

The preverbal domain in Cuwabo (Mozambique, P34)

Although Subject-Verb-Object can be considered the canonical word order in Cuwabo, with grammatical functions encoded according to the elements' position toward the verb, the language is also "discourse-configurational" (Kiss 1995) in that information structure seems to be an influential factor in the word order and its possible variability as well as in the conjoint/disjoint alternation.

This talk presents an overview of the elements that may occur in the preverbal domain in Cuwabo, in term of their syntactic properties, their informational interpretations, and the principles that determines their occurrence. After analyzing first-hand data collected on the field, and investigating the possible positioning of subjects, objects and adjuncts, I report three syntactically different types of preverbal elements: non-dislocated preverbal subjects (1), left-dislocated objects (2) and scene-setting elements, such as locative inversion (3).

- (1) mwáán' óólle kaádhówa omundda
mwááná ólle ka-á-dhówa o-mundda
1.child 1.DEM.III NEG.1-PST.IPFV-go 17-3.field.PL
'that child was not going to the field'
- (2) múkwáni ddiikáána vatákûlu, kaddíngûla
múkwáni ddi-Ø-hi-káána va-tákûlu ka-ddi-Ø-ní-gûla
3.greenery 1SG-PRS-PFV.DJ-have 16-9a.home NEG-1SG-PRS-IPFV-buy
'greenery, I have at home, I do not buy'
- (3) rímba mwa mwánámáándámaní mwaávolówa nówa baddipá
rímba mwa mwánámáándámaní mu-a-hí-volówa nówa ba-ddi-pá
18.house 18.into 1.neighbour 18-PST-PFV.DJ-enter 9a.snake SEQ-1SG-kill
'a snake had entered into the neighbour's house, and I killed it'

These three preverbal elements all share the impossibility of having a focus function, which represents a broadly attested constraint in Bantu (Morimoto 2006, Zerbian 2006, among others), but they have different syntactic, interpretational, and prosodic properties that will be exposed in this talk. I will also discuss the possible combinations in case two elements precede the verb, making the distinction between internal and external topics.

Whenever relevant, I will draw up comparison with the pre-verbal domain elements in Makhuwa (Van der Wal 2009), spoken north of Cuwabo.

References

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