LabEx ASLAN, projet DISAL
master class, ISH, 27 mai 2016

MORPHOSYNTACTIC TYPOLOGY OF SUBSAHARAN LANGUAGES

Denis Creissels
DDL (UMR 5596) & Université Lyon 2
denis.creissels@univ-lyon2.fr
http://deniscreissels.fr

1. INTRODUCTION

This presentation is about the diversity in the morphosyntactic organization of the languages spoken in Subsaharan Africa. Subsaharan languages are very diverse in their morphosyntax. It is possible, at least to some extent, to recognize types of morphosyntactic organization typical for languages spoken in some areas, or belonging to some families, but it is impossible to propose a type of morphosyntactic organization that could be considered typical for Subsaharan languages as a whole.

Crucially, the morphosyntactic diversity of Subsaharan languages is in many respects very different from that observed in other parts of the world. Some types of organization relatively common elsewhere in the world are very rare, or even not attested at all, among the languages of Subsaharan Africa, but the reverse is also true: some types of morphosyntactic organization very rarely found in other parts of the world are widely attested in (some parts of) Subsaharan Africa.

It is impossible to give a comprehensive account of the morphosyntactic typology of Subsaharan languages within the limits of this presentation. After discussing the possibility of dividing Subsaharan Africa into linguistic areas (Section 2), I will limit myself to a brief overview of selected topics that are of particular interest for a comparison between the morphosyntactic diversity observed in the languages of Subsaharan Africa and that observed in other parts of the world (Sections 3 to 13).

For a general overview of the morphosyntactic typology of the languages of Subsaharan Africa, see Creissels & al. (2008). For a more detailed discussion of the topics dealt with in this presentation and other similar topics, see Creissels (Forthcoming(b).

2. LINGUISTIC AREAS IN SUBSAHARAN AFRICA

A linguistic area (or 'Sprachbund') is a zone within which languages that are only distantly related genetically, or even unrelated, share a number of typological features that cannot be analyzed as inherited from a common ancestor, and can only be explained as the result of spreading or convergence in a situation of language contact. Two linguistic areas have long been recognized in the Northern part of Subsaharan Africa:

– one of them extends from Somalia and Erythrea to the area surrounding Lake Chad (Crass and Meyer 2008)

– the other one (commonly known as 'Sudanic belt') includes the rest of the Northern part of Subsaharan Africa (Güldemann 2008).

By contrast, the notion of linguistic area is problematic for the Central and Southern part of Subsaharan Africa, at least in the domain of morphosyntax. Bantu languages take up most of this part of Subsaharan Africa, and their relative homogeneity is the mere consequence of their relatively close genetic relationship, and of the contact they have maintained thoughout their history. Three other language families are found in the South Western part of Subsaharan Africa: Kx'a, Khoe, and Tuu. There is no convincing proof of a genetic relationship between Kx'a and Tuu languages, which are admittedly the indigenous languages of this part of Africa, but they are typologically very similar. By contrast, Khoe languages (whose presence in this zone is admittedly the result of relatively recent migrations) are typologically very different from both Kx'a / Tuu languages and Bantu languages. This suggests that Kx'a and Tuu languages might the vestige of a linguistic area that covered a wider part of Southern Africa before the Khoe and Bantu migrations.

3. CORE ARGUMENT FLAGGING

By core argument flagging, I mean the use of case markers or adpositions to mark distinctions between the following three types of arguments:

– A: the agent of the basic transitive construction,
– P: the patient of the basic transitive construction,
– U: the unique argument of semantically monovalent verbs.

In this section, I will use the following terminology: an argument is *unflagged* if its form coincides with the form of nouns used for quotation or pure designation, it is *flagged* if it is in a case form different from the quotation form of nouns, or accompanied by an adposition.

It is well-known that, in Subsaharan languages, flagged core arguments are not distributed similarly among different phyla. They are quite widespread in Nilo-Saharan and Afroasiatic languages, but uncommon in Niger-Congo and almost inexistent in Khoisan languages.

Moreover, the distribution of the possible patterns of core argument flagging in Subsaharan Africa is very different from that observed in the languages of the world.

Outside of Africa, two patterns only are widely attested:

– the so-called *nominative-accusative* pattern: unflagged A/U (subject) vs. flagged P (object);
– the so-called *absolutive-ergative* pattern: unflagged P/U (object+intransitive subject) vs. flagged A (transitive subject).

Among the languages of Subsaharan Africa that have core argument flagging, the absolutive-ergative pattern is extremely marginal. By contrast, a third type of core-argument flagging is quite widespread: the so-called *marked-nominative* pattern. This pattern, illustrated by Ex. (1), is characterized by the following configuration: unflagged P (object) vs. flagged A/U (subject).

(1) Oromo (Cushitic – Griefenow-Mewis & Bitima 1994)

(1a) quotation form of nouns: **Tulluu** (proper name), **makiinaa** 'car'

(1b) **Makiinaa-n hin dhufu.**
car-S NEG arrive.CPL.3SG.M
'The car is not arriving'

(1c) **Tulluu-n gammada.**
Tulluu-S be glad.PRS.3SG.M
'Tulluu is glad'

(1d) **Tulluu-n makiinaa bite.**
Tulluu-S car buy.CPL.3SG.M
'Tulluu bought a car'

Outside of Africa, the marked-nominative pattern is extremely rare. By contrast, this pattern is found in roughly half of the Subsaharan languages that have core-argument flagging. Interestingly, in this respect, the Berber languages of Northern Africa behave like the languages of Subsaharan Africa, since in typological terms, the so-called 'states' of Berber nouns constitute a binary case system following the marked-nominative pattern (König 2008).

4. SOVX, AN UNCOMMON TYPE OF CONSTITUENT ORDER

Textbook accounts of constituent order typology suggest that the notion of SOV type of constituent order is more or less equivalent to the notion of verb-final language. It is true that, in most languages, objects and obliques tend to occupy the same position either before or after the verb. This however does not hold for languages in which, in pragmatically unmarked clauses, the core syntactic terms of the basic transitive construction precede the verb, and all obliques follow it (SOVX constituent order), as illustrated by Soninke – Ex. (2).

(2) Soninke (Mande – pers.doc.)

(2a) **Fàatú dà tíyè-n qóbó sáxà-n ŋá.**
Fatou TR meat-D buy market-D POSTP
'Fatou has bought meat at the market.'

(2b) **Fàatú dà tíyè-n ñígá-ndí lémínè-n ŋá.**
Fatou TR meat-D eat-CAUS child-D POSTP
'Fatou had the child eat meat.'

(2c) **Ó dà qálìsî-n kínì à yí.**
1PL TR money-D give 3SG POSTP
'We gave him/her the money.'

The SOVX type of constituent order is one of the morphosyntactic features concerning a proportion of Subsaharan languages significantly higher than that observed at world level. It shows a particular concentration in West Africa, where in addition to the whole Mande family, in which it is the only possible constituent order, it is found also in some languages belonging to the neighboring Gur and Songhay families (Creissels 2005).

Interestingly, in many respects, the languages that have this unusual type of constituent order show features commonly associated with VO rather than OV order. For example, like SVO languages, they have clause chains with the most finite clause as the first clause of the chain, whereas verb-final languages have clause chains with the most finite clause as the last clause of the chain.

5. SYNTACTICALLY CONDITIONED VARIATIONS IN CONSTITUENT ORDER

The proportion of languages with a syntactically flexible constituent order is much lower among Subsaharan languages than at world level. Extreme cases of flexible word order as attested for example in Russian, Basque, or Hungarian, are extremely rare (if attested at all) in Subsaharan Africa. Some interesting cases of pragmatically conditioned alternations in constituent order can be found, but the question dealt with in this section is that of alternations in constituent order that have no discourse function and have a purely syntactic conditioning, a phenomenon rarely found in the languages of the world.

TAM-polarity-driven VO~OV alternations are widespread in the Gur, Kwa, and Kru families, i.e., in the central part of West Africa. They are strictly conditioned by the TAM-polarity value expressed in verb morphology or by auxiliaries occurring immediately after the subject NP, allowing no room for the expression of information structure (Creissels 2005).

For example, according to Grah (1983), in Newole (Eastern Kru), SOXV is the canonical constituent order triggered by six auxiliaries – Ex. (3), whereas clauses including none of these six auxiliaries can only have the SVOX constituent order.

(3) Newole (Grah 1983: 232, 259)

(3a) **Kóní ní sáká jàlɛ́ lī.**
Koni CPL.NEG rice kitchen eat
'Koni has not eaten rice in the kitchen.'

(3b) **Làlí yā mágìtī kó līēplō yɛ́.**
Lali CPL market at scarf see
'Lali has seen a scarf at the market.'

6. INTERPOSITIONS

Several Subsaharan languages with SVOX as their basic constituent order have a grammatical word (or clitic) for which I propose to coin the term 'interposition'. This term is intended to capture a distribution that fits with none of the possible types of grammatical words proposed in general accounts of parts-of-speech systems. Interpositions can be viewed as a variety of adposition that has gone unnoticed so far: they have in common with other types of

adpositions the obligatory adjacency to NPs, but differ from them in that they must necessarily be adjacent to two NPs (or NP-equivalents) at the same time.[1]

In the languages that have this rare type of adposition, it never occurs when the verb is followed by a single object or oblique. It can only be found between two successive terms (objects or obliques) in the construction of the same verb. In this type of context, the use of an interposition may be obligatory, depending on language-specific rules.

For example, in the Kx'a language Ju|'hoan (Dickens 2005), verbs divide into three classes (intransitive, transitive, and ditransitive) according to the number of the non-subject terms that can be present without triggering the use of a verbal suffix **-a** encoding the presence of at least one term that does not belong to the valency of the verb in postverbal position. Independently of the use of this verbal suffix (glossed VE 'valency-external participant'), the interposition **kò** is used whenever a postverbal term is followed by another postverbal term. Ex. (4) & (5) illustrate this mechanism with the intransitive verb **!áí** 'die' and with the transitive verb **||ohm** 'chop'.

(4) Ju|'hoan (Kx'a – Dickens 2005: 37, 38, 39)

(4a) **Mí !ú-n!a´àn !áí.**
1SG grand-father die
'My grandfather died.'

(4b) **Mí !ú-n!a´àn !áí-á |Aotcha.**
1SG grand-father die-VE |Aotcha
'My grandfather died at |Aotcha.'

(4c) **Mí !ú-n!a´àn !áí-á goàq=´àn.**
1SG grand-father die-VE yesterday
'My grandfather died yesterday.'

(4d) **Ha !áí-á |Aotcha kò |ámà hè.**
3SG die-VE |Aotcha INTERP today
'He died in |Aotcha today.'

(4e) **Ha !áí-á |ámà hè kò |Aotcha.**
3SG die-VE today INTERP |Aotcha
'He died in |Aotcha today.'

(5) Ju|'hoan (Kx'a – Dickens 2005: 37, 38, 39)

(5a) **Ha kú ||ohm !aìhn.**
1SG ICPL chop tree
'He was chopping the tree.'

[1] In the literature, interpositions have also been designated as 'transitive particles' (Dickens), 'default prepositions', or 'multipurpose oblique markers' (Güldeman). None of these terms is consistent with the very particular distribution of interpositions.

(5b) **Ha kú ||ohm-a !aìhn kò g|úí.**
1SG ICPL chop-ve tree INTERP forest
'He was chopping the tree in the forest.'

(5c) **Ha kú ||ohm-a g|úí kò !aìhn.**
1SG ICPL chop-VE forest INTERP tree
'He was chopping the tree in the forest.'

In Ju|'hoan, the verb **|a´àn** 'give' can be followed by two postverbal terms representing the recipient and the gift. According to the general rule, **kò** must occur between them. The order **|a´àn** – *recipient* – **kò** – *gift* seems to be usual, but according to Baker & Collins (2006), **|a´àn** – *gift* – **kò** – *recipient* is also possible, and valency-external terms may even be inserted between the NPs representing arguments, or precede them – Ex. (6).

(6) Ju|'hoan (Kx'a – Baker & Collins 2006)

Mi |'an Maria ko ambere ko tzi.
1SG give Maria INTERP bucket INTERP outside
'I give Maria the bucket outside'

~ **Mi |'an tzi ko Maria ko ambere.**
~ **Mi |'an Maria ko tzi ko ambere.**
~ **Mi |'an ambere ko Maria ko tzi.**
~ **Mi |'an tzi ko ambere ko Maria.**
~ **Mi |'an ambere ko tzi ko Maria.**

The other two languages in which this uncommon type of adposition has been signalled are Nande (Bantu) and Lamba (Gur) – Schneider-Zioga and Nguessimo Mutaka (2015), Aritiba (1988). Interestingly, they are very distant from each other, and none of their immediate neighbours of close relatives seems to have developed an interposition.

7. EXISTENTIAL PREDICATION IN THE LANGUAGES OF THE SUDANIC BELT

In this section, I discuss an areal feature of the Sudanic belt not mentioned so far in the literature: the particularly high frequency of a type of existential predication which is relatively rare at world level.

Existential predications (*There is a book (on the table)*) provide an alternative way of encoding the prototypical figure-ground relationships also denoted by plain locational sentences (*The book is on the table*), from which they differ in the perspectivization of figure-ground relationships.

Probably less than half of the world's languages have a special predicative construction encoding the existential perspectivization of figure-ground relationships (Creissels, Forthcoming(a)), but in many cases (for example, Finnish – Ex. (7)), variation in constituent order provides a rough equivalent of existential perspectivization.

(7) Finnish (Uralic – Huumo 2003: 464)

(7a) **Poika on piha-lla.**
boy is yard-in
'The boy is in the yard.'

(7b) **Piha-lla on poika.**
in-yard is boy
'There is a boy in the yard.'

However, some of the languages devoid of a dedicated existential construction also have a rigid constituent order in locational predication. In such languages, in the absence of indications provided by definiteness marking or focus marking, the same locational clauses are used indiscriminately in contexts that would trigger a choice between locational and existential predication in other languages:

(8) Mandinka (Mande – pers.doc.)

Wùlôo bé yíròo kótò.
dog.D is tree.D under
'The dog is under the tree.' or 'There is a dog under the tree.'

Languages with rigid order in locational clauses and no possible contrast with a dedicated existential predicative construction are very common in the Sudanic belt. By contrast, they are rare in the remainder of Subsaharan Africa and in other parts of the world. In the database I constituted for a world-wide survey of existential predication (Creissels, Forthcoming(a)), I have 36 languages with a rigid figure–ground order in locational predication and no posible contrast with a dedicated existential construction. 28 of them are spoken in the Sudanic belt, and the remaining 8 outside of Africa (Europe, Australia, South East Asia, or South America).

8. INCORPORATION OF ATTRIBUTIVE ADJECTIVES

In most languages, *adjective – noun* compounding is limited either to lexicalized compounds such as *blackbird* or *redbreast*. *Adjective – noun* compounding as a regular and productive morphological process creating words equivalent to the *attributive adjective – noun* phrases found in most languages is not common. Attention has been drawn to this phenomenon by Dahl (2004: 225-235 & 2015: 127-131), who argues that "combinations of adjectives and nouns may become tightened and integrated into a one-word construction without losing their productivity." and also notes that some languages have *adjective – noun* constructions analyzable as instances of quasi-compounding (combinations of words which in some respects behave as if they were the two elements of a single compound word).

Although this is rarely made explicit in the available grammatical descriptions, phenomena interpretable in terms of quasi-compounding in *attributive adjective – noun* combinations are pervasive in the languages of Subsaharan Africa. Moreover, languages in which the integration of attributive adjectives and nouns into one-word constructions is obligatory can be found at least within the Mande and Gur language families.

Subsaharan languages provide evidence against mainstream approaches to lexical categories that put on a par adjectives and adverbs (and sometimes adpositions) with nouns and verbs, and rather support the view that there are only two basic lexical categories (nouns and verbs), since adjectives and adverbs do not necessarily have the ability to 'project' phrasal categories.

In Subsaharan languages, the recognition of 'adjectival phrases' with an internal structure comparable to that of NPs or VPs is problematic, since the possibilities of expansion of attributive adjectives are most of the time limited to a single word expressing intensity. For example, Bambara has an adjective **júgú** 'bad' that can be juxtaposed to nouns as an attributive modifier, but there is nothing in Bambara syntax (and as far as I know, in the syntax of other Subsaharan languages) that could be compared to the use of *bad* as the head of an adjective phrase including a complement NP such as *as bad as NP* in English. In Bambara, *a dog as bad as yours* can only be rendered as lit. *a dog whose badness and that of your dog are equal* – Ex. (9).

(9) Bambara (Mande – pers.doc.)

(9a) **wùlù-júgú**
dog-bad
'bad dog'

(9b)

wùlû	**mîn**	**júgú-yâ**	**ní**	**í**	**ká**	**wùlû**	**tá**	**ká**	**kán**
dog.D	REL	bad-ABSTR.D	and	2SG	LK	dog.D	that_of	POS	be_equal

'a dog as bad as yours'

As regards the morphological incorporation of attributive adjectives, Soninke (West Mande) illustrates the clearest possible case of a language with *noun – adjective* compounding, since in this language, the distinction between phrases and compounds is particularly clear-cut.

Crucially, Soninke nouns have a distinction between an autonomous form that can function as a word without any additional material, and a non-autonomous form occurring exclusively when the nominal lexeme is a non-final formative of a complex lexeme. For example, the non-autonomous form of **yìràamê** 'cloth' is **yìràn-** (as in the compound **yìràn-gáagàanâ** 'cloth seller', where **gáagàanâ** is an agent noun derived from **gáagà** 'sell').

Morphologically, Soninke adjectives are not different from nouns, and can fulfill the same syntactic functions. For example, **qúllè** 'white' can be found in all nominal positions with the type of meaning expressed in English as *a/the white one*. Simply, much in the same way as for example in French and other Romance languages, this use of adjectives requires some discursive conditioning. Adjectives can also combine with nouns expressing the concept they modify, as in **yìràn-qúllè** 'white cloth', but as shown by this example, *noun – adjective* combinations expressing the kind of modification typically expressed by attributive adjectives can only take the shape of compounds with the noun in its non-autonomous form:

(10) Soninke (Mande, pers.doc.)

(10a) **Ń dà yìràamê-n qóbó.**
1SG TR cloth-D buy
'I bought a/the cloth.'

(10b) **Ń dà qúllè-n qóbó.**
1SG TR white-D buy
'I bought a/the white one.'

(10c) **Ń dà yìràn-qúllè-n qóbó.**
1SG TR cloth-white-D buy
'I bought a/the white cloth.'

Very clear cases of *noun – adjective* compounding are also attested in various branches of the Gur language family.

9. ACTIVE / PASSIVE LABILITY (ZERO-CODED PASSIVES)

Languages may have verbs that can be used in their underived form either transitively, or intransitively with a subject representing the same patient-like participant as the object of the same verb used transitively (P-lability).

Semantically, two varieties of P-lability must be distinguished: causative / anticausative lability, if the subject of the intransitive construction represents a participant undergoing the same process as the object of the transitive construction, but not necessarily as the result of the action of an agent, and active / passive lability, if the intransitive construction implies the participation of an unexpressed agent.

Cross-linguistically, causative / anticausative lability, illustrated by English *break*, is extremely common, and its existence is widely acknowledged in typological investigations of valency changes, whereas until not long ago, the very possibility of active / passive lability was either ignored or even explicitly denied by typologists working on valency-decreasing derivations. Arka & Kosmas (2005) on Manggarai (Autronesian) and Lüpke (2005) on Jalonke (Mande) are to the best of my knowledge the first published works that have explicitly argued the case for the recognition of zero-coded passives (aka bare-passives), but this recognition was implicit in many previously published descriptions of languages belonging to various families, both within and outside Africa (for a review, see Cobbinah and Lüpke (2009); see also Hamlaoui (2014) for an analysis of zero-coded passives in Bantu and western Nilotic languages).

The Mande language family shows a particular concentration of languages with more or less productive zero-coded passives, or active/passive lability (Lüpke (2007), Cobbinah and Lüpke (2009)). Manding languages illustrate the extreme case of languages which have no strictly transitive verb, and a very restricted class of A-labile verbs, but in which all the verbs that have a transitive use can also be used intransitively in their underived form with a passive reading.

For example, (11b) is an intransitive construction, as evidenced by the choice of the intransitive variant of the completive marker, and in spite of the absence as anything that

could be interpreted as passive marking, the subject of this intransitive construction (**kúlúŋò** 'the boat') can only be interpreted as being assigned exactly the same semantic role as the object of the transitive construction (11a).

(11) Mandinka (Manding, Mande – pers. doc.)

(11a) **Kèwôo yè kúlúŋ-ò dádáa.**
man.D CPL.TR boat-D repair
'The man repaired the boat.'

(11b) **Kúlúŋ-ò dádàa-tá.**
boat-D repair-CPL.INTR
'The boat was repaired.'

Consequently, (11b) is not a transitive construction with a null subject, but an intransitive construction whose subject (**kúlúŋò**) has the same semantic role as the object of the transitive construction (11a) – in other words, a zero-coded passive.

10. ANTIPASSIVES IN 'ACCUSATIVE' LANGUAGES

In the long-standing debate about the relationship between antipassive and accusativity/ergativity, a number of Subsaharan languages belonging to various families and areas provide crucial evidence against the hypothesis of a privileged relationship between antipassive as a type of valency change and ergativity, and provide strong support to the view that accusative languages may have fully productive antipassive derivations. The languages in question have accusative alignment in core argument coding, and also have antipassive derivations that only differ from the antipassive derivations found in ergative languages in that (a) they are less visible, since in an accusative language, the coding properties of an A noun phrase converted into the unique core argument U of an intransitive construction do not change,[2] and (b) one of the functions fulfilled by antipassive derivations in some ergative languages (making A's accessible to operations to which P's and U's only have access) has no possible equivalent in accusative languages.

Ex. (12) illustrates this situation in Tennet (Surmic, Eastern Sudanic): Tennet uses the same 'marked-nominative' case for all subjects (transitive A's and intransitive U's), and requires the addition of a special antipassive suffix to transitive verbs in unspecified-P constructions.

(12) Tennet (Surmic, Eastern Sudanic – Randall 1998:245)

(12a) **Á-dáh dolec áhát.**
IPF-eat child.S asida
'The child is eating asida.'

[2] A, P, and U must be understood as 'agent in the basic transitive construction', 'patient in the basic transitive construction', and 'unique argument of monovalent verbs', respectively.

(12b) **Á-dáh-ye** **dolec.**
IPF-eat-ANTIP child.S
'The child is eating.'

Among the Subsaharan languages that have accusative alignment in core argument coding and antipassive constructions, Soninke (Mande) distinguishes itself not only by the very high degree of productivity of its antipassive derivation, but also by the fact that the productivity of antipassive derivation in Soninke relies essentially on the use of a dedicated antipassive suffix.

Soninke has a particularly clear-cut distinction between transitive and intransitive predication, even in comparison with other Mande languages, and very strict constraints on the intransitive use of transitive verbs. With the only exception of a handful of A-labile verbs, transitive verbs in their underived form cannot be found in constructions in which the P argument would not be expressed. The discourse frequency of antipassive constructions in which the verb is overtly marked as detransitivized follows from the fact that, in Soninke, they constitute the usual strategy to encode two-participant events lexicalized as transitive verbs without mentioning the patient. A minority of transitive verbs have an antipassive form marked by a multifunction detransitivizing suffix **-i** also found (sometimes with the same verbs) with an anticausative or passive function, but most transitive verbs use the dedicated antipassive suffix illustrated in (13).

Soninke has no constraint restricting the use of the antipassive form of transitive verbs to stereotyped activities or habitual events. Antipassive verb forms can refer to specific events, provided no specific patient is mentioned.

(13) Soninke (pers.doc.)

(13a) **Yàxàrén dà kónpèn céllà.**
woman.D TR room.D sweep
'The woman swept the room.'
(basic transitive construction)

(13b) **Yàxàrên céllá-ndì.**
woman.D sweep-ANTIP
'The woman did the sweeping.'
(antipassive construction)

11. THE TYPOLOGY OF APPLICATIVES

3.7.1. Introductory remarks

It is well-known that an important proportion of Subsaharan languages makes a wide use of the applicative strategy (in contrast to the cross-linguistically more common adpositional strategy) for the licensing of extra-valency NPs. In their canonical use, applicative derivations license the presence of an NP in the syntactic role of object (the *applied object*) referring to a semantic role that the non-applicative form of same verb cannot assign to an NP in the syntactic role of object.

A distinction can be made between *obligatory applicatives* (when the applicative construction is the only way to encode the participant encoded as the applied object) and *optional applicatives* (when the participant encoded as the applied object can alternatively be encoded as an adjunct of the non-applicative verb form). In the literature on valency changes, applicatives are sometimes defined in terms of promotion of adjuncts to the status of object, which implies excluding obligatory applicatives from the notion of applicative, but this contradicts the common practice in descriptions of Subsaharan languages, where obligatory applicatives are extremely common.

Most Bantu languages have derived applicative verb forms with a remarkably wide range of uses meeting the standard definition of applicatives, but also have non-canonical uses whose relationship to the standard definition of applicative verb forms is sometimes far from obvious.

Ex. (14) illustrates the canonical use of Tswana applicatives. Note that the applicative suffix of Tswana is semantically unspecified, in the sense that, by itself, it gives only negative indications about the semantic role of the object it licenses: the applied object may assume any semantic role that the verb in its non-applicative form cannot assign to an object, and that cannot be coded by means of a preposition either. Practically, this means that the interpretation of applicative constructions crucially depends on the lexical meanings of the verb and of the applied object.

(14) Tswana (Bantu – pers.doc.)

(14a) **Qʰɔ́sí** **ʻí-átɬʰól-éts-í** **mò-ńná** **bɔ́-χò:dù.**
(CL9)king CL9-condemn-APPL.PRF-FV CL1-man CL14-theft
'The king condemned the man for theft'

(14b) **Qʰɔ́sí** **ʻí-átɬʰól-éts-í** **mò-ńná** **lò:-sɔ́.**
(CL9)king CL9-condemn-APPL.PRF-FV CL1-man CL11-death
'The king condemned the man to death.'

Ex. (15) illustrates a first non-canonical use of Tswana applicatives: in this example, applicative derivation does not license the expression of an extra-valency participant as an object, but the promotion of an adjunct to subject function.

(15) Tswana (Bantu – pers.doc.)

(15a) **ʊ̀-nè** **à-àpày-à** **qʰáká** **á-ʃàbà**
CL1-AUX CL1.SEQ-cook-FV (CL9)guinea-fowl CL1.SEQ-flavour-fin

bò-χɔ́bɛ́ **ká** **námà** **y-á-y-ɔ̀:nɛ́.**
CL14-porridge with (CL9)flesh 9-LK-9-CL9.PRO
'He cooked the guinea-fowl and flavoured the porridge with its flesh'

(15b) **Nàmà** **í-ʃáb-él-à** **bò-χɔ̂:bɛ̀.**
(CL9)meat CL9-flavour-APPL-FV CL14-porridge
'Meat is used to flavour the porridge.'

This use of applicative derivation is clearly non-canonical, since in (15b), the subject of the non-applicative form of the verb is suppressed, and the instrumental adjunct is not promoted to the role of object, but to that of subject.

With locative complements of movement verbs, applicative derivation does not license the presence of a locative object. Rather, it encodes a change in the semantic role of the locative expression: either the role of destination is assigned to a locative expression that otherwise would be interpreted as expressing the localization of the event – Ex. (16), or the role of destination is assigned to a locative expression that otherwise would be interpreted as expressing the source of movement – Ex. (17).

(16) Tswana (Bantu – pers.doc.)

(16a) **Kì-tɬàà-tábʊ́χ-à kó tsʉ̀lê**ː**-ŋ̀.**
1SG-FUT-run-FV LOC (CL9)road-LOC
'I will run on the road.'

(16b) **Kì-tɬàà-tábʊ́χ-ɛ́l-à kó tsʉ̀lê**ː**-ŋ̀.**
1SG-FUT-run-APPL-FV LOC (CL9)road-LOC
'I will run to the road.' [3]

(17) Tswana (Bantu – pers.doc.)

(17a) **Kì-tɬàà-húdúχ-à kó Kàːɲɛ́.**
1SG-FUT-move-FV LOC (CL1)Kanye
'I will move from Kanye.'

(17b) **Kì-tɬàà-húdúχ-ɛ́l-à kó χàbʊ́rô**ː**nì.**
1SG-FUT-move-APPL-FV LOC (CL1)Gaborone
'I will move to Gaborone.'

(17c) **Kì-tɬàà-húdúχ-à kó Kàɲɛ́**
1SG-FUT-move-FV LOC (CL1)Kanye

kì-húdúχ-él-ì kó χàbʊ́rôː**nì.**
1SG-move-APPL-FV LOC (CL1)Gaborone
'I will move from Kanye to Gaborone.'

With verbs that do not express movement, the use of the applicative form is obligatory to license the presence of a locative whose semantic role departs more or less form the mere indication of a location. For example, Tswana syntax is sensitive to the difference in the semantic role of *in the yard* and *in the big pot* in *She is cooking porridge in the yard* / *She is cooking porridge in the big pot*. In the first sentence, *in the yard* expresses nothing more than the location of the event, whereas in the event represented by the second sentence, the pot

[3] See section 3.7.8 for another possible interpretation of this sentence.

contains the porridge, which justifies to code it as a locative, but it also plays the role of an instrument in the cooking event. In other words, the spatial relation between the pot and the porridge is not accidental; it follows from the role they play in the cooking event. In such configurations, the use of applicative verb form is obligatory, but here again, no additional object is introduced.

(18) Tswana (Bantu – pers.doc.)

(18a) **Lòrátɔ́ ˈó-tɬáá-àpày-à mò-tɔ̀ːχɔ́.**
(CL1)Lorato CL1-FUT-cook-FV CL3-porridge
'Lorato will cook the porridge.'

(18b) **Lòrátɔ́ ˈó-tɬáá-àpɛ̀-ɛ̀l-à mò-tɔ̀χɔ́**
(CL1)Lorato CL1-FUT-cook-APPL-FV CL3-porridge

mó pìtsé-ŋ̀ é ˈtôːnà.
LOC (CL9)pot-LOC (CL9)LK (CL9)big
'Lorato will cook the porridge in the big pot.'

Finally, there is a use of applicative derivation that involves no change in the valency of the verb, either from a formal or semantic point of view. This use of the applicative derivation is strictly limited to constructions including a locative phrase expressing the localization of the event. In such configurations, the applicative suffix can be interpreted as expressing the focalization of the locative expression. This constitutes an alternative to cleft constructions, which are in Tswana the standard way to express focalization.

(19) Tswana (Bantu – pers.doc.)

(19a) **Lòrátɔ́ ˈó-ápáy-à mó dʒáràtêː-ŋ̀.**
(CL1)Lorato CL1-cook-FV LOC (CL9)yard-LOC
'Lorato does the cooking in the yard.'

(19b) **Lòrátɔ́ ˈó-ápɛ́-ɛ̀l-à mó dʒáràtêː-ŋ̀.**
(CL1)Lorato CL1-cook-APPL-FV LOC (CL9)yard-LOC
'Lorato does the cooking IN THE YARD.'

To conclude, Bantu applicatives provide particularly interesting data for a typology of valency-changing devices, and also for an investigation of the possible interactions between the expression of valency changes and other functional domains such as information structure.

12. VERB MORPHOLOGY AND INFORMATION STRUCTURE

Some languages (e.g. English) primarily use intonation (higher pitch) to emphasize one word or phrase over the others and signal it as the focus of the sentence, without changing anything in its construction. Few Subsaharan languages can use intonation alone to focalize a word or phrase; focus most commonly involves morphosyntactic alterations in Subsaharan Africa. The

importance of lexical and grammatical tone in most Subsaharan languages may provide an explanation for this tendency to avoid a purely intonational strategy of focus marking.

Several types of morphosyntactic devices can be used to mark the focus of a sentence, and it is common for a language to use more than one of them, but a remarkable feature of Subsaharan languages is the relatively high proportion of systems of verbal inflection that directly express distinctions relating to various types of focus phenomena, or interfere with other focus marking devices. Such systems seem to be very rare outside Africa. Sereer (Atlantic) provides an illustration.

(20) Sereer (Atlantic – Faye 1979: 205, 207, 209)

(20a) **Fadaam** **a** **Jeen.**
hit.CPL.1SG ACC Jeen
'I hit Jeen.'

(20b) **Mi** **fadu** **a** **Jeen.**
PRO.1SG hit.CPL.FOC ACC Jeen
'It is me who hit Jeen.'

(20c) **Jeen** **fadum**
PRO.1SG hit.CPL.FOC.1SG
'It is Jeen whom I hit.'

13. PRESENTATIONAL FOCUS CONSTRUCTIONS

In languages with a basic SVO constituent order, intransitive verbs often have an alternative construction in which the argument canonically encoded as a preverbal subject occurs in postverbal position (i.e., in the canonical position for the object of transitive verbs). These so-called inverted subjects may maintain the other properties characteristic for subjects (for example, control of verb agreement), or lose (some of) them, as in French *Trois femmes sont venues* vs. *Il est venu trois femmes*. In this alternative construction of French intransitive verbs, the argument encoded as a preverbal subject in *Trois femmes sont venues* occurs in post-verbal position and does not control verb agreement, which invariably expresses the default value '3rd person singular masculine'. A subject index (*il*) is present, but its role is purely formal, since it invariably expresses the value *3rd person singular masculine*, whatever the person-gender-number characteristics of the inverted subject.

As illustrated by Ex. (21), such constructions, often designated as 'presentational', or 'thetic', are very common among Bantu languages. This example also shows that, against the common belief, they are not necessarily limited to so-called 'unaccusative verbs': in Tswana, all intransitive verbs can occur in the inversion construction expressing de-topicalization of the subject, and in some other Bantu languages, even transitive verbs lend themselves to presentational inversion.

(21) Tswana (Bantu – pers.doc.)

(21a) **Bà-símàní ˈbá-tɬáà-bîːn-à.**
CL2-boy CL2-FUT-dance-FV
'The boys will dance.'

(21b) **χó-tɬáà-bín-á bà-símàːní.**
EXPL-FUT-dance-FV CL2-boy
'There will be a dance performed by (the) boys.'
(lit. 'There will dance boys.')

By contrast, judging from the available descriptions, presentational inversion seems to be absent from West African languages, which is *a priori* the expected situation, given the general rigidity of constituent order patterns in West African languages. However, this is not entirely accurate. Presentational inversion does exist in many languages of West Africa, but its use is restricted to very small sets of verbs (most of the time, just one verb), and this explains that they have passed unnoticed so far. Interestingly, among the West African languages that have been recognized as having inverted subjects in a presentational construction, the sets of verbs attested in this construction always include *remain*, and in many of them, *remain* is the only verb that lends itself to subject inversion.

This situation can be illustrated by Mandinka. No other Mandinka verb accepts a construction similar to that of **tú** 'remain' in (22b), where the canonical subject position to the left of the verb is occupied by an expletive 3rd person singular pronoun, and the semantic role normally assigned to the preverbal subject is assigned to an NP occupying the position to the right of the verb, which is in Mandinka the canonical position for obliques. In this position, the inverted subject is optionally flagged by the postposition **lá**.

(22) Mandinka (Mande – pers.doc.)

(22a) **Mùsù-kéebáa fùlá tú-tá sàatéwòo tó.**
woman-old two remain-CPL.INTR village.D LOC
'Two old women remained in the village.'

(22b) **À tú-tá jĕe mùsù-kéebáa fùlá (là).**
3SG remain-CPL.INTR there woman-old two POSTP
'There remained two old women.'

Interestingly, the languages in which such a construction has been observed before are SVO languages in which the position occupied by the inverted subject can be analyzed as the object position, but Mandinka contradicts this generalization. In Mandinka, due to the SOVX constituent order pattern, the position of the inverted subject in the presentational construction is clearly not the object position, but the oblique position. This suggests that the really relevant notion is not that of object position, but rather that of immediate postverbal position.

This particularity of the verb *remain* in the languages of West Africa raises an interesting theoretical problem. In the languages that have a presentational inversion construction, the ability of verbs to occur in this construction is an instance of split / fluid intransitivity, and in

the literature on so-called *unaccusative* vs. *unergative* intransitive verbs, the presentational inversion construction is commonly presented as a possible unaccusativity diagnostic. In this perspective, the data presented in this section suggests that *remain* must be semantically the most typical 'unaccusative' verb, since it can be the only verb for which such a construction is possible in languages characterized by a particular rigidity of constituent order patterns and drastic lexical restrictions on the use of the presentational inversion construction. However, I am aware of no proposal in the unaccusativity literature that would predict this particularity of *remain*, and this can be viewed as a serious shortcoming in the discussions about the semantic basis of split intransitivity.

14. CONCLUSION

In this presentation, I have tried to give some illustrations of the morphosyntactic diversity of the languages spoken in Subsaharan Africa, in relationship to their geographical position and genetic affiliation, and to place these advances into the larger context of current discussions about the morphosyntactic diversity of the world's languages.

Until recently, in comparison with other continents, the investigation of the morphosyntactic typology of Subsaharan languages was limited by the lack of precise and reliable descriptions presented in a format that facilitates their use by linguists interested in typological comparison. Fortunately, in this respect, things are changing very rapidly, but there are still many generalizations that remain uncertain due to a lack of data, and probably also many interesting phenomena that remain to be discovered.

ABBREVIATIONS

A: agent, ABSTR: abstraction, ACC: accusative, ANTIP: antipassive, APPL: applicative, AUX: auxiliary, CAUS: causative, CL: noun class, CPL: completive, D: definite, EXPL: expletive, FOC: focus, FUT: future, FV: final vowel, ICPL: incompletive, INTERP: interposition, INTR: intransitive, IPF: imperfective, LK: linker, LOC: locative, M: masculine, NEG: negative, O: object, P: patient, pers.doc: personal documentation, PL: plural, POS: positive, POSTP: postposition, PRF: perfect, PRO: pronoun, PRS: present, REL: relativizer, S: subject, SEQ: sequential, SG: singular, TR: transitive, U: unique argument of monovalent verbs, V: verb, VE: valency external, X: oblique.

REFERENCES

Aritiba, Adji Sardji. 1988. Un type particulier de morphème relateur en Lamba. *Linguistique Africaine* 1. 5-12.

Arka, I.W. & J. Kosmas 2005. Passive without passive morphology? Evidence from Manggarai. In: Arka, I. W. & M.D. Ross (eds.) *The many faces of Austronesian voice systems: some new empirical studies*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics. 87-117.

Baker, Mark and Chris Collins. 2006. Linkers and the internal structure of vP*. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 24. 307-354.

Cobbinah, Alexander and Lüpke, Friederike. 2012. Not cut to fit - zero-coded passives in African languages. In Matthias Brenzinger and Anna-Maria Fehn (eds.), *Proceeedings of*

the 6th World Congress in African Linguistics, Cologne 2009. Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe. 153-165.

Crass, Joachim and Rony Meyer. 2008. Ethiopia. In Bernd Heine and Derek Nurse, *A linguistic geography of Africa*. Cambridge University Press. 228-250.

Creissels, Denis. 2005. S-O-V-X constituent order and constituent order alternations in West African languages. *Proceedings of the 31st annual meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society, special session on the languages of West Africa*. Berkeley Linguistics Society.

Creissels, Denis. Forthcoming(a). Existential predication in typological perspective.

Creissels, Denis. Forthcoming(b). Current issues in the morphosyntactic typology of Subsaharan languages. In Tom Güldemann (ed.), *The languages and linguistics of Africa*. Mouton de Gruyter.

Creissels, Denis, Gerrit Dimmendaal, Zygmunt Frajzyngier, and Christa König. 2008. Africa as a morphosyntactic area. In Bernd Heine and Derek Nurse, *A linguistic geography of Africa*. Cambridge University Press. 86-150.

Dahl, Östen. 2004. *The growth and maintenance of linguistic complexity*. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Dahl, Östen. 2015. *Grammaticalization in the North: Noun phrase morphosyntax in Scandinavian vernaculars*. Language Science Press.

Dickens, Patrick. 2005. *A concise grammar or Ju|'hoan*. Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe.

Grah, C. 1983. *Approche systématique du nɪwɔlɪ*. Doctoral thesis. University of Paris.

Griefenow-Mewis, C. & T. Bitima. 1994. *Lehrbuch des Oromo*. Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe.

Güldemann, Tom. 2008. The Macro-Sudan belt: towards identifying a linguistic area in northern Subsaharan Africa. Bernd Heine & Derek Nurse (eds.), *A linguistic geography of Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 151-185.

Hamlaoui, Fatima. 2014. A note on bare-passives in (selected) Bantu and western Nilotic languages. *ZAS Papers in Linguistics* 57. 123-135.

Huumo, Tuomas. 2003. Incremental existence : the world according to the Finnish existential sentence. *Linguistics* 41-3. 461-493.

König, Christa. 2008. *Case in Africa*. Oxford University Press.

Lüpke, Friederike. 2005. *A grammar of Jalonke argument structure*. Doctoral thesis. Nijmegen: Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen.

Randall, Scott. 1998. A grammatical sketch of Tennet. in Gerrit Dimmendaal (ed.), *Surmic Languages and Cultures*. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag. 219–272.

Schneider-Zioga, Patricia & Philip Nguessimo Mutaka. 2015c. The linker in Kinande : a predication relation. *Journal of West African Languages* 42(2). 101-124.