
Tense and Aspectual Systems in EKID

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides the analysis of Ekid tense and aspectual systems, with a view to determining their morphological and syntactic features; that is, how tense and aspect are being formed and marked within sentences in Ekid. A descriptive research design was adopted for the study. Data for the analysis were drawn from the central Ekid via elicitation. The analysis reveals that the tense system in Ekid include: the past, present and future tenses, which are marked by distinctive affixes and are prefixed to verbs in constructions; on the other hand, the aspectual system in Ekid include: inceptive, habitual, completive (perfect and relative), progressive aspects, which are all marked by distinctive affixes which are prefixed to verbs in constructions, exception of the relative (completive) aspect which is marked by reduplication (doubling of the verb) in the expression. The analysis shows that, the tense and aspectual systems in Ekid correspond to that of Ibibio, though slight morphological variation in their aspectual systems. This work serves as a tool for further research on Ekid grammar for the development and preservation of Ekid language.

KEYWORDS: Language, Syntax, Tenses and Aspect

Introduction

One of the aspects of language study has to do with the four basic units of grammar according to the traditional grammarian which include: word, phrase, clause and sentence (Ndimele, 2007). The study of phrases, clauses and sentences therefore constitutes the area of the study of language known as 'syntax'.

The study of the syntax of language, thus, covers the study of the: grammatical categories, phrasal categories, sentences and the syntactic function of constituents within a syntactic construction (Crystal, 1985). The term 'grammatical category' has been used to cover a wide variety of concepts, such as the nominal and verbal categories, including what traditional grammarians call 'parts of speech'; while the phrasal category includes different levels of syntactic categories which are: Noun phrase (NP), Verb phrase (VP), Adjectival phrase (AdjP), Prepositional phrase (PP); Noun with bar (N'), Verb with bar (V'), Preposition with bar (P'); Noun (N), Verb (V), Adverb (Adv), Adjective (Adj), Preposition (P); and word level of a phrase (Loos, 2003; Crystal, 1985)

At this point, the study examines the tense and aspectual systems in of the syntax of Ekid, which are the major verbal categories of Ekid grammar. What follows are: linguistic classification of Ekid, review of related literature, analyzing and discuss the tense and aspectual system in Ekid and summary/conclusion.

Linguistic Classification of Ékɪd

Geographically, Ékɪd people are from the southern region of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. They reside along the Atlantic Coast at Ibeno, and along the Qua Iboe River north latitude. Ékɪd community extends from the southern coast of Akwa Ibom to Ikot Ubo in Ubium Clan in the north, a distance of about fifteen Kilometers. The headquarters of Ékɪd community, Eket town, is situated near the Qua Iboe River (Udo, 1983: p72). In other words, Eket Local Government Area (LGA) occupies the South Central portion of Akwa Ibom State. Its territorial expanse spans northwards between latitude 4.33o and 4.45o; and the eastwards between longitudes 7.52o and 5.02o. Eket is bounded on the North by Nsit Ubium LGA, on the West by Onna LGA, and on the South by Ibeno LGA /Bight of Bonny.

Ékɪd is the name of a language likewise the name of the speakers of the language. Ékɪd is spoken as the main and dominant local language in Eket and Esit Eket LGAs of Akwa Ibom State, by a population of about 172, 557 (male: 88,635; female: 83,922) according to the 2006 result of the National Population Census.

Ékɪd language is closely related to Ibibio, Efik, Anaang, Oro and Ibuno languages. It has dialectal differences with Ibibio and other Lower Cross languages, and there is unidirectional intelligibility between Ékɪd and Ibibio. Ékɪd language has two varieties: Ékɪd and Esɪd Ékɪd, spoken in Eket and Esit Eket LGAs respectively.

Genetically, according to the linguistic classification of languages, Ékɪd belongs to the Lower Cross subgroup family of the Delta group of the Cross River sub-branch of the New Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo sub-family (Williamson, 1989). According to Connel (1994), the Lower Cross group spans three Nigerian states in this coastal region - Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Cross River, as well as the international frontier to the Isangele sub-division of South-Western Cameroon. More recent classification has placed Ékɪd in the Lower Cross group of the Cross River sub-branch of proto Benue-Congo of the Niger-Congo phylum (Williamson and Blench 2000).

Review of Related Literature

The major grammatical categories that are associated with the verb are tense, aspect and mood; amongst them, the commonest one is tense (Ndimele, 2007). Other categories are person and number. In what follows, we shall first look at the tense, followed by the other two grammatical categories: aspect and mood in English and the lower-cross language Ibibio.

Tense

In modern linguistics, tense refers to a grammatical category which determines the form of verb in a sentence with respect to changes in time; in other words, tense refers to a verb form (i.e. the morphological changes that a verb undergoes) and not to chronological time (Ndimele, 2007: p113). Tense can also refer to a grammatical category that grammaticalizes time reference by making use of indicators or operators (other than adverbs of time) which mark the relationship between the time of a situation and the time an utterance is made concerning that situation (Essien, 2008). Tense may also be defined as a deictic category that locates an event on a time line, usually with reference to the time speaking or moment of speech (cf. Comrie, 1976).

Ndimele (2007: p114) is of the opinion that for practical purposes, time as experienced in communication with its three phases can be graphically illustrated as seen in table 1:

Table 1: Three phases of tense in English communication

Before MS/TL	MS/TL	After MS/TL	Time as experienced in discourse
PAST	PRESENT	FUTURE	The three temporal phase

Source: Ndimele (2007: p114)

In Ibibio, according to Essien (1990), Ibibio tense system corresponds to the classical tripartite system of past, present, and future tenses, and each of the tenses has two allomorphs (except the present tense) as shown in figure 1:

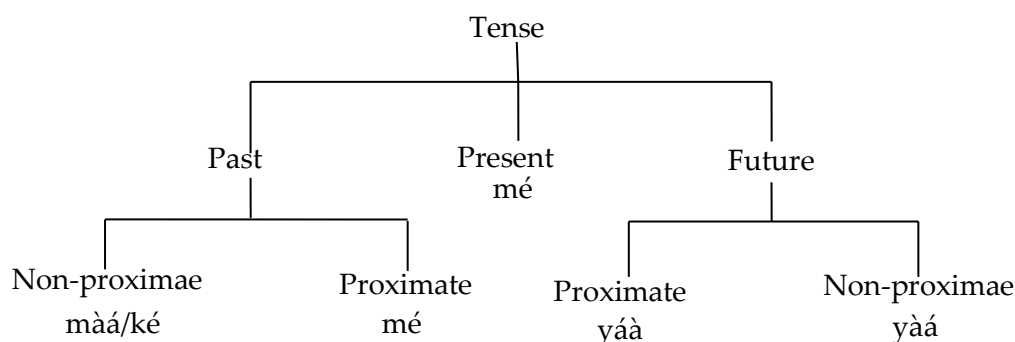


Figure 1: Tree diagram of Ibibio tense. Source: Essien (1990: p78).

Ibibio Past Tense

A past tense indicates that a situation took place or held before the moment of the utterance concerning it (Essien, 1990). In Ibibio, according to Essien (1990), the non-proximity (indefinite) past is marked by two allomorphs *màá* or *ké*, and their occurrence depends on the presence or absence of some syntactic categories which are themselves based on sentence types as seen in the following sentences:

- (1) a. àmì m màá kòp ‘I heard it’;
b. àmì ñ ké kòppó ‘I did not hear it’.

From the above illustration, example (1a) consists of a concord marker *m-*, a past tense marker *màá-*, and the root of the verb *kòp* ‘hear’; while example (1b) consists of a negative form of the past tense marker *màá-*: *ké*, because that sentence is negative.

Ibibio Present Tense

A present tense indicates that the time of the situation is simultaneous or concurrent with the moment of speaking about the situation (Essien, 1990). The present tense in Ibibio is marked in comparison with the past and future in the sense that, it is somewhat irregular. With certain verbs described as stative (which describes states, rather than actions or events), the present tense is indicated by the affix *mé* as shown in the following examples:

- (2) a. m-mé-kpón ‘I am big/fat’;
b. m-mé-yàiyá ‘I am pretty/beautiful’;
c. à-mé-kàà-ná-mí ‘You are old here’.

Ibibio Future Tense

A future tense indicates that a situation will hold after the moment of speaking about it. Ibibio future tense distinguishes formally between the proximate and non-proximate future. The proximate future tense is marked by *yáà* (cf. 3a); while the non-proximate future tense is marked by *yàá* (cf. 3b), as shown below:

- (3) a. i-yá-i-dí/ i-yáà-i-dí ‘We will come (shortly)’;
b. i-yà-i-dí/ i-yàá-i-dí ‘We will come’.

Aspect

Aspect refers to a grammatical category which designates the internal temporal organisation of the situation described by the verb (Ndimele, 2007: p114). Aspect can also be defined as a grammatical category associated with verbs that express a temporal view of the event or state expressed by the verb, and often indicated by verbal affixes or auxiliary verbs (Loos, 2003). According to Quirk and Greenbaum (1973: p40), aspect is concerned with “the manner in which the verbal action is experienced”. Also, aspect is concerned with the various phases or time components of a situation (Essien, 1990, p83).

A verbal action may be viewed as its beginning or initiation phase or time components of a situation (i.e. inceptive aspect), or as terminated or completed (i.e. perfect or completive aspect), or continuing through time with the beginning, middle and end rolled into each other (i.e. durative or progressive aspect), etc (cf. Ndimele, 2007: p114; Essien, 1990, p83).

In Ibibio, aspect is grammaticalized in that there are formal markers that perform some of the aspectual distinction; and reduplication and prefixation are the grammatical devices used in showing aspectual distinction in Ibibio. According to Essien (1990), “the principal aspectual distinctions grammaticalized in Ibibio are inceptive, completive and habitual (p84)” as shown in figure 2:

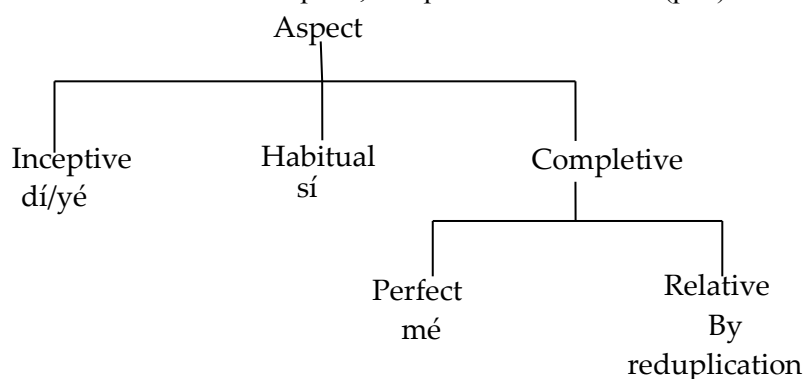


Figure 2: Tree diagram of Ibibio aspectual system. Source: Essien (1990: p84).

The Inceptive Aspect

This is aspect which indicates the beginning of a situation which is marked by the prefix *dí-* in some dialects and *yé-* in other dialects in lower-cross language group. The prefix *dí-* is commonly used in Itu, particularly Ibiono, Itam, Eket and Ikono LGAs. While the prefix *yé-* is used mostly in Uyo, Etinan and Ikot Abasi LGAs. The following examples indicate the inceptive aspect by the prefixes *dí-* and *yé-*:

- (4) a. Ìkpé é-dí-wèt ñkpò ǹtè Ùmò; or b. Ìkpé é-yé-wèt ñkpò ǹtè Ùmò
‘Ikpe has started to write like Umo (and may continue to do so)’.
- (5) a. Ènyé é-dí-sàñà ǹtè àníé-òbíò; or b. Ènyé é-yé-sàñà ǹtè àníé-òbíò
‘He now walks like a free citizen (and may continue to do so)’.

The Habitual Aspect

The habitual aspect in Ibibio is marked by the prefix *sí-* or *sé-* in some parts of Etinan LGA. The habitual marker *sí-*, is best interpreted as ‘often’, ‘from time to time’, and ‘sometimes’ depending on the tense as shown in the examples below:

- (6) a. *m-má-sí-fèghè ènyé* 'I used to dread him';
 b. *i-mà-í-sí-fèghé ènyé* 'We used to dread him';
 c. *i-mí-í-sí-fèghé ènyé* 'We often dread him'.
- (7) *m-màá-sè-m-bó* 'I used to say'.

As also observed by Essien (1990) that in some dialects as in Anua, a variant of the habitual aspectual marker *sí-* is *síé-*, we have the example below:

- (8) *á-síé-kà* 'He goes frequently'.

Essien (1990) also observes that the use of *sí-* is optional in sentences that express timeless truths (cf. Lyons, 1977: p716), as the following examples show:

- (9) a. *ibáàn é-sí-màn éyín* 'It is women who give birth to children';
 b. *ibáàn é-màn éyín* 'It is women who give birth to children'.

Ibibio Completive Aspect

This aspect places emphasis on the termination or completion of a situation. As indicated in the tree diagram (fig. 2), it is divided into two types: perfect and relative or pluperfect (by reduplication) (cf. Essien, 1990; Willie and Udoinyang, 2012). It is marked with the prefix *mé-*. The perfect aspect emphasizes the completion of a situation as well as the recentness of that completion. Hence, it is not only aspectual but also temporal as seen in example (40) where the action of eating the plantain or killing the animal is completed but obviously recently:

- (10) a. *m-mé-díá úkóm* 'I have eaten plantain';
 b. *è-mé wòt únám ódò* 'You have killed the animal'.

The relative or pluperfect completive aspect (unlike perfect) is not affixal. Rather, it is indicated by reduplication. It doesn't only emphasize the termination or completion of a situation, but also relates the completion to some other event either mentioned or understood in the context of the speech act. Consider the following examples:

- (11) a. *i-màí-wéwèt mbèmísó Nsê ékédí* 'We had already written before Nse came'
 b. *m-mé-bíábìàrá* 'I am already spoiled (so don't worry about me)'.

In examples (11), it is observed that in (11a), the root of the verb is *wèt* 'write', and it is reduplicated and modified phonologically to yield *wéwèt*. Similarly, in (11b), the verb root *bìàrá* 'spoil' is reduplicated and modified phonologically to become *bíábìàrá*.

It is also observed that both the perfect *mé-* and the reduplication for completion can occur together in the same verb. When this occurs, *mé-* performs a purely tense or temporal function, present (cf. 11b) or approximate past (cf 11c):

- (11) c. *m-,mé-dóó-dóók mbèmísó àfò ádá èbééd édú*
 'I have already climbed it before you brought the ladder'.

Ibibio Progressive Aspect

This aspect in Ibibio is not emphasized by Essien, as is done by Willie and Udoinyang (2012). According to Willie and Udoinyang (2012), Ibibio progressive aspect is marked with the affix *sAk* as seen in the sentence below:

- (12) *Èmèm á-ké- sAk à-dià úkóm* 'Emem was eating plantain'.

Tense System in Èkìd

Èkìd language uses systematic contrast to indicate the different time references or relationships that are relevant to the native speakers of the language. Èkìd tense system is just the same as that of Ibìbio (as discussed in literature review). The Èkìd tense system corresponds to the classical tripartite system of past, present and future tenses. The tenses (exception of zero present tense) are affixes which are contrastive syntactically and semantically and determined by certain grammatical categories in the sentence.

The Past Tense: A past tense indicates that a situation took place or held before the moment of the utterance concerning it (Essien, 1990). In Èkìd, past tense is marked by two allomorphs *má-* or *ké-* (neutral) and *kí-* (non-neutral, i.e. negative), and their occurrence depends on the presence or absence of some syntactic categories which are themselves based on sentence types as seen in the following sentences below:

(13) a. àfè à-mă -díí ñdidià ádà?
you 2sg.cl Pst buy food the
'Did you buy the food?'

b. ñsě àfè à-ké-díí ?
what you 2sg.cl Pst buy
'What did you buy?'

From the above examples, it is observed that all the sentences are interrogative sentences, but of different types. Example (13a) consists of a concord marker *á-*, a past tense marker *má-* (because it is a Yes/No question (YNQ)), and the root of the verb *díí* 'buy'; while example (13b) consists of a concord marker *á-*, a past tense marker *ké-* (because it is a question word question (QWQ; i.e. a Wh question)) and the verb root *díí* 'buy'.

Also, there is a situation in which the past tense marker *ké-* can be changed to *kí-* because of the influence of the vowel sound of the concord marker that precedes it (the tense marker *ké-*) before the verb in a question word question (QWQ) as seen in the sentence below:

(13) c. ànié í-kí-búñ ñkpóitìghé ànim ?
who 3sgcl Pst break chair this
'who broke this chair?'

Another example of sentence that indicates the past tense marker *má-*, is a declarative sentence as seen below:

(14) a. Údúák á-má-díá ñdidiá ádà
Uduak 3sg.cl Pst eat food the
'Uduak ate the food'.

The sentence (14a) consists of the past tense marker *má-* because it is declarative. Also, the past tense marker *má-* can be negated; and if negated, it attracts an additional affix, which is the negative marker whose role is to modify the concord marker. Also, the neutral past tense marker *má-* will change to non-neutral form *kí-* as shown in example (14b) below:

(14) b. Údúák í-kí-díá-há ñdidiá ádà
Uduak 3sg.cl Pst eat Neg food the
'Uduak did not the food'.

In example (14b), it is observed that the negative marker is *-há* which comes after the verb root.

In addition, when *mà-* occurs with plural verbs, its vowel is reduced in length, because the concord marker is repeated on the root of the verb, as the following examples indicate:

- (15) a. àyìd ì-mà-í-díí ‘We came’;
b. ànyìn è-mà-é-díí ‘You (-pl.) came’;
c. émò é-má-é-díí ‘They came’.

The Present Tense: A present tense indicates that the time of the situation is simultaneous or concurrent with the moment of speech about the situation (Essien, 1990). The present tense in Ékìd (like in Ibibio) is marked in comparison with the past and future. It is marked by the affix *mé* when a stative verb (which describes states, rather than actions or events) is used as shown in the examples below:

- (16) a. àm̀ì m-mé-níõñ ‘I am tall’;
b. àm̀ì m-mé-yě ‘I am handsome’;
c. àfè à-mé-fíá ‘You are fair (in complexion)’.

In example (16), it is observed that the present tense marker *mé-* is only used in a situation where a stative verb is used rather than a verb of action. Also, in a situation where the first personal pronoun is in plural form, the vowel of *mé-* assimilates to the vowel of the concord as seen in the examples below:

- (17) a. àyìd ì-mí-fò ‘We are good’;
b. àyìd ì-mí-fíá ‘We are fair (in complexion)’.

In situation where a positive stative statement is negated, the present tense is not indicated, that is, a zero presence marker, as the following examples show:

- (18) a. àm̀ì n-níõñ- ñò ‘I am not tall’;
b. àm̀ì n-yě-ké ‘I am not handsome’;
c. àfè ú-fíá-ké ‘You are not fair (in complexion)’.
d. àyìd ì-fó-ké ‘We are not good’;
e. àyìd ì-fíá-ké ‘We are not fair (in complexion)’.

Also, with non-stative verbs (verbs that describe actions or events), the present tense marker *mé-*, is not used at all, even in simple positive sentences as seen below:

- (19) a. àm̀ì ñ-jì-ídí ‘I am having my bath’
b. àfè à-tì-ńdídíá ‘You are cooking food’
c. émò é-nàk-únák ‘They are dancing’.

The Future Tense: A future tense indicates that a situation will hold after the moment of speaking about it. Ékìd future tense distinguishes formally between the proximate and non-proximate future. The proximate future tense is marked by *yá-* (cf. 20a/b); while the non-proximate future tense is marked by the positive viewpoint affix *yà-* (mainly used in questions; cf. 20c); and by the negative viewpoint *mì-* (for 1sg/pl, 2pl, 3sg/pl, cf. 130d) and *mù-* (for 2sg, cf. 20e). We have:

- (20) a. àm̀ì ñ-yá-nyõñ úfà?
I 1sg.cl-Fut-go home
‘I will go home’.
b. ànyé á-yá-díí
he 3sg.cl Fut come
‘He will come’

- c. àfè à-yǎ-díí ? (interrogative)
you 2sg.cl Fut come
'Will you come?'
- d. àdíékè ànyé á búoppo ényì ésií, ànyé í mì- mǒ-ké mkpó
If he 3sg.cl-close eyes his, he 3sg.cl fut see Neg.something
'If he closes his eyes, he will not see'.
- e. àdíékè àfè á búoppo ényì àfè, àfè ú mù- mǒ-ké mkpó
If you 2sg.cl-close eyes your, you 2sg.cl fut see Neg.something
'If you close your eyes, you will not see'.

Aspectual System in Èkìd

The aspectual system of Èkìd include the following”

The Inceptive Aspect: This is aspect which indicates the beginning of a situation which is marked in Èkìd by the prefix *dí-*. It has already been pointed out by Essien (1990) that “the prefix *dí-* is commonly used in Itu, particularly Itam and Ikono LGAs; While the prefix *yé-*, is used mostly in Uyo, Etinan, Eket and Ikot Abasi LGAs. But Èkìd native speakers use *dí-* to mark inceptive aspect. The following examples indicate the inceptive aspect by the prefixes *dí-*.

- (21) a. Ìmè á-dí-díá ñdídíá ntè ndisémé
Ime 3sg.cl Incpt food like fool
'Ime now eats like a fool'.
- b. Ìmò á-dí-kwò íkwó ntè Údúák
Imo 3sg.cl Incpt sing song like Uduak
'Imo now sings like Uduak'.

The Habitual Aspect: The habitual aspect in Èkìd is marked by the prefix *kán-*, which is best interpreted as ‘often’, ‘from time to time’, and ‘sometimes’ depending on the tense (cf. Essien, 1990) as shown in the examples below:

- (22) Údúák á- má-kán-a-díá ñdídíá ániñke
Uduak 3sg.cl Pst Hab 3sg.cl eat food that
'Uduak used to eat that food'.
- (23) mbábà é- kán- é- tì ñdídíá
women 3sg.cl Hab 3sg.cl cook food
'It is women who cook food'.

The Perfective (Compleitive) Aspect: In Èkìd (like in Ibibio), perfective aspect is divided into two types: Perfect and Relative or Pluperfect (by reduplication) (cf. Essien 1990, Willie and Udoinyang 2012). In Èkìd, perfect aspect is marked by the prefix *mé-*. The perfect aspect emphasizes the completion of a situation as well as the recentness of that completion.

- (24) a. ànyé á- mē- tì ñdídíá
she 3sg.cl Perf cook food
'She has cooked food'
- b. émò é- mé- kǎ útum
they 3pl.cl Perf. go work
'They have gone to work'

Also, the pluperfect completive or relative aspect (unlike perfect) is not affixal rather, it is reduplicated. It relates the completion of an action to another event either mentioned or understood in the context of the speech act. Let us consider the following examples:

- (25) a. ànyé á- má á- té- tí ndídiá
 she 3sg.cl Pst 3sg.cl Rel cook food
 ‘She had already cooked food’
- b. émò é- má é- ká-kǎ útum
 they 3pl.cl Pst 3pl.cl Rel go work
 ‘They had already gone to work’.

In example (25), it is observed that, the roots of the verbs are *tì* ‘cook’ and *kǎ* ‘go’, and they are reduplicated and modified phonologically to result in *tétì* and *kákǎ*.

The Progressive Aspect: The progressive aspect in *Ékìd* is marked by the affix *sùk*, which indicates the progressiveness of an action performed by an agent, as shown in the following examples:

- (26) a. ànyé á- sùk á-né m̀kpó
 he 3sg.cl Prog 3sg.cl do something
 ‘He is doing something’.
- b. émo e- sùk e- dia ndidia
 they 3pl.cl Prog 3pl.cl eat food
 ‘They are eating food’.

Conclusion

So far, we have discussed the two major verbal categories of *Ékìd*, which are: tense and aspect. In *Ékìd*, The analysis has revealed that the tense system in *Ekìd* include: the past, present and future tenses, which are marked by distinctive affixes and are prefixed to verbs in constructions; on the other hand, the aspectual system in *Ekìd* include: inceptive, habitual, completive (perfect and relative), progressive aspects, which are all marked by distinctive affixes which are prefixed to verbs in constructions, exception of the relative (completive) aspect which is marked by reduplication (doubling of the verb) in certain constructions. Therefore, the tense and aspectual systems in *Ékìd* could be represented in the tree diagrams distinctively as follows:

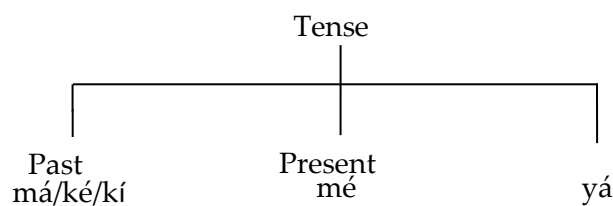


Figure 3: Tree diagram of *Ékìd* tense. Source: Compiled by the Researchers.

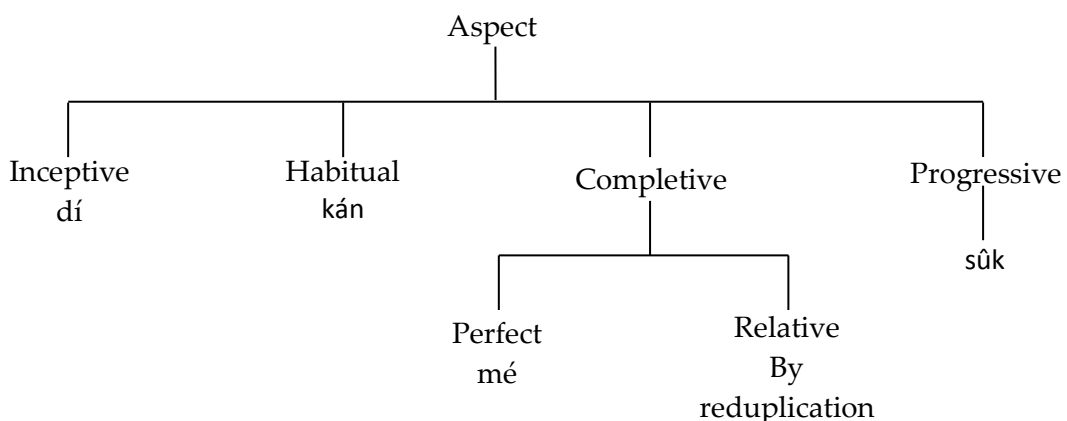


Figure 4: Tree diagram of Ékìd aspectual system. Source: Compiled by the Researchers.

Having undergone this research, despite of no reference material in Ékìd to this aspect of research, this research is therefore just one of the pioneering works in Ékìd language, which serves as a reference point for further research.

Recommendation

Ekid language is an independent language which is becoming popular in the society through the speakers and researchers of the language in various institutions of Nigeria, to prevent it from language endangerment. This research is relevant to the aspect of the syntax of Ekid, which are the verbal categories – tenses and aspects. This will help to improve the syntactic and morphological levels of Ekid grammar; and serve as a tool for further researches in Ekid language.

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