

The Expression of Tense and Aspect in Shona

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1. Introduction

This paper examines how tense and aspect are realized in Shona.¹ A set of relations between speech time (S), reference time (R) and event time (E) provides the framework for the analysis. Descriptively, while tense expresses the time at which an event takes place (e.g., past, present, future), aspect describes the internal structure of the event (e.g. progressive, perfect, prospective). Klein (1994) analyzes tense as the relation between R (the time that is relevant in the discourse) and S (the time when the utterance takes place). Relative to the speech time, the reference time may precede it (past tense: I worked), coincide with it (present tense: I am working), or follow it (future tense: I will work). As for aspect, it is analyzed as the relation between E (the time that the situation described takes place) and R. The relative ordering of the event time and the reference time derives different aspectual meanings. For example, progressive aspect, which presents an internal segment of a durative event (I am working), results when the reference time is contained within the event time. Perfect aspect, which often refers to a state resulting from a previous action (I have worked), is obtained when the event time precedes the topic time. Finally, prospective aspect, which represents an event that is about to take place (I am going to eat dinner), results when the event time follows the reference time (Hornstein, 1990; Klein, 1994; Comrie, 1976).

There are three observations about Shona's tense/aspect system that are discussed in this paper. First of all, there is a class of morphemes that express precedence or subsequence, marking either tense (S-R) or aspect (R-E). These morphemes have traditionally been seen only as tense markers, but I will show that rather than coding simply past or future tense, they code precedence or subsequence. These morphemes are the "remote past" morpheme, *aka-* (1), the "recent past" morpheme, *a-* (2), and the "future" morpheme, *cha-* (3).²

Remote Past	(1)	w ³ - aka -famb-a 2SG-RP-walk-FV You walked (some time ago).	---	[R,E]	---	[S]	---	⁴
Recent Past	(2)	w- a -teng-a 2SG-RECP-buy-FV You (just recently) bought a fruit.	---	[R,E]	--	[S]	---	
(Remote) Future	(3)	u- cha -famb-a 2SG-SUBS-walk-FV You will walk.	---	[S]	---	[R,E]	---	

¹ Shona is a Bantu language spoken by about 9 million people in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Zambia and Botswana. The data for this paper are from the Karanga dialect.

² *aka-* is glossed RP for "remote precedence," *a-* is glossed RECP for "recent precedence," and *cha-* is glossed SUBS for "subsequence." FV stands for "final vowel."

³ The 2SG morpheme is usually /u-/. However, note that in (1) and (2) it becomes a glide, /w-/ before a vowel.

⁴ These are timelines representing the relative ordering of R, S, and E. If two of R, S, and E occur at the same time, they are separated by a comma.

Secondly, Shona distinguishes between progressive and imperfective aspect. Finally, I observe that, in Shona, in the absence of precedence or subsequence, there is a present tense construal. The result of this is that the present tense is unmarked.

2. Methodology

All data for this paper was gathered from Calisto Mudzingwa, a native Shona speaker (Karanga dialect) from Zimbabwe who is fluent in English and is also a graduate student in linguistics. Data was collected through a range of elicitation methods. To start with, I constructed English sentences, which were then translated into Shona. Another method was to describe different contexts and ask the speaker for an appropriate Shona phrase to suit each context. For example, Context 1, below, I enter a room in which a man is singing. In that context, it is appropriate to say (4), but not (5). However, (5) is appropriate in Context 2, in which the man begins singing after I enter. This suggests that (4) could be expressing progressive aspect, since it refers to the internal structure of an event (singing) by referring to something that occurred while that event was in progress (I entered the room).

Context 1: I enter a room, and inside there's a man singing. He was singing before I entered, and he continues singing after I have entered.

Context 2: I enter a room, and inside there's a man. He starts singing just after I enter.

(4) pa-nd-aka-pind-a mu-mba, a-ka-nga a-chi-imb-a
 when-1SG-RP-enter-FV CL3-room 3SG-RP-AUX 3SG-PROG-sing-FV
 When I entered the room, he was singing.

(5) pa-nd-aka-pind-a mu-mba a-ka-imb-a
 when-1SG-RP-enter-FV CL3-room 3SG-RP- sing-FV
 When I entered the room, he sang.

This method also allowed me to compare sentences in Shona that were quite similar in meaning by providing different contexts and checking which sentence was appropriate for which context. Finally, I constructed my own sentences in Shona and checked if they were grammatical, and if so, what they mean and in what contexts such a phrase could be used (Matthewson, 2004).

3. Framework

Before beginning this investigation of Shona, it is helpful to look at the framework used here for studying tense and aspect. Our model orders three temporal points: the speech time (S), the reference time (R), and the event time (E).⁵ This concept is generally accepted in the literature on tense and aspect (Reichenbach, 1947; Hornstein, 1990; Klein, 1994). Different configurations of these points are associated with different tenses and aspects. The speaking time, S, is the moment when the utterance occurs. It is a deictic element whose meaning depends on the context of the discourse in which it takes place. The event time, E, is the moment when the action conveyed by the main verb takes place, and the reference time, R, is the point in time about which an assertion is made, a time that is relevant in the discourse. Klein (1994) refers to it as the *topic time*. The reference point "mediates the relationship between S and E" (Hornstein, 1990, p. 12), so that S and E are never directly related to each other. For example, a past perfect predicate, such as in (6) has an event, E (buying fruit), which occurs in the past relative to another point in time, R (when you came), which is in the past relative to the speech time, S. The fruit was bought (E) before your coming (R), and your coming (R) occurred before the utterance was spoken (S). The reference time may be stated overtly, as in (6), or it may be understood from context. Tense is generally considered to be the relation between S and R, and aspect is the relation between R and E.

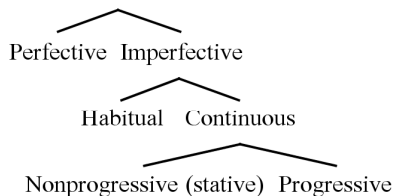
⁵ The actual terminology for these three temporal points varies in the literature.

- (6) nd-aka-nga nd-aka-teng-a mu-chero pa-w-aka-uy-a [E]----[R]----[S]
 1SG-RP-AUX 1SG-RP-buy-FV CL3-fruit when-2SG-RP-come-FV
 I had bought fruit when you came.

Hornstein considers both the S-R relation and the R-E relation to be tense relations. This means he considers something like the past perfect to be a complex tense. However, following Klein (1994), and Comrie (1976), I consider the S-R relation to be tense and the R-E relation aspect. Comrie (1976) describes aspect as dealing with the "internal temporal constitution of a situation" (Comrie, 1976, p 52). For example, progressive aspect expresses that E is internal to R. The reason certain aspects, namely the perfect (*to have done something*) and the prospective (*to be about to do something*), are sometimes considered tenses rather than aspects is because they express a relation between two non-intersecting points in time, rather than describing the internal temporal contour of an event. Thus, the perfect "is an aspect in a rather different sense from the other aspects" (Comrie, 1976, p 52). The analysis in this paper holds regardless of which theory is taken to be correct. If, in fact, both the S-R and the R-E relations are tense, it is still true that *aka-* and *a-* mark precedence- either R preceding S (tense), or E preceding R (aspect in this paper, but considered tense by Hornstein), and *cha-* still marks subsequence- either R follows S, or E follows R. The only thing that changes is terminology.

In the following diagram, Comrie (1976) classifies aspectual oppositions that deal with the internal structure of an event.⁶ Perfective aspect (not to be confused with perfect aspect) is used for an event which is described from an external viewpoint, without making reference to its internal structure. The perfective is often used in narratives, describing a chain of events (eg. past tense perfective: *He went to the store and bought a bag of apples.* eg. present tense perfective: *So, he goes to the store and buys a bag of apples. On the way home he gets hit by a bicycle.*).

Diagram 1



In Shona, perfective aspect is grammatically unmarked, so the examples shown in (1-3) above may be considered perfective. Imperfectives, on the other hand, view a situation from the inside. Imperfective aspect can be further subdivided into habitual and continuous aspects.

Finally, continuous actions may be either nonprogressive (that is, stative) or progressive. Therefore, although imperfective aspect and progressive aspect are quite similar, the progressive has a more narrowly defined meaning than the imperfect. In particular, progressives make reference to the internal structure of events, but are not used to describe habitual actions, nor stative ones. Habitual aspect describes "a situation which is characteristic of an extended period of time, so extended in fact that the situation referred to is viewed not as an incidental property of the moment but, precisely, as a characteristic feature of a whole period" (Comrie, 1976, p 28). Stative aspect is used for events which have duration, but in which there is no change in the event from beginning to end.

4. Observations about Shona's Tense/Aspect System

4.1. Morphemes that Mark Precedence/Subsequence

The same morphemes are used in Shona to mark tense in some contexts and aspect in others. I claim that they code precedence (past tense and perfect aspect) and subsequence (future tense and prospective aspect) rather than simply past and future tense. The first morpheme, *aka-*, which has

⁶ Note that perfect and prospective aspect are not included in the diagram because they do not describe the internal structure of an event.

traditionally been called the Remote Past morpheme, codes precedence, as does *a-*, the Recent Past morpheme. The difference between these two is one of degree. In general, *a-* is used for precedence relations between two events occurring on the same day, whereas *aka-* is used for precedence relations of longer duration. Finally, *cha-*, the traditional Future morpheme, marks a subsequence relation. These relations are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1	REMOTE PRECEDENCE	RECENT PRECEDENCE	SUBSEQUENCE
Shona morpheme	<i>aka-</i>	<i>a-</i>	<i>cha-</i>
Tense	past [R]----[S]	past [R]--[S]	future [S]----[R]
Aspect	perfect [E]----[R]	perfect [E]--[R]	prospective [R]----[E]

Tense/aspect markers usually occur as verbal prefixes. Whenever both tense and aspect are overtly marked, the tense marking generally precedes the aspect marking. The usual template is given in (a).

(a) SUBJ-TENSE-nga SUBJ-ASPECT-V.

The morpheme *-nga* is an auxiliary, which provides morphological support for the expression of tense/aspect. If either tense or aspect is unmarked, the auxiliary is superfluous. In the absence of overt aspect marking, the tense morpheme appears on the main verb, as in (1-3). The template for that is given in (b).

(b) SUBJ-TENSE-V

Across Bantu languages, tense markers such as those shown above are common. Nurse and Philippson (2006) show that three quarters of the Bantu languages they surveyed have some kind of past marker with the form *-a-*. In addition, many languages have a form of *-ka-*, which sometimes has a far past or far future meaning, as well as a wide variety of other meanings cross-linguistically. It is likely that in Shona the morpheme glossed as *recent past* is in fact a general precedence marker, with *-ka-* marking remoteness. The recent past would then be the unmarked precedence form. As for the future morpheme, *cha-*, it does not look very similar to *-laa-*, which is Nurse and Philippson's reconstructed future marker for Proto-Bantu. It more closely resembles *-ka-*, which can also be a remote future marker in Bantu languages. As far as I know, Nurse and Philippson say nothing about the same markers being used for tense and aspect, so it is possible that their aspectual function is a more recent development in Shona. These three morphemes mostly function as tense markers. The following examples, repeated from above, show simple (perfective) tense constructions in Shona.

Remote Past	(1)	w- aka -famb-a 2SG-RP-walk-FV You walked (some time ago).	---[R,E]----[S]---
Recent Past	(2)	w- a -teng-a 2SG-RECP-buy-FV You (just recently) bought a fruit.	mu-chero CL3-fruit ---[R,E]-[S]---
(Remote) Future	(3)	u- cha -famb-a 2SG-SUBS-walk-FV You will walk.	---[S]---[R,E]---

In the above examples, *aka-* and *a-* mark a precedence relation between R and S, while *cha-* marks a subsequence relation between R and S. Since R and E are simultaneous, their relation is unmarked. Remember that S is never directly related to E, but only indirectly through R. Also, there is no reference to the internal structure of E, so these constructions are all perfective, which is also unmarked in Shona. Therefore there is no aspect marking of either kind in these examples under their

usual reading.⁷ The present tense, which does not involve precedence or subsequence, will be discussed later.

4.1.1. Coding Aspectual Precedence: Perfect Aspect

In phrases with tense marking already present, *aka-* and *a-* may be used to mark perfect aspect (E precedes R). In this case, aspect is marked on the main verb and tense is marked on an auxiliary verb, *-nga*. These two morphemes may co-occur in any combination- with *aka-* and *a-* marking either tense or aspect. The result is four varieties of the past perfect, each with different shades of meaning, as shown in (7) to (10).⁸

- (7) (ǂ)-*aka-nga* (ǂ)-*a-teng-a* mu-*chero* -[E]-[R]----[S]-
 3SG-RP(TNS)-AUX (3SG)-RECP(ASP)-buy-FV CL3-fruit
(Some time ago) he had bought fruit (just a bit earlier).
- (8) nd-*a-nga* nd-*a-teng-a* mu-*chero* --[E]-[R]-[S]--
 1SG-RECP(TNS)-AUX 1SG-RECP(ASP)-buy-FV CL3-fruit
(Recently,) I had bought fruit (just a bit earlier).
- (9) nd-*aka-nga* nd-*aka-teng-a* mu-*chero* -[E]----[R]----[S]-
 1SG-RP(TNS)-AUX 1SG-RP(ASP)-buy-FV CL3-fruit
(Some time ago,) I had bought fruit (a while earlier).
- (10) (ǂ)-*a-nga* (ǂ)-*aka-teng-a* mu-*chero* -[E]----[R]-[S]-
 (3SG)-RECP(TNS)-AUX (3SG)-RP(ASP)-buy-FV CL3-fruit
(Recently,) he had bought fruit (a while earlier).

Both (7) and (9) mark remote past tense, which means that R precedes S by at least a day. In contrast, (8) and (10) mark recent past tense, meaning that R precedes S by less than a day. As for aspect, (7) and (8) mark recent perfect, so E precedes R by less than a day, and (9) and (10) mark remote perfect,

⁷ (1) and (2) have an alternative reading because *aka-* and *a-* can also mark perfect aspect. They can either be past perfectives, as shown above, or they can be present perfects, since the present tense is unmarked, as in (i) and (ii). The addition of adverbials, such as *-mbo* or *-to* makes the present perfect reading more readily available. However, (3) is not ambiguous between a future perfective and a present prospective because there is already a way to express present prospective, as shown in (iii).

- (i) nd-*aka-mbo* gar-*a* mu-Vancouver (ii) a-*ka-to* uy-*a*
 1SG-RP-before stay-FV LOC-Vancouver (3SG)-RP-already
 I have been to Vancouver before. He has already come.
- (iii) nd-*a-va* ku-*bik-a* ma-*nhanga*
 1SG-?-AUX INF-cook-FV CL6-pumpkin
 I am going to cook pumpkins. (*or* I am about to cook pumpkins.)

⁸ Both forms of the past tense have a morpheme beginning with a vowel. To avoid hiatus, the vowel of the subject marker deletes. This causes the third person singular form of the recent past to appear at first to have no tense marker. (iv) is the result of the deletion of the subject marker vowel, shown in (v). It is more obvious that it is the first vowel that deletes in an example with a first person subject, as shown in (vi) and (vii). In (11) we see the 1SG prefix with its vowel.

- (iv) a-*teng-a* mu-*chero* (vi) nd-*a-teng-a* mu-*chero*
 3SG/REC.P-buy-FV CL3-fruit SG-REC.P-buy-FV CL3-fruit
 She just bought a fruit. I just bought a fruit.
- (v) (a)-*a-teng-a* mu-*chero* (vii) nd(i)-*a-teng-a* mu-*chero*
 3SG-REC.P-buy-FV CL3-fruit 1SG-REC.P-buy-FV CL3-fruit

which means E precedes R by at least a day. Thus, these four examples are all examples of past perfect (E before R before S), but as the schematic diagrams on the right show, they are all slightly different.

To form the future perfect, *cha-* is used as a tense marker in combination with either *aka-* or *a-* as aspect markers, as shown in (11) and (12). Two alternate configurations are given for the schematic diagrams below because only two things are specified: the relation between S and R (tense) and the relation between R and E. Since the relation between S and E is not directly specified, either order is possible, although the first one is pragmatically more likely.

(11) ndi-**cha**-nga nd-**a**-tenga mu-cheró -[S]----[E]-[R]-
 1SG-SUBS(TNS)-AUX 1SG-REC.P(ASP)-buy-FV CL3-fruit (or -[E]---[S]---[R]-)
 I **will have** bought fruit (**just a bit earlier**).

(12) a-**cha**-nga (**a**)-**aka**-teng-a mu-cheró -[S]----[E]----[R]-
 3SG-SUBS(TNS)-AUX (3SG)-RP(ASP)-buy-FV CL3-fruit (or -[E]---[S]---[R]-)
 He **will have** bought fruit (**a while earlier**).

4.1.2. Coding Aspectual Subsequence: Prospective Aspect

Prospective aspect refers to a situation in which something is *about to* happen- the event time follows the reference time. It is the reverse of the perfect aspect in that it relates a situation (R) with a *later* event instead of with an earlier one. In Shona, *cha-* codes prospective aspect, an aspectual subsequence relation. Like the perfect, prospective aspect may be marked whenever a temporal precedence/subsequence relation is already marked. The following sentences are examples of prospective aspect, paired with each possible temporal precedence/subsequence relation (*aka-*, *a-* and *cha-*). The first two are past prospective, and (15) is future prospective.

(13) (**a**)-**aka**-nga a-**cha**-teng-a mu-cheró -[R]----[E]----[S]-
 (3SG)-RP(TNS)-AUX 3SG-SUBS(ASP)-buy-FV CL3-fruit (or -[R]----[S]----[E]-)
 He was going to buy fruit.

(14) (**a**)-**a**-nga a-**cha**-teng-a mu-cheró -[R]----[E]-[S]-
 (3SG)-RECP(TNS)-AUX 3SG-SUBS(ASP)-buy-FV CL3-fruit (or -[R]----[S]-[E]-)
 He was going to buy fruit (just recently).

(15)⁹ ?ndi-**cha**-nga ndi-**cha**-teng-a mu-cheró -[S]----[R]----[E]-
 3SG-SUBS(TNS)-AUX 3SG-SUBS(ASP)-buy-FV CL3-fruit
 I will be going to buy fruit.

As seen above, in order for both tense and aspect to be marked, Shona introduces an auxiliary verb, *-nga*, which takes a tense marker as a prefix, allowing aspect to be marked as a prefix on the main verb. This auxiliary verb is a morpheme that provides morphological support for the expression of temporal precedence/subsequence. It is only used when both tense and aspect are overtly marked. In a predicate with *-nga*, both verbs carry subject marking in addition to tense/aspect marking. Double subject marking is common in Bantu languages.¹⁰

Over two thirds of the languages surveyed by Nurse and Philippson have a marker of the shape *a(n)g-a* that has "a range of imperfective aspect meanings" (Nurse and Philippson, 2006: 190). Shona's auxiliary *-nga*, while not marking either tense or aspect directly, does allow a wide range of aspect distinctions to be marked by providing a place for the tense prefix, so that the aspect prefix can be marked on the main verb. Kimenyi (online) provides a detailed description of the wide variety of meanings the verb *-nga* plays in Bantu languages, including its many uses in Shona.

⁹ The Shona consultant was a bit hesitant about this construction, but stated that it was grammatical, although somewhat rare.

¹⁰ See Henderson (2006) for discussion of multiple agreement in Bantu. This phenomenon will simply be noted here as a characteristic of *-nga*, as well as other auxiliary verbs.

The examples (16) and (17) below, which are (1) and (13) repeated from above, allow comparison between structures that use *-nga* and those that do not. Both sentences are past tense¹¹, but tense is not marked in the same place. In (17), the aspect marker, *cha-*, takes up the position otherwise occupied by tense, as in (16). The auxiliary, *-nga*, provides a place for the displaced tense marker.

- | | | | | | |
|------|--|--|-----------------------|--|--|
| (16) | w- aka -famb-a
2SG-RP-walk-FV
You walked. | | | | --[R,E]----[S]-- |
| (17) | (a)- aka -nga
(3SG)-RP(TNS)-AUX
He was going to buy fruit. | a- cha -teng-a
3SG-SUBS-buy-FV | mu-cheru
CL3-fruit | | -[R]----[E]----[S]-
(or -[R]----[S]----[E]) |

4.2. *Progressive vs. Imperfective*

Progressive aspect refers to a situation in which the reference point is internal to the event. In Shona, the prefix *chi-* marks the progressive in constructions with a temporal precedence/subsequence relation, as shown in the examples below. The first two are past progressives, and (20) is a future progressive.

- | | | | | | |
|------|---|--|--|--|----------------------------------|
| (18) | nd- aka -nga
1SG-RP-AUX
I was running (a while ago). | ndi- chi -mhany-a
1SG-PROG-run-FV | | | - _E [--[R]--]----[S]- |
| (19) | nd- a -nga
1SG-RECP-AUX
I was running (just recently). | ndi- chi -mhany-a
1SG-PROG-run-FV | | | - _E [--[R]--]-[S]- |
| (20) | ndi- cha -nga
1SG-SUBS-AUX
I will be dancing. | ndi- chi -tamb-a
1SG-PROG-dance-FV | | | -[S]- _E [--[R]--]-- |

In Zezuru, another dialect of Shona, it is also possible to use the defective verb, *-ri* (which takes an infinitive complement) to express progressive aspect with the past and future tense, although these forms are ungrammatical in Karanga.

- | | | | | | |
|------|--|------------------------------------|------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| (21) | (a)-aka-nga
3SG-RP-AUX
He was buying fruit. | a- ri
3SG-AUX INF-buy-FV | ku-teng-a
CL3-fruit | | - _E [--[R]--]----[S]- |
| (22) | (a)-a-nga
3SG-REC.P-AUX
He was buying fruit (recently). | a- ri
3SG-AUX INF-buy-FV | ku-teng-a
CL3-fruit | | - _E [--[R]--]-[S]- |
| (23) | a-cha-nga
3SG-FUT-AUX
He will be buying fruit. | a- ri
3SG-AUX INF-buy-FV | ku-teng-a
CL3-fruit | | -[S]- _E [--[R]--]-- |

These syntactic forms in Shona are in fact progressives rather than imperfectives. This may be shown by comparing them with stative (nonprogressive), and habitual constructions, since the difference between imperfectives and progressives is that imperfectives include habitual and stative meaning, while progressives do not. The morphemes *chi-* and *-ri* can not have habitual or stative meaning. That meaning is formed using the morpheme *no-* in the present tense (24, 25) and *yi-* in the past tense (26, 27).

¹¹ However, in some contexts, (16) may also have a perfect interpretation.

Present Habitual	(24)	ndi-no-bik-a 1 SG-PRES.HAB-cook-FV I (usually) cook pumpkins.	ma-nhanga CL6-pumpkin
Present Stative	(25)	ndi-no-ku-d-a 1 SG-PRES.HAB-2SG-love-FV I love you.	
Past Habitual	(26)	nd-a-yi-bik-a ¹² 1 SG-RECP?-HAB-cook-FV I usually cooked pumpkins./ I used to cook pumpkins.	ma-nhanga CL6-pumpkin
Past Stative	(27)	nd-a-yi-mu-d-a 1 SG-RECP?-HAB-3SG-love-FV I loved him.	

4.2.1. The Present Progressive

The present progressive differs from the other forms of the progressive already discussed in that there is no temporal precedence or subsequence relation, because S=R. Since, as I explained, Shona's tense/aspect system is organized in terms of precedence and subsequence, rather than in terms of past, present and future, as a natural (though not obligatory) consequence, the present tense is unmarked. Similar to the progressive aspect in other tenses, the reference time is internal to the event time in the present progressive. Instead of using a tense marker, Shona expresses the fact that R is within E by the use of the defective verb, *-ri*. As shown in (21) to (23), above, *-ri-* can mark the progressive in a similar manner as *chi-* in a different dialect of Shona. An example of the present progressive is given in (28).

(28)	ndi-ri	ku-tamb-a	-- _{s,R} [--E--]--
	1 SG-AUX	INF-dance-FV	
	I am dancing.		

Comrie (1976) explains that Shona's present progressive is a copular, *-ri*¹³, followed by a locative (the infinitive *ku-* is also used as a locative), so that this construction is literally *to be at doing something*. According to Comrie, using locatives to express progressive aspect is quite common cross-linguistically.

There is a contrast between *chi-* and *-ri*. *Chi-* is not an auxiliary verb but a prefix and it does not seem to be able to occur without an overt tense marker, except in a subordinate clause, where it marks simultaneity with an event in the main clause. Thus, avoidance of ambiguity is probably the best explanation for why a construction with *chi-* can not have a present progressive construal. An example of this is given in (29).

(29)	ndi-chi-famb-a
	1 SG-PROG-be.happy-FV
	When I was walking. . .
	*I am walking

¹² Notice that in this example, and the next one both the tense (*a-*) and aspect (*yi-*) are marked on the main verb. I do not have an account for this.

¹³ If *-ri* is an aspect marker, it is different from other aspect markers because it is an auxiliary, not a prefix. Alternatively, we could say that it is just an auxiliary, and that one way of forming the progressive is with a periphrastic construction using the auxiliary, *-ri*, and an infinitive.

4.3. Present Tense Construal

Shona's temporal system is organized in terms of precedence and subsequence relations, using the same morpheme to mark precedence for both tense and aspect, and another morpheme to mark subsequence for both tense and aspect. Since the present tense has neither of these relations, it is unmarked. As argued above in the discussion of the present progressive, the morpheme *ri-* is an aspect marker rather than a tense marker. Comparing Shona with other Bantu languages, it is interesting to note that half of the Bantu languages in Nurse and Philippson's survey have a zero marker for the present tense. It seems reasonable to suggest that the same is true for Shona.

The following examples illustrate the claim, using progressive sentences. When there is a precedence or subsequence relation, as in (30)–(32), tense is overtly marked. In (33), only aspect is marked, and the result is a present tense construal.

Precedence:

(30) nd-**aka**-nga ndi-**chi**-mhany-a
1SG-RP(**TNS**)-AUX 1S-PROG(**ASP**)-run-FV
I was running.

(31) nd-**a**-nga ndi-**chi**-mhany-a
1SG-RECP(**TNS**)-AUX 1SG-PROG(**ASP**)-run-FV
I was running (just recently).

Subsequence:

(32) ndi-**cha**-nga ndi-**chi**-tamb-a
1SG-SUBS(**TNS**)-AUX 1SG-PROG(**ASP**)-dance-FV
I will be dancing.

Elsewhere:

(33) ndi-**ri** ku-tamb-a
1SG-**ASP** INF-dance-FV
I am dancing.

The same pattern occurs with the perfect aspect, as shown in the next four examples. (34) and (35) are past perfects, and (36) is a future perfect. In (37), however, only perfect aspect is marked. Interestingly, this construction usually has a recent past tense reading, but the presence of the adverbial phrase, *kubva mangwanani*, makes the perfect reading the preferred one. The remote precedence morpheme, *aka-*, also displays this ambiguity between past tense and perfect aspect readings in the appropriate contexts, which is explained perfectly by this analysis.¹⁴

Precedence:

(34) ndi-**aka**-nga nd-**aka**-teng-a mu-chero
1SG-RP(**TNS**)-AUX 1SG-RP(**ASP**)-buy-FV CL5-fruit
I had bought fruit.

(35) nd-**a**-nga nd-**aka**-teng-a mu-chero
1SG-RECP(**TNS**)-AUX 1SG-RP(**ASP**)-buy-FV CL5-fruit
I had bought fruit.

¹⁴ The same is not true for the subsequence morpheme, *cha-*. A sentence such as (3) is unambiguously future tense. I do not have an account for this, except to suggest that the present prospective reading, which is expected to be possible under this analysis, is blocked because there is already an independent construction for the present prospective.

Subsequence:

- (36) ndi-**cha**-nga nd-**aka**-teng-a mu-chero
 1SG-SUBS(**TNS**)-AUX 1SG-RP(**ASP**)-buy-FV CL5-fruit
 I will have bought fruit.

Elsewhere:

- (37) nd-**a**-bik-a ma-nhanga kubva mangwanani
 1SG-RECP(**ASP**)-cook-FV CL6-pumpkin since this.morning
 I have cooked pumpkins since this morning.

5. Conclusion

It has been shown that Shona's tense/aspect system is based on a precedence/subsequence framework rather than a past/present/future framework. The three observations described above are a consequence of that framework. First of all, Shona has a set of morphemes which mark precedence or subsequence- either temporal or aspectual, meaning that the same morphemes are used for both tense and aspect. Secondly, Shona has a progressive aspect, which is contrasted with imperfective aspect, and finally, it was shown that in this system, the present tense is unmarked and is inferred from the lack of marked precedence/subsequence relations.

Tense and aspect in Shona is much more complex than what is shown here. Particularly, questions remain about other possible constructions with shades of meaning that vary only slightly from the ones shown here, as well as very different constructions involving some of the same tense/aspect morphemes. However, the generalizations given above provide a basis for further study on this topic.

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