3 Morphology

Bantu languages have long been appreciated by scholars for their distinctive morphology, highly agglutinative and allowing great structural complexity to nominal and even more so to verbal forms.

Basic to Bantu nominal morphology is the division of nouns into numerous noun classes, the precise number of which varies from language to language due to syncretism and secondary developments. Traditionally, each reconstructed noun class has been assigned a number. The reconstructed Common Bantu noun classes number nineteen. Each is associated with a different class prefix preceding the noun stem. It is thought that the Bantu noun classes arose in pre-Bantu times from a system of classifiers, probably from nouns even earlier, adding content to the nouns they introduced. The semantic content of many of the classifiers is transparent due to their role in nominal derivation. Some of the noun classes specialise in marking collective or plural nouns and many of the pairings of classes into singular and plural found in the current Bantu languages are traceable to Common Bantu. The list given here presents the reconstructed Bantu noun classes with a rough indication of their semantics. Their semantics is most evident when they are used derivationally. Lexically, there is greater unpredictability for whether a noun of a particular meaning belongs to a certain class, both within and across the various languages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class (singular)</th>
<th>Class (plural)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. *mo- 'human singular'</td>
<td>2. *ba- 'human plural'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. *mo- 'thin or extended objects, trees, singular'</td>
<td>4. *me- 'plural of class 3'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. *di/e- 'singular of objects that tend to come in pairs or larger groups, fruits'</td>
<td>6. *ma- 'collective or plural of class 5'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exemplifying from Swahili when possible: (1) \textit{m-tu} ‘person’, pl. (2) \textit{wa-tu}; (3) \textit{m-ti} ‘tree’, pl. (4) \textit{mi-ti}; (5) \textit{ji-cho} ‘eye’, pl. (6) \textit{ma-cho} (Swahili also uses this class pair for augmentatives, e.g. (5) \textit{ji-tu} ‘giant’, pl. (6–5) \textit{ma-ji-tu}); (7) \textit{ki-tu} ‘thing’, pl. (8) \textit{vi-tu} (Swahili also uses this class for diminutives, e.g. (7–5) \textit{ki-ji-ji} ‘village’, pl. (8–5) \textit{vi-ji-jī}, cf. (3) \textit{m-ji} ‘town’, pl. (4) \textit{mi-jī}); (9) \textit{ng’ombe} ‘cow’, pl. (10) \textit{ng’ombe} (*di- is not prefixed to plural nouns in most North-East Bantu languages, cf. Zulu (9) \textit{i-n(-)komo} ‘cow’, pl. (10) \textit{i-zi-n(-)komo}); (11) \textit{u-limi} ‘tongue’, pl. (10) \textit{n-dimi}; (12) Gikuyu \textit{ka-ana} ‘small child’, pl. (13) \textit{tw-ana} (the urban Swahili dialects have lost this pair and switched their functions to (7)/(8), as shown above; \textit{ka-} remains lexicalised in \textit{ka-mwe} ‘never’ < ‘(not even a) little one’); (14) \textit{u-baya} ‘evil’ < \textit{-baya} ‘bad’; (15) Gikuyu \textit{kī-gūrū} ‘leg’, pl. (6) \textit{ma-gūrū} (Swahili has shifted this class of nouns to (3) \textit{m-guū}, Southern pl. (4) \textit{mi-guū}, Northern pl. (6) \textit{ma-guū}); the locative classes (16) to (18) can be directly prefixed to nouns in most Bantu languages, cf. coastal southern Tanzanian Mwera (16) \textit{pa-ndu} ‘at a place’, (17) \textit{ku-ndu} ‘around a place’, (18) \textit{mu-ndu} ‘inside a place’, but Swahili uses an associative construction, (16) \textit{p-a nyumba-ni} ‘at-of house-loc.’, i.e. ‘at home’, \textit{kw-a nyumba-ni} ‘around-of house-loc.’, i.e. ‘at/around home’, \textit{mw-a nyumba-ni} ‘in-of home’, i.e. ‘inside the house’; (19) Kongo (north-west Zaire) \textit{fi-koko-koko} ‘little hand’, pl. (8) \textit{vi-koko-koko} (this class is largely restricted to West Bantu and does not occur in Swahili).

Regardless of various rearrangements of the noun classes, class concord is a pervasive feature of many grammatical categories in all Bantu languages. All categories modifying a noun have concordial prefixes determined by the noun. In addition, coreferential markers in the verb phrase, such as the subject, object and relative markers, also show class concord. The form taken by the class prefix is determined by the category to which it is prefixed. A secondary set of class prefixes is general for the nasal prefixes, formed by replacing the nasal with *\textit{g} (> \textit{y} in Swahili). Which categories take the primary vs. the secondary prefixes varies across the Bantu area. Swahili restricts the nasal class prefixes to adjectives and numerals, except for the retention of nasal class 1 for the object marker, i.e. \textit{m(u)-} rather than \textit{yu-}. The following examples are illustrative of the syntactic extent of class concord in Bantu languages (\textit{cp} = class prefix, \textit{cc} = concord):
An interesting further development of concord has occurred among Swahili and some adjacent North-East coastal Bantu languages: animate concord. This device extends class 1/2 concord to animates, regardless of their lexical noun class. For example, most animals are class 9/10 nouns, e.g. *simba* 'lion', *njovu* 'elephant', *ndego* 'bird'. One result of animate concord is the distinction between *ndego yu-le* 'that bird' with a class 1 animate concord marking the demonstrative and *ndego i-le* 'that aeroplane' with a strictly syntactic class 9 concord on the demonstrative. It must be noted that animate concord is atypical of Bantu languages on the whole. Even in Swahili, when the class of the noun is determined by a semantic rather than a lexical process, class concord overrides animate concord. Thus, *ki-jana yu-le* 'that youth (e.g. teenager)' shows animate concord on the demonstrative, illustrating the perceived lexical arbitrariness of the class 7 prefix on the noun, but *ki-jana ki-le* 'that little-old youth' with class 7, where the class prefix to the noun functions as a diminutive. As a local innovation in North-East coastal Bantu, animate concord serves to illustrate that even though the original semantic motivation for noun class is often obscure for individual lexical items, the syntactic resources of class concord continue to be exploited for semantic purposes.

In addition to the class prefix, it is probable that Common Bantu had a preprefix marking definite and generic nouns and their modifiers. This preprefix survives in various forms and functions in the interior and southwest, usually anticipating at least the vowel of the class prefix, e.g. Zulu *u-mu-ntu* 'the person', *a-ba-ntu* 'the people'. The preprefix has been lost in much of the eastern coastal area. A relic remains in the Northern Bajuni dialects of Swahili in *i-ťi* 'land(s)' < *e-n(e)-čé*, Southern Swahili *nchi*. In most dialects of Swahili, the preprefix was lost earlier than voiceless nasals. With the loss of the preprefix penultimate stress was transferred to the nasal, which prevented the loss of the nasal despite its voicelessness. The opposite chronological sequence is evident for Bajuni. When removed from stress, the voiceless nasal and preprefix are lost in all dialects, cf. Bajuni *ți-ni*, Southern Swahili *chi-ni* 'below' (i.e. 'on the ground').

The personal pronouns have a variety of specific forms in Bantu, according to the grammatical category to which they are attached. The chart shows the Swahili pattern, indicative of the formal variation, though not the precise shapes, of the personal pronouns in Bantu.
SWAHILI AND THE BANTU LANGUAGES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'I'</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Possessive</th>
<th>Subject marker</th>
<th>Object marker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mimi</td>
<td>-ngu</td>
<td>ni-</td>
<td>ni-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wewe</td>
<td>-ko</td>
<td>u-</td>
<td>ku-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ye ye</td>
<td>-ke</td>
<td>a/-yu-</td>
<td>m-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sisi</td>
<td>-itu</td>
<td>tu-</td>
<td>tu-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ninyi</td>
<td>-inu</td>
<td>m(w)-</td>
<td>wa-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wao</td>
<td>-(w)o</td>
<td>wa-</td>
<td>wa-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The k- forms of the second and third singular are usual in Bantu and also appear as the subject markers ku- and ka- respectively in a few languages (including the central dialects of Swahili). Some Bantu languages have independent pronouns for the other classes, but Swahili uses demonstratives instead, e.g. for class 7 hi-ki ‘this thing’, hi-ch-o (< hi-ky-o) ‘that thing (proximate)’, ki-le ‘that thing (distal)’.

Nominal derivational processes have already been alluded to above in the discussion of noun classes and class concord. In some Bantu languages these provide sufficient resources to nominalise verb-object predicates, e.g. Swahili m-fanya-kazi ‘worker’ with class 1 animate prefix, < -fanya kazi ‘do work’. However, all Bantu languages also show extensive use of nominal suffixes, converting verbs to nouns, e.g. *-o: Swahili nen-o ‘word’ < -nen-a ‘say’, *-i: Swahili u-zaz-i ‘parenthood’ < -zaa ‘bear children’ via *bo-biád-i, *-u: Swahili -bov-u ‘rotten’ < -oza ‘rot’ via *bo-d-u. Note that the suffix -u derives stative qualities from process verbs and forms the basis for derived adjectives as well as nouns. Morphologically nouns and adjectives are not distinct in the Bantu languages. Among the noun derivational suffixes is the locative -ni, corresponding in function to the locative prefixes. Suffixed to a noun, -ni marks the noun as head of a locative phrase, e.g. Swahili kazi-ni ‘at work’, mto-ni ‘at the river’. Historically, these derivational suffixes are indicative of a syntactic system quite different from the current Bantu systems and well advanced in the process of morphologising by Common Bantu times. This will be further discussed on pages 1010–12.

Bantu verb morphology shows the fullest extent of Bantu agglutinative word structure. Central to the verb is the root, which may be extended to a more complex stem by the addition of derivational suffixes. Final modal suffixes *-a and *-e distinguish the indicative and subjunctive respectively. In the indicative mode this is sufficient complexity for the imperative, e.g. Swahili fany-a ‘do (it)’. Obligatory elsewhere is a subject marker, referring to and concording with the subject of the clause. Since lexical subjects which are inferrable in the context of discourse need not be expressed, the subject marker is often the only reference to the understood subject in a clause and thus functions as a pronoun. The independent pronouns are not obligatory in the clause. The subject marker is sufficient to form a subjunctive clause in most Bantu languages, e.g. Swahili a-fany-e ‘he should do (it)’. In the indicative mode, at least one more element is necessary for non-imperatives: the tense/aspect marker. The tense/aspect marker may immediately follow
Bantu languages are quite extensive, marking a variety of tenses, aspects and moods. The fine distinction between degrees of pastness is particularly striking as unusual among world languages, e.g. Gikuyu a-gwat-ire ‘s/he held’ (current (today) past), a-ra-gwat-ire ‘s/he held’ (recent (yesterday) past), a-à-gwat-ire ‘s/he held’ (remoter past). Among Bantu languages with such distinctions, some show tense concord between the initial tense and consecutive tense markers, e.g. Giriama a-dza-fika a-ka-injira ‘s/he arrived and entered (today)’ vs. w-a-fika a-ki-injira ‘s/he arrived ... (yesterday or earlier)’. The consecutive marker, common in east coast Bantu and extending into the interior, functions as a perfective, necessarily giving a consecutive interpretation to verbs so marked with respect to the preceding verb.

A great many Bantu languages allow concatenation of particular tense/aspect markers, e.g. Gikuyu i-ngi-ka-na-endia ‘if I should ever sell (it)’ where -ngi- is ‘hypothetical’, -ka- is ‘future’ and -na- is ‘indeterminate time’. Along the east coast this degree of morphological complexity is largely reduced to a single tense prefix per verb. Thus, in Swahili ‘compound tenses’ allow two tenses to mark a clause through the device of an auxiliary verb -kuwa ‘be(come)’ supporting the first tense, e.g. a-li-ku-wa a-ki-fanya ‘s/he used to do it’ where -li- is the ‘past’ marker and -ki- is ‘habitual/progressive’. The construction a-li-ki-fanya survives in Northern Swahili with the same meaning.

Both the reduction of some of the paradigmatic complexity and the introduction of new tense-aspect markers in specific contexts have led to extensive asymmetry between affirmative and negative tense/aspect markers among the east coast languages. Swahili provides many examples. Many scholars caution against direct comparison of the semantics of the affirmative and negative tenses. Thus, the chart given here is approximative, in order to indicate differences in the affirmative and negative tenses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affirmative</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-na/a-</td>
<td>-Ø...-i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-me-</td>
<td>-ja- ‘not yet’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-li-</td>
<td>-ku-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ta-</td>
<td>-ta/to-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-nge/ngali-</td>
<td>-nge/ngali-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ki-</td>
<td>-si-po- ‘unless’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ka-</td>
<td>(use neg. subjunctive) ‘without then V-ing’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This standard Swahili paradigm is general to most urban Swahili dialects. The rural dialects show various differences, e.g. -na- is ‘today past/perfect’ in the rural coastal dialects, -Ø...-ie- < *-ide serves a similar function in the Bajuni dialects and ChiMwini (-ire), Comoros dialects use nga-...-o rather than a tense prefix for the ‘progressive/general’, e.g. ng-u-som-o ‘s/he’s
reading’, cf. standard a-na-soma. In addition to the above markers standard Swahili uses hu-, usually considered a tense/aspect marker but not admitting a subject marker (<ni+ku- = copula + infinitive marker), to mark ‘occasional recurrent action’ (i.e. ‘sometimes’). In the Northern dialects, hu- is generally used as the ‘progressive/habitual’, and -na- only occurs in speech to speakers of other varieties of Swahili.

An optional element of the Bantu verb is the object marker, placed immediately before the verb stem. Common to all Bantu languages is the use of an object marker anaphorically to refer to an understood second argument of the clause, not expressed in the clause itself, e.g. Swahili a-me-vi-ona ‘s/he has seen them’, where -vi- refers to some class 8 object such as vi-su ‘knives’ (pl. of ki-su). The invariant reflexive object marker, -ji- < *gi (many Bantu languages use a reflex of *ke-) marks subject-object coreference, e.g. a-me-ji-kata ‘he cut himself’, tu-me-ji-kata ‘we cut ourselves’ etc.

Many Bantu languages allow multiple object markers, e.g. Umbundu w-a-u-n-dekisa ‘s/he showed him/her to me’, where -u- is the class 1 object marker ‘him/her’ and -n- is the first person singular object marker ‘me’. On the east coast and spreading inland toward the south is the restriction of the object marker to one per verb. In some languages, either of two object arguments may be represented by the object marker, the other being expressed anaphorically by an independent pronoun or demonstrative. Most investigated languages indicate that there are further restrictions on which object may be so represented. Swahili is highly developed in this respect. Animate are selected over inanimates and there is a hierarchy of roles from agent down to direct object. These roles are determined either lexically or by verbal extensions. The verbal extensions will be discussed immediately below. First, however, it is worth mentioning that Swahili is unique in gravitating toward the object marker as an obligatory verbal category, though only for reference to human objects. The use of the object marker with expressed indefinite human objects in the same clause is generally tolerated in Bantu only by those North-East coastal languages which have been in contact with Swahili for several generations (e.g. the Kenyan coastal languages Pokomo and Miji Kenda), but is obligatory in urban dialects of Swahili and the standard language, e.g. a-li-mw-ona mtu ‘s/he saw somebody’, where -m(w)- class 1 refers to mtu ‘person’ and the referent is not yet known to the addressee. Elsewhere in Bantu the object marker must have an anaphoric reference.

The verbal extensions are verbal suffixes which define the role of one argument of the verb. They are directly suffixed to the verb root or to each other when grammatically possible. All the verbal suffixes are inherited from Common Bantu. The system has undergone little semantic change and a moderate amount of formal change in the current languages. Swahili will serve to illustrate the basic system common to all Bantu languages.

In Swahili the regular causative is -ilesha (the vowel determined by the
vowel harmony rule discussed on page 999), e.g. *pik-ishá 'cause to cook', *chek-eshá 'make laugh'. Its origin appears to be a sequence of stative + causative. The -ya causative survives in a few transparent lexical items, e.g. *on-ya 'warn', cf. *ona 'see', *on-eshá 'show'. The causative focuses on the agent of the root verb if a specific agent referent is understood. If not, it may focus on the object of the root verb, e.g. *a-li-zi-jeng-eshá 's/he had them built', where 'them' refers to a class 10 noun such as *nyumba 'houses'.

The stative suffix focuses on the state or potential of the subject. With the perfect -me- it focuses on state, e.g. *i-me-vunj-ika 'it is broken' < *vunja 'break', *i-me-poto-ka 'it is twisted' < *potoa 'twist'. With the general 'present' -na-, -a- or hu- it may focus on a potential, e.g. *i-na-vunj-ika 'it is breakable' (i.e. 'it can get broken'). With some verbs the stative form is *ilekana as if from stative + reciprocal, e.g. *i-na-pat-ikana 'it is obtainable' < *pata 'get'. Sometimes the stative interpretation remains with this tense, e.g. *i-na-jul-ikana 'it is known' < *jua 'know'. A number of stative verbs show lexicalisation of the stative marker, e.g. *amka 'awaken (intr.)', *choka 'be tired', where no simpler forms of the verb exist.

The prepositional suffix (also called applicative) covers the semantic range of the most common prepositions in English. It may be benefactive, e.g. *ni-li-m-pik-ia 'I cooked for her', directive, e.g. *ni-li-lil-ia kijiko 'I cried over a spoon', directional, e.g. *ni-li-m-j-ia 'I came to him', instrumental, e.g. *ni-li-l-ia kijiko 'I ate with a spoon', affected participant, e.g. *wa-li-m-f-ia 'they died on him'. That is, the prepositional suffix focuses on the role of some argument other than the direct object. The particular role focused on in context is a matter of the lexical meaning of the verb and inference, e.g. *ni-li-mw-ib-ia may mean either 'I stole for him' or 'I stole from him'. As with other extensions, in some cases they have lexicalised, e.g. *ambi-a 'say to' < *amb-i-a, where the verb -amba 'say' survives in Swahili elsewhere only as a complementiser, e.g. nimesikia kwamba a-me-fika 'I heard that he has arrived'. Double prepositional verbs have a 'persistive' meaning, e.g. *tup-il-ia 'throw (far) away', end-el-ea 'continue' < end-e-a 'go in a certain direction' < enda 'go'.

The reversive suffix functions to undo the action of the root verb, e.g. *fung-u-a 'open, untie' < *fung-a 'close, tie', *chom-o-a 'pull out' < *chom-a 'stick in, skewer'.

The reciprocal suffix indicates reciprocal roles for two subjects or a subject and the object of a na 'and' phrase, e.g. *wa-li-pig-ana 'they fought (with each other)' < *piga 'hit', *a-li-pig-ana na-ye 's/he fought with him/her', where
the north-west, suggests an intermediate stage of evolution between an analytical verb-final syntax and the strict verbal morphology of Swahili and the east coast, with maximally a single tense prefix and object marker per verb. In particular, the morphologisation of auxiliary-like categories, both pre- and post-verbal, does not appear to have occurred uniformly over the Bantu area as the languages assumed their current verb-medial syntax. The slight ordering freedom of verbal extensions, e.g. in the Umbundu example on page 1008, suggests the relatively late survival of pre-Bantu verbal extensions as a separate word class in part of the southwestern area. The prepositional verbal extension -eleda, as well as the use of verbs for prepositional direction, e.g. Swahili (ku)toka 'come (from)' and kw-end›a '(go) towards', suggest the serial verb constructions general to Niger-Congo languages, including Bantu's north-west relatives (see pages 988–9). In the process of evolution towards complex verb morphology, the attraction of these auxiliaries to the preceding verb precluded a preverbal position for the object of the 'prepositional' verb and may have precipitated verb-medial syntax. The Bantu languages which still allow multiple object-markers, the interior east and most of the west (in the north-west object markers have been partially lost in favour of post-verbal independent pronouns), indicate the retention of verb-final syntax, allowing two or more preposed objects, but only for a pronominal form of the object. That is, where O is a lexical object and o is a pronominal object, O–V O–aux. appears to have evolved into O-V+aux. O and finally V+aux. O O, but o–V o–aux. evolved into o–o–V+aux. In most contexts, languages like Swahili have gone further in reanalysing the object of the extension as the only object of the main verb. Syntactically, focusing options have been maintained in Swahili through the development of a new prepositional device, using the possessive construction for instrument discussed above, e.g. a-li-pig-i-a nyundo msumari 'he hit the nail with a hammer' (i.e. he used a hammer to hit the nail), with the extension focusing on the instrument, and a-li-piga msumari kwa nyundo, with the same meaning but use of the possessive construction, reversing the order of lexical objects. Interestingly enough, the instrumental use of the prepositional extension in Swahili still allows an object marker for the direct object despite the presence of the instrument in the clause, e.g. a-li-u-pig-i-a nyundo msumari (where -u- refers to msumari 'nail'). All other uses of all verbal extensions allow the object marker only to refer to the object of the extension when that object is mentioned in the clause. Amidst variation in the position of the negative marker across Bantu languages and according to tense/aspect within the languages, the widespread use of a post-verbal negative marker in the north-west (and in Chagga, as discussed above) suggests an auxiliary origin in verb-final syntax for negation: verb negative (= auxiliary). The preverbal position of the negative marker *ti (Swahili si) appears to be a manifestation of the shift to verb-medial syntax. This *ti is also the negative copula, e.g. Swahili mnyama si mtu 'an animal is
na-ye consists of na ‘with/and’ and a cliticised form of the independent pronoun yeye ‘him/her’.

The passive focuses on the non-agentive status of the subject, e.g. a-li-shind-wa ‘s/he was defeated’ < shinda ‘defeat’, a-li-on-esh-wa ‘s/he was shown’ (...‘see’ + causative + passive). Only an object which can be referred to by an object marker with the active verb can be the subject of the passivised verb in Swahili. Thus, the only passive corresponding to the active sentence, ni-sha-ku-on-esh-wa watu ‘I already showed the people to you’, is u-li-on-esh-wa watu ‘you were shown the people’. The direct object watu ‘people’ cannot be passivised over the indirect object, just as it cannot be represented by an object marker while there is an indirect object in the clause. The passive is always the last verbal extension in the Swahili verb. This appears to be quite general to Eastern Bantu. However, in the south-west the passive may precede the prepositional if the subject has the role of direct object of the active verb, e.g. Umbundu onjo y-a-tung-iw-ila ina-hé ‘the house was built for his/her mother’ < tunga ‘build’, where the subject of tung-iw- ‘build-passive’ is onjo ‘house’ and ina-hé ‘mother-his/her’ is the object of -ila, the prepositional suffix. A number of other verbal extensions are extant in Bantu, but are no longer productive, cf. Swahili kama-ta ‘seize’ < kama ‘squeeze’, nene-pa ‘get fat’ < nene ‘fat (adj.)’, ganda-ma ‘get stuck’ < ganda ‘stick to’. Still further verbal extensions are recognisable through Niger-Congo reconstruction, e.g. *bi-áda (Swahili zaa ‘bear children’) contains *bi, a Niger-Congo root for ‘child’ not common in Bantu.

To complete discussion of the morphological complexity of the verb structure, the relative marker must be mentioned. In most of the Bantu area relativisation is a syntactic process which does not interfere with the verbal complex. However, among the North-East coastal languages, including Swahili, a relative marker may be infixed in the verbal complex by suffixation to the tense prefix. The relative marker in such cases is itself complex, consisting of a secondary class concord marker + the referential morpheme -o, e.g. ni-li-p+o-fika ‘when I arrived’. Here the relative marker -p+o-consists of the concord for class 16, a locative used here as a temporal, and the referential -o. The form functioning as a relative marker here occurs throughout Bantu in a demonstrative series, e.g. the Swahili proximate ‘that’ hu-y+o (cl. 1), hi-l+o (cl. 5) etc. In the languages which have the infixed relative marker it only appears with a few tense prefixes. In all cases these tense prefixes are innovations developing later than the Common Bantu period. The origin of this infixation is postposing of the relative marker to the entire verbal complex. This process survives on the north-east coast and in the south-east, when there is no tense prefix on the verb, e.g. Swahili mwezi u-Ø-ja-(w+)+o ‘the month which is coming’, i.e. ‘next month’, where the Ò- marks the absence of a tense prefix and the relative marker is suffixed to the verb ja ‘come’, or Pokomo want’u wa-Ø-jie-(w+)+o ‘the people who came’, with the addition of a tense suffix -ie to the verb -ja
'come'. The tense prefixes which allow the infixed relatives originate in auxiliaries where the relative marker was postposed, e.g. Swahili -li- 'past/ anterior' < (-a- 'remote past') + li 'copula'. The tense prefix -na- 'general, progressive' regularly takes infixation in the standard and Southern dialects, but is largely resisted by the Central dialects, e.g. standard Swahili waatu wa-na-(w+)o-sema 'the people who are speaking', while Central Swahili prefers waatu amba-(w+)o wa-na-sema 'the people who have spoken', where the relative marker cliticises to a complementiser amba introducing the relative clause. This device is used for relativisation in all dialects and is the only option with tense prefixes which do not allow relative infixation.

4 Syntax

Bantu languages have a basic verb-medial word order with a strong tendency toward subject first. Auxiliaries precede the verb (itself usually in infinitive form with *ko- prefixed). All noun modifiers follow the noun in most of the Bantu area: adjectives, numerals, demonstratives, relative clauses. However, most languages optionally allow demonstratives to precede the noun to mark definiteness. The basic possessive (or 'associative') pattern is Possessed cc-a Possessor, where -a is the associative marker 'of', and the class concord prefix concords with the possessed noun. As discussed on page 1003, the pronominalised possessor takes a special form, which is suffixed to -a-; thus, Swahili ngoma z-a-mtu '(the) drums of/for (the) man' with the class concord z- (class 10) concordng with ngoma 'drums' and ngoma z-a-ke 'his/ her drums' with the special possessive form of the pronoun suffixed to -a-.

Most Bantu languages show concord for the class of the pronominalised possessor, but Swahili uses -ke for all classes except the animate plural (class 2).

With the exception of *nà 'and/with', Common Bantu does not appear to have prepositions. Beside the prepositional extension, Swahili uses both verbs and nouns to function like English prepositions, e.g. a-me-fika toka Dar 'he has arrived from Dar', where toka is the verb 'come from'; a-li-tembea mpaka Dar 'he walked to Dar', where the noun mpaka 'boundary' is used as a vector to mean 'up to, until'. Commonly, the possessive construction is used prepositionally, e.g. chini y-a nyumba 'under (of) the house', where chini 'down, under' etymologically displays nchì 'ground' + -ni, the locative suffix. The possessed concord ignores the locative and concords directly with the root noun. The possessive construction is also used with the locative concords prefixed, especially ku- (class 17), to express locative, instrumental and manner relations, e.g. kw-a Fatuma 'at Fatuma's (place)', kw-a nyundo with (a) hammer', kw-a nguvu 'by force'. In all cases, these preposition-like uses of constructions are noun second. In all respects, then, Swahili and the other Bantu languages are very much like the prototypical SVO language.
However, word order is not invariant. Topicalisation is possible, e.g. 
*kiabu ni-li-ki-kuta* 'the book, I found it'; note the usual use of the object 
marker (-*ki* (class 7) in this case) in the topicalised construction. In Swahili a 
topicalised possessive construction is optional with animate possessors: *mtu 
goma zake* 'the man, his drums'. Some Bantu languages require a cleft 
construction for interrogatives, equivalent to Swahili *ni nani uliyemwona?* 
'who did you see?' lit. '(it) is who that you saw?', where the interrogative 
pronoun *nani* 'who' is introduced as the predicate of the copula *ni*, a marker 
used to focus on noun phrases or entire clauses in the Bantu languages. In 
Swahili, topicalisation is never obligatory. The usual form of the question 
leaves an object interrogative in object, i.e. post-verbal, position, e.g. 
*ulimwona nani?* 'you saw who?'. The widespread use of Bantu interrogative 
pronouns ending in -*ni*, e.g. Swahili *na-ni* 'who?', *ni-ni* 'what?', *li-ni* 'when?', 
*ga-ni* 'what kind?' indicates the earlier prevalence of topicalisation in *wh-* 
questions in Bantu, still found in Bantu's Benue-Congo and Kwa relatives, 
where cognates of *ni* (< *ne*) are suffixed to topics, whether interrogative or 
otherwise, e.g. in Yoruba (see page 986).

Beside its predicate-marking function, the particle *ni* (usually called a 
copula because of its equative function in Bantu languages, e.g. *Fatuma ni 
m-Swahili* 'Fatuma is a Swahili speaker') functions in some North-East 
interior languages to mark a main clause, e.g. Gikuyu *ni-a-gwat-ire* 'he held 
(it)' as main clause, but *mündū ù-ria a-gwat-ire*, 'the man who held (it)', 
where *a-gwat-ire* is relativised by means of the demonstrative *ù-ria* (Swahili 
*yu-le*) introducing the relative clause. Another Bantu 'copula' reflected in 
Swahili -*li* acts like a verb in taking tense prefixes and is used for both 
equative and locative purposes in most Bantu languages (replacing *ni* as 
equative with non-third persons). In Swahili, equative and locative 
predicates are strictly distinguished, so that *skuli ni hapa* means 'this place is 
a school' but *skuli i-ko hapa* (*iko < i-li-ko*) means 'the/a school is in/around 
here'.

Despite its typically verb-second syntax, much of the morphology of the 
Bantu languages indicates a verb-last origin, only sporadically found among 
the Niger-Congo languages. Signs of verb-last syntax are found in the 
preposing of the object marker to the verb stem (as if of OV origin), the 
postposing of the verbal extensions and mode markers (as if of 
verb–auxiliary origin), the suffixing of the locative marker -*ni* to the affected 
noun (as if of noun–postposition origin), the class prefix on nouns (as if of 
modifier–noun origin) and probably the postposing of the relative marker to 
the non-tense-prefixed verbal complex surviving on the north-east coast and 
in the south-east (as if of clause–relativiser origin). Otherwise, with its 
obligatory subject marker and tense prefixes in that order, and its 
noun–genitive possessive construction, the Bantu languages resemble the 
majority of their Benue-Congo and Kwa neighbours in the north-west.

The variation in position of some Bantu categories, most characteristic of
not a person’. In the same way that there are traces of a post-predicate position for the currently prepredicate copula ‘ne (Swahili ni) among the interrogative pronouns, as discussed earlier, the negative ‘copula’ appears to have shifted to a preverbal auxiliary: negative (= auxiliary) verb. The other forms of negation, which place the negative before the subject marker, appear to be even later developments within the Bantu area, evolving from verbs with inherent negation, e.g. Swahili ha-< nk’a- (still common in the Central dialects) perhaps developing from ni ‘copula’ + kana ‘deny’.

Bantu subordination patterns are relatively consistent across languages. Relativisation is generally introduced by a demonstrative or, among languages with prefixes, a prefix when the subject is relativised, e.g. Zulu a-bantu a-ba-funa-yo ‘people who want’ (note the final relative marker -yo used with no tense prefix). The prefix itself may derive from an earlier demonstrative in concord with the head noun and subject of the relative clause. Complement clauses and even adverbial clauses are generally introduced by verbs etymologically meaning ‘say’ (as generally in Niger-Congo), e.g. Swahili kwamba, Southern and Central Bantu ku-ti, and/or ‘be(come)’, e.g. Swahili ku-wa. Thus, -amba- in Swahili may introduce reported speech, a relative clause and earlier introduced the protasis of conditional sentences, e.g. na kwamba moyo ni chuo ningeKupa ukasome ‘and if the heart were a book, I would give it to you for you to read’ (a verse from the early nineteenth-century Mombasan poet, Muyaka). This last use of kwamba has been replaced by kama of Arabic origin, also used as the preposition ‘like’. In the rural dialect of Chifundi ku-wa ‘be(come)’ retains this function, cf. Zulu u-ku-ba and u-ku-ti which also may function like this. In Swahili ku-wa may also introduce reported speech and other complements of verbs of communication or mental action, e.g. ‘think’.

In sum, the syntax of the Bantu languages reflects an SVO language which has evolved out of a language with both SOV characteristics and interclausal relations common to Niger-Congo languages of either basic word order. It is most distinctive among Niger-Congo languages in its noun-class system and its verb morphology. Among Niger-Congo class languages it is specifically distinctive in the complexity of its verb morphology. For example, the distantly related West Atlantic language Fula is also a class language, but the class markers follow rather than precede the noun and there are no tense prefixes or object markers preceding the verb root. Like Bantu, Fula is currently verb-medial showing the prevalence of this type of syntax throughout Niger-Congo.