A linguistic cycle for quotatives in eastern Bantu languages
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In the absence of historical records for most Bantu languages, grammaticalization paths must be hypothesized on the basis of comparisons between existing languages and cross-linguistic generalizations concerning language change. However, language change is strongly influenced by frequency, and for many Bantu languages there is no corpus of material of sufficient size to allow frequency effects to be measured.

In this paper, I use narrative text corpora in ten eastern Bantu languages totalling 10,232 clauses to reconstruct a grammaticalization path for quotatives (Güldemann 2002). Quotatives may be obligatory lexical verbs (1), ‘reduced’ verbs (verbs which take limited derivational morphology and may be phonologically reduced) (2), or invariable particles (3). Some quotatives have also developed into complementizers with non-speech verbs (4).

(100) yuya mlume wa-amb-a “…” (Digo)
1.DEM 1.man 3SG.PST-say-FV
‘that man said, “…”

(2) Abhalɨndʉ bha-kha-tɨ, “…” (Malila)
2.girls 3PL-NARR-say
‘The girls said, “…”

(3) Abhaanu bhayo a-bha-aik-a ati, “…” (Kwaya)
2.person 2.DEM PRES-3PL-say-FV QUOT
‘Those people say that, “…”

(4) ^n-o-ongw-ag-a ati … (Kwaya)
NARR-3-hear-HAB-FV COMP
‘... hearing that …’

The corpus data reveal how quotatives function in context as part of wider ‘speech orienters’ (clauses that identify the speaker and/or addressee, and optionally describe the manner of speech). This reveals cross-linguistic variation in relation to:

- the variety of speech verbs that may occur in speech orienters
- whether a speech verb is obligatory or optional in a speech orienter when a quotative is present
- the number of quotatives in each language (ranging from zero to five)
- the morphological characteristics of the quotatives
- whether quotatives (if they exist) are obligatory or optional in speech orienters
- whether or not the (default) quotative in a given language also functions as a general complementizer.

I conclude that the grammaticalization path for quotatives is in fact cyclical (Hodge 1970), and that the eastern Bantu languages in question are undergoing a form of Jespersen’s Cycle.

References