

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 remains contentious. Whereas some authorities such as Clements (1984) see *nĩ-* as focus marking, Bergvall (1987) sees it as an assertion marker while Kĩhara (2017) see it as both. In the literature, 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 presented in the Gĩkũyũ language by three preachers and using 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 demonstrates that the morphemes *nĩ-/ti-* as used in the ex-situ focus constructions are copula verbs which facilitate focus marking by availing a focus sensitive position after them. It also establishes 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.

1. Introduction

This paper concerns the structure of and the motivations behind the ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ. According to Erteschik-Shir (2007) “the FOCUS of a sentence S... (is) the (intension of a) constituent...of S which the speaker intends to direct the attention of his/her hearer(s) to, by uttering S,” (2007:38). Stevens (2017:1) note that such constituents in focus are marked as so via some linguistic means. Focus marking has received substantial scholarly attention (Rooth 1992; Lambrecht 1994; Gundel 1999; Schwarz 2007; Erteschik-Shir 2007; Büiring 2010 and Wilbur, 2012). In the literature, focus is usually classified into broad focus which is marked on more than one constituent and narrow focus which is marked on “...one...constituent¹,” (Gundel 1999:57). This paper concentrates on narrow focus in Gĩkũyũ² a zone E51 (Guthrie 1948) Bantu language largely spoken in the central parts of Kenya.

In Gĩkũyũ, narrow focus is marked in two ways: in situ and ex-situ. In the in-situ focus marking strategy, a constituent is marked as focused in its usual syntactic position and no special morpheme or interference with clause structure is employed. It is therefore unmarked. In the ex-situ focus strategy, (an example of marked focus) a constituent is moved from its usual syntactic position to the front of the clause for it to be marked for focus. Such a constituent gets obligatorily attached to the particle *nĩ*³ ‘be,’ or (in this usage), to its negative counterpart *ti* ‘be + not’ as illustrated in example (1).

(1) *Nĩ/ti nyeni ũrakera...*

KenG2-T2:17-18 (modified)

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

² According to the 2019 Population and Housing census report, the population of the Agĩkũyũ is 8.1 million.

³ The presence of *nĩ/ti* differentiates ex-situ constructions from topicalization which also fronts constituents but attaches them to *-rĩ* ‘as for.’

Nĩ/ti nyeni ã-ra-Ø-ker-a
 COP/Neg 10.kales⁴ 2SG-PRS-PROG-chop-FV
 It is/ it is not kales you are chopping⁵

As will be argued later, the NP *nyeni* ‘kales’ in example (1) is the object of the verb *-ker-* ‘chop’ but it is moved to the front of the clause and attached to the morpheme *nĩ-* ‘is.’ With a falling intonation at the end, the clause in example (1) is an affirmative statement which changes into the negative statement when the morpheme *ti-* ‘is not’ replaces the affirmative *nĩ-* ‘is.’ With a rising intonation, both the positive and negative clauses change into a question. In all these realizations, focus marking falls on the object NP *nyeni* ‘kales.’ Now that focus is marked outside the default syntactic position of the object NP and the NP is attached to the particle *nĩ-/ti-* ‘is/is not,’ then (1) is a case of an ex-situ focus marking.

In the ex-situ focus marking structure in Gĩkũyũ, the particle *nĩ-/ti-* is indispensable prompting Schwarz’s (2003) contention that “...virtually all discussions of focus...concentrate on the particle...” (Schwarz 2003:54). In the literature, two main approaches compete in accounting for the role and distribution of the morpheme *nĩ-/ti-* in ex-situ focus constructions: the Focus Phrase Analysis (Clements 1984; Schwarz 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 and that *nĩ-* heads a focus phrase which occurs within an extended CP (Rizzi 1997). Therefore, the focus phrase has a fixed syntactic position so the various distributions of *nĩ-* are contingent on the constituents moved into its scope. Copula clauses are treated as cases of preverbal *nĩ-* with a null verbal head whereas the restriction to one *nĩ* per clause is a reflex of the one focus phrase per clause constraint. FPA inadequately accounts for the complementarity between *nĩ-* ‘be’ and the negative morpheme *ti* ‘be+not’ in ex-situ focus constructions. For instance, Schwarz (2007) argues that “perhaps...the negative head is capable of checking the focus feature on the fronted element...,” (Schwarz 2007:8). This implies that the FOC phrase has two heads. Further, FPA does not satisfactorily account for narrow verb focus⁶ and the restriction of the ex-situ focus construction to the present tense in the ‘verb-less’ ex-situ focus construction. FPA also opposes a cleft analysis of the ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ yet Morimoto (2017) confirms that subject ex-situ focus in Gĩkũyũ is a cleft construction.

The Cleft Analysis treats *nĩ-* as a marker of assertion just like Barlow (1951) and Güldemann (2008). Copula clauses are viewed as cases of the preverbal *nĩ-* with a null copula verb same case with ex-situ focus structures whose verb and subject are null. The constraint of one *nĩ-* per clause results from the fact that a clause makes only one assertion. Relative clauses do not make assertions hence do not host *nĩ-*. The ex-situ focus construction is taken as a case of a cleft construction. The approach does not account for the use of *nĩ-* in non-assertive environments such as in questions and it erroneously predicts that all ex-situ focus constructions are clefts though Morimoto (2017) confirms that only the subject ex-situ construction is a cleft.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the debate on the ex-situ focus in Gĩkũyũ is an open topic. This paper contributes to this debate by supporting a copular clause structure of the ex-situ focus construction and by explaining some possible motivations behind the ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ. Section 2 of this paper presents the theory, Section 3 the data, Section 4 the structure of the ex-situ focus construction, Section 5 discusses the attractiveness of the ex-situ position for focus marking whereas Section 6 concludes the paper.

⁴ Cardinal number attached shows the Noun Class.

⁵ The culinary term is ‘chiffonade;’ but this paper uses the term ‘chopping’ for simplicity.

⁶ Aboh (2006) calls it predicate cleft while Heins (2017) calls it verb fronting.

2. The Data

The data for this paper came from publicly availed sermons preached in the Gĩkũyũ language by three purposefully sampled televangelists. Their choice was informed by the fact 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. Eighteen sermons were included in the final sample 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 necessary, they were modified to illuminate a point under discussion. In the discussion, the position of focus marking in a sermon is shown using line numbers attached to the previously discussed label via a colon. The data was then discussed in the light of the Prominence Theory of Focus Realization (Büiring 2010).

3. The Theory

The Prominence Theory of Focus Realization or PTF, (Büiring: 2010) proposes a common approach to all forms of focus marking. According (Büiring 2010:178) languages use pitch, prosodic phrasing, constituent order variations or a mixture of all these as mechanisms for focus marking. Since the different mechanisms address the same feature; their differences ‘... are... pragmatic not grammatical,’ (Büiring 2010:179) hence the need for a common theory of focus. Building on Truckenbrodt (1995) concept of ‘Prosodic Prominence,’ PTF contends that focus in all languages is ‘realized by structural prominence’ (Büiring 2010:177). The theory also posits that focus interacts with clause structure through the ‘Focus Prominence,’ which states:

(2) Focus needs to be maximally prominent

Büiring (2010:178).

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

- (3) a. Focus position > *Prom* rest
 b. rest > *Prom* subject

Büiring (2010:204).

The constraint above claims that the focus position is more prominent than the rest of the clause which is in turn more prominent than the subject position. This hierarchy is the natural 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 so.⁷

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

3.1. Ex-situ Focus Constructions in the Data

The data shows the use of the ex-situ focus construction for subject, object, verb and *wh*-constituent focus. An example of subject ex-situ focus construction is presented in example (4). It comes from sermon KenG2-Y1 where in line 79, the speaker ridicules church members

⁷ This occurs when a non-focused constituent is in a focus position, or a focused constituent occurs in a non-focus position.

who fail to go to church to attend to other matters. He gives an example of a Christian lady who insulted a porter for soiling her clothes. Since this is unexpected from a Christian, the Christian lady justifies herself by saying:

- (4) **Nĩ andũ**⁸ mathiaga mena ũrimũ. Keng2-Y1:79
Nĩ a-ndũ ma-thi-ag-a ma⁹-ena¹⁰ ũrimũ
FOC¹¹ **2.People** 2SM-move-HAB-FV 2-with(have) foolishness¹²
 It is people who move foolishly

In example (4), the subject NP *andũ* ‘people’ is put in a focus position by following the morpheme *nĩ*-‘is.’ Gĩkũyũ does not obligatorily require an overt subject NP and when such an overt subject NP occurs, it is usually not marked for focus. For instance in example (4) above, the NP *andũ* ‘people’ can occur at the beginning of the clause without *nĩ*- ‘is’ leading to *andũ mathiaga mena ũrimũ* ‘people move with foolishness.’ In this case, the default focus falls on the post verbal constituent *mena ũrimũ*¹³ ‘with foolishness.’ Therefore, focus marking on the overt subject NP is a case of an ex-situ focus construction since the subject NP is moved from its normal non-focus position and attached to the morpheme *nĩ*- ‘is’ or *ti*- ‘is not’ to receive focus marking.

Example (5) below comes from sermon KenG2-T2 in which the speaker encourages his audience to remain happy. He gives the illustration of a happy couple in which while the husband is dicing beef, the wife:

- (5) **Nĩ nyeni ũrakera** KenG2-T2:17-18
Nĩ nyeni ũ-ra-Ø-ker-a
COP 10.kales 2SG-PRS-PROG-chop-FV.
 It is kales you are chopping.

In this example, the NP *nyeni* ‘kales’ is in ex-situ focus as confirmed by its position in the front of the clause and its attachment to the morpheme *nĩ*- ‘is.’ A closer observation reveals that it is also the object NP in the clause since it receives the action denoted by the transitive verb *-ker-* ‘chop.’ Given that Gĩkũyũ is an SVO¹⁴ language, then the default position of the NP *nyeni* ‘kales’ is the post verbal position so its presence at the beginning of the clause is a case of an object ex-situ focus construction.

A structure related to this is the *wh*- question in which a *wh*- constituent is fronted from a post verbal position. This is illustrated through example (6) coming from sermon KenG2-T2

⁸ Bold used to direct the reader to the specific area of the example.

⁹ The ‘a-’ in this agreement marker gets raised to ‘e-’ to form ‘meena’ which in turn prompts the deletion of one of the vowels ‘e-’ leading to *mena*.

¹⁰ This is the word ‘have’ but as used here translates to ‘with.’ Thus the underlying sentence is ‘people move having foolishness.’

¹¹ This morpheme is here glossed as a focus marker until the views in this paper are motivated.

¹² The following glossing is used in this paper. 1SG/PL-1st person singular/plural pronoun; 2SG/PL-2nd person singular/plural pronoun; COMPL-Completive aspect; COP-Copula; DEM-Demonstrative; FOC-Focus particle; APPL-Applicative; FV-Final vowel; HAB-Habitual aspect; PRS-Present tense; PST-Past tense; SM-Subject Marker, BRP-Bounded Recent Past, TRNS-Transitivizer; SUBJ-Subject; RECP-Reciprocal; PROG-Progressive aspect; INF- Infinitive marker;

¹³ If *nĩ* is shifted to follow the NP *andũ* ‘people,’ then the focus falls on the entire clause *mathiaga mena ũrimũ* ‘they move foolishly.’

¹⁴ Subject+verb+object. The object of an active verb follows the verb.

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

Nĩ ũ-ra-N-rakar-ĩr-a **kĩĩ**?
1SG 2SG-PRS-1SG.SUBJ-annoy-APPL-FV **what**?

Nĩ **kĩĩ** tũ-ra-ũr-an-i-a?
FOC **what** 1PL.SUBJ¹⁵-PRS-ask-RECP-TRNS¹⁶-FV

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

Example (6) presents two distributions of the *wh*- pronoun *kĩĩ* ‘what’ with the first part showing the occurrence of the pronoun in its in-situ post verbal position. In the second part of the sentence, the pronoun *kĩĩ* ‘what’ gets fronted and attached to the morpheme *nĩ*- ‘is’ in a case of *wh*- pronoun ex-situ focus marking. Example (7) below illustrates verb focus. It comes from sermon KenG3-Y1 which encourages the audience to fight for its wealth. The example in (7) shows what God does to give wealth to His people.

(7) Nĩ **gũtunya** atunyaga... KenG3-Y1:90

Nĩ **kũ-tuny-a** a-tuny-ag-a...
FOC INF-rob-FV 1SM-rob-HAB-FV
It is robbing (to rob) that He robs...

In (7), the finite verb *tunyaga* ‘robs’ is copied then changed into its gerundival/infinitival form *gũtunya* ‘robbing/to rob’ before being attached to the morpheme *nĩ*- at the front of the clause. To get focus, the copy of the verb is placed at the beginning of the clause which is not natural to the verb hence a case of verb ex-situ focus.

3.2. The Structure of the Ex-situ Focus Construction

This part concerns the structure of a clause with ex-situ focus marking in Gĩkũyũ. As seen in the introduction, the literature does not agree on the structure of such a sentence. Whereas some authorities take it as mono-clausal (Schwarz 2007); others view it as bi-clausal (Bergvall 1987) while yet others view it as both monoclausal and biclausal (Kĩhara 2017 and Morimoto 2017). What the literature agrees on is that the subject ex-situ focus construction is bi-clausal (Schwarz 2007; Morimoto 2017 and Kĩhara 2017). The key diagnostic used to reach this conclusion is the nature of the subject marker in the predicate. According to Morimoto (2017), this subject marker resembles the one used in relative clauses and since relative clauses are dependent clauses, then the predicate in the subject ex-situ focus marking is also dependent. Borrowing from Mũgane (1997: 148 (22)), Morimoto (2017) uses the example reproduced in (8) below to support his argument.

(8) a. nĩ Kamau **ũ-nyu-ire** njohi nyingĩ.
 f Kamau 1sm-drink-pfv 9.beer 9.lot
 ‘[Kamau]F drank a lot of beer.’

b. nĩ njohi nyingĩ Kamau **a-nyu-ire**.
 f 9.beer 9.lot Kamau 1sm-drink-pfv
 ‘Kamau drank [a lot of beer]F.’

(Morimoto 2017: 150(2)).

¹⁵ Same morpheme used for the objective plural hence the label ‘SUBJ’ in this usage.

¹⁶ ‘Transitivizer.’ See Wittke (2015:78) for an explanation.

The subject marker (SM) in example (8a) is *ũ-* ‘he’ which is the form used in dependent clauses. In (8b), it changes to *a-* ‘he’ which is the SM form used in independent clauses. This test is used to confirm that the predicate in (8a) forms a clause different from the *nĩ Kamau* ‘it is Kamau’ part of the sentence. If the predicate is dependent, then the *nĩ Kamau* ‘it is Kamau’ part of the sentence is independent. This has been taken as the standard test to challenge a two-clause structure of the ex-situ focus construction. However, the distinction between the two forms of the SM in (8) gets lost if the subject is changed into a plural as in the modified Morimoto’s (2017) example in (9).

- (9) a. *nĩ Kamau na Njoroge ma-nyu-ire njohi nyingĩ.*
 f 2.Kamau and Njoroge 2SM-drink-pfv 9.beer 9.lot
 ‘[Kamau and Njoroge]F drank a lot of beer.’
- b. *nĩ njohi nyingĩ Kamau na Njoroge ma-nyu-ire.*
 f 9.beer 9.lot 2.Kamau conj. Ngoroge 2SM-drink-pfv
 ‘Kamau and Njoroge drank [a lot of beer]F.’
 (Morimoto 2017: 150(2) modified)

The example in (9) lacks the distinction in the SM that was seen in example (8). This suggests that the SM of plural subjects does not reflect the dependent/independent status of the clauses in which they appear. Noting this, this paper uses negation as an alternative diagnostic. In Gĩkũyũ, the morpheme used for negation varies depending on whether the clause in which it is used is a main clause or a subordinate clause¹⁷. Main clauses take either *nd-*¹⁸ or *ti-* ‘neg’ as their negating morpheme whereas subordinate clauses take the *ta-* ‘neg’ form of the negating morpheme. To differentiate them, the former is here glossed as Neg.₁ and the latter as Neg.₂. *Nd-* is the same as *ti-* in terms of interpretation but differs in terms of form and distribution. The former is *ti* ‘Neg.₁’ with pre-nasalization which the latter lacks and whereas *nd-* occurs before and gets attached to single vowels which follow it, *ti* occurs in all the remaining distributions in the main clause. Subjecting the clause in (8) to the test confirms its adequacy in differentiating main from subordinate clauses.

- (10) a. *nĩ Kamau ũ-ta(*ti)-na¹⁹-nyu-a njohi nyingĩ.*
 f 1.Kamau 1sm-Neg.₂ (*Neg.₁)-tns-drink-pfv 9.beer 9.lot
 Intended: ‘[Kamau]F did not drank a lot of beer.’
- b. *(*Ta) Ti Kamau ũ-Ø-nyu-ire njohi nyingĩ.*

¹⁷ Also independent and dependent clauses.

¹⁸ The form underlying it is *ti* ‘neg’ so they bear the same interpretation.

¹⁹ The status of this portmanteau morpheme (also functions as ‘and’ and ‘with’) is controversial. Barlow (1951: 146ff) views it as a tense marker whereas Rose et al. (2002:31) argues that it marks experiential aspect. As used in this example, the morpheme marks tense not as an aspect marker since it does not co-occur with other tense markers. Because it is restricted to negative constructions, it has been viewed as introducing an ‘emphatic negative past’ (Leakey 1978:48) but since it can take other tenses besides the past, Kĩhara (2017) calls it ‘emphatic negation,’ (Kĩhara 2017:77). Now that it creates a sense of the past in (10a), it is here taken as in Barlow (195:146ff), as a tense marker working with the negative to mark the hordenial past. However, as it can work with other ‘non-past’ tense markers, it is further viewed as a ‘pseudo tense marker’ for the hordenial past in negative clauses. To differentiate it from the conventional glossing of the past tense morpheme (PST), it is glossed as ‘tns.’

(*Neg.₂) Neg.₁ 1.Kamau 1sm-drink-pfv 9.beer 9.lot
 ‘[It is not Kamau]F drank a lot of beer.’

(Morimoto 2017: 150(2) modified)

Note, the negating morpheme *-ta-* ‘Neg.₂’ cannot co-work with the ‘current past completive aspect’ marking morpheme *-ir-* to form **ũ-ta-nyu-ire* (intended) ‘who did not drink’ in example (10a). Being an aspect marker, the morpheme *-ir-* would require a tense marked verb except in the current past tense in which the tense is naturally unmarked (see Wittke 2015:151, 154). Remember that in the example **ũ-ta-nyu-ire* (intended) ‘who did not drink,’ the negative morpheme *-ta-* is introduced to host negation marking in the clause. In this usage, the morpheme *-ta-* functions as an auxiliary verb and it requires a tense marked main verb. Notice, if tense is overtly marked, the preceding example becomes correct as in *ũ-ta-a-nyu-ire* ‘who did not drink (a long time ago)’ where the morpheme *-a-* marks the remote past tense.²⁰ The sentence in example (10a), is in the current past tense and in marking the completive aspect, it does not take any tense marking (see example 8 above) hence the null (Ø) sign in (10b). Since *-ta-* Neg requires a tense marked verb and the current past tense does not allow such tense marking, then the completive aspect morpheme *-ir-* cannot legitimately work with the negative marking *-ta-* in this tense.

Consequently, the morpheme *-na-* ‘tns’ is introduced in example (10a) changing it into *ũ-ta-na-nyu-a* ‘who did not drink’ which is now acceptable. Also, since the predicate in (10a) is a dependent clause, the *-ti-* ‘Neg.₁’ morpheme cannot correctly work in it whereas *-ta-* ‘Neg.₂’ can. Alternatively, since *nĩ Kamau* ‘it is Kamau’ is an independent clause, it cannot take *-ta-* ‘Neg.₂’ but correctly takes the *ti* ‘Neg.₁.’ Thus seen, negation differentiates the two types of clauses in example (10). For discussion purposes, this paper calls the independent clause the upper clause and the dependent clause the lower clause. Let us now focus on the examples of ex-situ focus constructions presented in section (3.1) above.

The tentative proposal in this part is that all ex-situ focus constructions lead to a bi-clausal structure akin to the one observed in example (8a) for the subject ex-situ focus construction. Since the subject ex-situ focus construction bi-clausal nature is not in contention, this section focuses on the object, *wh-* element and verb ex-situ focus constructions. The object ex-situ construction in example (5) is repeated here for a discussion.

- (11) **Nĩ nyeni** ũrakera... KenG2-T2:17-18
Nĩ nyeni ũ-ra-Ø-ker-a
 FOC²¹ 10.kales 2SG-PRS-PROG-chop-FV.
 It is kales you are chopping (You are chopping kales)

In example (11), the NP *nyeni* is in focus this resulting from its attachment to the morpheme *nĩ-*‘FOC.’ The interest now is to find out whether the *ũrakera* ‘you are chopping’ clause is a main or a subordinate clause. For a start, the sentence in example (11) is reconstructed into its non ex-situ focus form in which the object NP *nyeni* ‘kales’ is in its usual post-verbal position.²²

- (12) a. **Ũrakera nyeni** KenG2-T2:17-18 (modified)
Ũ-ra-ker-a nyeni

²⁰ Verbs bearing the *-ir-* morpheme are always in the past since the morpheme indicates completion. Some authorities equate it to the perfective (see Cable 2013:8).

²¹ The morphemes *nĩ-* and *ti-* are here presented as FOC (Schwarz 2007) until the view held in this paper is presented.

²² Remember Gĩkũyũ is an SVO language.

2SG-PRS-chop-FV 10.kales
You are chopping kales.

- b. Ndũrakera nyeni KenG2-T2:17-18 (modified)
Nd-ũ-ra-ker-a nyeni
 Neg.₁-2SG-PRS-chop-FV 10.kales
 You are not chopping kales.

The reconstructed example in (12a) is negated in (12b) where only the *nd*- ‘Neg.₁’ is felicitous confirming that it is a main clause. However, the *nd*-/ti ‘Neg.₁’ version of the negative morpheme becomes infelicitous in the next example.

- (13) * Nĩ nyeni **nd**ũrakera... KenG2-T2:17-18 (modified)
 Nĩ nyeni **nd**-ũ-ra-ker-a
 FOC 10.kales **Neg.**₁-2SG-PRS-chop-FV
 Intended: it is kales you are not chopping.

Though attached to the same clause *ũrakera* ‘you are chopping’ as in (12b), the sentence above is not acceptable. The difference between the two sentences is that in (12b), the negated clause is a main clause but it is a subordinate clause in (13). To ascertain the validity of this claim, we change the negative marker in (13) into Neg.₂ leading to:

- (14) Nĩ nyeni **ũta**²³rakera... KenG2-T2:17-18 (modified)
 Nĩ nyeni **ũ**-**ta**-ra-Ø-ker-a
 FOC 10.kales 2SG-**Neg.**₂-PRS-PROG-chop-FV
 It is kales you are not chopping.

The sentence in (14) is acceptable confirming the previously held assumption that the *ũrakera* ‘you are chopping’ clause is a subordinate clause. Further support comes from semantic considerations. The clause *ũrakera* ‘you are chopping’ does not make complete sense without additional information or some means of focus marking. In sum, the clause *ũrakera* ‘you are chopping’ in example (14) is a subordinate clause. This leads to the speculation that the *nĩ nyeni* ‘it is kales’ part of example (14) is a main clause. Let us subject it to the same negation test.

- (15) * **Ta** **nyeni** *ũrakera*... KenG2-T2:17-18 (modified)
Ta **nyeni** *ũ*-ra-Ø-ker-a
 Neg.₂ 10.kales 2SG-PRS-PROG-chop-FV
 * Not kales you are chopping (intended: it is not kales you are chopping)

The sentence above is not acceptable. This follows the use of *ta* ‘Neg.₂,’ which usually works with subordinate clauses, in the part in bold thereby suggesting that it is a main clause. However, Neg.₁ works correctly with it as shown in (16).

- (16) **Ti** **nyeni** *ũrakera*... KenG2-T2:17-18 (modified)
Ti **nyeni** *ũ*-ra-Ø-ker-a
 Neg.₁ NC₁₀-kales 2SG-PRS-PROG-chop-FV

²³ The order of the SM and the negating morpheme is left to future work.

It is not kales you are chopping

Since the clause in (16) is acceptable, it confirms that the *nĩ*-clause in this ex-situ focus construction is a main clause. Notice that the negating morpheme *nd*- ‘Neg.₁’ could not have worked here because the only stand-alone²⁴ opposite of *nĩ*- is *ti*-. Through this simple test, it is here confirmed that the *nĩ nyeni* ‘it is kales’ part of example (11) is a main clause and the *ũrakera* ‘you are chopping’ part is a subordinate clause. Using the terminology proposed here, the former is an upper clause whereas the latter is a lower clause.

The use of *ti* ‘Neg.₁’ to establish the nature of the upper clause in Gĩkũyũ does not work in a straightforward manner with *wh*- questions. We therefore focus on establishing the status of the remaining part of the *wh*- ex-situ focus construction as in the example below.

- (17) a ...Nĩ kĩĩ **tũrorania?** Keng2-T2:15-16 (modified)
Nĩ kĩĩ **tũ-ra-ũr-an-i-a?**
FOC what 1PL.SUBJ-PRS-ask-RECP-TRNS-FV
‘What are we quarrelling (lit. asking each other) about?’

- b. ?...Nĩ kĩĩ **tũ ta (*ti) rorania?** Keng2-T2:15-16 (modified)
Nĩ kĩĩ **tũ-ta (*ti)-ra-ũr-an-i-a?**
FOC what 1PL.SUBJ-Neg.₂ (*Neg.₁)-PRS-ask-RECP-TRNS-FV
‘What are we not quarrelling about?’

Example (17b) shows that the lower part of the clause cannot legitimately take *-ti*- ‘Neg.₁’ for a negator but takes the *-ta*- ‘Neg.₂’ instead. The use of the *-ta*- ‘Neg.₂’ confirms that the clause *tũrorania* ‘we quarrelling about’ in example (17) is a subordinate clause.

Verb focus shows a similar pattern. Let us negate example (7) above for a discussion.

- (18) **Ti (*ta) gũtunya** ata(*ti) tunyaga KenG3-Y1:90 (modified).
Ti(*ta) **kũ-tuny-a** a-ta-(*ti)tuny-ag-a...
Neg.₁(*Neg.₂) INF-rob-FV 1.SM-Neg.₂(*Neg.₁)-rob-HAB-FV
It is not robbing (to rob) that He does not rob...

The upper clause in example (18) correctly takes *ti* ‘Neg.₁’ for a negator whereas its remaining part *atunyaga* ‘he robs’ takes the *ta* ‘Neg.₂’ morpheme. This observation identifies the first part of example (18) as a main clause and the remaining part as a subordinate clause. Semantic considerations corroborate this view since the upper clause can function independently as a response to a question whereas the lower clause is in need of additional information to be complete.

The preceding discussion has demonstrated that ex-situ focus constructions in Gĩkũyũ are bi-clausal. Of interest now is to establish the nature of the upper clause. The first observation made is that the morphemes *nĩ*-/ *ti*- ‘be, be+not’ used in the upper clause of an ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ are also used as copula verbs in some types of copula clauses.²⁵ According to Gibson et al. (2019), a copula verb is a “...linguistic element which co-occurs with certain lexemes ... when they function as predicate nucleus,” (Gibson et al. 2019:214). A copula clause on the other hand is a sentential construction which has “...two core

²⁴ *Nd*- requires to be attached to a pronoun following it (so it is not stand-alone) which cannot happen in the example since *nd*- ‘Neg.₁’ is followed by a noun.

²⁵ There are other copular verbs in Gĩkũyũ.

arguments, Copula Subject (CS) and Copula Complement (CC),” (Dixon 2010:159) linked by a copular verb which provides marginal or no semantic content.

Higgins (1979) categorizes copular clauses into predicational, identificational, specificational and equative (Higgins 1979:204 ff). In predicational copular constructions, the CC gives a quality of the CS. In the sentence *Bernard is kind* for instance; the adjective *kind* denotes a feature of the NP *Bernard*. The CS specifies a property of the CC in specificational copular clauses as in the clause *the thief is Mary* where the NP *thief* gives a trait of the CC *Mary*.²⁶ The CC in an identificational copular clause provides the identity of a CS which is semantically indeterminate by providing a referential constituent. For example, without the CC, the CS in the clause *that man is Bernard*, would remain unidentified. The equative copular clause signals equal identity between the CS and the CC as in the clause *Bernard is Njuguna* provided that the NPs *Bernard* and *Njuguna* refer to the same person. This paper adopts Higgins (1979) classification of copular clauses.²⁷

The data reveals the use of the morphemes *-nĩ-*, *-ti-*, *-rĩ-* and *-um-* ‘be’ as copula verbs. The verb *-um-* ‘be’ has other lexical verb functions such as functioning as the verb ‘leave or go.’ Such lexical verbs which also serve as copular verbs are called “...semi-copulas, copula verbs or verbal copulas,” (Gibson et al. 2019:214). This paper is interested in the copula *-nĩ/-ti-* ‘be’ since it is also used in ex-situ focus constructions in Gĩkũyũ. Examples of the copula use of *-nĩ-* and *-ti-* are provided next.

(19)a	Ndeto icio nĩ njega	KenG2-T1:4-5	
	Ndeto icio	nĩ	n-ega
	10.News 10.DEM (those)	COP	10-good
	Those ²⁸ news are good.		
(b)	Ndeto icio ti njega	KenG2-T1:4-5 (modified)	
	Ndeto icio	ti	n-ega
	10.News 10.DEM (those)	COP.Neg.1	10-good
	Those news are not good.		

In example (19a), the morpheme *-nĩ-* ‘are’ links the CS *ndeto icio* ‘those news’ to the CC *njega* ‘good.’ It changes to *-ti-* ‘are not’ in example (19b) which is the negative version of example (19a). This suggests that *-nĩ-* ‘is’ is a verb since it has a negative version. Besides, the morpheme is marked for and restricted to the present tense (its past form being *-rĩ-* ‘was/were’) and its useful for the formation of intonation based interrogatives in copular clauses. For example, the copula clause in (19) can be changed into an interrogative by raising the intonation starting at the copular verb *-nĩ-* ‘are’ and ending at the CC *njega* ‘good.’ This process of interrogation cannot work correctly in copular clauses without the presence of the copular verb. So, the question **ndeto icio njega*²⁹ ‘those news good?’ is not acceptable. This agrees with Kihara’s (2017) assertion that ‘...a statement cannot be intonationally converted into a question if the statement does not have *ne*,’ (Kihara 2017:136). The arguments in this paragraph show that the morphemes *-nĩ-* and *-ti-* bear some verb features.

This study notes some similarities between *-nĩ/-ti-* ‘is, is not’ copula clauses and the upper clause in an ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ. First, they both use the morphemes *-nĩ-* and

²⁶ These constructions are structurally an inverse of the predicational copula clauses.

²⁷ Other types include the locative and temporal copulas.

²⁸ Gĩkũyũ has a plural for ‘news’ hence the plural demonstrative.

²⁹ Note: *ndeto njega*? Is an acceptable question but the meaning now is ‘good news?’ different from what is presented in (19).

-*ti-* in a similar manner and with similar meanings. For example, in ex-situ focus constructions, *nĩ-* is assertive and *ti-* is negative just like in the copula use. In ex-situ use however, the morphemes *-nĩ-* and *-ti-* do not inflect for number usually because they lack an overt subject as will be proven below.

Another similarity has to do with the role of the copular verbs in the formation of intonation based questions in Gĩkũyũ. An example of such a question is provided next.

- (20) Ndeto icio **nĩ njega** ? KenG2-T1:4-5 (modified)
 Ndeto icio *nĩ* *n-jega* ?
 10.News 10.DEM (those) COP 10-good
 Are those news good? (Lit. those news are good?)

The rising intonation makes the clause in (20) a question. Notice that the rising intonation starts from the copular verb *-nĩ-* ‘are’ and ends at the CC *njega* ‘good.’ Let’s now change the ex-situ construction in (5) into the question in (21).

- (21) ~~Nĩ nyeni~~ ũrakera?... KenG2-T2:17-18
 Nĩ nyeni ũ-ra-Ø-ker-a ?
 FOC 10.kales 2SG-PRS-PROG-chop-FV.
 Is it kales you are chopping? / You are chopping kales?

With a rising intonation on the upper clause, the example in (21) becomes a question restricted to whether it is the ‘kales’ or something else the addressee is chopping. Example (21) also shows that both the *nĩ-* and the NP *nyeni* ‘kales’ host the rising intonation just like *nĩ* ‘are’ and *njega* ‘good’ in the copular clause in example (20). The conclusion here is that the clause in (20) and the ex-situ construction in (21) bear the same copular structure.

The discussion in this section suggests that the upper clause in an ex-situ focus construction is a copula clause. This view is however challenged by the fact that the upper clause in ex-situ constructions does not have a CS. One way to address this challenge is to argue that the CS of the upper clause is implicitly or explicitly carried along in the discourse as a question to which the ex-situ construction responds. Such a question has been called the “Question Under Discussion,” (Roberts 1996:4) here QUD. QUD contends that focus becomes acceptable if ‘...replacing the focused element with an appropriate *wh-* expression will reveals the active QUD,’ (Grindrod and Borg 2019:419). Thus, the focused constituent is a response to an overt or covert *wh-* question in the discourse. Consider the next example for an illustration.

- (22) Ti rokĩshoni Ngai arathimaga Ken2-T1:29
 Ti rokĩshoni Ngai a-Ø-rathim-ag-a
 FOC rokĩshoni 1.God 1SM-PRS³⁰-bless-HAB-FV.
 It is not the location that God blesses.

A possible QUD in (22) could be ‘what does God bless?’ Its response becomes the upper clause *ti rokĩshoni...* ‘it is not a location...’ in example (22). Another way to respond to the QUD ‘what does God bless?’ is to form an introduction in the form of a clause using the

³⁰ Not overtly marked in the present-habitual.

elements of the QUD for example, *kĩrĩa Ngai arathimaga*³¹ *ti rokĩshoni* ‘what God blesses is not a location.’ Here, the introduction functions as the ‘CS’ of the copular clause. Notice that the said introduction is a pseudo-cleft clause made from the constituents of the lower clause in the ex-situ construction (see Jin & Chen 2022 for a similar argument for Chinese).

From the foregoing paragraph, it is here concluded that the underlying/implicit CS in Gĩkũyũ ex-situ focus construction is a pseudo cleft construction. Since the pseudo cleft does not usually surface overtly, it is better to take the ex-situ focus construction as a copular clause without a CS here named a ‘reduced copular clause.’ Now that the ex-situ construction takes an implied pseudo-cleft as its subject, then the CC gives a value for that pseudo-cleft by specifying the contents of the *wh*- constituent in the pseudo-cleft. This means that the reduced copular clause in the upper clause of ex-situ constructions has the structure ‘x is ...’ where ‘X’ is a variable in need of specification. For example in the clause: *kĩrĩa Ngai arathimaga...* ‘what God blesses...’, one needs to specify what God blesses for it to be complete. With this in mind, this paper concludes that the upper clause in an ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ is a specificational copular clause. In specificational copular clauses, the CC is always in focus whereas its CS is always a topic (Mikkelsen 2005; den Dikken 2006). Following our argument here, the CS in the ex-situ focus construction is a presupposed pseudo-cleft forming part the assumed information. As such, it is also never in focus in the ex-situ upper clause. Besides, specificational copular clauses by nature take a nominal CC.

The nominal CC constraint in ex-situ focus construction forces for the nominalization of non-nominal CCs in need of focus marking. Verbs for example have to change into their gerundival/ infinitival forms in order to follow *-nĩ/ti-* in ex-situ focus constructions. This demand for a nominal CC causes a repetition of the finite verb in a clause as an infinitive in an ex-situ upper clause CC since in Gĩkũyũ, the infinitive also functions as a NC-15 noun. The ‘nominal’ constraint also explains the unacceptability of constituents which cannot be nominalized such as adverbs in the ex-situ construction.³² Through this observation, this paper expounds on Abels & Mũriũngi (2008) observation that *nĩ-* in Kĩĩtharaka (a language related to Gĩkũyũ) relates with constituents bearing nominal features.

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 finite copular verb as advanced in this paper accounts for this observation. The verb provides a position immediately after it which carry the feature [+Focus]. Any constituent moved to this position gains a focused reading. Several observations support this view including the behaviour of interveners.³³ Buell (2009) notes that if such a post-verbal focus position exists in a language no constituent can intervene between the verb and the focused constituent otherwise the intervener gets focused. This holds for the ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ. For example, it is illegitimate to have a constituent between the copula *-nĩ-* and the NP *andũ* ‘people’ in example (4) as in *nĩ *(ngari,airĩtu, harĩa) andũ mathiaga mena ũrimũ* ‘it is *(car/ladies/ there) people who move foolishly.’ The interveners in brackets separate the copula verb and focused constituent ‘people’ thereby making the sentence unacceptable. This confirms Buell’s (2009) assertion that “an element focused in this way has to follow the verb immediately,” (Buell 2009:167). Only some select focus sensitive particles can intervene between the copula and a focused constituent since they identify the focused constituent as focused.

³¹ Underlining used to highlight the introduction for the reader. The remaining part of the sentence is the ex-situ construction which was already in existence.

³² Some are acceptable in non ex-situ copula clauses.

³³ The interested reader is referred to Buell (2009: 167ff) for a discussion on other tests.

The discussion in the preceding paragraph suggests that Gĩkũyũ has a [+Focus] position after a finite verb where default focus is marked. It shares this feature with other Bantu languages such as Zulu (Buell 2009) and Luganda (van der Wal et al. 2016). With this holding true, the copular *-nĩ/ti-* then provides a focused syntactic position to host a constituent one wishes to put in focus. In this manner, the ex-situ focus construction is similar to a copular construction in the present tense which also, in absence of marked focus such as clause re-ordering, assigns focus to the constituent following the copula verb.

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 focus constructions. For a start, the subject ex-situ structure in example (23) is used for a discussion.

- (23) Nĩ Ngai ũmenyereire KenG2-Y2:65
 Nĩ Ngai ũ-(Ø³⁴)-menyere-ir-e
 COP 1.God 1SM-take care of-COMPL-FV
 It is God [who has taken care of me].

Following Hartmann & Veenstra (2013) parameters, example (23) above is a cleft construction. First, it is bi-clausal with *nĩ Ngai...* ‘it is God’ as its upper clause and *...ũmenyereire* ‘who has taken care of me’ as its lower clause. It also bears the proposition of the single clause ‘God has taken care of me.’ Hartmann & Veenstra (2013) further note that the upper clause in a cleft has an impersonal subject pronoun, a copula verb and a cleft phrase bearing the focused material. Likewise, example (23), has *nĩ-* as the copula verb and *Ngai* ‘God’ as the cleft phrase. However, being a ‘reduced clause,’ the structure in (23) lacks a subject pronoun. Hartmann & Veenstra (2013) further note that a cleft sentence takes a relative clause (RC) as its lower clause. This is the case in example (23) where the lower clause is the RC ‘who has taken care of me.’ In Gĩkũyũ, RCs may or may not be introduced by an overt relative pronoun (RP). When overt, the RP is constructed using the relativizer *-rĩa/ria*³⁵ and a corresponding noun class (NC) agreement marker of the antecedent as in *mũndũ ũ-ria* ‘the man who’ and *ng’ombe ĩ-rĩa* ‘the cow which...’ When covert, the subject marker (SM) in the lower clause functions as a ‘relativizing prefix’ (Englebretson 2015:138) which refers back to the antecedent. This is the case in example (23) where *ũ-* ‘who’³⁶ refers back to the antecedent ‘God.’ In clefts, the relative pronoun/SM pronoun is followed by a verb phrase which again holds in example (23) where the pronoun *ũ-* ‘who’ is followed by the verb *-menyerer-* (take care of). Thus, the ex-situ construction in (23) is a cleft construction.³⁷

Now consider the ex-situ construction presented in example (24) which is a reproduction of example (5) above.

- (24) Nĩ nyeni ũrakera... KenG2-T2:17-18
 Nĩ nyeni ũ-ra-Ø-ker-a
 COP 10.kales 2SG-PRS-PROG-chop-FV

³⁴ The person marker is not necessary in the first person. It becomes compulsory in the other persons and/or numbers. For example if those taken care of were many, then the sentence in (23) could have read *nĩ Ngai ũ-tũ-menyere-ir-e*, ‘it is God who has taken care of us.’ Note, if one drops the SC1 *tũ* ‘us,’ the sentence loses the intended meaning and goes back to the interpretation in sentence (23).

³⁵ The choice is dependent on the word the morpheme is attached to.

³⁶ Main clause form is *a-* ‘he.’

³⁷ Diathesis does not interfere with the structure of a cleft in Gĩkũyũ.

It is kales you are chopping

The construction above apparently has the same structure as the cleft in example (23). Deeper scrutiny however reveals that it is different. Its lower clause does not modify the CC *nyeni* ‘kales’ and its subject pronoun *û-* ‘you’ does not refer back to the CC ‘kales’ but to the person chopping the kales. Besides, the lower clause is not introduced by a relativizer which could have been *i-ria* ‘which.’ The example in (24) is therefore not structurally similar to the sentence in example (23). However, it is still an ex-situ construction since the object NP *nyeni* ‘kales’ is fronted from its post-verbal position and made the CC of the upper clause. The structure in (24) is common in Gikũyũ and especially involves object, *wh-* constituent and verb ex-situ focus constructions. It therefore demands for an explanation.

Since there is no relation between the upper clause CC and the lower clause SM in example (24), one may conclude that the upper clause is not related to the lower clause. However the CC 'kales' in the upper clause is also the object of the lower clause. This is proven by deleting the upper clause as shown in example (25).

- (25) * ũrakera KenG2-T2:17-18 (modified)
 *ũ-ra-ker-a...
 2SG-PRS-chop-FV
 *You are chopping.

Example (25) is unacceptable since whereas the verb *-ker-* ‘chop’ is transitive, it lacks an object argument. Since it is acceptable with the upper clause, then the upper clause carries the object argument of the verb *-ker-* ‘chop.’ The lack of an object leads to another problem. Without the expected constituent following the verb *-ker-* ‘chop’ to carry unmarked focus, and without any overt marking of focus; then the clause in (25) lack focus marking yet every clause must have focus (Carlson 2014). Marking focus on any of its constituents redeems the clause. For instance, introducing the pre-verbal *nĩ-* leads to *nĩ ũrakera* ‘you are chopping’ which is acceptable even without the object NP. This is because the copula *nĩ-* assigns verum focus to the clause *ũrakera* ‘you are chopping’ since it follows it³⁸.

In example (24) the CC *nyeni* ‘kales’ is fronted from the object position and attached to the copula verb *nĩ-* ‘is.’ On moving, the object NP does not leave a pronoun in its former locus so the fronting does not qualify as ‘left dislocation,’³⁹ Westbury (2018:21). Instead, it behaves like a case of topicalization but without the usual topicalization⁴⁰ markers in Gĩkũyũ. Besides and unlike in topicalization, the fronted NP gets obligatorily attached to *nĩ-*. This happens because the intent of fronting was to mark the object NP as focused yet it lands in the subject [-Focus] position of the clause. To assign focus, the copula *nĩ-* is introduced to host the fronted NP in its [+Focus] position and in the process forms a new ‘reduced copula’ clause. This makes the object NP the focused CC of the upper clause and the topic under discussion of the lower clause. Since this form of topicalization leads to focus marking, Wilbur (2012) calls it ‘focalization,’ (Wilbur 2012: 471) a term adopted in this paper.

In sum, this section has demonstrated that ex-situ focus constructions in Gikūyū are biclausal contra Schwarz (2007) assertions. The upper clause is a reduced specificational copula which takes the focused constituent as its CC whereas the lower clause may or may

³⁸ This explains the obligatoriness of *nĩ-* in intransitive verb constructions without which they would miss focus. See also Kihara (2017:177).

³⁹ The syntactic process through which a constituent is fronted but leaves a pronoun in its original position as in *nĩ Jesu ndĩmũendete* ‘**It is Jesus**_i I love **him**_i.’

⁴⁰ For example it lacks the expected Gīkūyū topicalizer *harī* ‘as for.’

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 also differ with Mũriũngi's (2005) account of *nĩ-* as focus marking in Kĩĩtharaka and Hartmann & Zimmermann's (2012) view of *an-* in Bura as "a focus copula verb (FCOP)⁴¹," (Hartmann & Zimmermann 2012:1067).

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

Ex-situ focus marking targets the position before the subject marker (SM) whether or not a lexical subject is available. Here, this position is called the 'pre-SM' position. In need of an explanation is why the position is attractive to focus marking. The concern is more pronounced in the case of object and *wh-* pronoun focus both of which have corresponding in-situ focus structures yet still participate in ex-situ focus constructions. Indeed, Morimoto (2017:156) notes that the ex-situ construction is the most preferred structure for *wh-* questions.

We explain this observation by proposing that the pre-SM position is more prominent than the other syntactic positions in a clause. This view is supported by contrastive focus⁴² (Bianchi 2016 and Lee 2017). Contrastive focus "...involves the exclusion of at least one relevant (and salient) focus alternative...and is...in need of a special structural licensing," (Onea 2011:20). Consequently, "...contrastive foci must be marked in a special way by means of special prosodic, or syntactic, or morphological means, which sets them formally apart from mere information foci," (Onea 2011:19). As observed above, contrastive focus is canonically realized via an ex-situ construction (fronting) hence "...focus fronting... (is) a cue for the presence of contrast," (Samek-Lodovici 2018:57). But why is contrastive focus linked to fronting?

According to Katz & Selkirk (2011), "...contrastive focus constituents are more phonetically prominent than discourse new constituents⁴³ ...," (2011:771). This view is supported by Lee (2017) who also notes that contrastive focus marking needs "...phonetic prominence," (Lee 2017:10). Thus, constituents carrying contrastive focus are the most prominent in a clause and hence seek a clause position of the highest prominence. Now that contrastive focus associates with the ex-situ focus position, it is logical to conclude that the ex-situ focus position offers the prominence it seeks. This confirms that the ex-situ position is the most prominent position in a clause a feature which makes it alluring to focus.

A possible reason behind the prominence of the pre-SM focus position in Gĩkũyũ clauses is that, it is a non-argument and a non-focus position yet hosts focused constituents. Ordinarily, the position does not host verbal arguments as example (25) below demonstrates.

- | | | | |
|------|---|--|---------------------------|
| (25) | *Nyeni
Nyeni
10.kales
*Kales you are chopping. | ũrakera
ũ-ra-ker-a
2SG-PRS-chop-FV | KenG2-T2:17-18 (modified) |
|------|---|--|---------------------------|

⁴¹ The implication is that the fcop carries its own CS. This is falsified in this work by showing that the copula verb carries a pseudo-cleft as its CS.

⁴² Contrastive focus, according to Lee (2017) is a response to an implicit (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) and Jiménez-Fernández (2015) for the Romance languages.

⁴³ 'Discourse new constituents' carry informational focus due to their newness.

The clause in example (25) is unacceptable because the object NP *nyeni* ‘kales’ occurs in a non-argument position yet it is the internal argument of the verb *-ker-* ‘chop.’ In ex-situ focus constructions, such arguments are permitted in this non-argument position by attaching them to *nĩ-* ‘is.’ This unexpected positioning of the argument attracts attention since it is odd and breaks the norms followed by Gĩkũyũ clauses.

Also, the pre-SM position in Gĩkũyũ, as in other Bantu languages, does not host focused constituents because the SM is an anti-focus marker. This is as observed by Zeller (2008) who commenting on the clause subject in Bantu notes ‘...the SM marks the subject NP as [-Focus]⁴⁴,’ (Zeller 2008:239). The effect is that “...a preverbal subject in Bantu can never be the focus of the sentence in which it occurs,” (Zeller 2008:239).⁴⁵ This means that the pre-SM position the object NP ‘kales’ in (25) occupies is a [-focus] position.

Since the intent of fronting was to mark the object as focused, Gĩkũyũ creates a reduced copula clause adjoined to the existing clause to host the fronted constituent in its [+Focus] position. Thus seen, the copula verb itself does not mark the fronted constituent as focused but rather it avails a focused syntactic position to the fronted constituent. This observation responds to Schwarz’s (2007) query on the significance and obligatoriness of *nĩ-/ti-* in clefts which are focusing by nature. Whichever the case, focus is marked at the front (-focus and non-argument) position of the lower clause in the ex-situ focus structure. This is a deviation from the clausal norms in Gĩkũyũ so it makes the focused constituent foregrounded hence prominent.

As seen in the immediately preceding paragraphs, the ex-situ focus position is more prominent than the other positions in a clause. This feature makes it attractive for focus marking since focus seeks maximal prominence. Thus, the search for maximal prominence motivates the formation of ex-situ focus marking structures.

Now, if focus must be maximally prominent (Büring 2010), then even unmarked (in-situ) focus is maximally prominent. This observation challenges the claim that the search for maximal prominence motivates ex-situ (marked) focus. A counterargument can however be developed. Consider example (26) below.

- (26) ...**Nĩ** **kĩĩ** tũrorania____? Keng2-T2:15-16 (modified)
Nĩ **kĩĩ** tũ-ra-ũr-an-i-a?
COP **what** 1PL.SUBJ-PRS-ask-RECP-TRNS-FV
What are we quarrelling (asking each other) about?

The *wh-* pronoun *kĩĩ* ‘what’ in example (26) above is the object of the verb *-ũr-* ‘ask.’ As Gĩkũyũ is an SVO language, the pronoun initially occupied the post-verbal position. Therefore, the pronoun had already received unmarked focus in its in-situ position. In line with the ‘focus prominence constraint,’ the in-situ focus assigned to the pronoun *kĩĩ* ‘what’ is maximally prominent. Now that the same pronoun is again marked as focused in the ex-situ construction in example (26), the ‘focus prominence constraint’ predicts that such focus is also maximally prominent. Accordingly, in-situ and ex-situ focus are prominence to an equal degree. Noting this, Schwarz (2003) lamented that “...it is unclear why Kikuyu would have developed two different types of focus constructions, in-situ and preposed (ex-situ) 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 ex-situ and in-situ focus were equal in terms of prominence, there would be no preference for the ex-situ structure noted in *wh-* questions (Morimoto 2017) for they also receive in-situ focus.

⁴⁴ Even when overtly present, subjects in Gĩkũyũ clauses, are never in focus.

⁴⁵ See (Kimenyi 1980 for Kinyarwanda; Zerbian 2006 for Sotho and Sabel et al. for 2006, Zulu)

Consequently, we argue that though in-situ and ex-situ focus are both prominent, they are prominent to different degrees. Noting the preference of the ex-situ focus marking even when in-situ focus marking is possible, we further argue that the ex-situ (marked) position is more prominent than the in-situ focus position. This view conflicts with the ‘maximally prominent’ (Büring 2008:2; 2010:178) requirement for focus marking. We resolve the conflict by modifying Büring’s (2010) syntactic ‘focus prominence constraint’ repeated below.

- a. Focus position $>_{\text{prom}}$ rest
- b. Rest $>_{\text{prom}}$ subject Büring (2010:204).

The constraint above, as in this work, treats focus as a syntactic position and 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. To accommodate the different levels of prominence between the ex-situ and the in-situ focus marking, we propose an expansion of the focus position in the focus constraint above. The expansion is supported by the constraint itself which in using the label ‘maximal prominence’ presupposes varying degrees of prominence.

With the intent of capturing the varying degrees of prominence, this paper proposes the expanded constraint below.

- (27) 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; which is in turn more prominent than the rest of the clause itself more prominent than the subject position in a clause. This constraint captures the various degrees of prominence and also accounts for the allure of the *ex-situ* position to focus marking.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to establish the structure of and the motivations behind the 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 the morphemes *nĩ-/ti-* ‘is, is not’ in ex-situ focus constructions are not focus markers but copula verbs which provide a position after them 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. 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,’ (Büring 2010:178) for it to capture the degrees of prominence in in-situ and ex-situ focus marking.

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