

TENSE AND ASPECT IN YALA

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Tense and aspect are two related and often confusing categories in language. This paper examines these two categories in Yala and finds out that Yala has a system of temporal reference that is in part grammaticalised and in part lexicalised. This is to say that in certain situations the tense opposition is neutralised and temporal status can only be got from the context. The tense dichotomy here is one of future and non-future. Aspect is realised as the progressive and the habitual, both of which form part of Comrie's imperfective (Comrie, 1976). The perfect, which is also grammaticalised in Yala, is here considered an aspect.

Le temps et l'aspect sont deux catégories grammaticales rattachées mais qui sont souvent confondues. Cette étude examine les deux, trouve que le Yala a un système de référence temporelle qui est partiellement grammaticalisé et partiellement lexicalisé. C'est-à-dire que dans certaines situations, la distinction temporelle (futur vs non-futur) est neutralisée, et ce n'est que le contexte qui indique le temps. L'aspect est réalisé comme progressif ou habituel, qui sont compris par l'imparfait en Comrie (1976). La catégorie aspectuelle parfaite est aussi grammaticalisée dans la langue.

0. INTRODUCTION

Though it has often been said that the distinction between tense and aspect is difficult to define clearly (Lyons 1968:314, Langacker 1972:207, Comrie 1976:82), they are nevertheless, two different grammatical categories and quite a number of African languages distinguish them: Ibibio (Essien 1982 and 1983), Isekiri (Omamor 1982), and by this investigation, Yala¹ to mention but a few. Treating the two in this paper is a matter of convenience as they are closely related and impinge on each other quite a lot. In this introductory section, we shall attempt to give current definitions of tense and aspect which will form the basis of our analysis of Yala.

Tense as a grammatical category relates the time of an action, event or state of affairs (hereafter referred to as the "situation") to the time an utterance is made concerning the situation; the time of utterance being "now" (cf. Lyons 1968:304f, Comrie 1976:2f).

Sometimes the time of the situation is related to a time other than the moment of speaking. The first type of relationship, which is deictic, since it locates the time of a situation to the time of the utterance, is referred to as "absolute tense". The

second type is non-deictic, since the time of the situation is not related to the moment the individual is making the speech, but to some other time.

It is assumed that tensed languages have formal temporal operators (Lyons 1968: Comrie 1976: Quirk & Greenberg 1974). This is to say that they 'grammaticalise the relationship which holds between the time of the situation that is being described and the temporal zero-point of the deictic context' (Lyons 1977:678).

Furthermore, Gale (1968a:7 in Lyons 1977) identifies 'the dynamic or tensed way' of conceiving time, according to which, 'events are represented as being past, present and future, and as continually changing in respect of these tensed determinations'; and there is 'the static or tenseless way'; according to which, 'the very same events which are continually changing in respect of their pastness, presentness and futurity are laid out in a permanent order'. From the above definitions of tense, we can abstract the following:

- i. Tense is deictic;
- ii. Tense is grammaticalized in languages;
- iii. Tense is dynamic.

The above, so far, has dwelt on the syntactic analysis of temporal reference. But as Lyons has said (1977:679f) though not all languages have tense, all languages have 'various deictic adverbs or particles of time, comparable with the English words "now", "then", "recently", "soon", "today", "yesterday", etc.;" which provide the means when necessary for drawing deictic temporal distinctions in languages. Languages that use deictic temporal adverbs as time locators are said to lexicalise time reference. They are said to be tenseless and as Gale (1968:7f) has termed it "static".

Tense in tensed languages admits of various categorisations based on the grammatical analysis of such a language (Lyons 1977:678f). The dichotomy could be between the future and non-future or past and non-past, present and non-present. Similarly, the distinction could be based on the notion of proximity to yield a dichotomy of proximate versus non-proximate.

This investigation is concerned with absolute tense which is deictic. By the above definition then, Yala is said to be tensed, since it grammaticalises temporal reference in the form of the future preverb *gé* 'will' and *yégé* 'be going + infinitive'². The absence of these future preverbs in a sentence, places the situation in the non-future. These then give rise to a tense distinction of future and non-future.

It is said that the distinction between the future and non-future is not as basic to language as say, the opposition of past and non-past. The argument here is that futurity includes 'an element of prediction or some related modal' (Lyons 1977:677). In fact, the evidence in Yala shows that the future preverb *gé* is also a modal used in various non-factive utterances (cf. 1 below).

This notwithstanding, there is enough ground for analyzing *gé* as a future tense marker rather than a modal used to indicate futurity. In fact, related languages like Yoruba (Bamgbose 1983), Isekiri (Omamor 1982) and Idoma (Ada Ugar, personal communication) also have a tense distinction of future and non-future. Moreover, Ultan (1978:105) has said that, 'the reason for the preponderance of modal application of future tenses must lie in the fact that most modal categories refer to differing degrees of uncertainty, which correlates with the element of uncertainty inherent in any future event ...'. On the question of the tenseness of modality of the "future", he says that while some languages strongly suggest tense, some suggest modality. In Yala, there is evidence to suggest that the future preverb *gé* is primarily a tense marker with a secondary function, among other functions, of modal marker. One evidence is that the absence of the future preverb in the sentence renders it definitely past (which is a part of the non-future) for non-stative verbs, or ambiguous for stative verbs, (cf. 2 below).

One complication in the analysis of tense in Yala is that for the non-future tense, there is only partial marking. Stative verbs neutralise the past/present distinction in the non-future so that sentences with these verbs are ambiguous as to temporal status. Ambiguity is resolved by lexicalisation. Having looked at the definition of tense and tense opposition in Yala, let us briefly give an overview of aspect as is understood in current linguistic research.

Unlike tense, aspect is non-deictic and is not concerned with relating the time of the situation to any other time, but with the internal temporal constituency of the one situation. So aspect views the internal temporal composition of a situation (Comrie 1976; Lyons 1968). When a language makes a systematic distinction along 'temporal distribution or contour' (Hockett quoted by Lyons 1977:315), aspect is said to be grammaticalised in it. According to Lyons (1977:705) aspect 'is intended to cover a wide variety of oppositions, in so far as they are grammaticalised in the structure of particular languages - oppositions based upon notions of duration, instantaneity, frequency, initiation, completion, etc.'. In this regard then, Yala has aspect. It makes aspectual distinctions based on the notion of progressivity and habituality. The devices used for aspectual marking are tonal inflection and preverbalisation.

The perfect differs in meaning from various tense forms as it indicates a situation in the past with a present relevance, and also differs from aspect as it tells us nothing directly about the situation itself. The evidence in Yala shows that certain perfect forms have aspectual connotations. Specifically such forms are related to completive or terminative situations. The perfect is clearly marked like the other aspects in Yala.

To recapitulate, we have said that

- i. Tense distinction is between the future and non-future;
- ii. The future is marked by the presence of a preverbal particle and a preverbal construction;
- iii. Yala has the progressive and habitual aspects;
- iv. These aspects are marked by such formal devices as tonal inflection and preverbalisation.

1. VOWEL SEQUENCES

The future tense is the less complicated of the two tenses. It is marked by a preverbal particle *gé* 'will' and a preverbal construction *yé-gé* 'be going' + infinitive. Consider,

- 1a. *N gé lè èyi òhù íchíchí* 'I will be 20 tomorrow'
I will have year 20 tomorrow
- b. *òko gé wa íchiho* 'Okoko will come tomorrow'
Okoko will come tomorrow
- c. *N gé ré ní* 'I will not eat'
I will eat NEG
- d. *Yé grá ònà nà à gé má o má*
Q Time which you will see him/her
'When will you see him/her again?'

The examples in (1) show that the future is regularly marked in declarative, negative and interrogative sentences. In each of these cases the marker occurs before the verb. Note, however, that the marker may not always occur just before the verb.

- 2a. *YE grá ònà nà à gé gbáá má o má*
Q Time which you will again see him/her.
'When will you see him/her again?'
- b. *A gé gbáá de mé* 'Are you about to cry again?'
You will again cry
- c. *òwò gé gbáá ha riwo* 'It will rain again'
God will again pour rain

It appears from (2) and other similar sentences in the language that it is only when we have *gbáá* 'again' that *gé* is separated from the verb. Again, it appears that whether *gé* is before *gbáá* or after it does not make any difference in meaning nor does it render the sentence ungrammatical as the sentences of (3) show:

- 3a. *YE grá ònà nà à gbáá gé má o má*
Q Time which you again will see him/her
'When will you see him/her again?'
- b. *A gbáá gé de mé* 'Are you about to cry again?'
Q You again will cry

So **gé** is a preverbal particle in all instances except in the environment of **gbáà** 'again', where **gé** may occur before **gbáà** or after it (in the latter case **gé** will occur immediately before the verb).

The other future tense marker is **yegê** which is 'be going' + infinitive.

- 3c. **Ogbenyi yɛ gê gaa nyɔ** 'Ogbenyi is going to go
 Obgenyi is going to go there there
- d. **Ó yé gê ha riwo** 'It is going to rain'
 It is going to pour rain
- e. **˘kòr yɛ gê yá oja àmù**
 Ekor is going to do something here
 'Ekor is going to do something here'

The similarity of the future form **gé** and the infinitive form **gê** will be explained later.

It is interesting to note that futurity is not the only function performed by **gé**. It also performs a temporal function in non-factive utterances involving suppositions, inferences, wishes and intentions. Consider (4), (5) and (6) below expressing inferences, supposition and intention respectively.

- 4a. **Okò gê Kwéji úmàmà mé** 'Okò will be finished
 Okò will finish now now'
- b. **Orji gê píà mé** 'Orji will go'
 Orji will have gone
- 5a. **N gé gáà, ñ gê dé nà** 'If I went, I would take
 I if go, I if take it'
- b. **Ó gé lè Okpò, Ó gê rá ímmoto**
 He/she if have money, he/she will buy motor
 'If he had money, he would buy a car'
- 6a. **N gê ho rigbigbo ní** 'I shan't be long'
 I will stay long NEG.

This non-factive use of a future time indicator is not peculiar to Yala as it is also noticed in English among other languages. Here futurity is expressed by the use of the modal auxiliaries "will" and "shall". These modal verbs are also used to express wishes, promises, intentions and suppositions. The difference between the future marker in English and Yala is that in English, the marker is regarded as a modal used to indicate futurity, while in Yala, it is a tense marker that can also perform modal functions.

Modal marking is not the only temporal function of **gé**. It is also used in infinitival clauses.

- 7a. **ó chikpo gê wâ** 'He/she wants to come'
He/she wants to come
- b. **Ñ yɛ gê ré ojworé** 'I am going to eat'
I am going to eat food
- c. **ó chikpó gê má ógár ní**
He/she want to see Ogar NEG.
'He/she does not want to see Ogar'

Infinitival clauses inherently denote futurity, so in this regard **gé** is not departing too much from its primary function of a future tense marker.

In (7b) **gé** serves as an infinitival particle 'to'. This particle + the 'be going' particle **yɛ** forms a preverbal future tense marker **yɛ gê** mentioned earlier.

2. THE NON-FUTURE

The non-future tense in Yala relates a situation that is anterior to and inclusive of the moment of speaking to the "now" of utterance. The first type of situation we shall refer to as the "remote non-future", while the second type of situation will be called the "recent non-future". For purposes of clarity we shall again call the remote non-future the past and the recent non-future, the present. One may at this stage wonder why it is necessary to have a future and non-future dichotomy, if the past and present are marked as the above categorization of anterior to "now" = past; simultaneous with "now" = present, appears to suggest. The truth of the matter and the reason for a future / non-future categorization is that there is no marker of the past or present, though certain sentences are understood as definitely past, while others may refer to the past or present (cf. 2.1; 2.2). Let us look at the first type of situation where a situation anterior to the "now" of utterance is in the past.

2.1 THE PAST

This tense is simply marked by the absence of the future preverbs **gé** and **yɛ gê**.

- 8a. **Oko gê píà** 'Oko will go'
b. **Oko píà** 'Oko went'
- 9a. **Órjĩ gê wa ní** 'Orji will not come'
b. **Órjĩ wa ní** 'Orji did not come'
- 10a. **onyè gê ré má** 'who will eat?'
b. **onyè ré má** 'who ate?'
- 11a. **ó yɛ gê ha riwo** 'It is going to rain'
b. **ó ha riwo** 'It rained'
- 12a. **Eyegê ré ojworé** 'They are going to eat'
b. **E ré ojworé** 'They ate'

The (a) sentences of (8) - (10) have the future marker **gé**, and the (a) sentences of (11) - (12) have the second future marker **yɛgê**. The absence of both markers in the two sets of sentences place the situations in the past as the (b) sentences in (8) - (12) show.

2.2 THE PRESENT

This situation is simultaneous with the "now" of utterance and as has been said earlier is categorized here as the recent non-future. It is unmarked in Yala, and in fact quite a number of languages (Ullan 1978:90). The question of the present would not come in here at all as it is unmarked but for the behaviour of certain verbs which may have present meaning. In this case temporal reference is lexicalised to denote the past (remote non-future). It is found that commonly classified stative verbs have present meaning, and while they can be used in the future by the use of the future preverbs, they cannot be used in the manner that other verbs are used in the past - the absence of the future preverbs. Thus in the absence of the future preverbs sentences with such verbs have present meaning, and may only refer to the past if the necessary information is indicated in the context.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| 13a. Arìkù gê lè ichɛ là àwò | 'Ariku will |
| Ariku will have believe in you | believe you' |
| b. Arìkù lè ichɛ là àwò | 'Ariku believes/ |
| Ariku have believe in you | believed you' |
| 14a. Ogbudú gê blă tú àwò | 'Ogbudu will |
| Ogbudu will remember of you | remember you' |
| b. Ogbudú blă tú àwò | 'Ogbudu remembers/ |
| Ogbudu remembers of you | remembered you' |
| 15a. O gê jé ipu | 'He/she will be |
| He/she will know book | intelligent' |
| b. O jé ipu | 'He/she is/was |
| He/she know book | intelligent' |

The (a) sentences of (13) - (15) are in the future tense, marked by the future preverb **gé**. However, in the (b) sentences the past/present distinction is neutralised.

Note that the other future marker **yɛ gê** cannot be used in the way that **gé** is used in (13) - (15). Thus (16) is ungrammatical despite the English translation.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 16. Ogbudú yɛ gê blă tú àwò | 'Ogbudu is going to |
| Ogbudu is going to remember of you | remember you' |

This may be due to the element of progression inherent in **yɛ gê** in Yala. It is generally believed that to a certain extent progressivity and stativity do not go together, though in Yala some commonly classified stative verbs do occur in the progressive (cf.3.1.2).

To go back to the main point here, we have said that stative verbs neutralise the remote non-future (past) and recent non-

future (present) distinction. There are, however, exceptions to this generalisation, and these are the sense verbs : *pó* 'hear', *má* 'see', *má* 'taste', *gwo* 'touch', *yá* 'feel'.

Note the following :

- 17a. *Ó gē pó ɛla ní* 'He/she will not listen to
He/she will hear thing NEG. advice'
- b. *Ó pó ɛla ní* 'He did not listen to
He/she hear thing NEG. advice'
- 18a. *N gē má ɔ* 'I will see him
I will see him
- b. *N má ɔ* 'I saw him
I see him
- 19a. *A gē má ɔ là òkò* 'Will you taste it'
You will taste it mouth
- b. *A má ɔ là òkò* 'Did you taste it?'
You taste it mouth
- 20a. *Oko gē yá nà Ó de yá inu lshshá*
Oko will make him/her feel him sorry
Oko will make him/her feel sorry for him/herself.
- b. *Oko yá nà Ó de yá inu lshshá*
Oko made him/her feel him sorry
'Oko made him/her feel sorry for him/herself'

The (b) sentences of (17) - (20) show that the absence of the future marker *gē* does not render the sentences ambiguous as to temporal status in terms of a past/present distinction even though the verbs are stative. The second future marker *yē gē* behaves in a similar manner.

- 21a. *A yē gē má ɔ* 'Are you going to see him?'
Q You are going to see him/her
- b. *A má ɔ* 'Did you see him/her?'
Q you see him/her

The point to note here is that in the recent non-future, sentences with stative verbs are ambiguous with regard to temporal status and temporal reference is lexicalised, with the exception of the sense verbs.

3. ASPECTUAL DISTINCTIONS

Yala has the following aspects : the progressive, which is further divided into past and present progressives; the habitual, which comprises the past and present habituals. Aspectual markers are : the preverbals particle *yèé* for past progressive; the preverbal construction *yè àmù/àbɔ* for present progressive; tonal change on subject of sentences for present habitual; the preverbal particle *la* for past habitual and the post sentential particles *má* and *jé* for the perfect.

3.1 THE PROGRESSIVE ASPECTS

The progressive is said to denote a continuing situation either

in the past, present or future. This situation is usually not extended in time enough to become characteristic of an entity (Comrie 1976:32-40). In Yala, the progressive denotes a continuing situation, both in the past and in the present which we shall accordingly call past progressive and present progressive respectively.

3.1.1 Past progressive

This aspect is marked by the preverbal particle **yèé**.

- 21a. **Ń yèé yá ukúfwó** 'I was working'
 I ASP+PAST do work
- b. **Iyí nā àwò yèé yá má** 'What were you doing?'
 Q What you ASP+Past do doing?'
- c. **Óyèé yá ojoja ní** 'He/she was not doing
 He/she ASP+PAST do thing NEG. anything'

3.1.2 The present progressive

The present progressive is marked by the preverbal particle

yè + {àmù} 'here' **{àbò}** 'there'

The presentness of the progressive is indicated by the place adverbs **àmù** 'here' and **àbò** 'there'.

- 22a. **Ń yè àmù yá úkúrwó** 'I am working'
 I ASP + here do work
- b. **Iyínāāwòyèàmù yá má** 'What are you doing?'
 Q What you ASP + here do doing?'
- c. **Ó yèàmù yáojoja ní** 'He/she is not doing anything'
 He/she ASP + here do thing NEG.
- d. **Ogbenyíyè àbòngúipu ní** 'Ogbenyi is not
 Ogbenyi ASP + there learn book NEG. studying

Sentences (22a) - (22c) have the marker **yè àmù**, while (22d) has **yè àbò**. The difference in the use of these two forms is that in **yè àmù**, the subject is expected to be where the utterance is made ("here") while in **yè àbò**, the subject is expected to be somewhere removed from "here" - "there". Accordingly in (22c) the subject **Ó** "he/she" is expected to be where the speaker is, while in (22d), the subject, **Ogbenyí** is expected to be somewhere other than "here" - "there".

It does appear that Yala past and present progressive forms are in the process of syncretisation, the final form of which may be used to denote presentness only. The evidence for this assertion comes from the fact that the sentences of (21) can perfectly be interpreted grammatically as progressive in the present. That is, 'I am working', 'What are you doing?', and 'He/she is not doing anything' for (21a), (21b) and (21c) respectively. So while the past progressive marker may denote presentness of the progressive, the present progressive marker denotes specifically only present of the progressive.

One interesting feature in the discussion of the progressive is the issue of stativity. It is said that only non-stative verbs or verbs in dynamic use occur in the progressive, while stative or static verbs cannot occur in the progressive. Thus Lakoff (1966) and Filmore (1970) propose criteria for stativity. According to Lakoff (1966 in Filmore 1970:31) 'the "true imperative", the progressive aspect, the occurrence of benefactive phrases ... occur only with "nonstative" verbs.'

Even though there is general agreement that the major part of stative verbs cannot be used in the progressive (Lyons 1968; Comrie 1976; Quirk and Greenbaum 1978) and that progressiveness to a certain extent may be equated with a combination of progressive meaning and non-stative meaning; they are equally agreed that there are no hard and fast rules about this generalisation in languages, and even in English for that matter. As for English, Comrie (1976:38) has noted that '... the meaning of the progressive has extended well beyond the original definition of progressivity as the combination of continuous meaning and non-stativity' and suggests that the English progressive should be given a more comprehensive definition 'than the general linguistic definition of progressiveness'. As for other languages, 'they are free to choose, essentially as an arbitrary choice, whether such verbs are classified as stative or not' (Comrie 1976:35).

In line with the above argument, the evidence in Yala shows that some commonly classified stative verbs do in fact occur in the progressive.

- 23a. **N yèé pó éla nà Ó yèé ka má**
 I ASP hear thing he / she ASP say
 'I am hearing at he/she is saying'
- b. **N yèé chìkpó gè wá** 'I am wanting to come'
 I ASP want to come
- c. **Ó yèé de òtúlichó de àwò**
 He/she ASP give respect for you
 He/she is respecting you'
- d. **N yèé tú ùfi àwò** 'I am fearing you'
 I ASP fear you

Other such verbs include "see", "smell", "taste", "think" to mention but a few.

By these findings, one would tend to echo Omamor (1982:120), '... the Lakoff-Filmore distinction stative/non-stative may in fact be an over simplification ...', since what they term stative seems to lack homogeneity in many languages including Yala, Isekiri and English. In view of the above, one agrees with Comrie when he concludes that the classification of verbs as stative or non-stative should be a choice of individual languages.

3.2 THE HABITUAL ASPECTS

The habitual aspect describes situations over extended time. Such situations are viewed as characteristic features of whole periods, rather than as accidental properties of the moment. Yala

has two habitual aspects : the past habitual aspect marked by the preverbal particle *la* and the present habitual aspect marked by tonal changes on subjects of sentences. While the past habitual aspect describes situations extended over time in the past, which may or may not be prevalent at the time of speaking; the present habitual aspect describes a situation true of the past and prevalent at the time of speaking. In Yala, the past of the present habitual may only be a short while before the moment of speech.

3.2.1 The past habitual aspect

This aspect is marked by the preverbal particle *la*.

- 24a. O la bà ðjá 'He used to beg'
He/she ASP+PAST beg thing
- b. O bà ðjá 'He/she begs'
He/she ASP+Pres beg thing
- 25a. E la hyehi wólá pápá
They ASP+Past wake sleep quick
'They used to wake up from sleep early'
- b. E hyeyi wólá pápá 'They wake up from sleep early'
They wake sleep quick

The (a) sentences of (24) and (25) are in the past habitual aspect, while the (b) sentences are in the present habitual aspect (cf. 3.2.2).

Sentence (24) , a typical sentence in the past habitual aspect has the following semantic interpretations :

1. He used to be a beggar in the past, but has now stopped and is probably doing something else.
2. He used to beg in the past, but now I don't see him begging.

(The implication here is that he may or may not be begging anymore.) What is most fundamental in either of the interpretations is that the situation existed for some period of time in the past. If the situation ended in the past or the speaker is in doubt as to its existence at the time of speaking, then the past habitual aspect is used. If, however, the speaker knows as a certainty that the situation persists up to the time of his utterance, the present habitual is used. This aspect is less problematic than the present habitual aspect (cf 3.2.2) as it is regularly marked for all persons.

- 26a. N la bà ðjá 'I used to beg'
- b. A la mngá onya 'You used to be beautiful'
- c. O la jé ipu gbáá 'He/she used to be very intelligent'
- d. Alǝ la yá irɛ riwo 'We used to play in the rain'
- e. Alâ la gwá emwo gbáá 'You used to drink heavily'
- f. E la wa àmù 'They used to come here'

3.2.2 The present habitual aspect

This aspect is marked by a change of tone on the subject of the sentence.

- 27a. N yà úkúrówó gbáá 'I work very hard'
I +ASP+Pres do work hard
- b. N yá úkúrówó gbá 'I worked very hard'
I +Past do work hard
- 28a. A jêje yeYE 'You dance well'
You +ASP+Pres dance well
- b. A jêje yeYE 'You danced well'
You +Past dance well
- 29a. O rênyà gbáá 'He/she runs fast'
He/she +ASP+Pres run hard
- b. O rênyà gbáá 'He/she ran fast'
He/she +Past run hard
- 30a. Aló ré ojworé okoku 'We eat too much'
We +ASP+Pres eat food too much
- b. Alò ré ojworé okoku 'We ate too much'
We +Past eat food too much
- 31a. Alâ tu ùfi kpêjì 'You fear a lot'
You +ASP+Pres have fear a lot
- b. Alá tu ùfi kpêjì 'You feared a lot'
You +Past have fear a lot
- 32a. È jê pápá 'They grow fast'
They +ASP+Pres grow fast
- b. È jê pápá 'They grew fast'
They +Past grow fast

The (a) sentences of (27) - (32) are in the present habitual aspect, while the (b) sentences are in the past (remote non-future tense). In each number, the difference in the two sentences is a tonal difference on the subject of the sentence. There is, however, no definite tone associated with the present habitual aspect as the (a) sentences of (27) - (32) show. It is marked by a mid tone on the 1st and 2nd persons singular, a falling tone on the 3rd person singular, the 2nd (the last vowel) and 3rd persons plural and a rising tone on the 1st person plural (the last vowel). In addition to the complication noted above, tonal changes on non-pronominal subjects like personal names depend on the tone of the last syllable.

- 33a. Orji jêje yeYE 'Orji danced well'
b. OjÍ jejeYE 'Orji dances well'
- 34a. Aríkù rênyà gbáá 'Ariku ran fast'
b. Aríkú rênyà gbáá 'Ariku runs fast'
- 35a. Ogbudú hêhê gbáá 'Ogbudu laughed a lot'
b. Ogbudú hêhê gbáá 'Ogbudu laughs a lot'

If the tone of the last syllable is a low tone as in (33a) and (34a), then it changes to a rising tone in the present habitual aspect as in the corresponding (b) sentences. On the other hand, if this tone is a high tone (35a), then it changes to a falling tone (35b). If, however, this last syllable carries a mid-tone, no change occurs; the present habitual aspect and the remote non-future tense is neutralised in this context and one or the other will depend on the context.

36. Oko yá úkúruwó gbáá 'Okó worked/works hard'

The neutralisation of the present with the past in tense in certain context, (cf.2.2) and the neutralisation of the present habitual aspect with the past tense here seems to support an analysis of future and non-future tense systems, rather than one of past, present, future, despite the verbs that primarily have present meaning.

Gnomic sentences or general truths are in the present habitual aspect :

37a. Ela òdwobí wú útù là íchó
 Thing had start at top
 'Corruption started at the top'

b. Ela odwobí wú útù là íchó
 'Corruption starts at the top'

From (37b) this tonal inflection for the present habitual may even fall on the adjective odwobí 'had' and sometimes the verb, (38b).

38a. N blá tú àwò 'I remember/remembered you'
 I remember you

b. N blǎ tú àwò 'I always remember you'

It appears from the foregoing discussion on the present habitual aspect that the marking is non-systematic.

The use of the present habitual aspect for gnomic sentences is not uncommon in languages. Yoruba, a related language³, also expresses timeless sentences in the habitual aspect (Bamgbose 1983).

THE PERFECT

The perfect is said to denote the continuing present relevance of a past situation. It is neither quite a tense nor an aspect. In Yala, it is grammaticalised and it performs aspectual functions in resultative situations. The perfect is marked by the post sentential particles mé and jé.

39a. Aríkù wa mé 'Ariku has come'
 Ariku come ASP

b. N gwa iye mé 'I have taken my bath'
 I take body ASP

40. Oko hò rigbígbó mé 'Okó has stayed for long'
 Oko stay long ASP

41. **N p6 má ikírô ikà élé wa mé**
 I hear recently that they come ASP
 'I heard recently that they have come'
42. **Ekôr wâ àmù jé** 'Ekor has come here before'
 Ekor come here ASP

Sentences (39), (40), (41) and (42) are instances of the perfect of result, the perfect of persistent situation, the perfect of recent past and the experiential perfect respectively⁴. Normally, the above sentences are interpreted as conveying the present relevance of a past situation in a language like English. In Yala, while the other types of perfect perform this function; the perfect of result, more than expressing the present relevance of a past situation, expresses completive situations. This is to say that the presentness of the situation is only secondary to completiveness. In fact the perfect marker **mé** is also used in constructions, which in some sense are terminative.

- 43a. **N yè àbô mé** 'I am coming'
 b. **O hì wôhì mé** 'It is enough'
 c. **O mù èbè mé** 'It is plenty enough'
 d. **N gè tá mèmé** 'I can write it now'

The sentences of (43) will be said as intended terminations or conclusions of a particular situation (even if such a situation does not terminate after all).

(43c) for instance will be said when a person refuses to take more food into his plate, or a bigger load unto her basin etc. The intention here is that such a sentence is intended to stop the action. This is different from say,

44. **O mùèbè** 'It is plenty'

(44) could be uttered and still more food will be piled into the plate and more load will be piled unto the basin.

In the face of the sentences of (43) and their semantics the perfect of result expresses perfective meaning⁵. This relationship between the perfect and the perfective is quite natural and much more common than one between the perfect and the imperfective. The reason for this, according to Comrie, is that 'the perfect looks at a situation in terms of its consequences, and while it is possible for an incomplete situation to have consequences, it is much more likely that consequences will be consequences of a situation that has been brought to completion, i.e. of a situation that is likely to be described by means of the perfective'.

The perfect marker **mé** combines with the future marker **gé** to give the future perfect.

- 45a. **Orjì gé pià mé** 'Orji will have gone'
 Orji Fut go ASP
- b. **Ogbudú gé máómé** 'Ogbudu will have seen it'

Ogbudu Fut see it ASP

5. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ASPECT AND TENSE IN YALA

In Yala, there are no specific markers of the past tense, nor of the present, though there are markers of the future. The question of the future is therefore quite straightforward. For the past and present situations, however, certain aspects perform secondary temporal functions in the absence of temporal adverbials.

Stative and non-stative verbs have no marker, if they have perfective meaning.

Non-stative and some stative verbs take markers if they have imperfective meaning. In the absence of any temporal adverbial therefore, stative and non-stative progressive forms refer to the present.

On the other hand, non-stative and stative verbs with perfective meaning (which take no marker) refer to the past. The habitual aspects serve as the only distinction between the present and the past in the absence of temporal adverbials.

So Yala has a future tense with no aspectual opposition, a remote non-future (past) with a habitual and a partial progressive opposition and a recent non-future (present) with a habitual and a progressive opposition.

One thing to note about the formal markers of tense and aspect in Yala is the complete lack of symmetry in these devices. The past of the progressive *yɛɛ* and the past of the habitual are marked differently from each other and both are different from the past tense (remote non-future tense). Again this asymmetry is noticed in the tense/aspect oppositions. We have a future/non-future tense opposition with no corresponding aspect in the future.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has looked at the tense and aspectual systems of Yala and has found that Yala has a tense opposition of future versus non-future, while it has the habitual and progressive aspects. The neutralisation of the present and past of the non-future tense in certain contexts, and the irregular behaviour of the present habitual aspect seem to suggest that the present was either once more marked in the language or that it is in the process of evolution. It is also noticed that the distinction between stative and non-stative verbs by Lakoff and Filmore does not hold good in Yala as far as progressivity is concerned since progressivity does not preclude stativity. It therefore appears that some other criteria have to be used to define stativity in Yala. Finally, we have looked at the relationship between aspect and tense in Yala and found that the aspects in Yala have secondary temporal functions in the absence of temporal adverbials.

NOTES

¹Yala here refers to Yala Ogoja spoken by about 90,000 people in the Northern part of Cross River State of Nigeria. It belongs to the Idomoid group. This article was presented at the 17th West Africa Languages Congress at Ibadan, March, 1986.

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²Tones are indicated as follows :

High tone	'
Low tone	`
Mid tone	˘
Rising tone	ˆ
Falling tone	ˋ

³Yoruba and Yala belong to Greenberg's Kwa group under the Niger-Congo sub-family. (Greenberg 1966).

⁴For a more detailed discussion on the various types of perfect, see Comrie (1976).

⁵The perfective is not grammaticalised in Yala.

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