



Functions and informational structure of ekegusii cleft sentences

Alice Nyariki^{1*}, Henry Nandelenga²

¹⁻² Department of Literature, Linguistics and Foreign Languages, Kenyatta University, Nairobi-Kenya, Kenya

Abstract

The article investigates sentence patterns considered to be cleft sentences and where they may be situated within the structure of Ekegusii language. The motivation of the study is to find out if Ekegusii differentiates the types of cleft sentences in their informational structures. It also addresses the functions of cleft constructions within the larger sentence structure of Ekegusii. Various types of cleft patterns are produced through a set of operations on the ordinary Ekegusii sentence. Through this, certain components of a sentence are moved to more prominent positions. In some cases, the speaker or writer's attitude can be realised. The study only focuses on one meaning; clause as exchange through which the researcher looks at the grammatical system of MOOD and the structural elements of the clause from an interpersonal perspective as outlined in Systemic Functional Grammar. The findings are explained in terms of the different structures of cleft sentences in Ekegusii.

Keywords: clefts, mood, information structure, focus, SFG

Introduction

A cleft sentence is an intricate construction which has two clauses: the main clause and the relative clause which are fundamentally expressed as a single clause (Lambrecht, 2001) ^[4]. The cleft sentence in English is introduced by a dummy subject 'it', followed by a verb phrase whose main verb is 'be' (Eggs, 2004) ^[2]. Consider the example below;

'Mary played basketball in the evening'

Two cleft sentences formed from it are possible as follows;

'It was Mary who played basketball in the evening'

'It was in the evening that Mary played basketball'

This is not the only definition but it is appropriate because it is based on the syntactic features.

The study focused on Ekegusii language. Ekegusii speakers occupy two counties: Nyamira and Kisii which are situated to the South East of Lake Victoria. Mecha (2004) ^[5]. observes that Ekegusii has two dialects: the Northern (Rogoro) dialect which is also known as 'Kikwetu' is the standard form used in written works and taught in rural areas and the Southern (Maate) dialect spoken by Ekegusii speakers in Gucha South District. This study focused on the Northern dialect because it is the standard form and it also exists in written sources.

Isolating languages such as English have morphemes occurring separately: for instance the sentence, *you are late* has three morphemes occurring individually. The same sentence occurs as one word in Ekegusii as *kwa-nyo-rirwe* since several morphemes are glued together (Mose, 2012) ^[6]. This is because Ekegusii is an agglutinating language. Moreover, Ekegusii is a relatively homogenous language throughout the thirteen districts where it is predominantly spoken. Linguistically, the study falls in the category of syntax because it identified the structure of cleft sentences in Ekegusii language as well as differentiated pseudo clefts from cleft sentences.

Cleft sentence structures enable the users of the language to overcome the restrictions that are experienced in the use of the

common SVO sentence structure in Ekegusii. It further divides a sentence into two and thus enables the reader or hearer to interpret it correctly considering the position of all the elements in such a construction. Moreover, the placement of a particular element as the focus in a cleft sentence draws attention to such an element and increases understanding of any disparity between the information presented in the cleft sentence and that in or suggested by the context.

The main research questions of the study are; how cleft sentences are structured in Ekegusii as well as how they can be analyzed using Halliday's Functional Grammar Theory. The impetus for the study stemmed from the supposition that Systemic Functional Grammar is a universal theory that can be used for the description of syntactic structures in all languages in the world. To achieve the above objectives, a qualitative research design was used. The researcher used purposive sampling to choose sentences from the Bible for the study. Content analysis and introspection were also used to generate data in the form of sentences. The site of the study was Nyamira County in Kisii. Five females and five males aged between 20 and 70 years were the informants. Data was obtained by interviewing the selected informants. Data obtained was analyzed using Systemic Functional Grammar approach with specific reference to the interpersonal function. It is notable that the clefting process is considered a kind of conversion which forms sentences by implementing changes in position and form of particular elements in basic sentences. Clefting offers a platform for reorganising a basic sentence to enable it to fit in closely with the order of ideas in the context in which it appears. The prime factor which determines the choice of a particular cleft sentence is the thematic organization of the sentence as well as the discourse in which it appears. In many languages, several syntactic options exist for ordering information into a sequence of alternative messages. Consider this example;

What I admire about him is his humility

In the example above, we emphasize the information (his humility) in the sentence with a wh-clause. It becomes a pseudo-cleft because there is no division. Wh-cleft sentences are usually considered pseudo-cleft because they very often occur in the pattern:

What Mary did in the evening was play basketball

What-clause + be + emphasized phrase or clause

A subject is often the initial element in a clause. It is basically what the sentence is about. In 'Mary bought a beautiful dress, 'Mary', is the subject that occupies the first position, but in 'a beautiful dress was bought yesterday by Mary,' the object 'a beautiful dress' takes the first position and becomes the focus of the sentence, hence receives thematic prominence.

In many languages, numerous syntactic options exist for ordering information into a sequence of alternative messages. This is evident in Ekegusii language as shown in the examples below;

1. Etotagete ebikorua, tari amang'ana
2. (We need action, not words).
3. Nebikorwa totagete, tari amang'ana
4. (It is action that we need, not words).
5. Eki totagete nebikorwa, tari amang'ana
6. (What we need is action, not words).
7. ntagete esani yobokima
8. I want a plate of ugali
9. nesani yobokima ntagete
10. (It is a plate of ugali I want).
11. Eki ntagete nesani yobokima

(What I want is a plate of ugali).

In summary, it is notable that numerous cleft constructions can be obtained from a basic sentence by inserting various elements and reorganizing them depending on the semantic features of the required focus. These procedures are not linguistic accidents but they are actual syntactic processes through which the focus, changes to another noun in a sentence.

2. The Structure of Ekegusii Cleft Sentences

In Ekegusii, various cleft structures can be obtained by reordering sentence elements in regards to the element that needs to be brought to focus. They include subject focus, reason focus, time focus, manner focus, prepositional phrase focus, non-finite clause focus and gerund focus

The illustrations used in this study were obtained from Ekegusii Bible in Genesis and Exodus. More data was obtained through the selected informants as well as introspection.

The following examples illustrate the various structures of cleft sentences evident in Ekegusii language;

a. Subject focus

7. *Ninche nkomorenda oyominto* (Omochakano 4: 9) (It is me who takes care of my sibling (Genesis 4:9) Basic- Nkorenda oyominto *I take care of my sibling* From example 1, it can be noted that Ekegusii cleft sentences is introduced by *ni* or *n* which stands for subject 'it' and the verb 'is'. This introduces the emphasized element in the clause. A complement clause then precedes the element.

8. *Ninche omonene nakorusetie Korwa ase Uru Y' Abakalidayo* (Omochakano 15: 7) (It is me the saviour who got you out of Ur of the people of Chaldeans (Genesis 15:7) Basic- Nagokonyete Korwa ase Abakalidayo *I saved you from the people of Chaldean*

In example 2, *ninche* is used for purposes of emphasis. It is equivalent to 'it is me.' It identifies the *doer* of the action of 'korusetie' which means 'saved.' and not any other person.

9. Nere ong'ete oborito obo (Omochakano 38: 25) (It is him who gave me this pregnancy (Genesis 38:25) Basic- Ambegete omorito *He made me pregnant* The cleft structure modifies the order of the components in the kernel sentence because the highlighted element changes position for the reason of emphasis. For example in 1: the simple construction appears as a unit, it has the subject at the start followed by the predicate. It has an unmarked sentence order.

10. Nkorenda oyominto. (I take care of my sibling)

The expression *nkorenda* conflates both the subject of the sentence *n* (I) and the verb *korenda* (take care). Emphasis has been placed on the object *nche* (me) by putting the element at an initial position resulting in the cleft structure. The splitting results from presenting the expression *Ni* (it is) to introduce the component being highlighted. The first part of the structure is the main clause introduced by *ni* and followed by the highlighted section *nche*. It is then followed by the subordinate clause *nkomorenda oyominto* (who takes care of my sibling). This sentence could be compelled by the query 'who takes care of my sibling?' In this case, *nche* could be considered as the new information. It is, therefore, crucial, and actually contrastive; it is *nche* who takes care of my sibling and not any other person. The complement clause would then be noncompulsory (Collins & Hollo, 2000:142) ^[1]. In such a case, the emphasized element would obtain *end focus* prominence. It is notable that the focused part of a cleft is characteristically a noun phrase. However, it may be any other aspect of the sentence as illustrated below:

b. Reason focus

11. *Nase eng'encho arwarete twanchiete nyagitari* It was because he was sick that we went to hospital The cleft sentence above focuses on the reason. The element *nase eng'encho* which is equivalent to it was because has been used categorically to introduce the reason for carrying out the action that is stated later in the sentence.

c. Time focus

12. *Nomotienyi okianda akorete enyangi* It was in September that he did a wedding The elements *nomotienyi okianda* that have been emphasized in the sentence above are equivalent to *it was in September* in the English version. This cleft construction focuses on the specific time that the action takes place. It is notable that time focus clefts in Ekegusii tell us when the action happened or will happen. On the other hand, clefts of time can describe the duration of an event. Also, it can show when an action is complete.

d. Manner Focus

13. *Nobororo obonge Grace are'ere omwana oye* It was with sorrow that Grace mourned her child In Ekegusii, clefts that focus on manner indicate the way or how to do something. Instead of describing a noun, this type of cleft describes or modifies a verb. In the construction above, 'Nobororo obonge' is equivalent to 'it was with sorrow' which indicates how Grace mourned her child.

e. Prepositional phrase focus

14. *N'asamagoro achiete Bosongo* It was on foot that he went to Bosongo. Ekegusii prepositional phrase is made up of a preposition followed by its complement. Mostly, the phrase modifies a noun or a verb. In the cleft construction above, *asamagoro* contains the prepositional phrase which is written as

on foot in the English equivalent. This prepositional phrase acts upon a verb and hence it is behaving adverbially because adverbs modify verbs. A prepositional phrase that behaves adverbially is called an adverbial phrase.

f. Non- finite clause focus

15. Nogokonya abataka Nyagarama achakerete esukuru It is to help the poor that Nyagarama started the school The cleft construction above that is in form of a non-finite clause contains a verb which does not show tense. The element 'gokonya' is equivalent to 'to help'. It has been used to understand the purpose referred to from the context of the main clause.

g. Gerund focus

16. N'okogenda nka chinsa chitaraika omoteneneri atancheti It is going home before time that the boss does not like.

As shown in the illustration above, the gerund is presented as a form of a verb that functions as a noun. Okogenda is the element that is equivalent to going in English. The gerund is indicated by the -ing form of the verb 'go'. The resulting clause as a whole is used as a noun in the given structure. It thus functions as the subject of the sentence.

3. The Structure of Pseudo-Cleft Sentences

A pseudo cleft clause looks like a cleft sentence in that it seems to have two parts. However, only one part has the construction of a clause; a subordinate 'Wh' nominal clause. The other part is a phrase with the absence of the subject, or even the verb when it moves towards the beginning. It is the section which contains the emphasized nominal component.

On the one hand, the highlighted element can be the subject and the 'Wh' clause the complement of the verb 'be'. Examples of pseudocleft sentence structure are shown below;

17. Neyanga enyia ntagete A new dress is what I need

On the other hand, the 'Wh' clause could be the subject and the highlighted element the complement.

18. Eki ntagete neyanga enyia What I need is a new dress

The two types of the pseudo-cleft structures were evident in Ekegusii. Examples:

a. Subject focus

19. Eki kiagerete bakabwekanigwa chisee netabie eywo (Emebayeno ya Abagusii) what made them to be likened to dogs is this behaviour (Proverbs of Ekegusii) Basic; Ebabwekanetigwe chisee aseng'encho yetabi eywo They were likened to dogs because of this behaviour The basic structure has the SVO order with eki (What) as the subject, bakabwekanigwa (to be likened) the verb and etabi eywo (that behaviour) as the object. To generate a pseudo-cleft structure, the subordinate clause eki kiagerete (it is what made them) is presented to accentuate the subject of the basic which still remains the subject in the subsequent pseudo-cleft structure. It is prudent to note that the expression eki correspondent to 'what'. Eki is an agglutination of the subject and the verb it is corresponding to. Eki is equivalent to the relative pronoun 'who'. The subordinate clause is, therefore, an equivalent of a 'wh' relative clause.

20. Eki twanyorire bonoiga Yeso Kristu ore omogima (Omochakano 45: 8)

What we have just received is Jesus Christ being whole (Genesis 45: 8).

The highlighted nominal element Yeso Kristu ore omogima (Jesus Christ being whole) is placed at the end to receive end weight prominence. It is a complex nominal element comprising

the head noun Yeso Kristu (Jesus Christ) post modified by ore omogima (being whole). But when the highlighted element is not intricate, for instance, if it was Yeso Kristu (Jesus Christ), then the prominence would be end focus.

21. Eki otakeire nokorara okuya What you need is good sleep.

The element eki otakeire is equivalent to what you need. It is the subject in the pseudocleft above. It clearly identifies the thing about which the statement is made.

22. Eki ntancheti nomoerio bwe egepindi ekio what I do not like is the end of the program. In the pseudocleft above, this grammatical form Eki ntancheti can perform the grammatical function of subject is the noun clause. A noun clause is a subordinate clause made up of a subordinating conjunction followed by a clause. It performs a nominal function. For example, the noun clause what I do not like functions as subject.

b. Place Focus

23. Ase nasabete omorembe nomosalaba (Okong'anya 6: 4) Where I prayed for peace (it) is at the cross (Exodus 6:4). Basic; Nasabete omorembe ase omosalaba I prayed for peace at the cross The basic sentence has the SVOA order with Na (I) as the subject, -sabete (prayed for) as the verb, omorembe (peace) as the object and omosalaba (at the cross) as the adverbial. The emphasis in the pseudo-cleft is on the adverbial and it is pointed out by the subordinate clause 'ase nasabete omorembe' (where I prayed for peace). Ase is corresponding to 'where'. Na is corresponding to the subject and the verb, therefore, equivalent to 'it is'. Ase is a relative adverb corresponding to 'where' and it is followed by a relative clause ase nasabete omorembe (it is where I prayed for peace).

c. Time Focus

24. Ekeri indosete mono marogoba when I am most tired is in the evening Ekeri is an element which functions as an adverb of time which indicates when the stated action happened. When has been placed at the beginning of the sentence to emphasize the time element. It has been followed by an expression of duration of time which is evening.

Although they are not very common, some pseudo-cleft sentences which begin with who exist in Ekegusii:

d. Who Pseudoclefts

25. Oyo ngokwanera nomonene bwa abanyanyimbo Who I am speaking about is the leader of the police In this sentence, Oyo which is equivalent to who is used as the topic of the sentence also called as the subject. It clearly shows what the sentence is about that is the leader of the police and not anyone else.

4. Functional Grammar Analysis of Ekegusii Cleft Sentences

When a clause is viewed as an exchange of information, it is divided into two functional elements; mood and residue. It is, therefore, significant to focus on the function of grammar in giving meaning to clauses. This is a concern of Functional Grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) [3]. SFG provides the basis upon which the cleft sentences in Ekegusii can be examined. This study used the clause as exchange which has two parts: *mood*, which contains Subject (S) and Finite (F); and *residue*, which has Predicator (P), Complement (C) and Adjunct (A). The mood elements: *Subject* is the nominal group which shows what the sentence is about. It also controls subject-verb agreement because it is the grammatical subject. The verb group is where the *Finite* is. The finite expresses the time of speech or event, modality and polarity. In the residue elements, *predicator* is the

verbal element with the exception of the finite that is in the mood. It is, therefore, non-finite and it specifies the secondary tense. The nominal group forms the *Complement* while an adverbial or a prepositional phrase (PP) forms the *Adjunct* (A).

The emphasized element is placed at the beginning of a clause. This is referred to topic/thematic prominence. Ekegusii is an agglutinative language because it puts together more than one grammatical component in one word. The expression serving as the verb in the Ekegusii sentence encompasses other elements functioning as subject and object. This is revealed when the clause is analyzed in terms of clause as exchange.

In Ekegusii clefts, in both subject and object focus cleft sentences; mood is expressed by the subject and finite elements. These are shown by the *n'* in Ekegusii clefts which is equivalent to *it is* in English. The mood comprises of two elements; the subject, a noun group and a verbal group termed as a finite element. The finite constituent, on the other hand, expresses modality and tense through the various verbal operators in its structure. In most instances in Ekegusii, the verb and the finite element exist as one word. This is possible when the verb is in simple tenses, positive, in active voice and neutral contrast in regards to gender. The Subject and the finite combine to form one element termed as mood. In the pseudo-cleft clause as exchange analysis, the 'wh' nominal clause corresponding comes initially and it is the one that takes the Subject function while the emphasized element serves as Complement. An element receives this kind of prominence on being made the topic of the sentence as shown by the examples in Ekegusii which illustrate the different types of cleft and pseudo cleft sentences in Ekegusii.

Cleft sentences in Ekegusii enables a speaker or writer to emphasize different information depending on the intended meaning. They are used to bring to attention a certain part of a sentence and to stress what is being said by beginning it with a certain relative clause. The cleft sentence structures point out the reason why, identify the person who, the place where and the time when an action occurs/occurred. The What-clause is mostly connected to the element that the speaker wants to emphasize on. Clefting enables the writer or the speaker to emphasize on a given section of the information as desired to create a particular sense or meaning. Consider the following examples:

a. Normal word order

26. Choni aibete enyama koru Keroka omwaka oria (John stole meat from Keroka last year)

b. Subject as focus

27. n'nChoni oibete enyama koru Keroka omwaka oria (It was John who/that stole meat from Keroka last year.)

c. Object as focus

28. n'enyama Choni aibete koru Keroka omwaka oria (It was meat (that) John stole from Keroka last year.)

d. Time as focus

29. nomwaka oria nario John aibete enyama korwa Keroka (It was last year (that) John stole meat from Keroka).

e. Place as focus

30. N'nkorwa Keroka Choni aibete enyama omwaka oria

(It was from Keroka John stole meat last year.)

31. Eki kiangogeti mono nengero ya Monyoncho What I enjoyed most was Monyoncho's music

32. Eki abanyanyimbo bakorete ritang'ani nokoboria abanto amaborio what the police did first was (to) ask people questions

33. Eki otakeire gokora nogotumia chibesa chiago buya what you should do is (to) spend your money well

34. Eki agokora nokorika ebitabu as e komputa what she does is (to) write all her novels on a computer When, who or that can be used in introductory it- cleft sentence to combine words that the speaker wishes to focus on in a particular context

5. Summary, Conclusion and Further Issues

The study reveals that cleft constructions are of different types which rely on the focus that the speaker or writer wishes to point at. Through the study, it can be noted that information can be ordered in various ways to put emphasis on certain elements of a clause such as subject, object, the reason, the time, the manner, focus on a prepositional phrase, focus on a non-finite clause and focus on a gerund.

It can be noted that Ekegusii cleft sentences is introduced by *ni* or *n* which stands for subject '*it*' and the verb '*is*'. This introduces the emphasized element in the clause. A complement clause then follows the element.

Ekegusii language differentiates pseudoclefts from cleft sentences. In Ekegusii, the structure of clefts and pseudoclefts differ as shown in the study. Clefts typically begin with '*n*' [it is]. On the other, pseudocleft constructions in Ekegusii begin with '*eki*' [what] followed by other elements in the sentence. The wh-clause is the subject in the sentence. It is observed that Ekegusii cleft and pseudo-cleft structures are similar to English. Both clefts and pseudo-clefts enable a speaker or writer to emphasize different information depending on the intended meaning.

It is notable that one has to make a choice from the various sets of clauses to express the desired meaning, the organization of information and the order of the constituents. This indicates that when language is used, messages have to be organized in a manner that is clear on how the messages fit among themselves in the context in which they are spoken or written.

This study may form the basis upon which further study of Ekegusii would be built; studies on syntax, origin and prevalence of the clefts and pseudoclefts will be informed by the study's findings. It is notable that some areas still require further research. This study highlights the functions and informational structure of clefts sentences which is essentially a syntactic analysis. However, it is clear that emphasis can also be marked phonologically especially in a tonal language such as Ekegusii. There is need for further research on this possibility.

References

1. Collins P, Hollo C. English grammar: An Introduction. Houndmills Palgrave, 2000.
2. Egins S. An introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics. Second edition. London, New York, Continuum, 2004.
3. Halliday M, Matthiessen C. An Introduction to Functional Grammar. Third edition. London, Hodder Arnold, 2004.
4. Lambrecht K. A Framework for the Analysis of Cleft Constructions. *Linguistics*, 2001; 39(3):463-516.
5. Mecha G. The Phonology and Morphology of Ekegusii Reduplication: Optimality Theoretic approach. Unpublished MA Dissertation. Kenyatta University, Nairobi, 2004.
6. Mose G. The Structure and Role of the Determiner Phrase in Ekegusii: A Minimalist Approach. Unpublished MA Dissertation. Kenyatta University, Nairobi, 2012.
7. Nyarangi J. Kisii Proverbs. Press Lines Printers, Nairobi, 2006.
8. United Bible Societies. Ebuku Ya Nyasae- Ekegusii Bible. The Bible Society of Kenya, Nairobi, 1965.