

Word order, subject marking and information structure in Kukuya (Bantu B77a)

The Kukuya language belongs to the Teke group (Guthrie code B70) of Bantu languages and is spoken in the Republic of Congo. This paper is based on intensive fieldwork on the morphosyntax and information structure of this language. The new data illustrate that in this language both preverbal and postverbal focus strategies are allowed. There is a dedicated immediate-before-verb (IBV) focus position (1) which seems to be an areal feature and may be reconstructable to the West-Coastal Bantu level. When the IBV focus position is filled, the other non-focal elements all tend to occur in the preverbal domain (1). While postverbal focus is also allowed, there is an interpretational difference between preverbal and postverbal focus. The immediate-before-verb (IBV) site is often associated with identificational focus while the canonical word order can express simple focus, as shown in (2). The IBV position is also associated with VP focus and predicate-centered focus and shows some interesting syntactic properties, for example the preverbally focussed element in a lower clause can move to the IBV position of the matrix clause. This preverbal focus construction also has a marked tone pattern (3), the preverbally focussed element always bears a high tone on its prefix, and when the IBV position is filled and there are other elements following the verb, the prefix of the postverbal NP also shifts to a high tone, which may reflect its origin from the relative construction. An morphological alternation of subject marking is attested with speech participants and class 1 objects. We find that information structure plays a more crucial role in determining the word order in this language than grammatical roles.

(1) Taará lóoso munkí ká-dzí?
1.father 5.rice when 1sm.pst-eat.pst
'When did he eat the rice?'

(2) a. (There are many dishes and the father ate only some fish)
Taará báa-ntsúí ká-dzí.
1.father 2-fish 1sm.pst-eat.pst
'The father ate some FISH.'

b. (there were some fish and the father ate it all, or the father may also have eaten something else, but irrelevant to the dialogue)

Taará á-dzí baa-ntsúí.
1.father 1sm.pst-eat.pst 2-fish
'The father ate some fish.'

(3)a. Nkaaká á-wí ma-désu ku baa-ndzulí.
1.grandma 1sm.pst-give.pst 6-beans 17.loc 2-cats
'The grandma gave beans to the cats.'

b. Ambú, ndé lóoso ká-wí baa-ndzulí.
no 1.prn 5.rice 1sm.pst-give.pst 2-cats
'No, she gave RICE to the cats.'