

# 17

## Makaa

(Narrow Bantu, Bantoid)

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### 17.1 General

Makaa is a northwestern Bantu language, identified by Guthrie (1971:33) as A83, and has some 80,000 speakers in the southeastern area of Cameroon. It has maintained a robust system of noun classifiers, with prefixes that have typical Bantu cognates. The tense/aspect system, which is similar to that of many other Bantu languages, was described by Daniel Heath in 1991, and a sketch of the language was published by Theresa Heath in 2003. Examples below come from both sources. This Bantu language is included here since it exemplifies a set of northwestern Bantu languages which differ significantly, especially in their analytic verbal morphology, from most other Bantu languages.

The dialect described by the Heaths has nine oral vowels (four front /i, ɪ, e, ε/, three central /ɨ, ə, ɑ/, two back /u, o/ and two nasalized vowels /ẽ, õ/. (The Heaths use different transcription systems for central vowels). Length is distinctive and there are two distinctive tones (H, L); floating H (acute accent) and L (grave accent) are part of the analysis; surface tones include rising (marked by a hachek), falling (marked by a circumflex), and downstepped H (marked by a superscript exclamation point).<sup>1</sup>

### 17.2 Word Order

Word order is S V O Other as in (1). Any argument of the verb may be left-dislocated for topicalization.

- (1) **mù-ùd**      **á**      **nyé**      **wíng**      **ò-mpyê**  
cl1-person    P<sub>2</sub>    he    H<sub>1</sub>    chase.away    cl2-dog  
'The person chased away the dogs (before yesterday).'

### 17.3 Verb Structure

The complicated structure of the Makaa verb is shown in (2) and exemplified in (3). The verbal complex has three parts: (i) a subject marker with a following tense marker, and a verb complex that begins and ends with a high tone, and is divided into (ii) a set of independent pre-stem morphemes, and (iii) a stem consisting of a root with prefixed OM and suffixed extension and final vowel. The high tone at the beginning of the verb complex is a replacive/floating tone, realised on the preceding or following syllable (depending on tonal context). The Near Past (P<sub>1</sub>) marker follows this H and is in turn

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations used in this chapter: CM= 'clause marker', VC= 'verbal complex', MacH = the term the Heaths use for the tonal delineation of parts of the verbal complex.

followed by a variety of clause markers which precede the Habitual and Progressive aspect markers, a variety of temporal adverbial elements, the object marker, and the main verb. Following this are the extensions, the Final Vowel, and a second high tone which displaces its tone to the right, onto any following constituent.

(2) [SM TM] [H<sub>1</sub> P<sub>1</sub> NEG=CM HAB PRG ADV/AUX [OM-root-EXT-FV] H<sub>2</sub>]

The pre-stem structure of the verb is analytic, so that instead of listing the verbal elements as word formatives, they are listed in (2) as ordered parts of the verbal complex (VC), the main formatives of the verb being analysed as separate elements with the following basic order (aspects follow the clause marker, and allow the combination of HAB with PRG). Theresa Heath makes the following observations on the status of different elements: The pre-root morphemes (clause marker, aspect markers, adverbials, and auxiliaries) are more loosely linked to the verb radical, because they can have both a H and an inflectional clitic (negative, hortative, imperative) separating them from the verb. “Neither the H nor a clitic can separate the post-root verbal extensions from the verb radical. Therefore, the pre-root morphemes are free forms, having the same syllable structures as other words, while post-root verbal extensions are bound forms, usually a suffix consisting of a continuant (**l, y, w, sh, or s**) and a vowel” (2003:243).

The two floating high tones (H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>) appear to have a significance for the ordering of the verbal piece, H<sub>1</sub> apparently indicates the relationship of the initial unit [subject marker + tense] to the main stem with all its parts, and H<sub>2</sub> likewise indicates the relationship of the whole verbal piece to a following nominal direct object or other verbal complement. In short, the two high tones delineate the elements of verb structure. The fact that H<sub>2</sub> is not used with P<sub>2</sub> or with the Present Progressive, however, as in the examples which follow (and in (6)) remains a problem that has no obvious explanation.

Morphemes occurring in the positions illustrated in (2) are listed below and exemplified in examples (4)-(8):

SM: 1s **mè**, 2s **wò**, 3s **nyè**, 1p (excl) **sè**, 1p (incl) **shé**, 1(dual) **shwé**, 2p **bí**, 3p **bwó**

TM: (Ignores associated tones, see 17.4, below). **ámè** P<sub>1</sub>, **a** P<sub>2</sub>, Ø present, **e** F<sub>1</sub>, **bá** F<sub>2</sub>

NEG: **a´** (non-past)

CM: **shí** (“polar focus”), **ká**, **mú**. There are others not listed here.

HAB: **dù**

PRG: **ngè**

ADV/AUX: **ná** ‘still/not yet’, **ɲwá** ‘almost’, **lèèl** ‘quickly’, **zè** ‘inceptive’ (from a verb meaning ‘come’), **kè** ‘terminative’ (from a verb meaning ‘go’), **bwèy** ‘long ago’ (from a verb meaning ‘take a long time’).

OM: 1s **mè**, 2s **wò**, 3s **è**. The object markers are limited in usage. They occur in some dialects only when the object is a Class 1 noun. Otherwise, the object is simply a pronoun or a noun following the verb.

EXT: Passive **-òw-**, Reflexive/Reciprocal **-lò-** / **-yò-**, Causative **-òl-** or vowel change **o** > **e**, Resultative **-ya-**.

FV: A very limited set: **-ε** (NEG), **-á** (plural IMP) **-i** (singular Imperative) (see example (11)).

(3) Examples:

	[1s TM]	[H <sub>1</sub>	P <sub>1</sub>	NEG	HAB	PRG	ROOT-EXT-FV	H <sub>2</sub> ]	OBJ
<b>PRS</b>									
HAB/PRG	<b>mè</b>	´			<b>dù</b>	<b>ngè</b>	<b>wíng</b>	´	<b>ò-mpyê</b>
	‘I am always chasing the dogs.’								
<b>P<sub>2</sub></b>									
HAB/PRG	<b>mè</b>	<b>a</b>	´		<b>dù</b>	<b>ngè</b>	<b>wíng</b>		<b>ò-mpyê</b>
	‘I was always chasing the dogs.’ (before yesterday)								
<b>P<sub>1</sub></b>									
HAB/PRG	<b>mè</b>	´	<b>ámè</b>		<b>dù</b>	<b>ngè</b>	<b>wíng</b>	´	<b>ò-mpyê</b>
	‘I was continually chasing the dogs.’ (yesterday)								
<b>NEG</b>	<b>mè</b>	<b>a</b>	´	<b>cal-</b>			<b>é</b>	´	<b>mèléndú</b>
	<b>mè àcálé mèléndú</b>								
	‘I do not cut down palm trees.’								

## 17.4 Tenses and aspects

There are five tenses, four of which are marked, and one unmarked, indicating a common Bantu division between a Vast Present (unmarked), and subsequent representation, at a secondary level, of time divided into a contrastive set of tenses: Far Past (P<sub>2</sub>), Near Past (P<sub>1</sub>), Near Future (F<sub>1</sub>), and Far Future (F<sub>2</sub>). In most situations the Far Past (P<sub>2</sub>) refers to situations earlier than the morning of the previous day, the Near Past (P<sub>1</sub>) to hodiernal or hesternal situations, the Present to general, current, or immediate future situations, the Near Future (F<sub>1</sub>) to hodiernal situations, and the Distant Future (F<sub>2</sub>) to situations after today. The different contrasts of tense and aspect, and the different levels of tense are illustrated in the diagram in §17.7 below, and the combinations of tense and aspect are illustrated by the grid in example (7). The aspectual contrasts are found with all of the tensed forms of the verb.

### 17.4.1 Tense Morphology

The following table of indicative tense forms is based on Theresa Heath (2003:344). The floating tone H<sub>1</sub> docks its high tone to the right if the tone to the right is high; if low, H<sub>1</sub> docks its tone to the left. These floating Hs are consequently only distinctive if both left and right tones are low.

(4) The five tenses of Makaa (based on T. Heath 2003:344)

TENSE	TM	VC		
Far Past (P <sub>2</sub> ),	<b>a</b> +	H <sub>1</sub>	VC	∅
Near Past (P <sub>1</sub> ),	H <sub>1</sub> +	<b>ámè</b>	VC	H <sub>2</sub>
Present	H <sub>1</sub> +	∅	VC	H <sub>2</sub>
Near Future (F <sub>1</sub> ),	<b>e</b> +	H <sub>1</sub>	VC	H <sub>2</sub>
Far Future (F <sub>2</sub> )	<b>bá</b> +	H <sub>1</sub>	VC	H <sub>2</sub>

The details of this scheme are not entirely clear. From the data it appears that **bá** + H<sub>1</sub> should be parallel to P<sub>2</sub> and F<sub>1</sub>, but according to the data given by Daniel Heath (see (7) below) it is followed by H<sub>1</sub>. There is in fact no way of telling, since it has an underlying high tone. There is also a H<sub>1</sub> before **ámè** which docks to the left in spite of the initial high tone on **ámè**; consequently in Daniel Heath's data a floating low is inserted before this formative to justify the left docking. It is clear, nevertheless, that P<sub>1</sub> is both morphologically and positionally different from the other tense markers (and appears to have been bi-morphemic). The five tenses are exemplified below (the arrow (→) indicates the resultant surface forms):

(5) a Vast Present

**mè** ' **wíng** ' **ò-mpyá** → **mè wíng ómpyè**  
 1s H<sub>1</sub> chase H<sub>2</sub> cl2-dog  
 'I am about to chase the dogs away.'

b Far Past

**mè a** ' **wíng** ' **ò-mpyè** → **mé a wíng ómpyè**  
 1s P<sub>2</sub> H<sub>1</sub> chase H<sub>2</sub> cl2-dog  
 'I chased the dogs away (before yesterday).'

c Near Past

**mè** ' **ámè wíng** ' **ò-mpyá** → **mé ámè wíng ómpyá**  
 1s H<sub>1</sub> P<sub>1</sub> chase H<sub>2</sub> cl2-dog  
 'I chased the dogs away (yesterday or today).'

d Near Future

**mè e wííng ò-mpyᵛ** → **mé e wííng ómpyᵛ**  
1s F<sub>1</sub> H<sub>1</sub> chase H<sub>2</sub> cl2-dog  
'I will chase the dogs away (later today).'

e Far Future

**mè bá wííng ò-mpyᵛ** → **mè bá wííng ómpyᵛ**  
1s F<sub>2</sub> H<sub>1</sub> chase H<sub>2</sub> cl2-dog  
'I will chase the dogs away (tomorrow or later).'

### 17.4.2 Aspect markers

There are four aspects, exemplified in (6a-d) below, of which one is unmarked and probably Performative (called Perfective by the Heaths, using the older undifferentiated terminology). The three marked aspects are Habitual, Progressive, and Retrospective (Perfect); the Habitual may be the typical generic Imperfective of the Vast Present, as seen elsewhere throughout Niger-Congo. These are all illustrated by examples of the Present tense in (6a-d). The Perfect is marked by **mé** ` , and the floating L causes a following H to be down-stepped as in (5d):

(6) The four aspects of Makaa

a Present Perfective (= Performative)

**mè wííng ò-mpyê** → **mè wííng ómpyê**  
1s H<sub>1</sub> chase H<sub>2</sub> cl2-dog  
'I am about to chase the dogs away.'

**mè à- càl-é mè-lóndú** → **mè àcálé mè-lóndú**  
I NEG cut-NEG H<sub>2</sub> cl6-palm tree  
'I do not cut down palm trees.'

b Present Habitual (Imperfective?)

**mè dè wííng ò-mpyᵛ** → **mé dè wííng ómpyᵛ**  
1s H<sub>1</sub> HAB chase H<sub>2</sub> cl2-dog  
'I (regularly) chase dogs away.'

c Present Progressive

**mè ngè wííng ò-mpyᵛ** → **mè ngè wííng ómpyᵛ**  
1s H<sub>1</sub> PRG chase H<sub>2</sub> cl2-dog  
'I am chasing the dogs away.'

d Present Perfect

**mè mé** ' wííng ' ò-mpyâ → **mè mé** ' wííng ómpyâ  
 1s PFT L chase H<sub>2</sub> cl2-dog  
 'I have chased the dogs away (and they haven't returned).'

The so-called Perfective that is used in 6b, with an habitual sense ("It is not my habit to cut down palm trees") is clearly a Performative, as it is in the English translation. Perfectives are only used of events that are complete in time: the typical Perfective is a marked form that represents a completed event.

17.4.3 Complete array of tense and aspect forms

We are now in a position to present a grid showing the various combinations of tense and aspect, as prepared by D. Heath for his original presentation (1991:14). The Perfect has been left out of this grid.

(7) Tenses and Aspects in Makaa

	1s	P <sub>2</sub>	H <sub>1</sub>	P <sub>1</sub>	HAB	PRG	STEM	H <sub>2</sub>	O
<b>PRES</b>									
PFM	mè						wííng		òmpyâ
PRG	mè					ngè	wííng		òmpyâ
HAB	mè				dù		wííng		òmpyâ
HAB/PRG	mè				dù	ngè	wííng		òmpyâ
<b>P<sub>2</sub></b>									
PFM	mè	a					wííng		òmpyâ
PRG	mè	a				ngè	wííng		òmpyâ
HAB	mè	a			dù		wííng		òmpyâ
HAB/PRG	mè	a			dù	ngè	wííng		òmpyâ
<b>P<sub>1</sub></b>									
PFM	mè			ámè			wííng		òmpyâ
PRG	mè			ámè		ngè	wííng		òmpyâ
HAB	mè			ámè	dù		wííng		òmpyâ
HAB/PRG	mè			ámè	dù	ngè	wííng		òmpyâ
<b>F<sub>1</sub></b>									
PFM	mè	e					wííng		òmpyâ
PRG	mè	e				ngè	wííng		òmpyâ
HAB	mè	e			dù		wííng		òmpyâ
HAB/PRG	mè	e			dù	ngè	wííng		òmpyâ

<b>F<sub>2</sub></b>						
PFM	mè	bà			wííng	òmpyê
PRG	mè	bà		ngè	wííng	òmpyê
HAB	mè	bà	dɛ̀		wííng	òmpyê
HAB/PRG	mè	bà	dɛ̀	ngè	wííng	òmpyê

## 17.5 Other categories

### 17.5.1 Mood

There are three moods, Indicative, Subjunctive, and Imperative, the Indicative being the unmarked or default form. Subjunctive and Imperative are both marked by high tone and a suffixed **-g**, as in (8) and (9) with the verb **càl** ‘cut’.

(8) **wò càlígí méléndú** ‘You should cut down palm trees!’

(9) **càlígí méléndú** ‘Cut down palm trees!’

The Subjunctive is marked by a high tone that replaces the first tone of the verb complex. The Subjunctive also differs from the Imperative by having a subject pronoun.

### 17.5.2 Focus

Any argument of the verb may be left-dislocated for topicalization. A fronted pronoun takes a contrastive suffix. Non-verbal clauses that use the focus **ó** instead of the regular copula are cleft constructions:

(10) **jíné dám ó Mpa** (high on first four vowels)  
 name my FOC Mpa  
 ‘It is my name that is Mpa.’

### 17.5.3 Imperative

Heath (2003:345) gives three examples:

(11) **cal-íg** (H on last vowel) ‘Cut down (s)!’  
**cal-i-g-í méléndú** (H on last four vowels) ‘Cut down (s) palm trees!’  
**cal-íg-á méléndú** (H on vowels, 3, 5, 6) ‘Cut down (p) palm trees!’

Thus, Imperatives have the suffix **-Vg** and a high tone on the final vowel of the verb complex. As can be seen, singular and plural Imperatives have different final vowels.

### 17.5.4 Relativization

“Relative clauses are marked with a high tone on the conjunction or in the verb, as are other subordinate clauses. Relative clauses are post-nominal. The head of the clause can

be a noun or the pronoun **-ang** with concord. Tonally the relative clause is marked by a high tone that replaces the high one of the subject NP and another high tone that replaces the tone of the first morpheme of the verb string, a relative marker agreeing with the head noun occurs at the end of the clause. example (Heath 2003:347):

- (12) **mè cɛɛl b-ang bwó dǐ ʼ bul ʼ sɛ́y wá**  
 1s want cl2-those 3p HAB MacH lot MacH work REL.cl2  
 ‘I like those who work hard.’

## 17.6 Negation

Data on negation in the sources are limited. There appears to be a binary negative contrast between Indicative and Subjunctive/Imperative. According to Theresa Heath (2003:345): “Negation in the indicative is marked by both a pre-stem clitic and a suffix in the position of Final Vowel. The clitic (toneless **a** + H + suffix **ɛ** or **ɛ́**) varies somewhat from tense to tense”, attaching itself to **shí** in past tenses, and with tonal adjustments elsewhere. She gives the following example (2003:346):

- (13) **mə a- cal ɛ ʼ mə-ləndu > mə̀ àcalé móléndú**  
 L L L H H L H H  
 I NEG cut + NEG MacH cl6-palm tree  
 ‘I do not cut down palm trees.’

In the Subjunctive and Imperative, which have volitional intent, negation is expressed by **kú** + L, and this low tone causes downstep of a following high, as in (14).

- (14) **ku ʼ wiing ʼ o-mpye > kú ʼwiing ómpyɔ̀**  
 H L HH H L-HL  
 NEG chase MacH cl2-dog  
 ‘Do not chase the dogs!’

However, while most examples do support this two-way contrast, a few suggest that negation may not be quite so simple. Consider these two sentences:

- (15) **mè dǐ mə́ jáámb > mə̀ dǐ mə́ jáámb**  
 1s NEG.FOC 1s cook  
 ‘It’s not me that cooks.’

- (16) **mè kú ɛ nyingə ɛ ngə wáámbilə ifambə**  
 1s NEG.SBJ MacH again MacH PRG clear field  
 ‘I am not clearing the fields again.’

The **dǐ** in (15) might be interpreted as a negative copula or focus marker. Heath labels the **kú** in (16) as a Negative Subjunctive, but it is not obvious to us how or why that sentence contains a Subjunctive.

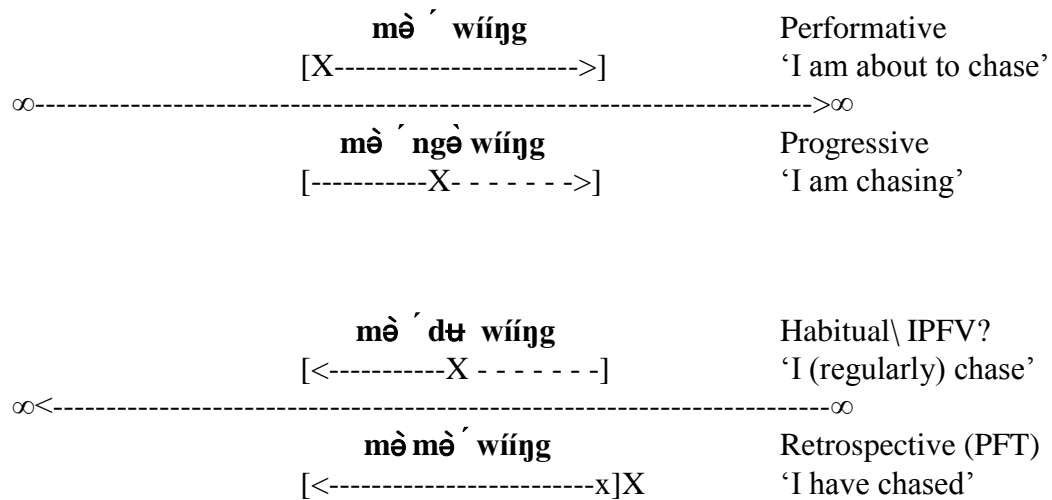


## 17.7 Diagram of the tense-aspect system

(All forms have 1<sup>st</sup> person subject pronoun **mè**)

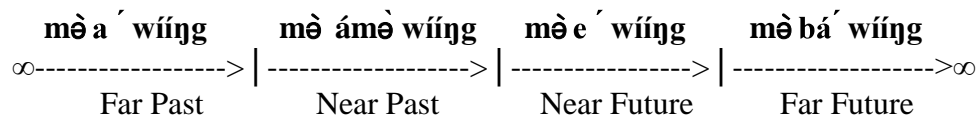
Stage 1

Vast Present



Stage 2

Tense contrasts



### REFERENCES

Heath, Daniel. 1991. Tense and Aspect in Makaa. In *Tense and Aspect in Eight Languages of Cameroon*, Anderson, Stephen C. & Bernard Comrie (eds.), 3-15. Dallas: SIL

Heath, Theresa. 2003. Makaa. In Nurse & Philipson (eds.), 335-348.