

(M)ACOL 2020 abstract

Title: Imperfective in absence of perfective: -ag in East Ruvu Bantu

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Preference: talk

The morpheme **-ag/ang*, found across the Bantu language family, is most often associated with imperfective meanings (Nurse & Devos 2019). In the East Ruvu (ER) Bantu languages spoken in the Morogoro region of central Tanzania, *-ag* yields habitual (1) and ongoing (2) readings:

1. Ha-ni-tung-**ag**-a salu. Kagulu
PST-SM1SG-bead-**IPFV**-FV 9.bead
'I was beading beads regularly.' [*context: it was my job last year*]
2. Ha-ni-tung-**ag**-a salu fo-ya-ing-ile. Kagulu
PST-SM1SG-bead-**IPFV**-FV 9.bead TEMP-SM1-enter-ILE
'I was beading beads when she entered.'

However, *-ag* is not obligatory in ER. In fact, when translating English or Swahili progressive or habitual constructions/contexts, speakers rarely offer *-ag* constructions, but instead offer, for example, auxiliary constructions (3) or habitual adverbials (4):

3. Vi-ni-vik-ile Amina **ka-kal-a** ku-som-a ki-tabu. [Zalamo]
TEMP-SM1SG-enter-ILE Amina **SM1-be/remain-FV** 15-read-FV 7-book
'When I arrived, Amina was reading a book.'
4. **Chila siku chilugulu** Amina ka+o-legal-a. Kwere
every 9.day at.6pm Amina SM1+PRS-be/get.tired-FV
'Everyday at 6pm Amina becomes tired.'

Moreover, speakers tend to interpret *-ag* constructions as habitual rather than progressive (5):

5. Ka-fagil-**ag**-a. Kutu
SM1-sweep- **IPFV**-FV
'S/he normally sweeps'; #S/he is sweeping'

The goal of this paper is to account for the preferred habitual readings of *-ag* in the ER languages. We propose that (i) this preference is due the lack of other verbal habitual constructions in ER, and (ii) the loss of a dedicated perfective morpheme in ER languages has led to a narrowing of the function of *-ag*. Our account has implications for an understanding of the development of temporal/aspectual systems in Bantu languages and beyond.