



The Morphophonemics of Tense and Aspects in Wana Dialect of Eggon Language in Contrast With English Language

Mwanti Rebecca Sunday^{1*}; Prof Adewole A. Alagbe Ph.D²

¹ Federal University of Education, Pankshin

² Department of English Faculty of Arts, Nasarawa State University, Keffi

ARTICLE'S INFO

Article No.: 061925105

Type: Research

Full Text: [PDF](#), [PHP](#), [EPUB](#), [MP3](#)

DOI: [10.15580/gjllr.2025.1.061925105](https://doi.org/10.15580/gjllr.2025.1.061925105)

Accepted: 20/06/2025

Published: 29/06/2025

Keywords: Morphophonemic, tense and aspects, Eggon, English

*Corresponding Author

Mwanti Rebecca Sunday

E-mail: mwantirebecca@gmail.com

Phone: 08036101168

Article's QR code



ABSTRACT

This study examines the differences and similarities in the morphophonemics of tense and aspects in Wana Dialect of Eggon language in contrast with English language. The study adopts the contrastive analysis theory and Reichenbach theory of tense to describe the tense and aspects of the two language of study. Data is collected from community meetings attended by the researcher as a passive observer. Structured sentences of the native speakers of Wana Dialect of Eggon language from villages of Kagbu-Wana, Tkpa and Aruwa-wayo are translated to English language and analyzed through the use of qualitative data analysis method. The analysis reveals that there is a marked difference in the morphological and phonemic processes of the two languages. Although the two Languages have two basic tenses, there are still differences between the two. English has the present and the past tense, Eggon has the future and the non-future tense. In English Language, tense is typically a morphological category of the verb. Verbs in English undergo the process of inflection for both regular and irregular verbs to form the past and present tense. The verbs are inflected for person, number and tense through the use of suffixation. Thus, it is possible to have morphological changes on the verb to form the present and the past tense in English but not future tense because there is no morphological change to indicate the future. Eggon Language like English has two basic tense distinction; the future and the non-future but tense in Eggon Language is not morphologically marked. Tense is marked by tone changes on the verb agreement prefix. The future is marked by a 'H' (high) tone and non-future is marked by 'M' (mid) tone on the agreement prefix which always reflects on the verbs. The prefixes are the Eggon vowel phonemes made up of a seven-vowel system. Understanding or lack of understanding these differences in the morphological process of the two languages can serve to enhance or impede the learning of English as L2.

INTRODUCTION

Language is as old as man and very important to man and his environment. It plays a very significant role in the life of man. The entire world bubbles and remains active as a result of language. It is the greatest gift of God to mankind and the most unique endowment of man. Through language, people are able to live together to interact and express their thoughts and feelings. The world is in a way, held together because people learn or acquire each other's language thereby maintaining constant interaction and relationship. Language helps mankind to stay connected. Even though the precise origin of language has remained a matter of speculation, a few scholars have provided technical definition of language among whom are Sapir (18) who sees language as ... a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotion and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. Gimson (4-5) describes language as ... a system of conventional symbols used for communication covers a system of significant sound units, the inflection and the arrangement of words and association of meaning with words. Similarly Hall (158) says that language is ... the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral-auditory arbitrary symbols. The definition above show that some features are common to all languages. These are the arbitrary and conventional nature, the non-instinctiveness ie it can be learned or acquired and the

fact that language is essentially used among human beings.

Researchers are usually interested in investigating the features of language that are not common to all languages such as identified in the definition by Gimson which include the inflection and arrangement of words and association of meaning with words which linguists consider as language specific phenomenon. This study therefore attempts to show the relationship or contrast in the morphological system of the tense and aspects of English and Eggon languages. The study basically describes how tense and aspects are morphologically formed in Eggon in contrast with English language. It attempts to answer the questions to what extent are the morphology of the tense and aspects of English and Eggon language similar or different? What difficulties do Eggon native speakers of English have regarding the use of English (morphology) tense and aspect? It is hoped that adequate knowledge of the morphology of tense and aspects is important in the acquisition of English as a second language especially for Eggon native speakers as they desire to possess effective communication skills in English as a second language.

English language wields an enormous control over the Nigeria society. It is not only the pivot on which formal and informal communication in Nigeria rotates, its overwhelming acceptance and presence in the Nigeria society exerts pressure on indigenous languages. It is the official language of government, language of

instruction in school and language of even informal communication in our homes. These functions of English and its elevated position in the Nigeria society and its preeminence as a global language underscore the need for the average Nigerian particularly learners to attain an appreciable level of proficiency in their use of English. In spite of duration for studying and using English as a Language of instruction and subject of study, many Nigerians still have problems in the use of English tense and aspect. Alagbe & Zayol (52) agree with this observation as they state that ... tense presents one of the most complicated and slippery problems to language users ,especially English. The fact that the verb must agree with the subject of the sentence encumbers many students performance.

The History of Eggon Language - Wana Dialect and People

The Eggon Language is spoken by a large number of people in South-west of Nasarawa State in central Nigeria. These represent the present Local Government Area of Akwanga, Lafia, Nasarawa –Eggon and Kagbu Wana. They stretch as far south as Lafia and west of Akwanga as far as the railway line. They are bordered on the north by the Mada and to the south by the Migili and the Alago. The Eggon people were known as Madan Dutse. The Eggon lived in the Mada hills south of Akwanga in the pre-colonial period. The exact number of speakers is unknown but the most recent data on the population of Eggon by Eberhard , Charles , and Gary as cited by Timothy (4) estimate the population of Eggon to be 254,000 .

The Eggon people live in Nasarawa Eggon Local Government Area (formerly part of Akwanga LGA) of former plateau state but currently Nasarawa State. The Eggon Ethnic group is spread all over Nasarawa Eggon and over other LGAs, namely Akwanga, Lafia,Awe and Obi all in current day Nasarawa State. They are bordered by the Migili to the south, some Alago (Assakio) groups to the east, and the Mada and Nungu (Rindre) to the north. The Eggon dialects are divided into twenty-five mutually comprehensible dialects and atwenty-sixth-madantara,said to be unintelligible without special learning. Some of the dialects are, Eggon Wangibi, Ikka, Wana, Lizzi, Ezzen, Arikpa. These dialects of the Eggon people belong to the family of languages classified as the Benue Congo Group of the languages. There have been several classifications of Eggon language as Benue and Jukunoid group but the recent grouping by Blench (8) says Eggon is better classified as belonging to a Plateau group. Blench groups Jijilic , Migili , Ake and Eggon in what he refers to as the Jijilic – Eggonic languages as listed in an article Nominal affixes and number marking in the Plateau languages of Central Nigeria (155)

The Concept of Morphology

The Websters dictionary defines morphology as the scientific study of the form and structure of words usually with regard to function especially in linguistics, it is the study of the internal structure of morphemes (words and their semantic building blocks). Many languages lack a fixed order of the kind that one finds in English. It examines how words are formed and varied. Also Wikipedia adds that morphology is the study of words including the principles by which they are formed and how they relate to one another within a language. It studies how parts of words called morphemes are combined to form phrases and sentences. The Oxford Research Encyclopedia states that tense morphology situates events along a timeline with respect to some point of reference most often the moment of speaking. Mithun (548) explains that...'Distinction of time are among the most common notions expressed in morphology cross-linguistically. But the invention of distinctions marked in individual languages are also varied. Some languages have few if any morphology markers that pertain to time. While others have extensive sets. Certain categories do recur pervasively across languages but even these can vary subtly or even substantially in their uses and they may be optional or obligatory.

Furthermore, the grammar of time is traditionally divided into two domains. Tense and aspects. Tense locates situations in time. Tense markers place them along a timeline with respect to some point of reference, a deictic center. The most common point is the moment of speech. Many languages have just three tense categories. Past for situations before the time of speech, present for those overlapping with the moment of speech, and future, for those subsequent to the moment of speech. But many languages have no morphological tense, some have just two categories and some have many more. In some languages morphological distinctions correspond fairly closely to identifiable times. There may, for example, be a today (hodiernal) present that contrasts with a yesterday (hesternal) past. In other languages tense distinctions are more fluid. sA recent past might be interpreted as some time earlier today for a sentence meaning 'I ate a banana,' but within the last few months for a sentence meaning ' he returned from the US .' Language also vary in the mobility of the deictic center. In some languages tense distinctions are systematically calibrated with respect to the moment of speaking. In others, the deictic center may shift. It may be established by the matrix clause in a complex sentence, or it may be established by a large topic of discussion. Tense is most often a verbal category because verbs generally portray the most dynamic elements of a situation, but a number of languages distinguish tense on nouns. Aspect characterizes the internal temporary structure of a situation. There may be different forms of a verb 'eat', for example in sentences meaning I ate potatoe chips, I was eating potatoe chips, I used to eat potatoe chips, though all are past tense. They may pick out one phase of the situation with different forms for 'I took a bite' I nibbled and 'I kept

eating'. Morphological aspect distinctions are usually marked on verbs but in some languages they can be marked on nominals too.

Mithun again explains that in some languages there is a clear separation between the two: tense is expressed in one part of the morphology, and aspect in another. But often a single marker conveys both. A single suffix might mark both past tense and progressive aspect in a sentence meaning 'I was eating' for example. A tense distinction may be made only in a particular aspect and or a certain aspect distinction marked only in a particular tense. The meaning of markers can shift over time, as speakers apply them to new context, and as new markers enter the system, taking over some of their functions. Markers can shift for example from aspect to tense, or from derivation to inflection. The gradelessness of such development underline the cross linguistic differences we find in tense and aspects categories.

Morphologically English has only two tenses.

- 1 the present (or non-past) as in he goes.
- 2 the past (or preterite) as in he went.

The non-past usually reference the future as in the bus leaves tomorrow.

Morphophonemic Rule

Languages have a phonological system that governs how symbols are used to form sequences known as morphemes or words and syntactic system that governs how morphemes and words are combined to form phrases and sentences. The word formation process of languages is unique because no two languages are the same. According to Alagbe & Zayol (10) a morpheme is the smallest unit of grammatical structure. Citing Fromkin & Rodman (43), they further explain that morphemes are the minimal units of grammatical analysis, the units of the lowest rank out of which words, units of the next higher rank are composed. The morpheme being the smallest indivisible meaningful unit of language. Morpheme is derived from the Greek word 'morphē' meaning form, it is the basic parts of a complex word ... the different building blocks that make it according to Akmajian et al (16) as cited by Alagbe & Zayol (10). Fromkin and Rodman further described the morpheme as "the minimal linguistic sign, a grammatical unit in which there is an arbitrary union of a sound and meaning which cannot be further analysed". (142) the implication of this description of the morpheme by Fromkin and Rodman as summarized by Alagbe & Zayol (10) is that every word in every language is a composition of one or more than one morpheme.

The morphemes are also made up of morphs as explained by Ndimele (5) in Alagbe & Zayol (10) that morphemes are the actual morphological forms

consisting of a sequence of zero, one or more discrete units and which are used to realize recurrent distinctive sound, sequence of sound or no sound at all, used to represent the more abstract unit morpheme... All the morphs that represent one morpheme are referred to as its allomorphs. That is allomorphs are variant forms of a morpheme".

The morpheme is classified into types; these are the free, or root, or base (which is independent) morpheme and the bound or inflectional (which is subordinate to the free morpheme). Bound morphemes are the affixes which are either prefixes, infixes or suffixes.

The Concept and Function of the English Tense and Aspects

Tense is one of the most important system of the verbal group in English. The verbs play a very critical role in every English sentence the reason is that no sentence is complete without the verb or verb phrases as they indicate the time of the action in the sentence. It is this time indication that is referred to as tense. Tense can be seen as a correspondence between a form of the verb and a given time reference. Time is a universal, non-linguistic concept with three divisions i.e past, present and future, by tense we understand the correspondence between the form of the verb and concept of time. Aspect concerns the manner in which the verbal action is experienced or regarded (for example as completed or in progress), while mood relates the verbal action to such conditions as certainty, obligation, necessity possibility to a great extent these three categories (tense aspect and mood) impinge on each other in particular the expression of time present and past cannot be considered separately from aspect, and the expression of the future is closely bound up with mood. Quirk and Greenbaum (40).

Since the concepts of tense and aspect are closely related, and thus cannot be distinctly treated separately especially in particular, the expression of the present and past time cannot be considered separately from aspect and expression of future time is connected to mood which relates the action of the verb to such conditions as certainty, obligation, necessity and possibility; further discussion on tense, aspect and mood will be examined together according to the interrelationships.

a. Tense and aspects

English has two basic tenses the present tense usually refers to the present time and the past tense usually refers to the past time. For example Quirk & Greenbaum (41)

Simple Present	Complex work	progressive Am working - Was working -	Present past
Past	Wrote	Perfective Have written - Had written -	(Present) perfect (past) perfect
		Perfect progressive Have been writing Had been writing	(Present) perfect (past) perfect

Future Time

There is no future tense since there are no formal time changes in the verbs that signal future. Future time is indicated in a number of ways, as the following examples show.

1. By using the modal auxiliaries "shall" and "will":
We shall go to the market later.
They will send for the workers tomorrow.

2. By using the form 'be going + full infinitive':
We are going to beat their team.
Aisha is going to do well in the examination.

Aspects

Aspect is another important feature of the verb in English. Aspect indicates whether the action expressed by the verb is continuous or still in progress (progressive) or whether it has been completed (perfective). Basically, therefore, there are two aspects in English: the progressive and the perfective aspects. We will illustrate them.

Progressive Aspect

This indicates that an action is in progress or is continuous. It is formed by combining a form of the verb he (**am, is, are, was, and were**) with the main verb in the present participle form; (v-ing) e.g.:

- *They are praying now. (Present progressive)*
- *They were working when he came. (Past progressive)*

Perfective Aspect

The perfective aspect indicates that an action has been completed. It is formed by combining a form of 'have' with the main verb in the past participle form

- *I have done the work. (Present perfective)*
- *I had done the work. (Past perfective)*

- Sometimes the progressive and the perfective may be combined in the verb phrase:

- *I have been teaching for ten years. (Present perfect progressive)*
- *She had been cooking for two hours before we arrived. (Past perfective progressive)*

Empirical Review

Ibbi (110-124) in a critical analysis of Existing theories on the tense and aspect of English, reviewed some scholarly views to improve understanding and uses of tense- aspect, especially for the purpose of teaching English as a second language. The scholarly views include those of traditional, structural and transformational generative grammarians, offering an educative approach to the investigation of tense. Ibbi believes that such a model can be adequately used to examine the use of tense of most learners native language and that of English. Ibbi observes that tense is arguably one of the most difficult aspects of language learning, teaching and use in both L1 and L2 contexts and that the difficulty is more pronounced with the linguistic reality that the concept is conveyed in different ways in given human languages. Linguistic scholars have attempted to provide explanations or distinction for it in a bid to enhance language learning and acquisition yet these explanations have depended on the nebulous nature of the concept (110). Ibbi's conclusion agrees with this research work as it affirms the complexity and difficulty experienced by L2 learners in acquisition of the English tense and aspect as a result of their difference.

Alsalamy (270-282) in a study on Tense and Aspects Acquisition in L2 English by Native speakers of Arabic states in his findings that based on the contrastive Analysis, Arabic speakers would encounter many difficulties to include verbs whereas Arabic verb form. The progression in Arabic can be expressed through the use of the imperfect which is also different from English. There is lack of one-to-one relationship between forms expressing tense and aspect in English and Arabic i.e present perfect, present continuous, past perfect and future perfect consequently this would lead to transfer from Arabic to English. However there is a one-to-one relationship between forms expressing the simple

present and simple past which may be easily acquired by Arabic native speakers. Eggon L2 speakers will be confronted by a lack of one on one relationship between English tense and aspect.

Unubi and Yusuf (425-439), in an investigation of selected derivational morphological processes in English, Hausa, Igala and some other languages of the world, the study analysed derivational morphological processes of selected parts of speech in the listed languages with particular emphasis on how they are used to form new lexemes i.e words that differ in syntactic category or in meaning from their base. It discussed how prefix, suffix, infix, interfix, circumfix, transfix and superfix and other morphological analysis of this study dealt mainly with lexis and not tenses and aspect.

Uwaezuoke and Ogunkeye (193-219), in a contrastive analysis of tense formation in Igbo and Yoruba. Implication on learners and teachers, found that there are differences in the processes of forming tenses in both languages for instance, Igbo language has indicative suffix-*rv* which may be deleted or optionally used with certain verbs in the present and obligatorily used for verbs in the past, but in Yoruba language, the present and past tense are unmarked. A hyphen is written between the future morpheme and the verb in Igbo, but Yoruba has a separate free morpheme to express the future. Also, in Igbo the 1st person singular pronoun and the 3rd person plural pronoun can come after the future morpheme – *ga* which is prefixed with ‘*a*’ followed by the prefixed verb root, but in Yoruba the subject pronouns come before the future morpheme. These areas of differences are predicated by contrastive analysis as constituting learning difficulties. This finding relates to the present study in the sense that, Igbo, Yoruba and Eggon tense formation differ morphologically with that of English language. Igbo, like Eggon language also uses vowel prefix on the verb root. Yoruba has a separate morpheme to mark the future. While Eggon uses tone to mark the future.

Timothy (1-75) in verbal morphosyntax of Eggon Language did an extensive and elaborate study on the morphological process of the various types of verbs in Eggon Language with particular reference to both the phonological and orthographic description. He also explained the use of prefixes and tone in verb morphology Timothy briefly described the verbs in relation to the tense and aspect where he identifies two tenses in Eggon Language non future and future with tone playing an important role in distinguishing the tenses. Timothy’s work and that of Blench have greatly shaped the direction and in-depth analysis in the present study which deals with only the tense and aspect of Eggon and English Language.

Jo-Wang (1-53) in a study, Time in a Language without Tense: The case of Chinese outlines a framework of the temporal interpretation in Chinese with a special focus on complement and relative clauses. Jo-Wang explains that not only does Chinese have no morphological tenses but there is no need to resort to

convert semantic features under a tense mode in order to interpret time in Chinese. Instead, it utilizes various elements such as the information provided by default aspect, the tense- aspect particles and pragmatic reasoning to determine the temporal interpretation of sentences. It is revealed that aspectual markers in Chinese play the same role that tense plays in tense languages (English). This implies that the Chinese phrase structure has ‘ASP P’ above ‘Vp’ but no ‘Tp’ is above ‘ASP P’. The relationship between Jo-Wang’s study and the present study is that Chinese like Eggon Language marks tense and aspects differently from English i.e Chinese is a language without tense while Eggon marks tense through the use of tone.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two theoretical framework: First on Bloomfield (1933), Fries’ (1945) and Lado (1957), Contrastive Analysis theory. This is a systematic comparison of learners languages and culture for effective language teaching. This is supported by behaviourists and structuralists like Brown (1980), who argued that “the principal barrier to second language acquisition is the interference of the first language system with the second language system “and” ... that second language learning basically involves the overcoming of the differences between the two linguistic systems- the native and target language”.

The second theory is Reichenbach’s 1947 theory of tense and its application in English. The theory consists of two aspects, a morphological aspect, namely a system of tenses encoded in verbs morphology and a semantic aspect dealing with the temporal location of the event or events depicted in one or more sentences; the meaning of the various tenses . Reichenbach suggested for English a semantic model the SRE system in which every tense is defined in terms of linear combination of three theoretical entities; Speech Time, Event Time, and Reference Time symbolized by SE and R .

METHODOLOGY

The research method that is adopted for this study is the qualitative research method. This is because qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data (e.g, text, video or audio) to understand opinions or experiences. It can be used to gather in-depth insight into a problem or generate new ideas for research. Qualitative research is commonly used in humanities and social sciences where the researcher investigates the phenomenon by describing and interpreting the data collected. The choice of qualitative research is to help the description of the variables. The researcher attended community meetings and church services as a passive observer to be able to get firsthand information. Structured sentences collected from the meetings are analyzed in the result section. The research adopted the purposive sampling method. The

sampling method used samples of structured sentences collected at the community meetings which were analyzed with emphasis on the tense and the aspect of the two languages since the research is based on the study of the tenses and aspects of English and Eggon Languages .The data was analyzed contrastively using the qualitative data analysis (QDA) this is the process of organizing, analyzing interpreting qualitative data –non numeric, conceptual information and user feedback. This is to capture theories and user feedback. It enabled the researcher to identify the actions to take to improve the language learner in this case the Eggon learner of English.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents the data collected from Eggon Language translated to English for a better understanding of the similarities and differences that exist between the morphological processes of the tense and aspects of Eggon and English languages.

Tone, Tense and Aspects in Wana Dialect of Eggon Language

Tone is the use of pitch in language to distinguish lexical or grammatical meaning. Tone plays a very critical role in Eggon Language. Tense is realised through the use of tone. According to Blench (4) Eggon Language has three (3) contrastive tone levels and three contours , there are both lexical and grammatical tones in the language identified as ‘H’- high tone ‘M’- mid tone- low tone, ‘F’-HL falling tone, ‘R’-LH rising tone and ‘HM’-high- mid falling tone Timothy (16). Similarly, variation in the tone of lexical items equals variation in meaning. The H (high) tone reflects across both nouns and verbs in Eggon Language, verbs do not take M tone except verbs that indicate the perfective, imperative and the progressive are strictly marked by tone.

Tense in Eggon language is not morphologically marked rather it is marked by tone change on the verb agreement prefix which are the vowels. Eggon Language has two tense distinctions as identified by Blench (8) and Timothy (361); they are future and non-future.

Table 1: Eggon seven Vowel phonemes system Blench (4)

	Front	Middle	Back
Close	i		u
Close-mid	(e)		(o)
Open mid	ɛ	ɔ	
Open		a	

These vowels with exception of exclamatory words are used morphologically as verb prefixes. The sounds when found in words, /a/ /ɛ/ and /o/ have allomorphs as shown on the table but these rules do not apply on verbs which are mostly one syllable words; though the verbs hardly

allow close-mid vowels but can apply to words with more than one syllable . These vowels are in brackets because they are best classified as rare vowels. Timothy (15).

The future is marked by a H (high) tone and the non-future is marked by a M (mid) tone on the agreement prefix which always reflects on verbs. The pre-fixes are the Eggon vowel phonemes which is a seven-vowel system Blench (4). The examples below show the three verb classes with the prefixes and their tonal contrasts, the tones are usually constant. The three classes of verbs are presented on the table below according to their lexical tones. First group of verbs take ‘H’ tone, the second ‘L’ and the third group a ‘LH’ contour. Adopted from Timothy (31)

Table 2: Root forms of Eggon monosyllabic verbs.

Tone	Eggon verb	Gloss
H	/ka’/	To see
	/lu’/	To speak
	/li’/	To carry
L	/dzu/	To sit
	/mbzi/	To build
	/lma`/	To bark
	/hwa`/	To clean
LH	/lgj/	To return
	/gma`/	To break
	/ksɔ~/	To rise

The next table shows examples of verbs that are not morphologically derived. These verbs are made up of a V+N structure and are interpreted as a single but complex unit, they are pronounced as a single unit along with the prefix i.e the vowel prefix.

Table 3: Complex verb stems

Eggon verb	Gloss
ʃenɔ akpɔ	to lie
tnuàgà	to think
tiégba	to jump
tsí enɔla	to read
nze ènú	to sleep
tʃkúresu	to wrestle
wlũr aji	to be wicked
ci àbgo	to leave
fàɔlú	to pray
vúàí	to pain
ri edze	to grow old
fúr èhà	to doubt
tspiàji	to be spoilt
tspi esɔhàji	to be angry

In the actual pronunciation of these words some of the vowels undergo ellipsis (they are dropped).

Example sentences showing tone changes for the tense and aspects are presented in the table below.

1.	me ʃko gimi la ɔmba he	I greet you (pl)
2.	me ê vye ba gimi gnu ɔzume	I am happy that you hear (answer) my call
3.	areŋ à-bà íʃki aŋye	Chief have come (for) meeting today
4.	areŋ à-bà íʃki aŋye	Chief will come (for) meeting today
5.	areŋ à-bà íʃki ba aci	Chief will come (for) meeting tomorrow
6.	ɔgbu à-bà	Rain have fall
7.	ɔnzɔ àgmǎ	River have overflow(ed)s (break)
8.	ɔzŋe à tsíàjí	Road have spoil
9.	giê bime ba gi ŋuɔɔŋe kpo	we have agree(d) to repair road
10.	gi ê zga ɔnda sati bà ɔrin bà ɔha bà aci bà gi ê kpo ɔtum hê ló	we have set first Saturday of the month to do the work
11.	gi ê kzǎ ɔtum lo êklj	we have finish the work mid tone
12.	moa à jà kpo ɔtum bàngàgyê	they have been work(ing) since

The sentences are sampled from the discussion of native Eggon speakers at village meetings held at Takpa village and Kagbu Wana.

FINDINGS

The major findings of this study indicate that sentences 1 and 2 in Eggon language show example of the simple present tense. The vowel /è/ pronounced with a 'M' tone marks the present tense verb to be 'am' in sentence 2 while sentence 1, the subject 'me' (I am) begins with the 'M' tone which also flows to the end of the sentence making it possible to realise the simple present tense. In most cases the simple present tense is not easily distinguished from the past tense earlier mentioned that Eggon has only two tense distinction i.e future marked by a H (high) tone and non-future marked by a M (mid) tone on the agreement prefix which always reflect on the verb.

In sentences 3, 9 and 10 the 'M' tone is used on both the prefix 'à' and the verb 'bà' to form the past tense. In sentence 4 and 6 the 'H' tone on the prefix a and 'M' tone on the verb bā is used to form the progressive aspect. In sentence 5, the 'LH' tone on the prefix ǎ and 'H' tone on the verb 'ba'. In sentence 7 and 8 both the 'ǎ' prefix and ǎ prefix and the ǎ in the verb gmā (break) are marked with the 'LH' tone.

In sentence 11 the 'M' tone flows from the beginning to the end of the sentence with the word êkhǎ which means finished to mark completed action (past perfect aspect)

In sentence 12 the 'M' tone flows from the prefix ê to the progressive marker 'là' and also to the verb kpǎ (do) tum (work) and bànyànyê (since), this marks the present continuous aspect.

Worthy of note is the fact that the vowel prefixes of the verbs are usually in harmony with the vowel in the subject pronoun of the sentence as exemplified below.

Me ê	I am
aŋa à	he/she is
ŋo ó	you /s/ are
gimi ê	you /pl/ are
amo à	they are
gi ê	we are

On the whole the tone markers are very important as explained by Timothy (2) the punctuation marks must be used as part of verbs phonologically and that they do not behave as separate words.

The foregoing findings have implications for the Eggon L2 acquisition of English Language. The Eggon speaker may not be able to approximate the morphological changes of the English verb to form tense particularly for the second person singular of the present tense and the "ed" suffix of the past tense. Past tense is formed by adding the "ed" suffix to the base of verbs this "ed" suffix has three allomorphs of the past morphemes which are in complimentary distribution and where one occurs the other does not. Their pronunciations depend on the type of sound proceeding it. These allomorphs are: /t/, /d/ and /ɪd/. The study shows that unlike English language Eggon tense is not morphologically marked it is tone marked with only future and non-future hence, the phenomenon of English transfer is a common feature with Eggon native speakers of English as a L2. The verb inflection 's' (for the second person singular) 't', 'ed' and 'en' inflections are usually omitted or misplaced in some cases leading to negative transfer from the L1 to L2. Eggon native speakers may construct wrong sentences because of the differences in the tense and aspect morphology of English and Eggon languages. The English verbs are inflected for tense and aspects but Eggon verbs are static and modified for past and future only through the use of tone thus Eggon speakers may fail to inflect the verbs with the past and participle suffixes-ed and en since in Eggon language vowel prefixes in addition to tone rather than suffixes are used to mark the past, progressive and perfective action. This situation would result in the transfer of the feature of tone in transliteration to English- There is no one on one relationship between the forms expressing tense and aspects in English and Eggon Languages hence Eggon L2 may experience difficulties in the use of English tense

and aspects since they are morphologically marked in English while Eggon is marked with the use of tone.

CONCLUSION

The morphophonemic analysis of the tense and aspects of English and Eggon Languages has revealed that there is a marked difference in the morphological and phonemic processes of the two languages. Although the two Languages have two basic tenses, there are still differences between the two. While English has the present and the past tense, Eggon has the future and the non-future tense. In English Language, tense is typically a morphological category of the verb. Verbs in English undergo the process of inflection for both regular and irregular verbs to form the past and present tense. The verbs are inflected for person, number and tense through the use of suffixation. Thus, it is possible to have morphological changes on the verb to form of the present and the past tense in English but not future tense because there is no morphological change to indicate the future.

Eggon Language like English has two basic tense distinction; the future and the non-future but tense in Eggon Language is not morphologically marked. Tense is marked by tone changes on the verb agreement prefix. The future is marked by a 'H' (high) tone and non-future is marked by 'M' (mid) tone on the agreement prefix which always reflects on the verbs. The prefixes are the Eggon vowel phonemes made up of a seven-vowel system already explained in the body of this work. Understanding these differences in the morphological process of the two languages can serve to enhance or impede the learning of English as a L2. The contrastive study of language enhances the pace at which teaching and learning processes can be tailored to achieve the success in L2 acquisition. This study has revealed the areas of similarities and difference that exist between the tense and aspects of English and Eggon Languages which can provide reference materials for native speakers of Eggon to improve in the acquisition and effective communication in English as a L2. Similarly research may be conducted on other linguistic areas of the language like the phrases and clauses.

REFERENCES

Alagbe, A.A & Zayol, M. *A Course Text in General English*. Siloam Publication; 200 Katsina Ala Road;Wukari; 2016

- Al Salami, M. Tense and Aspect Acquisition in L2 English by Native Speakers of Arabic. Arab World English Journal; International Peer Reviewed Journal ISSN: 2229-9327.4(2) pp270-282,2013
- Blench, R. *A Dictionary of Eggon Language*. <http://www.rogerblench.infor/Rbop.htm>, 2015.
- Blench Rogers.' *Nominal Affixes and Number Marking in the Plateau Languages of Central Nigeria East Benue- Congo, Nouns, Pronouns and verbs*. Eds. John R. Waters. Language Science Press, 2018.
- Fries, C. *Teaching and Learning English as a Second Language*. Ann Arbor University of Michigan press, 1945.Print
- Gimson, A. *An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English*. Edward Arnold; 1980.
- Hall, R.A. *An Essay on Language*. Chilton Books. 1986.
- Hachmack, S, Reichehbach's Theory of Tense and its Application to English. L- universita ta malta: <http://staff.un.edu.mt> 2001.
- Ibbi, R.I. Tense and Aspect: A Critical Analysis of Existing Theories in International Digital Organisation for Scientific Research IDOSR Journal of Communication and English 2(1) pp110-124,2017.
- Lado, R. *Linguistics Across Cultures*. Ann Arbor University of Michigan press, 1957.
- Jo-Wang, L. Time in a Language without Tense: The Case of Chinese. Journal of Semantics 23 (1) pp 1-53. <https://doc.org/10/1093/jos/ffho33>;Oxford University press 2024.
- Mithun, M. Tense and Aspect Morphology <https://doc.org/10.1093/acrfore/G7801993846550> 548pub.online 24th June, 2019.
- Ndimele, M. *Morphology and Syntax*. Port Harcourt: Emhal Printing and publishing 1999 print.
- Quirk, R. & Greenbaum, S. *A University Grammar of English*. Pearson Educational Limited English, 1973
- Sapir, E. *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*. Longman, 1985.
- Timothy, T. Verbal Morphosyntax of Eggon Language: Unpublished research for the award of master degree at the Theological college of Northern Nigeria Bukuru 2023.
- Uwaezuoke, A.H. & Ogunkeye, O.M.A Contrastive Analysis of Igbo and Yoruba: Implication on Learners and Teachers. Ujah; 18.3.10,193-219;2017.