Tense agreement in Ndebele light-verb constructions

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1 Introduction

• Ndebele uses a class of light verbs (LVs) to express adverbial meanings (e.g. qala ‘do first’, phose ‘almost do’, ze ‘finally do’, mane ‘simply do’)

• The main, lexical verb appears with subjunctive mood morphology

(1) Ngi-qala  
 1sg-first.pres
ngi-pheke.  
1sg-cook.pres.sbjv
‘I first cook’

(2) Ngi-qalé  
1sg-first.pst
ng-aphéka.  
1sg-cook.pst.sbjv
‘I first cooked ’

• The subjunctive verb co-varies with matrix tense (present subjunctive or past subjunctive)

Examining Ndebele LV-constructions, I argue that:

• Tense agreement is a relation which need not involve T heads

• It is an instance of Infl-agreement – an independently motivated mechanism

• The main constraint that governs tense/Infl-agreement is locality

PROPOSAL:
Tense agreement in Ndebele is agreement between the subjunctive verb and the closest inflectional head:

\[(\text{Infl}) \ldots (\text{Infl}) \ldots \text{Infl} \ldots V_{\text{light}} \ldots V_{\text{sbjv}} \ldots\]

PLAN:

2 Tense agreement in Ndebele and Sequence of Tense

3 Analysis: tense agreement as an instance of Infl-agreement

4 Evidence for locality: intervention by lower Infl

5 Conclusion

1 Abbreviations: FS = final suffix, FUT = future, PRES = present, PST = past, SBJV = subjunctive
2 Tense agreement in Ndebele and Sequence of Tense (SOT)

(3) a. Ngi-qala  ngi-pheke.  \hspace{1cm} \textit{Ndebele}
   \hspace{1cm} \text{1sg-first.\textbf{pres} 1sg-cook.\textbf{pres.sbjv}}
   \hspace{1cm} ‘I first cook’

   b. Ngi-qalé  ng-aphéka.
   \hspace{1cm} \text{1sg-first.\textbf{pst} 1sg-cook.\textbf{pst.sbjv}}
   \hspace{1cm} ‘I first cooked’

- \textit{Sequence of Tense}: embedded tense is dependent on matrix tense

(4) a. Gianni crede che Maria sia incinta.  \hspace{1cm} \textit{Italian (Giorgi, 2009:7)}
   \hspace{1cm} Gianni believe.\textbf{pres} that Maria be.\textbf{pres.sbjv} pregnant.
   \hspace{1cm} ‘Gianni believes that Maria is pregnant’

   b. Gianni credeva che Maria fosse incinta.
   \hspace{1cm} Gianni believe.\textbf{pst} that Maria be.\textbf{pst.sbjv} pregnant.
   \hspace{1cm} ‘Gianni believed that Maria was pregnant’

⇒Embedded past tense morphology expresses simultaneity, not precedence

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
higher tense & lower tense \\
\hline
\text{Morphology: PAST} & \text{PAST} \\
\text{Semantics: PAST} & \text{PRES/∅} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

Accounts of Sequence of Tense:
- the lower past tense is a semantically deficient T (anaphoric/dependent tense)
  (Picallo, 1984; Abusch, 1997; Giorgi & Pianesi, 1997; Landau, 2004; Giannakidou, 2009; a.o.)

- the semantics–morphology mismatch is due to operations on the lower T (PF/LF feature deletion, agreement with higher T)
  (Comrie, 1986; Enç, 1987; Ogihara, 1989; Giorgi, 2009; a.o.)

→ \textbf{A dependency between two Ts}: \[
[\text{main clause } T \ldots [\text{sbjv clause } T_{dep} \ldots ]] \]

\textbf{A CHALLENGE}:
In Ndebele light-verb constructions, the subjunctive complement is smaller than a TP.

(6) Two types of subjunctive complements in Ndebele
a. \textit{Clausal Subjunctive} (CP)

b. \textit{Small Subjunctive} (≈VP) (selected by aspectual light verbs)

(7) Assumed clause structure: \[
[\text{CP} \ [\text{TP} \ [\text{PerfP} \ [\text{AspP} \ [\text{VP} \ldots ]]]]] ]
\]
• CP: only Clausal Subjunctives can be introduced by a complementizer

(8) a. Ngi-m-funa [ ukuthi a-bale. ]  
   1sg-1o-want COMP 1-read.sbjv 
   I want him to read.  
   *Clausal Subjunctive

b. U-qala [ (*ukuthi) a-bale. ]  
   1-first (*COMP) 1-read.sbjv 
   He first reads.  
   *Small Subjunctive

• TP: only Clausal Subjunctives can have a preverbal subject (in Spec,TP)

(9) a. Ku-fanele [ ukuthi uZodwa abale. ]  
   17-must COMP 1Zodwa 1-read.sbjv 
   ‘Zodwa must read’.  
   *Clausal Subjunctive

b. *Ku-qala [ uZodwa abale. ]  
   17-first 1Zodwa 1-read.sbjv 
   (‘Zodwa first reads’)  
   *Small Subjunctive

• PerfP: only Clausal Subjunctives can express Perfect aspect

(10) a. Ngi-m-funa [ ukuthi a-be e-balile. ]  
   1sg-1o-want COMP 1-aux.sbjv 1-read.perf 
   I want him to be done reading.  
   *Clausal Subjunctive

b. *U-qala [ a-be e-balile. ]  
   1-first 1-aux.sbjv 1-read.perf 
   *Small Subjunctive

• AspP: only Clausal Subjunctives can express imperfective aspect

(11) a. Ngi-m-funa [ ukuthi a-be e-bala. ]  
   1sg-1o-want COMP 1-aux.sbjv 1-read.impf 
   I want him to be reading.  
   *Clausal Subjunctive

b. */? U-qala [ a-be e-bala. ]  
   1-first 1-aux.sbjv 1-read.impf 
   *Small Subjunctive

(12) Ndebele small subjunctives are selected by aspectual light verbs

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{VP} \\
\text{V} \\
\end{array} \\
\begin{array}{c}
\text{light verb} \\
\text{VP} \\
\text{V} \\
\end{array} \\
\Rightarrow \text{Small Subjunctives do not contain a TP}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{v} \\
\text{subjunctive verb} \\
\end{array}
\]
Tense agreement in the two types of subjunctive complements:

(13) **Small Subjunctive: tense agreement**

a. U-qala a-bale. \(\text{Present} \rightarrow \text{Present Subjunctive}\)
   
   1-first.\text{pres} 1-read.\text{pres}\text{sbjv}  
   
   He first reads.

b. U-qalé w-abala/*a-bale. \(\text{Past} \rightarrow \text{Past Subjunctive}\)
   
   1-first.\text{pst} 1-read.\text{pst}\text{sbjv}/*1-read.\text{pres}\text{sbjv}  
   
   He first read.

(14) **Clausal subjunctive: no tense agreement**

a. Ngi-m-funa ukuthi a-bale. \(\text{Present} \rightarrow \text{Present Subjunctive}\)
   
   1sg-1o-want.\text{pres} COMP 1-read.\text{pres}\text{sbjv}  
   
   I want him to read.

b. Ngi-a-m-funa ukuthi a-bale/*w-abala. \(\text{Past} \rightarrow \text{Present Subjunctive}\)
   
   1sg-\text{pst}-1o-want COMP 1-read.\text{pres}\text{sbjv}/*1-read.\text{pst}\text{sbjv}  
   
   I wanted him to read.

- Clausal Subjunctive contains a T projection but shows no tense agreement with higher tense.
- Small Subjunctive does not contain T but it does show tense agreement with higher tense.

WHAT WE NEED:
an account of tense agreement that does not require making reference to a lower T head

3 Analysis: tense agreement as an instance of Infl-agreement

PROPOSAL:
morphological tense agreement in Ndebele Small Subjunctives is not a dependency between Ts, but between local heads in the clausal spine

3.1 The mechanism of Infl-valuation

- every verb has an unvalued Infl feature
- every inflectional head (e.g. T, Asp) has a valued Infl feature
- Agreement between Infl-features results in downward valuation (Adger, 2003; Bjorkman, 2011; Wurmbrand, 2011)

(15) The Infl-inventory in Ndebele

\[
[T^0 \text{Infl:PAST/FUT/PRES}^2 \ [\text{Perf}^0 \text{Infl:PAST} \ [\text{Asp}^0 \text{Infl:IMPF} \ [\text{V}^0 \text{Infl:}]]]]
\]

\(^2\) The present tense has actually be argued to be unmarked in Ndebele and modeled as absence of Infl on T (Pietraszko, 2016). This detail is not crucial here and I use [Infl:PRES] for clarity.
Tense agreement in Ndebele light-verb constructions

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(16) Simple Past:

U-∅-bal-ile.
1-pst-read-FS.pst
‘He read’

TP

T

V

Infl: pst

(17) Present tense:

U-ya-bal-a.
1-pres-read-FS
‘He is reading’

TP

T

V

Infl: pres

(18) Future Tense:

U-za-bal-a.
1-fut-read-FS
‘He will read’

TP

T

V

Infl: fut

3.2 Infl-agreement in Small Subjunctives

(19) Non-past → Present Sbjv

1sg-first.pres 1sg-cook.pres.sbjv
‘I first cook’

1sg-fut-first 1sg-cook.pres.sbjv
‘I will first cook’

- Both the light verb (V\textsubscript{light}) and the subjunctive verb (V\textsubscript{sbjv}) have a [Infl:].
- An agreement relation can be established between two unvalued features (Pesetsky & Torrego, 2007)

(20) Past → Past Sbjv

a. Ng-á-qala ng-aphéka.
1sg-Dpst-first 1sg-cook.pst.sbjv
‘I first cooked (long ago)’

b. Ngi-qal-é ng-aphéka.
1sg-first-Rpst 1sg-cook.pst.sbjv
‘I first cooked (recently)’

(21) Present tense ((19)-a):

TP

T

V\textsubscript{light}

Infl: pres

⇒ present subjunctive

(22) Future tense ((19)-b):

TP

T

V\textsubscript{light}

Infl: fut

⇒ present subjunctive
3.3 Independent motivation for Infl-agreement: periphrasis

- Infl-agreement plays a role in verbal periphrasis:
  - If there is more than one valued Infl, the verb will agree with the more local one
  - the higher Infl is supported by an auxiliary

(Cowper, 2010; Bjorkman, 2011)


U-∅-be e-bála
1-pst-aux 1-read impf
‘He was reading’

(26) Future Perfect (Infl:FUT, Infl:PAST):

U-za-be e-bal-ile
1-fut-aux 1-read pst
‘He will have read’
4  Evidence for locality: intervention by lower Infl

(27)  Tense agreement in Ndebele is an instance of Infl-agreement \( \Rightarrow \) Agreement with the closest Infl

\[
\text{Infl} \ldots \text{Infl} \ldots V_{\text{light}} \ldots V_{\text{subj}} \ldots
\]

\[
\uparrow \quad \uparrow
\]

4.1  Past subjunctive blocked by a local Infl

- In Simple Past, the subjunctive V co-varies with past tense

(28)  U-∅-qalé [ w-abala/*a-bale ] \( \text{Past T \rightarrow past subjunctive} \)

1-pst-first 1-read.\text{pst.sbjv/*1-read.\text{pres.sbjv}}

‘He first read’

- In Past Imperfective, the subjunctive V does not co-vary with past tense

(29)  U-∅-be e-qala [ a-bale/*w-abala ] \( \text{Past T \rightarrow unmarked subjunctive} \)

1-pst-aux 1-first.\text{impf} 1-read.\text{pst.sbjv/*1-read.\text{pres.sbjv}}

‘He was reading first’

(30)  a.  Simple Past: Agreement with T

\[
[\text{T Infl:PAST} \ldots [\text{VP } V_{\text{light}} \ldots [\text{VP } V_{\text{subj}} \ldots \rightarrow \text{past subjunctive} \]
\]

\[
\uparrow \quad \uparrow
\]

b.  Past Imperfective: Agreement with Asp

\[
[\text{T Infl:PAST} \ldots [\text{Asp Infl:IMPF} \ldots [\text{VP } V_{\text{light}} \ldots [\text{VP } V_{\text{subj}} \ldots \rightarrow \text{unmarked subjunctive} \]
\]

\[
\uparrow \quad \uparrow
\]

4.2  Unmarked subjunctive blocked by a local Infl

(31)  Ngi-ya-qala [ ngi-pheke/*ng-apheka ]

1sg-\text{fut-first} 1sg-cook.\text{pst.sbjv/*1sg-cook.\text{pres.sbjv}}

I will cook first

- Perfect aspect is a type of past tense

(Hoffman, 1966; McCawley, 1971; Klein, 1992; Cinque, 1999; Arregi & Klecha, 2015; a.o.)

(32)  Ngi-za-be ngi-qal-é [ ng-apheka/*ngi-pheke ]

1sg-\text{fut-aux} 1sg-first-\text{perf} 1sg-cook.\text{pst.sbjv/*1sg-cook.\text{pres.sbjv}}

I will have cooked first

(33)  a.  Simple Future: Agreement with T^0

\[
[\text{T Infl:FUT} \ldots [\text{VP } V_{\text{light}} \ldots [\text{VP } V_{\text{subj}} \ldots \rightarrow \text{unmarked subjunctive} \]
\]

\[
\uparrow \quad \uparrow
\]
b. Future Perfect: Agreement with Perf⁰

\[
[T \text{ Infl:FUT} \ldots [\text{Perf Infl:PAST} \ldots [V_P V_{\text{light}} \ldots [V_P V_{\text{sbjv}} \ldots \rightarrow \text{past subjunctive}}
\]

- Tense agreement in Ndebele is a relation between the subjunctive V and the closest inflectional category;
- it is not a direct relation between the subjunctive V and T

5 Conclusion

- Ndebele light-verb constructions exhibit tense agreement patterns which cannot be accounted for by mechanisms proposed for SOT-type tense agreement
- It is a dependency that need not involve any T heads
  - The lower T is absent in Ndebele Small Subjunctives
  - The higher T does not control agreement on the subjunctive verb in compound tenses
- Tense agreement is an instance of Infl-agreement – an independently motivated mechanism, which
  - does not rely on manipulating T heads
  - and derives the Infl-intervention effects in compound tenses from locality.

References