

## CHAPTER

# 2

## The Verb

*A short exploration of the amazing intricacy of Kinyarwanda's verb system.*

Kinyarwanda verbs are incredibly complex. This chapter begins with an exploration of the five main verb varieties.

- **Regular polysyllabic verb stems**, as in *-genda* (*go*).
- **Monosyllabic verb stems**, whose conjugated and derived forms are irregular and have to be treated exceptionally, as with *-za* and *-jya* (*come*); *-zi* and *-menya* (*know*).
- **Vowel-stemmed verbs**, which affect to a considerable extent the form of most verb prefixes that may be used with them, as with *-oma* (*pursue*), *-izera* (*believe*).
- **Compound verbs**, which give rise to numerous combinations relating time to time and mood to time, as *nzaba naragiye*.
- **Derived verb stems**, which were treated briefly in Part 1 of this book and are given more attention in this chapter. We begin with them:

### IMPORTANT REGULAR VERBAL DERIVATIVES

1. The passive
2. The neuter
3. The prepositional
4. The causative
5. The intensive
6. The persistent
7. The reversive
8. The protractive
9. The reciprocal
10. The reflexive

## OBSCURE VERBAL DERIVATIVES

In addition to the above regularly formed derivatives, there are, in Kinyarwanda, a number of derivative forms that cannot be treated in this work because of their obscurity and complexity. Many of them are found regularly in other Bantu languages, where their full force can be readily seen. Only traces remain in Kinyarwanda. Examples include the following:

- The contactive suffix **-ata** (as in *gupfumbata, gufata*)
- The dispersive suffix **-arara** (as in *kudamarara, gusandara*)
- The persistive suffixes **-eza, -uza** (as in *kuzunguza, kubuza, kubobeza, gukomeza, and kumenyereza*)
- The irreducible prepositional **-era** (as in *kugororera*)

## OTHER VERBAL DERIVATIVES

There are evidences of derivatives formed from ideophones, such as *guhobera* (to embrace) from *hobe hobe*, which is said when embracing.

### 1 – PASSIVE VERBS

In addition to what was discussed in Part 1 concerning the passive verb, it should be noted that certain common objects of daily life, such as household objects and clothing, are used with the active voice of certain verbs, where the meaning would seem to require the passive:

Agezeyo, asanga urugi **rukinze**.  
(When he arrived there, he found the door **closed**.)

Inzu ye **irasakaye** neza.  
(His house is well **thatched**.)

Ibibindi byose yabibonye aho byari **biteretse**.  
(He found all the jars where they **had been placed**.)

Mushyire imyenda **imeshe**.  
(Give her the **washed** clothes.)

An even more surprising idiom is found in some phrases where the subject and object change places without any change in meaning:

Bizi Imana (*God knows*) rather than such regular forms as *Bizwi n’Imana or Imana ni y’ibizi*.

Bitegetse nde? (*Who ordered it?*) Or: Byategetswe na nde? Or: Ni nde wabitegetse?

## Rules for the Formation of Passive Verbs

- Generally speaking, the passive is formed from active verbs by inserting **-w-** into the verb stem immediately before the final vowel:

guhinyura (*to despise*)  
gucacura (*to flatter*)

guhinyur**wa** (*to be despised*)  
gucacur**wa** (*to be flattered*)

- Polysyllabic verbs, of which the final syllable of the simple stem begins with the bilabial consonant **b**, form their passive by inserting **yw** before the final vowel:

guhaba (*to get lost*)  
gutuba (*to make small*)

guhaby**ywa** (*to be lost*)  
gutuby**ywa** (*to be made small*)

- The passive of monosyllabic verbs is formed by suffixing the particle **-bwa** to the simple verb stems:

guta (*to discard*)  
kuba (*to be*)

gutab**bwa** (*to be discarded*)  
kubab**bwa** (*as in Iyi nzu n'iyu kubabwamo n'umwami*)

When the radical of the perfect verb stem is not identical with that of its infinitive (i.e., when the radical is not immutable), the passive is formed from the radical of the *perfect stem*:

### Formation of the passive from the first syllable of the *perfect stem*:

INFINITIVE	PERFECT STEM	PASSIVE STEM
gu- <b>ca</b> ( <i>to cut</i> )	- <b>ci</b> -ye	- <b>ci</b> -bwa
ku- <b>jya</b> ( <i>to go</i> )	- <b>gi</b> -ye	- <b>gi</b> -bwa*
ku- <b>rya</b> ( <i>to eat</i> )	- <b>ri</b> -ye	- <b>ri</b> -bwa
gu- <b>kwa</b> ( <i>to pay dowry</i> )	- <b>ko</b> -ye	- <b>ko</b> -bwa
ku- <b>nywa</b> ( <i>to drink</i> )	- <b>nyo</b> -ye	- <b>nyo</b> -bwa
gu- <b>sya</b> ( <i>to grind</i> )	- <b>se</b> -ye	- <b>se</b> -bwa

- The passives of ordinary verbal derivatives are usually formed according to the general rule, for example:

gukundira (*to love for*)  
kurakaza (*to make angry*)

gukundir**wa** (*to be loved for*)  
kurakaz**wa** (*to be made angry*)

\* As in *kugibwaho n'urubanza (Urubanza rwamugiyeho)*.

## 2 – NEUTER VERBS

The neuter or quasi-passive form in Kinyarwanda indicates an intransitive state or condition, without any special reference to an agent determining that condition. There is a clear distinction between the passive and the neuter forms in their implications. The following examples show this:

<b>SIMPLE:</b>	-shima ( <i>to praise</i> )	-onona ( <i>to spoil</i> )	[transitive]
<b>PASSIVE:</b>	-shimwa ( <i>to be praised [by]</i> )	-ononwa ( <i>to be spoilt [by]</i> )	[transitive]
<b>NEUTER:</b>	-shimika ( <i>to be praiseworthy</i> )	-ononekara ( <i>to be spoilt</i> )	[intransitive]
<b>SIMPLE:</b>	-vuna ( <i>to break</i> )	-uzuza ( <i>to fill</i> )	[transitive]
<b>PASSIVE:</b>	-vunwa ( <i>to be broken [by]</i> )	-uzuzwa ( <i>to be filled [by]</i> )	[transitive]
<b>NEUTER:</b>	-vunika ( <i>to be broken</i> )	-uzurika ( <i>the state of being full</i> )	[intransitive]

The passive form always implies agency, whereas the *neuter* does not:

Iyo twujuje ikintu, na cyo kikaba **cyujujwe na twe** [transitive], tuvuga ko **cyuzuritse** [intransitive].  
*(When we **fill** something, and it **is filled** by us, we say that it **is full**.)*

The verb above, **cyujujwe** (*is filled*), is transitive (its agency is **us**) and requires the *passive* form, whereas the last verb, **cyuzuritse**, is intransitive, implies no agency, and therefore takes the neuter form.

### Rules for the Formation of Polysyllabic Neuter Verbs

- When the penultimate syllable of the simple or derived verb contains either **a**, **i**, or **u**, the final syllable is removed and replaced with **-ika**:

gusandara ( <i>to scatter</i> )	gusandarika ( <i>to be scattered</i> )
gushima ( <i>to praise</i> )	gushimika ( <i>to be praiseworthy</i> )
gupfunya ( <i>to fold, to bend over</i> )	gupfunyika ( <i>to be folded, to be bent over</i> )

- When the penultimate syllable of the verb contains the vowel **e**, the final vowel is replaced with **-eka**:

kumena ( <i>to break</i> )	kumeneka ( <i>to get broken</i> )
kureba ( <i>to see</i> )	kurebeka ( <i>to be visible</i> )

- When the penultimate syllable of the verb contains the vowel **o**, the final vowel is replaced with **-oka**:

kugorora ( <i>to straighten</i> )	kugororoka ( <i>to be straight</i> )
-----------------------------------	--------------------------------------