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Proceedings of the Twenty-Third Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society: Special Session on Syntax and Semantics in Africa (1997), pp. 47-58

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The Annual Proceedings of the Berkeley Linguistics Society is published online via [eLanguage](#), the Linguistic Society of America's digital publishing platform.

Predicate clefting in Kisi

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1.0. Introduction. This paper examines the focus construction of Kisi, an Atlantic language (Niger-Congo) spoken by some half a million people primarily in Guinea but also in nearby Sierra Leone and Liberia. The data come from work done in 1983-84 on the southern dialect spoken in the Foya area of Upper Lofa County, Liberia. Of particular interest is the presence of what has been known in the literature as "predicate clefting", e.g., DeGraff 1996. Its interactions and complementarity with negation, an inherently focusing construction (Marchese 1983), evince some complexity. Despite some superficial similarity, however, substantial syntactic differences exist. More similarities exist in comparison to relativization and question formation, two other constructions involving movement.

The paper begins by examining the formal features of focus, presenting the most highly grammaticized construction, "Focus with *ni*", as one of several ways an item can be focused. When a constituent is focused with *ni*, the item is fronted and the particle *ni* appears at the end of the clause in which the fronted item appears. No phonetic trace of the item appears at the place of extraction. This contrasts with the usual and expected placement of the focus marker more immediately adjacent to the item of focus, e.g., Bambara (Creissels 1991:336), Miya (Schuh 1997:137).

If the focused item is the subject (the initial position; Kisi has a "mixed" word order of SVO and SAuxOV), the only surface evidence for a focused (non-pronominal) subject is the final focus particle; pronouns, however, always show a change in case. All nominal items can be focused, including adpositional phrases and nominalized adjectives. Of a different nature, however, is what happens when verbs are focused, in what has been called the "predicate clefting" construction. A nominalized form of the verb appears in initial position while the inflected form remains *in situ*.

The approach taken by this paper is an historical-typological one attempting to resolve issues in the syntax of a West African language. Work on the phonology and morphology of Kisi shows a language falling into no single typological category. The language has a "mixed" noun class system involving both prefixing and suffixing (Childs 1983); the prosody similarly shows two types of prominence, as it perhaps changes from tone to accent (Childs 1989). The explanation for at least the last set of facts is prolonged and intimate contact with speakers of Mande languages (Childs 1995). What follows is the first analysis of a purely syntactic construction, with comments drawn from language typology and from comparative linguistics.

The implications of the Kisi facts for proposals on basic word order in Kisi and in Niger-Congo are then considered using Koopman 1983 as the organizing basis. In her discussion of several Kru languages, Koopman provides guidance as to how the “mixed” word order of Kisi should be analyzed (synchronically), and the likely historical source of the synchronic situation. Although the Kisi facts are substantially different from those found in Kru, the conclusion here is that Kisi, just as the Kru languages she discusses, is also an SOV language.

2.0. Focus constructions in Kisi. There are several formally different ways of focusing in Kisi, but in the following discussion I concentrate on the syntax of the most highly grammaticized means. The syntax of focus is relatively straightforward. When items are focused, they are fronted to initial position, with the particle *ní* appearing at the end of the clause. The basic generalization is that only nominal elements can be focused. Adjectives and verbs, then, can be focused only when nominalized; items that cannot be focused are verbs, ideophones, adjectives, adverbs, adpositions, conjunctions, and other function words.

2.1. Nominal constituents. All types of nominal phrases can be fronted. In fact, a Kisi clause can consist only of a noun and *ní* (as in the (a) example in (1)) although the copula *cò* may also be used, as in (b).

- (1) a. *yá ní* ‘It’s me.’ b. *yá cò ní*
 me FOC me be FOC

I give several examples of subject focus in (2). The (a) sentence shows a proper noun being focused; (b), a pronoun; (c), a modified noun; and (d), a relativized noun.

- (2) a. *wàngó cò wàná sòṅmgbóṣṅndó ní*
 Wango be person stingy FOC
 ‘Wango is a stingy person.’
 b. *yá kààndí á ndú ní*
 I whip him FOC
 ‘I (myself) whipped him.’
 c. *yòṅ wòṣṅndó kéléṅá ndú yùùwíá ní*
 thing bad hurry him age-PL FOC
 ‘Disreputable behavior has caused him to age prematurely.’
 d. *nyè [wàná mándàṅ]-ó cò còṅgùláj ní*
 thing people careful-REL be gossips FOC
 ‘What one has to be wary of is gossips.’

Noun phrases in object position can equally well be focused.

- (3) a. *mààlóŋ ó có cùùcúúwó ní*
 rice he AUX sow FOC
 'It's the rice he's sowing.'
- b. *wànáà pèèlaŋ pí'lá ì cǎ núà ní*
 people swagger one you see thus FOC
 'These are just swaggerers that you see.'

Adpositional phrases can also be focused with *ní*.

- (4) a. *lé kǎláŋ ì hìŋ ní*
 for going you come FOC
 'Did you come just to leave?'
- b. *ò bǎlǎs bèŋgú ndá cǎl yá ndú ní*
 to banana under they bury me him FOC
 'Under the banana tree they buried him for me.'

2.2. Nominalized constituents. Adjectives can be focused only if they are preceded by the pronoun of the noun they modify, the same form used when they appear as predicate adjectives. The first example shows such a construction with the *o*-class subject pronoun *ò*; the second features an adjective preceded by the *ŋ*-class pronoun *ì*. Note that both of these adjectives appear in copular constructions, i.e., involving the copula *có*. Adjectives cannot be focused when they directly modify a noun.

- (5) a. *ò hùŋnǎŋ kó ó có níŋ ní*
 PRO come indeed he be now FOC
 'He's really ready to come now.'
- b. *ì fùlùlǎŋ mààlóŋ múŋ cò ní*
 PRO parboil rice this be FOC
 'Is this rice parboiled?'

Adjectives have this form in predicate-adjective constructions, as illustrated in (6), the non-focused form of (5a).

- (6) ò cò níŋ ò húŋŋŋ
 PRO be now PRO come
 'He's now prepared to come.'

That it is only nominal constituents that can be focused is even more dramatically demonstrated with finite verbs. The morphosyntax of the focus construction is superficially quite different for verbs: the finite form of the verb is left behind in its original spot as a non-finite form of the verb is fronted to the focus position, as seen in (7). Verb copying with front focusing is quite common in West Africa, e.g., Yoruba, Akan, Temne (Gilman 1986:39) and in Caribbean creoles. Koopman 1983 discusses the same phenomenon in several Kru languages, where it is called "predicate clefting", and Lefebvre 1992 discusses it in Fòñ and other, related languages, as well as in Haitian Creole. I give rather non-idiomatic glosses for such constructions to clarify the syntax of the construction.

- (7) a. pùéŋ-ndáŋ yá pùéŋ ní'
 forget-NOM I forgetFOC
 'It's forgetting that I did.'
- b. yòù-wó yá yóú ndú ní'
 lend-NOM I lend him FOC
 'It's lending to him I did.'
- c. kpùwà-á ò kpúwá yá ndú ó bà ní'
 grab-NOM he grab me him to hand FOC
 'It's grabbing he did to me.'

That it is the nominalized form that is fronted is shown by the different nominalizing suffixes ("NOM"), realized differently for each verb in (7), respectively, *-láŋ* (phonetically realized as [-ndáŋ]) (a), *-ó[wó]* in (b), and *-ó[-á]* in (c). These forms can be compared to the finite forms (without the suffix) appearing later in each sentence. Note also that it is not the full VP that is fronted, only the nominalized form in the verb with no complements.

In several tenses Kisi verbs consist of two parts, the first of which can be identified as an auxiliary, and the second as something like a participle, identical in form to the nominalized form of the verb. In such compound constructions the auxiliary carries all of the information as to tense. The position of the object is now between the auxiliary and the non-finite verb, thus contrasting with the normal SVO order when there is no auxiliary. The meaning of these compound tenses is most often something like 'progressive' (there is a 'future' or 'irrealis' as well), not surprising in light of the fact that cross-linguistically the progressive is the most widely-cited aspectual context for OV constructions (e.g., Fabb 1992:5).

- (8) SVO *í' bɛ́í' ndú* 'I hurt him.'
 I hurt him
 SAuxOV *í' có ndú bɛ̀ìyó* 'I am hurting him.'
 I AUX him hurt

Kru languages also display this split word order, and on the basis of several movement rules, the OV order has been identified as basic (Koopman 1983). The Kisi verb movement rule, however, does not pattern in exactly the same way.

When the non-finite part of a compound verb is focused, there is no change in the verb and no verb form is left behind (represented by the "Ø" in the Kisi line of (9)). Here the focused verb form is *pìsùltáj* (second clause). The finite auxiliary *wa* (*wé* when negated) immediately precedes the Ø.

- (9) *à wé cìèé lé pìsùltáj ndá wà Ø ní'*
 they AUX fight NEG play they AUX FOC
 'They weren't fighting, it's playing they were doing.'
 Cf. *ndá wà pìsùltáj*
 they AUX play
 'They were playing.'

It is clear that it is the inflection that causes a different treatment of the lexical verb, i.e., the fact that the verb is now nominal.

The example in (10) shows that no verbal arguments are fronted with the nominalized form. The object *bùngàṅ mùṅ* remains in place after the auxiliary.

- (10) *fɛ̀fɛ̀háá ó có bùngàṅ mùṅ ní'*
 staying PRO AUX portions these FOC
 'He's lingering for (to get) those portions (of food).'

This set of facts supports the constituency of non-subject arguments with the finite verb rather than with the lexical (non-finite) verb. (The phonology of such constructions, namely, cliticization, also support this contention.) They also suggest a relatively weak bond between the non-finite verb and the rest of the verb phrase.

The focus particle *ní'* can be used with the copula (cf. other examples in (1)).

- (11) *tàmbà bɛ́é kpá có bɛ́é wánà wóóṅndó ní'*
 Tamba even truly COP even person bad FOC
 'It is truly Tamba himself that is a bad person.'

bùùlùùláj kposǒŋ lá có ó kóbó lá láj ní
holes many PRO COP to can PRO those FOC
‘There are all sorts of holes in those cans.’

Focus constructions also provide evidence for evaluating the integrity of the subject-finite verb unit, one which seems close on the basis of tonal evidence. When finite verbs are focused with *ní*, a non-finite form is fronted without the subject, and the finite form of the verb remains in place. In all cases the subject pronoun remains behind, just as do objects. In (12a) the first word *cùlùkàá* shows that it is non-finite by its tone pattern; it has a high tone only on the final nominalizing suffix *-á* while the finite form *cùlúká* has the LH pattern of the Perfect (and no suffix). Similar facts are displayed in (12b).

- (12) a. *cùlùkàá fòndàá hòd cùlúká téí ní*
slippery place this slippery IDPH FOC
‘This place is exceedingly slippery.’
b. *wòó ó wó yá ní*
fear he fear me FOC
‘It’s afraid that he is of me.’

Thus the focus construction when used for verbs shows the centrality of the inflected verb to the clause and the integrity of the bonds with its arguments.

As was noted above, the subject pronoun can be extracted and focused, just as can any other noun phrase. When subject pronouns, e.g., *í* ‘I’ in (13), are focused with *ní*, they change their case to the objective (*yá*).

- (13) *í káándí ándú* *yá kààndí ándú ní*
I whip him I whip him Foc
‘I whipped him.’ ‘It’s me that whipped him.’

The fact was noted above that when subjects are focused with *ní*, they are linked more closely to the verb than subjects focused without *ní*.

3.0. Focus and negation. In a pragmatic sense the negative and focus particles are quite similar. Negation has inherent focus comparable to that produced by the focus particle, and there is some implied contrastiveness or negation in the focus construction. Such shared functionality is illustrated by the pair of sentences in (14a). The second example shows the same complementarity with a verb.

(14) Pragmatic similarity of *lé* and *mí*

- a. *tàndǎŋ mí ò có má tándà lé*
 pubic-hair FOC it be PRO pubic-hair NEG
 'It's pubic hair.' 'It's not pubic hair.'
- b. *à fèyáá lé wàŋndá wàà mí*
 they brush NEG people plow FOC
 'They weren't brushing; the people were plowing.'

The two particles can co-occur, but not if focusing on the same constituent, as might be suggested by the example in (15). In the first clause the focus is on the object *kákáá* 'stinginess', and in the second on *nyè kòŋ* 'that thing', which refers to the entire preceding clause (the reason why no one wants to work for Tamba). The focus particle *mí* appears after or outside the Negative marker *lé* since the focused item functions as topic rather than as a syntactic constituent of the intervening clause.

(15) Clauses with *mí* and *lé*

- kákáá tàmbà nɔ́ téí mí*
 stingy Tamba have much FOC
nyè kòŋ wànáwáá wíù ndú ó bà lé mí
 thing that laborers stay him to hand NEG FOC
 'Tamba is so incredibly stingy that no one stays working with him.'

What is vastly different between the two is the syntactic object of focus. Negation affects the verb or INFL, while focus is restricted to noun phrases. That negation is intimately involved with the verb is clearly shown by the fact that it is doubly marked. In addition to the clause-final particle, verbs undergo segmental and tonal changes. Furthermore, if a full S is to be focused, it must have a complementizer, such as *mèé* or *màà* in the examples below.

(16) Complement clauses focused

- màà sìèléí yómál kpùndóó mí*
 COMP laziness drop trouble FOC
 'It's that his laziness caused the trouble.'

mèé náá ĩ s'ím núáá yé béé m' ĩ kúà mì ĩ cúá
 COMP us we stand thus PRT indeed FOC we go and we take
 'It's because we indeed stand this way that we must go and steal.'

Thus *m'* can focus only nominal constituents; this fact is confirmed by its comparison to the negative particle *lé*, which focuses non-nominal elements.

Although a negated clause cannot be focused (without a complementizer), a focused construction can be negated. This involves a rather circuitous means involving a cleft construction much like that found in English.

When a focused construction is negated, the product is bi-clausal (the (a) sentence in (17)), the new order differing considerably from its affirmative counterpart (b). This construction still relies on fronting for focus but now the fronted element appears with a full negated clause. Simple negation of the focused element, the (c) sentence, is ungrammatical.

- (17) a. *ò có sàà lé ò có lé*
 PRO be Saa NEG PRO be NEG
 'It's not Saa.'
- b. *sàà ò cò m'* c. * *sàà ò cò m' lé* (* *sàà ò cò lé m'*)
 Saa (PRO be) FOC
- 'It's Saa.'

In a naturally occurring sentence such as (18), the subject is focused and negated. Since *m'* clauses cannot be directly negated, once again a doubly negated construction is used and *m'* disappears, where only one item, the focused item, is logically negated. The first clause negates the item of focus; the second clause represents the clause from which it was extracted, albeit also negated. The noun *wèlâṅndâṅ* is the subject of the second clause, its pronoun *lá* remaining behind.

- (18) *ò có wèlâṅndâṅ ndâṅ lé lá hîṅ náá hòllá lé*
 it be resemblances these NEG PRO spin us face NEG
 'It's not these resemblances that confuse us.'

If (18) were simply focused, the order would be as in (19).

- (19) *wèlâṅndâṅ ndâṅ lá hîṅ náá hòllá m'*
 resemblances these they spin us face FOC
 'It's these similarities that confuse us.'

If (18) were simply negated, the order would be as in (20).

- (20) *wèlâṅndâṅ ndâṅ lá hîṅ náá hòllá lé*
 resemblances these PRO spin us face NEG
 'These similarities don't confuse us.'

The example in (21) shows a focused object being negated. Here the object of *sòḥiós* (*cáṅ-ndò* 'his crying') is removed and fronted, just as in *mí* clauses, but instead of appearing isolated in a noun phrase, it now appears in a full clause with the copula *co* and the negative *lé*.

- (21) *ò có cáṅ ndò lé ndá cò sòḥiós lé*
 it be crying his NEG they AUX take-out NEG
 'They are not holding a wake for him.'

In the (a) example of (22), a focused adjective is negated. The nominalized adjective *ó bîṅgí'ínáá* would normally appear right after the copula *co*, as in sentence (b). If focused with *mí*, it would appear at the beginning of the clause, as in (c). That it is possible to negate the adjective without it being focused is shown in the (d) sentence.

- (22) a. *ò có ó bîṅgí'ínáá lé ó có lé*
 he be he short NEG he be NEG
 'It's not very short that he is.'
- b. *ò cò ò bîṅgí'ínáá*
 he be he short
 'He is very short.'
- c. *ó bîṅgí'ínáá ò cò mí*
 he short he be FOC
 'It's very short he is.'
- d. *ò có ó bîṅgí'ínáá lé*
 he be he short NEG
 'He is not very short.'

Double negation with focus is found elsewhere in Kisi's genetic group, e.g., in closely related and geographically nearby Temne, where similar structures have been used to motivate a multiclausal analysis of focus constructions (Hutchinson 1989:9), the same analysis that can be applied to Kisi.

Focus with *mí* is clearly an NP-movement rule which, despite its functional similarity to negation, exhibits dramatic structural differences. Negation is verbal in its orientation while focus is a nominal process.

4.0. Basic word order. In this section I discuss the reasons for seeing basic word order in Kisi as SOV in much the same way that SOV word order has been seen as basic for several Kru languages and for Niger-Congo in general.

The general consensus is that Proto-Niger-Congo had (S)OV word order. For example, “every branch of Niger-Congo shows morphological evidence of the safest kind ... in support of the hypothesis that an older OV syntax must be indeed reconstructed for the family as a whole” (Givón 1979:221). Kay Williamson reaches the same conclusion: Proto-Niger-Congo was strictly SOV (with serial verbs) (Williamson 1986). These observations would recommend a bias towards seeing the mixed system of Kisi as being basically SOV, especially in light of arguments for Kru languages presented in Koopman 1983.

In an extensive look at two Kru languages of Ivory Coast (Gbadi and Vata), Koopman 1983 identifies facts similar to Kisi’s and uses them to motivate a rule of verb movement and to reconstruct the proto-language as SOV. Just as with Kisi the languages she discusses have a mixed SVO / SAuxOV system, which state has been considered by others to be “unstable” but her analysis establishes considerable underlying regularity (Koopman 1983:99) and harmony with the Niger-Congo pattern.

Language-internal arguments include the following. (Adjectives are a non-projecting lexical category (vs. Kisi)).

(23) Some arguments for basic OV word order in Kru (Koopman 1983:41-99)

- 1) Word order in tensed clauses with no auxiliary are “exceptional”; all other clause types exhibit complement-verb word order.
- 2) Many processes require adjacency between V and certain elements, where the basic position of the verb must be last in VP.
- 3) Projections of other lexical categories, N and P (adjectives are non-projecting), both exhibit complement-head order.

Koopman’s motivation for seeing SVO order as derived comes from Case Theory, the verb moving into the Aux spot just when there is no Aux segmentally present, placing “the verb in the INFL node of a tensed clause” (Koopman 1983:98). In more technical terms, she sees the verb movement rule as a way of “saving” a base-generated structure that violates the Case filter, much as NP movement does, e.g., for passive constructions such as [_{NP}] *was killed John*. Such similarities to NP movement (there are others) moves her to call such movement “NP-type of V-movement” (Koopman 1983:139-141). In (24) I give some more specific examples of Koopman’s evidence for her analysis. Each point is followed by a comment on the same phenomena in Kisi.

(24) Evidence for basic OV word order in Kisi

1. When the verb appears in non-final position, it can be explained as a result of movement:

- a. NP-type of V-movement: Repairing violations of the Case Filter (no case assigner for subject).
- b. Parallels between predicate clefting and WH-movement.

Kisi: Exact parallels in both cases. In addition Kisi verbs are nominalized when fronted (and show no verbal inflections when final).

2. Gerunds, infinitives, and other verbal constructions are verb-final. Higher arguments precede, e.g., patient, lower, e.g., locative, follow.

Kisi: The same facts obtain in Kisi.

3. Other lexical categories with maximal projections are also head final.

Kisi: No other Kisi lexical categories are (exclusively) head final. Nouns are always head-initial; prepositions can appear before, after, and around their objects, although head-initial seems to be the basic position (Smallwood 1996).

4. PPs (which are head-initial) cannot be related to NPs, as is done in many West African languages.

Kisi: PPs in final position (PostPs) can be transparently related, but not PrePs.

5. Adjacency arguments: Particle verb constructions, idioms.

Kisi: not applicable or not known.

The one striking fact to emerge from this comparison is the contrast in headedness between Kru and Kisi lexical projections. At the present time I have no explanation for the fact except that we would probably want to interpret it as an illustration of the fact that headedness may be a separate setting for word categories. Above the word the language shows a general tendency for final marking, i.e., the focus particle, the marking of relativization, etc., but there is also a preference for marking INFL, i.e., the question particle.

Nonetheless I believe this comparison of Kisi with the Kru languages as analyzed by Koopman furnishes insights into the basic word order of Kisi and suggests a greater attachment of the language to the Niger-Congo stock than has been previously thought. It may turn out that many of the other SVO languages within Atlantic may be analyzed in this way.

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