

TENSE AND ASPECT IN IŞEKIRI

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The paper starts by demonstrating why carrying over the implications of the analysis of 'tense' and 'aspect' provided in Chomsky (1957) and (1965) into the investigation of a language such as Işekiri (or any other lesser-known language?) is bound to result in avoidable problems. It then provides a summary of the notion of 'time' and 'tense' presented in Bull (1963) and explains why the framework provided by Bull's analysis, which goes from meaning to form, more adequately reflects the correct facts in relation to 'tense' and 'time reference' than any purely syntactic proposal. The tense and aspect system reflected in Işekiri is described in terms of Bull's framework; and it shows that in Işekiri, the grammatical category 'tense' involves the opposition future/non-future, while 'aspect' distinguishes between perfective and imperfective, each of which is further subdivided. The paper ends with an examination of the question of the sensitivity or otherwise of Işekiri verbs to specific aspectual notions, especially in terms of distinctions such as 'stative/non-stative' or the various classes and/or sub-classes of verbs isolated in Vendler (1967). The conclusion is that either the classes of verbs concerned are not as homogenous or the notions themselves are more language-specific than literature on the subject would lead one to expect. Either way, attention is drawn to some of the issues which would need to be researched further in the search for more definitive answers.

Nous commençons par montrer que les conclusions de Chomsky (1957 et 1965) sur le temps et l'aspect appliquées à une langue comme l'Işekiri (ou n'importe quelle autre langue moins connue?) sont vouées à générer des problèmes, somme toute, évitables.

Exposant alors les notions de temps (philosophique) vs. temps grammatical élaborées par Bull (1963), nous expliquons pourquoi sa procédure, du fait qu'elle parte de la signification pour aboutir à la forme, fournit un cadre théorique approprié aux faits relatifs à ces concepts de temps que celui d'une théorie purement syntaxique.

Par la suite, nous décrivons le système du temps et l'aspect en Işekiri selon la méthodologie de Bull. Cette description montre clairement qu'en Işekiri, le temps grammatical consiste en une opposition futur/non-futur, alors que l'aspect distingue le perfectif et l'imperfectif (accompli/non-accompli) qui comportent respectivement d'autres catégories aspectuelles.

Nous terminons par l'examen du comportement des verbes en Işekiri vis à vis certaines notions aspectuelles spécifiques telles que celles qui autorisent la distinction verbes statifs et non-statifs (ou duratifs/non-duratifs) et les différentes classes et sous-classes de verbes établies par Vendler (1967). Notre conclusion c'est que soit les classes des verbes en question ne sont pas tellement homogènes soit les notions elles-mêmes sont d'une application beaucoup moins universelle qu'on le laisse croire.

Quoiqu'il en soit, l'attention est attirée sur les faits qui, dans l'avenir, méritent des recherches plus poussées en vue de solutions plus satisfaisantes.

1. This study is in four parts. The first part tries to show why a carry over of the implications of the analysis of 'tense' and 'aspect', provided in Chomsky (1957) and (1965), into an investigation of lesser-known languages is bound to lead to problems. The second part summarises the notion of 'time' and 'tense' discussed in Bull (1963), and explains why the framework it provides seems to more adequately reflect the correct facts in relation to 'tense' and 'time reference' than any purely syntactic proposal is likely to. In the third part of the paper, an attempt is made to examine the verb in Işekiri from the point of view of the operation of 'tense' and 'aspect' in the language, and against the background of the framework provided by Bull (1963). Finally, the paper ends with a tentative attempt to examine the question of how sensitive or otherwise verbs in Işekiri may be to specific aspectual notions, especially in terms of the kind of distinction which Comrie (1976) makes between states and dynamic situations as well as classes and/or sub-classes of verbs such as the one isolated in Vendler (1967).

2. Chomsky's Analysis of 'Tense' and 'Aspect'

2.1. In Chomsky (1957:39), the following analysis of 'tense' and 'aspect' is presented:

Verb → Aux + V

The auxiliary element is then expanded by the following rule:

Aux → C (M) (have + en) (be + ing) (be + en).

This analysis is revised slightly in Chomsky (1965:106-107) and we have inter alia:

Pred. Phrase → Aux VP (Place) (Time)
Aux → Tense (M) (Aspect)

Implicit in Chomsky's analysis is the fact that 'tense' is realised as either past or present. Although it would be safe to assume that Chomsky was only specifically proposing a syntactic analysis of the verbal nucleus for English and that his analysis is not intended to define tense and aspect for all languages in the same way as it is proposed for English, some writers on the subject with specific reference to lesser-known languages seem to have taken Chomsky's position as implying that:

- (a) tense as a syntactic category is only found in those languages that make a morphological distinction between 'present' and 'past'¹.
- (b) 'Future' is not a tense but a modal.

The idea that all languages with no morphological indication of the opposition present - past are tenseless appears to be rather difficult to accept. It appears to be a rather narrow view of 'tense' for the following reasons:

- (i) 'tense' as a syntactic category seems to be one way in which the generality of languages grammatically indicate 'time reference';
- (ii) which is probably not unrelated to (i) above, an analysis that goes from meaning to form such as the one discussed in Bull (1963) clearly demonstrates that temporal order is the fundamental concept of all tense systems. This means that 'tense' involves the order relationship of before - after with the point of initiation of speech serving as the primary axis of orientation.
- (iii) A blanket application of Chomsky's analysis to lesser-known languages will imply that, from a purely typological point of view, Edo languages like Okpe and Uvwie, where the opposition present - past is marked with the aid of prefixes and suffixes are similar to a language like English and different from other

African languages like Işekiri and Yoruba to which they are not unrelated. This kind of division hardly seems plausible.

Okpe²: nya 'go/walk'

1. m̀ì ánya 'I go/walk'
2. m̀ì ányàr̀èn 'I am going'
3. m̀ì nyár̀ín 'I went/walked'
4. m̀í nà nyá 'I will go'

Uwíe: şa 'go/walk'

5. m̀èm̀è áşà 'I go/walk'
6. m̀èm̀è áşár̀è 'I am going'
7. m̀ì şánì 'I went/walked'
8. m̀ì mòò şáà 'I will go/walk'

Işekiri: r̀èn 'walk'

9. mó r̀èn 'I walk/walked'
10. mó waá r̀èn 'I will walk'

It is difficult to accept that the question of whether temporal order is expressed in a language or not is a function of how such a notion is marked as those who extend Chomsky's analysis to other languages tend to suggest.

(i) Chomsky's present - past distinction in English is not always one of 'tense' but merely morphological as can be shown by the following sentences:

11. I will go (tomorrow)
12. I would go (tomorrow)...

Chomsky's analysis tends to suggest that the difference between (11) and (12) is the one of 'tense', i.e. the modal in (11) is 'present' while that of (12) is 'past'. But the fact that the modal in (12) cannot combine with any adverb of time which is synonymous with past time such as 'yesterday' strongly suggests that the modal in this sentence cannot actually be 'past'.³

2.3. We concede, however, that Chomsky may have good reasons for considering the 'Future' as a 'modal' rather than a 'tense' in English. Jespersen (1949:298-299) says of this tense in English:

"...It must be conceded that English has no real 'future tense'...". This is because, according to him, the auxiliary 'will' in English may denote "volition, obligation or the pure future". But the fact still remains that a pure future time interpretation of this auxiliary is also possible in English as Jespersen later explains (see page 299). That the future auxiliary 'will' is ambiguous in English does not, however, mean that some other languages do not or cannot have a real 'future tense' to exclusively describe events anticipated as occurring at a point in time *after* the moment of initiation of speech. This is precisely where those who try to carry over Chomsky's analysis of English into other languages begin to get it all wrong.

Criticism of Chomsky's proposals in respect of 'tense' is usually dismissed with disdain by linguists from the Western world as basically deriving from "...lack of intelligence, and ignorance..." on the part of people who, according to them, fail to see that Chomsky was thinking specifically of English. Whatever the original intentions of Chomsky (1957 and 1965) may have been, the truth is that in the analysis of what may be termed the lesser-known languages, especially by non-indigenes of the areas where such languages are spoken, Chomsky's proposals have been treated as if they were meant to apply across the board, as it were, to just any language, and not specifically to English.⁴

3. Bull's Analysis of Time, Tense and Aspect

3.0. We may at this point turn to Bull's analysis of 'tense' which starts off from the position that:

"...there are only three possible order relationships between events and any axis of orientation: the event being perceived may be anterior to, simultaneous with or posterior to the event used as an axis of orientation."

This means in effect that we can perceive events, recall them or anticipate them. The question as to *how* this fact relates to grammar will be taken up later.

3.1. A summary of the Bull framework will be presented below in order to make the discussion of its application to Işekiri clearer.

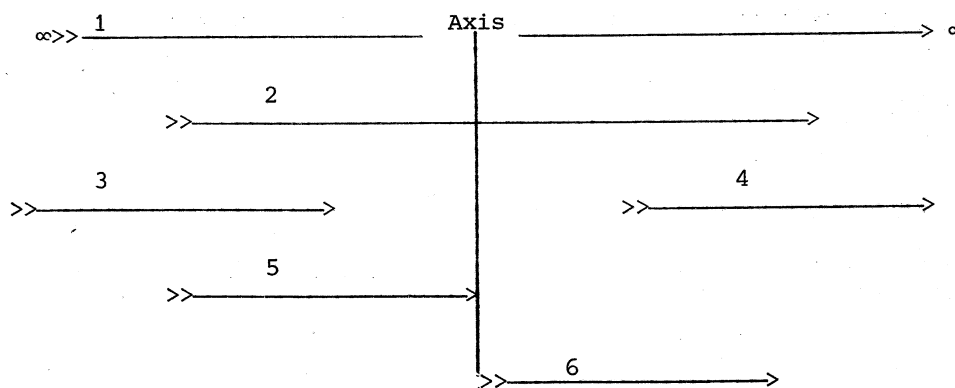
Since there are only three possible order relationships between an event and an axis of orientation, all order morphemes are in some sense synonymous with 'anteriority', 'simultaneity' and 'posteriority'.

Considering that every event takes place in time, every event has length and three aspects (perspectives?), i.e. a beginning, a

middle and an end. The absolute beginning and the absolute end are perceptible; but they do not have duration. Although the termination of an event is usually simultaneous with its perception, it is treated as anterior to the act of speaking and it is the point of initiation of speech which serves as the axis of orientation or the point present (Bull's PP), the 'now' of utterance as Lyons (1968:305) terms it.

Bull's diagram (see below) clearly shows all the possible order relationships which the aspects (perspectives) of events, points and time intervals may have to an axis of orientation. An arrow represents either a time interval or the three aspects (perspectives) of an event, i.e. the beginning, the middle or the end of the event concerned.

Order Relationships of Aspects, Points and
Time Intervals to an Axis⁵



The figures on the above diagram are to be interpreted as follows:

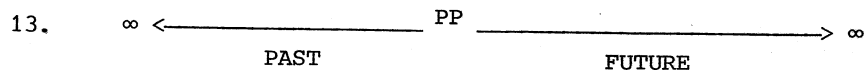
1. The speaker at 'Axis' (the 'now' of utterance of Lyons (1968:305) can look backward or forward toward infinity.
2. The beginning of the action (its initiative aspect) is anterior to PP, i.e. the time of speaking with which its middle is simultaneous. Its end (the terminative aspect) is posterior to PP.
3. All three aspects of this event are anterior to PP.
4. All three aspects are posterior to PP.
5. The end of this event is simultaneous with PP. Its beginning and its middle must therefore be anterior to PP.

6. This is the opposite of 5. The beginning of this event is simultaneous with PP. Its middle and its end must be posterior to PP.

Considering the order relationships shown on the diagram above, Bull establishes several points of orientation:

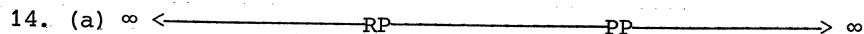
- (i) PP - the initiation of speech which serves as the axis of orientation, the point present of a tense system.
- (ii) RP - this is a point which must have served as the point of initiation of speech at some time prior to the actual initiation of speech. For example, when a person says: "I saw the man", what he is actually doing is recollecting that at some moment prior to the present moment, the seeing took place. That past moment, Bull labels RP i.e. Retrospective Point.
- (iii) AP - this is Anticipated point, a point in time posterior to the moment of initiation of speech. It indicates a future point in time when it is anticipated that an event will take place.

Bull explains, quite rightly, that man experiences and thinks about reality and time only at PP but that recall and anticipation, being themselves events, must also be simultaneous with PP such that only the contents of recollection and anticipation can be anterior to, or posterior to PP. He illustrates his points of reference with the following diagrams:⁶

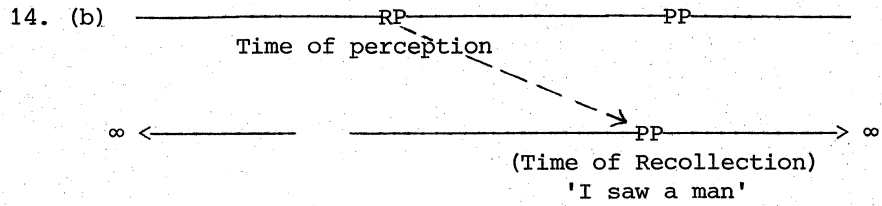


The speaker who at PP in (13) above perceives a man can say: "I see someone".

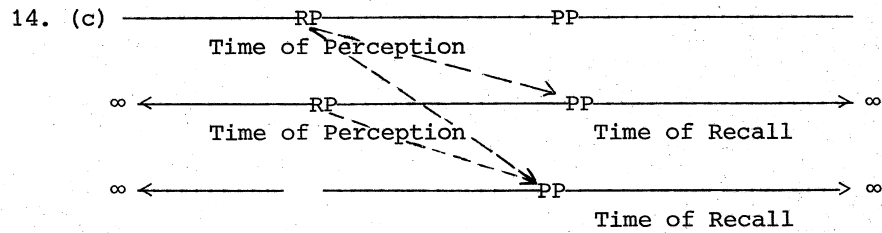
Later, at a new initiation of speech, i.e. a new PP, he can recall this perception (along with the point in time of perception) and say: "I saw.../I had seen..." The original PP is obviously retrospective; it has become RP as in (14a) below:



This means that when the speaker concerned says at his new initiation of speech, "I saw a man", he does what the next diagram suggests:



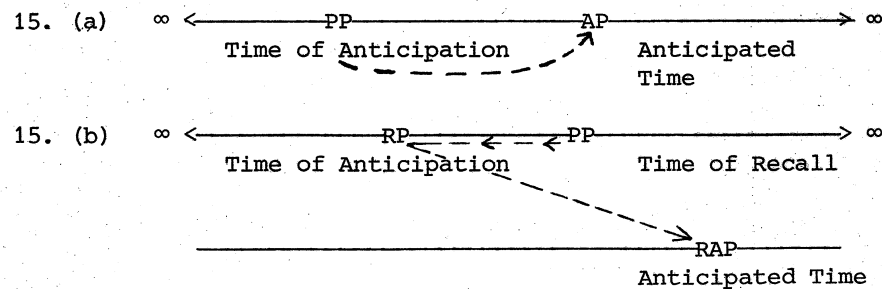
As should be obvious by now, the number of possible RP's is theoretically infinite. (14c) below tries to show how this works out:



Clearly, if a speaker can look back and recall events, then he can also foresee that, at some anticipated point in time, he will be contemplating/experiencing infinity bidirectionally. He can also recall this fact at yet a new point in time. This is why Bull argues that if:

- (i) RP can be recalled at PP, (cf. (14b) and (14c) above)
- and (ii), AP can be anticipated from PP (cf. (15a) below),

then total recall seems possible only if one could remember at PP that a point in time was once anticipated from RP. This latter point is what Bull terms Retrospective Anticipated Point, RAP schematically represented as (15b) below:



The point marked RAP in (15b) would be identical to what is labelled AP in (15a) if it is anticipated from PP rather than from RP.

3.2. Although Bull (1963) explicitly admits that calendar time and tense systems are not exactly identical, he convincingly demonstrates the need which both systems share for an axis of orientation and a concept of direction. The question at this point is: What exactly is the relationship between Bull's analysis of time relative to a speaker and the grammatical category 'tense'? This is the question to which attention will now be directed.

3.3. The Relationship between Bull's Concept of Time and the Grammatical Category 'Tense'

3.3.0. This attempt to answer the question posed at the end of the last section is based on what seems to be the fundamental principle underlying Bull (1963).

3.3.1. Fundamental to what we would term the relationship between 'time' and 'tense' in the context of Bull (1963) is the claim made by Bull, and to which attention was drawn earlier, that:

"Man experiences and thinks about reality and time only at what Bull (1963) terms PP (see (13) above)."

The diagrams (14b) through (15b) above clearly show (one at least hopes they do) that recollection and anticipation are events which occur at PP, i.e. the point of initiation of speech; such that, being themselves simultaneous with PP, their contents are either anterior to or posterior to PP. This means that 'tense' is grammar's own way of locating the time of whatever the verb refers to in terms of the actual time of initiation of speech, i.e. Bull's PP, or the 'now' of utterance of Lyons (1968:305). This is not unlikely to be what Comrie (1976:2) means by:

"...Since tense locates the time of a situation relative to the situation of the utterance, we may describe the tense as deictic."

Lyons (1968:304-305) makes basically the same point when he says, inter alia, that the grammatical category tense:

"...has to do with time-relations in so far as these are expressed by systematic grammatical contrasts.

"...the essential characteristic of the category of tense is that it relates the time of the action, event or state of affairs referred to in the sentence to the time of

utterance (the time of utterance being 'now'). Tense is therefore a deictic category, which (like all syntactic features partly or wholly dependent upon deixis) is simultaneously a property of the sentence and the utterance."

The result of all this is that, as Comrie (1976:2) correctly notes, when the situation described by a verb or predicative element is temporally *simultaneous* with the point of initiation of speech (Bull's PP), it is said to be in the *present* tense; when it is *anterior* to this point, it is described as *past* tense. The third possibility is when a verb or predicative element describes a situation that is posterior to the point of initiation of speech; in such cases, the verb is said to be in the *future* tense.

3.3.2. The question now is, if 'tense' regroups those grammatical features of the verb which indicate time relationships relative to the point of initiation of speech, what exactly does aspect do?

We would like to say that it is not always easy to draw a line indicating where 'tense' ends and 'aspect' begins. Leech (1969:134) seems to have been sensitive to this difficulty when he defined tense as:

"...those grammatical features of the verbal group which express relations of simultaneity or overlap of time (i.e. relations involving the system \neq TIM) or else relations of 'before'/'after' (involving the system \neq BEF)."

Leech's definition of tense seems to involve some purely aspectual notions; and this is precisely what Odunuga (1969) means when he says that the formal differentiation of temporal and aspectual meanings is difficult, if not impossible. Dahl (1980) seems to echo this view when, while noting that in theory, 'tense' and 'aspect' "... are not easy to keep apart ..." concludes that in reality, "... there is no neat delimitation ..." between the two concepts. In spite of these difficulties, however, the discussion in Bull (1963) clearly suggests that the grammatical category 'aspect' has to do with a kind of perspectivising of the internal, temporal structure of the situation described by the verb relative to the point of initiation of speech. This internal, temporal structure is what Bull describes in terms of the beginning, the middle and the end of an event, and refers to as the different aspects of any event.

In view of the above, we are inclined to conclude that whereas 'tense' temporally locates the situation described by a verb in terms of simultaneity with, anteriority to or posteriority to the

point of initiation of speech, 'aspect' reflects the temporal relationship between either:

- (i) the point of initiation of speech and the internal, temporal structure of the event described by the verb; or
- (ii) the internal, temporal structure of a specific background situation described by one verb and the totality of the situation referred to by another verb,

by being sensitive to whether it is the beginning, the middle, the end or the whole of the one that is simultaneous with, anterior to, or posterior to the other.

4. The Tense and Aspectual System of Iṣẹkiri

4.0. In the rest of this study, we shall examine the verb phrase in Iṣẹkiri in an attempt to determine the interaction of 'tense' and 'aspect' in the language.

4.1. Consider the following sentences in Iṣẹkiri:

- 16. ́ jẹ òjẹ
 He/she eat food
 i.e. 'He is eating/He ate'
- 17. ́ jẹ òjẹ rẹn
 He/she eat food?
 i.e. 'He has eaten'
- 18. ́ waá jẹ òjẹ
 He/she future time eat food
 i.e. 'He will eat'

(16) and similar sentences in Iṣẹkiri describe either:

- (i) a situation that is definitely *anterior* to the time of utterance; or
- (ii) an ongoing situation, i.e. one that is *simultaneous* with the time of utterance.

On the other hand, (17) and comparable sentences in Iṣẹkiri refer to a situation that has *completely taken place* before the time of

utterance; while sentences such as (18) assert that the situation referred to by the verb is posterior to the time of utterance, i.e. it will take place at some anticipated, but unspecified point in time after the time of utterance.

The data available to us suggests that the following negative sentence, though not common, could quite easily be uttered by an exasperated wife or mother faced with the prospect of all the available food being gulped down at one sitting:

19. Eṅẹ̀ éè jẹ̀ ọ̀jẹ̀ ní ejúmá?
 We NEG eat food in tomorrow
 i.e. 'Won't we eat tomorrow?'

The presence of the adverbial ní ejúmá 'tomorrow' in (19) clearly indicates that the time referred to in the sentence is future time. The point, however, is that (20) below which is the positive sentence that corresponds to (19) is definitely unacceptable.

20. *Eṅẹ̀ jẹ̀ ọ̀jẹ̀ ní ejúmá?
 We eat food in tomorrow

What all of the above seems to suggest is that the presence of waá before a verb, as in (18), imposes a strict future time interpretation whereas the form without waá does not necessarily exclude a future time interpretation (at least, not in the negative). This means that although the marked form, i.e. the form with waá, is strictly restricted in its function, the unmarked form is not so restricted, and its function is determined only by the context. It should, however, be pointed out that, in reality, (20) above is almost invariably replaced by:

21. Eṅẹ̀ éè wá jẹ̀ ọ̀jẹ̀ ní ejúmá
 We NEG future time eat food in tomorrow
 i.e. 'Won't we eat tomorrow?'

which differs from (20) by the presence in it of the variant of the overt marker of future time wá in negative sentences, i.e. wá

Careful examination of the next few sentences against the background of what was said about 'tense' and time in the previous section should reveal how 'tense' operates in Iṣẹkiri.

22. Ó fọ̀
 He/she speak
 i.e. 'He spoke/is speaking'

23. Ó fò ní ọ́lá
 He/she speak in yesterday
 i.e. 'He spoke yesterday'
24. Ó waá fò ní ejú má
 He/she future speak in tomorrow
 i.e. 'He will speak tomorrow'
25. *Ó fò ní ejú má
 He/she speak in tomorrow
26. Ó waá fò
 He/she future speak
 i.e. 'He will speak'
27. *Ó waá fò ní ọ́lá
 He/she future speak in yesterday

(22) describes a situation which is either anterior to, or simultaneous with the moment of utterance. The presence of the adverbial in (23), which is what distinguishes (23) from (22), excludes an interpretation of the sentence such that it refers to a situation which is simultaneous with the time of utterance. In addition, in spite of what the gloss in (22) may lead one to expect, (23) does not tolerate a 'progressive' interpretation. (25) shows that the simple verb stem is not in fact compatible with a future time interpretation; it is, precisely the presence in this sentence of the adverbial ní ejú má 'tomorrow', which is compatible with a future time interpretation, that accounts for the unacceptability of the sentence. (24), (26) and (27) clearly indicate that with or without the help of adverbials, the presence of waá in a sentence excludes any interpretation other than a future time one. A comparison of (22) and (23) on the one hand, with (24) and (26) on the other reveals that even if the explicit time adverbials in (23) and (24) are deleted the resulting strings, i.e. (22) and (26) still serve to establish two distinct points in time relative to the time of utterance, and to give a clear indication of the way in which the grammatical category 'tense' is expressed in Iṣẹkiri. Thus, without any further modification to the sentences concerned, the situations referred to by the verbs in (26) and (22) are, in purely temporal terms, *after* the time of utterance and *not-after* the time of utterance respectively. Considering what was said to be the relationship between time reference and 'tense' in section (3.3.1) above, and, on the basis of sentences such as the ones discussed above, as well as similar and/or comparable sentences, we are inclined to conclude that Iṣẹkiri makes a distinction between *Future*, and *Non-Future* tense such that, the presence of waá or its variant in negative sentences wá systematically indicates the future tense, while the absence of either of these elements is systematically indicative

of the non-future tense. The conclusion reached here about 'tense' in Iṣẹkiri does seem to confirm the claim made in Lyons (1968:305) to the effect that:

"... The 'theoretical zero point' (the 'now' of utterance) might be included with either past or future to yield, on the one hand, a dichotomy between 'future' and 'non-future' or on the other a dichotomy between 'past' and 'non-past'.

4.2. If we tentatively define the verb as that element in the verb phrase, which can occur in a minimal sentence, i.e. in the empty slot in the following structural frame:

28. # NP₁ _____ (NP₂) #

then, a close examination of the available data reveals that in Iṣẹkiri, this verb is made up of a verb stem (VS), and a number of elements, including the future tense marker waá/wá, which occur between NP₁ in (28) above, and the verb stem, such that:

29. V → Aux + VS

The items which feature in the Aux position in (29) above do not all perform the same function in the language; they are of different types. Some, like waá/wá, indicate tense, others mark aspect and yet others mark mode, or serve as a signal of embedding. The question of the formal grammatical status of all the items which occur in this slot is clearly beyond the scope of this paper. In the rest of this section, we shall simply identify and examine those items in Aux which mark either 'tense' or 'aspect' in Iṣẹkiri, and the relationship between them.

It would appear that there are four such simple morphemes in Iṣẹkiri, i.e.

- (i) waá/wa
- (ii) wínọrọn (gbá)
- (iii) ká
- (iv) rẹn/tè

As has been shown above, waá/wá marks the future, as opposed to the non-future tense. The other items listed as (ii) through (iv) above indicate different aspects. These items occur as either single morphemes, or as a compound of two or more markers, in association with waá/wá, and then only in the following linear order.⁹

30.	wáá/wá	(wínóròn (gbá))	rẹn/tẹ
		{)
		(ká)

4.3. The Semantic Interpretation of Tense and Aspect
Markers in Iṣẹkiri

4.3.0. The discussion in section (4.1) above says the most basic things that need to be highlighted about wáá/wá as a marker of 'tense' in Iṣẹkiri. We have also, in the immediately preceding section, drawn attention to the specific elements which either on their own, or in combination with one another introduce different, semantic, aspectual distinctions into the sentences in which they occur.

What is left at this point is to:

- (i) identify the different aspectual distinctions that are expressed in Iṣẹkiri;
- (ii) indicate the different markers of the distinctions referred to in (i) above; and
- (iii), determine how wáá/wá interacts with the elements in (ii) above.

This will be done by listing the forms in which the different aspect markers occur, whether as simple or compound markers, and then taking each such marker within the context of specific sentences in Iṣẹkiri to determine its semantic contribution to the sentence. It is hoped that this will result in the identification of all the semantic distinctions that are expressed within the grammatical category 'aspect' in Iṣẹkiri, as well as the relationship, if any, between them.

4.3.1. The simple form of the aspect markers in Iṣẹkiri is as indicated in (ii) through (iv) (section 4.2.) above. It would appear that there are only two combinations in which these aspect markers usually occur; these combinations are shown below:

Possible Combinations of Aspect Markers in Iṣẹkiri¹⁰

- (i) wínóròn (gbá) ...rẹn/tẹ
- (ii) Ká ... rẹn/tẹ

Tẹ is listed as an alternative form to rẹn because the two are actually in complementary distribution such that tẹ only occurs in negative sentences while rẹn occurs in positive sentences.

The following sentences exemplify the uses of all the aspect markers and the tense marker in Işekiri¹¹:

- 31 (a) Ó waá şe e 'He will do it'
 (b) Èè wá şe é 'He will not do it'
32. Ó wínọ̀rọ̀n (gbá) fọ 'He is in the process of talking'
33. O ká fọ 'He usually talks, i.e. he is talkative'
- 34 (a) Ó bọghọ rẹn 'He/she/it has passed'
 34 (b) Èè tẹ̀ bọghọ '... it has not passed'
- 35 (a) Mó waá wínọ̀rọ̀n (gbá) şe uşẹ 'I will be in the process of working'
 35 (b) Mée wá wínọ̀rọ̀n (gbá) şe uşẹ 'I will not be in the process of working'
- 36 (a) Ẹnẹ waá ká bírọ 'We will keep asking'
 36 (b) Ẹnẹ èè wá ká bírọ 'We will not keep asking'
- 37 (a) Ó waá jíná rẹn 'It will have cooked'
 37 (b) Èè tẹ̀ wá jíná 'It will not have cooked'
- 38 (a) O wínọ̀rọ̀n (gbá) jẹ ọ̀jẹ rẹn 'He is/was already in the process of eating'
 38 (b) Èè tẹ̀ wínọ̀rọ̀n (gbá) jẹ ọ̀jẹ 'He is/was not already in the process of eating'
- 39 (a) O ká yẹn rẹn 'It has now started laying'
 39 (b) Èè tẹ̀ ká yẹn 'It has not started laying yet'
- 40 (a) O waá ká rẹ rẹn 'He will have started going (habitually)'
 40 (b) Èè tẹ̀ wá ká rẹn 'He will not have started going yet'
- 41 (a) O waá wínọ̀rọ̀n (gbá) şẹ egín rẹn 'He will already be in the process of splitting wood'
 41 (b) Èè tẹ̀ wá wínọ̀rọ̀n (gbá) şẹ egín 'He will not be in the process of splitting wood yet'
42. O ká şe eré jù 'He usually plays too much'
43. O gín gbẹ ọwa a 'He told his father'
44. Mo gbọ́ tí o gbá gín gbẹ ọwa a 'I heard when he was¹² telling his father'
45. O wínọ̀rọ̀n gbá ba omẹgháán ké 'He is scolding the children'

46. Iye rẹ ma wá mée
wá kín wun 'When/if your mother comes,
I will not greet her'
47. Ujó eyí wé nọkàn
owun o ká jó 'It is only this particular dance
that he usually dances'
48. Ó ẹ ẹ ẹ ẹ gín o
wínọrọn mà rẹn 'It looks like she is beginning
to know/now realising'
49. Ó rẹ ubo omere ro
'She went/is going to her
brother's/sister's place'
50. Mo wínọrọn gbá rí 'I can actually see you.¹³
ẹ ò
51. Ó gbẹgbé rẹn 'He has forgotten'
52. Èè tè tìgbì 'He has not yet remembered'
53. Á kpa á kókọ rẹn 'He has since been killed'
54. Kẹkẹ ùghòjọ méeḡua 'Even before it was ten o'clock
gbà tó, o tó ubo wé he had arrived.'
rẹn

4.3.2. Conclusions with Respect to Semantic Interpretation

The following conclusions as to semantic interpretation can be drawn from the preceding set of sentences involving the different tense and aspect markers in Işekiri:

1. Wáá/wá definitely indicates a future situation. A comparison of (31 (a) and (b)) above with (55) below confirms this, as do the set of sentences discussed earlier (section 4:1.), and those sentences in (31), through (54) above which involve this item.

55. (a) Ó waá ẹ ẹ { ní ejuma
(b) Èè wá ẹ ẹ { ní ọjó ọkàn
{ ní ọḡọn méeḡua ti ó wa.

i.e. 'He will/will not do it {tomorrow
{some day in the future,
{in ten years' time.'

Whether or not the items in braces are present, futurity is implied as in:

56. Mó waá ẹ ẹ 'I will do it.'

but not:

57. *Mó se é {ní ejúma } *I do it tomorrow/in ten
 {ní ọ̀ḍọ̀n mēēgua} years'

This means that the elements in braces in (55) are redundant for the expression of futurity, the idea of which is solely borne by the morpheme wáá/wá.

2. Wínóron (gbá) denotes a situation that is in progress, i.e. continuing. According to Leech (1969:149-151), a continuous form implies duration as opposed to an indivisible entity without extension in time. But this duration is limited as the situation is temporary. The form also implies incompleteness; the absolute beginning and the absolute end of the situation are not known. All that is known is that the beginning of the situation in question is *before* the time of utterance, and the situation will continue for some time, i.e. its middle is *simultaneous* with the time of utterance. The fact that if wínóron-gbá is deleted from sentence (32) above, the resulting string only describes a situation *not-after* as opposed to one that is *after* the time of utterance clearly shows that the idea of continuous (progressive?) situation is specifically borne by this item.

However, the gloss provided for (16) and (22) (section 4.1.) suggests that the simple verb stem in Isekiri does not actually exclude a non-future continuous interpretation. This, according to Comrie (1976:33), suggests that in Isekiri, "... the use of a specifically progressive form is optional ..." The truth, however, is that a progressive interpretation of the simple verb stem is not always possible with just any verb. In the case of a relatively large number of verbs, including rè 'go' and sá 'run/escape', such a progressive interpretation of the simple verb stem is definitely excluded. It is, of course, quite possible that what appears to be 'progressive' is actually an effect of translation into English.

3. Ká describes a situation that is seen as characteristic of an extended period of time or repeated over a period of time, i.e. a *habitual* situation. The test used for wínóron gbá, in relation to (32) above, can also be applied to the examples (33), (36), (39), (40), (42) and (47) to confirm this. Perhaps we should also point out that the use of ká with reference to a particular situation in Isekiri has the implicature: *the situation referred to still holds*, unless ká co-occurs with sí 'before' when this implicature is cancelled. Thus, o ká rè sí 'he used to go' has as implicature: 'he no longer goes'.

4. Waá wínóron (gbá) refers to a situation which, at some anticipated point in time *after* the time of utterance, will be *ongoing*.
5. Waá ká describes a situation which, at some anticipated point in time after the time of utterance, will either be characteristic of an extended period of time, or be repeated over a period of time, i.e. a *future, habitual* situation.
6. Rén/tè seems to be associated with 'perfective' aspect. As (7) through (11) below show, it can combine with any of the tense and aspect markers in Işekiri. That this is the case is confirmed by the sentences (34), (37), (38), (39), (40), (41), (48), (51), (53), and (54). Rén/tè seems to introduce the notion of 'completion' of the situation referred to. However, careful consideration of sentences involving rén/tè in Işekiri also suggest that its contribution to the meaning of a sentence also involves a notion of 'present relevance', thus suggesting that this item shares features of what is generally termed 'perfect' in other languages, as well as 'perfective' aspect.
7. Waá r n/t  describes a situation which at some anticipated point in time *after* the time of utterance will have completely taken place, but will still have some relevance.
8. A situation referred to by W n ron (gb ) r n in Işekiri is one which, although it had started before the time of utterance, is actually still going on at the time and will most probably continue for some time after. This means that although the beginning of such a situation is anterior to the time of utterance its middle is simultaneous with it.
9. K  r n refers to a situation which has started to characterize an extended period of time, or has been repeated over a period of time up to, and including the time of utterance.
10. Waá k  r n depicts a situation which at some anticipated point in time *after* the time of utterance will either have started to characterize an extended period of time or have been repeated over a period of time. The habitual nature of the appropriate situation will be established well before the anticipated time, but it will extend right up to and beyond this time. This means that in terms of the three phrases of any situation, the

beginning of the relevant situation will be anterior to the anticipated future time while its middle will be simultaneous with it.

11. Wáá wínóron (gbá) rẹn describes a situation which, at some anticipated point in time *after* the time of utterance, will not only have started, but also will still be in progress.

4.3.3. Our next task is to show the implications which the different shades of meaning isolated above have for the totality of the system of temporal and aspectual meanings in Işekiri.

It is evident from the preceding semantic interpretation assigned to the tense and aspect markers in Işekiri, that for all tense purposes, wáá marks *futurity*, i.e. an event that will take place at an anticipated point in time *after* the point of initiation of speech. Therefore the *future tense* does exist in Işekiri. The tense that is opposed to the future tense seems to be characterized by the absence of an overt marker. This tense can be interpreted as either past or present depending on the context and/or the verb involved. As earlier indicated (section 4.1), this tense will be termed non-future. Therefore in Işekiri, the opposition in terms of 'tense' is between:

Future and Non-future.

If at this point, we make a table of the available forms, it should be easier to more clearly see the nature of the distinct time relationships that our markers introduce whether alone or in combination with one another in a sentence. The table is provided below and it shows six different pairs of forms.

Table of Tense and Aspect Markers in Işekiri

1. VS	wáá + VS
2. wínóron (gbá) + VS	wáá wínóron (gbá) + VS
3. ká + VS	wáá ká + VS
4. wínóron (gbá) rẹn + VS	wáá wínóron (gbá) rẹn + VS
5. ká rẹn + VS	wáá ká rẹn + VS
6. rẹn + VS	wáá rẹn + VS

The above table shows that in each of the two sets of six forms set up above, there is one basic difference, i.e. the forms in the right hand column each contain the future tense marker wáá which, in the forms in the left hand column, is absent. In view of what was said earlier about wáá, we would say that Iṣẹkiri has six aspect forms in the future tense and six corresponding aspect forms in the non-future tense. The question now is: what kind of system of tense and aspect emerges from this table and how do the forms isolated relate to tense forms found in other languages?

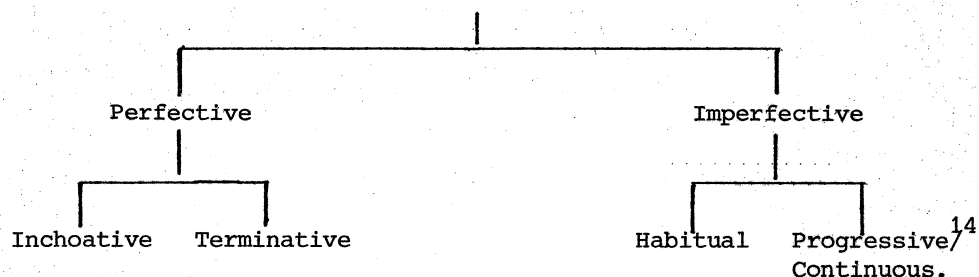
From the examples (32), (35), (37) and (38) and more especially from conclusion (2) and (3) on the one hand, and (5) and (6) on the other, it can be seen that, irrespective of the tense involved,

- (i) wínóron (gbá) describes a situation in progress; and
- (ii) ká refers to a habitual situation.

A situation in progress and a habitual one have one thing in common; they involve duration, i.e. an extension in time. Comrie (1976) suggests that progressive in the sense of 'continuous', and habitual involve the notion of imperfectivity which is what distinguishes perfective and imperfective aspect. We will therefore say that wínóron gba and ká together realise *imperfective* aspect in Iṣẹkiri; but that imperfective is subdivided into progressive (continuous), and habitual represented by wínóron gbá and ká respectively.

Examples (34), (37), (38), (39), (40), (41), (48), (51), (53) and (55) along with conclusions (6) in particular, and (7) through (11) in general show that rẹn combines with either non-future or future tense forms to introduce the notion of completion plus present relevance. The indications are that rẹn marks perfective aspect in Iṣẹkiri. However, a comparison of the sentences (34), (37), (51), (53) and (54) on the one hand, and (38), (41), (48), (39) and (40) on the other suggests that Iṣẹkiri makes a distinction between a situation whose inception is completely anterior to the time of utterance, as is the case with forms involving either wínóron (gbá) or ká and rẹn and a situation which, as a whole, is completely anterior to the time of utterance as exemplified by the sentences involving just rẹn + VS. In view of this fact, we are inclined to conclude that perfective aspect as depicted by rẹn in Iṣẹkiri is actually subdivided into *inchoative* marked by wínóron (gbá) or ká + rẹn and *terminative* marked by just rẹn cooccurring with the verb stem. In addition, we will say that the forms numbered (1) in our table above are neutral with respect to aspect since they do not seem to involve either of the two major aspectual oppositions identified above. In other words, the forms in question involve neither perfective aspect nor imperfective aspect. The picture of aspectual oppositions that emerges for Iṣẹkiri is as schematically represented below:

Aspectual Oppositions Expressed in Iṣẹkiri



When the various tense forms in Iṣẹkiri are compared with forms in the better-known languages, on the basis of their semantic input to the sentences in which they feature, they can be labelled in the way which the following table suggests.

Tense Forms in Iṣẹkiri

Label	Marker	Label	Marker
1. Simple Non-Future	VS	Simple Future	waá + VS
2. Non-Future Continuous	wínọ̀rọ̀n gbá + VS	Future Continuous	waá wínọ̀rọ̀n (gbá) + VS
3. Non-Future Habitual	Ká + VS	Future Habitual	waá ká + VS
4. Non-Future Perfect Continuous	wínọ̀rọ̀n (gbá) rẹ̀n + VS	Future Perfect Continuous	waá wínọ̀rọ̀n (gbá) rẹ̀n + VS
5. Non-Future Perfect Habitual	Ká rẹ̀n + VS	Future Perfect Habitual	waá ká rẹ̀n
6. Non-Future Perfect	rẹ̀n + VS	Future Perfect	waá rẹ̀n + VS

4.4. At this point, to complete the picture of the working of the tense and aspect system in Iṣẹkiri, attention is drawn to what appears to be the only recorded case of grammatical tone in the language. This is the case of the verb wá 'come' where the following was noted:

58. Ó wa { 'he is coming'
 { 'he will come'
59. O wá 'he came'
60. (i) Ó waá wa ní ejú má } 'he will come tomorrow'
 (ii) O wa ní ejú má }

This would tend to mean that in the case of the verb wá 'come', the language makes a distinction between time *before* the point of initiation of speech and time *not before* i.e. a distinction between *past* and *non-past* time. This is clearly different from the more general distinction discussed earlier i.e. future, non-future. But this distinction is restricted to the simple form. When wá 'come' combines with forms (2), (3), (4), (5) and (6) on our table, a three-way distinction then operates i.e. *Past: Present: Future*. The high tone bearing form of the verb wá marks *Past* and the presence of the morpheme waá marks the mid tone bearing form of the verb which occurs in a compound tense form as future. This is the only recorded case of such a phenomenon in the language. Although the behaviour of wá 'come' may be of some historical importance, a comprehensive investigation of what may actually be involved is completely beyond the scope of this paper.

However, the data shows that apart from this basic difference the verb wá 'come' seems, in all other respects, to behave like all other verbs in the language; it combines with each of the two sets of our forms (2) through (6) set up above. This means that our conclusions about the interplay of the grammatical categories 'tense' and 'aspect' in Işekiri remain valid even for the verb wá 'come'. This also leads one to believe that in spite of the apparent difference between the behaviour of this verb and that of all other verbs in the language, there is no need to treat it as an exception and set up two separate systems in the language. The verb wá 'come' can be integrated into the general system which operates for all other verbs in Işekiri. To do this, the two forms of this verb i.e. the high and the mid tone bearing forms could be considered as alternants. In this case, the mid tone bearing form of the verb would indicate present/future, i.e. non-past. But when this form has waá preposed to it, it will be solely interpreted as 'future'. On the other hand, the high tone bearing form of the verb will be marked for interpretation as 'past' by its tone. We would then have, for the simple form of this verb, the following picture:

61.	Non-Future	Future
	wa/wá	wa

with a rule indicating that the high tone form of the verb is specifically marked for interpretation as 'past'.

The simplicity of this approach seems to recommend it especially as it will avert what appears to be the high cost of setting up two separate systems, one solely for the verb wá 'come', and the other for all other verbs in the language.

4.5. In conclusion, in the present writer's opinion, the grammatical categories 'tense' and 'aspect' exist in Iṣẹkiri. Furthermore, there are two tenses in the language, the *non-future* (past/present) and the *future*. The former, with only slight restriction is not characterised by any surface marker whereas the latter is marked by the presence of waá/wá. Each of the two tenses has one simple form and five compound forms. The simple forms are unmarked with respect to 'aspect', i.e. they show neutrality vis à vis 'aspect'. But the compound forms structurally consist of one item or a combination of more than one item which, when added to the simple form of the verb introduce an aspectual meaning. There are basically two such marked aspectual meanings in Iṣẹkiri, *perfective* and *imperfective*; the former is sub-divided into *inchoative* and *terminative*, while the latter subdivides into *habitual* and *progressive*. In addition, we have had to recognise neutrality with respect to 'aspect' for the simple forms of the two tenses in the language which are not themselves marked for aspect.

It would appear that essentially the same information as the above about the operation of the tense and aspect system in Iṣẹkiri can be conveyed by the table which follows.

Tense and Aspect System of Iṣẹkiri

ASPECT	TENSE	
	NON-FUTURE	FUTURE
Neutral	VS	waá + VS
<u>Imperfective:</u>		
(i) Progressive	wínọ̀rọ̀n (gbá) + VS	waá wínọ̀rọ̀n gbá + VS
(ii) Habitual	ká + VS	waá ká + VS
<u>Perfective:</u>		
(a) Inchoative:	(i) wínọ̀rọ̀n (gbá) rẹ̀n + VS	waá wínọ̀rọ̀n (gbá) rẹ̀n + VS
	(ii) Ká rẹ̀n + VS	waá ká rẹ̀n + VS
(b) Terminative	rẹ̀n + VS	waá rẹ̀n + VS

The above table is exemplified below:

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Exemplification of Tense and Aspect System in Isekiri

ASPECT		TENSE	
NEUTRAL	NON-FUTURE	FUTURE	
	Mó rè 'I went/am going.'	Mó waá rè 'I will go.'	
<u>Imperfective:</u>	Mó wínọ̀rọ̀n (gbá) rè.	Mó waá wínọ̀rọ̀n gbá rè.	
(i) Progressive	'I am/was in the process of going.'	'I will be in the process of going.'	
(ii) Habitual	Mó ká rè. 'I go/I usually/used to go.'	Mó waá ká rè. 'I will make a habit of going.'	
<u>Perfective:</u>	(i) Mó wínọ̀rọ̀n (gbá) rè rẹ̀n. 'I have/had already been going.'	Mó waá wínọ̀rọ̀n (gba) rè rẹ̀n. 'I will already have been going.'	
(a) Inchoative	(ii) Mó ká rè rẹ̀n. 'I have/had already made a habit of going.'	Mó waá ká rè rẹ̀n. 'I will already have made a habit of going.'	
(b) Terminative	Mó rè rẹ̀n. 'I have/had already gone'	Mó waá rè rẹ̀n. 'I will already have gone.'	

5.0. There are indications that, irrespective of the language concerned, and in spite of the tense and aspect system in the language, the question of the actual semantic interpretation of a verb form in context goes well beyond that of the tenses and the aspectual distinctions attested in the language. It is ultimately a function of the kind of verb involved in the sentence; and the tense interpretation imposed on the verb may turn out to be different from what its form would normally suggest. There is no doubt that a comprehensive account of the semantic interpretation of the various kinds, classes and/or sub-classes of verbs in Isekiri will require research of a dimension that is clearly beyond the scope of this

paper. What does seem to be a step in the right direction is an examination of the relationship between different verbs and different aspectual distinctions. This is why, in the rest of this paper, a tentative attempt will be made to see the extent to which different verbs in Iṣẹkiri display the kind of sensitivity to aspectual notions which Vendler (1967), Comrie (1976), and other writers on the subject would generally lead one to expect.

5.1. In Omamor (1976 :224-235) where the Lakoff-Fillmore distinction stative/non-stative is discussed, attention is drawn to the fact that a relatively large number of verbs in Iṣẹkiri which do not, under any interpretation, have an associated Agent NP, and which would therefore, superficially at least, appear to be covered by the label 'stative' in the sense of Fillmore (1968 (a)) and Lakoff (1966) seem to be less sensitive to aspectual notions than the Lakoff-Fillmore distinction would essentially lead one to expect. Evidence for this view relates to the fact that some of such verbs in Iṣẹkiri:

- (i) actually feature in the imperative;
- (ii) occur in sentences containing a benefactive expression as in:

Urun ti o sí wé bà mí èrù gbé rẹ
Thing Rel. it happen this afflict me fear for you

i.e. 'This thing which has happened makes me fear for you.'

and (iii), tolerate the progressive aspect marker wínórọ̀n (gbá).

It is also pointed out that the bulk of such verbs in Iṣẹkiri appear to be (- Imp.) and (+ Prog.), thus behaving more like process verbs in the sense of Chafe (1970:101).

On the basis of the above, the present writer, following McCoy (1971:162, footnote 4), concluded that, if the defining criteria for stativity proposed by Lakoff and Fillmore are assumed to have universal validity, then the Lakoff-Fillmore distinction stative/non-stative may, in fact, be an over-simplification since what Lakoff and Fillmore term stative verbs clearly seemed to lack homogeneity in Iṣẹkiri.

5.2. Comrie (1976:34-5) seems to echo Lakoff and Fillmore in part when he says:

"...verbs tend to divide into two disjoint (nonoverlapping) classes, those that can appear in the progressive forms, and those that cannot. Moreover, this distinction corresponds to that between stative and non-stative verbs."

In addition, the discussion in Comrie (1976:48-51) suggests a distinction between states and dynamic situations, such that states can be termed (+ Change), (- Effort), (- Continuing input of energy) and (- Progressive); while dynamic situations are (+ Necessarily Change), (+ Effort), (+ Continuing input of energy) and (+ Progressive). It would also appear that this distinction also corresponds to the distinction stative/non-stative. However, Comrie does point out (p.35) that:

- (i) some languages may have a strict lexical classification of verbs in terms of this distinction, while some other languages may make a classification based on meaning;
- (ii) non-stative uses of basically stative verbs sometimes occur; and
- (iii), it may in fact be the case that a language such as English, for instance,

"... is developing from a restricted use of the Progressive, always with progressive meaning, to this more extended meaning range, the present anomalies representing a midway stage between these two points."

In view of the above, one could actually say that, perhaps, the distinction in question is not quite as clearcut as literature on the subject seems to suggest.

5.3. A close examination of verbs in Işekiri which feature in the progressive against the background of Comrie (1976:32-40 and 48-51) leads to basically the same conclusions as the one reached in Omamor (1976:234-5), and cited in part earlier on. This conclusion is again based on the fact that, as the following table clearly shows, verbs in Işekiri which literature on the subject would have led one to classify as 'stative' consistently occur in the progressive¹⁶.

See table overleaf:

Verbs in Isekiri and Compatibility with Progressive

Verbs in Işekiri and Compatibility with Progressive

+ Progressive	- Progressive	± Progressive
sá	gbọ́	kanf 'live (+ loc.); + Prog. =
sá ògùré	wí/gha 'be (-Loc.)'	temporary, - Prog. = permanent'
ya	soró 'stand'	nọ́
şe uşé	sàn 'be good (in the sense of 'suit')'	- Prog. = of things/person
gwà	ta ẹwó 'slap'	+ Prog. = 'show evidence of being unaware of one's roots.'
rọ́	rí gbà 'receive'	
rí	kàn 'touch'	
dọ́n	yẹlé 'be proper/necessary'	
wán	yá 'be quick'	
mà	wù 'please'	
bà ẹrù	kpà ẹbóbo 'surprise'	
şe ìbìnọ́	te 'be full (of stomach)'	
bí inọ́	gbẹ́gbé 'forget'	
fùn	désìn 'know (of person)'	
mú	tìgbì 'remember'	
jó	dà 'vanish/become'	
dẹ̀n	kuàn 'be injured/injure'	
go	màwọ́ 'turn sour'	
mú		

+ Progressive	- Progressive	+ Progressive	
kú	'die'	sǐ	'happen (of events)'
rǐ mà	'realise'	fù	'leak'
dīn	'be dark (of day)'	ré	'be (equative)'
fó	'strike (of thunder)'	ré	'be (in identificatory sense)'
nè	'have/own'	bì	'be broad'
fún	'fine (of weather)'	kè	'be cheap'
fèn	'be white/clean'	rì	'be far'
lǎ	'be big'	kù	'be short'
rò	'be soft'	yò	'be sweet/interesting'
nì	'be strong/hard'	rò	'be bitter'
tīn	'be dirty'	dǎn	'shine/be sharp (of colour and taste respectively)'
là	'survive/become important'	mú	'sharp (of knives)'
gǔn	'tear/be torn'	bè	'be sharp (of colour or persons)'
fán	'shower (of rain)'	rò	'be difficult'
sǐ	'fall (of dew or mist)'	ghán	'be expensive'
bè	'be titled'	rò	'weaken'

+ Progressive	- Progressive	+ Progressive
<p>kpa ẹrín 'make laugh'</p> <p>rò 'think'</p> <p>yé 'be many/dawn on (understand)'</p> <p>gbọ ẹmì 'smell'</p> <p>gbàn 'be pressed (of urine etc.)'</p> <p>kòn 'overwhelm (of sleep)'</p>	<p>jé 'allow/accept'</p> <p>şe anọmú 'cause shame'</p>	

Apart from the items listed above, some other interesting items which also feature in the progressive in Iṣẹkiri include;

jẹ	'consume/afflict (of suffering); eat.'
bẹ	'itch'
kpa	'afflict (of hunger)'
ta	'afflict (of heat)'
gín	'say'
mú	'catch; afflict (of harmattan or cold)'
rè àlẹ̀/yè	'set (of sun)'
má	'dawn (of day)'
guó	'collapse'
dànò	'pour away'
gbè	'be rotten'

When the same set of verbs are considered on the lines which Vendler (1967) suggests, we find that:

- (i) Much of what is said relative to the semantics of the various classes and/or sub-classes of verbs is generally true of verbs in Iṣẹkiri; but,
- (ii) although Iṣẹkiri equivalents of Vendler's state terms are generally compatible with habitual aspect as the discussion of such verbs would lead one to expect, a good number of them are also compatible with the progressive. In addition,
- (iii) some of what the discussion in Vendler (1967) would lead one to classify as 'achievement' terms in Iṣẹkiri sometimes feature in what we have termed 'progressive' here, which covers basically the same thing as Vendler's 'continuous'¹⁷, thus, appearing to provide some support for the suggestion made by Comrie (1976:47-8) when faced with essentially the same situation in English:¹⁸

"... that a new class of situations will have to be recognised, referring to a punctual event and the immediately preceding process, in the sense that the process preceding the event is so intimately bound up with the event that once the process is under way the event cannot be prevented from occurring."

It is quite possible that (ii) and (iii) above only indicate that either the classes of verbs concerned are not as homogenous as is

suggested or that they are more restricted in Iṣẹkiri, than, say, in English. Another view, of course, would be to say that, in this case, as in the case of the distinction stative/non-stative discussed earlier in relation to verbs in Iṣẹkiri, the defining criteria may actually be more language specific than the literature so far would lead one to expect.

What all of the above seems to suggest is that, perhaps any definitive pronouncement as to verbs in Iṣẹkiri and their sensitivity or otherwise to aspectual notions will have to await a careful and comprehensive documentation, and analysis of:

- (i) the exact relationship between the different meanings of verbs in the language, and notions such as 'progressive' and 'habitual', in relation to the situation that is said to obtain in the better-known languages; and
- (ii), the different types of uses to which verbs basically belonging to particular classes and/or sub-classes are put, as well as the explanation if any, for such uses.

6. CONCLUSION

In the preceding discussion of 'tense' and 'aspect' in Iṣẹkiri, we have tried to point out why an across-the-board application of the implications of the analysis of tense and aspect in English provided in Chomsky (1957) and (1965) to the study of lesser-known languages, as evidenced by various writers on the subject, will invariably lead to avoidable inaccuracy. We have then proceeded to provide a summary of the discussion of 'time' and 'tense' in relation to verbs in Bull (1963), and to explain why an analysis such as Bull's which goes from meaning to form is most likely to more accurately reflect the true facts relative to 'tense' and 'time reference' than any purely syntactic proposal on 'tense'. Finally verbs in Iṣẹkiri were examined against the background of the framework provided by Bull (1963). We have been able to show that in Iṣẹkiri, the opposition in terms of 'tense' is between 'future' and 'non-future', whereas in terms of aspectual distinctions, the language basically distinguishes 'perfective' and 'imperfective' aspects such that the former is subdivided into 'inchoative' and 'terminative' while the latter subdivides into 'progressive' and 'habitual'. We have also drawn attention to the fact that some forms of the verb in Iṣẹkiri are actually neutral vis à vis 'aspect'. In the final part of this study, attention has also been drawn to what seems to be 'unusual' behaviour on the part of verbs in Iṣẹkiri in relation to the widely accepted distinction 'stative/non-stative', or what Comrie (1976:48-51) terms a distinction between 'states' and 'dynamic situations', and

classes and/or sub-classes of verbs such as the ones discussed in Vendler (1967). We have also indicated those areas where possible research in the future may provide much-needed answers.

FOOTNOTES

¹Cf. Banjo, L.A. (1969:23-25) who, following Chomsky, notes: "...Aux is optional in Yoruba whereas it is obligatory in English. The reason for this, in turn is that English has *Tense* which is obligatory whereas Yoruba has not ..."
See also Welmers (1973:345-347) who treats Yoruba as basically a tenseless language because it has no specific markers of this distinction. Comrie, B. (1976:82-3) echoes Welmers' analysis.

² (i) In the following examples in Okpẹ and Uvwie, two Edo languages of the Niger Delta of Nigeria, as in other examples in this study, the transcription used is orthographic: ọ, ẹ, ị and ẹ represent /ɔ/, /e/, /i/ and /j/ respectively. Nasality is indicated by adding n to an oral vowel symbol except in the case of a nasalised vowel occurring after a nasal, where n is omitted. Tones are indicated as follows: high (´), low (˘), mid (no mark).

(ii) Where ambiguity is not indicated in the translation provided, it means the form concerned usually has only the meaning indicated.

³The question of what it may be is clearly outside the scope of this paper.

⁴See footnote 1 above.

⁵The term 'aspects' as used by Bull here is to be distinguished from the grammatical category 'aspect'. It relates to the perspective(s) of a specific event.

⁶Only the first two diagrams are in fact taken from Bull (1963). The others are the present writer's attempts to schematically capture the situations described by Bull.

⁷For a discussion of the reasons for the difference in the tonal shape of ẹnẹ 'we' in this sentence as compared to say (19) or (21), see Omamor (1980:218-223).

⁸The details in respect of Negation in Işẹkiri are discussed in Omamor (1977).

⁹Rén usually occurs VP-finally. A special movement rule will therefore be needed to subsequently move this element to its surface-structure position. Tè which is the form that rén takes in negative sentences usually follows the negator éè in such sentences.

¹⁰As (30) above clearly shows when these combined (compound?) aspect markers occur in a sentence containing wáá/wá, the future tense marker, they usually *follow* it.

¹¹When no examples involving negation are given for any specific form, it means that negativisation of the sentence in question is effected by the mere presence in the sentence of the negator éè 'not, i.e. NEG.'

¹²Mo gbó seems to be compatible with just the past tense interpretation except when it is uttered in response to a question from someone who is/has just been scolding/advising the speaker. In such cases it actually translates into English as the unacceptable 'I am hearing you'.

¹³A more accurate/faithful translation will be the unacceptable 'I am seeing you'.

¹⁴The question as to whether the term 'progressive' as used here, as elsewhere in this paper, can be defined in terms of stativity on the same lines as Comrie (1976: 35 and footnote 4) is one that will have to await careful documentation and analysis for answers.

15 The gloss provided for forms involving *rén* are not intended to suggest, implicitly or explicitly, that this item has an adverbial meaning of any kind, as there is no synchronic evidence to support such a view. What we have tried to do is to capture as accurately/faithfully as possible the English equivalent of the meanings of the appropriate forms.

16 (i) The idea of the table is not so much to provide a comprehensive list as to highlight the point made above about verbs in Işekiri and the progressive.

(ii) Future research into the subject may yet reveal many more items that are (+ Prog.) than our table suggests. The items listed here are the ones that most readily come to mind.

17 Comrie (1976:12 and 33-4) provides an interesting view of the relationship between 'progressiveness' and 'continuousness'.

18 The question of the exact relationship between the situation in Işekiri and the one said to obtain in English will probably require closer examination in future.

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