

A dedicated topic position in Kipsigis

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1 Introduction

- Data from African languages have played an important role in the advancement of theories of information structure, with a number of West African languages displaying a variety of topic and focus markers (see Güldemann et al. 2015 for an overview).
- Less attention has been given to East African languages, many of which lack such markers (but see Abels & Muriungi 2008, Asiimwe & van der Wal 2020, among others).
- In this talk, we provide an investigation of a dedicated topic position marked by the particle *ko* in Kipsigis (Nilotic; Kenya). This is, to our knowledge, the first semantic study of topicalization in a Nilotic language.

(1) Kibê:t kó kà-Ø-tʃó:r rabɪnɪk.
Kibeet TOP PST-3-steal money
'Kibeet stole the money.'

- On the empirical side, the data:
 - show that topic markers might be more widespread in East African languages than previously thought (see also Asiimwe & van der Wal 2020 on the Bantu language Rukiga)
 - support the typology of focus and topic in Neeleman et al. (2009), where three features [topic], [focus], and [contrast] are proposed
- On the theoretical side, we argue that the Kipsigis data:
 - point towards a unified analysis of contrastive topics and aboutness topics
 - provide clear evidence *against* analyzing contrastive topics in terms of focus (Wagner 2012)

Roadmap:

- §2 Previous accounts of topichood
- §3 Background on Kipsigis clausal syntax
- §4 The *ko*-position
- §5 Towards an account of *ko* in Kipsigis
- §6 Loose ends

2 Previous accounts of topichood

- Roberts (2011) describes two notions of topics in the literature:
 - subject matter of a text: the topic identifies the entity that the sentence is about, indicates where the information given in the sentence should be stored in the *Common Ground* (Stalnaker 1974)
 - subject-matter of a discussion: the topic identifies a *Question Under Discussion* (Roberts 1996), taken as a central organizing factor in discourse
- Roberts (2011) provides a cross-linguistic overview suggesting that these two notions should not be conflated and must receive independent theoretical modeling, as they are expressed differently across languages.

2.1 Aboutness topics

- The topic identifies the entity that the sentence is about.
- This is often viewed as a “file card” (Heim 1982) onto which the information contained in the sentence is entered, also known as Vallduví’s LINK (Vallduví 1992, Heycock 1994, 2008, Tomioka 2007).

(2) [A man]₁ found [a cat]₂. He₁ took [the cat that he₁ found]₂, home.



- The entity-based view can also be implemented without postulating an independent level of Information Structure: Portner & Yabushita (1998) propose that the Common Ground consists of a set of infinite sequences of pairs, where each pair consists of an entity (the LINK) and a set of possible worlds (the information entered with respect to that LINK).
- An aboutness topic is unmarked in English, but can receive morphological marking in other languages, e.g. Japanese *-wa* marking.

- A common way of eliciting aboutness topics is the following (Reinhart 1981):

(3) **Context:** *Tell me about John!* (Neeleman et al. 2009:31)

Well, [John]_{Topic} is a PhD student enrolled at the University of Lund.

(4) **Context:** *Tell me about that dog!* (Neeleman et al. 2009:31)

[Sono inu]_{Topic}-wa kinoo John-o kande-simatta.

that dog-TOP yesterday John-ACC bite-ended.up

‘The dog bit John yesterday.’

Japanese

- Since aboutness topics are perceived as entity-denoting, certain types of arguments are predicted to not make good aboutness topics:

→ Kiss (1993) reports for Hungarian that only entity-denoting and not quantificational NPs can appear in the designated “topic position”.

→ Tomioka (2007) identifies a class of NPs in Japanese which cannot take the *-wa* marker:

(5) *Anti-topic items in Japanese* (Tomioka 2007:1576)

*daremo-wa / *dareka-wa / *[John-ka Bill]-wa
everyone/anyone-TOP / someone-TOP / John-or Bill-TOP

2.2 Contrastive topics

- Contrastive topics often co-occur with another focus-marked argument in the sentence. Hence, contrastive topic accounts often build on Rooth’s (1992) alternative semantics for focus.

- A common way of eliciting contrastive topics is the following:

(6) **Context:** *Who ate what? What did Fred eat?* (Büring 2003:519)

[FRED]_{Contrastive Topic} ate [the BEANS]_{Focus}.

H* L-H%

= *fall rise contour*

(7) **Context:** *Who ate what?* (Tomioka 2010:123)

[ERika]_{Contrastive Topic}-wa [MAME-o]_{Focus} tabe-ta (kedo)

Erika-TOP beans-ACC eat-PST but

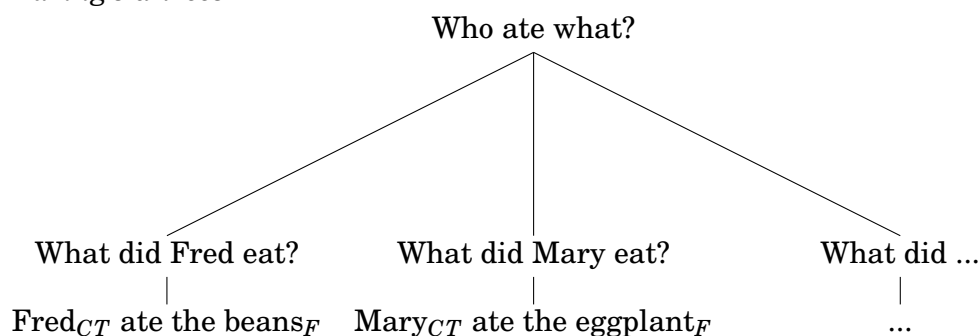
‘Erika ate beans (but) ...’

Japanese

- In contrast to English aboutness topics, English contrastive topics receive a dedicated intonation contour, the so called *B-accent* (Jackendoff 1972); Japanese *-wa* marking also seems to be compatible with contrastive readings.

- Based on Roberts’ (1996) discourse model, which takes the properties of topics/focus to address the *Question Under Discussion* (QUD), Büring (2003) proposes that contrastive topics mark a discourse strategy:

→ A contrastive topic indicates an answer to a sub-question within a strategy aimed at addressing some larger issue.

(8) *Büring's d-trees*

- Büring (2003) connects the prosodic marking (fall rise contour) of the contrastive topic argument to a dedicated CT-value → creates a semantic object which is congruent with at least 2 sister subquestions in a d-tree (a set of a set of propositions).

(9) $[[\text{Fred}]_{CT} \text{ ate } [\text{the beans}]_F]^{ct}$

$$= \{ \text{What did Fred eat? What did Mary eat?, ... } \}$$

$$= \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \{ \text{Fred ate the beans, Fred ate the eggplant, ... } \} \\ \{ \text{Mary ate the beans, Mary ate the eggplant, ... } \} \end{array} \right\}$$

- Other accounts (Tomioka 2010, Wagner 2012, Constant 2014) aim to derive similar semantic readings by making use of focus semantic values only.

3 Background on Kipsigis clausal syntax

- Kipsigis is the major variety of Kalenjin, a cluster of dialects of the Southern Nilotic branch of Nilo-Saharan. It is spoken by approximately 2 million speakers in Kenya (Eberhard et al. 2020).
- Unless otherwise indicated, data in this handout come from original fieldwork with 4 native speakers (online and in Nairobi, Kenya).¹
- The language is pro-drop and verb-initial (Bossi & Diercks 2019), and it has a marked nominative case system (Toweett 1979, Kouneli 2019).² Case is expressed tonally (Kouneli & Nie 2021).

(10) Kò:-Ø-tʃó:r (Kíbê:t) rab:ɪnik.
 PST-3-steal Kibeet.NOM money
 'Kibeet/he stole the money.'

- The default/pragmatically neutral word order is VSO, but there is extensive scrambling post-verbally (Bossi & Diercks 2019).

¹We are grateful to Enock Kirui, Wesley Kirui, Hillary Mosenik, and Philemon Ronoh for their valuable work as linguistic consultants. We provide IPA transcriptions of the Kipsigis data. Tone is transcribed whenever possible, but certain transcriptions are incomplete due to sound difficulties over Skype. Glosses follow the Leipzig glossing rules, with the addition of VENT = ventive.

²See König (2006, 2008), Handschuh (2014) for the typology of these systems and Baker (2015), van Urk (2015) for generative analyses.

- (11) a. Kò:-Ø-tʃó:r Kíbê:t rabɪ:nɪk úmùt. VSO-Adv
 PST-3-steal Kibeet.NOM money yesterday
 ‘Kibeet stole the money yesterday.’
- b. Kò:-Ø-tʃó:r rabɪ:nɪk Kíbê:t úmùt. VOS-Adv
 PST-3-steal money Kibeet.NOM yesterday
 ‘Kibeet stole the money yesterday.’
- c. Kò:-Ø-tʃó:r úmùt Kíbê:t rabɪ:nɪk. V-Adv-SO
 PST-3-steal yesterday Kibeet.NOM money
 ‘Kibeet stole the money yesterday.’

- Bossi & Diercks (2019) argue that scrambling is discourse-based, with discourse-prominent elements occupying the immediately post-verbal position (IPP).
 - They identify the IPP as SpecTP, where elements with a discourse feature move due to an EPP feature.
 - The verb raises to a projection α (higher than T but lower than C) via head movement.
- They show that focused items most naturally occupy the IPP, but they argue that aboutness topics (among others) can also appear there.

- (12) Q: Kà-Ø-ám **nê:** Kíbê:t.
 PST-3-eat what Kibeet.NOM
 ‘What did Kibeet eat?’
- A: Kà-Ø-ám **kímpé:t** Kíbê:t.
 PST-3-eat ugali Kibeet.NOM
 ‘Kibeet ate ugali.’

- They conclude that focus is not the relevant semantic factor driving scrambling, and opt for the more general ‘discourse prominence’ notion.

4 The *ko*-position

4.1 Syntax

- The language has one pre-verbal position, marked by the particle *ko*.

- (13) a. Kà-Ø-ám Kíbê:t kímpé:t.
 PST-3-eat Kibeet.NOM ugali
 ‘Kibeet ate ugali.’
- b. Kíbê:t kó kà-Ø-ám kímpé:t.
 Kibeet TOP PST-3-eat ugali
 ‘Kibeet ate ugali.’

- c. Kímpé:t kó kà-∅-ám Kíbê:t.
 ugali TOP PST-3-eat Kibeet.NOM
 ‘Kibeet ate ugali.’

- The position is restricted to nominals:

- Adverbs cannot occupy the *ko*-position:

- (14) *mù:tjù kó ∅-kè:t-é Kíbê:t.
 slowly TOP 3-drive-IPFV Kibeet.NOM
 ‘Slowly, Kibeet drives.’

- PPs cannot occupy the *ko*-position:³

- (15) *Ak Kíplàngàt kó kà-∅-tʃap-e Kíbê:t amitwa:gik.
 with Kiplangat TOP PST-3-make-IPFV Kibeet.NOM food
 ‘With Kiplangat, Kibeet made food.’

- There is a case alternation for subjects: they bear marked nominative post-verbally, but they are unmarked pre-verbally.

- But *ko* is not a case marker:

- It does not attach to the noun, but rather cliticizes to the verb in fast speech.
- Case is generally marked tonally in the language (Kouneli & Nie 2021).

- There is a V2 effect: only one noun can ever precede the verb.

- (16) a. *Kíbê:t kímpé:t kó kà-∅-ám.
 Kibeet ugali TOP PST-3-eat
 ‘Kibeet ate ugali.’

- b. *Kíbê:t kó kímpé:t kà-∅-ám.
 Kibeet TOP ugali PST-3-eat
 ‘Kibeet ate ugali.’

- Syntactically, the position has many similarities to the pre-verbal position in Dinka (also Nilotic), as described by van Urk (2015).

³The language has few genuine prepositions. For PPs headed by the generic preposition *é:n* ‘at/to/for’, we got mixed results from our consultants: two speakers judged those PPs ungrammatical, but another two simply noted they were degraded.

4.2 *Ko* marks topics

- The most salient interpretation of nouns in the *ko*-position is that of a contrastive topic (Büring 2003 a.o.):

(17) **Context:** *We were at an event with many other people attending, and multiple dishes such as beans were available. Who ate what? Who ate beans? Who ate meat?*

- a. ɲé:ndé:k kó kà-∅-ám Kibê:t.
 beans TOP PST-3-eat Kibeet.NOM
 ‘Beans, Kibeet ate.’
- b. Pè:ndú kó kà-∅-ám Tʃé:bê:t.
 meat TOP PST-3-eat Cheebeet.NOM
 ‘Meat, Cheebeet ate.’

- In line with the licensing of contrastive topics, the *ko*-position also resists exhaustive answers (18), and answers to maximal element contexts (19), see Constant (2014) for discussion.

(18) *Exhaustive answer context*

Q: Kà-∅-sí:ndàn ɲù: ɲwàê:k?
 PST-3-win who.NOM race
 ‘Who won the race?’

A: #Kibê:t kó kà-∅-sí:ndàn ɲwàê:k.
 Kibeet TOP PST-3-win race
 ‘Kibeet won the race.’

(19) *Maximal element context*

Q: Kà-∅-bún kà:rit-à:p má:t ájnó:n?
 PST-3-take car-POSS fire which
 ‘Which train did they take?’

A: (Pí:k) àlák/ #túyùl kó kà-∅-bún kà:rit-à:p má:t né tà:j.
 people some/ all TOP PST-3-take car-POSS fire REL.SG first
 ‘Some/all (people) took the first train.’

- Aboutness topics are also possible: all consultants offer the sentence in (20) as an answer to a ‘tell me about X’ question (Reinhart 1981).

(20) **Context:** *We are talking, Samantha is mentioned, and I ask ‘Tell me about Samantha!:*

Samantha kó ∅-méɲ-è Nairobi.
 Samantha TOP 3-live-IPFV Nairobi
 ‘Samantha lives in Nairobi.’

5 Towards an account of *ko* in Kipsigis

The major challenge for the analysis of the *ko* marker in Kipsigis lies in the double function of *ko* signaling aboutness and contrastive topics. These two topic types diverge substantially, on the one hand conceptually (McNally 1998, Krifka 2008, Heycock 2008) and on the other in terms of the cross-linguistic picture (Roberts 2011). For the Japanese *-wa* marker in particular, a fully unified analysis is rarely proposed (Heycock 2008: 81).

5.1 A problem for the entity-based account

- Recall from Section 2.1 that entity-based accounts of topicalization predict that quantified and disjunctive NPs cannot serve as topics (Kiss 1993, Tomioka 2007 a.o.).
- Disjunctions are, however, possible in the *ko*-position in Kipsigis:

(21) Kibê:t anan Tjê:bê:t kó kà-∅-ám kímne:t.
 Kibeet or Cheebeet TOP PST-3-eat ugali
 ‘Kibeet or Cheebeet ate ugali.’

- ... and so are quantified NPs:

(22) Là:gók tóyòl kó kà-∅-ám kímne:t.
 children all TOP PST-3-eat ugali
 ‘All children ate ugali.’

(23) Là:kwé:t age-tóyòl; ko ko:-∅-ke:r tʃò:rwè:(t)-ní:n_{i/k}.
 child any-all TOP PST-3-see friend-POSS.3SG.NOM
 ‘Every child, his/her friend saw.’

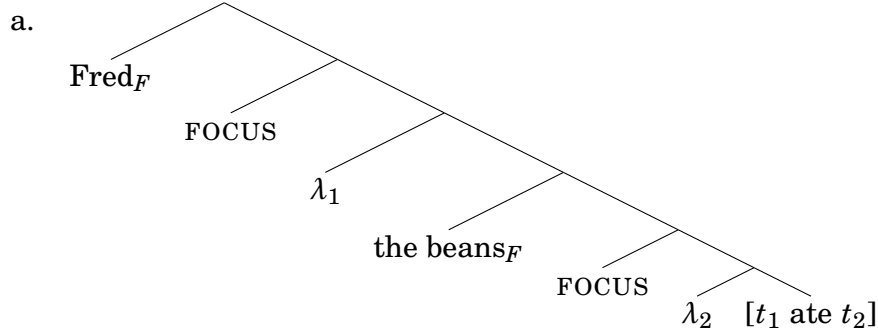
- The quantifier *age*, analyzed as an indefinite determiner by Landman 2019, is also possible, but only under a contrastive topic interpretation:

(24) Là:kwé:t ágè kó ∅-tʃám-è tʃè:gá. Là:kwé:t ágè kó ∅-tʃám-è tʃa:nk.
 child some TOP 3-like-IPFV milk child some TOP 3-like-IPFV tea
 ‘Some child likes milk; another child likes tea.’

5.2 *Ko* does not signal a nested focus structure

- Wagner (2012) derives contrastive topics as nested focus structures. The proposed focus operator can take topics or foci as arguments.
- In the nested focus structure, each instance of the focus operator is introduced up-stairs attracting an F-marked argument. (For the interpretation it must be ensured somehow that the outer focus attracts the contrastive topic.)
- The focus operator presupposes that alternatives to the F-marked phrase must be salient, where each occurrence introduces its own presupposition.

(25) $\llbracket [\text{Fred}]_F \text{ ate } [\text{the beans}]_F \rrbracket_a^g$ (Wagner 2012: 31)



- b. Presupposition introduced by inner focus:
 $\{ y \mid \text{Fred ate } y \}$ is salient and $\exists a \in \llbracket \text{beans} \rrbracket_a^g$ other than beans
- c. Presupposition introduced by outer focus:
 $\{ x, y \mid x \text{ ate } y \}$ is salient and $\exists a \in \llbracket \text{Fred} \rrbracket_a^g$ other than Fred

- Wagner (2012) argues that simple focus structures can be derived by the single application of the focus operator \rightarrow **Problem:** Assuming that *ko* spells out the focus operator, we make wrong predictions for Kipsigis.
- Focused elements are consistently infelicitous in the *ko*-position: answers to *wh*-questions (26), inherently focused phrases like *wh*-words (27), phrases with exclusive adverbs (28), and corrective focus (29).⁴

(26) *Question-answer context*

Q: Kà-∅-ám ηù: ηé:ndé:k?
 PST-3-eat who.NOM beans
 ‘Who ate beans?’

A: #Kibê:t kó kà-∅-ám ηé:ndé:k.
 Kibeet TOP PST-3-eat beans
 Intended: ‘Kibeet ate beans.’

(27) *ηá: kó kà-∅-ám pè:ndá?
 who TOP PST-3-eat meat
 Intended: ‘Who ate meat?’

(28) *Kibê:t íné:kém kó kà-∅-só:màn kítàbút.
 Kibeet only TOP PST-3-read book
 Intended: ‘Only Kibeet read the book.’

(29) **Context:** *I tell you that Kibeet is sleeping. But you know that Kibeet is awake, and Cheebet is sleeping instead. We have this exchange:*

A: ∅-rú-è Kibê:t.
 3-sleep-IPFV Kibeet.NOM
 ‘Kibeet is sleeping’

⁴Elements in the *ko*-position can never serve as answers in Kipsigis. Kipsigis, thus, differs from Japanese, which sometimes allows *wa*-marked phrases as answers to certain questions, albeit without focus semantics (Heycock 2008).

B: #Â:tʃà, Tʃè:bê:t kó Ø-rú-è.
 no Cheebeet TOP 3-sleep-IPFV
 ‘No, Cheebeet is sleeping.’

5.3 Aboutness topics different from contrastive topics?

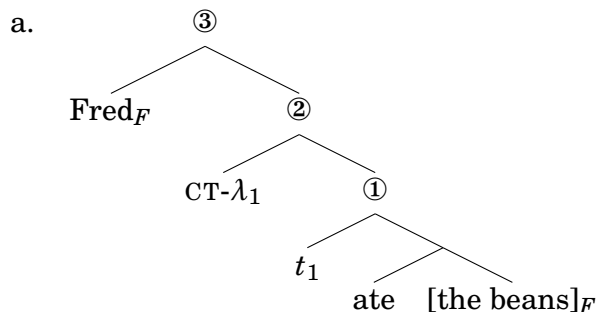
- As introduced above, Büring (2003) introduces the CT-value for contrastive topics as a new semantic dimension, similar to how Rooth (1992) introduced the focus semantic value for F-marked constituents.
- CT-values get mapped to fall-rise contours on PF, similar to how F-values are argued to get mapped to pitch accents.
- CT-values are calculated by (i) replacing F-marked phrases with variables, and (ii) replacing CT-marked phrases with variables:

(30) $[[\text{Fred}]_{\text{CT}} \text{ ate } [\text{the beans}]_{\text{F}}]^{ct}$ (Büring 2003:519)

- i. $[\text{Fred}]_{\text{CT}} \text{ ate } y \rightarrow \text{What did Fred eat?}$
- ii. $\text{What did } x \text{ eat?} \rightarrow \{ \text{What did Fred eat? What did Mary eat?, ... } \}$
 $= \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \{ \text{Fred ate the beans, Fred ate the eggplant, ... } \} \\ \{ \text{Mary ate the beans, Mary ate the eggplant, ... } \} \end{array} \right\}$

- The account in Constant (2014) derives the same semantic object for contrastive topics by positing a topic abstraction operator.
- As in Wagner (2012), both contrastive topics and foci are simply F-marked. Only contrastive topics, however, obligatorily raise and trigger topic abstraction.
- The operator adds a nesting layer in the focus dimension by abstracting over alternative sets \rightarrow creates sets of sets of propositions via *pointwise functional application* (Hamblin 1973) in ③
- The $\text{CT-}\lambda_i$ operator is realized as a clitic with phonological content in English, but can also be realized as a particle in other languages.

(31) $[[\text{Fred}]_{\text{F}} \text{ ate } [\text{the beans}]_{\text{F}}]_{\text{f}}^g$ (Constant 2014:97-98)



- ① = $\{ g(1) \text{ ate the beans, } g(1) \text{ ate the eggplant, ... } \}$
- ② = $\{ \lambda x. \{ x \text{ ate the beans, } x \text{ ate the eggplant, ... } \} \}$
- ③ = $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \{ \text{Fred ate the beans, Fred ate the eggplant, ... } \} \\ \{ \text{Mary ate the beans, Mary ate the eggplant, ... } \} \end{array} \right\}$

- **Important:** Both Buring (2003) and Constant (2014) treat contrastive topics separately from focus. Assuming that *ko* either spells out CT- λ_i or attaches to a CT-valued phrase, this derives why focused phrases cannot occur in the *ko* position.
- **But:** Neither account can be extended to aboutness contexts, which equally trigger the *ko* construction in Kipsigis.
- This has led many to search for syntactic differences between aboutness and contrastive topics in languages where both topics are realized the same on the surface (e.g. like in Japanese).
- In Japanese, contrastive topics show properties of movement (e.g. obey islands), while aboutness topics do not (Hoji 1985, Heycock 2008 a.o.).
- In Kipsigis, phrases in the *ko*-position always trigger island violations, irrespective of interpretation:

(32) *Complex NP island*

***Kibeet**_{*i*} [ko] ka-∅-soman Tjébê:t [kítábó:t ne
 Kibeet TOP PST-3-read Cheebeet.NOM book REL.SG
 ki-∅-sir-e (inéndèt_{*i*})].
 PST-3-write-IPFV 3SG.NOM
 Intended: ‘Kibeet, Cheebeet read the book that he wrote.’

(33) *Adjunct island*

***Kibeet**_{*i*} [ko] ka-ki-sɪndan-ɛ:tʃ [amun ma-∅-jo: ____{*i*}].
 Kibeet TOP PST-1PL-win-1PL(IMP) because NEG-3-come
 Intended: ‘Kibeet, they beat us (at the race) because he didn’t come.’

- The *ko*-position is restricted to nominals, irrespective of the type of topic: adverbs and PPs are ungrammatical in that position, with the exception of *ɛn*-PPs for a subset of speakers.
- There are only two differences between aboutness and contrastive topics that we could detect in Kipsigis:

- While for 2 speakers, PPs are always impossible in the *ko*-position, at least one speaker allows *ɛn*-PPs (but not *ak*-PPs, see (15)), but only when used as a contrastive topic. Hoji (1985) argues that *wa*-marked PPs are contrastive topics in Japanese (but see Heycock 2008, among others, on scene-setting adverbials):

(34) ɛn ɔ:sne:t [kó] tʃâ:ŋ ke:tɪ:k. ɛn desert kó tu:te:m ke:tɪ:k.
 at forest TOP many trees.NOM at desert TOP few trees.NOM
 ‘In the forest, there are many trees. In the desert, there are few trees.’

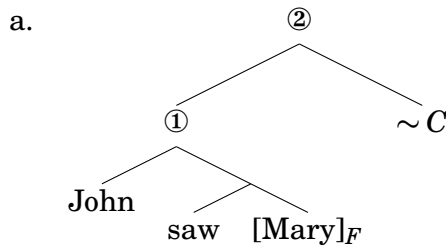
- The indefinite quantifier *agɛ* ‘any/some’ can only be used as a contrastive topic, as shown in (24) which is repeated below:

- (35) Là:kwé:t ágè kó Ø-tfám-è tfè:gá. Là:kwé:t ágè kó Ø-tfám-è
 child some TOP 3-like-IPFV milk child some TOP 3-like-IPFV
 tʃa:ɪk.
 tea
 ‘Some child likes milk; another child likes tea.’

5.4 The beginning of a unified theory

- In order to account for aboutness topics and contrastive topics uniformly, we need a theory that covers both constructions and ideally links the two via some common element. One such theory is proposed in von Stechow (1994).
- von Stechow (1994) proposes that topics are licensed by an operator which is built on the semantics proposed for the \sim (squiggle) operator that licenses focused phrases (Rooth 1992).
- The purpose of the \sim operator is to connect alternative sets, produced by F-marking, to a discourse antecedent.
- The mediation is done by a covert variable C : C has to be a subset of the input of \sim , i.e. ①, for F-marking to be licensed. C is anaphoric to a discourse antecedent.
- As shown in (36-c), if C denotes a set of propositions, produced by the Hamblin-denotation of *Who did John see?*, it constitutes a subset of the f -value of ①. Hence, the question *Who did John see?* should license the F-marking in (36-a).

(36) $\llbracket \text{John saw } [\text{Mary}]_F \rrbracket^{o,f}$



$\llbracket \text{①} \rrbracket^f = \{ \text{John saw Mary, John saw Sue, ... } \}$

b. *Question-answer constraint:*

In a question-answer pair, $\langle \psi, \alpha \rangle, \psi^o \in \llbracket \alpha \rrbracket^f$.

$\llbracket \text{②} \rrbracket = C \subseteq \{ \text{John saw Mary, John saw Sue, ... } \}$

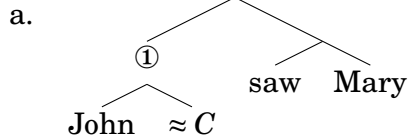
c. $\llbracket \text{Who did John see?} \rrbracket \subseteq \{ \text{John saw Mary, John saw Sue, ... } \}$

- For topics, von Stechow (1994) proposes a \approx (double squiggle) operator, which also introduces an anaphor that has to find a discourse antecedent.

- (37) *The \approx operator* (adapted from von Stechow 1994: 53)
 Given a sentence topic associated with an expression α , \approx introduces the anaphor C into the context whose value is constrained to be a subset of the set of propositions of the form ‘ $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket^o$ Ps’. The most unmarked situation would be that this is precisely the discourse topic at this point.

- Here is how topic licensing works for aboutness topics:

- (38) $\llbracket [\text{John}]_T \text{ saw Mary} \rrbracket^{o,f}$ (von Stechow 1994: 55)

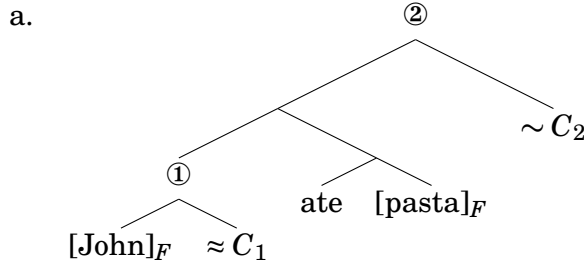


$$\begin{aligned} \llbracket \textcircled{1} \rrbracket &= C \subseteq \{ p \mid \exists P[P(\text{John}) = p] \} \\ &= C \subseteq \{ \text{John saw Mary, John went home, ...} \} \end{aligned}$$

- b. $\llbracket \text{What about John?} \rrbracket \subseteq \{ \text{John saw Mary, John went home, ...} \}$

- Crucially, this topic operator is also found in von Stechow (1994) for the derivation of contrastive topics.

- (39) $\llbracket [\text{John}]_{CT} \text{ ate } [\text{pasta}]_F \rrbracket^{o,f}$ (von Stechow 1994: 59)



$$\begin{aligned} \llbracket \textcircled{1} \rrbracket &= C_1 \subseteq \{ p \mid \exists P[P(\text{John}) = p] \} \\ &= C_1 \subseteq \{ \text{John ate pasta, John went home, ...} \} \end{aligned}$$

- b. $\llbracket \text{What about John?} \rrbracket \subseteq \{ \text{John ate pasta, John went home, ...} \}$

$$\llbracket \textcircled{2} \rrbracket = C_2 \subseteq \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \{ \text{John ate pasta, John ate pizza, ...} \} \\ \{ \text{Mary ate pasta, Mary ate pizza, ...} \} \end{array} \right\}$$

- c. $\llbracket \text{Who ate what?} \rrbracket \subseteq \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \{ \text{John ate pasta, John ate pizza, ...} \} \\ \{ \text{Mary ate pasta, Mary ate pizza, ...} \} \end{array} \right\}$

5.5 Conclusion

- The fact that quantifiers and disjunctions can serve as topics points against an entity-based theory of topichood in Kipsigis.
- The fact that focused phrases are illicit in the *ko* position excludes analyses of contrastive topic as a nested focus structure such as Wagner (2012).
- Since the *ko* construction is seemingly identical in aboutness and contrastive contexts, this calls for an analysis where a component is shared across aboutness and

contrastive topic configurations, as it is in von Stechow (1994). This seems to be impossible for accounts such as Büring (2003), Tomioka (2010), Wagner (2012), Constant (2014).

- *ko* spell out the \approx operator!⁵

6 Loose ends

6.1 Optionality of the *ko*-position

- Contrastive topics do not obligatorily appear in the *ko*-position:

(40) **Context:** *We were at an event with Kibeet, Cheebeet, and many other people attending, and multiple dishes were available. We want to ask who ate what? What did Kibeet eat? What did Cheebeet eat?*

- a. Kà-∅-ám Kìbê:t ñé:ndé:k. VSO
 PST-3-eat Kibeet.NOM beans
 ‘Kibeet ate beans.’
- b. Kìbê:t kó kà-∅-ám ñé:ndé:k. *Ko*
 Kibeet TOP PST-3-eat beans
 ‘Kibeet ate beans.’

- Aboutness topics are much more likely to appear in the *ko*-position. For example, for the context in (20), repeated here as (41), post-verbal orders were judged infelicitous by 4 speakers.

(41) **Context:** *We are talking, Samantha is mentioned, and I ask ‘Tell me about Samantha!:*

- a. Samantha kó ∅-méɲ-è Nairobi.
 Samantha TOP 3-live-IPFV Nairobi
 ‘Samantha lives in Nairobi.’

⁵A problem put forth against the account by von Stechow (1994) is that Japanese *-wa* marking in questions is felicitous. This is not predicted by the account since the question that is presupposed by the topic (or that the topic is anaphoric to) is identical to the question actually asked, which seems paradoxical. In Kipsigis, *ko* marking in questions is either unnatural or requires a contrastive reading. Contrastive topics in questions do presuppose more than what the question asks.

- (i) ?Kìbê:t kó kà-∅-ám nê:?
 Kibeet TOP PST-3-eat what
 ‘What did Kibeet eat?’
 Consultant’s comment: “You can say that though not the most natural way”
- (ii) Kìbê:t kó kà-∅-jáj nê:?
 Kibeet TOP PST-3-do what
 ‘What did Kibeet do?’
 Consultant’s comment: “This would be a continuation. Cheebeet did something, and then you’re asking what Kibeet did.”

- b. #Ø-méɲ-è Samantha Nairobi.
3-live-IPFV Samantha Nairobi
'Samantha lives in Nairobi.'
- c. #Ø-méɲ-è Nairobi Samantha.
3-live-IPFV Nairobi Samantha
'Samantha lives in Nairobi.'

- However, we do find some exceptions, such as the following context:

(42) **Context:** *We both know Cheebeet and we've been talking about her. I know a secret about her and I want to share it with you. I'm going to tell you something about Cheebeet: Cheebeet stole Kibeet's money.*

- a. á-mátʃ-e a-mwa-u-in ki: ago-ba Tʃè:bêt.
1SG-want-IPFV 1SG-say-VENT-2SG thing about Cheebeet
'I want to tell you something about Cheebeet.'
- b. Kɔ:-Ø-tʃɔ:r Tʃé:bêt rabɪ:nɪk-à:p Kibêt.
PST-3-steal Cheebeet.NOM money-POSS Kibeet
'Cheebeet stole Kibeet's money.'
- c. #Tʃè:bêt ko kɔ:-Ø-tʃɔ:r rabɪ:nɪk-à:p Kibêt.
Cheebeet TOP PST-3-steal money-POSS Kibeet
'Cheebeet stole Kibeet's money.'

- Bossi & Diercks (2019) also report examples of aboutness topics occupying the immediately post-verbal position.
- One consultant's comment regarding the above context was the following: "the problem here is that we both know Cheebeet and have been talking about her. This sentence does not give a description of her". This context thus seems different from our other 'Tell me about X' contexts.
- The consultant's comments are reminiscent of the distinction in the literature between true aboutness topics in Japanese, which are always fronted, and anaphoric uses of *wa*-marked phrases, which appear in-situ (e.g. Vermeulen 2007, Neeleman et al. 2009).

(43) sono inu-ga dare-o kande-simatta no?
that dog-NOM who-ACC bite-closed Q
'Who did the dog bite?'

- a. **sono inu-wa** kinoo kooen-de JOHN-O kande-simatta
that dog-WA yesterday park-at John-ACC bite-closed
- b. JOHN_i-O **sono inu-wa** kinoo kooen-de t_i kande-simatta
John-ACC that dog-WA yesterday park-at bite-closed
'The dog bit John in the park yesterday.'
(Vermeulen 2007: 184, emphasis ours)

- (44) sono inu-nituite osiete-kudasai
that dog-about tell-please
'Tell me about that dog.'
- a. **sono inu-wa** kinoo kooen-de JOHN-O kande-simatta
that dog-WA yesterday park-at John-ACC bite-closed
- b. #JOHN_i-O **sono inu-wa** kinoo kooen-de t_i kande-simatta
John-ACC that dog-WA yesterday park-at bite-closed
'The dog bit John in the park yesterday.'
(Vermeulen 2007: 185, emphasis ours)

6.2 Additive and scalar particles

- Even though the *ko*-position is generally incompatible with focus, the equivalent of the English *even Peter* in (45) must appear in the *ko*-position, as shown by the infelicity of post-verbal orders.
- *Even* in Kipsigis consists of two parts: obligatory *ogot*, which we gloss as *even* (though it may have non-scalar additive interpretations for non-subjects) and the optional, additive *àk ínê*: 'and him', which follows the noun, but can also be 'stranded' at the end of the sentence (45-a) without an obvious semantic difference.

(45) **Context:** *Although we know that Peter doesn't like ugali, everyone at the party ate it. Even Peter ate ugali.* (van der Wal 2020: 82)

- a. **Ógòt Peter** (àk ínê:) kó kì:-Ø-ám kímpé:t (àk ínê:).
even Peter and 3SG TOP PST-3-eat ugali and 3SG
'Even Peter ate ugali.'
- b. #kì:-Ø-ám kímpé:t **ógòt Peter** (àk ínê:).
PST-3-eat ugali even Peter and 3SG
Intended: 'Even Peter ate ugali.'
- c. #kì:-Ø-ám **ógòt Peter** (àk ínê:) kímpé:t.
PST-3-eat even Peter and 3SG ugali
Intended: 'Even Peter ate ugali.'
- While subject *even*-NPs must occupy the *ko*-position, non-subjects can but do not have to move there. There are multiple word order possibilities and it is not clear yet what the semantic differences among them are.

(46) **Context:** *After you and your friend Kibeet, who does not like ugali, returned from a long and tiring walk, you went to the canteen to eat. Later, you are explaining to another friend how hungry you were, and say: Kibeet ate even ugali (although we know that he hates it).* (van der Wal 2020: 83)

- a. **Ogot kímpé:t** ko ka-Ø-am Kíbê:t.
even ugali TOP PST-3-eat Kibeet.NOM
'Kibeet ate even ugali.'

- b. Kà-∅-ám Kíbê:t **ogot kímpé:t.**
 PST-3-eat Kibeet.NOM even ugali
 ‘Kibeet ate even ugali.’
- c. Kíbê:t ko ka-∅-am **ogot kímpé:t.**
 Kibeet TOP PST-3-eat even ugali
 ‘Kibeet ate even ugali.’

- Even though we leave the exploration of these data as a topic for further research, we note that Kipsigis is added to an increasing list of languages where scalars do not pattern with other (esp. exclusive) focused elements (e.g. Zimmermann 2005 on *Hausa*, Hartmann & Zimmermann 2007 on *Bura*, Grubic & Zimmermann 2011 on *Ngamo*, Zimmermann 2017 on Vietnamese, Driemel & Nformi 2018: fn.5 on *Limbum*).
- There are analyses that make a connection between scalars and contrastive topics (Zimmermann 2017, Greenberg 2018), but it is not clear how they would account for subject *even*-NPs obligatorily appearing in the *ko*-position in Kipsigis.

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