

A syntactico-semantic analysis of the Lari preposition “mu”

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the syntactic and semantic analysis of the preposition **mu** in Lari language. It demonstrates that this preposition **mu** occurs in three semantic properties namely spatial, temporal and abstract features. This analysis demonstrates the syntax of **mu** used in different ways and its distribution within a sentential structure. The **mu-phrase** is not static in a sentence construction and **mu** can also give rise to complex prepositions.

Key words: Lari, preposition, spatial, temporal, abstract, analysis.

Résumé

Cet article porte sur l'analyse syntaxique et sémantique de la préposition ‘mu’ en Lari. Il démontre que cette préposition a trois propriétés sémantiques, à savoir l’espace, le temps et l’abstrait. Cette analyse démontre que la syntaxe de ‘mu’ est variée au sein d’une structure phrastique. La phrase ‘mu’ n’est pas statique dans une phrase et ‘mu’ peut aussi donner lieu à des prépositions complexes.

Mots clés : Lari, préposition, espace, temps, abstrait, analyse.

Introduction:

The aim of this study is to carry out a syntactic and semantic analysis of the preposition **mu** as it is used in Lari which is one of the dialect of Koongo language classified as H16f by Guthrie (1971). It is spoken in Brazzaville and its surroundings (Pool region: kinkala). Additionally, it seeks to analyze the prepositional system of Lari, and addresses the following questions:

- (1) What are the different usages of the preposition” mu” in the language under scrutiny?
- (2) How does it merge to get complex prepositions?

This article is structured into four main sections:

Section one deals with some theoretical issues while section two is concerned with an account of simple prepositions. Section three discusses the use of the preposition **mu** in connection with the notion of complexity, whereas section four is about the preposition **mu** and the verb. I shall begin with a discussion of some theoretical issues.

1. Theoretical background

In recent years there has been an impressive growth in the number of studies on prepositional phrases that express spatial relations. Among these two main types may be distinguished, namely, functional and lexical ones. The former is generally taken to comprise basic (stative and directional) or “simple prepositions”, and the latter can be regarded as “complex prepositions” (Cinque, 2010:3). (Dubois et al.1994, s.v) define the term preposition as follows: *a preposition can be viewed as an invariable word which connects one constituent of the sentence to another.*

Similarly, Chauvin (2011:2, quoted by Ndongo Ibara, 2014:19-20) has the following to say about the issue: ... *Prepositions have many uses which often turn out to be particularly difficult to deal with, classify, and ultimately analyze.*

In this quotation the authors show that how the domain of prepositions is relatively complex due to their very polysemous nature. This can

also be explained by the fact that various meaning associated with spatial particles are related in systematic and highly motivated ways. Likewise Leeman (2008 :16) states that : *Mais la plupart du temps, les prépositions sont polysémiques en ceci qu'on leur attribue telle ou telle identité selon leur environnement [...]*.

As things stand, it appears that the meaning of prepositions is immediately encoded in the co-text which covers the context and the distributional environment in which it is used. That is why the polysemy approach is a suitable way to account for the meaning of preposition, because monosemy is too restricted and homonymy suffers from some weaknesses. In this connection, Tyler and Evans (2003:7) assert that:

The question of how best to model the distinct meanings associated with a single lexical form has been approached from three perspectives. These are homonymy, monosemy and polysemy. [...] The position we advocate is that of polysemy. A polysemy approach suggests that the meanings associated with a spatial particle such as over are related in some fashion. [...] Our account of polysemy holds that a linguistic form is paired at the conceptual level, not only with a single meaning, but rather with a network of distinct but related meanings. Hence, the meanings associated with a particular form constitute a semantic network.

In other words, we advance a polysemy approach to word meaning, arguing that the multiple distinct meanings associated with the same lexical form are often related.

2. Simple prepositions

In this section the main focus is on the spatial aspect of Lari prepositional system. To begin with I shall look at the uses of the Lari preposition **mu** in relation to the notion of space.

2.1 **Mu** and space

The semantic analysis of the Lari preposition gives rise to three basic notions namely locative, temporal and discursive properties of the preposition. First of all, the preposition **mu** exhibits some spatial characteristics as in

- 2-a **Bala bena mu nzo**
children they-be in house
- 2-b **Bala mu nzo bena**
Children in house they-be
- 2-c **Mu nzo bena bala**
in house they-be children
“Children are in the house”
- 2-d **Samba bwisidi tadi mu bulu**
samba drop-Past stone in pit
- 2-e **Samba mu bulu ka bwisidi tadi**
samba in pit he/she drop-past stone
“Tom dropped the stone into the pit”
- 2-f **Malonga lueti mulunga mu nsingu**
He/she wear-past bracelet in neck
- 2-g **Malonga mulunga ka lueti mu nsingu**
Malonga necklace he/she wear-past in neck
- 2-h **Malonga mu nsingu mulunga ka lueti**
Malonga in neck bracelet he/she wear-past
“he/she wore a bracelet in a neck”

In these examples (2a-b-c-d-e) it appears that the lari preposition **mu** implies the notion of interiority. As Noonan (2010: 165-167) has written

The effect in the case of **in** is to entail and emphasize that the location is a container-like space [...]. And **in** is interpreted as interior which can mean that the possessor is a container but can also have the less specific interpretation of a vaguely enclosed space.

It means that, this interiority property must be relativized in connection to the notion of space involved by this preposition. That is to say, the meaning of the lari preposition **mu** depends on the word that represents the space (location) and the verb that is used to locate the NP(referent). In this way, the examples (2a-b-c-d-e) show that the NP (**bala & tadi**) are located in a space that limits it (**mu nzo & mu bulu**) which can be represented as containers. Observing the internal structure of (2d&e) we note that the located space **mu bulu** expresses a directed motion (vertical axis) referring to a trajectory shape.

On the other hand, in (2f-g-h) the space is viewed differently and the NP **mulunga** is located in the space referring to a part of body namely **neck**. In this case the notion of the embodiment intervenes. That is to

say, **neck** is represented as an external localizer. In this respect Evans (2000:23) suggests that *Embodied experience constitutes the notion that human experience of the world is mediated by the kinds of bodies we have....* It means that as human beings we have some parts of body referring to space or place associated with locational meanings. Therefore, the term of space indicated by the lari preposition **mu** followed by the noun **nsingu** is viewed as external localizer.

In fact, the lari preposition **mu** does not always refer to inside environment but it can also be used to locate something out.

2-2 **Mu** and temporality

The temporal properties of the Lari preposition **mu** are summarized in the following examples:

2-h **Samba manisi salu tiandi mu bilumbu biole**

he finish-Pst work his in days two

2-i **Mu bilumbu biole ka-manisi salu tiandi**

in days two Prn finish-Pst work his

2-j **Salu tiandi mu bilumbu biole ka-manisi tio**

Work his in days two Prn-finish-Pst it

“he finished his work in two days ”

2-k **Zimi dia Loutaya dieka mu ngonda tatu**

pregnancy of she it-be in months three

2-l **Mu ngonda tatu dieka zimi dia Loutaya**

In months three it-be pregnancy of Loutaya

2-m **Zimi dia Loutaya mu ngonda tatu dieka**

pregnancy of she in months three it-be

“ She is three months pregnant ”

These examples (2) reveal that the lari preposition **mu** indicates the notion of time which has to be considered as duration or measure. It must to be said that **mu bilumbu biole** & **mu ngonda tatu** are considered as temporal adverbs by indicating duration or a period of time. It may be observed that the **mu-phrase** can be initial, middle and final position. According to Melis (2003 :71) :

Le temps est représenté comme une succession ordonnée et structurée de deux manières : elle est d’une part dotée d’une mesure intrinsèque, fondée sur l’existence du rythme cyclique des jours et des années, et d’autre part, de points de référence [...]. Enfin, le temps est dynamique il est par nature mouvement.

It means that temporal values of lari preposition **mu** is linked to the notion of time when using temporal adverbs referring to days, months and years...

2-3 **Mu** and abstractness

The other semantics of the lari preposition **mu** is viewed as abstract.

Consider:

2-n *Samba sadidi mu ti-dzunu*
samba work-Past in peace

o- *Samba mu tidzunu ka-ta-sadila*
samba in peace he-asp-work

p- *Mu tidzunu Samba ka-ta-sadila*
In peaceful Samba he-asp-work
“*Samba works in peace*”

q- *Bala bena mu nsayi*
Children are in joy

r- *Mu nsayi bena bala*
in joy are children
“*children are in joy*”

In these two examples (4n&4q) the use of **mu** expresses the notion of abstractness in connection with abstract words such as **tidzunu** and **nsayi** referring to nouns which are exhibit neither spatial nor temporal features. To quote Leeman (2008:16): *By abstract, we have to understand that it is nor spatial nor temporal, but it can be notional,*

figurative or discursive. It can be assumed that the usage of abstract property of preposition is more confusing as it is related to different readings. In contrast to concrete nouns, abstracts form a semantically defined class of nouns that denote concepts (psyche), characteristics, relationship, institutions...but not persons, objects, substances.

In the light of the examples (2n-r), it is worthy to note that each of them has its specific meaning which has nothing to do with the other. Consequently, some authors used the adjective abstract to qualify this semantic aspect of prepositions.

3. *Mu* with complexity

3.1 Spatial complex prepositions

The lari preposition *mu* can merge with other prepositions to yield complex prepositions as in:

3-a *Mwana kotele mu-kati dia nzo*

Child enter-Past in side of house

b- *Mu-kati dia nzo mwana ka kotele*

in side of house child Pr enter-Past

“Child entered inside the house”

c- *Nioka y-ena mu-ndeko mamba*

snake Pr-is in border water

d- *Nioka mu-ndeko mamba y-ena*

snake in border water Pr-is

e- *Mu-ndeko mamba nioka y-ena*

in border water snake Pr-is

“The snake is in the river side”

In (3a) the particle *mu* followed by the morpheme *kati* form a complex preposition. Here, the scene involves the notion of containment

function and the located referent (*mwana*) is enclosed by the landmark (*nzo*). Being contained inside the house, the activities of the NP (*mwana*) are limited by the contained entity referring to the space in which he/she is found. In (3b) the position of lari preposition *mukati* is initial following by the complement *dia nzo* and we have to note that when the *mu-phrase* is placed in initial position and followed by a regular verb, the verb conjugated is preceded by the personal pronoun *ka* as in (3b) which enlarge the sentence construction. The locative preposition *mukati* can be employed without its complement (*dia nzo*).

In (3c-d-e) the space is viewed differently as in (3a-b). The extended landmark *mu-ndeko mamba* gives information about the spatio-physical configuration. The figure *nioka* is found in a space in which it can move from one point to another. As things stand, the particle *mu* implies the notion of outsideness.

3-2 Temporal complex prepositions

The lari preposition “mu” can combined with temporal expressions as exemplified hereafter:

3-f *Mu-ntangu ya ntama mboma ba bakala kwa bedi ya dia*
 in time of old boa n.cl men only whom it ate

3-g *Ba bakala kwa bedi dia mboma mu-ntangu ya ntama*
 N.cl men only whom ate boa in time of old
“In the past, boa was eaten by men only”

3-h *Tata mu-ntangu mbata kizidi*
 father in sun time he-come-Past

3-i *Mu-ntangu mbata Tata kizidi*
 In sun time father he come-past
“Father came in the afternoon”

In these set of examples (3f-g-h-i) the preposition *mu* is in connection with some temporal expressions like *mu ntangu ya ntama* and *mu-ntangu mbata*. Here the temporal complex prepositions indicate a span of time longer which has to be considered as duration, reference

and a scale of time. Distributionally, temporal complex prepositions can be initial, middle and final position.

3-3 Lari complex prepositions and discourse

Let us consider:

3-i **Nzambi beto ka zololo mu-bungu dio ka-tu lemvokela**
 God us Prn love that is why Prn we forgive
 “God is love that is why he forgives us”

3-j **Mu bungu dia nsi ta didila**
 Why he/she cry-Pst
 “*why do you cry?*”

These examples (3i&j) taken here have their specific meaning and can be considered as idiomatic expressions because the meaning of the Lari preposition **mu** is discursive.

4. Mu and verb

The usage of lari preposition **mu** can also be possible when it is associated with a verb in the infinitive form as attested in (4):

4-a **Tata mu dia fweti kela mukento andi**
 Father for eat must wait woman of him
 “*For eating, father must wait for his wife*”

4-b **Sita hua kala mu longesa bala**
 Sita has refused for teach children
 “*Sita refused to teach children*”

In these examples (4) the use of **mu** is not considered as a preposition but posited before the verb it expresses the infinitive form and gives details about the verb action.

Conclusion

When analyzing the syntactic distribution and property of Lari preposition **mu**, we come to conclude that, firstly, the Lari preposition **mu** is a model of spatial prepositions. In this respect, the Lari preposition **mu** can be used to locate a noun or something which has interiority or external characteristics. Accordingly, locational meaning gives information about the physical configuration of the relationship between a figure (an object) and a ground (object of the preposition).

Secondly, as far as temporal feature is concerned it has been demonstrated that the preposition **mu** is used with temporal adverbs that represents the notion of deadline. This deadline expresses a period of time that the action occurs: duration, measure, reference... The preposition **mu** can merge with a noun followed by a number.

Finally, the preposition **mu** also refers to abstract feature. As things stand, the abstract usage is also proper to the Lari spatial particle **mu** which has been developed in many discursive contexts. We have also complex prepositions in Lari by making up of other longer prepositions like *mu-kati*, *mu-ntangu ya ntama*, *mu bungu nsi*...

Another aspect that can be taken into account is the use of **mu** that expresses an infinitive form. As such, it is more accurate to say that the Lari preposition **mu** can be represented as spatial, temporal and notional or abstract. Besides it is not static within a sentential structure. Distributionally, this can occur initially, in middle or final position in a sentence.

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