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The *ku*-marker in Swahili
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Abbreviations

1	First person
2	Second person
3	Third person
ADVZ	Adverbializer
ASP	Aspect
AUX	Auxiliary
COP	Copula
DEM	Demonstrative
FUT	Future
GEN	Genitive
IMP	Imperative
IMPF	Imperfective
INF	Infinitive
LOC	Locative
NARR	Narrative
NC	Noun Class
NEG	Negative
NOM	Nominalizer
NP	Noun Phrase
NPX	Noun Prefix
OC	Object Concord
PERF	Perfective
PL	Plural
POSS	Possessive
PROG	Progressive
PRST	Present
PST	Past
S	Sentence
SC	Subject Concord
SG	Singular
TAM	Tense-Aspect-Mood
V	Verb
VB	Verb Base
VP	Verb Phrase
*	Proto-root
#	Ungrammatical ex.

1. Introduction

This paper attempts to investigate the *ku*-marker in Swahili, a Bantu language, and its possible diachronic development. This *ku*-marker occurs in many contexts with different functions in Swahili as well as in its related languages. The aim of this paper is to investigate if the various functions of *ku*- have a common origin. To my knowledge, there are no previous diachronic studies on this issue in any Bantu language. This present study was thus undertaken to trace, if possible, the origin of the various functions of the *ku*-marker. A purely synchronic analysis cannot account for irregularities and inconsistencies within a language. A diachronic approach, however, can sometimes provide possible explanations to seeming inconsistencies. The study consists of two parts of which the first aims to give a synchronic mapping of the occurrences of the *ku*-marker in Swahili.¹ The second part is a discussion on the possible diachronic developments of this marker. In the following section, a background to the Bantu languages and especially Swahili is provided. This section also contains a brief literature overview.

2. Background: Bantu languages

2.1 *The Bantu languages*

In this section, we will look at the genetic classification of the Bantu subgroup to which Swahili belongs. There have been many attempts to classify the languages of the African continent since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Due to lack of data, and also due to the linguistic complexity of these languages, the classification is still uncertain. Williamson and Watters (in Bendor-Samuel 1989:3-40, 402-417) arrive at the subgrouping presented in figure 1 for the Niger Congo language phylum² after taking into consideration the major scholarly works³ of the last two centuries.

According to one estimate (Grimes 1996), the Niger-Congo language phylum consists of 1436 languages. This makes it the largest phylum in the world (Heine & Nurse 2000:11). The Narrow Bantu subgroup alone consists of some 500 languages spoken by at least 60 million people in sub-Saharan Africa. This subgroup is the largest and the best known of all the Niger-Congo subgroups (Hinnebusch in Bendor-Samuel 1989:450f). Swahili, as well as the other Bantu languages referred to in this study, are classified as Narrow Bantu (hereafter “Bantu”)⁴. The focus of this paper is on the Swahili language. As will be seen in the following sections, Swahili is one of the few Bantu languages where there are written records available which has its advantages in investigating diachronic processes.

¹ The *ku*-marker denoting the second person singular will not be dealt with in this paper.

² Phylum is a term used for postulated but unproven higher-order and more inclusive families. Some scholars object to this terminology. See e.g. Campbell (1998:166).

³ These have mainly relied on lexicostatistics, which is a method rejected by many historical linguists. See e.g. Campbell (1998:177ff).

⁴ Narrow Bantu is in the literature commonly called simply “Bantu” (Watters in Bendor-Samuel 1989:401).

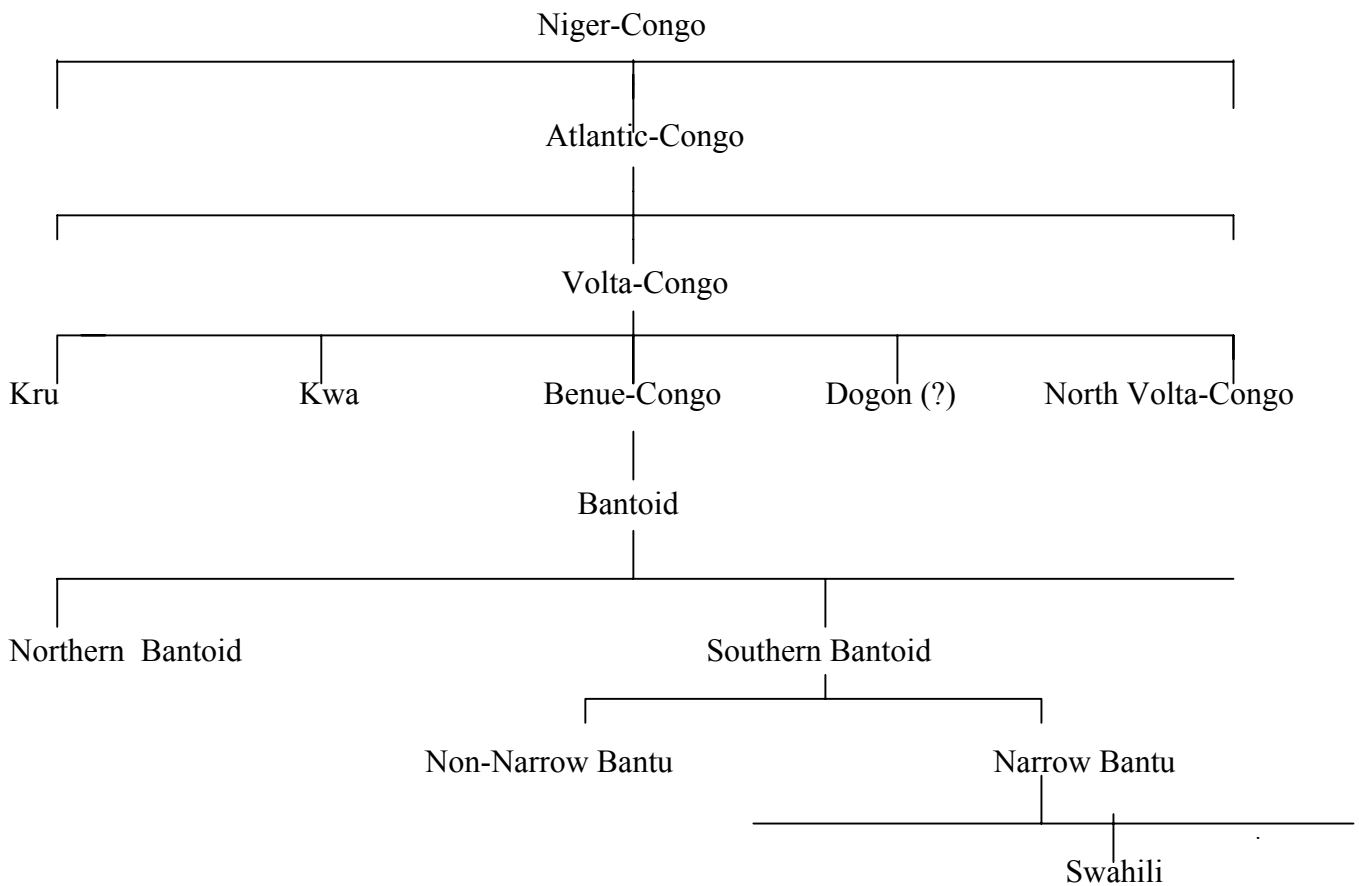


Fig. 1: Classification of the Niger-Congo language phylum

2.2 Swahili grammar sketch

Swahili, like other Bantu languages, is agglutinative. This means that most words consist of a root and one or more affixes. The basic word order in Swahili is SVO. It is also noteworthy that a variation in word order is connected with a degree of emphasis. Bantu languages are characterised by their noun classes (NC), which are usually numbered in singular/plural pairs (such as 1/2, 5/6 etc) as shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: Some Swahili noun classes

NC number	NPX	Example	Gloss
1	m-	mtu	man
2	wa-	watu	men
5	ji-, Ø	jicho	eye
6	ma-	macho	eyes
9	n-	nyumba	house
10	n-	nyumba	houses

The classes are identified by the noun prefixes (NPX) and/or by the concord their nouns take⁵. Many scholars believe that this classification was originally made on semantic grounds, although there are only traces of this earlier system left in modern Swahili. In Bantu languages, the so-called concord or grammatical agreement means that the noun determines the concord affix on other constituents of a sentence such as on adjectives, demonstratives and quantifiers. The verb also agrees with its subject (SC) and/or object (OC). The Bantu verb furthermore typically takes verbal extensions whereby for instance causative, applicative and stative are formed. Another common feature of the Bantu languages is that there is no general relative pronoun for noun phrases of all categories. A special construction is used instead which will have to agree with the relativized noun. These various features are illustrated in the examples below.

(1) Swahili (Ashton 1944:209)

Visiwa vyote vile vilivyomo katika ziwa kubwa

vi-	siwa	vy-	ote	vi-	le	vi-	li-	vy-	o-	mo	katika	ziwa	kubwa
NPX.8	island	SC.8-	all	SC.8-	DEM	SC.8-	be-	SC.8-	REL-	LOC	in	NPX.Ø ⁶ - lake	SC.Ø- big

“All the islands that are in the great lake.”

(2) Swahili (Ashton 1944:233)

Ng’ombe mkali alimkimbiza mtoto

ng-	ombe	m ⁷ -	kali	a-	li-	m-	kimb-	iza	m-	toto
NPX.9-	cow	SC.1-	fierce	SC.1-	TAM-	OC.1-	run-	APPL-	SC.1-	child

“A fierce cow made the child run away.”

2.3 The Swahili language and culture

Swahili developed during the eighth century in the coastal towns around what today is the Kenyan-Somali border. The name *Swahili* was coined by Arab scholars who visited the East African coast during the Middle Ages. They called the people of the coast *biladu’s sawahili*, which means “the towns of the coastal people”. The Swahili people are unique among the peoples of tropical Africa in having developed a written language at an early stage. They were the only writers of history of sub-equatorial Africa before the Europeans entered the scene. Through their trading, they spread their language up-country to the great lakes and served as mediators between the tribes and the external traders from Arabia and India (Knappert 1979:xii-2).

Swahili literature can be traced back to the tenth century in the coastal towns of Pate and Lamu. It consisted mainly of poetry and was almost entirely Islamic. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Swahili literature had its peak period in Mombasa and some decades later it had reached Zanzibar Island. The oldest known surviving writing is the *Hamziah* from 1652. It is a translation from Arabic of a poem to the glory of Allah and his Prophet. During the early days, most of the literature consisted of Muslim poems of this kind and the early poets mainly used the *Kiamu* dialect of Lamu and the *Kimvita* dialect of Mombasa. Arabic script was used until the 1920s (Lindfors 1999).

The 20th century brought great changes. Since the standardisation of Swahili was done in 1926, the writers adapted to the Latin script and today only a few people on the coast use the Arabic script. Today Swahili is the second literary language in Africa. There are special councils in each of the East African countries that are responsible for the issues of the Swahili language. Despite the efforts of these councils, the Swahili language is still short of up-to-date grammars and dictionaries

⁵ Traditionally in Bantu languages, the concordial prefixes of a noun determine to which class it belongs (Guthrie 1967:13).

⁶ Note that some NPXs are realized as zero.

⁷ Note that animals take NPX 1 (animate) irrespective of the NC it belongs to.

of good standard. Lodhi (2000:8), in his study of Oriental loans in Swahili, comments on the shortcomings of the most frequently used Swahili dictionary *The Standard Swahili-English Dictionary* by Frederick Johnson (1939)⁸. Up until now, it has been reprinted at least 35 times without being updated even once.

Today Swahili is widely spoken throughout East Africa. It has the status of both official and national language in Tanzania and it is a national language even in Kenya and Uganda. It is furthermore spoken in parts of Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire, Northern Mozambique, Southern Somalia, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and the Comoros. It is also understood to some extent as far away as in Madagascar, Southern Oman, Yemen, and around the Persian Gulf. The variants of Swahili spoken in what used to be British East Africa are so close that no communication problems should arise within this area. The main dialect of Swahili in the former British East Africa is the *Kiunguja* dialect from Zanzibar, which is also the basis for the standard form of Swahili today. This standard Swahili (*Kiswahili Sanifu*) contains features of the *Kimvita* dialect of Mombasa and *Kiamu* dialect of Lamu as well as the Zanzibar dialect. *Kiamu*, *Kimvita*, and *Kipate* are the dialects traditionally used by most of the early poets. *Kiunguja* was one of the last dialects to develop, but most of the prose today is in this dialect (Lindfors 1999).

About 40% of the Swahili vocabulary is of non-Bantu origin. The early loan words are mostly Arabic and Persian brought into the region mainly through business contacts. Indian languages (Cutchi, Gujarati and Hindi) have also contributed to the Swahili vocabulary with some 300 words (Lodhi 2000). Some of these are common words like *gari* (car), *ubepari* (capitalism), *embe* (mango), and *chandarua* (mosquito net). The Portuguese occupied the coast of East Africa for 200 years, but still, there are only a few words originating from them, for example *gereza* (jail), and *meza* (table). There are also a few loan words from Turkish, German, and French in today's Swahili. In this century, most of the loans are naturally from English giving rise to words like *kipilefti* (roundabout) and *daktari* (doctor).

2.4 Data and theoretical framework

Unlike most other Bantu languages, there are relatively many sources to draw from when investigating aspects of the Swahili language. For the data, this study relies heavily on E.O. Ashton's *Swahili Grammar* from 1944 with its wealth of data from newspapers, folktales and proverbs. It is still widely used as a reference grammar of Swahili (see e.g. Lodhi 2000, Maho 1999). Some of the examples used in this study were given by the native Swahili-speaker Abdulaziz Y. Lodhi. Jan Knappert's *Traditional Swahili Poetry* provided some very useful data from old Swahili poetry. The examples showing grammaticalization processes in Swahili are taken from the epic *Chuo cha Herekali* from 1728 written in the Pate dialect in the Arabic script⁹.

As for Bantu roots, Guthrie's *Comparative Bantu* (1967/71) was consulted. His comprehensive work has served as a starting point for all subsequent comparative work in Bantu Languages (Hinnebusch in Bendor-Samuel 1989:450).

Amidu, in his book *Classes in Kiswahili* (1997), devotes a whole chapter to the treatment of noun class 15. According to him, it is "toyretics" to refer to noun class 15 as an infinitive noun class in Swahili. These ideas will be commented on throughout the study.

The treatment of diachronic changes in this study relies mainly on Heine & Reh's *Grammaticalization and Reanalysis in African Languages* (1984). Their work, which deals with several of the various language families on the African continent, serves as an eye-opener to the possibilities for diachronic research in African languages. Their focus on diachronic changes in African languages is an area of research, which had not earlier gained much interest among linguists. It furthermore gives a theoretical background to diachronic processes. Bybee et al's *The*

⁸ This dictionary is based on an even older dictionary by Madan from 1903.

⁹ Transliteration was done already around the turn of the last century by scholars such as Büttner and Mainhof (Knappert 1967:2)

Evolution of Grammar – Tense, Aspect, and Modality in the Languages of the World (1994) has also been useful for the theoretical discussions of grammaticalization in the study.

Payne's *Describing morphosyntax* (1997) provided valuable input for the descriptive part of the study. It provides an outline for describing syntactic and morphological aspects of lesser-known languages, including organisation of data.

3. Background: diachronic processes

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this section is to provide a theoretical background to the study of the diachronic developments involving the *ku*-marker in Swahili, which will be dealt with in section 4. First, we will consider what we can gain by adopting a diachronic approach when analysing languages. Second, we will look at the factors causing linguistic changes in general and the specific mechanisms responsible for syntactic changes in particular. Lastly, we will look at grammaticalization illustrated by examples from Swahili ending with an in-depth study of the grammaticalization process where nominal periphrastic constructions develop into TAM-marking.

3.2 Why do we need a diachronic approach?

In this section, we will ask what we can gain from a diachronic approach to linguistics. We will see how this approach can be used for describing synchronic constructions. We will also discuss how we can do diachronic research even on languages that have no or little written history.

Firstly, it is claimed that a diachronic approach makes it possible to actually explain linguistic theory (Bybee et al 1994:3f). It becomes possible to answer why a given construction has come to have a certain function. This is what we will see in section 4, where we, at least to some extent, will be able to account for the constructions in the synchronic descriptions of the *ku*-marker in Swahili. Furthermore, linguistic changes reveal the underlying cognitive and communicative functions of grammar better than any static representation of language. Finally, similarities between languages become more apparent when languages are studied from a diachronic viewpoint. The study of Bybee et al (1994:23), as well as many other works, confirms that one sees similar paths of grammaticalization cross-linguistically. Generalizations about paths of development can be made, and through these, we can compare languages in a more efficient way. This is what Heine and Reh (1984:90-93) proposed ten years earlier. By proposing "generalisations on diachronic processes", they wanted to provide a tool by which otherwise hidden diachronic developments can be made visible. These cross-linguistic generalisations enable us to do research on historical developments even on languages where there are no early written records, which is the case with many of the African languages¹⁰. However, we need a word of caution here. When studying paths of grammaticalization and using generalisations drawn from them, we will inevitably be influenced by earlier *documented* changes. This might produce a bias towards the better-known languages of the world, such as the Indo-European languages (Bybee et al 1994:23). A diachronic approach can nevertheless be useful in many cases for describing both differences between related languages and, as will be shown in this study, irregularities within a given language. This approach to language study can thus shed light on both typological diversity and synchronic language structure (Heine & Reh 1984:11-13).

¹⁰ Not Swahili, however, as we will see in section 4.

3.3 Syntactic change

This section deals with three basic mechanisms for syntactic change namely, borrowing, reanalysis and extension. Grammaticalization processes rely on all of these and especially on reanalysis¹¹ (Campbell 1998:226-234). In this section, these mechanisms and how they relate to grammaticalization will be examined. First, we will consider what causes syntactic change.

3.3.1 What causes syntactic change?

In the past linguists were primarily concerned with *how* languages change. *Why* they change was considered a question for anthropologists as the causes were thought to be mainly cultural or social. Since the 1970s however, linguistic studies have been directed towards factors that govern language change (Campbell 1998:282f). Linguists now seem to agree that pragmatic factors are important for the rise of syntactic change although they do not agree to what degree these are responsible for the change. Givon (1979a), in his pioneering work on grammaticalization, argues that syntactic change is mainly caused by pragmatic factors (Halliday’s textual function). Heine & Reh (1984:80-83), however, claim that other functions of language are equally responsible for patterns of syntactic change. They argue that Halliday’s interpersonal function is relevant for the development of, for example, future markers from volitive or desiderative verbs¹². According to them, the major source of grammaticalization is, however, the ideational function. This is also what we will see in section 4 regarding the *ku*-marker. Most cases of grammaticalization would thus be motivated by purely syntactic considerations. It seems clear that in order to account for language change we need to look at language as a whole. We need to take into account both internal as well as external factors and how these factors interact with one another. This multifactor view of linguistic change makes us understand that describing linguistic change does not mean that we can predict the changes (Campbell 1998:295).

3.3.2 Mechanisms of syntactic change

In this section, we will look at the basic mechanisms of change: borrowing, reanalysis and extension. Examples will be given to illustrate the three mechanisms.

Not only lexical words are borrowed from one language to another but also in some cases grammatical words and grammatical morphemes may be borrowed. In Swedish, for example, there is a nominalising morpheme *-het* borrowed from German exemplified in e.g. *svensk-het* (“Swedishness”) which consists of *svensk* (“Swedish”) and *-het* (nominalising morpheme). In Swahili, where there are many Arabic influences in the vocabulary, there are also cases of syntactic borrowing. Consider the following example where the Arabic loanword *kabla* “before” has influenced Swahili on the syntactic level. Before the import of the Arabic loan construction, this meaning was expressed by the Bantu construction *alipokuwa* “when he was” and the TAM marker *ja-* as shown in (3a) below. The loan word *kabla* is instead used with the infinitive, marked by *ku-* as shown in (3b).

(3a) Swahili (Lodhi 2000:100)

Alirudi nyumbani alipokuwa hajamaliza kazi

a-	li-	rudi	nyumba-	ni	a-	li-	po-	ku-	w-	a
3.SG.SU-	TAM-	return	home-	LOC	3.SG.SU-	TAM-	REL-	NPX.15-	be-	TAM

“He returned home ...

ha-	ja-	maliz-	a	kazi
NEG.3.SG-	TAM-	finish-	TAM	work

without finishing work”

¹¹ Some linguists do not distinguish between reanalysis and grammaticalization.

¹² See the case of Swahili *taka* “want” in section 3.3.3.

(3b) Swahili (Lodhi 2000:100)

Alirudi nyumbani kabla kumaliza kazi

a-	li-	rudi	nyumba-	ni	kabla	ku-	maliz-	a	kazi
3.SG.SU-	TAM-	return	home-	LOC	before	NPX.15-	finish-	TAM	work

“He returned home without finishing work”

The above construction is not possible with *alipokuwa* as shown below:

(3c) Swahili

Alirudi nyumbani alipokuwa kumaliza kazi

a-	li-	rudi	nyumba-	ni	a-	li-	po-	ku-	w-	a
3.SG.SU-	TAM-	return	home-	LOC	3.SG.SU-	TAM-	REL-	NPX.15-	be-	TAM

ku-	maliz-	a	kazi
NPX.15-	finish-	TAM	work

By reanalysis, we mean that the deep structure of a construction changes while the surface construction remains unchanged. This mechanism is dependent on the existence of more than one alternative way of interpreting the construction in question. The English loan word *hamburger* has undergone lexical reanalysis as can be seen by the later innovation *fishburger*. While the surface structure is intact, the original meaning of “something from Hamburg” has been lost in the deep structure. Heine & Reh (1984:101) gives an example of reanalysis from Swahili that leads to syntactic change in the underlying structure. They show how a possessed noun phrase gets the function of an adposition as illustrated in the figure below:

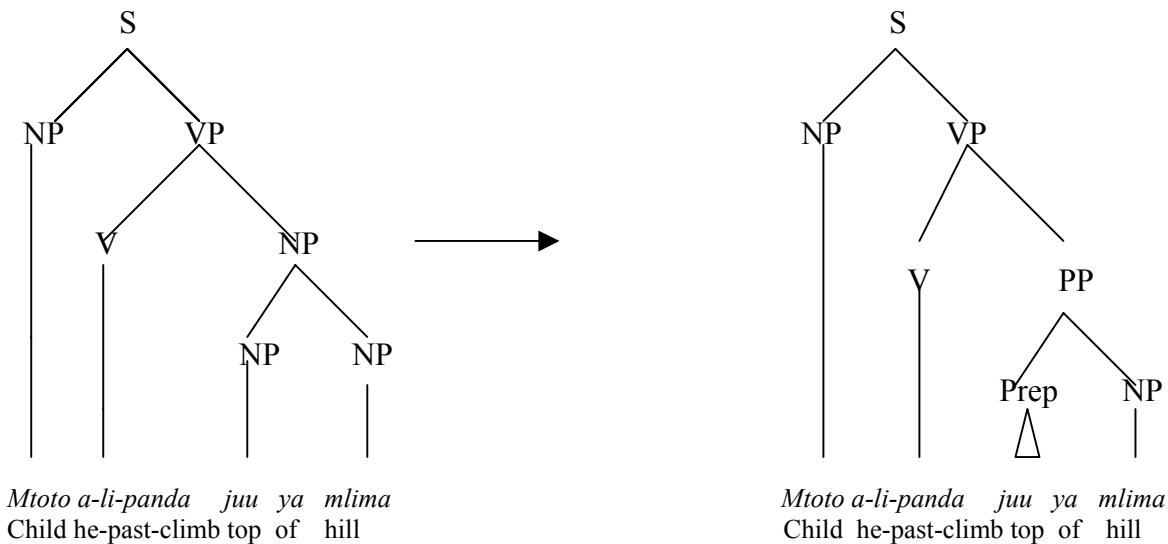


Figure 2. From genitive construction to prepositional phrase in Swahili.

Extension is another process that may lead to morphological as well as syntactic change. Here the surface structure changes while the deep structure remains the same. This is the case when a non-default morphological pattern is extended to new words, which formerly did not deviate from the default pattern. The past tense of the Swedish verb *rycka* is in Standard Swedish *ryckte*, according to the weak verb pattern. It is sometimes conjugated according to the pattern for strong verbs, leading to the new construction *röck*.

In this section, we have seen how both reanalysis and extension often have an underlying idea of analogy. In the next section, we will look at grammaticalization, which rely on the general processes discussed above¹³.

3.3.3 Grammaticalization

Traditionally grammaticalization has been defined as:

The attribution of a grammatical character to a formerly independent word
(Meillet (1912:132) quoted in Campbell 1998:238)

Later, the definition has been expanded in the following way:

Grammaticalization consists in the increase of the range of a morpheme advancing from a lexical to a grammatical or from a less grammatical to a more grammatical status.
(Kurylowicz (1965:52) quoted in Campbell 1998:238)

Heine & Reh (1984:15), whose approach will be adopted in this section, define grammaticalization in this way:

With the term “grammaticalization” we refer essentially to an evolution whereby linguistic units lose in semantic complexity, pragmatic significance, syntactic freedom, and phonetic substance, respectively.

They furthermore emphasise that grammaticalization should be regarded as an “evolutional continuum”. Although there are no discrete boundaries in these processes, dividing the process up into different stages is nevertheless useful when analysing real languages (Heine & Reh 1984:15f). Below we will look at some of the major stages in grammaticalization. The processes involved can occur on the phonetic, morphosyntactic or functional level. The processes we will discuss here are desemanticization¹⁴, affixation, erosion, expansion and fossilisation. Desemanticization seems to be the starting point for many of the other processes mentioned above. Functional changes thus seem to lead to subsequent phonological as well as morphological processes. The relationship between phonological and morphological changes seems to be unidirectional in that morphological changes may cause phonological changes but not vice versa. Phonological processes may occur independently of functional and morphological processes and they are the most easily affected processes of the three (Heine & Reh 1984:62-66). In this section, examples will be given from Swahili, illustrating the various processes in preparation for the study in section 4.

Desemanticization is one of the most important characteristics of grammaticalization processes as we saw in the definitions above. It is best described as a functional process whereby a *lexical* unit gains a grammatical function. The lexical and non-lexical functions may exist side-by-side (split) in a language or the lexical function may disappear over time (shift). The two units tend to become less and less similar due to processes such as affixation (Heine & Reh 1984:36f). By affixation, a function word is made part of another word. An affix has often been cliticized¹⁵ at some point

¹³ There are instances of reanalysis that do not involve grammaticalization, for example word-order changes and changes from one syntactic structure to another. This is why most linguists agree that grammaticalization is not a mechanism of change in its own right, but relies on other underlying mechanisms. Some scholars even argue that grammaticalization has no independent status of its own since it merely involves other kinds of linguistic changes such as sound change, semantic change and reanalysis (Campbell 1998:241).

¹⁴ “Bleaching” (Givon 1975) or “Semantic Generalization” (Bybee & Pagliuca 1985).

¹⁵ Cliticization is a process associated with phrasal constituents whereby a full word becomes syntactically dependent on other words. Distinguishing between affixation and cliticization may sometimes pose a problem. In many languages, e.g. Indo-European languages, deaccentuation is said to be a distinctive feature of cliticization. In African languages, however, suprasegmental features are often very complex involving tonal structures, making accentuation a difficult

before it becomes an affix (Heine & Reh 1984:35). Phonetically, a desemanticized unit tends to undergo erosion, which is a process that continues to work on language structure as long as there is phonological substance to work on. It leads to reduction of phonological substance in various ways. The reduction may be syllabic, changing a disyllabic phoneme in to a monosyllabic one or it may be junctural, deleting a phoneme at the boundary between two morphemes. It can of course also be peripheral, leading to the loss of word-final or word-initial phonemes. Non-segmental erosion involves a change in markedness as, for instance, when changing from a nasal to an oral phoneme in a language where one of these is the marked one (Heine & Reh 1984:21-25). When a linguistic unit changes from a semantic to a grammatical function there will also be a shift in its syntactic status, which will eventually, also lead to changes in the constituent structure (Heine & Reh 1984:36-39).

Desemanticization, affixation and syllabic erosion can be exemplified by the grammaticalization of the Swahili verb *taka* “want”, which developed into the future marker *ta-*. *Taka* is still used as the verb for “want” (4a) alongside the grammaticalised *ta-* (4b). The origin of *ta-* is revealed in the relative construction as shown in (4c). There also seems to be an intermediate stage meaning “being about to” as shown in (4d).

(4a) Swahili (Ashton 1944:36)

Nilitaka

ni-	li-	tak-	a
1.SG.SU-	TAM-	want-	TAM

”I wanted”

(4b) Swahili (Ashton 1944:36)

Nitataka

ni-	ta-	tak-	a
1.SG.SU-	TAM-	want-	TAM

“I shall want”

(4c) Swahili (Ashton 1944:208)

Tutakaokuwa

tu-	taka-	o-	ku-	w-	a
1.PL.SU-	TAM-	REL-	NPX.15-	be-	TAM

“we who will be”

(4d) Swahili (Ashton 1944:36)

Unataka kuanguaka

u-	na-	tak-	a	ku-	anguk-	a
2.SG.SU-	TAM-	be.about.to-	TAM	NPX.15-	fall-	TAM

“You are about to fall”

Expansion¹⁶ is another process that may follow desemanticization. It works by giving an existing grammatical unit¹⁷ an additional grammatical function. In this way, the function of a linguistic unit is extended to other contexts and categories by the way of syntagmatic analogy. When expansion does not affect the morphological status of the linguistic unit in question it is said to be category-

means of distinguishing between cliticization and affixation. It is therefore better to look at syntactic properties in these cases. A clitic is a linguistic unit described with reference to whole phrasal constituents (Heine & Reh 1984:32-35).

¹⁶ Not to be confused with extension, which is one of the major mechanisms of syntactic change as described in section 3.3.2.

¹⁷ As opposed to a lexical unit.

internal. A category-external expansion, on the other hand, is present when the new function affects the morphological status of the unit (Heine & Reh 1984:39-41). Category-internal expansion is here illustrated by an example from Kenya Pidgin Swahili where the demonstrative *ile* has come to be used as a relative particle.

(5a) Kenya Pidgin Swahili (Heine & Reh 1984:29)

Miti ile kubwa

mi-	ti-	ile	kubwa
NPX.3-	tree	DEM	big

“That big tree”

(5b) Kenya Pidgin Swahili (Heine & Reh 1984:29)

miti kubwa ile naanguka

mi-	ti-	kubwa	ile	na-	anguka
NPX.3-	tree	big	REL	TAM-	fall

“The big tree, which has fallen down”

Lastly, we will consider fossilisation, which is characterised by productive morphemes becoming unproductive. Fossilised morphemes have a tendency to allow co-occurrence only with certain roots or stems. They also cause irregularities in the morphological system, as fossilised morphemes may no longer be in complementary distribution according to phonological conditioning (Heine & Reh 1984:35f). Fossilisation can be illustrated by the adverbial prefix *ka-*, which commonly occurs in Bantu languages. In Swahili, however, it only occurs in one word, *kamwe* “at all, not once”. It can only be used in negative sentences. It is no longer productive in the language as it can only occur together with the archaic Swahili root *mwe* “one” as shown below:

(6) Swahili (Ashton 1944:166)

Sipendi kamwe

si-	pend-	i	ka-	mwe
1.SG.NEG-	like-	TAM	ADVBL-	one

“I do not like it at all”

The above description has shown us some examples of how grammaticalization processes work. Let us now consider how they may interact and in which order they may occur.

Most linguists assume that grammaticalization processes are unidirectional. Bybee et al (1994:12ff) for instance, claim that the development from the specific to the more general and abstract is a universal feature of grammaticalization and that this order cannot be reversed. Heine & Reh (1984:74f), however, argue that there is evidence that grammaticalization processes, especially desemanticization and cliticization, may be reversed under some circumstances.

There is also the scholarly issue of morphological cycles vs. spirals. It is obvious that lexemes that have been lost through grammaticalization tend to be replaced by new lexemes. The issue is whether these processes work like a cycle or a spiral. Heine & Reh (1984:68-74) seem to favour the spiral model, as they have shown that in many cases renovation¹⁸ takes place before the existing grammatical unit is lost. However, one should not dismiss the cycle model entirely. There is according to Heine & Reh evidence that in development of pidgins (e.g. Kenya Pidgin Swahili) old function markers are lost completely when a new one is introduced. Bybee et al (1994:295f) also discuss what happens to the old morphemes when new ones emerge. According to them, if they survive they may absorb features of the context. New grammatical morphemes are usually

¹⁸ Replacement of frozen lexemes by new ones (Heine & Reh 1984:49).

introduced in main indicative clauses leaving the old morphemes in the subordinate modal clauses. These old forms have very little semantic content and so are able to absorb some of the modal contextual meaning. If they are ever moved back into the main clause, they will retain this modal flavour, which they absorbed from the linguistic context rather than from the general pragmatic context.

3.3.3.1 From nominal periphrastic constructions to TAM affixes

In this section, we will consider a grammaticalization path common to African languages. This section will help in understanding the development of *ku-* as a negative past tense marker in Swahili, which we will look at in section 4.

The primary channel¹⁹ for tense and aspect markers in African languages is what Heine & Reh (1984:113f) have chosen to call nominal periphrasis. By this term, they mean “the tense or aspect function is introduced by an auxiliary verb while the main verb is used in an infinitive, nominalized form”. This leads to the following structural change where V1 is the main verb and V2 has an auxiliary function:

V2 – V1 > V – NP (Heine & Reh 1984:102)

This construction gives rise to a conflict between semantic and morphosyntactic structure because the main verb is encoded as a verbal complement (nominal structure) and the auxiliary is encoded as the main verb. This conflict is resolved through adjustment whereby the nominal structure expressing the verbal action regains the morphosyntax of a verb while the auxiliary degenerates to a tense or aspect marker (affixed to the main verb).

The grammaticalization path from nominal periphrasis to tense marking in Swahili has also been proposed by Dammann (1975), who suggests that the present tense marker *na-* originates from modern Swahili *na* “with, and”. He gives the following reconstruction:

(7a) Hypothetical Old Swahili (Dammann 1975)

Nina kusoma

ni-	na	ku-	som-	a
1SG.SU-	with	NPX.15-	read-	TAM

“I am reading (lit. I am with the process of reading)”

(7b) Modern Swahili (Ashton 1944:37)

ninasoma

ni-	na-	som-	a
1SG.SU-	TAM-	read-	TAM

”I am reading (now)”

The grammaticalization path from nominal periphrasis to aspect marking can be exemplified by the Swahili case of *kwisha* “to finish”. The aspectual notion of “already” was originally expressed by a periphrastic construction involving *kwisha* and a main verb in the infinitive (nominal construction) as seen in (8a). The construction was gradually reduced as seen by examples (8b - 8e). In (8e), *kwisha* has been reduced to *sha-* and the infinitive marker *ku-* has disappeared. We are left with an aspectual marker meaning “already” (Otterbrandt & Lodhi 1987:22). All of these stages are present in the language today but display a regional distribution (A.Y. Lodhi p.c.).

¹⁹ The different options available for introducing a new grammatical category within a given language are here called channels of grammaticalization following Heine & Reh (1984:113).

(8a) Swahili (Otterbrandt & Lodhi 1987:22)

Nimekwisha kufanya

ni-	me-	kw-	ish-	a	ku-	fany-	a
1.SG.SU-	TAM-	NPX.15-	finish-	TAM	NPX.15-	do-	TAM

“I have already done”

(8b) Swahili (Otterbrandt & Lodhi 1987:22)

Nimekwisha fanya

ni-	me-	kw-	ish-	a	fany-	a
1.SG.SU-	TAM-	NPX.15-	finish-	TAM	do-	TAM

“I have already done”

(8c) Swahili (Otterbrandt & Lodhi 1987:22)

Nimeisha fanya

ni-	me-	ish-	a	fany-	a
1.SG.SU-	TAM-	finish-	TAM	do-	TAM

“I have already done”

(8d) Swahili (Otterbrandt & Lodhi 1987:22)

Nimesha fanya

ni-	me-	sh-	a	fany-	a
1.SG.SU-	TAM-	finish-	TAM	do-	TAM

“I have already done”

(8e) Swahili (Otterbrandt & Lodhi 1987:22)

nishafanya

ni-	sha-	fany-	a
1.SG.SU-	TAM-	do-	TAM

“I have already done”

3.4 Summary

In this section, we have seen various diachronic processes involved in developing new grammatical markers illustrated by examples mainly from Swahili. We have seen how we can account for synchronic patterns by studying their diachronic development. The diachronic developments are not always as transparent as those discussed above, however. In the next section, we will see how less transparent synchronic constructions in Swahili can be accounted for by studying old texts, dialects as well as related languages.

4. The *ku-* marker in Swahili

4.1. Introduction

The *ku-* marker in Swahili functions as a prefix of two distinct noun classes (NC 15 and NC 17) and as a marker encoding the negative past tense. It is furthermore used as a stress affix in some constructions. In this section, the different functions of the *ku-* marker will be analysed. First, a description of the various functions will be given and then possible diachronic developments and their interrelation will be discussed.

In order to understand the *ku-* marker in Swahili one needs to have some understanding of the noun class system (class hereafter) and how these classes interact with one another. According to

Givon (quoted in Bendor- Samuel 1989:466), there are three types of gender in the Bantu class system: inherent, derived and locative genders. The *ku-* marker occurs in all of these. The inherent gender is lexical and part of the noun and spreads to the rest of the sentence through concordial prefixes. NC 15 contains inherent gender nouns with the noun prefix (in short NPX) *ku-*. The derived gender is an acquired gender, which is formed through nominalization whereby genderless words, such as verbs, may take up gender features. NC 15 also contains derived gender nouns with the NPX *ku-*, denoting verbal nouns. Nouns with inherent gender may also change their noun class by undergoing movement to another gender acquiring derivational meaning. The locative or propositional gender relates to the entire clause. This gender can be exemplified by the NC 17, which contains locative nouns, which take the concordial prefix *ku-*. Below we will see examples of all three of these gender types.

4.2 *Ku-* in NC 17 (locative gender)

In order to understand NC 15, we first need to look at the locative NC 17, as **ku-* is the Bantu root for the NPX 17²⁰ (Guthrie 1970:225). In standard Swahili, there are no nouns with inherent gender in this class with the prefix *ku-*²¹. Instead, this noun class consists of nouns with the derivative locative suffix *-ni* (Lodhi & Otterbrandt 1987:14), as shown below:

(9) Swahili

Shambani

shamba-	ni
field-	LOC

“In the field”

The locative *ku-* still, however, occurs as a concordial prefix²² on, for instance, adjectives, demonstratives and quantifiers in Swahili. As soon as a noun, irrespective of which noun class it originally belongs to, takes the suffix *-ni*, it will obligatorily take the concordial prefixes from NC 17, as illustrated in the examples below²³. This is the reason for having a NC 17 in Swahili although there are no nouns with this inherent gender.

(10a) Swahili

Shamba yangu

shamba	y-	angu
field	SC.9-	1SG.POSS

“My field”

Compare with:

(10b) Swahili

Shambani kwangu

shamba-	ni	kw- ²⁴	angu
field-	LOC	SC.17-	1SG.POSS

“In my field”

²⁰ It has the same form as the NC 15 prefix, which also is *ku-* (Guthrie 1970:225).

²¹ In the Kimvita dialect of Swahili, there is *kuhali* “place” (A.Y. Lodhi p.c.)

²² Traditionally in Bantu languages, the concordial prefixes of a noun determine to which class it belongs (Guthrie 1967:13).

²³ Depending on the context, it may also take the concordial prefixes from either NC 16 (definite place) or NC 18 (withinness).

²⁴ *Ku-* is realised as *kw-* in front of vowels (Ashton 1944:12).

In Kikongo, distinct from Swahili, there is one instance of NC 17 with inherent gender, namely [*ku-ma*] “indefinite place”. *Kuma*, however, does not have a plural.

(11) Kikongo (Laman 1912:69)

Kuma kwaku kwambote

ku-	ma	kw-	aku	kw-	ambote
NPX.17-	place	SC.17-	?	SC.17-	good

“This is a good place”

Although the locative NPX 17 has the same form as the NPX 15 (see next section), they are not regarded as homonyms, since NPX 17 can occur as an “extra” prefix (*ku-*), whereas NPX 15 cannot (Guthrie 1970:230). As this double prefix construction is not possible in Swahili, we will look at an example from Kikongo. When *kuma* is used as a formal subject or “adverbial” in Kikongo it is replaced by *ku-* (Laman 1912:69). In (12), we can see how the locative *ku-* functions as an “extra” prefix.

(12) Kikongo (Laman 1912:69)

Ku miongo

ku	mi-	onggo
NPX.17	NPX.4-	mountain

“To the mountains.”

The NPX 15 *ku-* cannot occur in front of another NPX (since they occur in front of verbs, which do not themselves take an NPX). This is the reason for distinguishing between the locative NPX 17 *ku-* which we have discussed here and the NPX 15 *ku-*, which we will look at in the next section.

4.3 *Ku-* in NC 15 (inherent and derived gender)

In this section, we will look at NC 15, which contains both inherent nouns and derived nouns. Lastly, we will also consider the use of NPX 15 *ku-* as a stress affix.

4.3.1 *Ku-* in inherent NC 15 nouns

The inherent NC 15 nouns will be treated here. We will also discuss how they can be distinguished from NC 17 nouns.

The Proto-Bantu NC 15 marker has been reconstructed as **ku-* by most scholars²⁵ (Maho 1999:247). Although NC 15 in most Bantu languages almost exclusively contains nouns derived from verbs, according to most scholars (e.g., Maho 1999:78-86), some languages’ body part terms (arm, hand, armpit, ear, leg and shoulder) should also be placed in this class as they have the same prefix *ku-*. How do we know that this prefix is the NC 15 prefix and not the locative NC 17 prefix? Laman (1912:VIII), for instance, places these body part terms in the locative NC 17 as shown in (13a). Examples (13b) and (13c) give the reason for including these nouns in NC 15. In accordance with the discussion in the previous section, this *ku-* prefix cannot appear as an “extra” prefix. *Ku-* instead appears on the bare roots, in this case *-tu*. This distinguishes NPX 15 from NPX 17.

(13a) Kikongo (Laman 1912:VIII)

kutu (ntu “head”)

ku-	tu
NPX.17-	head

“ear” (lit. “at head”)

²⁵ E.g. Bleek (1869), Meinhof (1932), Meussen (1967) and Guthrie (1970).

Placing *ku-* in front of another NPX is ungrammatical as illustrated below:

(13b) Kikongo

#²⁶*kuntu*

ku-	n-	tu
NPX.17-	NPX.9-	head

#”ear”

(13c) Kikongo (Maho 1999:80)

kutu

ku-	tu
NPX.15-	head

”ear”

In Swahili, there is only one instance of a NC 15 body part, namely *kw-apa* “armpit”. This noun, however, belongs to NC 5/6 in modern Swahili. Maho (1999:82) suggests the possibility that all the above-mentioned body parts formerly were classified in NC 15 also in languages where they today belong to other NCs.

Amidu (1997:243) claims that NC 15 contains other inherent nouns in addition to the body part terms mentioned above. The reason for not putting these nouns in NC 17 is that they can take the locative suffix *-ni* as in (14). If the *ku-* were the locative NPX 17, it could not have taken the locative suffix, as no words in Swahili take double locative marking (Amidu 1997:239). These inherent NC 15 nouns are listed in table 2. However, it could be argued that they are not prototypical nouns, as they cannot be pluralized.

(14) Swahili (Knappert 1967:205)

Kushotoni

ku-	shoto-	ni
NPX.15-	left-	LOC

“on the left”

Table 2: NC 15 inherent nouns (non-body parts)

ku-ume	the right, male side
ku-lia	the right, the eating with (hand)
ku-ke	the left, female side
ku-shoto	the left, inactive side
ku-zimu	the ancestral world, neither death nor life

Amidu (1997:234, 243) furthermore argues that all noun classes should be identified by their inherent nouns rather than by their derived nouns. In his view, it is thus incorrect to call NC 15 “the infinitival noun class”, which has been the term used by most Bantu scholars since 1850 (e.g. Laman 1912, Guthrie 1970).

In this section, we have discussed the inherent NC 15 nouns and why most scholars believe they belong to NC 15 rather than NC 17 although they take the same NPX *ku-*. In the following section, we will look at the derived NC 15 nouns and why they are commonly called infinitives.

²⁶ # means ungrammatical, whereas * means reconstructed root.

4.3.2 *Ku-* in derived nouns – the infinitive form

In this section, we will look more closely at the derived nouns in NC 15 and how they function as infinitives. Amidu (1997:237) claims “there is no such thing as an infinitive noun class, or infinitive and gerund noun class in Kiswahili.” This issue will be investigated. It will also be shown that these derived nouns in some contexts show inflectional properties.

According to Bybee (1985 as quoted in Payne (1997:25)), “derivational operations tend to be more relevant to the situation expressed in the root than do inflectional operations”. They consist primarily of operations that change the grammatical category, valence or the basic concept expressed by the root. Furthermore, important characteristics of derivational operations are that they are non-obligatory, idiosyncratic and non-productive.

Now let us look at Swahili, where nouns can be derived from verbs by prefixing a morpheme and adding a suffix. The prefixes are the noun class prefixes. The choice of the prefix describes the NC of the derived noun. The suffixes *-i, -ji, -u, -o, -e* each has its own significant meaning, whereas the remaining suffix *-a* does not (Ashton 1944:284ff). As can be seen from the table below, *ku-* in Swahili can function as a derivational prefix and these derived nouns are assigned to NC 15.²⁷ These verbal nouns express the act of doing, of becoming or the state of being (Ashton 1944:123). This is similar to what Payne (1997:224) refers to as “action nominalization”. By this term, he means a “nominalization that refers to the action, usually in the abstract, expressed by the verb root”. These derived nouns are exemplified in table 3.

Table 3. Derived nouns in Swahili (Ashton 1944:284ff, 123)

VERB (no gender)		NOUN (derived gender)	
fuata	‘follow’	mfuasi (NC 1)	‘follower’
imba	‘sing’	mwimbaji (NC 1)	‘singer’
punguka	‘diminish’	upungufu (NC 11)	‘shortage’
funga	‘fasten’	kifungo (NC 7)	‘button’
kata	‘cut’	mkate (NC 3)	‘loaf of bread’
tata	‘tangle’	matata (NC 6)	‘complications’
soma	‘read’	kusoma (NC 15)	‘to read, reading’

Let us now consider how the derived NC 15 nouns function as the infinitive form in Swahili. By infinitive, we mean a non-finite²⁸ form of the verb that typically serves to express the abstract meaning of the verb without any marking for TAM or person. The infinitive is often a distinctly inflected form used as complement of other verbs. They are also commonly used as citation forms of verbs (Trask 1993:141). Person, number, gender as well as TAM are typical inflectional operations. These operations tend to be regular and productive and appear in paradigms. They are normally obligatorily required by the syntactic environment and less relevant to the concept described by the root (Payne 1997:26). The examples below show the *ku-* marker functioning as an inflected infinitive marker. Note how *ku-* is obligatory in example (15a-b). The infinitive in Swahili can also function as the citation form of verbs as exemplified in (16).

²⁷This is the case for most other Bantu languages as well (Maho 1999:78).

²⁸ Any form of a verb that cannot occur as the only verb in a simple sentence (Trask 1993:185).

(15a) Swahili (Ashton 1944:123)

Ataka kusoma

a -	tak-	a	ku-	som-	a
3SG.SU	want	TAM	NPX.15	read	TAM

“He wants to read”

Compare with the following ungrammatical example:

(15b) Swahili

#Ataka soma

a-	tak-	a	som-	a
3SG.SU-	want-	TAM	read-	TAM

#”He wants to read”

(16) Swahili (Ashton 1944:124)

Kusikia si kuona

ku-	siki-	a	si	ku-	on-	a
NPX.15-	hear-	TAM	NEG.COP	NPX.15-	see-	TAM

“Hearing is not seeing”

In this section, we have seen how the derived NC15 nouns show both derivational and inflectional properties. It has also been argued that these derived nouns do show infinitival properties in line with mainstream definitions of the infinitive.

4.3.3 *Ku-* as a stress affix

In this section, we will examine *ku-* functioning as a stress affix. Stress as a prosodic feature normally falls on the penultimate syllable in Swahili, but some TAM prefixes cannot take the stress although they occur as the penultimate syllable. Thus in order to prevent the stress from falling on these prefixes (*na, me, li, ta, nge, ngali*) and the relative particles, *ku-* is “inserted” before all monosyllabic verb roots as well as before the two disyllabic verbs, *-enda* “go” and *-isha* “finish”²⁹ (Ashton 1944:142). This is why *ku-* is obligatorily used in some constructions (with mainly monosyllabic words). These verbs, which are some of the most frequently used, are shown in table 4. Example (17a) shows how *ku-* is used with a monosyllabic verb together with the TAM marker *ta-*. Other TAM prefixes (*ki, ka, ku, si, hu, a*), as well as the subject and object concords (SC and OC), can take the stress so the monosyllabic verbs with these affixes do not take the stress affix *ku-* (Ashton 1944:142f). Example (17b) shows how a monosyllabic verb with the TAM marker *ka-* does not take the *ku-* affix.

Table 4. Monosyllabic words in Swahili (Ashton 1944:142)

Ku-cha	To fear	Ku-la	To eat
Ku-cha	To rise, i.e. of sun	Ku-nya	To drop like rain
Ku-chwa	To set	Ku-nywa	To drink
Ku-fa	To die	Ku-wa	To be, become
Ku-ja	To come	Ku-pa	To give

²⁹ In certain dialects, even *-epa* “avoid” (A. Y. Lodhi p.c.).

(17a) Swahili (Ashton 1944:99)

Atakula

a-	ta-	ku-	l-	a
3SG.SU-	TAM-	NPX.15-	eat-	TAM

”He will eat.”

(17b) Swahili (Ashton 1944:142)

Akala

a-	ka-	l-	a
3SG.SU-	TAM-	eat-	TAM

”And he ate (NARR)”

The question is whether this *ku-* is “inserted” (Ashton 1944:143)³⁰ or whether it is retained from an earlier construction involving *ku-*. This issue will be discussed in section 4.7.

4.3.4 Nouns or verbs in NC 15?

The aim of this section is to investigate the nominal properties of derived nouns in NC 15. It will be shown that these words in Swahili are not prototypical nouns.

Amidu (1997:237) claims that it is fundamentally wrong to say that nouns of NC 15 are both infinitives and nouns at the same time since “infinitiveness” is a property of predicates and not of nouns. According to Payne (1997:33,34), however, there are ambiguous cases where words function as verbs in some contexts and nouns in other contexts. In these cases, the time-stability criterion is difficult to apply. The criteria available to distinguish nouns and verbs are the distributional and structural properties of the form. In this section, we will look at the derived NC 15 nouns from both the structural and distributional point of view.

4.3.4.1 Structural features

In this section, we will examine the structural, i.e., the internal structure of the derived NC 15 nouns. For example, some languages may exhibit case and number marking on nouns but not on other grammatical categories (Payne 1997:33). It will be shown that the derived NC 15 nouns in Swahili show both prototypical and non-prototypical noun-like behaviour.

The derived NC 15 nouns in Swahili behave like prototypical nouns in that they can take the locative suffix as shown in examples (18a) and (18b):

(18a) Swahili (Otterbrandt & Lodhi 1987:137) Inherent NC 9 noun

nyumbani

nyumba-	ni
house-	LOC

”In the house, at home”

(18b) Swahili (Amidu 1997:240) derived NC 15 noun

ku-	anguk-	a-	ni
NPX.15-	fall-	TAM-	LOC

”in falling”

The derived NC 15 nouns as opposed to prototypical nouns, however, cannot be pluralized. There is no “plural pair” in NC 15, which is the case with most other NCs (see (19a-b) below). Further, an

³⁰ Laman (1912:167) is of the view that in Kikongo the *ku-* is there to protect the stem vowel.

NC 15 derived noun cannot form the plural by taking the plural form of another NC, which commonly happens with other nouns (see (20a-b) with NCs 11/6).

(19a) Swahili (Otterbrandt & Lodhi 1987:92)

ki-	ti
NPX.7-	chair

”chair” (sg.)

(19b) Swahili (Otterbrandt & Lodhi 1987:92)

vi-	ti
NPX.8-	chair

”chairs” (pl.)

(20a) Swahili (Otterbrandt & Lodhi 1987:13)

ugonjwa

u-	gonjwa
NPX.11-	disease

“disease” (sg.)

(20b) Swahili (Otterbrandt & Lodhi 1987:13)

magonjwa

ma-	gonjwa
NPX.6-	disease

“diseases” (pl.)

Furthermore, the derived NC 15 nouns behave like non-prototypical nouns in that they can be negativized (i.e. “not to do”) by means of the derivating morpheme *toa-* or *to-* (from the verb *toa* “put out”), in the following ways (Ashton 1944:279):

(21) Swahili (Ashton 1944:279)

kutokufanya or *kutoafanya* or *kutofanya*

ku-	toa-	fany-	a
NPX.15-	NEG-	do-	TAM

“not to do, not doing”

If *toa* is used in the same way with a prototypical noun (i.e. with inherent gender), the result is an ungrammatical construction.

(22) # *kutoakitu*

ku-	toa-	ki-	tu
NPX.15-	NEG-	NPX.7-	thing

#”no thing”

In this section, it has been shown that the derived NC 15 nouns are not prototypical nouns when it comes to their structural properties. In the next section, we will look at their distributional features.

4.3.4.2 Distributional features

When studying distributional features we examine how words are distributed in phrases and clauses. For example, nouns can serve as heads of NPs and subjects and objects of clauses (Payne 1997:33).

In this section, we will see how the derived NC 15 nouns display prototypical noun behaviour at the distributional level. This point will be further emphasized by examples from old Swahili texts showing the diachronic development.

The derived NC 15 nouns function as head of NPs and like other nouns, they require concordial prefixes for both subject and object (Ashton 1944:123). In addition, a derived NC 15 noun can take an object pronoun. These claims are illustrated by the examples below.

(23) Swahili (from Ashton 1944:123f)

Kuimba kuzuri kumekwisha

ku-	imb-	a	ku-	zuri	ku-	me-	kwish-	a
NPX.15-	sing-	TAM	SC-	good	SC-	TAM-	finish-	TAM

“The beautiful singing is finished”

(24) Swahili (Ashton 1944:124)

Unakusikia kuimba kwao?

u-	na-	ku-	siki-	a	ku-	imb-	a	kw-	ao
2SG.SU-	TAM-	OC-	hear-	TAM	NPX.15-	sing-	TAM	SC-	3PL.POSS

“Do you hear their singing?”

(25) Swahili (A.Y. Lodhi p.c.)

Amekwenda kumleta

a-	me-	kw-	end-	a	ku-	m-	let-	a
3SG.SU-	TAM-	NPX.15-	go-	TAM	NPX.15-	3SG.OBJ-	bring-	TAM

“He has gone to bring her.”

In order to highlight the syntactic similarities between derived NC 15 nouns and prototypical nouns, let us look at some examples from old Swahili texts. From these texts, it can be inferred that Swahili made use of periphrastic constructions to a higher degree in the past than what is the case today. The TAM markers occurred on the auxiliary and the main verb was used in the nominalized form (with *ku-* prefix). This means that the main verb behaved syntactically in the same way as a noun. Consider the following sentence extracted from the epic *Chuo cha Herekali* dated 1728:

(26) Swahili (Knappert 1967:183)

Ilio kutangulia

i-	li-	y-	o	ku-	tanguli-	a
SC-	TAM-	OC-	REL	NPX.15	precede-	TAM

“who preceded”³¹

Compare (26) with (27):

(27) Swahili (Knappert 1967:31)

Kama ilivyo sharia

kama	i-	li-	vy-	o	sharia
as	SC-	TAM-	OC-	REL	law

“Such as is laid down in the law”

³¹ Knappert’s own translations have been used in all examples from his works.

Note how the non-prototypical noun *kutangulia* “to precede” and the prototypical noun *sharia* “law” function syntactically in the same way in the two sentences. This is in modern Swahili obscured by the grammaticalization processes that have taken place in the verbal group (see section 3.3.3.1). In modern Swahili, example (26) would be rendered as example (28) where the infinitival *ku-* has been omitted and the TAM markers occur on the main verb.

(28) Swahili
iliyotangulia

i-	li-	y-	o-	tanguli-	a
SC-	TAM-	OC-	REL-	precede-	TAM

“that preceded”

Below are two more examples ((29) is from *Chuo cha Herekali* (1728)) with the directional *kwa* construction that illustrate the same point³²:

(29) Swahili (Knappert 1967:156)
Enda kwa kuwatakasa

end-	a	kw-	a	ku-	wa-	takas-	a
go-	TAM	NPX.17-	of	NPX.15-	OC-	wipe-	TAM

“Go and wipe them away!”

(30) Swahili (Ashton 1944:1723)
Enda kwa Bwana

end-	a	kw-	a	Bwana
go-	TAM	NPX.17-	of	title

“Go to the Bwana!”

Note how the prototypical noun *Bwana* “master” and the non-prototypical noun *kuwatakasa* “to wipe them away” syntactically functions in the same way in this instance as well.

In this section, we have seen how the derived NC 15 nouns function syntactically as nouns.

4.6 *Ku-* as a tense marker

In this section, we will look at *ku-* functioning as a tense marker. In Swahili, *ku-* functions as a marker for the past tense in negative sentences. This is illustrated in the following examples.

(31) Swahili (Ashton 1944:70)
Hakutaka

h-	a-	ku-	tak-	a
NEG-	3SG.SU-	TAM-	want-	TAM

“He did not want”

(32) Swahili (Ashton 1944:350)
Mti haukufa

m-	ti	ha-	u-	ku-	f-	a
NPX.3-	tree	NEG-	SC-	TAM-	die-	TAM

“The tree did not die”

³² In modern Standard Swahili the directional *kwa* is only used with reference to people or living beings (Ashton 1944:172)

The conclusion is that the infinitive marker (the derived NPX 15) in Swahili might have originated from the locative marker through desemanticization and subsequent expansion. This, however, is not accepted by everybody (Bernd Heine p.c.).

4.7.2 From infinitive marker to TAM marker

Nominalizers are known to develop into TAM markers in languages of the world. In the Tibeto-Kinnauri languages, for instance, the perfective marker *pa-* has been shown to be a reanalysis of the nominalizer *pa-* (Saxena 1997:81). In section 4.7.2.1, we will briefly consider the possibilities that the infinitive marker *ku-* in some Bantu languages has developed into TAM marking. In section 4.7.2.2, we will examine more in depth the negative past tense marker in Swahili and how it might have developed from the infinitive marker through a diachronic process that resulted in a more agglutinative language.

4.7.2.1 From infinitive marker to TAM marker in some Bantu languages

Guthrie (1979:225, 237) lists **ku-* as the Proto-Bantu root for the infinitive as well as the NPX 15. In addition, he lists **ku-a* as the Proto-Bantu root for both the aspect of progress and the future tense. Guthrie finds it likely that this root is the result of a contraction of a “two-word tense”, where the second element was a nominalized verb with the NPX *ku-* (See section 3.3.3.1). In the following, we will briefly look at the *ku-*marker functioning as a TAM marker in the Bantu languages Kinyamwezi, Kamba and Gikũyũ, which are spoken in East Africa.

In Kinyamwezi there is a TAM marker *kv-*, which, according to Maganga & Schadeberg (1992:106), is probably derived from NPX 15. It functions as the immediate future tense marker as well as the habitual aspect marker with the addition of *-ag-* as illustrated below:

(35) Kinyamwezi (Maganga & Schadeberg 1992:120f)

Immediate future tense

	kv-			-a
SC-	TAM-	(OC)	VB	TAM

(36) Kinyamwezi (Maganga & Schadeberg 1992:120f)

Habitual aspect

	kv-			ag-	a
SC-	TAM-	(OC)-	VB-	TAM-	TAM

In Kamba there is a TAM marker *kũ-*, which refers to the present continuous or immediate future as illustrated below:

(37) Kamba (Whiteley & Muli 1962:73)

nĩnũkoota

nĩ-	n-	ũ³⁴-	koot-	a
PPX-	1SG.SU-	TAM-	pull-	TAM

“I am pulling, I am about to pull”

In Gikũyũ, which is closely related to Kamba above, there is a TAM marker *kũ-* which refers to the current future or the current past (within the day) as illustrated below:

³⁴ /k/ occurs only preceding roots in which there is an initial vowel (Whiteley & Muli 1962:18f).

(38) Gikũyũ (Mugane 1997:119)

Kamau akũnyua ũcũrũ

kamau	a-	kũ-	nyu-	a	ũcũrũ
name	3SG.SU-	TAM-	drink-	TAM	porridge

“Kamau will drink porridge”

Are the above examples of the *ku*-marker functioning as TAM markers a reanalysis of the infinitive marker, which is also *ku*- or the equivalence, in these languages? It is noted that unlike Swahili, the TAM marker *ku*- in these languages is non-past tense and non-perfective. Is it possible that the infinitival *ku*- in these languages developed into a non-past and non-perfective marker while in Swahili the same infinitival *ku*- developed into a negative past tense marker? This issue would need further investigation. In the next section, we will look at the development of *ku*- as a past tense marker in negative sentences in Swahili, where we have the possibility to investigate old texts to verify the diachronic development.

4.7.2.2 From infinitive marker to negative past tense marker in Swahili

Bernd Heine (p.c.) suggests that the negative past marker *ku*-, which was discussed in section 4.6, may be a relic of a former periphrastic construction. In this section, we will investigate the possibilities for the hypothesis that the negative past tense marker *ku*- has gone from being an infinitive marker, serving as part of a nominal periphrastic construction, to being a tense marker in Modern Swahili.

That Swahili was less agglutinative in the past can be verified from old Swahili texts. Consider the following examples from the Swahili epic *Chuo cha Herekali* dated 1728. Here we can find nominal periphrastic constructions involving both a TAM marker (in these cases the affirmative past tense) and the *ku*-marker. The *ku*-marker in these examples functions as a derivating nominalization morpheme. When compared to the modern Swahili versions (39b and 40b) it is noted that the *ku*- marker disappears, leaving the past tense marker *li*- intact. It is also noteworthy that the old Swahili texts contain numerous examples of this nominal periphrastic construction especially in the relative clauses. Typically, the non-basic clause types retain the older morphosyntactic patterns (Payne 1997:291).

(39a) Old Swahili (Knappert 1967:165)

Farasi zili kupita

farasi	zi-	li	ku - ³⁵	pit-	a
horse	SC.10-	TAM	NPX.15-	pass.by-	TAM

”Horses went by”

(39b) Modern Swahili (A. Y. Lodhi p.c.)

Farasi walipita

farasi	wa-	li-	pit-	a
horse	SC.2-	TAM-	pass.by-	TAM

“Horses went by”

³⁵ It is clear from the context that this is not the 2.SG.OBJ marker, which is also *ku*-. The first line *farasi zilikipita* “Horses went by” is followed by *zisi watu zikemeta* “without rider, neighing”.

(40a) Old Swahili (Knappert 1967:190)

Kilikyo kuwapitia

ki-	li-	ky-	o	ku-	wa-	pit-	ia
SC.7-	TAM-	OC.7-	REL	NPX.15-	3.PL.OBJ-	happen-	APPL

”That which happened to them.”

(40b) Modern Swahili (A. Y. Lodhi p.c.)

Kilichowapitia

ki-	li-	ch-	o-	wa-	pit-	ia
SC.7-	TAM-	OC.7-	REL-	3.PL.OBJ-	happen-	APPL

“That which happened to them”

The data searched for this study has not revealed any examples of this kind of nominal periphrastic construction in the negative past tense, as there were no instances of negatives in the past tense in the material. A. Y. Lodhi (p.c.), however, gives a hypothetical reconstruction as shown below. In this case, the NPX 15 *ku-* is the only part of the nominal periphrastic construction that survives, while the original TAM marker³⁶ *li-* disappears.

(41a) Old Swahili

sili kufanya

si-	li	ku-	fany-	a
1SG.SU.NEG-	TAM	NPX.15-	do-	TAM

”I did not do”

(41b) Modern Swahili

sikufanya

si-	ku-	fany-	a
1SG.SU.NEG-	TAM-	do-	TAM

”I did not do”

In accordance with the examples given above for the affirmative past tense, it seems plausible that the negative past tense marker *ku-* is actually the infinitive NPX 15 *ku-*. In the negative, the TAM marker *li-* undergoes loss leaving the *ku-* to express the tense after affixation has taken place. This grammaticalization process has thus transferred *ku-* from derivational to inflectional morphology.

Consider again the monosyllabic verbs (including the disyllabic *-enda* “go” and *-isha* “finish”) that with certain TAM markers need a *ku-* marker to take the stress while others can stand on their own as illustrated by (42) and (43). The data obtained from the old Swahili texts suggests that this *ku-* could be a fossilized remnant from an older periphrastic construction as illustrated in (44a) and (44b).

(42) Swahili (Ashton 1944:99)

Atakula

a-	ta-	ku-	l-	a
3SG.SU-	TAM-	NPX.15-	eat-	TAM

“He will eat.”

³⁶ This TAM marker is probably a reduced form of the verb for “be”.

(43) Swahili (Ashton 1944:142)

Akala

a-	ka-	l-	a
3SG.SU-	TAM-	eat-	TAM

”And he ate (NARR)”

(44a) Old Swahili (Knappert 1967:157)

Ali kwenenda yuani

a-	li	kw-	enend-	a	yua-	ni
3SG.SU-	TAM	NPX.15-	go-	TAM	sun-	LOC

“She ran in the sunshine”

(44b) Modern Swahili (A. Y. Lodhi p.c.)

Alikwenda juani

a-	li-	kw-	end-	a	jua-	ni
3.SG.SU-	TAM-	NPX.15-	go-	TAM	sun-	LOC

“She went in the sunshine”

Amidu (1997:237) argues that the *ku-* in constructions such as (44b) simply is a “stress affix”. This is, of course, its function today, but, as discussed above, it is likely that this is a retained *ku-*, a remnant of an older periphrastic construction. The TAM markers that cannot take the stress are then possibly older than the ones that do take the stress, as a morpheme undergoing grammaticalization becomes increasingly reduced morphologically and phonologically. This would need to be confirmed by further investigation.

Dialect studies give further evidence for the diachronic development discussed above. In certain phonological environments in some Swahili dialects, the derived NC 15 *ku-* has been reanalysed as part of the verb stem. This finding is in accordance with Maho (1999:82), who claims that this kind of reanalysis whereby a former prefix is reanalysed as part of the stem is rather common in Bantu languages. This reanalysis gives us a construction where a TAM marker occurs together with *ku-* (phonologically reduced through erosion to *k-*), as shown in the following examples from modern Swahili³⁷:

³⁷ In the Kiunguja dialect the derived *ku-* may sometimes also be used in the imperative, as shown below:

Standard Swahili (A. Y. Lodhi p.c.)

Osha vyombo!

osh-	a	vy-	ombo
wash-	TAM	NPX.8-	dish

“Wash the dishes!”

Compare with:

Kiunguja dialect of Swahili (A.Y.Lodhi p.c.)

Kosha vyombo!

k-	osh-	a	vy-	ombo
NPX.15-	wash-	TAM	NPX.8-	dish

“Wash the dishes!”

(45a) Standard Swahili (Otterbrandt & Lodhi 1987:138)

kuogelea

ku-	og-	e-	le-	a
NPX.15-	bathe-	APPL-	APPL-	TAM

“to swim, swimming”

45b) Kiunguja dialect of Swahili (A.Y.Lodhi p.c.)

alikojelea

a-	li-	k-	og-	e-	le-	a
3SG.SU-	TAM-	NPX.15-	bathe-	APPL-	APPL-	TAM

“He swam”

45c) Standard Swahili

aliogelea

a-	li-	og-	e-	le-	a
3SG.SU-	TAM-	bathe-	APPL-	APPL-	TAM

“He swam”

To summarize this section, we have seen how Swahili has become more agglutinative during the last centuries leading to the rise of new affixes. In this process, the nominalization marker *ku-* is reanalysed as an inflectional TAM marker. In addition, we have found a possible explanation for the *ku-* occurring in monosyllabic verbs with certain TAM markers. This hypothesis, postulated in the beginning of this section, has been confirmed by the study of old Swahili texts as well as modern dialect variants.

5. Summary

In this paper, an attempt has been made to investigate the *ku-*marker in Swahili both synchronically and diachronically. A background was given in Bantu languages in general and Swahili in particular. Attention was also focussed on Swahili literary history in order to prepare the reader for the findings in the study. In the background section on diachronic processes, several well-known grammaticalization pathways were given to illustrate the theoretical discussion.

The results of the diachronic study presented above, show that the various occurrences of the *ku-*marker to some degree can be accounted for by studying its history through comparisons with related languages, Swahili dialects as well as the study of old Swahili texts. First, we discussed the possibility that the NPX 15 originates from the NPX 17. However, we were not able to take this hypothesis any further. Second, we raised the question whether the *ku-* TAM marker in Swahili and other Bantu languages is related to the infinitive marker *ku-*. As regards the *ku-*marker functioning as the negative past tense marker in Swahili, we were able to show a possible diachronic development from the infinitive marker with the help of data from old Swahili texts. Over time, Swahili has become more agglutinative and, in the process, the infinitive marker was reanalysed as the past tense marker in negative sentences. We were not able to verify this development for the other Bantu languages. Finally, we accounted for the so-called stress affix *ku-*, which was found to be a remnant of the former periphrastic nominal construction involving *ku-*.

Swahili, as opposed to most other Bantu languages, has a written history dating back to the 17th century. To the knowledge of the present investigator, this information has not been utilized much in previous diachronic studies on the Swahili language. It seems obvious that linguists would have a lot to gain from cooperation with literary scholars in this respect. It is hoped that Bantu diachronic studies in the future will consider the old Swahili texts, as they can shed light on cryptic synchronic constructions.

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