Ex-situ verb focussing and its interpretation in Igbo.

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Focus is a category of information structure and has been associated with many concepts in the literature÷, including new information (Jackendoff 1972), significant information (Mithun 2018) and prominence (Winkler 2012). A widely accepted definition describes focus as evoking a set of alternatives (Rooth 1992; Krifka 2008). This paper presents a description of a type of verb focus construction that has not been properly accounted for in Igbo language (Nigerian, West Benue-Congo, SVO) namely, the ex-situ verb focus popularly referred to as **verb fronting** (Heins 2017) or **predicate cleft** (Aboh 2006).

It is already established that there is a wide variation in the grammatical strategies employed for expressing focus. With the increase in empirically driven research on Information Structure (IS), claims on the obligatory formal realization of focus have been called into question. Zimmermann & Féry (2010) note that these claims are based primarily on intonation languages. Many languages from West Africa have been and still serve as sources of empirical data for the research on focus and IS in general. Igbo, however, remains largely absent from these studies. Manfredi (1993) provides an analysis of in-situ verb focus in Igbo, arguing for an event argument analysis. Agbo (2013) presents a morphosyntactic account of the Igbo focus structure within the RRG (Role and Reference Grammar) framework. These two works constitute the only significant studies of instances of focus in Igbo. There is no in-depth account of the ex-situ verb focus in Igbo in any known published work apart from few statements in Manfredi (1993). He acknowledges the existence of ex-situ verb focus in Igbo stating that the fronted verb copy which is a gerund moves to [SPEC, CP] and is an event nominal as opposed to verb movement analyses. Two examples are provided in a footnote and nothing else is said about this construction in Igbo in the article. In this paper, I investigate how ex-situ verb focus (realized through the phenomenon of verb fronting with doubling (VFD)) is encoded and interpreted in Igbo. I present the properties of the Igbo VFD including that of the focus morpheme 'kà' which is also known as a complementizer in Igbo grammar. Evidence for the focus marking function of the morpheme **ka** is shown by its obligatoriness when a constituent is marked ex-situ (see object focus in 1 and the VFD constructions in 2 & 3). In these contexts, the focus marker always occurs adjacent to the focused constituent.

With evidence from empirical data gathered through elicited production (question-answer pairs prompted by pictures shown in Power Point to six participants), acceptability judgements and introspection, preliminary investigation indicates that the VFD is a focussing device. I also show that, as in object focus (1A), the ex-situ verb focus (2B) in Igbo involves fronting of the focused item to the left periphery followed by the focus marker 'kà'. A fully inflected copy of the verb is also left in its canonical position in the clause (Igbo is a strict SVO language). The fronted verb form is usually a nominalised form of the verb nominalised through reduplication (O- + VR x 2), or by the addition of a homorganic syllabic nasal to a complex verb structure (M-/N- + CVCV). I demonstrate that ex-situ verb focus in Igbo expresses contrastive focus used for correction, and equally evokes a set of alternatives (Rooth 1992). I also illustrate the interaction of the VFD construction with focus sensitive particles e.g., **'naānị̄' 'only'** as in 3A. The focus sensitive particle '**naani**' occurs sentence initially and is immediately followed by the fronted verb which is in turn followed by the focus marker. The VFD construction in Igbo will also be compared with that of related languages (e.g., Ewe, Ameka 1992 & 2010) where it is already well documented.

Object focus

1. Q: Ònye   kà   Àda   mà-rà   ùra?
       Who   FM   Ada   slap-PAST   slap
       'Who did Ada slap?'

A: [Uchè]_F   kà   ọ   mà-rà   ùra

A:	[Uchè]$_F$	kà	ọ	mà-rà	ùra
	Uche	FM	3SG	slap-PAST	slap

'She slapped **Uche.**'

Ex-situ verb focus

2. A:

	Ùgònnà	tu-fù-rù	àkpà	ya	ùnyàahù.
	Ugonna	lost-PAST	bag	2SG-POSS	yesterday

'Ugonna lost his bag yesterday.'

B:

	Mbà,	[ò-ri-re]$_F$	kà	o	rè-rè	ya.
	NEG	RED-sell	FM	3SG	sell-PAST	3SG

'No, he **SOLD** it.'

3 Q:

	Ị̀	gà-esō	ānyị̄	gaa	ahịā	zụta	ihe	nrī?
	2SG	PROG-follow	IPL	go	Market	buy	thing	food

'Will you join us to the market to buy food stuff?'

A:

	Naānị̄	[ò-ri-ri]$_F$	kà	m	gà-èri.
	PRT	RED-eat	FM	1SG	FUT-eri

'I will only **EAT**.'

This description of ex-situ verb focus contributes to the ongoing discussion on focus and typologically groups Igbo among "mixed languages", that is, languages which combine more than one strategy for realizing focus (Büring 2010). In this case, morphological devices and syntactic manipulation are combined. The data presented in the paper provides empirical evidence for formal theories of focus and the study itself constitutes a first attempt at the description of verb fronting construction in Igbo within a broader domain of information structure.

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