

Joanna Reilly Robertson - Tense and
Aspect in the Kikuyu
Speech Form of the Kiambu District

NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE
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TENSE AND ASPECT
IN THE KIKUYU SPEECH FORM
OF THE KIAMBU DISTRICT:
a Discussion of Indicative Sentences
including
Negative Past Constructions

BY

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NEGST.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Genetic affiliation and Demography

Kikuyu (Gikuyu) is a Bantu language of the Niger-Congo Phylum, and is of the Niger-Kordofanian language family. More specifically, the *Atlas of World Languages* classifies it as belonging to the Thagicu group of the North-East: Interior branch of the Bantu family. Kikuyu is one of Kenya's main languages, being spoken by nearly four and a half million speakers as their mother tongue (1987), i.e. almost 20% of the population (Grimes, 1993:244). Of these Kikuyu speakers 20% live in the Kiambu district of the Central Province according to the Kenya population census of 1989.

1.2 Dialects

The major dialects of Kikuyu are Ndia, Gichugu, Mathira, Kiambu, Murang'a and Nyeri according to the *Atlas of World Languages* (maps 86:9), although the *Ethnologue* (p. 244) states that it only has four dialects: three are western, in Kiambu, Murang'a and Nyeri districts, and a fourth in Nyandarua district. The dialect names listed are NDIA (Kiambu), GICHUGU (Murang'a) and MATHIRA (Nyeri). Kikuyu is described as existing in a complex dialect continuum having 73% lexical similarity with Embu, 70% with Chuka, 67% with Kamba and 63% with Meru.

1.3 The Kikuyu speech form of the Kiambu district

This practicum will focus on 'the Kikuyu speech form of the Kiambu district'.

However, since that is rather cumbersome the shorthand 'Kiambu' will be used to

refer to the speech form being studied, but this is not intended to mislead the reader into thinking that ‘Kiambu’ should be understood as a language distinct from Kikuyu, rather it is the particular expression of the Kikuyu language which is normally found in the Kiambu district. The principal language informant used in the collection of data for this practicum has lived all her life in Nairobi but her own individual speech form has been mainly received from her mother and those in her community who also consider themselves to speak ‘Kiambu’. Undoubtedly her speech form will have been affected by urbanisation to some extent, but unfortunately it has not been possible to travel to Kiambu district to check the received data against older, preferably monolingual ‘Kiambu’ speakers.

Kiambu is actually a tonal language and according to Gathenji has five tonal classes, but investigating the tonal system has proved to be beyond the scope of this practicum. As will be seen, Kiambu employs a rich morphological system for distinguishing between tenses and aspects. However, because of morphophonemic changes it does occasionally happen that two expressions have the same grammatical form and are even phonetically identical, but are distinguished by means of tone. For example, in section 10.1 examples (1) and (3) both begin with the word ‘etire’, ‘she called’. However, reducing the words to their original constituent morphemes shows that they are representing two different temporal locations.

(1) et -ire
 T₁: a- a- it -ire
 3SG-T₁-call-T₁

NB a+a→a, a+i→e
 T₁ indicates the Remote Past tense

(2) et -ire
 T₃: a- ~~ɸ~~- it -ire
 3SG-T₃-call-T₃

NB a+i→e

T₃ indicates the Near Past tense

On the printed page these forms are identical but there are tonal differences which disambiguate when spoken aloud. Written phonetically with tone marked, the two words would be uttered respectively as:

(3)
 T₁: [é t ì r ē]

(4)
 T₃: [ē t ī r ē]

The major difference concerning tense and aspect between Kiambu and the Kikuyu speech form of other districts lies in the elision of vowels in the former. For example, the following extract was taken from Kago's *Wirute Gũthoma: Ibuku ria Kerĩ* p. 27, which was written in Standard Kikuyu. However, example (6) gives the same extract, pronounced and written by a Kiambu speaker, clearly showing elision of vowels.

(5) **Standard Kikuyu:**

Tene nĩkwari na ago maarathaga maũndũ maria
 Long ago there were witch doctors they were foretelling things that
 Long ago there were witch doctors who foretold about things that were going

magoka thutha
 they will come afterwards
 to happen in the future

ma- a- rath -aga
 3PL-T₁-foretell-PROG

(6) **Kiambu:**

Tene nikwarĩ na ago marathaga maündũ marĩa magoka thutha

ma- rath -aga

ma- a- rath -aga

3PL-T₁-foretell-PROG

i.e. a+a→a

1.4 Orthographic conventions

The orthography of Kiambu follows that of standard Kikuyu and is phonemic.

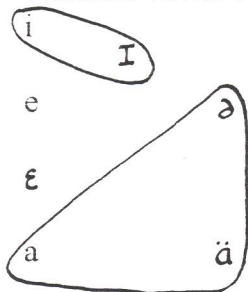
Throughout this paper the standard Kikuyu orthography has been used rather than phonetic symbols. However, due to the typographic difficulty of printing the diacritic ~ above the letters i and u, this paper has adopted the convention of writing *ĩ* in the place of *ĩ̃*, and *ũ* in the place of *ũ̃*.

ĩ (*ĩ̃*) is the close-mid front unrounded vowel [e], + ATR /e/.

ũ (*ũ̃*) is the close-mid back rounded vowel [o], + ATR /o/.

The distribution of vowels in Kiambu is given below in three charts. The first shows the actual phonetic vowel distribution, with the phonetic realisations of the phonemes /ä/ and /i/ enclosed in loops. The phonemic chart reveals the symmetry of the vowel system and the orthography for Kikuyu vowels is given in chart (3) below.

(1) Phonetic vowel chart



u The phonetic symbols used here are
o those recommended at the 1989 IPA
ɔ (International Phonetic Alphabet)
convention.

(2) Phonemic vowel chart

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| i | u | The phonemes enclosed in loops in the phonetic chart above are allophones, yielding this phonemic chart. |
| e | o | |
| ɛ | ɔ | |

ä

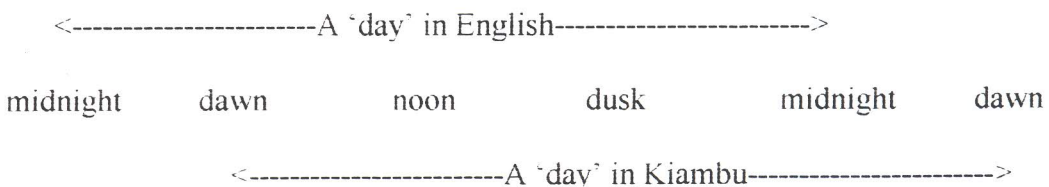
(3) Orthographic vowel chart

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| i | u | A comparison of charts (2) and (3) will reveal the fact that Kikuyu's orthography is in fact phonemic, although the symbols are mostly different from the IPA ones. |
| ĩ | ũ | |
| e | o | |
| a | | |

Where some confusion may arise regarding pronunciation of consonants the following conventions are being followed: th: [ð]; c: [ʃ] or [tʃ] (depending on individual variation between informants); g: [ɣ] or [g]; b: [β]; ng: [ŋg] or [ŋ].

1.5 A 'day' in Kiambu

The Western understanding of a 'day' is 24 hours from midnight to midnight, so that the 24 hours prior to the most recent midnight would be called 'yesterday', and the 24 hours immediately following the next midnight would be called 'tomorrow'. However, like many Bantu languages a 'day' in Kiambu is reckoned to be the 24 hours from dawn to dawn. The diagram below should make this distinction clear.



For example,

7 a.m. is equivalent to *thaa imwe cia rüciini* - ‘hour 1 of morning’

12 p.m. is equivalent to *thaa thita cia müthenya* - ‘hour 6 of day’

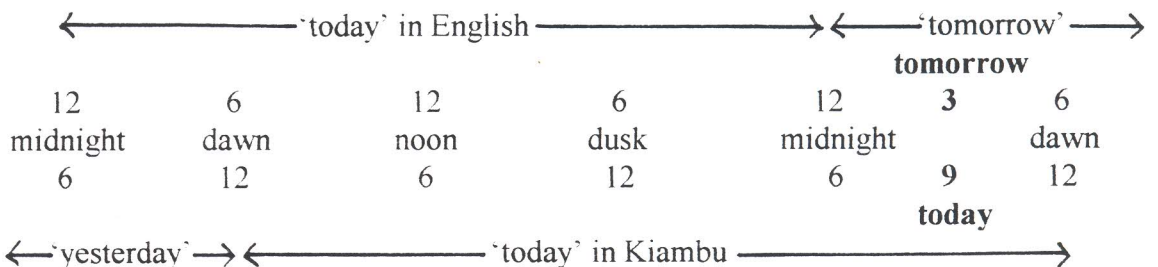
6 p.m. is equivalent to *thaa ikümi na igiri cia hwaini* - ‘hour 12 of evening’

3 a.m. is equivalent to *thaa kenda cia ütuku* - ‘hour 9 of night’

This means that some of the tenses may be used in situations that would not be expected if working from a Western preconception of time. For example, suppose the following utterance was spoken at dusk:

- (1) nĩ- n- **gü**- thiĩ wĩra thaa kenda cia ütuku
 PR-1SG-T₆-go work hour nine of night
 I will go to work at 3 a.m.

In English the time reference would be interpreted as meaning ‘3 a.m. tomorrow morning’. However, *thaa kenda cia ütuku* falls within the current 24 hours according to the Kiambu conception of a day, so it is still **today** and can therefore take **gü**- which will be described as the marker for the Immediate/Near Future tense (see section 5.1), covering any time later today, but not tomorrow. Again a diagram may clarify the situation.



1.6 Previous research

At least three grammars have been written on Kikuyu, by Barlow, Gecaga and Leakey, although Barlow's was unobtainable at the time of writing this paper. As the bibliography reflects, some work has been done on the tense and aspect of Bantu languages, and Gathenji's work on verbal extensions in Gikuyu (alternative spelling for Kikuyu) was particularly helpful, but it has not been possible to locate any previous work specialising in tense and aspect in Kiambu.

Unless otherwise indicated, the content of this paper, including the morphophonemic analysis, was not taken from any source but is the author's own work.

1.7 Data collection methods

Three methods were employed for the collection of data for this paper. The first was to translate sentences and passages from Kago's two Kikuyu primers *Wirute Gũthoma* Books 1 and 2, making any lexical or morphological changes necessary in order to modify the standard Kikuyu into more natural Kiambu. Secondly, a tape recording was made for section 9: Use of tenses in discourse, and subsequently transcribed with minor alterations in order to remove fillers and repetition. The third method was to elicit data by describing a context within which a certain situation could occur. The Kiambu sentences so produced have been given here as examples without their contexts, apart from indications of temporal location.

1.8 Scope of the Practicum

This paper is restricted to an investigation of tense and aspect in indicative sentences.

The original data collection included a few imperative and interrogative sentences, but the former showed no tense and aspect marking and so were uninteresting for the present study, and the latter would have made the scope of the study too wide.

Similarly, the great majority of the examples used are positive constructions, since inclusion of the whole spectrum of negative constructions would have broadened the scope too much, although a brief analysis of the negative past construction has been outlined in section 2.4.

2. OVERVIEW OF TENSE AND ASPECT

Kiambu has a very interesting system of tense and aspect. Past, present and future are all subdivided with respect to time, yielding divisions such as immediate, near and remote past, all of which are marked morphologically on the verb. In addition there are perfective, habitual and progressive aspects, which are also marked morphologically on the verb. Although the aspectual morphemes will be described in sections 2.1 - 2.3, and some small discussion of their functions will be made in sections 6 - 8, the bulk of this paper will concentrate on the tense system of Kiambu.

There is some dispute as to the conceptual nature of tense in Kikuyu and hence in Kiambu. The two scholars, Gecaga and Leakey, whose Kikuyu grammars have been consulted for the purpose of this study, arrive at very different conclusions. Their analyses of the actual morphemes corresponding to tense change prove to be very similar, although Leakey includes some aspectual morphemes mixed in with tense, while Gecaga separates tense and aspect. However, their attribution of sense to each of the tense morphemes is strikingly different.

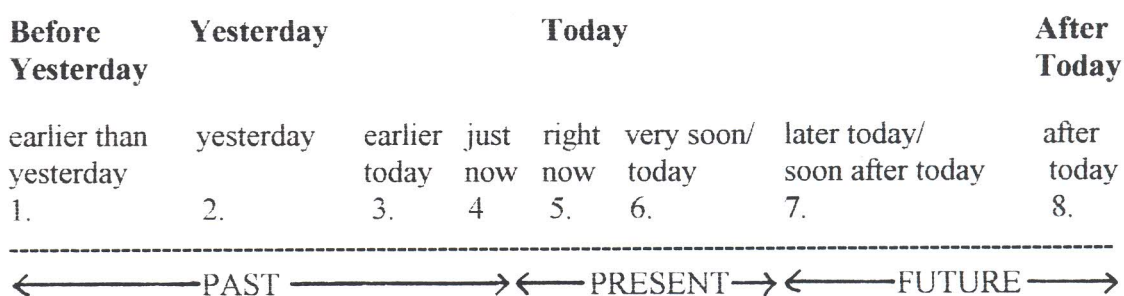
Gecaga (1953:18) works on an eight tense system as follows:

| | Tense prefix | Tense suffix | Tense meaning | |
|----|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. | a- | -ire | PAST | earlier than yesterday |
| 2. | ra- | -ire | | yesterday |
| 3. | ∅- | -ire | | earlier today |
| 4. | a- | -a | | just now |

| | Tense prefix | Tense suffix | Tense meaning | |
|----|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 5. | ra- | -a | PRESENT | right now |
| 6. | kü- | -a | | very soon |
| 6. | kü- | -a | FUTURE | today |
| 7. | rī- | -a | | later today or soon after today |
| 8. | ka- | -a- | | after today |

Note that Gecaga classifies his tense 6 as both present and future.

Diagrammatically Gecaga's system may be described as follows:

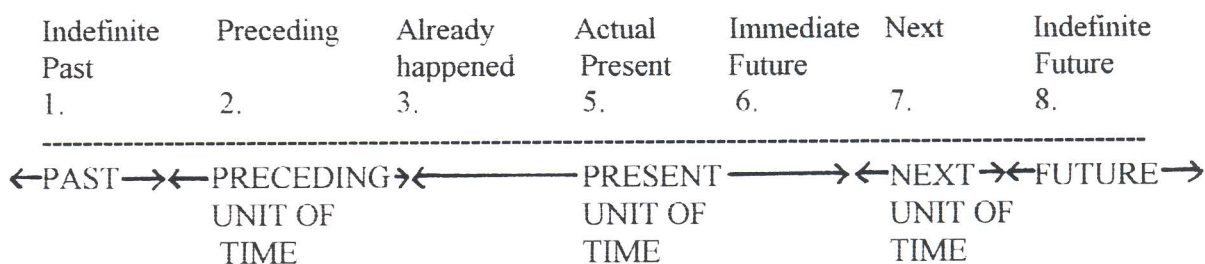


Leakey (1959:29-31) describes eleven tenses in Kikuyu but in order to facilitate ease of comparison the following table will show only those morphemes which show tense alone, missing off his examples where tense and aspect are combined. His tense numbering has also been altered as he organises his tenses according to criteria other than chronology.

| | Tense prefix | Tense suffix | Tense meaning | |
|----|---------------------|---------------------|------------------------|--|
| 1. | a- | -ir-END | PAST | Indefinite Past - any time prior to the preceding unit of time |
| 2. | ra- | -ir-END | PRECEDING UNIT OF TIME | |
| 3. | ∅- | -ir-END | PRESENT UNIT OF TIME | Already happened within the present unit of time |

| | Tense prefix | Tense suffix | Tense meaning |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---|
| PRESENT UNIT OF TIME (CONTINUED) | | | |
| 5. | ra- | -END | Actual present - something actually in the process of being done while the speaker is speaking. |
| 6. | kü-/gü- | -END | Immediate Future within the present unit of time |
| 7. | ka-/ga- | -END | NEXT UNIT OF TIME |
| 8. | rī- | -END | FUTURE Indefinite Future - any time after the next unit of time |

Leakey's tense system may be diagrammed as follows:



Comparing the two tables it will be noticed that Leakey does not have the equivalent of Gecaga's tense 4., the 'just now' tense. Leakey's descriptions are more general as by putting -END to signify the verb ending he covers all possibilities, whereas Gecaga only specifies the most common verb ending: -e in his tenses 1-3, and -a for the remainder. Leakey also gives the alternate forms for the **kü-** and **ka-** morphemes. While this additional information may make the table slightly more cluttered, it makes it more directly useable. The other main difference is their interpretations of the **rī-** morpheme. Gecaga takes it to be chronologically placed between 'today' and 'after today', whereas Leakey maintains that it marks indefinite future.

However, the more significant factor is their divergent conceptualisations of time. It will be noted from the diagram of Leakey's system that he makes no explicit reference to 'today' or 'yesterday', both of which are vital components in Gecaga's model.

If a unit of time is taken to be a day, then the present unit of time becomes 'today', the preceding unit of time becomes 'yesterday' and the two systems coincide (with minor modifications due to different understanding of the future -rī tense), as shown in the diagram below:

| | | | | | |
|---------|-----------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|---|--------|
| Gecaga: | Before Yesterday | Yesterday | Today | After Today | |
| Leakey: | PAST (before yesterday) | PRECEDING UNIT OF TIME (yesterday) | PRESENT UNIT OF TIME (today) | NEXT UNIT OF TIME (after today) | FUTURE |

However, if a unit of time is taken to be a month, then the present unit of time becomes 'this month', the preceding unit of time becomes 'last month' and the two systems do not coincide. Again a diagram may help:

| | | | | | | |
|---------|------------------------------------|--|--|--|------------------------|--|
| Gecaga: | | Before Yesterday | Yesterday | Today | After Today | |
| Leakey: | PAST (before last month) | PRECEDING UNIT OF TIME (last month) | PRESENT UNIT OF TIME (this month) | NEXT UNIT OF TIME (next month or later) | FUTURE | |

Thus it is not a trivial matter to try to ascertain which, if either, of these systems holds true for Kiambu as the solution affects the practical usage of tense in the language.

However, since most meaningful data works within a time frame which takes one unit of time to be a day it is difficult to find data which conclusively shows the validity of one system over against the other.

A third analysis of the Kikuyu tense system is provided by Gathenji (1981:43-45) who enumerates seven temporal distinctions which he describes as Remote Past, Near Past, Immediate Past, Present, Immediate Future, Near Future and Remote Future, thus displaying a symmetrical pattern in terms of degrees of remoteness. His material is not analysed morphologically but is presented in verb paradigm tables. His data are included in brackets in tables 2.1a, 2.2a and 2.3a for the purpose of comparison.

For the sake of identifying morphemes throughout this paper the following labels will be used, but their meanings will be explained at the end of this section. The numbers used above to enumerate Gecaga's and Leakey's tense morphemes are also included for reference.

| Tense label | Tense prefix | Tense suffix | Gecaga | Leakey |
|----------------|----------------|--------------|--------|--------|
| T ₁ | a- | -ire | 1. | 1. |
| T ₂ | ra- | -ire | 2. | 2. |
| T ₃ | ∅- | -ire | 3. | 3. |
| T ₄ | a- | -END | 4. | |
| T ₅ | ra- | -END | 5. | 5. |
| T ₆ | gü-/kü- | -END | 6. | 6. |
| T ₇ | ga-/ka- | -END | 8. | 7. |
| T ₈ | rī- | -END | 7. | 8. |

The following examples are necessarily rather forced, and thus may not have captured the true essence of the conception of time in Kiambu. In order to make an attempt at investigation, the data examples collected focussed on the week, the month and the year as units of time. However, they all produced the same paradigms so only the examples for the week are listed. The examples are very repetitive but are designed to systematically discover which tense morphemes are acceptable in conjunction with which units of time. Unacceptable expressions are starred according to convention.

The Week

Five time frames are investigated in accordance with Leakey's model, ie. working from past to future and taking the week as the basic unit of time there is PAST (e.g. the week before last), PRECEDING UNIT OF TIME (i.e. last week), PRESENT UNIT OF TIME (i.e. this week), NEXT UNIT OF TIME (i.e. next week), FUTURE (e.g. the week after next).

The week before last

(1) kiumia ūkiu kīngī kī- a- thir -ire ciana nī- ci- **a- thire** cukulu
 T₁: week that another CONC-T₁-finish-T₁ children PR-CONC-T₁-go:T₁ school
 the week before last the children went to school

(2) kiumia ūkiu kīngī kī- a- thir -ire ciana nī- ci- **ra- thire** cukulu
 T₂: week that another CONC-T₁-finish-T₁ children PR-CONC-T₂-go:T₂ school
 the week before last the children went to school

(3) kiumia ūkiu kīngī kī- a- thir -ire ciana nī- ci- **thire** cukulu
 *T₃: week that another CONC-T₁-finish-T₁ children PR-CONC-go:T₃ school

Both Gecaga and Leakey anticipate that T_1 alone would be acceptable for the week before last. However, the data suggests that T_2 can also be used (example (2)).

Last week:

Still taking the week as the unit of time, when speaking of ‘last week’ Gecaga would expect only T_1 to be used, while Leakey suggests T_2 alone. However, as the next three examples show, we again find that in Kiambu both T_1 and T_2 can be used, but T_3 cannot.

(4) kiumia kīu kī- ra-thir -ire ciana nī- ci- **a- thire** cukulu
 T_1 : week that CONC- T_2 -finish- T_2 children PR-CONC- T_1 -go: T_1 school
 last week the children went to school

(5) kiumia kīu kī- ra-thir -ire ciana nī- ci- **ra- thire** cukulu
 T_2 : week that CONC- T_2 -finish- T_2 children PR-CONC- T_2 -go: T_2 school
 last week the children went to school

(6) *kiumia kīu kī- ra-thir -ire ciana nī- ci- **thire** cukulu
 $*T_3$: week that CONC- T_2 -finish- T_2 children PR-CONC-go: T_3 school

This week:

Gecaga’s system would allow for each of the tenses T_1 to T_8 being acceptable within the current week if breaking it down into days, if not, it is not at all clear how he would handle tense in the block of time that is ‘this week’. Leakey would permit T_3 , T_5 and T_6 . The following examples demonstrate that when the week is taken as the current unit of time Kiambu allows T_2 , T_4 , T_5 and T_6 .

(7) kiumia gīkī ciana nī- ci- **a- thire** cukulu
 $*T_1$: week this children PR-CONC- T_1 -go: T_1 school

- (8) kiumia gīkī ciana nī- ci- **ra-thire** cukulu
 T₂: week this children PR-CONC-T₂-go:T₂ school
 this week the children went to school
- (9) *kiumia gīkī ciana nī- ci- **thire** cukulu
 *T₃: week this children PR-CONC-go:T₃ school
- (10) kiumia gīkī ciana nī- ci- **a-thi-ī** cukulu
 T₄: week this children PR-CONC-T₄-go-END school
 this week the children have gone to school
- (11) kiumia gīkī ciana nī- ci- **ra-thi-ī** cukulu
 T₅: week this children PR-CONC-T₅-go-END school
 this week the children are going to school
- (12) kiumia gīkī ciana nī- ci- **gū-thi-ī** cukulu
 T₆: week this children PR-CONC-T₆-go-END school
 this week the children will go to school
- (13) kiumia gīkī ciana nī- ci- **ga-thi-ī** cukulu
 *T₇: week this children PR-CONC-T₇-go-END school
- (14) kiumia gīkī ciana nī- ci- **rī-thi-ī** cukulu
 *T₈: week this children PR-CONC-T₈-go-END school

Next week

Here Gecaga and Leakey converge in their expectation that only T₇ be used. The data on the other hand displays much greater flexibility in the use of tense markers in that T₅, T₆, T₇ and T₈ are all perfectly acceptable in Kiambu in the context of next week.

- (15) kiumia gīkī kīngī ciana nī- ci- **ra-thi-ī** cukulu
 T₅: week this another children PR-CONC-T₅-go-END school
 next week the children are going to school

(16) kiumia gīkī kīngī ciana nī- ci- **gū**-thi-ī cukulu
 T₆: week this another children PR-CONC-T₆-go-END school
 next week the children will go to school

(17) kiumia gīkī kīngī ciana nī- ci- **ga**-thi-ī cukulu
 T₇: week this another children PR-CONC-T₇-go-END school
 next week the children will go to school

(18) kiumia gīkī kīngī ciana nī- ci- **rī**-thi-ī cukulu
 T₈: week this another children PR-CONC-T₈-go-END school
 next week the children will go to school

The difference between T₇ and T₈ in this context is that T₇ has the implication of greater certainty, e.g. ‘I am sure the children will go to school next week’, whereas T₈ displays a higher degree of irrealis, more in keeping with the notion of indefinite past, e.g. ‘Hopefully the children will go to school next week’.

The week after next

Now towards the other end of the time line Gecaga maintains T₇ as the only possible tense while Leakey claims that T₈ alone can be used. Again the data are at variance with both of them, accepting both T₇ and T₈.

(19) kiumia ūkīu kīngī ciana nī- ci- **gū**-thi-ī cukulu
 *T₆: week this another children PR-CONC-T₆-go-END school

(20) kiumia ūkīu kīngī ciana nī- ci- **ga**-thi-ī cukulu
 T₇: week this another children PR-CONC-T₇-go-END school
 the week after next the children will go to school

(21) kiumia ūkīu kīngī ciana nī- ci- **rī**-thi-ī cukulu
 T₈: week this another children PR-CONC-T₈-go-END school
 the week after next the children will go to school

Abstracting from these examples the information relating to which tenses are acceptable in different time periods in Kiambu yield some interesting results:

| Tense (Kiambu) | Week before last | Last week | This week | Next week | Week after next |
|-------------------|---------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------------|
| T ₁ | ----- | | | | |
| T ₂ | ----- | | | | |
| T ₃ | | | | | |
| T ₄ | | | ----- | | |
| T ₅ | | | ----- | | |
| T ₆ | | | ----- | | |
| T ₇ | | | | ----- | |
| T ₈ | | | | ----- | |

A similar diagram for Gecaga's system is as follows:

| Tense (Gecaga) | Week before last | Last week | This week | Next week | Week after next |
|-------------------|---------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------------|
| T ₁ | ----- | | | | |
| T ₂ | | | | | |
| T ₃ | | | | | |
| T ₄ | | | | | |
| T ₅ | | | | | |
| T ₆ | | | | | |
| T ₇ | | | | ----- | |
| T ₈ | | | | | |

Anything before this week would definitely be T₁ and anything after this week would definitely be T₇, but it is difficult to know which tense would be used to describe 'this week', referring to it as a block of time, rather than seeing it as broken into its constituent days, as Gecaga's system is heavily dependent on marking off time in days.

For Leakey's system the diagram looks as follows:

| Tense (Leakey) | Week before last | Last week | This week | Next week | Week after next |
|-------------------|---------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------------|
| T ₁ | ----- | | | | |
| T ₂ | | ----- | | | |
| T ₃ | | | ----- | | |
| T ₅ | | | ----- | | |
| T ₆ | | | ----- | | |
| T ₇ | | | | ----- | |
| T ₈ | | | | | ----- |

Neither Gecaga nor Leakey allow for overlap, but it is clearly the case that in Kiambu overlap of tenses is permitted. It is interesting to note that the T₃ tense is unacceptable to use when taking the week as a unit. The data does not seem to fit the 'unit' system that Leakey propounds for Kikuyu. Obviously more work needs to be done in this area and a great deal more varied data would need to be collected and analysed in order to disentangle the basic meanings of the tense markers, as it is possible that much of the overlap in the data could have arisen from pragmatic considerations.

Levinson (1983:77) suggests that 'In those languages that unequivocally exhibit it, tense is one of the main factors ensuring that nearly all sentences when uttered are deictically anchored to a context of utterance.' Section 9 on the use of tenses in discourse clearly illustrates this point, where the same tense morphemes are given different temporal interpretations depending on their context.

In the absence of conclusive findings the basic meanings which will be attributed to the tense markers for the remainder of this paper are as follows:

| Tense label | Tense prefix | Tense suffix | Basic tense meaning | | Prototypical tense meaning |
|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| T ₁ | a- | -ire | PAST | Remote Past | (before yesterday) |
| T ₂ | ra- | -ire | | Recent Past | (yesterday) |
| T ₃ | ∅- | -ire | | Near Past | (this morning) |
| T ₄ | a- | -END | | Immediate Past | (just now) |
| T ₅ | ra- | -END | PRESENT | Actual Present | (right now) |
| T ₆ | gü-/kü- | -END | FUTURE | Immediate/Near Future | (later today) |
| T ₇ | ga-/ka- | -END | | Remote Future | (after today) |
| T ₈ | rī- | -END | | Indefinite Future | (any future time) |

The basic meanings have been kept deliberately vague to try and take account of the wide scope of each tense. However, the meanings in brackets could be taken as the prototypical characterisations of each tense marker, but, as will be seen throughout this paper, there are many occasions when the context of their use leads one to a different interpretation of its temporal location.

In order to provide a concise illustration of the possible verbal forms the first person singular of the verb *güthii* ‘to go’ has been used with each of the different tenses and aspects in tables 2.1a, 2.2a, 2.3a and 2.4. This particular verb was chosen for several reasons: firstly, in order to enable comparison with Gathenji’s data; secondly, because it is regular in its inflections (although the verb root is irregular in its *-ī* ending rather than the usual *-a*); and thirdly, because the sense of the verb is not restrictive in terms of the potential range of possible example sentences.

The tables are laid out with the tenses horizontally, labelled as above with their characteristic tense prefixes. It will be noted that the tense prefixes have some variations in T₃, T₄ and T₅ if the verb is also inflected for aspect. The left hand column lists first the simple tense, unmarked for aspect, and then the different aspects found in Kiambu, each labelled with their respective suffixes.

As an example the following is an explanation of the entry in table 2.1a which is classified under Remote Past (T₁), Perfective Aspect (meaning ‘I had gone’):

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| nīndathiite (ndaathiite) | the whole word in Kiambu (Gathenji’s Kikuyu data) |
| nī- nda- thi-ite | the word split into morphemes |
| nī- n- a- thi-ite | the morphemes in their original forms prior to elision or morphophonemic changes |
| PR-1SG-T ₁ -go-PERF | morphemic analysis |

Providing the morphemes prior to elision or morphophonemic changes facilitates a clearer understanding of how the tense system functions morphemically. For example, the tense morpheme for T₁ is **a-** but when it follows the 1SG marker **n-** they become **nda-** (see section 12.3 for morphophonemic rules), and so the tense morpheme is not so immediately identifiable. This is particularly true if the verb root begins with a vowel. The words in brackets are Gathenji’s data in their published form and are included for the purpose of comparison with the Kiambu dialect. As mentioned in section 1.3 the major differences between Standard Kikuyu and Kiambu are due to vowel elision in the latter so that, for example, *i+i→i* and *a+a→a*. Tense and aspect prefixes and suffixes are highlighted. The list of abbreviations used in the morphemic analysis is given in section 12.1.

2.1 Past Tenses

Table 2.1a Examples of Past tenses in Kiambu using the verb *gũthũũ* 'to go' and first person singular

| | Remote Past (T ₁) a- | Recent Past (T ₂) ra- | Near Past (T ₃) ϕ- gũ-/kü- | Immediate Past (T ₄) a- ϕ- gũ-/kü- |
|--|--|---|---|--|
| Simple Past (I went) -ire | nũdathire (ndaathire) nĩ- nda- thire nĩ- n- a -thi-ire PR-1SG-T ₁ -go-T ₁ | nĩdirathire (ndirathire) nĩ- ndi- ra- thire nĩ- n- ra- thi-ire PR-1SG-T ₂ -go -T ₂ | nĩthire (thire) nĩ- thire nĩ- n- ϕ- thi-ire PR-1SG-T ₃ -go-T ₃ | nũdathĩ (-) nĩ- nda- thi-ĩ nĩ- n- a- thi-ĩ PR-1SG-T ₄ -go-END |
| Perfective Aspect (I had gone) -ite | nũdathiite (ndaathiite) nĩ- nda- thi-ite nĩ- n- a- thi-ite PR-1SG-T ₁ -go-PERF | nĩdirathiite (ndirathiite) nĩ- ndi- ra- thi-ite nĩ- n- ra- thi-ite PR-1SG-T ₂ -go -PERF | nĩngũthiite (ngũthiite) nĩ- n- gũ- thi-ite PR-1SG-T ₃ -go -PERF | nĩthiite (-) nĩ- thi-ite nĩ- n- ϕ- thi-ite PR-1SG-T ₄ -go-PERF |
| Habitual Aspect (I used to go) -aga | nũdathiaga (ndaathiaga) nĩ- nda- thi-aga nĩ- n- a- thi-aga PR-1SG-T ₁ -go -HAB | nĩdirathiaga (ndirathiaga) nĩ- ndi- ra- thi-aga nĩ- n- ra- thi-aga PR-1SG-T ₂ -go-HAB | nĩngũthiaga (-) nĩ- n- gũ- thi-aga PR-1SG-T ₃ -go-HAB | nĩngũthiaga (-) nĩ- n- gũ- thi-aga PR-1SG-T ₄ -go-HAB |
| Progressive Aspect (I was going) -aga | nũdathiaga (ndaathiaga) nĩ- nda- thi-aga nĩ- n- a- thi-aga PR-1SG-T ₁ -go-PROG | nĩdirathiaga (ndirathiaga) nĩ- ndi- ra- thi-aga nĩ- n- ra- thi-aga PR-1SG-T ₂ -go-PROG | nĩngũthiaga (ngũthiaga) nĩ- n- gũ- thi-aga PR-1SG-T ₃ -go-PROG | nĩngũthiaga (-) nĩ- n- gũ- thi-aga PR-1SG-T ₄ -go-PROG |

Table 2.1b Summary of morphology of Past Tenses in Kiambu

| | Remote Past (T₁) | Recent Past (T₂) | Near Past (T₃) | Immediate Past (T₄) |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Simple Past -ire | a- a-...-ire | ra- ra-...-ire | ø- gü-/kü- | a- ø- gü-/kü- |
| Perfective Aspect -ite | a-...-ite | ra-...-ite | gü-...-ite | ø-...-ite |
| Habitual Aspect -aga | a-...-aga | ra-...-aga | gü-...-aga | gü-...-aga |
| Progressive Aspect -aga | a-...-aga | ra-...-aga | gü-...-aga | gü-...-aga |

Notes on table 2.1b

Note that the patterns of tense morphemes are not quite consistent in tenses T₃ and T₄.

One would expect the simple Near Past tense to be *nīngūthire*, whereas in fact it is *nīthire*. The Near Past and the Immediate Past show no distinction between habitual and progressive aspects. There is no confusion between the two **a-** tense prefixes, used in T₁ and T₄, since none of their specific forms are identical. This can be seen by comparing the T₁ and T₄ columns above in both tables 2.1a and 2.1b. E.g. the perfective form of the T₄ tense is *nīthiite* rather than the expected *nīndathiite* in order to avoid duplication with the T₁ form.

2.2 Present tense

Table 2.2a Examples of Present tenses in Kiambu using the verb *gũthii* ‘to go’

with first person singular and Summary of Present tense morphology

| | Actual Present (T ₁) | Actual Present (T ₂) Summary |
|--|---|--|
| Simple Present (I am going) | nĩdirathii (nĩdirathii) nĩ- ndĩ- ra -thi-i PR-1SG-T ₁ -go-END | ra- |
| Perfective Aspect | --- | --- |
| Habitual Aspect (I go) | nĩthiaga (thiaga) nĩ- \emptyset -thi- aga PR-T ₁ -go-PROG | \emptyset-...-aga |
| Progressive Aspect (I am going - right now and continuing) | nĩdirathii (nĩdirathii) nĩ- ndĩ- ra -thi-i PR-1SG-T ₁ -go-END | ra- |

In the Actual Present tense the simple present tense and the progressive aspect both take the same form, there is no perfective form, and the form of the habitual aspect is *nĩthiaga* (\emptyset -...-aga), rather than the expected *nĩndirathiaga* (ra-...-aga), to avoid confusion with the habitual (and progressive) aspects of the T₂ tense (see table 2.1b).

2.3 Future Tenses

Table 2.3a Examples of Future tenses in Kiambu using the verb *gũthii* 'to go' and first person singular

| | Immediate/Near Future (T ₆) gũ-/kũ- | Remote Future (T ₇) ga-/ka- | Indefinite Future (T ₈) rĩ- |
|---|--|---|--|
| Simple Future (I will go) | nĩngũthii nĩ- n- gũ -thi-i PR-1SG-T ₆ -go-END | nĩngathii nĩ- n- ga -thi-i PR-1SG-T ₇ -go -END | nĩndĩrithii nĩ- ndi- rĩ - thi-i nĩ- n- rĩ - thi-i PR-1SG-T ₈ -go-END |
| Perfective Aspect (I will have gone) -korwo -ite | nĩngũkorwo thiite nĩ- n- gũ -korwo nĩ- n- gũ -korwo n- thi- ite PR-1SG-T ₆ - be found 1SG-go-PERF | nĩngakorwo thiite nĩ- n- ga -korwo nĩ- n- ga -korwo n- thi- ite PR-1SG-T ₇ -be found 1SG-go-PERF | nĩndĩrikorwo thiite nĩ- ndi- rĩ -korwo nĩ- n- rĩ -korwo n- thi- ite PR-1SG-T ₈ -be found 1SG-go-PERF |
| Habitual Aspect (I will be going-regularly) -aga | nĩngũthiaga nĩ- n- gũ -thi-aga PR-1SG-T ₆ - go-HAB | nĩngathiaga nĩ- n- ga -thi-aga PR-1SG-T ₇ -go-HAB | nĩndĩrithiaga nĩ- ndi- rĩ - thi-aga nĩ- n- rĩ - thi-aga PR-1SG-T ₈ -go-HAB |
| Progressive Aspect (I will be in the process of going) -korwo gĩ- | nĩngũkorwo ngithii nĩ- n- gũ -korwo n- gĩ - thi-i PR-1SG-T ₆ -be found 1SG-CON-go-END | nĩngakorwo ngithii nĩ- n- ga -korwo n- gĩ - thi-i PR-1SG-T ₇ -be found 1SG-CON-go-END | nĩndĩrikorwo ngithii nĩ- ndi- rĩ -korwo n- gĩ - thi-i nĩ- n- rĩ -korwo n- gĩ - thi-i PR-1SG-T ₈ -be found 1SG-CON-go-END |

Table 2.3b Summary of morphology of Future Tenses in Kiambu

| | Immediate /Near Future (T₆) gü-/kü- | Remote Future (T₇) | Indefinite Future (T₈) |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| Simple Future | gü- | ga- | rī- |
| Perfective Aspect -korwo -ite | gü-korwo -ite | ga-korwo -ite | rī-korwo -ite |
| Habitual Aspect -aga | gü...-aga | ga...-aga | rī...-aga |
| Progressive Aspect -korwo gī-/kī- | gü-korwo gī- | ga-korwo gī- | rī-korwo gī- |

NB 1SG: n+rī→ndīrī when rī- is a tense/aspect marker BUT n+rī→ndī when rī is the verb root 'eat'

2.4 Negative Constructions

Subject prefixes:

| | | | |
|--|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| The following changes to the person prefixes take place when negating an expression. | <u>Person</u> | <u>Positive</u> | <u>Negative</u> |
| | 1SG | n-/ ndi | ndi- |
| | 2SG | ü- | ndü- |
| | 3SG | a- | nda- |
| | 1PL | tü- | tüti- |
| | 2PL | mü- | müti- |
| | 3PL | ma- | mati- |

Although the prefix **nĩ-**, ‘PR’, is optional when the sense is positive, it is always omitted in the negative.

The following Indefinite Future examples illustrate the difference between positive and negative constructions.

(1) nĩdirikorwo thiite kũrĩma mbere ya cukulu kũhingurwo
 T₈: **nĩ- ndĩ-** rĩ- korwo thi -ite kũ- rĩma mbere ya cukulu kũ- hingurwo
 positive PR-1SG-T₈-be found 1SG:go-PERF INF-dig before school INF-be started
I will have gone to dig before school begins

(2) ndirikorwo thiite kũrĩma mbere ya cukulu kũhingurwo
 T₈: **ndi-** rĩ- korwo thi -ite kũ- rĩma mbere ya cukulu kũ- hingurwo
 negative 1SG:NEG-T₈-be found 1SG:go-PERF INF-dig before school INF-be started
I will not have gone to dig before school begins

Negative past

As mentioned under the scope of this paper (section 1.8) there will not be an attempt to present a full analysis for all negative constructions. However, by way of illustration, the following table contrasts the positive and negative paradigms for just the first three past tenses, again using the verb *gũthiĩ*, ‘to go’. The simple negative pasts for T₂ and T₃ (and also T₄ although it is not included in the table) are the only

ones with significant irregularities (see table 2.4 with irregularities italicised and also the explanation after example (6) below).

The key lines to compare in table 2.4 are those immediately above the morphemic analysis, e.g. comparing the positive and negative constructions of the Remote Past: Habitual Aspect reveals the expected omission of the empty prefix **nĩ-** and the first person singular prefix change from **n-** to **ndi-**.

| | Remote Past (T₁) |
|--|---|
| Habitual Aspect (I used to go) -aga | nĩndathiaga nĩ- nda- thi-aga nĩ- n- a- thi-aga PR-1SG-T ₁ -go -HAB |
| Habitual Aspect (I didn't used to go) -aga | ndiathiaga ndi- a-thi-aga 1SG:NEG-T ₁ -go-HAB |

Table 2.4 Examples of positive and negative Past tenses using *güthii* ‘to go’

| | Remote Past (T ₁) | Recent Past (T ₂) | Near Past (T ₃) |
|--|---|---|--|
| Simple Past (I went) | nindathire nī- nda- thire nī- n- a- thi-ire PR-1SG-T ₁ -go-T ₁ | nindirathire nī- ndī- ra- thire nī- ndī- ra- thi-ire PR-1SG-T ₂ -go -T ₂ | nithire nī- thire nī- n- o- thi-ire PR-1SG-T ₃ -go -T ₃ |
| Simple Past (I didn't go) -ire | ndiathire ndi- a- thire ndi- a- thi-ire 1SG:NEG-T ₁ -go -T ₁ | ndinathii ndi- na- thi-ī 1SG:NEG-NEG-go-END | ndinathii ndi- na- thi-ī 1SG:NEG-NEG-go-END |
| Perfective Aspect (I had gone) -ite | nindathiite nī- nda- thi-ite nī- n- a- thi-ite PR-1SG-T ₁ -go-PERF | nindirathiite nī- ndī- ra- thi-ite PR-1SG-T ₂ -go -PERF | ningüthiite nī- n- gü- thi-ite PR-1SG-T ₃ -go-PERF |
| Perfective Aspect (I hadn't gone) -ite | ndiathiite ndi- a- thi-ite 1SG:NEG-T ₁ -go-PERF | ndirathiite ndi- ra- thi-ite 1SG:NEG-T ₂ -go-PERF | ndigüthiite ndi- gü- thi-ite 1SG:NEG-T ₃ - go-PERF |
| Habitual Aspect (I used to go) -aga | nindathiaga nī- nda- thi-aga nī- n- a- thi-aga PR-1SG-T ₁ -go -HAB | nindirathiaga nī- ndī- ra- thi-aga PR-1SG-T ₂ -go-HAB | ningüthiaga nī- n- gü- thi-aga PR-1SG-T ₃ -go-HAB |
| Habitual Aspect (I didn't used to go) -aga | ndiathiaga ndi- a- thi-aga 1SG:NEG-T ₁ -go-HAB | ndirathiaga ndi- ra- thi-aga 1SG:NEG-T ₂ -go-HAB | ndigüthiaga ndi- gü- thi-aga 1SG:NEG-T ₃ - go-HAB |
| Progressive Aspect (I was going) -aga | nindathiaga nī- nda- thi-aga nī- n- a- thi-aga PR-1SG-T ₁ -go-PROG | nindirathiaga nī- ndī- ra- thi-aga PR-1SG-T ₂ -go-PROG | ningüthiaga nī- n- gü- thi-aga PR-1SG-T ₃ - go-PROG |
| Progressive Aspect (I wasn't going) -aga | ndiathiaga ndi- a- thi-aga 1SG:NEG-T ₁ -go-HAB | ndirathiaga ndi- ra- thi-aga 1SG:NEG-T ₂ -go-HAB | ndigüthiaga ndi- gü- thi-aga 1SG:NEG-T ₃ - go-HAB |

In positive constructions there are four distinct past tenses, referred to in this paper as T₁, T₂, T₃ and T₄. However, when the verb is unmarked for aspect, in negative past constructions T₂, T₃ and T₄ collapse into one, covering earlier today and all day yesterday. Examples (3) - (9) will illustrate this:

(3) nīndathire ndünyü kiumia kīu kīrathirire
 Simple Past nī- nda- thire ndünyü kiumia kīu kī- ra-thir-ire
 T₁: positive PR-1SG:T₁-go:T₁ market week that CONC-T₂-go- T₂
I went to the market last week

(4) ndiathire ndünyü kiumia kīu kīrathirire
 Simple Past ndi- a- thire ndünyü kiumia kīu kī- ra-thir-ire
 T₁: negative 1SG:NEG-T₁-go:T₁ market week that CONC-T₂-go- T₂
I didn't go to the market last week

Note that in examples (3) and (4) T₂ rather than T₁ is used to refer to the previous week, suggesting that T₂ has a wider use than just 'yesterday'. It could be reflecting the idea that 'last week' is semantically equivalent to 'the week of yesterday'.

(5) nīndīrathire ndünyü ira
 Simple Past nī- ndī- ra- thire ndünyü ira
 T₂: positive PR-1SG-T₂-go:T₂ market yesterday
I went to the market yesterday

* (6) *ndirathire ndünyü ira
 Simple Past ndi- ra-thire ndünyü ira
 T₂: negative 1SG:NEG-T₂-go:T₂ market yesterday

As mentioned prior to table 2.4, the simple negative pasts for T₂ and T₃ are irregular.

Thus example (6) which gives the negative form of the T₂ Simple Past formed according to the normal rules, is actually unacceptable in Kiambu. In tenses T₂ and T₃ the tense prefix (**ra-** for T₂ and **ϕ-** for T₃) is replaced with an extra negative prefix **na-** and the citation verb ending is added in place of the Simple Past suffix **-ire**. Thus examples (7) and (9) give the correct, though irregular, forms of the negative simple pasts for T₂ and T₃.

(7) ndinathii ndünyü ira
 Simple Past ndi- na- thi-ī ndünyü ira
 T₂: negative 1SG:NEG-NEG-go-END market yesterday
I didn't go to the market yesterday

(8) nĩthire ndũnyũ rũciĩnĩ
 Simple Past nĩ- thire ndũnyũ rũciĩnĩ
 T₃: positive nĩ- **n-** ~~∅~~- thi-ire ndũnyũ rũciĩnĩ
 PR-1SG-T₃-go-T₃ market morning
I went to the market this morning

(9) ndinathiĩ ndũnyũ rũciĩnĩ
 Simple Past **ndi-** **na-** thi-ĩ ndũnyũ rũciĩnĩ
 T₃: negative 1SG:NEG-NEG-go-END market morning
I didn't go to the market this morning

Thus, comparing examples (7) and (9) it can be seen that the negative forms of the verb are exactly the same for the Simple Past of both the T₂ and T₃ tenses (highlighted in table 2.4). Similar examples would show that this holds true for the T₄ tense as well.

This collapsing of distinct tense forms in the negative is a recognised typological feature in language.

3. PAST TENSES

3.1 T₁: Remote Past: a-...-ire

What follows is a short section of a story set in the remote past. It is often difficult to see the tense marker **a-** in the verbs since, being a vowel, it is usually either elided or combined with preceding or following vowels. The main verbs in this tense are highlighted in the text and subsequently analysed.

Tene nīkwarī na ago **marathaga** maündü maria
Long ago there were witchdoctors they were foretelling things that were
Long ago there were witchdoctors who were foretelling about things that would

magoka thutha, ningī nīkūrī na ago angī **metigirītwo**
they will come afterwards, and then there are witchdoctors others they were
feared
happen in the future, and then there were other witchdoctors who were very much

nī andü müno tondü wa ciiko ciao iria **mekaga** cia
by people very much, because of bad deeds their that they were doing of
feared by the people, because of the bad deeds that they were doing to frighten

kūmakia andü. Kwarī mündü mügo ümwe warī ngumo
to frighten people. There was a person witchdoctor one he was famous
the people. There was one famous witchdoctor

wetagwo Mügo wa Kībiru, nake aarī Mūnjirū. **Nīarathire** atī
he was called Witchdoctor of Kībiru, his was Mūnjirū. He foretold that
called the Witchdoctor of Kībiru, of the Mūnjirū clan. He foretold that

nīkūrī nyamü -cia-thī igirī igoka ciumite mwena wa irathiro
there are animals-of- earth two they will come coming from side of East
two snakes would come from the East and

ituīkanie būrūri wa Gīkūyū irorete ithūiro.
they will pass area of Kikuyu looking to West.
pass through Kikuyuland towards the West.

- (1) ma- rath -aga
 ma- a- rath -aga since ma+a→ma
 3PL-T₁-foretell-PROG
- (2) metigir -it -wo
 ma- a- itigir-it -wo since ma+a→ma, and ma+i→me
 3PL-T₁-fear -PERF-PASS
- (3) mek -aga
 ma- a- ik -aga since ma+a→ma, and ma+i→me
 3PL-T₁-do-HAB
- (4) wet -ag -wo
 a- a- it -ag -wo since a+a→a, a+it→et, and word initial et- is
 preceded with w-
 3SG-T₁-call-HAB-PASS
- (5) nī-a-rath-ire
 nī- a- a- rath -ire since a+a→a
 PR-3SG-T₁-foretell-T₁

3.2 T₂: Recent Past: ra-...-ire

The prototypical meaning of the **ra-...-ire** tense is that of ‘yesterday’. The first two examples make that explicit.

- (1) Nīturonire mbimbi cia mbükü ira
 Nī- tü- ron -ire mbimbi cia mbükü ira
 PR-1PL-T₂:see-T₂ droppings of rabbit yesterday
 We saw the rabbit droppings yesterday

NB The T₂ marker **ra** plus the verb root **on** becomes **ron** (see section 12.3)

- (2) Ngüi nīaroigaga mbu ira
 Ngüi nī- a- roig -aga mbu ira NB ra+ug→roig
 Ngüi PR-3SG-T₂:say-PROG shout yesterday
 Ngüi was shouting yesterday

Note that in example (2) the **-ire** ending is replaced by the **-aga** progressive ending (see table 2.1b).

However, although ‘yesterday’ is not explicitly mentioned in the following examples it is implied by the use of T₂.

- (3) Nītūrārī kūona ngurunga ya ngurumo ya Cania
 Nī- tü- **ra- rī** kü- ona ngurunga ya ngurumo ya Cania
 PR-1PL-T₂-be INF-see cave of down of Cania
 We went to see the cave under Cania

NB although the verb BE is used the sense is GO

- (4) Ng’ondu ciaku niiratenirie mbembe cia Ng’ang’a
 Ng’ondu ci- aku nī- i- **ra- ten -irie** mbembe cia Ng’ang’a
 Sheep CONC-your PR-CONC-T₂-scatter-T₂:CAUSE maize of Ng’ang’a
 Your sheep scattered Ng’ang’a’s maize

3.3 T₃: Near Past: \emptyset -...-ire

Table 2.1b shows that the Near Past tense is marked with the suffix **-ire** if there are no aspectual characteristics. However, once aspect is also included the tense marker becomes the prefix **gū-/kü-** (depending on the first consonant in the verb root - see section 12.3). Leakey identifies the morpheme **gū-/kü-** as having two uses: it is either used in conjunction with the **-ite** perfect suffix to denote that ‘something had already been done within the present unit of time, at a time when something else took place’ (p. 30), or as a marker for the immediate future, within the present unit of time. Gecaga classifies its uses as being present - very soon; future - today; and also sometimes for the actual present.

In Kiambu it appears that the basic meaning of **gü-/kü-** is to show adjacency to the present moment, regardless of whether the situation occurred in the past or future.

(See table 2.1b columns T₃ and T₄, and table 2.3b column T₆.) This inevitably leads to a certain degree of ambiguity. Thus for example *nīngüthiaga raibarari güthoma* has the following interpretations:

(1) nī- n- **gü**-thi-aga raibarari gü- thoma
PR-1SG-T- go-HAB library INF-read

- a) I used to go to the library to study
- b) I will be going to the library to study

(NB There is actually a third meaning which will be examined in section 7.)

In order to disambiguate this statement contextual information is required. This could be the shared background or information that both speaker and hearer are privy to, or it could be provided by further linguistic content - often an expression using a time adverbial which will serve to refer the original statement either towards the past or towards the future, relative to the present moment as the deictic centre.

(2) nīngüthiaga raibarari güthoma norīu ngüthiī kīrathi
nī- n- **gü**-thi-aga raibarari gü- thoma no- rīu n- **gü**-thiī kīrathi
PR-1SG-T- go-HAB library INF-read but-now 1SG-T- go classroom

- a) I used to go to the library to study but now I will be going to the classroom
- b)*I will be going to the library to study but now I will be going to the classroom

The most relevant meaning of *nīngüthiaga* is inferred from the use of the contrastive time adverb *norīu* - 'but now', with the implicature that the situation of going to the library was previous to now, i.e. located in the past. Similarly, since *ngüthiī* provides the second half of the contrast, by implication it is located in the future. Here the aspectual meaning of a habitual action is also an implicature since the literal meaning

‘I will go’ is a simple future. This is a natural implicature since a construction using the habitual morpheme **-aga** in both the first and second clauses, e.g.

- (3) ***nĩngũthiaga** raibarari gũthoma norĩu **ngũthiaga** kĩrathi (compare with example (2))

is unacceptable in Kiambu. The use of **-gũ-** in both clauses shows that the present moment is a critical turning point. Up until just a moment ago a certain condition existed, but from now on another will come into play.

- (4) **nĩngũthiaga** raibarari gũthoma nginya ùmũthĩ ruciinĩ
 nĩ- n- **gũ**-thi-aga raibarari gũ-thoma nginya ùmũthĩ ruciinĩ
 PR-1SG-T- go-HAB library INF-read until today morning

- a) I used to go to the library to study until this morning
 b)*I will be going to the library to study until this morning

In this example the referring expression *ùmũthĩ ruciinĩ* ‘this morning’ (literally today morning) locates the deictic centre as being in the immediate past. The use of the time adverbial *nginya* ‘until’ then provides the remaining contextual clue in order to be able to draw the inference that the situation occurred in the past.

- (5) **nĩngũthiaga** kĩrathi gũthoma kũma rĩu gũthĩĩ na mbere
 nĩ- n- **gũ**-thi-aga kĩrathi gũ- thoma kũma rĩu gũ- thĩĩ na mbere
 PR-1SG-T- go-HAB classroom INF-read from now INF-go onwards

- a)*I used to go to the classroom to study from now on
 b) I will be going to the classroom to study from now on

The present moment is established as the deictic centre in this example through the use of *riũ* ‘now’, and the expression *kũma rĩu gũthĩĩ na mbere* ‘from now onwards’ shows that the situation will be continuing into the future. Despite the use of *riũ* the situation is not actually occurring at the present moment but will be commencing in the immediate future.

3.4 T₄: Immediate Past; a-

It will be seen from the following examples that the T₄ past tense has a variety of uses. The simple tense marker **a-** is often obscured due to morphophonemic processes, so the derivational forms have been given for ease of cross-reference.

Example (1) relates to a completed action in the very near past.

- (1) nīwaigua ūhorō wa nguru na mbükü
 nī- wa- igua ūhorō wa nguru na mbükü
 nī- ü- a igua ūhorō wa nguru na mbükü NB ü+a→wa
 PR-2SG-T₄-hear news of tortoise and rabbit
 you heard the story of the tortoise and the rabbit (just now)

Example (2) however, shows the T₄ tense marker being used in a situation where the actual event, i.e. the action of passing sentence, happened in the very near past, but the effects of that event, i.e. the jail term, will continue into the present moment and into the future, in this case, three years into the future.

- (2) nīohwo miaka itatü
 nī- ohwo mī- aka ĩ- tatü
 nī- a- a- ohwo mī- aka ĩ- tatü NB a+a→a; a+o→o
 PR-3SG-T₄-be jailed CONC:PL-year CONC:PL-three
 he has been jailed for three years (the sentence was passed just this minute)

Similarly example (3) is describing a situation where the event began in the immediate past but has continuing effects.

- (3) nīndathii ndüka
 nī- nda- thi-ĩ ndüka
 nī- n- a- thi-ĩ ndüka
 PR-1SG-T₄-go-END shop
 I am going to the shops (I've just started going but I'm still on my way)

However, example (4) shows that when combined with the perfective aspect marker, the T₄ tense does not have continued relevance or a perfect sense.

- (4) nīthiite gücerera mama
 nī- thi-**ite** gü- cerera mama
 nī- n- ~~ϕ~~- thi-**ite** gü- cerera mama
 PR-1SG-T₄-go-**PERF** INF-visit uncle
 I have gone to visit (my) uncle (and I have already returned)
 * I have gone to visit (my) uncle (and I am still there)

The meaning in this case is that ‘I have gone to visit my uncle, and I have already returned’, ie. the going is a completed or perfective action.

Example (5) demonstrates the use of a performative verb using the T₄ tense to denote the present moment.

- (5) nīndakwīrira gūkühe ciringi igana rīmwe
 nī- nda- kwīrira gü- kü- he ciringi igana rīmwe
 nī- n- a- kwīrira gü- kü- he ciringi igana rīmwe
 PR-1SG-T₄-promise INF-2SG:OBJ-give shillings hundred one
 I promise to give you one hundred shillings

NB n+a→nda

4. PRESENT TENSE

4.1 T₅: Actual Present: ra-

The tense marker **ra-** for T₅ is used to indicate the present tense, ‘right now’, i.e. this present moment. However, as with most of the tense markers, it actually has different nuances of sense which are largely inferred from the context.

Examples (1) and (2) use tense T₅ to set the temporal location for continuous actions that are taking place at the very time of utterance. Example (2) could be seen as an example of relative tense since the event of calling the children is referred temporally to another event, that of finishing cooking the ugali, (see section 10.1), but as the deictic centre in this case is the present moment it becomes absolute tense and so properly belongs in this section.

- (1) ndogo nīratogerera kahīi karīa kanini
ndogo nī- i- **ra-** togerera ka- hīi ka- rīa ka- nini
smoke PR-CONC-T₅-come to CONC-boy CONC-that CONC-small
smoke is surrounding that small boy (right now)
- (2) areta ciana irie arīkia kūruga ngīma
a- ret ciana i- rie a- rīkia kūruga ngīma
3SG-T₅:call children CONC-eat:SUBJ 3SG-finish INF-cook ugali
she is calling the children to eat having finished cooking ugali (right now)

Examples (3) - (5) could mean that the events referred to are actually occurring concurrently with the time of utterance, but they could also describe situations that are occurring at this general time, in these days.

- (3) üraga ngaara ñno ñraria mbembe ciitü
 üraga ngaara ñno ñ- ra- rĩa mbembe ci- itü
 kill:IMP rat this CONC-T₅-eat maize CONC-our
 kill the rat which is eating our maize
- (4) üragocwo nĩ andü othe
 ü- ra- gocwo nĩ andü othe
 2SG-T₅-be praised by people all
 You are praised by all the people
- (5) ndĩrandĩka wĩra
 ndĩ- randĩka wĩra
 1SG-T₅:write work
 I am writing my project

In example (6) the adverbial prefix **no-** adds the idea that the digging has already started, and is continuing, but has not yet finished. Again the morphology alone is not enough to be able to infer the exact sense of the expression, whether the digging is occurring at the time of utterance, or whether it is taking place in this general period of time.

- (6) nondĩrarĩma
 no- ndĩ- ra- rĩma
 still-1SG-T₅-dig
 I am still digging

The particular expression in example (7) precludes the ‘right now’ sense of the **ra-** tense as it is rather hard to drink and speak at the same time! In this case the inferred meanings would be either that ‘I have already started drinking this water’, or that ‘I am about to drink this water’. In example (8) because the speaker and drinker are now different people a third possibility becomes available, the sense in which ‘you are drinking water right now’.

(7) nīndīranywa mai maya
 nī- ndī- **ra**- nywa mai maya
 PR-1SG-**T₅**-drink water this
 I am drinking this water

(8) nīūranywa mai
 nī- ü- **ra**- nywa mai
 PR-2SG-**T₅**-drink water
 you are drinking water

The Actual Present tense is also used to communicate an immediate intention. So in example (9) T_5 is used to refer to a situation that has not yet begun but is about to begin in the very immediate future. Compare this example with example (3), section 3.4.

(9) nīndīrathii ndūka
 nī- ndī- **ra**- thi-ī ndūka
 PR-1SG-**T₅**-go-END shop
 I am going to the shops (I am about to go)

5. FUTURE TENSES

5.1 T₆: Immediate/Near Future: gü-/kü-

Examples (1) and (2) below demonstrate the use of the **gü-/kü-** Immediate/Near Future marker.

- (1) nīngūthīi gwaka haria
 nī- n- **gü-** thi-i gw- aka haria
 PR-1SG-**T₆**-go-END INF-build there
 I will go and build there (sometime very soon, later today)
- (2) Tiga tondü ndikürīa ndüma kahinda gaka
 Tiga tondü ndi- **kü-**ri- a ndüma kahinda ga- ka
 Stop:IMP because 1SG:NEG-**T₆**-eat-END arrowroot time CONC-this
 Stop because I won't eat arrowroot at this time

However, rather than just being considered as the marker for the Immediate/Near Future there does seem to be some evidence to suggest that it may more generally be taken to mark closeness to the present moment, whether past or future. See section 3.3 for further elaboration of this proposal.

5.2 T₇: Remote Future: ga-/ka-

The first example shows the use of the **ga-** morpheme in its standard function, showing future time of tomorrow or later, here in a negative sentence.

- (1) tütigacererüo güthīi mücemanio
 tü- ti- **ga-**cererüo gü- thiī mücemanio
 1PL-NEG-**T₇**-be late INF-go meeting
 we won't be late for the meeting (tomorrow or some time later than
 tomorrow)

However, example (2) provides an interesting alternative use for **ga-**: here the time orientation is set as the present moment by the initial imperative, and in that context the T₇ tense marker implies immediate future, i.e. certainly today, and probably very soon.

- (2) Nītūteng'ere nīguo tūtīgacererūo nī gīthomo
 Nī- tū- teng'ere nīguo tū- ti- **ga**-cererūo nī gī- thomo
 PR-1PL-run:IMP so that 1PL-NEG-T₇-be late to CONC-lesson
 Let's run so that we won't be late to the service

5.3 T₈: Indefinite Future: rī-

The morpheme **rī-** is used to mark the future tense, but is unspecified as to how far distant in the future, unlike **gū-** which marks the Immediate/Near Future, i.e. some time later today, or **ga-** which marks the future from tomorrow onwards. By using **rī-** it is possible to make a statement which is simply set some time in the future without specifying deliberately whether the event will take place today or after today.

- (1) müthenya ümwe nī- ndī- **rī**-thiī ndünyü
 day one PR-1SG-T₈-go market
 one day I will go to the market
- (2) nī- ndī- **rī**- thiī gū- cerera maitü
 PR-1SG-T₈-go INF-visit mother
 I will go to visit mother (at some point in the future)

6. PERFECTIVE ASPECT: -ite

The following examples are intended to check whether the perfective aspect is able to co-occur with specific time adverbials in the different tenses. The verbs in examples (1) to (8) have not been broken down into their component morphemes but these can be found in tables 2.1a, 2.2a and 2.3a.

- | | |
|--|---|
| (1) T ₁ : Remote Past nīndathiite mwaka ūmwe muthīru I had gone year one ago | (5) T ₅ : Actual present |
| (2) T ₂ : Recent Past nīndīrathiite ira I had gone yesterday | (6) T ₆ : Immediate/Near Future nīngūkorwo thiite ndakīka ithanū I will have gone minutes five |
| (3) T ₃ : Near Past nīngūthiite rūciinī I had gone morning | (7) T ₇ : Remote Future nīngakorwo thiite mweri ūcio ogī I will have gone month that another |
| (4) T ₄ : Immediate Past nīthiite ndakīka īmwe thīru I have gone minute one ago | (8) T ₈ : Indefinite Future *nīndīrikorwo thiite rūcio I will have gone tomorrow |

From these examples it can be seen that the only tenses which cannot be used with a specific time adverbial are the Actual Present tense and the Indefinite Future tense.

The former is due to the fact that there is no perfective form for the present tense, and the latter is entirely predictable from a pragmatic point of view, since the very indefiniteness of this tense precludes the specifying of any particular point in the future. Each of the other tenses contains within its own morphological marker some information about the distance in time from the present moment, so the time adverb adds explicit information in order to increase the accuracy of that temporal location.

7. HABITUAL ASPECT: -aga

The main use of the aspect suffix **-aga** is to mark the habitual aspect. It is employed by Kiambu in all the past and future tenses. However, in the past tenses **-aga** can also denote the progressive aspect. This results in ambiguity, especially when combined with the tenses marking time closest to the present moment (i.e. the Near and Immediate Past tenses, and the Immediate/Near Future tense). In the following examples the letter T will be used to label the ‘adjacent’ tense marker **-gũ-/kü-**, and ASP will be used to label the aspect marker **-aga** (see tables 2.1a, 2.1b, 2.3a and 2.3b). It will be shown that the context can be used to disambiguate between the different possible senses yielding either a past or future tense, and a habitual or progressive aspect.

- (1) nĩngũthiaga mũciĩ
nĩ- n- **gũ-thi-aga** mũciĩ
PR-1SG-T- go-ASP home
- a) I was going home (in the process of)
Near/Immediate **past : progressive** aspect
 - b) I used to go home (regularly, up to today)
Near/Immediate **past : habitual** aspect
 - c) I will be going home (regularly, starting today)
Immediate/Near **future : habitual** aspect

Taking a logical approach it is clear that if the context suggests:

future then a) and b) are eliminated and the meaning is c) **future : habitual**

past then c) is eliminated and the meaning is either a) or b)

- more information is needed to disambiguate

progressive then b) and c) are eliminated and the meaning is a) **past : progressive**

habitual then a) is eliminated and the meaning is either b) or c)

- more information is needed to disambiguate

(2) nīngūthiaga mūciī tondū rīu njkaraga hakūhī na maitū
 nī- n- **gū-thi-aga** mūciī tondū rīu nj- ikar-aga hakūhī na maitū
 PR-1SG-T- go-ASP home because now 1SG-stay-HAB near with mother

a)*I was (in the process of) going home because now I stay near (my) mother

b)*I used to go home because now I stay near (my) mother

c) I will be going home because now I stay near (my) mother

The additional clause containing the time adverbial connective *tondū rīu* ‘because now’ immediately leads the hearer to infer a future meaning. In this sentence an adverb such as *ūmūthenya* ‘every day’ expressing regularity is unnecessary since the only future meaning of *nīngūthiaga* is already habitual. i.e. this is an example of a future habitual.

(3) nīngūthiaga mūciī noningī ndīciiririe gūthiī gücerera tata
 nī- n- **gū-thi-aga** mūciī no- ningī ndī- ciir- irie gü- thiī gü- cerera tata
 PR-1SG-T- go-ASP home but-then 1SG-think-T₃ INF-go INF-visit aunt

a) I was (in the process of) going home but then I decided to go and visit (my) aunt

b) I used to go home but then I decided to go and visit (my) aunt

c)*I will be going home but then I decided to go and visit (my) aunt

In this example the situation of going home is located prior in time to the event of visiting the aunt, which is also in the past tense, by the use of *-ningī* ‘then’. Thus the hearer is led to infer a past meaning, i.e. meaning c) is eliminated immediately.

Theoretically either a) or b) could be the intended meaning but, since the visiting of the aunt is a punctiliar event, the most relevant interpretation, in order to provide

contrast with it in the given context, is to perceive the going as a progressive rather than a habitual action, i.e. this is an example of a past progressive.

- (4) nīngüthiaga müciî rîria njemanirie na fafa
 nī- n- **gü-thi-aga** müciî rîria njeman -irie na fafa
 PR-1SG-T- go-ASP home when 1SG:meet-T₃ with father
- a) I was (in the process of) going home when I met (my) father
 b)*I used to go home when I met (my) father
 c)*I will be going home when I met (my) father

The context supplies a specific event which happened in the Near Past, i.e. the meeting with father occurred sometime earlier today. The use of the adverb *rîria* ‘when’ locates the ‘going’ in the same period of time, i.e. the going was a progressive action. Thus both the habitual meanings are eliminated. i.e. this is an example of a past progressive.

- (5) nīngüthiaga müciî ümüthenya
 nī- n- **gü-thi-aga** müciî ü- müthenya
 PR-1SG-T- go-ASP home every-day
- a)*I was (in the process of) going home every day
 b) I used to go home every day
 c) I will be going home every day

Here the option which can be immediately eliminated is a) the progressive aspect, since the use of *ümüthenya* ‘every day’ implies the habitual aspect. There is still not enough in the context to be able to disambiguate whether the situation occurred in the past or whether it is still to occur in the future. However, although both meanings are possible and permissible, in the absence of further contextual evidence the default meaning is the future, i.e. this is an example of a future habitual.

- (6) nīngüthiaga müciī ümüthenya noriū njikaraga küraihu
 nī- n- **gü-thi-aga** müciī ü- müthenya no- riū nj- ikar -aga küraihu
 PR-1SG-T- go-ASP home every-day but-now 1SG-stay-HAB far
- a)*I was (in the process of) going home every day but now I stay far
 b) I used to go home every day but now I stay far
 c)*I will be going home every day but now I stay far

As in example (5) the use of the time adverb *ümüthenya* ‘every day’ precludes the progressive inference, but here the use of *norīu* ‘but now’ also locates the present moment as the deictic centre with the situation of going home every day prior to the present. Thus this context has completely disambiguated *nīngüthiaga*, i.e. this is an example of a past habitual.

- (7) *nīngüthiaga müciī ümüthenya nonigī ndīrathamire
 nī- n- **gü-thi-aga** müciī ü- müthenya no- nigī ndī- ra-tham -ire
 PR-1SG-T- go-ASP home every-day but-then 1SG-T₂-move-T₂

Example (7) is similar to example (6), but the fact that the going home which is temporally located adjacent to the present, i.e. sometime today, is located in time prior to an event which is expressed in the Recent Past tense, i.e. yesterday, means that it is an unacceptable sentence.

8. PROGRESSIVE ASPECT: -aga or -korwo...gĩ-/kĩ-

Section 7 has demonstrated the use of the suffix **-aga** as having a progressive meaning as well as habitual when it occurs in the past tenses. There follows a straightforward example of this use.

- (1) Ngüi nĩaroigaga mbu ira
Ngüi nĩ- a- roig **-aga** mbu ira NB ra+ug→roig
Ngüi PR-3SG-T₂:say-**PROG** shout yesterday
Ngüi was shouting yesterday

Example (2) also marks the progressive action with the Recent Past tense and shows how tense T₅ is being used as a historic present rather than the Actual Present tense.

- (2) ndĩrathiaga gwatanĩro ira ndĩraririkana ndĩna mügeni
ndĩ- ra- thi-**aga** gwatanĩro ira ndĩ- ra- ririkana ndĩna mügeni
1SG-T₂-go- **PROG** fellowship yesterday 1SG-T₅-remember 1SG:have visitor
I was going to the fellowship yesterday but I remembered that I had a visitor

Examples (3) to (7) explore the relationship between simultaneity and the progressive aspect, along the lines investigated by Orwig (1991). The situation described in example (3) is co-extensive, with the two events taking place throughout the same time period, thus they are both marked for progressive aspect.

- (3) ndarugaga ngĩma ngĩkimaga njahĩ kiumia kũu kĩathirire
nda- rug **-aga** ngĩma n- gĩ- kim **-aga** njahĩ kiumia kũu kĩathirire
1SG:T₁-cook-**PROG** ugali 1SG-CON-mash-**PROG** beans week that finished
I was cooking ugali as I was mashing beans last week

Example (4) is ambiguous out of context as sections 3.3, 5.1 and 7. have demonstrated, and even if we take it to be a past progressive there is still the choice between degrees of remoteness: T_3 or T_4 .

- (4) ngürugaga cai
 n- gü-rug -aga cai
 1SG-T-cook-**PROG** tea

Example (5) adds an extra clause to (4) and is an example of a non-co-extensive situation of simultaneity where the including situation is marked as being progressive, whereas the included situation has no aspectual marker, and both are given in the same tense (i.e. the ambiguous *gü* tense marker has been disambiguated by its context as being T_3 , the Near Past tense).

- (5) ngürugaga cai riria Wanjirü akinyire
 n- gü-rug -aga cai riria Wanjirü a- kiny -ire
 1SG- T_3 -cook-**PROG** tea when Wanjirü 3SG-arrive- T_3
 I was making tea when Wanjirü arrived

Tables 2.3a and 2.3b show that the progressive aspect does not take the **-aga** suffix when the temporal location is future, but the verb *gükorwo* ‘to be found’ is used analytically with the consecutive tense marker **gĩ-/kĩ-** to indicate a future progressive sense. Examples (6) and (7) illustrate this, with (7) being an example of a co-extensive situation.

- (6) kahii gagükorwo gakiĩithia ngombe hwaini
 ka- hii ga- gü-korwo ga- kī- riithia ngombe hwaini
 CONC-boy CONC- T_6 -be found CONC-CON-look after cows evening
 the boy will be looking after cows in the evening

- (7) agakorwo endünyü akiendia mboga üudümwe niakaria na arata
 a- ga-korwo e- ndünyü a- kī- endia mboga üudümwe
 3SG-T₇-be found LOC-market 3SG-CON-sell vegetables at the same time
 she will be at the market selling vegetables and

nī- a- karia na arata
 PR-3SG-CON:talk with friends
 talking with her friends

Example (8) illustrates the difference between the future perfective and progressive aspects in the Remote Future tense.

- (8) Q: “Nouke ünjerere gwakwa Mütüinī kiumia kiu kīngī?”
 “Nouke ü- njerer -e gwakwa Mütüinī kiumia kiu kīngī?”
 2SG:come 2SG-1SG:visit-SUBJ mine Mütüinī week that another?
 “Can you come and visit me at Mütüinī next week?”
- Aa: “Aca, ngakorwo thiite Machakos”
 “Aca, n- ga-korwo thi -ite Machakos”
 No, 1SG-T₇-be found 1SG:go-PERF Machakos
 “No, I will have gone to Machakos
- Ab: “Ee, noningī ngakorwo ngithi Machakos”
 “Ee, no- ningī n- ga-korwo n- gī- thi-i Machakos”
 Yes, but-then 1SG-T₇-be found 1SG-CON-go-END Machakos
 “Yes, but then I will be going to Machakos”

as a narrative tool in order to advance the pace of the narration. Thus the initial word in the episode which bears a time reference, in this case *njükirire*, is all important as it temporally locates the entire scene.

A word of explanation is needed regarding the temporal marker **-coka**. It is marked for person and sometimes tense, but always conveys the consecutive sense of ‘then’ or ‘and then’. The prefix **gĩ-/kĩ-** is also used to show consecutive action (CON) and will be further explained in section 10.2. For example,

- line 1. nda- coka ‘then I’
 1SG:T₄-then
- line 7. n- gĩ- coka ‘and then I’
 1SG-CON-then
- line 16. a- gĩ- coka ‘and then she’
 3SG-CON-then

Scene 1: This morning

- 1 Nj- ükir -ire rüciini nda- ruga cai. nda- coka nda- hiühia maï
1SG-wake up-T₃ morning 1SG:T₄-cook tea. 1SG:T₄-then 1SG:T₄-warm water
I woke up in the morning and I made tea, then I warmed water
- 2 ma gwi-thamba. Nd- okir -ia ciana nda- coka
for INF-bathe. 1SG:T₄-wake up-CAUSE children 1SG:T₄-then
for bathing. After that I woke up the children and then
- 3 nda- thamb-ia ido. Nda- coka nda- hata nyumba,
1SG:T₄-wash -CAUSE dishes. 1SG:T₄-then 1SG:T₄-sweep house,
I washed the dishes. Then I swept the house,
- 4 nde- hariria nd- oka wira.
1SG:T₄-prepare oneself 1SG:T₄-come work.
I prepared myself and I came to work.

Despite its internal use of T_2 it is the phrase *Kiumia kiu kirathirire* (1.5) which sets the temporal orientation of the second scene as ‘last week’, i.e. the Remote Past, T_1 , since it is further back in time than yesterday (see also the comment after example (4) in section 2.4). It can be observed that once the time frame has been set, the verbs in the rest of the scene are unmarked for tense, unless they have an additional semantic role to play. As previously mentioned the prefix **gĩ-/kĩ-** shows consecutive action and serves as a linguistic device for keeping up the momentum in the narration. In this scene we find the Immediate Past tense, T_4 , being used to conjoin two events together. In this role it often signals a change of episode as well.

For example,

line 9. nda- kinya müciĩ n- gĩ- thiĩ... ‘when I reached home I went...’
 1SG: T_4 -reach home 1SG-CON-go

In line 12 T_1 is used in *yathirire* (finished), rather than T_2 as in line 5 *kirathirire* (finished), since it is referring to a day further back than yesterday.

Scene 2: Last weekend

5 Kiumia kiu kī- ra-thir -ire wetano, n- gĩ- ükīra rüciini,
 Week that CONC- T_2 -finish- T_2 Friday, 1SG-CON-wake up morning,
 Last week on Friday I woke up in the morning,

6 n- gĩ- ruga cai, n- gĩ- ükīr -ia ciana
 1SG-CON-cook tea, 1SG-CON-wake up-CAUSE children
 then I cooked tea, I woke up the children,

7 n- gĩ- hariria n- gĩ- üka wīra kwa Joanna.
 1SG-CON-prepare oneself 1SG-CON-come work house of Joanna.
 I prepared myself and I came to work at Joanna’s.

- 8 N- gĩ- rikia wira n- gĩ- coka n- gĩ- inũka mũciĩ.
 1SG-CON-finish work 1SG-CON-then 1SG-CON-go home home.
 I finished work and then I went home.
- 9 Nda- kinya mũciĩ n- gĩ- thiĩ kwa mwari wa maitũ.
 1SG:T₄-reach home 1SG-CON-go house of daughter of mother.
 When I reached home I went to my sister's house.
- 10 Tũ- kĩ- hurũk-aga ũgwo. N- gĩ- coka n- gĩ- inũka
 1PL-CON-rest -PROG that way. 1SG-CON-then 1SG-CON-go home
 We rested a little. Then I went home,
- 11 n- gĩ- ruga irio cia hwainĩ, gũ- gĩ- tuka ũgwo.
 1SG-CON-cook food of evening, CONC-CON-get dark that way.
 and I cooked the evening meal, and then it got dark.
- 12 Rũu nigĩ ndĩ- renda kw- aria juma iyo ya- thir -ire. Juma
 Now again 1SG-T₅:want INF-talk Saturday that CONC:T₁-finish-T₁. Saturday
 Now I want to talk about last Saturday.
- 13 iyo ya- thir -ire n- gĩ- ũkĩra rũciĩnĩ, n- gĩ- hariria,
 that CONC:T₁-finish-T₁ 1SG-CON-wake up morning, 1SG-CON-prepare oneself,
 Last Saturday I woke up in the morning, I prepared myself,
- 14 n- gĩ- ũka kwa Arani. Nda- ima kwa Arani n- gĩ- inũka
 1SG-CON-come house of Alan. 1SG:T₄-leave house of Alan 1SG-CON-go home
 and I came to Alan's house. When I left Alan's house I went home
- 15 n- gĩ- hũra ngũo. Mwari wa maitũ a- gĩ- ũka,
 1SG-CON-wash clothes clothes. Daughter of mother 3SG-CON-come,
 and I washed the clothes. My sister came,
- 16 n- gĩ- mũ- twithia mahuti ma ng'ombe. a- gĩ- coka a- kĩ- inũka.
 1SG-CON-3SG-help to cut grass for cows, 3SG-CON-then 3SG-CON-go home.
 I helped her to cut grass for the cows, and then she went home.
- 17 Rũu nigĩ kiumia n- gĩ- ũkĩra rũciĩnĩ n- gĩ- hariria
 Now again Sunday 1SG-CON-wake up morning 1SG-CON-prepare oneself
 Now on Sunday I woke up in the morning, I prepared myself

- 18 n- gĩ- thiĩ kanitha. Nda- thiĩ kanitha tü- gĩ- thoma gĩ- thomo.
 ISG-CON-go church. ISG:T₄-go church 1PL-CON-read CONC-lesson.
 and I went to church. When I went to church we read a lesson
 (i.e. attended the service).
- 19 Githomo gĩ- a- thira n- gĩ- riganĩrwo vurana yakwa kanitha.
 Lesson CONC-T₄-finish ISG-CON-forget cardigan my church.
 When the service was finished I forgot my cardigan in the church.
- 20 Nonĩ njũĩ nĩ- n- ga-mĩ- kũra kiumia.
 But ISG:T₄:know PR-ISG-T₇-CONC-find Sunday.
 But I know I will find it on Sunday.
- 21 Rĩu nigĩ jumatatu n- gĩ- ũkĩra rũciĩnĩ, n- gĩ- hariria,
 Now again Monday ISG-CON-wake up morning, ISG-CON-prepare oneself,
 Now on Monday I woke up in the morning, I prepared myself,
- 22 rũciĩnĩ n- gĩ- ũka wĩra.
 morning ISG-CON-come work.
 and in the morning I came to work.

The first sentence of the third scene is an interjection by the speaker to indicate the direction of the narration. This uses T₆ - the Immediate/Near Future tense. The week ahead and the anticipated actions are all announced with the same T₆ markers. In line 24 the Immediate Past tense, T₄, fulfills the role discussed above in scene 2 of conjoining action, ‘when....I will....’, and the rest of the verbs in the episode are marked with the expected T₇ **ga-/ka-** marker for the future any later than today.

Scene 3: This weekend

- 23 Rĩu nĩ- n- gw-aria ũhoru wa kiumia gĩkĩ gĩ- gũka ũrĩa n- gw-ika.
 Now PR-ISG-T₆-talk news of week this CONC-T₆:come what ISG-T₆- do.
 Now I will talk about this coming week’s news, what I will do.
- 24 Kiumia gĩkĩ gĩ- gũka juma nd- okira, n- ga-hũra ngũo.
 Week this CONC-T₆:come Saturday ISG:T₄-wake up, ISG-T₇-wash clothes clothes
 This coming week on Saturday when I wake up I will wash the clothes

25 njoke n- ga-ruga raji. Njoke n- ga-thii n- ga-tuwari mwana
 then 1SG-T₇-cook lunch. Then 1SG-T₇- go 1SG-T₇-take child
 then I will cook the lunch. Then I will go and take the child

26 a- ka-hii ndawa ya vorio.
 3SG-T₇-get medicine of polio.
 to get a polio vaccine.

Scene four begins by locating the period being reported in the Remote Past by the use of the phrase *kiumia uküu kingi kiathirire*, 'week that another finished'. Thereafter it is very similar to the situation already described in the second scene. **Gi-/ki-** is used to show consecutive action and the Immediate Past tense is used to show conjoined action.

Scene 4: The weekend before last

27 Ndi-renda kw-aria ühoro wa kiumia uküu kingi ki- a- thir- ire.
 1SG-T₅:want INF-talk news of week that another CONC-T₁-finish-T₁.
 I want to talk about the week before last.

28 Tiga giki ki- ra- thir- ire uküu kingi kiumia ki- a- thir- ire.
 Not this CONC-T₂-finish-T₂ that another week CONC-T₁-finish-T₁.
 Not the week that just finished, but the week before.

29 Juma n- gi- ukira rüciini, n- gi- ruga cai, n- gi- coka
 Saturday 1SG-CON-wake up morning, 1SG-CON-cook tea, 1SG-CON-then
 On Saturday I woke up in the morning, I made tea, and then

30 n- gi- hagara mai ma gwü-thamba. N- gi- thamba n- gi- coka
 1SG-CON-put on water for INF-bathe. 1SG-CON-bathe 1SG-CON-then
 I heated water for bathing. I bathed and then

31 n- gi- thambia ido, n- gi- hata nyumba, n- gi- coka n- gi- thii
 1SG-CON-wash dishes. 1SG-CON-sweep house. 1SG-CON-then 1SG-CON-go
 I washed the dishes, I swept the house, and after that I went

- 32 mügüda. N- gĩ- rĩma nginya tha thita. N- gĩ- ũka n- gĩ- ruga
shamba. 1SG-CON-dig up to hour six. 1SG-CON-come 1SG-CON-cook
to the shamba. I dug until noon. Then I came and cooked
- 33 raji, n- gĩ- he ciana. N- gĩ- coka n- gĩ- hariria,
lunch, 1SG-CON-give children. 1SG-CON-then 1SG-CON-prepare oneself,
lunch and gave it to the children. Then I prepared myself,
- 34 n- gĩ- thĩ ndũnyũ. Nda- thĩ ndũnyũ n- gĩ- gũra waru, karoti na
1SG-CON-go market. 1SG:T₄-go market 1SG-CON-buy potatoes, carrots and
I went to the market. When I went to the market I bought potatoes, carrots and
- 35 igĩ nyingi, n- gĩ- coka n- gĩ- inũka. N- gĩ- ũka, n- gĩ- ruga
others many, 1SG-CON-then 1SG-CON-go home. 1SG-CON-come 1SG-CON-cook
many other things, and then I went home. I came and cooked
- 36 irio cia hwainĩ. Nda- ruga irio cia hwainĩ n- gĩ- harĩria ciana,
food of evening. 1SG:T₄-cook food of evening 1SG-CON-prepare children,
the evening meal. When I cooked the evening meal I prepared the children
- 37 i- gĩ- thĩ toro. Rĩu ndĩ- renda kw- aria ũhoro wa kiumia.
CONC-CON-go sleep. Now 1SG-T₅:want INF-talk news of Sunday.
and they went to sleep. Now I want to talk about Sunday.
- 38 Kiumia ũkiũ rũciinĩ n- gĩ- ũkĩra n- gĩ- ruga cai
Sunday that morning 1SG-CON-wake up 1SG-CON-cook tea
On that Sunday morning I woke up, made some tea,
- 39 n- gĩ- hariria n- gĩ- thĩ kanitha. Ndaima kanitha
1SG-CON-prepare oneself 1SG-CON-go church. After church
prepared myself and went to church. After church
- 40 n- gĩ- coka n- gĩ- thĩ mũcemanio wa barĩ ito.
1SG-CON-then 1SG-CON-go meeting of clan our.
I then went to a gathering of our clan.
- 41 mũcemanio wa barĩ ito wa- thira n- gĩ- inũka mũciĩ.
meeting of clan our CONC:T₄-finish 1SG-CON-go home home.
When the gathering of our clan finished I went home.

10. RELATIVE TIME REFERENCE

This section will attempt to look at how Kiambu handles relative time reference, i.e. time references where the present moment is not taken as the deictic centre, but rather some other point in time, whether past or future.

10.1 Relative recent past

First let us look at the case where one event takes place before another event, whether past, future or present habitual. (NB. Example (2) in section 4.1 is a similar example, but should not be placed in this section as its deictic centre is the present moment.) It will be observed from the examples below that the independent clause carries its own temporal marker, and thus establishes the time frame, but the clause containing the event in the 'relative recent past', i.e. in the recent past relative to the event just mentioned, has no unique verbal morpheme expressing this relative tense, but occurs in a fixed form (here *arikia küruga*), which is thus dependent on the preceding clause to provide its specific temporal meaning (Beavon: 75).

(1) etire ciana irie arikia küruga ngīma
T₁: et- ire ciana i- rie a- rīkia kü- ruga ngīma
3SG:T₁:call-T₁ children CONC-eat:SUBJ 3SG-finish INF-cook ugali
she called the children to eat when she finished cooking ugali (last week)

(2) aretire ciana irie arikia küruga ngīma
T₂: a- ret -ire ciana i- rie a- rīkia kü- ruga ngīma
3SG-T₂:call-T₂ children CONC-eat:SUBJ 3SG-finish INF-cook ugali
she called the children to eat when she finished cooking ugali (yesterday)

(3) etire ciana irie arikia kūruga ngīma
 T₃: et -ire ciana i- rie a- rīkia kū- ruga ngīma
 3SG:T₃:call-T₃ children CONC-eat:SUBJ 3SG-finish INF-cook ugali
 she called the children to eat when she finished cooking ugali (this morning)

(4) eta ciana irie arikia kūruga ngīma
 T₄: eta ciana i- rie a- rīkia kū- ruga ngīma
 3SG:T₄:call children CONC-eat:SUBJ 3SG-finish INF-cook ugali
 she called the children to eat when she finished cooking ugali (just now)

(5) agwīta ciana irie arikia kūruga ngīma
 T₆: a- gwīta ciana i- rie a- rīkia kū- ruga ngīma
 3SG-T₆:call children CONC-eat:SUBJ 3SG-finish INF-cook ugali
 she is going to call the children to eat when she has finished cooking ugali
 (today)

(6) ageta ciana irie arikia kūruga ngīma
 T₇: a- geta ciana i- rie a- rīkia kū- ruga ngīma
 3SG-T₇:call children CONC-eat:SUBJ 3SG-finish INF-cook ugali
 she will call the children to eat when she has finished cooking ugali
 (tomorrow)

10.2 Consecutive Relative

Now let us turn our attention to the case where one event occurs after another event.

This is common in narrative discourse as events are often recounted in chronological order. This time it is the initial event which carries the temporal marker and the relative tense refers to subsequent events. Scenes 2 and 4 in section 9 are good examples of how there is an initial clause which sets the time frame, followed by the **gī-/kī-** consecutive relative tense marker (used mainly in the Remote Past tense, but see also table 2.3b for its use with future progressive). The other tenses appear to use the same temporal markers for both the main clause and the consecutive relative clause. The following examples follow the pattern of section 10.1 above and it will

be noted that as in section 9 there are consecutive conjunctions based on the temporal marker **-coka**.

- (1) etire ciana ciüke agıcoka akıruga ngıma
 T₁: et -ire ciana ci- üke a- gı- coka a- kı- ruga ngıma
 3SG:T₁:call-T₁ children CONC-come:SUBJ 3SG-CON-then 3SG-CON-cook ugali
 she called the children to come and then she cooked ugali (last week)
- (2) aretire ciana ciüke aracoka araruga ngıma
 T₂: a- ret- ire ciana ci- üke a- ra- coka a- ra- ruga ngıma
 3SG-T₂:call-T₂ children CONC-come:SUBJ 3SG-T₂-then 3SG-T₂-cook ugali
 she called the children to come and then she cooked ugali (yesterday)
- (3) etire ciana ciüke acoka arugire ngıma
 T₃: et- ire ciana ci- üke a- coka a- rug -ire ngıma
 3SG:call-T₃ children CONC-come:SUBJ 3SG:T₃-then 3SG-cook-T₃ ugali
 she called the children to come and then she cooked ugali (this morning)
- (4) agwıta ciana ciüke agıcoka akıruga ngıma
 T₆: a- gwıta ciana ci- üke a- gü-coka a- kü-ruga ngıma
 3SG-T₆:call children CONC-come:SUBJ 3SG-T₆-then 3SG-T₆-cook ugali
 she will call the children to come and then she will cook ugali (this afternoon)

11. CONCLUSION

This paper represents an initial inquiry into tense and aspect in the Kikuyu speech form of the Kiambu district and merely scratches the surface of their complexities. The assignment of basic tense meanings to the different morphemes described in section 2 is to be taken more as a starting point than as the final word. More work needs to be done on the conceptual temporal framework in Kiambu in order to clarify and confirm or contradict the findings, and to establish more conclusively whether the tense boundaries are absolute or more fluid, whether they should be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions or in terms of a prototype.

Throughout the paper it has been observed that the tense markers cannot be comprehensively understood in isolation since their context of use contributes to their interpretation. However, Comrie (1985:29) warns against mistaking implicature for meaning when analysing a language's tense system, stating that

“it is also possible that a tense will receive particular interpretations in particular contexts, but these are always explainable in terms of the interaction of context-independent meaning and context, and do not therefore form part of the meaning of the tense category in question” (Comrie, 1985:26).

This paper has almost entirely concentrated on indicative sentences. Obviously a thorough investigation of tense and aspect in Kiambu would need to incorporate and

explain data from the whole range of speech acts. Regarding aspect there is scope for further research into the strategies employed by Kiambu to handle aspectual distinctions such as perfect, pluperfect, inceptive, completive, punctual and iterative. Further study could also be done on the interaction of root semantics with tense and aspect.

Despite all these limitations and shortfalls it is hoped that the present work will at least have made a small start in the right direction for exploring this fascinating topic.

12. APPENDIX

12.1 List of Abbreviations

| | | |
|----------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1SG | = | First person singular |
| 1PL | = | First person plural |
| 2SG | = | Second person singular |
| 2PL | = | Second person plural |
| 3SG | = | Third person singular |
| 3PL | = | Third person plural |
| ASP | = | Aspect |
| CAUSE | = | Causative suffix |
| CON | = | Consecutive relative tense |
| CONC | = | Noun class Concord |
| END | = | Verb Ending |
| FUT | = | Future tense |
| HAB | = | Habitual aspect |
| IMP | = | Imperative |
| INF | = | Infinitive |
| LOC | = | Locative marker |
| NEG | = | Negative |
| PASS | = | Passive |
| PAST | = | Past tense |
| PERF | = | Perfective aspect |
| PR | = | Prefix nĩ- |
| PRES | = | Present tense |
| PROG | = | Progressive aspect |
| SUBJ | = | Subjunctive |
| T | = | Tense |
| T ₁ | = | Remote past |
| T ₂ | = | Recent past |
| T ₃ | = | Near past |
| T ₄ | = | Immediate past |
| T ₅ | = | Actual present |
| T ₆ | = | Immediate/Near future |
| T ₇ | = | Remote future |
| T ₈ | = | Indefinite future |

12.2 List of verbs

| | | | |
|---------------|---|---------------|-------------------------|
| gw-aka | to build | gü-küra | to find |
| kw-andika | to write | kü-ma | to leave |
| kw-aria | to talk | kü-mbüka | to fly |
| gw-atüra | to split | kü-mwira | to reply, answer |
| gü-cerera | to visit | kü-nywa | to drink |
| gü-cererwo | to be late | kü-ohwü | to jail |
| gü-coka | to return | kü-ona | to see |
| kw-enda | to want, like, love | gw-ota | to warm oneself |
| kw-endia | to sell | kü-re | to get |
| kü-ganda | to be rotten | kü-rehe | to bring |
| kü-goca | to praise | kü-ri | to be |
| kü-gocwo | to be praised | kü-ria | to ask |
| kü-güra | to buy | kü-ria | to eat |
| kü-gwa | to fall | kü-riganirwo | to forget |
| kü-hagira | to put on (food, water etc.) | kü-riithia | to look after |
| kü-haica | to climb | kü-rihia | to finish |
| kü-handa | to plant | kü-rima | to dig |
| kü-hariria | to prepare (something/ someone else) | kü-ringa | to cross |
| kü-hata | to sweep | kü-ririkana | to remember |
| kü-he | to give | kü-rora | to look |
| kü-hiana | to look like | kü-ruga | to cook |
| kü-hihia | to burn | kü-rügama | to stand |
| kü-hiühia | to warm (water) | kü-ruta | to come out, do |
| kü-hota | to be able | gü-tara | to count |
| kü-hüra | to wash (clothes) | gü-tema | to cut (trees etc.) |
| kü-hürira | to hammer | gü-teng`era | to run |
| kü-hurüka | to rest | gü-tenia | to spoil |
| gw-iciiria | to think | gü-thama | to move |
| kü-igua | to hear | gü-thambia | to wash (dishes) |
| kw-ihariria | to prepare oneself | gü-thii | to go |
| gw-ika | to do | gü-thikiriria | to listen |
| gü-ikara | to sit, stay | gü-thira | to finish |
| gw-ikira | to put | gü-thoma | to read |
| kw-imenyerera | to be careful | gü-tiga | to stop |
| kü-ina | to sing | gü-togerera | to come to (e.g. smoke) |
| kü-inüka | to go home | gü-tonya | to enter |
| kw-irira | to promise | gü-tuka | to get dark |
| gw-ita | to call | gü-tüwara | to take |
| gw-iterera | to wait | gü-twithia | to help to cut |
| gw-ithamba | to bathe | kü-uga | to say |
| gw-itwo | to call | kü-üi | to know |
| gü-kaana | to deny | gü-üka | to come |
| gü-kima | to mash | gü-ükira | to wake up |
| gü-kinya | to reach, arrive | kü-uma | to come out |
| gü-koma | to sleep | kü-umba | to make |
| gü-korwo | to be found | kü-ura | to rain |
| | | kü-üraga | to kill |

12.3 Notes

Morphophonemic rules:

Vowel combinations:

| | | | | |
|----------|------|--------------|---------|--|
| a | plus | a | becomes | a |
| a | plus | e | becomes | e |
| a | plus | i | becomes | e |
| a | plus | ī | becomes | e |
| a | plus | o | becomes | o |
| a | plus | u | becomes | oi |
| a | plus | ū | becomes | o |
| i | plus | a | becomes | a |
| i | plus | i | becomes | i |
| ī | plus | a | becomes | a |
| ī | plus | i | becomes | ii |
| ī | plus | ī | becomes | ī |
| ī | plus | u | becomes | iu |
| ū | plus | o | becomes | uo |
| ū | plus | u | becomes | uu or u or o (possibly due to phonological conditioning - this is an area for further research) |
| ū | plus | vowel | becomes | w |

Combinations with 'n':

| | | | | |
|----------|------|--------------|---------|---|
| n | plus | b | becomes | mb |
| n | plus | c | becomes | nj |
| n | plus | g | becomes | ng |
| n | plus | h | becomes | h |
| n | plus | k | becomes | ng |
| n | plus | m | becomes | m |
| n | plus | n | becomes | n |
| n | plus | r | becomes | n (when next consonant is m or n) |
| n | plus | r | becomes | nd (in all other cases) |
| n | plus | t | becomes | nd |
| n | plus | th | becomes | th |
| n | plus | vowel | becomes | ny (when next consonant is m or n) |
| n | plus | vowel | becomes | nj (in all other cases) |

NB. According to Gecaga there are exceptions to these rules in 1SG of the verb tenses, e.g. *n-rathii* becomes *ndirathii* rather than *ndathii*, *n-athii* becomes *ndathii* rather than *njathii*.

Combinations with 'k':

| | | | | |
|----------|------|--------------------------|---------|----------|
| k | plus | next consonant c | becomes | g |
| k | plus | next consonant k | becomes | g |
| k | plus | next consonant t | becomes | g |
| k | plus | next consonant th | becomes | g |

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