

Finesse of Tenses in Olukabarasi, A Bantu Language of Western Kenya

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Abstract

This study is basically a description of the tense system in the Lukabarasi dialect of Oluluyia. Oluluyia is a language mainly spoken in Western Kenya. This is a synchronic study that examines the forms that mark tense, their position(s) in the verb morphology of Olukabarasi, and the time distinctions that they draw. To achieve this, interviews were conducted and tape recordings carried out to corroborate introspection data for the tense analysis. A morphological breakdown of the Lukabarasi verb was done, to isolate the forms that mark tense, which were then described to establish their form and meaning. Declerck's theory of tense was used to illustrate the tense forms. The study found out that there are nine absolute tenses in Olukabarasi. These usually occupy the second position in the Lukabarasi verb morphology. They divide the past time-sphere into four sectors and the non-past time-sphere into five. The time distinctions drawn by these tenses are, however, not rigid- there are several overlaps in the use of adjacent tense. Language typologists can benefit from this study.

Key words: Tense, Bantu, Kabras, Time, language typology

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

t ₀	- Deictic Centre Time
SA	- Subject Agreement Affix
OA	- Object Agreement Affix
RAD	-Verb Radical i.e Root of the Verb
FV	-Final Vowel
PFV	-Perfective
ADV	-Adverbial
FOC	-Focus particle
DIM	-Diminutive
AUG	-Augmentative
NEG	-Negative
PRES	-Present Tense
PRES.PERF	-Present Perfect
PROG.	-Progressive
BENEF	-Beneficiary
!	- Questionable grammaticality
PAST _a ,	-Immediate Past
PAST _b ,	-Near Past
PAST _c	-Distant Past
PAST _d	-Remote Past
FUT _a	-Immediate Future
FUT _b	-Near Future
FUT _c ,	-Distant Future
FUT _d ,	-Remote Future
1Sg, 2Sg, 3Sg	-First-, second- and third-person singular markers
1P1,2P1, 3P1	-First-, second- and third-person plural markers

Background to the Study

Tense can be defined as grammaticalisation of the relationship that holds between the time of the situation that is being described, and the temporal zero-point of the deictic context (Lyons 1977: 68; Declerck, 2015). A tensed proposition will, therefore, contain a reference to some point or period of time which can only be identified in terms of the zero-point of utterance. Gisborne (2008: 534) defines an absolute tense as a tense which relates the time of the situation directly to the 'temporal zero point' or t_0 , which is normally the time of speech and functions as an orientation time.

The phenomenon 'tense' has continued to be a controversial issue in linguistics, with widely divergent views among various schools of thought. Some claim, for instance, that there are only two tenses that are truly distinctive: past and non-past, and that what are regarded as 'tenses' should really be classified as modal and aspectual categories for instance, Posthumus. (1990). Others argue that tense has no connection whatsoever with time (c.f. Weinrich, 1964).

Linguists interested in tense have, therefore, developed approaches that do not constrain 'tense' to the delimiting methodological artefacts of any one school of linguistics, like Transformational Grammar or Montague Grammar, for instance Dahl (1985) and Comrie (1985). Working mainly with typological comparisons, these studies have revealed a lot about tense, ranging from the discovery that there exist 'tenseless' languages, to the observation that others are very rich and complex in tense marking. The Bantu languages belong to this latter category. Recommendations have been made that these languages be studied further to explicate this richness (Dahl, 1985). This study picks up from there and examines the tense system of Olukabarasi, a dialect of Oluluyia, a Bantu language.

Background to the Language

Olukabarasi is a dialect of Oluluyia, a language spoken mostly in the Western region of Kenya. Oluluyia belongs to the interlacustrine Bantu group, and has 17 dialects according to Were (1967) and eighteen according to Bulimo (2013). Olukabarasi is spoken mainly in Kabras area, Malava/Lugari subcounties, Western Region. Typical of Bantu languages, Olukabarasi is agglutinative and also highly inflectional. It is characterized by alliterative concordial morphemes, e.g 'O' "Omundu omukali omumesi wulia" (that big drunkard).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this study Declerck (2015 [1991]). It is an eclectic approach to tense involving morphology, semantics and pragmatics. The main primitives (basic times) used in Declerck's theory (Declerck 2015), are the 'Time of the Situation' (TS); the Time Established' (TE); the Time of Orientation'(TO); 'the Time of Utterance' (TU), and the temporal zero point (t_0). The term situation is a cover term for the various things that can be expressed in a clause. The term temporal zero-point (t_0) refers to the time which is the ultimate origin of all the temporal relations expressed in the sentence, that is the time to which all the situations referred to in the sentence are directly or indirectly related, and which is not itself represented as dependent on any other time. The term temporal domain means the time interval taken up by a situation or by a number of situations which are temporally related to each other by means of special tense forms. This theory helps us establish the times referred to by various tense from in Olukabarasi

Statement of the Problem

Some scholars claim that there are only two tenses: past and non-past in language. Therefore, this study sought to provide an investigation into the Lukabarasi tense system, with a view to establishing and illustrating how many and what the tense forms are, the position they take in the Lukabarasi verb morphology, and the time distinctions made by use of the tenses.

This study set out to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To identify and describe the forms used to mark tense in Olukabarasi.
2. To establish the position of tense markers in the morphology of Olukabarasi verb.
3. To discuss the time distinctions made by use of the various tense forms.

The phenomenon 'tense' has continued to be a controversial one with inconsistencies in the way it is perceived. This is partly because there haven't been enough data-based studies in other languages apart from the relatively well-studied Indo-European ones. Bruyn and de Swaart (2023:1) note that all languages have ways of referring to time and events; therefore, cognitive and semantic universals are awaiting discovery. This study was intended to systematically analyse tense in Olukabarasi dialect of Oluluyia and shed some light on some of these unclear areas.

The findings of this study have implications for typologists interested in studying tense and aspect systems of the world's languages with a view to establishing universals and locating idiosyncrasies. In-depth studies on individual languages, using a uniform descriptive framework make their logical comparisons easier and more accurate, especially when they are carried out by native speakers of the languages under study. As Wangia (2014) points out understanding language typology for translators can aid accuracy and effectiveness in translation. Further, Fortuin (2019) and Bodomo (2018) point to the need further study to look at for instance, various uses to see whether there is a logic to the way aspectual and tense functions are distributed over various languages.

Nurse (2008) argues that scholars of Bantu 'have dealt much less well with the semantics of these verbal categories, and with how they fit together in a coherent morphosemantic system for each language. The emphasis now is to start to deal with the semantics, drawing on contemporary general linguistic theory (Bybee et al. 1994, Comrie, 1985, Dahl 1985), and the systems involved. Once the structures (including tones), the categories, their semantics, and the overall system have been established for each language, a later step will be to establish the pragmatics, how the categories are used in practice.

It is often the case that many students have difficulties mastering the English tense system. Studies of the tense systems of various indigenous languages can be useful in shedding some light on the possible causes of these difficulties, and has implications for second language pedagogy in that the linguists will have a better understanding of the learners' difficulties and try to assist them in overcoming these.

Research Methodology

One of the general aims of linguistic description is to capture native speaker intuition and use of language. Being a native speaker of Olukabarasi, therefore, the researcher used her intuitions as recommended in Mutiga (2002) to generate tense paradigms using at least twenty Olukabarasi verbs. The only difference in the sentences in the paradigms was expected to be brought about by tense. The verbs were selected to represent those starting with vowels, those starting with consonants, transitive verbs and intransitive verbs.

The researcher counter-checked with other native-speakers about the time distinctions made by use of the tenses, and their overlaps. Naturally-occurring conversations were also tape-recorded in various settings, like kitchens, market-places, and work-places, to capture the use of the tenses in every-day speech. The data were transcribed orthographically and tone was indicated where semantically significant. The forms that mark tense were then isolated and described using the analytical principles of Declerck's theory of tense (2015).

Literature Review

Binnick (2017:1) observes that there is considerable controversy and disagreement between scholars of Tense, aspect and mood on all but the most basic terms, concepts, and research

findings; 'it remains an inchoate, incoherent, and very diverse field'. Traditional grammarians recognized several tenses; for instance, Jespersen (1924), recognised seven. He first of all established the present as contemporaneous with the theoretical zero-point (the 'now' of the utterance), the 'past' as 'before-now' and the future as 'after now'. Unlike what was believed in traditional grammar, the neat division of grammatical time marking in the form of tense, that was clearly divisible into past, present and future can no longer be taken for granted. The very existence of 'present tense' is argued against as in fact unnecessary. Miller (2021:6) argues for a B-Theory of tense where she negates the present tense. She contends that 'The B-theory of time naturally ... aligns with eternalism and similarly gains support from science... there is no preferred Now'.

Neither does the future fare any better. There are those who feel that the future does not even necessarily tell time and it is more of modality. Broekhuis and Verkuyl (2014) argue against a definite future tense marker demonstrated by 'will' They argue that 'in a binary system Future loses the status it has in a ternary analysis as being at the same level as Past and Present.

Furthermore, in the wake of 'empiricism', some linguists began arguing that one could only speak of different tenses if one had to do with morphologically differentiated verb forms. They argued that in fact there are only two tenses in English: past and present. Since the Transformational Generative Grammarians like Radford (1988), are mainly concerned with generating rules, the distinction of tenses into past and non-past is sufficient for them. Bjorkman (2022) points out that in contemporary generative syntax; tense is treated as representationally simplex, encoded via a syntactic head T or Infl.

Interestingly, tense has also been shown to be formally marked on word classes other than the verb in some languages. In Japanese, the expression of time relations can be marked on adjectives (see Crystal, 1987). In Potowami, the same ending that expresses past time on verbs, can be used on nouns also. It is no wonder, then, that in spite of this popular opinion, some linguists like Declerck (1991) and Dahl (1985) argue that tenses do not have to be marked by inflections on the verb (unlike what is suggested in Huddleston (1988), Quirk et. al (1985) etc.). They are of the opinion that tenses may also be marked by auxiliaries and other forms. They argue that forms such as 'will do', 'has done', 'will have done' are realizations of different tenses and do not simply express the non-past tense. Lyons (1977) goes further and argues that tense is a category of the sentence as a whole and is not just verbal inflections.

These controversies stem out of the assumption that the use of the term 'tense' is uniform. However, some linguists view tense from the semantic perspective (Lyons, 1977), while others limit themselves to a narrower, syntactic view of tense. Lyons (1977), therefore, draws the distinction between the semantic or theoretical tense, (metalinguistic or 'M-tense') and the verbal inflections that a particular language may have, called that language's tense ('L-tense'). The crucial fact about 'M-tense', whether we are talking about sentences or propositions, is that it is a deictic category. A tensed proposition will not merely be time bound or even temporally restricted; it will contain a reference to some point or period of time which cannot be identified, except in terms of the zero-point of reference. In fact, 'M-tense' and 'time' are often regarded as synonymous (Muthiani 1994, Personal Communication).

There are some languages which are said to be tenseless. Bochnak et al (2019: 409) argue that morphologically overt tense marking may be entirely absent in a language (c.f. Bittner, 2005; Lin, 2012; Mucha, 2013); or it may be optional (Bochnak, 2016; Cable, 2017; Mucha, 2017). They compared data from four typologically unrelated and under-researched languages: the optional-tense languages Washo (language isolate) and Medumba (Niger-Congo), and the tenseless languages Hausa (Afro-Asiatic) and Samoan (Austronesian). Their main finding was that the observed variation in tense systems is not a decisive factor when it comes to the availability of backward-shifted and simultaneous readings in complement clauses.

Koss et al (2022: np) point out that even though the languages found in the SE Asia region are genetically diverse, they share the absence of obligatory marking of tense and aspect. Temporal reference is marked by temporal adverbials or must be inferred from the context, and verbs are not systematically marked for (im)perfectivity. Lin (2006:1) argues that not only does Chinese have no morphological tenses but there is no need to resort to covert semantic features under a tense node in order to interpret time in Chinese. Instead, it utilises various factors such as the information provided by default aspect, the tense aspect particles, and pragmatic reasoning to determine the temporal interpretation of sentences. Particular utterances of Chinese may be translated as 'It is raining' or 'It was raining', provided that the necessary information is given in the context.

Okoth (1986) analyses some aspects of time reference in Dholuo and comes to the conclusion that there is no tense in the language, even though he does not restrict the definition of 'tense' to morphological inflections on the verb. However, as for whether tense is a necessary element in telling time in diverse languages, Pearson (2017:2) posits that 'tensed language captures facts that tenseless language cannot'. Hermont and Martins (2020: 29) differ and postulate that there are some ways of expressing more precise time information beyond grammatical categories such as "10 thousandths of seconds after the beginning of the experiment".

In this study tense was neither restricted to mean 'L-tense', nor over-stretched to be synonymous with 'time.' It is a fact that time is not only marked by tense, but by the influence of aspectual morphemes, the speech participants' knowledge of the world, text and context, and the interrelation between tense forms and temporal adverbials as well (Posthumus, 1990). The definition of Lyons (1977:68) that 'tense grammaticalizes the relationship which holds between the time of the situation that is being described and the temporal zero-point of the deictic context' was adapted.

The decision to adapt this broader view of tense was not arbitrary but well-motivated. Taking English as an example, we find that those who claim that there are only two tenses base their claim on two observations. First, there is the observation that the present tense and the preterit are the only tenses that are morphologically marked; and second, that there are two temporal perspectives.

However, one may wonder what is so particularly important about morphological marking that it should be used as the criterion for deciding what counts as tense and what does not. Often, one and the same idea is expressed morphologically in one language and periphrastically in another. For instance, the expression 'I am going' translates as '-ndatsitsanga' in Olukabarasi. The English version expresses the same message as the Olukabarasi translation, though it is periphrastic and not inflectional. As Declerck (1991) puts it: Why should we not accept that some tenses can be expressed morphologically while others make use of free morphemes (auxiliaries)? He points out that in any case, some morphological indication of tense has developed out of an auxiliary anyway. Whether a tense is morphologically marked is the result of a historical development determined by arbitrary factors that have nothing to do with the essence of the phenomenon of tense itself.

Studies on African languages are also related to this study and have provided some insights to it. Kioko (1994) was a helpful guide, especially as far as the time line is concerned, since she modified Comrie's (1985) time-line, to include the finer distinctions Bantu languages make in tense, and their overlaps. The overlaps show that the tenses in Kikamba do not have a strict temporal reference frame. Sometimes reference which would objectively require the use of a recent past (like PAST_b) can still be referred to using ' PAST_a ' without becoming ungrammatical. Muthiani (1994) similarly deals with tense and aspect in Kikamba. Unlike Kioko, however, Muthiani postulates that there are nine tenses in Kikamba. The difference comes about partly since Muthiani (1994) treats tense as synonymous with time, whereas

Kioko (1994) restricts it to morphological inflections on the verb. In other words, Muthiani can be said to be referring to the broader M –Tenses whereas Kioko refers to the more restrictive L tenses.

The researcher was of the opinion that tense has, as its primary meaning time reference, and it is an exaggeration trying to divorce 'tense' from 'time' entirely because of the metaphorical uses, which do not negate the time factor anyway. However, we tested these views in our study to investigate these differing opinions. We now discuss the tenses in Olukabarasi.

Olukabarasi Past Tenses

As in other Bantu languages (Mould 1976), tense markers in Olukabarasi occur between the subject agreement prefix (SA) and the optional object agreement infix(es) (OA) or the verb stem (herein, RAD), The verb stem is followed by a vowel suffix (sometimes referred to a FV) though aspectual extension suffixes (E) may intervene. A full verb looks like this in Olukabarasi:

SA (Sg/pl) -	TM –	(OA)-	V(RAD)-	(E) --	S
n	á	mu	khol	er	a
I	past	him	work	BENEF.	INDIC.

Adapted from Mould (1976:133)

During her research the author observed that some scholars, such as Appleby (1961), regard the tenses in Oluluyia (of which Olukabarasi is a dialect), as non-discontinuous morphemes. Others, like Mould (1976) regard them as discontinuous morphemes. However, going by the results from the fieldwork, the researcher observed that the verb final vowel takes different forms depending on the tense of the verb. Appleby (1961), also acknowledges the distinctiveness of the final vowel in regard to tense. She notes that the difference between the immediate past form and the far (distant) future, both which take the form '- àkhá -', is that the final vowel in the former is 'a', whereas in the latter it is 'e'. Thus, in agreement with Mould (1976), it was preferable to view Olukabarasi tenses as discontinuous.

The past tenses locate situations prior to t_0 . Olukabarasi distinguishes four past tenses, determined by the distance in time a particular situation is perceived as being from the coding time. These forms are '- àkhá...a', for immediate past, 'Ø...ile' for near past, 'àà...ile' for distant past, and 'á...a', for remote pastⁱ. The immediate past is usually used to refer to situations that have just happened, up to situations that happened earlier on in the same day; the near past, for situations that occurred on the previous day; the distant past for situations on the day before yesterday; and, the remote past, for situations that happened from a year ago' to many years ago'. However, these are just guidelines and not rigid rules. This is because there are a lot of overlaps in the use of the tenses, and it is up to the user to decide on which tense will best portray their perception of time. When talking about months, for instance, a situation that occurred this month' can be discussed in the immediate past, one that occurred 'last month' in the near past, that which occurred two months ago, in the distant past, and that which occurred many months ago' in the remote past. Examples (a), (b), (c) and (d) below, are typical examples of the immediate past, the near past, the distant past, and the remote past respectively:

- a. (i) Khwakhetsa saa tsino
 Khu- àkhá-itsa saa tsino
 1PI - PASTa RAD (come) time this'
 We have come this time
 We came a short while ago

- (ii) Ndakhakhufuchila obusuma saa tsino
N- àkhà -khu-fuk-ila obusuma saa tsino
1Sg- PASTa -2sg-RAD-BENEF ugali time this
I cooked *ugali* for you a short while ago.
- (iii) Wakhoola
Wa- àkhà -ula
2Sg- PASTa RAD
You have arrived
You arrived a short while ago
- b. (i) Khwitsile asubuyi
Khu- Ø- i-its-ilenibushiere
1Pl-PAST_b-RAD-PFV this morning
We came this morning.
- (ii) Emufuchile obusuma saa saba
E- Ø m-u- fuk- ile obusuma saa saba
1Sg- PAST_b, 2sg-RAD-BENEF ugali time seven
I cooked thick porridge for him at one o'clock.
- (iii) Alile angolobe
A- Ø - li- ile angolobe
3Sg- PAST_b RAD-PFV in the evening
He ate in the evening.
- c. (i) Khwayetsile mungolobe
Khu- àà -its-il-e mungolobe
1Pl- PAST_c RAD-PFV yesterday
We came yesterday.
- (ii) Ndamufuchlle obusuma lwabele
N- àà - mu- fuk- ile obusuma lwabele
1SG- PAST_c 3sg-RAD-BENEF the day that was
I cooked thick porridge for him the day before yesterday.
- (iii) Wayolile mushiro
U- àà -ui-il-e mushiro
2Sg- PAST_c RAD-PFV in the night
You arrived at night.
- d. (i) Khwetsa omwaka kwali
Khu- á -itsa omwaka kwali
2pl- PAST_d -RAD year that was
We came last year but one.
- (ii) Ndamufuchila obusuma omwaka kwawele
N- á -mu-fuk-ila obusuma omwaka kwawele
1Sg-PAST_d-2sg-RAD-BENEF ugali year last
I cooked thick porridge for him last year.
- (iii) Woola khale wene
U- á -ula khale wene
2Sg- PAST_d -RAD a long time very
You arrived a long time ago.

The Present Tenses

As Jespersen (1924:258) notes, the concept present time theoretically, is a point which seems to have no duration no more than a point in theoretic geometry has dimension. Some scientific experiments have suggested that the present lasts three seconds. It is not easy for a situation to

coincide perfectly with the present moment, and, therefore, in practice, the present tense is characteristically used to refer to situations which occupy an appreciable duration. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines present tense as “the tense of a verb that expresses action or state in the present time and is used of what occurs or is true at the time of speaking and of what is habitual or characteristic or is always or necessarily true, that is sometimes used to refer to action in the past, and that is sometimes used for future events.” The length of time that the present tense is used to refer to varies greatly according to circumstances, as can be seen in (e) below:

- e. (i) Wubele inzala sa tsino
S/he is hungry at this time).
(i i) Alalwalanga okhurula mungolobe
S/he is being sick from yesterday.
(i i i) [S/he has been sick since yesterday] W u f w i l e
(She is dead).

With regard to the present tense therefore, Olukabarasi, like other languages, only requires that the theoretical zero-point 'now', in its strictest sense, falls within the period alluded to. This definition applies to 'eternal' truths and generic propositions such as those in (f) below:

- f. (i) Tsimbwa tsialula
Dogs are harsh
(ii) Indala notasakho tsitaru ni tsine
One plus three is four

It is in fact notable that most, or all, of our pronunciations about the present time necessarily concern some part of what belongs to the past and to the future. In Olukabarasi, the present tense is not overtly marked and we can say that it is marked by the zero morph. Present time is marked by the use of the immediate past and immediate future forms, in conjunction with aspectual morphemes. These are, the discontinuous morpheme 'là...nga', for the present progressive, and 'Ø ...ile' for the present perfect'.

The Present Progressive

The use of this present time form stretches from the immediate past time to the immediate future. The form 'là...nga' is not only used to mark present time, but is also a marker for on-going activities. It will therefore be referred to as Present Progressive. Typical examples of its use can be seen in (g) below:

- g. (i) Alafuyanga tsingubo
A- là -fuya-nga tsingubo
3Sg- FUT_a -RAD-PROG clothes
S/he is washing clothes.
(iii) Balakonanga
Ba- là -kona-nga
3P1- FUT_a -RAD- PROG
They are sleeping
(iii) Baletsanga
Ba- là -its-a-nga
3P1- FUT_a -RAD- PROG
They are coming

In examples (i) and (ii) above, the interpretation is 'current on-going activities'. Current activities are continuing; therefore, the present progressive form is appropriate. In example (iii) above, the form can also be used to signify immediate future. Example (iv) below is also an example of such a use:

- (iv) Khavele alena? (Where is Khavele?).
Aletsanga (She is going to come -in a short while).

As in the case with Kikamba, (Kioko, 1994), a form can be said to signify a situation coming into being. If it is affixed to a verb that describes an activity involving the repetition of similar actions e.g., 'lima' (dig), and 'lia' (eat), the immediate future meaning is encoded for each one of the series of the actions, thus producing a progressive meaning. Each of the component actions will be viewed in the immediate future time, and, since they follow each other in progression, the result is given a progressive interpretation. In conclusion, the form 'là...nga' is a present time indicator and is used for situations which are just beginning. It is actually a combination of the form for immediate future, 'là' with the progressive aspect marker '-nga-', since, in essence, the present time now is only a fleeting period, hard to capture, but which certainly stretches into the immediate future and covers ongoing activities. More typical examples of this form are shown in (h) below:

- h. (i) Aletsanga
A- là -itsa-nga
1SG- FUT_a -RAD-PROG
He will come immediately. (He is coming)
- (ii) Olalimanga
O- là - lim- a- nga
2SG- FUT_a,-RAD-PROG
You are digging.
- (iii) Salatsitsanga ta
Si-a- là -tsitsa-nga ta
NEG-3Sg- FUT_a-RAD- PROG not
He is not going.

The Present Perfect

This time form is primarily used to indicate that an action or state is situated in the present, but in addition to tense information, it also indicates that a situation has just been completed. The suffix indicates a completed action; therefore, this time form carries aspectual information as well, and hence the term present perfect. Examples of this form can be seen in (i) below:

- (i) Witsile
u-ø- its-ile
2Sg-PRES-RAD-PERF
You have come.
- (ii) Khafwile
Kha- ø- fwa- ile
DIM-PRES-RAD-PERF
It (little one) has died.
- (iii) Basakale eshieyo
Ba- ø- sakal-ile eshieyo
3Pl-PRES-RAD-PERF broom
They have looked for the broom.

The Future Tenses

Since human beings do not know so much about the future as about the past, they are obliged to talk about it in a more speculative way. In fact, many languages are said to have no future tense proper, or have given up forms which they once had, and replaced them with circuitous substitutes. In Olukabarasi the future is marked by use of several forms: 'là...a', for immediate future, 'na... Ø ...e' for near future, '- àkhà...e', for the distant future and 'lì...a', for the remote future.

The Immediate Future

This form is typically used for locating situations expected to occur shortly after the present moment, up to the next day. Example (j) illustrates some characteristic uses thereof:

- j. (i) Khuletsa angolobe
 Khu- là -itsa angolobe
 1P1- FUT_a-RAD-in the evening
 We shall come in the evening.
- (ii) Alaroba obusala mutsuli
 A- là -rob-a obusala mutsuli
 3Sg- FUT_a -RAD porridge tomorrow
 She will cook porridge tomorrow
- (iii) Alamulimila saayino
 A- là - mu- lim- ila saayino
 3Sg- FUT_a -3Sg-RAD-BENEF time this
 He will dig for him this time.

The Near Future 'na... Ø ...e'

The form 'na... Ø ...e' is used to locate situations in the near future. This form is used for situations perceived as going to occur in the period stretching from later tomorrow, up to a year. It is illustrated in section (j) below

- j. (i) Nakhwitse mutsuli
 N-a-khu- itse mutsuli
 FOC-3P1- FUT_b -RAD tomorrow
 We shall come tomorrow.
- (ii) Naarobe obusala bushia
 Na- á -rob-e obusala bushia
 FOC-3Sg- FUT_b RAD- the day after tomorrow
 She will cook porridge the day after tomorrow.
- (iii) Nabakhulimile omwaka kwitsanga
 Na-ba- khu- lim-ile omwaka kwitsanga
 FOC-3P1-FUT_b-2P1-RAD-BENEF year next
 They will dig for you next year.

The Distant Future- '- àkhá ...e'

This form is used for situations perceived as going to take place in the period stretching from a week to a year. It is illustrated in section (k) below:

- (i) Khwakhwetse omwaka kwitsanga
 Khu- àkhá -itse omwaka
 kwitsanga
 2P1- FUT_c -RAD year next

- We will come next year
- (ii) Yakharobe obusala liwichi litsanga
 Y- àkhá -robe obusala liwichi litsanga
 3Sg- FUT_c-RAD porridge week coming
 She will cook porridge the coming week.
 - (iii) Bakhakulimile omwaka kulia
 Ba- àkhá -ku-limile omwakae kulia
 3Sg- FUT_c -AUG-RAD-BENEF year that
 They will dig for it (big) that year.

The Remote Future '- lì...a'

This form is used for situations which are expected to occur in the remote, far future. The remote future is here taken to mean any time from next year to infinity. The examples in (1) below illustrate its usage:

- 1. (i) Alitsa omwaka kulonda kuno
 A- lì -itsa omwaka kulonda kuno
 3Sg-FUT_d-RAD year following this
 She will come next year but one.
- (ii) Baliroba obusala omwaka kundi
 Ba- lì -rob-a obusala omwaka kundi 3P1-
 FUT_d -RAD porridge year another
 They will cook porridge another year in the (future)
- (iii) A- lì -khu-lim-il-a emiaka chibili nichiaxhawa
 3Sg-FUT_d-RAD-BENEF years two when they are over
 He will dig for you when two years are over.

In conclusion, Olukabarasi can be said to have a total of nine absolute tenses. These are summarized in Fig1 below:

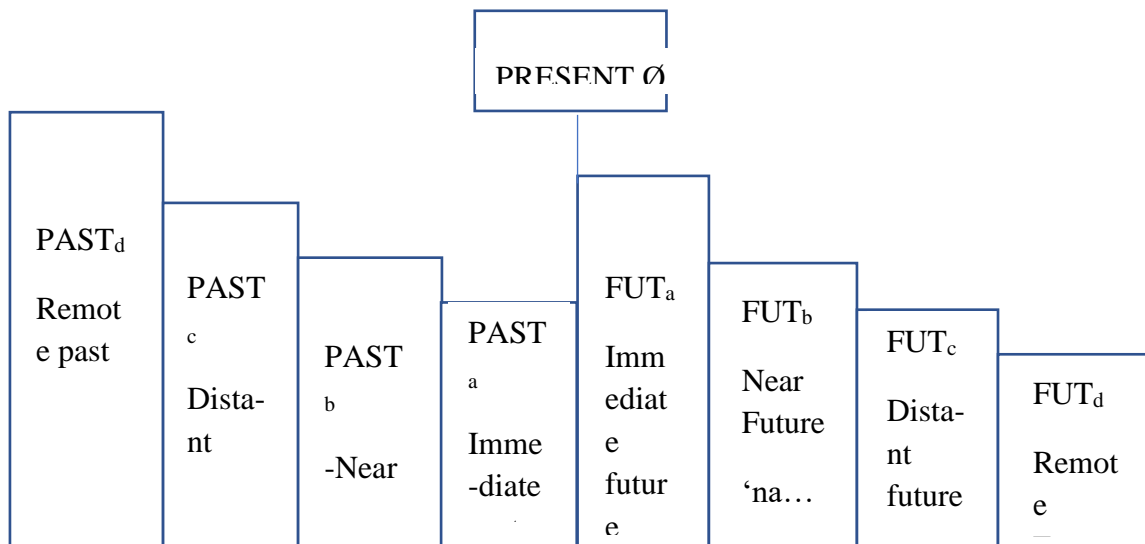


Figure 1: The tense paradigm for Olukabarasi Absolute Tenses

These absolute tenses usually appear in the form of affixes (more specifically, prefixes). They usually occupy the second affix position in the verb morphology, being preceded by the

concordial noun class morphemes. Tenses alter the form of the final vowel too. The distant future also requires the focus marker 'n' - to occupy the first position even preceding the subject concord marker. Tone is phonemic and significant in distinguishing the near past from the present perfect.

To illustrate how these tenses locate situations in time, temporal adverbs can be a guide. Table 1 below illustrates this.

Table1: The Interaction of Olukabarasi tenses with temporal adverbs.

TEMPORAL ADVERB	TYPICAL TENSE
Esaino (now)	PRESENT; PAST _a FUT _a
Mungolobe (yesterday)	PAST _a ; PAST _b ,
lwabele (the day before yesterday)	PAST _c
Khale wene (long ago)	PAST _d ,
Bulano (today)	PAST _a , PRES; FUT _a
Angolobe (in the evening)	FUT _a
Mutsuli (tomorrow)	FUT _a ,
Bushia (day after tomorrow)	FUT _b ; FUT _c
Omwaka kwitsanga (next year)	FUT _c
Inyanga, indala (one day)	FUT _c ; FUT _d

From Table 1 it is evident that there is a lot of overlap in the use of these tenses. This is so, because linguistic time is not necessarily the same as objective, 'mechanical time'. Linguistic time is subjective: it is the prerogative of the speaker to locate situations in time as they perceive them. They choose the tense they feel will portray situations as they see them. As Mould (1976) points out there are syntactic and pragmatic factors that influence choice of tense to use. The following conversation which was recorded by the researcher on a Sunday, illustrates this. The context was Kolongolo in Trans Nzoia where people were moving out of their homes for fear of the insecurity posed by Pokot cattle rustlers

MAMA: Wawuya? (Did you move out?) < PAST_d >

SONGA: Ndakhawuya (I have moved out) < PAST_a >.

MAMA OOH; Olarulanga okhuwuya? (Ooh, so you've just moved?) < PAST_a >

SONGA: Ndakhawuya Jumatatu. (I have moved on Monday) < PAST_a >.

Even though this conversation takes place almost a week after Songa moved house, he prefers to use the immediate past tense as opposed to the more appropriate remote past tense (PAST_d). This is because he probably doesn't want to appear as if he moved house a long time ago, yet he hasn't informed his relatives or to look fearful. He perceives a week as a very short time, so the immediate past tense is the one which can express this best.

Table 1 above, however, is a guide to the default (unmarked) uses of the various tenses. There are certain restrictions to the use of certain tenses, whereby, for instance, a situation that took place a hundred years ago would require the use of the remote past tense under normal circumstances. It would be questionable to say, for instance:

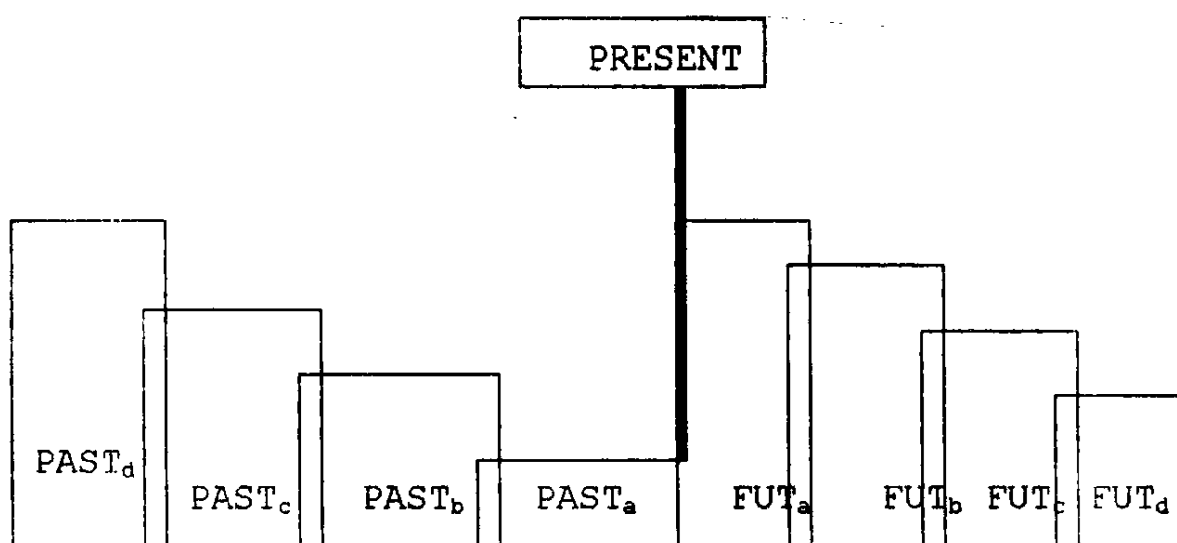
? Koko yakhebulwa 1898

Koko ya- àkhà -ibulwa 1898

Grandmother 3sg-PAST- RAD (born) 1898

! Grandmother has been born in 1898.

The appropriate tense would be the remote past (yebulwa PAST_d). However, for pragmatic reasons, for instance, if her age is being contrasted with a much older person, the statement is perfectly acceptable. The overlap in the Lukabarasi tenses is captured in the paradigm in Fig 2 below. The present is placed in the indicated position, to show that the immediate past PAST_a and immediate future FUT_a are used to indicate present time.



Conclusion

The Lukabarasi absolute tense forms are 'á... a' for remote past, '-àà...ile' for distant past, 'Ø...ile' for near past, and '-àkhà...a' for immediate past; Ø for the present tense; 'là...a' for the immediate future 'na... Ø ...e' for the near future, 'àkhà...e' for distant future and 'li...a' for the remote future. These tenses are the ones used to locate situations in the absolute sectors of the past and non-past time spheres. Declerck's (1991), theory adopts a holistic approach to time reference, whereby the interaction of tense with temporal adverbials is explicitly shown. This enables situations to be located in time clearly. It also shows situations to be durative or punctual. Finally, it was also noted that, even though the Lukabarasi tenses are intricately subdivided into fine sectors, these divisions are not as rigid or inflexible as would appear. The choice of a tense is determined by syntactic and pragmatic factors. Indeed, it was emphasized

that linguistic time is not as rigid as objective time, but depends on the speaker's perception of time. Due to pragmatic considerations, a speaker may decide to choose a near past tense instead of a remote past form for instance, to show that the situation did not occur too long ago as far as s/he is concerned. In this paper we only examined the absolute tenses. There is need for a further study to explore the Lukabarasi relative tenses too.

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i This is a slight variation from Khasandi (1996); for example, Khasandi (1996) did not include tone on the tense markers then. With more than twenty years’ development in linguistics it has now been established that this is a more accurate realization of the Lukabarasi tenses.