The Rift Valley area of central and northern Tanzania is a region with a sustained history of language contact, long characterised by patterns of bi- and multi-lingualism, as well as language shift. A subset of six Bantu languages spoken in this region of East Africa exhibit an unusual word order in which the auxiliary appears post-verbally in restricted contexts. This can be seen in the examples below from Rangi (1), Simbiti (2) and Kuria (3).

(1) *Maama jót-a a-ri maaji mpoli*

1.mother collect-FV SM1-AUX 6.water later

‘Mother will collect water later.’ (Rangi, Gibson 2012:101)

(2) *U-ru-sikō u-ru-ghima n-ku-tuk-a tö-rē*

AUG11-SM11-day AUG1-SM11-whole FOC-INF-dig-FV SM17pl-AUX

‘We are digging all day long.’ (Simbiti, Walker 2013: 101)

(3) *N-ko-nyaháár-ék-á á-re*

FOC-INF-harm-STAT-FV SM1-AUX

‘He is becoming injured.’ (Kuria, Cammenega 2004:259)

This order is unusual in the context of East African Bantu where auxiliary-verb order predominates. It is also unusual from a typological perspective where SVO languages are typically associated with auxiliary-verb order. It has been proposed that this feature is the result of sustained contact with non-Bantu languages spoken in the linguistic area or that it may have its origins in language-internal, grammaticalisation processes (Stegen 2002, Dunham 2005, Gibson 2013, Gibson and Marten 2015).

This talk explores instances of possible contact-induced change in these languages, including but not limited to the verb-auxiliary constructions. This is done with a view to shedding light on the possible origins of the unusual word order, as well as to further our understanding of the influence of language contact in these languages and the region more broadly.

References


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