The role of discourse practice in the spread of linguistic features: The case of logophoricity

(Workshop 3: Areal Phenomena in Northern Sub-Saharan Africa)

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Abstract
The use of logophoric markers is commonly treated as an areal phenomenon characteristic of parts of sub-Saharan Africa (Güldemann 2003, 2008). Unlike typical areal phenomena, however, logophoricity plays a minor role in ordinary discourse: in contrast to tone, ATR harmony or word order patterns, logophoric markers are relatively infrequent, and mostly occur in specific speech genres, rather than in daily conversation. In many languages, moreover, logophoric markers are optional (e.g., (1) shows how logophoric pronouns can alternate with first person pronouns); they are also commonly restricted in their grammatical function.

(1) [Wan, Mande]

ɓé	è	gé	ēé!	**ɓāā**	kē̄	é,	lā	nɔ̀nì-ɑ̣́	**ŋ̀**	mì.	ēé!
then	3SG	said	yeah	LOG.EMPH	this	DEF	2SG	lose-STAT.PERF	1SG	at	yeah

'He said: Yeah, as for **myself**LOG here, you cannot recognize **me**PERS'

All these properties make logophoric markers unlikely candidates for direct borrowing, and an atypical case among areal linguistic phenomena. The situation is complicated by the lack of evidence for logophoric markers being borrowed from one language into another; instead, logophoric pronouns are often traced back to old pronouns, demonstratives, and other third person elements (Dimmendaal 2001).

In this paper, I address the question of areal status of logophoricity by exploring several logophoric systems from sub-Saharan Africa. I show that unlike so-called "logophoric" uses of reflexive pronouns in languages like Japanese or Italian, African logophoric markers are part of a special discourse reporting strategy characterized by systematic shifts in deictic values that do not fit well with the Eurocentric distinction between "direct" and "indirect" reporting. The strategy serves the demands of interactive oral performance characteristic of parts of traditional sub-Saharan Africa, in which the speaker constantly switches roles between the narrator and the story's characters. The language of such performances is equipped with a variety of devices enabling the speaker to mark such shifts more effectively, including specialized "character-reporting" pronouns; in some languages, third person pronouns are used in otherwise "direct" reporting to the same effect (as in 2, where a third person pronoun is used to introduce self-reporting by the story's character, and to distinguish it from self-reference by the narrator).

(2) [Obolo, Cross River; Aaron 1992]

ògwú	úgâ	okêkĭtó	ító	íkíbé	gwúŋ̣	kàŋ̲,	ɔ̀mɔ̂	ìkâtùmú
this	mother	was.crying	cry	say	child	3SG.POSS	3SG	not.told

ìnyí	òwù	yê	íbé	òwù	kàgɔ̌ɔk	ìfĭt	ífĭt	yì
give	2SG	Q	say	2SG	not.follow	play	play	this

'The mother was crying, saying: My child, did I not tell you not to join in this dance group?'

More generally, I argue that African-style logophoricity is grounded in specific types of communicative practice, which are transmitted through traditional genres (cf. also Ameka & Breedveld 2004). Even though in some languages, logophoricity only survives in specific genres, it can develop as a functionally-motivated device when communicative practices in question spread through contact. In this sense, the spread of logophoricity across genetic family boundaries need not depend directly on language contact.

Keywords: logophoricity, genre, oral performance