

The ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ: Its structure and the motivations for it¹

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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. In the ex-situ focus strategy, a constituent occurs at the front of a clause and gets attached to the morphemes *nĩ-* ('is') or *tĩ-* ('is not'). This makes the morpheme *nĩ-* obligatory in an ex-situ focus construction, but there is no agreement on what its role is. Whereas Clements (1984) and Schwarz (2007) see it as a focus marker, Bergvall (1987) sees it as an assertion marker. Consequently, the structure of the ex-situ clause has also been a subject of debate. In the literature, two main theoretical approaches compete in trying to explain it. The Focus Phrase Approach (Clements 1984) treats it as a mono-clausal construction, whereas the Cleft Analysis (Bergvall 1987) treats it as a bi-clausal one. The literature also does not explain the motivation behind the ex-situ focus construction, particularly where in-situ focus marking is also possible. For these reasons, the structure and the motivations behind ex-situ focus in Gĩkũyũ remain an open topic; hence, the interest of this paper. Using the Prominence Theory of Focus Realization (Büning 2010) to analyse data from sermons presented in the Gĩkũyũ language, this study concludes that the ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ is bi-clausal. Further, it demonstrates that the morphemes *nĩ-* and *tĩ-*, as used in the ex-situ focus constructions, are copula verbs which facilitate focus marking by allowing a focus-sensitive position after them. The study further establishes that the search for maximal prominence motivates the preference for the ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ. It also demonstrates that the "Prominence Constraint," in the Prominence Theory of Focus Realization, requires parameterisation for it to more adequately account for the ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ.

Keywords: Gĩkũyũ, Kikuyu, ex-situ focus, in-situ focus, Prominence Theory of Focus Realization, bi-clausal, copula verb, [+Focus], prominent, maximal prominence

¹ An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the WOCAL-11 conference held at the University of Nairobi from 6 to 8 August 2024. We wish to thank the audience for their helpful comments. We also wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers who reviewed this paper; their comments went a long way towards improving its quality.

1. Introduction

This paper re-examines the mono/bi-clausal nature of the ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ, also Kikuyu. It also examines the motivations behind the ex-situ focus construction, besides evaluating the applicability of the Prominence Theory of Focus Realization (Büiring 2010) in accounting for ex-situ focus constructions in Gĩkũyũ. “The FOCUS of a sentence S=the (intension of a) constituent c of S which the speaker intends to direct the attention of his/her hearer(s) to by uttering S” (Erteschik-Shir 2007: 38). Stevens (2017: 1) notes that such constituents in focus are marked as so via some linguistic means. Focus marking has received substantial scholarly attention, (Büiring 2010; Erteschik-Shir 2007; Lambrecht 1994; Rooth 1992; Schwarz 2007). 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 a single constituent. This paper concentrates on narrow focus in Gĩkũyũ,² a zone E51 Bantu language (Maho 2014: 645) largely spoken in central 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 focused while in its usual syntactic position, and no special morpheme or interference with clause structure is employed. In the ex-situ focus strategy, a constituent is moved from its usual syntactic position to the front of the clause for it to be marked for focus. Such a

² According to the 2019 Population and Housing Census Report, the population of the Agĩkũyũ was 8.1 million in 2019.

constituent gets obligatorily attached to the particle *nĩ*³ ('is'), or (in this usage), to its negative counterpart *ti* ('is not') as illustrated in example (1).

- (1) *Nĩ/ti nyeni⁴ ũraker-a* KenG2-T2:17-18 (modified)
Nĩ/ti nyeni ũ-ra-a-ker-a
 COP/Neg 10.kales 2SG-PRS.PROG-chop-FV⁵
 It is/ it is not kales you are chopping⁶

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

³ The presence of *nĩ/ti* differentiates ex-situ focus constructions from topicalization and left dislocation, which also front constituents. For illustration, let us consider the clause *nĩ nyeni ũ-ra-ker-a* ('it is kales you are chopping') in example (1) above. In topicalization, the fronted constituent lacks any overt marker attached to it or it gets attached to a topicalization marker such as *-rĩ* ('as for'), thereby setting it apart from ex-situ focus constructions. With topicalization, the preceding example would become *nyeni rĩ, nĩ ũ-ra-ker-a* ('as for kales, you are chopping'), or *nyeni nĩ ũ-ra-ker-a* ('kales you are chopping'), with an imperative interpretation. With left dislocation, the fronted constituent is represented by a resumptive pronoun embedded in its locus of origin as in *nyeni nĩ ũ-ra-cĩ-ker-a* ('kales you are chopping **them**'). It is the resumptive pronoun which sets left dislocation apart from the other two above. In agreement with Bergvall (1987: 46), Kihara (2017: 70) assigns the following features to distinguish topicalization, left dislocation and ex-situ focus constructions: "... TOP is [-ne, -pron], LD is [-ne, +pron] and FOC is [+ne, -pron]".

⁴ The word *nyeni* in Gikũyũ is a hypernym for vegetables but also a hyponym for kales. For this reason, it is here translated as kales.

⁵ The following abbreviations are 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; AM-Assertion marker; FV-Final vowel; HAB-Habitual aspect; PRS-Present tense; PST-Past tense; SM-Subject Marker, BRP-Bounded Recent Past, TRNS-Transitivizer; RECP-Reciprocal; PROG-Progressive aspect; INF- Infinitive marker; HZ-Hertz.

⁶ The culinary term is *chiffonade*, but for simplicity, this paper uses the term *chopping*.

the NP is attached to the morpheme *nĩ-/ti-* ('is/is not'), then (1) is a case of an ex-situ focus marking.

In the ex-situ focus marking construction in Gĩkũyũ, the particle *nĩ-/ti-* is indispensable thereby motivating Schwarz's (2003) observation that "... virtually all discussions of focus ... concentrate on the particle ..." (p. 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. It also claims that *nĩ-* heads a focus phrase which occurs within an extended CP (Rizzi 1997). 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-* ('is') and the negative morpheme *ti-* ('is 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 ..." (p. 146). Further, FPA does not satisfactorily account for narrow verb focus. FPA also opposes a cleft analysis of the ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ; although Morimoto (2017) confirms that the subject ex-situ focus in Gĩkũyũ is a cleft construction.

The Cleft Analysis, on the other hand, treats *nĩ-* as a marker of assertion. Copula clauses are viewed as cases of a preverbal *nĩ-* with a null copula verb, and so are 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; hence, it can only have a single *nĩ-*. Since relative clauses do not make assertions, they do not host *nĩ-*. The ex-situ focus construction is treated as a cleft construction. However, the approach does not account for the use of *nĩ-* in non-assertive environments.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the debate on the ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ is an open topic. This paper contributes to this debate by supporting a bi-clausal structure of the ex-situ focus construction and, by

explaining some possible motivations behind the ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ.

2. Other functions of *nĩ-* and *ti-* in Gĩkũyũ

Besides their use in ex-situ focus constructions, the morphemes *nĩ-* and *ti-* are used in other contexts in Gĩkũyũ, such as in passives, in adverbial clauses (indicating reason and purpose, among others), before expletives such as *there* and in copular constructions, each of which is illustrated in example (2).

(2) a. *Destiny ya Daudi ya hithitwo nĩ Goliathũ* KenG1 T3: 164

Destiny ya Daudi ya-a-hith-it-wo nĩ Ngoliathũ.

Destiny of David OM-PST-hide-PERF-PV by Ngoliathũ.

David's destiny was hidden by Goliath.

b. *Ngorwo nĩ thayũ nĩ maũndũ marĩa nyonete.* KenG1-T2:76

N-ka-ũr-ũo nĩ thayũ nĩ ma-ũndũ ma-rĩa N- on - et-e

1.SG-PRS-lose-PV by peace because of 6.things AC6-DEM. 1.SG-see-PERF-FV.

I lose peace because of the things I have seen.

c. *Nĩ kwarĩ mũndũ wetagwo Korinelio.* KenG1-Y2:195

Nĩ kũ-a-rĩ mũndũ ũ-a-et-ag-wo Korinelio

FOC INF-PST-COP person who-PST-call-HAB-PV Cornelius

There was a person who was called Cornelius.

d. *Andũ nĩ mathiaga mena ũrimũ.* Keng2-Y1:79 (modified)

A-ndũ nĩ ma-thi-ag-a ma-e-na⁷ ũ-rimũ

2PL-Person AM 2SM-move-HAB-FV 2-COP-with 14-foolishness

People move with foolishness.

⁷ This construction combines the plural SM *ma*, the copula *e*, which can also be *-rĩ* to form *ma-rĩ-* ('they are'), and the comitative *na* ('and/with') to form ('they are with'). In this form, it is simply interpreted as *with* or *having*.

Example (2a) illustrates the use of the morpheme *nĩ-* in passive constructions. Here it functions, like in all other passive constructions in Gĩkũyũ, as the English preposition *by*. It introduces and heads a peripheral prepositional phrase usually denoting the agent, like *Ngoliathũ* ('Goliath') in example (2a). *Nĩ-* ('by') in the passive construction is a preposition because, like other prepositions, it is invariable and does not take negation or number, but it takes a complement and creates a relation with another constituent in the clause. Example (2b) demonstrates the use of the morpheme *nĩ-* to introduce reason adverbials. The clause *nĩ maũndũ marĩa nyonete* ('because of the things I have seen') explains why the speaker in (2b) doesn't have peace. Example (2c) illustrates the use of the expletive *kwarĩ* ('there was'), where the addition of *nĩ-* puts its content 'there was' in focus. Example (2d), on the other hand, demonstrates the use of the morpheme as an assertion marker. It asserts the truth that 'people move around foolishly'. In turn, it marks the clause for verum focus. In this use, the morpheme occurs before the verb and can be substituted with *ti-* ('negative') to deny the truth in the clause, usually with a corrective function. Structurally, the negative morpheme follows the subject marker, unlike *nĩ-*, which precedes it. An explanation of this observation is reserved for future research.

In addition to the functions above, *nĩ-* and *ti-* also function as copula verbs in copula clauses. A copula clause has a "... Copula Subject (CS) and Copula Complement (CC)" (Dixon 2010: 159) which are linked by a copula verb. In the copula use, *nĩ-* and *ti-* translate as ('is, are') and ('is not, are not') respectively, and they are restricted to the third person present.

Other persons and tenses take other morphemes, such as *rĩ-* (am, are, was, were) in the past tense and *-um-* (am/are/was/were) in the bounded recent past tense. The verb *-um-* (am/are/was/were) has other lexical-verb functions, such as functioning as the verb *to leave*. Such lexical verbs with a copula use are called "... semi-copulas, copula verbs or verbal copulas" (Gibson et al. 2019: 214). Example (3) illustrates the use of *nĩ-* ('are') and *ti-* ('are not') in copula clauses.

(3) a. *Ndeto icio nĩ njega*

KenG2-T1:4-5

<i>Ndeto</i>	<i>i-cio</i>	<i>nĩ</i>	<i>n-ega</i>
10.News	10-DEM (those)	COP	10-good

Those news are good.⁸

b. *Ndeto icio ti njega* KenG2-T1:4-5 (modified)

<i>Ndeto</i>	<i>i-cio</i>	<i>ti</i>	<i>n-ega</i>
10.News	10-DEM (those)	COP.Neg.1	10-good

Those news are not good.

In example (3a), the morpheme *-nĩ-* ('are') links the CS *ndeto icio* ('those news') to the CC *njega* ('good'). It changes to *-ti-* ('are not') in example (3b), which is the negative version of example (3a). This suggests that *-nĩ-* ('is') is a verb since, in this use, it has a negative version. Besides, the morpheme is marked for and restricted to the present tense, with its past form being *-rĩ-* ('was/were'). It is also useful in the formation of intonation-based interrogatives in copular clauses. For example, the copula clause in (3a) can be changed into an interrogative by raising the intonation starting from the copular verb *-nĩ-* ('are') and ending at the CC *njega* ('good'). This process of interrogation cannot work correctly in (3a) without the presence of the copular verb.⁹ This is in agreement with Kihara's (2017) assertion that "... a statement cannot be intonationally converted into a question if the statement does not have *ne*" (p. 136). What the discussion in this paragraph shows is that the morphemes *-nĩ-* and *-ti-* bear some verb features, hence they are best treated as semi-copulas rather than particles.

Since, as seen above, the morphemes *nĩ-* and *ti-* have several uses in Gĩkũyũ, their discussion in this paper is restricted to their use in ex-situ focus constructions. In that use, they correctly substitute one another but with an attendant change in polarity and interpretation. Whereas *nĩ-* ('is') is contrastive and emphatic, *ti-* ('is not') is contrastive and corrective.

⁸ Gĩkũyũ has a plural for *news*, hence the use of the plural demonstrative *those* in the translation.

⁹ Note that the question *ndeto njega?* ('good news?') is acceptable but has a meaning which is different from the meaning in the question formed from example (3).

3. Methodology

Some of the data for this paper came from published papers and books on focus marking in Gĩkũyũ. However, the primary source of data was sermons preached in the Gĩkũyũ language by three purposefully selected televangelists. The choice of the televangelists was informed by the fact that they preach using Gĩkũyũ as their primary language, to a sit-in audience, and that they distribute their sermons through the television and/or YouTube platforms. They were each assigned the arbitrary label KenG: Ken for Kenya, showing that they are from Kenya, and G for using Gĩkũyũ as the primary language in their preaching. The numbers 1, 2 or 3 were attached to the label to identify the individual preachers. The assignment of this number was also arbitrary. Eighteen of their sermons were included in the final sample. Sermon videos procured from the church outlets were labelled ‘T,’ while those downloaded from YouTube were labelled ‘Y.’ Thus, a sermon from a video by the first preacher downloaded from YouTube was labelled *KenG1-Y*, and that from the church outlets *KenG1-T*.

The sermons were transcribed, forming 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. For example, *KenG2-Y1:79* means that the focus construction was found in line 79 of the first YouTube sermon by the second preacher. The data was then discussed in the light of the Prominence Theory of Focus Realization (Büiring 2010).

The Prominence Theory of Focus Realization (Büiring 2010) proposes a common approach to all forms of focus marking. According to Büiring (2010: 178), languages use pitch, prosodic phrasing, constituent order variations or a mixture of all these as mechanisms for focus marking. Given that 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’s (1995) concept of “Prosodic Prominence”, the Prominence Theory of Focus Realization (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” constraint, which states:

- (4) Focus needs to be maximally prominent

Büiring (2010: 178)

Büiring (2010: 204) notes that the Prominence Constraint in (4) does not adequately account for a language like Hausa. This is because in addition to an ex-situ strategy of marking focus, Hausa also allows for focus marking in-situ. The same is observed in Gĩkũyũ, though, as it will be argued below, there are pragmatic considerations which motivate the choice between ex-situ and in-situ focus constructions.

This is different from Hausa, in which the choice between the ex-situ and the in-situ focus construction is not “... correlated with any semantic or pragmatic distinctions” (Büiring 2010: 203). Additionally, subjects in focus in Hausa occur only in a marked focus position, and they prompt the formation of a relative clause that follows them. If focus is not marked in this special way, the remaining clause may bear focus on the VP, object or even the entire clause. This again is similar to the behaviour in Gĩkũyũ. In terms of focus marking therefore, Gĩkũyũ and Hausa have some similarities even though the two languages are from different language families. Consequently, Gĩkũyũ qualifies as a “non-marking” language in Büiring’s (2010) typology.

To account for such non-marking languages, Büiring (2010) redefines prominence in syntactic terms as shown below:

- (5) a. Focus position $>_{Prom}$ rest
 b. rest $>_{Prom}$ subject

Büiring (2010: 204).

The constraint above, as in this work, treats focus marking as placement in a given syntactic position. It therefore claims that a focus position in a clause is more prominent (shown by the $>_{prom}$ symbol) than the remaining part of the clause,

which is in turn more prominent than the subject position. Thus seen, the subject position is inherently the least prominent in a clause. This claim is borne out in Gĩkũyũ, a language which lacks in-situ focus for subjects; subjects in focus must be marked as such, usually via an ex-situ focus construction. Again, this is in line with Büring’s (2010) assertion that “... focus prominence requires action if ... a focused subject were left in-situ ...” (p. 204). Since the interest in this article is on the syntactic prominence shown in (5), it will use the $>_{Prom}$ symbol to highlight a focused constituent in its examples. The direction of the *greater-than* sign in $>_{Prom}$ may change to highlight the syntactic position of focus in a clause.

4. The ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ

4.1 Types of 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 (5). It comes from the sermon KenG2-Y1, where in line 79, the speaker ridicules church members 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:

- (6) *Nĩ andũ mathiaga mena ũrimũ.* Keng2-Y1:79
Nĩ a-ndũ>Prom ma-thi-ag-a ma-e-na ũ-rimũ
 FOC¹⁰ 2-People>Prom 2SM-move-HAB-FV 2-COP-with 14-foolishness
 It is people>Prom who move foolishly

In example (6), the subject NP *andũ* (‘people’) is put into focus by following the morpheme *nĩ-* (is). Note that 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 (6) above, the NP *andũ* (‘people’) can occur at the beginning of the clause without *nĩ-* (‘is’), leading to *andũ mathiaga mena ũrimũ*

¹⁰ This morpheme is here glossed as a focus marker until the views in this paper are motivated.

(‘people move with foolishness’). In this case, focus falls on the post-verbal constituent *mena ūrimū*¹¹ (‘with foolishness’), not on the subject NP *people*, though it is at the front of the clause. So, since the subject NP is moved from its regular non-focus position and attached to the morpheme *nĩ-* (‘is’) or *ti-* (‘is not’) to receive focus as in example (6), focus on the overt subject NP is a case of an ex-situ focus construction.

Example (7) below comes from the sermon KenG2-T2, in which the speaker encourages his audience to always remain happy. He gives the example of a happy couple who are preparing a meal. Concerning the wife, he says:

- (7) *Nĩ nyeni ūrakera* KenG2-T2:17-18
Nĩ nyeni>_{Prom} *ũ-ra-ker-a*
 COP 10.kales >_{Prom} 2SG-PRS.PROG-chop-FV
 It is *kales*>_{Prom} you are chopping.

In this example, the NP *nyeni* (‘kales’) is in ex-situ focus as confirmed by its position at 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 SVO language, then the default syntactic 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 the object ex-situ focus construction above is the *wh*-question in which a *wh*-constituent is fronted from a post-verbal position. This is illustrated through example (8) coming from the sermon KenG2-T2.

- (8) *Nĩ ūrandakarĩra* _{Prom} <¹²*kĩĩ*¹³? *Nĩ* *kĩĩ* >_{Prom} *tũrorania?* Keng2-T2:15-16
Nĩ ū-ra-N-rakar-ĩr-a _{Prom} <*kĩĩ*?
 1SG 2SG-PRS.PROG-1SG.SUBJ-annoy-APPL-FV what?

¹¹ If *nĩ-* is shifted to follow the NP *andũ* (‘people’), then the focus becomesthetic.

¹² Note that the direction of prominence has changed in order to capture in-situ focus marking.

¹³ Note that this construction also has the ‘what’ interpretation especially when it is preceded by *nĩ* to form *nĩ kĩĩ* (‘because of what’). This is not the construction in this piece of data.

4.2 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), and yet others view it as both mono-clausal for non-subject focus and bi-clausal for subject focus (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 form of the subject marker (SM) in the subject predicate. According to Morimoto (2017: 150), this SM resembles the one used in relative clauses, and since relative clauses are dependent clauses, the clause in which this form of the SM appears is also dependent. Borrowing from Mũgane (1997: 148 (22)), Morimoto (2017) uses the example reproduced in (10) below to support her argument.

(10) 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).

The subject marker (SM) in example (10a) is *ũ-* ('he'), which is the form used in dependent clauses such as relative clauses. In (10b), it changes to *a-* ('he'), which is the SM form used in independent clauses. This distinction confirms that in subject focus constructions (as in example (10a) above), the construction following the *nĩ-* ('is') focus construction is a dependent clause. Since this distinction does not surface in non-subject ex-situ focus constructions, it has been used to challenge a bi-clausal structure for the ex-situ focus construction.

However, the distinction between the two forms of the SM in (10) gets lost once the subject is changed into a plural, as in the modified example presented in (11), which is adapted from Morimoto (2017).

(11) a. *nĩ Kamau na Njoroge ma-nyu-ire njohi nyingĩ.*

F 2.Kamau and Njoroge^{>Prom} 2SM-drink-pfv 9.beer 9.lot

‘[Kamau and Njoroge]F^{>Prom} drank a lot of beer.’

b. *nĩ njohi nyingĩ Kamau na Njoroge ma-nyu-ire.*

F 9.beer 9.lot 2. ^{>Prom} Kamau conj. Ngoroge 2SM-drink-pfv

‘Kamau and Njoroge drank _{Prom<}[a lot of beer]F.’

Adapted from Morimoto (2017: 150); its SM is modified.

The example in (11) lacks the distinction in the SM that was seen in example (10). This suggests that the SM of plural subjects does not reveal the dependent/independent status of the clauses in which they appear.¹⁶ Noting this, this paper uses negation as an alternative diagnostic for clause status. Gĩkũyũ uses the morphemes *-ti-* and *-ta-* to mark negation. The *-ti-* morpheme has various person- and number- conditioned variants such as *ndi-* for the 1st person singular, *ndũ-* for the 2nd person singular, and *nda-* for the 3rd person singular, but they all take *-ti-*¹⁷ as the negating morpheme in their plural. The choice between the *-ti-* and the *-ta-* negating morphemes is syntactically conditioned: main clauses take the negating morpheme *-ti-*, whereas subordinate clauses take the *-ta-* negating morpheme. To differentiate them, the former is here abbreviated as Neg.₁ and the latter as Neg.₂.

Subjecting the clause in (10) to the test confirms its applicability in differentiating main from subordinate clauses.

¹⁶ This is common even with relative clauses (with or without overt relative pronouns) taking plural antecedents, but the point here is that if one were to rely on the form of the SM to establish the main/subordinate nature of a clause, then cases with plural subjects may motivate contentious conclusions.

¹⁷ Note that the distinction between the *nd-* forms and the *-ti-* negation morpheme form is also phonologically conditioned, with the *nd-* form coming before vowel sounds (which are enclitic to the *nd-* form), and the *-ti-* form coming before consonant sounds.

- (12) a. *nĩ Kamau ũ-ta(*ti)-na¹⁸-nyu-a njohi nyingĩ.*
 f 1.Kamau>_{Prom} 1sm-Neg.₂ (*Neg.₁)-tns-drink-pfv 9.beer 9.lot
 Intended: ‘[Kamau]F>_{Prom} did not drank a lot of beer.’

- b. *(*Ta) Ti Kamau ũ-Ø-nyu-ire njohi nyingĩ.*
 (*Neg.₂) Neg.₁ 1.Kamau>_{Prom} 1sm-drink-pfv 9.beer 9.lot
 ‘[It is not Kamau]F>_{Prom} drank a lot of beer.’

Adapted from Morimoto (2017: 150)

Note that in example (12a), the negating morpheme *-ta-* (Neg.₂) is acceptable. However, it could not co-work with the “current past completive aspect” marking morpheme *-ir-* to form **ũ-ta-nyu-ir-e* (intended: ‘who did not drink in the recent past’). This construction can only be correct if the action *nyua* (‘drink’) happened in the past, in which case, it would require the inclusion of the past tense marking morpheme *-a-* to form *ũ-ta-a-nyu-ire* (‘who did not drink’).¹⁹ Since this is not the case in example (12a) and in order to retain the ‘current past completive’ interpretation, the morpheme *-na-* (‘tns’) is introduced in example (12a) changing it into *ũ-ta-na-nyu-a* (‘who did not drink’). This clause is now acceptable since it is in the recent past just as is the original positive clause.

Bearing in mind that example (12a) is a cleft construction, then the clause *ũ-ta-na-nyu-a njohi nyingĩ* (‘who did not drink a lot of beer’) is a dependent relative clause. Consequently, as per the predictions of the arguments in this paper, the *-ti-* (Neg.₁) which works with independent clauses cannot work correctly with it. This is borne out since the construction **ũ-ti-na-nyu-a njohi nyingĩ* (intended: ‘who did to drink a lot of beer’) is unacceptable, whereas, example (12a) above

¹⁸ The status of this portmanteau morpheme (also functions as ‘and’ and ‘with’) is controversial. As used in this example, the morpheme marks tense. 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 (12a), it is here taken as in Barlow (1951: 146ff), as a tense marker working with the negative to mark the hordenial past. To differentiate it from the conventional glossing of the past tense morpheme (PST), it is glossed as ‘tns.’

¹⁹ Verbs bearing the *-ir-* morpheme are always in the past since the morpheme indicates completion. For this reason, some authorities equate it to the perfective (see Cable 2013: 8).

with *-ta-* (Neg.₂) is acceptable. Alternatively, since the *nĩ Kamau* ('it is Kamau') part of example (12) is an independent clause, it cannot take *-ta-* (Neg.₂) which works with subordinate clauses, but it correctly takes *ti-* (Neg.₁) as shown in example (12b). The deductions then are that a cleft construction has an independent and a dependent clause, and that negation in Gĩkũyũ adequately differentiates the two types of clauses as example (12) above shows. 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 (4.1) above.

The tentative proposal in this part is that all ex-situ focus constructions lead to a bi-clausal structure, which is akin to the subject ex-situ focus construction in example (10a) above. Since the bi-clausal nature of the subject ex-situ focus construction is not in contention, this section examines the structural nature of the object, *wh*-pronoun and verb ex-situ focus constructions.

The object ex-situ focus construction in example (7) is repeated here for a discussion.

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

In the example above, the NP *nyeni* ('kales') is in focus, this resulting from its attachment to the morpheme *nĩ-*('FOC'). The interest now is to find out whether the *ũ-ra-ker-a* ('you are chopping') clause is an upper or a lower clause. For a start, the sentence in example (13) is reconstructed into its unmarked form, in which the object NP *nyeni* ('kales') is in its usual post-verbal position.

- (14) a. *Ūrakera nyeni* KenG2-T2:17-18 (modified)
Ū-ra-ker-a *Prom* <*nyeni*
 2SG-PRS-chop-FV *Prom* <10.kales
 You are chopping *Prom* <kales.

- b. *Ndūrakera nyeni* KenG2-T2:17-18 (modified)
Nd-ũ-ra-ker-a _{Prom} <*nyeni*
 Neg.1-2SG-PRS-chop-FV _{Prom} <10.kales
 You are not chopping kales.

The reconstructed example in (14a) is negated in (14b) where only the *nd-* (a version of Neg.1) form is felicitous thereby indicating that it is a main clause. However, the *nd-/ti-* (Neg.1) version of the negative morpheme becomes infelicitous in (15).

- (15) * *Nĩ nyeni ndūrakera ...* KenG2-T2:17-18 (modified)
Nĩ nyeni >_{Prom} *nd-ũ-ra-ker-a*
 FOC 10.kales >_{Prom} Neg.1-2SG-PRS-chop-FV
 Intended: it is kales >_{Prom} you are not chopping.

Though attached to the same clause *ũ-ra-ker-a* ('you are chopping') as in example (14b), sentence (15) is not acceptable. The difference between the two sentences is that in (14b) the negated clause is a main clause but is a subordinate clause in (15). To ascertain the validity of this claim, we change the negative marker in (15) into Neg.2 leading to example (16).

- (16) *Nĩ nyeni ũta²⁰rakera ...* KenG2-T2:17-18 (modified)
Nĩ nyeni >_{Prom} *ũ-ta-ra-ker-a*
 FOC 10.kales >_{Prom} 2SG-Neg.2-PRS.PROG-chop-FV
 It is kales >_{Prom} you are not chopping.

The sentence in (16) is acceptable, thereby supporting the previously held assumption that the *ũ-ra-ker-a* ('you are chopping') part of the sentence is a subordinate clause. This leads to the speculation that the *nĩ nyeni* ('it is kales') part of example (16) is a main clause.

To establish that negation is used as shown in example (17) below.

²⁰ The order of the SM and the negating morpheme is left to future work.

- (17) *Ti(*ta) nyeni ūraker-a ...* KenG2-T2:17-18 (modified)
*Ti(*ta) nyeni*>*Prom* *ū-ra-ker-a*
 Neg.₁ (*Neg.₂) 10.kales>*Prom* 2SG-PRS-PROG-chop-FV
 It is not kales>*Prom* you are chopping

The upper clause in example (17) above correctly takes Neg.₁. The *nd-* form of Neg.₁ could not have worked here because the only stand-alone²¹ opposite of *nĩ-* is *ti-*. All the same, the acceptable use of Neg.₁ in *ti nyeni ...* ('it is not kales ...') shows that it is a main clause. Semantic reasons support this conclusion; *ti nyeni ...* ('it is not kales ...') can function as a semantically complete corrective response to a question, whereas the *uraker-a* ('you are chopping') part of the example cannot make complete sense without additional information. It is therefore a subordinate clause.

The use of *-ti-* (Neg.₁) to establish the syntactic status 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 a *wh-* ex-situ focus construction using the next example.

- (18) a. ... *Nĩ kī tūrōrania* Keng2-T2:15-16 (modified)
Nĩ kī>*Prom* *tū-ra-ūr-an-i-a?*
 FOC what>*Prom* 1PL-PRS-ask-RECP-TRNS-FV
 'What>*Prom* are we quarrelling (lit. asking each other) about?'
 b. ?... *Nĩ kī tū ta (*ti) rōrania* Keng2-T2:15-16 (modified)
Nĩ kī>*Prom* *tū-ta (*ti)-ra-ūr-an-i-a?*
 FOC what>*Prom* 1PL Neg.₂ (*Neg.₁)-PRS-ask-RECP-TRNS-FV
 'What>*Prom* are we not quarrelling about?'

Example (18b) shows that its lower clause cannot legitimately take *-ti-* (Neg.₁) for a negator, but it takes the *-ta-* (Neg.₂) instead. This in turn confirms that the clause *tū-ra-ūr-an-i-a* ('we are quarrelling about') in

²¹ The *Nd-* form of Neg.₁ requires a vowel SM after it to which it coalesces into a single pronunciation unit such as *ndū-* in *nd-ū-ra-ker-a nyeni* ('you are not chopping kales') in example 14a above.

example (18) is a subordinate clause, so the *nĩ kĩĩ* ('it is what ...') part of the clause is a main clause.

Verb focus shows a similar pattern. Let us repeat example (9) above, but with negation for a discussion.

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

The upper clause in example (19) acceptably takes *ti-* (Neg.₁) for a negator, whereas its remaining part *a-tuny-ag-a* ('he robs') takes the *-ta-* (Neg.₂) morpheme. This observation identifies the first part of example (19) as a main clause and its remaining part as a subordinate clause. Semantic considerations again corroborate this view. This is because the upper clause can function independently as a response to a question, unlike the lower clause which requires additional information for it to be complete.

Schwarz (2007) observes that *nĩ-* "... cannot co-occur with the regular verbal negation marker *ti-*" (p. 142). In this study, it has been argued that *ti-* (Neg.₁) occurs in main clauses, whereas its *ta-* (Neg.₂) version occurs in subordinate clauses but with a similar negating function. Thus, *ti-* (Neg.₁) and *ta-* (Neg.₂) are allomorphs of the same morpheme. Notice, though, that *nĩ-* and *ta-* can co-occur in sentences with ex-situ focus structures, as demonstrated by examples (12a) and (16) above. This, in turn, implies that *nĩ-* and *ta-* in such a sentence are in different clauses, further supporting the bi-clausal approach to ex-situ focus constructions assumed in this paper. When the upper and the lower clauses co-occur, the upper clause becomes the discourse topic of the lower clause, but it functions as a response to an implicit question when it occurs alone.

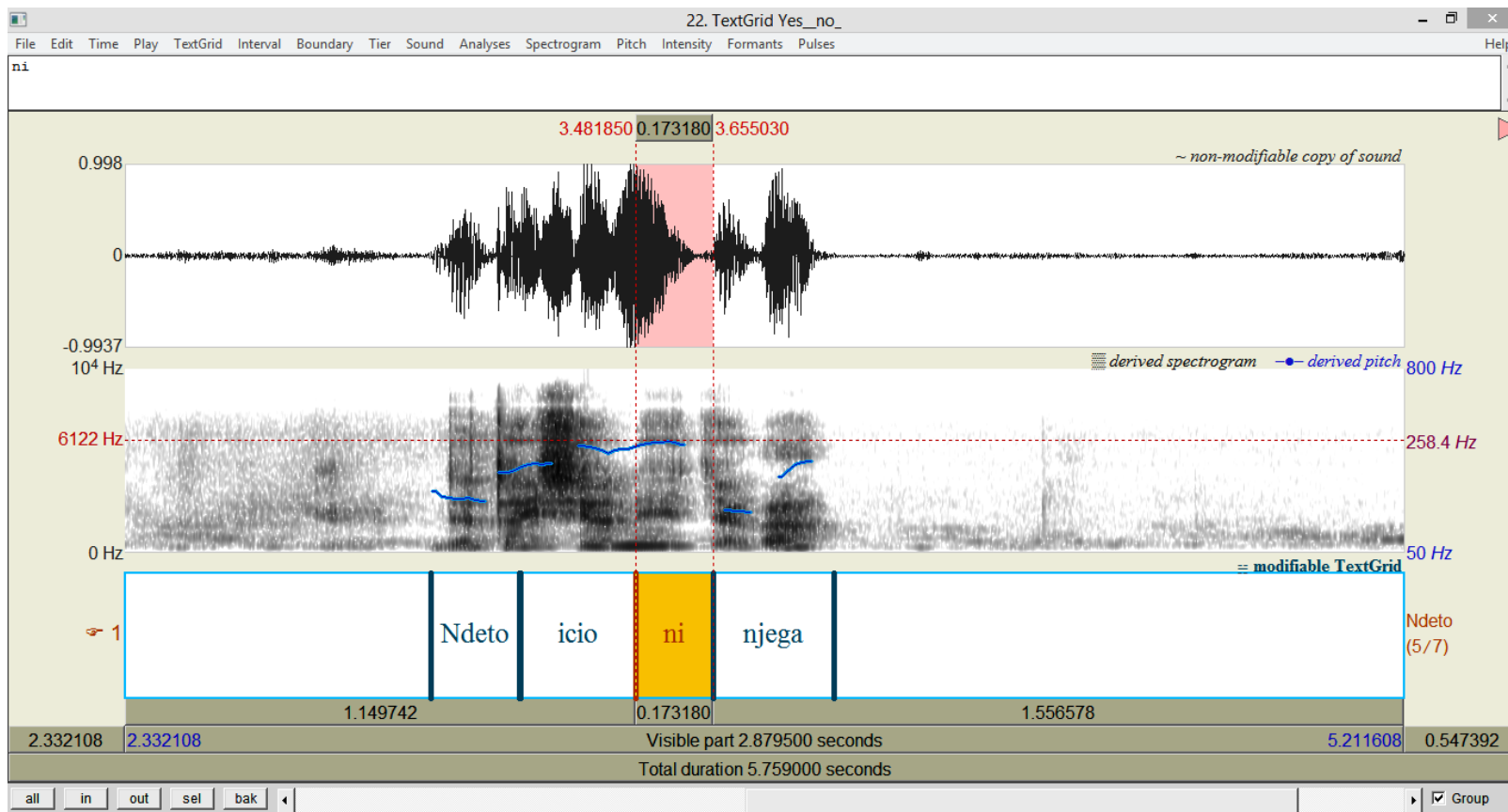
The preceding discussion has demonstrated that ex-situ focus constructions in Gĩkũyũ are bi-clausal. Of interest now is to establish the nature of the upper clause. The first observation made is that the morphemes *nĩ-* ('is') and *ti-* ('is not') used in the upper clause of an ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ are also used as copula verbs in some types of copula clauses. As a consequence, this study is of

the view that the upper clause in an ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ is, to a large extent, similar to a copula clause. For example, both copula and ex-situ constructions use the morphemes in a similar manner and with similar interpretations: *nĩ-* as assertive and *tĩ-* as negative, as well as corrective.

Another similarity has to do with the role of the copular verbs in the formation of intonation-based questions in Gĩkũyũ, an example of which is provided next.

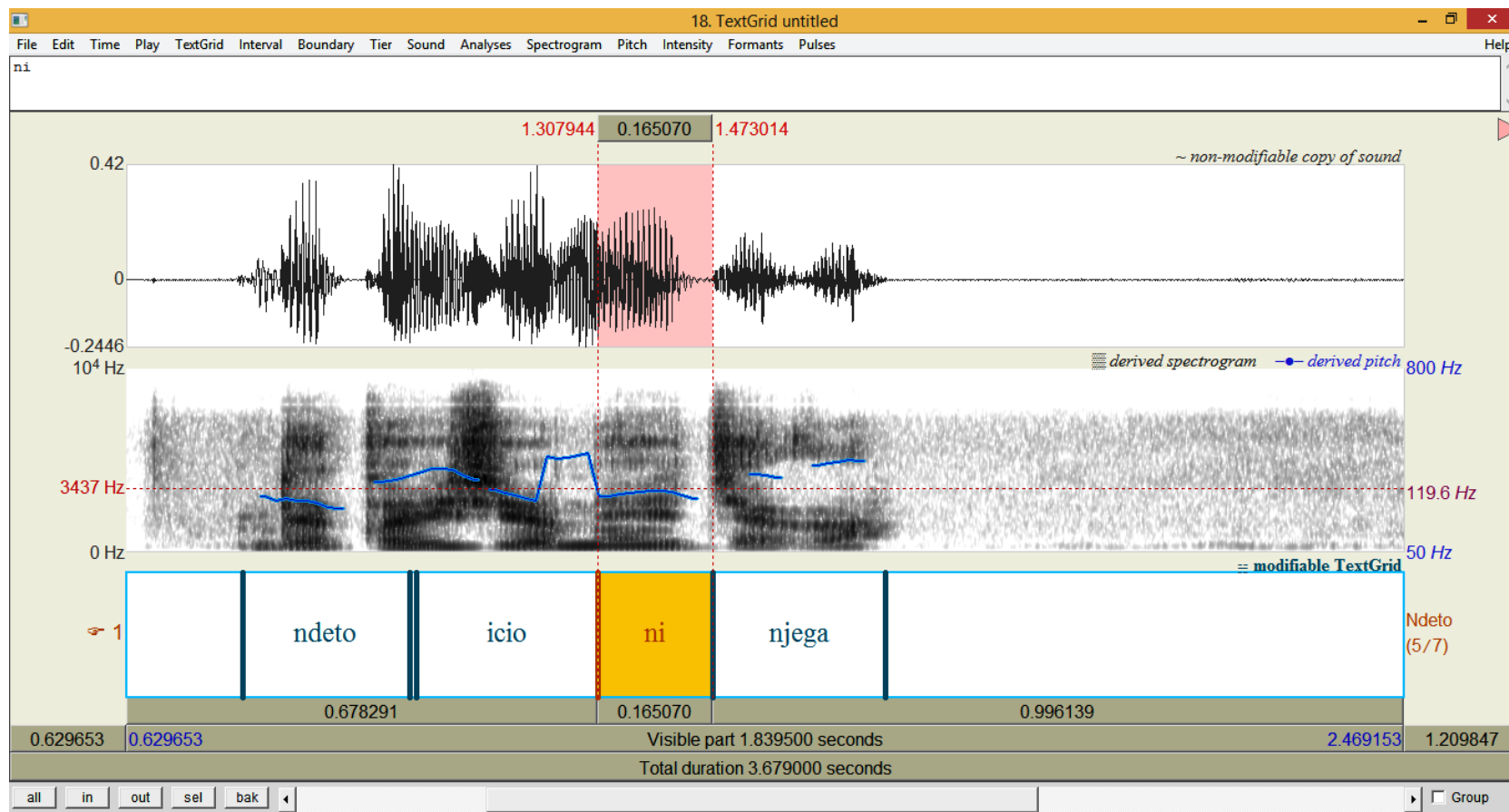
- (20) *Ndeto icio nĩ njega ?* KenG2-T1:4-5 (modified)
Ndeto i-cio *Prom <nĩ* *n-egá?*
 10.News 10-DEM (those) *Prom <COP* 10-good
 Are those news good? (Lit. those news *Prom >are* good?)

Use of intonation is a common way through which Gĩkũyũ forms questions. Yes/no questions typically bear a rising intonation at the end. This feature distinguishes them from statements which are structurally similar to them. Example (20) above is a question made from the statement in example (3) via the use of a rising intonation at its end. The rising intonation starts from the copular verb *-nĩ-* ('are') and ends at the CC *njega* ('good') as confirmed by the PRAAT spectrograms below.

Figure 1: A Screenshot of the PRAAT Spectrogram for *ndeto icio nĩ njega?* ('Are those news good?')

The highlighted part in Figure 1 shows the pitch and the length of the copula *-nĩ-* ('are') in the question *ndeto icio nĩ njega?* (literally: 'those news are good?'). It demonstrates that in such a question²² the pitch rises at *nĩ-* (see the curve in Figure 1); indeed, at 6122 Hz, it is the highest in the spectrogram above. Its complement *njega* ('good') starts off with a falling intonation but ends in a rising intonation, as the graph displays. In support of this claim, let us consider the spectrogram for the declarative version of the question in example (20).

²² PRAAT shows that in a confirmatory question made from the same statement, *nĩ-* 'are', has a falling intonation but takes a longer duration at 0.300444 seconds, as compared to the question in Figure 1 at 0.173180 seconds, and the statement in Figure 2 below, at 0.165070 seconds.

Figure 2: A screenshot of the PRAAT spectrogram for *ndeto icio nĩ njega* ('those news are good')

The curve in Figure 2 above now shows a fall in pitch to 3437 Hz at *nĩ-*. This confirms that in declaratives, the intonation at *nĩ-* falls, unlike in *yes/no* questions, in which it rises.

Let's now change the ex-situ construction in (7) into the question in (21).

(21) *Nĩ nyeni ũrakera?*

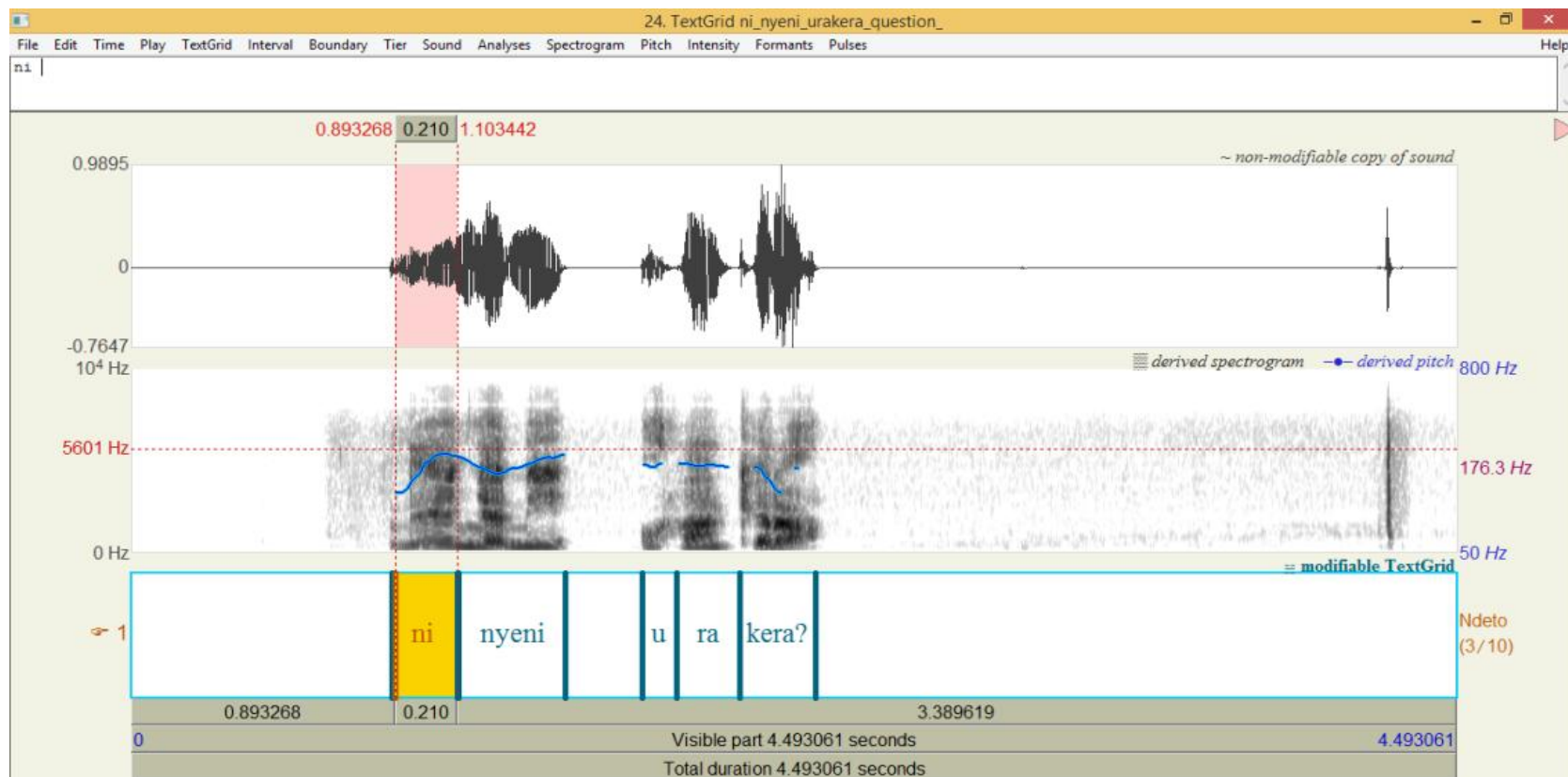
KenG2-T2:17-18

Nĩ *nyeni*^{>Prom} *ũ-ra*[>] *ker-a*[>]?

FOC 10.kales 2SG-PRS.PROG-chop-FV.

Is it *kales*^{>Prom} you are chopping? / You are chopping *kales*?

Using intonation, the upper clause in example (21) can be changed into a question, seeking information on whether it is the *kales* or something else that the addressee is chopping. The lower clause also has some prosodic changes with a rising intonation at *-ra-* ('PRS.PROG'), and a falling intonation at the verb *kera* ('chop'). In forming the question in the upper clause, both the *nĩ-* and the NP *nyeni* ('*kales*') host the rising intonation as the spectrogram below shows.

Figure 3: A screenshot of the PRAAT spectrogram for *nĩ nyeni urakera?* ('Is it kales you are chopping?')

Our interest in Figure 3 above is in the intonation pattern in the upper clause *nĩ nyeni* ('it is kales'). The spectrogram reveals that the upper clause has the highest intonation at *nĩ-* ('is') and at the end of the NP *nyeni* ('kales'). The rise in intonation to form a question began from *nĩ-* ('is'), and ended at its CC *nyeni* ('kales'), in a pattern similar to the one observed in the copula clause-based question in example (20). We can therefore conclude that in question formation, copula clauses and ex-situ focus constructions have a similar structure.

The discussion in this section demonstrates that the upper clause in an ex-situ focus construction is a copula clause. However, different from a copula in a non-ex-situ focus construction, the copula in the ex-situ focus construction lacks a CS; so, here it will be referred to as a "reduced copula clause".

Another observation concerning the Gĩkũyũ ex-situ focus construction is that the focused constituent is always to the right of the morpheme *nĩ-/ti-* ('is/is not'). Taking the morpheme *nĩ-/ti-* ('is/is not') as a copula verb, as advanced in this paper, accounts for this observation. Active verbs in Gĩkũyũ provide a position immediately after them (to their right) which carries the feature [+Focus]. The behaviour of "interveners" (see Buell 2009: 167 for the discussion) justifies the postulation of such a focus position in Gĩkũyũ. Buell (2009: 167) 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 impossible to have a constituent between the copula *-nĩ-* and the NP *andũ* ('people') in example (4), and retain focus on the NP *andũ* ('people'). Thus, in the sentence *nĩ *ngari/*airĩtu/*harĩa/andũ mathiaga mena ũrimũ* ('it is *cars/*ladies/*there people who move foolishly'), only the first constituent in the list can bear focus and not the intended NP *people*. This is in line with 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 verb and a focused constituent, since they identify the focused constituent as focused.

What the preceding discussion suggests is that Gĩkũyũ has a post-verb [+Focus] position where default (syntactic) focus is marked. It shares this feature with

other Bantu languages such as Zulu (Buell 2009) and Luganda (van der Wal & Namyalo 2016). Taking the morphemes *nĩ-* and *tĩ-* as copula verbs means that they also provide a [+Focus] post-verbal position.²³ Due to this feature, copula verbs in Gĩkũyũ permit the assignment of focus to the constituents in their post-verbal position. The same behaviour is seen in the ex-situ focus constructions, where constituents following *nĩ-* or *tĩ-* are marked as focused. In this regard, the ex-situ focus construction compares to a copular clause in the present tense, which also assigns focus to the constituent that follows the copula verb.

In sum, this section has demonstrated that the ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ is bi-clausal. This conclusion is different from Schwarz's (2007) assertion that ex-situ focus constructions are mono-clausal. The upper clause is a reduced copula that takes the focused constituent as its CC, and in turn, functions as the discourse topic of the lower clause. The relation between the upper and the lower clauses in ex-situ focus constructions, as well as a response to the arguments given against a bi-clausal approach, is reserved for future study.

5. 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 even more pertinent in the case of object and *wh*-pronoun focus, both of which have corresponding in-situ focus structures; yet, they 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 focus.²⁴ This is focus which "... involves the exclusion of

²³ Since the constituent immediately following these copula verbs is always put in focus, and given that these copula verbs do not take CSs, they have been analysed as focus particles (Schwarz 2003, 2007 for Gĩkũyũ).

²⁴ Contrastive focus, according to Lee (2017) is a response to an implicit Question. Corrective focus and focus based on alternatives are the two major types of contrastive focus.

at least one relevant (and salient) focus alternative ... and is ... in need of a special structural licensing” (Zimmermann & Onea 2011: 1669). 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” (Zimmermann & Onea 2011: 1668). Thus, contrastive focus is canonically realized via an ex-situ focus construction (fronting), so “... 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 constituents²⁵...” (p. 771). This view is supported by Lee (2017) who also notes that, contrastive focus needs “... phonetic prominence” (p. 10). Thus, constituents carrying contrastive focus are the most prominent in a clause, and so they 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, in turn, suggests 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 the fact that it is a non-focus position, yet it hosts focused constituents in ex-situ focus constructions. Ordinarily, the position does not host focused constituents, as example (22) below demonstrates.

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

The clause in example (22) is unacceptable because the pre-SM position, where the object NP *nyeni* (‘kales’) occurs, is a non-focus position in the clause. The reason is, as is the case in other Bantu languages, the SM is an anti-focus marker. This is as observed by Zeller (2008), who, while commenting on the clause subject in Bantu, notes that “... the SM marks the subject NP as [- Focus]” (p. 239). The

²⁵ “Discourse new constituents” carry informational focus due to their newness.

effect is that “... a preverbal subject in Bantu can never be the focus of the sentence in which it occurs” (Zeller 2008: 239).²⁶ This is in line with Sabel’s & Zeller’s (2006) argument that in Zulu (a Bantu language) there is a “... general constraint that bans focused constituents ... from appearing in subject position” (p. 274). This means that the pre-SM position the fronted object NP *kales* in example (22) occupies is a [-Focus] position. Given that every clause must have focus (Carlson 2014 & Erteschik-Shir 2007), then the lack of in-situ focus (the object NP has moved) or ex-situ focus (no marked focus on the object NP) makes example (22) unacceptable.

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. This way, and as argued in the previous section, the copula verb provides a focused syntactic position to the fronted constituent for it to receive focus. This observation responds to Schwarz’s (2007) concern about the significance and obligatoriness of *nĩ-/ti-* in clefts, which are focusing by nature. All the same, ex-situ focus is marked at the front [-Focus] position of the lower clause. This is a deviation from the clausal norms in Gĩkũyũ, so it makes the focused constituent foregrounded, hence more prominent than the other positions in the clause.

As argued in the immediately preceding paragraph, the ex-situ focus position is more prominent than the other positions in a clause. This feature makes it attractive for focus marking, considering that focus seeks maximal prominence. Viewed in this light, then the search for maximal prominence motivates the formation of ex-situ focus marking constructions.

Now, if focus must be maximally prominent (Büring 2010: 178), then even unmarked (in-situ) focus is maximally prominent. This can be illustrated using the sentence in example (7) above, here repeated as example (23).

- (23) *Ūrakera nyeni* KenG2-T2:17-18 (modified)
Ū-ra-ker-a *Prom <nyeni*
 2SG-PRS-chop-FV *Prom <10.kales*
 You are chopping *Prom <kales*.

²⁶ This is a common feature in Bantu. See, for example, Zerbian (2007) for Sotho.

In (23) above, the constituent in focus is the NP *nyeni* ('kales') since it is immediately following the verb. As a result, it bears the highest syntactic prominence in the clause in example (23). This observation challenges the claim that the search for maximal prominence motivates ex-situ (marked) focus. A counterargument can, however, be developed. Consider example (24) below.

- (24) ... *Nĩ kĩĩ tũrorania*_____? Keng2-T2:15-16 (modified)
Nĩ kĩĩ >_{Prom} *tũ-ra-ũr-an-i-a?*
 COP what>_{Prom} 1PL.SUBJ-PRS-ask-RECP-TRNS-FV
 What>_{Prom} are we quarrelling (asking each other) about?

The *wh*-pronoun *kĩĩ* ('what') in example (24) above is the object of the verb *-ũr-* ('ask'). Consequently, it bore the default focus in the clause. Besides, question words are inherently focal, again proving that the *wh*-pronoun *kĩĩ* ('what') in example (24) already had 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 (24), the "focus prominence constraint" predicts that such focus is also maximally prominent. For that reason, in-situ and ex-situ focus are prominent to an equal degree. Noting this, Schwarz (2003) comments 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" (p. 114)²⁷. 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 focus structure noted in *wh*-questions, for they also receive in-situ focus. This preference is noted by Morimoto (2017), who concludes that "... (ex-situ with *nĩ*) is generally preferred or obligatory for all types of *wh*-questions" (p. 156). Also, there would be no impetus for the formation of object ex-situ focus constructions, because objects can also receive focus in-situ. Consequently, we

²⁷ This observation is not restricted to Gĩkũyũ but also exists in other languages. Of importance to this paper is to explain the motivations behind ex-situ focus constructions though Gĩkũyũ also permits in-situ focus construction.

argue that though in-situ and ex-situ focus positions are both prominent, they are prominent to different degrees. Noting the preference for the ex-situ focus even where in-situ focus is possible, we further argue that the ex-situ focus position is syntactically more prominent than the in-situ focus position. This view conflicts with the “maximally prominent” (Büring 2010: 178) requirement for focus.

We resolve the conflict noted in the preceding paragraph by modifying Büring’s (2010) syntactic “focus prominence constraint” presented in (5) above and repeated below as (25) and (26):

(25)

a. focus position $>_{\text{Prom}}$ rest

b. rest $>_{\text{Prom}}$ subject

Büring (2010: 204).

The constraint above treats focus as a syntactic position, as was previously noted. It claims that a position hosting focus is more prominent than the rest of the clause. To accommodate the varying degrees of prominence between the ex-situ and the in-situ focus marking, we propose an expansion of the focus position in the focus prominence constraint in (25) as follows:

(26) a. marked²⁸ focus position $>_{\text{Prom}}$ unmarked focus position $>_{\text{Prom}}$ rest

b. rest $>_{\text{Prom}}$ subject

This constraint expands thus: a marked focus position is syntactically more prominent than an unmarked focus position; an unmarked focus position is, in turn, more prominent than the rest of the clause. The rest of the clause is itself more prominent than the subject position in a clause. The ex-situ focus position is therefore the most prominent syntactic position in a Gīkūyū clause. It is this fact, together with the type of focus encoded by the construction (for example contrastive focus), which motivates the preference for the ex-situ focus even in cases where in-situ focus is possible. It should be noted, though, that a clause in Gīkūyū can only have one focused constituent, except in cases of broad focus, such asthetic and verum focus. Subsequently, ex-situ and in-situ focus

²⁸ The marked focus position is in this work the position for ex-situ focus construction whereas the unmarked focus position is the position where in-situ focus is marked.

constructions cannot co-occur in the same clause. The implication is that, however the constituent focus is realised in an individual clause, the focused part is more prominent than the parts of the same clause without focus.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to re-evaluate the structure of and the motivations behind the ex-situ focus construction in Gĩkũyũ. It also aimed at assessing the adequacy of the Prominence Theory of Focus Realization in accounting for the ex-situ focus constructions in Gĩkũyũ. The paper has demonstrated that ex-situ constructions in Gĩkũyũ are bi-clausal, with the upper clause being a reduced copula clause. Further, the paper revealed that in ex-situ focus constructions, the morphemes *nĩ-* ('is') and *tĩ-* ('is not') function as copula verbs, which facilitate focus assignment by providing a [+Focus] position after them. The article 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 parameterisation of the hierarchy-based syntactic prominence proposed in Büring (2010: 178). This will allow it to capture the varying degrees of prominence between in-situ and ex-situ focus constructions.

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