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R.C. ABRAHAM AND SOMALI GRAMMAR: TONE, DERIVATIONAL MORPHOLOGY AND INFORMATION STRUCTURE*

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1. Introduction

R.C. Abraham came to the study of Somali towards the end of his illustrious career as an Africanist. Although he is best known amongst Somali scholars for his lexicographical work, he also wrote a substantial body of grammatical description. In particular, in 1951 he published with Solomon Warsama, *The Principles of Somali*, and his *Somali-English Dictionary* includes a grammatical outline called 'The Basis of Somali' (Abraham 1964: 258-332). Both of these works are based on northern Somali dialects. In this paper I will briefly discuss the nature of Abraham's contributions to the description of the grammar of Somali.

The Principles is itself a substantial piece of work: it is 481 pages long and contains 59 chapters. It is not clear to me how the division of labour fell between Warsama and Abraham, but the work is impressive given Abraham's relatively short exposure to the language:

> Somali is a language of vast richness and raciness, and much still remains to be done by my successors, for two years of study are insufficient – in the case of some West African languages, I have required twenty five years! ('Introduction', p. 2)[1]

Abraham's understanding of Somali is even more impressive given that he does not appear ever to have visited the Horn of Africa.

More detailed discussion of the content of *Principles* follows in subsequent sections. A few more general points can be made here. One of the more difficult aspects of trying to view Abraham's work in its historical perspective is establishing when the works were written, relative to other work in the field. This is a result of the difficulties Abraham met in finding financial support to publish his work. *Principles*, for example, is a very poorly produced volume, roughly reproduced and bound; the second edition has errata and addenda sheets pasted into many of its pages. This is because Abraham was forced to undertake the whole of the production and publication himself, as his rather bitter note in the introduction makes clear:

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* I would like to thank B.W. Andrzejewski for information about R.C. Abraham's work and life, and Xuseyn Nuur for reading through the Somali language material in this paper. Thanks are also due to Peter Gurnham, Marie Fowless, and Liz Early in Toxteth, Liverpool for facilities enabling me to write this paper.

1 The 'Introduction' in Warsama & Abraham (1951) is not paginated. I have therefore for convenience used page numbers (p. 1 etc.).

> The entire work of typing, duplicating and binding has fallen on myself and the method adopted was the only one within my means: it might be thought that as I was Lecturer in Somali at the School of Oriental and African Studies, a grant might have been expected from their Publications Fund – previous bitter experience dissuaded me from seeking a further rebuff. ('Introduction', p. 2)

His *Somali-English Dictionary* also seems to have had a chequered publication history, as B.W. Andrzejewski has related to me. The published volume appeared in 1964 by the University of London Press, but appears to have been written some years earlier. The colonial government of British Somaliland originally agreed to publish the work but Somali independence in 1960 intervened. The project lapsed until some creative lobbying of the new minister of education by Muuse Galaal and B.W. Andrzejewski gained Somali Government backing. The result is that this work belongs to the late 1950s rather than the mid-1960s. And once again Abraham seems to have received little support in preparing the work:

> The present burdensome task of printing – at least five pounds per page for setting up by monotype – has necessitated my typing the whole work for production by photo-offset, a gigantic task on top of the enormous task of compiling the dictionary. If in a few places the print is defective, I must crave the indulgence of the user for an author seventy years of age and suffering from heart trouble. (1964: viii)

A second problem for commentators is caused by Abraham's academic isolation from the work of other scholars in this field, possibly a result of his late entry to it. His *Principles* does not refer to earlier work by leading scholars in Cushitic and Somali linguistics, even major figures like Reinisch (1900/1903) and Cerulli (1919). In fact he is remarkably candid about his ignorance of some work:

> I should like to say how closely I am in agreement with the conclusions reached in Somali phonetics by the late Lilias Armstrong; apart from some slight misunderstandings due to lack of knowledge of the language, there are very few points where I disagree with her – my own conclusions were arrived at independently, and I was not aware of her work until one of my students called my attention thereto. ('Introduction', p. 2)

We might note that Armstrong's paper 'The phonetic structure of Somali', even now the outstanding study of Somali phonetics, was published in 1934.

We can compare this, for example, with Martino Moreno's (1955) work on southern Somali dialects, *Il Somalo della Somalia*. Moreno was a contemporary of Abraham's: he started work on Somali in Rome in 1949, later visiting Somalia (1955: v). His work is centrally positioned within the Cushitic linguistic tradition, and securely based on reviews of the earlier literature. His footnotes are full of detailed comparisons of his own data and analyses with work by others on various Somali dialects. Interestingly, *Il*

Somalo, finished in 1953, discusses details of Abraham's analyses in *Principles* (see for example Moreno 1955: 5, fn. 3).

These delays and difficulties with publication, and his lack of discussion of other work, mean that in many cases Abraham's work is more pioneering than its publication dates suggest and often very original, even if in some cases he is retracing ground covered by other scholars.

Rather than review the works in great detail, I will pick out three areas where Abraham's contribution to the study of Somali grammar seems to me to be particularly significant. These are the issues of the role of tone, the description of derivational morphology, and the marking of information structure – focus and topic – in syntax; all centrally important areas of the grammar. Before that, though, as a reader, I must note that one difficulty in using Abraham's work is the density and fragmentation of its presentation. It seems clear that *Principles*, for example, was intended as a teaching grammar rather than a reference grammar:

> ... from my experience with my pupils, a student who works conscientiously through this book has nothing to fear from any construction. ('Introduction', p. 1)

It is tempting to add that any student who could work through the book would have nothing to fear from any intellectual exercise. There may have been exceptionally gifted and durable students in the 1940s, but the task facing one trying to 'work through' *Principles* is a daunting one. There are no exercises or texts, and the organisation of the many sections is hard to fathom, being arranged neither according to grammatical levels and categories, nor to any pedagogical principle of simple to complex structures. Despite some descriptive shortcomings, C.R.V. Bell's (1953) *The Somali Language* is a far better teaching guide to Somali from roughly the same period. By comparison, Abraham's later work 'The Basis of Somali', being a short reference grammar, is much clearer in structure and usable. I can speak as a satisfied customer: I have used it for years and still refer to it for one of Abraham's strongest points: his excellent use of examples.

Despite the difficulty of his work, I hope to show that Abraham displays in crucial areas a great insight into the Somali language and even when his descriptive acuity occasionally fails him, for example in the transcription of vowel and consonant length, or tone marking,[2] his ideas are always interesting and often, it seems to this reader, correct.

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[2] Abraham's work predated the adoption of an official Somali orthography, and his own transcription changed over the years. For the convenience of readers not familiar with Somali, I have taken the liberty of transliterating all examples he used into the official Somali orthography, except where noted. Page references are given to allow the reader to check the various original transcriptions. For details of the official orthography, see Saeed (1987: 13-26). In addition the following tone marks are used: á = HIGH TONE, à = HIGH FALLING, a (unmarked) = LOW

2. Tone

One important area where Abraham is on the side of the angels is the question of the role of tone in Somali, and whether Somali can be called a tone language. The behaviour of tone in relation to accent or stress has been a difficult issue in Somali grammatical description. Lilias Armstrong (1934) had noted that in northern Somali word tone seemed significant (in a complicated relationship with stress), giving pairs like (1) and (2) below (using Armstrong's own notation for tone):

(1)	a.	gees \	HIGH FALLING TONE	'horn'
	b.	gees·	MID TONE	'direction'
(2)	a.	i˙ nan.	HIGH-LOW	'boy'
	b.	i· nan˙	MID-HIGH	'girl'

We might prefer to identify MID as a positional variant of LOW tone but the essential observation is of course correct.

However, tonal differences are mainly put to grammatical work in Somali, marking, for example, gender, number and case in nouns, and individual inflectional paradigms in verbs. So, for example, the (a) examples above are masculine in gender and the (b) examples feminine, while (3) below shows the marking of number by tone:

(3)	a.	èy	HIGH FALLING	'a dog'
	b.	éy	HIGH	'dogs'

Lexical differentiation by tone can be seen as the minor case: an offshoot of the marking of grammatical information by tone.

A full working out of the role of tone in Somali had to await the work of Andrzejewski (1964, 1968, 1979). The system is briefly outlined in Saeed (1987). In the 1940s and 1950s the issue was far from clear. Moreno (1955) notes Armstrong's findings for northern Somali dialects but says, basically, that the jury was still out on tone in southern dialects – the jury being Andrzejewski, then researching the area:

> Occorrerà attendere i risultati delle ricerche fatte dall'Andrzeyewsky in Somalia per conoscere la funzione del tono nel benādir, dārōd e digil. (Moreno 1955: 22)
>
> It will be necessary to await the results of the research done by Andrzejewski in Somalia to understand the function of tone in Benaadir, Daarood and Digil.

Bell (1953) is misleading on the subject:

> Somali is not a tone language in the accepted sense of the term, that is words are not normally differentiated only by tone. However, the tone, that is the rise and fall of the voice in speaking is of importance just as it is in English. The sentence 'He's dead' may mean (a) 'He is dead,' (b) 'I am afraid he is dead,' (c) 'Is he dead?' or (d) 'Surely he's not dead?'. The only difference is

> the tone of the voice. In Somali you should notice the rise and fall of the voice in the principal kinds of sentence. (1953: 9)

This comparison with English is unfortunately wrong: it is not possible to form a question from a statement in Somali by just changing the intonation. The role of tone in conveying grammatical information means that as a resource it is tied up: sentence-types are differentiated by specific morphemes identifying questions, various types of imperatives, optatives etc. (see Saeed (1987: 69ff.) for details).

Bell continues, even more confusingly:

> When words are the same but are different in meaning they are (in theory at least) distinguishable by tone, e.g.: (a) Common nouns `inan` 'boy', `inan` 'girl', `nirig` 'baby he-camel', `nirig` 'baby she-camel'. (1953: 9)

Note that there is no tone marking on the above examples to help the student. In fact neither tone nor stress is marked on any of Bell's examples.

In contrast, Abraham is very sure on the importance of tone in Somali grammar. In *Principles*, Chapter 9 is entitled 'Word-tone and semantical musical tone of Somali nouns', and this chapter goes on to prefigure in embryonic form the findings of Andrzejewski (1964) on the relationship between tone and noun declension classes.

Some of the detail of his tone transcriptions in this chapter might be amended, and he identifies an extra tone, RISING, which subsequent work has not confirmed: most accounts use just HIGH, LOW and (HIGH) FALLING tones. Nonetheless, the chapter is full of interesting suggestions. For example, it has been proposed by several writers, e.g. Saeed (1987: 21), that since the HIGH FALLING tone only occurs on long vowels and diphthongs, and specifically where we would expect the sequence HIGH-LOW on bisyllables, that it is possible to analyse Somali with just two underlying tones, HIGH and LOW, by identifying long vowels and diphthongs as two tone units. Going through *Principles* for this paper, I was interested to find Abraham making the same point, characteristically in a single parenthetic line:

> Monosyllables have falling tone in the singular – a falling tone being in many languages, a compound of a high tone coalescing with a low tone. (1951: 46)

By the time of the *Dictionary*, Abraham is forcefully emphasising the role of tone. The full title of the grammatical section is 'The basis of Somali: grammar, stress and tone', and there is a clear signal of intent in the Introduction:

> It has been contended that Somali is not a tonal language; in actual fact, the tonal changes given to words which are the same in form, but different in meaning, are the very background of Somali. Unless we rigidly adhere to tone, meaning vanishes and the rhythm becomes distorted to an extent where the language is no longer itself. (1964: vii)

All of the language material in both *Principles* and the *Dictionary* is tone marked – an essential convention more honoured in the breach by subsequent work. In the *Dictionary* Abraham reiterates the importance of tone in both nominal and verbal morphology, using examples like (4) below:

(4) shúqulkan sámèe 'do this work!'
shúqulkan samée 'he did this work' (1964: 331)

where he is identifying a tonal contrast between the verb forms for the imperative and the independent past tense.

We can speculate that it was his background in West African languages that helped Abraham be so clear on the importance of tone in Somali. If so, this is one of the areas where his position as a latecomer to Cushitic linguistics was of benefit to him and the field.

3. Derivational affixes

A second area of the grammar where Abraham's work is important is that of verbal and nominal derivational affixes. Somali has a complex system of affixes by which, for example, the argument structure of verbs may be altered along various semantic parameters. So, to use some of Abraham's own examples, we find pairs like in (5) and (6), where a causative verb is formed by adding an affix to a base verb:

(5) a. wuu gelayaa 'he is entering'
b. wuu gelinayaa 'he is causing (him) to enter' (1951: 334)

(6) a. wuu qadeynayaa 'he is having lunch'
b. wuu i qadeysiinayaa 'he is giving me lunch' (1951: 335)

or pairs like (7) and (8) below, where an affix causes an autobenefactive interpretation – what Warsama and Abraham (1951) call 'middle verbs':

(7) a. wuu dhisayaa 'he is building (it)'
b. wuu dhisanayaa 'he is building (it) for himself' (1951: 342)

(8) a. wuu hagaajinayaa 'he is arranging (it)'
b. wuu hagaajisanayaa 'he is arranging (it) for himself' (1951: 345)

or a pair like (9a-b), where a change of affix produces a passive interpretation:

(9) a. wuu hubsanayaa 'he is investigating (it)'
b. wuu hubsoobayaa 'he/it is being investigated'
(Warsama & Abraham 1951: 360; Abraham 1964: 287)

Given both his activities as a lexicographer and his background in Hausa studies, it is perhaps not surprising that Abraham would be sensitive to verbal derivational affixes, and he includes in his *Principles* several chapters of analysis, with a large number of examples, of causativising, transitivising, passivising and autobenefactive (or 'middle') affixes. Some of the detail of

his analysis has inevitably been changed by later work, but his coverage prefigures an important line of subsequent investigation, including notably Andrzejewski (1968) and Puglielli (1984).

Abraham also dealt with nominal derivational affixes in great detail. Chapter 43 of *Principles*, for example, is called 'Noun Terminations' (pp. 311ff.) and lists around 25 types of derivational affix, each with subtypes and a profusion of examples, showing how nouns can be formed from other syntactic categories, and from other nouns. The following are a few selections with a couple of the many examples originally given:

> The suffix -ad. This termination -ad forms the female of certain animals. Examples: doofaar 'the wild boar', doofaarad 'sow', baqal 'the he-mule', baqlad 'the she-mule'. (p. 317)
>
> The suffix -asho. Nouns in -asho (always feminine) are formed from Conjugation 2 verbs which end in -anayaa, by substituting -sho for -tay of 2nd person singular past tense. Examples: wuu dhimanaya 'he is dying', way dhimatay 'she died', dhimasho 'death', wuu dhunkanayaa 'he is kissing', dhunkasho 'a kiss'. (p. 322)
>
> The suffix -niin. The root of a Conjugation 1 verb+niin forms a verbal noun, in some cases masculine, in other cases, feminine. If the verb is transitive, these verbal nouns are so too. Examples of masculines: wuu duubayaa 'is folding', duubniin-kii (i) 'the act of folding', (ii) 'the crease, fold'; wuu barayaa 'is teaching', barniin-kii 'the teaching'. (p. 330)
>
> The suffix -e. This -e denotes the male doer of an act ... xabaal > xabaashii 'the grave' ... xabaalqode 'grave-digger' (wuu qodayaa 'is digging'). (p. 323)

The complexity and elegance of the system of lexical derivational affixes is one of the striking features of Somali grammar, and the detail given to this area in Abraham's work is greater than in other work of the time. Bell (1953) uses verbal derivational affixes to set up verb conjugation (as have done most writers since), but his coverage is limited and he has little to say on noun derivation. Moreno (1955) covers both verbal and nominal affixes but not nearly in the detail of Abraham's work. It has to be said, though, that Moreno's analyses are often more elegant and more clearly presented. His ear, too, is sharper for the morpho-phonological structure of his data.

For work giving as much attention to derivational affixes as Abraham's we have to wait until Andrzejewski (1968) for verbal affixes, and Puglielli (1984) for nominal affixes – the latter being one of the by-products of the large Italo-Somali dictionary project in Rome and Mogadishu (see Agostini et al. 1985). This remains one of the most interesting areas of Somali grammar from a comparative and typological perspective.

4. Information structure

The third area of Abraham's work I would like to discuss here is information structure, by which I mean the grammatical packaging of an utterance to fit the context of a discourse. This is the level at which terms like *given* and *new*, *theme* and *rheme*, *focus*, *topic* and *comment* are often applied in the literature.

For the Somali grammarian the importance of an uttered sentence's information structure is clear very early on: Somali has a number of lexically empty morphemes whose role it is to mark focused elements, for example noun phrases. Moreover, we very regularly find sentences with extra NP arguments outside the predication, acting as topics or afterthought topics. We will see examples of both of these features shortly.

It has emerged that there are two problems facing the linguist in this area of Somali grammar: firstly to recognise and outline the use of the basic system; and then, equally difficult, to describe the morphosyntactic complexities associated with, for example, the focus markers. For, most likely due to their historical development, focus markers are not simply neutral elements dropped into sentences but impact on a whole range of syntactic relations: agreement, case marking, the distribution of clitic pronouns, word order, etc. I have tried to describe some of this behaviour in Saeed (1984).

Moreno (1955) provides a short sketch of the NP focus markers baa and (a)yaa, the cleft structures introduced by waxa, and the morpheme waa, often identified as a verb focus marker – which he takes to be a preverbal particle. He notes that the speaker of Somali has to use these markers of information structure in declarative sentences:

> wā, yā, bā, waḥa sono indispensabili ... quando il compiuto o l'incompiuto e usato in proposizione principale affermativa. Esse sono le «particelle staffette», come io le chiamo, del verbo principale affermativo. (1955: 259)

> waa, yaa, baa and waxa are indispensable when the complete or incomplete is used in an affirmative main clause. These are the 'message-carrier particles', as I call them, of the main affirmative verb.

Bell has a fuller treatment. He recognises the function of these morphemes and stresses their importance in speaking Somali, for example:

> Baa draws attention to a noun, and waa draws attention to a verb. If you use baa you know what the verb is likely to tell you but the noun (subject or object) is something freshly introduced to your notice: in an extreme case it will cause you surprise. If you use waa you assume a knowledge of the noun, probably because it had already been mentioned previously in the conversation, and what happened will be unknown to you, and in an extreme case, a surprise, e.g.: (i) Baa: 'The dog it was that died (but the man recovered)' Eygii baa dhintay, 'Ali (but not Ahmed or Farah) will go with me' 'Ali baa i raa'eya; (ii) Waa: 'The man (you expected) has come' Ninkii waa yimi. (1953: 25-26)

Bell, it seems to me, does a good job of briefly introducing English speakers to the use of these morphemes; and he covers one of the main morphosyntactic irregularities associated with NP focus: that focused subjects show a reduced concord pattern with an agreeing verb.

Abraham agrees with the main point:

> The word ba' is the most important word in Somali and it is no exaggeration to say that if its usage is not understood, most Somali sentences cannot be explained ... ba' means 'is the one who' and *grammatically* emphasises the word after which it stands.[3] (1951: 72).

And he goes on to point out the major concord irregularity:

> A pecularity of this word ba' (which also applies to ya' when the latter is synonymous with ba') is that when preceded by a plural noun, ba' (or ya') has the meaning 'are the group who is'. 'Group' here requires a *singular* verb to follow (not plural verb), such singular verb being in the masculine singular if the noun in the plural (subject) is grammatically masculine. Similarly, the verb is in the feminine singular after a noun-subject which is grammatically feminine. (p. 73)

This prefigures Andrzejewski's (1968, 1975) identification of *restrictive* verbal paradigms, though interestingly, none of these earlier authors detects the tonal difference between normal verb forms and those showing agreement with focused subjects, as described in Andrzejewski (1968).

There are several significant areas where Abraham's account of information structure in *Principles* is more detailed and interesting than other contemporary work. We can take, as examples, his treatment of the distribution of subject clitic pronouns, of word order and of topic structures with waa. I will look at these very briefly.

In *Principles* Abraham investigates the effect of NP focus on clitic pronouns. When the subject NP is not in focus, a coreferential clitic pronoun may occur:

(10) Carab wuu tegay 'an Arab man went' (1951: 75)
Arab$_i$ waa+uu/he$_i$ went

where the subject clitic pronoun 'uu 'he' is coreferential with the NP Carab 'an Arab man.' Similarly in a sentence with a non-subject NP in focus we find examples like (11) where capital letters in the translation show focus:

(11) ninkii faraskii buu dilayaa
man+the horse+the baa+he beating
'the man is beating THE HORSE'

However, as Warsama and Abraham point out, if the subject NP is in focus, no coreferential clitic may occur:

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[3] Note that Abraham consistently transcribes baa and (a)yaa with short vowels.

> ... faraskii buu dilayaa 'he is beating the horse' . *This buu consists of the emphatic ba' (with elided -a)+-uu meaning 'he' [JIS = subject pronoun of the series shown in (8b)]. **The emphatic ba' ... may only stand after a grammatical subject, whatever may be the logical object ... Hence, ba' after a noun = 'is the one who...', buu after a noun = 'is the one whom'. (p. 78)

Abraham is here correctly identifying the odd subject clitic distribution and, it seems to me, proposing the plausible hypothesis that the clitic pronouns are providing a back-up system for identifying the grammatical relations of the sentence. This is even more plausible given the identification in later work (e.g. Andrzejewski 1979) of a blocking of nominative case in focused NPs.

Abraham is also very bold, if less successful, in trying to explain the use of focus on subjects in terms of a difference between what he calls 'logical' and 'grammatical' subjects, making, it seems, a parallel between sentences like (12) and English passives like (13):

(12) faraskii buu dilayaa
horse+the baa+he beating
'he is beating THE HORSE = it's THE HORSE he's beating'

(13) the horse is being beaten by him

For Abraham the NP faraskii 'the horse' in (12) is logically the object but 'grammatically' the subject (1951: 78). This parallel between English passives and the use of baa on subjects is quite revealing at the pragmatic level – and it starts the reader/learner thinking about information or thematic structure strategies – but at the morphosyntactic level faraskii is neither nominative in case as Abraham wrongly suggests, nor acts like a subject in terms of even the reduced verbal concord we find in focus sentences. Nonetheless, this suggestion, like many of his observations on NP focus, is original and serves as a flag or warning to English speakers that this area of Somali is quite unlike their own language.

Abraham also recognised the influence of information structure on word order and he attempts in *Principles* to map out the complicated interrelationship between focus, clitic pronouns and word order in a way that prefigures recent work by Lucyna Gebert (1986). Abraham uses a variation of slot and filler tables to map out the possibilities, e.g.:

> Noun subject + pronoun-object + verb:
>
> noun-subject ba' short pronoun object verb ...
> noun-subject long pronoun buu short pronoun verb ...
> noun-subject ba' noun-object verb ...
> noun-object noun-subject ba' verb ...
> noun-subject noun-object buu verb ...
> noun-object buu noun-subject verb (1951: 81-82)

This is just a tiny excerpt from his tables: in each case he provides many example sentences and discusses, though typically in a very epigrammatic

way, the frequency of the various orders. In this, he was beginning work that still has to be comprehensively followed up – on the use of information structures and their consequent word orders in discourse.

Finally in this area, Abraham's work is innovative in identifying topic structures in Somali. As can perhaps already be seen from the brief examples discussed here, this is probably because of his willingness to provide semantic and pragmatic explanations at any level of analysis. He does not seem to have any of the desire to rigorously separate levels of analysis that we associate with some of his contemporaries and successors, under the influence we might assume of American structuralist-descriptive linguistics. So we continually find in his work not only tables of forms but, sprinkled around, suggestions of the meaning and use of forms. In retrospect these suggestions are often more valuable than his morpho-phonological analyses. Thus, we find suggestions throughout *Principles* that sentences with waa should be seen as topic structures, for example:

> in ninkii wuu furayaa ... and naagtii way furaysaa, wuu means 'it is he who' and way means 'it is she who', so the sentences literally mean 'the man – it is he who is opening' and 'the woman – it is she who is opening', respectively. In other words, the subject 'he' is indicated by the -uu, and the subject 'she' is indicated by the -ay which is tacked on to way. (1951: 73)

Abraham's identification here of the clitic pronouns as arguments of the predication, and of the sentence-external status of the coreferential full NPs is one early contribution to the debate about 'double' subjects and objects in Somali, and parallels my own conclusions in Saeed (1984).

Abraham also seems to propose the label 'accusative of reference' for topic elements and to exclude them from the argument structure of the main predicator; see for example the discussions of comparatives in:

> naagta+ninkii waa ka wanaagsanyahay 'the man is better than that woman' ... In all the above sentences, the second part (i.e. what follows +) is intransitive and the first part (i.e. what precedes +) is the *accusative of reference* ('as to that woman'). (1951: 275)

It seems that the proposal for the above example, repeated again in (14a) with a gloss, is a topic structure like that shown in (14b):

(14) a. naagtaa ninkii waa ka wanaagsanyahay
woman+that man+the waa more good+is
b. [TOPIC that woman], the man is better

This proposal occurs again in Abraham (1964):

> L. ACCUSATIVE OF REFERENCE
>
> A noun is often in the accusative in the sense of 'with reference to'. Examples: birtan waxaa lugu qodbay, sibidhka ('as to this metal, the place as to which people have embedded it in, is the cement') 'this metal is embedded in cement'; rasiidhka magacaaga geesta kale kaga qor ('in

> regard to the receipt, write your name on the other side'),'write your name on the other side of the cheque!','endorse the cheque!'. (1964: 311)

Once again, Abraham's interpretation of the literal meaning of Somali sentences is very revealing.

So we can see that in this crucial area of information or thematic structure, Abraham's analyses, though somewhat epigrammatic, concern themselves with both sides of the problem: with the use of different sentence-types and with the grammatical complexities of focus and topic constructions. In investigating word order, the role of clitic pronouns, and the evidence for topics, his work picks out some of the most difficult issues in Somali syntax and foreshadows some seminal work by Andrzejewski in particular. In some cases his work highlights areas which still await description: in particular we still await discourse-based studies of the use of these different information structures.

5. *Conclusion*

As was claimed in the introduction, Abraham as a grammarian of Somali is an interesting figure. Compared with his contemporaries, he is probably less successful as a writer of a reference grammar than Moreno, and less successful as a writer of an introductory teaching grammar than Bell. Nevertheless he is often less cautious and more insightful about syntax than either. In both *Principles* and the 'Basis of Somali' section of his *Dictionary*, the shorter of his descriptions, his work is full of bold suggestions, based on an enviably large amount of data. When we think of the circumstances of his research: as an elderly man, often unwell, working with Somali speakers in London, we can perhaps only wonder at the scale of his achievement in compiling a major dictionary and two works of grammatical description.

His glosses and translations are still a valuable aid to the syntactic structure of the language. Moreover his attention seems to have been caught by some of the most difficult and interesting areas of the language: the derivational morphology, the problem of focus markers and topic structures, and the role of tone. In each of these areas his work prefigures important lines of research by his successors. Besides, who could resist his grammarian's personal enthusiasm, as evidenced in his introduction to the *Principles* volume:

> I shall always be glad to give personal help to those interested in the study of this absorbing subject. My telephone number is Hendon 2297. (1951, 'Introduction', p. 2)

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