

TENSE IN IKWERE LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at tense in Ikwere language in Rivers State of the South-South of Nigeria. The primary purpose of this study is to explore into tense in the language; identify types of tense and the different makers that mark tense in the language. The intuitive knowledge of the researcher being a native competent speaker and the interviews of competent native speakers of the language were the instruments for the data collection. The study adopts Current generative grammar and X-bar as the appropriate theories to analyze the data collected. The study under tense was considered three major headings: the past, present and future tenses. The study reveals that the past tense is marked by the -rv suffix realized on the verb root. In Ikwere, the present tense is marked by **zi**, a low tone vowel. While the In Ikwere, the future tense is marked with the auxiliary verb 'ya' which has a CV syllable structure and a low tone. 'ye' and 'yo' are allomorphs of the morpheme 'ya' which is conditioned by the vowel of the following verb. Also, the study reveals that in the language, there is a tripartite tense system; the present, past and future. The study later recommends works on other verbal categories to enhance the available literature in the language



INTRODUCTION

Tense systems refer to the different ways tense is shown or realised in different languages of the world. Thus, the tense system of any language results selection of the following distinctions identified with semantic referents: the time of speech (S), the time of the event (E), and the reference point (R). (Kibort 2008:7). It is generally assumed that when humans relate experiences, it either reflects some past, present or future events (Ejele 2000, Michaelis 2006, and Bittar 2010). Thus, in speech, whatever is said can mostly be located in time in the past, present or future time (tense). Furthermore, a tense is said to be absolute when it relates to time of event or action to the locus- moment of speech. Tense is the correspondence between form of a verb and changes in time. This paper attempts to underscore the relevant morphological and syntactic markers of tense Ikwere

METHODOLOGY

The population of this study comprises of two hundred fifty competent native speakers of Ikwere including lecturers, teachers, and language students of several universities.

Geographically, the research was situated in four Local Government Areas being; Port Harcourt; Obio Akpo, Ikwere; and Emohua local government areas of Rivers State, Nigeria. Therefore, the data were drawn from participants who were selected from some major towns and villages from the four local government areas.

The research instruments used for this study were the field notes generated from interviews and the analyses/review of existing relevant documents and materials on Ikwere language.

The data for this study were generated through the primary sources which involved the researcher's intuitive knowledge of the lect, personal interviews and elicitations through constant collaboration and cross fertilization of ideas. While the secondary sources of data collection included textbooks, journals, internet

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tense refers to an event that is fixed relative to some other reference point or we say a tense is relative when the primary event serves as a reference point for the secondary event. Declerck (2006:25) states that relative tenses are, "those which express a single temporal relation between the time of the situation referred to an orientation time other than the zero – time". He further argues that relative tense can express any of the following temporal relations.

Anteriority

When situation time comes before the orientation time. Example:

He said (orientation), he had eaten early (situation time).

Simultaneity

When situation time corresponds with the orientation time. Example: He said, (orientation time), he did feel well (situation time)

Posterity

When situation time follows orientation time. Example:



He said (orientation time), he would deliver us (situation time)

Absolute – Relative Tense System

The absolute-relative tense is a combination of the absolute tense, which relates an event to the moment of speaking while the relative tense relates an events to another reference point in the context. A good example of absolute-relative tense is the English pluperfect.

Binary or Bipartite Tense System

Comrie (1985:49) perceives a binary tense system as a tense system, which recognizes a two way split with either an opposition between past and non-past or between future and non-future. Crystal (2008) asserts that in traditional grammar, tense was thought as grammatical expression of time and identified by a particular set of endings on the verb. In Latin, there were present tense endings, future tense endings, perfect tense endings and several others marking different forms. English by contrast has only one inflectional time. The past tense marker (typically - ed) as in walked, jumped. There is, therefore, a two-way contrast in English: I walk vs I walked (present and past tenses).

Tripartite Tense System

Following Betty (2014), “a language is said to have a tripartite tense system if it has a distinct and separate morphological marking for the present, past, and future tenses without any of the markers overlapping. For example, the Lithuanian language operates a tripartite tense system, where the past tense is marked with the suffix ‘-e’. the present tense ‘-o’, and the future tense “-s”.

Time a Universal Entity

Egbilika (2018) asserts that a universally acceptable definition of time shall consider various factors including socio-economically, politically, environmentally, religiously, and so on; thus, if such definitions cannot encompass all of these rejection is inevitable.

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973:40) clearly puts it, “time is a universal, non-linguistic concept with three divisions: past, present, and future”. Emenanjo (2013: 485) time in relation to tense, notes that time is an unlimited and limitless continuum, from creation to eternity is a reality fashioned by man to put order on actions, a state, and events to give meaning to life and existence. It can also be measured in different ways with different criteria and by different culture or people. Linguistically, time relates to tense through lexicalisation and grammaticalisation. That is, time is marked by grammatical morphemes and it is used to describe or explain the way it is expressed in human grammar of the language of time into past, present and future. Furthermore, in a concised form, according to Emensnjo’s position, time is the continued sequence of existence and events that occurs in an apparently irrevocable progression from the past, through the present, into the future.

TYPES OF TENSE



Tense is classified into past, present or future depending on the moment of speech. In what follows, we shall discuss the types of tense below.

Present Tense

This relates to time reference that specifies that a verbal action takes place at the moment of speech.

Let us consider some examples below:

- 21a. Smart sings.
- b. John is a tailor.
- c. Emeka goes.
- d. She goes to port tomorrow.
- e. Peter cries.

Past Tense

The past tense is used to express an action which is anterior to the moment of speech.

Some examples include:

- 22a. Smart slept.
- b. John cried.
- c. Emeka clapped.

Future Tense

The future tense is used to express an action that is posterior to the moment of speaking.

Some examples include:

- 23a. Smart will go to school tomorrow.
- b. John is going to the state in a fortnight.

Comrie (1985:2) recognises three tenses which he said could be represented diagrammatically on a time line thus:

Fig. 2.1 Time Line



Source: Comrie (1985:2).

According to him, the present moment is represented diagrammatically on the time line at a point labelled 0, the past is represented diagrammatically to the left of 0, while the future is represented diagrammatically to the right of 0. He further states that systems which relate entities to a reference point are termed as deictic systems, and therefore tense is deictic with present moment or speech situation as the dietetic centre. Leech (1971) argues that English expresses future time in one of the various ways shown below:

Simple Present

- 24a. Mary leaves for Lagos tomorrow.



Will + present

b. Mary will leave for Lagos tomorrow.

Be + progressive aspect

c. Mary is leaving for Lagos tomorrow.

Will + be + progressive aspect

a. Mary will be leaving for Lagos tomorrow.

Types of Tense in Ikwere

In this section, we shall discuss each of the tense distinctions and their different markers below.

The Past Tense in Ikwere

The past tense is used to express an action or state that took place before the moment of speaking. It allocates a semantic orientation of a forgone, concluded or done event, which serves only as reminder of the event. Different languages have different markers or operators of past tense. In Ikwere, the past tense is marked by the -rv suffix realized on the verb root.

Let us consider some examples below:

1a Anebno gbù-rù òwó kám

(PN Kill-Pst goat Det)

‘Anebno killed the goat’.

b. Osi ràrù árià

(PN sick-pst sick)

‘Osi was sick’.

c. O znè-ru áhià á

(3sg go-pst market)

‘He/she went to the market’

d. ò jné-rù ànyàrá

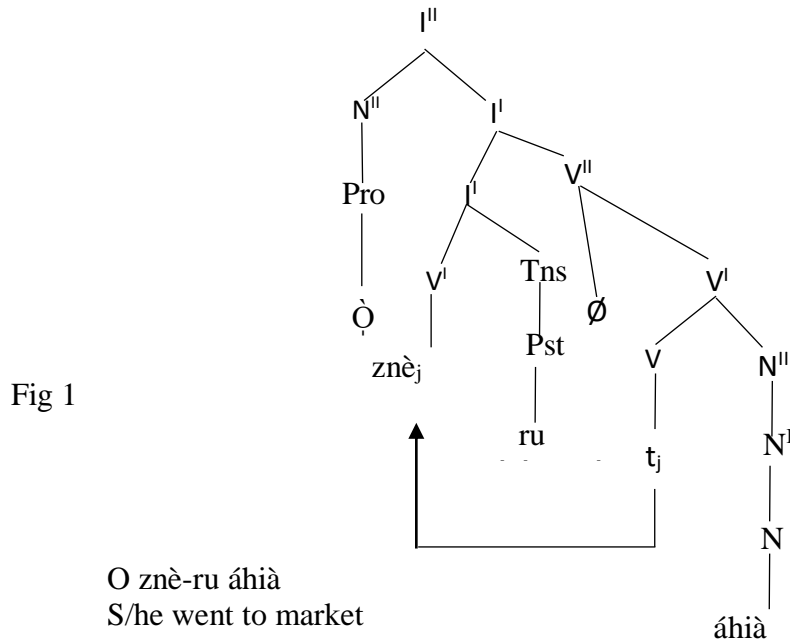
(3sg sleep-pst sleep)

‘S/he has slept’.

e. ò lù-rú nwéyeri

(3sg mary-pst wife)

‘he has married a wife’.



The *-rv* time suffix in Ikwere has it that the vowel agrees with all the features of the verb root. (+ATR) verb root vowels take on (+ATR-*rv*) suffix, while (+ATR) root vowels take on (+ATR)-*rv* suffix. According to Nwachukwu, (1976) cited in Cajetan (2014), he opines that in all verbs activity, the *-rv* expresses nothing more than a past meaning without the assistance of any time adverb. Hence, the morphological marker for past in Ikwere is **ru** as suffixed in the verb roots exemplified in the sentences above (1a-f).

The Negative Simple Past Tense

In Ikwere, the negative markers are high tone suffixes. The past tense negative constructions involve the attachment of the negative marker to the verb root.

Examples are as follow:

2a. Ánébnó gbú-**lè** wówú kám

(PN kill-Neg goat that)

‘Anebno did not kill the goat.’

a. Àznúbúíkné ríá-**là** nrià

(PN Sick-Neg Sick)

‘Azubuike was not sick.’

b. Ò znè-**nè** àhjá



(3sg go-Neg market)
 ‘S/he did not go to the market.’

c. Ò lù-là nnwèrè
 (3sg marry-Neg wife)
 ‘S/he did not marry a wife.’

d. Ò znê- nê àhíá
 (3sg go-Neg market)
 ‘S/he did not go to the marke

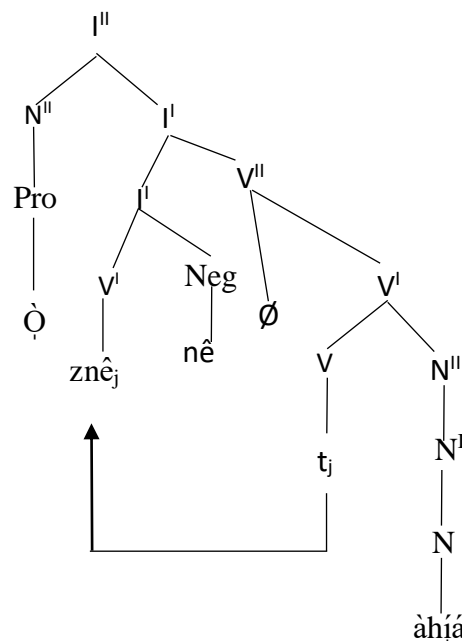


Fig 2

Ò znê- nê àhíá
 ‘S/he did not go to the marke

From the data above, the past tense negative constructions are marked with the addition of negative markers **le/la/ne**. The negative suffixes harmonize with the verb root and are allomorphs of the same morpheme.

Present Tense in Ikwere

The present tense affirmative is used to express an action or event that coincides with the moment of speaking (MS). In Ikwere, the present tense is marked by **zi**, a low tone vowel, which refers to an on-going event simultaneously referenced to the moment of speech, the locus moment.

Examples are as follow:

3a .Alekiri **zi** òhnhá

(PN pres here)

‘Alekiri is here.’

b. Nyêgè zì rímè
 (PN pres pregnant)
 ‘Nyege is pregnant’.

b. Á zì n’àhjá
 (3pl pres prep market)
 ‘We are in the market.’

c. Nkanye zì òknòrnó
 (PRN pres Adj)
 ‘Nkanye is troublesome’.

d. Nchelem zì n’òrò
 (PN pres prep house)
 ‘Nchelem is in the house

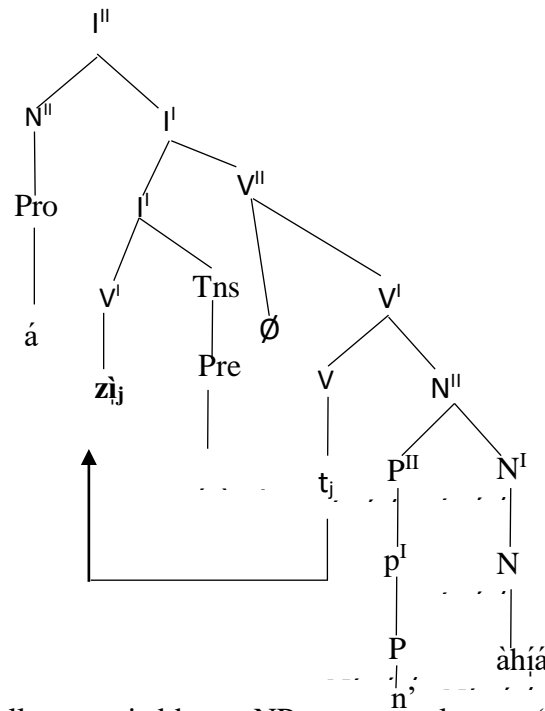


Fig 3

Á zì n’òrò
 ‘We are in the house.’

The Spec position is usually occupied by an NP as personal name (PN) or pronoun (PRO) which operates within the IP as part of the VP- even in a negative construction in Ikwere.

The Negative Present Tense

In Ikwere, the present tense negative constructions are marked with “-la’; a high tone which is suffixed to the present tense marker ‘zi’.

See some examples below:

4a. Alekiri zí - là nhná

(PN pres – Neg here)
 “Alekiri is not here”.

b. Nyege zí - là rìmé

(Pro-N Pres – Neg pregnant)
 “Nyege is not pregnant”.

e. O zí - lá n’ àhiá

(3sg pres – Neg prep market)
 ‘He/she is not in the market’.

f. Nkanye zí - lá m̀kpá

(Pro-N pres-Neg Adj)
 ‘Nkanye is not troublesome’.

g. Nchelem zí - là n’ óró

(PRN pres –Neg-prep house)
 “Nchelem is not in the house”

h. Ò zí -la n’ àhiá

(3sg pres – Neg prep market)
 He/she is not in the market

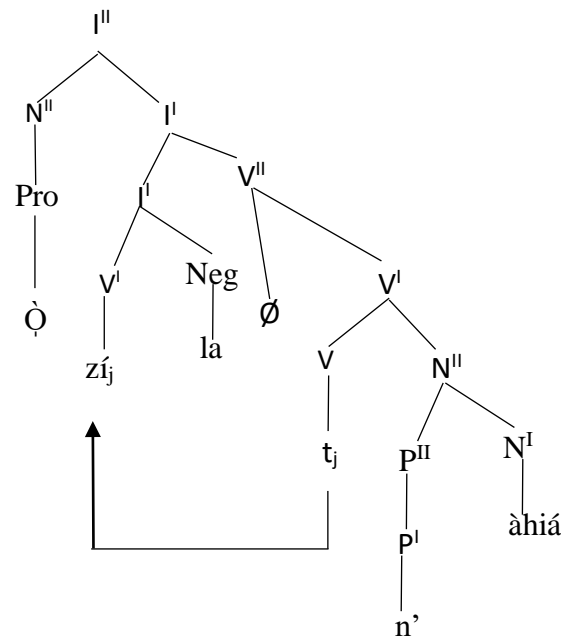


Fig 4



Ò zì -la n' àhiá

'He/she is not in the market'.

The Future Tense

The future tense expresses an action that will take place sometime after the moment of speaking.

The time of the actual happening does not correlate with the time it was spoken.

In Ikwere, the future tense is marked with the auxiliary verb 'ya' which has a CV syllable structure and a low tone. 'yè' and 'yò' are allomorphs of the morpheme 'ya' which is conditioned by the vowel of the following verb.

Some examples include:

5a. Ánêbnó yà à-bjá

(PNFut pref-come)

'Anebno will come'.

b. Ánêbnóyà à-gbá mìnì

(PN Fut pref-fetch water)

'Anebno will fetch water.'

c. Áyà à-gbámá ónú-hnā

(3pfut pref-open mouth-thing)

'We will open the door.'

d Ó yè è-rí wírí

(3sg Fut pref-eat food)

'S/he will eat food.'

e Èzìwhúò yò ò-gbú ā

(PN Fut pref-kill 3sg)

'Eziwhuo will kill it.'

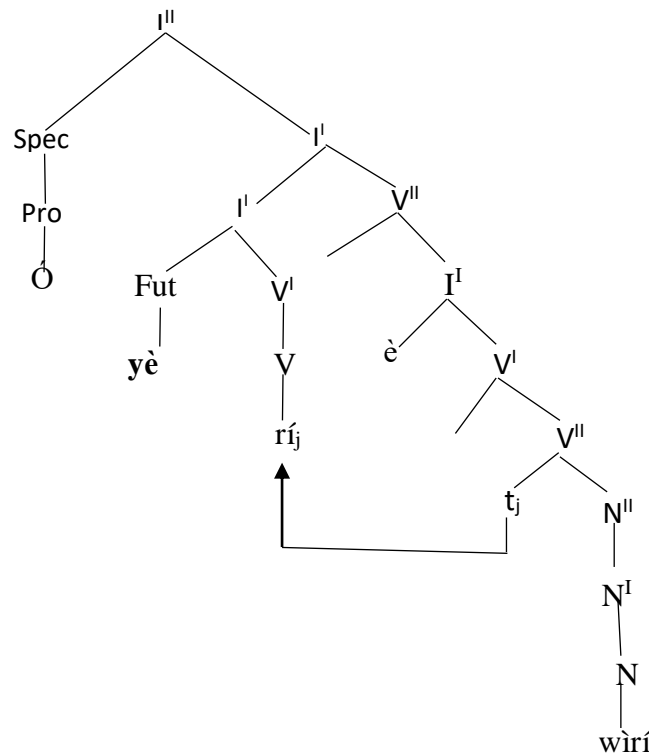


Fig 5
 Ó yè è-rí wírí
 ‘S/he will eat food.’

The Future Tense Negative

The future tense negative construction specifies an event that will not take place after the time of actual speech. In Ikwere, the future tense negative markers are **bá/bé/bó** which are allomorphs of the same morpheme.

Some examples include:

- 6a. **Ánêbnó bá á-bjà**
 (PN Neg pref-come)
 ‘Anebno will not come’.
- b. **Ánêbnó bá á-gbâ mìní**
 (PN Neg pref-fetch water)
 ‘Anebno will not fetch water’.
- c. **Ò bá á-gbámâ ònú-hnā**
 (3sg Neg pref-open mouth-thing)
 ‘S/he will not open the door’.
- d. **Ò bé é-rí wírí**
 (3sg Neg pref-eat food)
 ‘S/he will not eat food.’

- e. Èzìwhùò **bó** ó-gbù là
 (PN Neg pref-kill it)
 ‘Eziwhuo will not kill it.’

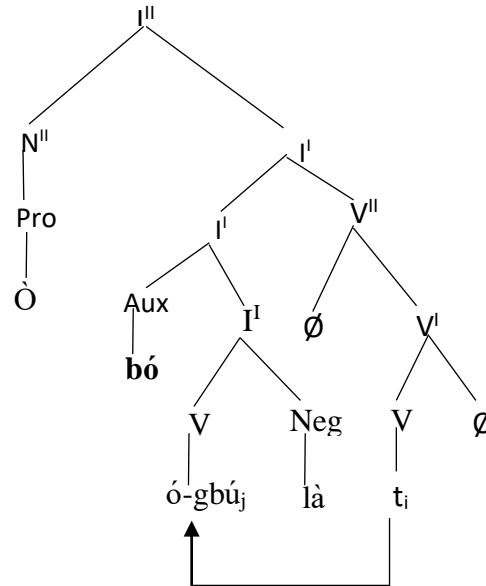


Fig 6
 Ò **bó** ó-gbù là
 ‘S/he will not kill it.’

We observe that the future tense negative markers ‘bá’, ‘bé’ and ‘bó’ are all high tone vowel and that these markers are allomorphs. The vowels of the allomorphs are determined by the vowels of the following verbs as noted above. Verb roots with +ATR vowel (s) takes **bé** or **bó** negative marker depending on whether they back or front vowels. Also, while the verb root with a front +ATR vowel(s) takes **bé** negative marker the verb root with -ATR vowel(s) takes **bá** negative marker.

Importantly, the work identified Present Perfect, Present Progressive, Present Perfect Progressive, Past Perfect, Past Progressive, Past Perfect Progressive, Future Perfect, Future Progressive and Future Perfect Progressive. The study revealed that Present Perfect is marked by ‘**lám/lém**’ and the vowel of these suffixes are determined by the vowel of the main verb. The Present Progressive is marked by ‘-**gá**’ suffix attached to the verb, while the Present Progressive is by ‘**zìné**’ and ‘**zné**’ morphemes respectively. Also, according to the study, Past Perfect are marked by ‘**lém**’ and a compulsory adverb of time. Past Progressive is marked by ‘**gá**’ suffix with an adverb of time. The past perfect progressive is marked by the suffix ‘**zòlám**’ which is attached to the verb root. The Future Perfect is marked by ‘**ném**’ suffix with an auxiliary verb. Future progressive is marked by ‘**yè**’ morpheme expresses futurity while the suffix ‘-**wá**’, a high tone vowel. The perfect progressive is marked ‘**bà-zím**’ and ‘**nà**’.

CONCLUSION

The structure of ‘-rv time suffix agrees with all the features of the verb root. [+ART] verb root vowels take on [+ATR] –rv suffix; while [+ATR] root take on [- ATR] –rv suffix. We observed that the present tense is marked by ‘zi’ morpheme. We observed also that the future tense is marked by ‘yà’ morpheme which is an auxiliary verb with a CV syllable structure with a low tone. We also observed that past tense negative markers are ‘**lé**, **lá**, and **né** morphemes which are high tones suffixed to the verb roots, while the present tense negative marker is ‘ –lá, a high tone morpheme which acts as a suffix to the main verb. Also, the future tense negative markers in the lect are ‘**bá**, **bé**, and **bó** which are high tones and occur before the main verb. Finally, we say Ikwere language has a tripartite tense system.

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