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Tense, Aspect and Case in Bantu and significance in Translation: The Case of Lulogooli Bible

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ABSTRACT

Tense and Aspect are morphological features and in some languages like English, they are marked mainly by inflection on the verb. In Bantu languages, the verbal element is characteristically conflated to mark tense and aspect and more often than not, the morphemes marking tense and aspect cannot be isolated. In many instances, they are tonally marked. Thus, a lexical verb may mark three or even more distinctions whose semantic realization is only through tonal variation. Similarly, Case realization is unique compared to for example English that marks possession on the noun and gender distinction on pronouns. This study will examine these features in Lulogooli, a Bantu language spoken in Western Kenya. Lulogooli has only two gender distinctions; male and female but does not use pronouns to mark them. This study proposes to sample data from the Lulogooli bible translation to show why and how improper use of these three grammatical categories leads to mistranslation. The analysis will also contribute to the significance of understanding language typology to translators so as to aid accuracy and effectiveness in translation. The study posits the significance of aspects of linguistic analysis to translation.

1. Introduction

It has been stated that translation is an art (Bignenet and Shulte, 1989). By extension, then, a translator is an artist and language is the translation tool. Translators who want to produce a masterpiece need to tactfully weave their work around the languages they are working in. This calls for more than competence and/or proficiency in the languages involved. Knowledge of lexis, semantics and syntax of a language will give you a good translation but probably not a masterpiece. The intricate nuances of a language are tied to the phonological and morphological as well as the supra-segmental features which in some languages dictate the semantic realization and hence cannot be overlooked in translation.

A study by Margherita and Jun-ichi (1993), on tense and aspect in relation to translation, highlights the significance of the understanding that languages differ in their temporal and aspectual systems hence do not allow simple correspondence of verbal forms of two languages. In their illustrations of translation from Italian to Greek, they invoke knowledge-based processing during transfer to perform disambiguation of SL interpretation as to the aspects required by the TL to the degree of granularity determined by the TL.

There are different levels of linguistic analysis and each level is significant to translation. However, not much attention is paid to the sound level (phonology) as far as translation is concerned. It is assumed that the lexicalized items are the ones that carry meaning hence, most studies describe translation from the word level upwards (Baker, 1992). Whereas this may be the case for some languages, it is notable that other language typologies carry meaning all the way from their minimal phonological properties.

Wangia (2003) identifies categories of mistranslation problems from the Lulogooli Bible and in the present paper attempt has been done to list phonological and morphological aspects.

2. Background to the Study

Bantu languages mark tense and aspect as well as case in a specific way distinct from many other languages. Bantu is said to be poly-morphemic where nouns and verbs conflate with affixation to form complex semantic strings (Trudell and Schroeder, 2007). These differences are bound to affect accuracy in translation. In this respect, this study attempts to illustrate, to some degree, how the intricacies of the grammatical categories, arising from the Bantu tense, aspectual and case affixes and/or phonemic distinctions, marked by supra-segmental features, are significant and relevant in translation. Examples for demonstration are drawn from the Lulogooli Bible (1952). The study demonstrates that there are many instances of mistranslation of tense and aspect and unnatural case references which can be attributed to the contrast between the SL and the TL. Lulogooli belongs to a cluster of about 17 mutually intelligible[i] dialects of the *Luyia* language spoken in western Kenya. Luyia is therefore an umbrella term and these dialects belong to the larger classification of Eastern Bantu group.

3. Tense and Aspect in Bantu

Bantu languages are characteristically distinct. A translator, working with any language, needs to be critically aware of its distinguishing typological properties. Bantu languages, for example, are highly agglutinating; the verbal element bearing the most salient features of the agglutination. Intricate verbal extensions cam be constructed through affixation to exhibit for

example aspect, temporal, locative, causative, applicative etc functions. In Swahili for example, the verb *kimbia* (run) can take various affixations to exhibit different meanings as follows:

<div align="center">

kimbia (run)
</div>

kimbilia (run for)
kimbiza (cause to run)
kimbizana (run/compete with)
kimbiliana (run (against others) for something
kimbizania (fight for something)
kimbiliwa (passive) – being run for

Similarly, Lulogooli, as well as many other Bantu languages, are highly tonal and will mark many syllable structure distinctions of tense etc using tone. It is this phonemic tonal feature that poses a challenge in translation and that will be the focus of this study.

There have been extensive studies in Bantu e.g. Nurse (2008) summarized in Seidel (2009). Seidel's account gives insight into Nurse's analysis of tense and aspect in Bantu. Nurse (2008) postulates that verbal affixes usually follow a set order and each grammatical category involved in the verb tends to be encoded at a particular position (slot) or a combination of positions (Seidel, 2009). Other studies e.g. Henderson (2006) attest to the complexity of understanding the Bantu compound tense and the multiple concord relationship with the noun phrase bringing case into play. Thus, tense, aspect and case relationships play a significant role in the structure and meaning of the language and have to be taken on board when it comes to translation.

3.1 Tense and Aspect in Lulogooli

It has already been observed that, due to the agglutinative nature of Lulogooli, what may appear to be a single lexeme could actually be a whole sentence where the roots coalesce with various morphemes. Often times there are no isolable morphemes to

represent tense, aspect and sometimes number as can be illustrated in the example:

Ndakumucheliza (I greeted him/her)
This can be broken down as follows:

nda	*ku*	*mu*	*cheliza*
(I	past	him/her	greet)

This looks clear until you realize, for example, that apart from *'cheliza'* (greet), the representations for the pronouns *I*, *him/her* are not constant. These are realized differently in different contexts. Secondly, although it is indicated here that the past tense is marked by the morpheme *'ku'*, it should be realized that part of the tense is marked in the subject prefix *'nda'* but it is not very possible to specify the feature. This can be contrasted with for example, *'muchelizi'* which depending on the tone could either mean (I have just greeted him/her or an imperative, greet him/her). Consider this other example:

ndengezaa   (I am dozing)
atengezaa   (he/she is dozing)

In this example, the constant item is *'tengeza*[ii] (doze) while *'n'* stands for I and *'a'* for he/she. The final lengthened vowel *–aa* marks the tense. We see the variation in the representation of the subjective I. It is upon this backdrop that we shall consider samples from the Lulogooli bible and draw some lessons.

Tense, in Lulogooli, is described as having gradable degrees in the past or future in relation to the present (Kanyoro, 1983, Wangia, 2003). The distribution is three degrees into the past and four into the future as illustrated below:

FP IP NP **PRES** NF IF FF RF

The Present Tense

PRES refers to ongoing action, whether immediate or habitual e.g. *'asooma'* (he/she is studying or he/she studies)

The Past Tense

NP = Near past. This incorporates action which has occurred within the past few hours or even minutes e.g. *'ndiyi'* (I ate) or *'ndakalia'* (I have just eaten).

IP = Imrmediate past which can extend over a period of a few weeks e.g. *'ndaliyi'* (I ate recently).

FP = Far past, which refers to a period beyond the immediate past e.g. *'ndaalia'* (I ate a long time ago).

The Future Tense

NF = Near future e.g. '*ndalia'*
(I am going to eat)

IF = Immediate future e.g. *'nandie'*
(I will eat soon)

FF = Far future e.g. *'ndakalie'*
(I will eat sometime)

RF = Remote future e.g. *ndilia'*
 (I will eat whenever).

We see that different tenses are marked by very slight modifications on the verb. Often, the modification is not orthographically marked because the speaker uses tone to distinguish the meanings. This presents a great challenge to the translator as we see in the examples cited below.

3.2 Case

Case is a noun or pronoun realization that changes their form to indicate their grammatical function in a phrase, clause or sentence. The number and types of cases vary from language to language. In English for example, nouns are inflected for singular/plural and possessive/non-possessive distinction by the morphological feature s/'s (e.g. girl, girls, girl's, girls'). A pronoun may be realized in its subjective case (**I** taught Maina); objective case (Maina taught **me**) or possessive case (**my** teacher).   Subjective pronouns include, (I, he she we) objective ((me, him, her, her, us) and possessive (my/mine, his, her(s), our(s)). Case realization in Lulogooli is complicated by the agglutination and is discussed in details in the following sections.

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4. Data from Lulogooli Bible

In this section, various examples of tense, aspect and case from the Lulogooli bible are discussed and highlighted to demonstrate the challenge of representing them in translation when they are not fully lexicalized in the surface form of the language. The samples are randomly drawn from the book of Proverbs and Acts[iii]. The paper begins with the analysis of selected texts to see the error in the representation of tense and aspect or case and make recommendation of the appropriate rendering. It will then proceed to discuss the type of mistranslations that result from these errors, their effect on a target text and audience and how they can be avoided. The analysis of the Lulogooli texts is done in comparison to the English New King James Version unless otherwise stated.

Table 1: Proverbs

Sr/ No	Text	Gloss	Grammatical Category	Explanation
1.	*Litia lia Yahova liveye litanga lie limanya* (1:7)	The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge	Case	expressed in the of genitive *"Litia lia Yahova"* (The fear of the Lord) which is ambiguous.
2.	*Kigira wa Yahova a yanza...*(3:12)	For whom the Lord loves...	Tense/aspect.	*"a yanza"* consists the tense 'is loving/will love' which changes meaning.
3.	*Ulungikidze inzira yevirenge vivyo... (4:26)*	Make level paths for your feet(NIV)	Case	*"inzira ye virenge"* literally, 'a path for the feet' is an unnatural expression in Lulogooli.
4.	*Yahova ukoli vindu*	The Lord has made all	Tense/aspect	*"ukoli"* = 'has just made'

	vyosi ku bulaliri bwibwe (16:4)	for himself		
5.	*Mwana wange...* (5:1; 6:1; 7:1...)	My son	Case	*Mwana wange* translates to 'my child' instead of 'my son.

Table 2: Acts

Sr/ No	Text	Gloss	Grammatical Category	Explanation
6.	*Agumire ubutumiki nobutumwa yibu bwa Yuda ya lega a tsie hehe mwene (1:25)*	To take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell that he might go to his own place.	Tense/aspect	Lulogooli translate into: 'he goes' to his own place.
7.	*vindu vya Nyasaye yatanga kumanyia mu minwa gyavaprofeti vosi, Kristo weve a la saliridzwa umali kuvidukidza ndi (3:18)*	those things which God foretold by the mouth of all his prophets, that the Christ would suffer , he has thus fulfilled.	Tense/aspect	The tense can be interpreted as 'will be made to suffer' (leaning more to the present).
8.	*...ndalola muno tsinyama tsyelirova tsyevirenge vine...* (11:6)	... I saw four-footed animals of the earth...	Case	Lulogooli back translation: 'animals of the earth of four legs' is unnatural and confusing.
9.	*...litempeli lya nyasaye munene wekikali, Diana...* (19:27)	...the temple of the great godess Diana...	Case	The term 'great godess' is translated as *nyasaye menene we kikali* (the great female god).
10.	*Kandi mwami ya va dasira madiku na madiku ava li ni vahonnywa (2:47b)*	And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.	Tense/aspect	There is a discrepancy in the tense. Lulogooli uses a past perfect i.e. 'those who had been saved' while NKJV is present continuous.

4.1 Observations

From the few examples cited above, some insights into the challenges of orthographic realization of tense, aspect and case in Lulogooli can be gained and one can make some deductions and recommendations.

4.1.1 Tense and Aspect Realization

In section 3.1 above, it is seen that the past tense can be graded to three levels (near past, immediate past and far past). These have to be observed accurately otherwise a slight violation in the representation of the intended tense results into errors such as the ones reported above. Inaccuracy in the translation of tense is noted in extracts 2, 4, 6, 7 and 10 in the two tables above.

In number 4, for example, the verb *ukoli* for 'has made' is not an accurate approximation because although it has an aspect of perfective, it is less to some degree in relation to the English. On the scale of the Lulogooli past tense, it communicates the notion 'has just made'. Therefore, it can be placed at **near past.** The correct equivalent of 'has made' would be, *yakola* 'has/had made' – **far past.** It is not easy to split the affixes on these verb roots to determine the aspect marker. The element *ukoli* (has just made) for example can be analysed as follows:

$$u \qquad kol \qquad i$$
(subj. agreement[iv] - he)   (vb. stem – make)   (fv – Tpast)

In the above analysis, it would appear that the tense is marked on the final vowel suffix. However, to determine the aspect, the entire element has to be considered because the aspect is contained in the agreement prefix as well as the tense marker prefix. This

can be attested to when you contrast *ukoli* (has made – near past) with *yakola* (has made – far past). It is seen that the prefix as well suffix in the latter changing from *u* to *ya* and *i* to *a* respectively. These are intricate details which to the translator may not appear significant but it is seen that they can alter the meaning of a text and therefore have to be keenly considered for accurate translation.

In example 7, a disparity in the future tense marking is also seen. The tense in: *a lasaliridzwa* can be back translated as 'will be made to suffer'. This has a future aspect whereas in the NKJV, the past perfect (would suffer) is used. The rendering that would capture this in Lulogooli is: *a lakasaliridzwi.* The introduction of the element *ka* and change of final vowel from *a* to *i* introduces the perfective aspect. Similar examples can be seen from samples 2 and 10.

4.1.2 Tone

Lulogooli is a tone language and tone is used to mark tense among other distinctions to a great degree. The fact, that tone is not marked orthographically, makes it difficult to decipher tense spontaneously in written form. Extract 6 and 10 illustrate how tense distinction can be realized in the same element through tone variation. In example 6, the verb *azie* can either mean (has gone) or (to go) depending on the tone. The former is said with a rising tone: *atsieé* while the latter has a falling tone, *atsieè.* Similarly, in extract 10, *avail ni vahonnywa* could mean (who had been saved) with a rising, rising falling tone thus, *ni váhónnywà* or (who were being saved) with falling tone throughout as in, *ni vàhònnywà.* Another distinction in this last expression is that it has a lengthened final vowel which is not indicated in the orthography. These distinctions show the phonemic nature of tone in Bantu and its significance in accurate translation.

4.1.3 Case

As the samples above show, translation of Case in Lulogooli is also a challenge. There is a clear pattern of the nature of problems related to Case realization in Lulogooli. Two common areas of challenge are: possession and gender.

In possession, the main problem is with personified nouns. Whereas these appear normal to mark possession in English, they are quite unnatural in Lulogooli. Examples are seen in extracts 1, 3 and 8. In 1, for example, *'The fear of the Lord'* is translated as, *Litia lia Yahova ,* which is a literal word for word matching but with a different connotation. Structurally, '*The fear of the Lord* is a noun phrase or subject of the entire clause i.e. "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.* The 'of' genitive here describes the type of fear. This is natural and acceptable in English but in Lulogooli this phrase cannot naturally act as a subject taking on the descriptive attribute. Consequently, it comes out ambiguously implying that the "*Lord is fearful*". The problem can be solved by removing the possessive attribute '*lia'* (of), i.e. *Litia Yahova* (*To fear the Lord*) which clarifies that a human subject is performing the action.

A similar problem is portrayed in extract 3, where "*paths for your feet*" is translated as *inzira yevirenge vivyo* literally (path of your feet). This again is an unnatural attribute where feet seem to possess a path. *Inzira yoyo* (your path) would be more acceptable. Thus, one can see that Lulogooli does not naturally employ attributive adjectives for inanimate objects and this should carefully be observed in translation.

In 5 and 8, another aspect of Case-Gender is seen that works differently in Lulogooli in comparison to English. As noted earlier, Lulogooli does not mark gender distinction, especially use of pronouns or even by inflection on nouns, as in some other

languages. The phrase "*my son*" in no. 5 is used repeatedly in the book of Proverbs and is consistently translated as *mwana wange* (*my child*) in Lulogooli. It is not clear why the translators chose to use this but the only way they could have distinguished the gender would have been by the use of the phrase *mwana wange muyayi* (my boy child) or alternatively, *muyayi wange* (*my boy/son*). These alternatives do not carry the strong endearment entailed in *mwana wange* (*my child*) which admittedly is a closer approximation to 'my son'. Similarly, in extract 9, *nyasaye munene wekikali Diana* for, (*the great goddess Diana*), a struggle to render the feminine aspect in goddess is seen. The literal back translation of this phrase is, (*a great woman/female god Diana*). This too is a good approximation given the lack of alternatives.

4.2 Recommendation

A logical recommendation that may be postulated by this study, based on this analysis, is that phonological and morphological analysis is significant and relevant to translation theory and practice. From the data analysis above, it is seen how various aspects of linguistic analysis can have significant bearing to translation. One such aspect is prosody. In tone languages, prosodic features alter lexical functions without altering the shape of a word. At other times, the prosodic features will dictate a modification of the word shape (like in the case of vowel length/quality) to distinguish meaning. The latter, if not made explicit in writing, affects the coherence and/or the meaning of the text. These features are not obvious to a translator who is not keen or well conversant with a language. When dealing with unrelated language typologies, it is important to study the prosodic or supra-segmental features of the target language versus the source language. This study has

attempted to exemplify this through the data from Lulogooli bible discussed above.

A number of studies also concur with this observation. Erichson (undated) for example reports the following about the English Spanish contrast:

When you're translating from English to Spanish, you often need to figure out first what the English sentence means. That's especially true when translating the simple past tense of English*:*

He gives an illustration of the sentence, "When I was a child I went to Disneyland" and asks, "Does that sentence refer to a particular trip I took to the Magic Kingdom? Or does it mean that I frequently went there, much as I might say that when I was a child "I went to school"? He suggests that without any context, the sentence is ambiguous. The solution is to use two simple past tenses.

There is a similar contrast in English – Chinese translation (Xiao and McEnery, 2002). According to their explanation, English is predominantly a tense language whereas Chinese is exclusively an aspect language. The grammatical category of tense in Chinese is denoted by content words like adverbs of time or is implied by context and even though both languages mark aspect, the aspect system differs significantly. This obviously has significant implications in translation.

4.2.1 Auto segmental Phonology

Auto segmental phonology (Goldsmith, 1976; 1990) is a framework that has been suggested for explaining segmental and non segmental features of a language. Auto segmental phonology is a non-linear approach to phonological analysis that allows phonological processes such as tone and vowel harmony to be independent and extend beyond individual consonants and vowels. As a result, phonological processes may influence more than one vowel or

consonant at a time (Halle and Mohanan, 1985). Auto segmental phonology differs from Generative Phonology in that it specifies rules for describing segments. These can be summed up as follows:

- Segments are in linear arrangement. (Earlier segments identified only those described by lip and tongue movement)
- AP identifies tonal segments
- Each set of segments are marked on a separate tear. Tone segments are marked on the vowel syllable.
- A single syllable could mark two tones
- Tonal segments are marked systematically and can be described by a set of phonological rules.
- AP accounts for floating tones as well as stability of segments
- AP also accounts for vowel harmony and tone spreading rules – vowels spread their vocalic features to another segment so that they can resemble and behave the same in tone.

This phonological framework supports the analysis in this study. It captures the phonological details that account for semantic analysis of segments. This is significant and useful in talking about tone languages in particular. The relevance of this in translating tone languages can be realized. The study therefore postulates the relevance of a phonological and morphological theory to this type of analysis. In particular, the auto-segmental phonology theory has greater application to the analysis of segment tier in Bantu tense and aspect realization.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed at underscoring the importance of accuracy in translation. It has brought out the notion that there are non lexical grammatical categories of language whose meanings have to be carefully captured if accurate translation is to be realized. These features are prominent in Bantu. A few examples cited from Lulogooli, a Bantu language attest to this. The relevance of auto segmental phonology theory to this type of analysis has been suggested.

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[i] The Luyia dialects invariably referred to as languages, vary in degree of mutual intelligibility and are classified as central, northern and southern geographically.

[ii] The root *tengez* has the initial sound /t/ assimilated and voiced to /d/ due to the pre- nasalization in *ndegezaa.*

[iii] The two books are selected because of their dynamic and descriptive nature. Only a few texts are selected for illustration and these can be generalized to any book of the bible i.e. the results yielded will be similar. The emphasis therefore is on the analysis of the grammatical categories and not the samples.

[iv] In Bantu, the verbal prefixes enter into agreement with the noun/pronoun subject marker (concord) in line with the nominal class system hence, *u* is an ordered pronoun marker to create agreement with the subject *Yahova* (the Lord).

End Notes: