

Polysemy, Distribution, and Variation in Kinyarwanda Verbal *ra-*
Supplemental Handout
Child Language Proseminar
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Kinyarwanda has morphological complexity:

- (1) *U-ra-gi-som-a-ho.*
2sg.SBJ-PROG-7.OBJ-read-IPFV-16.LOC
'You're reading it there.'

The prefix *ra-* has at least three different functions: a) present progressive, b) proposition-finality, and c) phonological homophony avoidance. (1) demonstrates the present progressive *ra-*.

In Kinyarwanda propositional content (bolded) must remain adjacent, in contrast to English (2a). In non-present-progressive contexts, *ra-* appears when the verb is proposition-final (2b).

- (2) a. ***Wahageze kare*** *ku bw'amahirwe.*
you arrived early fortunately
'You fortunately **arrived early.**'
- b. ***Warahageze*** *ku bw'amahirwe.*
you arrived fortunately
'You fortunately **arrived.**'

Lastly, (3) shows a *ra-* that isn't progressive or proposition-final.

- (3) *Nsanga warahageze ejo.*
I realize **you arrived yesterday**
'I realize you arrived yesterday.'

I argue that this *ra-* is phonologically inserted for homophony avoidance: *wahageze* is "taken."

Across all three functions, *ra-* is forbidden in negation (among other environments):

- (4)
- | | | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|-------------------|----|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| a. | <i>Barasoma</i> | <i>ibitabo.</i> | b. | <i>Ntibasoma</i> | <i>ibitabo.</i> |
| | they are reading | books | | they aren't reading | books |
| | 'They are reading books.' | | | 'They aren't reading books.' | |
| c. | <i>Barasomye</i> | <i>rwose.</i> | d. | <i>Ntibasomye</i> | <i>rwose.</i> |
| | they read | definitely | | they didn't read | definitely |
| | 'They definitely read.' | | | 'They definitely didn't read.' | |
| e. | <i>Nsanga</i> | <i>barasomye.</i> | f. | <i>Nsanga</i> | <i>ntibasomye.</i> |
| | I realize | they read | | I realize | they didn't read |
| | 'I realize they read.' | | | 'I realize they didn't read.' | |

As unmarked verbs have many other functions, the lack of *ra-* occasionally results in ambiguity. *ra-* disambiguates progressive from non-progressive in the present tense (5a-b) but there is no disambiguator when negated (5c-d).

- (5)
- | | | | | | |
|----|------------------------------|-----------------|----|--------------------------|-----------------|
| a. | <i>Barasoma</i> | <i>ibitabo.</i> | b. | <i>Basoma</i> | <i>ibitabo.</i> |
| | they are reading | books | | they read | books |
| | 'They are reading books.' | | | 'They read books.' | |
| c. | <i>Ntibasoma</i> | <i>ibitabo.</i> | d. | <i>Ntibasoma</i> | <i>ibitabo.</i> |
| | they aren't reading | books | | they don't read | books |
| | 'They aren't reading books.' | | | 'They don't read books.' | |