

Aspect marking strategies in Igala

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Introduction. It has been argued by Travis (2010) that there is an inflectional domain embedded within the vP, namely *Inner Aspect*, and that these inflectional categories are used to mark telicity in languages in which accomplishments are atelic. In this paper, I examine the morpheme $f(i)$ in Igala (Benue-Congo), an isolating tenseless language of Nigeria. I argue that $f(i)$ (i) is a functional category within the vP (not above it) and (ii) carries perfective meaning. My analysis provides evidence for the existence of Inner Aspect in Igala.

Syntax of $f(i)$. In contrast to the progressive and imperfective aspects, $f(i)$ does not behave like a regular aspectual morpheme: it is incompatible with intransitive verbs it causes a change in word order, from VO to OV (compare progressive in (1) with $f(i)$ in (3) below). Moreover, $f(i)$ can co-occur with the future/imperfective morpheme \check{a} , as in (2).

- (1) ú nâ k(ɔ) ótākīdā (2) òná nă: tʃɛ f(i) òdz(e) àbátʃà hì
1SG PROG write book tomorrow 1SG.IPFV already PERF mashed cassava cook
'I was writing a book.' 'Tomorrow I will have cooked mashed cassava.'

Based on the word order change and the presence of higher aspectual heads, I argue that $f(i)$ is in a lower position than other aspectual morphemes, concretely in little-*v*. In constructions without $f(i)$, the verb moves to *v*, whereas no movement occurs when $f(i)$ occupies *v*.

Perfective meaning. Completed events in Igala occur with $f(i)$, which cannot be used in ongoing or habitual situations, as illustrated in (3). Most perfectives are bounded events, with initial and final points within the reference time (Kratzer 1998). In structures with $f(i)$, the event occurs completely within the time frame of an adverbial phrase, as in (4) (ungrammatical without $f(i)$).

- (3) ù f(i) òdz(e) àbátʃà hì (4) í f(i) ùŋì ŋ^wū k^wɔ̄ nă nâ gò
1SG PERF morsel cassava cook 3SG PERF house 3SG.POSS paint 1SG PROG look
'I {have cooked}/{*habitually cook}/
{*am cooking} mashed cassava.' 'She painted her house while I watched.'

Perfectives may have termination or culmination entailments (Toews 2015). Perfectives of atelic verbs may lack final points as opposed to telic verbs which have culmination/termination entailments (Bar-el 2005, Toews 2015). This distinction holds in Igala; $f(i)$ occurs in contexts such as (a) *She danced all night but she's not finished*, but not in (b) *#I drew a circle but I'm not finished*. Travis argues that events lack telicity in Malagasy (Austronesian) and that telic entailment is created by adding an Inner Aspect within the vP. Igala has a very similar morpheme, but (b) shows that this language does have telic verbs, contrary to Malagasy.

Proposal. Given that $f(i)$ carries perfective meaning, occurs with a subset of verbs, triggers word order change and seems very low in the structure, I propose that it is a functional head within the vP. My proposal suggests that Inner Aspect is not found only in languages in which all verbs are atelic. Finally, $f(i)$ is similar to the Mandarin *ba*-construction, often used in sentences with perfective meaning (Liu 1997). Just like $f(i)$, *ba* requires an object (Sun 2018) and triggers word order change (Sybesma 1992). Both Sybesma and Travis argue that *ba* is within the vP.

Conclusion. In this paper, I analyse the morpheme $f(i)$ in Igala as a morpheme with perfective meaning occupying a vP-internal position. My analysis provides cross-linguistic support for the existence of Inner Aspect and shows close similarities between aspect marking strategies in unrelated isolating languages.

References

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