

Mobile subject agreement markers and focus in Sheko

Anne-Christie Hellenthal

Leiden University - the Netherlands

In my presentation, I discuss the placement of subject agreement markers in Sheko, a little-known Omotic language spoken in Southwest Ethiopia. Although subject agreement markers are a verbal category, they cliticize to other constituents in the sentence which are in focus. This phenomenon is reported for other Omotic languages as well, in particular for Zayse (Hayward 1990) and Zargulla (Azeb Amha 2007), which belong to the Omoto subgroup. In both languages, focused constituents and question words are affixed with verbal subject agreement markers; in most cases a copula/focus element – **tte** is also present. No attention is given to movement of subject agreement markers in the languages of the Majoid subgroup to which Sheko belongs, except for a few remarks on Dizi by Beachy (2005). Movement of subject agreement markers has not been described for Sheko so far. However, subject agreement markers are central to focus and information structure in the language. Therefore, I explore the relation between the movement of subject agreement markers and focus based on a corpus of texts, describing the differences between focus on the verb predicate, subject and non-subject constituents. In comparing constructions with and without the copula, I discuss parallels with other Omotic languages such as Zayse and Zargulla. Furthermore, I investigate the circumstances under which subject agreement markers are totally absent.