

Post-verbal focus in Bantu: In-situ, IAV and final focus

A number of Bantu languages have been argued to demonstrate the so called *immediate after verb* (IAV) focus for which analyses along the lines of Belletti (2002), arguing for a low FocP under an articulated IP region, have been suggested (see for example Ndayiragidje 1999 for Kirundi). This paper, on the contrary, argues that the distribution of focus in Bantu cannot be a categorial fact but is contingent on prosodic effects that can be replicated in different positions resulting in focus being expressed in differing positions in Bantu languages including IAV, final and in-situ. These differing focal positions, sometimes also attested within the same language, follow naturally from a prosodic analysis.

For IAV and final focus the attested changes in word order will be treated as not motivated by discourse factors but as resulting from a blind generation of syntax of the possible word orders according to the syntactic constraints of the language involved and that these are filtered out at the interface with the phonological component. The prosodic phrasing at the interface will identify focus positions under a metrical tree kind of structure, or by reference to alignment constraints in an optimality theoretic approach (e.g. Truckenbrodt (1999), as occupying the right-edge of a prosodic constituent, at least for the cases at hand.

Since the prosodic effects that indicate phonological phrasing are tonal, this paper contributes to our understanding of prosodic phenomenon in focus that go beyond stress languages arguing against the conception that prominence is an essential component of the role of prosody in indicating focus.

Consider in this respect the data in (1) illustrating IAV focus in Bemba. Parentheses indicate phonological phrasing (φ).

(1) Bemba

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|----|--|---------------------|
| a. | (<i>tù-kà-byáálà ínjànjé mwííbàlǎ màílò</i>) φ
1PLSM-FUT-plant 9maize 16garden tomorrow
'We will plant maize in the garden tomorrow' | (broad/VP focus) |
| b. | (<i>tùkàbyáálá!</i>) φ (<i>ínjànjé mwííbàlǎ màílò</i>) φ
'We will <i>plant</i> maize in the garden tomorrow' | (verb focus) |
| c. | (<i>tùkàbyáálèénjànjè</i>) φ (<i>mwííbàlǎ màílò</i>) φ
'We will plant <i>maize</i> in the garden tomorrow' | (object NP focus) |
| d. | (<i>tùkàbyáálǎ mwííbàlǎ</i>) φ (<i>ínjànjé màílò</i>) φ
'We will plant maize <i>in the garden</i> tomorrow' | (locative PP focus) |
| e. | (<i>tùkàbyáálǎ màílò</i>) φ (<i>ínjànjé mwííbàlǎ</i>) φ
'We will plant maize in the garden <i>tomorrow</i> ' | (adverbial focus) |

The canonical word order is given in (1a) with four possible permutations given in (1b-e) freely generated by syntax. The four different word orders get mapped onto different prosodic structures at PF with the rightmost constituent in the left-hand phonological phrase surfacing as the focus. The right edge of a phonological phrase in Bemba is indicated by a downstepped high tone (!) or in the absence of a high tone by a low tone usually accompanied by pause. High or rising tone between constituents (cf. 1d, e), as well as segmental effects such as vowel fusion (1c), are diagnostic of the absence of a phonological phrase break.

Notice therefore that even in cases where no apparent change in word order from canonical (1a) is seen (1b-c) changes in tone and therefore phrasing take place quite unambiguously indicating verb (1b) and object (1b) focus.

IAV focus is further supported by the fact that subjects can also be focused in this position in Bemba as (2) shows.

- (2) (á-kà-byáálá *Chisanga*) (màílò) (ínyànjè)
SM1-FUT-plant 1Chisanga tomorrow 9maize
'Chisanga (and no-one else/is the one who) will plant maize tomorrow'

Under the view advocated here, the low position of the subject is not a consequence of its informational status as syntax is blind to the informational status of the sentence constituents, rather it is an option made available by the relatively free word order syntax of Bantu languages (Bresnan & Mchombo 1987). In similar fashion prosodic phrasing acts independently, identifying the focus at the right edge of a phonological phrase under a constraint such as Align Focus Right, PPhr Right. This implies that discourse plays a filtering role on the different word orders generated by syntax. Discourse requirements impose that the focus constituent occurs in a position where a particular prosodic structure (a phonological phrase edge) is available. The prosodic effects that identify focused constituents are in this sense carried solely by the prosodic phrasing leading to two conclusions; (i) Syntax does not encode focus as a primitive and (ii) the prosodic manifestation of focus is not derived in syntax.

References

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