

Jespersen cycles in Bantu languages

Category: Oral

In Bantu languages negation is typically marked on the verb. The following is a somewhat simplified representation of the typical structure of a Bantu inflected verb form.

SLOT	Pre-Initial-	Initial-	Post-Initial-	Pre-Radical-	Verbal Base-	Final-	Post-Final
FUNCTION	<i>Negative, Relative</i>	Subject	TAM, <i>Negative</i>	Object		TAM	Imperative Plural

Most frequently negative markers occur in the pre-initial or the post-initial slot. The forms, origins and functional loads of pre-initial and post-initial verbal negators have been amply studied in the literature on Bantu languages (e.g. Kamba Muzenga 1981, Güldemann 1996, Güldemann 1999). This paper examines a less studied type of negation in Bantu languages, involving double marking (NEG1 + NEG2).

(1) NEG1: a pre-initial or post-initial negative marker (slot 1 or 3)

NEG2: a post-final negative marker (slot 7) or a particle at the end of the verb phrase / sentence

In a geographically diversified sample of 100 Bantu languages this type of double negation occurs 24 times. As noted by Güldemann (2008: 165) it probably represents a relatively recent innovation arising from the functionally motivated process of negation reinforcement. In fact, Güldemann and Hagemeyer 2006, Güldemann 1996 and some individual grammarians analyse this kind of double negation as the second stage of what is generally known as Jespersen cycle, illustrated below with its famous French example.

(2) Stage 1 \longrightarrow Stage 2 \longrightarrow Stage 3
ne *ne ... pas* *pas*

Moreover, Jespersen (1917: 67-69) already gives examples of Bantu languages with double negation. In spite of all this, until now no study of Jespersen cycles in Bantu languages has been made. The present paper aims at filling this gap.

First, an inventory of the elements used as NEG2 in Bantu languages will be given. Amongst them are negative particles, locative pronouns, personal pronouns, possessive pronouns and locative possessive pronouns ('as for me', etc.). Second, hypotheses about the functional motivation for their grammaticalization as negative markers will be formulated. Third, two possible further stages of Jespersen cycle will be discussed. The first is like French in that NEG1 becomes optional. The second is more peculiar and involves triple negation (van der Auwera forthcoming). After NEG2 has become grammaticalized as a negative marker, it is in its turn reinforced by a NEG3. Bantu languages show combinations of NEG1 + NEG 2 (locative pronoun) + NEG3 (possessive pronoun or locative possessive pronoun). Finally, the question put forward by Dryer (forthcoming) whether this type of double negation in Bantu languages is part of an areal phenomenon of Verb-Object-Negative order in Central Africa will be addressed.

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