

# Italian *si*-constructions and their Bantu counterparts

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## 0. Introduction

The comparison between Romance clitics and Bantu affixes, carried forth in previous work,<sup>1</sup> has led to hypothesize that the two classes of elements are one and the same thing, and in particular that these elements are not generated in the corresponding thematic positions, but rather they represent lexicalizations of inflectional nodes, which are projected in the different domains of sentence structure.

The aim of this work is to proceed further in the Bantu-Romance comparison, by analysing different classes of elements. Indeed it is well known that, in Romance varieties, clitics do not only denote subject, (direct and indirect) object and locative, but reflexive and impersonal as well. Crucially, the aim of this paper is to explore Romance constructions which make use of the clitic *si/se*, and compare them with their Bantu counterparts, which typically involve affixes as well. We will discuss the relative ordering and mutual exclusion patterns of these elements with respect to other elements of the clitic/affix string and highlight the peculiar behaviour exhibited, on the one side, by *si*-constructions in Standard Italian or Italian dialects, and, on the other, by Bantu corresponding affixes.

This paper proceeds as follows. In section 1 we will present the interesting similarities, partly discussed in previous work, which involve subject, object and locative clitics/affixes; we will also compare the micro-variation that we may observe within different Bantu languages and Romance varieties, with special regard for Italian dialects. In section 2 we will discuss Italian *si* in its twofold nature, i.e. reflexive and impersonal, and its relation with other elements of the clitic string. In section 3 we will introduce the morphemes which encode reflexive and impersonal in Bantu. We will discuss data from Tshiluba and Swahili, i.e. the languages which I have mainly investigated in my previous works on Bantu, as well as data from other Bantu languages taken from the literature, in order to highlight the high degree of micro-variation which is observed within the Bantu family. Finally, in Section 4 we will compare Bantu and Romance varieties with respect to the expression of reflexive and

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<sup>1</sup> See in particular Cocchi (2000a, 2000b, 2020).

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impersonal constructions and highlight the features they share, as well as the differences they exhibit.

## 1. Bantu affixes and Romance clitics: previous hypotheses

This work analyses pre-root pronominal affixes in Bantu languages. The most widely studied among them are subject prefixes and object affixes (Baker 1988, Alsina & Mchombo 1990, Bresnan & Moshi 1990 among the many), but other syntactic elements surface as pre-root affixes in these languages, such as locative, reflexive, impersonal and even relative pronouns.

Linguists have often disagreed on the syntactic status of Bantu affixes,<sup>2</sup> and in particular whether we should consider them arguments or rather agreement markers. However, the high number and the variety of syntactic relations expressed by pre-root affixes contradicts an analysis of the latter as pure agreement markers.<sup>3</sup> Such an analysis would in fact at most apply to subject and object elements, but certainly proves inadequate for the other types of affixes mentioned above.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, I assume that Bantu affixes have argument status, and in particular they are to be analysed as the morphologically bound counterpart of Romance clitic pronouns (cf. Cocchi 2000a). This parallelism endorses a unitary analysis of the Bantu and Romance data.

Traditional generative accounts of Romance clitics, stemming from Kayne (1975), assume a movement analysis: clitics are arguments, generated in thematic positions like their tonic/DP counterparts and, in the course of the derivation, raise and adjoin to  $I^\circ$  (or  $T^\circ$ ) for morpho-phonological reasons connected to their unstressed status. Other analyses, building on Sportiche's (1992) seminal work,<sup>5</sup> assume instead that clitics are generated in the position where they surface, rather than moving there. Such an analysis is certainly preferable for Bantu affixes, and in particular object affixes, which are morphologically bound elements placed in the middle of the complex verb form, between the tense-aspect affix and the V-root (Alexandre 1981).

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<sup>2</sup> Analogously, linguists have often disagreed on the syntactic status of Romance clitics as well.

<sup>3</sup> This analysis is indeed commonly found in the literature (e.g. Stucky 1976, Marantz 1984, 1993, Baker 1988, Nakamura 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Crucially Manzini & Savoia (2005, 2011) and related work assume that even what is traditionally considered as an agreement marker, like person inflection on verbs, has argument status: indeed, in null subject varieties like Italian and its dialects, verb inflection may rightfully qualify as a subject argument, and there is no reason to posit an empty category like *pro*. Cocchi (2020) extends this analysis to Bantu languages, which are null subject varieties too.

<sup>5</sup> See in particular Poletto (1993, 2000), Manzini & Savoia (2004, 2005) and following work.

Furthermore, as pointed out by Manzini & Savoia (2004) and following work, a movement analysis does not adequately account for Romance clitics' relative rigid order and mutual exclusion patterns, when such restrictions do not apply to post-verbal tonic arguments.<sup>6</sup> This fact is even more evident in Bantu: some Bantu languages – the so-called asymmetrical languages like Swahili – may allow only one pre-root affix (besides subject prefix), but up to three or four post-verbal arguments in complex clauses, like those featuring causative + applicative (Baker 1988, Cocchi 1998).

In the sub-sections that follow I will briefly summarize the conclusions reached in previous work with respect to the most frequently discussed types of clitics/affixes, in a comparative Bantu-Romance perspective.

### 1.1. *Subjects*

The well-known and widely studied Null-subject parameter (since Rizzi 1982, Jaeggli & Safir 1989) divides world languages into two groups: those where the subject pronoun is obligatorily expressed, like English or French, and those where it can remain phonologically implicit, like Italian. This possibility correlates to the richness of inflection, i.e. the presence of six different inflected forms in the paradigm, with notable exceptions.<sup>7</sup>

However, Northern Italian dialects seem to represent an intermediate situation (Brandi & Cordin 1989): they feature subject clitic pronouns – for the whole paradigm or limitedly to some persons, depending on the dialect – which are obligatorily expressed, even in the presence of a full DP-subject, unlike French subject pronouns, to which they resemble from a morpho-phonological point of view:

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<sup>6</sup> See the contrast in (i)-(ii) from Standard Italian:

- (i) Ho dato un libro a Gianni / Ho dato a Gianni un libro  
       'I-have given a book to John / I-have given to John a book
- (ii) Gliel'ho dato / \* Lo gli ho dato  
       cl.IO-cl.DO I-have given / \* cl.DO cl. IO I-have given  
       'I have given it to him'.

Note in passing that I will not indicate Case distinctions (nominative/accusative/dative) in the glosses relating to Italian or other Romance varieties, since Bantu affixes do not exhibit morphological Case distinction. Therefore, in order to have comparable glosses for the two language families, I will simply indicate grammatical relations: SU (subject), DO (direct object), IO (indirect object/benefactive), LOC (locative), refl (reflexive) and imp (impersonal). When necessary, these labels are accompanied by the indication of person, number and gender/noun class (in Bantu).

<sup>7</sup> Indeed there are null-subject languages like Chinese, which feature one single undifferentiated form for all of the six person of the paradigm (for greater detail see Jaeggli and Safir 1989).

- (1) a La balla / La Maria \*(la) balla (Florentine)  
 SUf.sg dances / the Mary SUf.sg dances
- b elle danse / Marie (\*elle) danse<sup>8</sup> (French)  
 she dances / Mary (\*she) dances  
 ‘she dances / Mary dances’

For this and other reasons - e.g. the availability of free DP-subject inversion or their behaviour with respect to the that-trace effect (Poletto 1993: 53-54), Northern Italian dialects can be considered as null-subject varieties, in spite of the presence of subject clitics. Crucially, subject clitics have sometimes been analysed as inflectional elements (since Jaeggli 1982): together with the verb final inflection, they may contribute to distinguish the six persons of the paradigm, providing person and number features (cf. Rizzi 1986, Roberts 2014). Indeed, in some cases, final inflection may be ambiguous, and the various forms are distinguished only thanks to the subject clitic:<sup>9</sup>

- (2) a el/la magna (Basso Polesano, Poletto 1993: 55)  
 SU3m.sg/f.sg eat  
 ‘he/she eats’
- b i/le magna  
 SUm.pl/f.pl eat  
 ‘they(masc)/they(femm) eat’

As concerns Bantu languages, they are generally regarded as null-subject varieties too, as they feature six different inflected forms for the six persons of the paradigm and the DP-subject can be left unexpressed or placed in a post-verbal position. At a closer look, however, their situation rather mirrors Northern Italian dialects: indeed person agreement is not expressed by a final inflection, but rather by an obligatory prefix – the so-called subject prefix – which

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<sup>8</sup> This is of course grammatical if *Marie* is considered as a left-dislocated DP: *Marie, elle danse*.

<sup>9</sup> Indeed there are dialects where subject clitics may be absent in some persons of the paradigm, especially when inflection alone is able to distinguish them. This may be the reason why, for instance, in some varieties the subject clitic is absent with meteorological verbs, whose person feature is unambiguous. However, a discussion of the restrictions which exclude the presence of subject clitics in certain contexts lies beyond the scope of the present work.

precedes the verb stem and may cluster with object affixes, exactly like Northern Italian subject clitics. The difference between the two groups of languages, thus, reduces to their different morphological status: free morphemes in Italo-Romance varieties and bound affixes in Bantu:

- (3) a tu' lo compri (Florentine)  
 SU2sg D0m.sg buy  
 b u-ki-nunua (Tshiluba)  
 SU2sg-7DO-buy  
 'you buy it'

### 1.2. Indirect and direct objects

With respect to the number of object affixes which may be allowed, Bantu languages have been divided by scholars into symmetrical and asymmetrical ones (see e.g. Bresnan & Moshi 1990). The first group contains languages, like Tshiluba in (4-5) below, where the two objects of a ditransitive predicate<sup>10</sup> show a parallel behaviour: among other things, both can be pronominalized with an object affix placed before the verb root, and we may have co-occurrence of two affixes, with DO preceding IO, as exemplified in (5a-c):<sup>11</sup>

- (4) muana u-p-a mukaji tshimuma  
 boy 1.SU-give-FV woman fruit  
 'the boy gives the woman fruit'
- (5) a muana u-mu-p-a tshimuma  
 boy 1.SU-1.IO-give-FV fruit  
 'the boy gives her fruit'
- b muana u-tshi-p-a mukaji  
 boy 1.SU-7.DO-give-FV woman

<sup>10</sup> In this group I include both ditransitive predicates like 'give' and those which have become ditransitive when inserted in a causative or applicative construction (Baker 1988).

<sup>11</sup> In Bantu glosses, the number preceding SU/DO/IO indicates the noun class number (with 3<sup>rd</sup> person DPs); with T/A I indicate the Tense/Aspect affix, which follows subject prefix and precedes object affixes, though it may be absent in present/generic tenses, as in (4)-(5). Finally, FV represents the final vowel, an inflectional element connected to mood and, sometimes, to aspect.

- ‘the boy gives it to the woman’
- c muana u-tshi-mu-p-a  
 boy 1.SU-7.DO-1.IO-give-FV  
 ‘the boy gives it to her’

Conversely, in asymmetrical languages like Swahili in (6-7), only the indirect object of a ditransitive predicate can be expressed by a pronominal affix (7a); the co-occurrence of two affixes is ruled out (7c),<sup>12</sup> as well as affixation of the sole DO (7b):

- (6) mtoto a-na-m-p-a<sup>13</sup> mwanamke matunda  
 boy 1.SU-T/A-1.IO-give-FV woman fruit  
 ‘the boy gives the woman fruit’
- (7) a mtoto a-na-m-p-a matunda  
 boy 1.SU-T/A-1.IO-give-FV fruit  
 ‘the boy gives her fruit’
- b \* mtoto a-na-ya-p-a mwanamke  
 boy 1.SU-T/A-6.DO-give-FV woman
- c \* mtoto a-na-ya-m-p-a  
 boy 1.SU-T/A-6.DO-1.IO-give-FV

This dichotomy is observed also in Romance. Indeed, the situation exhibited by Standard Italian and most of its dialects, where IO and DO clitics may co-occur, mirrors what observed for Tshiluba and the other symmetrical languages (8).<sup>14</sup> However, we may find Italian dialects

<sup>12</sup> The co-occurrence of a DO and an IO affixes would be ruled out even if the latter were expressed by a 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person affix. Hence, the ungrammaticality of (7c) is not due to the presence of two 3<sup>rd</sup> person affixes.

<sup>13</sup> Differently from Tshiluba, in Swahili the affix doubling a human indirect object (-*m-*) is obligatory, or at least strongly preferred. This situation recalls the well-known clitic doubling phenomenon which occurs in Spanish: even in this language doubling applies only to human DPs (Torrego 1994 and related work). Vice versa, in Tshiluba there is no affix-doubling, as there is no clitic doubling in many Romance varieties including Italian.

<sup>14</sup> Notice that the relative order of the two clitics/affixes is different: in Italian and its dialects IO>DO, while in Bantu DO>IO; however, French patterns with Bantu languages in this regard, though limitedly to 3<sup>rd</sup> person IO clitics:

- (i) Jean le lui donne  
 Jean DO IO give  
 ‘Jean gives it to him/her’.

where IO and DO clitics are mutually exclusive - as in Bantu asymmetrical languages - and only one of the two surfaces, either the dative (9) or the accusative (10), or even a form which is morphologically ambiguous between the two (11):<sup>15</sup>

- (8) glielo do                      Standard Italian  
 IO-DO(masc) I-give  
 ‘I give it to him/her’
- (9) issu li a                      (Mascioni; Manzini & Savoia 2005/II: 284)  
 he IO gives  
 ‘he gives it to him’
- (10) la ‘da:jə                      (Stigliano; *ibid*: 276)  
 DO(femm) gives  
 ‘s/he gives it(femm.) to him/her’
- (11) lə ‘dɔnnə                      (Miglionico; *ibid*: 275)  
 DO/IO they-give  
 ‘they give it to him/her’

In all frameworks where clitics are assumed to be base-generated in pre-verbal position, mutual exclusion of two clitics suggests that these elements compete for the same position (cf. Manzini & Savoia 2004, 2005), an assumption which seems to be reinforced by data like (11): in this variety there is only one position for an ambivalent clitic. The same hypothesis may apply to Bantu asymmetrical languages like Swahili, where there is only one position which may be filled either by a DO affix (in simple transitive clauses), or by an IO one (in ditransitive clauses), and the two of them have the same morphological form for each noun class.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The crucial difference between the Italian dialects in (9)-(11) and Bantu asymmetrical languages (cf. (7) above) is that the single clitic we find in the former may pronominalize both arguments at the same time, as evidenced in the translations provided; indeed in some dialects the IO cannot be cliticized (cf. also Paoli 2014). Conversely, in Bantu asymmetrical languages it is only the IO that can pronominalize in ditransitive constructions, while the DO must appear as a post-verbal DP. These languages may exhibit a DO affix only in simple transitive clauses.

<sup>16</sup> In this I see a sort of animacy restriction: since an indirect object/benefactive is generally human, or at least animate, a DO affix (which generally corresponds to an inanimate DP) can be lexicalized only in clauses where no animate IO is present.

Furthermore, there are other Italian dialects where an accusative clitic cannot co-occur with a 3<sup>rd</sup> person dative clitic at all,<sup>17</sup> and the latter is substituted by a locative, an impersonal/reflexive or a partitive clitic. An analogous substitution is observed also in Spanish, where the 3<sup>rd</sup> person dative clitic cannot cluster with an accusative clitic and is replaced by impersonal/reflexive *se* (cf. *le doy un libro* ‘I give him/her a book’ vs. *se lo doy* ‘I give it to him/her’, instead of \* *le lo doy*).

### 1.3. Locatives

Bantu locative phrases behave indeed very similarly to objects with respect to a number of phenomena, including affixation, as discussed by Stucky (1976), Kamwangamalu (1985), Baker (1988), Bresnan and Moshi (1990), Cocchi (2000b) among others.

Locatives can in fact pronominalize on the verb in the form of a pre-root affix, as in (12b) below, similarly to what holds for (direct or indirect) objects, and we may even have an affix cluster of locative and DO (12c).

Crucially, in Bantu, what used to be independent locative prepositions in earlier stages of these languages have later on turned into class prefixes, behaving analogously to the other class prefixes. Notice in this regard that, in (12b-c), it is the locative/class 16 affix *pa-*, and not class 9 affix *mu-*,<sup>18</sup> which pronominalizes on the verb:

- (12) a muana u-di-a tshimuma pa mesa  
 boy 1.SU-eat-FV fruit on table  
 ‘the boy eats fruit on the table’
- b muana u-pa-di-a tshimuma  
 boy 1.SU-16.LOC-eat-FV fruit  
 ‘the boy eats fruit there’
- c muana u-pa-tshi-di-a  
 boy 1.SU-16.LOC.-7.DO-eat-FV  
 ‘the boy eats it there’

<sup>17</sup> In these varieties a dative clitic exists, and it emerges in sentences corresponding to ‘I gave him a book’, but it cannot occur in clitic clusters. For the different behaviour exhibited by 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person clitics see Manzini & Savoia (2005) and related work.

<sup>18</sup> Indeed, class 9 affix would obligatorily be used by the noun *mesa* outside the locative construction.



But the situation appears to be more complex than this. It is in fact marginally possible, in a symmetrical language like Tshiluba, to have even the co-occurrence of three affixes, when a ditransitive or applicative verb has a locative complement in addition to the required IO and DO, as in (13).<sup>19</sup>

- (13) a mukaji u-tek-el-a<sup>20</sup> mfumu tshimuma pa mesa  
 woman 1.su-put-appl-FV chief fruit on table  
 ‘the woman puts fruit on the table for the chief’
- b mukaji u-pa-mu-tshi-tek-el-a  
 woman 1.SU-16.LOC-1.IO-7.DO-put-appl-FV  
 ‘the woman puts it there for him’

This co-occurrence of locative and object affixes is frequently found in Romance as well: indeed, in Italian, the locative clitic can co-occur even with two object affixes (IO and DO), as in (14), which translates (13b) above:<sup>21</sup>

- (14) la donna gli ce la mette (la frutta sul tavolo al capo)  
 the woman IO(m.sg) LOC DO(f.sg) puts (fruit on the table to the chief)

Interestingly, the relative order of the three elements is not the same: in Italian IO precedes LOC, while in Tshiluba we observe the opposite; DO is ordered last in the two languages.

Guérois (2016), who examines micro-variation in locative constructions among Bantu languages, reports many cases of languages where the pre-root slot is reserved to object affixes, and locative affixes cannot appear there, as well as languages – like Cuwabo and Makuwa that she mainly investigates – which do not feature locative affixes at all.

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<sup>19</sup> The co-occurrence of three affixes, as in (13b), is relatively rare, but still cannot be judged ill-formed; cf. also Bresnan and Moshi (1990: 151), where a similar example from Kichaga (another symmetrical Bantu language), with three affixes, is reported.

<sup>20</sup> The Tshiluba applicative suffix *-il-* changes into *-el-* when preceded by a middle vowel (Willems 1949).

<sup>21</sup> Although a sentence like (14) sounds perfectly natural and grammatical to me, I am aware that many speakers deem it marginal; this may be linked to which part of Italy one comes from. However, indirect evidence for the order exhibited by (14) is also provided by the fact that, if IO > LOC, LOC > DO and IO > DO, by transitivity we obtain IO > LOC > DO.

This situation is not unknown in the Romance domain either: it is well known that Romanian and Spanish, unlike Italian, do not have any locative clitic at all. Within Italian dialects, we find some which have no locative clitic as well, and many others where the 3<sup>rd</sup> person dative clitic morphologically coincides with the locative clitic;<sup>22</sup> this ambiguous form may co-occur with the accusative clitic (15):

- (15) a *ʃe jo 'da*                      Sonnino (Manzini & Savoia 2005/II: 202)  
           IO DO gives  
           's/he gives it to him/her/us'<sup>23</sup>
- b *ʃe jo 'metto*  
           LOC DO I-put  
           'I put it there'.

## 2. The ambiguity of Italian *si*

Differently from French *on*, the morpheme used in Italian impersonal constructions, *si*, is homophonous to the 3<sup>rd</sup> person reflexive clitic, as has been widely pointed out in the literature. Indeed, there has been a long debate on whether reflexive and impersonal *si* must be treated as two different morphemes, which are only by chance homophonous (see Napoli 1976, Burzio 1986), or if they must be seen as two variants of the same morpheme, thanks indeed to their homophony (see Manzini 1986, Rizzi 1986, Cinque 1988, Kayne 1988).

Nevertheless, there are some important differences between the two constructions:

a) In reflexives, the form *si* represents the 3<sup>rd</sup> person reflexive clitic (singular and plural), which alternates with the forms corresponding to the other persons (*mi*, *ti*, *ci*, *vi*). In impersonals, on the contrary, only the form *si* can be used.

b) The verbs which show up in a reflexive constructions are more limited in number with respect to impersonal: we can form the reflexive construction only with transitives and some unergatives, while unaccusatives and passives are excluded. On the contrary, impersonal *si* constructions is possible with almost all verbs.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See Manzini & Savoia (2005: 147 ff.).

<sup>23</sup> Notice that the form *ʃe* is also used as a 1<sup>st</sup> person plural dative clitic, exactly like *ce/ci* in Standard Italian (where it also coincides morphologically with the locative).

<sup>24</sup> This assumption refers to Standard Italian. An anonymous reviewer has indeed pointed out that in Romanian this possibility is more limited.

Let us examine these constructions in turn.

### 2.1. Reflexives

Reflexives are constructions which typically involve a transitive verb, whose two arguments are assumed to be co-referential: one of the arguments is therefore represented by a (clitic or tonic) reflexive pronoun with anaphoric properties, while the second argument binds the first. Hence, traditional analyses assume that *si* has object properties, exactly like tonic *se stesso* or English *himself*.

However, the reflexive *si* construction differs from its tonic counterpart (which is very limited in use, by the way) in many important aspects. Firstly, the auxiliary selected in compound forms is obligatorily BE (at least in Standard Italian),<sup>25</sup> and the past participle must agree in gender and number with the DP-surface subject (cf. (16a) vs. (16b)); secondly, there are many reflexive verbs like (17a) which lack a tonic counterpart (17b), as they can never be used transitively (17c):

- |      |   |                              |   |                                 |
|------|---|------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| (16) | a | Maria <i>si</i> è lavata     | b | Maria ha lavato se stessa       |
|      |   | Maria refl is washed(f.sg)   |   | Maria has washed(unm) herself   |
|      |   | ‘M. has washed herself’      |   | ‘M. has washed herself’         |
|      |   |                              |   |                                 |
| (17) | a | Maria <i>si</i> è arrabbiata | b | * Maria ha arrabbiato se stessa |
|      |   | Maria refl is got.angry      |   | Maria has got.angry herself     |
|      |   | ‘M. has got angry’           | c | * Maria ha arrabbiato Gianni    |
|      |   |                              |   | Maria has got.angry John        |

These properties, which assimilate constructions like (16a-17a) to unaccusatives and passives, led Burzio (1986) to offer two different analyses for the two reflexive constructions: while tonic reflexives like (16b) would pattern with transitives, *si*-reflexives could be analysed similarly to unaccusative clauses. Consequently, the full DP-subject in (16a-17a) would be base-generated not as the external argument of the verb, as traditionally assumed, but rather as the internal argument, while the clitic *si* would ‘absorb’ the external thematic

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<sup>25</sup> There are indeed several exceptions to this rule in both Northern and Southern Italian dialects.

role.<sup>26</sup> Also Manzini & Savoia (2005) assert that reflexive predicates are symmetrical, so that we cannot be sure whether *si* corresponds to the internal or the external argument; indeed the latter hypothesis is also plausible, in line with Marantz (1984), Cocchi (1994) and other works.<sup>27</sup>

The hypothesis that *si* receives the external theta-role would imply that it is possible to have a reflexive construction only with those verbs which assign the external theta-role, similarly to what happens in passive constructions. This prediction is borne out: reflexive constructions cannot be formed out of unaccusatives and passives:

- (18) a \**Maria si arriva*  
M. refl arrives  
b \**Maria si fu presentata*  
M. refl was introduced

Unaccusatives and passives are not, however, the sole verbs excluded from reflexive constructions. Crucially, since the reflexive pronoun is anaphoric, it must be bound by an antecedent. Hence, in order to have a reflexive construction, we do not only need a verb which assigns the external theta-role (which is taken over by *si*), but this verb must have (at least) another argument which serves as the antecedent for the anaphor. Therefore, unergative verbs which do not subcategorize for an indirect object do not admit a reflexive reading:

- (19) a \**Maria si dorme* vs. b *Maria si chiede...*  
M. refl sleeps M. asks herself...

To sum up, reflexive *si* is a rather ambiguous element: while it is traditionally considered to be an internal argument, on a par with its tonic counterpart, unaccusativity criteria point to the

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<sup>26</sup> Burzio shows very convincingly how reflexives respond positively to all established unaccusativity criteria. Cocchi (1994, 1995) further expands Burzio's analysis and shows that the unaccusative hypothesis can apply also to the so-called indirect reflexives, like *Maria si è comprata un libro* ('M. has bought a book for herself'): indeed, in this case, the verb would have no external argument (as the external thematic role has been absorbed by *si*), but rather two internal arguments: an IO (*Maria*) and a DO (*un libro*).

<sup>27</sup> However, in Northern Italian dialects, where also subject clitics are present, there is evidence that *si* is internal to the object clitic string (ibid.). Nevertheless, the same could be said also for impersonal *si* (often ordered after all types of object clitics), which is generally regarded as an element with subject properties; see the discussion that follows.

opposite conclusion, i.e. that it represents the external argument of the verb, while the DP-internal argument is promoted to the subject position, in parallel with the passive construction, and binds *si* regularly.

## 2.2. Impersonals

Like reflexive *si*, impersonal *si* is also ambiguous with respect to thematic identification: though it is generally regarded as a ‘subject’, it must not necessarily receive the external theta-role (as its reflexive counterpart does, coherently with what is assumed earlier), but it may receive the internal theta-role as well. Indeed, in Italian, an impersonal *si* construction (ISC henceforward) can be formed also out of those verbs which are excluded from reflexive clauses, namely unergatives without an IO, unaccusatives, passives, as well as reflexive verbs too:<sup>28</sup>

- |      |   |   |   |  |
|------|---|---|---|--|
| (20) | a | <i>Si</i> dorme<br><i>si</i> sleeps<br>‘one sleeps’                               | b | <i>Si</i> arriva<br><i>si</i> arrives<br>‘one arrives’               |
|      | c | <i>Si</i> fu presentati<br><i>si</i> was introduced(m.pl)<br>‘one was introduced’ | d | Ci <i>si</i> lava<br>refl <i>si</i> washes<br>‘one washes (oneself)’ |

But even if ISCs are possible with the majority of verbs, there is still a class of verbs which is excluded from these constructions: those verbs which do not select any (nominal) argument (21):

- |      |   |                                      |   |  |
|------|---|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| (21) | a | * <i>Si</i> piove<br><i>si</i> rains | b | * <i>Si</i> sembra che...<br><i>si</i> seems that... |
|------|---|--------------------------------------|---|--|

From these data we can conclude that *si* needs a theta-role, and ISCs are impossible with verbs which do not assign any. This conclusion is also supported by the fact that *si* in ISCs is intuitively interpreted as a real argument of the verb, namely an element which obligatorily

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<sup>28</sup> Notice that, in the latter case (20d), the suppletive form of the reflexive clitic (*ci*) must be used in cluster with impersonal *si*, as the co-occurrence of two *si*'s is not allowed.

carries a [+ human] feature (as in Cinque 1988) and has a generic interpretation corresponding to ‘one’, ‘people’, as in Burzio (1986) and Manzini (1986).<sup>29</sup>

In ISCs with mono-argument verbs like (20), there cannot be any other DP-argument, even semantically generic and thus compatible with the impersonal reading, since *si* has received the sole thematic role available. Vice versa, when ISCs feature a transitive verb, this can also select an overt direct object, as in (22) below. That the full DP is indeed the internal argument is confirmed not only by semantic/interpretive factors, but also by syntactic criteria: it can in fact be replaced by an accusative clitic or by partitive *ne*, as in (23):

(22) *Si mangia spaghetti*  
*si* eats spaghetti  
‘people eat spaghetti’

(23) *Li si mangia spesso / Se ne mangia molti*  
DO.3pl *si* eats often / *si* cl-partitive eats many  
‘people often eat them/ people eat a lot of them’

This is not, however, the sole possibility. The direct object can in fact move to the subject position, analogously to what happens in passive constructions<sup>30</sup>, and in this case the V/Aux agrees with it. Such a process was labelled by Burzio (1986) ‘Object Preposing’ (OP), even when the object actually surfaces in post-verbal position; cf. (24) with (22) above:

(24) *Si sono mangiati gli spaghetti / Gli spaghetti si sono mangiati*  
*si* are(3pl) eaten(mpl) the spaghetti / The spaghetti *si* are(3pl) eaten(mpl)  
‘people have eaten spaghetti’

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<sup>29</sup> My present proposal partially diverges from Cinque (1988), who assumes that impersonal *si* has argument status only in some occurrences but not in others (with unaccusative, passive or reflexive verbs). I am now arguing, instead, that impersonal *si* is always an argument.

<sup>30</sup> In this regard, in grammar textbooks a distinction is often made between ‘impersonal *si*’, namely constructions like (20) and (22), and ‘passivizing *si*’, i.e. cases like (24) that recall the derivation of passive clauses.

Indeed, in (24), the DP-internal argument moves to Spec(TP) and checks agreement on T<sup>o</sup>,<sup>31</sup> as in passive, reflexive and unaccusative constructions.

Many Italian speakers show a strong preference for (24), namely the OP variant, with respect to (22), without OP.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the latter can be considered stylistically marked, but not ungrammatical; indeed, this is the only option available when the DP-internal argument is a first or second person pronoun, as in (25a). In this case OP is not possible; see (25b):

- (25) a *Si* accusa anche voi / Vi *si* accusa  
*si* accuses also you-pl / you-pl(acc) *si* accuses  
 ‘one accuses you(pl) too’
- b \* *Voi si* accusate  
 You-pl(nom) accuse(2.pl)

The latter sentence becomes acceptable only if we assume that the 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural tonic pronoun (*voi*) is in a more peripheral position, e.g. focus, as in (26); cf. fn. 31 above. As a consequence, the verb shows default (3<sup>rd</sup> sg.) agreement, as in the majority of ISCs:

- (26) *Voi si* accusa, non me  
 you-pl *si* accuses, not me  
 ‘people accuse you, not me’

When the internal argument is instead a 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun/DP, as in (24) above, it can move to subject position without causing any feature mismatch, since the impersonal clitic *si* is inherently 3<sup>rd</sup> person and it is compatible with either singular or plural number. The sentence with OP will thus be ambiguous between an impersonal and a reflexive reading; pragmatic factors generally intervene to disambiguate the situation. Indeed, if the DP is animate, the

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<sup>31</sup> Alternatively, as an anonymous reviewer pointed out, one can assume that the preverbal DP is topicalized, in line with Raposo & Uriagereka (1996). Indeed we cannot have OP with weak pronouns or bare quantifiers:

(i) \* *Egli* / *Nessuno si* è eletto  
 He / Nobody *si* is elected.

<sup>32</sup> This is especially true when the DP-object is introduced by a definite article, cf. ? *si mangia gli spaghetti*.

reflexive (or reciprocal) reading will be preferred, even if the impersonal one is not excluded, as in (27), while if it is inanimate only the impersonal reading will be acceptable, as in (28):

- (27) I politici *si* sono accusati  
 the politicians *si* are accused  
 ‘the politicians have accused themselves/one another’  
 ‘? one has accused the politicians’
- (28) Gli spaghetti *si* sono mangiati  
 the spaghetti *si* are eaten  
 ‘one has eaten spaghetti’

### 2.3. *Clitic clustering with si*

Assuming a base-generation analysis for pre-verbal clitics, as stated above, when we examine Italian clitic clusters which involve *si* we immediately notice that the position occupied by reflexive *si* and impersonal *si* is not the same:

- (29) a la pasta la *si* mangia molto in Italia                      DO3p>*si*-Imp  
 the pasta DOf.sg *si*-Imp eat a lot in Italy  
 ‘people eat pasta a lot in Italy’
- b Gianni se la mangia sempre (la pasta)                      *si*-Refl>DO3p  
 Gianni *si*-Refl DOf.sg eats always (the pasta)  
 ‘Gianni always eats it (pasta)’

Indeed, a 3<sup>rd</sup> person accusative clitic precedes impersonal *si*, but follows reflexive *si*. A 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person DO clitic also precedes impersonal *si* (*mi si invita sempre* ‘one always invites me’), while it cannot co-occur with reflexive *si*.

As concerns the dative clitic, it precedes impersonal *si*, as in (30a), and also reflexive *si*, as in (30b); the order of clitics remains unaltered also with 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person DO or IO clitics:

- (30) a a Gianni gli *si* fanno sempre regali                      IO3sg> *si*-Imp  
 to Gianni IOm.sg *si*-Imp make always presents  
 ‘to Gianni, people always make presents’



- b gli *si* è presentato come un lontano parente IO3sg> *si*-Refl  
 IOm.sg *si*-refl is introduced as a distant relative  
 ‘he introduced himself to him as a distant relative’

Indeed, in many Italo-Romance varieties, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person dative clitic cannot co-occur with reflexive *si*. A case in point is represented by those Italian dialects where the 3<sup>rd</sup> person dative and reflexive *si* coincide, as in Spanish:

- (31) issu *si* ddu ‘ada Belvì (Manzini & Savoia 2005/II: 332)  
 he *si* DO3m.sg gives  
 ‘he gives it to him/her’

As concerns interactions with locative clitics, the data in (32) below show that 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> person reflexive clitics precede locative (32), while the latter precedes *si* (33); in this case the interpretation of *si* is ambiguous between reflexive and impersonal:

- (32) in questo posto mi ci metto io 1/2-Refl>Loc  
 in this place 1sg-Refl Loc put I  
 ‘in this place, I’ll put myself’
- (33) in questo posto ci *si* mette Gianni Loc>*si*-Refl/Imp  
 in this place, Loc *si*-Refl/Imp put Gianni  
 ‘in this place, G. will put himself’/‘in this place, one will put G.’

To sum up, the data concerning their relative positioning with respect to other elements of the clitic string suggest that impersonal *si* and reflexive *si* are not one and the same element. Indeed, impersonal *si* is adjacent to the verb, and is preceded by all of the other clitics (dative and accusative clitics, independently of their person features, and locatives as well), while reflexive *si* precedes accusative clitics and follows dative and locative ones.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> As said above, the distribution of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> reflexive clitics is different from 3<sup>rd</sup> person reflexive *si*, as they precede locative clitics and cannot co-occur with dative ones.

The following section, which analyses reflexive and impersonal affixes in Bantu, reinforces what we have just affirmed, as these elements, besides occupying different positions, do not have the same morpho-phonological form.

### 3. Bantu counterparts of Italian *si*

#### 3.1. Reflexives

The reflexive morpheme, as expected, appears as a pre-root affix in Bantu, and in this we observe a further parallelism with Romance reflexive clitics which are ordered within the object string. However, though a Bantu reflexive affix is an anaphoric element bound by the syntactic subject, as usual, it does not show any class/person/number agreement with it, unlike Italian *si* which alternates with 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> person forms. Indeed, in any Bantu language, the reflexive affix always shows up with the same morphological form, irrespectively of the person/class of the subject (see (34) below), unlike subject or object affixes.

Such a form has been reconstructed as \*-i- in Proto-Bantu; it appears in the various modern languages either as a single vocalic element (generally -i-) or as a CV affix, like Tshiluba -di- or Swahili -ji-;<sup>34</sup> the latter is exemplified in (34):

- |      |   |                                 |                            |
|------|---|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| (34) | a | n-a-ji-uliza                    | Swahili (Perrott 1957: 39) |
|      |   | 1sg.SU-T/A-refl-ask             |                            |
|      |   | ‘I ask myself’                  |                            |
|      | b | watoto wa-li-ji-tazama          |                            |
|      |   | children 2.SU-T/A-refl-look     |                            |
|      |   | ‘children looked at themselves’ |                            |

Marlo (2015) offers a detailed analysis of the micro-variation of reflexive constructions in several Bantu languages and, in particular, he considers the possible co-occurrence of reflexive with other object affixes. Interestingly, in many languages, reflexive has the special ability to co-occur with one more object affix than is usually allowed in the language in question.<sup>35</sup> For example, in Bukusu only one object affix is admitted in a causative construction (35a), but reflexive may occur with another object affix (35b):<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Such affixes have the same pronunciation, as both Tshiluba <d> and Swahili <j> correspond to the voiced palatal affricate [dʒ].

<sup>35</sup> Marlo (2015), quoting Polak (1986: 403).

- (35) a \* Wamalwa a-a-mu-ba-siim-isy-a Bukusu (Marlo 2015: 5)  
 Wamalwa 1.SU-T/A-1.DO<sup>37</sup>-2.DO-like-caus-FV  
 ‘Wamalwa made him like them’
- b Wekesa a-a-mu-i-siim-isy-a  
 Wekesa 1.SU-T/A-1.DO-Refl-like-caus-FV  
 ‘Wekesa made him like himself’<sup>38</sup>

According to Marlo, these data support an analysis where reflexive and other object affixes occupy different positions and do not compete for the same; in particular, reflexive would occupy a lower position with respect to other affixes, and it is the last element before the verb stem.<sup>39</sup> The sole exception to this rule may be represented (in some languages) by the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular object affix, which, together with the reflexive, competes for the innermost position within the affix string. Indeed in Nyaturu, an asymmetrical language where DO and IO affixes cannot co-occur, we may observe the coexistence of two affixes if one is either Refl or 1<sup>st</sup>.sg, which are ordered last.

Furthermore, Marlo reports that there may be differences in the relative order of reflexive and 1<sup>st</sup>.sg affix among Bantu languages:

Tharaka, Kikuyu, etc.: other object affixes > Refl > 1<sup>st</sup>.sg

Bukusu, Kerewe, etc.: any object affix (1<sup>st</sup>.sg included) > Refl

Tiriki: Refl > 1<sup>st</sup>.sg or 1<sup>st</sup>.sg > Refl.

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<sup>36</sup> In Swahili, as far as I know, this possibility is not allowed. However in other languages – among those that we labelled symmetrical languages, like Rundi or Ruwund - we may even have three object affixes, where one is reflexive (Marlo 2015: 5).

<sup>37</sup> The first DO is to be interpreted as a causee.

<sup>38</sup> In (35b) the reflexive is to be interpreted as co-referent with the DO-affix that precedes it, and not with the sentence subject. This is indeed in line with Principle A of Binding Theory (Chomsky 1980 and following work), assuming a VP-shell analysis of causative constructions (Larson 1988, Harley 2002 and related work).

<sup>39</sup> Also Meeussen (1967) reconstructs the reflexive as the innermost pre-root affix in Proto-Bantu.

Marlo explains this sort of affairs by assuming that reflexive and 1<sup>st</sup> person singular are highest in terms of person-number and animacy-topicality, a fact which may influence the order of affixes.

Furthermore, due to its special position, the reflexive affix is intimately tied to the verb root, so that it often gets lexicalized with it and becomes inseparable. As a consequence, there are verbs which get a different, idiosyncratic meaning when combined with the reflexive (36), and also verbs which obligatorily occur with the reflexive affix (37):

- (36) a ku-el-a<sup>40</sup> mulu Tshiluba (Willems 1949: 143)  
 15-refl-throw-FV upward  
 ‘to throw upward’
- b ku-di-el-a mulu  
 15-throw-FV upward  
 ‘to become proud’
- (37) i-héng-a / i-kut-a<sup>41</sup> Nyaturu (Marlo 2015: 8)  
 ‘to look at, inspect / to be satiated’

Data like (37) are indeed reminiscent of those Italian reflexive verbs which lack a non-reflexive counterpart, like *arrabbiarsi* ‘to get angry’ or *pentirsi* ‘to repent’.

### 3.2. Impersonal constructions

Interestingly, in many Bantu languages there is a peculiar impersonal construction which reminds of Italian impersonal *si*. Most works classify it as a passive construction (Baker 1988, Hamlaoui 2014, Ngunga & Langa da Camara 2020) and it is often referred to as ‘bare’ passive, in order to be distinguished from the most widely studied passive construction which features a special passive morphology, i.e. a specialized verbal extension (a post-root suffix).

In this peculiar construction there is no DP-subject, and the verb always carries a class 2 subject prefix, as if it agreed with an unspecified 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural human subject.<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, this construction is not restricted to transitive verbs – unlike Bantu passive

<sup>40</sup> Tshiluba class 15 prefix *ku* indicates the infinitival forms of verbs (i.e. the nominal forms of verbs).

<sup>41</sup> *i-* represents the reflexive affix.

<sup>42</sup> Indeed, in all Bantu languages, 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural human subjects always require a class 2 prefix (classes 1 / 2 contain nouns referring to human beings, in an opposition singular / plural).

constructions made with the verbal extension – but can be found with all verbs, unaccusative included, as seen in the following examples from Tshiluba, which recall the Italian *si*-constructions placed aside:

- (38) a ba-di-a tshimuma                      a' *si* mangia la frutta  
       2.SU-eat-FV fruit                              imp eats fruit  
       'people eat fruit/one eats fruit'
- b ba-lu-a                                      b' *si* viene  
       2.SU-come-FV                                imp comes  
       'people come/one comes'

The sole verbs which are excluded from Bantu bare passives are zero-argument verbs, an exclusion that mirrors Italian *si*, as seen above.

Another similarity between Bantu bare passives and Italian ISCs lies in the fact that, with transitive verbs, the DP-internal argument may also precede the verb; this is indeed the reason why the Italian impersonal *si* construction with object preposing is generally referred to as *si passivante* ('passivizing *si*'), as said above. Unlike Italian (cf. (28) above), however, the Bantu preposed object does not control verb agreement: the subject prefix is still class 2, but a resumptive object affix appears on the verb, as in the following example:<sup>43</sup>

- (39) mbaa                      ba-e-dzim-i                                      Mbuun  
       fire(Cl.9)                      2.SU-9.DO-extinguish-Perf  
       'the fire has been extinguished/one has extinguished the fire'

Another important difference between Italian and Bantu lies in the fact that, in Italian impersonal/passivizing *si* constructions, the (optional) expression of a PP-agent is ruled out (40b), unlike what holds in Bantu (40a). Interestingly, the optional agent is not necessarily a class 2 DP, but it may carry whatever class and person feature (40c):

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<sup>43</sup> Mbuun is a Bantu language spoken in Congo, not far from the Tshiluba area. Examples come from Bostoen & Mundeke (2011), quoted by Hamlaoui (2019).

Also in Italian ISCs with Object Preposing we may have a resumptive object clitic; cf. *il fuoco lo si è estinto*, which translates (39).

- (40) a ba-lu-a / ba-di-a tshimuma kudi mukaji (cf. (38) above)  
 b *si* viene / *si* mangia la frutta (\* dalla donna)  
 ‘one comes / eats fruit by the woman’  
 c ba-lu-a / ba-di-a tshimuma kundi meme  
 ‘one comes / eats fruit by me’

The impersonal Bantu prefix is thus undifferentiated for person, number and class, and in this it recalls the undifferentiated subject clitic which appears in Northern Italian dialects, where it also precedes all other clitics. Indeed there are varieties, like the dialect of Lugano (Poletto 2000: 12), where such an undifferentiated clitic shows the same form, *a*, for all of the six persons.

Since the affix used for these impersonal/bare passive constructions is a subject prefix, it may co-occur with object affixes (as seen in (39)), the number of which depends on the number of affixes allowed by the different Bantu languages (symmetrical vs. asymmetrical).

#### 4. Discussion and concluding remarks

In the previous sections the Romance clitic string and the Bantu affix string have been compared and we may observe that the two present several interesting similarities.

Bantu subject prefixes find a parallel in the subject clitics that we observe in Northern Italian dialects, which are also elements that contribute (together with final inflections) to the identification of the person/number features of the syntactic subject (Poletto 1993, 2000; Manzini & Savoia 2005 and related work). Also the situation concerning (indirect and direct) object and locative affixes is quite similar in the two groups of languages. Indeed, within the Romance family we find, on the one hand, several varieties (Standard Italian included) where these clitics have independent realizations and may co-occur, just as object affixes do in symmetrical languages like Tshiluba, and, on the other hand, varieties where we observe mutual exclusion patterns (cf. Manzini & Savoia 2005), which mirror the situation of Bantu asymmetrical languages like Swahili; this fact suggests that the two (or more) clitics/affixes compete for the same position. In addition, the different order exhibited by Tshiluba IO and DO affixes with respect to Italian clitics is attested within the Romance family too, not only in Standard French but also in some Italian dialects like Olivetta or San Michele (Manzini & Savoia 2005/II: 55), where the DO clitic precedes not only the IO but also reflexive *si*.

The parallelism between Bantu and Romance is less strict for what concerns reflexive and impersonal elements, which, however, also have pre-root affix status in Bantu. The interesting thing concerning Italian and its dialects is that the impersonal clitic and the 3<sup>rd</sup> person reflexive clitics are homophonous, a fact which suggests a unitary analysis of the two, as convincingly suggested by Burzio (1986) and following work. Indeed *si* can in both cases be analysed as a free variable, i.e. an element with an indefinite reference (Manzini 1986, Chierchia 1995, Cocchi 1995), which may be bound by different elements (a generic quantifier or a definite antecedent) giving rise to the different interpretations.

However, the situation is more complex than this. As seen above, in Standard Italian the position occupied by impersonal and reflexive *si* with respect to other clitics is different, while within Italian dialects (Manzini & Savoia 2005) we observe a variegated situation, ranging from dialects where *si* (whatever its interpretation) precedes all object clitics (e.g. Casaccia, Soglio), to others that exhibit different orders, with some clitics which may precede *si*; in particular, the impersonal *si*-clitic is often ordered after IO, DO and LOC, as in Italian (e.g. Urbino, S. Agata Feltria). Finally, we even find cases where *si* may reduplicate, and we observe two instances of impersonal *si*, one preceding and the other following another clitic:

- (41) ez ge (se) n'da tri                      Vezza d'Oglio (Manzini & Savoia 2995/II: 24)  
*si* IO *si* part gives three  
 'one gives three of them to him' (cf. Italian *gli se ne dà tre*)

The Bantu data support the idea that impersonal and reflexive elements occupy different positions within the string. However, these elements are hardly comparable with Italo-Romance *si*, since Bantu impersonal and reflexive affixes are not at all homophonous. Moreover, their positioning looks specular with respect to (at least) Standard Italian.

The Bantu impersonal morpheme is indeed a subject prefix which precedes all eventual other affixes and may co-occur with them, in all languages; within the Romance family it recalls the French impersonal subject pronoun *on*, which is not homophonous to French reflexive clitic either (*se*). Similar impersonal subject clitic pronouns exist also within Italian dialects:<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Indeed both French *on* and *omə* in the Ortona dialect derive from Latin *homo* 'man', which is used as a generic human subject.

- (42) an omə itə Ortona (Cocchi 1995: 127)  
 have(3pl) imp gone  
 ‘one has gone/people have gone’

Indeed the Bantu impersonal prefix derives from class 2 subject prefix – the one we observe in plural words indicating humans<sup>45</sup> – though its class, person and number features have faded away, to the point that it may co-occur with optional PP-agents which are not necessarily class 2/3<sup>rd</sup> person plural elements.

Conversely, the Bantu reflexive morpheme behaves as an object affix, which may be in mutual exclusion with other object affixes; this depends on how many object affixes a language allows. In languages where more affixes may co-occur, it follows other affixes and occupies the rightmost position within the affix string. However, in some languages the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular object affix may compete with reflexive for occupying the pre-root position, as seen in 3.1. above.

Interestingly, also in Standard Italian and in many Italian dialects 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person object clitics often show a different behaviour and a different positioning within the clitic string with respect to 3<sup>rd</sup> person ones.<sup>46</sup> In particular, Manzini & Savoia (2005) report many examples of Italian dialects where *si* (be it impersonal or reflexive) precedes all other clitics, including P clitics (e.g. Casaccia), but also other dialects where P clitics alone precede reflexive *si* (43a vs. 43b):

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<sup>45</sup> This fact also mirrors Cinque’s (1988) assumption mentioned above, i.e that Italian impersonal *si* is inherently [+human]; furthermore, it should be noticed that also *si* – like Bantu class 2 prefix – is inherently plural, as shown by the plural participial agreement in compound forms:

- (i) *si* è arrivati  
*si* is arrived-m.pl  
 ‘one has arrived’.

<sup>46</sup> These clitics have been labelled P (< Person) clitics just because they show a different behaviour with respect to 3<sup>rd</sup> person ones (Manzini & Savoia 2005 and related work). Besides having a different positioning, they do not show accusative/dative distinction and are often in mutual exclusion with other clitics, as observed in (ib) vs. (ia) in Standard Italian:

- (i) a glielo do  
 IO3sg DO3m.sg give  
 ‘I give it to him’  
 b \*gli ti do  
 IO3sg DO2sg give  
 ‘I give you to him’.



- (43) a a m 's met davanti Modena (Manzini & Savoia 2005/II: 28)  
 SC1 IO1sg refl put in front  
 'he puts himself in front of me'  
 b al se g met davanti  
 SC1 refl IO3m.sg put in front  
 'he puts himself in front of him'.

To sum up, all the examples of similar behavior exhibited by Romance clitics on the one hand, and Bantu affixes on the other, may endorse an attempt to offer a unitary analysis of the two sets of data.

Evidently, in the present work I am only suggesting a possible line of research, being aware that many more data would be necessary and that an analysis of micro-variation within the Bantu language family, which covers an incredibly vast area in Sub-Saharan Africa and contains an enormously high number of languages and dialects, is something that would take a very long time and the joint effort of many more researchers.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> I am optimistic, however, as research on the syntax of Bantu languages has incredibly grown in volume since the early nineties, when I started working on Tshiluba syntax, as confirmed by the many recent contributes that we may find, some of which I have cited in the present work.

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