THE 0 TENSE MARKER IN THE DECLINE OF THE SWAHILI AUXILIARY FOCUS SYSTEM.

BENJI WALD

This paper addresses the history and current status of the Swahili 0 "tense marker" (henceforth TM), as in:

(1) yule u-0-m-penda-ye si-ye a-0-ku-penda-ye
    (that 2s-TM=0-3s-love-Re/M Neg-3s 3s-TM=0-2s-love-Re/M)
    "the one you love is not the one who loves you" (MBS 1944:31)

The 0 TM identifies a morphological position within the Swahili (and general Bantu) verb complex immediately following the obligatory subject marker, and necessarily preceding the verb of the clause. A few additional elements, such as the object markers in (1), may intervene between the TM and the verb. Usually the TM position is filled by one of a number of substantive TMs. Example (2) below exemplifies with a and na, the two TMs which will be of further interest to us, since in certain contexts they are only minimally, if at all, distinct from the 0 TM.

(2a) u-na-m-penda (2s-TM=na-3s-love)
(2b) w-a-m-penda (2s-TM=a-3s-love)
   'you love/loved/are/were gonna love him/her'

We will soon be very much concerned with the semantic content of na and a, but, as the shared translation in (2) suggests, there is a problem in determining the semantic difference between these two TMs. Similarly, with regard to tense or aspect, the same problem exists in trying to determine a difference between 0 and the TMs of (2). Otherwise, the Swahili 0 TM is confined to relative clauses. 1 The TMs of (2) are not. Therefore, the problem of distinguishing 0 from a and na becomes most acute when a and na mark the verb of a relative clause, as in (3).

---

1 For the sake of accuracy, it should be noted that 0 is also historically manifest in the "locative copula" construction. That is, tu-po "we're here" and similar cases could be analyzed as tu-0-po (1p-TM=0-COP=0-here). Earlier the construction had the form tu-0-li-po (1p-TM=0-COP=li-here) with an explicit copula, the defective verb li li survives in the relative construction, e.g., mahali tu-0-li-po (place we-TM=O-COP-RelM) "the place that we are". This is exactly the same as any other 0 relative clause construction, e.g., mahali tu-0-oma-po (place we-TM=O-see-RelM) "the place that we see (here)". This direct survival of the 0 TM must be carefully distinguished from other cases in which 0 results from the loss of a historical TM. For example, originally the 0 TM in tu-0-li-po (> tu-po) contrasted with a "Past" TM a (< *a, distinct from a < *a, the TM discussed in the text), e.g., tw-a-li-po (1p-TM=a-COP-Loc M) 'we were here'. This TM was lost through the stages: tw-a-li-po > tw-a-li-kuwa-po > tu-*0-li-kuwa-po 'we were here'. In the second stage, the verb kuwa 'become' takes over the "copula" function and a-li becomes an unanalyzed unit serving as the "Past" TM. In the third stage, the "Past" TM a-li was reduced to li, so that the appearance of *0 before li here is unetymological. The first stage survives mainly as a resource in Swahili verse, and the second stage survives in some Northern
(3a) AMBA-REL yule amba-ye u-na-m-penda/w-a-m-penda

(3b) TM-REL yule u-na-ye-m-penda
‘the one you love/loved/are/were gonna love’

In appropriate contexts the 0 TM, as in (1), can have any of the translations indicated for (3). The semantic distinctions between 0, a and na as used in the relative clause contexts of (3) remain problematic. Example (4) below illustrates apparent indifference in the variation among the three possibilities, 0, AMBA-REL and TM-REL.

(4) yule a-0-jijimika-ye tangi yake ni nzuri kuliko a-0-kaa-’e wazi - lakini yule amba-ye a-vaa bubui kidogo staha yake na heshima yake inakuwa zaidi kuliko yule a-na-ye-tembea wazi wazi

"the woman who covers (TM=0) herself has a better composure than the one who stays (TM=0) uncovered - but the one who (AMBA-REL) wears (TM=a) the hooded robe, her [sense of] decorum and respect comes across a little more than the one who walks around (TM=na-REL) exposed " (M27m Mkumbi)

Example (4) quotes a speaker from Mkunumbi, a Northern Swahili speaking town on the mainland of Lamu province in Kenya. It does not reflect the speaker's vernacular (kiSwahili cha ndani), a variety of Bajuni, but rather a more general out-talk variety (UmgangSprache) of the Northern Swahili area. No decisive motivation can be discerned for the switch from one relative clause strategy to another, or, as we will come to look at it, the switch from one to another of the three TMs, 0, a, and na. This range of variation would be rare in the standard of the same time period, as we will see, but in principle there is nothing in the standard grammar to prevent it. Later we will discuss this phenomenon further.

More generally, we will examine evidence that (a) the standard and Southern uses of 0, a and na TMs do not differ in tense or aspect but are historically distinguished from each other in an auxiliary focus system embedded in the tense-aspect-mood system that vastly pre-dates standardization, (b) the decline of this system began well before standardization, and has continued through the period of standardization, both in spoken and standard written varieties of Swahili.

Discussion will proceed from a historically distant point of departure requiring much deduction and the comparative method of reconstruction to much more recent history where direct observation is possible, revealing greater detail in the later phases of the process of change involving 0 and the other relevant TMs.

dialects, e.g., Bajuni. It will not be necessary to further discuss this continuing Swahili context for the 0 TM in the text. Nevertheless, the text characterization of the historical function of the 0 TM will be consistent with recognizing the formal survival of the same 0 TM in the locative copula context. This has to do with the fact that "it and its reflexes can never be the final constituent of a clause.

2 In this respect, standard written Swahili shows itself to be more influenced by the trends affecting certain widely spoken varieties of Swahili than by regulatory standards described in pedagogical Swahili grammars.
Comparative evidence indicates that the current Swahili distinction between a and na descends from a much earlier distinction between 0 and a, at a time when 0 was used in main as well as relative clauses. For our purposes it will be sufficient to consider evidence in East Bantu. The 0 TM in main clause uses is widespread in East Bantu. Particularly revealing is Zulu (Southeast Coast Bantu/Nguni group), representative of the Southeast Bantu languages. Like all the other Southeast Bantu languages, Zulu has embedded in its tense-aspect system a system of the type called an auxiliary focus system by Hyman & Watters (1984). The "auxiliary" element in this kind of system is reflected in Bantu systems in the TM. Since many of the TMs which engage in this system in Bantu have an auxiliary origin, Hyman & Watters' term can be retained, with an extension of the notion of "auxiliary" in Bantu to cover the TMs. Alternatively, the Bantu systems can be called TM focus systems. We will prefer this latter term, in order to concentrate on the distinctions among the TMs of interest. In any case, the function of the Zulu, and other Bantu, TM focus systems is within the range of those described more generally by Hyman & Watters for auxiliary focus systems.

In terms of function, such a system can also be called a constituent focus system, because its purpose is to assign the maximal focus of a clause to one or another clause constituent. Accordingly, this term will be used in further discussion where the functioning of this system is at issue. Focus, itself, is a fairly abstract but unified principle of relative information status, such that the information contained in the constituent with maximal focus in a clause has some implication which is more asserted and less presupposed than any other information in the clause. In this way, maximal focus may have various more concrete contextual purposes, such as counter-assertion, contrast or indication that a nominal referent has the status of new information. Accordingly, in the examples given below for Zulu and other constituent focus systems, there will be several possible translations for focus effects out of further context. In any particular context, interpretation of the particular motivation for maximal focus depends on pragmatic deduction from the larger discourse context and/or communicative situation. The constituent focus system itself is grammatical and semantic, since it is supported by obligatory grammatical devices which indicate that some particular constituent rather than another is being emphasized by receiving maximal focus.

3 If we go back much further than East Bantu, we would have to recognize the basis of the 0 TM in a post-verbal tense-aspect-mood system. In addition to the 0 TM, this system survives in Swahili in the subjunctive, e.g., tu-0-pend-e (lp-0-love-Sjn) 'we should love (it)', and the negative ha-tu-0-pend-i (Neg-lp-0-love-Neg) 'we don't/didn't/ won't love (it)'. Additional post-verbal markers in this system occur in various Bantu languages, including various non-urban varieties of Swahili. In the post-verbal system the 0 TM is distinguished by the final vowel -a, e.g., tu-0-pend-a. Already in Proto-Bantu, some pre-verbal auxiliaries function as TMs. But most of the current pre-verbal TMs in Swahili are later developments. As the pre-verbal TM system developed, the 0 TM came to show a closer affinity for it than the other members of the post-verbal system, because it alone shares with the pre-verbal TM system the continuation of the final vowel -a. (The TM ka is a partial exception here, because it can co-occur with the subjunctive, e.g., tu-ka-on-e lp-ka-see-Sjn 'let's go and see'; interestingly ka was already a TM in Proto-Bantu.) It is of course interesting and important for other purposes, but, for our purposes, it is not necessary to explore the post-verbal system in Proto-Bantu or later in order to understand what has been happening to the 0 TM in relation to the a and na TMs.
The examples in (5) below, adapted from Doke (1968:334-41), show the basic elements of the Zulu constituent focus system.

(5a) *Post-V Focus*

ngi-0-bona abantu (I-TM=0-see people) 'I see (the) people'

(5b) *V included in Maximal Focus.*

ngi-ya/*0 (-ba)-bona (I-TM=ya-(OM=them)-see) 'I (DO) see (them)'

(5c) *Post-V Focus/V included in Maximal Focus*

ngi-ya/0 -ba-bona abantu 'I DO see or am seeing/habitually see (the) people'

(cf. Doke 1968:339)

The point of departure for this system is one in which the maximal focus of the clause is restricted to an obligatory post-verbal constituent. In (5a) the post-verbal constituent happens to be the object of the clause. Maximal focus on the object would be appropriate if, for example, it represented new information, e.g., 'I see (some) people'. However, it would also be appropriate if it were old information, but in contrast with some other referent understood or expressed in the larger discourse context, e.g., 'I see the people (themselves), NOT their footprints.'

In the Zulu constituent focus system, the TM 0 is paired with the TM ya. The TM ya retracts either the entire maximal focus, or the scope of maximal focus from post-verbal position so that the verb is included in the maximal focus of the clause. In other words, it raises the focus on the verb constituent to the same level or even higher than any post-verbal constituent. It is not otherwise distinct from 0 with respect to tense-aspect. With regard to the grammatical obligatoriness of this system, (5b) is particularly revealing because it shows that if the verb is clause-final, then it MUST be marked with ya. This follows the grammatical logic of reserving 0 for indicating that the maximal focus of the clause is *post-verbal*. The translations for (5b) indicate that pragmatic choices of interpretation remain, e.g., whether or not the clause is counter-asserted.

Finally, in (5c) we come to a *pragmatic* distinction between ya and 0 which will be of great importance in understanding the relationship between the Southeast Bantu and Swahili auxiliary focus systems, and which has misled many analysts of Swahili and other East Coast languages who were not aware of the relationship between the constituent focus system and the tense-aspect system. (5c) displays a minimal pair between ya and 0 with post-verbal material. By one possible interpretation, the difference is simply one of the scope of maximal focus. With 0 the maximal focus is restricted to the post-verbal constituent, as in (5a). With ya the scope of maximal focus may include the verb as well as the post-verbal constituent, i.e., the entire predicate. This would be appropriate, for example, if the predicate were being counter-asserted for some reasons, as in "I DO see the people (right now or from time to time)". However, for such contexts Doke also reports a possible distinction between ya as "continuous" (i.e., progressive) and 0 as "habitual" (i.e., Vendlerian state, cf. Vendler 1967). About this he wrote:
In some cases when the same adjunct [post-verbal material] is used with either tense [TM], the former [0] has the idea of habitual action, the latter [ya] of continuous action. (Doke 1968:167)

He did not provide further explanation for these "cases" than to provide examples which need not have such progressive interpretations. The examples he actually offers are:

(5d) ba-0-yi-dumisa inyoka (they-TM=0-cl 9-worship snake)
'they conduct snake-worship'

(5e) ba-ya-yi-dumisa inyoka (they-TM=ya-cl 9-worship snake)
'they are worshipping the snake'

Doke (1968:339)

In appropriate contexts, either (5d) or (5e) can be either progressive or habitual. Thus, (5d) can also be used for progressive "they are worshipping the SNAKE", with maximal focus restricted to the post-verbal constituent, and (5e) can also be used for habitual "they DO (so) worship the snake", with the verb included in the maximal focus. Elsewhere Doke (1968:167) admits this, stating "The two tenses ... are not really distinct in meaning or significance". By this he means "with respect to tense and aspect"; they are clearly different with respect to assignment of maximal constituent focus.

Why, then, did Doke mention (5d) and (5e)? What is the effect that Doke is referring to in (5d) and (5e), and how does it come about? The following section addresses these questions under the label, the pragmatic aspectual focus effect.

It can be deduced that the preference of high focus for a progressive rather than a habitual interpretation, out of further context, is a pragmatic effect of the constituent focus system of Zulu and various other East Bantu languages, including the one ancestral to Swahili's current system. I will call this pragmatic effect the pragmatic aspectual focus effect. It begins with the pragmatic interpretation of ya as placing the maximal constituent focus on the TM itself. This is a possible use of ya, since it obligatorily includes the verb (i.e., something in the morphological verb complex) in the maximal scope of focus, while it may or may not include post-verbal material as well. Note also that the phonetic substantiality of ya iconically provides it with greater focus than 0. We would not expect any language to have a constituent focus system in which 0 could be grammaticalised as the higher of a pair of focus markers.

It is natural that if Zulu speakers were presented with a minimal pair such as (5d) and (5e), which differ only in the choice of a TM, their first impulse would be to recognize ya as a case in which the maximal focus is on the TM itself. The question then becomes: why would focus on the TM favor a progressive interpretation more than a habitual one?

I am not aware that evidence has ever been gathered from Zulu to answer that question. However, the likely answer can be gleaned from some observations Contini-Morava (1989) made
about (standard) Swahili. In order to see the connection, we must note the parallelism between the (standard and Southern) Swahili TMs a and na and the respective Zulu TMs 0 and ya. The parallelism of relevance is that, according to Contini-Morava, both Swahili a and na are semantically neutral to "activity" (her term for "progressive") and state contexts, where by "state" she means Vendlerian state contexts such as habitual, general, gnomic, predispositional, etc. (Vendler 1967), i.e., contexts attributing indefinite iterativity or duration to an event. This semantic neutrality parallels the Zulu neutrality of 0 and ya to the same contexts, as discussed above.

Contini-Morava did not quite recognize Swahili a and na to reflect a pair of TMs related in a TM focus system (and indeed the Swahili TM focus system no longer sustains a constituent focus system with the grammatical constraints of the Zulu system). Instead, she proposed that na has a more specific semantic content than a within the tense (time-related) system. She then argued that the more specific semantic content of na pragmatically favors it over a for progressive contexts, even though a is not semantically excluded from such contexts, nor is na excluded from state contexts. Her argument is as follows:

Based on the hypothesized semantic distinction between a and na, one would expect a to be relatively favored with verbs describing states, whereas na should be favored with verbs describing activities. This is because na defines a more precise temporal relationship between an event and a point in time—that of inclusion—than does a, which simply covers the whole time line. This difference between their meanings suggests that na is the more likely choice with verbs describing activities, because activities are "processes going on in time" (as defined in Vendler 1967:99), than with states, which lack temporal definition. Similarly, we may expect speakers to use a more often when referring to states, where precision of time-reference is unnecessary, than to activities. [BW: my emphases] (Contini-Morava 1989:68).

The particular semantic component that C-M attributes to a and na is the linking of some phase of the event represented by the verb to a point in time which, following C-M, we will call the time orientation (conceptually adopted by C-M from my term "time reference point" in Wald 1973). For example, in an utterance meaning "it's raining" the time orientation is the moment of speaking. In an utterance meaning "every spring it rains" the time orientation is "every spring", an indefinitely iterative series of points in time, indefinite because no final event of this series is expected or, more importantly, relevant. According to C-M, the particular time orientation referred to by a or na must be deduced pragmatically in any context, but in the case of a it may have any temporal relation to the event, while in the case of na it must more explicitly be included in some phase of the event.

In further interpreting what C-M intends in the above passage, the concept "temporal definition" can be taken as key. It then becomes clearer that progressive events tend to be single events, temporally bounded, i.e., "temporary", and thus have a perceptual salience, that makes them more often worthy of higher focus than states, the latter being less often singular, as in the case of habituals (which are iterative, recurrent events), and less often clearly temporally bounded,
particular with respect to an expected end-point, as in the case of both iteratives and duratives, cf.
"it's raining" vs. "every spring it rains", "life goes on (all the time)".

At the moment I am more interested in building on C-M's insight than in criticizing her
particular analysis of the distinction between a and na. However, I must mention that the notion
that na allows the information contained in the TM as a constituent to have greater focus than a
seems to me more justifiable than her claim that na indicates a more specific temporal relationship
than a. C-M proposes that na differs from a by containing a semantic component "includes time
orientation" (p. 63). It would seem from this that a but NOT na could be used in contexts where
the relationship "excludes time orientation" exists between a verb and a time orientation, e.g., if all
phases of the event were either completed before the time orientation or began after the time
orientation. However, C-M admits that she cannot identify examples which clearly show this. This
is indeed why she argues for the distinction on pragmatic bases, as in the quote of p. 68 given
above. It seems that in principle C-M cannot identify examples in which a excludes the time
orientation because she can offer no control on pragmatic determination of the time orientation
which can prevent it from being construed as "included" in some phase of the a-marked event in
any example. One can always substitute na for a in standard Swahili without changing the inferred
time relations. Similarly, for Zulu 0 and ya, as we have already seen admitted by Doke.

By the pragmatic aspectual focus effect, manifested in Doke's description of Zulu and C-M's
discussion of Swahili, the constituent in relatively high focus is the TM (as opposed to a post-
verbal constituent), and the particular information in focus, implied or inherent in the TM, is the
time orientation. As argued above by C-M, the pragmatic aspectual focus effect will preferably
interpret the time orientation as referring to a progressive, a single bounded stretch of time (often
called "definite" in the literature), rather than to a state/habitual, a single unbounded stretch of
time or an unbounded series of stretches of time (often called "indefinite" in the literature). As a
pragmatic effect, it reflects only one of many possible uses of including the verb in the maximal
focus of the clause. In all other uses, Swahili na/a and Zulu ya/0, are indifferent to the pragmatic
aspectual difference between state and progressivity, as admitted by Doke and more explicitly
recognized by C-M.

Table 1 below reproduces C-M's table showing the pragmatic relation between a and na for a
set of standard Swahili written texts. It demonstrates that na is more favored over a in contexts
which are most likely to express activities (progressive contexts) than in contexts which are more
likely to represent states. C-M seems to have followed my lead (Wald 1973) in not trying to
decide in every particular case whether or not a context was progressive, since that interferes with
inter-subjective agreement and reproducibility of the results. Instead, she mainly distinguishes
between lexical verbs which are more likely to be used pragmatically in discourse to express states
and those more likely to express ongoing activities. Later (in section 4.2) we will return to the
differential nature of such lexical verbs. For the moment, we will concentrate on the evidence
provided by Table 1 for the connection between higher focus on the TM, i.e., na (but ya in Zulu),
and (probable) progressive contexts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>58% (76)</td>
<td>42% (55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>na</td>
<td>36.8% (156)</td>
<td>63.2% (268)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ p < .001 \]

Table 1 shows a marked and significant difference between a and na. Once again, C-M suggested that the singular temporary activity, characteristic of progressive contexts, generally has a perceptual salience that is worthy of the more precise specification than the indefinite recurrence or duration of states. According to my reformulation, it is not more precise specification but greater focus on the time orientation which produces this effect (the pragmatic aspectual focus effect). We would expect the same to be true of the difference between Zulu 0 and ya respectively.

We can understand, then, how Zulu 0 and ya can be pragmatically polarized in such minimal pair contexts as (5d) and e above to induce speakers to interpret the distinction as "habitual" vs. "progressive" respectively. ya, but not 0, can limit the maximal focus to the time orientation, as information implied in the TM, and this is preferably interpreted as progressive. As long as there is a post-verbal constituent, obligatory for Zulu 0, 0 can be drawn into contrast with ya as having less than maximal focus on the time orientation, and this is interpreted in contrast to ya as habitual. Most likely this is what Doke was reporting on with respect to the minimal pair of (5d-e).

Meanwhile, Table 1 further indicates that in discourse the connection between focus and aspect is only a pragmatic tendency. It is far from invariant. With regard to the Swahili distinction, while Table 1 shows that a exhibits a marked preference for states (or at least certain states) and na for progressive contexts (or at least certain progressive contexts), in either progressive or non-progressive contexts na outnumbers a in raw frequency of occurrence. This would suggest that even though progressive contexts are more often worthy of higher focus than states, states themselves are, more often than not, also worthy of the higher focus.

The establishment of a connection between the constituent focus system and the pragmatics of aspect is an important one, since it is the failure to see this connection that has confused many analysts about the nature and origins of the Swahili and many other East Coast tense-aspect systems. The confusion usually shows up in statements about a TM distinction between "progressive" and "habitual", or some such terms, where the analyst realizes, and often provides data, to show that such a distinction is not reliably made. We have already seen this in Doke's discussion of Zulu, and will see it for other East Bantu languages. In this respect, an important

---

4 We will see that the unconditioned preference of Swahili for "high focus" is a feature of the decline of the constituent focus system. Thus, we do not expect the same degree of preference to be reflected in the Zulu system.
feature of C-M's analysis is that it allows either a and na to be used in progressive and state contexts, since that is indeed the case for standard and many Southern varieties of Swahili. And yet it helps explain the impression of many earlier observers of such varieties that na is more closely associated with progressive contexts than a.

To sum up the discussion so far, the Swahili a/na distinction descends from a constituent focus system in which na indicated that the verb was included in the maximal focus of the clause. As that system declined, one of its pragmatic interpretations remained, the pragmatic aspectual focus effect, by which na indicates relatively high focus on the nature of the time orientation indicated by the TM itself. The particular time orientation of a and na is always a matter of pragmatic inference. The shared semantic content of the two TMs is simply that there is a time orientation. They differ in the degree of focus directed toward that time orientation. Pragmatically, relatively high focus is more favored for a progressive time orientation than for a state one, but there is no semantic compulsion to such an interpretation, and there never has been.

2. In recognizing a correspondence between Swahili a/na and Zulu 0/ya, we have begun to reconstruct the functional (semantic) relations within a constituent focus system from which the current Swahili and Zulu systems descend. But we have not yet begun a reconstruction of forms. At this point I will address the implications between the formal correspondence of the Zulu 0 TM and the Swahili 0 TM.

We can begin by noting that they have some commonalities. One is that in both cases there must be a post-verbal constituent. If there is none, as in (5b) above, Zulu excludes 0 and requires ya in the same tense-aspect contexts. In Swahili a relative marker (RM) obligatorily follows the 0-marked verb, and is encliticised to it, as in (1) above. If there is no RM to represent the post-verbal constituent, Swahili does not allow the 0 TM. Instead, a different form of relativization and choice of either the TM a or na is required, as exemplified in (3) above. To this extent the Swahili and Southeast Bantu 0 TM behave similarly, from which can be reconstructed an earlier grammatically shared requirement that the 0 TM indicates maximal focus on a post-verbal constituent in the clause.

An even closer relationship becomes evident when we compare the Zulu and Swahili 0 TM in relative clause contexts. Representative of a large area of Southeast Bantu, Zulu, like Swahili, requires a post-verbal RM in a relative clause with a 0 TM, if there is no other post-verbal constituent in the relative clause. Thus, we see an identical constraint in Zulu (6)a and the equivalent Swahili (6)b below.

(6a) ZULU umuntu e-ngi-0-m-bona-*(yo) person Dem-1s-TM=0-3s-see-*(-RM)
    (Doke 1968:322)
(6b) SWAHLI mtu ni-0-mw-ona-*(ye) person 1s-TM=0-3s-see-*(-RM)
    'the person I see'
It is evident that the constraint shared by Zulu and Swahili reflects an ancestral constraint, requiring 0 to focus on a post-verbal constituent. Swahili appears to be more archaic than Zulu in one respect. The Swahili RM explicitly refers to the head of the relative clause, and thus indicates that the relative clause as a constituent is being compared for relative focus with the head of the relative clause. In Zulu, as in other Southeast Bantu languages, the post-verbal RM has become formally stereotyped, so that it seems simply to indicate that the entire relative clause, as a constituent, is and must be in lower focus than the matrix clause as a whole. There is no grammatical indication that the information in the relative clause is being compared specifically with the head of the relative clause in terms of relative focus.

On the other hand, Zulu is probably more archaic than Swahili (and those languages closest to Swahili) with respect to another feature of 0 relative clauses. This involves the optionality of the post-verbal RM if there is a post-verbal constituent in the relative clause. (6c) and (6d) below show that Zulu and Swahili differ in this constraint.

(6c) ZULU  umuntu e-angi-0-m-bona-(yo) manje (Doke 1968: 322)
(6d) SWAHILI  muntu ni-0-mw-ona-*ye)sasa  'the person I see now'

The post-verbal RM is not obligatory in cases like Zulu (6c) However, the post-verbal RM is obligatory in Swahili in all cases. This can be explained in terms of the loss of grammatical function of the Swahili 0 TM as an indication of maximal focus restricted to the post-verbal constituent, no less in relative than in main clauses. As we have already seen above, the post-verbal focus function of 0 remains productive in Zulu Thus, as in (6c), the RM can be dropped if the maximal focus within the relative clause is restricted to the post-verbal constituent manje 'now'.

The preceding discussion amplifies our view of the descent of the Swahili 0 TM as follows. The Swahili 0 TM was at one time distinct from the a and na TMs as the TM which indicated post-verbal constituent focus. In the course of time its domain of operation was narrowed to a specific kind of relative clause (discussed further in section 3 below). The narrowing process by which Swahili 0 became restricted to relative clauses is part of a more general and long-term process of decline by which a and na also became restricted to degree of focus on the time orientation shared by these two TM, as discussed earlier. In order to explore relatively early stages of this process in greater detail, we now turn to comparison between Swahili and a system much closer to the one from which the Swahili system developed, the Shambaa system, as described, for example, by Odden (1982) and Besha (1989).

---

5 The RM shows class concord with the head in Swahili (and an adjacent area of the Bantu Northeast Coast), e.g., -ye for a class 1 head such as muntu 'person', but the RM would be -o for a class 2 head such as watu 'people', and so on.
21. Shambaa (Northeast "Coast"/Seuta group) is the language most similar to Swahili to retain a relatively fully functioning constituent focus system. By virtually any measure, Shambaa shares more with Swahili than does Zulu. The most relevant commonality it has with Swahili is a TM focus system with *three* terms, rather than two. The Zulu system has only the two terms 0 and ya. The Shambaa system has three terms, 0, a and ta, corresponding functionally to the three terms of the Swahili system 0, a, and na. Example (7) below illustrates the Shambaa set of distinctions.

(7a) *Post-V Focus.*

\[
\text{ni-0-dika manga (I-TM=0-cook cassava)} \\
\text{`I'm cooking CASSAVA (NOT something else)'}
\]

(7b) *Neutral Focus.*

\[
\text{n-a-dika (manga) (I-TM=a-cook ...)} \\
\text{`I'm cooking (cassava)'}
\]

(7c) *V included in Maximal Focus.*

\[
\text{ni-ta-dika (manga) (I-TM=ta-cook ...)} \\
\text{`I'm COOKing (NOT EATING) (cassava) / I am SO cooking (cassava)'}
\]

Shambaa (7a) illustrates how 0 indicates post-verbal focus, just as in Zulu. This is clearly a very archaic feature of the ancestral constituent focus system. However, Shambaa (7b) and (c) indicate a further distinction to which Zulu ya is indifferent. As in (7b), a indicates what we will call a "neutral" focus. This means that there is no necessary focus difference between the verb and a post-verbal constituent, and indeed the latter need not occur at all. In contrast, (7c) explicitly calls attention to a heightened focus which necessarily includes the verb. However, it does not necessarily include post-verbal material. If it does, an appropriate interpretation is counter-assertion of the entire predication, e.g., "I am so cooking (cassava)". However, the heightened focus may be restricted to some information in the verb, e.g., "cooking, not eating".

On the basis of the Swahili a/na distinction, it might also be expected that the focus could also be on the information contained in the TM itself. While this turns out to be true, the Shambaa a/ta distinction does not parallel the Swahili a/na distinction in the location of the latter's pragmatic aspectual focus effect (as reflected in Table 1 above). That effect remains located in the Shambaa 0/à distinction, parallel to the probably cognate Zulu 0/ya distinction.

As early as Roehl (1911) it was recognized that ta specializes in heightened verb focus. Thus, he translates *ni-ta-kunda* as 'ich will doch', i.e., as a contradictory/counter-assertive 'I do so want (it)' (126). Instead, Roehl, and even Besha, suggest that à is the progressive marker, as opposed to 0. Roehl (125) characterizes à in *n-a-kunda* as "ich will d.h. ich will jetzt (in diesem Augenblick oder auch in dieser Zeit)", i.e., "I want, i.e., now (at this moment or at this time)". The focus on a...

---

6 Roehl's characterization of the Shambaa TM à is the same in intent as Ashton's later characterization of the (standard) TM na, cf. "The use of a-na-taka [BW: 3s-TM=na want /need] indicates that the cook is in
particular time orientation (e.g., "now") contrasts, according to Roehl, with the inexplicit time orientation of 0 (111). Although Besha (1989) goes along with this characterization, her paper contains counter-examples, e.g., *mishi yoshe t-åâ-ja samaki* 'every day we eat (a) fish' (235). As experts in Shambaa, Roehl and Besha confused the semantics of focus with the pragmatic aspectual focus effect. Nurse & Hinnebusch (1993:396) exhibit the complementary confusion when they identify Shambaa 0 with "habitual" contexts. Besha (1989:223) provides counter-examples, e.g., *ivi aha ni-0-handa matindi 'right now I'm planting (0) banana plants'. Instructively, this example continues with two distinct focus contrasts: *nikibinda ni-ta-handa manga* 'when I finish, I'll plant (ta) cassava'. Thus, the 0 focuses on the post-verbal constituent contrast between 'banana plants' and 'cassava'. The ta contrasts with 0 as an indication of time orientation: 'when I finish' as opposed to 'right now'. ta, then, is capable of focusing on the time orientation indicated by the TM. However, such focus does not have the effect of preferably suggesting a progressive interpretation.

Discussion so far suggests that the Shambaa à/ta distinction is not directly comparable to the Swahili a/na distinction. Instead, it suggests that the pragmatic aspectual focus effect is the same in Shambaa as in Zulu, i.e., that it affects the 0/(ya)a distinction. The commonality Shambaa and Zulu share, in contrast to Swahili, suggests that the Swahili withdrawal of 0 from certain grammatical contexts, e.g., main clauses, was crucial to the shift in the a/na distinction. The following section considers in more detail this aspect of the decline of the Swahili constituent focus system.

3. In order to further understand the historical shifts in the Swahili TMs na, a and 0, and, particularly the severe grammatical restrictions on the 0 TM, it is necessary to consider the distinctions in the functions of different Swahili relative clause types. It was already noted in connection with (3) above that there are three distinct Swahili relative clause types, 0, in which the RM (relative marker) follows the verb, TM-REL in which it occurs between the TM and the verb, and AMBA-REL, in which it precedes the TM (as part of a preceding complementizer amba-, introducing the entire relative clause).

The distinction between AMBA-REL and the other two types is easiest to recognize. The AMBA-REL clause has all the properties of a main clause, most importantly for our purposes, freedom in the selection of a TM. In this way it is distinct from both 0 and TM-REL clauses. It will be revealing to recognize that all types of relative clauses have relatively less focus than the matrix clauses in which they are embedded. This notion has already been encountered above in connection with the discussion of the examples in (6), with respect to the relation between the relative clause and its head, the latter being a constituent of a matrix clause. Nevertheless, the

*immediate need of...* (38). Ashton's characterization reflects the pragmatic aspectual focus effect, and was never taken seriously as a semantic norm in standard Swahili by fluent Swahili speakers and writers.
AMBA-REL clause is the type of relative clause in which the focus difference between it and the main clause is minimal. In this respect, it can be characterized as a high focus relative clause.

Consistent with this notion is Ashton's (1944:310) observation about the relation between AMBA-REL clauses and "continuative", i.e., non-restrictive, relative clauses, e.g., "safari zetu, amba-zo zi-li-kuwa ndefu... "our journeys, which (AMBA-REL) were (TM=li) long". This relationship is expected because the information in non-restrictive relative clauses is new, not given or presupposed. Under such conditions the clause could be expected to have higher focus than if it contained only given or presupposed information, as is often the case for restrictive relative clauses, e.g., "safari zetu zi-li-kuwa ndefu "our journeys that were (TM=li-RM) long", where it may already be known that some of our journeys were long, so that the relative clause functions to restrict the reference of the head to these particular journeys.

Meanwhile, Ashton recognized that an AMBA-REL clause need not be non-restrictive. To the extent that AMBA-REL is the only option for certain TMs to appear in a relative clause, it is logical that AMBA-REL is not constrained to non-restrictives. Thus, among Ashton's examples is the restrictive "kazi amba-yo hu-ku-i-fanyajana "the work which (AMBA-REL) you did not do (TM=ku) yesterday" (113). The TM ku does not allow any other kind of relativisation strategy.

Ashton also notes that for information organizational purposes, such as a complex subject (310), AMBA-REL may be used with a restrictive relative clause featuring a TM which can also occur in a TM-REL construction. However, she does not go so far as to explain cases like (8a) below in which AMBA-REL and TM-REL appear to be used indifferently with na in restrictive relative clauses:

(8a) mapigano ya-na-yo-onekana kama yamezemwa sehemu zingine za Kenya yameenea kwingine "kwa njia amba-o i-na-onekana kama iliyopangwa." "fights that seem (TM=na-REL) to have been extinguished in some parts of Kenya have spread elsewhere in a way which (AMBA-REL) seems (TM=na) to have been pre-arranged." (Taifa Leo October 29, 1993:1)

In this example, from the journalese reportage style of standard Swahili, common to both Kenyan and Tanzanian newspapers, apart from the representation of the AMBA-REL clause as a quote from an interviewed witness, the high focus emphasizes what is pragmatically the most important information in the entire passage - that the fights seem to be purposely instigated rather than arising spontaneously. This motivation is entirely independent of the restrictive nature of the clause in which the information is presented.

---

7 The range of functions of restrictive relative clauses deserves more discussion than is practical here. And, in any case, as discussed further in the text, the different Swahili relative clause strategies are not grammatically distinguished by their range of functions, but only by the degree of focus that they attribute to the relative clause as a whole.
At the same time, Ashton's assertion that non-restrictives "require" (310) the AMBA-REL strategy does not seem to be entirely accurate. In (8b) below, an example of seventeenth century (Northern) Swahili poetic verse exhibits the use of 0 in what must be taken to be a non-restrictive relative clause.

(8b) yakwe masikio a-0-pulik-ia-o (her ears she-TM=0-hear-with-RM) "her ears, with which she hears" (Knappert 1979:75)

Standard examples of TM-REL occurring in a non-restrictive clause are also found, as in the following from the jornalese reportage style, e.g.,

(8c) ... serikali ya Algeria i-na-yo-unga mkono POLISARIO "... the Algerian government, which is supporting (TM=na-REL) the POLISARIO" (Uhuru November 9, 1992:2)

In view of the facts, it is most accurate to conclude that AMBA-REL differs from 0 and TM-REL in bestowing relatively high focus on the relative clause. Pragmatically, non-restrictive relative clauses favor relatively high focus, but whether a relative clause is restrictive or not is determined by pragmatic deduction in Swahili, not on the basis of the form of relativisation used.

Once we recognize that the different Swahili relative clause strategies differ in the degree of focus they assign to the relative clause, and that 0 indicates a low degree of focus, consistent with its origin as indicating maximal focus on a post-verbal constituent, then we can deduce that the 0 TM became restricted to its particular type of relative clause when it was grammaticalised as inherently too low in focus to be compatible with clauses of higher focus, such as main and AMBA-REL clauses. For purposes of further discussion, we will recognize main clauses and AMBA-REL clauses as inherently high focus clauses, and TM-REL and 0 clauses as correspondingly inherently low focus clauses.

At this point we need to consider the problem of establishing a difference in focus between 0 and TM=na-REL clauses. This is discussed below.

3. Ashton (1944:111) is uncharacteristically inaccurate in the distinction she draws between 0 and na-REL. She characterizes 0 has having "no time implication". This is accurate in terms of her understanding of a time implication, i.e., a time orientation relative to the moment of speaking. But her characterization of na-REL as indicating an event occurring "at the moment of speaking" is inaccurate. In effect, her translation of the difference between examples of na-REL, e.g., "people who are reading", "a bell which is ringing", etc., and 0 "people who read", "a bell which rings", etc., falls back on the pragmatic aspctual focus effect, discussed above. In this case, the effect is a function of the more general focus distinction between 0 and na, as the two terms of the focus sub-system in inherently low focus clauses.
Evidence from the earliest Southern Swahili texts include minimal pairs which show that the distinction is not aspectual, whatever it may be. The examples in (9) below, recorded in Steere (1870), reflect the mid nineteenth century pre-standard urban Zanzibar varieties from which the current standard was later developed.

(9a) twaa ki-0-sema-cho na ki-si-cho-sema katika milki yangu
"take what speaks (TM=0) and what doesn't speak from among my possessions"
(Steere 1870:306)

(9b) ki-na-cho-sema na ki-si-cho-sema katika milki yangu, mimi Sultani ni-me-ku-pa
"what speaks (na-REL) and what doesn't speak from among my possessions, I the Ruler hereby grant you" (Steere 1870:300)

Both passages refer to the same entity in the same story. They do not differ in aspect; both refer to the same state context of predisposition. Similar pairs are found in texts considered standard, as in (10) below.

(10) Ah! bwana wangu, sijui ni-na-ko-kwenda, napotea na dunia tu... na mimi vivyo
bwana wangu, sijui ni-0-enda-ko
"Ah, my lord, I don't know where I'm going (na-REL), I'm just adrift in the world... and so, my lord, I don't know where I'm going (TM=0)" (Anonymous 1935:69)

Example (10) represents an early twentieth century variety of written Southern Swahili considered standard by all scholars. Here, 0 and na-REL are used indifferently in a progressive context.

Occasionally such minimal pairs occur even in much more recent examples of standard Swahili, despite vanishingly rare use of 0, e.g.,

(11) hatuna bado Watanzania wa kutosha wenyewe ujuzi u-na-o-takiwa na kufanya kazi zote
zi-0-takiwa-zo kufanywa
"we still do not have enough Tanzanians with the necessary (na-REL) experience
(and) to do all the work that needs (TM=0) to be done" (Nyerere 1968:146)

In contrast to 0, na-REL is not attested earlier than Steere (1870). However, this cannot be interpreted as evidence that it is relatively new, because earlier Swahili texts reflect only the indigenous written standard based on earlier Northern (Lamu area) varieties of Swahili. These varieties are distinctive in completely excluding the TM na. Indeed, it is remarkable that the early nineteenth century Mombasan poet Muyaka uses na at all, even though extremely rarely, e.g.,

(12) nawaauliza mkofi m-na-shika nt'a gani?
"I, the debtor, am asking (all of) you, 'What end are you holding (TM=na)?'" (Abdulaziz 1979: 314)

It is evident that Muyaka purposely uses it to make allusion to his vernacular variety of Swahili, Mombasa, as it was spoken in the late eighteenth century at the earliest. Several decades later Krapf (1850) confirms the use of na in Mombasa, but not of na-REL. Similarly, Taylor's
transcriptions of Mombasa Swahili in the last decades of the nineteenth century (Harries 1959) continue to attest na but not na-REL.\(^8\)

Issues involving ultimate origin of na-REL will not be resolved in this paper.\(^9\) However, it will still be possible to show that in standard and Southern Swahili prose, 0 and na-REL are related to each other in the same declining focus system that has determined the relationship between a and na.

4.1. At this point we can consider in more detail the evolution of the TM focus system of standard Swahili during the course of the twentieth century, by examining the trends in standard and pre-standard texts of Southern origin.

The simplest useful instrument for examining the trends involving 0 in the focus system distinguishes between the inherently higher focus sub-system in which a and na operate, and the inherently lower focus sub-system in which 0 and na-REL operate. All examples of a and na which can be distinguished are counted continuously over a number of pages, until enough examples of each have been found to form a fairly reliable body of data.\(^{10}\)

In our focus on 0, our interest is in how the relative frequency of na-REL/0 compares with na/a, since I have characterized the relation as the same in either case, simply a difference of focus.

Table 2 below displays the data from a number of samples of Southern written Swahili over the twentieth century. In addition to standard written samples, some examples of late nineteenth

---

\(^8\) There is much more to be said about na and na-REL in Mombasa and related dialects than can be said in this paper. That must be reserved for another occasion. Similarly, the relatively recent evolution of the verse standard, based on the pre-colonial written standard of Northern origin, has a different history with respect to na-REL, but cannot be further discussed in the text.

\(^9\) Ultimately the origin of na-REL is connected with the origin of na. Among the issues here is whether na-REL has coexisted in the Southern dialects with na since that origin. If so, why doesn't it exist in any of the other languages which have a cognate na TM, e.g., the Miji Kenda languages (between Tanga and Lamu)? The answer to this may be that na-REL arose in Swahili, or its ancestor, at the same time as na, but that by subsequent developments na was evaluated as too high in focus to occur in a TM-REL clause, cf. the TM me. Still, that line of development may have occurred only in the Kenyan dialects, so that, in the Southern dialects, na-REL remains historically continuous with other contexts for na.

\(^{10}\) Generally, a/na cannot be distinguished following the 1s subject marker, ni-, since further contraction usually leads to na for both, e.g., na-sema (1s TM-say) may reflect either ni-na-sema (na) or n-a-sema (a). Standard orthography usually represents ni-na (1s-TM=na) by the contracted form na. However, if the verb following the TM is monosyllabic, it is possible to distinguish na and a, since Swahili preserves the older TM form na-ku, when this TM coincides with Swahili penultimate stress, e.g., na-ku-ja < ni-na-ku-ja (1-TM=na-come). a has the same form under penultimate stress as elsewhere, e.g., n-a-ja (1-TM=a-come). Less reliable is using the same technique with the specific polysyllabic verbs enda 'go' and isha 'finish'. Thus, in standard texts na-ku-enda should be analyzed only as 1s-TM=na-ku-go, as opposed to n-a-enda (1s-TM=a-go). However, some standard texts omit ku between na and enda, e.g., tu-na-enda. For such texts, na-enda is indeterminate between a 1s-a and a 1s-na analysis, just like any other polysyllabic verb. There is no choice but to exclude indeterminate cases from consideration. In all cases, they are much less frequent than easily identifiable examples of a and na.
century Southern non-standard written prose are included for purposes of variety: VLT (1896) and TT (1903) represent these varieties.\textsuperscript{11}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & \% \(0 (n = 0 + na\text{-REL})\) & \% \(a (n = a + na)\) \\
\hline
SRK (1953) & 95 (n=74) & 85 (n=53) \\
SRM (1949) & 81 (n=31) & [25 (n=4)] \\
MBS (1944) & 62 (n=42) & 21 (n=81) \\
MKN (1975) & 57 (n=42) & 26 (n=76) \\
SRA (1952) & 55 (n=11) & 12 (n=16) \\
TI (1903) & 42 (n=57) & 54 (n=185) \\
AB (1935) & 39 (n=33) & 44 (n=119) \\
ST (1870) & 39 (n=82) & 43 (n=157) \\
MWK (1960) & 18 (n=56) & 11 (n=72) \\
VLT (1896) & 17 (n=23) & 24 (n=161) \\
JNU (1968) & 06 (n=103) & 19 (n=93) \\
KTL (1975) & 04 (n=28) & 02 (n=164) \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

Table 2. Comparison of the percentage of \(0\) out of all occurrences (\(n\)) of \(0 + na\text{-REL}\) with percentage of \(a\) out of all occurrences (\(n\)) of \(a + na\) in 12 samples of standard and pre-standard Southern prose.

In Table 2 the samples are arranged according to decreasing frequency of \(0\). There is no simple relationship between the frequency of \(0\) and that of \(a\), or, conversely, between \(na\text{-REL}\) and \(na\). There is great variety. Among the more easily discernible trends are certain features of the second column. There is no overall predictability of the frequency of \(a\), but it is generally less frequent than \(na\) (SRK and TT are exceptions). Extremely low frequencies of \(a\), below 20\%, occur only after the mid-point of the twentieth century. This includes SRA (1952) and MWK (1960), reflecting what was acceptable for the standard in the late colonial period. Even more extreme in disfavoring \(a\) is the Tanzanian standard as it evolved in the post-independence period. JNU (1968) and KTL (1975) are representative of interior Tanzanian standard writers following independence. These writers either do not use \(a\), or mainly use it in very limited stereotyped ways which do not presuppose a choice with \(na\), e.g., \(y\text{-}a\text{-}tu\text{-}pasa \text{'we have to (a)', lit. 'it behooves us'}\) in JNU (Nyerere's speeches).\textsuperscript{12}

Genre differences are minimally included in the samples of Table 2. With two exceptions, the samples are either personal or fictional narrative, oriented toward past time. The two exceptions are SRK and JNU, oriented toward general time.

\textsuperscript{11} As indicated in the references, the dates given for the samples in Table 2 refer to the approximate production date of the text, according to information in the published sources used for the samples.

\textsuperscript{12} There are a few instances of non-stereotyped uses of \(a\) in JNU's (Nyerere's) larger output, but not enough to change the extremely low frequency of \(a\).
The SR samples reflect an early to mid pre-independence standard represented in the writings of Shabaan Robert. SRK is a sample of SR's essay style. It is very low in na, while a is extremely frequent. This is consistent with the moralistic and descriptive content of the essays, featuring a general, state/habitual time orientation. In contrast, SRA, representing fictional narrative, shows the opposite relationship. JNU, a collection of Nyerere's speeches discussing economic and political principles, is most comparable to SRK in genre. However, it differs only minimally from KTL's (1975) sample of fictional narrative in its frequency of a. In the late twentieth century a is usually so rare in the Tanzanian standard that genre differences do not appreciably affect its frequency.

Shabaan Robert represents an earlier standard, with a more productive TM focus system. As fictional narrative, SRA is most comparable in genre to the other samples (except JNU). The extreme volatility of the frequency of a between SRA and SRK contrasts with the relative stability of the frequency of 0 between the same works. With respect to the frequency of 0, SRM, a sample of SR's autobiographical narrative, can also be brought into the comparison, since it contains enough examples of 0 and na-REL to be taken seriously. 0 is more frequent than na-REL across the SR samples, and is less influenced by genre than a relative to na. In contrast, in the comparison between JNU (1968) and KTL (1975), the general relative frequency of 0 and a is so low that genre has little opportunity left to have a discernible effect. The TM focus system is not functioning productively in the post-independence interior Tanzanian standard. 13

It is easier to see the overall trend in the relation between the relative frequencies of 0 and a with the visual aid of a graph. Figure 1 below presents the data in Table 2 in graph form.

Figure 1 shows more immediately visually than Table 2 that there is a relation between the relative frequencies of 0 and a. The relationship begins between the fifth and sixth samples, SRA and TT. It indicates that 0 and a vary at roughly the same rate only when 0 is less frequent than na-REL (less than 50% of both). When 0 is more frequent than na-REL, the only discernible relationship is that 0 also tends to occur at a substantially higher rate than a, but varies greatly for how much higher.

I interpret the above observations as follows. The key is that when the focus system was fully functioning, 0 and a, as in Shambaa, were the least marked choices. By including the verb in the maximal focus of the clause, na (including na-REL) came to more generally raise the focus of the clause in which it occurs. This system is retained to a considerable extent in Figure 1. Information

13 In case of the journalale style of standard Swahili newspapers, the virtually complete absence of a and only stereotyped use of 0 (see fn 18 below) is best analyzed as a genre effect rather than an intrinsic decline of the standard TM focus system. This matter cannot be pursued here, but one of the considerations involved is that the TM ka is also minimally used in that style. There is no other relevant variety of Swahili in which the TM ka is discarded. Therefore, it is implausible that ka fails to occur in newspaper articles because it has been lost from the Swahili TM system used in those contexts. In fact, the failure of 0, a and ka to be used productively in this style can be shown to be an effect of how information is organized in that style, and hence that it is a genre effect.
for which high focus is desired is preferably put in an inherently high focus clause. In this case the choice is na, not na-REL. A relatively high frequency of na-REL presupposes a relatively high frequency of na, since high focus information will more readily be put into na than na-REL clauses in the first place. The covariation between the rates of na and na-REL (or, conversely, a and 0) when na-REL has reached a relatively high frequency further suggests that the distinction between inherently high and low focus clauses is no longer playing much of a role in the use of the focus system at that point, and that the same TM focus decisions are being without regard to the inherent focus of clauses. The historical implication is that as the focus system declines, it declines first in the relatively high focus contexts before it declines in the relatively low focus contexts, so that the decline of the TM a begins earlier than the decline of the TM 0.

4.2 Figure 2 below brings the pragmatic aspectual focus effect back into consideration. It is essential to the operation of the historical TM focus system. It is based on comparing the sample as a whole with a special discourse pragmatic set of verbs in the sample. Following Wald (1973), I call this set the A verbs. As explained in detail in Wald (1973), I first identified the A verbs, on the
basis of spoken Mombasa Swahili discourse, as a set of verbs which occur most frequently with a, rather than na, among all verbs used. These verbs are also among the most frequently used in all kinds of discourse, regardless of genre. They include verbs used by Contini-Morava in Table 1 above as representative of state contexts, esp. the three verbs weza 'can, be able', jua 'know, find out', and taka 'want, need' (singled out for further discussion in section 4.3 below). Table 1 indicates that the A verbs belong to a similar set in standard Swahili. Indeed they are general to the samples, as indicated by Figure 2. 

Figure 2: Comparison of the percentage of a out of all occurrences (n) of a + na for all verbs with percentage of a out of all occurrences (n) of a+ na for A verbs in 12 samples of standard and pre-standard Southern prose. Figure 2 is arranged in terms of decreasing frequency of a for all verbs in each sample.

Disregarding the last two samples, the A verb set is more resistant to the high focus of na than the verbs as a whole. The separation of verbs would obviously be larger if the A verb set were compared with all non-A verbs, rather than with all verbs. However, Figure 2 is sufficient to demonstrate the distinctive behavior of the A verbs. Table 1 above followed C-M in interpreting this distinction as a greater preference of a than na in state contexts. Here I will leave it in terms

---

14 I have found that the A verbs are generalizable to all varieties of urban Swahili, and can play a role in examining the status of the TM focus system across most varieties of Swahili. They help establish that all such varieties reflect the same ancestral TM focus system.
of the focus system. For pragmatic reasons, A verbs do not favor high focus on the TM. The apparent cross-over for the last two samples is illusory. These are SRM and SRA. In both cases the sample of A verbs is restricted to a single occurrence. The other cases range from 14 (MKN) to 91 (VLT) occurrences of the A verbs, and are all worthy of confidence.

Figure 3 below shows that the A verb set has a very similar focus sensitivity for the 0/na-REL distinction as for the na/a distinction. This further supports the notion that these two sub-systems have an identical function, characterized in terms of relative focus.

![Graph showing the percentage of 0 out of all occurrences (n) of 0 + na-REL for all verbs with percentage of 0 out of all occurrences (n) of 0 + na-REL for A verbs in 12 samples of standard and pre-standard Southern prose.](image)

The effect of the A verbs in favoring 0 (disfavoring na-REL) is quite large in many samples. It is generally even visibly larger than the corresponding effect in the inherently higher focus clauses (Figure 2 above). This is consistent with the earlier observation that 0 has been more resistant to loss of productivity than a. The apparent lack of an A verb effect for the first two samples is reliable, (A verb n=22 and n=11 respectively). There is very little effect registered in SRK and SRM, despite the genre difference. I will not try to explain why this is so. Meanwhile, the fifth sample in Figure 3, SRA, shows SR's considerable sensitivity to the distinction with A verbs. In general, Figure 3 shows that 0 is the low focus clause equivalent of a in high focus clauses.
4.3 A final set of observations on the A verbs further links the TM focus system examined above to the earlier constituent focus system. There is no reason to doubt that some of the distinctive behavior of the A verbs reflects the pragmatic aspectual focus effect, such that A verbs favor state contexts more often than other verbs. However, this is only one of several features associated with A verbs, and not one associated with all of them. It is associated with the three primary A verbs weza 'can', jua, 'know' and taka 'want/need'. However, another feature of these verbs is that they can serve as auxiliaries, and thus take complex complements including an infinitivized verb and all its associated complements, e.g.,

(13) Labuda mtu a-taka kutuhusudu, kututoa roho zetu
"Maybe the man wants (TM=a) to insult us (and) to take our lives."
(Steere 1870:302)

These infinitival complements are potentially very rich in information and worthy of higher focus than the auxiliary itself. Their post-verbal position automatically gives them that relatively higher focus. However, a may still be residually functioning here in preference to na to exclude the verb from the scope of maximal focus.

In addition, I found empirically that three verbs which do not take infinitival complements are also A verbs in Mombasa Swahili. Even so, they often take other kinds of complements. The verbs are ita 'call', sema 'say, speak', and ambia 'say to, tell'. Ita was most frequently encountered in Mombasa Swahili discourse in the context of introducing names, "(there was) a man called Juma/a woman called Lulu /.."). Pragmatically there is maximal focus on the nominal complement. Ambia and sema often introduce reported speech, which is as complex as any other full clause, e.g.,

(14) hapana a-0-sema-ye kama Mbwa amekula wali!
"nobody (lit. there was no one who) said (TM=0) that Dog has eaten (all) the rice!"
(Anonymous 1935: 60)

In terms of information potential, we would expect ambia and sema to have the same relation to a complement of reported speech that the verb of an inherently lower focus clause (e.g., a relative clause) has to an inherently higher focus clause (e.g., the matrix clause in which a relative clause is embedded).16

---

15 Admittedly such a context also fits into a state time orientation, to the extent that ita 'call' favors a over na. The same is not true of the other two verbs, which are connected with reported speech.

16 The information potential of reported speech has no limits other than those of spoken language itself. This qualifies it as an inherently higher focus clause. In such cases, the information potential of a clause is distinct from its syntactic status. For structural reasons, reported speech is considered a subordinate or embedded clause, giving it the same status as a relative clause, rather than its matrix clause. The line of inquiry discussed in the text pulls the focus system to the information potential of a constituent, independent of its particular syntactic status.
Figure 4 compares the behavior of the three "sema" verbs, *sema*, *amba* and *ita*, with the three "taka" verbs, *taka*, *weza* and *jua*, and all verbs, for those samples containing sufficient data. The amount of data in the samples is often not sufficient for the "sema" verbs, although it almost always is for the "taka" verbs. It was possible to compare the "sema" and "taka" verbs for a larger number of samples by pooling the *a* and *0* examples together, as the two low focus markers, and compare their combined frequency against the high focus markers *na* and *na*-REL.

![Graph](image-url)

**Figure 4.** Comparison of the percentage of low focus TMs (*a*+*0*) to all TMs in the focus system (*a*+*0*+*na*+*na*-REL) for all verbs, all "taka" verbs, and all "sema" verbs in six samples of standard and pre-standard Southern prose.

Figure 4 is arranged according to the decline in the influence of the "sema" verbs on the frequency of the low focus markers. The most interesting feature of this arrangement is that it generally reflects chronological order, as if to directly display the general decline of the focus system from the Southern pre-standard to the mid twentieth century standard. The exceptions to this trend are the late nineteenth century nonstandard personal narratives of TI and VLT. They anticipate the standard loss of distinctiveness of "sema" verbs as a set. The "taka" verbs remain distinct at all times.
Figure 4 is consistent with the notion that as late as the mid twentieth century, the standard low focus TMs, \(a\) and \(0\), were still marginally sensitive to post-verbal focus, a residual effect of the constituent focus system.\(^{17}\)

While Figure 4 takes us only as far as the mid twentieth century (MWK 1960), Table 3 below shows decline of the "taka" verbs in the late twentieth century.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% 0/(a) in &quot;taka&quot; verbs</th>
<th>% 0/(a) in all verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MWK</td>
<td>36 (n=36)</td>
<td>14 (n=128)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KTL</td>
<td>16 (n=19)</td>
<td>02 (n=192)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JNU</td>
<td>13 (n=23)</td>
<td>12 (n=196)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Comparison of the percentage of low focus TMs (\(a+0\)) to all TMs in the focus system (\(a+0+na+na-REL\)) for all verbs and "taka" verbs for three standard samples in the mid to late twentieth century.\(^{18}\)

For the sake of consistency, I included JNU's 5 examples of the cliché \(y-a-tu-pasa\) 'it behooves (TM=\(a\)) us/we have to' in the 0/\(a\) count. Discounting them would reduce the frequency of 0/\(a\) in all verbs to 09\% (n=191), and reveal more clearly that the "taka" verbs remain a distinct class in Nyerere's prose.

Table 3 is especially important in indicating continuity between the pre-independence standard, representing writers from relatively traditional Southern coastal Swahili communities, and the post-independence standard, largely representing writers from relatively non-traditional Southern (Tanzanian) interior communities. Table 3 indicates the further decline of the "taka" verbs, following in the wake of the "sema" verbs. They remain marginally distinctive.

5: This paper has presented evidence that the TM \(0\) together with the TMs \(a\) and \(na\), descend from a pre-Swahili constituent focus system embedded within the TM system. The system was at one time very similar to the current Shambaa system, except that the high focus marker was \(na\) rather than \(ta\), and that unlike Shambaa \(ta\), it had or later acquired the ability to mark the verb of an inherently low focus clause.

---

\(^{17}\) The Mombasa Swahili sample of Wald (1973) is even more conservative than Steere (1870), the oldest sample on Figure 4. In Mombasa Swahili, "taka" and "sema" verbs were extremely favorable to \(a\), as opposed to \(na\), at 97\% (n=165) and 96\% (n=109) respectively. In that study, all verbs were not counted, only three relatively frequent large classes, of which only the A verbs favor \(a\) above 90\%. Even though A verbs are the majority of the total number of verbs counted (n=294), favorability to \(a\) falls to 60\% (n=477). This degree of favorability to \(a\) distinguishes Mombasa from all contemporary Southern spoken varieties. An analysis of the relative frequencies of \(0\) and \(na-REL\) were not undertaken in that study, but it was evident to me through observation that \(0\) was much more frequent than \(na-REL\) for the verbs as a whole.

\(^{18}\) The "sema" verbs are too rare in KTL and JNU to be included in Figure 4 (with 3 and 4 total examples respectively). Of the total of 7 examples, only 1 occurs with a low focus marker, \(sema\) with \(0\), in JNU.
In that system, the verb was excluded from the maximal focus of the clause, while the TM a allowed the verb to be included in that maximal focus, and the TM na required it to be so included. The system began to decline when 0 became limited to inherently low focus clauses. That change presupposes that the low focus of 0 on the verb, relative to a and na, was abstracted from 0's restriction of maximal focus to the post-verbal constituent. The post-verbal relative marker associated with the 0 TM remains from that earlier function.

On the basis of the present evidence, it is difficult to establish when na-REL became part of this system. Whenever it did, it served to include the verb in the maximal focus of the clause, as the inherently low clause counterpart of na. Thus, 0, like a in inherently high focus clauses, was preferred when the maximal focus of the clause was restricted to a post-verbal constituent. This system favored the "sema" verbs for 0 and a, because the "sema" verbs are likely to have a post-verbal constituent in higher focus than the verb. However, this system continued to decline, and, by the mid twentieth century, ceased to operate in the developing standard.

The TM focus system has persisted longer with the "taka" verbs. These verbs have two pragmatic properties. One is the same as for the "sema" verbs, the restriction of maximal focus to a post-verbal constituent, the infinitival complement of a "taka" verb used as an auxiliary. The other is the likelihood that the "taka" verbs will be used in state rather than progressive contexts. The greater preference of state than progressive contexts for 0 and a is the result of the pragmatic aspecual focus effect.

The pragmatic aspecual focus effect, as illustrated by Zulu, has played a role in the TM focus system since the time that the latter was a fully operational constituent focus system. However, the continuing decline of the constituent focus system enhanced that effect, by reducing other uses of the system. The effect stems from the focus on the TM itself as an information unit.

The pragmatic aspecual focus effect specifically comes into play as a by-product of high or low focus on the time orientation implied by the TM. The pragmatic association between low focus and state seems to explain why the "taka" verbs have resisted decline of the TM focus system longer than the "sema" verbs. Nevertheless, in the continuing decline of the standard TM focus system in favor of the historically high focus markers na (and na-REL), it is clear that the pragmatic aspecual focus effect is not sufficient to prevent the complete loss of the system. The standard has already evolved varieties in which a is no longer at all active, and the trend is unmistakable that 0 will soon follow suit.

The trend shows that the functioning of a in inherently high focus clauses is necessary to the continuing functioning of 0 in inherently low focus clauses, because the inherent focus of a clause

---

19 Excluded from active use of 0 are stereotyped, fossilized uses, such as with ja 'come' to indicate 'next' with a time head, e.g., mwizi u-0-ja-o 'next (0) month', i.e., 'the (up)coming month', and a journalese favorite with pata 'get' with a numerical complement to indicate 'as many as', e.g., watu wa-pata-o hamsini 'as many as (0) fifty people', lit 'people who get (to be) fifty (in number)'. It was earlier pointed out in the text that Nyerere often uses 'a in a fossilized way with pusa 'behoove' in y-a-tu-pasa "it behooves (a) us to = we have to"
has become a continually decreasing factor in resisting the high focus marker, na (and na-REL).

The decline of this factor has been seen in some samples shown in Figure 1 above since as early as the late nineteenth century, and reveals continuity between the pre-standard Southern written varieties and the current written standard.

6 This afterword identifies some further considerations appropriate to the conclusions reached above. Foremost is that it has not been shown in this paper that the standard decline of the TM focus system has affected any spoken dialects. Considerations beyond the scope of this paper would reveal that the standard is unusually advanced in the direction of decline of the system, but that it has declined to some degree in all spoken varieties of Swahili. Mombasa and the other traditional Kenyan coastal dialects show the least decline, but they all have declined to the extent that 0 is limited to inherently low focus clauses, and TM indication that the maximal focus is restricted to a post-verbal constituent is no longer grammatically obligatory. The traditional Southern (Tanzanian) coastal dialects are more advanced, but not as advanced as the standard.

The pre-standard written samples of the late nineteenth century suggest that the decline of the standard focus system has been fed by its relationship to the Southern urban dialects. Beyond that, it is only safe to assume that this decline involves the use of the TM focus system in out-talk (Umgangssprache), not in the more intimate vernacular styles of these varieties. It is indeed the case that even in Southern dialects which have become distinctive in the twentieth, e.g., Dar es Salaam, vernacular style preserves a, whereas it is virtually totally absent from more formal styles, which approach the standard in non-use of the TM focus system (i.e., in no productive use of 0 and a). Information is less available for vernacular style in urban Zanzibar. However, it seems likely that urban Zanzibar has had at least as much decline in the TM focus system as other Southern coastal dialects. Rural Zanzibar shows a different path of decline by which 0 has been totally eliminated from inherently low focus clauses, leaving only na-REL, and that 0 and a merged in higher focus clauses before the twentieth century (cf. Whiteley 1959). Rural Zanzibar speakers do not recognize a as part of their vernacular system. It is not yet clear whether rural Zanzibar has influenced urban Zanzibar in the decline of the TM focus system in the latter, but it seems most unlikely that sufficient use of a or 0 remains in urban spoken Zanzibar to reintroduce it back into the rural vernaculars.

20 In effect, the merger simply completes the loss of a as distinct from 0. Thus, before the merger, a and 0 were ambiguous following a subject marker ending in -a, e.g., wa-ch'aka 'they want/need' was ambiguous between the analyses w-a-ch'aka and w-a-ch'aka, but tw-a-ch'aka and tw-a-ch'aka 'we want/need' were distinct. The general merger, then, eliminates the remaining distinction between a and 0 in favor of 0. In general, rural Zanzibar has followed a rather different path of decline of the TM focus system from the urban dialects, including urban Zanzibar. Thus, text discussion implies that the corresponding ambiguity of wa-taka 'they want' in urban Swahili was resolved in favor of a, not 0, in high focus clauses. The assumption of ambiguity here rests on the assumption that there was not a tonal distinction between 0 and a (< *a) during the relevant period. This assumption is not crucial to the text discussion.
It is also worth noting that the decline of the TM focus system is not a feature of Swahili alone, nor are the TMs discussed in this paper the only TMs which have been historically involved in the decline of this system. The decline of the TM focus system extends to all coastal languages of Kenya and Tanzania adjacent to Swahili, i.e., the other Sabaki languages, and all the Tanzanian coastal groups from Seuta (e.g., Bondei) to Ruvuma (e.g., Makonde). The scope of decline includes not only the TMs discussed in this paper but also the relation between the TMs me and *0 ile. Reflexes of the latter survive in the verse standard and in a declining state in the Northern dialects, particularly Bajuni.

Finally, it must be noted that the pragmatic aspectual focus effect is different in Mombasa than in other urban dialects. However, this cannot be explained without consideration of the TMs me and *0 ile, and must be reserved for another occasion.

References


21 Recent evolution of this part of the TM focus system also involves consideration of the auxiliary isha, often reduced to a TM sha, in many varieties of Swahili.


MWK = Muhammed S. Abdulla 1960 *Mzimu wa watu wa kale* Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau

Nurse, Derek & Thomas J Hinnebusch 1993 *Swahili and Sabaki: A linguistic history*. (Linguistics Vol. 121) Berkeley: University of California Press


ST = Edward Steere. 1870. *Swahili Tales as told by Natives of Zanzibar*. London: The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge


