

# The Conjoint/Disjoint Alternation in Sambia\*

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## 1 Introduction

Like many Bantu languages, Sambia has a verbal alternation of conjoint and disjoint verb forms:

- (1) a. \* A- chi- som- iye. (conjoint)  
SM1- OM7- read- PERF.CJ  
b. A- za- chi- soma. (disjoint)  
SM1- PERF.DJ- OM7- read  
'He read it.'
- (2) a. A- chi- som- iye kitabu. (conjoint)  
SM1- OM7- read- PERF.CJ 7book  
b. A- za- chi- soma kitabu. (disjoint)  
SM1- PERF.DJ- OM7- read 7book  
'He read the book.'

In other Bantu languages, the alternation has been linked to two properties:

- Focus (Güldemann 1996; Ndayiragije 1999; van der Wal 2006).
- Constituency (van der Spuy 1993; Buell 2005; Buell 2006).

- (3) a. Izingane zi- dlala phandle. ]<sub>VP</sub> (conjoint)  
10.children SM10- play outside  
'The children are playing OUTSIDE.'
- b. Izingane zi- **ya-** dlala ]<sub>VP</sub> phandle. (disjoint)  
10.children SM10- DJ- play outside  
'The children are playing outside.'

This talk discusses the distribution of this alternation in Sambia, in connection with focus, *wh* questions, object marking, and constituency.

Contrasts will be shown between Sambia and Zulu, a language in which the connection between the alternation and focus/constituency is clearer.

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## 2 Conjoint/disjoint morphology

Sambaa has a very complex tense/aspect system (Roehl 1911). Several disjoint forms correspond to one conjoint form, there are no neutral forms in the present or past tenses, but the future forms are neutral. All negative verb forms are also neutral.

(4) Sambaa conjoint and disjoint morphology

Tense/Aspect	Conjoint	Disjoint	Neutral
present	-à	-aa-, -ta-	
past	-iye	-za-, -i- iye, -te-	
future			ne-, nge-

- (5) a. Ng'ombe zi- ja mani. (conjoint)  
 10cow SM10- eat.PRES.CJ 6grass  
 'Cows eat/are eating grass.'
- b. Ng'ombe z- aa- ja. (disjoint)  
 10cow SM10- PRES.DJ- eat  
 'The cows graze/are grazing.'
- c. Ng'ombe zi- ta- ja. (disjoint)  
 10cow SM10- PRES.DJ- eat  
 'The cows graze.'

In the future the two forms NE- and NGE- can both be used in both conjoint and disjoint contexts.

(6) *Ne-* future

- a. Ne- n- shezigh- e.  
 FUT1- SM1S- play- FV.SUBJ  
 'I will play'
- b. Ne- wa- imb- e mbwai?  
 FUT1- SM2- sing- FV.SUBJ what  
 'What will they sing?'

(7) *Nge-* future

- a. Nge- u- kund- e?  
 FUT2- SM2S- want- FV.SUBJ  
 'Will you want?'
- b. Nge- u- kund- e- i?  
 FUT2- SM2S- want- FV.SUBJ- what  
 'What will you want?'

## 3 Focus

- A *wh* phrase must be preceded by a conjoint verb form.
- Some other focus types sometimes have a slight preference for a conjoint verb form.

**Wh** → **conjoint**. The disjoint form cannot be used preceding a *wh* phrase, as shown in (8):

- (8) a. U- mw- ene ini Juma? (conjoint)  
 SM2S- OM1- see.PERF.CJ when 1Juma  
 b. \* U- za- mw- ona ini Juma? (disjoint)  
 SM2S- PERF.DJ- OM1- see when 1Juma  
 ‘When did you see Juma?’
- (9) a. U- ghosho- e- i? (conjoint)  
 SM2S- do- PERF.CJ- what  
 b. \* U- za- ghoshoa- i? (disjoint)  
 SM2S- PERF.DJ- do- what  
 ‘What did you do?’
- (10) a. U- kund- iye mbwai? (conjoint)  
 SM1S- want- PERF.CJ what  
 b. \* U- za- kunda mbwai? (conjoint)  
 SM1S- PERF.DJ- want what  
 ‘What did you want?’

**Echo questions.** Echo questions can use the disjoint form.

- (11) Uja Change ushe a- za- bua hii? A- za- bua hawe.  
 1that 1Change now SM1- PERF.DJ- arrive where SM1- PERF.DJ- arrive 16loc.poss  
 ‘That Change, now, where did she arrive? She arrived at his place.’

**Other types of focus.**

- In some cases, if there is some type of focus on the immediately postverbal element, there is a slight preference for the conjoint form.
- Four other types of focus were checked: answers to *wh* constituent questions, choice questions, ‘even’, and ‘only’.
- In out-of-the-blue contexts (neutral focus, sentence-wide focus, no focus) there is a preference for disjoint verb forms.

**Answers to *wh* questions.** *Wh* questions may be answered with the conjoint form, as expected:

- (12) Q: U- awa na hii? (conjoint)  
 SM2S- come.from.PRES.CJ with where  
 ‘Where do you come from?’  
 A: Ni- awa na Ng’wezii. (conjoint)  
 SM1S- come.from.PRES.CJ with Ng’wezii  
 ‘I’m from Ng’wezii.’

But sometimes the disjoint form is used:

(13) Q: Mw- inuke zeze? (conjoint)  
 SM2P- arise.PERF.CJ how  
 ‘How did you wake up?’

A: Ti- za- inuka wedi. (disjoint)  
 SM1P- PERF.DJ- arise 2well  
 ‘We woke up well.’

### Choice questions.

- (14) a. U- mw- ene Juma shule o aha? (conjoint) (*Better than (14b).*)  
 SM2S- OM1- see.PST.CJ 1Juma 9school or here
- b. U- za- mu- ona Juma shule o aha? (disjoint)  
 SM2S- PST.DJ- OM1- see 1Juma 9school or here  
 ‘Did you see Juma at school or here?’

### Contrastive focus.

(15) Q: Mvyee a- m- to- eye ng’wivi mwe mtwi na ng’oda? (conjoint)  
 1woman SM1- OM1- hit- PERF.CJ 1thief 18loc 3head with 9hammer  
 ‘Did the woman hit the thief on the head with a HAMMER?’

A: Do, a- m- to- eye ng’wivi mwe mtwi na sufuiya. (conjoint)  
 no SM1- OM1- hit- PERF.CJ 1thief 18loc 3head with 9pot  
 ‘She hit the thief on the head with a POT.’

(16) Q: Wantu wa- handa viazi? (conjoint)  
 2person SM2- cultivate.PRES.CJ 6potato  
 ‘Are the people planting POTATOES?’

A: Do, wantu w- aa- handa mahaagi. (disjoint)  
 no 2person SM2- PRES.DJ- cultivate 6bean  
 ‘No, the people are planting BEANS.’

### ‘Even’.

- (17) a. Ni- mw- on- iye hata Juma. (conjoint)  
 SM1S- OM1- see- PST.CJ even 1Juma
- b. ? N- za- mu- ona hata Juma. (disjoint)  
 1S- PST.DJ 1- see even 1Juma  
 ‘I even saw Juma.’

‘Only’. In Zulu, a phrase modified by ‘only’ must be preceded by a conjoint verb form:

- (18) a. Ngi- bon- e abangane bami bodwa. ]<sub>VP</sub> [Zulu]  
 SM1S- see- CJ 2friends 2my 2alone
- b. \* Ngi- ba- bon- ile ]<sub>VP</sub> abangane bami bodwa.  
 SM1S- OM2- see- DJ 2friends 2my 2alone  
 ‘I saw only my friends.’

This is not the case in Sambiaa:

- (19) a. A- wa- ink- iye wavyee du zawadi. (conjoint)  
 SM1- OM2- give- PST.CJ 2women only 10gifts  
 b. A- za- wa- inka wavyee du zawadi. (disjoint)  
 SM1- PST.DJ- OM2- give 2women only 10gifts  
 ‘He only give the WOMEN gifts.’

Phrases modified by ‘only’ can be subject to other focus-related preferences for either a conjoint or disjoint form:

- (20) a. Sauda a- vya- iye wabwanga du. (conjoint)  
 1Sauda SM1- bear- PST.CJ 2boys only  
 ‘Sauda gave birth only to boys.’  
 (Answer to ‘What did Sauda give birth to?’)  
 b. Sauda a- za- vyaa wabwanga du. (disjoint)  
 1Sauda SM1- PST.DJ- bear 2boys only  
 ‘Sauda gave birth only to boys.’ (Out-of-the-blue context.)

**Out-of-the-blue contexts.** In out-of-the-blue contexts, there is a preference for disjoint verb forms:

- (21) a. N- aa- kunda mavuta ya taa ya shiingi 100 (disjoint)  
 SM1- PRES.DJ- want 6oil 9OF 9lamp 9OF shilling 100  
 ‘I would like lamp oil for one hundred shillings.’  
 (Context: arriving at the shop being invited to speak)  
 b. # Ni- kunda mavuta ya taa ya shiingi 100 (conjoint)  
 SM1- want.PRES.CJ 6oil 9OF 9lamp 9OF shilling 100  
 ‘I would like lamp oil for one hundred shillings.’
- (22) a. U- kunda- i? Ni- kunda mavuta (conjoint)  
 SM1- want.PRES.CJ- what SM1- want.PRES.CJ 6oil  
 ‘(Speaker A:) What would you like? (Speaker B:) I would like lamp oil.’  
 (Context: arriving at the shop being asked what one wants)  
 b. U- kunda- i? # N- aa kunda mavuta (disjoint)  
 SM1- want.PRES.CJ- what SM1- PRES.DJ- want 6oil  
 ‘(Speaker A:) What would you like? (Speaker B:) I would like lamp oil.’  
 (Context: arriving at the shop being asked what one wants)

However, that preference is not absolute:

- (23) Ku- na- i? Mvyee a- m- to- eye ng’wivi mwe mtwi na sufuiya.  
 SM18- with -what 1woman SM1- OM1- hit- PERF.CJ 1thief 18LOC 3head with 9pot  
 ‘What happened? A woman hit a thief on the head with a pot.’

## 4 Phrase-finality

### 4.1 The conjoint/disjoint alternation and phrase-finality

**Conjoint** → **non-phrase-final**. The conjoint form cannot be used in phrase-final position, as shown in (24):

- (24) a. \* U- on- iye. (conjoint)  
SM2S- see- PERF.CJ  
b. U- za- ona. (disjoint)  
SM2S- PERF.DJ- see  
'You saw.'

**Disjoint** → **phrase-final?** What types of evidence can we use to establish whether a disjoint verb form means that the verb is phrase-final?

- The disjoint form cannot be used preceding a *wh* phrase, which could mean that the *wh* phrase always appears within the VP.
- The consequence of saying this is that any element other than a *wh* phrase can be extraposed. Compare with Zulu:

- (25) a. A- ngi- bon- anga umfundisi kuphela. ]<sub>VP</sub> [Zulu]  
NEG- SM1S- see- NEG 1teacher only  
b. \* A- ngi- **m-** bon- anga ]<sub>VP</sub> umfundisi kuphela.  
NEG- SM1S- OM1- see- NEG 1teacher only  
'I didn't see just the teacher.'

In Sambia, an element modified by 'only' can occur after either a conjoint or disjoint form:

- (26) a. A- wa- ink- iye wavyee du zawadi. (conjoint)  
SM1- OM2- give- PST.CJ 2women only 10gifts  
b. A- za- wa- inka wavyee du zawadi. (disjoint)  
SM1- PST.DJ- OM2- give 2women only 10gifts  
'He only give the WOMEN gifts.' (Repeated from (19).)

Saying that disjoint forms in Sambia were phrase-final would require giving a different syntactic analysis to each type of pair like (26).

## 4.2 Object marking and phrase-finality

In some Bantu languages, object marking is a diagnostic for the position of an object:

- (27) a. Ngi- nik- e uThembi imali. ]<sub>VP</sub> [Zulu]  
 SM1S- give- PERF.CJ 1Thembi 9money  
 b. Ngi- m- nik- e imali ]<sub>VP</sub> uThembi.  
 SM1S- OM1- give- PERF.CJ 9money 1Thembi  
 c. \* Ngi- m- nik- e uThembi imali. ]<sub>VP</sub>  
 SM1S- OM1- give- PERF.CJ 1Thembi 9money  
 ‘I gave Thembi some money.’

At first glance, it would appear that object marking is also useful in Smbaa for determining constituency, because it is required for some A'-movement, such as left dislocation:

- (28) a. Waja wana ni- za- wa- toa.  
 2those 2child SM1S- PERF.DJ- OM2- hit  
 ‘Those children, I beat them.’  
 b. \* Waja wana ni- za- toa.  
 2those 2child SM1S- PERF.DJ- hit  
 Int: ‘Those children, I beat them.’

However, it appears that an object marker can occur even if the object doesn't move.

- (29) N- za- m- nka Stella kitabu.  
 SM1S- PERF- OM1- give 1Stella 7book  
 ‘I gave Stella a book.’ (Repeated in (37a). Compare with Zulu (27a).)

- (30) a. Ni- ( chi- ) ghul- iye kitabu. ] (conjoint)  
 SM1S- OM7- buy- PAST.CJ 7book  
 ‘I bought the book.’  
 b. A- ( ha- ) it- iye kaya. ] (conjoint)  
 SM1- OM16- go- PAST.CJ 16home  
 ‘He went home.’

High tones spread within the VP from the verb onto its complements up to the penultimate vowel. This process happens with and without object marking. *Kítábù* ‘book’ has the underlying tone pattern LHL, under High tone spread the vowel of the prefix is realised with a high tone in (31b and c) while the underlyingly high tone on the penult is down-stepped (indicated with an exclamation mark).

- (31) a. Nì- kúnd- à **kítábù**.  
 SM1S- want- PRES.CJ 7book  
 ‘I want a book.’  
 b. Nì- ghùl- íyé **kít!ábù**.  
 SM1S- buy- PERF.CJ 7book  
 ‘I bought the book.’

- c. Nì- chí- ghúl- íyé *kít!ábù*.  
 SM1S- buy- PERF.CJ 7book  
 ‘I bought the book.’

With right-dislocation there is a clearly audible pause and no tone spread. Thus in (32b), *ng’òmbè* ‘cow’ is realised with low tones.

- (32) a. N- zà- í- óná *ng’ómbè*.  
 SM1S- PERF.DJ- OM9- see 9cow  
 ‘I saw the cow’  
 b. N- zà- í- óná, *ng’òmbè*.  
 SM1S- PERF.DJ- OM9- see 9cow  
 ‘I saw it, the cow’

- Object marking is of limited use as a diagnostic of constituency in Sambiaa.

## 5 The four postverbal focus properties

In Buell (to appear), four properties were found to be related to postverbal focus in Zulu:

- **Conjoint Property.** A conjoint verb form is required.
- **Immediately Postverbal Property.** The focused element must occupy the immediately postverbal position.
- **No-Crossing Property.** A focused phrase cannot cross over an intervening object to occupy the immediately postverbal position.
- **No Postfocal Material Property.** Material following the focused element is strongly dispreferred.

To what extent do these properties hold in Sambiaa?

### 5.1 The Conjoint Property

A conjoint verb form is required if a postverbal element is focused.

- (33) a. Ngi- bon- e abangane bami bodwa. ]<sub>VP</sub> (conjoint) [Zulu]  
 SM1S- see- CJ 2friends 2my 2alone  
 b. \* Ngi- ba- bon- ile ]<sub>VP</sub> abangane bami bodwa. (disjoint)  
 SM1S- OM2- see- DJ 2friends 2my 2alone  
 ‘I saw only my friends.’ (Repeated from (18).)

This property holds with respect to Sambiaa:

- Completely with respect to *wh* phrases.
- In the form of a slight preference with respect to other types of narrow focus.

## 5.2 The Immediately Postverbal Property (IAV)

In Zulu, the focused element must occupy the immediately postverbal position (in most cases).

- (34) a. Ngi- phuz- is- e izivakashi ikhofi. [Zulu]  
 SM1S- drink- CAUS- PERF.CJ 8visitors 5coffee  
 ‘I served the guests coffee.’
- b. \* Ngi- phuz- is- e izivakashi *ikhofi*, hhayi itiyi.  
 SM1S- drink- CAUS- PERF.CJ 8visitors 5coffee not 5tea  
 ‘I served the guests COFFEE, not tea.’

In Samba, we have already seen a violation of this property for choice questions:

- (35) U- mw- ene Juma shule o aha? (conjoint)  
 SM2S- OM1- see.PST.CJ 1Juma 9school or here  
 ‘Did you see Juma at school or here?’ (Repeated from (14).)

The Immediately Postverbal Property holds for some speakers even with *wh* phrases. First note this unmarked word order:

- (36) Samba unmarked word order: S V IO DO.

In non-questions the word order is strict and any deviation from the canonical word order is judged degraded, with or without object marking:

- (37) a. N- za- m- nka Stella kitabu.  
 SM1S- PERF- OM1- give 1Stella 7book  
 ‘I gave Stella a book.’
- b. \* N- za- nka kitabu Stella.  
 SM1S- PERF- give 7book 1Stella  
 Int: ‘I gave Stella a book.’
- c. \* N- za- m- nka kitabu Stella.  
 SM1S- PERF- OM1- give 7book 1Stella  
 Int: ‘I gave Stella a book.<sup>1</sup>’

But with a questioned direct object, the facts vary between speakers:

- (38) a. Speaker A
- i. ✓ OM<sub>i</sub>-V DO ]<sub>VP?</sub> IO<sub>i</sub> ]<sub>VP?</sub>  
 U- m- nk- iye *mbwai* Stella? (conjoint)  
 SM2S- OM1- give- PERF.CJ what 1Stella
- ii. \* OM<sub>i</sub> IO<sub>i</sub> *wh*-DO ]<sub>VP</sub>  
 \* U- m- nk- iye Stella *mbwai*? (conjoint)  
 SM2S- OM1- give- PERF.CJ what 1Stella  
 ‘What did you give Stella?’

<sup>1</sup> This sentence is grammatical with an after-thought intonation for *Stella* or if *Stella* is dropped.

b. Speaker B

i. ✓ OM<sub>i</sub>-V DO ]<sub>VP?</sub> IO<sub>i</sub> ]<sub>VP?</sub>

Hu- m- ghul -iye **mbwai** ng'wana? (conjoint)  
SM2S.NEG- OM1- buy- PERF.CJ what 1child

ii. ✓ OM<sub>i</sub> IO<sub>i</sub> *wh*-DO ]<sub>VP</sub>

Hu- m- ghul- iye ng'wana **mbwai**? (conjoint)  
SM2S.NEG- OM1- buy- PERF.CJ 1child what

‘What didn’t you buy for a/the child?’

**Questioning locative phrases.** In Zulu, the Immediately Postverbal Property can be freely violated if the *wh* phrase is a locative (Buell to appear):

- (39) a. U- leth- e izimpahla zami **ku- liphi ikamelo**? [Zulu]  
SM2S- bring- PERF.CJ 10things 10my to- 5which 5room
- b. U- leth- e **ku- liphi ikamelo** izimpahla zami?  
SM2S- bring- PERF.CJ to- 5which 5room 10things 10my
- ‘Where did you put my stuff?’

This also holds of Smbaa. Here is a locative adjunct, without object marking of the direct object:

- (40) a. U- ghul- iye- hi matonte? (conjoint)  
SM1S- buy- PERF.CJ- where 6banana
- b. U- ghul- iye matonte hii? (conjoint)  
SM1S- buy- PERF.CJ 6banana where
- ‘Where did you buy bananas?’

And here is a locative argument with object marking of the direct object:

- (41) a. U- mw- ighee hii ng'wana? (conjoint)  
SM1S- OM1- send.PERF.CJ where 1child
- b. U- mw- ighee ng'wana hii? (conjoint)  
SM1S- OM1- send.PERF.CJ 1child where
- ‘Where did you send the child?’

### 5.3 The No-Crossing Property

A lower *wh* phrase cannot cross over an intervening object to occupy the immediately postverbal position.

- (42) \* U- phek- ela [ kudla kuni ]<sub>i</sub> ubaba *t<sub>i</sub>* ]<sub>VP</sub> ? [Zulu]  
SM2S- cook- APPL 15food 15what.kind 1father
- ‘What kind of food are you cooking for Father?’

In Smbaa, the No-Crossing Property seems to be violated, if it is correct that no extraposition of the indirect object has occurred:

- (43) OM<sub>i</sub>-V DO<sub>j</sub> IO<sub>i</sub> t<sub>j</sub> ]<sub>VP</sub>  
 a. U- m- nk- iye **mbwai** Stella t<sub>j</sub> ]<sub>VP</sub> ? (conjoint)  
 SM2S- OM1- give- PERF.CJ what 1Stella  
 ‘What did you give Stella?’  
 b. Hu- m- ghul -iye **mbwai** ng’wana t<sub>j</sub> ]<sub>VP</sub> ? (conjoint)  
 SM2S.NEG- OM1- buy- PERF.CJ what 1child  
 ‘What didn’t you buy for a/the child?’  
 (Data repeated from (38).)

## 5.4 No Postfocal Material Property

Material following the focused element is strongly dispreferred.

- (44) a. U- zo- wa- theng- ela- ni ]<sub>VP</sub> amaqanda? [Zulu]  
 SM2S- FUT- OM6- buy- APPL- what 6eggs  
 b. \* U- zo- theng- ela- ni amaqanda? ]<sub>VP</sub>  
 SM2S- FUT- buy- APPL- what 6eggs  
 ‘Why will you buy eggs?’

In Sambaa, this property is also violated, if it is correct that no extraposition of the indirect object has occurred in (43). And here is an example with ‘only’:

- (45) Ni- m- nk- iye Juma du heya. (conjoint)  
 SM1S- OM1- give- PERF.CJ 1Juma only 9money  
 ‘I only gave JUMA some money.’

## 6 Conclusion

- **Wh and focus.** *Wh* elements have a strict conjoint requirement. Other types of focused elements do not. This seems compatible with a theory in which *Wh* features and focus features are separate (Sabel and Zeller 2006).
- **Phrase-finality.** A conjoint form is never phrase-final. The converse is not true: the disjoint form is not always phrase-final.
- **The four postverbal focus properties:**
  - The Conjoint Property is respected with *wh* phrases, but not with other focus items.
  - The Immediately Postverbal Property:
    - \* Some speakers respect this property for *wh* phrases while others do not.
    - \* In both Sambaa and Zulu, it is easy to violate the Immediately Postverbal Property with a *wh* locative phrase.
    - \* The property is violated for other focus items.
  - Some speakers seem to violate the No-Crossing Property with *wh* items.
  - The No Postfocal Material Property is freely violated, even with *wh* items.

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