

# ‘Go’ on a rare grammaticalisation path to focus\*

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## 1. Introduction

Shangaci is a Bantu language, spoken in northern Mozambique by approximately 4000 speakers. Like most Bantu languages it has an agglutinative verb structure, displaying rich morphology for the various tenses. Four tenses are of special interest, because they form pairs which differ morphologically, as shown in the formulas in Table 1.<sup>1,2</sup> We descriptively name these tenses ‘simple’ and ‘complex’.

Table 1. Shangaci paired tenses

	simple	complex
Present	SM-tti/ni-VB-a	SM-ttoo/ntto-VB-a
Perfective	SM-VB-V	SM-entt-e Inf
Past Imperfective	SM-a-o-VB-a	SM-a-ntto-VB-a
Past Perfective	SM-a-o-VB-V	SM-a-ntto-VB-a <sup>3</sup>

The complex tenses are probably all derived from the corresponding simple tense of the verb *-entta* ‘go’ followed by an Infinitive. This is most obvious with the complex Perfective tense, which consists of the simple Perfective of *-entta* followed by an Infinitive and thus still has a clear analytical structure. In the other tenses the auxiliary and the Infinitive have fused, creating a new tense with either *-ttoo-* or *-ntto-* as tense marker, as in (1). The verb *-entta* ‘go’ is also still used as a lexical verb, as illustrated in (2).

- (1) a-ttóo-sayéla va-áncé  
1SM-GO-sweep 16-outside  
‘she sweeps around the house’

- (2) mwaw-éntt-é            vaái    taána?  
 1PL.SM.PAST-go-PERF where yesterday  
 ‘where did you go yesterday?’

This paper examines what the difference is between the simple and complex forms, or, more precisely, what meaning *-entt-* contributes. By examining two languages in the same region we arrive at two hypotheses which are tested in the remainder of the paper.

One of the neighbouring languages is Koti, which has the same alternation with the same verb *-etta* ‘go’, see Table 2. In Koti the complex tenses (still) have an analytical structure; they all consist of a simple tense of *-etta* followed by an Infinitive. Schadeberg & Mucanheia (2000: 142) suggest that “the verb *weetta* ‘to go’ is used in various tenses followed by an Infinitive to express progressive events”.

Table 2. Koti paired tenses (Schadeberg & Mucanheia 2000)

	simple	complex	
Present	SM-ni-VB-a	SM-ni-ett-a Inf	Present Progressive
Recent Past	SM-a-VB-a	SM-a-etta Inf	Past Progressive
Remote Past	SM-aa-VB-iyé	SM-aa-ett-iyé Inf	Remote Progressive

Matuumbi, a language spoken in southern Tanzania, also has verb forms with *-enda-* ‘go’, which are also named and translated as progressive, as shown in Table 3. However, the specific meaning of the forms with *-enda-* is not that they are progressive, but that they express a focus on the verb. This is illustrated in the interpretational difference between (3a), where the focus is on the object, and (3b), where the focus is on the verb.

Table 3. Matuumbi paired tenses (Odden 1996)

	noun-focal	verb-focal
Present Progressive	SM-VB-a	SM-enda-VB-a
Past Progressive	SM-VB-a-(g)e	SM-endeé-VB-a

Matuumbi (Odden 1996: 64)

- (3) a. ndeleka-gee            ñáma  
 1SG.SM.cook-PAST meat  
 ‘I was cooking *meat* (not something else)’  
 b. eendeé-telekaa        ñáma  
 1SM.GO.PAST-cook meat  
 ‘he was *cooking* meat (not eating it)’

We can thus formulate two hypotheses on the meaning of the marker *-entt-* in Shangaci:

Hypothesis 1. *-entt-* encodes progressive aspect

Hypothesis 2. *-entt-* encodes verb focus.

These hypotheses are examined in Sections 2 and 3, respectively, after some comparative evidence is discussed.

## 2. Progressive aspect

### 2.1 Comparative evidence

Are there any general indications that ‘go’ could be the source of a progressive marker? Bybee et al. (1994: 128) find ‘go’ as a source for progressive aspect in various languages, although it does not appear frequently. Heine et al. (1993: 106–107) mention a grammaticalisation of ‘go’ to a durative marker which is used “to indicate continuous, prolonged, repetitive, persistent performance of a situation”. Nevertheless, progressive forms in African languages are more commonly derived from postural and durative verbs, rather than motion verbs like ‘go’ (Heine & Reh 1984: 124).

In order to test the hypothesis that *-entt-* encodes progressive aspect in Shangaci, we discuss the use and interpretation of the complex form. For ease of recognition, we use examples in the Present tense (*-tti-/ni-* and *-ttoo/-ntto-*) where possible. The marker is glossed as GO.

### 2.2 Shangaci

The complex Present tense in Shangaci can indeed be used to refer to events that are in progress at the moment of speaking, as illustrated in (4).

- (4) ni-si-vir-é-wó                      oókho aáthu a-ńttóo-nyoónya  
 1PL.SM-NEG-PASS-OPT-17 17.DEMii 2.person 2SM-GO-defecate.RED  
 ‘we should not pass there, people are defecating’

However, the simple Present tense can also be used with a progressive meaning (5), and both the simple and the complex tense can be used to refer to habitual (see (6) and (7)) and future events (see (8) and (9)).

- (5) a-tti-íkhaála vattitthi váttíitthi  
 1SM-PRES-sit 16-small RED  
 ‘s/he is sitting down slowly’
- (6) miíyo ki-ttú-c-eésha  
 1SG.SUBST 1SG.SM-PRES-eat-INT  
 ‘I eat a lot’
- (7) mwaán’ otú a-tti-sókhoówa  
 1-child 1.DEMI 1SM-PRES-be.gluttonous  
 khúlá y’ ooca a-ttóo-vav-eéla  
 each 7-CONN 15-eat 1SM-GO-fly-APPL  
 ‘that child is a glutton, whatever food (available) he jumps on it’
- (8) meéxo ki-tt-éttá oláanta  
 tomorrow 1SG.SM-PRES-go Holland  
 masi ki-tti-rút-éla ttuúkhunó<sup>4</sup>  
 but 1SG.SM-PRES-return-APPL here  
 ‘tomorrow I will go to Holland, but I will come back here’
- (9) meésho ki-ttóo-liíla  
 9.tomorrow 1SG.SM-GO-cry  
 ‘tomorrow I will cry’

Bybee et al. (1994: 144–148) point out the existence of languages with two Present tenses. Typically, one of these is less grammaticalised and has developed out of a Progressive tense. Accordingly, the complex Present tense in Shangaci could be a Progressive in origin which has generalised to habitual and future contexts. However, this can only explain the pair of Present tenses and maybe also the pair of Past Imperfective tenses. For the complex Perfective and Past Perfective tenses a Progressive origin cannot be claimed.<sup>5</sup> The short dialogue in (10) contains a complex and a simple Perfective tense of the same verb. The complex form cannot in any way be claimed to be more progressive than the simple form. Rather, a pragmatic difference appears to be implied. Whereas in (10a) the fact that Ali hurt his ankle is the central piece of information, the answer in (10b) stresses that this happened on the fields.

- (10) a. Alí múunu ent’ ovúlaála leélo ekwákwiínyo  
 Ali 1.sir 1SM.GO.PERF 15.hurt today 7.ankle  
 a-ttóo-tuúntha  
 1SM-GO-be.lame  
 ‘sir Ali hurt his ankle today, he limps’

- b. aw-éntt-é            vaai  
 ISM.PAST-go-PERF where  
 ‘where did he go?’  
 a-vulal’            o-máxáamba  
 ISM-hurt.PERF 17-6.field  
 ‘he hurt himself on the fields’

If *-entt-* would encode progressive aspect, we would expect it to not combine well with stative verbs, since these are generally known to be less compatible with continuing, progressive meaning. The stative verb *-cuwa* ‘know’ occurs 24 times with *-tti-* in the database, as in (11b), and 6 times with *-ttoo-*, as in (11a). Although this shows a preference for the simple tense, *-cuwa* ‘know’ can apparently also combine with the complex tense, which is not what one would expect given a progressive interpretation. However, in Makwe, another Bantu language of Mozambique, an unmistakable Progressive tense does combine with the verb expressing ‘to know’, actualizing the entering into the state (i.e., ‘to begin to know’) (Devos 2008: 305). Could this explain the co-occurrence of *-ttoo-* with *-cuwa* ‘know’ in Shangaci? The utterances in (11) are taken from a dialogue discussing a non-native’s knowledge of Shangaci. The use of the complex tense (11a) does not imply that the foreigner is beginning to know the language; on the contrary, the speaker wants to stress that she already knows it very well indeed. As in (10), the choice between the complex and the simple tense appears to be pragmatically determined. Whereas the complex tense stresses the knowing itself, the simple tense focuses on what is known (i.e., the language game).

- (11) a. a-ttúo-cuúwa w’            oolílaáhi saáneéne  
 ISM-GO-know 17.CONN INT            well.very  
 ‘she knows it very well’  
 b. mpákhá yeéne    a-ttí-cúwa            ettáaphi  
 until    1.SUBST ISM-PRES-know 7.language.game  
 ‘she even knows the language game’

In summary, although progressive is one of the possible interpretations of the complex Present and Past Imperfective tenses, it is incompatible with the complex Perfective and Past Perfective tenses. Next, we have seen that the complex Present tense can combine with stative verbs, which does not fit well with a progressive interpretation. Finally, examples (10) and (11) suggest that there is a pragmatic difference between the simple and complex tenses. This possibility is further examined in the following section.

### 3. Verb focus marker

#### 3.1 Comparative evidence

Evidence for the grammaticalisation of ‘go’ into a marker of verb focus rather than a TAM-marker is found in a couple of Bantu languages other than Matuumbi. Heine et al. (1993:110) mention a path from ‘go’ to predicate focus marker based on Xhosa. In several grammars for southern Bantu languages like Xhosa, the connection has been made between a “predicate focus” marker *-a-* or *-ya-* and the verb *kuya* ‘to go’ (Torrend 1891:242, Krüger 2006:184). This has been put into question based on the diversity of markers for the same system (McLaren 1951:208), but it is still not rejected as a hypothesis.

#### 3.2 Shangaci

There are two types of evidence that point towards an analysis of *-entt-* as a verb focus marker. First, the complex tenses cannot be followed by a focused constituent. Second, the use of a complex tense is preferred when there is focus on the verb.

The incompatibility of the complex form with a focused constituent can be seen in two contexts: with *wh*-words, which are inherently focused, and with the focused form of nouns. As can be seen in (12), the complex form with *-ttoo-* is ungrammatical when the verb is followed by the *wh*-question particle *-ni*, whereas the simple form with *-tti-* is allowed.

- (12) a. o-tti-rénttaá-ni?  
           2SG.SM-PRES-do-what  
           ‘what are you doing?’  
       b. \*o-ttóo-renttaá-ni?

In the same way, a focused noun may not follow the complex form. Focus can in Shangaci be expressed by a difference in the tonal pattern of the noun. When an object has the tonal pattern as in citation form (13a), it may be preceded by either a simple or a complex tense (13b,c). When the object loses the first underlying high tone, it has a focused interpretation and it can only be preceded by a verb in a simple tense (13d) (cf. Schadeberg & Mucanheia 2000 for Koti, and Van der Wal 2006 for Makhuwa). The focused form with only low tones is ungrammatical after a verb in a complex tense (13e). The complex form is thus incompatible with a postverbal focused constituent.

- (13) a. *nzúruukhu* ‘money’  
 b. *ki-ttí-veénka nzúruukhu*  
 1SG.SM-PRES-beg 3.money  
 ‘I am begging / beg / will beg for money’  
 c. *ki-ttóo-veénka nzúruukhu*  
 1SG.SM-GO-beg 3.money  
 ‘I am begging / beg / will beg for money’  
 d. *kittivénká nzuruukhu*  
 ‘I am begging / beg / will beg for MONEY’  
 e. \**kittóovénká nzuruukhu*

Based on the previous evidence we can hypothesize that complex forms do not occur with light verbs, that is, with verbs that have little semantic content and that require a complement (cf. Erteschik-Shir 2007). This is because with a light verb the focus is always on the complement and not on the verb itself. The verb *-entta* ‘go’ itself qualifies as a light verb as it cannot occur without a locative complement. Although we do not have ungrammaticality judgements on its co-occurrence with *-ttoo-*, the corpus findings are revealing. Whereas *-entta* combines with *-tti-* 86 times, not one example with *-ttoo-* is found. For the sake of comparison, the non-light verb *-lawá* ‘go’, which can be used without a locative complement, occurs 14 times with *-tti-* and 13 times with *-ttoo-*.

The impossibility for the complex form (*-ttoo-*) to occur with postverbal focus implies that when the complex form is used, the focus must somehow be on the event expressed by the verb. Note that this does not imply that the simple form (*-tti-*) is restricted to express focus on a post-verbal term. It may also be used in other environments. Consequently, we can only claim a one-way form-meaning correspondence: if a complex tense is used, the verb is focused, but not every sentence with focus on the verb necessarily has a complex tense. In contexts where the verb is focused in some way, there is no clear-cut distinction in grammaticality, but we do find a clear preference for the complex tense. For example, in (14a) the use of *-ttoo-* is expected because focus is on the predicate. However, the use of *-tti-* is not ungrammatical in this context, and thus we can only speak of a *preference* for *-ttoo-*. In (14b), on the other hand, the use of the complex form would be ungrammatical because the post-verbal constituent is focused (as is evident from the tonal pattern).

- (14) a. *weéyó o-ttóo-ripeleéla pipipipi*  
 2SG.SUBST 2SG.SM-GO-be.blue ID  
 ‘you are shining black’

- b. o-tti-rípelel-ela                      vitthu za              nsímána w-áangu  
 2SG.SM-PRES-be.blue-APPL 8.thing 8.CONN 1.sibling 1-POSS.1SG  
 ‘you are shining black because of the things of my younger brother’

This preference for complex tenses in contexts of verb focus is visible with reduplicated verbs, with the focus enclitic *-ru*, in sentences where the verb is contrasted and in answers to questions of the type ‘what are you doing?’.

First, reduplication of the verb stem iconically puts focus on the verb, which induces a preference for complex tenses. Whereas in the database *-tti-* occurs only once with reduplicated verbs, 13 examples of *-ttoo-* are found. In the one case where *-tti-* is used, given in (16), the focus is on the complement, which rules out the use of the complex form *-ttoo-*.

- (15) ki-ttóo-varula-várúla nguúw’ epi  
 1SG.SM-GO-rip-RED 10.clothes 10.DEMI  
 z-íy-é              pattaso páttáaso  
 10SM-be-OPT 10.piece RED  
 ‘I am ripping these clothes to pieces’
- (16) ki-tti-várúla-varula míttítti<sup>6</sup>  
 1SG.SM-PRES-rip-RED 4-torn.cloth  
 ‘I am tearing (it) TO PIECES’

Second, the enclitic *-ru* puts focus on the noun (17) or the verb (18) to which it is attached. It typically expresses contrastive or exclusive focus. In (17) the speaker wishes to express that she wants rice and not the cassava mush presented to her. Note that the use of the simple tense is obligatory in this context. In the short dialogue in (18) the second speaker contradicts the first speaker who thinks the journey to the coast will not take place.

- (17) ki-tti-thénéya      uucaá-ru      miíyo  
 1SG.SM-PRES-want 14.rice-FOC 1SG.SUBST  
 ‘I want only rice’
- (18) nkaháyá weéyo      óphwaáni teeí?  
 well 2SG.SUBST 17.coast how  
 ‘well, you, what about the coast?’  
 waalá n-ttóo-lawaaá-ru  
 nor 1SG.SM-GO-go-FOC  
 ‘no, we are going’

The enclitic occurs 12 times in combination with *-ttoo-* (18) and 6 times in combination with *-tti-*. Remarkably, when used with the simple tense the

enclitic never expresses contrastive focus but rather stresses the repeated occurrence of the event, as seen in (19).

- (19) ki-tti-límaá-ru                      leélo ki-teep-e  
 1SG.SM-PRES-cultivate-FOC today 1SG.SM-be.worse-PERF  
 ‘I always work on the land, but today I worked even more’

Third, in sentences where the verb is contrasted the complex tenses are preferred as well. In (20) the verb *orezula* ‘sweep’ is contrasted with *okhurupa* ‘plough’, and the complex Perfective tense is used.

- (20) miíyó      koów-áampel-e                      okhuruúpa  
 1SG.SUBST 1SG.SM.PAST.2SG.OM-tell-PERF 15.plough  
 ‘I told you to pull out the weed  
 weéyo w-entt’                      orézuúla miyaní z-áawe  
 you 2SG.SM-GO-PERF 15.sweep 4.weed 4-POSS.1  
 but you just swept it.’

Fourth, there is one environment involving verb focus where the use of a complex tense is not just preferred but obligatory. When an answer to a question of the type ‘what are you doing’ contains only an intransitive verb, the complex tense must be used. The use of the simple tense would then be ungrammatical, as shown in (21b,c). However, the simple form is used in the answer when the predicate contains more than just the verb (21d). Although we do not have an ungrammatical counterpart of (21d) with a complex tense, these data suggest that the focus expressed by *-entt-* is restricted in scope: the focus contains the verb, but it may not include a postverbal element.

- (21) a. o-tti-rénttaá-ni?  
 2SG.SM-PRES-do-what  
 ‘what are you doing?’  
 b. ki-ttóo-fuúla  
 1SG.SM-GO-wash  
 ‘I am washing’  
 c. \*ki-ttí-fuúla  
 d. ki-tt-uúzánya      maáye  
 1SG.SM-PRES-buy 6.egg  
 ‘I am buying eggs’

In conclusion, the incompatibility of the complex form with postverbal focus and the preference for the use of the complex form in sentences where the verb is focused point towards an analysis of the complex tenses in terms of verb focus. The examples show that *-entt-* does not encode a specific type of

focus, as it can be used with contrastive/narrow focus on the lexical value of the verb, but also with so-called ‘new information’ focus. However, more research is needed to further specify the nature of verb focus in Shangaci, e.g., whether it includes focus on polarity, truth or aspect, and whether it can/must be exhaustive.

#### 4. Conclusion, discussion and further research

We can now return to the hypotheses formulated in the introduction and conclude that *-entt-* in Shangaci does not encode progressive aspect, as is claimed for Koti, but rather verb focus, as is the case in Matuumbi. As explained, this does not imply that the simple tenses in Shangaci can only be used when the post-verbal constituent is focused. For one, a post-verbal constituent need not be focused after a simple tense, as shown in (13b) and (13d) where a simple tense is followed by a non-focused and a focused constituent, respectively. Next, simple tenses can occur sentence-finally ((6) and (23b)).<sup>7</sup> Finally, simple tenses are not excluded from environments where there is some kind of focus on the event expressed by the verb, as shown in (6) and (19).<sup>8</sup> In sum, Shangaci has pairs of tenses for which the simple forms are focally neutral, and the complex forms imply verb focus.

In the complex tenses the verb *-entta* ‘go’ thus grammaticalised into a verb focus marker. Although general verbs like ‘go’ quite commonly serve as a source for grammaticalisation, the development to verb focus is a rare grammaticalisation path: ‘go’ develops very frequently to a future tense marker, a purpose marker, an andative marker etc. (Heine et al. 1993). Hence, the question is how ‘go’ can grammaticalise to verb focus.

There are two components in the meaning of *-entta* which we think are relevant in the development to verb focus: (1) *-entta* has relatively little semantic content; (2) *-entta* is a motion *towards a GOAL*. Both can be illustrated for Shangaci through the comparison with the verb *-lawá*, which is also translated as ‘go’. The verb *-entta* always needs a complement referring to the goal of the movement, as in (22). In the case of *-lawá* it is the motion that is salient, not the goal, which is apparent in (23).<sup>9</sup>

- (22) a. o-tt-étt’            ó-nlíímpu?  
 2SG.SM-PRES-go 17-3.well  
 ‘are you going to the well?’

- b. waalá ki-tt-étt’            ó-muúti  
 nor 1SG.SM-PRES-go 17-3.town  
 ‘no, I am going home’
- (23) a. o-ttí-láw’            ó-nlímpu?  
 2SG.SM-PRES-go 17-3.well  
 ‘are you going to the well?’
- b. khan-cúuwi            nkhámá ki-ttí-laáwa  
 NEG.1SG.SM-know if 1SG.SM-PRES-go  
 ‘I do not know whether I am going’

Although there is no historical evidence for this diachronic development, we could imagine a possible grammaticalisation path along the following lines. The original verb ‘go to GOAL’ was used in broader contexts, notably also with Infinitives, as in (24).

- (24) ki-tt-éttá            wiipheéya  
 2SG.SM-PRES-go 15.cook  
 ‘I am going to cook’

In this context the idea of motion was lost, and the semantic loss was replaced by pragmatic strengthening: the salience of the GOAL, which is no longer a location but rather the action expressed by the infinitive, was brought to the foreground. As *-entt-* becomes a more dependent morpheme, the foregrounded infinitive functions as the main verb. This is interpreted as verb focus. Although semantic bleaching and pragmatic strengthening are well-known processes in grammaticalisation (Traugott 1995: 49), the apparent extreme nature of the semantic loss in this grammaticalisation path remains puzzling.

A further research question is whether there are more languages where the verb ‘go’ follows this rare grammaticalisation path, and if so, whether the lexical meaning of the verb includes some emphasis on the locative goal.<sup>10</sup> Finally, we hope that this article inspires more Bantu scholars to study auxiliaries/markers that do not express a traditional kind of aspect, but induce a more pragmatic effect.<sup>11</sup>

## Notes

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on Shangaci was possible thanks to a grant from the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project.

1. Abbreviations used in this paper: APPL (applicative), CONN (connective), DEM (demonstrative), DUR (durative), ID (ideophone), INT (intensifier), SM (subject marker), OM (object marker), OPT (optative), PASS (passive), PERF (perfective), POSS (possessive), RED (reduplication), SUBST (substantive), VB (verbal base), <tt> (retroflex voiceless stop). High tones are indicated by an acute accent, low tones are unmarked. Numbers refer to noun classes, or to persons when followed by SG or PL.
2. The alternation between *-ni-* and *-tti-* in the simple Present tense is dependent on the subject. The marker *-tti-* is used for 1st and 2nd person and noun class 1, and *-ni-* is used elsewhere. The same is true for the alternation between *-ttoo-* and *-ntto-* in the complex Present tense. A capital V stands for a vowel identical to the last vowel of the verbal base. The simple Perfective of the verb *-entta* thus has a final *-e*.
3. There is a tonal difference between the complex Past Imperfective and the complex Past Perfective.
4. In combination with the tense marker *-tti-*, *-entta* is shortened to *-etta*.
5. Schadeberg & Mucanheia (2000: 142) also note that “in the past tenses, “progressive” is possibly not the best label. The emphasis is not so much on the *ongoing* action, but on description of the activity” (italics in original).
6. Focused nouns lose their lexical high tone. Here, the high tone on the prefix comes from the verb.
7. The alternation in Shangaci differs in this crucial aspect from the conjoint/disjoint alternation found in the neighbouring language Makhuwa and other southern Bantu languages.
8. Possibly, the focus that can co-occur with simple tenses is different or more restricted than the focus implied by the complex tenses. More research is needed to confirm this.
9. The same pair of ‘go’ verbs is found in Koti: *weetta* ‘go (the destination is important or new information)’ and *olawa* ‘go (the destination is less important or old information)’ (Schadeberg & Mucanheia (2000: 235, 224). Botne (2005: 45) identifies a similar pair of go-verbs in Chindali: *-buuka*: ‘GO to goal’ and *-ya* ‘go to GOAL’.
10. Note in this respect that Matuumbi apparently has a pair of ‘go’ verbs as well, i.e., *-buuka*, which, as far as we can deduce from the text in which it appears (Odden 1996: 299), is similar to Chindali *-buuka* (Botne 2005: 45) and means ‘GO to goal’ and *-yenda* ‘go to GOAL’. Only the latter verb has grammaticalised as a verb focus marker.
11. Nicolle (2007) shows that in the Bantu language Digo, *-enda* ‘go (to)’ has a discourse-pragmatic function in complex constructions.

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