

## VARIATION IN DOUBLE OBJECT MARKING IN SWAHILI

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There is a high degree of morphosyntactic microvariation with respect to the number and position of object markers found across Bantu languages. This paper examines variation in object marking in Swahili, against the backdrop of variation in object marking in Bantu more broadly. Verb forms in Standard Swahili are well-known to typically only permit one pre-stem object marker. However, here we show that there are isolated cases of post-verbal marking of objects from both a synchronic and diachronic perspective. The paper focuses on two case studies. Firstly, ‘Old Swahili’ – that is, the language of classical Swahili poetry – where examples of typologically unusual emphatic object marker doubling are found. Secondly, we show that post-verbal object marking is in fact also found in Standard (Modern) Swahili, namely in second person plural marking, in post-verbal locative markers and with non-verbal predication. However, we also show that the relationship between these forms, the Old Swahili paradigm of object marker doubling, and post-verbal object marking in Bantu more widely – in particular post-verbal plural addressee marking – is complex.

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### 1. Introduction

The presence of noun classes and the associated extensive systems of agreement are often considered characteristic of Bantu languages. In addition to agreement with subject arguments, Bantu languages also exhibit agreement in which object arguments are cross-referenced on the verb. This is the case in Swahili where a system of object markers is found. Thus, in example (1) the object marker *m-* which appears before the verb stem refers to the benefactive object *mzee* ‘elder’, while in example (2) the class 2 object marker *wa-* is triggered by the presence of the animate class 2 noun *wanafunzi* ‘students’.<sup>1</sup>

- (1) *Wa-li-m-pa m-zee zawadi.* [Standard Swahili]  
SM2-PAST-OM1-give 1-elder 9.present  
‘They gave the elder a present.’

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Swahili examples are Standard Swahili (*Kiswahili Sanifu*) as spoken by the second-named and last-named authors. Glosses follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules with the following additions: 1, 2, 3 etc. = noun class, CD = concord, CJ = conjoint, CONSC = consecutive, DJ = disjoint, FV = final vowel, OM = object marker, PAST2 = intermediate or distant past, PAST3 = remote past, PRO = pronoun, SM = subject marker.

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- (2) *Asha a-ta-wa-ona wa-nafunzi.* [Standard Swahili]  
1.Asha SM1-FUT-OM2-see 2-student  
'Asha will see the students.'

Across the Bantu languages there is extensive variation in terms of the properties of object markers and their distribution. Swahili is commonly considered to be a language in which only one, pre-stem object marker is permitted. This paper seeks to examine variation in object marking in Swahili, within the broader context of comparative Bantu. We draw on data from what we call 'Old Swahili' – the language of classical Swahili poetry – and Standard Swahili and consider the position of these varieties of Swahili within a broader micro-typology of object marking across Bantu.

While in Standard Swahili object marking seems to be synchronically restricted to a single pre-stem marker, we show that in Old Swahili there were instances of object marker doubling, which appears to have been used for emphatic purposes. We also explore cases of apparent post-verbal object marking with second person plural objects and post-stem object marking in non-verbal predication.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides the relevant comparative background of object marking patterns across Bantu languages. Section 3 examines variation in object marking in Swahili, drawing on examples of emphatic object marking in Old Swahili (Section 3.1), second person plural object marking in Standard Swahili (Section 3.2) and post-stem object marking in Standard Swahili (Section 3.3). Section 4 presents a concise conclusion.

### **2. Object marking in Bantu: Comparative background**

Bantu languages are known for their overall typological similarity on the one hand, and for their high degree of complex microvariation on the other. Variation in object marking, in particular, has attracted a considerable amount of scholarly attention. Here, we present an overview of work examining variation in object marking across Bantu languages with a view to providing the comparative background against which the findings in Section 3 are presented.

Early studies of Bantu object marking by Polak (1986) and Beaudoin-Lietz *et al.* (2004) were followed by the parametric comparison in Marten *et al.* (2007) and the subsequent more detailed studies of Marten & Kula (2012) and Marten *et al.* (2018a). The most recent overview of the field is Marlo (2015). In addition, several studies provide in-depth analysis of object marking in a specific language or group of languages against a comparative background, including Riedel (2009) and Taji (2017).

Beaudoin-Lietz *et al.*'s (2004) study is based on a sample of 72 languages and compares the position of pronominal object markers with respect to the verb (although locative and reflexive object markers are excluded from the study). It distinguishes three types of Bantu languages: Type 1 with pre-stem object markers, Type 2 with post-stem object markers, and Type 3 with both pre-stem and post-stem object markers. The three types are illustrated with examples from Haya (3), Basaa (4), and Lunda (5) below (data from Beaudoin-Lietz *et al.* [2004: 176, 182]):

- |     |  |                |
|-----|--|----------------|
| (3) | <i>Kat' á-ka-ki-mú-h-a.</i><br>Kato SM1-PAST3-OM7-OM1-give-FV<br>'Kato gave it [a class 7 noun] to him.' | Type 1 [Haya]  |
| (4) | <i>Me n-lóná wê yó lén.</i><br>I FUT-bring you it today<br>'I'll bring it to you today.'                 | Type 2 [Basaa] |
| (5) | <i>N-a-mw-ink-á-wu.</i><br>SM1SG-PAST2-OM1-give-FV-OM3<br>'I gave it to him.'                            | Type 3 [Lunda] |

There is a difference between pre-stem and post-stem markers. Pre-stem markers have a number of unique formal properties in terms of morphological shape and syntactic position and distribution, and so form a morphosyntactic category which is comparatively easy to identify. Morphologically, the pre-stem markers typically take the shape of the noun class prefix of the object nouns which they represent (for example the object marker *ki-* in Haya references a class 7 noun in [3], and *mw-* in Lunda represents a class 1 noun in [5]). Syntactically, only object markers can appear before the verb stem – full lexical or pronominal objects appear after the verb.

On the other hand, post-stem object markers often do not form a distinct morphosyntactic category, and so object marking can be expressed by full pronouns which occur in the same position as an overt lexical NP would. In Basaa for example, the post-stem object markers *yó* 'it' and *wê* 'you' in (4) are not morphosyntactically distinct from personal pronoun forms, and appear in the same position in which overt object NPs would appear. A similar case can be observed in example (6) from Konzime (Beaudoin-Lietz *et al.* 2004: 183) where the post-stem object markers are personal pronouns.

- |     |   |                  |
|-----|---|------------------|
| (6) | <i>Go á si bee me.</i><br>You PAST see PERF me<br>'You saw me.' | Type 2 [Konzime] |
|-----|---|------------------|

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The three types of languages identified in the typology also appear to be related to specific geographic areas: Type 1 languages are predominantly found in the east and south of the Bantu area, Type 2 languages are found mainly in the north-west of the Bantu-speaking area, and Type 3 languages are found mostly in between these two areas, i.e. in the central and western part of the Bantu area.

Swahili is normally analysed as a Type 1 language (Beaudoin-Lietz *et al.* 2004: 179), with only pre-verbal object markers. However, as we will show below, there are some exceptions to this generalisation. In Old Swahili, object marker doubling constructions are found which employ both pre-stem and post-stem object markers – thus making it a Type 3 language – but with the unusual typological twist that the two object markers refer to the same object. In Standard Swahili, a similar construction is found with second person plural object marking, and post-verbal object markers are found in non-verbal predication.

Riedel (2009) and Marten & Kula (2012) focus on pre-stem object markers – so on Type 1 languages in the typology of Beaudoin-Lietz *et al.* (2004) – and show that there are complex restrictions on the number and order of object markers in different Bantu languages, as well as on the interpretation and co-occurrence of object markers and co-referential NP objects. Riedel (2009) is a comparative study of Sambia (G23) and Haya (JE22), while Marten & Kula (2012) adopt six surface-level parameters of variation to compare 16 Bantu languages: Bemba (M42), Chaga (Kivunjo) (E62b), Chichewa (N31), Ha (D66), Haya (E22), Kinyarwanda (D60), Lozi (K21), Makuwa (P31), Nsenga (N41), Herero (R31), Ruwund (L53), Sambia (G23), Swati (S43), Swahili (G42), Tswana (S31), and Yeyi (R41). They note that locative objects are often marked post-verbally. In Yeyi for example, this is the only structural option to mark locatives (7), while in Bemba there are both pre-stem and post-verbal locative object markers (8):

- (7) *Ka-ti-yis-a mi-ti yemi-ndji. Ka-ti-bik-a-po.* [Yeyi]  
 SM1-NAR-take-FV 4-tree 4-many SM1-NAR-put-FV-PRO16  
 ‘He took many sticks and put them there.’ (Seidel 2008: 393)
- (8) a. *N-áli-pa-món-a.* [Bemba]  
 SM1SG-PAST-OM16-see-FV  
 ‘I saw it (i.e. that place there).’ (Marten *et al.* 2007: 291)
- b. *N-alií-món-a-mo.* [Bemba]  
 SM1SG-PAST-see-FV-PRO18  
 ‘I looked inside.’ (Marten & Kula 2012: 244)

Marlo (2015) is a comprehensive survey of object marking patterns across Bantu, with a focus on the number of object markers allowed. The study aims to add to the understanding of the

microvariation found in the number of object markers across Bantu, as well as to consider some of the factors that might be responsible for this variation. In relation to the latter point, Marlo (2015) considers much of the morphosyntactic variation that can be seen in relation to object marking patterns to be the result of i) restrictions on the object marking of features of the topicality hierarchy that are present in individual languages, and ii) the unique ability of certain types of object markers such as the locative, the first person singular and the reflexive markers to circumvent these otherwise quite robust restrictions.

Of particular relevance to the current paper is the observation that object marking patterns in relation to locatives may differ from non-locative object marking (as also previously noted by Marten & Kula [2012], and Riedel & Marten [2012: 282-283]). Locative objects appear to be of indeterminate status and there are instances in which locative object markers may be used while non-locative object markers are disallowed (Riedel & Marten 2012: 277). For example, not all Bantu languages that allow object marking freely allow locative object markers. In Haya for example, object marking is acceptable with direct object locative phrases (9). However, object marking with some verbs of motion (10) as well as with verbs like *-nyiama* ‘sleep’ is unacceptable (11).

- (9) *N-ka-ha-goba.* [Haya]  
SM1SG-PAST3-OM16-arrive  
‘I arrived there.’
- (10) \**N-ka-ha-ruga.* [Haya]  
SM1SG-PAST3-OM16-leave  
Int: ‘I left there.’
- (11) ?*N-ka-ha-nyiama.* [Haya]  
SM1SG-PAST3-OM16-sleep  
Int: ‘I slept there.’ (Riedel & Marten 2012: 282)

As noted by Marlo (2015: 32), for example, in both Smbaa and Swahili, adjuncts cannot usually be cross-referenced with an object marker. Similarly, in Haya, locative object markers are possible in object relative clauses, although non-locative object markers are not possible in these contexts. The possibility of cross-referencing locatives with an object marker may have an impact on the total number of object markers allowed. In Rundi for example, commonly a maximum of two object markers are permitted. However, if one is a locative marker (or a reflexive), this number is ‘increased’ to three. A similar situation is seen in Kuria which has locative enclitics (Marlo 2015: 32).

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This latter point is of particular interest to the current study, since it pertains to microvariation in terms of the number of object markers found (as well as their position). As noted above, while (Standard) Swahili is commonly described as a language that only allows for a single object marker, we will show below that the situation is more complex (see Section 3.1 and 3.3. below).

Taji (2017) investigates object marking strategies in Chiyao (P21). He observes that within Beaudoin-Lietz *et al.*'s (2004) typology, Chiyao belongs to Type 1 as it permits only one object marker which occurs in pre-stem position.

- (12) *Jwa-mikuúli a-kú-li-púta lí-jóka.* [Chiyao]  
 1a-hunter SM1-PRES-OM5-hit 5-snake  
 ‘A hunter is hitting a snake.’ (Taji 2017: 172)

As for what triggers object marking, Taji (2017) observes that object marking in Chiyao is determined by the type of construction in which the marker appears. Thus, different types of constructions license different strategies for object marking. Generally, object marking in the language is influenced by a combination of factors, including the thematic role of the object NP, animacy and syntactic position as summarized in Table (1) below.

**Table 1:** Object marking patterns in different construction types in Chiyao (from Taji [2017: 208])

	<b>Construction type</b>	<b>+/- OM</b>	<b>OM trigger</b>
1	Double object constructions	+	Thematic role + Animacy
2	Relative clauses	+/-	Tense + Animacy
3	Personal pronoun objects	+	Animacy
4	Topicalised objects	+	Syntactic position
5	Locative objects	+	Nature of object NP

The contribution of thematic role and animacy in the object marking patterns in Chiyao, as was also observed to be at play in many languages subsumed under Marlo's (2015) study, is of relevance to the current study. In both Marlo (2015) and Taji (2017), the relevant ‘prominence’ on the topicality hierarchy (in line with that proposed by Duranti [1979: 32]) also appears to be a factor in object marking patterns. In the case of (Standard) Swahili, the question is therefore whether object marking is at all related to topicality and prominence, in the way that has been described for these other languages. This would reflect the observation that second person plural is relatively high in terms of topicality (albeit not as high as first person singular).

Guérois *et al.* (2017) adopt a parametric approach to the examination of variation across Bantu languages. The work comprises 142 surface-level, descriptive parameters which examine 12 morphosyntactic domains. Building on the parameters detailed in Guérois *et al.* (2017), Marten *et al.* (2018a) develop a database of morphosyntactic variation in Bantu. The database contains value points which enable cross-language comparison across either the whole parameter set (i.e. all 142 parameters) for a given language or languages, or an examination of a sub-set of parameters, again, with a selection of languages as desired.

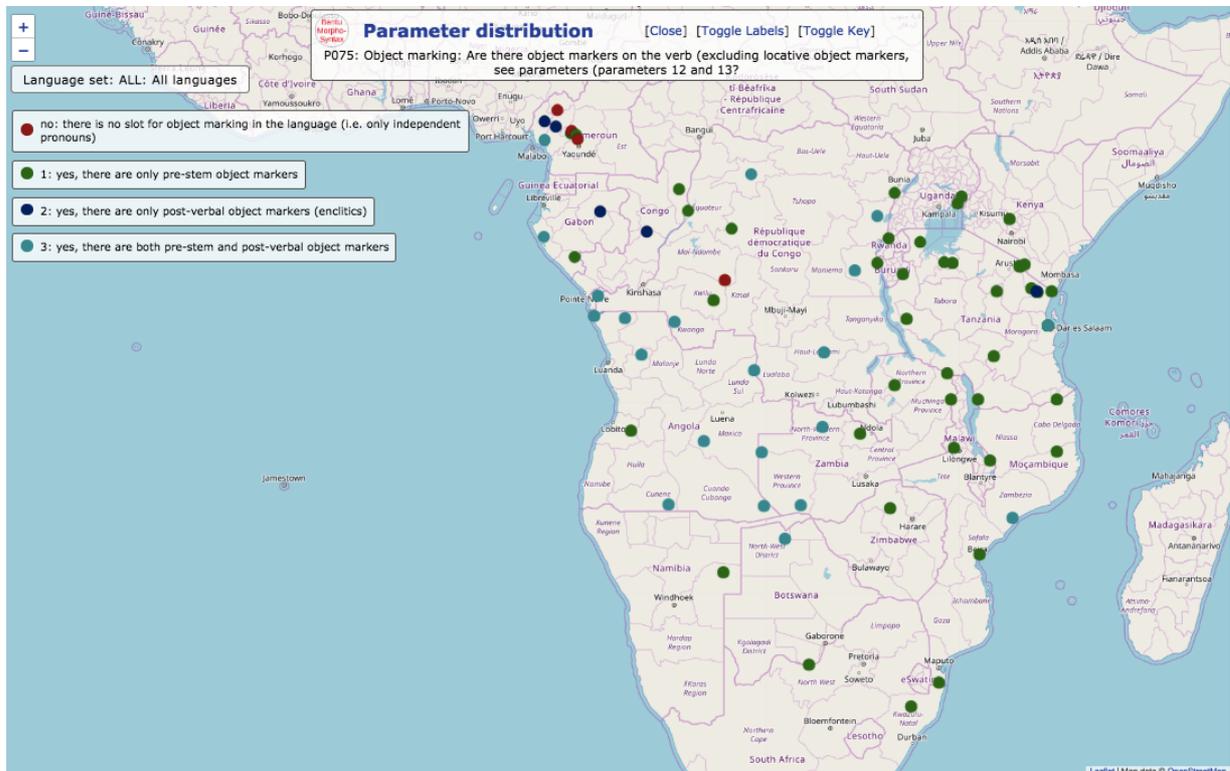
Two of the parameters of Guérois *et al.* (2017) are directly relevant to the present study: Parameter 75 relating to the position of object markers and Parameter 13 which focuses on locative verbal enclitics. The first relevant parameter for the current study relates to the presence of pre-stem and/or post-stem object markers:

- (13) Parameter 75 (P075): Object marking: Are there object markers on the verb (excluding locative object markers)? (Guérois *et al.* 2017: 10)
- |      |   |
|------|---|
| null | unknown   |
| no   | there is no slot for object marking in the language         |
| 1    | yes, there are only pre-stem object markers                 |
| 2    | yes, there are only post-verbal object markers              |
| 3    | yes, there are both pre-stem and post-verbal object markers |

As can be seen in the formulation above, the parameter follows the typology of Beaudoin-Lietz *et al.* (2004) and asks whether there are object markers on the verb and the possible answer values provide additional information relating to the possible position(s) of the object markers: pre-stem, post-verbal or both pre-stem and post-verbal. In relation to Parameter P075, Marten *et al.* (2018a) produce the following results: of the 76 languages examined, there are 4 languages in which there is no position for object marking, 46 languages in which there are only pre-stem object markers, 5 languages in which there are only post-verbal object markers and 21 languages in which there are both pre-stem and post-verbal object markers. The geographic distribution of these language types is shown in Map 1 below.

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**Map 1:** P075 Geographic distribution of object marking strategies (from Marten *et al.* 2018a)



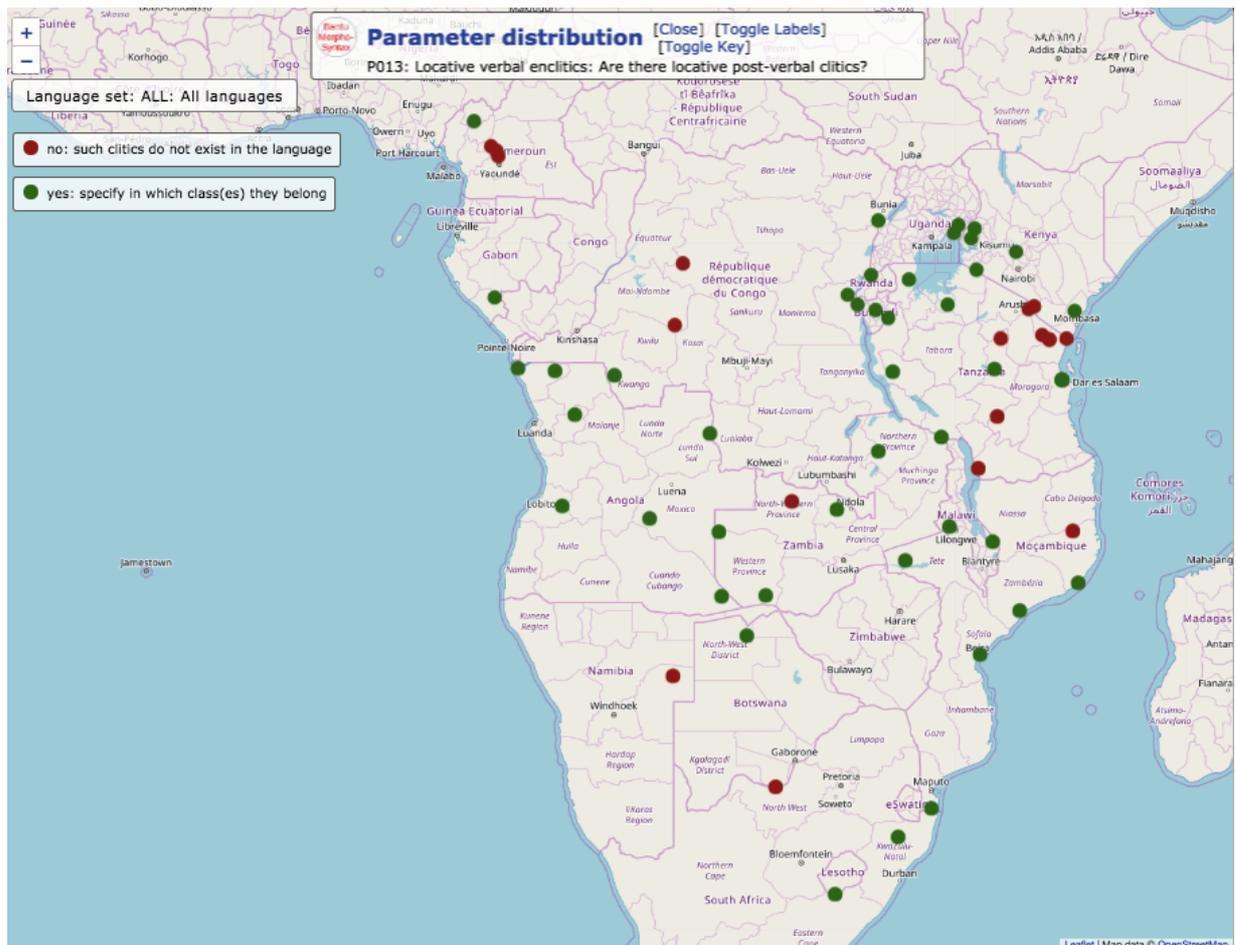
The distribution of object marking patterns as seen in Map 1 above shows three broad areas, confirming the results of Beaudoin-Lietz *et al.* (2004). In the north-west, languages mostly either have no object marking, or only post-verbal object marking. In the east and the south, languages have predominantly pre-verbal object markers, while in the central area, languages typically use both pre- and post-verbal object markers. As an eastern Bantu language, Swahili is thus found in an area which predominantly uses pre-verbal object markers. While we will show that Swahili is consistent with this generalisation, there are also patterns which involve a post-verbal position, and so make the situation more complex.

The second parameter which is of relevance to the current study is Guérois *et al.*'s (2017) Parameter 13. This is formulated as in (14) below.

- (14) Parameter 13 (P013): Locative verbal enclitics: Are there locative postverbal clitics? (Guérois *et al.* 2017: 2)
- 0 no: such clitics do not exist in the language
- 1 yes: specify in which class(es) they belong

In a sample of 64 languages,<sup>2</sup> Marten *et al.* (2018a) identify 18 languages which do not have post-verbal locative clitics and 46 languages which do have such clitics. The geographic distribution of these language types is shown in Map 2 below.

**Map 2:** P013 Post-verbal locative clitics (from Marten *et al.* 2018a)



Map 2 shows that the dominant pattern across the Bantu area is the presence of post-verbal locative clitics. Absence of such clitics is found in particular in the northwest and the northeast of the area.

It is clear from the foregoing comparative background that there is wide variation across Bantu languages in terms of strategies and criteria for object marking. A review of three groups of studies, namely comparative studies such as Beaudoin-Lietz *et al.* (2004) and Marlo (2015),

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<sup>2</sup> The total language sample sizes for P075 and P013 differ. This is because we have simply calculated the number of languages that fall into the various categories on the basis of all of the information we have. Since the data coverage is uneven, we have more information for some parameters than for others.

language specific studies such as Taji’s (2017) study of Chiyao, and parametric studies such as Marten & Kula (2012) and Guérois *et al.* (2017) has provided insights into object marking variations in Bantu. More specifically, previous studies have established that there is variation across languages in terms of the positioning of the object marker in relation to the stem, thus resulting in three categories as identified by Beaudoin-Lietz *et al.* (2004): languages with pre-stem object marker (Type 1), post-stem object marker (Type 2), and both pre-stem and post-stem object marker (Type 3). Furthermore, Guérois *et al.* (2017) have shown how these three categories are distributed across the area in which Bantu languages are spoken.

In terms of morphosyntactic structures, it has been shown that object marking in Bantu languages is influenced by a number of factors, including animacy, noun class, person, type of construction and topicality. There is also widespread variation in the number of object markers, with some languages allowing only a single object marker and others allowing multiple object markers. Parametric studies have indicated adherence or lack of adherence to the established set of parameters of object marking, and the geographical distribution of languages subscribing to such parameters. We use the insight from these studies to investigate variation in object marking in Swahili below. Specifically, we show that in what we term Old Swahili, examples of object marker doubling are found in which co-referential pre- and post-verbal object markers are used within the same verb form. We then note that while Standard Swahili is commonly thought of as a language which permits maximally one (pre-stem) object marker, instances of the use of post-verbal object markers can be found in Standard Swahili as well, namely with second person plural object marking, in post-verbal locative markers and with post-stem object marking in non-verbal predication.

### 3. Variation in object marking in Swahili

Against the comparative background provided in Section 2, this section explores diachronic and synchronic variation in object marking between Modern Standard Swahili and Old Swahili. By Standard Swahili (*Kiswahili Sanifu*), we refer here to the variety of Swahili which has been standardised and is used primarily in the mass media, education institutions, and for administrative purposes in Tanzania and Kenya. Historically, Standard Swahili is based on the Kiunguja dialect of Swahili spoken on the largest island of the Zanzibar archipelago, Unguja.

By ‘Old Swahili’ we refer to the language used in Classical Swahili poetry, as well as the language reported in early sources of Swahili. The data used here are the result of a study of a large corpus of texts by Mische (1979). There is no implication that Old Swahili is a coherent or homogenous variety, nor that there is a direct historical and uncomplicated link between the Old Swahili data reported here and Standard Swahili (cf. also Marten *et al.* [2018b], who discuss a number of other morphosyntactic differences between Old Swahili and Standard Swahili). Additional details of the source data are provided in Section 3.1 below.

### 3.1 Object marker doubling in ‘Old Swahili’

For the study of Old Swahili presented here, we draw on a corpus of manuscripts mainly from the 19th and early 20th century analysed by Mieke (1979). These are texts by different authors, from different time periods and from different geographical regions – although the majority of texts are composed in Northern dialects of Swahili. The texts are all poetic in nature, and so belong to a specific genre. We also use an early source of Swahili, Steere’s (1884/1913) *Handbook of the Swahili Language*, which reflects language use in the second half of the 19th century.

While Standard Swahili typically only allows one object marker per verb, on the basis of these sources, the situation in Old Swahili is different. Both Mieke (1979) and Steere (1884/1913) report a particular use of double object marking, where a pre-stem object marker is doubled by a post-stem object marker of the same class, referring to the same object, as shown in (15).

- (15) *Ni-mu-dhamini-ye*                      *jaza.*    [Old Swahili]  
SM1SG-OM1-guarantee-OM1 reward  
‘I will guarantee him reward.’ (Mieke 1979: 101)

The example shows that the class 1 pre-stem object marker *mu-* is doubled by the post-stem class 1 object marker *-ye*. In terms of the morphological shape of the markers, while the pre-stem object markers are reflexes of those reconstructed for Proto-Bantu (Meinhof 1899, Meeussen 1967), and are also found in Standard Swahili, morphologically the post-stem object markers are short forms of absolute pronouns or demonstratives or ‘bound substitutes’ (Schadeberg 1992), functioning as object markers. They could probably be analysed as enclitics rather than as suffixes. In terms of Beaudoin-Lietz *et al.*’s (2004) typology, Old Swahili would be a Type 3 language with both pre-stem and post-stem object markers. However, in contrast to other Type 3 languages, the function of the post-stem object markers in Old Swahili is severely restricted – they are only used to double pre-stem object markers. Further examples of the construction are provided below:<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The analysis of the pre-stem object marker *wa-* in (16c) is complicated, as it functions as class 2 (i.e. third person plural animate) object marker, as well as object marker for second person plural, as in (16c). A full analysis of the pattern, also for Standard Swahili, remains outstanding, and we treat the two forms here as homonyms. In the same example, we are analysing *na-* as first person singular subject marker, possibly from *ni-* plus present tense (*n)a-*.

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- (16) a. *Na u-me-n-amkuw-a-mi.* [Old Swahili]  
 and SM2SG-PERF-OM1SG-call-FV-OM1SG  
 ‘Then you called me.’ (Miehe 1979: 101)
- b. *U-ni-hifathi-mi.* [Old Swahili]  
 SM2SG-OM1SG-preserve-OM1SG  
 ‘Do thou preserve me.’ (Steere 1884/1913: 108)
- c. *Na-wa-ambia-ni.* [Old Swahili]  
 SM1SG-OM2PL-tell-OM2PL  
 ‘I tell you.’ (Steere 1884/1913: 108)
- d. *A-ka-zi-angush-a-zo.* [Old Swahili]  
 SM1-CONSC-OM10-throw.down-FV-OM10  
 ‘And he threw them down.’ (Steere 1884/1913: 108, also in Miehe 1979: 101)

The first two examples (16a-16b) show first person singular marking with *n(i)-* and *-mi* object markers, while (16c) shows second person plural marking with *wa-* as a pre-stem object marker and *-ni* in post-stem position – in fact this form is (still) in use in Standard Swahili, which we will discuss in more detail in Section 3.2. The final example (16d) shows agreement with class 10, with *zi-* as pre-stem marker and *-zo* as post-stem marker, showing the use of a bound substitutive for class agreement. Bound substitutives such as *-zo* in (16d) are no longer used as general verbal object markers in Standard Swahili, but are still found after non-verbal predicates and in relative clauses. We will discuss these forms further in Section 3.3.

Miehe (1979), commenting on the doubling forms, states that “mention should be made of the additional suffix with presumably emphatic function, which is not (no longer?) used in this function in Standard Swahili” (Miehe 1979: 101). Steere (1884/1913: 108) notes the following: “In poetical Swahili an object suffix is used as well as the object prefix. The syllables used as a suffix are the same as those given before with *na* [i.e. the bound substitutives in e.g. *nami*, *naye*, etc.]. These suffixes are not used in the dialect of Zanzibar.” The comments show that, despite the fact that they are no longer in use, the forms were used in Old Swahili. These forms are also found in Northern dialects, but not in the Kiunguja dialect which is spoken in Zanzibar. Miehe (1979) also mentions the possibility that the forms were used for emphasis, which is a common function of repetition or doubling, although more textual evidence would be needed to support this idea.

As noted above, the availability of two positions for object markers makes Old Swahili a Type 3 language in terms of the micro-typology of object marking patterns in Bantu proposed by Beaudoin-Lietz *et al.* (2004), allowing both pre-stem and post-verbal object markers, in

contrast to Standard Swahili which would be a Type 1 language with only pre-stem object markers. Similarly, in terms of the parameters of Guérois *et al.* (2017), Standard Swahili is analysed as a language with one pre-stem object marker slot, so value ‘1’ for Parameter P075, discussed above. In contrast, Old Swahili has the value ‘3’, that is, as having both pre-stem and post-verbal object markers (cf. Marten *et al.* 2018b).

On the other hand, given that the two object markers in Old Swahili always refer to the same object, Old Swahili is a peculiar Type 3 language, in the sense that the occurrence of the post-verbal object markers is highly restricted. An alternative approach might be to analyse the forms as complex circumfixes, and so as falling outside of the typological approaches which are based solely on the distinction between pre-stem and post-verbal markers. However, this analysis would necessitate postulating a new morphological type of Bantu object marker, which would ideally be based on the presence of more comprehensive comparative evidence. As such, we thus leave this possibility for future research.

In terms of the relation between Old and Standard Swahili, both Mieke (1979) and Steere (1884/1913) note that the system of double object marking which existed in Old Swahili is not found in Standard Swahili. However, as noted above, one of the forms – the double marking of second person plural objects – is found in Standard Swahili, a point that will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

### 3.2 Second person plural object marking in Standard Swahili

In the previous section, it was shown that Old Swahili permits double object marking. In the current section, we will discuss Standard Swahili which does not permit double object marking with the exception of second person plural marking. The relevant Old Swahili example is presented in (17) below while examples (18) and (19) show second person plural object marking in Standard Swahili (cf. Ashton 1944, Kihore *et al.* 2001):

- |      |   |                    |
|------|---|--------------------|
| (17) | <i>Na-wa-ambia-ni.</i><br>SM1SG-OM2-tell-OM2PL<br>‘I tell you.’ (Steere 1884/1913: 108) | [Old Swahili]      |
| (18) | <i>Wa-ta-ku-ambi-e-ni.</i><br>SM2-FUT-OM2SG-tell-FV-PL<br>‘They will tell you (pl.).’   | [Standard Swahili] |
| (19) | <i>Wa-ta-wa-ambi-e-ni.</i><br>SM2-FUT-OM2-tell-FV-PL<br>‘They will tell you (pl.).’     | [Standard Swahili] |

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The parallel between the example in (17) on the one hand and (18) and (19) on the other hand is striking, although there are also differences. There is no change in the quality of the final vowel in Old Swahili – it remains /a/ – while in Standard Swahili the final vowel is /e/, possibly as a result of regressive vowel harmony or umlaut, where the following high vowel /i/ of the suffix *-ni* raises the preceding low vowel /a/ to mid /e/. Furthermore, in Standard Swahili *-ni* can be used with either the second person (singular) pre-stem marker *ku-* (18) or with the class 2 pre-stem marker *wa-* (19). In the first case, this results in what appears to be a feature mismatch in number (*ku-* singular vs. *ku-* ... *-ni* plural), in the second case a mismatch in person (*wa-* third person vs. *wa-* ... *-ni* second person). We do not have any evidence that *-ni* could also be used with *ku-* in Old Swahili. However, it is clear from Steere (1884/1913: 106) that the normal paradigm for marking second person plural objects was by simply using *wa-* (forms like these are still used in Standard Swahili, although forms with *-ni* as in (18) and (19) are probably more common):

(20) a. *A-wa-pend-a.* [Old Swahili]  
 SM1-OM2-love-FV  
 ‘He loves you (pl).’ (Steere 1884/1913: 106)

b. *A-wa-ambi-a.* [Old Swahili]  
 SM1-OM2-love-FV  
 ‘He tells you (pl).’ (Steere 1884/1913: 106)

This means that there was no formal difference between the forms shown in (20) above and the class 2 forms meaning ‘He loves them’ and ‘He tells them’. The use of *-ni* may thus have developed to formally distinguish marking of second person plural and class 2 objects, and so to some extent be independent of the object marker doubling paradigm of Old Swahili. There is a link between this idea and the widespread use of *-ni* in Bantu as plural addressee marker, which we discuss below.

The parallel between Old Swahili and Standard Swahili in the use of double markers for second person plural marking raises a number of interesting questions:

- 1) Does the current use of *-ni* in Standard Swahili for second person plural objects reflect the older (emphatic) usage of Old Swahili?
- 2) What is the relation between these forms and other uses of ‘pluralising’ *-ni*?
- 3) Is there relevant comparative evidence from other languages?

It is tempting to answer Question 1 in the affirmative and draw a connection between the two construction types. However, there are problems with this – we have already noted the difference in the quality of the final vowel which would have to be explained as a later development. Furthermore, we have noted Steere’s (1884/1913: 108) remark that the doubling

constructions are not found in dialects of Zanzibar – yet Standard Swahili is often said to be based largely on Kiunguja of Zanzibar. If it is true that the object marking doubling constructions were never part of Kiunguja, we would have to assume that they entered Standard Swahili as a result of influence from another, probably Northern, dialect of Swahili. We would thus have to postulate not only a diachronic link, but also inter-dialectal transfer to connect the two constructions. Finally, there are also comparative aspects which need to be taken into account, which we will briefly discuss below.

The first relevant comparative aspect is related to Question 2 above. There are well-known examples of another use of pluralising *-ni*, namely in the context of imperatives. Meeussen (1967: 111) reconstructs *\*-ni* and a regional variant *\*-i* as the only members of the post-final slot, as the plural of the imperative. Examples (21) and (22) show the form in Standard Swahili.

- (21) a. *Njoo!* [Standard Swahili]  
come  
'Come (to one person)!'
- b. *Njoo-ni!* [Standard Swahili]  
come-PL  
'Come (to many)!'
- (22) a. *Som-a!* [Standard Swahili]  
read-FV  
'Read (to one person)!'
- b. *Som-e-ni!* [Standard Swahili]  
read-FV-PL  
'Read (to many)!'

The example in (22b) shows that the final vowel in the plural imperative is /e/ rather than /a/. This may be due to vowel assimilation as we have suggested for the second person plural forms. However, it may also be related to inflection, where a final vowel *-e* is used in all forms of the imperative other than the bare imperative, as in (22a). This is the case, for example, with imperatives with an object marker, as in (23), which formally may also be analysed as subjunctives.

- (23) *I-som-e!* [Standard Swahili]  
OM9-read-FV  
'Read it (referring to a class 9 noun)!'

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The plural imperative marker *-ni* is widespread across Bantu (cf. van de Velde & van der Auwera 2010) and, as noted above, has been reconstructed for Proto-Bantu (Meeussen 1967). It is often analysed as a plural addressee marker. It is tempting to draw a connection between this plural addressee marker and the use of *-ni* in the context of second person plural object marking. However, the distribution of *-ni* in the context of second person plural object marking is more restricted than with imperatives, so if there is a relation between the two forms, it would seem that the use in plural imperatives historically precedes the use in object marking constructions, which would be a later development.

The distribution of the second person plural object marker *-ni* brings us to the final question, namely whether there is relevant comparative evidence in support of the idea that Old Swahili object marker doubling constructions and the use of *-ni* in second person object marking constructions in Standard Swahili are related. Guérois (2017: 94-95) observes the use of *-ni* in Cuwabo (P34), as in Swahili, both in plural imperatives and as second person plural object marker, and analyses the form as plural addressee marker (glossed as PLA below), as illustrated in example (24).

- (24) *E-ní-fun-á=inyu*                      *ka-lóg-a=ní*    *míyo*            [Cuwabo]  
 9-IPFV-want-FV.REL=PRO2PL    IMP-say-FV=PLA    PRO1SG  
*ni-ni-o-ú-ttambir-ih-a=ní.*  
 SM1SG-IPFV.DJ-INF-OM2PL-receive-CAUS-FV=PLA  
 ‘Tell whatever you want, and I will grant you (plural).’ (Guérois 2017: 94)

Furthermore, Guérois (2017) notes that the use of *-ni* as an object marker is also found in a number of other Bantu languages, including Makhuwa, Ekoti, Makwe and Chichewa. However, we are not aware of the presence of emphatic object doubling in these languages of the kind found in Old Swahili. The comparative evidence thus does not support an affirmative answer to Question 1, that there is a direct diachronic link between object marker doubling and second person plural object marking with *-ni* – unless we assume that all languages with the object marker *-ni* had object doubling structures historically, a position for which at present there is very little evidence.

Two further comparative observations add to the complexity of the picture. First, plural *-ni* is also found in the popular Sheng greeting *hamjamboni*. Sheng can be considered a ‘stylect’ of Swahili (in the sense of Hurst [2008: 2]), that is a variety that is heavily linked to a performative practice of a particular identity or identities. Sheng draws heavily on Swahili but

also on other (Bantu and non-Bantu) languages spoken in the ecologies in which Sheng is found.<sup>4</sup>

- (25) *Ha-m-jambo-ni?* [Sheng]  
NEG-SM2PL-matter-PL  
'Are you all well?' (Githiora 2018: 86)

The use of *-ni* in (25) is similar to the second person plural object marker *-ni*, since both involve a finite, inflected verb form.<sup>5</sup> However, here the pluralising *-ni* combines with the second person subject marker *m-*, rather than with the object marker *ku-* in the object marking case. Both contrast with the use of pluralising *-ni* with non-finite infinitives shown in (21) and (22) above. In all three cases, however, *-ni* contributes the meaning of plural addressee. A similar structure to (25), also involving a plural greeting, is found in the Zulu form *Sanibonani*, which is used when a plural addressee is involved.

Second, while the evidence so far has documented the widespread use of *-ni* for expressing plural addressee, evidence from language contact between Swahili and Bondei shows how the form can become obsolete.

Bondei (G24) is a Bantu language spoken in Tanga region, along the northern Tanzania coast. Speakers of Bondei have been in contact with Swahili for a sustained period of time. The majority of present-day speakers of Bondei are older speakers, with a rapid shift to Swahili and high levels of code-switching observable amongst the younger generations (Kiango 2013, Marten & Petzell 2016). There is evidence to suggest that the language has been greatly affected as a result of this contact, in terms of both lexicon and structure.

Kiango (2013: 204-205) describes how Bondei second language speakers of Swahili do not use *-ni* for second person plural object marking, but rather substitute the form found in the Bondei paradigm *mi-*:

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<sup>4</sup> Some of the Bantu languages which Sheng draws on, or which users of Sheng also speak, may also allow for double object marking, although we have not identified a direct link between these other languages and this greeting found in Sheng. Alternatively, the form may have been modelled on the popular greeting *Hawayuni?*, from English 'How are you?'. We are grateful to the editors of the special issue for this suggestion.

<sup>5</sup> Even though the example in (25) is an inflected verb form, the stem *-jambo* can also be regarded as the class 5 nominal stem 'matter'. The greeting expression in (25) is not used in affirmative forms nor in any other tense and is thus not fully inflected, even though it follows the inflectional template of the present negative. Nothing hinges on this for the present discussion.

- (26) *Ni-me-mi-ambi-a.* [‘Bondei Swahili’]  
 SM1SG-PERF-OM2PL-tell-FV  
 ‘I have told you (pl).’ (Kiango 2013: 205)

This example illustrates how through language contact the object marking paradigm can be regularised, leading to the loss of the post-stem object marker *-ni*. In this case, speakers who have another Bantu language as their first language (i.e. Bondei) use the form from this language – *mi-* – to indicate second person plural objects in their variety of Swahili (‘Bondei Swahili’), thereby creating a more regular paradigm – compared to Standard Swahili – where all object markers are pre-verbal and the irregular, post-verbal *-ni* is no longer used.

In summary, we have seen that one particular form of object marker doubling, a process which was more widespread in Old Swahili, is also found in Standard Swahili, namely the use of the post-stem marker *-ni* for second person plural object marking. However, we have shown that there is no direct diachronic link between the forms, and that comparative evidence shows that the use of *-ni* for coding plural addressees is found in other construction types, notably with imperatives, and in other languages of the Eastern and Southern Bantu zone, which have no reported cases of (other) object doubling. Finally, we have noted the use of *-ni* in Sheng and Zulu plural greetings, and shown how effects of language contact with Bondei have led to the loss of plural object marking *-ni* in ‘Bondei Swahili’. The discussion shows the complex distribution and interaction between the different contexts in which a form *-ni* is used to encode plural addressees. In the next section we discuss another form which was used in the Old Swahili object doubling paradigm, namely post-stem bound substitutes, and the presence of these in Standard Swahili.

### 3.3 Post-stem object marking in Standard Swahili

As noted above, Standard Swahili, like many other Bantu languages, typically only allows pre-stem object markers, and only one object marker at a time. This can be seen in the examples below where (27a) and (27b) are both grammatical, and involve the presence of a single object marker. In contrast, (27c) involves an attempt at cross-referencing a second object argument in the pre-stem position and results in an ill-formed sentence. Similarly, (27d) involves the presence of a second object marker in the post-stem position which renders the utterance ungrammatical.

- (27) a. *Ni-li-m-p-a.* [Standard Swahili]  
 SM1SG-PAST-OM1-give-FV  
 ‘I gave him/her (something).’

- b. *Ni-li-m-p-a* *hi-zi.* [Standard Swahili]  
SM1SG-PAST-OM1-give-FV DEM-CD10  
'I gave them (to) him/her.'
- c. \**Ni-li-zi-m-p-a.* [Standard Swahili]  
SM1SG-PAST-OM10-OM1-give-FV  
'I gave them (to) him/her.'
- d. \**Ni-li-m-p-a-zi/-zo.* [Standard Swahili]  
SM1SG-PAST-OM1-give-FV-OM10  
'I gave them (to) him/her.'

However, in addition to second person plural object marking illustrated in Section 3.2, there are two other areas in which there seems to be variation in this regard, even within Standard Swahili, namely the use of post-stem bound substitutives with non-verbal predication and in relative clauses.

Non-verbal predication involves a variety of copula and existential constructions, including locative and possessive constructions (see, for example, Marten 2013, Gibson *et al.* 2019). While these constructions typically do not involve canonical objects, they can include complements which can be 'object'-marked. However, object-marking with non-verbal predication occurs invariably after the predicate, never before.

- (28) *Baba a-na-lo shamba kubwa. (\*a-li-na)* [Standard Swahili]  
1.father SM1-POSS-OM5 5.farm 5.large SM1-OM5-POSS  
'Father has a large farm.'
- (29) *Mw-alimu a-na-cho ki-ti ki-zuri. (\*a-ki-na)* [Standard Swahili]  
1-teacher SM1-POSS-OM7 7-chair 7-nice SM1-OM7-POSS  
'The teacher has a nice chair.'

As the examples in (28) and (29) show, the complement of the possessive copula *-na* is expressed by a bound substitutive – class 5 *-lo* in (28) and class 7 *-cho* in (29) – following the copula, and the use of pre-stem object markers is ungrammatical. The forms are the same as the forms used in the Old Swahili object marking doubling paradigm, ending in *-o*, and are likewise placed after the predicate – only that the predicate here is not verbal.

Similarly, in locative predication, indexing of a locative complement is achieved by the use of post-copula bound substitutives such as the class 16 locative clitic *-po*, as illustrated in example (30) below.

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- (30) *Ni-li-kuw-e-po nyumba-ni.* [Standard Swahili]  
 SM1-PST-be.present-FV-LOC 16.house-LOC  
 ‘I was there at home.’

As the gloss indicates, the post-stem locative clitic *-po* translates as ‘there’, cross-referencing the locative complement *nyumbani* ‘at the house/home’. Here as well, the position and form of the marker are reminiscent of the post-verbal object markers in Old Swahili object marker doubling constructions. However, it is also possible to analyse *-po* as a locative predicate (cf. Gibson *et al.* 2019) in which case the parallel between post-verbal locative and other post-verbal markers would be more tentative.

A second relevant context in which bound substitutives are found in Standard Swahili are in relative clauses. Here, bound substitutives agree with the head of the relative clause, and are found after the predicate:<sup>6</sup>

- (31) *Vi-tabu a-som-a-vyo.* [Standard Swahili]  
 8-book SM1-read-FV-REL8  
 ‘The books s/he is reading.’

These constructions are also available with locative clitics. This can be seen in the examples below in which the locative markers *-ko* and *-mo* appear on the verb forms.

- (32) a. *Ni-onyesh-e tu-end-a-ko.* [Standard Swahili]  
 OM1-show-SBJV SM1PL-go-FV-LOC16/OM  
 ‘Show me where we are going.’
- b. *Ni-na-fahamu tu-ingi-a-mo.* [Standard Swahili]  
 SM1-PRS-know SM1PL-enter-FV-LOC18/OM  
 ‘I know where we are entering.’

In the examples in (32), the predicates are verbal and the locative markers refer to locative complements. In terms of form and position, they resemble post-verbal object markers in Old Swahili. In terms of function, all the forms discussed here share their anaphoric quality – Ashton (1944) calls the *-o* formative found in these forms the ‘o of reference’. As we have shown it is shared by object marking doubling forms, non-verbal predication and relative clause constructions.

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<sup>6</sup> There are several relative clause constructions in Swahili (see Schadeberg 1989), and the point about the post-verbal position of the substitutive is best seen with examples like (31). However, with some diachronic reasoning, it holds for all relative types.

#### 4. Conclusions

Swahili is usually thought of as a language with only one pre-stem object marker slot. However, in this paper we have presented data from what we have termed ‘Old Swahili’, as well as examining data from Standard Swahili, and discussed these data against the background of variation in object marking in Bantu. We have shown that once this wider perspective on object marking is adopted, Swahili exhibits more variation in this regard than is typically described.

We first looked at Old Swahili and the use of both pre-stem and post-verbal object markers, where both refer to the same object, possibly giving rise to emphatic meaning, and noted that the pattern is quite rare across Bantu languages. We then drew attention to second person plural object marking involving *-ni* in Standard Swahili and highlighted the parallels with the corresponding Old Swahili structure. However, we also noted differences between the two constructions, and also drawing on comparative evidence, concluded that the relation between them was more complex than it would appear, and that there probably is no direct diachronic link from one to the other. The second connection between the Old Swahili data and Standard Swahili is the use of bound substitutives as post-stem object markers, which are found with non-verbal predicates. While here, also, no direct diachronic line is likely to exist, the data nevertheless show the complexity of object marking in Standard Swahili when approached from a wider comparative perspective.

Overall our study has shown the richness of variation of object marking in Bantu, and even within a single Bantu language like Swahili, especially if several varieties of the same language are taken into account. We hope that our results will contribute to an understanding of morphosyntactic variation in Bantu, and to the study of variation in Swahili, and that they will inspire further work in these areas.

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