

Functional properties of the particle -o in four Bantu languages



Ba**S****IS**
Bantu Syntax & Information Structure

Patrick Kanampiu¹, Allen Asiimwe², Amani Lusekelo³,
Ernest Nshemezimana⁴, Jenneke van der Wal⁵

¹The University of Edinburgh, ²Makerere University,
³University of Dar Es Salaam, ⁴University of Burundi,
⁵Leiden University

BaSIS

Bantu Syntax & Information Structure



Allen Asiimwe

Makerere University
Rukiga



Ernest Nshemezimana

University of Burundi
Kirundi



Patrick Kanampiu

University of Edinburgh
Kiitharaka



Amani Lusekelo

University of Dar es Salaam
Nyakyusa

Introduction

- A particle based on **-o** appears in four of the 9 Bantu languages in the BaSIS project.
- It is used to mark contrastive topics and we gloss it as a contrastive marker (CM), following Asiiimwe & Van der Wal (2021)

(1) Mabúkú **mó** imauriré.

Ma-buku **ma-o** ni-ma-ur-ire
6-book 6-cm foc-6sm-lost-pfv
'As for the books, they are lost.'

[Kĩitharaka]

(2) Igifaraánsa **có** ndakívuga.

i-ki-faraánsa **ki-ó** n-ra-ki-vúg-a
aug-7-french 7-cm 1sg-dj.prst-7om-speak-fv
'As for as French, I speak it (unlike English or Lingala, for example).'

[Kirundi]

(3) Ikinyangwa pakusya **po** bikusya.

i-ki-nyangwa pa-ku-sy-a **pa-o** bi-ku-sy-a
aug-7-banana.flour 16-15-grind-fv 16-cm 2sm-prs-grind-fv
'As for banana flour, they do the grinding.'

[Kinyakyusa]

Introduction

The particle is structurally optional and only used with given referents, not focus.

(4) Naawuríye, umuhwí (**wó**).

n-a-a-wu-rí-ye u-mu-hwí u-ó

1sg.sm-pst-dj-3om-eat-pfv aug-3-banana 3-cm

'I have eaten it, the banana.'

[Kirundi]

(5) a. E-n-jojo z-á-ij-a

aug-10-elephant 10-n.pst-come-fv

'(The) elephants have come.'

b. E-n-jojo **zó** z-á-ij-a.

aug-10-elephant 10-cm 10-n.pst-come-fv

'As for the elephants, they have come (maybe the antelopes, the lions etc. have not shown up).'

[Rukiga]

Introduction

Aim of the talk:

- To show the use and interpretation of the -o particle across the languages

Structure of the talk:

- Origin as a pronominal element
- Formal properties
- Functional properties
- NA+PRO
- Conclusion

Origin as a pronominal element

Ashton (1945: 12) describes the “-o (and -e) of reference”

We encounter the particle as a pronominal element in the four Bantu languages, e.g., after *na* ‘with’ and as an enclitic:

- (6) a. A-ka-zin-a ná=**we**.
1sm-f.pst-dance-fv with=1.pro
‘She danced with him.’
- b. Tu-gyend-é ná=**bo**.
1pl.sm-go-sbjv with=2.pro
‘Let us go with them.’
- (7) N-aa-bon-a=**ho** ó-mu-terere.
1sg.sm-n.pst-find-fv=16 aug-3-mongoose
‘I found there a mongoose.’

[Rukiga]

Formal properties

Formal properties

- The particle can be used by itself (= with referent expressed as subject or object marker)
- It can be interpreted here as a pronoun or a contrastive marker.

(8) **Bó**, baamaze kugenda kw'ishuúre.

ba-ó ba-a-a-mar-ye ku-geenda kw' i-shuúre
2-cm/pro 2.sm-n.pst-dj-finish-pfv 15-go 17 aug-5.school
'As for them, they have already gone to school.'

[Kirundi]

(Asiimwe & Van der Wal 2021: 5)

(9) **Bó** baateek' ómucéeri

ba-o ba-aa-teek-a o-mu-ceeri
2-cm/pro 2sm-n.pst-cook-fvaug-3-rice
'As for them (the women), they have cooked rice.'

[Rukiga]

(10) Bakûthi bo

Ba-kû-thí **bó.**
2sm-prs-go 2-cm/pro

'As for them, they have gone' / 'They have gone, in fact.'

[Kîitharaka]

Formal properties

The particle takes a class specific prefix, agreeing with its (overt or covert) antecedent:

(11) Mwé, ukweenda **ko** eendire!

mwe u-ku-enda **k-o** a-end-ile
excl aug-15-walk 15-cm 1sm-walk-pfv
'He (really) walked!'

[Kinyakyusa]

(12) **Gw'** ábakázi báágutéeka.

gu-o a-ba-kazi ba-aa-gu-teek-a
3-cm aug-2-woman 2sm-n.pst-3om-cook-fv
'As for it (the rice) the women have cooked it.'

[Rukiga]

Formal properties

Typically appears **after the noun** in Kĩĩtharaka, Rukiga and Kirundi, but prenominal use is also possible for Kĩĩtharaka and Rukiga as in (13) and (14):

(13) {gwo} Á-ba-kázi {gwo} bá-á-gu-téek-a {gwo}
aug-2-woman 3-cm 2sm-n.pst-3om-cook-fv
'As for it (the rice) the women have cooked it. [Rukiga]

(14) {bo} A-rutwa {bo} ba-kaa-thi cukuru {bo}
2-learners 2-cm 2sm-fut-go 9.school
'As for them (the learners), they will go to school.' [Kĩĩtharaka]

Prenominal use is untenable in Kirundi:

(15) {*} A-bá-ana {bó} ba-a-maze ku-genda kw' i-shuúre {bó}.
aug-2-child 2-cm 2.sm-n.pst-dj-finish.pfv 15-go 17 aug-5.school
'The children have already gone to school (but the women haven't).' [Kirundi]

Formal properties

In case of **conjoined clauses** (contrast between subjects), the particle can appear in the first clause (16a) or preferably the second clause, but not both – that would be overdoing it:

(16) (What is the woman eating and what is the man eating?)

a. Omukázi **wé** naaryá ápo, omushíija naary' ómunekye.

o-mu-kazi **w-o** ni-a-ri-a apo o-mu-shaija ni-a-ri-a o-mu-nekye
aug-1-woman 1-cm ipfv-1sm-eat-fv 9.apple aug-1-man ipfv-1sm-eat-fv aug-3-banana
'The woman is eating an apple; the man is eating a banana.'

b. Omukázi arikuryá ápo, kándi **wé** omushíija arikurya' ómunekye.

o-mu-kazi a-riku-ri-a apo kandi **w-o** o-mu-shaija a-riku-ri-ao-mu-nekye
aug-1-woman 1sm-prog-eat-fv 9.apple and 1-cm aug-1-man 1sm-prog-eat-fv aug-3-banana
'The woman is eating an apple while the man is eating a banana.'
[Rukiga]

(17) Gaceri aíníre rwîmbó, Mwende **weé** áugá macaíri.

Gaceri a-i-na-ire rû-îmbo Mwende **û-e** a-ug-a ma-cairi
1.Gaceri 1sm-sing-pfv 11-song 1.mwende 1-cm 1sm-say-fv 6-poem
'Gaceri sang a song, Mwende, on her part, recited a poem.'
[Kîitharaka]

Formal properties

The particle is not compatible with a noun in a cleft (18) or pseudocleft (19):

(18) Ni abaana (***bo**) baajé.

ni a-ba-áana **ba-ó** ba-əz-ye^h
cop aug-2-child 2-cm 2sm-come-pfv.rel

'It's the children who have come.'

[Kirundi]

(19) Abaáje ni abaana (***bó**).

a-ba-əz-ye^h ni a-ba-áana **ba-ó**
aug-2sm-come-pfv.rel cop aug-2-child 2-cm

'The ones who have come are the children.'

[Kirundi]

For Kĩĩtharaka, the particle cannot be used with in-situ focus; the PCF verb form with ni- must be used instead:

(20) (He didn't feed the donkey and the cows!)

*(N')Árárúmíirie îng'ooî **rîo**.

ni a-ra-rûm-ir-i-e î-ng'oi î-o
foc 1sm-ypst-feed-pfv-ic-fv 5-donkey 5-cm

'As for the donkey, he fed it.'

[Kĩĩtharaka]¹²

Functional properties

Functional properties

The particle is used with topic, not focus.

- (21) a. What have you eaten?
Nariiye umuhwi (***wó**).
n-a-∅-rí-ye u-mu-hwíu-ó
1sg.sm-n.pst-cj-eat-pfv aug-3-banana 3-cm
'I have eaten a banana.'
- b. What have you done?
Naaríiye umuhwí (***wó**).
n-a-a-rí-ye u-mu-hwíu-ó
1sg.sm-n.pst-dj-eat-pfv aug-3-banana 3-cm
- c. Have you eaten the banana?
Naawuríiye, umuhwí (**wó**).
n-a-a-**wu**-rí-ye u-mu-hwíu-ó
1sg.sm-pst-dj-3om-eat-pfv aug-3-banana 3-cm
'I have eaten it, the banana.'

Functional properties

The use of the -o particle is context-dependent strategy for encoding **contrastive** meaning.

(22) a. (Context: You weren't expecting other animals)

Enjojo záija.

e-n-jojo za-ij-a.

aug-10-elephant 10sm-n.pst-come-fv

(The) elephants have come.

b. (Context: You were expecting other animals)

Enjojo **zó** záija.

e-n-jojo **z-o** za-ij-a.

aug-10-elephant 10-cm 10sm-n.pst-come-fv

'As for the elephants, they have come (maybe the antelopes, the zebras, the lions etc. have not shown up).'

[Rukiga, Asiimwe & Van der Wal, forthcoming]

Functional properties

The particle serves as a topic marker in Kĩĩtharaka, Rukiga and Kirundi. As such it expresses contrastive topic, with **five** possible context driven interpretations:

- (23) Mbúra **yoó** îkuúra
m-bura î-o î-kû-ura
9-rain 9-cm 9sm-prs-rain
'It has (indeed/really) rained (but...)' [Kĩĩtharaka]

- Contrast: There was a weather forecast that predicted there would rain accompanied by heavy storm
- Truth focus: Has it really rained? I do not trust what Edith says.
- Intensive: I hear you received some good amount of rainfall unlike other times!
- Depreciative: It has rained but you think it won't help because the crops had already withered.
- Mirative: see (24)

Functional properties

Rukiga has an additional **mirative** interpretation:

(24) O-kw-óg-a kw-é n-áá-yog-a.
aug-15-swim-fv 15-cm 1sg.sm-n.pst-swim-fv
'I have indeed/really swum (but...).'

[Rukiga]

Contrast: I was expected to swim and play baseball.

Truth: Pool attendant sees me walking away from the pool area showing no sign that I entered the water.

Intensive: I went into the pool and swam for a long time with lots of energy.

Depreciative: The water was too cold but I went ahead and swam anyway.

Mirative: I have always feared to get into the water but hey I can swim!

The same interpretations can be realised in predicate doubling constructions, where the use of the particle is optional and seems to add the same effect (see presentation Lusekelo et al.).

Functional properties

This situation is however different for Kinyakyusa where the discourse functionality of the particle is greatly reduced—only classes 16 **po** and 15/17 **ko** are functional. It can't function as a contrastive topic marker as in (24):

(24) Abalimi (*bo) mbapeele ifijĩnja; abafwimi (*bo) ngabapa.

a-ba-limi bo m-ba-pa-ile i-fi-jinja a-ba-fwimi bo n-ka-ba-p-a
aug-2-farmer 2.cm 1sg.sm-2om-give-pfv aug-8-banana.tree aug-2-hunter 2.cm 1sg.sm-neg-2om-give-fv
'The farmers I gave banana trees; the hunters I didn't give.'

This may be related to the fact that **-o** has developed to an identificational copula in Kinyakyusa, as shown in the contrast between predicational and specificational non-verbal predication in (25).

(25) a. (Who is the teacher in this classroom?) (specificational)

Ummanyisi *(jo) nkikuuru uju.

u-m-manyisi jo n-kiikuru uju
aug-1-teacher 1.id.cop 1-woman 1.dem.prox

'The teacher is this woman.'

b. What does Hobokera do for a living? (predicational)

Hobokera m-manyisi
1.Hobokera 1-teacher
'Hobokera is a teacher.'

Functional properties

Additionally, for Kinyakyusa, the marker seems to be further developing into a pragmatic particle, introducing new topics and/or marking a discourse boundary, as in (26). This, however, requires further investigation and is outside of the scope of this presentation.

(26) (Context: discussion about elections and a local candidate).

Po ikampeni akomelaga kuugu?

po	i-kampeni	a-kom-el-ag-a	ku-ugu
then	aug-9.campaign	1sm-hit-appl-hab-fv	17-where

'Now where did he do campaigns?'

[Kinyakyusa]

O-particle in different clothing!

The na+ pro marker can only mark the second topic (the shift or contrast).

(30) (What did Souza do with the beans and the carrots?)

Mboócó (*nació) n' árarugire, kaaráti nació, éendíá.

m-booco na-ci-o ni a-ra-gur-ire kaarati na-ci-o a-endi-a
10-beans and-10-pro foc 1sm-ypst-cook-pfv 10.carrots and-10-pro 1sm-sell-fv
'The beans he cooked and the carrots he sold.'
[Kĩĩtharaka]

(31) Yaareeb' éntéb' (é)nnungi (*nazó) n'embí (nazó) yáázíreeba.

a-a-reeb-a e-n-tebe e-n-rungi na-zo na e-n-bi a-a-zi-reeba
1sm-n.pst-see-fv aug-10-chairs aug-10-good and-10.pro and aug-10-bad
1sm-n.pst-10om-see
'He saw good chairs, and bad ones he also saw.'

[Rukiga]

Additive vs shift topic na+pro

Overlap where both interpretations are plausible: as an additive marker and shift topic marker.

(32)Kaana kaugia, gakurû **nakoó** i kaugîtie.

ka-ana ka-ugi-a ka-kurû na-ka-o ni ka-ug-ît-i-e
12-child 12sm-run-fv 12-dog with-12-pro foc 12sm-run-pfc-ic-fv

'The child ran, while the little dog was also running.'

[Kîîtharaka]

Narrative-structuring na+pro

In addition to marking a shift topic na+ pro also functions as a narrative-structuring device, switching between different referents.

(33) (Hare grabs Hyena and begins raining hot blows on him. Hyena cries ‘My husband, the mighty one, leave me! Leave me alone!’)

Kayúgú **nakó** n’wa kûmírúmia mmá! mmá!

ka-yûgú na-ko ni-w-a ku-mî-rum-i-a mma mma

12-hare and-pro cop-1-conn 15-9om-beat-sc-fv ideo ideo

‘Hare, for him, he kept on beating Hyena: whack! whack!’ [Kîitharaka]

More on composition and syntactic restrictions-next presentation (Hannah & Lutz)

Conclusions

- **-o** is used as a contrastive topic marker in all three languages
- The extra 'flavours' of intensity, depreciation, and mirativity come for free in the right context
- Kinyakyusa is more restricted in only having **po** and **ko**, and on the other hand these show a wider use, also on the discourse level
- The particle prefers a postnominal use, attached to a noun in the left periphery of the sentence, but appears flexible in its position
- The particle can also appear by itself, or perhaps in a different vision as modifying an accessible referent that is not expressed by a noun phrase (but by a subject or object marker)

Further questions

- If topic predicate doubling and -o are both used with a contrastive topic meaning, what is the result of combining them, in interpretation and use?
- Which stages between pronoun and particle use can be postulated, and can we find evidence for them?
- Should -o in its use as contrastive topic marker be analysed as the spell-out of a **ContrTopP** head in the syntax?
 - If so, how should we deal with the use of the particle in other positions than the left periphery? An alternative: the marker forms part of the noun phrase.
 - Can we trace which languages the o- of reference developed into contrastive topic and in which it became an identification copular

The end

Thank you!

Comments and
questions are
welcome!

References

- Ashton, E. (1945). Notes on Form and Structure in Bantu Speech. *Africa*, 15(1), 4-20. doi:10.2307/1156825
- Asimwe, Allen, and Jenneke van der Wal. 2021. [The multifunctionality of -o in Rukiga: pronoun, contrastive topic, and mirative marker](#). *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 30 (1).