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Chapter 4

The expression of information structure in Kĩitharaka

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Kĩitharaka employs a variety of linguistic strategies to structure information. The preverbal domain is preferred for topicalised constituents while non-topical ones tend to be post-verbal. Various pragmatically sanctioned interpretations such as polarity focus, depreciative, contrastive and intensive readings are expressed through topic marking and predicate topic doubling. Focus can be expressed using the basic cleft (exhaustive focus), the pseudocleft and two constructions that at first look like reverse pseudoclefts. The expression of the object is regulated by accessibility, humanness, predicate type, and salience. Finally, the presence or absence of *ni*-correlates with predicate-centred focus or focus on the postverbal constituent.

1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of information structure in Kĩitharaka. Kĩitharaka is a Central Bantu language, ISO code [thk] and classified as E54 in Maho's (2009) revised Guthrie (1948) classification. It is spoken by Atharaka people mainly occupying Tharaka Central, Tharaka North and Tharaka South Sub-counties of Tharaka Nithi County of Kenya. Kĩitharaka speakers are also found in eastern parts of Maara and Chuka Sub-counties, and Tharaka Sub-county in Kitui County.¹ There are approximately 220,000 Atharaka people, according to

¹The speakers are said to speak the Thagicũ dialect, which is heavily influenced by the adjacent Kikamba language. Thagicũ here refers to a variant of the present-day Kĩitharaka language spoken mainly by inhabitants of Tharaka Sub-county of Kitui County and not the Proto-Eastern Bantu language mentioned in some diachronic literature.



the 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census report (2019). Kĩitharaka has approximately 61,000 monolinguals with L1 literacy rate below 15% as compared to that of L2 that stands at 45% (Eberhard et al. 2022). Literature on Kĩitharaka morphosyntax includes the following: Lindblom (1914), Harford (1991, 1997), wa Mberia (1993), Muriungi (2005, 2008, 2014), Abels & Muriungi (2008), Kanampiu (2017), Kanampiu & Muriungi (2019).

The data for this study were collected during a field study in December 2019 and January 2020 with three native speakers (all male) of age bracket 29–47 years. This included translations, judgements, reactions to stimuli as well as traditional folk tales and a recounting of the frog story. Additional data was elicited introspectively by the first author. The data were transcribed and stored in an Online Language Database accessible through the Dative user interface that allows data sharing in a collaborative research. This database will be accessible through The Language Archive. We also refer to the introduction to this book for further information on Dative and for further background on the terms and diagnostics used for information structure.

Kĩitharaka has a seven-vowel system, in which the mid-high vowels [e] and [o] are represented orthographically as ⟨î⟩ and ⟨û⟩. Furthermore, Dahl's Law is active in Kĩitharaka, causing voiceless stops to become voiced when followed by another voiceless stop, for example underlying *a-kû-t-a* 's/he is throwing' is realised as *agûta*.

2 Word order

Information structure influences Kĩitharaka word order in various ways: in preferring topics in the preverbal domain (Section 2.1), allowing unmarked focus postverbally only (Section 2.2), and encoding logical subjects postverbally when not topical (subject inversion, Section 2.3). Nevertheless, Kĩitharaka does not have a dedicated focus position, and the occurrence of preverbal focus is dependent on further analysis (see also Section 5.1). See for further discussion on the discourse-configurationality of word order Kerr et al. (2023).

2.1 Preverbal domain

Kĩitharaka prefers topics in the preverbal domain, allowing left-dislocation of subjects, as in (1) and (2), as well as objects as in (3). Dislocation of the subject can be identified by an intervening constituent between subject and verb, and/or by a prosodic break after the subject (indicated by a comma).

- (1) (Did Peter eat ugali and stew?)
 Bitá i nkima yoonká arĩĩré.
 Bitá ni n-kima i-onka a-rĩ-ire
 1.Peter FOC 9-ugali 9-only 1SM-eat-PFV
 ‘Peter, it is only ugali that he ate.’
- (2) (How did the teachers do in the performance?)
 Arímũ, í baínĩré!
 a-rimũ ni ba-in-ire
 2-teachers FOC 2SM-dance-PFV
 ‘The teachers, they danced (very well)!’
- (3) (Can I buy bananas here?)
 Ndígú nwa úgúre.
 n-digũ nwa ũ-gur-e
 10-banana can 2SG.SM-buy-SBJV
 ‘Bananas you can buy.’

Whether the dislocated object is resumed by an object marker on the verb depends on the predicate and various other factors, as discussed in Section 6. The dislocated topics can also be interpreted as contrastive, as in (4), and may then be marked by NA+PRO (further discussed in Section 3).

- (4) Nyóóndõ, ní yá kũríngĩra mĩsumáálĩ, mũchũménõ ni wá kũgítáánga mbáo, **nayo** raandá, ní yá kũmarĩĩria (mbáo).
 ny-oondo ni y-a kũ-riing-ir-a mĩ-sumaarĩ mũ-chũmeno ni
 9-hammer COP 9-CONN 15-hit-APPL-FV 4-nails 3-saw COP
 w-a kũ-gitaanga mbao na=y-o raanda ni
 3-CONN 15-cut 9.wood and=9-PRO9.plane COP 9-CONN
 y-a kũ-mar-iir-i-a (mbao)
 15-smooth-APPL-IC-FV (9.wood)
 ‘The hammer is for hitting nails; the saw is for cutting wood into pieces; and the plane is for smoothening (wood).’

We also find scene-setting topics in the left periphery, which are typically adverbials, as in (5) and (6).

- (5) Ĩĩgóró, í kũráárĩ na matu.
 ĩ-goro ni kũ-ra-rĩ na ma-tu
 5-yesterday FOC 17SM-YPST-be with 6-cloud
 ‘Yesterday it was cloudy.’

- (6) Ai, gúgúkíá, ántû bákûyúkíá báumagarûká, índi baatiga bááthaíká mwari njá.
 ai kû-kúkia a-ntu ba-kû-yûki-a ba-umagar-ûk-a índi
 EXCL 15-daybreak 2-person 2SM-PRS-take-FV 2SM-get.out-RECP-FV but
 ba-a-tig-a ba-a-thaík-a mu-arî n-ja
 2SM-PST-leave-FV 2SM-PST-tie-FV 1-lady 9-compound
 ‘Gosh, when the day broke, they removed the ‘marûa’, and left the girl
 tethered in the compound.’

Multiple topics can also be found when multiple arguments are given information, for example both ‘John’ and ‘his father’ in (7).

- (7) Jónii, îthé í ndagitaári.
 Jonii îthe ni n-dagitaarî
 1.John his.father COP 9-doctor
 ‘(As for) John, his father is a doctor.’

This, however, does not mean that the preverbal domain is reserved for topics, as indefinite subjects may appear in preverbal position as in thethetic sentence in (8):

- (8) (What’s the news from the market?)
 Múntû n’aathûungíire ndúkáaní.
 mû-ntû ni a-ra-thûungír-ire n-duka=ini
 1-person FOC 1SM-YPST-enter-PFV 9-shop=LOC
 ‘Someone entered the shop.’

Furthermore, SV(O) order is acceptable with idioms in athetic context, as illustrated in (9). In this case, the subject of the clause is not an available referent in actual speech context.

- (9) Tîiri îgûúka.
 tîiri î-kû-ûk-a
 9.dust 9SM-PRS-rise-FV
 ‘Things are finished.’
 lit. ‘Dust has risen.’

Therefore, not all preverbal referents are topical, but there is a debate about whether preverbal focus is possible in Kîitharaka. On the one hand, it is clear that focused subjects may not appear unmarked in their canonical preverbal

position, as illustrated for interrogatives (10), answers to content questions (12), and subjects marked by the exhaustive focus-sensitive particle ‘only’, as in (13) and (14). While it is correct to use (11), the context strongly suggests an echo-question interpretation, and we conclude that unmarked focused subjects are not allowed in a canonical preverbal position.

- (10) * Ûû áiyiré?
 ûû a-a-iy-ire
 who 1SM-N.PST-steal-PFV
 ‘Who stole?’
- (11) (Context: Peter meets his friends discussing how a certain person stole and was attacked and torched by a mob. He does not get the name of the thief, so he asks):
 Ûû aiyá?
 ûû a-a-iy-a
 who 1SM-PST-steal-FV
 ‘Who stole?’
- (12) # (Who went to the farm?)
 Kîmathi n’áthiiré mûndaaní.
 Kîmathi ni a-thi-ire mû-nda=ini
 1.Kîmathi FOC 1SM-go-PFV 3-farm=LOC
 ‘Kimathi went to the farm.’
- (13) * Baabá wéenka n’ ákinyiré.
 baaba we-onka ni a-kiny-ire
 1.father 1-only FOC 1SM-arrive-PFV
 ‘Only dad arrived.’
- (14) Jééní wéenká² n’aandíkiré baarúa.
 Jane we-onka ni a-andík-ire baarúa
 1.Jane 1-alone FOC 1SM-write-PFV 9.letter
 *‘Only Jane wrote a letter.’
 ‘Jane alone wrote a letter.’

²When used with animates, *-nka* (*wenka* for human and *-onka* for other animates) is ambiguous between ‘alone’ and ‘only’ but when used with inanimates, it means ‘only’. *Akî* means ‘only’ both with animates and inanimates.

- (15) * Jééní akí (n')áandikire baarúa.
 Jane akî ni a-andîk-ire baarúa
 1.Jane only FOC 1SM-write-PFV 9.letter
 'Only Jane wrote a letter.'

On the other hand, subjects may be focused as in (16) and (17) when preceded by *ni* (appearing as *i-* before a consonant and *n-* before a vowel).

- (16) Ámúûríá 'Íngukûúria mwarí, n'úû ágûpééré rûûtha rwá gûtaa rûúyî?'
 a-mû-ûri-a ni n-kû-kû-ûri-a mû-arî, ni û
 1SM-1OM-ask-FV FOC 1SG.SM-PRS-2SG.OM-ask-FV 1-girl FOC who
 a-kû-per-ire rûûtha rû-a kû-taa rû-ûyî?
 1SM-PRS-give-PFV 11.permission 11-CONN 15-fetch 11-water?
 'He asked her, 'let me ask you girl, who gave you permission to fetch water?''
- (17) (Who went to the farm? cf. (12))
 I Kîmáthi ûthíire mûndaanî.
 ni Kîmathi û-thi-ire mû-nda=ini
 FOC Kîmathi 1RM-go-PFV 3-farm=LOC
 'Kimathi went to the farm.' / 'It's Kimathi who went to the farm.'

A question for analysis is whether this is a preverbal focused element marked additionally by the focus marker *ni*, or whether it is a (biclausal) cleft in which *ni* could be a copula (see brief discussion in Section 5.1).

We can therefore conclude that the preverbal domain in Kîitharaka is not restricted to topics, even if topics are preferably placed preverbally. We now turn to the postverbal domain.

2.2 Postverbal domain

The postverbal domain in Kîitharaka consists of the non-topical information in the comment, and a right periphery for resumptive/afterthought information. Kîitharaka does not have a dedicated position for focus; neither the immediate-after-verb (as in Makhuwa-Enahara, van der Wal 2025 [this volume]) nor the final position (as in Kirundi, Nshemezimana & van der Wal 2025 [this volume]) is required or preferred for focused constituents. All internal arguments and non-arguments can be focused in the postverbal domain – only external arguments are excluded, as discussed in Section 2.3 on subject inversion. Note further that the form of the verb also makes a difference in the interpretation of the postverbal

constituents: the form prefixed by *ni* is used more naturally in predicate-centred focus and at the end of the clause, whereas the form without this marker goes together with focus on the postverbal constituent. This is discussed in more detail in Section 7.

Both the Recipient and the Theme can be questioned in their canonical position, as shown in (18) and (19), where we also see a preference to stick with the thematic order Recipient-Theme.

- (18) Ūyúúgú ánénkééré twáana mbí?
 ûyûgû a-nenker-ire tû-ana m-bi
 1.grandmother 1SM-give-PFV 13-child 9-what
 ‘What did grandma give the children?’
- (19) (Context: Grandmother had some mangoes and she gave an unknown person the mangoes.)
- a. Apééré 'úú méémbé?
 a-per-ire ûû ma-embe
 1SM-give-PFV who 6-mango
 ‘Who did she give mangoes?’
- b. ?? Apéére méémbe ûû?
 a-per-ire ma-embe ûû
 1SM-give-PFV 6-mango who
 ‘Who did she give mangoes?’

A question with multiple question words is even possible for both objects, but only in their base order Recipient-Theme, as shown in (20).

- (20) a. (Context: Grandmother gave something unknown to someone unknown)
 Ūyúgú ánénkéére ûû mbí?
 ûyûgu a-nenker-ire ûû mbi
 1.grandmother 1SM-give-PFV who what
 ‘What did grandmother give to whom?’
- b. * Ūyúgú ánénkéére mbí ûû?
 ûyûgu a-nenker-ire mbi ûû
 1.grandmother 1SM-give-PFV what who
 ‘What did grandmother give to whom?’

Furthermore, both recipient and theme can be answers to a content question in their canonical position (21), and a constituent modified by ‘only’ is allowed in either position, as in (22) and (23).

- (21) (What did the teacher give to the children?/Who did the teacher give pens?)³
 Mwarímû aránénkéére twaána tûramu.
 mû-arimû a-ra-nenker-ire tû-ana tû-ramu
 1-teacher 1SM-YPST-give-PFV 13-child 13-pen
 ‘The teacher gave the children pens.’
- (22) a. Mwarimû aránénkéére twaána akî tûramu.
 mû-arimû a-ra-nenker-ire tû-ana aki tû-ramu
 1-teacher 1SM-YPST-give-PFV 13-child only 13-pen
 ‘The teacher gave only children some pens.’
 b. Mwarimû aránénkéére twaána tûramu akî.
 mû-arimû a-ra-nenker-ire tû-ana tû-ramu akî
 1-teacher 1SM-YPST-give-PFV 13-child 13-pen only
 ‘The teacher gave only pens to the children.’
- (23) Frida anénkééré Kawĩĩra fáanta yóonká.
 Frida a-nenker-ire Kawĩĩra fanta î-onka
 1.Frida 1SM-give-PFV 1.Kawĩĩra 9.fanta 9-only
 ‘Frida gave Kawĩĩra only Fanta.’

Constituents in the right periphery of the sentence may be interpreted as afterthoughts, as illustrated for a subject in (24) and for an object in (25). Note that the object referent can also be marked on the verb if it is expressed as a right-dislocated noun phrase (see also section Section 6, and that there must be a pause preceding the noun phrase, indicated by the comma.

- (24) (Context: Hyena roasted the guinea fowl and ate him whole. Where Hare arrived, he checked and found there was no guinea fowl. He asked Hyena.) Mbítí, írî kú nkáángá?
 m-biti î-rî kû n-kanga
 9-hyena 9SM-be where 9-guinea.fowl
 ‘Hyena, where is the guinea fowl?’

³Note that typically, the subject would be elided because it’s already the topic.

- (25) a. Mwarímû agátuona, twaána.
 mû-arimû a-ka-tû-on-a, tû-ana
 1-teacher 1SM-FUT-12OM-see-FV 13-child
 ‘The teacher will see them, the children.’
 b. Mwarímû akóóna (*,) twaána.
 mû-arimû a-ka-on-a tû-ana
 1-teacher 1SM-FUT-see-FV 13-child
 ‘The teacher will see the children.’

As mentioned, the interpretation of postverbal constituents is also dependent on the form of the verb, as discussed in more detail in Section 7. We conclude that the postverbal domain typically hosts non-topical constituents, which may be focal, and which can be focused in their canonical position, i.e. there is no dedicated focus position. This also means that logical subjects can be expected to appear postverbally when non-topical, which is what we turn to next.

2.3 Inversion constructions

In subject inversion constructions, the logical subject appears in postverbal position. There are a number of different inversion constructions (see Marten & van der Wal 2014), which we discuss for Kĩĩtharaka in turn. As Buell & Muriungi (2008) show, Kĩĩtharaka does not show patient inversion (26), formal locative inversion (see below), or agreeing inversion (27), regardless of the form of the verb with or without *ni* (for which see Section 7).

- (26) a. Mûtí n’úgútwá ígúna.
 mû-tí nî û-kû-tw-a î-gúna
 3-tree FOC 3SM-PRS-climb-FV 5-monkey
 **‘A/the monkey climbs the tree.’
 lit. ‘The tree climbs a/the monkey.’
 b. Mûtí ûgáatwá îgúna.
 mû-tí û-kaa-tw-a î-gúna
 3-tree 3SM-FUT-climb-FV 5-monkey
 **‘The/a monkey will climb the tree.’
 lit. ‘The tree will climb the monkey.’
 (27) *N’ yáakúa nyamû. / *Yáakúa nyamû.
 (ni) î-a-ku-a n-yamû
 (FOC) 9SM-PST-die-FV 9-animal
 ‘A/The animal died.’

Canonical instrument inversion is not accepted in Kîtharaka, as illustrated in (28), with or without *ni* preceding the verb. Even if an applicative were present (which remedies inversion in Zulu, Zeller 2013), this is not accepted. Interestingly, however, we do find what looks like instrument inversion in the presence of *na* ‘with’, as in (29b) and (30b). While (30b) may not in fact be instrument inversion, as indicated in the translation, we wonder how (29b) may be interpreted. As we currently do not have enough insight into this construction, we leave it to one side here.

- (28) * Gîcîko (i)gîkûrîa Kanyúá.
 kî-ciko ni kî-kû-rî-a Kanyua
 7-spoon FOC 7SM-PRS-eat-FV 1.Kanyua
 int. ‘Kanyua has eaten with a spoon.’
- (29) a. (Context: Anyone is welcome to eat the porridge on the table. But I am afraid it’s very thick, so I wonder how you will eat it.)
 Kanyúá ákûrîa na gîcîko.
 Kanyua a-kû-rî-a na kî-ciko
 1.Kanyua 1SM-PRS-eat-FV with 7-spoon
 ‘Kanyua has used a spoon to eat.’
 b. (Context: You’re looking for a spoon to eat and there is one on the table.)
 Gîcîko gîkú gîkûrîa *(na Kanyúá).
 kî-ciko kî-ku kî-kû-rî-a na Kanyua
 7-spoon 7-DEM.MED 7SM-PRS-eat-FV with 1.Kanyua
 ‘That spoon has been used by Kanyua to eat (so don’t use it).’
- (30) a. (Why do you look so happy?)
 Kîmáthi ákûûya na ndeké.
 Kîmathi a-kû-j-a na n-deke
 1.Kîmathi 1SM-PRS-come-FV with 9-airplane
 ‘Kimathi has come with an airplane.’ / ‘Kimathi has come by airplane.’
 b. (Why do you look so happy?)
 Ndeké íkûûya na Kîmathi.
 n-deke í-kû-j-a na Kîmathi
 9-airplane 9SM-PRS-come-FV with 1.Kîmathi
 lit. ‘The airplane has come with/brought Kimathi.’

The more frequent inversion construction is Default Agreement Inversion (DAI), and Semantic Locative Inversion (SLI) is also accepted but not used often. We first discuss the form and then the interpretation of both constructions.

In DAI, the subject marker is the default/expletive *kũ-*, the original marker for locative class 17. However, since *kũ-* no longer refers to an actual location, and a preverbal locative is not obligatory (see (32)), we analyse this subject marker as default agreement.

- (31) (Context: Reporting on what happened yesterday.)

Í kũrátũúbágá twaána.
ni kũ-ra-tũúb-ag-a tũ-ana
FOC 17SM-YPST-HAB-FV 13-child
'The children were jumping.'

- (32) (Mũthítũúni) í kũrágwiire mĩtĩ.

mũ-thítũ=ini ni kũ-ra-gũ-ire mĩ-tĩ
3-forest=LOC FOC 17SM-YPST-fall-PFV 4-tree
'(In the forest) there fell trees.'

In SLI, the subject marker is determined by a preverbal semantically locative DP – this is *semantic* locative inversion (Buell 2007), as the preverbal locative is not marked as such by locative morphology. In (33), the initial noun 'clinic' refers to a location but is in the non-locative noun class 7, and not marked by the locative suffix *-ini*. The subject marker on the verb shows agreement with the noun in class 7 rather than a locative class or the default *kũ-*.

- (33) Kĩ-rĩniki gĩ-kĩ i kĩ-ij-ag-a a-ekũrũ ba-ingĩ.

7-clinic 7-DEM.PROX FOC 7SM-come-HAB-FV 2-woman 2-many
'To this clinic come many women.'
(Buell & Muriungi 2008: 7, glosses adapted)

For SLI to apply, the locative must be an argument of the verb. This is the case in (33) because motion verbs like 'come' and 'go' take a locative complement, but for other verbs an applicative extension is used, as in (34). Note that this is still locative inversion (not instrument), as the plate is seen as a location, and the same sentence with 'spoon' would not be grammatical.

- (34) Q: Kũ-rĩ wee a-rĩ-ĩr-a thaani-iini ño?

17SM-be 1.PRO 1SM-eat-APPL-FV 9.plate=LOC 9.DEM.PROX
'Is there anyone who has eaten from this plate?'

- A: Ínu î-kû-rî-îr-a Kanyúá.
 9.DEM.PROX 9SM-PRS-eat-APPL-FV 1.Kanyua
 ‘This one has been eaten from by Kanyua (don’t use it).’

Scope interpretations show that the postverbal logical subject is in situ in a position below negation, in both DAI (35) and SLI (36):

- (35) Gùtíákwá rwaagí rûûnthe.
 kû-ti-a-ku-a rû-agî rû-onthe
 17SM-NEG-PST-die-FV 11-mosquito 11-all
 ‘Not all mosquitoes died.’ (some are still alive)
- (36) Njîrá íno îtithíyágá antû bóonthe.
 n-jîra îno î-ti-thi-ag-a a-ntû ba-onthe
 9-path 9.DEM.PROX 9SM-NEG-go-HAB-FV 2-person 2-all
 ‘On this path not all people go (but some do).’

In tenses with an optional *ni* marker (see Section 7), the marker is present in DAI for a thetic interpretation:

- (37) (Context: You saw this and report it to the watchman so he can be alert.)
 Ndúkáaní í kûthúúngîré muntû.
 n-duka=ini ni kû-thûûngîr-ire mu-ntû
 9-shop=LOC FOC 17SM-enter-PFV 1-person
 ‘In the shop there entered somebody.’

When the *ni* marker is absent, the focus is more on the postverbal subject, as seen in the question and answer in (38).

- (38) (Who entered the shop?)
 Ndúkáaní kûthúúngîré antû báírí.
 n-duka=ini kû-thûûngîr-ire a-ntû ba-îrí
 9-shop=LOC 17SM-enter-PFV 2-person 2-two
 ‘In the shop there entered two people.’

Subject inversion is used when the logical subject is not the topic. This can be in thetic contexts, as illustrated in (39) for DAI and (40) for SLI, but also when the subject is in narrow focus, as shown below.

- (39) (There was an accident on the road and...)

Í gũkwíré mũntũ.

ni kũ-ku-ire mũ-ntũ

FOC 17SM-die-PFV 1-person

‘Somebody died.’

- (40) Mũthítũ n’ũágwĩire mĩtĩ.

mũ-thítũ ni ũ-a-gũ-ire mĩ-tĩ

3-forest FOC 3SM-PST-fall-PFV 4-tree

‘In the forest trees fell.’

Three tests for focus all show that the postverbal logical subject in DAI can be focused: the inherently focal *wh* word is allowed, as in (41), the answer to a content question too, as in (42–44), as well as a subject modified by the exhaustive focus particle ‘only’ as in (45) and (46). As mentioned earlier, in those conjugations that allow an optional preverbal marker *ni*, the marker cannot be present when the postverbal subject is in focus; compare to the presence of *ni* with athetic interpretation above (see Section 7 on *ni*).

- (41) Gũkuiré ũũ?

kũ-ku-ire ũũ

17SM-die-PFV who

‘Who died?’

- (42) (Someone entered this place, was it you? OR Who entered this place?)

Kũthũũngĩĩre kaána.

kũ-thũũngĩr-ire ka-ana

17SM-enter-PFV 12-child

‘There entered a child.’

- (43) (There were visitors here and I can’t see what they brought us; what was brought?)

Kũréétirwe conda na mĩgááté.

kũ-reet-w-ire conda na mĩ-gaate

17SM-bring-PASS-PFV 9.soda and 3-bread

‘There was brought soda and bread.’

- (44) (Who was laughing?)
 Í gúkúthekaga mbiti.
 ni kû-ku-thek-ag-a m-biti
 FOC 17SM-PRS-laugh-HAB-FV 9-hyena
 ‘A/the hyena laughed.’
- (45) (#I) Kûthûungîre kaána akî.
 kû-thûungîr-ire ka-ana akî
 17SM-enter-PFV 12-child only
 ‘There entered a child only.’
- (46) Kûratóórookire ngúkú akî.
 kû-ra-toorook-ire n-gúkú akî
 17SM-YPST-escape-PFV 10-chicken only
 ‘There escaped chickens only.’

Buell & Muriungi’s (2008) manuscript shows that locative inversion is only accepted with passive (43), unaccusative (41) and unergative intransitive predicates (44), not with transitives (47). In our limited data, unergatives are often frowned upon and preferably expressed with a passive.

- (47) (Buell & Muriungi 2008: 8, glosses adapted)
- a. Arîmi i baendagia nyani thokoوني îno.
 a-rîmi ni ba-endi-ag-a nyani thoko=ini
 2-farmer FOC 2SM-sell-HAB-FV 10.vegetable 9.market=LOC
 î-no.
 9-DEM.PROX
 ‘Farmers sell vegetables at this market.’
 - b. * Thokoni îno i kûendagia arîmi nyani.
 thoko=ini î-no ni kû-endi-ag-a a-rîmi
 9.market=LOC 9-DEM.PROX FOC 17SM-sell-HAB-FV 2-farmer
 nyani.
 10.vegetable
 int. ‘At this market farmers sell vegetables.’
 - c. * Thoko îno n’ îendagia arîmi nyani.
 thoko î-no ni î-endi-ag-a arîmi nyani.
 9.market 9-DEM.PROX FOC 9SM-sell-HAB-FV 2-farmer 10.vegetable
 int. ‘At this market farmers sell vegetables.’

(48) (Buell & Muriungi 2008: 7)

- a. Tw-ana tũ-kũrũ i tũ-ceth-ag-a kĩ-eni=ini.
13-child 13-old FOC 13SM-play-HAB-FV 7-field=LOC
'Older children play in the field.'
- b. Kĩ-eni=ini i gũ-ceth-ag-a tw-ana tũ-kũrũ.
7-field=LOC FOC 17SM-play-HAB-FV 13-child 13-old
'In the field play older children.'
- c. ?? Kĩ-eni i gĩ-ceth-ag-a tw-ana tũ-kũrũ.
7-field FOC 7SM-play-HAB-FV 13-child 13-old
'In the field play older children.'

However, Buell and Muriungi report that unergatives fare better with an applicative morpheme. In this case, the intuition is that the applicative encodes an explicit locative interpretation, while the locative sense is implicit in the passive.

(49) (Buell & Muriungi 2008: 10)

- a. Tw-ana tũ-kũrũ i tũ-ceth-ag-ĩr-a kĩ-eni=ini.
13-child 13-old FOC 13SM-play-HAB-APPL-FV 7-field=LOC
'Old children play in the field.'
- b. Kĩ-eni=ini i gũ-ceth-ag-ĩr-a tw-ana tũ-kũrũ.
7-field=LOC FOC 17SM-play-HAB-APPL-FV 13-child 13-old
'On the field play older children.'
- c. Kĩ-eni i gĩ-ceth-ag-ĩr-a tw-ana tũ-kũrũ.
7-field FOC 7SM-play-HAB-APPL-FV 13-child 13-old
lit. 'The field plays older children.'

The applicative can be seen even with an unaccusative, illustrated for SLI in (50) and DAI in (51), making the locative into an argument of the verb (see also (34) above).

(50) Barabára n'ĩrákw*(íĩr)íĩre ndúru.

barabara ni ĩ-ra-ku-ir-ire n-duru
9.road FOC 9SM-YPST-die-APPL-PFV 9-squirrel
'On the road died a squirrel.'⁴

⁴ An alternative non-sensical interpretation has the road as the benefactive 'A squirrel died for the road'.

- (51) Barabáraani í kûráku*(íir)íire ndúru.
 barabara=ini ni kû-ra-ku-ir-ire n-duru
 9.road=LOC FOC 17SM-YPST-die-APPL-PFV 9-squirrel
 ‘On the road there died a squirrel.’

Similar to inversion constructions, passives also encode the Theme as the pre-verbal topic and thereby structure the information. Two differences with inversion constructions are that 1) the verb is marked as passive by the suffix *-w-*, and 2) the subject can be omitted but if it is present, it is marked by *ni* (here functioning as ‘by’). The passive is illustrated in a sequence from a folktale in (52).

- (52) (When Hare came back, he checked and found there was no guinea fowl. He asked Hyena: ‘Hyena, where is the guinea fowl?’)
 Mbítí yámííra: “Nírírúwé í mwánki múnýáánya. Nkáánga nírírúwé í mwanki.”
 m-bíti î-a-mî-îr-a ni î-rî-w-ire ni mû-anki
 9-hyena 9SM-PST-9OM-tell-FV FOC 9SM-eat-PASS-PFV FOC 3-fire
 mû-nyanya n-kanga ni î-rî-îr-w-e ni mû-anki
 1-friend 9-guinea.fowl FOC 9SM-eat-APPL-PASS-FV FOC 3-fire
 ‘Hyena told him, it was eaten by the fire, my friend. The guinea fowl was eaten by the fire.’

In summary, Kĩitharaka shows a preference for topical information to precede the verb and non-topical referents to follow, which accounts for left-dislocations and subject inversion. On the other hand, there is no dedicated focus position, and focused phrases do occur preverbally when preceded by *ni-*, as further discussed in the section on clefts (Section 5.1). The possible interpretations of the canonical SVO order depend on the conjugation of the verb involving the focus particle *ni-* as discussed in Section 7. For now, we first turn to additional marking of topics.

3 Topic marking

There are two types of structures that show evidence of topic marking in Kĩitharaka. One involves a topic marker *-o* that agrees with the topical NP in class, and the other involves a combination of *na* ‘with, and’ and the same *-o*. The two are illustrated in (53) and (54), respectively. This marker is also found in Kirundi and Rukiga with similar functions, see Nshemezimana & van der Wal (2025 [this volume]) and Asiimwe & van der Wal (2025 [this volume]).

- (53) Ma-búkú mó í-má-úr-iré.
 ma-buku ma-o ni ma-ur-ire
 6-book 6-PRO FOC 6SM-lost-PFV
 ‘As for the books, they are lost.’
- (54) (Context: The dog would climb to see whether the frog was hiding there.)
 Kaána **nakoó** gácééke mûrinyáani í mbí îrî óogó.
 ka-ana na=ka-o ka-cek-e mû-rinya=ini ni mbii î-rî
 12-child and=12-PRO 12SM-check-SBJV 3-hole=LOC FOC what 9-be
 a-ogo
 16-DEM
 ‘The child on the other hand, would check in the hole what is there.’

The topic marker *-o* has four context-driven interpretations, namely; polarity focus/verum, contrastive, intensive, and depreciative. These, together with their contexts are illustrated in (55) to (56), respectively.

- (55) (Is it really true that Brian lost the books? I don’t trust what Edith says.)
 Mabúkú mó⁵ imauriré.
 ma-buku ma-o ni ma-ur-ire
 6-book 6-PRO FOC 6SM-lost-PFV
 ‘As for the books, they are lost.’ [polarity focus]
- (56) (Did you water the cows and the sheep? Well, the cows did not drink water...)
 Índĩ cíó ng’oóndu icinyúiré.
 índĩ ci-o n-g’oondu ni ci-nyu-ire
 but 10-PRO 10-sheep FOC 10SM-drink-PFV
 ‘...but as for the sheep they drank.’ [contrastive]
- (57) (Has it rained that much?)
 Mbúra yoó ikuúra.
 m-bura î-o î-kû-ur-a
 9-rain 9-PRO 9SM-PRS-rain-FV
 ‘It has really rained.’ [intensive]

⁵A reviewer suggested that *mabuku* is a left-dislocated topic and *mo* functions as the argument rather than a topic marker. While this has likely been the case in a previous stage of the language, the fact that a prosodic break (if one is present) would be following *mo* rather than *mabuku* shows that currently *mo* functions as a contrastive topic marker and not a pronoun in this sentence.

- (58) (Context: It has rained but you think it will not help much because there are lots of weeds in the farm that prevent you from planting early.)

Mbúra yoó ìkuúra.

m-bura î-o î-kû-ur-a

9-rain 9-PRO 9SM-PRS-rain-FV

‘It has rained but...’

[depreciative]

It is possible to move the marker from the pre-verbal to the post-verbal position and still maintain the various interpretations, as in the variant of (58) in (59).

- (59) Mbúra ìkuúra yoó.

m-bura î-kû-ur-a î-o

9-rain 9SM-PRS-rain-FV 9-PRO

‘It has rained but...’

It is interesting to note that these interpretations are the exact same as those found in topic doubling, discussed in Section 4.3.

Second, the combination of *na* ‘with, and’ and the pronominal clitic in *-o* is used as a contrastive or shift topic marker in Kîitharaka. We first discuss the other uses of *NA+ PRO* before returning to its use as a contrastive/shift topic marker, so that its origin and multifunctionality are clear. We find the combination for pronominalised complements of the preposition *na* ‘with’, for example in the instrumental (60) combination also features as a resumptive pronoun in clefts and relative clauses, as seen in (62).

- (60) Índaátúlíre ñkú baabá ábuá **nacíó** mwaanki.

ni nda-ra-tul-ire n-kû baaba a-bu-a na=ci-o

FOC 1SG.SM-YPST-split-PFV 10-firewood 1.father 1SM-light-FV with=10-PRO

mû-anki

3-fire

‘I split firewood for father to light the fire with it.’

- (61) (Does Thomas have a cat? + QUIS picture of Thomas with a cat and a rabbit.)

Ii árí **nakó** naká wána kayúgú.

ii a-rî na=ka-o na=ka wana ka-yugu

yes 1SM-be with=12-PRO and=POL even 12-rabbit

‘Yes, he has one, and also a rabbit.’

- (62) (Does William have four melons? + QUIS picture of William with three melons.)

Arí, i mathátû arí **namó**.

ari ni ma-thatû a-rî na=ma-o

no FOC 6-three 1SM-be with=6-PRO

‘No, he has three.’ (lit. ‘it is three that he is with’)

The pronoun with *na* can also be used with an additive meaning, with a coreferential noun phrase as in (63) or without it as in (64). The same is found with *wana* ‘even’ + pro, as in (65).

- (63) Tó**m** **nawé** n’aráíníre.

Tom na=we ni a-ra-in-ire

1.Tom and=1.PRO FOC 1SM-YPST-dance-PFV

‘Tom also danced.’

- (64) (The gazelle threw the child into the water. The little dog, because he was running, did not see the bank.)

Nakó na kũgwa.

na=ka-o na ku-gũa

with=12-PRO and 15-fall

‘He too fell.’

- (65) Mũtúgí **wana wé** árí na meetho mátuúne.

Mũtugi wana we a-rî na ma-itho ma-tuune

1.Mũtugi even 1.PRO 1SM-be with 6-eyes 6-red

‘Mũtugi among others/even he has brown eyes.’

We speculate that this additive use facilitates marking a contrastive topic. In (66), we see a bridging context in which both interpretations are plausible: as an additive marker (not just the child but also the little dog), or as a shift topic marker (the topic shifting from the child to the little dog).

- (66) Kaana kaugia, gakturû **nako** i kaugĩĩtie.

ka-ana ka-ugi-a ka-kurû na=ka-o ni ka-ugi-ĩte

12-child 12SM-run-FV 12-dog with=12-PRO FOC 12SM-run-STAT.PFV

‘The child ran, while the little dog was also running.’

The NA+ PRO marker can only mark the second topic (the shift or contrast), as indicated by the felicitous and infelicitous placement of the marker in (67).

- (67) (What did Souza do with the beans and the carrots?)
 Mboócó (***nació**) n' árarugire, kaarati **nació**, éendíá.
 m-booco na=ci-o ni a-ra-gur-ire kaarati na=ci-o
 10-bean and=10-PRO FOC 1SM-YPST-cook-PFV 10.carrot and=10-PRO
 a-endi-a
 1SM-sell-FV
 'The beans he cooked and the carrots he sold.'

In (68), the use of *namo* is only allowed if we have been talking about other fruits before, contrasting the mangoes to bananas and oranges, for example.

- (68) Méémbé **namó** mbeendéété mára méerú.
 ma-embe na=ma-o n-end-ite ma-ra ma-eru
 6-mango and=6-PRO 1SG.SM-like-STAT.PFV 6-RM 6-ripe
 'And as for mangoes, I like ripe ones.'

Note that in these contrastive topic examples, the marker is syntactically optional, unlike in (60–62); and an optional prosodic break may follow the marker, e.g. after *namo* in (68) as judged by the first author, and the lengthened syllable (*nakoó*) in (54) above.

In its use as a shift topic marker, the NA+ PRO marker is also used as a narrative-structuring device, switching between different referents. This was illustrated in (53) above, and can again be seen in (69): Hyena and Hare are the protagonists, and the story alternates between the actions of the one and those of the other.

- (69) (Hare got hold of Hyena and beat him. Hyena cries 'My husband, the black one, leave me! Leave me alone!')
- Kayúgú **nakó** n'wa kûmírúmia mmá! mmá!
 ka-yûgû na=ka-o ni w-a ku-mî-rum-i-a mma mma
 12-hare and=12-PRO COP 1-CONN 15-9OM-beat-SC-FV IDEO IDEO
 'But Hare kept on beating him: whack! whack!'

Summarising this section, Kĩtharaka can (but does not need to) mark contrastive topics by the marker -o, which follows the topic NP and agrees with it in noun class. The context determines whether the interpretation results in just a contrast on the topical referent, or a polarity focus/verum, intensive, or depreciative interpretation of the clause. When the same proposition applies to a second topic, the marker -o is preceded by *na* 'and'.

4 Predicate doubling

Güldemann & Fiedler (2019) show that across Bantu languages there are three constructions in which the infinitive and the inflected form of the verb can co-occur in the same sentence: the infinitive can appear in a cleft (70), in situ in a postverbal position (71), and as a left-peripheral topic (72).

- (70) I kũríngá túríngiré ng'óombé, tũtiracíthaika. [cleft]
 ni kũ-riinga tũ-riing-ire ng'-oombe tũ-ti-ra-ci-thaik-a
 FOC 15-hit 1PL.SM-hit-PFV 10-cow 1PL.SM-NEG-YPST-10OM-tie-FV
 'We *hit* the cows, we didn't tie them.'
- (71) Bakĩbáthiríá kũbathíría. [in situ]
 ba-kĩ-ba-thiri-a kũ-ba-thiria
 2SM-DEP-2OM-finish-FV 15-2OM-finish
 'They completely finished them.'
- (72) Kũrúgă nkáárúga. [topic]
 kũ-ruga n-kaa-rug-a
 15-cook 1SG.SM-FUT-cook-FV
 'I will indeed cook.'

Kĩĩtharaka shows all three types of predicate doubling, which seems to be unique among the Bantu languages studied in our project. We present the formal and functional properties of each in turn. For completeness, we mention that predicate doubling only occurs with the infinitive, not with other nominalised forms of the predicate (as in Kirundi or Rukiga, for example).

4.1 Cleft doubling

In a cleft doubling structure, a preverbal infinitival verb is preceded by a focus marker/copula. The structure looks like a basic cleft with a non-infinitival noun (see Section 5.1; thus, alternatives are triggered for the clefted constituent, in this case a predicate. The structure has a state-of-affairs focus reading (focus on the verb itself). An object may follow the inflected verb and have the same SoA reading, as in (74).

- (73) (Context: We were supposed to wash the child, apply lotion, and dress him/her.)

I kùtháámbiá túkáthaambiirié.

ni kù-thaamb-i-a tú-ka-thaamb-i-ire

FOC 15-clean-IC-FV 1PL.SM-12OM-clean-IC-PFV

‘We only *washed* him/her (the child).’

- (74) Í kûnywá bánywíré kawá... índî batíráátûûra.

ni kû-nyua ba-nyu-ire kawa índî ba-ti-ra-tûûr-a

FOC 15-drink 2SM-drink-PFV coffee but 2SM-NEG-YPST-pour-FV

‘They drank the coffee, but they didn’t pour it.’

The infinitive may also contain an object, as in (75), resulting in VP focus, not SoA focus, as is clear from the following contrasting clause.

- (75) (Context: We were expected to hit the cows and wash clothes.)

Í kû-rínga ng’óómbé tú-ríng-ire; tû-tí-rá-bûûr-a

FOC 15-hit 10-cow 1PL.SM-hit-PFV 1PL.SM-NEG-YPST-wash-FV

n-gúo.

10-cloth

‘We hit the cows; we didn’t wash clothes.’

4.2 In situ doubling

For in situ doubling, the infinitive follows inflected verb. In tenses with an optional *ni* marker, the marker must be absent, placing the focus on the infinitive (see Sections 2.2 and 7 for postverbal focus and the absence of *ni* marking on the verb marking focus, respectively).

- (76) (Did they sing/dance well?)

(#Í) báráíníre kwiína.

ni ba-ra-in-ire kû-ina

FOC 2SM-YPST-dance-PFV 15-dance

‘They really danced/sang.’

With a transitive predicate, the infinitive can follow the object but cannot precede it, as in (77).

- (77) Twííníré (kĩbũco)⁶ kwíína.
 tũ-in-ire kĩbũco kũ-ina
 1PL.SM-sing-PFV kĩbũco 15-sing
 ‘We really sang (*kĩbuco*).’

In the above examples, the in-situ doubling is used in a polarity-focus context. Another possible interpretation is a high degree of doing the action, with alternatives being lesser ways of doing the action, as in (78). Some contexts, as in (79), may also allow state-of-affairs focus.

- (78) (How did Mary do in the dancing competition?)⁷
 Araíníre kwíína (kúngwa).
 a-ra-in-ire kũ-ina (ku-ngwa).
 1SM-YPST-sing-PFV 15-sing 15-self
 ‘She danced amazingly well.’ (nearing professional levels)

- (79) (About Bible verse Numbers 21:3: And what did the Israelites do to the enemy camp when they found them?)
 Ba-kĩ-bá-thírí-á kũ-ba-thírí-a.
 2SM-DEP-2OM-finish-FV 15-2OM-finish
 ‘They completely finished them.’

4.3 Topic doubling

In topic doubling, the infinitive occurs at the left edge of the sentence. This can be understood the same way as topicalization of a simple noun: it is simply an infinitive (noun) that is placed in the left periphery as a topic.

- (80) (How have I performed?)
 Kwííná ûkũína...
 kũ-iina û-kũ-in-a
 15-sing 2SG.SM-sing-FV
 ‘You have sung, but...’

Notably it can involve different predicates as in (81), providing evidence that the initial infinitive is not a copy of the inflected verb but a simple topicalised phrase.

⁶A traditional Tharaka romantic song/dance.

⁷The verb *kũina* means both ‘dance’ and ‘sing’; we translate it as appropriate for the context.

- (81) (Do you do sports? What kind of sporting activities do you do?)

Gûcéétha, í mbúgagía.

kû-ceetha ní n-ugi-ag-a.

15-do.sports FOC 1SG.SM-run-HAB-FV

‘As for sports, I run.’

The predicate being the topic, it is marked as not being the new information, which should therefore be elsewhere. What forms the new information depends on the arguments in the sentence: when an object is present, the focus is typically on the object or the VP as in (82), and when followed by a subject cleft, the focus is the subject as in (83). When there is no other constituent, focus on the polarity is a natural interpretation, as in (84).

- (82) (Context: Someone insisting on catching of goats.)

Kû-gwáátá n-tí-gwaat-a m-búri.

15-catch 1SG.SM-NEG-catch-FV 9-goat

‘I won’t catch a goat (but maybe something else).’

- (83) (Who is swimming? + QUIS picture of three people in different activities)⁸

Kû-butîrá í mw-aáná á-kû-butîr-a.

15-swim FOC 1-child 1SM-PRS-swim-FV

‘As for swimming, it’s the child who is swimming.’

- (84) (Context: Someone is doubting whether the teachers danced.)

Kúíná (arímû) í baíníré!

kû-ina a-rimû ni ba-in-ire

15-dance 2-teacher FOC 2SM-dance-PFV

‘(The teachers) they did dance!’

- (85) (How will they manage to graze the cows and all those sheep?)

Kû-rííthía ba-káá-rííthi-a ng’-oóndu, ng’-óómbě ba-káá-thaik-a.

15-graze 2SM-FUT-graze-FV 10-sheep 10-cow 2SM-tie-FV

‘They will graze the sheep; the cows they will tie.’

Topic doubling is also very naturally used in contexts where the infinitive is contrasted to other actions that are implied not to be carried out.

⁸Note that this may not be the most natural response, which would be simply the cleft. The use of the topical material depends on whether the speaker wants to overtly express the topic or not.

- (86) (I hear you laughed at him and beat him up.)
 Kũtheká í tũthekiré... índĩ tũtĩrámũrĩngá.
 kũ-theka ni tũ-thek-ire ínĩ tũ-ti-ra-mũ-riing-a
 15-laugh FOC 1PL.SM-laugh-PFV but 1PL.SM-NEG-YPST-1OM-hit-FV
 We did laugh (admittedly), but we didn't hit him.'

Two possible additional flavours of interpretation are possible: a depreciative and an intensive reading. In examples (87) to (89), we have a depreciative interpretation: although it is true that the actions are carried out, they did not yield much value. In (90), we have an intensive reading.

- (87) (I saw you weeded quite a large portion!)⁹
 Kũ-rĩmá í tũ-rĩm-iré.
 15-dig FOC 1PL.SM-dig-PFV
 'We weeded, but...'
 'Although we weeded...' (it's useless, the weeds will come back soon)
- (88) (How can one kill a chicken?)
 Kw-ítá, nwá w-ĩit-e, índĩ î-tĩ-kw-a rũa.
 15-strangle can 2SG.SM-strangle-SBJV but 9SM-NEG-die-FV soon
 'Well, you can strangle, but it doesn't die quickly.'
- (89) (I liked your game, you really played!)
 Gũ-céethã í tũ-ceeth-iré, índĩ n-gúkũm-án-o
 15-play FOC 1PL.SM-play-PFV but 9-corrupt-RECP-NMLZ
 y-á-tũ-túũny-a gĩ-kóómbé.
 9SM-PST-1PL.OM-snatch-FV 7-cup
 'We did play well, but corruption snatched the cup from us.'
- (90) (You weeded an incredible two acres in five hours while your father expected that you can only do one acre.)
 Kũrĩma itũrĩmire baaba.
 kũ-rĩma ni tũ-rĩm-ire baaba
 15-weed FOC 1PL.SM-weed-PFV dad
 'We really weeded (a lot), dad.'

⁹A reviewer asked whether intonation is necessary to derive the intended meaning, as witnessed to some extent in Kikuyu. For Kĩitharaka, however, intonation does not license the intended meaning and a prosodic break at the end of the clause is optional.

These additional aspects of interpretation are not encoded in the semantics but pragmatics, as they can vary with the context and examples can hence be ambiguous:

- (91) Kwííná n' áííniré bai!
 kû-iina ni a-iin-ire bai
 15-sing FOC 1SM-sing-PFV buddy
 intensive: 'Boy did she sing!' (we never knew she had such a good voice)
 depreciative: 'Well at least she sang...' (try to see the positive side)

The infinitive can be analysed as a contrastive topic, where the alternative topics are on a scale of expectation: for the intensive reading the assertion is higher than expected, and for the depreciative reading the assertion is more than zero (see Jerro & van der Wal in preparation). Interestingly, polarity focus/verum, contrast, depreciative and intensive are exactly the same interpretations as those possible for contrastive topics marked by *-o*, as exemplified in Section 3, which supports an analysis of topic doubling as the infinitive functioning as a contrastive topic.

A final interpretation occurs in the future tense, which has an optional *ni* marker on the verb. When the marker is absent, the interpretation is one of verum, as in (92), but when it is present, a deontic interpretation results.

- (92) (Context: A and B are arguing over cooking. A thinks B is unwilling to cook, then B answers:)
 Kûrúgă nkáárúga.
 kû-ruga n-ka-rug-a
 15-cook 1SG.SM-FUT-cook-FV
 'I will cook.'
- (93) (Context: You are organising a function and are told to go and sleep, but you need to prepare. Whatever else I do,)
 ...kûrúga ínkáárúga.
 kû-ruga ni n-ka-rug-a
 15-cook FOC 1SG.SM-FUT-cook-FV
 'I must cook.'

In summary, Kîitharaka exceptionally shows three types of predicate doubling with infinitives. These are not special constructions but simply consist of the infinitive occupying a focus or topic position. When the infinitive is clefted (cleft doubling), the resulting interpretation is one of state-of-affairs focus; as a

postverbal focus (in situ doubling), the infinitive is used polarity focus/verum context and with an intensive reading; and when the infinitive is in the left-periphery (topic doubling), it functions as a contrastive topic, used with a contrastive, verum, intensive, or depreciative interpretation. It is interesting to note the influence of the pragmatics on the precise interpretation here, specifically the intensive and depreciative aspects of meaning.

5 Cleft constructions

Like other languages in van der Wal (2025), Kĩitharaka too shows three structures that look like a basic cleft, a pseudocleft, and a reverse pseudocleft (although their underlying structures are subject to debate). All three constructions use the marker *ni*, which surfaces as *i* before a consonant and *n* before a vowel – the copula has the form *ti* in negation. The marker *ni* functions as a copula in simple predication and identification, illustrated in (94) and (95), but has been analysed as a focus marker by Abels & Muriungi (2008). We gloss it as COP in clear copula constructions, and as FOC in cleft(-like) constructions and preceding the verb (see Section 7).

- (94) (What does Jane do for a living?)

Jane i mw-arimũ.

1.Jane COP 1-teacher

‘Jane is a teacher.’

[predicational]

- (95) (Who is the chef?)

Chebu i mw-ekũrũ ũyũ.

chef COP 1-woman 1.DEM.PROX

‘The chef is this woman.’

[specificational]

The debate about the precise status of the copula is briefly summarised in Section 5.1 but an in-depth discussion is part of further research. In what follows, our aim is to describe the information-structural interpretation of the three cleft(-like) constructions. We start with the basic cleft/preverbal focus construction in Section 5.1, followed by the pseudocleft and reverse pseudocleft in Section 5.2, and finally a related construction characterised by *ni* followed by a pronoun (NI-PRO) in Section 5.3.

5.1 Preverbal focus construction/basic cleft

Starting with the basic cleft, there are two conflicting perspectives in the literature for analysing this structure. On the one hand there are authors that advocate for a biclausal cleft analysis (see Bergvall 1987 for Kikuyu, Harford 1997 for Kĩĩtharaka, Lafkioui et al. 2016 for Kirundi, and Zentz 2016 for Shona) with the structure consisting of a copula, clefted constituent, and relative clause. On the other hand it has been argued that the structure is monoclausal, hence, better analysed as a focus construction (see Clements 1984, Schwarz 2003 for Kikuyu, Muriungi 2005, Abels & Muriungi 2008 for Kĩĩtharaka). In the current chapter we will not go into this syntactic debate (see Kanampiu & van der Wal in preparation for additional considerations to not assume Abels & Muriungi's monoclausal analysis), and after introducing the basic information about the form of the construction, we rather concentrate on the interpretation of the construction. We refer to the construction as “preverbal focus” or “basic cleft” interchangeably without committing to a syntactic analysis.

The basic cleft consists of *ni/ti* (the copula or focus particle) followed by a focused constituent, and a relative clause. Apart from argument NPs, as in (96), the focused constituent can also be a pronoun as in (97) (which will be relevant in the discussion of the NI-PRO construction in Section 5.3), a nominalised modifier (98), or an infinitive as in cleft predicate doubling (see Section 4).

- (96) (Who went to the farm?)

I Kĩmáthi ũthĩĩre mũndaaní.
 ni Kĩmáthi ũ-thi-ire mũ-nda=ini
 FOC Kĩmáthi 1RM-go-PFV 3-farm=LOC
 ‘It is Kĩmáthi who went to the farm.’

- (97) (If she washes with water from a pool without frogs.)

I rĩĩ akaabúá.
 ni rĩ-o a-ka-bu-a
 FOC 5-PRO 1SM-FUT-be.good-FV
 ‘It’s then (that time) that she will heal.’

- (98) (It’s alleged that the Swahili teacher was absent this morning.)

Arĩ t’wa gĩchoiri n’wá matháábu.
 arĩ ti w-a gĩ-choiri ni w-a ma-thaabu
 no NEG.FOC 1-CONN 7-Kiswahili FOC 1-CONN 6-mathematics
 ‘No, it is not (the one) of Kiswahili but of mathematics.’

Note that there is no presupposition of existence in this construction, as the question in (99a) can felicitously be answered by the empty set in (99b). Here, the construction differs from the pseudocleft (compare in Section 5.2).

- (99) a. N'ûû ûyûûgú ápééré meembe?
 ni ûû ûyûûgu a-per-ire ma-embe
 FOC 1.who 1.grandmother 1SM-give-PFV 6-mango
 'Who did grandma give mangoes?'
 b. Gûtírí wě.
 kû-ti-rî we
 17SM-NEG-be 1.PRO
 'Nobody.' lit. 'There isn't one.'

Abels & Muriungi (2008) show in detail that the Kĩitharaka basic cleft/prenominal focus structure is used to express exhaustive focus on the initial constituent marked by *ni*. We refer to their work for valuable and intricate argumentation, and add the following diagnostics and data to arrive at the same conclusion. First, to show that the preverbal constituent is in focus, consider that questions and answers are naturally given in the preverbal focus construction, especially for subjects (although subjects may also be focused postverbally, see subject inversion in Section 2.3). Subject clefts are illustrated in (100) and object clefts in (101).

- (100) Q: Íbaaû báayá?
 ni ba-û ba-a-y-a
 FOC 2-who 2SM-PST-come-FV
 'Who(pl) came?'
 A: I Mwendé na Baráka (báayá).
 ni Mwende na Baraka (ba-a-y-a)
 FOC 1.Mwende and 1.Baraka (2SM-N.PST-come-FV)
 'It's Mwende and Baraka (who came).'
- (101) Q: I mbi Áshá ágûkáánda?
 ni mbi Asha a-kû-kaand-a
 FOC what 1.Asha 1SM-PRS-bake-FV
 'What is Asha baking?'
 A: Ímûgaáté Áshá agûkáánda.
 ni mû-gaate Asha a-kû-kaand-a
 FOC 3-bread 1.Asha 1SM-PRS-bake-FV
 'It's bread that Asha is baking.'

If part of an idiom is focused in this construction, it loses its idiomatic interpretation (though see van der Wal 2021 on types of idioms and focus), as expected if this is a focus construction. This is because no alternatives can be triggered for the object in the idiomatic reading, as this reading is dependent on both the verb and the object, as illustrated for the idiom *kûtwâ mûtî* ‘to become pregnant’, lit. ‘to climb a tree’ (102).

- (102) Í mûtî mwaarí átwéeté.
 ni mû-tî mû-ari a-tw-îte
 FOC 3-tree 1-girl 1SM-climb-STAT.PFV
 *‘The girl became pregnant.’
 ‘It’s a tree that the girl climbed.’ (van der Wal 2021: 10)

The preverbal focus is naturally used in a corrective context, as in (103).

- (103) (Are these people wearing hats? + QUIS picture)
 Éékúrú bataikîrîté (nkoobia), n’ aantû arúme béékîrîté nkoobiá.
 a-ekûrû ba-ta-ikîr-îte n-koobia ni a-ntû a-rume
 2-woman 2SM-NEG-dress-STAT.PFV 10-hat FOC 2-person 2-male
 ba-e-kîr-îte n-koobia
 2SM-REFL-dress-STAT.PFV 10-hat
 ‘The women don’t wear (hats); it’s the men who wear hats.’

The focus constituent is compatible with the exhaustive focus particle *-onka* (only) as in (104), but not with the scalar particle *wana* ‘even’ (105a).¹⁰ The example in (105a) was improved by placing the particle sentence-initially as in (105b), where it has scope over the whole action and cannot be interpreted as ‘even/also tablecloths’. Given the inclusive nature of ‘even’, the incompatibility shows the exclusive nature of the construction.

- (104) (Did the teacher give the children books and pens?)
 I tûramu túunká mwarímû apééré twaána.
 ni tû-ramu tu-onka mû-arimû a-per-ire tû-aana
 FOC 13-pens 13-only 1-teacher 1SM-give-PFV 13-child
 ‘It is pens only that the teacher gave to the children.’

¹⁰The particle *kinya* (a variant of the additive particle) is equally inadmissible in the structure; thanks to a reviewer for asking about this.

- (105) a. I (*wana) ítaambáa Naómi áthaambirié.
 ni wana i-tambaa Naomi a-thaamb-i-ire
 FOC even 8-cloth 1.Naomi 1SM-clean-IC-PFV
 ‘It’s (*even) curtains that Naomi washed.’
 ‘It’s the tablecloths that Naomi washed (not the bedding).’
 b. (Context: Naomi was supposed to wash the bedding, but ...):
 Wana n’ítaambaa Naómi áthaambirié.
 wana ni i-tambaa Naomi a-thaamb-i-ire
 even FOC 8-cloth 1.Naomi 1SM-clean-IC-PFV
 ‘In addition to that it’s curtains that Naomi washed.’

The universal quantifier ‘all’ is only accepted in this construction in the context of contrasting the universality with other quantities, as indicated in the corrective contexts for (106) and (107a). Modification by a relative clause also allows for the generation and exclusion of alternatives and also makes the universal quantifier acceptable in this construction, as in (107b): all the animals in this home can be contrasted with the alternative animals outside this home.

- (106) (He tasted this cake. / He tasted two cakes.)
 I kéki cionthé aronchiré.
 ni keki ci-onthe a-ronch-ire
 FOC 10.cake 10-all 1SM-taste-PFV
 ‘It is all the cakes that he tasted.’
- (107) a. (Context 1: You bring a hen, a cow, and a goat to be slaughtered. Someone says we slaughter the hen and the cow only.
 Context 2: (In a different scenario) someone says all the *people* will die.)
 Arî, í nyamú cionthé igakúa.
 arî ni n-yamû ci-onthe i-ka-ku-a
 no FOC 10-animal 10-all 10SM-FUT-die-FV
 ‘It is all the animals that will die.’
 b. Í nyamú yoonthé îrî mûcî ûyú igakúa.
 ni n-yamû y-onthe î-rî mû-cî û-yû î-ka-ku-a
 FOC 9-animal 9-all 9-be 9-home 9-DEM.PROX 9SM-FUT-die-FV
 ‘It is every animal in this home that will die.’

The indefinite quantifier *-mwe* ‘some’ necessarily requires a subset reading in a cleft: in (108) it is not ‘some beans’ but ‘some *of the* beans (not the other)’, as is

clear not only from the translation, but also from the impossibility of following up with the whole set. We can again understand this as the cleft construction bringing exhaustive focus.

- (108) I mbooco ímwé irá irí gíkóómbéení gíkíĩ, ntuúne... #wana ícíóonthe.
 ni m-booco i-mwe i-ra i-rî kî-koombe=ini kíkî ni
 FOC 10-bean 10-one 10-RM 10SM-be 7-cup=LOC 7.DEM.PROX COP
 n-tuune wana ni ci-onthe
 10-red even COP 10-all
 ‘It’s some of the beans that are in this cup that are red... #it’s even all of them.’

Numerals lose the lower-boundary reading and instead become the exact amount in the preverbal focus construction. This is illustrated in (109a), and can be contrasted with the interpretation of a numeral modifying the object in an SVO sentence – compare (109b). The fact that the SVO order allows the follow up ‘and even more’ but the cleft/focus construction does not shows again that this construction excludes alternatives, in this case all amounts higher than 100,000.

- (109) a. Íngirí ígana áríágwá #wana í nkûrûki.
 ni n-giri î-gana a-rî-ag-w-a wana ni
 FOC 9-thousand 9-hundred 1SM-pay-HAB-PASS-FV even FOC
 n-kûrûki
 9-more
 ‘It’s 100,000 that he is paid, #even more.’
 b. Agwáátága/ ariágwa ngirí ígana, wana í nkûrûki.
 a-kû-at-ag-a/ a-rî-ag-w-a n-giri î-gana
 1SM-PRS-earn-HAB-FV/ 1SM-pay-HAB-PASS-FV 9-thousand 9-hundred
 wana ni n-kûrûki
 even FOC 9-more
 ‘He earns / is paid 100,000, even more.’

Unexpectedly, an indefinite interpretation of the focused constituent is possible; specifically, the focus construction can be used in athetic context, as in (110–112).

- (110) (Context: You're explaining what is happening, what has caused the sadness.)¹¹

Í múúntú ákwííre.

ni mû-ntû a-ku-ire

FOC 1-person 1SM-die-PFV

'Somebody died.'

- (111) (Why were you running away? / Why did you scream?)

I gĩĩntú mbónire.

ni kî-ntû n-on-ire

FOC 7-thing 1SG.SM-see-PFV

'I saw something.' / 'It's something I saw.'

- (112) (Why are you walking in a funny way?)

I múgoongó úkúúmbaankana.

ni mû-goongo û-kûû-n-aankan-a

FOC 3-back 3SM-PRS-1SG.OM-ache-FV

'It is my back that aches.'

This can perhaps be understood as focus on the whole situation: 'it is only for this reason that I'm sad'. This interpretation is also possible for the full clefted clause in (113).

- (113) (Why are you crying?)

N'áatî mûntû ágûkua/ n'ákwiré.

ni atî mu-ntû a-kû-ku-a/ ni a-a-ku-ire

FOC COMP 1-person 1SM-PRS-die-FV/ FOC 1SM-N.PST-die-PFV

'It is that a person has died/died (that I'm crying), and that's it.'

In summary, the preverbal focus construction/basic cleft shows all the hallmarks of an exhaustive focus interpretation (see again also Abels & Muriungi 2008). Its use inthetic contexts may be explained as an exhaustive interpretation of the whole sentence, or interpreted as a widening/bleaching of meaning in the process of grammaticalization.

¹¹The sentence can also be interpreted as narrow focus under a generic reading, for example in a context where people are disagreeing whether it was an animal or a person who died.

5.2 Pseudocleft

The pseudocleft (and the reverse pseudocleft) is a copular clause that links a free relative with a noun phrase. In the pseudocleft, the free relative precedes the copula and the noun phrase follows, as in (114) and (115).

- (114) (What did Karîmi kick?)
 [Kî-rá Karîmi á-ríng-iré] í mù-bíirá.
 7-RM Karîmi 1SM-kick-PFV COP 3-ball
 ‘What Karîmi kicked is a ball.’
- (115) [Bará bapéerwé tûrámu] i twáána tuunka.
 [ba-ra ba-per-w-ire tû-ramu] ni tû-ana tû-onka.
 2-RM 2SM-give-PASS-PFV 13-pens COP 13-child 13-only
 ‘Those that were given pens are the children only.’

The free relative is introduced by the definite relative marking, that is, the distal demonstrative ending in *-ra*, taking the noun class of what it refers to. Free relative clauses function as independent NPs, as can be seen in their use as a subject as in (116) or object as in (117).

- (116) (Muntû) [Ûra gwîtiré] akáaya.
 mu-ntû û-ra û-ît-ire a-kaa-y-a
 1-person 1-RM 2SG.SM-call-PFV 1SM-FUT-come-FV
 ‘The one you called will come.’
- (117) Í mbeendeeté (kîntû) [kîrá mbóniré].
 ni n-end-îte kî-ntû kî-ra n-on-ire
 FOC 1SG.SM-like-STAT.PFV 7-thing 7-RM 1SG.SM-see-PFV
 ‘I like what I saw / I like the thing that I saw.’

Kîûtharaka also has the reverse structure where we find a precopular noun phrase and a postcopular free relative, as in (118).

- (118) (Who is Karîmi in your class?)
 Karîmi n’ [ûrá árumiré mwarímû].
 Karîmi ni [û-ra a-rum-ire mù-arimû
 1.Karîmi COP [1-RM 1SM-insult-PFV 1-teacher
 ‘Karîmi is the one who insulted the teacher.’

Structurally, this would count as a reverse pseudocleft, because it is the exact reverse of the pseudocleft, but the term “reverse pseudocleft” has been applied mostly to constructions in which the preverbal NP is in focus. In both of the constructions above, however, the focus is on the postcopular constituent (bolded in (119) and (120)), as indicated in the accepted and unacceptable context questions for each construction.

- (119) (Context 1: Is Joy washing the dishes?
Context 2: Who is washing the dishes?
#Context 3: I am looking for Rob, who is working in a kitchen full of people. I ask ‘Who is Rob?’)
[Ūrá ũ-kũ-thaamb-i-a thaáni] i **Rob**.
1.RM 1RM-PRS-clean-IC-FV 10.plate COP 1.Rob
‘The one who is washing the dishes is Rob.’
- (120) (#Context 1: Is Joy doing the dishes?
#Context 2: Who is washing the dishes?
Context 3: I am looking for Rob, who is working in a kitchen full of people. I ask ‘Who is Rob?’)
Rob n’ [Ūrá ũ-kũ-thaamb-i-a **thaáni**]
1.Rob COP 1.RM 1RM-PRS-clean-IC-FV 10.plate
‘Rob is the one who is washing the dishes.’

We illustrate for the pseudocleft that the postcopular noun phrase is in focus, as seen in the question-answer pairs in (119) above, and that this focus identifies the correct referent among alternative referents. The inverse construction as in (120) we shall refer to as the NI+RM construction in order to not create confusion between form and function with the term “reverse pseudocleft”, and this is compared to a very similar construction in Section 5.3.

Examples (121) and (122) illustrate an infinitive and a pronominal demonstrative as the focused constituent in the pseudocleft. The contexts here indicate a choice among alternatives and a correction, respectively.

- (121) (Between getting lost in the forest and encountering wild animals, what don’t you want to experience?)
Bũrá ntakwéenda, í kũũra.
bũ-ra n-ta-kũ-end-a ni kũ-ũra
14-RM 1SG.SM-NEG-PRS-like-FV COP 15-get.lost
‘What I don’t want, is to get lost.’

- (122) (Is it this one that came late?)

Arî ûrá aceereerwé n'ûûrá (t'ûûyû).

arî û-ra a-ceerew-e ni û-ra ti û-yû
no 1-RM 1SM-be.late-PFV COP 1-DEM.DIST NEG.COP 1-DEM.PROX

'No, the one that was late is that one (not this one).'

The free relative establishes a presupposition of existence, which can be seen in the impossibility to answer a pseudocleft question with 'nobody/nothing' as illustrated in (123) and (124). Since it is presupposed that there is a referent for which the predicate is true, this cannot be denied, but instead it is expected that this referent is identified.

- (123) a. Kîrá ágwáátiré i kîbí?

kî-ra a-gwaat-ire ni kî-bi
7-RM 1SM-catch-PFV COP 7-what

'What did he catch?', lit. 'What he caught is what?'

- b. # Gûtíríkyó.

kû-ti-rî=kî-o
17SM-NEG-be=7-PRO

'Nothing.'

- (124) a. Êrá áceereerwé n'ûû?

û-ra a-ceerew-e ni ûû
1-RM 1SM-be.late-PFV COP who

'Who is the one who was late?', lit. 'Who was late is who?'

- b. # Gûtírí we.

kû-ti-rî=we
17SM-NEG-be=1.PRO

'Nobody / There is no one.'

Identification among alternatives entails that alternatives must be present. Since parts of idioms cannot trigger a set of alternatives within the idiomatic reading, only the literal meaning is left under focus. This is what we see in (125), from the idiom *kûoria nthang'a ûthiû* 'to make the face of the monkey rot' which means to worsen the situation: the idiomatic reading is lost when you focus on the constituent *face of the monkey*.

- (125) Kĩrá ûkũóriá n'ûthiũ bwa ntháng'á.
 kĩ-ra û-kũ-or-i-a ni ûthiũ bũ-a n-thang'a
 7-RM 2SG.SM-PRS-rot-IC-FV COP 14.face 14-CONN 9.monkey
 'What you are causing to rot is the face of the monkey.'
 **You are worsening the situation.'

A first diagnostic to check the exclusive reading among alternatives is that the NP can be modified by the exhaustive focus-sensitive particle 'only' (126) but not by the inclusive/scalar 'even' (127). As 'even' includes all alternatives, no referent is identified to the exclusion of others, and hence this is incompatible with the pseudocleft.

- (126) Kĩrá gĩonká Bitá arĩĩré i nkĩma.
 kĩ-ra kĩ-onka Bitá a-rĩ-ire ni n-kima
 7-RM 7-only 1.Peter 1SM-eat-PFV COP 9-ugali
 'What Peter ate is ugali only.'
- (127) * Kĩrá Bitá ágwaátiré í (*wana) mũkũnga.
 kĩ-ra Bitá a-gwaat-ire ni wana mũ-kũnga
 5-RM 1.Peter 1SM-catch-PFV COP even 3-eel
 'What Peter caught is (*even) eel.'

Secondly, the structures are compatible with universal quantifiers only if they allow an exclusive reading. The pseudocleft in structure (128) is felicitous because it presupposes two subsets; the people who work within the institution and the ones that work elsewhere. Those with hats, therefore, are the ones that work within the institution. The people who work elsewhere are excluded. In structure (129) the focus does not trigger any subsets. It remains inclusive, thus, infelicitous with the universal quantifier *kĩra*. The conclusion here is that the pseudocleft structures express exclusive focus, and thus, disallow universal quantifiers because of their inclusive nature. The same holds for the universal quantifier 'all' in (130).

- (128) Ūrá gwĩkĩrĩte nkoobĩá i kĩa muntũ ũrutága ngũgĩ gũkũ.
 ũ-ra ũ-ĩkĩr-ité n-koobia ni kĩa mu-ntũ
 1-RM 1SM.REL-wear-STAT.PFV 9-hat COP each 1-person
 a-rũt-ag-a n-gũgĩ kũ-kũ
 1SM-do-HAB-FV 9-work 17-DEM.PROX
 'The one wearing a hat is each/every person who works within.'

- (129) * Ūrá gwíkíríté nkoobíá i kírá muntû.
 û-ra û-îkîr-îte n-koobia ni kîra mu-ntû
 1-RM 1SM.REL-wear-STAT.PFV 9-hat COP each 1-person
 int. 'The one wearing a hat is everyone.'
- (130) Bará béékîríté nkoobíá n' antû bóonthé *(bará barutagá ngûgî nja).
 ba-ra ba-îkîr-îte n-koobia ni a-ntû ba-onthé ba-ra
 2-RM 2-wear-STAT.PFV 10-hat COP 2-person 2-all 2-
 ba-rût-ag-a n-gûgî n-ja
 RM 2-do-HAB-FV 9-work 9-outside
 'The ones wearing hats are all the people who work outside.'

Thirdly, the pseudocleft structures are not compatible with non-specific indefinites, because such expressions do not refer to anything in particular and thus cannot identify or exclude. Infelicity in such contexts thus confirms the exclusive nature of the Kĩitharaka pseudocleft. Instead, they can only be used with a generic interpretation. Structure (131) for instance would only make sense if it were interpreted that the speaker saw a person and not an animal. Proceeding from this premise, structure example (132) is judged infelicitous. The use of the relative marker in class 1 *ûra* (the one/who) already calls for a specific element in the clefted constituent because the speaker already knows it is a person. Identification of 'a/the person' requires a specific name and not a generic reference, whose use here amounts to redundancy.

- (131) (What did you see? OR There was some movement at the door. I guess it was a goat?)
 Kírâ mbóniré i muntû (ti mbûri).
 kî-ra n-on-ire ni mu-ntû (ti mb-ûri)
 7-RM 1SG.SM-see-PFV COP 1-person NEG 9-goat
 'What I saw is a person.'
- (132) ? (Who did you see?)
 Ūrá mbóniré i muntû.
 û-ra n-on-ire ni mu-ntû
 1-RM 1SG.SM-see-PFV COP 1-person
 ?'The one I saw is a person.'

Similarly, the NP in a pseudocleft can only be modified by 'some' if there is a contrast with 'all'. Outside of this context, the use of the indefinite quantifier 'some' in the clefted constituent fails to achieve the identificational role of the focus.

- (133) (#Context 1: Did all the chickens escape?)
 (Context 2: All the animals ran away! Chickens, cows, goats... No, actually...)
 Irá irátoorookíre i ngúkú ímwé.
 i-ra i-ra-toorook-ire ni n-gúkú i-mwe
 10-RM 10SM-YPST-escape-PFV COP 10-chicken 10-some
 ‘The ones that ran away are some (of the) chickens.’
- (134) (Context: Did all the chickens escape?)
 Irá irátoorookíre n’ímwé.¹²
 i-ra i-ra-toorook-ire ni i-mwe
 10-RM 10-YPST-escape-PFV COP 10-one
 ‘Only some ran away.’ lit: ‘The ones that ran away are some.’

Fourthly, the Kĩitharaka pseudocleft is incompatible with mention-some contexts. This is a non-exhaustive context that asks about entities without excluding alternatives. Instead, the pseudocleft is indicated as exclusive. If for instance, you are in need of a pen and you luckily meet about four people working in an office that have all sorts of pens, you are hopeful to be lent one, so you ask: *who amongst you can lend me a pen?* In the given situation, there is no one correct answer, because there are multiple people who can lend a pen. In Kĩitharaka, an SVO sentence would be acceptable in this context, but a pseudocleft as in (135) is not acceptable. The pseudocleft can only be interpreted exclusively, suggesting that the others do not have pens to lend; *it is Peter that has several pens so he can assist you with one.*

- (135) # Ūrá gúũmba kũróómba i Bitá.
 ū-ra gũ-ũmba kũ-róómba ni Bitá
 1-RM 2SG.SM-can 15-borrow COP Peter
 ‘The one you can borrow from is Peter.’

Similarly, if (136) is given as an answer to the question ‘which places in Kenya can I visit for holiday?’ then it cannot be taken to mean that Mombasa is one of the many places one can visit. Instead, it means Mombasa is the one good place, thus, getting an exclusive indication.

¹²A reviewer asked whether it is possible to have *n’imwe ira irátoorookíre* to mean ‘it is some that ran away’. In our view, such a structure is not possible in the same context as it results in a different interpretation in Kĩitharaka – ‘it is some; the ones that ran away.’

- (136) Kûra kwééga i Mombasa.
 kû-ra kû-ega ni Mombasa
 17-RM 17-good COP 17.Mombasa
 ‘The best place is Mombasa.’
 #‘Where it is good is Mombasa.’

Fifthly, correction of falsehood is also a natural environment for the pseudocleft, as shown in (137) and (138).

- (137) (Context: Person A continues to suggest that Karîmi must be in the market because she is a trader there. Person B insists...)
 Kûrá Karîmi árí i mûndaaní.
 kû-ra Karîmi a-rî ni mû-nda=ini
 17-RM 1.Karîmi 1SM-be COP 3-farm=LOC
 ‘Where Karîmi is is on the farm.’
- (138) (Did the girl steal the ball?)
 Arî, kará kaiyiré i kaíyí.
 arî ka-ra ka-iy-ire ni ka-îyî
 no 12-RM 12-steal-PFV COP 12-small.boy
 ‘No, the one who stole is a small boy.’

Finally, although it is quite unnatural to ask the question in (139) in the form of a pseudocleft, the best answer to it starts with ‘no’. This negates the exhaustivity that is expressed in the pseudocleft, as it asks for only one of the two referents for which the predicate is true.

- (139) (Context: photo of a woman selling onions and tomatoes)
 Kîra mwekûrû akweendia i nyaanya?
 kî-rá mû-ékûrû a-kû-endi-a ni nyaanya
 7-RM 1-lady 1SM-PRS-sell-FV COP 10-tomato
 ‘What the woman is selling, is it tomatoes?’
- (140) Arî ariendia nyaanyá na itûngûrû.
 arî a-rî-endi-a nyaanya na i-tûngûrû
 no 1SM-PRS-sell-FV 10.tomato and 8-onion
 ‘No, she sells tomatoes and onions.’

We conclude that the pseudocleft identifies a referent whose existence is presupposed in the free relative, and does so to the exclusion of alternatives. However, Kĩitharaka speakers commonly use another structure in these contexts with the form [XP + NI-PRO + V], which is what we turn to now.

5.3 The NI-PRO construction

There is another construction that differs minimally from the structure we have introduced as the NI+RM construction, but as we will see it is different in its interpretation. This construction also features an initial NP followed by *ni*, but is then followed not by the relative (demonstrative) pronoun, but by the pronoun in *-o* (see Section 3 for other uses) and the verb. This is illustrated in (141), to be compared to the NI+RM construction in (142). We will refer to this as the NI-PRO construction.

- (141) (Is it Mwangi that wrote the letter?)
 Bíta n'wé áandikiré (tí Mwangi). [NI-PRO]
 Bita ni we a-andik-ire (ti Mwangi)
 1.Peter FOC 1.PRO 1SM-write-PFV (NEG.COP 1.Mwangi)
 'Peter, it is he who wrote (not Mwangi).'
- (142) (Who is Peter?)
 Bíta n'ûrá áandikiré. [NI-RM]
 Bita ni ûra a-andik-ire
 1.Peter FOC 1.RM 1SM-write-PFV
 'Peter is the one who wrote.'

While the structural parallel between the two constructions is striking, they differ on various points. A first point is that, unlike the pseudocleft which can be reversed, the NI-PRO construction cannot be reversed. That is, the phrase headed by the pronoun cannot precede *ni*, as shown in (143) and (144).

- (143) a. [Kĩrá ûkwoóná] í [kyó ûgapewá].
 [kĩ-ra û-kû-on-a] ni [ki-o û-ka-per-w-a]
 7-RM 2SG.SM-PRS-see-FV COP 7-PRO 2SG.SM-FUT-give-PASS-FV
 'What you see is what you get.'
- b. * [Ky-o û-kw-oon-a] i [ky-o û-ga-p-ew-a].
 [ki-o û-kû-on-a] ni [ki-o û-ka-per-w-a]
 7-PRO 2SG.SM-PRS-see-FV COP 7-PRO 2SG.SM-FUT-give-PASS-FV
- c. * [Kyo ûkwoona] i [kĩra ûgapewa].
 [ki-o û-kû-on-a] ni [kĩ-ra û-ka-per-w-a]
 7-PRO 2SG.SM-PRS-see-FV COP 7-RM 2SG.SM-FUT-give-PASS-FV
- (144) [Ûrá/ *We û-kû-thaamb-i-a thaání] í Rób.
 1-RM/ 1.PRO 1RM-PRS-clean-IC-FV 10.plate COP 1.Rob
 'The one/he who washes dishes is Rob.'

Secondly, if the copula functions like a predicator, as it does in the pseudocleft and the NI+RM construction, we expect it to change form to express different tense/aspect in the NI-PRO construction as well. The copula *ni* is replaced by the verb *-ri* in the past tense, both in copular clauses like (145), as well as in the NI+RM construction (146).

- (145) Téné mûnó mbiti na kayúgú **baarí** acooré.
 tene mûno m-biti na ka-yûgû ba-a-rî a-coore
 long INT 9-hyena and 12-hare 2SM-PST -be 2-friend
 ‘A long time ago, Hyena and Hare were friends.’
- (146) A: Are you talking about the pen that Peter was given by the teacher?
 B: No,...
 Karámu **ka-a-rî** ka-rá Kawîra a-gûr-íté.
 12-pen 12SM-PST-be 12-RM 1.Kawîra 1SM-buy-PFV
 ‘The pen was the one that Kawîra bought.’

Crucially, this tense/aspect-based variation is ungrammatical in the NI-PRO construction – see (147b). This not only shows us that the NI-PRO construction behaves differently from the NI+RM construction, but also that *ni* in the NI-PRO construction does not fully function like a copula between the initial NP and the rest – an important ingredient for the analysis.

- (147) a. Ny-oombá **ni-y-ó** î-rá-bí-íre (y-óónka).
 9-house COP-9-PRO 9SM-YPST-burn-PFV 9-only
 ‘(Only) the house is what has burnt.’
- b. * Ny-oombá **y-aa-rî-yó** î-rá-bí-íre (yóónka).
 9-house 9SM-PST-be-PRO 9SM-YPST-burn-PFV 9-only
 int. ‘(Only) the house was what has burnt.’

Thirdly, in the NI-PRO construction the focus is on the referent of the preverbal NP, whereas in the NI+RM construction it cannot be. This is visible in the comparison of the context questions in (148) for the two constructions, as well as the question-answer pair in (149). We have bolded the focus.

- (148) a. (Context 1: Is Joy doing the dishes?
 Context 2: Who is washing the dishes?
 #Context 3: I am looking for Rob, who is working in a kitchen full of people. I ask ‘Who is Rob?’)
Rob n’-[**we** û-kû-thaamb-i-a thaáni.]
 1.Rob COP-1.PRO 1RM-PRS-clean-IC-FV 10.plate
 ‘Rob, it’s him washing the dishes.’

b. (#Context 1: Is Joy doing the dishes?

#Context 2: Who is washing the dishes?

Context 3: I am looking for Rob, who is working in a kitchen full of people. I ask ‘Who is Rob?’)

Rob n’-[ûra û-kû-thaamb-i-a thaani.]

1.Rob COP-1.RM 1RM-PRS-clean-IC-FV 10.plate

‘Rob is the one who is washing the dishes.’

(149) (Where is a good place to go on a holiday? Interpretation: there are no other places that are good.)

Nanyukî i-kû kw-éégá.

9.Nanyuki COP-17.PRO 17-good

‘Nanyuki is the place that is good.’

Concluding that the NI-PRO construction is not structurally a reverse pseudo-cleft (and thus not a copular construction), we want to know what the structure and interpretation of this construction are. As we have seen, the initial NP seems to be focused. One analysis is therefore that there is a focus position sentence-initially, in addition to the focus in the basic cleft/focus construction, but marked differently. However, there is also the post-copular independent pronoun that is co-indexed with the initial NP. Instead of taking the preverbal NP as the focus constituent, we will argue that the structure is best analysed as an initial NP followed by a basic cleft/focus construction in which the pronoun is the focused constituent: NP [FOC/COP PRO V], translatable as ‘Rob, it is *him* that is doing the dishes’. This analysis fits better with the tendency for post-copular focus (see (119) and (120) above): focus is not necessarily on the initial NP but instead on the post-copular pronoun (the *kyo* in *ikyo*). As they both refer to the same referent, however, we get the impression that the initial NP represents the focus.

Regarding the second part being analysed as a basic cleft/focus construction, it was already shown in (97) above that a pronoun can be focused in the basic cleft/focus construction, with the pronoun referring to a contextually accessible referent – the same is illustrated in (150).

(150) I-ky-o gî-tem-ag-a n-gûkû î-kurur-a.

COP-7-PRO 7SM-make-HAB-FV 9-chicken 9SM-crow-FV

‘That’s why Chicken crows.’ lit. ‘It is *that* that makes Chicken crow.’

Now let us turn to the initial NP in this construction. If it were the focus, we would expect it to be able to host (inherently focused) interrogative phrases. The fact that the initial NP cannot be a true interrogative, as in (151) and (152), shows us that the initial position is not a normal focus position. The examples in (151)

and (152) were indicated by the speakers to be felicitous only in an echo context. Had the initial position been the focus, we would expect it to be able to host a question word and the structure to be used as a true content question.

- (151) (Context: You overhear that someone was tasked to wash the plates but you didn't get the name right.)
 Ũû n'-we û-kû-thaamb-i-a thaáni?
 1.who COP-1.PRO 1RM-PRS-clean-IC-FV 10.plate
 'Who (is the one who) is washing the dishes?'

 (152) (Context: You overhear that something got burnt but you didn't actually get what it was.)
 Mbi ni-y-ó î-rá-bí-íre?
 9.what COP-9-PRO 9SM-YPST-burn-PFV
 'What (is it that) has burnt?'

If the initial NP is independent of the following basic cleft, the possible prosodic break after the NP is also predicted, as in (154) and (150). This break is unexpected if the initial NP were in a focus position as part of a focus construction.

- (153) (Whose pen did the doctor borrow?)
 Karámú gáakwá, ikó ndagitári araroombíre.
 ka-ramu ka-akwa, ni-ka-o n-dagitari a-ra-roomb-ire.
 12-pen 12-1SG.POSS COP-12-PRO 9-doctor 1SM-YPST-borrow-PFV
 'My pen is what the doctor borrowed.' / 'My pen, it is *that* that the doctor borrowed.'

 (154) (There is an egg, where did it come from?)
 N-gûkû î-nú, n' îy-ó î-ra-ciár-ire.
 9-chicken 9-DEM.MED FOC 9-PRO 9SM-YPST-give.birth-PFV
 'That chicken is who laid it.' / 'That chicken, it's *her* who laid it.'
 (pointing at chicken)

Furthermore, the NP may be separated from the basic cleft, for example as in (155), where the adverb *nûumba* intervenes between the contextually active *aga* 'here' and the cleft/focus construction *n'oo* 'it is here'.

- (155) (One day, she went to a river, a very calm pool. If you listened you couldn't hear anything talking.)

Áugá índí ágá nũũmba n'óó ngaatéethekerá.
a-ug-a índi a-ga nũũmba ni o
1SM-say-FV now 16-DEM.PROX maybe FOC 16.PRO
n-ka-teth-ík-ír-a
1SG.SM-FUT-help-ABL-APPL-FV
'She said, "Probably, this is where I will get help".'

So what is the function of the initial NP? Its status seems to be ambiguous, and will need more research for it to become completely clear. We propose that in at least some contexts it is a topic, for example in (147). The NI-PRO construction then forms a way to indicate both the highly accessible status of the referent (by the topical NP) and also the focus function (by the clefted pronoun).

On the other hand, in some context we see that the initial NP seems to function as a fragment answer. This is clear in (153) above, for example, and also when we look at the exhaustive focus-sensitive particle 'only': this cannot modify a topic NP, but it can be used in a fragment answer, as shown in (156c). In the NI-PRO construction, we see that it can modify the clefted pronoun, as in the preferred structure (156b), but it can also modify the initial NP as in (156a).

- (156) a. (How many students wrote a letter?)
Jéení wéenká n'wé áandikiré baarúa.
Jeeni we-onka ni-wé a-andik-ire baarúa.
1.Jane 1-only COP-1PRO 1SM-write-PFV 9.letter
'Only Jane wrote a letter.'
- b. Jéení n'wé wéenká áandikiré baarúa.
Jeeni ni-wé we-onka a-andik-ire baarúa. (preferred)
1.Jane COP-1PRO 1-only 1SM-write-PFV 9.letter
'Only Jane wrote a letter.'
- c. Jéení wée-nká.
1.Jane 1-only
'Only Jane.'

Topics and fragment answers cannot be the whole story, though. We find a little conundrum when we try the word 'person' as the initial NP, as illustrated in (157). It cannot be interpreted as a (specific or non-specific) indefinite. Instead, a generic interpretation can be forced, i.e. a human being (not a goat), or else

‘Muntu’ has to be interpreted as the name of a person. This is indicated in the three interpretations a-b-c under the example. For interpretation c, it is possible to add a prosodic break after *Muntû*, and this can be an answer to ‘Who did you see this morning?’ (context 3). In contrast, in interpretation b, a prosodic break is not very acceptable, and it can be used in contexts 1 and 2 but not 3.

- (157) (Context 1: Is it a goat or a person that entered your house?¹³
Context 2: I heard a goat entered your house this morning. No, ...
Context 3: Who did you see this morning?)
Muntû n’wé mbóniré.
mu-ntû ni we n-on-ire
1-person FOC 1.PRO 1SG.SM-see-PFV
a. * ‘Someone I saw.’
b. ‘A person/human being is who I saw.’ (not a goat)
contexts 1: ✓ 2: ✓ 3: ✗
c. ‘Muntu is who I saw.’
context 3: ✓

If the construction is to be analysed as a fragment answer plus cleft in all three contexts, then we would expect the initial NP to be acceptable as a fragment in all three contexts. The fragment answer in (158), however, can only be used in context A but not B (and is uninformative in context C – unless interpreted as a proper name). This means that the NI-PRO construction with interpretation b above can be analysed structurally as a fragment answer + cleft structure in context A, but must be analysed differently in context B.

- (158) Muntû.
1.person
‘A person/human being.’
1: ✓ 2: ✗ 3: ✗

Further data and targeted investigation are needed to reveal the syntactic and interpretational status of the initial NP in this construction. For now, we conclude that in some contexts it functions as a topic and in some as a fragment answer, and move our attention to the cleft-part of the construction.

If the NI-PRO construction features a basic cleft/focus construction, then we expect the same properties to hold as in that construction, that is, an exhaustive

¹³ A basic cleft would also be acceptable as the answer here.

interpretation. Indeed, the answer to an incomplete question using the NI-PRO construction as in (159) starts with ‘no’, as in the basic cleft and the pseudocleft. This negates the exhaustivity in the question, showing that the focus is interpreted as exhaustive.

- (159) Q: Twaarí itú tûthaambiirié thaání?
 tû-aarî ni tu tû-thaamb-i-ire thaani
 13-girl FOC PRO 13SM-clean-IC-PFV 10.plate
 ‘The girls, is it them who washed plates?’
- A: Arí ti twaarí túunká (tûthaambiirie thaani). I twaarí na twíyí.
 arí ti tû-aarî tû-onka tû-thaamb-i-ire thaani. ni tû-aarî
 no NEG.COP 13-girl 13-only 13SM-clean-IC-PFV 10.plate FOC 13-girl
 na tû-îyî
 and 13-boy
 ‘No, it is not girls only (that washed the plates). It is boys and girls.’

Furthermore, the unacceptability of the initial NP to be modified by ‘even’ is expected if the NI-PRO construction is fundamentally the same as the basic cleft/focus construction.¹⁴ The construction was improved as in (160b), where *nawé* marks *wana Kanyua* as a topic (and see Section 3 on *nawe*).

- (160) a. *Wana Kanyúa n’wé aandikiré baarúa.
 wana Kanyua ni we a-andik-ire baarúa
 even 1.Kanyua FOC 1.PRO 1SM-write-PFV 9.letter
 int. ? ‘Even Kanyua is the one who wrote a letter.’
- b. Wana Kanyúa nawé n’aandikiré baarúa.
 wana Kanyua na=we ni a-andik-ire baarúa
 even 1.Kanyua and=1.PRO FOC 1SM-write-PFV 9.letter
 ‘Even Kanywa (she too) wrote a letter.’

Additionally, checking the indefinite interpretation of *-mwe* ‘some’ in the construction, we find that just as in the basic cleft, a subset reading is necessary, contrasting ‘some’ with ‘all’.¹⁵

¹⁴Note that ‘even’ is grammatical in a fragment answer. For example, a question ‘Did Jane write a letter?’ can be answered by *wana Kanyua* ‘even Kanyua’.

¹⁵Note that ‘some’ can also modify a fragment answer, as in (i).

- (i) Q: You had trees, cows, goats, maize. What did you sell?
 A: Mî-tí î-mwé.
 4-tree 4-one
 ‘Some trees.’

- (161) (Did all the chickens escape?)
 Ngúkú ímwé ició círátooróókire.
 n-gúkú i-mwe ni ci-o ci-ra-toorook-ire
 10-chicken 10-one FOC 10-PRO 10SM-YPST-escape-PFV
 ‘Some of the chickens are the ones who escaped.’

In summary, there are clear arguments against analysing the NI-PRO construction as a sort of pseudocleft, and instead we propose that it is an initial NP functioning as a topic or fragment answer, plus a basic cleft/focus construction in which a pronoun coreferential with the initial NP is in exhaustive focus. The results of all the diagnostics for the three tests, where we have data, are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Diagnostics for focus and exhaustivity in Kĩitharaka cleft constructions.

	basic	pseudo	NI-PRO
wh	✓	✓	✗
answer	✓	✓	✓
only	✓	✓	✓
even	✗	✗	✗
mention some	✗	✗	✗
all	✗	✗	✗
some	subset	✗	subset
numeral	exact		
idiom	✗	✗	✗
indef	✓	✗	✗
incompl	no	no	no
answer nothing	✓	✗	N/A

6 Object marking and object drop

The information status of a referent influences the expression used to refer to it. In Kĩitharaka, whether an object is expressed overtly or dropped depends on the interaction of several factors. They include accessibility hierarchy, predicate type and referential properties (whether human or non-human). We will look at each of them with a view to understanding their roles in object drop, drawing on Kanampiu (forthcoming).

6.1 Accessibility status

We hypothesize that the Accessibility Theory by Ariel (2001) (and earlier works), and related works by Chafe (1976, 1987), Gundel et al. (1993) and Givón (1984), can be used to explain the paradigm of object marking and drop in Kĩitharaka. As explained in the introductory chapter, according to Ariel (2001), referring expressions mark varying degrees of mental accessibility of referents, in an inverse relation between linguistic encoding and accessibility: A new referent is inaccessible, and thus has the most linguistic encoding (full NP, or NP + modifier when being reactivated), whereas a previously mentioned referent is considered accessible, and hence requires less linguistic encoding (with zero anaphora being the lowest in the scale). The degree of accessibility forms a scale referred to as the “accessibility hierarchy”. Accordingly, the Kĩitharaka accessibility hierarchy for object referents can be constructed as follows:

- (162) Lexical NP+modifier > Lexical NP > DEM > Pron/SM/OM/PRO > Object Drop

This accessibility hierarchy correctly predicts that new referents are expressed with an expression at the far left end of the hierarchy (full lexical NP). This is illustrated in example (163) and (164), where a new referent (the guinea fowl and the wound, respectively) is introduced into the narrative.

- (163) (Context: Hare and Hyena went to the bush to hunt. They hunted for some time.)

Bakĩgwĩmága gwa ũgú, booná nkáanga.

ba-kĩ-guĩm-ag-a wa ũgu ba-on-a n-kanga

2SM-DEP-hunt-HAB-FV like that 2SM-saw-FV 9-guinea.fowl

‘As they were hunting, they saw a guinea fowl.’

- (164) (Context: A woman was injured by a stick while collecting firewood. The stick was poisonous.)

Aagea na kĩronda kĩnéne mũno kũgũrũ.

a-a-ge-a na kĩ-ronda kĩ-nene mũno kũ-gũrũ

1SM-PST-develop-FV with 7-wound 7-big INT 17-leg

‘She developed a very big wound on the leg.’

Apart from introducing a purely new referent, full lexical NPs are used to reactivate referents at paragraph or episode boundaries. If a referent is less accessible because it was mentioned several paragraphs behind, it may be expressed in the form of full NP + relative clause modifier as illustrated in (165).

- (165) (Context: They saw a guinea fowl. Hyena took the arrows and aimed, shot and killed it. They became very happy.)
 Mbítí na Kayúgú báákámata **nkáánga írá báúragiré**, báathí n'yó bántû
 kathakáani.
 mbiti na ka-yûgû ba-a-kamat-a n-kaanga î-ra
 1.Hyena and 1-Hare 2SM-PST-carry-FV 9-guinea.fowl 9-RM
 ba-ûrag-ire bá-a-thi na=yo ba-ntû ka-thaka=ini
 2SM-kill-PFV 2SM-PST-go with=9.PRO 16-someplace 12-bush=LOC
 'Hyena and Hare carried the guinea fowl that they had killed to some place in the bush.'

One step further on the hierarchy, demonstratives can be used to refer to participants, actions or locations that are obviously identifiable by the hearer, either adnominally or pronominally, as illustrated for *aga* 'here' in (166).

- (166) (Context: The lady sees a handsome young man who she thinks is interested in her daughter. She decides to take charge.)
 Ntitigá mwaána ûyû **áagá**.
 ni n-ti-tig-a mû-ana û-yû aga
 FOC 1SG.SM-NEG-leave-FV 1-child 1-DEM.PROX 16.DEM.PROX
 'I can't leave this young man here.'

Demonstratives may also be used exophorically, as in (167), where *ûyû* 'this one' refers to the person who slapped another person, and *aagá* refers to a place where s/he has been slapped. Both are accompanied by a pointing gesture.

- (167) a. (Who slapped you?)
 N'ûyû.
 ni ûyû
 COP 1.DEM.PROX
 'It is this one.'
- b. (Where did he slap you?)
 N'áagá.
 ni aga
 COP 16.DEM.PROX
 'It is here.'

In (168), *ûgu* 'that' refers to the swelling and beating of wings by the chicken, ostensibly to frighten the mongooses; this is an example of discourse deixis, referring to the earlier described actions.

- (168) Mĩrũngũũru yóoná ũgu...
 mĩ-rũngũũru ĩ-a-on-a ũgu
 4-mongoose 4SM-PST-see-FV 14.DEM.MED
 ‘When the mongooses saw that...’

Highly active objects can be expressed by an object marker on the verb, a pronoun, or simply dropped (zero expression). This choice, however, seems to be determined by factors other than information status/accessibility, involving syntactic environment (DP object vs. PP or predicate), predicate type, and animacy of the referent. We briefly discuss these here and refer to Kanampiu (forthcoming) for further details.

6.2 Object marker vs. independent pronoun

Pronominalising active objects happens in two ways: either by an object marker on the verb, or by a separate pronoun. In example (169), repeated from above, the referent *nkaanga* is introduced as a full NP, and in the next line (170), it is referred to in the form of an object marker as it is now active.

- (169) Bakĩgwĩmága gwa ũgú, booná nkáánga.
 ba-kĩ-guĩm-ag-a gwa ũgu ba-on-a n-kanga
 2SM-DEP-hunt-HAB-FV like that 2SM-saw-FV 9-guinea.fowl
 ‘As they were hunting, they saw a guinea fowl.’
- (170) Mbiti yáárutá mũgwĩ yáugiá bwaa, yamĩrathá, yamĩũraga.
 m-biti ĩ-a-rut-a mu-guĩ ĩ-a-ug-i-a bwaa
 9-hyena 9SM-PST-remove-FV 3-arrow 9SM-PST-do-IC-FV IDEO
 ĩ-a-mĩ-rath-a ĩ-a-mĩ-u-rag-a
 9SM-PST-9OM-shoot-FV 9SM-PST-9OM-kill-FV
 ‘Hyena took the arrows and aimed, shot and killed it.’

The separate pronoun occurs as an enclitic after the preposition *na* ‘with’, as in (171), but it also occurs when pronominalising two objects, as in (172). As there is only one slot for object marking on the verb, the Recipient/Benefactive must be marked there, and a pronominalised Theme object can optionally be expressed as a separate pronoun postverbally.

- (171) a. Kĩmathi náayire na kĩbanga?
 Kĩmathi ni a-y-ire na kĩ-banga
 Kĩmathi FOC 1SM-come-PFV with 7-panga
 ‘Did Kimathi bring (lit. come with) a panga?’

- b. Yii, náayire na*(kío).
 yii ni a-ya-ire na=kî-o
 Yes, FOC 1SM-come-PFV with=7-PRO
 ‘Yes, he brought (lit. came with) it.’

- (172) (Did you give Mary the carrots?)
 Yii i *(mû)néeenkeeré (cio).
 yii ni n-mû-nenker-ire ci-o
 yes FOC 1.SG.SM-1OM-give-PFV 10-PRO
 ‘Yes I gave her (them).’

The *-o* pronoun is also used in topic marking to achieve a contrastive reading, as well as a shift topic marker (see Section 3 for a description and examples). It is not encountered in our spontaneous texts as a means to mark contrastive focus – only in the NI+PRO construction do we find it as such (see Section 5.3).

6.3 Object marking vs. object drop

Basically, transitive verbs are expected to take objects. However, not all active objects that could be expressed as an object marker are actually marked, and objects may simply be dropped. Whether an object marker occurs or not seems to depend on various factors (but more research is necessary to establish the exact interactions and circumstances): dislocation, predicate type, humanness, and something like prototypicality or expectedness.¹⁶ As these are not directly relevant for information structure, we only touch upon them briefly.

First, an object marker may never be present in the same domain as the coreferring object NP. That is, the object marker functions like a true pronoun, and a coreferring NP must therefore be in a dislocated position to the right or left of the sentence. Second, some predicates seem to require object marking of active referents, here illustrated by left-dislocated objects. Predicates of perception like *-ona* ‘see’, *-enda* ‘like’ (173) and *-îgua* ‘feel’ (174) must be accompanied by object markers when the object is left dislocated, and telic predicates seem to prefer object marking more so than atelic predicates. Object drop is not licensed in such cases, regardless of the properties of the object (noun class, humanness). An overview of which predicates require or allow object marking is still outstanding.

- (173) Kîthéré, i n*(kî)endeeté.
 kî-there ni n-kî-end-îte
 7-kitheri FOC 1SG.SM-7OM-like-PFV
 ‘Githeri,¹⁷ I like it.’

¹⁶We acknowledge the MA thesis by Leiden University student Dominique Loviscach that helped clarify some of the factors.

¹⁷A meal of a mixture of maize and beans.

- (174) Mũríó, i ngũ*(cú)ígua.
 mũ-río ni n-kũ-cu-igu-a
 3-sweetness FOC 1SG.SM-PRS-3OM-feel-FV
 ‘Sweetness, I feel it.’

For other predicates, object marking seems to depend mainly on humanness of the object, and noun class. Transitive verbs require obligatory object marking with dislocated class 1 and 2 human objects, as shown in (175) and (176). Non-human objects are, however, optionally object marked, as in (178) and (179), and humans in class 12/13 also receive optional object marking (177).

- (175) Mwarímũ nká*(mũ)tũma.
 mũ-aarimũ n-ka-mũ-tũm-a
 1-teacher 1SG.SM-FUT-1OM-send-FV
 ‘The teacher, I will send him.’

- (176) I *(mũ)tũmiré, Précious.
 ni n-mũ-tũm-ire Précious
 FOC 1SG.SM-OM-sent-PFV 1.Precious
 ‘I sent her, Précious.’

- (177) Twáána ngá(tũ)cereria mabuku.
 tũ-ana n-ka-tũ-cer-ir-i-a ma-buku
 12-children 1SG.SM-FUT-12OM-find-APPL-IC-FV 6-book
 ‘Children, I will find books for them.’

- (178) a. Gíciáti ngũ(ki)gũra.
 kĩ-ciati n-kũ-kĩ-gũr-a
 7-broom 1SG.SM-PRS-7OM-buy-FV
 ‘The broom, I have bought (it).’
 b. Ngũ(ki)gũra, gíciáti.
 n-kũ-kĩ-gũr-a, kĩ-ciati
 1SG.SM-PRS-7OM-buy-FV 7-broom
 ‘I have bought (it), the broom.’

- (179) (How can I kill a chicken?)
 Noá úrííng-e na mũraagí...
 nwa û-riing-e na mũ-raagi
 can 2SG.SM-hit-SBJV with 3-stick
 ‘... you can hit (it) with a stick...’

The phenomenon of the predicate type influencing object expression can be related to what is observed for Luguru (Marten & Ramadhani 2001) and Kinyakyusa (Lusekelo 2024). For these languages, however, the predicates involved are different from the ones in Kĩtharaka. We refer to Kanampiu (forthcoming) for further discussion on the generalisation of predicate types.

A remaining question is what determines the presence or absence of the object marker when the predicate does not require it, and the object is not a human in class 1/2. In her MA thesis, Dominique Loviscach suggests that the likelihood or predictability of the object referent might play a role, where less expected objects are preferably object marked, and it is easier to drop the object (and the marker) for unsurprising objects, e.g. ‘eat rice’ can go unmarked, whereas ‘eat a cat’ would need marking. Verum is another function that might facilitate object marking. As said, these factors need further systematic research.

6.4 Saliency

Repetition of a full NP, as well as a combination of a demonstrative and full lexical NP can lead to a saliency effect, as illustrated in (180). The referent *ndia* ‘pool’ is introduced in a conversation, then questioned, and in the answer, referring back to the already active referent, speaker A responds by using the NP+DEM combination, *ndia inu* ‘the/that pool’. The use of the NP+DEM for an already active referent (rather than a pronoun) emphasises the fact that this particular pool is very important to the story. It is not just any other pool that is being referred to.

(180) (A: ‘This lady, her wound will be healed by water fetched from a pool without voices of frogs.’)

B: Î ndia îtakwaria kîûra?

î n-dia î-ta-kû-ari-a kî-ûra
 PP9-pool 9SM-NEG-PRS-speak-FV 7-frog
 ‘A pool without voices of frogs?’

A: Îî, wona aathaamba na rûûyî rwa ndia inu îtakwaria kîûra.

îî wona a-a-thaamb-a na rû-ûyî rû-a n-dia
 yes COND 1SM-PST-wash-FV with 11-water 11-CONN 9-pool
 î-nu î-ta-kû-ari-a kî-ûra
 9-DEM.MED 9SM-NEG-PRS-speak-FV 7-frog

‘Yes, if she washes with the water from the pool without voices of frogs.’

Similarly, the order within the NP may be reversed so that the demonstrative precedes the noun (see Kanampiu & Muriungi 2019), as in (181). With this kind of order, the emphasis is on the particular day – not any other day.

- (181) Īnu ntugũ Kanyamũ Nkió gakauma gakathi...
 ĩ-nu n-tugũ Kanyamũ Nkio ka-ka-uma ka-ka-thi...
 9-DEM.MED 9-day 12.Kanyamũ Nkio 12SM-SUBS-leave 12SM-SUBS-go
 ‘That particular day, Kanyamũ Nkio would leave, and go...’

6.5 Excursion: Subject drop

While we have examined the expression of objects in some detail, the expression of subjects also shows an interesting feature. Subjects are prototypically given information and function as topics in Kĩĩtharaka (although see Section 2.1 for detailed discussion). They determine subject marking on the verb in most cases, and the subject NP can easily be omitted when the referent is active, leaving the subject marker as the expression of the subject – in fact this is the more natural way to refer to active subjects. This is illustrated in (182): the daughter of the firstly-introduced man and woman is referred to by a NP+possessive, but subsequently only by the subject marker (with the “missing” NP subject indicated by ∅).

- (182) (A woman has been told that her wound will heal with water from a pool without frogs. She and her husband are wondering how they will find this pool.)
 Mwarĩ wake, augá agaacwa ndia ĩnu ĩtakwaria kũũra.
 mũ-arĩ w-ake a-ũg-a a-ka-cu-a n-dia ĩ-nu
 1-girl 1-POSS.1 1SM-say-FV 1SM-FUT-find-FV 9-pool 9-DEM.MED
 ĩ-ta-kũ-ari-a kĩ-ũra
 9SM-NEG-PRS-speak-FV 7-frog
 ‘His daughter said that she would find that pool without frog voices.’
 ∅ Auma agu, ∅ aathi muuroni.
 a-um-a a-gu, a-a-thi mũ-uro=ini
 1SM-move-FV 16-PRO 1SM-PST-go 3-river=LOC
 ‘She left there and went to the river.’

Ø Aathi, keenda Ø amenya kana kûrî kîûra kîrîku, Ø aina "...".
a-a-thi ka-end-a a-meny-a kana kû-rî kî-ûra kî-rî=ku
1SM-PST-go FUT-like-FV 1SM-know-FV if 17-be 7-frog 7SM-be=17
a-in-a
1SM-sing-FV
'She went, so that she could know whether there was a frog in there,
and she sang "...'

Interestingly, there seems to be a reduced inflection on subsequent verb forms such as *aina* 'she sang'. But subject marking is still present and cannot be omitted like we saw for object marking. Nevertheless, in narratives, accessible referents that function as the topic and subject for several subsequent clauses may also be dropped altogether: no NP and no subject marker appears, and the verb in these clauses is an infinitive. This is illustrated in (183), where the Hare (class 12) is the subject marked on the verbs in the first clause, but the verbs in the second and third clause are infinitives. Note also that these clauses are introduced by *na*, showing that they indicate sequential events that are the culmination of the previously mentioned series of events. For further discussion, we refer to Kanampiu (forthcoming).

- (183) Kámîgwatá kámíogá bwéega, kámíoga muumá
ka-mî-guat-a ka-mî-og-a bu-ega ka-mî-og-a
12SM-9OM-catch-FV 12SM-9OM-tie-FV 14-well 12SM-9OM-tie-FV
mu-uma
3-absolutely
'He got hold (of Hyena) and tied him firmly,'
na kûrúma mûcioro
na kû-rûma mû-cioro
and 15-bite 3-stick
'then collected a strong stick,'
na kûmiúgia mmá! mmá! Kámîbúúra.
na kû-mî-ug-i-a mma mma ka-mî-buur-a
and 15-9OM-do-IC-FV IDEO IDEO 12SM-9OM-beat-FV
'and went on him whack! whack! He beat him.'

In summary, an object referent is typically introduced as a full NP, reactivated when it is accessible by an NP + modifier, and highly active objects may be expressed as an independent pronoun or an object marker, or they may remain

unexpressed (object drop). Whether an object can be dropped depends primarily on the predicate and whether the object is a human in class 1/2 or not. Further research is needed to disentangle the precise factors that determine object marking and object drop. Subject NPs can also easily be dropped when referring to active referents. Typically, the subject is visible as subject marking on the inflected verb, but in sequences of events where the subject stays the same (a familiarity topic), the verb may appear in the infinitive form.

There is one final aspect of Kĩitharaka grammar that we have referred to in various sections, and that is the marker *ni-* preceding the inflected verb. The marker also has a fundamental influence on the information structure, as we discuss in the next section.

7 Focus marker *ni* on verbs

As Muriungi (2005) indicates, Kĩitharaka has three conjugational categories (tense/aspect combinations) with a choice for the presence or absence of the preverbal focus marker *ni-*, and three where the absence or presence is fixed, as summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Kĩitharaka tenses and their use of *ni*

present perfective	SM-kũ-VB-a	a-kũ-ring-a ‘he has beaten’
present progressive	ni SM-kũ-VB-a / SM-ri-VB-a	n’a-kũ-ring-a ‘he is beating’
future	SM-ka-VB-a	a-ka-ring-a ‘he will beat’
perfective	(ni) SM-VB-ire	(n’)a-ring-ire ‘he beat’
yesterday past	(ni) SM-ra-VB-ire	(n’)a-ra-ring-ire ‘he beat’
remote past	(ni) SM-a-VB-ire	(n’)a-a-ring-ire ‘he beat’

The question we can ask for the “optional” conjugations (perfective, yesterday past, and remote past) is thus what determines the presence or absence of the marker. Apart from being restricted to these conjugations, there appear to be three more restrictions at the clausal level:

1. A verb in sentence-final position of a main clause must have the marker;
2. Negative verb forms and a verb in the embedded clause cannot take *ni-*;
3. When the marker is absent, the focus falls on the postverbal element.

The first restriction is evident in Muriungi (2005: 46) and illustrated in (184), where the postverbal element can be an object (184a) or an adjunct (184d), but the verb may not be clause-final without the marker *ni* on the verb (184b–184c).

- (184) a. Árárúmiirie ìng'ooi.
a-ra-rùm-i-ire ì-ng'ooi
1SM-YPST-bite-IC-PFV 5-donkey
‘He fed the donkey.’
- b. Wana ìng'ooi *(n')áárúmiirie.
wana ì-ng'ooi ni a-ra-rùm-i-ire
even 5-donkey FOC 1SM-YPST-bite-IC-PFV
‘Even the donkey he fed.’
- c. *(Í) túagwíré.
ni tû-a-gû-ire
FOC 1PL.SM-PST-fall-PFV
‘We fell.’
- d. Ndaráthiir' ígoro.
nda-ra-thi-ire ì-goro
1SG.SM-YPST-go-PFV 5-yesterday
‘I went yesterday.’

This is reminiscent of the conjoint/disjoint alternation, as Abels & Muriungi (2008: 728) note in comparison with Kirundi; see especially also Morimoto (2017) for a comparison of the marker *nĩ-* in closely-related Gikuyu to the conjoint/disjoint alternation.

The second restriction is shown by Muriungi (2005: 80) in his example (185c): *ni* cannot be used on a negative verb form.

- (185) (Muriungi 2005: 80, glosses adapted)
- a. Paul n' á-rá-rúg-íre n-kíma.
1.Paul FOC 1SM-YPST-cook-PFV 9-ugali
‘Paul cooked food.’
- b. Paul a-tí-ra-rúg-a n-kíma.
1.Paul 1SM-NEG-YPST-cook-FV 9-ugali
‘Paul did not cook food.’
- c. * Paul n' a-tí/tá-rúg-a n-kíma.
1.Paul FOC 1SM-NEG-YPST-cook-FV 9-ugali
‘Paul did not cook food.’

The third restriction comes out in a number of tests, showing that when *ni* is absent, the element following the verb is in focus. The form with *ni* cannot be used in an object question (186), and neither is it felicitous as an answer to an object question, as shown in (187) and (188).

- (186) (*N)ûroóníre ûû?

ni û-ra-on-ire ûû
FOC 2SG.SM-YPST-see-PFV who
'Who did you see?'

- (187) (What did Asha bake?)

Áshá (#'n') akáándíré mûgááté.
asha ni a-kaand-ire mû-gaate
1.Asha FOC 1SM-bake-PFV 3-bread
'Asha baked bread.'

- (188) (Who did you see at the high school reunion?)

(#I)mbóníré Kîmakû báí.
ni n-on-ire Kîmakû bai
FOC 1SG.SM-see-PFV 1.Kîmakû buddy
'I saw Kîmakû, friend.'

Muriungi (2005: footnote 13) indicates that a question word preceded by a *ni*-marked verb may be interpreted as an echo question, but we found that the interpretation is more one of emphasis, as indicated in the context and translation of (189a). The same interpretation can be obtained by the presence of the polarity particle *ka* as in (189b). Echo questions in our data are asked with a *ni*-less verb, a rising intonation, and possibly a modification of the question word by a following *-o* pronoun, as in (189).

- (189) (Context: Someone got a stomach ache after dinner, so what could they have cooked that made this so?)

- a. N' árárugíré m̀bí?

ni a-ra-rug-ire m-bi
FOC 1SM-YPST-cook-PFV 9-what
'What (on earth) did s/he cook?'

- b. Ká árárugíré m̀bí?

ka a-ra-rug-ire m-bi
Q 1SM-YPST-cook-PFV 9-what
'What did s/he cook?'

- (190) (Context: You haven't heard well what someone said.)

Arárúgire mbié?

a-ra-rug-ire m-bi-e

1SM-YPST-cook-PFV 9-what-ECHO

'She cooked what?'

Cognate objects, which cannot be focused, can follow a verb with *ni* (191), but are awkward when *ni* is absent (191b). Since cognate objects cannot be focused (as there are no realistic alternatives), this shows that the constituent following the *ni*-less form is focused. As expected, when specifying the object with a relative clause, it becomes possible to focus the object (as alternatives can be generated outside this subset, here dreams that are not scary) and hence the verb form without *ni* is acceptable – see (191c).

- (191) a. N' áaróótíré kîróóto.

ni a-a-root-ire kî-root-o

FOC 1SM-PST-dream-PFV 7-dream-NMLZ

'He dreamt a dream.'

- b. * Aróótíré kîróóto.

a-a-root-ire kî-root-o

1SM-PST-dream-PFV 7-dream-NMLZ

'He dreamt a dream.'

- c. Aaróótíré kîróóto kîámûmakia mûnó.

a-a-root-ire kî-root-o kî-a-mû-maki-a mûno

1SM-PST-dream-PFV 7-dream-NMLZ 7SM-PST-1OM-scare-FV INT

'He dreamt a dream that really scared him.'

Similarly, an idiomatic object does not keep its idiomatic reading when *ni* is absent (192b), as opposed to when it is present (192a), again showing the focus status of the element following the *ni*-less verb.

- (192) a. N' áátwéére mûtí.

ni a-ra-tûa-ir-e mû-tî

FOC 1SM-YPST-climb-PFV-FV 3-tree

'She climbed a tree'

'She became pregnant.'

- b. Aatwééré mûtí.
a-ra-tw-ire mû-tí
1SM-YPST-climb-PFV 3-tree
‘She climbed a *tree*.’ (it’s not a rock)
*‘She became pregnant.’

For alternative questions, where the focus is on the object, the form without *ni* is required, shown in (193a). The form with *ni* (and a variation in constituent order) will be interpreted as a yes/no question, as in (193).

- (193) a. Suúzà arúgiiré Yénéké kũkĩ kaná Ngírũbati?
Souza a-rug-ire Jenneke kũkĩ kana Wilbert
1.Souza 1SM-cook-PFV 1.Jenneke 9.cake or 1.Wilbert
‘Did Souza bake a cake for Jenneke or for Wilbert?’ (answer:
Jenneke/Wilbert)
- b. Suúzà n’árúgiiré Yénéké kaná Ngírũbati kũkĩ?
Souza ni a-rug-ir-ire Jenneke kana Wilbert kũkĩ
1.Souza FOC 1SM-cook-APPL-PFV 1.Jenneke or 1.Wilbert 9.cake
‘Did Souza bake a cake for Jenneke or for Wilbert (at all)?’ (answer:
yes/no)

The interpretation of the postverbal element as focus also emerges clearly when the postverbal object is modified by ‘some’. Following a verb form without *ni*-, this cannot be interpreted as a lower boundary (some, perhaps all), but must be interpreted as a proper subset as in (194b), in line with focus triggering and excluding alternatives. In contrast, the form with *ni* in (194a) was said to “focus on the fact that they were slaughtered”. The continuation clauses in (194a) (actually all) and (194b) (leaving others) cannot be interchanged between the two examples.

- (194) a. Í baráurágíre ngúkũ ímwe... wana íciónthe.
ni ba-ra-urag-ire n-gúkũ i-mwe wana ni ci-onthe
FOC 2SM-YPST-kill-PFV 10-chicken 10-one even FOC 10-all
‘They slaughtered some chickens... actually all of them.’
- b. Baráurágíre ngúkũ ímwe... baatiga irá ingĩ.
ba-ra-urag-ire n-gúkũ i-mwe ba-ra-tig-a i-ra
2SM-YPST-kill-PFV 10-chicken 10-one 2SM-YPST-stop-FV 10-RM
i-ngĩ
10-other
‘They slaughtered some chickens... they left others.’

From the interpretation of ‘some’, it already becomes clear that the focus following the *ni*-less verb may be exclusive. This conclusion is also supported by the interpretation of the postverbal word ‘person’ in (195): when *ni* is present, ‘person’ is interpreted as a non-specific indefinite (195a), but in the absence of *ni* as a generic ‘human being’ (195b), triggering the speakers’ comment “it was not a dog”. If the focus following a *ni*-less verb is exclusive, we can understand the incompatibility with the indefinite non-specific reading, as there are no alternatives: someone/anyone includes all referents. The generic reading, however, can exclude other species.

- (195) a. Í ndaróóníre múntú îgoro.
 ni nda-ra-on-ire mû-ntû î-goro
 FOC 1SG.SM-YPST-see-PFV 1-person 5-yesterday
 ‘I saw someone yesterday.’
 b. Ndaróóníre múntú îgoro.
 nda-ra-on-ire mû-ntû î-goro
 1SG.SM-YPST-see-PFV 1-person 5-yesterday
 ‘I saw a person yesterday.’

However, the unmarked form is also acceptable if the word ‘person’ is modified, inducing a specific meaning, as in (196).

- (196) Ndaróóníre múntú akííyá.
 nda-ra-on-ire mû-ntû a-kí-iy-a
 1SG.SM-YPST-see-PFV 1-person 1SM-DEP-steal-FV
 ‘I saw someone stealing.’

This effect seems more general: adding further information can improve the *ni*-less form, as seen in (197).

- (197) Gûkuíré ûû?
 kû-ku-ire ûû
 17SM-die-PFV who
 ‘Who died?’
 Gûkuíré mùká... # (na twaáná twíírí).
 kû-ku-ire mû-ka na tû-ana tû-îri
 17SM-die-PFV 1-woman and 13-child 13-two
 ‘There died a woman... with two children.’

The (im)possibilities of focus-sensitive particles ‘even’ and ‘only’ also support the exhaustive interpretation. If the object following the verb is modified by ‘even’, the form with *ni* is preferred, as in (198a), the absence of *ni* is judged to be degraded – see (198b) (see also Abels & Muriungi 2008: 714). The same holds for the default agreement inversion in (199).

(198) (Kimathi feeds the goats grass, sometimes the cows, but yesterday...)

- a. Kîmááthí n’árárúmíiryé kinyá ñng’ooí irió.
 Kîmathi ni a-ra-rûm-i-ire kinya ñ-ng’ooi i-rio
 1.Kîmathi FOC 1SM-YPST-bite-IC-PFV even 5-donkey 8-food
 ‘Kimathi fed even the donkeys food.’
- b. ? Kîmááthí árárúmíiryé wana ñng’ooí irió.
 Kîmathi a-ra-rûm-i-ire wana ñ-ngóoi i-rio
 1.Kîmathi 1SM-YPST-bite-IC-PFV even 5-donkey 8-food
 ‘Kimathi fed even the donkeys food.’

(199) *(Î) gwakamatirwe kinya maíga.
 ni kû-a-kamat-w-ire kinya ma-iga
 FOC 17SM-PST-carry-PASS-PFV even 6-stones
 ‘Even stones were carried away.’

If the object following the verb is modified by ‘only’, the form without *ni* must be used (200).

(200) (Did he wash shirts and sheets?)
 Árí, (#n)ábúúrire shááti cónká.
 arî a-bûûr-ire shaati ci-onka
 no 1SM-wash-PFV 10.shirt 10-only
 ‘No, he washed shirts only.’

The same goes for the inversion construction in (201). If the verb had *ni*-, it was indicated that this cannot be an answer to a question, but (without *wenka* ‘only’) you would need a list: there died a woman, and children, and her husband.

(201) (#) Gûkuíre mûká wéenka.
 ni kû-ku-ire mû-ka we-onka
 FOC 17SM-die-PFV 1-woman 1-only
 ‘Only a woman died.’

Apart from providing a range of tests arguing that the preverbal *ni*-marked noun phrase is in exhaustive focus (see Section 5.1), Abels & Muriungi (2008) also show that the postverbal constituent is in exhaustive focus when the marker *ni* is absent on the verb. One such test is the entailment test in (202): If Ruth bought a book and a pen, then the statement in (202b) without *ni* cannot be an entailment, because (evidently) this means that Ruth bought *only* a book (which is not true). The statement with *ni* in (202c), on the other hand, is acceptable as an entailment.

(202) Abels & Muriungi (2008: 713, tones added)

- a. Rúth a-gûr-íre î-búkú na ka-rámu.
1.Ruth 1SM-buy-PFV 5-book and 12-pen
'Ruth bought a book and a pen.'
- b. $\nRightarrow$ Rúth a-gûr-íre î-búkú.
1.Ruth 1SM-buy-PFV 5-book
'Ruth bought *a* book.'
- c. $\Rightarrow$ Ruth n' á-gûr-iré î-búkú.
1.Ruth FOC 1SM-buy-PFV 5-book
'Ruth bought a book.'

If the absence of *ni* indicates (exhaustive) focus on the constituent following the verb, we may wonder whether its presence is also related to a particular interpretation. Abels & Muriungi (2008: 706) indicate a range of contexts in which the verb can take the marker *ni*-, shown in (203), as long as the focus is not exhaustively on a term.

(203) (Abels & Muriungi 2008: 706, modified)

María n' á-gûr-iré î-búkú.

1.Maria FOC 1SM-buy-PFV 5-book

'Maria bought a book.'

as an answer to:

- What is the problem? thetic
- What did Maria do? VP focus
- It is there anything that Maria bought? non-exh object focus
- Is there anybody who bought a book? non-exh subject focus
- Did Maria buy a book? polarity focus
- What did Maria do with the book? state-of-affairs focus
- What did Maria buy? object focus
- Who bought the book? subject focus

We also found that *ni* must be present to express predicate-centred focus in SVO order, illustrated by verum in (204).

- (204) (Daniel didn't talk yesterday.)
 Ndáníéri #(n')ááiriirie ígóro.
 Daniel ni a-ari-ire í-goro
 1.Daniel FOC 1SM-speak-PFV 5-yesterday
 'Daniel did talk yesterday.'

Again, the same we also find in default agreement inversion, where the form with *ni* is interpreted as athetic sentence, as in (205a) and (206), but this reading is impossible for the *ni*-less form in (205b) (see also Section 2.3 on subject inversion).

- (205) a. (What is happening down there?)¹⁸
 Í 'gúkũríngwa mûbírá kiéniíni.
 ni kû-kû-riing-w-a mû-biira kî-eni=ini
 FOC 17SM-PRS-hit-PASS-FV 3-ball 7-field=LOC
 'Football is being played at the field.'
- b. (Context: You heard the sound of a ball)
 Gúkũríngwa mûbírá kiéniíni.
 kû-kû-riing-w-a mû-biira kî-eni=ini
 17SM-PRS-hit-PASS-FV 3-ball 7-field=LOC
 *'Football is being played at the field.'
 'A ball has been hit on the field.'
- (206) (How is Marimanti?)¹⁹
 I kûáárité mûnó.
 ni kû-ar-ite mûno
 FOC 17SM-be.hot-STAT.PFV INT
 'It's very hot.'

Considering this highly underspecified use of the presence of *ni* on the verb, and adding also that *ni* must be present on the verb when it occurs in sentence-final position, we conclude that the *ni*-form is the elsewhere form, and the absence of the marker is the marked case, being associated with exhaustive focus on the postverbal constituent.

¹⁸This question could also felicitously be answered by a basic cleft/focus construction; see Section 5.1 for use of the preverbal focus in thetic contexts.

¹⁹Note that *ni* can be omitted but only in an echo exclamative content, e.g. A: 'I heard that the sun is really scorching you guys down there!' B: *Tiga! Kwarĩite mûno*. 'Tell me about it (lit. leave it)! It's damn hot!'

The distribution and function of *ni* on the verb in Kĩitharaka closely matches that of Kikuyu. For this language, Morimoto (2017) compares the two verb forms to the conjoint/disjoint alternation that is found in other eastern Bantu languages (see for example van der Wal (2025 [this volume]) for Makhuwa and Nshemezi-mana & van der Wal (2025 [this volume]) for Kirundi).

In conclusion, we have seen that the presence or absence of invariable preverbal *ni-* in Kĩitharaka occurs in various tense-aspect categories, and most importantly, whether the verb or following element is in focus. The absence of *ni* on the verb indicates that focus falls on the postverbal element; its presence is not associated with a particular interpretation, although it is indeed used with predicate-centred focus.

8 Summary

We have shown that Kĩitharaka employs a variety of linguistic strategies to structure information. Such strategies are evident in word order, topic marking, predicate doubling, cleft constructions, object/subject marking and drop, and the use or absence of *ni* on the verb. In Section 2, we have shown that topicalised constituents are preferred in pre-verbal position while non-topical ones tend to be post-verbal, thus accounting for left dislocation, and subject inversion. There is evidently no dedicated focus position in Kĩitharaka. Possible interpretations for canonical SVO order depend on tense-aspect conjugation of the verb involving the use of the focus particle *ni* as discussed in Section 7.

In Sections 3 and 4, we have illustrated how various pragmatically sanctioned interpretations such as polarity focus/verum, depreciative, contrastive and intensive readings are variably encoded through the use of the contrastive topic marker *-o* (topic marking) and co-occurrence of the infinitive and inflected form of the verb (predicate doubling). In Section 5 we have also discussed how various interpretations are encoded using the preverbal focus construction (basic cleft), the pseudocleft and the NI+RM and NI+PRO constructions (“reverse pseudocleft”). Particularly, we have indicated that the basic cleft encodes exhaustive focus on the sentence-initial constituent. We have also discussed (reverse) pseudoclefts and a similar NI-PRO structure and concluded that the two are different grammatical structures which can be analysed differently: While in the NI+RM construction the postcopular part is in focus, for the NI-PRO structure, we argue that the post-copula pronoun is in focus (which is co-indexed with the initial NP).

Our discussion has also touched on the parameters that regulate the expression of the object, either in full NP, pronoun, object marker or object drop altogether

(see Section 6). We have seen that accessibility, humanness, predicate type, and salience play some role, though more work needs to be done on this. Lastly, we have discussed the role of the invariable *ni-* on the verb and showed that its absence denotes (exclusive) focus on the post-verbal constituent. It will be interesting in further research to see the precise differences in meaning and use between the focus expressed after a *ni*-less verb, in a basic cleft, the pseudocleft, and in the NI-PRO construction.

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Abbreviations and symbols

Numbers refer to noun classes, unless followed by SG/PL, in which case the number (1 or 2) refers to first or second person. Tone marking indicates surface tone including intonation; high tones are marked by an acute accent; low tones remain unmarked. The mid-close vowel [o] is realised as ⟨û⟩ while [e] is written as ⟨î⟩. What is written as ⟨c⟩ is pronounced [s], and ⟨ngʻ⟩ represents [ŋ].

*	ungrammatical
?	degraded grammaticality
#	infelicitous in the given context
!	downstep
*(X)	the presence of X is obligatory and cannot grammatically be omitted
(*X)	the presence of X would make the sentence ungrammatical
(X)	the presence of X is optional
ABL	able
CONN	connective
DAI	default agreement inversion

DEM.DIST	distal demonstrative
DEM.MED	medial demonstrative
DEM.PROX	proximal demonstrative
DEP	dependent conjugation
DP	determiner phrase
ECHO	echo-question
EXH	exhaustive
FV	final vowel
HAB	habitual
IC	immediate causative
IDEO	ideophone
INT	intensifier
int.	intended meaning
NA + PRO	combination of ‘and’ with pronoun
NI-PRO	combination of the copula and a pronoun (as in the “reverse pseudocleft”)
NI+RM	construction with a copula followed by a free relative clause which starts with a relative marker
N.PST	near past tense
OM	object marker
POL	polarity
PP	pragmatic particle
PRO	pronoun
QUIS	Questionnaire on Information Structure (Skopeteas et al. 2006)
RM	relative marker
SC	short causative
SLI	semantic locative inversion
SM	subject marker
STAT	stative
SUBS	subsecutive
XP	a phrase headed by an unspecified category X
YPST	yesterday past

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