

## Book Reviews

Enoch Oladé Aboh, Katharina Hartmann and Malte Zimmermann (eds.): *Focus strategies in African languages. The interaction of focus and grammar in Niger-Congo and Afro-Asiatic*. (Trends in Linguistics, Studies and Monographs 191). Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2007. vi + 324 pp. EUR 98.00.

This volume brings together 11 articles which discuss aspects of focus and grammar in African languages. These articles approach this topic from a variety of theoretical backgrounds and deal with a variety of Niger-Congo and Afro-Asiatic languages. The book is divided into five sections: (1) focus and prosody, (2) information structure and word order, (3) ex-situ and in-situ strategies of focus marking, (4) the inventory of focus marking devices and (5) focus and related constructions. Though most chapters touch on several of these issues, each chapter is subsumed under the most relevant section. In the introduction to this book, the topics of the five sections are discussed. This discussion nicely draws connections between the various chapters and provides a good overview of the issues that are important in the rest of the book.

The first section of this book, "Focus and prosody", contains two chapters. The first, by Victor Manfredi, considers focus and prosody in eastern Benue-Kwa languages from a universal perspective. His starting point is prosodic unity: "all natural languages compute semantically relevant prosody as phrasal accent ('nuclear stress')" (18). He argues that tonal phenomena in eastern Benue-Kwa can be more efficiently accounted for if we replace autosegmental tonemes with phrasal accent and templatic verb morphology with a hierarchical syntactic structure. Manfredi shows how this can be done by reanalyzing data from a few Bantu languages. In the second article, Sabine Zerbian claims that there is no prosodic marking of focus in Northern Sotho. To arrive at this

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conclusion, she conducted production and perception studies in this language. Zerbian's conclusion seems to contradict Manfredi's hypothesis of prosodic unity. It also shows that Bantu languages differ greatly in their prosodic expression of focus. More detailed studies like Zerbian's would be welcome in order to find out just how much difference there is between languages. How languages like Northern Sotho could fit into Manfredi's framework remains to be seen.

The next section, "Information structure and word order", consists of two very different chapters. In the first one Tom Güldemann provides a functional explanation for OV word order in Benue-Congo. He argues that the standard grammaticalization approach cannot account for all instances of preverbal objects in this language family. He discusses several types of preverbal object that occur in different Benue-Congo languages. He shows that in all these cases, preverbal objects are less focal than postverbal objects. This is the result of the association of the postverbal position with pragmatic salience. The second article of this section discusses focus and topic in the left and right peripheries of Bantu clauses. Lutz Marten shows how this can be accounted for within dynamic syntax. In this approach, topic and focus interpretations arise from the context and not from specific positions in the structure of the sentence.

The section "Ex-situ and in-situ strategies of focus marking" contains three articles written within the framework of generative syntax, in which movement to a Focus Phrase within CP accounts for ex-situ focus constructions (constructions with the focused element in the left periphery). In the first chapter, Florian Schwarz shows that this movement account provides the best explanation for the distribution of the (focus) marker **ne** in Kikuyu. The competing cleft hypothesis, which views **ne** as an assertion marker following a zero copula, is convincingly shown to have many drawbacks. One of these is that it cannot account for Schwarz's new data, which shows that topics can precede the fronted focused phrase. The following chapter, by Mara Frascarelli and Annarita Puglielli, discusses the details of the extended C-domain, based on data from Somali and Afar. It is argued that focus and illocutionary force are strictly connected. Wh-phrases target an interrogative projection, activated by the focus field. For readers who do not know the details of generative syntax, this very theory-oriented article is probably difficult to understand and not very relevant. The last article in this section is written by Chris H. Reintges. He points out the typologically rare pattern in Coptic where so-called relative inflection surfaces with in-situ focus and wh-constructions. In ex-situ constructions, where relative inflection would be expected, it does not occur. Reintges accounts for this pattern by arguing that relative inflection marks operator-variable dependencies, and that in-situ focused and wh-phrases are covertly moved to the periphery of the sentence, creating such a dependency. In ex-situ constructions the same movement takes place overtly. The relative marking

is left unpronounced there because of a language-specific economy condition which prevents double marking.

The next section, entitled “The inventory of focus marking devices”, consists of two chapters. In the first one, Brigitte Reineke discusses the focus marker of the Gur language Byali. This well-structured article starts with an elaborate description of the focus system of the language, something that is all too often missing in the more theoretical chapters. The nominal focused constituent in Byali is always followed by a focus marker, both in in-situ and ex-situ constructions. Reineke goes on to show the similarity between ex-situ focus constructions and identificational or equative constructions. She shows clearly that the focus marker originates from the identificational verb (‘to be’). Ex-situ focus constructions can therefore be analyzed as bi-clausal: an identifying part and a presupposed verbal process representing the background. This naturally leads to the conclusion that in in-situ constructions, consisting of only one clause, the focus marker is more grammaticalized. In another clear and convincing chapter, Katharina Hartmann and Malte Zimmermann look into the properties of the marker **nee/cee** in Hausa. They argue that this is not a focus marker, as has often been proposed, but a focus-sensitive exhaustivity marker.

The last section of this book is entitled “Focus and related constructions”. Similarities between focus constructions and certain other constructions have been a recurring theme in previous chapters of this book. Especially the relation between the out-of-focus part or background of the focus construction and relative clauses has been much discussed. In the previous chapters of this book, relations between these two types of constructions are mentioned for Kikuyu, Somali, Coptic, Hausa, and Byali. A much less studied similarity is that between focus and narrative constructions. In the first chapter of this section, Anne Schwarz and Ines Fiedler take up this topic. They have studied the similarities between focus and narrative constructions in five Gur and Kwa languages and propose that the non-focal part of ex-situ focus constructions in these languages is a narrative clause. In these constructions the conjunction marker that starts narrative clauses has grammaticalized, or is grammaticalizing as a focus marker. The authors seem to have discovered an intriguing pattern and it would be interesting to find out in how many other languages it is attested. At least one Gur language does not seem to follow the pattern: Byali, discussed earlier in this book by Reineke, has a focus marker that developed from the identificational verb. In the last chapter of this book, Enoch Aboh examines another much-discussed similarity: that of *wh*-questions and focus constructions. Based on cross-linguistic evidence, he shows that there are focused and non-focused *wh*-phrases, which condition different answers in question-answer pairs. Focused *wh*-phrases require a focused constituent in the answer and non-focused ones require a non-focused constituent in the answer. This article is somewhat confusing, because it seems to imply that the answer

to a wh-question does not necessarily contain a focused phrase, as most researchers assume. However, Aboh uses a syntactic definition of focus, rather than the pragmatic definition used by most authors and by the editors in the introduction of the book. According to the pragmatic definition, focus refers to the part of the clause containing the most relevant or most salient information. Aboh defines focused as being displaced to a designated focus position, which means not all clauses need to have something in focus. This way he provides a different look on focus than other chapters do and shows interesting syntactic parallels between wh-questions and their answers.

As the above discussion of the chapters shows, *Focus Strategies in African Languages* is not just a collection of descriptions of focus systems in several languages. According to the editors, this book is “unique in its effort to combine careful empirical study and theoretical analysis of the prosody, morphology, and semantics of focus [in African languages]” (2). This combination is definitely praiseworthy, as is the inclusion of articles written with different and often conflicting theoretical assumptions. The many different approaches brought together in this book range from generative theory and universal grammar, via dynamic syntax, grammaticalization theory, functional linguistics and typology to experimental phonetics. This way an interesting overview of possible ways to study focus is provided.

A problem with some of the theoretical analyses in this book is that they make the chapters less accessible. The effort to bridge the gap between description and theory is commendable, but to do this effectively it is necessary for the chapters to be comprehensible without an extensive background in the framework used. Some articles, such as those by Frascarelli & Puglielli and Reintges are clearly written for people who have had advanced training in generative syntax. In a book like this, aimed at a diverse audience, it would have been better to include only chapters in which the used framework is explained and in which implications of the analysis outside that framework are made clear. That it is possible to do this even when using a complex theory such as minimalism is shown by Schwarz. Rather than using the theory as a starting point, he shows why it is a useful approach to deal with focus in Kikuyu. Marten uses a similar strategy with dynamic syntax as theoretical approach. First, he clearly explains the theory and then he shows how it can be usefully applied.

All in all, given the diversity of chapters in this book, there will be something in it for every reader with an interest in focus or in African languages. The editors show that focus is a lively field of study in which African languages have a lot to contribute.

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