Igbo cleft constructions
Mary Amaechi (Universität Potsdam)

Overview: This paper examines two constructions in Igbo which show properties of clefts. I present novel empirical facts showing crucial differences between the constructions: the presence/absence of the focus marker, tonal reflex of movement, the presence/absence of the negation particle, and the choice of different copula verbs. I propose that one type of cleft involves a relative clause (RC) and is base-generated, while the other involves focus movement of the clefted constituent in the case of non-subjects, but no movement in the case of (local) subjects.

Data: The two types of cleft are illustrated in (1). The \textit{it}-cleft in (1-a) shows a clear bi-partition structure of the focus constituent and the backgrounded information. The \textit{kédú} cleft in (1-b) is found in wh-question. It has similar cleft-like semantics (including existential presupposition, cf. Rooth (1999); Renans (2016)).

(1) a. Ô bụ jí kà Ádá rí-rí n’ụtụtụ
   3SG COP yam FOC Ada eat-PST p-morning
   ‘It is yam that Ada ate in the morning.’ \textit{it-cleft}

b. Kédú ihé Ádá rí-rí n’ụtụtụ
   WH COP thing Ada eat-PST p-morning
   ‘What is it that Ada ate in the morning?’ \textit{kédú cleft}

The \textit{kédú} question has been reported to involve RCs (Nwachukwu 1976; Goldsmith 1981), supporting the view that it is biclausal. The morpheme \textit{kédú} is analyzed as a compound consisting of the wh-morpheme \textit{kè} and the copula \textit{dú} or \textit{di} for some speakers (Nwachukwu 1995; Mbah 2012).

I present a number of differences between the cleft constructions in (1): (i) the focus marker \textit{kà} is absent in the \textit{kédú} cleft. It is not found in RCs in the language, either. (ii) there is a downstep tone present on the verb when subjects are relativized (2) which is absent in \textit{it}-cleft.

(2) Kédú ónyé __hụ-ụrụ Obí
   WH COP person see-PST Obí
   ‘Who is it that saw Obí?’

(3) Ô bụ Ádá hụrụ Obí
   3SG COP Ada saw Obí
   ‘It was Ada that saw Obí.’

The \textit{kà} marker is compatible only with non-subject, and not with subject. Compare (1-a) to (3). (iii) the presence of the particle \textit{ná} which obligatorily occurs in RCs containing negation is absent in the \textit{it}-cleft. For the \textit{kédú} question with negation in (4-a) where one would expect an answer as in [b], the answer in [c] involving relativization is what is obtainable.

(4) a. Kédú ónyé ná álụ-ghi Obí
   WH COP person PRT see-NEG Obí
   ‘Who did not see Obí?’

b. *Ô bụ Ádá ná álụ-ghi Obí
   3SG COP Ada PRT see-NEG Obí
   intended: ‘It is Ada that did not see Obi.’

c. Ô bụ Ádá bụ ónyé ná álụ-ghi Obí
   3SG COP Ada COP person PRT see-NEG Obí
   ‘It is Ada that did not see Obi.’ [lit. ‘It is Ada that is the person that didn’t see Obi.’]

(iv) While \textit{kédú} clefts occur only with the predicational copula \textit{dí} which selects predicate complements of semantic type <\textit{e,t}> (Mikkelsen 2003; Geist 2007), and combines with descriptive
and locational elements in the language (6); the it-cleft occurs with the bụ copula which can be both specificational and predicational (5).

(5) a. ´Onyé ǹkuzi *(áhụ) bụ  ADVISED Ada
  person teaching DET  COP  Ada
teacher is Ada.’

b.  ADVISED Ada bụ  onyé ǹkuzi (áhụ)
     Ada COP person teaching DET
     ‘Ada is the teacher.’

(6) a. ´Adá dị  ochá
     Ada COP white
     ‘Ada is fair in complexion.

b. Ánụ dị  n’ità
     meat COP P-pot
     ‘There is meat in the pot.’

Analysis: I argue that the kédú cleft involves base-generation where the clefted constituent is co-indexed with an empty operator that raises into the left periphery of the cleft RC (Chomsky 1977; Hartmann and Zimmermann 2012). Absence of both phonosyntactic and semantic identity effects (Adger and Ramchand 2005), as well as lack of reconstruction for Principle C (Adesola 2005) support this analysis. Assuming the same structure for both subject and non-subject kédú clefts, (7) below shows the proposed structure for (1-b) above.

(7) Kédú [CP, ũh́i [CP Op, [TP  ADVISED riri tị n’ụtụtụ]]]

The copula in the it-cleft, on the other hand, selects different complements for the subject and non-subject - a TP complement for subject and a CP (FocP) for non-subject (cf. Torrence 2013). There is movement of the clefted non-subject to Spec-FocP, and the Foc head realizes kà; subject does not move but remains in its Spec-TP position. The structures in (8) below are based on (3) and (1-a) respectively.

(8) a. subject: Ô bụ [TP  ADVISED hűrụ  Ôbí ]

b. non-subject: Ô bụ [FocP jú [Foc kà [TP  ADVISED riri tị n’ụtụtụ]]]

Unlike non-subjects, subject it-cleft obligatorily lacks the kà marker. It does not show the tonal reflex of subject extraction that is found in operator movement in RCs as in (2) as well as in long-distance A’-movement (9-b), where both the kà marker and downstep tone are attested.

(9) a. Ô bụ  égo dị  n’élú óche
     3SG COP money COP P-top chair
     ‘It is money that is on the chair.’

b. Ô bụ  égo kà  Adidas  sıra [CP [TP tị dị  n’élú óche
     3SG COP money FOC Ada think COP P-top chair
     ‘It is money that Ada thinks that is on the chair.’

Conclusion: This study provides evidence that two superficially similar constructions in Igbo have very different syntactic structures. It also shows novel insights into copula verbs in Igbo and how they differ depending on the kind of predicate complement they select. The study also shows tonal reflex of movement (as attested in other Niger-Congo languages, Clements (1984); Zentz (2011); Korsah and Murphy (2017)) as a diagnostic for syntactic structure in Igbo.