

Possible origins of the possessive particle *-ka-* in Zulu

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The aim of this article is to trace some of the possible origins of the possessive particle *-ka-* in Zulu, which occurs when the possessor noun is a noun of class 1a. Research done so far on the nature of *-ka-*, does not provide conclusive evidence on the exact origins of this particle. Nevertheless, several postulations regarding the origins of *-ka-* have been made, such as the possibility that *-ka-* is a contracted form of the locative class possessive concord *kwa-*, or that *-ka-* originates from a class prefix. These hypotheses are critically evaluated, and arguments are put forward for yet another hypothesis, namely that *-ka-* possibly developed from a lexical item by means of a process of semantic broadening. It is further demonstrated that the process of grammaticalization also plays a role in the postulated derivation of this particle.

Introduction

The so-called possessive construction in Zulu is typically described as being constructed of two parts, namely (i) a concord which agrees with the possessee or thing possessed; and (ii) a stem or root which agrees with or indicates the possessor.

The possessive concord, which is the connecting element or link between the possessee and possessor, can be divided into two basic parts – an initial concordial element (that is related to the subject concord of the nominal class to which the possessee belongs), and what is referred to as the possessive particle *-a-* or in some cases *-ka-*. The possessive concords, constructed with the possessive particle *-a-*, are as follows for the various classes in Zulu (see Table 1).

However, possessives formed from possessor nouns in class 1a take different forms of possessive concords. In this case the possessive concord consists of a subjectival concord followed by the particle *-ka-*. The subjectival concord is omitted if it is merely a vowel (that is, *a-*, *i-* or *u-*), in which case the particle *-ka-* alone forms the possessive concord. Compare Table 2.

Thus the so-called possessive construction in Zulu is characterized by two types of possessive particles, namely *-a-* and *-ka-*. While *-a-* enjoys a wide distribution in Zulu, *-ka-*, as already mentioned, is restricted to an environment in which the possessor noun is a noun in class 1a.¹ Given the restricted and specialized occurrence of *-ka-*, it is the aim of this article to trace the possible

origins of this particular possessive particle. In so doing, I hope to throw more light on why *-ka-* is restricted to nouns in class 1a, and why it does not occur with other classes.

Nature of *-ka-*

In research done so far on the nature of *-ka-*, it does not appear as though conclusive evidence has been provided on the exact origins of this particle. Nevertheless, several postulations regarding the origins of *-ka-* as it is used in the formation of class 1a possessives, have been made. I shall refer to two of these hypotheses. Thereafter I shall present a third alternative hypothesis, which I believe offers a new dimension to the case in hand.

-ka- from *-kwa-*?

Van Eeden (1956: 173) postulates that *-ka-* is a contracted form of the locative class possessive concord *kwa-*.² This view is shared by Grégoire³ who states that *-ka-* is a locative morpheme of class 17. She regards the true meaning of an example such as the following:

(1) *inja kababa* 'my father's dog'

to be 'the dog of the place of my father'. Grégoire adds, however, that it is difficult to give a full explanation of the evolution which led to the actual form of this specific morpheme.

Table 1 Possessive concords with particle *-a-*

Class 1	<i>wa-</i>	Class 2	<i>ba-</i>
Class 3	<i>wa-</i>	Class 4	<i>ya-</i>
Class 5	<i>la-</i>	Class 6	<i>a-</i>
Class 7	<i>sa-</i>	Class 8	<i>zu-</i>
Class 9	<i>ya-</i>	Class 10	<i>zu-</i>
Class 11	<i>lwa-</i>		
Class 14	<i>ba-</i>		
Class 15	<i>kwa-</i>		
Class 16	<i>kwa-</i>		
Class 17	<i>kwa-</i>		

Table 2 Possessive concords with particle *-ka-*

Class 1	<i>ka-</i>	Class 2	<i>baka-</i>
Class 3	<i>ka-</i>	Class 4	<i>ka-</i>
Class 5	<i>lika-</i>	Class 6	<i>ka-</i>
Class 7	<i>sika-</i>	Class 8	<i>zika-</i>
Class 9	<i>ka-</i>	Class 10	<i>zika-</i>
Class 11	<i>luka-</i>		
Class 14	<i>buka-</i>		
Class 15	<i>kuka-</i>		
Class 16	<i>kuka-</i>		
Class 17	<i>kuka-</i>		

In addition to expressing 'wife/husband of', the *-ka-* particle in Zulu may also express kinship relations such as 'son of' and 'married daughter of', as illustrated in the following examples:

(6a) *UMpande kaSenzangakhona*

'Mpande, son of Senzangakhona'

(6b) '*Nawe Mbopha kaSithayi, uyangibulala?*' (Mazibuko *et al.*, 1992: 127)

'Are you, Mbopha, son of Sithayi, also killing me?'

(6c) '*UMthembu abheke oKaMajola ...*' (Mncwango, 1983: 103)

'Mthembu then looked at Majola's married daughter/the married daughter of Majola...'

It is noteworthy that a Proto Bantu form **ka* (970) has been postulated by Guthrie (1971: 163) to mean 'wife/wife of'. A morpheme *-ka-* is clearly recognizable in the examples in (5) and (6), while the meanings 'wife' and 'wife of' both imply a notion of possession. Furthermore both meanings express kinship relations. It would therefore not be inappropriate to ask the question whether the possessive morpheme *-ka-* in Zulu may possibly have originated from **ka*. The only other South-Eastern zone Bantu languages in which a similar possessive construction for possessor nouns in class 1a is to be found, are Xhosa and Tswana.⁶ The construction in Xhosa is very close to the Zulu construction, while in the case of Tswana, Cole (1982: 161) points out that certain dialects require the insertion of an element *-ga-* between the possessive concord and the stem in cases of the possessor being in class 1a.

A process which could possibly have taken place in the formation of the present-day possessive concord is that of semantic broadening, whereby a lexical item with a specific meaning becomes generalized over a period of time. In the words of Fromkin & Rodman,

'When the meaning of a word becomes broader, that word means everything it used to mean, and then some' (1988: 313).

In terms of **ka*, this would mean that the notion of possession has moved to the foreground while the specific meanings 'wife/wife of' have now taken on a more general semantic connotation of kinship, which is primarily reserved for class 1a. It is therefore not surprising that possessives which are based on class 1a nouns take on a prefix that incorporates this *-ka-* element.

This process of semantic broadening may be illustrated very clearly by means of the English demonstrative pronoun 'that' which has a general pronominal function in an example such as the following:

(7a) The man *that* I saw was rather tall.

The pronoun 'that' has lost its specific deictic function and become so generalized that it can actually be omitted in a sentence such as the following:

(7b) The man I saw was rather tall.

This process of semantic broadening may also be observed in the case of demonstrative pronouns in Bantu languages, when they occur in relative clauses. In a language such as Tsonga the full demonstrative pronoun is used in the initial position of relative clauses, e.g.

(8) *vanhu [lava va vulavulaka] i vadyondzisi*

'The people who are talking are teachers.'

According to Poulos (1986: 292) demonstrative pronouns in fact lose their deictic significance when they occur in relative clauses. In Swati for instance there is still a morphological trace of the demonstrative left in relative concords, whereas it seems to have disappeared completely in Zulu. Compare the following examples:

Swati

(9a) *kudla lesikudlile bekumnandi*

'The food we ate was nice'.

Zulu

(9b) *ukudla esikudlile bekumnandi*

'The food we ate was nice.'

Poulos explains that,

'What appears to have happened in the Nguni languages is a reduction process whereby the restrictive features of deixis as well as number (agreement) have been completely eliminated and the more general features of pronoun and specifier have been retained' (1986: 293).

In accordance with the above concept of semantic broadening, we can consider yet another original lexical item, namely **kadi* (986/987) also listed by Guthrie (1971: 163), with the following postulated meanings: 'wife, woman, female, sister'. It is quite possible that this lexical item could also have represented the original form of *-ka-*. The explanation of the development of *-ka-* as presented here reflects a linguistic process which has been well-attested in the development of grammatical forms in the evolution of language, namely grammaticalization. By this process is meant the change from a fully fledged lexical item to a grammatical morpheme over a period of time.

Thus it is postulated here that the original lexical items **kadi*, or **ka*, for that matter, lost their lexical status over a period of time and have become a grammatical item, in other words a mere prefixal form in present-day languages like Zulu. Coinciding with this grammatical process has been the process of semantic broadening from the specific meaning of 'wife, sister, female' to the more general semantic connotation of kinship.⁷

This process of grammaticalization has already been attested in the development of certain other morphemes in Zulu. Typologists such as Givón (1976) and Wald (1979) among others maintain that grammatical agreement systems evolve historically from the morphological incorporation of deictic and anaphoric pronouns into verbs. In other words grammatical formatives developed from full lexical items. Initially subject and object pronouns were used for reference to topics. Givón (1976: 155) for example offers the following English glosses for a simple Bantu sentence:

(10a) The man, he came

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Givón (1976: 155) proposes that through a process of demarking, such anaphoric pronouns became cliticized and subsequently morphologically incorporated in the verb, e.g.

(10b) The man he-came

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in Bantu as *a*, and in languages where it does appear it is not usually used in as wide a variety of constructions'.

7. These postulations could possibly answer the question posed by Poulos & Msimang (1995: par.3.3) whether *umka-* is 'a fully fledged word or a shortening of *umfazi ka-*'.
8. Baga Maduri is a member of the Temne-Landuma-Baga languages of the West Atlantic branch of Niger-Congo.

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