ functions as a topic in (11) creates another problem. Topics in Gĩkũyũ occupy a non-focused syntactic position³³ yet the intent in fronting an object is to mark it as focused. To attain focus, the fronted object is attached to the IAV position of the copula *nĩ*. In the process, a new clause is formed which takes the fronted constituent as the CC of the copula *nĩ/ti*. The remaining part of the original clause becomes the lower clause. This way, the object NP in (11) becomes a CC to the upper clause and a focused topic for the lower clause just like in basic clefts where the upper clause CC also functions as the lower clause subject via a pronoun. From this angle, this special type of topicalization³⁴ is similar to clefting as also noted in Japanese (Kima 2005). Since this form of topicalization leads to focus marking, Wilbur (2012) calls it ‘focalization,’ (Wilbur 2012: 471) a term adopted in this paper for this kind of ex-situ construction.

In sum, ex-situ constructions in Gĩkũyũ are bi-clausal contra Schwarz (2007) for Gĩkũyũ, Mũriũngi (2005) for Kĩĩtharaka; and Landman et al (2018) for Kuria observations. The upper clause is an identificational copula which takes the focused constituent as its CC whereas the lower clause may or may not be a relative clause. Either clefting or focalization relates the two clauses. In ex-situ constructions, the morpheme *nĩ/ti* functions as a copula verb contra Clements (1984) and Schwarz (2007) who view it as a focus marker. These findings are also contra Reintges (2007) accounting of a similar morpheme *ce* in Hausa as a “focus copula,” (Reintges 2007:188) and Hartmann et al’s (2012) view of *an* in Bura as both a copula and a focus marker hence “a focus copula verb (fcop)³⁵,” (Hartmann et al 2012:1067). Taking *nĩ/ti* as a copula verb also accounts for its use in non-assertive environments such as in question.

4. The Appeal of the pre-SM Position in a Gĩkũyũ Clause

³¹ The syntactic process through which a constituent is fronted but leaves a pronoun as in *nĩ Jesu ndĩmũendete* ‘It is Jesus I love him’ is called left dislocation. This is not the process in example (11).

³² Typical of Bantu languages

³³ This explains why subjects (topics) are only focused via marked focus.

³⁴ It is focus marking contra the behaviour of topics and also lacks the Gĩkũyũ topic marker ‘-*rĩ*.’

³⁵ The implication is that the fcop carries its own CS. This is falsified in this work by showing that overt CSs can be attached to the copula verb.

Ex-situ focus marking targets the syntactic position before the subject marker (SM) or before the lexical subject in a clause. For discussion purposes, this position is here called the ‘pre-SM’ position. In need of an answer is why the position is attractive to focus marking. The concern is more pronounced in the case of object and wh- focus both of which have corresponding in-situ focus structures, produced by their IAV position in a clause, yet they participate in ex-situ constructions. Indeed, following Morimoto (2014), the ex-situ construction is the most preferred structure for wh-constructions.³⁶ Why?

A possible explanation is that the pre-SM position is pragmatically more prominent than the other syntactic positions in the clause. This viewpoint is supported by contrastive focus³⁷ (Rizzi et al 2016; Bianchi 2016 and Lee 2017 among others) which is canonically realized via ex-situ focus constructions³⁸. A speaker using contrastive focus is sure of the validity of the information he/she puts in focus and further judges that the hearer needs to incorporate such information in his/her background knowledge. Such information should therefore be packaged in the most noticeable manner hence the ex-situ construction. The noticeability results from the fact that the focused information is positioned at the beginning of the lower clause therefore processed before the information in the lower clause is considered. Indeed, the lower clause functions as an update to the information in the upper clause. Consider example (5) above here repeated as example (17) for an illustration.

- (14) *Nĩ kīgongona tu gĩteithagia mūdũ.* KenG1-Y4:60
 Ø Nĩ kĩ- gongona gĩ -te- ith- ag- i- a mũ-ndũ...
 S COP NC₇-altar SM₇ -help- CAUS - HAB- TRNS-FV NC₁-person
 It is the altar which helps a person.

In interpreting this clause, the copula verb *nĩ* and the focused constituent *kīgongona tu* ‘the altar only’ come first whereas the remaining part of the sentence tells more about the focused constituent. This way, the focused constituent is easy to note as the rest of the clause becomes unacceptable or changes in meaning without it. In being noticeable, the constituent becomes prominent. Thus seen, the noticeability of the pre-SM position gives it prominence which makes it attractive for ex-situ focus marking.

Another factor which makes the pre-SM position noticeable in Gĩkũyũ clauses is that, it is a non-argument and non-focus position. Clause arguments cannot therefore occur in this position. Consider example (11) here repeated as example (15).

- (15) a. *Nĩ nyeni ũ rakera* KenG2-T2:17-18
 Ø Nĩ nyeni ũ ra ker a
 S COP kales 1.SM TNS(prs) dice FV.
 It is kales you are dicing.

In this sentence, the NP *nyeni* ‘kales,’ is the fronted object of the verb *ker* ‘dice.’ The sentence can be reconstructed as (15b) with the object in its default after the verb position.

³⁶ Except manner and instrument adverbials

³⁷ Contrastive focus, according to Lee (2017) is a response to an implicit question under discussion (QUD). Corrective focus and focus based on alternatives are the two major types of contrastive focus. Counterarguments against the relation between contrastivity and ex-situ abide for example (Zafiu 2013, Jiménez-Fernández 2015 and Holtus et al 2017 for the Romance languages).

³⁸ Its association with the ex-situ may explain why it selects the ex-situ position.

- (15) b. **ũ rakera nyeni** KenG2-T2:17-18 (modified)
 ũ ra ker a nyeni
 1.SM TNS(prs) dice FV kales
 You are dicing kales

Moving the NP *nyeni* ‘kales’ to the pre-SM position leads to the unacceptable construction in (15c)

- (15) c. ***Nyeni ũ rakera** KenG2-T2:17-18 (modified)
 Nyeni ũ ra ker a
 Kales 1.SM TNS(prs) dice FV.
 *Kales you are dicing

The unacceptability of the sentence in example (15c) results from the fact that the object NP *nyeni* ‘kales’ occurs in a non-argument position. Put differently, the object NP is a part of the clause but it is now outside the clause. Besides, the fronted object NP occupies a non-focus position of the clause in (15c). This follows the constraint that the pre-SM position in Gikũyũ, as in other Bantu languages, does not host focused constituents. This is because the SM is an anti-focus marker as affirmed by Zeller (2008) who commenting on the subject, notes that in Bantu “...the SM marks the subject NP as [-Focus]³⁹,” (Zeller 2008:239). The effect of the anti-focus feature is that “...a preverbal subject in Bantu can never be the focus of the sentence in which it occurs,” (Zeller 2008:239)⁴⁰. Thus, the pre-SM position the object NP *nyeni* ‘kales’ occurs is a [-focus] position. The consequence is that, without a constituent in its IAV and without overt marking on the fronted object, the clause in (15c) lacks focus marking yet every clause must have focus (Schwarz 2007; Carlson 2014).

Since the intent of fronting was to mark the object as focused, then the language creates a new copula clause adjoined to the existing one which takes the fronted constituent as its CC hence in its [+focus] IAV position. As such, it is not the copula itself which marks the constituent as focused but rather the syntactic position⁴¹ it avails to the fronted constituent. This observation responds to Schwarz’s (2007) concern on the significance of *nĩ/ti* in clefts which are by default focus marking. All the same, focus is marked at the front (-focus; non-argument) position of the lower clause which is a deviation from the clausal norm in Gikũyũ. This in turn makes the focused constituent foregrounded hence noticeable and prominent. In line with this claim, the search for maximal prominence provokes ex-situ focus marking.

Now, if focus must be maximally prominent (Büring 2010), then even in-situ and other forms of unmarked focus are also maximally prominent. This observation defeats the claim that the search for maximal prominence is the motivation for marked focus. A contrary stand can however be developed. Consider example (17) below.

- (17) **Nĩ kĩĩ ũ raerĩra a wĩra?** KenG1-T1:18
 Ø Nĩ kĩĩ ũ -ra -ĩr ĩr- a a irĩtu a
 S COP what 2SG–TNS(prs)-promise APP FV 1.PL girl ASSOC

³⁹ This means that even in cases where overt subjects are present in a Gikũyũ clause, they are not in focus.

⁴⁰ Also observed in other Bantu languages (Kimenyi 1980, Kinyarwanda; Zerbian 2006, Sotho and Sabel et al. 2006, Zulu among others)

⁴¹ Only the invariable copula verb can work here since it can host an invariable CS; otherwise, the use of a variable copula will demand for the use of overt CSs to provide agreement features.

wĩra?

work?

What are you promising the house maids?

The wh- element *kĩĩ* ‘what’ focused in (17) above is the direct object of the verb *ĩĩra* ‘promise,’ the indirect object being the NP *airĩtu a wĩra* ‘house-helps.’ By being in the IAV of the verb ‘promise,’ it was already marked for in-situ focus. Following the focus prominence constraint, the in-situ focus assigned to *kĩĩ* ‘what’ in its in-situ position is maximally prominent as is the focus assigned to *kĩĩ* ‘what’ in the ex-situ structure in (17). That is to say, in-situ and ex-situ focus are equal in terms of prominence. Noting this, Schwarz (2003) lamented that ‘...it is unclear why kikuyu would have developed two different types of focus constructions, in-situ and preposed if these serve exactly the same purpose and express the same meaning,’ (Schwarz 2003:114). Bearing the same concern but from the angle of prominence, this study contends that if the two were equal, there would be no preference for the ex-situ structure noted in wh- questions (Morimoto 2014). Consequently, the study argues that though in-situ and ex-situ focus are both prominent, they are prominent to different degrees contra the ‘maximally prominent’ condition (2010:178).

This new assertion can be reconciled with the ‘Focus Prominence’ constraint by modifying the syntactic focus prominence constraint below.

a. Focus position $>_{\text{Prom}}$ rest

b. Rest $>_{\text{Prom}}$ subject Buring (2010:204).

The constraint above, as in this work, treat focus as a syntactic position and it claims that a position hosting focus is more prominent ‘>’ than the rest of the clause which in turn is more prominent than the subject position. Noting the preference of the ex-situ focus marking even when in-situ focus is possible, this study proposes that whereas the in-situ (non-marked) position is prominent, the ex-situ (marked) position is more prominent. Consequently, it proposes an expansion of the focus position in the syntactic focus constraint above in order to accommodate the different levels of prominence in in-situ and ex-situ focus marking. The expansion is supported by the constraint itself which in talking of maximal prominence presupposes varying degrees of prominence including non-maximal prominence⁴². The proposed constraint which captures the hierarchy between marked and unmarked focus is presented (18).

(18) a. Marked focus position $>_{\text{Prom}}$ Unmarked Focus position $>_{\text{Prom}}$ rest

b. Rest $>_{\text{Prom}}$ subject

This constraint expands thus: a marked focus position is more prominent than an unmarked focus position; whereas the unmarked focus position is more prominent than the rest of the clause which is in turn more prominent than the subject position. The appeal of this constraint is that it captures the various degrees of prominence and in the process accounts for the appeal of the ex-situ position for focus marking. Another corollary of this argument is that the prominence constraint can now account for secondary occurrence focus (Baumann 2016).

⁴² In arguing that voice gives verb arguments different levels of prominence, Maldonado (2012) supports the this paper’s view that prominence is a gradient concept.

That is, if a clause has primary focus and some additional focus, then one of them will be maximally prominent while the other will be prominent. More comprehensive discussions on this assertion are left for future studies.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to establish the structure of and the motivations behind ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ. The paper has demonstrated that ex-situ constructions in Gĩkũyũ are bi-clausal with the upper clause being a copula clause whereas the lower clause may or may not be a relative clause. The lower clause relates with the upper clause either through clefting or focalization. Further, the paper revealed that ex-situ focus in Gĩkũyũ is a syntactic position such that every constituent that occupies the IAV position in a clause gains focus. Consequently, the morphemes *nĩ/ti* in ex-situ constructions are not focus markers but copula verbs that provide an open IAV position to host constituents in need of focus marking. Additionally, the study showed that only constituents with nominal features can be put under ex-situ focus. Taking the upper clause as a copula explains the presence of other grammatical constituents before the morpheme *nĩ/ti* as well as the complementary relationship between the affirmative (*nĩ*) and the negative (*ti*) morphemes in the ex-situ.

The paper also established that prominence is a gradient concept and that ex-situ focus marking is motivated by the search for maximal prominence. Consequently, the paper proposes a parameterization of the ‘Prominence Constraint,’ (Büding 2010:178) for it to capture the degrees of prominence in in-situ and ex-situ focus. Further work on the relation between the copula verb in ex-situ constructions and the present tense as well as with other particles in the Gĩkũyũ focus system is necessary.

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