On the non-Bantu origins of reflexive-reciprocal polysemy in Tanzanian Bantu languages

Aron Zahran (Inalco, Llacan (CNRS) & Ghent University)

Prototypically, there is a morphological difference in how Bantu languages encode reflexive and reciprocal events. The reflexive morpheme is usually a prefix occurring immediately before the verb stem as a reflex of the Proto-Bantu reflexive prefix *i-* (Schadeberg 2003b, 151); whereas the typical reciprocal marker is a derivational suffix, reconstructed in Proto-Bantu as *-an* (Schadeberg 2003a, 72). The two different constructions are illustrated in example (1) and (2) from Swahili.

1. Wa-li-**ji**-on-a.   [Swahili G42]
   sm2-past-**refl**-see-fv
   'They saw themselves'.

2. Wa-li-on-**an**-a.
   sm2-past-see-**recp**-fv
   'They saw each other.'

However, some Bantu languages have seen the function of the reflexive prefix expand to encode also reciprocal events, thus creating a polyfunctional reflexive-reciprocal prefix. This is illustrated in example (3) with the *i-* prefix in Nilamba F31.

3. ʊ-Naftali   na ʊ-Juma   a-**i**-yón-ile   [Nilamba F31]
   aug-Naftali com aug-Juma sp2-**refl/recp**-see-pfv
   'Naftali and Juma saw each other/themselves.'   (Ngwasi 2021, 141)

This paper concerns the mapping of the previously unspecified geographical distribution of this innovated prefix. An analysis of data from 79 Tanzanian Bantu languages shows that the development of the reflexive prefix into a polyfunctional REFL-RECP marker is a widespread feature, spread through contact to at least 26 Bantu languages in Tanzania.

The innovated REFL-RECP prefix is particularly prevalent in Guthrie Zones F and G. Through a comparative analysis of the formal marking of different types of reciprocal situations, it is shown that the grammaticalization of the prefix as a reciprocal marker has progressed the furthest in the languages spoken in, and around, the Tanzanian Rift Valley. The grammaticalization evidence is drawn mainly from the preservation of the original reciprocal marker *-an* in the different languages. While languages in the Rift Valley, such as Mbugwe (F34) have no or very little synchronic evidence of a once productive reciprocal suffix *-an*, other languages, such as Kinga (G65), spoken further away from the Rift Valley have largely preserved the suffix with natural reciprocal verbs:

   Kinga (G65)
4. *-gav-**an**-a*   'share'   (p.c. Chesco Habili, 2023)
5. *-lundam-**an**-a*   'unite'   (Wolff 1905, 58)
6. *-tíhi-**an**-a*   'agree'   (Schadeberg 1973, 13)
7. *-hwaán-**an**-a* 'become similar'   (Schadeberg 1973, 25)

In few languages, mostly in the very periphery of the geographical contact area, such as Bena (G63), both the original reciprocal suffix and the innovated REFL-RECP prefix are used productively as reciprocal markers:

Bena (G63)
8. *-won-**an**-a*   'see each other'   (Morrison 2011, 249)
9. *-**i**-won-a*   'see oneself/each other'   (Morrison 2011, 249)

Besides the Bantu languages included in the sample, reflexive-reciprocal polysemy is found in all Cushitic and Nilotic languages spoken in the Tanzanian Rift Valley. Based on the multilingual and contact-prone nature of this area, it is hypothesized that the REFL-RECP category in Tanzanian Bantu languages is a structural borrowing of non-Bantu origins. This hypothesis, in turn, corroborates the conclusion reached in previous studies such as (Kießling, Mous, and Nurse 2008), that the languages spoken in the Tanzanian Rift Valley have been involved in vast language contact. The present paper adds to the extensive list of grammatical features borrowed from one language family to another in the Rift Valley, which may support the idea of an historically linguistic landscape characterized by a high degree of multilingualism.

References

Kießling, Roland, Maarten Mous, and Derek Nurse. 2008. 'The Tanzanian Rift Valley Area'. In *A Linguistic Geography of Africa*, edited by Bernd Heine and Derek Nurse, 186–227. Cambridge Approaches to Language Contact. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486272.007.

Morrison, Michelle Elizabeth. 2011. 'A Reference Grammar of Bena'. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. https://search.proquest.com/docview/894767455?pq-origsite=primo.

Ngwasi, Lengson. 2021. 'The Multiple Functions of the Reflexive Prefix in Hehe, Sukuma, Nilamba, and Nyaturu'. http://hdl.handle.net/2077/69663.

Schadeberg, Thilo C. 1973. 'Kinga: A Restricted Tone System'. *Studies in African Linguistics* 4 (1): 23–47.

———. 2003a. 'Derivation'. In *The Bantu Languages*, edited by Derek Nurse and Gérard Philippson, 71–89. London: Routledge.

———. 2003b. 'Historical Linguistics'. In *The Bantu Languages*, edited by Derek Nurse and Gérard Philippson, 143–63. London: Routledge.

Wolff, R. 1905. Grammatik der Kinga-Sprache: (Deutsch-Ostafrika, Nyassagebiet) ; nebst Texten und Wörter-Verzeichnis. LINCOM Gramatica 194. Berlin: LINCOM.