



---

Topic and Focus in Seediq

Author(s): Tsukida, Naomi

Source: Proceedings of the International Workshop on Information Structure of Austronesian Languages, 10 April 2014, pp.129-137.

Published by: ILCAA, TUFUS

Permanent URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/10108/75991>

---

The Prometheus-Academic Collections are a repository of academic research. In them are found the research and educational achievements of the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies and also historical materials which have been preserved. The University shares such academic achievements on the Internet to ensure an open university. Copyright is retained by each author, academic society, association, publisher, and/or other rights owners. The whole or parts of the materials can be used (referred to, reproduced, printed), with copyright acknowledged, for academic and personal use only.

## Topic and Focus in Seediq

Tsukida Naomi  
Aichi Prefectural University

### 0. Introduction

In describing Philippine-type Focus system the term "focus" is used, but in a sense different from the notion of focus in studies of information structure in general. As a general description of focus, Krifka (2007: 18) notes "Focus indicates the presence of alternatives that are relevant for the interpretation of linguistic expressions", for example. In Philippine-type system, focus is said to highlight one of the entities relevant to the discourse, or to be the most salient entity relevant to the discourse, but as can be seen, its definition is quite vague.

Seediq is an Austronesian language spoken in Taiwan, and of course has Philippine-type "Focus" system. In this paper, I will show how the "focus" in Seediq, is like in respect to the information structure. I do not, however, call this NP "focus". I would rather call it "subject". "Focus" and this "subject" sometimes coincide, but sometimes do not.

I will also look at how the pre-clausal NP, which is often considered as Topic, behaves. I will see its function more precisely, with respect to the information structure.

### 1. A sketch of Seediq grammar

Related areas of Seediq grammar are sketched below: voice system, "NP ka VP" construction, and pre-clausal NP.

#### 1.1 Voice system

Seediq is a "Philippine type language", as it has a voice system so-called "focus system". I will show what this voice system is like in Seediq.

In a verbal clause, one of the arguments (including so-called adjuncts) is chosen as subject of the clause. I call this NP the subject, but this NP or corresponding NPs in other languages are sometimes called "focus" or "topic". This NP is marked by *ka* in this language and appears clause-finally. In the Seediq voice system, semantic roles are grouped into three macro roles, and verbs forms show which one of the three macro roles are in subject position. Verb forms are thus in one of three voices.

Examples in (1) show three focus forms of the intransitive verb '*usa* 'to go'.

- (1) a. *m-usa*    *kariNku*            *ka* \_\_\_\_\_ *laqi*.  
AV-go    Hualien            NOM    child  
The child goes to Hualien.
- b. *sa-'an*    *laqi*                    *ka* \_\_\_\_\_ *kariNku*.  
go-GV2<sup>1</sup> child            NOM    Hualien  
A/The child goes to Hualien.
- c. *se-'usa*    *laqi*    *kariNku*            *ka* \_\_\_\_\_ *payi*.  
CV-go    child    Hualien            NOM    old:woman  
A/The child goes to Hualien for the old woman.

Example (1a) is an Actor Voice sentence. The verb form *m-usa* indicates that the semantic role of the subject *ka laqi* 'child' is among those which are classified into AGENT macro role. Example (1b) is a Goal Voice sentence. The verb form *sa-'an* indicates that the semantic role

---

<sup>1</sup> The use of GV1 and GV2 forms differs in terms of tense/aspect. Punctualness/spacialness of the Patient also affects their use.

of the subject *ka kariNku* 'Hualien' is among those which are classified into GOAL macro role. Example (1c) is a Conveyance Voice sentence. The verb form *se-'usa* indicates that the semantic role of the subject *ka payi* 'old woman' is among those which are classified into CONVEYED THEME macro role. These three voices are summarized into table 1.

**Table 1. Three voices of 'usa 'to go' and semantic roles**

	Voice	Verb Form	Semantic role of the subject	Macro role which the semantic role of the subject is classified into
(1a)	AV	m-usa	Actor	ACTOR
(1b)	GV	sa-'an	Goal	GOAL
(1c)	CV	se-'usa	Beneficiary	CONVEYED THEME

In verbal clauses, the NP marked by *ka* is grammatically the most salient. Its semantic role decides the verb form as shown above; it causes a series of clitic pronoun which can be regarded as Nominative; and it is relativized. Quantifier float is observed only with this NP and possessor is raised only from this NP. It therefore can be regarded as the grammatical subject. Non-subject NPs, on the other hand, do not have such properties.

### 1.2 "NP ka VP" construction

Seediq has a construction that goes as "NP ka VP", which has an NP predicate and VP subject. This predicate position is a salient position. VP in Seediq can function as an NP. *Sa-'an* 'go-GV2' in (1b), for example, can function as an NP meaning 'a place to go'. It can become the subject of a sentence.

- (2) kariNku ka sa-'an laqi.  
Hualien NOM go-GV2 child

The place where the child goes is Hualien. It is Hualien that the child goes. Although such clauses involve VP, it is a nominal clause, since its predicate is an NP.

### 1.3 Pre-clausal NP

A pre-clausal NP occurs sentence-initially and followed by a non-final pause, and then a clause comes. I will call this clause main clause.

- (3) sehiga 'u, m-en-sa yayuN ka hiya.  
yesterday CNJ AV-PRF-go river NOM 3s  
Yesterday s/he went to a/the river.

It is salient in respect to word order; it is mentioned first of all and separated from the rest of the sentence by a pause. It does not, however, exercise any grammatical properties. It is separated from the rest of the sentence and it does not influence the main clause at all. What can appear in this position is limited to the following:

- i. an NP coreferential with the subject of the main clause
- ii. an NP coreferential with the agent of the main clause
- iii. Expression that indicates time when or place where the situation expressed by the main clause occurs.
- iv. place of existential sentence, possessor of possessive sentence
- v. Choices of alternatives questions

Example of iii is given above as example (3). Below are examples of i (examples (4) and (5), and an example of ii (example (6)).

- (4) senaw gaga 'u, t-em-abug huliN paru.  
man that CNJ AV-raise dog big  
As for that man, he keeps a/the big dog.

- (5) huliN paru niyi 'u, tebug-un senaw gaga.  
 dog big PRX CNJ raise-GV1 man that  
 As for this big dog, that man keeps it.
- (6) senaw gaga 'u, biq-un=na patas ka laqi.  
 man that CNJ give-GV1=3s.GEN book NOM child  
 As for that man, he will give a/the book to the child.

We will examine how these NPs function in information structure.

## 2. Focus and information structure

In 2.1, we will review studies in information structure and see the classification. Then in 2.2 and 2.3, we will see how pragmatic focus and semantic focus, respectively, are realized in Seediq.

### 2.1 Classification

The notion of focus has been explicated in a variety of ways, in particular as "highlighting" the "most important" or "new" information in an utterance (Krifka 2007, 28). Highlighting and importance are quite unclear. There are cases old information is in focus. Alternatively, Krifka presents us with what he thinks the most successful understanding of focus as follows (p.18).

(K6)<sup>2</sup> Focus indicates the presence of alternatives that are relevant for the interpretation of linguistic expressions.

Krifka first distinguishes between denotation focus and expression focus (p.19). Among uses of denotation focus he distinguishes pragmatic use and semantic use (p.21). Pragmatic uses do not have immediate truth-conditional effect, but semantic uses do. He classifies pragmatic uses as follows: question, correction, confirmation, parallels and delimitation (pp.21-25). As for semantic uses of focus, he says some semantic operators are associated with focus (p.25). There are focus-sensitive particles like *only* (exclusive), *also* (additive), and *even* (scalar). Some other adverbials are also focus-sensitive.

### 2.2 How pragmatic focus is realized in Seediq

Krifka (2007) classifies pragmatic uses of focus as follows:

1. Question
2. Correction
3. Confirmation
4. Parallels
5. Delimitation

Below we will see first what Krifka means by these terms and then corresponding Seediq expression for such meanings.

#### 2.2.1. Question

The classical pragmatic use of focus is to highlight the part of an answer that corresponds to the wh-part of a constituent question (ibid.: 21). 'Presentational' or 'information' focus also can be subsumed under the use of alternatives to indicate covert questions suggested by the context (ibid.: 23). Krifka's examples are (K10) and (K11).

(K10) Who stole the cookie?

(K11) Peter stole the cookie.

In Seediq, such are expressed using "NP ka VP" construction, as in (7), or by making the

---

<sup>2</sup> (Kn) indicates the example number in Krifka (2007).

interrogative and focused part into non-subject argument, as in (8). One cannot make interrogative into subject.

- (7) a. 'ima ka m-aNal buNa?  
 who NOM AV-take sweet:potato  
 Who took the sweet potatoes?  
 b. 'awi ka m-aNal buNa.  
 Awi NOM AV-take sweet:potato  
 Awi took the sweet potatoes.
- (8) a. 'uq-un 'ima ka buNa niyi?  
 eat-GV1 who NOM sweet:potato this  
 Who will eat this sweet potato?  
 b. 'uq-un laqi ka buNa niyi.  
 eat-GV1 child NOM sweet:potato this  
 The child will eat the sweet potato.

### 2.2.2. Correction

Krifka's example is B in (K14).

- (K14) A: Mary stole the cookie.  
 B: (No,) Peter stole the cookie!  
 B': Yes, Mary stole the cookie.

In Seediq, such are expressed using "NP ka VP" construction, as in (9), or by making the focused part non-subject argument, as in (10).

- (9) ('adi,) 'ipay ka m-aNal buNa.  
 NEG Ipay NOM AV-take sweet:potato  
 (No,) Ipay took the sweet potatoes.
- (10) ('adi,,'uq-un laqi ka buNa niyi.  
 NEG eat-GV1 child NOM sweet:potato this  
 (No,) the child will eat this sweet potato.

### 2.2.3. Confirmation

Krifka's example of confirmation is B' in (K14) above.

In Seediq, such are expressed using "NP ka VP" construction, as in (11), or by making the focused part non-subject argument, as in (12).

- (11) kiya, 'awi ka m-aNal buNa.  
 so Awi NOM AV-take sweet:potato  
 Yes, Awi took the sweet potatoes.
- (12) (kiya,,'uq-un laqi ka buNa niyi.  
 so eat-GV1 child NOM sweet:potato this  
 (Yes,) the child will eat this sweet potato.

### 2.2.4. Parallels

Another pragmatic use of focus is in highlighting parallels in interpretations. This can affect whole clauses as in (K15a) or parts of clauses as in (K15b) (Krifka 2007: 24).

- (K15) a. Mary stole the cookies and Peter stole the chocolate.  
 b. An American farmer talked to a Canadian farmer.

In Seediq, such are expressed by ordinary verbal sentences. (13), (14) and (15) are examples of clause-level parallel, while (16) is an example where two words in a clause are in parallel relationship. (13) is an example with AV clauses, and (14) and (15) are examples of GV clauses. In (13) and (14) both non-subject NP and subject NP have alternatives. (15) is an

example of verb-level parallels. One can use pre-clausal NP position for focus, also, as in b. examples.

- (13) a. t-em-egesa 'uyas kelemukan ka tiwaN 'u,  
 AV-teach song Taiwanese NOM Ciwang CNJ  
 t-em-egesa 'uyas nihuN ka daway 'uri.  
 AV-teach song Japanese NOM Daway also  
 Ciwang taught Taiwanese songs, and Daway taught Japanese songs.
- b. tiwaN 'u, t-em-egesa 'uyas kelemukan,  
 Ciwang CNJ AV-teach song Taiwanese  
 daway 'u t-em-egesa 'uyas nihuN.  
 Daway CNJ AV-teach song Japanese  
 Ciwang taught Taiwanese songs, and Daway taught Japanese songs.
- (14) a. 'uq-un laqi ka niyi ni, 'uq-un bubu ka gaga.  
 eat-GV1 child NOM this and eat-GV1 mother NOM that.  
 This is what the child will eat and that is what the mother will eat.
- b. niyi 'u, 'uq-un laqi ni, gaga 'u, 'uq-un bubu.  
 this CNJ eat-GV1 child and that CNJ eat-GV1 mother  
 This one, it is for child to eat, and that one, it is for mother to eat.
- (15) a. duh-un ka hiyi, puy-un ka qesurux.  
 burn-GV1 NOM meat cook-GV1 NOM fish  
 Meat is to roast, fish is to cook.
- b. hiyi 'u, duh-un, qesurux 'u, puy-un.  
 meat CNJ burn-GV1 fish CNJ cook-GV1  
 Meat is to roast, fish is to cook.
- (16) ga r-em-eNaw se'diq nihuN ka se'diq teruku.  
 DIST.PROG AV-speak person Japan NOM person Teruku.  
 A Teruku person is speaking to a Japanese person over there.

### 2.2.5. Delimitation

Krifka's examples are as follows.

- (K16) a. As for John, he was seen in the kitchen.  
 b. In my opinion, John stole the cookies.
- (K51) An ingenious mathematician he is not.
- (K52) And where did you read Dostoyefsky in school?

In Seediq, one express such focus using pre-clausal position.

- (17) Kari niyi 'u, m-atas=su sekenuwan?  
 story this CNJ AV-write=2s.NOM when?  
 As for this story, when did you write it?

## 2.3 How semantic focus is realized in Seediq

Some semantic operators are associated with focus. Krifka lists as follows.

1. *only* (exclusive)
2. *also* (additive)
3. *even* (scalar)

Some other adverbial expressions are also mentioned, but I will not deal with them below.

### 2.3.1. only (exclusive)

Krifka's examples are (K22) and (K23).

- (K22) John only introduced Mary to Sue.

(K23) a. Mary only said that John stole a cookie.

b. Mary said that only John stole a cookie.

(K22) is ambiguous in that only may associate with Mary, with Sue, with introduce, or with whole VP.

The Seediq expression for 'only' is *wana*. This occurs as a part of the noun phrase with which it is associated. The noun phrase which contains this particle occurs in predicate NP of nominal construction (as in (18) and (19)), or in non-subject NP of verbal clauses (as in (20)). It cannot occur in subject NP, as in (20b).

(18) wana deha balay ka 'elug.  
only two really NOM road

There are only two roads. Lit. The roads are only two.

(19) wana 'awi balay ka m-en-sa tehpaq.  
only Awi really NOM AV-PRF-go Taipei

Only Awi has been to Taipei.

(20)a. m-ekan=ku wana sagas.  
AV-eat=1s.NOM only watermelon

I eat only watermelon.

b. \*'uq-un=mu ka wana sagas.  
eat-GV1=1s.GEN NOM only watermelon

One can focus verb also, as in (21).

(21) dehiya 'u, wana r-em-eNaw ni ini 'uda q-em-e'pah.  
3p CNJ only AV-speak and NEG AV.NFIN.do AV-work

As for they, they only talk, but do not work.

### 2.3.2. also (additive)

Seediq expression for *also* is *'uri*. This expression directly follows the noun which it is associated with. The noun may be the subject NP (as in example (22)), predicate NP (as in example (23)), and non-subject NP (as in example (24)).

(22)a. gaga 'u, tege-paru 'ina=mu.  
that CNJ SUPERL-big daughter:in:law=1s.GEN

That is my eldest daughter-in-law.

b. 'ina=mu ka kuyuh niyi 'uri.  
daughter:in:law=1s.GEN NOM woman this also

This woman, too, is my daughter-in-law.

(23) nawxay kumu 'uri ka se-tinun=na.  
thanks:to Kumu also NOM CV-weave=3s.GEN

She wove one for Kumu, too.

(24) hiya ga 'u, m-en-sa 'amirika, m-en-sa 'igirisu 'uri.  
3s.DIR that CNJ AV-PRF-go America AV.PRF-go England also

That person, he has been to America, and has been to England, too.

### 2.3.3. even (scalar).

Seediq expression for *even* is *'ana*. This expression occurs as a part of the noun phrase with which it is associated. Such an NP may occur as subject NP (as in example (25)), as non-subject NP (as in example (26)), and as pre-clausal NP (as in example (27) and (28)). It cannot appear in the predicate position of "NP ka VP" construction.

(25) 'ini senehiyi hiya'an ka 'ana mensewayi=na.  
NEG AV.NFIN.believe 3s.OBL NOM even brothers:and:sisters=3s.GEN

Even his brothers and sisters did not believe him.

- (26) 'ini=su=bi kela 'ana bilaq na?  
 NEG=2s.NOM=really AV.NFIN.know even AV.little yet  
 You do not understand at all yet?

An NP which contains *'ana* may be left-dislocated, but without being followed by *'u*.

- (27) 'ana 'idaw, 'ini kela me-hapuy.  
 even rice NEG AV.NFIN.know AV-cook  
 Even rice, s/he doesn't know how to cook.

- (28) 'ana bitaq reheNun, 'uNat 'iyax.  
 even until door NEG.exist space  
 (There were so many people so)There was no space left even up to the door.

## 2.4 Discussion

As for question, correction and confirmation, focused element appears as the predicate of the “NP *ka* VP” construction or as non-subject argument of verbal clause. One cannot make the focused element into subject. As for “NP *ka* VP”, we may regard this construction as cleft focus construction. As for parallel, focused element occurs in-situ in ordinary verbal clauses. Focused element can either be subject, non-subject or pre-clausal NP. As for delimitation, the focused element occur in the pre-clausal position.

As for semantic use of focus, in-situ focus and cleft-focus construction are both used. In what position the focused element may occur depends on the semantic operator. Focused element associated with *wana* ‘only’ appears in predicate of cleft-focus construction and in non-subject position of verbal clauses. It cannot occur in the subject position. We can see that semantic use of focus associated with *wana* ‘only’ shows the same pattern with question, correction and confirmation, that is, pragmatic uses of focus. Focused element associated with *'uri* ‘also’ occur as subject NP, as predicate NP of cleft-focus construction and as non-subject NP. Focused element associated with *'ana* ‘even’ may appear as subject NP, non-subject NP and pre-clausal NP.

The summary is given in table 2.

**Table 2 Focus-types and position in a sentence**

Focus type	Predicate NP of cleft-focus clause	Subject NP	Non-subject NP	Pre-clausal NP
Question	+(7)		+(8)	
Correction	+(9)		+(10)	
Confirm	+(11)		+(12)	
Parallel	+(17)	+(13a),(14a), (15a),(16)	+(13),(14),(16)	+(13b),(14b), (15b)
Delimitation				+(17)
Only	+(18)(19)		+(20)	
Also	+(23)	+(22b)	+(24)	
Even		+(25)	+(26)	+(27),(28)

## 3. Topic and information structure

### 3.1 Preliminaries

Krifka (ibid.: 49) shows us the following definition, presupposing a file-card like structure of information storage.



(K39) The topic constituent identifies the entity or set of entities under which the information expressed in the comment constituent should be stored in the CG content. So (K38b) should be stored as information about Jacqueline Kennedy.

(K38b)[Jacqueline Kennedy]<sub>Topic</sub> [married Aristotle Onassis]<sub>Comment</sub>.

Krifka shows us interesting cases of interaction between topic/comment and old/new and topic/comment and focus. In many cases, topic constituents are "old", but there are certainly cases of new topics (Krifka *ibid.*: 42).

(K40) [A good friend of mine]<sub>Topic</sub> [married Britney Spears last year]<sub>Comment</sub>.

The comment need not be identical to the focus.

(K41) When did [Aristotle Onassis]<sub>Topic</sub> marry Jacqueline Kennedy?

[He]<sub>Topic</sub> [married her in [1968]<sub>Focus</sub>]<sub>Comment</sub>.

There are topics that contain a focus. Such are called contrastive topics.

(K44) What do your siblings do?

[My [SISter]<sub>Focus</sub>]<sub>Topic</sub> [studies MEDicine]<sub>Focus</sub>,  
and [my [BROther]<sub>Focus</sub>]<sub>Topic</sub> is [working on a FREIGHT ship]<sub>Focus</sub>.

(K45) Where were you at that time of the murder?

[[I]<sub>Focus</sub>]<sub>Topic</sub> [was [at HOME]<sub>Focus</sub>]<sub>Comment</sub>.

### 3.2 How topic appears in Seediq

In Seediq, topic NPs are realized as pre-clausal NP, as in (29a). (29b), which do not have pre-clausal NP, is *thetic*.

(29)a. bubu=mu 'u, me-kela balay t-em-inun.  
mother=1s.GEN CNJ AV-know really AV-weave  
My mother, she knows how to weave very well.

b. me-kela balay t-em-inun ka bubu=mu.  
AV-know really AV-weave NOM mother=1s.GEN  
My mother knows how to weave very well.

In Seediq also, there are cases of new topics as in (30a). Here, too, the sentence which do not have pre-clausal NP (example (30b) has only *thetic* reading.

(30)a. kiNal lupuN=mu sebenawan 'u, m-ita 'amei sehiga.  
one friend=1s.GEN Amis CNJ AV-see A-Mei yesterday  
An Amis friend of mine, she saw A-Mei yesterday.

(A-Mei is the name of a Puyuma pop singer.)

b. m-ita 'amei sehiga ka kiNal lupuN=mu sebenawan.  
AV-see A-mei yesterday NOM one friend=1s.GEN Amis  
An Amis friend of mine saw A-Mei yesterday.

Topics may contain a focus, as in (31b).

(31)a. ga h-em-uya ka laqi=su?  
PRG AV-do:what NOM child=1s.GEN  
What do your children do?

b. laqi=mu kuyuh 'u, ga m-atas tehipaq ni,  
child=1s.GEN female CNJ PROG AV-study Taipei and  
laqi=mu senaw 'u, niyi q-em-pah kariNku.  
child=1s.GEN male CNJ PROG AV-work Hualien  
My daughter is studying in Taipei, and my son is working at Hualien.

### 3.3 Discussion

We can say from the examples in 3.2 that topic in Seediq occurs at the pre-clausal position, but can we say that an NP that occurs at the pre-clausal position always is a topic?

As we saw in 1.3, what can occur at the pre-clausal position is as follows.

- i. an NP coreferential with the subject of the main clause
- ii. an NP coreferential with the agent of the main clause
- iii. Expression that indicates time when or place where the situation expressed by the main clause occurs.
- iv. place of existential sentence, possessor of possessive sentence
- v. Choices of alternatives questions

The topics we saw in 3.2 are all examples of i. Can we say that others, namely ii-v are also topics? Or are they something else? Let us see examples and examine.

- (32) ii.  
 senaw gaga 'u, biq-un=na patas ka laqi.  
 man that CNJ give-GV1=3s.GEN book NOM child

As for that man, he will give a/the book to the child. (=6)

- (33) iii.  
 sehiga 'u, m-en-sa yayuN ka hiya.  
 yesterday CNJ AV-PRF-go river NOM 3s

Yesterday s/he went to a/the river. (=3)

- (34) iv.  
 rubiq 'u, niqan kiNal laqi=na.  
 Rubiq CNJ exist one child=3s.GEN

As for Rubiq, she has one child.

We may say that (32), (33) and (34) provide us information about 'that man', 'yesterday' and 'rubiq' respectively, so the preclausal element is a topic.

How about v? (35) is an example of v.

- (35) deha niyi 'u, 'ima ka sewayi=su?  
 two this CNJ who NOM younger:sibling=2s.GEN

Between these two, who is your younger sibling?

This sentence is not an information about 'deha niyi', so 'deha niyi' is not topic. It sets frame for the question which follows it.

#### 4. Summary

After having seen a sketch grammar of related areas in Seediq, we examined how focus and topic are realized in Seediq, referring to Krifka (2007) to see the definition and classification of focus and topic. There is a cleft-focus construction used for pragmatic focus except parallels. This cleft construction is used for some of semantic uses of focus as well, that is, those associated with *wana* 'only' and *'uri* 'also'. Subject position is usually not for focus, except parallel use, and those associated with semantic operators *'uri* 'also' and *'ana* 'even'. As for topics, pre-clausal position is the position for topics, but not all the NPs that are in the pre-clausal position are topic.

#### References

- Chafe, Wallace. 1976. Givenness, contrastiveness, definiteness, subjects, topics and point of view. In Charles N. Li (ed.) *Subject and Topic*, Academic Press: New York. 27-55.
- Krifka, Manfred. 2007. Basic Notions of Information Structure. In Féry, Caroline, Gisbert Fanselow and Manfred Krifka (eds.) 2007. *The Notions of Information Structure*. Universitätsverlag Potsdam: Potsdam. 13-55.
- Tsukida, Naomi. 2009. *Sedekku-go-no Bunpou (Grammar of Seediq)*. Ph.D. Dissertation submitted to the University of Tokyo. (In Japanese.)