



Grammaticalized not-yet markers in Bantu languages

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Bantu languages are typically used to illustrate the distinction between plain negation and the encoding of both the non-realization of a situation, and the expectations of the speaker for its future realization. Data from Digo, a Bantu language from Kenya and Tanzania, are shown in (1) by way of introductory illustration.

(1) Digo [digo1243], (Nicolle 2013: 150, 135)

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|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| a. <i>u-ka-rim-a</i> | b. <i>ta-m-ka-fwih-a</i> |
| 2SG-ANTERIOR-farm-FINAL VOWEL | NEG-2PL-ANTERIOR-dance-FINAL VOWEL |
| 'You have farmed/you farmed' | 'You have not danced' |
| c. <i>ta-ri-dzangbwe-dung-a</i> | |
| NEG-5-INCEPTIVE-pierce-FINAL VOWEL | |
| 'It has not yet pierced' | |

In Digo negation is expressed by the prefix *ta-* for a number of tenses, including the anterior, cf. (1b). The form *-dzangbwe-* is glossed 'INCEPTIVE'; it is a bound item observed only in the context of negation or in questions. That is, it is an example of a *negative polarity item*, hereafter NPI. The suffix *-dzangbwe-* indicates "that an event has not occurred prior to and including the reference time" (Nicolle 2013: 157). This author goes on to state that this form typically also implies that the non-realized event may occur at some point after the reference time. The form *-dzangbwe-* appears in the same position as other tense-aspect markers in Digo; thus it can be seen to be in opposition with them. It is considered a grammatical rather than a lexical item based on the following features (i) it is bound, rather than free form; (ii) it has a fixed position within verb forms, (iii) it is restricted to specific contexts, e.g. negation and questions, and (iv) it has an abstract rather than specific meaning. Following the praxis suggested by Bybee, Perkins and Pagliuca (1994: 2), grammatical markers are also referred to as **grams**. For discussions of similar expressions, see Comrie (1985), Contini-Morava (1989), van Baar (1997), van der Auwera (1998), Plungian (2000), Zeshan (2004), the list of references given here is minimal. Olsson (2013) as well as Dahl & Wälchi (2016) discuss the categories of *perfect* and *iamitive* from a cross-linguistic perspective. The latter categories are relevant here since not-yet markers are often cited as special negators for them.

As indicated above, it is often stated that markers such as *-dzangbwe-* are commonly encountered in Bantu languages. However, there is still no specific information about their frequency in the Bantu family. Consequently, the first goal of this study is provide a plausible picture of the distribution of grammaticalized not-yet expressions in this family. We also strive to outline their contexts of use and ultimately arrive at a semantic map of this under-described lexico-grammatical category.



We work with a sample of 100 Bantu languages fairly well distributed throughout the Bantu area. Our main data sources are grammars and parallel texts, specifically the Parallel Bible Corpus. We also use a questionnaire for data elicitation but this is only feasible for a handful of languages.

So far the preliminary results indicate that not-yet markers are abundant in the central-eastern parts of the Bantu territory but are not so common in the north-west areas. It is not always easy to determine the morpho-syntactic category of not-yet markers. In some languages, such as Digo above, they are clearly affixes, typically, prefixes. However, in many others, not-yet markers appears as defective verbs or auxiliaries. There are also instances of more complex constructions. In terms of content, not-yet markers typically indicate the non-occurrence of an otherwise expected action or state but also an anticipation about its occurrence. They are also frequently used as temporal subordinators. Other uses observed in the parallel texts are indication of surprise/counter-expectation, emphatic negation, questions and near future. There are also a few instances where the not-yet marker appears to be used as a marker of plain negation.

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