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Sociolinguistic determinants of relational coherence devices: Concessive markers in African languages

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Definition

Concessives are coherence devices which indicate that the clause (main or dependent) which they introduce counters some other idea, either by directly contradicting an idea which is explicitly expressed, or by countering an inference or expectation generated by previous material. English concessives include *but*, *although*, *nevertheless*, *however*, *instead*, *on the other hand*, and so forth.

Even in languages with elaborate inventories of concessive expressions, concessive interpretations may still be inferred:

"Asyndetic types of clause linking, absolute constructions, as well as nearly all adverbial clauses may be interpretatively enriched and receive a concessive interpretation:

- Fred was already drunk, early as it was in the night.
- This is an interesting, if complicated, solution.
- There was a funny smile on Dickie's face, as if Dickie were pulling his leg by pretending to fall in with his plan, when he hadn't the least intention to fall in with it. (P. Highsmith, *Ripley*, p.75)
- Il était d'accord, tout en gardant ses objections fondamentales." (König 1988:150)

Arabic [arb] – a common source of concessives in African languages: (*wa*)*lakin* – conjunction (*wa* being 'and') can normally be translated 'but'
amma – in Tunisian Arabic functions much the same way as *lakin*, but in Standard Arabic introduces topics (with potential contrast): 'as for'
illa – preposition meaning 'except', 'but for', 'apart from'; can govern PPs and not just NPs: *illa b-il-quwa* ('only/except by strength') but can't be used as a conjunction. (Maik Gibson p.c. 03/06/13)

Ik [ikx] (Uganda; Nilo-Saharan, Eastern Sudanic, Kuliak, Ik)
Concession is conveyed by *koto*, but only in the vaguest way. *Koto* is an additive, which can indicate 'then', as in *kutoo koto* 'then he said'.
Ik speakers who are multi-lingual tend to borrow concessives from other languages, *nai* from Karimojong and *lakini* from Swahili (originally from Arabic). (Terrill Schrock p.c. 27/06/12)

Berta [wti] (Ethiopia; Nilo-Saharan, Berta)
In general, concessive relations are inferred and a general additive connector *u* is used: *Maabdo giti gadi u wald agenné tha almádarassiyétiq.* "That man has a child **and**/but he does not send him to school.'
Clausal contrast can be expressed with the connective *lakin* or (more rarely) *illa*: *Né shít kqalga mádba dádári.* "Mín mbá ztali u mbá fwasqáll ájudfálo alhályáti kqálliti gii are u thini mádbáigámmo, *lakin* márra wald máamandáni dádóq thá ánd kqapqagf alqáfúthi márra, inshá shigo wald ali dfini maabá pqlshí shigo, u wald ali fdaqí juuda, *illa* ma ali dádá ngó gímán ma mífátiqúthi(meaning) nínéti afínit ngó." The old man told him: "From the time I have planted that guava tree, it has produced fruit every year, and it was that people ate it, **but** not once did someone come and look for forgiveness. So I will not forgive/set free such a good man, and I do not want money, **but** if I may give you something to take with you, then I will let you go. (Suzanne Neudorff p.c. 21/03/13)

A claim

"Not all languages seem to have specific concessive connectives like E. *despite*, *although*, *nevertheless*, though they all seem to have a counterpart for the adversative conjunction *but*." (König 1988:151)
This may be true of all languages, but for many, the counterpart for the adversative conjunction *but* is a **borrowed** expression.

Safaliba [saf] (Ghana; Gur, Western Oti-Volta)
Safaliba has one basic word *che* which often translates English 'but' (but which can also be used with a meaning more like 'and'. there is also another word (more rarely used in Safaliba, but more commonly in its linguistic relatives), *ama* which is a strong adversative and is borrowed from Hausa (originally from Arabic). (Paul Schaeffer p.c. 25/06/12)

Mundari [mq] (Sudan; Nilo-Saharan, Nilotic, Eastern, Bari)
ama 'but', 'instead' joins a main clause with unexpected information: *Ilo guri mar merenyeni kulik po kuta mede yu. Ama nye a walanu ja worani a guri esa lo iti a borop!* 'That person is from the chief's grandfather's family. **But** he changed and instead of a person he became an animal!' (Tim Stirtz p.c. 25/07/12)

Eastern Bantu languages often borrow concessives, even if a term already exists; the existing term typically expresses weaker contrast or a wider range of meaning than the borrowed term:
Rangi [lag] (Tanzania; Bantu F33) "Rangi speakers claim that their language has no 'but', i.e. in current speech, *lakini* is borrowed from Swahili. However, there's a connector *maa* which, when in initial sentence position, seems to have a merely additive function but in second sentence position, can have a contrastive function." (Oliver Stegen p.c. 08/10/12)
Mailia [mgq] (Tanzania; Bantu M24) has *lakini* (from Swahili) as well as *ileelo* – both mean 'but' (Eaton, in press)
Bena [bez] (Tanzania; Bantu G63) has *lakini* 'but' (from Swahili) as well as the additive *lino* 'but', 'now' (Helen Eaton p.c. 10/07/12)
Ngoni [ngo] (Mozambique; Bantu N12) The most common concessive is *nambu* 'but'; other forms are borrowed from Swahili: *lakini*, *kwaní*, and Portuguese: *mas*. (Heidrun Kröger p.c. 25/06/12)
Shangazi (Mozambique; dialect of Makhuwa, Bantu P312) has borrowed *embora* 'although' from Portuguese. (Devos & Bostoen 2012:108)

A case study: Adult L2 learners

The Mara Region adjacent to Lake Victoria in NW Tanzania is a highly multilingual environment. In addition to their mother tongue, most adult inhabitants of the area speak Swahili, the National Language of Tanzania, plus at least one of the two regional Languages of Wider Communication: Kuria in the north (pop. 690,000), and Sukuma in the south (pop. over 5,430,000).

Most of the smaller languages spoken in the Mara Region are typical of Eastern Bantu languages in having a single concessive, which is often a borrowed form.

Suba-Simbiti [ssc] (Bantu E43; pop. 113,000) has one conjunction, *kasi*, which is used to express surprising or unexpected events in the following clause. (Swift, in press)
Ómóntó uyó yaahanshiré uwómwé kasi uwómwé oora teyaamohanshiré hé. 'That person loved one (wife) but he didn't love the other.'

Kabwa [cwa] (Bantu E405; pop. 14,000) has borrowed *lakini* from Swahili (Higgins 2010).

Kwaya [kya] (Bantu E251; pop. 115,000) has *rakini* (also a loan from Swahili); this is the only concessive found in 10 narrative texts out of a total of 17 conjunctions. (Odom, in press)

The exception is **Jita** [jit] (Bantu E25; pop. over 205,000) which has at least three concessives: *nawe*, *tari* and *lakini*, all glossed as 'but'. *Nawe* is the most common: *Abhaana bheswe bhatakugosorera andi wuri nawe abhagosorera ewa omwikasyanya weeswe Mutuuji era.* 'Our children don't visit other places, **but** they visit our neighbour Hare only.' (Pyle & Robinson, in press)
However, *Jita* functions as a local LWC; it is most likely to be learnt by speakers of other languages, and *Jita* speakers are less likely to learn other languages (except Swahili and Sukuma). (Tim Roth p.c. 14/06/13)



Hypothesis

Efficient communication involves a compromise between the desire of the speaker/writer to communicate as quickly and easily as possible and the need of the hearer/reader for enough information to process the message.

In relatively small, tight-knit, isolated communities with a high proportion of shared assumptions, speakers will typically need to provide hearers with few overt coherence devices to ensure successful communication, thus favouring the communicative preferences of speakers.

In larger communities with looser social networks, more contact with outsiders, and fewer shared assumptions, speakers will need to use more frequent and more specific coherence devices to ensure successful communication, thus favouring the communicative needs of hearers. (See Trudgill 2011 for a discussion of this general principle.)

The development of written forms of a language may also favour the development of more frequent and specific coherence devices, since writers and readers may potentially share very few assumptions.

Factors favouring elaborate inventories of concessive expressions:

- Communities (usually relatively large compared to their neighbours) with looser social networks (and hence fewer shared assumptions), and frequent and prolonged contact with outsiders who are likely to learn the community's language as adults.

Shared assumptions:

"The assertion of two facts against the background assumption of their general incompatibility must be based on prior knowledge of compatibilities and connections." (König 1988:157)

When these assumptions are not shared, it is in the speaker's/writer's interest to indicate the incompatibility of the two facts so as to increase the chances of successful communication.

- A written tradition, especially involving argumentation.

"An elaborate inventory of concessive expressions, as found in European languages, presupposes, it seems, a certain tradition of argumentative writing." (König 1988:145)

As a corollary to this, König (1988:151) notes that "concessive connectives seem to have developed fairly late in the history of the languages for which we have evidence." We have evidence when written material becomes available, and as a written tradition develops, so does a more elaborate inventory of concessive expressions.

Factors favouring reduced inventories of concessive expressions:

- Communities (usually relatively small compared to their neighbours) with tight social networks (and hence a large number of shared assumptions), and little contact with outsiders who are likely to learn the community's language as adults.
- No written tradition, or a fairly recent written tradition.

If a written tradition has developed or is developing under the influence of a Language of Wider Communication, it is likely that concessive expressions will be borrowed from this LWC.

Case study: Loose social networks and an established written tradition

Grebo [grb] (Liberia; Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Kru) is a macro-language consisting of the following constituent languages: Barclayville Grebo [gry], Central Grebo [grv], Gboloo Grebo [gce], Northern Grebo [gbo], and Southern Grebo [grj]. Pop. 387,000 all Grebo languages in Liberia (2001). Concerning Barclayville and Southern Grebo, Ethnologue comments: "Strong ethnocentric attitudes between subgroups." This may be indicative of loose social networks.

In addition, Grebo has been written since the 1860s.

Innes (1966) lists the following concessives:
bàà, *biàné* 'nevertheless', 'notwithstanding'
hàte, *nemá*, *nemáse* 'although'
ké 'but'

Innes (1966: 115) comments: "Complex sentences of this type [two indicative mood clauses, one of which is introduced by a conjunction] are extremely common"

Saafi-Saafi [sav] (Senegal; Atlantic-Congo, Atlantic, Northern, Cangin) . Pop. 200,000 (2012). The conjunction *nde* connects two clauses, and only occurs in narrative, not in argumentation. It seems to say something like "It would perhaps be logical after the first clause to expect X, but Y (where Y implies not X): *A sonid, nde a kaandí.* 'She is in pain **but** hasn't died.'
The conjunction *waaye* 'but' counters an expectation: 'I have no money to give you for transport home, **but** (*waaye*) I will give you a powder...'
When a countering relation is predictable in the context, no overt concessive need be used: *A waadta kad ruya, a raakdi kadaha.* 'She wanted to go to the burial, [but of course] she hadn't any money to go.' (Hillebrand Dijkstra, p.c. 26/06/12)

Bozo Tigemaxo [boz] (Mali; Niger-Congo, Mande) Pop. 150,00 (estimated). The only concessive marker seems to be the conjunction *nkaa* [H.L.L]. Cognates found in neighboring languages: Bambara, Fulani. (Thomas Blecke, p.c. 06/10/12)

Suri [suq] (SW Ethiopia; Surmic) Pop.26,900 (2007), 18,700 monolinguals. No concessive is used in prototypical contrast; the additive connective *na* is used: *da bere buga buga ko kele kele el ta na mamafinaa ge el jr.* 'Long ago, Hyena and Rabbit were in the cattle camp, **but** their mothers were in the village.'
Concession can be indicated by the suffix *-fi* plus subjunctive: *ñakxtonu tamarat wo. Na kabége galyi-fi wo.* 'That situation refuse it. On the contrary, we should guard the highlander!' (Bryant 2005)

Fur [fvr] (Darfur, Sudan; Nilo-Saharan, Fur) Pop. over 500,000. The conjunction *maraj* has a wide range of uses, and can be glossed as 'but', 'though', 'except', etc.
Kí rây kío maraj táári òkàaba. 'We went to the field **but** we did not work.'
Namá maraj kwa krra'j boru-jalé... 'And **though** (the Fur people travel to) the countries of other people...'
Kwa kíi koiy maraj bam òkèaba. 'All the people were **there** **except** the brother.' (Waag 2001: 292-4)

Languages that do not conform to the hypothesis

Diola-Bandial [bqj] (Senegal; Atlantic, Jola) Pop. 11,200.

bare 'but' is a very frequent clause-initial conjunction which can even start a discourse, e.g. in a statement like "But today you look sad."

til 'rather' is rarer; it occurs towards the beginning of the second part of a contrastive construction, with a somewhat flexible position, but never clause-initially. It usually occurs after the contrasted element (NP), or just after *bare* if the whole clause is contrasted.

hani min 'even though' introduces subordinate concessive clauses which normally precede the main clause (*hani* alone is a strong negator, and *min* alone means 'for, as' in a causal sense). (Wolfgang Berndt p.c. 26/06/12)

Lydia Hoefft (p.c. 12/07/12) comments: "absence or presence of concessives does not just depend on common/shared context, it also depends on the general communication style of the people, or style of interaction of the people. Without wanting to stereotype people, some groups are more straight forward (or more quiet, reserved) in interactions, others more argumentative, more orally active, challenging each others' wit. And it seems to me that the latter group would use richer and more varied kinds of clause connections in general, even though the speakers may all share the same context."

Koorete [kqy] (SW Ethiopia; Afro-Asiatic, Omotic, Ometo East) Pop. 157,000 (2007), 84,400 monolinguals.

"In some ways, the Koore language community has linguistically been fairly isolated. They are bordered on the west by two lakes with only a narrow land bridge in between, and on the eastern side by a group with whom they were not on friendly terms in the past and had little interaction with..." However, concessives are frequent and include the following expressions: (Lydia Hoefft, p.c. 12/07/12)

-akoni < conditional marker *-ako* + additive *-ni*:
Shekkerei wodhe harge e maaddh-akoni...
malaria deadly sickness 3M.SG. exist-CONCESSIVE
'Although malaria is a deadly sickness...'

-kofa 'instead' (ablative):
Gadhesa hame-kofa zawa e atto.
market go-ABLATIVE house 3M.SG. remain-PST
'Instead of going to the market he stayed at home.'

baaka 'but rather' contrasts two actions with same subject:
Esa galiese baaka esa galatase yoodo baasso.
3M.SG.ACC rebuke rather 3M.SG.ACC thank come.PST NEG.3M.SG
'He did not come to thank him, but rather to rebuke him.'

Frequency and functions of concessive expressions

Not only the size of the concessive inventory in a language is at issue, but also the frequency with which concessives are used, and the range of functions associated with concessive expressions.

In some languages spoken by communities exhibiting factors favouring reduced inventories of concessive expressions, concessives may also be used very infrequently (indicating that successful communication can occur without overt marking of concession) and with additional textual functions which appear to be more frequent than semantic concession, at least in narratives.

Infrequent use of concessives: Hortatory texts in Dirayta

Dirayta [gdI] (Ethiopia; East Cushitic, Konso-Gidole) Pop. 65,300 (2007 census).

Although Dirayta has a number of concessive expressions, they occur infrequently in non-translated texts; in 7 hortatory texts totaling 129 sentences, there were only 3 occurrences of *lammí* 'but' (see example 1), one of *male* 'but', and one of *hekoddumale* 'however' (see example 2).

- Dalata nama hawas lekaan annin, ulata lammí asha setepa dalanniyyu.*
'The number of people being born is increasing, but fields are not increasing at the same rate.'
- Etin toywane, ukota akkana somma pahananni, hekoddumale rakkooota lekiti qafta.*
'When we look at drinking, it looks like a good thing, **however** it has many troubles.'

All other concessive relations were inferred, as in the following example:

- ...amm kollisa ufunaattahamu shoke amm kollisa fotaahamu, kiyata helisattan Moha huran quma lalayetepa kallaattan erkamampayta Moha kodda fottinta.*
'Not by knowing teaching nor by being able to teach, [but] by taking care of your life, fearing God and living according to his word you can become worker of God.'
(Data from Mirjami Uusitalo, p.c. 21/03/13)

Textual functions of concessives: Narratives in Fulfulde and Rangi

Fulfulde [ffm] (Mali; Niger-Congo, Atlantic, Northern, Senegambian, Fula-Wolof, Fula) Pop. 1m in Mali.

The conjunction *kaa* functions as a general concessive:
Oon palooma, walaa fuu no dogoto/en bee ngadaali kaa ndonkii yo ndarnu looyre ndee e ndogu reedu oo.
'That day, there wasn't anything the doctors didn't do (for her) but they failed to stop the vomiting and diarrhoea.'

However, in narrative texts, *kaa* functions as a concessive conjunction only 40% of the time. In the remaining 60%, *kaa* exhibits a range of textual or discourse functions, including marking thematic developments and indicating switch topics:
Too powal kaa haandinkinorii. Bojel kaa bami seedam tan, hooti. Powal kaa wii...
'There hyena *kaa* acted crazy. Rabbit *kaa* took only a little and went home. Hyena *kaa* said...'
(Higby 2003)

Rangi [lag] (Tanzania; Bantu F33)

Of 745 occurrences of the additive connective *maa* in Rangi narrative texts, 612 are in clause-initial position, and most give rise to a consecutive reading. In clause-second position, *maa* indicates thematic developments, and can often be translated as 'however' as it usually also expresses contrast:
Moosi Lubuwa maa akamusea... 'Old Lubuwa, however, told him, ...'
(Stegen 2011: 229)

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