

Dissertation Project: Information Structure in Gamo

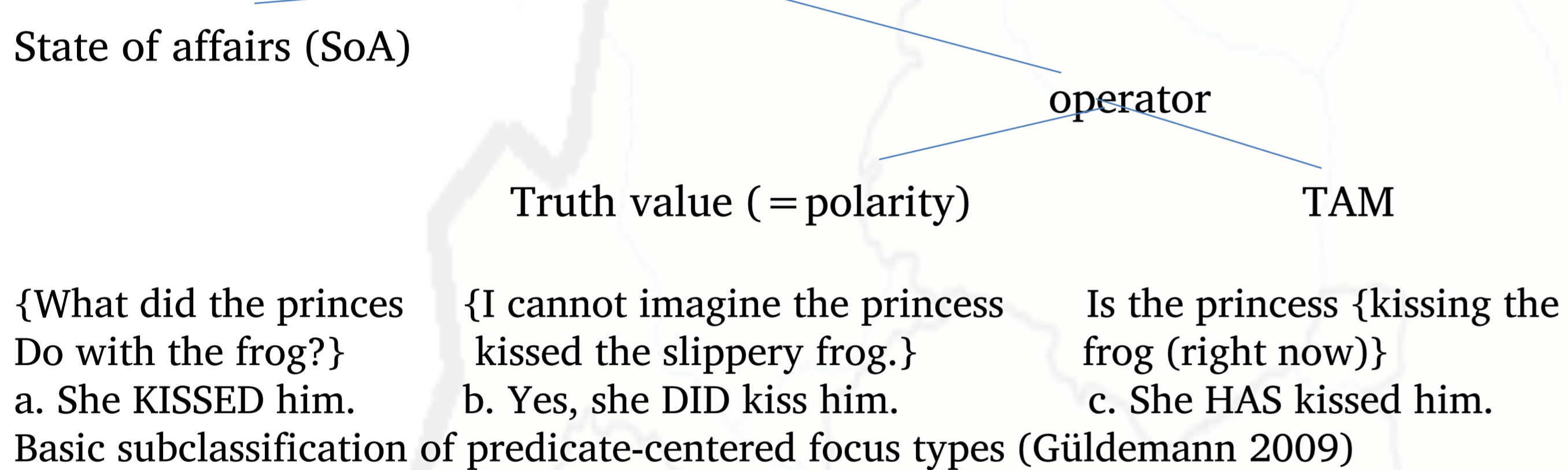
The aim of this project is to describe the *information structure* (IS) of Gamo, a little-documented language of the Omotic family which is spoken in Southwestern Ethiopia. The project combines descriptive and (synchronic) comparative methods for a multi-dimensional understanding of the language's information structure. The descriptive part will focus on describing how the language encodes basic information-structural notions such as *topic*, *focus* and *theticity*. The comparative section will look at data from genealogically related and geographically close languages to see whether language contact has left any structural traces on the IS encoding strategies of the language.



Information Structure and Predicate-Centered Focus

Prince (1981: 224) defines IS as “the tailoring of an utterance by a sender to meet the particular assumed needs of the intended receiver,” thus reflecting “the sender's hypotheses about the receiver's assumptions and beliefs and strategies”. IS has been widely associated with the binary partitioning of a sentence into topic-focus, given-new, asserted-presupposed etc. Focus, which is the concern of this poster, is defined as “that information which is relatively the most important or salient in the given communicative setting, and considered by S [speaker] to be most essential for A [addressee] to integrate into his pragmatic information” (Dik 1997: 326). Predicate-centered focus, as its name implies, is one of the subtypes of focus, where the scope is over the predicate of an utterance or part of it. It may be associated with focus on operators like TAM and polarity, or with focus on the lexical meaning of the verb.

Predicate-centered focus



General Information on Gamo

- > ISO 639-3 (Lewis 2014)
 - > Classification: Afro-Asiatic > Omotic > Omoto > Northern Omoto > Gamo (Fleming: 1976 and Bender: 2000)
 - > Spoken in Southwestern Ethiopia
 - > More than one million speakers (source)
 - > SOV
 - > Head final language
 - > Subjects trigger agreement but not objects
 - > Verbs inflect for person, number, gender, aspect and sentence type
 - Stem-Subject agreement-(Aspect)-(Subject agreement)*
 - > The agreement markers show variation depending the tense and mood of the verb
 - > Has converbs and switch reference forms
- 1) maro-z-i s'ilo-z-a eridi simm-i-d-e-s
wizard-DEF-NOM truth-DEF-ACC know.SS.CONV return-3M-PERF-3M-DECL
Having made out the truth, the wizard returned. (Hompó 1990: 390)

Predicate-Centered Focus Type in Gamo

I. Unmarked sentences

Plain assertions are not marked. Rather they are expressed by the canonical sentence structure.

- 1) SoA focus
adde-i bees'e-ra mitts-a k'ans'-ee-s
man-NOM axe-COM tree-ACC cut-3M-DECL
{What is the man doing to the tree with the axe?}
The man CUTS (a) tree with the axe. [field note]
- 2) Truth value focus
?ee gupp-ee-s
yes jump-3M-DECL
{The man jumps} yes, he JUMPS. [field note]
- 3) TAM focus
bro b-ee-s
yet go-3M-DECL
{Did Taye go to the market?} No, he WILL go. [field note]

II. Marked Constructions

The Morpheme -kko

The morpheme *-kko* is a polyfunctional morpheme in Gamo. It serves as a copula in non-verbal clauses (4), identificational marker (5) and focus marker (7). It marks TAM focus when it is attached to a finite verb. The structure of the verb looks like: stem-SUBJ.AGR-PERF-SUBJ.AGR-DECL-*kko*

- 4) As A copula
zallanča-i gene asi-kko
merchant-NOM cunning man-COP
Merchants are cunning people. (Hompó 1990: 390)
- 5) Identificational marker
na?a-z-a-kko
boy-DEF-ACC-ID
{Who is running?} It is the boy. [field note]
- 6) TAM focus
pitta gettettida-iss-a pitt-a-d-i-s-kko
wipe say.REL.PASS.PERF-NOML-ACC wipe-3M-PERF-3M-DECL-FOC [field note]
I HAVE cleaned what I was told to clean.

Clefts

Clefts are mainly used to mark term focus, but in some instances, they mark truth value focus. Although one needs the context in order to see what differentiates the two constructions, the difference to some extent seems to rest on the discourse status of the noun to which the morpheme *-kko* is attached. In term focus constructions *-kko* is attached to the citation form of the noun while for truth-value focus it is attached to a case-marked nouns which in turn entails definiteness. The term-focus reading of the cleft simply selects one referent out of many, to signal that referent exhaustively performed the action expressed by the backgrounded clause. However, in case of truth-value focus the reading is like 'It IS X who did Y' and it gives a confirmation about the identity of the performer of the action.

- 7) Truth-value focus
akkay, lepa ušša uuyaaada de?iza-i mac'c'asi-yo-kko
no, soft drink drink.CONV.PERF exist.REL.IPFV-NOM woman-NOM-TV
{The woman is not drinking a soft drink}
No, It IS the woman (who) drinks the soft drink. [field note]

Verb Doubling

This is a construction in which the gerundive form of the verb appears as a double before the main verb. It serves as a topic in the sense of 'As for ver, he is verb-ing.' The construction is used to mark both SoA and truth-value focus.

- 8) SoA focus
hamet-u-kk-u. Wos'o wos'-au-s.
go-3F-NEG-3F run.GER run-3F-DECL
{The girl is walking.} She is not walking. She is RUNNING.
[Lit: She RUNS RUNNING] [field note]
- 9) Truth value focus
ee iččečči ičč-i-d-e-s.
yes sleep.GER sleep-3M-PERF-3M-DECL
{He is sleeping, Isn't he?} Yes, as for sleeping, he IS SLEEPING.
[Lit: Sleeping he slept] [field note]

Conclusion

- > Tendency: plain assertion is unmarked, contrast is marked.
- > The morpheme *-kko* is polyfunctional; its function as a truth-value focus marker seems to be derivable from its function as identification via grammaticalization.
- > Verb doubling is used for SoA and truth-value focus



Literature

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