

The Categorical Status and Functions of Auxiliaries in Shona

Nhira Edgar Mberi

What are auxiliaries - verbs, adverbs or a part of speech of their own?

The categorical status of auxiliaries has been an issue of debate and investigation to linguists in relation to many of the world's languages, not only Shona.

In this study, the first monograph to deal with auxiliaries in Shona, Edgar Mberi uses the grammaticalization theory to account for the nature and behavior of Shona auxiliaries. He argues that auxiliaries in Shona, as in many other languages, have historically developed from main lexical verbs. An attempt is then made to show the pathways of changes that may have taken place when verbs change from content verbs - describing for instance an action or a state - to grammatical verbs - marking a relationship between other words..

In this study Mberi takes as his premise of interpretation the cognitive view that the basic human strategy of dealing with the unknown is to describe it and interpret it through terms that are known and understood. As a consequence, the original meaning of the verb to be grammaticalized, determines the path of grammaticalization, and consequently the resulting grammatical forms.

Edgar Mberi's interest and subsequent research into the grammaticalization process of the Shona auxiliary was motivated by his findings when working as an editor of the first monolingual Shona dictionary - *Duramazwi ReChiShona* (1996). Through using the Shona Corpus, Edgar Mberi has had access to a solid empirical foundation for his study of Shona auxiliaries.

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