

# The scope and functions of the stative extension in Swahili

Julius Taji

To cite this article: Julius Taji (2025) The scope and functions of the stative extension in Swahili, Cogent Arts & Humanities, 12:1, 2467495, DOI: [10.1080/23311983.2025.2467495](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2025.2467495)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2025.2467495>



© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 18 Feb 2025.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 284



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# The scope and functions of the stative extension in Swahili

Julius Taji 

University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania & University of the Free State, South Africa

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the behaviour of the stative extension in Swahili. It specifically describes the co-occurrence restrictions of the stative extension, explores various meanings induced by the stative extension, determines the scope of occurrence of the stative extension, and discusses the morphological functions of the stative extension. Using data collected from online platforms, field notes, documentary review, and elicitation, the study demonstrates that besides attaching to transitive verbs, the stative extension can also attach to concrete and abstract nouns (to form denominal verbs) and to adjectives (to form deadjectival verbs). It is further shown that the stative extension is less restricted in terms of co-occurrence with other verbal extensions. It can thus co-occur with the reciprocal (to show that the subject is entering a state of being acted upon), the applicative extension (to show that the subject is passively entering a state of being acted upon for the benefit of someone or at a certain location), and the causative extension to induce the meaning 'be able to be caused to do something'. It is generally established that the stative extension in Swahili has a wider scope of occurrence and can perform more functions than it has previously been assumed.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 14 October 2024  
Revised 10 February 2025  
Accepted 11 February 2025

## KEYWORDS

Swahili; verb; verbal extensions; suffix; stative; denominalisation; deadjectivisation

## SUBJECTS

Grammar, Syntax & Linguistic Structure; Semantics

## 1. Introduction

This study examines the behaviour of the stative extension in Swahili, a Bantu language spoken by about 100 million people across East and Central Africa (Mugane, 2022). It specifically describes the co-occurrence restrictions of the stative extension, explores various meanings induced by the stative extension, determines the scope of occurrence of the stative extension, and discusses the morphological functions of the stative extension. The stative extension, also referred to as the neuter extension (Bernander, 2018; Dom et al., 2016; Chavula, 2016; Schadeberg, 2003), is a suffix that attaches to transitive verbs to indicate an intransitive state, condition or capability (Lodhi, 2002, p. 5). The affixation of this morpheme requires that the base verbal radical be a transitive verb; consequently, the object of the base verb becomes the subject, and the subject disappears (Mchombo, 1993). Since it changes transitive verbs to intransitive ones, it is regarded as a valency-decreasing extension. In this case, the stative extension is used to express a state without reference to agency and to express potentiality (Lodhi, 2002). The Proto-Bantu reconstructed form for this extension is *\*-ɪk-* but it is currently realised in various forms in different Bantu languages, including *-k-*, *-ik-*, and *-ek-*, as illustrated in (1).

- (1) ben-ek-a 'be broken' (Kagulu, Dom et al., 2023, p. 204)
- tal-ik-a 'become tall' (Kagulu, Dom et al. 2023, p. 204)
- cem-ek-a 'be called' (Tumbuka, Chavula, 2016, p. 65)
- val-ek-a 'be closed' (Ndebele, Khumalo, 2009, p. 168)
- deny-ɪk-a 'be breakable' (Manda, Bernander, 2018, p. 178)

**CONTACT** Julius Taji ✉ [juliustaji@gmail.com/juliustaji@udsm.ac.tz](mailto:juliustaji@gmail.com/juliustaji@udsm.ac.tz) 📍 University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania & University of the Free State, South Africa

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

According to Schadeberg (2003), the stative or neuter extension usually attaches to two semantic classes of verbs, namely destruction verbs ('be breakable/be broken' [itr.] < 'break' [tr.], 'be splittable/be split' [itr.] < 'split' [tr.]) and experiencer verbs ('be visible' < 'see', 'be audible' < 'hear'). The examples provided in (1) above from various Bantu languages illustrate how the stative extension attaches to these classes of verbs.

In Swahili, the stative extension is quite productive. Like in other Bantu languages, the Swahili stative extension is a valency-decreasing extension that combines with a wide range of transitive verbs. Common forms of the stative extension in Swahili include *-ik-*, *-ek-* and *-ok-* subject to the rules of vowel harmony, as shown in (2).

- (2) kata 'cut' katika 'be cut'  
 vunja 'break' vunjika 'be broken'  
 soma 'read' someka 'be read'  
 jenga 'build' jengeka 'be built'  
 bomoa 'demolish' bomoka 'be demolished'

As a valency-decreasing suffix, the stative extension derives a one-place predicate from a two-place predicate and consequently suppresses the agent (Ngonyani, 2016), as shown in (3).

- (3) a. Juma a-li-fungu-a m-lango  
 1.Juma SM1-PST-open-FV 3-door  
 'Juma opened the door'. (Vitale, 1981, p. 23)  
 b. M-lango u-li-fung-uk-a  
 3-door SM3-PST-open-STAT-FV  
 'The door opened'. (Vitale, 1981, p. 24)

Besides serving as a valency-decreasing extension as illustrated in (3), the stative extension exhibits some unique morphosyntactic and semantic features in Swahili. In this language, the stative extension attaches not only to transitive verbs but also to nouns (including abstract and concrete nouns) and adjectives where it yields different meanings, as illustrated in (4).

- (4) a. Stative extension affixed to nouns  
 kambi 'camp' kambika 'camp (v)'  
 pombe 'alcohol' pombeka 'drink alcohol'  
 huzuni 'sadness' huzunika 'become sad'  
 b. Stative extension affixed to adjectives  
 bora 'better' boreka 'become better'  
 imara 'strong' imarika 'become strong'  
 chafu 'dirty' chafuka 'become dirty'

This pattern seems interesting and thus warrants a closer investigation to determine the scope of occurrence of the stative extension, the semantics that the affix is associated with and its morphological roles. This study, therefore, examines the Swahili stative extension to address four specific objectives: (i) to describe the co-occurrence restrictions of the stative extension, (ii) to explore various meanings induced by the stative extension, (iii) to determine the scope of occurrence of the stative extension, and (iv) to discuss the morphological functions of the stative extension.

The paper proceeds as follows: Section two describes the methodology employed in the study. Section 3 presents the Swahili verb template. Section 4 discusses the co-occurrence restrictions of the stative extension. Section 5 explores the various meanings induced by the stative extension. Section 6 examines the scope of occurrence of the stative extension. Section 7 discusses the morphological roles of the stative extension. Section 8 provides a conclusion.

## 2. Methods and materials

This study collected data from four main sources, namely online platforms, field notes, documentary reviews and elicitation. Data from online platforms included posts on Facebook, Instagram, Jamii Forums, and YouTube. From these platforms, Swahili constructions containing words with the stative extension

were extracted and analysed based on the aims of the study. Apart from online sources, a significant amount of data was obtained from field notes. This involved recording utterances containing words with the stative extension that were overheard from natural conversations in different contexts. Some of the words were recorded from face-to-face conversations while others were obtained from various media such as radio and TV. The third source of data was documentary review. This mainly involved reading the existing Swahili texts to extract constructions containing words with the stative extension. The texts were selected based on their ease of accessibility to the researcher.

As for elicitation, 10 adult native speakers of Swahili were consulted. These were presented with a list of Swahili words from different categories, including verbs, nouns and adjectives. They were then asked to derive verbs from these words using the stative extension. Additionally, for each verb they had formed, they were asked to construct an example sentence if they could. The list of words was prepared by the researcher since he is a native speaker of Swahili.

Data from all these sources were analysed based on the objectives of the study. Specifically, in each construction, words with the stative extension were identified and analysed to determine the occurrence and co-occurrence of the stative extension with other extensions, the meaning induced by the stative extension, and the roles performed by the stative extension in such words. This analysis helped to establish the categories of stems to which the stative extension attaches, including verbs, nouns and adjectives, and the morphological functions it serves, notably denominalisation and deadjectivisation. Apart from individual words containing the stative extension from these sources, sentential occurrences of the extension were also examined. This involved analysing the whole sentence containing a word with a stative extension to determine the meaning that the sentence conveys resulting from the stative extension. This analysis helped to identify various meanings conveyed by the stative extension in the sentences, including stative and potentiality readings.

### 3. The Swahili verb template

Swahili has a complex verb structure that mimics its agglutinating nature. The verb may comprise a verbal base and several affixes, including prefixes and suffixes. The verbal prefixes are mainly inflectional while the suffixes are mainly derivational. The verbal prefixes include markers for negation, tense and aspect, subject, object, and relative. The suffixes mainly include verbal extensions as well as mood and negation markers (Bearth, 2003; Meeussen, 1967; Miti, 2006; Nurse, 2008; Schadeberg, 1992). Following Meeussen (1967), the Swahili verbal template can be linearly represented as in (5).

(5) The Swahili verb structure (after Meeussen 1967, p. 109)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Pre-initial negation	Subject marker	Post-initial negation	Tense-aspect	Object marker	Relative marker	Verbal base	Final	Post-final

A complex Swahili sentence containing some of the elements above is presented in (6).

(6) Ha-tu-ta-wa-pik-i-a  
NEG-SM2-FUT-OM2-cook-APPL-FV  
'We will not cook for them.'

The verbal extensions differ in terms of frequency of use and productivity. As such, some of the verbal extensions are more productive while others are less productive. The most productive ones are the causative, passive, stative, applicative, and reciprocal while other extensions such as the contactive, impositive, extensive and positional are considered less productive (Gibson et al., 2023; Schadeberg, 2003). Below is the list of Swahili verb extensions.

(7) Swahili verb extensions (Polomé, 1967)

#### Verbal extension Form

Causative -ish-/-esh-

Applicative -i-/-e-

Passive -w-

Stative -ik-/-ek-

Reciprocal -an-

## Reversive -u/-o-

This analysis focuses on the stative extension, whose form in Swahili is *-ik-/-ek-* subject to the rules of vowel harmony.

## 4. Co-occurrence of the stative with other extensions

The stative extension can co-occur with several other extensions, notably the reciprocal extension *-an-*, the applicative extension *-i/-e-* and the causative extension *-ish-/-esh-*. Some of these combinations are highly productive while others are no longer productive and thus result in lexicalised forms, as will be explained in the respective sections. Each of these combinations follows a strict order and results in a slightly different meaning.

### 4.1. Stative + reciprocal

When the stative co-occurs with the reciprocal extension, the stative must precede the reciprocal, and the meaning induced is that the subject is entering a state of being acted upon. Seidl and Dimitriadis (2003) describe this combination as reciprocal stative. Forms resulting from this combination seem to be lexicalised as they yield rather idiosyncratic meanings. The following examples are from Gibson et al. (2023, p. 9) and Seidl and Dimitriadis (2003, p. 5).

- (8) Stative + reciprocal  
 ona 'see' onekana 'be seen'  
 pata 'obtain' patikana 'be available'  
 jua 'know' julikana 'be known'  
 sema 'say' semekana 'be rumoured'  
 kosa 'err' kosekana 'be unavailable'  
 shinda 'win' shindikana 'be impossible'

The above examples reveal quite interesting observations regarding the form and meaning of the reciprocal stative. Firstly, in all the words listed, the reciprocal cannot be left out, meaning that none of them allows the plain stative to occur. Leaving out the reciprocal results in unacceptable forms. Thus, the forms *\*oneka*, *\*patika*, *\*julika*, *\*koseka* and *\*shindika* are all ruled out. Secondly, the reciprocal statives do not convey any canonical reciprocal meaning of 'acting to one another'. Most of them convey the same meaning as plain statives, that is, indicating a state. For example, both the plain stative form *katika* 'be cut' and the reciprocal stative form *patikana* 'be available' indicate a state. Given this observation, it has often been argued that there is no semantic difference between plain stative and reciprocal stative forms in Swahili (Dammann, 1954; Ngonyani, 2016). However, some of the forms in (8) seem to convey rather idiosyncratic meanings. For example, *semekana* does not express only the state of something being said but also some information about the nature of the information and the way it is conveyed. It therefore relates to a rumour. Another interesting example is the word *shindikana* 'be impossible' which conveys the meaning which is almost the opposite of its source verb *shinda* 'win'.

### 4.2. Stative + applicative

When the stative co-occurs with the applicative extension, the stative must occur first. This combination shows that the subject is passively entering a state of being acted upon for the benefit of someone or at a certain location. Therefore, it introduces a beneficiary, a locative argument, or time. Ngonyani (2016, p. 64) offers the following examples.

- (9) a. A-ta-tum-ik-i-a mi-ezi sita.  
 SM1-FUT-send-STAT-APPL-FV 4-month 4.six  
 'She/he will serve for six months' Ngonyani (2016, p. 64)  
 b. Pambano hilo li-ta-fany-ik-i-a Arusha

5.contest 5.that SM5-FUT-do-STAT-APPL-FV Arusha  
 'The contest will take place in Arusha'. (Ngonyani 2016, p. 64)

More examples of applicative statives in Swahili include the following:

- (10) Stative+applicative  
 kata 'cut' katikia 'be cut for/at'  
 vunja 'break' vunjikia 'be broken for/at'  
 bomoa 'demolish' bomokea 'be demolished for/at'

Unlike reciprocal statives, whose plain stative counterparts are not permitted as shown in (8), in applicative statives, the applicative extension can be removed, and the remaining plain stative can still make sense. Thus, the forms *katika* 'be cut', *vunjika* 'be broken' and *bomoka* 'be demolished' that occur without the applicative extension in (10) are permitted.

Apart from expressing state in relation to a location or beneficiary, applicative statives can be used to introduce a malefactive argument. A malefactive argument indicates that something is in the state of being harmed or losing something. Extract (11) is illustrative.

- (11) a. Gari li-li-tu-harib-ik-i-a  
 9.car SM5-PST-OM2PL-break down-STAT-APPL-FV  
 'The car had a breakdown for us' (i.e. we had a breakdown)  
 b. Umeme u-li-ni-zim-ik-i-a  
 14.electricity SM14-PST-OM1SG-putt off-STAT-FV  
 'Power went off for me' (i.e. I was affected by the power cut)

The example in (11a) not only shows that the car experienced a breakdown but also indicates that someone was directly affected by the incident. Similarly, (11b) shows that someone was negatively affected by the power cut. This interpretation is possible through the stative-applicative combination.

#### 4.3. Stative + causative

This combination differs from the preceding two combinations (stative+applicative and stative+reciprocal) in that the causative commonly occurs first followed by the stative extension. This is consistent with the CARP principle (Hyman, 2003) which places the causative extension before all other extensions. The meaning induced by the stative-causative combination is 'be able to be caused to do something'. The combination seems to be less productive since very few examples have been encountered, as shown in (12).

- (12) Stative+causative  
 soma 'read' somesheka 'be able to be caused to read'  
 enda 'go/move' endesheka 'be able to be caused to move/be driven'  
 kopa 'loan' kopesheka 'be able to be loaned'

However, in addition to the order demonstrated in (12), there is a less common order in which the stative occurs first, thus countering the CARP principle. In this order, the causative reading dominates (13).

- (13) tuma 'send' tumikisha 'cause someone to be in the state of working'  
 Besides inducing the causative reading, the example in (13) has a stative reading, thus contrasting with those in (12) which have a potentiality reading (see Section 5.2 for more examples on potentiality reading). Therefore, the general meaning resulting from stative + causative combinations may differ depending on how these affixes are ordered.

### 5. The semantics of the stative extension

The stative extension has often been associated with two meanings, namely denoting state without mentioning the agent and expressing potentiality (Ashton, 1947; Ngonyani, 2016; Polomé, 1967; Schadeberg, 2003). Polomé (1967, p. 87) further explains that when the stative extension indicates a state, it denotes "a state as such (and not the process by which this state was reached, which is the

function of the passive)”. When used in the sense of indicating potentiality, the stative extension expresses the possibility for the subject to undergo a specific process. Both meanings are well-attested in Swahili, as will be explained in the subsequent sections.

### 5.1. Denoting state

Polomé (1967, p. 87) demonstrates the stative meaning of the stative extension by contrasting it with the passive extension. He argues that when used in the stative sense, the stative extension is affixed to inchoative verbs – verbs whose inherent meanings show a change of state or transition. In Swahili, when the stative extension is used with inchoative verbs, it describes the subject as either being in a state or condition or as entering a state or condition (Seidl & Dimitriadis, 2003, p. 7).

- (14) a. *Daraja li-me-vunj-ik-a*  
 5.bridge SM5-PERF-demolish-STAT-FV  
 ‘The bridge is broken.’  
 b. *Kamba i-li-kat-ik-a*  
 9.rope SM9-PST-cut-STAT-FV  
 ‘The rope got cut.’

In (14a), the subject *daraja* ‘bridge’ is described as being in the broken state, while in (14b), the subject *kamba* ‘rope’ is conceived as entering the state of being cut. Other verbs with a stative reading include the following:

- (15) *pasua* ‘split’ *pasuka* ‘be split’  
*ponda* ‘grind’ *pondeka* ‘be ground’  
*pinda* ‘bend’ *pindika* ‘be bent’  
*haribu* ‘destroy’ *haribika* ‘be destroyed’  
*kata* ‘cut’ *katika* ‘be cut’  
*sikia* ‘hear’ *sikika* ‘be heard’  
*ona* ‘see’ *onekana* ‘be seen’

As observed in (15), a significant number of change of state verbs relate to destruction and experienter verbs. This is consistent with Schadeberg (2003) who remarked that the stative or neuter extension usually attaches to destruction verbs and experienter verbs. Verbs of destruction denote the destruction of the entity described by the verb, as in *pasuka* ‘be split’, *katika* ‘be cut’ and *pinda* ‘be bent’. On the other hand, experienter verbs denote the experiencing of some emotion and bodily sensations like pain, hunger or cold-ness (Fleischhauer-Helfer, 2021). According to Levin (1993), experienter verbs encompass ‘psych verbs’ and ‘verbs of bodily state and damage to the body’, such as ‘hurt’ and ‘itch’. They also include perception verbs such as ‘hear’, ‘see’ and ‘listen’. The verbs *sikika* ‘be heard’ and *onekana* ‘be seen’ in (15) fall under this category.

### 5.2. Denoting potentiality

The potentiality reading of the stative extension arises when the extension expresses the possibility for the subject to undergo a definite process (Polomé, 1967). In this case, it indicates the ability or possibility of an action to be done. In some cases, potentiality indicates that the action can be done easily (Seidl & Dimitriadis, 2003). The examples in (16) are illustrative.

- (16) a. *Bidhaa hizi zi-ta-uz-ik-a?*  
 9.goods these SM9-FUT-sell-STAT-FV  
 ‘Will these goods be sellable?’  
 b. *Ki-jiji kile ha-ki-fik-ik-i kwa gari*  
 5-village that NEG-OM5-reach-STAT-FV by car  
 ‘That village is not accessible by car.’



In both (16a) and (16b), the stative extension induces the possibility of the action to be done. These contrast with the examples in (15) which simply express the state of their subjects.

In some cases, potentiality in Swahili can be expressed through a combination of a stative extension and other extensions such as the causative (17a), reciprocal (17b) and applicative (17c).

- (17) a. Stative + causative  
 kopa 'borrow' kopesheka 'be borrowable'  
 hama 'migrate' hamishika 'be migratable'  
 b. Stative + reciprocal,  
 ona 'see' onekana 'be visible'  
 pata 'get' patikana 'be available'  
 c. Stative + applicative  
 chukua 'take/carry' chukulika 'be carriable.'  
 gundua 'discover' gundulika 'be discoverable'

## 6. The scope of the stative extension in Swahili

As pointed out earlier, the literature indicates that the stative extension attaches to transitive verbs, thus making them intransitive (Lodhi, 2002; Ngonyani, 2016; Polomé, 1967; Schadeberg, 2003). Hence, the stative extension is regarded as a valency-decreasing extension. However, the findings of the present study indicate that the stative extension has a wider scope of application in Swahili compared to other Bantu languages; apart from attaching to transitive verbs, it also attaches to other word categories, including adjectives (as a deadjectivising suffix) and nouns (as a denominalising suffix). This striking feature warrants close investigation. This section takes a close look at this unique pattern exhibited by the Swahili stative extension. It specifically examines how this extension derives verbs from different word categories in Swahili and explores various meanings induced by the newly formed verbs.

Firstly, as in other Bantu languages, the stative extension canonically derives transitive verbs from intransitive ones in Swahili. It is thus used as a valency-decreasing suffix, as the following list illustrates.

- (18) **Transitive Intransitive**  
 lima 'cultivate' limika 'be cultivatable'  
 pika 'cook' pikika 'be cookable'  
 sikia 'hear' sikika 'be heard'  
 kata 'cut' katika 'be cut'  
 soma 'read' someka 'be readable'  
 jenga 'build' jengeka 'be built'  
 osha 'wash' osheka 'be washable'  
 bomoa 'demolish' bomoka 'be demolished'  
 cheza 'play' chezeka 'be playable'

In addition to these, there are some frozen forms whose transitive counterparts cannot be easily traced. These yield various idiosyncratic meanings that cannot be predicted (19).

- (19) sononeka 'agonise'  
 furika 'overflow'  
 nung'unika 'complain'

Besides attaching to transitive verbs, the stative extension in Swahili also derives verbs from nouns, thus functioning as a denominalising suffix. Examples of Swahili verbs derived from nouns through the stative extension are presented in (20).

- (20) **Noun Derived verb**  
 burudani 'entertainment' burudika 'be entertained'  
 huzuni 'sadness' huzunika 'be sad'  
 aibu 'shame' aibika 'be ashamed'



elimu 'education' elimika 'be educated'  
 heshima 'respect' heshimika 'be respected'

Moreover, in Swahili, the stative extension can be affixed to adjective stems to form verbs, thus serving as a deadjectivising suffix, as illustrated in (21).

(21) **Adjective Derived verb**

bora 'better' boreka 'become better'  
 imara 'strong' imarika 'become strong'  
 chafu 'dirty' chafuka 'become dirty'  
 rembo 'beautiful' rembeka 'become beautiful'  
 refu 'long/tall' refuka 'become long/tall'  
 kamili 'perfect' kamilika 'become perfect'

The use of the stative extension with adjective stems promotes the patient argument to a structurally subject position, just like what the passive extension does, as in (22).

- (22) a. Uchumi wa Tanzania u-me-endelea ku-imar-ik-a  
 14.economy of Tanzania SM14-PERF-continue INF-strong-STAT-FV  
 kwa ku-kuwa kwa asilimia 5.2  
 by INF-grow by per cent 5.2

'The Tanzanian economy has continued to grow by 5.2 per cent'. (Haji, 2024, *HabariLeo*, March 24, 2024).

The foregoing analysis shows that the occurrence of the stative extension is quite extensive in Swahili. It shows that apart from attaching to transitive verbs, which is also the case in several other Bantu languages, the Swahili stative extension exhibits some unique patterns as it derives verbs from various word categories, including transitive verbs, nouns, and adjectives. When the stative extension attaches to these different types of words, it performs different morphological and syntactic functions. These various functions of the stative extension are examined in the following section.

## 7. Functions of the stative extension in Swahili

This section explores various functions of the stative extension in Swahili. It establishes that the morphological role of the stative extension is mainly derivational; it derives verbs from other verbs and other word categories. It thus performs three specific functions, namely valency decreasing, denominalisation and deadjectivation.

### 7.1. The stative extension as a valency-decreasing suffix

Valency decreasing is the canonical function of the stative extension that has been reported in Swahili and other Bantu languages (Lodhi, 2002; Ngonyani, 2016; Polomé, 1967; Schadeberg, 2003). As a valency-decreasing suffix, the stative extension derives intransitive verbs from transitive verbs. By so doing, it decreases the valency of a verb from two arguments to only one. It thus serves as an important resource for verb-to-verb derivation. The sentences in (23b) and (23b) have their valencies decreased through affixation of the stative extension.

- (23) a. M-zee a-li-u-kata m-ti  
 1-old man SM1-PST-OM3-cut 3-tree  
 'The old man cut the tree.'  
 b. M-ti u-li-kat-ik-a  
 3-tree SM3-PST-cut-STAT-FV  
 'The tree was cut.'

- (24) a. Wezi wa-li-vunja m-lango  
 2.thieves SM2-PST-break 3-door  
 'Thieves broke the door.'

- b. M-lango u-li-vunj-ik-a  
3-door SM3-PST-break-STAT-FV  
'The door broke.'

When the stative extension is used as a valence-decreasing suffix, the agent is not mentioned. In this case, it is used to express state without reference to agency.

## 7.2. The stative extension as a denominalising suffix

Denominalisation is a linguistic mechanism whereby nouns come to be used as verbs (Clark & Clark, 1979, p. 167). According to Ilonga (2023, p. 11), this morphological process is specifically employed to express actions which in one way or another lack specific words for action. Contrary to the general assumption that in Bantu languages, the stative extension only attaches to verbs (see Lodhi, 2002; Ngonyani, 2016; Polomé, 1967; Schadeberg, 2003; Seidl & Dimitriadis, 2003), in Swahili, the stative extension also attaches to various types of nouns to form verbs, thus serving as a denominalising suffix. Some studies have reported that the use of the stative extension as a denominalising suffix is uncommon in Swahili, except in the field of advertising where it is used to evoke recipients' feelings on a particular product or service (see Ilonga, 2023; Kariuki et al., 2015). Ilonga (2023, p. 12) lists the following examples used in a bank's advertisement: *bimika* 'pay for insurance' derived from *bima* 'insurance', and *mobika* 'get mobile bank services' derived from the English word *mobile*. Similarly, Kariuki et al. (2015, p. 243) list examples such as *digitika* 'get digitalised' derived from the English word *digital*, and *dosika* 'get rich' derived from the Sheng word *mdosi* 'a wealthy person'. The findings of the present study show that denominalisation through the stative extension is gaining more widespread use beyond the advertising field. It is thus extensively used in daily communication in different contexts where it raises different meanings. For convenience, the present study distinguishes the denominalisation of concrete nouns from that of abstract as these result in slightly different meanings.

### 7.2.1. Denominalisation of concrete nouns

When the stative extension attaches to concrete nouns, it derives verbs with various meanings, the most prominent of which being 'consume or use something'. In this case, it indicates that the subject is gaining something or benefiting in some way from the action described by the verb. For example, through affixation of the stative extension, the noun *pombe* 'alcohol' derives the verb *pombeka* 'drink too much alcohol', as illustrated in (25).

- (25) a. Sasa u-na-pomb-ek-a bila ku-la u-na-taraji-a nini?

Now SM1-PRS-alcohol-STAT-FV without INF-eat SM1-PRS-expect-FV what When you drink alcohol without eating, what do you expect?

(Jamii Forums: <https://www.jamiiforums.com/threads/kumbe-pombe-zina-madhara-kiasi-hiki.2250369/page-2#post-51233965>)

- b. Wewe pomb-ek-a tu, ila u-tambu-e kwamba  
You 9.alcohol-STAT-FV just but SM1-know-SUBJ that  
pombe si chai  
9.alcohol not tea

'You just keep drinking, but you should remember that alcohol is not tea (Jamii Forums: <https://www.jamiiforums.com/threads/natamani-niwe-mlevi.2055249/page-3#post-44916362>)

Other verbs resulting from the denominalisation of concrete nouns exhibit a locative reading. They convey the meaning 'be located at x'. A good example of a Swahili word formed through this type of denominalisation is the word *kambika* 'to camp'. This denominalised form is commonly used among members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to refer to their tradition of camping for spiritual seminars and activities. Thus, in relation to this tradition, (26a) presents a commercial advertisement promoting the sale of tents to be used for camping while (26b) is the title of an online TV programme broadcasting events related to camping among members of the SDA Church. In both examples, the stative extension has been used to derive the verb *kambika* 'to camp' from the noun *kambi* 'camp'.

- (26) a. Kamb-ik-a na ofa ya mw-aka m-pya  
Camp-STAT-FV with offer of 3-year 3-new  
'Camp with new year offer' (Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/196HPgtgDF/>)  
b. Ku-kamb-ik-a pamoja na Yesu  
INF-camp-STAT-FV together with Jesus  
'Camping with Jesus' (YouTube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qd\\_IORlIdqs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qd_IORlIdqs))

Denominalisation of concrete nouns through the stative extension further denotes a sense of using some equipment, such as for transport or any other purpose. In this case, the concrete noun is derived into a verb which incorporates both the noun and the action through the stative extension, giving rise to the meaning 'travel by x'. The sentence in (27) contains the verb *bodabokeka* 'travel by motorbike taxi' from *bodaboda* 'motorbike taxi'. This sentence was overheard when a Swahili native speaker was responding to the question of whether he had a car.

- (27) (Do you have a car?)  
Mie si-na kabisa, sa hivi na-bodabod-ek-a  
I NEG-POSS.PRS at all now SM1.PRS-motorbike taxi-STAT-FV 'I don't have one (car), I currently use a motorbike taxi'

The foregoing meanings resulting from the denominalisation of concrete nouns through the stative extension indeed suggest that the interpretation of the stative extension in Swahili is so diverse. It indicates that the Swahili stative extension can be subjected to more diverse interpretations beyond stative and potentiality, including consuming or using something, being located at a certain point, or travelling by a certain means of transport. Indeed, most of the examples suggest that the stative extension often induces a sense of benefiting or gaining rather than losing or simply being in a state.

### 7.2.2. Denominalisation of abstract nouns

Another category of nouns that are often subjected to denominalisation through the stative extension is that of abstract nouns. The verbs resulting from this type of denominalisation have inchoative meaning; they show a change of state or transition. Therefore, when the stative extension is affixed to an abstract noun to form a verb, the subject is described as either being in a state or condition or as entering a state or condition. The following are examples of denominalised verbs in this category.

- (28) **Abstract noun Denominal verb**  
huzuni 'sadness' huzunika 'become sad'  
aibu 'shame' aibika 'be ashamed'  
elimu 'education' elimika 'be educated'  
heshima 'respect' heshimika 'be respected'  
gonjwa 'disease' gonjeka 'be ill'

Except for the word *gonjwa* 'disease' which derives *gonjeka* 'be ill', the words in (28) can also be denominalised using the causative extension, thus yielding the forms in (29).

- (29) **Abstract noun Denominal verb**  
huzuni 'sadness' huzunisha 'cause to be sad'  
aibu 'shame' aibisha 'cause to be ashamed'  
elimu 'education' elimisha 'cause to be educated/educate'  
heshima 'respect' heshimisha 'cause to be respected'

The pattern demonstrated in (29) suggests that besides the stative extension, denominalisation of abstract nouns in Swahili can also be expressed through the causative extension which occurs in the same slot as the stative extension. Indeed, most of the verbs analysed in this study have their causative counterparts, including those formed through deadjectivisation, as in *bora* 'better' whose causative and stative counterparts are *boresha* 'improve' and *boreka* 'become better/improve', respectively (see example 33). This study acknowledges the role of the causative extension in denominalisation and deadjectivisation but limits its scope of analysis to the stative extension as it has received less scholarly attention in Swahili as far as denominalisation is concerned.

Apart from the inchoative meaning illustrated in (29), other verbs resulting from the denominalisation of the abstract noun through the stative extension exhibit several different meanings that are not easily predictable. Some of them show that the subject is actively involved in some activity, as in *shereheka* 'party' (verb) derived from *sherehe* 'party' (30a) and *shangweka* 'celebrate' from *shangwe* 'celebration' (30b). However, others show that the subject is simply a passive recipient of an action described in a verb, as in *burudika* 'be entertained' from *burudani* 'entertainment'.

- (30) a. *Sherehe-k-a ki-shujaa*  
 Party-STAT-FV 7-hero  
 'Party heroically'.  
 (Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/kanuniward/posts/4302138483346540/>)  
 b. *Shangwe-k-a na mbungi la Serie A*  
 celebration-STAT-FV with 9.tournament of Serie A  
 'Enjoy life with Serie A tournament'  
 (Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/dstvtanzania/p/DDEut78sTxz/>)

The examples in (30) are both from commercial advertisements. Example (30a) was posted on Facebook to promote a music concert scheduled for Mashujaa Day in Kenya. Similarly, example (30b) was posted by a pay TV company on Instagram convincing potential customers to pay their subscription fees so that they could enjoy watching the Italian Football League, popularly known as Serie A.

In some cases, nominalisation through the stative extension takes place after the adaptation of a borrowed word. This applies to both concrete and abstract nouns. Most of such words are borrowed from English. The adaptation process simply involves the affixation of the stative extension to the English stem, leaving other elements intact. Verbs derived in this way are commonly used in commercial advertisements. In (31a), a supermarket called Skymart advertises its promotion whereby customers will receive gifts after purchasing some goods from them. Thus, using the stative extension, the advertisers derive the verb *giftika* 'receive a gift' from the English noun 'gift'. Similarly, in (31b), a seller is promoting a detergent called MAQ Washing Powder by convincing customers to take selfies with the detergent that they have purchased so that they can win Tsh. 500,000. To make this advertisement artistic, the seller derives the verb *selfika* 'take a selfie' from the English word 'selfie'.

- (31) a. *Gift-ik-a na Skymart*  
 Gift-STAT-FV with Skymart  
 'Get a gift from Skymart' (Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/skymarttz/p/DEWj-jftBZd/>)  
 b. *Self-ik-a na MAQ Washing Powder u-pat-e nafasi ya*  
 Selfie-STAT-FV with MAQ Washing Powder SM1-get.SUBJ chance of  
 ku-ji-shind-i-a Tshs. 500,000!  
 INF-REFL-win-APPL-FV Tshs. 500,000  
 (Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Blissconsumerbrands/posts/selfika-na-maq-washing-powder-upate-nafasi-ya-kujishindia-tshs-500000-kushiriki1/1948960165464395/>)

The denominalisation strategy illustrated in (31) is consistent with Ilonga (2023) who observed that adapted loan words that are nominalised through the stative extension are commonly used in the field of business advertisement to evoke consumers' feelings about a particular product or service.

Apart from attaching to borrowed stems, the stative extension also attaches to some complex stems formed through blending. A case in point from the data is the word *sensabika* 'be counted'. This word was first formed by blending two Swahili words, *sensa* 'census' and *hesabu* 'count' and then affixing the stative extension *-ik* (*sensa* + *hesabu* + *ik*), thus forming *sensabika* 'be counted'. The word *sensabika* was a common slogan used by the Tanzanian Government as a campaign to encourage people to participate in the 2022 National Census. A popular slogan containing this word was used by government leaders to encourage people to participate in the exercise. The slogan was "*Ushujaa ni ku-sensabika*" which roughly translates to 'Being a hero means being counted', as shown in (32).

- (32) *U-shujaa ni ku-sensa-b-ik-a*  
 14-hero is INF-census-count-STAT-FV

'Being a hero means being counted'.

(Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/swahilitimes/posts/1750306888654730/>)

Given the above instances of denominalisation through the stative extension, one would be interested to know what motivates Swahili speakers to employ this morphological process. One of the reasons could be speakers' inclination to use shorter forms of the language. Since there are no lexical terms to express verbs associated with certain nouns, language users are obliged to express such actions through sentences, which they find too tedious. To avoid such long sentences, speakers choose to derive a new verb straight from the noun using the available resources, in this case, the stative extension appears more useful. This is consistent with Clark and Clark's (1979) ideas of economising language. Since Swahili verbal expressions associated with the nouns above appear too long, speakers opt for shortening such expressions by deriving verbs using the stative extension. These findings conform with Ilonga (2023) who observed a similar pattern in Swahili commercial advertisements.

### 7.3. The stative extension as a deadjectivising suffix

Another striking feature of the stative extension in Swahili is its ability to derive verbs from adjectives. In this case, it is used as a deadjectivising suffix. Deadjectivisation through the stative extension is associated with denoting a state. Specifically, it indicates that the subject is changing from its previous quality to a new quality that is associated with the source adjective. For instance, *bora* 'better' derives *boreka* 'become better/improve'; and *rembo* 'beautiful' derives *rembeka* 'look beautiful'. The examples in (33) further illustrate this pattern.

- (33) a. Rais wetu Samia a-na-pambana kwa dhati kabisa  
 president our Samia SM1-PRS-struggle with commitment very  
 ku-hakik-ish-a ma-isha ya Wa-tanzania wote  
 INF-ensure -CAUS-FV 6-life of 2-Tanzanians all  
 ya-na-bor-ek-a  
 SM6-PRS-better-STAT-FV

'Our President, Samia is working hard to ensure that the life of all Tanzanians is improved'. (Jamii Forums: <https://www.jamiiforums.com/threads/mbunge-wa-gairo-ataja-sababu-za-ukata-wa-fedha-mitaani.1928441/#post-40720439>)

- b. Jaribu ku-tembea u-ji-on-ee wa-rembo  
 Try INF-walk SM1-REFL-see-SUBJ 2-beauties  
 wa-li-vyo-remb-ek-a bila hata make-up  
 SM2-PST-REL-beautiful-STAT-FV without even make-up

'Try to walk around and see how ladies look beautiful even without applying make-up'. (Jamii Forums: <https://www.jamiiforums.com/threads/hali-halisi-ya-wanawake-wa-kibongo.263247/page-2#post-3866785>)

As is evident in the examples above, the meaning of the deadjectivised stative verbs can easily be predicted; they both induce a sense of change from a previous state to the current.

## 8. Conclusion

This study sought to examine the stative extension in Swahili focusing on four specific objectives: (i) to describe the co-occurrence restrictions of the stative extension, (ii) to explore various meanings induced by the stative extension, (iii) to determine the scope of occurrence of the stative extension, and (iv) to discuss the morphological functions of the stative extension. The findings have revealed three interesting facts regarding the scope, co-occurrence restrictions, meaning and functions of the stative extension in Swahili. It has been established that the stative extension in Swahili has a wider scope of application than has previously been assumed. In this case, it occurs not only with transitive verbs to serve as a valency-decreasing affix, but it also occurs with several other types of words to serve different purposes. It thus derives verbs from nouns (as a denominaliser) and adjectives (as a deadjectiviser). In all these

cases, the stative extension yields stative and potentiality readings with some slightly additional meanings. It has further been shown that the stative suffix can co-occur with several other extensions, including the reciprocal (to show that the subject is entering a state of being acted upon); the applicative extension (to show that the subject is passively entering a state of being acted upon for the benefit of someone or at a certain location; and the causative extension where it induces the meaning 'be able to be caused to do something'. This extensive verbalisation through stative extensions seems to be motivated by speakers' interest toward shorter forms of the language, and the increase in the number of foreign nouns that do not have their verbal equivalents in Swahili. The findings of this study enrich the existing literature on the stative extension in Bantu languages and call for further analysis of this affix in other Bantu languages to determine whether it exhibits any idiosyncrasies like those of Swahili.

## Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Dr. Gerald Kimambo for proofreading the manuscript.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## About the author

**Julius Taji** is a senior lecturer at the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics, University of Dar es Salaam and a research associate at the Department of Linguistics and Language Practice, University of the Free State. His areas of specialisation include morphosyntax, lexicography and sign language linguistics.

## ORCID

Julius Taji  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0516-0583>

## References

- Ashton, E. O. (1947). *Swahili grammar* (2nd ed.). Longman.
- Bearth, T. (2003). Syntax. In D. Nurse & G. Philippson (Eds.), *The Bantu languages* (pp. 121–142). Routledge.
- Bernander, R. (2018). The neuter in Manda, with a focus on its reinterpretation as passive. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 36(3), 175–196. <https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2018.1552165>
- Chavula, J. J. (2016). *Verbal derivation and valency in Citumbuka*. LOT dissertation series. [Doctoral dissertation]. Netherlands Graduate School]. LOT.
- Clark, E. V., & Clark, H. H. (1979). When nouns surface as verbs. *Language*, 55(4), 767–811. <https://doi.org/10.2307/412745>
- Dammann, E. (1954). Reziprok und assoziativ in Bantusprachen. *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 104, 163–174.
- Dom, S., Bar-el, L., Kanijo, P., & Petzell, M. (2023). Middle voice in Bantu: In- and detransitivizing morphology in Kagulu. *STUF - Language Typology and Universals*, 76(2), 195–216. <https://doi.org/10.1515/stuf-2023-2008>
- Dom, S., Kulikov, L., & Bostoen, K. (2016). The middle as a voice category in Bantu: Setting the stage for further research. *Lingua Posnaniensis*, 58(2), 129–149. <https://doi.org/10.1515/linpo-2016-0012>
- Fleischhauer-Helfer, J. (2021). 8 experiencer verbs. In *Degree gradation of verbs* (pp. 263–286). Düsseldorf University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110720273-011>
- Gibson, H., Kula, N. C., Marten, L., & Taji, J. (2023). Suffix order restrictions in Bantu. In P. Ackema, S. Bendjaballah, E. Bonet, & A. Fábregas (Eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell companion to morphology* (pp. 1–33). Wiley Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119693604.morphcom002>
- Haji, S. (2024, 3 Mei). Nape: Uhuru wa vyombo vya habari nchini umeimarika. HabariLeo. <https://habarileo.co.tz/nape-uhuru-wa-vyombo-vya-habari-nchini-imeimarika/>
- Hyman, L. M. (2003). Suffix ordering in Bantu: A morphocentric approach. In G. Booij & J. van Marle (Eds.), *Yearbook of morphology* (pp. 245–281). Kluwer.
- Ilunga, E. (2023). Linguistic innovations in a multilingual digital advertising context in Tanzania: A translanguaging perspective. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 44(16), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2023.2234873>

- Kariuki, A., Kanana, F. E., & Kebeya, H. (2015). The growth and use of Sheng in advertisements in selected businesses in Kenya. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 27(2), 229–246. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2015.1029879>
- Khumalo, L. (2009). The passive and stative constructions in Ndebele: A comparative analysis. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 18(2), 154–174.
- Levin, B. (1993). *English verb classes and alternations*. University of Chicago Press.
- Lodhi, A. (2002). Verbal extensions in Bantu (the case of Swahili and Nyamwezi). *Africa & Asia*, 2, 4–26.
- Mchombo, S. (1993). A formal analysis of the stative construction in Bantu. *Journal of African Languages and Linguistics*, 14(1), 5–28. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jall.1993.14.1.5>
- Meeussen, A. E. (1967). Bantu grammatical reconstructions. *Africana Linguistica*, 3(1), 79–121. <https://doi.org/10.3406/aflin.1967.873>
- Miti, L. (2006). *Comparative Bantu phonology and morphology*. CASAS.
- Mugane, J. M. (2022, October 6). The story of how Swahili became Africa's most spoken language. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/the-story-of-how-swahili-became-africas-most-spoken-language-177259>
- Ngonyani, D. (2016). Pairwise combinations of Swahili applicative with other verb extensions. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 25(1), 52–71.
- Nurse, D. (2008). *Tense and aspect in Bantu*. Oxford University Press.
- Polomé, E. C. (1967). *Swahili language handbook*. Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Schadeberg, T. C. (1992). *A sketch of Swahili morphology* (Vol. 3). Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.
- Schadeberg, T. C. (2003). Derivation. In D. Nurse & G. Philippson (Eds.), *The Bantu languages* (pp. 71–89). Routledge.
- Seidl, A., & Dimitriadis, A. (2003). Statives and reciprocal morphology in Swahili. In P. Sauzet & A. Zribi-Hertz (Eds.), *Typologie des langues d'Afrique & universaux de la grammaire* (Vol. 1, pp. 239–284). L'Harmattan.
- Vitale, A. J. *Swahili Syntax*. Foris Publications (1981).