

Topic and Focus in Teke-Kukuya (Bantu B77)

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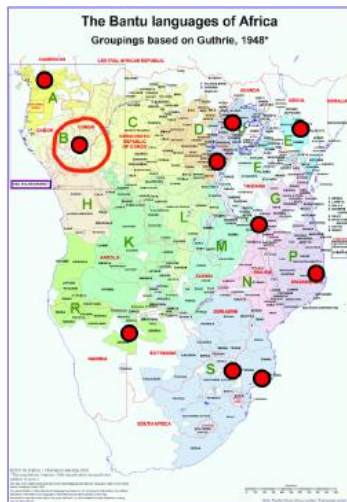
Introduction to the language and the fieldwork

Topic and Focus in Bantu languages

Dedicated IBV focus position in Teke-Kukuya

Morphological focus marking

Summary and further research questions



- ▶ Teke language group: Narrow Bantu, Guthrie code **B70**
- ▶ Spoken in **Congo, Gabon and DRC** by approximately 600,000 native speakers (2000)
- ▶ Main variants: **North Teke** (Tege B71); **Central Teke** (Ngungwei B72; Eboo B74); **West Teke** (Iyaa B73); **East Teke** (Bali B75; Tio B76); **Southern Teke** (**Kukuya B77**; Fuumu B78)
- ▶ Detailed study on the phonology (Paulian 1975), no grammar description

Figure 2: Classification of Bantu languages and location of Teke



Figure 3: Sites of fieldwork: Lékana and Brazzaville

- ▶ part of the **BaSIS** (Bantu Syntax and Information Structure) research project
- ▶ **Brazzaville** and **Lékana**, Republic of Congo, May to Sept 2019
- ▶ 6 consultants; French as the communication language
- ▶ Methodology: **elicitation** (translation, syntactic experiments, visual stimuli); **spontaneous speech** (discussion, story-telling)
- ▶ 1,554 sentences collected and transcribed using the Dative database



Figure 4: A social gathering in Lékana



Figure 5: Working with two consultants



- ▶ **Topic:** 1) old or presupposed information; 2) what the information in the comment is anchored to; 3) always preverbal in Bantu languages;
- ▶ Subject inversion:

(1) **Ibitabo** **bi-á-somye** **Yohani**.
8.books 8SM-PST-read:PERF 1.John
'JOHN has read (the) books.' (lit.'The books read John.')

[Kirundi JD42]

- ▶ Object preposing

(2) **Ndaam** **a-nsa** **ntaam** **ká-(bá-)dzú-i**.
some 2-antelope lion 1SM-(2OM-)kill-PERF
'Some antelopes have been killed by the lion.' (lit.'Some antelopes, the lion killed them.')

[Mbuun B87]



- ▶ **Focus:** 1) new information or contrastive information; 2) to trigger a set of contextually relevant alternatives; 3)
- ▶ Dedicated focus position: immediate-after-the-verb (IAV)

(3) a. [Bá-níké ú-Síphó í-mà:li.]
2SM-give 1-Sipho 9-money

'They give Siphó money.'

b. [Bá-m-níké: í-ma:li] ú-Si:pho.
2SM-1OM-give 9-money 1-Sipho

'They gave **money** to Siphó.' (answer to 'what did they give to Siphó?') [Zulu S42]



- Morphological focus marking: conjoint/disjoint alternation:

(4) a. nthíyáná o-hoó-cá nráma

1.woman 1SM-PERF.DJ-eat 3.rice

'the woman ate rice'

b. nthíyáná o-c-aalé nramá

1.woman 1SM-eat-PERF.CJ 3.rice

'the woman ate RICE'

[Makhuwa P31]



- ▶ arguments and adjuncts “prefer” to be focused in the **immediate-before-verb (IBV)** position
- ▶ new information focus (object)

- (5) a. Maria **kí-má** ká-swaak-í ma-tsíka mu
Maria 7-what 1SM.PST-wash-PST 6-yesterday 19.LOC
nkunkólo?
9.evening
‘**What** did Maria wash yesterday?’
- b. Ndé ali **ma-sáni** ká-swaak-í.
1.PRN AUX.PST 6-plate 1SM.PST-wash-PST
‘She washed the **plates**.’



► new information focus (subject)

- (6) a. *Ma-ntséke ná yi-pfuká má-dza?*
6-field who IMPF-water 6-water
'The fields were watered by **whom**? (Who watered the fields?)'
- b. *Mó ma-dzá taará á-pfuk-i.*
6.PRN 6-water 1.father 1SM.PST-water-PST
'They were watered by **father**.' (Them, water, father watered.)



► contrastive focus (adjunct)

- (7) a. Maamá á-wék-í mú-nkáání ku Djambala?
1.mother 1SM.PST-send-PST 3-letter 17.LOC Djambala
'Did mother send the letter to Djambala?'
- b. Ndé mu-nkáání **ku** **mfaí** ká-wék-í.
1.PRN 3-letter 17.LOC 3.capital 1SM.PST-send-PST
'She sent the letter to **Brazzaville.**'



- ▶ non-focused elements tend to be fronted before the focused element

(8) a. Maamá matsíka á-yók-i mu-kíiké ma-dzá
1.mother yesterday 1SM.PST-wash-PST 3-baby 6-water
mu nkunkólo?
18.LOC 9.evening

'Did mother wash the baby yesterday evening?'

b. Ndé mu-kíiké ma-dzá ali léle
1.PRN 3-baby 6-water AUX.PST avant-hier
ká-yók-i.
1SM.PST-wash-PST

'She washed the baby the day before yesterday.'



- ▶ alternation in the TAM slot which co-carries with constituent order and tense/aspect/polarity;
- ▶ only occurs with 1SG, 2SG and class 1 subjects;

- (9) a. Maamá **á**-wék-í mú-nkáání ku Djambala?
1.mother 1SM.PST-send-PST 3-letter 17.LOC Djambala
'Did mother send the letter to Djambala?'
- b. Ndé mu-nkáání ku mfaí **ká**-wék-í.
1.PRN 3-letter 17.LOC 3.capital 1SM.PST-send-PST
'She sent the letter to **Brazzaville**.'



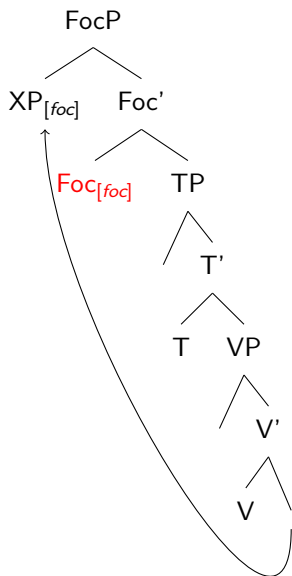
- ▶ Example of minimal pair on this alternation

- (10) a. Taará ná **á**-béer-i?
1.father who 1SM.PST-beat-PST
'The father is beaten by whom? (Who beat father?)'
- b. Taará ná **ká**-béer-i?
1.father who 1SM.PST-beat-PST
'Who did the father beat?'



Table 1: Distribution of this alternation in different tense/aspect

	present tense	past tense	negative
1st singular	✗	✓	✓
2nd singular	✓	✓	✓
class 1	✗	✓	✓



- ▶ How can the IBV focus position be represented in the cartographic model?
- ▶ How to explain and represent the “altruistic” movement of the non-focus elements?
- ▶ Interpretational differences between preverbal and postverbal focus?
- ▶ What are the possible origins of the alternation on the TAM slot?
- ▶ How to locate the IBV focus position and the alternation of TAM marking in a typology of focus expression in Bantu?



AUX auxiliary

CJ conjoint

DJ disjoint

IMPF imperfect

LOC locative

OM object marker

PERF perfect

PRN pronoun

PST past

SM subject marker



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