



2013 HAWAII UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES
ARTS, HUMANITIES, & SOCIAL SCIENCES
JANUARY 6TH TO JANUARY 8TH
ALA MOANA HOTEL
HONOLULU, HAWAII

TENSE, ASPECT AND NEGATION IN ÀHÀN

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Abstract

Unlike the standard Yoruba and some of its dialects that permit clustering of aspects to show the internal time relations of the verb, Àhàn does not permit clustering of Aspects or tenses. This paper takes a dialectological approach to analyze tense and aspect in the Àhàn dialect of Yoruba spoken in Òmùò Ekiti in Nigeria. Apart from identifying the various markers of Tense and Aspect in the language, it examines their distributions in negative constructions particularly as they differ from the standard Yoruba. The paper demonstrate that Àhàn employs both tonal and lexical items to indicate tenses in affirmative sentences and that unlike Yoruba, the non-future tense is realized as a null category.

1. Introduction

This paper describes some aspect of the verbal morphology of Àhàn an endangered variety of Yoruba language spoken in the Southwestern part of Nigeria. A comparative dialectologist orientation is assumed in this work with the aim of studying the differences in Àhàn and other close varieties of Yoruba. It has become increasingly clear in recent times that research efforts on the standard Yoruba (SY) can only be sustained by regional dialectal studies. Regional or dialectal study of the language will provide a better appreciation of developments at the local level and produce the empirical data required for work of synthesis on the standard Yoruba. It is believed that by studying the dialects of Yoruba, linguists will be able to provide satisfactory answers to some of the ongoing debates on the syntax of the language (Awobuluyi 1998). This study therefore strives to give an analytical description of the syntactic categories Negation, Tense and Aspect system in Àhàn. I will examine tense makers in Àhàn under two headings, the first being tense makers in positive or affirmative sentences and the second heading examines tense makers in negative sentences. I will demonstrate that Àhàn employs both tonal and lexical items to indicate tenses in affirmative sentences. The first section of the paper gives a preliminary overview of the language and its basic syntactic structure. The second section discusses the Tense and Aspect markers in affirmative sentences; the third section is an analysis

of the Tense and Aspect in negative sentences. Section four is the conclusion; there I give a summary of the discussions on Negation, Tense and Aspect in Àhàn.

The People and the Language

Àhàn is the name of the language spoken by the Àhàn people of Òmùdò-Ekiti. As far as can be ascertained from the claims of local historians, the Àhàn people migrated from the acclaimed ancestry home of the Yorùbá race-Ilé Ife in the company of the Àyèré ethnic group of the present Kogi-State, Nigeria. This perhaps explains while despite the spatial difference in the location of Àhàn and the Àyèré people, the two languages are mutually intelligible and similar in structure and form. According to the claims of local historians (high chiefs and the traditional ruler), it was civilization on one hand, and ethnic politics and expansionism on the other hand that led to the migration of the Àhàn people from the ‘*apole*’ (near Oyín Àkókó) where they initially settled, to their present location in Òmùdò land. The linguistic fieldwork that produced the knowledge described in this paper also reveals that Àhàn people speak a language that is unique to them and almost unintelligible with the other dialects of Yoruba spoken in and around Òmùdò Ekiti.

LANGUAGE CLASSIFICATION

Àhàn has been classified as one of the languages of the Benue-Congo family under the Akokoid branch (Ogunmodimu 2008). Williamson 1989:261; Crozier and Blench 1992:13 also classified the language as belonging to the Àngbé lects. Capo, as reported in Ore Yusuf 1992:172 however gave a more diachronic classification of Àhàn under the defoid classification. Ilori (2010) reports that the term defoid is a coinage introduced by Capo (1989:275) to describe languages that are believed to have their roots in a Proto-Yoruba language typology.

a non-transparent coinage based on **èdè + ifẹ + oid**. ...

èdè is the standard Yorùbá term for ‘language’, **ifẹ**

refers to the presumed cradle, and **-oid** is the group suffix conventionally used.

From the genetic relationship point of view and the facts of lexico-statistics, Àhàn is doubtlessly a Yoruboid language, there are however ongoing research to establish its status as a dialect of Yoruba. In this paper, I wish to maintain that Àhàn is a dialect of Yoruba.

WORD ORDER AND STRUCTURE

Àhàn is an SVO language with the guiding factor being the position of the verb in a simple declarative sentence as witnessed in sentence 1 below.

1.
 - a. Òshoje pu erunjù
hunter kill wild animal
“the hunter killed a wild animal”
 - b. Adé kó òdè
Ade build house
“Ade built a house/building”

Syntactic processes such as relativization, focusing, movement, topicalization etc. may change the word ordering as seen in the relativized form of (1a) given in 2 below.

2.
 - a. Òshoje pu erunjù (Simple declarative sentence)
hunter kill wild animal
“the hunter killed a wild animal”
 - b. ¹Erunjù òshojé pu

¹ The relative clause operator and focus marker are null category in the language, from the facts of my data, it appears that Àhàn only mark relativization by subject-object movement.

Wild animal hunter kill

“the wild animal that the hunter killed”

When emphasis is on the object as in (2b), the structure of the sentence at the surface is realized as OSV.

tone

Ahan is a tone language with three phonemic principal tonal patterns tagged the high [Á], mid [A] and low [À]. The tonal convention adopted in this work recognizes the high, the mid and the low, while the high and low tones are orthographically marked, the mid tone is not marked

- 3
- a. [ùgbà] ‘time’
 - b. [ugbà] ‘climbing rope’
 - c. [ugbá] ‘calabash’
 - d. [ugba] ‘two hundred’

POOR INFLECTIONAL MORPHOLOGY

Àhàn has a poor inflectional morphology. Unlike Endo-European languages like Italian, Spanish and English, where the verb may bear tense, aspect or mood morphology, Àhàn verbs do not have affixes that inflect for tense, aspect and mood. The verb always keeps the same shape. This will be shown in the examples below.

TENSE AND ASPECT

Tense as a grammatical concept has been defined as a grammatical expression of location in time Comrie (1985: 9). It is the grammatical category that relates the time of an event to the moment of

utterance. Tense specifies whether an action described and denoted by the verb is present, past or future. Lyons (1968: 305) explaining this category says:

The essential characteristic of the category of the 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 begins now.

The notion of tense therefore has to do with time relation between event and time of utterance (Taiwo 2003). Omamor (1982) put it succinctly that there are only three possible order relationships between events and any axis of orientation, the axis of orientation being the point of initiation of speech or the point present. The Retrospective point present (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. I discuss tense markers in Àhàn presently.

Tense Makers in Àhàn

To understand tenses in Àhàn, it is best to look at the subject under two headings, the first being tense makers in positive or affirmative sentences and the second heading examines tense makers in negative sentences.

Tense Makers in Affirmative Sentences

Àhàn employs both tonal and lexical items to indicate tenses in affirmative sentences. Consider the following examples.

- (4) (a) Segun ra ìwè

 NP buy book

 “Segun bought a book”
- (b) Segun éé ra iwe

 NP fut buy book

 “Segun will buy a book”

- (5) (a) Má gbe usu
NP plant yam
“I planted yam ”
- (b) Mé éé gbe usu
NP fut plant yam
“I will eat yam”
- (6) (a) Kólé kó òdè
NP build house
“Kole built a house”
- (b) Kólé éé kó ode
NP fut build house
“Kole will build a house”
- (7) (a) Má yun Ado
NP go NP
“I went to Ado”

- (b) Mé éé yun Ado
 NP fut go NP
 “I will go to Ado”

In the sentences (4a – 7a) above, the verbs indicate that the action so described had taken place before the moment of utterance. That is, the situation is anterior to the time of utterance. The sentences in (4b- 7b) describe a situation that would happen in the future. The action of the verbs involved will take place at some time posterior to the time of speaking. In other words, the action will take place at some anticipated but unspecified point in time after the time of utterance.

From the foregoing, two types of tenses can be established in affirmative sentences in Àhàn, future and non – future. Àhàn can be said to have a tense pattern that is similar to that of the standard Yoruba (Bamgbose 1990, Omamor 1982), which makes a distinction between future and non-future (Ajongolo, 2005). The non future tense is not overtly marked. The future tense is overtly marked in affirmative utterances by the lexical items éé. The presence of the éé therefore indicates the future tense while its absence is indicative of non-future tense.

Tense markers in Negative Sentences

Tense markers in negative utterances can be either marked or unmarked in the language. While the non – future tense negative marker is not morphologically realized, the future tense negative marker is indicated by the item ye in the language.

- (8) (a) Taye àà thùla
 NP neg. big
 “Taye is not fat”
- (b) Taye àà thewà
 NP neg. be-beautiful
 “Taye is not beautiful”

- (c) Taye aà ni eo
NP neg. have money
“Taye does not have money”

A cursory look at the sentences in 8 shows that the non-future tense negative marker is realized as a null category in the language. Only the negator *aà* is expressed. However, it must be mentioned that there are two types of verb forms in relation to tenses, stative verbs and action verbs. Stative verbs are unmarked for tense, they are verbs used for reporting or quoting thoughts, observations, orders, wishes and requests (Awobuluyi 1978). Thus the tense in the sentences below are unmarked because the verbs are stative.

(9)

Obè ohun yún
Soup the sweet
“The soup is sweet/ tasty”

Awu ohun thito
Cloth the red
“The cloth is red”

Action verbs in Àhàn are not neutral to tenses as they do show tenses. This is consistent with the remarks of Bamgbose (1967) on “unmarked” tense in Yoruba. Bamgbose submits that a negator followed by a verb in the positive unmarked tense indicates the unmarked tense. The negative

tense may be past or non- past irrespective of whether the verb is an “action” verb or not. I posit that the non-future negative marker in Àhàn has the same behavior as that of Yoruba.

The future tense negative marker is realized as *yé* in the language, consider the examples below.

- (10) (a) Kòlè éé kó òdè
NP fut build house
“Kòlè will build a house”
- (b) Kòlè àà yé kó òdè
NP neg. fut build house
“Kòlè will not build a house”
- (11) (a) Kòlè éé theun
NP fut eat
i.e “Kòlè will eat”
- (b) Kòlè àà yé theun
NP neg. fut eat
i.e “Kòlè will not eat”
- (12) (a) Kòlè éé era iwe
NP fut buy book

i.e “Kole will buy book”

(b) Kole àa yé ra iwe

NP neg. fut buy book

i.e “Kole will not buy a book”

(13) (a) Kole éé yun Ado

NP fut go NP

“Kole will go to Ado”

(b) Kole àa yé yun Ado

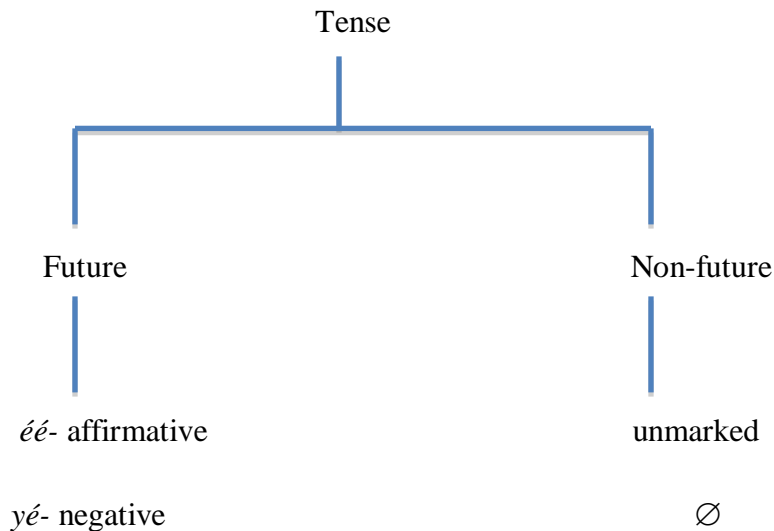
NP neg. fut go Ado

“Kole will not go to Ado”

We decided to put the sentences (8-13) in pairs (a and b). The (a) part of the sentences is the affirmative counterparts of their (b) negative utterances. The future maker of the affirmative sentences has been identified as *éé* earlier. The future tense maker for negative sentences is *yé*. It describes a future event in the negative. *Yé* is used to indicate a situation that will not take place in the future nor in the present.

It is noteworthy however, that a negative particle (*àa*) occurs initially before the negative future marker in the language. This is simply what the language allows as the absence of the negative particle would indicate or describe an entirely different situation. The figure below is a representation of Àhàn tense markers discussed as discussed afore.

Tense Markers in Àhàn



Aspectual Markers

Comrie (1976:3) defines the element Aspect as specifying the way of viewing the internal constituency of a situation.

Aspect is the grammatical category that state whether the action of the verb is completive or continuative. By completive we mean that the action of the verb is already perfected and by continuative we mean that the action of the verb is on going, or imperfective. We will examine Àhàn aspects only under affirmative sentences, as there are no overt makers for the aspects in negative sentences.

Aspect in Àhàn Affirmative Sentences

Àhàn distinguishes between an action that has been completed (perfective) and that which is ongoing (habitual/ continuous). Examine the following sentences below.

- (14) (a) Kole yá theru
Kole hab eat
i.e. “Kole usually eats”
- (b) Kole yá ko ode
Kole hab build house
i.e. “Kole usually build houses”
- (c) Kole yá ra iwe
NP hab buy book
i.e. “Kole usually buy books”
- (15) (a) Kole ká theru
NP perf eat
i.e. “Kole has eaten”
- (b) Kole ká kó ode
Kole perf build house
i.e “Kole has built a house”
- (c) Kole ká ra iwe

NP perf buy book

“Kole has bought a book”

From the sentences in (14) above, we understand that the action of the verb is imperfective, *Yá* denotes a habitual situation. A situation that still holds and has been repeated over a period of time (Omamor 1982). However, it must be mentioned that Àhàn does not have a separate way of indicating continuous actions. From the fact of the data, Àhàn inflect for perfective and imperfective actions. The marker for imperfective action in the language is *yá*.

In the examples given in (15), we understand that the action of the verb is completive. The marker of completed action is the item *ká*. It indicates an action that has been completed like “Kole has built a house”.

Olumuyiwa (2012) accounts for three aspectual markers in the Moba dialect of Yoruba which he identifies as the *í* (progressive), **mṚṚ, í** (habitual) and **tí** (perfective). Àhàn does not have any separate marker for progressive marker, the language marks time difference between habitual and perfective aspects. Another point of difference in Moba and Àhàn aspectual markers is that Àhàn unlike Moba and some other varieties of Yoruba does not permit to clustering of aspectual markers. Aspect clustering refers to the combination of two or more aspectual markers in certain constructs to show the action or state of the verb, this is exemplified in the examples below.

16 i. Ìhan akṚrin tí í kṚrin

3pl chorister perf prog sing-song

“The choristers have started singing”

ii. Olú tí í suse

Olú perf prog do-work

‘Olú has started working

(Olumuyiwa 2012)

In Àhàn, the perfective and the habitual aspects cannot be combined to describe the internal time relations of a situation, all such constructions will be ungrammatical in the language as demonstrated in the examples below.

17. * Kole *ká yá* therù

Kole perf hab eat

Kole has eats

18 * Kole *ká yá* ko ode

Kole perf hab build house

Kole has builds a house

The simple explanation for the ungrammaticality of 16-17 is that an action of the verb cannot be perfective and imperfective at the same time in the language. While it is possible to cluster perfective and progressive aspects in standard Yoruba and some of its other dialects, aspect clustering is not attested in Àhàn given that the language do not have progressive aspect markers

Conclusion

In this paper, I present the description and analysis of the grammatical category of tense and aspect in the Àhàn dialect of Yoruba spoken in Òmùò Ekiti in Nigeria. I examine tense makers in Àhàn under two headings, the first being tense makers in positive or affirmative sentences and the second heading examines tense makers in negative sentences. I demonstrate that Àhàn employs both tonal and lexical items to indicate tenses in affirmative sentences and sentences with negation. From my data, I showed that two types of tenses could be established in affirmative sentences in Àhàn, future and non – future. Àhàn can be said to have a tense pattern that is similar to that of the standard Yoruba (Bamgbose 1990, Omamor 1982), which makes a distinction between future and non-future (Ajongolo, 2005). The non future tense is not overtly marked. The future tense is overtly marked in affirmative utterances by the lexical items *éé*. The presence of the *éé* therefore indicates the future tense while its absence is indicative of non-future tense. I demonstrate that tense markers in negative utterances can be either marked or

unmarked in the language. While the non – future tense negative marker is not morphologically realized, the future tense negative marker is indicated by the item *yé* in the language.

On Aspectual markers, I examine Àhàn aspects only under affirmative sentences, as there are no overt makers for the aspects in negative sentences. From the facts of my Àhàn data, I showed the interactions of phonology and syntax as tones and lexical items interplay in marking tense and aspects.

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