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## A Primer of Cicopi Plural Inflectional Morphology For English Speakers

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# A PRIMER OF CICOPI PLURAL INFLECTIONAL MORPHOLOGY FOR ENGLISH SPEAKERS

FELIX MAIELANE MANGANHELA

## ABSTRACT

*From the mid-1990s, with the advent of technology, English has become the language of globalization, an international language, a Lingua Franca for intercultural communication (Jenkins 2015, p. 10; Kirkpatrick 2008, p. 36), and the number of English speakers is increasing. At the same time, the Bantu languages and other languages around the world became primacy in linguistic research, contributing to language learning and revitalization of many oral languages. This paper discusses inflectional morphology, particularly the plural marker affixes for nouns in Cicopi. The primary goal is to help English learners, missionaries, Peace Corps volunteers, or any speakers of other languages that are willing to learn Cicopi. The paper also grasps peculiar affixation processes in inflectional morphology that make Cicopi distinctive to show how this language shifted from the 19 Proto-Bantu nominal classes as a result of language change. Moreover, the analysis gives insights on challenges that speakers of other languages, whose affixation rules match with English, might face when learning Cicopi, or how speakers of Cicopi find it challenging when dealing with inflectional morphology in English.*

## 1.0 Morphology

Morphology is a branch of linguistics that studies and describes the patterns of word formation, including inflection, derivation, and compounding of a language. While structural morphology studies the internal structure of affixes and their position in words, functional morphology is more concerned with the syntactic function of affixes in grammar. Linguists classify affixes in five categories: prefixes, suffixes, infixes, interfixes, and circumfixes. Depending on their function, affixes may be labeled as inflectional morphemes or derivational morphemes. According to Koffi (2015, p. 113), while inflectional morphemes are claimed to only add grammatical information, the derivational morphemes usually change the part of speech or syntactic category of the words they are attached to.

## 1.1 Inflectional Morphology in English

Linguists argue that most human languages have affixes that allow their vocabulary expansion through morphological rules. Derivational morphemes are by far the most frequent morphemes in most languages, and English is claimed to have more than a hundred derivational suffixes. However, based on their syntactic function and meaning English only accounts for 8 to 10 inflectional morphemes. This is because some linguists stick to the form rather than the syntactic function of the morphemes <-er> and <-est>, especially when dealing with adverbs. In all human languages affixation is assumed to be regular or irregular, and English is not an exception.

### 1.1.1 Regular Inflection in English

Regular inflections follow standard rules and affixes can be predicted. The regular plural marker in English and other European languages, such as French and Portuguese, is the morpheme <-s><sup>1</sup> as shown in the examples: car <cars>, key<keys>.

### 1.1.2 Irregular Affixations and Morphological Irregularities

Unlike regular inflections, irregular affixations do not follow standard rules. They are so complex and at certain levels, we fail to recognize some words from their original roots. In the following section, I describe the 5 common irregular word formation processes in English.

#### 1.1.2.1 Allomorphy

Allomorphy is a word formation process whereby a morpheme has alternate phonetic forms. The morphophonemic rule is accounted for the plural morpheme because its application is both determined by the phonology and the morphology (Fromkin et al. 1988, p. 146). In some cases the morphemes <-es/-en> are used on the behalf the morpheme <-s>, as its allomorphs. When words end in graphemes such as <ch >, <s>, <sh>, <o>, or <x>, the <-es<sup>2</sup>>, spelling is predicted: peach <peaches>, bus <buses>, dish <dishes>, potato <potatoes>, box <boxes>. However, the morpheme <-en> is complex because its pronunciation and/ or spelling is not predictable within its environments as in ox <oxen> and child <children>.

#### 1.1.2.2 Internal Vowel Change Irregularity

One of the peculiar characteristics of irregularity due to vowel change is the resemblance of the derived words with their original roots. Yet, the consonants remain the same and vowel change is the most remarkable morphological transformation. While in some cases the change occurs with a single vowel, in other words the change affects two vowels. See the examples: man <men>, tooth <teeth>.

#### 1.1.2.3 Irregular Affixation in Loan Words

Most human languages enrich their vocabulary through borrowings or neologisms. Greenberg (1978, p. 99) coined that borrowing is a process whereby a certain language acquires some structural properties from another language that is considered contemporary to it. The Early Modern period is coined as one of increasing contact between European languages. Many writers introduced neologisms/new words as a result of a complex act of word creation.

Going further, Greenberg underlines that borrowing constraints account for borrowings arguing that non-distinctive/non-structurally classes classified as subsets of all human languages cannot be borrowed. Goodland (2013, p. 18) highlights that neologisms, loan words/borrowings may undergo phonetic, lexical, and meaning/usage change. In most cases, borrowings keep both their original singular and plural forms. However, in certain cases, inflectional morphological patterns will apply to conform the new vocabulary to the target language. See the examples: curriculum <curricula>, stadium <stadia/stadiums>, cactus <cacti/cactuses>.

<sup>1</sup> Also used as the regular present tense marker for 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular in English: s/he/it talks; a possessive marker: <Wanda's laptop>. Some nouns in English are spelt with <-s> but their meaning is singular: <news>, <genetics> among others.

<sup>2</sup> Also used as the plural marker in nouns ending in <-f/-fe> that change <-f> into <-v>: knife <knives>, or nouns ending in the semi-vowel <-y> that is changed into <-i>: body <bodies>.

### 1.1.2.4 Zero Forms Irregularity

Zero forms irregularity is a word formation process in which the derived words usually preserve their original forms. Thus, the spelling and pronunciation of words belonging to this category are invariable in both their singular and plural forms as shown in the examples: <sheep>, <antelope>, <fish<sup>3</sup>> among others.

### 1.1.2.5 Suppletion Irregularity

Linguists refer to suppletive forms as the most complex and silly derivations in inflectional morphology. Koffi (2014, p. 116) highlights that the derived or inflected words are so irregular that they have no phonetic or spelling similarities with their original roots. Consequently, even with dictionaries, it is extremely hard or even impossible to find their meaning if we do not master the etymology of such words. Suppletive nouns are rare in English. Irregularity due to suppletion is common with verbs and adjectives.

The present and past tense of the verb ‘to be’ <I *am*, you/we/they *are*, she/he/it *is*; I/she/he/it *was*, you/we/they *were*, the past simple of ‘go’ are some examples of suppletive forms. The comparative and superlative of <good> which are <*better, best*>, <far> <*further, furthest*> illustrate suppletion with adjectives. In the following sections, I describe the plural marker affixes of Cicopi, starting by some background information about this language.

## 2.0 Who speaks Copi/Cicopi?

Cicopi is one of the Niger-Congo Bantu languages spoken in Mozambique, a multilingual country in Southern Africa with 43 local languages. With 760,000 speakers, (Lewis, 2009, p.158), Cicopi is among the 17 vital languages spoken in Mozambique. In Doke classification, the 43 Mozambican languages are divided into five zones: two major (50 and 60) and three subsidiaries (51, 52 and 62); and Cicopi takes the position 60 | 5 | 1, (Ngunga 2004: 42). Nowadays, Cicopi is spreading in Maputo, and Gaza provinces, but Quissico remains the center in Inhambane. This language accounts for 6 variants: Cicopi, Cikhambani, Cilambwe, Cilengue, Cindonge, and Citonga. Ngunga and Siteo (2000) argue that these dialects are all mutually inherently intelligible, and have 44 per cent of lexical similarity with Gitonga, which is also spoken in Inhambane.

Nominal classes, which are grammatical systems overtly used by some languages to categorize nouns, are both the most grammatically and semantically productive processes in most Bantu languages (Demuth 2000, p. 2). However, morphological rules for affixation are applied according to each language. In the following sections, I describe the most common inflectional processes for the plural marker with nouns in Cicopi using the 19<sup>4</sup> Proto-Bantu nominal classes.

<sup>3</sup> Fish takes the plural marker only when referring to different species.

<sup>4</sup> Table1, attached.

### 3.1 Inflectional Morphology in *Cicopi*

#### 3.1 Classes 1 & 2

The class 1 with the prefix <mu-> in Cicopi may take the syllabic nasals <m'/n'-> according to the dialect. While the speakers of Cicopi, the variety widely spoken in the south of the District of Zavala, favor the nasal <m'->, and preserve the prefix <mu-> speakers of the other five varieties use the nasal <n'->. However, in all dialects, the prefixes <mu/m'/n'-> are singular markers, and the class 2, with the prefix <va->, is used for plural as shown in the examples:

N0	Singular	Plural
1.	N'thu or m'thu (a person)	Vathu (persons, people)
2.	N'fana (a boy)	Vafana (boys)
3.	Wan'sikati (a woman)	Vavasikati (women)
4.	Wamwana (a man)	Vavana (men)

Table 1: Classes 1 and 2

The nouns <wansikati> and <wamwana> require the prefix <wa-> to mean <man/woman> because <n'sikati> and <mwana> if used with a possessive adjective/pronoun, the former with zero morpheme, mean <spouse>, respectively. Despite the position of the possessed noun, the spelling of the possessive adjective is invariable, and both constructions have the same meaning. See the examples:

N0	Possessive adjectives	
	Singular	Plural
1.	n'sikati wangu (his wife)	Vasikati vakwe (his wives)
2.	mwana wakwe (her husband)	Vana vawe (their husbands)

Table 2: Possessive Adjectives

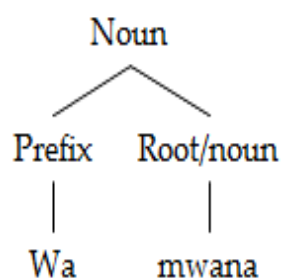
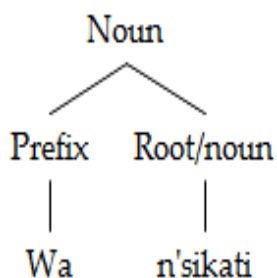
However, with possessive pronouns the prefix <mb-> is added to the possessive adjectives, and the nouns precede the possessive pronoun:

N0	Possessive pronouns	
	Singular	Plural
3.	n'sikati mbwangu (the wife is mine)	Vasikati mbangu (the wives are mine)
4.	mwana mbwakwe (the husband is hers)	Vana mbawe (the husbands are theirs)

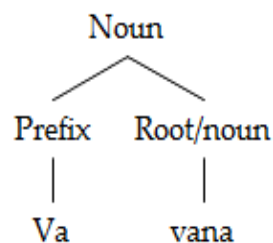
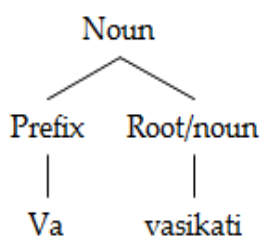
Table 3: Possessive Adjectives with &lt;mb-&gt;

Thus, the words <mwana> and <n'sikati> are considered roots when dealing with inflectional morphology in Cicopi. Careful analysis in word formation processes and inflectional morphology clearly reveals that apart from adding the prefix <va->, the syllable <mwa> in <mwana> changes into <va> while in <n'sikati> the syllabic nasal <n'-> also changes into <va>. Both phonetic and spelling evidences suggest that the plural forms of *n'sikati* and *mwana* in Cicopi are formed through reduplication of the plural marker prefix <va->. See the diagrams:

## a) Singular forms



## b) Plural forms



## 3.1.1 Classes 3 &amp; 4

The class 3 <mu-> has lexical and phonological similarities with class 1. The class 4, with the prefix <mi->, which is invariable, is used for plural inflection. The examples show that classes 3 and 4 can be used with both countable/uncountable nouns.

N0	Singular	Plural
1.	m'punga (rice)	mipunga rices <sup>5</sup>
2.	m'thetho/n'theto (law)	mithetho (laws)
3.	n'kondo (foot)	mikondo (feet)

Table 4: Classes 3 and 4

## 3.1.2 Classes 5 &amp; 6

The class 5 in Proto-Bantu consists of the prefix <i-> which in Copi takes the consonant (d) <di->. The class 6, with the prefix <ma-> used as the plural marker, is invariable. The examples show that both classes 5 and 6 are used with countable/uncountable nouns.

N0	Singular	Plural
1.	direfu (cloud)	marefu (clouds)
2.	diati (a drop of water)	mati <sup>6</sup> (a lot of water)
3.	dibuku (a book)	mabuku (books)

Table 5: Classes 3 and 4 with &lt;i-&gt; and &lt;ma-&gt;

<sup>5</sup> When referring to varieties of rice.

<sup>6</sup> Water is often used as a mass noun. When used in singular it suggest a long period without rain (drought).

### 3.1.3 Classes 7 & 8

In Proto-Bantu, the class 7 consists of the prefix <ki> which is realized <ci> in Copi. The class 8 is used for plural inflection with its prefix <bi> replaced by the prefix <si> in Cicopi. These classes are often used with countable nouns. See the examples:

N0	Singular	Plural
1.	citoto (a store)	sitolo (stores)
2.	citulu (a stool)	situlo (stools)
3.	ciponi (a spoon)	siponi (spoons)

Table 6: Classes 7 and 8

### 3.1.4 Classes 9 & 10

In Proto-Bantu, both classes 9 and 10 consist of the prefix <n->. In Cicopi, the class 9 remains invariable while the class 10 is replaced by the prefix <ti->. With lexical and phonological similarities with classes 1 and 3, the class 9 conveys singularity, and the class 10 with the prefix <ti-> acts as the plural marker. These classes may be used with both countable/non-count nouns:

N0	Singular	Plural
1.	mbilu (a heart)	timbilu (hearts)
2.	mbunga (a flower)	timbunga (flowers)
3.	n'donga (a stick)	tindonga (sticks)

Table 7: Classes 9 and 10

### 3.1.5 Classes 11

The class 11 consists of the prefix <li-> which is invariable, and it uses the class 10 for plural. Similarly to class 1, the class 11 may have zero morpheme in singular nouns, and it is often used with countable nouns as shown in the examples:

N0	Singular	Plural
1.	litiho (a finger)	titiho (fingers)
2.	libande (a belt)	tibande (belts)
3.	homu (a cow)	tihomu (cows)
4.	khukhu (a hen)	tikhukhu (hens)

Table 8: Class 11

### 3.1.6 Class 12 & 13

In Proto-Bantu, the class 12 consists of the prefix <ka->, while class 3 consists of the prefix <tu->. In Cicopi, the classes 12 and 13 have lexical and morphological similarities with classes 7 and 8. Both classes are used for diminutive by adding the suffixes <-ana>, <-nyana>, or <-wana>. While the class 12 conveys singularity with the prefix <ci->, the class 13 with the prefix <si-> acts as the plural marker. Both classes are used with either countable or uncountable nouns. Consider the examples below:

N0	Singular diminutives	Plural diminutives
1.	<b>cifanyana</b> (a small boy)	<b>sifanyana</b> (small boys)
2.	<b>cidiswana</b> (a small eye)	<b>sidiswana</b> (small eyes)
3.	<b>cimovana</b> (a small car)	<b>simovana</b> (small cars)

Table 9: Classes 12 and 13

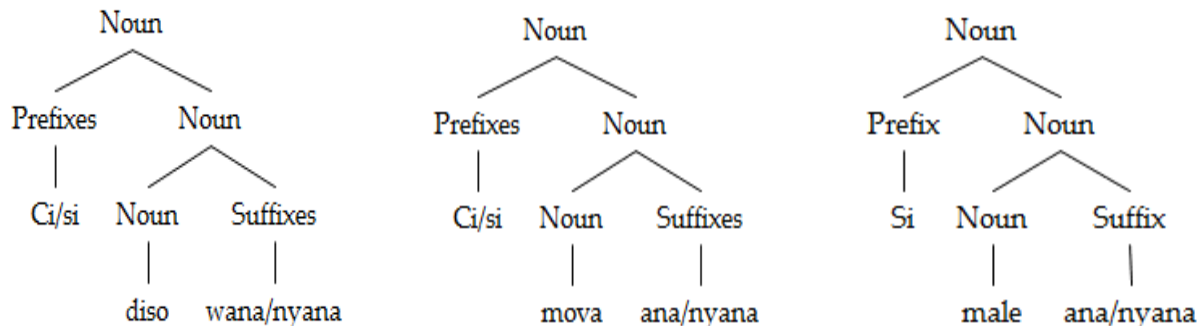
To express more emphasis/intensity with diminutive nouns, Copi speakers often use the suffix <-nyana> because it is stronger than <-ana>, and <-wana> as shown in the examples:

N0	Diminutives	Emphatic diminutives
1.	<b>cimovana</b> (a small car)	<b>cimovanyana</b> (a very small car)
2.	<b>cidiswana</b> (a small eye)	<b>cidiswanyana</b> (a very small eye)
3.	<b>idoropana</b> (a small town)	<b>idoropanyana</b> (a very small town)

Table 10: Classes 12 and 13 with Diminutive Suffixes

Copi speakers may also use diminutives for endearment or to emphasize their likes. In the following utterances “*cisikatianyana cangu*” the inferred meaning by the speaker is “*my dear/beloved wife,*” and the sentence “*nacidunda cimuzikana eco*” semantically means “I really like that song.”

The diagrams show that classes 12 and 13 in Cicopi accept both prefixes and suffixes:



### 3.1.7 Class 14

The class 14 consists of the prefix <wu-> which is invariable in Cicopi. In general, nouns with the prefix <wu-> are classified uncountable. However, inflected nouns take the class 6 with the prefix <ma-> as their plural marker:

N0	Singular	Plural
1.	<b>wukhalo</b> (a place/site)	<b>makhalo</b> (palces, sites)
2.	<b>wulombe</b> (a honey)	<b>malombe</b> (a lot of honey, types of honey)
3.	<b>wutomi</b> (life)	Often used as mass noun
4.	<b>wungana</b> (friendship)	Often used as mass noun
5.	<b>wunene</b> (righteousness/kindness)	Often used as mass noun

Table 11: Class 14



### 3.1.8 Class 15

The class 15 consists of the prefix <ku->, and it is invariable. In Cicopi this prefix acts as a locative marker/preposition of place, but it is chiefly used as the infinitive marker of verbs that would be equivalent to <to> in English infinitives. In Cicopi, verbs in the infinitive will always require the prefix <ku-> as shown in the examples below:

N0	Locatives	Infinitives
1.	<b>kule</b> <sup>7</sup> (far away)	<b>kuhanya</b> (to live)
2.		<b>kufa</b> (to die)
3.		<b>kusela</b> (to drink)
4.		<b>kuwona</b> (to see)

Table 12: Class 15

### 3.1.9 Classes 16 and 17

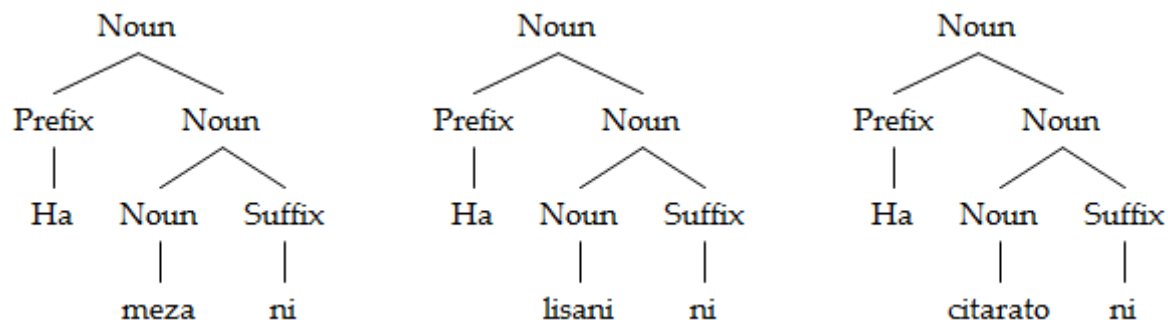
In Proto-Bantu, the class 16 consists of the prefix <pa-> equivalent to <ha-> in Copi. The class 17, similarly to class 15, consists of the prefix <ku->, which is invariable. Both prefixes are used as prepositions of place/locative markers. The class 16 modifies nouns, while 15 and 17 chiefly modify verbs. All the three classes require the suffix <-ni> for inflection:

N0	Noun modifiers	Verb modifiers
1.	<b>Han'dilo</b> (on the fire)	<b>kuendani</b> (on trip)
2.	<b>hamezani</b> (on the table)	<b>kuringelani</b> (on fishing)
3.	<b>hacitaratoni</b> (on the street)	<b>kuxavisani</b> (on selling)
4.	<b>halisanani</b> (on the sunshine)	<b>kutsibilani</b> (on vacation)

Table 13: Classes 16 and 17

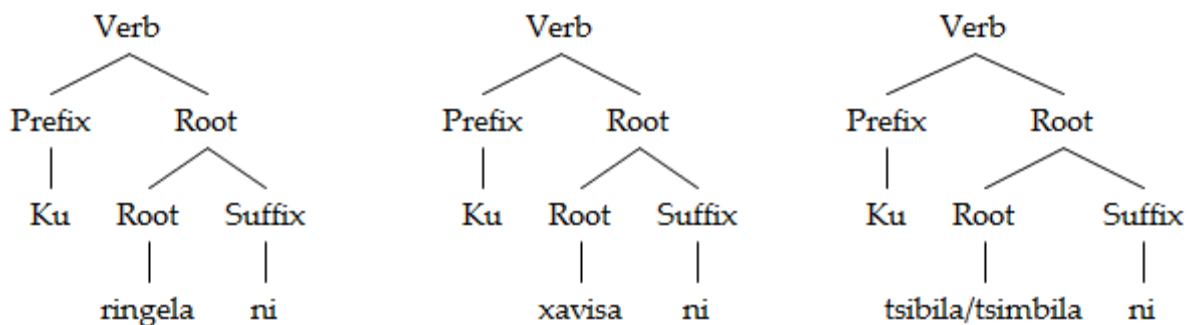
The diagrams show that classes 15, 16, and 17 accept both prefixes and suffixes.

#### a) Modifying nouns



<sup>7</sup>The adjective <kule> is the commonest used with the locative prefix <ku->. The most used locative markers are the prefix <ha-> and the suffix <-ni>.

## b) Modifying verbs



## 3.1.10 Class 18 and 19

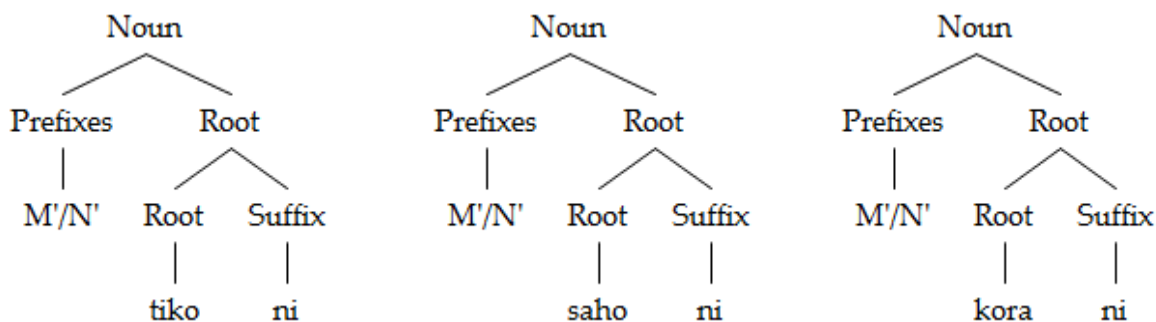
In Proto-Bantu, the class 18 consists of the prefix <mu>. In Cicopi, the class 18 has lexical, phonological, and inflectional similarities with classes 1, 3, and 9. The class 19 takes the prefix <pi>, and it does not occur in Cicopi. Acting as a locative marker, the class 18 requires the suffix <ni>, and uses the prefixes <mi> and <ma> for plural from classes 4 and 6, respectively:

N0	Singular	Plural
1.	n'tikoni (in the country)	matikoni (in the countries) <sup>8</sup>
2.	n'sahoni (in the festival)	misahoni (in the festivals)
3.	m'korani (in prison)	mikorani (in the prisons)

Table 14: Classes 18 and 19

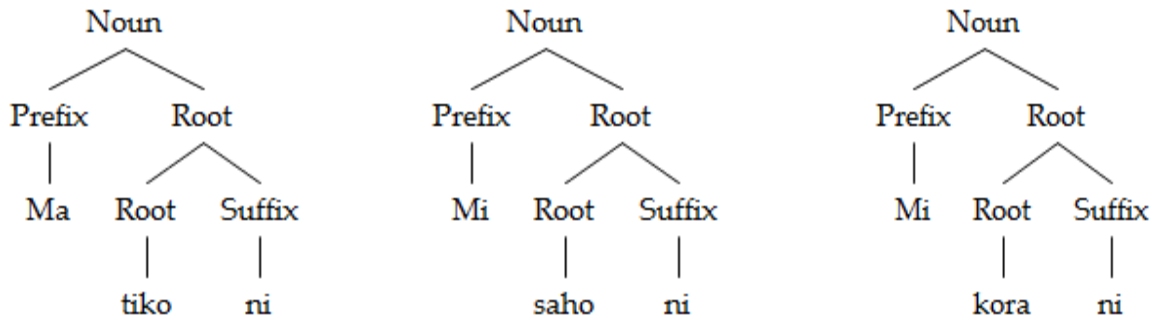
The diagrams illustrate that inflection with the class 18 may undergo prefixation and suffixation.

## a) Singular forms



<sup>8</sup> Often used to refer to overseas or abroad.

## b) Plural forms



### 3.1.11 Inflection with Zero Prefix in Singular and Other Observations

Many singular nouns in Cicopi do not take the prefixes from the Proto-Bantu list, but they take a prefix in their plural. The most common prefixes for plural are classes 2 and 10:

N0	Singular	Plural
1.	pinisela (a pen)	tipinisela (pens)
2.	male (money)	timale (a lot of money/different currencies)
3.	phongo (a goat)	tiphongo (goats)
4.	xoferu (a drive)	vaxoferu (drivers)

Table 15: Class of Zero Morphs

Words such as *bola* <ball> from Portuguese; *xoferu* <chauffeur> from French; and *phayiphe* <pipe>, *hamela* <harmer>, *ciponi* <spoon>, *kujoyina* <to join> from English show that Cicopi has a huge number of borrowings from other languages. Moreover, reduplication is one of the most productive word formation processes, especially with verbs in Cicopi.

## 4.0 Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications for English Learners of Cicopi

In inflectional morphology, prefixation is the chief word formation process in Cicopi. Only the classes 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, and 18 accept both prefixes and suffixes. Most singular nominal classes have morphological and lexical similarities, but their predictable prefixes for plural are distinct. While classes 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 12 always convey singularity, classes 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 13 express plurality. Classes 12 and 13 are also diminutive markers while class 14 is used with mass and abstract nouns. The classes 15, 16, 17, and 18 are used as locative markers, and 19 does not occur in Cicopi. Many nouns in Cicopi do not take the prefixes from the Proto-Bantu list, but they require a prefix for their plural. Most nouns use the prefixes from classes 2 and 10.

Since English uses suffixation for inflection, the biggest challenge for English speakers would be switching from suffixation to prefixation when learning inflectional morphology in Cicopi. The classes 1, 3, and 9 would be easy to learn because they have both lexical and morphological similarities. The easiest nominal classes to acquire would be 7 and 8 which have inflectional similarities with classes 12 and 13. Moreover, the classes 12 and 13 accept inflection through both prefixes and suffixes like most European languages.

Finally, the classes 14 and 18 would be the hardest to master. The class 14, for instance, similarly to other nominal classes may be used with both countable/non-countable nouns. The class 18 has both lexical and morphological similarities with classes 1, 3, and 9. Notwithstanding these similarities each class has its peculiar inflectional restrictions and exceptions. Thus, to master these exceptions, it would require learners to work thoroughly and a great deal of time as well as constant practice.

To avoid linguistic ‘cancers’ such as overgeneralization (Moskowitz 1992, p. 38), through negative L1 transfer, or fossilization (Saville-Troike 2006, p. 19), learners have to be taught overtly these distinctive inflectional processes of Cicopi. The famous businessman Albert Einstein has coined “you have to learn the rules of the game, and then you have to play better than anyone else.” The words *timbilas*, *machanganas*, *mikumes*, widely used by speakers of Portuguese and found in many text books, including media, are some examples of what I call “double infection.” Similarly to other languages, Cicopi enriches its vocabulary through borrowings.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Felix Maielane Manganhela** is a graduate student in the MA TESOL/Applied Linguistics program at Saint Cloud State University. He earned a BA degree in Translation and Interpretation from French to Portuguese from Eduardo Mondlane University. He has spent most of his life in Mozambique. He is currently teaching English at Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique. His area of interest is descriptive analysis of Copi/Cicopi, a Bantu language spoken in southern Mozambique. **Email address:** [felixmanganhela@gmail.com](mailto:felixmanganhela@gmail.com).

**Recommendation:** This paper is recommended for publication by **Dr. Ettien Koffi**. It was first written for his Pedagogical Grammar course. It underwent significant revisions prior to publication.

Proto Bantu	Noun classes (Cicopi)	Prefixes	Suffixes	Number	
				Singular	Plural
1 *Mu	Mu	m’/ n’	∅	✓	∅
2 *Va	Va	va-	∅	∅	✓
3 *Mu	Mu	m’/ n’	∅	✓	∅
4 *Mi	Mi	mi-	∅	∅	✓
5 *I	Di	di-	∅	✓	∅
6 *Ma	Ma	ma-	∅	∅	✓
7 *Ki	Ci	ci-	∅	✓	∅
8 *Bi	Si	si-	∅	∅	✓
9 *N	N	m’/n’	∅	✓	∅

10 *N	Ti	ti-	Ø	Ø	✓
11 *Li	Li	li-	Ø	✓	Ø
12 *Ka	Ci	ci-	-ana/-nyana/-wana	✓	Ø
13 *Tu	Si	si-	-ana/-nyana/-wana	Ø	✓
14 *Wu	Wu	Wu-	Ø	✓	Ø
15 *Ku	Ku	ku-	-ni	Ø	Ø
16 *Pa	Ha	ha-	-ni	Ø	Ø
17 *Ku	Ku	Ku-	-ni	Ø	Ø
18 *Mu	Mu	m'/n'	-ni	✓	Ø
19 *Pi	Ø =does not occur	Ø	Ø	Ø	Ø

Table 16: Nominal classes in Bantu Languages<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Adapted from: [cog.brown.edu/.../2000DemuthBantuNounClasses](http://cog.brown.edu/.../2000DemuthBantuNounClasses)