

# Aspect<sup>1</sup> and Phase Systems in Yoruba

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## 1. Introduction

Despite Oyelaran's (1982:41) claim that both the imperfective and what he regards as the perfect aspect in Yoruba are not controversial, a look at some of the writing on the topics shows several crucial problem areas.

Where the imperfective aspect is concerned, if Oyelaran's reference to Comrie's (1976) instructive account on the topic is anything to go by, one could say that none of the Yoruba scholars to date has actually written anything on this subcategory of aspect. What previous writers (i.e. Awobuluyi [1967] and Oke (1969)) often mention are the durative and the habitual aspects. Though these two could be regarded as subcategories of the imperfective as defined by Comrie (1976) (if we tentatively take durativity as equivalent to progressivity), they are characterized differently by these writers and no attempt is made by any of them to account for "both in relation to each other and each to other subcategories" (Oyelaran 1982:41).

For example, Awobuluyi (1967:263-264) regards both *máa ní/máa ní* and *ní/ní* as in (1) and (2) respectively as having the same meaning, hence, "the preverb *maa* seems redundant" in (1):

- (1) *bólá máa ní ta ìwé*  
"Bola sells books"  
or "Bola used to sell books"
- (2) *bólá ní ta ìwé*
  - (i) Present: "Bola is selling a book (right now)"  
or "Bola sells books"
  - (ii) Past: "Bola was selling a book"  
or "Bola used to sell books"

He even confuses issues by stating that there is no difference (if we understand him correctly) between the usages of the word *máa* in the following sentences<sup>2</sup>

- (3) (i) *bólá máa ní ta ìwé*  
"Bola sells books"  
or "Bola used to sell books"

- (ii) m<sup>á</sup>a ta ìwé  
"Keep selling books"
- (iii) b<sup>ó</sup>lá m<sup>á</sup>a l<sup>ò</sup>  
"Bola will go"

Oke (1969:440-448), on the other hand, regards *m<sup>á</sup>a ní* as a single auxiliary. Awoyale (1974:18) disagrees with this view and concludes without justifying his claim that "there is no entity *m<sup>á</sup>ań* in Yoruba but *m<sup>á</sup>* and *ní*."

Some writers even believe that the progressive aspect is not marked in the language. For instance, Dalphinis (1985:87-88), after giving the following sentences as examples from Yoruba:

Yoruba:

- eni mu [sic] lo si oja - 'Today I'm going to market' i.e. literally 'today I'm in the process of going to market'
- ola mu [sic] lo si oja - 'Tomorrow I'll go to market' i.e. literally 'tomorrow I'm in the process of going to market'
- ano mu [sic] lo si oja - 'Yesterday I went to market' i.e. literally 'yesterday I'm in the process of going to market'

concludes that "... it is the progressive aspect rather than time which is the standard by which the *action* of the verb is judged; it could be 'today, yesterday or tomorrow', ... in ... Yoruba one can say: 'I'm in the process of going to market' - the verb does not change its form nor the personal pronoun its shape with any change along a time-scale".

Bangbose (1963:144) also classifies what Oyelaran regards as the perfect marker in Yoruba as the perfective marker. Abraham (1958:639) regards this same item as the past tense marker in the language. Amuda (1986:199-200) also makes the following remarks about what he regards as the Yoruba Tense and Aspect Systems:

The tense system of Yoruba has two terms: *simple* and *perfective*. The simple tense has five positive and four negative sub-terms. The positive sub-terms include: future, conditional, continuative, habitual, and unmarked. The unmarked tense, whether in the positive or negative, is made up of *past* and *present* or *neutral*. The perfective is also made up of the same number of sub-terms as in the simple tense. The only difference is the occurrence of the perfective marker, *ti*, "have" with each of the sub-terms in the perfective. Unlike English, Yoruba has no affixes with base forms of the verbs for deriving past tense such as the *-ed* or the third person singular *-s* form.

As no examples are given, it is not clear to us how Amuda's simple tense terms can be realized in the language. His perfective term is the same as that of Bangbose noted above.

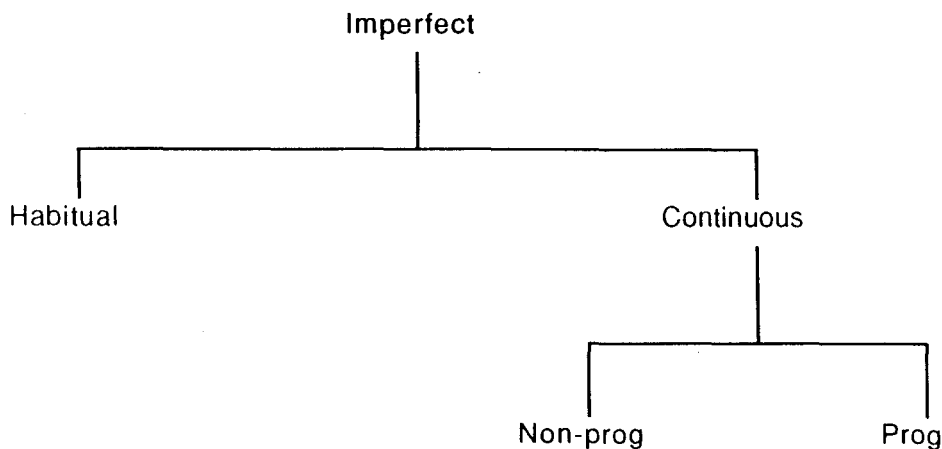
We also have some misgivings about the accuracy of the use of such terms as durative, terminative, ingressive etc. by Awobuluyi (1967) and Odunuga (1982) for some subcategories of aspect in the language. Studies have shown that these terms do not refer to aspectual subcategories. Rather, they are elements of what is often referred to in literature as *mode of action* (= *aktionsart* in German). In Safarewicz's (1974:328) opinion, "they are nothing else but certain features of the vocabulary; they do not form any grammatical category".

Apart from the controversies noted above, a greater weakness of all the previous works which have anything to do with any aspect of the perfect and the imperfective is their failure to discuss their form and content in detail. Our concern in the remaining part of this paper, then, is to account for some of the discrepancies mentioned above. We begin with the imperfective.

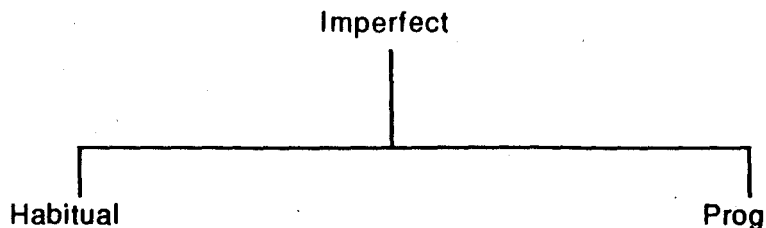
## 2. The Imperfective Aspect in Yoruba

Comrie (1976:24-25) takes the imperfective aspect as referring "to the internal temporal structure of a situation, viewing a situation from within". He also identifies two different types of imperfective (IMPFV henceforth) in languages - one in which IMPFV is realized as a single subcategory of aspect and the other in which IMPFV itself could still be divided into other subcategories. The Yoruba IMPFV belongs to the second class. It differs, however, from Comrie's (1976:25) classification shown in (4) in that there is no non-progressive continuous marker in the language as shown in (5).

(4)



(5)



## 2.1 The Progressive Aspect

The progressive aspect, according to Freed (1979:14) and Dahl (1985:91), could be regarded as a subcategory of the imperfective which allows us to view an activity not only as durative or continuous but essentially as on-going. The item that performs these types of functions in Yoruba and so could be said to mark the progressive aspect in the language is *ń*. It has a suppletive, *máa*, which replaces it after modal verbs and in imperative constructions. Both items are exemplified in the following sentences:

- (6) (i) Mo *ń* na Adé  
I PROG hit Ade  
“I am hitting Ade”
- (ii) Máa lọ  
PROG go  
“Start to go (now)”
- (iii) Mo lè *máa* na Adé  
I M PROG beat Ade  
“I can start hitting Ade”

Apart from the examples in (6), Oyelaran (1982:45) also states that this suppletive form of *ń* also occurs “before (a certain *ń*) in a modal construction” and after the NEG. Since examples are not given, we can only guess that it is the occurrence of *máa* together with *ń* in such constructions as *O máa ń jẹ ọgẹdẹ* “He usually eats bananas” that he is referring to. If this is the case, we doubt the correctness of this view. Our claim here is very much in line with the one made by Oke (1969:440-449) who, with convincing evidence, shows that *máań* is a polymorphemic word used in the language to mark Habitual Aspect.

Some scholars do not accept Oke's argument. The question they often ask is that if *máań* is the habitual aspect marker, why are its functions often taken over by the progressive marker as in *Ó ń lọ* which, depending on the context, could be given a

progressive reading, glossed by “He is going” or a habitual reading, “He usually goes”. Because the progressive could be so used, they argue that both the progressive and the habitual aspects should be classified as one.

We find this argument difficult to accept because habitual readings of the progressive in some contexts are common in many languages of the world. These readings are not, in any way, used as points against the establishment of the imperfective subcategories of progressive and habitual in such languages, especially if evidence that they are distinct can be provided. Mufwene (1984:41) refers to this habitual use of the progressive as “the habitative extension of the progressive”.

To account for the habitual interpretation of the progressive, one can propose a habitual subcategory for the language and “distinguish between a metalinguistic (and perhaps universal) (sub)category of progressive and the progressive form” (Freed 1979:15 quoting Comrie) in Yoruba of which the range of the latter is wider than the former. This suggestion becomes tenable when one notes many examples where both the progressive and the habitual contrast. An example of such contrasts is given in (7).

- (7) (i) Ó n gbẹ  
           “It is/was becoming dry”  
       (ii) Ó máa n gbẹ  
           “It usually becomes/became dry”  
           (Quoted from Awobuluyi 1967:265)

In (7), the progressive cannot be given any habitual reading, nor can the habitual marker be given a progressive reading. Examples of these types of sentences which abound in the language call for a progressive/habitual distinction.

It will be recalled that “ongoingness” has been suggested as the most important property central to the use of progressive aspect (Freed 1979:14 and Dahl 1985:91). Most Yoruba scholars do not give this property the prominent treatment it deserves when discussing the progressive aspect in the language. They often lay emphasis on the durativity of the action expressed by the verb with which the progressive marker cooccurs. Most of them even drop the term “progressive” and adopt the term “durative” while discussing the item we have identified as the progressive marker. Dahl's (1985:91) comment on this is that “The label ‘durative’ for PROG, ... is misleading in that it gives the impression that PROG is used in contexts where duration of a process is stressed”. Hence, while “PROG naturally occurs with punctual temporal reference” in (8) (i), it is generally avoided in (8) (ii) (a).

- (8) (i) Ní iwòyí ànà, ó sì n na Olú  
           In this time yesterday, he still PROG hit Olu  
           “By this time yesterday, he was still hitting Olu”

(ii) (a) ? Ó n kọrin fún wákàtí mẹta  
He PROG sing for hour three  
“He was singing for three hours”

(b) Ó kọrin fún wákàtí mẹta  
He sing for hour three  
“He sang for three hours”

At first glance, it may look as if Awobuluyi's treatment of what he regards as 'durative' is very much in line with the view of the progressive expressed by Dahl. This claim becomes stronger if one notes the following comments made by him on his idea of durativity. First, he defines the subcategory as indicating “action occurring through time” which, depending on the context, “may be interpreted as either continuous or habitual” (Awobuluyi 1967:262). He then goes on to add that:

The durative does not cooccur with such adverbials of time as 'three hours', a whole day' etc. Thus, one does not say in Yoruba:

\*bọlá n ẹ işẹ fún WÁKÀTÍ MẸẸTA

“Bola aspect-marker do work for three hours”

i.e. “Bola works for three hours”

but

bọlá ẹ işẹ fún WÁKÀTÍ MẸẸTA

“Bola worked for three hours”

without a durative aspect marker. In view of this, our term 'durative' is for the present account not likely to signify more than the feature that is common to habitual and continuous action (Awobuluyi 1967:284, n. 93).

(our capitalization)

From the above quotation one could deduce that the feature common to both the habitual and the continuous is the non-collocability with the type of adverbials of time capitalized in the quotation. But a look at Awobuluyi's discussion on the 'durative' shows that most of the examples used can cooccur with the adverbials of time noted in his examples. Almost all his examples with habitual marker take these adverbs freely. So, whereas a sentence with a progressive marker, as the one in Awobuluyi's quotation, is not acceptable, sentences of the type in (9) are:

(9) Ó máa n ẹ işẹ fún wákàtí mẹta lójúmọ  
He HAB do work for hour three in one day  
“He usually works for three hours a day”

So, with (9), we are saying that the claim made by Awobuluyi in the above quotation, applies to the progressive (or what he calls the continuous) aspect alone. Thus, the collocability or the non-collocability of the progressive and the habitual with

these types of adverbials of time serves as another valid ground for our wanting to distinguish the habitual from the progressive aspect.

## 2.2. Dynamic - Stative

Another important feature often ascribed to the progressive is the non-stativity feature. By this is meant that the use or non-use of the progressive depends on the type of verb with which it cooccurs. Various writers have expressed this claim in different ways. According to Lyons (1966:222), "the notional categories of action and state are relevant to the classification of verb...for the purpose of generating well-formed sentences". Though Comrie uses the term 'situation' as a cover term for state, event or process, his remark that "in discussing aspect it is often necessary to refer to the differences between states, events, processes etc." Comrie's observation (1976:13) is very much in line with Lyons' observation. To most Yoruba linguists, the progressive naturally cooccurs with the dynamic verbs. But does this mean that the progressive cannot occur with the stative in the language?

The following comments are noted in the literature. In Ajeigbe's (1979:16) opinion, the stative verbs in the language can cooccur with all tense markers. His examples are:

- (10) (a) Adé ti burú rí şùgbón kò burú mó  
Ade have been wicked before but not wicked again  
"Ade has been wicked in the past but he is no longer wicked"
- (b) Òjó yìd ga tó Adé ní ọdún yí  
Ojo shall tall equal Ade in year this  
"Ojo will be as tall as Ade this year"

As he does not state whether the progressive is one of the tense markers and the examples given to justify his claim do not include the progressive, his view on the cooccurrence of the stative verbs and the progressive is not clear to us.

Oyelaran (1982:37), on the other hand, states clearly that when the stative verb (he uses the term "verbs of perception") takes the progressive marker, (he also calls this "imperfective marker") "the only permissible reading is iteration, since reference to situation-internal time would be nonsensical".

In as much as we agree with Oyelaran that the progressive can occur with stative verbs for iterative purposes, we are also of the opinion that reference can still be made to the situation-internal time of such verbs. A look at the sentences in (11) shows that, with the presence of the progressive marker, apart from the fact that the verbs are iterated or intensified, the speaker is also focussing on the properties of states that resemble those of events (Smith 1986:498).

- (11) (i) Mo ní gbọ́n sí i  
I PROG wise more it  
"I am becoming wiser"
- (ii) Mo ní gbọ́ Yorùbá sí i  
I PROG hear Yoruba more it  
"My knowledge of Yoruba is improving"
- (iii) Ó ní jọ baba rẹ sí i lójoojúmọ  
He PROG resemble father his more it everyday  
"He gets more like his father every day"

The verb in the individual sentences have now been given the dynamism of an event. Hence one is able to perceive not only the internal structures of the situation, but also successions of stages which are located on a continuum. Thus, the stative verbs: *gbọ́n* "to be wise", *gbọ́* "to hear", *jọ* "to resemble" are now seen to be involved in some changes "from one stage to the other" (Smith 1986:483).

Smith's view is very similar to Mufwene's (1984:35) notion of the progressive "as a kind of quantifier" which (i) converts events expected to be punctual into longer-lasting, even if transient, states of affairs (ii) conversely converts those states of affairs expected to last long [lexical statives] to shorter-lasting/transient states of affairs (iii) simply presents those verbs whose denotations are neutral with regard to duration as in process/in [transient] duration, though duration is expected of statives.

These observations lead us to the conclusion that, though it is natural for the progressive to occur with dynamic verbs, it also occurs with the stative verbs in the language. When this happens, just as in other languages, such stative verbs are treated as dynamic verbs.

### 2.3. The Progressive in Imperative Constructions

The occurrence of the progressive aspect in the Yoruba imperative constructions merits some mention in this work. Apart from the notion of futurity (which is often explained in pragmatic terms) only a progressive reading can be given to an imperative. This principle also applies to Yoruba, but in a rather peculiar manner. Observe the following non-progressive imperatives and their progressive counterparts.

- (12) (i) Lọ Máa lọ  
"go" PROG go  
"Start going"
- (ii) Jẹun Máa jẹun  
"eat" PROG eat  
"Start eating"



- (iii) Sùn            Múa sun  
 "Sleep"        PROG sleep  
                   "Continue sleeping"

All three non-progressive imperatives are matched with the progressive ones. We think there are two ways in which the frequent occurrence of the progressive in the imperatives can be explained. First, the progressive marker cooccurs obligatorily with some verbs. So, the question of whether the verbs are used declaratively, imperatively or interrogatively does not come up, they both have to cooccur. Examples are:

(13) DECLARATIVE

|                  |        |
|------------------|--------|
| Mo n bộ          | *Mo bộ |
| I PROG come      | I come |
| "I am on my way" |        |

INTERROGATIVE

|                   |            |
|-------------------|------------|
| Sé o n bộ ?       | *Sé o bộ   |
| Q you PROG come   | Q you come |
| "Are you coming?" |            |

IMPERATIVE

|                |        |
|----------------|--------|
| Múa bộ         | *bộ    |
| PROG come      | "come" |
| "Start coming" |        |

Second, just as it does elsewhere, the progressive "allows the speaker to tell the addressee, not merely to do something, but to be in the process of doing it at some particular moment" (Davies 1986:15—16).

- (14) (i) Sọ ọ kí n tó dé  
 Say it that I before arrive  
 "Say it before my arrival"
- (ii) Múa sọ ọ kí n tó dé  
 PROG say it that I before arrive  
 "Start saying it before my arrival"

(14) (i) does not require the type of action in progress required in (14) (ii).

It should be noted too that just as in the declarative sentence, the progressive can also be given an habitual interpretation. But this can only be possible in a positive construction. In a negative construction, the progressive is quite distinct from the habitual. The distinction is shown clearly in (15).

- (15) (i) POSITIVE  
 Má ɟeun  
 "Start eating  
 or  
 Stay eating"
- (ii) NEGATIVE  
 Má ɟeun  
 "Do not eat" (for prog)  
 Má máa ɟeun  
 "Do not eat (at all)" (for Hab)

Thus, the distinct habitual and progressive negative imperative constructions also stand as another valid ground for our proposed subcategories of habitual and progressive in the language.

### 3. The Yoruba Habitual Aspect

The habitual aspect is regarded as "describing a situation which is characteristic of an extended period of time, so extended in fact that the situation referred to is viewed not as an incidental property of the moment but, precisely as a characteristic feature of a whole period" (Comrie 1976:27-28). The notion of "extended period" as used in the above definition is conceptual rather than linguistic, hence, Comrie (1976:27) warns that habituality should not be confused with iterativity. According to him, "the mere repetition of a situation is not sufficient for that situation to be referred to by a specific habitual ... form". The reason for this is that "a situation can be referred to by a habitual form without there being any iterativity at all" (Comrie 1976:27). In support of this view, Dahl (1985:97) adds that "the difference between 'once' and 'twice' or even 'seven times' is almost totally irrelevant to HAB". With these two writers' views of the habitual, one can conclude that sentences such as (16) are not in any way habitual.

- (16) (i) Ó lọ sí oko púpò ní èsì  
 He go to farm plenty in last year  
 "He went to the farm many times last year"
- (ii) Ó lọ sí oko ní ọgọrùn ẹ̀gbà ní èsì  
 He go to farm in hundred times in last year  
 "He went to the farm a hundred times last year"

Rather, what actually marks the habitual aspect in the language is the polymorphemic word *máa nì*. What the use of this item in any sentence indicates is that the action expressed "took place in the majority of those occasions" (Dahl 1985:97) indicated or understood in the sentence. Thus the item, as used in (17), refers to indefinite individual occasions when the action takes place.

- (17) Ó mǎá n̄ lọ  
 He HAB go  
 "He usually goes"

The notion of an indefinite occurrence of an action credited to the habitual aspect does not mean that it could be interpreted as denoting the same notion with such adverbials of time as *nígbà gbogbo* "every time". The fact that the appendage *sùgbón ní èkèkòkan ó mǎá n̄ wọ aṣọ funfun* "but once in a while, he puts on white clothes" is possible with (18) (i) but not with (18) (ii) brings this out clearly.

- (18) (i) Ó mǎá n̄ wọ aṣọ dúdú sùgbón ní èkèkòkan  
 He HAB wear clothes black, but in one one time,  
 ó mǎá n̄ wọ aṣọ funfun  
 He HAB wear clothes white  
 "He usually puts on black clothes but once in a while he puts on white"
- (ii) \*Ó mǎá n̄ wọ aṣọ dúdú nígbà gbogbo, sùgbón ní  
 He PROG wear clothes black in time all, but in  
 èkèkòkan, ó mǎá n̄ wọ aṣọ funfun  
 in one one time, he HAB wear clothes white  
 "He is always putting on black clothes but once in a while, he puts on white".

Despite the fact that there is no controversy about the notion of the habitual aspect as defined above, the form in which the subcategory is realized in the language is still a subject of dispute. To most Yoruba scholars, the subcategory does not exist. To some few others, only some Yoruba speakers use it, "other speakers use the *n* form (the progressive marker) freely in both senses" (Comrie 1976:101 quoting Rowlands). The only Yoruba scholar who has given unqualified support for the postulation of the subcategory in the language is Oke (1969:440-448). One of the reasons he gives for regarding the habitual as a distinct subcategory from the progressive is that the distribution of the habitual is quite different from that of the progressive. According to him, whereas verbs such as *wá* "to come" and *wà* "to be" cannot be immediately preceded by the progressive, they occur with the habitual quite freely. Examples are:

- (19) (i) Ó mǎá n̄ wá  
 He HAB come  
 "He usually comes"
- (ii) Ó mǎá n̄ wà ní ibẹ̀  
 He HAB be in there  
 "He is usually there"

- (iii) \*Ó ñ wá  
He PROG come  
He is coming
- (iv) \*Ó ñ wà<sup>3</sup>  
He PROG be  
“He is being”

On the other hand, verbs such as *bọ* “to come” and *bẹ* “to be”, are not also immediately preceded by the habitual markers. Examples are:

- (20) (i) \*Ó maa ñ bọ  
He HAB come  
“He usually comes”
- (ii) \*Ó maa ñ bẹ  
He HAB be  
“He is usually existing”
- (iii) Ó ñ bọ  
He PROG come  
“He is on his way”
- (iv) Ó ñ bẹ ní ibẹ  
He PROG be in there  
“He is there”

These examples, according to Oke, show that the progressive and habitual markers have different distributions.

Our previous discussion has shown that we are very much in support of Oke's view that there should be a distinct habitual subcategory of Aspect in the language. One may then wonder why the opinions of the Yoruba grammarians differ on the status of the Habitual subcategory of Aspect in the language.

The main reason for this divided view can be traced to the fact that both the habitual and the progressive share the same variant forms. Hence, the sentence in (21) has two interpretations which the negations in (22) clearly distinguish:

- (21) Maa se é
  - (a) Start to do it (right now)
  - (b) “Continue to do it (henceforth)”
- (22) (a) Má se é  
NEG do it  
“Don't do it (now)”

- (b) Má máa ʒe é  
 NEG HAB do it  
 "Do not do it (henceforth)"

While (22) (a) negates the progressive, the habitual can be negated only as in (22)(b). Most linguists who do not consider examples such as (21) and (22) or the ones given by Oke in (19)-(20) or the ones we have given earlier on in (7) often conclude that *máa ní* and *máa* are the contextual realizations of the Progressive.

We hope that enough has been said here to show that the Habitual to which almost all Yoruba scholars give a notional recognition, needs to be formally distinguished from the progressive.

#### 4. Phase System in Yoruba

In the previous sections of this paper, we have been able to show how the Yoruba speakers indicate when the action expressed by the verb can not be said to have any clear limit. This case is achieved in the language by the use of the markers of the imperfective subcategories. There is still another Yoruba grammatical category that we need to discuss. For instance, King (1983) discusses the grammatical categories from the relational point of view. First, he defines orientation "as that semantic notion which allows the speaker to express an ordering relationships for the reported situation". He then classifies the types of ordering relationship into two—the primary form and the relational form. He classifies both the perfective and the imperfective as the primary form. By the primary form he means that they do not express any orientation and that no ordering relationship is involved in the action they depict. The relational form on the other hand relates one situation to another.

We have discussed how some of the primary forms<sup>4</sup> are expressed in Yoruba. What now remains is for us to show how the Yoruba speakers relate one situation-token to another situation-token in an utterance-situation<sup>5</sup>. This relationship is shown by what Thrane (1983:188) regards as the Phase. Thrane defines Phase as "the category which enables H (the hearer) to identify a particular S-token of a certain type in terms of its sequential order relative to some other S-token". The item that is used in the language to show such a relationship is *ti* "has/have/had". This item, as we have discussed above, has been analysed either as a past tense marker or a perfective marker.

According to Thrane (1983:189), "the basic semantic function of Phase is such that it will allow valid inferences to be drawn from it in the direction of both Tense and Aspect" but whereas the two latter categories are concerned with matters of time, the former is concerned with space. For example, in (23), the Phase marker *ti* "has/have/had" only indicates the sequential ordering of the S-tokens involved relative to the Utterance-situation.

- (23) Ó ti lọ kí a tó ó dé  
 He PH go before we equal INF come  
 "He had left before our arrival"

The Phase marker in (23) does not say where the entities are in any absolute sense. What it states is that "the entities are arranged relative to one another along a single spatial dimension" (Thrane 1983:188).

King (1983:147) uses the term "relational form" for this marker. The reason is that, in terms of orientation, what the marker does is to relate two S-tokens to each other relative to the utterance-situation. The Utterance-situation is not fixed in any way. Thus, (24) (i) can be read either as (24) (ii) or (24) (iii) depending on the nature of the Utterance-situation.

- (24) (i) Ó ti lọ  
 He PH go  
 "He has gone"
- (ii) Ó ti lọ (Ó fún un lówó nì yẹn)  
 He PH go (He give him money is that)  
 "He has gone (He must have given him some money)"
- (iii) Ó ti lọ (Ó fẹ ẹ fún ún lówó nì yẹn)  
 He PH go (He want INF give him in money is that)  
 "He has gone (that means he wants to give him some money)"

It will be noted that the "sequentiality of the anterior S-token" (Thrane 1983:188) in (24) (ii) has undergone a subtle change in (24) (iii). This change, according to Thrane, shows that Phase is essentially concerned with sequence and only inferentially with time.

#### 4.1. Tense, Aspect and Phase

With the notion of Phase as described above, the reason why its marker has been analysed either as a past tense marker or as a perfective marker can now be explained. Tense has been defined as "the category which enables H (the Hearer) to identify a particular S-token in terms of its temporal occurrence relative to the deictic centre of the Utterance-situation" (Thrane 1983:188). With this definition, it becomes clear why two sequentially arranged S-tokens are given some temporal cooccurrence attributes. Before two S-tokens can be sequentially ordered, "they both have to be 'there' at the same time" (Thrane 1983:189). What time does in such circumstances is to impose some direction on the sequential order of the S-tokens. The mere mention of the terms 'anterior', 'posterior', 'after' and 'before' while defining Phase shows that time has to impose some directionality on the sequential order. It is because of this linguistic encoding of sequential order that some Yoruba scholars inaccurately regards the item *ti* "has," as a past tense marker.

The past tense, in the languages in which it occurs, is regarded as simply stating that a given situation obtained before the Utterance-situation without any reference to overt orientation. The item *ti* does not function in this way. Rather, what it indicates is only the sequentiality of S-tokens. In our opinion, it is the notion of one S-token being anterior to another which the advocates of the past tense analysis of *ti* “has,” regard as tense.

If we now turn to the perfective, what we note is that Phase also draws some Aspectual meaning especially from this sub-category of Aspect. Aspect is taken as “a category which enables H to identify a particular S-token in terms of its internal temporal structure” (Thrane 1983:188). For two S-tokens to be considered sequential, one must have been perceived as either ‘complete’ or ‘finished’. Since the notion of perfective denotes a situation viewed in its entirety, it is not surprising that the perfective and the Phase are often confused with each other. The confusion stems from the ‘complete’ notion which Phase partially shares with the perfective.

#### 4.2. The Phase as a Relational Form

Phase, as we have stated, is by orientation a relational form. It does not refer to any particular S-token but relates one S-token to another. Both the perfective and the imperfective subcategories, on the other hand, are regarded as primary forms, the reason being that no sequential ordering of any S-token is made by them. They can both cooccur with the Phase.

When the perfective cooccurs with the Phase in an S-token, it views such an S-token in its entirety and orders it sequentially relative to the Utterance-situation. When the Phase cooccurs with the progressive, it indicates that what is ordered sequentially relative to the Utterance-situation is the middle of the said S-token. Finally, the Phase marker cooccurs with the Habitual marker to indicate that an indefinite occurrence of S-tokens is ordered sequentially relative to the Utterance-situation. Examples are:

- (25) (i) PERFECTIVE AND PHASE  
 Olú ú ti lọ kí Òjò tó ó dé  
 Olu HTS PH go before Ojo equal INF come  
 “Olu had left before Ojo’s arrival”
- (ii) PROGRESSIVE AND PHASE  
 Ó ti n lo kí a tó ó dé  
 He PH PROG before we equal INF come  
 “He was leaving when we arrived”

(iii) **HABITUAL AND PHASE**

Ó ti máa ní lọ kí a tó ó dé

He PK HAB go before we equal INF come.

"He usually leaves before our arrival"

**5. Summary**

In this paper, we have discussed some issues regarding aspect and phase in Yoruba. We started with the discussion of the imperfective aspect. Following Comrie (1976), we proposed two subcategories of the imperfective for the language—the progressive and the habitual. We then contested the classification of the item *ti* "has/had/have," either as a past tense marker or as a perfective marker. We suggested that the item should be regarded as the relational Phase marker in the language.



## Notes and References

1. Only the progressive and the habitual subcategories of aspect shall be discussed here. For a comprehensive discussion of the perfective aspect in the language, see Adewole (1986). See also Adewole (1987).
2. Awobuluyi's remark on the sentences is that "it is this preverb, *máa* incidentally, which appears to be shared by both the temporal and the aspectual subsystems, that led us to the conclusion that the terms in the Yoruba temporal subsystem should perhaps be definite and indefinite rather than past, present and future" (p. 265). What is not clear here is whether *máa* is the same both in form and function in these sentences. See Adewole's (1986) comments on this type of situation.
3. *Ó n wà ní ibẹ̀* "He is usually there" is possible but according to Oke, the *n* form used is not a progressive marker. It is a variant of the habitual marker. We support this claim.
4. Note that only the imperfective aspect is discussed in the previous paragraphs of this paper. For some discussions of the perfective aspect in Yoruba, see Adewole (1986; 1987).
5. Thrane (1983:182) defines a situation as "a delimited organization of entities between which specifiable relations hold". In this definition, a situation is taken to be language-independent. To link situations to linguistics, he introduces the terms situation-token (S-token), situation-type (S-type) and Utterance-situation (US) where S-token stands for "a situation identified or identifiable in terms of its actual occurrence in space and time", and S-type stands for "a situation identified or identifiable in terms of the relationship holding between the entities that make up the situation" and the Utterance-situation as "a particular type of actual occurrent situation, established in each case by someone making an utterance".

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