



MORPHOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION OF VERBS IN KI IMENTI DIALECT: KIMERU LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

The paper assesses the morphological description of verbs in the Imenti dialect of the larger Kimeru language. A verb is one of the seven parts of speech in Ki imenti; it is among the four open categories of speech portrayed in the language. The paper employs Morris Halle's 1973 model of Generative Morphology Theory to evaluate the morphological description of verbs in Ki imenti language. The basic principle in generative morphology is that the process of word formations can generate actual words and potential words. The research uses the descriptive research design to obtain information from data that was accumulated from the adjectives in the Ki imenti language. The Ki imenti language is spoken by people from North Imenti, Central Imenti, Buuri and south Imenti constituencies in Meru County. Ki imenti verbs are divided into different categories and subcategories which explains the diversity in their formations. Hence different morphological descriptions. The study seeks to identify a rule or rules that would account for morphological description of verbs in Ki imenti language.

Introduction

This paper examines the verb formations in Ki imenti language of the larger Kimeru speaking communities. Kimeru is a Bantu language spoken by Ameru people of Kenya. The Ameru people reside in Meru County and Tharaka Nithi county. The two counties are on the Eastern slopes of Mt. Kenya. Mwebia (2006) however notes that, a considerable number of Meru speakers live in other parts of the country as a result of migration, land settlement and employment. A significant number occupy the Laikipia District, Nairobi, Isiolo and parts of the Kenyan Coast. (Kawira 2014).

There are several dialects spoken by the Ameru people. According to Muriungi (2015) Kimeru language is not homogeneous, it has various variations in dialects and there is a discrepancy between what the native speakers recognize as main Kimeru dialects and what the scholars' state to be the dialects of Kimeru language (Gacunku 2005). Marete (1981) recognizes five regional varieties. Ki-Tharaka, Gi-Tigania, Gi-chuka, Ki-Mwimbi and Ki-imentu. Mberia, however, treats Ki-tharaka as a distinct language and not as a dialect of Kimeru. Guthrie (1970/71) assigns Meru and Tharaka different codes thus treating the two as languages that are distinct from each other.

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Nkubitu (1993) recognizes only four dialects of Ki-meru- Ki-Igembe, Gi-Tigania, Ki-Imenti and Ki- Mwimbi. More recent studies, for example, Gacunku (2005), up to 8 dialects can be distinguished in Kimeru. These are: Ki-igembe, Gitigania, Gi-chuka, Ki-muthambi, Ki-mwimbi, Ki-igoji, Ki-imenti and Ki-miutine.

The eight dialects are represented in the two counties as follows:

Meru county- Ki-imenti, Ki-igoji, Ki-igembe, Gi-tigania and Ki-miutine

Tharaka Nithi county- Gi-Chuka, Ki-muthambi, and Ki-mwimbi.

The present study focused on the Imenti variety which is the researcher's native language. At the same time, it is considered to be more dominant Taitumu (2014). The data used for this paper is derived from Ki-imenti language.

Literature review

Many studies have also been done on different aspects of Kimeru as well as other related Bantu languages. Maore (2013) based his study on the phonological basis of misspellings in written English of Kimeru speaking pupils in public Primary schools. The study focused on whether the phonology and orthography of Kimeru as a learner's first language affected their spelling of English words. The study adapted Error Analysis as its theoretical framework. The data for this study was collected from creative compositions and dictation of words written by primary school learners whose first language was Kimeru. His study had a significant input to the current study; however, the difference is that the current is based only on the morphology of Ki imenti verbs.

Mwebia (2001) did a study on Lexical pragmatic analysis of sense relations in Kimeru. The study was aimed at finding out differences and similarities in the sense relations involving corresponding lexical items in English and Kimeru. The investigation was done to test the claims about universality of sense relations. The study takes account of the relevant context, which is very important in interpreting meanings of words, sentences and utterances. He used relevant contexts to disambiguate the various lexical items occurring in Kimeru. His study is relevant to the current research because it was based on analyzing words, which is also the basis of the current study. His study was open to the use of words in any part of speech while the current research was restricted use of verbs.

Kanana (2016) did a study on reduplication in Kimeru, she sought to look at the reduplicated words basing on the open categories of speech. The study uses common Kimeru words particularly in the open categories of speech. These words were taken from the Imenti dialect of Kimeru language. The study aims were to identify reduplication in Kimeru; to investigate full and partial reduplication in Kimeru; to look at reduplication in all open categories of speech in Kimeru and examine how they occur; to account for reduplication in Kimeru using the Morphological Doubling Theory (MDT). The study by Kanana (2016) is similar to the current one because both deal with analysis of words in open categories of speech although the current study looks at verbs only as one of the open categories of speech in the Ki imenti dialect.

Other studies include Madondo (2001) who did a study based on aspects of word formation in isiZulu with special reference to morphological and lexical processes. The main aim of his study was to put word-formation into its rightful place in isiZulu grammar, that is at the centre of every morphological application. It therefore attempts to deal with processes that are vital in word-formation in isiZulu. Which included the processes like: affixation, grammaticalization, compounding, reduplication, word coinage as well as borrowing. His study was closely related to the current study in terms of word formation, it differs only on the fact that; while his study was done in isiZulu, the current study is based on Ki imenti dialect of Kimeru language.



Cand & Xhina ((2013) studied prefixation in English and Albanian languages. They analyzed the characteristics of English and Albanian prefixes in various ways; their types and classifications in both languages by comparing and contrasting. The classification is mostly done basing on different principles related to some of their typical features and their meanings which they studied into depth in order to examine the productivity by means of prefixation in both languages. This study although related to the current research in terms of morphological analysis it covered only a very small part of word formation that is linked to prefixation.

Booij (2009) defines morphological analysis as the sub-discipline of Linguistics that deals with the internal structure of words. He looked at, word formation, lexicon and, affixes among other words used in morphological analysis giving examples from English Language. Being a morphological analysis study, this particular study will assist the researcher in doing a morphological description of words in Ki imenti language. His study further deals with words and word formations, which is also the core purpose for the present study making it an important aspect of consideration in the current study.

Jerniati et.al (2021) studied inflectional markers of Mandarese using Generative Morphological perspective. This study investigated inflectional markers of Mandarese language concerning generative morphology. It aimed to describe the forms of the inflectional marker and its distribution in the Mandarese language, spoken by natives from Sulawesi province in Indonesia. It deployed a Generative morphological approach to analyze language based on linguistic knowledge or intuition of native speakers. This study used morphological theory just as the current study. At the same time, the studies are based on the linguistic knowledge of the native speakers of both Kimeru and Mandarese languages respectively.

These articles are relevant to this paper since they have highlighted on the related studies done in Kimeru as well as studies done on morphological analysis of different languages and further based on the research done on word formation processes in different languages. However, the above research done on the articles was not based on morphological description of words in Ki imenti which imposes the need for this research in order to fill in the gap in Ki imenti literature.

Methodology

Based on the research problem being investigated, this study was carried out in Meru County, South Imenti constituency in Nkubu area. Purposive sampling was used to select Nkubu area which is in South Imenti constituency because the residents of the area speak the Imenti dialect and thus there is availability of language experts who may provide data relevant for this paper. In addition, the researcher comes from the locality. Nkubu area is easily accessible through the Mombasa- Nairobi- Meru-Maua highway. Similarly, the availability of resources, and the ethical implications of conducting research in the area encourage this particular area.'

The study used Purposive sampling also called judgment sampling this is because Purposive sampling involves the researcher choosing participants who possess the qualities needed in the research. It is a non-random technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of participants. Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience (Benard (2002) as quoted by Etikan et. al (2015). In this case all the selected participants were native speakers and of Ki imenti language.

The researcher selected 30 informants through purposive sampling basing her criteria for selection on their knowledge in Ki imenti dialect and their age. The researcher settled on 30 informants citing their knowledge in Ki imenti language and saturation of information, resource constraints and also presence of other sources of data like books which helped in getting more data required in the study. Further, the researcher considered

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those who had reached the age of 30 and above fit for the research because most were not affected by slang/sheng or code switching. The informants generated data that was used for the study. Data collected from these informants was used in analysing the morphological description of Ki imenti verbs.

The nature of the research prompted the adoption of a descriptive research design. The descriptive research design allowed the researcher to obtain information without changing the environment more so; the language was not manipulated in any way. Such a design, enabled the researcher obtain information about the naturally occurring verbs in the Imenti dialect of the larger Kimeru language. Similarly, the descriptive design was chosen since the study involved a one-time interaction with the Ameru speakers in the form of questionnaires which contained language tests in order to collect and analyze many words in Kimeru.

Data analysis and interpretation

The study aimed to collect data on Imenti words portrayed in the categories and sub-categories of verbs. The researcher used a questionnaire that was aimed to get Ki imenti verbs this was used by the informants who could read and write. This primary source of data would help the researcher in collecting relevant and suitable data for this study. In some few isolated cases, the researcher used guided interview targeting informants who could not read and write. Then the researcher used kimeru story books *Ui Wiji Atia? Jukia luku Ukathome* and the Kimeru bible *luku ria Murungu* and *Kiimeru dictionaru* as a source of word lists and further to be used to validate the data given.

For the data analysis; the researcher translated the words collected into English to make it easier for anyone reading the work to understand. Then, classified the given data into the lexical sub-categories of verbs. Later the researcher described the formation of words in the verbs category of speech and analysed them basing on any rule that governs their formation in Ki-imenti. The researcher then filtered the words based on the word formation rules, consequently explaining other aspects in the morphological description of the language. Finally, the researcher analysed the extent to which the Generative Morphological theory accounted for the formation of verbs in the Ki imenti language that are acceptable in the vocabulary of the Imenti dialect of the larger Kimeru language.

Theoretical Framework

To account for the morphological a description of verbs in Kimeru-Imenti dialect this paper utilizes Morris Halle's (1973) model of Generative Morphological Theory as discussed by Scalise (1984) in his book *Generative Morphology*.

The Analysis of Generative Morphology Theory of Halle's (1973) Model

Generative morphology also makes use of the principles and techniques of morpheme identification used by structural morphology. The basic principle in generative morphology is that the process of word formations can generate actual words and potential words.

Morris Halle (1973), looked at four the basic principles of Generative Morphological Theory. They included the following:

- i. List of Morphemes

That morphemes portrayed in languages can be bound or free morphemes. Free morpheme can stand alone as words that consist of class or content words, like nouns (N), verbs (V), adjective (Adj), and adverbs (Adv), and function words, like determiners (primary auxiliaries and modal auxiliaries), intensifiers, and question words. Bound morpheme on the other hand cannot stand alone as words instead they consist of affixes which



can be further divided into prefixes that are added after the base. This paper is based on morphemes that are portrayed verbs.

ii. Word formation rules

After all morphemes are listed in the list of morphemes, then the linguists formulate a set of word formation rules (WFR), which could be the noun formation rules (NFR), the verb formation Rules (VFR), the adjective formation rules (AdjFR), and the adverb formation ruler (AdvFR). Every rule must be accompanied by its meaning or semantic. This paper utilises the verb formation rules (VFR).

iii. Filter

The filter is the mechanism that can change unacceptable underlying representation into acceptable ones.

iv. Dictionary

All verbs that have been formed through word formation rules (WFR) and have gone through the filter are listed in the dictionary, the last component of Halle's model. In the dictionary, all words are accompanied by their meanings and their semantic features. This is needed for the selection and application of words in sentences, so that we do not generate ungrammatical sentences.

Discussions and Findings

Ki imenti language uses verbs to show actions done as in *guketha* 'to harvest'. The *basic form* of a verb is known as its root form with no changes or conjugations for instance the root for the word *ketha* 'harvest' is *keth-* which acquire prefixes or suffixes in order to be used in a sentence.

Establishing rules governing verb formation

In this study the words we will refer to as the root includes words like; *ija* (to come) *enda* (to love), and *ruga* (to cook). Ki imenti verb forms use affixation that is, prefixes and suffixes to denote the tenses which are presented differently in the three personal pronouns used in the language. The study also focused on the formation of Ki imenti verbs in the habitual forms and how to form negative verbs the study then identifies the set of rules required to derive the surface forms from the underlying forms.

The following are examples of different verb formations as used in Ki imenti language

Ki imenti tense marker

Ki imenti has three major tenses which includes; *kagita gaka* 'present tense' *kagita ga karaja*, 'past tense' and *kagita karia gakejea* 'future tense' which were marked with affixes as discussed in this section.

Table 1: Showing Ki imenti present tense.

-kinya – to reach

Personal pronoun	Root verb	Ki imenti sing-	Sing-Marker	Ki imenti Plu-	Plu-Marker
1 st person	-Gukinya 'to arrive'	Ngukinya 'I arrive	n-	Tugukinya 'we reach'	Tu-
2 nd person		Ugukinya 'You arrive'	u-	Bugukinya 'we arrive'	Bu-



3 rd person		Agukinya 'He/she arrives'	a-	Bagukinya 'they arrive'	Ba-
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Table 1 above shows verbs in present form marked through prefixation. Notice that in Ki imenti language the base form of the verb is the same for every subject pronoun from 1st person to the third person that is, -gukinya 'arrive' which basically means 'to arrive' or 'to reach'. To mark present tense therefore, the language uses the prefix *gu-* which is attached to the root verb in singular and plural. This happens only to the verb root that start with the velar stop /k/. For all the other verb roots, the present tense prefix marker is /ku/ which is attached to the root verb in singular or plural as in *Kur-rima* 'cultivate' given in the table above. This can be shown in the following rule;

RULE

Given the root word to be X, then one can form a verb in present tense by adding the prefix **ku/gu** to the root verb as shown below;

This can be presented in the following formular;

Ku/gu +X= present tense

Where;

Ku/gu-prefix

X- root verb

Table 2: Showing Ki imenti past tense

-mama- to sleep

Personal pronoun	Ki imenti sing-	Marker	Ki imenti plu-	Marker
1 st person	Ndamamire 'I slept'	Ndi-	Twamamire 'we slept'	Tu-
2 nd person	wamamire 'you slept'	u-	Bwamamire 'you slept'	Bu-
3 rd person	Amamire 'he slept'	a-	Bwamamire 'they slept'	Ba-

From table 2 above Ki imenti past tense is marked through suffixation. The suffix *-ire* which is attached to the root word for all the three pronouns both in their singular and plural form. The suffix *-ire* which replaces the last vowel *a-* in the root verb. This can be presented in the following rule;

RULE

Given the root verb to be X, then one can form a verb in past tense by replacing the last vowel with the suffix *-ire* which is attached it to the root verb. This can be presented in the following formular;

X - v + ire = past tense

Where;

X- root verb

v- end vowel

ire – suffix



Table 3: Showing Ki imenti recent past tense

-rima (dig)

Personal pronoun	Ki imenti Sing-	Sing-marker	Ki imenti plu-	Plu-Marker
1 st person	Ndiririmire 'I dug'	ndi-	Turaramire 'we dug'	Tu-
2 nd person	uririmire 'you dug'	u-	Buririmire 'you dug'	Bu-
3 rd person	Aririmire 'he dug'	a-	Baririmire 'they dug'	Ba-

From table 3 above, notice Ki imenti recent past tense is marked through affixation. The prefix *ra-* is attached to the root word for all the three pronouns both in their singular and plural form. Then the past tense marker and suffix *-ire* replaces the final vowel *a-* in the root verb. This can be presented in the following rule;

RULE

Given the root verb to be X, then one can form a verb in its recent past tense by adding the prefix *ra-* to the root verb and replacing the final vowel *a* with the suffix *-ire*.

This can be presented in the following formula;

ra+ (X -a) + ire = past tense

Where;

ra - prefix

X- root verb

a- vowel

ire – suffix

Table 4: Showing Ki imenti future tense

Personal pronoun	Root verb	Ki imenti sing-	marker	Ki imenti plu-	Plu-marker
1 st person	-Ruga 'cook'	Nkaruga 'I will cook'	n-	Tukaruga 'we will cook'	Tu-
2 nd person		Ukaruga 'you will cook'	u-	Bukaruga 'you will cook'	Bu-
3 rd person		Agacwa 'he/she will find'	a-	Bagacwa 'they will cook'	Ba-

In the table 4 above, notice that the future tense in Ki imenti is marked through prefixation. The prefix *ga-* or *ka-* is attached to the root verb to denote the future. So, when prefix *ka-* or *ga-* is attached with a verb root it means *will*. This can be shown in the following rule;

**RULE**

Given the root word to be X, then one can form a verb in future tense by adding the prefix *ka-* or *ga-* to the root verb as shown below;

This can be presented in the following formular;

Ka + X =Future tense

ga + X =Future tense

where;

Ka – prefix (future)

ga – prefix(future)

X- root verb

Habitual tense

The habitual tense marker in Ki imenti language is marked with the suffix *-ga* attached after the root verb as shown in the examples below;

Table 5: Showing Ki imenti habitual tense

Personal pronoun	Root verb	Ki imenti sing-	Tense marker	Ki imenti plu-	Tense marker
1 st person	Ija	Mbijaga 'I come'	Mb-	Twijaga 'we come'	Tw-
2 nd person		Wijaga 'you come'	W-	Bwijaga 'you come'	Bw -
3 rd person		Ejaga 'he/she comes'	E-	Bejaga 'they come'	Be-

Ki imenti habitual tenses are formed though suffixation. The prefix */ga/* is attached to the root verb *ija* to form the habitual tense *ijaga*. The table show examples derived from the representational of the verbs in the 1st person second person and the 3rd person. The tense markers apply to all habitual tenses. This can be established through the following rule:

RULE

Given the root verb to be X, then one can form a verb in habitual tense by adding the suffix

-ga to the root verb.

This can be presented in the following formular;

X+ ga =habitual tense

Where;

X - root verb

ga – suffix



Verb Negative formation

The standard negative verb marker in Ki imenti is the prefix *ti-* which means 'not'. The negative marker is effective when it is attached to a root word. The present tense and the future tense are marked with a prefix *ti-* for which is used with the auxiliary verb then attached the root verb in both singular and plurals. While the past tense takes *ta-* used with an auxiliary verb to denote the negative form in both its singular and plural forms. Just as in English language the negation constructions differ depending on their usage. The following tables shows examples of negation in Ki imenti verbs.

Table 6: Showing Verb Negative formation in present/future tense

Personal pronoun	Ki imenti Sing-	Sing marker	Ki imenti Plu-	Plu- marker
1 st person	Ntiruga 'I will not cook'	n-	Tutiruga 'we will not cook'	Tu-
2 nd person	Utiruga 'you will not cook'	u-	Butiruga 'you will not cook'	Bu-
3 rd person	atiruga 'he will not cook'	a-	Batiruga 'they will not cook'	Ba-

Table 6 above shows verb negative formation using prefixation. Notice in Ki imenti while dealing with present and future tenses the prefix *ti* is attached to the main verb as shown in the examples on table 6. The process occurs the same way in the 1st person, the 2nd person and the 3rd person.

This can be presented in the following rule;

RULE

Given the root word to be X, then one can form a negative verb in present and future tense by attaching the prefix *ti-* which means **will not** to the root verb.

This can be presented in the following formula;

Ti +X= negative verb (present and future tense)

Where;

ti - prefix

X- root verb /main verb

Table 7: Showing Verb Negative formation past tense

Personal pronoun	Ki imenti Sing-	Sing-marker	Ki imenti Plu-	Plu-Marker
1 st person	Ntarimire 'I did not cultivate'	n-	Tutarimire 'We did not cultivate'	Tu-
2 nd person	Utirimire 'you did not cultivate'	u-	Butirimire 'You did not cultivate'	Bu-



3 rd person	Atarimire 'he did not cultivate'	a-	Batarimire 'They did not cultivate'	Ba-
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The table 7 above shows that Ki imenti past tense negative verb is marked through affixation. The prefix *ta-* which means **did not** is attached to the root word for all the three persons' (1st person, 2nd person, 3rd person) both in their singular and plural form. Then stem attaches to the suffix *-ire* which replaces the final vowel in the root verb *a* to denote past tense.

This can be presented in the following rule;

RULE

Given the root verb to be X, then one can form a negative verb in past tense by attaching the prefix *ta-* which means **did not** to the root verb and replacing the final vowel *a-* with the suffix *-ire* to mark past tense as shown below;

Ta + (X-a) + ire =negative past tense

Where;

ta - prefix

X- root verb

a-final vowel

ire – suffix (tense marker)

Morphological constraints

While discussing ki imenti tenses, the study established that the Ki imenti present tense is marked with a prefix *ku-* which is attached to the root verb. For instance, *rea* 'eat' *kurea* 'to eat', *mama* 'sleep'- *kumama* 'to sleep' among other words. Which gives the rule:

RULE

Given the root word to be X, then one can form a verb in present tense by adding the prefix **ku** to the root verb as shown below;

Ku+X= present tense,

where;

Ku-prefix

X- root verb

The study further established that the words that some words that started with a voiceless velar stop /k/ like *kinya* 'reach' *kima* 'mash' did not take the prefix *ku* instead they acquired a prefix *gu* which starts with a voiced velar stop. So, the words were presented as; *gukinya* 'to reach', *gukima* 'to mash'.

This can be presented in the following rule:

RULE

Given the root word to be X, then one can form a verb in present tense to the words that started with a voiceless velar stop /k/ by adding the prefix **gu** to the root verb as shown below;



gu +X= present tense

where;

gu-prefix

X- root verb

Conclusively the study observed that the morphology of the language does not allow the repetition of the voiceless velar stop prefix in forming present tense.

Recommendation

This study set out to analyze morphological description of verbs in Ki imenti dialect using Morphological generative theory. So far, this study is by no means the final study on morphological description since the domain is still a rich reservoir of future research possibilities. The study recommends further research on word formation processes in other dialects as well as other languages. In order to account for the close relationship between morphology and phonology encountered during the study, it was further recommended that research can be done based on Ki imenti phonology account for the phonological constraints encountered during the study.

Conclusion

The study of morphological description in Ki imenti identified various sub categories of Ki imenti verbs. The study observed that, Ki imenti verbs are subcategorised into three main tenses namely; present tense, past tense and future tense which are marked differently. Other tenses include recent past tense and habitual tense. The present tense is marked with the prefixes *ku/gu* while the past tense is marked with the suffix *ire*, the recent past tense is marked with the prefix *ra* together with the suffix *ire* finally the future tense is marked with the prefixes *ka/ga*. Ki imenti language also observes habitual tense marker which is marked by a prefix *ga*. The prefix shows an action that goes on every time. Other subcategories of verbs identified include the negative formation. Verbs in their negative form in Ki imenti are marked with a prefix *ti* which simply mean 'not.' This however differs in different tenses, while present tense and future tense take *ti* as a negative marker past tense takes the prefix *ta* to mark negative verbs. This research however, encountered some constraints both morphological and phonological. The study established that the words that started with a voiceless velar stop /k/did not take the prefix *ku* instead they acquired a prefix *gu* which starts with a voiced velar stop. In conclusion Ki imenti verbs were formed through the process of prefixation and suffixation. The research therefore observed that; that the verbs found in Ki imenti language fit in the list of bound morphemes and that they portrayed clear word formation rules. However, there were some words which experienced phonological and morphological constraints which were accounted for through filtering (where the words that did not follow rules were marked and accounted for) thereafter, the words were found to fit in the Ki imenti dictionary as indicated in the Generative Morphology Theory. All the above was accounted for by Halle's (1973) Generative Morphology Theory.

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