

Auxiliary constructions in Xitsonga revisited

The Southern Bantu language Xitsonga employs a range of constructions in which auxiliaries appear alongside lexical main verbs. Earlier work noted the existence of such constructions (Baumbach 1987). While more recent work has sought to describe the distribution and restrictions operative on these forms (Lee & Hlungwani 2015).

Inspired by Anderson (2011) who describes auxiliaries as a “verbal element on a diachronic form-function continuum standing between a fully lexical verb and a bound grammatical affix”, we consider auxiliaries to be elements which are verbal in origin but which make a grammatical (rather than lexical) contribution to the clause. Auxiliary constructions are widespread across Bantu. However, there is extensive microvariation in the language family with respect to a number of properties, including, subject marking properties, the encoding of tense-aspect-mood distribution, the distribution of this TAM information across the verb form and the inventory of auxiliaries. In Xitsonga, both the auxiliary and the main verb host subject information (1). Auxiliaries can also encode meanings beyond tense and aspect, including mood and modal senses, such as *dzumbá* ‘always’.

- (1) Vakhalabye va dzumba va karhele
 old men SM2 always SM2 tired
 ‘Old men are always tired’ (Hlungwani, Lee & Maswanganyi 2021:173)

In contrast to what is described for a number of other Bantu languages, in Xitsonga it is possible for an element to intervene between the auxiliary and the verb, as in (2).

- (2) a. ndzi hàtlà ndzi nwá byàlwà **ná múnghánà**
 1SG quickly 1SG drink beer with c11-friend
 ‘I quickly drink beer with a friend’
 b. ndzi hàtlà **ná múnghánà** ndzi nwá byàlwà
 1SG quickly with c11-friend 1SG drink beer
 ‘I quickly drink beer with a friend’ (Lee and Hlungwani 2015:118)

Xitsonga allows negation marking in auxiliary constructions but negative marking appears only on the auxiliary (3a), not on the main verb (3b).

- (3) a. à-ndzi hàtl-ì ndzi nwà màti
 NEG-1SG quickly-NEG 1SG drink water
 ‘I don’t quickly drink water’
 b. * ndzi hatla a-ndzi nwi mati
 1SG quickly NEG-1SG drink water (Lee and Hlungwani 2015:123)

While the combination of two auxiliary forms is possible(4), Xitsonga also exhibits auxiliary stacking in which three auxiliaries can co-occur (5) given the appropriate semantics and context.

- (4) Ndzi **dzumbela** ku **hatla** ndzi nwa mati
 1SG always SM15 quickly 1SG drink water
 ‘I always quickly drink water’ (Hlungwani et al. 2021: 173)

- (5) ndzi **tlhèlà** ndzi **hátlá** ndzi **èngètà** ndzi nwà màti
1SG once 1SG quickly 1SG again 1SG drink water
'Once again, I quickly drink water again' (Lee and Hlungwani 2015:132)

This talk examines auxiliary constructions in Xitsonga in light of a more in depth understanding of variation in auxiliary constructions across the language family and in Southern Bantu languages in particular. We report on 1) the restriction on the number of auxiliary forms, 2) the co-occurrence of certain auxiliaries, and 3) the associated interpretations. The talk provides further insight into auxiliary constructions in Xitsonga, as well as contributing to our understanding of auxiliary constructions across Bantu more broadly.

References

- Anderson, Gregory D.S. 2011. Auxiliary verb constructions in the languages of Africa. *Studies in African Linguistics* 40(1 & 2). 1–409.
- Baumbach, E.J.M. 1987. *Analytical Tsonga Grammar*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Hlungwani, Crous M., Seunghun J. Lee & Vincent Maswanganyi. 2021. Xitsonga (S53). In Seunghun Lee, Yuko Abe, & Daisuke Shinagawa (eds.), *Descriptive materials of morphosyntactic microvariation in Bantu vol. 2: A microparametric survey of morphosyntactic microvariation in Southern Bantu languages*, 135–191. Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA).
- Lee, Seunghun J. & Crous Hlungwani. 2015. Aspectual auxiliary verbs in Xitsonga. *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus* 113–135. DOI: <https://doi.org/doi:10.5842/48-0-678>