S/TAM/P morphs (portmanteau subject/TAM/polarity morphs) in Niger-Congo languages

The use of portmanteau morphs that encode the referent properties of subjects in addition to various TAM and polarity categories also (sometimes also subject-object combinations) is highly skewed areally, occuring in defined clusters restricted to certain parts of the world (Anderson 2006), viz. Melanesia-Australia, but most especially to a large band stretching from west to east across Africa that subsumes many of the groups traditionally classified under the Niger-Congo phylum. In part due to areal influences that cross-cut genetic units within and outside of Niger-Congo, the constituency of Niger-Congo has indeed been challenged in recent work. In this paper, I discuss the morpho/syntactic typology, syntactic status, origin, and subsequent historical developments and areal distribution of this unusual and oft overlooked phenomenon that fuses subject referent properties with TAM and polarity categories, which I call 'S/TAM/P' morphs, among the languages of the Niger-Congo phylum (see also Babaev 2010). In addition to helping shed some light on the pre-history of Niger-Congo, the study further serves as a demonstration of contemporary approaches that have been recently called for with respect to typological surveying in Africa (Dimmendaal 2008, Sands 2009, Segerer [& Lionnet] 2010, Blench 2011).

Note that S/TAM/P morphs also occur in other genetic units of the 'Macro-Sudan Belt' (Güldemann 2008, cf. also Dryer 2009), such as Chadic and Bongo-Bagirmi in particular, but these latter remain outside the scope of the present study. Genetic units traditionally subsumed under Niger-Congo presented here include Benue-Congo sub-families (Bantoid, Cross River, Plateau-Tarokoid, Kainji, Bendi), Nupoid-Okoid-Idomoid, Youruboid-Edoid-Akokoid-Igboid, Ukaan, Gbe, Kwa sub-families (Ka-Togo, Na-Togo, Potou-Tano, Ga-Dangme), Ega, Kru, Senufic, Gur, Kulango-Lorhon, Fali, Leko-Nimbari, Mbum-Day, Waja-Kam, Jen Bambukic, 'Atlantic' groups (Cangin, Wolof, Tenda), Mande families (E, SW, SE NW) and Ubangian families (Zande, Gbaya, Ngbandi, Mba).

Free-standing S/TAM/P morphs generally represent the fusing of subject markers or subject pronouns with highly eroded TAM and polarity auxiliaries. Such forms are particularly characteristic of the Niger-Congo languages and other groups within the Macro-Sudan Belt of Africa (1), but occur only sporadically elsewhere in Africa. Complex verb forms representing the fusing of these constructions are found throughout the area as well (2). Such complex verb forms may be more common in Niger-Congo languages than is generally reported due to constraints imposed by certain (e.g., francophone) grammatical traditions (Creissels et al. 2008), but it is a true generalization that the further east one goes in the Macro-Sudan Belt region, the more likely one is to find fused forms of this sort, not free-standing S/TAM/P morphs. Lastly, while the phenomenon cross-cuts genetic units, there appear to be recurrent and consistent patterns of correspondence within genetic units, such that certain specific traits can be tentatively reconstructed for various older historical stages or proto-languages. Preliminary reconstructions are offered for Proto-Benue-Congo (3) and more tentative ones (e.g., for Proto-Atlantic-Congo) as well.

(1) a. <u>Kulango</u> b. <u>Kulango</u> c. <u>Kulango</u> d. <u>Fyem</u> e. <u>Fyem</u>
mì dɔ́lì *mí̀ dɔ̀lì* *má dɔ̀lì* *náá soo Gindiríŋ* *ín soo dirámmék*
1.PRF sell 1.PROG sell 1.HAB sell 1.PRF go Gindiri 1.IMPF go farm.your.OBLQ
'I have sold' 'I am selling' 'I sell' 'I went to Gindiri' 'I will go to your farm'
(Elders 2007: 193) [Kulango-Lorhon] (Nettle 1998: 32; 35) [Plateau (Southeastern)]

f. <u>'Bozom</u> g. <u>'Bozom</u> h. <u>'Bozom</u> i. <u>Mano</u>
ʔà̰ ré *má rè* *ʔà̰ rè-á* *lɛ̀ɛ́ máá wè gèē*
3.RLS enter.IPFV 3.IRR enter.PRF 3.RLS enter.PRF-DEP 3SG.NEG[HAB] Mano language speak

'he enters'   'he will enter'   'he has entered'   's/he doesn't speak Mano'
(Moñino 1995: 159)   [Gbaya Ubangi]   (Vydrine 2009: 226; Vydrin 2006) [Mande]

(2) Ndemli
mà-bó-di:
1.PST-TAM-eat
'I have just eaten' (Ngoran 1999: 72) [Bantoid]

(3) *mé (~*mí)* I.IRR (/NPST)   *ma-* I.RLS (/PST/PRF/)   PROTO-BENUE-CONGO

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