

The focus suffix in Kamya

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14 August 2020

1 Introduction

In Kamya, the so-called “focus suffix” is a morphological marker that has various related functions. These can all roughly be described as marking a participant as being particularly salient or prominent in the discourse in some way. These functions are to form intensifiers, to mark contrastive focus and to convey the reflexive as well as to express explicit or forceful superlatives.

The suffix is realised as *-ko* after vowels and sonorants and elsewhere as *-uko*. It is always the final suffix attached to a word, occurring after any derivational or inflectional suffixes.

- (1) a. *çera-ko* ‘woman-FOC’
- b. *kez-uko* ‘dog-FOC’
- c. *bata-da-ko* ‘parent-PL-FOC’
- d. *şerf-ata-ko* ‘family-INST-FOC’
- e. *uşinta-ko* ‘milkman-FOC’

It should also be mentioned that a word bearing the focus suffix is generally accompanied by an exaggerated intonation peak on its primary-stressed syllable.

- (2) Cenko acadat na kengiz.
cen-ko aca-da-t na kengi-z
1SG.NOM-FOC sour-CAUS-NPST DEF fig-ACC
‘I pickled the figs myself!’

In general, the focus suffix has a preference to attach to pronouns and personal names rather than common nouns. That said, it is still used with common nouns but attaches much more often to nouns referring to animate entities, especially human beings, than those referring to inanimate entities. This follows the hierarchy in (3) below (adapted from Dixon 2010: 137–8).

- (3) pronouns > proper nouns > human > non-human animate > inanimate

This and other similar hierarchies are known as the nominal, animacy or agentivity hierarchy.

2 Intensifiers

The focus suffix is used to form intensifiers, predominantly with pronouns. This overt marking is not, however, obligatory and the information may instead be conveyed solely by a change in intonation. This is, however, a common enough strategy, especially with pronouns. This may be used in either subject or (direct/indirect) object positions, as can be seen below.

- (4) Meko tereredit na kudiz.

me-ko tere-r-dit na kudi-z
1PL.NOM-FOC write-PL-NPST DEF book-ACC

‘We wrote the book ourselves.’

- (5) Koş hay bithar tazuko.

koş hay bith-ar-Ø ta-z-uko
all 3PL.NOM hate-PL-PRES 2SG-ACC-FOC

‘They all hate *you*.’

- (6) A co reçit aşuko şi leylare biganyaz.

a co reçit a-ş-uko şi leyla-re biganya-z
3SG.NOM MIR give.NPST 3SG-DAT-FOC INDEF flower-GEN bouquet-ACC

‘He [to my surprise] gave *her* a bouquet of flowers.’

However, it is not only pronouns to which the focus suffix may attach in this role. It is also found on common nouns.

- (7) Na saletiko reçit na kiraçaz.

na saleti-ko reçit na kiraç-az
DEF queen.NOM-FOC give.NPST DEF order-ACC

‘The queen herself gave the order.’

3 Contrast

As illustrated below with personal names, the focus suffix can be used to explicitly indicate contrast on subjects, objects and other arguments alike. In this case, the prior or presupposed information is morphologically unmarked and the contrasting information bears the suffix.

- (8) Cen be pezi az; Hawlako pezi az.

cen be pezi-Ø a-z Hawla-ko pezi-Ø a-z
1SG.NOM NEG know-PRES 3SG-ACC PN.NOM-FOC know-PRES 3SG-ACC

‘I don’t know him, *Hawla* knows him.’

- (9) Cen be maldit Yuhanaz; cen maldit Markazuko.

cen be mal-dit Yuhan-az cen mal-dit Mark-az-uko
1SG.NOM NEG see-NPST PN-ACC 1SG.NOM see-NPST PN-ACC-FOC

‘I didn’t see Yuhan, I saw *Marak*.’

- (10) Cen be vercuz Antuniş; cen vercuz Rigaşuko.

cen be ver-cuz Antun-iş cen ver-cuz Riga-ş-uko
1SG.NOM NEG help-FUT PN-DAT 1SG.NOM help-FUT PN-DAT-FOC

‘I won’t help Antun, I’ll help *Riga*.’

As with the similar intensifier function, this marking is not obligatory but is nevertheless an extremely common accompaniment to changes in intonation.

4 Reflexive (and beyond)

The focus suffix is also attached to an oblique pronoun coreferent with the subject to convey the reflexive. In this function, the focus suffix is obligatory and, when used purely as a reflexive-marking strategy, arguments bearing the suffix are not given special intonational prominence, though this may still be present (e.g. for reasons of contrast).

- (11) Yuhan_i maldit azuko_i na paçurişa.

Yuhan mal-dit a-z-uko na paçur-işa
PN.NOM see-NPST 3SG-ACC-FOC DEF mirror-LOC

‘Yuhan_i saw himself_i in the mirror.’

- (12) Marya_i reçit aşuko_i ş’ işaz.

Marya reçit a-ş-uko ş’ işa-z
PN.NOM give.NPST 3SG-DAT-FOC INDEF gift-ACC

‘Marya_i gave herself_i a present.’

This strategy serves to explicitly disambiguate coreferential from non-coreferential arguments, as seen below.

- (13) a. A_i imit az_j.

a imit a-z
3SG.NOM kill.NPST 3SG-ACC

‘He_i killed him_j.’

- b. A_i imit azuko_i.

a imit a-z-uko
3SG.NOM kill.NPST 3SG-ACC-FOC

‘He_i killed himself_i.’

This can also be extended to coreferentiality between two arguments, neither of which are a subject. This is found, for example, between direct objects and possessors of indirect objects.

- (14) Cen_i imit az_j n’ areko_j zalerta.

cen imit a-z n’ a-re-ko zaler-ta
1SG.NOM kill.NPST 3SG-ACC DEF 3SG-GEN-FOC gun-INST

‘I_i killed him_j with his_j gun.’

However, in cases such as this, this may lead to ambiguities.

- (15) a. A_i imit az_j n’ areko_j zalerta.

a imit a-z n’ a-re-ko zaler-ta
3SG.NOM kill.NPST 3SG-ACC DEF 3SG-GEN-FOC gun-INST

‘He_i killed him_j with his_j gun.’

- b. A_i imit az_j n’ areko_i zalerta.

a imit a-z n’ a-re-ko zaler-ta
3SG.NOM kill.NPST 3SG-ACC DEF 3SG-GEN-FOC gun-INST

‘He_i killed him_j with his_i gun.’

5 Superlatives

In Kanya, comparative and superlative adjectives are not ordinarily morphologically differentiated from one another, both being formed by addition of the suffix *-(i)k*.¹ However, the focus suffix can optionally be attached to adjectives following this suffix to create explicit or forceful superlatives.

(16) A na zuriko kada, na sidh cen pezit di.

a Ø na zuri-k-ko kada na sidh cen pezit
 3SG.NOM COP.PRES DEF tall-CMP-FOC man.NOM DEF REL 1SG.NOM know.NPST
 di
 already

‘He is the tallest man I’ve ever met.’

Note that, in this usage and context, the focus suffix is invariably realised simply as *-o* due to the phonological process of word-internal degemination.

Abbreviations

1	first person	DEF	definite	NEG	negative
2	second person	FOC	focus suffix	NOM	nominative
3	third person	FUT	future	NPST	near past
ACC	accusative	GEN	genitive	PL	plural
CAUS	causative	INDEF	indefinite	PN	personal name
CMP	comparative	INST	instrumental	PRES	present
COP	copula	LOC	locative	REL	relativiser
DAT	dative	MIR	mirative	SG	singular

Reference

Dixon, R. M. W. 2010. *Basic Linguistic Theory: Grammatical Topics*, vol. 2. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹Thus, *tithik*, derived from the adjective *tith* ‘pure’, may mean either ‘purer’ or ‘purest’ according to context.