

NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

THE APPLICATIVE CONSTRUCTION AND OBJECT SYMMETRY
IN KISWAHILI AND MARAGOLI

BY

PAUL MURRELL

A Linguistic Project submitted to the Graduate School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Translation Studies

December, 2000

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Approved:

Supervisor

George L. Huttar

Second reader

Mary L. Huttar
Mary L. Huttar

External reader

S. Nicolle
Steve Nicolle

30315

December, 2000

Student's Declaration

THE APPLICATIVE CONSTRUCTION AND OBJECT SYMMETRY
IN KISWAHILI AND MARAGOLI

I declare that this is my original work and has not been
submitted to any other College or University for academic credit.

The views presented herein are not necessarily those of the Nairobi Evangelical
Graduate School of Theology or the Examiners

(Signed) Paul Murrell

Paul Murrell

December 1st, 2000

ABSTRACT

Many Bantu languages have recently been used in studying syntactic theory and there is much debate concerning double objects in applicative constructions and the symmetry, or lack of it, which can be observed operating on the object. It is currently argued that generative and relational grammars are unable to account for the complexity of such object behaviour. It would appear that object symmetry depends to some degree on the precise family that the language belongs to. This paper therefore investigates the applicative construction and object symmetry in two Bantu languages from different families, KiSwahili from Bantu (G40) and Maragoli from Bantu (J30). I shall refer to two syntactic theories which deal with the applicative construction and object symmetry, Relational Grammar and Lexical Functional Grammar.

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ABBREVIATIONS

1	1 st person
2	2 nd person
3	3 rd person
APP	applicative extension
em	final vowel
fut	future tense
NP	Noun Phrase
om	object marker (verbal pronominal prefix)
PASS	passive
past	past tense
pl	plural
pres	present tense
REC	reciprocal extension
rel	relative pronoun
s	singular

Bantu noun classes are indicated by a roman numeral. Thus, noun class 1 is represented as I.

For tables of data summary

×	not found in language
✓	found in language
n/a	not applicable
?	semantically odd

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to describe and compare the applicative constructions in Swahili and Maragoli, while classifying these languages as either more or less symmetrical in their object behaviour. The behaviour of the object in Swahili is intriguing, in that speakers of Swahili strongly disagree on its possible roles and properties. This has led to a number of difficulties for me while learning the language. This paper should help clarify some of the complexities of the object in Swahili with application across a range of Bantu languages.

In the context of current research, this paper enters the continuing debate about object symmetry in Bantu, which centres on the contribution of symmetry to syntactic theory and offers an adequate explanation for the phenomena observed. In this paper I shall therefore refer to one current syntactic theory which deals with the applicative construction. More recent work has also included a pragmatic/discourse dimension which makes this research increasingly relevant to the work of SIL in Bible translation.

It would appear that symmetry depends to some degree on the precise family that the language belongs to. For this reason I have chosen to investigate the applicative construction and object symmetry in two Bantu languages from different families, Swahili from Bantu (G40) and Maragoli from Bantu (J30). My hypothesis is as follows: Swahili is an asymmetrical language, Maragoli is a symmetrical language.

1.2 Background to Swahili

1.2.1 Language and Culture

KiSwahili or Swahili is the most widely spoken African language, with between 92,000 and 97,000 mother-tongue speakers in Kenya, a further 11,923,000 second language speakers and a total of 30,000,000 who speak it in East Africa. It is spoken as a mother tongue on the East African coast from Mogadishu in Somalia to Mozambique, but through trade has spread as a second language as far as Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Grimes 1996, 295). It is the national language of Tanzania, and with English, is an official language of Kenya. It has some fifteen dialects of which Kiunjugo and Kimvita are the most widely spoken (Grimes, 295). Swahili is a Bantu language belonging to the Niger-Congo or Niger-Kordofanian language family, classification G40 within Narrow Bantu (Grimes, 295). As much as 13% of its vocabulary consists of loan words, many from Arabic or English, but its structure remains Bantu with a number of noun classes which force prefixes to agree.

For many Kenyans Swahili has become a language of wider communication among a number of other languages spoken. City-dwelling Kenyans will frequently speak their mother-tongue, Swahili and English. In Nairobi, however, there is a growing generation who have learned Nairobi Swahili as their mother tongue irrespective of tribal origin. This dialect is notably different from the language as it is spoken on the coast.

1.2.2 Morphology and Syntax

Swahili contains five phonemic vowels and typically has a CV syllable pattern in most words. It has a normal constituent order of SVO or AVP when there is a full Noun Phrase in the direct object position, in an independent declarative clause. When an object Noun Phrase is deleted, but is still referred to, this is marked with a bound

pronominal prefix on the verb, occurring directly before the verb stem. This may give the appearance of SOV. Swahili is agglutinative, as can be seen by the numerous affixes taken by the verb, including grammatical relation concord and various inflections for tense, mood and aspect.

1.2.3 Previous Works on Swahili

There is an extensive literature on Swahili, ranging from the briefer works of Whiteley (1968) and Maw (1994b), to the considerable comparative study of Guthrie (1967-71). The contributions of Vitale (1981) and Ashton (1944) in providing formal grammars of Swahili have provided important context for this research. With respect to the applicative construction and object symmetry the major works in this field are Driever (1976), Ngonyani (1998) and Gary (1977), although the latter deals with Swahili only as it typifies the behaviour of certain Bantu languages.

Object asymmetry has been widely studied in a number of languages related to Swahili. Bresnan and Moshi (1993), Moshi (1998) and Alsina and Mchombo (1993) have investigated this topic in the Bantu languages Kichaga and Chichewa with a view to developing Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG). Marantz (1993) and Harford (1993) have used previously gathered data in Bantu to explain the asymmetries which can be observed. Hyman and Duranti's work (1982) provides a sound base for investigating the object in Bantu languages, but does not deal directly with symmetry. Since 1996 there has been an ongoing debate concerning the symmetrical properties of Bantu languages between Alsina (1996) and Woolford (1993), but where Swahili is mentioned in these articles, it is always assumed to be symmetrical. This paper will contribute to this debate, by rigorously testing Swahili for symmetry.

The language data for this project was provided by Lillian Awuor, a 25-year-old whose first-learned language is Swahili and best approximates a Nairobi dialect. She has subsequently learned Luo and English. It should be noted that the data

presented here may differ considerably from previous Swahili research, because where this bears an influence on the conclusions drawn from the data appropriate comments will be made in the text.

1.3 Background to Maragoli

1.3.1 Language and Culture

Maragoli or Logooli is spoken in the Kakamega area of Western Province of Kenya and is generally considered one of the eighteen regional dialects of Luyia. According to Grimes (1996, 292) there are 197,000 speakers of the language which is classified as Bantu, Narrow, Central J, Masaba-Luyia (J30), Luyia. As Mould points out, Maragoli may be considered part of a 'Greater Luyia' language family. Lexicostatistics suggest that Maragoli, and other 'Luyia' languages are indeed dialects of a single language (Mould 1981, 184). Nevertheless, Maragoli varies considerably from the majority of other Luyia languages except 'Southern Luyia' in a number of important phonological respects. For this reason Maragoli is considered a sub-family of 'Greater Luyia', distinct from Western, Central, Northern and Eastern Luyia (Mould, 183).

The Maragoli people are traditionally agriculturists keeping small herds of sheep and cattle to supplement their income. There is a literacy rate of between 50-75% and a small range of published material including the Bible, some novels and school textbooks (Grimes 1996, 292). While the Bible is considered to be accessible and readable there are few people today under the age of 50 years who own a copy. Increasingly, there are a number of Maragoli people living in Nairobi who have learned a Nairobi dialect of Swahili as their mother tongue and have therefore lost contact, to some degree, with the Maragoli language.

