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A grammar of Lumun : a Kordofanian language of Sudan

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Citation

Smits, H. J. (2017, September 21). *A grammar of Lumun : a Kordofanian language of Sudan*. LOT, Utrecht. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/57165>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Title: A grammar of Lumun : a Kordofanian language of Sudan

Issue Date: 2017-09-21

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 **attot/áttót** (see 6.8) (including the associative + numeral **at-C-ut-NUM/át-C-út-NUM**, see 10.4.2). Here too, a development from **at-C-ut**, rather than a historical form with double concord, seems the more likely possibility.

The construction **a-C-C-** is mainly used in Tɔɾəmaɾɔn, whereas in Tɔɾu and Tɔɾɪ 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.

takəɾuk	t-aa.t	n-tɛ-ttɔk
chicken	C-come:COMPL	with-at-fenced_place_for_livestock
the chicken came out of the animal shelter		

takəɾuk ákk-aa.t / á-t-t-aa.t n-tɛ-ttŏk
 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-íáia p-íná
 PERS-my_mother C-know:INCOMPL
 my mother knows it

ɔ-íáia ákk-íná / a-p-p-íná
 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-i ákk-ɔpərŏt
 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.mente itti ɔ-un ákk-a.ɲóle kappentína
 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 ákk-íra t-a.nán-uŋ lón appík
 PERS-3A FOC-should C-bring_to:INCOMPL-O2 words all
 it is them that should explain everything to you

ɔ-kín t-íra ákk-a.nán-uŋ lón appík
 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-ɔŋ** **lón** **appík**
 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:

ɔ́t-ɬa **akk-a.ɪk** **p-a.kək-óŋ**
 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:

ɔ́kérənn-ɔ́ká **pa-p-ɔ-kíra** **akk-ɔ́kɪccé.r-óŋ**
 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:

íkkərə **lɪcɔk** **ákka** **ŋ-kw-immâ.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-kukkú** **p-ɪp.ánɬét** **áôn**
 no-REDUP old_woman that PERS-Kukku C-collect_for:PST bees

no, Kukku collected honey for the *old woman* (it is for the old woman that Kukku 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.

takəɽok akka m-p-ɔɽəkɔ.t tɨŋkɛ t-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)

kaɽər k-ɔ-tɔɽɨ²⁷ akka m-p-ɔkəttɔ.t ɪ-a-kumən tít
 road C-of-Tɔɽɨ that 1-C-run_into:COMPL in-PERS-Kuman in:ABS

it was on the road to Tɔɽɨ that I ran into Kuman

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 ...’.

ɨəɽɪ ɨ-á.ɽɨŋkwət nɔ-capu kâɾəttôm
 water C-remain:INCOMPL on-ground Khartoum
ana.rruk tɔrró ɨ-ɨ-íntat cɪk cɔkɔc-cəkət
 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

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