CONTEXTUAL EXPLICATION OF ABSOLUTE AND RELATIVE FORMS OF TENSE FORMS AND THEIR METHODS FOR TEACHING

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Abstract:*While the article Distinguishing between the absolute and relative tense paradigms and defining tense in the Bantu languages with reference to Zulu focuses on the distinction between absolute and relative tense and defining tense (with reference to the Bantu languages) tense as a verbal category is distinguished from both time and aspect. The semantic distinction between the absolute and relative tense paradigms of Zulu (and other Bantu languages) is represented schematically as a relation between utterance time, reference time (topic time in Klein's terms) and the eventuality. The options of defining absolute and relative tense separately or supplying an encompassing definition for both absolute and relative tenses are considered. Defining tense using an encompassing definition is preferred because that results in a single definition for tense.*

Key words: *languages, Tonhauser, however, remote past, immediate past, present, immediate future.*

THE ANALYSIS OF TENSE IN THE TRADITIONAL ZULU GRAMMARS.

In this article the focus is on tense forms that are marked in the verb such as those of the Bantu languages. This article does not consider languages with temporal marking on the nominal phrase. For a discussion on such instances of temporal marking refer to Nordlinger and Sadler (2004), Tonhauser (2005) and Haspelmath (2010). The treatment of tense in standard Zulu grammars is totally inadequate. Doke (1981:162) maintains that tenses should be subdivided according to implications. He distinguishes three implications, namely the simple, progressive (with -sa-) and exclusive (with se-) implications. He furthermore divides the tenses according to manner or aspect and in this regard distinguishes between indefinite, continuous and perfect. The examples he supplies to illustrate these distinctions are: "ngihlala (I sit), ngiyahlala (I am getting into a sitting posture and ngihlezi (I am sitting, i.e. I am set down)". He then distinguishes five basic tense divisions "according to time", namely the remote past, immediate past, present, immediate future and remote 2 future. Doke (1981:163) moreover refers to those tense forms that employ deficient1 verb forms as compound tenses. In his analysis of the tenses of the participial mood he (1981:192) labels a form such as "bengithanda" as a simple implication, continuous, immediate past tense of the participial mood. The forms containing the future marker are however classified as belonging to the contingent mood. The form "bengizothanda 'I would have loved, if…' is for instance classified as a simple, continuous, immediate past tense of the contingent mood. Van Eeden (1956:244) like Doke, distinguishes a present, near past, remote past, near future and remote future

tense. He, however, does not refer to the morpheme -ya- of the present tense as a tense morpheme but rather offers an exposition of the environments where this morpheme occurs as opposed to environments where it does not occur (1956:245-257). He refers to the forms containing the auxiliary -be (1956:320) as "samegestelde tydvorms met ba- / be-" (compound tense forms with ba- / be-). It is significant that Van Eeden (1956:245 footnote 2) asserts that these verb forms should be regarded as one grammatical and semantic whole. Van Wyk (1981) also refers to the relative tenses of Northern Sotho as "saamgestelde tye" (compound tenses). Ziervogel, Louw and Taljaard (1985:5) do not define tense but simply state that, "Tense forms may be divided into various present and various past and future tenses". They moreover distinguish between tenses that comprise single verb forms and tenses "formed by using an 'auxiliary' verb". They give the example "ngibe ngibona (I was seeing)" as an example of the latter type of tense. They (1985:47) refer to the present tense forms containing the morpheme -ya- as "the long present tense or continuous present tense". Apart from the present tense forms, Ziervogel, Louw and Taljaard (1985:91) also distinguish the future tenses with the auxiliaries -za- and -ya- and the remote past tense (1985:99) with -a-. These scholars refer to the verb forms with the basic verbal final morpheme -e/-ile as the "perfect tense". Ziervogel, Louw and Taljaard therefore distinguishes four single verb tense forms, namely the present, perfect, remote past and future tense. They include both the forms with the auxiliary -za- and those with the auxiliary -ya- under the category "future tense". 3 Taljaard and Bosch's handbook (1988) does not deviate significantly from Ziervogel, Louw and Taljaard's handbook as far as the discussion of tense is concerned. They too do not give a definition of mood. Taljaard and Bosch (1988:31) deviate from the afore-mentioned treatise of tense by referring to the present tense as the "so-called present tense", while they categorise the perfect forms as "aspect" (1988:55) and label the remote past tense as the "past tense" (1988:59). They too, include the two future tense forms (with the auxiliaries -za- and -ya-) under the heading "future tense" (1988:61). Poulos and Msimang (1998:254) also distinguish four basic tenses for Zulu, namely the present, future, perfect and past tense. These authors regard the morpheme -yathat occurs in the present tense positive form under certain conditions as "a tense marker" (1998:218). Poulos and Msimang (1998:306 et seq.) call the tense forms comprising the auxiliary verb stem –ba/-be "compound tenses". From their proposal for the two options to name these tenses (1998:307) it is clear that they regard these verb forms as two (or more) tenses that are combined. From the foregoing discussion of the treatment of tense in Zulu grammars, a number of observations can be made. Firstly, no Zulu grammarian has described tense as a deictic category. Lyons (1977:677) criticizes this shortcoming in the descriptions of tense as follows: Traditional discussions of the grammatical category of tense do not give sufficient emphasis to the fact that it is a deictic category; and they tend to be misleading in other respects as well. Secondly, no grammarian has offered a proper definition of tense. Thirdly, the grammarians do not agree on the number of tense forms to be distinguished nor on the

names to be used to refer to the individual tense forms. This is especially true of the two past tenses and the two future tenses. Fourthly, the scholars do not agree on the naming nor the function of the morpheme - ya- occurring in the present tense. Fifthly, the grammars generally regard the tense forms comprising the auxiliary forms -ba/-be as compound tenses, thus comprising two (or more) tenses and propose that 4 these tense forms should be named accordingly while others maintain that these tense forms denote continuity, hence the term "continuous…" in the names given to these tense forms. Both these assumptions are erroneous. Tense, time, aspect and modality While grammarians, such as, Gabbay and Moravcsik (1980:59), distinguish between tense and time, others, for example, De Klerk (1978), make no distinction between tense and time. It is essential to draw a clear distinction between these two categories. For a discussion of time reference and the time reckoning mechanisms operative in Zulu see Posthumus (1990). A clear distinction also needs to be made between tense and aspect. All these categories pertain to the verb, but they are not all verbal categories, neither do they reflect the same aspects of meaning. The two primary strategies employed by languages to locate events in time, relative to the deictic centre, are to vary the morphological form of the verb (tense marking) and to use descriptive lexical items (adverbials). These two time establishing mechanisms are both operative in Zulu. Generally the tense form and the temporal adverbial have the same relational value. This is the case in example 1 below where the adverbial izolo 'yesterday' has an anterior relational reference while the verb form sibone 'we saw' also marks the eventuality2 as being prior to coding time. Tense and time reference thus both have an anterior referential value in example 1 below. 1. Sibone inyamazane ibalekela izinja izolo. 'We see (near past) an antelope it run away from (present) the dogs yesterday.' 'We saw an antelope running away from the dogs yesterday.' In example 2 below the temporal adverbial clause kuthangi kusihlwa 'the evening of the day before yesterday' has an anterior referential value, while the verb form ngihlala 'I sit (down)' is a verb form associated with an event coinciding with coding time, thus present tense. 2. Kuthangi kusihlwa ngihlala esigqikini kanti sengizibeka phezu kwenyosi … 'The day before yesterday, the evening I sit (present) on the stool, but then I place (present) myself on top of a bee …'' 'The evening of the day before yesterday I sit (down) on the stool, but I was then putting myself onto a bee ...' Time is a semantic category that supersedes the temporal reference of the tense form. Time is that category which causes the event ngihlala in 2 to be interpreted as being anterior even though the verb tense form of the verb is present. This time interpretation 5 is brought about by the temporal adverbial kuthangi kusihlwa. The fact that the location of the eventuality in 2 does not coincide with the tense analysis should not be attributed to an inadequate tense analysis but to the influence of time interpretation. Apart from the time interpretation, aspectual distinctions may also exert an influence on the temporal interpretation of tense. Referring to the various applications of the present tense Du Plessis (1986:71) remarks: Xhosa has grammaticalized certain forms as the present tense: This grammaticalized tense

does not necessarily need to have one meaning or even have a meaning related to the name of the form. The fact that a verb in a particular tense form may denote a meaning other than the primary meaning associated with that particular tense form is well known. This does not invalidate the existence of that particular tense form. Lyons (1977:682) asserts: For instance English has certain functions which are not covered by any definition that one might give to the term 'past tense' in general linguistic theory; and English is not untypical in this respect. Indeed it is no exaggeration to say that there is probably no tense, mood or aspect in any language whose sole semantic function is the one that is implied by the name that is conventionally given to it in grammars of the language. In this regard Comrie (1985:19-20) points out that the past tense of English can for instance be used to express politeness apart from denoting past time. He says: The existence of such counterexamples to the general characterisation of the English past as indicating past time reference does not invalidate this general characterisation, given the distinction adopted here between basic and secondary meanings … Comrie moreover, distinguishes explicitly between tense and aspect. He (1985:14) declares: A system which relates entities to a reference point is termed a deictic system, and we can therefore say that tense is deictic. (By contrast, aspect is non-deictic, since a discussion of the internal temporal constituency of a situation is quite independent of its relation to any other time point.) Comrie clarifies the semantic nature of aspect in (1976:3) and (1985:6). He asserts (1985:6): 6 The internal temporal contour of a situation provides the conceptual basis for the notion of aspect, which refers to the grammaticalisation of expression of internal temporal constituency. Lyons (1977:704 et. seq.) emphasises the need to distinguish between tense and aspect and points out that the terms 'perfect' and 'imperfect' have been erroneously used with reference to as tense distinctions rather than to refer to aspectual distinctions. Scholars of the South-eastern Bantu languages are often guilty of using the terms perfect and imperfect with reference to tense. Even though Van Wyk used the terms 'imperfective' and 'perfective' with reference to the tense forms of Northern Sotho, he opted to reserve these terms for aspectual distinctions in a later publication by stating, (1987:283): I have used the term TENSE for these categories in the past, but now I consider ASPECT to be more appropriate. Louwrens also eventually discarded the use of the terms 'imperfect tense' and 'perfect tense'. He explains (1994:116): This analysis leads, inter alia, to the conclusions that (a) the terms perfect and imperfect "tense" should be done away with by replacing them with past tense and present tense respectively … Brisard and Meeuwis (2009:25) criticise Poulos and Bosch (1997) and Poulos and Msimang (1998) for their inappropriate use of the term 'perfect' with reference to tense. They say: Many Bantuists link up the alleged past reference of the form with some notion of perfect aspect. Poulos and Bosch (1997:22) refer to the cognate morpheme -ile (with allomorphs -e and -i) in Zulu (zone S) as the "perfect or past tense", not only treating perfect unconventionally as a category of tense, rather than aspect, but also presenting perfect and past as synonymous labels. Moreover, Poulos and Bosch observe that 7 the same form is used with stative

verbs. However, as translations of the latter into English do not involve any notion of pastness, they feel compelled to ascribe this use to a separate entry in the Zulu verb system, which they then call the 'stative tense' (Poulos and Bosch 1997:22–23). In another publication on Zulu (Poulos and Msimang 1998), past is not used as a synonym of perfect when the form is discussed. Yet these authors call the same form a "perfect tense" (1998:265; our emphasis), also insisting on the interpretation of "perfect" as a category of tense in the rest of the book… Future tense is often regarded as a modal distinction rather than a tense distinction. In this regard Lyons (1977:677) remarks: But the future is not like the past from the point of view of our experience and conceptualization of time. Futurity is never a purely temporal concept; it necessarily includes an element of prediction or some related modal* notion. Palmer (1991:7; 21) maintains that the distinction between mood and modality exactly parallels the distinction between tense and time. He (1991:21) furthermore, points out that, like mood, the category of tense is traditionally restricted to verbal morphology. He states that tense is a morphosyntactic category of the verb, even though its semantic function relates to the sentence as a whole. Posthumus (1988) offers a model for tense analysis in the Bantu languages with particular focus on Zulu. Defining tense It is evident from the foregoing discussion that tense has to be defined semantically in terms of deixis. The grammaticalisation of tense in languages is highlighted by Lyons (1977:678): It is an empirical fact … that tense, like person, is commonly, though not universally, realized in the morphological variations of the verb in languages. Lyons (1986 and 1977), Comrie (1976 and 1985), Levinson (1983) and Klein (1994) 8 all emphasise that tense is deictic and that the temporal interpretation of tense has to be done with three points of reference in mind. Klein (1994) uses the term 'topic time' instead of 'reference time' used by the other scholars of tense. Lyons (1968:304) describes the deictic nature of tense as follows: The essential characteristic of the category of tense is that it relates the time of the action, event or state of affairs referred to in the sentence to the time of utterance (the time of utterance being 'now'). Tense is therefore a deictic category … Lyons (1977:678) affirms the deictic nature of tense as follows: Tense, in those languages which have tense, is part of the deictic frame of temporal reference: it grammaticalizes the relationship which holds between the time of the situation that is being described and the temporal zero point of the deictic context. Comrie (1985:17) insists that a deictic centre or reference point is a crucial characteristic of all tense forms. Absolute tenses The term 'absolute tense' is a well-established, conventionalised term that has been used by linguists over decades. Moreover, Comrie (1985:36) himself points out that the term 'absolute tense' is somewhat misleading because absolute time reference is impossible in that time can only be interpreted from another established time point even though the present moment (the deictic centre) is the default point from which the temporal interpretation of events can be measured. In spite of this he asserts: There is thus a real sense in which taking the present moment as the deictic centre establishes the most basic tenses cross-linguistically, those in terms of which it is often easier to understand

deviations from absolute tense. We shall continue to use the traditional term absolute tense… Some scholars (notably Bohnemeyer (2014), Chung 1999 and 2007) and Haspelmath (2010) have used the term 'deictic tenses' while others (notably Nurse in Nurse and Philippson (2003)) and Soga (2011) have employed the term 'basic tenses' and yet others (notably Salmon in Jokic and Smith in Jokic and Smith (2003)) have used the term 'pure tenses' to refer to the absolute tenses. See Posthumus (2016:2) for inter alia a discussion on the terms used by different scholars to refer to the absolute tenses. 9 The term 'absolute tenses' is still the most widely used term and will be used in this article. Johnson (1981) rightly notes that the majority of current theories on tense have been influenced by Reichenbach (1947). Hundreds if not thousands of scholars have based their analysis of tense on Reichenbach's treatment of tense. Guenthner (1977:83), Nerbonne (1983:3), Comrie (1985), Klein (1994) Posthumus (1984) and Botne (1986) are a few of a host of scholars who basically concur with Reichenbach's analysis of tense. Followers of Reichenbach's tense analysis assert that the temporal interpretation of tense should be done in terms of the relation between speech time, event time and reference time. Nerbonne (1983:3) relies on Reichenbach's analysis of tense in explaining these three concepts: Reichenbach distinguished speech time s, event time e and reference time r. … Speech time is simply the time of utterance … while the time of the various episodes described constitutes event time. … reference time is the time "from which an event is seen". Kibort (2009:1390) also maintains that Reichenbach's parameters are adequate to model tense meanings in language and to 'provide a suitable foundation for a formal framework to model tense'. Since Reichenbach's publication of 1947, numerous scholars have described tense across languages defining the absolute tenses with respect to the deictic centre. Trask (2003:3) defines absolute tense based on Comrie's work when he pronounces: A tense form which takes the present moment as its point of reference, such as the simple past, present and future tenses found in many languages. The term is traditional, but regrettable, since the so-called absoluterelative tenses have just as much claim to being considered 'absolute'. Cf. relative tense, absolute-relative tense. (See Comrie 1985 for discussion) Rose, Beaudoin and Nurse (2002:1) also base their definition of 'absolute tense' on Comrie's model of tense analysis. They define absolute tense as: The term absolute tense is a traditional, though somewhat misleading term that has come to be used to refer to tenses which take the present moment as their deictic centre' (Comrie 1985:36). Comrie goes on to say that it would be more accurately 'interpreted to mean a tense which includes as part of its meaning the present moment as part of its deictic centre'. 10 Two important characteristics of tense are that tense is deictic and that tense is systematically marked in the verb by grammatical contrasts. Tense relates the temporality of eventualities relative to a selected reference point. Lyons (1968:304) asserts: The category of tense has to do with time-relations in so far as these are expressed by systematic grammatical contrasts. Lyons (1968:305) continues: The essential characteristic of the category of tense is that it relates the time of the action, event or state of affairs

referred to in the sentence to the time of utterance (the time of utterance being 'now'). Tense is therefore a deictic category... Posthumus (1999) differs from Comrie (1985:16) in as far as the identification of more than one deictic centre (Comrie (1985:16 and 17)) or the shifting of the deictic centre (Comrie (1985:108)) is concerned. Unlike Comrie, Posthumus (1999) maintains that the deictic centre can neither be shifted nor can there be more than one deictic centre in a particular tense form. The zero point or origo of the deictic centre is fixed by the person speaking (the "I"), the central place being the location of the speaker at the time of speech (the "here"), and the central time being the time at which the speaker encodes the utterance (the "now"). The speech participants have no command over these inherent characteristics of a deictic expression. Both Reichenbach and Comrie's definitions of tense thus make provision for two possibilities, namely to describe the event (eventuality) in relation to speech time (utterance time) or in relation to reference time. Comrie points out that the semantic interpretation of the eventuality is not always done from utterance time, but can also be made from another reference point. He (1985:56) says: In chapter 2 we illustrated absolute tense, whereby the reference point for the location of a situation in time is the present moment. We now turn to relative tense, where the reference point for the location of a situation is some point in time given by the context, not necessarily the present moment. Relative tenses 11 The description of tense as the interpretation of an eventuality from either utterance time or from reference time (as championed by Reichenbach) has led to the differentiation of tenses as being absolute or relative. The large majority of grammarians who have conducted research on tense have consistently distinguished between absolute and relative tenses. Tense forms whose temporal interpretation is done from the utterance time are labelled 'absolute tenses', while those whose temporal interpretation is done from a reference point (which is located either before the time of utterance or after it) are labelled 'relative tenses'. The term 'relative tense' is well-established and has been used over decades by numerous grammarians with reference to a variety of languages. Consider in this regard Gabbay and Rohrer (1978), Botne (1986), Posthumus (1988), Chang (1999), Declerk, Reed and Capelle (2008) Nurse (2008) and Zagona (2012).

The four auxiliary parts directly underneath the small squares (■) can combine with any of the four complementary verb parts immediately above the asterisks (*) in the figure above to form a relative tense. The arrows stretching from the rectangular shapes on the basic time line have not all been drawn in since that will clutter the figure. Arrows are supposed to be drawn in from each of the gaps in the rectangular shapes to each of the four asterisks denoting that each of the auxiliary parts can combine with any of the complementary verb parts to form the sixteen individual relative tenses of Zulu. The sentences below are examples of the sixteen relative tense forms of Zulu. 8. Izinkomo zabe ziphuzile (< zaziphuzile) ngaleso sikhathi. [Seen from RT: long before UT] 'The cows had already drank (water) at that time.' 9. Izinkomo zabe ziphuza (< zaziphuza) ngaleso sikhathi. [Seen from RT: long before UT] 'The cows had been drinking (water at that time).'

10. Izinkomo zabe zizophuza (< zazizophuza) ngaleso sikhathi. [Seen from RT: long before UT] 'The cows were going to drink (water) at that time.' 11. Izinkomo zabe ziyophuza (< zaziyophuza) ngaleso sikhathi. [Seen from RT: long before UT] 'The cows were going to drink (water) at that time.' 12. Izinkomo zibe ziphuzile (< beziphuzile) ngaleso sikhathi. [Seen from RT: shortly before UT] 'The cows had already drank (water) at that time.' 13. Izinkomo zibe ziphuza (< beziphuza) ngaleso sikhathi. [Seen from RT: shortly before UT] 'The cows had been drinking (water) at that time.' 14. Izinkomo zibe zizophuza (< bezizophuza) ngaleso sikhathi. [Seen from RT: shortly before UT] 'The cows were going to drink (water) at that time.' 15. Izinkomo zibe ziyophuza (< beziyophuza) ngaleso sikhathi. [Seen from RT: shortly before UT] 'The cows were going to drink (water) at that time.' 16. Izinkomo zizobe ziphuzile (< zobe ziphuzile) ngaleso sikhathi. [Seen from RT: shortly after UT] 'The cows will have drank (water) at that time.' 17. Izinkomo zizobe ziphuza (< zobe ziphuza) ngaleso sikhathi. [Seen from RT: shortly after UT] 'The cows will be drinking (water) at that time.' 18. Izinkomo zizobe zizophuza (< zobe zizophuza) ngaleso sikhathi. [Seen from RT: shortly after UT] 'The cows will still have to drink (water) at that time.' 19. Izinkomo zizobe ziyophuza (< zobe ziyophuza) ngaleso sikhathi. '[Seen from RT: shortly after UT] 'The cows will still have to drink (water) at that time.' 20. Izinkomo ziyobe ziphuzile ngaleso sikhathi. [Seen from RT: long after UT] 'The cows will have drank (water) at that time.' 21. Izinkomo ziyobe ziphuza ngaleso sikhathi. [Seen from RT: long after UT] 'The cows will be drinking (water) at that time.' 19 22. Izinkomo ziyobe zizophuza ngaleso sikhathi. [Seen from RT: long after UT] 'The cows will have to drink (water) at that time.' 23. Izinkomo ziyobe ziyophuza ngaleso sikhathi. [Seen from RT: long after UT] 'The cows will have to drink (water) at that time.'

Conclusion The temporal interpretation of the Zulu tense forms is described in terms of the relation between utterance time, reference time and the eventuality. Following this analysis tense is defined as, "the grammaticalised expression of time in the verb form as a relation between the time of utterance time, reference time and the eventuality. (In the case of the absolute tenses reference time coincides with utterance time.)" Zulu (and the Bantu languages in general) has two tense paradigms, namely the absolute and relative tenses. Figures 1 and 2 are schematic representations of the five absolute and sixteen relative tenses respectively.

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