

**Verb apocope as a marker of predicate backgrounding in Yulu
(Central Sudanic, Chad/Sudan)**

Abstract (category: oral)

Provided that they are followed either by a pause or by the polar interrogative *nee* / *-ee*, some Yulu verb forms are articulated without their final vowel (non-intense ə). Contrast 1-2a and 1-2b below:

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| (1a) mēsó àayō
chief.DEF 3.come
‘The chief came.’ | (1b) nínō k-āay
who? FOC-come
‘Who came?’ |
| (2a) à-lāayō nēe
3.FUT-come Q
‘Will he come?’ | (2b) à-cē làay-ēe
3.FUT-NEG come-Q
‘Won’t he come?’ |

This apocope, which is then to be observed in very restricted contexts only (final position or before the polar interrogative), affects systematically – i.e. without any possible choice – the *subject-focalizing* forms (e.g. 1b), the *negative* forms (e.g. 2b), and, in dependent clauses, the *purposive* and the *consecutive* forms. It is clearly related to discourse hierarchy (or information structure) and indicates predicates that are backgrounded because of the assertion (or ‘focus’ in a wide sense) bearing either on another constituent (subject, negation) in the same clause, or on the predicate of the preceding main clause (in the case of purposive and consecutive).

As was pertinently pointed out by Hyman and Watters (1984), many African languages display two types of verbal inflections, one type consisting of usually shorter verb forms that are put ‘out of focus’ in the utterance hierarchy, may or may not be optional (‘pragmatic vs grammatical control’), and are frequently observed, be they free or compulsory, in the following contexts: constituent focalization (term focus), constituent questions (WH-questions), negation, imperative, relative clauses, and consecutive clauses. Furthermore, compatibilities of certain tenses/aspects with forms of either type are sometimes limited.

The aim of the present paper is to give a more detailed account of the situation of Yulu, in relation with similar phenomena in some languages of the same continent. Finally two different questions will be asked: 1. What is the real value of a function the marking of which is limited to the above mentioned contexts? and 2. Are such cases of interaction between verbal morphology and information structure attested outside Africa? If yes, where and how?

Reference

Hyman L.M. & J.R. Watters. 1984. Auxiliary Focus. *Studies in African Linguistics* 15/3, 233-273.