# The grammaticalisation of a specific indefinite determiner

## Prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* in Tunen

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### 1 Introduction

Tunen is a Bantu (Niger-Congo) language spoken in Cameroon in the Centre and Littoral provinces, with Guthrie classification A44 (Maho 2003, 2009). The language is typologically unusual in displaying SOV base word order, i.e. a head-final verb phrase (O V), while elsewhere being head initial (prepositions, Dem-N order). Dugast (1971) and Mous (1997) note that cardinal numerals appear postnominally (N NUM), with the exception of the form *-mɔ̀tɛ́* 'one', which can also appear before the noun in the plural. In this article, I investigate this puzzling prenominal case of *-mɔ̀tɛ́* and argue based on new data that it is not synchronically a numeral and has in fact grammaticalised to function as an indefinite determiner marking epistemic specificity. I use controlled elicitation to show semantic tests to support this and present syntactic arguments that prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* appears in the position of a determiner rather than a numeral. I then investigate the marker's likely grammaticalisation over time by considering the "seemingly universal" grammaticalisation path of numeral 'one' to (specific) indefinite markers that has been proposed in the typological literature (Givón 1981: 35); Heine (1995, 1997). I test the predictions of such an account by means of a corpus study of 61 folk tales (*contes*) published in Dugast (1975), and conclude by a brief survey of related Cameroonian languages.

The structure of the article is as follows. Section 2 gives background on Tunen nominal syntax, Section 3 presents my fieldwork study on the syntax and semantics of postnominal and prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́*, Section 4 lays out the proposed grammaticalisation, Section 5 investigates a corpus of older Tunen texts to test the predictions, Section 6 considers the question of language contact, and Section 7 concludes.

### 2 Background

As is typical of Bantu languages, the Tunen noun is composed of a noun root (-√) and a noun class prefix (PFX-), e.g. *mɔ̀-ndɔ̀* 'person', where *mɔ̀-* is the class

1 prefix, and *-ndɔ̀* is the lexical root. The noun root can never appear in isolation, and so the noun stem PFX-√ is considered a 'bare noun' in this article, while the additional of elements such as demonstratives would make it a modified noun phrase.[1] The prefix varies dependent on the gender of the noun, which I will gloss throughout this article using traditional Bantu noun class numbering.[2]

Looking now further than the noun, we can show that the order of nominal modifiers is fixed in the following way:[3]

**Table 1**
**Linear order of Tunen nominal modifiers.**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| DEM<br>POSS<br>WH | NOUN | ADJ | NUM<br>Q |

For example, consider (1) below.[4]

(1) *tɔ̀éyɛ̀ tɔ̀bànánà tɔ̀fítìtìà tɔ̀tɛ́ˡtɛ́ tɔ́fàndɛ̀* **DEM N ADJ ADJ NUM**
/tɔ-ɛyɛ tɔ-banana tɔ-fititiə tɔ-tɛtɛ tɔ-fandɛ/
13-DEM.PROX 13-banana 13-black 13-small 13-two
'ces deux petites bananes noires'
'these two small black bananas'
[JO, 844]

Here, we see that the demonstrative *tɔ̀éyɛ̀* 'these' appears before the noun *tɔ̀bànánà* 'bananas', while the adjectival and numeral modifiers are postnominal. The demonstrative and nominal modifiers all take a prefix *tɔ̀-* in agreement with the class 13 head noun *tɔ̀bànánà* 'bananas'.

Further evidence shows us that the relative order of nominal modifiers is hierarchically fixed, as the grammaticality contrast between (2) and (3) below exemplifies.

1 Ferch (2013) uses the term 'bare classified nouns' to describe *PFX*-√ forms in the Bantu language Shona; I use 'bare nouns' here in a synonymous way.

2 The prefix is standardly called a class prefix, with 24 noun classes reconstructed for Proto-Bantu (Katamba 2003). Within these classes, there are singular/plural pairs, e.g. 1/2, 3/4. These pairs should be considered as genders.

3 I assume that quantifiers and numerals occupy the same slot in the absence of examples that test their co-occurrence. Similarly, I do not have evidence to distinguish between the position of demonstratives, possessives and *wh*-words.

4 See Section 3.1 for discussion of the format of data I will use in this article.

(2) *tɔ̀bànánà tɔ̀ŋɛ́ŋà tɔ́fàndɛ̀* **N ADJ NUM**
/tɔ-banana tɔ-ŋɛŋa tɔ-fandɛ/
13-banana 13-big 13-two
'deux grandes bananes'
'two big bananas'
[JO, 839]

(3) **tɔ̀bànánà tɔ́fàndɛ̀ tɔ̀ŋɛ́ŋà* ***N NUM ADJ**
/tɔ-banana tɔ-fandɛ tɔ-ŋɛŋa/
13-banana 13-two 13-big
Intd.: 'deux grandes bananes'
Intd.: 'two big bananas'
[JO, 840]

For the analysis of these nominal structures in Tunen, I assume the DP hypothesis, where a determiner (D) takes a noun phrase (NP) as complement, following work in the generative tradition since Abney (1987). We saw above in (1) that demonstratives are prenominal in Tunen.[5] As demonstratives have a determining function, we can situate them in D, meaning that the Tunen DP is head-initial, while numerals and nominal modifiers with a qualifying function such as adjectives appear after the noun.[6]

Having set up the necessary background into Tunen nominal syntax, we can turn to investigating the puzzling case of prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́*.

## 3 Investigating prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́*: fieldwork study

### 3.1 Methodology

The data come from fieldwork conducted in March-June 2019 with 6 Tunen speakers in Ndikiniméki, Cameroon. The majority of speakers spoke the Tɔbɔ́ányɛ dialect, while 1 speaker, EO, spoke Hiliŋ. All sessions were recorded and transcribed, and will be archived open access.[7] For this reason, the form ID is given in square brackets alongside the consultant's initials. I provide the French translation along with the English as this was a translation agreed upon together with the consultant, and so potentially more useful in understanding the sense of the original Tunen than the English translation I added later.

Stimuli were used from the Bantu Syntax and Information Structure (BaSIS) questionnaire, drawing on the Questionnaire on Information Structure (QUIS;

5 Demonstratives can also occur postnominally in Tunen, but crucially only in a doubling construction of the form DEM-N-DEM.

6 Note in the interest of syntactic typology that this order is consistent with Greenberg's Universal 20 (Cinque 2005; Dryer 2018) and the Final Over Final Condition (FOFC) (Sheehan et al. 2017).

7 The data will be archived towards the end of the Bantu Syntax and Information Structure (BaSIS) project, predicted as 2022.

Skopeteas et al., 2006). Other stimuli were constructed by the author. The fieldwork study used two main research strategies: (1) presentation of context to speaker and record of their response, (2) grammaticality/felicity judgements of a form in the context given. The first data allow for the more natural Tunen response (with fewer priming effects) and the second allows for negative evidence, i.e. shows us what is not possible in a given context. Together, these allow us to work out the meanings of a given form.

## 3.2 The data

### 3.2.1 Postnominal numeral

I first present the cardinal numeral form of *-mɔ̀tɛ́*. The true numeral *-mɔ̀tɛ́* 'one' agrees with the head noun and always appears postnominally, matching what was indicated for cardinal numerals in Dugast (1971) and Mous (2003). For example, consider the data below (head nouns are underlined, and numerals are marked in bold font).

(4) Context: Hand-drawn picture stimulus of people, one of which without a hat.
*bɛ̀ndɔ̀ bàkìmə̀ bálɛ̀ nà tɔ̀tàmbá úhúúlíá mɔ̀ndɔ̀ ɔ̀mɔ̀tɛ́*

| /bɛ-ndɔ | bə-kimə | ba-lɛa | na | tɔ-tamba | uhuuliə |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2-person | 2-all | SM2.-be | with | 13-hat | except |

| mɔ-ndɔ | **ɔ-mɔtɛ**/ |
|---|---|
| 1-person | 1-one |

'Tout le monde portent le chapeau sauf une personne.'
'Everybody is wearing a hat except one person.'
[PM, 481]

(5) *bànáá kíákáá ɔ́mànáá nɛ̀kɔ̀sɔ̀nà nɛ́mɔ̀tɛ̀. báŋɔ̀ mɔ́mɔ̀tɛ́ kíákà*

| /ba-na | kiaka | ɔmana | nɛ-kɔsɔna | **nɛ-mɔtɛ** | ba-ŋɔ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2-child | do.DUR | only | 5-exam | 5-one | 2-FUT |

| mɔ-mɔtɛ | kiaka/ |
|---|---|
| 6-one | do.DUR |

'Les enfants ont fait seulement un examen. Ils vont faire d'autres.'
'The children have only done one exam. They will do others.'
[JO, 532]

This matches the behaviour of other cardinal numerals, which are always postnominal, e.g. (6), being ungrammatical when prenominal (7).

(6) Context: Same picture as (4), but two people are without hats
*bèndɔ̀ bàkìmə̀ bálɛ̀ nà tɔ̀tàmbá úhúúlíá bèndɔ̀ báfàndɛ́*

| /bɛ-ndɔ | bə-kimə | ba-lɛa | na | tɔ-tamba | uhuuliə |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2-person | 2-all | SM.2-be | with | 13-hat | except |

| bɛ-ndɔ | **ba-fandɛ**/ |
|---|---|
| 2-person | 2-two |

'Tout le monde portent le chapeau sauf deux personnes.'
'Everybody is wearing a hat except two people.'
[PM, 482]

(7) Context: Shown drawing of two birds, EK asks in Tunen "How many birds do you see?"
**méndɔ̀ tɔ́fàndɛ́ túnònì sìn*

| /mɛ-ndɔ | **tɔ-fandɛ** | tɔ-noni | sinə/ |
|---|---|---|---|
| SM.1SG-PRS | 13-two | 13-bird | see |

Intd.: 'Je vois deux oiseaux.'
Intd.: 'I see two birds.'
[JO, 874]

As all other cardinal numerals are restricted to a postnominal position with a numeral reading, the rest of the article will restrict its discussion to *-mɔ̀tɛ́*, which as we will see in the next section can appear prenominally.

### 3.2.2 Prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́*

To investigate prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́*, I controlled elicitation contexts for the definiteness and specificity of the referents. This was done by providing the speaker with a full discourse context and/or by using a continuation that disambiguates the specificity of the referent. By investigating a range of different contexts, I was able to pinpoint the conditions on the usage of prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́*.

In a specific context, prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* can be used. This was supported by multiple consultants, as in the examples below.[8]

(8) Context: You can't find your friend Maarten, and are looking for him
*mɛ́ndɔ̀ ɔ̀mɔ̀tɛ́ mɔ̀ndɔ̀ sìə̀ bá↓sɛ́á Mátìn*

| /mɛ-ndɔ | **ɔ-mɔtɛ** | mɔ-ndɔ | siə | ba-sɛa | Mətinə/ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SM.1SG-PRS | 1-one | 1-person | search | REL.SM.2-say | Maarten |

'Je cherche quelqu'un qui s'appèle Maarten.'
'I am looking for someone who is called Maarten.'
[PM, 1189]

8 I assume that the difference in agreement prefix between ɔ- in (8) and *wɔ-* in (9) is simply due to the insertion of a semivowel in the environment ɔ#_ɔ, applying in fast speech.

(9) Context: You are looking for your friend Daniel
*méndɔ̀ wɔ̀mɔ̀té mɔ́ndɔ̀ sì. nèàyá nínyə̀ á Tə̀nìɛ̀l*

| /mɛ-ndɔ | **ɔ-mɔtɛ** | mɔ-ndɔ | siə | neaya | nɛ-nyə |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SM.1SG-PRS | 1-one | 1-person | search | 5.POSS.1 | 5-name |

| á | Tənɪɛlɛ/ |
|---|---|
| COP | Daniel |

'Je cherche une certaine personne. Son nom est Daniel.'
'I'm looking for someone. His name is Daniel.'
[JO, 891]

These contexts are specific because the speaker is using the noun phrase *ɔ̀mɔ̀té mɔ́ndɔ̀* to refer to a particular referent they have in mind, namely Maarten in (8) and Daniel in (9). This is *epistemic specificity* (Ionin 2013), also termed *referential specificity* (Karttunen 1968; Von Heusinger 2019), and contrasts with a predicational reading of an indefinite (Fodor and Sag 1982). As well as the discourse context supplied, the continuations (a relative clause in (8) and a follow-up sentence in (9) reinforce a specific interpretation on the nominal.

Note that prenominal *-mɔ̀té* is not obligatory in such contexts. Bare nouns (as defined in Section 2 above) can also be used; these are ambiguous in terms of definiteness and specificity, as shown below.

(10) *méndɔ̀ mɔ́ndɔ̀ sì*

| /mé-ndɔ̀ | mɔ́-ndɔ̀ | sìə̀/ |
|---|---|---|
| SM.1SG-PRS | 1-person | search |

'Je cherche {quelqu'un/une personne/la personne}.'
'I'm looking for {someone/a person/the person}.'
[JO, 898]

We therefore have prenominal *-mɔ̀té* + N competing in usage with a bare noun, where the former is specific and the latter is ambiguous between specific and non-specific interpretations. If my analysis is correct and prenominal *-mɔ̀té* is really what contributes the specific referential meaning, then it should not be possible to use prenominal *-mɔ̀té* in a non-specific context. We see in (11) below that this prediction is borne out.

(11) Context: You need an extra pair of hands to help with your work, so you announce that you are looking for an extra employee (it doesn't matter who)
**méndɔ̀ (w)ɔ̀mɔ̀té mɔ́ndɔ̀ sì*

| /mɛ-ndɔ | **ɔ-mɔtɛ** | mɔ-ndɔ | siə/ |
|---|---|---|---|
| SM.1SG-PRS | 1-one | 1-person | search |

Intd.: 'Je cherche quelqu'un.'
Intd.: 'I'm looking for someone.'
[JO, 894, 895]

This context is set up for a predicational use of the indefinite, where there is no particular referent in mind, just someone who is able to work. The fact that prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* was judged infelicitous here supports the argument that it marks epistemic specificity rather than just indefiniteness. As predicted, a bare noun is felicitous in this context, with (10) above being judged as fine in the same context.

To sum up the findings so far, we have seen that prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* is used in specific contexts and is infelicitous in non-specific contexts. It is not obligatory; a bare noun can also be used. However, it is systematic; it always has a specific interpretation.

Let us now investigate the restrictions on prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* in more detail. Firstly, as already indicated, prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* agrees with the noun class of the head noun. So far we have only seen class 1 (singular human animates) examples, but *-mɔ̀tɛ́* can appear with other noun classes, as in the class 7 example below.

(12) Context: I am looking at a map, clearly searching for something. PM asks me what I am doing. I reply:
*méndɔ̀ yɛ̀mɔ̀tɛ́ bálíkà sìà báséá Yəhànd*

/mɛ-ndɔ **yɛ-mɔtɛ** bɛlikə siə ba-sɛa Yəhəndə/
SM.1SG-PRS 7-one 7.town search SM.2-say Yaoundé
'Je cherche une certaine ville qui s'appèle Yaoundé.'
'I am looking for a town which is called Yaoundé.'
[PM, 737]

Interestingly, prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* can also be used with plural nouns, functioning as an indefinite quantifier. For example, see (13) below.[9]

(13) Context: You are a teacher giving a lesson about animals
*tátá tùnɔ̀ní túkìmà á tɔ́ndɔ̀ hùlùlù. tɔ́mɔ̀tɛ̀ tùnɔ̀ní tɔ́léndɔ̀ hùlùlù*

/tata tɔ-nɔni tɔ-kimə á tɔ-ndɔ hululu
not 13-bird 13-all COP SM.13-PRS fly

**tɔ-mɔtɛ** tɔ-nɔni tɔ-lɛ-ndɔ hululu/
13-one 13-bird 13-NEG-PRS fly

'Ce n'est pas tous les oiseaux qui volent. Certains oiseaux ne volent pas.'
'Not all birds fly. Some birds do not fly.'
[EO, 412]

While this ability for *-mɔ̀tɛ́* to be used prenominally with plural nouns was picked up in earlier work by Dugast (1971: 158), it was not discussed in depth and the marker was still treated as a numeral. I argue that the ability for *-mɔ̀tɛ́* to be used with the plural noun *tùnɔ̀ní* 'birds' shows that it is not functioning

9 Note that class 13 is the plural counterpart of class 19 nouns in Tunen (see Dugast (1971) and Mous (2003) for more detail on the Tunen noun class system).

as a cardinal numeral and therefore should not be treated as such. Further evidence against analysing prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* as a numeral comes from the fact that it can co-occur with a postnominal numeral, as in example (14) below.

(14) Context: I am looking at a map, clearly searching for something. PM asks me what I am doing. I reply:

*mɛ́ndɔ̀ bɛ́mɔ̀tɛ́ bìbálíkà bɛ́fàndɛ́ sìà báséá Yəhàndə nà ìNdìkìnímákìà*

| /mɛ-ndɔ | **bɛ-mɔtɛ** | bɛ-bɛlikə | **bɛ-fandɛ** |
|---|---|---|---|
| SM.1SG-PRS | 8-one | 8-town | 8-two |

| siə | ba-sɛa | Yəhəndə | na | iNdikinimɛki/ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| search | SM.2-say | Yaoundé | and | Ndikiniméki |

'Je cherche deux certaines villes qu'on s'appelle Yaoundé et Ndikiniméki.'
'I am looking for two particular towns which are called Yaoundé and Ndikiniméki.'
[PM, 738]

Here, we can see that prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* appears with a plural noun, while the true numeral changes to the stem *-fàndɛ́* 'two'.[10] Unless we allow semantic clashes and assume recursive Numeral heads in the syntactic structure, this example gives further evidence that prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* is not a numeral.

## 3.3 Section summary

To sum up, we have investigated the constraints on the use of prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* and compared its behaviour with true numerals, which are always postnominal. Although prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* is homophonous with the postnominal numeral *-mɔ̀tɛ́* 'one', there is significant evidence that it does not function as a numeral: (i) prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* appears in the syntactic position of a determiner, not in the position of the numeral, (ii) prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* appears only in specific indefinite contexts, (iii) prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* can occur with plural nouns, and (iv) prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* can co-occur with a cardinal numeral. I therefore argue that the correct synchronic analysis of prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* is that it is a specific indefinite determiner.[11] Having established this to be the best synchronic account, I will now turn to detailing the grammaticalisation process.

10 The sentence would more naturally be said without the determiner or without the numeral for pragmatic reasons. However, the fact that it is judged syntactically well-formed is significant.
11 I take prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* as a determiner as it appears in a D slot. Future empirical work should test (i) its ability to co-occur with demonstratives, possessives, and wh-questions, and (ii) the difference between prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* and these other categories, in order to make a more precise analysis.

## 4 The grammaticalisation of the specific indefinite determiner

Our starting point for understanding the history of this marker is postnominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́*, which clearly functions as the numeral 'one' synchronically, and can also be traced back to the numeral 'one' in Proto-Bantu. For example, one widely supported proposal for Proto-Bantu 'one' is **mòtí* (Bastin et al. 2002). As the link between the Proto-Bantu numeral and prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* is uncontroversial, I leave aside the specifics of the reconstruction. The phonological changes proposed depend heavily on the starting point chosen (Pozdniakov (2018) has also proposed **m-ò-dì* as a reconstruction, and **mòì* is the MAIN reconstruction from Bastin et al. (2002)), and such debates are tangential to our current purposes.

The origin of prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* as the numeral 'one' is therefore clear. We are then left with two outstanding questions: (i) How did the marker change in meaning from the numeral 'one' to a marker of epistemic specificity, and (ii) How did the syntactic change from postnominal numeral to prenominal determiner take place? I will discuss these in turn.

### 4.1 Semantic shift

In this section, I argue that the semantic change from the cardinal numeral 'one' to a specific indefinite determiner is to be expected given the crosslinguistically commonality of such a grammaticalisation path, which suggests that such a semantic shift is cognitively likely. In this section I consider language-internal change, leaving the question of language-external influence to Section 6.

Semantic change from the numeral 'one' has been particularly well-studied for the development of indefinite articles, with the following pathway given in the World Lexicon of Grammaticalization:

(15) **Crosslinguistic grammaticalisation path (to be revised)**
ONE > INDEFINITE MARKER (Heine et al. 2004)

Evidence for this grammaticalisation pathway comes from a wide variety of languages across the world. The phenomenon has been well-studied for the article systems of Indo-European languages such as English and French, but has also been suggested for various language (families) including Mandarin, Sherpa, Hungarian, Neo-Aramaic, Persian, Turkish, Amerindian, Austronesian, and various creole languages (Givón 1981). The wide variety of languages across the world that show such a shift in meaning from a numeral 'one' to an indefinite marker leads Givón (1981: 35) to write that the development from the numeral 'one' to a marker of indefiniteness is "seemingly universal".

However, Tunen was seen to have a form sensitive to *specific* indefinite contexts, which is slightly less general than the indefinite contexts marked by

items such as the English indefinite article *a(n)*. Under Givón (1981)'s analysis, this is to be expected given that other languages have this extra restriction. In Hebrew, for example, the use of a numeral-derived marker *-(a)xat* 'one' in Hebrew is sensitive to specificity, being present in specific indefinite contexts and absent in non-specific contexts, as shown in the data below.[12,13]

(16) *hu* *mexapes* *isha,-(a)xat*
he looking-for woman-one
'He is looking for a (specific) woman.'

(17) *hu* *mexapes* *(lo)* *isha*
he looking (for-him) woman
'He is looking for a woman (a member of the type).'
Hebrew; Givón (1981: 45)

On the basis of data from languages such as Hebrew, Givón adds an intermediate step in the grammaticalisation pathway from (15), where the marker is restricted to specific indefinites. This results in the following 3-step categorisation:

(18) **Crosslinguistic grammaticalisation path (3-step)**

ONE > SPECIFIC INDEFINITE MARKER > INDEFINITE MARKER

(Givón 1981)

This elaborated grammaticalisation path has a category that corresponds to the behaviour of prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* in Tunen as a specific indefinite marker, as defined in terms of epistemic specificity. The direction of the grammaticalisation path makes the prediction that older forms of *-mɔ̀tɛ́* were not general indefinite markers, as the marker is first restricted to specific indefinites.[14]

While the grammaticalisation path in (82) from Givón (1981) is sufficient to understand the synchronic behaviour of Tunen *-mɔ̀tɛ́*, a more detailed picture has arisen through subsequent typological research. Heine (1995, 1997) extends the path to a 5-stage model, where the specific indefinite stage is split into two (one for presentative uses for referents that are then elaborated on, and one for the introduction of any specific referent; Von Heusinger (2019)) and a fifth stage with broadening of meaning to readings such as generics is added.

12 Givón uses the term "referential indefinites", which I understand as epistemic specificity, i.e. having a particular referent in the mind of the speaker (see Ionin (2013), Lyons (1999)). Glosses and translations of the Hebrew data have not been changed.

13 See Becker (2019) for a slightly different view where Hebrew *-xat* is a presentative marker rather than a marker of specificity. I will return to this distinction in (20) below.

14 This should however be taken as a general tendency rather than an absolute prediction, as the close semantic links between the interpretations means that different people will vary in where exactly they conceptualise the marker.

(19) **Crosslinguistic grammaticalisation path (5-step)**

numeral 'one' > presentative marker > specific marker > nonspecific marker > generalized marker

Heine (1995: 71-6), as rephrased in Becker (2019: 174)

This second stage of presentatives accounts for referents that are introduced to the discourse, and therefore discourse prominent. While I believe that 'specific marker' is sufficient for a synchronic account of Tunen, we will see in Section 5 that the distinction between presentative marker and specific marker can be useful in understanding older Tunen texts.

## 4.2 Syntactic change

Having established the commonality of an interpretative shift from the numeral one to a marker of specific indefinites, we can turn to the other subquestion: How did the syntactic change take place?

To recap from Section 3, we saw that Tunen *-mɔ̀tɛ́* has changed from being a postnominal numeral to a prenominal determiner (with the assumption that there are two *-mɔ̀tɛ́s* synchronically: the one in question, and the postnominal cardinal numeral). There is therefore a difference in syntactic category and structural (and linear) position which we need to account for. Note that in other languages where the numeral 'one' has changed syntactic category to a determiner, this change is often structurally ambiguous due to the order of nominal modifiers. For instance, the English numeral 'one' was prenominal, and demonstratives and determiners are also prenominal in English, meaning that there is no effect on the linear order.

To answer this question, I propose that the semantic change occurred before the syntactic change. Once the form *-mɔ̀tɛ́* started being used in specific indefinite contexts, it opened up the possibility to reanalyse this form as a different syntactic category, losing the quantificational reading of a numeral and gaining the referential meaning of a specific indefinite marker. This referential meaning is elsewhere expressed by demonstratives, which are prenominal (Section 2). It is therefore very likely that the broadening of interpretation of postnominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* was a sufficient catalyst for speakers to reanalyse it as a D-type element, and therefore express it in prenominal position. We therefore have the following timeline:

**Table 2**
**The grammaticalisation stages of -mɔ̀tɛ́ in Tunen.**

| Stage | Syntactic position | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| Stage I | postnominal | cardinal numeral |
| Stage II | postnominal | specific indefinite marker |
| Stage III | prenominal | specific indefinite marker |

Based on the crosslinguistic pattern reported by typologists, we could imagine a fourth stage in Tunen, Stage IV, whereby we see prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* as an indefinite determiner, and possibly a later stage, Stage V, where the marker broadens to other cases such as generics (Heine 1997). However, these stages are not attested and so can only be taken as speculation.

Having illustrated my proposal for the grammaticalisation of Tunen prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* based on crosslinguistic comparisons, I will consider some Tunen-specific factors to be taken into account.

## 4.3 Discussion

One reason to be cautious about generalising from other languages is that independent properties of the language may affect the grammaticalisation path. I will consider some of these briefly below.

A commonly reported feature of (specific) indefinite markers derived from the numeral 'one' is phonological reduction. For instance, Ionin (2013) reports that the Russian specificity marker *odin* is phonologically reduced (*odin*$_R$), a phenomenon also found in languages such as Hebrew and English (Givón 1981).[15] In contrast, there is no evidence that prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* is phonologically reduced in Tunen: it still takes noun class agreement, and is therefore trisyllabic. One typological difference is that Tunen does not have a stress system, unlike Russian. Note also that demonstratives and possessives, which are prenominal, also take noun class agreement in Tunen, as is typical of Bantu. I therefore propose that whatever mechanism controls agreement for these elements is also responsible for agreement on prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́*.

A further difference between Tunen and many other languages reported to have (specific) indefinite markers is the difference in use of bare nouns. Prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* in Tunen is optional, competing with a bare classified noun (i.e. the noun stem with noun class prefix). To my knowledge, there is no definite or nonspecific counterpart of prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́*. Again, the

15 Himmelmann (2001) argues that phonological reduction is a weak criterion for determining whether a numeral has become an article, but he argues that the law is that numerals may be unstressed, whereas for Tunen we are concerned with whether the determiner must be unstressed.

optionality of Tunen *-mɔ̀té* relates to the distinction between articles and other types of determiners, with obligatoriness (and therefore high frequency) a criterion for articlehood (Himmelmann 2001, Becker 2019). I therefore do not call prenominal *-mɔ̀té* an 'article' in Tunen, and instead refer to it as a determiner.

## 4.4 Section summary

To conclude this section, I have shown how prenominal *-mɔ̀té* in Tunen fits into a broader crosslinguistic picture of the grammaticalisation pathway ONE > PRESENTATIVE MARKER > SPECIFIC INDEFINITE MARKER > INDEFINITE MARKER, as discussed in typological work by Heine et al. (2004), Givón (1981), and Heine (1997). I propose that the semantic broadening from quantificational to referential function happened first, which then fed syntactic reanalysis from a numeral to a determiner, resulting in the switch from postnominal to prenominal position. The data presented in Section 3 above locate Tunen at the SPECIFIC INDEFINITE MARKER stage of the pathway, matching the behaviour of markers such as *-xat* in Hebrew (Givón 1981) and *odin*$_R$ in Russian (Ionin 2013). As the marker in Tunen is optional, competing with bare nouns, and as it is not phonologically reduced, I refer to it as a determiner rather than an article.

# 5 Corpus study of Dugast texts

So far, I have shown from fieldwork data that the consultants I worked with used prenominal *-mɔ̀té* as an indefinite determiner marking epistemic specificity, and I situated this in a broader typology of grammaticalisation of (specific) indefinite markers from the numeral 'one'. This made the prediction that *-mɔ̀té* in earlier stages of the language functioned as a cardinal numeral, then a presentative marker/specific indefinite marker, but not a more general indefinite marker (as that would be expected only after a more restricted usage). I also suggested that the change in meaning occurred before the change in syntactic position. While we have little textual record of the Tunen language, we do have texts and other studies of the language that have been conducted in the last 60 years, and so I will use these materials to test my predictions from Sections 3 and 4 above.

## 5.1 Methodology

The earliest Tunen texts we have are those transcribed by Idalette Dugast, who published a collection of Tunen texts that were transcribed in the mid 20th century (Dugast 1975), and so are a record of the Tunen spoken two generations or so before the data presented in Section 3 above. As these are the oldest records we have of the Tunen language, I will take these as my object of study. The texts are *contes* (folk tales) and proverbs, presented in

Tunen with word-by-word translation alongside a translation into natural French and some linguistic commentary.

Because the texts are not digitised, I used the *contes* from *Part I* and *Part II* of the book as a subcorpus. These *contes* span two genres: social customs ('*Contes faisant allusion à quelques coutumes sociales et à quelques techniques*'), and moral truths ('*Contes faisant apparaitre une vérité morale*'). The table below gives an overview of this corpus, including what we know of the *conteurs* (storytellers).

**Table 3**
***Contes* corpus overview.**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Format** | Tunen contes with French translation, commentary, and linguistic annotation |
| **Number of *contes*** | 61 |
| **Average length of *conte*** | 3.5 pages (including French translation and commentary) |
| **Number of *conteurs*** | 11 |
| **Age of *conteurs*** | 4 old, 7 younger |
| **Gender of *conteurs*** | All male |

In order to set up the corpus study, I manually annotated the *contes* to give a line number that could be referenced. [16] I then manually searched for occurences of *-mɔ̀tɛ́* and inputted each example and reference into a spreadsheet, tagging it using the following coding schema:

16 For *contes* that spanned multiple pages, I continued the line numbering from the previous page, rather than starting from 1 on each page. For proverbs that appeared before or after the main *conte* text, I used the *i, ii, iii...* numbering system.

**Table 4**
**Corpus study coding schema.**

| Field | Meaning |
|---|---|
| **UID** | Unique identifier |
| **Example** | *-mɔ̀tɛ́* + N, usually bigram |
| **Syntax** | Pre- or post-nominal |
| **Interpretation** | specific, (nonspecific) indefinite, numeral, unclear |
| **Part** | Part 1 or Part 2 |
| **Page** | Page number |
| **Line** | Line number |
| **Full quote** | Example in sentential context |
| **Translation** | Translation of full example |
| **Notes** | Text field for miscellaneous observations |

For the syntax tagging, I ignored cases where *-mɔ̀tɛ́* was used without a noun and cases where it was discontinuous (e.g. separated from the noun by a verb). The forms left were therefore prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* and postnominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́*, which are the focus of the current article.

The tagging of interpretation was more subjective. Discourse context and the French translation provided by Dugast was used to judge whether the DP had a specific, (nonspecific) indefinite, or numeral reading, with a fourth category "unclear" added for cases where the context/translation was too ambiguous to make a clear choice. Specificity was taken to mean epistemic specificity, as elsewhere in this article.

Once the spreadsheet was complete, I used Excel and Python for quantative analysis and investigated interesting cases manually for qualitative analysis. The results are shown in the next section.

## 5.2 Results

The quantative results for the syntax and interpretation tagging are shown in Table 5 below.

**Table 5**
**Corpus results (syntactic position vs interpretation).**

| | **specific** | **nonspecific indefinite** | **numeral** | **unclear** | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **postnominal** | 58 | 0 | 27 | 7 | *92* |
| **prenominal** | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | *4* |
| *Total* | *61* | *1* | *27* | *7* | *96* |

While these results are not to be taken as objective given the subjectivity in tagging the interpretation, there are several interesting findings. Firstly, prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* is indeed found in the Dugast texts, although it is rare, at only 4 out of 96 tokens (4%). Secondly, there are postnominal cases of *-mɔ̀tɛ́* which appear to be specific, contrary to what was found in the 2019 fieldwork study where *-mɔ̀tɛ́* was used prenominally in specific contexts. As expected, none of the prenominal occurrences of *-mɔ̀tɛ́* had a numeral reading.

## 5.3 Discussion

Before discussing the implications further, I will give examples of the coding decisions made. I will show below an example of (i) postnominal + specific, (ii) postnominal numeral, and (ii) postnominal + unclear. As glossing imposes analysis, much of which is tangential to the discussion at hand, I give the Tunen and French quotes as they appear in the source text, provide an English translation, and explain the context in the discussion after each example.[17]

*(i) Postnominal + specific*

(20) *'Bô:, <u>mòndo</u> **ɔmɔtɛ́** à bákà mí lìəˀ, a miaŋó mona bwa 'nɛn, à menyama húlənə nà mesona, à bala mèsona ó windi ó mòn. […]'*

'Non. Il y a quelqu'un qui, lorsque je me suis comme toujours au travail, porte pour moi l'enfant dans ses bras, il apporte de la viande et des plantains murs et donne de ceux-ci à l'enfant. […]'

'No. There is someone who, as I am always at work, carries the child in their arms for me, brings meat and ripe plantains and gives these to the child. […]'
[Bihiomb, 223.16]

In this example, the speaker is informing her husband that, contrary to his assumption, she had not been collecting all the foodstuff they were eating

17 I copy Dugast's transcription of Tunen, which differs from my own system in several ways. The most important thing for readers to be aware of is that Dugast only uses tonal diacritics when the tone changes. In square brackets, I give the name of the *conteur* (one who told the *conte*), together with the page number and line reference.

each night for dinner herself, but was in fact given it by a particular person (*mòndo ɔmɔtɛ́*), so, a specific referent. This is clearly detailed earlier in the story. In fact, the referent is a chimpanzee, so the use of the phrase *mòndo ɔmɔtɛ́* 'somebody' could be motivated by the desire not to give away too much information about the actual referent.[18] We therefore have a case that is **postnominal** and **specific**. We will come back to the implications of such examples once the other tags have been illustrated.

*(ii) Postnominal + numeral*

(21) *àta bolía* ***bomɔ̀tɛ*** *bó sà tikən ò yéy ebok; mìsəku kahɔ́ 'nɔ̀kɔʔ mʷəkim.*

'Pas un arbre ne restait debout à cet endroit, l'éléphant les avait tous cassés.'

'Not even one tree stayed standing in that place; the elephant had destroyed them all.'
[Ngɔmɛn, 67.18-19]

Here, *-mɔ̀tɛ́* is postnominal, agreeing in class 14 with the head noun *boliá* 'tree'. The *conteur* is describing the destruction caused by an elephant, who destroyed everything: *àta bolía bomɔ̀tɛ* 'even one tree' is a clear numeral reading conveying the extent of the destruction. This example is therefore tagged as **postnominal** and **numeral**.

*(iii) Postnominal + unclear*

The phrase *ɛbók ɛmɔtɛ* appeared in several *contes*. While the meaning was sometimes clear, it received multiple different translations in the French, sometimes as 'un seul endroit' ('one single place'), sometimes as 'à la meme endroit' ('at the same place'), and sometimes as 'ensembles' ('together'). Because *-mɔ̀tɛ́* seems to behave differently in these cases, the tag *unclear* was given.

Now we can turn our attention to the cases of prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́*. As there are only 4 of them in the sample, I will quote them all here, with English translations of my own added to aid the reader.

*(iv) Prenominal + specific*

(22) ***w'ɔ̀mɔtɛ́ muàndu*** *níaya níny á Mùkóloŋ; wò' mɔtɛ́ tonàʔ á Nyɔ̀kɛnyɔk.*

'L'une s'appelait Mukolong, l'autre Nyokenyok.'

'One of the women was called Mukolong, the other [was called] Nyokenyok.'
[Bɔhɔkɛn, 87.1-2]

18 The fact that the human animate class 1 is used for an animal likely reflects the personification of animals in Tunen narrative genre and/or withholding information from the speaker's husband.

(23) *à ná* ***w' òmɔtɛ́ mona*** *wà Yálá nìak, à nɔ̂n.*

'Il mangea le coeur d'un enfant de Yal qui mourut.'

'He ate the heart of one of Yal's children, who died.'
[Babulə, 177.18]

(24) *mbà m' índi ò* ***yemɔtɛ́ menyàma*** *mb' ă fàmbák*

'Je donnerai à un autre animal pour qu'il le boucane.'

'I will give it to another animal so that it smokes dry.'
[Ngɔmɛn, 195.5]

We see that prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* is used by 3 different *conteurs*, suggesting that it is used more widely in the language. Although precise ages are not known for most *conteurs*, Dugast describes the familial relations and identifies the older speakers with the title *vieillard* ('old man') in her metadata (Dugast 1975: 14-26), allowing us to approximate their ages. It is interesting to note that Bɔhɔkɛn and Babulə are both older speakers (Ngɔmɛn is from a younger generation). Furthermore, Dugast writes that Babulə is "at least 90 years old" (Dugast 1975: 14), meaning that prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* has been attested in the speech of someone born in the 1800s. This suggests that the syntactic reanalysis of *-mɔ̀tɛ́* was already underway a century before the fieldwork study presented in Section 3.

While these 3 instances of prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* support the proposal in Sections 3 and 4 above in showing specific indefinite (or at least presentative) uses, there was 1 prenominal case that was tagged as nonspecific. This is given below.

*(v) Prenominal + non-specific*

(25) *Hîfəkəfəkə kàbíənà bănа balan. Wówò nátwəˈnə motɛtɛ̀, bá lɛ wɛ́yà lubun. Bá twənəkin ònía̰ʔ, a si á twəˈnə̀ʔ, bá sɛ̀ʔ: « Hɛ́kɛ, hɔalɛna hôy.* ***ɔ́mɔ̀tɛ́ mòndo*** *wáo e? »*

'La chauve-souris mit au monde cinq enfants. L'une resta petite et les autres ne la respectaient pas. Lorsque tous s'asseyaient pour manger et qu'elle aussi voulait s'asseoir, ils lui disaient : « Va-t-en, lève-toi de là. Es-tu un homme, toi ? » '

'The bat brought five children into the world. One of them remained small and the others did not respect her. When they all sat down to eat and she also wanted to sit down, they told her: "Go away, get up from there. Are you a man, huh?" '
[Yit, 79.2]

In this case, the context is the runt of a litter of bats being bullied by the rest, who tell it not to feed with them, and ask "Are you a man?". As far as I understand this context, the question is rhetorical and not asking about a particular man, but the status of being a man (with the contrast being between being a strong member of the pack and a runt to be cast aside). It is

therefore a case of prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* that has a non-specific reading, which I do not have an account for. One point to bear in mind for future accounts is that this question has no main verb, consisting solely of *-mɔ̀tɛ́*, the noun, the second person possessive pronoun *wáo*, and the question particle *e*.

Turning back to the postnominal specific cases, it is important to note that many of the tokens occur in the same type of phrase, with the most commonly occuring types *mòndo ɔmɔtɛ́* 'a man' (26 tokens) and by *buɔ́sɛ bomɔtɛ* 'a day' (26 tokens). The former is a common way of starting the story, and the latter is used at the start of a sentence to start describing events that happened after a period of time had passed. I tagged these as specific because the speaker is referring to a particular man, who is the subject of the story, or a particular day on which a notable event takes place. Given the discourse-prominent nature of the referents introduced, the marker could also be termed a presentative, at Stage 2 of Heine (1997)'s grammaticalisation path. I chose to treat them all as specific as the data do not show a clear distinction between these two stages; the rest of the sentence often goes on to name the subject or otherwise identify him, as exemplified in (26) below. Such continuations support a specific reading, echoing the fieldwork data from Section 3. I therefore tagged these as specific.

(26) *Mòndo* ***ɔmɔtɛ²****, níaya niny ŭmbʷəˈkùk, à kabélèna bʷə̌ndú bàlal.*

'Un homme qui s'appelait Umbʷəkuk était marié avec trois femmes.' [Bɔhɔkɛn, 87.1]

We saw in Table 5 that 58 of the 61 specific occurrences of *-mɔ̀tɛ́* (=95%) were postnominal. That is different from the findings from the 2019 fieldwork study discussed in Section 3. However, it is not incompatible with the grammaticalisation pathway proposed in Section 4, as I argued that the semantic change must have occurred before the syntactic change, in order to trigger reanalysis. The Tunen recorded in the Dugast corpus therefore looks to be an earlier stage of the grammaticalisation, where the semantic change had taken place but the syntactic change to prenominal position was only partially underway. We can use this to (tentatively) date the change from Stage II to Stage III of Table 3 above as within the last century.

One complexity should however be borne in mind in any attempt at dating this change, and that is the nature of the texts used. When looking at the 58 specific occurrences of *-mɔ̀tɛ́*, we find that many are the same phrase, as noted above for *mòndo ɔmɔtɛ́* 'un homme', 'a man', which is used to introduce a character, and *buɔ́sɛ bomɔtɛ* 'un jour', 'one day', which is used at the start of a sentence to move the narrative onwards to a new event. Because of the high frequency of these phrases, I hypothesise that they may be remembered as set phrases used in Tunen narratives, and therefore represent more historic forms of the language. This means that the change to prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* may have been further underway than these results show, as narratives often preserve older forms of the language than other speech types. One interesting question for future research is whether the consultants I worked with for the fieldwork

study who had the prenominal specific *-mɔ̀tɛ́* system would also use the postnominal variants in a storytelling context, or whether this has changed in the half-century since the Dugast texts were transcribed.

## 5.4 Section summary

In this section, I tested the proposal made in Section 4 about the grammaticalisation of prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* in Tunen using a corpus from the oldest available texts. While these only let us look a few generations back in time, the results showed interesting differences from the fieldwork study presented in Section 3. Out of 96 occurrences of *-mɔ̀tɛ́* adjacent to a noun, 4 prenominal instances were found, of which 3 were specific (as expected), and 1 was non-specific (unexpected). 58 postnominal uses of *-mɔ̀tɛ́* were identified as having a specific interpretation, often used presentatively to introduce a character or timeframe. This suggested that the syntactic change to prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* was not fully underway in the 1970s, but has since become robust. However, I noted that the nature of the texts as *contes* (folk tales) and the high frequency of particular phrases likely means that the language is more historic, and so the grammaticalisation of a prenominal marker was likelier further developed than these texts show. One possible avenue for future research is to study a similar genre of text with modern-day Tunen speakers, to see whether they also use postnominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* to mark specific indefinites within this speech style.

# 6 Implications

Before concluding this article, it is worth considering the implications of this study. If Tunen has developed a prenominal specific indefinite marker derived from the numeral ‘one’, was this a fully language-internal development, or was it driven by language-external factors, i.e. language contact? While the cross-linguistic commonality of the grammaticalisation path in Section 4 above has been claimed to be sufficient to justify a language-internal account (e.g. Ionin 2013), and so I do not make this question the main focus of this article, language contact is still a likely factor in the grammaticalisation. In this section I will conduct a preliminary review of some related languages to Tunen and highlight interesting areas to explore in future study on languages of this region.

Mous (2003) gives Nyokon, Nomaande, Bonek, Gunu, Yambasa, and Basaá as examples of languages Tunen has been in close contact with. I conducted a brief survey of the literature of these languages, adding Eton and Douala as they have also had contact with Tunen, and due to limited resources found for the other languages. For each language, I identified key sources and looked for occurrences of forms related to the numeral ‘one’. I observed whether the interpretation was commented on, and whether the form occurred prenominally or postnominally. The languages and sources for

which I found relevant information are shown below, alongside the source consulted and results of the study.[19]

**Table 6**
**Survey overview for neighbouring Cameroonian Bantu languages.**

| Language | Guthrie no. | Source(s) | 'one' prenominally? | 'one' → spec. indefinite? |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Basaá | A43a | Makasso and Lee (2015), Hyman (2003), Moreton and Njock (1968) | no | some evidence |
| Douala | A24 | Ittmann (1978) | no | some evidence |
| Eton | A71 | Van de Velde (2008) | no | some evidence |
| Nomaande | A46 | Wilkendorf (2001) | no | no relevant discussion |

As Table 6 shows, I did not find any language which matched Tunen in having a *pre*nominal form derived from the numeral 'one'. The syntactic change from a postnominal numeral to a prenominal determiner therefore appears to be Tunen-specific, at least within this small sample.

However, there was some evidence for an interpretative change from a numeral to a (specific) indefinite marker. For instance, in Ittmann (1978)'s grammar of Douala, there is brief discussion that the numeral 'one' can occur with plural agreement to mean 'some', just as we saw with the prenominal determiner in Tunen, and in Eton, the same phenomenon occurs:[20]

(27) *mukom'* *mǒ*
1.slave 1.one
'un esclave'
'one slave'

(28) *bato* *bǒ*
2.person 2.one
'quelques gens'
'some people'
Douala; Ittmann (1978: 90)

19 Guthrie codes are taken from Maho (2003, 2009).
20 Noun classes and an English translation have been added to the Douala examples, and the notational changes have been made for the Eton data.

(29) *tíd pwág*
/tíd pɔ́g/
9.animal 9.one
'one animal'

(30) *bòd bèvwág*
/b-òd bə̀-vɔ́g/
2-person 2-one
'some people'
Eton; Van de Velde (2008: 161)

These examples are reminiscent of what was reported for Tunen in Dugast (1971), where the numeral 'one' was said to be possible with plural nouns. Nothing is said about a non-cardinal use of the marker with singular nouns, so further study is required to see whether this is possible like it is in Tunen.

In Basaá, slightly more detail is given, with a marker from the numeral 'one' contributing what looks like referential specificity. This marker is permissible for both singular and plural nouns, as below.

(31) *mùt wàdá*
1.person 1.one
'un certain homme', 'un homme'
'a certain person', 'one person'

(32) *bòt bàdá*
2.person 2.one
'certains hommes'
'some people (in particular)'
Basaá; Moreton and Njock (1968: 296, 382)

The Basaá case differs from Tunen in that the marker is postnominal, as was seen for Douala and Eton. For these languages, a detailed look into their nominal syntax is required to understand the syntactic status of the marker derived from numeral 'one'. It may be the case that these languages differ from Tunen in having a postnominal D position. Another interesting point to look at is how other (specific) indefinite markers interact with this one, which requires study of the expression of definiteness and specificity more generally in these languages.

To conclude this short survey, I have found no language that has a prenominal marker derived from numeral 'one' as in Tunen. However, there is evidence that a similar semantic change has taken place in languages with which Tunen has been in contact. For Douala and Eton, this was seen for plural nouns, and for Basaá, there was evidence of a specific indefinite marker derived from the numeral 'one' compatible with singular nouns as well. Further study on these Cameroonian Bantu languages could shed light on the grammaticalisation that Tunen underwent by showing the extent to which the changes that led to prenominal *-mɔ̀tɛ́* were driven through language-external pressure. Further

study on Tunen's neighbours will also give more detail on referentiality in these languages than is currently available through grammatical sketches.

## 7 Conclusion

In summary, we have seen that Tunen has a prenominal form *-mɔ̀tɛ́* that marks a noun as a specific indefinite and is derived from the cardinal numeral 'one', which is synchronically found as *-mɔ̀tɛ́* in a postnominal context. I argue that this prenominal use of *-mɔ̀tɛ́* is a determiner rather than a true numeral, having grammaticalised along the grammaticalisation path ONE > PRESENTATIVE MARKER > SPECIFIC INDEFINITE MARKER > INDEFINITE MARKER (Givón 1981; Heine 1995, 1997), with the semantic change preceding the syntactic change. I tested this proposal by means of a corpus study with Tunen texts collected in the 20th century (Dugast 1975), with results supporting this proposal. The fact that evidence for this grammaticalisation path has been found from many different language families across the world suggests that the change in meaning is a natural semantic shift that can occur language-internally, as has also been argued for other languages (e.g. Ionin (2013) on Russian). However, it is possible that the change was not unique to Tunen, and so I conducted a brief survey of neighbouring languages, finding no language with a prenominal marker derived from the numeral 'one', although there was evidence of similar semantic changes. Further research could therefore investigate the syntactic status of such markers in neighbouring languages in order to see whether they have also grammaticalised into determiners. For Tunen, an interesting addition to the current study would be to look into how modern-day speakers use *-mɔ̀tɛ́* in narrative contexts and compare this to the speakers recorded in the 20th century texts.

## Abbreviations

1, 2, 3 = Bantu noun class marker; 1SG = 1st person singular; COP = copula; DEM = demonstrative; NEG = negation; PRS = present tense; PROX = proximal deixis; POSS = possessive pronoun; REL = relative marker; SM = subject marker.

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