

The circumstantial forms of Tswana verbs and the notion of participle

Denis Creissels
Université Lumière (Lyon 2)

This article discusses the status of a set of verb forms found in Tswana and other Southern Bantu languages, designated as participial forms in the South-African Bantuist tradition. The description of the morphological and syntactic properties that distinguish the forms in question from the other inflected forms of Tswana verbs leads to the conclusion that they constitute a dependent mood that can conveniently be designated as circumstantial mood or situative mood, but for which the label ‘participial’ is quite misleading. Crucially, the forms in question show no evidence of deranking and project adverbial clauses, whereas the term ‘participle’ commonly refers to morphosyntactically deranked verb forms that can be employed for adnominal modification.

Keywords. Tswana, Bantu, dependent moods, participles, balanced vs. deranked dependent clauses.

1. Introduction

The verbal inflection of Southern Bantu languages includes a set of forms labeled PARTICIPIAL in the South African Bantuist tradition. Outside zone S, forms showing the same properties are also found at least in some Bantu languages of zone P. The term ‘participial’ is found not only in classical Dokean grammars such as Doke & Mofokeng’s (1957) grammar of Southern Sotho or Cole’s (1955) grammar of Tswana, but also in many recent works on Southern Bantu languages, regardless of their theoretical orientation, such as Du Plessis & Visser (1992) on Xhosa, or Buell (2005) on Zulu.

In an article on the morphological analysis of Tswana verb forms published fifteen years ago (Creissels 2006), I have proposed to rename CIRCUMSTANTIAL the forms in question, for which the following terms can also be found in the literature: SITUATIVE (Posthumus 1991, van der Wal 2009, Guérois 2015), CONTINGENTIAL (Katupha 1983) and DEPENDENT INDICATIVE. Among these terms, ‘dependent indicative’ can be discarded as a contradiction in terms, since the ability to project independent assertive clauses is an essential characteristic of the forms labeled ‘indicative’ not only in traditional grammar but also in many recent descriptions of typologically and areally diverse languages. With non-traditional terms such as ‘situative’ or ‘contingential’ there is no risk of confusion, and their etymology is compatible with the analysis presented here. In this article, I will use the term ‘circumstantial’, because it seems to me that it better reflects the semantic nature of the forms in question, but I would have no problem abandoning it in favor of ‘situative’, whose advantage is that it has already been used by several authors.

Examples (1) and (2) illustrate the contrast between the circumstantial forms of Tswana in the bracketed part of sentences (1b) and (2b), and the corresponding indicative forms in (1a) and (2a) (‘indicative’ being taken in its usual meaning of a set of inflected verb forms that share the ability

to be used as the nucleus of plain independent assertive clauses). The relevant verb forms are in bold, and the brackets mark the limits of the clauses projected by circumstantial forms.¹

(1) a. *O tsamaile.*

ó-tsámà-ì:l-è

sI:cl1-go-PRF-FV

‘(S)he went away.’

b. *Re gorogile [a tsamaile].*

rì-χòróχ-ìl-è

á-tsámá-ì:l-è

sI:1PL-arrive-PRF-FV sI:cl1-go-PRF-FV

‘We arrived after (s)he went away.’

(2) a. *Ke bo ja ka jeme le botoro.*

kì-bù-j-á

ká

Ø-¹džémé

‘lí-Ø-bótò:ró

sI:1SG-oI:cl14-eat-FV with SG-jam(cl9) and-SG-butter(cl9)

‘I eat it (the bread) with jam and butter.’

b. *Ke bo rata [ke bo ja ka jeme le botoro].*

kì-bù-rát-à

kì-bù-j-á

‘ká

Ø-¹džémé

‘lí-Ø-bótò:ró

sI:1SG-oI:cl14-like- sI:1SG-oI:cl14-eat- with SG- and-SG-

FV

FV

jam(cl9)

butter(cl9)

‘I like it (the bread) when I eat it with jam and butter.’

In this article, after discussing the division of the set of inflected forms of Tswana verbs into moods (section 2), the morphological distinction between the indicative, circumstantial, and relative moods (section 3), and the syntactic properties of circumstantial forms (section 4), I discuss the traditional identification of circumstantial forms as ‘participles’ (section 5). Section 6 summarizes the conclusions.

2. The inflection of Tswana verbs

The inflected forms of Tswana verbs (either synthetic or analytic) can be grouped into several subsets that correspond to the traditional notion of mood since they differ in the syntactic nature of the clauses they project. My view of the division of the set of the inflected forms of Tswana verbs

¹ The examples quoted in this article come from a variety of sources, but they have been checked with the help of native speakers of the Ngwaketse and Ngwato dialects. They are systematically given with a first line reflecting the current Tswana orthography (in italics), and a second line with the Tswana forms in a broad phonetic transcription reflecting the pronunciation of my consultants. The reason is that current orthography may be quite misleading in a linguistic analysis, since it distinguishes only 5 vowels and does not indicate tones at all, whereas Tswana has 9 vowel phonemes, and tonal alternations play a crucial role in the verbal morphology of Tswana. Note in particular that, in example (2), the distinction between the circumstantial form in (2b) and its indicative counterpart in (2a) is purely tonal. Moreover, many morphemes that are unquestionably prefixes (in particular, subject indexes and object indexes) are traditionally written as if they were separate words. The correct word division and the segmentation of words into formatives are given on the second line.

into moods, which differs in several important respects from that found in Cole's reference grammar of Tswana, is as follows:

- The forms that constitute the INDICATIVE mood act as the nucleus of independent assertive and interrogative clauses, and are also used in the complementation of the quotative verb *ri* 'say'; note that Cole's reference grammar of Tswana gives a different classification of the inflected forms of Tswana verb, according to which (i) the circumstantial forms are included in the indicative mood, (ii) the term 'indicative principal' is used for the forms designated here simply as 'indicative', and (iii) the potential forms, which meet all conditions to be included in the indicative mood, are treated as constituting a separate 'conditional mood'.
- The distinctive property of the forms that constitute the CIRCUMSTANTIAL mood, which are the central topic of this article, is their ability to project adverbial clauses.
- The forms that constitute the RELATIVE mood are found in relative clauses and cleft constructions.
- The forms that constitute the SUBJUNCTIVE mood are found in independent hortative clauses, in purpose clauses, and in the non-initial clauses of clause chains expressing commands (the initial clause being in the imperative); note that, in Cole's classification of the inflected forms of Tswana verbs, the sequential verb forms (considered here as constituting a distinct mood) are also included in the 'subjunctive mood', and the forms designated here simply as subjunctive are designated as the 'present tense of the subjunctive mood'.²
- The forms that constitute the SEQUENTIAL mood are found in the non-initial clauses of clause chains in which the initial clause is in the indicative; note that, in Cole's classification of the inflected forms of Tswana verbs, they are designated as 'habitual tense of the subjunctive mood' and 'past tense of the subjunctive mood'.
- The forms that constitute the IMPERATIVE verb forms are found in imperative clauses.
- The forms that constitute the INFINITIVE mood are special in that the Tswana infinitive is a 'mixed category' projecting phrases that may include not only typical verb modifiers such as object NPs or adverbs but also modifiers that normally modify nominal heads rather than verbal heads (in particular, genitival modifiers corresponding semantically to the subjects of the verb forms belonging to the other moods). For more details on the Tswana infinitive, readers are referred to Creissels & Godard (2005).

A detailed account of the morphological characterization of the synthetic verb forms that constitute the core of Tswana verb inflection can be found in Creissels (2006, 2017). For analytical verb forms and auxiliarization, see Creissels (2004). Given the topic of this article, it is

² Readers are referred to Posthumus (1991) for a detailed discussion of this point.

sufficient to give some general indications on the morphological structure of the indicative, circumstantial, and relative forms.

3. The morphological structure of the indicative, circumstantial, and relative verb forms

3.1. General remarks. The indicative, circumstantial, and relative verb forms differ in the syntactic distribution of the clauses they project (which justifies the view that they constitute distinct moods), but their morphological characteristics are similar. They equally include an obligatory subject index, they can equally incorporate object indexes, and they share a TAM-polarity paradigm that has no equivalent in the subjunctive, imperative, and sequential moods. The TAM paradigm common to the synthetic forms of the indicative, circumstantial, and relative moods consists of the following four cells:

- present
- perfect
- future
- potential (Cole’s ‘conditional’)

For the indicative forms and some of the circumstantial forms, each of these TAM values is expressed by 4 distinct forms that differ along the following two binary contrasts: positive vs. negative, and conjoint vs. disjoint.³ The other circumstantial forms and the relative verb forms express the positive vs. negative distinction but have no conjoint vs. disjoint contrast.

The conjoint vs. disjoint distinction is expressed by a formative following the subject index in the indicative present positive, and this is the only conjoint/disjoint contrast acknowledged in traditional accounts of Tswana grammar.⁴ However, the same functional distinction is also found in several forms (including some of the circumstantial forms) in which it involves a complex system of tonal alternations (Creissels 2017).

The expression of negation is complex. It involves not only negation markers occupying various positions in the verbal template, but also the choice between different paradigms of subject indexes, changes in TAM marking, variation of the final vowel, and complex tonal alternations. In fact, in Tswana, it is impossible to find two positive tenses whose negative counterparts would be formed exactly in the same way.

3.2. The distinction between indicative and circumstantial forms. Leaving aside the conjoint vs. disjoint distinction, example (2) illustrates the contrast between indicative and circumstantial

³ A conjoint verb form is a verb form that cannot be found in sentence-final position and cannot be separated from the following phrase by a pause. Disjoint verb forms typically occur in sentence-final position, but are not excluded from non-final contexts either, and when in non-final sentence position, are not necessarily followed by a perceptible pause. Across Bantu languages there is some cross-linguistic variation in the function of the conjoint/disjoint contrast – Van der Wal and Hyman (2017). In Tswana, the conjoint/disjoint contrast marks the distinction between phrases in post-verbal position that form part of the verb phrase and contribute to the comment expressed by the verb, and phrases in post-verbal position that are VP-external and fulfill the discourse function of afterthought (alias antitopic) – Creissels (2017).

⁴ In Cole’s reference grammar of Tswana, the forms in question are simply designated as the ‘short’ and ‘long’ form of the present positive. The discursive nature of the distinction, as well as the fact that tonal alternations express a functionally identical distinction in other tenses, were first acknowledged by Creissels (1994, 1996).

forms in the different tenses with the verb *limà* ‘cultivate’ in the second person singular. All the forms quoted in (2) are conjoint.

(2) Indicative and circumstantial forms of *limà* ‘cultivate’ with a 2nd person singular subject

	indicative	circumstantial
present positive	<i>ò-lim-à</i>	<i>ó-lim-á</i>
present negative	<i>χà-ó-lim-í</i>	<i>ó-sá-lim-í</i>
perfect positive	<i>ò-lim-il-é</i>	<i>ó-lim-il-é</i>
perfect negative	<i>χà-ó-á-lim-á</i>	<i>ó-sá-lim-á</i>
future positive	<i>ò-tlà-à-lim-à</i>	<i>ó-tlá-á-lim-à</i>
future negative	<i>ò-tlà-à-sì-lim-í</i>	<i>ó-tlá-á-sì-lim-í</i>
potential positive	<i>ò-ká-limà</i>	<i>ó-ká-limà</i>
potential negative	<i>ò-ká-sì-lim-í</i>	<i>ó-ká-sì-lim-í</i>

In six cases out of eight, the contrast between indicative and circumstantial forms involves the choice between two different paradigms of subject markers (a paradigm in which the 1st and 2nd person subject indexes are L-toned and the class 1 subject index is *ó-*, and another paradigm in which the 1st and 2nd person indexes are H-toned and the class 1 subject index is *á-*), but this is not the case in the present negative and the perfect negative, where the contrast between indicative and circumstantial forms relies on the use of distinct negative markers, and the variation of the final vowel.

As illustrated in (3), the circumstantial forms of the present and the perfect also differ from the corresponding indicative forms concerning the conjoint vs. disjoint distinction, which is neutralized in these two circumstantial forms. In the present positive, the disjoint marker found in the indicative does not feature in the corresponding form of the circumstantial mood. In the perfect positive, the tonal alternation that marks the conjoint vs. disjoint distinction in the indicative has no equivalent in the corresponding form of the circumstantial mood.

(3) Conjoint and disjoint forms of *limà* ‘cultivate’ with a 2nd person singular subject in the present positive and perfect positive forms of the indicative and circumstantial moods

		indicative	circumstantial
present positive	(conjoint)	<i>ò-lim-à</i>	<i>ó-lim-á</i>
	(disjoint)	<i>ò-à-lim-à</i>	<i>ó-lim-á</i>
perfect positive	(conjoint)	<i>ò-lim-il-é</i>	<i>ó-lim-il-é</i>
	(disjoint)	<i>ò-lim-il-è</i>	<i>ó-lim-il-é</i>

The decision to group together the circumstantial forms and to analyze them as constituting one of the moods that structure the verbal system of Tswana is fully justified by the fact that the clauses they project occur in the same syntactic contexts, and the syntactic contrast with the corresponding indicative forms is the same across the TAM paradigm. However, morphologically, the heterogeneity of the circumstantial mood is obvious, since it is impossible to select a particular feature (either segmental or tonal) that could be analyzed as a dedicated circumstantial marker, or

even as the main exponent of the distinction. This is the reason why, in the glossing of the examples quoted in the remainder of the article, CIRC does not feature in the glosses of any of the formatives into which circumstantial forms can be segmented, and circumstantial forms are simply followed by subscript CIRC, to be understood as summarizing the complex and heterogeneous set of features, variable across the TAM paradigm, that identify circumstantial forms as distinct from their counterparts in the indicative mood.

The morphological heterogeneity of the circumstantial mood constitutes a puzzle whose solution could only be a reconstruction of the grammaticalization processes from which this mood emerged, probably as the result of the alignment of the syntactic properties of forms of disparate morphological origin. However, I am not able to comment further on that. A historical hypothesis about the emergence of the circumstantial mood cannot be elaborated on the sole basis of Tswana data. Comparative data should be first gathered on as many other Bantu languages as possible among those that have this type of verb form so that this question must be left for future investigation.

3.3. The distinction between circumstantial and relative forms. The relative verb forms, found in relative clauses and in cleft constructions, are distinguished from all the other inflected forms of Tswana verbs by a postfinal *-ǀ*. The relative postfinal is homonymous with the clitic form *-ǀ* of the interrogative *ǀǀ* ‘what?’.⁵ Example (4) provides some illustrations of relative verb forms.

- (4) a. *nna yo ke lemanǀ*
 ñná 'yó 'kí-lím-à-ǀ
 1SG c11.LK sI:1SG-cultivate-FV-REL
 ‘I who am cultivating’
- b. *batho ba ba sa lemenǀ*
 bà-tʰò bá 'bá-sá-lím-í-ǀ
 PL-person(c12) c12.LK sI:c12-NEG-cultivate-FV-REL
 ‘the people who don’t cultivate’
- c. *monna yo o go lemetsenǀ*
 mò-ńná jó 'ó-ǀó-lím-éts-ì-ǀ
 SG-man(c11) c11.LK sI:c11-oI:2SG-cultivate-APPL.PRF-FV-REL
 ‘the man who has cultivated for you’
- d. *tshimo e re sa e lemanǀ*
 Ø-tsʰímò é rí-sà-í-lím-á-ǀ
 SG-field(c19) c19.LK sI:1PL-NEG-oI:c19-cultivate -FV-REL
 ‘the field that we have not cultivated’

⁵ Interestingly, in closely related Southern Sotho, relative verb forms are marked by a postfinal *-ǀ* which does not coincide with the clitic form of the interrogative ‘what?’, but with the locative suffix of nouns. The tones of the relative postfinal constitute an exception to the general rule according to which the structural tones of the verbal formatives of Tswana and Southern Sotho are identical (Letšeng 1995). However, I have no explanation to put forward for this exception to regular tonal correspondences, and I leave entirely open the question of the historical origin of the relative postfinal.

The relative postfinal *-j* attaches to a stem very similar to the corresponding circumstantial form. For example, the circumstantial forms corresponding to the relative forms quoted in example (4) are *ke lema* /kí-lím-á/, *ba sa leme* /bá-sá-lím-í/, *a go lemetse* /á-χó-lím-éts-í/ and *re sa e lema* /rí-sà-í-lím-á/ respectively. This suggests that, historically, relative forms developed from circumstantial forms. However, the relative postfinal is not the only thing that distinguishes the relative forms from the circumstantial forms:

- In the positive form of the present, the tonal structure of the relative form is not identical to that of the circumstantial form.
- In relative forms corresponding to indicative forms that select *ó-* as the subject index of class 1, the subject index of class 1 varies freely between *á-* and *ó-*, whereas *á-* is the only possibility in circumstantial forms.

4. The syntactic properties of the circumstantial verb forms

The circumstantial forms occur, either as the form taken by lexical verbs in a number of analytic verb forms, depending on the nature of the auxiliary, or as the nucleus of dependent clauses expressing circumstantial meanings. Both uses are illustrated in example (5), where *ó-ts^héχ-á* is a circumstantial form of the verb ‘laugh’ whose combination with the auxiliary *bò* yields an analytical form of the indicative expressing habitual aspect, whereas *kí-ùtlw-á* is a circumstantial form acting as the nucleus of the dependent clause ‘when I am in pain’.

(5) *O a bo o tshega [nna ke utlwa bothoko].*

ò-à-bò	ó-ts ^h éχ-á	nna	kí-ùtlw-á	bò-t ^h ò:kò
sI:2SG-DJ-AUX	sI:2SG-laugh-FV _{CIRC}	1SG	sI:1SG-feel-FV _{CIRC}	SG-pain(cl.14)

‘You always laugh when I am in pain.’

The clauses whose nucleus is a circumstantial form can be used as subordinate clauses without any conjunction, in which case they express a temporal or conditional relationship between the event they denote and that denoted by the matrix clause, as in (6). Their subject is most of the time coreferent with the subject or the object of the matrix clause, but, as shown by examples (1b) and (5) above, this is not obligatory.

(6) a. *Re bonye basimane [ba tshameka ka molelo].*

rì-bòp-í	bà-símàní	bá-ts ^h àmík-á	'ká	mó-li:lò.
sI:1PL-see.PRF-FV	PL-boy(cl.2)	sI:cl2-play _{CIRC}	with	SG-fire(cl.3)

‘We saw the boys playing with the fire.’

b. *Re ba bonye [ba sa dire sepe].*

rì-bá-bòp-ì	bá-sá-dìr-í	'sî:-pè.
sI:1PL-ol:cl2-see.PRF-FV	sI:cl2-NEG-do-FV _{CIRC}	cl7-not.any

‘We saw them not doing anything.’

b. *Ka [a sa mpona], o itse jang gore ke ne ke le teng?*

ká	'á-sá-m-pón-á	'ó-its-i	dzáǰ	χóri	kì-nè	kí-lí	tè:ǰ
since	sI:cl1-NEG-oI:1SG-see-FV _{CIRC}	sI:cl1-know-FV	how	that	sI:1SG-AUX	sI:1SG-be	there

'Since s/he did not see me, how does s/he know that I was there?'

Finally, the circumstantial form is used in the complementation of *ke gantsi* 'it is common (that)', it often occurs (that)', as in (10).

(10) *Ke gantsi [ke ba thusa ka madi].*

kí	χàntsí	kí-bà-t ^h ús-á	ká	mà:-dí
it.is	often	sI:1SG-oI:cl2-help-FV	with	PL-money(cl6)

'I often help them financially.'

5. The circumstantial verb forms and the notion of participle

Morphologically, two essential features of the circumstantial forms are that (i) they agree with their subject exactly like the indicative forms, and (ii) they express the same TAM and polarity distinctions as the indicative forms. This is at odds with the label 'participial', since cross-linguistically, this term is used for verb forms showing MORPHOLOGICAL evidence of non-finiteness.

Moreover, syntactically, the circumstantial forms are used in adverbial subordination, either by themselves or in combination with conjunctions, they can also combine with auxiliaries into analytical verb forms, but they cannot be used as the nucleus of relative clauses, which again contradicts the label 'participial', since participles are commonly defined as non-finite verb forms used for NOUN MODIFICATION like adjectives.

The circumstantial forms of Tswana and other Southern Bantu languages can be analyzed as constituting a DEPENDENT MOOD, i.e. a set of verb forms that, although distinct from the indicative forms found in independent clauses, are similar to them in their morphological structure and in the internal structure of the clauses they project (such as the moods labeled 'subjunctives' in European languages). The circumstantial forms of Tswana and other Southern Bantu languages do not show the kind of deviation from the standard of the independent clause predicate that characterizes the forms traditionally designated as participles. In other words, in reference to the distinction between DERANKING and BALANCING introduced by Stassen (1985: 76-83), in Southern Bantu languages, it is uncontroversial that the clauses projected by circumstantial forms are BALANCED dependent clauses.

Shagal (2017) proposes a cross-linguistic definition of participles as MORPHOSYNTACTICALLY DERANKED VERB FORMS THAT CAN BE EMPLOYED FOR ADNOMINAL MODIFICATION. Not all languages have forms meeting this definition, which is however cross-linguistically valid in the sense that such forms can be found in a number of genetically and geographically diverse languages. As discussed by Shagal (2017: 15-20), this formulation of the definition of participles is consistent with the use of the label 'participle' in many traditions, and has some advantages in comparison with others that can be found in traditional grammars or have been proposed in the literature, such as "forms derived from verbs and used as adjectives" (traditional grammars), or

“verb forms that behave like adjectives with respect to morphology and external syntax” (Haspelmath 1994: 152).

Quite obviously, the way the term ‘participial’ is traditionally used by South African Bantuists is in blatant contradiction, not only with the definitions of ‘participle’ that can be found in traditional grammars of European languages, but also with the cross-linguistic notion of participle as proposed in recent typological literature.

Functionally, the circumstantial forms of Tswana verbs have more affinities with CONVERBS, commonly defined as verb forms specialized in adverbial subordination.⁶ However, converbs are usually defined as DERANKED verb forms, and consequently, identifying the circumstantial forms of Tswana verbs as converbs is excluded by the fact that they express the same TAM distinctions as the corresponding indicative forms, combine in the same way with subjects, and more generally, project clauses whose internal structure is in no way different from that of independent clauses.

6. Conclusion

Outside Bantu, I am aware of no language having inflected verb forms similar in all respects to the forms analyzed in this article. Of course, a more systematic investigation of genetically and areally diverse languages would be necessary before proposing a conclusion about the distribution of such forms in the world’s languages. What is, however, sure, is that the current linguistic terminology provides no term for dependent verb forms characterized by this combination of morphological, syntactic and semantic properties.

In such a situation, the use of non-traditional terms whose etymology evokes the meaning expressed by the forms discussed in the present article, such as ‘circumstantial’ or ‘situative’, is fully justified, but in any case, ‘participial’ should be avoided, since this term evokes a cross-linguistically common type of dependent verb forms whose properties are in several crucial respects very different from those of the forms analyzed in this article.

Abbreviations

APPL applicative
 AUX auxiliary
 CIRC circumstantial
 clX class X (X a number between 1 and 17)
 DJ disjoint
 FUT future
 FV final vowel
 INF infinitive
 LK linker
 NEG negative
 PASS passive
 PL plural
 POT potential
 PRF perfect

⁶ On converbs in sub-Saharan languages, see Amha & Dimmendaal (2006).

REFL reflexive
 REL relative
 SBJV subjunctive
 SG singular
 sI subject index.

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Denis Creissels

Université Lumière (Lyon 2)

denis.creissels@univ-lyon2.fr

<http://deniscreissels.fr>

denis.creissels@gmail.com