

## BASIC ASPECTUAL CATEGORIES IN PROTO-KRU<sup>1</sup>

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Drawing from over ten Kru languages, basic aspectual categories for proto-Kru are proposed. The perfective is reconstructed as  $\emptyset$ , i.e. an unmarked verb stem, while the imperfective is traced to two markers: a nominal suffix and a verbal suffix. Reflexes and remnants of these proto-forms are traced. Cases of phonological reduction, semantic change and reanalysis are discussed.

Une étude portant sur plus de dix langues kru aboutit à la reconstruction des catégories aspectuelles principales de cette famille de langues. Selon cette reconstruction, le perfectif serait signalé par le radical verbal simple, tandis que l'imperfectif porterait deux marques: un suffixe nominal et un suffixe verbal. Nous proposons une description de l'évolution de ces formes dans plusieurs langues. Nous proposons en outre des cas de réduction phonologique, de changement sémantique, et de restructuration.

### 1. Introduction

At first glance, the major aspectual distinction within the Kru family appears to be between perfective and imperfective actions, a common division in languages of the world (Comrie, 1976:25). Perfective (PR) or completive actions are typically punctiliar and refer to events which have already occurred. Imperfective (IMP) or incompletive actions are viewed as taking place over an extended period of time, whether in reference to present, past, or future action. An example from Klao, a Western Kru language illustrates this distinction:

(1) Klao (N. Lightfoot, 1974)

(a) ̄ blē                    'He sang'  
    he sing

(b) ̄̄                    blē                    'He is singing' or 'He habitually  
    he: IMP sing                    sings'

In this paper, it will be claimed that the perfective/imperfective distinction was basic to proto-Kru. The semantic range of these aspects - in particular that of the perfective - will be refined and discussed in detail. In addition, the markers associated with these aspects will be reconstructed. The historical development of the proto-forms in various languages, including cases of semantic shift, phonological reduction, and reanalysis will also be described.

## 2. Background on the Language Family

Kru languages are spoken primarily in Liberia and southwestern Ivory Coast. The family is divided into two main groups: Eastern and Western Kru. The languages mentioned in this study fall into the following groups (Marchese, 1979a):

### Western Kru

Guéré complex: Wobé, Nyabwa, Krahn (Gbaeson and Tchien)  
 Grebo complex: Grebo, Tepo Kru, Cedepo, Borobo, Nyabo  
 others: Klao, Bakwé, Dewoin

### Eastern Kru

Bété (Guibéroua and Daloa), Godié, Koyo, Vata, Neyo,  
 Dida (Lakota and Lozoua)

### Isolates

Kuwaa, Seme

## 3. The Perfective

Within Kru, the perfective is usually marked by one of two means - either by a bare verb stem (seen in (1a) above) or by a low tone on the verb as seen in the following example from Godié (ɟlɔkɔ dialect):

### (2) Godié

(a)	ɔ̄	lɛ̄	tlɛ̄	'He ate a snake'
	he	eat:PR	snake	

Compare: (b) lɛ̄ 'Eat' (imperative)

(c)	ɔ̄	lɛ̄	tlɛ̄	'He eats snakes (habitually)' or 'he's eating snakes'
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When the use and distribution of perfective forms is examined, it becomes evident that the definition given in section 1 above is inadequate. Some verbs do have a completive punctiliar reading in this aspect ((1a) & (2a)), but stative verbs like 'have', 'be at' and 'be red' as well as cognitive verbs like 'know' have a present reading. This can be seen in the following examples from Krahn, a Western Kru language, and from Godié, an Eastern one:

(3) Krahn (bare verb stem)

- (a)  $\bar{o}$  jübō dē 'They know something'  
*they know something*
- (b)  $\bar{o}$  kɔ̄ dē 'They have something'  
*they have something*

(4) Godié (low tone on the verb stem)

- (a) ɔ̄ kò sūkú 'He is at school'  
*he be at:PR school*
- (b) ē zλ 'It's red'  
*it red:PR*
- (c) ɔ̄ kλ bɔ̄dɔ̄gō 'He has a book'  
*he have:PR book*

In describing the aspectual system for Dewoin, Welmers (1977) used the term 'factative' to describe an aspect which "expresses the most obvious fact about the verb in question, which in the case of active verbs is that the action was observed or took place, but for stative verbs is that the situation obtains at present" (1973: 246-7). Thus with verbs like 'eat' and 'sing', the aspect designates past completive action, but stative or cognitive verbs such as those in (3) and (4) have a stative (present) reading. This characteristic of perfective forms has been noted in every Kru language which is known to have a zero (bare verb stem) or low tone perfective marker.

It is easy to test whether a sentence contains a perfective or not. In all Kru languages, there are at least two negation strategies: a sentence-second particle which is used to negate imperfective sentences and an auxiliary used to negate perfective sentences. When perfective verbs signalled by zero or a low tone suffix are negated, a change in word order occurs: the typical SVO pattern becomes S NEG O V. Stative verbs with either a bare verb stem or a low tone negate as other perfectives:

(5) Neyo (Thomann, 1905)

- (a) e ne fe ka 'I don't have strength'  
*I NEG strength have*  
S AUX O V
- (b) ma ne wa yo la 'But I didn't bring  
*but I:NEG PAST child bring the child*  
S:AUX O V

Imperfectives, on the other hand, are negated by particles which cause no change in the basic SVO word order:

- (c) né            mla    dili-no    'I don't drink raphia palm  
       I:NEG    drink raphia-wine wine'  
       S:NEG    V            O

This formal distinction in negation strategies provides further evidence that the perfective or factative is a single aspectual category.

It must be noted that this semantic combination is not without parallel. D. Lightfoot (1979:101,103) notes the existence of a class of "preterite-presents" in Old English which were marked like past preterite forms, but which had a present reading. Bickerton (1975, as reported by Givón, MS) notes a similar aspect in Hawaiian-Creole. Closer to home, many West African languages outside the Kru family have similar aspectual systems. Igbo (Welmers, 1973), Yoruba and Ogori, all Kwa languages, have systems in which completed actions and present states are treated as one aspectual category<sup>2</sup>.

### 3.1 Reconstruction of the Perfective Marker

In the preceding section, it was noted that the perfective aspect may be signalled in one of two ways - either by a bare verb stem or a low tone suffix on the verb stem. The unmarked perfective occurs in many Western languages including Dewoin, Klao, Grebo, Krahn, Wobé and Nyabwa. In these languages tonal differences on the verb have nothing to do with aspect; they merely reflect lexical tone. This can be seen in the following example from Krahn:

(6) Krahn (Hansell)

- (a) ǒ            bà            dǒbǒ    'They whittled a mortar'  
       they    whittle mortar
- (b) ǒ            bá            dǒbǒ    'They grabbed a mortar'  
       they    grab    mortar
- (c) ǒ            dī            dē        'He ate something'  
       he        eat    something

In many Eastern languages, however, the perfective is overtly marked by a low tone. In Godié, for example, high tone verbs are high-low in the perfective, while mid and low verbs are realized on low tone:

(7) Godié

<u>stem</u> <sup>3</sup>	<u>perfective</u>	
nú	nû	'hear'
yī	yî	'come'
ǂà	ǂà	'leave'

Similar patterns are found in Koyo and Vata:

(8) Koyo (Kokora, 1976)

l̄í	l̄í	'eat'
v̄é	v̄è	'fight'
ḡólū	ḡólū	'plant'
w̄ólō	w̄ólō	'wash'

(9) Vata (Koopman, p.c.)

gbā	gbà	'speak'
nù	nù̀	'understand'
pá	pá̀	'throw'
sè	sè̀	'pick'

This low tone also appears in Lakota Dida.<sup>4</sup>

To summarize, then, in Western Kru, the perfective is most often signalled by a bare verb stem, while in many Eastern Kru languages, it is indicated by low tone. This leaves us with two possibilities in proto-Kru. The perfective could have been marked with a low tone (or a low tone vocalic suffix), which was lost in Western Kru and retained in many Eastern languages. Or, the perfective could have been signalled by a bare verb stem in which case the low tone in Eastern Kru would be innovative. Data from Bété of Guibéroua sheds some light on the problem. Werle (field notes) describes two completive aspects which he labels 'passé accompli ponctuel' and 'permansif'. The 'passé accompli ponctuel' describes a punctiliar event, without consideration of its effect in the present. The permansif, on the other hand, apparently insists on the effect of a past action on the present:

(10) Bété of Guibéroua (Werle)

ponctuel: ɔ ɛlɔ̄	'He got tired out' or 'He tired himself out'
permansif: ɔ ɛlɔ	'He got tired out and is worn out'

What Werle calls the 'passé accompli ponctuel' seems to correspond with the perfective as it has been described in this paper. The 'permansif', however, appears to be a kind of perfect, indicating a past action whose result is still effective at the time of speaking. What is interesting about the 'permansif' is that it is marked by low tone, which in other Eastern languages marks the perfective. The perfective (or punctual) is unmarked:

(11) Bété of Guibéroua (Werle)

<u>perfective</u>	<u>'permansif'</u>	
pā	pāā	'throw'
cɛlɔ	cɛlī	'write'
ŋʌmā	ŋʌmā	'sleep'
lī	lī	'eat'
dɪ	dɪɪ	'cut'
mɛ	mɛɛ	'stick'
kābā	kābā	'grab'
wāzɪ	wāzɪ	'call'
lɪbɛ	lɪbɛ	'pick up'

There is some evidence that the low tone 'permansif' suffix had the shape a. In a few of the forms supplied by Werle, there are apparently remnants of a low tone a suffix when the final vowel of the verb stem is ɛ or ɔ:

(12)	<u>perfective</u>	<u>'permansif'</u>	
	pɛ	pāā	'give'
	sɛ	sāā	'pick'
	sɔ	sɔɔā	'get up'
	bɛ	bɛɛ/bɛā	'make, fabricate'

These paradigms from Bété are significant for two reasons. First, they provide evidence for an unmarked perfective in Eastern Kru. Taken together with evidence from Western Kru, this would tend to suggest that the perfective in proto-Kru was unmarked.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, the examples seem to provide a source for the low tone factative found in the majority of the Eastern Kru languages.

3.2 Proposed Reanalysis

From the above discussion, it seems quite likely that the low tone found in some Eastern languages is an innovation, resulting from a reanalysis of the low tone 'permansif'. Such an explanation makes sense semantically. The shift from a perfect aspect to a perfective one is very slight, contrasting mainly in the relevance of an action to the present. (Compare, for example, English: 'He has eaten', a perfect with relevance to the past, with 'He ate' a perfective without this direct link.) This type of shift is attested historically in many languages such as French and other Romance languages. In French, the compound past (passé composé) developed from a perfect into a punctiliar past (Comrie, 1976:61). Besides the naturalness of the shift, there could be another motivation for the change. Many Kru languages have developed perfect auxiliaries<sup>6</sup>:

(13) Godié

(a)  $\bar{ɔ}$   $y\bar{\Lambda}$   $m\bar{u}$  'He has gone'  
*he PERF go*

Compare (b)  $\bar{ɔ}$   $m\bar{u}$  'He went'  
*he go:PR*

It is not known at what period this took place, but it seems likely that at some stage there were two ways to express the perfect in proto-Eastern Kru: by a low tone suffix  $*\bar{v}$  (probably with the shape  $*\bar{a}$ ) and by an auxiliary:

aspect:	perfective	perfect
marker:	unmarked	low tone suffix      auxiliary

If this was the case, then the auxiliary could have dominated the suffix, leaving the latter to be reanalyzed as a perfective in many Eastern languages:

aspect:	perfective	perfect
marker:	low tone suffix	auxiliary

Exceptionally, Bété of Guibéroua conserved the older system, with the perfective unmarked and two perfect-like aspects co-existing.<sup>7</sup>

To sum up, if the above scenario is correct, proto-Kru would have had an unmarked perfective, a system which was conserved in Western Kru, Neyo, and at least one dialect of Bété. In a subset of Eastern languages, a perfect-like low tone suffix would have been reanalyzed as a mark of the perfective.

#### 4. The Imperfective

The imperfective contrasts with the perfective in that it indicates ongoing or durative action. It is also used in most Kru languages to express habitual or customary action, as is the case in many languages of the world (Comrie, 1976:26). Examples of the imperfective were seen in (1) and (2) above. It is important to note that the imperfective is not a present tense. In many languages, it co-occurs with past tenses<sup>8</sup>, indicating on-going or habitual actions in the past:

(14) Koyo (Kokora, 1976)

n	mlɛ-a	suklu	'I used to go to school.'
I	go:IMP-PAST	school	

In some languages it may co-occur with futures, indicating the action is unrealized:

(15) Klao (Rickard, 1970:35)

ʒ	mú	kā	'She will go tomorrow.'
she:IMP	go	one-day-removed	

As the above examples show, not all Kru languages indicate the imperfective aspect in the same way. There are basically two means of expressing this aspect: by marking the verb as in (14), or by marking the subject (15). Of these two strategies, verbal suffixation is the more widespread.

4.1. The Imperfective Verbal Suffix

In the majority of Kru languages, the imperfective verbal suffix has the same form: a front vowel which typically agrees in vowel harmony with the vowel stem. Often the imperfective suffix completely replaces the final vowel of the stem (i.e. the final vowel of the stem is lost). Examples of the imperfective verbal suffix are given below:

(16) Eastern Kru

	<u>stem</u>	<u>imperfective</u>	
Neyo (Grah)	lī	liē	'eat'
	kū	kūē	'die'
	blī	blīē	'sing'
Lakota Dida	pi	pe	'cook'
	lī	lē	'eat'
	blū	blē	'pound'
Koyo (Kokora)	golu	gōlē	'plant'
	wolo	wōlē	'wash'

Western Kru

Grebo (Innes)	du	dui	'pound'
	to	toe	'string'
	po	pe	'throw'
	wɔ	wɛ	'fatigue'
	sɔ̃	sōē	'moisten'
Cedepo (Laesch)	tɔ̃	tōē	'buy'



(16) Western Kru (continued)

	<u>stem</u>	<u>imperfective</u>	
Borobo	nū	nī	'do, make'
	mū	mī	'go'
Nyabo	mu	mi	'go'
Bakwé	pi	pie	'cook'
	bli	ble	'sing'
	su	sue	'buy'

The addition of the vocalic suffix causes many morphophonological changes. In some languages, the vocalic suffix assimilates to the height of the vowel in the stem, as seen in the examples from Grebo. In other languages, like those in the Eastern group, the vowel is always non-high. Nasalization spreads over the suffix in Grebo and Cedepo, and in these two languages, the addition of the suffix may cause the final vowel of the verb stem to heighten. Both phenomena are very common in Kru (Marchese, 1975, 1979a). Centralized vowels emerge as a result of morphophonological changes in at least one language - Bakwé. With these series of changes, it is not always possible to state regular rules of phonological change. For example, some verb stems in Grebo drop their final vowels (po/pe, wɔ/wɛ), while others retain them (to/toe/sɔ̃/sɔ̃ẽ). Despite some irregularities, however, there is still sufficient evidence to posit a proto-Kru \*e imperfective marker.<sup>9</sup>

4.1.1 Reduction of the \*e Suffix

In languages where the \*e suffix appears, there is evidence that it is being reduced or assimilated to the vowel quality of the final vowel of the verb stem. In Vata, for example, the \*e suffix no longer appears with stems ending in back vowels. The distinction between the imperfective and the bare verb stem is signalled by vowel height. Imperfectives have lower vowels than the corresponding verb stem (Koopman, p.c.):

(17) Vata

	<u>stem</u>	<u>imperfective</u>	
	lī	lē	'eat'
	mī	mīē	'go'
	wɔ ɔ	wɔ ɔ	'wash'

In Koyo, the assimilation has not progressed so far. \*e appears with both front and back vowels. When the vowel suffix appears on verbs ending in a, however, e does not occur on the surface:

(18) Koyo (Kokora, 1976:48)(a) full form of e

á	lî	á	lē
they	eat:PR	they	eat:IMP
'They ate'		'They're eating'	

(b) without e

ṣ	pā	ṣ	pā
he	ran:PR	he	ran:IMP
'He ran'		'He's running'	

When vocalic assimilation does take place, the distinction between the perfective and imperfective may be maintained by tone. In Koyo, the perfective is realized as a low tone on the verb stem. The imperfective carries a mid tone suffix:

(19) Koyo

<u>perfective</u>	<u>stem</u>	
lî	lē	'eat'
gòlù	gōlē	'plant'
wòlò	wōlē	'wash'
yì	yē	'come'

Thus, when e is reduced, tonal differences maintain the perfective/imperfective distinction: pā/pā. The same is true in Lakota Dida:

(20) Lakota Dida

ṣ	mlê	ṣ	mlē
he	go:PR	he	go:IMP
'He left'		'He's going'	

In the *ɟlɔkɔ* dialect of Godié, a three tone language, the imperfective suffix has completely disappeared leaving only a mid tone suffix on the verb stem to indicate this aspect. Thus, we can establish a verbal paradigm consisting of three forms for each verb: the inherent tone (obtainable in the imperative), the perfective tone (always ending in low tone), and the imperfective tone (always ending on mid tone):

(21) Godié

<u>stem</u>	<u>perfective</u>	<u>imperfective</u> <sup>10</sup>	
yī	yì	yī	'come'
ḃā	ḃā	ḃā	'leave'
nú	nū	nū	'hear'
būdō	būdō	būdō	'bathe'
ḃālā	ḃālā	ḃālā	'kill'

In Bété of Guibéroua, the form of the imperfective is not as regular as in Godié. Bété has four lexical tones: high ´, mid-high ´, mid -, and low ` . The imperfective forms are always in the middle range - mid-high or mid, i.e. never high or low:

(22) Bété of Guibéroua (Werle, field notes)

<u>stem</u>	<u>imperfective</u>	
pá	pá	'throw'
pé	pé	'give'
bé	bé	'make'
sé	sé	'pick'
lí	lí	'eat'
mé	mé	'stick'

Together with evidence from Koyo, Lakota Dida and Godié, it seems likely that these middle range forms in Bété come from a proto \*e suffix, which was non-low in tone.

4.1.2 Remnants of \*e in Western Kru

We have seen, then, various realizations of \*e in Eastern Kru. There are also remnants of \*e in Eastern Kru. Singler (1979:21,22 and p.c.) reports a past imperfective marker with the shape é or í in Klao:

(23) Klao

(a) 55	pló-é	kɔ	'He was selling rice.'
he:IMP	sell-PAST:IMP	rice	
(b) 55	dí-í	kɔ	'He was eating rice.'
he:IMP	eat-PAST:IMP	rice	

It would perhaps seem that é is a past tense marker, but it may not (\*\*) combine with perfective verb stems as other past tenses:

(24) Klao

**5	pló-é	kɔ	'He sold rice.'
he	sell-PAST	rice	

Thus, é is more aspectual than a regular tense marker. Given its shape and meaning, it seems likely that é is a remnant of proto \*e which has retained the imperfective meaning, but has been narrowed down to apply only to past actions.

Duitsman (p.c.) reports the rare occurrence in Gbaeson Krahn of an í suffix which may be associated with imperfective actions:

(25) Gbaeson Krahn

- (a)  $\tilde{a}$       mú-í       $\emptyset$       yě      dɛ      dí  
 I:IMP    go í       $\emptyset$       SEQ    thing eat  
 'I'm going in order to eat'
- (b)  $\tilde{i}$       mu       $\emptyset$       yě      dɛ      dí  
 I        go       $\emptyset$       SEQ    thing eat  
 'I went in order to eat'

(where  $\emptyset$  indicates deletion of a coreferential pronoun,  
 and SEQ a sequential auxiliary)

It is possible that í is a remnant of a former imperfective marker \*e.

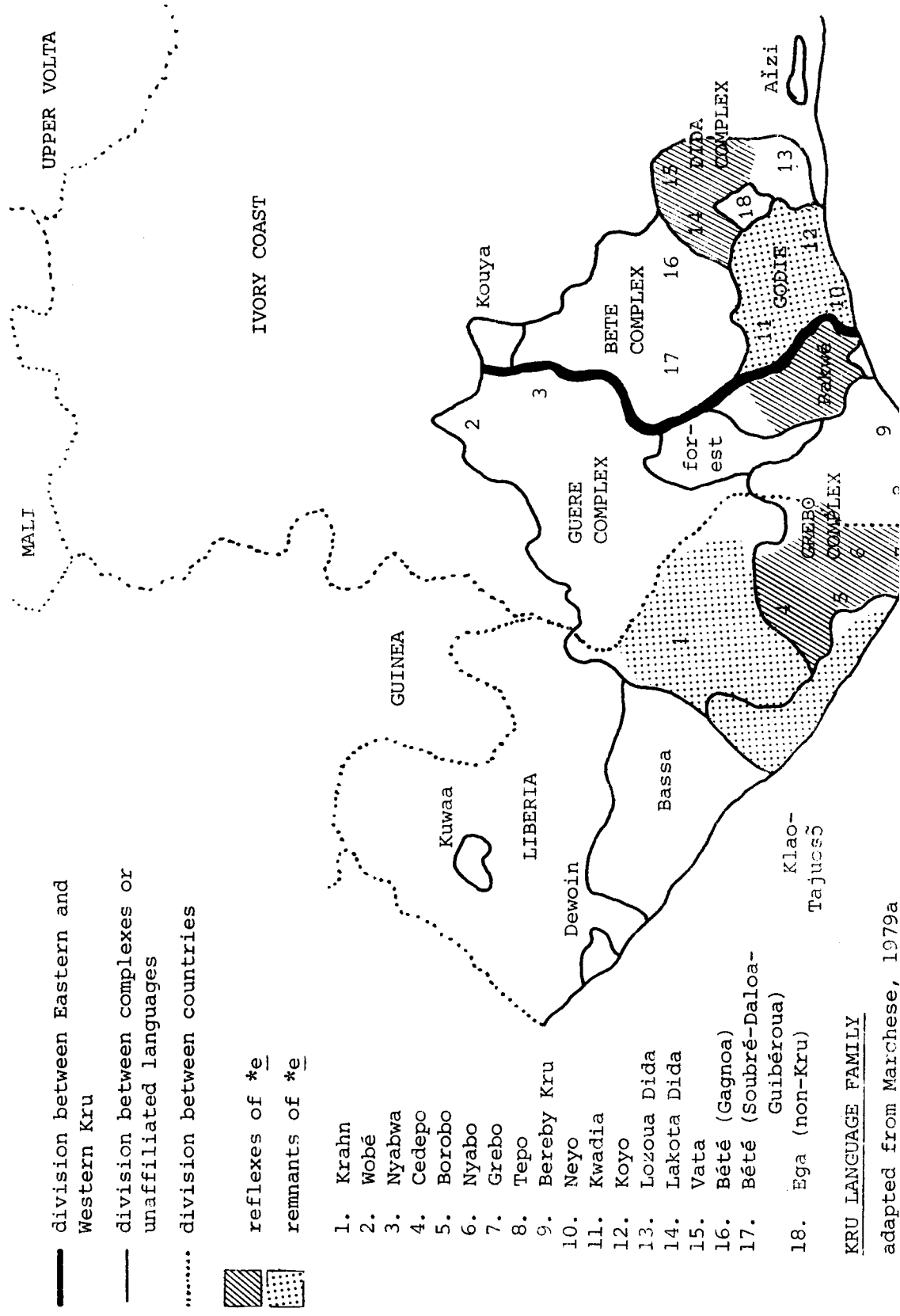
Though languages in the Guéré complex do use the imperfective nominal suffix (to be discussed in detail in the next section), there are some tonal realizations on verbs that are vaguely reminiscent of what was seen in Eastern Kru. In Tchien Krahn (Tisher, field notes), the imperfective is usually indicated by a nominal suffix. Verbs are realized with no change when their inherent tone is high, mid-high, or mid. When the stem is low, however, it is realized as mid in the imperfective. In closely related Gbaeson Krahn, when the verb stem is low, it is realized as rising in the imperfective. If it is high, it falls high-mid. If it is mid, it is realized as high. Though this last change from mid to high is problematic and not yet understood, these changes do indicate that there is a tendency for imperfective verbs to be non-low. Similar observations have been made in Klao (Lightfoot, 1974; Marchese, 1979b). Tonal variations in these forms seems to suggest a previous suffix, which could very well have been \*e.

In summary, the following map shows the distribution of the non-low imperfective verbal suffix \*e. It can be seen that reflexes and remnants occur widely in both Eastern and Western Kru. There is some evidence that the suffix perhaps had the shape consonant + e. Koelle (1854) noted a re durative suffix in at least one Kru language, and Vogler (MS:297) suggests that le may have been the old form for the durative (or imperfective) suffix in Vata. A lɛ suffix also occurs with some verbs in Neyo (Grah, p.c.):

(26) Neyo

<u>stem</u>	<u>imperfective</u> <sup>11</sup>	
zɛ̃	zɛ̃lɛ̃	'read'
mɔ̃	mlɛ̃	'go'

It is difficult to say conclusively that \*e really had the form \*le, but there is some reason for believing this was the case. The reduction of l is quite common in the family (Marchese, 197a), thus the phonological change poses no problem. Also, if this recon-



- division between Eastern and Western Kru
- division between complexes or unaffiliated languages
- ..... division between countries

▨ reflexes of \*e  
 ▩ remnants of \*e

1. Krahn
2. Wobé
3. Nyabwa
4. Cedepo
5. Borobo
6. Nyabo
7. Grebo
8. Tepo
9. Bereby Kru
10. Neyo
11. Kwadia
12. Koyo
13. Lozoua Dida
14. Lakota Dida
15. Vata
16. Bété (Gagnoa)
17. Bété (Soubré-Daloa-Guibéroua)
18. Ega (non-Kru)

KRU LANGUAGE FAMILY

adapted from Marchese, 1979a

struction is eventually substantiated, it would link the imperfective suffix to an existential verb ne or ni. It is well known (Givón MS:39,41) that verbs of being are often used to indicate non-punctiliar (imperfective) actions. It seems appropriate, then, to look in this direction for the origin of the imperfective marker in Kru.

#### 4.2 The Imperfective Nominal Suffix a

The nominal suffix which has been alluded to in previous sections occurs primarily in Western Kru. It has the shape a and is suffixed onto the last element of the subject noun phrase (NP):

##### (27) Klao

(a) (N. Lightfoot)

dó	blē	dó-ā	blē
<i>Doe</i>	<i>sing</i>	<i>Doe:IMP</i>	<i>sing</i>
'Doe sang'		'Doe is singing'	

(b) (Rickard)

slā	ná	wā	slā	ná-ā	wā
<i>house</i>	<i>definite</i>	<i>burn</i>	<i>house</i>	<i>DEF-IMP</i>	<i>burn</i>
'The house burnt'			'The house is burning'		

When a subject pronoun occurs, a is suffixed directly onto it, often resulting in a long form pronoun, as seen in the following examples from Tepo Kru (Peter Thalmann, p.c.):

##### (28) Tepo Kru

<u>unmarked</u>	<u>imperfective</u>	
ń	nĩ	1 pers sing
ň	nĩĩ	2 pers sing
ṅ	ṅṅ	3 pers sing
ḱ	ḱḱ	3 pers sing non-human
ṭ	ṭṭ	
à	àà	1 pers pl
ā	āā	2 pers pl
ō	ōō	3 pers pl human

In some languages where pronouns are nasalized (usually in first and second person singular forms), the addition of a changes the shape of the pronoun, as seen in the following examples from Wobé:

##### (29) Wobé

ĩ	+	a	-->	má	1st person SING IMP
ĩ	+	a	-->	mâ	2nd person SING IMP

The merging of the imperfective marker and the pronouns has given rise to what some researchers have called imperfective or incomplete pronouns.

As was the case with the \*e suffix, a has also been weakening in some languages. In Tchien Krahn for example, the imperfective distinction on pronouns is neutralized in third person singular (5) and first and second person plural forms (ā and ā) Tisher, field notes):

(30) Tchien Krahn

<u>unmarked</u>	<u>imperfective</u>	
ʔ	ʔ	1 pers sing
ʔ	ʔ	2 pers sing
ʔ	ʔ	3 pers sing
ā	ā	1 pers pl
ā	ā	2 pers pl
ā	ā	3 pers pl

There is also a remnant of the a suffix in Dewoin, another Western language. Welmers (1977) reports that in Dewoin imperfective actions are signalled by a periphrastic progressive construction.<sup>12</sup> To express habitual and future (FUT) actions, however, speakers make use of "presumptive" (PRES) pronouns:

(31) Dewoin

- (a) ʔ zā kélé 'She sells pepper.'  
*she:PRES sell pepper (It's her job)*
- (b) ʔ , mū sāyē pi-i mǔ  
*he:PRES FUT meat cook-NOM FUT*  
 'He's going to cook meat.'

It has already been shown that the imperfective aspect encompasses habitual actions and that in some languages (such as Klao) the imperfective co-occurs with the future where it signals unrealized actions. Thus, from a semantic point of view, what Welmers calls "presumptive" fits nicely into the imperfective aspect as defined for Kru. The obvious conclusion is that these pronouns represent remnants of the a suffix. Confirmation of this hypothesis comes from the first and second person singular forms, where the presence of a is clearly seen:

(32) Dewoin

<u>unmarked</u>	<u>PRES</u>	
ʔ	ná	1st sing
ʔ	nā	2nd sing

Evidently, then, in this language, the continuous or durative meaning associated with imperfectives was lost, while the habitual and unrealized meaning remained.

To summarize, then, the imperfective nominal suffix and its remnants are found in Klao, Krahn, Tepo Kru, Wobé, Nyabwa, and Dewoin, all Western languages. In Eastern Kru, however, the nominal suffix seems almost non-existent. The only known language which has a clear remnant of \*a functioning with an imperfective meaning is Neyo, a language which borders the Western group. According to Grah (p.c.) there are two incomplete forms:

(33) Neyo

- (a)  $\bar{5}$      $\bar{6}l\bar{1}-\bar{e}$                     'He sings' or 'He can sing'  
*he sing-IMP*
- (b)  $5\bar{5}$      $\bar{6}l\bar{1}-\bar{e}$                     'He's singing'  
*he-IMP sing-IMP*

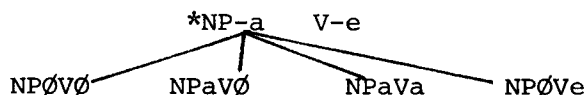
In the rest of Eastern Kru, the imperfective is signalled only by \*e or its remnants. However, there is a small bit of evidence that a was once present in these languages also. If we compare the third person plural pronouns in Eastern and Western Kru, the Eastern forms seem to be made up of two morphemes: the pronoun o, found in the majority of Western languages, and the element a:

(34)	Nyabwa	$\bar{o}$	Godié	wa
	Wobé	$\bar{o}\bar{o}$	Bété (G)	wá
	Tepo	$\bar{o}$	Vata	ɔá
	Grebo	$\bar{o}$	Neyo	aa

Having seen that the combination pronoun + a in Western Kru is likely to undergo phonological change and reduction, it seems quite reasonable to assume that the Eastern forms contain remnants of a past imperfective suffix \*a. In Eastern Kru, however, due to bleaching, these pronouns no longer carry any aspectual information. The following map shows the sure and probable remnants of \*a.

4.3 The Imperfective in Proto-Kru

In the preceding sections, evidence was given supporting the reconstruction of two imperfective markers: a verbal suffix \*e and a nominal suffix \*a. If these reconstructions are correct, this implies that at some stage of proto-Kru the imperfective construction had the following form: \* NP-a            V-e. The daughter languages exhibit all the possible reflexes:





- division between Eastern and Western Kru
- division between complexes or unaffiliated languages
- ..... division between countries



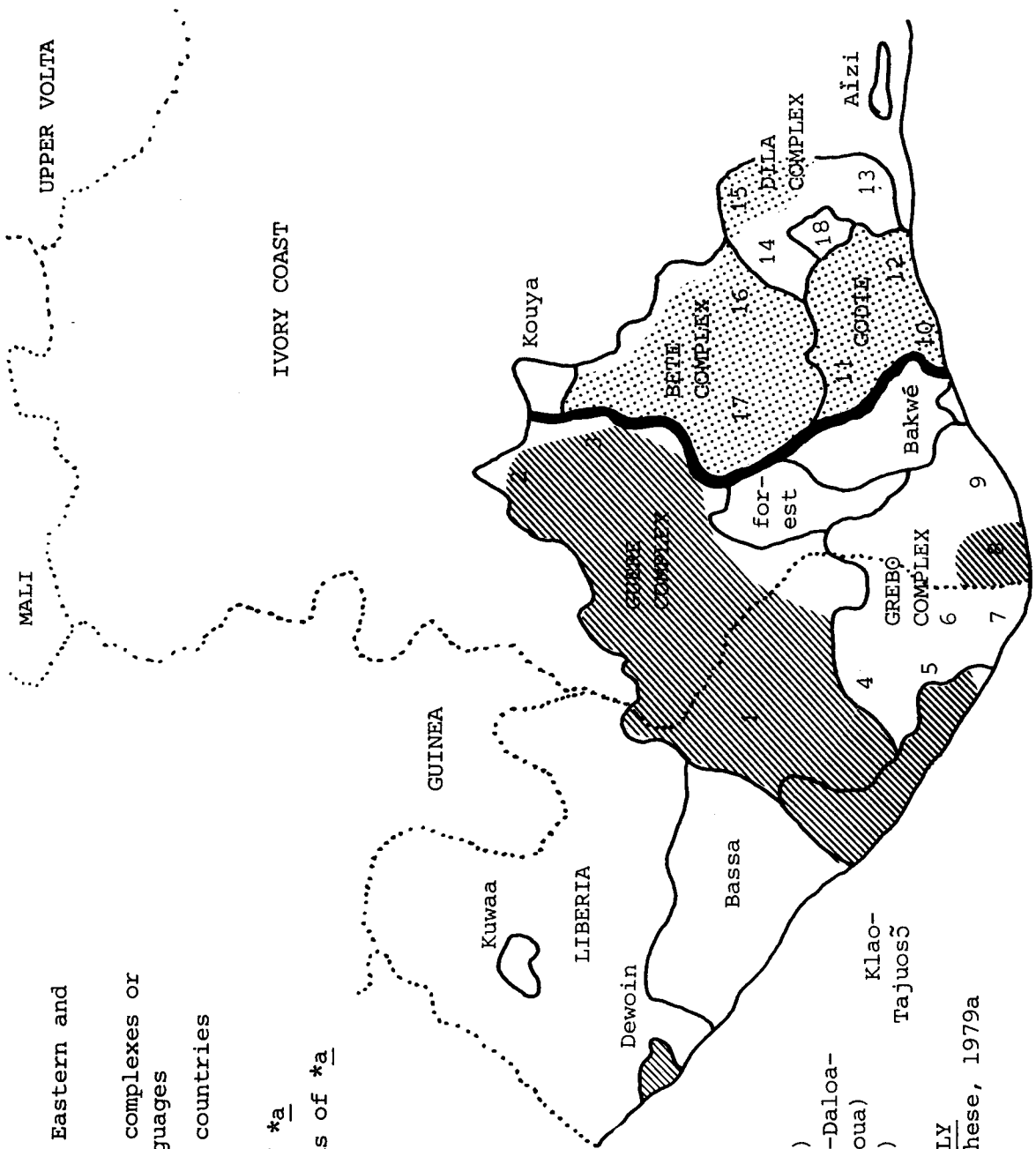
sure remnants of \*a  
 probable remnants of \*a

1. Krahn
2. Wobé
3. Nyabwa
4. Cedepo
5. Borobo
6. Nyabo
7. Grebo
8. Tepo
9. Bereby Kru
10. Neyo
11. Kwadia
12. Koyo
13. Lozoua Dida
14. Lakota Dida
15. Vata
16. Bété (Gagnoa)
17. Bété (Soubré-Daloa-Guibéroua)
18. Ega (non-Kru)

Klao-  
Tajuos̃

KRU LANGUAGE FAMILY

adapted from Marchese, 1979a



NPØVØ was seen in Dewoin, where the imperfective markers were lost except when referring to habitual and unrealized future actions. A periphrastic progressive has taken over the function of signalling continuousness. Though not much data is available, this appears to be the case in Kuwaa also.

NPaVØ is presently found in Wobé and Nyabwa. Imperfective actions are signalled by a attached to the NP in subject position. Even in these languages, however, there is some evidence that \*e did function at one time (see Marchese, 1979b: 93-96).

NPaVe Neyo and Gbaeson Krahn appear to maintain the use of both markers. In Neyo, it seems the \*e is dominant, while in Krahn this marker surfaces only rarely.

NPØVe and its tonal variant NPØV̄ were seen in all Eastern languages.

It is perhaps worth mentioning that the \*NP a V e structure coincides with a typical Niger-Congo pattern (Welmers, 1973:343):

pronoun    construction-marker    verb-base    affix

Synchronic patterning in Kru languages suggests that a was at one time an independent word, which was eventually suffixed onto the preceding item.

Presumably, one of the forms - \*e or \*a - is older than the other. For the moment, however, it is impossible to tell which, though it is likely that a be-related \*e, which is presently functioning in both Eastern and Western Kru, is a later innovation.

## 5. Conclusion

It has been suggested that in Kru the main aspectual distinction is between the perfective and imperfective. It was pointed out that the perfective category in Kru includes a present reading for stative verbs as well as a punctiliar (past) reading for active verbs. The imperfective expresses the idea of continuousness, customary action, and sometimes unrealized action. From the evidence available, it seems very likely that in proto-Kru the perfective was unmarked, while the imperfective was marked by one and, at some stage, two markers.

Several linguists have tried to study the markedness features associated with tense-aspect systems. Despite some irregularities (Comrie, 1976), there is a general consensus that imperfectives are more marked than perfectives, both by their morphological marking and their less high frequency (Friedrich, 1974; Givón, MS<sup>13</sup>). Despite the fact that historical changes have brought about a system in some Eastern Kru languages where both aspects are morphologically marked, these aspects can be traced back to a basic proto-system which is more in line with the universal prototype.

NOTES

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<sup>2</sup>Comrie notes that in several languages perfective forms are used with stative verbs to indicate ingressesives (i.e. entry into a given state). This does not appear to be the case in Kru. Kru languages have other means of representing this notion. Consider Godié:

ē	zā	<i>it red:PR</i>	'It's red'
ē	zāmā	<i>it became:red:PR</i>	'It became red'

<sup>3</sup>In Godié and most Kru languages, inherent tones on verbs can be determined by their form in the imperative or in any auxiliary construction S AUX...V.

<sup>4</sup>From preliminary work in Lozoua Dida, however, it appears that the perfective is replaced by an auxiliary (Gratrix-Brinneman, p.c.).

<sup>5</sup>Further evidence comes from Neyo, another Eastern language, where the perfective is also unmarked (Grah, p.c.):

í	pí	'I cooked'
í	tá	'I grated (something)'

<sup>6</sup>The discussion in this paper revolves around the perfective/imperfective distinction in proto-Kru. It must be noted, however, that many Kru languages have perfect auxiliaries. Though this aspect is widespread, I believe it is innovative and not as basic to the aspectual system as the perfective/imperfective distinction.

<sup>7</sup>Bété of Daloa, on the other hand, apparently lost the unmarked perfective but did not replace it with the low tone suffix. According to Zogbo (1981), the perfective is expressed by an auxiliary construction:

n̄	jé	síká	lī	bè	'I ate the rice'
I	AUX	rice	eat		

<sup>8</sup>There has been no discussion of tense in this paper. Kru languages have a variety of tense systems, most of which are believed to be innovative (Marchese, 1979b and forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup>In SEME which is thought to be a Kru isolate, a front vowel e or ɛ also occurs in imperfective forms (Prost (1964:365-6) calls them 'présent'):

<u>stem</u>	<u>présent</u>	
di	le	'eat'
do	lɛɛ	'go'
to	tɛl	'go hunting'

<sup>10</sup>To my ears, imperfective forms are slightly lengthened, perhaps due to the underlying vocalic suffix. They are not as long as the realization of two tones on one vowel, however.

<sup>11</sup>For some verbs, there is an imperfective form with m:

ŋwɔ̃	ŋwɔ̃mē	'sleep'
nā	nāmē	'walk'

I suspect this comes from a derivational morpheme (compare the Bété form in (11)), and has nothing to do with the imperfective.

<sup>12</sup>Periphrastic progressive constructions are very common throughout Kru. They almost always contain a locative-be verb followed by a nominalized verbal complement. While they highlight continuousness, only a few languages have adopted them as the unique expression of this notion. Even fewer use the construction to express habituais. For more details, see Marchese, 1979b.

<sup>13</sup>Givón ties markedness to discourse function by noting that in creoles and in many non-contact languages, an unmarked ( $\emptyset$ ) aspect which indicates punctual, realis, and in-sequence actions is used to code main events or assertions in narratives. Non-punctual, out-of-sequence, irrealis aspects, on the other hand, are "conceptually and frequency-wise the marked case." He continues: "...the non-punctual aspect tends to occur overwhelmingly in side-trip, background, lacunae in narrative, rather than in the mainline/backbone description of events" (MS:11).

Studies need to be done throughout the Kru family to see the exact distribution of perfective and imperfective aspects in discourse. I have the feeling that Givón's claim will hold for Kru. The discourse situation is far from simple, however. Imperfectives, in Godié at least, are sometimes used for "live reports" and thus may occur quite frequently. Punctiliar actions, on the other hand, are not expressed uniquely by unmarked or low tone perfectives. Most Kru languages rely heavily on sequential auxiliaries, which follow in sequence after perfective forms. I would imagine that in some narratives, in-sequence auxiliaries could outnumber unmarked perfectives. In any case, a detailed study of this subject is certainly in order.

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