Making Nouns with Prefixes *ka-* and *na-* in Chichewa: An Alternative View

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Abstract

The paper discusses the noun prefixes *ka-* and *na-*, specifically those used to derive nouns that trigger the agreement marker traditionally associated with noun class 1 in Chichewa. The motivation for conducting this study comes from the current partial understanding of these prefixes in Chichewa and many other Bantu languages. In the existing analyses, the noun prefixes *ka-* and *na-* are taken either to be marginal or ceased to be noun prefixes in the synchronic grammars of some Bantu languages. In the present paper, I show that these two prefixes are productive in the synchronic grammar of Chichewa. I provide three types of evidence to support this view, namely (i) Chichewa neologisms, (ii) Chichewa names of places and persons, and (iii) nominal lexicon evidence from the Chichewa Monolingual Dictionary. I conclude that *ka-* and *na-* are not marginal prefixes in noun class 1 but productive prefixes of present-day Chichewa grammar.

1. Introduction

In this paper, I revisit the existing assumptions about the morpho-semantic status of the noun prefixes *ka-* and *na-*, specifically those that are used to derive nouns that trigger the agreement marker (AM) that is traditionally associated with noun class 1 (NC1) in Chichewa. The motivation for conducting this study emanates from the observed uncertainty surrounding the status and the role of these prefixes in Chichewa and other Bantu languages. First, the prefixes are not shown on the Bantu noun class schema in most Bantu studies. This exclusion

is empirically and theoretically significant because the Bantu noun class and nominalisation accounts are noun prefix-based such that any omission of some prefixes undermines the classification system and the nominalisation accounts. Second, studies that discuss these prefixes treat them with suspicion, referring to them as "prefix-like elements" or "former prefixes" (see Doke, 1927, p. 198). Others consider them frozen prefixes; they have diachronically become part of the nominal stem (Givón, 1971; Vail, 1971). Third, some studies consider the prefix *ka-* as originating from other noun classes, specifically from the diminutive (DIM) noun class 12 where the *ka-* in question is homophonous with the DIM prefix *ka-* as is the case in Chichewa and many other Bantu languages (see i.a. Givón, 1971; Greenberg, 1963; Maho, 1999; Mchombo, 2017; Ritter & Wiltschko, 2009; Schadeberg & Bostoen, 2019). It is common among Bantuists to claim that the current distribution of prefixes in the noun class schema is a result of language change and that what we have currently is a relic of the hypothesised parent Bantu language – variously referred to as *Proto-Bantu* or *Ur-Bantu* (see i.a. Cole, 1967; Demuth & Weschler, 2012; Doke, 1954; Givón, 1971, 1972; Maho, 1999; Mchombo, 1978; Okhotina, 1975).

From the pioneer studies to the present works, the prefixes *ka-* and *na-* have been treated as marginal in the description of the Chichewa noun class and nominalisation systems. Unsurprisingly, to my knowledge, except for Msaka (2019), all the key studies focusing on Chichewa nominal morphology do not discuss NC1 nouns derived by prefixes *ka-* and *na-* (see i.a. Bresnan & Mchombo, 1995; Corbett & Mtenje, 1987; Matiki, 2001; Mchombo, 2004; Watkins, 1937). However, I show that treating these prefixes as marginal is not correct for Chichewa, where these prefixes are currently robust and derive nouns like many other affixes in the language.

The rest of the present paper is structured as follows: In Section 2, I provide a brief background to the noun prefixes *ka-* and *na-* in Chichewa and other Bantu languages. In Section 3, I present three types of evidence showing that the prefixes are active and productive in the present grammar of Chichewa as

follows: In Subsection 3.1, I offer evidence from Chichewa neologisms, followed by Subsection 3.2, where I outline evidence from Chichewa names of places and individuals. In Subsection 3.3, I present nominal lexicon evidence from the Chichewa Monolingual Dictionary. I then discuss the common morpho-semantic properties of the prefixes *ka-* and *na-* in Section 4 before I conclude the paper in Section 5.

2. Background to the problem of the noun prefixes *ka-* and *na-*

2.1 The morphemes *ka-* and *na-* in Chichewa

Before I discuss the existing views about the noun prefixes *ka-* and *na-*, a clarification about their form is imperative. First, the morpheme *ka-* manifests in a range of morphosyntactic environments in Chichewa. There are three environments where *ka-* is associated with nominal expressions.[1] Therefore, a distinction should be drawn regarding three 'homophonous' *ka*-s as summarised below.

The first type is the diminutive (DIM) *ka-*, such as in (1).

(1) a.   munthu   ka-munthu
              person   DIM-person
              'a small person'

     b.   chiwala   ka-chiwala
              grasshopper   DIM-grasshopper
              'a small grasshopper'

As shown in (1), the DIM *ka-* consistently gives a diminutive reading of the noun to which it is attached. In the traditional literature, this type of *ka-* is analysed as a noun class 12 (NC12) prefix, a class that is associated with the agreement marker *ka-* (cf. Bresnan & Mchombo, 1995; Mchombo, 2004).

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1   There are, however, other instances where the morpheme *ka-* is associated with verbal and adjectival elements (see Msaka, 2019) but this is not of concern in the present paper.

The second type of *ka-* is the one that functions as a manner (MAN) nominalisation prefix (see i.a. Bresnan & Mchombo, 1995; Mchombo, 1998, 2017; Msaka, 2019; Nankwenya, 1992). Consider example (2).[2]

(2)   a.   -dy-a   ka-dy-edw-e
                -ROOT-FV$_{IND}$ MAN-ROOT-PASS-FV$_{SUBJ}$
                'eat'   'manner of walking/diet'

      b.   -lemb-a   ka-lemb-edw-e
                -ROOT-FV$_{IND}$ MAN-ROOT-PASS-FV$_{SUBJ}$
                'write'   'manner of writing/handwriting'

Like diminution with *ka-*, manner nominalisation using the prefix *ka-* is also a productive and predictable grammatical process in Chichewa. The derived nouns also trigger the agreement marker *ka-*. However, in the traditional noun class literature, many scholars do not recognise the manner nouns as belonging to any other class on the schema. At the same time, Mchombo (2004, 2017) classifies them to the diminutive noun class 12 (see the discussion in Msaka, 2019, pp. 78–79).

The third type of *ka-* is the one which is of central concern in the present paper. This *ka-* is observed to make nouns from verbal or nominal stems as shown in (3). The derived nouns control agreement marker set {*m(u)-, a-*}, one associated with the traditional NC1. I will refer to this prefix as the nominalisation prefix *ka-* (NP*ka*).

(3)   a.   dzutsa   ka-dzutsa
                VERB STEM   NP*ka*-VERB STEM
                'wake someone up'   'breakfast'

      b.   mbuzi   ka-mbuzi
                goat   NP*ka*-goat
                'type of chilli with the flavour of goat meat/type of fish'

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2   The atomic unit of verbal expressions in Chichewa is the so-called 'verb' root (VR) which obligatorily requires either a final vowel (FV) *e-* which expresses subjunctive (SUBJ) mood and *a-* which is associated with all other moods, such as indicative (IND) mood (see e.g. Hyman & Mtenje, 1999; Mchombo, 2004).

The morpho-semantic properties of nouns in (3) differ from those in (1-2). First, the nouns derived in (1-2) are highly predictable, i.e. one can tell the meaning by virtue of the prefix. However, the nouns derived by the type of *ka-* illustrated in (3) are not as predictable as those in (1-2). Second, the agreement markers (AMs) triggered by the nouns in (1-2) differ from those triggered by the nouns in (3), as shown in (4).

(4) a. Ka-munthu   **ka**-nu   **ka**-ti-sangalatsa.
         DIM-person   AM-3RDPRS.PL.POSS   SM-OM-impress
         'Your small person has impressed us.'

    b. Ka-dy-edw-e   **ka**-nu   **ka**-ti-sangalatsa.
        MAN-eat-PASS-FV$_{SUBJ}$ AM-3RDPRS.PL.POSS   SM-OM-impress
        'Your manner of eating has impressed us.'

    c. Ka-dzutsa   **wa**-nu   **wa**-ti-sangalatsa.
        NP*ka*-wake (breakfast)   AM-3RDPRS.PL.POSS   SM-OM-impress
        'Your breakfast has impressed us.'

In (4a-b), the DIM and MAN *ka-* nouns are shown to trigger AM *ka-* (one associated with the traditional NC12), however the noun *kadzutsa* in (4c) triggers the AM *wa-* (one associated with nouns in the traditional NC1). The distribution illustrated in (4) is observed to be very consistent in Chichewa (cf. Matiki, 2001; Msaka, 2019). Although the nouns such as those in (3) trigger NC1 AMs, the traditional literature considers the prefix *m(u)-* as the putative NC prefix for NC1 and null prefix for what is labelled as sub-NC1a (see the noun class schema tables in Katamba, 2006; Maho, 1999, p. 51; Matiki, 2001, p. 66). For the works that discuss *ka-* bearing nouns, the prefix *ka-* is understood differently, some claim that the prefixes of this kind are former prefixes (Maho, 1999, p. 74), others claim that it has moved from NC 12, or that it is a frozen prefix, i.e. has become part of the stem (see e.g. Givón, 1971, p. 35). However, I will show that the prefix *ka-* of the type illustrated in (3) is very productive and has no peculiar properties in Chichewa grammar.

Third, there are differences in the way these nouns are pluralised. The diminutive nouns are pluralised by the morpheme *ti-*, one associated with the traditional NC13. Consider example (5).

(5)   **Singular**   **Plural**
   a.   ka-mu-nthu   ti-a-nthu
             DIM-NC1-person   DIM-NC2-person
             "small person"   "small people"

   b   ka-galu   ti-a-galu
             DIM-dog   DIM-NC2-dog
             "small dog"   "small dogs"

Example (5) illustrates what is well described in the literature about singular-plural alternations of noun classes 12 and 13. The diminutive singular prefix *ka-* is replaced by the plural form, *ti-*. As I will show below, this is not the case with the NP*ka-*, which is under discussion in the present paper.

Although Mchombo (2004, 2017) associates the *ka-* derived manner nominals with NC12 which is a singular class, manner nominals are perceived as non-count although they alternatively take the prefix *ma-*. Both the *ka-* initial and *ma-*initial manner nominals do not show singular-plural distinction.[3] Consider the following:

(6)   a.   dy-   ka-dy-edw-e
              ROOT   MAN-ROOT-PASS-FV$_{SUBJ}$
              "eat"   "manner(s) of eating, diet(s)"

      b.   lemb-a   ka-lemb-edw-e
              ROOT   MAN-ROOT-PASS-FV$_{SUBJ}$
              "write"   "manner(s) of writing, handwriting(s)"

As shown in (6), the manner nominal *ka-*initial nouns do not morphologically mark singular or plural readings, whereas the NP*ka-*derived nouns pluralise by means of prefixing *a-*, one associated with NC2.

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3   For ease of exposition, I will not discuss *ma-*initial manner nominals. For further details see Msaka 2019:116-117.

(7)		**Singular**	**Plural**
	a.	ka-lozera	a-ka-lozera
		NP*ka*-point for	PL- NP*ka*-point for
		"contour ridge"	"contour ridges"
	b.	ka-dziotche	a-ka-dziotche
		NP*ka*-burn oneself	PL-NP*ka*-burn oneself
		"moth/brave person"	"moths/brave people"

Note that unlike the nouns putatively identified as forming NC1, the prefixation process involving NP*ka*-derived nouns is additive, i.e., the plural prefix does not replace any existing prefixes. However, this is not unique to this class nor to this type of nouns only but is observed in many other classes, such as NC5 and NC12 (see, Msaka, 2019). Therefore, in number morphology terms, just like with the agreement marking, nouns derived by NP*ka*- behave like typical NC1 nouns and are indeed different from the DIM- and manner-*ka*- nouns in (1-2) above.

Now, I turn to the prefix *na-*. Although the prefix *na-* is also found in verbal inflection as a past tense marker, unlike *ka-*, *na-* does not have multiple functions in nominal morphological processes in Chichewa. Instead, the prefix *na-* appears in two variations: high-toned *ná-* and low-toned *na-*. On the one hand, the high toned *ná-* is commonly observed to derive feminine kinship terms and less commonly to derive common nouns (8a). The low-toned *na-*, on the other hand, is commonly observed to derive common nouns as shown in (8b).

(8)	(a)	Jere	Ná-jere
		male clan name	NP*na* -clan name
			'female clan name'
	(b)	mwali	na-mwali
		nominal stem	NP*na* -nominal stem
			'virgin/initiate'

As shown in (8), among the Chewa people, adding the prefix *ná-* to a clan name implies that the addressee or the referent is female. However, other low-toned *na*-initial proper names are not clan names, such as *na-moto, na-mpanda,* etc. (see Section 3.2).

I propose that the morphemes *ná-* and *na-* are allomorphs because the nouns they derive share morpho-semantic properties and trigger the agreement marker set associated with NC1. Although the high-toned *ná-* is associated with the feminine kinship reading while the low-toned *na-* is for general nominal reading, the present study came across two non-clan nouns that bear the high-toned *na-*, namely *ná-nyongo* ('clitoris')[4] and *ná-madzi* ('noise made by swimming children'). For ease of exposition, I will continue to refer to the allomorphs *ná-* and *na-* by the low-toned variant *na-*, unless it is imperative to show the distinction.

In the next section, I present the context in which the discussion of prefixes *ka-* and *na-* has been cast in the previous studies of Chichewa and Bantu languages in general.

2.2 Previous understanding of the prefixes *ka-* and *na-*

The discussion of the noun prefixes *ka-* and *na-* is usually couched within the Bantu noun class system. The noun class framework adopted in the analysis of Chichewa noun class and nominalisation systems is that assumed to apply to many Bantu languages. This classification system was originally proposed by Bleek (1862, 1869) and Meinhof (1899, 1906, 1932) (henceforth the *Bleek-Meinhof system*). As such, many analyses of Chichewa nominal morphology, nominal classification or agreement marking make reference to the Bleek-Meinhof system (see i.a. Bresnan & Mchombo, 1995; Carstens, 1994; Matiki, 2001; Mchombo, 2004). The Bleek-Meinhof system is a reconstruction to Proto Bantu (PB), a hypothesised parent Bantu language (Katamba, 2006; Maho, 1999). These noun classes were identified

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4   Although not referring to any female kinship name, the noun refers to female genitalia which could still be considered as depicting the femininity

on the basis of the so-called noun class prefixes (NCPs).[5] As such, each noun class is assumed to comprise of one NCP. Bleek devised a numbering schema that identifies each noun class (NC) by means of Arabic numerals. The total number of these NCs varies from one language to another, for example Chichewa has 17, IciNdali and Ganda have 21 (Katamba, 2006; Kishindo, 1998), Shona has 22 (Fortune, 1955), etc. Table 1 shows the NC and NCP sets for Proto-Bantu and Chichewa.

Table 1: The Bleek-Meinhof noun class system depicting NCs in PB and modern Chichewa

NC	Proto-Bantu NCP	Chichewa NCP	Assumed semantics of the NCs
1	*mù-	m(u)-	humans
1a	*ø-	ø-	kinship terms, personified animals
2	*va-	a-	honorific, plural to NC1
2a	*va-	a-	honorific, plural to NC1a
3	*mu-	m(u)-	trees, plants, inanimates
4	*mi-	mi-	plural NC3
5	*li-	*li-	miscellaneous, paired things, augmentatives
6	*ma-	ma-	liquids, collectives, plural to NCs 5,9,11,14 and 15
7	*ki-	chi-	inanimates, manner/style, diminutives, augmentatives
8	*bi-	zi-	plural to NC7
9	*n-	*N	animals
10	*n-	*N	plural to NCs 9 and 11
11	*du-		long thin things, abstracts
12	*ka-	ka-	diminutives
13	*tu-	ti-	plural to NC12
14	*bu-	u-	abstract nouns, mass nouns, plural to NC12
15	*ku-	ku-	infinitives

5   Bleek is reported to have "hypothesized that noun class prefixes in Bantu originally were nouns in their own right which could appear in compounds such as 'person-x', 'tree-x'. As a result of grammaticalization and semantic bleaching, the relevant nouns lost their ability to appear independently and always had to be appended to another noun" (cited in Katamba, 2006, p. 106). However, these diachronic views have been strongly challenged in Amidu (1997) and Msaka (2019).

16	*pa-	pa-	locatives, 'near' or 'explicit'
17	*ku-	ku-	locatives, 'remote' or 'general'
18	*mu-	m(u)-	locatives, 'inside'
19	*pi-		diminutives
20	*γo		augmentatives, diminutives
21	*γi-		augmentatives, pejoratives
22	*γa-		plural to NC20
23	*γe-/*i-		locative, unspecified

Table 1 is based on Maho (1999), Mchombo (2004) and Katamba (2006).

As shown in Table 1 (the rightmost column), in addition to the NCP criterion, each NC is also assumed to have semantic coherence of some kind, for example nouns with human reference are assumed to belong to NC1, diminutives to NC12, etc.

However, Table 1 is an idealised picture of the noun class system. There are three important challenges, in this regard. First, the NCP criterion is not consistent, not all nouns bear prefixes (cf. Matiki, 2001; Msaka, 2019). Second, other noun prefixes are not considered in the framework, especially in Chichewa where such evidence has been adduced, see Table 2 below (see Msaka, 2019, Chapter 4 for all Chichewa NCs).

Third, the assumed semantic criteria are not systematic across the Bleek-Meinhof noun class framework (Amidu, 1997; Msaka, 2019). According to the traditional literature, these inconsistencies are generally blamed on the effects of language change (see i.a. Katamba, 2006, p. 116; Maho, 1999, p. 63; Richardson, 1967, p. 378). Given these inconsistencies, the NCP and the semantic criteria have been observed to poorly account for some Bantu languages' noun classification and agreement systems (see i.a. Amidu, 1997; Msaka, 2019). Of critical relevance to the present paper is the distribution of the noun prefixes *ka-* and *na-*, whose nouns trigger the same AM set as the traditional NC1. What is problematic about the Bleek-Meinhof system in this regard is that the framework does not systematically account for nouns that are not derived by the putative prefix *m(u)-* (such as the

noun prefixes *ka-* and *na*) but trigger the same AM set as the other NC1 prefix *m(u)*-derived nouns. Some studies (e.g. Maho, 1999; Vail, 1971) consider *ka-* initial nouns in NC1 as null prefix nouns, treating them more or less as the simplex null prefix nouns such as *galu* ('dog'). This view does not account for the fact that there is a whole range of *ka-* and *na*-initial nouns that, for 'unknown reasons', prefer the agreement marker for NC1. This distribution pattern begs the question of why are *ka-* and *na*-initial nouns (see Section 3.3 for statistical distribution) taking the same agreement marker as the putative *m(u)*-initial nouns.

Some previous studies acknowledge the role of the prefixes *ka-* and *na-* in NC1 in other Bantu languages. These studies allocate the nouns bearing *ka-*, *na-* and null prefixes to the traditional subclass NC1a. The prefix *na-* is generally associated with kinship terms and proper nouns as shown in Table 1 (see i.a. Bresnan & Mchombo, 1995; Demuth, 2000; Givón, 1971; Maho, 1999; van de Velde, 2019). However, as illustrated in (5), not all nouns derived by the prefix *na-* are kinship terms. Although the noun prefix *ka-* is associated with NC1a in some studies it is not even mentioned in some studies, especially in Chichewa. The only recognised *ka-*initial nouns are the DIM type which forms NC12. However, the DIM *ka-* and the NP*ka-* (which is of concern here) are different, as shown in (4) above. Evidence considered in the present study shows that both noun prefixes *ka-* and *na-* are equally productive just as the prefix *m(u)-*. Nouns derived using these prefixes also trigger AM set as any other NC1 nouns, which suggests that the view that these prefixes are peculiar or marginal may not be entirely correct in some Bantu languages, Chichewa being a case in point.

3. Empirical evidence in support of the noun prefixes *ka-* and *na-*

My burden in the present section is to provide evidence that shows that the prefixes *ka-* and *na-* are active and productive in the grammar of Chichewa. I present three types of evidence. In Section 3.1, I present evidence from neologisms that speakers in Malawi create to refer to new phenomena. In Section 3.2, I present evidence from names of places and individuals. Finally, in Section 3.3, I present nominal lexicon evidence from the Chichewa Monolingual Dictionary.

3.1 Chichewa neologisms

In the present section, I show that the prefixes *ka-* and *na-* are actively used in creating new words in Chichewa to describe or refer to new phenomena. In this regard, I follow some common nouns given to new artefacts or phenomena in Malawi in previous years.

3.1.1 Neologisms with *ka-*

In the early 1990s, Malawi saw the influx of second-hand clothes (Mhango & Niehm, 2005; Nyondo, 2013; US Embassy-Lilongwe, 1999). Since the clothes come in bails and in large quantities, they are usually displayed in heaps for buyers to rummage and choose that which appeals to them. The name for second-hand clothes in Malawi was derived from this display mode, *kaunjika* (Banik, 2020). This noun is derived by prefixing *ka-* to the verb *unjika* 'heap/pile up' as shown in (9).

(9)   unjik-a   ka-unjika
         V.STEM-FVIND   NP*ka*-heap
         'heap/pile up'   'second-hand clothes'

In addition to nouns that emerge spontaneously within the Chichewa linguistic communities, there are also formal processes of word formation that have used the noun prefix *ka-*. For example, before 1990s, Chichewa grammar was taught using wholesale borrowing of grammatical terms from English e.g. *verebu* 'verb', *nauni* 'noun' (see i.a. Loga, 1972; Loga & Mangoche, 1971; Nankwenya, 1978). This changed around early 1990s, when efforts were made to coin meaningful Chichewa grammatical terms (see i.a. Chichewa Board, 1991; Nankwenya, 1992). The term coined for phrase was *kapandamneni*, Lit. 'without a verb'. The word *kapandamneni* is derived as follows.

(10)   panda + mneni   ka-panda+mneni
         be without + verb   NP*ka* -be without a verb
                                   'phrase'

In a related development, in 2012, the Centre for Language Studies (CLS) of the University of Malawi embarked on a project of creating a glossary of Chichewa literary terms. Out of the 137 terms proposed in the unpublished booklet, there are four terms that are created by means of the prefix *ka-*. As with similar NP*ka*-nitial nouns, all these nouns control agreement marker set *m(u)-, u-, -a*, i.e. the traditional NC1. Consider the following from the Glossary of Literary Terms in Chichewa (Centre for Language Studies, 2014).

(11) a.   ka-loser-a
               NP*ka*-foretell-FV$_{IND}$
               'foreshadow'

     b.   ka-m-bwerez-a
               NP*ka*-PRE-repeat-FV$_{IND}$
               'anadiplosis'

     c.   ka-m-tsuts-e
               NP*ka*-PRE-oppose-FV$_{SUBJ}$
               'antithesis'

     d.   ka-m-shosh-e
               NP*ka*-PRE-provoke-FV$_{SUBJ}$
               'inciting force'

Note that examples (11b-d) derive from complex deverbal nouns. The prefix *m-* in all these cases is the subject marker of the complex verb. Cases where nouns are derived from complex verb phrases abound in Bantu (see Msaka & Biberauer, 2017). As shown in (10) and (11), the formal processes of word coinage also recognise the role of prefix *ka-* in Chichewa. I now turn to neologisms formed with the prefix *na-*.

3.1.2 Neologisms formed with *na-*

Just like the prefix *ka-*, *na-* is another popular prefix for creating neologisms. The first example is the word *namasipuni* 'water hyacinth', an exotic floating water weed. The name is derived as shown in (12).

(12)	sipuni	ma-sipuni	na-ma-sipuni
	spoon	PL-spoon	NPna -PL-sipuni
	'spoon'	'spoons'	'water hyacinth'

The name is not completely local as the noun stem *sipuni* 'spoon' is a loan word from English. The name was derived from the appearance of leaves of water hyacinth, resembling a spoon. I contend that the word *namasipuni* is a neologism, as it does not appear in Chichewa dictionaries and word lists before 2000 (see i.a. Barnes, 1902; Centre for Language Studies, 2000; Hetherwick, 1932; Rebman, 1877; Scott, 1929). This observation holds true despite the initial spotting of water hyacinths in certain parts of Malawi around the late 1960s (see Phiri et al., 2001). However, the word begins to appear in dictionaries published after 2000 (see i.a. Centre for Language Studies, 2008; Paas, 2009, 2017). The emergence of the word coincides with the phenomenon of water hyacinth infestation on the Shire River in the 1990s which consequently incapacitated power generation capacity, especially in 2001 where two power generation machinery collapsed due to blockage (Liabunya, 2007; Mzale, 2018; Mzuza, Chapola, Kapute, Chikopa, & Gondwe, 2015). *Namasipuni* became a popular word for it is commonly associated with massive load shedding across Malawi. Currently, the noun, *namasipuni* is undergoing semantic extension as it is also used to refer to 'sex workers' – the logic being that water hyacinth produces very beautiful flowers, but it also causes damage to hydro-electric machinery in the same way sex workers are culturally perceived to be beautiful, but may harbour or transmit deadly diseases.

The second and third neologisms to be considered here are associated with two phenomena of criminal nature. First, in 2009, Blantyre Secondary School and surrounding areas were terrorised by gruesome attacks by a suspected 'magic man' who was seen in underwear only (Ashforth, 2014; Chikoja, 2009). The name given to him was derived from his only clothing, underwear, *nachipanti* as illustrated in (13).

(13)	panti	chi-panti	na-chi-panti
	"underwear"	AUG-underwear	NP*na* -AUG-underwear
		'big underwear'	Lit. 'of big underwear'

The noun *panti* is also a loan word, more likely from pants, panties or underpants in some dialects of English.

Second, in 2016, some communities in the southern districts of Malawi were under mass hysteria over suspected blood suckers. The blood suckers were given the name *namapopa* 'one who sucks/pumps' (Chinele, 2017; Christopher, Kumbani, & Chikoko, 2017; Muheya, 2017). The noun is derived as shown in (14).

(14)	popa	ma-popa	na-ma-popa
	suck/pump	pre-suck/pump	NP*na* -PRE-suck/pump
		"one who pumps"	'one who sucks'

As shown in (12-14), *na-* is equally an active noun prefix in Chichewa. Interestingly, the prefix *na-* is attached to loan words, which are being added to the lexicon. However, not all *na-* or *ka-* bearing nouns are neologisms. In the next section, I further present examples of proper nouns derived through prefixes *ka-* and *na-*.

3.2 *Ka-* and *na-* initial proper names in Chichewa

In addition to the neologisms discussed above, traversing the country, especially in the central and southern regions of Malawi, one finds several names of places, mountains, rivers and individuals that suggest to have been derived by the prefixes *ka-* and *na-*, as shown in (15) (cf. Msaka, 2019, Chapter 4).

(15)	a.	Kasiya	f.	Námadzi
	b.	Kachulu	g.	Namitete
	c.	Kamuona	h.	Namikango
	d.	Kaning'a	i.	Namitembo
	e.	Kampepuza	j.	Nathenje

The names shown in (15) are derived by prefixing *ka-* or *na-* to verbal or nominal expressions. For example, (15a) and (15f) can be said to have been derived as follows:

(16) a.   siy-a   Ka-siya
               V.ROOT.FVIND   NP*ka* -stop
               stop'   'name of a place/person'

      b.   madzi   Ná/ná-madzi
               water   NP*na* -water
                                       'name of place/ a child who knows how to
                                       swim/noise made by swimming children'

On the one hand, *Kasiya* is derived by attaching the prefix *ka-* to the verb stem *-siya* 'stop' giving the literal reading 'one who stops'. *Námadzi*, on the other hand, is derived by prefixing *na-* to the noun *madzi* 'water'. In general, the noun *námadzi* refers to 'a child who knows how to swim because of growing up around water bodies/noise made by swimming children'. In many such nouns, the meanings are compositional, i.e. the source meaning of the stem to which they attach contributes to the meaning of the derived noun.

The second type of proper names are clan names. Among the Chewa and other tribes from southern Malawi, the high-toned prefix *ná-* is also well known for deriving female clan names from male counterparts, as shown in (17) (cf. Msaka, 2019, Chapter 4).

(17)   **Male clan names**   **Female clan names**
      a.   Phiri   Ná-phiri
      b.   Banda   Ná-banda
      c.   Zunga   Ná-zunga
      d.   Jere   Ná-jere

In addition to the regular clan names shown in (17) there are also what Professor Kishindo describes as *pseudo-clan* names (P.J. Kishindo, personal

communication, July 19 2020). To derive pseudo-clan names, the *ná-* is prefixed to common nouns or other part of speech as shown in (18).

(18)		**Proper noun**	**Pseudo-female-clan names**
	a.	magetsi 'electricity'	Námágetsi
	b.	njinga 'bicycle'	Nánjínga
	c.	siketi 'skirt'	Násíketi

Note that the clan names consistently take the high-toned allomorph, *ná-*. It is possibly due to examples such as those in (17) and (18) that some previous studies have divided the traditional NC1 into 1 and 1a, where the latter is identified as comprising kinship terms (see i.a. Maho, 1999; Matiki, 2001). However, according to the evidence being considered in the present study, it is not only the high-toned *ná-*, that is active (cf. Msaka, 2019).

The neologisms and proper names evidence presented in the preceding sections raises the question, are the prefixes *ka-* and *na-* as productive as the putative NC1 prefix *m(u)-* in the grammar of Chichewa? To answer this question, I further consider a statistically balanced data sample from the Chichewa Electronic Monolingual Dictionary.

3.3 The Chichewa nominal lexicon

The nominal lexicon data for the present study was taken from the Chichewa Electronic Monolingual Dictionary. This dictionary is an outcome of a lengthy lexicography project, which started in the early 1970s carried out by, firstly, the Chichewa Board and then the Centre for Language Studies (CLS) (Kamwendo, 1999; Kishindo, 2001). In total, the dictionary delivered 5822 nominal expressions. Of these, 1222 were found to control the *m(u)-, u-, -a* AM set associated with the traditional NC1. The nouns were also comprised of diverse morphological characteristics, not just those derived by prefixes *m-, ka-* or *na*. Consider Table 2.[6]

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6   The infinity symbol (∞), represents derivation processes that are highly productive such that not all the derived nouns are lemmatised in the dictionary.

Table 2: Morphological distribution of Chichewa nouns in the traditional NC1

	Derivation strategy	Morpheme	Number of lemmas	Example	Gloss
1	prefix	ka-	23.4% (287/1222) ∞	ka-fadala	'snouted beetle''
2	''	na-	8.5% (104/1222) ∞	na-nkalizi	'centipede''
3	prefix	m(u)-	12.2% (150/1222) ∞	m-londa	guard
4	prefix and suffix	m(u)- and -i		m-sodz-i	'fisher (man)'
5	suffix	-i		gonth-i	'deaf person'
6	conversion	ø/tone	3.1% (38/1222) ∞	gogoda	'high-heeled shoe'
7	prefix	sa-	1.1% (14/1222) ∞	sa-khuta	'glutton'
8	''	ma-	1.8% (23/1222) ∞	ma-taya	'affluent person'
9	''	w(o/a)-/o-/a-	∞	wo-lumala	'person with disability'
10	''	cha-	0.7% (9/1222) ∞	cha-mbampha	'a type of termite'
11	''	bwa-	1.3% (16/1222)	bwa-ntasa	'a type of frog'
12	''	tsa-	0.5% (6/1222)	tsa-munda	'colonialist, estate owner'
13	non-derived	ø	47.1% (575/1222)	galu	'dog'
14	compounding	ø		msungi-chuma	'treasurer'

Three important aspects of the data in Table 2 require explaining. First, the data set includes nouns that are derived by productive rules and those that are idiosyncratic (non-derived e.g. compounds). Since derived nouns result from productive morphological rules, not all nouns of this type are lexicalised and lemmatised in the dictionary. Therefore, at its best, this dataset represents the mechanisms that generate all possible novel nouns in Chichewa, not necessarily its quantitative value.

Second, besides the putative NC1 prefix *m-*, many other prefixes derive nouns in this group. However, although the other noun-types shown in the table are significant, the present study only focuses on prefixes *ka-* and *na-*. For a complete discussion of these forms see Msaka (2019, Chapter 4).

Third, what is referred to as a prefix in Bantu is not always a distinct morpheme as in some words the so-called prefix is grammaticalised or the so-called stem cannot be shown to be productively used in deriving other words (see Msaka 2019:119). Consider example (19).

(19) a.   mowa ("beer")   NC3
      b.   minga ("thorn/ thorns") NC4
      c.   dzina ("name")   NC5   ma-ina ("names")   NC6

In (19a-b), the mass nouns *mowa* and *minga* cannot be said to comprise of the prefix and stem. While (19c) shows singular and plural prefixes, both the singular prefix *dz-* and the stem *-ina* are not productive in Chichewa. In this regard, the more general way to refer to these nouns should be *m-*, *ka-* and *na-* initial bearing nouns, which include both the productive prefixes and the spurious forms. The data presented in Table 2 includes all nouns that trigger agreement markers associated with NC1. In this regard, assuming that the main classification criterion for NC1 nouns is the prefix *m-*, which only contributes 12.2% (150/1222) in the current data set is far from true. Whereas, the *ka-* and *na-*initial bearing nouns in the current data set contribute 23.4% (287/1222) and 8.5% (104/1222), respectively.

Although the nominal lexicon evidence is from a more recent Chichewa dictionary, very early Chichewa bilingual dictionaries and word lists also feature nouns derived by the prefixes *ka-* and *na-* (see i.a. Rebman, 1877; Scott, 1929). Scott (1929, p. 198) describes the prefix *ka-* as follows: "worthy of note are the words that denote AGENTS made by the prefix [ka-], as well as the animal named." With regard to *na-* Scott (1929, p. 418)) states that "it is also the initial of a whole class of nouns, names, animals …" All these observations in the earliest

Chichewa dictionaries show that the noun prefixes *ka-* and *na-* are not a more recent innovation of Chichewa grammar.

In the next section, I discuss the observed morpho-semantic properties of the nouns derived by prefixes *ka-* and *na-*.

4. Discussion

According to the preceding discussion, evidence is overwhelming that the noun prefixes *ka-* and *na-* are not marginal or irregular in Chichewa. The prefixes are found in three types of contexts, namely, neologisms, proper names, and nominal dictionary lexicon. Their omission in the descriptive and theoretical accounts of Chichewa grammar appears to be related to the common practice of adopting a *uniform diachronic Bantu grammar* in contrast to the language's synchronic evidence (Amidu, 1997), a problem labelled as the factor of *standardisation* (Maho, 1999) or *pan-dialectical grammars* (Janda, 1982). In this regard, the one-prefix-per-class view has been appealing to many Bantuists because it makes the traditional noun class system logical. Otherwise, identifying additional noun prefixes in one class challenges the Bleek-Meinhof system which dedicates one prefix per each noun class. As demonstrated in the preceding discussion, the tradition of uniform Bantu grammar has obscured unique grammatical features of Chichewa.

Consistently, *ka-* and *na-* bearing nouns considered in the present discussion control AM set associated with NC1 – these nouns have various meanings – what appears to be common among them are the prefixes. Contrary to the traditional view, the prefixes *ka-* and *na-* function like many other prefixes in Chichewa. Morpho-semantic wise, the prefixes *k*a- and *na-* derive nouns that are generally descriptive of the source noun or verb to which they attach. For example, denoting 'person/thing that looks like …', 'person/thing that has …' etc. (cf. Msaka, 2019, p. 91; Scott, 1929, p. 198, 418). Consider examples (20) and (21).

(20) a. fumbata   ka-fumbata
         V.STEM   NP*ka*-V.STEM
         'clench'   'tetanus'

	b.	gongono	ka-gongono	
		N.STEM	NP*ka*-knee	
		'knee'	'elbow'	
(21)	a.	f-a	ku-fa	na-ku-fa
		V.ROOT-FV	INFIN-V.STEM	NP*na*-INFIN-VSTEM
		'die'	'to die'	'deceased person'
	b.	nyongo	na-nyongo	
		gallbladder	NP*na*-gallbladder	
			'clitoris'	

In (21a), the noun *kafumbata* is derived by attaching the prefix *ka-* to the verb stem *fumbata*. The derived noun refers to the disease with the stiffness of muscles as one of its common symptoms and gives the victim the appearance of one clasping hands. The noun takes the agreement marker *wa-* one associated with NC1, as in *Kafumbata wa-fala* (Tetanus has spread). Similarly, the noun *nakufa* in (21a) is derived from a verb stem that means 'to die' and attached to the prefix *na-* to derive the noun meaning 'deceased person'. The nouns derived from nominal stems are also observed to follow the same pattern. In (20b), the noun *kagongono* 'elbow' is derived by attaching *ka-* to the noun *gongono* 'knee'. The prefix *ka-* in this instance likens the elbow to the knee because the physical features of the knee are somewhat similar to those of the elbow. In more broad terms, the prefixes *ka-* and *na-* play an associative role, for example giving the readings 'of clenching', 'of death', 'knee-like', and 'gallbladder-like'. All this points to nominalisation where the derived nouns either name an activity or state, or name an argument (e.g. agentive, instrumental, manner, objectives or reason nouns (cf. Comrie & Thompson, 2007). In all these cases, the derived nouns may retain properties of the verbal, ideophonic, or nominal expressions they are derived from, a phenomenon observed in many other languages (see i.a. Comrie & Thompson, 2007; Lieber, 2004).

With regard to the *ka-* and *na-* facts that are centrally relevant here, I can conclude that the view that the prefix *ka-* is marginal and unpredictable in Bantu languages does not hold for Chichewa. A proper description for the so-called NC1 nouns in Chichewa should include diverse other prefixes. The noun prefix *m-* cannot

be considered a key criterion for identifying nouns for this class. The dataset only contributes 12.2% (150/1222) to the nouns triggering the AM set associated with NC1. If we are to set a noun class or sub-noun class for each noun prefix, then we will have a proliferation of sub-noun classes in Chichewa (cf. Msaka, 2019). It is, therefore, proper to argue that the traditional analyses mischaracterise the role of the prefix *m-* to the extent that other derivational prefixes are not recognised equally in Chichewa.

5. Conclusion

In the present paper, I set out to challenge the traditional practice that treats the noun prefixes *ka-* and *na-* as marginal in Bantu languages, specifically focusing on Chichewa. I began by describing the prefixes. I showed that the noun prefix *ka-* plays several roles in Chichewa, I therefore showed that the noun prefix *ka-* under discussion differs significantly from two other types namely, the diminutive *ka-* of NC12 and the manner nominal prefix *ka-*, which does not have a dedicated main or sub noun class on the Bleek-Meinhof schema. Regarding the noun prefix *na-*, I showed that it is not as multifunctional as *ka-*, however it manifests in two forms namely, the high-toned *ná-* and the low-toned *na-*. The high toned *ná-* is associated with kinship terms while the low toned *na-* is associated with more general common and proper nouns. Having clarified the morpho-semantic nature of the relevant prefixes, I briefly understood the morphemes in the traditional literature. I showed that the previous analyses of the prefixes *ka-* and *na-* did not consider the morphemes' wide-spread nature in Chichewa. This is a problem because studies focusing on derivational morphology and the noun class system in Chichewa follow the Bleek-Meinhof noun class orientation. The challenge that arises from taking the Bleek-Meinhof assumptions is that every noun class is identified by one noun class prefix and does not entertain other equally important prefixes per each noun class. To show that this is a problem, I presented three types of evidence for Chichewa: neologisms, proper names, and nominal dictionary lexicon data. All the three types of evidence show that the prefixes *ka-* and *na-* are prevalent and are involved in very productive morphological processes. The prefixes derive

several noun types such that they are worth being recognised in the grammar of Chichewa. These prefixes are also not unique in their morpho-semantic function as they are found to derive nouns by attaching to verbal, ideophonic or nominal stems and the meanings of the derived nouns maintain some property of the source stems. Therefore, I argue that the prefixes *ka-* and *na-* are not marginal but are productive in the present grammar of Chichewa. The implication of this is that what is traditionally identified as NC1 is not made up of only one prefix *m-* or sub-prefix *na-* but rather several other prefixes (Msaka, 2019). This diversity of noun prefixes within one noun class has not been systematically incorporated into the traditional theory of Bantu noun class and nominalisation systems.

Abbreviations

NC - noun class, DIM - diminutive, MAN - manner nominalisation prefix, VR - verb root, PASS - passive, F - final vowel, IND - indicative, SUBJ - subjunctive, NP*ka* - nominalisation prefix ka-, NP*na-* nominalisation prefix *na-,* SM - subject marker, OM - object marker, PRE - prefix, PRS - person, PL - plural, POSS - possessive, AM - agreement marker, CLS - Centre for Language Studies

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