

## Properties of Subjects in Bantu Languages

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It has often been claimed that overt preverbal subjects have A' properties in null subject languages (henceforth NSLs). Based on an exploration of Romance, Arabic, Celtic, and Greek, Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou (1998; henceforth A&A) present an influential proposal that in such languages the EPP is fulfilled by pronominal subject agreement on the verb in T. Spec, TP isn't generated (see 1a). Variations on this theme include the idea that Spec, TP is present but occupied by the silent pronominal *pro* (Baker 1996; see 1b). Both proposals predict that lexical subjects will have uniformly wide scope unlike English subjects, which can interact with negation and with quantifiers in object position. As Lopez (2007) points out, the two diverge in that (1b) alone is consistent with such A-movement diagnostics as Q-float and reconstruction effects in raising constructions.

- (1) a. Subject...<sub>[TP V+T<sub>EPP</sub>+AGR]</sub>  
 b. Subject...<sub>[TP *pro* [<sub>T'</sub> V+T<sub>EPP</sub>+AGR]]</sub>

Bantu languages are NSLs. A number of researchers have argued for this kind of A' syntax for Bantu subjects. Carstens & Diercks (to appear) demonstrate A-movement effects connected with overt preverbal subjects in Luyia hyper-raising constructions, ruling out (1a) for Luyia. Preliminary research suggests that this conclusion should be generalized, since overt preverbal subjects can have reconstructed readings in hyper-raising constructions in a range of Bantu languages. But *pro* in (1b) could head an A-movement chain, so (1b) is a plausible hypothesis for Bantu.

Several diagnostics have been proposed for the positions of overt preverbal Bantu subjects. Kinyalolo (1991) and Henderson (2006) advocate an A' location based on the fact that in otherwise SVO Kilega and Lingala, subjects are obligatorily post-verbal in wh-questions (see 2, and see Carstens 2005 for an alternative account). On the other hand, many Bantu languages do allow the combination of preverbal subjects and wh-movement, raising questions for the generality of the analysis (although see Schneider-Zioga 2007 for one approach to this problem).

- (2) Bikí (\*bábo bíkulu) bi-á-kás-í-l-é \*(bábo bíkulu) mwámí mu-mwílo? [Kilega]  
 8what 2that 2woman 8CA-A-give-PERF-FV 2that 2woman 1chief 18-3village  
 'What did those women give the chief in the village?'

Baker (2003) argues that unlike English subjects, Kinande (and likely other Bantu) subjects cannot enter into inverse scope relations (see 3) because they occupy a high left-peripheral position. Schneider-Zioga (op cit) claims preverbal subjects cannot be interpreted as non-specific indefinites (4), or be construed within the scope of sentence negation (5) for the same reason.

- (3) Omukali a-gul-a obuli ritunda. [Kinande]  
 1woman 1SA-buy-FV every fruit  
 'A (single) woman bought every fruit' (the only reading)
- (4) Abakali ba-ahuka ebikene [Kinande]  
 2woman 2SA-cooked yams  
 \*Out on reading: 'Women cooked the yams.'
- (5) Omukali si-a-anzire Johani  
 1woman NEG-1SA-like John  
 'A specific/\*Any woman didn't like John (i.e. No woman liked John)'

Baker's and Schneider-Zioga's evidence from Kinande is the most detailed for Bantu to date, but it is nonetheless very limited and not entirely convincing. First, the absence of inverse scope is claimed on the basis **only** of (3), a sentence whose English translation we find resists an inverse scope reading as well. In our judgment, (3'A) is felicitous just in case a single woman bought every fruit.

- (3') *I come home from selling at the market and we have the following exchange:*

Q: How did it go today?

A: Great! A woman bought every fruit!

Much more felicitous in English are inverse scope relations in generic statements.

- (7) A flag stands in front of every house in our neighborhood.

(8) In some cultures, a woman cooks every meal.

While we do not yet have access to Kinande speakers, we have done some initial exploration in Shona and Swahili and found that, just as in English, inverse scope is infelicitous in (3) but readily available in the translations of (7) and (8) (we provide just 7' to conserve space). This suggests that Bantu subjects are not so high as to disallow the relevant scope interactions.

(7') Bandera i-na-pepea mbele ya kila nyumba mtaani kwetu. [Swahili]  
9flag 9SA-PRES-wave in.front of every 9house 3neighborhood-LOC our  
'A flag waves in front of every house in our neighborhood.'

The interaction of indefinite subjects with negation also seems to us to involve complexities not acknowledged in the very modest Bantuist literature on the topic. Consider the English translation for the Kinande (5) and its felicitous interpretations. (9a-c) should be read as continuations.

(9) A woman didn't like John.

a. ...But a man did. *OK* (a contrastive focus reading)

b. ...She told me so later. *OK* (the specific reading)

c. ...So he could never get married. \*\* (Out on the 'nobody' reading. Compare *A woman never loved John, that's why he stayed a bachelor*; the NEG>SU reading seems more readily accessible.)

(3') and (9) show that close parallels to the Bantu tests can yield poor results even in non-NSL English, arguing that the evidence in the literature is not reliable. But a sentence from Kinyalolo (1991) illustrates that the Neg>SU interpretation is fine in a Kilega generic statement, and we find the same to be true in its English translation.

(11) Mutu t-á-ku-sol-ág-á maku wéneéne [Kilega]  
1person NEG-1SA-PROG-drink-HAB-FV 6beer alone  
'A person does not usually drink beer alone'

Also, a universal quantifier in subject position is readily interpreted as under the scope of negation in English. We have found the same to be true in Swahili and Shona.

(12) All that glitters is not gold.

(12') Zvese zvi-no-vaima ha-zvi-zi ndarama [Shona]  
8all 8SA-PRES-glitter NEG-8SA-be 9gold  
'All that glitters is not gold'

As for non-specific indefinite subjects, the absence of a determiner like 'some' can be a confounding factor. But initial exploration suggests that they are possible.

(13) Mali i-na-badilisha watu [Swahili]  
9money 9SA-PRES-change 2person  
'Money changes people'

All these facts cast doubt on the claim that the nature of agreement in NSLs bars subjects from Spec, TP. But more than this, they show that the study of Bantu subjects is in its infancy. A thorough investigation is of the utmost importance to comparative syntax. It promises not only to improve our understanding of Bantu but also to yield greater insight into NSLs generally; and to clarify the conditions under which interactions between subjects and other clausal operators are possible.

We propose to create a detailed questionnaire for gathering data on the syntax of Bantu subjects. It will be informed by diagnostics from A&A, Costa (2004), Lopez (2007, 2008), but adapted to take into account Bantu-particular factors. The goal will be to determine on a case-by-case basis the properties of Bantu subjects, and to compare them to subjects in other NSLs and non-NSLs.

*Selected references:* Alexiadou, A. & E. Anagnostopoulou. 1998. 'Parametrizing AGR: word order, V-movement and EPP-checking. *NLLT* 16: 491-539. Baker, M. 2003. Agreement, dislocation, and partial configurability. In Carnie, A., Harley, H., and Willie, M. (Eds.), *Formal Approaches to Function*. John Benjamins, Amsterdam, pp. 107-134. Carstens, V & M. Diercks. To appear. Parametrizing Case and Activity: Hyper-raising in Bantu. *Proceedings of NELS 40*. Lopez, L. 2009. *A Derivational Syntax for Information Structure*. Oxford Studies in Theoretical Linguistics 23, Oxford University Press. Lopez, L. 2007. *Locality and the Architecture of Syntactic Dependencies*. London: Palgrave-MacMillan. Schneider-Zioga, P. 2007. Anti-agreement, anti-locality and minimality. *NLLT* 25: 403-446.

## Appendix of Sample Questionnaire Items

### I. Are indefinite subjects possible, with generic readings?

Please translate the following literally, without altering word order. If your language has uninflecting copulas, or tenses that do not inflect for subject agreement (such as the Swahili habitual) please avoid these. Provide a grammaticality judgment: is the result acceptable?

1. A dog will eat anything.
2. Money changes people.
3. A person doesn't usually drink beer alone.

### II. Can indefinite subjects interact with quantifiers lower in the clause?

1. In some cultures, a woman cooks every meal. *Is the literal translation okay -- the subject is an indefinite singular noun? Does this sound like an acceptable way to state the generalization that whatever home you visit, the cooking is done by a woman, never by a man? That is, it's not the same woman cooking every meal in a given culture; the women vary with the homes.*
2. A flag waves in front of every house in my neighborhood. *Can it be a different flag in front of each house?*
3. In this religion, a (different) law governs each type of activity.
4. A candle illuminates each table in the restaurant.

### III. Can clausal negation scope over a subject quantifier?

Please translate the following and evaluate whether the continuations provided would be felicitous with the meanings indicated. Once again, please avoid copulas or verb forms that lack full subject agreement.

1. All that glitters is not gold. *Gold glitters, but so does glass.  
(= some things that glitter are gold but others are not)  
The gold is in fact dull-looking; the glittery stuff is all glass.  
(= nothing that glitters is gold)*
2. Every man here isn't married. *Bill and George are married, but John isn't and he's here.  
(= some guys here are married, but not all)  
You have to prove you're a bachelor to get in.  
(= No man here is married)*
3. All the students didn't tell the truth. *I know that Mary, for example, was lying  
(= some of them lied)  
  
As usual, they lied (none of them told the truth)*
4. Every circle doesn't have a dot in it.  
*Can you say this to characterize a page of empty circles?  
Suppose some circles contain dots and others don't. Is it still okay to say (4)?*

### IV. Are focused subjects possible?

1. How would you say "The woman dropped the pot?"

2. How do you say "What happened?"

*Suppose what happened is that the woman dropped the pot. Does it sound reasonable to word this answer to the "What happened?" question as follows:*

3. The pot, the woman dropped (it)

4. *Alternatively in response to the question "What happened?" Can you answer felicitously with SVO word order "The woman dropped the pot"? Or does the word order need to be different?*

5. *What if the answer is "The pot broke". What word orders are acceptable in the exchange, "What happened?" "The pot broke".*

## **V. Negative Polarity Items.**

A. *Does your language have words like "anybody" or "anything"? If there are augment vowels that can be dropped, the augmentless nouns may fulfill this function.*

1. I don't like anybody.
2. I didn't see anything.

B. *If yes, can they be licensed by negation in a higher clause?*

3. John doesn't think I like anybody.
4. John doesn't believe I saw anything.

C. *Can they be left-dislocated? English does not permit 5 or 6; how are their translations in your language?*

5. John doesn't think that anybody, I like (him).
6. John doesn't think that anything, I saw it.

D. *Lastly, how do preverbal subjects pattern on this point?*

7. John doesn't think that anybody likes me.
8. John doesn't think that anything will break.

Finally, is there an alternate word order that is possible or preferred for rendering the meanings in (7) and (8)?

## **VI. Embedded wh-subjects in object relatives. How would you say the following:**

1. This is the man that I know who likes.
2. This is the book that John saw who bought.