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en Morphosyntaxe et Sémantique*



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SOMMAIRE**N'GUESSAN KOUADIO et WOBE Jean-Herve,**

La Virgule : de la syntaxe à la sémantique des affiches publicitaires
en Côte d'Ivoire..... 7

SILUE SASSONGO Jacques,

La contraction et l'ellipse dans une perspective énonciative
et sociolinguistique..... 27

HABECHI Sameh,

Evolution dans les constructions concurrentes
du complément du verbe..... 47

KPANGUI Kouassi,

L'absence de déterminant en français de Côte d'Ivoire..... 61

GNATO Sia Modeste,

Analyse morphosyntaxique et énonciative des phrases averbales
dans *Les soleils des indépendances* d'Ahmadou Kourouma.....73

KOUASSI Roland Kouakou,

La parataxe orale dans la structuration textuelle
de *Voyage au bout de la nuit* de Céline..... 93

KEI Joachim,

Étude grammaticale des marques de politesse et leur pertinence
dans le théâtre racinien..... 115

NDONGO IBARA Yvon-Pierre,

A morphosyntactic analysis of the adverb of degree
in some congolese languages..... 131

LIAGRO RABÉ Charles,

La problématique du langage hypocoristique
dans *la ronde des jours* de Bernard Dadié..... 149

ODJOLA Régina Véronique,

La taxinomie des motos en français parlé
au Burkina Faso..... 161

DIAKHOUMPA Birahim,	
Fonctionnement syntaxique de quelques formes elliptiques sur des éléments de corpus : étude descriptive.....	185
ILOKI Bellarmin Etienne,	
<i>Le bloc-notes</i> de François Mauriac ou l'écriture de l'instant.....	207
BALIMA Dimitri Régis,	
Objets connectés et mutations dans les deux principales villes du Burkina Faso : Ouagadougou et Bobo Dioulasso.....	227
NIAMKEY Aka,	
La communication sociale entre persuasion et engagement.....	245
GBAKRÉ Andoh Jean-Marie,	
De l'argumentativité des opérateurs « tu vois » et « tu sais » en interaction.....	255
SIMEU Simplicie,	
Le marqueur discursif <i>là</i> en français parlé au Cameroun.....	269
KANAZOE Sénon,	
Un problème de morphosyntaxe chez des stagiaires burkinabè	291
Avis aux auteurs.....	115

A MORPHOSYNTACTIC ANALYSIS OF THE ADVERB OF DEGREE IN SOME CONGOLESE LANGUAGES

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Résumé : Cet article examine l'analyse morphosyntaxique des adverbes de degré dans certaines langues bantu parlées au Congo-Brazzaville. Il ressort de la discussion que l'intensité exprimée par les adverbes de degré peut être basée sur le lexique ou sur la prosodie. Au niveau lexical, il se dégage deux degrés dans la taxonomie en termes très élevé et moins élevé; tandis au niveau de la prosodie l'intensité s'exprime via l'allongement de la voyelle de la racine du mot pour signaler un rang plus élevé en intensité. De plus, l'expression de l'adverbe de degré peut être justifiée par un adjectif modifiant un autre adjectif. Cette occurrence va du plus grande au plus petit. De plus, les adverbes de degré peuvent impliquer une verbalisation ou une nominalisation de l'intensité. L'opération de fusion entre l'adverbe de degré et sa tête démontre que l'on peut aboutir à un accord sur la position de l'adverbe de degré inférieur, c'est-à-dire avant la tête, alors que la position de l'adverbe de degré supérieur est soit avant la tête, soit après la tête.

Mots clés : Adverbes de degré, morphosyntaxe, langues congolaises

Abstract: This paper scrutinizes the morphosyntax analysis of degree adverbs of some Bantu languages spoken in Congo-Brazzaville. It comes out from discussion that the intensity expressed via degree adverbs can be either lexically based or prosodic based. At lexical level, there are two degrees notably top and bottom line taxonomy; whilst the prosody via the lengthening of vowel of the base can signal higher rank in intensity. Moreover, the expression of bottom line degree adverb can be substantiated by an adjective modifying another adjective. This occurrence follows the big to the small shape. Furthermore, the top degree adverb can imply a verbalization or a nominalization of the intensity. The merger operation between the degree adverb and its head shows that there is an agreement regarding the lower degree adverb position, that is, before the head, whereas the top degree adverb position is either before the head or after the head.

Keywords: Degree adverb, adjective, morphosyntax, Congolese languages

0. Introduction

This study aims to undertake a morpho-syntactic analysis of the intensifier *very* driving data from some Congolese languages¹ amongst which Laali, Engbengbel, Likuba, Vili, and Lingala. This analysis concerns initially the identification of the lexemes that denote *very* vs *fairly* in these languages and finally highlight their distributional properties. As a matter of fact, this research paper addresses the following questions:

- (i) What is the equivalent of the adverb of intensity *very/fairly* in the above mentioned languages?
- (ii) What are the distributional characteristics of this adverb?
- (iii) Is the adverb of intensity category based or cross-category worldwide?

In this connection, the first section will provide an overview of adverb cross linguistically, the last section presents the way intensity is expressed in these Congolese languages. This study is carried out within the generative framework developed by Noam Chomsky.

1. Adverb overview

Adverbs are amongst the different parts of speech whose characteristics are fundamentally summarized by the term modification. As a result, the adverb can modify words other than a noun. In the words of P. Larreya and C. Rivière (2005, p.277) '*Les adverbes sont des mots invariables qui peuvent porter sur une phrase entière, sur le verbe, sur les adjectifs, sur d'autres adverbes et aussi sur des déterminants, pronoms et groups nominaux.*'

This word class has a large number of subclasses which describe either the manner (adverbs of manner), the frequency (adverbs of frequency), the place (adverbs of place), the degree (adverbs of degree), the time (adverbs of time), the mood (adverbs of mood), the opinions (adverbs of viewpoints) as illustrated below:

- (1) a- He repaired the car ingeniously.
- b- He prays at home twice a day.
- c- Tchikapika is near the Alima River.
- d- My kids certainly remember this film.
- e- Personally, I don't believe in religions.

¹ I owe special thanks to people who provide me with relevant information to carry out this investigation. Ndounia Krishna Amen (Engbengbel native speaker), Ndouli Guy Blaise (native speaker of Vili language), Mberi Ngakala Perrin Robson (native speaker of Laali language), Tuseku Mutsipayi Bebeta (native speaker of Lingala, RD Congo), and Ngouma Damase (Likuka native speaker).

f- Masters act fairly.

Moreover, there are three canonical positions adverbs are supposed to occur within a syntactic structure, namely front position, mid position, and end position. Ndongo Ibara (2009, p.222) argues that:

- (i) Peripheral adverbs, i.e., adverbs that modify the whole sentence. They can stand as connective devices in a discourse context or linking words. These features can explain why they occur either in front, mid or final sentence position;
- (ii) Integrated adverbs, i.e., adverbs that either modify the verbs or occur in the sentence internal position.

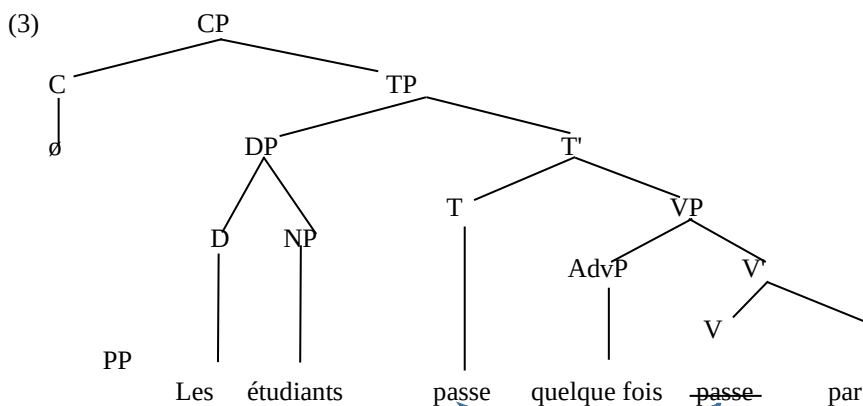
Based on examples (1), one can come to the conclusion that the adverb ‘personally’ in (1e) for example instances a case of peripheral adverb, whilst ‘fairly’ in (1f) shows a case of integrated adverbs. The question that immediately crops out concern the relationship between the different positions of the adverbs and the meaning of the sentence. Consider:

(2) a- **Personally**, I don’t believe in religions.

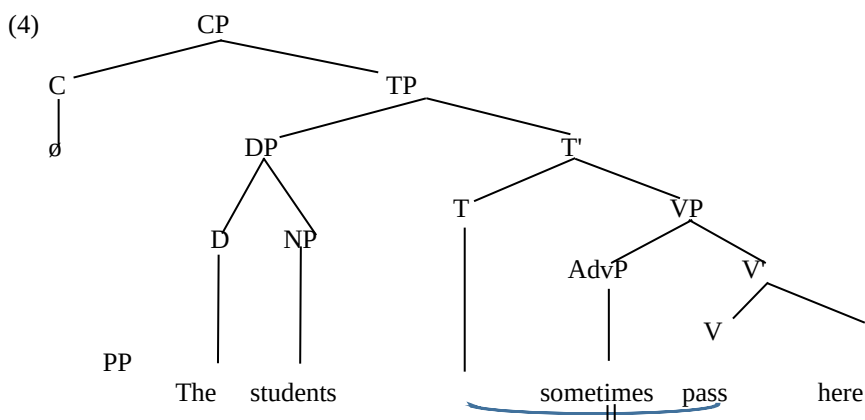
b- I **Personally** don’t believe in religions

c- I don’t believe in religions **personally**.

Based on the semantics of adverbs, G. Leech and J. Svartvik (1975: 197) assert that *‘Adverbs tell something about the action, happening, or the state described by the rest of the sentence. For example, the time when it happened, the place where it happened, or the manner in which it happened’*. This assumption is based on the traditional grammar information referring to the general information provided by adverbs. Yet, if one observes the examples in (2), it is obvious that this semantic information does not provide enough assistance to get the core meaning because these three sentences will look like simple paraphrases, what misses some subtlety. As result, I am going to consider two assumptions supported by Chomskian generative grammar (N. Chomsky 1995, A. Radford 2009) and C. Laenzlinger (2006). According to generative approach, the position of words in a sentence obeys some constraints dictated by phi-features. Comparing French and English languages based on that issue, the conclusion is that the phi-features are stronger in French than in English to extend that T always attracts the verb below and under V-VP in order to appear under T. To put things quite slight differently, the application of attract closest principle distinguishes French from English as adverbs always follows verbs in French, whilst except auxiliaries, adverbs precede verbs in English. I use tree diagrams to show this operation.



ici



It appears from the trees diagrams (3 for French) and (4 for English) that the verbs make the movement in French illustrated by the arrow whereas the same movement is blocked in English. The movement and non-movement of the verb either in French or English is structural, but not contentive. What this means is that the movement does not say something on the meaning of the sentence, but it only justifies the position of words within a sentence. To explain the link between the position and the meaning, we need to consider C. Laenzlinger

(2006). It comes out from C. Laenzlinger (op.cit) that the position of words within a sentence is determined by the information curve. He assumes that

L'information non marquée a le rang informationnel le plus bas, alors que l'information marquée (p.ex. adverbe préverbal, constituant en fin de phrase) a un poids plus élevé...Les éléments les plus proéminents sont réalisés aux périphéries de la phrase, alors que les éléments les moins proéminents se trouvent plutôt au centre de la phrase.

(C. Laenzlinger, op. cit., p.63)

Laenzlinger admits that all words in a sentence do not play the same role as well as do not have the same value. As a result, it is worth claiming that the position of adverbs in a sentence is the immediate consequence of the interface syntax-pragmatics or rather syntax-Information structure. In other words, it is the contextual thought of the speaker-hearer that determines the position of word in a syntactic unit. In connection with adverb distributional features, it will be argued that the front and end position represent the preeminence of the information the adverb conveys. This means that the front and the end position of adverbs indicate emphasis and lead to assuming that the adverb has some inherent strength that affects the information which takes a form, which is the reflection of the thinking. In fact, syntax shows or mirrors the mind representations through a given structure that corroborates with it.

The ensuing lines introduce briefly an account of degree adverbs. M. Hewings (2002, p.183), writes '*Degree adverbs can be used before adjectives, verbs, or other adverbs to give information about the extent or degree of something*'. This means that degree adverbs provide information about the strength and intensity describing how something happens. As degree is not univocal, there are scales or layers about intensity which I labeled in (5).

(5) degree adverb chart

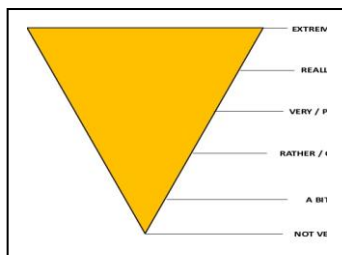
N°	Degree scales	Sample examples
1.	Weak	Slightly, a bit, not at all, etc.
2.	Medium	Rather, fairly, pretty, quite, etc.
3.	Strong	Extremely, completely, totally, absolutely, very, etc.

It is worth stressing that belonging in the same grade of adverbs is not synonym to sharing the same meaning. As a result, when I say, 'Tom is *fairly* young to be

a husband', this does not mean that 'Tom is *rather* young to be a husband'. In the first sentence, it is used to mean that Tom is not too old to be a husband, whereas in the second sentence, Tom looks young to be a husband. In addition to this meaning, P. Larreya and C. Rivière points out another interesting argument supporting the flexibility and shift feature of adverb meaning in connection to stress. They write:

Par ailleurs, son sens peut varier de façon nette en fonction du schéma intonatif utilisé, et cela dans les deux variétés de l'anglais : it's 'quite $\searrow$ GOOD! est un compliment ou du moins un encouragement, alors que it's $\searrow$ QUITE $\nearrow$ GOOD! sous-entend ça paraît être mieux. (P. Larreya and C. Rivière, op. cit., p.286)

The following schematize the semantic grades of degree adverbs, but this is about general information which can change based on the information structure. (6)



Finally, if adverbs are in general threefold properties in connection to their distributional aspects, this story cannot be told about degree adverbs. Degree adverbs can be compared to bound morphemes in morphology. This means that they cannot occur alone in a structure, they are true dependent words which require the presence of its head word. This justifies the oddness of the examples in (7).

*(7) a-Jackson is extremely.

b-Cena is very

c-Caramen is really.

d-Pat and Tom are quite

e- Tim and Jason are not very.

The ungrammaticality of the examples in (7) can be accounted of by the absence of the adjectives which should be intensified using these adverbs of degree. Next,

even though these adverbs can occur with these degree adverbs, if they are not adjacent, these sentences should be ungrammatical. Consider:

(8) a-Jackson is extremely skillful.

*b-Extremely Jackson is skillful

c- Cena is very strong.

*d- very Cena is strong.

*e- Cena very is strong.

f- Jerry often beats Tom.

g- Sometimes, Kim lies Robson.

In the light of examples (8) above, some distributional changes of adverbs of degree lead to sentence ill-formedness, hence ungrammatical. The examples (8b, 8d, 8e) are ungrammatical for two reasons which are summarized by degree adverb position in a sentence. If in (8f) and (8g), frequency adverb can occur either at the beginning of a sentence or in mid position before ordinary verbs, the same positions cannot be occupied by degree adverbs, hence justifying the oddness of (8b, 8d, 8e). In this connection degree adverbs differ from other adverbs in terms of distributional properties. In fact, adverbs of degree generally occur before the head they modify only.

2. Degree adverbs in some Congolese languages

This section is devoted to analysis of degree adverbs in a sample of Congolese languages to determine their morphology, their category, and their distributional properties. In order to better present degree adverbs in Congolese languages, I am going to provide 3 examples which summarize this issue based on distributional properties.

(9) a-Tààtà	ngo	obèèlè	a-li	Laali
father	Very	Ill	he-be	
'Father is very ill'				

b- Tààtà	mwa	obèèlè	a-li
Father	Quite	Ill	he-be
'Father is quite ill'			

c- Bokilo a-lowā likuba malaamu **Likuba**
 Bokilo he-speak Likuba Good
 Bokilo speaks Likuba very well.

d- Bokilo a-lowā Likuba **mwa** malamu
 Bokilo he-speak Likuba Fairly good
 Bokilo speaks Likuba fairly well.
 e- Bokilo a-lowā Likuba **malamu** **mayele** **te**
 Bokilo he-speak Likuba Good intelligence not
 Bokilo speaks Likuba extremely well.

f- Ndounia a-yinh Engbengbel **Ban** ngèsè
Engbengbel
 Ndounia he-speak Engbengbel very Good
 Ndounia speaks Engbengbel very well
 g- Ndounia Ayinh Engbengbel **mwā** ngèsè
 Ndounia he-speak Engbengbel very good
 Ndounia speaks Engbengbel fairly well.

There are many observations worth mentioning. Firstly, it comes out that the intensity in Congolese languages is based on a trifold diagram represented as follows:

(10)

Degree	Congolese languages	Equivalences
Highest	mayèlè tè	extremely
Mid high	ban, ngo	very
Lower	Mwá	fairly

It is worthwhile noting that the highest level of intensity is rather a complex phrase. This stands for the fact that in these languages, when it comes to qualify

highest degree, it looks as though in these languages it is impossible to qualify either to quantity; this is the reason why the highest degree is described as ‘no way to determine it’ or ‘neither intelligence can mean it’. Otherwise, no word in the language can name it. Secondly, the mid high degree can be expressed by suprasegmental level. In this connection, the expression of ‘very’ is rendered through intonation. In fact, some Congolese language resort to phonology-syntax interface to express some specific meaning. Laenzlinger (op.cit., p.55) writes :

Le lexique est un répertoire d’items lexicaux associés à des traits formels (catégorie, flexion d’accord, Cas, sélection), phonologiques et sémantiques. La syntaxe manipule ces traits et les transmet aux interfaces pertinentes pour qu’ils y soient interprétés.

According to Laenzlinger, lexical words are embodied with formal phi-features (categorical, tense, agreement, case, selection) together with phonological and semantic properties that are manipulated by syntax before their surface interpretation. In other words, syntax maps information from different levels of the language into phonetic form to convey the message. With regards to Congolese languages and the equivalences of ‘very’, some languages resort to prosody, intonation. So, the speakers-hearers of these languages will lengthen the vowel of the adjective. The lengthening stands for emphasis to mean more than the natural meaning of this adjective. Example (9c) is an appropriate illustration. This fact corroborates with what happens in English when the stress is used to differentiate meanings with some degree adverbs like ‘quite good’ (Larrea and Rivière, *ibid*).

Finally, the distributional aspects of these degree adverbs are twofold. Most Congolese languages allow the degree adverbs to occur before the head word it modifies. Some languages, on the contrary, in addition to mid position, they allow the degree adverbs to occur in final position. As a matter of fact, Vili instantiates the two cases as illustrated in (10) below.

(10)a-	Tata	wun-beela	Beena	
				Vili
	Father	he-suffer	Very	
	Father is	very ill		
b-	masi	m’keli	beena	Mbasu
	Water	it-is	very	Hot
	Water is	very hot.		

c- Nandi	wun- tabanga	mwa	Bubi
Her	she-speak	a bit	Bad
She speaks fairly well.			
d- Sonia	wun- lambanga	buboti	beena
Sonia	she-cook	good	Very
Sonia cooks very well.			
e- Baana	ba-keli	beena	sinyenzi
Children	they-are	very	important
Children are very important.			

In Vili language, the degree adverbs is twofold. It is either on top standing for ‘very’ or bottom ‘a bit or fairly’. The bottom line adverb has a static position, that is, it precedes the adjective. The top adverb ‘very’ has two positions within a sentence. In fact, this degree adverb *beena* can occur either before an adjective or after an adjective. The choice between the two positions is connected to the target or the focus in the sentence. When one wants to emphasize the subject, the degree adverb appears before the adjective as in 10 (b, e), whilst once we insist on the quality of the subject, the degree adverb occurs post head position. (10a) and (10d) are true illustrations.

(11) a-Tatá	a-zali	kitoko	mpenza/makasi
	he-is	beauty	Lingala
Father			really/extremely
Father is really handsome			

b-To-kèndékí	mosika	mingí	
We-go	far	a lot	(Dzokanga,
We went too far			1979: 282)

c- Mwána	óyo	moyíbi	mabé	
Child	this	robber	bad	(Dzokanga, ibid)
This child is a very talented robber				

d- Máí	maleki	míngi		(Dzokanga, op.cit.: 283)
Water	overstep	a lot		
There is too much water				
e- Noko	a-zali	mwá	malámu	
Uncle	he-is	a bit/quite	good	
Uncle is a bit well.				
f- Kayembe	a-zali	munene	mukye	
Kayembe	he-is	fat	small	
Kayembe is fairly fat.				
g- Kapaya	a-zali	mbingá/engambé		
Kapaya	he-is	giant		
Kapaya is very big.				

In Lingala, the degree adverbs have a rich propensity. Based on distributional properties, Lingala degree adverbs can occur either before an adjective (11e) or after an adjective (11a-c). These two positions are semantically based since they denote either extreme degree (after an adjective) or medium degree (before an adjective). Yet, amongst the extreme degree, one adverb deserves specific mention namely *mpenza* ‘*extremely, really, very*’. This adverb can occur either before or after an adjective. The difference is on the focus or the emphasis the speaker wants to express; when it occurs before, it means that the emphasis is put on the adverb expressing the highest intensity. However, when it occurs after adjective, it means that the emphasis is on the adjective.

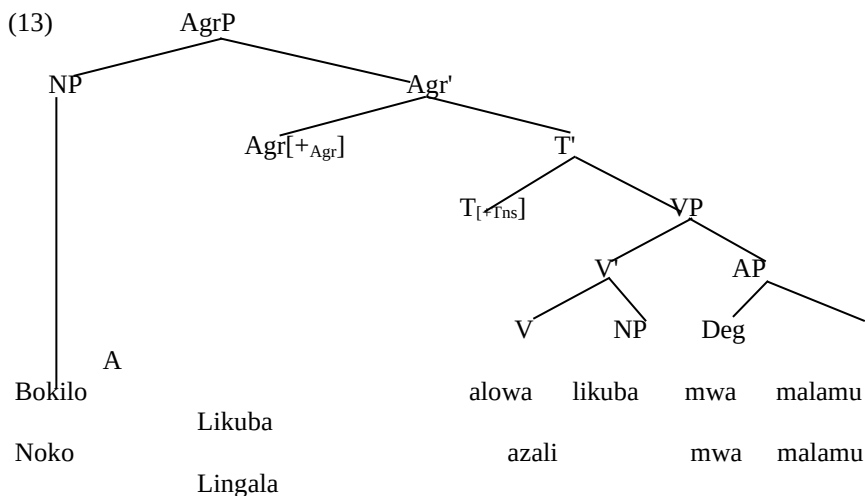
In addition, the expression of intensity is sometimes lexicalized in Lingala. In this connection, Lingala speakers-hearers resort to verbalization (e.g. *koleka*+ adjective) or nominalization (e.g. *mbinga/engambe*). In fact, in Lingala one can use the predicate *koleka* ‘to overstep’ to mean ‘very’ or ‘a bit’ depending on the nature of the adjective following the predicate. As a matter of fact, this formulaic stands for the fact that the speaker-hearer presupposes some ideas of comparison. Finally, Lingala shows a case of an adjective modifying another adjective. In (11f), there are two adjectives namely *munéné* and *mukyé*. At distributional level, this adjective collocation raises an issue related to their interpretation. This interpretation concerns the identification of the main adjective standing as the head and the secondary adjective playing the role of an adjective modifier. We

should take into account the semantic syntactic aspects of these two adjectives to determine the order between the two adjectives. As a result, *munéné* means ‘big’, whereas *mukyé* means ‘small’. In this connection, the appropriate interpretation will be considering something which is ‘small big’ to mean that it is not very big. This means that *small* modifies *big*. Next, as in many other syntactic aspects regarding the hierarchical order between the head and its modifiers in Bantu languages spoken in Congo, determiners are generally post head words in a structure. This corroborates the fact that *munéné* precedes *mukyé* because the former is the head whilst the latter is the modifier.

Based on Split IP hypothesis advocated by Pollock (1989), the difference between the two positions of degree adverbs is straight forward. That is to say, the degree adverb behaves like a floating element around the head noun it modifies; leading to the structure (Deg) A (Deg). This means that from this structure we can derive the following ones:

- (12) AP $\longrightarrow$ Deg+A
 AP $\longrightarrow$ A+Deg

Medium degree adverbs in Bantu languages spoken in Congo can have the following Phrase marker presentation.



Nandi		wuntabanga	mwa	bubi
	Vili			
Ndounia		ayinh	Engbengbel	mwã ngésè
	Engbengbel			

This tree diagram is inappropriate to Laali language because there is a movement resulting in the change of order between the adjective phrase and the verb. In fact, for Laali speaker-hearers, the adjective phrase represents a new information, hence it is focused justifying its occurrence close to the subject. In the words of Radford (2009:325) ‘*From a discourse perspective, a focused constituent typically represents new information (i.e. information not previously mentioned in the discourse and unfamiliar to the hearer)*’. In addition, Radford (ibid) writes:

Reasoning along these lines, Luigi Rizzi (1997, 2001b, 2004) suggests that CP should be split into a number of different projections – an analysis widely referred to as the split CP hypothesis. More specifically, he suggests that complementisers (by virtue of their role in specifying whether a given clause is declarative, interrogative, imperative, or exclamative in force) should be analysed as Force markers heading a ForceP (Force Phrase) projection, and that focused constituents should be analysed as contained within a separate FocP (Focus Phrase) headed by a Foc constituent (Focus marker).

In this connection, the Laali example will look like the following:

(14)

The diagram shows a syntactic tree for the sentence "Taata mwa obɛɛlɛ ali mwa obɛɛlɛ". The root node is AgrP, which branches into NP and Agr'. NP branches to the word "Taata". Agr' branches into Agr[+Agr] and FocP. FocP branches into AP and VP. The first AP branches to the word "mwa". The VP branches into V and another AP. V branches to the word "ali". The second AP branches into Deg and another node, which branches to the word "mwa". The final node in the tree branches to the word "obɛɛlɛ".

Taata

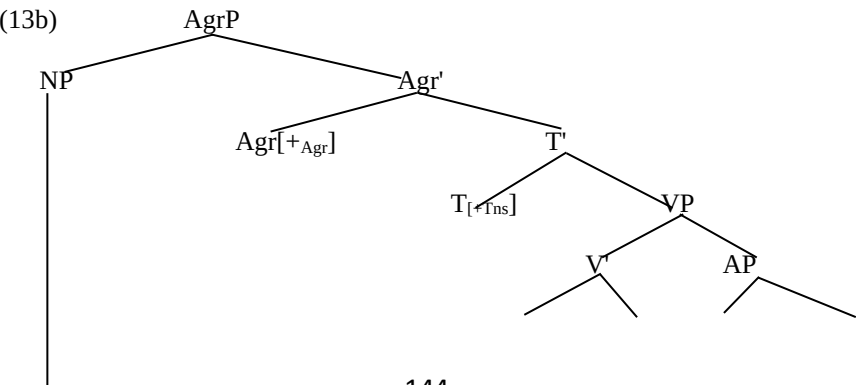
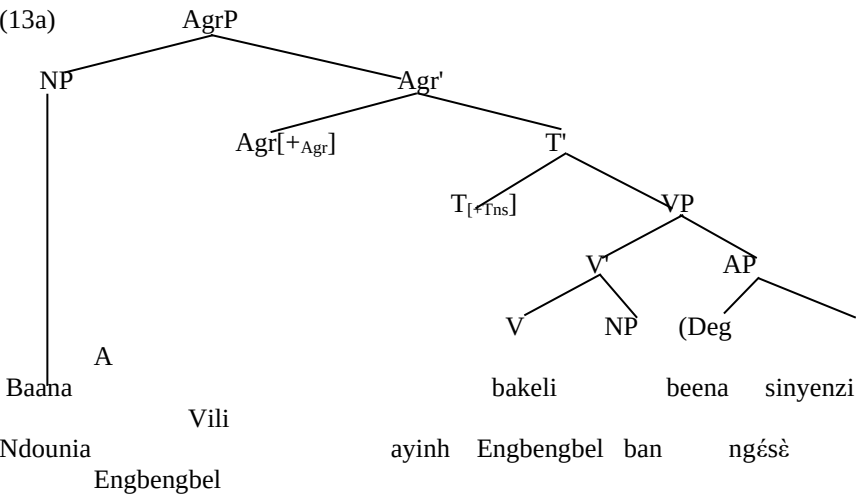
A

mwa obɛɛlɛ

ali

mwa obɛɛlɛ

Extreme degree adverbs are given the follow tree diagrams due to the double position of the degree adverbs as either preceding the adjective (13a) or following (13b).



		V	NP	A
Tata	Deg	azali	kitoko	makasi
	Lingala			
Sonia		wunlambanga	buboti	beena
	Vili			

Conclusion

It is important to say that the way people view the world is intimately reflected in their speech or language. As Chomsky usually echoes language mirrors the mind. Not all languages in the world appreciate the degree, the intensity with the same propensity as well as the same production embodied lexically; some have a lot of expressions, others have a few. This is why European languages can use a very rich propensity in terms of words expressing degree adverbs, whilst some Bantu languages use to degree dimensions, notably top versus bottom degree adverbs.

In addition, the same reality is not always assumed in the same lexical category cross linguistically. This is certainly due to the fact that languages over the world resort to large possibilities to translate the same idea through different idiosyncratic properties. This is one of the reasons why some languages use adverbs, intensifiers, whereas others use verbs or nouns to express intensity. Some languages can use both intensifiers, verbs and nouns while others use prosodic features to highlight intensity.

It comes out through analysis that the degree adverbs have two distributional properties amongst Bantu languages spoken in the Republic of Congo. If there can be an agreement regarding the position of medium degree adverbs amongst these languages, the position of extreme degree raises differences. In fact, the medium degree adverbs generally occur before the head word it modifies. Yet, the extreme degree adverb can occur either before or after the head noun it modifies.

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