

Chapter 5

Present and Future Tenses and Their Negations

In this chapter, we will learn how to make simple sentences using verbs in the present tense and future tense. In Swahili, a particular tense marker denotes each tense. The present tense marker is *-na-* and the future tense marker is *-ta-*. The hyphens (-) before and after the tense marker indicate that something has to be added before and after the tense marker. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the Personal Subject Prefix comes before the first hyphen and the verb comes after the second hyphen (STV rule). We will now learn how simple sentences using tense markers are constructed.

Section A: The Present Tense

The present tense is used to show an action that is in progress at the present moment or an action that takes place on a daily basis. As mentioned above, the present tense is expressed by the tense marker *-na-*. Sentences using present tense markers are constructed in the following manner.

Personal Subject Prefix + Present Tense Marker + Verb

There are six Personal Subject Prefixes in Swahili. Please refer to Chapter 3 for more details. The present tense marker is always *-na-*. There are many verbs in Swahili as you may have seen in previous chapters, and you will see many more in this chapter.

If we want to make a simple sentence such as “I am playing,” we do it as follows. We take the Personal Subject Prefix for “I” which is *ni-*. We then attach this to the present tense marker *-na-* and we get *nina-*. Finally, we attach this to the verb “play” which is *cheza* and we get *Ninacheza* which means “I am playing.”

Using the same method of construction with other Personal Subject Prefixes and Bantu verbs (see below for more information on different categories of verbs), we get:

- U-na-soma.* – You (sing.) are reading.
- A-na- andika.* – He/She is writing.
- Tu-na-kimbia.* – We are running.
- M-na-chekeka.* – You (pl.) are laughing.
- Wa-na-nunua.* – They are buying.

The important thing to notice here is that in all these sentences, *-na-* is the present tense marker and it does not change.

We will now briefly mention verbs in Swahili. Swahili verbs can be divided into three categories: verbs of Bantu origin, Arabic verbs and Monosyllabic verbs. Monosyllabic verbs are Bantu verbs; however, since they have special rules, they will be treated as a separate category. It is important to remember these categories of verbs as they will have their own rules governing the construction of affirmative and negative sentences. In the present tense, verbs of Bantu origin and Arabic verbs follow the same rules in affirmative sentences. The verbs discussed so far in Section A are all verbs of Bantu origin. Below are some examples of verbs of Arabic origin.

- Ni-na-kubali.* – I am accepting.
- U-na-fikiri.* – You (sing.) are thinking.
- A-na-rudi.* – He/She is returning.

Please note the way to distinguish Bantu verbs from Arabic verbs is by looking at the last vowel of the verb. The last vowel of a Bantu verb is always the letter *a* while Arabic verbs never end with the letter *a* and instead end with either *e*, *i* or *u*.

Monosyllabic verbs are treated slightly differently. Monosyllabic verbs have a *ku-* infinitive marker prefixed to the verb and this is retained in affirmative present tense sentences for all Monosyllabic verbs except *pa*.

The most common Monosyllabic verbs are listed below:

- la* (eat)
- pa* (give)
- wa* (become)
- nywa* (drink)
- nya* (rain)
- chwa* (setting of the sun)
- ja* (come)
- fa* (die, perish)
- cha* (rising of the sun)

Sentences using present tense markers with Monosyllabic verbs are constructed as follows:

- Ni-na-kula.* – I am eating.
- U-na-kunywa.* – You (sing.) are drinking.
- A-na-kuja.* – He/She is coming.

Practice Exercise A

Translate the following sentences into English.

1. *Mnasoma.*
2. *Wanaandika.*
3. *Anapika.*
4. *Tunaruka.*
5. *Anapenda chakula.*
6. *Unaishi Kanada.*
7. *Watu wanakuja.*
8. *Mgonjwa anakunywa dawa.*
9. *Mama anapika.*
10. *Babu anafikiri.*

Section B: Present Tense Negation

When negating a simple present tense sentence, we need to negate the Personal Subject Prefix, the present tense marker and the verb. In present tense sentences, the Personal Subject Prefix is always negated by substituting it with a Negative Personal Subject Prefix (see Chapter 3), and the present tense marker is always negated by deleting it; however each of

the three categories of verbs is negated differently. This is illustrated below:

Negative Personal Subject Prefix + ~~Present Tense Marker~~ + Negated Verb

Negated Bantu Verbs

With verbs of Bantu origin, negation of the verb is done by changing the last vowel of the verb, which is *a*, to the letter *i*. If we want to negate a present tense sentence containing a Bantu verb, such as, *Ninacheza* “I am playing,” we do it as follows. We substitute the Personal Subject Prefix for “I” which is *ni-* with the Negative Personal Subject Prefix which is *si-*. We then delete the present tense marker *-na-*. Since the present tense marker is deleted, the Negative Personal Subject Prefix is directly attached to the negated verb. As mentioned above, since the last vowel of the Bantu verb changes to the letter *i*, the verb “play” which is *cheza* would become *-chezi*. The complete negation of *Ninacheza* “I am playing” would be *Sichezi* “I am not playing.”

Here are more examples:

- Ninapika.* – I am cooking.
- Sipiki.* – I am not cooking.
- Unasoma.* – You (sing.) are reading.
- Husomi.* – You (sing.) are not reading.

Negated Arabic Verbs

The negation of present tense sentences containing Arabic verbs is done in the same way as sentences containing verbs of Bantu origin, except that Arabic verbs retain their last vowel in their negated verb i.e. the Arabic verb remains unchanged.

Examples:

- Ninarudi.* – I am returning.
- Sirudi.* – I am not returning.
- Unafhamu.* – You (sing.) understand.
- Hufhamu.* – You (sing.) do not understand.

Negated Monosyllabic Verbs

The negation of present tense sentences containing Monosyllabic verbs is also done in the same way as sentences containing regular Bantu verbs, except that Monosyllabic verbs drop their infinitive *ku-* in their negated form. Also note that the last vowel of Monosyllabic verbs change to *i* as seen in other negated Bantu verbs.

Examples:

Ninakula. – I am eating.

Sili. – I am not eating.

Unakunywa. – You (sing.) are drinking.

Hunywi. – You (sing.) are not drinking.

Practice Exercise B

Translate the following into English.

11. *Hatufahamu.*

12. *Hawanywi.*

13. *Hakubali kwenda Kenya.*

14. *Hawali samaki.*

15. *Daktari haji.*

16. *Huandiki.*

17. *Mama harudi leo.*

18. *Mtoto hafikiri.*

19. *Msichana hali samaki.*

20. *Sisomi katika Chuo Kikuu cha Toronto.*

Section C: The Future Tense

The future tense is used to show an action that will take place in the future. As mentioned previously, the future tense is expressed by the tense marker *-ta-*. Sentences using future tense markers are constructed in the following manner.

Personal Subject Prefix + Future Tense Marker + Verb

If we want to make a simple sentence such as “I will play,” we do it as follows. We take the Personal Subject Prefix for “I” which is *ni-*. We

then attach this to the future tense marker *-ta-* and we get *nita-*. Finally, we attach this to the verb “play” which is *cheza* and we get *Nitacheza* which means “I will play.”

Using the same method of construction with other Personal Subject Prefixes and Bantu verbs, we get:

U-ta-soma. – You (sing.) will read.

A-ta-andika. – He/She will write.

Tu-ta-kimbia. – We will run.

M-ta-cheka. – You (pl.) will laugh.

Wa-ta-nunua. – They will buy.

The important thing to notice here is that in all these sentences, *-ta-* is the future tense marker and it does not change.

In the future tense, verbs of Bantu origin and Arabic verbs follow the same rules in affirmative sentences. Below are some examples of verbs of Arabic origin.

Ni-ta-kubali. – I will accept.

U-ta-fikiri. – You (sing.) will think.

A-ta-rudi. – He/She will return.

Monosyllabic verbs retain their infinitive marker *ku-* in sentences using future tense markers.

Ni-ta-kula. – I will eat.

U-ta-kunywa. – You (sing.) will drink.

A-ta-kuja. – He/She will come.

Practice Exercise C

Translate the following sentences into English.

21. *Mtasoma barua.*

22. *Wataandika.*

23. *Atapika.*

24. *Tutaruka katika ndege.*

25. *Atapenda zawadi.*

26. *Utaishi Kanada.*

27. *Watu watakuja katika duka.*
28. *Mgonjwa atakufa.*
29. *Kaka atanunua nguo.*
30. *Mama atapika samaki.*

Section D: Future Tense Negation

It is very simple to negate future tense sentences. The only change that occurs is that the Personal Subject Prefix is substituted with Negative Personal Subject Prefix. The future tense marker and each of the three categories of verbs remain the same. This is illustrated below:

Negative Personal Subject Prefix + Future Tense Marker + Verb

If we want to negate a future tense sentence containing a Bantu verb, such as, *Nitacheza* “I will play,” we do it as follows. We substitute the Personal Subject Prefix for “I” which is *ni-* with the Negative Personal Subject Prefix which is *si-*. We then attach it to the future tense marker *-ta-* to get *sita-*. We finally attach this to the verb “play” which is *cheza* and the complete negation of *Nitacheza* “I will play” would be *Sitacheza* “I will not play.”

Here are more examples of negation of future tense sentences containing verbs of Bantu origin.

- Nitapika.* – I will cook.
Sitapika. – I will not cook.
Utasoma. – You (sing.) will read.
Hutasoma. – You (sing.) will not read.

Here are examples of negation of future tense sentences containing verbs of Arabic origin.

- Watarudi.* – They will return.
Hawatarudi. – They will not return.
Mtafahamu. – You (pl.) will understand.
Hamtafahamu. – You (pl.) will not understand.

Here are examples of negation of future tense sentences containing Mono-syllabic verbs. Please note that the infinitive *ku-* is retained.

Nitakula. – I will eat.

Sitakula. – I will not eat.

Utakunywa. – You (sing.) will drink.

Hutakunywa. – You (sing.) will not drink.

Practice Exercise D

Translate the following into English.

31. *Hatutafahamu.*
32. *Watoto hawatakunywa.*
33. *Hatakubali.*
34. *Hawatakufa.*
35. *Daktari hatakuja.*
36. *Hutaenda katika soko.*
37. *Mama hatarudi leo.*
38. *Mtoto hatafikiri.*
39. *Thomas hatakula samaki.*
40. *Sitasoma leo.*

New Vocabulary

andika: write

cha: rising of the sun

chakula/vya-: food(s)

cheka: laugh

cheza: play

chuo/vy- kikuu/vi-: university(ies)

chwa: setting of the sun

duka/ma-: shop(s)

enda: go, move

fa: die

fikiri: think

ishi: live

ja: come

katika: in, into, inside, at

kimbia: run

kubali: accept, agree

la: eat
mtu/wa-: person(s)
nunua: buy
nya: rain
nywa: drink
pa: give
panda: love, like
rudi: return, come back
ruka: jump, fly
samaki: fish(es)
soko/ma-: market(s)
wa: be, exist

Key to Exercises

Answers to Practice Exercise A

1. You (pl.) are reading.
2. They are writing.
3. He/She is cooking.
4. We are flying.
5. He/She loves food.
6. You (sing.) are living in Canada.
7. The people are coming.
8. The patient is drinking medicine.
9. Mother is cooking.
10. Grandfather is thinking.

Answers to Practice Exercise B

11. We don't understand.
12. They are not drinking.
13. He/She is not agreeing to go to Kenya.
14. They are not eating fish.
15. The doctor is not coming.
16. You (sing.) are not writing.
17. Mother is not returning today.
18. The child is not thinking.
19. The girl is not eating fish.
20. I am not studying at the University of Toronto.

Answers to Practice Exercise C

21. You (pl.) will read a letter.
22. They will write.
23. He/She will cook.
24. We will fly in an airplane.
25. He/She will love the gift(s).
26. You (sing.) will live in Canada.
27. People will come in the shop.
28. The patient will die.
29. Brother will buy clothes.
30. Mother will cook fish.

Answers to Practice Exercise D

31. We will not understand.
32. The children will not drink.
33. He/She will not agree.
34. They will not die.
35. The doctor will not come.
36. You (sing.) will not go inside the market.
37. Mother will not return today.
38. The child will not think.
39. Thomas will not eat fish.
40. I will not study today.