FOCUS CONSTRUCTION IN KOLOKUMA

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A B S T R A C T

This is a descriptive work that discusses focus construction in the Kolokuma Dialect of the Izon Language. A North Central Ijoid Lect under the Niger-Congo Phylum, spoken in the Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area in Bayelsa State. The objective of this paper is to examine and describe focus construction in Kolokuma with a view to determining how the focus is realised in the language and the constituents that can be focused. Exploiting a native speaker's intuition, data was collected and analysed on Kolokuma through oral interviews. The study shows that focus in Kolokuma is primarily in-situ, that is, it is realised clause internally. The study also shows that the language encodes focus morphologically, using the particles 'ki', 'ko' and 'kiri ki' as focus markers. Some of the constituents that can be focused on in the language are the subject NP, the object NP, the object of the preposition NP, and the verb. The particle 'ko' is used to lay emphasis on locatives (postpositions of location), while 'ki' is used for other prepositions and NPS. 'Kiri ki' is used to focus on short pronouns. The verb is the only constituent that is fronted in the language; it is fronted to a pre-verbal position and a copy is left at the construal site.

K E Y W O R D S:

Kolokuma, Focus Construction, Constituents and In-situ.

1.1 Introduction

Focus is a functional element that refers to the part of a sentence that is presented as NEW information (the information that is not already known by the hearer) as opposed to GIVEN (presupposed) information (information that the hearer is already aware of).

Focus can also be seen as that part of a sentence that is made prominent as a result of its contribution of NEW or CONTRASTIVE information; the part that the speaker wants the hearer to take particular note of.

From the foregoing, two things stand out: New Information and Given Information. New Information is the information that the speaker assumes that the hearer does not know. Although the new information may not necessarily be new, what is important is that the speaker codes it in such a way as to draw the hearer's attention to it or to make it emphatic. Given information, on the other hand, is the background knowledge that the hearer has about the subject of discourse. It has been said that given information is the theme or topic of the sentence – what is being talked about while new information (focus) is what is being said about the topic. Jackson (2007, p.74) says focus is what is most newsworthy about the topic.

Focus changes the semantics of a sentence; the same sentence could have two or more meanings or interpretations, depending on the constituent or part that is focused.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss focus constructions in Kolokuma, a dialect of Izon, spoken in the Kolokuma/Opokuma LGA of Bayelsa State. It seeks to identify and describe the various constituents that can be focused in the language, and also examine how focus is realised (encoded) in the language.

2.1 Focus

Focus is a functional element that lays emphasis on a constituent of a sentence. According to Lambrecht (2001, p.10), Focus is the constituent part of a pragmatically structured conversation that is different from previous assumptions. The focused constituent is an unexpected part of the conversation.

Jakendoff (cited in Arokoyo (2009, p.120) posits that Focus signifies the new material in the statement that the speaker suspects the hearer does not know.

Quirk (1973, p.408) observes that Focus is the contrast between information that is known and that which is unknown. That is, the information that is overt and had earlier been furnished by the text and that which was not anticipated.

Matthews (2007, p.142) says, "Focus is an element or part of a sentence given prominence by information or other means. Usually, where there is contrast or emphasis, or a distinction of new Vs given."

Jackson (2007, p.74) defines focus as "The most newsworthy element in a sentence, usually marked by the nucleus of an intonation unit".

2.2 Realization of Focus

Focus can be coded or realised in different ways cross linguistically. According to Jones (cited in Arokoyo (2009, p.121), focus is marked "prosodically (English Intonational focus), morphologically (Mandeng) or structurally (English Cleft focus, Yoruba)'.

Examples of Cleft Focus in Owe, a dialect of Yoruba

Subject NP Focus

1(a)   Solá   rá   ìwé

Sola   buy   book

'Sola bought a book'

(b)   Solá   kí   o [t;] rá   ìwé

Sola   FM RP   buy   book

'It was Sola that bought a book'

Direct Object NP Focus

2(a)   mò   ra   motò

I   buy   car

'I bought a car'

(b)   motò;   ki   mò   rá   ti

Car   FM   I   buy

'It is a car that I bought.   (Arokoyo, 2009:125-127).

Lambrecht (2001, p.20) on the other hand, says focus can be marked through:

Prosodic shifts (Changes in the unmarked position of focus accents)
Syntactic shifts (Changes in the unmarked position of focus constituents)

Cleft formation (biclausal coding of a proposition with concomitant

Changes in prosody, constituent order and grammatical relation).

He however, acknowledges the fact that focus can be marked morphologically in Japanese, Korean and a great number of African languages. (Bearth1999b) This study is limited to morphological focus.

2.2.1 Morphological Focus

The third way focus is marked in languages is by the use of particles as focus markers. Some languages, like Owe, a dialect of Yoruba, uses a combination of clause initial position and the particle 'ki'. Some other languages use either focus markers or special positions. Valin (1999, p.5) says Toura, an SOV Mande language that is spoken in Ivory Coast "Presents an elaborated system of focus marking which makes use of both special position as well as focus markers for clause – internal elements'.

3.1 Focus in Kolokuma

Focus in Kolokuma is realised morphologically by using the particles 'ki', 'ko' and 'kiri ki' as focus markers. Kolokuma does not permit the movement or preposing of focused elements to the left periphery of the clause, rather focus in Kolokuma is in-situ.   The focus marker occurs clause internally after the constituent that is focused.

3.2 The Constituents of Focus

The constituents of focus that will be discussed in Kolokuma are the subject NP focus, the object NP focus, the object of the preposition focus, the verb focus, the genitive focus, and the personal pronoun focus.

3.2.1 Subject Focus

The focused constituent in subject focus is the subject NP. The focus marker is written immediately after the subject to show that it is the subject that is in focus. The following data exemplifies this:

3(a)   Tari   fun-bi   gou-mi

        Tari   book-DEF Read-PST

        Tari   read   the   book

(b)   Tari   ki   fun-bi   gou-mi

        Tari   FM   book-DEF Read-PST

        It was Tari that read the book.

4(a)   Kala   tobou-ma   fou   gho   mu-mi

        Small   girl-FDEF   market   LOC   go-PST

        The small girl went to the market.

(b)   Kala   toubo-ma   ki   fou   gho   mu-mi

        Small   girl-FDEF   FM   market   LOC   go-PST

        It was the small girl that went to the market.

3.2.2 Object Focus

In object focus, the verb can subcategorize for one or two arguments, depending on the verb. The verb 'wash' for instance, can subcategorize for one argument; in 'he washed the clothes', clothes is the argument of the verb 'wash'. The verb 'give' on the other hand can subcategorize for two arguments; in she gave me the money, me and money are the arguments of give. Both the direct object and indirect object can be focused in Kolokuma. The focus marker is placed after the constituent that is focused. Examples:

        Direct Object

5(a)   Tari   sili   ni   I   piri-mi

        Tari   money   LINK   ISGOBJ   give-PST

        Tari gave me money.

(b)   Tari siliki   ni I   piri-mi

         Tari   money FM LINK ISGOBJ give-PST

         It was money that Tari gave me

6(a)   Ere-ma   tobou-ma   famu-mi

         Woman-FDEF   girl-FDEF   beat-PST

         The woman beat the girl

(b)   Ere-ma   tobou-ma   ki famu-mi

         Woman-FDEF girl-FDEF FM beat-PST

         It was the girl that the woman beat.

         Indirect object

7(a)   Tari   sili   ni   I   piri-mi

         Tari   money LINK   ISGOBJ give-PST

         Tari gave me money.

 (b)   Sili-bi,   Tari I   kiri ki   piri-mi

         Money-DEF Tari ISGSUB   FM   give-PST

         It was me that Tari gave the money

8(a)   Ine dau fun fee ni I piri-mi

My father book   buy   LINK 1SGOBJ   give-PST

         My father bought a book for me

(b)   Fub-bi,   ine dau fee ni I kiri ki piri-mi

         Book-DEF my father buy LINK 1SGOBJ FM   give-PST

         It was me my father bought the book for.

3.2.3 Object of Postposition Focus (Preposition)

The object of the postposition can also be focused in Kolokuma. A postposition is a word which shows the relationship between nouns or pronouns in a sentence. The postpositional phrase in Kolokuma is head final. It is called a postposition because it comes after its complement unlike the preposition. In the case of the postpositional focus, the focus marker 'ki' changes to 'ko' when the postposition is locative but remains 'ki' with other forms of postpositions. Examples of post position focus in Kolokuma :

9(a)   Tokoni tebulu ogono boo fiyai-bi   gbana-mi

Tokoni table   top   LOC food-DEF placed-PST

Tokoni placed the food on the table.

(b)   Tokoni   tebulu   ogono ko fiyai-bi   gbana-mi

Tokoni   table   top   FM food-DEF put-PST

It was on the table that Tokoni put the food.

10(a)   Arí   fóú   ghó   mu-yemi

I   market   LOC   go-PROG

I am going to the market

(b)   Arí   fóú   komu-yemi

I   market   FM   go-PROG

It is market that I am going to.

11(a)   Erí   wo   binaówei   mo   bó-mí

He   his   brother   with come-PST

He came with his brother

(b)   Erí   wo   binaówei   mo   ki   bó-mí

He   his   brother   with FM come-PST

It was with his brother that he came

3.2.4 Verb Focus in Kolokuma

According to Jakendoff (1977:17) in Arokoyo (2009:133), "Only NPS can be focused, i.e., only the constituents that share the feature [-V] can be focused." Although this is true of the English language, Owe

dialect of Yoruba and some other languages, it is not true of the Kolokuma dialect. The [+V] constituent focus is attested in the language. When a verb is focused, the normal SOV structure of the sentence changes, the object of the sentence is preposed to a clause initial position while the focus phrase is fronted to a pre-verbal position, but a copy of the verb remains at the construal site. This is the only constituent that exhibits fronting in the language.

Examples of verb focus in Kolokuma

12(a)   Idisemiobori fe-mi

          Idisemi   goatbuy-PST

          Idisemi bought a goat

(b)   Obori-bi, Idisemi fe   ki   fe-mi   (furu-gha)

          goat-DEF Idisemi buy FM   buy-PST (steal-NEG)

          It was buy that shebought the goat (She didn't steal it).

13(a)   Tena   fun-bi   bolei-mi

          Tena   book-DEF borrow-PST

          Tena borrowed the book

(b)   Fun-bi,   Tena bolei   ki   bolei-mi,   (fe-gha)

          Book-DEF, Tena borrow FM borrow-PST (buy-NEG)

          It was borrow that Tena borrowed the book, he did not buy it.

14(a)   Lade   fiyai-bi   tangbe-mi

          Lade   food-DEF   throw-PST

          Lade threw away the food.

(b)   Fiyai-bi,   Lade tangbe ki tangbe-mi

          Food-DEF, Lade throw FM throw-PST

          It was throw that Lade threw away the food.

The verb constituent focus can also be written without an overt subject.

(c)   Tangbe   ki   tangbe-mi, (fii-gha)

Throw   FM throw-PST, (eat-NEG)

It is throw that (Lade) threw it, he did not eat it

3.2.5 Genitive Noun Phrase Focus

In genitive NP focus, the whole NP is focused. The focus marker is written after the genitive phrase that is focused, whether it is the subject NP, object NP or object of the preposition NP. Examples of the genitive noun phrase focus in Kolokuma are cited below:

15(a)   Ari   Tari fun   dou-yemi

ISGSUB Tari book find-PROG

I am looking for Tari's book.

(b)   Ari   Tari fun   ki   dou-yemi

ISGSUB Tari book FM   find-PROG

It is Tari's book that I am looking for.

16(a)   Tokoni binaowei sili   furu-mi

Tokoni brother   money steal-PST

Tokoni's brother stole money

(b)   Tokoni binaowei ki   sili   furu-mi, (ari-gha)

Tokoni brother   FM money steal-PST (ISGSUB-NEG)

It is Tokoni's brother that stole money, not me.

3.2.6 Personal Pronoun Focus

Personal pronouns in Kolokuma can receive focus. The personal pronouns change their forms to show case distinctions. For instance, Arí "I", wóni "we", arí "you", áraú "she" etc. are used in the subject position while the short pronouns /i/ "me", /i/ "you", /a/ "her" etc. are used in the object positions. The 'ki' particle is used to focus pronouns used in the subject position while 'kiri ki' is used to focus pronouns used in the object position, except wo "us that uses 'ki'. Examples of the personal pronoun focus in Kolokuma are :

17(a)   Ari   ine   fiyai fii-dou

ISGSUB POSS food eat-PRSPRF

I have eaten my food.

(b)   Ari ki inei fii-dou

ISGSUB FM POSS eat-PRSPRF

It is I that have eaten mine.

18(a)   Arau sili-bi ni i piri-mi

3SGSUB money-DEF LINK   ISGOBJ   give-PST

She gave me the money.

(b)   Arau sili-bi ni i   kiriki piri-mi

ISGSUB money-DEF LINK ISGOBJ FM give-PST

It was I that she gave the money.

/i/ "me" is glossed as 'I' in example (41b) even though it is an object pronoun because it has been focused, but in the (a) counterpart, it is correctly glossed as an object "me".

4.0 Summary and Conclusion

This study sets out to examine and describe focus constructions in Kolokuma with a view to determining how focus is realised in the language, and the constituents that can be focused. The study shows that focus in Kolokuma is primarily in-situ, though the verb constituent is fronted to a pre-verbal position. The study also shows that the language encodes focus morphologically, using the particles 'ki', 'ko', and 'kiriki' as focus markers. The study showed that 'ki' is a productive way of focusing constituents; it is used to focus the subject NP, the object NP, and the verb. The particle 'ko' is used to focus the object of the postposition when it is locative, but 'ki' for other forms of postpositions, while 'kiri ki' is used to focus personal pronouns in object position.

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