Alignment in Bantoid double object constructions

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This paper proposes a comparative study of the way in which the Recipient (R) and the Theme (T) arguments of the verb 'give' are expressed in the Bantoid languages (including Narrow Bantu). It will concentrate on the mutual ordering of R and T in double object constructions that have a fixed word order determined by semantic role. An example is provided in (1). This excludes constructions where R, T or both are flagged, as well as those where the mutual ordering of these arguments is free or determined by their place on the referentiality hierarchy.

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(1) Bekwarra [bkv] (Stanford 1967: 301)
i-bâ kà ènì ábin wa: ìrìjí
3SG-FUT give people these all food
R

'He will give food to all these people.'
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When both R and T follow the lexical verb (V) in such constructions, their mutual order is always V R T, as in (1). When both precede V in an analytical verb form involving an auxiliary (AUX), the ordering is always AUX R T V (2).

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(2) Eton [eto] (Van de Velde 2008: 302)

m-èèy <u>ní</u> <u>dô</u> vé

1SG-FUT him it INF.give

'I will give it to him.'

also allowed: mèèy <u>ní</u> "vé <u>dô</u>, mèèy vé <u>nî</u> <u>dó</u>

not allowed: *mèèy <u>dó</u> <u>nî</u> vé, *mèèy vé <u>dô</u> <u>ní</u>
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However, when both are prefixed to the verb stem in the synthetic verb forms of Narrow Bantu languages, their mutual ordering is inversed: T-R-Root (3).

- (3) Luganda [lug] (Ranero 2015: 13; cited via van der Wal 2020: 216)
 a. Omusajja y-a-zi-ba-wa.
 1.man 1SM-PST-10OM-2OM-give
 'The man gave them it.'
 - b. *Omusajja y-a-<u>ba</u>-<u>zi</u>-wa.

Therefore, double object constructions suggest that AUX is the most relevant reference point or pivot for the order of objects (versus V), making word order in languages such as Tunen seem less exceptional. Moreover, the switch in pivot from AUX to Root as we move East across Bantoid is potentially problematic for the common hypothesis that the object prefixes in synthetic verb forms of contemporary Narrow Bantu languages are a direct reflex of object

pronouns in AUX O V constructions that became trapped in the process of univerbation (see, e.g. Good & Güldemann 2006).

References

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