

**Properties of Subjects in Bantu Languages**  
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**I. Introduction.**

(1) Bantu languages are *pro*-drop, hence null subject languages (NSLs):

- |    |  |    |  |
|----|--|----|--|
| a. | Juma a-me-ondoka<br>III <sub>s</sub> SA-PERF-depart<br>'Juma has left' | b. | (Yeye) a-me-ondoka [Swahili]<br>III <sub>s</sub> IndPro III <sub>s</sub> SA-PERF-depart<br>'He has left' |
| c. | (Mimi) ni-me-ondoka<br>IsIndPro IS-PERF-depart<br>'I have left'        | d. | (Wao) wa-me-ondoka<br>III <sub>pl</sub> IndPro III <sub>pl</sub> SA-PERF-depart<br>'They have left'      |

Where are overt, preverbal subjects in NSLs?

- |        |   |  |
|--------|---|--|
| (2) a. | [ <sub>TP</sub> Subject [ <sub>T</sub> (V+)T <sub>EPP</sub> +AGR]]              | The usual place...or                     |
| b.     | Subject...[ <sub>TP</sub> (V+)T <sub>EPP</sub> +AGR]                            | Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou 1998 or      |
| c.     | Subject...[ <sub>TP</sub> <i>pro</i> [ <sub>T</sub> (V+)T <sub>EPP</sub> +AGR]] | Baker 1996; 2003<br>Schneider-Zioga 2007 |

Arguments that have been given for (2b, c):

- Uniform wide scope for subjects: unlike in English, no interaction with sentence negation and object Qs (see Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou (1998 on Romance, Arabic, Celtic, and Greek; see 3 from Baker 2003 and also Schneider-Zioga 2007, henceforth SZ).
- Apparent intervention effects of preverbal subjects in A'-movement constructions (see 4; Kinyalolo 1991 on Kilega; Henderson 2006 on Dzamba).
- Non-specific indefinite and non-referential expressions are disallowed in subject position (see 5, 6, from SZ).

- |     |  |                             |
|-----|--|-----------------------------|
| (3) | Omukali a-gul-a obuli ritunda.<br>1woman 1SA-buy-FV every 5fruit<br>'A (single) woman bought every fruit' (the only reading)   | [Kinande]<br><br>Baker 2003 |
| (4) | Bikí (*bábo bíkulu) bi-á-kás-íl-é *(bábo bíkulu) mwámí mu-mwílo?<br>8what 2that 2woman 8CA-A-give-PERF-FV 2that 2woman 1chief 18-3village<br>'What did those women give the chief in the village?' | Kinyalolo 1991              |

- (5) Abakali ba-ahuka ebikene [Kinande]  
2woman 2SA-cooked yams  
\*Out on reading: ‘Women cooked the yams.’ SZ 2007
- (6) \*(O)mukali si-a-anzire Johani [Kinande]  
(augment)woman NEG-AGR-like John  
‘A specific/\*Any woman didn’t like John (i.e. No woman liked John)’

Problems: (i) The intervention effect is absent in many Bantu languages, including Kinande.  
(ii) (3) and (6) are replicated in English, a non NSL language.  
(iii) The effect in (5) is not typical and in fact non-specific indefinites *can* be subjects in various languages.  
(iv) Additional tests that have been provided are of uncertain usefulness.

Initial findings:

- Preverbal subjects can, in fact, be non-specific indefinites (in at least Lubukusu and Kirundi)
- In Kirundi, expressions that are not licit in left-dislocated positions are fine as subjects.
- Person and tense/aspect influence the availability of inverse scope relations.
- Preliminary conclusion: At least some Bantu subjects are in Spec, TP; hence the nature of subject agreement in NSLs does not in general preclude subjects from occupying that position.

Roadmap

§2 provides evidence that (3) and (6) should be discounted and explores some additional problems with existing arguments that Bantu subjects are left-dislocated.

§3 illustrates some properties of Bantu subjects in the languages we have explored thus far which seem inconsistent with obligatory left-dislocation.

§4 lays out some questions for future research in additional languages.

But first, a strong argument against (2b). Reconstructed readings for subjects of raising/passive verbs reveal that there is A-movement – the matrix subject in (10a,b) gets its thematic role in the embedded clause and moves up to an A-position. We will therefore assume (2b) is untenable and focus on (2c), since the reconstructed readings might follow from raising of *pro*.

- (2) b. Subject...<sub>TP</sub> (V+)<sub>T<sub>EP</sub></sub>+AGR] Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou (1998)

*Subject base-generated at the left edge; nothing occupies Spec, TP*

- (7) a. Efula yi-bonekhana i-na-kwa muchiri (FUT = Future) [Lusaamia]  
9rain 9SA-appear 9SA-FUT-fall tomorrow  
‘It seems that it will rain tomorrow’  
[Lit: Rain seems will fall tomorrow; ok to say on reading the forecast]



- b. \*Mukali mo-a-teta-gula eritunda  
1 woman 1SA-PST-NEG.PST-buy 5fruit (augment vowel required)  
'No woman bought a fruit'
- c. Olukwi si-lu-li-seny-a (\*a)-bakali [Baker 2003]  
11wood NEG-11SA-PRES-chop-FV 1 woman (no augment vowel)  
'WOMEN do not chop wood'
- d. Ekihi kyo mukali sy-a-ngahuka  
7what 7that 1 woman NEG-1SA-cook (no augment vowel)  
'What did no woman cook?'

Problem: Independently of its being a subject, we don't know if the licensing conditions on the augmentless form are met in (9b). Compare to (10).

- (10) a. I didn't see anybody. *NPI licensed by negation.*  
 b. \*Anybody didn't see me. *Is it simply bad in subject position?*  
 c. Did anybody see me? *No, because it can appear there if licensed by Q.*  
*(Could this be what's happening in 9d?)*  
 d. I don't think anybody saw me. *OK as subject with c-commanding Neg.*

SZ: If extracted, the augmentless form can be licensed by subject negation in its own clause.

- (11) Yohani a-anzire mulimi u-ta-nyua [Kinande]  
 John 1SA-like 1farmer ANTI.AGR-NEG-drink  
 'John likes any farmer who doesn't drink'

But maybe, as in the case of English *any*, the augmentless form is available as head of a relative clause, and isn't/cannot be licensed by non-c-commanding negation. Can you say in Kinande, 'John likes any farmer who drinks'?

### 3. Some properties that seem inconsistent with a left-dislocated syntax for subjects.

#### A. Felicitous occurrences of non-specific indefinite preverbal subjects.

- (12) Umwáarimú umwé a-ø-tegerezwa ku-ja ku-du-serukira. [Kirundi]  
 1teacher 1one 1SA-PST-be obliged INF-go INF-OM-represent.  
 Nindé mushaka?  
 Who you-want  
 'One teacher must go to represent us. Which one do you want to?'
- (13) Omundu a-p-ile khu-mulyaango likoloba  
 1person 1SA-hit-PST 17-3door yesterday  
 'Someone knocked on the door yesterday' [Lubukusu]

**B. A non-specific indefinite can't left-dislocate in Kirundi, but it can be a preverbal subject.**

- (14) \*Abantu isinzi *pro* tu-zoo-(ba)-tumira. [Kirundi]  
2people 5crowd 1PI-FUT-OM-invite  
'\*A huge crowd we will invite'
- (15) a. Abantu isinzi ba-á-ri ba-uzuye isengero.  
2people 5crowd 2SA -PST-be 2SA-fill: ASP 5church  
'A huge crowd filled the church'
- b. *pro* a-a-vuze ko abantu isinzi ba-á-ri ba-uzuye isengero.  
1SA-PST-said C 2people 5crowd 2SA -PST-be 2SA-fill: ASP 5church  
'He said that a huge crowd filled the church'

**C. The languages we have so far explored do seem to have pretty rigid scope.** This does not necessarily mean that their subjects are left-dislocated; scope rigidity has been documented in Chinese and Japanese, with subjects nonetheless analyzed as occupying Spec, TP. And in Spanish, some speakers judge scope to be rigid in constructions where the subject is analyzed as occupying its base position:

- (16) Ayer devolvió un cliente cada paquete. [Spanish]  
Yesterday returned a customer every package  
'Yesterday a customer returned every package.' (Must be a single customer)

Our investigation of scope rigidity is in the very early stages. Justine Sikuku reports that he finds (17-20) acceptable with inverse scope).

- (17) li-reba ly-onaka buli embakha [Lubukusu]  
5-question 5SA-spoiled every 9conversation  
'A question spoiled every conversation.'
- (18) si-fwani sy-ang'onya buli li-sisi  
7-painting 7SA-adorned every 5-wall  
'A painting adorned every wall.'
- (19) embwa y-asama buli mw-itada  
9dog 9SA-barked every 18-homestead  
'A dog barked in every homestead.'
- (20) libale ly-apa buli mundu  
5stone 5SA-hit every 1person  
'a stone hit every person'

But comparable examples in Kirundi are infelicitous; a point of variation requiring further study!

Consistently in non-generic tenses, singular human subjects resist inverse scope in all the languages we have investigated (Kirundi, Lubukusu and Swahili):

- (21) muchuli omu-silikhi a-kha-silikhe buli omu-lwala [Lubukusu]  
 tomorrow 1-doctor 1SA-fut-examine every 1-patient  
 'Tomorrow a (single) doctor will examine every patient.'

Hypothesis: this is due to the person feature of Class 1, which features also in the anti-agreement phenomenon (cf. Kinyalolo 1991 among others). Kinyalolo (1991) proposes that agreement with operators cannot include person features.

- (22) a. t-á-li kikóngóló ang'ine [<sub>RC</sub> **ú**-á-kít-ile bubo]  
 neg-3<sup>rd</sup>Sing-be 7stupid as me 1<sub>whA</sub>-ASP-do- ASP 14that  
 's/he is not as stupid as me who have done that'
- b. \* t-á-li kikóngóló ang'ine [<sub>RC</sub> **n**-á-kít-ile bubo]  
 neg-3<sup>rd</sup>Sing-be 7stupid as me 1<sup>st</sup>.SING-ASP-do- ASP 14that  
 's/he is not as stupid as me who has done that'
- (23) a. t-á-li kikóngóló anga biswé [<sub>RC</sub> **b**-á-kít-ile bubo]  
 neg-3<sup>rd</sup>Sing-be 7stupid as us 2<sub>CA</sub>-ASP-do- ASP 14that  
 's/he is not as stupid as we who have done that'
- b. \* t-á-li kikóngóló anga biswé [<sub>RC</sub> **tu**-á-kít-ile bubo]  
 neg-3<sup>rd</sup>Sing-be 7stupid as us 1<sup>st</sup>.PL-ASP-do-ASP 14that  
 's/he is not as stupid as we who have done that'

Bokamba (1976) explores the same phenomenon in Dzamba, Likila, and Lingala. He shows that agreement with subject operators includes all the Noun Class features of the operator (see 24a,b). Bokamba notes that only singular [+human] operators trigger a special agreement form (24c; these examples adapted from Bokamba's 30 and 29):

- (24) a. Izikenge **ízi**-bung-í o kalasi zi-ba-áki za-nga [Dzamba]  
 9slate 9<sub>CA</sub>-lost at school 9<sub>SA</sub>-was of-me  
 'The slate which was lost at school was mine'
- b. Ma-kenge **má**-bung-í o kalasi ma-ba-áki ma-nga  
 the slates 6<sub>CA</sub> -lost at school 6<sub>SA</sub>-were of-me  
 'The slates which were lost at school were mine'
- c. Omoto ó-(\*a)-kpa-áki imundondo a-kim-í.  
 1person wh.agr-take-PST 3jug 3<sup>rd</sup>Sing-flee  
 'the person who took the jug fled'

Precisely what role [person] plays in scope rigidity is a question we will explore in this project.

A pitfall to be avoided: Fox and Sauerland (undated) point out that generic present promotes what they call scope illusions: uncharacteristically broad scope readings. Thus while (25a) lacks the inverse scope reading, it is available in (25b).

- (25) a. Yesterday, a guide ensured that every tour of the Louvre was fun.  
b. In general, a guide ensures that every tour of the Louvre is fun.

Our investigation discovered this to be true of Bantu habituals and imperfect tenses – a factor to be considered when testing for inverse scope, and something of potential interest in the investigation of Bantu tense systems.

- (26) Muri ivyo bitaro, umuganga a-a-vur-a buri murwayi  
in that clinic, doctor h1agr-pst-treat-imperfevery patient  
'In that clinic, a doctor treated every patient' (*inverse scope is fine*) [Kirundi]

#### 4. Directions for future work.

--Detailed study of subject properties in individual languages!

--Distribution and properties of indefinites

--Inverse scope

--Augment vowel syntax

--Comparison of subjects with left-dislocation constructions, in particular CLLD, in the same languages, especially in connection with NPIs and downward entailing expressions.

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 configurationality. 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*. Fox, D. & Sauerland (undated) *Illusive Scope of Universal Quantifiers*. 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 non-specific 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. Somebody knocked on the door.

2. Last night a cab driver came looking for you.

II. Can indefinite singular subjects interact with quantifiers lower in the clause outside of indefinite/generic contexts?

1. During the parade, a flag waved in front of every house in my neighborhood. Can it be a different flag in front of each house?
2. There were all these kids throwing rocks yesterday. A rock hit every passerby on the head.
3. I loved Mary's house, it was so pretty. A picture adorned every wall.

III. Can clausal negation scope over a subject quantifier?

1. Everybody can't fit into that car. Some will have to take a cab.
2. Hey, I asked you to put food in every bowl. But every bowl doesn't contain food; these two are still empty.
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)

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. 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.