



Title	A sketch of we- in Uru (Bantu E622D)
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Citation	スワヒリ&アフリカ研究. 2024, 35, p. 61-76
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://doi.org/10.18910/95320
rights	
Note	

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Table 1: Classification of the Kilimanjaro Bantu languages (cf. Philippon & Montlahuc 2003, Maho 2009, Hammarström 2019)

E621 WK	E621A	Rwa/Meru	E622 CK	E622A	Mochi	E623 Rombo	E623A	Useri
	E621B	Machame		E622B	Mbokomu		E623B	Mashati
	E621C	Siha		E622C	Vunjo		E623C	Mkuu
	E621D	Kiwoso		E622D	Uru		E623D	Keni
	E621E	Masama						
	E621F	Ng’uni						
E63		Rusha/Okuma						
E64		Kahe						
E65		Gweno						
E74	E74a	Dabida						

It is well recognised in the literature that KB is one of the typical groups of languages where verbs can take a string of multiple tense and aspect (TA) markers, unlike in many other Bantu languages where a single TA marker per verb is canonical (cf. Nurse 2003b: 94). In the generalised verbal template of the Bantu languages shown in Table 2, the sequential TA markers occur in the post-initial (POSTIN) slot.

Table 2²: Morphological template of Bantu verbs (cf. Meeussen 1967, Güldemann 2022)

	Pre-stem markers				Stem cluster				
Slot labels	PREIN	IN	POSTIN	PRERAD	RAD	EXT	PREFIN	FIN	POSTFIN
Index no.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
Typical Functions	NEG, TAM, etc.	SCd	NEG, TAM, etc.	OCd	Root	Derivation	TAM	TAM	Clause Type, etc.

As in (1), the CK variety Vunjo allows to have a string of at least three TA markers, namely *le-*, *maa-*, *enda-*, while the WK variety Rwa takes up to four TA markers in the pre-stem POSTIN slot namely *a-*, *i-*, *ṁ-*, and *maa-*, as illustrated in (2).

(1) Vunjo (Moshi 1994 as cited in Nurse 2008: 94)

à-lé-màà-èndà-írzérzâ
s/he-past-asp-asp-speak
‘S/he had already spoken’

² The abbreviations in the table stand for the following: PREIN = pre-initial, IN = initial, POSTIN = post-initial, PRERAD = pre-radical, RAD = radical, EXT = extension (derivational suffix), PREFIN = pre-final, FIN = final (inflectional suffix), POSTFIN = post-final, NEG = negation, TAM = tense, aspect, and modality, SCd = subject concord, OCd = object concord.

(2) Rwa

eéṃmaatistí[†]ráa

a-a-i-m-*maa*-tisir-a-V

SM₁-PST-PST.IPFV-PRF-COMP-write-FV-PST.IPFV

‘S/he had (already) written’

These examples also show that there is a clear structural tendency about the order of the morphemes, i.e., the closer a TA marker is to the boundary with the initial (IN) slot, the more it tends to serve as a tense marker rather than an aspect or modality marker. As argued in Nurse (2003a: 73, 77), this tendency seems to be associated with the chronology of grammaticalisation, where a novel TA marker is first introduced at the right edge of the string, i.e., immediately before the boundary with the stem, which may or may not be preceded by one or more object markers, while older TA markers are placed closer to the left edge and followed by ‘new comers’. Thus, the one closest to the stem in (1), *enda-* is segmentally identical to the lexical verb *-enda* ‘go’, i.e., the form has undergone almost no phonological attrition. Likewise, the marker *maa-*, which is the closest to the stem in (2) and the second closest in (1) denotes an aspectual concept of ‘completion’ with slight abstraction of the meaning of its lexical origin **-mal-* ‘finish’ (PB **-màd-*), i.e., the degree of semantic bleaching of the form is minimal. On the other hand, ones closer to the left edge, such as *le-* in (1) and *a-* and *i-* in (2), all indicate the past tense (with different specifications). Remaining others, i.e., those which are neither typical tense markers that occur closer to the left edge nor typical ‘new comers’ that occur closer to the stem boundary, may have intermediate characteristics within a specific TA system and show more cross-linguistic variation, which in turn may tell us about a yet uncovered process of development of the TA systems in these languages.

This paper aims to provide a descriptive overview of one such marker *we-* in Uru, a Central KB language. As shown in Section 2, its corresponding forms are widely spread across different subgroups and their basic functions can be captured within a specific domain of TA categories. However, as a descriptive sketch of the form in Sections 3 reveals, the *we-* in Uru shows a unique development in terms of both its structural constraints as well as its functionality, which apparently expanded towards indicating specific types of information status rather than a specific TA category (or a group of categories) as expected for a prefix occurring in the POSTIN slot. Section 4 concludes this paper with a brief discussion on what the descriptive facts about *we-* in Uru tell us about the development process of this form and its potential insight for the interaction between TA, information structure, and other relevant morphosyntactic components.

2. *we-* in KB: the background

2.1 Geographical distribution and basic features

The morpheme *we-*, as a verbal prefix occurring in the POSTIN slot, is attested across KB especially in CK, Rombo, and Gweno. For example, one of the southern variety of Rombo³ has it to mark the past tense of various stative predicates including imperfective verb forms. As shown in (3a), the prefix, which phonetically realises as *βε-*, appears with the stative verb root *-kund-*, which is inflected by the final stative suffix *-i* instead of the default suffix *-a*, to mark the past tense. The same morpheme is also used with the stative predicate *-re* ‘have’, etymologically analysable as *-ra* ‘hold’ followed by the old anterior marker **-ile* (PB **-ide*), to mark the past tense as shown in (3b). With active verbs, *we-* can be used as a past progressive marker, which may or may not co-occur with the dedicated progressive marker *i-* as illustrated in (3c).

(3) Rombo-Mkuu

a. *dúβekundi ikulolya*

du-βε-kund-i i-ku-loli-a
SM1PL-PST.STAT-want-STAT 5-OM2SG-see-FV
‘We wanted to see you’

b. *sóosó dúβeére íshamba*

sooso du-βε-i-re i-shamba
PRON.1PL SM1PL-PST.STAT-PROG-have 5-field
‘We had a field’

c. *ngíβe(é)andika bárúa*

ngi-βε-i-andik-a barua
SM1SG-PST.STAT-PROG-write-FV 9.letter
‘I was writing a letter’

2.2 Anomalous nature of *we-* in Vunjo and Gweno

The *we-* prefix is also attested in the CK variety Vunjo. As shown in (4), however, the function indexed by the morpheme seems to be elusive in that it appears not only to denote the past tense of various imperfective verb forms as in Rombo, but also serves as an aspectual marker that refers to non-present progressive despite being slotted in the left edge of the TAM slot where tense markers are expected to appear. Due to this ambiguous nature, Nurse (2003a) describes this morpheme in Vunjo as ‘anomalous’.

³ The variety from which the examples were taken might be identified as Keni (E623D) which is spoken adjacent to Mkuu (E623C), as the consultant spent her childhood in a village called Mamusera located in the administrative district of Keni. However, it can be also said that the dialectal classification of Rombo may be more complicated and fluid than the one shown in Table 1 based on the practical situation.

- (4) Vunjo (Nurse 2003a:86)⁴
- a. lu-we-(i)-kap-a
SM_{1PL}-PST.IMPF-PROG-hit-FV
'We were hitting' (past progressive)
 - b. lu-we-ke-kap-a
SM_{1PL}-PST.IMPF-HAB-hit-FV
'We hit regularly' (past habitual)
 - c. lu-we-kap-ie
SM_{1PL}-PST.IMPF-hit-ANT
'We had hit' (past perfect)
 - d. lu-we-ci-kap-a
SM_{1PL}-PST.IMPF-FUT-hit-FV
'We will be hitting' (future progressive)

The same kind of anomaly is also observed in Gweno. Philippson & Nurse (2000: 251) describe the morpheme as a past tense marker frequently used with the 'perfect' stem, which in this context can be interpreted as a stative predicate, as illustrated in (5a). However, as anomalous as it is in Vunjo, the same morpheme is used to denote not only past progressive as in (5b), but also present progressive as in (5c). Even more 'mysterious' (Nurse & Philippson 2000: 255) is the fact that it can be used in a simple past tense form as shown in (5d).

- (5) Gweno (Nurse 2003a: 80; Philippson & Nurse 2000: 251)
- a. *mangí ábéyambie ku áletfúkírwe kirúmo*
mangí a-βe-γamb-ie ku a-le-tfukirwe ki-rúmo
1.chief SM₁-VE-say-PST COMP SM₁-PST.R-be_angry.PST very
'The chief said he was very angry [when is not clear]' (stative past)
 - b. fu-ve-kya-rema
SM_{1PL}-VE-PROG-cultivate
'we were cultivating' (near past progressive)
 - c. *mká wiyá ábékyafiya kyandwí kyékwárira*
mka wiya a-βe-kya-fiγ-a kyandwi kya i-kwar-ir-a
1.woman 1.this SM₁-VE-PROG-look_for-FV 7.knife 7.ASSC 5-scrape-APPL-FV
'The woman is [?] looking for a knife for scraping' [sic.] (present progressive)
 - d. fu-ve-rem-ie
SM_{1PL}-VE-cultivate-PST
'we cultivated' (simple near past)

⁴ Presentation of the examples are slightly modified. The present author added glosses of all the examples and the morpheme boundary between *we-* and *ci-* in (4) to reflect the description by the original author that "[...] apart from the temporally unmarked Present in column 3 [= showing a series of progressive forms], the morpheme *we* occurs throughout the column", suggesting that *we-* is used as an independent, across-the-board progressive marker.

However, as Nurse (2003a: 80) rightly points out, at least part of this anomaly is ‘regular’ from a cross-KB point of view in that the past-imperfective as a TA-combined category is well morphologised across different varieties even in WK where the morpheme *we-* is itself generally missing. For example in Rwa, the TA category is consistently encoded by the TA marker *i-* (with lengthening of the final vowel), a clear reflex of the marker grammaticalised from the old copula **-li* (PB *-dì*).

(6) Rwa

a. *tiikeékabáa*

ti-i-kee-kab-a-V

SM_{1PL}-PST.IPFV-PROG-hit-FV-PST.IPFV

‘We were hitting’ (past progressive)

b. *tiiloliāā*

ti-i-loli-a-V

SM_{1PL}-PST.IPFV-see-FV-PST.IPFV

‘We used to see (regularly)’ (past habitual)

c. *teénkabáa*

ti-a-i-ṁ-kab-a-V

SM_{1PL}-PST-PST.IPFV-PFV-hit-FV-PST.IPFV

‘We had hit’ (past perfect)

d. *tiishii*

ti-i-ishi-V

SM_{1PL}-PST.IPFV-know-PST.IPFV

‘We knew’ (past stative)

It is clearly evidenced by all these facts that the TA category, the past tense in the context of various imperfective aspects, or stative predicates in general, is quite stable across KB. As summarised in Table 3, the category is denoted by the TA marker *i-* and *e-* in WK, while it is indexed by *we-* in a wide range of other KB subgroups.

Table 3. Distribution of *we-* and related forms in KB languages (based on Shinagawa 2024)

Group	Guthrie code	Lang. name	Form	Function/ Use	Source
WK	E621A	Rwa	<i>i-</i>	PST.IPFV	Shinagawa (2024)
	E621B	Mashami	<i>e-</i>	PST.IPFV	Rugemalira & Phanuel (2012)
	E621D	Kiwoso	<i>e-</i>	PST.IPFV	Kagaya (1989)
CK	E622C	Vunjo	<i>we-</i>	PST.IPFV PROG	Nurse (2003a)
	E622D	Uru	<i>we-</i> [βe-]	PST.IPFV ADD.FOC	Shinagawa (2024)
Rombo	E623C	Mkuu	<i>ve-</i> [βe-]	PST.IPFV	Shinagawa (2024)
Gweno	E65		<i>ve-</i> [βe-]	PST.IPFV PROG PST	Nurse (2003a), Philippson & Nurse (2000)

2.3 Grammaticalisation path

As observed in Vunjo and especially in Gweno, not only does the *we-* marker denote the past-imperfective as a TA combined category, but it also covers a general progressive aspect and even a simple past tense. Although we do not go into detail about the cross-KB process of the semantic expansion of this morpheme, it seems reasonable to assume that if the hybrid past-imperfective is the prototype notion denoted by *we-*, then the ‘anomaly’ observed in Vunjo and Gweno should be interpreted as a result of the process of semantic bleaching, or abstraction, as one of the basic mechanisms of grammaticalisation process (cf. Heine 2003), i.e., both the across the board usage of progressive on one hand, and the simple past usage attested in Gweno on the other, can be seen as a result of expansion through semantic abstraction from the past-imperfective as a source category. This assumption is supported by the cross-Bantu tendency that the TA-combined category is frequently encoded by an auxiliary construction where ‘be’ verbs are the most typical forms of the (tense-marking) auxiliary stem (cf. Nurse 2008: 29–30), and the lexical origin of *we-*, in turn, is exactly assumed to be **-ba* (PB **-bá*) ‘be, become’ (Nurse 2003a: 77).

3. *we-* in Uru

3.1 Basic function of *we-* in Uru

The common marker *we-* in Uru shows yet another deviant feature distinct from those found in Vunjo and Gweno. What is striking with the *we-* in Uru is that it serves to express specific types of information status of the predicate it attaches to or nominal arguments of the predicate,

rather than to indicate a specific TA category as expected for a marker that occurs in the slot for TA markers.

Whereas, as shown in (7), *we-* in Uru also has a function as a TA marker that denotes the past tense of imperfective verbs as a typical function of *we-* in other KB varieties, its outstanding feature is to mark a variety of focus related concepts, as illustrated in (8)–(10).

- (7) function of *we-* in Uru-1: past tense of imperfective verbs

lwéwe:tʃi kundó kwě:i
 lu-e-we-tʃi ku-ndo ku-e-i
 SM_{1PL}-PST2-WE-know 17-entity 17-PST2-be
 ‘We had known the place where you were’

- (8) function of *we-* in Uru-2: additive ‘also’

a. *néworé waná saba*
 ní-a-e-wór-ie wa-ána saba
 FOC-SM1-PST2-hold-STAT 2-child seven
 ‘S/he had seven children’

b. *néweworé waná saba*
 ní-a-e-we-wór-ie wa-ána saba
 FOC-SM1-PST2-WE-hold-STAT 2-child seven
 ‘S/he also had seven children’

- (9) function of *we-* in Uru-3: event recurrence ‘again’

a. *nálě:tʃa*
 ni-a-le-tʃ-a
 FOC-SM₁-PST1-come-FV
 ‘S/he came’

b. *náləwê:tʃa*
 ni-a-le-we-tʃ-a
 FOC-SM₁-PST1-WE-come-FV
 ‘S/he came again’ or ‘S/he also came’

- (10) function of *we-* in Uru-4: persistent ‘still’

a. *nákeri márõ:ni*
 ni-a-keri maro-ni
 FOC-SM₁-EXT 6.sleepiness-LOC
 ‘S/he is asleep’

b. *náwekeri márõ:ni*
 ni-a-we-keri maro-ni
 FOC-SM₁-WE-EXT 6.sleepiness-LOC
 ‘S/he is still asleep (i.e. S/he has not woken up)’

In all pairs of (8)–(10), which are structurally solely differentiated by the absence vs. presence of *we-*, the semantic difference between each pair seems to be associated with the representation of the information status of the predicate or its argument, rather than the indication of TA notions. For example, in contrast to (8a) which expresses the fact that the subject of the verb had seven children, (8b) presupposes an existence of another (unspecified) person who also had seven children, i.e., the function of *we-* in (8b) can thus be identified as to provide extra background information within a specific discourse context, which, in this case, seems to be relevant to the notion of additive focus⁵. The semantic difference between (9a) and (9b) is also pertaining to additive focus, as shown in the English translation of (9b) ‘S/he also came’. However, (9b) can also be interpreted as a sentence that presupposes another occurrence of the event expressed by the predicate, i.e., the *we-* can also denote another type of focus that refers to a recurrence of a past event.⁶ However, the semantic component rendered by *we-* in (10b) seems to be aspectual in that it denotes temporal persistency, which can be otherwise expressed through a reflex of the PB prefix **kí-* labeled as ‘perstitive’ by Meeussen (1967: 109) in a wide range of (southern) East Bantu languages, which is however not attested in a northern group of Eastern Bantu languages including KB (Nurse 2008: 145–8). In this sense, it may be reasonable to posit that ‘persistive’, as a more general term, is at least not a stable category morphologised by a specific TA marker in KB. This, in turn, may suggest that the persistive-like category encoded by *we-* in Uru may be different from the typical persistive widespread in other Bantu languages, and rather associated with the notion of, say, temporal redundancy, i.e., (10b) might be interpreted as ‘S/he is in an extra time of sleeping’, which is readily relatable to the notion of additional/repetitive occurrence of events or referents as illustrated in (8b) and (9b).

3.2 Structural position in the template

As mentioned earlier in Section 1, a multiple occurrence of TA markers in the POSTIN slot is a norm in KB, and there is a general tendency that ones in the left edge tend to be an old marker and to mark a tense category rather than aspectual or modal ones. However, according to Nurse (2003a: 77), this general assumption does not apply to the behaviour of *we-* in Vunjo, i.e., *we-*

⁵ As Gibson & Marten’s (2023) cross-Bantu survey of additive focus expressions shows, several morphosyntactic strategies can be identified as major types that frequently occur cross-linguistically, which include i) a conjunction followed by pronoun or pronominal clitic, e.g., *na=ye* {CONJ=PRON.CLT.1} ‘s/he also’ in Swahili (G42), ii) a pronoun followed by i), e.g. *a-gweye ## na-gwe* {AUG-PRON.2SG ## CONJ=PRON.CLT.2SG} ‘you too’ in Kagulu (G12), iii) (a pronoun followed by) a locative possessive, e.g., *pa-anyi* {16-POSS.1SG} ‘I too’/‘As far as I am concerned’ (lit. ‘my (place)’). The descriptive facts about the *we-* in Uru presented in this paper may suggest that a verb-internal grammaticalised marker can also be identified as another possible structural type of additive focus marking in Bantu.

⁶ Based on Ippolito’s (2007) classification of focus-sensitive particles, this type of focus can be interpreted as ‘assertion about a discourse-new eventuality’ that is denoted by *again* in English, which is in contrast to ‘assertion about a discourse-old eventuality’ that can be expressed by *still*, and the notion may also be indicated by *we-* in Uru.

sits in the left edge of the POSTIN slots replacing old tense markers such as *a-* and *le-*, as schematically shown in (11), though it still indicates even a purely aspectual category.

(11) *we-* in the verbal template in Vunjo (based on the examples provided in Nurse 2003a)

IN	POSTIN		PRERAD
	TAM1	TAM2	
SM-	<i>we-</i> <i>a-</i> PST1 <i>le-</i> PST2	<i>ke-</i> HAB <i>i-</i> PROG	OM-

This anomalous mismatch between the structural position it occurs in and the concepts it denotes is not the case in Uru. As expected by the semantic feature indicated by *we-* as a TA marker, i.e., the past tense for various imperfective verbs as a TA-combined category, the form sits in the middle of the string, preceded by typical old tense markers and followed by younger aspectual or modal markers such as the progressive marker *ke-* (< *-*kal-* ‘sit’). This structural independency, in turn, might have been a necessary condition by which *we-* in Uru was able to develop the unique functionality deviating from a typical TA domain.

(12) *we-* in the verbal template in Uru

IN	POSTIN			PRERAD
	TAM1	TAM2	TAM3	
SM-	<i>le-</i> PST1 <i>e-</i> PST2 <i>tʃi-</i> FUT1 <i>a-</i> ANT	<i>we-</i>	<i>ke-</i> PROG	OM-

3.3 Co-occurrence restrictions

3.3.1 Clause types

This morpheme has another syntactic restriction on the morphosyntactic environment where occurrence of *we-* leads to ungrammaticality. The most salient and consistent constraint at a morphosyntactic level is the requirement of co-occurrence with the preverbal clitic *ɲí=*, which has been labelled with various names including ‘stabilizer’ (Nurse & Philippson 1977), a ‘preverbal morpheme’ encoding ‘affirmation’ (Dalgish 1979), and simply ‘focus marking’ element (Moshi 1988). Recently Shinagawa (To appear) identifies a functional range denoted by the morpheme in Uru and in Rombo-Mkuu. In that paper, I argued that while the focus marking in a broad sense is a shared feature in both languages, the morpheme has developed into a marker that specifies a contextual scope of utterance (‘contextual specificity’) in Uru, whereas its functionality seems to be generalised into ‘syntactic non-dependency’ (or ‘main clause-ness’) in Rombo. The latter direction is also argued by Philippson & G  erois (2024),

discussing that in a wide range of KB varieties the morpheme follows a development path from a focus marker into a theticity marker, then further into more general ‘default declarative’ marker. The following elicited sentences explicitly show that presence of *ni=* is a necessary condition for the occurrence of *we-*.

(13) a. *ni=alewê:tfa* =(9b)

ni=a-le-we-tf-a

FOC=SM₁-PST1-WE-come-FV

‘S/he came again’ or ‘S/he also came’

vs. b. **alewe:tfa*

a-le-we-tf-a

SM₁-PST1-WE-come-FV

c. *nió áwe:tfa*

ni=o H=a-a-we-tf-a

FOC=PRON₁ FOC=SM₁-ANT-WE-come-FV

‘(It is) s/he (who) has come again; The one (whom we were talking about, e.g.,) has come again (Sw. yule yule amekuja tena)’

(13b) shows that the pre-initial marker *ni=* is an integral part of (13a), without which the entire verb form becomes grammatically unacceptable. However, it is also to be noted here that the *ni=* element need not necessarily be a verbal enclitic. As shown in (13c), verbs can take *we-* without being encliticised by *ni=*, when it occurs with a preceding constituent marked by *ni=*.⁷ Likewise, negative verb forms generally cannot take *we-* since *ni=* is not compatible with negation, which is structurally marked by a clause final particle etymologically originating from independent pronouns (or demonstratives for non-person nouns) that agree with the subject.

(14) **alewetfa: o*

a-le-we-tf-a o

SM₁-PST1-WE-come-FV NEG (<PRON₁)

Intd. ‘S/he did not come again’

⁷ It should also be noted that, while the verb form in (13) does lack the *ni=*, its accompanying high tone apparently realises on the surface, i.e., the underlying high tone that is a suprasegmental trace of the clitic *ni=* might still be a structural requirement for the occurrence of *we-*. What should also be mentioned is the structural ambiguity of the entire form. If the initial *ni=* is taken to be a term focus marker, the whole clause should be identified as a single main clause with a pre-verbal focal subject. On the other hand, if it is taken to be an independent copula, the whole sentence should be regarded as a cleft sentence. The structural ambiguity of this kind is frequently observed in many Bantu languages where this type of construction is productively utilised as a focus marking strategy.

The same restriction applies to relative verb forms with which the pre-initial *ni=* basically does not co-occur as illustrated in (15a). The iterativity of an event that is encoded by *we-* in *ni=* marked verbs can be expressed substitutionally by the lexical clitic *=se*.

- (15) a. *_{RC}[*alewetfa*] *ŋ kilau*
 a-le-we-tʃ-a *ni kilau*
 SM₁-PST1-WE-come-FV COP Kilau
- b. _{RC}[*aletfa:sé*] *ŋ kilau*
 a-le-tʃ-a=se *ni kilau*
 SM₁-PST1-come-FV=again COP Kilau
 ‘The one who came again is Kilau’

3.3.2 Co-occurrence with other TA markers

While the multiple occurrence of TA markers is a common feature throughout KB, possible combinations of TA markers seem to be generally fixed in a principled way. As mentioned in 3.2, *we-* in Uru sits in between the typical tense markers occurring in the left-most position and the typical aspect and modality markers appearing closer to the boundary with the stem. As shown in (16), this morpheme co-occurs with a wide range of different tense markers.

- (16) a. *ŋálewéwalê:mba*
 $ni=a-le-we-wa-lemb-a$
 FOC=SM₁-PST1-WE-OM₂-deceive-FV
 ‘S/he deceived them again’
- b. *ŋéwewalê:mba*
 $ni=a-e-we-wa-lemb-a$
 FOC=SM₁-PST2-WE-OM₂-deceive-FV
 ‘S/he deceived them again’
- c. * *ŋaewewale:mba*
 $ni=a-i-we-wa-lemb-a$
 FOC-SM₁-FUT1-WE-OM₂-deceive-FV
- d. *ŋátfewéwalê:mba*
 $ni=a-tʃi-we-wa-lemb-a$
 FOC-SM₁-FUT2-WE-OM₂-deceive-FV
 ‘S/he will deceive them again’

Practically the only tense marker that is incompatible with *we-* is the near future marker *i-*, as shown in (16c). One possible explanation to this restriction might be sought for the semantic similarity of the lexical sources, i.e., both *we-* and *i-* are assumed to have been grammaticalised from the copulative verbs, i.e., **-ba* and **-li*, respectively. This may remind us of the fact that

the functional range of *we-* in Vunjo is well covered by *i-* (< *-*li*) in Rwa. This quite regular cross-linguistic correspondence may suggest that, even within the same TA system, the two forms are structurally incompatible with each other due to the possible functional overlap caused by the semantic similarity.⁸

Likewise, *we-* can co-occur with a wide range of aspectual markers as illustrated in (17). Note, however, that in (17) the pre-verbal marker *ɲí=* segmentally drops before the class 9 SM *i-* but its accompanying high tone remains to serve as a (generalised) predicate focus marker.

- (17) a. *mpfuó yǎweká:pa*
 mpfuo H=i-a-we-kap-a
 9.rain FOC=SM9-ANT-WE-hit-FV
 ‘It has (not only been cloudy but) rained; It has rained again’
- b. * *mpfuo yawemka:pa*
 mpfuo H=i-a-we-m-kap-a
 9.rain FOC=SM9-ANT-WE-COMP-WE-hit-FV
 Intd. ‘It has finished raining again’
- c. *mpfuó íwekekápa ũlǎ:lu*
 mpfuo H=i-we-ke-kap-a ulalu
 9.rain FOC=SM9-WE-PROG-hit-FV now
 ‘It is raining again’
- d. *mpfuó íweká:pá*
 mpfuo H=i-we-kap-a
 9.rain FOC=SM9-WE-hit-HAB
 ‘It rains again (so did it last year)’

The only exception in (17) that does not allow co-occurrence with *we-* is the form with the perfect/completive marker *m-* as shown in (17b). While the reason of this incompatibility is still unclear, one may assume that the aspectual concept of completeness may not be in accordance with the concept of recurrence/repetition of the event expressed as part of information status encoded by the prefix *we-*.

Table 4. Compatibility with other TA markers

	Tense	Aspect
Compatible	PST1 <i>le-</i> , PST2 <i>e-</i> , FUT2 <i>tí-</i>	ANT <i>-ie</i> , PROG <i>ke-</i> , HAB <i>-á</i>
Incompatible	FUT1 (PRS-used-as-FUT) <i>i-</i>	PRF <i>m-</i>

⁸ It might also be worth noting that the prefix *i-* is exactly what is called ‘present-used-as-future’ by Nurse (2003a), i.e., it also has a transitional nature covering both aspectual (progressive) and tense (near future) categories. This fluid nature seems to be comparable with the semantic nature of *we-* that covers past tense category as well as a wide range of imperfective aspectual categories, and this similarity, in turn, might be relevant with the incompatibility of the both morphemes within the same verb form.

4. Conclusion

This paper has provided a descriptive information of the pre-stem marker *we-* in Uru. It is clearly observed that its functionality has deviated from the expected TA categories and developed into a more discourse-sensitive domain to index the additive focus (in a broad sense) on the nominal arguments or the predicate focus on the recurrence of an event expressed by the predicate it attaches to. This paper also reveals major morphosyntactic constraints that condition the occurrence of the morpheme. A striking feature is that the morpheme cannot occur without the presence of the focus marking (in a broad sense) clitic *ɲí=* or its accompanying high tone. In this sense, the morpheme can also be characterised as a focus-sensitive marker, or co-focus marker, that serves to indicate a specific aspect of focus assigned to the predicate it attaches to or the nominal arguments syntactically governed by the predicate.

When it comes to the interrelation with the preverbal clitic *ɲí=*, it is interesting to note that, if we assume its core functionality as ‘affirmation’ as claimed by Dalgish (1979), against the almost universal contrast between unmarked affirmative vs. marked negation, KB has developed a unique system in which affirmative is a marked category in contrast to negation, which is indicated by the lack of *ɲí=*. This, however, does not mean that the negation is an unmarked category in KB. Rather, it suggests that the negative verb forms might be grouped together with other ‘non-affirmative’ clause types including interrogatives and relative clauses, which are structurally indexed by the lack of the ‘affirmative’ marker. This topic is obviously too far-reaching to be sufficiently discussed in this short article. However, it should be definitely endeavoured in future research to clarify this fundamental mechanism that lies behind the whole grammatical system of this language. Such endeavours, in turn, may shed a new light on the interplay between different grammatical components including TA, information structure, and polarity marking, all of which are uniquely intertwined in the grammatical systems of KB languages.

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3...	noun classes (when referred to as an agreement properties, they are subscripted, e.g. SM ₁ , OM ₂ etc...)	H	a grammatical high tone (as a suprasegmental trace of FOC <i>ɲí=</i>)
1SG, 2PL etc.	person and number	IPFV	imperfective
ANT	anterior	LOC	locative
APPL	applicative	NEG	negation
ASSC	associative	OM	object marker
CLT	clitic	PROG	progressive
COMP	completive	PRON	pronoun
COP	copula	PRS	present
DEM	demonstrative	PST	past
EXT	existential	PST.R	remote past
FOC	focus/ main clause marker	SM	subject marker
FUT	future	STAT	stative
FV	final vowel (default inflectional suffix)	-	affix boundary
		=	clitic boundary

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Abstract

This paper aims to present a descriptive sketch of the verbal prefix *we-* in Uru (E622D), a Central Kilimanjaro Bantu language. This morpheme, grammaticalised from the lexical item PB **-ba* ‘be, become’, is widely distributed across different subgroups of Kilimanjaro Bantu languages and typically appears as a past tense marker extensively occurring with imperfective aspects or stative predicates in general. However, in Uru, though it occurs in the TAM slot of the verb as in other languages, this morpheme serves as an indicator of a specific type of information status which can be assigned to the predicate it attaches to or nominal arguments governed by the predicate. In this short article, I will provide a fundamental description of its structural and semantic features, which is essential to clarify the unique developmental process of this morpheme, which in turn may shed a new light on the interplay between TA and information structure marking strategies in KB and beyond.

Keywords

Kilimanjaro Bantu languages, tense and aspect markers, *we-*, additive focus, grammaticalisation