



DEVELOPING PARAMETERS FOR MAPPING MORPHOPHONOLOGICAL AND MORPHOSYNTACTIC MICRO-VARIATION

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Outline of talk

- Background (the article)
- Field method and elicitation
- The parameters – what worked and what did not
- A created story to generate a specific phenomenon (the pre-prefix)
- The lack of negative data
- Data from different types of sources – are they comparable?



Grammatical and lexical comparison of the Greater Ruvu Bantu languages

The article discusses lexical and grammatical comparison and sub-grouping in a set of closely related Bantu language varieties in the Morogoro region, Tanzania. The Greater Ruvu Bantu language varieties include Kagulu [G12], Zigua [G31], Kwere [G32], Zalamo [G33], Nguu [G34], Luguru [G35], Kami [G36] and Kutu [G37]. The comparison is based on 27 morphophonological and morphosyntactic parameters, a lexicon of 500 items and the speakers' self-assessment of linguistic similarity.

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Field method

When secondary sources are not available elicitation is needed:

- oral data
- structured interviews
- written questionnaires
- (or a combination of these?)

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Elicitation

- Translational elicitation

Asking the speaker to translate sentences (orally or in writing) from a contact language into the target language.

- Transformational elicitation

When the speaker is asked to transform one type of construction into another (usually with a specified grammatical target). It can be asking the speaker to transform an affirmative sentence to a negative one, or to change a statement from present to past tense. (This proved very useful when avoiding the Swahili *me-* vs. *li-* trap.)

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Binary parameters

I used parameters that essentially could be answered with yes or no. This facilitated a quantitative comparison in addition to a qualitative one.

The entire work was inspired by Marten et al (2007) who in turn mention Longobardi (2004).

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Parameters from Marten et al (2007) that generated the same answer

- Can the object marker and the lexical object NP co-occur? (yes)
- Are two object markers possible in a restricted context? (no)
- Are there locative object markers? (yes)
- Is object marking restricted to one object marker per verb? (yes)
- Can either object be adjacent to the verb? (no)
- Can either object become the subject under passivisation? (no)
- Can either object be expressed by an object marker? (no)



Parameters retrievable from other sources (Bible translations etc.)

- Is there a relative marker in the subject relative?
- Is there a diminutive class?
- Is the object marker placed before the subject marker?
- Are the tenses marked in more than one slot?
- Is the subjunctive used for giving negative commands?
- Is there a 'non-past tense'?
- Is general negative marker the regional 'default' ha-?
- Is the reciprocal marker a CV-structure?
- Is the negative command marked with an auxiliary?
- Is there a pre-prefix?

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Parameters that may require elicitation

- Does noun class 1a take the inherent agreement?
- Does class 5 commonly pair with class 4?
- Is the pre-prefix used in everyday speech?
- Does indefinite pronoun 'another' take the concord prefix?
- Is there a morphological past marker distinct from the perfective?
- Does the language have an intensive extension?
- Does the language use an extension for the reciprocal?
- Is there general animacy concord (GAC) on the verb?
- Does the verb take the locative subject marker in locative inversion?
- Is an object marker optional in object relatives?
- Is there a designated relative marker in copular phrases?

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Parameters that usually require elicitation

- Does the locative possessive take the inherent concord prefix?
- Do the languages display reflexes of Meeussen's 3 *-nóo,
- *-díá and *-o, demonstratives?
- Can the infinitive take the pre-prefix?
- Can either object become the subject under passivisation?
- Is partial agreement with conjoined NPs possible?

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Example of a parameter that usually requires elicitation

Do the languages display reflexes of Meeussen's 3
*-nóo, *-día and *-o, demonstratives?

	Near	Far	Referential
Kagulu	yuno	(a)yuya	yuyo or ayo
Kami	ino, (a)yuno, ayu	(a)ija, (a)yuja, yula	iyo, (ayo)
Kutu	ino	ija	iyo, (ayo)
Kwere	ino	ija	iyo, (ayo)
Luguru	(a)yuno	(a)yula ((a)yuwa)	ayo
Nguu	uyu	yudya	uyo
Zalamo	yuno	yuja	ayo
Zigua	yuno	yudya	uyo

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Example of a parameter that usually requires elicitation

Is partial agreement with conjoined NPs possible?

- Zigua (no – default class 8):

Chigoda hamwenga na mti vigulwa (na mntu).

7-chair together CONJ 3-tree 8-buy-PASS-FV (by 1-person)

'The chair and the tree were bought (by a person).'

- Zaramo (yes – the noun closes to the verb):

Luzabi na biki digwa hasi.

11-rope CONJ 5.tree 5-fall-FV down

'The rope and the tree are falling down.'

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A created story for collecting the pre-prefix

Hapo kale kulikuwa na mtu mmoja. Huyu mtu (umunu?) alikuwa na mke. Mke huyu alipenda kupanda mbegu. Kila siku alikuwa anapanda mbegu. Yeye alikuwa anapanda kila mbegu kwa umakini. Kisha alikuja mtu mwengine. Huyu mtu alisema 'Sikuwahi kupanda mbegu yoyote.' Kisha yule mtu wa kwanza alisema : 'Sitapanda mbegu ya aina yeyote madamu niko hai (mpaka kufa kwangu).' 'Lakini hizi ni mbegu maalumu.' Yule mke alisema. Mara alitokea bwana fisi. Huyu fisi (idifisi?) alikuwa na sifa mbaya ya kuiba mbegu maalumu. Hawa watu wawili na yule mke wote kwa pamoja walisema ...

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The pre-prefix story, translation

Once there was a man. This man had a wife. This wife liked to sow seeds. Every (kila) day she planted these seeds. She carefully planted each seed. Then another man came. He said 'I have never planted any (-o ose) seeds'. Then the first man said: 'I will never plant any seeds as long as I live'. 'But these are special seeds', the wife said. Then suddenly Mr Hyena came. This Hyena was notorious for stealing the special seeds. These two men and that woman they all said ...

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The absence of negative data?

In linguistic descriptions, negative data (i.e. grammaticality judgements on about acceptable or unacceptable sentences) are common, but they are not always included in this kind of approach. What does the absence of negative data mean?

In addition, several answers may be correct and occur in different settings in the language (cf. the pre-prefix and different levels of formality). How do we account for that?

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To sum up: are the sources comparable?

When looking for answers to parameters in different languages and different sources, how do we evaluate the sources and the answers we get? (Cf. a Bible translation with a recorded conversation.)

- grammar sketches
- Bible translations
- elicited data
- stories
- natural speech

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References

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