

Transitivity and complex predicates in Wolaitta

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In Wolaitta, an Omotic language spoken in south-west Ethiopia, transitive verbs may be derived from intransitive ones by suffixing the productive causative/transitive morpheme -is. With a number of verbal lexemes non-productive final-consonant alternations distinguish intransitive/middle on the one hand and transitive/causative or ditransitive verbs on the other: e.g., gufann- 'fall forward' vs. gufant- 'make fall forward', dagamm- 'be scared' vs. dagant- 'scare some one' in which the transitive verb ends in -t. In other cases, the intransitive/middle form ends in -t and the corresponding transitive form ends in -y: yiillot- 'be angry' vs. yiilloy- 'make angry', ?amott- 'crave, long for (certain food)' vs. ?amoy- 'make/cause to crave for food'. All considered, transitivity is one of the salient verbal categories in Wolaitta.

In the presentation, we will examine complex predicates which are formed by combining two predicative-elements: V_1 and V_2 . Generally, V_2 is a semantic modifier of V_1 , specifying its manner, location, direction or duration. V_1 may be any verb in the language given semantic compatibility with V_2 . However, the number of verbs featuring in V_2 position is restricted and their combinatorial possibility with V_1 is partly determined by transitivity. Thus, intransitive V_1 verbs combine with intransitive V_2 and transitive V_1 s combine with transitive V_2 , exhibiting something like 'transitivity concord'. For example, ?eét't'- kiy- 'be aflame, catch fire quickly' and ?eett- kess- 'ignite, set fire to' contrast in that their component verbs differ in transitivity. The former comprises two intransitive verbs ?eét't'- 'burn' and kiy- 'go out' whereas the latter is formed by combining two transitive verbs ?eett- 'burn some thing' and kess- 'take out'. In some cases the same transitive V_1 may combine with intransitive and transitive V_2 s but the alternation results in meaning-difference. We will focus on the constructional meaning of complex predicates vis-à-vis simple verbs and the role of transitivity between different forms of complex predicates based on a study of extensive text material.