

## **TOPIC, FOCUS, AND WORD ORDER IN THE KISWAHILI CLAUSE**

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The Kiswahili language has been classified as an SVO language. This paper argues that the SVO word order is dependent on the occurrence of both the subject and object overtly. When the two do not surface overtly, the word order varies: it is V when neither surfaces and VO when only the object does. This paper illustrates this point with data from ten oral narratives. It shows that the Kiswahili word order cannot be established using syntactic information only; the pragmatic principles of topics and foci must be taken into account as well. Based on the latter, the paper shows that the basic (commonest) word order in the Kiswahili clause is V word order and the default (if no other is specified) word order is VO word order. Topics and foci surface in both marked and unmarked forms. Marked topics are represented by overt lexical NPs and overt pronouns while the unmarked ones are represented by the incorporated pronouns. For its part, marked focus surfaces as fronted constituents (*ex situ*), while the unmarked surfaces *in situ*. The paper also argues that the Minimalist Program (MP) is inadequate in terms of analysing topic and focus and proposes a reanalysis of the MP in order for it to be able to capture topic and focus phenomena more appropriately.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

A number of scholars (Polome 1967, Myachina 1981, Vitale 1981, Mdee 1986, Habwe & Karanja 2004, Mwamzandi 2014) have argued that although Kiswahili typically has an SVO word order, this is at the same time free, which means that the words can be shuffled without affecting the meaning. Thus, the SVO word order in (1a) can be rearranged as in 1(b, c, d, e, and f):

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| (1) a) <i>Jerusa a-na-lim-a shamba</i> | (Jerusa is tilling the land)            |
| b) <i>A-na-lima shamba Jerusa.</i>     | (*Is tilling the land <i>Jerusa</i> )   |
| c) <i>A-na-lima Jerusa, shamba.</i>    | (*Is tilling <i>Jerusa</i> the land)    |
| d) <i>Shamba a-na-lima Jerusa.</i>     | (*The land is tilling <i>Jerusa</i> )   |
| e) <i>Shamba, Jerusa a-na-lima.</i>    | (*The land, <i>Jerusa</i> is tilling)   |
| f) <i>Jerusa, shamba a-na-lima.</i>    | (* <i>Jerusa</i> , the land is tilling) |

In the constructions in (1), each argument can be analysed on the basis of whether it is new or old information. In (1a), for instance, *Jerusa* and *shamba* ('farm') are new information. When it comes to the verb complex, the agreement marker *a-* in all the examples represents old information (referring to *Jerusa*, which does not have to be repeated). The different word orders in (1) are as a result of emphasis. Emphasis in this paper is used for highlighted information that the speaker wants the hearer to hear and not to miss. Structurally, emphasis is captured as focus. The arrangement of the words depends on what the speaker wishes to emphasise in the clause, i.e. whether it is the doer of the action, the act itself, or the one receiving or suffering the action expressed by the verb. Vitale (1981: 19), however, states that the word order is not entirely free; he acknowledges that Kiswahili word order can vary from the normal SVO sequence due to such factors as emphasis, definiteness, or the type of information being given (old versus new information). The type of information that is given leads us to pragmatic considerations (topic and focus).

The structure of Kiswahili allows a construction to converge without overt subjects and objects. The agglutinative nature of Kiswahili allows the occurrence of incorporated subjects and objects. This means that they are functioning as agreement markers (Bresnan & Mchombo, 1987), which ensures that the Kiswahili clause converges according to the Economy Principle, a Minimalist Program principle which stipulates that (all other things being equal) syntactic representations should contain as few constituents and syntactic derivations and involve as few grammatical operations as possible (Radford, 1999: 259). Therefore, there is no need for overt subjects and objects. When these do not occur overtly, they are

functioning either as incorporated pronouns or as agreement markers (Bresnan & Mchombo, 1987). This is where the pragmatic notions of topic and focus come in to help reanalyse these elements. This paper will apply these two notions to analyse what have traditionally been referred to as subjects and objects. Its analysis will provide a more elaborate way of describing Kiswahili syntax using the Minimalist Program (MP). The starting assumption here is that the Kiswahili clause cannot be adequately analysed using syntactic principles alone without incorporating discourse-pragmatic notions. Overt subjects can be reanalysed as topics and in terms of how they influence the different word orders in the Kiswahili clause. At the end of this paper, we shall propose syntactic projections for topic and focus in the phrase structure tree, positions which are very different from the usual subject AgrSP positions proposed in the Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 1995).

## 2. The source of the data used

In order to be able to analyse the Kiswahili clause adequately, illustrative examples were drawn from ten narrative texts, six of which were chosen from published collections and four were collected from the field by the present authors. From the ten narratives, five different clause types emerged, which are, according to their order of prevalence: the V word order (as in 2a, S1 and S2), the VO word order (as in 2b, S1 and S2), the SV word order (as in 2c, S1), the SVO word order (as in 2d, S1), and the verbless clauses (as in 2e). This last type comprises the O word order (as in 2e), the S word order (as in 2f), and the SO word order (as in 2g).<sup>1</sup>

- (2) a) S1: *A-li-ye-sem-a S2: ha-m-ju-i S3: mw-ongo, S4: kwani w-ote*  
 3Sg-Pst-Rel-say-Fv Neg-3Sg-know-Fv Cl1-lie because Cl2-all  
*wa-na-m-ju-a.*  
 3Pl-Prog-3Sg-know-Fv

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<sup>1</sup> In the examples S1, S2, S3, etc., refer to clauses while a), b), c), etc. refer to sentences.

Whoever claimed not to know him is a liar because all of them know him.

- b) S1: *U-ki-m-taka Kombo*, S2: *fika hapo skuli tu, na*  
 2Sg-Cond-3Sg-want Kombo arrive there school only and  
 S3: *u-mw-uliz-e yeyote* S4: *u-na-ye-mw-ona, basi*  
 2Sg-3Sg-ask-Fv anyone 2Sg-Prog-Rel-3Sg-see so  
 S5: *a-ta- ku-pelek-a moja kwa moja mpaka meza-ni kw-ake.*  
 3Sg-Fut-2Sg-take-Fv one by one up to table-Prep Cl16-Poss  
 If you need Kombo, just go to school and ask anyone you meet and (s)he will take you up to his desk.
- c) S1: *Tembo a-li-mw-angalia Sungura kwa dharau sana na*  
 Elephant 3Sg-Pst-3Sg-look hare with scorn very and  
 S2: *ku-mw-ambia* S3: *kw-ake ha-fu-i dafu<sup>2</sup>*  
 Inf-3Sg-tell Prep-Poss Neg-beat-Fv coconut when it full of milk  
 S4: *hata a-ki-ja na u-koo w-ake wo-te.*  
 even if 3Sg-Cond-come with Cl11-clan 3Sg-Poss Cl2-all  
 Elephant looked at Hare very scornfully and told him that he cannot beat him even if he came with his entire clan members.
- d) *Lakini mbona mw-izi siku z-ake e arobaini?* (SO word order)  
 But how come Cl1-thief day Cl10-Poss forty (verbless clause)  
 But how come the days of the thief are forty
- e) S1: *A-ka-m-kisia mama-ke*, S2: *a-ka-jua* S3: *hana maamuru*  
 3Sg-Narr-3Sg-weigh mother-Poss 3Sg-Narr-know Neg authority  
*mbele ya nguvu za mwana-mume, yaani* S4: *baba-ke.*  
 in front of strength of child-man that is father-Poss  
 She weighed her mother and found that she didn't have any authority over a man, that is, her father.
- f) S1: *Kiboko a-ki-w-a maji-ni na* S 2: *Sungura, nchi kavu.*  
 Hippopotamus 3Sg-Cond-be-Fv water-Loc and hare land dry  
 Hippopotamus being in water and Hare on land.

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<sup>2</sup> This is an idiomatic expression in Kiswahili meaning that he ('Hare') cannot beat him ('Elephant').

- g) S1: *Sikiliza Mrashi*, S2: *a-li-onya baba-mtu*, S3: *mchezo wa-ko huo eeh*  
 Listen Mrashi, her father warned, this game of yours, ehe!  
*Haya*  
 Okay (S word order)

Table 1 below shows the results of our analysis and counting of the different clause types occurring in the narratives.

Table 1: Frequencies of clause types across the ten narratives

	Clause type	Frequency	%
1.	V	906	40.59
2.	VO	694	31.09
3.	SV	376	16.85
4.	SVO	222	9.95
5.	O	13	0.58
6.	S	11	0.49
7.	SO	10	0.45
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,232</b>	<b>100</b>

It is evident from the table that the most frequent word order is the V, followed by the VO. This suggests that the V word order is the basic sentence type in Kiswahili while the VO word order is the default sentence type<sup>3</sup>.

### 3. TOPIC AND WORD ORDER IN KISWAHILI

In this section, topics will be discussed with a view to showing how they relate to word order in Kiswahili: they can surface either as overt NP subjects or objects or as incorporated subjects and objects (in the form of pronouns).

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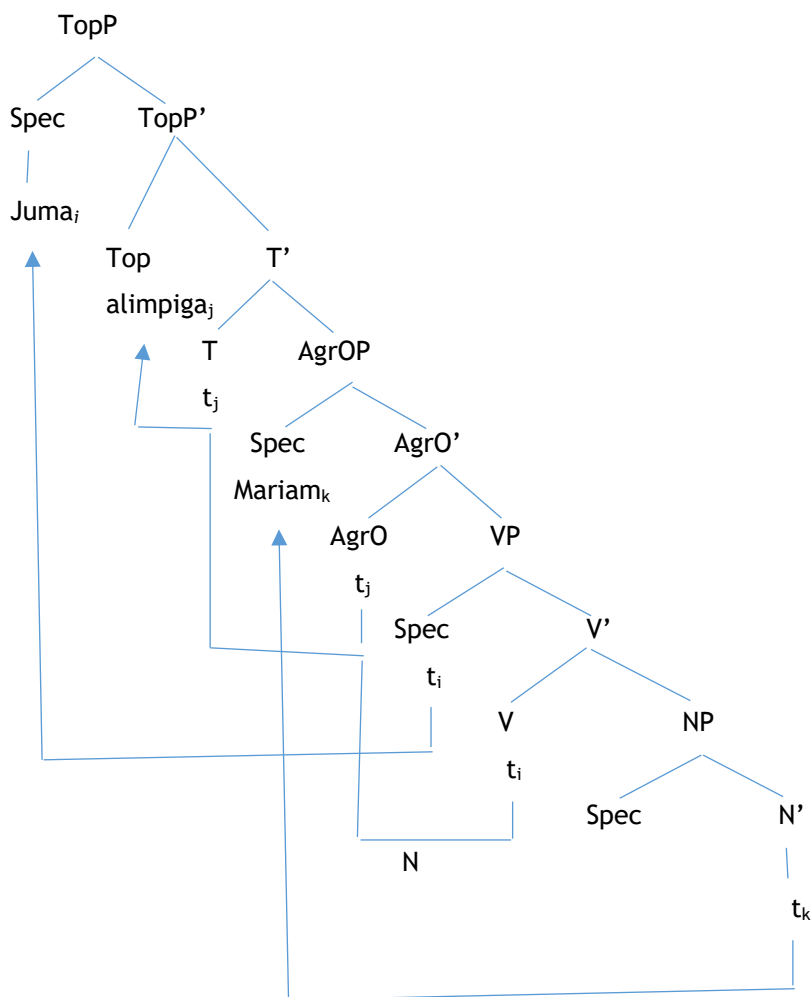
<sup>3</sup> The basic sentence or clause type is used in this paper as the commonest sentence type while the default sentence type is used to mean the clause type that surfaces when no other type is specified.

### 3.1 The topic position in Kiswahili “revisited”

Topics are pragmatic notions that can and do induce deviations from canonical word orders (Skopeteas & Fanselow, 2008b: 5). They have been analysed (Rizzi 1982, Gundell et al. 1993, Lambrecht 1994) as post-syntactic notions (i.e. discourse-pragmatic notions that are not part of narrow syntax) which are associated with various structural positions. Gundell et al (1993: 279), for instance, claim, without referring to any configurational projection, that the topic position is often in subject position. The subject position does not identify any position where topics are to be projected. According to them, topics ought to be projected in the Spec/CP. This paper illustrates that the topic position is neither the Spec/CP nor Spec/AgrSP. It proposes an independent position (SpecTop) to host the topic.

Topics in Kiswahili are usually projected in SpecTop position, which is different from the proposal by Rizzi (1982), Cinque (1999) and subsequent work, which projects it at Spec, CP position. However, Jerono (2012:112) has convincingly argued against this proposal. We adopt Jerono’s argument that topics and foci in Kiswahili are associated with functional categories of their own and are said to occupy the specifier positions of their respective heads. Such an interpretation is due to the features (either [+Topic] or [+Focus] features) that are assigned to topics by the verb and, therefore, cannot be projected in the CP. The topic (and focus for that matter) features are checked via movement in a Spec-head relation. This checking can be done either overtly before Spellout when the topics occur *ex situ* or covertly at LF when they occur *in situ*. The overt topic moves to the SPEC/TopP to check for the [+Topic] features. The natural position for the unmarked topics is usually the sentence-initial position. The topic normally moves from its base-generated position in the specifier position of the verb phrase to the SPEC/TopP to check for the [+Topic] features. The following phrase structure tree illustrates how the topic moves from its base generated position to the sentence-initial position in Kiswahili.

(3) *Juma alimpiga Mariam* (Juma beat Mariam).



Bresnan & Mchombo (1987) argue that the object marker in Chichewa does not exhibit grammatical agreement with the NP it refers to but instead shows anaphoric agreement. While this may be the case in Chichewa, in the present study we are arguing that in Kiswahili the NP is not an argument of the verb but is instead a topic. According to Bresnan & Mchombo (1987), the object marker (OM) sometimes functions as an anaphoric pronoun and at other times as a grammatical agreement marker. In Kiswahili, marked

topics are those topics which bear the feature [overt NP] or [overt Pronoun] and bears the feature [+old information] whereas unmarked topics are the incorporated pronouns that bear the feature [+old information].

This section has shown that topics surface in two ways in Kiswahili: marked topics, which are represented by the overt lexical NPs and overt pronouns when they function pragmatically as old information, and unmarked topics, which are represented by the incorporated pronouns. It has also shown that topics in Kiswahili usually occupy the sentence-initial position. The relation between topics is checked in a Spec-head relation. The Kiswahili verb enters the derivation with the subject marker, the tense or aspect marker, the object marker, the verbal extensions, and the final vowel.

### 3.2 Topics in Kiswahili

Topic is defined in this paper as any old information. Topics in Kiswahili are those lexical NPs and incorporated pronouns that present old information. In 4(a), *Kombo* and *yeye* are referring to old information and, hence, they are marked topics) whereas the unmarked topics are the incorporated pronouns (such as the incorporated pronoun *a-*, which refers to *Kombo*)<sup>4</sup>.

(4) S1: *Kombo a-li-kuwa mw-enye umbo la nguvu*

Kombo 3Sg-Pst-be Cl1-Poss build of strong  
Kombo was heavily built.

S2: *na umri wa mi-aka kumi na mbili*

And age of Cl4-year ten and two  
And aged twelve years old.

S3: *Lakini u-kubwa w-ake huu ha-u-ku-m-zuia kuwa*

But Cl11-big Cl1-Poss Dem Neg-Cl11-Pst-3Sg-prevent be  
But his huge build did not deter him from being naughty.

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<sup>4</sup> Marked topics surface as overt proper nouns or NPs and pronouns as long as they refer to old information whereas unmarked topics surface as the incorporated pronouns (i.e. old information, which is known to both the speaker and the hearer).



*m-tundu* S4: *na a-li-m-sabab-ish-a baba-ke mw-enye umri*  
 Cl1-naughty and 3Sg-3Sg-cause-Fv father-3Sg Cl1-Poss age  
*wa mi-aka sabini* S5: *ku-kumb-an-a na mi-jitu mi-fidhuli.*  
 of Cl4-year seventy Inf-meet-Rec-Fv Conj Cl4-giant Cl4-stubborn.  
 And he caused his father aged seventy years to come face to face  
 with stubborn youth.

S6: *Yeye a-li-kuwa a-ki-soma darasa la sita.*  
 3Pron 3Sg-Pst-be 3Sg-Prog(Pst)-read class of six  
 He was a standard six student.

S7: *lakini u-maarufu wa-ke na nguvu za-ke zi-li-vuma kama*  
 But Cl11-fame Cl1-Poss and strength Cl10-Poss Cl10-Pst-spread like  
*ngoma* S8: *na a-li-ju-lik-an-a skuli nzima, kutoka kwa*  
 drum and 3Sg-Pst-know-applic-Fv school whole from  
*wa-dogo hadi wa-kubwa*  
 of Cl2-small up to Cl2-big  
 And he was known in the entire school, from the little ones to the  
 big ones.

S9: *na hata mw-alimu m-kuu.*  
 Conj even Cl1-teacher Cl1-big  
 And even by the head teacher.

The section will revisit the analysis of the topic position in a clause.

### 3.2.1 *The V word order*

The V word order is a result of the omission of the overt subjects and objects, leaving only the verbal complex. Topics in Kiswahili can surface either as marked or unmarked<sup>5</sup>. The verbal complex contains the incorporated pronoun, which represent the unmarked topics, which refer to old information that is already known to both the speaker and the hearer,

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<sup>5</sup> Marked topics surface as overt NPs and pronouns so long as they refer to old information. Unmarked topics, on the other hand, surface as incorporated pronouns.

as illustrated in example (5) from the narrative *Tembo na Kiboko* (Ngole & Sengo, 1976: 21).

- (5) S1: *Siku i-li-po-wadia* S2: *a-ka-enda* S3: *ku-m-p-a Kiboko na*  
 Day Cl3-Pst-Rel-come 3Sg-Narr-go Inf-3Sg-give hippopotamus and  
 S4: *ku-mw-elez-a kuwa* S5: *a-ki-siki-a mbinja basi* S6: *a- anz-e*  
 Inf-3Sg-tell-Fv be 3Sg-Cond-hear-Fv whistle then 3Sg-start  
 S7: *ku-vut-a.*  
 Inf-pull

When the day came he went to give the rope to Hippopotamus and told him that when he hears the whistle, then he should start pulling.

S2, S4, S6, and S7 in the above example are all instantiations of the V word order. However, only S2, S4, and S6 make use of the incorporated pronouns (*a-* in S2 and S6, and *-mw-* in S4) to represent old information. The overt subjects and objects have been omitted altogether. The V word order clauses contain only a single word, the verbal complex. Once an argument has been introduced in Kiswahili discourse, it usually is not repeated again, unless it is for emphasis. Instead, known information is represented by the incorporated pronouns in the verb. In most constructions, a mere verb suffices to stand as a complete clause. The subject and object agreement markers (*a-* and *-mw-*, respectively) are used instead of full (overt) NPs.

### 3.2.2 *The VO word order*

The VO word order exemplifies old information for the subject of the clause, which is normally represented by the incorporated pronoun. This incorporated pronoun is old information that has already been introduced in the discourse and as such does not have to be repeated. The subject is, therefore, a topic. Objects, on the other hand, are represented by lexical NPs. These lexical NPs are new information, which are being introduced for the first time in the discourse and, hence, they are focus elements.

The VO word order either allows the object agreement marker to be present or not<sup>6</sup>. For inanimate objects, the object agreement may or may not be present. When it is present, it means that the object is specific. When the object agreement marker position is empty, it means that the object is not specific. However, for animate objects, the object agreement marker must always be present or else the derivation will crash as exemplified by the following examples:

(6) a) S1: *Sungura a-ka-enda* S2: *ku-tayari-ish-a* *kamba moja nene sana*  
 Hare 3Sg-Narr-go Inf-ready-Caus-Fv rope one big very  
 Hare went to prepare one very big rope.

b) S1: *Siku i-li-po-wadia* S2: *a-ka-enda* S3: *ku-m-pa* *Kiboko*  
 day Cl9-Pst-Rel-arrive 3Sg-Narr-go Inf-3Sg-give *Hippopotamus*  
 When the day came, he went to give (it to) *Hippopotamus*.

In 6(a) S2, the sentence can also be read with the object agreement marker as in (7):

(7) S1: *Sungura a-ka-enda* S2: *ku-i-tayar-ish-a* *kamba moja nene*  
 Hare 3Sg-Narr-go Inf-Cl 9-prepare-Caus-Fv rope one big  
*sana.*  
 very  
 Hare went to prepare one very big rope.

However, it is not possible to do away with the object marker when the object is an animate object, as is evident in (8), which is a constructed example:

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<sup>6</sup> Keach (1995) makes a case for obligatory object agreement when the object is animate, but for optional agreement if it is inanimate. Bresnan & Mchombo (1987), in their study of Chichewa, argue that object agreement is basically an incorporated pronoun and claim that the object agreement, and not the overt object, is indeed the object. They further claim that when the object agreement marker is present, word order is free, whereas when the object agreement marker is absent, the word order is rigid. However, in the case of Kiswahili such a diagnostic can only be applicable to the SVO word order and not to the VO one.

(8) a) \**ku-∅-pa* *Kiboko*.

Inf-∅-give Hippopotamus

Intd: To give Hippopotamus.

b) S1: *A-li-m-pima* *baba-ke*.

3Sg-Pst-3Sg-weigh father-Poss

(S)he weighed his/her father.

\**A-li-∅-pima* *baba-ke*.

Intd: (S)he weighed her father

S2: *A-ka-mw-ona* *moto*.

3Sg-Narr-3Sg-see fire

She saw (in him) fire.

S3: *A-ka-m-kisia* *mama-ke*.

3Sg-Narr-3Sg-estimate mother-Poss

She thought about her mother.

(cf: \**A-ka-kisia* *mama-ke*)

3Sg-Narr-estimate mother-Poss

Intd: \*She thought of her mother.

The object agreement marker is, therefore, mandatory for animate objects but optional for inanimate objects. Un Deen (2002: 42-45) convincingly argues for specificity as the determining factor for object agreement in Kiswahili. This paper corroborates Un Deen's finding that object agreement is not optional, but instead, it all depends on the specificity of the object.

### 3.2.3 *The SV word order*

Marked topics can surface as overt lexical nouns or NPs as long as they had already been introduced in the discourse. They surface in the same form in which they were introduced (that is, as lexical NPs or overt pronouns). They are marked because they have the feature of having been introduced earlier in the discourse, i.e. they are old information as in the following example:

(9) Question: *Halima a-li-fanya nini?*

Halima 3Sg-Pst-do what

What did *Halima* do?

Answer: *Halima a-li-ni-piga.*

Halima 3Sg-Pst-1Sg-beat

Halima beat me.

In the above question, the object NP *nini* is introduced for the first time in the question and it is therefore, in focus. Wh-words are often analysed as being inherently being in focus. So *nini* is in focus while *Halima* is topic in both the question and answer. It is worth noting that in both question and answer, the topic surfaces as an overt proper noun even though it is topical (van der Wal, 2014, Krifka, 1995). The overt pronouns only apply to NPs denoting human beings, that is nouns belonging to noun classes 1 and 2. The overt pronouns are *mimi* (me), *wewe* (You (singular)), *yeye* (he/she), *sisi* (we), *ninyi/nyinyi* (You (Plural)), and *wao* (them). The following example from the narrative *Malipo Duniani Hesabu Ahera* (Said, 1972: 12) illustrates the use of the third person singular *yeye* (he) (refer to example 4).

In the said example (S6), the overt pronoun *yeye* (he) refers to *Kombo*, who has already been introduced in the preceding discourse and is already known by the interlocutors. It is therefore, old information and topical in nature. Pronouns can sometimes be used as topics (when they occur in subject position) but other times they are used as focus constituents (when in object position) when they are governed by the object marker (Krifka, 1995: 1409). When they are in focus position, they express focus, which will be explained later.

It is worth noting that Kiswahili inflected verbs do function as complete sentences with both subjects and objects being reflected in the incorporated pronouns. According to the Minimalist Program, once a derivation converges, there is no need of the derivation undergoing any further processes. Now, when we have fully incorporated verbs and overt subjects, which are evident in V word orders, what do these presumed

subjects stand for if they occur in SV constructions? The following examples may help us to understand this complexity:

- (10) S1: *Tembo a-ka-anza* S2: *ku-vuta*  
 Elephant 3Sg-Narr-begin Inf-pull  
 Elephant begun to pull.  
 S3: *Kiboko na-ye<sup>7</sup> a-ka-anza* S4: *ku-vuta*  
 Hippopotamus conj-3Pron 3Sg-Narr-begin Inf-pull  
 And Hippopotamus begun to pull.

In these examples, even though the two arguments, *Elephant* and *Hippopotamus*, are overt subjects, they are not new information as they have been mentioned over and over again in the narrative text. As such, because of their old information status, they are topic elements. However, in the derivation they cannot be reintroduced for a second time. Instead, they appear as incorporated pronouns, hence old information, that is, as topics. But if the overt NPs occur as old information they are also topics as shown in example 10 S1 and S3. Hence, both the overt NPs and the incorporated pronouns are topic elements.

#### 3.2.4 *The SVO word order*

According to van der Wal (2014: 1-2), the majority of the Bantu languages, apart from having agglutinative inflectional and derivational morphology, they also have SVO as their canonical word orders. This claim is supported by a number of other Bantuists (Polome 1967, Myachina 1981, Mdee 1986, Mwamzandi 2014). The SVO word order is also claimed to be the unmarked word order for Kiswahili (Un Deen, 2002: 17). SVO simply means the order when both the subject and object are expressed by overt NPs. However, from a morphological analysis, it is evident that the Kiswahili complex verb functions as a complete clause. Nevertheless, when syntactic movements take place, the material in the verb remains intact; it never gets

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<sup>7</sup> *na-ye* is marked with the use of the conjunction *na-* and the pronoun *-ye*.

disorganized in any way. It is only the other words, such as the subject and/or the object that change position (refer to examples in (1)). The occurrence of the inflected verb is sufficient for the derivation to converge as it is sufficient to convey all the information required by the interlocutors. The occurrence of the overt subject and object in Kiswahili is, therefore, motivated by pragmatic concerns.

#### 4 FOCUS AND WORD ORDER IN KISWAHILI

The term *focus* has been used in two distinct ways. First it has been used to mean items or elements being “in focus”, which is a psychological notion of ‘focus of attention’. Secondly, it has been used linguistically to refer to the notion of focus as the position of linguistic prominence in the part of the sentence that expresses the comment (Gundell et al., 1993: 279). Kroeger (2012) defines focus on the basis of Lambrecht (1994) as the essential piece of information that is carried by a sentence. The most widespread definition of focus is that focus involves alternatives (cf. Krifka, 1985, 1995 and subsequent work). It is worth noting that, in a sense, each and every sentence does have a focus because, in every situation, the interlocutors’ main objective is to convey information. This paper adopts Kiss’s (1995: 15) idea that focus refers to that part of the sentence that carries “NEW” information and also functions as an operator expressing identification and contrast. Pragmatically, focused elements are meant to highlight what the speaker wants to bring into the focus of attention. A linguistically focused element, having been introduced in the discourse, is likely to be in topic position in subsequent utterances in the discourse. However, even though linguistic form is crucial in determining what is to be focused, focus cannot be dealt with adequately in syntax; eventually the actual determination of in focus material relies more on pragmatic factors than syntactic ones.

Another method used to categorise focus is the informational structural one which uses the terms “New” versus “Old”.<sup>19</sup> Other terms used to describe these focus types are “explicit focus” vs. “implicit focus” (Garrod

& Sanford: 1982), and “Givenness” (Prince 1981b, Gundell et al., 1993: 275). The proponents of the Givenness theory postulate that what is known is represented as the Givenness Hierarchy, as shown below:

(11) The Givenness Hierarchy (Gundell et al, 1993:275)<sup>8</sup>

In Focus > Activated > familiar > uniquely identifiable > referential > Type  
 identifiable

(it)	that	(that N)	(the N)	(Indefinite)	[a N]
	This				(this N)
	This N				

#### 4.1 Focus position in Kiswahili

The term “focus projection” has its origin in Chomsky (1971), where he observed that in a sentence like the following, in which he indicates focus by using brackets, any of the constituents in brackets may be regarded as a focus:

(12) He was (warned (to look out for (an ex-convict (with (a red (SHIRT)))))).

Chomsky also assumes that focus is a property of phrases and hence can be appropriately dealt with using syntactic methods.

According to San-Ah et al. (2007), focus projection can be accounted for by the interaction between argument types and grammatical functions rather than purely syntactic structure. Languages exploit various mechanisms to portray focus. They can exploit prosodic mechanisms such as accent and pitch or even morphological mechanisms, which include noun

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<sup>6</sup> Gundell refers to these hierarchies as statuses and not hierarchies. Prince (1981b), the one who originally came up with the idea of “Givenness”, on the other hand, suggested the following preference hierarchy:

**Familiarity Scale:**

{Evoked } > Unused > Inferable > Containing inferable > Brand new  
 Anchored > Brand new  
 {Situationally evoked}

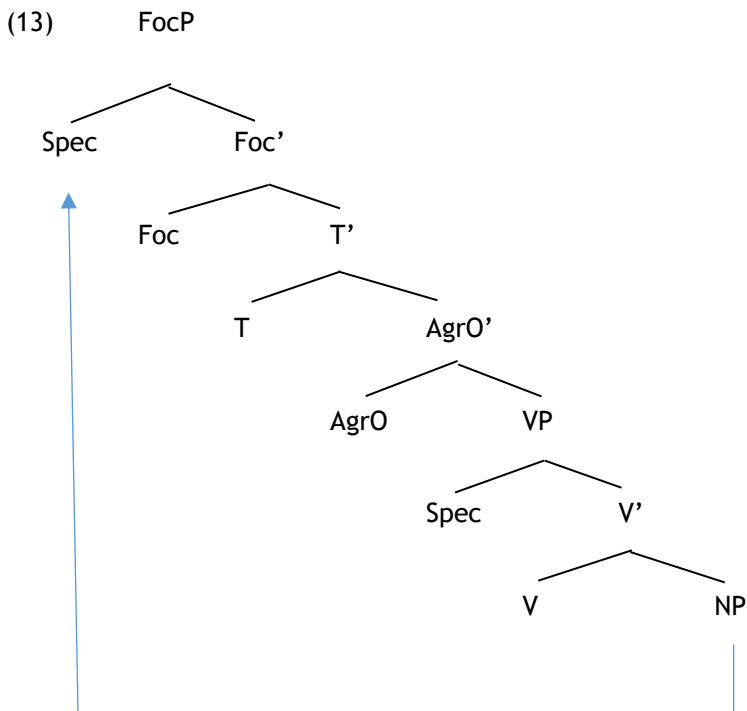


incorporation as well as syntactic devices such as fronting/preposing (some scholars call it pre-verbal position) (see Gundell et al. 1993; van der Wal 2014, 2016).

Focus constructions have varying syntactic effects across languages. In some languages, focus is encoded *in situ* whereas in other languages it is encoded *ex situ*. In the latter group of languages, focus induces an array of constructions that deviate from the canonical word orders, such as clefts or dislocations (Skopeteas, 2008: 1). In Kiswahili, focus is encoded either *in situ* or *ex situ*. Focus *in situ* occurs in object position and represents the so-called unmarked focus, whereas focus *ex situ* surfaces in the subject position. Focus *in situ* is licensed by the object marker for animate objects (syntactic verb-object agreement according to Krifka 1995: 1407).

Different scholars have associated the focus position with different syntactic positions. Focus is associated with a structural position at the beginning of a sentence. Some refer to the landing site for the focus element as being pre-predicate (or even pre-verbal) position, which means that the focused elements occupy the leftmost part of the matrix clause or what is commonly referred to as the left-periphery (Hovarth 1986: 149, Skopeteas & Verhoeven 2015: 27, Skopeteas & Fanselow 2008a: 10, Abraham & de Meij, 1986) and others. Kiss (2007: 78) claims that the structural positions for both topic and focus are in the left-periphery, positions which are associated with logical rather than discourse functions.

Jerono (2012:147), using the Minimalist Program to analyse Tugen word order, postulates that pronominal arguments under emphasis bear an extra focus [+F] feature and are represented by a double strategy whereby the lexical pronoun occurs together with the incorporated pronominal argument and these arguments that are in focus appear at SPEC/FP or SPEC/CP. The Tugen language which is the source of her data is a Nilotic language, which is quite different from Kiswahili structurally. In this paper, we adopt Jerono's proposition of focus position being in the Spec FP position, and, thereby, the following structural configuration for focus projection:



Skopeteas & Fanselow (2008a: 63) claim that focus constituents target the maximally prominent position within the relevant prosodic domain<sup>9</sup>. Syntactically, the maximally prominent position is achieved via fronting. The focused element is said to be fronted in order to avoid a configuration with ambiguous focus interpretations (Skopeteas & Verhoeven, 2015: 63). Thus it normally moves from the V to the head of Foc position to check for the [+F] features as shown with the arrows in the above structure.

In summary, the focused elements occupy the Focus position in the phrase structure. This is a position that occurs in sentence-initial position for the unmarked focus structure. However, we can have marked focus constituents *in situ*, that is in object position.

<sup>9</sup> It should be stressed, though, that it is not necessarily the case that the maximally prominent position in the domain is always interpreted as focused as languages vary in the ways in which they employ to satisfy the focus targets.

#### 4.2 Focus and the VO word order

Unmarked foci in Kiswahili surface *in situ*. They are base-generated in object position. Consider the following example:

(14) S1: *Sasa hapo utungu hu-end-e-le-a* S2: *na m-toto yu-ko*  
 Now there pain Hab-go-Ben-Ben-mood and CL1-child CL1-is  
*karibu sasa;*

near now

And the pain continues and the child is about to come out

S3: *wakati 'ta-kuwa m-toto* S4: *a-me-toka* S5: *tu-na-omba*  
 time ø-Fut-be CL1-child 3Sg-Perf-come out 3Pl-Prog-pray  
*dua*

prayer

When the child will have come out (be born), we recite a prayer

S6: *ambapo tu-na-mw-ita Mwenyezi Mungu na M-tume wa-ke.*  
 Rel-Cl16 3Sg-Prog-Cl 1 Almighty God and CL1-prophet CL1-Poss  
 Whereby we call upon Almighty God and His Prophet.

In the above example, S3, S5, and S6 illustrate the VO word order in which the object occurs in object position. There is no overt subject in these examples (cf. with S1 and S2, which have an SV word order). The unmarked focus in S3 *mtoto*, which should have been in subject position, remains in its base position (sentence final position) due to focus. But in 15, *mtoto huyu*, which is a topic, has been postposed. The focus element *ni moto* and the whole construction is a nominal-predicate construction. There is no object position in this construction type.

(15) *Ni moto mtoto huyu.*  
 Cop hot CL1-child Dem  
 This child is hot.

#### 4.2 Focus and the SV word order

In Kiswahili, marked focus can only surface as *ex situ*. The marked focus constructions are instances of movement of the focused elements from their base position in object position to the sentence-initial (subject) position. The following example from the narrative *Ushaufu* illustrates focused elements occurring *ex situ*:

- (16) a) *M-toto<sub>i</sub> tu-ka-m-ramb-ish-a t<sub>i</sub> asali kw-enye m-domo*  
 CL1-child 3Pl-Narr-3Sg-taste-Caus-mood honey Inf-Poss CL3-mouth  
*wa-ke.*

CL3-Poss.

We make the child to lick honey placed in his/her mouth.

- b) *U-ka-m-pat-i-a ule amba-o 'uko karibu m-toto<sub>i</sub>*  
 2Sg-Narr-3Sg-give-Ben-mood Dem Rel-CL6 is near CL1-child  
*a-ka-m-poke-a t<sub>i</sub>.*  
 3Sg-Narr-3Sg-receive-mood e

You give the child to the person nearest to you, and (s)he receives him/her.

- c) *Ki-tovu<sub>i</sub> twa-li-ki-ki-pima t<sub>i</sub> u-kovu-te yaani*  
 CL7-navel 1Pl-pst-CL7-Refl-measure CL14-scar-poss that is  
*shubiri moja*

about nine inches

We would measure the scar on the navel that is about nine inches.

- d) S1: *Badala ya ku-zika mji, S2: mzazi, kabla ya t<sub>i</sub> kw-enda*  
 After of Inf-bury placenta parent before of Inf-go  
*choo-ni S3: tu-li-kuwa S4: tu-ki-m-pa-ti-a kahawa*  
 toilet-Loc 2Pl-Pst-be 2Pl-Cond-3Sg-give-Ben-Fv coffee

S5: *amba-po ni mdalasini S6: i-na-pik-w-a kahawa vile*  
 Rel-CL16 is cinnamon CL9-Prog-cook-Pass-Fv coffee that

After burying the placenta, before the parent visited the toilet,  
 we gave her coffee that was cooked in cinnamon.

The marked focus *mtoto* (child) in 16(a) and (b) originates from the object of the verb position. However, as illustrated by the trace, this element moves in both (a) and (b) to a higher structural position in the tree. These are examples of focus elements surfacing *ex situ*, which are all marked foci. In 16(c), the unmarked focus *kitovu* (navel), which is the indirect object is fronted. In 15(d) the marked focus *mzazi*, is moved from its base position after the adverb *kabla ya* (before) to the sentence-initial position. All these are examples of focus *ex situ*.

### 4.3 Focus and the SVO word order

The subject position may also be a focus one as long as the argument in it is new information. The subject in 17 is new information and, hence, is focus. In Kiswahili, though, *wh*-words are usually in focus and they normally occur in sentence-final position. Focus can also surface in an SVO construction, as in the following example:

- (17) *Je, wewe u-na-fikiri vipi?*  
 Question particle 'you' 2Sg-Prog-think what  
 What do you think?

The *Wh*-word *vipi* is in object position. The sentence has an SVO structure.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Using authentic texts, this paper analysed topic, focus, and word order in Kiswahili. It has established that the V word order is the most frequent one in the language, followed by the VO word order, the SV word order, the SVO word order, and the verbless clauses. It transpires from the paper that when the subject and the verb occur overtly, the normal word order is the SVO. However, when the subject and object do not surface overtly, the word order varies. Based on the word order frequency, it is clear that the basic word order in Kiswahili is the V word order while the default word order is the VO order.

The paper has also established that word order cannot be established on the basis of syntactic information alone. It has to incorporate pragmatic information. Based on that, topic and focus have been analysed using the information structure theory. Topics have been shown to surface in two forms: marked and unmarked. Marked topics are represented by overt lexical NPs and overt pronouns while unmarked topics are represented by the incorporated pronouns. Topics generally represent old information. Focus has also been shown to surface in two ways: marked and unmarked. Unmarked focus surfaces *in situ* whereas marked focus surfaces *ex situ*. Both *focus in situ* and *focus ex situ* are represented by overt lexical NPs and their complements. In the analysis of the Kiswahili structure in this paper, topic and focus are what have traditionally been referred to as subjects and objects.

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