

Investigating focus marking in Luganda and Lingala

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While it is admittedly difficult to investigate information structure in an unfamiliar language, in this talk I hope to show that there are some manageable diagnostics for focus that can be applied in elicitation. Based on data from Luganda and Lingala I show why the discoveries about focus marking in Bantu languages are crucial for understanding both the synchronic analysis and the diachronic development of focus.

For Luganda I discuss the presence vs. absence of the augment (e.g. *o-mu-ntu* vs. *-mu-ntu* 'person'), arguing that the absence indicates not just underspecified focus but exclusivity (1). For Lingala I show the use of two focus markers *nde* and *moto* (2), showing how the latter has grammaticalised from a cleft construction in an unexpected way.

- (1) a. *Y-a-gúla e-bí-tábó.* [Luganda]
1SM-PAST-buy 8A-8PX-books
'He bought books.'
- b. *Y-a-gúla bi-tábó.*
1SM-PAST-buy 8PX-books
'He bought *books*.'
- (2) a. *Mwána moto azalí na ndáko.* [Lingala]
child MOTO ASG.be.PRF in.the house
'It is the child who is in the house.'
- b. *Mwána ndé azalí na ndáko.*
child FOC ASG.be.PRF in.the house
'It is rather the child who is in the house.'

References

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