

Functional properties of the particle ‘-o’ in eastern Bantu Languages

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In this talk, we examine an independent particle *-o* in four eastern African Bantu languages namely, Kĩĩtharaka (E54, Kenya), Kirundi (JD62, Burundi), Rukiga (JE14, Uganda) and Kinyakyusa (M31, Tanzania). The particle is one of the strategies the languages use to express information structure. It is generally optional and is associated with given information. Particularly, in all the four languages, the particle expresses contrastive topic (1-2).

1. Igifaraánsa có ndakívuga. Kirundi
i-ki-faraánsa ki-ó N-ra-ki-vúg-a
AUG-7-french 7-CM 1SG-DJ.PRST-Ó M7-speak-FV
‘As for as French, I speak it (unlike English or Lingala, for example).’

When attached to the conjunction *na* ‘and/also/with/even’ the particle has been found to realise a topic shift (2) or additive meaning (3) in two of the languages.

2. (Hare got hold of Hyena and beat him. Hyena cries ‘My husband, the black one, leave me! Leave me alone!’) Kĩĩtharaka
Kayúgú **nakó** n’wa kũmírúmia mmá! mmá!
ka-yúgú na-ko ni-w-a ku-mĩ-rum-i-a mma mma
12-hare and-PRO COP-1-CONN 15-9OM-beat-SC-FV ideo ideo
‘But Hare kept on beating him whack! whack!’
3. (Tomorrow we will iron bedsheets, trousers and skirts) Rukiga
E-sááti **na-zó**, nyénsákare ni-tu-z-á ku-zí-gorora
AUG-10.shirts and-10.PRO tomorrow PROG-1PL.SM-go-FV 15-10OM-iron
‘The shirts too, we will iron them tomorrow.’

Since the particle associates with topics, it can occur in predicate doubling constructions in all the four languages. When present, it highlights the concessive aspect of meaning, or adds a mirative or exclamative meaning or even trigger truth focus meaning. These and other pragmatic interpretations associated with the particle are context-dependent.

4. Mwé, ukweenda ko eendire! Kinyakyusa
mwe u-ku-enda ko a-end-ile
EXCL AUG-15-walk 15.PRO 1SM-walk-PFV
‘He (really) walked!’ [Intensity]

Certain information structure strategies are not unique to individual languages, but there are cross-linguistic variations in their functional properties and context of use. This creates a motivation to study given strategies across related Bantu languages.