

European Science Foundation  
Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH)

**ESF SCH EXPLORATORY WORKSHOP**

**The Bantu-Romance Connection**

**Scientific Report**



Leeds, United Kingdom, 25 - 27 May 2006

**Convened by:**  
**Cecile De Cat<sup>①</sup> and Katherine Demuth<sup>②</sup>**

<sup>①</sup> Department of Linguistics & Phonetics, University of Leeds, UK

<sup>②</sup> Department of Cognitive and Linguistic Sciences, Brown University, USA

---

*Co-sponsored by*



## ESF Exploratory Workshop EW 05-242: The Bantu-Romance Connection

### 1 Executive summary

The aim of this workshop was to bring together specialists of Romance and Bantu languages to explore the striking morpho-syntactic similarities between these two unrelated language families. Most scholars are unaware of these similarities, and the time is right to initiate dialogue between these two sets of researchers in an effort to better understand the nature of morpho-syntactic structures, and, ultimately, syntactic universality.

This exploratory workshop enabled us to bring together leading experts as well as “rising stars” in Romance and Bantu linguistics.

Participants were invited to address several questions regarding the surface similarities found in these two language groups: Are the syntactic structures underlying these surface similarities really the same? or are they actually different, and how can we tell? What is the diversity of structures permitted in each of these domains, and how are they represented across these two language groups? The questions were organised around three themes:

- *The structure of the Determiner Phrase*
  - What is the structure of the DP?
  - At what level of structure are determiners and/or noun class (pre)prefixes specified?
  - How does this interact with definiteness and/or specificity?
  - What is the structure of concord?
  - How does this explain within language group and across group similarities and differences in surface morpho-syntactic structure?
  
- *Clitics, agreement and object drop*
  - What is the decisive evidence for the agreement/pronominal status of subject and object markers/clitics?
  - What is the grammatical status of overt expletives, and how are these realized?
  - What are the discourse/syntactic restrictions on null objects?
  - What is the connection between object agreement and specificity?
  
- *Focus, topic and Information Structure*
  - What evidence bears on the structural analysis of lexical subjects? Are these actually ‘topics’ rather than ‘subjects’ ?
  - What is the structure for topicalisation, clefting, right and left dislocation? What are the syntactic/discourse restrictions on such structures?
  - How does subject/object agreement play a role in determining the nature of structures such as postverbal objects?
  - What are the structures resulting from Focus?
  - What relation do stressed pronouns have to Information Structure (focus/topic)?

## **2 Scientific content of the event**

### **2.1 Structure of the event**

There were three sessions of talks, organised around the three themes:

- The structure of the Determiner Phrase
- Clitics, agreement and object drop
- Focus, topic and Information Structure

Half of each session was dedicated to each language family. The three themes were also addressed in 8 posters.

### **2.2 Content**

The workshop was opened by the co-organisers Prof. Katherine Demuth and Dr. Cecile De Cat. This introduction included a brief historical survey of the study of Bantu languages and highlighted the significance of recent developments in the field. It also provided some background on the Bantu-Romance Connection project and explained its aims.

The contributions to the workshop were diverse. Contributions came from different theoretical perspectives (Minimalism, Dynamic Syntax, Optimality Theory,...) and addressed different aspects of language (phonology, syntax, morphology, information structure, acquisition).

Lutz Marten and Ruth Kempson proposed a unified account of passives, locative inversion and subject-object reversal in Bantu languages, within the Dynamic Syntax perspective, arguing that this framework makes it possible to capture morphological information without morphology-specific templates.

Yukiko Morimoto provided an Optimality-Theoretic account of object clitics in Bantu. Adopting a historical and variationist perspective, she provided a cross-linguistic comparison of Differential Object Marking and argued that the synchronic variation across Bantu languages mirrors a path of diachronic change in Romance object clitics.

Anna Cardinaletti gave an analysis of clitic clusters in Romance (based essentially on Italian data, but also incorporating French). She proposed that two types of clitic clusters need to be distinguished: the first type (which occurs in enclitic position and involve vowel lowering) allowing the adjunction of one clitic to another; and the second type (which does not occur in enclitic position and does not involve vowel lowering) allowing adjunction of clitics to distinct functional heads.

Marie Labelle proposed an analysis of reflexive/reciprocal SE in French, arguing that both pronominal and reflexive clitics are manipulated by the computational component, bind a thematic position (subject to locality conditions) and semantically introduce lambda abstraction over a variable. Reflexive clitics were shown to be reflexive voice head introducing the external argument and marking the predicate as reflexive.

Vicki Carstens argued in favour of a noun-raising analysis of word order phenomena in Bantu and Romance DPs, establishing a comparison between Bantu Noun Class and Romance gender. She also argued that concord mechanisms were identical in Bantu

and Romance, in that it reduced to closest c-command in both cases.

Marianna Visser provided an analysis of noun class preprefix in isiXhosa, arguing that it instantiates the head D of a DP projection. She presented an analysis of nominal modifiers in terms of a three-fold classification invoking the occurrence of a DP projection headed by the morpheme -a-.

Roberto Zamparelli discussed the notion of interpretability in a theory of number agreement. He argued that D and N shared in some cases a feature for number that has semantic effects on both and discussed various ways of implementing this within the generative framework.

Giuliana Giusti developed an account of articles from a cross-linguistic perspective, arguing that they are the realisation of a bundle of functional nominal features. She explored the consequences of this approach from a syntactic and a semantic point of view.

Nhlanhla Thwala proposed a syntactic analysis of Focus in SiSwati, exploring the information structure and clause structure of three focus strategies: presentational, contrastive and phonological.

Nancy Kula explored the phonological phrasing of topic and focus constructions in Bantu (Chichewa, N.Sotho, Kitharaka, Swahili, CJ-DJ languages, Tumbuka, Kikuyu). For each language she assessed the prosodic and syntactic requirement of 5 types of focus structures. Using phonological phrasing facts, she identified non-canonical focus positions that syntax needs to account for.

Joao Costa argued in favour of a more autonomous syntax, not making reference to interface conditions. He proposed that interface considerations could not interfere with syntactic derivations. Evidence came essentially from Romance languages, and in particular from phenomena such as null subjects, subject-verb inversion, possessives and elliptical structures.

Mara Frascarelli defended the opposite approach, whereby discourse functions are encoded directly in syntax, via functional projections. She argued for a transparent mapping of prosody onto syntax in order to derive different types of topics in the left and the right periphery.

Peter de Villiers gave an account of the acquisition of noun class markers in Xhosa by children between 24 and 39 months of age. This revealed that children distinguish the preprefix from the prefix from very early on, treating them as independent morphemes.

Franca Ferrari provided a comparative analysis of the Italian and the Luganda nominal system, on the basis of which she proposed a novel syntactic analysis of simple nouns, treating them as complex structures formed via the Merger of a nominal head [n] with an XP.

Paul Hirschbuhler and Sam Mchombo explored location object constructions in Romance and Bantu, arguing that the presence of applicative prefixes allow verbs that normally cannot license the Location object construction to do so.

Kamil Ud Deen investigated the acquisition of Subject Agreement in Swahili, between the ages of 1;8 and 3;1, revealing the relatively late acquisition of this morpheme comparatively with Object Agreement. He also showed that the Specificity Condition on Object Agreement was acquired earlier than had been previously assumed.

Udo Klein drew a comparison between accusative clitic pronouns in Romanian with

object markers in SiSwati and provided an analysis based on the assumption that semantic functions distinguish the place holders of predicates by means of the prominence of place holders.

Luisa Astruc-Aguilera gave a functional and phonological analysis of left- and right-detached constructions in Catalan within an Optimality Theoretic approach. Her account aimed to explain patterns of phonetic variability on the basis of a set of phrasing constraints ranked with faithfulness and effort-minimising constraints.

Jeneke van der Wal explored postverbal subject constructions in Bantu and Romance languages, arguing that they are thetic in nature. Subject raising is associated with a topic interpretation in both language families. Two types of languages were distinguished on the basis of agreement properties, and this was shown to account for similarities between objects and postverbal subjects in some languages.

Carolyn Harford proposed an analysis of verbal inflectional morphology in Bantu and Romance languages, accounting for variation in terms of ordering and allomorphy. She correlated these variations in terms of a common basic clause structure and alignment preferences. Differences were argued to be due to a different historical development of the subject agreement morpheme.

The workshop closed on a discussion exploring the main issues raised during the talks and poster sessions.

### **3 Assessment**

This workshop was the first of its kind in bringing together researchers from the Bantu and the Romance language families, and due to the hitherto limited exchanges between the two, was certainly a challenge. But it proved to be a real success: there was a rich exchange of ideas, the discussions were lively and challenging, and a clear research programme emerged from the final discussion.

The exploration of similar phenomena in such diverse language families was felt to be an ideal testing ground for various hypotheses. It was agreed that further cross-linguistic collaborative research was needed to establish reliable diagnostics in the analysis of clitics /agreement markers, to explore the syntax and semantics of noun phrases, and to evaluate the relative contribution of grammatical modules to information structure phenomena — among other things.

Participants were keen to take the project further. As a first step, a discussion list has been created on the conference website (available only to registered members) to foster collaboration between researchers. A second step will be the publication of a volume comprising papers addressing the issues identified in the final discussion. These contributions will go beyond the workshop presentations, and will all adopt a comparative perspective throughout.

A subgroup of participants will submit a further funding application to the ESF to enable us to continue this cross-linguistic investigation.

## 4 Final programme

### 4.1 Papers

Friday 26<sup>th</sup> of May

- 09:00 Opening introduction
- 09:30 Lutz Marten and Ruth Kempson (Session A: Bantu)  
“Agreement and context-dependent processing in Bantu”
- 10:15 Yukiko Morimoto (Session A: Bantu)  
“On the status of object clitics in Bantu and implications for the diachrony of object marking”
- 11:00 Refreshments + poster session
- 11:45 Anna Cardinaletti (Session A: Romance)  
“On clitic clusters”
- 12:30 Marie Labelle (Session A: Romance)  
“Syntactic and semantic aspects of French object clitics”
- 13:15 Lunch + informal discussion
- 15:15 Vicki Carstens (Session B: Bantu)  
“DP in Swahili”
- 16:00 Marianna Visser (Session B: Bantu)  
“DP structure in isiXhosa : definiteness properties and the occurrence of the noun class pre-prefix”
- 16:45 Refreshments + poster session
- 17:30 Roberto Zamparelli (Session B: Romance)  
“Features and agreement in DPs”
- 18:15 Giuliana Giusti (Session B: Romance)  
“Determiners and uninterpretable nominal features”

Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> of May

- 09:00 Nhlanhla Thwala (Session C: Bantu)  
“Aspects of the syntax of focus in SiSwati”
- 09:45 Nancy Kula (Session C: Bantu) “Phonological Phrasing in Bantu topic and focus constructions: what implications for syntax”
- 10:30 Refreshments and poster session
- 11:00 Joao Costa (Session C: Romance) “Sources of cross-linguistic variation at the syntax-discourse interface”
- 11:45 Mara Frascarelli (Session C: Romance)  
“The fine structure of the Topic field”
- 12:30 Closing discussion
- 13:30 Lunch and goodbye

## 4.2 Posters

- Luisa Astruc-Aguilera “*They are crazy, these Catalans:*  
detached constructions in a Romance language”
- Kamil Ud Deen “The Acquisition of Clitics in Swahili”
- Franca Ferrari “Syntactic Noun Formation in Italian and in Luganda”
- Carolyn Harford “Order and Allomorphy in Verbal Inflectional Morphology in  
Bantu and Romance Languages”
- Paul Hirschbühler “The location object construction in Romance and Bantu : ap  
& Sam Mchombo plicatives or not?”
- Udo Klein “Comparing accusative clitic pronouns in Romanian with object  
markers in SiSwati”
- Peter de Villiers “Acquisition of Noun Class Markers in Xhosa Children”
- Jenneke van der Wal “How object-like is the post-verbal subject?”

## 5 Statistical information on participants

Two poster presenters were unable to attend for personal reasons: Sam Mchombo (co-presenter with Paul Hirschbuhler) and Juvenal Ndayiragije.

The ages of the participants ranged from early twenties to early sixties, most of them in their thirties and forties. Exact data is not available.

The list of countries of origin is as follows: Belgium (2), Canada (1), Germany (2), Italy (5), Kenya (1), Netherlands (1), Portugal (1), Romania (1), South Africa (2), Spain (2), UK (2), USA (5), Zambia (2).

The academic positions included 10 Professors, 4 Associate Professors, 1 Assistant Professor, 4 Lecturers, 2 Researcher Fellows, 1 Research Assistant, 1 Post-Doctoral Fellow, 1 Teaching Fellow and 3 PhD students.

There were 8 males and 18 females.

## 6 Final list of participants

Half of the participants were invited on the basis of a call for posters. This meant that we had very little control (if any) over the country of affiliation of those participants. We endeavoured to choose non-UK and non-US presenters as much as possible, but most candidates just happened to come from these countries. We thought that not accepting their submission on the sole ground of country of affiliation would be wrong, as it would clearly have a detrimental impact on the quality of the workshop as a whole. Many of the "UK" or "US" participants were in fact not nationals from these countries, but from Kenya, Zambia, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Germany and their work is not necessarily representative of what is mainstream in their country of affiliation. The spirit of the ESF rules was therefore respected. Note also that two of the UK participants (Kempson and Lutz) and two of the US participants (Peter and Jill De Villiers) were co-presenters.

Prof. Anna Cardinaletti, Dipartimento di Scienze del Linguaggio, Universita di Venezia, Ca' Bembo, Dorsoduro 1075, 30123 Venezia Italy. +39 041 2345724  
cardin@unive.it.

Prof. Vicki Carstens, Dept of English, 107 Tate Hall, University of Missouri-Columbia, Columbia, Missouri 65211, USA. +1(573)-882-8814. carstensv@missouri.edu.

Prof. Joao Costa, Departamento de Linguistica, FCSH -Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Av. de Berna 26C, 1059-061, Lisbon, Portugal.(+35)1217933519.  
jcosta@fcsh.unl.pt.

Prof. Mara Frascarelli, Universit degli Studi Roma Tre, Dipartimento di Linguistica, Via Ostiense 236, 00146 Roma, Italy. +39-06-54577540. frascare@uniroma3.it

Prof. Giuliana Giusti, Dipartimento di Scienze del Linguaggio, Universita di Venezia, Ca' Bembo, Dorsoduro 1075, 30123 Venezia, Italy.(+39)0412345723.  
giusti@unive.it.



Prof. Ruth Kempson, Department of Philosophy, King's College London, Strand, London WC2R 2LS, UK. (+44)020 7848 2655.kempson@dcs.kcl.ac.uk.

Dr. Nancy Kula, Leiden University Centre for Linguistics, van Wijkplaats 4, P.O. Box 9515, 2300 RA Leiden, The Netherlands. +31-71-527 2102. N.C.Kula@let.leidenuniv.nl.

Prof. Marie Labelle, Universite du Quebec Montral Case postale 8888, succursale Centre-ville Montral (Qubec) H3C 3P8 CANADA. +1(514) 987-3000, ext. 7036. labelle.marie@uqam.ca.

Dr. Lutz Marten, Department of Africa, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG, UK. (+44) -(0)20 -7898 4653. lutz-marten@soas.ac.uk.

Dr. Yukiko Morimoto, Zentrum fur Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft Jaegerstr. 10/11, 10117 Berlin, Germany. morimoto@zas.gwz-berlin.de.

Dr. Nhlanhla Thwala, School of Oriental and African Studies, Department of African Languages and Cultures, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG, UK. +44 (0)20 7898 4583. nt26@soas.ac.uk.

Prof. Marianna Visser, Dept. of African languages, University of Stellenbosch, Private Bag X1, MATIELAND 7602, South Africa. (+27) 21 808 2106. mwv@sun.ac.za.

Dr. Roberto Zamparelli, Dipartimento di Scienze della Cognizione e della Formazione, Universita degli Studi di Trento, Via Matteo del Ben 5, 38068 Rovereto, Italy. (+39) 0464 483571. roberto.zamparelli@unitn.it.

Dr. Lluisa Astruc-Aguilera, The Open University in the East of England, Cintra House, 12 Hills Road, Cambridge CB2 1PF, UK. luisa@astruc.info.

Prof. Peter de Villiers, Department of Psychology, Bass Hall 412, Smith College, Northampton MA 01063, USA. +1 413-585-3908. pdevilli@email.smith.edu.

Prof. Jill de Villiers, Department of Psychology, Bass Hall 401, Smith College, Northampton MA 01063, USA. +1 413-585-3908. jdevilli@email.smith.edu.

Dr. Franca Ferrari-Bridgers, (personal address only – not currently affiliated)USA. ff244@nyu.edu.

Prof. Carolyn Harford, Executive Dean Faculty of Arts, Midlands State University, P. Bag 9055, Gweru, Zimbabwe.(263) (054)260450. chharford@yahoo.com.

Prof. Paul Hirschbuhler, Departement de linguistique, Universite d'Ottawa 70 rue Laurier Est, Piece 424 Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5. +1 (613) 562-5800 ext. 1755. phirsch@uottawa.ca.

Mr. Udo Klein, Department of Philosophy, King's College London, Strand, London WC2R 2LS, UK. udo-michael.klein@kcl.ac.uk.

Dr. Kamil Ud Deen, 1890 East-West Rd, Moore Hall #559, Honolulu HI 96822, Hawaii, USA. +1-808-956-3223. kamil@hawaii.edu.

Miss Jenneke van der Wal, Leiden University Centre for Linguistics, van Wijkplaats 4, P.O. Box 9515, 2300 RA Leiden, The Netherlands. +31-71-527 2102. J.van.der.Wal@let.leidenuniv.nl.

Miss Kristina Reidel, Leiden University Centre for Linguistics, van Wijkplaats 4, P.O. Box 9515, 2300 RA Leiden, The Netherlands. K.Riedel@let.leidenuniv.nl.

Dr. Bernadette Plunkett, Department of Language & Linguistic Science, University of York, Heslington, York YO10 5DD, UK. +44 1904 43 2650.bp4@york.ac.uk.

**The contact details for the two convenors and the rapporteur are not included above.**

There were 2 last-minute cancellations, due to personal reasons: Dr Juvenal Ndayiragije and Prof Sam Mchombo.