On the syntax of tense and aspect in Likpakpaanl.

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This paper discusses the syntax of tense and aspect in Likpakpaanl, a Mabia language spoken in the Northern and Oti regions of Ghana and the Western part of the Republic of Togo. (Manessy, 1971; Tait, 1953). Likpakpaanl displays a system of markers that encode tense/aspect specifications. The aspectual paradigms are perfective, imperfective and habitual. The perfective aspect, which refers to an event with a definite endpoint in time, is unmarked (1a). In contrast, the imperfective aspect, describing an ongoing event, is marked by the preverbal particle **bì** (1b). The habitual aspect is expressed using the marker -**nì** that suffixes the verb (1c).

(1). a. *Ntébí   jún   m-mìì   gbààn.*
         N.   extinguish.PFV   3-fire   DEF
         'Ntébí has extinguished the fire.'

     b. *Sàpù   **bì**   jún   m-mìì   gbààn.*
         S.   IPFV   extinguish   3-fire   DEF
         'Sàpù is extinguishing the fire.'

     c. *Mpòpíín   jún-**nì**   m-mìì   gbààn.*
         M.   extinguish-HAB   3-fire   DEF
         'Mpopiin extinguishes the fire.'

     d. *Mpòpíín   **bì**   jún-**nì**   m-mìì   gbààn.*
         M.   IPFV   extinguish-HAB   3-fire   DEF
         'Mpopiin is extinguishing the fire.'

Tense, on the other hand, is morpho-syntactically expressed using preverbal particles. The past tense is marked using the particles **fè** 'a day before', **nán** (remote past) 'two or more days ago', and **bá** (immediate past) 'earlier today, as shown in (2). The future tense is marked by **gà** (2d). The use of dedicated particles for marking tense and aspect in the Mabia languages has been attested to by Dakubu (2003) for Gurenɛ, Bodomo (1997) for Dagaare, and Issah (2015) for Dagbani.

(2). a *Mpòpíín bà   ŋààl   bù-ŋɔ-b.*   c. *Mpòpíín   nàn   ŋààl   bù-ŋɔ-b.*
        M.   PST   drive   9-canoe-9   M.   PST   drive   9-canoe-9
        'Mpòpíín paddled a canoe.'   'Mpòpíín paddled a canoe.'

     b. *Mpòpíín   fè   ŋààl   bù-ŋɔ-b.*   d. *Mpòpíín   gá   ŋààl   bù-ŋɔ-b.*
        M.   PST   drive   9-canoe-9   M.   PST   drive   9-canoe-9
        'Mpòpíín paddled a canoe (yesterday).'   'Mpòpíín will paddle a canoe.'

Following Cinque (1999) and Tenny (1987), I postulate that aspect is encoded by a syntactic category Aspectual Phrase (AspP) comprising Perfective (PerfP) and Imperfective (ImperfP) and Habitual (HabP). The tense particles in Likpakpaanl are heads of functional categories that project the tense Phrase (TP) (Pollock, 1989). Adopting Chomsky's (1995) feature-checking theory suggests that aspect and tense markers are the PF realisations of the features [+future], [+habitual], [+imperfective], which are associated with the T° and AsP°, that the verb must check before LF. Evidence for arguing that Tense and Aspectual markers manifest two distinct categories comes from their different distribution in some middle field adverbs which intervene between the subject and the verb. For instance, the tense marker precedes the adverb **kí** 'again' (3a) but habitual and imperfective aspect markers must follow it (3b, c).

(3). a. *Badak gà/nàn* **kí** *ŋàŋ ì-yùù.*
     B.   FUT/ PST again measure 6-millet
     'Badak will measure/measured millet again.'

  b. *Badak (*bì)* **kí** *bì ŋàŋ ì-yùù.*
     B.   again   IPFV   measure 6-millet
     'Badak is measuring millet again.'

  c. *Badak* **kí** *ŋàŋ-nì ì-yùù.*
     B.   again measure- HAB   6-millet
     'Badak measures millet again (habitually).'

The interaction between tense and aspect in Likpkapaanl is illustrated in (4), showing that T is projected higher, followed by imperfective, perfective and habitual aspects and then vP.

(4). $[_{TP} [_{\pm Past, +Futue} [AspP_1[_{\pm Imperfective}] [AspP_2[_{\pm Habitual}] [vP [VP]]]]]$.

The fact that bare verbs must be licensed for perfective interpretation suggests that there is always v-to-Asp movement adjoined to the morphologically null perfective, the imperfective or habitual head. Thus, verb (head) movement in the Likpakpaanl does not target T°, but rather the aspect since T is always overtly filled. Once a verb is licensed for habitual interpretation, it can only move and left-adjoin to HAB° since the movement to Perf° or Imperf° is blocked to avoid violating Travis's (1984) Head Movement Constraint.

(5). $[_{TP}$ Badak $_i$ $[_{T^o}$ nàn $[_{AspP} [_{ImperfP}$ bì $[_{HabP}$ ŋàŋ$_x$-nì $[_{vP}$ t$_i$ t$_x$ $[$ $[_{VP} [_{DP}$ ì-yùù$]]]]]]]]]$.

X

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