Igbo cleft constructions

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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 *it*-cleft in (1-a) shows a clear bi-partition structure of the focus constituent and the backgrounded information. The *kèdú* 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. Ọ́ bụ̀ jí kà Àdá rì-rì n'ụ̀tụ́tụ̀
        3SG COP yam FOC Ada eat-PST P-morning
        'It is yam that Ada ate in the morning.'   *it-cleft*
     b. Kèdú íhé Àdá rì-rì n'ụ̀tụ́tụ̀
        WH.COP thing Ada eat-PST P-morning
        'What is it that Ada ate in the morning?'   *kèdú cleft*

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

I present a number of differences between the cleft constructions in (1): (i) the focus marker *kà* is absent in the *kèdú* 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 *it*-cleft.

(2) Kèdú ónyé __ **hụ-rụ** Òbí   (3) Ọ́ bụ̀ Àdá **hụ̀rụ̀** Òbí
     WH.COP person   see-PST Obi   3SG COP Ada saw   Obi
     'Who is it that saw Obi?'   'It was Ada that saw Obi.'

The *kà* marker is compatible only with non-subject, and not with subject. Compare (1-a) to (3). (iii) the presence of the particle *ná* which obligatorily occurs in RCs containing negation is absent in the *it*-cleft. For the *kèdú* 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. Kèdú ónyé **ná** áhụ-ghi Òbí
        WH.COP person PRT see-NEG Obi
        'Who did not see Obi?'
     b. *Ọ́ bụ̀ Àdá **ná** áhụ-ghi Òbí
        3SG COP Ada PRT see-NEG Obi
        intended: 'It is Ada that did not see Obi.'
     c. Ọ́ bụ̀ Àdá bụ̀ ónyé **ná** áhụ-ghi Òbí
        3SG COP Ada COP person PRT see-NEG Obi
        'It is Ada that did not see Obi.' [lit. 'It is Ada that is the person that didn't see Obi.']

(iv) While *kèdú* clefts occur only with the predicational copula *dí* which selects predicate complements of semantic type <e,t> (Mikkelsen 2005; Geist 2007), and combines with descriptive

and locational elements in the language (6); the *it*-cleft occurs with the *bú* copula which can be both specificational and predicational (5).

(5) a. Ónyé ńkuzi *(áhụ̀) **bụ̀** Àdá (6) a. Àdá **dị̀** òchá
    person teaching DET COP Ada   Ada COP white
    'The teacher is Ada.'   'Ada is fair in complexion.

  b. Àdá **bụ̀** ónyé ńkuzi (áhụ̀)   b. Ánụ́ **dị̀** n'ìtè
     Ada COP person teaching DET   meat COP P-pot
     'Ada is the teacher.'   'There is meat in the pot.'

Analysis: I argue that the *kèdú* 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 *kèdú* clefts, (7) below shows the proposed structure for (1-b) above.

(7) Kèdú [$_{CP_{Rel}}$ íhé$_i$ [$_{CP}$ Op$_i$ [$_{TP}$ Àdá rìrì t_i nụ̀tụ́tụ̀]]]

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: Ó bụ̀ [$_{TP}$ Àdá hụ̀rụ̀ Òbí]
    b. non-subject: Ó bụ̀ [$_{FocP}$ jí$_i$ [$_{Foc}$ kà [$_{TP}$ Àdá rìrì t_i nụ̀tụ́tụ̀]]]

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. Ọ́ bụ̀ égo **dị̀** n'élú óche
    3SG COP money COP P-top chair
    'It is money that is on the chair.'

  b. Ọ́ bụ̀ égo **kà** Ada chere [$_{CP}$ [$_{TP}$ t_i **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.

Selected references: **Adger & Ramchand** (2005) 'Merge and move: Wh-dependencies revisited', *Linguistic Analysis*, 36(2):161-193. **Chomsky** (1977) 'On wh-movement' in *Formal syntax*, pp.71-132. **Goldsmith** (1981) 'The structure of wh-questions in Igbo', *Linguistic Analysis*, 7(4):367-393. **Mikkelsen** (2005) *Copular clauses: specification, predication and equation.* **Nwachukwu** (1995) *Tone in Igbo syntax.* **Renans** (2016) *Exhausitivity: on exclusive particles, clefts and progressive aspect in Ga.* **Rooth** (1999) 'Association with focus or association with presupposition?' in *Focus: linguistic, cognitive, and computational perspective*, pp.232-244. **Torrence** (2013) 'The morphosyntax of Wolof clefts: structure and movement' in *Cleft structures*, pp. 187-223.