

Situating the Subject in Bantu

Vicki Carstens, University of Missouri
Michael Diercks, Pomona College
Luis López, University of Illinois-Chicago
Loyiso Mletshe, University of the Western Cape
Juvénal Ndayiragije, University of Toronto
Justine Sikuku, Moi University

I. Introduction.

This questionnaire is part of an attempt to understand the patterns of placement and interpretation of subjects of sentences in Bantu languages.

In many of the tasks that follow, you will be asked not only for a translation of a model sentence, but for judgments about the scenarios in which the sentence can be appropriately uttered. Please be sure to indicate as clearly as possible which reading for any given sentence is the one you find acceptable and if you find that some examples are more acceptable than others, please use our acceptability scale to give graded judgments, if you feel that such gradations accurately capture your intuitions. The scale is as follows:

* Unacceptable either at all or at least under the interpretation that you have been asked about.

*? Very marginally possible, perhaps only by comparison with an example or interpretation that is clearly *

?? Very odd. You probably would not say this sentence this way or would not say it this way for the interpretation you have been asked about.

? Just a little off. Something not quite right about it.

OK This sounds like a natural sentence and is an appropriate sentence to use for the interpretation that you have been asked about.

When providing a sentence in your language, whether it is based on a model sentence or is one that you formulate or add in a comment about the sentence you are eliciting, always use the following format (example from Lubukusu).

1. Yòháná éésònyá ómwèènè
Yòháná á-á-í-sòní-á ó-mù-èènè
Yohana SM.c1-PST-RFM-shame-fv c1-c1-own
John shamed himself.

The first line is a rendering in the latinized alphabet that is typically used for your language with tone marked accordingly. If your language has no latinized representation or certain diglosses are used for certain sounds (e.g., *-kh-* for the voiceless velar fricative, or *-sh-* for the voiceless palatal fricative) then please indicate this information in some explanatory commentary provided with your answers to the questionnaire. The glossing

conventions we want you to use are available on the Afranaph site: Look at the lefthand margin of the homepage and click on glossing conventions.

Unless you are explicitly asked to use a particular word order or manner of translation, provide more than one translation if you think the sentence is ambiguous or might be said more than one way. Your comments about what you think might be factors in making the judgment that you do are always welcome and are very frequently useful, if you will be kind enough to provide them.

After we receive your responses to our questionnaire, we will think about the data you have given us and we will be contacting you again both to insure that we have everything we need and that the responses are clear and complete, as well as to ask follow-up questions, questions that involve asking you for new data, especially when an empirical pattern seems to be of particular rarity or serves a particular theoretical interest.

II. Base line sentences.

This section is designed to give us an overview of how sentences are constructed in your language. Please translate them using the glossing conventions described above.

1. A big goat ate three bananas.
2. The chief gave the girls presents.
3. The axe can easily cut this firewood.
4. Mary believes that these children should not meet you.
5. We made the boys wear new shoes to school.

III. Indefinite subjects with non-specific readings.

Please translate the following literally, without altering word order. We would like the sentences to include subject markers on the verb, so if our choices of sentences happen to have translations in your language that involve uninflecting copulas or tenses that do not inflect for subject agreement (such as the Swahili habitual) please indicate that you are avoiding these and use another tense. Provide a judgment of acceptability for the reading described or for appropriateness for the context described in (a-c) under the examples.

1. Somebody knocked on the door.
 - a) Is this sentence appropriate if the one who utters it does not know who it is who knocked on the door?
 - b) Is this sentence appropriate if the one who utters it knows who is at the door and wants the addressee to go to the door to see for himself?
 - c) Is this sentence an appropriate response to the question, "Did anything happen while I was out?"

2. Last night a cab driver came looking for you.

a) Is this sentence appropriate if the speaker has a particular cab driver in mind (e.g., the one who was wearing a yellow t-shirt)?

b) Is this sentence appropriate if the speaker knows that some cab driver came looking, but he doesn't know who or why?

3. One person must work. Who should do it?

(Just provide a translation modeled as closely as possible on the English).

4. A letter arrived this morning.

a) Could this be an appropriate response to "Did anything happen while I was out?" (Assume the letter is not in view; you are just reporting the morning's events).

b) Could this be appropriate in addressing a person who was only expecting to receive parcels while he was out? See if it works in this context as a continuation of the sentence, "You didn't receive any parcels but..." (As in (a), assume no letter is in view; you are just reporting the morning's events).

c) Could this be an appropriate response if someone asks "Did the governor send his reply?" and you respond with (4) while placing the letter in the questioner's hand.

5. Please translate the following. We are interested to know how 'somebody' is expressed and whether it can appear in preverbal position. Assume the intent of the speaker is that there are lots of unknown but friendly people around who would be likely to help you.

If you get lost, just ask people. Somebody will help you.

IV. Preverbal subjects and left-dislocation.

IV.a Left-dislocation diagnostics.

Please translate and judge the following:

1. This book, I read yesterday.
2. This book, I read it yesterday (with object marking).
3. Mary, I see at school.
4. Mary, I see her at school. (with OM)
5. A book, I will buy at the store.
6. A book, I will buy it at the store.

For examples (7-10), please indicate whether or not each sentence permits a bound variable reading, that is, a reading where the choice of book owners always corresponds to the choice of student (7-8), or the choice of boy corresponds to the choice of dog owner (9-10). In 7, for example, the bound variable reading would imply that ‘*John* should read the schoolbook that is *his*, *Sam* should read the schoolbook that is *his*, etc.’). Readings like these are known as ‘bound variable readings’ because, as semanticists put it, the choice of owner must covary with each choice of a member of the set denoted by the quantifier.

7. His book, every student should read (with bound variable reading, no OM)
8. His book, every student should read it (with OM, with bound variable reading)
9. His dog, every boy should feed. (with bound variable reading but no OM)
10. His dog, every boy should feed him. (with OM, with bound variable reading)

IVb. Negative Polarity Items.

A. Does your language have words like “anybody” or “anything”? If nouns have augment vowels that can be dropped, the augmentless nouns may fulfill this function. Here are some Xhosa examples to illustrate the general pattern that’s been found in languages where augmentless nouns function as NPIs:

- (a) Ndibona into
Ndi- bona i-nto
SM.ISG-see c9-thing
‘I saw a/the thing’
- (b) Andibonanga nto
A-ndi-bon-anga nto
NEG-SM.1SG-see-PAST thing
‘I didn’t see anything’

For purposes of comparison, please start by translating the following:

1. I like somebody.
2. I saw something.
3. I went somewhere.

Now translate (4-6) and indicate whether the result is acceptable.

4. I don’t like anybody.
5. I didn’t see anything.
6. I didn’t go anywhere.

B. If your language does have words like “anybody” or “anything” or such meanings can be achieved only in the absence of augment vowels, we would like to know if these forms

can be licensed by negation in a higher clause. Translate the following and indicate if they are acceptable.

7. John doesn't think I like anybody.
8. John doesn't believe I saw anything.
9. The kids don't like to go anywhere.
10. We won't say that Mary went anywhere.

IVc. Combining NPIs and left-dislocation.

If there are negative polarity items, this section tests whether they can left-dislocate. Please give translated examples without object marking and then please give examples with object marking (marking them (a) and (b) corresponding to each example given below and in all similar cases in this section).

11. She doesn't like anybody.
12. Anybody, she doesn't like.
13. Anybody, she doesn't like him.
14. I don't go anywhere.
15. Anywhere, I don't go.
16. Anywhere, I don't go there.

In translating these examples, please use our glossing conventions for object markers, 'OM', should be accompanied by noun class affiliation, e.g., for the noun class marker for plural persons, the marker should be glossed '-OM.c2-'.

IVd. Polarity items licensed from higher clauses: trying left-dislocation.

Please translate the following and provide grammaticality judgments.

1. John doesn't think that anybody, I like him.
2. John doesn't think that anything, I saw it.
3. We will not say that anywhere, Mary went there.

IVe. Other quantificational NPs.

For the sake of comparison, please translate the following and indicate whether they are grammatical (note that the presence or absence of a pronoun in the English sentences is intended to elicit sentences with and without object markers).

1. We greeted each boy.
2. Each boy, we greeted.
3. Each boy, we greeted him.

IVf. Trying subjects of embedded clauses.

Here the higher verb is negated. The quantifier or NPI is subject of the embedded clause which crucially is NOT negative. Please include a complementizer like ‘that’ preceding the embedded subject.

1. She doesn't think that anybody likes me.
2. I don't think that anyplace has enough water.
3. I didn't see that anything broke.
4. He said that each boy worked.
5. We believe that every student passed the exam.

IVg. As above, but without ‘that’.

Now please translate and judge the same sentences but minus the complementizer ‘that’.

1. She doesn't think anybody likes me.
2. I don't think anyplace has enough water.
3. I didn't see anything break.
4. He said each boy worked.
5. We believe every student passed the exam.

IVf. Raising to object of NPIs.

This section explores the possibility of raising an NPI from embedded subject position to matrix object position. When translating these sentences, please be careful to include the complementizer (the word corresponding to English *that*) and please comment about whether or not it can or should be missing). The sentences are translated with the appropriate finiteness (or non-finiteness) for English, please translate into the appropriate forms for your language.

1. She doesn't think anybody that (he) likes me.
2. We don't believe anyplace that (it) has enough water.
3. They don't want anybody (that) to leave.
4. He doesn't expect anybody (that) to read the newspaper.

IVg. Comparing with free choice any.

Can the same words that are used for ‘any X’ in negative contexts also be used outside of negative contexts to mean “anyone at all” or “whoever”? Please see if they are acceptable in translations of the following sentences.

1. I will pay anyone who works hard.
2. I will dismiss anyone who doesn't work hard.
3. I will go anyplace that has good weather.
4. I will leave anyplace that has too much rain.
5. She will buy anything that is on sale.
6. She will return anything that doesn't fit.

V. Looking for negative NPs.

Are there words like ‘nobody’ and ‘nothing’? If so, they should be possible as stand-alone sentence fragment answers in exchanges like the following:

1. Who did you see? Ans: Nobody (or, no one).
2. What did you buy? Ans: Nothing.

If such words exist, please provide judgments for the following

3. Nobody came.
4. Nothing happened.
5. We bought nothing.
6. We saw nobody.

VI. Scope interactions.

Please translate the sentences in this section and then answer if they are acceptable with the interpretation described. Please comment on how the interpretation would be rendered if the translations of these sentences do not permit the intended reading. In case English is not one of your first languages, we include some information about what native English speakers assume in these contexts about what interpretation these sentences allow.

1. There were many kids throwing rocks off a wall yesterday. A rock hit every passerby on the head.

Please be sure to translate the sentence such that ‘a rock’ is the subject of the sentence, as indicated by the subject marker (SM) on the verb. In English, this context favors the interpretation ‘Each passerby was hit by a rock’ (and not the same rock crushing every passerby!). Is this an interpretation your translation allows? Is it the only one?

2. Last night at 9 pm a siren went off. Then a dog started to bark in every compound.

Please be sure to translate the sentence such that ‘a dog’ is the subject of the sentence. In English, the most plausible interpretation for this sentence is that in every compound, there was a different dog barking. Is this an interpretation your translation allows? Is it the only one? Is there a special word for ‘some’? If so, does it make a difference to say, “Some dog started to bark in every compound”?

3. The morning after the tsunami a message of sympathy was sent by each government.

In English, this sentence is permitted to mean that each government that sent such a message sent a different one. Is this an interpretation your translation allows? Is it the only one?

4. At the conference, it seemed like a question interrupted every talk.

Please be sure to translate the sentence so that ‘a question’ is the subject of the clause. In English, this can mean that every talk was interrupted and when a question was asked, but that the question posed was not necessarily the same question at every talk. Is this an interpretation your translation allows? Is it the only one?

5. Here we put together quantifiers, locative inversion, and the raising verb ‘seem’. Please translate, matching the word order indicated.

a. In some villages seemed to bark every dog. Is this an acceptable way of expressing the meaning that it seemed some villages were such that every dog in them barked?

b. In every village seemed to bark some dog. Is this an acceptable way of expressing the meaning that every village seemed to be such that at least one dog in it barked? Could the dogs vary with the villages?

VII. Clausal negation and scope over a subject quantifier.

1. Everybody can’t fit into that car. Some will have to take a cab.

Please be sure to translate the first sentence so that ‘everybody’ is the subject of the clause. Most speakers of English permit the first sentence to mean that although some people can fit into the car, not all of them can. Please translate both sentences and comment as to whether the first sentence permits either of the two readings below. Which statement is true? Are both meanings possible?

- a) Sentence #1 has the ‘not all of them, but some’ reading.
- b) Sentence #2 means that no one can fit into that car.

2. Hey, I asked you to put food in every bowl. But every bowl doesn’t contain food; these two are still empty.

Please be sure to translate the second sentence with ‘every bowl’ as the subject of ‘contain’.

3. All the students didn’t tell the truth.

Please be sure to translate the sentence with ‘all the students’ as the subject. Answer whether both interpretations given below are possible, or if only one of them is:

- a) I know that Mary, for example, was lying, even though Luke and many of the others might have indeed told the truth (= some students told the truth and some lied)
- b) As usual, they all lied (= no student told the truth)

IIIX. Subjects and Focus.

- 1. How would you say "The woman dropped the pot?"
- 2. How do you say "What happened?"

Suppose what happened is that the woman dropped the pot. Does it sound reasonable to word this answer to the "What happened?" question as follows:

- 3. The pot, the woman dropped (it)

Please translate the answer and indicate whether it is an appropriate answer in the context (with the comment "This is/is not an appropriate answer to the question in this context".)

- 4. Alternatively in response to the question "What happened?" can you answer felicitously with SVO word order "The woman dropped the pot"? Or does the word order need to be different?

Please translate the answer and indicate whether it is an appropriate answer in the context (with the comment "This is/is not an appropriate answer to the question in this context".)

- 5. What if the answer is "The pot broke". What word orders are acceptable in the exchange, "What happened?" "The pot broke". Please translate the answers that are appropriate.

IX. Embedded wh-subjects in object relatives.

How would you say the following:

- 1. This is the man that I know who likes.

The intended reading of (1) is something like 'I know who likes this man, and this is the man in question' The sentence in (1), in case you are wondering, is typically judged unacceptable in English, but one thing we would like to understand is whether or not languages differ in this respect, and if so, how.

- 2. This is the book that John saw who bought.

The intended reading of (2) is something like 'John saw who it was that bought the book in question and this is the book (e.g., perhaps the speaker is holding the book up for the

addressee to see). Once again, (2) is frequently judged unacceptable by many English speakers, but once again, we are interested in probing potential cross-linguistic differences.