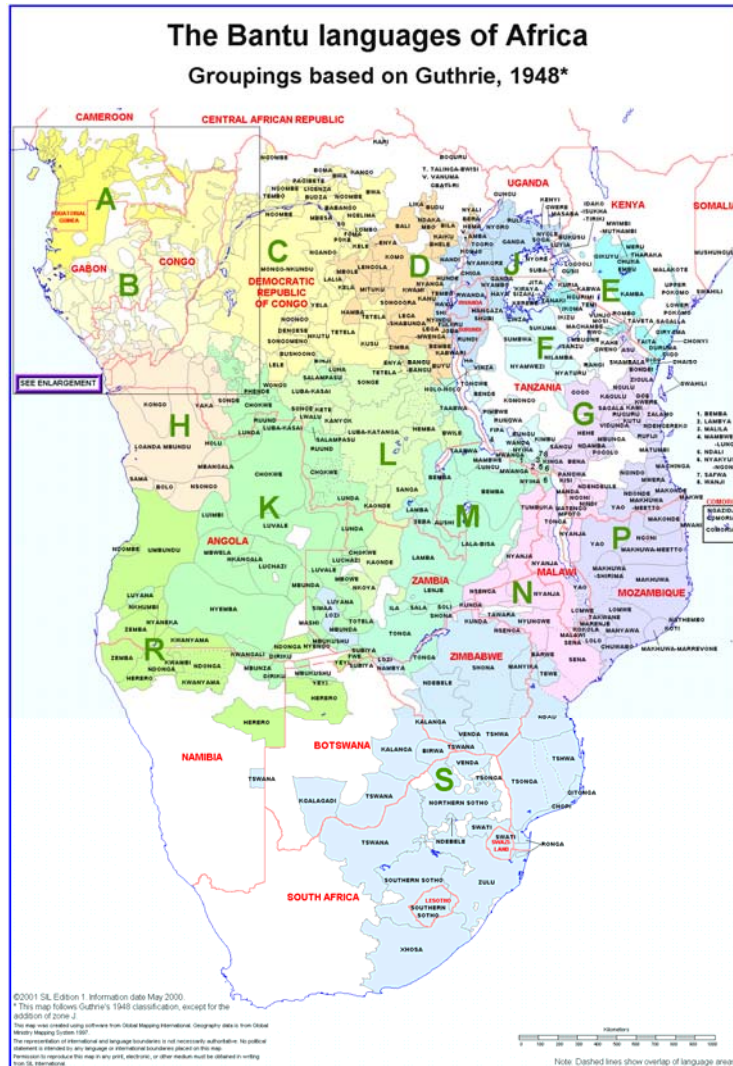


WHY RELATIVE VERBS AGREE WITH THEIR HEAD NOUN IN MANY BANTU LANGUAGES

Mark Van de Velde

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- 550 languoids (Glottolog.org)
- referential classification: “Guthrie numbers”
- rich morphology
- great for the diachronic study of syntax
- this talk: provide a historical explanation for a typologically unusual phenomenon involving agreement in relative clause constructions

In many Bantu languages, the same verbal morpheme (called *Initial*) is used to index **the subject** of the verb in non-relative verbs and to index **the head noun** of the relative clause in relative verb forms,

a situation “in need of explanation” (e.g. Henderson 2007).

(1) Luvale; K14; Angola, Zambia (Horton 1949: 21, 177)

a. **mu**-tu w-a-mwangana **a**-mbata-nga ci-teli (...)

1-person PP₁-CON-chief IN₁.PST-carry-PST 7-load

‘The chief’s person carried the load.’

b. **vi**-ze [mw-**a**-va-han-a **mw**-ata va-kw-etu]

8-DEM FUT-IN₁-OM₂-give-FV 1-master PP₂-PP₁₅-1PL.POSS

‘those (things) which the master will give to our fellows’

(2) Orungu; B11; Gabon (Van de Velde & Ambouroué 2017)

a. ó[↓]ɲwánt àgòlín ó[↓]g ábà

ó[↓]ɲw-ántò à-à-gòl-in-ì ó-gà á-bà

1-woman IN₁-RPST-buy-APPL-RPST 1-chief 6-mango

‘The woman bought the mangoes for the chief.’

b. ábà [mágòlìn ó[↓]ɲwánt [↓]ógà]

á-bà má-à-gòl-in-ì ó[↓]ɲw-ántò ó-gà

6-mango IN₆-REL.RPST-buy-APPL-RPST 1-woman 1-chief

‘the mangoes [that the woman bought for the chief]’

Simplified slot-filler model of Proto-Bantu verb structure
(Meeussen 1967)

PreIN + IN + PostIN + TA + [OM + [[root + ext] + FIN]] + postFIN
(1) (1) (1) (n) (n) 1 (n) 1 (1)

IN = Initial morpheme also glossed as SM (subject marker)

The diachronic scenario that leads to agreement of a relative verb with its head noun consists of three simple steps:

- 1) Emergence of a relativiser of demonstrative origin, agreeing with the head noun;
- 2) Morphological integration of the relativiser into the relative verb as a Pre-initial;
- 3) Formal reduction of the Pre-initial – Initial sequence

Evidence for this scenario:

- 1) correlation between the paradigm of agreement markers used in Initial position and the type of agreement;
- 2) every step is attested;
- 3) many other aspects of relative clause structure are explained, including:
 - 1) correlations between word order and type of agreement;
 - 2) absence of 1st and 2nd person agreement markers

The Initial can be occupied by a Verbal Prefix (VP) or by a Pronominal Prefix (PP) in relative verb forms (cf. Meinhof 1948)

The Proto-Bantu noun class system as reconstructed by Meeussen (1967: 97)

	NP	EP	PP	VP	OP
1	mò-	(ò?)	jò-	ó-, á-	mò-
2	bà-	bá-	bá-	bá-	bá-
3	mò-	(ó?)	gó-	gó-	gó-
4	mè-	(é-?)	gé-	gé-	gé-
5	ì-	dé-	dé-	dé-	dé-
6	mà-	(á-?)	gá-	gá-	gá-
7	kè-	ké-	ké-	ké-	ké-
8	bì-	bí-	bí-	bí-	bí-
9	n-	(è-)	jè-	jé-	jé-
10	n-	í-	jí-	jí-	jí-
11	dò-	dó-	dó-	dó-	dó-
...					

Nsuka Nkutsi's (1982) comparative work on Bantu relative clauses allowed me to find a correlation between the type of agreement and the paradigm of agreement markers:

IF the relative verb agrees with its subject, THEN the Initial is always a VP

If the relative verb agrees with its head noun, its Initial is often a PP

The "PP" is a reflex of a demonstrative, i.e. of a relative linker.

Step 1: a demonstrative linker appears (perhaps originally a nominalizer)

NP [RelCl] → NP_i LNK_{AGi} [RelCl]

(3) Haya; JE22; Tanzania (Duranti 1977: 121)

e-mótoka éy' ó-mu-sháíja y-a-gúla

AU-9car 9REL.DEM AU-1-man IN₁-PST1-buy

'the car that the man has bought'

Step 1: a demonstrative linker appears (perhaps originally a nominalizer)

NP [RelCl] → NP_i LNK_{AGi} [RelCl]

Step 2: if Subj is postverbal, the LNK is integrated into the verb

NP_i LNK_{AGi} [RelCl] → NP_i [PP_i-VP_j-RelV SUBJ_j...]

- (4) Shona; S10; Zimbabwe (Demuth and Harford 1999)

Mbatya dza-v-aka-son-era va-kadzi mwenga

10.clothes REL₁₀-VP₂-PST-SOW-APP 2-women bride

‘the clothes which the women sowed for the bride’

- (5) Lega; D25; DRC (cited via Nsuka-Nkutsi 1982)

mǎ-zɪ [ma-tú-[↓]kákúbulá]

‘the water [that we will pour]’

Step 1: a demonstrative linker appears (perhaps originally a nominalizer)

NP [RelCl] → NP_i LNK_{AGi} [RelCl]

Step 2: if Subj is postverbal, the LNK is integrated into the verb

NP_i LNK_{AGi} [RelCl] → NP_i [PP_i-VP_j-RelV SUBJ_j...]

Step 3: Initial CV-CV- is reduced to CV-

- If the PP- goes, we end up with well-behaved subject indexation.
- If the VP- goes, we arrive at the pattern that needed explanation.

NP_i [PP_i-VP_j-RelV SUBJ_j...] → NP_i [PP_i-RelV SUBJ...]

Ongoing reduction of the PP-VP- succession is shown at work in Lunda, where VP- is on its way to being pushed out.

It survived where the VP is 1st or 2nd person or class 1 (the only VP with a V- shape) and was lost elsewhere.

(6) Lunda; L52; Zambia, Angola (Kawasha 2003)

a. chitwámu chinálanda

chi-twámu chí-ni-a-landa

7-chair REL₇-IN_{1SG}-PST-buy-FV

‘the chair that I bought’

b. wúta waténtékelíyi Womba hakadidi

wúta wu-a-a-tentek-el-i-yi Womba ha-kadidi

14.gun REL₁₄-IN₁-PST-put-RP-FV-3SG Womba LOC-bed

‘the gun that Womba had put on the bed’

c. kazémba kazátíshilíwu antu

ka-zémba ki-a-zat-ish-il-i-wu a-ntu

12-axe REL₁₂-PST-work-CAUS-RP-FV-3PL 2-people

‘the axe that the people used’

There is a strong tendency that:

IF the relative verb agrees with its head noun in non-subject relatives, THEN its subject is post verbal

Obviously because this is the easiest way in which relativisers can be integrated into the relative verb, and NOT because both are symptoms of some “underlying” property of Bantu relative clauses

By the way, there *are* a few exceptions, which are easy to explain.

In many (most/all?) Bantu languages in which relative verbs agree with the head noun, they do not allow 1st and 2nd person agreement markers:

(7) Orungu; B11; Gabon (Van de Velde & Ambouroué 2011)

myé yí⁺kó⁺kó nè nkòlò

I IN₉-am.called CMP Nkolo

‘I, who am called Nkolo’

This is now easy to explain as due to the demonstrative origin of these agreement markers.

Advantages of this diachronic explanation:

- made up of widely attested, “trivial” changes
- none of which is goal-oriented / claimed to be functionally motivated
- all phases are attested
- the different logically possible outcomes at every juncture in the evolution are also all attested

- Many logically independent aspects of relative clauses are explained:
 - agreement of the Rel verb with head noun
 - the existence of both PP and VP in the Initial slot of Bantu relative verbs
 - the absence of 1st and 2nd person agreement on relative verbs in many Bantu languages
 - the link between the agreement controller and the position of the subject, and the directionality of this link (IF agreement with head noun THEN usually postverbal subject)