ABSTRACT

This is a study of the syntax and morphology of argument licensing in Lutsotso, a dialect of Luluhyia language. Luluhyia is an agglutinating language and therefore its morphology is relevant to syntactic derivation. Morphological processes determine the number of arguments of the verb while syntax determines the distribution of the arguments in the sentence. As such, there is interplay between morphology and syntax. Lutsotso verbs have derivational morphemes that cause valence change in a sentence. As for now, there is no comprensive work dealing with the constraint that govern the order in which these morphemes co-occur in a Lutsotso sentence. Thus, this study seeks to investigate the argument licensing morphology in Lutsotso and show relevance of morphology to the syntax of the Lutsotso sentence. The objectives of this study are to: identify verbal morphology that license overt arguments in Lutsotso, determine the order of the argument licensing morphemes and the constraints that govern their occurrence and determine the licensing of null arguments in the sentence structure of Lutsotso. This study employs a theoretical framework which uses concepts from Chomsky`s Government and Binding theory and the Minimalist Program and Baker`s Mirror principle in the description and analysis of the Lutsotso sentence. The research adopted a descriptive research design that deals with naturally occurring phenomena using data which may either be collected first hand or taken from already existing data sources. The study area was Kakamega Central Sub County, in Kakamega county .The study population was Lutsotso native speakers. The study targeted a sample size of 21 Lutsotso native speakers. Judgmental sampling was used alongside the chain technique in the identification of informants who were native speakers of Lutsotso. Data was collected through informal interviews, participant and non-participant observation, translation tests and texts written in Lutsotso. The study established that the Lutsotso verb consists of more than one morpheme expressing a particular grammatical meaning, that the derivational morphemes modify the syntactic and semantic structure of the sentence of Lutsotso and that the valence increasing operations of the applicative, causative and instrumental affect the internal argument while the valence decreasing operations of the passive reciprocal and the reflexive have effect on the external and internal arguments.The study also revealed that Lutsotso verbs have the capacity to accommodate three arguments. Rich verbal morphology and strong agreement is quite evident in Lutsotso and points to the existence of null arguments (pro) in both subject and object positions whenever lexical NPs are dropped from the sentence. From this analysis, the following conclusions are made: that verbal derivations in the sentence of Lutsotso are systematic and rule governed, the valence adjusting morphemes co-occur morphologically on the same verb.Rich verbal morphology and strong agreement licence null arguments (pro) in the Lutsotso sentence. The distribution of the null argument (PRO) is thoroughly costrained in that it can only occur in subject position of infinitive clauses. The study recommends that further research should be done to investigate if there are specific markers for the instrumental and the applicative. The study recommends research on other empty categories such as traces and the parasitic gaps which the study did not handle due to scope. The findings of this study may not only shed new light on Lutsotso morphosyntactic structure but also be useful to those researchers interested in studies related to the syntax of Bantu languages in general.