

Chapter 1

Focus Marking in Kuria

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1 Introduction

Kuria (Narrow Bantu E.43) is an understudied language spoken in Kenya and Tanzania. In this paper, we investigate the syntax and semantics of the Kuria morpheme /ne-/, which in the literature has been labeled a focus marker (Cammenga 2004; Mwita 2008). In declaratives, this morpheme obligatorily occurs pre-verbally, as in (1):^{1, 2}

- (1) ichi-ng'iti *(n-)cha-a-it-ir-e ege-toocho
10-hyena (FOC-)10SA-PST-kill-PRF-FV 7-rabbit
'The hyenas killed the rabbit.'

Previous analyses of Kuria /ne-/, as well as similar morphemes in other Bantu languages, treat these items in different ways: some view them as focus markers (see Cammenga 2004 and Mwita 2008 for Kuria, Schwarz 2007 for Kikuyu, and Abels & Muriungi 2008 for Kiitharaka), while others see them as assertion or polarity markers (see Bergvall 1987 for Kikuyu and Eslinger 2013 for Kuria). We argue here, based on original data, that /ne-/ is in fact a focus marker, and we propose an extension of Schwarz's (2007) syntactic account of Kikuyu to Kuria, so that /ne-/ heads a Focus Phrase projection in the left periphery of the clause.³ Thus, our aims in this paper are two-fold: first, empirically,

¹ /Ne-/ displays predictable allomorphy, surfacing as either [ne] or as [n], and it is possible that it is /n- that is in fact under-lying.

² In the declaratives presented in this paper, /ne-/ is obligatory only in the remote past and remote future tenses; /ne-/ does not appear in the immediate past or immediate future tenses—see also Mwita 2008, who reports that /ne-/ must appear in 11 out of 22 TAM combinations. It is unclear to us why /ne-/ is absent in certain tenses; this may be due to phonological, syntactic, or semantic/pragmatic conditioning, and we do not attempt an account of this pattern here.

³ Mwita (2008) suggests that some cases involving pre-verbal /ne-/ are due to grammaticalization, and therefore lose the focus meaning. We argue here that because some instances of pre-verbal /ne-/ involve focus, the simplest synchronic analysis is to take all instances of pre-verbal /ne-/ as instantiating focus.



to document an array of patterns related to Kuria /ne-/, which illustrate the language’s strategy for focus realization, and, second, theoretically, to show that an extension of a previous syntactic analysis of a similar morpheme in a related language (i.e., Schwarz’s account of Kikuyu) can capture the Kuria data.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In §2, we present the basic syntactic distribution of /ne-/. In §3, we present evidence for analyzing /ne-/ semantically as a focus marker. In §4, we propose a syntactic account of /ne-/, extending Schwarz (2007)’s account of Kikuyu to Kuria. In §5, we compare focus marking in Kuria to what has been observed for focus marking in other languages, discussing how Kuria fits into a cross-linguistic typology of focus marking. In §6, we document a number of additional patterns regarding /ne-/, articulating several issues regarding /ne-/ for future research. Finally, §7 concludes our paper.

2 The basic distribution of /ne-/

Kuria displays default SVO word order, with some freedom of object ordering in ditransitive and tritransitive constructions. As shown in (1), in declaratives, /ne-/ obligatorily appears pre-verbally and only once per clause (parallel to Kikuyu; see Schwarz 2007: 142).^{4,5}

In *wh*-questions and focus constructions, that is, constructions that involve a fronted constituent, /ne-/ obligatorily precedes the fronted constituent. E.g. in the *wh*-questions in (2), /ne-/ precedes the fronted *wh*-phrase; note that here /ne-/ cannot also occur pre-verbally:

- (2) a. *(n-)ke (*n-)ge-it-ir-e ege-toocho?
 (FOC-)what (FOC-)SA-kill-PRF-FV 7-rabbit
 ‘What killed the rabbits?’
 b. *(n-)ke ichi-ng’iti (*n-)cha-a-it-ir-e?
 (FOC-)what 10-hyena (FOC-)IOSA-PST-kill-PRF-FV
 ‘What did the hyenas kill?’

Similarly, in (information) focus constructions, e.g. answers to *wh*-questions, as in (3), /ne-/ appears on the fronted, focused phrase; here too, /ne-/ cannot also appear pre-verbally:

⁴ This also holds for embedded declaratives, e.g. clauses embedded by a bridge verb such as ‘say’:

(i) n-eng’we a-a-gamb-er-e iga gati *(n-)a-a-ha-y-e umw-igia ege-tabo
 FOC-who SA-PST-say-PRF-FV COMP 1.Gati FOC-3SG.SA-PST-give-APPL.PRF-FV 1-teacher 5-book
 ‘Who said that Gati gave the teacher a book?’

⁵ See, however, §5.1, in which we observe some phrase-internal instances of /ne-/.

- (3) a. *(n-)ichi-ng'iti (*n-)cha-a-it-ir-e ege-toocho
 (FOC-)10-hyena (FOC-)10SA-PST-kill-PRF-FV 7-rabbit
 'THE HYENAS killed the rabbit.'
- b. *(n-)ege-toocho ichi-ng'iti (*n-)cha-a-it-ir-e
 (FOC-)7-rabbit 10-hyena (FOC-)10SA-PST-kill-PRF-FV
 'The hyenas killed THE RABBIT.'

Note that alongside (3a), the alternative word order in (4) is also possible, where the subject precedes the /ne-/ marked constituent; as far as we can tell, there is no difference in interpretation or contextual appropriateness between (3a) and (4).

- (4) ichi-ng'iti *(n-)ege-toocho (*n-)cha-a-it-ir-e
 10-hyena (FOC-)7-rabbit (FOC-)10SA-PST-kill-PRF-FV
 'The hyenas killed THE RABBIT.'

It is not possible for /ne-/ to appear post-verbally, thus, attempting to focus an *in situ* object is ungrammatical:

- (5) ichi-ng'iti cha-a-it-ir-e (*n-)ege-toocho
 10-hyena 10SA-PST-kill-PRF-FV (FOC-)7-rabbit
 (Intended meaning: 'The hyenas killed THE RABBIT.')

To summarize this section, in declaratives /ne-/ obligatorily appears pre-verbally, while in *wh*-questions and focus constructions, /ne-/ obligatorily precedes the fronted constituent.⁶ We see the varied distribution of this morpheme as raising two questions for a uniform account of its different uses: first, is /ne-/ truly a focus marker?; and second, where does /ne-/ originate syntactically? We put forward answers to these questions in the next two sections. Specifically, in §3, we present evidence that /ne-/ semantically is uniformly a focus marker, and in §4, we show that Schwarz's (2007) syntactic account of Kikuyu can be extended to Kuria, so that in all cases, /ne-/ heads a Focus Phrase projection in the left periphery of the clause.

⁶ A reviewer asks whether /ne-/ also appears in copular constructions, as in Kikuyu (Schwarz 2007). A nasal morpheme does indeed appear in copular constructions, as in (ii) below, but investigating the distribution of this morpheme and whether it is the same as /ne-/ goes beyond the scope of this paper:

- (i) gati n-omo reri
 1.Gati N-1-doctor
 'Gati is a doctor.'

Note also that the negative counterpart to /ne-/, /te-/, which we discuss in §6.2, also appears in copular constructions:

- (ii) gati t-omo reri
 1.Gati T-1-doctor
 'Gati is not a doctor.'

3 Diagnosing focus

In this section, we present evidence that /ne-/ behaves like a focus marker, across its different uses. Following the Alternative Semantics approach to focus (Rooth 1985; 1992), we assume that ‘focus indicates the presence of alternatives that are relevant for the interpretation of linguistic expressions’ (Krifka 2008). This definition encompasses different types of focus, e.g. signaling new information, correction, contrast, etc. We elicited data from three types of contexts in which focus marking would be expected, and found that /ne-/ consistently marks focused constituents, across syntactic categories. Specifically, following in part Hartmann & Zimmermann (2009)’s work on focus marking in Gürüntüm, we looked at the following four focus contexts in Kuria, all of which involve morphological marking with /ne-/: (i) question-answer congruence, (ii) corrective focus, (iii) contrastive focus, and (iv) association with focus sensitive operators such as Kuria *bene* ‘only’. In the following subsections, we consider each type of focus context in turn.

3.1 Question-answer congruence

In felicitous answers to *wh*-questions, /ne-/ obligatorily appears on the phrase corresponding to the *wh*-phrase. Consider, e.g. the object *wh*-question in (6). A felicitous answer to this question is one where the object bears /ne-/, as in A1; answers in which /ne-/ appears on the subject, as in A2, are grammatical but infelicitous in this context.⁷

- (6) Q: n-ke ichi-ng’iti cha-a-it-ir-e
 FOC-what 10-hyena 10SA-PST-kill-PRF-FV
 ‘What did the hyenas kill?’
- (7) A1: n-ege-toocho ichi-ng’iti cha-a-it-ir-e
 FOC-7-rabbit 10-hyena 10SA-PST-kill-PRF-FV
 ‘The hyenas killed THE RABBIT.’
- (8) A2: #n-ichi-ng’iti cha-a-it-ir-e ege-toocho
 FOC-10-hyena 10SA-PST-kill-PRF-FV 7-rabbit
 (Intended meaning: ‘They hyenas killed THE RABBIT.’)

Consider also subject *wh*-questions and their answers, as in (9). A felicitous answer to a subject *wh*-question exhibits a fronted subject DP bearing /ne-/, as in A1; if other phrases bear /ne-/, the answer is infelicitous, as in A2:

⁷ We have conflicting judgments from our speaker regarding whether pre-verbal /ne-/ as in (iv) below is felicitous in contexts where we would expect the object to bear /ne-/. E.g. (iv) below is sometimes judged as infelicitous, and sometimes as felicitous as an answer to (6); however, A1 is consistently offered by our speaker as the first and best answer to the question in (6).

- (i) A3: # ichi-ng’iti n-cha-a-it-ir-e ege-toocho
 10-hyena FOC-10SA-PST-kill-PRF-FV 7-rabbit
 ‘The hyenas killed the rabbit.’

(9) Q: Who ate mangoes?
 A1: n-omo-onto a-a-rey-e ama-yembe
 FOC-1-person 1SA-PST-eat.PRF-FV 6-mango
 ‘SOMEONE ate mangoes.’

(10) A2: #n-ama-yembe omo-onto a-a-rey-e
 FOC-6-mango 1-person 1SA-PST-eat.PRF-FV
 (Intened meaning: ‘SOMEONE ate mangoes.’)

/Ne-/marking in answers to *wh*-questions holds not only for object and subject *wh*-questions, but also for adjuncts, such as PPs and adverbials. E.g. (15) illustrates a focused PP, and (17) illustrates a focused AdvP.^{8,9}

(11) Q: Where will Gati see the owl?
 A: n-ko-mesa gati umw-iti a-ra-maah-e
 FOC-on-17.table 1.Gati 3-owl 3SG.SA-FUT-see-FV
 ‘Gati will see the owl ON THE TABLE.’

(12) Q: How did Chacha drink the chai?
 A: m-bongo chacha a-a-nyoy-e i-chaahe
 FOC-quickly 1.Chacha 3SG.SA-PST-drink.PRF-FV 8-chai
 ‘Chacha drank the chai QUICKLY.’

In answers to VP-oriented *wh*-questions, /ne-/ must occur pre-verbally, as the question-answer pair in (??) shows; we take this to indicate that pre-verbal /ne-/ is also a focus marker, in this case marking VP focus.^{10,11}

⁸ PP adjuncts canonically appear at the end of the sentence and manner adverbs are relatively free in their positioning.
⁹

(i) A reviewer asks whether in this case the PP S O V ordering is obligatory. We note that a postverbal object is also possible, as in (v):

Q: Did you see the frog on the table or on the floor?

A: n-ko-mesa naa-mah-er-e i-kjoora
 FOC-on-17.table 1SG.SA-PST-see-PRF-FV 9-frog

‘I saw the frog ON THE TABLE.’

The PP S O V ordering in (??) above might be evidence for a TopP below FocP, although this matter needs further investigation.

¹⁰ The example in (vi) below, in which the object bears /ne-/, is occasionally judged by our speaker as a felicitous reply to the VP-oriented question in (??); thus, objects appear to project focus to VP in Kuria, as has been observed for English (Selkirk 1984):

(i) ?n-i-chaahe a-a-nyoy-e
 FOC-8-chai 3SG.SA-PST-drink.PRF-FV
 ‘Gati DRANK CHAI.’

¹¹ Note that while fronting the nominalized version of a verb is grammatical in Kuria, as in (vii) below, this

(13) Q: n-ke gati a-a-korr-e
 FOC-what 1.Gati 3SG.SA-PST-do.PRF-FV

‘What did Gati do?’

(14) A: n-a-a-nyoy-e i-chaahe
 FOC-3SG.SA-PST-drink.PRF-FV 8-chai

‘Gati DRANK CHAI.’

Answers to questions in which sentential focus is expected, e.g. answers to questions such as ‘What happened?’, also require pre-verbal /ne-/, as (15) shows; thus, preverbal /ne-/ also marks sentential focus.¹² Attaching /ne-/ to any other constituent, e.g. the object, as in A2, would be infelicitous:

(15) Q: What happened?
 A1: gati n-a-a-it-ir-e ama-siisi
 Gati FOC-3SG.SA-PST-kill-PRF-FV 6-ant

‘Gati killed ants.’

(16) A2: #n-ama-siisi gati a-a-it-ir-e
 FOC-6-ant 1.Gati 3SG.SA-PST-kill-PRF-FV

(Intended meaning: ‘He killed ants.’)

Summarizing this subsection: (i) /ne-/ consistently marks focus expressions in answers to *wh*-questions across categories; and (ii) pre-verbal /ne-/ marks VP focus as well as sentential focus.

3.2 Corrective focus

Corrective focus contexts are those in which a (focused) phrase serves as a correction to a like phrase already introduced into the discourse. Consider, e.g. the dialogue in (17) below; here, speaker B corrects the VP from speaker A’s utterance. In this context, /ne-/ may not occur on any phrase other than the corrected VP, as the infelicitous C utterance shows:¹³

construction is infelicitous as an answer to a VP *wh*-question such as in the example below.

(i) #n-oko-ria ama-ako b-a-rey-e
 FOC-15-eat 6-fruit 3PL.SA-PST-eat.PRF-FV
 (Intended meaning: ‘They ATE FRUITS.’)

This contrasts with data reported for Kikuyu (see Schwarz 2007); see §5.2 below.

¹² A reviewer notes that this instance of sentential focus looks identical to what we called a declarative in (1). We wish to emphasize that this is a context where sentential focus would be expected, and so we take /ne-/ to be indicating focus here.

¹³ A reviewer asks if something is focused in (17)A. We assume that the appearance of /ne-/ in this instance shows sentential focus.

- (17) A: m-ba-a-gurr-i i-nyamu
 FOC-3PL.SA-PST-sell.PRF-FV 9-cat
 ‘They sold the cat.’
- (18) B: aʔa, m-ba-a-gi-sirr-i
 no, FOC-3PL.SA-PST-9OM-lose.PRF-FV
 ‘No, they LOST it.’
- (19) C: #aʔa, n-i-nyamu ba-a-sirr-i
 no, FOC-9-cat 3PL.SA-PST-lose.PRF-FV
 (Intended meaning: ‘No, they LOST the cat.’)

Compare the dialogue in (i), where B corrects the object DP from A’s utterance; in this case, the corrected DP object bears /ne-/:¹⁴

- (20) A: ichi-ng’iti n-cha-a-it-ir-e ege-toocho
 10-hyena FOC-10SA-PST-kill-PRF-FV 7-rabbit
 ‘The hyenas killed the rabbit.’
- (21) B: aʔa, n-in-chage cha-a-it-ir-e
 no, FOC-9-zebra 10SA-PST-kill-PRF-FV
 ‘No, they killed the ZEBRA.’

Corrective focus contexts thus provide further evidence that phrases bearing /ne-/ are focused.

3.3 Contrastive focus

Contrastive focus contexts are those in which a phrase is presented in contrast with one or more like phrases already introduced into the discourse. Consider for example (22), where the contrastively focused VP in the conjoined clause bears /ne-/:¹⁵

¹⁴ As with question-answer congruence, we have conflicting judgments regarding whether pre-verbal /ne-/ is felicitous in object-focused contexts. Thus, (viii) below is occasionally judged as felicitous for corrective focus on the object:

- (i) aʔa, n-cha-a-it-ir-e in-chage
 no, FOC-10SA-PST-kill-PRF-FV 9-zebra
 ‘No, they killed a ZEBRA.’

¹⁵ A reviewer asks how we can tell that /ne-/ in the second conjunct in (22) marks VP focus. The alternative would be to claim that nothing is marking VP focus in the second conjunct and it is just another case of sentential focus (i.e., a declarative). Given that in this contrastive context we expect VP focus in the second conjunct, we conclude that it is /ne-/ that marks focus.

- (22) chacha n-a-a-gorr-e i-indwi, na gati
 1.Chacha FOC-3SG.SA-PST-buy.PRF-FV 9-lion and 1.Gati
 n-a-a-gurr-i i-indwi
 FOC-3SG.SA-PST-sell.PRF-FV 9-lion
 ‘Chacha bought a lion and Gati SOLD a lion.’

Similarly in (23), the contrastively focused DP in the conjoined clause bears /ne-/:¹⁶

- (23) chacha n-a-a-gorr-e i-nyamu, na gati n-i-indwi
 1.Chacha FOC-3SG.SA-PST-buy.PRF-FV 9-cat and 1.Gati FOC-9-lion
 a-a-gorr-e
 3SG.SA-PST-buy.PRF-FV
 ‘Chacha bought a cat and Gati bought a LION.’

Since /ne-/ appears on a contrastively focused phrase in these examples, they thus also indicate that /ne-/ is a focus marker.

3.4 Focus sensitive operators

Finally, we consider focus sensitive operators such as *only*, which have been shown to associate with phrases bearing focus (see e.g. Rooth 1992; 1996). In Kuria, focus sensitive operators such as *bene* ‘only’ associate with phrases bearing /ne-/. Consider e.g. (24) below, which is felicitous given the context:

- (24) Context: *We are discussing the methods used by students to protest dining hall food two weeks ago at school. There was only one method they used to protest and I specify it as such.*
 m-ba-a-tan-er-a g-oko-rekeera ama-geena bene
 FOC-3PL.SA-PST-protest-PRF-FV by-15-throw 6-stone only
 ‘They only PROTESTED BY THROWING ROCKS.’

Bene may also associate with a focused DP, in which case *bene* displays noun class agreement morphology, as evidenced by (25) (which is felicitous in a different context):¹⁷

- (25) n-i-nswi i-nyene ba-a-ta-rey-e
 FOC-9-fish 9-only 3PL.SA-PST-NEG-eat.PRF-FV
 ‘They only didn’t eat FISH.’

That Kuria *bene* ‘only’ associates with phrases bearing /ne-/ also indicates that /ne-/ is a focus marker.

¹⁶ A reviewer asks whether the appearance of /ne-/ in the first conjunct means that it is an instance of focus. We assume that all sentences in this tense bear focus, and that the first conjunct is an instance of default or sentential focus.

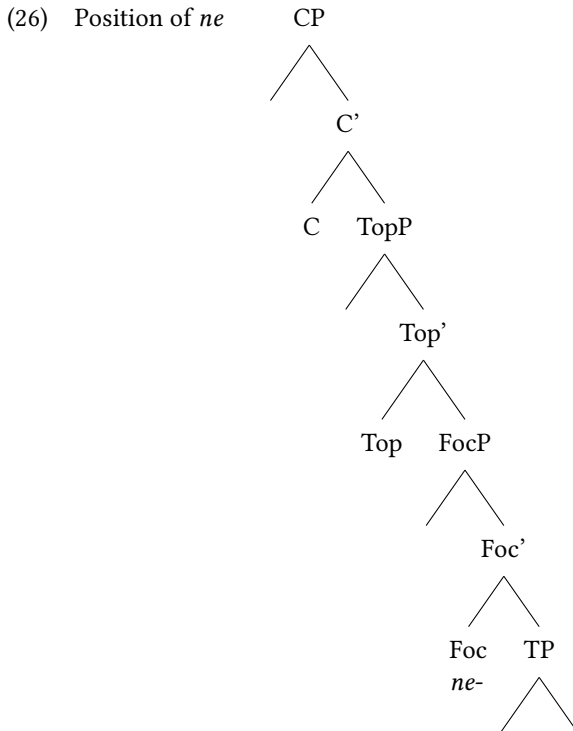
¹⁷ A reviewer asks whether this is the only reading for this sentence or whether any scope interactions exist. This is indeed the only reading available for the sentence.

3.5 Summary of focus diagnostics

Summarizing this section, we have shown that /ne-/ appears on just those phrases that are in focus, based on four types of focus constructions: (i) question-answer congruence; (ii) corrective focus; (iii) contrastive focus; and (iv) association of phrases bearing /ne-/ with focus sensitive operators.

4 Analysis

Having established that /ne-/ is semantically a focus marker, we turn now to its syntax. Extending Schwarz (2007)'s account of Kikuyu to Kuria, we analyze /ne-/ as heading a Focus Phrase (FocP) projection in the left periphery of CP (Rizzi 1997), as in (26).¹⁸



Following Schwarz, we derive the different constructions that /ne-/ occurs in via movement of phrases bearing /ne-/ into [Spec, FocP].¹⁹ For example, in a sentence with a

¹⁸ A TopP projection is observed in the tree, since we will argue for this position below.

¹⁹ We, like Schwarz (2007), are noncommittal with respect to how /ne-/ combines morphologically with the constituent in [Spec, FocP]. Schwarz (2007: 144) notes two possibilities for Kikuyu *ne*: (i) *ne* itself heads FocP, and cliticizes to whatever is in the specifier of FocP, and (ii) the focus feature is spelled out phonologically as *ne*, and surfaces to the left edge of whatever occupies [Spec, FocP]. For concreteness, we adopt the first possibility, and position /ne-/ as heading the focus phrase in the trees throughout.

fronted object, the object raises to [Spec, FocP], as (37) illustrates.²⁰ Here, topicalization of the subject is optional.

(27) Object focus

[_{CP} [_{TopP} [_{FocP} OBJECT₁ [_{Foc'} [_{Foc} ne-] [_{TP} ...*t*₁...]]]]]]

In the case of sentential focus, again following Schwarz (2007), TP moves up into [Spec, FocP], while the subject is obligatorily topicalized, as in (28).²¹

(28) Sentential focus

[_{CP} [_{TopP} SUBJECT₂ [_{Top'} [_{FocP} [_{TP}1 ...*t*₂...]] [_{Foc'} [_{Foc} ne-] [_{TP} ...*t*₁...]]]]]]

In the case of VP focus, VP moves to [Spec, FocP], while the subject is obligatorily topicalized, again following Schwarz:

(29) VP focus

[_{CP} [_{TopP} SUBJECT₂ [_{Top'} [_{FocP} [_{VP}1 ...*t*₂...]] [_{Foc'} [_{Foc} ne-] [_{TP} ...*t*₁...]]]]]]

Summarizing the analysis, we have extended Schwarz's account of Kikuyu to Kuria, so that in all of its uses, /ne-/ heads a Focus Phrase in the left periphery of the clause. We turn first to a comparison of /ne-/ to morphological marking of focus in other languages

²⁰ A reviewer asks what the trigger for movement is in our analysis. While we do not spell-out in detail the mechanics of movement, our account is compatible with a Minimalist analysis (Chomsky 2000; 2004), whereby A-bar movement is the result of an Agree operation between a head bearing an uninterpretable feature (such as [wh], [Foc]) and a Goal which carries a matching feature. Furthermore, when the Probe has the [EPP] property, this property is satisfied via internal merge of the Goal, which merges in the Spec position of the Probe. While extending the Agree operation to account for A-bar movement in addition to A movement is not uncontroversial—see the discussion in Horvath 2007 for instance—the present analysis is compatible with accounts that take Agree and [Foc] features to drive syntactic movement.

²¹ A reviewer asks whether movement of the subject out of the TP, which itself has moved to [Spec, FocP] in (28) constitutes a violation of Rizzi 2010's Criterial Freezing: "In a criterial configuration, the Criterial Goal is frozen in place." We believe that it does not, on the following grounds. Rizzi states that "In the criterial configuration, only the element carrying the crucial feature is frozen in place, while the other elements of the phrase pied-piped to the Spec of the Criterial Probe remain available for movement, and can be subextracted, if no other syntactic principle is violated..." Although Rizzi does not specifically discuss examples in which a TP moves to the specifier of a Criterial Probe, we hypothesize that in these cases the subject is still available for movement, as observed in example (28).

(§5), and then to further data regarding the distribution of /ne-/ (§6).^{22, 23}

5 Cross-linguistic comparison

In this section, we compare focus marking in Kuria to focus marking in other languages, thereby placing the Kuria data in a cross-linguistic context.

5.1 Phrase-internal focus

In contrast with related Bantu languages (Abels & Muriungi 2008 on Kiitharaka) and other language families (Hartmann & Zimmermann 2009 for Gùrùntùm), Kuria permits phrase internal focus marking. Consider first the following examples, which show that /ne-/ can appear on the head noun in a fronted DP, (30), or on the determiner, (31):

(30) Q: Which owls did Johnes see, these owls or those owls?

A: n-imi-iti ge-no chonesi a-a-roch-e
 FOC-4-owl 4-this 1,Johnes 3SG.SA-PST-see.PRF-FV
 ‘Johnes saw THESE OWLS.’

²² An alternative account of /ne-/ might analyze it as a cleft construction. E.g. Bergvall (1987) treats Kikuyu /ne-/ as an assertion marker that heads TP, which would correctly account for the position of pre-verbal /ne-/. To account for clauses involving fronted phrases, Bergvall proposes a bi-clausal cleft analysis: the matrix clause has a null expletive subject, and /ne-/ appears before a null copula, followed by a relative clause. We see this type of account as problematic for Kuria on several counts. First, if these sentences are clefts, we might expect that idiomatic readings should not be possible (e.g. in English *It was the bucket that he kicked* lacks the idiomatic reading). However, idiomatic readings are preserved in Kuria, as the example in (ix) illustrates:

- (i) n-i-bara chonesi a-a-gey-e
 FOC-9-wild 1,Johnes 3SA-PST-go.PRF-FV
 ‘Johnes went INTO THE WILD.’ ~ ‘Johnes did something completely unexpected.’

Second, as Schwarz (2007) points out, clefts are not expected to occur in multiple *wh*-questions, such as *Who killed what?* However, we do find such data in Kuria:

- (ii) n-eng’we a-it-ir-e (*n-)ke
 FOC-who SA-kill-PRF-FV FOC-what
 ‘Who killed what?’

Third, /ne-/ appears in non-assertive contexts, e.g. yes/no questions, which differ tonally from declaratives but are other-wise identical (see Mwitwa 2008 for a discussion of Kuria tonology).

²³ A reviewer asks whether an analysis along the lines of Horvath (2007), according to which an exhaustivity operator merges with some phrase and then is attracted by a higher head, would also account for the Kuria pattern. While the full consequences of extending Horvath’s analysis to Kuria is an issue for future research (especially with regards to phrase internal focus marking; see §5.1), we do not see how Horvath’s account can be extended to Kuria for the following reason: Horvath justifies the exhaustivity operator based on the empirical observation that information focus remains in-situ in Hungarian, while contrastive/identificational focus undergoes overt movement. Since no such asymmetry exists in Kuria (i.e., both types of focus are expressed in the same way, with /ne-/), we do not see that positing an exhaustivity operator is justified for Kuria.

- (31) Q: Which owls did Johnes see, these owls or those owls?
 A: imi-iti n-ge-no chonesi a-a-roch-e
 4-owl FOC-4-this 1.Johnes 3SG.SA-PST-see.PRF-FV
 ‘Johnes saw THESE OWLS.’

In contrast with (30), if the determiner is kept constant and the nouns differ in the two possible answers provided by the question, marking the determiner with /ne-/ becomes infelicitous:

- (32) Q: What did the children like, this lion or this rhinoceros?
 A1: n-i-huuburia e-no b-a-tanch-er-e
 FOC-9-rhino 9-this 3PL.SA-PST-like-PRF-FV
 ‘They liked this RHINOCEROS.’
- (33) A2: #i-huuburia n-e-no ba-a-tanch-er-e
 9-rhino FOC-9-this 3PL.SA-PST-like-PRF-FV
 (Intended meaning: ‘They liked this RHINOCEROS.’)

As a reply to questions that require a possessive DP as an answer, /ne-/ may also appear phrase internally. Possessive DPs exhibit the following surface structure:

- (34) [Possessed DP Associative Marker Possessor DP]

The morpheme can attach to the possessed DP on the left edge of the phrase, or on the associative marker. Consider first (35) below, where a question offers two alternative answers in which the possessor DP is kept constant. Attaching /ne-/ to the left-edge of the fronted phrase is the only felicitous reply in this context, as A1 and A2 show:

- (35) Q: What did Boke eat, Gati’s uali or Gati’s chapati?
 A1: n-iri-chabati re gati a-a-rey-e
 FOC-5-chapati 5.ASSOC 1.Gati 3SG.SA-PST-eat.PRF-FV
 ‘He ate Gati’s CHAPATI.’
- (36) A2: #iri-chabati ne-re gati a-a-rey-e
 5-chapati FOC-5.ASSOC 1.Gati 3SG.SA-PST-eat.PRF-FV
 (Intended meaning: ‘He ate Gati’s CHAPATI.’)

However, compare (35) with (37) below. Here, the question asks for the identity of the possessor. As the second answer, A2, shows, only attaching /ne-/ to the associative marker is felicitous in this context:

- (37) Q: Whose ugali did Sammy eat?
 A1: #n-ubu-kima bo gati a-a-rey-e
 FOC-14-ugali 14.ASSOC 1.Gati 3SG.SA-PST-eat.PRF-FV
 (Intended meaning: ‘He ate GATI’s ugali.’)

- (38) A2: ubu-kima n-obo gati a-a-rey-e
 14-ugali FOC-14.ASSOC 1.Gati 3SG.SA-PST-eat.PRF-FV
 ‘He ate GATI’S ugali.’

As a reply to the question in (37) above, we might have expected that marking the possessor DP with /ne-/ would have been the only felicitous reply. However, it is ungrammatical (in any context) to mark the possessor DP with /ne-/, as (39) shows:²⁴

- (39) *ubu-kima bo n-gati a-a-rey-e
 14-ugali 14.ASSOC FOC-1.Gati 3SG.SA-PST-eat.PRF-FV
 (Intended meaning: ‘He ate GATI’s ugali.’)

Based on these examples, we wish to highlight the fact that /ne-/ may attach to different subconstituents of a focused phrase, depending on the context. Therefore, a potential analysis treating the appearance of /ne-/ on different subconstituents of a focused phrase to a semantically vacuous morphological operation would be undesirable. For now, we leave the mechanics by which the focus marker appears phrase internally for future research, although we can shed doubt on /ne-/ being base-generated phrase internally given examples like (40) below, which show that marking /ne-/ on both the possessed DP and the associative phrase is ungrammatical:

- (40) *n-ubu-kima n-obo gati a-a-rey-e
 FOC-14-ugali FOC-14.ASSOC 1.Gati 3SG.SA-PST-eat.PRF-FV
 (Intended meaning: ‘He ate Gati’s ugali.’)

5.2 VP fronting

As reported by Schwarz (2007), VP focus in Kikuyu involves fronting an infinitival verb, while a fully inflected form remains in base position (see his example 15B). This construction is also possible in Kuria, but does not trigger VP focus. Instead, fronting an infinitival verb is felicitous only as a reply to a question expressing incredulity. Therefore, this construction can only be used to express a *verum* interpretation. Consider first the following question-answer pairing, in which marking the VP with /ne-/ triggers VP focus, as expected:

- (41) Q: What did they do, eat fruits or drink water?
 A1: m-ba-a-rey-e ama-ako
 FOC-3PL.SA-PST-eat.PRF-FV 6-fruit
 ‘They ATE FRUITS.’

²⁴ The ban on this type of construction was also noted for Kiitharaka by Abels & Muriungi (2008). We hypothesize that the correct analysis of the surface structure of a possessive DP is one in which the associative marker and the possessor DP form a single morphophonological unit that cannot be broken up by the /ne-/ morpheme. Therefore, the ban against marking the possessor DP with /ne-/ might not be related to semantics at all.

- (42) A2: #n-oko-ria ama-ako ba-a-rey-e
FOC-15-eat 6-fruit 3PL.SA-PST-eat-PRF-FV
(Intended meaning: ‘They ATE FRUITS.’)

However, as a reply to the follow-up question observed below, only example (43)A is felicitous:

- (43) Q: Did they really?
A: e, n-oko-ria ama-ako ba-a-rey-e
yes, FOC-15-eat 6-fruit 3PL.SA-PST-eat.PRF-FV
‘Yes, they DID eat fruits.’

These data indicate that in Kuria, *verum* focus in the remote past is marked via fronting of an infinitival verb and predicate doubling. Further, these data show that Kuria differs from Kikuyu with respect to the use of preverbal /ne-/ and the expression of *verum* focus: in Kikuyu, preverbal /ne-/ is used for *verum* focus, while fronting the infinitival verb and predicate doubling is akin to the use of preverbal /ne-/ in Kuria (what Schwarz 2007 calls “narrow focus on the verb”). Although we leave an analysis of constructions such as (43) for future research, we note the typological difference between Kikuyu and Kuria with regards to the realization of VP and *verum* focus.²⁵

6 Additional patterns regarding /ne-/

In this section, we document some additional patterns regarding the syntactic distribution of /ne-/, and in doing so articulate some puzzles for future research with respect to focus marking in Kuria. Specifically, in §6.1, we observe certain contexts which appear to involve focus, but lack /ne-/, and in §6.2, we discuss the complementary distribution between /ne-/ and the negative marker /te-/.

6.1 Focus but no /ne-/

We have identified at least three contexts in which a phrase is semantically focused, while /ne-/ is absent, which we discuss in the following subsections.

6.1.1 TAM

In certain TAM combinations, /ne-/ does not appear pre-verbally in certain contexts (as also observed by Mwitia 2008). Consider e.g. the question-answer pairing in the immediate past below (cf. the remote past, in which /ne-/ does appear, as in, e.g. (1)):

²⁵ The examples in (41)A2 and (43)A are parallel to data from other languages discussed in Aboh (2006) and Aboh & Dyakanova (2009), where they are called “predicate fronting with doubling”. We refer the reader to these papers for further examples of this type of construction cross-linguistically and thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing these papers to our attention.

(44) Q: What did Gati and Johnes just do?

A: ba-rey-e omo-gate
 3PL.SA-eat.PRF-FV 3-bread
 ‘They just ATE BREAD.’

The morpheme may only appear pre-verbally in this tense as a reply to questions showing incredulity, expressing a *verum* focus interpretation. This context, similar to the previously discussed VP nominalization cases in the remote past, is exemplified below in (45):

(45) Follow up Q: *Did they really?*

A: m-ba-rey-e omo-gate
 FOC-3PL.SA-eat-PRF.FV 3-bread
 ‘They DID just eat bread.’

We presently have no explanation for why /ne-/ only appears in *verum* focus contexts in certain TAM combinations, as illustrated above, and why *verum* focus in certain TAM combinations is not expressed via fronting of the infinitival verb and doubling.

6.1.2 Focus in relative clauses

Relative clauses provide another context in which /ne-/ does not appear pre-verbally. Even in answer to an echo question context that forces a focus interpretation on the verb, /ne-/ may not appear, as the question-answer pair in (46) shows:

(46) Q: The teacher who did WHAT drank water?

A: umw-arimu ora (*n-)a-a-giy-er-e
 1-teacher 1.who (FOC-)3SG.SA-PST-march-PRF-FV
 ‘The teacher who MARCHED.’

We might account for the restriction on /ne-/ in this context to the absence of a FocP projection in the left-periphery of relative clauses. However, it remains a puzzle how phrases with no morphological marking are interpreted as being focused. We leave this issue for future research.²⁶

6.1.3 Multiple *wh*-phrases

Since we assume that congruent answers to *wh*-questions involve semantic focus, we would expect all replies to *wh*-questions to bear /ne-/: this, however, is not the case. Consider the multiple *wh*-question-answer pairing below; notice that only the phrase that answers the *wh*-phrase marked with /ne-/ in the question can bear /ne-/ in the answer; the in situ constituent cannot also bear /ne-/:

²⁶ A reviewer notes that a fuller paradigm related to the unavailability of /ne-/ in relative clauses might show this is due to island effects.

- (47) Q: n-eng'we a-it-ir-e (*n-)ke
 FOC-who SA-kill-PRF-FV (FOC-)what
 'Who killed what?'
- (48) A1: m-boke a-it-ir-e igi-siisi
 FOC-1.Boke 3SG.SA-kill-PRF-FV 7-ant
 'Boke killed ANTS.'
- (49) A2: #n-igi-siisi boke a-it-ir-e
 FOC-7-ant 1.Boke 3SG.SA-kill-PRF-FV
 (Intended meaning: 'BOKE killed ANTS.')

Examples like these again raise the question of how semantic focus is expressed and interpreted in Kuria; if structural restrictions ban the appearance of multiple instances of /ne-/ in a clause, how are phrases with no morphological marking interpreted as being focused? We leave further discussion of this matter for future research.

6.2 The complementary distribution of /ne-/ and /te-/

While /ne-/ appears in positive sentences, its apparent negative counterpart, /te-/, appears in exactly the same position in negative sentences:

- (50) aba-saacha te-ba-a-mah-er-e eng'-ombe
 2-man NEG.FOC-3PL.SA-PST-see-PRF-FV 9-cow
 'The men did not SEE THE COW.'

The two are in complementary distribution, never co-occurring on the same phrase or in the same clause. /Te-/ appears to express both negation as well as focus. Like /ne-/, /te-/ attaches to focused phrases, such as the question-answer pairing below:

- (51) Q: Was it the men who saw the cow?
 A: a; *(t-)aba-saacha (*m-)ba-a-mah-er-e eng'-ombe
 no, NEG.FOC-2-man (FOC-)3PL.SA-PST-see-PRF-FV 9-cow
 'It was not THE MEN who saw the cow.'

Also like /ne-/, focus sensitive semantic operators such as bene 'only' may associate with /te-/. The exam-ple below is felicitous if the speaker is commenting on the methods used by student protesters:

- (52) te-ba-a-giy-ir-e bene
 NEG-FOC-3PL.SA-PST-march-PRF-FV only
 'They did not only MARCH.'

The complementary distribution of /ne-/ and /te-/ in Kuria suggests to us that the two are closely related in their syntax and semantics, though we do not presently have an explanation for this connection. Mwita (2008) attributes the incompatibility of /ne-/ with /te-/ to negation itself being “inherently focused”. However, this approach would not account for the fact that /ne-/ can co-occur with a different negation marker, /ta-/, which immediately precedes the verb root in contexts such as the following:²⁷

- (53) Q: What won't they do?
 A: m-ba-taa-r-e ege-eki
 FOC-3PL.SA-NEG.FUT-eat-FV 5-cake
 ‘They will not EAT THE CAKE.’

A connection between the morphological marking of focus and negation has not, to our knowledge, been studied in detail in the Bantu literature on focus realization. While Schwarz (2007) and Abels & Muriungi (2008) acknowledge the incompatibility of the focus morpheme with a negation morpheme in Kikuyu and Kiitharaka, respectively, they do not propose an account of the pattern.²⁸ We leave the issue for future research as well.

7 Conclusion

In this paper, we have presented a range of novel data regarding the syntax and semantics of the Kuria morpheme /ne-/. We have argued that our data support analyzing the morpheme /ne-/ as a focus marker, and have shown that an analysis in the spirit of Schwarz (2007) captures the syntactic distribution of /ne-/. This paper thus contributes to our understanding of focus strategies in Bantu specifically, as well as across languages more generally. Furthermore, we have articulated the following puzzles regarding the realization of focus, not only for Kuria but across the Bantu family. First, we have documented patterns that involve phrase-internal focus marking, which have not previously been reported in the Bantu literature. Second, we have shown how VP focus differs in Kuria in comparison with other Bantu languages like Kikuyu. Finally, we have observed the complementary distribution of focus and negation in Kuria, a connection that may have implications for the analysis of focus in Kuria specifically, as well as focus across languages more generally.

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²⁷ /Te-/ and /ta-/ may not both appear on the verb stem.

²⁸ A similar connection between focus and negation manifests in English do-support, suggesting a cross-linguistic connection between focus and negation. E.g. in English, do-support is obligatory in negated sentences (e.g. *They *(did) not leave*) as well as *verum* focus sentences (e.g. *They *(DID) leave*).

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Abbreviations

Glosses are as follows:

FOC	focus	SA	subject agreement
PST	past	NEG	negation
PRF	perfective	COMP	complementizer
FUT	future	ASSOC	associative marker
FV	final vowel	APPL	applicative.

In the orthography used through-out, an intervocalic represents a voiced bilabial fricative [β], an intervocalic <g> a voiced velar fricative [ɣ], <ng'> a velar nasal [ŋ], <ny> a palatal nasal [ɲ], <y> a palatal glide [j], <r> an alveolar tap [ɾ], <rr> a voiced alveolar trill [r], and <ch> a voiced alveo-palatal affricate [tʃ]. Numbers indicate Bantu noun class. For ease of comprehension, when one morpheme's presence is to be noticed in an utterance, it appears in bold; when two morphemes are to be noticed, the second one is underlined. We do not transcribe tone in our data; see [Mwita \(2008\)](#) and [Marlo, Mwita & Paster \(2014; 2015\)](#) for discussion of Kuria tone.

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