



Is N- or \emptyset the Synchronic Class9 Prefix in Lekuwa (C27)?

THIERRY TSONO MOWELLE

Department of Foreign Modern Languages, Marien Ngouabi University, Congo-Brazzaville

***Corresponding Author:** THIERRY TSONO MOWELLE, Department of Foreign Modern Languages, Marien Ngouabi University, Congo-Brazzaville

Abstract: This paper addresses the question whether the prefix of the class9 is N-, \emptyset - or not in Lekuwa (C27), a Bantu language spoken in the Republic of Congo. Based on the notion of Empty Categories of the Government and Binding Theory and an agreement noun classification, it demonstrates that the class 9 prefix in Lekuwa, although phonologically unspecified, is e-, and not N- or \emptyset -. This is evidenced first by the agreement pattern of nouns assigned to the class9 and data from Lumbu, a Bantu language in which i- is the prefix and the agreement maker of nouns of the so-called class 9, and then by the iterative agreement displayed by all Bantu nouns. The appearance of the agreement marker (AM) e-n- on modifiers commencing with the morpheme[y] in Lekuwa, suggests that the class9 N- at a given stage of Lekuwa history was preceded by the augment e, which nowadays is taking over the prefix n.

Keywords: Synchronic- null prefix- Empty categories- agreement marker- homorganic nasal

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the following questions: Is N-, \emptyset the synchronic class9 prefix in Lekuwa? Are the classes 7 e- and 9 N- merging into a single class7/9 e- in Lekuwa? Some scholars like Bleek and Meinhof portioned Bantu nouns into classes on the basis of the semantic and shape of their prefixes; while others like Fortune (1955) and Guthrie (1956) group them not only in relation with their prefix semantic and form, but also according to the type of concord they govern. Thus, the class9 Nⁱ- should contain only nouns which have both morphologically the prefix n-, \emptyset - and semantically refer to [\pm animate] and govern the same sets of concord. Unfortunately, the majority of nouns of the class9 in Lekuwa does not have the prefix n- and does not copy it on their verbs and modifiers as agreement marker. They rather trigger the AM e- on categories they govern. The unique case when the homorganic nasal prefix N- is used as an AM it is always preceded by e-. The AMs e- and e-n- mandate me to hypothesize not only that the class 9 prefix n- was preceded by the augment e-, i- in Lekuwa, but also that this augment is taking over the place of the class9 prefix n- or the classes 7 and 9 are merging together, since e- is assumed to be the prefix of the class7 in Lekuwa. If the noun class in Bantu is defined as 'words that have similar prefixes, which in turn form part of the set of concord elements operating a distinct pattern of agreement' (Guthrie 1956, p.80), and as the majority of nouns of the class 9 trigger the AM e-, I can contend that their dropped prefix is e- or the nasal prefix in Lekuwa is conceding its place to the augment e-, i-.

As for the prefix \emptyset , subscribing myself to the Government and Binding Theory and Minimalist Program, I argue that the noun class9 prefix is not zero, but it is dropped and emerges through the agreement between nouns of the so-called class9 and their verbs and modifiers. In fact, in generative grammar a category can be null (also known as empty category) or overt. A 'null constituent have a grammatical and semantic features but lack phonetic features (and so are silent or inaudible)' (Radford 2004, p.92). This implies that the class9 prefix, although phonetically null, can be identified thanks to the agreement marker on nouns, adjectives and verbs governed by nouns of this class, since it denotes its grammatical and semantic features. If the prefix of Bantu noun classes which are assumed to have a zero prefix can be identified via agreement, thus the classification of Bantu nouns in classes with the prefix \emptyset should be reviewed. This paper is structured out as follows:

Section 2 introduces briefly the theory of empty categories. Section 3 addresses the issues of previous views about the noun classes 9. Section 4 lays emphasis on the synchronic prefix of the classes 9 in Lekuwa. Section 5 rounds up the analysis.

2. DEFINITION OF EMPTY CATEGORIES

Diego and Kosta (2013, p.69) ‘define empty category as a semantically interpretable syntactic node (either X^0 or an XP in traditional terms) that receives no phonological features in the course of the derivation.’ In other terms, an empty category is a category with grammatical and semantic properties which is not spelled out.

Chomsky (1982) identifies four types of empty categories: NPⁱⁱ-trace, Wh-trace, PRO, and pro, which were considered as the cases of the empty nominal category [NP e]. This category is grammatically determined by the binding relation it enters into:

[NP e] is

- a. wh-trace if it is locally A-bar bound,
- b. NP-trace if it is locally A-bound from a non- θ -position,
- c. PRO if it is locally A-bound from a θ -position,
- d. pro if it is governed by strong enough INFL or by a clitic.

These four categories enter the derivation at different moment. Both NP-trace and Wh-trace are generated as the result of Move- α . As for PRO and pro, they are assumed to be taken from the lexicon and based generated in A-/ θ positions (Spec-vP) and move to Spec-TP for EPP reasons.

In the eighties and nineties, the theory of empty categories began to fall apart with the discovery of various NPs like long distance reflexive, logophoric pronouns (cf. Huang 2000), dependent pronouns (Fiengo and May 1994) etc. which did not fit into the Binding Theory.

In MP, traces are no longer considered as distinctive categories from their antecedents, they are rather unpronounced copies of moved categories. Hence, there is no trace, in the sense of an empty category with its own distinctive properties. NP- and Wh-traces are eliminated in the MP, all that remains of empty categories are PRO and *pro*. The empty category that is relevant to this study is *pro*. Although the identification of *pro* in MP by uninterpretable agreement marker is controversial, I restrict myself to its GB Theory conception. Thus, taking Chomsky’s (1982, p.241) statement that ‘where there is overt agreement, the subject can be dropped, since the deletion is recoverable’ *pro* can be defined as a dropped subject which can be recovered or identified thanks to its agreement (person, gender and number features). This can be illustrated by the following example:

(1) *a-nuya-ka*

SM sulk-Ps.PROG

‘S/he is sulking’

The subject position in (1) seems to be empty. It is in reality occupied by a null subject *pro* whose presence is indicated by its agreement marker *a*. This third person singular agreement marker shows that the dropped or empty subject in (1) is either *ye* (s/he) or a singular noun, as shown below:

(2) a. *ye a -nuya- ka*

S/he SM sulk-Ps.PROG

‘She is sulking’

b. *Mbesi a -nuya- ka*

Mbesi SM sulk-Ps PROG

‘Mbesi is sulking’

Although languages with poor morphology like Japanese allow null subject, the dropping of subjects and other lexical items in Lekuwa and other Bantu languages is licensed by its rich morphology, which makes possible their recoverability. Thus, I postulate in this paper that the dropped class prefix is recovered thanks to its agreement marker on verb, auxiliaries and adjectives governed by its noun, and its position in the DP is not empty; it is rather occupied by a null class prefix. A null category in GB and MP does exist even though it is not phonologically spelled out. This null class prefixⁱⁱⁱ is recovered thanks to the agreement its noun spreads mainly on other nouns and adjectives, and sometimes on verbs

The theory of null class prefixes and their identification by virtue of agreement pattern can allow us to identify the synchronic prefix of the class9 in Lekuwa.

3. PREVIOUS VIEWS ABOUT THE NOUN CLASS 9

This section examines and discusses different previous analysis of the noun class 9, the classification of Bantu nouns into this class and issues they did not raise.

Brusciotto (1659) portions Kongo nouns into classes on the basis of their their concords-specially in possessive constructions (cf. Katamba 2006). Other bantuists, like Fortune (1955), Guthrie (1956), Hockett (1958) etc. proposed a classification of Bantu nouns that takes into account the shape of the noun prefix and the sets of agreements they govern.

Bleek's (1862) and Meinhof (1899, 1932)^{iv} noun-class system was based on a set of reconstructed noun class prefixes from the hypothetical Pro-Bantu. They classify Bantu nouns by means of their semantic and morphological characteristics.

Laman (1912)'s classification of Kongo nouns. His classification is based on morphology, phonology and semantics. Morphologically, he argues that the assignment of a noun to a given class depends on whether the character of its first syllable is a part of the stem or a prefix. Phonologically and semantically, it is the difference of tone and meaning of two similar words that determines their classes. To illustrate, let us consider nouns with omitted prefixes and which are alike in form.

- (3) a. *lòngo (lu)* 'marriage' b. *lòng (bi)* 'medicine'
c. *wolo* 'laziness' d. *wolo* 'bell'

Nouns in (3) can be portioned in two different classes on the account of the first character of their syllable and their identical shape, namely the class *lu* and *u*. Unfortunately, each of them belongs to a different class. First, for the fact that the first characters *l* and *w* of the first syllable in the nouns *lòngo* 'medicine' and *wolo* 'bell' are parts of the stem, they belong to the class *ki* or *bi* or *ma* respectively. However, in *lòngo* 'marriage' and *wolo* 'laziness' *l* or *w* is a prefix, and so they belong to the class *lu* and *u* respectively. Second, although the identical shape of nouns in (3), they have different tone and meaning, and so they belong to different classes according to Laman.

The class 9 in Laman (1912)'s terms has two light nasals prefixes *n* and *m*, which are singular prefixes of the class *zi* as shown in (4).

- (4) a. *nzenza* 'stranger' b. *nzenza* strangers
c. *Mbombo* 'nose' d. *mbombo* 'noses' Laman (1912 :74)

Guthrie (1948, 1956)'s classification of Bantu nouns. Like Msaka (2019), Guthrie (1948) also claims that the classification of nouns in respect to their prefixes and their agreement pattern is unsatisfactory. In fact, he argues that there are in one hand words with similar prefixes which control distinct sets of agreements as illustrated by examples from Lozi in (5).

- (5) a. *mu-sole a-tabu yu-munde* b. *mu-lilo u-tabu yu-munde*
'The soldier will be good' 'The fire will be good'

Guthrie opines that the nouns in (5a and b), although their verbal agreement markers are different, they should be assorted into the same class because of their identical class prefixes and agreements on modifiers.

On the other hand, there are words with different prefixes which control identical agreements, as the following examples from Bubangi:

- (6) a. *i-loko i-yi i-Ega i-lamu* b. *ntina i-yi i-Ega i-lamu*
'This thing is good'^v 'This root is good'
d. *li-baya li-yi li-Ega li-lamu* c. *ntina li-yi li-Ega li-lamu*
'This plank is good' 'These roots are good'

Guthrie notes that the class **i-** and the class **n-** in (6a and b) would be treated as one class in respect to their identical agreements, and similarly the classes **li-** and **n-** in (6d and c). But, he thinks that the difference in the shape of prefixes should not be ignored. Thus, he proposes that (**i-**, **n-**) and (**li-**, **n-**) can be treated as subdivisions of classes.

Like other Bantuists, Guthrie (1948, 1956) also admits the existence in Bantu languages of a zero prefix as in (10a) and the homorganic nasal prefix as in (9b).

Ruguru Guthrie (1948, p849)

(7) a. *fiŋga di-dia kulu di-nonga*

‘That big egg is a good one’

Ngulu G.34 o.p cit (1956, p83)

b. *mbuzi* ‘goats’

ngola ‘knife’

Herbert’s (1977) analysis of the class9/10 n. He argues that the class9/10 **n** was /**ni-**/ before the loss of the prefix-final /i-/ at a late stage in the pro-language. Herbert (1977) uses three alternations in favor of positing a synchronically nasal prefix 9/10. First, he claims that the substitution of the prefix **n** in augmentative and diminutive nouns and its undone effect show that it is a synchronic prefix. Although in other Bantu languages it is additive in those constructions, he suggests that the underlying form of the alternating item contains two lexical entries: one in which the nasal is part of the stem and another one in which it is excluded. The second evidence in favor of the synchronic 9/10 prefix is the consonant hardening and aspiration it causes to adjectives which modify class 9/10 nouns, as shown below:

(8)	Shona	base	9/10 form	gloss	Herbert (1977: 107)
		<i>-refu</i>	<i>n-defu</i>	‘high, tall’	
		<i>-kuru</i>	<i>huru</i>	‘large’	

Third, he claims that his analysis is justified by the fact that the class10b^{vi} triggers the same alternations (i.e. Hardening, aspiration etc.) as does the class 9/10. Herbert (1977) demonstrates the restructuring of a prefix by resorting to Makonde data. Makonde has a rule which deletes a voiceless stop after a nasal consonant: NC → ∅.

Class 9/10a

(9) *imepo* (/i+N+pepo) *dimepo* (di+N+pepo/) ‘wind(s)’ Herbert (1977: 109)

Class11/10b

Lu-papa (/lu+papa/) *di-mapa* (/di+N+papa/) ‘wing(s)’

He asserts that the class 9/10 in Makonde became /**i-**, **di-**/ once the nasal prefix was interpreted as part of the stem.

Gowlett’s (2003) analysis of the class9 n. He notes that noun prefix of cl.9 is ø- before polysyllabic stems in Copi, Gitonga, Sotho and Tsonga^{vii}, but N- before monosyllabic stems in Sotho, and yi- (yi-N- for Tsonga) before monosyllabic stems in Tsonga, as in (10).

(10) *yi-mbwe* ‘dog’

Msaka’s (2019) classification of Bantu nouns. He rejects a Bantu noun classification which is only based on semantic and morphological properties of the noun prefixes or merely based on the noun agreement. He asserts that the former type of classification is problematic because there are noun classes (NCs) which contain nouns without any prefix, and nouns derived by suffixes only, conversion and other prefixes and nouns which don’t denote the semantic feature of the class they belong to. With regard to the agreement-based classification, he claims that it does not explicitly state how the noun class prefix (NCP) criterion and agreement evidence work together to realize the noun classes, since there are many distinct noun classes triggering the same agreement markers (AMs). Thus, Msaka (2019) proposes a classification based on agreement, morpho-phonological and semantic feature of the nouns prefixes.

He groups the classes 4 and 9 into the super class i-ANC. Nouns of this class, which have different prefixes (ø, N-, **mi-**, **me-** **i-**, **e-**, **s-**, **t-** etc.) share the semantic feature [+inanimate/-agentive] and mainly their phonological feature [+cor]/i/ which clusters with [+cor, +ant] consonants, and cause them to control the AM **i-** or **e-** (cf. Msaka 2019 for further details) as shown below:

- (11) a. *mphasa i-modzi* ‘one reed-mat’ Msaka (2019, P164)
 b. *mi-nga i-modzi* ‘one ball’
 c. *me-sa i-modzi* ‘one knife’

Studied reviewed here are concerned with the different systems of classification of Bantu nouns and the classes9, and the assignment of nouns into this class. It turns out from these studies that the class9 prefix is either N-, ø or **yi-(yi-N-)**. In the following section, I shall discuss Guthrie (1948, 1956) and Msaka (2019), Laman (1912), and Hebert (1977)’s arguments which relevant to the present study according to morpho-phonological and semantic features of nouns and their prefixes.

3. 1. Discussion

Hebert (1977)’s argument about the origin of the classes 9/10 is important to the present study. The fact that the class 9/10 **n** is replacive in augmentative and diminutive constructions in some Bantu languages as in (12), although in other it is additive as in (13), proves its existence.

(12) a. Kikuyu

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>m-bori</i> ‘goat’ | <i>ka-bori</i> ‘small goat’ |
| 9 goat | 7 goat |

Shona

- b. *m-huka* ‘beast’ **huka** ‘large beast’
 9 beast 6 beast

(13) a. Shona

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| <i>m-huka</i> ‘animal’ | <i>ka-m-huka</i> ‘small animals’ |
| b. <i>tsoka</i> ‘feet’ | <i>ma-zi-tsoka</i> ‘big feet’ |
| 9 feet | 6 -12-feet Herbert(1977, p107) |

If the class prefix9 **n** exists in some languages thanks to its replacement in diminutive or augmentative prefix, it can no longer be considered as a class prefix in languages where it is additive. Moreover, a plural prefix can only be substituted for the singular prefix **n-** in languages in which it is a synchronic prefix, and not in those where it is not, as illustrated in (14) and (15).

(14) Kikuyu

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| a. <i>N-bata</i> ‘duck’ | b. <i>ma-bata</i> ‘ducks’ | |
| 9 duck | 6 duck | Li (2015, p31) |

(15) Lekuwa

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| c. <i>Nkoli</i> | d. <i>ba-nkoli</i> |
| 9 crocodile | 2 crocodiles |
| ‘The crocodile’ | ‘Crocodiles’ |

The nasal **N-** is replaced by the plural prefix in Kikuyu, but it is not in Lekuwa. Thus, **N-** is the prefix of the class9 in Kikuyu and other Bantu languages in which it is replacive in augmentative, diminutive and plural constructions, while in Lekuwa and others in which it is not replacive in those constructions, it is no longer the class9 prefix. This may justify why the majority of syntactic categories controlled by the class9 nouns take the agreement **e-** in Lekuwa.

With respect to Guthrie (1948, 1956) and Msaka (2019), I can say that their claims on nouns with similar prefixes which trigger different sets of agreements, and nouns with different prefixes which

trigger the same agreement are not clear-cut. Guthrie (1948) forgets to underline that the different sets of agreements in (5) are due to the fact that there are two different types of **mu**. The prefix 1 **mu** in (5a) triggers the subject maker **a-** on verbs because it is [+human], while the prefix 3 **mu-** in (5b) copies the subject maker **u-** on verbs because of its semantic feature [\pm animate]. Similar facts can also be observed in Lekuwa (cf. section 4.2 for more details). As for nouns in (6) which seem to have different prefixes and trigger the same agreements, it can be said that in (6a, b) nouns have the class prefix **i-**, even though it is covert in the noun **ntina** (root). Nouns in (6c,d) have two agreement markers which are homophonous, but have different meaning. In (6c) the class prefix **li-** denotes singularity, while in (6 d) it indicates plurality when nouns take the plural class prefix **n**. In Bobangi and Lekuwa, nouns of the class9 can form their plural either in **ba-** or class 10 **n-**, as shown below:

- (16) a. *lo-pangu lo-bisu* b. *m-pangu le-bisu*
 11 plot of land 11AM us 10 plot of land 10 AM us
 ‘Our plot of land’ ‘Our plots of land’
 c. *ba-mbŌli ba-yindu* d. *mbŌli le-n-zindu*
 2 goat 2 AM black goat 5-10 black
 ‘black goats’ ‘black goats’

With reference to Msaka (2019), I contend that nouns in (13) and others mentioned in (17) do not have different prefixes and their classes are not determined by the phonological features of their initial morphemes as he claims.

- (17) a. *m-pasa u-modzi* b. *mo-no u-modzi*
 3 kind of fish AM one 3 fish trap AM one
 ‘one kind of fish’ ‘one fish trap’

The distinction in examples (11) and (17) is of course phonological, but not in the sense of Msaka(2019). I suggest that, like in e-mbCsi (cf. ex. 18), the syllable onset in (11 a, b,c) and the syllable vowel in (17a), like in Ki-koongo (cf.19), are dropped during the DPs derivation. Therefore, the DP in (11) and (17) should be rewritten as in (20).

- (18) a. *a-yúru ba*
 2-women 2 DEM PROX
 ‘These women’

- (19) *mu-tú* *n-tú*
 1head 1head
 ‘a head’ ‘a head’

- (20) a. *mu-pasa u-modzi* b. *mi-nga mi-modzi*
 3 kind of fish AM one 4ball AM one
 ‘one kind of fish’ ‘one ball’
 c. *me-sa mi-modzi*
 9^{viii} knife
 ‘One knife’

The agreement marker of the noun **mu-pasa** ‘kind of fish’ in (19) is **u** because nouns of the classes 1,1a and 3 trigger different type of AMs, namely **mu-**, **mo-**, **o-** or **u-**, as the following data witness:

- (20) a. Lekuwa
 mwete mo-ko o-mo-sanda
 1 tree AM one AM 1height
 ‘One long tree’

b.Ki-beembe

mu-ti wú-mo-si ú-a mu-lá^{ix}

1tree AM one AM As. M 1height

‘One long tree’

It stems out from what follows that nouns in (11) and (17) belong to the classes 3mu and 4mi and trigger respectively the agreement marker **u-** and **mi-**. As for the noun **me-sa** ‘knife’ that Msaka attributes to the class9, its agreement marker **mi-** might be a case of the generalization of the agreement rule of nouns of the class 4**mi**. This might be justified by the similarity between the shape of the prefix **mi-** or **me-** of the class4 and the prefix **me-** of the noun **me-sa**.

Such a generalization can be seen in Msaka’s following examples in which nouns with different class prefixes apparently trigger the same set of agreements:

(21) a. *Munthu wá-nu wó-yera*

1person AM 3RD PER-POSS.HON AM-ASC-white

‘Your light complexioned person’

b. *U-ta wá-nu wó-yera*

14 bow AM 3RD PER-POSS. HON AM-ASC-white

‘Your white bow’

c. *Fodya wá-nu wó-yera*

14 tobacco AM 3RD PER-POSS PL AM Asc-white

‘Your white tobacco’

Msaka (2019, p125)

The AMs in (21) are just homophonous. Semantically and phonologically, they are different. In (21a), **w-** is the result of the glide formation of the AM **ú** of the class1 and the associative maker **a**, while in (21b, c) **w** is the result of the glide formation of the remnant **u-** of the class 14 **bu** caused by the associative maker **a**. The deletion of the consonant of the class14 **bu-** makes it look like the augment and the agreement marker **u-** of the class1**mu-**. Thus, a regular use of **u-** as the prefix of the class14 might have caused speakers of Chichewa to mistake it with the augment and the agreement marker of the class 1**mu-**, and so assign the agreement **u-** to the class 14 **bu-**.

The foregoing data show that the agreement-based classification can be misleading in case of nouns which seem to have different prefixes and trigger the same type of agreement. In that case, it is important to resort to morphology, phonology, and sometimes to semantic to achieve good results. But as far as the classification of nouns in the class9 in Lekuwa is concerned, I shall limit myself to a morphological and semantic-based classification, since all nouns attributed to this class copy on verbs and modifiers they govern the AM **e-** in general, and in particular they can trigger the subject marker (SM) **a-** when their referents are personalized.

4. IS N OR Ø THE SYNCHRONIC CLASS9 PREFIX IN LEKUWA?

This section addresses the question whether **N-** or **ø-** is the prefix of the class 9 in Lekuwa, or not. I argue that the prefix of the class9 is **e-** in Lekuwa. This is evidenced by the recoverability of the dropped prefix thanks to its agreement markers. In section 4.1, I demonstrate that the synchronic class9 prefix in Lekuwa is **e-**, and no longer **N-**, and cannot be **ø-**. In section 4.2, I deal with nouns of the class 9 which trigger the subject maker **a-**, instead of **e-**, **i-**.

4.1. Lekuwa Synchronic Class9 Prefix?

It is demonstrated in this section that the present class 9 prefix in Lekuwa is neither **ø-** nor **N-**. It is rather **e-** even though it is phonologically null in nouns of the so-called class9 starting with the nasal **n**. A null category in generative grammar is dropped in the PF, but it can be recovered thanks to its agreement on the verb and modifiers controlled by the noun to which it is attached in the lexicon, as shown below:

(22) Lekuwa

a. *ndáku e- ne ye-ku é- munyangá*

7 house 7AM big 7AM-DEMM 7SMNPST collapsed

‘This big house has collapsed’

b. *ndoto e-námu ye-ku é- limbil-á*

7 dream 7AM good 7AM DEMM. 7SM disappear

‘My good dream has disappeared’

The agreement marker **e-** in (22) indicates that the dropped class prefixes is **e-**. But, the fact that nouns of the class9 trigger the AM **e-n** which causes the spirantization of the morpheme **y** into **z** (cf. ex. 23 below) mandates me to argue not only that **e-** was the augment of the class9 prefix **N-** at an early stage in Lekuwa, like **yi-N-** is the class9 prefix in Tsonga, but also that it is taking over the place of its prefix. If the taking-over of the prefix **N-** by the augment **e-** is partial in Lekuwa, it is, however, complete in Lumbu, as exemplified in (24).

(23) Lekuwa

Mbǃli e- n- zindu ye-ku é- wá

7 sheep 7AM 9 AM black 7AM DEMM NPST die

‘This black sheep has died’

(24) Lumbu^x

a. *i-ntsubu i-boti a- yi i- ne hidme*

7 house AM nice DEMM 7AM SM NPST collapse

‘This nice house has collapsed’

b. *yale i-neni a- yi i- li bukalu*

7 carp 7AM big DEMM 7AM SM be expensive

‘This carp is expensive’

c. *i-mbiolu a-yi i- ne fu*

7 crocodile DEMM 7AM 7SM NPST die

‘This crocodile has died’

d. *i- rung- ul -u a- yi i-li i-boti*

7 build expl AgM DEMM AM SM be AM good

‘This way of building is good’

Unlike in Lekuwa, there is the presence of the synchronic prefix **n-** in Lumbu. All nouns which are attributed to the class prefix 9 **n-**, **ø** in many Bantu languages, take the prefix **i-** in Lumbu, which triggers the AM **i**. The fact that nouns of the class9 in Lekuwa and Lumbu do not copy on categories they govern the AM **y-** or **yi-** as does nouns of this class in many Bantu languages can imply that the class7 **e-**, **i-** is mistaken for the class9 **N-**, **ø** - in this paper. But, this concern is ruled out by the presence of the AM **ye-**, **yi** in the formation of demonstratives of the class9 in Lekuwa and Lumbu. Demonstratives in Lumbu (cf.ex. 24) and Lekuwa (cf. ex.22, 23 above and 25 below) are formed by merging the demonstrative morpheme **a-**, **-ku** and the AM **ye-** or **yi**, which is generally considered as the AM of the class9 in Bantu.

(25) a. *e-taku ye-ku é- kumulá ndzoto yi-ngumi*

7 door 7AM DMM SMNPST open NPST 7body 7AM RflexM

‘This door has opened itself’

b. *e-tawi ye -ku é-mong-á*

7 sweet banana AM DEMM 7SM NPST ripen NPST

‘This banana has ripened’

c. *e-yendi e-mo-sayi ye- ku é-long-á*

7 nail 7GM 1 finger 7AM DEMM 7 NPSTSM remove NPST

‘This finger nail has been removed’

If the true prefix of nouns attributed to the class9 is *e-*, it can be either assumed that those nouns belong to the class 7 as fully illustrated by Lumbu data or the class7 is merging with the class 9 as it is the case in Makhuwa (cf. Kisseberth 2003, p561). In this language, the classes 7 and 9 have merged into a single class that Kisseberth represents as the class 7,9 /i/. He notes that the class7, 9/i/ prefix is *e-* in non-Ruvuma dialects.

The evidence that the prefix of the class9 is *e-* in Lekuwa is further provided by the iterative agreement displayed by the majority of nouns in Bantu languages. In fact, nouns in Bantu copy on different linguistic categories they control their class prefixes as agreement markers, as illustrated in (26).

(26) a. *lé-taki lé- ke lé- mwete lé-bunya lé-ngúmi*

5 branch AM small GM tree SM NPST fall off 5AM self

‘The small branch of the tree has fallen off itself’

b. *e-taku e- ne e- ndáku é- kumul-á ndzoto yi-ngumi*

7 door AM big GM 7/9 house SM NPST open body 7/9 AM self

‘The big door of the house has opened itself’

One can observe that the adjectives *ke* (small) and *ne* (big), the nouns *mwete* (tree) and *ndaku* (house), the verbs *-bunya* (fall off) and *-kumul-*(open) and the reflexive pronoun *-ngumi* (self) controlled by the nouns *lé-taki* (branch) and *é-taku* (door) take their class prefixes *lé-*and *é-* respectively. Thus, a class prefix of noun which seems to be absent can be discovered thanks to its agreement on different categories it governs. However, there are Bantu nouns of the class 7/9 whose subject agreement marker is different from their class prefix. I am going to tackle this issue in the following subsection.

4.2 Nouns of the class7/ 9 which trigger the subject marker a- instead of e-, i-

This subsection is about some nouns of the class7/9 which trigger agreement on verbs which are different from what is assumed as their ordinary subject maker. Nouns of the class7/9 should normally trigger the agreement maker *e-* on all linguistic categories they control. Unfortunately, this is not always the case, as the following examples witness:

(27) a. *mpota é- polisá lo-yina lo-ndúku*

7/9 wound SM NPST bring out 11 pus AM much

‘The wound has brought out a lot of pus’

b. *Ngoi e-ne ye-ku átítá mayi*

7/9 leopard AM big AM DEM SM NPST water

‘That big leopard has walked into water.’

b. *mbula e- ne ye-ku a- bom-i be-bwele be-yiki*

7/9 rain AM big DEM SM kill RPST animal AM many

‘That big rain killed many animals’

The noun *mpota* (wound) in (27) triggers on the subject agreement maker *e-* on the verb *-polis-* (bring out), as does the majority of nouns of the class7/9, whereas the nouns *ngoi* (leopard) and *mbula* copy

on their respective verbs –**tit-** (walk into) and –**bom-** (kill) the SM **a-**, which is the third singular SM of [+human] nouns. Nouns of the class7/9 which are semantically [\pm animate and – human] should not copy on verbs the SM **a-**. The triggering of the SM **a-** by some nouns of the class7/9 is justified by two facts, namely the personalization of animals in stories and the semantic agent role ascribed to [\pm animate] nouns. In (27b), the [+animate] subject **ngoi** (leopard) is considered as a character of a story in which it speaks and acts as a human being, and so as a personalized character it can trigger on the verb the [+human] SM **a-**. With reference to the noun **mbula** (rain), the used of the SM **a-** is favored by the fact that it is assumed to be the doer or the agent of the action undergone by the object. The fact that many nouns of the class7/9, which are personalized or ascribed the agent role, trigger on nouns the SM **a-** cannot have any influence on the determination of their class prefix. In fact, the SM **a-** is triggered by [+ human] nouns which belong to different classes.

5. CONCLUSION

The noun class9 is said to have the prefix N or \emptyset in Bantu languages by many scholars. N- represents the nasal prefix n- and homorganic initial syllables, and nouns of this class are assumed to trigger the AM **y(i)-** or **y(e)-** on verbs and modifiers they govern. However, in Lekuwa the homorganic N- occurs only together with e- as the AM triggered on the adjective **yindu** (black) by the class9 post-nasal nouns. Apart from the AM **e-N-**, nouns ascribed to the class9 copy on their verbs and modifiers the agreement marker **e-**, which is the AM of nouns of the class7 in Lekuwa. The AM **ye-** is only used in the formation of demonstratives of nouns of the class9 in Lekuwa. But, nouns of the class7 in Lekuwa also form their demonstratives with the AM **ye-** as seen in (4.1). As for \emptyset -, which signifies a zero prefix is not tenable in GB Theory. This theory admits the existence of null categories which can be recovered thanks to their agreements. It has been demonstrated in this paper that post-nasal nouns of the class 9 in Lekuwa has a null prefix which is recovered thanks to the agreement marker **e-** that those nouns trigger on verbs and modifiers they govern. The class9 prefix in Lekuwa is **e-**, and is neither N- nor \emptyset . This is justified by data from Lumbu. In this language all nouns and deverbals of the class9 take the prefix **i-** and trigger it on their verbs and modifiers. The presence of the AM **e-N-** authorizes me to hypothesize that the class9 prefix N- was likely preceded by the augment **e-** at an early stage of Lekuwa history, it now is taking over the place of the prefix N- or the classes 7e- and 9 N- are merging into a single class7/9e-. If what was assumed as the zero prefix of the class9 has been identified by the agreement displayed by nouns of this class, thus all prefix of Bantu noun classes with zero prefix can be discovered in the same way, and as a result the classification of nouns with the assumed zero prefix should be reanalyzed.

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ⁱ The upper-case notation signifies the underlying form which is manifested as a nasal prefix *n-*, \emptyset , or homorganic **n+stop consonant-** or **m+stop consonant-**initial syllables (cf. Alcock & Ngorosho, 2004: 9).

ⁱⁱ **Abbreviations and observations**

Here are mentioned some abbreviations which are specified in the text:

NP= Noun Phrases, Wh= interrogative pronouns started with wh, NPST=New Past, Ps= Present, PROG= Progressive, DEMM demonstrative morpheme, GM=genitive morpheme, Asc =associative, Ag.M = agentive morpheme, 3rd PER-POSS.PI/ HON = third person possessive plural/ Honorable, RflexM= reflexive morpheme

Bantu data in the text are in bold, and they are in bold and italics out of the English text.

The phonemes /k/ and /t/ in Lekuwa in intervocalic environment is realized / $\$/$ and /r/ respectively.

Figure before abbreviations and glosses represent noun classes.

ⁱⁱⁱ The term null prefix here refers to a prefix which is not phonologically pronounced, but not to a zero prefix.

^{iv} Bleek (1862) and Meinof (1899, 1932) are quoted by Nsaka (2016)

^v This is Guthrie's translation. It could have normally been translated as '*This thing of mine is good*'

^{vi} This is Herbert's way of referring to the plural prefix of the class 11.

^{vii} Copi (S60), Gitonga (S62), Tsonga (S53), Makuwa (P30), Shona (S10) are Bantu languages of Mozambique, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Swaziland, Southern Tanzania and Malawi.

^{viii} Msaka (2019, p 164) does not give any explicit reasons for the classification of the noun *me-sa* 'knife' in the class 9.

^{ix} The AM *u-* in (25b) often turns into a glide *w-* when followed by the vowels /a/ or /o/, and it is often dropped when preceded the numeral *mo-si* 'one'

^x Lumbu (B44) is a Bantu language spoken in Gabon and the Republic of Congo between the Punu area and the Atlantic Ocean, and in particular in the port of Mayumba where it mingles with Vili. In that variety of Lumbu, the class9 prefix is *yi-*.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



THIERRY TSONO MOWELLE, is a lecturer of Bantu linguistics at the department of Foreign Modern Languages and of Business and administrative English at the National College of Administration and Magistrature of Marien Ngouabi University, Congo-Brazzaville.

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