

The Distribution of the Nguni Augment: A Review

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Purpose:

- Give overview of the distribution of the Nguni augment as described in the literature.
- Do so from a modern syntactic perspective.

1 Form

Segments. In Zulu, the augment always takes the form of an initial vowel:

(1) Zulu augment+prefix forms:

u- 1 *um(u)-*, 3 *um(u)-*, 11 *u(lu)-*, 14 *ubu-*, 15 *uku-*, 17 *(u)ku-*
i- 4 *imi-*, 5 *i(li)-*, 7 *isi-*, 8 *izi-*, 9 *in-*, 10 *izin-*
a- 2 *aba-*, 6 *ama-*

In Swati, some classes don't have a segmental augment:

(2) Swati segmental augments (Ziervogel and Mabuza, 1976)

- a. With augments: 1 and 3 *umu-*, 4 *imi-*, 9 *in-*, 6 *ema-*, (infrequently) 2 *eba-*
- b. Without augments: all other classes.

Tone. There is a tonal distinction best analysed as an underlying H tone on the augment Rycroft (1979).

- (3) a. [á-bántù] 'people' < /á + bantu/
b. [bàntù] 'people' < /bantu/

There may be distinctions within the augmentless forms, but Mzolo's description in (4i) is not compatible with (5):

- (4) Mzolo's (1968) three types of augmentless nouns (as summarised by von Staden)
- i. "simple": high tone (as with augment)
 - ii. vocative: low tone on prefix
 - iii. copulative: rising tone on prefix (probably high tone with depression)
- (5) à-kú-nà-bàntù
NEG-17SM-with-2people
'There aren't any people.'

2 Interpretation

- With augment: “a/the (particular, individual) X” (Von Staden 1973), “a (specific) X” (Visser 2007)
- Without augment: “any, anything like, anything that can be classified as X” (Von Staden 1973), “(any) X” (Visser 2007)

On the basis of her handout, it seems most likely that Visser (2007) was arguing that the augment is a D^0 head with the feature [+specific], while the absence of the augment is a [-specific] D^0 .

3 Distribution

My main source is Von Staden (1973). Translations are often long-winded and try to convey the various nuances of meaning of the augmented and augmentless forms. Here is an example of a complete translation of his:

- (6) a. A-ku-fik-anga a-bahambi. (vst73)
NEG-17SM-arrive-NEG D-2visitors
“No (particular, individual) travellers arrived.” (lit. “There did not arrive (particular, individual) travellers”) (e.g., travellers whom the speaker knows would have come, or travellers referred to previously)
- b. Akufikanga bahambi. (vst73)
“No (nothing like) travellers arrived.” (lit. “There didn’t arrive any travellers”) (i.e., anything which can be classified as travellers)

In the following, glosses are my own. Minor modifications have been made without indication. Von Staden does not exhibit any ungrammatical examples. All stars in his data have been added by me on the basis of his discussion.

Elsewhere condition. The augment must be present except in the circumstances specified. In other words, it is easiest to describe the distribution in terms of where the augment can/must be omitted.

The following presentation is organised loosely by syntactic level:

- NP level and lexical derivation
- DP level
- PP level
- clausal level

3.1 NP-level and derivation

3.1.1 Regular derivational processes

In four derivational processes, the augment is always omitted:

- Compound nouns:

(7) u-mlindimasango < u-mlindi + a-masango (vSt73)
D-1gatekeeper D-1guard D-6gates
'gatekeeper'

- Nouns transposed to other classes:

(8) a. u-Ndoda < i-ndoda (vSt73)
D-Ndoda D-9man
'Ndoda' (man's name?)
b. u-buluhlaza < u-(lu)hlaza
D-ignorance D-11greenness
'ignorance'

- As 'relative stems' (non-agreeing adjectives):

(9) I-sinkwa si-manzi. < a-manzi
D-7bread 7SM-wet D-6water
'The bread is wet.'

- Adverbs derived from 'relative stems':

(10) ka-buhlungu; u-buhlungu (vSt73)
ADV-painful D-14pain
'painful; pain'

This is all entirely unsurprising if the augment is a D^0 head (de Dreu, 2008).

3.1.2 Nouns of class 17

Some class 17 class members never have an augment:

(11) a. kude; kudala; phansi
17far 17old 17bottom
'far away; long ago; bottom, down, on the ground'
b. u-kwindla; u-kuntoko
D-17autumn D-17toy
'autumn; toy'

I suspect that those lacking an augment all have special properties:

- All are locative or temporal.
- None are amenable to modification (i.e., *the other X*, *all X's*, *this X*, *the big X*, etc.). However, some can be modified with an associative phrase, in which case they are analogous to English *inside of...*, *in front of...*, etc.:

(12) phansi kwe-mithi, phakathi kwa-bantu
 under 17of-4trees, between 17of-2people
 ‘under the trees, among the people’

- All can be used as adjuncts. They have the distribution of PPs.

Are these really nouns? Please help me wish away examples like this:

(13) Mina Ngi-thand-a Phezulu Google
 I 1S.SM-love-FS 17above
 ‘I Love Heaven’ (title of hymn)

Perhaps these nouns have the following structure and the lack of augment can be attributed to the deictic nature of the embedded PP (Buell, 2009):

(14) [DP [PP phansi]]

3.1.3 Elements heading temporal adjuncts

Augmentless forms could be considered lexicalised complementisers (C^0 heads), relative pronouns, or augmentless nouns heading a temporal relative clause.

- (15) a. Mhla e-zal-w-a u-Maya....; cf. u-muhla (vSt73)
 when 1SM-bear-PSV-FS D-1Maya D-3day
 ‘When Maya was born....’
- b. ... nyakana ku-bus-a u-Ndwandwe.; cf. u-nyaka + -ana (vSt73)
 ... when 17SM-rule-FS D-1Ndwandwe D-3year -DIM
 ‘...when Ndwandwe ruled’
- (16) a. I-nxa u-nga-sa-ngi-fun-i, u-nga-ngi-tshel-a. (vSt73)
 D-portion 2S.SM-POT-DUR-1S.OM-want-NEG 2S.SM-POT-1S.OM-tell-FS
 ‘Immediately/The moment you don’t want me, you may tell me.’
- b. Nxa u-nga-sa-ngi-fun-i, u-nga-ngi-tshel-a.
 ‘Any time you don’t want me, you may tell me.’

If these are complementisers, then they are a productive of derivation.

3.2 DP level

3.2.1 Following DP-like elements

The augment can or must be omitted in three cases immediately following a D- or DP-like element:

- After a demonstrative pronoun, but not before one:

- (17) a. le ndawo
9this 9place
'this place'
b. i-ndawo leyo
D-9place 9that
'that place'

- Following an absolute pronoun:

- (18) a. Na-mi, u-mfundi, be-ngi-bon-a. (vSt73)
and-me D-1student was-1S.SM-see-FS
'I, a/the student, was also seeing.'
b. Nami mfundi bengibona.
'I, (in my capacity as) a student, was also seeing.'

- Proper names after titles:

- (19) u-Mongameli Mbeki Google, 10:1 preference for augmentless form
D-1mister Nozaza
'Mr. Nozaza'

3.2.2 Before certain quantifiers

There are two cases before a quantifier where von Staden reports an alternation, with an interpretive difference.

- Nouns before enumeratives (numbers):

- (20) a. Zi-bik-e i-zwi linye. (vSt73)
10SM-call-PERF D-5message 5one
'They have reported one MESSAGE.'
b. Zi-bik-e zwi linye.
'They have reported ONE message.'

- Before quantitative pronouns ('all'):

- (21) a. Ng-a-qal-a u-ku-qalaza i-(z)indawo zonke. (vSt73)
1SM-PAST-begin-FS D-15watch D-10places 10all
'I started to watch all the (particular, individual) places.'
b. Ng-a-qal-a u-ku-qalaza (z)indawo zonke.
'I started to watch all places (every place).'

3.3 PP level

In three morphosyntactic environments, the augment must be omitted (von Staden, 1973):

- Nouns of class 1a after associative *ka-*:

(22) u-muzi ka-Cele (vSt73)
D-3village of-1Cele
'Cele's village'

- After associative concord *kwa-*:

(23) a. Kw-a-fik-a i-sihambi e-mzi-ni wa-kwa-Nxumalo. (vSt73)
17SM-PAST-arrive-FS D-traveller LOC-3village-LOC 3of-17of-1Nxumalo
'There arrived a traveller in the village of Nxumalo's (place)'
b. *wak(w)oNxumalo

- After the locative preposition *ku-* (Buell, 2009; Marten, 2009): The augment of the nouns of classes 1, 1a, and 2 are omitted after the locative particle *ku-*:

(24) a-bantwana, ku-bantwana
D-2children, to-2children
'children, to children'

3.4 Clausal level

3.4.1 NPI-like environments

Negative verbal clauses. An element inside the verb phrase can omit the augment if the verb is negative. External argument:

- (25) a. A-ku-fik-anga a-bahambi. (vSt73)
NEG-17SM-arrive-NEG D-2travellers
'No (particular, individual) travellers arrived.'
b. Akufikanga bahambi. (vSt73)
'No (nothing like) travellers arrived.'

Objects:

- (26) a. A-ba-fuman-anga i-bhubesi. (vSt73)
NEG-2SM-find-NEG D-5lion
'They haven't found a/the (particular, individual) lion.' (e.g. a lion for which they had been searching)
b. Abafumananga bhubesi. (vSt73)
'They haven't found any (anything like a) lion.'

Embedding under prepositions under negation. The augmentless noun can be embedded under *na-* ‘and; with; even’:

- (27) a. A-ku-fic-w-anga ne-khiye. (vSt73)
 NEG-17SM-find-PSV-NEG even:D-key
 ‘Not even a/the (particular, individual) key has been found.’
 b. Akuficwanga nakhiye. (vSt73)
 ‘Not even any (anything like a) key has been found.’

The augmentless noun can be embedded under a preposition (like *nga-* ‘by, (instrumental) with’, *njenga-* ‘like’, and *nganga-* ‘as much as’) and in an associative phrase:

- (28) a. Ba-be-nga-lw-i ngo-mkhonto. (vSt73)
 2SM-was:2SM-NEG-fight-NEG by:D-3assagai
 ‘They were not fighting with an/the assagai.’
 b. Ba-be-nga-lw-i nga-mkhonto. (vSt73)
 2SM-was:2SM-NEG-fight-NEG by-3assagai
 They were not fighting with any (anything such as an) assagai.’
- (29) a. A-ka-dl-anga u-mmbila wo-mlungu. (vSt73)
 NEG-1SM-eat-NEG D-3mealies 3of:D-1caucasean
 ‘He didn’t eat the mealies of a/the white person.’
 b. A-ka-dl-anga u-mmbila wa-mlungu.
 NEG-1SM-eat-NEG D-3mealies 3of:1caucasean
 ‘He didn’t eat the mealies of any white person.’

Disjunction under negation. Von Staden gives a series of permutations with a disjunctive phrase with *noma* under negations. Here is just one permutation, in which the second disjunct is augmentless:

- (30) A-ka-m-jikijel-anga [nge-tshe noma zembe la-muntu.] (vSt73)
 NEG-1SM-1OM-throw-NEG by:D-5stone or 5axe 5of-1person
 ‘He didn’t throw a/the stone or any axe of any person at him.’

Yes/no questions with verbal clauses. Von Staden describes example like (31) in terms of being in the context of affirmative verbs, not noting the important fact that his examples are polarity questions, a typical environment licensing negative polarity items:

- (31) N-azi muntu nga-zwi lakhe? (vSt73)
 2P.SM-know 1person by-5voice 5his
 ‘Do you know any person by his voice?’

My own data indicates that an augmented noun triggers an intervention effect:

- (32) a. neg-V \emptyset -N \emptyset -N
 b. *neg-V Aug-N \emptyset -N

Negative associative copulatives (*na-* as ‘have’). The immediate complement of a negative *na-* predicate must be augmentless:

- (33) Leli pheshana a-li-na-gama. *alinegama (vSt73)
 5this 5paper:DIM NEG-5SM-with-5name
 ‘This little paper has no name.’

Von Staden claims:

Nouns in these constructions can refer to particular, individual objects or to objects in their generic capacity. (vSt73, p. 174)

However, if the complement of *na-* is a conjunction, the second conjunct may bear the augment:

- (34) a. ... ngi-nge-na-sono noma i-nxabano no-muntu? (vSt73)
 1S.SM-NEG-with-7sin or D-9quarrel with:D-1person
 ‘...while I have no sin nor any quarrel with any person?’
 b. ... ngi-nge-na-sono noma nxabano na-muntu?
 1S.SM-NEG-with-7sin or 9quarrel with-1person
 ‘...while I have no sin nor any quarrel with any person?’

These two facts make the ungrammaticality of the augment in (33) difficult to account for. It’s truly morphosyntactic: dependent on adjacency to the morpheme *na-*, but also dependent on the higher syntactic property of negation.

NPI licensing over clause boundaries? We don’t know anything about licensing NPI’s across clause boundaries:

- (35) a. I don’t believe [_{CP} that he saw anyone.]
 b. Do you believe [_{CP} that he saw anyone?]

3.4.2 Nouns used adverbially

Nouns used adverbially all retain the augment, according to Von Staden:

- (36) a. u-qobo, i-mpela, i-siminya, ne-mbala (vSt73)
 D-1truth D-9... D-7... with:D-9...
 ‘really, truly’
 b. i-zolo, ngo-vivi
 D-5yesterday D-1dawn
 ‘yesterday, dawn’

Von Staden does not discuss *ndawo* ‘nowhere’, though:

- (37) a. A-ngi-m-bon-anga ndawo.
 NEG-1S.SM-1OM-see-NEG 9place
 ‘I didn’t see him anywhere.’
 b. i-ndawo ‘place’

3.4.3 Object-marked DPs

A DP with a corresponding object marker always has the augment:

- (38) A-ngi-(*m-)bon-anga muntu.
NEG-1S.SM-1OM-see-NEG 1person
'I didn't see anyone.'

3.4.4 Preverbal subjects

According to Von Staden, preverbal subjects always have the augment:

- (39) *(U-)fudu lu-hamb-a kancane. (vSt73)
D-11tortoise 11SM-walk-FS slowly
'A tortoise walks slowly.'

But example (39) is covered by the elsewhere condition. The relevant cases to check are NPI contexts:

- (40) a. I don't believe [_{CP} that any tortoise walks slowly.]
b. Do you believe [_{CP} that any tortoise walks slowly?]

Knowing this would provide clues about the nature of the preverbal subject position.

3.4.5 Predicate nominals

A predicate nominal may optionally omit the augment:

- (41) (I-)zimbuzi ezi-bon-w-a. (vSt73)
COP:D-10goats REL:10SM-see-PSV-FS
'It is goats that are seen.'

(Roughly,) the second conjunct of the predicate nominal may either have or lack the augment, if the first conjunct lacks it.

- (42) a. I-sisebenzi noma i-salukazi se-xhegu. (vSt73)
COP:D-7worker or D-7old.woman 7of:D-5old.man
'It is a/the labourer or old woman of an/the old man.'
b. Sisebenzi noma salukazi sa-xhegu.
- (43) a. A-ku-yi-vila noma *(i-)sidawudawu. (vSt73)
NEG-17SM-COP:D-7lazybones or D-7simpleton
'It is not a/the lazy person or a/the simpleton.'
b. A-ku-vila noma (i-)sidawudawu.
NEG-17SM-7lazybones or D-7simpleton
'It is no lazybones or simpleton.'

This is good evidence that the prefixless form in (41) lacks the augment syntactically. But what about Mzolo's copulative tonal pattern in (4)?

Not all Zulu speakers accept the negative strategy in (43). Note the difference between Zulu and Ndebele in the alternative strategy:

(44) Zulu: augment ungrammatical

A-ba-wona *(a-)masela. (Zulu) (Buell, 2008a)
 NEG-2SM-6PRON D-6thieves

Intended: ‘They’re not thieves (at all).’

(45) Ndebele: augment grammatical (perhaps obligatory?)

a. Ka-si-so zinja. (Ndebele) (Bower and Lottridge, 2002)
 NEG-7SM-7PRON 9dogs

Intended: ‘They’re not thieves (at all).’

b. i-zinja ‘dogs’

3.4.6 Vocatives

Nouns used vocatively always lack the augment:

(46) Nkosi! Jojo! (vSt73)
 D-9king D-1George
 ‘King! George!’

3.4.7 Nouns in a particular relative clause construction

The augment is omitted in this non-subject relative strategy:

(47) U-mfana o-hhashi lakhe li-m-khahlel-e u-thukuthele kakhulu. (vSt73)
 D-1boy 1REL-3horse 3his 5SM-1OM-kick-PERF 1SM-be.angry:perf very
 ‘The boy whose horse kicked him is very cross.’

Characteristics of this type of relative clause:

- Prefix agrees with the head of the relative clause.
- Relative prefix is attached to the preverbal subject.
- Overt subject is obligatory. (If there is no overt subject, the relative prefix is invariable and fuses with the subject marker (Khumalo, 1992).)
- My suspicion: The subject must be one which would otherwise begin with an augment. Thus, no pronoun-, quantifier-, or demonstrative-initial.
- Archaic or unacceptable for many speakers (Zeller, 2004, 2003).

3.4.8 Subject nouns used figuratively

Omission of the augment in this context is limited to poetry and idioms:

(48) a. I-(zi)nkomo z-a-phel-a i-zinselo. (vSt73)
 D-10cows 10SM-PAST-finish-FS D-10hooves
 ‘The cattle had their hooves worn away.’

- b. Nkomo zaphel' izinselo.
 'The cattle (i.e., things that acted like cattle)....'

Can we trust Von Staden's claim that this is figurative? Maybe it's just another register, perhaps an archaism with no interpretational consequence.

4 Determiner spread

Visser (2007) describes a phenomenon in Xhosa which looks similar to Semitic determiner spread. When the head of the relative clause lacks the augment, then the relative clause itself may lack the relative prefix.

- (49) a. Aug-N *(Rel):SM-Pred
 b. \emptyset -N (Rel):SM-Pred

(50) Agreeing adjective:

- a. U-mfazi a-ka-nced-i mntwana o-mhle / mhle. (Xhosa)
 D-1woman NEG-1SM-help-NEG 1child REL:1SM-1beautiful 1beautiful

'The woman is not helping (any) pretty child.'

- b. U-mfazi a-ka-nced-i u-mntwana o-mhle / *mhle.
 D-1woman NEG-1SM-help-NEG D-1child REL:1SM-1beautiful 1beautiful

'The woman is not helping the/a specific pretty child.'

(51) Non-agreeing adjective:

- a. ... mntwana o-lusizi / u-lusizi. (Xhosa)
 1child REL:1SM-sad 1SM-sad

'The woman is not helping (any) sad child.'

- b. ... u-mntwana o-lusizi / *u-lusizi.
 D-1child REL:1SM-sad 1SM-sad

'The woman is not helping the/a specific sad child.'

(52) Verb:

- a. ... mntwana o-gul-a-yo / u-gul-a-yo.
 1child REL:1SM-be.sick-FS-REL 1SM-be.sick-FS-REL

'The woman is not helping (any) sick child.'

- b. ... u-mntwana o-gul-a-yo / *u-gul-a-yo.
 D-1child REL:1SM-be.sick-FS-REL 1SM-be.sick-FS-REL

'The woman is not helping the/a specific sick child.'

What are the constraints on verbal relative clauses? Is this phenomenon limited to subject relatives? Is it limited to adjective-like predicates?

5 Conclusion

- The augment's distribution is both morphologically and syntactically determined.

- The augment could provide information about the structure of the DP, but also information on issues such as the scope of negation (Buell, 2008b) and the characterisation of subject position and dislocation positions.
- Interesting open questions include confirming interpretations (figurative), tonal variants of augmentless forms, and cross-clausal NPI licensing.

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