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Morph Syntactic Analysis of the use of Tense in IGIKURIA Language: A Minimalist Program

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Abstract

Tense is marked in Igikuria verb. This research gives a general overview of tense. The Igikuria tense is looked into, which is divided into past and non-past. The past is further divided into immediate, recent and distant past. The non past is divided into the present and the future, and the distant future. The feature checking of the Minimalist Program will be shown to demonstrate how movement checks inflectional features for their correctness against their syntactic position in the constituency of a sentence.

Keywords: Tense, Immediate Past Tense, Recent Past Tense, Distant Past Tense, Present Tense, Future Tense, Distant Future Tense, Movements.

Introduction

Guthrie (1967:48) puts Igikuria in group 40 together with Ekegusii, Logooli(Kenya) Zamaki (Tanzania). Luhya(Kenya). Abakuria live both in Kenya and Tanzania. In Kenya they live in kuria district and in Tanzania they live in both Mara and Musoma districts.

The homeland of the Abakuria is between river Migori to the east and Estuary of river Mara to the West. On the eastern side the area stretches from Migori district in South Nyanza in Kenya to Musoma district of Tanzania on the western side. To the south, the land borders the Transmara district on the Kenya side and Nguruma area in Tanzania. To the north is Lake Victoria. The immediate neighbors are the Abagusii, Maasai, Ngurumi. This paper is based on the Abakuria in Kenya who speak Igikuria language.

Lyons (1968: 308) describes tense as 'relating the time of action, event or state of affairs referred to in sentence to the time of utterance'. According to Payne (1997: 236) tense is a grammatical expression of the relation of the time of an event to some reference point in time, usually the moment the clause is uttered. Lester (1971: 52) says 'every language can make the distinction between past, present and future time, but there is no obligation for the distinction to be carried solely by the inflection of the verb'.

Givon (1984: 273) links tense to the time of performing the speech act as a reference point referred to as absolute tense, or some other point in time which is referred to as relative tense.

It's also realized that adverbials can also mark tense even if they are not part of the verb affixation.

According to Quirk (1983) tense is ...“The correspondence between the form of a verb and our concept of time. This means that for one to know when an action took place, the word class that can answer this question is the verb only” Tense is what relates the time of action, event or state of affairs referred to in sentences to the time of the utterances or it is the correspondence between the form of the verb and our concept of time. This implies that for one to know when an action took place the word class that can answer this question is the verb because it carries the action and in some languages the auxiliaries and tone can play a part hence we can not say that tense is a preserve of the verb only. This definition is according to English language which therefore means that tense should be defined according to a specific language.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is a general set of assumptions about the nature of phenomena. To understand theoretical framework, an analysis of theories has to be made. For this study, theoretical frame work is The Minimalist Program.

The Minimalist Program is built on the theory of principles and parameters which in a nutshell is principle of economy in derivation and representation. Movement is directed by the interacting principle of economy, the Minimal link conditions, the principle of procrastinate and Greed.

The Minimal link condition states that movement is only possible into the nearest only position. Procrastinate makes sure that movement only takes place if there is need for it and if it is licensed by any morpho syntactic or lexical evidence from the language. Additionally, the Last Resort principle guarantees that a short movement is preferred over a longer one. Related to it, is the Greed Principle, which is some sort of self-serving Last Resort. It ensures that movement is only possible if the requirements for movement of the element are satisfied in terms of spell-out and convergence (Chomsky, 1995:200) these principles have possibilities for variation called parameters. In other words languages vary in the parametric values they select for each parameter in question. Minimalist program can be summarized as syntactic representation that minimizes levels of representation and adopts a justified structure. This theory is appropriate for my study because Igikuria language is agglutinative and has strong morphology.

Research Methodology

This study uses analytical research design which uses facts or information already available and analyses these to make critical evaluation of the material data .The data in this study was collected from Igikuria native speakers and verified with Abakuria professionals who are more competent native speakers. Data was collected through oral interview and use of questionnaires. The library was also a source of information which provided theoretical content on the Igikuria language. This study uses purposive sampling as a method whereby the researcher purposively targets a group of people believed to be reliable for the study (Kombo and Tromp 2006: 82). For this study the number included ; twenty teachers; ten primary school teachers and ten secondary school teachers, Igikuria speakers of over eighteen years old, professionals both men and women (primary and secondary school teachers from Abakuria tribe) were involved. These informants

are all native speakers of Igikuria language. Data Analysis is done in terms of the features of the verb structure that reveal the Igikuria tense.

Findings-tense in IGIKURIA

Tense in Igikuria language is marked by affixation. The tone also distinguishes tense as marked through morphological tone. The native speaker of the language is able to distinguish tenses based on tone by simply listening to another person speaking the language. Igikuria language divides tense into three major categories as shown below;

- a) The past.
- b) The non past.
- c) The future.

The Igikuria inflects for the past and the future, the language also uses auxiliaries to mark future tense, however, the present tense is not morphologically marked as it overlaps to the aspect.

The Past Tense

According to Comrie (1985: 36) past tense.. “is the location of the situation prior to the present moment”. The past tense in Igikuria has no definite interpretation of time and that actions that took place within past can be accounted for from three perspectives; immediate past, recent past and distant past. The past tense is morphologically marked by “re” which together with the right tone gives the specific tense for instance immediate past tense is given by the morpheme *re* together with high –low tone on the first syllable followed by a low tone on the subsequent syllables, the recent past tense is given by the morpheme *re* together with low-high tone on the first syllable followed by low tone on the subsequent syllables. The distant future is given by the morpheme *re* together with the low-high tone on the first syllable and high tone on the subsequent syllables.

The Immediate Past

The immediate past tense accounts for actions that took place within the past few hours or not long ago but within the same day, the time of the action is very close to the present moment .The immediate past is marked on the verb by tone pattern. The past tense marker ‘re’ is used as a general past tense marker but the tone on the syllables in the verb is what makes it immediate past. The first syllable has a high –low tone followed by a low tone on the subsequent syllables as shown.

- 1) Mary –a[^]– re[`]– che^èer^è – è[`]
Mary – Agr – ptns – play – fv
‘Mary played’

a) Creation of Heads

In structure building, a primary principle of the MP is the formation of heads where only visibly marked morphemes are moved for feature checking in positions that are checking domains. Verb features are all checked for elimination since the MP does not allow morphological features that are not licensed. This is to meet the requirements of the Principle of Full Interpretation and the Principle of Economy when they interact during the spell-out, Cook and Newson (1992:321).

In this case, a tense head has to be created where the verb root has to be checked by the abstract features, AGRs and TNS. The TON head is created because there is use of morphological tone that gives the immediate past tense. The morpho-syntactic nature of the MP allows inflectional properties to be accorded to the verbs and nouns in the lexicon.

b) The Movements

The verb “arechesere” undergoes three movements first from the base position to the TNS head to feature check for the right tense, then to the TON. Head to feature check for the right tone then to AGRs head to feature check for the right agreement. “Mary” undergoes one movement from the spec position of the base VP to the spec head of the AGRsP to feature check for the right agreement.

The Recent Past

The recent past tense is morphologically marked by ‘re’ but determined by the right tone. The recent past deals with actions that took place a few hours past and can run up to a few weeks before the distant past. The recent past has tone pattern where the tone changes from low- high on the first syllable and low on the subsequent syllables as shown below.

2a) John-n-ǎ- rē-èy-è
 John-foc-AGRs -Ptns – eat – fv
 ‘John ate’ (recent past)

a) Creation of Heads

In this case; the FOC. Head is created to feature check for the right focus the tense head has to be created where the verb root has to be checked by the abstract features, AGRs and TNS. The TON head is created because there is use of morphological tone that gives the recent past tense. The morpho-syntactic nature of the MP allows inflectional properties to be accorded to the verbs and nouns in the lexicon.

b) The Movements

The verb “Nareeye” undergoes three movements from the base position of the VP to the TNS head to feature check for the right tense, then to the AGRs head to check for the right agreement with the subject and finally to the focus head to check for the right focus, tone head is also created to check for the right tone for the recent past tense .John undergoes two movements from spec in VP position to the spec in the AGR_s P to check for the agreement and finally to the spec under FOC. P.

The Distant Past

The distant past indicates events from one month ago into the infinite past. It is marked by affixation, that is marked by the prefix ‘re’. The tone distinguishes this tense from the recent past. The first syllable has low- high tone while the subsequent syllables are high tones. The tone patterns that determine the distant past tense are shown below

2b) John n – ǎ – re-ey-e ˘ ˘ ˘
 John foc - AGRs- ptns – eat – fv

'John ate' (distant past)

a) Creation of Heads

In this case the FOC. Head is created to feature check for the right focus the tense head has to be created where the verb root has to be checked by the abstract features, AGRs and TNS. The TON head is created because there is use of morphological tone that gives the distant past tense. The morpho-syntactic nature of the MP allows inflectional properties to be accorded to the verbs and nouns in the lexicon.

b) The Movements

The verb "Nareeye" undergoes three movements from the base position of the VP to the TNS head to feature check for the right tense, then to the AGRs head to check for the right agreement with the subject and finally to the focus head to check for the right focus, tone head is also created to check for the right tone for the distant past tense .John undergoes two movements from spec in VP position to the spec in the AGR_s P to check for the agreement and finally to the spec under FOC. P.

The Non Past Tense

The non past tense is not overtly marked in Igikuria. According to Comrie (1985:36), the present tense is '... a coincidence of the time of the situation and the present moment...' In Igikuria this tense co-occurs with the imperfective aspect 'are'. In Igikuria the non past tense refers to events that are happening at the time of speaking.

The Present

It is not easy to divorce the present from aspectual function. The sentences below shows the non – past tense in Igikuria. There is no overt morpheme marker for the present tense
The verb "nkoragera" undergoes three movements first from the base position of the VP to the TNS head to feature check for the present tense, then it moves to the AGR head to feature check for the agreement with the subject and finally moves to the FOC. Head to check for the right focus. The aspect 'are' undergoes one movement from spec VP base position to the aspect head to check for the right aspect. John undergoes two movements from the spec VP to the spec AGR_S P to check for the right agreement and finally to the spec FOC. P, for the right focus.

- 3) Thatha n –ko – θ-rug – a – are
Mother-Foc - AGRs -θ -eat – fv – Asp.
'Mother is cooking' (right now)

a) Creation of Heads

The tense head is not created because there is no morpheme marker for tense hence the use of the zero morph. In structure building, a primary principle of the MP is the formation of heads where only visibly marked morphemes are moved for feature checking in positions that are checking domains. Verb features are all checked for elimination since the MP does not allow morphological features that are not licensed. This is to meet the requirements of the Principle of Full Interpretation and the Principle of Economy .The ASP head is created to take care of the

aspect *are* that is used. AGRs head is created to take care of the agreement. The morpho-syntactic nature of the MP allows inflectional properties to be accorded to the verbs and nouns in the lexicon.

b) The Movements

The verb “*nkoruga*” undergoes two movements, first from the base position of the VP to the AGRs head to feature check for the right agreement, then to the FOC head for the right focus.

Then ‘are’ undergoes one movement from the VP position to the aspect head to feature check for

the right aspect. The noun ‘Mother’ moves twice from the spec VP to the spec under AGRsP to feature check for the right agreement then to the Spec under FOC. P to feature check for the right focus.

The Future

The non past in the future implies that an action/event is yet to take place. According to Comrie (1985:36) non past tense in the future is...“Location of the situation after the present moment.”

The Igikuria language distinguishes two categories of future tense; the immediate future and the distant future. The auxiliary *narayi* is used for immediate future while *nariya* is used for distant future. In the verb complex the morpheme *-re-* marks future tense whereby low tone on the syllables bring out immediate future while high tone on the syllables bring out distant future

5.3 The immediate future

In Igikuria language, immediate future means that events will occur a few moments from now.

The auxiliary form ‘*narayi*’ which means is going/will is introduced as a separate auxiliary. ‘*narayi*’ comes before the verb complex. According to the procrastination principle of the Minimalist Program there will be need to create a head for ‘*narayi*’ under modal auxiliaries in order to capture it in the sentence structure. In using the morpheme marker *-ra-*, however, the intonation pattern differentiates the immediate future from distant future. In the immediate future low tones are used on the syllables as shown on sentence (41b) below.

. The sentence below shows how this would be captured in the Minimalist Program in a case where *narayi* is used.

- 4) John *narayi* ko – rager – a
John *Mod* - AGRs -eat – fv
‘John is going to/will eat’ (immediate future)

a) Creation of Heads

The tense head is not created because there is no morpheme marker for tense however the Mod. Head is created to capture the auxiliary *narayi* in structure building; the primary principle of the MP is the formation of heads where only visibly marked morphemes are moved for feature checking in positions that are checking domains. Verb features are all checked for elimination since the MP does not allow morphological features that are not licensed. The AGRs head is also created to take care of the agreement. Spec heads are created under VP and Mod phrase to take care of the noun phrase (John).

b) The Movements

The verb “koragera” undergoes one movement, first from the VP base position to the AGRs head to feature check for the right agreement. The modal auxiliary marker of the immediate future tense ‘narayi’ undergoes one movement from the VP position to Mod head to feature check for the right future tense (immediate future). The noun John undergoes one movement from the Spec VP base position to Spec Mod. p to feature check for the agreement. It should also be noted that Mod head has been created instead of Aux head because in the Minimalist Program, the Aux no longer exists and even INFL no longer exists (Pollock, 1989).

A part from using auxiliary to express immediate future, Igikuria language also uses morpheme marker –ra- to express future tense ‘A language may have a grammatical category that expresses time reference in which case we say a language has tense. Many languages lack tense i.e. do not have grammaticalised time reference though probably all languages can lexicalize time reference’ (Comrie, 1976:6). The Igikuria language has the ability to lexicalize tense i.e. using the auxiliary it can also grammaticalise tense using the morpheme marker –ra-, however, the tone pattern differentiates the immediate future from distant future. In the immediate future low tones are used on the syllables as shown below.

- 5) M̃ary n-à-ra`cheser-e
Mary Foc-AGRs-TNS-play -fv
‘Mary will play’ (immediate future)

a) Creation of Heads

In this case the FOC. Head is created to feature check for the right focus the tense head has to be created where the verb root has to be checked by the abstract features, AGRs and TNS. The TON head is created because there is use of morphological tone that gives the immediate future tense. The morpho-syntactic nature of the MP allows inflectional properties to be accorded to the verbs and nouns in the lexicon.

b) The Movements

The verb “Narachesere” undergoes three movements from the base position of the VP to the TNS head to feature check for the right tense, then to the AGRs head to check for the right agreement with the subject and finally to the focus head to check for the right focus, tone head is also created to check for the right tone for the immediate future tense. Mary undergoes two movements from spec in VP position to the spec in the AGR_s P to check for the agreement and finally to the spec under FOC. P.

5.4 The distant future

The Igikuria language has a distant future tense. This indicates that events will take place within one week and goes into the infinite future. In Igikuria the distant future is marked by introduction of ‘nariya’ which differentiates this tense from immediate future. According to the Minimalist Program there will be need to create a Mood head so as to present its movement, the distant future Mod. Comes before the verb complex and it’s not a prefix of the verb. In using the morpheme marker –ra-, however, the intonation pattern differentiates the immediate future from distant future. In the distant future high tones are used on the syllables as shown on

sentence sentence below indicates how the distant future is illustrated in the Minimalist Program when *nariya* is used.

- 6) John *nariya* ko - rager – a
John Mod-AGRs – eat – fv
'John is going to/will eat' (distant future)

a) Creation of Heads

The tense head is not created because there is no morpheme marker for tense however the Mod. Head is created to capture the auxiliary *nariya* in structure building; the primary principle of the MP is the formation of heads where only visibly marked morphemes are moved for feature checking in positions that are checking domains. Verb features are all checked for elimination since the MP does not allow morphological features that are not licensed. The AGRs head is also created to take care of the agreement. Spec heads are created under VP and Mod phrase to take care of the noun phrase (John).

b) The Movements

The verb “*koragera*” undergoes one movement, first from the VP base position to the AGRs head to feature check for the right agreement. The modal auxiliary marker of the distant future tense ‘*nariya*’ undergoes one movement from the VP position to Mod head to feature check for the right future tense (distant future). The noun John undergoes one movement from the Spec VP base position to Spec Mod. p to feature check for the agreement. it should also be noted that Mod head has been created instead of Aux head because in the Minimalist Program, the Aux no longer exists and even INFL no longer exists (Pollock: 1989).

A part from using auxiliary to express distant future, Igikuria language also uses morpheme marker *-ra-* to express distant future. In the distant future high tones are used on the syllables as shown below.

- 7) Mary n-á-rá-chésér-é
Mary Foc-AGRs-TNS-play -fv
'Mary will play' (distant future)

a) Creation of Heads

In this case the FOC. Head is created to feature check for the right focus the tense head has to be created where the verb root has to be checked by the abstract features, AGRs and TNS. The TON head is created because there is use of morphological tone that gives the distant future tense. The morpho-syntactic nature of the MP allows inflectional properties to be accorded to the verbs and nouns in the lexicon.

b) The Movements

The verb “*Narachesere*” undergoes three movements from the base position of the VP to the TNS head to feature check for the right tense, then to the AGRs head to check for the right agreement with the subject and finally to the focus head to check for the right focus, tone head is also created to check for the right tone for the distant future tense .Mary undergoes two

movements from spec in VP position to the spec in the AGR_s P to check for the agreement and finally to the spec under FOC. P.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study reveals that the Igikuria tense is divided into past and non past. The past is further divided into immediate past, recent past and distant past. The non past is divided into present and future. The future is further divided into immediate future and distant future. The distinction amongst immediate past, recent past and the distant past is based on the tone patterns. The present tense in Igikuria indicates the co-occurrence of aspect and tense. The distant future is marked by auxiliary ‘nariya’ while the immediate future is marked by auxiliary ‘narayi’. The morpheme –ra- can also be used to mark future tense while tone differentiates between immediate future and distant future. The Minimalist Program takes care of the Igikuria tense for instance the morpheme markers *re* and *ra* prompts the creation of heads. The features of the verbs also are raised to check for the features of the verb complex. The tense that does not have overt morpheme markers e.g. the present tense does not allow for creation of the head since the principle of economy does not allow unnecessary heads. The following diagram shows the summary of Igikuria tenses.

Distant past	Recent past	Immediate past
John n – ǎ – r̄e – ḡey – é John ate	John n – ǎ – r̄è – ḡèy – è John ate	John n – â – r̄è – ḡèy – è John ate
The Present		
The present	Immediate future	Distant future
John n – ku – rager – a – are John eating (right now)	John narayi ko – rager – a (John is going /will eat) Mary n – à – r̄à – ch̄èser – è (Mary will play)	John nariya ko – rager – a (John is going /will eat) Mary n – á – r̄á – ch̄èser – é (Mary will play)

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