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The Marking of Plural Participants on Verbs in Beria

This talk presents the system of marking plural participants on the verb in the Wagi dialect of Beria which shows an interesting behaviour. Beria, also called Zaghawa in the literature, is a Saharan language of the Nilo-Saharan language phylum spoken in the border region of Sudan and Chad. Like other Saharan languages, it has complex verbal morphology including person indexing. The focus of the talk is on the final morpheme (FM) of the verb which – among other functions – interacts with the person indexes to mark plural participants of both argument roles (A and P). Yet the functional characterization of the FM in terms of number is not straightforward. Apart from participant constellations with plural marking as expected, we find “singular” forms in plural contexts and “plural” forms in singular contexts.

We will present the forms and distribution of the FM showing that the main effect of the so-called “marked form” is to disambiguate between several verb forms that otherwise would be underspecified for number. A further function is the distinction between 1st person plural exclusive and inclusive not yet identified in the better described Kube dialect. Finally, this phenomenon plays a role in the interpretation of the alignment system of Beria in terms of split intransitivity.

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