



# Looking for evidentiality in Bantu

Thera Marie Crane

University of Helsinki

[thera.crane@helsinki.fi](mailto:thera.crane@helsinki.fi)

Mirativity and evidentiality in Bantu

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# Goals of talk

- Suggest reasons evidential expressions haven't yet been described for many Bantu languages
- Suggest places to look for them
- Explore the (emergent?) evidential functions of a TA form in Nzadi (B865)

# Where is the evidentiality?

- (As noted in the CfP) Africa is usually thought of as “lacking” evidential systems.
- For several reasons...



# Where is the evidentiality?

- Traditionally, we haven't been looking for it.
- We're sometimes definitionally constrained:

# Where is the evidentiality?

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- We're sometimes definitionally constrained:

“Evidentiality is a linguistic category whose **primary meaning** is source of information.”  
(Aikhenvald 2004: 3, emphasis added)

# Where is the evidentiality?

- Traditionally, we haven't been looking for it.
- We're sometimes definitionally constrained:

“Linguistic evidentiality is **a grammatical system** (and often one morphological paradigm). In languages with grammatical evidentiality, **marking how one knows something is a must**. Leaving this out results in a grammatically awkward ‘incomplete’ sentence.” (Aikhenvald 2004: 6, emphasis added)

# Where is the evidentiality?

- Traditionally, we haven't been looking for it.
- We're sometimes definitionally constrained.
- Evidential markers and evidential strategies commonly get short shrift in grammatical descriptions.

# Where is the evidentiality?

- For example, hearsay / reportative particles:
  - Kwanyama (R21) *váti* (Halme 2004: 75, 297)
  - Nyakyusa (M31) *baatɪ* (Persohn 2020: 315–316)
  - Ndali (M301) *báti* (Botne 2008: 107)
  - Swahili (G40) *ati~eti* (Madan 1903: 17; Maw 2013: 19; cited in Persohn 2020: 316).
- Such particles are often not described in grammars, and they are easily missed in traditional elicitation!



# Where is the evidentiality?

- “Evidentials are often fused with tense” (Aikhenwald 2004: 68)
- ...and grammatical descriptions tend to focus on the tense/aspect functions and contrasts.

# Bantu TA systems

- Famous for multiple degrees of past and future marking

## Past tenses in Shekgalagari (S30, Botswana)

DEGREE OF REMOTENESS	PARTICLE
recent	láábe
today	ńde
yesterday	léé
distant (before yesterday)	íye

(Crane 2009)

# Bantu TA systems

- Famous for multiple degrees of past and future marking
- But part of (broadly construed) an aspect-prominent family (Niger-Congo)
- Tense systems vary significantly, but typological work (e.g. Nurse 2008; Nurse & Devos 2019) shows the same (again, broadly construed) aspectual categories occurring over and over
- Not always with the same markers: **Bantu languages show remarkably rapid grammaticalization and recycling of TA markers** (Nurse 2008; Nurse & Devos 2019)

# Aspectual (+) categories in Bantu

- “Perfective” / “Perfect” / “Anterior” / ...
- Imperfective ( & progressive)
- Persistive (e.g. S. Ndebele S407, South Africa)  
*ngi-sa-dla* ‘I am still eating’
- Habitual (e.g. Kerebe E24, Tanzania)  
*tw-a-gul-ága* ‘We used to buy’ (Nurse 2008:144)
- ...

# Perfective/imperfective in Bantu

- The Bantu (and probably broader Niger-Congo) perfective/imperfective divide is, generally speaking, **typologically non-canonical** (see Polančec 2020; 2021)

# Perfective–Imperfective contrast: event verb

**Pfv:**  
**past event**

*uSipho u-cul-ile*

1A.Sipho SP<sub>1</sub>-sing-PFV.DJ

‘Sipho sang.’ (or ‘Sipho has sung’)

**Ipfv:**  
**ongoing event**

*uSipho u-ya-cul-a*

1A.Sipho SP<sub>1</sub>-DJ-sing-FV

‘Sipho is singing.’

‘Sipho sings.’

(Crane fieldnotes)

# Perfective–Imperfective contrast: COS verb

*uSipho u-hlakaniph-ile*

1A.Sipho SP<sub>1</sub>-be(come)\_clever-PFV.DJ<sup>5</sup>

‘Sipho is clever.’ (he’s wise/intelligent)

**Pfv:**

**present state**

*uSipho u-ya-hlakaniph-a*

1A.Sipho SP<sub>1</sub>-DJ-be(come)\_clever-FV

‘Sipho is becoming clever.’ (e.g. his test scores are showing improvement)  
(Crane fieldnotes)

**Ipfv:**

**ongoing change**

Perfectives (often) also have change  
(eventive) reading with COS verbs

Totela (K41)

a. *Ndá-komok-w-a!*

SP<sub>1</sub>.CMPL-surprise-PASS-FV

‘I am surprised!’

b. *Ndá-komok-w-á*

SP<sub>1</sub>.CMPL-surprise-PASS-FV

*sunu!*

today

‘I got surprised today!’

(Crane 2011: 116;127)



# Not all state verbs behave this way with pfv!

## Southern Ndebele

a. *uPhumzile u-ya-gul-a*

1A.Phumzile SP<sub>1</sub>-DJ-be.sick-FV

‘Phumzile is sick.’

b. *uPhumzile u-gul-ile*

1A.Phumzile SP<sub>1</sub>-be.sick-PFV.DJ

‘Phumzile was sick.’

‘Phumzile got sick.’

NOT: ‘Phumzile is sick.’

(Crane fieldnotes)

# Perfective in Bantu

- The stative / perfective split (in its various developments), along with the grammaticalization of additional TA forms (e.g. past/perfective and present/stative) means that **perfective forms may have overlapping temporal interpretations** with other forms, at least for a subset of verbs
- When this happens, one of those forms often develops specialized (evidential, modal...) connotations – at least in contrast to the other form with the same temporal meanings

# Fwe (K402, Namibia & Zambia; Gunnink 2018)

- Stative vs Near Past Perfective

# Fwe Near Past Perfective (NPP)

- Typical Bantu perfective: past event / present state

*cànyóngâmì*

ci-a-nyong-ám-i

SM<sub>7</sub>-PST-bend-IMP.INTR-NPST.PFV

‘It is bent (has become bent).’

# Fwe Stative

- *-ite*

(97) *hànshí kùbómbètè*  
ha-N-shí                      ku-bomb-éte  
NP<sub>16</sub>-NP<sub>9</sub>-ground      SM<sub>17</sub>-become\_wet-STAT  
'The ground is wet.' (ZF\_Elic14)

(98) *òpótó àzywìré bùsù*  
o-ø-potó                      a-zywir-é                      bu-su  
AUG-NP<sub>1a</sub>-pot              SM<sub>1</sub>-become\_full-STAT      NP<sub>14</sub>-flour  
'The pot is full of flour.' (ZF\_Elic14)

# Fwe Stative

- Some perfect-like readings (but only with strong present relevance)

(118) *ndìbárítè èmbúká 'yémiràhò*  
ndi-bar-íte                      e-N-buká                      i-é=mi-raho  
SM<sub>1SG</sub>-read-STAT      AUG-NP<sub>9</sub>-book                      PP<sub>9</sub>-CON=NP<sub>4</sub>-law  
'I've read a law book.' (i.e., I know the law) (NF\_Elic15)

# Stative vs. NPP in Fwe

- This difference is in part evidential
- Context 1: the speaker sees a dog lying on the road. He goes to investigate and finds that it is dead.

(111) *òzyú mbwà àfwitè*  
o-zyú          o-ø-mbwá          a-fw<sub>H</sub>-ite  
AUG-DEM.I<sub>1</sub>    AUG-NP<sub>1a</sub>-dog      SM<sub>1</sub>-die-STAT  
'This dog is dead.' (ZF\_Elic14)

# Stative vs. NPP in Fwe

- This difference is in part evidential
- Context 2: The speaker has killed a snake

(112) *èzyókà rínáfwì*

*e-ø-zyóka*

AUG-NP<sub>5</sub>-snake

*ri-na-fw-í*

SM<sub>5</sub>-PST-die-NPST.PFV

‘The snake is dead.’ (ZF\_Elic14)



# Stative vs. NPP in Fwe

- This difference is in part evidential
- Context: The speaker sees someone “staggering and talking incoherently”, but the speaker is “not aware of...previous actions”

(113) *ànywìtè*  
a-nyw<sub>H</sub>-ite  
SM<sub>1</sub>-drink-STAT  
‘S/he is drunk.’ (NF\_Elic15)

# Stative vs. NPP in Fwe

- This evidential-based contrast (direct vs. indirect evidence) is also seen in related languages (e.g. Mbalangwe; see Crane 2012)
- Also e.g. Nyamwezi (Kanijo 2019 etc.)

# Nzadi (B865, DRC)

- NB: Nzadi appears to have very few COS verbs!

[7.6]	no á kwa	‘It is sufficient’	(lit. ‘it has sufficed’)
	mi â lé	‘I am tired’	(lit. ‘I have (become) tired’)

(Crane, Hyman & Tukumu 2011:123)

# Nzadi (B865, DRC; Crane, Hyman & Tukumu 2011)

- NB: Nzadi appears to have very few COS verbs!
- And the evidential contrast is found in a different part of the TAM system!
- Nzadi data taken from Crane, Hyman & Tukumu (2011); Crane, Gunnink, Kanijo & Roth (forthc.); unpublished notes, all from elicitation with Simon Nsielanga Tukumu

# Nzadi presents

- Two present tenses: (shorthand) **a**-present and **e**-present

	<i>Infinitive</i>		<i>Aff. a-PRESENT</i> ( <i>'I X/am X-ing'</i> )
<i>L</i>	o-lyaa	'to cry'	mi a lyáà
	<i>Infinitive</i>		<i>Aff. e-Present</i> ( <i>'I am X-ing / X'</i> )
<i>L</i>	o-lyaa	'to cry'	mi é lìí

# Nzadi presents

- Two present tenses: (shorthand) ***a***-present and ***e***-present

[7.1]

<i>TAM</i>	<i>Marker</i>	<i>Stem Tone Pattern</i>	<i>Stem Vowel Change</i>	<i>Section</i>
Past	ó	HL	yes (see §6.3)	§7.2.1
Present Perfect	â	basic stem	no	§7.2.2
<i>a</i> -PRESENT	a	HL	no	§7.2.3
<i>e</i> -PRESENT	ê	L → LH H, HL → H L-L → <sup>↓</sup> H-L H-L → H-L	yes (see §6.3)	§7.2.3
Future	a	L → H-LH H, HL → HL-H L-L, H-L → H- <sup>↓</sup> HL (redup.)	no, but CV- reduplicative prefixing (see §6.4)	§7.2.4
Imperative (2sg)	--	HL / LHL	no	§7.2.5
Subjunctive / Hortative	e (ke)	HL	yes (see §6.3)	§7.2.6

(Crane, Hyman & Tukumu 2011:120)

# Nzadi presents

- *a*-present typically (but not always) has habitual readings; also simple present
- *e*-present typically (but not always) has present progressive readings

[7.13]    bɔ     a     tswá    entúnj.     bɔ     a     tswá    enjér    obyê  
          they   HAB   bring   vegetables   they   HAB   bring   things   many  
          ‘They bring vegetables. They bring many things.’

[7.14]    mi     ê            dzé     ńtswé  
          I        PROG    eat       fish  
          [What are you doing?] ‘I am eating fish’

# Nzadi presents

- *a*-present typically (but not always) has habitual readings; also simple present
- *e*-present typically (but not always) has present progressive readings

[7.16]      bɔ a pɔ́ tòó      ‘they are sleeping’  
              bɔ é pǎ tòó      ‘they are sleeping’



# Nzadi presents

- *a*-present typically (but not always) has habitual readings; also simple present
- *e*-present typically (but not always) has present progressive readings

[7.18]      bɔ a sónka    ‘they are writing’

bɔ é ↓sónka    ‘they are writing’

# Nzadi presents

- *a*-present typically (but not always) has habitual readings; also simple present
- *e*-present typically (but not always) has present progressive readings

[7.22]      ...bo é yě      [Even if you don't call them] '...they come'

# Nzadi presents

- *a*-present typically (but not always) has habitual readings; also simple present
- *e*-present typically (but not always) has present progressive readings

[7.21]

bɔ a mán mbin

‘they are dirty’

bɔ é ye mbin

‘they are dirty’

# Nzadi presents

- *a*-present typically (but not always) has habitual readings; also simple present
- *e*-present typically (but not always) has present progressive readings

[7.23]      bɔ    é    ye    mbin    ntsúú    mo-ánkǔm  
              they PRES be    dirty    days    all  
              ‘they are always dirty’  
              (lit. ‘they are dirty every day’)

# Nzadi presents

- *a*-present typically (but not always) has habitual readings; also simple present
- *e*-present typically (but not always) has present progressive readings

[7.15]

bɔ a sónka ɔŋkàán

‘they’re writing a book [this year]’

\*bɔ é ↓sónka ɔŋkàán

*intended*: ‘they’re writing a book [this year]’

# Nzadi presents

- When there is overlap, *e*-present conveys what we originally analysed as epistemic certainty
- Now I think the contrast can be understood as largely evidential
- But – possibly – also emergent and therefore messy!
- Caveats:
  - Single speaker study
  - Little textual analysis
  - No analysis of natural conversation; all non-textual data come from speaker intuitions in elicitation sessions

# Nzadi presents

- Usually(?) visual evidence

[7.16]      bɔ a pɔ́ tòó      ‘they are sleeping’ *context: the speaker doesn’t see them*  
              bɔ é pǒ tòó      ‘they are sleeping’ *context: the speaker sees them*

# Nzadi presents

- Usually(?) visual evidence

[7.17]	bɔ a lyâ	‘they are fishing’	<i>context: the speaker knows they’ve gone to the river with the intention of fishing, but doesn’t see them</i>
	bɔ é lĩ	‘they are fishing’	<i>context: the speaker sees them fishing</i>



# Nzadi presents

- Usually(?) visual evidence

i. bɔ̃ ê báàn      ‘they are climbing’

ii. #bɔ̃ a báàn      infelicitous with progressive interpretation

notes: *Simon cannot think of a context when this would be uttered; if they are far up in the tree so you can't see them, the perfect/anterior would be used*

# Nzadi presents

- Also possible: auditory evidence

[7.18]      bɔ a sónka    ‘they are writing’

*context: the speaker knows they are in a classroom, and is making a confident guess about what they are doing, but doesn’t want to make a strong assertion of knowledge*

bɔ é ↓sónka    ‘they are writing’

*context: the speaker sees or hears them writing, or is otherwise certain*

# Nzadi presents

- Visual trumps auditory?

a. *Bɔ à mén.*  
3PL APRES dance.APRES  
'They are dancing.'  
(Context: the speaker hears the dancing)

b. *Bɔ ê mén.*  
3PL EPRES dance.EPRES  
'They are dancing.'  
(Context: the speaker sees them)

# Nzadi presents

- Sometimes also epistemic certainty, with source of knowledge unspecified? (example repeated)

[7.18]      bɔ a sónka    ‘they are writing’    *context: the speaker knows they are in a classroom, and is making a confident guess about what they are doing, but doesn’t want to make a strong assertion of knowledge*

             bɔ é ↓sónka    ‘they are writing’    *context: the speaker sees or hears them writing, or is otherwise certain*

# Nzadi presents

- Sometimes also epistemic certainty/certainty through inference

bo ê báán

‘they are going  
upriver’

*context: the statement is made at 12pm.  
The people in question left in a boat at  
11am, and the speaker knows that they  
won’t reach their destination until 1pm.*

# Nzadi presents

- Epistemic certainty not always asserted!! (at the time of utterance)

a. *Mi a báńtsa bɔ á dza.*  
1SG APRES think.APRES 3PL APRES eat.APRES  
'Maybe they're eating.' (lit. 'I think they're eating.')

(Context: the speaker is making a presumption)

b. *Mi a báńtsa bɔ ê dzé.*  
1SG APRES think.APRES 3PL EPRES eat.EPRES  
'Maybe they're (still) eating.' (lit. 'I think they're eating.')

(Context: the speaker knows for certain that they *started* eating, because, for example, he saw them)

# Nzadi presents

- Epistemic certainty not always asserted!! (at the time of utterance)

[7.20]	mi a báńtsa	‘maybe they’re writing’	<i>context: the speaker is making a presumption</i>
	bɔ a sónka	(lit. ‘I think they’re writing’)	
	mi a báńtsa	‘maybe they’re (still) writing’	<i>context: the speaker knows for certain that they started writing</i>
	bɔ é ↓sónka	(lit. ‘I think they’re writing’)	

# Nzadi presents

- Also possible: trusted secondhand testimonial/“authoritative” evidence (see Botne 2021)

a. *Bɔ a mên.*

3PL APRES dance.APRES

‘They are (probably) dancing.’

(Some possible contexts: they told me this morning that they would dance; they usually dance at about this time)

b. *Bɔ ê mên.*

3PL EPRES dance.EPRES

‘They are dancing.’

(Some possible contexts: I just talked to them on the phone and they told me; somebody who saw them told me; the A-PRESENT would also be possible in these contexts)

(Crane et al. forthc.)



# Nzadi presents

- The analysis is not yet fully resolved...
- Role of evidentiality vs. epistemicity?
- What's clear: evidential source plays a salient role

# Nzadi presents

- The analysis is not yet fully resolved...
- (At least predication) copular clauses muddy the waters a bit

[7.85]	ndzó a mán̄ ye okúb <sup>↓</sup> é swîi	‘the house is red’ (lit. ‘the house is with the color of red’)
	bɔ a mán̄ ye ndzaa	‘they are hungry’ (lit. ‘they are with hunger’)
	mi é ye (ye) kyêš	‘I am happy’ (lit. ‘I am (with) happiness’)
	mi a mán̄ ye kyêš	‘I am happy’ (lit. ‘I am with happiness’)
	mi a mán̄ ye mbvêl dzũm̀	‘I am 10 years old’ (lit. ‘I am with 10 years’)

# Nzadi presents

- The analysis is not yet fully resolved...
- (At least predication) copular clauses muddy the waters a bit

- i. ndzée é yè mpfyô ‘the river is cold’ (*I am in it*)
- ii. ndzée é yè mpfyô ‘the river is cold’ (*it is usually cold this time of year*)
- iii. ndzée é yè mpfyô ‘the river is cold’ (*it looks cold*)

# Nzadi presents

- The analysis is not yet fully resolved...
- (At least predication) copular clauses muddy the waters a bit
- --> e-Present is definitely NOT (yet) a primarily evidential marker

# Nzadi presents

- Summary:
- E-PRESENTS are used with direct, usually visual evidence; the visual evidence may also be trusted second-hand testimonial.
  - Caudal and Roussarie (2005) note connections between progressive marking and “testimonial” evidence across languages.
  - Botne (2021) describes “authoritative” evidentiality as an important category in Bantu evidential category, on a par with first-hand information.
- A-PRESENTS are neutral in terms of evidentiary source, and they tend to be the form chosen when the truth value of an utterance is inferred rather than directly observed.

# Nzadi presents

- Summary:
- Interpretive contrasts in Nzadi presents may be a case of emergent evidentiality
- Epistemic certainty also plays a role



# Conclusions

# Conclusions

- Although they frequently don't have dedicated or obligatory categories, (epistemic and) evidential stances are associated with numerous Bantu temporal-aspectual forms (see Botne 2021; Crane et al. forthc. for additional examples)
- I think that more of these will be found as more languages receive in-depth semantic study
- The evidential contrasts relevant for Bantu languages may look different from what's typologically common
- One promising place to look is (tense/)aspect constructions that have semantic (temporal, aspectual) overlaps with other T/A constructions: how do they contrast?
- I think we will discover a treasure trove of evidential strategies!



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# Perfective in Bantu

- *-ile* perfective (/perfect/etc.) extremely widespread, traceable to very early Bantu
- **Likely resultative origin** (see e.g. Botne 2010; Crane 2012; but cf. Nurse 2008; Nurse & Philippson 2006; Bastin 1983; Schadeberg 2003; Meeussen 1967: 110)
- Often retains past event / present state interpretive split

# Fwe Stative

- **-ite** (NB: my description here is only (very) partial!)

(97) *hànshí kùbómbètè*  
ha-N-shí                      ku-bomb-éte  
NP<sub>16</sub>-NP<sub>9</sub>-ground      SM<sub>17</sub>-become\_wet-STAT  
'The ground is wet.' (ZF\_Elic14)

(98) *òpótó àzywìré bùsù*  
o-ø-potó                      a-zywir-é                      bu-su  
AUG-NP<sub>1a</sub>-pot              SM<sub>1</sub>-become\_full-STAT      NP<sub>14</sub>-flour  
'The pot is full of flour.' (ZF\_Elic14)

# Fwe Stative

- No past eventive readings: can't reference change itself

(109) \**èténdè ryómbwà wángù rìcókétè zyónà*

e-tènde	rí-o-ø-mbwá	u-angú	ri-co:k-éte	zyóna
AUG-leg	PP <sub>5</sub> -AUG-NP <sub>1a</sub> -dog	PP <sub>1</sub> -POSS <sub>1SG</sub>	SM <sub>5</sub> -break-STAT	yesterday
Intended: 'The leg of my dog broke yesterday.' (ZF_Elic14)				

# Fwe Stative

- Can't add information about non-subject agent

- (107) a. *ciàzò ciàrukìtè*  
cí-azo      ci-ar-úk-ite  
NP<sub>7</sub>-door      SM<sub>7</sub>-close-SEP.INTR-STAT  
'The door is open.'
- b. \**ciàzò ciàrukìtè kú'ru:ho*  
cí-azo      ci-ar-úk-ite      kú-rú:-ho  
NP<sub>7</sub>-door      SM<sub>7</sub>-close-SEP.INTR-STAT      NP<sub>17</sub>-NP<sub>11</sub>-wind  
Intended: 'The door is opened by the wind.'

# Fwe Stative

- Some perfect-like readings (but only with strong present relevance)

(118) *ndìbárítè èmbúká 'yémiràhò*  
ndi-bar-íte                      e-N-buká                      i-é=mi-raho  
SM<sub>1SG</sub>-read-STAT              AUG-NP<sub>9</sub>-book              PP<sub>9</sub>-CON=NP<sub>4</sub>-law  
'I've read a law book.' (i.e., I know the law) (NF\_Elic15)