Alagwa functional sentence perspective and “incorporation”

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Abstract
The outstanding syntactic feature of Alagwa and the other Southern Cushitic languages is that they have a distributed predicative syntax which provides three alternative positions for non-subject constituents: preverbal, postverbal or intra-verbal. This paper examines the factors that govern this kind of word order variation in Alagwa, especially the semanto-pragmatic profile of the intra-verbal position or “incorporation”. Incorporation within the verbal complex reduces the number of verbal complements by one to form a more compact type of utterance, depriving the incorporated constituent of its syntactic accessibility and its pragmatic prominence. Although there is a preference for generics, indefinites and inanimates to occur in incorporation, specific and definite NPs and deictics are also affected, and incorporation is even used for the function of complementary focus (Dik 1989). With respect to Sasse’s Eastern Cushitic based model (1984) of a progressive dissociation of semantic and pragmatic functions in syntactic structures, leading to a differentiation of language types between the extremes of a largely semantically based syntax and one where pragmatics takes the precedence, Alagwa (as representative of Southern Cushitic) takes a position further to the pole of a pragmatic orientation, since major syntactic devices, especially “noun incorporation”, are determined to a large extent by purely pragmatic factors.

1. Introduction
The outstanding syntactic feature of Alagwa and the other Southern Cushitic languages is that they have a distributed predicative syntax, i.e. “verbal functions are divided over the verb and an obligatory sentence building word that has been variously termed indicator particle, selector …” (Mous 2001: 125, preverbal clitic cluster, or most general, predicative marker (PM). The Alagwa clause in (1) presents the PM ningi which displays subject agreement for person (not number) and a TAM marking element which indicates sequential action, directly followed by the finite verb, bu’iyee’, which is marked for person and number of the subject (agreement), between the clause-initial subject, dende’eewós, and the clause-final direct object, yaawda.
(1) Alagwa clause structure S PM V O (postverbal position of direct object)
  dende’ee-w-ós ningi bu’-i-yee’ yaawáa
  folks-N-3SG.POSS SEQ:S3 pay-3-PF.PL dowry
  S PM V O
  ‘His folks paid the dowry.’

Both words, the inflected verb on the one hand and the predicative marker on the other, make up the verbal complex as a syntactic unit. This kind of split basic verbal structure provides three possible syntactic positions for non-subject constituents such as the direct object: before the verbal complex (preverbal), after it (postverbal) or inside (intraverbal):

(2) Syntactic options for the direct object
  S O [PM V] (preverbal position)
  S [PM V] O (postverbal position)
  S [PM O V] (intraverbal position or incorporation)

All three possibilities are realised in Alagwa. The object is in postverbal position in (1), in (3) it comes before the verbal complex, and in (4) it is inside.

(3) Alagwa clause structure S O PM V (preverbal position of direct object)
  dende’ee-w-ós yaawáa ningi bu’-i-yee’
  folks-N-3SG.POSS dowry SEQ:S3 pay-3-PF.PL
  S O PM V
  ‘His folks paid the dowry.’

(4) Alagwa clause structure S PM O V (intraverbal position of direct object)
  dende’ee-w-ós ningi yaawáa
  folks-N-3SG.POSS dowry
  S PM O V
  ‘His folks paid the dowry.’

Agreement in the PM is governed by the principle of leftward adjacency, i.e. in (1) and (4) the PM agrees with the subject which is immediately preceding, whereas in (3) it agrees with the object immediately to its left.\footnote{The effect could not be seen here, since the marker for third person subject $i$ and...} This il-

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1 Abbreviations: ABL ablative, ADV adverb, ALL allative, AN anaphorical base, BEN benefactive, BGND background marker, CAUS causative, CON construct case, COP copula, D determiner, DEP dependent marker, EMPH emphatic, F feminine marker, FOC focus, INDEF indefinite, IPF imperfective, LOC locative marker / locative adjunct, M masculine marker, MED Mediopassiv, O object, N neuter marker, OB oblique, OPT optative, PCP participle, PERF perfect, PF perfective, PL plural, PM predicative marker, PN predicational noun, POSS possessive, PROH prohibitive, PST past, REC reciprocal, REL relative, S subject, SEQ sequential, SG singular, SID subject-indefinite, SJN subjunctive, V verb, VEN ventive, VN verbal noun. The Iraqw glossing in (28-30) has slightly been adapted for the sake of compatibility with the conventions of the Alagwa glossing.

2 The transcription uses the following conventions: $’$ [’], / [’], hh [h], sl [h], tl [l’], ts [ts’].

3 Underlining indicates the incorporated constituent(s).

4 The effect could not be seen here, since the marker for third person subject $i$ and...
illustrates the different syntactic status of the incorporated direct object vis-à-vis the preverbal direct object: it is inaccessible for agreement in the PM.

The rest of this paper explores the semantics and pragmatics of this kind of syntactic variation, especially with respect to the last option which might be called “incorporation”.

2. **General organisation of information in the clause**

Basically, the linear organisation of information in an Alagwa clause obeys iconicity principles in that new information is presented in postverbal position, whereas given information precedes in preverbal position:

(5) Alagwa: correlation of syntactic position and information value

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final (postverbal) position</th>
<th>= NEW information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial (preverbal) position</td>
<td>= GIVEN information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How this linearisation of information works in narratives is shown by Mous (2001: 129): “In a story new entities are usually introduced in the post-verbal position as in the case in the first sentence of (11) [cited here as (6), R.K.]; in the next sentence in (11) [i.e. (6), R.K.] this previously introduced entity, troughs, now appears sentence-initially and with a referential demonstrative, while the new entity, milk, appears in the post-verbal position; in the next sentence this information is repeated and the sentence is marked as being background information. Such sequences and repetitions for cohesion are typical of narrative style.”

(6) i-n háts-is mlambebee; mlambabee-wá-d i-yaa hats-ir
    S3-PF full-CAUS:3M troughs troughs-N-D S3-PST full-3PL
    ilibaa. ilibaa k-i hats-ir-íi …
    milk milk DEP-S3 full-3PL-BGND
    ‘He filled troughs. Milk filled those troughs. The troughs being filled with milk …’

In such a string of sentences, there is a progressive development of new information introduced in postverbal position becoming given information and taken up in preverbal position again. The change of information status does not necessarily coincide with a switch in syntactic role as in (6), where the new constituent comes in first as an object and is taken up again as subject of the next sentence. Once introduced in object position, it may also be taken up again still as an object. In this case, an alternation in syntactic position indicates its changed information status: the object representing new information comes in postverbal position; and if it is taken up again as given, it will be in preverbal position. This is the case in (3) which is taken from a narrative with a sentence like (1) preceding it, presented in (7) as (7d) and (7e) in the context.

(7) Alagwa switch in syntactic position reflecting the changed information status of the direct object

third person plural object *i* are homophones.
In (7d), ‘dowry’ is introduced, therefore it comes in postverbal position, and in (7e) it is taken up again, therefore preverbal position.

3. Syntactic aspects of incorporation

Apart from the direct object, there are other syntactic constituents which might be incorporated between verb and PM, e.g. indirect objects (8) and adverbials such as locatives (9), temporals (11), modals (12) and subject continuity markers (13). Thus, the goal NP of speech act verbs is frequently placed between the PM and the verb, since the postverbal position is occupied by the new information which is a stretch of direct speech.

(8) Addressée of speech act verbs in incorporation
… diraw-uw-ód ningi daaqay-w-ád maahas …
… lion-M-D SEQ:S3 children-N-D ask
‘… and the lion asked the children …’

Spatial adverbs, such as diisí ‘there to’ (referential), diisáa ‘from there’ (referential), hadi ‘over there’, haqí ‘there’, taysí ‘there to’ (distal), taysáa ‘from there’ (distal), and entire locative phrases such as ka’afu-lí taatlimoo-lí (10) are also found in incorporation:

(9) Spatial adverb in incorporation
ningi haq-i haa’ut-iyee’ maa l-ii diis-i
SEQ:S3 there-ALL go-away-3:PF:PL then OPT-S3 there-ALL
raa’amamin-aa’
sing:3:PF:PL
‘And they went there and would be singing there.’
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(10) Locative phrase in incorporation
k-a  dah-at-i  l-aa  ka'afu-lí  taatlimoo-lí
OB.REL-S1/2  arrive-2SG-PF  OPT-S1/2  entrance-LOC  upper.pole-LOC
'ee'ibit
settle:2SG
‘When you arrive at the entrance of the cattle fold, settle down on
the upper pole above the entrance!’

Temporal adverbials such as hiinkóo ‘now’, leesá ‘at first’, 'asó ‘right then’
also occur in incorporation:

(11) Temporal adverbial in incorporation
l-aa  leesá  tsaaah-at  raa'amu-w-ós  k-od
OPT-S1/2  at.first  understand-2SG  song-M-3SG.POSS  AN.M-D
‘You first have to understand his song.’

Frequently, modal adverbials based on the dummy noun doo ‘kind, manner’
are used for creating cohesion in a text. They also often occur in incorpora-

(12) Modal adverbial in incorporation
gurutu-w-ód  ko  dootí  ’óoh-i  ningi  'iliidahhh
he-goat-M-D  OB.REL-O3SGM  so  grab-SJN.3SGM  SEQ:S3  escape
‘Grabbing the he-goat, he made off.’

As regards reference tracking, a nominal based on the feminine anaphor ta
modified by a possessive suffix that refers back to the subject is used for in-
dicating topic continuity. This constituent occurs in incorporation only:

(13) Topic continuity marker ta plus possessive suffix in incorporation
ningi  haa'ut  'ini  ningí  t-ós  kon
SEQ:S3  leave  3SG  SEQ:S3  AN.F-3SG.POSS  have:3SGM
‘He left and had – for his part – his share.’

The verb kaw ‘go to’ is on the brink of being grammaticalised to an inchoa-
tive marker ‘go to do something, be about to do’. Its verbal noun comple-
ment is always found in incorporation (14) and may also drag along with it
an adverbial (15).

(14) Inchoative kaw construction with incorporated verbal noun comple-
ment
ningi  qaasa  káy  'ilibáa-w-as
SEQ:S3  storing  go.to:3SGM  milk-N-3SG.POSS
‘And he went to store his milk.’

(15) Inchoative kaw construction with incorporated verbal noun comple-
ment plus locative adverbial
nungunu  tsée/aa-w-ád-i  slaslaymu  kayee’  sloomee
SEQ:REC  steppe-N-D-ALL  meeting  go.to:3-PF-PL  all
‘And they all went to meet in the steppe.’

There is also a special discontinuous “secondary object” construction (Mous
2001: 130) which is characterised by a primary object in intra-verbal position
and the secondary object in pre-verbal position. Usually there is a semantic
tie between both objects, e.g. a part-of-a-whole-relationship as with the
body-part found in (16).

(16) Primary body part object in incorporation

maa karaama-r-ød nanga hhaysoo óoh
then castrated.bull-F-D SEQ:O3SGF tail grasp

‘He grabbed the castrated bull by its tail.’

There is also a closed word class of special adverbs that might be called “in-
traverbials”, defined on the basis of their property that they occur in incor-
poration predominantly. Typically they give a modal or aspectual shading to
the action or event, e.g. kara ‘again’, qoro ‘definitely’, hara ‘simultane-
ously’, tsiiga ‘quickly, early’.

(17) ‘Intraverbials’ (= adverbs that occur in incorporation predomi-
nantly)

dakaa’imoo-w-ød i-yaa qoro nakats
baobab-M-D S3-PST definitely be.slippery

‘The baobab was definitely slippery.’

In general, every type of syntactic constituent could be incorpo rated, except
for the subject which is restricted to preverbal position. Incorporation does
not involve a syntactic decategorization of the items affected, e.g. nouns in
incorporation do not lose their “nouniness”, they still retain most of their
inflectional options, except for two things: they become inaccessible for
agreement in the PM and they could not be modified by relative clauses.

4. Semantic aspects of incorporation

Apart from the various syntactic roles of the incorporated constituents, there
is also a great variety as regards their semantic properties. Direct objects
tend to be generic, unspecific or indefinite when they are incorporated (18),
but incorporation also affects definite nominals, such as possessives (19),
personal pronouns (20) and even names (21).

(18) Generic, inspecific and indefinite objects in incorporation

(a) maarée ‘aslaa ‘ohis-it hara tays-í
PROH fire light-2SG at there-ALL

‘Don’t light a fire over there!’

(b) ningi ma’áy firin
SEQ:S3 water ask.for:3SGM

‘He asked for water.’

5 In closely related Burunge this is even clearer still, since the adverbs of this class,
called “preverbs” there (Kießling 1994: 187), have to undergo a morphological op-
eration, as soon as they are extracted from incorporation. This may serve as an indi-
cator of the degree of functional entrenchment of this syntactic position.
(19) Definite object modified by possessive in incorporation
   gaa sa-k-a $\text{hhyt-og}$ geemáw-t-i
   thing BEN-OB.REL-S1/2 husband-2SG.POSS let-2SG-PF
   lo-k-o /ag na diraw
   OPT-SID-O3SGM eat by lion
   ‘Why did you leave your husband to be eaten by a lion?’

(20) Personal pronoun in incorporation
   hiinkóo makaay i-yaa $\text{ana}$ /íis-it
   now animal S3-PST 1SG rescue-3SGF
   ‘Now this animal has actually rescued me!’

(21) Personal name in incorporation
   ha’ut-aree’ na Neetíi tsuunkutim-an
   leave-VEN.PL SEQ-S1/2 Neti pinch-1PL
   ‘Come here and let’s pinch Neti!’

From this it becomes clear that incorporation is not constrained by semantic properties such as indefiniteness or genericity, but determined by pragmatic considerations. It is a syntactic device for tying up information which is composed of at least two conceptual entities into a single compact bundle which is to be analysed without internal informational substructure any more. So the incorporated constituent loses syntactic and conceptual independence, merging with the verbal complex to form a monolithic conceptual block.

5. **Riddles as a testing ground for information structure**

Riddles could serve as a perfect testing-ground for this hypothesis. They have been characterised as verbal puzzles “in which a statement is posed in challenge and another statement is offered in response either to the hidden meaning or the form of the challenge” (Okpewho 1992: 239). Because of this strict limitation to only one statement, they are forced to condense an aesthetic message in a minimum of only one proposition. Typically they construct a situation as a complex whole with no given information to draw upon, everything is presented as new information. Many of the Alagwa riddles (22) which have complex initial propositions come up with a syntactic structure that employs incorporation of an adverbial and / or a direct object.

(22) Incorporation in propositions of riddles

(a) ‘ufoodo’o-w-í’ i-yaa rawáa xu’
   door-M-1SG.POSS S3-ABL up face
   ‘My door faces upwards.’

(b) ‘Aali-w-ór i-ni $\text{sihheeri}$ /isin
   Ali-M-1PL.POSS S3-PERF teeth make:3SGM
   ‘Our Ali has grown teeth.’

This observation supports the point that incorporation is in fact used as a strategy to build a pragmatic unit and to conceptualise something as a thetic block which would otherwise have to be presented resorting to a structure of figure vs. ground.
6. The puzzle of question words

Taking incorporation as a strategy of shifting syntactic constituents into the pragmatic background and depriving them of their conceptual independence, it may come as a surprise to find that question words like mii ‘what’, malee ‘how’ and kaa[li] ‘where’ occur in incorporation. This seems to be at odds with the fact that they are very salient information-wise and typically associated with inherent focus. So why should they be incorporated to form a bigger chunk of information (23) in which the question word itself is not singled out as specifically salient?

(23) Incorporation of question words

(a) i-yaa malee tleehhit-ir
   S3-PST how turn.into-3PL.PF
   ‘What did they turn into?’

(b) mukolookoli-r-oo’in y-aa kaa dahh-at
   clan-F-3PL.POSS S3-ABL where come.from-3SGF
   ‘Where does their clan come from?’

(c) 'ini i-naa mii 'etaa kaw-t he-t?
   3SG S3-PERF what give.bad.sign go.to-3SGF AN.D-F
   ‘So what kind of bad sign does this (bird) give?’

In a number of cases (24), these question words do not constitute real information questions, but rather form rhetoric questions that signal incredulity, perplexity, helplessness, surprise, indignation or reproach.

(24) Incorporation of question words in rhetoric questions

(a) s-ii mii 'awaanah-at
   BEN-O1SG what cheat-2SG
   ‘So why do you cheat me?’

(b) garimoo-w-ód ningi slaqw fayu-w-ós ko-d,
   elder-M-D SEQ:S3 shoot arrow-M-3SG.POSS AN.M-D
   'asó Laa’áy 'oo káalf slay?
   but Laa’áy O3SGM where get:3SGM
   ‘The old man shot his arrow, but could he ever get Laa’áy?’

(c) hiinkkóo 'iyóo-r-oor he-t s-aa mii hhâáb
   now mother-F-1PL.POSS AN.D-F BEN-S1/2 what tell
   ‘What shall I say mother now?’

(d) kii 'aa malée Laa’áy /atlisit
   2SGF S1/2:PST how Laa’áy seize-2SG
   ‘How could you ever dare to seize Laa’áy?’

The interrogative pronoun and the direct object are placed between the PM and the verb to form an informational unit here. The utterance is an outburst in which Laa’áy reproaches his mother for having repeatedly tried to surrender him to the lion, in an appeal to the auditory for justifying his own counter-trick by which he had managed that, instead of himself, his father had been caught as the victim of the
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For the majority of cases the explanation is a different one. In both instances, rhetoric questions (24) and information questions (23), the incorporated question words are used for the function of completive focus in the sense of Dik (1989: 282) and Dik (1991: 269), in that the item fills in a gap in knowledge, adds a missing bit of information in a presupposed scene, in order to form a concise whole, to complete the picture. There is no competing information, as would be the case with contrastive focus. Using the term “focus” in this context might be misleading, since it is rather the idea of completion that is central here. With this in mind, it seems to be perfectly reasonable to reserve the intraverbal position (of incorporation) for this kind of function.

Contrastive focus in Alagwa questions is formed quite differently: either by a cleft construction of the model X na kaloo ‘X is which?’ (25), where X could be a noun or a relative clause, na being a focalising copula and kaloo the focalised question word ‘which’ in right dislocation, or by a different cleft construction X mii Y ‘what kind of X is it that Y’ (26), where X is the fronted focalised constituent modified by the attributive question word mii ‘which, what kind of’ and Y is a relative clause.

(25) Alagwa: Contrastive focus questions with predicative kaloo ‘which’

(a) Laa’áy ná káloo?
   Laa’áy COP.FOC which
   ‘Which one is Laa’áy?’

(b) hiinkóo hati wée na káloo?
   now daughter EMPH COP.FOC which
   ‘Which daughter is it then?’

(26) Alagwa: Contrastive focus questions with attributive mii ‘what kind of’

hiru míi he-k kw-aa xots-u tays-áa
person what AN.D-M REL.M-ABL walk-PCP.M there-ABL
   ‘What kind of person is this that comes walking from over there?’

Subject focus questions in Alagwa are formed by a construction X na miya or miya na X, in which the focalising copula na of (25) takes over subject focus function as PM.

(27) Alagwa: Subject focus question

miya na ’arin Laa’áy hhak!
who S.FOC see:3SGM Laa’áy lacking
   ‘Who would see Laa’áy? No one!’

It is remarkable that Iraqw and Gorwaa deviate typologically in this respect. Just like the other West Rift languages, it also has the option to incorporate direct objects (and adjuncts) freely into the verbal phrase, i.e. Whiteley’s (1958: 31) “encapsulation” and Nordbustad’s (1988: 305f.) “clause type 2”. Mous (1993: 251ff.) clearly shows that the difference between “external” and “internal”, i.e. incorporated, objects is in information structure. External objects are always singled out as pragmatically prominent and conceptually

lion in the end.
independent from the action or event encoded in the verb, whereas internal objects merge with the verbal phrase to form a solid block of information. Thus the construction with internal, i.e. incorporated, direct object in (28a) would be an appropriate answer to questions like “What are you doing?” or “Are you eating porridge?”, whereas the “external” direct object construction in (28b) serves as an appropriate answer to questions like “What are you eating?” or “Are you eating porridge?”.

(28) Iraqw: Internal vs. external direct object constructions (Mous 1993:
254)

(a) a fa/á-r /áay
   S1/2 porridge:CON-F eat:1SG
   ‘I am eating porridge.’

(b) fa/a a /áay
   porridge O3SGF eat:1SG
   ‘I am eating porridge.’

In contrast to Alagwa, however, Iraqw does not incorporate question words. Instead it has a fairly elaborate system of interrogative PMs or “selectors” based on the interrogative clitic ma ~ m (Whiteley 1958: 41ff., Nordbustad 1988: 224ff., Mous 1993: 287f.).

(29) Iraqw: Interrogative PM (Mous 1993: 287)

   laarí ma /ay-áan
   today what-O3SGF eat-1PL
   ‘What are we eating today?’

There is the alternative strategy to form a cleft construction with the question word in right dislocation (Mous 1993: 283).7

(30) Iraqw: Cleft question with the question word in right dislocation
    (Mous 1993: 284)

   láa gá-r ta /ay-aan a milá
   today thing:CON-F DEP.S1/2 eat-1PL:SJN COP what
   ‘What do we eat today?’

Although Mous (1993: 287) concedes that the semantic difference between (29) and (30) is not clear, a comparison to the Alagwa opposition of contrastive vs. completive focus suggests that – while both languages concur in employing cleft constructions for contrastive focus function – the interrogative PM (29) in Iraqw takes over the completive focus function which is encoded in Alagwa by the incorporation of question words.

7. Conclusion

In discussing the pragmatics of noun incorporation in Eastern Cushitic, Sasse 1984 observes a historical drift which is characterised by a progressive dis-

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7 Left dislocation is also possible for xaylá ‘when’ and daqmá ‘at what time’ (Mous 1993: 286f.). There is an overall tendency towards ellipsis of the question word in right dislocation (Mous 1993: 284) with concomitant reanalysis of the dummy head noun as a question word.
sociation of semantic and pragmatic functions in syntactic structures. This
development leads to a differentiation of types which spans out between the
extremes of languages with a largely semantically based syntax and those
where pragmatics takes the precedence. Within this framework, the findings
show that Alagwa (as representative of Southern Cushitic) takes a position
further to the pole of pragmatical orientation, since major syntactic devices,
especially ‘noun incorporation’, are determined to a large extent by prag-
matic factors.

In a number of interrogatives, Alagwa question words, such as mii ‘what’,
miyaa ‘who’, malee ‘how’, kaa – kaali ‘where’, occupy the position of in-
corporation between PM and finite verb which is typically used for back-
grounding information and building a monolithic block of information in
which no single bit of information receives salience. This finding seems to
violate the general assumption that question words, being focalised inher-
tently, should be incompatible with backgrounding, i.e. a syntactic constit-
ent cannot at the same time be in focus and part of a thetic information
block. The reason of this apparent contradiction is that these questions are
never used for the purpose of contrastive focus (which is done by clefts of
the kind ‘the place that … is where?’), but instead for what would be “com-
plementary focus” in Dik’s (1989) terminology. The perspective in these
questions is not on the prominence of the missing bit of information that is
needed to round up the picture, but on the unity of this picture as a whole.
This is why the structure of these “complementary questions” goes together
with the syntactic structure used for building larger unitary blocks of infor-
mation. The alleged contradiction is resolved by a similarity in perspective
on an informational unit, not on the salience of one of its parts.

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