Revisiting the Disjoint/Conjoint Form Distinction in Bantu Verbs

In some Bantu languages the verb may have a different form depending on whether it is followed by a verbal argument or an adjunct, or not. This difference, known as conjoint/disjoint distinction, is illustrated in (1) for Setswana. Note the form-medial "disjoint" morpheme /a/ characteristic of Setswana disjoint present forms.

In this talk I revisit the disjoint/conjoint form distinction using data from Setswana and Isizulu. Using tonal evidence I show that the disjoint form presents a recursive PhWd with an internal PhWd-boundary separating the Inflectional Stem (Subject Marker + Tense) from the Macrostem (optional Object Marker + Derived Stem including aspectual markers), while the conjoint form consists of a single (non-recursive) PhWd. Furthermore, I show that this is true not only of present forms but also of perfect forms, which in Setswana manifest no difference in segmental content of disjoint and conjoint forms (Creissels, 1996).

Based on a suggestion made in Buell (2005) I argue that the verb undergoes V-to-T in conjoint environments. When the verb appears in T (the "conjoint" form), it is part of the MWd (Morphological Word) SM-V-T-FV, which is mapped to a single PhWd. However, in disjoint environments, where the vP contains no other material besides the verb, it surfaces in its base-generated position in the vP due to a requirement that the vP must contain heavy phonological material in Setswana. When the verb is inserted in the vP (the "disjoint" form), the form consists of two MWds, traditionally identified as the Inflectional Stem and the Macrostem: (SM-T-FV) (V-ASP-FV). The two MWds are at first mapped to two PhWds, but following cliticization of the Inflectional stem to the Macrostem together they make up a recursive PhWd (Selkirk, 1995). These structures are shown in (2).

The so-called "disjoint" morpheme /a/ that is the hallmark of disjoint present forms, is analyzed here as the functional equivalent of the Final Vowel, which is the term used for form-final vocalic suffixes in Bantu literature. I propose that these vocalic suffixes are adjoined to the top node of every MWd, similar to Massuet and Arregi's proposal for Theme Vowels in Romance (Massuet and Arregi, 2005). The absence of the form-medial /a/ in the perfect form is due to the fact that FVs in perfect forms are assigned a different exponent.

Finally, I address the fact that in Isizulu, a language which behaves very similarly to Setswana in regards to disjoint/conjoint distinction in the present, disjoint and conjoint perfect forms are also segmentally distinct , as shown in (3). I argue that the alternation illustrated in (3) is a purely phonological phenomenon, sensitive to the presence or absence of a PhPhr-boundary following the verb, and that it affects only those verbs that use the suffix /IL/ to form the perfect but not those that use zero suffixation for this purpose. As such, it is a phenomenon principally different from the disjoint/conjoint alternation in the present.

1. *Setswana*

a. CONJOINT PRESENT FORM: **kɩ-rɛ́k-á** n:kú
1SGSM buy.FV CL9.sheep
"I'm buying a sheep"

b. DISJOINT PRESENT FORM: **kɩ-a-rɛ́:k-a**
1SGSM.DISJ.buy.FV
"I'm buying"

c. CONJOINT PERFECT FORM: **bá-tshámík-íl-é** di-kɛ́:tó
CL2SM.play.PERF.FV CL10.keto
'We have played diketo'

d. DISJOINT PERFECT FORM: **bá-tshamík-í:l-e**
CL2SM.play.PERF
'They played'

2. a. CONJOINT FORM: {[(SM-V_i-T-FV)]-[(~~V_i~~)]-[(**OBJ**)]}
b. DISJOINT FORM: {[(SM-T-FV)-[(**V-FV**)]]}

{ = PhPhr boundary, [= PhWd boundaries, (= MWd boundary, FV = Final Vowel, SM = Subject Marker, T = Tense, OM = Object Marker, V = Verb, M= Mood, ASP = aspect, OBJ = Object

3. *IsiZulu*

a. DISJOINT PERFECT FORM:
ngi-ba-bon-i:l-e
1SGSM.2PLOM.see.PERF.FV
'I have seen them'

b. CONJOINT PERFECT FORM:
ngi-bon-e: a-ba-fa:na
1SGSM.see.PERF.FV AUG.CL2.boy
'I have seen the boys'

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