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## TENSE AND ASPECT IN THE ÌKÁLÈ DIALECT OF THE YORÙBÁ LANGUAGE

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### Abstract

This paper presents the realization of both tense and aspect in the Ìkálè dialect (Southeastern Yorùbá). It notes that there are marked differences in the realization of tense and aspect in the dialect and the standard Yorùbá. The data for the study were obtained from native speakers of specific communities in Okitipupa Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria which includes Àyèkà, Aaye, Erékìtì, Òde-Erinje and Òde-Ìtèpe. Five informants ranging from ages 52 to 62 were selected in order to authenticate our data. The randomly selected informants were fluent native speakers living in the communities. Using Russell Ultan's tense system dichotomy, the study identifies the tense and aspectual system in Ìkálè dialect to be retrospective, in line with Bamgbose (1990)'s view where the dichotomy between future and non-future is paramount. The varying forms of tense and aspect markers are in relation to the interwoven nature of tense and aspect in the dialect.

**Keywords:** tense, aspect, Yorùbá language, Ìkálè dialect

### TEMPS I ASPECTE EN EL DIALECTE ÌKÁLÈ DE LA LLENGUA YORÙBÁ

### Resum

Aquest article presenta la realització tant del temps com de l'aspecte en el dialecte ìkálè (sud-est yorùbá). S'observa que existeixen diferències marcades en la realització del temps i de l'aspecte en el dialecte i en l'estàndard Yorùbá. Les dades per a l'estudi es van obtenir de parlants nadius de comunitats específiques en l'àrea de govern local d'Okitipupa, estat d'Ondo, Nigèria, que inclou Àyèkà, Aaye, Erékìtì, Òde-Erinje i Òde-Ìtèpe. Es van seleccionar cinc informants amb edats compreses entre 52 i

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62 anys per autenticar les nostres dades. Els informants seleccionats a l'atzar eren parlants nadius amb fluïdesa que vivien a les comunitats. Utilitzant la dicotomia del sistema de temps de Russell Ultan, l'estudi identifica el sistema de temps i d'aspecte en el dialecte ìkálẹ̀ com a retrospectiu, en línia amb la visió de Bamgbose (1990), on la dicotomia entre futur i no futur és primordial. Les diferents formes de marcadors de temps i aspecte estan en relació amb la naturalesa entrelaçada del temps i de l'aspecte en el dialecte.

**Paraules clau:** temps, aspecte, llengua yorùbá, dialecte ìkálẹ̀

## TIEMPO Y ASPECTO EN EL DIALECTE ÌKÁLẸ̀ DE LA LENGUA YORÙBÁ

### Resumen

Este artículo presenta la realización tanto del tiempo como del aspecto en el dialecto ìkálẹ̀ (sureste yorùbá). Se observa que existen marcadas diferencias en la realización del tiempo y del aspecto en el dialecto y en el estándar Yorùbá. Los datos para el estudio se obtuvieron de hablantes nativos de comunidades específicas en el área de gobierno local de Okitipupa, estado de Ondo, Nigeria, que incluye Àyèkà, Aaye, Erékìtì, Òde-Erinje y Òde-Ìtèpe. Se seleccionaron cinco informantes con edades comprendidas entre 52 y 62 años para autenticar nuestros datos. Los informantes seleccionados al azar eran hablantes nativos con fluidez que vivían en las comunidades. Utilizando la dicotomía del sistema de tiempo de Russell Ultan, el estudio identifica el sistema de tiempo y de aspecto en el dialecto ìkálẹ̀ como retrospectivo, en línea con la visión de Bamgbose (1990), donde la dicotomía entre futuro y no futuro es primordial. Las distintas formas de marcadores de tiempo y aspecto están en relación con la naturaleza entrelazada del tiempo y del aspecto en el dialecto.

**Palabras clave:** tiempo, aspecto, lengua yorùbá, dialecto ìkálẹ̀

### 1. Concept of tense and aspect

The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (9th edition) defines *tense* traditionally as any of the forms that a verb can take which may be used to indicate the time of an action or state expressed by the verb. It can be deduced from this definition that one major element in analyzing tense is the concept of time. Tense is concerned with the time an action took place, whether in the past, in the present, or scheduled for the future. According to Saeed (2003: 124), tense 'allows a speaker to locate a situation relative to some reference point in time, most likely the time of speaking....' Most grammatical tense system allows the speaker to describe situations as prior to, concurrent with, or following the act of speaking.

It is obvious, from the above, that one important factor in describing tense is what Comrie (1976) calls the "Moment of Speech (MOS)". Comrie (1976) posits that

when the situation or timing of the action or event described by a predicate is simultaneous with the moment of speech (MOS), it is said to be in the present tense; when it is anterior to the MOS, it is in the past tense; and when it is posterior to the MOS, it is said to be in the future tense. Similarly, Bull (1963) identifies three points of reference, viz

- i. The Present Point (PP)
- ii. Retrospective Point (RP)
- iii. Anticipated Point (AP)

i. The Present Point is the point which serves as the primary axis of orientation, where speech is initiated. This is what Lyons (1968) referred to as the 'now' of utterance. It is also similar to Comrie's 'Moment of speech (MOS).

ii. Retrospective Point (RP) is a point which is sometime prior to the actual time of speech.

iii. Anticipated Point (AP) is a point which is posterior to the present point. This indicates a future point in time in relation to the moment of utterance, when it is anticipated that an action will take place.

Bull's (1963) analysis of the notion of tense is based on meaning rather than form. According to him, a model can imaginatively look either backward or forward towards infinity. In other words, a model can perceive, recall or anticipate any event. On the other hand, Aspect is concerned about whether an action happens just once or repeatedly, or whether the action is still on-going or has completed. Saeed (2003: 126) describes aspect in the following terms:

Aspect system allow speakers to relate situations and time, but instead of fixing situations in time relative to the act of speaking like tense does, aspect allows speakers to view an event in various ways: a complete, or incomplete, as so short as to involve almost no time, as something stretched over a perceptible period or as something repeated over a period.

From the above, it is obvious that tense and aspect are somewhat related, although distinct. Comrie (1976: 5) clearly distinguishes between tense and aspect. He says:

Although both aspect and tense are concerned with time in different ways... Tense is a deictic category, i.e. locates situations in time, usually with reference to the present moment, though also with reference to other situations. Aspect is not concerned with relating the time of a situation to any other time point, but rather with the internal constituency of the one situation; one could state the difference as one between situation - internal time (aspect) and situation-external time (tense)

It is worthy of note that both tense and aspect are related and interwoven. Both concepts basically complement each other.

## **2. Tense and aspect in standard Yoruba**

Ultan (1972) cited in Oyelaran (1982) groups tense system into two, namely, the prospective system and the retrospective system. Thus, for retrospective system, the dichotomy past is primary; for retrospective languages, future-non future. In the extreme case, the former shows no distinction between present and future. Similarly, for retrospective languages, where the distinction between present and past is lost.

Judging from the above, the Yoruba language could be said to be a retrospective language, where the dichotomy future-non future is paramount.

Tense and aspect have been a very controversial subject in the Yoruba language with several scholars arguing for or against the realization or nomenclature of the concept in the language. Adewole (1991) highlights some of the varying views of Yoruba language scholars on the concept and states this own position. Oshodi (2017) as well as Adejube & Taiwo (2018) also agree that extant studies on tense in the

Yoruba language have been controversial. This paper intends not to delve into these arguments but would rather align with Bamgbose (1990)'s position on the tense and aspectual system in the Yoruba language.

Bamgbose (1990) in a tabular form below presents his analysis of the standard Yoruba tense and aspectual system:

Standard Yoruba Tense and Aspectual System:

	Non-future	Future
<b>1. Neutral</b>	Tolú lọ 'Tolu went'	Tolú á lọ 'Tolu will go' Tolú <i>máa</i> lọ Tolú <i>yòò</i> lọ
<b>2. Imperfective</b>		
<b>i. Habitual</b>	Tolú <i>máa n</i> lọ 'Tolú used to go' Tolú a <i>máa</i> lọ	Tolú á <i>máa</i> lọ 'Tolú will be going' Tolú <i>máa</i> lọ
<b>ii. Progressive</b>	Tolú <i>n</i> lọ 'Tolu is going'	Tolú <i>yòò máa</i> lọ 'Tolu will be going' Tolú á <i>máa</i> lọ
<b>3. Perfective</b>		
<b>i. Beginning</b>	Tolú <i>ti n</i> lọ 'Tolu has been going' Tolú á <i>ti máa</i> lọ 'Tolu would have been going'	Tolú á <i>ti máa</i> lo 'Tolu would have been going' Tolú <i>yòò ti máa</i> lọ Tolú á <i>ti ma máa</i> lo
<b>ii. Terminative</b>	Tolú <i>ti</i> lọ 'Tolu has gone'	Tolú á <i>ti</i> lọ 'Tolu would have gone' Tolu <i>yòò ti</i> lọ Tolú <i>ti máa</i> lọ

Table 1. Table showing the realization of tense and aspect in the Standard Yoruba

The table shows the interrelationship between tense and aspect. The Yoruba language can be said to have a retrospective system, distinguishing between future-non future, in line with Ultan's grouping. Bamgbose identifies the non-future and the future tense in Yoruba.

The non-future tense indicates actions prior to or simultaneous with Comrie's Moment of Speech (MOS) or Bull's Present Point (PP). The non-future tense in the neutral aspect is not marked in the language. The future tense indicates actions

posterior to the MOS and PP. In other words, it portrays action that may happen after the moment of speech. The future tense markers in standard Yoruba identified by Bamgbose are *á, yóò/yó/ó, máa*.

Bamgbose (1990) divides the aspectual system into three, namely

1. Neutral aspect

2. Imperfective aspect: This is subdivided into two namely

(i) Habitual Imperfective aspect: indicating events that always happen. The markers are *a máa, máa ní* when used in the non-future tense and *a máa, ma máa*, when used in the future tense.

(ii) Progressive Imperfective aspect: This is used for events that are simultaneous to the moment of speech. When used in the non-future tense, it is marked with *ń*. In the future tense, it is marked with *yóò máa, a máa*

3. Perfective Aspect: This is further divided into; viz (i) Beginning Perfective aspect: This is used to indicate that the commencement of an action has begun, when used with non-future tense. It is marked with *ti ní, á ti máa, ti máa ní*. In the future tense, it is marked with *á ti máa, yóò ti máa, á ti ma máa*.

(iii) Terminative Perfective Aspect: This indicates the completion or termination of an action. When used in the non-future tense, it is marked with *ti*. In the future tense, it is marked with *á ti, yóò ti, ti máa*.

Odunuga (1982) identifies the non-future tense as present-past which is unmarked and stands in opposition to the future tense which is marked in the Yoruba language. Awolubuyi (1975, 1978) identifies three tenses in the standard Yoruba namely:

(a). Past/Present (Non-future) tense, as in

1. *Èyin ni ó sọ bẹ̀ẹ̀*

You Foc Pro say so

'It is you that said so'

(b) Future Tense as in

2. *Adé máa padà/Adé yóò padà*

Ade FUT come back

'Ade will come back'

(c) Neutral tense as in

3. *Adé lọ*  
Ade go  
'Ade went'

The neutral tense, according to Awobuluyi (1975, 1978) is unmarked.

Awobuluyi also identifies two aspects, namely:

(a) Imperfective aspect as in

4. *Ibo ni o ní lọ*  
Where FOC PRO ASP go  
Where are you going?

(b) Perfective aspect, as in

5. *Adé ti lọ*  
Ade PERF go  
Ade has gone

However, Awobuluyi (2008: 115) identifies a stumbling-block, which the non-future tense marker 'o' meets. According to him, if "O" is a non-future tense marker, how come it can be used alongside a future tense marker *máa* as in

6. *Oyè é máa tètè padà*  
Oye HTS ASP MOD come back  
'Oye will quickly come back'

It should be noted in (6) that the high tone syllable 'ó' has been assimilated by the final vowel of the subject-noun. Regardless of all arguments however, Awobuluyi (2008) believes that the high tone syllable, HTS "O" is a non-future tense marker.

Oyelaran (1982) on his own part does not believe that the standard Yoruba has a tense system. Rather, he posits that what the language has is aspectual system. He proposes the following to be the appropriate terms:

- i. The perfective (PERV) which is usually unmarked
- ii. The Prospective (PROS) realized by *yóò* and its alternants

- iii. The Imperfective (PROG) with *ń* (and its variants) as marked
- iv The perfect (PERF) realized by *ti* (*tî*, in the negative).

However, Omamor (1982) argues that all languages, as a principle of Universal Grammar (UG) have tense. Individual languages then have their own parametric variations used in realizing these tense forms in the surface representation.

### 3. Ìkálẹ̀ Dialect

Ìkálẹ̀ is the dialect spoken in Òkítìpupa and its environs such as Ayeka, Aaye, Igbótako, Erekiti, Òde-Erínje, Òde-Itepe, etc. These towns fall under Òkítìpupa Division. The data for the study were obtained from five native speakers of the dialect from the afore-mentioned communities in Okitipupa Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria. Scholars including Adetugbo (1973), Oyelaran (1976), Awobuluyi (1998), Adeniyi & Ojo (2005) classify the Ìkálẹ̀ dialect under Southeastern Yoruba (SEY). Some other dialects classified with the Ìkálẹ̀ dialect are Ilaje, Ondo, Owo, Ikare, Egba etc. Taiwo (2003) also groups Ao along with the dialects of the South-Eastern Yoruba (SEY).

### 4. Realization of tense and aspect in the Ìkálẹ̀ dialect

As mentioned earlier, tense and aspectual system is interrelated in Yoruba as Bamgbose (1990) identifies. We shall base our analysis of tense and aspect in Ìkálẹ̀ dialect, (henceforth ID), on Bamgbose (1990) analysis of the tense and aspectual system in standard Yoruba, (henceforth SY). This is because the ID tense system can be said to be a retrospective system where the dichotomy future-non future is paramount just like that of SY. The tense and aspect markers in ID are overtly represented.

i. Non-future tense and Neutral Aspect: The non-future tense indicates events or actions that have either happened in the past or is happening at the time of utterance.



In other words, it could be either anterior to or simultaneous with the moment of speech. When used with the neutral aspect, it is unmarked as in:

	ID		SY
7.	<i>Olú ó lọ - Oló lọ</i>		<i>Olú lọ</i>
	Olu HTS go/went		

ii. Non-future tense and Progressive imperfective aspect: The progressive aspect when used with the non-future tense indicates actions going on at the time of utterance. It indicates an action simultaneous with the moment of utterance. It is marked with *é* in ID, as in

	ID		SY
8.	<i>Olú é ̀en</i>		<i>Olú ǹ rìn</i>
	Olú PROG walk		
	'Olu is walking'		

iii. Non-future tense and Habitual Imperfective Aspect: When used with non-future tense, the habitual imperfective aspect indicates an action that always occurs and perhaps has become a habit. The markers in ID are *e* and *a ka* as in:

	ID		SY
9.	<i>Olú é jẹun</i>		<i>Olú ǹ jẹun</i>
	Olú HAB ASP eat		
	'Olú eats'		
10.	<i>Olú a ka kọrin</i>		<i>Olú a máa kọrin</i>
	Olu HAB ASP sing		
	'Olu use to sing'		

iv. Non-Future Tense and Beginning Perfective Aspect: Stockwell (1977: 39) explains that the perfective aspect indicates events or actions that have ended. Bamgbose (1990: 168) on his own part explains that the Beginning Perfective aspect in the non-future tense indicates events whose commencement has begun, and it is

possible that the event or action has not yet ended. This is marked with *e ti, ti ka* in ID, as in

- |     |                                   |  |                           |
|-----|-----------------------------------|--|---------------------------|
|     | ID                                |  | SY                        |
| 11. | <i>Olú e ti lọ - Olée ti lo</i>   |  | <i>Olú ti n lọ</i>        |
|     | Olu ASP go                        |  |                           |
|     | 'Olu has started going'           |  |                           |
|     | ID                                |  | SY                        |
| 12. | <i>Ànán ti ka kọrin</i>           |  | <i>Wọn á ti máa kọrin</i> |
|     | They ASP/TNS sing                 |  |                           |
|     | 'They would have started singing' |  |                           |

v. Non-Future Tense and Terminative Perfective Aspect: The terminative perfective aspect with the non-future tense indicates an event that is completed. The marker for this is *ti* as in:

- |     |  |  |                          |
|-----|--|--|--------------------------|
|     | ID                                     |  | SY                       |
| 13. | <i>Mo ti fọfọ múẹn</i>                 |  | <i>Mo ti sọrọ miíràn</i> |
|     | 1st PER SING PRO ASP/TNS speak another |  |                          |
|     | 'I have spoken another word'           |  |                          |

vi. Future Tense and Neutral Aspect: The neutral aspect is in itself not marked. The future tense marker used with the neutral aspect in ID is *a*, as in

- |     |                              |  |                          |
|-----|------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
|     | ID                           |  | SY                       |
| 14. | <i>Olú a lọ</i>              |  | <i>Olú á lọ</i>          |
|     | Olu ASP go                   |  |                          |
|     | 'Olu will go'                |  |                          |
| 15. | <i>Ìyábọ a fọfọ nọ̀lọ</i>    |  | <i>Ìyábọ á sọrọ lọla</i> |
|     | Iyabo ASP/TNS speak tomorrow |  |                          |
|     | Iyabo will speak tomorrow    |  |                          |

vii. Future Tense and Progressive Imperfective Aspect: The future tense indicates actions posterior to the moment of speech. When used with progressive imperfective aspect, it indicates actions that would be in progression in the future. This is marked

with *a ka*, in ID as in

	ID	SY
16.	<i>Ìyábò a ka họnkún</i> Ìyábò TNS/ASP cry Iyabo will be crying	<i>Ìyábò á máa sunkún</i>

viii. Future Tense and Habitual Imperfective Aspect: This is used to indicate actions that would be recurring or that would become a habit in the future. It is also marked with *a ka* in ID as in:

	ID	SY
17.	<i>Àládé a ka jeja eri</i> Alade TNS/ASP eat fish river 'Alade will be eating fresh fish'	<i>Àládé á máa jeja odo</i>

ix. Future Tense and Beginning Perfective Aspect: This indicates actions whose commencement would have begun in the future. It is marked with *ti a* in ID as in:

	ID	SY
18.	<i>A ti a jọ lọ hí oko</i> Pro TNS/ASP together go to farm 'We would have gone together to the farm'	<i>A ó ti jọ lọ sí oko</i>

x. Future Tense and Terminative Perfective Aspect: This is used to indicate actions whose completion would have ended in the future. It is marked with *a ti* as in

	ID	SY
19.	<i>Olú a ti rẹn</i> Olú TNS/ASP walk 'Olu would have walked'	<i>Olú á ti rìn</i>

## 5. Conclusion

It is obvious from the analysis above that both tense and aspect are interwoven and can hardly be separated. As discussed earlier, both of them deal with the concept of time. While tense deals with external time, aspect deals with internal time. The tense and aspect markers in the Ìkálẹ̀ dialect align with Japhet (2021) who opined that short pronouns are used as negation, tense and aspect markers in the Ìkálẹ̀ dialect, also classified under the South-Eastern Yoruba. We have been able to show, in line with Bamgbose's view, that both tense and aspect have an overt representation in the Ìkálẹ̀ dialect. However, the forms which the markers take are quite different from that of the standard Yoruba. Furthermore, the forms that the tense and aspect markers take vary and are in relation to the interwoven nature of tense and aspect in the dialect. Finally, we have also shown that the tense and aspectual system in the Ìkálẹ̀ dialect is that of Ultan's retrospective system where the dichotomy between future-non future is paramount, just like that of standard Yoruba.

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