

Like many Bantu languages, Mashi employs multiple distinct complementizers to introduce a finite clause under clause-embedding predicates. As in other related languages, the Mashi complementizers are generally described as introducing different types of embedded clauses; *mpu* introduces reported speech, while *oku* serves to introduce a ‘generic’ embedded clause (Polack-Bynon, 1975).

- (1) *nawagize oku/mpu inkuba injo yanyaga*
 1SG.think COMP 9.rain yesterday 9.fall.IPFV
 ‘I think that it rained yesterday’

In light of a growing body of research suggesting that complementizers may serve a range of evidential, modal, and discourse-oriented functions, we present novel fieldwork data concerning the semantic contribution of the Mashi complementizers *oku/mpu*. In addition to their functions as general clause-embedding (*oku*) and reportative (*mpu*) complementizers, we find that *oku/mpu* also encode a distinction in evidential strength and modal force; *oku* encodes strong evidence/modal force, while *mpu* encodes weak evidence/modal force.

Evidentiality. Complementizers in Bantu languages sometimes encode evidential properties, most notably reportative evidentiality (Wandera, 2004; Letsholo & Safir, 2019). Such is the case in Mashi, where evidentiality is most prominent in the form of the reportative complementizer *mpu*, which introduces reported speech. However, under predicates like ‘possible’, we find that both *oku* and *mpu* exhibit evidential properties in that they encode a distinction in evidence strength; with *oku*, the speaker has strong evidence to support the embedded proposition, while with *mpu*, they do not.

Context: Mary said she’d be going to Kinshasa, and now her house is empty.

- (2) *bihashikine oku Maria ajire e=Kinshasa*
 14SM.possible COMP Maria 3SG.go.PFV LOC=Kinshasa
 ‘It is probable that Mary went to Kinshasa’

Context: Mary said she’d be travelling today, but she didn’t say where.

- (3) *bihashikine mpu Maria ajire e=Kinshasa*
 14SM.possible COMP Maria 3SG.go.PFV LOC=Kinshasa
 ‘It is possible that Mary went to Kinshasa’

Modal Force. Like what has been reported of the expletive agreement markers in Loogori (Gluckman & Bowler, 2016), we find that Mashi *oku/mpu* encode a distinction in deontic modal force; *oku* encodes strong deontic modal force, e.g. “you must wear a helmet” while *mpu* encodes weak deontic modal force, e.g. “you should wear a helmet”.

Context: The law states that you must wear a helmet while riding a bike.

- (4) *bihunire oku oyambale enkofera*
 14SM.require.PFV COMP 2SG.wear 9.helmet
 ‘It is required (by law) that you wear a helmet’

Context: You require your child to wear a helmet while riding a bike.

- (5) *bihunire mpu oyambale enkofera*
 14SM.require.PFV COMP 2SG.wear 9.helmet
 ‘It is required (by me) that you wear a helmet’

Discussion. Given the variable semantic function of the two complementizers, we conclude that Mashi *oku/mpu* cannot be distinguished solely as ‘generic’/‘reportative’ complementizers, as they also encode distinctions in evidentiality and modal force. In our paper, we discuss possible accounts as to why *oku/mpu* encode similar strength distinctions across different properties (e.g. *oku* encoding both strong evidence/modal force), and comment on similar complementizer distinctions in other Bantu languages.

References

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