Introduction[*]

Fatima Hamlaoui
ZAS, Berlin

1   Preverbal Domain(s) in Bantu Languages

The papers in this volume take up some aspects of the preverbal domain(s) in Bantu languages. They were originally presented at the Workshop BantuSynPhonIS: Preverbal Domain(s), held at the Center for General Linguistics (ZAS), in Berlin, on 14-15 November 2014. This workshop was co-organized by ZAS (Fatima Hamlaoui & Tonjes Veenstra) and the Humboldt University (Tom Güldemann, Yukiko Morimoto and Ines Fiedler).

Bantu languages have been at the heart of the research on the interaction between syntax, prosody and information structure. In these predominantly SVO languages, considerable attention has been devoted to postverbal phenomena. By addressing issues related to Subjects, Topics and Object-Verb word orders, the goal of the present papers is to deepen our understanding of the interaction of different grammatical components (syntax, phonology, semantics/pragmatics) both in individual languages and across the Bantu family. Each paper makes a valuable contribution to ongoing discussions on the preverbal domain.

Cheng & Downing's paper focuses on the relation between subjecthood and topicality. Based on the careful examination of the interpretational properties of indefinite subjects, they argue that Durban Zulu (S42) preverbal subjects primarily come with an existential presupposition. Contrary to what has been claimed for other Bantu languages, Zulu preverbal subjects can thus neither be reduced to being topics, nor analyzed as being simply non-focused. The authors propose that the presuppositional reading of Zulu preverbal subjects can be connected to how high the verb moves in this language.

Aborobongui, Hamlaoui and Rialland's paper deals with left and right dislocation in Embɔsi (C25). They provide a basic description of this syntactic process and show that in this language, left and right dislocation do not mirror each-other, as right-dislocation is much more restricted. Based on the study of a corpus of elicited read speech, they also offer a description of the prosodic realization of simple and multiple dislocations. Hiatus avoidance processes,

boundary tones distribution and register manipulations indicate that both left and right-dislocated phrases sit outside of the core Intonational Phrase but only right-dislocated constituents form their own Intonational Phrase. Various groupings of multiple dislocations are also observed and discussed.

Mous, Koni Muluwa & Bostoen, and De Kind's papers concentrate on issues relating to preverbal focusing and the Immediately Before the Verb (IBV) position. Mous discusses Nen (A44) and Nyokon (A45), two neighbouring Mbam languages of Cameroon which, contrary to the vast majority of Bantu languages, allow full nominal objects to occur between the tense/aspect marker and the verb. Whereas this position only hosts objects in certain tenses in Nyokon, no such restriction is found in Nen. Mous further shows that despite their close relation, the two languages make a different use of the IBV position. Preverbal objects are the default in Nen, which however places quantified and contrastive objects postverbally. The latter also tend to occur postverbally in Nyokon, but the two object positions seem functionally equivalent.

De Kind provides a detailed overview of various preverbal focusing strategies in Kisikongo (H16a). Based on the careful study of diverse corpora and grammars, as well as elicited data, he shows that Kisikongo locates focused constituents preverbally, either in the IBV position or by means of various types of cleft-sentences. Additionally, the common distinction between informational and contrastive focus is not syntactically encoded in this language.

Koni Muluwa and Bostoen's paper discusses the preliminary results of a corpus study of Nsong (B85d). The authors show that Nsong is yet another SVO Bantu language that focuses nominal (and verbal) categories preverbally. They argue that just like Mbuun (B87), a closely related language, it places foci in the IBV position. The location of an argument in the IBV position often goes together with the topicalization of another non-focused argument to the clause-initial position and, contrary to Mbuun, Nsong does not restrict the IBV to arguments, as adjuncts too can occupy this position.

Guérois and Marten's papers concentrate on inversion constructions, with a special focus on the preverbal position(s) in Marten's paper. Guérois provides a survey of locative inversion constructions (LI) in Cuwabo (P34) and shows that, contrary to existing predictions, both semantic inversion and formal LI can be found in one language, thus enriching the typological debate on these constructions. Furthermore, she proposes that, in this language, the source of the

use of disjoint forms in LI is to be found in the avoidance of the relative reading associated with the conjoint forms.

Marten's paper offers an overview of recent analyses of the preverbal domain in LI, instrument inversion and "subject-object reversal", and highlights their conceptual and empirical similarities and differences. Whereas there is little controversy about the information-structural properties of the preverbal and the postverbal NPs, which are respectively viewed as topical and focal, their syntactic status is still debated. The author also connects the different analyses with comparative studies of Bantu inversion constructions, and discusses how the various approaches fare in accounting for the attested cross-linguistic variation and the high degree of micro-variation.

Hamlaoui's paper deals with bare-passive strategies in Bantu (Bàsàá (A43), Mbuun (B87), Bemba (M42), Kinyarwanda/Kirundi (JD 61)) and in Western Nilotic languages (Dholuo and Lango). She argues that impersonal passives, zero-coded passive left-dislocations and "subject-object reversal" passives occur in languages in which topicality and subjecthood are clearly split. They allow to pragmatically promote a non-agent, without departing from the default mapping between agent and grammatical subject (Spec,TP). Together, the languages considered provide evidence for an inflectional-domain internal, argumental, Topic projection, which hosts fronted non-agent arguments in bare-passives and hosts the verb too in the Kinyarwanda/Kirundi-type of OVS structures.

2   Selected References

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