A-bar clefts in Kirundi and elsewhere

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1. Introduction

In this short paper, I will sketch an analysis for two cleft constructions in Kirundi (Great Lakes Bantu), illustrated in (1). I argue that both clefts are bi-clausal (in contrast to mono-clausal analyses made for other Bantu languages; for example, see Kikuyu, Schwarz 2003, Yuan 2017a,b; Kîîtharaka, Abels & Muriungi 2008).

(1) a. Yohaáni a-a-som-ye igitabu
Yohani 1SM-PST-read-PFV 7.book
'Yohani read a book.' (neutral sentence)

b. **Ni igitabu** Yohaáni a-a-som-yé
NI 7book Yohani 1SM-PST-read-PFV.EMB
'It is the book that Yohani read.' (matrix cleft)

c. Kagabo a-a-vug-ye [kó **a-ri** **igitabu** Yohaáni a-a-som-yé]
Kagabo 1SM.PST-say-PFV COMP 1SM-COP 7.book Yohani 1SM.PST-say.EMB-PFV
'Kagabo said that [it is the book that Yohani read].' (embedded cleft)

Furthermore, I propose that the choice of copula which embeds the cleft, the morphologically invariant *ni* in matrix clefts (1b) and the inflecting *-ri* inembedded clefts (1c), reflects a distinction in the size of embedding material. In the remainder of this paper, I will present the core data regarding the two cleft constructions, showing that they are biclausal (§2.1), and that there is evidence from the distribution of the two copulas across constructions that distinguishes the two clefts structurally (§2.2). I then argue for an $\overline{\text{A}}$-momvent derivation of clefts (§2.3). This final point gives rise to typological observation on related cleft and "cleft-like" constructions across languages (§3). The Kirundi data in this paper, unless otherwise noted, were elicited by the author from September 2021 through to April 2023 in Montréal, Canada.

2. Two clefts in Kirundi

In this section, I will develop an analysis for the two cleft constructions illustrated above in (1). In doing so, I make three claims. Firstly, the cleft constructions are biclausal. Secondly, there are two syntactically distinct copulas in Kirundi. Finally, both cleft clauses are formed by $\overline{\text{A}}$-movement.

2.1. Biclausal clefts

One point of variation across Bantu languages is the number of clauses present in a cleft (Zentz 2016b). Correspondingly, there are two main proposals concerning the structure and derivation of Bantu clefts: a mono-clausal Focus Phrase (FocP) analysis and a bi-clausal embedding predicate analysis. Clefts

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in languages which contain relative clause morphology in the cleft-clause, or otherwise have bi-clausal properties, are typically analyzed akin to standard analyses of English clefts, wherein a relative clause-like CP is embedded by a copular clause. Consider, for instance, the Kinande cleft in (2a) which is headed by a relative complementizer like in relative clauses (2b).[1]

(2) **Kinande clefts clauses are relative clauses (Schneider-Zioga 2007: p. 420)**

a. ni-ki [ekyo Kambale a-agula]
be-what that Kambale AGR-bought
'What is it that Kambale bought?' (Kinande cleft)

b. ekitabu [ekyo Kamable a-agula]
book that Kambale AGR-bought
'the book that Kambale bought' (Kinande relative clause)

However, other languages such as Kikuyu lack the overt morphological diagnostics seen in Kinande. Instead, we must rely on the syntactic behaviour of the cleft clause. For instance, Schwarz (2007: 77*ff*) argues that topicalization asymmetries are a good diagnostic for a clause-boundary in Kikuyu, forming the basis for analyses of clefts in Kîîtharaka by Abels & Muriungi (2008) and in Shona by Zentz (2016a,b). The diagnostic asymmetry in question, illustrated in (3), is that (temporal) adverbials can be fronted across a focus construction but *not* a relative clause. Since fronting is not permitted across the latter's clear clause-boundary, the possibility of fronting across the focus construction is taken to show the absence of a clause-boundary.

(3) **Kîîtharaka relative clauses and focus construction differ for modifier left-dislocation (Abels & Muriungi 2008: 725)**

a. **î-goro**$_2$ i-mw-amba$_1$ Peter a-ra-on-ir-e t_1 t_2.
5-yesterday FOC-1-thief 1.Peter 1.SM-REC.PST-see-PFV-FV
'Yesterday, THE THIEF Peter saw.' (Left-dislocation ok for focus construction)

b. * **î-goro**$_2$ boriisi ba-ka-thaik-a [$_{RC}$ mw-amba$_1$ û-ra Peter
5-yesterday 2.police 2.SM-FUT-arrest-FV 1-thief 1-that 1.Peter
a-ra-on-ir-e t_1 t_2].
1.SM-REC.PST-see-PFV-FV
'Yesterday, the police will arrest the thief that Peter saw.'
(No left-dislocation for relative clause)

Languages such as Shona, however, do not have this asymmetry across focus constructions and relative clauses as seen in (4), leading Zentz (2016a,b) to conclude that Shona clefts are bi-clausal.

(4) **Shona relative clauses and clefts both disallow modifier left-dislocation Zentz 2016a: 167**

a. * **Nezuro**$_2$ i-m-bavha$_1$ ya-aka-on-a t_1 t_2.
yesterday NI-9-thief 9.NSE-1.SM.TA-see-FV
'Yesterday, it's A THIEF that s/he saw.' (No left-dislocation for cleft)

b. * **Nezuro**$_2$ ma-purisa a-cha-sung-a [$_{RC}$ m-bavha$_1$ ya-aka-on-a t_1 t_2].
yesterday 6-police 6.SM-FUT-arrest-FV 9-thief 9.NSE-1.SM.TA-see-FV
'Yesterday, the police will arrest the thief that s/he saw.'
(No left-dislocation for relative clause)

Zentz (2016b) discusses and dismisses several other diagnostics as inconclusive, relying heavily on the above contrast. Turning to the Kirundi data, however, we find reason to call the reliability of even this diagnostic into question. Firstly, note that Kirundi patterns like Kîîtharaka in permitting a temporal adverbial to be fronted in clefts, suggesting a mono-clausal structure. This is illustrated in (5).

[1] Kinande also has a distinct focus-fronting construction which is morphosyntactically distinct from the cleft. Assuming that this focus-fronting construction instantiates a mono-clausal FocP structure as argued by Schneider-Zioga (2007), this supports the view that clefts in Kinande are structurally distinct from the mono-clausal FocPs structure.

(5) **Kirundi relative clauses and focus construction differ for modifier left-dislocation**

a. **Mūndwi ihezé** ni Kagabo a-a-tsîn-ze ihigawa ryo kwiíruka
last.week NI Kagabo 1SM-PST-win-PFV 5.competition 5.LK to.run
'Last week, it's Kagabo that won the race.' (Left-dislocaiton ok for cleft)

b. * **Mūndwi ihezé** n-zō-vug-an-a umugabo [$_{RC}$ a-a-tsîn-ze
last.week 1SG.SM-FUT-speak-COM-IPFV 1.man 1SM-PST-win-PFV
ihiganwa ryo kwiíruká].
5.competition 5.LK to.run
Intended: 'Last week, I will speak to the man who won the race.' (No left-dislocation for relative clause)

Nonetheless, Kirundi has independently available diagnostics for the bi-clausality of clefts. While on the surface, Kirundi is similar to Kikuyu in that it lacks *segmental* morphology that marks cleft clauses, there are three properties which diagnose non-matrix clause status in Kirundi; all of these properties also occur in cleft clauses. I take these diagnostics to be stronger evidence than the temporal adverbial data above, concluding that Kirundi clefts are in fact bi-clausal.[2]

Firstly, embedded verbs in Kirundi occur with a distinct tone melody.[3] While this is traditionally referred to as the "relative tone" (Lafkioui et al. 2016, Edenmyr 2001), it is not restricted to relative clauses and is instead general across non-matrix clauses as seen in (7), with some exceptions not discussed here.[4] Clefts reliably surface with the embedded tone melody, seen in (6b).

(6) **Clefts take embedded tone**

a. Yohaáni a-a-som-ye igitabu
Yohani 1SM-PST-read-PFV 7.book
'Yohani read a book.'

b. Ni igitabu$_1$ [Yohaáni **a-a-som-yé** ___$_1$]
NI 7book Yohani 1SM-PST-read-PFV.EMB
'It's THE BOOK that Yohani read.'

(7) **Embedded tone across contexts**

a. N-a-bōn-ye igitabu Yohaáni **a-a-som-yé**
1SG.SM-PST-see-PFV 7.book 1.Yohani 1SM-PST-read-PFV.EMB
'I saw the book that Yohani read.' (Relative clause)

b. N-a-vug-ye kó Yohaáni **a-a-som-yé** igitabu
1SG.SM-PST-say-PFV that Yohani 1SM-PST-read-PFV.EMB 7.book
'I said that Yohani read a book.' (Complement clause)

Secondly, Kirundi has two negation morphemes which are in complementary distribution (Ndayiragije 1999, Chaperon to appear). In matrix clauses, the pre-subject-marker negation morpheme *nti-* is used, (8a); in embedded clauses and clefts, the post-subject marker negation morpheme *-ta-* is used, (8b).

(8) **Clefts take secondary negation**

a. Yohaáni nti-a-kor-a imikâté
Yohani NEG-1SM-make-IPFV 4.bread
'Yohani didn't make bread.'

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[2] The asymmetry for modifier left-dislocation still requires explanation, however. I can not pursue this here for space, but I believe the complications raised by the Kirundi data sufficiently call into question the reliability of this diagnostic taken alone.

[3] The generalization is slightly more complicated, where lexical and other grammatical high tones neutralizes the contrast.

[4] For exceptions, see Zorc & Nibagwire (2007).

b. Ni Yohaáni a-da-kor-á imikâté
NI Yohani 1SM-NEG-make-IPFV.REL 4.bread
'It's YOHANI who didn't make bread.'

Finally, the conjoint/disjoint alternation is available only in matrix clauses, signalled overtly in matrix disjoint clauses with the morpheme *-ra-*.[5] I will not discuss the properties of this alternation for reasons of space, but it suffices for our purpose to note that *-ra-* is only permitted in matrix clauses; it is ruled out in all embedded clauses, included cleft clauses.

(9) **No *-ra-* in clefts (Ndayiragije 1999: 407)**

a. Ni abâna ba-á-(*ra)-nyôye amatá
NI 2.children 2SM-DIST.PST-RA-drink.PERF 6.milk
'It was children who drank milk.'

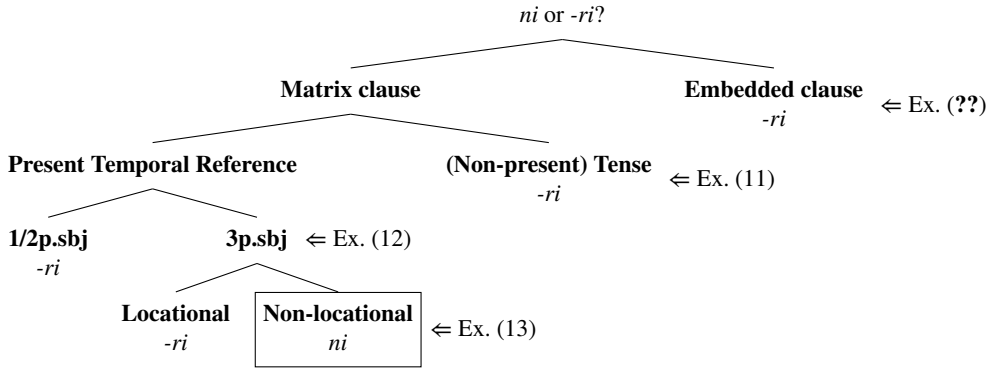
b. Ni amatá abâna ba-á-(*ra)-nyôye
NI 6.milk children 2SM-DIST.PST-RA-drink.PERF
'It was milk that children drank.'

In sum, these data shows that in three contexts, cleft clauses pattern with embedded clauses; this is in contrast to what is suggested by the adverbial fronting. I conclude from these data that clefts in Kirundi contain two clauses. Consequently, the language-specific morphosyntactic diagnostics call into question the adverbial fronting test as a reliable diagnostic for bi-clausality.

2.2. Two kinds of copulas

Turning now to the cleft-embedding copula, I will show that the inflecting *-ri* copula which appears in embedded clefts and the invariant *ni* copula are in complementary distribution; the factors determining the distribution are given in the choice-diagram in (10). This complementary distribution between analogous copulas is found in several Bantu languages (Gibson et al. 2019, Gluckman 2022); the copular distributional asymmetry in the closely-related Kinyarwanda has been analyzed as principally due to the semantics of the two copulas by Jerro (2015). While the analysis proposed by Jerro (2015) is able to capture some of the asymmetry, it is unable to predict the full distribution of the two copulas.

(10) **Contexts of use**



In contrast, I propose a syntactic analysis, where this complementary distribution is a result of their categorical dissimilarity: while the distribution of *-ri* overlaps with verbs, the distribution of *ni* shares no environment with verbs. Here, I will exemplify this with three of the four asymmetries for space reasons. The main generalization to be drawn is that *ni*, both as a copula and a cleft-marker, is in complementary distribution with the presence of TP. I will cash this generalization out with the proposal that *ni* is a non-verbal marker of predication, whereas *-ri* is a (defective) verbal copula. While I will not illustrate this for

[5] On the function and the status of the conjoint/disjoint alternation in Kirundi, see Ndayiragije (1999) and Nshemezimana & Bostoen (2017).

space reasons, the distributional restrictions on *ni* hold for its cleft use as well (see Gatchalian 2023 for illustration).

Firstly, the overt expression of a tense morpheme requires the use of *-ri*, as seen in (11). Secondly, first- and second-person (speech act participant; SAP) subjects require the use of *-ri*, (12). Finally, PP predicates (unlike NP or AP predicates) require the use of *-ri*, (13)

(11) **Overt tense requires *-ri***

a. Umwígīsha **ni** Yohaani
1-teacher *ni* John
'The teacher is John'

b. Keerá Yohaani a-á-**ri**/ni umwígīsha
before John 3SG.SM-PST-*ri*/NI 1.teacher
'John was a teacher, a while ago.'

(12) **Speech Act Participant subjects require *-ri***

a. Yohaani **ni** umunyeshuúre
John *ni* 1.student
'John is a student '

b. n-**ri**/*ni umunyeshuúre
1SG.S-*ri*/NI 1.student
'I am a student.'

(13) **Locational (PP) predicates**

a. inká **i-ri** mu murima
9.cow 9SM-*ri* in 3.field
'The cow is in the field.'

b. * inká **ni** mu murima
9.cow *ni* in 3.field
Intended: 'The cow is in the field.'

Rather than claiming that the invariant *ni* is (lexically) restricted in it's verbal inflection or occupying a subset of verbal distribution as one might expect of a copula, I propose that the Kirundi *ni* is in fact entirely non-verbal. As such, it is unable to host the requisite (verbal) functional material needed to host tense, license person-features of local person subjects (Béjar & Rezac 2003), be selected by clausal-complement-taking verbs, and bind eventuality variables introduced by locational PP predicates (Adger & Ramchand 2003). Each of these restrictions can be tied to the generalization that *ni* is in complementary distribution with T.[6] In other words, I adopt the distinction made by Pustet (2003) between verbal and particle copulas. The verbal copula *-ri* overlaps partially in properties with verb; the particle copula *ni* in fact has no shared properties with verbs.

2.3. Clefts are formed by A-bar movement

Despite the variation in the mono-/bi-clausality of clefts across langauges, and as I have argued here, the syntactic category of the copula, I argue that the portion of the cleft construction selected by the copula is derived by $\overline{\text{A}}$-movement. Ultimately, this data brings the Kirundi cleft in line with other (cleft-like) focus-related movement phenomena across languages, which I will compare in §3. For the moment, I will briefly develop the analysis of Kirundi's clefts. I argue argue that the clefted constituent is $\overline{\text{A}}$-moved to the left-edge of the cleft clause, which is then selected by a copula, based on the distribution discussed in §2.2 above. The evidence I present are standard diagnostics for $\overline{\text{A}}$-movement: (i) the formation of long-distance dependencies, (ii) islandhood, and (iii) reconstruction for binding.

Firstly, constituents may be clefted across clause boundaries, as expected of $\overline{\text{A}}$-dependencies. Consider the pair in (14), where the multiply-embedded object of (14a), *Kēza*, is clefted in (14b).

[6] Another piece of evidence is the use of inflecting -ri as an auxiliary verb; *ni* never has such a use.

(14) **Long-distance dependencies**

a. Kagabo yavúze kó Yohaáni yībaza kó Petero akūnda
Kagabo a-a-vúg-ye kó Yohaáni a-ī-baz-a kó Petero a-kūnd-a
1.Kagabo 1SM-PST-say-PFV C Yohani 1SM-RFLX-think-IPFV C Petero 1SM-love-IPFV
Kēza.
Kēza
Keza
'Kagabo said that Yohani believes that Petero loves Keza.'

b. Ni **Kēza** Kagabo yavúze kó Yohaáni yībaza kó Petero
Ni Kēza$_i$ Kagabo a-a-vúg-ye [kó Yohani a-ī-baz-a [kó Petero
NI 1.Keza 1.Kagabo 1SM-PST-say-PFV C 1.Yohani 1SM-RFLX-think-IPFV C Petero
akūnda.
a-kūnd-a ___$_i$]]
1SM-love-IPFV
'It's Keza that Kagabo said that Yohani believes that Petero loves.'

Secondly, clefting is island-sensitive. For space reasons, I limit exemplification to the adjunct island, a strong island (Szabolcsi & Lohndal 2017). This is given in (15).

(15) **Adjunct Islands**

a. n-a-gīye kw' isoko [kubēra n-kenér-ye umukâté].
1SG.SM-PST-walk.PFV to store because 1SM-need-PFV bread
'I went to the store because I needed bread.'

b. * Ni umukâté n-a-gīye kw' isoko [kubēra n-kenér-ye ___].
NI bread 1SG.SM-PST-walk.PFV to store because 1SG.SM-need-PFV
'It's bread that I went to the store because I need.'

Finally, clefted material reconstructs for Condition A and Condition C. I take the reconstruction phenomena support a promotional analysis, whereby the clefted constituent is directly moved, following e.g. Torrence (2013a,b) and Hartmann & Zimmermann (2012).

(16) **Condition A reconstruction**

a. Yonaáni$_1$ a-a-vúg-ye [kó Petero a-a-bōn-ye [ubwīwé$_{*1/2}$ bwambure]]
Yohani 1SM-PST-say-PFV C Petero 1SM-PST-see-PFV [his.own nakedness]
'Yohani$_1$ said that Peter$_2$ saw his own$_{*1/2}$ nakedness' (Condition A)

b. N' [ubwīwé$_{*1/2}$ bwambure] Yonaáni$_1$ a-a-vúg-ye [ko Petero$_2$ a-a-bōn-ye
FOC his.own$_{*1/2}$ nakedness Yohani 1SM-PST-say-PFV C 1.Petero 1SM-PST-see-PFV
___$_1$]

'It's his own$_{*1/2}$ nakedness who Yohani$_1$ said Peter$_2$ saw.' (Condition A reconstruction)

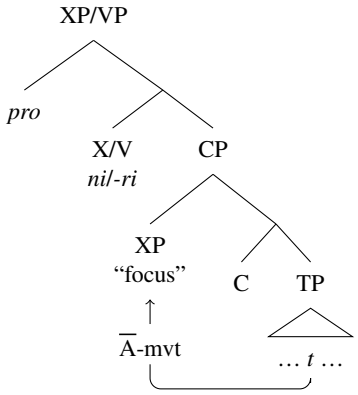
(17) **Condition C reconstruction**

a. *pro*$_{*1/3}$ a-a-vúg-ye [kó Petero a-a-bōn-ye Yohaáni$_1$]
pro 1SM-PST-say-PFV C Petero 1SM-PST-see-PFV 1.Yohani
'He$_{*1/3}$ said that Peter saw Yohani$_1$' (Condition C violation)

b. Ni Yohaáni$_1$ [*pro*$_{*1/2}$ a-a-vúg-ye kó Petero a-a-bōn-ye ___$_1$]
FOC 1.Yohani *pro* 1SM-PST-say-PFV C 1.Petero 1SM-PST-see-PFV
'It's Yohani$_1$ who he$_{*1/2}$ said Peter saw.' (Condition C reconstruction)

Both the island sensitivity of this dependency and the possibility of long-distance dependency formation support the view that clefting is an $\overline{\text{A}}$-movement construction; I take the reconstruction phenomena to demonstrate that this dependency is not formed by the binding of a null operator, either in the base position or in a derived position at the left-edge of the cleft clause. Together, these converge upon the analysis in (18)

(18) **Final analysis of Kirundi clefts**



3. Cross-linguistic variation in A-bar fronting for focus

In this section, I will build upon a typological observation made by É. Kiss (1998), who analyzes English cleft clauses in light of her FocP analysis of the Hungarian pre-verbal position. In particular, I will suggest that, if the above analysis sketched above is on the right track, Kirundi *ni*-clefts expand this typological picture by an additional parameter: the syntactic weight of the embedding material (when it is independently required).

(19) **Two parameter typology of cleft structures**

	Cleft clause is …	
	Matrix clause	Embedded clause
No copula	**Mono-clausal focus** Hungarian, Wolof	N/A
Verbal copula	N/A	**Bi-verbal cleft** English Kirundi *-ri* cleft
Particle copula	N/A	**Mono-verbal cleft** Kirundi *ni* cleft

As can be seen in the table in (19), the two parameters for cleft structures relate to the embedding of a cleft clause. By cleft clause, I understand a CP wherein a constituent is A-moved into a prominent position at the left-edge, with possibly other language-specific properties related to this position, typically for focus (though see, among others, É. Kiss 1998, Horvath 2005, 2007, 2013). In this context, the pre-verbal position in Hungarian is a well-discussed instance of a mono-clausal focus construction involving overt A-movement. This is illustrated in (20), where the focussed material is immediately pre-verbal, sitting in Spec,FP (FocusP). Wolof focus constructions, as analyzed by Martinović (2021), also involve A-movement to Spec,CP, where C is overtly realized as the *wh*-complementizer *la*, (21). Both these structures may include a pre-focal topic.

(20) **Hungarian mono-clausal focus construction (É. Kiss 1998: p. 249)**

a. Mari **egy kalapot** nézett ki magának
Mary a hat.ACC picked out herself.ACC
'It was a hat that Mary picked for herself'

b. [$_{\text{TopP}}$ Mari [$_{\text{FP}}$ **[egy kalapot]**$_j$ nézett$_i$ [$_{\text{VP}}$ t_i ki magának t_j]]]

(21) **Wolof mono-clausal focus construction (Martinović 2021)**

a. Man, Yusu Nduur la a gis
1s.STR Youssou N'Dour C$_{\text{Wh}}$ 1SG see
'Me, it's Yousouu N'Dour that I saw.'

b. [$_{\text{TopP}}$ Man [$_{\text{CP}}$ **Yusu Nduur** la [$_{\text{IP}}$ a gis]]]

Crucially, none of the above "cleft" clauses are obligatorily embedded; both are licit root clauses in their respective languages. Consider now the English cleft in (22). Roughly following the analysis in É. Kiss (1998), the focused material (*to John*) is $\overline{\text{A}}$-moved to FP above the CP.[7] Note that the resulting cleft clause is not a possible root clause of English, and must be supported by a copular clause. The structurally minimal clause in English nonetheless involves additional verbal functional projections.

(22) **English bi-clausal, bi-verbal cleft (É. Kiss 1998)**

a. It was to John that I spoke

b. [$_{\text{IP}}$ It was [$_{\text{FP}}$ [to John]$_i$ F [$_{\text{CP}}$ that [$_{\text{IP}}$ I spoke t_i]]]

In a similar fashion, when the matrix clause in the Kirundi cleft is tensed (most naturally when it is further embedded under an attitude verb or a verb of saying/perception), the full verbal spine is present, as seen by the obligatory inflection on the copula.

(23) **Kirundi bi-clausal bi-verbal cleft**

a. a-a-ri **igitabu**$_1$ [Yohaáni a-a-som-yé ___$_1$]
1SM-PST-COP 7book Yohani 1SM-PST-read-PFV.REL
'It was THE BOOK that Yohani read.'

b. [$_{\text{TP}}$ *pro* a-a-ri [$_{\text{VP}}$ <-*ri*> [$_{\text{CP}}$ **igitabu**$_1$ C [$_{\text{TP}}$ Yohaáni yasomyé t_1]]]]

Finally, I have argued that Kirundi *ni*-clefts involve substantially reduced structure. When there is no independent need to project additional verbal functional projections, Kirundi has a lexical alternative to the verbal copula: the particle copula serves to satisfy the obligatory embedding requirement of the cleft clause.

(24) **Kirundi bi-clausal mono-verbal cleft**

a. Ni **igitabu**$_1$ [Yohaáni a-a-som-yé ___$_1$]
NI 7book Yohani 1SM-PST-read-PFV.REL
'It's THE BOOK that Yohani read.'

b. [$_{\text{XP}}$ *pro* ni [$_{\text{CP}}$ **igitabu**$_1$ C [$_{\text{TP}}$ Yohaáni yasomyé t_1]]]

In other words, the lexical resources of Kirundi include a non-verbal particle copula which can be used in place of the verbal copula, according to the conditions outlined in §2.2.

4. Conclusions

In this paper, I presented a bi-clausal analysis for cleft constructions in Kirundi. This account explicitly argues for the bi-clausal status of these constructions, which has been widely assumed for Kirundi (Edenmyr 2001, Lafkioui et al. 2016). I showed in passing that a diagnostic for clause-boundaries involving fronting of adverbials is not as reliable as previously assumed. Finally, I sketched a syntactic account for the distribution of the two copulas in Kirundi, which relies on a categorical distinction between "verbal" and "particle" copulas made by Pustet (2003). This final point led me to develop a two-parameter typology whereby focus structures can be either mono- or bi-clausal, and if the latter, can be embedded by verbal or non-verbal material, depending on the lexical resources of the language.

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[7] This structure is slightly simplified. For É. Kiss, the copula is the overt realization of the F head, which head moves to T.

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