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Research Article

Analysis of Negation Categories in Kirombo and Kiswahili in Tanzania

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Abstract

This study examined and compared negation categories in Kiswahili and Kirombo using Miestamo's Typology of Standard Negation. It aimed to identify the types of negation, analyze their morphosyntactic realization, and establish similarities and differences between the two languages. The study employed a qualitative descriptive and comparative research design. Primary data were collected from eight Kirombo native speakers aged 60 years and above in Mrere Village, Katangara Mrere Ward, Rombo District, Tanzania, through interviews, elicitation, and natural conversations, while Kiswahili data were obtained from grammatical descriptions and previous studies. The data were analyzed morphologically, syntactically, and functionally. The findings show that both languages express negation through verbal morphology but differ in the form and position of negative markers. Kiswahili mainly employs preverbal negative markers such as *ha-*, *hu-*, *si-*, and *-to-*, while Kirombo predominantly uses the post-verbal negative suffix *-fo*. These differences are observed in standard, tense-based, infinitival, copular, existential, and prohibitive negation. The study concludes that although Kiswahili and Kirombo share Bantu grammatical features, they employ distinct morphosyntactic strategies for expressing negation. The findings contribute to the documentation of Kirombo and comparative studies of Bantu languages, while emphasizing the need for further research on under-described Tanzanian languages.

Keywords

Kirombo, Kiswahili, Negation Categories, Bantu Languages

1. Introduction

Negation is a universal grammatical category through which speakers express denial, rejection, contradiction, or the reversal of an affirmative proposition. It is a fundamental area of linguistic inquiry because it involves the interaction of morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Contemporary research views negation not merely as the absence of affirmation but as a complex grammatical system shaped by structural, functional, and discourse-related factors, Herbst and Hoffmann [10], Haspelmath, [8]. Recent studies further demonstrate that negation is closely connected to language use, discourse, and cross-linguistic variation. Miestamo, Shagal, and Silvennoinen [13], for example, emphasize that negation provides an important domain for usage-based linguistic research because its expression is influenced by discourse context and the pragmatic properties of negative constructions. Similarly, recent research on negation highlights its interaction with po-

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larity, focus, and other aspects of grammatical structure, Morante & Blanco, [15], Shinagawa & Marten, [20].

Negation also provides important evidence for understanding how languages organize meaning and grammatical relations because negative constructions interact with tense, aspect, modality, focus, and information structure, Miestamo, [12], Payne, [18], Miestamo et al., [13]. From a typological perspective, languages differ considerably in how they construct negative clauses, including the position and morphological status of negative markers. Krasnoukhova, van der Auwera, and Crevels [10], for instance, show that although preverbal negation is widespread cross-linguistically, postverbal negation also occurs in a substantial number of languages and is often associated with morphological developments.

Kiswahili provides an important example of a language in which negation affects the internal structure of the verb. Earlier studies have demonstrated that negative constructions in Kiswahili involve changes in verbal morphology and the interaction of negative markers with tense, aspect, subject agreement, and other verbal categories, Mohammed, [14], Ngonyani, [16]. This observation is particularly significant within the wider Bantu context. Shinagawa and Marten [20], in their comparative study of Bantu languages, demonstrate that negation may interact systematically with focus-marking morphology, revealing important relationships between negative marking and information structure. Consequently, the study of negation in Kiswahili contributes not only to the description of Kiswahili grammar but also to broader discussions of Bantu morphosyntax and the typology of negation as illustrated in (1).

Affirmative – A-li-som-a - kitabu

3SG- PST- read- FV - book

He/she read a book.

Negative - Ha- ku-som-a - kitabu

NEG.3SG-PST- read - book

He/she did not read a book.

The example shows that negation is not expressed by adding an independent word but through changes in verbal morphology. The affirmative tense marker -li- is replaced by the negative past construction -ku- together with the negative marker ha-. Cross-linguistic investigations have demonstrated that languages employ different strategies to encode negation. Miestamo [12] distinguishes between symmetric negation, where negative clauses maintain the same structure as affirmative clauses, and asymmetric negation, where negation causes additional morphological or syntactic changes. Recent typological studies further show that negative constructions reflect both universal tendencies and language-specific grammatical developments, Dryer, [5], Haspelmath, [8]. Example: Symmetric and asymmetric negation.

English (symmetric tendency)

John eats meat.

John does not eat meat.

The negative marker not is added without major changes to the verb structure.

Kiswahili (asymmetric tendency)

(a) Juma-a-na-chez-a. Juma SM- PRES- play – FV. Juma is playing. *(b) Juma -ha- chez-i. Juma NEG.SM- play- NEG.FV.* Juma is not playing.

Unlike English, Kiswahili changes the verbal structure through:

negative subject marker ha-

final vowel change -a → -i

This confirms Miestamo's argument that many languages express negation asymmetrically. The diversity of negation systems is particularly evident within the Bantu language family. Although Bantu languages commonly express negation through verbal morphology, they differ in the position and function of negative markers and their interaction with tense, aspect, mood, and agreement systems, Nurse, [17], Van de Velde et al., [21]. Studies indicate that Bantu negative systems reflect both inherited Proto-Bantu structures and independent grammatical developments caused by language change and grammaticalization, Devos & Van der Auwera, [4], Güldemann, [6]. Example from Kinyarwanda;

(a) A- ra- kor- a. 3SG- PRES-work-FV. He/she works. *(b) Nti- a- ra- kor- a. NEG- 3SG-PRES- work-FV.* He/she does not work.

This show that, Kinyarwanda uses the negative marker nti- before the verb complex.

In Chichewa, Mchombo, [11] example;

(a) Mwana- a -na-gula – nyama. Child SM- PRES- buy meat. The child buys meat. *(b) Mwana -sa-gula – nyama. Child NEG.SM- buy meat.* The child does not buy meat.

Chichewa shows that negation changes the subject agreement marker from a- to sa-.

Within the Bantu language family, Kiswahili has received extensive scholarly attention because of its status as Tanzania's national language and regional lingua franca. Studies of Kiswahili grammar demonstrate that negation involves complex interaction between negative markers, subject agreement, tense, aspect, and clause structure, Mohammed, [14], Ngonyani, [16]. However, recent African linguistic research emphasizes that Kiswahili should not represent the entire linguistic diversity of Tanzania because many indigenous languages remain insufficiently documented, Güldemann, [6], Nurse, [17]. Example: Kiswahili tense-based negation.

1) *(a) Present - A- na-ku-j-a. 3SG- PRES -INF- come- FV.* He/she is coming. *(b) Ha-j-i. NEG.3SG - come NEG.FV.* He/she is not coming.
2) *(a) Future - A-ta- ku-j-a. 3SG- FUT-INF -come –FV.* He/she will come. *(b) Ha-ta-ku-j-a. NEG.3SG - FUT-INF - come – FV.* He/she will not come.

These examples show that Kiswahili uses different negative constructions depending on tense. Kirombo represents one of the less-described Bantu languages. Despite belonging to the Chagga group, it has received limited linguistic attention, particularly concerning its negation system. Consequently, little is known about the categories of Kirombo negation, the morphological strategies used to express negative meanings, and

whether its negative constructions resemble or differ from better-described Bantu languages such as Kiswahili. Comparative linguistic research provides an effective method for investigating such differences. Haspelmath, [7], argues that comparison allows researchers to identify shared grammatical patterns while recognizing language-specific structures. Croft [2] further explains that related languages may develop different grammatical systems despite sharing historical origins, as in Comparative Table 1.

Table 1. *Comperative Languages.*

Language	Affirmative	Negative strategy
Kiswahili	a-na-cheza	ha- + verb + -i
Kinyarwanda	a-ra-kora	nti- + verb
Chichewa	a-na-gula	sa- + verb
Haya	a-ka-som-a	ta- + verb + -i

Haspelmath [8] & Croft [2].

Such comparison helps determine whether Kirombo follows general Bantu patterns or has developed its own unique system.

Although previous studies have contributed significantly to understanding negation in Bantu languages, comparative research involving Kirombo remains limited. The grammatical categories of Kirombo negation, their morphological realization, and their relationship with wider Bantu patterns have not been adequately established. Therefore, this study comparatively analyzes negation categories in Kirombo and Kiswahili by examining their morphological and syntactic realization, identifying similarities and differences, and contributing to Bantu linguistics, language documentation, and typological theory.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Miestamo's [12] Typology of Standard Negation, a framework developed to explain how languages encode standard negation in declarative verbal main clauses. The theory is based on the premise that, although negation is a universal feature of human language, languages differ systematically in the grammatical strategies they use to express it. Miestamo [12] classifies negation according to the structural relationship between affirmative and negative clauses, providing a framework for comparing negation systems across languages.

A key tenet of the theory is that all languages possess grammatical mechanisms for expressing negation, but these mechanisms vary in their morphosyntactic realization. Negation may be expressed through verbal affixes, negative particles, auxiliary verbs, negative copulas, or combinations of these devices, Miestamo, [12]. Miestamo further distinguishes between symmetric negation, where negative clauses differ from affirmative clauses only by the presence of a negative marker, and asymmetric negation, where negation also causes changes in verb morphology, tense, aspect, agreement, or word order. The theory also recognizes that negation interacts with other grammatical categories, particularly tense, aspect, mood, and agreement, making it an important domain for typological and comparative linguistic analysis, Nurse, [17].

Miestamo's [12] framework is appropriate for this study because it provides a systematic basis for comparing the negation systems of Kirombo and Kiswahili. Although both languages belong to the Bantu family, they may differ in the categories of negation they employ and in the morphosyntactic realization of negative constructions. Guided by this theory, the study examines the forms and functions of negation in the two languages, identifies whether their negation systems exhibit symmetric or asymmetric patterns, and explains the similarities and differences from a typological perspective. In doing so, the study contributes to comparative Bantu linguistics and the documentation of Kirombo.

3. Literature Review

Negation has been widely studied as a fundamental grammatical category that enables speakers to express denial, rejection, contradiction, and non-existence. Contemporary linguistic research considers negation as more than the simple reversal of affirmative meaning; rather, it is a complex system involving the interaction of morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics Herbst, [9], Payne, [18]. Languages differ considerably in how they encode negative meanings. While some languages express negation through independent negative particles, others employ verbal morphology. This variation demonstrates that although negation is a universal linguistic phenomenon, its grammatical realization is language-specific.

Herbst, [9], Payne, [18]. explain that English typically ex-

presses negation through an independent negative particle rather than by changing the internal morphology of the main verb. Example;

Affirmative - He is coming.

Negative -He is not coming.

In English, the negative particle not follows the auxiliary verb is without altering the form of the lexical verb coming. This illustrates an analytic strategy of negation.

Mohammed, [14] and Ngonyani [16] demonstrate that negation in Kiswahili is expressed through verbal morphology. Negative constructions involve changes in the verbal complex, including the addition of a negative subject marker and, in some tenses, changes in tense marking and the verb-final vowel. Example;

Affirmative -A- na- ku-j-a

3SG - PRES - INF - come -FV

He/she is coming.

Negative - Ha- j-i

NEG.3SG- come -NEG.FV

He/she is not coming.

Unlike English, Kiswahili incorporates negation into the verb itself. The negative marker ha- combines with the verb, and the verbal morphology changes to indicate negation. This demonstrates that negation is an integral part of the Kiswahili verbal system rather than an independent grammatical word.

Typological studies have provided important insights into the structural variation of negation across languages. Building on Dahl's work [3], Miestamo [12] developed a typology of standard negation based on the relationship between affirmative and negative clauses. He distinguishes between symmetric negation, where the negative clause differs from the affirmative clause only by the addition of a negative marker, and asymmetric negation, where negation causes additional morphological or syntactic changes. This distinction has become an important framework for comparing negation systems across languages. Miestamo [12] identifies Finnish as an example of asymmetric negation because the verb changes its grammatical form in negative constructions as shown below;

Affirmative - Hän - tulee

3SG come.PRES

He/she comes.

Negative - Hän - ei - tule

3SG NEG - come.CONNEG

He/she does not come.

In this example, negation is expressed by the negative auxiliary -ei-, while the main verb changes from the finite form "tulee" to the connegative form "tule". Thus, negation involves more than simply adding a negative marker; it also changes the grammatical structure of the verb, illustrating asymmetric negation.

Research on Bantu languages shows that negation is closely integrated into the verbal morphology of these languages. Nurse [17] argues that Bantu verbs typically consist of several grammatical elements, including subject markers, tense-aspect markers, mood markers, and polarity markers. Consequently, negation cannot be analyzed independently of other verbal categories because it interacts with the overall structure of the verb. This interaction makes negation an important feature for understanding the organization of the Bantu verbal system.

Nurse [17] illustrates that negation in Kiswahili is expressed through changes in the verbal complex rather than by adding an independent negative word. Example;

Affirmative - A-na-som-a

3SG-PRES - read - FV

He/she is reading.

Negative - Ha-som-i

NEG.3SG -read- NEG.FV

He/she is not reading.

In this example, negation is encoded within the verbal morphology. The affirmative form 'anasoma' changes to the negative form 'hasomi' where ha- functions as the negative subject marker, the present tense marker -na- is omitted, and the final vowel changes from -a → -i. This demonstrates that, as Nurse [17] argues, negation in Bantu languages involves the restructuring of the verbal complex through the interaction of polarity, tense, and verbal morphology, rather than simply adding an independent negative marker.

Recent studies have further shown that Bantu negation reflects both historical continuity and language-specific innovation. Devos and Van der Auwera [4] argue that negative constructions in Bantu languages have undergone processes of grammaticalization, including the development, reinforcement, and replacement of negative markers over time. They further explain that some Bantu languages exhibit multiple negative markers within the same clause, reflecting different stages of grammatical change associated with the Jespersen Cycle. These developments suggest that while Bantu languages share a common historical origin, they have also evolved distinct negation systems through independent grammatical innovations.

Devos and Van der Auwera [5] discuss Kinyarwanda as one of the Bantu languages illustrating the historical development of negative marking through grammaticalization. Example;

Affirmative - A-ra- kor-a

3SG-PRES - work - FV

He/she works.

Negative - Nti-a- ra- kor-a

NEG - 3SG - PRES - work - FV

He/she does not work.

In this example, negation is expressed by the preverbal negative marker nti-, which combines with the ordinary verbal structure. Devos and Van der Auwera [4] argue that such negative markers are the result of historical grammaticalization processes through which new negative forms emerge and become integrated into the verbal system. This illustrates that although Bantu languages share common grammatical features, they have developed different negative strategies over time, reflecting both shared inheritance and language-specific

innovation.

Kiswahili has received considerable attention in studies of Bantu negation because of its status as Tanzania's national language and a regional lingua franca. Mohammed [14] and Ngonyani [16] demonstrate that negation in Kiswahili is realized through different grammatical strategies depending on the type of construction involved. They show that verbal negation is primarily expressed through negative subject markers integrated into the verbal morphology, whereas nominal clauses employ a negative copula. In addition, infinitival constructions use a distinct negative marker. These observations indicate that Kiswahili does not rely on a single negative form but employs different negation strategies according to grammatical context. Example;

Affirmative - A-na-chez-a
3SG – PRES - play - FV.
He/she is playing.
Negative - Ha-chez-i.
NEG.3SG -play -NEG
He/she is not playing.

In this example, negation is expressed through changes within the verbal morphology. The affirmative form 'anacheza' changes to 'hachezi', where ha- functions as the negative subject marker, the present tense marker -na- is omitted, and the final vowel changes from -a → -i. This demonstrates that verbal negation in Kiswahili is integrated into the structure of the verb.

Example 2: Past Tense Negation, Mohammed, [14] Ngonyani, [16].

Affirmative - A-li-ku-j-a.
3SG - PST -INF come - FV
He/she came.
Negative - Ha- ku-j-a.
NEG.3SG - PST- come - FV
He/she did not come.

In this example, negation changes the internal structure of the verb. The affirmative marker -li- is replaced by the negative past marker ha- and ku-, illustrating the close relationship between negation and tense in Kiswahili.

Example 3: Nominal Negation, Mohammed, [14] Ngonyani, [16].

Affirmative - Yeye ni mwalimu.
3SG.COP teacher
He/she is a teacher.
Negative - Yeye si mwalimu.
3SG NEG.COP teacher
He/she is not a teacher.

In this example, negation is expressed through the negative copula "si", which replaces the affirmative copula "ni". Unlike verbal negation, no changes occur within verbal morphology because the construction is nominal rather than verbal.

Example 4: Infinitival Negation, Mohammed, [14] Ngonyani, [16].

Affirmative - Kuja ni muhimu.
INF.come COP important
To come is important.
Negative - Kutokuja ni muhimu.
INF.NEG.come COP important
Not to come is important.

In this example, negation is formed by inserting the negative marker -to- within the infinitive prefix ku-, producing *kutokuja*. This illustrates that Kiswahili also possesses a specialized strategy for expressing negation in infinitival constructions.

Therefore, these examples support Mohammed [14] and Ngonyani's [16] argument that Kiswahili employs multiple negation strategies, each determined by the grammatical environment in which negation occurs.

Although Kiswahili is relatively well documented, many indigenous Tanzanian Bantu languages remain insufficiently described. Scholars of African language documentation argue that limited descriptions of under-researched languages create gaps in understanding linguistic diversity Austin & Sallabank, [1], Seifart, [19]. Kirombo is among the languages that require further grammatical investigation, particularly concerning negation. Despite its relationship with Kiswahili within the Bantu family, little is known about the categories of negation in Kirombo, the forms of negative markers it employs, and how these markers interact with tense, aspect, mood, and agreement. As a result, the position of Kirombo within the broader typology of Bantu negation remains unclear.

Comparative linguistic studies provide an appropriate approach for addressing this gap. Haspelmath [8] emphasizes that cross-linguistic comparison allows researchers to identify both universal grammatical patterns and language-specific features, while Croft [2] argues that typological comparison explains why related languages may develop different grammatical systems. Comparing Kirombo and Kiswahili therefore provides an opportunity to examine whether similarities in their negation systems result from shared Bantu inheritance, language contact, or independent grammatical change.

Although previous research has contributed significantly to the understanding of negation in Kiswahili and other Bantu languages, comparative studies involving Kirombo remain limited. Existing studies provide valuable information about Bantu negation generally and Kiswahili specifically, but they do not explain how Kirombo organizes negative constructions. This study therefore addresses this gap by analyzing and comparing negation categories in Kirombo and Kiswahili. It examines the morphological forms, syntactic structures, and functional uses of negation in the two languages, contributing to Bantu linguistics, language documentation, and typological research on negation.

4. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative descriptive and comparative research design to analyze negation categories in Kirombo and Kiswahili. A qualitative approach was appropri-

ate because the study focused on describing the forms, structures, and functions of negative constructions rather than on statistical analysis. The analysis was guided by Miestamo's [12] *Typology of Standard Negation*, which provided the framework for examining how the two languages express negation.

The study focused on Kirombo and Kiswahili, two Bantu languages spoken in Tanzania. Kiswahili was selected because it is well documented and has been widely studied, while Kirombo was selected because it remains under-described, particularly with regard to its system of negation.

Primary data on Kirombo were collected in Rombo District, Katamgara Ward, Mrere Village, where Kirombo is spoken. The study involved eight (8) native speakers aged 60 years and above, who were purposively selected because they are considered the guardians of the language and are more likely to preserve its traditional linguistic features. Data were collected through interviews, elicitation sessions, and naturally occurring conversations. Secondary data on Kiswahili were obtained from published books, grammatical descriptions, and previous studies, particularly Mohammed [14] and Ngonyani [16].

The collected data were analyzed at the morphological, syntactic, and functional levels. The analysis examined the forms and positions of negative markers, their interaction with tense, aspect, mood, and agreement, and the functions of different negation categories. Miestamo's [13] distinction between symmetric and asymmetric negation was used to compare the negation systems of Kirombo and Kiswahili.

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, participation was voluntary, and all information provided by participants was treated confidentially.

5. Findings and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings on negation categories in Kiswahili and Kirombo. The analysis focuses on the forms, structures, and functions of negative constructions, with particular attention to how negation is morphologically realized in the two languages. The findings are discussed comparatively to identify similarities and differences between Kiswahili and Kirombo, while relating the observed patterns to Miestamo's [12] typology of standard negation and previous studies on Bantu languages.

5.1. Present Tense Negation in Kiswahili and Kirombo

Present tense negation in Kiswahili and Kirombo is expressed through verbal morphology, particularly through the use of subject markers, negative markers, and changes in the structure of the verb. Although both languages belong to the Bantu language family and share certain morphological features, they differ in the way negative polarity is realized in present-tense constructions. Table 1 shows affirmative and negative constructions in Kiswahili and Kirombo and their negation strategies.

Table 2. *Present tense Negation in Kiswahili and Kirombo.*

Kiswahili	Kirombo	Translation
a-na-som-a SM3- PRS- read –FV	Na-som-a SM3-read-FV	He/she is reading
ha-som-i NEG.SM3 -read -NEG.FV	Na-som-a-fo SM3-read-FV -NEG	He/she is not reading
wa-na-chez-a SM3-PRS- play –FV	Va-tem-a SM3- play -FV	They are playing
Ha-wa-chez-i NEG.SM3- play-NEG.FV	Va-tem-a-fo SM3- play- FV-NEG	They are not playing
A-na-pik-a SM3-PRS- cook –FV	Na-kor-a SM3- cook - FV	He/She is cooking
Ha-pik-i NEG.SM3-cook -NEG.FV	Na-kor-a- fo SM3-read-FV-NEG	He/She is not cooking
A-na-fany-a SM3-PRS- do – FV	Na-rund-a SM3-do-FV	He/she works
Ha-fany-i NEG.SM3 -cook-NEG.FV	Na-rund-a-fo SM3-do- FV-NEG	He/she does not work
A-na-end-a SM3-PRS- go – FV	Na-nd-a SM3-go-FV	He/she goes

Kiswahili	Kirombo	Translation
Ha-end-i NEG.SM3-go -NEG.FV	Na-nd-a-fo SM3-go-FV-NEG	He/she does not go
U-na-wa-on-a SM2-PRS-SM3- see - FV	Wa-va-loli-a SM3-SM3-FV-FV	You see them
Hu-wa-on-i NEG.SM2-SM3-see - NEG.FV	U-va-loli-a-fo SM2-SM3- see -FV-NEG	You are not see them
U-na-Sali SM2-PRS-pray	U-Sali SM2-pray	You are praying
Hu- Sali NEG - pray	U-Sali-fo SM2-pray-NEG	You are not praying
Na-ku-on-a SM1-INF-see-FV	ngi-ku-wen-i SM1-INF-see -FV	I see you
Si-ku-on-i NEG-INF - see-FV	ngi-ku-wen-i-fo SM1-INF-see-FV	I am not seeing you
Ni-na-Sali SM1-PRS –pray	Ngi-Sali-fo SM1-pray-NEG	I am praying
Si-Sali NEG - pray	Ngi-Sali-fo SM2-pray-NEG	I am not praying

Source: field data (2026).

The findings in Table 1 show that both Kiswahili and Kirombo express standard negation through verbal morphology. However, the two languages differ in the form, position, and distribution of negative markers. Kiswahili mainly employs preverbal negative markers together with changes in the verbal structure, whereas Kirombo generally uses the post-verbal negative suffix *-fo*. The data from first-, second-, and third-person constructions demonstrate that negation is not realized through a single uniform strategy but varies according to the grammatical system of each language. Such variation reflects the cross-linguistic observation that languages employ different morphological and syntactic strategies to express negation Payne, [18].

In Kiswahili, affirmative present-tense constructions consist of a subject marker, the present-tense marker *-na-*, the verb stem, and the final vowel. The general affirmative pattern can therefore be represented as *SM + -na- + V + -a*.

The negative constructions demonstrate a different morphological organization. For example, ‘anasoma’ ‘he/she is reading’ contrasts with ‘hasomi’ ‘he/she is not reading’, while wanacheza’ ‘they are playing’ contrasts with ‘hawachezi’ ‘they are not playing’. These examples show that the affirmative present-tense marker *-na-* is absent in the negative construction and is replaced by a negative subject marker. In addition, the final vowel changes from *-a* to *-i*. Therefore, Kiswahili negative marking is sensitive to subject person and involves a reorganization of the affirmative verbal template.

The Kiswahili data therefore illustrate *asymmetric negation* as described by Miestamo [13], because the negative construction differs structurally from the affirmative construction rather than simply adding an independent negative element. Negation affects more than one part of the verbal structure, including *tense marking* and *the final vowel*.

Kirombo demonstrates a different morphological strategy. The affirmative constructions, such as ‘nasom’ ‘he/she is reading’, ‘vatema’ ‘they are playing’, ‘nakora’‘he/she is cooking’, consist of a subject marker, *verb stem*, and *final vowel*. Unlike Kiswahili, the Kirombo affirmative forms in the present data do not contain an overt equivalent of the Kiswahili present-tense marker *-na-*. The affirmative structure can therefore be represented as *SM + V + -a*.

In negative constructions, Kirombo introduces the negative suffix *-fo* after the verb and final vowel. Examples include ‘narundafo’ ‘he/she does not work’. The structure can therefore be represented as *SM + V + -a + -fo*. The post-verbal position of *-fo* is also maintained in constructions containing object marking, such as ‘uvalolafo’ ‘you are not seeing them’.

This demonstrates that the negative marker occurs at the right edge of the verbal construction, following other verbal morphology.

The comparison between the two languages reveals that Kiswahili and Kirombo share the Bantu tendency of incorporating grammatical categories into verbal morphology but differ in the organization of negative marking. Kiswahili uses a predominantly preverbal strategy involving negative subject markers and modifications to the affirmative verbal structure, whereas Kirombo employs a post-verbal suffixal strategy

through *-fo*. This pattern supports Nurse's [17] observation that Bantu languages share important structural features while displaying considerable variation in the realization of grammatical categories.

Therefore, the findings demonstrate that Kiswahili marks standard negation through changes within the verbal structure, including negative subject markers and final vowel alternation, while Kirombo marks negation through the addition of the post-verbal suffix *-fo*. The comparison highlights both shared Bantu grammatical tendencies and language-specific developments in the expression of verbal negation.

5.2. Past Tense Negation in Kiswahili and Kirombo

Past tense negation in Kiswahili and Kirombo is expressed through verbal morphology involving subject markers, tense markers, and negative markers. Although both languages mark past tense morphologically, they differ in how negation interacts with the past-tense construction. Kiswahili employs a preverbal negative strategy, whereas Kirombo uses a post-verbal negative suffix -fo. The relevant data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Past Tense Negation in Kiswahili and Kirombo.*

Kiswahili	Kirombo	Translation
A-li-ku-j-a SM1- PST-INF-come-FV	Na-le-sh-a SMI-PST-come-FV	He/she came
Ha-ku-j-a NEG.SM1-PST-come –FV	Na-le-sh-a-fo SMI-PST-come-FV-NEG	He/she did not come
wa-li-ku-l-a SM3-PST-INF-eat-FV	Va-le-ly-a SM3- PST- eat -FV	They ate
Ha-wa-ku-l-a NEG.SM3-PST- eat –FV	Va-le-ly-a-fo SM-PST-eat-FV- NEG	They did not eat
M-li-chez-a SM2-PST-play –FV	M-le-tem-a SM2-PST-play -FV	You all play
Ha-m-ku-chez-a NEG.SM2-PST-eat- FV	M-le-tem-a-fo SM1-PST-eat-FV-NEG	You all did not play
ni-lipik-a SM1- PST-cook –FV	ngi-le-kor-a SM1-PST-cook-FV	I cooked
Si-ku-pik-a NEG -PST - cook –FV	Ngi-le-kor-a-fo SMI - PST- cook - FV - NEG	I did not cook
U-li-wa-on-a SM2 - PST- SM3 - see –FV	U-le-va-loli-a SM2 – PST-SM3 - see - FV	You saw them
Hu-ku-wa-on-a NEG -PST-SM3 - see –FV	U-le-va-loli-a-fo SM2 - PST-SM3-see - FV -NEG	You did not see them
Ni-li-chek-a SM1-PST-laugh –FV	Ngi-le-sek-a SM1 - PST-laugh -FV	I laughed
Si-ku-chek-a SM1-PST-laugh –FV	Ngi-le-sek-a-fo SM1-PST-laugh -FV-NEG	I did not laugh

Source: field data (2026).

The findings presented in Table 2 show that both Kiswahili and Kirombo express past tense and negation through verbal morphology. However, the two languages differ in the form and position of negative markers. Kiswahili employs a preverbal negative strategy in which the affirmative past tense marker *-li-* is replaced by a negative construction involving *-ku-* and person-sensitive negative subject markers. Kirombo, on the other hand, retains the past tense marker *-le-* and expresses negation through the post-verbal suffix *-fo*.

In Kiswahili, affirmative past tense constructions consist of a subject marker, the past tense marker -li-, a verbal stem, and a final vowel. Examples include a-li-ku-j-a 'he/she came'. The general structure is: *SM + PST -li- + V + FV*.

Negative constructions show a significant structural change. The affirmative past marker -li- is absent and the negative

form contains person-sensitive negative subject morphology together with -ku-. For example, a-li-ku-j-a ‘he/she came’ becomes ha-ku-j-a ‘he/she did not come’, ni-li-pik-a ‘I cooked’ versus si-ku-pik-a ‘I did not cook’, and u-li-wa-on-a ‘you saw them’ versus hu--ku-wa-on-a‘you did not see them’.

Therefore, Kiswahili negative marking is person-sensitive, with negative forms such as ha-, si-, and hu-. Its general negative structure can be represented as: *NEG.SM + -ku- + V + FV*. The replacement of -li- and modification of the subject-marking component show that Kiswahili exhibits *asymmetrical negation* in the sense of Miestamo [13], since the negative construction is structurally different from its affirmative counterpart.

Kirombo displays a different pattern. Its affirmative past constructions consist of a subject marker, the past marker -le-, a verbal stem, and a final vowel. Examples include ‘nalesha’ ‘he/she came’, ‘valelya’ ‘they ate’, ‘ngilekora’ ‘I cooked’, and ‘ulevalolia’ ‘you saw them’. The structure is: *SM + PST -le- + V + FV*.

In negative constructions, all the affirmative elements are retained and the negative suffix -fo is added after the final vowel. For example: ‘naleshafo’ ‘he/she did not come’. ‘Valelyafo’ ‘they did not eat’, ‘ngilekorafo’ ‘I did not cook’.

The object-marked forms further confirm this contrast. Thus, Kirombo retains the entire affirmative structure and expresses negation solely through -fo.

The major differences can be summarized as follows:

Table 4. *Comparative Structures and Strategies of Negation in Kiswahili and Kirombo.*

Language	Affirmative structure	Negative structure	Strategy
Kiswahili	SM + PST -li- + V + FV	NEG.SM + -ku- + V + FV	Preverbal
Kirombo	SM + PST -le- + V + FV	SM + PST -le- + V + FV + NEG -fo	Post-verbal

Source: Field data (2026).

The comparison shows that both languages express past tense and negation morphologically but organize the two categories differently. Kiswahili modifies the internal structure of the verb by replacing the affirmative past marker -li- with a negative construction involving negative subject morphology and -ku-. Kirombo, in contrast, retains the past marker -le- and adds the negative suffix -fo at the right edge of the verbal complex.

These findings demonstrate both shared Bantu characteristics and language-specific strategies. Kiswahili exhibits greater structural modification in negative past constructions, while Kirombo preserves the affirmative structure and adds a consistent negative suffix. This supports Nurse’s [17] observation that Bantu languages share broad grammatical characteristics while showing considerable variation in their verbal systems. Therefore, the principal difference between Kiswahili and Kirombo lies in the position and morphological realization of negation: Kiswahili employs preverbal structural modification, whereas Kirombo employs post-verbal suffixation through -fo.

5.3. Future Negation in Kiswahili and Kirombo

Future negation in Kiswahili and Kirombo is expressed through verbal morphology involving subject marking, future tense marking, verbal stems, final vowels, and negative markers. Although both languages overtly mark future tense, they differ in the position and form of negative marking. Kiswahili uses the future marker -ta- and preverbal negative subject morphology, whereas Kirombo uses the future marker -she- and the post-verbal negative suffix -fo. The relevant data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Future Negation in Kiswahili and Kirombo.*

Kiswahili	Kirombo	Translation
wa-ta-fany-a SM3-FUT-do- FV	Va-she-rund-a SM3- FUT -do-FV	They will do
Ha-wa-ta-fany-a NEG.SM3-FUT-do –FV	Va-she-rund-a-fo SM3-FUT-do-FV -NEG	They will not do
M-ta-on-a SM2-FUT- see – FV	mu-she-loli-a SM2-FUT- see - FV	You will see

Kiswahili	Kirombo	Translation
Ha-m-ta-on-a NEG.SM2-FUT-see- FV	Mu-she-loli-a-fo SM2- FUT - see-FV -NEG	You will not see
U-ta-uliz-a SM2-FUT-ask –FV	we-she-ves-a SM2-FUT-ask-FV	You will ask
Hu-ta-uliz-a NEG.SM2-FUT-ask-FV	We-she-ves-a-fo SM2-FUT-ask- FV-NEG	You will not ask
Ni-ta-end-a SM1 - FUT -go - FV	Ngi-she-nd-a SM1-FUT- go -FV	I will go
Si-ta-end-a NEG.SM1-FUT-go-FV	Ngi-she-nda-fo SM1- FUT - go - FV -NEG	I will not go
Ni-ta-ku-l-a SM1-FUT-INF-eat – FV	Ngi-she-ly-a SM1 - FUT- eat - FV	I will eat
Si-ta-ku-l-a NEG.SM1-FUT-INF-eat-FV	Ngi-she-lya-fo SM -FUT- eat -FV-NEG	I will not eat

Source: field data (2026).

The Kiswahili affirmative future construction consists of a subject marker, future marker -ta-, verbal stem, and final vowel. Examples include ‘watafanya’ ‘they will do’, Where the general structure is: *SM + FUT -ta- + V + FV*.

In negative constructions, -ta- remains unchanged, while negative subject morphology occurs at the beginning of the verbal complex. For example, ‘hawatafanya’ ‘they will not do’. Therefore, the Kiswahili negative structure is: *NEG.SM + FUT -ta- + V + FV*.

This shows that Kiswahili future negation is *preverbal and person-sensitive*. The negative forms vary according to grammatical person and number, as illustrated by ha-, hu-, and si-. Negation therefore affects the subject-marking component while the future marker remains unharmed.

Kirombo exhibits a different pattern. Its affirmative future construction consists of a subject marker, future marker -she-, verbal stem, and final vowel. Examples include ‘vasherunda’ ‘they will do’, ‘mushelolia’ ‘you will see’, ‘weshemvesa’ ‘you will ask him/her’, ‘ngishenda’‘I will go’, Therefore, the affirmative structure is: *SM + FUT -she- + V + FV*.

In the negative construction, the subject marker and future marker remain unchanged, while -fo is added after the final vowel. For example: ‘vasherundafo’ ‘they will not do’. ‘ngishelyafo’ ‘I will not eat’. The general structure is: *SM + FUT -she- + V + FV + NEG -fo*.

Therefore, Kirombo employs a *post-verbal suffixal strategy*, in which negation is added to an otherwise unchanged affirmative structure.

The major differences can be summarized as follows:

Table 5. *Comparative Structures and Negative Marking in the Future Tense in Kiswahili and Kirombo.*

Language	Affirmative future	Negative future	Negative marking
Kiswahili	SM+ FUT -ta-+V + FV	NEG.SM + FUT -ta- + V + FV	Preverbal
Kirombo	SM+FUT-she-+V + FV	SM + FUT -she- + V+ FV+ NEG -fo	Post-verbal

Source: Field data (2026).

The comparison shows that Kiswahili and Kirombo share a basic verbal organization in which the subject marker precedes the future marker and verbal stem. However, they differ in the realization of negation. Kiswahili introduces negative morphology at the beginning of the verbal complex, whereas Kirombo adds the negative suffix -fo at the end.

From the perspective of Miestamo’s [13] distinction between symmetrical and asymmetrical negation, the two languages also differ in their structural relationship between affirmative and negative constructions. In Kiswahili, the negative construction involves modification of the subject-marking component, as in ‘ni-ta-end-a’ ‘I will go’ versus ‘si-ta-end-a’

'I will not go'. This represents an asymmetrical pattern because the negative form is structurally different from the affirmative form.

In Kirombo, the negative construction retains the subject marker, future marker, verbal stem, and final vowel and adds -fo, as in 'ngi-she-ly-a' 'I will eat' versus ngi-she-ly-a-fo' 'I will not eat'. The negative form is therefore structurally closer to the affirmative form. However, this conclusion is limited to the future constructions examined here; a broader classification would require data from other tense, aspect, mood, and clause types.

Overall, the findings show that both languages overtly mark future tense, using -ta- in Kiswahili and -she- in Kirombo, while retaining these markers in negative constructions. The major difference lies in the position of negative morphology: Kiswahili uses *preverbal, person-sensitive negative marking*, whereas Kirombo uses *post-verbal suffixation through -fo*. This variation supports Nurse's [17] observation that Bantu languages share broad grammatical characteristics while exhibiting considerable diversity in their verbal systems. The findings therefore demonstrate both shared Bantu features and language-specific strategies in the expression of future negation.

5.4. Negative Copular Construction in Kiswahili and Kirombo

Negative copula constructions in Kiswahili and Kirombo are used to express the denial of identity, classification, or existence of a referent. Unlike verbal negation, which involves action verbs, copula negation involves nominal predicates such as occupations, identities, and objects. The two languages employ different strategies in marking copular negation. Table 6 present affirmative and negative copular constructions in Kiswahili and Kirombo.

Table 6. *Negative Copula Construction in Kiswahili and Kirombo.*

Kiswahili	Kirombo	Translation
yeye ni mwalimu 3SG COP teacher	Fe ni mwalimu 3SG.COP-teacher	He/she is a teacher
yeye si mwalimu 3SG NEG.COP teacher	Fe shi mwalimu fo 3SG.COP-teacher-NEG	He/she is not a teacher
yeye ni mwanafunzi 3SG COP student	Fe ni mwanafunsi 3SG.COP-student	He/she is a student
yeye si mwanafunzi 3SG NEG.COP student	Fe shi mwanafunsi fo 3SG.COP-mwanafunsi-NEG	He/she is not a student
huyu ni mtoto DEM1 COP child	Soosu ni mwana DEM1 COP child	This is a child
huyu si mtoto DEM1 NEG.COP child	Soosu shi mwana fo DEM1 COP child- NEG	This is not a child
Hiki ni kitabu DEM7 COP book	Choochi ni kitabu DEM7 COP book	This is a book
hiki si kitabu DEM7 NEG.COP book	Choochi shi kitabu fo DEM1 COP child- NEG	This is not a book
Ni wewe COP 2SG	Ni fe COP 2SG	You are the one
Si wewe NEG.COP 2SG	Shi fe fo NEG.COP 2SG NEG	You are not the one

Source: field data (2026).

The data in Table 6 show that both languages use the copula (*ni)* in affirmative constructions, but they differ in the realization of negation. Kiswahili replaces the affirmative copula (*ni)* with the negative copula (*si)*, whereas Kirombo uses (*shi)* together with the clause-final negative marker (*fo)*.

In Kiswahili, affirmative copula constructions such as *yeye ni mwalimu* 'he/she is a teacher', *yeye ni mwanafunzi* 'he/she is a student', *huyu ni mtoto* 'this is a child', and *hiki ni kitabu* 'this is a book' contain the copula (*ni)* between the subject and nominal predicate. The identificational construction *ni wewe*

'you are the one' similarly contains (*ni)*. These examples demonstrate that (*ni)* functions as the affirmative copula in the Kiswahili data.

Kirombo shows a similar affirmative pattern. Examples such as *Fe ni mwalimu* 'he/she is a teacher', *Fe ni mwanafunsi* 'he/she is a student', *Soosu ni mwana* 'this is a child', and *Choochi ni kitabu* 'this is a book' use (*ni)* as the copula. The identificational construction *ni fe* 'you are the one' provides further evidence of the use of (*ni)* in affirmative copula clauses. Thus, both languages share the use of (*ni)* in affirmative copula constructions.

The negative Kiswahili constructions show a copular replacement strategy. For example, *yeye ni mwalimu* 'he/she is a teacher' contrasts with *yeye si mwalimu* 'he/she is not a teacher', while *huyu ni mtoto* 'this is a child' contrasts with *huyu si mtoto* 'this is not a child'. Similarly, *ni wewe* 'you are the one' becomes *si wewe* 'you are not the one'. In these constructions, (*si)* replaces (*ni)*, while the subject and nominal predicate remain unchanged. The basic pattern can therefore be represented as:

Affirmative: Subject + NI + NP

Negative: Subject + SI + NP

The Kirombo negative constructions demonstrate a different strategy. Examples such as *Fe shi mwalimu fo* 'he/she is not a teacher', *Fe shi mwanafunsi fo* 'he/she is not a student', *Soosu shi mwana fo* 'this is not a child', and *shi fe fo* 'you are not the one' contain *shi* in the copular position and *fo* at the end of the construction. The Kirombo pattern can therefore be represented as:

Affirmative: Subject + NI + NP

Negative: Subject + SHI + NP + FO

The contrast between the two languages can be summarized as follows:

Table 7. *Comparative of Affirmative and Negative Copular Constructions in Kiswahili and Kirombo.*

Language	Affirmative	Negative	Strategy
Kiswahili	Subject + ni + NP	Subject + si + NP	Copula replacement
Kirombo	Subject + ni + NP	Subject + shi + NP + fo	Negative copula + clause-final marker

Source: field data (2026).

The data therefore demonstrate that Kiswahili and Kirombo share an affirmative copula element (*ni)* but differ in the expression of copular negation. Kiswahili uses (*si)* to replace (*ni)*, whereas Kirombo uses (*shi)* and adds the clause-final negative marker (*fo)*.

From the perspective of Miestamo [13], both languages show structural differences between affirmative and negative copula constructions, although the nature of the difference is language-specific. Kiswahili changes the copular element from (*ni)* to (*si)*, while Kirombo changes (*ni)* to (*shi)* and additionally introduces (*fo)*. These findings further demonstrate variation within Bantu languages, where similar grammatical functions may be realized through different morphological strategies.

Therefore, Table 4 shows that Kiswahili and Kirombo share the affirmative copula (*ni)* but employ different strategies for copula negation. Kiswahili uses a negative copula replacement strategy, while Kirombo uses a negative copula plus clause-final marker strategy. The patterns occur in nominal, demonstrative, and identificational constructions, demonstrating that the contrast extends across different types of copula clauses.

5.5. Negative Existential Construction in Kiswahili and Kirombo

Negative existential constructions express the absence or non-existence of a person, object, or entity. In Kiswahili and Kirombo, existential clauses are formed using existential markers, which are modified when expressing negation. The analysis of these constructions is important because existential negation often shows distinct grammatical behavior from ordinary verbal negation. Table 8 illustrate affirmative and negative existential constructions in Kiswahili and Kirombo.

Table 8. *Negative Existential Construction in Kiswahili and Kirombo.*

Kiswahili	Kirombo	Translation
Kuna maji EXIST water	Kwete mringa EXIST water	There is water

Kiswahili	Kirombo	Translation
hakuna maji NEG.EXIST water	Kwete mringa fo EXIST water. NEG	There is no water
Kuna mtu EXIST person	Kwete mndu EXIST person	There is a person
hakuna mtu NEG.EXIST person	Kwete mndu fo EXIST person NEG	There is no person
Kuna wanafunzi EXIST students	Kwete vanafunsi daraseni EXIST students in the class	There are students
Hakuna wanafunzi NEG.EXIST students	Kwete vanafunsi fo EXIST students NEG	There are no students
Kuna shida EXIST problem	Kwete shida EXIST problem	There is a problem
Hakuna shida NEG.EXIST problem	Kwete shida fo EXIST problem NEG	There is no problem
Kuna umeme nyumbani EXIST electricity at home	Kwete umeme kaa EXIST electricity at home	There is electricity at home
Hakuna umeme nyumbani NEG.EXIST electricity at home	Kwete umeme kaa fo EXIST electricity at home NEG	There is no electricity at home

Source: field data (2026).

The data show that both Kiswahili and Kirombo use *existential* constructions to express the presence or absence of entities. In affirmative constructions, Kiswahili uses the existential marker "kuna", as shown in *kuna maji* 'there is water' and *kuna mtu* 'there is a person'. Similarly, Kirombo uses "kwete" in *kwete mringa* 'there is water' and *kwete mndu* 'there is a person'. These forms occur in contexts where speakers indicate the existence or availability of an entity.

In negative existential constructions, Kiswahili uses "hakuna", which functions as a negative existential marker. The forms *hakuna maji* 'there is no water' and *hakuna mtu* 'there is no person' show that negation is expressed through a change from the affirmative existential marker "kuna" to the negative form "hakuna". Therefore, Kiswahili does not simply add a separate negative element but modifies the existential construction itself.

Kirombo, on the other hand, maintains the existential marker *"kwete"* and expresses negation by adding the negative marker -fo at the end of the construction, as seen in *kwete mringa fo* 'there is no water' and *kwete mndu fo* 'there is no person'. This indicates that Kirombo marks existential negation through an additional negative element, while Kiswahili uses a negative existential form. The difference demonstrates variation in the grammatical realization of negation between the two Bantu languages.

From a typological perspective, these findings support Miestamo's [12] argument that languages differ in the structural relationship between affirmative and negative clauses. Kiswahili shows an asymmetric pattern because the negative existential construction involves a structural change (*kuna to hakuna*), whereas Kirombo shows a pattern where negation is added to the affirmative structure through the marker *-fo*. This distinction demonstrates that negative constructions may affect grammatical organization differently across languages.

The findings also agree with Nurse's [17] observation that Bantu languages share common grammatical features but display considerable variation in the expression of tense, polarity, and clause structure. Although Kiswahili and Kirombo belong to the same language family, their existential negation strategies reveal different grammatical developments. These differences contribute to understanding how Bantu languages preserve shared features while developing language-specific mechanisms for expressing negative meanings.

5.6. Prohibitive Negation in Kiswahili and Kirombo

Prohibitive negation is used to express commands that prevent or forbid an action. Unlike declarative negation, which denies the occurrence of an event, prohibitive negation functions in imperative contexts to instruct someone not to perform an action. Table 9 illustrate how Kiswahili and Kirombo express prohibitive negation.

Table 9. *Prohibitive Negation in Kiswahili and Kirombo.*

Kiswahili	Kirombo	Translation
Njoo Come IMP	Nshoo Come IMP	Come
usi- je NEG.IMP-come	Utashe-fo come-NEG	Do not come
Kula Eat.IMP	Lya Eat.IMP	Eat
usi- le NEG.IMP-eat	Utalye fo Eat NEG	Do not eat
Ingia Enter.IMP	Injia Enter.IMP	Enter
usi- ingie NEG.IMP-enter	Utainjie fo Enter NEG	Do not enter
Toka Leave.IMP	Fuma Leave.IMP	Leave/Come out
usi- toke NEG.IMP-leave	Utafume fo Leave NEG	Do not leave
Cheka Laugh.IMP	Seka Laugh.IMP	Laugh
usi- cheke NEG.IMP- laugh	Utaseke fo Laugh NEG	Do not laugh
Pika Cook IMP	Kora Cook IMP	Cook
usi- pike NEG.IMP-cook	Utakore fo Cook NEG	Do not cook
Fanya Do IMP	Runda Do IMP	Do/Work
usi- fanye NEG.IMP- do	Utarunde fo Do NEG	Do not do/Do not work

Source: field data (2026).

The data show that both Kiswahili and Kirombo distinguish between affirmative and negative imperative constructions, although they employ different grammatical strategies. In Kiswahili, affirmative commands are expressed using imperative verb forms such as *njoo* 'come', *kula* 'eat', *ingia* 'enter', *toka* 'leave', *cheka* 'laugh', *pika* 'cook', and *fanya* 'do'. These forms are used to instruct or request someone to perform an action.

To express prohibition, Kiswahili introduces the negative imperative marker {usi-}, as seen in *usi-je* 'do not come', *usi-le* 'do not eat', *usi-ingie* 'do not enter', *usi-toke* 'do not leave', *usi-cheke* 'do not laugh', *usi-pike* 'do not cook', and *usi-fanye* 'do not do'. The data show that prohibitive negation is formed by replacing the affirmative imperative with a negative imperative construction. Thus, negation is expressed through a dedicated preverbal marker that indicates prohibition.

The Kirombo data reveal a different pattern. Affirmative commands are expressed through simple imperative forms such as *Nshoo* 'come', *Lya* 'eat', *Injia* 'enter', *Fuma* 'leave', *Seka* 'laugh', *Kora* 'cook', and *Runda* 'do'. In the negative constructions, however, forms such as *Utashe fo*, *Utalye fo*, *Utainjie fo*, *Utafume fo*, *Utaseke fo*, *Utakore fo*, and *Utarunde fo* are used. Unlike Kiswahili, Kirombo does not employ a preverbal negative imperative marker similar to usi-. Instead, prohibition is expressed by the addition of the negative marker -fo after the verb, accompanied by a change in the imperative form.

The comparison indicates that both languages grammatically distinguish affirmative commands from prohibitions, but they differ in the realization of negative marking. Kiswahili expresses prohibition through a preverbal negative imperative marker, whereas Kirombo marks prohibition through a post-

verbal negative marker. This finding is consistent with Miestamo's [12] typological framework, which argues that languages employ different morphosyntactic strategies to express negation. It also supports Nurse's [17] observation that, although Bantu languages share common grammatical characteristics, they differ in the organization and placement of negative markers.

Therefore, the findings demonstrate that prohibitive negation in both Kiswahili and Kirombo is morphologically encoded within the verb phrase. However, the two languages differ in the position and realization of negative markers, highlighting both shared Bantu features and language-specific developments in the expression of prohibition.

5.7. Infinitival Negation in Kiswahili and Kirombo

Infinitival negation refers to the expression of negative meaning 'not to do something' through non-finite verb forms. Infinitival constructions function in various syntactic environments and differ from finite verb forms in their morphological organization. The data presented in Table 7 show that both Kiswahili and Kirombo express infinitival negation morphologically; however, the two languages employ different negative markers and structural patterns. Kiswahili marks infinitival negation using the negative element *-to-* within the infinitival construction, whereas Kirombo employs the negative element *-lyee-*. The examples in Table 10 show how these negative elements are integrated into each language's verb structure.

Table 10. *Infinitival Negation in Kiswahili and Kirombo.*

Kiswahili	Kirombo	Translation
Ku-som-a INF.PRF- read – FV	I-som-a INF.PRF-read - FV	To read
Ku-to-som-a INF.PRF-NEG- read –FV	I-lyee-som-a INF.PRF-NEG -read -FV	Not to read
Ku-j-a INF.PRF-come – FV	I-sh-a INF.PRF-come-FV	To come
Ku-to-ku-j-a INF.PRF-NEG.INF.PRF-come- FV	l-Iyee-sh-a INF.PRF-NEG-come - FV	Not to come
Ku-fany-a INF.PRF-do-FV	I-rund-a INF.PRF-do-FV	To do
Ku-to-fany-a INF.PRF-NEG -do-FV	I-lyee-rund-a INF.PRF-NEG-do -FV	Not to do
Ku-nyw-a INF.PRF-drink-FV	I-nw-a INF.PRF-drink-FV	To drink
Ku-to-ku-nyw-a INF.PRF-NEG.INF-drink-FV	I-lyee-nw-a INF.PRF-NEG - drink - FV	Not to drink
Ku-l-a INF.PRF-eat –FV	I-ly-a INF.PRF-eat-FV	To eat
Ku-to-ku-l-a INF.PRF-NEG-INF-eat-FV	I-lyee-ly-a INF.PRF-NEG - eat - FV	Not to eat

Source: field data (2026).

The affirmative Kiswahili infinitival constructions contain the infinitive marker *ku-* followed by the verb stem and final vowel. Examples such as 'ku-som-a' 'to read', illustrate the structure: *ku- + V + FV*.

In the negative constructions, the negative element *-to-* occurs after the infinitive marker, as in 'ku-to-som-a' 'not to read' The negative marker is therefore integrated into the infinitival construction rather than occurring as an independent word. The basic negative structure can be represented as: *ku- + to- + V + FV*. These examples show that Kiswahili negative infinitives do not display a completely uniform.

The Kirombo affirmative infinitival constructions contain I- followed by the verb stem and final vowel. Examples ly-a 'to eat'. The affirmative structure is: Kirombo affirmative: *I-*

+ V + FV.

In the negative constructions, the negative element *-lyee-* consistently occurs between the infinitive marker *I-* and the verb stem. Examples include I-lyee-rund-a 'not to do', I-lyee-nw-a, 'not to drink'. The structure of Kirombo negative: *I-lyee- V + FV.*

Unlike Kiswahili, Kirombo shows a regular distribution of the negative element, where *lyee-* consistently occurs after the infinitive marker and before the verb stem. This indicates that *lyee-* functions as the main negative marker in Kirombo infinitival constructions.

The comparison shows that both languages express infinitival negation morphologically but differ in their negative elements and structural organization. Kiswahili uses *ku-+to-*, with some variation involving an additional *ku-*, whereas Kirombo consistently uses *I-+-lyee-*. Thus, both languages integrate negation into the infinitival verb structure but employ different morphological strategies.

The difference between affirmative and negative constructions reflects Miestamo's [13] concept of asymmetric negation, where negative forms involve structural modifications of affirmative forms. In the present data, Kiswahili introduces to- within the infinitival construction, whereas Kirombo introduces *lyee-*. This shows that both languages express infinitival negation morphologically, although they differ in the realization of their negative markers.

These findings support Nurse's [17] observation that Bantu languages share general grammatical tendencies while displaying variation in the expression of particular categories. Thus, Table 7 demonstrates that Kiswahili and Kirombo employ distinct morphological strategies: Kiswahili follows the pattern *ku-+to-+V+FV*, while Kirombo follows *I-+lyee-+V+FV*. In both languages, negation is integrated into the infinitival verb structure rather than expressed through an independent negative word.

6. Summary of the Findings

This study examined and compared the grammatical expression of negation in Kiswahili and Kirombo, focusing on present tense, past tense, future tense, negative copular constructions, negative existential constructions, infinitival negation, and prohibitive constructions. The findings show that both languages express negation through grammatical and morphological strategies; however, they differ in the form, position, and distribution of negative markers.

In Kiswahili, negation is mainly expressed through preverbal negative markers such as ha-, hu-, and si- in verbal constructions, while infinitival negation is marked by to- following the infinitive marker ku-. The negative copula is expressed by 'si', which replaces the affirmative copula 'ni'.

In Kirombo, the data show that negation is frequently expressed through the clause-final negative marker -fo in verbal and copular constructions, while infinitival negation is marked by -lyee- following the infinitive marker I-. In negative copular constructions, Kirombo uses 'shi' together with the final negative element 'fo'. These patterns demonstrate differences in the morphological organization and placement of negative markers in the two languages.

The comparison of present, past, and future tense constructions further shows that Kiswahili generally employs preverbal negative marking, whereas Kirombo commonly retains the affirmative verbal structure and adds the negative suffix -fo at the end of the construction. Similarly, infinitival negation reveals that Kiswahili uses the pattern ku-+to-+V+FV, while Kirombo follows I-+lyee-+V+FV.

These findings indicate that although Kiswahili and Kirombo belong to the Bantu language family and share general grammatical characteristics, they employ different morphosyntactic strategies in expressing negation. The findings support Miestamo's [13] distinction between symmetric and asymmetric negation, as the two languages modify affirmative structures differently when forming negative constructions. They also agree with Nurse's [17] observation that Bantu languages share broad structural features while showing considerable variation in the organization of their grammatical systems.

Therefore, this study contributes to the description and documentation of Kirombo by providing field-based evidence on its negative constructions. It also contributes to comparative Bantu linguistics by demonstrating that related languages may express the same grammatical function through different morphological and morphosyntactic patterns.

7. Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that Kiswahili and Kirombo share the grammatical function of negation but differ significantly in its morphological realization. Kiswahili predominantly employs preverbal negative markers such as ha-, hu-, and si- in verbal constructions, while Kirombo frequently uses the post-verbal or clause-final negative element -fo. However, the Kirombo data also reveal other negative markers, particularly -lyee- in infinitival constructions and 'shi' in negative copular constructions.

The study therefore concludes that negation in the two languages reflects both shared Bantu characteristics and language-specific grammatical patterns. The similarities demonstrate their common structural heritage, whereas the differences show how related Bantu languages may develop distinct strategies for expressing grammatical categories.

The findings further demonstrate that negation is not expressed through a single uniform strategy in either language but varies according to the grammatical construction involved. This is evident in Kiswahili negative copula constructions, where 'si' replaces the affirmative copula 'ni', and in Kirombo constructions, where 'shi' occurs with the final negative marker -fo. Similarly, infinitival negation differs, with Kiswahili using ku-+to- and Kirombo using I-+-lyee-. Therefore, the

study confirms the importance of examining negation across different grammatical constructions rather than treating it as a single morphological phenomenon.

8. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed for future research and linguistic documentation. First, further studies on Kirombo grammar are recommended, particularly in areas such as tense, aspect, mood, agreement systems, pronominal structures, clause organization, and word formation. Since this study focused on negation, a broader grammatical description would contribute to a deeper understanding of Kirombo's morphosyntactic system and its position within the Bantu language family.

Although this study identified negative markers such as -fo, -lyee-, and shi, further investigation is needed to establish their precise functions, distribution, and restrictions across different constructions and grammatical categories.

The comparative studies between Kirombo and other Bantu languages, especially those spoken in Tanzania, should be encouraged. Such studies would provide insights into shared grammatical features, language variation, and innovations within the Bantu family.

Furthermore, systematic documentation of Kirombo should be prioritized through the collection, transcription, analysis, and preservation of linguistic data. As an under-described Bantu language, Kirombo requires further documentation to preserve its grammatical structures, vocabulary, and oral traditions for future generations.

Lastly, research and documentation of under-described indigenous languages in Tanzania should be strengthened. Studies on languages such as Kirombo contribute to linguistic theory, language preservation, and the recognition of Tanzania's linguistic diversity. Continued investigation of Kirombo will therefore enhance comparative Bantu studies and support efforts to preserve linguistic heritage.

Abbreviations

1SG	First Person Singular
2SG	Second Person Singular
3SG	Third Person Singular
DEM	Demonstrative
EXIST	Existential Marker
FV	Final Vowel
FUT	Future Tense
IMP	Imperative
INF	Infinitive
NEG	Negative/Negation
NEG.COP	Negative Copula
NEG.EXIST	Negative Existential
NEG.FV	Negative Final Vowel
NEG.IMP	Negative Imperative
NEG.INF	Negative Infinitive
NEG.SM	Negative Subject Marker
NP	Noun Phrase
PRES	Present Tense
PRF	Perfect
PST	Past Tense
SM	Subject Marker
SM1	First Person Subject Marker
SM2	Second Person Subject Marker
SM3	Third Person Subject Marker
V	Verb/Verb Stem

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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