

á, à, í, ò, ó, nà ... nà

A puzzle in Tunen (Bantu, A44)

Outline

§1. Introduction; §2. Background; §3. The á puzzle, §4. Possible allophones; §5. Red herrings; §6. Overlap; §7. Conclusion.

1 Introduction

This talk is a case study from my ongoing PhD work on the syntax and information structure of Tunen (Bantu A44, Cameroon). It comes from one main research question (RQ1), which I show can't be answered without addressing related questions (RQ2).

RQ1: What is the function of á?

RQ2: Which surface forms are variants of á, and which perform separate functions in the grammar?

Phrased another way:

[á, à, í, ò, ó, nà ... nà]

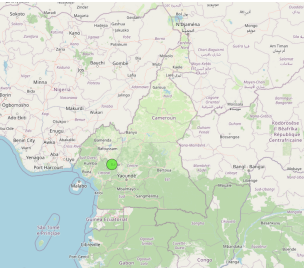
/?, ?, ?, ?/

These two research questions bring us into the domains of **focus, copulas, subject marking, prepositions, infinitives, vocatives**, and **topics**.

2 Background

2.1 Tunen

- Tunen/Nen [tvu], Bantu (Niger-Congo), Guthrie classification A44 (Maho 2009), spoken in Francophone Cameroon (Centre/Littoral)
- Spoken by the Banen, neighbouring languages incl. Basaá, Nyokon, Eton (Mous 2003)
- My recordings from 6 speakers from Ndikiniméki (région du centre), March-June 2019. Elicitation + natural speech



Ethnographies: Dugast (1955); Johnson (2012)

2.2 Tunen phonology

- 7 contrastive vowels¹
- ATR (vowel height) harmony within words

Dominant (+ATR)	i	ə	o	u
Recessive (-ATR)	ɛ	a	ɔ	ɒ

Table 1: Tunen vowel phonemes according to Mous (2003:285)

Sources: Boyd (2015); Mous (2003); Bancel (1991); Mous (1986); Leynseele (1977).

- H and L tone, downstep (⁴H) on surface when floating L precedes a H (for both lexical and grammatical contrasts)
- H tone spread (rightward, 1 step)
- Vowel elision across word boundaries:

V1#V2 → Ø#V2

Sources: Boyd (2015); Mous (2003); Bancel (1991); Janssens (1988); Hulst et al. (1986); Mous (1986); Leynseele (1977); Wilkinson (1975).

Example of vowel elision applying in fast speech (note that H tone of first vowel is preserved):²

- (1) hé! ʔ éŋgàndò yéèyé!
/he! ʔ ɛ-ŋgàndò yɛɛyɛ/
hey FOC2 7-crocodile DEM.7
'Hey! There's a crocodile!' [PM, 457]
- (2) hé! éŋgàndò yéèyé!
/he! ʔ ɛ-ŋgàndò yɛɛyɛ/
hey FOC2 7-crocodile DEM.7
'Hey! There's a crocodile!' [PM, 458]

→ as RQ1 is about á, which is a single vowel, vowel elision will crop up

3 The á puzzle

3.1 The á puzzle

In the literature on Tunen, the form á has been given a few different analyses. There is not yet a consensus as to how to describe its meaning.

Dugast (1971:339): á is a "demonstrative particle"³

Mous (2003:304): á is a "contrastive preposition"

- (3) mé-ndò ní á bóniàk (EB)
1SG-PROG eat CONTR yams
'What I eat is yams' (Mous 2003:304)

3.2 á: My proposal

- á = the copula used in **identificational** and **specificational** copular constructions
- used in **clefts**, which are grammaticalising from biclausal to monoclausal structures (copula → focus marker⁴)

¹8 in Boyd (2015)'s analysis; the difference is that Boyd includes /u/ as a separate phoneme.

²In this presentation, consultant initials and form id from Dative database are given in square brackets for all examples from my corpus. See the Appendix for glossing abbreviations.

³Dugast notes some contexts which I leave out of this presentation for space reasons, including e.g. the end of possessives like wámíá 'my'.

⁴As a result, á is glossed both as cop and foc in this presentation.

3.5 The challenge

- Identifying **possible allophones**
- Need to identify when *á*/allophone is present, taking into account **red herrings** caused by phonological processes such as vowel harmony
- Considering **overlap** - vocatives and topics

4 Possible allophones

4.1 ʒ for non-humans

In hot news thetic construction, *á* for humans and *ʒ* for non-humans (!)

- (12) hé! *á* básiṭà wóṵwò!
/he! *á* básiṭà wóṵwò/
hey FOC 1.pastor DEM.1
'Hey! There's a pastor!' [PM, 459]

- (13) hé! *ʒ* mǐsəkù yééyè!
/he! *ʒ* mǐsəkù yééyè/
hey FOC2 3-elephant DEM.7
'Hey! There's an elephant!' [PM, 460]

Can't use *á* for non-humans unless personifying the referent:

- (14) hé! *á* mǐsəkù wóṵwò!
/he! *á* mǐsəkù wóṵwò/
hey FOC 3-elephant DEM.1
'Hey! There's Mr. Elephant!'
*# 'Hey! There's an elephant!' [PM, 462]

Summary:

- á* has an allophone *ʒ* for non-humans (in hot news thetic environment at least)
- In which case, see whether other instances of *ʒ* map onto *á*, and watch out for **red herrings**

5 Red herrings

Red herring - something that looks like what you are looking for but is really something else; a deception



We need to distinguish the *á* in question from a few other markers that we know are separate: low-toned class 1 subject marker *à*; low-toned 2SG subject marker *ʒ*; preposition *ʒ*; infinitive *ʒ*

Challenges:

- Subject markers can get H tone for independent reasons so e.g. /*à*/ SM.1 can appear as [á]
 - dependent clauses (as we've seen for relatives)
 - floating H of PRES tense marker -'ndò

- (15) ándò sàṭ
/à-'ndò sàṭà/
SM.1-PRES fish
'He/she swims' [EO, 430]

→ floating H tone of 'ndò PRES results in SM.1 /à/ realised as H-toned [á]

- Vowel elision and tone rules lead to same surface form
 - /*á*/ → [á]
 - /*á-á*/ → [á]
- Other markers can surface as *á* and *ʒ*
- Workaround:** Avoid present tense -'ndò, avoid class 1 /*à*/ SM.1

6 Overlap

Possible cases of overlap: (i) **vocatives**, (ii) **topics**, and (iii) **the *nà ... nà* construction**.

6.1 Vocatives

Appearances of *á* for vocative:

- (16) á Pièl, yàté yéná bèṭòmbàk?
/á Pièl, yàté yé-na be-tomb-aka/
FOC Pierre what SM.7-PAST2 MID-happen-DUR
'Pierre, what happened?' [EO, 577]

→ Vowel quality = ATR harmony from proper name, suggesting *á* used for vocative.

→ Q: Is this a different /*á*/, or the same /*á*/?

6.2 Topics

Use of *ʒ* PREP for left-peripheral topics:

- (17) (#(ʒ) bɛɛ(pɛ) bèlábónéá bɛɛpɛ,) báná tàlɛáká èlɛáyé èngàndà yè básèkà
/(#(ʒ) bɛɛ(bɛ) be-labɔneá bɛɛpɛ) ba-na taleaka elɔaye e-nganda ye baseka/
PREP DEM.8 8-food DEM.8 SM.2-PAST2 cook.DUR for 7-holiday ASSOC.7 Easter
'(As for this food here,) they cooked (it) for Easter' [PM, 508]

Topic-marking with *ʒ* PREP not obligatory...

- (18) Nsà, yéndò kèà òwá ándò nà
/Nsà yé-ndò kea ɔwá a-ndò na/
Noah SM.7-PRES do REL.1 SM.1-PRES be_sick
'As for Noah, it seems that he is sick' [JO, 1306]

One instance of *á* in the same function?⁵

⁵Note that both *á* and *ʒ* are used within this same example.

- (19) á mǝngǝlǝ mǎtɛ́tɛ́, ǝ mǎàmǎ mǎsúǎ mǝngǝlǝ mǎ hááhà ǝ bǝŋǝŋǝ, ǝmǎ ábákà tǝ siǝkinǝ hááhà (ǝ) úwǎsú bǝŋǝŋǝ
bǝ kǎmǎlún, ǝbákà ǝ mǎátà hikǎkǎ?
á ma-ongolo ma-tete ǝ maama mǎsuǎ ma-ongolo ma haaha ǝ bǝ-ŋǝŋǝ,
FOC 6-mango 6-small PREP DEM.PROX.6 POSS.PRON.1PL.6 6-mango ASSOC.6 here PREP 14-country
ǝma abaka tǝ siǝkinǝ haaha (ǝ) úwǎsu bǝ-ŋǝŋǝ bǝ kǎmǎlun ǝbaka ǝ
REL.6 regularly SM.1PL see here (PREP) 14-country ASSOC.14 Cameroon normally SM.2SG PREP
maata hikǎkǎ
DEM.6 like
‘As for small mangoes, the small ones we get here in Cameroon, do you like them?’ [PM, 950]

Summary:

- Left-peripheral topics can be marked by ǝ PREP, but there is one instance of á, which needs further investigation

6.3 nà...nà

In presentative thetic context, á appears with singular...

- (20) isinǎnǎnǎ ǝkǎsɛ́ tǝ mǎkiniǝnú káhà ǝwǎ ánú húlínǎ ǝ Yǝhǝndǝ: *(á) bǝsítǝ ǝmǎnúǝlǝ wǎ ilúkúnǎ yé Nǎsǎlɛ́tɛ́ ǝ Yǝhǝnd
/isinǎnǎnǎ ǝkase tǝ mǝ-kiniǝnu kaha ǝwa a-nǝ hulinǎ ǝ Yǝhǝndǝ: *(á)
now inevitably SM.1PL 1-stranger receive REL.1 SM.1-PAST1 come_from PREP Yaounde: *(FOC)
bǝsítǝ emanuɛ́lɛ́ wǎ ɛ-lukuna yé Nasalɛ́tɛ́ ǝ Yǝhǝndǝ/
pastor Emmanuel ASSOC.1 7-church ASSOC.7 Nazareth PREP Yaounde
‘Now we will present a visitor from Yaoundé: here is pastor Emmanuel, coming from Nazareth church in Yaounde’
[PM, 318]

... but with a conjunct noun phrase, nà ... nà appears:⁶

- (21) bǝsú mǎŋǎn, bá lǝmǝtǝkǎn ǝ Nǝhǎlá: nǎ Dǎfni nǎ Minkz
bǝsú ma-ŋǎn, bá lǝmǝtǝkǎn ǝ Nehala: na Dafni na Minkz
?musicians 6-song SM.2 concert PREP Douala and Daphne and MINKS
‘Musicians, performing in Douala: Daphne and MINKS’ [PN, 365]

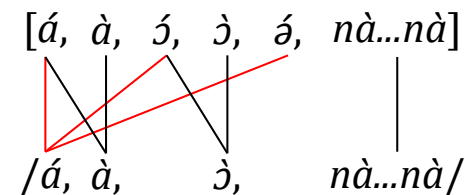
Q: are these constructions parallel (in which case we should link nà...nà to á)?
Possible exhaustive meaning of á (related to focus/identificational copular)

7 Conclusion

- Building a new analysis of Tunen á as copula/focus marker. Working out what is and isn’t related in order to finalise analysis
- allophone ǝ for non-humans, overlap with nà...nà for conjuncts
- á can be realised just by a H tone when vowel elision applies
 - Avoiding PRES and SM.1 helps diagnose where the marker appears (but this limits how many examples can be used (+ link to acquisition and effects on grammaticalisation))
- á is separate from subject markers, preposition, infinitive
- Possible overlap with vocatives and topic marking

This provisional analysis as a diagram:

⁶nà = ‘and’, ‘with’



7.1 Remaining questions

- Are there other overlaps between á and nà ... nà? e.g. how are identificational/specificational copulars/clefts formed with conjunct subjects?
- tátá ... á construction (see appendix)
- infinitive vs prepositional use of ǝ (see appendix)

References

- Bancel, P. (1991). The three-way vowel harmony in nen. In *Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, volume 17, pages 3–14.
- Boyd, V. L. (2015). *The phonological systems of the Mbam languages of Cameroon with a focus on vowels and vowel harmony*. PhD thesis, Leiden University.
- Dugast, I. (1955). *Monographie de la tribu des Nǎiki (Banen du Cameroun)*. Institut d’ethnologie Paris.
- Dugast, I. (1971). *Grammaire du Tunen*. Éd. Klincksieck.
- Harris, A. C. and Campbell, L. (1995). *Processes that simplify biclausal structures*, page 151–194. Cambridge Studies in Linguistics. Cambridge University Press.
- Heycock, C. (2012). Specification, equation, and agreement in copular sentences. *The Canadian Journal of Linguistics/La revue canadienne de linguistique*, 57(2):209–240.
- Higgins, F. R. (1973). *The pseudo-cleft construction in English*. PhD thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).
- Higgins, R. F. (1979). *The pseudo-cleft construction in English*. Garland.
- Hulst, H. v. d., Mous, M., and Smith, N. (1986). The autosegmental analysis of reduced vowel harmony systems: the case of tunen. *Linguistics in the Netherlands*, 105(122).
- Janssens, B. (1988). Ton et éliision vocalique en nen. *Linguistique Africaine*, 1:61–94.
- Johnson, M. (2012). *Ethnobotanik der Region NDIKI (Kamerun): Die Pflanze im alltäglichen Leben der Banen der Region NDIKI; Der soziokulturelle Wert*. PhD thesis, Universitaet Hamburg.
- Leynseele, H. v. (1977). *Essai d’analyse historique des voyelles et consonnes du tunen (Bantu A.44)*.
- Maho, J. F. (2009). NUGL online: The online version of the new updated guthrie list, a referential classification of the bantu languages. *Online file: http://goto.glocalnet.net/mahopapers/nuglonline.pdf*.
- Mous, M. (1986). Vowel harmony in tunen. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG.
- Mous, M. (2003). Nen (a44). In Nurse, D. and Philippson, G., editors, *The Bantu Languages*, pages 283–306. Routledge.
- Wilkinson, R. W. (1975). Tunen tone changes and derived phonological contrast. *Language*, pages 561–575.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to my consultants in Cameroon: Daniel Mbel, Etienne Ondjem, Flore Ongmdak, Jeanne Ongmolale’ba, Pierre Molel, Patience Nambi.



All data from fieldwork conducted by Elisabeth J. Kerr in Mar-Jun 2019 in Ndiikiméki, Cameroon under MINRESI permit no. 90000061/MINRE-SI/B00/C00/C10/C12 as part of the NWO BaSIS project (PI Jenneke van der Wal, Leiden University.)

Image credits

Tunen map Open Street maps via Glottolog: <https://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/tune1261> [accessed 2020-06-11]

Red herring <https://blacklabellogic.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/redherring.png> [accessed 2020-07-30]
All other images by Elisabeth J. Kerr.

Abbreviations

Gloss	Meaning
1, 2, 3...	Bantu noun class marker
1SG	1st person singular
2SG	2nd person singular
APPL	applicative extension
ASSOC	associative marker
CONTR	contrastive marker (Mous 2003 gloss)
COP	copula/focus marker
COP2	non-human copula/focus marker
DEM	demonstrative
DEP	dependent clause
DIST	distal
DUR	durative verbal extension
EMPH	emphatic (greater contrast)
EXCL	exclamation
DUR	durative suffix
FOC	focus marker/copula
INF	infinitive
NEG	negation
PAST1	first-degree past tense (just now)
PAST2	second-degree past tense (hodiernal)
PAST3	third-degree past tense (yesterday and backwards)
PAST4	fourth-degree past tense (far past, many years ago)
...	

Gloss	Meaning
...	...
PREP	preposition
PRES	present tense marker
PROG	progressive (Mous 2003 gloss, = PRES)
PRON	pronoun
PROX	proximal
PTCL.DISC	discourse particle
PTCP	past participle
Q	question particle
REL	relative marker
REP	repetitive suffix (action repeated)
SM	subject marker

Appendix

Tense

Gloss	Main clause	Dependent clause	Time depth
FUT	ŋɔ̃	ŋɔ̃	future from tomorrow onwards
PRES	’ndɔ̃	’ndɔ̃	present, immediate future
PAST1	nɔ̃	nɔ̃	recent past, just an instant ago
PAST2	ná	ná	a few hours ago (same day)
PAST3	kà	↓ná	yesterday and backwards
PAST4	lè	lè	ancient past; many years ago, before birth

Table 3: Tunen tense marking paradigm (simple tenses)

tátá ... á

tátá as negative copula:

- (22) (bɔ̃ɔ̃,) bɛ́fàndé kòndá bɛ́láló tátá bɛ́lendáɔ̃
/(bɔ̃ɔ̃) befandɛ kɔ̃nda belalɔ̃ tata belendalɔ̃/
(no) two add three NEG.COP six
‘No, two plus three doesn’t equal six’ [PM, 784]

tátá ... á construction”:

- (23) tátá tùnɔ̃ní túkímà á tóndɔ̃ hùlùlù. tòmɔ̃tè tùnɔ̃ní tɔ́lɛndɔ̃ hùlùlù
tata tɔ̃-nɔ̃ni tɔ̃-kimə á tɔ̃-ndɔ̃ hululu. tɔ̃-mote tɔ̃-nɔ̃ni tɔ̃-le-ndɔ̃ hululu
not 13-bird 13-all FOC 13-PRES fly. 13-one 13-bird 13-NEG-PRES fly
‘Not all birds fly. Some birds do not fly.’ [EO, 412]

Exhaustivity

á appears with ámàná ‘only’, which is inherently exhaustive:

- (24) Context: “Have you visited Kribi and Limbe?”
bɔ̃ɔ̃, ámàná Kribi á mé⁺ ná kàhùlùk
/bɔ̃ɔ̃ ɔ̃mana Kribi á mɛ-na ka-huləka/
no only Kribi FOC DEPSM.1SG-PAST3 DIR-visit.DUR
‘No, I’ve only visited Kribi’ [PM, 1243]

It is not possible to have *ómàná* ‘only’ without *á*:

- (25) bód, méndò ókò ómàn(á) *(á) fèlénd̥ʒ(è)
 no, SM.1SG-PRES understand only FOC French //
 /bɔɔ, mɛ-ndɔ ɔkɔ ɔmana *(a) fɛlɛnd̥ʒɛ/
 ‘No, I only understand French’ [PM, 90]

PREP VS INF

Both prepositions and the infinitive are [ɔ] (Dugast 1971:89).

Embedding verbs take PREP + INF:

- (26) mèná hǎá ɔ ɔsɔà
 /mɛ-na hɔa ɔ ɔ-sɔa/
 SM.1SG-PAST2 finish PREP INF-wash
 ‘I’ve finished washing (it).’ [JO, 1345]

Embedding verbs with object repeat PREP:

- (27) mǝbákà mǝ hikǝkiǝ ɔ hǝkòkè ɔ ɔtǎlè
 mɛ-baka mɛ hikǝkiǝ ɔ hɛ-kɔkɛ ɔ ɔ-talɛa
 SM.1SG-be.DUR SM.1SG like PREP 19-kok PREP INF-cook
 ‘I like cooking kok’ [JO, 1319]

- (28) mèná káná ɔ bǝkálàtò ɔ ɔwónɔnd
 /mɛ-na kana ɔ bɛ-kaloto ɔ ɔ-ɔnd/
 SM.1SG-PAST2 go PREP 8-carrot PREP INF-buy
 ‘I went to buy carrots’ [EO, 1427]

See also Kendall Isaac’s thesis p32 (discussing Mous 2005:422)

ǎ

- (29) *Context: You know somebody who goes by two names, Lilian and Sarah. A friend of yours mistakenly thinks that there are two different people, one called Lilian, and one called Sarah. You explain to them that Lilian and Sarah are both the same person*
 nǎ Lǐlǐǎnǎ nǎ Sǎlá ǎ mǝndò ɔmòtè
 /na lɛlɛana na sala ǎ mɔ-ndɔ ɔ-mɔtɛ/
 with Lilian with Sarah COP2 1-person 1-one
 ‘Lilian et Sarah, c’est la même personne’
 ‘Lilian and Sarah are the same person’ [PM, 782]

→ Evidence of ǎ outside of the hot news sthetic construction.

Contact

Elisabeth J. Kerr
 e.j.kerr@hum.leidenuniv.nl



www.bantusyntaxinformationstructure.com