

Grammaticalization of Babanki quotative markers

In Babanki, a Grassfields Bantu language of North-West Cameroon two quotative markers appear with dedicated, but sometimes, overlapping functions. Data from conversations between five native speakers over WhatsApp in November 2021 show that while *lá* introduces reported speech (1), *ta* introduces adverbial clauses (2), and both *lá* and *ta* are used with various ideophones, as in (3) where certain ideophones select the quotative marker they occur with while others tolerate both.

- (1) *wàyn yì gà? lá wù kwén*
1.child P1 say QT 2SG enter
'The child said that you should enter'
- (2) *wàyn yì dī tá ntē?*
1.child P1 cry QT ADV
'The child cried only a little'
- (3) a. *ndòŋ á féná lá lèèm*
1.potato DJ (be)black QT IDEO
'The potato is very black'
- b. *ndòŋ á tʃíʃí tá kùù?*
1.potato DJ (be)silent QT IDEO
'The potato is tasteless'
- c. *ndòŋ á bwáʔá lá/tá wùù?*
1.potato DJ (be)soft QT IDEO
'The potato is tasteless'

In this study, I examine the grammaticalization of these function words which have become dedicated markers in Babanki. Since the quotatives are opaque with respect to their etymologies, as in some African languages (Güldemann 2008), I explore possible inputs before their grammaticalization. I find the verb *làʔà* 'announce' and the adverb *tà* 'only' as the closest lexical sources from which Babanki quotatives might have evolved.

Reference

Güldemann, Tom. 2008. *Quotative indexes in African languages: A synchronic and diachronic survey*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.