

Inflectional Forms of Tense in Lutsotso

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ABSTRACT

Lutsotso verbs consist of more than one morpheme expressing a particular grammatical meaning. The various morphological affixes attached to the verb indicate agreement, tense, aspect and voice. Tense and aspect morphemes in Lutsotso follow the same order for all types of verb constructions. Although tense and aspect in Lutsotso are deeply intertwined, this paper focuses on tense only. The Lutsotso tense is divided into the present, past and the future. The past and the future are distributed in four degrees as follows: remote, intermediate, near and immediate. Since the verb is the unit of analysis in this paper, we first describe the basic verb form in Lutsotso. This will entail the verb root and other crucial aspects such as the final vowel and the infinitive form that influence it. We also give agreement in the feature, person, number, subject verb markers and object markers. Finally, tense forms in Lutsotso will be discussed beginning with the present, followed by the past and the future.

1. Introduction

This paper analyzes the Lutsotso verb inflection. Lutsotso is a dialect of the Oluluhya language which belongs to the Niger Congo family, Bantu, Masaba (E.32) (Eberhard et al., 2020). It is spoken by the Batsotso people who live in Kakamega County. The area inhabited by the Batsotso is divided into five: Butsotso North, Butsotso South, Butsotso East, Butsotso West and Butsotso Central. The population of Lutsotso speakers found in Kakamega County was estimated to be 162,822 as contained in the 2020 report of the Kenya National population census carried out in 2019. The Oluluhya dialects that neighbour Batsotso are: Luisukha, Luidakho, Lukisa, Luwanga, Lunyala (North) and Lukabras.

Angogo (1983) and Sikuku (1998) have observed that Bantu languages are agglutinative in structure. Lutsotso, like other Bantu languages, manifests the typical Bantu agglutinative structure. The verb is of great importance since it comprises a complete sentence on its own when inflected for person, tense, aspect, mood, number, and agreement.

Tense is a grammatical category that relates to time (Trask, 1999, p. 207). Each language is capable of communicating time's infinite variations. If a language in its grammar constructs these time distinctions, then it has the tense category. In its morphology, Lutsotso has the tense category labelled. Consequently, Lutsotso uses verb inflection to encode tense. It also makes use of optional time adverbials such as *mumaβweβwe* 'morning', *hamukoloβa* 'evening' to emphasize specific time being referred to.

This paper will explore the following areas: Firstly, it will look at the verb root which forms the nucleus of the verb structure in Lutsotso. Then, it will discuss the infinitive which forms the stem of the verb followed by agreement features. These features must also agree with the object NP in cases where the verb inflects for an object marker. This will be followed by a discussion on Lutsotso pronouns and the morphological configurations of tense in Lutsotso.

2. The Lutsotso Toor

The root of the verb, usually called the verb radical in Bantu studies, is the form that remains when all inflectional and derivational affixes have been removed (Kioko, 2005, p. 2). This, thus, makes it not easy to carry meaning in isolation until when various affixes are added to it. The verb root (VR) in Lutsotso, just like in many other languages, form the nucleus of the verb structure. Since the root is bound, it requires the final vowel (FV) suffix for complete meaning as illustrated in example 1 below:

1) a. rem–

VR

'cut'

b. rem–a

VR–FV

'cut'

The root in (1a) above cannot make sense on its own. Example (1b) makes sense because the final vowel has been added to the root.

Typically, the majority of verb roots in Lutsotso have the structure CVC as with /rem/ 'cut' in (1) and as illustrated in (2) below.

2) CVC

Lim–a

VR–FV

'Dig'

In example 2 above, *lim–* 'dig' is the verb root taking the structure CVC and /-a/ is the final vowel. The final vowel /-a/ usually marks the subjunctive and imperative mood. The examples below show the two forms of the final vowel representing the subjunctive and imperative mood.

3) a. o–remul–e

2SG–slash–SBJV

'that you may slash'

b. remul–a

3SG slash–IMP

'Slash'

c. m–remul–e

3PL–slash–IMP

'They slash' (plural)

The final vowel /-e/ in (3a) marks the subjunctive while /-a/ mark the imperative mood in singular and plural, respectively. The subjunctive is used to express a suggestion, a necessity or an indirect command/order while the imperative mood is the attitude on the part of the speaker towards the factual content of the utterance (Crystal, 1980, p. 247). The subjunctive is considered as a more polite form of the imperative (Appleby, 1961, p. 68).

3. The infinitive

The infinitive is a term for the form of a verb that is unmarked for person, tense, aspect, mood or concordial agreement. In other words, it is the basic form of a verb. The infinitive is the base form of a word (Payne, 1986, p. 156). In Lutsotso the infinitive form of the verb is formed by prefixing 'xu-/uxu-' to the stem of the verb. It is important to take note that the subject marker and the infinitive in Lutsotso do not co-occur. Consider the examples below:

4) a. oxu-kon-a

INF-VR- FV

'to sleep'

b. xu-βay-a

INF-VR-FV

'to play'

In examples (4a) and (4b), the infinitive *oxu-* and *xu-* is prefixed to the root '-kon-' in '4a' and 'βay' in '4b' respectively. The verb root has the final vowel '-a' as its suffix.

4. Agreement

Riemsdijk and Williams (1986) define agreement (AGR) as a set of features including specifications for gender, number and person. In Lutsotso, these features must agree with the subject NP and are eventually realized on the verb. These features must also agree with the object NP in cases where the verb inflects for an object. Osore (2017) observes that in Lutsotso, sentence constituents are brought into grammatical agreement by morphemes which inflect on the verb and which represent or carry the features of the subject or object where the NP could either be a noun or a pronoun. In this paper, these two morphemes are referred to as subject marker (SM) and object marker (OM). AGR manifests the features number, class and person (in cases of personal pronouns) of lexical NPs. The NP, that is, the subject of a verb must agree in number class and person with the inflected SA in the verb. Likewise, the object NP must agree with the OM.

The Lutsotso language has twenty noun classes (Osore 2009). They determine the verbal prefix to be used and the form of the final vowel on the verb stem. Table 1 below shows the noun classes in Lutsotso.

Table 1: Lutsotso noun classes

Class	Nominal prefix	Verb prefix	Example	Gloss
1.	omu-	a-	omusiani, omundu, omukhana	person
2.	aba-	ba-	abandu	people
3.	omu-	ku-	omusaalu	tree
4.	emi-	chi-	omisaala	trees
5.	li-	li-	linyonyi	bird
6.	ama-	ka-	amanyonyi	birds
7.	eshi-	shi-	eshifumbi	chair
8.	ebi-	bi-	ebifumbi	chairs
9.	i(n)	yi-	imbusi, ing'ombe	goat, cow

10.	tsi	tsi	tsimbusi, tsing'ombe	goats, cows
11.	olu	lu	olusaala	stick
12.	tsi	tsi	tsisaala	sticks
13.	akha	kha	akhaana	tiny baby
14.	oru	ru	orwana	tiny babies
15.	obu	bu/bw	obusuma	ugali
16.	okhu	Khu	okhulima	to dig
17.	ha	ha	hango	at home
18.	u	mu	munzu	in the house
19.	khu	khu	khunzu	on the house
20.	oku	ku	okundu	very big person

Source: Osore, 2009, p. 33

From class 1 – 14, 20 pairs differ in singular and plural, this is because nouns in these classes are countable nouns. Class 15 (*obu*-class) consists of abstract nouns such as *oβuheli* 'love' and collective nouns such as *oβusuma* (ugali) which are found in the singular form only. Class 16 consists of verbs in the infinitive form when they are used as nouns in sentences. For example, the verbs *oxulima* 'to dig' and *oxweya* 'to sweep' function as nouns as illustrated in the following sentences:

- 5) a. *oxulima khu reranga eβiaxulia*
 'Digging brings food'
- b. *oxweya xhu tβnyiyē aba:na*
 'Sweeping has made the children tired'

Class 17, 18 and 19 are locative prefixes which act as prepositions in Lutsotso. Therefore, these prefixes do not mark number. We also note that *omu*- prefix of class 1 and class 3 look alike. The difference is that they do not share the same concord prefixes as shown in Table 1 above. Concord prefix for class 1 is *u*- while the concord prefix for class 3 is *ku*-. The noun morphology influences the verb morphology as observed above, the noun classes determine the verbal prefix to be used and the form of the final vowel in relation to tense, aspect and mood.

4.1 The Personal Pronoun

The Lutsotso personal pronoun can occur as heads of noun phrases thus substituting whole NPs. When the personal pronoun co-occurs with the subject NP and is prefixed to the verb it functions as a subject agreement marker. The personal pronouns in Lutsotso are as follows:

Singular forms	Plural forms					
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd			
The pronoun	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	1 st	2 nd	3 rd
	esie	ewe	je	efwe	eβwe	βo
	(I, me)	(you)	(he, she)	we, us	you	they them

- 6) a. *je je-na*
 1 Pron 3SG-wants
 b. *je-na*
 3SG-wants
 'He/she wants'

In example (6a), *je-* is prefixed to *-na* 'want' and it function as a concordial marker. The personal pronoun *je* in example (6b) is prefixed to the verb *-na* 'want' and it specifies that the subject has the feature (+ singular) this subject in this case is optional.

4.2 Agreement in class gender/number

The class of the subject or object in Lutsotso is an important feature that is shown in agreement. The agreement marker must reflect the class to which the NP belongs. In most cases, the AGR marker is usually the class prefix of the NP it denotes. Agreement in the features number and class can be illustrated as shown in (7) below:

- | | Noun | AGR in the verb |
|-------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 7) a. | <i>omwa-ana</i> | <i>a-la-tsi-a</i> |
| | SG-baby | 3SG-FUT-go-FV |
| | 'baby' | |
| | Class one | Class one |
| b. | <i>aβa-ana</i> (babies) | <i>βa-la-tis-a</i> |
| | PL-baby | 3PL-FUT-go-FV |
| | Class two | Classes two |

In (7) above, the nominal root *-ana* is given a number specification by the prefix 'a' in singular form and 'βa' for plural form which are the subject agreement markers on the verb. *Omwa-* and *aβa-* are subject agreement markers on the noun.

4.3 Subject Marking

Person and number are integrated inflectional categories on the verb representing an overt subject in Lutsotso verbal form. The subject position of a Lutsotso sentence can be occupied by either a noun or a pronoun. This is observed in the subject marker on the verb which reflects person and number of the overt subject. The noun morphology interacts with the verb morphology to make tense possible since the subject of a verb must agree in number, class and person with the inflected SM in the verb. The subject marker on the verb therefore expresses subject incorporation in the verbal form. In other words, the subject marker copies the features of the nominal subject onto the verb morphologically so that these features (person and number) - for instance 'a' is used for singular subjects with the feature specification [+ human] while [i] is used for singular subjects with the feature [-human] as seen in (8) below;

- 8) a. *Senje a-la-tsi -a xu-kanisa*
 3SG:aunt 3SGSM-FUT-go-FV INF-church
 'aunt will go to church'

- b. *imβwa* *i-la-li-a* *i-nyama*
 3SG:dog 3SG-FUT- eat -FV SG- meat
 'The dog will eat meat'

In (8a), the agreement marker is 'a-' because the subject *senje* 'aunt' has the feature specification [+ human]. In (8b) the agreement marker is 'i-' because the subject *imbwa* 'dog' has the feature specification [-human]

The feature person is only associated with class one and two nouns and it represents the human nominal subject in the verb. Three persons are distinguished in Lutsotso. They are, first second and third person. The person agreement marker exists as a bound morpheme prefixed on the main verb. Agreement in the feature person in Lutsotso is best illustrated by use of personal pronouns as in (9):

- 9) a. *nda-soma*
 1SG:PST-read
 'I read'
- b. *xwa-soma*
 1PL:PST-read
 'We read'
- c. *o-soma*
 2SG:PRS -read
 'He/She read'
- d. *ja-soma*
 3SG:PST-read
 'He/she read'

In (9a), *nda* – is the subject agreement marker attached to the verb *soma* 'read' while in (9b) the agreement marker is *xwa-* and is attached to the verb *soma* 'read'. In (9c) and (9d) have the subject agreement markers *o-* and *ja-* respectively, attached to the verb *soma* 'read' It is also important to note that the subject marker on the verb also reflects person, tense and number of the overt subject.

4.4 The object markers

In Lutsotso, the object marker is prefixed to the verb root to denote a covert object in a syntactic structure. The object position in Lutsotso can be occupied by a noun or a pronoun. It occurs as a prefix immediately before the verb root. Like the subject marker, the object marker copies the features of the noun phrase on the verb as illustrated in (10) below:

- 10) a. *a-la-singa-a* *omwa-na*
 3SG-FUT-wash-FV SM-baby
 'He/she will wash the baby'
- b. *a-la-mu-singa*
 3SG-FUT-OM-wash

- 'He/she will wash him/her'
- *c. a-la-mu-sing-a omwa-na
- 3SG-FUT-OM-FV-wash SM-baby
- 'He/she will him/her wash the baby'

In (10b), the object marker is *mu-* and it occurs immediately before the verb root *singa* (wash). There appears to be a rule governed relationship between the object marker (morpheme) and the nominal object in terms of their distributional properties. Unlike the subject marker and its nominal subject which may both be present, the object marker and its nominal object cannot co-occur in the same sentence. For instance, in (10a) the object is *omwana* 'baby' and in (10b) the object marker is *-mu-*. The object *omwana* 'baby' cannot co-occur with the object marker *-mu-* in (10c) above. The object marker in (10b) incorporates the nominal object onto the verb leading to the obligatory deletion. In case we want to indicate that the object marked by *-mu-* is *omwana* and not any other a question can be asked like;

- 11) *a. wina-ou-la-singa omwana?
- who-will-FUT-wash baby?
- 'Who will wash baby?'
- b. a-la-mu-singa
- 3SG-FUT-him/her-wash
- 'He/she will wash him/her'

In (10a), both the nominal subject and object are not incorporated in the verb. Example (10c) is ungrammatical due to the occurrence of the object prefix *-mu-* and nominal object *omwana* 'baby' in the same sentence.

5. The Present Tense in Lutsotso

The present tense usually indicates events that are going on in the present time. Walker (2013, p. 88) adds that the present tense marked by a zero morpheme is found in many Bantu languages of the Great Lakes. In her study, Timbwah observed that the simple present tense is marked by a zero morpheme as a prefix in Lunyole, a language closely related to Lutsotso. Lutsotso marks the present tense non-overtly with a zero morpheme (\emptyset). The person and tense markers are prefixed to the verb root.

Example (12a) illustrates present tense marked by zero morpheme while 12b and 12c illustrates present continuous tense.

- 12) a. a- \emptyset -tex-a ama-pwoni
- 3SG-PRS-cook-FV PL- potatoes
- 'He/She cooks potatoes'
- b. a-tex-a-nga ama-pwoni
- 3SG-cook -FV-IMPFV PL-potatoes
- 'He/She is cooking potatoes'
- c. β a-som-a-nga
- 3PL-read-FV-IMPFV
- 'They are reading'

In example (12a) the present tense is marked by a zero morpheme while in (12b) and (12c) *-nga* is suffixed on the verb *atexa* and *β asoma*, respectively, as an imperfective marker of a present occurrence.

6. Past Tense

Past tense in Lutsotso occurs in four degrees as follows: Immediate past, near past, intermediate past and far past tense. Immediate past tense is a simple past tense indicating something that has just happened while the near past means an action has taken place not long ago (yesterday). Intermediate past means few days ago, more than a day and less than a week ago and finally, far (remote) past means long time ago, some days, months or years ago.

The past tense in Lutsotso is marked by *ja-* which is also the subject agreement marker. The adverbials for time help to specify the exact time as shown in (13):

- 13) a. *ja-texa* *e-mioko*
 3SG[PT]–cooked PL– cassava
 ‘He/she cooked cassava’
- b. *Ja-lola i-ngwe omwaka kwawa*
 3SG[PST] saw SG–leopard year last
 ‘He/she saw a leopard last year’

In (13a) and (13b) above, *ja-* is the third person subject marker and the past tense marker. In (13b), the adverbial of time is *omwaka kwawa* ‘last year’ is used to specify the exact time in the past.

6.1 Immediate Past

This is a simple past tense indicating something that has just happened. It is formed from the subject agreement marker plus *xa-* which is prefixed to the verb stem as (14) indicates:

- 14) a. *nda-xa-βukul-a*
 ISG–IPT–take–FV
 ‘I have just taken’
- b. *ja-xe-ts-a βulano*
 3SG–IPT–come–FV now
 ‘He/she has just come now’

The immediate past tense in Lutsotso is only used when there is a stress on the fact that the action has taken place just now. In (14b) the *-xa-* marker emphasizes the fact that he/she was not there a short time previously.

6.2 Near Past

As noted earlier, near past refers to an action that has taken place not long ago (yesterday). Near past is marked on the verb by the infix *-il-* which is placed between the verb root and the final vowel as shown in 15 below.

- 15) a. *omwa-na a-Ø-lia oβusuma*
 SM–child 3SG–PRS–eat ugali
 ‘The child eats ugali’ (present tense)
- b. *omwa-na a-li-il-e oβusuma*
 SM–child 3SG–NPST–eat–FV ugali
 ‘The child has eaten ugali’

In (15a) above we have a zero-morpheme to indicate the present tense while in (15b) the suffix *-il-* is placed between the verb root and the final vowel to indicate the near past tense.

6.3 Intermediate Past

Intermediate past – means few days ago (some time past today), more than a day less than a week ago. Intermediate past is shown by use the person marker *ja-* and the suffix *-il-* which is placed between the verb root and the final vowel as 16 indicates:

- 16) a. *ja-som-il-e*
 3SG-read-INT.PST-FV
 'He/she read'
- b. *ja-lim-il-e omu-kunda*
 3SG-dig-INT.PST-FV SG-field
 'He/she dug the field'

In example (16a) above the person marker *ja-* which is attached to the verb root *-som-* is used to mark intermediate past tense together with the infix *-il-* which is placed between the verb root and the final vowel. In (16b) the person marker *ja-* is attached to the verb root *-lim-* to mark the past tense and then together with the infix *-il-* placed between the verb root and the final vowel the intermediate past tense is marked.

6.4 Far (remote) Past

Far (remote) past tense is used to indicate events or situations which took place long time ago, some days, months or years ago (Comrie, 1985, p. 6). Far past tense is marked by the person marker *ja-* in singular and *βa-* in plural as (17a) and (17b) illustrate:

- 17) a. *ja-lol-a imβwa*
 3SG: FPST-see-FV dog
 'He/she saw a dog'
- b. *βa-lol-a imβwa*
 3PL: FPST-see-FV dog
 'They saw a dog'

In example 17, the person marker *ja-* is prefixed to the verb root *-lol-* to mark the far past tense in singular while *βa-* is used in plural.

7. Future Tense in Lutsotso

The future tense identifies situation that take place after the present moment. Shopen (1995, p. 204) mentions that 'The future is used for events subsequent to the speech moment.' Lutsotso distinguishes four categories of future,

Immediate future= few moments, minutes, hours to the action

Near future = The near future tense in Lutsotso shows events or actions that are intended to take place between today and tomorrow

Intermediate future = time ranging from a time more than a day but less than a week.

Remote future = unforeseeable.

7.1 Immediate Future Tense

Immediate Future tense indicates situations that are predicted to take place a moment after now to sunset of the same day of speaking. The prefix *la-* attached to the verb stem *-tex-* marks this tense as exemplified in (18) below:

- 18) a. a-la-tex-a ejiliβwa
 3SG-FUT-cook-FV food
 'He/she will cook food'
- b. o-la-tex-a ejiliβwa
 2SG-FUT-cook-FV food
 'You will cook food'

In example (18a) and (18b) above, the prefix *-la-* is attached to the verb stem *-tex-* to mark the immediate future tense.

7.2 Near future tense

The near future tense in Lutsotso shows events or actions that are intended to take place between today and tomorrow. In the near future, instead of the final *-a-* the verb ending is *-e-*. In addition, the suffix *-na* is put before the subject agreement marker as 19 illustrates:

- 19) a. a-som-a ejitaβu
 3SG/PRES-read-FV book
 'He/she reads a book'
- b. omu-siani na-a-som-e ejitaβu
 SM-boy FUT-3SG-read-FV book
 'The boy will read a book'

To mark the near future tense the final vowel changes from *-a* to *-e* as illustrated in (19a) and (19b) above. In addition, the suffix *-na* has been placed before the subject agreement marker *a-*.

7.3 Intermediate future tense

In Lutsotso, intermediate future tense indicates a time roughly more than a day but less than a week ahead. The intermediate future tense marker is *-axa-* with final vowel of the verb changed from *'a'* to *'e'* as exemplified in (20) below:

- 20) a. omwana a-∅-li -a oβusuma
 omwana 3SG/PRES- eat-FV ugali
 'child eats ugali'
- b. omwana ja-xa-li-e oβusuma
 omwana 3SG-INT.FUT-eat-FV ugali
 'omwana will eat ugali'

In example (20b) above, the intermediate future tense marker *xa-* prefix which is preceded by the person marker *ja-* marks the intermediate future tense.

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