

*Historical Cycles of Reciprocal Marking in Bantu and the Polysemy of Proto-Bantu *-an*

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The widespread Bantu verbal derivation suffix *-an* has been reconstructed in Proto-Bantu as a marker of reciprocity and associativity (Schadeberg 2003: 72; Schadeberg & Bostoen 2019: 182), a semantic category also known as “sociative-reciprocal” (Nedjalkov 2007). Across Bantu languages, the suffix is notoriously polysemous (Dammann 1954; Mugane 1999; Maslova 2007). It conveys meanings as diverse as sociative/collective, reciprocal, natural collective, natural reciprocal, chaining, antipassive, intensive/extensive, iterative, comitative/instrumental, body action middle, cognition middle, spontaneous event middle, mediopassive, potential, etc. (Bostoen *et al.* 2015). We have argued that the notion of ‘plurality of relations’, as developed by Lichtenberk (2000: 34), allows to account for the semantic extension or shift from prototypically associative meanings involving both plurality of participants and events to meanings rather uniquely pertaining to plurality of events (Bostoen *et al.* 2015).

The diachronic semantic evolution of the Proto-Bantu reciprocal marker **-an* is at the origin of several cycles of innovation in reciprocal marking. A first common innovation consists of the emergence of morphologically complex but semantically non-compositional reciprocal suffixes incorporating Proto-Bantu **-an* (cf. Dom *et al.* forthcoming). A second recurrent renewal is the development of reflexive/reciprocal polysemy out of the reflexive prefix (cf. Polak-Bynon 1983: 297-298; Marlo 2015: 9). In certain Bantu subgroups, these two cycles occurred successively (cf. Bostoen forthcoming).

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