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19. Focus

This chapter discusses subject focus marking and constructions for focusing constituents other than subjects.

19.1. Subject focus marking

Subject focus constructions involve the focus marker akk- or alternatively, a marker that is (synchronously) analysable as a-c-c-, having a double concord agreeing with the subject. Both akk- and a-c-c- may have developed from an earlier form *ak-c- (related to okà ‘be?’). In this scenario the form would historically not involve double concord. The only other case in the language that might involve double concord is the associative marker atṭot/āṭtōt (see 6.8) (including the associative + numeral at-c-ot-NUM/āt-c-ūt-NUM, see 10.4.2). Here too, a development from at-c-ot, rather than a historical form with double concord, seems the more likely possibility.

The construction a-c-c- is mainly used in Ṭaṟomātān, whereas in Ṭaṟu and Ṭaṟī mostly akk- is used. akk-/a-c-c- is attached to a non-dependent verb (an Incompletive, a Completive, or the Present of ‘be’) or adjective, replacing its concord. The focus marker can receive a high tone from a preceding element. It cannot be excluded that it has a floating high tone of its own, however, if such a tone were there it would not have an opportunity to be realized, because the verbs to which the focus marker can be attached always have a high tone. I therefore consider akk-/a-c-c- as low-toned. Compare the two pairs of examples below. The second example of each pair has (contrastive) subject focus.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ṭakəɾuk} & \quad \text{ṭ-aa.t} & \quad \text{n-ṭe-tṭōk} \\
\text{chicken} & \quad \text{C-come:COMPL} & \quad \text{with-at-fenced_place_for_livestock} \\
\text{the chicken came out of the animal shelter}
\end{align*}
\]
\[
\text{called} \quad \text{akk-aa.t} / \quad \text{á-t-t-aa.t} \quad \text{n-te-ttöök}
\]

chicken \quad \text{FOC-come:COMPL} \quad \text{FOC-C-come:COMPL} \quad \text{with-at-fenced_place_for_livestock}

The chicken came out of the animal shelter (it was the chicken who came out of the animal shelter).

\[
\text{p-iná} \quad \text{PERS-my_mother} \quad \text{C-know:INCOMPL}
\]

my mother knows it

\[
\text{akk-iná} / \quad \text{a-p-p-iná} \quad \text{PERS-my_mother} \quad \text{FOC-know:INCOMPL} / \quad \text{FOC-C-C-know:INCOMPL}
\]

my mother knows it (it is my mother who knows it)

In the next example the focus marker is attached to an adjective:

\[
\text{ákk-opørōt} \quad \text{DEM-C-NEARSP} \quad \text{FOC-good}
\]

\text{this one} is good (also: this one is the best)

In a focus-construction the full form of the subject pronoun is used instead of the pronominal proclitic:

\[
\text{n-kw-á.mente} \quad \text{ittti} \quad \text{c-on} \quad \text{akk-a.nôle} \quad \text{kappentına}
\]

\text{2-C-say.PLUR:INCOMPL} \quad \text{that} \quad \text{PERS-1} \quad \text{FOC-eat.PLUR:INCOMPL} \quad \text{groundnut_paste}

you are always saying that it is me who is always eating groundnut paste (but now it is you who has been eating groundnut paste)

In some constructions of auxiliary and main verb the focus marker can precede the main verb, the auxiliary or both:

\[
\text{c-kín} \quad \text{akk-íra} \quad \text{t-a.nán-oŋ} \quad \text{lón} \quad \text{appik}
\]

\text{PERS-3A} \quad \text{FOC-should} \quad \text{C-bring_to:INCOMPL-O2} \quad \text{words} \quad \text{all}

it is them that should explain everything to you

\[
\text{c-kín} \quad \text{t-íra} \quad \text{akk-a.nán-oŋ} \quad \text{lón} \quad \text{appik}
\]

\text{PERS-3A} \quad \text{C-should} \quad \text{FOC-bring_to:INCOMPL-O2} \quad \text{words} \quad \text{all}

it is them that should explain everything to you
This is not the case in verbal complexes with an auxiliary of ‘be’. They have the focus marker on the auxiliary:

\[
\text{št-ťa akk-a.ik p-a.kek-őń} \quad \text{PERS.3-QW FOC-be:PR C-shave:INCOMPL-O2}
\]

who is shaving you?

Question words replacing the subject use the same focus markers akk-/a-Č-C- (example above). More examples are provided in chapter 20.1.1 and 20.2.2.

Contrastive negative focus of the subject (‘it is/was not X’) is expressed by Dependent Incompletive negated ‘be’ (‘not being’) preceding the subject and akk-/a-Č-C- on the verb:

\[
\text{őkórínn-šká pa-p-ő-kira akk-őkccé.r-őń} \quad \text{NEG:DEP-be:DEPCOMPL thing-C-of-trees FOC-chase:COMPL-O2}
\]

it was not a leopard that chased you (‘A boy and a goat’)
Unlike the subject focus marker akk-, akka +H has no variant that can agree with the element on which it puts focus. akka +H in non-subject focus constructions functioning as complementizer seems to be the same element as the conjunction word akka +H. If and how akka +H and the focus markers akk-/a-C-C- (which replace the verbal or adjectival concord) historically relate to each other is not clear.

The possessor noun from a connexive construction is focused in the first example below, the noun from a prepositional phrase in the second. The connexive (first example) and preposition (second example) remain in place in their absolute form.

\[
\text{taqaruk ákka m-p-çokó.t ťúŋké ţ-en}
\]

I ate the liver of the chicken (it was of the chicken that I ate the liver)

\[
\text{kačar k-š-Țrî27 akka m-p-çoktót t-a-kumáŋ tít}
\]

it was on the road to Ţrî that I ran into Kumanj

In coordinated clauses locative adjuncts can also be contrasted without akka +H, namely through fronting of the adjunct in the second clause. ‘Khartoum’ in the first clause can be left-dislocated as well, but the sentence as given below was preferred. It was elicited with ‘in Khartoum the water ..., but in Lumun country the water ...’.

\[
\text{ŋørø n-á-raqwøt nọ-capu kàraṭṭom}
\]

in Khartoum the water remains on the ground, but in Lumun country it disappears quickly

\[
\text{ana.rruk t̪órró n-ŋ-intat cík cőkč̪-ćk̪øt}
\]

\[27\] Several paths go to Ţrî, coming from different places, as well as taking a different course. Which road is meant must be understood from the context.