Phasal Polarity in the Nguni cluster (Bantu, S.40)

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In South African Nguni varieties, phasal polarity notions are expressed by way of affixes in the fairly complex verbal morphology. The concepts still and no longer are formally related: The verb form containing the persistive affix -sa ‘still’ (1) yields the “no longer”-construction when externally negated (2).

(1) si-sa-hlal-a e-Mosesetjana
    1PL-still-live-FV LOC-Mosesetjana
‘We still live in Mosesetjana’

(2) a-si-sa-hlal-i e-Mokopane
    NEG-1PL-still-live-FV.NEG LOC-Mokopane
‘We are no longer living in Mokopane’

The notion ALREADY is expressed with a pre-verb sele (with a shorter variant, the prefix se-).

(3) a. sele ba-fik-ile ekhaya
    already 3PL-arrive-PFV at.home
‘they have already arrived at home’

b. se-si-fik-ile
    already-1PL-arrive-PFV
‘we have already arrived; we’re here now’

Besides describing basic Nguni PhP mechanics, the contribution discusses evidence for neutral v. counter-expectational usages of sele/se- and persistive sa-, telicity (se- ‘already’ being rather general), and strategies to paraphrase the NOT YET gap. This follows the lead of the position paper on PhP (Kramer 2017). Lexical verbs in Nguni interact with grammatical tense-aspect in intricate ways (Crane & Fleisch 2016, forthcoming; cf. also Croft 2012, Bar-el 2015). Phasal notions as expressed by sele/se- and sa- are obviously sensitive to these properties; this paper documents relevant observations and constraints discovered in systematic elicitation. Interestingly, a substantial degree of microvariation with regard to these parameters exists in what seems otherwise a fairly homogenous system across the Nguni varieties.

References


