

Khoekhoe focus marking

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1. Introduction

- spoken in Namibia (and surrounding areas), one of its official languages.
- formerly known as 'Hottentot', 'Nama' or 'Nama/Damara' (thoses were all ethnic denominations).
- part of the Khoe-family (Vossen 1997), formerly known as 'Central Khoisan'
- 'only' 24 clicks (four different influxes, six different effluxes)
- I use orthography from sources: tones are written differently and note that there is no voiced/unvoiced phoneme opposition for consonants.

2. Khoekhoe is similar to Germanic

Khoekhoe sentence structure is suprisinly alike to Continental West Germanic (i.e. German, Dutch, Afrikaans - a similarity also noted by den Besten 2002), a structure that can be displayed as:

(1) Vorfeld - P2 - Mittelfeld - Predicate - Nachfeld

The second position in Khoekhoe is filled by a subject clitic, attaching to the left, and a sentence-type marker (indicative, imperative or interrogative). These two element form a unit:

'On rare occasions, a speaker may pause between the initialized element and the rest of the sentence, which amounts to pausing in the middle of a word. ... Pausing at this point is avoided; the usual place to pause is after the declerative particle *ke*.' (Hagman 1977: 110)

(2) Khoekhoe (Hagman 1977: 110)

<i>/ðá-p</i>	<i>ke</i>	<i>!háése</i>	<i>'om-s</i>	<i>!'oá</i>	<i>kè</i>	<i>!xóé</i>
son-3SG.M	IND	quickly	house-3SG.N	to	PAST	run

'The son ran quickly to the house.'

All constituents of the sentence can be placed into the first position. If a non-subject constituent is placed in first position, than the subject is 'deposed' into the Mittelfeld and gets a multipurpose oblique marker *-à* ('oblique' being a misnomer, as it is still the subject). If the lexical verb is put into first position, the tense/aspect marking

preferably is place after the sentence-type marker. The preposed element is generally translated as being stressed (cf. already Dempwolff 1927). In answers to questions, the questioned element is normally put in the first position. So, the first position in Khoekhoe is at least a possible position to put something that has information focus.

(3) Khoekhoe (Hagman 1977: 110-111)

- | | | | | | | | |
|-----|--------------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| a. | <i>!háése-p</i> | <i>ke</i> | <i>/ðá-p-à</i> | <i>'om-s</i> | <i>!'oá</i> | <i>kè</i> | <i>!xóé</i> |
| | quicly-3SG.M | IND | child-3SG.M-OBL | house-3SG.N | to | PAST | run |
| b. | <i>'oms !'oá-p</i> | <i>ke</i> | <i>/ðá-p-à</i> | <i>!háése</i> | | <i>kè</i> | <i>!xóé</i> |
| | houseto-3SG.M | IND | child-3SG.M-OBL | quickly | | PAST | run |
| c.? | <i>!xóé-p</i> | <i>ke</i> | <i>/ðá-p-à</i> | <i>'om-s</i> | <i>!'oá</i> | <i>!háése</i> | <i>kè</i> |
| | run-3SG.M | IND | child-3SG.M-OBL | house-3SG.N | to | quickly | PAST |
| d. | <i>!xóé-p</i> | <i>ke</i> | <i>kè</i> | <i>/ðá-p-à</i> | <i>'om-s</i> | <i>!'oá</i> | <i>!háése</i> |
| | run-3SG.M | IND | PAST | child-3SG.M-OBL | house-3SG.N | to | quickly |

At the other side, larger phrases, e.g. relative clauses, can be moved to the end of a sentence, after the lexical verb:

(4) Khoekhoe (Haacke 1992: 155)

//i-b ge !oatara-e ge hõ /aena ra /aere-e
 3SG-3SG.M IND widow-3SG.N.OBL PAST find firewood PRES gather-3SG.N.OBL
 'He came upon a widow who was gathering firewood.'

3. Khoekhoe is different from Germanic

Besides the superficial similarity between Khoekhoe and Germanic, there are of course many differences. Four differences will be highlighted here. First, there is free 'scrambling' in mittelfeld, but no differential case marking (Hagman 1977: 114-115), which means that sentences like (5) are ambiguous. Also the tone structure does not help distinguish the two interpretations (Haacke 1999: 194). However, there seems to be a preference for the first interpretation, with the subject coming first in linear order.

(5) Khoekhoe (Haacke 1999: 194)

o-s ge Námǎ-s-ǎ tàrǎ-s-ǎ rà màà
 then-3SG.F IND nama-3SG.F-OBL woman-3SG.F-OBL PRES give
 'Then she, (being) the Nama, gave to the woman.'
 'Then she, (being) the woman, gave to the Nama.'

Second, there is nothing alike to Germanic stress to be used to highlight contextually important elements in the sentence. Khoekhoe is a tone language, analysed in depth in Haacke (1999). Each Khoekhoe lexeme is basically bisyllabic, distinguishing six

different moraic tone patterns. Haacke argues on phonetic grounds that there are four different tone levels on each syllable, but only a fraction of the possible tone movements is attested. He further differentiates for each lexeme a citation form with full tonal specification and a form with a reduced lexical specification (which he calls ‘sandhi’ – a rather wrong usage of the term in my opinion).

(6) Khoekhoe lexically determined tone patterns of bimoraic feet

Beach (1938: 131)	Haacke (1999: 49)	
	Citation	Reduced (‘Sandhi’)
low rising	12	21
mid rising	13	13
high rising	24	22
low mid level	22	22
high falling	43	32
mid falling	32	21

Theoretically, it would be possible to use the difference between a citations form and a reduced form alike to marking stress. However, Haacke (1999: 184-200) explicitly states that the usage of the two different tone patterns is determined by phrase structure. Roughly spoken, the first root in a lexical phrase gets the citation form, all other the sandhi form.

Third, if one would like to highlight various constituents, it is possible to put more than one constituent in the first position of the sentence, though this is only possible when at least the verb root and the tense marking are preposed together, and the subject is not deposed, so it looks a bit like left-dislocation:

(7) Khoekhoe (Hagman 1977: 111)

- a. ‘áo-p ke neetse tará-s-à kò ≠ái
man-3SG.MIND today woman-3SG.F-OBL REC.PAST call
‘The man just called the woman today.’

- b. neetse kò ≠ái ‘áo-p ke tará-s-à
today REC.PAST call man-3SG.M IND woman-3SG.F-OBL
‘The man just called the woman.’

- c. neetse tará-s-à kò ≠ái ‘áo-p ke
today woman-3SG.F-OBL REC.PAST call man-3SG.M IND
‘The man just called the woman.’

However, this only works with at least the verb in first position. It does not seem to be possible to express something like

(8) The boy ran *quickly* to the house.

Finally, there is a special tone structure in the formation of questions (Meriggi 1931; von Essen 1966; Haacke 1999: 197-204). Questions are characterised by a rising

intonation, a widespread feature of human languages. However, the raising is not towards the end of the sentence, but at the end of the first constituent of the sentence. Note that the questioned constituent is always placed in first position. As the examples in the literature are rather scanty and leave room for multiple interpretations, might it be possible to use such extra rising in contrastive focus?

4. Summary

- Due to tone structure, there is no suprasegmental form of stress.
- The first position of the sentence can be used to highlight elements of the sentence.
- Multiple highlighting only seem possible with at least the tensed verb being one of the highlighted elements.
- In the descriptions, there has been no other construction to mark focus.
- The rising tone is said only to be found on questioned constituents. However, the examples presented in the literature leave open some speculation on other usages: maybe contrastive stress?

5. References

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