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Focus Constructions in Kunuz Nubian

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1. Introduction

The study of focus constructions is not adequately done in Kunuz Nubian (henceforth KN), a member of the Nile Nubian languages that include Fadicca, Mahas or Nobiin[1] and Dongolese[2] or Dongolawi. KN, which is spoken in southern Egypt, is mutually intelligible with Dongolese, but not with Mahas or Fadicca.[3] It is unfortunate that the grammars of KN do not include focus constructions.[4] In fact, there is no reference to – let alone the distinction between – information focus and contrastive focus in KN. This is not surprising for "this distinction has often been neglected in language description."[5] Therefore, the present study is an attempt to fill this gap in KN grammar.

This study aims to investigate constructions in which nominals are focused or highlighted.[6] It is argued that KN, unlike Standard Arabic, does not have topicalization. Rather, it has two types of focus constructions, information focus and contrastive focus. The former type (cf. section 4.1) is triggered by context and depends on the constituent order variations permitted in KN. KN has basic SOV constituent order but the object can optionally be placed before the

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1   "Nobiin" is the name given to the Mahas or Fadicca varieties, cf. WERNER, *Grammatik des Nobiin.*
2   "Dongolese" is the name that Armbruster uses in the title of his grammar.
3   ABDEL-HAFIZ, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian,* p. 2.
4   Ibid. Focus constructions are not considered in MASSENBACH's grammar, "Wörterbuch des nubischen Kunūzi-Dialektes mit einer grammatischen Einleitung." It was Angelika Jakobi who kindly drew my attention to this observation.
5   CALLIES, *Information Highlighting in Advanced Learner English,* p. 21.
6   Cf. section 4. .

subject: OSV (cf. section 3). Other than this, KN does not have the patterns available in a language like Standard Arabic (henceforth SA): VSO, SVO, OVS or VOS.[7] Since SA, which differentiates between topicalization and focus construction, has had an impact on the structure of Nubian languages, it might be hypothesized that KN has both topicalization and focus constructions. It will be argued that the OSV pattern in KN is an instance of information focus rather than topicalization. Another type of focus – contrastive focus – is initiated by such pragmatic factors as emphasis or contrast (section 4.2). This type is introduced by a constituent to which –*tera* or –*ma* is attached. The choice between these suffixes depends on whether the focused constituent is definite or indefinite. Thus this study attempts to answer the following questions.

1. Does KN have topicalization?
2. Can sentence constituents be focused?
3. Are there different types of focus construction?
4. How can these different types be characterized?
5. What is the source of focus markers in KN?

Most of the sentences used in this study are elicited from carefully selected informants in Dahmeet, an Egyptian Nubian village. The informants, being over sixty, are elderly Nubians whose competence in KN is unquestionable. The researcher himself is a native speaker of the language under study. The sentences produced by him have been checked against what native speaker informants say. The unverified statements or sentences of the researcher were discarded from the data. The study is expected to be descriptive, analytic and theory-neutral. However, it draws on the Hallidayan model concerning thematic structure and information structure.[8] Thus reference will occasionally be made to such concepts as theme/topic and rheme/comment on the one hand and given/new on the other. These are proven useful and instrumental in the analysis of focus constructions.

2. An overview of thematic structure and information structure

A sentence in traditional Prague School is organized or divided into two types: theme/topic and rheme/comment. The theme is what the sentence is about, whereas the rheme is what is said about the theme/topic.[9] Moreover, two more concepts are often brought in the discussion of information structure: old/given information and new information. As Baker puts it, "[t]he organization of the message into information units of given and new reflects the speak-

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7   BAKIR, *Aspects of Clause Structure in Arabic,* pp. 10–12.
8   Cf. HALLIDAY, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar.*
9   BAKER, *In Other Words.*

er's sensitivity to the hearer's state of knowledge in the process of communication."[10] Halliday gives us a distinction of these concepts when he states that

> Given (or old) information is that knowledge which the speaker as-
> sumes to be in the consciousness of the addressee at the time of the
> utterance. So-called new information is what the speaker assumes
> he is introducing into the addressee's consciousness by what he
> says.[11]

Put simply, the old or given information is the part of information that is already known or shared between the participants, whereas the new information is the part the addressee does not know.

According to the traditional Prague School practices, old or given information is located in the theme position of the sentence and new information is found in the rheme part of the sentence. Thus the proponents of Prague School correlate theme with given information and rheme with new information. It was Halliday who drew our attention to the separation of thematic structure and information structure. He claims that theme is not necessarily associated with given information. Nor is rheme often correlated with new information. Halliday and Matthiessen clearly state their position when they say

> Given + New and Theme + Rheme are not the same thing. The
> Theme is what I, the speaker, choose to take as my point of de
> parture. The Given is what you, the listener, already know about
> or have accessible to you. Theme + Rheme is speaker-oriented,
> whereas Given + New is listener-oriented.[12]

Whether the theme is associated with old or new information depends on the context. It is the participants who negotiate what to consider old or new information; for example, it is the context of the following sentence that determines the status of its constituent parts.

What did the dog do?		1a
The dog	*bit the cat.*	1b
Theme/Topic	Rheme/Comment	
Old/Given Information	New information	

10 Ibid., p. 145.
11 Halliday, "Theme and Information in the English Clause," p. 30.
12 Halliday & Matthiessen, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar,* p. 93.

The determining context here is the question in 1a. Accordingly, in the 1b sentence *the dog* is the theme/topic that the addresser speaks about. This part is shared by the addresser and the addressee. Therefore, it constitutes old information. But *bit the cat,* which is the rheme or comment, provides the addressee with new information about *the dog.* Note that the part in the rheme position is new information that the addressee was unaware of.

Now suppose the context involves a question in which the speaker believes the hearer does not know what *bit the cat,* s/he would produce the sentence in such a way that the hearer will consider *the dog* as the new information.

2   *The dog*   *bit the cat.*
       Theme/Topic   Rheme/Comment
       New Information   Old/Given information

Thus the part of sentence *bit the dog* occupying the rheme/comment position is the shared or common information between the participants. In contrast, *the dog,* which is the thematized constituent, provides new information.

It should be noted that the context may force us to consider the whole sentence to be new information, if the question is formed in such a way that the speaker does not know anything about the incident.

3a   What happened?
3b   The dog   bit the cat.
        Theme   Rheme
        New information

Example 3b shows that the whole proposition constitutes new information. This discussion has given evidence that there is no one-to-one correspondence between theme and given information or between rheme and new information. Thus the concepts of thematic and information structure should be kept distinct.

3. Some basic facts of KN

KN is an SOV language.[13] The elements in the sentence carry suffixes that indicate their syntactic function, e.g. object.[14] However, its constituent order is not as free as that of SA.[15]

| *id* | *buru-gi* | *jom-s-u* | (SOV) | 4a |
| man | girl-ACC | hit-PST-3SG | | |

"The man hit the girl"

| *buru-gi* | *id* | *jom-s-u* | (OSV) | 4b |
| girl-ACC | man | hit-PST-3SG | | |

"The man hit the girl"

| **jom-s-u* | *id* | *buru-gi* | (VSO) | 4c |
| hit-PST-3SG | man | girl-ACC | | |

| **jom-s-u* | *buru-gi* | *id* | (VOS) | 4d |
| hit-PST-3SG | girl-ACC | man | | |

| **id* | *jom-s-u* | *buru-gi* | (SVO) | 4e |
| man | hit-PST-3SG | girl-ACC | | |

| **buru-gi* | *jom-s-u* | *id* | (OVS) | 4f |
| girl-ACC | hit-PST-3SG | man | | |

The sentences 4a–b have SOV and OSV orders, respectively. All the other sentences 4c–f involve a verb occurring in the non-final position. Thus KN is different from SA in that it has a stricter constituent order. SA allows all six constituent order patterns, whereas KN does not permit the patterns with the verb in the non-final position, VSO, VOS, SVO, and OVS.[16] A possible explanation for this semi-strict constituent order is that the verb in KN agrees not only with the subject but also with the object. Agreement with the subject is in person and number, as seen in 5.

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13 ABDEL-HAFIZ, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian*, p. 201.
14 Note that the accusative suffix has phonologically conditioned allomorphs: *–ti* after alveolar stops, *–g(i)* after vowels and sonorants except /r/, *–ji* after a palatal stop, and *–ki* occurs in all other environments, cf. ibid., p. 92.
15 Abbreviations: * – ungrammatical; 1, 2, 3 – 1st, 2nd, 3rd person; ACC – accusative; CF – contrastive focus; COP – copula; DEF – definite; GEN – genitive; IF – information focus; INDF – indefinite; KN – Kunuz Nubian; LOC – locative; NEG – negative; NOM – nominative; OBJ – object; OSV – Object Subject Verb; OVS – Object Verb Subject; PL – plural; PLOBJ – plural object; PST – past; Q – question; REL – relative; SA – Standard Arabic; SBJ – subject; SVO – Subject Verb Object; VOS – Verb Object Subject; VSO – Verb Subject Object.
16 BAKIR, *Aspects of Clause Structure in Arabic*, pp. 10–12.

5a *ay buru-gi   jom-s-i*
    1SG girl-ACC   hit-PST-1SG
    "I hit the girl"

5b *ter buru-gi   jom-s-u*
    3SG girl-ACC   hit-PST-3SG
    "S/he hit the girl"

5c *tir buru-gi   jom-s-a*
    3PL girl-ACC   hit-PST-3PL
    "They hit the girl"

The agreement of the verb with the object is in number only; a plural object cues agreement on the verb via the suffix *–ir*. The absence of the suffix on the verb indicates that the object is singular.

6a *id   buru-gi   nal-s-u*
    man   girl-ACC   see-PST-3SG
    "The man saw the girl"

6b *id   buru-ii-gi   nal-ir-s-u*
    man   girl-PL-ACC   see-PLOBJ-PST-3SG
    "The man saw the girls"

The nominals that cue agreement on the verb must precede the verb. This is why the only permissible patterns are verb-final: SOV and OSV. Note that the other four patterns involve a verb in the non-final position: VSO, VOS, SVO, and OVS.

4. Types of KN focus construction

Focusing is defined as a situation where "one particular discourse element is highlighted, foregrounded or simply given more prominence than other elements."[17] Two types of focus are recognized in KN, information focus and contrastive focus. The distinction between these two types is not clearly demarcated in the literature. In the words of Kiss, "[i]dentification focus [contrastive focus] and information focus are often mingled in language description, which leads to contradictory statements on focus."[18] However, Halliday defines information focus as "one kind of emphasis, that whereby the speaker marks out a part (which may be the whole) of a message block as that which he wishes to be interpreted as informative."[19]

17 CALLIES, *Information Highlighting in Advanced Learner English,* p. 20.
18 KISS, "Identification Focus Versus Information Focus," p. 245.
19 HALLIDAY, "Theme and Information in the English Clause," p. 204.

Lambrecht agrees with Halliday when he states that "the focus of the proposition expressed by a sentence in a given utterance context, is seen as the element of information whereby the presupposition and the assertion differ from each other."[20] As for contrastive focus, it is defined as "a subset of the set of contextually or situationally given elements for which the predicate phrase can potentially hold; it is identified as the exhaustive subset of this set for which the predicate phrase actually holds."[21] Callies gives a clearer distinction between these two concepts when he states that "[w]hile the information focus serves to introduce new information, identification focus [contrastive focus] has a contrastive value and singles out a candidate from a limited contextually given or inferable set of alternatives."[22]

4.1 Information focus

Information focus "serves to introduce new information."[23] In this section, information focus in KN will be tackled. This type of focus results as a response to a question. It is "a feature of context rather than of the language system."[24] As Baker states, "one can only decide which part of a message is new and what part is given within a linguistic or situational context."[25] This type of focus is triggered by pragmatic factors. In the words of Heine and Reh, it "manifests itself in answers to wh-questions."[26]

Mwamzandi argues that "cross-linguistic studies have shown that the felicity of sentences with non-canonical constituent order can often be explained if information structure is taken into consideration."[27] Thus the sentences that begin with an object are marked in KN. The object has occupied the front position in these sentences.

een	*buru-gi*	*kaa-r*	*wiil-gi*	*nal-s-u*	7a
woman	girl-ACC	house-LOC	yesterday-ACC	see-PST-3SG	

"The woman saw the girl at the house yesterday"

buru-gi	*een*	*kaa-r*	*wiil-gi*	*nal-s-u*	7b
girl-ACC	woman	house-LOC	yesterday-ACC	see-PST-3SG	

"The woman saw the girl at the house yesterday"

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20 LAMBRECHT, *Information Structure and Sentence Form*, p. 207.
21 KISS, "Identification Focus versus Information Focus," p. 245.
22 CALLIES, *Information Highlighting in Advanced Learner English*, p. 21.
23 Ibid., p. 21.
24 BAKER, *In Other Words*, p. 145.
25 Ibid., p. 245.
26 HEINE & REH, *Grammaticalization and Reanalysis in African Languages*, p. 148.
27 MWAMZANDI, *Swahili Worder Order Choices*, p. vi.

The constituent *burugi* is the focus of 7b. In KN there is a question that triggers the appearance of the focused constituent. Sentences like 7b can be a response to a question like 8.[28]

8   *nii-gi   een   kaa-r   wiil-gi   nal-maa?*
    who-ACC woman house-LOC yesterday-ACC see-Q.PST
    "Whom did the woman see at the house yesterday?"

Note that nominals can be focused in answer to a question about the place (as in 9a) or time (as in 9c).

9a   *saayer een   buru-gi wiil-gi   nal-maa?*
    where woman girl-ACC yesterday-ACC see-Q.PST
    "Where did the woman see the girl yesterday?"

9b   *kaa-r   een   buru-gi wiil-gi   nal-s-u*
    house-LOC woman girl-ACC yesterday-ACC see-PST-3SG
    "The woman saw the girl yesterday at the house"

9c   *sitaaki een   buru-gi kaa-r   nal-maa?*
    when woman-ACC girl-ACC house-LOC see-Q.PST
    "When did the woman see the girl at the house?"

9d   *wiil-gi   een   buru-gi kaa-r   nal-s-u*
    yesterday-ACC woman girl-ACC house-LOC see-PST-3SG
    "The woman saw the girl at the house yesterday"

In 9b, a locative nominal is focused, whereas in 9d a temporal element, marked by the accusative, is placed in the focus position. Thus it can safely be said that 9b is a response to 9a, whereas 9d is a response to 9c.

Note that the verb cannot be focused in KN. Thus the verb in 7a cannot be focused as evidenced by the ungrammaticality of 10.

10   **nal-s-u   een   buru-gi kaa-r   wiil-gi*
    see-PST-3SG woman girl-ACC house-LOC yesterday-ACC

The evidence provided by 9b–d shows that the focused element occupies the position of the question word in the following way.

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28 We need to distinguish between clause-final –*maa* as in ex. 8 and -*ma* used in focus or copula constructions. The clause-final –*maa* is a question marker that appears with or without interrogative pronouns. It is used if reference is made to a past state or event. It is produced with a long vowel and a rising tone to signal its function as a question marker. In contrast, the copula –*ma,* which is clause-final, is used to refer to a present or past state and its vowel is short. Moreover, the contrastive suffix -*ma* is often associated with an indefinite clause-initial nominal; its vowel is not as long as that of the question marker.

niigi is replaced with an object   11
saayer is replaced with a nominal indicating place
sitaaki is replaced with a nominal indicating time

4.2 Contrastive focus

Contrastive focus "has a contrastive value and singles out a candidate   117
from a limited contextually given or inferable set of alternatives."[29]
Contrastive focus shows up whenever the information provided by
the speaker is challenged or contradictory to, i.e. in contrast with
some previously mentioned information. All African languages
have strategies for focusing sentence elements.[30] The most common
strategy in African languages is "the cleft construction. In clefts,
the focused constituent is introduced by a copula and modified by
a relative clause."[31]

    Contrastive focus in KN is different from information focus in
that it involves a suffix *–tera* attached to the focused constituent if it
is definite, as in 12b-c.[32]

id	buru-gi	kaa-r	wiil-gi	jom-s-u	12a
man	girl-ACC	house-LOC	yesterday-ACC	hit-PST-3SG	

"The man hit the girl at the house yesterday"

id-tera	buru-gi	kaa-r	wiil-gi	jom-s-u	12b
man-CF.DEF	girl-ACC	house-LOC	yesterday-ACC	hit-PST-3SG	

"It was the man who hit the girl at the house yesterday"

id-tera	buru-gi	kaa-r	wiil-gi	jom-el	12c
man-CF.DEF	girl-ACC	house-LOC	yesterday-ACC	hit-REL.PST.SBJ	

"It was the man who hit the girl at the house yesterday"

Note that the word *id* "the man," which is subject in 12a, is focused
in 12b-c, as indicated by the suffix *–tera*. Moreover, the sentences
involving the focus marker *–tera* show that the focused constituent
can occur with a main clause as in 12b or can be modified by a rela-
tive clause as in 12c, as indicated by the relative marker *–el,* which
refers to a focused subject nominal. Sentences like 12b–c can be an
emphatic response to a question seeking a definitive answer. Such
questions involve the use of the interrogative contrastive suffix
–terre attached to the question word *nii* "who" as in 13.

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29 Callies, *Information Highlighting in Advanced Learner English,* p. 21.
30 Zeller, "The Syntax of African Languages: a Review."
31 Ibid., p. 12.
32 Unlike Dongolawi, in which, this marker is pronounced as *tarran* with double *rr*, KN focus
    marker *–tera* has a single *r*. I would like to thank Angelika Jakobi for drawing my attention to
    this difference.

13   *nii-terre   buru-gi   kaa-r   wiil-gi   jom-maa?*
      who-CF.Q   girl-ACC house-LOC yesterday-ACC hit-Q.PST
      "Who hit the girl at the house yesterday?"

The same sentence in 12b or 12c can be a response to a statement with which the speaker disagrees; it can be used as a correction to the statement, as in 14.

▸ Speaker A

14a   *een   buru-gi   kaa-r   wiil-gi   jom-s-u*
       woman girl-ACC house-LOC yesterday-ACC hit-PST-3SG
       "The woman hit the girl at the house yesterday"

▸ Speaker B

14b   *id-tera   buru-gi   kaa-r   wiil-gi   jom-s-u*
       man-CF.DEF girl-ACC house-LOC yesterday-ACC hit-PST-3SG
       "It was the man who hit the girl at the house yesterday"

Note that without the interrogative contrastive suffix *–terre* in 15a, the response is not expected to involve contrastive focus, as attested in 15b.

15a   *nii   buru-gi   kaa-r   wiil-gi   jom-maa?*
      who girl-ACC house-LOC yesterday-ACC hit-Q.PST
      "Who hit the girl at the house yesterday?"

15b   *id   buru-gi   kaa-r   wiil-gi   jom-s-u*
      man girl-ACC house-LOC yesterday-ACC hit-PST-3SG
      "The man hit the girl at the house yesterday"

It is worth noting that if the element that occupies the contrastive focus position is object, the object is placed in the front position and the suffix *–tera* is attached to it. Such a sentence is a response to a question in which the question word *nii* has an accusative suffix and the interrogative contrastive suffix *–terre*.

16a   *nii-gi-terre   id   kaa-r   wiil-gi   jom-maa?*
      who -ACC-CF.Q man house-LOC yesterday-ACC hit-PST-3SG
      "Whom did the man hit at the house yesterday?"

16b   *buru-gi-tera   id   kaa-r   wiil-gi   jom-s-u /*
      girl-ACC-CF.DEF man house-LOC yesterday-ACC hit-PST-3SG
      jom-s-i-n
      hit-PST-3SG-REL.OBJ
      "It was the girl whom the man hit at the house yesterday"

Sentences like 16b show that the out-of-focus clause can be a main clause or a relative clause. It should be noted that the relative marker, i.e. *–n,* used here is not the same marker as *-el* used in 12c. The reason is that the focused constituent is object in 16c, whereas it is subject in 12c. Note that contrastive focusing is not restricted to the subject or object; nominals referring to an object, time or place can also be used. Thus the nominal *buru-gi, kaa-r,* or *wiil-gi* in 17a can be focused, as seen in 17b–d.

id	*buru-gi*	*dugu-gi*	*kaa-r*	*wiil-gi*	17a
man	girl-ACC	money-ACC	house-LOC	yesterday-ACC	

tir-s-u
give-PST-3SG
"The man gave money to the girl at the house yesterday"

buru-gi-tera	*id*	*dugu-gi*	*kaa-r*	*wiil-gi*	17b
girl-ACC-CF.DEF	man	money-ACC	house-LOC	yesterday-ACC	

tir-s-u /   *tir-s-i-n*
give-PST-3SG give-PST-3SG-REL.OBJ
"It is the girl that the man gave the money at the house yesterday"

kaa-r-tera	*id*	*buru-gi*	*dugu-gi*	*wiil-gi*	17c
house-LOC-CF.DEF	man	girl-ACC	money-ACC	yesterday-ACC	

tir-s-u /   **tir-s-i-n*
give-PST-3SG give-PST-3SG-REL
"It was at the house that the man gave the girl money yesterday"

wiil-gi-tera	*id*	*buru-gi*	*dugu-gi*	*kaa-r*	17d
yesterday-ACC-CF.DEF	man	girl-ACC	money-ACC	house-ACC	

tir-s-u /   **tir-s-i-n*
give-PST-3SG give-PST-3SG-REL
"It was yesterday that the man gave the girl money at the house"

Sentences like 17b show that an indirect object can be focused. In such cases the out-of-focus clause can be a main clause or relative clause, which is indicated by the relative marker *–n* on the verb. In contrast, adverbials can be focused, as shown in 17c–d. However, they can only be modified by a main clause rather than a relative clause.

Even a pronoun, be it subject (as in 18b) or object (as in 18c), can be highlighted in KN. In such cases, the focus marker *–tera* is attached to the focused pronoun as in 18b and 18c.

18a   *tir buru-gi   jom-s-a*
       3PL girl-ACC   hit-PST-3PL
       "They hit the girl"

18b   *tir-tera   buru-gi   jom-s-a*
       3PL-CF.DEF girl-ACC   hit-PST-3PL
       "It is they who hit the girl"

18c   *tekki-tera   tir jom-s-a*
       3SG.ACC-CF.DEF 3PL hit-PST-3PL
       "It is her that they hit."

It has been shown that sentences like 12b indicate that the focused nominal to which *–tera* is suffixed is definite. Definite nominals are unmarked in KN, whereas indefinite elements are marked with *–weer*.[33] The question is: can indefinite constituents be focused if emphasized or contrasted? In sentences like 19a, the subject is indefinite, as indicated by the suffix *–weer*.[34] This indefinite subject is focused in 19b.

19a   *id-weer   buru-gi   kaa-r   wiil-gi   jom-s-u*
       man-INDF girl-ACC house-LOC yesterday-ACC hit-PST-3SG
       "A man hit the girl at the house yesterday"

19b   *id-ma   buru-gi   kaa-r   wiil-gi   jom-el*
       man-CF.INDF girl-ACC house-LOC yesterday-ACC hit-REL.PST.SBJ
       "It was a man who hit the girl at the house yesterday"

19c   **id-ma   buru-gi   kaa-r   wiil-gi   jom-s-u*
       man-CF.INDF girl-ACC house-LOC yesterday-ACC hit-PST-3SG

Sentences like 19 show that the indefinite nominal *id-weer,* which is subject in 19a, is *ma*-focused in 19b. Moreover, sentences like 19b show that the out-of-focus clause is a relative clause, as evidenced by the relative morpheme *–el*. Note that the focused constituent with *–ma* cannot occur with a main clause, as evidenced by the ungrammaticality of 19c. It has been shown in sentences like 12 that *–tera* occurs with or without non-relative clauses. The type of focus used in 19b is a response to a question raised by a speaker who is enquiring about the identity of the doer, instigator or patient of an

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33 ABDEL-HAFIZ, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian,* p. 101.
34 There is evidence that *–weer* is a suffix: the /w/ becomes [b] if preceded by a word ending in a bilabial sound (e.g. /m/ or /b/); for example, /kub-weer/, which may be glossed as "boat-INDF," becomes [*kub-beer*] and /kam-weer/ "camel-INDF" becomes [*kam-beer*]. This change does not occur if these sounds are separated by a word boundary as in /saab wel-gi acci-s-u/ "cat dog-ACC bite-PST-3SG" [*saab welgi accisu*] / *[*saab belgi accisu*].

action expressed by the verb. Thus a statement like 20a, which is challenging, can trigger an emphatic response, as seen in 20b.[35]

saab-minu	kowalli-gi	toog-el	20a
cat-CF.NEG	mirror-ACC	broke-REL.PST.SBJ	
"It is not a cat that broke the mirror"			

saab-ma	kowalli-gi	toog-el	20b
cat-CF.INDF	mirror-ACC	broke-REL.PST.SBJ	
"It was a cat that broke the mirror"			

The response in 20b can also be appropriate if the speaker aims to correct a previous statement by another participant. In the following sentence, the speaker believes that *wel-weer* "a dog" was responsible for breaking the mirror.

wel-weer	kowalli-gi	toog-s-u	21
dog-INDF	mirror-ACC	broke-PST-3SG	
"A dog broke the mirror"			

The sentence 20b can also be suitable for correcting the situation addressed in 21 by highlighting the constituent *saab* "a cat." The focused element is something the speaker is not familiar with. Here s/he is not talking about a particular "cat." If a particular cat had been referred to, the speaker would have used the definite focus marker *–tera* as in 22.

saab-tera	kowalli-gi	toog-el	22a
cat-CF.DEF	mirror-ACC	broke-REL.PST.SBJ	
"It was the cat that broke the mirror"			

saab-tera	kowalli-gi	toog-s-u	22b
cat-CF.DEF	mirror-ACC	break-PST-3SG	
"It was the cat that broke the mirror"			

The *ma*-focused constituents are shown to be indefinite subjects, as in 19b and 20b. Is it possible to focus an indefinite direct object or indirect object? Sentences like 23b–c show that it is.[36]

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35 The suffix *–minu* that appears after the nominal *saab* in 20a is not a simple negation. Rather, it is a combination of negation and focus. It can be used with indefinite nominals, as attested in 20a, or definite nominals as in *id-ter-minu* which may be glossed as "man-CF.NEG."

36 Note that the asterisk (*) before an element within the brackets indicates that the sentence is ungrammatical if the element is present. The /r/ of the indefinite *weer* is deleted before the accusative suffix. It seems that the numeral *weer* "one" is the source of this suffix.

23a   *id   buru-weer-gi   dugu-gi   kaa-r   wiil-gi*
man girl-INDF-ACC   money-ACC   house-ACC yesterday-ACC
tir-s-u
give-PST-3SG
"The man gave money to a girl at the house yesterday"

23b   *dugu-(*gi)-ma   id   buru-weer-gi   kaa-r*
money-ACC-CF.INDF   man girl-INDF-ACC house-LOC
wiil-gi   tir-s-i-n /   *tir-s-u
yesterday-ACC give-PST-3SG-REL.OBJ give-PST-3SG
"It was money that the man gave to a girl at the house yesterday."

23c   *buru-(*gi)-ma   id   dugu-gi   kaa-r   wiil-gi*
girl-ACC-CF.INDF   man money-ACC house-LOC yesterday-ACC
tir-s-i-n /   *tir-s-u
give-PST-3SG-REL.OBJ give-PST-3SG
"It was a girl that the man gave money at the house yesterday."

Sentences like 23b show that a direct object can be focused, where-as sentences like 23c indicate that it is possible to focus an indirect object. In such cases, the direct or indirect object appears without the accusative suffix. This is in stark contrast to focus constructions with *–tera* as in 17b, in which the accusative suffix remains intact. This is probably due to the fact that sentences like 23b are essentially relative clauses, whereas *tera*-constructions have undergone a functional split process in which the out-of-focus relative clause is gradually turning into a main clause. Obviously, this reanalysis of a relative clause as a main clause has not applied to *ma*-constructions, as evidenced by the ungrammaticality of the *ma*-sentence 19c in which the out-of-focus clause is not a relative clause.

Unlike the contrastive construction with *–tera,* nominals other than subject, direct or indirect object cannot be focused with *–ma.* Nominals referring to place (as in 24a) or time (as in 24b) cannot co-occur with *–ma.* Nor can a personal pronoun in 24c be focused in such constructions.

24a   **kaa-ma   id   buru-gi   wiil-gi   jom-el*
house-CF.INDF   man girl-ACC   yesterday-ACC   hit-REL.PST.SBJ

24b   **wiil-ma   id   buru-gi   kaa-r   jom-el*
yesterday-CF.INDF   man girl-ACC   house-LOC   hit-REL.PST.SBJ

*ter-ma   buru-weer-gi   kaa-r   wiil-gi   24c
3SG-CF.INDF girl-INDF-ACC house-LOC yesterday-ACC
nal-el
see-REL.PST.SBJ

Any attempt to *ma*-focus nominals other than a subject, direct ob-   123
ject or indirect object will turn out to be ungrammatical. In fact,
a focus construction with *-ma* involves only a relative clause, and
therefore focus is constrained by whether it is possible to extract
from the relative clause. In Nubian languages, only subjects and ob-
jects can be extracted, but adverbial phrases cannot.[37] Thus 24a and
24b are ungrammatical because an element other than the subject,
direct object or indirect object is focused. The ungrammaticality
of 24c, however, indicates the impossibility of attaching the focus
marker *–ma* to pronouns. It is quite possible to explain why *–ma* is
not compatible with personal pronouns.

The focus marker *–ma* is used with indefinite rather than defi-
nite elements (cf. section 4.3). In contrast, personal pronouns are se-
mantically definite because they refer to specific entities. Therefore,
they cannot be used with *–ma* in focus constructions.

4.3 *The focus suffixes –ma and –tera*

As has been shown, these two suffixes are associated with contras-
tive focus, *–ma* is used with an indefinite focused element, where-
as *–tera* is associated with definite elements. The two markers are
treated as suffixes because they are only used with nouns. They also
affect the phonological structure of the preceding word, e.g. *een*
"woman," *een-ma* "it is a woman," *een-tera* "it is the woman." One of
these suffixes, i.e. *–ma,* as is the case in many African languages, is
derived from a copula. Evidence for this claim is provided by copu-
lar constructions in KN, see ex. 25.

buru ašir   ma   25a
girl beautiful COP
"The girl is beautiful"

buru-ii ašr-ii   ma   25b
girl-PL beautiful-PL COP
"The girls are beautiful"

The fact that *ma* in these sentences accompanies definite nouns is
evidence that it is a copula rather than a focus marker. Moreover,

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the focus marker *–ma* is often used with indefinite elements. As Heine and Reh argue, the process of turning the copula *ma* into the focus marker *–ma* starts when "the constituent preceding the copula introduced the new information, while the relative clause presented the presupposed, 'out-of-focus,' content of the sentence."[38] Heine and Reh have shown that in some African languages "both the desemanticized and the non-desemanticized units may coexist."[39] This is also the case in KN: both the copula *ma* and the focus marker *–ma* coexist. This can be explained if these elements are dealt with as being the result of functional split in which the copula *ma* was grammaticalized as a focus marker.[40]

The other focus marker, *–tera,* is not derived from a copula. Rather, it is derived from the third person singular pronoun *ter* "he, she."

26a   *er   buru-gi   nal-s-u*
         2SG girl-ACC   see-PST-2SG
         "You saw the girl"

26b   *ter   buru-gi   nal-s-u*
         3SG girl-ACC   see-PST-3SG
         "S/he saw the girl"

Reduplication may be a source of focus markers, for example, in Efik, a Niger-Kongo language of Nigeria, "a clause which expresses contrast is marked morphologically by partial reduplication of the verb stem."[41] Given this, it is more likely that the KN pronoun *ter* has developed into a focus marker via reduplication in situations where emphasis is required. Thus emphasis may have been achieved by repeating the pronoun *ter* twice as in 27.

27   *ter ter buru-gi nal-s-u*   →   *ter-tera   buru-gi nal-s-u*
         3SG 3SG girl-ACC see-PST-3SG   3SG-CF.DEF girl-ACC see-PST-3SG
         "It is s/he who saw the girl (lit. S/he, s/he saw the girl)"

This marker is then generalized in such a way that it was used after other elements, including other personal pronouns, e.g. *er* "you (2SG)," as seen in 28b.

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38 HEINE & REH, *Grammaticalization and Reanalysis in African Languages,* pp. 167–8.
39 Ibid., p. 36.
40 Note that it is not easy to distinguish between clitics and affixes in African languages (ibid., p. 33). Both the copula *ma* and the focus *–ma* occur with phrasal constituents. However, as the focus element is described with reference to indefinite nominals and may affect the phonological structure of the preceding word, it should be treated as a suffix.
41 Ibid., p. 454.

er	*buru-gi*	*nal-s-u*	28a
2SG	girl-ACC	see-PST-2SG	

"You saw the girl."

er-tera	*buru-gi*	*nal-el* /	*nal-s-u*	28b
2SG-CF.DEF	girl-ACC	see-REL.PST.SBJ	see-PST-2SG	

"It is you who saw the girl."

Note that the comment or out-of-focus part of the sentence started as a relative clause, as evidenced by the relative marker –*el*. However, it has gradually gained the characteristics of non-relative clauses. This probably explains why the out-of-focus clause can be a relative clause or a subordinate clause.

4.5 Is there topicalization in KN?
Topicalization is defined as a device that is used to assign "greater prominence to the element concerned than it would have typically in an unmarked construction."[42] Such constructions are used to highlight a part of a sentence by placing it in the front position. The distinction between topicalization and focus is not often observed. For example, Khalil has treated topicalization and focus as the same construction that is subsumed under fronting.[43] Likewise, Salih treats topicalization as "a different type of focus."[44] Prince argues that sentences involving topicalization (as in 29a) and focus (as in 29b) are difficult to differentiate in English.[45]

Macadamia nuts I think they are called.	29a
Macadamia nuts I can't afford.	29b

However, Zeller has provided some clues with which topicalization can be identified in African languages.[46] He argues that the topic in these languages is marked "by means of left or right dislocation. Typically, the fronted or extraposed topic is picked up by a resumptive pronoun or pronominal clitic in the comment clause."[47]

Note that the constructions involving information focus in KN allow the fronting of object or time or place adjuncts, as attested in sentences like 9a–d. If the focused constituent in sentences like 30b were topicalized, it would be in the nominative case:

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42 HUDDLESTON, *Introduction to the Grammar of English,* p. 454.
43 KHALIL, *A Contrastive Grammar of English and Arabic.*
44 SALIH, *Aspects of Clause Structure in Standard Arabic,* p. 53.
45 PRINCE, "Topicalization, Focus-Movement, and Yiddish-Movement," p. 250.
46 ZELLER, "The Syntax of African Languages," p. 12.
47 Ibid.

30a   *buru id-gi   kaa-n-keel-lo   nal-s-u*
           girl   man-ACC house-GEN-beside-LOC see-PST-3SG
           "The girl saw the man beside the house"

30b   *id-gi   buru kaa-n-keel-lo   nal-s-u*
           man-ACC girl house-GEN-beside-LOC see-PST-3SG
           "The girl saw the man beside the house"

30c   *id   buru kaa-n-keel-lo   nal-s-u*
           man girl house-GEN-beside-LOC see-PST-3SG

The fact that the focused element in sentences like 30b is in the accusative case indicates that it is not topicalized. In contrast, the sentence in 30c is not grammatical because the focused constituent has lost its accusative case marker which refers to its function in the sentence. Needless to say, the absence of any case marker on the focused constituent in 30c indicates that it is in the nominative case. The problem with sentences like 30c is that two consecutive constituents are unmarked for nominative case, which impedes proper identification of syntactic function.

Moreover, if the focused constituent (i.e. *id-gi*) in sentences like 30b were the result of topicalization, we would expect a resumptive pronoun in the comment clause. That this is not the case is borne out by sentences like 31.

31   *id-gi   buru tekki   kaa-n-keel-lo   nal-s-u*
      man-ACC girl   3SG.ACC house-GEN-beside-LOC see-PST-3SG

This sentence is ungrammatical because a resumptive pronoun (i.e. *tekki*) is left in the comment clause.

It is not possible to ignore the differences between information focus and contrastive focus. Let us derive both types from a single sentence like 32a:

32a   *buru id-gi   kaa-n-keel-lo   nal-s-u*
           girl   man-ACC house-GEN-beside-LOC see-PST-3SG
           "The girl saw the man beside the house"

32b ▸ Information Focus
        id-gi   buru kaa-n-keel-lo   nal-s-u
        man-ACC girl house-GEN-beside-LOC see-PST-3SG
        "The man the girl saw beside house"

▸ Contrastive Focus   32c

   id-gi-tera   *buru kaa-n-keel-lo*   *nal-s-u*
   man-ACC-CF.DEF girl house-GEN-beside-LOC see-PST-3SG
   "It is the man the girl saw beside house"

Note first that the focused constituent in 32b is in the accusative   127
case, whereas that of 32c has the suffix *–tera* attached to it. The con-
trastive focused constituent must be definite, cf. 32c. If the constitu-
ent is indefinite a different suffix, *–ma*, is attached to the indefinite
focused constituent. In contrast, the information focused constitu-
ent can be definite, as seen in 32b or indefinite, as in 33.

   id-weer-gi   *buru kaa-n-keel-lo*   *nal-s-u*   33
   man-INDF-ACC girl house-GEN-beside-LOC see-PST-3SG
   "The girl saw a man beside the house"

These types are triggered by different pragmatic factors: the sen-
tence involving information focus is a response to a question intro-
duced with an interrogative pronoun such as *nii-g, saayer* or *sitaaki*.

   nii-gi   *buru kaa-n-keel-lo*   *nal-maa?*   34
   who-ACC girl house-GEN-beside-LOC see-Q.PST
   "Whom did the girl see beside house?"

As for the sentence involving contrastive focus, it is the result of
emphasis or contrast.

   id-tera   *(een-ter minu)*   *buru kaa-n-keel-lo*   35
   man-CF.DEF woman-CF.INDF-not girl house-GEN-beside-LOC
   nal-s-u
   see-PST-3SG
   "It was a man (not a woman) that the girl saw beside the house."

4.6 Contrastive constructions and information structure

Cleft constructions (e.g. *it*-clefts and pseudo-clefts) have drawn the
attention of many linguists. Huddleston argues that "[t]he main se-
mantic function ascribed to clefts is a textual one. *It*-clefts 'highlight'
an element, viz. the postverbal NP."[48] Baker discusses such construc-
tions as being characterized by a predicated theme which "involves
using *it*-structure (also called cleft structure) to place an element
near the beginning of the clause."[49] For example, the constituent
placed after the copula is considered the new information, whereas

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48 HUDDLESTON, *Introduction to the Grammar of English,* pp. 466–7.
49 BAKER, *In Other Words,* p. 135.

the given information appears in the out-of-focus clause. Prince and Hedberg treat clefts as a heterogeneous group, each having a different information structure and function.[50] According to Delin and Oberlander, "[t]he clefted constituent bears new, often contrastive information, and the cleft clause bears known or old information (and as a result), may often be elided or simply deleted altogether."[51]

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Focus constructions in KN can be discussed in terms of two concepts relating to information structure: old and new information. Old information involves what is already known to the hearer, whereas new information represents what is new to the hearer. Thus in sentences like 12b, repeated here for convenience.

36   *id-tera   buru-gi   kaa-r   wiil-gi   jom-s-u*
     man-CF.DEF girl-ACC house-LOC yesterday-ACC hit-PST-3SG
     "It was the man who hit the girl at the house yesterday"

The constituent *id-tera* is considered the new information. Note that KN prefers to place the heavier portion of the sentence at the end. By "heavier," we mean it contains more lexical items. In the words of Greenbaum and Quirk,

> Since the new information often needs to be stated more fully than the given (that is, with a longer, "heavier" structure), it is not unexpected that an organization principle which may be called end-weight comes into operation along with the principle of end-focus.[52]

In this construction the part that contains new information is lighter (i.e. contains one word) and occupies the front position in the sentence. In contrast, the second part, which is heavier and has more words, contains given information (*burugi id wiilgi jomsu*) and occupies the end-position. It might be argued that KN does not observe the End-Weight principle which states that the part of the sentence containing new information is expected to be heavier than the part that includes given information. As a result, the heavier part is to occupy the end position. In sentences like 36, it is the focused constituent, which is lighter, that takes up the front position. However, it is possible in KN to have the focused constituent moved to the end (i.e. pseudo-clefts) as in 37.

50 PRINCE, "A Comparison of WH-Clefts and *It*-Clefts in Discourse"; HEDBERG, *Discourse Pragmatics and Cleft Sentences in English.*
51 DELIN & OBERLANDER, "Syntactic Constraints on Discourse Structure," p. 468.
52 GREENBAUM & QUIRK, *Student's Grammar of the English Language*, p. 398.

buru-gi	*wiil-gi*	*jom-el*	*id-tera*	37a
girl-ACC	yesterday-ACC	hit-REL.PST.SBJ	man-CF.DEF	

"Who hit the girl yesterday is the man"

*buru-gi	*wiil-gi*	*jom-s-u*	*id-tera*	37b
girl-ACC	yesterday-ACC	hit-PST-3SG	man-CF.DEF	

It is worth noting that the relative clause is irreplaceable if it occupies the theme position, as shown in 37b. Sentences like 37a are conceived of as involving identifying or contrastive themes.[53] In such a case the focused constituent occupies the end position, whereas the other part of the sentence occupies the theme position.

These sentences show that the Hallidayan position concerning the separation of thematic structure and the information structure is sound. Note that the Praguian School linguists drew a correlation between theme position and given information and between rheme position and new information. The sentences indicate that the cleft construction in KN involves an element with new information in the theme position and given information is in the rheme position. In contrast, the pseudo-cleft construction has the new information in the rheme position and the given information in the theme position.

Theme	Rheme			38a
New	Given			
id-tera	*buru-gi*	*wiil-gi*	*jom-s-u*	
man-CF.DEF	girl-ACC	yesterday-ACC	hit-PST-3SG	

"It is the man who hit the girl yesterday"

Theme			Rheme	38b
Given			New	
buru-gi	*wiil-gi*	*jom-el*	*id-tera*	
girl-ACC	yesterday-ACC	hit-REL.PST.SBJ	man-CF.DEF	

"Who hit the girl yesterday is the man"

5. Conclusion

This study's contribution lies in the fact it has tackled such neglected concepts as information focus and contrastive focus in KN. No reference has ever been made to them in KN studies before. It has been shown that KN, which does not have topicalization, has two types of focus, information focus and contrastive focus. Evidence is given concerning the difference between these two types. Information focus is shown to be the outcome of word order variation, whereas the

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53 BAKER, *In Other Words*, p. 136.

latter is morphologically expressed. Note that the contrastive focus is expressed by a suffix attached to the focused element: *–tera* if the element is definite and *–ma* if it is indefinite. These focus markers are derived from different sources: *–ma* is derived from copula *ma,* whereas *–tera* originates in the pronoun *ter*. This probably explains why these focus markers have different morphosyntactic properties. The out-of-focus clause is a relative clause if *–ma* is the focus marker. In contrast, this clause can be a relative or main clause if the focused constituent is marked with *–tera*. Moreover, the two constructions have different extraction/fronting properties: Moreover, the two types of focus construction differ as to the elements that can be focused: all nominals, adverbials, and pronouns can be *tera*-focused. In contrast, adverbials and pronouns are not *ma*-focused.

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