

To phrase or not to phrase: on the (non-)congruence of focus and prosody

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It is widely assumed in the linguistic literature on focus (see nearly all the papers and references in the recent volume on *Information Structure* ed. by Zimmermann & Féry) that, cross-linguistically “Focus needs to be maximally [prosodically] prominent” (Büring 2010: 178). However, there is a growing body of work on a number of non-Germanic languages showing that this assumption is incorrect. Many languages do not have any phonological marking of focus (N. Sotho (Zerbian 2006); Yucatec Mayan (Gussenhoven & Teeuw 2008)), or do not mark focus with sentence stress (Bengali (Hayes & Lahiri 1991); Egyptian Arabic (Hellmuth)), or mark focus prosodically in some contexts but not others (Italian (Ladd 2008, Swerts et al. 2002); Basque (Elordieta 2007)).

This poster is intended to contribute to the typology of the marking of focus by presenting a detailed case study of the realization of focus in Tumbuka, a Bantu language spoken in Malawi. Tumbuka, unlike most Bantu languages, does not have contrastive tone. Rather, every prosodic phrase-final word has a lengthened penult (vowel length is not contrastive) and a falling tone on the lengthened penult, as shown in (1). (Phonological Phrase boundaries coincide with right XP edges; parentheses indicate prosodic phrases.) In short, Tumbuka is often classified as a stress language of a sort (Kisseberth & Odden 2003), and one might expect it to manipulate pitch, sentential stress and/or prosodic phrasing to indicate focus, like English, another stress language, does. However, this is not the case. Instead, like other Bantu languages for which detailed information is available (Aghem, Chichewa, N. Sotho, Makhuwa, Zulu), focus in some cases is marked by emphatic particles, in some cases is marked by syntactic structures (clefts, pseudo-clefts and the immediately after the verb (IAV) position), and often is not marked at all. As the Tumbuka data were elicited using a questionnaire in English, the talk will, in effect, present a comparison between the realization of focus in English and in Tumbuka, highlighting the differences in focus realization in two unrelated stress languages.

Focus was elicited by using *wh*-questions (for new information focus), polar questions (for contrastive focus), and focus particles. As shown by the data in (2), non-subject *wh*-words and the answers tend to occur in IAV position. (This same tendency is found in Aghem, Makhuwa and Zulu.) The answers to non-subject polar questions (in (3)) also tend to occur in this position, though not as strictly as with *wh*-questions/answers. Often the out-of-focus verb complements are fronted. While this often leaves the word in focus in sentence-final position, where it receives sentential stress, this is not obligatory, as we can see in (2b). *Wh*-words and answers receive phrasal stress, but this cannot be attributed to focus, as the final word in an XP receives phrasal stress whether it is focused or not. Focused subjects are clefted in Tumbuka, as shown by the data in (4), as in many Bantu languages. While the focused word is again followed by a phrase break, this follows from the bi-clausal syntactic structure of clefts; it is not directly conditioned by focus. The lack of necessary correlation between phrasal stress and focus is highlighted by Q/A pairs meant to elicit contrastive focus on XP heads: verbs and nouns. Tumbuka is a head-initial language. Notice in (5) that a phonological phrase break cannot occur XP-internally; it must align with the right edge of XP. As a result, there is no prosodic means to signal focus on an XP head (in this case, a verb) when it is not XP-final. Sentences containing focus particles like *-so* ‘also’ show further mismatches between the position of prominence and the position of focus. This particle occurs as an enclitic to the verb, whatever word it places in focus, and it also induces a phrase break following the verb (which simple focus on the verb never does). This is illustrated in (6).

In sum, Tumbuka has a typologically unusual focus prosody: only some morphemes with inherent focus have prominence lending prosody in Tumbuka. Other focus contexts do not.

- (1) Pitch and length are predictable (stress-like) in Tumbuka
- (a) (nyû:mba) (i-ku-wonê:ka) 'The house is visible.'
 9-house 9-TAM-be visible
- (b) (ti-ku-phika sî:ma) 'We are cooking porridge.'
 we-TAM-cook porridge
- (c) ([β]-â:na) ([β]a-ku-[β]a-vwira [β]a-bwê:zi) 'The children help the friends.'
 2-child 2-TAM -2.OBJ-help 2-friend

(2) Wh-question and answer - in IAV position

- a. (βa-mâ:ma) (βa-ku-chapa vya-kuvwara vya β-â:na) (ku-mâ:ji)
 2P-woman 2-TAM-wash 8-clothes 8.of 2-child Loc-6.water
 'The woman washes clothes for the children in the river.' = broad focus

- Q- b. (βa-mâ:ma) (βa-ku-chapira nkhû:) (vya-kuvwara vya β-â:na)
 2P-woman 2P-TAM-wash where 8-clothes 8.of 2-child
 'Where is the woman washing clothes for the children?'

- A c. (Vya-kuvwara vya β-â:na) (βa-mâ:ma) (βa-ku-chapa ku-mâ:ji)
 8-clothes 8.of 2-child 2P-woman 2P-TAM-wash Loc-6.water
 'The woman washes clothes for the children in the river.'

(3) Polar question and answer - not necessarily in IAV position

- Q-a. (βa-mâ:ma) (βa-ku-chapa vya-kuvwara vya β-â:na) (ku-mâ:jî:)
 2P-woman 2-TAM-wash 8-clothes 8.of 2-child Loc-6.water

- OR b. (Vya-kuvwara vya β-â:na) (βa-mâ:ma) (βa-ku-chapa ku-mâ:jî:)
 8-clothes 8.of 2-child 2P-woman 2-TAM-wash Loc-6.water

'Is your mother washing the children's clothes [in the river]_F?'

- A-(βa-ku-chapa vya-kuvwara vya β-â:na) (ku-mâ:ji) (yâ:yi) (βa-ku-chapira ku-nyû:mba)
 2P-TAM-wash 8-clothes 8.of 2-child Loc-6.water not 2P-TAM-wash.at Loc-9.house
 'She's not washing the children's clothes in the river. She's washing them at home.'

(4) Clefted focused subject wh-question and answer

- Q- (Ni njâ:ni) (uyo wa-ku-chapa vya-kuvwara vya β-â:na) (ku-mâ:ji)
 Cop 1.who 1.Rel 1-TAM-wash 8-clothes 8.of 2-child Loc-6.water
 'It is who who is washing clothes for the children in the river?'

- A- (mba-mâ:ma) (aβo βa-ku-chapa vya-kuvwara vya β-â:na) (ku-mâ:ji)
 Cop 2.mother. 2.REL 1-TAM-wash 8-clothes 8.of 2-child Loc-6.water
 'It's mother who is washing clothes for the children in the river.'

(5) Focus on XP heads has no effect on phrasing

- Q- (Kâ:si), (ch-û:vu) (chi-ka-khosomolesya_F ntchê:βê:)
 Q 7.dust 7-TAM-make.cough 9.dog

'Did the dust make the dog cough?'

- A- (Yâ:yi) (ch-û:vu) (chi-ka-yethyemulisya_F ntchê:βe)
 no 7.dust 7-TAM-make.sneeze 9.dog

'No, the dust made the dog sneeze.'

(6) Focus particle -so 'also'

- (a) (n-khu-limilíra ma-púuno). (b) (Ku-limiliráa-so) (ngóomá?)
 I-TAM-weed 6- tomatoes You.TAM-weed-also 9.maize
 'I am weeding tomatoes.' 'Are you also weeding the maize?'

Selected references:

Büring, Daniel. 2010. Towards a typology of focus realization. In Zimmermann & Féry (eds.), pp. 177-205.

Zimmermann, Malte & Caroline Féry. 2010. *Information Structure*. Oxford University Press.