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### ABSTRACT

*The internal temporal constituency of events is reflected in the verb element within the discourse structure of every natural language. This paper described aspectual distinctions in Gokana within a formal linguistic framework. The study identified sixteen discrete aspects in Gokana and found that these distinctions can be categorized into four basic aspects: completive, durative, inceptive and habitual which reflect the syntactic and semantic properties of aspects as a grammatical category in the language. The study reported an interaction between tense and aspect, and showed that four tenses viz simple, past, unfulfilled and future co-occur with each distinct aspect marked in Gokana. The paper reported that Gokana marks aspectual distinctions through three different strategies grammaticalization, lexicalization and a combination of both processes. The paper showed that the grammaticalized markers always precede the verb within clause structure (except the completive aspect marker) and are treated as distinct grammatical morphemes and not affixes or clitics. The study recommended a separate morpho-syntactic analysis of all aspectual markers in the language.*

**KEYWORDS:** Gokana, Aspects, Aspectual Markers, Tense, Grammaticalization, Lexicalization, Syntax

### Introduction

This paper investigated aspectual distinctions in Gokana within a formal linguistic framework. Gokana is spoken in Gokana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria by approximately 200,000 people. It is closely related to Baan, Eleme, Tee and Kana. These languages form a genetic unity and Williamson and Blench (2000:33) classify them in Delta-Cross of Cross River within the Bantoid-Cross of the East Benue-Congo branch of Benue-Congo.

### Defining Aspects

According to Comrie (1976:3) "aspects are different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation". Whereas tense is a deictic category, aspect is not (Lyons 1995:320). Tense grammaticalizes real world time contrast, but aspect grammaticalizes the internal temporal constituency of situations. Aspect focuses attention on the manner in which verbal actions are regarded or experienced by the speaker (i.e. whether completed, continuing through time, intermittent occurrence, beginning etc.).

A number of studies (e.g. Quirk and Greenbaum (1977), Radford (1988), Jenkins (2003), Ndimele (1996), Crystal (1997), Huddleston (1988), Dik (1978), and Isaac (2003)) agree that aspectual distinctions play a crucial role in the discourse structure of

natural languages. Thus, the present study attempts a description of the grammar of aspects in Gokana.

### Methodology

The researcher collected data from fluent native speakers of Gokana with the help of field assistants. The researcher also relied on his intuition as a native speaker of the language but where any given set of data contradicted his intuition, direct oral interview was used to elicit comparative data from other native speakers of the language. Secondary sources of data such as texts and library materials were also utilized.

### Analyzing Aspects in Gokana

In the grammatical structure of Gokana, the following aspectual distinctions are attested:

- i.) Completive Aspect
- ii.) Durative Aspect
- iii.) Inceptive Aspect
- iv.) Habitual Aspect

These distinctions reflect the syntactic and semantic properties of aspects in Gokana (cf. Lyons 1995:323). In what follows, each of these distinctions is analyzed.

#### A. Completive Aspect

This aspect defines itself in that it highlights completed situations only. Depending on deictic reference, three distinct completive aspects are distinguished in the language. These are:

- i.) The Simple Completive Aspect
- ii.) The Past Completive Aspect
- iii.) The Future Completive Aspect

##### i.) The Simple Completive Aspect

In Gokana, the simple completive aspect refers to completed situations. The simple completive marker is *lɔl*. It is a verbal item which has grammaticalized. It occurs after the verb whose aspect is to be marked.

Examples:

- |     |                          |       |     |
|-----|--------------------------|-------|-----|
| 1a) | Ledum                    | dé    | lɔl |
|     | PN                       | eat   | CAM |
|     | 'Ledum finished eating'  |       |     |
| b)  | bà                       | fó    | lɔl |
|     | they                     | plant | CAM |
|     | 'They finished planting' |       |     |

When the verb co-occurs with a complement, the completive aspect marker occurs after the complement, as in (2a-b):

- |     |   |             |                  |            |
|-----|---|-------------|------------------|------------|
| 2a) | Ledum<br>PN<br>'Ledum finished eating'        | dé<br>eat   | gyáá<br>food     | lọl<br>CAM |
| b)  | bà<br>they<br>'They finished planting pepper' | fó<br>plant | sáakéè<br>pepper | lọl<br>CAM |

## ii.) The Past Complete Aspect

The past complete aspect refers to a completed past in the past. In Gokana, this aspect is often used when the interest of the speaker is to know which of two or a series of events happened first.

The past complete marker has a discontinuous structure. It is made up of two parts **beè...lọl**. The first part is simple past marker, while the second part is the complete aspect marker. Both parts form a structural unit. The verb to be marked for the past complete aspect occurs between the two parts of the marker.

Examples:

- |     |  |            |                        |            |
|-----|--|------------|------------------------|------------|
| 3a) | bà<br>They<br>'They had finished eating'   | beè<br>PST | dé<br>eat              | lọl<br>CAM |
| b)  | Bàri<br>God<br>'God has finished his work' | beè<br>PST | sí a<br>do his<br>work | lọl<br>CAM |

## iii.) The Future Complete Aspect

The future complete aspect indicates situations that will extend to and be completed within a period of time in the future. The emphasis of this aspect is basically on completion of a given situation in the future. The future complete marker has a discontinuous structure. It is made up of two parts **gébeè...lọl**. The first part is the simple future marker, while the second part is the lexical item which modifies the first part. The consistent occurrence of this lexical morpheme meaning 'completed/finished' with the future marker as a structural unit, which indicates the future complete aspect, shows that this lexical item has been grammaticalized in the language. The verb to be marked for the future complete aspect always occurs between the two parts of the marker. The future complete marker **gébeè...lọl** has four variants. The first part corresponds to the four variants of the future marker.

- |       |             |   |            |
|-------|-------------|---|------------|
| i.)   | gébeè...lọl | : | CVCV...CVC |
| ii.)  | ébeè...lọl  | : | VCV...CVC  |
| iii.) | mbeè...lọl  | : | VCV...CVC  |
| iv.)  | è...lọl     | : | V...CVC    |

These variants have the following characteristics.

- i.) They occur in free variation
- ii.) They can occur with all subjects.



- 6) gbò nvin á gé/é ọl sọl  
 Pl child the FUT/DR sing song  
 'The children will sing/the children are singing'

In situations of this nature, the only way to resolve the ambiguity is to use the full forms of both the future marker and the durative marker. When the full forms are used, a distinction is established. Thus, gbò nvin á gébeè ọl sọl 'the children will sing' is distinct from gbò nvin á gé ọl sọl 'the children are singing'. But with the short forms, the difference is neutralized.

### ii.) The Past Durative Aspect

The past durative aspect is used to show that a situation was continuing at the time another situation occurred. This aspect has the meaning of incompleteness.

The past durative aspect is grammaticalized in the language. The grammatical morpheme **géeè** is used to mark this aspect and it always precedes the verb.

Observe that the past durative marker is made up of the simple durative morpheme **gé** and the past morpheme **è** (i.e. **gé+è** → **géeè**).

Unlike the other markers, the past durative marker **géeè** has no variant form.

Examples:

- 7a) Lédùm géeè zib nu tǒó m beè sii e  
 PN DR-PST seal something when I PST catch him  
 'Ledum was stealing when I caught him'
- b) Duùrà géeè emí kpá èrà a  
 PN DR-PST write book evening that  
 'Duura was writing that evening'

Notice that the constructions in (7a-b) show duration and incompleteness, since neither the stealing nor the writing was completed. In (7a) the action of stealing was interrupted by the next action of catching the thief, while there is no indication that the writing in (7b) was completed in the course of the evening.

### iii.) The Unfulfilled Durative Aspect

The unfulfilled durative aspect is used to show a situation that ought to have continued through time before the moment of speaking. Such constructions always have an unfulfilled interpretation. The unfulfilled durative aspect is marked by **gẹẹ...gé** which is a combination of the unfulfilled morpheme and the durative morpheme. Examples:

- 8a) Sira gẹẹ dù  
 PN UNF come  
 'Sira ought to have come'
- b) Sira gé dù  
 PN DR come  
 'Sira is coming'

- c) Sira gēē gé dù  
PN UNF DR come  
'Sira ought to have been coming'

Observe that (8a) and (8b) express an unfulfilled and a durative meaning respectively, but (8c) expresses an unfulfilled durative meaning through the combination of the unfulfilled and durative morphemes.

#### iv.) The Future Durative Aspect

The future durative aspect is used to indicate that a situation will extend over the whole of a future period of time, but its termination may eventually be expected.

The future durative aspect is grammaticalized. It has a complex structure. It is made up of a discontinuous structure **gébeè dī...gé**. This marker consists of the future marker, the verb 'to be' and the durative marker. Like the future completive marker, this marker consists of two parts, but while the future completive marker houses the verb whose aspect is to be marked between its two part, the future durative marker houses an anaphor between its two parts. This anaphor takes as antecedent the subject of the construction. The marker always precedes the verb.

Examples:

- 9a) Sira gébeè dī a gé érá  
PN FUT be she DR wait  
'Sira will be waiting'
- b) bà gébeè dī bà gé ọl sól  
they FUT be they DR sing song  
'They will be singing'

The future durative marker has eight variants. These variants occur as a result of segment deletion in connected speech. The variants have the following structures:

- |        |       |            |       |   |    |   |    |
|--------|-------|------------|-------|---|----|---|----|
| i.)    | gébeè | dī... gé : | CVCVV | + | CV | + | CV |
| ii.)   | ébeè  | dī... gé : | VCVV  | + | CV | + | CV |
| iii.)  | mbeè  | dī... gé : | VCVV  | + | CV | + | CV |
| iv.)   | é     | dī... gé : | V     | + | CV | + | CV |
| v.)    | gébeè | dī... é :  | CVCVV | + | CV | + | V  |
| vi.)   | ébeè  | dī... é :  | VCVV  | + | CV | + | V  |
| vii.)  | mbeè  | dī... é :  | VCVV  | + | CV | + | V  |
| viii.) | é     | dī... é :  | V     | + | CV | + | V  |

The future durative marker has the following characteristics:

- i.) All the variants occur in free variation.
- ii.) The choice of any variant is not dependent on any phonological conditioning factor.

### C. The Inceptive Aspect

The inceptive aspect marks the beginning of a situation. It is the initiation point. Tense occurs in the inceptive aspect such that it is possible to distinguish a simple inceptive, past inceptive, unfulfilled inceptive and future inceptive aspect. In what follows, each of these is examined.

#### i.) The Simple Inceptive Aspect

The simple inceptive aspect marks the starting point of a situation. Although this aspect coincides with the speech moment, it does not attract any deictic marking, as certain time adverbials showing different phases of time in relation to the speech moment may occur in a simple inceptive construction.

Examples:

- 10a) Vígà daà-togó sí tóm  
PN raise head do work  
'Viga started working'
- b) Vígà daà-togó sí tóm nyèna  
PN raise head do work last year  
'Viga started working last year'
- c) Vígà daà-togó sí tóm lọ̀re  
PN raise head do work tomorrow  
'Viga starts to work tomorrow'

The simple inceptive aspect is not grammaticalized in the language but its marking is achieved through lexicalization. It is expressed in the language by a compound lexical item **daà-togó** which glosses as 'start' in English. This lexical item is made up of the verbal element **daà** 'raise' and the noun **togó** 'head'. It must precede the verb.

Examples:

- 11a) Zigàkól daà-togó dé gyãá  
PN raise head eat food  
'Zigakol started eating'
- b) gbò nvín á daà-togó bìràbil  
group child the raise head play play  
'The children started playing'

#### ii.) The Past Inceptive Aspect

This marks the beginning of a situation that occurred before the moment of speaking. The past marker **beè** and the lexical inceptive marker **daà-togó** combine to form the past inceptive marker. **beè daà-togó**. The marker must always precede the verb. Examples:

- 12a) Gbàrà á beè daà-togó ò sīī  
Man the PST raise head drink cigarette  
'The man had started smoking'
- b) Lédùm beè daà-togó sí tòm  
PN PST raise head do work  
'Ledum had started working'

### iii.) The Unfulfilled Inceptive Aspect

This aspect marks the beginning of a situation that ought to have occurred before the speech moment. The unfulfilled inceptive aspect is marked by a combination of the unfulfilled marker and the lexical inceptive marker. It is realized as **gẹẹ daà-togó**. It occurs before the verb.

Examples:

- 13a) Biàlé gẹẹ daà-togó kyàà sòò kpóótọ ẹ zọ ẹ  
PN UNF raise head walk but leg her pain her  
'Biale ought to have started walking but her legs are aching'
- b) nvín á gèè daà-togó dé gyǎá be múúrọ beè dì  
child the UNF raise head eat food if soup PST be  
'The child would have started eating if there was soup'

### iv.) The Future Inceptive Aspect

The future inceptive aspect marks the initiation point of situations that may begin after the speech moment (such situations occur in posterior relation to the speech moment).

The future inceptive aspect is marked by a combination of the future marker and the lexical inceptive marker. It is realized as **gébeè daà-togó**. It always precedes the verb.

Examples:

- 14a) gbò nvín á gébeè daà-togó bìràbil  
group child the FUT raise head play play  
'The children will start playing'
- b) kpóótọ ẹ gébeè daà-togó zọ ẹ  
leg his FUT raise head pain him  
'His legs will begin to ache'

The various short forms of the future marker can also occur with the inceptive marker.

## D. Habitual Aspect

The habitual aspect is akin to the durative in that it refers to situations yet to be completed, but which are recurrent, customary or intermittent in nature. Tense also occurs in the habitual aspect, such that four habitual aspects are distinguished in the language. These are:

- i.) Simple Habitual Aspect
- ii.) Past Habitual Aspect



- iii.) Unfulfilled Habitual Aspect
- iv.) Future Habitual Aspect

### I.) The Simple Habitual Aspect

The simple habitual aspect refers to situations that are recurrent. It asserts the fact that a given situation is actually recurrent or habitual. The simple habitual aspect is lexicalized in the language. The lexical item **órò** is utilized to mark this aspect. Examples:

- 15a) Tèṭe órò bà túu  
PN HAB eat periwinkle  
'Tete eats periwinkle'
- b) gbò pábia órò bā píri  
group woman HAB enter gossip  
'Women usually gossip'
- c) gbò nvín á órò sí tọọkpá  
group child the HAB go house book  
'The children always go to school'

### ii.) The Past Habitual Aspect

This aspect refers to situations that were recurrent before the speech moment. The simple past morpheme and the lexicalized habitual marker co-occur to mark the past habitual aspect. It is realized as **beè órò**. It occurs before the verb.

Examples:

- 16a) Tèṭe beè órò bà túu  
PN PST HAB eat periwinkle  
'Tete used to eat periwinkle'
- b) gbò pábia beè órò bā píri  
group woman PST HAB enter gossip  
'Women used to gossip'
- c) gbò nvín á beè órò sí tọọkpá  
group child the PST HAB go house book  
'The children used to go to school'

### iii.) The Unfulfilled Habitual Aspect

This aspect refers to situations that ought to be recurrent, intermittent or habitual before the moment of speaking. It denotes a past unfulfilled situation. The unfulfilled morpheme and the lexicalized habitual marker **órò** combine to mark the unfulfilled habitual aspect. It is realized as **gẹẹ órò**. Examples:

- 17a) Tèṭe gẹẹ órò bà túu  
PN UNF HAB eat periwinkle  
'Tete ought to have always eaten periwinkle'

- b) gbò pábia gẹẹ órò bã píri  
group woman UNF HAB enter gossip  
'The women must have always gossiped'
- c) gbò nvín á gẹẹ órò sí tọọkpá  
group child the UNF HAB go house book  
'The children ought to have always gone to school'

#### iv.) The Future Habitual Aspect

This aspect shows situations that are recurrent after the speech moment. The future marker **gébeè** and the lexicalized habitual marker **órò** combine to mark the future habitual aspect. It is realized as **gébeè órò**. It always precedes the verb.

Examples:

- 18a) Tèṭe gébeè órò bà túu  
PN FUT HAB eat periwinkle  
'Tete will always eat periwinkle'
- b) gbò pábia gébeè órò bã píri  
group woman FUT HAB enter gossip  
'Women always gossip'
- c) gbò nvín á gébeè órò sí tọọkpá  
group child the FUT HAB go house book  
'The children will always go to school'

#### E. Interaction Between Tense and Aspect

The interface between tense and aspect in Gokana yields a number of aspectual distinctions which are summarized in Fig 4.1.

Fig 1: Interaction Between Tense and Aspect

TENSE	ASPECT	MARKERS	REMARKS
SIMPLE	Completive	lọl	Grammaticalized
	Durative	gé	Grammaticalized
	Inceptive	daà-togó	Lexicalized
	Habitual	órò	Lexicalized
PAST	Completive	beè... lọl	Discontinuous/Grammaticalized
	Durative	géè	Grammaticalized
	Inceptive	beè daà-togó	Combined
	Habitual	beè órò	Combined
UNFULFILLED	Completive	géè... lọl	Discontinuous/Grammaticalized
	Durative	géè... gé	Grammaticalized
	Inceptive	géè daà-togó	Combined
	Habitual	géè órò	Combined

FUTURE	Completive	gébeè... lɔl	Grammaticalized/Discontinuous
	Durative	gébeè ... gé	Grammaticalized/Discontinuous
	Inceptive	gébeè daà-togó	Combined
	Habitual	gébeè órò	Combined

## Conclusion

In this paper, we have analyzed aspectual distinctions in Gokana. The paper found that the completive, durative, inceptive and habitual aspects are attested in the grammatical structure of Gokana. These distinctions reflect the syntactic and semantic properties of aspects as a grammatical category in Gokana.

The paper presented the internal analysis of each of the attested distinctions that occur in the language and reported an interface between tense and aspect in the analysis of these distinctions. The study found that four tenses viz simple, past, unfulfilled and future co-occur with each distinct aspect marked in Gokana which culminated in sixteen discrete aspectual distinctions in the language.

The study showed that some of the aspectual forms are marked through a grammaticalized process, a few are lexicalized while others combine a lexical as well as a grammatical process in the marking of aspect. The paper noted that the grammaticalized markers always precede the verb in clause structure and are considered as distinct grammatical morphemes and not affixes or clitics.

## Recommendations

1. The paper recommended that further research be done in the analysis of the aspectual markers in order to determine the objective syntactic status of the grammaticalized markers.
2. The study equally recommended an independent morphosyntactic analysis of the lexicalized aspectual markers in order to determine whether they are in the process of grammaticalization and document all grammatical facts that emanate from the assessment.

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