The particle ɓe in Fali: Evidence for the genesis of a clause-final negator?

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Fali is a (S)VO language of Northern Cameroon that has been classified as an isolated branch within the Adamawa group by J. Greenberg (1963). Negation is marked by a clause-final morpheme, a typological feature that is recognized as being very common in VO languages of (west-)central Africa, but very uncommon in languages outside this area (Güldemann 2008; Dryer 2009). In Fali, the clause-final element, a particle ɓe, does not only signal negative meaning but also occurs finally in affirmative contexts, namely in temporal adverbial clauses and in extra-clausal constituent constructions with Setting and Theme function (Dik 1997:387ff.).

Particles of a *ɓa form that appear in clause-final position of affirmatives and negatives are evidenced in other Adamawa languages of this area as well. In these languages they do not signal negation (even if their co-occurence with negative morphemes is apparent), but tardative and praecoctive functions of a category that Schadeberg (1990) determines as the category of counter-expectation.

Aim of the paper is to argue for the final particle ɓe in Fali as a polysemous element whose overarching function in negative and affirmative constructions is to mark a change of common ground, a function that would be in line with the functional dimension of clause-final ɓa forms in other Adamawa languages. It is hypothesized that there may be evidence for the particle ɓe in Fali to have arose as a negation marking morpheme (negator) in a diachronic process that started with a marked negative construction involving a primary negation marker and a clause-final element of the counter-expectation category.

References

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