Form and Functions of Particles in Shinyiha

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Abstract

Shinyiha, is also referred to as Nyiha, is among the Bantu languages spoken in Tanzania. It is categorized as M 23 in Guthrie's referential Bantu language classification system. In this paper, attention is paid to the form and functions of particles in this language. It is noted that particles are among the least studied word categories in Bantu languages (cf Schneider-Zioga, 2015). The absence of adequate attention to the form and function of particles is glaring in the already unstudied Bantu language. It is anticipated that the description and analysis of items in this word category will provide some useful insights into human language word categories in general and those of Bantu languages and Shinyiha in particular. This paper specifically pays attention to **haa**, **pee, ishi**, **mwee**, *–***ope**, **nziila, alaa** *and* **bhuulo** *as particles in Shinyiha. More specifically, the paper attempts to discuss the meaning/use of those particles and their distribution. It is shown that particles have a variety of properties and meanings/functions. Based on the varied properties and functions, I demonstrate in this paper that particles are pragmatic and context-sensitive. Because of their pragmatic and context-sensitivity, particles have special semantic functions and roles such as showing certainty; attention calling; expressing exhaustiveness, surprise, confirmation, focus, stating condition, showing emphasis, meaning intensification, after-thoughts, etc. I conclude that particles are a unique category of words in Shinyiha which indicates human communication is complex in that as humans communicate they deploy a variety of strategies to ensure they meet their communicative agenda.*

Keywords: particles, function, forms, Shinyiha

Introduction

In Shinyiha, there are words that qualify to be categorised as particles. Words in this category have particular forms and serve a variety of communicative roles. This paper analyses the forms and functions demonstrated by various particles in Shinyiha, a Bantu language categorized as M23 under Guthrie's classification of Bantu languages. I will start with the definition of what particles are to clarify the concept. Then, various particles will be presented, described and explained before a conclusion is made at the far end of the paper.

Particles are defined as small, uninflected words in a language. Matthews (2007) uses the term 'particle' to refer to classes of uninflected words in divers of languages. He adds that particles are usually short, and sometimes they include words which are referred to as clitics. Matthews

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(ibid) further says that particles do not generally easily fall under any of the traditional parts of speech. Rather, they are simple words that are normally associated with other words in constructions. That then suggests that it has not been very easy to categorise particles.

In terms of structure, some particles in Shinyiha are made of a single syllable while others are made of two syllables. There are hardly particles with more than two syllables in the language. This suggests that, generally, particles are simple morphemes which are normally not inflected. As will be evident in the paper, in Shinyiha, some particles occupy syntactically fixed positions while others change positions depending on the communicative demands of the language users.

About the Language

Shinyiha is among the Bantu languages spoken in Tanzania particularly in Mbozi District in Songwe Region. The speakers of the language call themselves *abhanyiha* (the speakers of Shinyiha). The language is also called *Nyiha* (the Anglicised name) or *Kinyiha* (in Swahili). The native speakers of the language call it *Ishinyiha*, in which case, *I-* is the augment or pre-prefix and *-shi-* is the class 7 prefix. As pointed out earlier, in Guthrie's Bantu language classification, the language is categorised as M 23, which means that it belongs to Zone M, Group 20 (Nyika-Safwa Group) and it appears as language number 3 in the group together with Wanda (M 21), Nyamwanga (M 22), Malila (M 24), Safwa (M 25), Iwa (M 26), Tambo (M 27), Lambya (M 201) and Sukwa (M 202). Also, Shinyiha falls under the Nyasa-Tanganyika group of languages (see LOT, 2009: xi). In the latter case, Shinyiha belongs to the Mwika sub-group with Safwa, Pimbwe, Fipa, Nyamwanga, Bembe, Tongwe and Bende. In the *Mradi wa Lugha za Tanzania* (Languages of Tanzania Project) (2009), Shinyiha is recorded to have 275,864 speakers. That number is likely to have changed since it is more than ten years since the number of speakers was recorded.

Quoting SIL International (2009), Asheli (2013) reports that Shinyiha is spoken in some parts of Zambia and Malawi, in addition to Tanzania. That dispersal makes Shinyiha a cross-border language. In this paper, the focus is on the Shinyiha spoken in Tanzania particularly the variety spoken in the Mbozi District in Songwe Region.

Different Particles in Shinyiha

As pointed out, there are a variety of particles in Shinyiha demonstrating particular morphological and syntactic properties and playing different of communicative roles. This section presents, describes, explains and discusses these different particles in the language paying attention to their distribution and function/meaning.

Haa

The particle *haa*, in Shinyiha, is used with negative sentences. It literally means 'no'. It always appears at sentence final position. In the language, there is also *ndali* which behaves and means exactly the same as *haa*. The difference of these particles is dialectal where *ndali* is more used by elders while *haa* is more general. In this paper, only *haa* is discussed just because it is more dominant than *haa* and the two behave exactly the same. The particle *haa* and its counterpart *ndali* are exactly like what Ngonyani (2013) observes in Kikisi where there are *hee* and *ndali* which are synonymous and the author says the difference between them is dialectal. The following examples show the distribution of *haa* in Shinyiha:

1) *Ine   in-ta-ku-lil-a   haa*
       I   SM1SG-NEG-PRES-cry-FV no

'I am not crying'
2) *Tu-ta-ku-lim-a haa*
   SM1PL-NEG-PRES-cultivate-FV no
   'We are not cultivating'

As can be seen in the examples, the particle *haa* is always placed in the post-verbal position in a sentence. It does not come before the verb as shown by the ungrammaticality or unacceptability of the following sentences:

3) **haa in-ta-ku-lim-a*
   No SM1SG-NEG-INF-cultivate-FV
   'No I am not cultivating'
4) **haa tu-ta-ku-lim-a*
   no SM1PL-NEG-INF-cultivate-FV
   'No we are not cultivating'

The particle *haa* is also used in prohibitive imperative sentences as illustrated in the examples below:

5) *Mu-ta-lima-je haa*
   SM2PL-NEG-cultivate-Hab particle
    'You should not be cultivating.'
6) *U-ta-ha-bhal-e   haa*
   SM2SG-NEG-FUT-go-IMP particle
    'Never plan to go.'

According to Ngonyani (2013), in Kikisi where it is realized as *hee*, the particle is used as a negator in which case there is no other negative marker in the verb. Ngonyani (ibid) observes similar behaviour of the negating particles in Kindendeule and Chingoni. In such languages, it is the particles that make sentences negative and the negation is not marked in the verb. This is not the case for *haa* in Shinyiha. Instead, in Shinyiha, *haa* is used with negative sentences and the negation is marked in the verb. So, it rather an emphatic negator. It only supports negation after the verb has been negated.

Sometimes, the particle *haa* in Shinyiha is used as the only word in a sentence. That is the case when the speaker intends to give a short response like 'No' in English. The following examples illustrate:

7) Question: *Umuana akulila*?
                   'Is the child crying?'
   Answer: *Haa.*
        'No.'
   8) Question: *Ujeni a-ku-zug-a u-bhu-gali?*
      Jane SM1SG-PRES-cook-FV AUG-14-ugali
      'Is Jane cooking ugali?'
      Answer: *Haa*.
      'No.'

The fact that *haa* is capable of standing alone suggests that it is a word in its own right. Its interpretation is pragmatic. One understands the meaning of the response '*haa'* with the aid of

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context. As for its structure, like most other particles, it never changes its form; that is, it is never inflected.

As hinted earlier on, I find it convincing to argue that *haa* is used to emphasize negation in sentences containing negated verbs. That is because *haa* is only used with negative sentences. It is important to note that a negative sentence will still be meaningful in the absence of *haa*. In other words, Shinyiha sentences allow double negation i.e. the negation marked in the verb and that marked by *haa* in its post-verbal position. It is worth noting that a negative sentence with *haa* sounds more natural than that without it. It can then be argued that the particle has double roles. It is emphatic to a negative sentence and also a sole negator when it is the only word in a sentence especially when it serves as a negative answer to the question in the sense of 'no' as a short response.

Why *haa* in Shinyiha behaves differently from *hee* in Kikisi as shown by Ngonyani (2013) may attract an interesting discussion. A question may still be raised about why *haa* in Shinyiha behaves like *ngu* as shown by Taji (2019) in Chiyao. A possible answer to these questions could be to suggest that the languages have been changing from Proto-Bantu, each group of languages taking different a route. There are languages like those discussed by Ngonyani (2013) where the particle is a sole negator. Meaning, the particle is the only negator in a sentence and there is no negation in the verb. There are also languages where the particle is an emphatic negator. That is where Shinyiha and Chiyao belong. This again suggests that negation is a complex topic in Bantu that still needs further exploration. Güldemann (1999) talks about the genesis of verbal negation in Bantu languages where a number of issues concerning negation in Bantu are raised.

Pee

This particle is used to express condition and as attention calling element in a sentence. It occurs sentence-initially. The following sentences exemplify:

9) *Pee mu-ku-lim-a, na-sogol-a*
   Since SM2PL-PRES-cultivate-FV, I am –leaving-FV
   'Since you are cultivating, I am leaving'
10) *Pee a-bhal-a ku-i-jenje, mu-lesh-e*
   Since SM3SG-go17-AUG-river, SM2PL-leave-FV
   'Since he/she has gone to the river, leave him/her alone'

In the examples above, the particle is used to express condition. It shows the circumstances under which one takes a certain action. It also suggests that if things were otherwise, different actions could be taken. For example, 9) shows that the speaker decides to leave after seeing that the addressees are busy cultivating. Otherwise, the speaker would not leave.

There are times when *pee* is used to express confirmation or disbelief as in the following sentences:

11) *Pee i-gali li-a-tu-leh-a?*
   So AUG-car SM5SG-Perf-us-leave-FV
   'I am wondering, has the car left us?'
12) *Pee i-mvula ya-tim-a!*
   So AUG-rain SM9-rain-FV
   'So it has rained!'

The particle is also used to introduce a question with the sense 'By the way.' The examples below illustrate:

13) *Pee   mu-a-fih-a kwi?*
    By the way SM2PL-Perf-reach-FV where
    'By the way, where are you now on your journey?'
14) *Pee   u-li-sogol-a indabhi?*
    By the way SM2SG-FUT-leave-FV tomorrow
    'By the way, will you leave tomorrow?'

In Shinyiha, the particle *pee* strictly occurs in pre-verbal position. It neither occurs at sentence final position nor post-verbal position. The ungrammaticality of the following sentences proves this.

15) **U-li-sogol-a pee indabhi?*
    SM2SG-FUT-leave-FV pee tomorrow
    'You will leave, by the way, tomorrow?'
16) **U-mu-ana a-li kwi pee?*
    AUG-1-child SM3SG-copul where pee
    'A child, where is he/she, by the way?'

Ishi

This is yet another particle in Shinyiha. It is used by the speaker to attract the attention of the addressee. It can be roughly translated into English as 'If I may ask…' It strictly occurs at the beginning of a sentence. A glance at the following sentences will demonstrate how the particle is used in sentences.

17) *Ishi, mu-a-bhal-a kwi?*
    Ishi, SM2PL-perf-go-FV where
    'If I may ask, where have you gone?'
18) *Ishi, u-mu-ana a-ku-many-il-e?*
    Ishi, AUG-1-child SM3SG-OM-know-Perf-FV
    'If I may ask, does the child know you?'

The particle *ishi* expresses politeness apart from attention calling. A sentence can be without the particle. However, it will sound less polite. Moreover, when used in a statement, the particle *ishi* is used to express certainty. This can be exemplified by the following sentences below:

19) *Ishi, na-bha-lol-a a-bha-jeni*
    Ishi SM1SG-OM-see-FV AUG-2-visitors
    'I have certainly seen the visitors'.
20) *Ishi tu-a-mala i-sha-kulya*
    Ishi SM1PL-PT-finish AUG-7-food
    'We have surely finished the food'.

Interestingly, the particles *ishi* and *pee* can co-occur in a sentence. When they do, they *ishi* comes first and *pee* follows. The following sentence provides an example.

21) *Ishi pee   mu-ku-bha-lol-a a-bha-ana?*
    PART1 PART2   SM2PL-PRES-OM-see-FV AUG-2-child

'By the way, are you certainly seeing the children?'

It is important to note that the particles *ishi* and *pee* do not reverse order in Shinyiha. That means, whenever they co-occur, *ishi* comes first. This may suggest that *pee* is closer to the verb than *ishi*. Reversing order leads to ungrammaticality or unacceptability of a sentence in the language.

Mwee

This particle occurs post-verbally. It plays an emphatic role. It adds weight to what has been said. It can be translated as 'very much' or 'indeed.' The following sentences show how *mwee* is used in Shinyiha.

22) *I-n-zala   ya-tu-lum-a mwee*
    AUG-9-hunger SM9-OM1PL-bite-FV mwee
    'We have suffered from hunger very much'
23) *A-bha-jaha bha-lim-il-e mwee*
    AUG-2-youth SM2-cultivate-perf-FV mwee
    'The youth have cultivated very much.'

It should be noted that the particle is optional. Sentences are meaningful and grammatical, even without this particle.

The particle *mwee* in Shinyiha, is only used in affirmative sentences. The following sentences are ungrammatical as a result of containing this particle while they are negative sentences:

24) **I-n-zala yi-ta-tu-lum-a mwee*
    AUG-9-hunger SM9-NEG-OM1PL-bite-FV mwe
    'We have not suffered from hunger indeed'
25) ** A-bha-jaha bha-ta-lim-il-e mwee*
    AUG-2-youth SM2-NEG-cultivate-Perf-FV mwee
    'The youth have not cultivated indeed.'

The sentences 24) and 25) are ungrammatical or unacceptable in Shinyiha. That is because in this language it is contradictory to emphasize something that has not happened yet. Therefore, the particle only makes sense in affirmative sentences. It seems to be logical that one can only know the intensity of something after it has happened. Otherwise, it is difficult to tell the intensity and therefore it is unacceptable to use the particle in negative sentences for emphasis.

-ope

This particle means 'in addition to', 'even' or 'and'. It is used to modify nouns. For that reason, the particle is always in juxtaposition with the nouns it modifies. The sentences that follow show how the particle is used in Shinyiha:

26) *Bhope a-bha-ana bha-som-il-e*
    Even AUG-2-child SM2-read-Perf-FV
    'Even the children have read.'
27) *I-m-buzi   zi-ope zi-ku-li-a a-ma-ngagu*
    AUG-10-goat SM10-even SM10-PRES-eat-FV AUG-6-maize
    'Even goats eat maize.'

In the examples just presented, two observations can be made. First, the particle can be placed both pre-nominally and post-nominally. In whichever case, the particle has to be adjacent to the noun it modifies. That adjacency implies that the particle expresses focus. Second, the particle expresses the presupposition that something has been done by someone and now someone else is doing the same. In 26), for example, the presupposition is that some other people have read and that in addition to them, children have read. In 27), the sentence means that there are other creatures that eat maize in addition to goats. That is, goats are not the only creatures that eat maize.

It is important to point out that the particle is used with noun phrases both in subject and object positions. In the following sentences, attention is paid to the use of the particle –*ope* in the nouns found in the object position:

28) *U-mu-lindu a-ku-li-a a-ma-ngagu g-ope*
    AUG-1-girl SM1-PRES-eat-FV AUG-6-maize gope
    'The girl eats maize too'.
29) *Tu-a-bha-lola a-bha-na bhope.*
    SM1PL-Perf-OM2-see AUG-2-child bhope
    'We have also seen the children.'

I suggest, at this point, that the mobility of the particle shows that its role is to express focus. It is the discretion of the speaker to highlight the argument (noun phrase) of interest to them. The position of the particle will, therefore, be determined by the communicator. However, whatever choice is made, the speaker has to make sure the particle is in juxtaposition with the noun phrase focused. The fact that particles that express focus are placed near the focused noun is also observed in Nguni and Xhosa where *kuphela* and *qha* which mean 'only' are placed adjacent to the nouns where focus is placed (Carstens & Zeller, 2019). That suggests that focus is achieved by placing the focus marker near the focused constituent. So, focus markers tend to be mobile.

There are also times when the particle is used with a topicalised object that occurs at the beginning of a sentence. The examples that follow illustrate this:

30) *A-bha-na bhope tu-ku-bha-sung-a*
    AUG-2-child particle SM1PL-INF-OM-rear-FV
    'Children, we also rear them.'
31) *Bhope a-bha-na i-n-zala yi-ku-bha-luma*
    Particle AUG-2-child AUG-9-hunger SM9-INF-OM2-rear-FV
     'Children, also suffer from hunger.'

The summary I wish to make here is that –*ope* is always used with noun phrases. Its form is sensitive to the noun classes of the nouns it modifies. It, therefore, has a prefix that reflects the noun class of the noun it modifies. Moreover, its position is determined by focus. It behaves like *na* in Kinande as presented by Schneider-Zioga (2015) where the particle expresses focus. Expressing focus using the particle *le* is also attested in Grassfields Bantu as discussed by Fominyam &Simik (2017). Word order change involving entire phrases (argument structure) is also reported to be an important strategy for expressing focus (cf Bostoen & Mundeke, 2012; Hamlaoui & Makasso, 2014).

Nziila

This is yet another particle in Shinyiha. It is used to express exhaustiveness. It means 'completely' or 'totally.' It occurs post-verbally. The sentences that follow illustrate the use of *nziila* in Shinyiha:

32) *U-mayi a-ha-tu-leh-a nziila*
AUG-mother SM1-PT-OM1PL-abandon-FV forever
'Mother abandoned us forever.'
33) *U-mu-ana a-ta-sogoye nziila*
AUG-1-child SM1-NEG-go completely
'The child has not completely gone.'

As can be seen in the two examples, *nziila* is used with both affirmative and negative sentences. It is strictly used sentence-finally with the sense of 'completely.' One could then say it is used to show completeness.

Alaa

This particle is used to express surprise. It may be translated as 'What' when used in showing surprise or disbelief. The particle is used sentence-initially and not any other part of a sentence. The examples below illustrate its use in sentences:

34) *Alaa, a-bha-ana bha-so'gol-a!*
Particle AUG-2-child SM2-leave
'What! The children have left!'
35) *Alaa, mu-a-tu-leh-a!*
Particle SM2PL-Perf-OM1PL-leave-FV
'Good Heavens, you have left us behind.'

The particle *alaa* is sometimes used alone to express surprise, shock or disbelief. This is the case when it is used as a short response to something surprising or shocking. The following sentences are illustrative.

36) A: *Isimu yane yatega* 'My phone is lost'
B: *Alaa*! 'Good Heavens!'

Bhuulo

This adds to the list of particles in Shinyiha. It means 'only'. It restrictly occurs sentence-finally as shown in the following examples:

37) *Tu-ku-ku-p-a i-mbuzi zi-tatu bhuulo*
We-PRES-OM-give Aug-goat SM10-three only
'We are giving you three goats only.'
38) *U-mu-ana a-ku-lil-a bhuulo*
Aug-1-child SM-PRES-cry-FV only
'The child is only crying'

The particle shows the extent or limit of what is happening. Example 37) shows that the number of goats to be given will not exceed three. So the particle has a restrictive sense.

The general observation is that particles in Shinyiha are mostly morphologically simple, syntactically fixed or mobile and pragmatically meaningful. More interestingly, some particles

behave like those found in other Bantu languages, which might be further evidence of the historical relationship of the Bantu languages or an instance of universality across human languages.

Conclusion

This paper has presented and explained particles in Shinyiha. Attention has particularly been paid to the form, distribution and function of individual particles. It has been observed that different particles demonstrate different properties. There are those that are fixed in position since they only occur in particular parts of sentences. Yet, there are particles that are mobile as they move from one position to the other with a change in meaning (for example, focus). It has also been noted that some particles are attested in other Bantu languages while others are only found in Shinyiha. This suggests that Bantu languages have some shared attributes and points of departure as far as particles are concerned. This may be indicative of the historical evolution of Bantu languages from one genetic source and that these languages have been changing over the years. At the same time, the differences for particle distribution and use across languages show that each language, including Shinyiha, is unique in some respects and therefore will demonstrate unique properties of various aspects including particles. That then indicates that one can fully benefit in understanding the complexity of human language by studying individual languages while respecting areas of similarities among languages.

As far as the function and roles of particles are concerned, the paper has shown that particles have varied roles. The roles range from negation, emphasis, focus, surprise, condition to attention calling. These roles indicate that there are pragmatic and semantic functions of particles in human communication. I recommend further exploration of particles both in Shinyiha and other languages to add insights to the existing body of knowledge for ultimate theoretical generalizations about particles as a word category in human language.

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