

The structure of infinitives in Bantu TAM grammaticalization

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Although the infinitive in Bantu is typically described as a class 15 noun, it has long been observed to exhibit both nominal and verbal properties (Meinhof 1932, Doke 1955, Meeussen 1967, Du Plessis 1982). In addition to being associated with a nominal prefix, the Bantu infinitive can appear in NP positions, is associated with concordial agreement and is available for nominal modification, all of which are properties typically associated with nominal elements. In contrast, the infinitive can also be inflected for tense-aspect-mood distinctions, can be negated or extended by verbal suffixes, may take an object and can be modified by adverbs and locatives, all of which are typical verbal properties.

A number of analyses have been presented in order to account for the nominal and clausal properties of the Bantu infinitive. Visser (1989) claims that the properties exhibited by the infinitive in Xhosa (and in Bantu in general), are best captured by reference to a structure in which a clause (S) is dominated by an NP node. Creissels and Godard (2005) present a mixed category analysis of the Tswana infinitive, where the 'infinitive word' has the same underspecified head value in both nominal and verbal uses, which inherits its value from parts-of-speech.

Drawing on data from the Bantu language Langi, where the infinitive is used in conjunction with an inflected auxiliary to express the future tense (Dunham 2005), this paper addresses the way in which previous analyses of infinitival complements can be extended to account for the frequent role of infinitives in Bantu Tense-Aspect-Mood (TAM) grammaticalization. The development of the Swahili TAM morpheme -sha from the lexical verb -kwisha 'finish' (Marten 1998) will provide further context for examination of the role of infinitival complements in typical paths of TAM grammaticalization. The implications for syntactic and semantic analyses of complementation and control (Chomsky 1981, Chierchia 1984, Abney 1987) will also be examined.