

Morphological encoding of givenness in the Kagulu noun phrase

Kagulu (classified as G12 according to Guthrie (1967/71)) is a Bantu language spoken in Tanzania by roughly 240.000 people. It is agglutinating and, as such, rich in verbal and nominal morphology. One of the most prominent features in Bantu languages in general is the noun class system also reconstructed for Proto-Bantu. Kagulu is a fairly typical Bantu language, with a total of 16 noun classes, including three locative classes. The nouns comprise a stem and one or two prefixes; the one closest to the root marks the noun class. A further prefix, referred to as the *pre-prefix* or *augment*, precedes the noun class marker. The pre-prefix, is optional (*i-* in example 1) while the other two components (the noun class prefix and the noun stem) are integral constituents of any nominal phrase (example 2).

1 *ifilimu*
 i- *fi-* *limu*
 PP- 8- *animal:7/8*

animals

2 *migulu*
 mi- *gulu*
 4- *leg:3/4*

legs

The pre-prefix is generally found on nominals in Kagulu, but can also occur on determiners, numerals and it is the marker of subject relatives; it is thus less selective than typical affixes in the language. Its distribution and function vary in the different Bantu languages, cf. de Blois (1970) and Hyman and Katamba (1993).

In this paper I demonstrate that the discourse function of the Kagulu pre-prefix is conditioned by syntax, semantics and information structure: the usage of the pre-prefix is connected to definiteness and specificity as well as clausal position; factors which are in turn related to givenness in discourse. I demonstrate that the Kagulu pre-prefix is more frequently used when the noun phrases are not in the scope of focus, i.e. for given information, and review the implications this has for treatments of pre-prefixes in Bantu languages in general.

References

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