

Abstract title: Person-Number Agreement in Mande: Synchronic Hierarchies and Their Sources

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Theme session: Typological hierarchies in synchrony and diachrony

It is a textbook knowledge that typological hierarchies condition different morphosyntactic processes, such as case marking and agreement. For example, in Swahili the marker of object agreement is optional when the object NP is inanimate, but it is obligatory when the object is animate – cf. Morimoto (2002).

In this talk I am going to present some data on person-number agreement in Mande language family. Agreement in Mande is conditioned by several hierarchies including the number hierarchy and the referential hierarchy. The question is whether the two hierarchies can have the same synchronic (or diachronic) explanation. It seems that the answer is no. While there is no evidence that the number split originates in any special asymmetric construction and one has to account for it in terms of markedness or frequency; it is quite clear that referential split originates in relative clause constructions (at least in some languages) giving a good diachronic explanation of the hierarchy.

To my knowledge, Mande languages have never been discussed by typologists with relation to agreement. The fact is that the best documented Mande languages simply don't have it – cf. Creissels (1983) on Mandinka, Creissels (2009) on Kita Maninka, Dumestre (2003) on Bambara. The three languages just mentioned belong to the same branch of Manding languages within Mande family. However, other branches including Southern, South-Western and Eastern Mande have developed systems of person-number agreement (Konoshenko in print).

In Kpelle (South-Western Mande) the analytic predicative marker (auxiliary) agrees with the subject in person and number (personal data):

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| (1) <i>Pépèè è pà</i>
Pepe 3SG.PM come\L
'Pepe came'. | (2) <i>Nèáà dǎ pà</i>
DEF\woman.PL 3PL.PM come\L
'The women came'. |
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In the corresponding negative construction agreement is ungrammatical in singular (the predicative marker appears in a default unconjugated form) though obligatory in plural:

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| (3) <i>Pépèè hvé pà</i>
Pepe NEG come\L
'Pepe didn't come'. | (4) <i>Nèáà dǎhvé pà</i>
DEF\woman.PL 3PL.NEG come\L
'The women didn't come'. |
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The number hierarchy PL > SG (and Positive > Negative construction) are in play here. I know of no morphosyntactic sources of these hierarchies in Kpelle, so they can be described by referring to markedness or frequency (Greenberg 1966; Croft 2003; Haspelmath 2006).

In Dan (South Mande) a NP controls agreement whenever it is definite (Vydrine, Kességbou 2008: 70-71; p.c.):

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| (5) <i>Téèè yáàdū</i>
basin put
'Put a basin!' | (6) <i>Téèè bā à yáàdū</i>
basin DEF 3SG put
'Put the basin!' |
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In (6) the definite article *bā* originates from a demonstrative adverb 'there' and the definite NP can be "unfolded" into a correlative clause meaning something like "the basin that is there". It has internal head, and it is referred to by a pronoun *à* in the main clause (cf. Comrie (1989) on the typology of relative clauses, also Nikitina (2012) on correlatives in Mande).

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| (7) [<i>Téèè ɣ̣ bā</i>] <i>à yáàdū</i>
basin REL.3SG there 3SG put
'Put the basin (that is there)!' |
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Thus the two hierarchies mentioned above appear to have different origins in Mande languages: while the number hierarchy is (probably) discourse-based, the referential hierarchy is syntax-based inheriting the properties of a special syntactic construction – a correlative clause.

Abbreviations

DEF – definite; NEG – negative marker; PL – plural; PM – predicative marker; REL – relative clause marker; SG – singular.

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