PROTO BANTU QUESTION WORDS

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Bewildering **formal variation** of QWs in Bantu even within lower level groups (cf. Bastin et al. 1999 for NIPs ‘who?’ and ‘what?’)

- multitude of seemingly related forms and forms that do not seem to have anything in common
- often irregular correspondences between seemingly related forms
- the forms range from very short to relatively long (‘what?’: Mongo C61 é vs. Mwani G401 *kìnáni*)

In this respect, QWs in Bantu resemble various **deictic forms**, such as personal indexes (substitutives and possessives) and demonstratives (rather than nouns and verbs)
Different ways to go about such wild variation in reconstruction

- Reconstruct a smaller range of more common formal "types"
‘what?’
- (*-nĭ (see CS1354; CW, SE))
- *-yànĭ (CS1926; D:1; NE, CE)
‘who?’
- *náà (CS1337; D:0, NW, CW)
- *náńi (CS1343; D:3; CW, E)
- *-yànĭ (CS1925; D:3; CW, E)
‘which?’
- (*-ká (see CS1046; CW, SW)
- *-kí (CS1046; D:3; CW, NE, SE)
- *-nĭ (CS1354; D:3; N, CE)
- *-pĭ (CS1498; D:5; NW, SW, EE)
- *-tí (CS1728; D:2; CW, CE, SE)
‘where?’
- *-pí (CS1499; D:3; W, SE)
‘how many?’
- *-dìngá (CS586; D:1; NE, CE)
- *-ŋgá, (*-ŋgáńa, *-ŋganí; CS752; E’’ D:3)
- *-ŋgápì (CS789; E’’ (D:4))

*-yànĭ  ‘who?’ | ‘what?’
*-nĭ  ‘what?’ | ‘which?’
*-pí  ‘where?’ | ‘which?’
Different ways to go about such wild variation in reconstruction

- Reconstruct a smaller range of more common formal “types”
- Reconstruct the simplest possible form (pick one “type”)
“a set which looks like a fragmentary system of interrogative nouns with stem -í: 7 kì-í ‘what’, 16 pà-í (17 kù-í, 18 mù-í) ‘where’; but 1a n(d)áí ‘who’, if it belongs here, shows an element n(d)á- which is not attested otherwise (also n(d)ánî).” (Meeussen 1967:103)

- í ‘what?’ – a nominal stem with a nominal class prefix

- n(d)á(n)(-)í ‘who?’ – a nominal stem with an unusual form and high formal variability (whose reconstruction to PB is rather problematic)
Different ways to go about such wild variation in reconstruction

- Reconstruct a smaller range of more common formal “types”
- Reconstruct the simplest possible form
- Reconstruct the common denominator of all the variation (which gives longer forms, rather than shorter ones)
PERSONAL PRONOMINALS

(Kamba Muzenga 2003:228)
Different ways to go about such wild variation in reconstruction

- Reconstruct a smaller range of more common formal “types”
- Reconstruct the simplest possible form
- Reconstruct the common denominator of all the variation (which gives longer forms, rather than shorter ones)
Try to achieve a close match between:

- the observed variation in the reflexes of the element in question
- typological knowledge of common processes of change that may provide us with some cues as to what historical sources may have produced the observed variation
QWs tend to be diachronically **unstable** and structurally **complex** (polymorphemic constructions)

A strong predilection for **substance accretion** (first unbound, later bound → univerbation) related to:

- prominent **information structural status** of QWs
- very strong tendency for **continuity** in the evolution of QWs

A strong predilection for **substance reduction** (often irregular and radical) related to:

- **frequency effects** affecting functional words
The (apparent) ease vs. (real) difficulty of reconstructing QWs is largely dependent on where accretion and reduction of substance in QWs happen vis-à-vis each other.

- accretion and reduction occur at the same side of QWs: (apparent) ease of reconstruction

  \[ Aaa \rightarrow Aaa-Bbb \rightarrow AaBb \rightarrow ABb-Ccc \rightarrow ABCc \]

  e.g. Proto Indo-European interrogative “stem” \(^*k^w\)- (Cysouw & Hackstein 2011)

- accretion and reduction occur at the opposite sides of QWs: (real) difficulty of reconstruction

  \[ Aaa \rightarrow Aaa-Bbb \rightarrow AaBbb \rightarrow ABb-Ccc- \rightarrow BCc \]

  e.g. Eastern Mayan languages (Idiatov 2011)
“Mayan languages are so similar that the propriety of grouping them as a language family is readily apparent” (Fox 1978:1) and this relationship “was also recognized early, long before formal linguistic procedures have been formulated” (Campbell & Poser 2008:118)
IPs are **extremely diverse** in Eastern Mayan

- different **languages of the same branch**, such as ‘who?’ in Mamean (Mayers 1966:275):
  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mam</td>
<td>’alkyee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ixil</td>
<td>’ab’il</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awakatek</td>
<td>na’j</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- different **dialects of a single language**, such as ‘with what?, how?’ in K’iche’ (Par Sapón & Can Pixabaj 2000:94, 206):
  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Totonicapán</td>
<td>jas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz de El Quiché</td>
<td>su’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cubulco</td>
<td>wach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- within **one dialect**, such as ‘who?’ in Cubulco K’iche’ (Par Sapón & Can Pixabaj 2000:95, 203): *chinoq, china, na, pa*
• accretion on the sides vs. reduction inside of QWs: (real) difficulty of reconstruction

\[ Aaa \rightarrow Aaa-Bbb \rightarrow AaBb \rightarrow Ccc-ABb \rightarrow CcABb \rightarrow CBb \]

~ Bantu…

…but with:

- a slight preference for accretion at the right
- some reduction also at the left
Common types of accreted material (often combinations thereof) for NIPs

- various types of deictics: demonstratives, personal pronominals
- focus markers
- copulas
- relativizers
- nouns with generic semantics (‘thing’, ‘person’, ‘place’, ‘name’, etc.)
- gender (noun class) markers
- nominalizers (such as ‘one’ in ‘which one?’, the augment in Bantu)
Common types of semantic changes with respect to QWs (and especially, lack of differentiation between ‘who?’ and ‘what?’), without (!) taking into account gender-number marking or accretion of some other nominalizing material:

- ‘(be) where?’ > ‘(be) which one?’ > ‘which one?’
- ‘which one?’ > ‘who?’, occasionally ‘who?, what?’
- ‘who?, what?’ > ‘who?’ or ‘what?’ when a new dedicated form of either NIP emerges
- ‘(be) where?’ > ‘what (kind of) [N]?’, which [N]?
- ‘what (kind of) [N]?’ > ‘which [N]?’
- ‘which [N]?’ > ‘which one?’
- ‘what (kind of) [N]?’ > ‘what?’, ‘who (classification, rather than identification)?’
- constructions based on a noun meaning ‘name’ or verbs meaning ‘do, say, be’, ‘name’, ‘call’ > ‘who?’, ‘what?’, ‘who?, what?’

e.g. Lithuanian kàs ‘who?, what?’
Common types of semantic changes with respect to NIPs (and especially, lack of differentiation between ‘who?’ and ‘what?’)

- ‘who?’ cannot directly change to ‘what?’ or vice versa

(such a shift cannot be accounted for by any regular mechanisms of semantic change either)
Reduction due to frequency effects is largely irregular (language- and wordform-specific)
(you can drop a morpheme, you can drop a segment or segments here and there)

Lousiana Creole (cf. Rottet 2004; Idiatov 2007:253) ‘who?, what?’: *ki sa ki ~ ki sa ~ sa ki ~ sa* vs. French *c’est qui ça qui…* lit. ‘it is who this/that who (did this)?’

*cosa*-type reduction (endocentric compound reduction)
e.g. Italian *cosa* ‘what?’ < *che cosa* ‘what thing?’
(like *unions* for *trade unions*)
Lack of differentiation between ‘who?’ and ‘what?’ in a number of languages of zone C with °n(d)a(n)i

- ndè/nê ‘who?, what?’ in some variants of Mbos(h)i (C30; Bastin et al. 1999)
- nâ ‘who?, what?’ in some variants of Tetela (C80; Bastin et al. 1999)
- ñnɔ ‘who?, what?’ in Ntomba-Inongo (C70; Bastin et al. 1999)
- ñɔ ‘who?, what?’ in Bolia (C40; Mamet 1960:35)
“Reflexes” of °n(d)a(n)i as ‘who?’ and ‘what, what kind of, which [N]?’

- Enya Kibombo D14 naání ‘who?’ and kĩ-úmà naání ‘what?’ (literally ‘what thing?’)
- Ndaka D301 àní ‘who?’ vs. îmánì ‘what?’
- Mwani G401 náni ‘who?’ vs. ki-náni ‘what?’
- Basaa A43 njé(é) ‘who?’ vs. AG-njé(é) ‘what kind of, what [N]?’
- C31 Libobi + Lifonga + Gyando ya ‘who?’ vs. Mongo C70 AG-yá ‘what, what kind of, which [N]?”
“Reflexes” of °n(d)a(n)i as ‘who?’, ‘what, what kind of, which [N]?’, ‘what?, how?’

- Tswana S31 mang ‘who?’ vs. ‘what?, how? (it is called)’ vs. N mang ‘what kind of, what [N]?’ (thing, person) (but not ‘which [N]’!) (Andy Chebanne, p.c.)

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lefele je le bidiwa mang?
CL5.place AG5.this AG5 is.called who
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‘What is this place called? (lit.: ‘Who is this place called?’)’ (e.g. Gaborone)

- Kagulu G12 =ni ‘what?, how?’ (compare nhani ‘how?’; ‘why?’, NC-ani ‘where?’), AG-o =ni ‘what?’ (e.g., choni ‘what?’ (default), dyoni ‘what?’ (something said)) (vs. older =ki ‘what?’) (Petzell 2008:89-92, 177)
“Reflexes” of *n(d)a(n)i* as ‘(be) what? (about a name of a person or thing’)

Tswana S31 (Andy Chebanne, p.c.)

leina ja setlhare se ke mang?

\[ \text{CL5.name AG5.CON CL7.tree AG7.this COP who} \]

‘What is the name of this tree? (lit.: ‘The name of this tree is who?’)’ (e.g. oak)

Ngombe (C414; Rood 1958:xxi)\(^6\)

(18) a. ngando íyē nda?

\[ \text{CL9.village AG9.this who} \]

‘What is the name of this village? (lit.: ‘Who is this village?’)

b. moto íyũ nda?

\[ \text{CL1.man AG1.this who} \]

‘Who is this man?’
Implication #1: The aforementioned oddities with respect to \( \text{’n(d)a(n)i} \) can be derived from an earlier ‘\text{which (one)}?’ and ultimately ‘\text{where?}’ (in some languages, perhaps from ‘\text{where?, how?}’), but not from ‘who?’ or ‘what?’.

Implication #2: No NIP *‘who?’ can be reconstructed for Proto Bantu
In many languages, **NIPs questioning subjects** have to be framed as nominal **predicates**, often as [REL + (COP) + NIP], and cannot be controllers of agreement

- Tswana S31 *mang* ‘who?’ vs. N *mang* ‘what kind of, what [N]?’ (thing, person) (but not ‘which [N]’!) (Andy Chebanne, p.c.)
- Mongo C70 *ná* ‘who?, what?’
Implication #3: °n(d)a(n)i is likely to originate in a predicative (clausal) construction.
Reflexes of °-í ‘what?’ as ‘where?’ (without a locative class marker)

• Mongo C70 é ‘what?’ and ‘where?’ with verbs with a locative argument.

ā-otswá  é?
AG₁-went  where
‘Where has he gone?’
Implication #4: The original meaning of °-́‘what?’ is probably ‘(be) where?, how?’.
There are suspiciously many cases where there are no traces of the L tone of the presumed nominal prefix in reflexes (like in Mongo ø)

- **Implication #5**: The original class prefix of °-i in the meaning ‘what?’ is probably a H toned prefix from the PP paradigm, viz. *kì-ì* rather than BGR *kì-ì*.

…as is typical for deictic nominals and relative clauses, the latter (and originally probably also the former) being basically **nominalizations** used as modifiers or nominals
• Reflexes of \(n(d)a(n)i\) as ‘who?’ often do not have a CL1 prefix (of either NP or PP paradigm), like (genderless) nouns of class 1a (cf. Van de Velde 2006).

• And since often reflexes of \(n(d)a(n)i\) cannot be controllers of agreement we cannot actually know their class either.

(recall: \(n(d)a(n)i\) is likely to originate in a predicative (clausal) construction)
- ‘which one?’ > ‘who?’ (e.g. Doneux 1971 for zone J languages)
- ‘(be) where?’ > ‘which one?’

  Mongo C70 AG-lé nkó ‘which one?’, ‘what, which [N]?’ (lit. ‘it/(s)he/they is where?’)

- ‘(be) where?’ > ‘which one?’ > ‘who?’
  > ‘what (kind of), which [N]?’ > ‘what?, how?’

Kagulu (G12; Petzell 2008:89-92, 177) (i)hoki ‘where?’ (replacing older CL-ani ‘where?’), AG-hoki ‘which (one)?, what, which [N]?’, yehoki ‘who? (SG)’, wehoki ‘who? (PL)’

vs. ‘what?’ =nì ‘what?, how?’ (compare nhani ‘how?’, ‘why?’), AG-o=nì ‘what?’ (e.g., choni ‘what?’ (default), dyoni ‘what?’ (something said)), older =ki ‘what?’
Irregular reduction…

cosa-type reduction

Compare Kukuya (B77a) *kĩ-má* or Fumu (B77b) *ima* ‘what?’ vs. Enya Kibombo D14 *kĩ-úmà nàánî* (literally ‘what thing?’), Ndaka D301 *ìmánì* ‘what?’ (with *àní* ‘who?’)
Accretion by deictics, augment, copulas, reduplication…

- Doneux (1971:134-135) on the accretion of ‘where?’ in zone J languages by (i) reduplication, (ii) addition of initial *nka-* or final –*na*

- Enya Kibombo D14 *kìíkìi* ‘what?’

- Recall Kagulu (G12) AG-*o = ni* ‘what?’ with the –*o* demonstrative root (e.g., *choni* ‘what?’ (default), *dyoni* ‘what?’ (something said))

- Bila (D32) *èké* vs. Komo (D23) *èkéndò* ‘what?’

- Augment (or “predicative”) *i-* (e.g., compare Hunde (D51) *inde* ‘who? (SG)’ vs. *bende ~ bande* ‘who? (PL)’
Accretion by deictics, augment, copulas, reduplication…

- Accretion by \(-n(d)i \sim n(d)i\) of ‘where?’ and ‘who?’ interrogatives

  Duala (A24) \(we(ni)\) ‘where?’, Punu (B43) \(va(ni)\), Luba (L31) \(panyi/penyi\) ‘where?’ (accreting \(\text{'pá-í AG16-what}\))

  Songola Kasenga (D24) \(nà́ndi\) ‘who?’ (vs. Enya Kibombo (D14) \(kì-ùmà nàání\) ‘what?’ and Enya Manda (D14) \(kì-ùmà nàání\) ‘what?’)
**-n(d)i ~ n(d)i**

- A class 1 pronominal stem

  "Par ailleurs, le préfixe pronominal a-t-il la forme *ndi*- ou *ndi-*?"  
  (Kamba Muzenga 2003:48)

- A (presentative, existential) copula (nominal predicative marker)  
  *n(d)i ~ n(d)i*

- Historically, the two are most likely related: deictic > copula

**BGR’s *n(d)ái* ‘who’ is closer to the proto-form than BGR’s *n(d)ání***
#1: °n(d)áí is from an earlier ‘which (one)?’ and ultimately ‘where?’.

#2: No NIP ‘who?’ can be reconstructed for Proto Bantu.

#3: °n(d)áí is likely to originate in a predicative (clausal) construction.

#4: The original meaning of °-í ‘what?’ is probably ‘(be) where?, how?’.

#5: The original class prefix of °-í in the construction meaning ‘what?’ is probably a H toned prefix from the PP paradigm, viz. *kí-í rather than BGR *kì-í.

#6: n(d)i ~ n(d)i – class 1 pronominal stem & presentative copula
Idiatov (2009): *[(AG9 or AG7)-COP CL16-‘what?’] ‘(it) is where?’, viz. something like *(i~i-)ndi pà-i

The main problematic issue is the irregularity of the reflexes of *p of the °pà-i part of the construction, which could be accounted for by irregularity of the reduction following the univerbation of the construction

The palatalization/affrication and subsequent assibilation of many of the reflexes of d in the construction can be accounted for by the following i (~i), but this account is not completely satisfying (cf. also C70 Mongo –yá ‘what, which [N]?’, C31 Libobi ya ‘who?’)
An **update** on the reconstruction:

\[ *(i\sim i\sim)ndi \quad yì \quad à \quad yí \]

\[ \text{(AG9\sim 24?)-COP AG9.D AG1.SM be.where?} \]

‘it is the one who is where?’ (lit.: ‘it is that (s)he/it is where?’) → ‘it is which one?’ (person or thing)

- The agreement patterns of CL9 and CL1 are not uncommon in Bantu as **default agreement patterns** (cf. Van de Velde 2006)
An update on the reconstruction:

*(i~i-)ndî  yì  à  yî
(AG9~24?)-COP AG9.D  AG1.SM  be.where?
‘it is that who is where?’ (lit.: ‘it is that (s)he/it is where’) →
‘it is which one?’ (person or thing)

Mbula (Jarawan; 7 vowel system)

à yé ‘(s)he/it is where?’ (vs. à wá ‘(s)he/it is well/safe’)

X (L_) nè / X (H_) nê ~ né‘é ‘where is X?’
|X  nà  yê|

cf. X (L_) nà (Y) / X (H_) ná Y ‘it is X’, ‘X is Y’