



Conditional constructions in the EkeGusii language of southwestern Kenya

Evans Gesura Mecha

Evans-mecha@kisiuniversity.ac.ke

Kisii University, Kenya

<https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.7.2.135>

ABSTRACT

This paper describes how EkeGusii (Bantu, JE42), a language of south-western Kenya, forms and interprets conditional constructions. Using a descriptive linguistic approach and author-generated linguistic examples, it examines the grammatical forms and interpretations of conditionals. In EkeGusii there is no single dedicated conditional conjunction, so protases are introduced by the invariant conjunction *onye*, the subject-agreeing form *-ise*, or a periphrasis of the verb ‘be’ plus an infinitive with no conjunction. Apodoses may carry *kanga* ‘would’, *nabo* ‘may’, or the modal *goika* ‘must’, and a fixed phrase, *tangori ndero*, expresses a counterfactual wish about the present. The agreement paradigm of *-ise* is given for all noun classes in the data. Further, the paper shows that reality and predictive conditionals share their protasis markers, that *kanga* occurs only in unreal conditionals, and that no dedicated form separates hypothetical from counterfactual readings. The findings establish that EkeGusii expresses conditionality through multiple grammatical resources. Further research using systematic elicitation and natural discourse data is recommended to clarify these patterns.

Keywords: Agreement, Bantu, Conditionals, Counterfactuals, EkeGusii, Periphrasis

I. INTRODUCTION

A conditional construction relates two propositions. One, the protasis, states a condition whose truth is not asserted, and the other, the apodosis, holds under that condition (Nicolle 2017: 1). All languages appear to have ways of expressing such relations, and many have constructions that are used mainly for this purpose (Nicolle 2017: 1–2). Conditionals have been studied extensively in philosophy, semantics and psychology (Lycan 2001; Dancygier & Sweetser 2005; von Stechow 2011; Liu 2019), but far less is known about conditional constructions outside English and a few other European languages (Nicolle 2017). For Bantu languages, the 2017 special issue of *Studies in African Linguistics* includes descriptions of Cuwabo (Guérois 2017), Ndendeule (Ngonyani 2017) and Swahili (Mwamzandi 2017), and earlier work treats Haya (Saloné 1979) and Nyakyusa (Lusekelo 2016).

EkeGusii (also Gusii; ISO 639-3 *guz*) is an East Nyanza Bantu language spoken mainly in Kisii and Nyamira counties in south-western Kenya. It is coded E42 in Guthrie’s referential classification (Guthrie 1967–71) and JE42 in its update by Maho (2009). Its closest relative is Kuria, and Ethnologue figures cited by Cammenga (2002) put the number of speakers at about two million. The language has a comprehensive description of its phonology and morphology (Cammenga 2002), an earlier study of its tense system (Whiteley 1960), and work on its phonology that includes the voicing dissimilation known as Dahl’s Law (Bickmore 1998). To our knowledge, however, conditional constructions have not been described as such. This paper gives a first account of the formal means by which EkeGusii expresses conditions and of the readings those means receive.

Unless otherwise stated, the examples are the authors’ own. They are written in the practical orthography without tone marking, with morpheme boundaries added, and glossed following the Leipzig Glossing Rules (Comrie, Haspelmath & Bickel 2008). Abbreviations are listed before the references. In the free translations, P marks the protasis and Q the apodosis. Where an example is discussed again, it is repeated with a new number, and the repetition is signalled by a phrase of the form ‘Example 3 given as 11 below’.

Three results stand out. First, conditionality is expressed by a set of resources used together and not by a single conjunction, and one of them, *-ise*, agrees with the subject in person and noun class. Second, predictive conditionals pattern with reality conditionals, while *kanga* and the conjunctionless ‘be’ protasis are restricted to unreal readings. Third, no form in the data separates hypothetical from counterfactual conditionals. Section 2 introduces the terminology and classification used. Section 3 describes the markers, and Section 4 discusses the conditional types and the way each is marked. Section 5 concludes. Comparison with other Bantu languages is made at each point where it bears on the analysis.

The objective of this paper is to describe the grammatical structures and semantic interpretations of conditional constructions in EkeGusii, focusing on the markers introducing protasis and apodosis, subject agreement

patterns, and the roles of tense, aspect, and modality in expressing reality, predictive, hypothetical, and counterfactual conditional meanings.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In a conditional sentence, a typically subordinate clause, the protasis (p), states a condition, and a main clause, the apodosis (q), holds under that condition (Nicolle 2017: 1). We call a construction conditional if expressing such a relation is its basic function or one of its basic functions (Comrie 1986: 82), and we do not assume that ‘conditional’ is a uniform category across languages (Nicolle 2017: 1–2).

The meanings of conditionals have been classified in several ways (Athanasiadou & Dirven 1997; Bhatt & Pancheva 2006). We use the classification of Thompson, Longacre and Hwang (2007: 255–262), which follows Schachter (1971) in separating reality from unreality conditionals. Reality conditionals refer to present, habitual or generic, or past situations. Unreality conditionals are imaginative or predictive. Imaginative conditionals divide into hypothetical and counterfactual conditionals, and predictive conditionals refer to future situations that are predicted to occur (Nicolle 2017: 3). Taylor (1997) proposes a three-way division into factual, hypothetical and counterfactual conditionals, and Salomé (1979) distinguishes simple from imaginary conditionals, with predictives grouped among the simple ones (Nicolle 2017: 3–4). We use the scheme of Thompson et al. as a descriptive grid. Comrie (1986: 88–93) argues that conditionals form a continuum of hypotheticality and that languages differ in which points on it they mark (Nicolle 2017: 5). The question for EkeGusii is therefore which distinctions its forms encode and which are left to context.

Protasis and apodosis can also be related in different ways. Following Sweetser (1990), Nicolle (2017: 4) distinguishes content, epistemic, directive and interrogative relations, according to whether the apodosis is a prediction, a conclusion, an exhortation or a question. Our data contain content relations and interrogative ones. Concessive conditionals, such as English *even if* clauses, are not treated here. Haspelmath and König (1998) give a typology of them, and Nicolle (2017: 11–12) argues that they do not express conditions in the strict sense.

Descriptions of other Bantu languages show considerable variation in how these distinctions are encoded. Ndendeule has six conditional constructions, built with the conjunction *anda* ‘if’, the prefix *nga-* and other markers, and tense, aspect and mood markers are said not to contribute to the conditional interpretation (Ngonyani 2017). Cuwabo has three conditional conjunctions and a *ka-* tense for counterfactual and hypothetical readings (Guérois 2017). In Nyakyusa the protasis is introduced by *lunga*, the counterfactual marker *angali* introduces the apodosis, and reality and unreality are separated mainly by tense-aspect-mood formatives (Lusekelo 2016). A corpus study of written Swahili finds that *ki-*, *ikiwa*, *ngeli-ngali-* and *nge-* correspond only partly to degrees of hypotheticality (Mwamzandi 2017, as summarised by Nicolle 2017: 6). This variation is the reason EkeGusii has to be described on its own terms before it is compared.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive linguistic approach to examine how EkeGusii expresses and interprets conditional constructions. The analysis draws on linguistic examples supplied by the author, as stated in the introduction, illustrating conditional markers, verb forms, subject agreement, and the relationship between protasis and apodosis. The examples cover reality, predictive, hypothetical, counterfactual, and interrogative conditionals, providing the basis for describing the grammatical structures and meanings associated with each type.

The analysis identifies the forms introducing protases and apodoses, examines the agreement patterns of *-ise* across the noun classes represented in the data, and compares the distribution of markers such as *onye*, *kanga*, *nabo*, and *goika*. The examples are interpreted in their grammatical and contextual settings and compared with descriptions of other Bantu languages to identify similarities and differences. Since the study relies on a limited set of examples, its findings are descriptive rather than exhaustive, and further elicitation and natural discourse data are needed to test the patterns identified.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that EkeGusii expresses conditionality through multiple grammatical strategies, including *onye*, subject-agreeing *-ise*, the ‘*be*’ + *infinitive* construction, and specific apodosis markers. The analysis shows that reality and predictive conditionals share protasis markers, while *kanga* is restricted to unreal conditionals. Hypothetical and counterfactual readings lack dedicated formal distinctions, with interpretation depending on the construction and context. The *-ise* forms also exhibit agreement and syncretism across the noun classes represented in the data as discussed in the sub sections below.

4.1 Markers of Conditionality in EkeGusii

4.1.1 Correlative pairs

Conditional sentences in EkeGusii are typically built on a pair of markers, one in each clause. Example (1) combines the protasis conjunction *onye* ‘if’ with the apodosis marker *kanga* ‘would’. Example (2) combines a protasis introduced by *o-ise* ‘if you’ (second person singular) with the apodosis marker *nabo* ‘may’.

- (1) *Onye n-a-chi-et-e esukuru kanga n-i-nde o-mo-nto*
 if 1SG-TAM-go-PERF-FV school would FOC-1SG-be CL1-person
o-mo-nene
 CL1-big

‘[If I had gone to school,]_P [I would be a prominent person.]_Q’

- (2) *O-ise ko-rent-a ama-guta nabo nda-rosi-e ama-ndasi*
 2SG-if INF-bring-FV CL6-oil may 1SG-make-FV CL6-pancakes
 ‘[If you bring oil,]_P [I may make pancakes.]_Q’

The two pairs differ in the form of the protasis. In (1) *onye* is followed by a finite verb with its own subject marker and a perfective suffix. In (2) the subject marker is attached to the conditional element itself, and the verb that follows is an infinitive (*ko-rent-a*). They also differ in meaning. Every occurrence of *kanga* in our data belongs to an unreal conditional, namely (1), (5), (8), (18), (19) and (22a), whereas *nabo* occurs in a predictive conditional whose condition is open. The pairing is not obligatory. Example (4) has *onye* with the modal *goika* ‘must’ and no *kanga*, and (22b) has *-ise* with no apodosis marker at all.

4.1.2 Subject agreement on -ise

The conditional element *-ise* agrees with the subject. Table 1 gives its forms with first and second person subjects. Third person forms are those of classes 1 and 2 in Table 2.

Table 1

Forms of -ise with person-marked subjects

Person	Singular	Plural
1 st	<i>ingise</i>	<i>toise</i>
2 nd	<i>oise</i>	<i>moise</i>
3 rd	<i>aise (class 1)</i>	<i>baise (class 2)</i>

Source: authors’ data.

Table 2 gives the forms for all noun classes in our data, which comprise sixteen classes and four subclasses. In most rows the form is the subject marker written together with *-ise*. Two entries depart from this pattern: class 15 has *goise* although its subject marker is *ko-*, and class 21 has *aise* although its subject marker is *nya-*. The first person singular form *ingise* in Table 1 likewise does not decompose transparently into a subject marker and *-ise*.

Table 2

EkeGusii noun classes, subject markers and forms of -ise

Class	Prefix	Example noun	Gloss	Subject marker	-ise form
1	<i>o-mo-</i>	<i>o-mo-iseke</i>	girl	<i>a-</i>	<i>aise</i>
1b	Ø	<i>Taata</i>	father	<i>a-</i>	<i>aise</i>
2	<i>a-ba-</i>	<i>a-ba-iseke</i>	girls	<i>ba-</i>	<i>baise</i>
2b	<i>a-ba-</i>	<i>a-ba-taata</i>	fathers	<i>ba-</i>	<i>baise</i>
3	<i>o-mo-</i>	<i>o-mo-sie</i>	sugarcane	<i>o-</i>	<i>oise</i>
4	<i>e-me-</i>	<i>e-me-sie</i>	sugarcanes	<i>e-</i>	<i>eise</i>
5	<i>e-ri-</i>	<i>e-ri-ino</i>	tooth	<i>ri-</i>	<i>riise</i>
6	<i>a-ma-</i>	<i>a-ma-ino</i>	teeth	<i>a-</i>	<i>aise</i>
7	<i>e-ke-</i>	<i>e-ke-moni</i>	cat	<i>ke- ~ ge-</i>	<i>keise ~ geise</i>
8	<i>e-bi-</i>	<i>e-bi-moni</i>	cats	<i>bi- ~ βi-</i>	<i>biise ~ βiise</i>

Class	Prefix	Example noun	Gloss	Subject marker	-ise form
9	<i>e-</i>	<i>e-yanga</i>	cloth	<i>e-</i>	<i>eise</i>
9a	<i>e-n-</i>	<i>e-n-daagera</i>	food	<i>e-</i>	<i>eise</i>
10	<i>chi-</i>	<i>chi-anga</i>	clothes	<i>chi-</i>	<i>chiise</i>
10a	<i>chi-n-</i>	<i>chi-n-daagera</i>	foods	<i>chi-</i>	<i>chiise</i>
11	<i>o-ro-</i>	<i>o-ro-ko</i>	firewood	<i>ro-</i>	<i>roise</i>
12	<i>a-ka-</i>	<i>a-ka-moni</i>	small cat	<i>ka- ~ ga-</i>	<i>kaise ~ gaise</i>
14	<i>o-bo-</i>	<i>o-bo-taka</i>	poverty	<i>bo- ~ βo-</i>	<i>boise ~ βoise</i>
15	<i>o-ko-</i>	<i>o-ko-minyoka</i>	running	<i>ko-</i>	<i>goise</i>
16	<i>a-</i>	<i>a-ase</i>	place	<i>a-</i>	<i>aise</i>
21	<i>nya-</i>	<i>nya-mbera</i>	graveside	<i>nya-</i>	<i>aise</i>

Source: authors' data. The prefix column shows the augment followed by the class prefix. Segmentation is underlying, so glide formation and vowel coalescence are not shown. Where two forms are given, both are attested.

The twenty entries in Table 2 reduce to twelve distinct forms, because the subject markers themselves are syncretic: *a-* serves classes 1, 1b, 6 and 16, *e-* classes 4, 9 and 9a, *chi-* classes 10 and 10a, and *ba-* classes 2 and 2b. Agreement on *-ise* therefore adds no class contrast that the subject markers do not already show. The second person singular form *oise* is identical to the class 3 form.

Some entries have two forms: *keise* and *geise* (class 7), *kaise* and *gaise* (class 12), *biise* and *βiise* (class 8), and *boise* and *βoise* (class 14), while class 15 has only the voiced form *goise*. Voicing of a velar stop before a following voiceless consonant is the kind of alternation known as Dahl's Law, a voicing dissimilation that Bickmore (1998) documents for EkeGusii, and the voiced velar variants in Table 2 may reflect it. The labial alternants would need a different explanation. We have not investigated the conditioning of any of these alternants here.

In all three examples with *-ise*, namely (2), (3) and (22b), the lexical verb is an infinitive, so the protasis has the shape SM-*ise* + *ko-V-a*, with agreement on the conditional element and no finite verb. In the *onye* protases, by contrast, the verb is finite, as in (1), (4) and (5). A copular source has been proposed for some Bantu conditional conjunctions, such as Digo *kala*, which derives from *ichikala* 'if it be' (Nicolle 2017: 9). The agreement on *-ise* and its infinitival complement are compatible with a verbal or copular origin, but we have no historical evidence for the source of *-ise*.

- (3) *To-ise ko-gu-a egosori ya reero tw-a-gu-ir-e egekombe*
 1PL-if INF-win-FV game of today 1PL-TAM-win-PERF-FV cup
 '[If we win the game today,]_P [we have won the cup.]_Q'

4.1.3 Apodosis markers

The apodosis is introduced by one of three items in our data. *Kanga* 'would' stands at the start of the apodosis, and the verb that follows carries the focus marker *n-* in every example ((1), (5), (8), (18), (19), (22a)). *Nabo* 'may' occurs once, in the predictive conditional (2). *Goika* 'must' occurs in (4), where it expresses an obligation.

- (4) *Onye tw-a-chererirw-e goika to-ebw-e egesusuro*
 if 1PL-TAM-be.late-FV must 1PL-give.PASS-FV punishment
 '[If we are late,]_P [we must be punished.]_Q'

The apodosis markers are thus modal items. This is the distribution expected if the protasis restricts a modal operator in the apodosis, as in restrictor analyses of conditionals (Kratzer 1986; see von Stechow 2011 for an overview). *Kanga* also occurs in hypothetical conditionals, as in (5), so it does not by itself distinguish hypothetical from counterfactual readings (Section 4.2).

- (5) *Onye m-ba-a-ch-a kanga m-ba-gwenigw-a*
 if FOC-3PL-TAM-come-FV would FOC-3PL-heal.PASS-FV
 '[If they came,]_P [they would be healed.]_Q'

Kanga resembles the counterfactual marker of the Nyakyusa apodosis (*angali*; Lusekelo 2016) and, in form and function, the Swahili counterfactual formatives *ngali-* and *ngeli-* (Mwamzandi 2017, as summarised by Nicolle 2017: 6). It differs from the Swahili formatives in being a separate word placed before the verb. Whether the resemblance is historical cannot be decided from the present data.

4.1.4 The ‘be’ plus infinitive periphrasis

The verb ‘be’ combines with an infinitive in both clause types. In the apodosis of (6) the infinitive, with a focus marker, comes first and the subject-inflected form of ‘be’ follows (*n-ko-ebw-a to-r-e*), which corresponds to English ‘will be given’.

- (6) *Onye tw-a-chererirw-e n-ko-ebw-a to-r-e egesusuro*
 if 1PL-TAM-be.late-FV FOC-INF-give.PASS-FV 1PL-be-FV punishment
 ‘[If we are late,]_P [we will be given a punishment.]_Q’

In (7) and (8) the same elements form the protasis, with no conjunction: a subject-inflected form of ‘be’ (*chi-a-r-e, tw-a-r-e*) is followed by an infinitive (*go-ak-w-a* ‘be cast’, *ko-gu-a* ‘win’). The closest English equivalents are a bare past (‘votes were cast’) and inversion (‘had we won’). In (7) the apodosis also has the form *a-r-e ko-gu-a*.

- (7) *Chi-kura chi-a-r-e go-ak-w-a reero Ombati ni-igo*
 CL10-vote CL10-TAM-be-FV INF-cast-PASS-FV today Ombati PTCL
a-r-e ko-gu-a
 3SG-be-FV INF-win-FV
 ‘[(If) votes were cast today,]_P [Ombati would win.]_Q’
- (8) *Tw-a-r-e ko-gu-a kera engaki tw-a-ag-et-e omobiira*
 1PL-TAM-be-FV INF-win-FV every time 1PL-TAM-play-PERF-FV football
kanga n-to-bwat-e egekombe
 would FOC-1PL-have-FV cup
 ‘[Had we won every time we played football,]_P [we would have had the cup.]_Q’

The tense-aspect value of the segment *-a-* in these forms is unclear, since the same segment occurs in the perfect of (3) and in other verbs. We gloss it TAM throughout, and we do not claim that the ‘be’ forms are past tense forms, although the translations of (7) and (8) use English past forms.

Two observations bear on the analysis. First, the protasis in (7) and (8) has the same structure as the *-ise* protasis, a subject-inflected element followed by an infinitive. The frame *ko-ba to-bwat-i chi-ombe* ‘be not having cows’ occurs after either *o-ise* or *kw-a-r-e* in (22b) and (22c), so the two elements seem to occupy the same slot, although our data do not show whether they are interchangeable or differ in meaning. Second, forms of ‘be’ occur in the conditional constructions of other Bantu languages. Haya uses the auxiliary *ba* in reality conditionals (Saloné 1979, as reported by Nicolle 2017: 6), Vwanji marks counterfactuals with the far past of ‘be’ in both clauses (Nicolle 2017: 8), and Digo *kala* derives from a copular form (Nicolle 2017: 9). EkeGusii thus fits a recurrent Bantu pattern in which the verb ‘be’ supplies the conditional frame, although it uses it in more than one position.

4.1.5 The phrase *tangori ndero*

The expression *tangori ndero* is a fixed phrase that we gloss ‘would that it were today’. It can follow a clause, as in (9a), or precede one, as in (9b).

- (9) a. *N-ga-kani-gw-a ti-ndi-a amara tangori n-dero*
 1SG-PST-forbid-PASS-FV NEG-1SG.eat-FV tripe would.that FOC-today
 ‘I was forbidden from eating tripe, would that it were today.’
- b. *Tangori n-dero n-ga-kani-gw-a ti-ndi-a amara*
 would.that FOC-today 1SG-PST-forbid-PASS-FV NEG-1SG.eat-FV tripe
 ‘[If it were today,]_P [I would be forbidden from eating tripe.]_Q’

In (9a) the phrase follows the main clause and has the force of a wish. The sentence reflects a former practice: children were forbidden to eat tripe, which was believed to make them stubborn. The prohibition no longer holds, and the speaker wishes that the present were like the past. In (9b) the phrase comes first and the sentence is a conditional with an unreal protasis. The apodosis has no *kanga*. It contains the same past-marked verb as in (9a), and the unreal reading comes from the phrase itself. The phrase is therefore best treated as a lexicalised marker of a counterfactual condition that can also be used alone as a wish. Counterfactual wishes without an overt apodosis have been described as simple-clause counterfactual constructions (Van linden & Verstraete 2008).

4.1.6 Tense-aspect-mood formatives

Tense-aspect-mood formatives also bear on the conditional reading. Example (10) has no conjunction. Its protasis contains the formative *-ra-*, which we gloss TAM, and the two clauses are juxtaposed.

- (10) *O-ra-rent-a ama-guta ti-n-ko-ro-si-a ama-ndasi*
 2SG-TAM-bring-FV CL6-oil NEG-1SG-INF-make-FV CL6-pancakes
 ‘[If you bring oil,]_P [won’t I make pancakes?]_Q’

Whether *-ra-* contributes conditionality in its own right, or whether the conditional reading comes only from the juxtaposition of the clauses, cannot be decided from one example. In Ndendeule, tense-aspect-mood markers are said not to contribute to the conditional interpretation (Ngonyani 2017), whereas in Nyakyusa tense and remoteness are the main means of separating reality from unreality (Lusekelo 2016). The EkeGusii data are too limited to place the language on either side of this contrast. A systematic study of its tense-aspect-mood formatives in conditionals (see Whiteley 1960 and Cammenga 2002 for the formatives themselves) is needed.

Table 3*Conditional markers in the EkeGusii data*

Marker	Clause	Properties	Gloss	Readings in the data
<i>onye</i>	protasis	invariant; finite verb	‘if’	reality, predictive, hypothetical, counterfactual
<i>SM-ise</i>	protasis	agrees with subject; infinitive	‘if’	reality, predictive, unreal question
<i>SM-TAM-be + ko-V-a</i>	protasis	no conjunction	‘had, were’	hypothetical, counterfactual
<i>tangori ndero</i>	protasis, or alone	fixed phrase	‘would that it were today’	counterfactual
<i>kanga</i>	apodosis	invariant; precedes focus-marked verb	‘would’	hypothetical, counterfactual
<i>nabo</i>	apodosis	invariant	‘may’	predictive
<i>goika</i>	apodosis	invariant	‘must’	reality (obligation)
<i>‘be’ + infinitive</i>	apodosis	SM-be ko-V-a, or n-ko-V-a SM-be	‘would, will be, was going to’	predictive, hypothetical, counterfactual

Source: authors’ data. *SM* = subject marker.

4.2 Conditional types and their marking

This section takes the types of Thompson et al. (2007) in turn and asks how each is marked. Examples from Section 3 are repeated where they are discussed, with a new number.

4.2.1 Reality and predictive conditionals

Reality conditionals refer to present, habitual or generic, or past situations (Thompson et al. 2007). Example 3 given as 11 below belongs here. The protasis, with *-ise*, treats winning the game as sufficient for having won the cup, and, following the tense of the translation, we classify it with the reality conditionals because the apodosis is a perfect and not a future.

- (11) *To-ise ko-gu-a egosori ya reero tw-a-gu-ir-e egekombe*
 1PL-if INF-win-FV game of today 1PL-TAM-win-PERF-FV cup
 ‘[If we win the game today,]_P [we have won the cup.]_Q’

Example 4 given as 12 below is also a reality conditional. Its protasis has *onye*, and its apodosis states a general obligation with *goika*.

- (12) *Onye tw-a-chererirw-e goika to-ebw-e egesusuro*
 if 1PL-TAM-be.late-FV must 1PL-give.PASS-FV punishment
 ‘[If we are late,]_P [we must be punished.]_Q’

Predictive conditionals refer to future situations that are predicted to occur (Thompson et al. 2007; Nicolle 2017: 3). Example 2 given as 13 below offers a possible consequence of a condition that may be met, and Example 6 given as 14 below predicts a punishment.

- (13) *O-ise ko-rent-a ama-guta nabo nda-rosi-e ama-ndasi*
 2SG-if INF-bring-FV CL6-oil may 1SG-make-FV CL6-pancakes
 ‘[If you bring oil,]_P [I may make pancakes.]_Q’
- (14) *Onye tw-a-chererirw-e n-ko-ebw-a to-r-e egesusuro*
 if 1PL-TAM-be.late-FV FOC-INF-give.PASS-FV 1PL-be-FV punishment
 ‘[If we are late,]_P [we will be given a punishment.]_Q’

The same two protasis markers occur in both types: *onye* in 12 and 14, and *-ise* in 11 and 13. EkeGusii therefore does not separate reality from predictive conditionals by their protases, and neither type contains *kanga* or the conjunctionless ‘be’ protasis, which in our data are restricted to unreal readings. This matches the grouping of predictives with reality conditionals as simple conditionals proposed by Saloné (1979) for Haya, and it differs from Yoruba and Chagga, where predictive conditionals are marked like imaginative ones (Nicolle 2017: 6). The EkeGusii predictives differ from the reality examples only in the apodosis: *nabo* ‘may’ in 13 and the prospective ‘be’ construction in 14, against *goika* in 12 and a perfect in 11. With two examples of each type we cannot say whether these differences are systematic.

4.2.2 Hypothetical conditionals

Hypothetical conditionals present an imagined situation that could still come about. Two strategies are attested. Example 5 given as 15 below uses the pair *onye...kanga* with a finite verb in each clause, and the protasis verb has no perfective suffix.

- (15) *Onye m-ba-a-ch-a kanga m-ba-gwenigw-a*
if FOC-3PL-TAM-come-FV would FOC-3PL-heal.PASS-FV
‘[If they came,]_P [they would be healed.]_Q’

Example 7 given as 16 below uses the conjunctionless ‘be’ protasis, with *reero* ‘today’ placing the imagined situation in the present, and a ‘be’ plus infinitive apodosis.

- (16) *Chi-kura chi-a-r-e go-ak-w-a reero Ombati ni-igo*
CL10-vote CL10-TAM-be-FV INF-cast-PASS-FV today Ombati PTCL
a-r-e ko-gu-a
3SG-be-FV INF-win-FV
‘[(If) votes were cast today,]_P [Ombati would win.]_Q’

Nothing in 15 or 16 distinguishes the hypothetical from the counterfactual reading. *Kanga* and the ‘be’ protasis both recur in the counterfactuals of Section 4.3, so neither marks hypotheticality as opposed to counterfactuality. In this respect EkeGusii resembles Makary Kotoko, where counterfactual interpretations are determined by context and not by form (Allison 2017, as reported by Nicolle 2017: 8). The unreal reading follows from the construction as a whole and not from any single marker.

4.2.3 Counterfactual conditionals

Counterfactual conditionals have a protasis that is taken to be false and an apodosis that therefore does not hold (Thompson et al. 2007). EkeGusii has no dedicated counterfactual conjunction. Example 1 given as 17 below combines *onye...kanga* with a perfective protasis.

- (17) *Onye n-a-chi-et-e esukuru kanga n-i-nde o-mo-nto*
if 1SG-TAM-go-PERF-FV school would FOC-1SG-be CL1-person
o-mo-nene
CL1-big
‘[If I had gone to school,]_P [I would be a prominent person.]_Q’

The same pair occurs when the protasis is built from ‘be’ and an infinitive, as in 18 below, and when the same perfective verb form stands in both clauses, as in 19 below.

- (18) *Onye n-ko-gu-a tw-a-r-e kera engaki kanga*
if FOC-INF-win-FV 1PL-TAM-be-FV every time would
n-tw-a-gu-et-e egekombe
FOC-1PL-TAM-win-PERF-FV cup
‘[If we had won every time,]_P [we would have won the cup.]_Q’
- (19) *Onye n-tw-a-gu-et-e kera engaki tw-a-ag-et-e*
if FOC-1PL-TAM-win-PERF-FV every time 1PL-TAM-play-PERF-FV
omobiira kanga n-tw-a-gu-et-e egekombe
football would FOC-1PL-TAM-win-PERF-FV cup
‘[If we had won every time we played football,]_P [we would have won the cup.]_Q’

Example 8 given as 20 below drops the conjunction and keeps *kanga* in the apodosis, and Example 9b given as 21 below has neither: the protasis is the fixed phrase *tangori ndero*.

- (20) *Tw-a-r-e ko-gu-a kera engaki tw-a-ag-et-e omobiira*
1PL-TAM-be-FV INF-win-FV every time 1PL-TAM-play-PERF-FV football
kanga n-to-bwat-e egekombe
would FOC-1PL-have-FV cup
‘[Had we won every time we played football,]_P [we would have had the cup.]_Q’

- (21) *Tangori n-dero n-ga-kani-gw-a ti-ndi-a amara*
 would.that FOC-today 1SG-PST-forbid-PASS-FV NEG-1SG.eat-FV tripe
 ‘[If it were today,]_P [I would be forbidden from eating tripe.]_Q’

Counterfactual readings are thus found with *onye...kanga* in 17, 18 and 19, with the ‘be’ protasis and *kanga* in 20, with the fixed phrase in 21, and in the questions of Section 4.4. This is the situation Comrie (1986: 89) describes, in which counterfactuality is implied in context and not marked by a dedicated form, although dedicated markers do exist in some languages (Nicolle 2017: 7). Among Bantu languages, Zulu has *ngabe* (Halpert 2012; Nicolle 2017: 8) and Ndendeule has *nga-* (Ngonyani 2017). EkeGusii is closer to the languages in which counterfactuality is a matter of interpretation.

The verb forms of the counterfactuals vary. In 19 the same perfective form *n-tw-a-gu-et-e* appears in both clauses, a symmetric pattern of the kind that Olguín Martínez and Lester (2021) distinguish from asymmetric patterns in their typological study of counterfactuals. In 18 and 20 the clauses differ: the protasis has a ‘be’ plus infinitive form and the apodosis a different verb form, preceded by *kanga*.

Perfective morphology is frequent in the counterfactuals. It occurs in the protasis of 17, in both clauses of 19 and in the apodosis of 18, but it is not required, as 20 and 21 show. Haya requires a past or perfect form in both clauses of hypothetical and counterfactual conditionals (Saloné 1979, as reported by Nicolle 2017: 6–7), and Nyakyusa marks unreality mainly through remoteness in past tense (Lusekelo 2016). Past morphology has been argued to be the main source of counterfactual interpretation in many languages (Iatridou 2000), and Zulu can express counterfactuality through a past imperfective as well as through *ngabe* (Halpert 2012; Nicolle 2017: 8). The EkeGusii data show perfective marking as a tendency and not as a requirement. Whether past morphology plays a part in the sense of Iatridou (2000) depends on the value of the formative *-a-* discussed in Section 3.4.

4.3 Conditional questions

Conditionals can be asked as well as asserted. The questions in 22 below express one proposition, ‘if you had no cows, would you marry’, with three different protases and three different apodoses.

- (22) a. *Onye o-taa-bwat-e chi-ombe kanga n-kw-a-nywom-a*
 if 2SG-NEG-have-FV CL10-cow would FOC-2SG-TAM-marry-FV
 ‘[If you did not have cows,]_P [would you have married?]_Q’
 b. *O-ise ko-ba to-bwat-i chi-ombe n-o-nywom-e*
 2SG-if INF-be NEG-have-FV CL10-cow FOC-2SG-marry-FV
 ‘[If you did not have cows,]_P [could you marry?]_Q’
 c. *Kw-a-r-e ko-ba to-bwat-i chi-ombe n-ko-nywom-a*
 2SG-TAM-be-FV INF-be NEG-have-FV CL10-cow FOC-INF-marry-FV
kw-a-r-e
 2SG-TAM-be-FV
 ‘[If you were not having cows,]_P [were you going to marry?]_Q’

Example 22a uses *onye...kanga* with a finite negative verb (*o-taa-bwat-e*), 22b uses *o-ise* with an infinitive, and 22c uses the conjunctionless ‘be’ protasis. The negation differs accordingly: the finite verb in 22a takes *-taa-* after the subject marker, whereas the infinitive in 22b and 22c takes *to-* before the stem. The apodoses also differ. Example 22a has *kanga* and a finite verb, 22b a finite verb with the focus marker alone, and 22c the ‘be’ construction, with the infinitive first and *kw-a-r-e* at the end.

In the interrogative relation distinguished by Sweetser (1990), the apodosis is a question (Nicolle 2017: 4). That all three strategies occur in questions shows that the interrogative function does not select a particular protasis type. The translations supplied for 22a–c differ in modality and time reference (‘would you have married’, ‘could you marry’, ‘were you going to marry’), which suggests that the strategies are not fully interchangeable. Elicitation in controlled contexts would be needed to establish the differences.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This paper has given a first description of conditional constructions in EkeGusii. Conditionality is expressed by several resources used together and not by one conjunction: the invariant *onye*, the agreeing *-ise*, a conjunctionless ‘be’ plus infinitive protasis, the apodosis markers *kanga*, *nabo* and *goika*, the phrase *tangori ndero*, and tense-aspect-mood formatives. The agreement paradigm of *-ise* covers all noun classes in the data and shows syncretism that follows the subject markers. In terms of meaning, predictive conditionals pattern with reality conditionals and are not separated from them by their protasis. Unreal readings are associated with *kanga* and the ‘be’ protasis, but no form separates hypothetical from counterfactual readings, and perfective marking tends to appear in counterfactuals without

being required. These findings place EkeGusii among the Bantu languages in which counterfactuality is largely a matter of interpretation, in contrast to languages with a dedicated counterfactual marker such as Zulu or Ndebele. The description has limits. It rests on a small set of examples, and the ‘be’ forms and the formative *-a-* require a study of the EkeGusii tense-aspect-mood system. Concessive and other conditional types are not covered, and natural discourse data are needed to show how the constructions are used. A comparison with Kuria, the closest relative of EkeGusii (Cammenga 2002), would show how far the patterns reported here are shared within East Nyanza.

5.2 Recommendations

Future research should use systematic elicitation and natural discourse data to validate and expand this initial description of EkeGusii conditional constructions. Further studies should examine the tense-aspect-mood system, particularly the ‘be’ forms and the formative *-a-*, and investigate concessive and other conditional types not covered in this study. A comparative analysis with Kuria would also help establish which features are shared within East Nyanza and which are specific to EkeGusii.

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3 = first, second, third person; CL = noun class; FOC = focus; FV = final vowel; INF = infinitive; NEG = negation; PASS = passive; PERF = perfective; PL = plural; PST = past; PTCL = particle; SG = singular; SM = subject marker; TAM = tense-aspect-mood formative.

Declaration of Interest

The author declares that he does not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Funding Declaration

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

REFERENCES

- Athanasiadou, A., & Dirven, R. (1997). Conditionality, hypotheticality, counterfactuality. In A. Athanasiadou & R. Dirven (Eds.), *On conditionals again* (pp. 61–96). John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/cilt.143.05ath>
- Bhatt, R., & Pancheva, R. (2006). Conditionals. In M. Everaert & H. van Riemsdijk (Eds.), *The Blackwell companion to syntax* (Vol. 1, pp. 638–687). Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470996591.ch16>
- Comrie, B. (1986). Conditionals: A typology. In E. C. Traugott, A. ter Meulen, J. S. Reilly, & C. A. Ferguson (Eds.), *On conditionals* (pp. 77–102). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511753466.005>
- Dancygier, B., & Sweetser, E. (2005). *Mental spaces in grammar: Conditional constructions*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486760>
- Haspelmath, M., & König, E. (1998). Concessive conditionals in the languages of Europe. In J. van der Auwera (Ed.), *Adverbial constructions in the languages of Europe* (pp. 563–640). Mouton de Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110802610.563>
- Iatridou, S. (2000). The grammatical ingredients of counterfactuality. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 31(2), 231–270. <https://doi.org/10.1162/002438900554352>
- Liu, M. (2019). Current issues in conditionals. *Linguistics Vanguard*, 5(s3), Article 20190003. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lingvan-2019-0003>
- Lusekelo, A. (2016). The nature of conditional sentences in Nyakyusa. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5(1), 36–51. <https://doi.org/10.56279/jhss.v5i1.2>
- Lycan, W. G. (2001). *Real conditionals*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199242078.001.0001>
- Mwamzandi, M. (2017). A corpus study of Swahili conditionals. *Studies in African Linguistics*, 46(1–2), 157–173. <https://doi.org/10.32473/sal.v46i1.107248>
- Ngonyani, D. (2017). Conditionals in Ndebele. *Studies in African Linguistics*, 46(1–2), 175–192. <https://doi.org/10.32473/sal.v46i1.107249>
- Olguín Martínez, J., & Lester, N. (2021). A quantitative analysis of counterfactual conditionals in cross-linguistic perspective. *Italian Journal of Linguistics*, 33(2), 147–182. <https://doi.org/10.26346/1120-2726-178>
- Taylor, J. R. (1997). Conditionals and polarity. In A. Athanasiadou & R. Dirven (Eds.), *On conditionals again* (pp. 289–306). John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/cilt.143.16tay>



- Thompson, S. A., Longacre, R. E., & Hwang, S. J. J. (2007). Adverbial clauses. In T. Shopen (Ed.), *Language typology and syntactic description* (2nd ed., Vol. 2, *Complex constructions*, pp. 237–300). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511619434.005>
- van Linden, A., & Verstraete, J.-C. (2008). The nature and origins of counterfactuality in simple clauses: Cross-linguistic evidence. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 40(11), 1865–1895. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2008.03.008>
- von Stechow, P. (2011). Conditionals. In K. von Stechow, C. Maienborn, & P. Portner (Eds.), *Semantics: An international handbook of natural language meaning* (Vol. 2, pp. 1515–1538). De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110255072.1515>