A grammar of Lumun : a Kordofanian language of Sudan
Smits, H.J.; Smits H.J.

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Author: Smits, H.J.
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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 (synchronically) 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 **ɔkâ** '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 **aṯṯʊt/áṯṯʊ́t** (see 6.8) (including the associative + numeral **at**-C-**ʊt**-NUM/**át**-C-**ʊ́t**-NUM, see 10.4.2). Here too, a development from **at**-C-**ʊt**, rather than a historical form with double concord, seems the more likely possibility.

The construction **a**-C-C- is mainly used in Tɔɽəmaṯɔ̂n, whereas in Ṭaɽʊ and Ṭɔɽî 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.

ṯakəɽʊk   **ṯ-aa.t**   **n-ṯɛ-ṯṯʊ̆k**
chicken   C-come:COMPL   with-at-fenced_place_for_livestock

the chicken came out of the animal shelter

ṭakəɾʊk ákk-aa.t   /   á-ṭ-ṭ-aa.t   n-ṭɛ-ṭṭŏk
chicken   FOC-come:COMPL   FOC-C-C-come:COMPL   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)

ɔ-ɪáɪa   p-ɪná
PERS-my_mother   C-know:INCOMPL

my mother knows it

ɔ-ɪáɪa   akk-ɪná   /   a-p-p-ɪná
PERS-my_mother   FOC-know:INCOMPL /   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:

ɛm-p-ɪ   ákk-ɔpərɔ̂t
DEM-C-NEARSP   FOC-good

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:

ŋ-kw-á.mɛntɛ   ɪttɪ   ɔ-ʊn   ákk-a.ɲúlɛ   kappɛnṭína
2-C-say.PLUR:INCOMPL   that   PERS-1   FOC-eat.PLUR:INCOMPL   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:

ɔ-kín   akk-íra   ṭ-a.nán-ʊŋ   lɔ̂n   appɪk
PERS-3A   FOC-should   C-bring_to:INCOMPL-O2   words   all

it is them that should explain everything to you

ɔ-kín   ṭ-íra   akk-a.nán-ʊŋ   lɔ̂n   appɪk
PERS-3A   C-should   FOC-bring_to:INCOMPL-O2   words   all

it is them that should explain everything to you

ɔ-kín   akk-íra   akk-a.nán-ʊŋ   lɔ́n   appɪk
PERS-3A   FOC-should   FOC-bring_to:INCOMPL-O2   words   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:

ɔ́ṭ-ṭa   akk-a.ɪk   p-a.kɛk-ʊ́ŋ
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**-C-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**-C-C- on the verb:

ɔkə́rə́nn-ɔ́ká   pa-p-ɔ-kɪra   akk-ɔkị̣ccé.r-ʊ́ŋ
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')

19.2. Non-subject focus marking

Constituents other than the subject are contrastively focussed through left dislocation followed by **akka** +H 'that' and the rest of the clause. Two examples with focussed objects follow here:

íkkərɛ   lị̣cɔk   ákka   ŋ-kw-ɪmmâ.t
perhaps   goats   that   2-C-see:COMPL

it seems you saw *goats* (it was goats that you saw (and not a leopard)) ('A boy and a goat')

a-a   kəllán   akka   ɔ-kʊkkʊ́   p-ɪp.ánṭét   áôn
no-REDUP old_woman that   PERS-Kʊkkʊ C-collect_for:PST   bees

no, Kʊkkʊ collected honey for the *old woman* (it is for the old woman that Kʊkkʊ collected honey)

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.

ṭakəɽʊk	**ákka**	**m-p-ɔɽəkɔ.t**	**ṭúŋkɛ**	**ṭ-ɛn**
chicken	that	1-C-eat:COMPL	liver	C-of:ABS

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

kaṭər	**k-ɔ́-ṭɔ́ɽɪ́**[27]	**akka**	**m-p-ɔkəttɔ́.t**	**ɪ-a-kʊmáŋ**	**tít**
road	C-of-Ṭɔɽî	that	1-C-run_into:COMPL	in-PERS-Kʊmaŋ	in:ABS

it was on the road to Ṭɔɽî that I ran into Kʊmaŋ

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 …'.

ŋəɽɪ	**ŋ-á.ɽʊŋkwɔt**	**nɔ́-capʊ**	**kârəṭṭôm**
water	C-remain:INCOMPL	on-ground	Khartoum

ana.rruk	**tɔ́rrʊ́**	**ŋ-ŋ-íntat**	**cɪk**	**cɔ́kɔc-cɔkɔt**
but	Lumun_country	PRO-C-disappear:INCOMPL	VREF	quickly-REDUP

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

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