

CHAPTER

1

The Noun

*A very much
closer look at the
Kinyarwanda noun.*

Since the next six chapters deal with form and function rather than practical progression, this and the following chapters are mainly for reference.

As we know, the radical of a noun is the constant element. It may be influenced by prefixal or suffixal additives, as required by grammatical construction, or to indicate a different meaning.

- **The typical formation of a noun:** In the noun, *Amakenga* (*suspicious, mistrust*):

a-	is the initial vowel
-ma-	is the prefix proper
-kenga	is the radical

While the prefix proper is never detached from a noun radical in speech—with the exception of roots that form the second element in compound nouns (*e.g., ibirundorundo, numerous mounds*)—the initial vowel of a noun may be elided under certain conditions. To summarize, this occurs in the following circumstances:

- **After a preposition:**

mu bantu	<i>(among men)</i>
ku bwende bwe	<i>(of his own free will).</i>

- **After demonstrative adjectives:**

iyi ntorezo	<i>(this hatchet)</i>
uwo munsu	<i>(that day)</i>
harya hantu	<i>(that place)</i>
ino ntebe	<i>(this chair)</i>
za nsyo	<i>(those grinding stones)</i>

- **After a particle of negation:**

nta kabuza	<i>(without fail)</i>
nta mwanya	<i>(no space)</i>
nta kundi	<i>(no other way)</i>

- **After an absolute pronoun that is preceded by *ni* or *si*:**

Iyi ni **yo** nzira, yinyuremo.
(This is the way; walk in it.)

Niyonteze ni **we** mukobwa wa Mariya.
(Niyonteze is Mary's daughter.)

- **After the emphatic possessive:**

Nabibonye n'**ayanjye** maso.
(I saw it with my own eyes.)

Zana **uwawe** mugozi.
(Bring your own rope.)

- **After the enumerative formative, *-ndi*:**

ub undi bwato	<i>(another boat)</i>
ah andi hantu	<i>(some other place)</i>

- **After the particle *nya*:**

N'umuhigi **nya**-kuri.
(He is a veritable hunter.)

Yambereye inshuti **nya**-nshuti.
(He was a genuine friend to me.)

- **Before the particle *ki*:**

Ni muntu ki ?	<i>(What sort of a person is he?)</i>
Ni mbwa ki ?	<i>(What sort of a dog is it?)</i>

- **When the noun is in the vocative case:**

Yemwe **bagabo**, mwari mukwiriye kunyumvira.
(*Men, you should have obeyed me.*)

Ayī **Mana**, ntabara!
(*Oh God, rescue me!*)

- **When the noun is used as a proper noun, such as these names:**

Gikeri	(<i>Frog</i>)
Ngofero	(<i>Hat</i>)
Kagegera	(<i>Little Vagabond</i>)
Kinyogote	(<i>Porcupine</i>)
Mbwayahandi	(<i>Elsewhere's Dog</i>)

- **When the noun comprises the second element in a compound word:**

insha- biti	(<i>hatchet</i>)
akabura- rugero	(<i>limitlessness</i>)
she- buja	(<i>his master</i>)
umunya- bubwa	(<i>a surly man</i>)
insha- mugongo	(<i>backbreaking</i>)
ikinya- mateka	(<i>a newspaper</i>)
indema- mutima	(<i>heartwarming</i>)

THE IMPLICATION OF NOUN PREFIXES

Noun prefixes are interchanged to express number, to give the noun an augmentative, a diminutive, or abstract concept, and to indicate the class to which it belongs.

- **Examples of prefixes indicating change in number:**

umu -gabo (<i>man</i>)	aba -gabo (<i>men</i>)
iki -ntu (<i>thing</i>)	ibi -ntu (<i>things</i>)

- **Examples of prefixes indicating an augmentative or derogatory concept:**

umu -gabo (<i>man</i>)	iki -gabo (<i>a huge, hulk of a man</i>)
umu -sozi (<i>hill</i>)	igi -sozi (<i>a mountain</i>)

- **Examples of prefixes indicating a diminutive or complimentary concept:**

umu -gabo (<i>man</i>)	aka -gabo (<i>a small man, or compliment to a little boy</i>)
umu -sozi (<i>hill</i>)	aga -sozi (<i>a small hill</i>)

- **Examples of prefixes indicating an abstract concept:**

umu-gabo (<i>man</i>)	ubu-gabo (<i>manliness</i>)
umu-sore (<i>youth</i>)	ubu-sore (<i>youthfulness</i>)

- **Examples of prefixes modifying the meaning of a fixed root:**

umu-ntu (<i>person</i>)	aka-ntu (<i>little thing</i>)
iki-ntu (<i>thing</i>)	uku-ntu (<i>method, way</i>)
aha-ntu (<i>place</i>)	ubu-ntu (<i>generosity</i>)

THE DERIVATION OF NOUN ROOTS

In Kinyarwanda, *noun roots* may be classified under two main headings: primitive roots and nouns derived from other parts of speech.

Primitive Roots

Primitive roots are those that bear no reduction to a simpler form and show no origin in any other part of speech. Among the primitive roots of Kinyarwanda are found many that are common to a large number of Bantu languages. They may not be exactly the same as in the original Ur-Bantu language, but they are very similar. Many of these roots are monosyllabic.

- **Monosyllabic primitive roots:**

UR-BANTU RADICALS	KINYARWANDA ROOTS
-ntu (<i>person, place, thing</i>)	-ntu
-bwa (<i>dog</i>)	-bwa
-gwi (<i>leopard</i>)	-gwe
-zo (<i>house</i>)	-zu
-ezi (<i>moon, month</i>)	-ezi
-zi, -ji (<i>water</i>)	-zi

- **Polysyllabic primitive roots:**

UR-BANTU RADICALS	KINYARWANDA ROOTS
-kuku (<i>chicken, fowl</i>)	-koko
-gulub- (<i>pig</i>)	-gurube
-goma (<i>drum</i>)	-goma
-ina (<i>name</i>)	-zina
-ganga (<i>wizard, witch doctor</i>)	-ganga (<i>doctor, fever</i>)
-tako (<i>buttocks</i>)	-tako
-ila (<i>path</i>)	-ira
-limi (<i>tongue</i>)	-rimi
-jozi (<i>neck</i>)	-josi