

Contrastive topic marking in Avatime

Contrastive topics have usually been defined as a topics which evoke alternatives (Krifka 2007, Büring 2003, Vallduvi and Vilkuna 1998). In the prototypical case of contrastive topics, there are two alternative topics and there is an opposition between what is predicated of them. This opposition between comments could be described as implicature (Büring 2003) or as part of the core semantics of 'contrast' (Prince 1998). In English and German, contrastive topics are usually indicated by a specific type of pitch-accent and/or the syntactic construction of topicalization. Little work on contrastive topics has been done on other languages, especially on non-European languages.

Avatime is a Kwa language spoken in Ghana. In this presentation I will discuss two particles which seem to be used to mark contrastive topics in Avatime. These particles are the contrastive particle *kɔ* and the additive particle *tsyɛ*. Examples of the use of these particles can be seen in (1) and (2) below.

The particle *kɔ* is mostly used to indicate both alternative topics and an opposition between what is predicated of the alternatives. The expression of an opposition seems to be a core part of its meaning, as it can be used in cases where there is no alternative topic, but an opposition to a hypothetical situation. However, *kɔ* can also be used when there is no opposition between alternative topics in which case it simply seems to be a marker of topic switch.

The additive particle *tsyɛ* can be used with both topics and foci. It is usually translated as 'also' or 'too', but contrary to its English counterparts, it is used mostly with topics and less with foci. When used with topics, it can indicate, just like its English counterparts, that there is an alternative topic and what is predicated of the alternatives is identical. However, there is no strict condition of identity between predicates. Predicates can be quite different and seemingly unrelated, which makes *tsyɛ* look like a marker of topic switch in these cases (3).

In this presentation I will discuss the meanings and uses of these two particles in more detail, comparing them to the notion of contrastive topic as established in the literature.

- (1) Context: two other people have jumped from a burning house and were caught by the firefighters. Then the firefighters went to the third person.

a-yɔ *yɛ* *tsyɛ* *bɛ-sɔli* *yɛ*
 C1S-jump C1S ADD C1P-catch C1S
 'He jumped, he too, they caught him.'

- (2) Context: three brothers are sleeping when their house catches fire. The first two do not notice the fire and stay asleep.

ɔ-tanɔ-ɛ *gì* *yé* *o-nu* *ó-nyimemi-yè* *gɔgɔ-ɛ*
 C1S-third-DEF CON C1S C1S-be C1S-young.man-DEF last-CM
yɛ *kɔ* *a-yɔ*
 C1S CTR1 C1S-get.up

'The third one who was the last young man, as for him, he stood up.'

- (3) a. *àtrodze e-tsyidzyi* *sì* *yi-ze-hali*
 spider C1S-impatient COMP LOG:C1S-IT-gather
lì-fìflì-nɛ
 C3S-t.o.porridge-DEF

'Spider was impatient to go and collect the porridge.'

- b. *lulu* *tsyɛ* *e-vu* *yɛ* *sì* *ɔ́-kí-trɛ*
 small.ant ADD C1S-hold C1S COMP C1S-PROH-go

'Small ant was holding him so that he wouldn't go.'

References

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