Ngambay, a Nilo-Saharan language spoken in Chad (as well as in the Central African Republic) has a well structured set of morphemes which are used to add prominence to certain elements of a predication. This set consists of the deictic particles ga, Sa, and yââ, all of which could be translated as 'that'. They give, however, quite different kinds of prominence to the words (or expressions) they follow. Following the terminology suggested by John Watters ("Focus in Aghem," in Larry M. Hyman (ed.), Aghem Grammatical Structure, Southern California Occasional Papers in Linguistics No. 7, Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1979) their differences in meaning can be explained as follows:

Simple Assertive Focus ga

The particle ga indicates facts from which consequences result. It also has anaphoric function, linking the focused element to a previous mention. The simple assertion

(1) Lawkura têli dêge

'Lawkura killed a buffalo'

can be transformed into

(1) a. Lawkura ga têli dêge

'it was (the already mentioned) Lawkura who killed a buffalo'

b. dêge ga Lawkura têli

'it was the (already mentioned) buffalo that Lawkura killed'

c. têli ga Lawkura têli dêge

'Lawkura killed a buffalo (and the following is the result of this killing)'

Notice that the focused element is always front shifted, which necessitates the verb to be repeated when it is in focus position.

Exhaustive Listing Focus Sa

The particle Sa puts the focused element into a class all by itself, in contrast to all the other elements that could normally be compared with it. The simple assertion (1) can be transformed into

(2) a. Lawkura Sa têli dêge

'it was Lawkura (not John, nor Peter, it was no other than Lawkura) who killed a buffalo'
b. ḏoğe ɓa Lawkūrā ṭūl 'it was a buffalo (not an antelope, nor a rabbit, it was no other than a buffalo) that Lawkura killed'

c. ṭūl ɓa Lawkūrā ṭūl ḏoğe 'it was killing (not wounding nor seeing, it was really killing) that Lawkura did to the buffalo'

Counter-Assertive Focus  yàål

The particle  yàål indicates that whatever is asserted about the focalized element is in contrast to what was to be expected. So the simple assertion (1) can be transformed into

(3) a. Lawkūrā yàål ṭūl ḏoğe 'Lawkura (the fearful, or the tiny, or the old one) killed a buffalo'

b. ḏoğe yàål Lawkūrā ṭūl 'it was a buffalo (that strong, wicked, huge animal) that Lawkura killed'

c. ṭūl yàål Lawkūrā ṭūl ḏoğe 'it was killing (an exceedingly difficult task) that Lawkura did to the buffalo'

Defocalization

Another syntactic means of achieving prominence is to defocalize some elements of the predication, with the effect that the non-defocalized elements receive prominence without any further marking. Such defocalization is done by substituting a generic term for a specific one, or by the deletion of one of the elements, or by applying both transformations at the same time. The simple assertion (1) can be transformed into

(4) a. Lawkūrā ṭūl dā 'Lawkura killed an animal'

Here ḏoğe 'buffalo' is substituted by dā 'animal', with the result that the agent receives prominence.

(4) b. ṭūl ḏoğe 'someone killed a buffalo'

The agent Lawkūrā is deleted, and ḏoğe 'buffalo' receives prominence.

(4) c. ṭūl dā 'someone killed an animal'

By deleting the agent and replacing the specific ḏoğe 'buffalo' by the generic dā 'animal', the act of killing is the only definite information of this predication and therefore has prominence.