

Introduction

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1 The *Bantu Grammar: Description and Theory* Network

The collection of papers in this volume presents results of a collaborative project between the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, the Zentrum für allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft, Typologie und Universalienforschung (ZAS) in Berlin, and the University of Leiden. All three institutions have a strong interest in the linguistics of Bantu languages, and in 2003 decided to set up a network to compare results and to provide a platform for on-going discussion of different topics on which their research interests converged. The project received funding from the British Academy International Networks Programme, and from 2003 to 2006 seven meetings were held at the institutions involved under the title *Bantu Grammar: Description and Theory*, indicating the shared belief that current research in Bantu is best served by combining the description of new data with theoretically informed analysis. During the life-time of the network, and partly in conjunction with it, larger externally funded Bantu research projects have been set up at all institutions: projects on word-order and morphological marking and on phrasal phonology in Leiden, on pronominal reference, agreement and clitics in Romance and Bantu at SOAS, and on focus in Southern Bantu languages at ZAS. The papers in this volume provide a sampling of the work developed within the network and show, or so we think, how fruitful the sharing of ideas over the last three years has been. While the current British Academy-funded network is coming to an end in 2006, we hope that the cooperative structures we have established will continue to develop - and be expanded - in the future, providing many future opportunities to exchange findings and ideas about Bantu linguistics.

It goes without saying that an international project like the current one only comes alive through many different contributions. We would like to take the opportunity to express our gratitude to all participants in the network meetings, both from the partner institutions and as guests, to SOAS, ZAS, and the University of Leiden for hosting meetings, to the local organisers, to ZAS for inviting us to publish Bantu papers in the *ZAS Papers in Linguistics* series, and to the British Academy for the funding of the network.

2 Issues in Bantu Grammar and Description

The papers in this volume reflect a number of broad themes which have emerged during the meetings of the project as particularly relevant for current Bantu linguistics. The work discussed here largely builds on foundations that have been laid in the 1980s and 1990s, such as work on the expression of focus (Watters 1979) and its interaction with tone (Hyman 1999), and a specific Bantu phenomenon which is now often referred to as the conjoint-disjoint distinction in verb forms (Meeussen 1959, Creissels 1996). Furthermore, work in LFG on the relation between agreement and word order (Bresnan and Mchombo 1987) and, as a special instance of this relation, on locative inversion (Bresnan and Kanerva 1989) provides a point of reference for much of the work reported here. Another aspect of Bantu grammar which has attracted a good deal of attention is the syntactic effect of valency-changing morphology (e.g. several papers in Mchombo 1993). Although this topic is not directly addressed in the papers included here, it provides an important backdrop for several of them.

The papers show that approaches to Bantu linguistics have also developed in new directions since this foundational work. For example, interaction of phonological phrasing with syntax and word order on the one hand, and with information structure on the other, is more prominent in the papers here than in earlier literature. Quite generally, the role of information structure for the understanding of Bantu syntax has become more important, in particular with respect to the expression of topic and focus, but also for the analysis of more central syntactic concerns such as questions and relative clauses. This, of course, relates to a wider development in linguistic theory to incorporate notions of topic and focus into core syntactic analysis, and it is not surprising that work on Bantu languages and on linguistic theory are closely related to each other in this respect. Another noteworthy development is the increasing interest in variation among Bantu languages which reflects the fact that more empirical evidence from more Bantu languages has become available over the last decade or so. The picture that emerges from this research is that morpho-syntactic variation in Bantu is rich and complex, and that there is strong potential to link this research

to research on micro-variation in European (and other) languages, and to the study of morpho-syntactic variables, or parameters, more generally.

Against this background, the papers in this volume can be grouped according to general themes. The papers by Buell, McCormack and van der Wal take a closer look at the distribution of conjoint/disjoint verb forms in three Bantu languages. The conjoint/disjoint distinction refers to verb allomorphy found in some tense-aspect paradigms that is conditioned by the verb's relation to other elements in the clause. The disjoint form is required when the verb is clause-final, while the conjoint form requires some clause-internal constituent to follow the verb. Work like Givón (1975) and, more recently, Güldemann (2003) and Ndayiragije (1999) has argued that the distribution of conjoint/disjoint verb forms is directly related to focus: the disjoint is used when the verb is in focus, the conjoint when the constituent immediately following the verb is in focus. The papers in this volume reflect a range of variation in the relative influence of syntax and focus on the distribution of conjoint/disjoint verb allomorphy. Buell's paper shows that in Zulu the correlation between the choice of verb allomorphy and focus is an imperfect one, as one can find numerous mismatches. Instead, Buell argues that the distribution is syntactically conditioned: the disjoint form is used when the verb is final in the AgrSP constituent, the conjoint when the verb is medial in this constituent. The imperfect correlation with focus can be accounted for by proposing that topics cannot occur within AgrSP. Postverbal focused constituents obviously escape this ban. McCormack's paper reports on preliminary work on the conjoint/disjoint distinction in dialects of Setswana and in contexts not discussed in earlier studies by Creissels (1996) and Chebanne et al. (1997). This paper mostly confirms the findings of the earlier studies, while revealing some dialectal tone variation which warrants further investigation. An interesting new finding is that clause-final position more consistently correlates with the disjoint form than focus. Also highlighted is the need for more work on the phrasal tonology of Setswana, to tease apart general phonological conditions on tone realization from ones that must be attributed to a conjoint/disjoint verbal distinction. In contrast to these two papers, van der Wal's argues that there is a close connection in Makhuwa between the distribution of the conjoint/disjoint verb forms and focus. A constituent immediately following a conjoint verb is in focus; a constituent immediately following a disjoint verb is out of focus. This complementary distribution of postverbal focus and disjoint verb morphology is accounted for in van der Wal's analysis by two syntactic focus projections. When the lower one is filled by a focal object, the higher one is empty (and the verb is conjoint); when the lower one is not filled, the higher one must be, by the disjoint verb morphology.

The syntax of topic and focus is also the theme of the two papers on subject inversion in Bantu languages in this volume, by Marten and Morimoto. Subject inversion refers to constructions where the logical subject occurs in postverbal position, rather than in canonical preverbal position, and the verb shows subject agreement with the preverbal nominal – an object in subject-object reversal constructions or locative in locative inversion constructions – or takes an expletive subject agreement marker. The function of the construction is often to place the subject in the postverbal focus position, reserving preverbal position for topics. Marten’s paper provides a thoughtful and much-needed survey of the locative inversion construction. It convincingly demonstrates that there are fewer syntactic restrictions on this construction than is often assumed based on Bresnan and Kanerva’s (1989) pioneering study. In fact, one finds a range of variation, from languages like Chichewa which severely restrict the thematic structures of verbs which can participate in the construction to languages like Otjiherero, where there are few restrictions. One also finds striking variation in the function of the subject agreement morphology, from truly locative to merely expletive. More consistent across the languages surveyed is the function of locative inversion: the logical subject has presentational focus, introducing a new discourse topic. Morimoto’s paper provides an analysis of subject-object (S-O) reversal constructions found in languages like Kinyarwanda. Like locative inversion, the logical subject occurs in postverbal focus position in this construction, and the preverbal logical object triggers subject agreement. Morimoto demonstrates, however, that the preverbal object is not the grammatical subject. Instead, the preverbal NP is consistently best analyzed as a Topic, and S-O reversal languages distinctively require topic-marking agreement (rather than subject-marking) on the post-topic verb. The cross-Bantu distinction between topic-marking and subject-marking languages is arguably accounted for using a topicality hierarchy familiar from work like Comrie (1981).

The papers by Cheng and Kula, Downing, and Zerbian are concerned with the interaction between phonology and syntax/information structure and show that prosodic information and phonological phrasing are central aspects of Bantu grammatical structure. Cheng and Kula provide an analysis of phonological phrasing in relative clauses in Bemba and identify two marking strategies of Bemba relatives, a segmental one which employs an overt relative marker (derived from a demonstrative pronoun), and a tonal one where the relative clause is marked by a grammatical Low tone on the subject marker of the verb of the relative clause. The tonal strategy is only available for restrictive readings of relatives, and cannot be used for head-less relatives. The authors show that this restriction follows from a constraint which bars the alignment of a Low tone with a left edge of a phonological phrase. Furthermore, they show that

phonological phrasing of the head noun either together with, or separate from the following relative clause correlates with the difference in reading between restrictive and non-restrictive. The authors argue that this provides empirical support for a head-raising analysis of relative clauses as proposed by Kayne (1994), as the left edge of the phonological phrase and the CP, which includes the head in Kayne's analysis, are aligned. Downing's paper shows, based on evidence from Chitumbuka, that focus does not universally correlate with culminative prosodic prominence such as main stress, as is widely argued in the literature. Chitumbuka has two positions of culminative prominence in the intonational phrase, sentence-initial pitch prominence and sentence-final penultimate lengthening ('stress'). However, focus is not necessarily correlated with either of these, but correlates to phonological rephrasing (boundary narrowing): focused constituents are always followed by a phonological phrase boundary. Furthermore, evidence from focus-related morphemes shows that it is these morphemes themselves which trigger boundary narrowing, and not the constituents which are in focus, which do not necessarily attract special prosodic marking. Within an OT analysis, Downing shows that a constraint STRESS-FOCUS, requiring the correlation of a focussed constituent with main stress, is systematically violated in Chitumbuka as ALIGN-FOCUS and ALIGN-FOCUSRELATEDMORPHEME are ranked higher, showing that phonological rephrasing is the consistent correlate of focus. Zerbian's paper provides a detailed overview of question formation in Northern Sotho. She shows that polar questions are marked exclusively by pitch raising and the absence of penultimate lengthening, and that the optional use of question morphemes fulfils pragmatic functions different from clausal typing. In contrast, constituent questions are not marked prosodically, but simply by the presence of a question word. Constituent questions show an asymmetry between subject and non-subject questions, which, as Zerbian shows, is related to the discourse function of subjects as topics, so that they are incompatible with focus, and, hence, in-situ questioning.

Two papers in the volume, those by Mchombo and Thwala, are concerned with clausal syntax and the licensing of (object) noun phrases. Mchombo addresses the question of the licensing and the limits of discontinuity of constituents of the noun phrase in Chichewa. He argues that, even though the presence of an object marker plays a role for discontinuity, there are instances of discontinuous NPs where the object marker is either optional, or, in fact, disallowed. Instead, there are linear order restrictions on the discontinuous NPs in that the head of the NP has to precede the modifiers, in effect preserving the 'base' order of the NP. Conversely, there are cases where even the presence of an object marker does not license discontinuity, for example in relative clauses and in recursive constructions with associative phrases. Mchombo argues that these examples provide a challenge for linguistic models to address the intricate

relation between information structure, constituency and linear order. Thwala's paper is concerned with the notion of 'object' in Bantu grammar. He argues that many object diagnoses proposed for Bantu fail to result in a coherent notion of object and proposes to replace the notion by the notions of inherent complement, derived complement, and free adjunct and derived adjunct. Inherent complements are licensed (subcategorized) by the verb, while derived complements are licensed by the applicative morpheme. Free adjuncts are free modifying elements, while derived adjuncts are extra-clausal phrases licensed by the verb concord. In addition, Thwala argues that syntactic rules make reference to the category types of DPs, PPs and clauses. From these assumptions, Thwala derives a typology of verb-complement relations in Bantu, providing a systematic account of cross-Bantu variation in this area.

Last but not least, the papers by Kipacha and Nurse deal with verbal morphology in Bantu languages from a comparative perspective. They illustrate how the choice of verbal morphemes is determined by tense and aspect or focus. Kipacha's paper describes the variation of the subject markers of the first, second and third person singular found in seven Southern Swahili dialects. The distributional charts that he provides reveal how the allomorphy is determined by tense and aspect in these languages. Nurse's paper presents a comparative view of the morphological expression of focus on the verb. Taking the observations made in the seminal work by Meeussen (1959) and Watters (1979) as a starting point, the paper groups Bantu languages into four groups: those languages that express focus solely by tone, those which show a two-way contrast of verbal focus morphology ('disjoint/conjoint' – see also papers by Buell, McCormack, van der Wal), those with a three-way contrast, and those with a verbal prefix *ni-*. For the binary focus marking strategy, its potential shift in meaning towards the progressive (following Güldemann 2003) as well as an historical explanation are discussed.

We believe that the papers brought together in this volume provide the reader with a good idea about several topics at the centre of current research in Bantu linguistics. They provide new data and new analyses, as well as showing several new avenues for future research, and as such are above all an invitation to everyone to engage further with this rich and complex language group.

3 References

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