

A NOVEL APPROACH TO TEACHING, LEARNING AND ANALYZING
SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT IN SOUTHERN BANTU

R. David Zorc (Ph.D.)
Senior Linguist
MRM Inc., Language Research Center

1. Overview

In the course of developing newspaper readers for Sotho and Xhosa, my initial role was that of learner, and only later of linguist and teacher. Although the noun-classes were somewhat novel, the greatest difficulty I encountered was the highly complex phenomenon of subject-verb agreement throughout each system. As a mnemonic, I developed these labels (examples are from Sotho):

S1 - independent clause (indicative) agreement

I write / am writing **Kè a ngola.**

S2 - participial (dependent) clause agreement

He found me writing **O fihlile ké ngola.**

REL (relative) is separately marked but takes a participial verb

S3a - present subjunctive agreement

Let me write **Ha ké ngole.**

S3b - past subjunctive agreement

I have written **Ke ile ka ngola.**

Do not write! **Se ke wa ngola!**

S4 - potential (conditional) clause agreement

I can / may write **Nka ngola.**

What makes them so difficult are the facts that:

(1) With a few exceptions in some of the noun classes, these constructions are homographic although TONALLY DIFFERENT. Even when the subject is homophonic with that of another clause type, the tone of the entire clause will be different, i.e., the verb will have a different tone structure.

(2) Preverbs, auxiliary verbs, and conjunctions require one or another of these constructions. Some govern more than one type, with subtleties in meaning. Thus, the Xhosa conjunction **ukuba** 'that' can be followed by:

S1 + indicative to mark a statement of fact

Undixelele ukuba nifikile. 'He told me that you [S1] arrived.'

S2 + participial to mark a given situation

Baphawula ukuba beza kufumana uchatha.
'They note that they [S2] are going to get an increment.'

S3a + present subjunctive to mark a statement of desire or purpose

Into ebangela ukuba ndihlale. 'The thing that makes me stay (lit: that I [S3a] should stay)

(3) Compound verb constructions may consist of an appropriately governing subject marker and preverb, but the echo subject and subordinate verb will usually be of a differing subject-verb structure, as in:

Saye sifuna...
S3b-PAST S2-Δ-a

We were seeking ... [Xhosa]

O ile a atleha.
S1-PERF S3b-Δ-a

He succeeded [Sotho]

(4) Some contracted forms of compound tenses in Xhosa, while purported to be indicative, do not have any form of indicative (S1) marking.

Bebehambile.
PERF-S2-Δ-ile

They had departed.

Besifumane
PERF-S2-Δ-e

We had discovered.

I lay no claim to having “discovered” these, only to the mnemonic devices of S1, S2 (etc.) and to the need to teach or learn them thoroughly. Grammars and textbooks do discuss these in one place or another, however, most authors simply mark example sentences with “SC” (subject concord), therefore not specifying which subject it really is. Some authors use "SC^P" for participial agreement, but the other (non-independent) clause types have generally gone without identification. Derek Gowlett (in an email dated 99.02.19) has pointed out:

With regard to the specific marking of the SC itself, I experienced this with my own grammar teacher, the late P.-D. Beuchat, who in using patterns for tenses such as SC-R-e for the Present Subjunctive, would have some superscript mnemonic after the SC. A raised P for Participial, a ^ for the consonantal SC found in the Past Subjunctive, a raised N for negative SCs, and a raised C for the so-called Conditional. Only a passing mention was made of tone in Sotho and Zulu, though I think in Tsonga, which was her main language, a great deal more was done on tone. Others seemed not to take up this device though.

The student therefore feels an enormous sense of frustration when encountering these in written materials because they are homographic and there is no convention for marking tone. If one searches through a dictionary, for example, the usual result is to find that the meaning, but not the construction required, is covered. Textbooks give some examples of each construction, but are far from thorough. Both lexicographers and course-developers have left the student of these languages hanging.

Apart from adverbs and prepositions, one rarely learns (or studies) a word in isolation in Southern Bantu. The learner must face “double jeopardy,” in that he/she must learn NOUNS and VERBS in **pairs**, ADJECTIVES and NOUN CLASSIFIERS in full **sets**. With PREVERBS and CONJUNCTIONS, one must learn the **governing conditions**, whether the following verb (or clause) will be in the:

- indicative (with S¹ agreement),
- dependent (or participial with S² agreement),
- present subjunctive (with S^{3a} agreement),
- past subjunctive (with S^{3b} agreement),
- conditional (with S⁴ agreement), or
- infinitive (with no subject agreement)

In working on the *Sotho Newspaper Reader* (Zorc & Mokabe 1998), it became necessary to include a (student-friendly) reference grammar, due to the lack of CONTRASTIVE explanations of these phenomena. The same requirement is turning out to be true for our Xhosa project.

2. Southern Bantu Verb Clause Structure

The Sotho verb has the following conjugations or moods: INDICATIVE, PARTICIPIAL (dependent as well as relative), SUBJUNCTIVE (subordinate, further split into two: PAST and PRESENT), POTENTIAL, IMPERATIVE, and INFINITIVE. Xhosa has all those plus a TEMPORAL. Of these only the indicative and the imperative are truly independent, all the rest are dependent to some degree upon a main/auxiliary verb or a governing conjunction.

The verb in Southern Bantu languages is the most complicated of all grammatical structures. The principal forms involve SUBJECT and OBJECT AGREEMENT,[†] MOOD, NEGATION, IMPLICATION, TENSE, AFFIXATION, TONE, etc. The VERB PHRASE most commonly has some or all of the following parts or forms. Note that Sotho is written disjunctively while Xhosa conjunctively.

NEG / MODAL	SUBJ -AGR	PRE- VERB	ECHO -PRO	OBJ- AGR	ROOT + STEM	MODE + EXTENSION	SUFFIX
SOTHO							
ha	ba	a			ne-	-w-	-a
They were not given (the opportunity)							
	o	#	#	se	bolok	#	-e
Save it! (setjhaba the country)							
	o	#	#	#	fed-	-is-	-e
Abolish (them)! (i.e., wars and worries)							
	e	#	#	re	thus	#	-itse
It (the Bona magazine) has helped us.							
	o	boetse	o	#	tl		-ile
He has again come (to me).							
	o	ne	a	mo	otl	#-	-a
She would beat him.							
XHOSA							
a-	-ndi-				-tshay-		-i
I do not smoke.							
	si-				-theng-	-is-	-a
We sell (meat).							

[†] This means that ALL of the complexity of the noun classification system is carried over to that of the verb.

be-		-zi-	-fak-		-a
Putting themselves (into trouble)					
Nda-			-banj-	-w-	-a
I was arrested (in June)					
ni-		-ndi-	-thum-	-el-	-e
You should send me (a photograph)					
ya- -ye ya-			-yil-		-a
(Parliament) had drafted (a bill)					

3. The Indicative

The indicative is the mood of positive or negative statements of fact; it is also that of direct or indirect questions of fact. It occurs in most main clauses (apart from the imperative and hortative), and in dependent clauses after a few conjunctions. It has the greatest number of tense forms or combinations.

Indicative clauses are marked in the following ways:

1. S¹ subject marking (see Tables 2 for Xhosa and 3 for Sotho);
2. the negative is always marked by the preverb **ha** in Sotho and by the prefix **a-** in Xhosa; the negative subject of group 1 singular is **a** (rather than **o** in Sotho and **u** in Xhosa) and acquires a vowel-splitting **-k-** in Xhosa, i.e., **aka-**;
3. the verb is in any of the many indicative tenses (positive / negative forms of the short / long present, future, perfect, etc).

The structure for each language is outlined in the following table.

Indicative Mood [S1]	Sotho	Xhosa
short present indicative	S1 Δ - a	S1- Δ - a
long present indicative	S1 a Δ - a	S1- ya - Δ - a
present negative indicative	ha S1 Δ - e	a -SNEG- Δ - i
future positive indicative (short form)	S1 tla Δ - a	S1- ya ku - Δ - a TC- o - Δ - a
future negative indicative (short form)	ha S1 tlo Δ - a n/a	a -SNEG- yi ku - Δ - a a -TC- u - Δ - a
near future positive	n/a	S1- za ku - Δ - a
near future negative	n/a	SNEG- zi ku - Δ - a
perfect positive long form	S1 Δ - ile	S1- Δ - ile
perfect positive short form	S1 Δ - e	S1- Δ - e
perfect negative indicative	ha S1 a Δ - a	a -SNEG- Δ - anga

4. Participial (S2 In Dependent And REL In Relative Clauses)

The participial is the first of three kinds of dependent or subordinate constructions. It is used to mark second and subsequent concurrent actions (i.e., a verb subordinated to a head verb and qualifying the subject, e.g., *he arrived crying, he wound up working*). Its usage is also required by some tense or aspect preverbs, some auxiliary verbs, and some subordinating

conjunctions. In both direct and indirect relative clauses, the verb is participial, but S2 (subject) marking is replaced by an appropriate relative agreement marker.

A participial construction is marked by:

1. change of tone (on the verb sometimes LOW changes to HIGH, but there are certain syllables where HIGH may change to LOW); LOW-toned subject concords become HIGH;
2. S² subject marking (see Tables 2 for Xhosa and 3 for Sotho) in dependent constructions and in indirect relative clauses (but RELATIVE AGREEMENT in direct relative clauses) – Xhosa has two kinds of relative heads depending on the antecedent;
3. the negative marker is always **sa** in Sotho (a unique marker of this clause type) and **nga** in Xhosa (which also negates infinitive and present subjunctive constructions).

PARTICIPIAL

Participial	Sotho	Xhosa
present positive participial	S ² Δ- a	S2-Δ- a
present negative participial	S ² sa Δ- e	S2- nga -Δ- i
perfect positive participial	S ² Δ- ile	S2-Δ- ile
perfect negative participial	S ² sa Δ- a	S2- nga -Δ- anga
future positive participial	S ² tla Δ- a	S2- ya ku -Δ- a
future neg. participial	S ² sa ka S ^{3b} Δ- a	S2- nga-yi ku -Δ- a

RELATIVE

Relative	Sotho	Xhosa
present positive relative	REL Δ- ang	REL1 vs REL2-Δ- a(-yo)
present negative relative	REL sa Δ- eng	REL1 vs REL2- nga -Δ- i(-yo)
perfect positive relative	REL Δ- ileng	REL1 vs REL2-Δ- ile(-yo)
perfect negative relative	REL sa Δ- ang	REL1 vs REL2- nga -Δ- anga
future positive relative	REL tla Δ- a	REL1 vs REL2- ya ku -Δ- a

5. Present Subjunctive (S3a)

With regard to Sotho, although Guma (1971:182ff) just discusses a present subjunctive, Doke & Mofokeng (1967:232-236,443ff) describe two homographic forms: the PRESENT-FUTURE -**è** (usually transcribed with a grave accent) as opposed to the PERFECT -**ë** (transcribed with a macron). The latter is explained as a contraction (or alternate) of the perfect suffix (-**ile**) and differs in TONE from the indicative negative (-**e**). Because our study is based upon the printed word where both are similar in form and function, discussion of these two will here be merged. Xhosa has a single -**e** suffix.

Both of these subjunctive constructions are marked by:

1. homographic **-e** endings for positive or negative in Sotho and a single **-e** suffix in the Xhosa positive (replacing the **-a** of the present indicative); the Xhosa negative is marked by an **-i** suffix;
2. S^{3a} subject marking (differing in tone from the homographic S¹ marker)
3. the negative marker is always **se** in Sotho and **nga** in Xhosa.

PRESENT SUBJUNCTIVE [S3a]

Present Subjunctive [S3a]	Sotho	Xhosa
present positive subjunctive	S ^{3a} Δ- e	S3a-Δ- e
present negative subjuncti.	S ^{3a} se Δ- e	S3a- nga -Δ- i
present prog subjunctive	S ^{3a} be S ^{3a} Δ- e	unknown
future subjunctive	S ^{3a} tle S ^{3a} Δ- e	unknown
long pres subjunctive neg	S ^{3a} se ke S ^{3b} Δ- a	unknown
progressive subjunctive	S ^{3a} tla be S ^{3a} Δ- e	unknown
hortative positive	ha S ^{3a} Δ- e	kha -S3a-Δ- e ma -S3a(k/w)-Δ- e
hortative negative	ha S ^{3a} se ke S ^{3b} Δ- a	ma -S3a- nga -Δ- i

6. Past Subjunctive (S3b)

This construction is the most simple in that it only has two forms (positive and negative) and its subject agrees or “rhymes” with the **-a** verbal ending. Its characteristics are:

1. Low-toned **-a** on the verb
2. S^{3b} subject marking [note: always ending in **a**, which is the result of coalescence of the class marker with an **a** preverb]
3. Negative in Xhosa is preceded by the **a-** negative marker. Sotho has the structure S^{3b} **se ke** S^{3b} Δ-**a** according to Gowlett (personal communication); both Guma (1971:185) and Doke & Mofokeng 1967:235 state that there is no corresponding negative. The difference between the Sotho present and past subjunctive negative is thus:

O [S^{3a}] **se ke wa dieha.** You must not delay.
wa [S^{3b}] **se ke wa dieha** and you did not delay.

PAST SUBJUNCTIVE [S3b]

Past Subjunctive [S3b]	Sotho	Xhosa
past subjunctive positive	S3b Δ- a	S3b-Δ- a
past subjunctive negative	S3b se ke S3b Δ- a	a -S3b-Δ- a

7. Conditional / Potential [S4]

These constructions indicate ABILITY ('can, able to') or POTENTIALITY ('may, might, could, would'). They are marked by:

1. the preverb **ka** in Sotho and **nga** in Xhosa;
2. S⁴ subject marking before the preverb – in several Sotho constructions there is an echo subject with S^{3b} or S² marking; in Xhosa, S⁴ marking is only found in the simple present, it follows the requirements of each respective preverb for all the compound tenses;
3. the Sotho negative marker is always **ke** (with a corresponding assimilation or change of **ka** to **ke** – yielding the sequence **ke ke** / **keke**; the Xhosa negative marker is **nge**.

Potential Mode [S4]	Sotho	Xhosa
present positive potential	S ⁴ ka Δ-a	S4- nga -Δ-a
present potential negative alternate	S ⁴ ke ke S ^{3b} Δ-a ha S ⁴ ka ke S ^{3b} Δ-a S ⁴ ka se Δ-e	(a)-SNEG- nge -Δ-i
present prog potential pos	S ⁴ ka be S ² Δ-a	n/a
present prog potential neg	S ⁴ ka be S ² sa Δ-e	n/a
perfect potential positive	S ⁴ ka be S ² Δ-ile	S ^{3b} - ye S ² - nga -Δ-a
perfect potential negative	S ⁴ ka be S ² sa Δ-a	S ^{3b} - ye S ² - nge -Δ-i
past potential positive	S ⁴ ka be S ² ile S ^{3b} Δ-a	S ¹ - be S ² - nga -Δ-a
past potential negative	S ⁴ ka be S ² sa ka S ^{3b} Δ-a	S ¹ - be S ² - nge -Δ-i
future potential negative	S ⁴ ka be S ² sa tlo Δ-a	n/a
future potential positive	S ⁴ ka be S ² tla Δ-a	n/a

8. Temporal (Xhosa Only)

This is a special clause type found in Xhosa in both the positive and the negative to set the time of a given action in context. It consists of the thematic consonant of a pronoun or noun class, the past time marker (-a-), and a reduced form of the infinitive prefix (-ku-); the positive ending is -a, the negative is marked by -nga- and an -i suffix. It is homographic with the past subjunctive (S^{3b}) agreement forms, but consistently followed by -ku-.

Akufika umqhubi ekhaya

Zakufika kweli

wakuvela

kwakubanjwa

kwakugquba

When he-the driver arrived home ...

Upon their arrival here ...

when he appeared

when they were arrested [n10-impersonal]

when there was raising dust [n10-impersonal]

TEMPORAL

Temporal Mood	Sotho	Xhosa
positive	n/a	TC- a-ku-Δ-a
negative	n/a	TC- a-ku-nga-Δ-i

9. Complex Tenses

As can be seen in the two tables below, these tenses involve one or more preverbs which themselves involve other clause types.

Sotho complex tenses	
past positive indicative	S ¹ ile S ^{3b} Δ- a
past negative indicative	ha S ¹ a ka S ^{3b} Δ- a
past progressive positive	S ¹ ne S ² Δ- a
past progressive negative	S ¹ ne S ² sa Δ- e
pluperfect / remote past	S ¹ ne S ² Δ- e
past perfect positive	S ¹ ne S ² Δ- ile
past perfect negative	S ¹ ne S ² sa Δ- a
future perfect positive	S ¹ tla be S ² Δ- ile
future perfect negative	S ¹ tla be S ² sa Δ- a
past progressive positive alternate form	S ¹ na be S ² Δ- a S ¹ ne be S ² Δ- a
past progressive negative	S ¹ na / ne be S ² sa Δ- e
future progressive positive	S ¹ tla be S ² Δ- a
future progressive negative	S ¹ tla be S ² sa Δ- e
past conditional positive	S ¹ ne S ² tla Δ- a
past conditional negative	S ¹ ne S ² sa tlo Δ- a
past conditional prog pos	S ¹ ne S ² tla be S ² Δ- a
past conditional prog neg	S ¹ ne S ² tla be S ² sa Δ- e

Xhosa complex tenses	
recent past prospective positive full form	S1- be S2- za ku-Δ-a
recent past prospective negative full form	S1- be S2- nga-zi ku-Δ-a
near past conditional positive full = future near past	S1- be S2- ya ku-Δ-a
near past conditional negative full = future near past	S1- be S2- nga-yi ku-Δ-a
near past perfect positive short full	S1- be S2- Δ-e
near past perfect positive long / full form	S1- be S2- Δ-ile
near past perfect negative long / full form	S1- be S2- nga-Δ-anga
near past continuous / progressive positive long	S1- be S2- Δ-a
near past continuous / progressive negative long	S1- be S2- nga-Δ-i
remote past conditional = future in the remote past positive full	TC- a-ye/be S2- ya-ku-Δ-a Note: TC + -a is homographic with S3b
remote past conditional = future in the remote past positive contracted	TC- a-S2-ya-ku-Δ-a
remote past conditional = future in the remote past negative full	TC- a-ye/be S2- nga-yi-ku-Δ-a
remote past conditional = future in the remote past negative contracted	TC- a-S2-nga-yi-ku-Δ-a
remote past perfect positive long full	TC- a-ye/be S2- Δ-ile
remote past perfect positive long contracted	TC- a-S2-Δ-ile
remote past perfect positive short full form	TC- a-ye/be S2- Δ-e
remote past perfect positive short contracted form	TC- a-S2-Δ-e
remote past perfect negative full form	TC- a-ye/be S2- nga-Δ-anga
remote past perfect negative short form	TC- a-S2-nga-Δ-anga
remote past continuous / progressive positive full	TC- a-ye/be S2- Δ-a
remote past continuous / progressive positive contracted	TC- a-S2-Δ-a
remote past continuous / progressive negative full	TC- a-ye/be S2- nga-Δ-i
remote past continuous / progressive negative contracted	TC- a-S2-Δ-nga-Δ-i
† in the following	Called “indicative” but no S1
near past conditional positive contracted = future near past NOTE: n1-sg contracted: u/e-be-ya ku-Δ-a	† be-S2-ya ku-Δ-a
near past conditional negative contracted	† be-S2-nga-yi ku-Δ-a
near past perfect positive short contracted †	† be-S2-Δ-e
near past perfect positive contracted	† be-S2-Δ-ile
near past perfect neg contracted	† be-S2-nga-Δ-anga
NOTE: n1-sg contracted:	u-be-nga-Δ-anga
near past continuous / progressive negative short / contracted	† be-S2-nga-Δ-i
recent past prospective positive contracted	† be-S2-za ku-Δ-a
near past continuous / progressive positive short / contracted	† be-S2-Δ-a

10. Negatives, Preverbs, and Auxiliaries

Some authors lump preverbs and auxiliaries together, calling them either DEFICIENT VERBS (Doke & Mofokeng 1967:245-298, Einhorn and Siyengo 1990:47, Guma 1971:187-192) or AUXILIARY VERBS (Sharpe 1980:99-103, McLaren 1975:*passim*), but there is a major difference: preverbs are usually not inflected (they have an invariable form, e.g., Xhosa & Sotho **be**, Sotho **ne**, Xhosa & Sotho **sa**, or, at most, a very limited inflection, e.g., Sotho **ka** - **ke** sub - **kile** perf 'did once,' Xhosa **kha** - **khe** 'do sometimes or a little'), while auxiliaries go through all (or most) of the major verbal conjugations (present, past, perfect, progressive, etc.). What all of these do have in common, however, is that they govern a following verb (whether it will be in the infinitive, participial, or subjunctive), which may have subjects (S¹, S², S^{3a}, S^{3b}, or S⁴) as appropriate to the verbal mood.

It is also important to note that the subject marker of class 1 singular nouns is **a** (rather than Sotho **o** or Xhosa **u**) in negative indicative statements. The subject markers of all other Sotho classes and pronouns are homographic with their S¹ forms (see Table 3), but first and second person pronoun subject concords are high-toned in the negative (low-toned in the positive). Xhosa has sufficient differences to warrant a separate column, which I label SNEG (see Table 2).

PREVERBS are usually *uninflected* forms that indicate tense, aspect, or mood and which govern a following verb. There are a few with a limited inflection (e.g., Sotho **ka** - **kile** 'once VERBed,' **tla** - **tle** - **tlo** 'will,' Xhosa **da** - **de** 'until SUBJ VERBS'). Table 4 presents a few examples for Sotho, taken from Zorc & Mokabe 1998.

The vast majority of AUXILIARY VERBS involve special applications of normal verbs that take object or location (noun) complements. As auxiliaries, they have a separate meaning and govern another verb, i.e., they take a verbal complement (e.g., Xhosa **-phinda** 'do VERB again,' Xhosa **-hlala** 'keep on VERBing'). Some examples from Sotho can be found in Table 5. The use of some (e.g., Sotho **boela** - **boetse**, Sotho **fela** 'really VERB,' etc.) involve complexities which cannot be covered in this abbreviated treatment, so one must consult Doke & Mofokeng 1967:277-298 for details.

11. Conjunctions

This is an exceptionally complex part of speech with regard to both form and function. Firstly, there are very few "pure" conjunctions (e.g., Sotho **athe** 'whereas,' **ha** 'if, when,' **kapa** 'or,' **mme** 'and'), the majority are either formed from other parts of speech (especially verbs, e.g., **eba** 'and then,' **empa** 'but,'

hobane ‘because,’ **hore** ‘so that,’ **etlaba** ‘when’) or have a double function (e.g., **mohla** – ‘day’ NOUN, ‘at the time of’ PREP and ‘when’ CONJ, **feela** – ‘only’ ADVERB and ‘however’ CONJ). Secondly, there are those that link phrases (coordinating, non-influencing) as opposed to those that are followed by clauses. The latter GOVERN THE VERB and therefore require an understanding of the various SUBJECT FORMS (S¹, S², S^{3a}, S^{3b}, S⁴) and MOODS (infinitive, indicative, participial/relative, present or past subjunctive). Thirdly, several conjunctions (e.g., Sotho **hore**, **hoba**, **hoja** or Xhosa **ukuba**, **xa**), depending on subtleties in their meaning, govern more than one kind of clause, which – broadly speaking – involve details such as STATEMENT OF FACT, of CONSEQUENCE, of PURPOSE, or of REASON, etc.

For additional details on Sotho, consult Doke & Mofokeng 1967:351-364 or Guma 1971:237-245; for Xhosa, McLaren/Welsh 1939:148-152,173-177 or Einhorn & Siyengo 1990:36,41,42. However, no grammar or dictionary of either language to our knowledge has covered ALL conjunctions and ALL conditions (i.e., both FORM and FUNCTION). Ideally, a dictionary should identify not only the part of speech, but also the phrasal or clausal conditions required, especially when more than one kind of clause structure option prevails.

12. Teaching and Disambiguating These Phenomena

The importance of grammatical features, context, and tone in disambiguating such constructions cannot be underestimated. Here are some Sotho examples of how grammatical clues make the meaning clear:

Vuma o bolela. ‘Vuma says.’

[S1 (**o**) marks indicative, therefore **bolela** is present tense]

Vuma a bolela. ‘Vuma said.’

[S3b (**a**) marks past subjunctive, therefore **bolela** is narrative past]

ha ba tlaleha ‘if they report’ (R26#12)

[**ha** ‘if’ is followed by a participial construction, i.e., the verb ends in **-a**]

ha ba tlalehe ‘they do not report’

[**ha** ‘not’ is followed by a negative construction, verb ends in **-e**]

O sa bua ‘He is still speaking.’

[**sa** is a preverb; Note S1 (**o**) and indicative verb **-a**]

A sa bue ‘he not speaking’

[**sa** is dependent negative; Note S2 (**a**) and negative verb **-e**]

It is clear that the student must be aware of a large number of grammatical details to come to such an understanding.

I am deeply indebted to Derek Gowlett (email of 99.02.19) for his candor in the following statement:

Years ago at Wits, Mzilikazi Khumalo made the comment at a staff meeting that "If we think we are teaching the kids these languages (Sotho and Zulu) without teaching them tone, we're just fooling ourselves." I immediately took this to heart, proceeded to tone-mark all our Sotho classroom material, got all the rules under my belt, and insisted that the students know these as well. And it is true that the more able students WERE able to fill in tones on a noun if such and such a prefix preceded it, or could change the tones from Indicative to Subjunctive mood in the verb, as a theoretical exercise, BUT I don't believe a single one even attempted to apply them in speech, and most had the greatest difficulty in even hearing them. So I obviously failed there.

Khumalo himself then went on to do a Masters and a doctorate on Zulu tone, but never taught it to second language students. I know it's all hellishly difficult, and I suppose the fact that by and large one is understood even with the the wrong tones, mitigates against students being forced to learn tone. I found even my Xhosa-speaking students here were antipathetic to having to learn anything about Sotho tone. Some of them seemed naturally to pick tones on individual words, but only one or two ever seemed to show any ability to manipulate base tones in various contexts.

If native speakers of other Bantu languages have difficulties getting the tone correct, is there any hope for a learner coming from English- or another Indo-European language? I think so. Firstly, moving from one dialect (or related language) to another is its own kind of problem. One often brings carryover from one's mother tongue that is almost impossible to override beyond teenage years. Even after ten years in Australia, and with my best-intended efforts to emulate Australian-English vowels, palatalized consonants, etc., I was always considered a "Yankee," even on the telephone! Worse yet, some mistook my efforts as a slur on their dialect! English may be a Germanic language, but it is a rare Dutchman or German who can get the **v** vs. **w** distinction or question vs. statement intonation right! The Bantu-learner clearly has and will continue to have a Bantu problem.

The English-learner, on the other hand, is starting with a clean slate. When grammar was thrown out in the teaching of English in the 1970's, it was genuinely a case of overreaction when foreign language courses also threw the baby out with the bathwater. Highly grammatical languages need highly grammatical understanding. The tone patterns of each construction can and should be learned in progression. Furthermore, CONTRASTIVE DRILLS would appear to be requisite. These would include transforming an indicative statement into a participial, into a present subjunctive, into a past subjunctive, into a potential, and so on. Such an endeavor must be timed after the mastery of one (e.g., the indicative), so that the contrast with the new material (e.g., the participial or the past subjunctive) will be meaningful. Since these kinds of exercises are not covered in most textbooks, it will take care and preparation on the part of the teacher. But I believe the effort will result in a growing and genuine command of these challenging languages.

Table 1: Southern Bantu Noun Classes / Groups

Bantu class	Sotho	Type B group	Xhosa	Type B group
1	mo-	n1-sg	um-	n1-sg
2	ba-	n1-pl	aba-	n1-pl
1a	zero	n1a-sg	u-	n1a-sg
2a	bo-	n1a-pl	oo-	n1a-pl
3	mo-	n2-sg	um-	n2-sg
4	me-	n2-pl	imi-	n2-pl
5	le-	n3-sg	ili-	n3-sg
6	ma-	n3-pl	ama-	n3-pl
7	se-	n4-sg	isi-	n4-sg
8	di-	n4-pl	izi-	n4-pl
9	zero	n5-sg	i-	n5-sg
10	di-	n5-pl	ii-	n5-pl
9	N-	n5a-sg	iN-	n5a-sg
10	diN-	n5a-pl	iziN-	n5a-pl
11	N/A		ulu-	n6-sg
10	N/A		iiN-	n6-pl
14	bo-	n6-sg	ubu-	n7-sg (abs)
6	ma-	n6-pl	N/A	
15	ho-	n7-vn	uku-	n8-vn
16	fa-	n8-loc	pha-	n9-loc
17	ho-	n9-loc	uku-	n10-loc
18	mo-	n10-loc	N/A	

I distinguish between CLASS (the Bantu system of having one number assigned to each phenomenon) and GROUP (where singular and plural forms are taken together).

Note that the first five groups in both Sotho and Xhosa correspond. Thereafter, Xhosa has a group 6 (descended from Bantu class 11), so the Sotho numbers then lag one behind, e.g., Sotho n6 (**bo-**) then matches (or is cognate with) Xhosa n7 (**ubu-**), etc. However, Sotho has the remnants of three locative nouns (**fa-**, **ho-** and **mo-**) whereas Xhosa only two (**pha-** and **uku-**). Hence, a language-specific (or “emic”) approach yields a total of ten groups for each language.

Table 2: Xhosa Personal Pronoun and Subject Agreement

CLASS	S1	SNEG	S2	S3A	S3B	S4 (POT)	S5 (TEMP)	
First Person = speaker (I, we)								
sg	ndi-	andi-	ndi-	ndi-	nda-	ndinga-	ndaku-	
pl	si-	asi-	si-	si-	sa-	singa-	saku-	
Second Person = addressee (you)								
sg	u-	aku-	u-	u-	wa-	unga-	waku-	
pl	ni-	ani-	ni-	ni-	na-	ninga-	naku-	
Third Person = Noun Group Agreement Forms								
n1 and n1a								
sg	u-	aka-	e-	a-	wa-	anga-	aku-	
pl	ba-	aba-	be-	ba-	aba-	banga-	baku-	
n2								
sg	u-	awu-	u-	u-	wa-	unga-	waku-	
pl	i-	ayi-	i-	i-	ya-	inga-	yaku-	
n3								
sg	li-	ali-	li-	li-	la-	linga-	laku-	
pl	a-	aka-	e-	a-	#a-	anga-	#aku-	
n4								
sg	si-	asi-	si-	si-	sa-	singa-	saku-	
pl	zi-	azi-	zi-	zi-	za-	zinga-	zaku-	
n5								
sg	i-	ayi-	i-	i-	ya-	inga-	yaku-	
pl	zi-	azi-	zi-	zi-	za-	zinga-	zaku-	
n6								
sg	lu-	alu-	lu-	lu-	lwa-	lunga-	lwaku-	
pl	zi-	azi-	zi-	zi-	za-	zinga-	zaku-	
Higher Groups (no plural)								
n7-abs	bu-	abu-	bu-	bu-	ba-	bunga-	baku-	
n8-vn	ku-	aku-	ku-	ku-	kwa-	kunga-	kwaku-	
Locative Groups								
n9	follows Group 10 locative agreement							
n10	ku-	aku-	ku-	ku-	kwa-	kunga-	kwaku-	

Table 3: Sotho Personal and Subject Pronouns

PRO	S ¹	S ²	S ^{3a}	S ^{3b}	S ⁴	OBJ	ECHO
First Person = speaker (I, we)							
1sg	ke	ke	ke	ka	N-	N-	nna
1pl	re	re	re	ra	re	re	rona
Second Person = addressee (you)							
2sg	o	o	o	wa	o	o	wena
2pl	le	le	le	la	le	le	lona
Third Person (Noun Group Agreement Forms)							
n1-sg	o	a	a	a	a	m(o-)	yena
NEG	a						
n1-pl	ba	ba	ba	ba	ba	ba	bona
n2-sg	o	o	o	wa	o	o	wona
n2-pl	e	e	e	ya	e	e	yona
n3-sg	le	le	le	la	le	le	lona
n3-pl	a	a	a	a	a	a	ona
n4-sg	se	se	se	sa	se	se	sona
n4-pl	di	di	di	tsa	di	di	tsona
n5-sg	e	e	e	ya	e	e	yona
n5-pl	di	di	di	tsa	di	di	tsona
n6-sg	bo	bo	bo	ba	bo	bo	bona
n6-j/							jona
n6-pl	a	a	a	a	a	a	ona
n7-vn	ho	ho	ho	ha	ho	ho	hona

For SUBJECT AGREEMENT, see Guma 1971:162. Our abbreviations differ from Guma's in the following ways:

<u>Ours</u>	<u>Guma</u>
S ¹	SC
S ²	SC ^P
OBJ	OC

Table 4. Example of Some Sotho Preverbs

a	is (am, are) doing VERB [progressive ~ long present preverb] Structure: S ¹ a Δ- a
a	let [optative ~ hortative preverb] Structure: a S ^{3a} Δ- e (present subjunctive) + -ng (plural, as opposed to dual) Alt: ha
a	did (not) do VERB [negative past preverb used in conjunction with ha and ka] Structure: ha S ¹ a ka S ^{3b} Δ- a
be	-ing [compound tense progressive preverb indicating continuous action] Structure: followed by S ² and full participial complement
be	do VERB ultimately; till ~ until one VERBs Structure: followed by S ^{3a} + present subjunctive
e ka kgona	must, ought to, should Structure: S ^{3a} + subjunctive
ha	let [optative ~ hortative preverb] Structure: ha S ^{3a} Δ- e (present subjunctive) [Alt: a]
hle	do VERB habitually; should do VERB right away ~ promptly Structure: followed by S ^{3a} + present subjunctive
hlile	actually VERBed; really do VERB [current relevance] Structure: S ¹ hlile S ¹ Δ- a
ile	have done VERB [past tense preverb] Structure: S ¹ ile S ^{3b} Δ- a
ka	can, may; could [potential ~ conditional preverb] Structure: S ⁴ ka Δ- a
ka	actually did [emphatic perfect preverb in negative clauses] Positive: kile ; Sub: ke ; Structure: ha S ¹ a ka S ^{3b} Δ- a
ne	-ed, was VERBing, did VERB [past preverb] Structure: followed by S ² and full participial complement
nne	do VERB sometimes ~ occasionally Structure: followed by S ^{3a} + present subjunctive
se	already, now, presently [exclusive ~ initiative aspect marker] Structure: S ¹ se S ² Δ- a

Table 5. Example of Some Sotho Auxiliary Verbs

atisa	do VERB often, frequently ~ usually [Perf: atisitse]; Structure: atisa ho VERB (infinitive complement)
batla	nearly ~ almost VERB [Perf: batlile]; Structure: followed by S ² + participial verb construction
batla	want to VERB ~ that SUBJ VERB [Perf: batlile]; Structure: takes ho + infinitive verb complement if subjects are the same and hore + S ^{3a} + subjunctive if subjects are different
boela	do VERB again [Perf: boetse]; Structure: S ¹ boela S ² Δ-a (participial)
boetse	did VERB again; Structure: S ¹ boetse S ¹ Δ-a (current relevance) ~ Δ-ile (past)
dula	stay VERBing; keep on VERBing (s.t.) [Perf: dutse]; Structure: S ¹ dula S ² VERB (participial form)
fela	indeed, certainly, in fact, really VERB [Perf: fetse ~ fedile] Structure S ¹ fela S ² Δ-a (participial)
hla	actually VERB; really do VERB; VERB indeed [Perf: hlile ; Imp: hloo]; Structure: hla S ^{3b} + past subjunctive
hlola	do VERB always ~ repeatedly; be accustomed ~ used to VERB [Perf: hlotse]; Structure: followed by S ² + participial verb construction
kgona	can VERB, be able to VERB; manage to do [Perf: kgonne ; Neg part: sa kgone]; Structure: S ¹ kgona ho Δ-a
lala	do VERB at night ~ through the night, spend the night doing VERB [Perf: letse]; followed by S ² + participial construction
lokela	supposed to; have to, must, should Structure: lokela ho Δ-a
nyafa	act opportunely, do VERB in the nick of time [Perf: nyafile]; Structure: S ^{3a} + present subjunctive
sala	do VERB eventually ~ later; then, afterwards, after a while [Perf: setse ~ sadile]; Structure: followed by S ² + participial

REFERENCES

- Anonymous. 1991. **South African Multi-Language Dictionary and Phrase Book: English, Afrikaans, Northern Sotho, Sesotho, Tswana, Xhosa and Zulu**. Cape Town: Reader@s Digest Association South Africa.
- DeMuth, Katherine and Tholoana Sekhesa. 1978. **Basic SeSotho - an Oral Approach**. Bloomington: African Studies Program, Indiana University.
- Doke, Clement Martyn, and S.M. Mofokeng. 1967. **Textbook of Southern Sotho Grammar**. Cape Town: Longmans Southern Africa Ltd.
- Dowling, Tessa; Paul Wise, ed. 1998. **Speak Xhosa With Us** (Beginner to Advanced CD Rom). Cape Town: Mother Tongues Multimedia Development cc. trading as African Voices.
- Einhorn, E, and L. Siyengo. 1990. **Xhosa: a Concise Manual**. Capetown: Faircape Books [Johannesburg distributor: Thorold's Africana Books.
- Fischer, Arnold et al. 1985. **English-Xhosa Dictionary**. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Guma, Samson Mbizo. 1971. **An Outline Structure of Southern Sotho**. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter.
- Jordan, Archibald Currie. 1966. **A Practical Course in Xhosa**. Cape Town: Longmans, Green and Co.
- Kirsch, Beverly A. and Silvia Skorge. 1995. **Masithethe IsiXhosa**. Second edition. Kenwyn: Juta & Co, Ltd.
- Mabille, Adolphe, and H. Dieterlen. 1961. **Southern Sotho-English Dictionary**, 8th ed. Reclassified, revised and enlarged by R.A. Paroz. Morija, Lesotho: Sesuto Book Depot.
- McLaren, J., revised by G. H. Welsh. 1939. **A Xhosa Grammar**. London: Longmans, Green and Co.
- McLaren, J(ames D.), revised by W. G. Bennie, and put into the standard orthography by J. J. R. Jolobe. 1994. **A New Concise Xhosa-English Dictionary**. Tenth Impression. Hippocrene Books.
- O'Riordan, Sean, and John Coffey. 1979. **Lumko Course in Southern Sotho**. Johannesburg? S. O'Riordan. [also 1982? edition]
- Pahl, Herbert W., sen eds. A. M. Pienaar, T. A. Ndungane. 1989. **The Greater Dictionary of Xhosa**. Alice: University of Fort Hare [3rd vol.; Johannesburg distributor: Thorold's Africana Books]
- Paroz, R. A. 1959. **Elements of Southern Sotho**. Morija, Lesotho: Morija Sesuto Book Depot. [original edition 1946]
- Pinnock, Patricia Schonstein. 1994. **Xhosa - a Cultural Grammar for Beginners**. Africa Sun Publishers.
- Sharpe, M.R.L. 1980. **Everyday Sesotho Grammar**. Morija, Lesotho: Morija Sesutho Book Depot. [reprint of 1952 ed]
- Zorc, R. David. 1997. "Pedagogical Problems with Sesotho Noun Classes." Paper presented at ALTA Conference, Madison, Wisconsin.
- Zorc, R. David, and Paul Mokabe. 1998. **Sotho Newspaper Reader, Reference Grammar and Lexicon**. Kensington, Maryland: Dunwoody Press.

Zorc, R. David, and Linda Murphy-Marshall. In progress. ***Xhosa Newspaper Reader, Reference Grammar and Lexicon***. Kensington, Maryland: Dunwoody Press.

===== [GOWLETT2.TXT email from Derek Gowlett 1999.02.12]

But, the main point -- your idea of a paper sounds intriguing. I'm curious to know whether you would envisage "just" dealing with the subject markers, or whether you would in fact include the whole construction. Would you also be talking about teaching the tone on the SC or not? I have been very intrigued over the years in meeting with the top tonal fundis from Berkeley, and Kisseberth who was at Illinois (Champaign-Urbana), to find that none of them actually teach tone in their own classes. I was at a conference in Michigan where one of the papers was on teaching tone in Yoruba, but unfortunately protocol dictated that I had to attend a parallel lecture, so I never got to hear anything.

All for now. Good luck with the paper. We have had so little on any form of pedagogics for the Bantu languages, that this conference should be useful -- too late for me though, except perhaps for our schools material.

===== [GOWLETT3.TXT email from Derek 99.02.19]

I've been thinking about your paper, and still think it will be a valuable contribution. I also agree that the handling of the various constructions is generally woefully treated in grammars and particularly in dictionaries. We are only now getting to the stage of realizing that there is such a thing as a dictionary for which the target audience is the second-language learner, and that all this type of info is essential.

Dr. R. David Zorc

Address: 3410 Glorus Place, Wheaton, MD 20902-2469, USA

E-mail: dzorc1@comcast.net