Tense and Aspect in Gyeli (Bantu A80)

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Roadmap

Gyeli language

- Bantu A80
- 'Pygmy' hunter-gatherers (PHGs)
- 4000-5000 speakers dispersed over an area of 12.500 km^2
- speakers change their traditional way of life (more sedentary, more farming, less hunting)
- speakers shift to neighboring languages of farmers
- different dialects corresponding with different contact languages
- intense contact with neighboring languages

Chapter 4: Verbs and the verb phrase

1. Verb structure
2. Tense, aspect, mood
    1. Tense
        1. The present
        2. The recent past
        3. The remote past
        4. The future
    2. Aspect
        1. Progressive
        2. Inchoative
        3. Anterior
        4. Perfective
        5. Completive
        6. Prospective
        7. Habitual
    3. Mood
3. Negation
4. Adverbs

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Gyeli promises to make a contribution to our understanding of variation in Bantu grammatical systems.

('Pygmy') hunter-gatherer societies have attracted much interest because they are culturally and genetically distinct---it remains to be seen if this corresponds to linguistic differences also.

- There is a general feeling that PHG languages have less elaborate, 'simpler' structures than Bantu farmer languages.
- My recent results from the last months indicate that this is true for some parts of the grammar, namely in the minimality of the tense system.

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Tense in typical Bantu languages

Bantu languages are notable for their multiple time divisions (Nurse 2008: 22)

- distinction in terms of temporal proximity/distance
- 2-3 past tenses
- 1 or no future distinction, or 2-3 future distinctions

Expression of tenses

- inflectional morphology (verbal affixes)

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Examples of tense expression in Bantu

(1)   Shona (S10) (Nurse 2008: 81)

nd-**a**-dy-á
1S-PST1-eat-FV

'I ate (earlier today).'

(2)   Nkoya (L62) (Nurse 2008: 29)

w-**a**-mu-shíng-**ile**
3S-PST3-3S.OM-seek-PST3

'She looked (PST3) for him.'

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Tense in Gyeli

Tense in Gyeli is marked by means of

- tone on the pronominal subject marker (SM) (and the verb stem) and
- vowel lengthening of the SM

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The Gyeli verb structure

Slot					**Radical**	Prefinal		Post-final
Function					**Root**	valence change		participant, NEG, clause type (?)

Slot	Pre-initial	Initial	Post-initial	Pre-radical	**Radical**	Prefinal	Final	Post-final
Function	TAM, NEG, clause type	Subject concord	TAM, NEG, clause type	Object concord	**Root**	TAM, valence change	TAM	participant, NEG, clause type

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The Gyeli verb stem

Gyeli verb stems have one, two, or three syllables

Possible tonal patterns on Gyeli verb stems

σ	H
	L
$\sigma\ \sigma$	H L
	L L
$\sigma\ \sigma\ \sigma$	H L L
	L L L

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The Gyeli verb stem

Diachrony

- Diachronically, verb stems were monosyllabic.
- Additional syllables come from verbal extensions (synchronically or diachronically).
- Extension morphemes are L, or often analyzed as toneless.

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The Gyeli subject marker

The pronominal SM in Gyeli is optional if the tense is clear from the context

(3) Gyeli (A801)

    m-wánɔ̀ (á)   kɛ́ ndtáwɔ̀
    1-child   (3S.PRES) go 9.house

    'A/the child goes home.'

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The Gyeli subject marker in comparison with Swahili

(4) Gyeli (A801)

m-wánɔ̀ (á)　　　　kɛ́ ndtáwɔ̀
1-child (3S.PRES) go 9.house

'A/the child goes home.'

(5) Swahili (G42)

m-toto a-na-kwenda nyumba-ni
1-child 3S-PRES-go　9.house-LOC

'A/the child goes home.'

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Gyeli has four tenses

Tense	Example	Gloss
PRES	*á dè*	's/he eats'
PST1 (recent)	*à dé*	's/he ate (recently)'
PST2 (remote)	*áà dé*	's/he ate (a long time ago)'
FUT	*àà dè*	's/he will eat'

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Tenses in different verb stems

Tense	σ 'eat'	$\sigma\sigma$ 'buy'	$\sigma\sigma\sigma$ 'send'
PRES	*á dè*	*á gyàgà*	*á lúmèlè*
PST1	*à dé*	*à gyàgá*	*à lúmélé*
PST2	*áà dé*	*áà gyàgá*	*áà lúmɛ́lé*
FUT	*àà dè*	*àà gyàgà*	*áá lúmèlè*

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Generalizations on Gyeli tense expressions: PRESENT

Tense	Expression
PRES	H SM + default tonal pattern on verb stem

á dè   's/he eats'
á gyàgà 's/he buys'
á lúmèlè 's/he sends'

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Generalizations on Gyeli tense expressions: PAST1

Tense	Expression
PST1 (recent)	L SM + H on the last syllable(s) of verb stem

à dé   's/he ate'
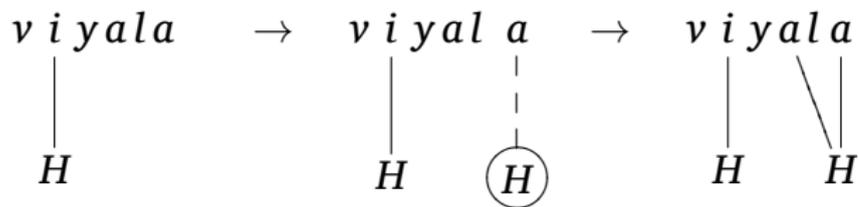*à gyàgá*   's/he bought'
à lúmɛ́lɛ́   's/he sent'

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Past tense: Monosyllabic stem, *dè* 'eat'

$$
\begin{array}{ccccc}
d\,e & \rightarrow & d\,e & \rightarrow & d\,e \\
| & & \genfrac{}{}{0pt}{}{\overset{=}{|}}{\diagdown} & & | \\
L & & L\ \circled{H} & & H
\end{array}
$$

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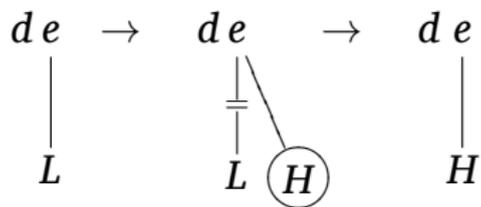
Past tense: Bisyllabic stem, *gyàgà* 'buy'

$$
\begin{array}{ccccc}
gy\,a\,g\,a & \rightarrow & gy\,a\,g\;\;a & \rightarrow & gy\,a\,g\,a \\
\;\;| & & \;\;| \;\;\vdots & & \;| \;\;\; | \\
L & & L \;\; \textcircled{H} & & L \;\; H
\end{array}
$$

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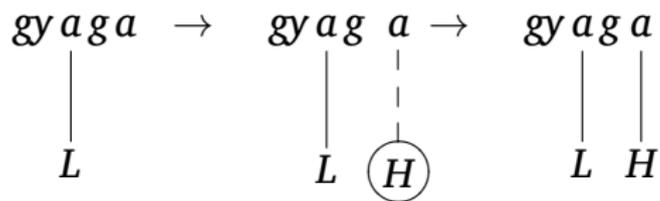
Past tense: Trisyllabic stem, *víyàlà* **'touch'**

$$
\begin{array}{ccccc}
v\,i\,y\,a\,l\,a & \rightarrow & v\,i\,y\,a\,l\ \ a & \rightarrow & v\,i\,y\,a\,l\,a \\
| & & | \qquad \vdots & & | \quad \backslash\,| \\
H & & H \quad \ \textcircled{H} & & H \qquad H
\end{array}
$$

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Generalizations on Gyeli tense expressions: PAST2

Tense	Expression
PST2 (remote)	vowel lengthening of SM with H L pattern + H on the last syllable(s) of verb stem

áà dé   's/he ate'
áà gyàgá   's/he bought'
áà lúmélé   's/he sent'

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Generalizations on Gyeli tense expressions: FUTURE

Tense	Expression
FUT	vowel lengthening of SM, while vowel receives its tonal specification from first tone of verb stem + default tonal pattern on verb stem

àà dè   's/he eats'
àà gyàgà   's/he buys'
áá lúmèlὲ   's/he sends'

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Future tense: Monosyllabic stem, *dè* 'eat'

$$a \quad d\,e \quad \rightarrow \quad a\,a \quad d\,e \quad \rightarrow \quad a\,a \quad d\,e$$

$$L \qquad\qquad\qquad L \qquad\qquad\qquad L$$

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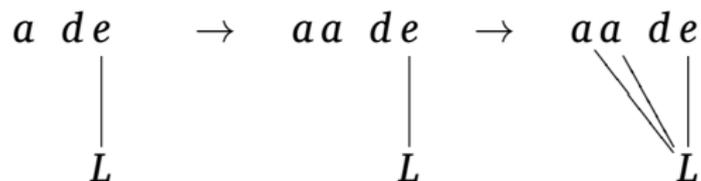
Future tense: Trisyllabic stem, High tone, *víyàlà* 'touch'

$$a \; v \, i \, y \, a \, l \, a \;\; \rightarrow \;\; a \, a \; v \, i \, y \, a \, l \, a \;\; \rightarrow \;\; a \, a \; v \, i \, y \, a \, l \, a$$

$$\quad\quad | \quad\quad\quad\quad\quad\quad | \quad\quad\quad\quad\quad\quad \backslash\!\backslash \;\; | \;\; | \;\; |$$

$$\quad\quad H \quad\quad\quad\quad\quad\quad H \quad\quad\quad\quad\quad\quad H \;\; L \;\; L$$

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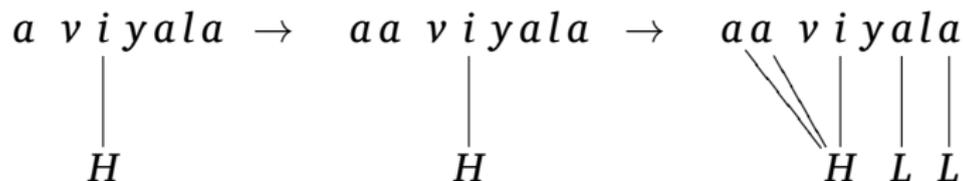
Generalizations on Gyeli tense expressions

- SMs have fixed tonal patterns in PRES (H) and PST1 (L) and PST2 (H L), while the lengthened FUT SM receives its tonal specification from the first tone of the verb stem
- PST is generally expressed by a floating H that attaches to the right of the verb stem (and spreads across toneless TBUs of extension morphemes)

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Interaction with syntactic tone

If any other argument follows the verb, a floating H attaches to
the right of the verb stem (and on otherwise L noun class
prefixes)

(6) a. á   dè
         3S.PRES eat
         's/he eats.'

     b. á   dé bé-déwɔ̀
         3S.PRES eat 8-food
         'S/he eats food.'

     c. á   dé dɛ̀ɛ̂ɛ̌
         3S.PRES eat now
         'S/he eats now.'

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Generalizations on Gyeli tense expressions

$\rightarrow$ Even though the tonal pattern of the verb stem changes in certain tenses, it is really the SM that carries tense information since the verb stem tones may be subject to changes induced by syntactic tone.

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Gyeli and Mabi tenses in comparison

Tense	Gyeli	Mabi	Gloss
PRES	*á dè*	*nyé dì*	's/he eats'
PST1 (recent)	*à dé*	*nyè* **n***dí*	's/he ate (recently)'
PST2 (remote)	*áà dé*	*nyè* **mí n***dí*	's/he ate (a long time ago)'
FUT	*àà dè*	*ny***àà** *dì*	's/he will eat'

→ Mabi uses much more inflectional morphology in tense
expression than Gyeli

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Further neighboring/related languages in comparison

Tense	Basaa (A43)	Nen (A44)	Ewondo (A72a)	Makaa (A83)	Kɔɔzime (A84)
PST4		lɛ			
PST3	´	ka	-ngá-		
PST2	pî	ná H	-á-	a	á
PST1	N-´	nó	∅	` ámὲ	∅ (tones)
PRES	Ń-`	∅	-ayi-	∅	∅ (tones)
FUT1	(k)â -	étàsɛ	-n-	e	ó
FUT2	-a-	ndo…	-ngá-	bá	
		ak			
FUT3		H ŋo			
FUT4		nă			

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Neighboring languages in comparison

- use of tone in tense expression is widely employed
- however, neighboring and related languages use much more inflectional morphology in tense expression than Gyeli
- contributes to the discussion whether HG languages are structurally reduced

Definition of aspect

grammaticalized expression of internal temporal constituency

Aspect in typical Bantu languages

Shared aspectual categories (Nurse 2008: 24)

- perfective
- imperfective
- progressive
- habitual
- persistive
- anterior (perfect)

Expression of aspect

Aspect in Bantu is typically encoded to the right of tense by

- inflection (bound) or
- compound constructions (periphrastic)

Examples of aspect expression in Bantu: inflection I

Aspect markers occur most often at FV slot, as exemplified by
Nurse (2008: 131) with Kamba (E55)

(7) a. a-∅-tony-**a**
         3S-∅-be.able-FV
         'S/he is able.'

     b. n-ũ-∅-semb-**eete**
         FOC-3S-∅-run-ANT
         'S/he has been running.'

     c. n-ũ-∅-koot-**ie**
         FOC-3S-∅-pull-PFV
         'S/he pulled.' (ie > *-ire)

     d. n-ũ-∅-koot-**aa**
         FOC-3S-∅-pull-IPFV
         'S/he always pulls.' (aa > *-aga)

Examples of aspect expression in Bantu: inflection II

Also quite commonly, aspect is expressed at the pre-stem TA
slot as in Mbuun (B87), Nurse (2008: 131)

- (8) a. ba-∅-dia
     3P-∅-eat
     'They eat/are eating.'

  - b. ba-**ye**-dia
       3P-PRG-eat
       'They are eating.'

  - c. ba-**wu**-toma
       3P-HAB-cry
       'They cry (regularly).'

  - d. ba-**be**-toma
       3P-ITR-cry
       'They are crying again.'

Examples of aspect expression in Bantu: periphrastic I

'In verbs [...] which include a present component, it is usual for there to be just a single verb, whereas when a reference to past or future is included, the use of compound constructions is more common.' (Nurse 2008: 131)

Examples of aspect expression in Bantu: periphrastic II

(9)   Swahili (Nurse 2008: 132)

   a.   tu-**li**-kuwa tu-**me**-imba
        1P-PST-be 1P-ANT-sing
        'We had sung.'

   b.   tu-**li**-kuwa tu-**ki**-imba
        1P-PST-be 1P-SIT-sing
        'We were singing, used to sing.'

   c.   tu-**ta**-kuwa tu-**me**-imba
        1P-FUT-be 1P-ANT-sing
        'We will have sung.'

   d.   tu-**ka**-kuwa tu-**na**-imba
        1P-NAR-be 1P-PROG-sing
        'And we were singing.'

Aspect in Gyeli

Aspect in Gyeli is characterized by

- very little grammaticalized aspectual marking
  - progressive *nzí*
  - inchoative *long LH SM*
  - anterior?
- many periphrastic constructions (with (semi-)auxiliaries)
  - (general) perfective *bwàá* 'have'
  - recent perfective *lɔ́* 'come'
  - completive *sílè* 'finish'
  - prospective *mwáà* 'have'
  - habitual *verb stem repetition*

PROGRESSIVE *nzí*

Progressive PROG

- 'represents a situation in progress at and around reference time' Nurse (2008: 139)
- 'common subtype of imperfective' → Since unmarked verb form seems to carry an imperfective meaning as default and since *nzí* seems to emphasize an action in progress, I prefer to refer to it as PROG
- The status of *nzí* is not entirely clear. It is not an obvious verb like the marking in periphrastic aspectual constructions. In the meantime, I call it a particle.

PROGRESSIVE *nzí*

(10) a. mɛ́   dè
          1S.PRES eat
          'I eat. (imperfective)'

      b. mɛ́   **nzí** dè
          1S.PRES PROG eat
          'I'm eating.'

      c. mè   **nzí** wúmbè ná   b-wánɔ̀ b-ɑ́ɑ̀
          1S.PST1 PROG want   QUOT 2-child 2-POSS.1S
          bá bwámɔ̀ mpù mí-ntáŋgánɛ́,   bè-kúdé bí
          2 receive like 4-white.person 8-skin   8:CON
          mpâ
          good
          'I wanted my children to receive like the white
          people, good skin.'

INCHOATIVE *long SM with L H tonal pattern*

INCHOATIVE INCH

- refers to a period of time shortly after the beginning of an action or state
- differs from the prospective aspect that refers to the time immediately before the beginning of an action or state

(11) a. á   gyì
      3S.PRES cry

      'She cries. (imperfective)'

   b. **àá**   gyì
      3S.INCH cry

      'She has started to cry, is at the beginning of crying. (Elle se met á pleurer, elle pleure déjà.)'

Anterior? *long final V on verb with H L pattern, alternating with -mɔ̀ suffix* → **'already'**

- There is an alternating pattern denoting 'already'.
- Either, the 'already' meaning is expressed by a long final vowel with a H L pattern (12a)
- or by a suffix -mɔ̀ (12b)
- It seems to be lexically specified which verb uses which construction.

(12)   a.   mɛ̀   déè
                1S.PST1 eat.ANT?
                'I ate already.'

        b.   mɛ̀   lɑ̀ɑ́-mɔ̀
                1S.PST1 pass-ANT?
                'I passed already.'

Anterior? *long final V on verb with H L pattern, alternating with -mɔ̀ suffix* → **'already'**

-mɔ̀ in neighboring languages

- In Mabi, this aspect is systematically and solely expressed by the suffix *-mà* while the vowel lengthening strategy is not employed.
- Gyeli seems to have borrowed this suffix for only certain verbs, but not as a paradigm/productively.
- It is typical that Gyeli changes a Kwasio final vowel [a] → [ɔ] which seems to be rather an innovation than a retention (Duke p.c.)

Anterior? *long final V on verb with H L pattern, alternating with -mɔ̀ suffix* → '**already**'

> ### -*mɔ̀* in neighboring languages
> - Nurse (2008: 156) suggests that shapes such as [ma] are derived from **-mala* 'finish' and labels this aspect as 'Anterior' (at least for Londo, A11)

(13) Gyeli

    *mè   dé-**mɔ̀**
    1S.PST1 eat-ANT?

    'I ate already.'

(14) Mabi (Kwasio)

    mè n-dí-**mà**
    1S PST1-eat-ANT?

    'I ate already.'

(15) Londo (A11)

    a-**má**-saká
    3S-ANT-seek

    'She has sought.'

PERFECTIVE

- problems with terminology: perfective vs. anterior/perfect (Nurse 2008)
  - PERFECTIVE: 'representing a situation as complete, [...] without regard to its internal structure' (Nurse 2008: 134)
  - ANTERIOR/PERFECT denotes the 'continuing present relevance of a previous situation' (Comrie 1976: 52)
- → Gyeli seems to combine both characteristics, but makes a distinction in terms of how close the reference point is to the action/event
- → distinction between
  - (general) PERFECTIVE (PFV)
  - RECENT PERFECTIVE (R.PFV)

PERFECTIVE *bwàá* '**have**'

- represents a situation as complete, without regard to its internal structure
- has continuing relevance to the present/reference point
- the reference point is temporally unspecified
- → the action has been completed, but no reference is made to which point in time

(16) a. mὲ   **bwàá** dὲ
          1S.PST1 PFV   eat
          'I have eaten.'

      b. mὲ   **bwàá** wὲ tʃíyὲ lὲ-kέlὲ   dɛ́
          1S.PST1 PFV   2S cut 5-speech today
          'I have cut you the word today. [I don't allow you to speak.]'

RECENT PERFECTIVE *lɔ́* **'come'**

- represents a situation as complete, without regard to its internal structure
- has continuing relevance to the present/reference point
- the reference point is temporally close to the action/event
- → the action has just been completed

(17) a. yà   **lɔ́**   fwálà nà   mè   **lɔ́**   láwɔ̀
          1P.PST1 R.PFV end   COM 1S.PST1 R.PFV speak
          'We have (just) finished and I have (just) spoken.'

      b. áh, gyí wɛ̀   **lɔ́**   njì   gyɛ́sɔ̀?
          EXCL what 2S.PST1 R.PFV come look.for
          'Ah, what have you (just) come to look for?'

COMPLETIVE *sílè* 'finish'

- Bybee (1994: 54, 57, 318) distinguishes separate completive category: 'do something thoroughly and to completion', e.g. *eat up*
- Nurse (2008: 154) subsumes completive under 'anterior' category
- In Gyeli distinct category from anterior since the completive has a distinct formal expression and distinct semantics.

COMPLETIVE *sílὲ* 'finish'

Semantics

completion in terms of the extent of the action

(18) mɛ́   nzí kὲ nà vúlὲ   lὲ-wúrûˆ nà
1S.PRES come go COM take.away 5-one   COM
mɛ́   tálὲ **sílὲ**   nyùlὲ
1S.PRES begin COMPL drink

'I go and take down one [palm tree] and start to drink
(it) up (= make palm wine out of it).'

COMPLETIVE *sílè* 'finish'

Semantics

interesting effects for plural events; completion in terms of distributivity (the event distributes over the different participants)

(19) a. bà-gyèlì bà-sɔ́ bá **sílè** bígkè
2-Gyeli 2-other 3P COMPL grow

'The other Bagyeli have all already grown.
[obtained some wealth]'

b. bà **sílè** kè → *à **sílè** kè
3P.PST1 COMPL go → 3S.PST1 COMPL go

'They have all left. → *He has all left.'

PROSPECTIVE *mwáà* '**have**' → '**be about to**'

PROSPECTIVE PROSP

- represents a situation immediately before the start of an action
- only used in PRES tense

(20) a. mɛ́   **mwáà** bíndɛ́lɛ́ nkwè
      1S.PRES PROSP lift   3.basket

      'I'm about to lift the basket.'

   b. á   **mwáà** dè
      3S.PRES PROSP eat

      'He is about to eat.'

HABITUAL → *repetition of verb stem*

HABITUAL HAB

- 'situation [...] characteristic of an extended period of time' Comrie (1976: 27)
- semantically linked to persistive as in (21b) (and repetitive?)

(21) a. mɛ́ **gyámbɔ̀ gyámbɔ́** bé-déwɔ̀
        1S.PRES prepare prepare 8-food
        'I usually, regularly prepare food.'

   b. mɛ̀ nzí bɛ́ mɛ̀ nzí **gyámbɔ̀**
        1S.PST1 PROG be 1S.PST1 PROG prepare
        gyámbɔ̀ à nzí gyímbɔ̀
        prepare 3S.PST1 PROG dance
        'While I was preparing [food], he was dancing.'

Aspect schema

PROSP	INCH	PROG		COMPL	R.PFV	ANT	PFV
$\rightarrow$	◯	ACTION		◯	$\leftarrow$	$\leftarrow$	$\leftarrow$

Tense framing with *bè* 'be'

Gyeli uses the auxiliary *bè* 'be' for temporal framing refering to past or future, especially with aspects such as the inchoative which are only marked by a specific tone pattern. This tense framing is, however, used with any other tense or aspect.

Tense framing with *bɛ̀* 'be'

While the unmarked simple use of the inchoative refers to the present tense, reference to past or future must be temporally framed with the auxiliary *bɛ̀* 'be'.

(22) a. àá   gyì
          3S.INCH cry

          'She has started to cry.'

     b. à   **bɛ́** àá   gyì nà kùgúù
          3S.PST1 be 3S.INCH cry SIM 7.evening

          'She had started to cry yesterday.'

     c. àà   **bɛ̀** àá   gyì nà mɛ́nɔ́
          3S.FUT be 3S.INCH cry SIM 7.morning

          'She will have started to cry tomorrow.'

Combinations of aspectual marking

Gyeli easily combines various (periphrastic) aspect markers as well as other semi-auxiliaries that are very frequent such as *kὲ* 'go' with an allocative function or *táàlὲ* 'begin'.

Combinations of aspectual marking

- The main verb always appears at the end of a verb sequence.
- In a sequence of (aspectual) verbs, it's the first aspectual verb that is inflected for tense, not the following or the main verb.
- The progressive marker *nzí* is closest to the main verb.

(23) yɔ́ɔ̀ mɛ̀ **lɔ́ nzí gyésɔ̀** sá yí dè
      so 1S.PST1 R.PFV PROG search 7.thing 7:CON eat
      'So I have just been looking for something to eat.'

Combinations of aspectual marking

- A change in the order of verbs may change its meaning.

(24) a. bá   tálè   sílè   kè
       3P.PRES begin COMPL go
       'They go first [then we will follow them].'

     b. bá   sílè   tálè   kè
       3P.PRES COMPL begin go
       'They all go first [waiting for everyone to leave].'

Combinations of aspectual marking

- Or a change in the order of verbs may not obviously change its meaning. (Or the speakers did not recognize the subtle meaning difference.)

(25) a. à   bwàá tálέ   kὲ sílὲ
          3S.PST1 PFV   begin go finish
          'He had first left to finish.'
      b. à   tálέ   bwàá kὲ sílὲ
          3P.PRES begin PFV   go finish
          'He had first left to finish.'

Different syntactic constructions

An alternative to verb sequences are embedded clauses as in
(26). Their meaning is, however, slightly different.

(26)   a.   á   tálè dè
              3S.PRES begin eat

              'He starts by eating.'

        b.   á   tálè á   dè
              3S.PRES begin 3S.PRES eat

              'He starts to eat.'

Aspect in related languages?

difficult to compare

- uneven information in grammars
- terminology comparable?

Wrapping up

- Tense
    - average number of tense distinctions (4) for Bantu
    - fewer tense distinctions than many languages of the area
    - minimal system in terms of inflectional morphology
    - the SM mainly carries tense information
- Aspect
    - so far 8 aspect distinctions
    - precise about point of time in relation to action (about to start, just started, just finished)

Conclusion

In both tense and aspect expression, there is a general
preference for analytic syntax. Instead of stacking morphemes

- tonal melodies
- larger syntactic (periphrastic) structures

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