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Commiserative *kaasi* and mirative *garaa*: two modal particles in Muna

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Abstract

Detailed studies of modal or attitudinal particles from minority languages are fairly rare. This paper gives a description of two such particles in Muna, an Austronesian language spoken in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia: the commiserative marker *kaasi* and the mirative marker *garaa*. The use of *kaasi* expresses the speaker's feeling of pity or empathy towards a suffering person. Mirative *garaa* signals to the addressee that the information heard or given is new, unexpected and surprising, either to the speaker himself/herself, or to the main character in a narrative. The analysis presented here is based on many years of interaction with speakers of Muna, and adds typological diversity to the field of descriptive pragmatics.

1. Introduction

Modal particles – also called pragmatic markers, discourse particles or attitudinal particles – are notoriously hard to describe.¹ They typically signal the speaker's attitude towards the statement made (whether, for example, it is certain, unlikely, necessary), or they encode the status of the information conveyed (new, surprising, shared, salient, etc.). They may also have other shades of meaning, some of which can be very difficult to catch. There is extensive literature on the topic; see, for example, the references in chapter I.3 of Bonifazi et al. (2016).

Particles in European languages have been studied in considerable detail, including English conversational particles such as *oh* in the following brief dialogue: (Speaker A:) *Did you learn to speak Chinese?* (Speaker B:) *Oh yes*. The *oh*-prefaced response indicates that the answer is self-evident, given that speaker A, an interviewer, knew that speaker B was teaching poetry at a Chinese university (Heritage 1998:294). German modal particles such as *doch*, *eben*, *ja*, *mal*, *wohl*, each of which have quite a variety of functions, have also drawn much attention, see e.g. Bross (2012) and references there. However, detailed studies of modal particles from minority languages are still fairly

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Language and Culture Research Centre at James Cook University in Cairns in February 2020. I wish to thank the participants for their input, and especially Professors Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald and R.M.W. Dixon for the regular opportunities I have had to visit LCRC since 2012 and for our stimulating conversations and interaction. Paul Kroeger and Steve Watters gave helpful comments on a draft version. I would also like to convey my heartfelt thanks to the many Muna people who have helped in my study of their language over the past 36 years. For this paper, conversations with Muslimin Uka (MU) and Lukas Atakasi (LA) in 2018 and 2019 were particularly helpful.

Abbreviations used: ACT.PTCP = active participle; ABS = absolutive; APPL = applicative; ART = article; CL = pausal clitic; EX = exclusive; FUT = future; IMP = imperative; IN = inclusive; IND.OBJ = indirect object; INT = intransitive; IRR = irrealis; LOC = locative; MIR = mirative; NEG = negative; NMLZ = nominaliser; OBJ = obj; PASS.PTCT = passive participle; PFV = perfective; PL = plural; POL = polite; POSS = possessive; PURP = purpose; RDUP = reduplication; REAL = realis; REC = reciprocal; SG = singular.

rare. Walrod (2006) provides an interesting preliminary sample of particles in various Philippine languages. The present paper gives a description of two such modal particles from Muna, an Austronesian language from Indonesia, in an attempt to add more typological diversity to this subfield of pragmatics. The actual description of the two particles in sections 3 and 4 is preceded by a brief typological overview of Muna in section 2.

MAP 1. MUNA IN INDONESIA



2. Muna: basic typology

Muna [mnb] is an Austronesian language of southeast Sulawesi (formerly Celebes, see map 1), spoken by some 300,000 to 350,000 people. It belongs to the Celebic supergroup. The main typological features of Muna, drawn from van den Berg (1989, 1996), are presented below.

The phonology of Muna is moderately rich with five vowels: /i ε a ɔ u/ and 25 consonants: /p t k b d g β ḍ m n ŋ m̥p m̥b n̥t n̥d n̥s ŋk ŋg f s h β ʁ r l/, including seven prenasalised consonants. The practical orthography uses <bh> for implosive /b/, <dh> for the lamino-dental /ḍ/, <gh> for the uvular fricative /β/, <ng> for /ŋ/, and <w> for /β/. There are no final consonants and no consonant clusters; V and CV are the only allowed syllable types. Stress falls on the penultimate syllable.

Muna morphology is rich in prefixation and suffixation, while infixation, circumfixation, and reduplication are also common, the latter with three subtypes. Three morphological verb classes are distinguished (*a-*, *ae-* and *ao-*class, based on the 1SG subject form), and verbs are normally inflected for subject in addition to direct object and indirect object, e.g. *no-wora-kanau* (3S.REAL-see-1SG.OBJ) ‘s/he sees me’; *a-basa-angko-e* (1SG-read-2SG.IND.OBJ-3SG.OBJ) ‘I (will) read it for you’. TAM morphology is limited to irrealis *-um-*, perfective *-mo* and reduplication for continuous action. The language also has a rich inventory of verbal derivational morphology. Not only is there a variety of valency-changing affixes (among others causative *fo*₋₁ and *feka-*, reciprocal *po-*, detransitivising *fo*₋₂, applicative *-ghoo*, transitivity *-Ci*, requestive *fe-*, and accidental passive *ti-*), but also various nominalisations (*ka-*, *-ha*, as well as the circumfix *ka-...-ha*). There is no voice marking in main clauses; the active-passive voice opposition is limited to relative clauses.

Nouns are not marked for case or gender, and only marginally for number. There are five pronominal sets (see table 1, limited to singular forms to keep it manageable): free pronouns; possessor/agent suffixes (on nouns and on passive participles); subject prefixes (three verb classes), (direct) object suffixes, and indirect object suffixes. The unmarked constituent order is VS in

intransitive clauses and AVO in transitive clauses, though variations are common for pragmatic reasons. The language uses prepositions.

TABLE 1. MUNA PRONOMINALS (SINGULAR ONLY)

| | FREE | POSS | SUBJECT | | | | | | OBJECT | INDIRECT OBJECT |
|------|-------------------|-------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|-----------------|
| | | | CLASS A- | | CLASS AE- | | CLASS AO- | | | |
| | | | REAL | IRR | REAL | IRR | REAL | IRR | | |
| SG 1 | <i>inodi, idi</i> | <i>-ku</i> | <i>a-</i> | | <i>ae-</i> | | <i>ao-</i> | | <i>-kanau</i> | |
| 2 | <i>(i)hintu</i> | <i>-mu</i> | <i>o-</i> | | <i>ome-</i> | | <i>omo-</i> | | <i>-ko</i> | <i>-angko</i> |
| 2POL | <i>intaidi</i> | <i>-nto</i> | <i>to-</i> | <i>ta-</i> | <i>te-</i> | <i>tae-</i> | <i>to-</i> | <i>tao-</i> | <i>-kaeta</i> | |
| 3 | <i>anoa</i> | <i>-no</i> | <i>no-</i> | <i>na-</i> | <i>ne-</i> | <i>nae-</i> | <i>no-</i> | <i>nao-</i> | <i>-e</i> | <i>-ane</i> |

3. The commiserative particle *kaasi*

The particle *kaasi* expresses the speaker's feeling of pity (encompassing sympathy, empathy, compassion, commiseration) towards a suffering person who is mentioned in the discourse. The word is glossed as 'pity', but it is not easy to translate. The closest equivalents are something like 'the poor thing', 'what a pity for X', 'too bad for X'. Here are some typical examples from narrative contexts with 3rd person referents.

- (1) *No-mate-mo ina-no kaasi.*
 3SG.REAL-die-PFV mother-3SG.POSS pity
 'Her mother has died, the poor thing.' (conv MU)²
- (2) *Awa-mu kaasi pae-mo na-d<um>adi-ko=a.*
 grandparent-2SG.POSS pity NEG.FUT-PFV 3SG.IRR-<IRR>live-2SG.OBJ=CL
 'Your grandmother, the poor old lady, can no longer provide for your needs.' (dict)
- (3) *Garaa do-mai-hi-da-mo dua ka-bhela-no lalo*
 MIR 3PL.REAL-come-TR-3PL.OBJ-PFV also NMLZ-wounded-3SG.POSS heart
o mie da-s<um>umbele-e kaasi.
 ART person 3PL.IRR-<IRR>slaughter-3SG.OBJ pity
 'How sad the people were that she was going to be slaughtered, the poor thing.'
 (Lit. 'People were visited by woundedness of heart [that] they will slaughter her, pity.')
 (t52:23)

With a first-person referent, the use of *kaasi* expresses self-pity, but at the same time it is meant to evoke sympathy in the addressee(s), as in the following two examples. Example (5) is a lament from a jilted lover taken from traditional poetry (called *kabhanti*), as shown by the prenasalisation of *-ngkanau* 'me'. (The regular form is *-kanau*; such prenasalisation is typical of poetry.)

² Example sources refer to either conversations (conv), the Muna dictionary (dict; van den Berg 1996), or to numbered texts from my corpus, of which a few are available online at www.bahasamuna.org/en/home. More work is planned for the future. Biblical examples can be found at alkitab.bahasamuna.org/en/introduction.

- (4) *Ao-wule kaasi.*
1SG-tired pity

‘I am tired, poor me.’ (So please don’t ask me to do anything.) (conv MU)

- (5) *Kaasi dua inodi, do-tabhe-rewu-ngkanau.*
pity also 1SG 3PL.REAL-shove.aside-dirt-1SG.OBJ

‘Poor me, I have been shoved aside like dirt.’ (dict)

In example (6), parents are talking to their rebellious teenage son. They are at their wits’ end, and plead for his sympathy.

- (6) *Insaidi kamokula-mu tao-wule ta-tangari-ko kaasi.*
1PL.EX parent-2SG.POSS 1PL.EX-tired 1PL.EX-advise-2SG.OBJ pity.

‘We your parents have done what we could (lit. are tired of) giving advice to you (and we feel miserable and sorry for ourselves, and so should you).’ (conv MU)

In a number of examples there is no explicit suffering involved, and hence the use of *kaasi* appears to be a more general strategy by a speaker to express affection and endearment for a referent in the direct context, or by a narrator to evoke sympathy for a character who is lonely, far away from home, vulnerable, unaware of danger, or in some other potentially pitiable state. This is illustrated in (7), where a grandfather discusses his family members.

- (7) *Awa-ku kaasi fato taghu-mo.*
grandchild-1SG.POSS pity four year-PFV

‘My grandchild is four years old now, the dear kid.’ (conv LA)

Apart from its semantics, a few more things can be said about the particle *kaasi*. The first point is that there is a plural form *kaasi-ndo* (pity-3PL.POSS), which is optionally used for plural referents, as in (8).

- (8) *Bhahi do-tehi kaasi-ndo.*
maybe 3PL.REAL-afraid pity-3PL.POSS

‘Maybe there were afraid, the poor things.’ (t38:18)

The second point is the position of *kaasi* in the clause. *Kaasi* either occurs in clause-final position, as in (1), (3), (4), (6) and (8), or it follows the NP or pronoun referring to the entity that is to be pitied, as in (2) and (7). Examples (1) and (3) actually illustrate both situations, with *kaasi* occurring clause-finally and directly following the referent, which in (3) is the suffix *-e*. Example (5) is remarkable, with *kaasi* in clause-initial position. In this example it appears that *kaasi* is used in combination with a vocative (in this case a self-directed pronoun), which accounts for its unusual position. A similar example of *kaasi* preceding a vocative clause-initially is shown in (9), where a grandfather addresses his grandson who unexpectedly returns home after an unexplained absence.

- (9) *Kaasi ana-ku, o-kala ne hamadi ghane kao-mpona-no*
pity child-1SG.POSS 2SG-go LOC where boy NMLZ-long-3SG.POSS
fitu gholeo fitu alo-mo ini?
seven day seven night-PFV this

‘My poor child, where you have been for the past seven days and nights?’ (t38:298)

A third point is that *kaasi* can refer to every possible function that an NP or a pronominal affix can have in a clause. This includes subject in (2), (4), (6), (7) and (8), direct object in (3), possessor in (1),

the translation equivalents *sneu! jammer! zonde! zielig!* and the Indonesian-French Labrousse (1985) has *le pauvre, malheureusement, quelle pitié!* Most dictionaries do not specify its word class; only Labrousse (1985) gives the word class of *kasihan* as interjection.

4. The mirative particle *garaa*

The term mirativity was coined by DeLancey (1997), and mirative markers have been found in a variety of languages (see Aikhenvald 2012 for a survey). Muna *garaa* is a typical mirative marker, indicating surprising new information. Information is presented by the speaker as new and unexpected, to either the speaker themselves, or to the main characters in a narrative, or possibly to the addressee(s). *Garaa* can occur on its own, but its most common use is as a free conjunction-like particle introducing new clauses, with the extra overtones of surprise, unexpectedness or suddenness. What counts as surprising is dependent on the perceived knowledge and expectations of the listener, while cultural factors also play a role. Syntactically and semantically, five main uses can be distinguished, which are discussed in turn.

- 1) a one-word response ('Oh I see');
- 2) a conjunction introducing a correcting statement ('but actually');
- 3) a conjunction introducing a new surprising event ('and then [to our surprise]');
- 4) a new development in a narrative (though not necessarily surprising with regard to the socio-cultural context);
- 5) a particle in questions, adding a component of genuine surprise as well as curiosity to find out.

Note that *garaa* occurs in statements and questions, but not in commands. *Garaa* has a low-frequency variant *garaahano*, and is occasionally followed by the demonstratives *ini* or *itu*, none of which seem to indicate any change in meaning.

4.1 One-word response

The use of *garaa* in one-word clauses is typically the reply to an unexpected answer or to a brand-new piece of information. The answer is often somehow different from what the person asking anticipated, and good translation equivalents are 'Oh, I see', 'That's new to me', 'Is that so?', but without the implication that the response is a question. Intonation also plays a major role. This can range from high intonation, indicating true amazement and even shock, to a more regular flat intonation, simply signalling acknowledgement ('I understand', 'I hear you'). In all these cases, *garaa* can be considered an interjection.

Example (13) is a conversation between two friends, one of which points to a nearby child. The answer in the third clause shows the information to be brand-new and unexpected.

- (13) A. *Ana lahae ini=a?*
 child who this=CL
 'Whose child is this?'
- B. *Ana-ku.*
 child-1SG.POSS
 'My child'
- A. ***Garaa!***
 MIR
 'Oh, I see!' (conv MU)

Example (14) is a conversation at a police station between a citizen (A) reporting a theft and a police officer (B). The officer's response *o garaa* simply indicates the acknowledgement of the new information, with no indication that he is shocked or overly surprised. The interjection *o* strengthens the exclamatory nature of *garaa*.

- (14) A. *Peda aini, bapak. Morondo o kasibu no-pesua welo lambu-ku.*
 like this sir last.night ART thief 3SG.REAL-enter in house-1SG.POSS
 'It is like this, sir. Last night a thief entered my house.'
- B. *O garaa. Na-pe rambi-rambi sehae no-pesua?*
 oh MIR IRR-about RDUP-o'clock how.much 3SG.REAL-enter
 'Oh, I see. Roughly at what time did he enter?' (t94.7:5-6)

4.2 Correcting statements

The second use of mirative *garaa* is as a conjunction-like particle which introduces a correcting statement ('but actually'). In these cases the first clause often contains the noun *soo* 'thought, idea, opinion', and *garaa* can be followed by a negator, as in example (17).

- (15) *Soo-ku o moghane, garaa o robhine.*
 thought-1SG.POSS ART man MIR ART woman
 'I thought it was a boy, but actually it was a girl.' (dict)
- (16) *Kataaho a-bisara, garaa ao-limpu.*
 actually 1SG-speak MIR 1SG-forget
 'Actually I wanted to say something, but I forgot to.' (dict)
- (17) *Soo-ndo=a ka-baru-ndo no-ndawu we tehi tingkulu*
 thought-3PL.POSS=CL NMLZ-happy-3PL.POSS 3SG.REAL-fall LOC sea slope.down
garaa miina, no-tuampo ne bhamba kaasi.
 MIR NEG 3SG.REAL-get.stuck LOC cliff pity
 'How happy they were, thinking that she had fallen in the ocean, but actually she hadn't, she got stuck (in a tree, halfway) on the cliff, the poor thing.' (t108:20)³

4.3 Surprising states or events

The most common use of *garaa* is as a conjunction-like particle introducing a surprising new state or event. *Garaa* is very frequent in narrative discourse, especially in folk tales. It is not easy to translate, but some simple equivalents are 'but (then)', 'and then (to our surprise)'. It is interesting to ask the question, 'who is actually surprised?' In most cases this is one of the main characters, and presumably the audience as well. In (18), for example, the tortoise is surprised that his request for bananas is answered in such a rude way, and this surprise is usually shared by the audience (if they don't know the story yet).

³ The order of *soo-ndo=a* and *ka-baru-ndo* in (17) is surprising, as it is the reverse of what is expected. Normally an exclamatory nominalisation such as *ka-baru-ndo* 'how happy they were' occurs sentence-initially, followed by a supporting reason clause. In this case, the first word of the supporting clause (*soo-ndo=a* 'they thought') appears before the nominalisation, creating a discontinuous structure. In the original oral version of this story there is no sign of hesitation or self-correction at this point, so presumably it is fine.

- (18) “*Ee... ghorokanau bhe idi*”, *amba-no a-kapokapoluka*.
 hey throw-1SG.OBJ with 1SG word-3SG.POSS ART-RDUP-tortoise

Garaa *ta-no-ghoro-ghoo kuli-no*.
 MIR only-3SG.REAL-throw-APPL skin-3SG.POSS

“‘Hey’”, said the tortoise, “‘throw some (bananas) down for me too.’” But he (the monkey) only threw him banana skins.’ (t9:36)

In first-person narratives, the surprise is fully on the part of the speaker/writer, who is the narrator. In (19), an older man narrates his experiences as a young boy going to the city of Makassar for secondary education, and how on his first day in the big city he bought an ice lolly from a street vendor. He had no idea what it was.

- (19) *Wura-ha-no naandoo no-pana. Garaa a-intara-e no-rindi*
 see-LOC-3SG.POSS be 3SG.REAL-hot MIR 1SG-hold-3SG.OBJ 3SG.REAL-cold
sepaliha, no-maho a-[m]odea.
 very 3SG.REAL-close 1SG-IRR.shout⁴

‘It looked like it was hot. But when I held it in my hand, I was surprised: it was very cold! I almost screamed.’ (t76:43-44)

In (20) a man narrates his dream, in which he sees a tree with nice fruits. He jumps up to pick a few of them, but ends up somewhere else. Again, the particle *garaa* signals the speaker’s surprise.

- (20) *Welo punda-ku maitu, garaa no-losa a-ko-bhondu ne*
 in jump-1SG.POSS that MIR 3SG.REAL-result 1SG-HAVE-banging.sound LOC
hale. Garaa ao-ndawu a-mai-ghoo ne kao-lodo-ha.
 floor MIR 1SG-fall 1SG-come-APPL LOC NMLZ-sleep-LOC

‘As I jumped, I ended up falling on the floor with a loud bang. To my surprise, I had fallen from the bed.’ (t95:29-30)

In summary, the element of surprise is there in all these narratives, but it can be either on the part of the main character, the narrator (only in first person narratives), presumably the audience as well, or a combination of these.

4.4 New narrative developments

Related to the previous discussion is the use of *garaa* in narratives, where it introduces a new development in the story of which the ‘surprise value’ is actually relatively low. From a socio-cultural perspective or from a narrative plot perspective, nothing unexpected happens at that particular point. In these cases *garaa* almost functions like a temporal conjunction marking the next clause. The following extract, provided in translation but with *garaa* indicated, is illustrative. The first *garaa*, in (21b), occurs on the ‘inciting’ event that gets the story underway. The second *garaa*, in (21e), occurs when the main character, the deer, meets the other main character, the dog. The information is new, but hardly surprising to either the main participant or to the audience, as visiting the dog was the deer’s intention, while the dog’s activity (weeding in his garden) is also culturally unsurprising. *Garaa* in (21e) therefore simply marks a new development in the narrative. The use of the third *garaa* in (21f) is similar, although seeing the horns (antlers) on a tree stump is somewhat more unexpected.

⁴ The root of *[m]odea* is *podea*. The change of initial *p* to *m* (in a verb stem) is one of the allomorphs of the irrealis infix *-um-*.

- (21) a. *Long ago, the dog and the deer were friends.*
 b. *Not long afterwards, **garaa** the deer wanted to go to a party.*
 c. *But there was something that made him nervous, and that was that he did not have horns to wear to go to the party.*
 d. *Then he went out and went by the house of the dog.*
 e. ***Garaa** when he arrived there, the dog was weeding in his garden.*
 f. ***Garaa** the deer saw the horns of the dog hanging from a tree stump. (t141:1-6)*

Good narrators and writers restrain the use of *garaa*, and employ it for special new, unexpected and surprising events. But occasionally the use of *garaa* is overdone, and gets a similar flavour to English ‘and then’ in story-telling, as in the following extract from a rather poorly told text (as I was informed when we were checking it), where four consecutive sentences start with *garaa*. The parts in parentheses have been added to help understanding.

- (22) a. *A village chief had seven unmarried daughters.*
 b. ***Garaa** a monster bird picked his (own) mangoes (by knocking them down from the tree); it was an exotic mango tree called ‘dhanggi’.*
 c. ***Garaa** the seven children of the village chief heard it (= heard the mangoes falling).*
 d. ***Garaa** they were wrong in thinking that those fallen mangoes belonged to the seven of them (and so they went to find them).*
 e. ***Garaa** one of them saw them. (t25:1-5)*

This may be similar to what Adelaar found for the mirative in Tarma Quechua (quoted in Aikhenvald 2012: 452), where it can also mark ‘an expected surprise’.

4.5 In questions

When *garaa* is found in questions, both polar and content questions, it marks the speaker’s attitude as someone who genuinely wants to know the answer, often bordering on puzzlement or bewilderment. There can also be an element of curiosity in the question, as well as urgency: ‘I really want to or would like to know this now.’ *Garaa* can occur in combination with all interrogative words: *hae* ‘what’, *lahae* ‘who’, *ne hamai* ‘where’, *sehae* ‘how many’ and *noafa* ‘why’, and in each case *garaa* follows the interrogative word directly. Example (23) is from a first-person narrative in which a young boy expresses his puzzlement about the identity of a person who often comes and gives him some money. He finally has the courage to ask him directly (and it turns out to be his father).

- (23) *Lahae **garaa** ihintu ini=a?*
 who MIR 2SG this=CL
 ‘Who are you really?’ or ‘Who exactly are you?’ (t102:19)

The following examples indicate genuine surprise mixed with puzzlement. Example (24) is from the same text as (23). The narrator walks with a friend past a building and hears singing and hand-clapping. In bewilderment he asks his friend:

- (24) *De-rabu hae **garaa** we lalo nagma?*
 3PL.REAL-do what MIR LOC inside that
 ‘What (in the world) are they doing in there?’ (t102:216)

The next example is taken from a story about two twin boys who each have a series of adventures. The oldest one arrives in a village that is completely deserted. He enters a house, sees a wooden drum, starts playing it, and discovers there is a girl hiding inside the drum. He then asks her the question that has been puzzling him since his arrival:

- (25) *Noafa garaa no-lino-ghoo welo liwu-mu ini?*
 why MIR 3SG.REAL-quiet-PURP in village-2SG.POSS this?

‘Why (on earth) is it so quiet here in your village?’ (t41:42)

Garaa is also found in rhetorical questions. Example (26) is God’s question to Cain, who has just murdered his brother Abel. The rhetorical question signals perplexity about the first recorded crime in history.

- (26) *No-ko-wamba-mo tora Ompu amba-no,*
 3SG.REAL-HAVE-word-PFV again Lord word-3SG.POSS
 “*O hae garaa ne-rabu-mu itu?*”
 ART what MIR PASS.PTCP-do-2SG.POSS that

‘The Lord spoke again, “What (on earth) have you done?”’ (Genesis 4:10)

Examples (27) and (28) are other rhetorical questions, in which the use of *garaa* signals mild irritation. In (28) this irritation is strengthened by the lexical choice of *bunsolo* ‘eye’ from the ‘angry register’, instead of the regular *mata*.

- (27) *Ta-na-sehae garaa so sabara-ku?*
 still-FUT-how.much MIR FUT patience-1SG.POSS

‘How much longer must I be patient?’ (Mark 9:19)

- (28) *O-owa-e ne hamai garaa bunsolo-mu itu?*
 2SG-bring-3SG.OBJ LOC where MIR eye-2SG.POSS that

‘Why did you not see it?’ (Lit. ‘Where did you bring/take your [bloody] eyes?’) (dict)

In yes-no questions the semantics is identical: the core meaning of *garaa* is to signal surprise, but the overtones range from genuine curiosity to perplexity, bewilderment and irritation. In these cases *garaa* occurs clause-finally, as in examples (29) to (31). The context of (29) is an officer at the harbour who addresses a young boy wandering around during school time, as he wonders why this boy is not attending school.

- (29) *Miina o-s<um>ikola garaa?*
 NEG 2SG-<IRR>go.to.school MIR

‘Don’t you go to school?’ (t102:146)

Example (30) expresses surprise mixed with puzzlement and disappointment, since Simon was told to stay awake.

- (30) *Simon, omo-lodo garaa?*
 S. 2SG-sleep MIR

‘Simon, are you (really/seriously) asleep?’ (Mark 14:37)

The use of *garaa* in (31), finally, indicates Pilate’s surprise and irritation at the total lack of response by Jesus during his trial before the governor.

- (31) *Pae omo-bhalo garaa?*
 FUT.NEG 2SG-answer MIR

‘Won’t you give any answer?’ (Mark 15:4)

5. Conclusion

The high-frequency modal particles *kaasi* and *garaa* each have a non-referential meaning, pertaining to the speaker’s attitude towards a referent in the discourse (commiserative *kaasi*), or his/her reaction to the new information received (mirative *garaa*). Prosodic, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic factors all play a role in the unique place such particles occupy in the intricate and beautiful tapestry presented by the Muna language.

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