Questionnaire on Tense and Aspect in African Languages

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Introduction

This questionnaire seeks to establish a number of facts related to the encoding and interpretation of temporal relations in African languages. The specific goals of this exercise are (i) to establish if tense systems have clearly marked temporal boundaries (for example some languages mark hodiernal and hestiernal past/future) and thus determine what ‘remote/distant’ and ‘near/recent’ tenses mean; (ii) to establish if (and the extent to which) the present tense is distinguished from habitual and (present) progressive aspect; (iii) to determine the extent to which the tense/aspect system is intertwined with the encoding of the ‘persistence of the effects’ or lack thereof of a past situation (see example 1 below); and (iv) to determine the flexibility in the uses of particular tenses in a language.

As you provide sentences based on the model sentence, please provide, for every example, a latinate version of the pronunciation as it might appear in works written in your language (the ‘orginal text’ line), and if there are no standard representations that make the pronunciation clear, please indicate to us as much as you can (in some prefatory remarks) how your transcriptions should be pronounced. If you find it best to use the phonetic alphabet, please do so, but it is not necessary as long as your instructions are clear enough.

Present each example with a morpheme breakdown as well indicating, as best you can, the distinctions between the morphemes. All morphemes within the same word should be separated by dashes and any morpheme that codes several features in an undecomposable form should distinguish the relevant elements by separation with periods. The following examples from ciNsenga are illustrative.

Example 1. (ciNsenga, Bantu N41)

1a) Khuzwayo waːnoːla mkoːndoː
Khuzwayo w–a–nol–a mkondo
Khuzwayo SM.C1-PST-sharpen-fv 3.spear
‘Khuzwayo sharpened the spear’

1b) Khuzwayo eːnze waːnoːla mkoːndoː
Khuzwayo Ò-e-nze w–a–nol–a mkondo
Khuzwayo SM.C1-PST-be SM.C1-PST-sharpen-fv 3.spear
‘Khuzwayo sharpened the spear’

Both sentences in Example 1 describe an event that occurred on the day of utterance (hodiernal past). The difference is that 1a) implies that the spear in question is still sharp (i.e. the effects of ‘sharpening’ persist) at the time of utterance whereas 1b) implies that the spear is no longer sharp (i.e. the effects of sharpening no longer persist) at utterance time. These interpretive distinctions are exemplary of the sorts of distinctions you will be asked to be sensitive to in answering the questions below. Please be sure to comment whenever you think it will clarify what you take the interpretation to be, and especially if the sentence is acceptable under one interpretation, but not another. If you notice something special, or you want to clarify the morphology or syntax, please comment on that as well (right below the example or set of examples in question. Finally, if a model sentence has more than one translation, be sure to provide both and please indicate, as best you can, whatever differences in meaning or conversational usage might distinguish using one translation or the other.

As the last remarks indicate, in many of the tasks that follow, you will be asked not only for a translation of a model sentence, but for judgments about the scenarios in which the sentence can be appropriately uttered. Please be sure to indicate as clearly as possible which reading for any given sentence is the one you find acceptable and if you find that some examples are more acceptable than others, please use our acceptability scale to give graded judgments, if you feel that such gradations accurately capture your intuitions. The scale is as follows:

* Unacceptable either at all or at least under the interpretation that you have been asked about.
*? Very marginally possible, perhaps only by comparison with an example or interpretation that
is clearly *

?? Very odd. You probably would not say this sentence this way or would not say it this way for
the interpretation you have been asked about.

? Just a little off. Something not quite right about it.

OK This sounds like a natural sentence and is an appropriate sentence to use for the
interpretation that you have been asked about.

If you have any questions about how to proceed or you would like to check if you are filling in the
questionnaire in the way desired, please contact me at R.Simango@ru.ac.za.

Questionnaire
Translate all the sentences in this questionnaire into
the specified language in accordance with the context given.

Specify the language into which you are translating here: **Limbum**

A1. The event or situation occurred today

a) Jak á ba boo rkiŋ nshe.
   Jack moulded a clay pot

b) Māvutō á ba du ntaa.
   Mavuto went to the market

c) Timotì á ba cep ṅgànọ.
   Timothy insulted the man

d) Môrîn á ba cete kêŋ.
   Maureen closed the door

e) Jenifà á ba shwa’ tu zhii.
   Jennifer combed her hair

A2. The event or situation occurred yesterday (if the sentences are identical those in (A1), say ‘same as above’)

a) Jak á mu boo rkiŋ nshe.
   Jack moulded a clay pot

b) Māvutō á mu du ntaa.
   Mavuto went to the market

c) Timotì á mu cep ṅgànọ.
   Timothy insulted the man

d) Môrîn á mu cete kêŋ.
   Maureen closed the door

e) Jenifà á mu shwa’ tu zhii.
   Jennifer combed her hair

A3. The event or situation occurred two days ago (if the sentences are identical to those in (A2), say ‘same as above’) **Same as above.**
A4. The event or situation occurs on a regular basis

a) Jak ke sù’si bkan bvi'ii
Jack ASP.HAB wash C2-dishes C2-3PL.POSS.FOC
Jack washes his own dishes

b) Mâvuto ke du ntaa.
Mavuto ASP.HAB go market
Mavuto goes to the market

c) Timotì kòn ıgàŋ
Timothy like the man.
Timothy likes the man

d) Môrîn ke caŋ basikùl
Maureen ASP.HAB ride bicycle
Maureen rides a bicycle

e) Jenifà ke saŋ mnlèŋshi
Jennifer ASP.HAB draw pictures
Jennifer draws pictures

A5. The event or situation is currently ongoing

a) Jak ce sù’si bkan bvi'ii
Jack ASP.PROG wash C2-dishes C2-3PL.POSS.FOC
Jack washing his own dishes

b) Mâvuto ce du ntaa.
Mavuto ASP.PROG go market
Mavuto is going to the market

c) Timotì ce lâa nè ıgàŋ
Timothy ASP.PROG speak PREP the man.
Timothy is speaking to the man

d) Môrîn ce caŋ basikùl
Maureen ASP.PROG ride bicycle
Maureen is riding a bicycle

e) Jenifà ce saŋ mnlèŋshi
Jennifer ASP.PROG draw pictures
Jennifer is drawing pictures

A6. The event or situation will occur later today

a) Jak be lò sù’si bkan bvi'ii
Jack FUT1 wash C2-dishes C2-3PL.POSS.FOC
Jack will wash his own dishes

b) Mâvuto be lò du ntaa.
Mavuto FUT1 go market
Mavuto will go to the market

c) Timotì be lò cep ıgàŋ
Timothy FUT1 insult PREP the man.
Timothy will insult the man

d) Môrîn be lò caŋ basikùl
Maureen FUT1 ride bicycle
Maureen will ride a bicycle

e) Jenifà be lò saŋ mnlèŋshi
Jennifer FUT1 draw pictures
Jennifer will draw pictures
Jennifer will draw pictures

A7. The event or situation will occur tomorrow (if the sentences are identical to those in (A6), say ‘same as above’).

a) Jak be fumu sù'si bkaŋ bvii
   Jack FUT2 wash C2-dishes C2-3PL.POSS.FOC
   Jack will wash his own dishes

b) Mavuto be fumu du ntaa.
   Mavuto FUT2 go market
   Mavuto will go to the market

c) Timothy be fumu cep ngaŋ.
   Timothy FUT2 insult the man.
   Timothy will insult the man

d) Maureen be fumu caŋ basikul
   Maureen FUT2 ride bicycle
   Maureen will ride a bicycle

e) Jennifer be fumu saŋ mln'gshi
   Jennifer FUT2 draw pictures
   Jennifer will draw pictures

A8. The event or situation will occur the day after tomorrow (if the sentences are identical to those in (A7), say ‘same as above’)

a) Jak be fumu sù'si bkaŋ bvii
   Jack FUT2 wash C2-dishes C2-3PL.POSS.FOC
   Jack will wash his own dishes

b) Mavuto be fumu du ntaa.
   Mavuto FUT2 go market
   Mavuto will go to the market

c) Timothy be fumu cep ngaŋ.
   Timothy FUT2 insult the man.
   Timothy will insult the man

d) Maureen be fumu caŋ basikul
   Maureen FUT2 ride bicycle
   Maureen will ride a bicycle

e) Jennifer be fumu saŋ mln'gshi
   Jennifer FUT2 draw pictures
   Jennifer will draw pictures

* If your language has other forms of marking future time over and above those indicated in A6 – A8, please indicate and provide examples following the pattern above.

This one marks the future time that comes before the time indicated in A6 and A8

a) Jak be sù'si bkaŋ bvii
   Jack FUT0 wash C2-dishes C2-3PL.POSS.FOC
   Jack will wash his own dishes

b) Mavuto be du ntaa.
   Mavuto FUT0 go market
   Mavuto will go to the market

c) Timothy be cep ngaŋ.
   Timothy FUT0 insult the man.
   Timothy will insult the man

d) Maureen be caŋ basikul
   Maureen FUT0 ride bicycle
   Maureen will ride a bicycle
The following mark future time that comes over and above those indicated in A6 – A8

f) Jak be kèe sùsì bkanj bvi
   Jack FUT3 wash C2-dishes C2-3PL.POSS.FOC
   Jack will wash his own dishes

g) Mavutò be kèe du ntaa.
   Mavuto FUT3 go market
   Mavuto will go to the market

h) Timotì be kèe cep ngàn.
   Timothy FUT3 insult the man.
   Timothy will insult the man

i) Mòrîn be kèe caŋ basikûl
   Maureen FUT3 ride bicycle
   Maureen will ride a bicycle

j) Jennifà be kèe saŋ mnlèŋshi
   Jennifer FUT3 draw pictures
   Jennifer will draw pictures

A9. The event or situation was ongoing at the said time

a) Jak à m ce sùsì bkanj
   Jack 3rd.SMPST3 ASP.PROG wash C2-dishes
   ânfè’ wèr à m tose e.
   TEM 1st.pl 3rd.pl.SM PST3 arrive vowel echo.
   Jack was washing dishes when we arrived

b) Mavutò à m ce du ntaa ânfè’ wèr-woowèe
   Mavuto 3rd.sg.SM PST3 ASP.PROG go market TEM 3rd.pl.INCL
   à m tarte e.
   3rd.pl.SM PST3 meet vowel echo
   Mavuto was going to the market when we met him

c) Timotì a m ce de’a ngàŋ ânfè’ Sàm
   Timothy 3rd.sg.SM PST3 ASP.PROG speak AM the man TEM Sam
   à m lótì.
   3rd.sg.SM PST3 leave
   Timothy was speaking to the man when Sam left

d) Mòrîn à m ce caŋ basikûl ânfè’ wèr à
   Maureen 3rd.sg.SM PST3 ASP.PROG ride bicycle TEM 1st.pl 3rd.pl.SM
   m ye ye.
   PST3 see 3rd.sg.OBJ
   Maureen was riding a bicycle when we saw her

e) Jennifà à m ce saŋ mnlèŋshi ânfè’ wèr
   Jennifer 3rd.sg.SM PST3 ASP.PROG draw pictures TEM 1st.pl
   à m tose e.
   3rd.pl.SM PST3 arrive vowel echo.
   Jennifer was drawing pictures before we arrived

A10. The event or situation had just come to pass at the said time

a) Jak à m ba nè a ku sùsì bkanj
   Jack 3rd.sg.SM PST3 be PERF ADJ wash C2-dishes
   ânfè’ wèr à m tose e.
Jack had just washed the dishes when we arrived.

Mavuto had gone to the market when we left.

Mavuto had been going to the market in the morning.

Timothy had spoken to the man that morning.

Maureen had been riding a bicycle for three months.

Jennifer had been drawing pictures before we arrived.

The event or situation will be ongoing at the said time.

a) Jack will be washing his clothes when we arrive home.

Mavuto will be going to the market in the morning.

Timothy will be speaking to the man starting tomorrow.

Maureen will be riding a bicycle from next week.

Jennifer will be drawing pictures until you return.

The event or situation occurred today (assume the information in brackets to be true at the time of speaking).

a) Jack moulded a clay pot (The pot still exists)

b) Mavuto went to the market (Mavuto is at the market)
B2. The event or situation occurred today (assume the information in brackets to be true at the time of speaking. Note: if the sentences are identical to those in (B1), say ‘same as above’).

a) Jak à ba boó rkin' nshe.  
Jack 3rd.sg.SM PST1 mould pot clay  
Jack moulded a clay pot (the pot is broken)

b) Mavutô à ba du ntaa.  
Mavuto 3rd.sg.SM PST1 go market  
Mavuto went to the market (Mavuto has since returned from the market or gone to another place)

c) Timotì à ba cep ngaan.  
Timothy 3rd.sg.SM PST1 insult the man  
Timothy insulted the man (Timothy has since apologized and the man has forgiven him)

d) Maurîn à ba cete kënj.  
Maureen 3rd.sg.SM PST1 close door  
Maureen closed the door (The door is closed)

e) Jenifà à ba shwa' zhii tu.  
Jennifer 3rd.sg.SM PST1 comb C1a-3rd.sg.POSS C1a-head  
Jennifer combed her hair (The hair looks kempt)

B3. The event or situation occurred yesterday (assume the information in brackets is true at the time of speaking. Note: if the sentences are identical to those in (B1/B2), say ‘same as above’).

a) Jak à muboo rkin' nshe.  
Jack 3rd.sg.SM PST2 mould pot clay  
Jack moulded a clay pot (the pot still exists)

b) Mavutô à mu du ntaa.  
Mavuto 3rd.sg.SM PST2 go market  
Mavuto went to the market (Mavuto is at the market)

c) Timotì à mu cep ngaan.  
Timothy 3rd.sg.SM SMPST2 insult the man  
Timothy insulted the man (The man is angry)

d) Maurîn à mu cete kënj.  
Maureen 3rd.sg.SM PST2 close door  
Maureen closed the door (The door is closed)

e) Jenifà à mu shwa' zhii tu.  
Jennifer 3rd.sg.SM PST2 comb C1a-3rd.sg.POSS C1a-head  
Jennifer combed her hair (The hair is dishevelled)
B4. The event or situation occurred yesterday (assume the information in brackets is true at the time of speaking. Note: if the sentences are same those in (B3), say ‘same as above’)
   a) Jack moulded a clay pot (the pot is broken)
   b) Mavuto went to the market (Mavuto has returned from the market or gone to another place).
   c) Timothy insulted the man (Timothy has since apologized and the man has forgiven him)
   d) Maureen closed the door (The door is open).
   e) Jennifer combed her hair (The hair is dishevelled).

   **Same as B3.**

B5. The event or situation occurred the day before yesterday (assume the information in brackets is true at the time of speaking. Note: if the sentences are identical to those in B3/B4, say ‘same as above’).
   a) Jack moulded a clay pot (the pot still exists)
   b) Mavuto went to the market (Mavuto is at the market)
   c) Timothy insulted the man (The man is angry)
   d) Maureen closed the door (The door is closed).
   e) Jennifer combed her hair (The hair looks kempt).

   **Same as B3.**

B6. The event or situation occurred the day before yesterday (assume the information in brackets is true at the time of speaking. Note: if the sentences are identical to those in B3/B4, say ‘same as above’).
   a) Jack moulded a clay pot (the pot is broken)
   b) Mavuto went to the market (Mavuto has returned from the market or gone to another place)
   c) Timothy insulted the man (Timothy has since apologized and the man has forgiven him)
   d) Maureen closed the door (The door is open)
   e) Jennifer combed her hair (The hair is dishevelled).

   **Same as B3.**

* If your language has other forms of marking past situations over and above those indicated in B1 – B6, please indicate and provide examples following the pattern above.

   a) Jak à m boo rkiŋ nshe.
      Jack 3rd.sm PST mould pot clay
      Jack moulded a clay pot.
   b) Māvutō à m du ntaa.
      Mavuto 3rd.sg.sm PST go market
      Mavuto went to the market.
   c) Timotì à m cep ngāŋ.
      Timothy 3rd.sg.sm PST insult the man
      Timothy insulted the man.
   d) Maurîn à m cete kēŋ.
      Maureen 3rd.sg.sm PST close door
      Maureen closed the door.
   e) Jenifā à m shwa’ zhiï tu.
      Jennifer 3rd.sg.sm PST comb C1a-3rd.sg.POSS C1a-head
      Jennifer combed her hair.

   **Same as earlier indicated in A9.**

C1. Using the same verb forms you chose for A1 state if it is possible to say that the event took place yesterday or the day before yesterday. **No! You can only use tense marker mu for yesterday past, not ba.**

   (i) ??Mòrîn à ba cete kēŋ nēŋkùr/ā cāa nēŋkùr.
      Maureen 3SG.SM PST1 close door yesterday/the day before yesterday
      Maureen closed the door yesterday/the day before yesterday

   a) Jak à mu boo rkiŋ nshe nēŋkùr/ā cāa nēŋkùr.
      Jack 3rd.sg.sm PST2 mould pot clay yesterday/the day before yesterday
Jack moulded a clay pot yesterday/the day before yesterday.

Mavuto went to the market yesterday/the day before yesterday.

Mavuto went to the market yesterday/the day before yesterday.

Mavuto went to the market yesterday/the day before yesterday.

Mavuto went to the market yesterday/the day before yesterday.

Maureen closed the door yesterday/the day before yesterday.

Maureen closed the door yesterday/the day before yesterday.

Maureen closed the door yesterday/the day before yesterday.

Maureen closed the door yesterday/the day before yesterday.

Maureen closed the door yesterday/the day before yesterday.

Maureen closed the door yesterday/the day before yesterday.

Maureen closed the door yesterday/the day before yesterday.

Jennifer combed her hair yesterday/the day before yesterday.

C2. Using the same verb forms you chose for A2 and A3 state if it is possible to say that the event took place today.

a) ?? Jak à mu boo rkinj nshe ntnini.
   Jack moulded a clay pot today.

b) ?? Mavuto à mu du ntaa ntnini.
   Mavuto went to the market today.

c) ?? Timoti à mu cep nga nga ntnini.
   Timothy insulted the man today.

d) ?? Maureen à mu cete kenge ntnini.
   Maureen closed the door today.

e) ?? Jennifer à mu shwa’ zhii tu ntnini.
   Jennifer combed her hair today.

C3. Using the same verb forms you chose for A6 state if it is possible to say that the event will occur tomorrow/the day after tomorrow/next week. No! For tomorrow and after, the future is be füu.

a) Jak be füu ce susi bkaŋ bviit
   Jack will wash his own dishes tomorrow/the day after tomorrow/next week

b) Mavuto be füu ce du ntaa.
   Mavuto is going to the market tomorrow/the day after tomorrow/next week

c) Timoti be füu ce lâa nè ngaŋ
   Timothy will speak the man tomorrow/the day after tomorrow/next week
a) ?? Jak be fuu sù’si bkaŋ bvii ntnini
    Jack FUT2 wash C2-dishes C2-3PL.POSS.FOC today
    Jack will wash his own dishes today.

b) ?? Mavutò be fuu du ntaa ntnini.
    Mavuto FUT2 go market ntnini.
    Mavuto will go to the market today.

c) ?? Timoti be fuu cep ngåŋ ntnini.
    Timothy FUT2 insult the man ntnini.
    Timothy will insult the man today.

d) ?? Morîn be fuu caŋ basikùl ntnini
    Maureen FUT2 ride bicycle ntnini.
    Maureen will ride a bicycle today.

e) ?? Jenifà be fuu saŋ mlèŋshi ntnini
    Jennifer FUT2 draw pictures ntnini.
    Jennifer will draw pictures today.

Tense forms as chosen in A7 can only be used for tomorrow and not today.