

The interaction of aspect, actional class, and the neuter affix *-ik* in Greater East Ruvu Bantu languages

Despite the increasing attention to the historical, morphosyntactic, and semantic analyses of verbal extensions in Bantu languages (e.g., Dom et al. 2023a, Jerro 2018, Schadeberg 2003, among others), some valency-decreasing processes in Bantu remain under-described. For example, with respect to Bantu verbs that are detransitivised by reflexes of Proto-Bantu (PB) “neuter” extension **-ik*, Dom et al. (2018:170) point out that “the data is still quite scarce, with only a few examples from a small number of different languages”. Jerro’s (2018) study of *-ik* in Kinyarwanda shows that verbs derived by this suffix result in three different meanings: stative (1), inchoative (2), and potential (3). Jerro argues that these meanings are predictable from the lexical meaning of the verb and the tense and aspect morphology with which it occurs.

- (1) *igi-kombe* *ki-ra-men-ets-e*
7-cup SM7-NON.PST-break-NEUT-PFV
‘The cup is broken.’
- (2) *iki* *gi-kombe* *cy-a-men-ets-e*
7.this 7-cup SM7-PST-break-NEUT-PFV
‘This cup broke.’
- (3) *iki* *gi-kombe* *cy-a-men-ek-a*
7.this 7-cup SM7-COND-break-NEUT-IMPV
‘This cup might break.’

Research on valency-decreasing processes in five of the Greater East Ruvu Bantu languages (Kagulu, Kutu, Kwere, Luguru and Zalamo; henceforth GER), spoken in the Morogoro region of Tanzania, has primarily focused on the correspondence types of noncausal-causal alternations (see Dom et al. 2023a, 2022), and the status of detransitivising morphemes as middle markers (Dom et al. 2023b). These studies show that the neuter suffix *-ik* (also phonologically realized as *-ek*) is found in all five languages. It is used to detransitivise a verb, resulting in stative (4i), inchoative (4ii), and potential (5) interpretations.

- (4) *u-mu-kono* *w-a* *Komba* *u-ben-ek-a* [Kagulu]
AUP¹-SM3-arm 3-CONN Komba SM3-break_something-NEUT-FV
(i) ‘Komba’s arm is broken.’
(ii) ‘Komba’s arm broke.’
- (5) *u-loles-e* *i-chi-kombe* *cho-tul-ik-a* [Luguru]
SM2SG-be_careful-FV AUP-7-cup SM7.NON_PST-break_something-NEUT-FV
‘Be careful the cup is breakable.’

Verbs suffixed by the neuter *-ik* in GER are derived from a transitive counterpart (6):

¹ AUP= augment prefix

- (6) Komba ka-ben-a m-kono w-ake [Kwere]
 Komba SM1-break_something-FV 3-arm 3-POSS.3SG
 ‘Komba broke his arm.’

The behaviour of *-ik* in GER languages differs from Kinyarwanda in several ways. First, in Kinyarwanda, the stative and inchoative interpretations available for verbs suffixed with *-ik* are associated with non-past (1) and past (2) morphology, respectively. In contrast to Kinyarwanda and many other Bantu languages, GER languages exhibit a reduced set of tense-aspect morphology (see Bar-el & Petzell 2021). For example, past is not overtly encoded while non-past/present is overtly encoded. Thus, in GER languages, the stative and inchoative interpretations of verbs derived by *-ik* are associated with the same (non-overt) morphology (4). This parallels other underived verbs in GER languages. Like most Bantu languages, GER has a class of inchoative states. When these verbs occur in the (non-overtly encoded) past, they are translated as stative (7), or inchoative (8):

- (7) Amina ka-donh-a sambi [Kutu]
 Amina SM1-be/get_tired-FV now
 ‘Amina is tired now.’
- (8) Ni-dyon-a di-bwa mi-tondo ino ni-fuk-a [Kami]
 SM1.SG-see-FV 5-dog 4-morning DEM SM1.SG-be/get_scared-FV
 ‘When I saw the dog this morning, I got scared.’

Thus, it appears that verbs derived by the neuter suffix *-ik* in GER are interpreted in the same way as underived inchoative verbs: the same past/perfective morphology yields stative interpretations (4i, 7) and inchoative interpretations (4ii, 8).

Second, in Kinyarwanda the potential is the only reading available with eventive verbs like *ku-rya* ‘eat’ when they are suffixed with *-ik*:

- (9) umu-gati w-a-r-ik-a
 3-bread SM3-COND-eat-NEUT-IPFV
 ‘The bread is edible.’
- (10) *umu-gati w-a-r-its-e
 3-bread SM3-PST-eat-NEUT-PFV
 ‘The bread got eaten.’
- (11) *umu-gati u-ra-r-its-e
 3-bread SM3-NON.PST-eat-NEUT-PFV
 ‘The bread is eaten.’

In GER, however, both the potential (12) and the inchoative (13) interpretations are available for *-ik* derived verbs:

(12) i-chi-tabu cho-som-ek-a [Luguru]
AUP-7-book SM7.PRS-read-NEUT-FV
'The book is readable.'

(13) i-chi-tabu chi-som-ek-a [Luguru]
AUP-7-book SM7-read-NEUT-FV
'The book became readable.'

In contrast to the verb in (4) above where both the stative and inchoative interpretations are available for the past tense of the *-ik* derived form, the stative interpretation of the verb in (12) is associated with present tense morphology.

Finally, In Kinyarwanda, stative verbs such as *-kunda* 'love' are not compatible with *-ik* (14):

(14) *n-da-kund-ik-a
S1SG-NON.PST-love-NEUT-IPFV
Intended: 'I'm lovable.'

However, in GER, this restriction does not seem to hold (15):

(15) Joan ko-pend-ik-a [Luguru]
Joan SM1.PRS-love-NEUT-FV
'Joan is lovable.'

In this paper we explore the interaction between aspect, actional class, and the neuter suffix *-ik* in GER languages. As Dom et al. (2018:170) suggest, "the role of aspect is pretty much uncharted territory in the literature on the neuter". This paper will thus shed light on this connection. This analysis contributes to the study of verbal extensions in Bantu languages, and in particular, the under-explored area of detransitivisers. Furthermore, this paper has implications for the growing body of literature on actional classes in Bantu languages (e.g., Bar-el & Petzell 2021, Crane & Persohn 2019, Kanijo 2019, among others), and in particular, research on state and change of state verbs.

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