



Vortrag im Rahmen des Linguistischen Kolloquiums

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Dissertation: „A documentation of Gyeli (Bantu A80): Tense and aspect “

The Gyeli language displays an unusual marking of tense and aspect in comparison to other, more typical Bantu languages. Both tense and aspect are not expressed by inflectional morphemes, but through other means. While tense distinctions are solely made by a change of the tonal pattern and sometimes vowel lengthening, aspect is conveyed by a range of aspectual verbs preceding the finite verb form. Gyeli is a Bantu A80 language spoken in southern Cameroon by so called “Pygmy” hunter-gatherers. Their language is closely related to Kwasio (A80) and, at the same time, in intense contact with both Kwasio speakers and other Bantu farmer languages such as Bulu (A70), Basaa (A40), Ewondo (A70), Fang (A70), and Yasa (A30). Despite this close contact and genetic relation, the Gyeli tense system is quite distinct from all these languages and remarkable for its minimality in terms of tense distinctions made and use of inflectional morphology. While the other farmer languages of the area usually display three distinctions for past tense and two for future, Gyeli only possesses four tenses altogether: present, a recent (PST1) and a remote (PST2) past, and future. As to the formal expression of tense, the tense systems of neighboring languages (see Hyman (2003) for Basaa and Alexandre (1955) for Bulu) and of closely related languages (see Ngue Um (2002) for Mvoumbo, Heath (1991) for Makaa, and Beavon (1991) for Koozime) mark tense by inflectional morphemes while Gyeli expresses tense distinctions only tonally (and by vowel lengthening) as illustrated in (1) through (4).

(1)	<i>mé dè</i>	(2)	<i>mè dé</i>	(3)	<i>mèè dé</i>	(4)	<i>mèè dè</i>
	1S.PRES eat		1S.PST1 eat		1S.PST2 eat		1S.FUT eat
	'I eat'		'I ate'		'I ate'		'I will eat'

In this talk, I will discuss how tonal patterns systematically change in different tenses on both the subject marker and the verb root. I also show that tones on verb roots interact with their syntactic position in the phrase. Thus, in the present tense, L tone verb roots such as in (1) would become H if they are not phrase final, but are followed by, for instance, a temporal adverb. On this basis, I argue that it is primarily the tonal pattern of the subject marker that expresses tense while the tonal pattern on the verb root may be subject to variation depending on its position in the phrase.

In a second part, I will explore the various aspectual verbs Gyeli uses. For instance, a perfective reading is associated with the verb *silé* 'finish' while *kè* 'go' expresses allocativity. I will go through the various aspectual verbs in turn and provide examples for the various contexts in which they occur. Finally, I will discuss how a range of aspectual verbs can be combined as in (5).

(5)	<i>a</i>	<i>ké</i>	<i>talè</i>	<i>silè</i>	<i>dè</i>
	3S.PRES	go	begin	finish	eat
	'He first goes (somewhere else) and finishes eating.'				

**Ort: Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften,
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Zeit: 16:15 Uhr

Alle Interessierten sind herzlich eingeladen!