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Sebastian Dom, Leonid Kulikov & Koen Bostoen

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INTRODUCTION
Valency-decreasing derivations and quasi-middles in Bantu: A typological perspective

Sebastian Dom,[1]* Leonid Kulikov[2] and Koen Bostoen[1]

[1]Department of Languages and Cultures, Ghent University, Belgium
[2]Department of Linguistics, Ghent University, Belgium
*Corresponding author, email: sebastian.dom@ugent.be

Introduction

This special issue, titled 'Valency-decreasing derivations and (quasi-)middles in Bantu' is a follow-up on the workshop 'Verbal derivation and verb extensions in Bantu', which was held during the 6th International Conference on Bantu Languages in Helsinki in 2016. In the same year, we presented a paper 'Middle voice in Bantu' at the workshop 'Correlations of valency-changing operations within and across languages' during the 46th Poznán Linguistics Meeting. It was published in the workshop proceedings as a special issue of *Lingua Posnaniensis* (Dom et al. 2016). In this article, we argue that the notion of the middle domain as a conceptual space is relevant for the description of a number of verbal derivational morphemes commonly found in Bantu languages. The affixes discussed in Dom et al. (2016) are (reflexes of) the Proto-Bantu reflexive **(j)i-*, the neuter **-ɪk*, the positional **-am*, the associative **-an*, and the intransitive separative **-uk*, the terms for these affixes being adopted from Schadeberg (2003). In the linguistic literature on Bantu languages, the number of descriptive studies dedicated to some of these affixes, such as the neuter, positional or intransitive separative, is rather low compared to other Bantu morphological derivational categories such as the applicative, causative, passive and associative. Each of the articles in this volume focuses on one of these valency-decreasing suffixes insufficiently studied in Bantu scholarship, more specifically on the reflexes of the neuter **-ɪk* (contributions by Bernander, Chavula, and Jerro) and the intransitive separative **-uk* (Guérois and Bostoen).

This introductory article is structured as follows. In the second section, we give a general and broad characterisation of the concept 'middle voice', and elaborate briefly how we envision it as a useful concept for the analysis of derivational verbal morphology in Bantu. In the third section, we present an overview of the contributions of the special issue through a state-of-the-art discussion of the neuter suffix **-ɪk*.

Middle from a cross-linguistic perspective

Middle voice is a notoriously complex, vague and ill-definable linguistic category, which remains the subject of vivid debate in typological and general linguistic scholarship (e.g. Kazenin 2001: 923; Shibatani 2004: 1149). There exists a rich literature on the topic, where several aspects of the middle voice are discussed and elaborate semantic definitions, often differing from one author to the other, are offered. In spite of the considerable variety of approaches, two main types of the usages of the term 'middle' can be gleaned from linguistic works (see also Manney 1998: 16):

(a) Middle as a *verbal (morphological)* category which is encoded with verbal affixes or free morphemes (typically, clitics), belonging to a broad domain of voice-related categories and thus typically referred to as 'middle voice' (see e.g. Kulikov 2013);
(b) Middle as a *lexical* category, encompassing a complex conceptual space which includes multiple distinct but related 'situation types' (Kemmer 1993) or semantic (lexical) classes.[1]

The term 'middle (voice)' originates in the Indo-European linguistic tradition, eventually going back to Ancient Greek grammatical terminology. In early descriptions of individual Bantu languages, heavily influenced by the grammars of (Indo-)European languages, the term 'middle voice' is not infrequent. For example, Bentley (1887: 621–627) very precisely and clearly describes a specific verbal category for Kisikongo (H16a), labelling it as 'middle voice' with a surprisingly apt definition:

> There is a third voice to nearly all Kongo verbs, which is neither active, transitive nor passive, but between the two, since it conveys the idea of action without the need of an object to complete the idea; as :–
>   **O nlele ubakuka**: The cloth tears.
> At the same time it expresses the idea of an active condition, or state, which is attributed to the subject itself, and is not regarded as being suffered or caused by anything exterior to the subject. It is therefore neither active transitive nor passive; but possessing an idea half way between the two, has been called by grammarians the Middle voice. A verb in that voice, or of that nature or form, is Active Intransitive (Bentley 1887: 621; bold in original).

However, as awareness has grown of the considerable structural differences between the Bantu and Indo-European linguistic types, the term 'middle' went out of use in Bantu scholarship. No wonder that the relevance of this category for the grammatical description of Bantu languages is often considered with scepticism (although see Creissels 2006: 36–37).

Before proceeding to the issues of Bantu grammar and verbal derivation, it is useful to outline the general framework and approach which we will follow to capture the main relevant features of the categories in question and to give basic definitions of the relevant notions. To begin with, a few brief remarks on the cross-linguistic validity of the very notion of the middle (voice) are in place. In spite of Haspelmath's justified scepticism and theoretical problems related to an attempt at a cross-linguistic definition and characterisation of the middle (see, in particular, Haspelmath 1995: 373), there is no doubt that the category of middle, however ill-definable it might appear, is no more and no less part of Universal Grammar than the categories of passive, reflexive, number, or case. Thus, there are categories of middle in Ancient Greek and Vedic Sanskrit (both Indo-European), because there are sets of functions (on which see below), not identical but similar to each other, regularly encoded by a particular morphological device (type of inflection). Furthermore, it is well known that similar categories are also found beyond the Indo-European language family. Thus, there is a middle category in Georgian and other Kartvelian languages, where we likewise find a set of functions regularly encoded by a particular morpheme (verbal prefix *i-*).[2] Likewise, there is a category of middle in Bella Coola (Salishan), encoded with the suffix *-m* (see Beck 2000). The linguistic categories referred to as 'middle' in Ancient Greek, Vedic Sanskrit, Georgian or Bella Coola are of course not (and cannot be) identical, but arguably share a significant number of features and can, at any rate, be compared and, possibly, identified cross-linguistically. Similarly, an unbiased approach should not rule out the relevance of a verbal category comparable with the middle of Indo-European, Georgian, etc. in yet another non-Indo-European language family, such as Bantu.

We neither intend to give here a detailed overview of the literature on the middle voice, nor will we offer a cross-linguistically valid description of this category. Rather, we will provide a general characterisation of the concept in a way that we envision to be helpful for the semantic analysis and description of valency-decreasing verbal affixes in Bantu languages. To begin with, we first set out some basic concepts in which middle voice is elucidated, essentially drawing upon the theoretical framework and definitions outlined in Kulikov (2011; 2013).

We describe voice as the regular encoding of a syntactic pattern (= diathesis in the terminology of Leningrad/St. Petersburg Typology Group) through verbal morphology (Kulikov 2011: 372). A syntactic pattern (diathesis) is understood as the mapping of semantic roles onto syntactic arguments. Voice alternations, then, amount to modifications of the basic syntactic pattern of a verb. One can distinguish between voice alternations which merely change the mapping relationship of semantic roles onto syntactic arguments (voices *sensu stricto*), and those that involve a change in the number of semantic roles involved in the situation (voices *sensu latiore*). Usually, a particular

voice-marking morpheme encodes a group, or *cluster*, of related syntactic patterns, rather than one single syntactic pattern.

The middle voice is a typical example of such a cluster, which normally involves some or all of the following functions, many (but not all) of which impose valency-reducing and/or intransitivising phenomena: passive, anticausative, reflexive, reciprocal, antipassive, conversive, and autobenefactive. These and other functions of the middle voice can also be represented as a conceptual space (Croft et al. 1987; Kemmer 1993), or as a complex network of middle voice functions in a particular language (for an example of Ancient Greek, see Allan 2003: 119).

Given the complex nature of the category of middle, definable in terms of comparable but not identical sets of closely related functions, it seems appropriate to use prototype theory in order to elucidate canonical and marginal instances of the middle in the languages of the world. Thus, as we argue in Dom et al. (2016), when a verbal derivational morpheme encodes more than one function of the middle cluster, which do not, however, encompass the major part of this domain, it is appropriate to use the term 'quasi-middle'. In most Bantu languages, this holds in particular for the verbal morphemes ('extensions') that go back to the Proto-Bantu (PB) suffix *-ɪk*, traditionally called 'neuter' in Bantu scholarship.

Overview and discussion of the contributions

The articles in this special issue discuss a range of issues which are relevant for both morphological and lexical usages of the term 'middle (voice)'. They all deal with verbal suffixes of the form *-Vk*, i.e. reflexes of either the PB neuter suffix *-ɪk* or the intransitive separative *-ʊk.* These suffixes have received considerably less attention than other Bantu verbal derivational morphemes. The studies collected in this special issue are therefore important contributions to a better understanding of Bantu grammar, morphosyntax, and valency-changing derivational morphology. Not only do the authors investigate these suffixes in Bantu languages for which in-depth descriptions are lacking, but they also offer new insights which highlight both Bantu-specific properties of this derivational morphology and offer cross-linguistically valid generalisations about the corresponding categories, analysing this linguistic material in a typological perspective.

In Dom et al. (2016: 132–135), we present a cross-Bantu typology of construction types in which a verb derived with a reflex of the PB neuter suffix *-ɪk* is used. An overview of the typology of construction types is presented in Table 1, to which the impersonal passive is added as yet another type of construction not discussed in Dom et al. (2016).

The dotted lines in Table 1 indicate the grouping of specific constructions into larger clusters. The first cluster centres around two basic intransitivising voice-related categories, the anticausative and passive. The second cluster involves patient-oriented potentials expressing dynamic participant-internal possibility (van der Auwera and Plungian 1998: 80; Palmer 2001: 9–10). The third and last group of constructions is restricted to perception verbs. In contrast to the other two clusters, constructions (vii) and (viii) are rarely reported or discussed in the literature on the neuter suffix.

Regarding the first cluster of construction types, it has only recently been brought to light that in certain Bantu languages the constructional range of neuter verbs has been extended to include productive passives, including impersonal ones (Chavula 2016). In this special issue, the phenomenon is further explored in two contributions. In the article by Chavula, the author builds on her previous findings of the reflexes of the neuter *-ɪk* used in passive constructions in Tumbuka (N21) (Chavula 2016: 65–87) and illustrates how the same evolution has occurred in Tonga (N15). Bernander's description of the neuter in Manda (N11) in this volume shows that in this language too the suffix is in competition with the reflex of the PB passive suffix *-ʊ* as a productive verbal passive marker. He furthermore presents a detailed comparative typology of passive constructions in the languages of the Lake Nyasa area, and offers a compelling diachronic scenario for the evolution of the functional range of the neuter to include the productive passive.

The Bantu languages in which this change has occurred follow a cross-linguistically common pattern in which anticausative and/or middle-related verbal morphology is used in passive constructions (Haspelmath 1990). Within Bantu, the best-known example of such an evolution is the one undergone by reflexes of PB *-am* in certain western Bantu languages (Grégoire 2003:

Table 1: Cross-Bantu overview of attested construction types in which a neuter verb is used

Construction type	Example
i) anticausative	(1) Bena (G63)[3] (Morrison 2011: 368)
	u-tu-bihi *tu-haa-deeny-**ih**-ile* *igolo*
	AUG13-13-tree SM13-PST-break-NEUT-PFV yesterday
	'The twig broke yesterday.'
ii) agentless passive	(2) Chewa (N31b) (Dubinsky and Simango 1996: 751)
	m-bale *zi-na-tsuk-**ik**-a* (*ndi *Naphiri*)
	10-plate SM10-PST-wash-NEUT-FV by Naphiri
	'The plates were washed (*by Naphiri).'
iii) agentive passive	(3) Tumbuka (N21) (Chavula 2016: 65)
	n-duna *zi-ka-cem-**ek**-a* *na* *Chikulamayembe*
	10-minister SM10-PST-call-NEUT-FV by Chikulamayembe
	'The ministers were called for by Chikulamayembe.'
iv) impersonal passive	(4) Tumbuka (N21) (Chavula 2016: 78)
	*kw-a-wumb-**ik**-a* *mu-phika*
	SM17-PRF-mould-NEUT-FV 3-pot
	'There has been moulded a pot.'
v) potential passive	(5) Swahili (G42) (Seidl and Dimitriadis 2003: 254)
	Ø-godoro *li-na-lal-**ik**-a*
	5-mattress SM5-PRS-sleep-NEUT-FV
	'This mattress can be slept on.'
vi) facilitative	(6) Tswana (S31) (Creissels 2002: 403)
	Mae a thubega motlhofo.
	màí *á-thúb-**ɛχ**-à* *m̉ɵ̀tɬhɵ̀fɵ̀*
	6.egg SM6-break-NEUT-FV easily
	'The eggs break easily.'
vii) stimulus-oriented perception	(7) Xhosa (S41) (Andrason and Dlali 2017: 406)
	USipho *u-khangel-**ek**-a* *ediniwe*
	1a.Sipho SM1-look_at-NEUT-FV being_tired
	'Sipho seems to be tired.'
viii) evidential	(8) Logooli (JE41) (Gluckman and Bowler 2016: 1040)
	*e-hol-**ek**-a* *kuresa* *vu-geni* *vu-ar-ɛ* *vu-hare*
	SM9-hear-NEUT-FV like 14-party SM14-COP-FV NCP14-good
	'It sounds like the party was fun.'
	(Indirect evidentiality through hearsay)

365; Schadeberg 2003: 75–76, Dom et al. 2016: 135–137). The positional, as the suffix is called by Schadeberg (2003: 75), is usually attached to verb stems denoting middle situation types such as position (of body or object), spontaneously occurring situations and/or their resultant state, motion, emotion and cognition (Dom et al. 2016: 135–136). In a wide area around the middle and lower Congo River, reflexes of the PB suffix **-am* are furthermore also used productively as the passive suffix, to the detriment of the original passive suffix **-ibʊ/-ʊ*. The article by Guérois and Bostoen in this volume describes how in Cuwabo (P34) another quasi-middle suffix, i.e. the intransitive separative *-uw*, has been recruited as the verbal marker of the productive passive construction. In all these cases, the degree to which the reinterpretation of the quasi-middle suffix as a passive marker in the grammar of a particular language has progressed can be measured by the productivity of other, competing passive constructions. The contributions by Chavula, Bernander, and Guérois and Bostoen illustrate how this works out in Tumbuka, Tonga, Manda and Cuwabo, and offer some interesting variation.

Although it is possible to draw up a cross-Bantu typological overview as presented in Table 1, individual constructions may considerably differ from each other, also varying from one language to another, as far as their semantic and syntactic properties are concerned. The anticausative and agentless passive only differ from each other semantically in that the former typically construes the

situation denoted by the verb as occurring spontaneously, whereas such a construal is not associated with the agentless passive construction. The anticausative construction therefore posits a specific selectional restriction on the type of verb it accepts, namely only change-of-state verbs of which the state-change can occur by itself and does not have to be brought about by a prototypical agent. However, both the anticausative and agentless passive construction often show identical syntactic behaviour when compared to the passive construction in which the verb is marked by a reflex of the PB suffix *-ʊ/-ibʊ*. The following three syntactic behavioural properties are most often discussed in the general literature on anticausatives and in the Bantu-specific literature on the difference between the neuter and passive suffixes.

(i) Oblique agentive phrases are allowed in *-ʊ/-ibʊ* passive constructions (9b) but not in *-ɪk* constructions (9a).

       Ndebele (S44) (Khumalo 2009: 166, 168)
(9a)   *isi-valo*   *sa-val-**ek**-a*   (*ngu   Thabo)*
       7-door   SM7-shut-NEUT-FV   by   Thabo
       'The door closes (*by Thabo).'
(9b)   *isi-valo*   *sa-val-**w**-a*   (ngu   Thabo)*
       7-door   SM7-shut-PASS-FV   by   Thabo
       'The door was closed (by Thabo).'

(ii) Instrumental phrases are allowed in *-ʊ/-ibʊ* passive constructions (10b) but not in *-ɪk* constructions (10a).

       Chewa (N31b) (Dubinsky and Simango 1996: 752)
(10a) **kalata*   *i-na-lemb-**ek**-a*   *ndi*   *pensulo*
       letter   SM9-PST-write-NEUT-FV   with   pencil
(10b) *kalata*   *i-na-lemb-**edw**-a*   *ndi*   *pensulo*
       letter   SM9-PST-write-PASS-FV   with   pencil
       'The letter was written with a pencil.'

(iii) Agent-oriented adverbs and purpose clauses are allowed in *-ʊ/-ibʊ* passive constructions ((11b); (12b)) but not in *-ɪk* constructions ((11a); (12a)).

       Ndebele (S44) (Khumalo 2009: 168)
(11a) *isi-valo*   *sa-val-**ek**-a*   (*ngabomo)*
       7-door   SM7-shut-NEUT-FV   deliberately
       *'The door closed deliberately.'
(11b) *isi-valo*   *sa-val-**w**-a*   *ngabomo*
       7-door   SM7-shut-PASS-FV   deliberately
       'The door was closed deliberately.'

       Chewa (N31b) (Mchombo 1993: 17)
(12a) **mphâtso* *zi-na-sókónez-**ek**-a*   *kutí*   *pa-sa-khál-é*   *ku-kondĕr-a*
       10.gift   SM10-PST-mix-NEUT-FV   that   SM16-NEG-be-SBJV   15-favor-FV
(12b) *mphâtso* *zi-na-sókónez-**ĕdw**-a*   *kutí*   *pa-sa-khál-é*   *ku-kondĕr-a*
       10.gift   SM10-PST-mix-PASS-FV   that   SM16-NEG-be-SBJV   15-favor-FV
       'The gifts were mixed up so that there should be no favouritism.'

   However, these syntactic behavioural properties are not as straightforward as they are sometimes presented in the literature. For example, in some cases *-ɪk* constructions do allow oblique prepositional phrases, as illustrated for different Bantu languages in examples (13) to (16).

(13)   Ndonga (R22) (Fivaz 1986: 111, in Fleisch 2005: 123)
       *ókinó   ndjoká   o-y-a-tál-**ik**-á   ká-á-ntu   a-yéhe*
       9.film   DEM9   AFF-SM9-PRF-watch-NEUT-FV   INSTR-2-person   PP2-many
       'This film is seen by many people.'

(14)   Matengo (N13) (van der Wal 2015: 86)
       *mwaáná   ju-jógw-**eek**-a   na   Álison*
       1.child   SM1-hear-NEUT-FV   by   Alison
       'The child has been heard by Alison.'

(15)   Xhosa (S41) (Jokweni 1989: 52, in Andrason and Dlali 2017: 398)
       *umama   u-bolek-**ek**-e   imali   nga   ba-phati*
       1a.mother SM1-lend-NEUT-PRF   9.money   COP   2-manager
       bebhanki   yi   ntobeko   yakhe
       POSS2.9.bank   COP   9.meekness   her
       'Mother has been lent money by the bank managers because of her meekness.'

(16)   Zombo (H16h) (Fernando 2017: 140)
       *Ø-yaka   ki-wul-**ik**-idi   mu   Ø-tembo*
       7-wall   SM7-break-NEUT-PST   LOC18   7-wind
       'The wall broke from/by the wind.'

These examples illustrate that a variety of factors have to be taken into account when investigating reflexes of PB *-ɪk* constructions or constructions involving another Bantu quasi-middle affix in a specific language. One should, in particular: (i) look at different semantic verb types, following a fine-grained semantic classification of verbs; (ii) consider various semantic micro-roles such as prototypical agent, experiencer, non-volitional causer, and instrument; and (iii) control each of these factors for the full range of construction types for which the neuter or another valency-decreasing affix is used in an individual Bantu language. At present, the data is still quite scarce, with only a few examples from a small number of different languages illustrating some aspects of the variables which should be taken into account.

Another major variable that plays a role in distinguishing between different constructions marked by *-ɪk* is grammatical aspect. Although Schadeberg (2003: 75) briefly hints at this when writing that 'the difference between the potential and the process-or-state interpretations may be linked to the aspectual meaning of the particular inflectional category of the verbal form', the role of aspect is pretty much uncharted territory in the literature on the neuter. It is well-known that most Bantu languages have a complex system of lexical and grammatical aspect categories, and that the intricate relationship between these is used to construe various aspectual situation types such as states, state-changes, and simple or result-oriented activities (see, for example, Botne and Kershner 2008; Crane 2011; Persohn 2017; forthcoming; Crane and Persohn forthcoming). The article by Jerro in this volume offers a detailed account of the lexical-aspectual semantics of neuter verb stems and their interaction with the grammatical-aspect system of Rwanda (DJ61). Jerro describes how a neuter verb stem can be used to construe three aspectual situation types in Rwanda, namely the potential, stative and inchoative, when combined with different tense-aspect constructions. The recent insights and advances in our knowledge on lexical aspect and its interaction with grammatical-aspect systems in Bantu have broadened the scope of investigation enormously. This holds particularly with respect to the semantic characteristics of the derivation of *-ɪk* in individual Bantu languages. The study by Jerro in this volume thus opens up an entirely new dimension in research on the neuter, delineating the area where more work needs to be done in the future.

In summary, this special issue offers a coherent collection of articles on valency-reducing verbal morphology in Bantu, focusing particularly on two under-described suffixes, the reflexes of PB *-ɪk* and *-ʊk*, in five Bantu languages. These contributions fill several gaps in the grammatical

descriptions of the languages concerned, and illustrate through specific case studies typologically interesting morphosyntactic variation across Bantu.

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3, …	noun class number
AUG	augment
COP	copula
DEM	demonstrative
FV	final vowel
INSTR	instrumental
LOC	locative noun class prefix
NCP	nominal concord prefix
NEG	negation
NEUT	neuter
PASS	passive
PB	Proto-Bantu
PFV	perfective
POSS	possessive
PP	pronominal concord prefix
PRF	perfect
PRS	present
PST	past
SBJV	subjunctive
SM	subject marker

Notes

[1] We do not discuss here yet another usage of the term 'middle' that is employed to refer to a particular voice-related, valency-reducing category, sometimes considered as a specific variety of passive. It is also known as 'potential (passive)' (see, among many others, Shibatani 1985; Haspelmath 1990; Narrog 2010) or 'facilitative' (e.g. Kaufmann 2007; Holvoet et al. 2015; Ahn and Yap 2017) as in French *La musique s'entend bien* 'the music is well heard'. Within the formalist (minimalist etc.) approach, this category is labelled 'middle' for labile verbs, as in the case of English *This book reads well* (see, e.g., Kulikov 2011: 375–376). Although the category of 'potential (passive)' does belong to the conceptual domain of the middle as defined above, using the term 'middle' to refer to this particular category alone (rather than to the entire domain) seems somewhat confusing and will not be further pursued here.

[2] See Lacroix (2012), with a useful discussion on the universal character of the category of middle.

[3] These codes refer to Guthrie's (1971) referential classification of the Bantu languages, as updated in Maho (2009).

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