

Focus marking in Koorete

Binyam Sisay

Addis Ababa University - Ethiopia

*This paper tries to explore the focus marking system in one of the least-documented Omotic languages of Ethiopia: Koorete. Koorete is an East-Ometo language that is spoken by a little more than hundred-thousand native speakers in the south-western part of Ethiopia. In this language, as it is the case in many African languages (Bearth 1999), focus is morphologically realized. Focus closely interacts with aspect/tense and sentence type marking. Focus in Koorete appears in main clauses and only one component is focalized per sentence. Two broad types of morphologically marked focus have been observed: assertive focus and contrastive focus. This goes in line with the claim made by Heine & Reh (1983) and Hyman & Watters (1984) that some languages mark the two types of focus by means of distinct morphemes. Assertive focus is marked by the morpheme **-ko** in the declarative and the morpheme **-a** in the interrogative. Contrary to Hayward (1982; 1989) claim that it is an enclitic copula, the element **-ko** in this study is analyzed as a focus marker. Contrastive focus, on the other hand, is shown by the suffix **-ma**.*

Assertive focus marking in Koorete is determined not only pragmatically but also grammatically (syntactically). A language is said to have a grammatically controlled focus marking system when a speaker is obliged to put focus in one part of the sentence in order to form a finite sentence. This rule is not without exception, however. The presence of obligatory focus is reported to Zay, a Semitic language spoken in Ethiopia (Meyer 2002) and some Cushitic languages like Wellega Oromo (Dabala & Meyer 2003), Somali (Saeed 1984) and Rendille (Oomen 1978). Koorete synchronically exhibits two strategies of assertive focus marking in showing predicate focus. In this study, the two strategies are labeled as 'main verb' and 'compound verb' focus marking strategies. While the focus morpheme is suffixed to the main verb in case of the 'main verb' strategy, a subordinate verb form is introduced into the sentence to carry the focus marker in 'compound verb' strategy. The distribution of the two strategies is determined by the aspect/tense category of the verb.