Word Order and Information Structure in Kelabit

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Introduction

• In this paper, I explore the interaction between **symmetrical voice, word order** and **information structure** in the Kelabit language of Northern Sarawak.

• The aim of this paper:

  ➢ To consider how **information structure** interacts with syntactic choices
  ➢ To consider the implications for **WAn voice systems** and **information structure** more generally
Outline

1. Features of Kelabit Grammar
2. Information Structure
3. Information Structure and Word Order in Kelabit
4. Conclusions
Features of Kelabit Grammar
Background

- **Kelabit** is a Western Austronesian (WAn) language spoken mainly in the Fourth and Fifth divisions of Sarawak, Malaysia (Martin 1996).

- It is part of the **Apad Uat** subgroup of Northern Sarawak which also includes Lun Bawang/Lundayeh, and Sa’ban (Kroeger 1998).

- Data is based on **fieldwork** in Bario from 2013-2019 and consists of elicited **grammaticality judgements** and naturalistic corpus examples.
Symmetrical Voice

(1a) **Actor Voice**

Nekuman *bua’ kaber* la’ih sineh
PFV.AV.eat pineapple man DEM
‘The man ate pineapple’

(1b) **Undergoer Voice**

Kinan *la’ih sineh* bua’ kaber
PFV.UV.eat man DEM pineapple
‘The man ate pineapple’

GFs are distinguished by **word order** and optional pre-subject particles (*teh* & *neh*)
(2a) La’ih sineh nekuman bua’ kaber
   man DEM PFV.AV.eat pineapple
   ‘The man ate the pineapple’

(2b) *bua’ kaber nekuman la’ih sineh

(2c) Bua’ kaber kinan la’ih sineh
   pineapple pfv.uv.eat man dem
   ‘The man ate pineapple’

(2d) *la’ih sineh kinan bua’ kaber

The subject can appear pre-verbally, whilst the non-subject cannot.
Kelabit Word Order

(3a) Nekuman la’ih sineh bua’ kaber
PFV.AV.eat man DEM pineapple
‘The man ate pineapple’

(3b) *Kinan bua’ kaber la’ih sineh
pfv.uv.eat pineapple man
FOR: ‘The man ate pineapple’

In AV, VSO order is also possible & attested
### Kelabit Word Order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SVO</th>
<th>VOS</th>
<th>VSO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AV</td>
<td>√ = AVU</td>
<td>√ = VUA</td>
<td>√ = VAU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UV</td>
<td>√ = UVA</td>
<td></td>
<td>√ = VAU</td>
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All else being equal, there is a preference for **actor** before **undergoer**

Deviations from this tend to be associated with **marked** readings.
Focus Fronting

It is possible for focus information to be fronted in an inversion construction using the particle *teh* (cf. *ang* in Tagalog)

(4a) **Peter** teh suk kuman *bua’ kaber*
Peter PT REL AV.eat pineapple
‘It was Peter who ate the pineapple’

(4b) **Bua’ kaber** teh kinan **Peter**
Pineapple PT UV.PFV.eat Peter
‘It was pineapple that Peter ate’
Summary

• Kelabit has symmetrical voice alternations

• These allow different arguments to be mapped to subject and appear in pre-verbal position

• There is also an external position for contrastive focus (using the teh construction)

• Q: What is the role of information structure in these choices?
Information Structure
**Information Structure**

- **Information structure** can be understood as a formal mechanism for facilitating effective information exchange or update (Dalrymple and Nikolaeva 2011, Erteschik-Shir 2007).

- Among the most important information structure roles are **topic** and **focus**:
  
  - **Topic** is an entity that the speaker **identifies** and **about** which a proposition is made (Krifka 2008)
  
  - **Focus** is the **informative** part of the proposition and indicates the presence of **alternatives** (Krifka 2008)
Information Structure

- These allow us to divide the information according to two major distinctions:
  - Topic vs Comment
  - Focus vs Background

**CONTEXT:** What did Peter do?

**CONTEXT:** What did Peter eat?

**TOPIC**
- He

**COMMENT**
- ate
- chips

**BACKGROUND**

**FOCUS**

.He ate chips.
Information Structure & Word Order in Kelabit
Kelabit Word Order

- **Word order** can be used as a strategy to mark **information structure** by placing focus information before the background.

- This can be seen if we explore:
  
  a) Question/Answer pairs
  
  b) Negative Contrast

- This involves the **initial position** and also **inversion** constructions with **teh**
Narrow Focus (Q&A)

(6) Focused Actor

Q. lih nemupu’ John? who AV.PFV.hit John ‘Who hit John?’

A. [Andy]_{focus} nemupu’ John Andy AV.PFV.hit John ‘Andy hit John’

Focused Undergoer

Q. lih pinupu’ Andy? who UV.PFV.hit Andy ‘Who did Andy hit?’

A. [John]_{focus} pinupu’ Andy John UV.PFV.hit Andy ‘Andy hit John’
Narrow Focus (Q&A)

(10a) **Focused Actor**

*nemupu’*  \( \text{John} \) \([\text{iih}]_{\text{focus}}?\)

\( \text{AV.PFV.hit} \)  \( \text{John} \)  \( \text{who} \)

For: ‘who hit John?’

(10b) **Focused Undergoer**

*pinupu’*  \( \text{Andy} \) \([\text{iih}]_{\text{focus}}?\)

\( \text{UV.PFV.hit} \)  \( \text{Andy} \)  \( \text{who} \)

For: ‘who did Andy hit?’
(7) **Focused predicate (verb+undergoer)**

**Q.** Enun tu’en *neh*?
what UV.IRR.do 3SG GEN
‘What is he doing?’

**A.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[Kuman]</th>
<th><em>bua’</em></th>
<th><em>kaber</em></th>
<th><em>nedih</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AV.eat</td>
<td>fruit</td>
<td>pineapple</td>
<td>3SG.POSS</td>
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</table>

*focus*

t=ieh

PT=3SG.NOM

‘He’s eating his pineapple’
(8) Focused predicate (verb+actor)

Q. Peh neto’ bua’ suk na’ai?
where PT fruit REL before
‘what happened to/where is that fruit?’

A. [Kinan \textit{uih}]_{\text{focus}}
UV.PFV.eat 1SG.NOM
‘I ate it’

n=idih
PT=DEM

Focus > Background
Adjunct Focus (Q&A)

(9a) \textbf{Idan} teh Peter kuman \textit{bua’} kaber nedih?
when PT Peter AV.eat pineapple 3SG.POSS
‘When will Peter eat his pineapple?’

(9b) \textbf{Na’an}_{focus} teh Peter kuman \textit{bua’} kaber nedih
later PT Peter AV.eat pineapple 3SG.POSS
Peter will eat his pineapple later.

Focus > Background
## Summary

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<td>[A]VU</td>
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<td>[U]VA</td>
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</tr>
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<td>[VU]A</td>
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<td>Narrow Focus on a <strong>Time Adverbial</strong></td>
<td>[X]AVU</td>
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**Focus > Background**
Narrow Focus (Negation)

CONTEXT: Did Andy hit John yesterday?

(12a)  Not Andy...

[Paul]_{focus}  teh  suk  nemupu’  ieh
Paul  PT  REL  PFV.AV.hit  3SG.NOM

‘It was Paul who hit him (John)’

(12b)  Not John...

[Paul]_{focus}  teh  suk  pinupu’  neh
Paul  PT  REL  UV.PFV.hit  3SG.GEN

‘It wasn’t John, it was Paul that he (Andy) hit’
Predicate Focus (Negation)

CONTEXT: did Andy hit John yesterday?

(13c) Andy didn’t hit John...

[nemepag  Paul]_{focus}  \quad t=ieh
AV.PFV.slap Paul

‘He slapped Paul’

(13d) Andy didn’t hit John...

[pipag  uih]_{focus}  \quad t=ieh
UV.PFV.slap 1SG.NOM

‘I slapped John’
Context: did Andy hit John yesterday?

(14a) **Not yesterday...**

[edto ma’un]_{focus} \quad t=ieh \quad pinupu’ \quad neh

day before \quad PT=3SG.NOM \quad UV.PFV.hit \quad 3SG.GEN

‘It was the day before that he hit him’

(14b) [edto ma’un]_{focus} \quad t=ieh \quad nemupu’ \quad ieh

day before \quad PT=3SG.NOM \quad AV.PFV.hit \quad 3SG.NOM

‘It was the day before that he hit him’
Negation Test (corrective focus)

(15a) Andy didn’t hit John...

#ieh [nemepag Paul]_{focus}  
3SG.NOM AV.PFV.slap Paul

FOR: ‘he slapped Paul’

(15b) Not yesterday...

#pinupu’ neh t=ieh [edto ma’un]_{focus}  
UV.PFV.hit 3SG.GEN PT=3SG.NOM day.before

FOR: ‘he hit him the day before’
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**Focus** > **Background**
Summary

• **Word order** can be used as a strategy for marking information structure in placing *focus* before *background* information.

• Using the *teh inversion construction* appears to be particularly associated with *contrast*.

• This gives us contexts for many of the orders that we saw were possible – but doesn’t explain everything (e.g. VSO? and the prevalence of SVO)...
Other Word Order Patterns
Word Order & Information Structure

• **Non-subject arguments** can be focused *in situ* – so long as the subject follows. This is shown by the same tests:

  a) Question/Answer Pairs
  b) Negative Contrast
Narrow Focus (Q&A)

(16a) **Focused Undergoer**

**Q.** Nekuman *enun* teh *Peter* ngimalem?

AV.PFV.eat what PT *Peter* yesterday

‘What did Peter eat yesterday?’

**A.** Nekuman *[bua’ kaber]_focus *t=ieh* ngimalem

AV.PFV.eat fruit pineapple PT=1SG.NOM yesterday

‘What did Peter eat yesterday?’
Narrow Focus (Q&A)

(16b) **Focused Actor**

Q. Kenen *iih* neh bua’ kaber sineh?

UV.IRR.eat who PT fruit pineapple DEM

‘Who will eat the pineapple?’

A. Kenen *[Peter]_{focus}* neh bua’ kaber sineh

UV.IRR.eat Peter PT fruit pineapple DEM

‘Peter will eat the pineapple’
Narrow Focus (Negation)

Context: did Andy hit John yesterday? NO...

(17a) Not John...

nemupu’ [Paul]\textsubscript{focus} t=ieh
AV.PFV.hit Paul PT=3SG.NOM
‘He hit Paul’

(17b) Not Andy...

pinupu’ [Paul]\textsubscript{focus} t=ieh
UV.PFV.hit Paul PT=3SG.NOM
‘Paul hit him.’
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SVO in AV appears to be a possible means of expressing many different focus constructions:

a) narrow focus on the actor
b) narrow focus on the undergoer
c) predicate focus
d) broad/sentence focus
(18) **Focused Undergoer**

Q. Kuman *enun* t=ieh?
AV.eat what PT=3SG.NOM?

‘What is Peter eating?’

A. neh ieh kuman [bua’ kaber neh]_focus
DEM Peter AV.eat fruit pineapple DEM

‘Peter is eating pineapple’
(19) **Focused Predicate**

Q. naru’ *enun* Peter?

Av.do what Peter?

‘what is Peter doing?’

A. neh Peter

[\([\text{kuman} \quad \text{bua’} \quad \text{kaber}]_{\text{focus}}\)]

Av.eat fruit pineapple

‘Peter is eating pineapple’
Broad Focus (Q&A)

(20) **Focused Sentence**

Q. Kapeh tebey’?
how actually
‘What happened?’

A. [nih Peter kuman bua’ kaber nedih]_focus
DEM Peter AV.eat fruit pineapple 3SG.POSS

‘Peter is eating pineapple’
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<td><strong>Broad Focus</strong></td>
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Topic-comment structure (e.g. with continuing topics in narratives) can also be expressed using UV VOS clauses and AV VSO clauses...

We can see this in:

a) narrative sequences
b) IS translation exercise
(21) **Continuing Topic (UV VOS)**

Nalap  
`neh` pupu’
UV.PFV.fetch  3SG.GEN hitting.implement
‘She [Dayang Beladan] fetched something to hit with’

Nukab  
`neh` bubpu’ daan
UV.PFV.open  3SG.GEN door hut
‘Opened the door to the hut’

Nalap  
`neh` dteh kayuh
UV.PFV.fetch  3SG.GEN one stick
‘Picked up a piece of wood’
Continuing Topic (AV VSO)

Ngalap-ngalap  t=ieh  bua’
AV.pick-REDUP  PT=3SG  fruit
‘So he was picking fruit’
Cats are so aggressive. They chase squirrels. They chase birds. Some even chase dogs. I also heard that cats were seen chasing a small kangaroo in Australia. They also chase rats, of course. But that is good.

(23a) **Ideh** ngalo *labo puur*. **Ideh** ngalo *manuk* [...] **ideh** peh ngalo *labo l’ek* meto’ *(SVO)*

(23b) Ngalo **tideh** *labo puur*. Ngalo **tideh** *manuk* [...] Ngalo **tideh** *labo l’ek* meto’ *(VSO)*

(23c) Metanur *labo puur* *nideh*. Metanur *manuk* *nideh* [...] kineh **tideh** metanur *labo l’ek* *(VOS)*

(23d) Tu’en **deh** metanur teh *labo puur*. Tu’en **deh** metanur teh *manuk* [...] Tu’en **deh** metanur ayu’ teh *labo l’ek*. *(UV VOS)*
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Summary

• Fronting can be used as a strategy for marking information structure – specifically indicating the status of information as focused.

• The voice alternations can facilitate this in mapping different arguments to different functions.

• However, there is no one-to-one link between position, function and information structure role... since both subjects and non-subjects can be topic and focus and both pre-verbal and post-verbal positions can be associated with these roles.
• Q. Is there a difference between narrow focus in initial position and focus in-situ?

• Possible hypothesis to explore: fronting is associated with contrast/prominence – whilst new focus can also be associated with default positions.

• This might explain why the teh construction is preferred in the negative contrast contexts!

• If so, perhaps this provides some additional support for distinguishing between different subtypes of topic and focus and including contrast as a separate feature...
Conclusion
Conclusion

• In this paper, I explored the interaction between voice, word order and information structure in Kelabit.

• I have shown that there is a preference for ordering focus before background which can be achieved by realising the subject pre-verbally, realising the VP initially, or fronting an oblique/adjunct to an external position and using teh inversion.

• However, I have also shown that neither voice nor word order is fully determined by information structure since the same context can result in different syntactic choices.
Conclusion

• This suggests that voice (or subject selection) should be thought of as independent from information structure.

• It also suggests that word order is just one of many possible strategies for marking information structure, including perhaps morphological markers and prosody.

• This motivates the interesting question of what differences emerge between these strategies and whether fronting is linked to overt contrast/prominence perhaps motivating finer distinctions between contrast, topic and focus.
Many Thanks!
Hanging Topic Construction

• It is also possible to have **hanging topics** in the left periphery (co-referenced by a pronoun).

(4a) **Paul** kedieh, nekuman **bua’ ebpuk**
Paul EMPH.3SG AV.PFV.eat fruit passion

‘As for Paul, he ate passion fruit’

(4b) **Bua’ ebpuk suk na’ai**, kinan **Paul**
fruit passion REL afore UV.PFV.eat Paul

‘As for the passionfruit, Paul ate it.’
Hanging Topic Construction

(4c) Paul kedieh, kinan **neh** bua’ ebpuk
Paul 3SG.EMPH UV.PFV.eat **3SG.GEN** fruit passion
‘As for Paul, he ate the passion fruit’

(4d) Tapi bulu’ sineh, kiteb **neh** pa’up ena’ ih, bukuh ih
but bamboo DEM UV.PFV.cut **3SG.GEN** end PRO PT edge PT
‘but that bamboo, he had cut both ends off’

The hanging topic can correspond a **contrastive topics** or **frame setter**