

The syntax of Jóola-Eegimaa verb stem morphology

Jóola-Eegimaa (Eegimaa, henceforth), an endangered Atlantic language of the Niger-Congo family, has a rich agglutinative morphology that results in complex words that often permit multiple readings for the same surface form. The regular nature and limitations of these ambiguities suggests that they are generated by systematic knowledge that each Eegimaa speaker has acquired. If we are to preserve the knowledge people have, we cannot simply catalogue the outward forms they produce, but we must understand the organizing principles of that knowledge that permits it to be used creatively to meet new circumstances. Our investigation of verb stem structure in Eegimaa shows that the superficial linear order of stem affixes that does not seem compositionally transparent arises from syntactic movement of sub-stem morphemes in a way that preserves the underlying structure that is necessary for compositional interpretation (particularly thematic and scopal relations). Moreover, our analysis requires that a copy of complex *v* movement will be left behind and that copy has just the right contents to predict the patterns of possible and impossible verb reduplication. Insofar as our endeavor is successful, it reveals how general features of the language faculty interact with specific lexical properties of Eegimaa morphemes to predict the order and interpretation of Eegimaa verb stem morphology, including a range of phenomena that our theory-driven methodology leads us to uncover.

Words for the index

Argument affix
Aspectual affix
Atlantic
Benefactive (BEN)
Clitic
Compositional (interpretation, anomaly)
Copy (of movement)
Eegimaa
Features (human, animate, plural)
Head movement

Head Movement Constraint (HMC)
Inner stem (movement, formation)
Morphological component
Niger-Congo
Noun class
Reciprocal
Reduplication
Reflexive
Shortest Move
Verb stem