

Focus structure in Acooli —Unmarked focus position—

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The Acooli language has an unmarked focus position in sentences. The unmarked focus position for core elements is the final position in the core, while the unmarked focus position for peripheral elements is the final position in the periphery. Constituents mentioned in context do not occupy the unmarked focus position, whereas wh-words always occupy the unmarked focus position. Constituents corresponding to wh-words are located in the same place that wh-words are found in wh-questions.

Keywords: Focus, Unmarked focus position, Information structure, Informational packaging, Wh-question

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1. Introduction¹

Acooli is a language in the southern Lwo group of Western Nilotic, a branch of the Nilotic languages, which forms a large group among the members of the Nilo-Saharan phylum (Greenberg 1966). Acooli is spoken in the Acholi District, Uganda, and in the Opari District, Southern Sudan. The number of speakers is 746,796 in Uganda, and approximately 45,000 in Southern Sudan (Gordon 2005).

There are few published works on Acooli. We have a grammatical sketch with a vocabulary by Crazzolara (Crazzolara 1938, 1955 [Revised]) and a descriptive study on relative clauses by Culver (Culver 1970). In addition, we have a short grammatical note by Malandra (Malandra 1952, 1955 [Revised]) and a small vocabulary by Malandra (Malandra 1956). We have also some dictionaries that have been published recently (Odonga 2005, Blackings 2009). However, no literature investigating the information structure in Acooli exists presently. There are a few descriptive works on syntax in

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Western Nilotic languages that briefly discuss information structure (Omondi 1982, Noonan 1992). Recently, a publication comprehensively discussing information structure in Kumam, a Western Nilotic language (Hieda 2013), appeared.

We observe that focus is marked phonologically, morphologically, or syntactically in languages. However, there is no established theory to define focus structure in languages. For instance, how many types of foci do languages have? Acooli contains at least two types of foci: unmarked focus and contrastive focus. Foci are marked morphologically and syntactically in Acooli. Acooli has no phonological device, such as intonation or prosody, to mark foci. An unmarked focus is indicated by word order. To be precise, Acooli has a specific position for an unmarked focus in sentences. A contrastive focus is morphologically marked by the particle *ayé* ‘CFM (Contrastive focus marker)’ in Acooli. Section 2 of this paper discusses unmarked focus in Acooli. Contrastive focus is discussed in the author’s forthcoming paper (Hieda, in preparation).

1.1. Configurational or non-configurational languages

Languages almost always have optional divergence of word order from a canonical order. Some approaches attempt to explain the divergence through purely syntactic structures. Other approaches try to explain the divergence through a purely pragmatic basis. In addition to these theories, there are also mixed varieties that explain divergence both syntactically and pragmatically. The purpose of this article, however, is to provide a descriptive outline of focus structure of Acooli, and it will not discuss theoretical implications.

With regard to word order, languages are cross-linguistically classified into non-configurational and configurational languages. Non-configurational languages allow a variety of word orders. Word order is determined by information structure. Configurational languages, on the other hand, have highly restricted word orders. Word order is relatively fixed and the topic and focus constituents are marked by intonation or prosody.

Japanese is a non-configurational language, and has optional divergence of word order from the canonical SOV order. For example, sentence (1) below has a canonical SOV order, while sentence (2) has a divergent OSV order. The direct object *sono tegami* ‘that letter’ occupies the unmarked focus position in (1). On the other hand, the subject *taro* ‘Taro’ occupies the unmarked focus position in (2). Because the direct object *sono tegami* ‘that letter’ does not occupy the unmarked focus position in which new information is located, the direct object *sono tegami* ‘that letter’ is presupposed and is old information for the speaker and hearer. The subject *taro* ‘Taro’ is new information. Thus, sentence (2) is mainly used as a response to a question such as ‘Who wrote that letter?’

- (1) *taro-ga sono tegami-o kaita.*
 Taro-NOM that letter-ACC write:PAST
 ‘Taro wrote that letter.’
- (2) *sono tegami-o taro-ga kaita.*
 that letter-ACC Taro-NOM write:PAST
 ‘Taro wrote that letter.’

English is a configurational language, where word order is highly restricted and the topic and focus constituents are marked by intonation or prosody. The stressed constituents are focalized in the following sentences. The subject, predicate, and object are focalized in (3), (4), and (5), respectively.

- (3) *I am writing a letter, not Tom.*
- (4) *I am WRITING a letter, not reading.*
- (5) *I am writing a LETTER, not a book.*
 (Capitalized constituents are stressed.)

In configurational languages, though word order is relatively fixed, it plays a role in identifying topics and foci. English has topicalization by which topicalized constituents are fronted in sentences. The object *woman* is fronted by topicalization in (6).

- (6) The woman, I saw.

In addition to syntactic devices such as rearrangement of word order, languages have some morphological or lexical devices to express information structures. Japanese contains the topic marker *-wa*. Topics marked by the topic marker *-wa* are frequently placed in sentence-initial position in topicalized sentences, as seen in (8). The object *sono hon* ‘that book’ is marked with the topic marker *-wa* and located in sentence-initial position in contrast with sentence (7).

- (7) *taro-ga sono hon-o katta.*
 Taro-NOM that book-ACC buy:PAST
 ‘Taro bought that book.’

- (8) *sono hon-wa, taro-ga katta.*
 That book-TOP Taro-NOM buy:PAST
 ‘As for that book, Taro bought.’

Configurational languages also have morphological or lexical devices to mark information structure. English has some expressions, such as *as for*, *only*, or *just*, used for marking topics or foci.

According to basic criteria, non-configurational languages have syntactically flexible but pragmatically strict word order. On the other hand, configurational languages have syntactically strict but pragmatically flexible word order. It is not easy to decide whether Acooli is classified as a non-configurational or configurational language. Acooli has a canonical SVO order. When sentences contain no topicalized NP, Acooli has relatively rigid SVO order in sentences. Preverbal position is firmly restricted to subjects and adverbials, except for topicalized NPs. The order of constituents in preverbal position is highly restrictive. In contrast, the order of constituents in postverbal position is quite flexible in Acooli. Constituents in postverbal position are quite freely rearranged with syntactic reservations. The rearrangement is determined by pragmatic factors, which are discussed in the following section. In addition to syntactic devices, Acooli uses some morphological devices, such as *ayé* ‘CFM’, to mark information structure².

The subject *oké!lɔ* ‘Okelo’ is followed by the verb *mumɔ* ‘to give’ in sentences (9) and (10). Though the topicalized object *búk* ‘book’ occupies the topic slot in sentence-initial position, the subject *oké!lɔ* ‘Okelo’ is followed by the verb *mumɔ* ‘to give’ in (10). Word order is quite rigid in preverbal position.

- (9) *oké!lɔ ɔ=muyɔ búk ki-latín³.*
 Okelo 3SG=PERF:give book to-child
 ‘Okelo gave the book to the child.’

- (10) *búk, oké!lɔ ɔ=muyɔ ki-latín.* (Topicalization)
 book Okelo 3SG=PERF:give to-child
 ‘The book, Okelo gave to the child.’

In postverbal position, constituents are relatively freely allocated. The object *búk* ‘book’ is followed by the prepositional phrase *ki-latín* ‘to the child’, such as in (11), while the object *búk* ‘book’ is preceded by the prepositional phrase *ki-latín* ‘to the child’, as in (12).

² The contrastive focus marker in Acooli is discussed in Hieda (in preparation).

³ Subject clitics are added to verbs. Prepositions are attached to the following nouns as prefixes.

(11) *a=mí!yó !búk ki-latín.*
 1SG=PERF:give book to-child
 ‘I gave the book to the child.’

(12) *a=mí!yó ki-latín !búk.*
 1SG=PERF:give to-child book
 ‘I gave the book to the child.’

Sentences (11) and (12) are perfectly grammatical, though not always appropriate pragmatically. For example, when the direct object *búk* ‘book’ is mentioned in the preceding context, sentence (11) is appropriate, but a sentence such as (12) would not be appropriate.

The object *búk* ‘book’ is mentioned in the first sentences, for example in (13) and (14). The object *búk* ‘book’ is followed by the prepositional phrase *ki-latín* ‘to the child’ in the second sentence in (13)⁴, where it is pragmatically appropriate in this context. On the other hand, the object *búk* ‘book’ is preceded by the prepositional phrase *ki-latín* ‘to the child’ in the second sentence in (14). The second sentence is pragmatically inappropriate in this context.

(13) *a=wí!ló !búk lá!wór.*
 1SG=PERF:buy book yesterday
 ‘I bought the book yesterday.’
a=mí!yó !búk ki-latín. = (11)
 1SG=PERF:give book to-child
 ‘I gave the book to the child.’

(14) *a=wí!ló !búk lá!wór.*
 1SG=PERF:buy book yesterday
 ‘I bought the book yesterday.’
 # *a=mí!yó ki-latín !búk.* = (12)
 1SG=PERF:give to-child book

⁴ The second sentence in (13) is syntactically well-formed and pragmatically appropriate in this context. However, this sentence is not the pragmatically most preferable sentence for Acooli speakers. The pragmatically most preferable sentence in the context is the following:

(1) *a=mí!yó ∅ ki-latín.*
 1SG=PERF:give ∅ to-child
 ‘I gave it to the child.’

A zero anaphor preferably refers to a non-human referent that is mentioned in the preceding context. In order to simplify the following discussions, we will not take a zero anaphor into consideration.

‘I gave the book to the child.’
 (#: pragmatically inappropriate expression)

On the other hand, when the prepositional phrase *ki-latín* ‘to the child’ is mentioned in the preceding context, a sentence such as (11) is not appropriate pragmatically, but sentence (12) would become appropriate in this context. The prepositional phrase *ki-latín* ‘to the child’ is mentioned in the first sentences, such as in (15) and (16). When the prepositional phrase *ki-latín* ‘to the child’ is preceded by the direct object *búk* ‘book’, the second sentence becomes pragmatically inappropriate in (15). When the prepositional phrase *ki-latín* ‘to the child’ is followed by the direct object *búk* ‘book’, the second sentence is pragmatically appropriate, as seen in (16).

- (15) *ɔnoŋo*⁵ *a=tyé* *ki-latín.*
 PAST 1SG=IMPERF:be with-child
 ‘I had the child.’
 # *a=mí!yó* *!búk* *ki-latín.* = (11)
 1SG=PERF:give book to-child
 ‘I gave the book to the child.’

- (16) *ɔnoŋo* *a=tyé* *ki-latín.*
 PAST 1SG=IMPERF:be with-child
 ‘I had the child.’
a=mí!yó *ki-latín* *!búk.* = (12)
 1SG=PERF:give to-child book
 ‘I gave the book to the child.’

The following section discusses the order of constituents in postverbal position, which is quite flexible, but determined by pragmatic factors with syntactic reservations.

2. Unmarked focus position in core and periphery

As discussed in the preceding section, order of constituents in postverbal position is quite free. Order of constituents is rearranged due to pragmatic factors. However, the rearrangement is not necessarily free from syntactic restriction. For instance, direct

⁵ The past particle *ɔnoŋo* ‘PAST’ originated from the verb *noŋo* ‘to observe’. Sentences in past tense consist of the main verb *noŋo* ‘to observe’ inflected with 3rd person in perfect aspect and the following complement clauses:

- (2) *ɔ=noŋo* *a=tyé* *ki-latín.*
 3SG=PERF:observe 1SG=IMPERF:be with-child
 ‘They observed (that) I have the child. = I had the child.’

objects cannot be preceded by oblique NPs, even though pragmatic requirements demand rearrangement of constituents in postverbal position.

The object *búk* ‘book’ is mentioned in the first sentences in (17) and (18). Because the object *búk* ‘book’ mentioned in the preceding context is followed by the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’ in the second sentence in (17), the second sentence in (17) is syntactically well-formed. Moreover, as discussed in the preceding section, the second sentence in (17) is pragmatically appropriate because the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’ is preceded by the direct object *búk* ‘book’ mentioned in the preceding context. On the other hand, the second sentence in (18) is not pragmatically appropriate because the direct object *búk* ‘book’ mentioned in the preceding context is preceded by the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’. Moreover, the second sentence in (18) is syntactically ungrammatical because the direct object *búk* ‘book’ is preceded by the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’. Thus, the second sentence in (18) is not only inappropriate pragmatically but also ungrammatical syntactically.

Direct object vs. Locative NP

- (17) *a=wí!lǒ* *búk* *lá!wór.*
 1SG=PERF:buy book yesterday
 ‘I bought the book yesterday.’
a=cwá!lǒ *!búk* *i-ɔt.*
 1SG=PERF:send book to-house
 ‘I sent the book to the house.’

- (18) *a=wí!lǒ* *búk* *lá!wór.*
 1SG=PERF:buy book yesterday
 ‘I bought the book yesterday.’
 **a=cwá!lǒ* *i-ɔt* *búk.*
 1SG=PERF:send to-house book
 ‘I sent the book to the house.’
 (*: syntactically not well-formed)

The locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’ is mentioned in the first sentences in (19) and (20). In the second sentence in (19), as the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’ mentioned in the first sentence is preceded by the direct object *búk* ‘book’, the second sentence in (19) is pragmatically inappropriate. However, the second sentence in (19) is preferably chosen as an acceptable sentence in spite of pragmatical inappropriateness by Acooli speakers. On the other hand, because the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’ mentioned in the first sentence is followed by the direct object *búk* ‘book’ in the second sentence in (20), the second sentence is

pragmatically appropriate. However, the second sentence in (20) is syntactically rejected by Acooli speakers. As the direct object *búk* ‘book’ is preceded by the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’, the second sentence in (20) is ungrammatical. If there are no other syntactically well-formed candidates, sentences that are pragmatically inappropriate but syntactically grammatical are accepted by Acooli speakers.

- (19) *ɔnoŋo a=tyé ki-ɔt gulú.*
 PAST 1SG=IMPERF:be with-house Gulu
 ‘I had the house in Gulu.’
 # *a=cwá!lɔ !búk i-ɔt.*
 1SG=PERF:send book to-house
 ‘I sent the book to the house.’

- (20) *ɔnoŋo a=tyé ki-ɔt gulú.*
 PAST 1SG=IMPERF:be with-house Gulu
 ‘I had the house in Gulu.’
 * *a=cwá!lɔ i-ɔt búk.*
 1SG=PERF:send to-house book
 ‘I sent the book to the house.’

Why is a dative NP – object word order interchangeable? Why is not an object – locative NP interchangeable? Sentences consist of core and periphery elements. Constituents are classified into one of the two groups, core or peripheral, based on their thematic roles in sentences. Peripheral elements cannot intervene between core elements. Oblique NPs, such as locative, reason, and instrumental NPs, constitute periphery elements in sentences, whereas subjects, verbs, and direct objects constitute core elements in sentences. Dative or benefactive NPs sometimes behave as core elements, or sometimes as peripheral. Adverbials are quite freely placed in sentences. The syntactic restriction dictates that peripheral elements should not intervene in core elements.

The second sentences, such as in (18) and (20), are syntactically ungrammatical because the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’ intervenes between the verb *cwá!lɔ* ‘to send’ and the direct object *búk* ‘book’. Locative NPs are peripheral elements, but verbs and direct objects constitute core ones. Because peripheral elements intervene between core elements, sentences such those seen in (18) and (20) are syntactically ungrammatical, even if pragmatic requirements demand rearrangement of constituents.

2.1. Unmarked focus position

Van Valin and LaPolla pointed out that many languages have a clearly defined unmarked focus position in their clauses. In English, the unmarked focus position is the final position in the core, which may or may not be the final position in the clauses (Van Valin & LaPolla 1997: 209).

As discussed above, Acooli sentences consist of core and periphery elements. In addition, rearrangement of constituents in postverbal positions is triggered by information structure with syntactic reservations. Namely, the relative position of constituents is determined by pragmatic characteristics of the constituents. To put it briefly, constituents mentioned in relation to a specific context are followed by those that are not mentioned in context. We summarize this by observing that old information is first and new information follows. We shall refer to this norm as the principle of informational packaging. Next, we will concretely discuss the manner in which the order of constituents is rearranged in postverbal position.

The second sentences seen below in (21) and (22) include both a benefactive and a locative NP. The benefactive NP *latín* ‘child’ is mentioned in the context in (21).

- (21) Context: *ɔnoŋo* *a=tyé* *ki-latín.*
 PAST 1SG=PERF:be with-child
 ‘I had the child.’
- a. *a=cwá!lǒ* *ki-latín* *!búk* *í-ɔt.*⁶
 1SG=PERF:send for-child book to-house
- b. *a=cwá!lǒ* *!búk* *kí-latín* *í-ɔt.*
 1SG=PERF:send book for-child to-house
- c. *#a=cwá!lǒ* *!búk* *í-ɔt* *ki-latín.*
 1SG=PERF:send book to-house for-child
- d. **a=cwá!lǒ* *í-ɔt* *ki-latín* *!búk.*
 1SG=PERF:send to-house for-child book
- e. **a=cwá!lǒ* *í-ɔt* *búk* *kí-latín.*
 1SG=PERF:send to-house book for-child
 ‘I sent the book to the house for the child.’

Subjects, verbs, and direct objects constitute core elements in the second sentences. Locative NPs are peripheral elements and therefore do not intervene between the core elements. Benefactive NPs sometimes behave as core, and sometimes as peripheral elements. Sentences such as (21d) and (21e) are syntactically ungrammatical because the

⁶ In the canonical order, a benefactive NP is followed by a direct object.

locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’ intervenes between the core elements, the verb *cwalo* ‘to send’ and the direct object *búk* ‘book’ or the benefactive NP *latin* ‘child’. The other sentences are syntactically grammatical because the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’ does not intervene between the core elements. Though the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’ intervenes between the direct object *búk* ‘book’ and the benefactive NP *latin* ‘child’ in (21c), sentence (21c) is syntactically grammatical. The benefactive NP *latin* ‘child’ behaves as a peripheral element in this sentence.

A sentence such as (21c) is syntactically grammatical but pragmatically inappropriate in this context. Because the benefactive NP *latin* ‘child’ mentioned in the preceding context is preceded by the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’ or the direct object *búk* ‘book’ that is not mentioned in the context, sentence (21c) is pragmatically inappropriate.

A sentence such as (21b) is pragmatically appropriate, though the benefactive NP *latin* ‘child’ is preceded by the direct object *búk* ‘book’ that is not mentioned in the preceding context. Sentence (21b) does not keep the principle of informational packaging that places old information first and new information last. Therefore, the principle of informational packaging is not sufficient in explaining the rearrangement of constituents in postverbal position. Why is sentence (21b) accepted by Acooli speakers?

The locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’ is mentioned in the context in (22).

- (22) Context: *ɔnoŋo a=tyé ki-ɔt gulu.*
 PAST 1SG=PERF:be with-house Gulu
 ‘I had the house in Gulu.’
- a. #*a=cwá!lɔ ki-latin !búk i-ɔt.*
 1SG=PERF:send for-child book to-house
- b. #*a=cwá!lɔ !búk ki-latin i-ɔt.*
 1SG=PERF:send book for-child to-house
- c. *a=cwá!lɔ !búk i-ɔt ki-latin.*
 1SG=PERF:send book to-house for-child
- d. **a=cwá!lɔ i-ɔt ki-latin !búk.*
 1SG=PERF:send to-house for-child book
- e. **a=cwá!lɔ i-ɔt búk ki-latin.*
 1SG=PERF:send to-house book for-child
 ‘I sent the book to the house for the child.’

Sentences (22d) and (22e) are syntactically ungrammatical because they violate the syntactic restriction that peripheral elements should not intervene between core elements. Sentences (22a) and (22b) are not appropriate pragmatically because the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’ mentioned in the preceding context (i.e. old information) is preceded by the direct

object *búk* ‘book’ or the benefactive NP *latín* ‘child’ that is not mentioned in the context (i.e. new information). Sentence (22c) does not maintain the principle of informational packaging that old information appears before new information, because the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’ mentioned in the preceding context is preceded by the direct object *búk* ‘book’ that is not mentioned in the above context. However, if the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’ is placed before the direct object *búk* ‘book’ as seen in sentences (22d) and (22e), the sentence violates the syntactic restriction that peripheral elements should not intervene between core elements. Therefore, sentences such as (22c) are accepted by Acooli speakers. The syntactic restriction obliges Acooli speakers to accept sentences such as (22c), though they do not uphold the principle of informational packaging.

The principle of informational packaging is not sufficient in explaining the rearrangement of constituents in postverbal position. Therefore, I propose a pragmatic constraint to explain the rearrangement of constituents as follows:

(23) Pragmatic constraint

Constituents mentioned in the preceding context (i.e. old information) should not occupy an unmarked focus position. The unmarked focus position for core elements is the final position of the core in sentences. The unmarked focus position for peripheral elements is the final position of the periphery in sentences.

Conversely speaking, the pragmatic constraint proposed above demonstrates that an unmarked focus position should be occupied by new information. The pragmatic constraint is not the same as the principle of informational packaging; however, it essentially conforms to the principle. The pragmatic constraint summarized in (23) can account for the pragmatic inappropriateness in (14), (15), (21c), (22a), and (22b).

I reexamine the examples in (13), (14), (15), and (16) for the following discussion. The second sentences, displayed in (13), (14), (15), and (16), include a direct object and a dative NP. In (14), the second sentence violates the pragmatic constraint proposed in (23), because the direct object *búk* ‘book’ mentioned in the preceding context occupies the final position of the core in the second sentence, namely the unmarked focus position for core elements. This renders the second sentence pragmatically inappropriate. On the other hand, in (13), the second sentence upholds the pragmatic constraint because the direct object *búk* ‘book’ mentioned in the preceding context does not occupy the final position of the core in the sentence.

- (13) *a=wí!lǎ* *!búk* *lá!wór.*
 1SG=PERF:buy book yesterday
 ‘I bought the book yesterday.’
 [*a=mí!yǎ* *!búk* *kí-latín*] CORE. = (11)
 1SG=PERF:give book to-child
 ‘I gave the book to the child.’

- (14) *a=wí!lǎ* *!búk* *lá!wór.*
 1SG=PERF:buy book yesterday
 ‘I bought the book yesterday.’
 #[*a=mí!yǎ* *kí-latín* *!búk*] CORE. = (12)
 1SG=PERF:give to-child book
 ‘I gave the book to the child.’

In (15), the second sentence violates the pragmatic constraint because the dative NP *latín* ‘child’ mentioned in the preceding context occupies the final position of the core, namely the unmarked focus position for core elements. Therefore, the second sentence is pragmatically inappropriate. On the other hand, in (16), the second sentence upholds the pragmatic constraint, as the dative NP *latín* ‘child’ does not occupy the unmarked focus position for core elements. Hence, the second sentence is pragmatically appropriate.

- (15) *ɔnoŋo* *a=tyé* *kí-latín.*
 PAST 1SG=IMPERF:be with-child
 ‘I had the child.’
 #[*a=mí!yǎ* *!búk* *kí-latín*] CORE. = (11)
 1SG=PERF:give book to-child
 ‘I gave the book to the child.’

- (16) *ɔnoŋo* *a=tyé* *kí-latín.*
 PAST 1SG=IMPERF:be with-child
 ‘I had the child.’
 [*a=mí!yǎ* *kí-latín* *!búk*] CORE. = (12)
 1SG=PERF:give to-child book
 ‘I gave the book to the child.’

We shall discuss pragmatic inappropriateness of the second sentences in (21) and (22), following the pragmatic constraint proposed in (23). Direct objects are always core elements, while locative NPs act as peripheral elements. Therefore, a sentence such as

(21a) has a boundary of core–periphery between the direct object *búk* ‘book’ and the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’. In (21a), because the benefactive NP *latín* ‘child’ mentioned in the context does not occupy the final position of the core, namely the unmarked focus position for core elements, sentence (21a) is pragmatically appropriate.

Acooli speakers judge the sentence seen in (21b) as also being pragmatically appropriate. Sentence (21b) is interpreted to have a boundary of core–periphery between the direct object *búk* ‘book’ and the benefactive NP *latín* ‘child’. Because the benefactive NP *latín* ‘child’ does not occupy the final position of the periphery, namely the unmarked focus position for peripheral elements, a sentence such as (21b) is pragmatically appropriate. On the other hand, a sentence such as (21c) is pragmatically inappropriate because the benefactive NP *latín* ‘child’ mentioned in the preceding context occupies the final position of the periphery, the unmarked focus position for peripheral elements. The sentence in (21c) violates the pragmatic constraint.

The benefactive NP *latín* ‘child’ behaves as a core element in (21a) but acts as a peripheral element in (21b). Benefactive NPs sometimes behave as core, and sometimes as peripheral elements. This explains why the two sentences in (21a) and (21b) are pragmatically appropriate. The pragmatic constraint summarized in (23) nicely explains why sentences such as (21a) and (21b) are pragmatically appropriate, but sentences such as (21c) are not.

- (21) Context: *ɔnoŋo a=tyé ki-latín.*
 PAST 1SG=PERF:be with-child
 ‘I had the child.’
- a. [*a=cwá!lɔ́ ki-latín !búk*] CORE [*í-ɔt*] PERIPHERY.
 1SG=PERF:send for-child book to-house
- b. [*a=cwá!lɔ́ !búk*] CORE [*ki-latín í-ɔt*] PERIPHERY.
 1SG=PERF:send book for-child to-house
- c.#[*a=cwá!lɔ́ !búk*] CORE [*í-ɔt ki-latín*] PERIPHERY.
 1SG=PERF:send book to-house for-child
- d.**a=cwá!lɔ́ í-ɔt ki-latín !búk.*
 1SG=PERF:send to-house for-child book
- e.**a=cwá!lɔ́ í-ɔt búk ki-latín.*
 1SG=PERF:send to-house book for-child
 ‘I sent the book to the house for the child.’

The locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’ is mentioned in the context in (22). Sentence (22a) has a boundary of core–periphery between the direct object *búk* ‘book’ and the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’. Because the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’ mentioned in the preceding context occupies

the final position of the periphery, namely the unmarked focus position, sentence (22a) is pragmatically inappropriate.

There are two syntactically possible constructions, (22b) and (22b'), for the same sentence. One construction shows that the sentence has a boundary of core–periphery between the benefactive NP *latín* ‘child’ and the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’, as in (22b). The other construction has a boundary of core–periphery between the direct object *búk* ‘book’ and the benefactive NP *latín* ‘child’, as in (22b'). In both the constructions, because the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’ occupies the final position of the periphery, these sentences are pragmatically inappropriate.

In (22c), there is a boundary of core–periphery between the direct object *búk* ‘book’ and the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’. Because the locative NP *ɔt* ‘house’ mentioned in the preceding context does not occupy the final position of the periphery, sentence (22c) upholds the pragmatic constraint, and is therefore pragmatically appropriate.

The pragmatic constraint summarized in (23) demonstrates why sentence (22c) is pragmatically appropriate but sentences (22a) and (22b) are not.

- (22) Context: *ɔnoŋo* *a=tyé* *ki-ɔt* *gulu*.
 PAST 1SG=PERF:be with-house Gulu
 ‘I had the house in Gulu.’
- a.#[*a=cwá!lɔ* *ki-latín* *!búk*] CORE [*ɪ-ɔt*] PERIPHERY.
 1SG=PERF:send for-child book to-house
- b.#[*a=cwá!lɔ* *!búk* *ki-latín*] CORE [*ɪ-ɔt*] PERIPHERY.
 1SG=PERF:send book for-child to-house
- b'.#[*a=cwá!lɔ* *!búk*] CORE [*ki-latín* *ɪ-ɔt*] PERIPHERY.
 1SG=PERF:send book for-child to-house
- c. [*a=cwá!lɔ* *!búk*] CORE [*ɪ-ɔt* *ki-latín*] PERIPHERY.
 1SG=PERF:send book to-house for-child
- d.**a=cwá!lɔ* *ɪ-ɔt* *ki-latín* *!búk*.
 1SG=PERF:send to-house for-child book
- e.**a=cwá!lɔ* *ɪ-ɔt* *búk* *ki-latín*.
 1SG=PERF:send to-house book for-child
 ‘I sent the book to the house for the child.’

The second sentences in (24) and (25) include a dative and a reason NP. Dative NPs sometimes behave as core, and sometimes as peripheral elements in sentences. Reason NPs are always peripheral. Sentences such as (24d) and (24e) are syntactically ungrammatical because the reason NP *pén* ‘examination’ intervenes between core elements - in this case, the verb *cwalɔ* ‘to send’ and the direct object *búk* ‘book’.

Sentence (24b) is pragmatically appropriate because the dative NP *latín* ‘child’ mentioned in the preceding context does not occupy the final position of the core in the sentence. A sentence such as (24b) upholds the pragmatic constraint. On the other hand, a sentence such as (24c) is pragmatically inappropriate because the dative NP *latín* ‘child’ occupies the final position of the periphery, the unmarked focus position. Sentence (24c) violates the pragmatic constraint.

Sentences (24a) and (24a’) are identical. Some Acooli speakers judge the sentence to be pragmatically appropriate, while others judge it as inappropriate. There are two possible syntactic constructions for (24a) and (24a’). One possible construction has a core–periphery boundary between the direct object *búk* ‘book’ and the dative NP *latín* ‘child’, as seen in (24a). The other construction has a boundary of core–periphery between the dative NP *latín* ‘child’ and the reason NP *pén* ‘examination’, as in (24a’). In (24a), because the dative NP *latín* ‘child’ mentioned in the context does not occupy the final position of the periphery, the sentence is regarded as a pragmatically appropriate sentence by Acooli speakers. In (24a’), because the dative NP *latín* ‘child’ occupies the final position of the core, the sentence violates the pragmatic constraint and is therefore judged to be pragmatically inappropriate.

The pragmatic constraint summarized in (23) explains the reasoning behind sentences (24a) and (24a’) being considered as sometimes pragmatically appropriate and sometimes inappropriate by Acooli speakers.

- (24) Context: *onoŋo a=tyé ki-latín.*
 PAST 1SG=IMPERF:be with-child
 ‘I had the child.’
- a. [*a=cwá!lǎ* *!búk*] CORE [*bót-latín pi-pén*] PERIPHERY⁷.
 1SG=PERF:send book to-child because of-exam
- a’ # [*a=cwá!lǎ* *!búk bót-latín*] CORE [*pi-pén*] PERIPHERY.
 1SG=PERF:send book to-child because of-exam
- b. [*a=cwá!lǎ bot-latín !búk*] CORE [*pi-!pén*] PERIPHERY.
 1SG=PERF:send to-child book because of-exam
- c. # [*a=cwá!lǎ* *!búk*] CORE [*pi-pén bót-latín*] PERIPHERY.
 1SG=PERF:send book because of exam to-child
- d. * *a=cwá!lǎ pi-pén búk bót-latín.*
 1SG=PERF:send because of-exam book to-child
- e. * *a=cwá!lǎ bot-latín pi-pén búk.*
 1SG=PERF:send to-child because of exam book

⁷ Vowels of prefixes are subjected to vowel harmony. When prefixes are followed by nouns consisting of [+ATR] vowels, vowels of the prefixes change their [ATR] value to [+ATR].

‘I sent the book to the child because of the examination.’

The reason NP *pén* ‘examination’ is mentioned in the context given in (25). Sentences such as (25d) and (25e) are syntactically ungrammatical because the reason NP *pén* ‘examination’, which is a peripheral element, intervenes between core elements.

Sentences such as (25a), (25a’), and (25b) are pragmatically inappropriate in this context⁸. According to the pragmatic constraint summarized in (23), constituents mentioned in the preceding context should not occupy an unmarked focus position, which is the final position of core for core elements and the final position of periphery for peripheral elements in sentences. Because the reason NP *pén* ‘examination’ mentioned in the preceding context occupies the final position of the periphery in sentences such as (25a), (25a’), and (25b), these sentences are pragmatically inappropriate.

A sentence such as (25c) has a core–periphery boundary between the direct object *búk* ‘book’ and the reason NP *pén* ‘examination’. Because the reason NP *pén* ‘examination’ mentioned in the preceding context does not occupy the final position of the periphery, a sentence such as (25c) upholds the pragmatic constraint. Therefore, this sentence is pragmatically appropriate.

- (25) Context: *onoŋo* *tyé* *ki-pén.*
 PAST 3SG:IMPERF:be with-exam
 ‘I had the examination.’
- a. #*[a=cwá!ló* *!búk]* CORE *[bót-latín* *pi-pén]* PERIPHERY.
 1SG=PERF:send book to-child because of-exam
- a’ #*[a=cwá!ló* *!búk* *bót-latín]* CORE *[pi-pén]* PERIPHERY.
 1SG=PERF:send book to-child because of-exam
- b. #*[a=cwá!ló* *bot-latín* *!búk]* CORE *[pi-!pén]* PERIPHERY.
 1SG=PERF:send to-child book because of-exam
- c. *[a=cwá!ló* *!búk]* CORE *[pi-pén* *bót-latín]* PERIPHERY.
 1SG=PERF:send book because of-exam to-child
- d. * *a=cwá!ló* *pi-pén* *búk* *bót-latín.*
 1SG=PERF:send because of-exam book to-child
- e. * *a=cwá!ló* *bot-latín* *pi-pén* *búk.*
 1SG=PERF:send to-child because of-exam book
 ‘I sent the book to the child because of the examination.’

⁸ Sentences (25a) and (25a’) are the same sentence. Sentence (25a) has a core–periphery boundary between the direct object and the dative NP. Sentence (25a’) has a core–periphery boundary between the dative and the reason NP.

In summary, the pragmatic constraint summarized in (23) effectively predicts pragmatic inappropriateness. The fundamental principle asserts that old information does not occupy an unmarked focus position in sentences. This unmarked focus position appears as the final position of core for core elements, and as the final position of periphery for peripheral elements. However, there remains an unsolved problem concerning classification of constituents into core and peripheral elements. Dative or benefactive NPs sometimes behave as core, but other times as peripheral elements. From the data, it is not clear in which environments dative and benefactive NPs behave as core or as peripheral elements.

2.2. Wh-questions and unmarked focus position

Wh-words are syntactically quite freely placed in in situ wh-questions, except in cases where wh-words act as subjects. Despite this freedom, the position of wh-words is determined by pragmatic factors. When wh-words serve as the sentence subject, wh-questions consist of a relative construction.

Though constructions with *ayé* ‘CFM’ are preferably used for an answer to wh-questions, constructions without this marker may also be used to respond to wh-questions⁹. When wh-words are subjects, they are located in sentence-initial position followed by a relative clause, such as in (26). Constructions with *ayé* ‘CFM’, such as (27a), are preferably used to answer wh-questions. Subjects are always followed by predicates in answering sentences, such as in (27a) and (27b).

(26) Question:

<i>aŋá/ŋá</i>	<i>má</i>	<i>ɔ=miyɔ</i>	<i>búk</i>	<i>kí-ɔkélɔ?</i>
who	REL	3SG=PERF:give	book	to-Okelo

‘Who gave the book to Okelo?’

(27) Answer:

a. <i>rwót</i>	<i>ayé</i>	<i>ɔ=miyɔ</i>	<i>búk</i>	<i>kí-ɔkélɔ.</i>
king	CFM	3SG=PERF:give	book	to-Okelo
b. <i>rwót</i>	<i>ɔ=miyɔ</i>	<i>búk</i>	<i>kí-ɔkélɔ.</i>	
king	3SG=PERF:give	book	to-Okelo	

‘The king gave the book to Okelo.’

The order of constituents in postverbal position is quite free, as previously discussed in this paper. Wh-words are similarly freely located in postverbal position, in cases where

⁹ The contrastive focus is discussed in Hieda (in preparation). Constituents corresponding to wh-words are topics in answering sentences.

they do not act as the subject in sentences. For example, the wh-word *ahô/hô* ‘what’ may be followed by the dative NP *okélo* ‘Okelo’ or may be preceded by the dative NP *okélo* ‘Okelo’, such as in (28a) and (28b).

(28) Question:

- | | | | | |
|----|-------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|
| a. | <i>rwót</i> | <i>ɔ=myɔ</i> | <i>ahô/hô</i> | <i>ki-okélo?</i> |
| | king | 3SG=PERF:give | what | to-Okelo |
| b. | <i>rwót</i> | <i>ɔ=myɔ</i> | <i>ki-okélo</i> | <i>ahô/hô?</i> |
| | king | 3SG=PERF:give | to-Okelo | what |
- ‘What did the king give to Okelo?’

There is a pragmatic constraint of word order for answering sentences to wh-questions. In responding to sentences with wh-questions, constituents corresponding to wh-words should be located in the same place where the wh-words are located in the wh-questions.

In the wh-question in sentence (29), the wh-word *ahô/hô* ‘what’ is followed by the dative NP *okélo* ‘Okelo’. An answering sentence such as (29a) is pragmatically appropriate because the corresponding constituent *búk* ‘book’ to the wh-word *ahô/hô* ‘what’ is followed by the dative NP *okélo* ‘Okelo’. Sentence (29a) upholds the pragmatic constraint for answering sentences proposed above. Answering sentence (29b) is not pragmatically appropriate, as the corresponding constituent *búk* ‘book’ to the wh-word *ahô/hô* ‘what’ is preceded by the dative NP *okélo* ‘Okelo’.

(29) Question:

- | | | | |
|-------------|---------------|---------------|------------------|
| <i>rwót</i> | <i>ɔ=myɔ</i> | <i>ahô/hô</i> | <i>ki-okélo?</i> |
| king | 3SG=PERF:give | what | to-Okelo |
- ‘What did the king give to Okelo?’

Answer:

- | | | | | |
|-----|-------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|
| a. | <i>rwót</i> | <i>ɔ=myɔ</i> | <i>búk</i> | <i>ki-okélo.</i> |
| | king | 3SG=PERF:give | book | to-Okelo |
| b.# | <i>rwót</i> | <i>ɔ=myɔ</i> | <i>ki-okélo</i> | <i>búk.</i> |
| | king | 3SG=PERF:give | to-Okelo | book |
- ‘The king gave the book to Okelo.’

Answering sentence (29a) seemingly violates the principle of information packaging that an old information is first and a new information appears last, because the corresponding constituent *búk* ‘book’ to the wh-word *ahô/hô* ‘what’ appears before the dative NP *okélo* ‘Okelo’ that is already mentioned in the wh-question. Since corresponding constituents to wh-words belong to new information, they would appear

first before constituents that are old. However, a corresponding constituent to a wh-word is new, while a set of possible entities to which the corresponding constituent belongs is old, because the set of possible entities already mentioned in the preceding wh-question. This is the reason why answering constituents to wh-words should be located in the same place where the wh-words are located in the wh-questions.

In fact, as pointed out above, it is natural that corresponding constituents to wh-words should be marked with *ayé* ‘CFM’ in answering sentences. Kumam speakers use the contrastive focus marker to bring a constituent into focus by contrast with other members of a set to which the constituent belongs. Even if the constituent is new, the set of possible entities to which the constituent marked with contrastive focus belongs is old. Therefore, constituents marked with contrastive focus are topical in sentences, though they are new.

On the other hand, in a wh-question, such as in (30), the wh-word *ahô/hô* ‘what’ is preceded by the dative NP *okélo* ‘Okelo’. Answering sentence (30a) is not pragmatically appropriate because the corresponding constituent *búk* ‘book’ to the wh-word *ahô/hô* ‘what’ is followed by the dative NP *okélo* ‘Okelo’. However, answering sentence (30b) is pragmatically appropriate because the corresponding constituent *búk* ‘book’ to the wh-word *ahô/hô* ‘what’ is preceded by the dative NP *okélo* ‘Okelo’.

(30) Question:

<i>rwót</i>	<i>ɔ=myɔ</i>	<i>ki-okélo</i>	<i>ahô/hô?</i>
king	3SG=PERF:give	to-Okelo	what

‘What did the king give to Okelo?’

Answer:

a. # <i>rwót</i>	<i>ɔ=myɔ</i>	<i>búk</i>	<i>ki-okélo.</i>
king	3SG=PERF:give	book	to-Okelo
b. <i>rwót</i>	<i>ɔ=myɔ</i>	<i>ki-okélo</i>	<i>búk.</i>
king	3SG=PERF:give	to-Okelo	book

‘The king gave the book to Okelo.’

From the examples cited above, we observe that wh-words are quite freely located in sentences, except when they are subjects. It is important to note, however, that the position of wh-words is determined by the pragmatic rearrangement of constituents in postverbal position, as discussed in the preceding section.

For example, the wh-question in (31a) is pragmatically inappropriate because the dative NP *okélo* ‘Okelo’ mentioned in the preceding context occupies the final position of the core, the unmarked focus position for core elements in the sentence. The wh-question in (31b) is pragmatically appropriate because the wh-question upholds the pragmatic

constraint that constituents mentioned in the preceding context should not occupy the unmarked focus position.

- (31) Context: *rwót onoŋo márɔ́ ɔkélɔ*¹⁰.
king PAST 3SG:IMPERF:like Okelo
‘The king liked Okelo.’
- a. #*rwót ɔ=miyɔ aŋɔ́/ŋɔ́ ki-ɔkélɔ?*
king 3SG=PERF:give what to-Okelo
‘What did the king give to Okelo?’
- b. *rwót ɔ=miyɔ ki-ɔkélɔ aŋɔ́/ŋɔ́?*
king 3SG=PERF:give to-Okelo what
‘What did the king give to Okelo?’

Another perspective on the rearrangement of word order demonstrates that wh-words occupy an unmarked focus position in sentences. In fact, the wh-question in (31b) is pragmatically appropriate because the wh-word *aŋɔ́/ŋɔ́* ‘what’ occupies the unmarked focus position in the final position of the core. Wh-words convey new information. Speakers use wh-questions in order to get new information about what they are interested in. Wh-questions such as (31b) uphold the principle of informational packaging that old information is first and new information appears last.

As discussed above, constituents corresponding to wh-words are located in the same place where the wh-words are located in the wh-questions. Since wh-words should occupy an unmarked focus position, constituents corresponding to wh-words similarly occupy an unmarked focus position in answering sentences.

When wh-words appear as subjects, they are located in sentence-initial position. These wh-questions seemingly violate the principle of informational packaging. However, when wh-words are subjects, the wh-questions consist of a relative construction such as in (32). What we should note is that the wh-questions have no predicate in the main clauses.

- (32) *aŋá/ŋá má ɔ=miyɔ búk kí-ɔkélɔ?*
who REL 3SG=PERF:give book to-Okelo
‘Who gave the book to Okelo?’

I propose that wh-questions with a relative construction consist of predicate nominal constructions, such as in (33). In (33), wh-words do not occupy the slot for subjects; however, the zero anaphor \emptyset occupies the slot for subjects in main clauses. The wh-word

¹⁰ Stative verbs are usually inflected in imperfect aspect.

modified by a relative clause constitutes a predicate nominal in predicate nominal constructions. In predicate nominal constructions, a subject is connected to a predicate nominal in main clauses without any copula in the present tense¹¹.

(33) \emptyset (COP) Wh-word REL CLAUSE

The wh-question (32) can be rewritten, seen in (34) below.

(34) \emptyset (COP) *aŋâ/ŋâ* *má* *ɔ=miyɔ* *búk* *kí-ɔkélɔ?*
 \emptyset (COP) who REL 3SG=PERF:give book to-Okelo
 ‘Who is it that gave the book to Okelo?’

Wh-words are preceded by a copula in nominal predicate constructions. Because wh-words occupy an unmarked focus position after a copula, wh-questions followed by a relative clause do not violate the pragmatic constraint that wh-words should occupy an unmarked focus position.

3. Concluding remarks

Acooli has an unmarked focus position in sentences. The unmarked focus position for core elements is the final position of the core, and the unmarked focus position for peripheral elements is the final position of the periphery in sentences. Constituents mentioned in the preceding context (i.e. old information) do not occupy the unmarked focus position. Subjects, predicates, and direct objects are core elements. Oblique NPs are peripheral elements; however, benefactive or dative NPs sometimes behave as core and sometimes as peripheral elements. Wh-words always occupy an unmarked focus position. Constituents corresponding to wh-words also occupy an unmarked focus position in answering sentences.

¹¹ A pronoun is followed by a predicate nominal without any copula in a predicate nominal construction.

(3) *ân* *ɔkélɔ.*
 1SG Okelo
 ‘I am Okelo.’

Abbreviations

ACC: accusative	PERF: perfect aspect
CFM: contrastive focus marker	REL: relative marker
COP: copula	TOP: topic marker
IMPERF: imperfect aspect	1SG: first person singular
NOM: nominative	3SG: third person singular
PAST: past tense particle	

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