Aspects of the Tense System of Efik

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Abstract

The Efik language has grammatical tense, inarguably. In most literature on Efik (and Ibibio, a sister language) however, a tripartite or multifarious division is always proffered (cf. Ward 1933; Jeffreys 1935; Essien 1983, 1990, 1991, 1999; Cook 1985; Udosen 2004; Okon 2006; Offiong & Mensah 2003; Mensah 2008). Our argument in this paper is in direct contrariety with these earlier postulations. Data for this work were elicited from native speakers (using instruments like structured sentences, essays) and the library. Our analysis, using a simple descriptive approach, fleshes out a compelling argument for a binary tense division, past and future. Part of our hypotheses is that me, the so-called present tense marker, is a completive aspectual morpheme. And, if, when, me tends to encode a temporal function, it is usually the recent past. A more detailed analysis of the Efik tense corpus is recommended, however, to engender more profitable insights to a definitive tense categorization.

Keywords: Efik, Ibibio, tense, morpheme, aspect, mood.

1.   Introduction

The Efik language is one of the most widely researched language in Nigeria, West Africa. As such, any detailed introduction may appear superfluous. However, a few remarks are quite expedient. The language is spoken by 400,000 people, as first language (Simmons & Fennig 2017). Most of these speakers reside in Calabar South, Calabar Municipality, Odukpani, Akpabuyo, Akamkpa and Bakassi Local Government Areas (L.G.As) in Cross River State, Nigeria. Efik has over 170 years of literary tradition, courtesy of the early Christian Missionaries. It is classified as a Lower Cross language of the Cross River sub-family in the East Benue-Congo sub-branch of the Niger Congo Phylum (cf. Williamson and Blench (2000). Simmons & Fennig (2017) classifies it as Lower Cross, Delta Cross, Cross River, Benue-Congo, Volta Congo, Altantic Congo, Niger Congo. Efik together with Ejagham and Bekwara constitute the literary languages of the State. Efik is quite influential due to decades of unparallel patronage by the European traders, missionaries and colonial administration. Anaang and Ibibio are nevertheless its closest linguistic relatives. All of these (Anaang, Efik and Ibibio) are to a very large extent, mutually intelligible[1]. Within Cross River State, however, Efut and Ejagham are the closest languages to Efik, but only in terms of geographical contiguity.

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[1] Ibibio and Anaang are spoken by 4.5million (Essien, 2001) and 1.m (Connell, 1991), respectively. The former is the fourth largest Nigerian language, after Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. Anaang and Ibibio are, however, spoken in Akwa Ibom State, but with a significant number of speakers in Cross River State. The combined population of these two far overwhelms that of Efik native speakers in the State. This paper was first presented in the *Languages & Linguistics Departmental Seminar Series* in the University of Calabar, before the current update.

With regard to our focus, we state that tense expresses systematic time relations between predication (event, state, process or action) and the time of signing, utterance or writing. This relation is typically grammaticalized with the use of specific formal (verbal) indicators. In other words, a tense language is one that obligatorily uses grammatical devices to encode the relation between predication and the time of signing, utterance or writing. Closely related to the concept of tense are aspect, mood and modality. Conceptually and in practice, an iron-clad distinction among these grammatical categories is for the most part very difficult to enact. Observe, for instance, that a past tense situation can as well signal a completive (perfective) aspect. Similarly, a future tense situation is not entirely independent of mood (Lyons 1995; Katamba 1993). This is essentially so, because futurity is more of predication than certainty. Lastly, an event or situation that is in the present, can be ongoing, which may result in the conflation of the present (tense) with the progressive aspect. This present ('tense') progressive aspect can be fleshed out in the following Efik phrase:

1.   Mmọ esak imam
        (a) 'They laugh'
        (b) 'They are laughing'

Aspect depicts how a situation (stative or dynamic) unfolds or develops through the course of time. Simply put, it is a non-deictic verbal category, which highlights the internal temporal structure of a situation with regard to its initiation, progress, interactivity or completion, principally (cf. Comrie 1976).

Mood, as a verbal category describes a situation with regards to whether it is necessary, permissible, desirable, obligatory and the like. This can be achieved through the use of a modal auxiliary (like,

'must' 'can', etc.,) in English or verbal inflection in Efik, for example.

The above definitions permit Efik to be formally categorized as a tense and aspectual language. However, cases of tense and aspectual overlapping are common, but not to the extent of blurring completely the basic distinction, as often reported in some languages, Yala, for example. There is no question as to the fact that Efik has grammatical tense as a pool of data and literature (previous and current) show. What seems to be disputable is the exact tense division. Is it a urinary, binary, ternary or multifarious tense distinction?[2] Our focus in this paper, therefore, is to attempt to determine a pragmatic number of tense distinction in Efik.

We attempt also to examine the interface between tense and the inherent tone of the verb roots, the conditioning of the tense morpheme, the interaction of Efik tense with other grammatical categories, namely, aspect and mood. Overall, it is the analysis or grammatical status of the (so-called) present tense that is the most problematic. In this paper, for pragmatic reasons we follow the path of Oliveira's (2004) argument for a sister language, Ibibio, and Noah & Okon 2020 for Oron, in postulating that Efik does not grammaticalize the present tense. Our binary approach runs parallel, therefore, to what is generally available in the Efik tense analyses (Ibibio and Oron, both of them sister languages). A tripartite or multifarious system is often proffered for Efik (and Ibibio), see among other sources: Akpanyuñ 1979; Ward 1933; Cook 1985; Essien 1983, 1990, 1991; Essien 1999; Udosen 2004; Okon 2006; Mensah, 2008).

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[2] Earlier analyses on the Efik language seem to converge on a ternary tense system (cf. Ward, 1933; Akpanyuñ 1979; Offiong & Mensah 2003; Mensah 2008 Cook (1985) posits a six tense division for Efik, however.

This work is organised into: the tense system of Efik, grammaticalization, tense markers. Section 2.4 interrogates and rejects the present tense assumption, prior to the future tense analysis in 2.5. Next is the interaction of tense and tone, and the conditioning of the tense allomorphs, before an examination of tense, mood and aspect. There is an epilogue on the so-called present tense marker: *mé,* before the concluding remarks in 4.0.

2. The Tense System of Efik

There doesn't seem to be much literature with regard to a systematic treatment of tense in Efik. Nevertheless, Ward (1933); Cook (1985); Offiong & Mensah (2003) and Mensah (2008) have made very useful effort in this direction. Our present analysis is significantly different from theirs, notwithstanding their equally well researched analyses.

As will be clearly demonstrated, Efik, like Ibibio and Oron, but unlike English, exhibit a binary tense contrast of past and future, in the analysis we hypothesize in this paper (cf. Olivera 2004; Noah & Okon 2020) apposite argument for Ibibio and Oron respectively, cognate languages). As will become evident too, the proximate/indefinite tense dichotomy is applicable only in the past, structurally. The distinction regarding Efik proximate/indefinite future is non-structural and as such can only be deciphered contextually, unlike the situation in Ibibio.

2.1 Grammaticalization of Tense

Tense expresses systematic time relations through formal grammatical contrasts, with the time of signing, utterance or writing being viewed as the deictic term of reference. Tense in Efik is essentially grammaticalized, but may be lexicalized, in addition. For example, in:

2)   N-*ye*-di   mkpọñ
       1SG.FUT.come   tomorrow
       '1 will come tomorrow'

*Y*é is the grammatical marker for the future tense, while *mkpọñ* ('tomorrow') lexicalizes future time. Observe that it is the *ye* prefix which specifies futurity, because *mkpọñ,* in the first instance, is semantically ambiguous. It can mean either 'yesterday' or 'tomorrow'. Futurity could still be encoded without it, as such.

In this paper, we investigate also the various means (syntactic, phonological, etc.) of tense grammaticalization that Efik employs. Data in the language reveals that affixation, in fact, prefixation, is the means by which tense is grammaticalized. This is the case in most other Lower Cross languages. Each Efik tense prefix has its inherent tone, which is capable of altering the basic tone of the verb root. The tense marker is prefixed to a verb root (VR) that has no other inflection than tense. In other words, if there are other inflections on the verb, the tense marker is prefixed between the Concord (C), Modal (Mod) and Aspectual (Asp) prefixes. This order of prefixation is valid in both simple and complex sentence constructions as shown in 3(a). The only proviso is that, in a negative construction, the Negative (Neg) affix (not tense) must occur as a suffix, as illustrated in 3(b). Here is a rundown of the normal order of constituents in Efik sentences, which to a certain extent also reveals the agglutinating property of the language:

3)   a.   *Positive Construction*:   C+ (Mod) + Tense + Asp + VR

b.   *Negative Construction*: C+ (Mod) + Tense + Asp +
VR + Neg

2.2 Tense Oppositions and Their Markers

Since tense is a dynamic, relational, grammatical and temporal
category, we attempt to find out how the different tenses contrast
and their formal markers operate in Efik. They are distinguished
syntactally in accordance with (±) Negation, Emphasis (Focus?),
Mood and Wh-word Question on the one hand and other sentence
structures on the other hand. To some extent, this is similar to what
obtains in Ibibio (cf. Essien, 1990, 1991). For now, let us examine
the uncontroversial instances of past and future tense occurrence in
Efik, as well as the contentious 'present tense'.

2.3   The Past Tense

The past tense in Efik has two allomorphs: *má/mé-* and *k*é (or
simply kV)[3]. Each marker performs different grammatical
functions. As illustrated in our data below: *m*é is a recent past (R.
Pst) tense and or a completive aspect marker in the language. This
is evident in 4(a) as opposed to 4(b), where *m*á encodes
indefinite/distant past (Ind. Pst):

4)   a.   Edet e*me*dia udia
                Edet + C+ R. Pst + eat food
                'Edet ate food' (R. Pst)

4)   b.   Edet a*ma*dia udia
                Edet + C + Pst + eat food

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[3] The vowel of the second allomorph in *kV* varies with the quality of the concord
marker, usually.

'Edet ate food' (Ind. Pst)

4)   c.   Edet i*ki*diaha udia
            Edet + C + Pst + eat + Neg food
            'Edet did not eat food'

The *má/mé*-allomorph (as in 4a & b above) is used generally in simple, positive, neutral, modally unmarked sentences and in Yes/No questions. We may label this as Sentence Type S (Simplex). The *ké-* (or kV) allomorph is used in negative, emphatic (+ focus), modally marked and or Wh-word question sentences (as in 4c, above). We may label this as Sentence Type C (Complex). The *má*-allomorph also marks indefiniteness (see 4b), in regard to past action or state, while *ké–* is neutral in this regard. We will return to more instances of past tense data in 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4.

2.4   Does Efik Have the Present Tense?

The analysis of the present tense (morpheme) in Efik as we already stated is not as clear – cut as is the case of the past and future. In fact, we are positing in this paper that the present tense does not exist as a grammatical category in the language. The allomorph *mé,* which has often been posited as the present tense marker, especially, in stative verbs in Efik, performs more of a *past* tense and or completive (*perfective*) aspectual function than a present tense. That *m*é has a near zero present tense grammatical function seems obvious, given the following sentences and a host of others:

5)   a.   Ami m*me*nem esit
            I+C + Pres(?) sweet heart
            'I am happy'

      b.   Afo e*me*ye
              You + C + Pres(?) + beautiful
              'You are beautiful'

      c.   Enye e*me*de idap
              3ps+C + Pst + sleeping sleep
              'She /He/it has slept'

6)   a.   Ami m*me*fre enyiñ esie
              I+C + Pst/ Comp forget his name
              'I have forgotten his name'

Observe that the present tense is (grammatically) unmarked in non-stative verbs as the preceding examples show (more on the grammatical function of *mé* in 3.3) below[4]. Note that in 5 and 6, among others, the state, or act of *'happy, beauty, sleep, forget'*, being mentioned have already been consummated prior to the moment of signing, speech, writing. This demonstrably shows that *mé* performs a recent past tense, a completive aspectual function (cf. Akpanyuñ 1978:60; Ward 1933: 183; Mensah 2008; Essien 1983). Examples 24(c), 25 (a-c) and others further flesh up *mé* as a past tense morpheme in the Efik language. We could end up over flogging the discussion on the recent *past tense* or *completive aspectual* status of *mé-*, if we add a lexical item like *okure* or *ama*

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[4] Although it can be argued that *mé* could make reference to a present time situation, it also occurs in phrases that have no present time/tense relevance (e.g. in 6). Also note that the vowel on *mV* may change to harmonize with the last vowel of the verb root, as in *mmadia udia* 'I have eaten food' (~ 'I ate food') – in the indefinite past.

('finish') to 5c (though it is already in the past/completive) to yield definitively (6b) below:

6) b. Enye   emede   idap   okure.
    3ps   C + R.Pst + sleeping   sleep   finish
    'She/he/it has finished sleeping (already)'

Observe how *ama/okure* ('finish') emphasizes the perfective aspect, hence, the temporal past nature of the event.

Even if it were possible to assign, generously, a zero morpheme as a present tense marker in Efik, (but) to deny the obvious progressive aspectual nature, function in sentences 26(a-c) in order to foist a present tense status on them (in the name of zero present tense morpheme) is tantamount to gross under specification of grammatical function. If there is no convincing device to encode a grammaticalized present tense in Efik, no matter how covert, we feel uncomfortable to overstretch the discussion. Since we are unable to conjecture one, so far, we will hypothesize that Efik does not grammaticalize the present tense. It has grammaticalized past and future tenses.

2.5 The Future Tense

The future tense analysis in Efik seems quite straightforward and definite. However, it does not follow the kind of indefinite-proximate opposition as found in Ibibio, for example (cf. Essien 1990, 1991). But similar to the past tense allomorphs (*m*á and *k*é), there are two future tense allomorphs in Efik: *y*é and *dí*. These are used for simple, positive, neutral, modally unmarked sentences (Type S) on the one hand and complex sentences (Type C) on the other hand. Consider the following examples:

7)   a.   Erikan e*ye*be udomo
                Erikan + C + Fut + pass examination
                'Erikan will pass examination' (Sentence Type S)

        b.   Erikan i*di*beghe udomo
                Erikan C + Fut + pass + Neg examination
                'Erikan will not pass examination' (Sentence Type
    C)

The future tense allomorph, *yé,* can or should be *yV*, because there is often an anticipatory vowel assimilation. This harmonizes the vowel of the verb root to the following prefix. Hence, (Fut) *yé* + *tá* ('chew') becomes *yátá.* When this happens, the personal prefix has to harmonize as well, to yield:

8)   Enye a*ya*ta isip (~e*ye*ta)
          3ps + C+ Fut + chew nut
          'She / he / it will eat nut'

Similarly, *eye*bom yields

9)   Enye o*yo*bom esio (~e*ye*bom)
          3ps + C + Fut + break pot
          'She/ he/it will break pot'.

This vowel assimilation is not attested in all Efik dialects, however. More data on the future tense in Efik are given in 3.1, 3.3. All the same, to a very large extent, the semantics of the verb helps to condition the interpretation of the non-future prefix in Efik.

3.   Conditioning of Allomorphs of the Tense Morphemes

Tense allomorphs in Efik are grammatically determined since the selection of one or the other tense marker is due to the presence or absence of certain grammatical categories (see sentence 7a and 7b respectively, for example). The respective tense allomorphs for Efik (*ma-a* and *ke-* for past and *yaa-*and *di* for future) are grammatically determined (similar to the Ibibio case, as reported in Essien 1983, 1991) by categories such as Neg, Emp, Wh-Q and Mood. Utterances exhibiting these categories (that is, Sentence Type C) select the allomorph *ke-*and *di* (for past and future respectively). Sentences without these categories (Sentence Type S): that is, Yes/No questions or simple, neutral, affirmatives, select *ma* and *yaa-*respectively.

For expository reasons, the *maa* and *yaa* allomorphs are grouped under Sentence Type C. In other words, allomorphs in Sentence Type C are conditioned by grammatical categories such as Negation, Modality, Wh-word Question and Emphasis (or + focus), as the following sentences exemplify (cf. also Mensah, 2008):

Negation

13)   a.   Ami n*ke*depke aran (~n*ki*depke)
          I + C + Pst + buy Neg oil
          'I dit not buy oil'

      b.   Ami ndep*ke* aran
          I + C + buy Neg oil
          'I am not buying oil'

Modality

14)   a.   Ami n*ke*ny*e*nendidep aran
          I + C + Pst + Mod (have) C + buy oil

'I had to buy oil'

b.   Ami nn*ye*nendidep aran
         I + C + Pres Mod (have) C + buy oil
         'I have to buy oil'

Wh-Word Question

15)   Anie e*ke*dep aran?
         Wh-Q+ C + Pst + buy oil
         'Who bought oil?'

Emphasis (+ focus)

16)   Ami *ke* idem mi n*ke*dep aran
         I + by self my + C + Pst + buy oil
         'I myself bought oil'

The future tense does not combine with mood, just as in English or Ibibio. We shall return to this very point in 3.2. However, let us observe allomorphs of Sentence Type S below. That is, those which occur in simple, affirmative, modally unmarked and Yes/No question sentences:

17)   a.   Ami m*ma*ndep aran
                 I + C + Ind.Pst + C + buy oil
                 I bought oil'

         b.   Ami n*ye*dep aran
                 I + C + Fut + buy oil
                 'I will buy oil'

    c.   Ami m*ma*ndep aran?
              Y/N-Q + I+ C + Ind.Past + C + buy oil
              'Did I buy oil?

18)   a.   Ami m*ma*nem esit
              I + C + Ind.Past +sweet heart
              'I was happy'

    b.   Ami n*ye*nem esit
              I + C + Fut + sweet heat
              'I will be happy'

    c.   Ami n*ye*nem esit?
              Y/N-Q + I + C + Fut + sweet heart?
              I will be happy? (~ 'Will I be happy'?)

One striking feature of the Yes/No question in Efik is that there is no segmental structural distinction between it and a simple declarative statement, except where focus is paramount. In other words, affirmative statement and Yes-No question have the same word order, basically, except intonationally, as in 18(b) & 18(c) respectively, similar to Ibibio (Noah 2004: cf. also Mensah 2008).

3.1   **Tense and Mood /Modality**
Tense is closely related to mood. And as we have said before, futurity is essentially of some modal concept; since it necessarily has to do with elements of uncertainty[5]**.** Modally marked sentences

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[5] Mood and modality are distinct in many languages (German for example), in which case one may talk of modal system of modal verbs. In this paper, we use the two terms as virtual synonyms, largely; apparently ignoring their actual

in Efik, such as: Neg, Emph, Wh-word Q, are conditioned to adopt *k*é and *dí* as markers, as can be seen below:

19)   a.   Okokon e*kpe*kedia bia
                    Okokon + C + Mod + Pst + eat yam
                    'Okokon should have eaten yam'

Note, however, that *kpe,* as a modal marker, performs an obligatory and not a probability function.

19)   b.   Ete oro e*kpe*kedide ufọk utom, ọkpọbọ okuk
                    Man the + C + Mod + Pst + come house work, C –
Mod + Pst receive money
                    'If the man had come to office (~ place of work), he would receive money'.

Modal affixes precede tense affixes in Efik. Using Essien's (1990, 1991) framework (in Ibibio, a sister language), one can say that in non-past situations, the modal markers occur with the zero tense marker, as the following examples show:

20)   Offiong e*kpe*tim enye
        Offiong + C + Mod+hit 3ps
        'Offiong ought (to be able) to beat her/him/it up'

In Efik, the past tense can be used in a dependent clause (with mood), when the situation talked about is hypothetical, as in:

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grammatical implications (cf. Lyons, 1968; Ubels, 1983). Palmer (2001) illumines these concepts further.

21)   E*kpe*dim*ma*ny*e*ne ufañ, m*kpe*kedi
       If I+C + Pst +have chance, C + Mod + Pst come
       'If I had the opportunity (time/chance), I would have come'

3.2   Tense and Aspect

Tense as a grammatical category naturally relates and interacts with other grammatical categories in languages. In fact, in some instances, the distinction between tense and aspect is so fluid (in some languages) that it becomes more convenient to talk of tense-aspect. In Efik, the *m*é allomorph does perform (sometimes) both temporal and aspectual functions. When *m*é-encodes such a temporal function in Efik, it is more likely to be a recent past tense function than a grammatical present. Other than this, the two grammatical categories, tense and aspect are distinguishable. Observe the following examples, which illustrate the intricate overlapping of the tense-aspect category in Efik.

22)   a.   Ami m*me*sinem esit
             I+ C + Pst + Hab + sweet heart
             I am used to being happy' / 'I am frequently happy'/
'I am always happy'

       b.   Ami n*ye*nsinem esit
             I+ C + Fut + Hab + sweet heart.
             'I will be frequently happy'/ 'I will always be happy'

Unlike the situation in Ibibio, as observed by Essien (1991), concerning the apparent mutual exclusiveness of proximate future (PF) in Efik, the difference between proximate and distant future (DF) in Efik is contextual, not structural. As such, it is perfectly acceptable to have 22(b) above. Through reduplication, we can have

examples of what is commonly referred to as relative completive (RC) aspect and its interaction with tense in Efik as in:

23) a. Ami m*man*dadara
         I + C + Dist. Pst + RC + sweet heart
         'I was already happy'

     b. Ami m*me*dadara
         I + C + R. Pst + RC sweet heart
         'I am already happy'

     c. Ami n*ye*dadara
         I + C + Fut + sweet heart
         'I will be happy already/right away'

In Efik, the inceptive aspect does not occur with the future. This should not be expected, since semantically, the notion of inception and futurity are incompatible. Rather, it freely coheres with the past tense and or present time, as below:

24) a. Ami n*ke*dadara nte ñwando
         I + C + Pst + Inc. + sweet heart as a bride
         'I began to be happy as a bride'

     b. Ami *ke*ndadara nte ñwando
         I+ C + Zero + Inc. + happy as a bride (present time)
         'I am (still in the process, act) as happy as a bride'

     c. Ami m*me*dadara nte ñwando
         I + C + Pst + Inc. + happy as bride
         'I was already happy as a bride'

3.3   More on the Past and Functions of *M*é

As we had earlier remarked (in 3.0 above), the *m*é- particle serves both the recent past temporal and completive aspectual functions, similar to the case in Ibibio. Essien (1983) confirms this situation, when he says that "*m*é combines two functions: a recent past function with a perfect function in which the completion of a situation as well as its recentness is empahasized" (p.11). This is a recent past (tense) function and not present! The following examples, again, demonstrably typify the situation at hand:

25) a.   Ami m*me*dia udia
            I + C + R. Pst + eat food
            'I have eaten food' (~ 'I ate food')

     b.   Afo e*me*di
            You (sg) + C + R. Pst + come
            'You have come/arrived/ 'You are welcome'; which
            is often said *after* someone's arrival

     c.   Ami m*me*wet ñwed
            I + C + R. Pst + write book
            'I have written a book' (~ 'I wrote a book')

     d.   Ami m*me*kwere udomo
            1 + C + R, Pst + finish examination
     '   I have completed (my) examination'

Sentence 25 (a-d) may look the same as the English present perfect tense but it is functionally a past tense in Efik because it has a perfective meaning, expressed by the simple past tense.

Thus, from these and other data, we can say that there is no means of grammaticalizing the present tense in Efik. *Mé* is a perfective aspectual marker, which typifies completion or immediate past action. The so-called zero tense marking in non-stative verbs indicates the present time (and *not tense*) cum the progressive aspect as the following examples show:

26)   a.   Ami ñka ñwed
            I + C + zero tense + go school
            'I am going to school' (progressive aspect)

       b.   Afo etiñ ikọ
            2 sg + C + zero tense + talk word
            'You are talking (talk)' (progressive aspect)

       c.   Enye ibreke mbre
            3ps + C + zero tense + play + neg playing
            'She/he/it is not playing'

4.   Summary and Conclusion

Tense in Efik is grammaticalized, but may be lexicalized in addition for specific discourse purposes. The Efik tense system does not follow the traditional tripartite division of past, present and future or a multifarious one, as often portrayed by previous tense analysts. Tense in Efik, which is marked by prefixation, is syntactically determined in accordance with (±) Negation, Emphasis (or Focus), Mood and Wh-Question sentence (Type C) on the one hand and other sentence structures: simple, positive, neutral, modally unmarked and Y/N question (Type S) on the other hand. The proximate-distant dichotomy holds only in the past, structurally.

This is contrary to the situation in Ibibio, where it manifests structurally in both the past and future.

Aspect has implication for tense marking in the language, just as tense has for mood. In some instances, clear distinction among tense, aspect and mood is blurred. For example, *yé* performs not only temporal but modal function, just as *mé* has (past) temporal cum (completive) aspectual loads. In addition, Efik tense markers have a progressive tonal influence on the verb root they are prefixed to. On the whole, Efik has tense in the absolute sense and the system bears striking similarities to those of Ibibio, Oron and Yoruba.

As we had earlier stated in 1.0, the present tense is not grammaticalized in Efik, even though all earlier analyses hold a polar view. Such previous analyses yielded a tripartite or a multifarious division. If Efik were to grammaticalize the present tense, we expect it would have had (as it is the case for past and future) some concrete, *specific* tense morpheme for it, even auto segmentally. The *mé* - particle, which has often been postulated as a present tense morpheme is actually a perfective aspectual indicator. As such, its so-called temporal function in this regard is the recent past, naturally. Until a pragmatically more impelling analysis can be distilled, we posit that Efik has grammatical past and future tenses only, but no present.

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List of Abbreviation

I	=	First Person Singular
C	=	Concord
Fut	=	Future Tense
Ind. Pst	=	Indefinite Past
Mod	=	Mood, Modality
Dist. Pst	=	Distant Future
RC	=	Recent Past
DF	=	Distant Future
Inc.	=	Inceptive
R. Pst	=	Recent Past
2 sg	=	Second Person Singular
3 ps	=	Third Person Singular
Type S	=	Simple Sentence
Type C	=	Complex Sentence
Pres	=	Present Tense
Pst	=	Past Tense
Y/N-Q	=	Yes/No Question
Hab	=	Habitual Aspect
Sg	=	Singular
Pl	=	Plural
Neg	=	Negation
Emph	=	Emphasis
Wh	=	What, who, which... etc.