Biclausal or monoclausal?
On focus constructions in Tima

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1   Introduction

Tima, a Niger-Congo language spoken in the north-west of the Nuba Mountains, has morphological constituent focus marking. The issue of constituent focus has already been addressed in several publications, starting with Dimmendaal (2009: 343ff.), who was the first to mention a set of constituent focus markers expressing assertive or contrastive focus. In Schneider-Blum (2018), constituent focus marking and selective marking are shown to be two distinct pragmatic strategies, the latter being employed for showing contrast most often on modifiers of nouns. Becker & Schneider-Blum (2020) discuss both marking options in more depth and describe their relationship to the notion of contrast. In their contribution, Becker & Schneider-Blum (2020) also briefly address the question of whether focus constructions in Tima should be considered cleft constructions. They argue that this is not the case and, in this contribution, I will elaborate on the background to this claim.

Before presenting and discussing Tima data, some basic information on certain aspects of the Tima grammar and on constituent focus marking, including cleft constructions, which are "the most explicit way of marking the focus" (Lehmann 2015: 123), are given in order to be able to place the Tima examples in the appropriate context. Thus, this paper is structured as follows. In SECTION 2, some general information on the Tima grammar is presented. In SECTION 3, an excursion into the domain of different kinds of clefts paves the ground for the subsequent analysis. Thereafter, in SECTION 4, detailed information necessary for understanding the discussion of focus marking in Tima is given. That is, nonverbal predication is introduced, as well as a discussion of relative-like clauses. SECTION 5 zeroes in on focus constructions with the specific question of whether we are dealing with cleft constructions or a canonical sentence in Tima. The contribution is concluded with a short summary, presented in SECTION 6.

2   Linguistic background information on Tima

Tima has a rather unspectacular consonant system consisting of 21 consonants and a typologically unusual 12-vowel ATR harmony system. The vowels are separated into two groups depending on the presence of the [ATR] feature (see Dimmendaal 2009; Bashir 2010, Chapter 3.2; Tabain & Schneider-Blum 2023; Tabain et al. 2024). Since the vowels of most affixes and clitics harmonize with the [ATR] feature of the root vowels and, additionally, may show rounding or fronting harmony, also referred to as 'color harmony' (see Padgett 1995, 2002), a lot of allomorphy can be observed in the language.

The basic constituent order in Tima is SV/AVO, with both subject and object unmarked for case. However, as described in several articles (see, e.g., Dimmendaal 2009, 2010; Schneider-Blum 2018, 2023), the constituent order of transitive sentences may be reversed so that we find OVA. In that case, A is precliticized by a homorganic nasal which assimilates to the following sound regarding its place of articulation.

The reasons for a modified constituent order going together with ergative marking of the subject have been described in considerable detail in Schneider-Blum & Hellwig (2018), as well as in Schneider-Blum (2023). Essential for the choice of the ergative construction is the linkage of the attentional centre (for the terminology see Himmelmann & Primus 2015) with subject vs. object. When the subject is the attentional centre we find the AVO construction, whereas we find the OVA construction when the object is centred upon. That is, in Tima, the sentence-initial position is reserved for the attentional centre. Attentional centring is "influenced by factors including the animacy of the participants, the identifiability of the agent, and the givenness of either A or O participant" (Schneider-Blum 2023: 87).[1]

3   What do we know about clefts?

Focus constructions can be divided into three kinds, that of predicate focus, that of constituent (or argument) focus and that of sentence focus (see Lambrecht 2001: 18, and, in more detail, Lambrecht 1994, Chapter 5). Our concern here is the constituent-focus structure. As Lambrecht (1994: 224) states: "The term 'argument-focus structure' applies in principle to any sentence in which the

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[1] Very early in the research on Tima, Dimmendaal suggested dynamicity as a factor influencing the prominence status of an argument and hence the sentence-structure. However, as Dimmendaal & Schneider-Blum (in preparation) argue, there are contexts in which the speaker has no choice and where ergative marking is obligatory.
The influence of discourse factors, in particular the function of SHIFT, but also the interplay of episode boundaries and ergative marking, is currently being scrutinized in Compensis et al. (under review); see also Schneider-Blum et al. (2022: 214).

focus is an argument rather than a predicate or an entire proposition."
Pragmatically, constituent focus exists when answering *wh*-questions (i.e.,
assertive or open focus) and to convey the notion of contrast (hence contrastive
focus), e.g., in the context of correction. Thus, focus marking "conveys the
information that is not yet asserted or part of the Common Ground" (as Becker
& Schneider-Blum (2020: 8) describe for Tima, following Chafe (1976) and
Vallduví & Vilkuna (1998)). As Lambrecht (1994: 228) points out, it is the noun
phrase rather than a noun that forms the focused constituent.

Cleft constructions are a subtype of argument focus. They are considered to
consist of two clauses, as opposed to the monoclausal focus construction. Thus,
though conveying the same proposition with the focus on 'snake' (both
sentences are possible answers to 'What frightened him?'), the structures in (1)
and (2) differ. While (1) exemplifies a monoclausal sentence, (2) is a biclausal
one.

(1) A *snake* frightened him.
(2) It was a *snake* that frightened him.

The structure of (1) can be captured by the abstract form AFOC V O, while (2)
consists of two parts, a copular construction and a relative(-like) clause, resulting
thus in COP AFOC – COMP$_{REL}$ V O. Hence, Lambrecht (2001: 467) presents the
following definition (bold marking added): "A CLEFT CONSTRUCTION (CC)
is a complex sentence structure consisting of a **matrix clause headed by a copula**
and **a relative or relative-like clause** whose relativized argument is coindexed
with the predicative argument of the copula. Taken together, the matrix and the
relative express a logically simple proposition, which can also be expressed in
the form of a single clause without a change in truth conditions."[2]

Example (2) represents such a cleft construction. It should be noted, though, that
this is but one type of cleft, generally called the *it*-cleft. Other types are the *wh*-
cleft (also known as the *pseudo*-cleft) and the reverse *wh*-cleft (see, e.g., Gundel
1977; Delin 1989; Lambrecht 2001; Hartmann & Veenstra 2013; Lafkioui et al.
2016; Caron 2016; Creissels 2021; Malcher 2021). All three are illustrated with
the examples Lambrecht (2001: 468) presents, with all three being variations of
clefts on the canonical sentence 'I like champagne'. Note that in the English *it*-
cleft, we may find the relative marker or complementizer 'that' referring to the
nominal of the matrix clause, i.e., 'champagne'.

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[2] Malcher (2021) calls the relationship between cleft clause and subordinate clause
'oriented nominalization', corresponding to Lambrecht's definition in which he says that
the "relativized argument is coindexed with the predicative argument of the copula"
(Lambrecht 2001: 467).

it-cleft:	*It is champagne (that) I like.*
wh-cleft:	*What I like is champagne.*
reverse *wh*-cleft:	*Champagne is what I like.*

The discussion on Tima clefts in SECTION 5 will be confined to *it*-clefts, because thus far, there is no evidence for the other types. However, as already indicated, even the existence of *it*-clefts is questionable and I will try to prove that we are dealing with constituent fronting rather than clefts in Tima.

4   Tima copulae and relative-like clauses

As copulae and relativizing clauses are considered essential parts of the *it*-cleft construction, both are discussed in the following two subsections, starting with the former.

4.1   Copulae

As described in more detail in Dimmendaal & Schneider-Blum (2024, SECTION 2), Tima has different kinds of copulae, basically *ŋ̀kɔ́* 'COP.SG' / *ǹcɛ́* 'COP.PL' and *ŋ̀kwíyʌ̀* 'COP'. They all have a stative meaning and are not inflected for tense/aspect, but differ regarding their functions. The number-sensitive pair *ŋ̀kɔ́/ǹcɛ́* are typically used in locative constructions relating a FIGURE to a certain GROUND, such as 'the basket is underneath the table' or 'the Tabaq (people) are to the west of Tima'. The copula *ŋ̀kwíyʌ̀*, not differentiated for number, generally indicates "the existence or availability of a generic referent" (Dimmendaal & Schneider-Blum 2024: 52), as in 'there is tea'.

All three copulae have grammaticalized in different directions. For the purpose of the present paper, the function adopted by *ŋ̀kɔ́* 'COP.SG' and *ǹcɛ́* 'COP.PL' is of interest, namely that they may be used together with a verb to express predicate focus, as exemplified by (3) for the singular and by (4) for the plural copula (note also the different tone marking of the copulae in this function).

(3)   *c-árhátà*   *ŋ̀kɔ̀*   *hɔ́l-àk*   *y-ánt̪ì*
      SG-winnowing.shovel   COP.SG   stay-AP   LOC-inside

      y-ɛ́ɛ̀h
      PL-sorghum
      'The winnowing shovel is stuck in the sorghum.' (12.04.09-04-01)

(4)   *à?à,*   *í-bʌ́=nʌ̀*   *ì-máádɔ́h=í*   *ǹcɛ̀*
      no   PL-child=DEM.PROX   PL-male=SEL   COP.PL

> *ù-kwááɽ-ə̀k*   *ì-tùŋkwíyʌ́ʌ́k*   *ì=y-áàh*
> P-carry-CAUS   PL-hat   DIR=PL-head
> 'No, (only) the male children are wearing hats on their heads.'
> (20170108_32)

The erstwhile plural copula *ɲ̀cɛ́* has been further grammaticalized into an imperfective aspect marker which procliticizes to the verb. "[I]t is no longer restricted to plural referents [as in (4)], but may occur with singular referents as well [as in (5)]" (Dimmendaal & Schneider-Blum 2024: 56). Also, as can likewise be seen in (5), it may occur in a phonologically reduced form (indicated by the bracketed *ɲ̀*, which is more often than not omitted), and the vowel takes part in the vowel harmony of the language.

(5)   *kì-néè*   *(ɲ̀)cɛ́=ń-dúp-ùk*   *kì-néè* [3]   *ŋ̀=kúlʌ́ŋkúlʌ̀*
      SG-sun   3IPFV=P-descend-CAUS   SG-sun   INS=evening
      'The sun sets in the evening.' (04.10.07-62)

Furthermore, Tima has a variety of markers which are in complementary distribution, functioning as copulae in equative sentences (i.e., they link two referential expressions) and also serving as focus markers. Because of this latter function, the exponents are glossed as FOC: *=li/=lɪ* 'FOC.SG'; *=(y)e/=(y)ɛ* 'FOC.PL'; *=(G)ʌ/=(G)a* 'FOC'. The first pair, *=li/=lɪ*, indicates the singularity of the referent and is used with unmarked subjects and objects. The second pair, *=(y)e/=(y)ɛ*, indicates the plurality of a referent. The third exponent, *=(G)ʌ/=(G)a*, consists of a glide (*w* or *y* depending on the environment) and the low central vowel. It is used with singular referents if they are expressed as proper names, oblique referents, ergative subjects or first and second person singular pronouns. See TABLE 1 for an overview.

FOCUS MARKER	USAGE CONTEXT
=li/=lɪ	singular referent with unmarked S/A or O
=(y)e/=(y)ɛ	plural referent
=(G)ʌ/=(G)a	singular referent with proper names, oblique referents, ergative subjects, first, second and third person singular pronouns

TABLE 1: Focus allomorphy

Examples (6) and (7) exemplify *=lɪ* 'FOC.SG' and *=e* 'FOC.PL', respectively; (6) also illustrates that the marker attaches to the last element of the noun phrase.

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[3] The term *kìnéè* is polysemous and may refer to 'sun', 'time' and 'weather'.

(6)   *k-wààn*[4]   *lêèn = íí = lí*   *⸜cííŋ*
        SG-sibling   POSS1SG = SEL = FOC.SG   SG:DEM.PROX
        'He/She is *my sibling* (of the same gender).' (2011_06_28_02_03)

(7)   *ì-ṭúk = é*   *í-nǐ*   *ɲì-ṭán*
        PL-mash = FOC.PL   PL-DEM.PROX   INS:PL-sauce

        ù = kù-múdùŋ
        DIR = SG-crops
        'This is *sorghum mash* with a sauce of ground crops (like simsim or groundnuts).' (12.04.09-02-01)

As outlined in Schneider-Blum (2018: 263f.), these predicate markers are used synchronically in equative constructions (including classifying, identifying and specifying functions).[5]

In non-verbal predication, these markers are ambiguous between their copular and focus functions, i.e., (6) may be uttered when introducing somebody or it may be the answer to the question 'Who is this?'. There is no formal difference, including in tonal and prosodic features, between the predicative and the focus functions. Thus, the context determines which function is relevant (see Schneider-Blum 2018: 265; Becker & Schneider-Blum 2020: 10). There is no such ambiguity in the verbal context. Here, the marker exclusively conveys the focus function (see Schneider-Blum 2018: 265), as will be elaborated upon in SECTION 5.

Cross-linguistically, homonymy between the copula and the focus marker and the development from the former to the latter has been addressed in numerous publications on grammaticalization and on focus marking in different languages (see, e.g., Heine & Reh 1984: 177ff.; Heine & Kuteva 2002: 95f.; Hartmann & Veenstra 2013: 7; Creissels 2021: 27).

4.2   Relative-like clauses

Relative or relative-like clauses are said to be an essential part of cleft constructions (see, e.g., the definition of Lambrecht (2001: 467), quoted here in SECTION 2). Thus, the question arises as to whether Tima has relative clauses and, if any, what the formal criteria are. The following examples (8), (9) and

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[4] With regard to kinship terminology, meanings and usage, see Veit & Schneider-Blum (2024).
[5] Predicative adjectives, unlike in the Bantu language Kirundi (see Lafkioui et al. 2016: 75), cannot be used with focus markers; instead they are prefixed by a stative marker differentiated for singular and plural, i.e., *a-* vs. *i-/t-*, respectively.

(10) are possible candidates. The potential relative clauses (hereafter consistently labelled 'relative-like clause') appear in square brackets.

(8)   *c-íbʌ́ = ꞌnʌ́*   *[ǹ-táán = nà = ná]*   *céŋúdánà*
        SG = child = DEM.PROX   P-beat = ERG:1SG = DEM.PROX   3IPFV:P:cry
        'The child [(that) I beat] is crying.' (15.02.07-20a.wav)

(9)   *wáyén = ꞌná*   *ɔ́ = kábáác = í*   *l-ájáŋ = í*
        SG.father = DEM.PROX   DIR = Kabaac = SEL   LOC-Ajang = SEL

        [k-ʌ̀húnén   ú-kúún = á = ṭáŋ = í]
        SG-woman   P-give.birth = SOUR = LOC3P = SEL

        ɨ́-díyʌ́ŋ = ṭáŋ …
        P-come = LOC3P
        'The father of Kabaac of Ajang, [to whom the wife had given birth], came …' (08_Hamad_1 001-004)

(10)   *ìhìnʌ̀   ɨ́-cí,   ɨ́-cí   kúmùn   kì-béɛ́y = wééŋ*
        PRON3PL   P-go   P-go   find   SG-person = DEM.REF

        [ɔ́-ṭáà   y-ʌ́cùk   tʊ̀ʔàŋ]   [ǹ-dúp-ùk-îŋ]
        P-pick   PL-baobab   up   P-descend-CAUS-VENT
        'They went and found that person [who had been picking baobab fruits up (in the tree)] [coming down].' (20190108_HamidPearFilm 026)

In (8) and (9), the subject of the complex sentence (*cíbʌ́ꞌnʌ́* / *wáyénꞌná*) is the object of the relative-like clause; in (10), it is the object (*kìbéɛ́ywééŋ*) of the matrix clause which is modified (functioning as subject of the relative-like clause). That is, either the subject or the object of the whole proposition can be the head of a relative-like clause. As a general rule, the head precedes the modifying element and, as other examples prove, is clause-external. Example (11) serves to illustrate the point. The head of the relative clause is the prepositional phrase 'to the proper language'. If the 'proper language' were the internal head of 'the proper language (from which) we had left', it would have to appear in the form indicating the source; however, it is marked by the directional preposition which indicates its semantic role in the main clause. Similarly, in the Tima sentence 'they went to this place (where) they wanted to settle', the phrase 'to the place' is an oblique participant as external head which would have to appear in the unmarked object form if it were clause-internal (see also Dryer 2013, example (7a) and the accompanying explanation).

(11) ààŋ   ŋ̀kɔ́   màk   m̀-pə̀là-wáá = ꞌná   kùhùnʌ̀ŋ   mɛ́ = yὲ
      well   COP.SG   then   P-want-INS = ERG:1SG   now   OPT = REP

      ì-tún-έl = yàŋ   ì = y-àmáá = ꞌná
      PL-return-MID = LOC3P   DIR = PL-talk = DEM.PROX

      í = kʌ̀lí = t̪ὲh   [ì-kʌ́múh = á = t̪áŋ = i]
      DIR = SG:truth = EMPH   PL-leave = SOUR = LOC3P = SEL
      'well, this is then why I want to return now to the proper language
      [(from which) we had left]' (07_MusaBukur 005)

I would like to come back to examples (8)-(10) and take a closer look at them, since there are certain differences to be observed between them. In (8), the demonstrative clitic = nʌ́/ = ná is not only attached to the head noun *cíbʌ́*, but also to the verb *ǹtáánnà* of the relative-like clause, the alternation between = nʌ́ and = ná being determined by ATR harmony rules. See Dimmendaal (2023: 266) for a discussion of a similar construction characterized as an 'adjoined clause'. We find a similar distribution of demonstratives with nouns and adjectival modifiers, for instance with 'two people' in (12). Thus, the phrase *ǹtáánnàná* in (8) may in fact be participle-like and the whole sentence may translate better as 'the by me punished child is crying'. However, considering its function, one can still subsume such a construction under relative-like clauses (see also Dryer 2013 on nonfinite participial relative clauses, such as 'the man reading the book').

(12) ìhwáá = nà   íhíꞌík = ná
      people = DEM.PROX   two = DEM.PROX

      án-tìkìhì̪t-ʌ̀k   í-dʌ̀
      3PRF-arrange.secret.meeting:PLUR-AP   PL-body
      'These two people have arranged to meet secretly (now they are sitting together).' (07.04.09, 2_01-04)

Certainly, demonstratives (both free pronouns and clitics) bear the notion of definiteness. This becomes obvious when comparing (13) and (14). The number expressing 'two' in the noun phrase *ìhìnʌ́ ìhíík* in (13), unlike the phrase *ìhìnʌ́ íhíꞌíkná* in (14) (or *ìhwáánà íhíꞌíkná* in (12)), does not have the demonstrative clitic attached. The meaning thus alters from indefinite (though indicating specificity), 'two of them' to the definite 'the two of them, the two, these two' (for a discussion on definiteness vs. specificity see von Heusinger 2002).

(13) ìhìnʌ́   ìhíík …
      PRON3PL   two
      'two of them …' (01.10.07-14 Adlaan Misiria, horsequarrel, AR:30)

(14)   *ìhìnʌ́*   *íhíík = ná …*
        PRON3PL   two = DEM.PROX
        'the two of them …' (no recording)

Example (9) has its potential relative-like clause *kʌ̀húnén úkúúnáʈ́áŋí*, translated as 'to whom the wife had given birth'. Here, the selective marker = *í* appears. The selective marker usually signals the existence of alternatives on the modifying level (see Becker & Schneider-Blum 2020, SECTION 3.3); that is, here, that the wife had given birth to other children. The selective marker generally occurs with phrasal modifiers, i.e., with adjectives or modifying nouns. Note that in (9) the marker also attaches to *ɔ́kábáác* and *lájáŋ* in the same sentence, both being nominal modifiers. The occurrence of the selective marker with different kinds of modifiers seems to make sense: a relative-like clause like *kʌ̀húnén úkúúnáʈ́áŋí* serves as a modifier just like the phrasal modifiers *ɔ́kábáácí* and *lájáŋí*. Although Becker & Schneider-Blum (2020: 22f.) acknowledge that "[t]he use of the selective marker, especially in clause-final position in relative clauses and the other two types of adverbial clauses, is reminiscent of the backgrounding marker in Chadic, […], and of clausal determiners in Kwa and Gbe languages […]", they provide evidence of the selective marker being "a nominal determiner rather than a clausal one" in Tima (Becker & Schneider-Blum 2020: 23).[6]

In (10), neither the demonstrative clitic nor the selective marker shows. That is, neither the presence of a demonstrative pronominal nor of the selective marker is indispensable for the formation of relative-like clauses functioning as attributes in Tima. Aside from that, the clause *ɔ́ʈáà yʌ́cùk tʉ̀ʔàŋ* 'he was/had been picking baobab fruits' can stand by itself, i.e., it is not necessarily a modifying or subordinate clause.

Furthermore, considering tense/aspect marking does not really help determine whether we are dealing with a relative-like clause. While the verbs *ǹtáánnà* in (8) and *ǹdúpùkîŋ* in (10) exhibit a reduced form in that the root-preceding tense/aspect marker is absent, this type of syncretism, or reduction in the number of paradigmatic distinctions used, is not unique to relative-like clauses. Consider example (15), which represents a possible answer to the question 'Did you meet Ithang at the market yesterday?' (in the context that the enquirer knew that the addressee was at the market).

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[6] The other two types of clausal modifiers are certain temporal clauses and reason clauses. Both kinds of subordinate clause begin with a subordinator that has a nominal base (for details see Becker & Schneider-Blum 2020: 22).

(15)   *ɔ̀ɔŋ,*   *ŋ́-kú'mún = nʌ́*
       yes   P-find = ERG:1SG
       'Yes, I saw her.' (20190206_08)

The answer *ŋ́kú'múnnʌ́* 'yes, I saw her' has the same structure as *ǹtáánnà* in (8). That is, a reduced tense/aspect form also occurs in contexts where its analysis as a relative-like clause is excluded. By way of contrast, the verb *úkúúnáṭán* of (9) is not reduced and can occur (while ignoring the selective marker) in a main clause, as is also true for * óṭáà* in (10).

Taken together, we have three different constructions which might qualify as relative-like clauses. There seem to be no hard criteria for their formation. They have in common that the argument which they modified precedes the modifying part. The head occurs outside the relative-like clause. Also obvious is that the Tima construction has no relativizer (particle or pronoun, like 'that' or 'who' in English).

Although the questions around relative-like clauses in Tima remain to some extent unclear, the assumption that such clauses exist in Tima can still be maintained even if only by keeping the definition relatively broad, as in the definition by Dryer (2013): "A construction is considered a relative clause […] if it is a clause which, either alone or in combination with a noun, denotes something and if the thing denoted has a semantic role within the relative clause. If there is a noun inside or outside the relative clause that denotes the thing also denoted by the clause, that noun will be referred to as the head of the relative clause." In this definition, neither a relative pronoun or complementizer nor a finite verb is a mandatory component of the clause. What remains is rather a semantic criterion, namely that the clause we are talking about modifies a noun.

We will now have a look at Tima focus constructions and try to answer the question of whether they should be considered cleft constructions consisting of a matrix clause and a relative-like clause.

5   Focus constructions with verbal (and non-verbal) predication

As has been outlined in SECTION 4.1, with non-verbal predication a variety of markers (labelled for practical reasons as FOC and henceforth also called 'focus markers') are ambiguous between predicate markers and focus markers. The ambiguity is resolved by the context.

In verbal predication, the same marking options exclusively single out a constituent to focus on it. Compare (16) with (17).

(16)   *k-àybə́lə̀l=lì*   *(ù-kɔ́yɔ̀   ì-hàŋkə̀réŋ)*
       SG-smith=FOC.SG   P-do   PL-bed
       'The/A *smith* (is making beds).' (20220102_02)

(17)   *(k-àybə́lə̀l)   ú-kɔ̀yɔ̀   ì-hàŋkə̀réŋ   kúlʌ́*
       SG-smith   P-do   PL-bed   yesterday
       '(The smith) made the beds yesterday.' (20220102_02)

Example (16) serves as the answer to 'Who is making beds?', thus occurring in a typical focus context (see, e.g., Gundel & Fretheim 2006; Krifka 2007; van Putten 2014); (17) answers the question 'Did the smith make the beds?'. The presupposed part of the answers, serving as common ground, is within brackets, indicating that it is an optional part of the answer. (Of course, the answer to the latter question could also just be 'yes'.)

Examples (18) and (19) are answers to the polar question 'Did you meet Ithang somewhere yesterday?' versus the *wh*-question 'Where did you meet Ithang yesterday?', respectively.

(18)   *ŋ̀-kúꞌmún=nʌ́*   *l-ɛ́ꞌŋédí*
       P-find=ERG:1SG   LOC-waterhole
       'I saw her at the waterhole.' (20190120_17)

(19)   *l-ɛ́ꞌŋédí=yá*   *ŋ̀-kúꞌmún=nʌ́*
       LOC-waterhole=FOC   P-find=ERG:1SG
       'I saw her at the *waterhole*.' (20190120_17)

While the English answers read the same, although they can be distinguished by intonation, there is a difference with regard to the Tima structure. Due to the fact that focus-marked constituents need to be preverbal (see Schneider-Blum 2018: 259f.), word order has changed from the unmarked order in (18) to the marked order in (19) with the focus-marked participant – in this case the oblique one – being promoted. While (19) is a focus construction answering a *wh*-question, (18) is not. In both sentences the direct object 'Ithang' is not overt, but would be expected in sentence-initial position, which is reserved for the attentional centre; see (33) and (34) (see Hellwig & Schneider-Blum, in preparation). Accordingly, we find the ergative construction with both sentences.

We now consider the following two sentence pairs (with (4) being repeated here as (20) for convenience); (20) and (21) refer to plural participants ('male children'), (22) and (23) to a single participant ('calabash'). That is, we expect the copulae/focus markers to occur in their plural vs. singular forms respectively.

Examples (20) and (21), triggered with a stimulus picture (Task 24, Condition A, Item 1, in Skopeteas et al. 2006), express, in principle, the same proposition: (20) is an appropriate answer to the question 'Are those people wearing hats?', while (21) is appropriate when the question is 'Who is wearing hats?', the latter again being a *wh*-question. (Note that the answer to 'Are those people wearing hats?' could also be expressed with a focus construction, as shown in Schneider-Blum (2018: 269). In that case, females and males are contrasted and the appropriate answer would translate as 'the *males* have hats on their heads, the females do not wear hats'.)
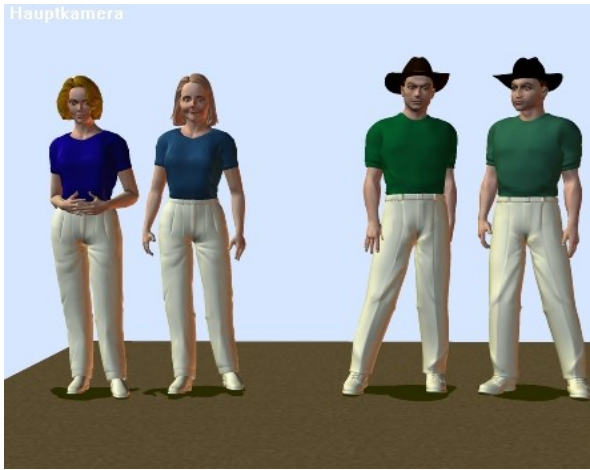
FIGURE 1: Stimulus for (20) and (21)

(20) *àʔà,* *í-bʌ = nʌ*   *ì-máádɔ́h = í*   *jìcɛ̀*
       no   PL-child = DEM.PROX   PL-male = SEL   COP.PL

      ù-kwááɽ-ɘ̀k   *ì-tùŋkwíyʌʌ́k*   *ì = y-áàh*
      P-carry-CAUS   PL-hat   DIR = PL-head
      'No, (only) the male children are wearing hats on their head.'
      (20170108_32)

(21) *í-bʌ = nʌ*   *ì-máádɔ́h = í = yɛ́*
       PL-child = DEM.PROX   PL-male = SEL = FOC.PL

      ù-kwááɽ-ɘ̀k   *ì-tùŋkwíyʌʌ́k*   *ì = y-áàh*
      P-carry-CAUS   PL-hat   DIR = PL-head
      'The *male children* are wearing hats on their head.' (no recording)

Examples (22) and (23) were triggered with a photo taken in the area and illustrate non-focus and focus constructions, respectively, with the singular copula/focus marker.

FIGURE 2: Stimulus for (22) and (23)

(22) *kù-dùléh*   *ŋ̀kɔ̀*   *túúh-ùk*   *tʊ̀ʔàŋ*
      SG-calabash   COP.SG   hang.up-CAUS   high
      'The calabash is hanging high.' (20180130_26)

(23) *kù-dùléh=lí*   *túúh-ùk*   *ù=kù-dùwʌ̀*
      SG-calabash=FOC.SG   hang.up-CAUS   DIR=SG-pole
      'A/The *calabash* is hanging on the pole.' (16.04.09-16-09)

As expected, we only find the focus marker with (21) and (23), since they are the answers to the appropriate *wh*-question. Recall now that the focus marker in fact originates from a copula as well (see SECTION 4.1). Thus, we find the same complementary distribution in the non-verbal context. While the copulae *ŋ̀kɔ́* 'COP.SG' and *ɲ̀cɛ́* 'COP.PL' are used when the question is 'Where is/are X?', the focus marker appears when the question is 'Who is/are at GROUND?'. The interested reader is referred to Dimmendaal & Schneider-Blum (2024) for examples.[7]

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[7] Some few examples in our database seem to contradict the assumption of mutual exclusiveness on the different kinds of markers, but only on first sight. In fact, we are dealing here with two clauses but, unlike in a cleft construction, these two clauses are independent of each other and answer two different implicit questions.

  kì-mɨ́nʌ̀=lí;   *ŋ̀kɔ̀*   *ə̀-kát̪ám-úŋ*   *á=ló, …*
  SG-snake=FOC.SG   COP.SG   P-leave-VENT   SOUR=far
  'It is the snake; it came out from there, … (03_AliTia_2 070f.)

Ignoring the (implicit) question behind the utterances and considering that, according to Lambrecht's definition (2001: 467), a cleft sentence has a "matrix clause headed by a copula", all constructions (20)-(23) might be candidates for cleft constructions, with the rest of the sentences possibly representing the relative-like clause (bearing in mind that relative-like clauses do not have an overt relativizer in Tima). Consequently, when addressing the issue of whether we are dealing with a monoclausal or a biclausal construction, we would have to take into account that both constructions, those with *ŋkɔ́/ɲcɛ́* as well as those with *=li/=lı*, *=(y)e/=(y)ɛ* and *=(G)ʌ/=(G)a*, have essentially the same structure, since they only differ with regard to the choice of the copula/focus marker. That is, either both of these two construction types should be considered clefts or none of them. Thus, the mere existence of a copula/focus marker is not a convincing indication of the existence of a cleft construction.

In their discussion of focus constructions in Yucatec Maya, Verhoeven & Skopeteas (2015: 10) point out that there is a crucial difference between a cleft with a headless relative clause and a canonical focus construction. That is, in the former, "the verb of the headless relative clause is not necessarily cross-referred by the clefted constituent; for instance, consider *it's you who is responsible*". By contrast, constituent fronting, as in canonical focus constructions, "implies that the agreement relations of the basic configuration must be preserved […] [o]bject cross-reference markers show the same pattern" (Verhoeven & Skopeteas 2015: 10-11). (See also Creissels 2021, SECTION 4.3.)

Although most of the examples in our database have third person participants (which are not cross-referenced at all, and therefore cannot be used for an agreement check), we find a few examples which let us assume that we are dealing with a canonical focus construction and not a cleft, though the data in that respect are not sufficient to come to a definite conclusion. Example (24) shows agreement regarding number between the focus-marked subject and the verb in form of a prefixed *i-*.

(24) *ìníín=ʌ̀*   *kúllú*   *i-dí-yʌ́ŋ*   *w-ùrùkwáy*
      PRON1PL.EXCL=FOC   all   PL-walk-VENT   LOC-passage

      kʌ̀hʌ̀tùn=í
      [proper_name]=SEL
      'All of *us* (excl.) came to the passage of Kʌhʌtun.'
      (310108_31_AdlaanWayExplaining 022)

Future research may allow us to elicit clearer examples of cross-referencing as clues for determining whether we are dealing with clefts or constituent fronting. For the time being, we have to be content with the fact that the examples we

have at our disposal do not speak against the hypothesis that we are dealing with focus-marked fronted constituents.

Furthermore, the fact that we find focus marking on flagged constituents (e.g., source marking with *á꞊ꞌtíntíìlìŋʌ̀* in (25) and direction marking with *ìyánt̪ù wálə̀ŋá* in (26)) is, according to Creissels (2021: 21), "evidence of a trend towards reanalysing the construction as monoclausal", since "in plain cleft constructions, the clefted constituent shows no variation in flagging related to its role in the content clause, […]". The clefted constituent is "invariably that of the phrase expressing identification in an identificational clause".[8]

(25)　á꞊ꞌtíntíìlìŋ꞊ʌ̀　　　　　ì-túlú-úŋ꞊nὲð
　　　SOUR꞊[proper_name]꞊FOC　　PL-leave.together-VENT꞊1PL.INCL
　　　'We (incl.) came out from Tintiiliŋ (to where we are sitting now).'
　　　(03_AliTia_2 004)

(26)　ì꞊yánt̪ù　　　w-álə̀ŋ꞊á　　　　ŋ̀-kʌ̪̀tí　t̪ìín
　　　DIR꞊inside　LOC-mountain꞊FOC　P-sleep　inside

　　　kɨ́-t̪ímìð-ìŋ꞊ʌ̀ŋ
　　　NEG-come.out-VENT꞊NEG
　　　'In the mountain she sleeps (inside) and doesn't get out (towards where the speaker is now).' (03_AliTia_2 021)

One more fact points in the same direction. In all the previous sentences containing a focus-marked constituent, that constituent was in sentence-initial position. However, the rule in Tima is that a focus-marked constituent has to be preverbal, but not necessarily sentence-initial. Consider the following examples, where we find AO:FOCVOBL in (27) and (28), SOBL:FOCV in (29) and (30), AOBL:FOCVO in (31), and OAERG:FOCV in (32), while the unmarked constituent orders would be AVOOBL, SVOBL, again AVOOBL, and AVO.

(27)　k-ʌ̀húnén꞊nʌ́　　　y-ʌ́ꞌkɨ́r꞊è
　　　SG-woman꞊DEM.PROX　PL-remainder꞊FOC.PL
　　　A　　　　　　　　OFOC

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[8] "In plain clefts […], the separation between the part of the sentence that refers to a presupposed event […] and that asserting the identification of a participant (the *clefted constituent*) is achieved by simply combining an equative predication construction and a participant nominalization construction, whereas grammaticalized clefts involve construction-specific rules, and may have discursive functions that are not limited to the exclusive identification of a participant in a presupposed event." (Creissels 2021: 17)

céwúr = á = ṭáŋ   á = y-éèh
rake = SOUR = LOC3P   SOUR = PL-sorghum
V   OBL
'This woman is raking the *remainders* from sorghum.' (12.04.09-02-07)

(28)   ìhwáá = ná   ìṭíŋkìk = è   mɔ̀ɔ̀k   ŋ̀ = k-ɔ̂lbíl
        people = DEM.PROX   mariisa = FOC.PL   drink   INS = SG-bowl
        A   OFOC   V   OBL
        'These people are drinking *sorghum beer* out of a bowl.'
        (12.04.09-06-06)

(29)   wǎṛṭúkɔ́lɔ́ŋ-ˈɘ = ná   ì = hʌ̀kʌ́ʌ̀r = ʌ́   hùndɔ̀nɔ́
        SG.elder-EP = DEM.PROX   DIR = sitting.stick = FOC   sit
        S   OBL:FOC   V
        'This elder is sitting on a *sitting stick*.' (12.04.09-07-01)

(30)   k-ʌ̀húnén = nʌ́   ì = pʌ̀rìntʌ̀ŋ   y-ʌ́wùh = ʌ́   ɔ́-dúʊ̀l
        SG-woman = DEM.PROX   DIR = gap   PL-stone = FOC P-stand:MID
        S   OBL:FOC   V
        'This woman is standing at the *stone gap*.' (13.04.09-01-29)

(31)   kì-bèéy = ná   ŋʌ̀tútúk = wʌ́   ú-kút-ì   k-wʌ̀nʌ̀ŋ
        SG-person = DEM.PROX   on.shoulders = FOC P-take-TR   SG-comrade
        A   OBL:FOC   V   O
        'This person took his comrade on his *shoulders*.' (13.04.09-01-22)

(32)   cìbóónín   ŋ̀ = kól ó = ˈwʌ́   kʌ́lúk
        girl   ERG = shame = FOC   eat
        O   AERG:FOC   V
        'The girl is ashamed.' (literal translation: '*shame* eats the girl')
        (06.04.09_05-15)

Consider also examples (33) and (34) which are constructed answers to the
questions 'Did you meet Ithang somewhere yesterday?' and 'Where did you
meet Ithang yesterday?', respectively (cf. the natural answers presented in (18)
and (19)).

(33)   ìṭʌ́ŋ   ŋ̀-kúˈmún = nʌ́   l-éˈŋédí
        Ithang   P-find = ERG:1SG   LOC-waterhole
        O   V = AERG   OBL
        'I saw Ithang at the waterhole.' (no recording)

(34) ìṭʌ́ŋ   l-ɛ́ʼŋɛ́dí=yá   ǹ-kúʼmún=nʌ́
      Ithang   LOC-waterhole=FOC   P-find=ERG:1SG
      O   OBL:FOC   V=AERG
      'I saw Ithang at the *waterhole*.' (no recording)

Note that in some of the previous transitive sentences, we see that either the object of the ergative construction, as in (19), or the subject, as in (26), is not overtly mentioned. If they were, they would appear – unmarked for case – before the focus-marked constituent, as is the case in (27)-(34), or A – marked for ergative case – may come after the verb (as in (33)) if not at the same time marked for focus (as in (32)). Also, only focus-marked S/A (as in (24) and (21), respectively) and O in the ergative construction maintain their position while at the same time being the attentional centre (i.e., occurring in sentence-initial position, as in (35) below); in all other cases, the focus-marked participant has to be moved to a position before the verb, as mentioned earlier.

FIGURE 3: Stimulus for (29)

(35) y-àṇṭúŋ=ʼɛ́   díṭʌk   ǹ=k-ʌ̀húnɛ́n=nʌ́   yàdìí
      PL-rattle=FOC.PL   tie:AP   ERG=SG-woman=DEM.PROX   LOC:leg
      'This woman tied *rattles* to her leg.' (12.04.09-02-10)

If we now assume that we are dealing with a cleft construction whenever a constituent is focus-marked, we get into trouble if this constituent does not occur in an edge position. Creissels (2021), discussing plain clefts as opposed to grammaticalized clefts and placing them in paradigmatic contrast with non-cleft focus constructions, addresses this problem: "Some languages have focus constructions involving a focus marker homonymous with an identificational predicator, but in which the focused constituent does not occur systematically in clause-initial or clause-final position, as expected in focus constructions resulting from the grammaticalization of plain clefts" (Creissels 2021: 24). He further concludes that focus marking, though homonymous with predicate markers, must not necessarily evolve via cleft constructions, as, for instance, Heine & Reh (1984: 181ff.) suggest. Creissels (2021: 24) presents the case of

Ivorian Jula with homonymous focus and identificational predicate markers as an example. He points out that the focus-marked constituent maintains its original position in the sentence, which makes an evolution from a cleft construction dubious.

How exactly the development in Tima took place remains, at least for the time being, an open question.[9] It is, however, not rare in this language for existing material to find other functions than the original one; this is true on both the lexical level (see Schneider-Blum 2012; Schneider-Blum & Dimmendaal, to appear) and the grammatical level (see Dimmendaal 2010; Casaretto et al. 2020).

6   Summary

The focus marker in Tima is homonymous with one of the predication markers, namely the copula used in equative non-verbal predication. Cross-linguistically, this fact points to the focus construction as being a cleft or as having originated from a cleft. However, in this contribution, I have argued that the focus construction we find in Tima is monoclausal. While I ruled out that we are dealing with a cleft construction synchronically, the question on the origin of the construction as a cleft remains open.

One argument for treating the focus construction as monoclausal is based on the position of the focus-marked constituent. A sentence-initial position, as we would expect if dealing with a cleft, is not required; the relevant constituent only has to be preverbal. Cross-referencing on the verb and flagging of the focus-marked constituent (such as to indicate source or direction) also point to a monoclausal construction.

Relative-like clauses, said to be an essential part of a cleft, can only be defined by their function in Tima as modifying elements; they do not share generally valid formal criteria. Even their subordinating character is questionable, so that, along with Dimmendaal (2023: 266), I prefer to regard the relevant clause as adjoined rather than subordinated, since "[…] the clause following the relativized noun (phrase) is dependent, because it shares an identical argument (the relativized head noun), but syntactically this clause is adjoined, as there is no relative clause marker […]".

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[9] In his in-depth study on Kikuyu focus constructions, Schwarz (2003, 2007) comes to the conclusion that in Kikuyu too, the construction containing the particle *ne* is not a cleft construction, considering "the different behavior of *ne*-focus constructions and biclausal constructions" (Schwarz 2003: 82). Future research, depending on peace in Sudan, may allow a similar systematic study, including collecting negative evidence, to be conducted for Tima.

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3	first, second, third person		O	object
			OBL	oblique
A	subject of tr. clause		P	person
AP	antipassive		PL	plural
CAUS	causative		PLUR	pluractional
COMP	complementizer		POSS	possessive
COP	copula		PRF	perfect
DEM	demonstrative		PRON	pronoun
DIR	directional		PROX	proximal
EP	epenthetic		REF	referential
ERG	ergative		REL	relativizer
EXCL	exclusive		S	subject of intr. clause
FOC	focus		SEL	selective
INCL	inclusive		SG	singular
INS	instrumental		SOUR	source
IPFV	imperfective		TR	transitive
LOC	locative		V	verb
MID	middle		VENT	ventive
NEG	negation			

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In the Tima area (photos: Gertrud Schneider-Blum, 2010/2011)