

What is definite about ‘definiteness’ in Wolaitta?

Most Omotic languages are reported to have various morphological and syntactic means to distinguish between indefinite and definite nouns. Modification by a word equivalent in meaning to the numeral ‘one’ and/or the use of ‘basic, unmarked nouns’ are frequently mentioned indications that the noun is indefinite whereas dedicated affixes are used as morphological markers for definiteness. More importantly, in several Omotic languages including Wolaitta, having a positive value for definiteness is a prerequisite for the realization of other nominal categories such as gender, number and (partly) case since these later categories cannot be morphologically marked when the noun is indefinite (i.e a basic lexical form). In the presentation, I will discuss this strong interdependence between definiteness and other nominal categories in Wolaitta. Secondly, I will address analytic and interpretive problems raised in earlier studies. Adams (1983) claims that Wolaitta has more than one morphological and prosodic means for indicating ‘definiteness’. On the other hand, Wakasa (2008) argues that various morphological forms of nouns that are generally known as ‘definite’ (e.g. from the English translations) mark a category that is broader than ‘definite’. He used the notion ‘+/- concrete’ to designate the use of these morphemes. In her analysis of participant marking in Wolaitta, Azeb Amha (2009) distinguished (non-scalar) definite-indefinite forms of nouns in Wolaitta without addressing earlier divergent suggestions on the topic. Based on extensive text material, own native-speaker intuition plus using insights from linguistic typology as heuristics, in the present paper the author proposes an alternative analysis of definiteness in Wolaitta.

Adams, B. A. 1983. A Tagmemic analysis of the Wolaitta language. PhD thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Amha, Azeb. 2009. Participant marking and valence in Wolaitta. In Gerrit Dimmendaal (ed.), *Participant marking: Case Studies from Twelve African Languages*, 335-386. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Hompó, Éva. 1990. Grammatical relations in Gamo: A pilot sketch. In R. J. Hayward (ed.), *Omotic Language Studies*, pp. 356–405. London: School of Oriental and African Studies.

Wakasa, Motomichi. 2008. *A Descriptive Study of the Modern Wolaytta Language*. Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Tokyo