Ordering Verbal Suffixes in Ekegusii

Abstract

Why series of affixes occur in specific orders is intriguing in Bantu languages where verbs take multiple suffixes. Meeussen (1967:92) proposed a sequence whereby -**ik**- (impositive, neuter), -**am**- (stative), -**ad**- (reciprocal) and -**at**- (contactive) occur first and -**i̧**- (causative) and -**u**- (passive) last. This study examined the order of verbal suffixes in Ekegusii to determine (a) the types; (b) order(s); and (c) effect of phonology, morphology/syntax, and semantics on the order(s). The data below show verbal suffixes in Ekegusii[1]:

(1) Verbal suffixes in Ekegusii
- a) Final vowel, -**a**:   riŋ-a   'fold'
- b) Reversive, -**or**-:   riŋ-or-a   'unfold'
- c) Applicative, -**er**-:   riŋ-er-a   'fold for'
- d) Reciprocal, -**an**-:   riŋ-er-an-a   'fold for each other'
- e) Passive, -**u**-:   riŋ-u-a   'be folded'
- f) Causative$_1$, -**i̧**-:   riŋ-i̧-a   'cause to fold'
- g) Causative$_2$, -**or-**:   tand-or-a   'cause to be torn'
- h) Stative$_1$, -**ek**-:   riŋ-ek-a   'foldable'
- i) Stative$_2$, -**ok**-:   riŋ-ok-a   'be unfoldable'
- j) Stative$_3$, -**am**-:   tug-am-a   'kneel down'
- k) Neuter, -**ek**-**an**-:   ror-ek-an-a   'be visible'

In (1), verbal suffixes occur as vowels (V) or vowel-consonant (VC) sequences, creating phonological words with open syllables. The examples in (2) illustrates some of the possible orders of verbal suffixes in Ekegusii[2]:

(2) Ordering verbal suffixes in Ekegusii

- a) riŋ-or-er-an-i̧-u-a
  → [riŋoreran̹iwa] unfold-RV-AP-RC-CS-PS-FV
  'cause to be unfolded with'

- b) siβ-or-er-an-i-u-a
  → [siβoreraniwa] untie- RV-**AP-RC**-CS-PS-FV
  'cause to be untied for each other'

- c) siβ-or-an-er-a
  → [siβoranera] untie- RV- **RC-AP**-FV
  'untie each other at'

In (2), -VC- suffixes precede -V- suffixes, implying the effect of phonology. In (2a), the suffixes have a fixed order of reversive-stative-applicative-reciprocal-causative-passive. Examples (2b-c) show that the reciprocal-applicative order is reversible due to the order of syntactic operations. The order of other suffixes remain unexplained, suggesting a morphotactic constraint. The reversive suffix appears closest to the base, implying a semantic constraint. The data in (3) tests the effect of syntax on ordering applicative, causative, and passive suffixes:

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[1] The data was provided by the author who is a native speaker of Ekegusii.
[2] Abbreviations: AP = applicative, AU = augment, C = consonant, CL = noun class, CS = causative, FV = final vowel, G = glide, N = nasal, PS = passive, RC = reciprocal, RV = reversive, V = vowel; 1, 8 = noun class number

(3) Effect of syntax on suffix ordering in Ekegusii
    a) o-mo-remi   n-a-rem-er-i-a   a-ba-ana   e-bi-te
       AUG-CL1-farmer FOC-s/he-dig-AP-CS-FV AUG-CL2-child AUG-CL8-stick
       'the farmer made the children dig with sticks'
    b) a-ba-ana   m-ba-rem-er-i-w-a   e-bi-te
       AUG-CL2-child   FOC-they-dig-AP-CS-PS-FV AUG-CL8-stick
       'the children were made to dig with sticks'
    c) e-bi-te   m-bia-rem-er-i-w-a   abana
       AUG-CL8-stick   FOC-they-dig-AP-CS-PS-FV AUG-CL2-child
       'the sticks were used to make the children dig'

The constructions in (3a-c) vary in syntactic structures, but the applicative-causative-passive order remains constant. This study revealed basic facts about Ekegusii suffixes. (a) They occur as -V- or -VC-. (b) Phonology determines the order since -VC- always precede -V- suffixes. (c) The general order of suffixes is **reversive-stative- applicative-reciprocal-causative-passive.** (d) The effect of syntax on the order is ambiguous. (e) The reversive and passive suffixes are always first and last, respectively. (f) The ordering of the suffixes conform to morphotactic Ekegusii principles.