1.1 THE BANTU

The name Bantu is credited to W.H.L. Bleek who founded the tradition of comparative Bantu linguistics upon which other pioneers in Bantuistics like Guthrie and Meeussen drew in their research into this branch of the Niger-Congo phylum (Schadeberg 2006). Two morphemes constitute the noun Bantu, namely, the class 2 plural prefix /ba-/ and the stem /-ntu/ both of which denote 'people'. Therefore, Bantu refers to the peoples who speak languages in which the reconstructed term for people is 'ba-ntu'.

Bantu languages, the bedrock on which the present research is embedded span close to 1/3 of the land area and population of the vast African continent. The estimated 240 million speakers of these languages are found in Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, CAR, Comoros, Congo, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mayotte, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Burse and Philippson 2006). The languages fall under the Niger-Congo, sometimes termed Niger-Kordofanian, the largest language phylum in the world (Guthrie 1948; Greenberg 1963; Bendor-Samwel 1989; Carstens 1991 Heine & Nurse 2000; Grimes 2000). Despite the lack of consensus as to the naming and classification methodology, it is estimated that about 1,489 languages belong to this phylum. Early research suggests that within the Niger-Congo phylum, Bantu languages belong to the Benue-Congo which falls under yet another branch, the Atlantic Congo. As figure 1 shows, the genealogy of Bantu is under constant review.
Similarly, the number of Bantu languages remains inconclusive. Conjectural figures range between 300 and 700. For example, Guthrie (1967-71) records 440, Mann et al. (1987) about 680, Bastin et al. (1999) 542, Grimes (2000) 501, Maho
Cognizant of the fluidity of the variables which come into play in dialect and language delineation, Nurse and Philippson suspect that the number of Bantu languages could be "300, or less" (Nurse & Philippson in 2006:3). Map 1 shows the geographical location of the Bantu-speaking people in Africa.

One of the reasons why the classification conundrum remains unresolved is the method of inquiry. Much of the current research findings are grounded on the collation of lexicons (Nurse & Philippson 2006). Both linguists argue that basic descriptions of these languages are necessary if more convincing comparative
conclusions are to be drawn about the formal phenomena on which convergence or divergence hinges.

Evidence from archeology suggests that the cradle-land of Bantu-speakers is the area on the border between Nigeria and Cameroon out of which they spread in the easterly and southerly directions within the African continent (Nurse & Philippson 2006).

In the literature, the term Narrow Bantu which was coined by the Benue-Congo Working Group specifically refers to languages classified as Bantu by Guthrie (1948) in contradistinction to other southern Bantoid which exhibit Bantu-like features. Even if this definition were strictly applied, EkeGusii, the focus of this study, will still remain within the designation Narrow Bantu.

1.2 EKEGUSII AND THE ABAGUSII

EkeGusii is coded as E42 in Guthrie's (1971) classification of Bantu languages (Bastin 2006). It is one of the many languages which belong to the interlacustrine zones, namely D and E. There are over 1 million native speakers of the language. In some of the literature, the name Kisii, Gusii and KiKisii are erroneously used to refer to the language. As Demuth (2000) has correctly observed, names of languages fall under classes 7/8 of the Bantu noun class system. In conformity with the native speakers of the language, the name EkeGusii, which bears the class prefix to denote 'language', is used throughout this research.¹ Map 2 shows the location of EkeGusii-speaking area within the interlacustrine Bantu family.

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¹ Gusii refers to the land of AbaGusii, the speakers of EkeGusii, while Kisii is the name of a town in Gusii. Undoubtedly, the use of KiKisii is a consequence of overgeneralization by Kiswahili speakers to denote the language spoken in Kisii/Gusii.
In Kenya, EkeGusii is spoken in the Kisii Central, Gucha and Nyamira districts of Nyanza province near Lake Victoria where it is sandwiched between the Cushitic Maa in the south and the Nilotic Dholuo and Kipsigis to the West and East,
respectively. The language exhibits two noticeable dialects, namely EkeRogoro and EkeMaate. The main aspects of variance between both regional dialects are the lexicon and phonology. In spite of this dialectical variability, the findings in this research hold in both varieties as their morpho-syntax has remained invariable. While the EkeRogoro speakers occupy Kisii Central and Nyamira districts, EkeMaate seems to be confined to South MuGirango in Gucha district. EkeGusii is almost mutually intelligible with Kuria (E43) and some dialects of Oluluyia (E32) which are the Kenyan Bantu languages to which it is proximate geographically and linguistically. Map 3 shows the EkeGusii-speaking region.

MAP 3 GUSII ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES
(Adapted from Cammenga 2002:17)

As Cammenga (2002) notes, it would be interesting to study a language like EkeGusii which interfaces with non-Bantu languages with a view to unearthing the

2 The number of EkeGusii-speaking districts may have tripled in 2007 following the pre-election promises by the Government which intended to woo voters in the then districts who were warming towards the Opposition.
possible phenomena which the latter have exerted on the former as a consequence of contact.

Considering that history may not have reliable apparatus with which to discount or verify oral tradition, the claim by the AbaGusii that they came from 'Misiri', a place they associate with present day Egypt, should be accorded the benefit of doubt. Further, since 'Misiri' is in a northerly direction from Gusii, the claim may not be farfetched if it is recalled that the Nigeria/Cameroon border has been cited as the most probable cradle land of Bantu.

1.3 **TYPOLOGICAL FEATURES OF BANTU**

Nurse & Philipsson (2006) identify some phenomena on which Bantu typological characteristics are based. Key among these is syntax. Bantu exhibits a default syntactic structure of the order SVO, which is the most common in the world (Nurse & Philipsson 2006; Schadeberg 2006). The simple transitive from Chichewa in (1) exemplifies this phenomenon:

1. (Chichewa, Mchombo 2004:19)
   Mi-kango i-ku-sá-k-á ziwawénga
   4-lions 4SM-pres-hunt-fv 8-terrorists
   'The lions are hunting the terrorists'

The EkeGusii di-transitive in (2) containing an auxiliary and an instrumental DP reveal the same word-order:

2. (EkeGusii)
   Bonuke a-o-re go-it-er-a chi-ombe eke-benoka
   Bonuke 3SG-PST-be PROG-beat-APPL-FV 10-cow 7-machete
   'Bonuke was beating the cows with a machete'.

The structure of both languages is consistent with the SVO order prevalent in Bantu languages. The Kiswahili example in (3) show that the pro-drop parameter is also applicable to Bantu:

3. (Kiswahili, Smallwood 1998:28)
   (a) pro vi-li-tosha
      8-PST-be.enough
   'They (inanimate objects) were enough.'
The second characteristic aspect of Bantu languages is its verb and nominal morphology. The Bantu verb stem hosts derivational and inflectional morphemes and permits the optionality of the lexical DPs, making the resultant verbal complex a grammatical string. Examples of this highly agglutinative property in shown in (4):

4. (EkeGusii)
O-ba-ta-sek-er-i-e omw-ana
3SG-3PL-2PL-laugh-APPL-TRANS-FV 1-child
'S/he has made the child laugh for us'

As is apparent, besides tense, aspect and morphology, argument structure changing morphology also attaches to the verb stem as 'extensions' within the verbal complex. Further, case is not morphologically marked and what is analyzed as case marking morphemes in the languages are incorporated pronomininals, otherwise termed subject and object markers as in (5):

5. (EkeGusii)
Omw-ana o-ɔ-chi-at-ir-e
1-child 3SG-PST-10-break-PFCT-FV
'The child has broken them'.

Bantu languages are also known for their elaborate noun class system in which nouns fall into several genders. Ordinarily, a noun constitutes a class prefix, which may occur with or without an augment, the noun stem and agent nominalizing suffix in the case of some nouns as in (6):

6. (EkeGusii)
(a) o-mo-gamb-i
AUG-NPX-rule-ANS
'ruler/chief'
The form of the noun class prefix or part of it occurs as an agreement marker as well as an incorporated pronominal as in (7):

7. (Kiswahili, Katamba 2006:111)

(a) M-toto m-dogo a-mefika.
c1.1 child cl.1 little cl.1 arrived
'The little child arrived'

(b) ki-kapu ki-dogo ki-mefika.
c1.17 basket cl.7 little cl.7 arrived
'The little basket arrived'.

Barring the inaccurate analysis of tense and aspect morphology, the examples show the use of the noun class prefix in 2 (b) as an incorporated pronominal.

Phonological features may also be relied upon in determining whether languages are genetically related or not. For example, Maddieson (2006) has considered that the 5 or 7 phonemic inventory of vowels which most Bantu languages exhibit can be traced back to ProtoBantu (PB). The 5 vowel system is usually /i, e, a, o, u/ and occurs in, for example, Xhosa, Ndebele, Shona and Kalanga while the 7 system is /i, e, e, a, ɔ, o, u/ and occurs in Nyamwezi, Sukuma and Vove, among others. In the case of EkeGusii, the occurrence of tone as an autosegment has been reported. Also notable, though not prevalent is phonemic length. Concerning syllable structure, preference for open syllabicity is remarkable as happens in the rest of Bantu languages and PB (Katamba 2006). Further, contact with Khoisan languages in Southern Africa has given rise to a high number of click consonants especially in Zulu, Xhosa, Phuthi, Sotho, Nkuna, Dzonga and Ronga, among others (Maddieson 2006).

Perhaps the starting point of comparative typological research is the lexicon. Schadeberg (2006) reports that linguistics of historical and comparative Bantu such as Meinhoff, Meeussen and Guthrie reconstructed 5-700, 2000 and 2,500 Bantu lexical
items, respectively. Such rudimentary data became the point of departure for the research programme in Bantuistics the development of which has resulted in some state-of-the-art such as Carstens (2000), Henderson 2005, Ngonyani & Githinji (2006), Ndayiragije (1999) Meombo (2004) Kinyalolo (1999), among others.

1.4 SCOPE AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study seeks to provide a description of the core properties of EkeGusii morphology and syntax autonomously as well as in the content of Bantu languages. In particular, it aims at analyzing the noun class system, predicate-argument agreement, the inflectional categories of the verb (tense, aspect and mood), argument structure and operator movement.

Despite the attempts to investigate the grammar of EkeGusii (Whiteley, 1965, Cammenga 2002), many lacunae remain especially in the terminology and theoretical analysis of morpho-syntactic issues. For example, in these studies, the term tense is used to include aspect and mood. Delineation of these categories is one the primary objectives of this study.

Considering that nouns control agreement as Aikhenvald (2000), among others, has observed, nominal morphology is central to this study. While focusing on agreement morphology, the study draws a distinction between concord and agreement which are often used interchangeably in the literature. The centrality of agreement to modern syntactic theory has been captured by Corbett in the observation that "...theorists, after long treating agreement as diagnostic... are now viewing it as an important problem in its own right" (Corbett 1988:23). In order to grapple with the nature of agreement in EkeGusii, aspects such as its domain, directionality and conflict resolution are addressed in this study. For example, the largest domain of agreement is the sentence where predicate-argument agreement occurs. Accordingly, clause-level agreement becomes one of the areas of concern in this research.

Within Verbal morphology, the study examines the derivational morphemes which are relevant to argument structure. Specifically, attention is paid to the causative, applicative, stative, reversive, passive, reflexive and reciprocal suffixes and their consequences on argument structure. The relevance of these morphemes to syntax has been noted in, among others, Baker (1988) and Good (2001). Good explains that "Bantu languages have a set of highly productive verbal suffixes which
alter the valence and semantics of verb roots" (Good 2005:1). Accordingly, an analysis of the syntax and semantics of these verbal "extensions" is of paramount importance to present study.

1.5 SOURCES OF DATA AND LOCATION OF STUDY

The research was conducted in two phases. Phase one comprised library research during which an in-depth grasp of existing literature on Bantu and non-Bantu morpho-syntax was attempted.

Phase two of the research involved field research during which native speakers of EkeGusii were interviewed for the purpose with a view to eliciting primary data in the language. Besides this, the researcher used his intuition as a native speaker to generate further data.

Secondary sources of data include oral as well as all manner of written materials such as primers, descriptive grammars and other texts such as dissertations/theses, electronic and print media bulletins and public speeches made in the language.

The research was conducted in the south western region of Nyanza Province in Kenya where EkeGusii is spoken.

1.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The research is a theory-neutral description of EkeGusii morpho-syntactic phenomena. Accordingly, the study is eclectic since no single theory is adopted in data analysis and discussion. This notwithstanding, some X-bar theoretic notions and minimalist assumptions appear salient in the theoretical orientation of the study. The principle tenets of specific theories, sub-theories and conceptual models used are provided in each section wherever the perspectives of their underpinnings seem applicable to the data.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THESIS

The organization of the thesis is as follows. Chapter one provides background information concerning the history, classification and typology of Bantu languages. An attempt is made in chapter two to describe the Bantu noun class system, nominal morphology and the structure of the DP. Chapter three focuses on the theory of argument structure by describing the morphology and syntax of the suffixes termed
'extensions'. The inflectional categories of the verb, namely tense, aspect and mood as well as sequence of tense phenomena are addressed in chapter 4. The analysis of aspect and mood in chapter 5 is intended to show that both categories are not subsumed under tense as has been suggested in the literature. The role of the elaborate noun class system in the understanding of the structure of the Bantu clause and theory of agreement is the concern of chapter 6. Chapter 7 sheds light on the syntax of two operators, namely the wh-phrase focus. The analysis presented in the chapter shows the wh-phrase interacts with focus and appears ex situ. A summary of the thesis is contained in chapter 8.