

Grammar and Pragmatics in the Swahili Auxiliary Focus System

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# Grammar and pragmatics in the Swahili auxiliary focus system

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0. Linguistic problems of tense-aspect-mood are well-known for challenging lines drawn between grammar and pragmatics, or either and semantics; the speaker seems to have much freedom of choice in using the grammar to organize events into coherent discourse. At first thought, it would seem that at least time relationships among events would have a constraining effect on speakers' freedom of choice. However, it turns out that very often in languages the importance of the time relationships between events is overshadowed by the purposes for which speakers choose to mention such events. From this evolves the problem of whether in a given language a time relationship should be recognized as an element of the grammar, and its relevance to the larger discourse unit (story or whatever) considered a matter of pragmatic inference on the part of a listener, or whether, conversely, some other relationship between events is encoded in the grammar, from which a time relationship can be pragmatically inferred.

My point will be that a particular distinction within the Swahili tense-aspect system, which has previously been taken to be the problem of a grammatical or semantic distinction within tense-aspect, is something else. It is a declining distinction within an auxiliary focus system which happens to be embedded in the Swahili tense-aspect system, as is the case in many Bantu languages. I will further suggest that if grammaticalization is the process by which a set of strategies which start off being pragmatic may evolve into grammatical patterns, meaning that they somehow become obligatory in describable contexts, then there seems to be a reverse phenomenon. That is, a distinction which was once grammatically obligatory at an earlier stage of Swahili or its ancestor now seems to have reverted to a set of pragmatic strategies, much to the confusion of scholars who, over the past century, have examined Swahili, particularly its standard and Southern varieties. This process might be called "de-grammaticalization".

1. Example (1) below illustrates the problem. It is taken from a Swahili folktale recorded by Steere (1870). The variety of Swahili is a pre-standard urban Zanzibari variety, of the type which later came to be the foundation for the standard language reflected in the Swahili literature usually examined for linguistic analysis.

- (1) hata watu **wa-me-zi-juu** nyimbo zile kidogo kidogo, lakini yeye, na mamaye, na mtumwa wake **wa-na-zi-juu** sana. Na maana yake zile nyimbo mamaye **a-zi-juu**, na wale watu mjini hawajui maana yake "so then the people were getting to know (**me**) those songs little by little, but he, and his mother, and his servant knew (**na**) them a lot. And his mother knew (**a**) the meanings of the songs, (while) the people of the city didn't know their meaning." (Steere 1870: 442)

In (1) the same verb occurs three times in succession, each time with a different tense marker (henceforth TM). In (2) below, the TMs of interest are isolated and

described.

- (2) Structure: Subject.Marker -**TM** (Tense.Marker) - Object.Marker -  
Verb Root...
- a. tu-**me**-zi-jua (1p-**TM=me**-cl.10-know) 'we are / were getting to  
know them / we have / had come to know them'
- b. tu-**na**-zi-jua (1p-**TM=na**-cl.10-know) 'we know / knew /are /  
were gonna know them'
- c. tw-**a**-zi-jua (1p-**TM=a**-cl.10-know) 'we know / knew /are / were  
gonna know them'

Example (2) shows the syntactic position of the TM in Swahili, and in Bantu in general. With regard to meaning, the translation possibilities out of further context show that there is no exact correspondence with any single English device. The TMs all take their time orientation from some time reference point which depends on a larger context. That's why they may be used in either past or non-past contexts. **me** in (2)a is generally translatable distinctly from the other two, and will not be considered further here.<sup>1</sup> The problem is in distinguishing **na**, as in (2)b, from **a**, as in (2)c. Both fit into the general concept of "imperfective" aspect markers, to use traditional terminology (cf. Comrie 1976). The only thing I will say here about that is that this includes both progressive and non-progressive uses. Among non-progressive uses are Vendlerian state uses such as habitual, dispositional, gnomic and such things (Vendler 1967). It is such a state use that is exemplified in the passage in (1), for both **a** and **na**. Beyond that, the difference between them has never been adequately analyzed or even described in the literature. It is impossible to figure out from example (1), or any other set of examples.

One final thing needs to be said about the difference between **na** and **a**, which is at once obvious and turns out to be important in an unrecognized way; **na** is phonologically more substantial than **a**. It allows the TM an entire syllable on its own. **a** shares a syllable with the preceding obligatory Subject Marker. Many Swahili speakers actually call **a** the "short" form of **na**. This suggests that there is a pragmatic rather than semantic basis for the choice between them. And, in fact, **a** is more common in colloquial speech than in more formal social contexts of speech, in those dialects that use it at all.

Meanwhile, analysts of standard Swahili have insisted that **a** and **na** differ in meaning. Part of the problem is the concept of "standard Swahili" itself. All I can do here is make the observation that the written varieties of Swahili which are considered standard vary greatly in how much they use the TM **a**. All use the TM **na** much more often. Some do not use the TM **a** at all. In this they agree with certain rural dialects of Zanzibar, for which spoken texts show no use of **a**, amidst copious use of **na** (cf. Whiteley 1959). But there is no direct connection between these rural dialects, largely unknown outside of their small communities of speakers, and the standard writers, who are often second language speakers of Swahili from areas of Tanzania distant from Zanzibar. This suggests independent trends which indicate that something principled from the earlier state is continuing to evolve along similar paths in various dialects.

2. One of the most interesting and novel analyses of the standard Swahili tense-aspect system is Contini-Morava (1989). Using a variety of standard Swahili

written texts, some of which did provide a number of examples of **a** as well as **na**, she suggested the following distinction:

"The difference between **na** and **a** is that **na** singles out a point in time to which an event is related, and indicates a type of [BW: temporal] ordering relationship, whereas **a** does not explicitly relate an event to any point in time (although it can be inferred to have a time-reference, given the appropriate context)." (Contini-Morava 1989: 67-8)

Elsewhere (p.93), she states that the semantic features of **a** are "not-negated" (i.e., cannot co-occur with negative markers) and "time-relevant" (i.e., there is some relevant time orientation), and that **na** has the same semantic features plus the additional feature "INCLUDES time orientation". Thus, "INCLUDES time orientation" is the specific "type of ordering relationship" referred to in the above quote.

It will not be necessary to give a full account of the motivations underlying Contini-Morava's analysis of the intended semantic distinction between **a** and **na**. Basically, it is simply that **na** contains more information than **a**, and more specifically that **na** refers to the fact that some phase of the event it marks INCLUDES a pragmatically determined time reference point. Such inclusion accounts for why **na** may be used in either progressive or Vendlerian state contexts. That is, she proposes that progressive contexts include a single point in time as the time orientation, while Vendlerian state contexts include any or all points in a relevant stretch of time (durative) or a series of recurrent points (iterative) as the time orientation. Thus, for example in (1), the time reference point can be pragmatically inferred to be any or all points in the past reached in the development of the story by the time of the passage in (1), perhaps including, for example, the last previously mentioned perfectly marked verb (i.e., the last preceding verb marked with the TM **ka**). Since **a** has an even more general meaning, according to Contini-Morava, it can also be used in the same contexts. Thus, there is no pragmatic difference in the interpretation of **a** and **na** in example (1).

Whatever our own theoretical inclinations, I think that we can agree, with regard to this or any similar analysis, that, according to classic linguistic analysis, if **a** has a more general meaning than **na**, then there should be some contexts in which **a** can occur but **na** cannot. However, Contini-Morava (1989: 68ff, esp. 78) admits that she cannot identify them. Instead she tries to show by statistical methods that **na** is more favored than **a** in contexts where the time relationship is worthy of greater precision. In this she comes close to an older and less accurate analysis by showing that **na** is particularly favored in progressive contexts. It is less favored, though still more frequent than **a**, in Vendlerian "state" contexts. In (3) I have reproduced as Table 1 her table which shows this.

(3)	State	<u>Activity</u>	Total	(n) = number of occurrences
<b>a</b>	58% (76)	42% (55)	100% (131)	
<b>na</b>	36.8% (156)	63.2% (268)	100% (424)	

Data: HLB, HBS, AB, PP  $p < .001$

Table 1. Distribution of **a** and **na** with respects to State [BW: Vendlerian] vs. Activity [BW: generally translatable as Progressive]  
(from Contini-Morava 1989: 71)

The logic may be that in progressive contexts there is acknowledgment that the event marked as progressive is "temporary" and will end sooner or later. Habitual and other state contexts do not make an issue out of coming to an end. In terms of acknowledging that there will be a final phase to the event, such states might be said to contain less information than progressives. Or it might simply be said, to paraphrase Contini-Morava, that temporary activity generally has a perceptual salience that is worthy of the more precise specification.

Note that Table 1 shows that **a** exhibits a marked preference for states (or at least certain states) and **na** for progressive contexts (or at least certain progressive contexts). However, also notice that in either progressive or non-progressive contexts **na** outnumbers **a** in raw frequency of occurrence. This would suggest that even though progressive contexts are more often worthy of greater specification than states, states themselves are, more often than not, also worthy of the greater specification.

One attractive feature of Contini-Morava's analysis is that it allows **a** and **na** to both be used in progressive and state contexts, since that is indeed the case for standard and many Southern varieties of Swahili. And yet it helps explain the impression of many earlier observers for such varieties that **na** is more closely associated with progressive contexts than **a**.

3. When I was able to interpret Contini-Morava's analysis in the preceding way, I recognized that the difference between **a** and **na** is a matter of the amount of focus on the time relationship, NOT one of different degrees of specificity of the time relationship. The favorability of **na** to progressive contexts remains for the same reasons that Contini-Morava suggested. I also recognized that the focus difference was a consequence of Swahili's evolution from an East Bantu type of auxiliary focus system similar to some of those described by Hyman & Watters (1984). Such auxiliary focus systems pair certain TMs (but not all), in order to indicate the location or scope of the constituent with maximal focus in the clause. I reasoned that in the course of time, the difference between **a** and **na** had narrowed in its domain from differences in constituent focus to different degrees of focus on the time relationship that **a** and **na** were originally paired to have in common, and still maintain. In fact, the narrowing is not toward specializing **na** as a marker of the progressive, but simply a stage in the eventual narrowing of the difference to zero, with the imminent loss of the **a** TM.

I will now consider the earlier focus system from which **a** and **na** have evolved. One of the simplest and well-known examples of such a system, not mentioned specifically by Hyman & Watters, is the Zulu system, typical of Southeast Bantu. The system involves devices for assigning the maximal focus of a clause to one or

another constituent of that clause, and/or varying the scope of maximal focus to include the verb as well as postverbal material. The actual uses of such focus are various, such as highlighting new information or casting certain constituents into contrastive or assertive focus in the larger discourse context. Which specific use of maximal focus is intended in a particular context is a matter of pragmatic inference. In contrast, the focus system itself is grammatical, as some of the constraints on the Zulu system show.

The point of departure is a grammar in which post-verbal position has been grammaticalized as having higher focus than pre-verbal position or the verb itself. Most comparable to the reconstructable distinction between Swahili **a** and **na** are the two Zulu TMs **0** and **ya**. The examples in (4) illustrate:

(4) ZULU: Southeast Coast Bantu / Nguni group. (Doke 1968: 334-41)

- Post-V Focus.
- a. **ngi-0**-bona abantu (I-TM=**0**-see people) 'I see (the) people'  
V included in Maximal Focus.
- b. **ngi-ya** /\***0** (-ba)-bona (I -TM=**ya**-(OM=them)-see) 'I (DO) see (them)'  
 (them)'
- c. **ngi-ya** / **0** -ba-bona abantu 'I DO see *or* am seeing / habitually see (the) people' (cf. Doke 1968: 339)

In (4)a, there is actually no TM at all. The information status of the post-verbal constituent is flexible, but it is considered to be more in focus than the verb. Such focus is suitable to post-verbal position as the site for introducing either new or contrastive information. Most telling is the syntactic prohibition against the **0** TM when the verb is final, as in (4)b. Since focus grammatically increases toward the end of the clause, if the verb is at the end of the clause it has maximal focus, and therefore it must be marked by **ya** since it must be included in the scope of maximal focus.

With regard to (4)c, Doke (1968: 339) observed that **ya** is more conducive to a progressive interpretation than **0** in some contexts. About this he wrote:

"In some cases when the same adjunct is used with either tense [TM], the former [**0**] has the idea of habitual action, the latter [**ya**] of continuous action..." (Doke 1968: 167)

However, he did not identify those contexts other than to provide examples which need not have such progressive interpretations. The examples he actually offers are:

- (5)a. **ba-0**-yi-dumisa inyoka (they-TM=**0**-cl.9-worship snake)  
 'they conduct snake-worship'
- b. **ba-ya**-yi-dumisa inyoka (they-TM=**ya**-cl.9-...)  
 'they are worshipping the snake' Doke (1968: 339)

It is evident that, for the same or similar reasons to those discussed above in connection with Table 1 in (3) for Swahili, the distinction given for (5)a-b is a pragmatic effect salient to speakers when they are asked to distinguish out of further context this minimal pair differing only in the TM used. Elsewhere Doke (p.167) notes "The two tenses ... are not really distinct in meaning or significance". In appropriate contexts, either (5)a or (5)b can be either progressive or habitual (i.e.,

Vendlerian state). Thus, (5)a can also be used for progressive "they are worshipping the SNAKE", with maximal focus restricted to the postverbal constituent, and (5)b can also be used for habitual "they DO (so) worship the snake", with the verb included in maximal focus. In sum, the effect in (5)a-b involves the higher focus of **ya** than **0**, and the greater pragmatic favorability of progressive than state contexts to such higher focus.

Note also that the greater substance of the TM **ya** than **0** also contributes iconically to retracting the scope of focus from strictly postverbal material. Recall the similar iconic relation between **na** and **a** in Swahili.

**3.1.** The system of associating certain TMs to vary maximal constituent focus within the clause is a feature of many East Bantu languages, but there are interesting differences in detail among them. Closest to Swahili among the better studied auxiliary focus systems is the Shambaa system, described as such by Odden (1982), and less explicitly in various articles by Ruth Bessa (e.g., 1989). The system is more complex than Zulu's. It has three degrees of focus for some tense-aspect contexts. Example (6) illustrates:

- (6) SHAMBAA: Northeast "Coast" Bantu / Seuta group.  
Post-V Focus.  
 a. ni-**0**-dika manga (I-TM=**0**-cook cassava)  
 'I'm cooking CASSAVA (NOT something else)'  
Neutral Focus.  
 b. n-**àà**-dika (manga) (I-TM=**àà**-cook ...) 'I'm cooking (cassava)'  
V included in Maximal Focus.  
 c. ni-**ta**-dika (manga) (I-TM=**ta**-cook...)  
 'I'm COOKing (NOT EATing) (cassava) / I am SO cooking  
 (cassava) / etc.'

Typologically, we can see the Shambaa system as further elaboration of the auxiliary focus system on a Zulu-like base. As in Zulu, the **0** TM requires a postverbal constituent to take the maximal focus. But unlike Zulu, there is a further contrast between a neutral focus marker and a marker which includes the verb in the maximal focus. The neutral focus marker does not require a postverbal constituent, but if there is one it does not have the heightened focus of its counterpart following the **0** TM. Finally, the marker in (6)c explicitly includes the verb in the maximal focus of the clause. The alternative translations of (6)c show that pragmatics is involved in deciding just what the scope of focus is. It can be just the verb, or it can be the entire predicate. Also notice that iconically, the phonological substance of the three markers reflect the degree of retraction of the scope of focus from postverbal position: **0** < vowel < syllable.

Swahili and Shambaa are closely enough related to see the cognate relationship between Shambaa **àà** and Swahili **a**. It can be further suggested that the Shambaa focus relationship between **àà** and **ta** is similar to the one which once obtained between Swahili **a** and **na** respectively. The difference is that the Swahili focus relationship no longer refers to the scope of maximal focus in the clause, but more narrowly refers to the amount of focus intended for a particular time relationship between the event marked by the TM and a time reference point. Beyond that, pragmatics must be used to decide whether the focus refers to a progressive time relationship or some other kind.

4. Next, it is important to note that Swahili also has a **0** cognate for Shambaa **0**. To my knowledge, the Swahili **0** TM has never before been viewed in this way. Just as with **na** and **a**, the Swahili **0** TM is more restricted in its focus domain than its Shambaa counterpart. It is restricted to a certain syntactic type of relative clause, as exemplified in (7)a below.

(7)a. Post-V Focus. (0-Rel) SWAHILI  
 u-**0**-taka-cho (2s-TM=**0**-want-**Rel.M**) 'what you want / need'

Significantly, in this type of relative clause there is an obligatory postverbal element, the relative marker (**Rel.M**), which refers to the head of the relative clause, whether expressed or understood, as in the example. Thus, we can see that the head of the clause has more focus than the verb, and is, in fact, the maximal focus of the clause, necessarily excluding the verb. The post-verbal relative marker represents the superior focus of the head.

Another, and perhaps less language-specific way to look at it, is that relative clauses are inherently lower in focus than main clauses, where relative focus takes on a significance to clause-size constituents. From this perspective, the domain of the Swahili **0** TM has narrowed to the point that it is too low in focus to dominate a main clause.

It is worth mentioning that the particular syntactic formation for relative clauses exemplified in (7)a is restricted to a relatively small area of Northeast Bantu which includes all the closest relatives of Swahili and extends to Shambaa, e.g.,

(7)a'. Post-V Focus. (0-Rel) SHAMBAA (Roehl 1911: 158)  
 ndima ni-**0**-kunda-**yo** (work 1s-TM=**0**-want-**Rel.M**)  
 'the work I want'

Thus, Shambaa also has this context for the **0** TM, though it has a greater range of contexts, as seen in (6)a. The generalization remains the same in both languages: the verb is not included in the maximal focus of the clause.

Further removed is the Southeast Bantu relative construction with the **0** TM and additional (tonal) marking of the subordinate status of the relative clause, e.g.,

(7)a". Post-V Focus. (0-Rel) ZULU (Doke 1968: 322)  
 umuntu e-ngi-**0**-m-bona(-**yo**) manje (person Rel.M-1s-TM=**0**-3s-  
 'the person I(m) see(ing) now' see(-**Rel.M**) now)

The most relevant difference between the Southeast construction of (7)a" and the Swahili-Shambaa area construction of the Northeast Coast is that in Zulu the postverbal relative marker is optional if there is another postverbal constituent in the relative clause. In the Swahili-Shambaa area the postverbal relative marker with the **0** TM is obligatory in all contexts, e.g.,

(7)a"". Post-V Focus. (0-Rel) SWAHILI  
 mtu ni-**0**-mw-ona-**ye** sasa (person 1s-TM=**0**-3s-see-**Rel.M** now)  
 'the person I(m) see(ing) now'

At the same time, all these languages agree that there must be a postverbal relative marker to take the maximal focus if there is no other postverbal constituent in the relative clause.

It should be noted that though a relative clause may be inherently lower in focus than a main clause, there are other Swahili relative clause strategies which allow its verb to be marked by the same TMs as in main clauses. (7)b and (c) illustrate them.

- (7)b. Neutral Focus: Restricted TM. (na-Rel)      SWAHILI  
 u-**na-cho-taka** (2s-TM=**na-Rel.M-want**)  
 'what / which you want / need'  
Neutral Focus: Unrestricted TM. (amba-Rel)  
 c. amba-**cho** w-**a-taka** (COMP-**Rel.M** 2s-TM=**a-want**)  
 'what / which you want / need'

By either device the relative marker precedes rather than follows the verb, and the verb may be final in the clause, as in the examples. The construction exemplified in (7)b is restricted to certain TMs, which vary slightly according to dialect. The construction in (7)c is common to all dialects and allows the full range of main clause TMs. The lack of restrictions on the *amba*-type relative clause of (7)c is most suitable to non-restrictive relative clauses. The non-restrictive relative contains new information, so that the focus difference between it and the matrix clause is minimal, while restrictives contain given or head-defining information. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the *amba*-type of (7)c may also be used for a restrictive relative clause, since there are some TMs which can only occur in this type of relative clause. In such cases, it might be said that the focus value of those particular TMs has been grammaticalized as so high that they have become incompatible with the other forms of relativization. Again, whether a relative clause is restrictive or not is a matter of pragmatics in Swahili.

4.1. Most revealingly, the problem of the difference between the **na** TM and the **a** TM in shared grammatical contexts is paralleled by the problem of the difference between the **na** TM as in (7)b and the **0** TM as in (7)a in relative clause contexts. For example, Ashton (1944: 111) implies that **na-Rel** and **0-Rel** are distinct in the same way that **na** and **a** are in other contexts. To my knowledge, later scholars have not made more accurate observations. Contini-Morava is not unusual in completely ignoring the **0** TM (cf. p.15, where she lists all other TMs, including them with verb-final vowels as "verb markers").

Of great importance to the coherence of the auxiliary focus system is that just as the **a** TM has been declining in standard and Southern varieties of Swahili, so has the **0** TM, though with a slight time lag, leaving behind some frozen constructions of high frequency connected with particular verbs in particular uses. Some statistical figures demonstrating the parallelism of the decline are given in Table 2, presented in (8) below.

(8)	% <b>na</b> (n = <b>a</b> + <b>na</b> )	% <b>na-Rel</b> (n = <b>0</b> + <b>na-Rel</b> )
Steere (1870)	60 (n=98)	42 (n=50)
AB (1935)	69 (n=188)	56 (n=50)
MWK (1960)	96 (n=150)	92 (n=52)

Table 2. Comparison of the percentage of **na** out of all occurrences (n) of **a** + **na** with percentage of **na-Rel** out of all occurrences (n) of **0** + **na-Rel** (except auxiliary *taka*) for one mid nineteenth century Zanzibar sample and two twentieth century standard samples.

All these samples represent coastal first language Southern varieties of Swahili. AB is a sample from one of the texts included in Contini-Morava's Table 1 in (3). MWK is another text which figures in her study, but it is clear from Table 2 that it was too poor in examples of **a** to be useful for inclusion in her count. Table 2 shows that it is also too poor in **0-Rel** in comparison to **na-Rel**. It is evident that the original system of focus, already very much narrowed in its domain of operation in comparison with such languages as Shambaa, has been continuing to collapse in favor of the highest focus marker of the set, **na**.<sup>2</sup> Sooner or later the problem I have been discussing will disappear from standard and various Southern varieties of Swahili.

5. So far discussion has only considered Southern and standard varieties of Swahili. In order to provide further evidence for the proposed declining auxiliary focus system of Swahili, I must turn to the status of this system in spoken Mombasa Swahili, where the **a** and **0** TMs are still very much alive, and much more favored than **na** in colloquial speech. It was Mombasa Swahili that first provoked my interest in the problems I have discussed above. One thing I discovered in Wald (1973) was that in Mombasa Swahili speech, there were different sets of verbs which have different favorabilities to **a** and **na** for discourse-pragmatic reasons. I have since found that these differential favorabilities cut across varieties, so that they are also properties of southern and even standard Swahili, to the extent that **a** remains at all in such varieties.

The set of verbs in all samples that are most favorable to **a** I call A verbs. A verbs include those most commonly used for representing states, of which the Swahili equivalents of "know", "be able", and "want" are most frequent in discourse. One thing I immediately noticed about the A verbs was that most of them were capable of taking infinitival complements, and thus were auxiliary-like. There were, however, three A verbs, also frequent in discourse, which showed the same favorabilities but could not take an infinitival complement. They are the Swahili equivalents of "call", as in "he's called Ali", and the two verbs equivalent to "tell" and "say". It took me until I arrived at the focus analysis of the Swahili tense-aspect system to realize that what these verbs have in common with the others is that they all pragmatically favor focus on postverbal complements. The complements of "tell" and "say" are the reported speech which most frequently follows these verbs as used in discourse. In this way it is evident that as the domain of **0** TM became restricted to relative clauses, the **a** TM extended to include **0**'s former function in main clauses of restricting the maximal focus of the clause to post-verbal position.

Currently, even in such non-Southern dialects as Mombasa, the focus system oriented toward postverbal constituents is no longer evident without such further conditions, which now appear to be disjunct from each other. Thus, both infinitival complements and reported speech remain as conditions favoring the use of the TM **a**. What these contexts may have in common, as opposed to such extinct conditions as postverbal objects or adverbs, is that they are potentially more complex syntactically and informationally heavier than the latter, because they imply an entire predicate which itself may include a postverbal object or adverb. Thus, they implicate more information than a postverbal object or adverb, and are worthy of higher focus than the latter. Still there is no grammatical obligatoriness to the choice of **a** or **na** in such contexts. While historically we can see such large constituents as residual holdouts to the complete loss of the constituent focus

system, synchronically we can suspect that **a** is preferred to **na** in such contexts because it is phonologically less substantial and thus is iconically more convenient for indicating the inherently superior focus of such postverbal material.

In (9) below, Table 3 compares a Mombasa speech sample with the historical samples of Table 2 ((8) above) for three verb classes.

(9)	A	MIXED	N
<u>Mombasa (1973)</u>	68 (n=294)	53 (n=152)	23 (n=31)
Steere (1870)	74 (n=19)	16 (n=32)	00 (n=2)
AB (1935)	38 (n=52)	21 (n=52)	00 (n=8)
MWK (1960)	13 (n=53)	03 (n=39)	00 (n=7)

Table 3. Percentage of **a** of total (n) occurrences of **na + a** for the three verb classes in a MOMBASA Swahili speech sample of 18 speakers (from Wald, 1973) and selections from the three Zanzibar / standard texts featured in Table 2 in (8) above.

The three verb classes are discourse-pragmatic sets, constant across all samples. A verbs include *taka* 'want, need', *weza* 'can, be able', *jua* 'know, find out, learn...', and *ita* 'call' *sema* 'say' *ambia* 'tell', among others. MIXED verbs are frequently occurring verbs in the Mombasa (1973) sample which exhibited no critical preference for **a** and **na**. They include such common verbs as *ona* 'see, feel, think', *enda* 'go', *ja* 'come', among others. N verbs are a distinct set of verbs that are discourse-pragmatically most favorable to "resultant state" (i.e., achievement) contexts. They include *oa* 'get / be married', *simama* 'stand up / be erect', *kaa* 'stay, live, sit', *wa* 'be / become', among others. Table 3 shows the cross-dialectal validity of the three verb classes, as well as the precipitous decline in the use of the **a** TM in the twentieth century Southern / standard dialects.

The sample for Mombasa in Table 3 includes colloquial and more formal styles. Otherwise the percentage of **a** for all verb classes would be even higher. As it is, it can be seen that the Zanzibar pre-standard of Steere (1870), over a hundred years older than the Mombasa sample, is already polarized toward favoring **a** only with the A verbs. The twentieth century samples show a strong tendency toward across-the-board decline in the use of **a**, even though the A verbs remain relatively favorable. Note, in particular, that MWK (1960) exhibits only minimal retention of **a** across contexts. Nevertheless, it still shows greater favorability with A verbs than with other verb classes.

6. To conclude the theme of distinguishing semantics and pragmatics, the Swahili tense-aspect system seems to provide a case not well attested in the literature. Usually studies have focused on phenomena which start out pragmatic, grammaticalizing into obligatory syntactic features. In the collapse of the standard and Southern Swahili auxiliary focus system, certain focus relations which were earlier semantic, with syntactic consequences, present the appearance of being used pragmatically rather than with the obligatoriness associated with grammaticalization. Thus, there is no obligatoriness left to the choice between **a** and **na** in main clauses or **0** and **na** in relative clauses. There is simply a lingering tendency, much more strongly operative in Mombasa than in the South, to iconically prefer the phonologically less substantial marker when the verb is less in focus than

postverbal material, either in the same clause or in a syntactically connected following clause.

In ending, it should be mentioned that there is much more to be said about a larger range of interconnected shifts in the tense-aspect systems of Swahili and other East Bantu as the auxiliary focus system continues to decline. The narrowing domain of the **a** and **0** TMs was not the beginning of this decline, nor is the decline restricted to Swahili among the Northeast Bantu languages. In most varieties of Swahili and many adjacent coastal languages the former "perfect" markers in the auxiliary focus system went into decline earlier, and that decline had other effects on the use of the Swahili TM **na** and the auxiliaries *\*mala* and *isha* (both meaning "finish / end"), particularly in Mombasa and the rural coastal dialects, which have not been discussed here.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the preceding paper should be seen as preliminary to investigation and discussion of the larger range of shifts in the East Bantu tense-aspect systems which started earlier and whose effects continue to evolve throughout the area.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Although the TM **me** is not further considered in the text, the final paragraph of the text alludes to its further importance to an understanding of the larger series of shifts in the tense-aspect system that also affect the TMs which are the subject of this paper. In such a larger discussion the semantic and pragmatic relations of **me** to the other two markers would have to be taken into account.

<sup>2</sup> Extension of a higher focus marker at the expense of the lower focus counterpart is paralleled elsewhere in East Bantu. Thus, it can be deduced for the Northeast Interior, where the higher focus marker is *\*ne-*, prefixed to verbs, and strictly functioning to retract maximal focus in the clause to include the verb. Gikuyu reflects the earlier system to the extent that *\*ne-* is incompatible with a post-verbal question word, e.g., (*\*nĩ-*) *ũ-k ũ-gwata kĩ* (*\*Foc.M-*) 2s-TM-take what) 'what are you taking hold of?' (cf. Barlow 1960: 44). Grammaticalization of a postverbal question word as obligatorily higher in focus than the verb is typical of functioning East Bantu focus systems. However, parallel to the case of the Swahili high focus marker **na** extending its domain at the expense of the lower focus markers **0** and **a**, some of the Lake Victoria Bantu languages show innovative compatibility of *\*ne-* with a post-verbal question word, e.g., Nkore-Kiga: *n-oo-kora ki* (*\*ne-*2s-do what) 'what are you doing?' (Taylor 1985: 189). Revealingly, describers of such languages do not recognize its function as the (former) focus marker *\*ne*, but characterise it as a "progressive" marker.

<sup>3</sup> Briefly, the earlier decline involved the loss of the postverbal "perfect" marker *\*-ile*, its replacement in the south by the TM **me** (< *\*mal-ile* 'finish-PF'), originally an auxiliary, and the rise of a new "high focus" perfect using the auxiliary *-isha* 'finish'. In the Mombasa colloquial and the rural dialects the TM **me** did not replace *\*-ile*. Instead, the TM **na** adjusted to fulfill this function. In Mombasa the loss of the high focus previously associated with **na** in this function involved the reduction of **na** to a mono-segmental homorganic nasal **n**. Needless to say, discussion of the evidence for and precise details of the shifts involving the perfect markers in the former Swahili focus auxiliary system must be reserved for a separate occasion.

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