The fronted-infinitive construction in Fwe

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1. Introduction

Fwe (Bantu, K402)

- spoken on the border of Zambia (Western province) and Namibia (Zambezi region, former Caprivi strip)
- 10,000 - 20,000 speakers (Lewis et al. 2015, Sakuhuka et al. 2011)
- Bantu Botatwe: closely related to Shanjo, Totela, Subiya, more distantly to Tonga, Ila, Lenje (Bostoen 2009, de Luna 2010)

The fronted-infinitive construction (FIC) in Fwe:

Advance verb construction (Meeussen 1967: 121), fronted-infinitive construction (De Kind et al. 2015, Güldemann 2003), verb doubling (cf. Morimoto this morning):

(1) kù-här-à  ndí-¹här-à
    INF-rake-FV        SC₁SG-rake-FV
    infinitive verb    inflected verb with high-toned subject concord
    ‘I am raking.’
2. Formal properties of the FIC

The infinitive verb always directly precedes the inflected verb:

(2)  kù-βútùk-à  ndí-βùtúk-à  
     INF-run-FV    SC_{1SG}-run-FV  
     ‘I’m running.’

(3)  *ndiβutuka kuβutuka

Prefixes only occur on the inflected verb:

(4)  object concord
     kù-tw-ír-à  ndí-mù-tw-ír-à  
     INF-pound-APPL-FV    SC_{1SG}-OC_{1}-pound-APPL-FV  
     ‘I’m pounding for someone.’

(5)  past imperfective prefix
     kù-óngòz-à  kà-ndí-òngóz-à  
     INF-shout-FV  PST.IPFV-SC_{1SG}-shout-FV  
     ‘I was shouting.’

(6)  distal
     kù-sèβèz-à  kà-ndí-ka-sèβèz-à  
     INF-work-FV  PST.IPFV-SC_{1SG}-DIST-work-FV  
     ‘I was working there.’

Suffixes occur on both verbs:

(7)  causative suffix -is-
     kù-r-ís-à  á-r-ís-à  ò-mù-cècè  
     INF-eat-CAUS-FV    SC_{1}-eat-CAUS-FV    AUG_{1}-NP_{1}-child  
     ‘She is feeding the child.’

(8)  stative suffix -ite
     kù-zik-ítè  ndi-ki-zik-ítè  
     INF-hide-STAT    SC_{1SG}-REFL-hide-STAT  
     ‘I am hidden.’

(9)  repetitive reduplication
     kù-tóndà-tóndà  ndí-tóndà-tóndà  
     INF-watch-REP    SC_{1SG}-watch-REP  
     ‘I am looking around.’
Different tenses are possible:

(10) present tense
    kù-yášhimis-à ndí-yàšhimis-à
    INF-sneeze-FV SC₁SG-sneeze-FV
    ‘I am sneezing.’

(11) past tense
    kù-kékèr-à kà-ndí-kèkér-à
    INF-plough-FV PST.IPFV-plough-FV
    ‘I was ploughing.’

(12) near future
    shunu a-βa-nce ku-zan-a βa-zan-e
    today AUG₂-NP₂-child INF-play-FV SC₂-play-SBJV
    ‘Today, the children will be playing.’

(13) remote future
    zyônà ku-nyw-a na-tu-nyw-e
    tomorrow INF-drink-FV FUT-SC₁PL-drink-SBJV
    ‘Tomorrow we will be drinking.’

Negation not possible:

(14) kù-hònd-à ndí-hônd-à
    INF-cook-FV SC₁SG-cook-FV
    ‘I am cooking.’

(15) tà-ndì-hônd-i
    NEG-SC₁SG-cook-NEG
    ‘I do not cook.’

(16) *kuhonda tandihondi

3. Functions of the FIC

1. Focus on the verb
2. Obligatory if the verb is the only element in the sentence (only in the northern variety of Fwe)
3. Progressive aspect

Function #1: focus on the verb

(17) contrastive focus:
    zyônà kw-ààzyá cì nà-nd-à-tênd-a
    yesterday SC₁G-have.not DEM PST-SC₁G-PST-do-FV
    ‘Yesterday, I did nothing.’
shùnù kù-sèβèz-à  ndí-sèβèz-à
today INF-work-FV  SC_{1SG}-work-FV
‘Today, I’m working.’

(18) information focus
question:  zi-njí  nò-tênd-ì  shùnù
COP_{8}’what  SC_{2SG}.PST-do-PST  today
‘What did you do today?’
answer:  kù-kékèr-à  kà-ndí-kèkér-à
INF-plough-FV  PST.IPFV-SC_{1SG}-plough-FV
‘I was ploughing.’

Focus on the verb, not on the entire VP

(19) focus on the verb and the object
answer to the question: ‘What did you do today?’
ndí-wá  ’ry-ángù  kà-ndí-kèkér-à
COP_{5}-field  CON_{5}.POSS_{1SG}.PST.IPFV-SC_{1SG}-plough-FV
‘I was ploughing my field.’

(20) thetic focus
The speaker is explaining to the hearer what happens during the night, while she is asleep.
ndí-sáβúrè  βá-nàkù-shàk-à  kù-mí-fùnd-ìs-àng-à
COP_{5}-machete  SC_{2}.REL-HAB-want-FV  INF-OC_{2PL}.cut-CAUS-HAB-FV
‘He keeps wanting to cut you with a machete.’

Focus marking also on non-progressive verbs:

(21) A child is brought to the clinic with a broken leg. The doctor asks what happened.
ò-mw-âncè  kù-gw-à  nà-gw-ì
AUG_{1}.NP_{1}.child  INF-fall-FV  SC_{1}.PST-fall-PST
‘The child has fallen.’

(22) answer to the question: ‘What were you doing in those times?’
kù-zyímb-à  kà-ndí-zyímb-à
INF-sing-FV  PST.IPFV-SC_{1SG}-sing-FV
‘I used to be a singer.’

Function #2 (only in northern variety of Fwe): FIC is obligatory when the verb is the only element in
the sentence

(23) a)  kù-shèk-à  ndí-’shék-à
INF-laugh-FV  SC_{1SG}-laugh-FV
‘I laugh, am laughing.’

b)  *ndí-shék-à
(24) a)  ndi-yénd-à  mù-mù-têmwà  
SC₁SG-walk-FV  NP₁₈ NP₃-forest  
‘I walk in the forest.’

b)  kù-yênda-à  ndi-yénd-à  
INF-walk-FV  SC₁SG-walk-FV  
‘I am walking.’

c)  *ndi-yénd-à

Function #3: progressive aspect:

(25)  kù-nyw-á  kà-βà-nyw-à  è-n-súndá  yò-nshê  
INF-drink-FV  PST.IPFV-SC₂-drink-FV  AUG₉ NP₉-week  CON₉-all  
‘They’ve been drinking the whole week.’

(26)  kù-g|ònt-à  á-g|ônt-à  à-m-ènji  
INF-drip-FV  SC₆-drip-FV  SC₆-NP₆-water  
‘Water is dripping.’

(27)  ò-mù-nwé  iw-ángù  kù-rèng-à  ú-rèng-à  
AUG₉-NP₉-finger  CON₃ POSS₁SG-INF-hurt-FV  SC₃-hurt-FV  
‘My finger is hurting.’

Not a canonical progressive: progressives are typically not stative (Comrie 1976), but verbs in the FIC can use the stative inflection:

(28)  kù-rérè  ndí-rèrè  
INF-sleep.STAT  SC₁SG-sleep.STAT  
‘I am asleep.’

(29)  kù-zík-ìtè  ndí-kì-zìk-ìtè  
INF-hide-STAT  SC₁SG-REFL-hide-STAT  
‘I am hidden.’

FIC can be used for actions with a very long duration:

(30)  òzyú  mw-âncè  kù-kúr-à  á-kúr-à  
DEM₁ NP₁-child  INF-grow-FV  SC₁-grow-FV  
‘The child is growing.’

(31)  kù-pòt-à  á-kàng-à  βà-kwâkwè  mwà-nânmìbìà  
INF-visit-FV  SC₁-DIST-visit-FV  NP₂-relative  NP₁₈-Namibia  
‘She’s visiting her relatives in Namibia.’
The progressive use of the FIC contrasts with a more canonical progressive with -kwesi, only used for actions that are actually ongoing at the time of speaking:

(32) è-fónì yò-zỳûmwì i-kwèsì i-rír-à
   AUG₉-phone CON₀-someone SC₀-PROG SC₀-cry-FV
   ‘Someone’s phone is ringing.’

(33) à-kwèsì à-tòmbwèr-à
   SC₁-PROG SC₁-weed-FV
   ‘She’s busy weeding.’

-kwesi is only used for actions with a fairly short duration:

(34) à-kwèsì à-sìngàβ-á mà-fútà
   SC₁-PROG SC₁-apply-FV NP₆-oil
   ‘She is putting oil on her skin.’

(35) βà-kwèsì βà-fwéβ-à mù-tòmbwè
   SC₂-PROG SC₂-smoke-FV NP₃-cigarette
   ‘He is smoking a cigarette.’

FIC can combine with -kwesi progressive to mark both focus and progressive:

(36) Someone is walking with a container full of water on her head. The container is leaking, but she doesn’t notice.
   è-ci-pùpè c-ákò kù-zỳwìzy-à ci-kwèsì ci-zỳwìzy-à
   AUG₇-NP₇-container CON₇-POSS₂SG INF-leak-FV SC₇-PROG SC₇-leak-FV
   ‘Your container is leaking.’

4. Origin of the FIC

The fronted-infinitive is a cleft construction:

(37) mbù-sùnsò ndí-ry-à
   [copulative + noun] [relative clause]
   COP₁₄-relish SC₁₅G-REL-eat-FV
   ‘It’s relish that I eat.’

(38) kù-ry-á 'ndí-ry-à
   [copulative + noun] [relative clause]
   COP₁₅-eat-FV SC₁₅G-REL-eat-FV
   ‘It’s eating that I eat > I’m eating.’

Relative clause verb takes a high tone on the subject concord:

(39) ndí-βàr-á è-m-bùkà
   SC₁₅G-read-FV AUG₉-NP₉-book
   ‘I read a book.’
The inflected verb in the FIC also takes a high tone on the subject concord:

(41) \textit{kù-βàr-à} \textit{ndí-‘βár-à}  
\textit{INF-read-FV} \textit{SC_{i1}}.\textit{REL-read-FV}  
‘I am reading.’

Nouns have two sets of copulative prefixes:

(42) \textit{indefinite, e.g. class 14 mbù-} 
\textit{mbù-sùnsò}  
\textit{COP_{14}}-relish  
‘It’s relish.’

(43) \textit{definite, e.g. class 14 mbô-βù-} 
\textit{mbó-βù-sùnsò}  
\textit{COP_{14}}\textit{NP}_{14}-relish  
‘It’s the relish.’

The FIC can also use two different copulative prefixes:

(44) “\textit{indefinite}” \textit{kù-} 
\textit{kù-kòw-à} \textit{ndí-‘ków-à}  
\textit{COP_{15}}-blink-FV \textit{SC_{1i}}.\textit{REL-blink-FV}  
‘I’m blinking.’

(45) “\textit{definite}” \textit{kó-kù-} 
\textit{kó-kù-màn-à} \textit{ndí-‘màn-à}  
\textit{COP_{15}}-INF-finish-FV \textit{SC_{1i}}.\textit{REL-finish-FV}  
‘I’ve just finished.’

Copulative prefix never takes an augment:

(46) \textit{(ò-)βù-sùnsò}  
\textit{AUG_{14}}\textit{NP}_{14}-relish  
‘relish’

(47) \textit{mbù-sùnsò}  
\textit{COP_{14}}-relish  
‘It’s relish.’

(48) *\textit{ò-mbù-sùnsò}
Infinitive in FIC also never takes an augment:

(49) \text{ndì-pàtèh-ìtè} \ (ò-)kù-nywá \ è-tiyì  \\
\text{SC_{1SG}-be.busy-STAT (AUG-INF-drink AUG-tea}}  \\
'I'm busy drinking tea.'

(50) kù-nyw-á \  \'ndí-nyw-à  \\
\text{INF-drink-FV SC_{1SG}-drink-FV}  \\
'I am drinking.'

(51) *ò-kù-nyw-á \  \'ndí-nyw-à  \\
\text{FIC is incompatible with another cleft construction:}

(52) mù-mù-témwà ndí-kì-zìk-îte  \\
\text{COP_{18}-NP_{3}-forest SC_{1SG}-REFL-hide-STAT}  \\
'It's in the forest that I'm hidden.'

(53) *mù-mù-témwà kù-zík-ìtè ndí-kì-zìk-îtè

5. Summary

- The FIC in Fwe is a cleft construction.
- The FIC marks focus on the verb or progressive aspect; the latter use probably developed out of the former (cf. Güldemann 2003).
- The focus function of the FIC explains certain restrictions on its progressive use, such as the incompatibility with another cleft construction or with negation.

Glosses

| Appl  | AUG  | AUG   | AUG
|-------|------|-------|
| FUT   | INF  | REL   | INF
| PST   | REFL | reflexive | REFL
| future| imperfective | repetitive | imperfective
| SBJV  | subjunctive | subjunctive | subjunctive
| OC    | object concord | object concord | object concord
| SC    | subject concord | subject concord | subject concord
| PROG  | progressive | progressive | progressive
| STAT  | static | static | static

References


