'Doubling' and 'non-doubling' Bantu languages – An RRG analysis

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The Bantu languages form a large subgroup (~500 languages) of the Niger-Congo phylum (> 1000 languages). Although the Bantu languages have attracted the attention of many researchers working within the framework of generative grammar, they received less attention within Role & Reference Grammar (an exception being, for instance, Kihara's work on Gĩkũyũ, e.g., Kihara 2016, 2023). In the talk, I will present an analysis of head marking in the Bantu languages. Building on previous work by Van Valin (2013), I present a uniform analysis of 'doubling' as well as 'non-doubling' Bantu languages.

The Bantu languages are mostly head-marking (at the clausal as well as the phrasal level) and show a lot of microvariation when it comes to argument realization (Beaudoin-Lietz 2004, Marten 2007, Marten 2012, Marlo 2015, van der Wal 2022). Whereas some languages, e.g., Swahili, license bound non-actor markers to co-occur with an independent RP (1), others such as Gĩkũyũ do not (2). To refer to the co-occurrence of a bound argument marker with a coreferential independent RP, the term 'argument doubling' is used in the literature (van der Wal 2022).

(1) *M-sichana   a-li-m-pat-i-a   ki-jana   ki-tabu.*   [Swahili]
     1-girl   1-PST-1-give-CAUS-FV   1-boy   7-book
     'The girl gave the boy a book.'

(2) a. *Ka-hĩĩ   nĩ   ka-ra-gũth-a   ngũmbe.*   [Gĩkũyũ]
         12-boy   COP   12-PRS-hit-FV   9.cow
         'The boy is hitting the cow.'
     b. *Ka-hĩĩ   nĩ   ka-ra-mĩ-gũth-a.*
         12-boy   COP   12-PRS-9-hit-FV
         'The boy is hitting it.'
     c. **Ka-hĩĩ   nĩ   ka-ra-mĩ-gũth-a   ngũmbe.*
         12-boy   COP   12-PRS-9-hit-FV   9.cow

In Gĩkũyũ (Kihara 2016), Chichewa (Bresnan & Mchombo 1987) and isiZulu (Fleischhauer 2023) – among other Bantu languages – argument doubling is restricted to the PSA. Concerning the Chichewa example in (3), Bresnan & Mchombo argue that the NP *alenje* 'hunter' is realized VP-internally in (3a) but it is right-detached – and therefore VP-externally – in (b).

(3) a. *Njûchi   zi-ná-lúm-a   alenje.*   [Chichewa]
         10.bee   10-PST-bite-INDIC   2.hunter
         'The bees hit the hunters.'
     b. *Njûchi   zi-ná-wá-lúm-a,   alenje.*
         10.bee   10-PST-2-bite-INDIC   2.hunter
         'The bees hit them, the hunters'
     (Bresnan & Mchombo 1987: 744)

Within the framework of generative grammar, head-marking in the Bantu languages has been analyzed from different perspectives. Based on language data from Chichewa, Bresnan & Mchombo argue that object markers – *wá-* in (3b) – are bound argument markers. Subject markers, on the other hand, are functionally ambiguous. If a co-referential NP is present, the subject marker functions as an agreement marker (as in (3a/b)). If no such co-referential NP is

present within the same sentence, the subject marker represents the argument and is analyzed as a bound argument marker.

A different analysis is proposed by Riedel (2009). On the basis of data from the Bantu language Sambaa, she argues that subject- and object-marker unambiguously function as agreement affixes. Sambaa, like Swahili, shows argument doubling without the object-NP being right-dislocated. Riedel's analysis requires postulating agreement with zero pronouns in cases like in (4). If no co-referential NP exists within the sentence, the marker agrees with a zero pronoun.

(4) *Stella   a-za-m-ni-ighaiya.*   [Sambaa]
     Stella   1-PERF.DJ-1-1SG-send.APPL
     'Stella send him to me.' (Riedel 2009: 145)

The RRG approach to head-marking, as presented in Van Valin (2013), treats prefixes as *zi-* and *wá-* as bound argument markers. It is the bound argument markers which instantiated the argument expression but not the independent RP. Within this framework, a unified analysis of Chichewa, Sambaa, Gĩkũyũ and Swahili is possible. Doubled arguments are realized within the extra-core slot. The extra-core slot is a core-external but clause-internal position. Bantu languages vary with respect to their number of extra-core slots. Whereas Swahili and Sambaa have up to two extra-core slots per sentence, languages like Chichewa and Gĩkũyũ only have one extra-core slot which is restricted to the PSA.

The realization of a bound argument marker blocks the core-internal realization of a coreferential RP. As Chichewa has only one core-external position – which is also restricted to the PSA – the RP *alenje* 'hunter' in (3b) can neither be realized the core nor within the extra-core slot. This forces dislocation of the coreferential RP.

A benefit of the RRG analysis is that it neither proposes a functional ambiguity of argument markers (unlike Bresnan & Mchombo do), nor needs positing zero pronouns unlike Riedel does in her agreement analysis.

Abbreviations
APPL: applicative, CAUS: causative, COP: copula, DJ: disjoint, FV: final vowel, INDIC: indicative, PERF: perfective, PRS: present tense, PST: past tense, SG: singular

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