



The influence of tense, aspect, and mood on tone in the Nambya language of Hwange District in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the interaction between Tense, Aspect, and Mood (TAM) and tonal realisation in Nambya, a Bantu language spoken predominantly in Hwange District in western Zimbabwe and, to a lesser extent, in parts of Botswana. Drawing from the broader framework of Bantu phonology, it aims to contribute to understanding how TAM categories influence tonal patterns and prosodic structure. Qualitative descriptive research design was employed, and data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and archival materials. The participant group comprised ten purposively selected native speakers, both formally trained and natural language users, who provided a rich linguistic corpus for analysis. The descriptive framework facilitated systematic identification and analysis of tonal variation as conditioned by TAM morphology. The findings reveal that, as in many Bantu languages, TAM exerts a considerable influence on tonal behavior in Nambya verbs. The language exhibits predictable penultimate lengthening across various verbal extensions, including the intensive, applicative, reciprocal, causative, passive and stative (potential) forms. This study enhances understanding of Nambya's phonological system and supports ongoing efforts to document and revitalise marginalised Zimbabwean languages through detailed linguistic analysis.

Key words: Applicative, Aspect, Causative, Mood, Tense, Verbal Extension

I. INTRODUCTION

In Bantu languages, the primary determinants of a verb's tone are its *Tense-Aspect-Mood* and the *Clause Type* in which the verb appears. Tone in Bantu languages is a crucial grammatical and lexical feature, often signaling distinctions in meaning as well as verbal categories such as tense, aspect and mood (TAM) (Yip; 2009). In Bantu languages generally, tonal patterns frequently reflect grammatical distinctions, with specific tonal melodies associated with TAM values (Marlo & Odden, 2019). This paper investigates how tense, aspect and mood influence tone in Nambya, aiming to identify systematic interactions between tonal variation and verbal morphology. By analysing tonal patterns across different TAM forms, the research contributes to understanding the phonology-morphosyntax interface in Nambya. The findings will not only enhance documentation of an underrepresented language but also provide insights relevant to comparative Bantu studies, language preservation, and the broader understanding of tonal grammar in African languages.

The Tense-Aspect Morphemes in Nambya: Distinguishing between tense and aspect in Bantu languages, including Nambya, presents significant morphological challenges. As Robinson (2023, p. 274) observes, this difficulty arises largely because the two grammatical categories are frequently expressed through the same morpheme. In linguistic terms, *tense* refers to the inflectional category that situates an event in time, typically in relation to the moment of speech. In many Bantu languages, tense distinctions extend beyond the basic past, present and future categories to include more temporal divisions such as the *recent past* (events occurring earlier today) and the *remote past* (events occurring before today).

Aspect, on the other hand, concerns the internal temporal structure of an event rather than its temporal location. According to Al Maaytah and Ayobami (2025, p. 34–35), aspect indicates whether the situation denoted by a verb is complete (*perfective*) or ongoing (*imperfective*, *progressive*, or *habitual*). Bostoen, et al (2022, p. 154) further clarify that aspect is a verbal category expressing the status or duration of an event in relation to specific time frames. Analysis of Nambya data reveals that, except for future tense markers, all tense markers simultaneously encode aspectual information. This overlap provides the rationale for analysing the markers of these two grammatical categories in tandem within this study. Faitaki and Murphy (2020) defines mood as a grammatical category of verb inflection distinguishing



modality such as indicative and subjunctive. All Bantu languages have at least the three moods (indicative, subjunctive and imperative).

1.2 Research objective

The objective of the study was:

To identify the influence of tense, aspect and mood on tone in the Nambya language.

1.3 Questions

The above objective was operationalised by the following research question:

What is the effect of tense, aspect and mood on tone realisation in Nambya language?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The application of Autosegmental Phonology to the analysis of Nambya provides a rigorous framework for examining how tonal variation interacts with grammatical categories such as Tense, Aspect, and Mood (TAM). By treating tone as an autonomous yet systematically linked feature, this model enables a more accurate mapping of tonal behaviour across verb stems and morphological constructions. This theoretical orientation is particularly suited to Nambya, a tonal Bantu language in which tone plays both lexical and grammatical roles.

2.1.1 Autosegmental Phonology

Using autosegmental representations, especially the concepts of tonal tiers and association lines the study systematically accounts for tonal alternations triggered by TAM distinctions and clause types. Consequently, this framework not only illuminates the structural organisation of tone in Nambya but also aligns the analysis with broader comparative research in Bantu phonology, enhancing the explanatory depth and cross-linguistic relevance of the findings. In Bantu, the primary determinants of a verb's tone are its *Tense-Aspect-Mood*, and the *Clause Type* in which the verb appears

Numerous phonologists and morphologists have studied verb extensions. Kari (2017) examined verbs in Central Delta languages and found that, beyond inflectional affixes, these verbs can also take one or more extensional suffixes also known as verbal extensions. The range of meanings these suffixes convey include causative, reflexive/ reciprocal, iterative, benefactive, associative, initiative, instrumental, accompaniment and directive function. Fernando and Kittila (2019) conducted an in-depth investigation into verbal affixes in Kikongo, focusing on their forms and functions. The study identified several morphemes: *-il-* and *-el-* as applicative morphemes, *-is-* and *-es-* as causative morphemes, *-ki-* as the reflexive morpheme, *-w-*, *-iw-*, and *-ew-* as passive morphemes, *-an-* and *-azyen-* as reciprocal morphemes, and *-ik-* and *-ek-* as stative morphemes. Fernando's analysis provided valuable insights into how verb extensions operate and are manifested in the Kikongo language.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

This study utilised qualitative research method through examining verbs with respect to tense, aspect and mood and identified tonal contrasts.

3.2 Study area

Participants for this study were selected from both rural and urban areas of Hwange district, specifically St Mary's, Lukosi, Hwange urban, Jambezi and Dete, which fall under the chiefdoms of Hwange, Shana and Nekatambe-regions where Nambya is actively spoken.

3.3. Target Population

Neuman (2014) states that the target population includes all individuals, events or objects belonging to a clearly defined group, to which a researcher intends to apply the study's findings. In this study the population included approximately 117,000 Nambya speakers (Joshua Project, (retrieved June 16, 2022).



3.4 Sampling Procedures and Sample Size.

Purposive sampling also known as “judgmental sampling” or expert was used. (Neuman, 2014) asserts that the procedure involves building a sample based on cases, individuals or communities judged as being appropriate for the study that is underway. Ten mother tongue speakers of Nambya were sampled.

3.5 Data Collection Instrument and Procedures

The data collection steps included setting the boundaries for the study, collecting information through unstructured or semi-structured observations and interviews, documents and visual materials as well as establishing the protocol for recording information. Elicitation as a method, was used to extract data on tone from the participants. Faitaki and Murphy (2020:360) define language elicitation as a task that requires a participant to produce some form of language, in either oral (speaking) or written form. Verbs were grouped according to tone patterns and syllable profile-monosyllabic, disyllabic, trisyllabic, quadrisyllabic or poly syllabic.

3.6 Data Analysis

The verbs were further analysed to determine whether their tonal patterns were influenced by specific consonants such as the effect of voiced vs. voiceless consonants or depressor vs. non-depressor consonants. Participants were given tasks such as adding extensions to verb forms.

Verbs were examined with respect to tense, aspect and mood (TAM) to identify tonal contrasts.

For example:

(1a) /labuka/	[laβuka]	‘run’	
Word	Applicative	Reciprocal	Causative
(a)lab-u ‘k-a	(b)lab-u ‘k-i ‘l-a	(c)lab-uk-i ‘l-a ‘na;	(d)lab-u ‘k-i ‘s-a
run- FV-a	run-APPL-FV-a	run-RECIP-FV-a	run-CAUS-FV-a
V.Root + FV	V.Root + EXT-APPL	VRoot- EXT-RECIP	VRoot- EXT-CAUS.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Data Gathering

For the purposes of TAM, a list of words was shared with the 10 mother tongue speakers, who were practicing teachers, cultural association members and graduates from the university who had studied Nambya. A group discussion was also held where students studying a Diploma in bible Translation (DBT) were involved in designing the Alphabet for the language during an Alphabet Design workshop. (ADW). Participants read the words in isolation and then with extensions and were recorded. The recorded data were analysed using AZT to display F0 contours, allowing identification and annotation of high, low, and contour tones for systematic comparison across lexical and phrasal contexts. FLEEx was used to organise words into morphological and syntactic frames, ensuring consistency in the tonal analysis.

4.2 Verbal Derivation/Verbal Extensions

Verbal derivation in Nambya is accomplished by use of derivational suffixes. Bernander (2017:98) states that the extensions are various kinds of verb-to-verb derivational suffixes, common throughout the Bantu languages. These are common in the postulated Niger-Congo phylum (Hyman, 2007). They are found in the next to last slot of the verbal word and are various morphemes used for semantic and/or functional derivations of the verbal root. The canonical verbal extension has the shape-VC, except for the passive and causative extensions with -V and -VCV.

4.3 The Agglutinative Nature of the Nambya Verb

Bernander (2017:130) and Van Der Wal (2022:158) concur that, generally Bantu languages have a Subject-Verb-Object word order and importantly are agglutinative. Nurse and Devos (2019:21) in Bernander (2017:130) says agglutinative languages are “characterised as verb-centred, having a rich set of grammatical information encoded as affixes on the main verb.” Agglutinative languages have been described as those that use affixes that denote single grammatical categories and are concatenated with relatively little phonological alteration (Croft 2003:46). Meeussen (1967) describes a typical structure for Bantu verb forms, which generally follows this pattern: *Initial – Negative – Subject – Tense/Aspect – Object ≠ Root – Extension – Final Suffix*.



4.4 Subject and Object Marker

(1b)-seka'

βa'ka'se'k-a

-β-a'ka'-se'k-a

CL2-RM.PST.PERF-laugh-FV

SC-TAM-Root-TAM

'Those who laughed'

The above example shows the occurrences of the various elements of the verb. As can be seen from the illustrative example, the obligatory elements of the verb are the verb root and a final vowel, which have to occur in every construction. In other words, all the other elements are optional, implying that they may or may not occur in the verbal structure.

Another feature is the multiple occurrences of some of the constituent parts of the verb. As shown in examples that follow, verbal extensions can occur in multiple after the verb root. An important point to note is the change in the final vowel from *-a* to *-e* / *-i* when there is the applicative formative as one of the verbal suffixes. For example:

a) [βa'ka]	'build'	[βak-i'l-a]	(applicative)
b) [seka']	'laugh'	[sek-e'l-a']	(applicative)
c) [baja']	'pierce'	[baji'si'sa]	(intensified causative)
		[baja'na']	(reciprocal)

4.5 Verb Roots

Koroma (2021) says, "a root is a morpheme that carries basic meaning of a word." Of the morphemes in the stem, typically only the root has underlyingly contrastive tonal properties.

(2)Verb	IPA	gloss	verb	IPA	gloss
/bulay-a/ Root-FV	βu'lay-a']	'kill'	/lay-a/ Root-FV	[laɟ-a']	'teach,'
/bhik-a'/ Root-FV	[bik-a']	'cook'	/tek-a/ Root-FV	[te'k-a']	'fetch'

The Nambya verb root as a bound morpheme allows one or more affixes to be attached. These affixes can either be prefixes or suffixes. The Nambya verb root also has the CVC structure that is typical of most Bantu languages (see Mkochi 2021).

4.6 The Tense Inflection

Nambya verbs are often inflected for tense. Comrie (1976) in Robinson (2023:275) defines tense as the grammaticalised expression of location in time. The crucial characteristic of tense is that it relates the time of the action, event or state of affairs referred to in a sentence, to the time of utterance. Tense has to do with the relationship of time denoting events or situations that move from past, present and future. In this study, time is conceived as linear and as stretching backwards to refer to the past and forwards to refer to the future, that is in relationship to the present. In this case, the present is the 'now', which refers to the moment of speaking or writing. Time can be represented in a straight line as follows:

Before

After

Now

There are two types of past tenses in Nambya, the recent past and remote past. The recent past tense is used to refer to situations or activities that took place before the time of speaking, but on the day of speech. The remote past tense is used for situations and activities that took place before the day of speaking, that is, before the morning of the day of speech or the day being referred to.

4.7 The Future Tense Markers

Al Maaytah, and Ayobami. (2025: 33) state that the future tense describes an event that has not yet happened, a future event or state of being and is expected to happen. It is a situation, action or process that takes place subsequent to the moment of speaking. It indicates an action or process that takes place after 'now'.

4.7.1-Cha- Future

This morpheme indicates that a situation, action or process will take place subsequent to the moment of speaking. This is illustrated with the examples:

3

Table 1

Future Tense Marker

Word	IPA	Tone pattern	gloss
(a)kanga	-ka'ŋga'-	HH	'fry'
tichakanga mangwana.	ti- tʃa' -kang-a ma'ngwana'		
	CL1-FUT-fry-FV tomorrow		
	SC-TAM-Root-TAM NP		
	'We will fry tomorrow'		
(b) ku'ma'	ku'ma'	HH	'praise'
ndichakuma mangwana	ndi- tʃa' -kum-a ma'ngwana'.		
	CL1-FUT-praise -FV evening.		
	SC-TAM-Root-TAM NP		
	'I will praise tomorrow'		

Verbs that have an HH tone realise the H shift from the prefixal H tone to the tense marker -cha-[tʃa]. This phenomenon blocks the H tone on the verb root to be realised as L tone in order to observe the OCP.

4.7.2 -Noo- Future

Another future tense marker in Nambya is -noo-. The *noo-* marker merges with the preceding SC. Below are illustrative examples:

(4)

Table 2

Future Tense Marker

Word	IPA	Tone pattern	gloss
to'l-a	to'l-a	HL	'take'
(a)ti-noo'-tol-a ma'ngwana'	(a)ti- noo' -tol-a ma'ngwana'		'We will take tomorrow'
	CL1-FUT-take-FV tomorrow		
	SC-TAM-Root-TAM NP		
(b) ku'nga	ku'nga	HL	'flow'
ndi-noo'-kung-a ma'deko'	ndi- noo' -kung-a ma'deko'		'I will flow in the evening'
	CL1-FUT-flow-FV evening		
	SC-TAM-Root-TAM NP		
(c)li'nga	li'nga	HL	'look'
ndi-noo'-ling-a ma'ngwana'	ndi- noo' -ling-a ma'ngwana'		'I will look tomorrow'
	CL1-FUT-look-FV tomorrow		
	SC-TAM-Root-TAM NP		

The rhythm rule lowers a prefixal H which is both preceded and followed by H on the tense marker -noo-. The H tone shift from the SC shifts to the tense marker -cha-[tʃa] and delete the H on the verb root to be realised as L tone.

4.7.3 The Present Tense-Aspect Markers

-no- Present Habitual marker

In Nambya the present tense is marked by **-no-**. This marker indicates an action, situation or process that is happening ‘now’. It merges with the SC. It is imperfective because it denotes something that one has been doing and is still doing. Below are examples:

(5)

Table 3

Present Habitual Marker -no-

Word	IPA	Tone pattern	gloss
(a) gusa'			‘shave’
a) ndi-no'-gus-a ma'susu.	ndi- no' -gus-a ma'susu.	LH	‘I shave hair’
	CL1-PRES.HAB-shave-FV hair		
	SC-TAM-Root-TAM NP		
(b) vwimpa'	vwimpa'	LH	‘drink’
ti'-no-vwimp-a i'-su'kwalugo	ti'- no -vwimp-a i'-su'kwalugo		
	CL1-PRES.HAB-drink-FV fermented drink		‘We sip fermented drink’
	SC-TAM-Root-TAM NP		
(c) vuma'	vuma'	LH	‘accept’
	ndi- no' -vuma u'-nda'ndu		‘I accept the blame’
	CL1-PRES.HAB-accept-FV ‘blame’		
	SC-TAM-Root-TAM NP		

In this analysis, the SC is underlyingly H tone (5b) (because of non-depressor initial consonant) and the tense marker- **no-** is underlyingly Low. There is deletion of the H in the verb root being caused by the H of the OP which is H tone. This happens to observe the OCP rule. In 5a and 5c the SC begins with a depressor consonant that blocks realisation of H and only on the aspect marker- **no-** which is H toned.

The present habitual can also be marked by **-o-** as shown in the alternative realisation of the above examples recast below:

(6)

Table 4

Present Habitual Marker -o-

Word	IPA	Tone pattern	gloss
(a) gusa'	gusa'	LH	‘shave’
	nd o' -gus-a ma'susu.		‘I shave hair’
	CL1-PRES.HAB-shave-FV hair		
	SC-TAM-Root-TAM NP		
(b) vwimpa'	-vwimpa'	LH	‘drink’
	to'-vwimp-a i'-su'kwalugo.		‘We sip fermented drink’
	CL1-PRES.HAB-drink-FV fermented drink.		
	SC-TAM-Root-TAM NP		
(c) vuma'	vuma'		‘accept’
	nd- o' -vuma u'-nda'ndu		‘I accept the blame’
	CL1-PRES.HAB-accept-FV ‘blame’		
	SC-TAM-Root-TAM NP		

The examples, (5 a-c) show that the **-o-** is used to express the same meaning expressed by **-no-** in (6 a-c) above. The **-no-** and **-o-** seem to occur in free variation. The vowel in the SC **-nd-i-** and the vowel in the TM **n-o-** coalesce to create **-o-**. The coalesced vowel carries the H tone from the first vowel. Thus, the H on the SC deletes the H on the FV **-a-** of the verb stem.



4.7.4 The Recent Past Tense-Aspect Marker

Nambya has no past recent marker. However, the presence of **-a-** in the SC behaves like the marker for recent past perfective. It indicates a situation, action or process that took place before the time of speaking, but on the day of speech, and has been completed. The following are illustrative examples:

(7)a

Table 5

Recent Past Tense Marker - The Immediate Past Tense has Ø Zero Marker

Word	IPA	Tone pattern	gloss
(a) mi'nya'	mi'ŋa'	HH	'stingy'v
	nd-a-mip-a' m'wana		'I stinged the child'
	CL1-RC.PAST.PERF-stinged -FV child		
	SC-TAM-Root-TAM NP		
(b)cheka	tʃe'ka'	HH	'cut'
	nd-a-tʃek-a' tʃink'wa		
	CL1-RC.PST.PRF-cheka -FV bread		'I cut bread'
	SC-TAM-Root-TAM NP		
(c)cheka	tʃe'ka'	HH	'cut'
	zw-a-tʃek-a' tʃink'wa		'They cut bread' (aug)
	CL2-RC.PST.PRF-cheka -FV bread		
	SC-TAM-Root-TAM NP		
(d)-benga	(d)-βe'ŋga'	HH	'hate'
	β-a-βe'ŋg-a' mwana.		'They have hated the child'
	CL2-RC.PST.PRF-hate-FV		
	SC-TAM-Root-TAM		
(e)mi'nya'	(e)mi'ŋa'	HH	'stingy'v.
	k-a-mi'ŋ-a' m'wana (dim)		'It stinged the child'
	CL12-RC.PAST.PERF-stinged -FV child		
	SC-TAM-Root-TAM NP		
(f)fu'ka'	fu'ka'	HH	'cover'
	β-a-fu'k-a'		'They have covered'
	CL2-RC.PAST.PERF-cover-FV		
	SC-TAM-Root-TAM		

The SC does not determine the tone of the root verb. If the SC marker is a non-depressor consonant, (7d-f) the root maintains its tone status as in βafu'ka'. However, if the SC is nasal or depressor consonant, (7a-c) the H tone in the root is blocked.

4.7.5 The Remote Past Tense-Aspect Markers

-aka- Remote Past Perfective

The remote past tense is marked by **-aka-**. This marker indicates an action, situation or process that took place before the day of speaking, that is, before the morning of the day of speech or the day being referred to. It also indicates that the action, situation or process has been completed (Al Maaytah & Ayobami (2025:34).

(8)

Table 6

Remote Past Tense Marker- aka-

Word	IPA	Tone pattern	gloss
a) -βu'ya'	b) -βu'ya'	HH	'come'
- ndakabuya	nd-aka'-βu-j-a		'I came'
	CL1-RM.PST.PRF-come -FV		
	SC-TAM-Root-TAM		
(b) ku'ma'	(b) ku'ma'	HH	'praise'
	β-aka'-ku'm-a' bashe		'They praised the chief'
	CL2-RM.PST.PRF-come-FV		
	SC-TAM-Root-TAM NP		

If the SC has a depressor consonant, the H tone in the root is blocked. However, where the SC is not depressor consonant, the verb root maintains its tone status.

4.8 The Modal Inflection

Like tense and aspect, mood is also an inherent verbal category. All Bantu languages have at least the three moods as illustrated in Nambya below. In Nambya the category mood comprises five members which are morphologically marked namely the hortative, the imperative, the indicative, the potential and the subjunctive. Katamba (1993:222) notes that the function of mood is “to describe an event in terms of whether it is necessary, possible, permissible or desirable.” Whilst languages like English indicate mood syntactically by using auxiliary modal verbs such as ‘must’, ‘can’ and others, in Nambya and most Bantu languages, mood is indicated by a verbal inflection. Koroma (2021:30) says the category of mood answers the question ‘is it real?’ ‘is it imagined?’ as it expresses the speaker’s attitude about the reality of events.

4.8.1 The Imperative Mood

The imperative mood expresses an order or a command in both the affirmative and negative forms (Nwokoji 2024, p.140; Ngowa and Ngonyani, 2020, p.101). The imperative can be defined as a finite form ending in *-a*, and lacking tense-aspect marking. In the negative form the finite form ends in *-e*. Below are some examples:

(9)

Table 7

The Imperative Affirmative

Word	IPA	Tone pattern	gloss
-baj-a'	-baj-a'	LH	'pierce'
baja pasi	baj-a' pa'si		'pierce down'
	pierce-FV down		
	Root-TAM LOC		
^m b ^w ela'	^m b ^w ela'	LH	'fall!'
	^m b ^w -el-a'		'fall' (imperative)
	fall-FV		
	Root-TAM		
wan-a'	wan-a'	LH	'find!'
	wan-a'		'find' (imperative)
	'find'-FV		
	Root-TAM		
dila	dila'	LH	'pour!'
	dil-a'		'pour' (imperative)
	pour-FV		
	Root-TAM		

Verbs with depressor consonant initial, predictably trigger L tone on the vowel of the first syllable.

4.8.2 The Imperative negative

In the negative imperative the negator *-si-* with a low tone on the following verb and a mid-on any object suffix. The negator has an emphatic sense: ‘do not’. For a negative command usually, the subjunctive is used.

(10)

Table 8

The Imperative Negative

Word	IPA	Tone pattern	gloss
-nda'	-nda'	H	'go'
usinde kungumba	u-si'- ⁿ d-e' ku-ŋu' ^m ba		'Do not go home'
	CL1-NEG-go-FV-Home		
	SC-POL-Root-TAM LOC		
-gala'	-gala'		'sit'
c) usigale pasi	u-si'-gal-e' pasi		'Do not sit down'
	CL1-NEG-sit-FV- down		
	SC-POL-Root-TAM LOC		

4.8.3 The Indicative Mood

The indicative mood expresses or asserts a fact (Ngowa & Ngonyani, 2020:111). The affirmative indicative form of the verb is made up of a verbal stem and a combination of different prefixes such as subject, tense and object markers. Below are some examples:

(11a)**Table 9***Indicative Mood*

Word	Indicative mood	Tone pattern	gloss
-seka'	-ndino'seka	LH	'I laugh' seka
-lima'	-ndino'lima		'I cultivate'
-lima'	-ndino'lima		'I cultivate'
-bika'	-ndimu'bika		'I am cooking'
-la'βu'ka	-ndino'laβuka		'I run'
-ndimu'seka	-ndimu'seka		'I am laughing'
-ndimu'laβuka	-ndimu'laβuka		'I am running'

In this analysis it can be observed that the verb root has a H on the FV. Thus in this indicative mood, - the SC-ndi-has L tone, while the tense marker **-no-** has a H tone. Consequently, the FV is realised with a L tone to obey finality effects, where phrase-final syllables tend to have lowered tone.

(11b)**Table 10***Indicative Mood*

Word	IPA	Tone pattern	gloss
(i)-to'la 'take'	-to'la	HL	'take'
ndinotola	ndi- no '-tol-a		'I take'
	CL1-PRES.HAB-take-FV		
	SC-TAM-Root-TAM		
(ii)-lo'βa	-lo'βa	HL	'beat'
ndichondoba	ndi- tfo '-nd-oβ-a		'I will beat him/her'
	CL1-FUT-CL1-beat-FV		
	SC-TAM-OC-Root-TAM		
(iii)HL -li'ŋga	-li'ŋga	HL	-li'ŋga
ndichondinga	ndi- tfo '-nd-ing-a		'I will look at him/her'
	CL1-FUT-CL1-look-FV		
	SC-TAM-OC-Root-TAM		

The SC which is underlyingly L- (i) because of its depressor qualities deny the realisation of H on the verb root to maintain the L-tone progressively. The H tone on the tense marker- **no-** deletes the H on the verb root. In (ii and iii) the SC which is underlyingly H deletes the H of the verb initial **-l-** which deverbally becomes nasal **nd-** which consequently is anticipated L- tone.

Below is the indicative negative.

Table 11*Indicative Negative*

Word	IPA	Tone pattern	gloss
(iv) to'l-a	to'l-a	HL	'take'
a-ndi-to't-ol-a	a-ndi-to't-ol-a		'I do not take'
	NEG-CL1-take-FV		
	POL-SC-Root-TAM		
-loba	-lo'βa	HL	'beat'
(v)anditondoba	a-ndi-to'-nd-oβ-a		'I will not beat him/her'
	NEG-CL1-NEG-CL1-beat-FV		
	POL-SC-POL-OC-Root-TAM		

4.8.4 The Potential Mood

The potential mood indicates a possibility. It can be used in both declarative and interrogative senses. When used in a declarative manner, it expresses a possibility, for example, that someone can do something. When used in interrogative manner, it is either asking for permission to do something or is soliciting advice on doing something. Below are some examples.

(12)

Table 12*The potential Mood'*

Word	IPA	Tone pattern	gloss
(a)-gus-a'	-gus-a'	LH	'shave'
ndi-nga'-gus-a	ndi- nga' -gus-a		'I can cut hair/Can I cut hair?'
	CL1-POT-cut hair-FV		
	SC-Mood-Root-TAM		
(b) -guta'	-guta'	LH	'be satisfied'
ndi-nga'-gut-a	ⁿ di- nga' -gut-a		'I can/Can I be satisfied?'
	CL1-POT-go-FV		
	SC-Mood-Root-TAM		
(c)vwimpa'	vwimpa'	LH	'sip'
ndi-nga'-vw-i- mp-a	ⁿ di- nga' -v ^w -i- ^m p-a		'I can sip/ Can I sip?'
	CL1-POT-sip-FV		
	SC-Mood-Root-TAM		
(d)dyunka'	dyunka'	LH	'pierce'
ⁿ di-nga'-dj-u-nk-a	ⁿ di- nga' -dj-u-nk-a'		'I can pierce/Can I pierce?'
	CL1-POT-go-FV		
	SC-Mood-Root-TAM		

Some prefixes are H in all contexts (subject to regular lowering between Hs), for example object prefixes like /-mú-/ 'cl. 1' or the tense prefixes /-chá-/ 'future', /-ngá-/ 'potential', combined with the H root /-tól-/ . The SC is underlyingly L/H. There is a H shift from the SC onto the tense marker -nga-. Because of its depressor qualities, the H on the FV is deleted.

4.8.5 The Subjunctive Mood

In a wide range of Bantu languages, the presence of an object marker triggers morphological and tonal changes on the verb in imperative and subjunctive forms (see Nurse & Devos, 2019; Lodhi, 2002, Marlo to appear). Even without an OM, imperative and subjunctive forms commonly have tonal patterns that are unique within the inflectional tone system of many languages. The phonological shape of subject markers is: CV- vs. V- vs. N- The phonological shape of the subject markers also sometimes interacts with tone patterns.

4.8.6 Present Subjunctive, Affirmative

-monosyllabic stem

(13a)(i)-pa' 'give'

Cl1-give -FV

Cl1-ROOT-TAM

'give'

1 st per.sg.	ndi'[-p-e]	'that I should give'
1 st per.pl.	ti'[-p-e]	'that we should give'
2 nd per.sg.	u'[p-e]	'that you should give'
2 nd per.pl.	mu'[p-e]	'that you should give'

(14)(ii))LH-sek-a'

Cl1-laugh -FV

Cl1-ROOT-TAM

'laugh'

1 st per.sg.	ndi'-se'ke	'that I should laugh'
1 st per.pl.	ti'-se'ke	'that we should laugh'
2 nd per.sg.	u'-se'ke	'that you should laugh'



2 nd per.pl.	mu'-se'k-e	'that you should laugh'
3 rd per. sg.	e'-se'k-e	'that he/she should laugh'
3 rd per pl.	be'-se'k-e	'that they should laugh'

Subjunctives with the final vowel -e where the subject prefix immediately precedes the stem have what could be seen as another variant of the basic non-melodic pattern. L verbs roots have an initial H due to Doubling from the subject prefix, as expected and H verbs spread the root H as far as the third stem vowel. (see 14a (ii)). However, unlike the base pattern, the final vowel is always L-toned, which can lead to deletion of the lexical H in monosyllabic stems. (13a (i)). Ngowa and Ngonyani (2020) note that as in other Bantu languages, the subjunctive is a morphological feature characterised by a verbal suffix -e, an obligatory subject marker, and the absence of tense.

4.8.7 Present Subjunctive, Negative

The negative command of the subjunctive is similar with the imperative negative.

-seka'
-si-sek-e
Cl1-NEG-laugh-FV
Cl1-Root-TAM
'do not laugh'

(15)1 st per.sg.	ndi'-si-seke	'that I should not laugh'
1 st per.pl.	ti'-si-sek-e	'that we should not laugh'
2 nd per.sg.	u'-si-sek-e	'that you should not laugh'
2 nd per.pl.	mu'-si-sek-e	'that you should not laugh'
3 rd per sg.	e'-si-sek-e	'that he/she shouldnot laugh'
3 rd per.pl.	be'-si-sek-e	'that they should not laugh'

Tone interacts with the SC which has a H tone. The negation -si- is underlying low. The verb stem with a L tone deletes and loses the H on the final syllable to become progressively L. Analysis of the subjunctive pattern would seem to be that a L tone is superimposed on the final vowel, overriding stem-internal tone-tripling.

4.9 The Verb Intensive Extension

Lodhi (2002) states that this form indicates intensity or quickness of action. The intensive extension is realised as -is- or -es-. The intensifying element is generally the same as the causative one but it does not contract as the latter does, e.g. Shona -naka (be good) > causative -nakisa/-natsa, but intensive -nakisa only. Below are comparative examples of the causative and applicative extensions in Nambya.

Causative extension

(16).HL'tola'	'take'
(a)tola	tolesa
-to'l-a	tole's-a
-tola-FV	tola-CAUS-FV
Root-TAM	Root-EXT-TAM
'take'	'take very much'

Applicative extension

tola	'take'
tola	tolela
to'l-a	tol-e'l-a
tola-FV tola	APPL- FV
Root-TAM	Root EXT-TAM
'take'	'take for/on behalf of'

Nambya like any Bantu languages, forms its verb causatives by affixing the suffix -is- or -es-onto the preceding verb root. Tajji (2025:13) states that the function of the causative extension is that "it induces the meaning 'be able to be caused to do something'." Fortune (1984) says the general significance of the causative is 'to cause to act', 'to make to act'. In other words, the causatively extended verb stem indicates that the action in question is being caused or brought about by one agent on another.

For example:

(17) LH Verb root

(a)gut-a'	+Causative extension	gloss
satisfied-FV	gu-ti's-a'	'cause to be satisfied'
Root-TAM	be satisfied-CAUS-FV	
'satisfied'	Root-EXT-TAM	
	'make someone to be satisfied'	



(b)mbal-a' dress-FV Root-TAM 'dress'	mba-li's-a' dress-CAUS-FV Root-EXT-TAM 'make someone to dress'	'cause to dress'
(c)mbul-a' undress-FV Root-TAM 'undress'	mbu-li's-a' undress-CAUS-FV Root-EXT-TAM 'make someone to undress'	'cause to undress'
(d)mbwel-a' -fall-FV Root-TAM 'fall'	mbwe-li's-a' fall-CAUS-FV Root-EXT-TAM 'make someone to fall'	'cause to fall'
HH(a)fu 'k-a' -cover-FV Root-TAM 'cover'	fu-ki's-a' cover-CAUS-FV Root-EXT-TAM 'cause someone to cover'	'cause someonecover'
(b) ka'm-a' -milk-FV Root-TAM 'milk'	ka-mi's-a' milk-CAUS-FV Root-EXT-TAM 'cause someone to milk. v.'	'cause someone to milk'v.
(c)ku 'β-a' -be finished-FV Root-TAM 'be finished'	ku-βi's-a' finish-CAUS-FV Root-EXT-TAM 'cause to be finished'	'cause to be finished'
(a) HL.-βa'ka build-FV Root-TAM 'build'	-βa-k-i's-a build-CAUS-FV Root-EXT-TAM 'make someone to build;	'cause someone to build'
(b) -te'ŋg-a buy-FV Root-TAM 'buy'	-te-ŋg-e's-a buy-CAUS-FV Root-EXT-TAM 'cause to buy'	'cause someone to buy'
(c)li'm-a -plough-FV Root-TAM 'plough'	lim-i's-a plough-CAUS-FV Root-EXT-TAM 'cause to plough'	'plough for'
(d)ko'm-a -dry-FV Root-TAM 'dry'	kom-i's-a dry-CAUS-FV Root-EXT-TAM 'cause something to dry'	'cause to dry'
(e)-su'ŋg-a arrest-FV Root-TAM 'arrest'	su-ŋg-i's-a arrest-CAUS-FV Root-EXT-TAM 'cause someone to arrest'	'cause someone to arrest'



The analysis on the above H tone verbs show that in a disyllabic verb, a High tone spreads twice postlexically onto the following two vowels in the causative extension to dock on the penultimate as a result of high tone spreading (17a-c; 17a-e). The verb stem with H tone on the initial syllable shifts to the penultimate.

4.9.1 The Applicative Verb Extension

Bernander (2017:100) states that the applicative verb extension contains a valence-increasing function as it introduces an extra (object) argument. In Nambya its post-radical element or the applicative suffixes are realised as **-il-** or **-el-**.

For example:

(18a) LH Verb root	+Applicative extension	Gloss
(i) baja'		'pierce'
-baj-a'	ba-ji'l-a'	'pierce for'
-pierce-FV	pierce-APPL-FV	
Root-TAM	Root-EXT-TAM	
'pierce'	'pierce for'	
(ii) kwedza'		'try'
kwedz-a'	kwe-dze'l-a'	'try for'
-try-FV	try-APPL-FV	
Root-TAM	Root-EXT-TAMP	
'try'	'try for'	
(iii) - vija'		'skin,'v.
-vij-a'	vij-i'l-a'	'skin on behalf of'
-skin-FV	skin-APPL-FV	
Root-TAM	Root-EXT.TAM	
'skin'	'skin on behalf of'	
(iv) buza'		'ask'
-buz-a'	buz-i'l-a'	'ask on behalf of'
-ask-FV	ask-APPL-FV	
Root-TAM	root-EXT-TAM	
'ask'	'ask on behalf of'	
In the LH we realise the H shift two postlexical to dock on the FV. This phenomenon is unlike in the other Tone patterns- HL, L.L or HH.		
(18b) (i)(a) HL-li'l-a		'cry'-
-li'l-a	li-l-i'la	'cry for'
-cry-FV	cry-APPL.FV	
Root-TAM	Root-EXT-TAM	
'cry'	'cry for'	
(ii)-ba't-a		'hold'
-ba't-a	bat-i'l-a	'hold for'
hold-FV	hold-APPL-FV	
Root-TAM	Root-EXT-TAM	
'hold'	'hold for'	
(iii)-βa'k-a		'build'
-βa'k-a	βak-i'l-a	'build for'
-build-FV	build-APPL-FV	
Root-FV	Root-EXT-TAM.	
'build'	'build for'	
(iv)-du'bw-a		'swim'
-du'bw-a	dubw-i'l-a	'swim for'



-swim-FV	swim-APP-FV
Root-TAM	Root-EXT-TAM
‘swim’	‘swim for’

The suffixes are underlyingly toneless, thus the High tone on these suffixes when they are attached to H tone verb roots is a result of high tone spreading rules to the penultimate in the applicative extension. The H in the first syllable of the disyllabic verb shifts to the penultimate.

(18c)(i)L.L – mbwed3-a		‘drop’
-mbwed3-a	mbwed3-e’l-a	‘drop for’
-drop-FV	drop-APPL-FV	
Root-TAM	Root-EXT-TAM	
‘drop’	‘drop for’	

(ii)-med3-a		‘plant’
-med3-a	med3-e’l-a	‘plant for’
-plant-FV	plant-APPL-FV	
Root-TAM	Root-EXT-TAM	
‘plant’	‘plant for’	

(iii)-kwed3-a		‘try’
-kwed3-a	kwed3-e’l-a	‘try for’
-try-FV	try-APPL-FV	
Root-FV	Root-EXT-TAM	
‘try’	‘try for’	

(iv)-ped3-a		‘finish’
-ped3-a	ped3-e’l-a	‘finish for’
-finish-FV	finish-APPL-FV	
Root-TAM	Root-EXT-TAM	
‘finish’	‘finish for’	

In the L.L. verb root, (18c (i-iv)) the H tone is realised in the penultimate. The verb root is L toned however there is the realisation of the H tone of the extension in the penultimate. It fails to explain why there is a realisation of H on these verb roots. This is a phenomenon that needs further research as the realisation of H on L verb roots has no explanation in place.

4.9.2 Passive Suffix Extension

This form indicates that the subject is acted upon by an agent. It has been observed in many Bantu languages that monosyllabic stems almost always occur with the longer form **-iw-**. Examples of monosyllabic and disyllabic stems and their passive forms follow below. The passive in Nambya is indicated by the post-radical/pre-final element (suffix) **-w-**, **-iw-**, **-ew-** and **-uw-**. The selection of which form to use depends on the verb stem being extended. Below are illustrative examples:

(19a) H Verb root	+Passive extension	gloss
(i)-ta’		‘do’
-t-a’	-ti-w-a’	‘be done’
-do-FV	be done-PASS-FV	
Root-TAM	root-EXT-TAM	
‘do’	‘be done’	
(ii) tja’		‘fear’
-tj-a’	tji-w-a’	‘be feared’
fear-FV	fear-PASS-FV	
Root-TAM	root-EXT-TAM	
‘fear’	‘be feared’	



(iii) -pa'		'give'
-p-a'	pi-w-a' / pu-w-a'	'be given'
-give-FV	root-PASS-FV	
Root-TAM	root-EXT-TAM	
'give'	'be given'	
(iv) -da'		'love'
-d-a'	di-w-a'	'be loved'
-love-FV	love-PASS-FV	
-root-TAM	root-EXT-TAM	
'love'	'be loved'	
(b).HH- tone		
(19b)(i) -ka'ng-a'		'fry'
-ka'ng-a'	ka'ng-w-a' / ka'ng-i'w-a'	'be fried'
-fry-FV	fry-PASS-FV	
Root -TAM	root-EXT-TAM	
'fry'	'be fried'	
(ii) -ku'm-a'		'praise'
-ku'm-a'	ku'm-w-a' / kum-i'w-a'	'be praised'
-praise-FV	praise-PASS-FV	
Root-FV	root-EXT-TAM.	
'praise'	'be praised'	
(iii) -tʃe'k-a'		'cut'
-tʃe'k-a'	tʃe'k-w-a' / tʃek-i'w-a' / tʃek-e'w-a'	'be cut'
-cut-FV	cut-PASS.FV	
Root-TAM	cut-EXT-TAM	
'cut'	'be cut'	
(iv) -fu'k-a'		'cover'
-fu'k-a'	fu'k-w-a' / fuk-i'w-a'	'be covered'
-cover-FV	cover-PASS.FV	
-root-TAM	root-EXT-TAM	
'cover'	'be covered'	

Analysis of the above indicates that monosyllabic and bisyllabic verbs (19bi-iv) take the **-w-**, **-ew** or **-iw-** for the passive TAM. In monosyllabic verbs, the H in the FV shifts to the FV of the extension. In disyllabic verbs, the H tone in the first syllable is deleted or shifted to observe the OCP principle and docked on the penultimate syllable. In principle, the rules of vowel harmony apply to all verbal extensions in question. Extensions containing /i/ or /a/, such as the passive or the reciprocal, do not change their vowel quality.

4.9.3 The Reciprocal (also called Associative) Extension

Moreno (1988) states that reciprocal constructions encode events in which two or more participants are in a symmetrical relation to one another. Each participant is both an agent and a patient of the event. Kari (2017) describes reciprocal extension as a suffix which has morphological structure **-a**. Many Bantu languages employ the reciprocal form to denote association. The usual post-radical element is **-na** or **-ana** and the extension often takes a conjunctive construction with **-na** or **-no**. The reciprocal extension in Nambya is realised as **-an-**. Unlike all the other suffixes that have so far been discussed, it has no allomorphic variation. Because of that, this is the form that occurs with all the verb roots that can be extended by this suffixal morpheme. The following are some examples.

**(20)(a)LH Verb root****+Reciprocal extension****Gloss**

(i) -baj-a'

-baj-a'

pierce-FV

Root-TAM

'pierce'

-baj-a'n-a'

pierce-RECIP-FV

Root-EXT-TAM

'pierce each other'

'pierce'

'pierce each other'

(ii) -daβ-a'

-daβ-a'

answer-FV

Root-TAM

'answer'

daβ-a'n-a'

answer-RECIP-FV

Root EXT-TAM.

'answer each other'

'answer'

'answer each other'

(iii) -vij-a'

-vij-a'

-skin-FV

Root-TAM

'skin'

vij-a'n-a'

skin-RECIP-FV

Root-EXT-TAM.

'skin each other'

'skin'v.

'skin each other'

(iv) -la^{mb}-a'-la^{mb}-a'

refuse-FV

Root-TAM

'refuse'

-la^{mb}-a'n-a'

refuse-RECIP-FV

Root-EXT-TAM

'refuse each other'

'refuse'

'refuse each other'

(i) HH

-fuka

-fu'k-a'

-cover-FV

Root-TAM

'cover'

fu-ka'n-a'

cover-RECIP-FV

Root-EXT-TAM.

'cover each other'

'cover'

'cover each other'

(ii) tʃeka

-tʃe'k-a'

-cut-FV

Root-TAM

'cut'

tʃe-ka'n-a'

cut-RECIP-FV

Root-EXT-TAM.

'cut each other'

'cut'

'cut each other'

(iii) -kanga

-ka'ŋg-a'

-fry-FV

Root-TAM

'fry'

ka-ŋga'n-a'

fry-RECIP-FV

Root-EXT-TAM.

'fry each other'

'fry'

'fry each other'

(20b)(iv)L.L -kuj-a

-kuj-a

-grind-FV

Root-TAM

'grind'

kuj-an-a

grind-RECIP-FV

Root-EXT-TAM.

'grind each other'

'grind'

'grind each other'

(v) -laβ-a

-laβ-a

-read-FV

Root-TAM

'read'

laβ-an-a

read-RECIP-FV

Root-EXT-TAM.

'read each other'

'count'

'count each other'

In the HH verb roots there is H shift to the penultimate. In the LH verb roots the realisation of H tone to the penultimate of the verb stem and FV is accountable to the H shift two places post lexically (20a) (i-iv) and (20) (i-iii). LL verbs (20b) (iv-v) maintain their tone pattern. We also notice that there is a predictable FV to L.

4.10 The Stative (Potential, Neuter) Extension

Bernander (2017) indicates that the potential marker expresses the coming into being of a situation, when operating on a stative verb like ‘be taken’, ‘be looked at’, ‘be flowable.’ Lodhi (2002) says this extension indicates position or posture. In some Bantu literature (For example, Fortune 1984; Moreno 1988), this suffix is also referred to as the potential or neuter extension. Taji (2025:13) says “the stative extension yields stative and potentiality readings with some slightly additional meanings. It has further been shown that the stative suffix can co-occur with several other extensions, including the reciprocal (to show that the subject is entering a state of being acted upon); the applicative extension (to show that the subject is passively entering a state of being acted upon for the benefit of someone or at a certain location and the causative extension where it induces the meaning ‘be able to be caused to do something’. The stative suffixes are -ik- and -ek-. The following are some illustrative examples showing its occurrence:

(21a).HL Verb root	+Stative extension	Gloss	stative reciprocal
(i) -to'la		‘take’	
-to'la	tol-e'k-a	‘be taken’	tol-e'k-a'n-a
-take-FV	take-STAT.FV		
Root-TAM	Root-EXT-TAM.		
‘take’	‘be taken’		
(ii) -li'ng-a			
-li'ng-a	ling-i'k-a	‘be looked at’	stative+causative
-look-FV	look-STAT.FV		ling-i's-a'n-a
Root-TAM	Root-EXT.TAM		
‘look’	‘be looked at’		
(iii) -ku'ng-a			
-ku'ng-a	kung-i'k-a	‘be flowable’	stative + applicative
-flow-FV	flow-STAT-FV		kung-i'k-a'n-a
Root-TAM	Root-EXT-TAMP.		
‘flow’	‘be flowable’		

Analysis of the stative TAM, the H tone of the verb stem shifts two places or syllables to the right to dock on the penultimate of the inflected verb base. In the stative + appl-causative-reciprocal, H shifts two vowels to the right to realise LHL tone melody.

(21b)HH (i) -ka'ng-a'		‘fry’	
-ka'ng-a'	kang-i'k-a'	‘be friable’	
-fry-FV	fry-STAT.FV		
Root-TAM	Root-EXT-TAM		
‘fry’	‘be friable’		
(ii) -ku'm-a'		‘praise’	
-ku'm-a'	kumi'ka'	‘be praisable’	
-praise-FV	praise-STAT.FV		
Root-TAM	Root-EXT-TAM		
‘praise’	‘be praisable’		
(iii) -be'ng-a'		‘hate’	
-be'ng-a'	beng-e'k-a'	‘be hateable’	
-hate-FV	hate-STAT.FV		
Root-TAM	Root-EXT-TAM		
‘hate’	‘be hateable’		



(iv) -tʃeˈk-aˈ		ˈcutˈ
-tʃeˈk-aˈ	tʃek-eˈk-aˈ	ˈbe cuttableˈ
-cut-FV	cut-STAT-FV	
Root-TAM	Root-EXT-TAM	
ˈcutˈ	ˈbe cutableˈ	

What is noticed in the analysis and the role of the stative TAM, is that disyllabic verbs with either HH or HL realise the shift of H tone to the right and dock on the penultimate. The study found that tone in Nambya functions as both a phonological and grammatical feature that systematically interacts with tense, aspect, and mood. Tonal variations correspond to specific TAM categories high tones marking perfective actions, and low or contour tones signaling imperfective or progressive aspects. Mood distinctions also show predictable tonal shifts, confirming tone's morphosyntactic role. Overall, Nambya aligns with Southern Bantu languages where tone is central to verbal morphology and meaning expression.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The verbal extensions in Nambya can occur in multiple after the verb root. In the applicative formative of the verbal suffix there is a notable change in the final vowel from *-a* to *-e /i* such as in

a)[βaˈka]	ˈbuildˈ	[βak-iˈl-a]	(applicative)
b[sekaˈ]	ˈlaughˈ	[sek-eˈl-a]	(applicative)

There is an observable phenomenon of H tone shift. For example, in disyllabic verbs with either HH or HL realise the shift of H tone to the right and dock on the penultimate.

5.2 Recommendations

Comprehensive documentation of Nambya phonology and tone is needed, including analyses of tonal behavior across grammatical categories such as negation and question formation. Comparative studies with related Bantu languages like Kalanga, Shona, and Ndebele should be pursued to trace historical and structural influences. The findings should also inform language revitalisation and education efforts by integrating tonal awareness into teaching materials. Additionally, future research should apply acoustic and computational methods to refine tonal analysis and develop digital linguistic resources for Nambya.

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