

## CALL FOR SPECIAL ISSUE OF NORDIC JOURNAL OF AFRICAN STUDIES

### AUXILIARY VERB CONSTRUCTIONS IN BANTU

We invite contributions to a special issue of the *Nordic Journal of African Studies* dedicated to auxiliary constructions in Bantu languages.

Bantu languages are renowned for being verb-centered, both in the sense that much of the functional information of a proposition is coded on the verb, but also in the sense that new grammatical material tends to be derived from verbs. The evolution of new grammatical markers from erstwhile lexical verbs occurs constantly and rapidly across the Bantu family, with the recurrent formation of auxiliaries and their further development into verbal prefixes as the principal example (Heine & Reh 1984, Heine 1993, Güldemann 1999, 2003, Nurse 2008).

Functionally, an auxiliary construction may encode “virtually every non-nominal (person, number, class) category described as ‘inflectional’” (Anderson 2006: 36). Bantu makes no exception to this claim. Beyond the manifold attestations of auxiliary constructions expressing tense and aspect (see, e.g., Nurse 2008: *passim*), the attestations of functional categories expressed through auxiliaries in Bantu include modality (Bernander et al. 2022 and further references therein), negation (Bernander et al. 2023, Devos & Van Olmen 2013), directionals (Devos 2014, Guérois et al. 2021), focus (e.g. Devos & Van der Wal 2010), (passive) voice (Guérois forthcoming), phasal polarity (many of the contributors in Kramer 2021; Zahran & Bloom Ström 2022; Bernander et al. 2023b), and various adverbial functions (Gibson forthcoming).

Still, the traditional focus on the already complex morphology of the simplex Bantu verbal word has often caused Bantu auxiliary constructions to play second fiddle as substitutes or early instantiations of synthetic constructions. Consequently, both the formal particulars of these constructions and the rich array of functional categories which may be expressed with auxiliaries have received relatively little in-depth and systematic attention in the general Bantu literature. From a historical perspective, the reconstructability of auxiliaries to Proto-Bantu remains largely unanswered, including the core issue of the extent to which Proto-Bantu and early Bantu ancestor varieties featured analytic (auxiliary-like) or synthetic predicate structures (see Nurse 2008: ch. 6; Nurse & Watters 2022; Güldemann 2022).

Moreover, in Bantu, just as elsewhere, defining and delimiting the notion of auxiliaries and auxiliary constructions remains notoriously challenging. In this regard, particularly useful heuristic definitions are offered by Anderson (2006, 2011) (ultimately based on the seminal work of Heine 1993). Anderson defines auxiliaries as “verbal element on a diachronic form-function continuum standing between a fully lexical verb and a bound grammatical affix” (Anderson 2011: 2) and auxiliary constructions as “a mono-clausal structure minimally consisting of a lexical verb element that contributes lexical content to the construction and an auxiliary verb element that contributes some grammatical or functional content to the construction” (Anderson 2006:7). While acknowledging the usefulness of these definitions, there are challenges associated with their application, including Anderson’s taxonomy based on inflectional “headedness”.

Pertaining to these issues and in light of a revived interest in auxiliary constructions in Bantu – see Gibson & Riedel (2021), Gunnink (2023), Gibson (forthcoming), Crane et al. (in progress) – and cross-linguistically – see <https://www.sfl.cnrs.fr/synsem-colloque-syntaxe-et-semantique-des-auxiliaires> – we invite contributions addressing the following issues (among other potential topics), many of which are interrelated.

- **Detailed studies addressing the categorical status of Bantu auxiliary constructions**, particularly in relation to interrelated terms and concepts such as “defective” and “deficient verbs” (Doke 1927) and “compound constructions” (see e.g., Nurse 2008: 29, 167–177). Similarly, there are attestations of elements of non-verbal origin acquiring verb-like features and subsequently developing into auxiliary-like markers (Güldemann 2012). Many languages also contain “aspectual copulas” (Nicolle 2013), that is, copula-like markers which seem to behave like canonical auxiliaries when operating on a predicate verb, but which may just as well operate on stative (i.e. nominal) predicates without any apparent change in the formal make-up or the function being conveyed. Should one draw a line between these different constructions and auxiliary constructions and, if so, how should one go about it?
- **In-depth analyses of the status, role and development of the lexical element.** Very few studies have addressed the formal and functional specifics of the lexical element (aka the “complement verb”, “auxiliate” or “second verb”), despite its crucial role in the development of auxiliary verb constructions (e.g., the same auxiliary verb operating on different lexical elements may yield different meanings).

The time is also ripe to take advantage of the recent upswing in studies on actionality (also known as *Aktionsart* or lexical aspect) in Bantu (see, e.g., Crane & Persohn 2019a,b) to conduct detailed investigations into the semantic development of auxiliary constructions in terms of expansion or relaxation in selectional restrictions.

- **Reconstruction work on auxiliary constructions and the potential uncovering of cycles of change.** Are there any auxiliary verbs that can be reconstructed to Proto-Bantu or any smaller Bantu subgroups? Is it possible to disentangle shared auxiliary constructions in a conglomerate of languages, as an innovation or a retention (or due to convergence or drift), similar to previous attempts in Botne (1998), Kawalya et al. (2018), and Gibson (2019)?

The form–function continuum verb→affix is arguably not always unidirectional but cyclic (see, e.g., Givón 1979). One telling illustration of the recycling potential of auxiliary constructions comes from the ‘already’~perfect(ive) post-initial complex in Swahili (see Furumoto 2019 and further references therein). Are any other such instances of cyclic change within the verb-to-affix continuum attested?

We invite contributions grounded in different theoretical frameworks (including so called “framework-free” frameworks), employing either synchronic or diachronic (or both, i.e. *panchronic*) approaches. These studies may focus on languages from any part of the Bantu speaking area including borderland-areas where Bantu and non-Bantu varieties interact. Contributions may adopt a comparative scope or address a specific language (variety). Similarly, studies may focus on a single auxiliary construction or choose to jointly tackle any functionally or formally defined set of auxiliary verb constructions.

**We particularly encourage submissions concerning:**

Previously non-described auxiliary verb constructions, either in relation to the categorical, functional and formal issues addressed above, or simply due to the fact that they occur in a previously un(der)described language or variety.

Auxiliaries and contact. Another facet of auxiliation which has remained poorly understood with regard to Bantu languages is the issue of contact-induced change. Little of substantial weight is mentioned about the role of contact-induced change in the study of Bantu auxiliaries. This is in spite of the fact that the Bantu family is characterized by a high degree of multilingualism and sustained contact and convergence not only across but also within its family confinements and that there are clear indications (see Bernander forthcoming) that several auxiliary constructions are the (partial) result of contact-induced change.

### **Practicalities**

Authors interested in contributing should upload an abstract of ~ 300 words through the NJAS submission system (<https://www.njas.fi/njas/submission/>), including a preliminary title and a synopsis/brief summary of their intended submission. Abstracts should be submitted to the section “Special Issue: Auxiliary Verb Constructions in Bantu”. Authors of accepted abstracts will be invited to submit a full-length paper for peer review. Publication in the special issue depends on timely submission of the full-length paper and its acceptance by the special issue editors after peer review and possible revisions.

### **Tentative Time frame**

Abstract submission deadline: 31 March 2025

Notification of abstract acceptance: 15 April 2025

Paper submission deadline: 30 September 2025

Revised paper submission deadline: 30 November 2025

Publication: 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2026

### **References**

- Anderson, G. 2006. *Auxiliary verb constructions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Anderson, G. 2011. Auxiliary verb constructions in the languages of Africa. *Studies in African Linguistics* 40(1 & 2): 1-409.
- Bernander, R. Forthcoming. Language contact and convergence. In L. Marten, N. C. Kula, E. Hurst, and J. Zeller (eds.), *The Oxford guide to the Bantu languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bernander, R., M. Devos, and H. Gibson. 2022. Modal auxiliary verb constructions in East African Bantu languages. *Journal of African Languages and Literatures* 3: 22-85. <https://doi.org/10.6093/jalalit.v3i3.9153>
- Bernander, R., M. Devos, and H. Gibson. Bantu negative verbs: a typological-comparative investigation of form, function, and distribution. *Linguistique et Langues Africaines* [Online], 9(1). <http://journals.openedition.org/lla/9818>
- Bernander, R., A. Laine, T. Roth, and L. Aunio. 2023b. -mara in Mara: On the ongoing grammaticalization(s) of a Bantu ‘finish’ verb. In S. Hancil and V. Tantucci (eds.), *Different Slants on Grammaticalization*, 74-102. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/slcs.232.03ber>
- Botne, R. 1998. The evolution of future tenses from serial ‘say’ constructions in Central Eastern Bantu. *Diachronica* 15(2): 207–230.
- Crane, T. M., and B. Persohn. 2019a. What’s in a Bantu verb? Actionality in Bantu languages. *Linguistic Typology* 23(2): 303-345.

- Crane, T. M., and B. Persohn. 2019b. A model-theoretic discussion of Bantu actionality. *Africana Linguistica* 25: 27-63.
- Crane, T. M., Gibson, H., and Riedel, K. In progress. Auxiliary Verb Constructions in Southern Bantu. Ms.
- Devos, M. 2014. Motion verbs in Shangaci. In M. Devos and J. van der Wal (eds.), *COME and GO off the beaten grammaticalization path*, Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Devos, M., and J. van der Wal. 2010. 'Go' on a rare grammaticalisation path to focus. In R. Nouwen and J. van Kampen (eds.), *Linguistics in the Netherlands* 27: 45-58. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Devos, M., and D. Van Olmen. 2013. Describing and explaining the variation of Bantu imperatives and prohibitives. *Studies in Language* 37(1): 1-57.
- Doke, C. M. 1927. *Text-book of Zulu Grammar*. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Press.
- Furumoto, M. 2019. -Mala 'finish' derived perfect(ive) prefixes in Unguja dialects of Swahili. *Swahili Forum* 26: 63-88.
- Gibson, H. 2019. The grammaticalisation of verb-auxiliary order in East African Bantu languages. *Studies in Language* 43(1): 37-72.
- Gibson, H. Forthcoming. Auxiliary construction. In L. Marten, N. C. Kula, E. Hurst, and J. Zeller (eds.), *The Oxford guide to the Bantu languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Givón, T. 1979. *On Understanding Grammar*. New York: Academic Press.
- Gunnink, H. 2023. Auxiliary Constructions in Southern Bantu. Paper presented at the BantUGent Research Seminar, 26 January 2023.
- Guérois, R. Forthcoming. Passive constructions. In L. Marten, N. C. Kula, E. Hurst, and J. Zeller (eds.), *The Oxford guide to the Bantu languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Guérois, R., H. Gibson, and B. Persohn. 2021. Associated motion in Bantu languages. In A. Guillaume and H. Koch (eds.), *Associated motion*, 569-610. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Güldemann, T. 1999. The genesis of verbal negation in Bantu and its dependency on functional features of clause types. In J.-M. Hombert and L. Hyman (eds.), *Bantu Historical Linguistics*, 545-587. Stanford: CSLI.
- Güldemann, T. 2003. Grammaticalization. In D. Nurse and G. Philippson (eds.), *The Bantu languages*, 182-194. New York: Routledge.
- Güldemann, T. 2012. Relexicalization within grammatical constructions. In J. van der Auwera and J. Nuyts (eds.), *Grammaticalization and (inter-)subjectification*, 65-80. Brussels: Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten.
- Güldemann, T. 2022. Predicate structure and argument indexing in early Bantu. In K. A. G. Bostoen, G.-M. de Schryver, R. Guérois, and S. Pacchiarotti (eds.), *On reconstructing Proto-Bantu grammar*, 387-421. Berlin: Language Science Press.
- Heine, B. 1993. *Auxiliaries: Cognitive forces and grammaticalization*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Heine, B., and M. Reh. 1984. *Grammaticalization and reanalysis in African languages*. Hamburg: Buske.
- Kawalya, D., G.-M. de Schryver, and K. Bostoen. 2018. Reconstructing the origins of the Luganda (JE15) modal auxiliaries sóból and yînz: A historical-comparative study across the west Nyanza Bantu cluster. *South African Journal of African Languages* 38(1): 13-25.
- Kramer, R. (ed.). 2021. *The Expression of Phasal Polarity in African Languages*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Nicolle, S. 2013. *A grammar of Digo: a Bantu language of Kenya and Tanzania*. Dallas, Texas: SIL International.

- Nurse, D. 2008. *Tense and aspect in Bantu*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nurse, D., and J. R. Watters. 2022. Tense in Proto-Bantu. In K. Bostoen, G.-M. de Schryver, R. Guérois, and S. Pacchiarotti (eds.), *On reconstructing Proto-Bantu grammar*, 73–106. Berlin: Language Science Press.
- Zahran, A. and E.-M. Bloom Ström. 2022. Against expectations – the rise of adverbs in Swahili phasal polarity. *Studies in African Linguistics* 51(2): 294–322.  
<https://doi.org/10.32473/sal.51.2.129687>