The Immediate Before the Verb Focus Position in Nsong (Bantu B85d, DR Congo): A corpus-based exploration

Joseph Koni Muluwa and Koen Bostoen
Kwilu Bantu DoBeS Documentation Project
Department of Languages and Cultures
Ghent University

1 Introduction[1]

Nsong is a western Bantu language spoken in the neighbourhood of Kikwit (5°2'28"S 18°48'58"E, Kwilu District, Bandundu Province, DRC) and encoded as B85d in the New Updated Guthrie List (Maho 2009). To this B80 or Tiene-Yanzi group also belongs Mbuun, encoded as B87 by Guthrie (1971: 39) and spoken in the wider vicinity of Idiofa (4°57'35"S 19°35'40", Kwilu District, Bandundu Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo). Both languages are closely related. They share a high percentage of fundamental and other vocabulary as well as several rather atypical phonological innovations (Bostoen & Koni Muluwa 2014; Koni Muluwa 2014; Koni Muluwa & Bostoen 2012). Preliminary elicitation-based research on Mbuun has pointed out that the pre-verbal domain plays a crucial role in the marking of argument focus in Mbuun (Bostoen & Mundeke 2011, 2012). In this paper, we assess whether this is also the case in Nsong on the basis of a text corpus which the first author has been collecting, transcribing and annotating in 2013 and 2014 as part of an endangered language documentation project funded by the DoBeS program of the Volkswagen Foundation through a 3-year grant (2012-2015). More information on the project can be found on http://www.kwilubantu.ugent.be/. This Nsong text corpus exclusively consists of oral discourse and currently counts 48.022 tokens and 11.973 types. The team's 2013 fieldwork aimed at documenting Nsong speech events in as many different cultural settings as possible. As a result, the corpus comprises different text genres, such as political speeches, historical traditions, folk music, tales, proverbs, hunting language, ceremonial language used during circumcision and twin rites, and popular biological knowledge. In line with previous research on Mbuun, we concentrate here on mono-clausal argument focus constructions, even if preliminary research has pointed out that bi-clausal focus structures are more common in the Nsong corpus.[2]

---

[2] In an earlier version of this paper, presented at the Workshop on the Syntax/Phonology/Information Structre of Preverbal Domains in Bantu Languages

Unlike in many other Bantu languages (see Buell *et al.* 2011 for an overview), a focused argument cannot occur in the Immediate After the Verb (IAV) position in Mbuun (Bostoen & Mundeke 2011, 2012). Focalising a non-verbal constituent in Nsong also involves deviations from SVO word order within the main clause. In anticipation of frequency tests, SVO is considered to be canonical in Nsong, as is commonly the case in Bantu (Bearth 2003). The object is post-verbal in pragmatically unmarked topic-comment structures, also known as 'categorical' statements (Sasse 1987). The example in (1), taken from an animal fable, is such a 'predicate focus' construction (Lambrecht 1994). Its previously introduced subject **ngɔ** 'leopard' is a topic, while the verb phrase that follows consists of newly asserted information.[3]

(1) **N-gɔ**   **[á-twís-í**   **mɔ-cwí**   **á**   **mú-nd]**[FOC]
      NP$_9$-leopard   SM$_1$-take.out-PRF   NP$_3$-head   CONN   NP$_1$-person
      'The leopard TOOK OUT A HUMAN HEAD.'[4]

2   Pre-verbal object focus: (S) O V (ADJ)

As in Mbuun, a focused object can be fronted to the Immediate Before the Verb (IBV) position in Nsong, resulting in a SOV word order. However, this type of object fronting within a mono-clausal setting is not frequently observed in the Nsong text corpus, and even more rarely with a lexical subject preceding the focused object. When representing discourse-old information, the subject tends to be only anaphorically referred to by a verbal subject marker.

The most clear-cut attestations of narrowly focused objects occurring in IBV position are those, as in (2) and (3), where the fronted object is preceded by the focus particle **ámbi**, which gives the focal information an exclusive reading. This particle is probably the cognate of **mbé** in Mbuun, which assumes a similar function (Bostoen & Mundeke 2012: 151). In (2), the speaker emphasizes that the first author, when inquiring about sexual taboos, is only doing his job.

(Berlin, ZAS, November 14-15 2014), we did present a preliminary typology of cleft-like focus constructions in Nsong. More research is needed, however, to make these data publishable.

3   The following abbreviations are used: CONN = connective, CONS = consecutive, DEM = demonstrative, =[FOC] = focus, FP = focus particle, FUT = future, HAB = habitual, IMP = imperative, NEG = negative, NP$_x$ = noun prefix of class x, OM$_x$ = object marker of class x, PP = pronominal prefix, PRF = perfect, PROG = progressive, PST = past, SM$_x$ = subject marker of class x, [TOP] = topic

4   Nsong is a 7V language whose second-degree vowel phonemes are realized as [ɪ] and [ʊ]. The vowels [e] and [o] only occur as allophones of the third degree vowels ɛ and ɔ in prefixes and suffixes which undergo ATR conditioned vowel harmony (Koni Muluwa & Bostoen 2008: 4-5).

(2) [ámbi ɛ́ -sal]^{FOC} kó-kir-ɛ́
     FP NP$_7$-work   SM$_1$-do-PRF
     'He does WORK (and nothing else).'

In (3), an interviewee stresses that people just know the names of the mushrooms that are eaten. Edible mushrooms are also the only one to be referred to by the generic name **bɔɔ**.

(3) [ámbi bɔ-ɔ]^{FOC} kɛ-wá-yíb-í   é-jín
     FP NP$_{14}$-mushroom SM$_{1PL}$-HAB-know-PRF NP$_5$-name
     'We know (only) THE MUSHROOMS (and nothing else) by their name.'

Contrastively focused objects not preceded by **ámbi** can also be observed in IBV, as in (4), where the speaker highlights the fronted object **mbáː** 'fire' in order to criticise modern society, where conflicts are settled in court instead of around the fire as their ancestors used to do.

(4) ma-lim   ma   bús   N-daá   li e-bu-í   [N-báː]^{FOC}
     NP$_6$-uncle CONN$_6$ us   NP$_9$-problem if SM$_9$-fall-PRF NP$_9$-fire
     ba-wá-kwésél-ɛ́   mɔ-ɛ-bwankɔ́ː
     SM$_2$-HAB-light-PRF   NP$_{18}$-NP$_7$-morning
     'Our uncles, if a problem occurred, they lit THE FIRE in the morning.'

Questioned objects, as those in (5) and (6) are also found in IBV position, although question words targeting the object, such as **nki** 'what?' and **ná** 'whom?' generally occur post-verbally.

(5) [mɛ-ɛc   kwɛ́]^{FOC} ɔ-wá-bwíl ?
     NP$_4$-river how.many   SM$_{2SG}$-HAB-cross
     'HOW MANY RIVERS do you (habitually) cross?' (rhetorical question)

The questioned object in (6) appears in between the topical subject, which is exceptionally overt here, and the verb. This indicates that the mono-clausal topic and IBV focus positions are clearly distinct and that the former is rather clause-initial than strictly pre-verbal.

(6) mɔ-án   wú   [ná   N-daa]^{FOC} ka-mú-kwé-bé-bwíl ?
     NP$_1$-child DEM$_1$ which NP$_9$-problem   SM$_1$-FUT-go-OM$_{1PL}$-cross.APPL
     'WHICH PROBLEM will this child cause us?'   (rhetorical question)

Not all pre-verbal objects are clear instances of narrowly focused arguments. The object **ɛ́baan** 'skin' which Fumu fronts to IBV position in (7b), for instance, does not convey new information. His interlocutor Mambo, who sends out a third person to collect wood for baking an animal skin, has just asserted this object post-verbally in (7a). The object is not exclusively focused either. Fumu rather emphasizes that the skin is already being baked, in contrast to what Mambo seems to assume, and that it is consequently not necessary to go and fetch wood.

(7) a. **Mambo:** Kembamb, lingí   mɛ́-ʃal   ké-fúmb
              Kembamba search.IMP NP$_4$-wood SM$_{1PL}$-bake.in.ashes
              ɛ-báán!
              NP$_7$-skin
              'Kembamba, search wood so that we bake the skin!'

     b. **Fumu:**   [ɛ́-baan]$^{FOC?}$ ké-fumb!
              NP$_7$-skin   SM$_{1PL}$-bake.in.ashes
              'We are baking THE SKIN in ashes!'

The fronted object in (7b) might be simply clause-initial here and not in IBV focus position. As we show in Sections 3 and 4, objects can also be fronted to a topic position in the beginning of the clause when another argument is narrowly focused in IBV focus position.

3 Pre-verbal subject focus: (O) S V (ADJ)

As in Mbuun, the object can also move away from its canonical post-verbal position in Nsong, when another argument, such as the subject, is narrowly focused. In that case the object moves to clause-initial position resulting in an OSV word order. This OSV construction, along with an impersonal 3PL construction, has been analysed as the functional or translational equivalent of a true morphological passive in Mbuun (Bostoen & Mundeke 2011). Just like Mbuun, Nsong does not have a reflex of the Proto-Bantu passive allomorphs ***-ʊ-** and ***-ibʊ-**. It needs further study to determine whether another suffix evolved into a dedicated passive marker.

  In contrast to the (S)OV main clause word order, OSV is much better attested in our Nsong text corpus. As shown in (8) to (13), the subject represents the focal information in such constructions. The fronted object consists of given information and is thus topical. As far as our current knowledge of Nsong morphosyntax and our present research on the corpus allow to judge, the

sentence-initial object seems to be clause-internal, since it is not co-referenced by a resumptive pronoun on or behind the verb.

In (8), the clause-initial constituent **mɔkwɛr awún** 'this (forbidden) plate' is such a topical object followed by the focused subject **bakéts ba bá** 'their wives'. This constituent represents the most salient pragmatic information, since the speaker wants to stress that the current-day disappointing hunts are due to hunter's wives no longer respecting traditional food taboos.

(8) **mɔ-kwɛr awún** **[ba-kéts ba   bá]**^{FOC} **ba-wɔ́l   lá-lá:m,**
    NP3-plate DEM3   NP2-wife CONN2 they   SM2-take   CONS-cook
    ba-lá-dya
    SM2-CONS-eat
    'THEIR WIVES take and prepare that (forbidden) plate, (and) then eat (it).'

It strikes that our Nsong text corpus contains many examples of focused subjects referring to one of the speech participants, as in (9) to (12). This could be due to the fact that it consists mostly of conversations. In such a case, the subject is not simply rendered by a verbal subject marker, as is the case when the subject is topical. It also expressed through an overt personal pronoun, which is moreover prosodically marked. When focused, it always carries a high tone, while it is usually low, as can been seen in (9), where a low vocative **nzɛ** 'you' contrasts with a high focused **nzɛ́** 'you'. The topical object **ɛlɛts** 'appointment' precedes the focused object again. The speaker stresses here that the appointment entirely depended on his interlocutor. As a wine tapper, he is the only one who knows when palm wine is available.

(9) **nzɛ   pa-ná   o-yi   ngɛ́m,   ɛ-lɛts   [nzɛ́]**^{FOC}
    you   PP16-DEM SM2SG-be wine.tapper NP7-appointment you
    a-ngú-sa
    SM2SG-PST-fix
    'You here, you are the wine tapper, YOU fixed the appointment.'

In (10) the speaker guarantees that he will be the one to provide the money needed for enabling a palaver. The object **nʒĭm** 'money' is discourse-old and appears clause-initially.

(10) **N-ʒĭm   [mɛ́]**^{FOC} **e-tús**
    NP9-money   me   SM1SG-put.out
    'I put out the money.'

In (11), Chief Kobongo emphasizes that his generation no longer knows about how blacksmiths used to forge bracelets, because they have never seen the bellows functioning. The object **myânz** 'bellows', which has been mentioned before, is clause-initial.

(11) **mé-anz**   **[busú]**[FOC] **ku-bɛ-ngwí-tén**   **lɔ́ː**
     NP4-bellow   we   NEG-SM1PL-PST-find   NEG
     'WE did not find the bellows.'

The speaker in (12) stresses that no lawyer is needed for the next palaver, since he guarantees to plead himself. The topical object is moved to clause-initial position, while the adjunct remains post-verbal.

(12) **N-saŋ**   **ayí**   **[mɛ]**[FOC] **e-múkɔ́-báːl**   **mu-ba-mbál!**
     NP9-palaver   DEM9   I   SM1SG-N.FUT-argue   NP18- NP2-Mbala
     'I will treat this case with the Mbala!'

Focused subjects can also be preceded by the focus particle **ámbi** in order to get an exclusive reading. The speaker in (13) emphasises here that no one else but his interlocutor is responsible for him receiving the aforementioned fine. The topical object **ewúk lí** 'this fine' is moved to clause-initial position, while the adverbial **yɔ́ːn** 'yesterday' remains post-verbal.

(13) **e-wúk**   **lí**   **[ámbi** **nzɛ́]**[FOC] **a-m-pɛ́**   **yɔ́ːn**
     NP5-fine   DEM5   FP   you   SM2SG-OM1SG-give.PST   yesterday
     'YOU (and no one else) gave me this fine yesterday.'

One could argue that subjects are focused in their canonical pre-verbal position. However, the fact that subject focus involves the movement of topical objects to clause-initial position is another indication that the canonical position of a topical subject, as in an unmarked topic-comment structure, is not pre-verbal, but rather clause-initial. The IBV focus site simply remains empty then, while both focused objects and subjects are moved to that position in the case of focus on a core argument. The association between topicality and clause-initiality is further corroborated by the fact that subjects occur behind the verb in 'out-of-the-blue' declarations whose propositional content is all new, also known as a 'thetic' statements (Sasse 1987) or 'sentence focus' constructions (Lambrecht 1994), as in (14), which is the beginning of a story. It starts with the typical opening formula **ákɛ́l yí** 'he was with'. The subject **múnd mwɛ́s** 'one man', which is neither topical nor narrowly focused, occurs in the post-verbal position.

In the following clause, which is a topic-comment construction, the subject is only anaphorically referred to by a verbal subject marker. The object **nziŋ évul** 'numerous traps' is post-verbal.

(14) á-kɛ́l   yí   mú-nd   mwɛ́s, **ka-tí**   **N-zïŋ**
      SM₁-be. PST   with NP₁-person one   SM₁-set.PST   NP₁₀-trap
      é-vul
      PP₁₀-numerous
      'There was one man, he set a lot of (squirrel) traps.'

4   Pre-verbal adjunct focus: (O) (S) ADJ V

As in Mbuun, where focused adverbials (except time adverbials) remain in their canonical post-verbal position, adjuncts can be focussed post-verbally in Nsong, as shown in (28) below. However, in contrast to Mbuun, fronting of adjuncts to the IBV position does also occur in Nsong, as exemplified in this section. This operation also involves the fronting of topical objects to clause-initial position. Since the latter is not co-referenced by a resumptive pronoun in or behind the verb, it can be assumed to be clause-internal and not left-dislocated. The topical subject tends to be solely expressed through a verbal subject marker, as in (15) to (17).

(15) **mɔ-kwɛ́b**   **wa**   **nzên** [**mɔ-má-in**   **ma**   **baŋ-á-baŋ**]ᶠᴼᶜ
     NP₃-coffin   CONN₃   him   NP₁₈-NP₆-earth   CONN₆   empty-empty
     bɛ-bá-sá   **lɔ́ː**
     SM₁ₚₗ-NEG-put   NEG
     'We do not put his coffin ON/IN THE NAKED EARTH.'

In (16) and (17), the focalized adverbials are locative demonstratives. Their deictic goal, to which the speaker points, represents new information.

(16) **ɛ-baan**   **é-nsɔ́**   [**kú**]ᶠᴼᶜ   **a-bá-kúl**   **lɔ́ː**
     NP₇-skin   PP₇-all   there   SM₂ₛG-NEG-remove   NEG
     'You have not removed all the skin THERE.'

(17) **bɔ́-sɛ́s**   [**pá**]ᶠᴼᶜ   **ɔ-bá-mɔ́n**
     NP₁₄-mushroom sp.   here   SM₂ₛG-NEG-see
     'You do not see the *Termytomyces microcarpus* HERE.'

If the subject is lexically represented, which is rare, it occurs in between the fronted object and the fronted adjunct, as the subject **bambút bá bús** 'our ancestors' does in (18).

(18) lɔ-haŋ   la   mɔ-áŋ   ba-mbút   bá   bús   [ébun]^{FOC}

     NP11-rite CONN11 NP3-ring NP2-elder CONN2 us   so

     ba-wá-sɛ́ː

     SM2-HAB-put.PRF

     'SO did our ancestors the enthronement ceremony.'

The manner question word **ebwín** 'how' is most often found in pre-verbal position, as in (19) and (20), though not exclusively, as shown in (21). Other adverbial question words, such as **(sâm á) nki** 'why' and **kwín** 'where', are also observed both pre- and post-verbally.

(19) nzɛ́ mɔ́-an   á   mɛ́ wu-kɔbɔ́ŋ-kɔbɔ́ŋ   [ebwín]^{FOC}

     you NP1-child CONN1 me PP1-beautiful-beautiful how

     ɔ-lá-ʃím ?

     SM2SG-CONS-catch

     'You, HOW have you (subsequently) caught this very beautiful child of mine?'

(20) N-bicí   o-pfǐ   wu   kɔ-ɛ́-tíl   [ebwín]^{FOC}

     NP9-animal SM1-die.PST DEM1 NP17-NP7-hunt how

     ɔ-wá-sɛ́ ?

     SM1-HAB-put.PRF

     'HOW did you use to arrange the animal that died at the ceremonial hunt?'

In (21), both the subject **mɛ** 'I' and the object **mwan wá** 'that child' seem to be left-dislocated. The latter is co-referenced by a resumptive object marker on the verb.

(21) mɔ-áŋ   wá mɛ ku-mo-ʃiːm   lɔ́ː [ebwín]^{FOC} ?

     NP1-child DEM1 I   NEG-OM1-catch NEG how

     'That child, me, WHY do I not catch it?'

In (22), **ebwín** 'how' is moved in front of an 'impersonal 3PL construction', a passive-like construction also occurring in Mbuun (Bostoen & Mundeke 2011) and known as 'ba-passive' elsewhere in Bantu (e.g. Kula & Marten 2010).

(22) lɔ-háŋ   [ebwín]$^{\text{FOC}}$ bɔ́-wá-sa   mɔ-ɛ-nsɔŋ ?
      NP$_{11}$-rite   how   SM$_2$-HAB-put   NP$_{18}$-NP$_7$-Nsong
      'How is this rite carried out in Nsong tradition ?'

Focused adverbials can also be accompanied by the focus particle **ámbi** and receive an exclusive reading, as illustrated in (23), where the speaker stresses that he paid his interlocutor yesterday (and no other day), but that the latter consumed it immediately on the same day.

(23) héέɛ [ámbi yɔ́nɔ́]$^{\text{FOC}}$ mɛ N-ɛ-pɛ́   [ámbi   yɔ́nɔ́]$^{\text{FOC}}$
      yes   FP   yesterday   me SM$_{1\text{SG}}$-OM$_{2\text{SG}}$-give.PST   FP   yesterday
      a-dí
      SM$_{2\text{SG}}$-eat.PST
      'Yes! I paid you YESTERDAY. You ate YESTERDAY.'

5 Infinitive fronting

Our Nsong text corpus also contains several cases of verb doubling whereby an infinitive precedes the conjugated main verb. These fronted infinitives manifest several correspondences with fronted arguments, both structurally and functionally. Fronted infinitives are either focus or topic.

   When focused, fronted infinitive constructions convey 'predication focus', i.e. focus centred on the predicate, but excluding objects and adjuncts (Güldemann 2003: 330-331). Such predicate-centred focus constructions are widespread in Bantu and particularly prolific in parts of Guthrie's zones B and H (De Kind *et al.* forthcoming; Güldemann 2003; Hadermann 1996). The sentence in (24) is an example of such a focused fronted infinitive. It was uttered during a conversation on marriage customs, more specifically incest taboos. The speaker emphasizes here that there are always cases in which the taboo on incest is not respected. The subject is clearly topical, while the doubled verb unmistakably conveys the most salient pragmatic information. The fronted infinitive **kokwúː** appears in IBV position in between the clause-initial topic and the finite verb. As a nominalised verb form, the focused infinitive thus behaves as narrowly focused nominal constituents do.

(24) ɛ-tak   akín   [ko-kwúː]$^{\text{FOC}}$ ɛ-wá-kwuː
      NP$_7$-taboo   DEM$_7$ NP$_{15}$-leave   SM$_7$-HAB-leave
      'This taboo CAN ALWAYS BE ABOLISHED.'

Another parallel with focused nominal constituents is the fact that a focused fronted infinitive can also be accompanied by the exclusive focus particle **ámbi**, as in (25). An adult stresses here that he was just testing a child when he sent him out to carry out some task. Such a test is part of traditional education. If the child gets up and does what he is ordered to do, the adult stops and rewards him.

(25) [ámbi   kɔ-mɛ́k]^{FOC} N-yɛ́-ɛ́-mɛ́k-ɛ́!
    FP   NP$_{15}$-test   SM$_{1SG}$-PROG-OM$_{2SG}$-test-PRF
    'I WAS JUST TESTING you!'

A further correspondence with fronted non-verbal constituents is that fronted infinitives can also be focused through a bi-clausal cleft-like construction, as in (26). The example is structurally comparable to the one in (25), except that the fronted infinitive is followed here by a co-referential relativizer of class 15, which is repeated behind the finite verb. This kind of circumpositional relative marking is characteristic of indirect relative constructions in Nsong. The propositional content of the verb is highlighted here as an answer to the question how the ancestors knew whether a plant was medicinal or not.

(26) [kɔ-mɛk]^{FOC} ku   ba-wá-mɛ́k-ɛ́   ku
    NP$_{15}$-test   REL$_{15}$ SM$_2$-PROG-test-PRF   REL$_{15}$
    'It was TESTING which they tested.'

However, not all fronted infinitives are predicate-centred focus constructions. They can also be relative-like left-dislocations conveying discourse-old information, as in (27) and (28). The sentence in (27) was stated during an interview on the migration history of the Nsong people. The speaker here answers the question why they settled where they currently live.

(27) [ko-túŋ   ku   be-túŋǎ]^{TOP} [sâmbu   á   N-ba]^{FOC} [sâmbu
    NP$_{15}$-settle REL$_{15}$ SM$_{1PL}$-settle reason   CONN NP$_{10}$-palm-nut reason
    a   bɛ́-sal   abí   bɛ́-nsɔ]^{FOC}
    CONN NP$_8$-work DEM$_8$ PP$_8$-all
    'As for the settling which we settled, (it was) FOR PALMNUTS, FOR ALL THOSE WORKS.'

The example (28) is similar in that the speaker explains here how they immigrated into the Kwilu region. The adjunct **mɔndɔŋndɔŋ** 'in waves'

representing new information is not fronted here. It is an answer to the question of how the Nsong people settled in their present-day area.

(28) [kɔ-yaː   ku   be-yí   busú kú]^{TOP} bɛ-yɛ́
       NP$_{15}$-come REL$_{15}$ SM$_{1PL}$-come.PRF us   REL$_{15}$ SM$_{1PL}$-come.PRF
       [mɔ-N-dɔŋ-N-dɔŋ]^{FOC}
       NP$_{18}$-NP$_{10}$-wave-NP$_{10}$-wave
       'As for the coming which we came, we came in waves'.

6   Conclusions

The oral corpus data presented in this article confirm that the mono-clausal argument focus constructions elicited in Mbuun also exist in its close relative Nsong. As in Mbuun (Bostoen & Mundeke 2011, 2012) and in Kikongo (De Kind *et al.* forthcoming, De Kind this volume), but unlike in many other Bantu languages (Buell *et al.* 2011), narrowly focused arguments are moved to the Immediate Before the Verb (IBV) position. This focus site can host arguments conveying either identification or information focus. This movement of arguments to IBV position involves deviations from the canonical SVO order, which is attested in unmarked topic-comment structures. Several observations indicate that this IBV focus position is clearly distinct from the clause-initial topic position.

First, object focus triggers (S)OV word order. If the lexical subject is overtly expressed, which is rare in object focus constructions, the focused object is positioned in between the topical subject and the verb.

Second, subject focus triggers OSV word order. In contrast to topical subjects in object focus constructions, topical objects in subject focus positions are often overtly expressed. If so, they cannot occur post-verbally. They need to be fronted to the clause-initial topic position. This indicates that subjects are not simply focused in their canonical pre-verbal position, which is rather a topic site, but moved to the dedicated IBV argument focus site.

This focus site remains empty in topic-comment structures, where the subject is topical and thus clause-initial and the post-verbal object is part of the focused verb phrase. Subjects that are neither narrowly focused nor topical obligatorily appear behind the verb, as evidenced by thetic utterances. This further corroborates the link between topicality and clause-initiality.

The IBV focus site does not only attract core arguments. Unlike in Mbuun, it can also host adjuncts, although focused adjuncts can also appear post-verbally. What is more, one way of expressing predicate-centred focus in Nsong is by fronting the infinitive form of the finite main verb to the IBV position. This

fronted infinitive construction is attested in several other languages of the wider region (De Kind *et al.* forthcoming; Güldemann 2003; Hadermann 1996), where preverbal focus is probably more prominent than assumed so far. Infinitives are not only fronted to IBV position in Nsong, but also to clause-intial position, in which case they are topical.

To conclude, we wish to stress that the mono-clausal OSV word order associated with subject focus is far more prominent in our Nsong text corpus than (S)OV word order associated with object focus. More generally, bi-clausal cleft constructions seem to be much frequent argument focus strategies in natural discourse than word order variations within a mono-clausal structure. A dedicated corpus-based study of different cleft constructions in Nsong is needed. To be continued…

References

Bearth, T. (2003). Syntax. In D. Nurse & G. Philippson (eds.), *The Bantu Languages*, 121-142. London, New York: Routledge.

Bostoen, K. and J. Koni Muluwa. (2014). Umlaut in the Bantu B80 languages of the Kwilu (DRC). *Transactions of the Philological Society* 112: 209-230.

Bostoen, K. and L. Mundeke. (2011). Passiveness and inversion in Mbuun (Bantu B87, DRC). *Studies in Language* 21: 72-111.

Bostoen, K. and L. Mundeke. (2012). Subject Marking and Focus in Mbuun (Bantu, B87). *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 30: 139-154.

Buell, L.C., K. Riedel and J. van der Wal. (2011). What the Bantu languages can tell us about word order and movement. *Lingua* 121: 689–701.

De Kind, J., S. Dom, G.-M. de Schryver and K. Bostoen. forthcoming. Event-centrality and the pragmatics-semantics interface in Kikongo: From predication focus to progressive aspect and vice versa. *submitted for publication in Folia Linguistica Historica*:

Güldemann, T. (2003). Present progressive vis-à-vis predication focus in Bantu. A verbal category between semantics and pragmatics. *Studies in Language* 27: 323–360.

Guthrie, M. (1971). *Comparative Bantu. An introduction to the Comparative Linguistics and Prehistory of the Bantu Languages. Volume 2: Bantu Prehistory, Inventory and Indexes.* London: Gregg International.

Hadermann, P. (1996). Grammaticalisation de la structure 'infinitif + verbe conjugué' dans quelques langues bantoues. *Studies in African Linguistics* 25: 155-196.

Koni Muluwa, J.(2014). *Noms et usages de plantes, animaux et champignons chez les Mbuun, Mpiin, Ngong, Nsong et Hungan en RD Congo* (Tervuren Series for African Language Documentation and Description). Tervuren: Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale.

Koni Muluwa, J. and K. Bostoen. (2008). *Noms et usages de plantes utiles chez les Nsong (RD Congo, bantu B85F).* Göteborg: University of Gothenburg, Department of Oriental and African Languages.

Koni Muluwa, J. and K. Bostoen. (2012). La diphtongaison dans les langues bantu B70-80 (Bandundu, RDC): typologie et classification historique. *Africana Linguistica* 18: 355-386.

Kula, N. and L. Marten. (2010). Argument structure and agency in Bemba Passives. In K. Legère & C. Thornell (eds.), *Bantu Languages: Analyses, Description and Theory*, 115-130. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.

Lambrecht, K. (1994). *Information structure and sentence form* (Cambridge Studies in Linguistics). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Maho, J.F. (2009). NUGL Online: The online version of the New Updated Guthrie List, a referential classification of the Bantu languages (4 juni 2009). (Online file: http://goto.glocalnet.net/mahopapers/nuglonline.pdf)

Sasse, H.-J.r. (1987). The thetic/categorical distinction revisited. *Linguistics* 25: 511-580.