The encoding of subjects and objects in Jumjum, a Nilotic OV language

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Abstract

This article shows that in Jumjum, a little-described language belonging to the Southern Burun subbranch of Western Nilotic, subjects and objects are obligatorily cross-referenced in the verb. Only definite patients are coded as objects, while indefinite patients are coded as non-core arguments of antipassive verbs. Jumjum and its sister language Mabaan are morphosyntactically unique among the Western Nilotic languages in three respects. Firstly, the object of a transitive verb always precedes the verb (OV order). Secondly, subjects and objects are always expressed by the inflection of the verb, which thus cross-references subject and object noun phrases. And thirdly, some subject suffixes are deleted before some object suffixes, which gives rise to many cases of segmentally homonymous forms, but these forms are kept phonologically distinct by their tone patterns. The article documents these features by also taking into account the effect of derived verb stems and of tense inflection on the expression of cross-reference. To some extent, the derivational morphemes are expressed by suffixation, but in addition, root-internal alternations play a major role, including alternations in vowel quality, vowel length, and the root-final consonant.

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1. Introduction

In his typology of subject and object markers in African languages, Creissels (2006:43) applies the term 'pronominal marker' to "any bound morpheme referring to an entity that is represented elsewhere in the same clause by a noun phrase, or could be represented by a noun phrase in a clause identical in all other respects". Creissels (2006:44–45) further distinguishes between three stages in the evolution of pronominal markers: Stage I pronominal markers "are in complementary distribution with the corresponding noun phrase"; "Stage II pronominal markers are obligatory"; Stage III pronominal markers are also obligatory, but unlike Stage II markers, they are not "able to represent by themselves the entity they refer to", and they are therefore "pure agreement markers". The purpose of the present article is to demonstrate and describe in detail that in the Western Nilotic language Jumjum, pronominal markers of subjects and objects belong to Stage II, and that they obligatorily express or cross-reference transitive subjects as well as non-third person intransitive subjects and non-third person objects. These pronominal markers are verbal suffixes. Some subject
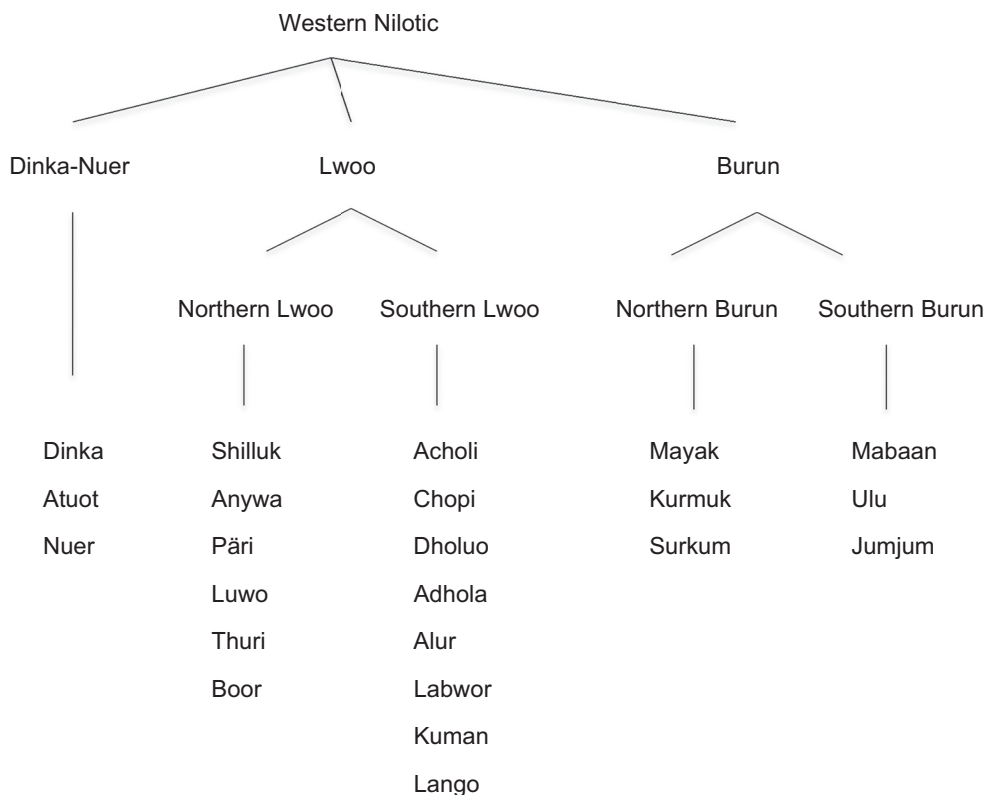
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Fig. 1. Subclassification of Western Nilotic, based on Köhler (1955) and Storch (2014:5).

suffixes are deleted before some object suffixes, which gives rise to many cases of segmentally homonymous forms, but these forms are kept phonologically distinct by their tone patterns.[1]

Jumjum is a little-described language spoken in the southern part of Blue Nile State in Sudan. As indicated in Fig. 1, it belongs to the Southern Burun subbranch of the Burun branch of Western Nilotic. The latter language family is itself a branch of Nilotic, which also includes the branches Eastern Nilotic and Southern Nilotic, and which is a subbranch of the Nilo-Saharan phylum.

The focus of the present article is on the manifestation of the subject-object inflection of transitive verbs. However, since (some of) the cross-reference suffixes exhibit allomorphy determined by tense inflection, this grammatical category is also included in the description. The form of (some of) the cross-reference suffixes also depends on the derivational status of the verb stem, and therefore the most common categories of derived stems with a transitive root are dealt with as well. Moreover, two kinds of intransitive verb stems are included in the description, namely simple intransitive stems and antipassive stems, in order to compare the subject inflection of such verbs with the subject-object inflection of transitive verbs.

The article is organized as follows. Section 2 is a brief introduction to the phonology of Jumjum, summarizing the main results given in Andersen (2004). Section 3 gives an introduction to basic clausal syntax and the structure of verbs in Jumjum. Sections 4–10, which constitute the bulk of the article, deal with the formation of six types of verb stems and with the cross-reference of subject and object in verbs with these stems: simple intransitive stems (Section 4), simple transitive stems (Section 5), and four derived stem types with transitive roots, namely antipassive stems (Section 6), centrifugal stems (Section 7), centripetal stems (Section 8), dative stems (Section 9), and multiplicative stems (Section 10). In each of these sections, I first deal with non-past tense forms, which are morphologically unmarked, and then with past tense forms. Section 11 concludes the article with a Western Nilotic outlook, including a brief comparison of Jumjum with other

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[1] The following abbreviations are used in interlinear translations and elsewhere: 1DUIN = first person dual inclusive; 1PL = first person plural; 1PLEX = first person plural exclusive; 1PLIN = first person plural inclusive; 1SG = first person singular; 2PL = second person plural; 2SG = second person singular; 3 = third person; 3PL = third person plural; 3SG = third person singular; ALL = allative; AP = antipassive; CF = centrifugal; CP = centripetal; CS = construct state; D2 = second person demonstrative; D3 = third person demonstrative; DAT = dative; ERG = ergative; FOC = focus; FUT = future; ID2 = second person demonstrative identifier; IMPF = imperfective; LOC = locative; MULT = multiplicative; O = object; PL = plural; PREP = multipurpose preposition; PRO = proform; PROH = prohibitive; PST = past; REL = relative pronoun; S = subject; SG = singular; TERM = terminator.