

Journal of West African Languages XVIII, 2 (1988)

A NOTE ON VERBAL EXTENSIONS IN JARAWAN BANTU

Ludwig Gerhardt
 Universität Hamburg, West Germany

1. BACKGROUND

Until very recently comparative linguists did not have much to say about verbal extensions (VE) in Niger-Congo (NC)¹. There have been occasional hints in the literature which point to the remarkable similarity of VEs in Fulfulde and Proto-Bantu. Nevertheless comparative linguists have, for the last hundred years or so, concentrated almost exclusively on the more conspicuous nominal class systems and the lexicon to adduce evidence for the genetic unity of NC.

On the other hand, VEs have been regarded from the start as a characteristic feature of the Bantu family. Meinhof (1910) devoted a long chapter to VEs, in which he described the function and form of some twelve VEs which he assumed to have been a feature of Proto-Bantu.

The verbal systems of West African languages, with their intricate morphologies, apparently lend themselves less readily than the nominal class-systems to a quick analysis. Linguists have therefore had more difficulties in presenting them. Only in 1977 did E. Voeltz ('VE in Niger-Congo'), give abundant evidence that PNC must have had a rich system of VEs more similar to the present day Bantu system than to anything else reconstructed in NC.

According to the classical writers, the functions of VEs in Bantu languages have been limited mainly to modifying the verb meaning:

1. reversing its meaning (tie vs. untie) or indicating
2. the result of the action (break vs. be broken)
3. the perfectivity of action (do vs. have done)
4. the intensity of action (break vs. shatter)

In this semantically biased analysis other important functions have been overlooked: VEs change the relation of the verb to the NPs in the sentence:

1. A transitive verb can become intransitive (I break the pot vs. the pot is broken);
2. A NP may be added to a transitive verb (write a letter vs. write somebody a letter).
3. In the passive VE the function of subject and object NP is exchanged etc.

Thus VE functions can be distinguished on both the semantic and syntactic levels.

The Bantu border area of which JB languages are a part has long been of special interest to students of African comparative linguistics because these languages display two contradicting particularities. On the one hand Marginal Bantu languages lack some features regarded as essential by such eminent Bantuists as M. Guthrie. One of these is the presence of a VE system. On the other hand, it was observed very early in the history of African linguistics that languages of the Benue valley area are closely related lexically with Bantu. Johnston, for example, maintained that Jara, a language of his Bauchi-group could be included under Bantu 'were not its grammar much worn down and deprived of Bantu features' (Johnston 1921:189). This indicates that the Bantu border area has always been used by typologists and geneticists to test their particular methods of classifying its languages.

I	Mboa	
II	Nagumi	
III	Nigerian Jarawan Bantu	* JBLs for which VEs have been recorded
A	Numan group*	
A (i)	Mbula*	
A (ii)	Bwaza*	
B	Kantana* (a name preferable to Mama)	
C	Lame cluster	
C (i)	Bambaro	
C (ii)	Gura	
D	Jaku-Gubi group*	
D (i)	Gubi	
D (ii)	Jaku*	
E	Kulung	
F	Jarawa*	
F (i)	Bankal*	
F (ii)	Ligri	
F (iii)	Dialect recorded by Meek	
F (iv)	Boar	
F (v)	Gingwak	
F (vi)	Duguri of Gar	
F (vii)	Duguri of Badar	
F (viii)	NE Duguri*	
F (ix)	SW Duguri	
F (x)	Bada	
F (xi)	Dialect recorded by Abraham	
F (xii)	Jaar*	

Table 1. The Jarawan Bantu Languages.

The Jarawan Bantu languages are the northern- and western-most members of the Bantu family. They are spoken in Kaduna, Plateau, Bauchi, and Gongola States of Nigeria and possibly in two small pockets in Cameroon. Although a wordlist of one Jarawan Bantu language is given in Koelle's monumental 'Polyglotta Africana' (1854), only limited attention has been paid to them since. Nearly all classifications have denied them proper Bantu status and have included them in a somewhat nebulous 'Semi-Bantu'-group.

Only N.W. Thomas (1926) tentatively included them in Bantu, on the basis of some clear lexical resemblances which he observed between them and the canonical Bantu languages. Greenberg finally established their membership in the Bantu family.

The Wider Bantu languages minus Narrow Bantu present relatively short canonical word stems. In Narrow Bantu the canonical root shape is -CVC- to which a stem-vowel is added, resulting in a canonical stem -CVC-V. VEs in Bantu occur between the root and the final vowel. In Northwestern Bantu and particularly in Marginal Bantu the stem shape has almost always been reduced to CVC. By this historical process the slot for verbal derivations has been lost and one assumes there is no place for VEs. However, this is only partially true; there are VEs in JBL.

What is remarkable about these VEs is that those with syntactic functions have been lost, while aspect-like VEs are still present.

I shall attempt to outline the VE systems of two JBLs for which I have sufficient data. It is clear that VEs do exist in other Nigerian JBLs too, but my data are very limited (see Table 2 for some examples). I use the classification of JB as given in Maddieson/Williamson 1975:145. Nothing is known about VEs in Cameroonian JBLs in this respect.

	eat	swallow
Mbula:	lí, líná, ---	mélí, myélinì
Kantana:	lí, liiná, ---	mélé, miilá
Jaku:	---, líyáŋ, ---	---, méláyáŋ, ---
Jaar:	lí, liím, liín	mílá?, mílá?má, mílá?ná
Bankal:	lí, lím, lín	mél, mélmá, myélan
Duguri:	lí, lím, lín	myél, myélám, myélán
	see	hear
Mbula:	sóní, sónónà, ---	?wi, ?wánùnì
Kantana:	súnú, sùnùná, ---	wó?ó, wà?àná
Jaku:	---, sí-náŋ.	---, wóxáŋ, ---
Jaar:	són, sònám, sònán	wó?, wà?ám, wù?án
Bankal:	si-n, zínà, sí-ní-n	wácá, wáxáam, ---
Duguri:	són, sònám, sònán	wá?, wà?ám, wá?án

Table 2: Some examples of extended verbs from different JBLs.
NB: The first form is present tense, the second perfect tense, the third future/habitual.

2. VERBAL EXTENSIONS IN JAAR

There are data for two VEs in Jaar. The first VE expresses perfectivity of action designated by the verb, the second expresses habitual or future action.

An important factor in the distribution of allomorphs of both VEs is the phonological weight of the verbal stem. Measuring the weight has to take into account the number of consonants or the

length of the stem-vowel. The stem is heavy when there are more than two consonants or where the vowel is long. In this case the VE for the perfect is **-ma**. In the case of light stems the VE is **Vm**, and in case of superlight stems of the shape CV, the VE is **-m**.

1. <u>Superlight stems</u>	ɔwà - ɔwàm	carve/have carved
	yú - yúm	come/have come etc.
	lí - lím	eat
	kwá - kwám	go/come in
2. <u>Light stems</u>	ɔàʔ - ɔàʔám	build
	kúr - kúrúm	buy
	gəb - gəbəm	close
	shíʔ - shíʔím	put down
3. <u>Heavy stress</u>	ɣàʔád - ɣàʔádám	open
	klàʔ - klàʔám	put down
	tùún - tùúnám	burn, roast
	ɔwààd - ɔwààdám	pour out

Table 3: Jaar: Instances of Stem-weight

The numerically most important realization of the V in the allomorph **-Vm** is **-a-**. This is because in Jaar there are quite a number of verbs which have **-a-** as stem-vowel. Most of the extended stems are formed by adding a copy of stem vowel + **m** to the verbal base. In addition, **-am** is used if the stem contains the sequence glide + **a**. In these cases the extended form contains a high vowel in the first syllable and **a** in the second one.

yá6 - yi6ám	climb, mount	ɔəl - ɔələm	follow
ɔyál - ɔílám	sow	pùr - pùrùm	go out
swár - sùrám	hide	ɔáj - ɔájám	run
swáʔ - sùʔám	pound		

Table 4: Formation of VEs in Jaar (glides in the verb-root)

Some cases do not fit the above system. In these verbs the vowel **ə** appears unexpectedly, i.e. without being the stem-vowel. This happens almost always where the stem vowel is **i**. The vowel of the VE is reduced to **ə**. In addition there are some forms (occasionally with normal variants) in which the stem vowel is reduced to **ə**. These can perhaps best be explained as allo-forms.

li6 - li6əm	moisten
ɔín - ɔínəm	dance
kás - kásám	come back
mal - məlám	finish

Table 5: Jaar VE-formation with Schwa.

The second aspect-extension indicates future and habitual action. It appears in many forms which correspond to adjectives on other languages. Its form is **-Vn**. As regards allomorphs this extension is exactly as described for the perfect VE.

3. VERBAL EXTENSIONS IN KANTANA

3.1 PERFECTIVE FORMS

In Kantana we find a VE in perfective forms. Again the distribution of allomorphs is phonologically conditioned.

In monoconsonantal stems and in stems of which the second consonant is ? we find a pf-extension of the shape -na:

wù - wúúná	die	swà - swààná	pierce
gá - gáàná	dig	sɔʔɔ - swàʔàná	pound
lí - líiná	eat	lɔʔɔ - lwàʔàná	speak, talk

Table 6: CV-stems in Kantana

In all other verb-stems the first vowel of the stem is lengthened and the final vowel is changed into -á. Verbs containing either ɛ or ɔ present special cases. In the case of ɛ there is neutralization between verbs containing i and ɛ, ɛ in extended stems becoming ii. Verbs containing ɔ, on the other hand, change this into waa.

NB: What takes place in Kantana in one syllable is spread over two syllables in Jaar e.g. sɔr ---> swaara vs. swar ---> suram.

lúmú - lùùmá	bite	yéré - yìirá	answer
θúnú - θùùná	break	yéwè - yìiwá	climb
lámá - lààmá	cook	mélè - mìilá	swallow
kájá - kààjá	fry	θɔnɔ - θwáàná	break off
θílí - θiilá	give birth	kɔmó - kwáàmá	cultivate
cúmú - cùùmá	send		

Table 7: Perfect forms in Kantana

In my data there are no special VEs to mark habitual and future tense/aspects.

The basic allomorph appears to be the one found in CV-verbs. The insertion of the second consonant results in a CVC stem which is by far the most frequent shape of words in Kantana. A certain measure of uniformity in verb-stems results from this VE. Moreover from a comparative point of view it is definitely easier to explain the loss of -n- in CVC-verbs than to explain the independent emergence of a nasal consonant which is found in all other JB-languages as well.

3.2 INTENSIVE FORMS

In addition to the VE just described we find in Kantana derived forms which signify intensive or multiple action.

Again we find several allomorphs the distribution of which is determined by the phonological structure of the verb-stem. a)The most frequent allomorph consists of ?+copy vowel and is used in CVC-stems, if the C2 is not a nasal. b)Where C2 is a nasal it is replaced by gg is the intensive form and the stem-vowel is lengthened. c)Finally, CV-verbs form the intensive stem by a special allomorph, which inserts a pseudo-C2 in form of a glottal stop:

a) yéré - yé?éré	cut		
púru - pù?úru	come out		
wúhù - wú?ùhù	pull		
b) súnú - súúngù	see	c) ñà - ñá?àhà	beat
súnú - súúngà	pull	fwá - fwá?áhá	open
kúmù - kúúngù	help	mwé - mwé?géhè	ask

Table 8: Kantana intensive forms

4. CONCLUSION

It is interesting that, with the exception of the intensive derivation, only nasal consonants are used to form VEs in JBLs. Among the consonants of this class only -n is used nearly universally in JB. There is comparative evidence which shows that -n- can, at least in a considerable number of instances, be compared with -d- of Proto-Bantu. Given these facts, one cannot but admit the connection between these VEs and the PB-VE with the form -ide indicating completion of action.

The evidence given in this paper shows that there is another typical Bantu feature represented in Marginal Bantu languages. Guthrie has defined those languages displaying Bantu lexical characteristics but lacking Bantu grammatical features as Semi-Bantu. My impression is that the Semi-Bantu languages are Bantu languages which have not been studied enough by linguists to make their Bantu features evident.

NOTES

¹This paper was presented at the 18th West African Languages Congress, Niamey in March 1988. The field work underlying it was made possible through a grant of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft which is gratefully acknowledged. Moreover, I owe thanks to the University of Hamburg for granting a sabbatical semester; to the University of Jos for affiliation as a research associate; to Mr. Steve Gwarlu, Mr. Toma Garba and Adam Maicibi Kwara who shared with me their knowledge and love of their mother tongue. Without their help I would never have been in a position to write this article.

REFERENCES

- Johnston, H. 1921. The Semi-Bantu languages of Eastern Nigeria. *JAfr. Soc.* 20:186-194.
- Koelle, S.W. 1854. *Polyglotta Africana*. London.
- Maddieson, I. and K. Williamson. 1975. Jarawan Bantu. *AL/LA* 1:124-163.
- Meinhof, C. 1910. *Grundriß einer vergleichenden Grammatik der Bantusprachen*. Berlin (2nd edition 1948).
- Thomas, N.W. 1927. The Bantu languages of Nigeria. In *Festschrift Meinhof*:65-72.
- Voeltz, E. 1977. Proto-Niger-Congo verb extensions. PhD dissertation, UCLA.