



Philosophische Fakultät



CCLS: Ken Safir (Rutgers University)

(co-authors, Justine Sikuku, Moi University – Joseph Wanyonyi, Bomet University College)

Embedded assertions in Bantu and complement clause typology

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A number of Bantu languages have a morphologically distinct clause type that commits the utterer of the sentence to the truth of the complement clause proposition. In an example like (1), the utterer of the sentence is not only committed to the truth that Aya told Marya something (the main clause assertion), but also that the proposition that Aya conveyed to Marya, which Aya may or may not believe to be true, is however, a true proposition in the world of the utterer. (The parenthetical in the translation asserts this, but there is no parenthetical in the Kiswahili example).

- 1) Aya a-li-mw-amb-ia Marya **a-ka-m-la** **samaki**
Aya SM1-PST-OM1-tell-FV Mary SM1-ACT-OM1-eat 9fish
'Aya told Mary to eat fish (and she did eat fish).' [Kiswahili]

The long low vowel that appears in the morphological slot where tense normally appears is what Safir, Sikuku and Baker (2020) have called “actual clause morphology” (ACT) in Lubukusu. Almost any non-factive verb (e.g., verbs describing speech, desire, epistemic commitment, etc.) can take an actual clause complement in the languages that have this morphology. New research across several Bantu languages shows that the availability of actual morphology in complement clauses depends on the existence of what has been described in the Bantu literature as “narrative” or “consecutive” marking, which is used in descriptions of sequences of events. Based on our analysis of actual morphology as assertive, we explain why these two usages are related and why factive verbs cannot have actual clause complements.