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The Expression of Information Structure

A documentation of its diversity across Africa

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Why contrast matters

Information structure in Gawwada (East Cushitic)

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The article discusses the information structure of Gawwada, an East Cushitic language of Southwest Ethiopia, along the lines of the Prague School and Lambrecht's (1994) theory. Gawwada does not have any dedicated focus-marking device – contrary to previous preliminary statements and in stark contrast with many Cushitic languages of the Horn of Africa. Moreover, it is argued that the category of focus itself is only scarcely grammaticalized in this language. It is rather "Contrast", marked through a clitic element =ska, which is central to the information structure of the language. It is also argued that possibly other purported Focus Markers of other Cushitic languages (most notably Somali) may be interpreted, at least partially, as markers of contrast.

Other pragmatic-marking strategies discussed in the article include the presence vs. absence of Subject-Verb agreement, the presence vs. absence of Subject Clitics, and, to a lesser degree, word order change and object-incorporation.
1. Generalities

Gawwada (/kawwada/, [gawwáda]) is a language of southwestern Ethiopia, an area well-known for its ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity: Cushitic and Omotic language of the Afro-Asiatic phylum are spoken, alongside (generally to the West and along the Sudanese border) a good number of Nilotic and Surmic languages of the Nilo-Saharan phylum, and at least one language (Ongota) of uncertain classification. Gawwada itself is a dialect of the Dullay cluster, which according to current classification is a direct offspring of East Cushitic. Administratively, the region is located in the "Southern Peoples, Nations, and Nationalities Region" (until 1991 it was part of the much smaller Gamo-Gofa province, a name often still encountered). According to the 1994 Ethiopian Census there were approximately 42,000 speakers of Dullay varieties.

The Dullay-speaking people have no common ethnonym for themselves and their language. The denomination "Dullay" (introduced by Amborn, Minker and Sasse 1980) - actually the local name of the river known in Amharic as Weytu - has largely replaced in scientific literature other terms, such as "Werizoid" (Bender 1971; Black 1976) and "Qawkor" (Hayward 1978). "Gawwada" has recently been introduced in Ethiopia as a cover term for all the Dullay-speaking groups except the Ts'amakko; here "Gawwada" will be used for the dialect spoken in and around the village of Gawwada (approximately at $5^\circ 25'\$N, 37°14'\$E), about 40 km. (one hour drive) westwards of Konso and to the north of the road leading to Linka and the Omo valley.

3. Basic syntactic structure

Sentential word order in Gawwada is SOV; pronominal word order is generally Head-Modifier.

As is generally the case in Cushitic, the verb is inflected (at least in the positive paradigms) for the person and number of the subject, as well as, with limitation to a third singular subject, for its gender (Masculine vs. Feminine). In the basic syntactic configuration (whose pragmatic value will be detailed further below) the verb is preceded by a subject clitic, which inflects for person but not for number nor for gender, all in all, four different subject clitics are found: 1st pl. /ma/ vs. 2nd pl. /na/ (where /a/ is a copy of the following consonant) vs. two clitics for a third person: a Specific /c/ "spec" vs. Generic subject ("gen") /na./ The subject clitics will be considered as fulfilling the syntactic role of subjects, and any NP coreferential with the subject clitic will be treated as syntactically dislocated. As predicted by the Preferred Argument Structure (Du Bois 1987), sentences with both subject and object expressed by full nominals are quite rare in spontaneous discourse. The following sentence exemplifies the canonical sentential word order:

1. /putab-t/ /wàraali-k/ /na/ /beræk-j/ /hyen-man wind-v send-spec /hyen-man went outwards the wind\n(from the folk tale "The Hyena Man")

More often, the NP coreferential with the subject clitic is missing:

2. /kaar-k-o/ /maar-p-e-ja/ /haddi-i-pa/ tree-sing-M aboveness-int-pl-diff climb-spec /tree and...\n(from the folk tale "The Lion and the Monkey")

Following the usage in other Cushitic languages (especially in Somal; cf. Saced 1999), one may refer to the syntactic string made up by the subject clitic, the object clitic, various adpositional and adverbal element and the verbal form, as the "Verbal Group". The internal structure of the Verbal Group reproduces the sentential SOV basic word order. Thus, a pronominal object of 1st or 2nd person follows the subject clitic before the verb.

1. Data have been collected in Arba Minch and in Gawwada town in various periods of fieldwork from 2000. I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of my former institution, the Universita di Napoli "L'Orientale" for funding my research, and the help of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies at Addis Ababa University for the permission to carry on fieldwork in Ethiopia. The final version of this article was written in August 2006 during a stay at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, whose assistance I gratefully acknowledge. Thanks are also due to an anonymous referee for many insightful comments and criticisms. The transcription is phonological and follows I. B. A. conventions, except for /æ/ = IPA /a/, /ɛ/ = IPA /ɛ/, and /ɛ/ = IPA /ɛ/ /ɛ/ and /ɛ/ mark the boundary of a non-lexical and a tonal intonation unit, respectively.

All errors and omissions are, of course, my exclusive intellectual property.

3. Voice opposition is not phonological for plain stops, and voiceless /t/ /k/ are used throughout the transcription. This is an areal feature encompassing Dullay, Konso, and possibly other varieties, as shown by Sasse (1996).

4. Phonological stress induces the gemination of a following consonant across a clitic boundary.
There is no object clitic of 3rd person; adpositional phrases with a 3rd person
pronounal object are represented before the verbal form by the Mover affix n-
(MOV) followed by Centripetal -a (OUT) or Centripetal -u (IN). In (4) and (5) n-a-
is cliticized to the following verbal form, and its referent is contextually
determined; the same applies to =n-a in (6):

(4) n-u=/all a-ppa
    MOV-INSPEAK-CONS3M=LINK
    'and he told them to...'(from the folktales "The Lost Hunter")

(5) sanu h-o
    =n u=mat i=pa
    elder.brother-SING3M spec=MOV-IN cheat-PFV3M=LINK
    'the elder brother cheated him...'(from the folktales "The Hyena Man")

(6) n-a=ye=padjaw
    MOV-OUT1SG.OBJ add.MSG
    'give me more of it'(from the folktales "The Hyena Man")

A MOV-IN or MOV-OUT sequence may be further followed by the Diffuse post-
position =ma (diff), building with it a phonological word:

(7) kar-att-ak-k-a knew-att-o
    squirrel-SING-SING3M stone_wall_SING3M spec=MOV-OUT-DIFF
    do=caus PFV3M=LINK
    'the Squirrel made a stone wall fall upon him (: the Dove)
    (from the folktales "The Francolin and the Squirrel")

The SOV and HMod word orders are followed quite strictly; apart from occa-
sional afterthoughts, an exception is made for the rare positioning of antitopic
material after the verb (on which see Section 3.3 below).

3. Theoretical background

Following a tradition going back at least to the Prague School, I assume that prop-
ositions are universally structured into a presupposed and a non-presupposed
portion, or Topic and Focus, respectively. Broadly speaking, "topic" is a linguistic
counterpart of the presuppositional notion of 'known' or 'given' information and 'focus'
is that part of the sentence structure that conveys 'new information' in the prot-
typical case (Hamarwa, Partee and Sgall 1998: 3). Topic will therefore be defined
here in terms of aboutness and reference, i.e., as: roughly speaking, as the part of
the proposition which is talked about and is the centre of current interest. As re-
gards Focus, the notion of 'new information' needs elucidation. As is well known,
the focal part of a proposition is not necessarily new in the discourse: it is rather
informationally new, i.e., it fills a gap in the previous state of knowledge. This
applies in innumerable cases but is most patently evident in identificational ques-
tions and answers (of the type "Who did X?" - "Y did"): the speaker who makes
the question is often familiar with the referent which is provided (and which is
coded as the Focus) in the answer. Still, s/he cannot associate it with the missing
element in her/his state of knowledge. This element is "new" not because of its
status in the discourse, but in relation to the asserted proposition. Cf. Lambrecht
(1994: 257) and the following for an ample discussion of "newness" and Focus.

Focus will therefore be defined here as

"the element of information whereby the presupposition and the assertion differ
from each other. The focus is that portion of a proposition which cannot be taken
for granted at the time of speech. It is the unpredictable or pragmatically non-
recoverable element in an utterance." (Lambrecht 1994: 207, emphasis in the original)

Contrastive focus and focalization as a marker of thitcicty (two major domains
of focalization in African languages) will cover only a subset of the overall focus
configurations of a language and will be dealt with in separate sections. Following
again Lambrecht (1994), I will further assume three major focus categories:
predicate focus (PF), sentence focus (SF), and argument focus (AF). These in turn
correspond, respectively, to Topic-Comment, Event-reporting (or Presentational),
and Identificational structures.

Before turning to the expression of Focus, the next section will expound the
structure of Topic in Gawwada. It will be shown that, not unexpectedly, Topic
will not be marked as such, that its position within the predication will be (a few
exceptions pending) initial, and that its role will be generally (but not always)
expressed syntactically by a subject.

stricter definition of focus, and to the exclusion of Topic-Comment structures.
4. Topics

The SOV sentence word-order of Gawwada mirrors the pragmatic structure Topic-Comment. Sentence (1) above, repeated here below, is taken from a folk tale whose actors are: the hyena man; his victim, a girl, and her elder brother, who at last succeeds in killing the hyena man and literally rescues his sister from the grave. In the sentences preceding (1), the brother had set up to kill the hyena man, who is now re-introduced as the topic:

(1) [pu-ta]_TOP  [pu-nu-war-i]_REC
   hyena_man  wind-3p  SPEC=send-Pfv.3M
   'the hyena man, he sent onwards the wind'
   (from the folk tale "The Hyena Man")

This example also shows that nouns in Gawwada need no determination in order to be grounded in a sentence: *puta* is "the" hyena man of the story, and it does not need articles (not existent in Gawwada) nor other deictic material.

A deictic can nevertheless be present; in the same folk tale, the hyena man is referred to as *puta-s-i*: *s-i* is made up of the Deictic *s-* (DEICT) followed by Specific *i* (SPEC), here (as usually in texts) with an anaphoric meaning. Although present previously in the text, the hyena man had been suppressed in the preceding sentences by the other major actor (the girl's brother). The use of the deictic material reactivates it:

(8) [s-i]_OUT-s-i  [s-i]_TOP
   put-a-s-i
   "I tell you, put a stone wall fall upon him (the Dove), so that he (the Squirrel) killed him (the Dove), and therefore they (the Squirrel and the Francolin) could harvest the Dove's field"
   (from the folk tale "The Francolin and the Squirrel")

In the following sentence the first NP (*piy-e 'the ground') can be understood as known (it is the area under the Monkey's tree and where the Lion presently is); it is therefore topical. Topicality is expressed here through the Deictic-Specific combination *s-i* (cf. (8) above):

(11) [piy-e-s-s-i]_TOP  [harf-o-tta-i]_REC  bôw
   land-1p=DEICT-SPEC  hand-1M=INSTR-SPEC  I DIREC
   [pi-y-s-i]_OUT-Pfv
   [s-i]_SPEC=hall-Pfv.3M  pay-as-i-ppa
   donkey-1p-above-INT-Pfv.3M=LINK
   'Then, they say, that hyena man mounted upon his donkey and...'
   (from the folk tale "The Hyena Man")

On the other hand, a full nominal may obviously be absent and its place be taken by an independent personal pronoun:

(9) [3i]_TOP  [3i]_REC
   s-i-ka-r-i-3M
   [3M]_TOP  SPEC=fell-PPV-3M=LINK
   'he had been warned, but...'
   (from the folk tale "The Two Mice")

The presence in topic position of a full NP and of a pronoun is a relatively rare strategy; more commonly, the topic is represented only by the relevant subject cliché and the verbal inflexion. In the following excerpt the subject of the first clause only (which was introduced earlier as (2)) is overtly mentioned ("the Squirrel"), while in the second clause the referent of the subject is understood by default (lack of an overt subject implying continuity of subjects), and in the third sentence through agreement (third plural) and textual inference (the two protagonists of the story are the Squirrel and the Francolin):

(10) [kar-att-akk-o]_TOP  [karw-att-o]
   squirrel-SING-SING-M  stone_wall-SING-M
   wi-i-nu-s=ma  60°-as-i-ppa
   SPEC=MOV-OUT-DIFF  fall-CAUS-Pfv.3M=LINK
   [pos-i-3M]_REC  [pos-o  hold-ATT-ATT-S-i]
   kill-CONS.3M=LINK  field-M  dove-SING-ASSOC.F=DEICT-SPEC
   [gim-ad-onki]_REC
   harvest-MID-CONS.3PL
   'the Squirrel made a stone wall fall upon him (: the Dove), so that he (: the Squirrel) killed him (: the Dove), and therefore they (: the Squirrel and the Francolin) could harvest the Dove's field'
   (from the folk tale "The Francolin and the Squirrel")

Although the pragmatic role of Topic is commonly played by the syntactic subject, it can also be filled by a previously introduced, and therefore known and topical, object. In the following sentence the indirect object *tiso he* is in sentence-initial position, followed by the direct object *auk-it-akk-o 'an animal':

(12) [tiso]_TOP  [kar-akk-o]
   kal-e=ma
   3M,1M  down-hill-OUT-DIFF  animal-SING-SING-M
   [3M]_TOP  down-hill-OUT-DIFF  animal-SING-SING-M
   [3M]_TOP  down-hill-OUT-DIFF  animal-SING-SING-M
   'I'll send behind him an animal'
   (from the folk tale "The Lion and the Monkey")
Occasionally and very rarely, a topic may appear in postverbal position, as an antitopic. Periodically, an antitopic often forms its own intonational unit, and as such it is separated from the preceding verbal form:

(13) [wextends-kka n=manak-i] TOP 
    [wends] TOP
    W-M-CONTR LSBJ=go_home-PFV.1SG 1SG.3MW
'I went home to Weyt'o, me' (from a conversation)

5. Topic-comment structures and the formal unmarkedness of focus in Gawwada

In Gawwada, the basic word order SXV (where X may be null) is used for categorial sentences (as opposed to thietic sentences, on which see below Section 6) and reflects a pragmatic order Topic Focus. Any shared (by the speaker and the audience) knowledge which is necessary in order to understand the sentence is presented first, followed by any "new" (in the sense outlined in Section 3) material which is in focus. In Lambrecht's (1994) terms, it is a predicate focus (PF) structure.

The focal part of the sentence can include an object NP (as in (1) above), or an adpositional phrase, as in (14):

(14) [pels-aak-e] TOP [kaar-k-ito saap-p-e-te
    monkey-SING-M tree-SING-ASSOC.M aboveone-NESS_INT-ASSOC.PL
    SPEC=MID-PFV.3M
'the Monkey was sitting on a tree'
(from the folktale "The Lion and the Monkey")

The new information may on the contrary also be represented by a bare verbal form preceded by the relevant subject clitic:

(15) [psita] TOP [psita le-n a] Roch
    hyena_man SPEC=tall-NESS-PFV.3M=MOV-OUT
'the hyena man fell down. and... (from the folktale "The Hyena Man")

Given the absence of an object pronoun of third person, this is especially common whenever the verb is transitive and the object is known. The Topic is represented by the Subject Clitic and can be inferred from the preceding context:

(16) [k-hloq os i-n a] Roch
    SPEC=swallow-CAUS-PFV.3M=MOV-OUT
'He made him swallow it, and...'
(from the folktale "The Lion and the Monkey")

In verbless sentences the focal part of the sentence is represented by a nominal:

(17) [baamb-o h-naya] TOP [setten] Roch
    boy-M M-1SG.POSS eight
'I have eight sons' (lit: "My boys are eight")
(from "Makurra Garmane's story")

In a very few cases neither a verbal form nor a nominal are necessary in order to have new information; in (18) an ideophone is used in order to predicate something about a nominal:

(18) [an=hoo haa-s-o=a pa] [xatt-e] TOP [hiss] Roch
    1SG.M=OBJ=tell-PFV.1SG=LINK fire-F IDEOPH
arm-M IDEOPH
'I tell you: "The fire (makes) hiss and the arm (makes) hiss"'
(from the riddle "The Night")

This structure is stylistically marked for riddles; much as other riddles are built upon a second clause which is counterexpectational in respect to a first clause (cf. (39), (40), (41), (49)), here we have a parallel structure built upon two elements, each of which is predicated with an ideophone not followed, as usual ideophones are (cf. (11), (43)), by the verb pay 'to say', thus creating a mild contrastive effect.

A verbal form may be likewise omitted in answers if the verbal form can be inferred from the question, as in the following exchange in a spontaneous conversation:

(19) Q: [pir-e] Roch [a=las-i?]
    birr-PL how_many gen=sell-PFV.3M
    'How much they sell it?'

A: [hudsol hoo hoo] Roch [pir-e] Roch [setten]
    ten three=LINK birr-PL eight
'thirty-eight Birrs [Ethiopian Dollars]'
(from a conversation)

The structure of the focal part of the sentence can be quite complex: in the following sentence the order of the two NPs, both of them focal, follows iconically the direction and goal of the movement (first the direction, then the final destination). The Subject (and Topic) is represented only by the verbal agreement on the verbal form (-a, marking a Third Masculine of the First Class of the Dependent paradigm), while all the sentence is in focus:
6. Thetic sentences and the localization of new subjects

In thetic sentences the bipartite organization of the sentence into a presupposed and a non-presupposed portion is by definition absent: "[T]he thetic statement forms a unit with respect to what it contributes to the discourse at a given point. It expresses a pragmatically unanalyzed state of affairs and presents it as a piece of complex information" (Sasse 1987: 558, emphasis in the original); it is a monovalent predication (Sasse 1995: 4; emphasis in the original).7 Therefore, in thetic sentences no element is predictable or presupposed; rather, "both the subject and the predicate are in focus. The focus domain is the sentence, minus any topical non-subject arguments" (Lambrecht 2000: 617).

Thetic sentences are the only place in Gawwada where an unmistakable focus configuration is used – although without a specific focus marker.

In order to express theticity, languages have recourse to a wide array of structures, whose common denominator is the fact that subjects lose, partially or totally, their subject properties, either in terms of case-marking, control of agreement, position in the sentence, and the like. They can also be introduced through a presentative particle or verb, or have special intonational features. In Cushitic languages, neither presentative elements nor intonation are available to mark pragmatic functions.8 Rather, the usual strategy to introduce a new participant in the semantic role of subject is to have recourse to what is normally called subject focalization. Basically, this involves the suspension of subject-verb agreement. Second, in languages with a morphologically-marked subject case (such as Somali and Afar), this will likewise be absent, and the subject NP will appear in the so-called absolute case-form.9 Finally, if Subject Clitics precede the verbal form in the basic syntactic configuration, no Subject Clitics will appear in thetic sentences.

7. On her part, Rosengren stresses that "TT]he distinction thetic/categorical is an extra-linguistic, conceptual distinction between two ways to presuppositivize an event. Thetic stands for a perspective where an event is looked upon as a stage, that is, an event in the flow of other [potential] events; categorical stands for a perspective where an event is divided into two parts, one of which in turn is viewed as an entity to which something happens or which is doing something" (Rosengren 1997: 472; emphasis in the original).

8. An exception is made for polar questions, which are marked by high pitch on the final syllable: The rare use in East Cushitic of intonation in order to mark pragmatic functions is possibly linked to the pitch-accent nature of accent in these languages. Cf. Di K (1987: 328, fn. 16) on the tendency of tone languages not to use accentuation (or accentuation alone) in order to mark focus.

9. The absence of subject marking and of subject-verb agreement suggests that the origin of this construction lies in a clitic sentence: Cf. Hense and Reh (1983) for an early African overview, as well as Siemensen-Sornelle, Vaudere and Hounenhagba (2000) for an analysis of the 'Afar focus along similar lines.'
In certain East Cushitic languages all three structural properties are found — with the possible added complication (e.g. in Somali: Saeed 1984) of a reduction of subject-verb agreement, rather than its total suspension. In languages in which no Subject Clitics exist, such as ‘Afar (cf. Simeone-Senelle, Vanhove and Houmedgaba 2000), one will only find the suspension of subject-verb agreement with the verb appearing in the form of the third singular feminine in ‘Afar) and the absence of subject markings on the subject. In Gawkwada, where the category of case is not realized on nouns, only the absence of the Subject Clitics and the suspension of the subject-verb agreement — with the verb appearing in the form found with a 3m subject whatever the gender, person, and number of its logical subject — are relevant. A further, by no means obligatory correlate of Sentence Focus is word-order change, whereby the subject comes to occupy the position immediately before the verbal form, with all the other nominals preceding it.

All this can be summarized in the following scheme:

Expression of Sentence Focus in Thetic sentences in Gawkwada:
Rule #1: verb in the 3m form;
Rule #2: no Subject Clitic
Rule #3 (optional): SXV ⇒ XSV

In the first sentence of the following excerpt (which is also the first sentence of a folktale), the subject is plural but the verb (‘saq-a) is in the third singular masculine form; by way of comparison, the second sentence, in which the same subject nouns are topical, contains an inflected third plural form, preceded by Specific hi (hi = 8aq-an(k)):

(22) koye‘kk-o to‘akk-o xa‘aaratt-t=c=pa=n-a
day-sing-m one-sing-m francoin-sing-f=link=mov-out
karr-att-akk-o ille=wa intens-and-3m
squirrel-sing-sing-m rec=instr=spec water-pl
7ak-a

‘one day the Francolin and the Squirrel were drinking water together...’

(23) koye‘kk-o to‘akk-o ape-3m rp=3m 8a=f=pa
day-sing-m one-sing-m man-sing-m hunt-pfv,3m=link
lapi-ad-3m
lose-mid-cons,3m

‘One day a man went hunting and got lost’ (‘there was a man who went hunting and got lost’; opening line of the folktale ”The Lost Hunter”)

Examples (21) and (22) further show that monoarguementality of the verb (intransitive, medio-passives, etc.) does not apply as a criterion for theticity in Gawkwada (cf. Sasse 1995: 20 ff. for a discussion of monoarguementality in theticon constructions in European languages): it is true that in (21) ‘and-e ‘uk-a ‘were drinking water’ could in principle be interpreted as an instance of an incorporated-object construction (‘they were water-drinking’; cf. below, Section 9), and therefore be ruled out as an instance of a transitive verb in a thetic sentence; but this analysis is certainly excluded for ‘raak-e muq=m-u mal-i=pa ‘cheated all the animals’ in (22). The same applies to the riddle in (24), which is a text composed of a single clause:

(24) cikkir-e t-ayyu takk-ay-a
shaving-knife-f f-1sg.poss little-int-m
pyi-e muq gafan-i
and-1 all shave-pfv,3m
‘my little shaving-knife shaved the whole country’

(from the riddle ‘The Fire’; cikkir-e is Feminine, the non-Sentence Focus form of the verb would be 8=gafan-i)

(25) is instead a proverb made up of two clauses; as the verb of the second clause is in the Imperative mood the two clauses are linked by the enclitic element ‘yew. The subject of the first clause is Masculine, and again Rule #2 only (absence of the Subject Clitic) is in evidence:

10. kain-e ‘day’ is a loan from Amharic Kain. It is common in the opening line of folktales instead of native koye‘kk-o.

11. The absence of Subject Clitic on the verb of the second clause (lapi-ad-3m ‘he got lost’) has nothing to do with Sentence Focus. It is rather determined by the following conditions: the verb is in the Consecutive paradigm (which is used under specific conditions on any non-final member of a chain of clauses); moreover, the two clauses share the same subject.
It must nevertheless be mentioned that, independently of pragmatic considerations, adverbials of time and place tend to occur at the left edge of the clause (cf. also (54) and (55) below). Moreover, the rightwards shift of a subject after an object is very rare in our corpus – cf. again the SOV word order in (21) (xasaar-att-e-qa=a=a) and (22) (karm-o-tuak-e-mul-a-nul=ai-pa), and (24) (cikir-e [ ... ] piy-e mulo qan-a), and is best considered a tendency in Gwavada. It is nevertheless very salient and can be interpreted as a strong clue in order to recover the Sentence Focus in a language where other clues are often absent.

7. Marking contrast: \(^{=kk}\)

Apart from the presence or absence of the Subject Clitics in front of the verb and the presence vs. absence of Subject-Verb agreement – which we have seen to be the strategies used in Gwavada to express Sentence Focus – Sasse (in Amborn, Minker and Sasse 1980) lists as pragmatic-marking devices for the Dullay cluster (and in particular the eastern dialects Harso and Dobaze) object-incorporation (formally identified as the presence of a nominal object immediately before the verb and after the Subject Clitic, i.e.: Subj. CL O V) and the use of the "focus markers" \(^{=kk}\)a and \(^{=ta}\). On the negative side, one can add as a peculiarity of Gwavada (and of Dullay in general) the absence of clitics – an unexpected fact, clitics being widespread in Ethiopian languages (cf. Appleyard 1989).

We shall deal with object incorporation in Section 9; as to the putative focus markers, \(^{=ta}\) has no focus-marking role in Gwavada nor has it anything to do with the marking of pragmatic relations; it is rather an instrumental (and occasionally comitative) postposition. It will not further concern us here. \(^{=kk}\)a is instead prominent; it occurs in two allomorphs: enclitic \(^{=kk}\)a and proclitic \(^{=k}\). The former is the basic allomorph, with \(^{=k}\) being used in clause-initial position following another clause, or if the preceding element ends in a consonant. As the usual final element of a clause is generally a verbal form, \(^{=k}\) is mainly found in postverbal position.

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12 Gwavada words normally end in one and only one vowel. Exceptions are most numerals (cf. (17), (39)), the ideophones (cf. (18), (43)), and most imperative singular verbal forms.
When asked about the meaning of =kka, native speakers often point out that it means "also, too". The following are two examples from a much wider corpus:

(29) *kawwar-k-a  h-a  *all-k-e  *pa-n-a
   G-SING-M  SPEC-PPL=PEFV.3M=LINK-MOV=OUT
   MINT-AAD-CE=KKA  *lik-l-a  *ppa
   HOUSE-PPL-PL-CONTR  DUR=SEMI-CONF-3D-LINK
   'the Gaawadas marched on and they further set fire to the houses (of the enemy)' (from the text "The War between Gawwada and Godjande")

(30) *mink-ad-d-e  *ol-h-o  el-h-o
   HOUSE-PPL-ASSOC.PL  thng-SING-M  M-M
   *a=di-n-i  *hoq-q  a-ti  *me-na/
   GEN=CAT-FUT=PEFV.3M  FULL=INT-CAPS-VN=DIFF
   *d=al-k-k  *h-o  *kar-a  *posf-q-a  *kka
   THNG-SING-M  M-M  PEOPLE-M  KILL=SEMI-IMP.3M=CONTR
   *k=nuk-a  *apa
   SPEC=BE  THERE-IPFV.3M=LINK
   'in the houses there is plenty of things one can eat, there is also something which kills people' (from the folk tale "The Two Mice")

Of course, =kka in (39) may also be rendered with "even; too" (e.g., "they even set fire to the houses"), and some degree of contrast is evident in (30) ("but there is...") the "additive" meaning of =kka, which is the most evident to speakers, is probably the starting point of a grammaticalization process leading eventually to the (textually far more common) use of =kka as a full marker of contrast, to which we turn now.13

7.2 Contrasting topic: =kka as a topic-switching device

=kka occurs in a number of pragmatic functions, but it seems possible to assume "contrast" as the common denominator of them all (=kka will therefore be glossed "CONT",). The constituent under contrast may itself be the topic (or a part of it)

or the focus (or, again, a part of it). This alone suffices to bar a characterization of =kka in terms of a focus marker tout court.

Beerth (1999) has rightly stressed the importance of studying the pragmatic markers from their textual, spontaneous use. It is a fact that as soon as one leaves the question-answer framework upon which much syntactic work has traditionally been based and delves into actual texts and spontaneous conversations, it becomes apparent that many purported "focus markers" are actually something else, or they are not only, nor essentially, focus markers at all.

Cusitic languages are no exception to this. The most obvious example is Somali, whose grammar of focus is without a doubt the single most studied syntactic feature of the language. Following a tradition going back at least to Andrzejewski (e.g., 1964, 1975) and further pursued by Saeed (e.g., 1984, 1999), Lancuttin (e.g., 1994), Puglielli (e.g., 1981) and her associates in Rome (e.g., Svolacchia, Meroni and Puglielli 1995), and many others, we have obtained a fairly fine-grained knowledge (often couched within a generative framework) of the syntactic conditions of "focus marking" in Somali. In contrast, the pragmatic and discourse conditioning of focus have received much less attention; among the very few studies dealing with the pragmatics of Somali sentences, one can mention Hétzer (1965), El-Solami-Mewis (1980, 1981), and, in particular, Gebert (1986). As a consequence, attention has been brought upon the conditions for the placement of "narrow" focus and the order of topical NPs within the sentence, while texts (be them written or oral) have hardly been studied at all (a notable exception being Ajello 1995). Still, an analysis of textual material reveals a starkly different picture: on the basis of an analysis of Somali written texts, Tosco (2003) has argued that focus is only one, nor even the most prominent, function of the Somali focus markers baa and ayaan. In fact, their use as topic-switching and action-enhancing devices is central in text-building.

Much the same is true of Gawwada =kka: while from the elicitation of isolated sentences one could well get the impression of =kka as a bona fide focus marker, as soon as one is confronted with texts and spontaneous conversations one realizes that the picture is much more complicated. And just as in Somali, from an analysis of oral, generally unplanned texts and spontaneous conversations it emerges that one of the textually most prominent functions of =kka is its use as a topic-switching and topic-resumptive device: by marking contrast against the active topic, =kka therefore re-activates an old one.

The following sentence is a very easy example of the topic-switching value of =kka: the family of a missing man has consulted a sorcerer; after he has explained what to do, the family once again assumes the role of topical subject, and is marked by =kka:

13 In Somali one finds a postclitic particle baa with the meanings: (a) distributive (each, whatever, etc.); (b) at all, even, and (c) also (cf. Muuse and Andrzejewski 1956:67-68 for a good summary with many examples). The origin of the Somali focus markers baa and ayaan is unknown, although Lamberti (1984) proposes a development from a former copula verb, a connection between baa and baa is at least a possibility.
In a similar vein, in the folktales "The Lion and the Monkey" the Lion summons all the animals, with the secret intention to choose among them his next meal. The Monkey only does not attend. After that, the Lion is reintroduced as the protagonist of the story. It comes as no surprise that it is marked by =kka.

Still, Gawwada is very different from Somali: Somali baa, ayaad and their allomorphs are indeed used in order to mark a newly introduced constituent – and this is probably their most common function in transitive clauses, especially in isolation. Gawwada =kka is never employed in this way. As a result of his cogitations in (32) above, the Lion decides to send after the Monkey another animal, and in (33) the Hyena is introduced, becoming the new topic (and, syntactically, the subject) immediately afterwards:

A similar sentence in Somali would require the presence of a focus marker in order to be grammatical:

Forcing instead the presence of =kka in Gawwada would yield a grammatical sentence, but with a completely different reading:

From (33) one further sees that, as anticipated in Section 4 above on Topics, a recently introduced element is frequently not pronounized in its second occurrence as a topic, and it is frequently repeated as full noun in the following instantiation unit. This "pronoun avoidance" is evident in many similar examples, such as (34):

Contrary to the second clause in (33), in (34) the subject of the second clause is also followed by =kka, although the Elephant (karap-k-o) is certainly topical in this context (being present in the clause immediately preceding). Why is it so? A further difference may explain this: in (34) the verb of the first clause (sall-onki; for the absence of the Subject Clitic cf. fn. 10) is followed by the move-out postpositional clitic =n(n)-a, while neither =n(n) nor other clitics are found after the verb of the first clause in (33) (=erak-i "he sent"). The presence vs. absence of =kka is here linked to the presence vs. absence of a postposition on the preceding verb: in (33) the two actions (sending the Hyena after the Monkey on the part of the Lion and the Hyena leaving) are seen as separate and independent actions (and a rather long pause intervenes between them). In (34), on the contrary, the two clauses are linked, but the topic is switched: the animals in the first clause speak to the Elephant and tell him of the Frog's plan to kill him; as a consequence, the Elephant bursts into laughter. Here =kka acts therefore as a topic-switching device.

Similarly, in (35) the Lion, who had been the addressee of the animals' speech in the preceding clauses, is reintroduced once again as the topic and the main actor, and is marked by =kka:
Further examples of =kka in its role as a topic-switching element are (36) and (37): here the Francolin, who has been spoken to by the Squirrel, becomes the topical subject and is re-introduced with the independent pronoun ?ise 'she' followed by =kka.

(36) hana=tir=i-ye ye=lo/ 1.sg=be-tired-PPV.1SG=LINK 1SG.OR=wash-IMP.SG
3.sg=CONTR SPEC=look-out-PPV.3F=LINK
"I am tired - so wash me!" And she washed him..."
(from the folktale "The Francolin and the Squirrel")

(37) nasi=a-pa gec=a-ppa/ pas-o go-CON=CONS.2SG=LINK field-M
ka=n o to* ak o n-a=nak i
tree-SING-M one-SING-M MOV-OUT=be-there-PPV.3M
h-ami=pe gina-gy//
m-PL.POSS=LINK.IMP hit-CONS.2SG
?ise=kka [te] samaw=ti=pa 3.sg=CONTR goatskin-SING-M collect-PPV.3F=LINK
?asi=a-ppa go-CON=CONS.3F=LINK
"(The Squirrel told her) "Go and look: that field which has only one tree in it is ours; so harvest it!" And so she [: the Francolin] took up a goatskin and went..." (from the folktale "The Francolin and the Squirrel")

In the following excerpt from a first-person account of a hunting party the use of =kka after the personal pronoun restarts the narration and resets it in motion after the description of what the hunters found hidden in the forest:

(38) ?a=h=eeq-n-ad-m=na qarat-i-te laks=look-1SG=AD.1PL=MOV-OUT bushbuck-SING-F

7.3 Contrasting focus: =kka as a counterexpectation marker

Similar to its use as a topic-switching device but closer to the traditional concept of a focus element in Cushitic is the use of =kka as a counterexpectation marker. In this use, =kka follows a new element and operates as a focus marker. At the same time, the newly-introduced element sets the scene for the next clause, which runs against the expectations created by the first. By this operation of scene-setting, the first clause becomes topical at the discourse level: still, =kka marks it quae new and focal.

In (39), a riddle, =kka appears in its variant k= because the preceding word, the numeral salah 'four', is consonant-ending. The presence of =kka on the object of the first clause makes sense only at the light of what follows, and the whole could be rendered as: "look here: I got four legs, and still I cannot walk":

(39) [lok-k-e salah] k=an=seek-i=pa /
leg-PLURAL-PL four CONTR.1.SBJ=get-PPV.1SG=LINK
?as-anqo ?ano ?ikas-i
go-1SG.1DP can-IPFV.NEG.1SG
'I got four legs, but I cannot walk' (from the riddle "The Stool")

The same in (40), another riddle, which can be roughly rendered as: "although I got a mouth and two ears, I still don't talk":

(40) [pak-o to* akke-oo=pa qaam-e lakki=kka] rec
mouth-M one-SING-M=LINK ear-PL two=CONTR
?an=seek-i=pa ?ano ?all-ai-i
1sg=GET-PPV.1SG=LINK 1SG.1DP speak-PPV.NEG.1SG
'I got a mouth and two ears, but I cannot speak' (from the riddle "The Pot")
him the next time he will approach the river, tells he is going to take a nap, and that tomorrow only – not today – he will go to the river:

(44) [qaymu=qka] \text{rec} \quad \text{?an} = \text{a}\ddot{\text{a}}\text{Sii-n-a} \quad \text{?and-e} \quad \text{?uk-\text{a}}
\text{tommorow=CONTR 1.SBJ=go-FUT-IPFV.1SG water=PL DRINK-CONS.1S}
‘TOMORROW I’ll go and drink water’ (from the folktale “The Elephant and the Frog”)

These and similar sentences show how \text{kka} can misleadingly be interpreted as a focus marker: it does act as a focus marker, but only in the same sense in which certain English operators (determiners, quantifiers, etc.) do mark focus in focus-sensitive constructions (cf. Hajiččová, Partee and Sgall 1998:24 and the following). These sentences also indicate that \text{kka}, in its use as a focus marker, may only mark a narrow focus: e.g., in (43) \text{kka} marks the preceding word \text{xapa} as an Argument Focus, but obviously it is the whole sentence \text{xapa} \text{k=am=pay-n-i=pa} \text{ha}\ddot{\text{a}}\text{-\text{a}} I’ll flap my wings and get off’ to be focal, insofar as it predicates something new and unpredictable about the topic.

7.4 From \text{kka} to \text{kk-\text{i}}: the marking of specificity in contrast

The specificity affix \text{-i} (\text{SPEC}), whose most common occurrence is after the Deictic \text{-s}, can also be attached to Contrastive \text{kka}, yielding \text{kk-\text{i}}, \text{kk-\text{i}} therefore combines the contrast inherent in \text{kka} with the specific value of \text{-i}. \text{kk-\text{i}} acts also as a Contrastive Focus marker, and its value may be seen in (45) and (46), in which \text{?ato=kk-\text{i}} is best translated as ‘YOU are the one’ and \text{?ano na\text{\text{u}}=kk-\text{i}} as ‘only ME’, respectively:

(45) [\text{?ano so}^{2}\text{-akk-o} \quad \text{?ant-i=kk=ma} / \quad \text{1SG.IDP MAGIC=Sing-M} \quad \text{BE=IPFV.NEG 1SG=CONTR=DIFF}

\text{?ato=kk-i} \quad \text{so}^{2}\text{-akk-o}
\text{2SG.IDP=CONTR-SPEC Magic=Sing-M}
‘I am not a sorcerer – YOU are!’ (elicited sentence)

(46) \text{lakki} \quad \text{?i=\text{ar-am-anki}=mma} / \quad \text{to}^2\text{-\text{ott-e}=\text{s-i}}
\text{two SPEC=KNOW-PASS-IMPF.3P=SIT one=Sing-F=DEICT-SPEC}
\text{?ano na\text{\text{u}}=kk-i} \quad \text{?lle=n-a} \quad \text{?ar=a=n-a}
\text{1SG.IDP only=CONTR-SPEC REC=Mov-OUT know=IPFV.1SG=Mov-OUT}
‘two of them are known (by everybody); but one – only ME I know it’
(from the riddle “The Penis”)
Another example is provided by the sentence immediately preceding example (12) above, in which the Lion realizes that the Monkey is missing from the animals' gathering:

(47) kek-akk-o-ːkk-i / ye=okaay-ːː=ppa /
      monkey-sing-m=contr-spec neg.3=come-present.neg.3=link
   ʔ̓il=kal-e=ma / ʔ̓il=it-akk-o
      3sg.idp downhill-e=sgg / animal-sing-sing-m
   ʔ̓il=ʔ̓il=ak-i / ʔ̓il=ak-i
   1,sg=send-out-present.lsg

'I was the monkey who did not come - I'll send behind him an animal'
(from the folktales "The Lion and the Monkey")

In the following we even have a textually rare instance of a repeated =kk-i:

(48) h-aqu-ːː-ː / tal-t-e
      m=1sg.pos=move-out / goat-sing-f
   e=ːkk-i / ye
      one-sing-f=contr-spec=contr-spec neg.3
   ʔ̓il=a=sg / ʔ̓il=ak-i=pa
      m=move-spec=deict-gen / be_there-ipfv.neg.3=link

'I did not have even one single goat at home'
(from the text "A Hunting Party")

The use of =kk-i is not textually prominent. It is furthermore often difficult to identify: in rapid, connected speech, =kk-i often assimilates its final vowel to the specific affix -i acting as a Subject Clitic of third person; such an assimilation of the phonological string /=kk-i/ yields a phonetic string [:k:i], blurring any difference with =kk-i.

7.5 The end of contrast? =kk-a in negative clauses

A very frequent use of =kk-a is after a negative verbal form: although negative verbal forms not followed by =kk-a have been encountered repeatedly (cf. (39), (49), and (41)), this use is quite common, often without any apparent difference in meaning:

(49) h-aqu-ːː-ː / ʔ̓il=ot-t-e / ʔ̓il=seek-i=pa / ʔ̓il=an-ana
      eye-sing-f / one-sing-f / lsg=go-present.lsg=link / lsg.idp=neg
   ʔ̓il=a / ʔ̓il=ak-i
      thing-m / see-ipfv.neg.1sg=contr

'I have an eye but I can't see anything' (from the riddle "The Needle")

(50) ʔ̓il=an-ana / ʔ̓il=an-ana
      animal-pl all spec=come-present.3pl=move-out
   kopol-akk-o / ye=an=ʔ̓il=ak-i
      fat-sing-m neg.3=move-out be_there-imp.neg.3=contr

'all the animals came, but a fat one was not there'
(from the folktales "The Lion and the Monkey")

From (49) and (50) it becomes apparent that, again, the notion of contrast is crucial: in (49) the use of =kk-a marks counterexpectation, in (50) opposition (between all the other animals and the Monkey).

The use of =kk-a with a negative verbal form is strongly preferred in dialogues if no object is present:

(51) ʔ̓il=a / ʔ̓il=ar-i=kk-a
      lsg.idp know-ipfv.neg.1sg=contr

'I do not know'

vs. the scarcely acceptable:

(51') ʔ̓il=a / ʔ̓il=ar-i
      lsg.idp know-ipfv.neg.1sg

Once again, contrast often seems to be pivotal, as is evident from (52):

(52) ʔ̓il=a / ʔ̓il=pal-o=s-i / ʔ̓il=a
      lsg.idp field-m=deict-spec lsg.idp
   ʔ̓il=ar-i=kk-a=ye / ʔ̓il=ʔ̓il=ni=pa
      know-ipfv.neg.1sg=contr=link.imp go-juss.3pl=link
   ye=hiʔʔ-da\
      1sg.obj=see-caus-con2sg

'as for me, I don't know that field; let's go and you'll show me'
(from the folktales "The Squirrel and the Francolin")

At the same time, it is also possible that =kk-i is currently undergoing further grammaticalization as a negative marker. There are no negative particles in Craw-wada, and many negative forms use the same segmental affixes found in positive paradigm, with stress only marking the difference (phonological stress on the last syllable marking the negative; cf. ʔ̓il=i 'I know' vs. ʔ̓il=ar-i 'I do not know'). The further grammaticalization of =kk-a into a negative marker, and the bleaching of its semantic contents, is therefore not surprising. It has already happened in Tsamakko, another Dallay variety bordering Craw-wada to the West: here all the negative verbal forms in main clauses are obligatory followed by =kk-a, which has apparently lost any residual pragmatic value (Savá 2009:162).
7.6 Conclusions on =kka and the marking of argument focus

Contrastiveness is not universally of good repute as a pragmatic category: according to Lambrecht, 'contrastiveness, unlike focus, is not a category of grammar but the result of the general cognitive processes referred to as "conversational implicatures" (Lambrecht 1994:291). This study has nevertheless shown that in Gawwada Contrast is a linguistic category, which finds its specific lexical expression in specific configurations. As expected, it has been seen that in Gawwada Contrast may apply to both Topics and (maybe with less frequency) Foci. As a marker of Contrastive focus =kka is therefore the foremost means for the expression of Argument Focus. The latter, however, does not receive a single, uniform treatment. In the expression of Argument Focus =kka is in its turn in competition with at least another strategy, to which we turn now: word-order change.

8. Argument focus, again: Word-order change

The postverbal positioning of an NP was mentioned in Section 4 in connection with antitopics, where it was also stressed how the clause-final position of the verb is quite strictly adhered to in Gawwada. A few examples of postverbal positioning of an NP which cannot be assumed under the rubric of antitopicity have nevertheless been recorded:

(53) muk̂e-att-e lokk̂ a send-e ‘it’s a frog’
frog-sing-pu slowlyness-n water-pl levelly-out
(54) muk̂e-att-e lokk̂ a send-e ‘it’s a frog’
frog-sing-pu slowlyness-n water-pl levelly-out

(55) [hantu h-u-i kal-a 5m-hal i /now move src down over t sat go back-verb tar]
downhill-occ house-plur-pl=puff
‘Now I went back down there - down, to the village' (from a conversation)

On the contrary, the position of NPs in preverbal position is quite free (once again conforming to a general rule in East Cushitic; cf. Tosco 2003 for Somali). Any nominal may be brought to the left in extrasentential position and be resumed by a postposition or by the Deictic plus Specific marker =s-i (DEICT-SPEC, as seen above in (28), (46), and (52)). In particular, apart from the use of =kka, word-order change is the second strategy employed in order to express Argument Focus.

An adpositional phrase with a non-pronominal object is sometimes left-extraposed together with the adposition, with the adposition repeated in front of the verbal form:

(56) ?akk-e=n-u n-u=‘all-i=papa
family-p=MOV-IN MOV-IN=speak-cons.3F=LINK
‘... she told her family:...
("to her family, she spoke to", from the folk tale "The Hyena Man")

More frequently, the NP is extraposed without any adposition:

(57) haarr- atte konn- att-ito tulluf- akk-o
donkey-ASSOC.F back-SING-ASSOC.M dust-SING.M
n-a=kutt-um-a
MOV-OUT=pick_up-PASS-IPFV.3M
‘only dust came out of the Donkey’s back'
(from the folk tale "The Donkey and the Oxpecker")

Also a third person direct or indirect object may be followed by the Deictic plus Specific marker =s-i (DEICT-SPEC, as seen above in (10), (11), (46), (52)). In (58) this element occurs three times: after a topical indirect object NP (muk̂e-att-e=ys-i ‘the frog'), which is left-dislocated before a direct object NP (‘send-e melo=ys-i ‘all the water'), and finally after a personal pronoun (‘tes-e ‘she') which fills the syntactic position of the indirect object NP after dislocation. While it was seen above (cf. Section 2) that a third person pronounal object is usually not expressed and is recoverable from context, in this case the use of the personal pronoun, marked by =s-i, is necessary in order to localize it through =kka, yielding ?es-e=s-i=kka.

Pending an analysis as an afterthought, and noticing that the Elephant’s brain will play a role further on in the text, one may assume here that by means of the postverbal positioning of the NP kat-a non-ito ‘up the brain’ an element which will later become topical is first introduced and given relevance: in other words, it is a focal element.

Within the focal part of a proposition, place and time expressions in particular are amenable to post-verbal position. In (54) the locative word kat-a ‘down’ is specified after the verb; in (55) a temporal adverbial is likewise positioned postverbally.

There is no overt expression of the Elephant's brain, but the word kat-a ‘down’ is specified after the verb; in (55) a temporal adverbial is likewise positioned postverbally.
9. Incorporation

Any account of the information structure of Gawwada would be deficient without mentioning incorporation. Incorporation is defined here as the positioning of an object noun after a Subject Clitic and/or the adposition and immediately before the verbal form (similar conditions apply in Somali; cf. Tosco 2004). In the examples below, incorporation is shown by the clitization of a postposition ((59), (60)) or of an object pronoun (61) in front of the noun, rather than immediately before the verb: the noun and the verb make thus a tight unit, if not a compound, and they cannot be separated.

As the incorporated element is de-contextualized and made non-referential, it comes as no surprise that generic nouns, such as nouns expressing position and movement, are typical targets of incorporations; one example is *kitt-atte* 'within' (from *kitt-e* 'interior'), which in (59) is found in the configuration *kitt-atte* *sak* ‘to be found in a place’:

(59) kaar\-k-o to\-okk-o n-a=kitt-atte

tree\-SING\-M one\-SING\-M MOV-OUT=interior-ASSOC.P

*sak-a*

be_there-PPF.3P

‘in it (the field), just one tree exists’

(from the folktale “The Squirrel and the Francolin”)

That *kitt-atte* is incorporated to the following verbal form is shown by the positioning of *n-a* (MOV-OUT), which refers to the location expressed in the preceding sentence (*paš-o* ‘the field’), and which usually precedes immediately the verb:

(59') kaar\-k-o to\-okk-o kitt-atte

tree\-SING\-M one\-SING\-M interior-ASSOC.P

n-a=sak-a

MOV-OUT=be_there-PPF.3P

‘there is just one tree in it’

Equally non-referential are *kod-e* ‘bride wealth’ in (60) (*kod-e* *tak-ak* ‘to take one’s bride wealth’), and *kal-e* ‘provisions for a voyage’ in (61) (*kal-e* *kod* to prepare - *kal-e* ‘provisions for a voyage’):

(60) tak\-okk-o paš-o n-a=kod-e tak-ak-ak

go\-IMPER-REL mov_out=bridewealth\-P take\-IMP\-CONS.2PL

‘go and take from him the bride wealth!’

(from the folktale “The Hyena Man”)

(61) ye=kal-e kod-ma / n-an=kod-e

isa\-one=provisions\-PL make\-IMP\-CONS=DIFF ISR=go\-OUT=SPEC ISR=field\-CON.1SG=LINK.LMP

‘Prepare me some provisions – I’ll go and harvest the field’

(from the folktale “The Squirrel and the Francolin”)

Incorporation is on the whole not very common in Gawwada (much less, e.g., than in Somali). Its pragmatic relevance lies in its backgrounding and de-topicalizing role: irrespective of the type of focus structure (Predicate, Sentence, or Argument) in which it occurs, the incorporated noun is not a real focus (although it can obviously enter into a focalized predicate).

10. Conclusions

This is the first study on the information structure of Gawwada, still basically an undescribed language, and further, finer-grained research and analysis are needed; nevertheless, this article has shown how Gawwada, as most languages, uses a wide array of strategies in order to express pragmatic functions. Using Lambrecht's (1994) tripartite division of focus structures into Predicate, Argument, and Sentence Focus, it has been seen that Gawwada employs the following focus-marking strategies:

1. Predicate Focus (Topic-Comment sentences): SXV word order, presence of Subject Clitics in front of the verb; full Subject-Verb agreement.

2. Sentence Focus (Thetic sentences):

   a. absence of Subject Clitics;
   b. suspension of Subject-Verb agreement (verb in the 3rd form);
   c. (occasionally) XSV word order;

3. Argument Focus: no unitary strategy, but:

   a. word order (left-extrapolation of NPs);
   b. *mek* (if contrast is implied)
The focus-marking devices themselves can therefore be syntactical (involving the use of different word orders), morphological (different agreement patterns), or lexical.

The interest of Gavwada for comparative and typological purposes alike lies in its being very different from Somali and other languages of the Horn, which make extensive use of focus-marking elements (although, as it has been argued above, also the so-called focus markers of Somali are used in a wide array of other pragmatic functions). The conclusions reached in this study fly in the face of many preconceptions and expectations about the marking of pragmatic structures in Cushitic languages: in Gavwada no dedicated focus marker exists, and its expression is parasitic of other categories. Insofar as focus — specifically, Argument Focus — is marked, it is through elements which cover other functions as well.

The expression of Topic does not fare better: while no dedicated topic markers exist (here following what seems a general pattern in Cushitic and in the languages of the area), a contrastive Topic is often marked.

For both Contrastive Topic and (but only as a possible strategy among others) Argument Focus, one and the same element is employed: the clitic =kka (and its proclitic allomorph ka), and both functions are best considered derivative for this element. While =kka could, prima facie, be interpreted as a focus marker, it has been shown that its main functions lie instead in the marking of topic-switch and topic-resumption on the Topic side, and the marking of Argument Focus on the Focus side. =kka itself — and here lies another interesting feature of Gavwada — finds its only unitary value as a marker of Contrast, either of a textual kind (to a previously mentioned element) or of a presuppositional kind (to any expectation of the addressee).

Gavwada is also interesting in an areal perspective because, different from many languages of the Horn of Africa, it does not have recourse to clitics; instead, presence vs. absence of Subject-Verb agreement, presence vs. absence of Subject Clitics, contrastive particles, and, to a lesser degree, word order change and object-incorporation are all used, either alone or in combination.

As a final word, this study — based almost entirely on oral texts and spontaneous conversations — has shown once again how only through the painstaking analysis of spontaneous textual material one may hope to arrive at disentangling the complexity of pragmatic marking in natural languages.

References


