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Focus in K'iche'

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Introduction

The goal of this module is to describe information structure in K'iche' with an emphasis on focus and focus marking. We will primarily review morphosyntactic focus marking and will briefly conclude with prosodic focus marking.

Ergativity in K'iche'

K'iche' marks transitive agents with one set of ergative morphemes and transitive objects, intransitive subjects, and subjects of non-verbal predicates with another set of absolutive morphemes. Possessors of nouns are also marked with the ergative morpheme; K'iche' does not demonstrate split ergativity

(Gan Pixabaj 2004: 28)

Intransitive subject (absolutive)

X-ee-wa'-ik
CPL-ABS3p-eat:IV-SS

'They ate.'

Transitive object (absolutive)

X-ee-qa-riq-o

CPL-ABS3p-ERG1p-meet-SS

'We met them.'

Transitive subject (ergative)

X-in-ki-ch'ab'ee-j

CPL-ABS1S-ERG3p-speak.to-SS

'They spoke to me.'

Subject of nonverbal predicate
(absolutive)

Ee k'oo-l-ik

ABS3p EXIST-PSL-SS

'They are (in a place).'

Syntactic focus marking

Focused constituents typically appear before the predicate and are often preceded by emphatic particles, such as *are*.

Non-focused

X-∅-tze'n ri ixoq
CPL-ABS3s-laugh DET woman
'The woman laughed.'

Focused

Are **ri** **ixoq** x-∅-tze'n-ik
EMPH DET woman CPL-ABS3s-laugh-SS
'The woman laughed.'

(Par Sapón and Can

Pixabaj 2000:189)

Topic and focus

Topic always appears before focus and in a different intonational phrase. Focus is part of the same intonational phrase as the predicate.

Le	a	Xwan,	are	le	al	Mari'y
DET	CL	Juan	EMPH	DET	CL	María

x-∅-u-ch'ab'ee-j

CPL-ABS3s-ERG3s-speak.to-SS

'It was María that Juan spoke to (and not anyone else).'

(Can Pixabaj and England 2011:19)

Antipassive/agent focus morpheme

When the agent of a transitive verb is under focus, a distinct suffix is used on the verb (-ow). In these cases, the object is reintroduced as an oblique.

Are le al Ixkaaj ~~x-∅-loq'~~**-ow** r-eech
EMPH DET CL Ixkaaj CPL-ABS3s-buy-AP ERG3s-
RN:PAT

le ja
DET house

'Ixkaaj bought the house.'

(Can Pixabaj and England

2011:21)

In situ focus marking

Under certain circumstances, the movement of a focused constituent is optional (Velleman, 2014b: 107, 110).

Subjects of intransitive verbs

Context: Who is singing?

Ka–b'ixon **jun** **w–atz**
ERG3s–sing DET ERG1s–
brother

'One of my brothers is singing.'

Objects of transitive verbs

Context: What is the man
carrying?

U–q'alu–m b'i
jun **kotz'ij**

ABS3s–carry–PERF DIR:away
DET flower

'He's carrying a flower (Lit. He's
going having picked up a flower).'

However....

In situ focus is NOT possible with agents of transitive verbs

Context: Who is carrying the flower away?

*U-q'alu-m	b'i	jun	achi		
ERG3s-carry-PERF		DIR:away		DET	man

Intended: 'A man is carrying it away.'

(Velleman 2014b:

108)

In situ focus + *are*

The emphatic particle *are* can be used along with in situ focus for marking the object of a transitive verb.

Context: What does María want to eat?

Are k-u-tij **le** **ichaj** le al
Mari'y
EMPH INC- ERG3s-eat:TV DET vegetable DET Miss
María
'María will have the vegetables.'

(Velleman

2014a:186)

In situ focus + *are* (contd.)

Or for marking the subject of an intransitive verb.

Context: Which of them is going to eat?

Are k-a-wa' **le** **al** **Mari'y**

EMPH ABS3s-eat:IV DET Miss María

'María will eat.'

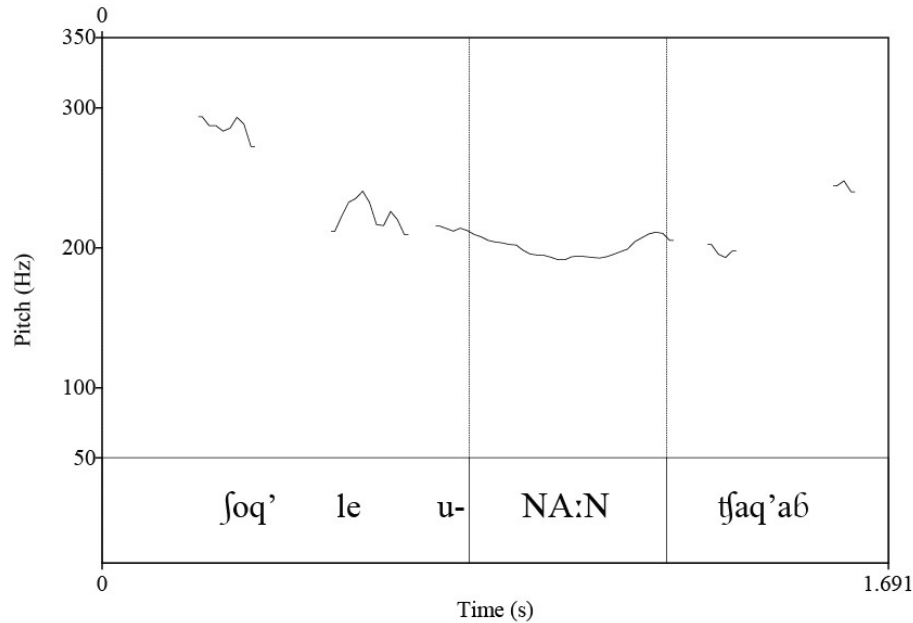
(Velleman

2014a:186)

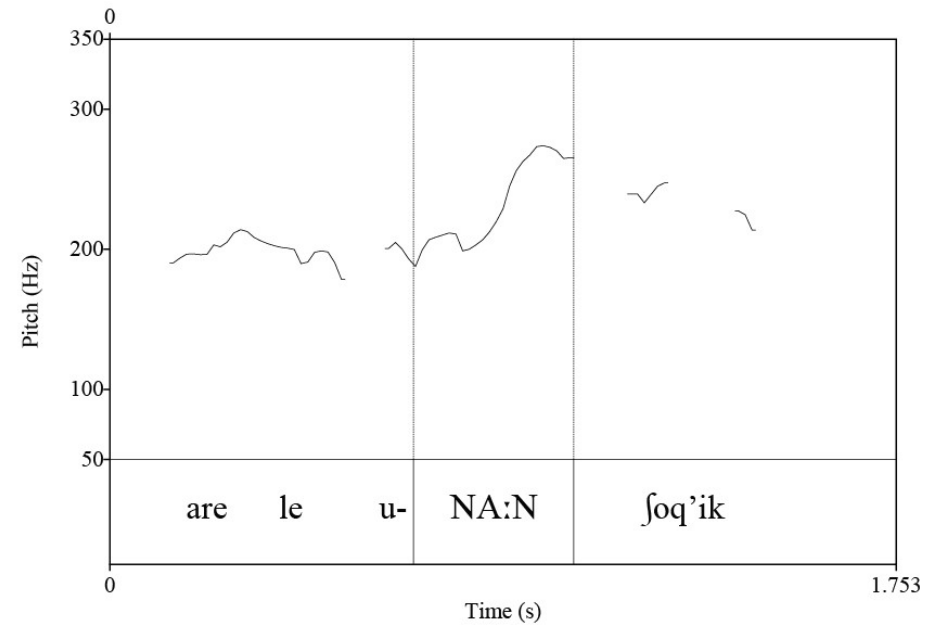
Prosodic focus marking?

- Yucatec Maya
 - o Researchers have generally agreed that prosody plays no role in marking focus in Yucatec and that any prosodic prominence is only a reflex of the syntactic construction (Verhoeven & Skopeteas, 2015).
- K'iche'
 - o Yasavul (2013) & Burdin et al. (2015) find no evidence on Spanish words in K'iche' discourse.
 - o Baird (2018): for subjects of intransitive verbs, all types of syntactic focus marking demonstrate significant prosodic prominence

Example- focus constituent movement (Baird, 2018)



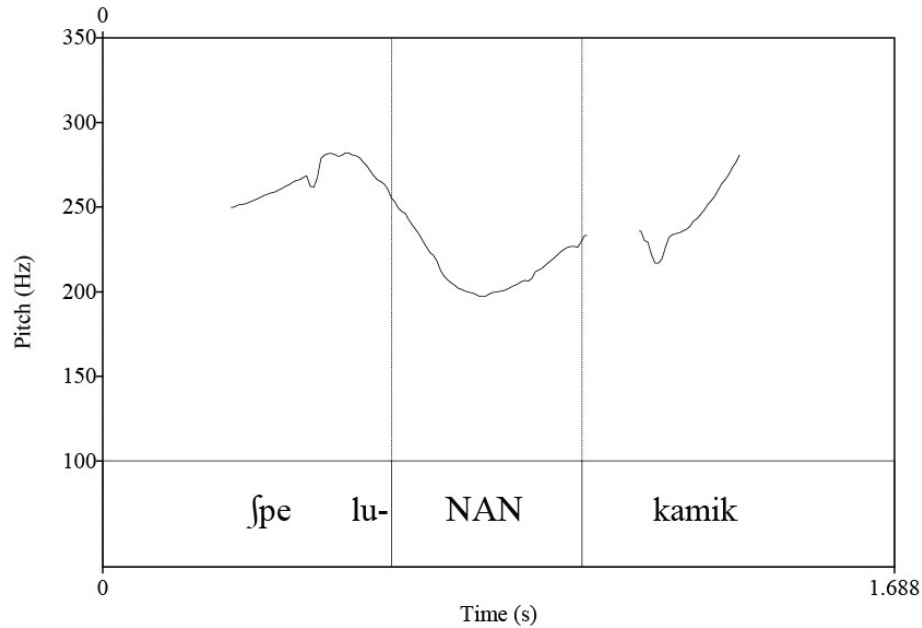
X-∅-oq' le u-nan chaq'ab
 INC-ABS3s-cry DET ERG3s-mother at night
 "His/her mother cried at night"



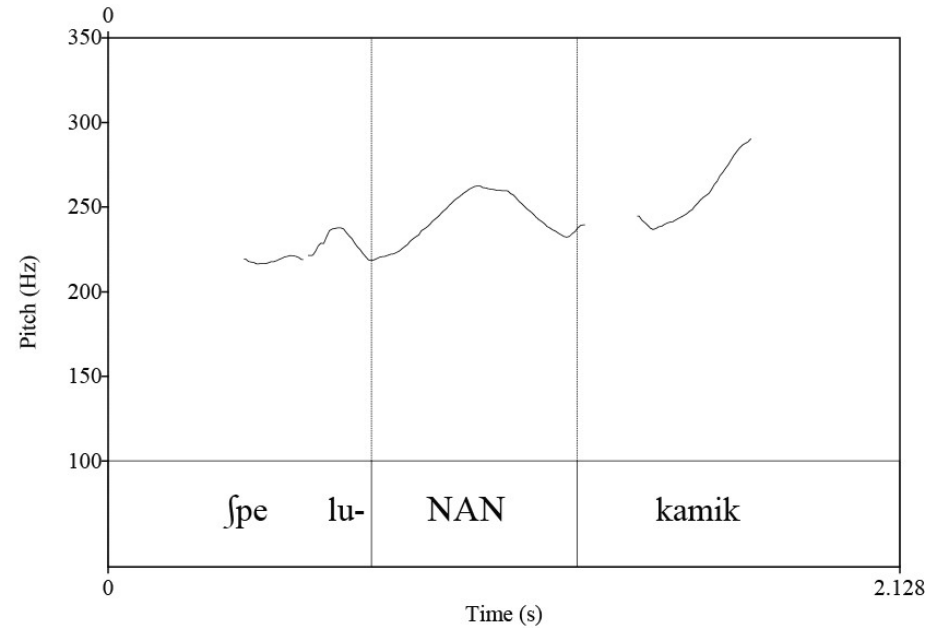
Are le u-nan x-∅-oq'-ik
 EMPH DET ERG3s-mother INC-ABS3s-cry-SS
 "His/her mother cried at night"



Example- in situ focus (Baird, 2018)



X-Ø-pe l-u-nan kamik
 INC-ABS3s-come DET-ERG3s-mother today
 "His/her mother came today"



X-Ø-pe l-u-nan kamik
 INC-ABS3s-come DET-ERG3s-mother today
 "His/her mother came today"



Takeaways

- Like in many other Mayan languages, focus is primarily marked via changes in word order.
- Variation in focus marking is allowed as long as the focus constituent is NOT the agent of a transitive verb.
- Unlike Yucatec Maya, prosody may be used as a/the only cue of focus in K'iche'.

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