

## On Tense, Aspect and Negation markings in Ògbahù Dialect of Ìgbò

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### Abstract

*This paper presents a descriptive account of some grammatical categories in Ògbahù dialect of the Ìgbò language, one of the three major languages of Nigeria, West Africa. The purpose of this study is to show how these grammatical categories operate in Ògbahù dialect. These grammatical categories (functors) are Tense, Aspect, Negation and Agreement. The study reveals that both Tense and Aspect exist as functional categories in Ògbahù dialect, contrary to earlier works on Ìgbò which claimed that Aspect rather than Tense is explicitly marked in Ìgbò. The -IV suffix clearly instantiates past tense in different constructions in Ògbahù. The study further reveals the existence of the E-/A-prefix as a default agreement marker which occurs only in negative constructions.*

*Keywords: Ògbahù, tense, aspect, negation.*

### Introduction

A grammatical category is a class of expressions, which shares a common set of grammatical properties (Radford, 1997b). Grammatical categories have been divided into lexical categories and functional categories (Chomsky 1981, 1995, Radford 1997a and b). The lexical and functional dichotomy is noted in the distinction drawn between two different types of words – namely contentives or content words and functors or function words (Radford, 1997a:45).

Contentives are words that have idiosyncratic descriptive contents or sense properties while functors are words, which serve primarily to carry information about the grammatical properties of expressions within the sentence. Content words that belong to the lexical categories are noun, verb, adjective, adverb and preposition (Radford 1997a:45), while those belonging to the functional categories (functors) are negators, tense, aspect, complementizers, determiners, emphatic markers, imperative markers, focus markers, conjunctions/disjunctions and genitive markers (Awoyale, 1995:115).

In this paper, we shall give a detailed discussion of some of these functors in order to highlight and establish their existence in Ògbahù dialect of Ìgbò. The following functors shall be discussed in Ògbahù, dialect of Ìgbò: Tense, Aspect, Agreement, Negation and Question markers

### **Tense, Aspect and Negation Markings in Ògbahù**

#### ***Tense***

Tense is the specification of the event to the time of speaking about it. Tense is a grammatical category that relates the time of an event to the moment of utterance. The notion of tense has to do with time relation between the events. Comrie (1985) says “tense is a grammaticalised expression of location in time. Lyons (1968:305) observes that: "The essential characteristic of the category of tense is that it relates the time of an action, event or state of affairs referred to in the sentence to the time of utterance, the time of utterance being now". A model can perceive, recall or anticipate an event. Therefore, there are only three possible other relationships between events and any axis of orientation, the axis of orientation being the point of initiation of speech or the point present, the ‘now’ of utterance (Lyons 1968:305). These three other relationships are retrospective point (RP), the time anterior to

the time of initiation of speech, anticipated point (AP), the time posterior to the point of initiation of speech and the point present (PP), the point of initiation of speech (Omamor 1982).

It has been a subject of controversy whether the functional category ‘Tense’ exists in Ìgbò. Earlier grammatical works on Ìgbò (cf Emenanjo, 1978) have claimed that ‘Aspect’ rather than ‘Tense’ is explicitly marked in Ìgbò. We shall demonstrate in this paper, that both Tense and Aspect exist as functional categories in Ògbahù dialect.

### ***Tense Marker in Ògbahù***

Past tense is the only tense form that is clearly marked in Ògbahù dialect. It is marked by the –IV suffix which is the dialectal form of the Standard Igbo –rV suffix. Consider the sentences in 1 – 3 below:

1. Òbi gbù – lù            agū.  
Obi kill – IV (pst) lion  
‘Obi killed a lion’
2. Nwa zà – là            unò  
3pl sweep – IV (pst) house  
‘They swept the house’
3. O    lì – lì            nni  
3sgcl. eat – IV (pst) food  
‘He/she/ ate food’

Sentences in examples (1), (2) and (3) are similar. The – IV suffix marks the past tense in each of them. The actions indicated in the sentences are clearly actions that took place at a point before the utterance. The other tense forms: present and future are better described as aspectual. Igbo operates the tense dichotomy: past vs non-past.

### ***Aspect***

Aspect looks at the internal temporal contour of a situation. It reflects the temporal relationship between either the point of initiation of speech and the internal temporal

structure of a specific background situation described by one element and the totality of the situation referred to by another (Omamor 1982:104 – 105). Two aspectual forms will be considered in this paper: Perfective and Progressive. Perfective aspect is sometimes erroneously conceived as perfective tense by the Ìgbò traditional grammarians, using the English parameters.

***Perfective Aspectual marker in Ògbahù***

Verbs indicating Perfective Aspect have the following structure in Ògbahù

- 4. (E)-VR-OVS-na  
 (where E= e/a harmonizing prefix, VR = Verb Root, OVS = Open Vowel suffix, na= Perfective suffix)

The following are sample sentences illustrating perfective aspect.

- 5. Nwa à – zà –a – nà            unò  
 3pl Agr sweep-OVS-PERF house  
 ‘They have swept the house’.
- 6. O li – e – na            nnī.  
 She eat-OVS-PERF food  
 ‘She has eaten food’.
- 7. Òbi e-gbu-o-na agū  
 Òbi Agr-kill-OVS-PERF lion  
 Òbi ‘has killed a lion’.

Sentences (5)-(7) above indicate present perfective action. Each of them expresses an action which has been completed in the present. It is realized by having a harmonizing prefix e-/a- to the verb root. The verb root is immediately followed by an Open vowel suffix (a,e,o,ọ) and then the perfective suffix –na as the final verbal element. Observe that in (6), the prefix is missing. We shall show in section ? why we gloss the prefix an Agr.

### ***Progressive Aspectual marker***

The progressive aspect expresses an action that is taking place or on-going at a particular point in time. Obiamalu (2015) describes the the progressive aspect as an ongoing process at the time of speaking, traditionally referred to as present continuous. It could also refer to an on-giong action at a point in time in the past, traditionally referred to as past continuous. It could also refer to a habit which has been going on over a period of time, either in the present or in the past, which could be referred to as habitual aspect. Emenanjo (1985) uses the term ‘durative’ as a cover term for progressive and habitual, since according to most dialects of Igbo do not distinguish the two. Ògbahù is one dialect that does not distinguish the two. The progressive aspect just like in Standard Igbo is marked by the Auxiliary *na*.

8. Ibè nà è-li nnī  
Ibe PROG e-eat food  
‘Ibe is eating food’
9. Ọ nà à-gụ akwụkwọ  
3S PROG e-read book  
‘S/He is reading a book’
10. Èmekà nà a-zà ụlọ  
Emeka PROG e-sweep house  
Emeka is sweeping the house’

### ***Negation***

Negation is a process or construction in grammatical and semantic analysis that typically expresses the contradiction of some of the sentence meaning (Crystal, 1980). Payne (1992:75) notes that negation is a universal category. One of the most striking features of negation in natural language is its syntactic ubiquity. Virtually all linguistic categories from clause to individual word can, in principle be negated; although in practice, individual languages display arbitrary restrictions (Payne *ibid*).

English language possesses a form of standard negation, whose primary function is to negate the positive declarative clauses of the language. In English, standard negation is either the negative particle not following a finite auxiliary verb as in example (11a) below or the bound negative morpheme – n't attached to a finite auxiliary verb as in example (11b) below:

11. (a) Mary is not lazy.  
 (b) Mary isn't lazy.

If no auxiliary verb is present, then the relevant form of the auxiliary do (do, does, or did according to tense and person) is inserted to effect the negation as in example (12b) below:

- 12 (a) I love him.  
 (b) I did not/ don't love him.

In Standard Yorùbá, negation is marked by the following negators: *kò/ò*, *kì*, *má* and *kó* as shown in the following sentences:

- 13 (a) Wálé kò/ò rí işé.  
 Wale neg see work  
 Wale is jobless'.  
 (b) A kì í şé  
 We neg pron do it  
 'We don't do it'.  
 (c) Má rà á.  
 neg buy it  
 'Do not buy it'.

In Ọgbahù, negation is marked by the suffix –*họ*. Consider the following sentences:

14. Ọ̀bi e-gbū-họ agū.  
 Obi Agr-kill-Neg lion  
 'Obi did not kill a lion'.

15.        Ò        li-hō    nni.  
             3SGCL eat-Neg food  
             ‘He/she/ did not eat food’.
16.        Òbi a-kụ-hō        ọkà.  
             Òbi Agr-plant-Neg maize  
             ‘Òbi did not plant maize’

Examples (14) – (16) show that in Ògbahù, negation is marked by the suffix –hō. This is used in place of the Standard Igbo –ghi. Moreover, observe that the prefix in (14) and (16) is glossed as Agr. It is the traditional assumption that the Ìgbò language has no morphologically realized agreement (Agr) marker. Dechaine (1993) observed that Ìgbò has a default agreement marker E-prefix which occurs only in negative constructions. The E-/A- prefix therefore, is a default agreement marker because it only occurs with certain kind of subject DPs. It does not occur with clitic pronouns as in (15). It occurs because according to Dechaine (1993) V-movement to T is blocked by NEG and leaves T empty thereby allowing a default agreement to surface. This could explain why the agreement prefix occurs only in the negative but not in the affirmative.

### **Conclusion**

This study has been able to highlight and establish the existence of some functional categories (functors) in Ògbahù dialect of Ìgbò. These functors are tense, aspect, negation and agreement. The only tense category that is clearly marked in Ogbahu is past tense which is indicated by the –IV suffix. Two aspectual categories are examined in the paper: perfective and progressive. The progressive marker differs only phonologically from that of Standard Igbo, the -la/-na alternation. The progressive marker is the same for both Ogbahu and Standard Igbo. On negation, the study shows that Oghahu marks Standard

negation with the suffix –họ which is usually accompanied by the harmonising verbal prefix e-/a-. This prefix has been shown to be an agreement element which occurs if the Subject NP is not a clitic pronoun. The same agreement prefix is also present in the perfective aspectual construction.

The study basically shows that some of the morphemes used to indicate these categories in Ògbahù dialect differ from those of Standard Igbo at the levels of phonology and morphology but the same syntactically.

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