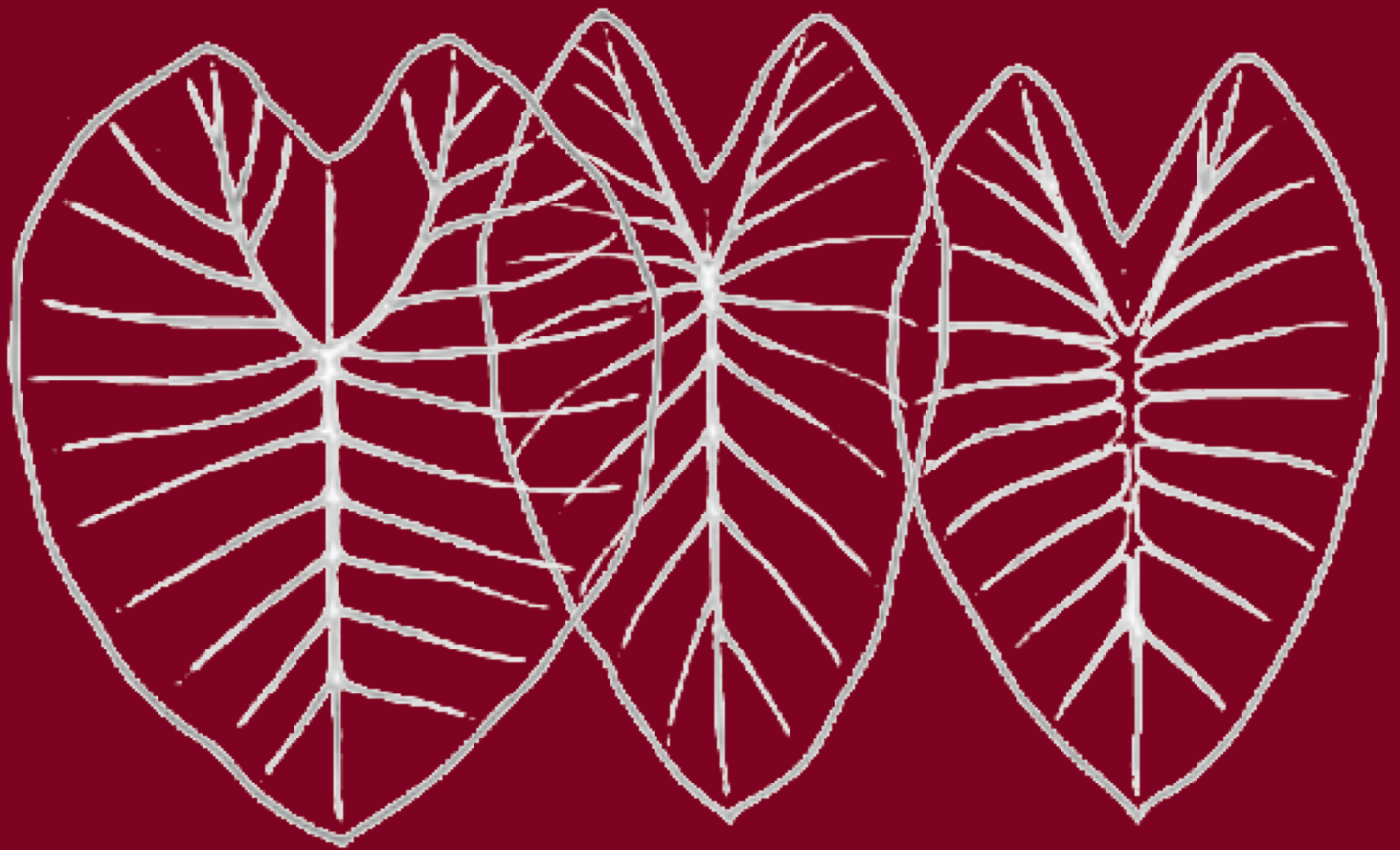


Proceedings of TripleA 7

Linguistic Fieldwork and Semantic Theory



Edited by Peng Liu, Erin Sjovall, Xue Sun,
Polina Berezovskaya and Vera Hohaus

*Proceedings of TripleA 7:
Linguistic Theory and Semantic Fieldwork*

Edited by Peng Liu, Erin Sjoval, Xue Sun, Polina Berezovskaya and Vera Hohaus
on behalf of Moritz Igel and Konstantin Sachs.

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Epistemic Marking on Nouns in Nyala East¹

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Margit Bowler — The University of Manchester

Abstract. We describe and analyze cases of “epistemic marking” on nouns in Nyala East (Bantu, Luhya; Kenya). In Nyala East, certain nouns may indicate the perspectival source of the information referred to by the noun. We analyze this pattern as an expansion of a more pervasive pattern in Bantu languages, that of marking nouns with speaker-oriented meaning (Gambarage, 2019). Our analysis extends this idea to include cases of perspectival shift, where the perspective is not (just) speaker-oriented.

1 Introduction

The Luhya Bantu language Nyala East (n1e JE 32) has a rich system of encoding *perspectival* information. Through prefixation on verbs, complementizers, and nouns, the language can indicate either perspectival source (where the information comes from) or privileged information (who is aware of the information).² We focus here on what we call *epistemic marking* (EM) on nouns: Certain nouns can be prefixed to indicate, broadly, “perspectival source”.

- | | | | | |
|-----|----|---|----|---|
| (1) | a. | <i>e-vi-ou-vehi</i>
8AUG- 8EM -14NC-lie
'a lie (that everyone knows is a lie)' | b. | <i>e-li-ou-vehi</i>
5AUG- 5EM -14NC-lie
'a lie (that only a specific person/
only I know is a lie)' |
|-----|----|---|----|---|

The translations given in (1) reflect one of two possible meanings for the Nyala East nouns; we detail the array of meanings available below. In general, the function of the prenominal affixes *vi-* and *li-* is to convey a “point-of-view” with respect to the lie. Who is aware that it’s a lie? When a speaker uses *vi-*, they are indicating that everyone (in some contextually relevant set) knows this is a lie; when a speaker uses *li-*, they are indicating that only the speaker is aware that this is a lie.

Our study contributes to recent typological work on varieties of perspectivization and privileged information (Evans et al., 2018; Schultze-Berndt, 2017; Bergqvist, 2015), as well as recent theoretical work on Bantu nominal semantics (Gambarage, 2019; ?). The data here point to a potentially new line of inquiry into perspectival domains in the nominal domain, an area that has not received equal attention compared to similar phenomena in the clausal domain.

¹We would like to thank Benard Walumbe, Valaria Okwako, and Periz Walumbe for their time teaching us about Kinyala/Olunyala.

²As we show in this paper, the categories of perspectival source indicated by EM do not correspond to categories of evidentials described in Willett (1988); Aikhenvald (2004). While EM and evidentiality are conceptually similar, they make different distinctions in information source.

2 Background on Nyala East

Like all Eastern Bantu languages, Nyala East has an extensive noun class system reflected in nominal prefixes, verbal subject agreement, adjectival concord, and object marking (not shown in Table 1).

Class	Noun Marker	Subj Marker	Adj Concord	Example
1	(o)mu-	a-/ka- ³	mu-	omusomi ‘student’
2	(a)va-	va-	va-	avasomi ‘students’
3	(o)mu-	ku-	mu-	omusaala ‘tree’
4	(e)mi-	ki-	mi-	emisaala ‘trees’
5	e-	li-	e-	ekhene ‘monkey’
6	(a)ma-	ka-	ma-	amakhene ‘monkeys’
7	(e)si-	si-	si-	esitau ‘book’
8	(e)vi-	vi-	vi-	evitau ‘books’
9	e-	e-	e-	emoosi ‘calf’
10	e-	chi-	e-	emoosi ‘calves’
11	(o)lu-	lu-	lu-	olusia ‘string’ ⁴
12	(a)kha-	kha-	kha-	akhalang’o ‘small door’
13	(e)chu-	chu-	chu-	ochulang’o ‘small doors’
14	ou-	ou-	ou-	ouvehi ‘lie’
21	(o)ku-	ku-	ku-	okupusi ‘big cat’ ⁵

Table 1: Noun Classes in Nyala East

We highlight the four subject agreement morphemes for class 5, 6, 8, 9 because these are morphologically identical to what we describe as *epistemic marking* in the next section, though we additionally note that none of the noun classes are inherently “perspectival” or “epistemic.”

We also point out another common Bantu property—the *augment* (or *pre-prefix*) (de Blois, 1970; Halpert, 2017). In Nyala East, consonant initial noun classes appear with a preceding vowel redundantly reflecting the noun class, demonstrated with singular/plural of the word for ‘word/news’ in classes 5 and 6 respectively.

(2) *e-khuwa*
5NC-word
‘word/news’

(3) *(a-)ma-khuwa*
6AUG-6NC-word
‘words/news’

The augment is sometimes omissible, for reasons we return to shortly.

³The class 1 agreement *ka-* is found only in particular tense/aspect combinations, and so can be distinguished from class 6, which is invariant across tense/aspect combinations.

⁴Class 11 forms plurals in class 10.

⁵Class 21 forms plurals in class 4.

3 Nominal-EM

In addition to the noun class marker, and the augment, certain nouns in Nyala East may also appear with the four EM markers. We refer to this as **nominal-EM** (glossed as EM).

- | | | | | |
|-----|----|---|----|---|
| (4) | a. | (e-)vi-e-khuwa
8AUG-8EM-5NC-word
'word/news
(that everyone knows about)' | c. | (e-)li-e-khuwa
5AUG-5EM-5NC-word
'word/news
(that a specific person knows about)' |
| | b. | (a-)ka-e-khuwa
6AUG-6EM-5NC-word
'word/news
(that a few people know about)' | d. | ? e-e-khuwa
9EM-5NC-word
'word/news
(that someone knows about)' |
-
- | | | | | |
|-----|----|---|----|--|
| (5) | a. | (e-)vi-a-ma-khuwa
8AUG-8EM-6AUG-6NC-word
'words/news
(that everyone knows about)' | c. | (e-)li-a-ma-khuwa
5AUG-5EM-6AUG-6NC-word
'words/news
(that a specific person knows about)' |
| | b. | (a-)ka-a-ma-khuwa
6AUG-6EM-6AUG-6NC-word
'words/news
(that a few people knows about)' | d. | ? e-a-ma-khuwa
9EM-6AUG-6NC-word
'words/news
(that someone knows about)' |

The presence of nominal-EM indicates, broadly, a *source* of information. The classes make the following contributions which are highly dependent on context and the lexical semantics of the associated noun.

- | | | |
|-----|----|--|
| (6) | a. | <i>evi-amakhuwa</i> 'news according to everyone/based on a lot of things' |
| | b. | <i>aka-amakhuwa</i> 'news according to a few people/based on a few things' |
| | c. | <i>eli-amakhuwa</i> 'news according to someone specific/based on a specific thing' |
| | d. | ? <i>e-amakhuwa</i> 'news according to someone/based on something' |

Class 9 EM is degraded on most nouns for all speakers. We believe this is because its contribution is particularly weak. The difference between class 9 and the absence of nominal-EM is so subtle—if it exists at all—that speakers choose not to use class 9 EM. The other three reflexes of EM, class 8, 6, and 5, are fully productive for all speakers.

The meaning that nominal-EM contributes is context dependent in two ways. It may contribute an **information source**: *Eviembaha*, derived from *embaha* 'story' with class 8 EM, can mean either "the story that everyone heard," or "the story that everyone told," or "the story that everyone knows," etc. Alternatively, nominal-EM may identify who the contextually **relevant group** is: *akeembaha*, derived from *embaha* 'story' with class 6 EM, may indicate a story that the discourse participants (you and I) know, but that no one else does. *eliembaha* may indicate a story that only I know. Still, it is important to recognize though that neither meaning is hardwired into the nominal-EM. For instance, class 5 may indicate the speaker, but it also may indicate just a specific relevant

individual.

In Table 2, we provide a non-exhaustive list of nouns which may appear with nominal-EM. As a rule, nominal-EM can appear on any noun that is either *propositional* (i.e., has propositional content) or *subjective*.

	Class	Gloss	(e)vi-	(a)ka-	(e)li-	e-
<i>ousiva</i>	14	sadness	<i>eviousiva</i>	<i>akousiva</i>	<i>eliouiva</i>	<i>yousiva</i>
<i>ouvi</i>	14	badness	<i>eviouvi</i>	<i>akouvi</i>	<i>eliouvi</i>	<i>youvi</i>
<i>ousang'afu</i>	14	happiness	<i>eviousang'afu</i>	<i>akousang'afu</i>	<i>eliouang'afu</i>	–
<i>oulemba</i>	14	beauty	<i>evioulemba</i>	<i>akoulemba</i>	<i>elioulemba</i>	–
<i>outinyu</i>	14	difficulty	<i>evioutinyu</i>	<i>akoutinyu</i>	<i>elioutinyu</i>	<i>youtinyu</i>
<i>ouvehi</i>	14	lie	<i>eviouvehi</i>	<i>akouvehi</i>	<i>eliouvehi</i>	<i>youvehi</i>
<i>oung'ali</i>	14	truth	<i>evioung'ali</i>	<i>akoung'ali</i>	<i>elioung'ali</i>	<i>young'ali</i>
<i>embaha</i>	9/10	story/stories	<i>eviembaha</i>	<i>akeembaha</i>	<i>eliembaha</i>	<i>yembaha</i>
<i>amakhuwa</i>	6	news/words	<i>eviamakhuwa</i>	<i>akamakhuwa</i>	<i>eliamakhuwa</i>	–
<i>omupango</i>	3	plan	<i>eviomupango</i>	<i>akomupango</i>	<i>eliomupango</i>	–
<i>emipango</i>	4	plans	<i>eviemupango</i>	<i>akemipango</i>	<i>eliemupango</i>	–
<i>amakoso</i>	6	mistake	<i>eviamakoso</i>	<i>akamakoso</i>	<i>eliamakoso</i>	<i>yamakoso</i>
<i>amalocho</i>	6	dream	<i>eviamalocho</i>	<i>akamalocho</i>	<i>eliamalocho</i>	–

Table 2: Epistemic Marking on Nouns

This set of nouns forms a natural class: They are the nouns that are evaluated *relative* to an individual's beliefs/judgements. Subjective predicates are standardly thought to occur with a *judge* (e.g. Stephenson 2007 among many others). It is less standard to assume that propositional “content” nouns require a judge argument, but see Djärv (2019) for a recent proposal to this effect.

Nominal-EM is not found on any other noun.⁶

- (7) a. *e-si-tau*
7AUG-7NC-book
'a/the book'
- b. **e-vi-e-si-tau*
8AUG-8EM-7AUG-7NC-book
[Intended: 'a/the book (that everyone know about)']
- c. **a-ka-e-si-tau*
6AUG-6EM-7AUG-7NC-book
[Intended: 'a/the book (that a few people know about)']
- d. **e-li-e-si-tau*
5AUG-5EM-7AUG-7NC-book
[Intended: 'a/the book (that someone specific knows about)']

⁶We note that nominal-EM is also not found on “picture” NPs (e.g., *epicha*, ‘picture’), suggesting that these NPs involve a different notion of “perspective” than propositional and subjective nouns.

- e. * *e-e-si-tau*
 9SM-7AUG-7NC-book
 [Intended: ‘a/the book (that someone knows about)’]

Morpho-syntactically, nouns with nominal-EM act like they are in the noun class of the EM marker. They trigger concordial agreement on adjectives, subject agreement, and object marking, all reflecting the noun class of the EM, not the “inner” or inherent class of the noun.

- (8) Without EM → Subject/adjectival agreement reflects noun class.

e-mbaha y-ali e-layi
 9NC-story 9AGR-COP 9AGR-good
 ‘The story was good.’

- (9) With EM → Subject/adjectival agreement reflects EM.

- a. *e-vi-e-mbaha vi-al-i vi-layi*
 8AUG-8AGR-9NC-story 8AGR-COP-FV 8AGR-good
 ‘The story (that everyone told) was good.’
- b. *a-ka-e-mbaha ka-al-i ma-layi*
 6AUG-6AGR-9story 6AGR-COP-FV 6AGR-good
 ‘The story (that a few people told) was good.’
- c. *e-li-e-mbaha li-al-i e-layi*
 5AUG-5AGR-9NC-story 5AGR-COP-FV 5AGR-good
 ‘The story (that a specific person told) was good.’
- d. *e-e-mbaha y-al-i e-layi*
 9AGR-9NC-story 9AGR-COP-FV 9AGR-good
 ‘The story (that someone told) was good.’

Referentially, however, nouns with EM reflect the inherent noun class of the noun, not nominal-EM. For instance, class 8 strictly consists of (count) plurals (*evitau* ‘books’), but does not refer to a plurality when class 8 is used as nominal-EM.

- (10) a. *e-vi-ou-rembo vi-li e-ua*
 8AUG-8AGR-14NC-beauty 8SM-COP 5NC-flower
 ‘(Everyone thinks that) Beauty is a flower.’
- b. **e-vi-tau vi-lala*
 8AUG-8NC-book 8AGR-one
 ‘*one books’
- c. *e-vi-o-mu-pango vi-lala*
 8AUG-AGR-3AUG-3NC-plan 8AGR-one
 ‘one plan (that everyone came up with)’

In sum, nominal-EM present a semantic and morpho-syntactic puzzle. On the one hand, their syntactic distribution transparently reflects the outermost noun class, while the reference of the NP

with EM appears to be independent of the EM morphology. It is further worth noting that EM are not, technically, nominal morphology. For instance, normal prenominal noun class morphology for class 6 is *(a)ma-*. But the class 6 EM is *(a)ka-*; it is identical the morphology that shows up in agreement contexts. This is yet another puzzle: Why does EM take this morpho-syntactic shape?

4 Analysis

Our solution to the puzzles posed above involves the following components. First, we adopt from Gambarage (2019) (and ?) the idea that the determiner in Nyala East asserts belief of existence relative to an individual, modeled in terms of a choice function. Second, we propose a perspectival operator in the left periphery of DP, by analogy to such projections/operators in CP (Speas 2004; Koopman and Sportiche 1989; Sundaresan 2018). These two assumptions, coupled with the fact that the nouns in Table 2 are judge-dependent, derives the distribution and meaning of nominal-EM. We start by examining the function of the augment in Nyala East.

4.1 Part I: The Bantu Augment and Speaker-Oriented Meaning

Nominal-EM is always prefixed outside of the augment. In this context, the “inner” augment is obligatorily present. (Recall that only CV-initial noun classes have an augment. We will restrict discussion to consonant-initial noun clauses, since vowel-initial noun classes do not have an overt augment.)

- (11) *(e-)vi-*(a-)ma-khuwa*
 8AUG-8EM-6AUG-6NC-word
 ‘news (that everyone knows about)’

The Bantu augment has been proposed to serve a range of functions across Bantu languages, from purely syntactic to semantic/pragmatic, though almost all authors identify the element as instantiating the category D (cf, Halpert 2017; Gambarage 2019 for recent overviews).

Most recently Gambarage (2019) (whose ideas are later adopted in ?) proposes that the augment in some Bantu languages asserts a belief-of-existence on the part of the speaker. In using an augment, the speaker commits themselves to a belief in the existence of a referent for the associated NP. In Bantu languages that have such a system, the augment is obligatory in positive declaratives, but not obligatory under non-factual operators, like negation, intensional predicates, or in hypothetical situations. Nyala East’s augment fits this pattern. It is obligatory in positive declaratives (12).

- (12) *Masika ka-von-e *(a-)va-ana*
 Masika 1SM-see-FV 2AUG-2NC-child
 ‘Masika saw (the) children.’

The augment can be omitted under non-factual operators like negation (13) and modals (14).

(13) **Augmentless nouns possible under negation**

Masika si ka-von-e (a-)va-ana
Masika NEG 1SM-see-FV 2AUG-2NC-child
'Masika didn't see (the) children.'

(14) **Augmentless nouns possible under modals**

aundi Wekesa ka-kul-a (e-)si-tau
maybe 1Wekesa 1SM-buy-FV 7AUG-7NC-book
'Maybe Wekesa bought a/the book.'

The augment does not correlate with definiteness, specificity, or related meanings (15).

(15) a. **Augments permitted on indefinite nouns**

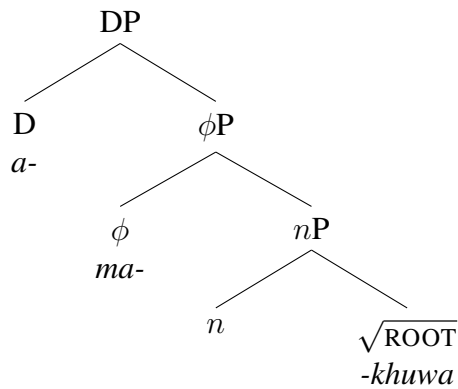
khali khaali khu-ali neende o-mu-ami
15.long.time 15.long.time 15NC-COP with 1AUG-1NC-king
'Long ago there was a king.'

b. **Augments permitted on non-specific nouns**

n-gamir-e e-si-tau
1OM-pass-FV 7AUG-7NC-book
'Pass me a book.'
[Context: There are many books on the table and you want any of them.]

Following others (e.g. Carstens 2008), Gambarage assume that the augment instantiates the category D. Noun class prefixes instantiate a ϕ -head below D.⁷

(16) *amakhuwa*, 'words/news':



Gambarage models the semantics of the augment (overt D) using a choice function (Reinhart, 1997), which is functionally “parameterized” to the speaker.

(17) a. *Wekesa ka-ul-iy-e a-ma-khuwa*
1Wekesa 1SM-hear-ASP-FV 6AUG-6NC-news
'Wekesa heard the news.'

⁷DP-less ϕ Ps are found in predicative positions, and consequently obligatorily lack an augment.

- b. $\llbracket (17a) \rrbracket = 1$ iff $\exists f$ [f is a choice function for the speaker & Wekesa heard $f(\text{news})$]

The purpose of the choice function is to map the speaker (via a knowledge-based relation) to some subset of news, thereby committing the speaker to a belief in the existence of some news. The absence of an augment (in non-predicative uses), is labelled *covert D*, and it is only possible in the scope of a non-factual operator. Covert D simply provides narrow-scope existential quantification.⁸

- (18) a. *Wekesa si ka-ul-iy-e ma-khuwa ta*
 1Wekesa NEG 1SM-hear-ASP-FV 6NC-word NEG
 ‘Wekesa didn’t hear any news.’
 b. $\llbracket (18a) \rrbracket = 1$ iff $\neg \exists x$ [Wekesa heard news(x)]

4.2 A Perspectival Operator in the Nominal Domain

Adopting the system illustrated above, we propose that nominal-EM is used when the speaker wishes to express *non-speaker-oriented* meaning. Nominal-EM asserts belief of existence *relative to a contextually salient group*. In many cases, salience correlates with discourse participation. Formally, this involves relativizing the choice function to a salient group. Our first pass at the meaning of (19a) is given below.

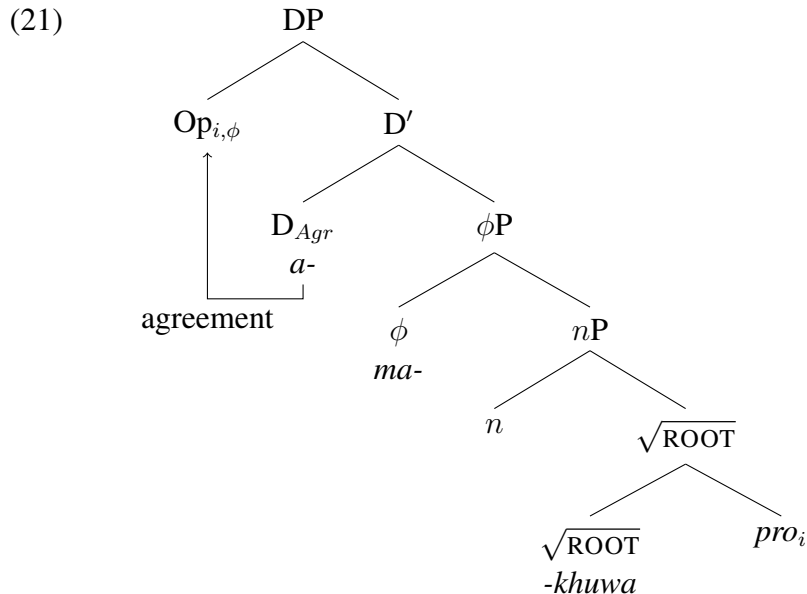
- (19) a. *Wekesa ka-ul-iy-e e-vi-a-ma-khuwa*
 1Wekesa 1SM-hear-ASP-FV 8AUG-8EM-6AUG-6NC-news
 ‘Wekesa heard the news (that everyone knows about).’
 b. $\llbracket (19a) \rrbracket^g = 1$ iff $\exists f_{g(i)}$ [$f_{g(i)}$ is a choice function for $g(i)$ & Wekesa heard $f_{g(i)}(\text{news})$]

The meaning of (19a) is that there is some way of choosing among news for a contextually relevant group (whoever $g(i)$ is), such that there is news for that group. Wekesa heard that news. Of course, the precise “way” of choosing is context-dependent, accounting for the fact that the relation between the group and the associated noun is not fixed. This is a natural consequence of using a choice function. We propose that the relevant group of individuals is determined by a *perspectival operator* in the DP left periphery, by analogy to the well known work on similar projections in the CP left periphery (e.g., Speas 2004 among many others). There are four such operators, imbued with different class features (ϕ features) which correlate with different contextually salient groups.

- (20) Where X ranges over the contextually salient people or evidence:
 a. $\text{Op}_{i,\phi:8}$: all of X
 b. $\text{Op}_{j,\phi:6}$: some of X
 c. $\text{Op}_{k,\phi:5}$: a specific member of X
 d. $\text{Op}_{l,\phi:9}$: a non-specific member of X

⁸Note that covert D is differentiated from cases in which D is entirely absent, like when the noun is a predicate. Predicate NPs in Nyala East obligatorily lack an augment.

The morphological reflex of nominal-EM is derived via an “agreeing determiner” in Nyala East, again by analogy to the “agreeing complementizer” found in many Luhya languages—including Nyala East—and which has a similar semantic function of “orienting” the embedded clause (Diercks, 2013; Carstens, 2016; Gluckman, 2021). The agreeing determiner agrees with the perspectival operator in the left periphery of the DP, and realizes this as inflectional agreement morphology.



Note that we are syntactically representing judge-dependence via null pronouns. The operator binds this variable (Kratzer, 1998, p. 168). The operator therefore has a dual role. On one hand, it perspectivizes the choice-function: There is a way of choosing *for* $g(i)$. On the other hand, it binds the judge argument, that is, news according to $g(i)$. This dual function is empirically supported. Evaluated with respect to a relevant group of individuals, *eviamakhuwa* must commit the relevant group of individuals to a belief in *what they think is* news, i.e., what is news to them.⁹

This explains the function of the inner augment, but it doesn’t explain the “outer” augment, which functions like other augments in being obligatory in positive declaratives, and optional otherwise under non-factual operators like negation.

- (22) a. *Wekesa ka-ul-iy-e *(e-)vi-a-ma-khuwa*
 1Wekesa 1SM-hear-ASP-FV 8AUG-8EM-6AUG-6NC-news
 ‘Wekesa hear the news (that everyone knows about).’
- b. *Wekesa si ka-ul-iy-e vi-a-ma-khuwa*
 1Wekesa NEG 1SM-hear-ASP-FV 8EM-6AUG-6NC-news
 ‘Wekesa didn’t hear any news (that everyone knows about).’

In fact, this outer augment serves the function of providing speaker-oriented meaning, just like the normal “non-agreeing” determiner found elsewhere in the language.

⁹Recall that nouns which are not judge-dependent may not occur with nominal-EM. We may explain this by appealing to the Ban on Vacuous Quantification: If there is no internal argument to bind, Op is not permitted because it has nothing to bind.

- (23) a. *Wekesa ka-ul-iy-e e-vi-a-ma-khuwa*
 1Wekesa 1SM-hear-ASP-FV 8AUG-8EM-6AUG-6NC-news
 ‘Wekesa heard the news (that everyone knows about).’
- b. $\llbracket (23a) \rrbracket^g = 1$ iff $\exists f, f_{g(i)}$ [f is a choice function for the speaker
 & $f_{g(i)}$ is a choice function for $g(i)$ & Wekesa heard $f(f_{g(i)}(\text{news-pro}_{g(i)}))$]

The final result is that the speaker asserts belief in the existence of some news which is believed to exist by some contextually relevant group, and Wekesa heard that news. Morpho-syntactically, Op is the highest element in the DP and is therefore available for agreement dependencies. Semantically, Op does not change the reference of the NP it occurs with. Moreover, the reflex of Op is an agreement dependency, which explains that particular morphological choice. EM in Nyala East are not formally noun class markers, but rather are agreement.

5 Conclusion

The idea that there is a locus of perspectivization in DP parallels the various works that have suggested a similar projection in CP. Indeed, previous work has suggested that DPs may have functional structure associated with topic/focus (Aboh, 2004), also thought to be clausal phenomena. The perspectival data shown above suggests a further parallel: Certain nouns may also have functional structure associated with perspective, traditionally (and standardly) found in the clausal left-periphery. Still, we are unaware of any other language that similarly marks “epistemic” distinctions on nouns, though we believe that the particular properties of Nyala East have given rise to this synchronic pattern. Specifically, the “agreeing determiner” was derived by analogy to an “agreeing complementizer,” found in many Luhya languages (Diercks, 2013). It is therefore worth noting that Nyala East also has such an agreeing complementizer.

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