

UNPRONOUNCED LOCATIVES IN INVERSION CONSTRUCTIONS

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Bantu languages, which have SVO as their canonical word order, show an interesting **variation in subject inversion constructions**, where the subject appears postverbally. The subject agreement in these constructions uncovers the nature of (null) expletives in presentational and existential constructions.

A first construction is **locative inversion**, illustrated in (1): not only is the logical subject *alendowo* ‘guests’ inverted, but a preverbal locative *kumudzi* ‘to the village’ determines agreement on the verb (*ku-*). This is agreement in noun class, indicated by the noun class number (17) in the gloss.

- (1) ku-mu-dzi ku-na-bwérá a-lendô-wo
 17-3-village 17sm-pst-come 2-visitor-2dem
 ‘to the village came those visitors’
Chichewa (Bresnan&Kanerva 1989)

Second, in an **expletive construction** the subject agreement is not determined by a preverbal element, but appears as ‘default’; see the class 18 adjoined locative and class 17 agreement in (2).

- (2) (mokereke-ng) go-opela basadi
 18-9.church-loc 17sm-sing 2.women
 ‘(in the church) there are women singing’
Tswana (Creissels 2011)

The development of the latter construction from the former provides a nice argument for the analysis of null pronouns as fully specified pronouns that are simply not pronounced (Holmberg 2005). We presume **the presence of a null locative** in this construction that controls subject agreement and that fulfills the requirement that the subject position be filled (the Extended Projection Principle, EPP), much like a silent version of the English expletive ‘there’.

A third type of inversion makes the picture even more interesting, where subject agreement is still with the postverbal subject, as in (3).

- (3) ju-híkítíMarî:a
 1-arrive.perf 1.Maria
 ‘Maria has come’
Matengo (Yoneda 2011)

In this talk I discuss the evidence for and against positing an expletive in these **agreeing inversion constructions** as well, like the null ‘LOC’ suggested for Romance languages (Pinto 1997). This fits in nicely with the idea of expletives as (stage) topics of a sentence (cf. Holmberg & Nikanne 2002). If there is an expletive, how can we explain the agreement with the subject? If not, is the implication necessarily that the subject position is not filled at all (i.e. no universal EPP)?

References

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