Valency Decreasing Derivations and Middles in Limbum

Abstract

Unlike can be seen in studies carried out on verbal extensions in Grassfields Bantu languages (Idiata et al. 2003), Limbum has more verbal extensions than related languages which can be used for a typological study of valency-changing derivations. Whereas the Grassfields Bantu language Bafut has seven verbal extensions, four have been examined as valency-changing derivations (Idiata et al. 2003: 25). From the nine verbal extensions that have been identified in Limbum (Wepngong 2007), six can be analyzed as valency-decreasing devices in the sense that they have an effect on the argument structure of a predicate. Of the six valency-decreasing derivations, five always retain intransitive notions whereas one is a type of verbal derivation which derives a transitive stem with reflexive and/or reciprocal meaning. In this paper, we will focus only on two valency-decreasing derivations which are –ti and –ŋger. Whereas –ti is used when anaphoric reference is made to singular subjects, –ŋger is used when reference is made to plural subjects. Such a correlation with number marking of subjects on verbs is rarely described in Bantu languages. The –ŋger suffix is also peculiar in contexts wherein the underlying objects are not stated thereby functioning as patientless antipassive. The –ti and –ŋger suffixes are also used in situations where non-subject arguments are moved into subject position.

Within Limbum verbal derivation morphology, the two main valency-decreasing devices –ŋger and –ti permit the omission of an agent or patient from a set of core participants. These valency-decreasing devices function mainly as anticausatives and antipassives whose meanings vary from reflexives to pluractional; serial, iterative or repetitive, and bifurcation. To eliminate an agent from a set of core participants, the –ŋger suffix can be added to transitive, intransitive, ditransitive verb roots or used to alternate between the plural transitive suffix –shi or other causative suffixes. The –ti suffix cannot be added to intransitive roots or replace a suffix as can be seen in (2c), yet it can be used to alternate between singular transitive suffixes or added to transitive roots. The **-ti** and **-ŋger** are used respectively to mark singularity and plurality of subjects as can be seen through (1.b) and (2.b) whereas in (2.d) we can find that -ŋger marks both plural subjects and serial manner of the action.

(1) (a). **Pità à tee kù.**
Peter CL1.SM cut rope
Peter has cut the rope[1].

(b) **Kù be teeti**
CL1.Rope FUT1 cut-Bi.FUC.ANTI.CAUS
The rope will cut off[2].

(2) (a) **Pità à teeshi bkù.**
Peter CL1.SM cut-PLU.CAUS CL2-ropes
Peter has cut the ropes.

(b) **Bkù bvi teeŋger e.**
CL2-Ropes CL2.SM cut-PLU.ANTI.CAUS echo vowel
The ropes have been cut off (by themselves).

(c) **Rwɛɛ rli mʉ kwe.**
CL5.Cat CL5.SM PST3 die
The cat died.

` (d) **Mwɛɛ mmi kweŋger e**
CL6.Cats CL6.SM die-PLU. ANTI.CAUS echo vowel
The cats have died.

Patient omission has been observed in sentences wherein an antipassive is derived from a transitive predicate by means of the suffix –ŋger. Bostoen et al. (2015: 14) have observed that the patient is

---

[1] *In Limbum, the present perfect tense is not marked. Hence we have it as PST0. PST1 is today past, PST2 as yesterday past and as the PST3 as historic past.*
[2] *Reflexives can be realized in Limbum by adding optional body part nouns after the verbs with –ti and ŋger extensions.*

always implied which is an important difference with basic intransitives prominence which is given to the event's aspectual features.

When used as reflexives, *-ti*, and **-ŋger** respectively mark singularity and plurality of subjects in single-argument or intransitive clauses. The **-ŋger** suffix is also used to expresses reflexivity where action carried out by a singular subject appears to have been done in a serial or iterative manner.

Although Kemmer (1993) uses the term middle to cover many senses of valency-decreasing derivations, we have observed that in Limbum, what can be identified as middle in the Greek sense is limited to anticausative which bears iterative senses. In sentences with such meanings, the intransitive *-ŋger* or *–ti* suffixes can be added to verbs yet those verbs are followed by noun phrases which are logical subjects.

Key Terms: Bantu, derivation, typology, semantics and morpho-syntax.

References

Bostoen, Koen, Sebastian Dom and Leonid Kulikov. 2018. Valency-decreasing derivations and quasi-middles in Bantu: A typological perspective, Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, 36:3, 165-173.

Bostoen, Koen, Sabastian Dom and Guillaume Segerer. 2015. Antipassive/Associative polysemy in Ciluba (Bantu, L31a) Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Bemjamins. Studies in Language, 354-385. DOI 10.1075/sl 39.2.03 dom.

Dixon, Robert M. W. 2000. A typology of causatives: form, syntax and meaning. In Dixon, Robert M. W. & Aikhenvald, A. I. U. (eds.), *Changing valency : case studies in transitivity*, 30-83. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Dom, Sebastian, Leonid Kulikov and Koen Bostoen. 2016. Middle Voice in Bantu. Ghent University.

Fransen, Margo A. E. 1995. *A grammar of Limbum, a Grassfields Bantu language spoken in the North-West Province of Cameroon*. Amsterdam: Free University of Amsterdam.

Haspelmath, Martin & Iren Hartmann. 2015. *Comparing verbal valency across languages* in: Malchukov, Andrej L. & Comrie, Bernard (eds.).*Valency classes in the world's languages.* Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Haspelmath, Martin. 1993. More on the typology of inchoative/causative verb alternations. In Causatives and transitivity, ed. by Bernard Comrie and Maria Polinsky, 87–120. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Hyman Larry M. 1981. *Noni Grammatical Structure*. Southern California Occasional Papers in Linguistics No. 9. Los Angeles, University of Southern California.

Idiata, Daniel Franck & Gabriel Mba (eds). 2003. Studies on voice through verbal extensions in nine Bantu languages spoken in Cameroon, Gabon, DRC and Rwanda. Munich: LINCOM.

Kemmer, Suzanne. 1993. *The middle voice* (Typological Studies in Language 23). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Koontz-Garboden. 2014. Verbal Derivation. The Oxford Handbook of Derivational Morphology Chicago 60637.

Lyons, J, 1968. *Introduction to theoretical linguistics.* Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

Van der Wal, J., 2015. Bantu Syntax: Linguistics, Morphology and Syntax. Oxford and books Online. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935345.013.50.

Wepngong Ndi, Francis. 2007. " Limbum Verbal Extensions for Quantification and Argument Structure." In. Leiden Leiden University Centre for Linguistics (work paper).

Wepngong Ndi, Francis. Limbum - English Dictionary and English - Limbum Index. 2015 (Royal Museum of Central Africa (RMCA) in Tervuren, Belgium. ISBN: 978-94-9161-506-1.