

Scalar focus morphemes: a cross-linguistic survey

Sergei Tatevosov, Moscow State University

The present paper surveys the phenomenon attested in a variety of areally and genetically unrelated languages: morphemes expressing scalar focus values such as ‘even’, ‘at all’, ‘ever’, etc. (hereafter SFMs). SFMs are interesting from different points of view. Structurally, they often exhibit exceptional properties as compared to other morphological material within a word. Semantically, their scope is wider than that of the majority of other morphemes, as they affect the truth conditions of the whole proposition, giving rise to different kinds of presuppositions. Structural and semantic characteristics of SFMs can be addressed from both language-specific and cross-linguistic perspectives. Cross-linguistically, one can be interested in how the meaning and distribution of SFMs are restricted across languages. In a given language, one has to find a way to treat adequately the structure of SFM containing word forms and paradigms of such forms. Here follow two examples of SFMs from typologically diverse languages — Chukchee and Bagwalal.

1. **Nominal SFM:** Chukchee (Chukot-Kamchatkan, Northern). Nominal form in Chukchee contains up to 15 affixes, counting both derivational and inflectional ones. The SFM *am//em* is a prefix which is external to the circumfix marker of absence *a-* *-ka//e-* *-ke* but internal to the comitative circumfix *ga-* *-ma*, as (1) demonstrates:

- (1) a. **em**-titi-t b. **em**-e-ŋinqeŋ-ke c. g-**am**-melgar-ma
SFM-needle-PL SFM-ABS-boy-ABS COMMIT-SFM-gun-COMIT
‘even needles’ ‘without a single boy’ ‘even with the gun(s)’
- b'. *e-(?)**em**-ŋinqeŋ-ke c'. ***am**-ga-melgar-ma
ABS-SFM-boy-ABS SFM-COMIT-gun-COMIT
‘without a single boy’ ‘even with the gun(s)’

am//em is not polar-sensitive: it serves well in both positive (1a, c) and negative contexts (1b). In the latter case *am//em* indicates that (a) there is a pragmatic scale with upward entailment on which all members of the set of objects referred to are ordered; (b) there is an object located at the edge of the scale which has a highest probability to take part in the situation in question; (c) this object does not participate in the situation; (d) this fact entails that any other object does not participate in the situation either.

2. **Verbal SFM:** Bagwalal (North-Caucasian, Andic). In Bagwalal the SFM is a negative-polarity item: its distribution is limited to negative verbal forms. Negative verbal forms occur in two series: plain and “emphatic”, as represented in Table 1. Emphatic negative forms are built according to the following two rules:

- (I) SFM *-da-* attracts the whole inflection of the corresponding plain form;
(II) “*-da-* plus inflection” complex is suffixed to the Imperfective stem.

Therefore, the Imperfective stem serves as a landing site for any string of inflectional suffixes headed by the SFM *-da-*.

Semantically, the SFM *-da-* can refer to two kinds of pragmatic scales. First, it may involve the scale on which each point corresponds to *n* occurrences of a situation, *n* varying from 1 to ∞ . In this case the following reading obtains: ‘the situation has not occurred/won’t occur even once’ \Leftrightarrow ‘the situation has never occurred/will never occur’. Second, the scale of different degrees of intensity of a situation can be taken into account, yielding the reading ‘even the slightest manifestation of the situation has not occurred/won’t occur’ \Leftrightarrow ‘the situation has not occurred/will not occur at all’. (Cf. the interpretation of (1b) from Chukchee.)

Table 1. Partial paradigm of the negative forms of the verb *ašti* ‘listen’.

	Plain		Emphatic
Preterite stem	a□ti-□'i listen-NEG 'didn't listen'	Preterit	a□ti-ra- da -□'i listen-IPFV-SFM-NEG 'has never listened'; 'didn't listen at all'
	a□ti-□'-u-b listen-NEG-PART-N 'one who didn't listen'	Negative Participle	a□ti-ra- da -□'-u-b listen-IPFV-SFM-NEG-PART-N 'one who has never listened'; 'one who didn't listen at all'
Imperfective stem	a□ti-ra:-□'-e listen-IPFV-NEG-PROSP 'am/is/aren't going to listen'	Negative Prospective	a□ti-ra- da :-□'-e *a□ti-ra- da-ra :-□'-e listen-IPFV-SFM-NEG-PROSP listen-IPFV-SFM-IPFV-NEG-PROSP 'am/is/are never going to listen'; 'am/is/aren't going to listen at all'
	a□ti-bi- še listen-BI-PRH 'don't listen!'	Prohibitive	a□ti-ra- da -bi- še listen-IPFV-SFM-BI-PRH 'never listen!'; 'don't listen at all!'
Prohibitive stem	a□ti-bi-□'-a: listen-BI-NEG-INF 'not to listen'	Negative Infinitive	a□ti-ra- da -bi-□'-a: listen-IPFV-SFM-BI-NEG-INF 'lit. to never listen'; 'not to listen at all'
	a□ti-bi-□'-a:-□'-o-b listen-BI-NEG-INF-FUT-PART-N 'one who won't listen'	Negative Future Participle	a□ti-ra- da -bi-□'-a:-□'-o-b listen-IPFV-SFM-BI-NEG-INF-FUT-PART-N 'one who'll never listen'; 'one who won't listen at all'

Chukchee and Bagwalal data touch on a range of major theoretical and empirical issues. Consider the following, among others:

STRUCTURE (**language-specific:**) What is the morphological structure of the verb in Bagwalal and the structure of the noun in Chukchee? (**cross-linguistic:**) What are attested patterns of the SFMs distribution, and what are non-attested patterns?

MORPHOLOGY-SYNTAX INTERFACE: (**language-specific:**) Are the word forms containing SFMs in Bagwalal in Chukchee opaque to the phrase structure rules? (**cross-linguistic:**) Can the distribution of SFMs provide an independent evidence supporting the lexicalist approach to the morphological form?

MORPHOLOGY-SEMANTICS INTERFFACE: (**language-specific:**) What are the scopal relation between SFMs and other items with clausal scope, e.g. quantifiers, modal operators, etc? (**cross-linguistic:**) Are the clusters of semantic characteristics of SFMs cross-linguistically stable?

Although the present study does not address any particular morphological theory, it aims to discuss briefly implications different theories draw about the SFMs structural characteristics. It appears that one of the main borderlines between different ways of accounting for this phenomenon (as well as for many other phenomena) is that between lexicalist and non-lexicalist views of morphology.

Proponents of the non-lexicalist theories such as Distributed Morphology argue the grammar constructs all the words in the syntax. In fact, in case of SFMs which has the scope as wide as, for example, that of quantifiers it can be expected that syntactic phrase structure rules applying at the level of Logical Form can also govern the distribution of SFMs.

Lexicalist theories can offer different accounts for the properties of word forms containing SFMs. For example, a theory that makes use of inheritance mechanisms when describing Bagwalal emphatic negative paradigm should allow multiple inheritance, as SFM -da- is not merely infixated into the corresponding plain form; rather, it inherits properties from two different nodes.