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‘WANT’-VERBS AND THEIR CO-EXPRESSIONS IN RUFIJI-RUVUMA

Rasmus Bernander
University of Gothenburg
rasmus.bernander@sprak.gu.se

Abstract
This study examines ‘want’-verbs in Bantu language varieties belonging to the Rufiji-Ruvuma subgroup of Eastern Bantu, spoken in southern Tanzania and northern Mozambique. It explores their use in desiderative constructions as well as their involvement in a wide range of other expressions. Ultimately, based on a comparative approach, the study employs semantic maps as an analytical and visual tool to capture patterns of co-expression, using ‘want’ as the pivot notion and plotting different senses attested for the various ‘want’-verbs across the languages. The findings reveal both inter- and intra-linguistic variation in the selection of ‘want’-verbs and in the complex networks of co-expression they may encode, spanning a range of lexical and grammatical senses. The study also highlights historical patterns of lexical innovation, grammaticalization, and contact-induced change.

Keywords: Want, volition, desiderative, Bantu, co-expression, semantic map

Muhtasari
Utafiti huu unachunguza vitenzi vya maana ya ‘kutaka’ katika lahaja za Kibantu zinazohusishwa na kundi dogo la Rufiji-Ruvuma la Kibantu cha Mashariki, linalozungumzwa kusini mwa Tanzania na kaskazini mwa Msumbiji. Utafiti unachunguza matumizi yake katika miundo ya kiutashi (desiderative constructions) pamoja na ushiriki wake katika aina mbalimbali za usemi. Kwa kutumia mtazamo wa kilinganishi, utafiti huu unatumia ramani za kisemantiki kama nyenzo ya kianaliti na ya kuona ili kunasa mifumo ya maonyesho ya pamoja, kwa kuchukua ‘kutaka’ kama dhana kuu na kuonyesha maana mbalimbali zinazothibitishwa kwa vitenzi tofauti vya ‘kutaka’ katika lugha husika. Matokeo yanaonyesha tofauti kati ya lugha na ndani ya lugha katika uteuzi wa vitenzi vya ‘kutaka’ na katika mitandao changamano ya maonyesho ya pamoja ambayo vinaweza kuelezea, ikijumuisha maana za kimsamiati na za kimaumbo. Utafiti huu pia unaangazia mitindo ya kihistoria ya ubunifu wa msamiati, ugramatishaji, na mabadiliko yanayosababishwa na mawasiliano ya lugha.

Maneno muhimu: kutaka, utashi, kiutashi, Kibantu, maonyesho ya pamoja, ramani za kisemantiki,

1. Introduction

Confined to the Rufiji-Ruvuma subgroup of (Eastern) Bantu languages, this study explores verbs meaning ‘want’ and the array of additional senses these verbs convey. This is done by jointly examining instances of lexical and grammatical patterns that are co-expressed – i.e., co-lexified and co-gramified (Haspelmath 2023) – by volitional verbs in this region.

Desiderative constructions expressing wanting, arguably, belong to the most fundamental concepts in human language. They have been discussed as a cross-linguistic universal (Harkins 1995), and as constituting a conceptual basis or component of many other linguistic expressions (see, e.g., Goddard & Wierzbicka 2010) – though see Khanina (2008, 2010) for some critical remarks on the linguistic universality of ‘want’. Expressing ‘want’ is also argued to be one of the earliest acquired and most frequently used verbal expressions among (English-speaking) children (Harner & Kenlami 2024).[1]

Although the meaning of wanting may be expressed through various linguistic categories and morphosyntactic means cross-linguistically (Khanina 2009), in the Rufiji-Ruvuma – as in most (maybe even all) Bantu languages, which are generally renowned for their “verbiness” – it is expressed with a verb.[2] A verb meaning ‘want’ tends to be associated with several different but related lexical senses, forming a

[1] In these respects, it is perhaps curious that ‘want’ is not included in any basic word lists, such as the Swadesh-lists or the updated Jakarta-Leipzig list (see Tadmor et al. 2010). It is also absent in the common set of words used in comparative-genealogical work on Bantu languages (see, e.g., Bastin et al. 1999). However, these lists are used to measure shared vocabulary indicative of genealogical affinity and therefore focus on lexical items that are least likely to be borrowed. In this regard, it is interesting to note that some of the language varieties examined in this study have in fact borrowed ‘want’-verbs (further addressed in §5.3).

[2] Just as it also is in our metalanguage, English.

complex polysemous network. However, 'want' is not only associated with co-expressing different lexical notions; it also often serves as a prime candidate for expressing various grammatical functions, particularly within the domain of tense and aspect. This is not least evidenced by Heine's (1994, Heine & Dunham 2010) seminal articles on volition-verbs and their "proximative" aspectual meaning in Bantu.

Furthermore, 'want' is an "inherently irrealis" verb, conveying the non-actualized status when operating on another verb (Givón 1980, 2001: 304; see also Khanina 2008). As such, it is tightly associated with the category of modality, i.e., the expression of the non-factualness of a proposition (Narrog 2012). More precisely, it aligns with the type of modal subcategories functioning either as lexical or grammatical categories depending on the desiderative construction in question, the language in which it occurs, and one's theoretical predilections. The notions of desideration and volition are often excluded from typological and comparative investigations of modality in Bantu languages.

By taking a collective grip on the Rufiji-Ruvuma 'want'-verbs – addressing both the complex lexical and grammatical co-expressions associated with 'want' – this study introduces a more fine-grained sensitivity to the lexical background and specific semasiological properties of verbs employed in grammatical constructions. It offers a deeper understanding of the synchronic status, their use, and the limitations of that use within a given language variety, while also providing comparative – and thus historically oriented – glimpses into the development of these verbs.

As a means of further representing and analyzing the complex desiderative networks found in this group of language varieties, this study employs semantic maps (in a first and very rudimentary attempt), using 'want' as the pivot notion (cf. François 2008). As further described in §4, semantic maps are visual representations of complex networks of co-expressions of a linguistic phenomenon, illustrating their connections and similarities. Despite their popularity in cross-linguistic and comparative work (see Georgakopoulos 2019 for an overview), semantic maps have been employed only to a limited extent in Bantu studies (but see Devos 2008, Dom et al. 2016, Andrason 2016, 2019a, b and Veselinova & Devos 2021 for some exceptions). When used, they often merely plot Bantu data onto pre-existing (cross-linguistically generated) maps. This despite the considerable value of semantic maps in comparative variation studies: firstly, in capturing the minute semantic changes of a given construction and the subtle differences between closely related – and in many other aspects similar – language varieties; and secondly, in their ability (as aptly demonstrated in Veselinova & Devos' 2021 study on 'not yet'-expressions in Bantu) to represent forms that exhibit both lexical (referential) and grammatical (procedural) senses, as well as senses that arguably lie in the borderline between these two.

This study focuses on Bantu languages spoken in Eastern Africa. However, its findings may also have implications for the wider Bantu/Niger-Congo family, and for African linguistics more broadly. The semantic diversity and the functional overlap associated with desiderative notions, as well as the method of employing semantic maps to describe and analyze this diversity and its historical precursors, are also useful for similar investigations elsewhere in Africa. Not least in a West African language context, which also appears to showcase complex patterns of co-expressing desiderative constructions (cf. Harkins 1995).

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 sketches the background of the Rufiji-Ruvuma genealogical grouping and presents the data collected. Section 3 describes the constructional profile associated with 'want'-verbs and the various senses they are attested to co-express. In Section 4, the complete set of senses presented in the previous section is used to construct a map against which variety-specific variation is further showcased. Section 5 interprets the synchronic variation as evidence of language change, drawing diachronic conclusions and offering historical explanations for the patterns described in the previous sections. Through this organization, the article moves from synchrony to diachrony and, within these sections, from the lexical to the grammatical. Section 6 concludes with final remarks and suggestions for further research.

2. The Rufiji-Ruvuma genealogical group (N10 and P10-P20) and the data

Table 1 lists the language varieties considered in this study, along with the sources from which the data have been taken. (TLS in the table refers to the Tanzania Language Survey (Nurse & Philippson 1975); see also footnote 3 in §3.2).

Table 1 List of language varieties in the Rufiji-Ruvuma considered for this study

Guthrie code	Language variety	Sources
N11	Manda	Bernander (2017), field notes
N11x	Matumba	Bernander (2017), field notes, TLS
N12	Ngoni	Spiss (1904), Ebner (1953), Moser (1983), Ngonyani (2003), Mapunda (2016), TLS
N12x	Xingoni	Kröger (2025)
N13	Matengo	Häfliger (1909), Yoneda (2006, 2025), field notes
N14	Mpoto	Botne (2019)
N101	Ndendeule	Ngonyani (2013, 2017), Nurse (2008)
P11-12	Ndengeleko	Ström (2013)
P13	Matumbi	Krumm (1912), Odden (1996), TLS
P14	Ngindo	Gromova & Urmanchieva (2005), Urmanchieva (2010)
P14x	Ndwewe	Richard Myeya (pers. comm.)
P21	Yao	Sanderson (1922, 1954), Whiteley (1966)
P22	Mwera	Harries (1950)
P23	Makonde (-Chinima)	Kraal (2005)
	(Plateau-) Makonde	Leach (2010)
P25	Mabiha	Harries (1940)

They are listed according to their Guthrie code – i.e., the alpha-numeric referential system applied to Bantu languages – where letters encompass larger zones, the decimals group languages within those zones, and individual numbers refer to specific languages (see Guthrie 1948-1967-1971; Maho 2003, 2009). The genealogical inaccuracy of this system is particularly evident for the Rufiji-Ruvuma (hereafter Ru-Ru) branch of the Eastern Bantu family tree, which genealogically comprises an amalgamation of varieties from disparate Guthrie groups, namely N10 and the two lowest numbered P-groups. One original member has been unanimously excluded in line with this genealogically based reclassification, namely Tonga (N15), spoken in Malawi and (more) closely related to Tumbuka and other N20-varieties. Others have occasionally been excluded by some authors (e.g., Manda N11 in Nurse 1988, 1999) and re-introduced by others (Gray & Roth 2016; Bernander 2017; Gonzales et al. forthcoming). In this study, we follow the latter group of researchers in including Manda in the Ru-Ru group. At the same time, and in agreement with Nurse (1988, 1999) – but *contra* Gonzales et al. (forthcoming) – we do not include the Kilombero languages (Pogolo G51, Ndamba G52 and Mbunga P15) in Ru-Ru for this study. See Bernander et al. (2022a) for a more detailed overview of the Ru-Ru subgroup and its varieties, including arguments for their genealogical validity.

A related issue concerns the fact that the notions of dialect (or some other lect) versus language are particularly hazy concepts in relation to the linguistic communities of this area (not least witnessed in the profound variation in the colexification and grammaticalization of 'want'-verbs both between and within these language varieties). Dialects (or other "lectal" varieties) are subsumed under the Guthrie code with which they are associated in Table 1. For Makonde, characterized as a cluster of dialects (see Leach 2010: 5-10), two different varieties have been included: one Tanzanian and one Mozambiquan. Note also that Mabiha (and Ndonde P24, not included due to lack of

data) are often subsumed as dialects of Makonde, despite having unique Guthrie codes (cf. Nurse 1999). Similarly, Mwera is considered a variant of Yao, in spite of its designated Guthrie number. Ndengeleko encompasses two unique language-codes based on Ström's (2013: 11, 13-15) argument that the two designations – Rufiji (P11) and Ndengeleko (P12) – refer to the same language. Some of the other varieties under scrutiny are instead considered separate languages or significant varieties but lack a dedicated Guthrie code. On admittedly rather *ad hoc* referential grounds, they have been assigned the Guthrie code of an affiliated variety, with an 'x' added to signal their unclassified status within this referential system.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that some language varieties that should have been included in the study are missing due to a lack of data access. Many of the varieties of this area remain under-described or even undescribed.

This notwithstanding, data come from as many Ru-Ru varieties as possible and are drawn from a broad selection of sources as possible for each language variety. Much of the data consists of primary material from the author's own fieldwork. In a further effort to mitigate the lacuna of linguistic data, we have been fortunate enough to gain access to, and incorporate, a previously overlooked and linguistically almost undescribed language variant, namely Ndwewe (cf. Waite 1987).

A related caveat is that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. The 'want'-verbs examined in this study belong to a complex conceptual network of often closely interrelated and near-synonymous senses associated with. Paired with the very limited access to data for some of the language varieties of this study, some instances of co-expression have likely been missed. It is also possible that other facts about these volitional verbs have been overlooked. Thus, it needs to be acknowledged that access to more language varieties and more comprehensive language data might have altered the picture portrayed in this study.

Finally, there is a structural limitation of the study worth mentioning, namely, that it only takes into account instances of "strict" co-expressions (cf. François 2008). That is, it considers only the bare verb stem expressing 'want' in different constructions, either as a lexical verb or as the substantial element of a grammatical construction, i.e., the auxiliary verb in an auxiliary verb construction. This means that variants in which the 'want'-verb-stem has been altered in various formal (and semantic) ways are not taken into consideration. Such stem alternations are primarily associated with suffixation by what are referred to in Bantu studies as verbal extensions, i.e. various derivational morphemes attached directly to the verb root (see Schadeberg & Bostoen 2019 on Bantu extensions). To illustrate what has been excluded, we might mention the common instance of 'want'-verbs derived with the medio-passive ("neuter") or passive extensions, which in some of the Ru-Ru language varieties are used to express participant-external (including deontic) necessity (see further discussion in §3.3.1). But also excluded from this study, in line with this strict policy, is, for example the reduplication of the 'want'-verb *-pinga* into *-pingapinga* in Mwera, used to express 'search for, desire' (Harries 1950: 77).

3. Verbs of wanting and their co-expressions

This section aims to map out and illustrate the various senses and uses associated with volitional, or desiderative, 'want'-verbs in the Ru-Ru group.

3.1 The 'want'-verb and the desiderative construction

Table 2 lists the different verbs associated with this desiderative notion as they occur across the sample of language varieties. Note that some varieties lexify 'want' using more than one verb – a topic to which we will return later in this article.

Table 2. The inventory of verbs lexifying 'want' in Ru-Ru

N11	Manda	**-londa**
N11x	Matumba	**-gana**
N12	Ngoni	**-funa**
		-londa
		-gana
N13	Matengo	**-pala**
N14	Mpoto	**-pala**
N101	Ndendeule	**-pala**
N12x	Moz. Ngoni	**-pala**
		-taka
P11-12	Ndengeleko	**-pala**
P13	Matumbi	**-pala**
P14	Ngindo	**-pala**
P14x	Ndwewe	**-pala**
P21	Yao	**-saka**
P22	Mwera	**-pinga**
P23	Makonde(-Chinima)	**-lembela**
		-tamwa
	(Plateau-) Makonde	**-lota**
P25	Mabiha	**-lota**

In terms of their semantic profile as lexical verbs, it would seem that the collection of 'want'-verbs discussed in this paper may all be broadly understood as stative verbs. Among the consulted sources, however, only Botne (2019) on Mpoto directly reports on the lexical actionality (*Aktionsart*) of 'want'. In line with his (slightly idiosyncratic) model of lexical verb classes, Botne (2019: 96-97) classifies Mpoto *-pala* 'want', as a type of stative verb – more specifically, as belonging to the "Undelimited Stative" subtype, which encompasses verbs that denote an unbounded or undelimited state.

All the 'want'-verbs in this study are transitive and, with regard to their argument structure, conform to the broad typological patterns outlined in Khanina (2009). This structure is construed as involving two participants in the desiderative state of affairs: the Wanter, i.e., the one who wants, and the Wanted, or *desideratum* – i.e., the object of the Wanter's wishes. The desideratum may, in turn, be one of two subtypes, the Wanted-object and the Wanted-event. That is, either a noun phrase, as in the case of the noun 'cassava' in examples (1), or a verbal complement, as illustrated in the examples in (1) below.

(1) Manda (N11; Bernander 2017: 223)

ngáti	**u-lónd-a**	**má-yáwo**	**u-tól-a**	**mi-kóngo**
if	SM2-want-FV	6-cassava	SM2-take-FV	4-trees

'if you want cassava, you take the trees…'

In complement clauses, the Ru-Ru language varieties generally follow the cross-linguistically common pattern whereby the complement verb occurs in the infinitive when it is co-referential with the subject, i.e., the Wanter (cf: Haspelmath 2013). When there is no such co-reference, the complement verb is marked with reflexes of the common Bantu subjunctive verb form. This contrast may be illustrated by the minimal pair sentences in (2) from Ngoni, involving the same volitional verb **-gana** and the same complement verb **-hamba** 'go'. In (2a), **-hamba** shares the same third-person subject reference as **-gana**, as indicated by its infinitive inflection. In (2b), in contrast, **-hamba**

refers to a different, second-person referent and is consequently inflected in the subjunctive.

(2) Ngoni (N12; Ngonyani 2003: 63)

a. **m-geni** **i-gan-a** **ku-hamb-a** **ku-m-gunda**
1-guest SM1.PRS-want-FV INF-go-FV 17-3-farm
'The guest wants to go to the farm.'

b. **m-geni** **i-gan-a** **ve** **u-hamb-i** **ku-m-gunda**
1-guest SM1.PRS-want-FV PRON2sg SM2sg-go-SBJV 17-3-farm
'The guest wants you to go the farm.'

It may be noted that in Matumbi, and also in Ndengeleko and Makonde, the infinitive is often realized with either an omitted infinitive prefix, in the case of the former, or a reduced (onset-less) form, in the case of the latter two. Thus, in example (3) from Matumbi, there is no **ku-** prefix surfacing on the complement verb 'eat' (see Odden 1996: 55-56; Ström 2013: 138-139, 225-226 for further details).

(3) Matuumbi (P13; Odden 1996: 245)
a-pal-a **ly-á** **mụ-ñụ́ụ́mba**
SM1-want-FV eat-FV 18-9.house
'he wants to eat in the house'

In any case, the general pattern sketched above – namely, the use of infinitives when there is co-reference between the subject/Wanter and the complement – still holds in these language varieties.

However, exceptions to this pattern have also been attested, as in example (4) from Plateau-Makonde, where, despite the Wanter and the Wanted being co-referential, the verb of the complement clause is expressed through the finite (subject-marked) subjunctive verb form.

(4) Plateau Makonde (P23; Leach 2010: 385)
ngu-upa **im-boógwa** **ngú-lót-á** **ngu-lyeel-e** **ú-gwááli**
OM1sg-give.IMP 9-protein SM1-want-FV SM1-eat.APPL-SBJV 14-staple
"'give me protein, I want to eat it with staple!"'

Any functional differences associated with this exceptional strategy in Plateau Makonde has to be set aside for further investigation.

3.2 Co-lexical senses

The desiderative verbs of Ru-Ru co-lexify several senses beyond 'want', as shown in Table 3 (where an x indicates that a given sense is attested).

Table 3. Co-lexified senses of 'want'

Code	**Language variety**	**Pivotal sense**	**Lexical senses**								
		WANT	'need'	'like'	'love'	'accept'	'desire'	'look for/search'	'hunt'	'wish'	'request'
N11	Manda	**-londa**	x		-			x			
N11x	Matumba	**-gana**	x		x			x		x	
N12	Ngoni	**-funa**	x								
		-londa		x	-			x			
		-gana			x					x	
N13	Matengo	**-pala**	x	x	x			x		x	x
N14	Mpoto	**-pala**	x	x	x					x	
N101	Ndendeule	**-pala**	x								
N12x	Xingoni	**-pala**	x		x		x			x	
		-taka	x							x	
P11-12	Ndengeleko	**-pala**						x			
P13	Matumbi	**-pala**	x					x		x	
P14	Ngindo	**-pala**	x		x			x		x	
P14x	Ndwewe	**-pala**	x		x			-		x	
P21	Yao	**-saka**			x				x	x	
P22	Mwera	**-pinga**									
P23	Makonde(-Chinima)	**-lembela**		x			x	x		x	
		-tamwa		x	x	x	x				
	(Plateau-) Makonde	**-lo(o)ta**	x								
P25	Mabiha	**-lota**									
		lembela									

Many of these senses are also associated with desiderative constructions cross-linguistically, as evidenced by the colexification network for 'want' found in the Database of Cross-Linguistic Colexifications (Clics3; Rzymski & Tresoldi et al. 2019).[3]

Examples of cross-linguistically common cases of co-lexification also attested for Ru-Ru 'want'-verbs, include 'need' in (5) and 'love' in (6).[4]

(5) Manda (N11; Bernander 2017: 224)

ni-lónd-a	**ndáláma**	**si-chokópi**	**kwa**	**ky-akúla**
SM1sg-need-FV	10.money	10-little	for	7-food

'I need some money for food'

(6) Ndwewe (P14x; p.c. with Richard Myeya 25-03-06)

ngu-ngu-n-pal-a	**n-humbu**	**ghw-angu**
SM1-PRS-OM1-love-FV	1-wife	1-POSS2sg

'I love my wife'

The sense 'look for' is also commonly attested both cross-linguistically as well as in the Ru-Ru languages, as illustrated in (7) from Ndengeleko.

(7) Ndengeleko (P11; Ström 2013: 240)

ba-ni-pál-a	**née**	**au ba-ku-pál-a**	**wée?**
SM2-OM1sg-look_for-FV	me	or SM2-OM2sg-look_for-FV	you

'are they looking for me or for you?'

Other matching co-lexifications include 'like' and 'request'. In addition to these semantic overlaps, however, the Ru-Ru data provide some additional senses not mentioned, such as the sense of 'wish' for many of the verbs across various language varieties, or 'hunt' for the verb *-saka* in Yao. Similarly, several co-lexifications of 'want' provided in Clics3 are unattested in our Ru-Ru data, such as 'speak', 'think', 'buy', etc.

Clics3 also do not consider the further grammatical functions associated with 'want'-verbs that exist in Ru-Ru, which we will now turn to.

3.3 Grammatical senses

Table 4 lists the various grammatical senses associated with the desiderative verbs in Ru-Ru. As briefly mentioned in §1 and further discussed in the next section, modal senses are also covered under this heading. These modal senses are, in many ways, lexical-like and arguably form more of bridging constructions between lexical and grammatical markers.

[3] The Clics3 database actually includes information retrieved from some of the language varieties discussed in this study, but their data are limited to the word list from the Tanzania Language Survey (TLS; Nurse & Philippson 1975), which is rather unsubstantial and inconclusive. See, e.g., Bernander (2020) on the problem with relying on data from TLS alone. Moreover, because this word list is restricted to lexemes, the data on 'want' only reflect co-expressions of lexical senses, without addressing the grammatical features associated with 'want'. While obviously being less of an issue for Clics3, which focuses on co-lexification, it is more unsatisfying for this study, which also seeks to address their grammatical co-expressions. That being said, we also acknowledge having consulted TLS, not least as a tool for my comparative-historical analysis of the 'want'-verb etymologies (in §5.1).

[4] For some reason, Clics3 list 'need' only as a noun; note also that another concept commonly associated with 'want' cross-linguistically, namely intention, is discussed in the next section on modal senses.

Table 4. Grammatical co-expressions of 'want' in Ru-Ru

Code	Language variety	Pivotal sense	Grammatical senses					
			Modality		Aspect-Tense			
		WANT	PI NEC	PE NEC	INTENTIONAL	PROX	FUT	
							st.	(non-st.)
N11	Manda	**-londa**	x			x		
N11x	Matumba	**-gana**						
N12	Ngoni	**-funa**				x		
		-londa						
		-gana						
N13	Matengo	**-pala**	x					
N14	Mpoto	**-pala**	x			x	x	
N101	Ndendeule	**-pala**						
N12x	Moz. Ngoni	**-pala**		x		x		x
		-taka						
P11-12	Ndengeleko	**-pala**			x		x	
P13	Matumbi	**-pala**						
P14	Ngindo	**-pala**					x	
P14x	Ndwewe	**-pala**	x		x			x
P21	Yao	**-saka**		x				
P22	Mwera	**-pinga**				x		
P23	Makonde(-Chinima)	**-lembela**			x			
		-tamwa					x	
	(Plateau-) Makonde	**-lo(o)ta**				x		
P25	Mabiha	**-lota**						
		-lembela					x	

In all grammatical constructions associated with 'want', the desideratum is an event, typically expressed as an infinitive (although further formal grammaticalization may obscure this fact; see §5.2).

3.3.1 Modal senses of volition, necessity and intention

As mentioned at the outset, when operating on an event, the verb 'want' is inherently associated with non-factivity and thus with modality.

Modality, however, is a linguistic category associated with considerable theoretical disagreement regarding terminology and conceptual delimitations. Most frameworks seem to agree that the modal domain consists of two core modal "forces": the relatively weaker force of possibility and the relatively stronger force of necessity. These are further divided into various intersecting subcategories (or "flavors"). Authors tend to differ in the labels and cut-off points they use, but they largely agree on distinguishing between more objective, participant-oriented categories – describing internal or externally motivated dispositions of a discourse participant – and the more attitudinal, speaker-oriented categories of deontic modality (expressing permissions and obligations) and epistemic modality (expressing speaker assessments).

Moreover, in any of its conceptualizations, modality constitutes a tricky domain as it transcends both lexical and grammatical categorization. Participant-oriented modal categories tend to be more lexical-like, if not entirely lexical, while more mature, event-

or subject-oriented modal categories are more unambiguously associated with grammatical functions (see, e.g., Krug 2011).

For the purpose of this study, 'want'-verbs are attested in use for various modal concepts, which will be categorized here as volition, intention and necessity. Volition refers to the basic 'want'-meaning associated with constructions where the desideratum is an event. Examples (2)-(4) above already illustrate such instances of volitional modality. Example (8) provides another case in point.

(8) Ndendeule (N101; Ngonyani 2013: 14)

t-i-pal-a	**ku-hik-a**
SM1-PRS-want/VOL-FV	INF-want-FV

'We want to come'

As mentioned, volitional modality is excluded in many influential conceptualizations of modality, such as the one by van der Auwera & Plungian 1998 (see also Nauze 2008, Nuyts 2016), because it does not clearly align with the core modal distinctions of necessity versus possibility and weak versus strong force. Narrog (2012: 9) also notes that volition is "relatively neglected in the literature, probably because it is poorly grammaticalized in Modern English".

As a corollary, the recent upsurge of studies on modality in Bantu languages likewise tends to overlook this modal subcategory, as they typically build on the typological work of the aforementioned authors.[5]

A sense closely related to volition, but arguably more functionally specific (and more clearly situated along the grammaticalization route toward a future tense marker, as discussed in the following section) is that of intention. Speakers of Makonde-Chinima appear to make use of a dedicated intentional construction based on the volitional verb *-lembela* 'want', which is occasionally realized in various formally reduced variants, as illustrated in (9) (See §5.2 for further discussion of formal indications of grammaticalization).

(9) Makonde-Chinima (P23; Kraal 2005: 323)

ndambel'	**u-líng-á**	**kadiíki**	**ku-lí-chímul-il-a**	**lí-ngwéele**
SM1sg.want/INT	INF-try-FV	a.bit	INF-OM5-open-APPL-FV	5-monkey

'I want to try to give the monkey some freedom'

In terms of classification within the onomasiological grid of modality, this study follows Devos' (2008) approach which treats intention as a "deontic subtype that is vague between possibility and necessity". This classification is grounded in the deduction that "when someone intends to do something, he or she assumes that it is possible to do it and feels some obligation to do so" (Devos 2008: 32).

Finally, the verbs examined in this study are also used to express necessity, primarily participant-internal necessity, i.e., needs and necessities inherent to the 1st participant (cf. van der Auwera & Plungian 1998). Example (10) illustrates a typical case.

(10) Matengo (N13: Field notes 2016)

ni-pal-a	**ku-sipul-a**
SM1sg-need/NEC-FV	INF-sneeze-FV

'I need to/have to sneeze'

Note that this expression of necessity is directly linked to the co-lexified sense of 'need' rather than 'want' (see Narrog 2012: 162). In Yao, however, the basic desiderative verb may also co-express participant-external necessity, i.e. necessities imposed by external

[5] Note that volitional modality is occasionally also referred to as either bouletic or boulomaic modality. To complicate matters, however, both terms are sometimes used for other types of modal subtypes as well (see Narrog 2012: 9, Nuyts 2016).

circumstances. Example (11) illustrates such a case. Here, the semantic difference is structurally marked by the presence of an expletive verb indexed as the subject (i.e., the Wanter). Note also that the verb 'carry' is inflected in the subjunctive rather than the infinitive.

(11) Yao (P21; Whiteley 1966: 178)
kw-aúl-a **kwéléko** **i-ku-sak-a** **m-kol-e**
INF-go-FV there SM9-OM2sg-want-FV SM2pl-carry-SBJV

cí-kalátá **m-ma-kónó**
7-ticket 18-6-hand
'Going there requires (that you carry) a ticket in your hand'

In many of the other languages, the volitional verb also appears in the same type of participant-external necessity expressions. However, in those cases, the verb is further derived using a mediopassive or passive form, which likewise serves to demote the first participant from subjecthood and suppress its volitional role (cf. Bernander et al. 2022b). Such instances are left out of this study, following the strict scope of analysis.

3.3.2 Aspectual and temporal senses

Volition verbs in Rufiji-Ruvama are also attested as the "substantial" element in the expression of aspect and tense – arguably more grammatical senses than the modal ones discussed in the previous section, as they are more unambiguously diverged from their co-lexical senses.

Among the senses associated with desiderative verbs in the language varieties examined in this study are proximative aspect, as illustrated in (12)[6], and future tense as seen in (13) – both representing common routes of grammatical expansion for 'want'-verbs (as further discussed in §5.2). The proximative is an aspectual category that roughly expresses 'be about (to)', 'nearly', or more technically, "the temporal phase that immediately precedes the boundary introducing a new situation" (Heine & Dunham 2010: 35).

(12) Mwera (P22; Harries 1950: 110)
ŋ-ā-piŋ-ag-a **ku-liŵalil-a**
SM1sg-PST-want/PROX-CONT-FV INF-forget.APPL-FV
'I nearly forgot'

(13) Ndengeleko (P11; Ström 2013: 239)
u-mánde **u-pal-a** **u-yongekek-a**
SM14-cold 14-want/FUT-FV INF-be(come)_increased-FV
'It will become colder'

Although proximative aspect and future tense are clearly conceptually interrelated, they exhibit important distinctions that correspond to the broader conceptual difference between aspect and tense; see Heine (1994: §5). Thus, unlike the future, the proximative does not involve prediction. Moreover, an aspectual marker, the proximative is not sensitive to deictic time constraints. As illustrated with Plateau-Makonde *-lota* in (14a-b), it may occur in different temporal contexts, i.e. the past in (14a) and the present in (14b).

(14) Plateau-Makonde (Leach 2010: 179)
a. **vá-shí-lót-á** **kú-júúgw-a**

[6] See also Kuteva et al. (2019: 451-452) and further reference therein on the conceptually similar avertive.

SM2-PST-want/PROX-FV INF-request-FV
'They were about to request'

b. **vá-lót-á** **kú-júúgw-a**
SM2-PST-want/PROX-FV INF-request-FV
'They are about to request'

Interestingly, in Xingoni and also in Ndwewe, the volitional verb that co-grammatify future tense seems to be distributionally specialized for "non-standard" clausal contexts (i.e. non-main or non-declarative clauses), such as the Ndwewe relative clause in (15).

(15) Ndwewe (P14x; p.c. with Richard Myeya 25-03-06)
ni-ki-m-mon-a **ka-mwali** **ywaa-pal-a** **ku-bhegh-a**
SM1sg-PST-OM1-see-FV 12-girl REL1.SM1sg-want/FUT-FV INF-be-FV

n-hunda **ghw-angu**
1-teacher 1-POSS1sg
'I saw the girl who will be my teacher'

Kröger (2025) also reports that **-pala** 'want' functions as (part of) a dedicated future marker in interrogative constructions, as in (16). As non-declaratives, interrogative clauses can arguably also be considered a type of non-standard clause, functionally also linked with non-main clauses through their backgrounded predicate.

(16) Xingoni (N12x; Kröger 2025: 201)
xilau **mw-ana=ngu** **a-pal-a** **ku-lye' ni?**
tomorrow 1-child-POSS1sg SM1sg-want/FUT-FV INF-eat what
'What will my child eat tomorrow?'

For some of the language varieties, the grammatical constructions with 'want'-verbs have undergone further formal changes, following typical grammaticalization processes described in typological and Bantu-specific literature. These effects are further described in §5; here it suffices to motivate why these constructions are still included in the study (perhaps seemingly opposing the criterion in §2). Basically, the inclusion is motivated by the fact that the source construction still constitutes a co-expression of a volitional verb and that there co-exist gradient instantiations of the construction, including non-eroded variants with the "full" volitional verb and verb complement. Example (17) with **-lembela** in Mabiha illustrates this. Whereas (17a) represents the more formally grammaticalized variant, showing stem erosion and fusion, (17b) shows the co-existing original, full construction.

(17) Mabiha (P25; Botne 1989: 170)
a. **tu-lembe-ku-tend-a**

b. **tu-lembel-a** **ku-tend-a**
SM1pl-want/FUT-FV INF-make-FV
'We will make'

4. Towards a grammatical map of 'want' in Rufiji-Ruvuma Bantu: Conceptual representation of the co-expressions of the notional pivot 'want'

4.1 Approach

A particularly fruitful way to showcase the complex network of co-expressions involving 'want' as well as the cross-linguistic variation in which different verbs express the same or similar senses or the same verb expresses a range of different senses, is to transform the relevant data into a semantic map. Over the recent 30 years, semantic maps have received plenty of scholarly attention. See Georgakopoulos & Polis

(2018a,b), Georgakopoulos (2019), for particularly comprehensive overviews, including literary reviews on various types of semantic maps and the range of different linguistic categories investigated using this model.

The next section presents tentative semantic maps with 'want' as the pivot sense, confined to the Ru-Ru Bantu subgroup. It needs to be stressed that this is a preliminary and hypothetical representation. Revised and more robust versions may be expected to be developed in the future as more comprehensive and higher-quality data become available. That being said, this points to one of the great strengths of the semantic map approach, namely, its falsifiability (cf. Haspelmath 2003, Georgakopoulos et al. 2016).

The maps presented in this paper essentially merge the frameworks presented in Haspelmath (2003) and François (2008). While the former focuses on grammatical categories, the latter concentrates on lexical ones. The latter work is explicitly influenced by the former (although, in my view, in a more refined manner), and both offer comprehensive guidance on the theoretical underpinnings of the model and how to operationalize the construction of a semantic map.[7]

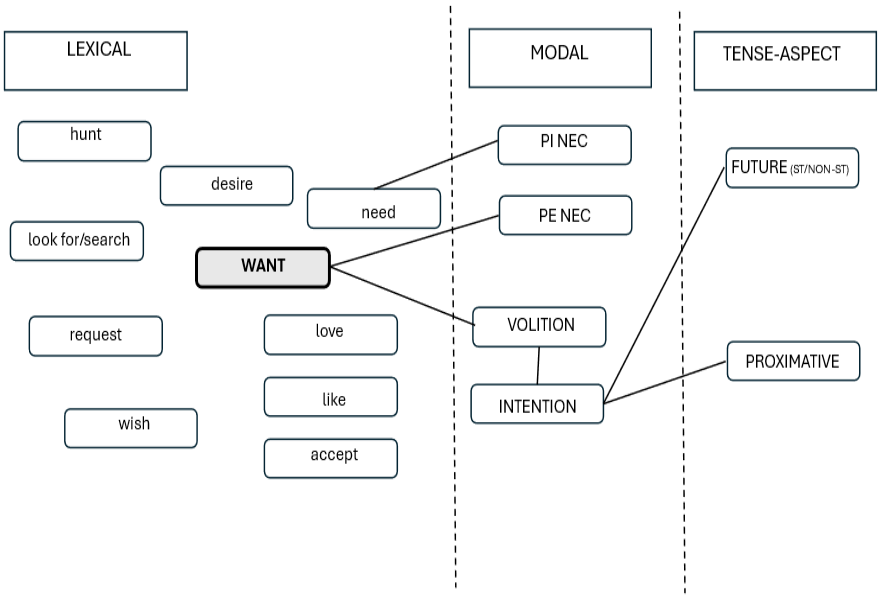
The Ru-Ru 'want'-map is, in a way, a mixture of a so-called proximity and connective map (cf. van der Auwera 2013), reflecting the fact that it has been easier to discern direct semantic adjacencies and the actual directions of development when dealing with the grammatical senses. In contrast, directionality between the lexical senses is less clearly ascertainable (see §5.1). Where direct connectivity has been identified, this is indicated with arrows in the map. In those cases where wehave not been able to work out (or where there might not be) any direction of extensions, we have tried to group senses together based on semantic cohesion, thus indicating the closeness of senses by spatial adjacency (see Georgakopoulos & Polis 2018a). Typically, certain senses can be grouped according to more directly shared semantic properties.

4.2 The maps

By plotting all the different senses attested for the different 'want'-verbs across the different languages, as explored in §3.2 and §3.3, and presented in Table 2 and Table 3, we may transform this information into the map shown in Figure 1. This map, which is arranged in three broad groups as indicated by dashed lines, clearly illustrates the plethora of senses associated with 'want' in this linguistic group, forming a complex network of co-expressivity straddling the lexical-grammatical interface.

[7] See also Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2022 for a recent discussion of merging lexical and grammatical data. Note, however, that she is not as restrictive as in this study, as she includes "loose" co-expressions.

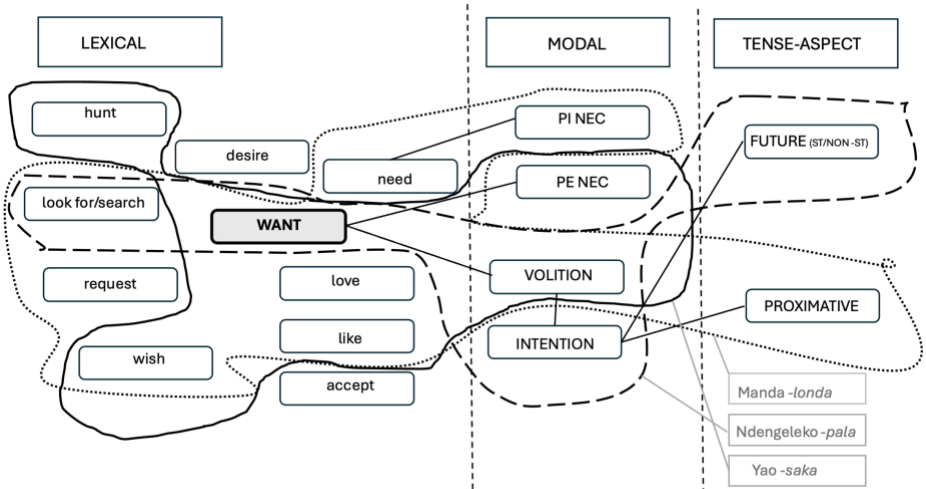
Figure 1. A semantic map for {WANT} in the Ru-Ru subgroup of Bantu languages



An important issue to mention is that there is additional comparative evidence showing that cognate verbs – although they do not share the pivotal meaning of 'want' (see §5.1) – still instantiate several of the other connected senses in this map (although, significantly enough, never the grammatical functions), thus further corroborating the direct connections outlined here.

In François's (2008) terms, the map based on the cumulative senses from the comparative overview of Ru-Ru data in Figure 1 forms the "etic grid" (Francois 2008). This grid provides the overall background against which language-specific "emic" categorizations of co-expressions of 'want'-verbs may be plotted, thereby highlighting inter-linguistic commonalities and differences. The following figures, in turn, represent such emic categorizations through different variety-specific "isolectic sets". For ease of reference, we have selected three language varieties that provide the most robust data, and that also represent what has been suggested to be the three major sub-branches within the Ru-Ru subgroup (cf. Nurse 1999); these are Manda (Songea, or Rufiji west), Ndengeleko (Rufiji east) and Yao (Ruvuma). The specific maps can be found in Appendix 2. Figure 2 presents the cumulative results of these three maps.

Figure 2. Some isolectic sets around the notion <WANT> in Ru-R



As can be seen in these maps, the verbs expressing 'want' are not only formally distinct, but they also exhibit strikingly different networks of co-expressed senses. Perhaps most significant is the variation in the grammatical domain: Ndengeleko's 'want'-verb **-pala** has developed a future tense meaning while Manda's equivalent **-londa** has acquired a proximative aspectual sense. In contrast, Yao's **-saka** has developed neither. The patterns of co-expression within the modal domain also differ substantially, with some interrelations to other developed senses. For instance, Ndengeleko links intention modality with future tense, whereas Manda co-expresses participant-internal necessity modality with 'want', which is clearly related to the fact that 'want' also co-lexifies 'need' in this language variety.

5. Diachronic inferences

5.1 Etymologies and pathways of co-lexification

Interestingly, it has been challenging to properly trace the etymologies of many of the 'want'-verbs, as many are not easily linked to proposed verb reconstructions for Bantu (as given in, *inter alia*, Guthrie 1967-1971, Meeussen 1980, Bastin et al. 2002, also Marlo 2013). A clear case is the etymology of **-londa,** attested as a volitional verb in Manda and Ngoni in our sample, which can be linked to the Proto-Bantu root ***dònd** 'search for, follow' (for a detailed discussion of the etymology of this verb, including additional senses developed in other Bantu languages, see Bernander 2017: 220-224). The reconstructed senses, along with the fact that the Matumba variety attests **-londa** only with these sense(s) (and not with 'want'), further suggest that the direction of metonymic extension – i.e., the change in the pattern of lexification – of this verb shifted from 'search for' to 'want'. Also *tún with the meaning 'desire', reflected in the spirantized variant **-funa** in Ngoni, is mentioned in Guthrie's comparative series, but only as part of an "exclusively eastern set of entries" (Guthrie 1970: 137) (see §5.3 for the argumentation that the presence of this 'want'-verb in Ru-Ru is due to contact). That volitional **-lo(o)ta** is an extension from the reconstructed ***dóót** 'dream', also appears to be a plausible semantic extension. This may be further corroborated because both Mabiha and Plateau-Makonde, where the volitional **-lo(o)ta** is attested, seem to use alternative terms for 'dream'.

Moreover, an expedient comparative overview using the TLS (Nurse & Philippson 1975), supplemented by additional sources for corroboration, reveals that many of the 'want'-verbs do have cognates in other Bantu language varieties outside the Ru-Ru subgroup – or even within the Ru-Ru group, although without the pivotal 'want'-sense. For instance, **-londa** lexifies 'want' in other (Tanzanian) Bantu languages outside of the Ru-Ru group, such as Nyakusa (M31), Digo (E73) and several G30/Ruvu languages, suggesting that this development follows a common pathway of extension, most likely due to drift. Similarly, **-pala** attests the meaning 'search for' in Makonde and Yao (see also Sanderson 1954), two language varieties that are part of Ru-Ru but use different verbs for expressing 'want'. This meaning is also seen in many other East African Bantu languages like Hehe, Rangi, etc. Additionally, the verb **-gana** (connected to the reconstructed ***gàn** 'think'?) attests the sense 'love' in many M-languages / "Corridor" group languages (Malila, Lambya, Nyika, Ndali).

Significantly, except for the few reflexes we have of the reconstructed volitional verb ***càka** – as a direct reflex and dedicated volitional verb **-saka** in Yao, and also as an additional and functionally secondary one in Xingoni (most likely horizontally transmitted from Swahili; see §5.3) – none of the verb stems can be linked to an original, or reconstructed, meaning 'want' at any higher (putative) proto-level. However, **-pala** lexified as 'want', makes a strong candidate for a shared innovation within a putative "proto-Mbinga" branch of Ru-Ru (cf. Gonzales et al. Forthcoming).

The most spectacular etymological reconstruction is perhaps found in Botne's

(1989) account of **-lembela** in Mabiha and Makonde, where the verb is hypothesized to originate from a reflexivized root with an intrusive nasal. This root then underwent vowel lowering, ultimately linking it to a form **°bɪd**, associated with volitional and desiderative senses according to Botne (although not found in any Proto-Bantu reconstructions, as far as we can tell).

This leaves us with **-pinga** in Mwera, for which we cannot provide any (plausible) etymology, and **-tamwa,** which is a Swahili loan (ultimately of Arabic origin; see §5.3).

5.2 Grammaticalization pathways

Under the discussion of grammatical senses of co-expressions with 'want'-verbs, the categories of modality and tense-aspect were subsumed. Unlike the modal senses, which in many ways exhibit little semantic specialization relative to the lexical senses, we will now turn to two tense-aspect senses that show clearer indicia of differentiation vis-à-vis the pivotal 'want'.

Both the development of 'want' into a marker of proximative aspect and its development into a marker of future tense constitute well-known instances of grammaticalization. Regarding the proximative, the work of Bernd Heine has been particularly influential (see e.g., Heine 1994, 1997, 2002; Heine & Dunham 2010), while the rise of future tense markers from volitional verbs has been discussed by several scholars – including, again, Bernd Heine in Heine et al. (1991: 170ff), as well as Bybee et al. (1991; 1994: 254-257) and Dahl (2000). The grammaticalization of 'want' into markers of tense-aspect have also been the topic of many language-specific studies on Bantu languages, including some addressing the Ru-Ru language varieties. Indeed, the grammaticalization of the volitional verb *-taka* to a future tense prefix *ta-* in the closely related Bantu language Swahili (G42), is often cited as a text-book example of grammaticalization. Heine's work further shows that the same verb in Swahili has also developed a proximative aspectual function, albeit in a formally distinct variant from the future, as it has not undergone morphologization and still surfaces only as a verb in a complex auxiliary construction.

As already noted in §3.3.2, there is a clear semantic difference in the developmental routes of proximatives versus futures, which justifies treating them not only as separate grammatical markers but also as separate, rather than contiguous, instances of grammaticalization. Crucially, while the development of a proximative from 'want' is characterized by the *loss* of the inherent component of intention, the development of the future tense is rather characterized by the *addition* of a component of prediction.

Particularly noteworthy is the development of 'want'-verbs into future auxiliary verbs in Xingoni, and also Ndwewe, where their use is distributionally restricted to "non-standard" (i.e. non-main or non-declarative) clausal contexts. This was illustrated in example (16) and (17), respectively, in §3.3.2. In contrast, as seen in (18), these languages use standard future markers consisting of the pre-initial prefix **ti-** or (its further weakened variant) **xi-**, both ultimately derived from a complex construction involving the auxiliary ***-ti*** 'say' and the content verb inflected in the dependent yet finite subjunctive verb form.[8] (Incidentally, this example also illustrates the non-standard future tense use of the volitional construction with **-pala**).

(18) Xingoni (N12x; Kröger 2025: 109)

xi-n-dang-an-i	**hi-m-bal-a**	**ku-hi-kombol-a=éhe**
FUT-SM1sg-tell-ASS-SBJV	REL8-SM1sg-want-FV	INF-OM8-be_able-FV=DEM8

'I will tell what we will be able'

[8] See Botne (1998) for an overview of this specific grammaticalization pathway. It is also interesting to note how this structurally encoded and distributionally confined functional division of labor parallels what Güldemann (1999) describes for the system of standard versus non-standard negative marking (and its genesis) commonly found in Bantu. An interesting topic for further investigation.

Since these special tense constructions ultimately stem from the same mechanisms of grammaticalization as those underlying the general future tense markers described above, they are still represented under the same node in the semantic map. The restriction to non-standard contexts is arguably linked to the concurrent rise of the *ti*-future construction, rather than to any inherent lexical properties of the 'want'-verbs themselves.

Once grammaticalized, these constructions may undergo further morpho-syntactic decategorialization and phonemic erosion – at which point the direct formal link with the volitional verb is arguably lost (as pointed out already in §3.3). There are particularly clear indications of formal grammaticalization of the 'want'-verb in those Ru-Ru language varieties where it has developed into a future marker. Consider, for instance, the formally condensed variant of the erstwhile volitional verb **-pala** in Ngindo, shown in (19).

(19) Ngindo (P14; Urmanchieva 2010: 274)
ba-ka-hich-a **ba-pa-ku-hwee**
SM2-COND-come-FV SM2-FUT-INF-kill
'if they come, they will kill'

Some caution is warranted, however, in analyzing cases of formal grammaticalization, given the general predilection among many of these language varieties to reduce the final syllable of verbs (see, e.g., Bernander 2017: 53; Botne 2019: 14; Yoneda 2025). Consider, for instance, example (20) from Mpoto, where the truncated **-pala** expresses nothing else than the lexical sense of 'want'.

(20) Mpoto (N14; Botne 2019: 129)

ni-paa	**mu-ndu**	**yo-yo-oha**	**a-lemb-ayi**	**tuu**
SM1-want	1-person	1-1-any	SM1-write-SBJV	just

'I want anyone to write'

Ström (2013: 260) discusses additional pieces of evidence supporting the formally grammaticalized status of **-pala** 'want' as a future marker in Ndengeleko, including patterns of tonal reduction. Moreover, according to her (Ibid: 225), the infinitive marker is consistently reduced to **u-** when used with **-pala** to express future tense. Recall from the discussion of example (3) in §3.1 that it otherwise shows optional variation between the fully realized **ku-** and the reduced **u-**.

5.3 Contact, convergence and divergence

Our final section on the historical background to the volitional verbs and their co-expression patterns in Ru-Ru concerns contact-induced change. With English 'want' as a notable exception (cf. Grant 2009), the transfer of (lexical) 'want' does not appear to be common cross-linguistically (see, e.g., its overall low ranking score in the World Loanword Database; Haspelmath & Tadmor 2009). The concept of volition also ranks low in Matras' (2007) borrowing hierarchy of modal expressions. At the same time, 'want' is apparently not viewed as resistant enough to external influences to qualify for inclusion in basic vocabularies (see footnote 1, §1).

For Ru-Ru some instances indicative of contact-induced change are attested within the volitional domain. Thus, the existence of a triple set of 'want'-verbs in Tanzanian Ngoni, i.e., **-gana**, **-londa** and **-funa** is most likely due to the history of Ngoni as a conglomerate of various ethnic and linguistic groups under the rule of the Nguni who migrated to southern Tanzania in the late 1800s (see, *inter alia*, Ngonyani 2001, Mous 2019, Bernander 2025). The presence of **-funa** is most likely a case of (super-strate) contact-induced change from South African Nguni (S40). Interestingly, the various volitional verbs also exhibit a functional division: **-funa** is functionally restricted to marking the grammatical function of proximative aspect – a grammatical sense that was likely adopted along with the lexical matter from Nguni (See Bernander 2017: 230 for further discussion of *-funa* and its origin). The verbs **-londa** and **-gana**, both widespread elsewhere in southern Tanzania, are instead confined to expressing a

broad range of lexical senses co-expressed with ‘want’.

Of probably a slightly later date of origin, we also find imprints from Swahili – the regionally dominant language – in this domain in Ru-Ru. (Swahili showcases sustainable influences on other East African language varieties; see, e.g., Bernander 2025 and further references therein for examples of various linguistic domains affected by “Swahilization”). Thus, **-tak(i)a** in Xingoni is most likely a non-integrated Swahili loan, since this verb stem can be traced back to the reconstructed form ***càk** (see §5.1). An inherited reflex of this form would have been realized as **/ʃaka/** in Xingoni if it adhered to regular sound correspondences (compare the cognate **-saka** in Yao).[9]

Moreover, according to Kraal (2005: 387), the volitional verb **-tamwa** in Makonde(-Chinima), occurring alongside **-lembela,** originates from the Swahili noun **tamaa** ‘hope’. This would imply an interesting case of adaptation involving some kind of categorical reanalysis from noun to verb. In contrast to these instances of interlingual convergence, it is also interesting to note the intralingual divergence within the Makonde group (including Mabiha), as the other varieties do not share the volitional verbs mentioned for Makonde(-Chinima) above but instead make use of the alternative **-lota.**

6. Summary and conclusions

This paper has accounted for the co-expression, i.e., the joint instances of co-lexification and co-grammatification (Haspelmath 2023), associated with ‘want’-verbs in the Rufiji-Ruvuma subgroup of Bantu languages, spoken in Southern Tanzania and Northern Mozambique. Aiming for a holistic approach, the study has taken into consideration all senses associated with these verbs, which furthermore have been represented in a semantic map.

The study shows there is a vast set of verbs expressing volitional and desiderative events, along with several additional senses. As demonstrated, ‘want’ is expressed by a staggering variation of different verbs, even between the closely related languages in this study. Different etymologies and lexical paths to become ‘want’-verb are also apparent. Even within the same language, different ‘want’-verbs with different extensions have been attested.

It is clear from the comparative tables and semantic maps that these verbs are not alike. Although they may appear synonymous when considering the meaning of ‘want’ in isolation, each carries a much broader and mutually distinct networks of co-expression. These networks functionally differentiate the verbs and motivate their mutual existence within a single variety.

From a diachronical perspective, this situation is reminiscent of the complex picture of metonymically driven extension and narrowing in the semantic composition described for another set of Eastern Bantu verbs, namely motion verbs (Devos 2014). Although the main etymology remains opaque for some of the ‘want’-verbs, attested pathways of change leading to the lexical sense of ‘want’ appears to involve verbs meaning ‘look for’; additionally, borrowing has been attested as a route for the introduction of a ‘want’-verb.

Further studies could expand the investigation to a broader set of data. On the one hand, similar situation of a plethora of distinct ‘want’-verbs co-expressing a variety of senses are well-known from other parts of (Eastern) Bantu. On the other hand, as this study has shown, a more fine-grained investigation of desirative expressions within individual languages (or language varieties) is also warranted, based on the intriguing amount of language-internal variation observed.

Finally, it would be revealing to explore the negative equivalents to these affirmative forms and their contextual use. We know that WANT.NOT is a commonly lexicalized category (Veselinova 2013). Furthermore, antonyms to the lexical senses

[9] The realization /taka/ with a fortified /t/ is probably itself the result of a language-internal loan from the Northern Swahili dialects to the southern Swahili varieties, including the standardized form (see, e.g., Nurse & Philippson 1993: 578). It is most likely the latter which have affected Xingoni.

associated with 'want' are commonly employed for grammatical negative marking in Bantu, but the affirmative 'want' may also give rise to certain negative functions such as admonitions (see Bernander et al. 2023).

Abbreviations

Glosses follow the Leipzig Glossing rules with the following exceptions:
1, 2, 3 etc. noun classes / person
ASS associative
FV final vowel
INT intentional
NEC necessity
OM object marker
PE participant-external
PI participant-internal
POSB possibility
PROX proximative
SM subject marker
VOL volitional

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Appendix
Figure 3 Isolectic set for Manda *-londa*

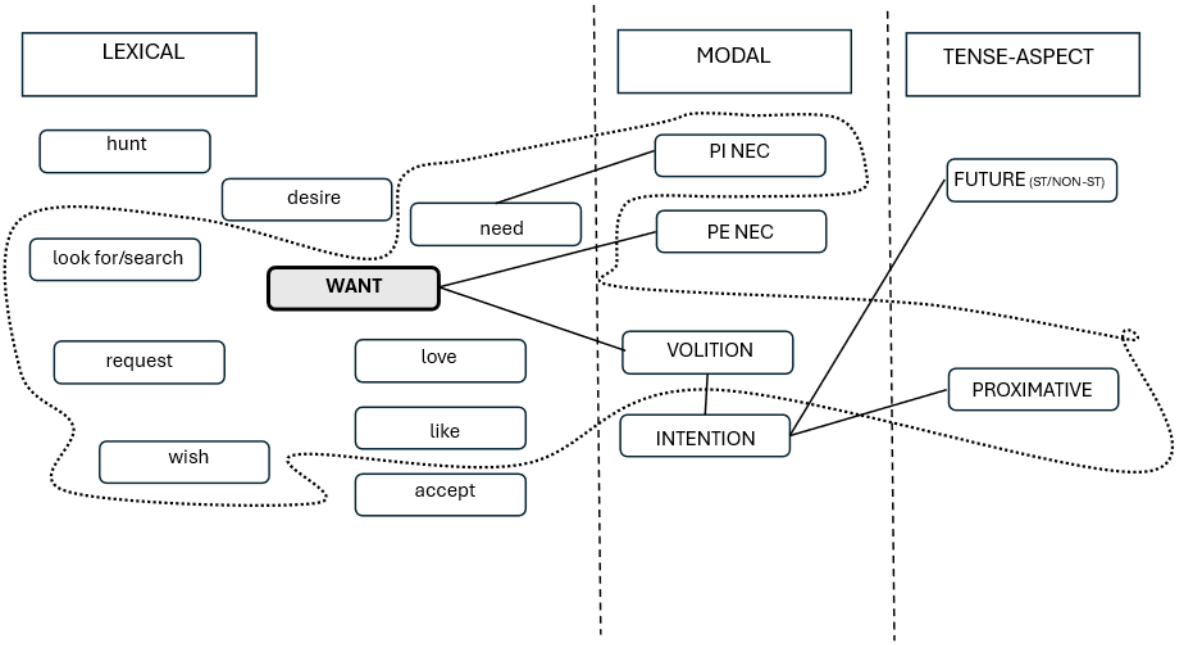


Figure 4. Isolectic set for Ndengeleko *-pala*

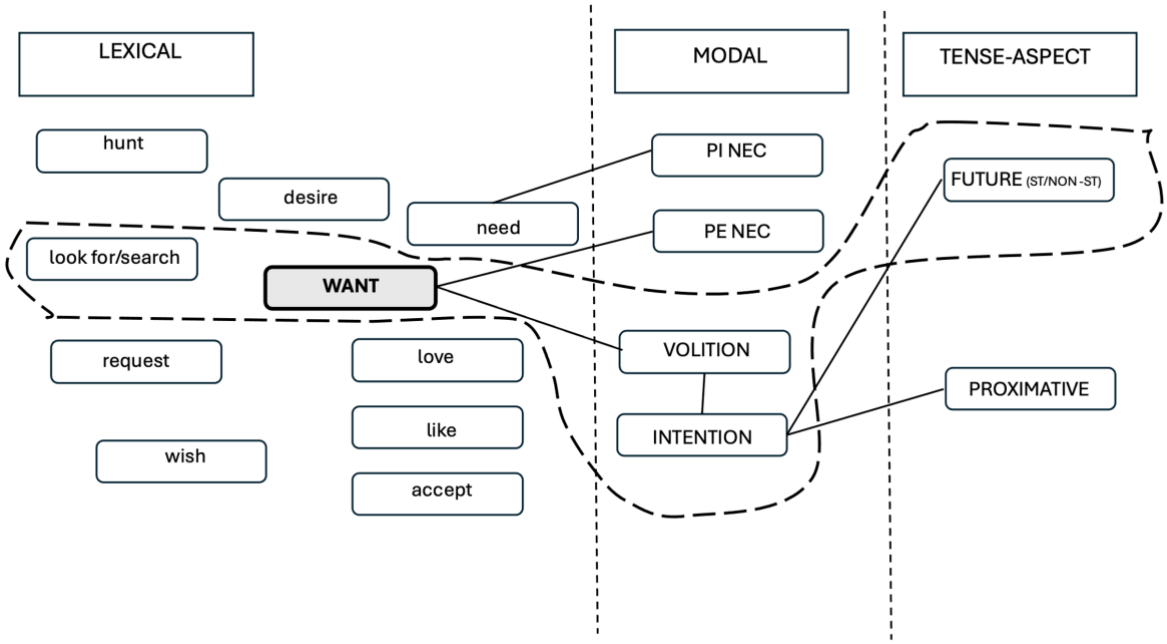


Figure 5. Isolectic set for Yao *-saka*

