

A Comparison of Demonstratives in the Karonga and
Henga Dialects of Tumbuka
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Abstract

Demonstratives in the Karonga dialect of Tumbuka (Niger Congo, Bantu) are compared to the Henga dialect described by Vail (1971). The Karonga dialect lacks one set of demonstratives present in the Henga dialect, and there is a semantic difference in the remaining sets. A more complex system based on relative proximity of an object to the speaker and addressee is replaced by a simpler system based only on the distance from the speaker. To a large extent the self-standing pronoun has been incorporated into the demonstrative system. There is also a time-dependence in the demonstratives.

Introduction 0

Tumbuka is the language of the Tumbuka. It is a member of the Niger-Congo branch of the Bantu language family. The 1998 World Almanac reports that there are roughly 2,000,000 speakers. It is spoken in the northern part of Malawi, the eastern part of Zambia and the southern part of Tanzania, although urbanization in Malawi has resulted in enclaves of Tumbuka in Blantyre and Lilongwe. Tumbuka is not the official language of any country, so there are very few printed materials in Tumbuka. Chichewa is the national language of Malawi and is taught in schools along with English. Regional variations include Henga, Phoka, Wenya, Mzimba and Lake Shore. Other nearby languages include Tonga and Cewa to the south and Ngonde, Sukwa and Lambya to the north. Tumbuka is used frequently by missionaries.

We are greatly indebted to our consultant, Siegfried Mkandawire. His kindness, his keen intelligence and especially his patience have all been invaluable to us as we have investigated his native tongue. He was gracious enough to share his linguistic and cultural background. Siegfried grew up in the Karonga district in the north of Malawi. His mother's family is of the Nkhonde tribe. His father's family is of the Tumbuka tribe. His paternal grandparents had moved to Karonga from Rhumpi. Siegfried studied mathematics at the University of Malawi in Blantyre. He went on to teach mathematics in English to prospective teachers at Chancellor College in Zomba. He finished a graduate program in educational assessment at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in the fall semester of

2004.

Section 1 provides background information on Tumbuka. It contains a consonant inventory of the language with the IPA notation used in this paper. Section 1 also contains a description of the available literature on Tumbuka. Section 2 is a comparison of the demonstratives of the Karonga and Henga dialects. It contains background information on the noun class system. Section 2 also contains sample data gathered from the consultant.

Background Information 1

Much of the preliminary work was done by missionaries in the later half of the 19th century and the early part of the last century. A modern linguistic approach was not undertaken until the 1970s. The most extensive work on Tumbuka is Vail 1971, 1972. More recently, work has been done by Lee Bickmore of the University of Albany.

Figure 1: Consonant Inventory of Tumbuka

	Bilabia l	Labiodental	Alveolar	Palata l	Velar	Glattal
Voiceless						
Unaspirated plosives	p		t	ʃ	k	
Aspirated plosives	p ^h		t ^h		k ^h	
Fricatives		f	s			h
Voiced						
Plosive	b		d	ʒ	g	
Fricatives	β	v	z		ɣ	
Nasals	m		n		ŋj	ŋ
Laterals			r			
Semi-vowels					j	w

There are differences between the IPA notation and the local orthography. Sometimes speakers write differently than they speak. [tʃ] correlates with orthographic “ch” or simply “c.” [β] is used for what our consultant called “special w.” The IPA [j] is

used in place of “y.” The IPA [ʒ] correlates with orthographic “j.” All cases of “l” or “r” are transcribed here as [r]. A very good discussion of sound changes, a homorganic nasal and clusters can be found in Vail 1972.

The Demonstratives of Tumbuka 2

Tumbuka, like many Bantu languages, has a system of grammatical noun classes. Some noun classes are composed of words that have to do with people, professions and tribal affiliations, while other noun classes are demarcated by the sound that begins the noun. Understanding the noun class system is essential to understanding the grammar of the language. Noun class agreement can be found in adjectives, the number system and verb phrases. The demonstrative used to modify a noun also agrees with the noun’s class.

fumu	iji	moto	uwu
king	this (class 4)	fire	this (class 14)
‘this king’		‘this fire’	

Vail (1972) examines the demonstratives of the Henga dialect of Tumbuka. He finds four sets of demonstratives with a rigid phonological form and a set semantic meaning. The first set of demonstratives has the form V_1CV_2 . Using this set of demonstratives implies that the modified object is relatively close to the speaker. The second set of demonstratives has the form V_1C^VO . The use of this set of demonstratives implies that the modified object is relatively close to the addressee. A third set of demonstratives has the form $CVno$ and denotes extreme proximity to the speaker. A fourth set of demonstratives has the form $CVla$ and denotes remoteness from both the speaker and the addressee. There is a separate demonstrative series for each noun class. In addition to a set of four demonstratives, Vail posits a fifth series of self-standing pronouns that would translate to “it.” These have the form iCV . For example:

mbuto	iji	mbuto	ijo	mbuto	jino	mbuto	jila	ijo
seed	this	seed	that	seed	this-here	seed	that-there	it (cl 4)
‘this seed’		‘that seed’		‘this here seed’		‘that there seed’		‘it’

Figure 2: Henga Dialect Demonstrative Sets (Vail 1972)

	Set 1	Set 2	Set 3	Set 4	Pronoun
	V-CV	V-C ^V o	CV-no	CV-la	i-C-V
cl. 1	uyu	uyo	yuno	yula	iyē
cl. 2	a β a	a β o	β ano	β ala	i β o
cl. 1a	uyu	uyo	yuno	yula	iyē
cl. 2a	a β a	a β o	β ano	β ala	i β o
cl. 3	uwu	uwo	uno	wula	iwo
cl. 4	iyi	iyō	yino	yila	iyō
cl. 5	ili	ilo	lino	lila	ilo
cl. 6	av a	av o	v ano	v ala	iv o
cl. 7	ici	ico	cino	cila	ico
cl. 8	ivi	ivyo	vino	vila	ivyo
cl. 9	iyi	iyō	yino	yila	iyō
cl. 10	izi	izo	zino	zila	izo
cl. 11	ulu	ulo	luno	lula	ilo
cl. 12	aka	ako	kano	kala	iko
cl. 13	utu	uto	tuno	tula	ito
cl. 14	uwu	uwo	uno	wula	iwo
cl. 15	uku	uko	kuno	kula	iko
cl. 16	apa	apo	pano	pala	ipo
cl. 17	uku	uko	kuno	kula	iko
cl. 18	umu	umo	munō	mula	imo

This paper asks if the demonstrative sets found in Vail (1972) are present in the Karonga dialect as well. Vail (1971) surveys the noun classes of Tumbuka giving several instances of each class. A list was made of the glosses and the consultant was asked to

translate each gloss into Tumbuka. The consultant was then asked to translate the phrases for “this (gloss)” and “that (gloss).” At first the consultant only gave two translations, corresponding to sets 1 and 2 of Vail’s classification. Asked about any other possible Tumbuka equivalents of the phrases, the consultant admitted that there was a third demonstrative series. The third series corresponds to Vail’s “set 4.”

The consultant was asked to explain what each set meant. He said that the first series was used for nearby things, the second was used for moderately far away things, and the third set was used for very far away things. The use of the second and third sets was accompanied by a rising intonation on the demonstrative that was always present. If the intonation was absent, the consultant said that the phrase sounded strange.

Figure 3: Data Sample

Class	English Gloss	Prefix	Tumbuka	This	That	That There
1a	friend	mu-	munjane	uju	ujo	jur a
2a	friends	β a-	β anjane	awa	awo	β ar a
1	father	None	dada	uju	ujo	jur a
2	fathers	β a-	β adada	a β a	a β o	β ar a
3	road	mu-	musen	uwu	uwo	wur a
4	roads	mi-	misewu	iji	ijo	jir a
5	word	r i-	r iʒ o	iri	iro	r ir a
6	words	ma-	maʒ o	ava	avo	var a
7	hyena	tʃ i-	tʃ imbwi	itʃ i	itʃ o	tʃ ir a
8	hyenas	vi-	vimbwi	ivi	ivo	vir a
9	seed	N-	mbuto	iji	ijo	jir a
10	seeds	N-	mbuto	izi	izo	zir a
11	tongue	r i-	r ir ime	iri	iro	r ir a
12	little bird	ka-	kajuni	aka	ako	kala
13	little trees	ti	timakuni	iti/utu	ito/uto	tur a
14	truth	u-	uneneʃ o	uwu	uwo	wur a
15	dancing	ku-	kuvina	uku	uko	kur a
16	to the villiage	pa-	pamuzi	apa	apo	par a
17	at the villiage	ku-	kumuzi	uku	uko	kur a
18	in the villiage	mu-	mumuzi	uwu	uwo	wur a

Note that the basic prefixes for classes 11 and 14 in the Karonga dialect have front vowels [i] instead of back vowels [u] as reported by Vail about the Henga dialect.

The data provided by the consultant left gaps in the series in Vail (1971). There seemed to be missing sets. Set 3 was absent, as was the self standing pronoun. I tried to force the construction by putting a demonstrative from Vail's set 3 after a word from the appropriate class. The consultant didn't understand these constructions. To him some of these constructions sounded like the word for "your" that correlated with the noun class. More often he tried to correct the construction by using the demonstrative from set 4. Because of this I postulate that Vail's set 3 is not present in the Karonga dialect.

A translation for "it" was sought, but the consultant said that there wasn't any equivalent of "it." "It" would be equivalent to the self standing pronoun. I tried to put the self standing pronouns in Vail's table (see figure 2) into sentences in place of the appropriate noun.

ηkhuwona	ijo	ηkhuwona	izo	ηkhuwona	ito
I-see	it (class 4)	I-see	it (class 10)	I-see	it (class 13)
'I see it.'		'I see it.'		'I see it.'	

The pronouns acceptable to the consultant in that context are shown in bold. Other pronouns were unacceptable.

*ηkhuwona	iwo	*ηkhuwona	ilo	*ηkhuwona	iwo
I-see	it (class 3)	I-see	it (class 11)	I-see	it (class 14)
'I see it.'		'I see it.'		'I see it.'	

There is an overlap between the self-standing pronouns and set 2. Aside from the personal pronouns (**iye**, iβo), it was these overlapping pronouns that were acceptable to the consultant. Perhaps a better gloss would be "I see that," rather than "I see it."

Figure 4: Karonga Demonstrative Sets 2004

	Near	Far	Farther
	V-CV	V-C ^v o	CV-r a
cl. 1	uju	ujo	jur a
cl. 2	aβ a	aβ o	β ar a
cl. 1a	uju	ujo	jur a
cl. 2a	aβ a	aβ o	β ar a
cl. 3	uwu	uwo	wur a
cl. 4	iji	ijo	jir a
cl. 5	ir i	ir o	lir a
cl. 6	av a	av o	v ar a
cl. 7	itʃ i	itʃ o	tʃ ir a
cl. 8	ivi	ivo	vir a
cl. 9	iji	ijo	jir a
cl. 10	izi	izo	zir a
cl. 11	ur u	ur o	r ur a
cl. 12	aka	ako	kar a
cl. 13	iti ~ utu	ito ~ uto	tur a
cl. 14	uwu	uwo	wur a
cl. 15	uku	uko	kur a
cl. 16	apa	apo	par a
cl. 17	uku	uko	kur a
cl. 18	umu	umo	mur a

At the end of each noun class the consultant would be asked if there were any more possibilities for demonstratives. It was surprising that when asked this question about class 13 the consultant said yes! The consultant said that for words that begin with t, there are five possible words rather than three. He further explained that two pairs of these are equivalent in meaning; ito ~ uto and iti ~ utu. “ito” is Vail’s absolute pronoun for class 13. This did not happen for any other noun class. Class 13 consists of words from other classes

with an additional prefix, “ti.” The function is similar to the French diminutive “ette.”

ma-kuni	ti-ma-kuni	ito
pl-tree	dim-pl-tree	that
‘trees’	‘those little trees’	

The consultant was asked how he would refer to an event that took place in the past. Three situations were given. The first situation was that he was at a party with a friend and wanted to talk about a previous party thrown by the same people. He used Vail’s set 4 demonstrative. The second situation was that he was driving around with a friend and he wanted to refer to a road they already passed. The consultant again used Vail’s set 4 demonstrative. The third situation was that the consultant was talking to a friend about a burden he had carried at some time in the past. The consultant again used the set 4 demonstrative. This would be equivalent to an English speaker referring to an ongoing problem as “this problem” and to a past problem as “that problem.” Lecarme believes that this provides evidence for tense agreement in noun phrases.

Figure 5: Use of Demonstratives in Henga and Karonga



Conclusions 3

It appears as though Vail's self-standing pronoun has disappeared in the Karonga dialect and been absorbed into set 2. The remains of this merger can be found in class 13. Set 3 is not present, leaving three rather than four sets of demonstratives. If one wishes to indicate the temporal distance of an object, idea or event one uses set 4.

References:

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