Tense and Aspect in Ọ̀họ̀rí

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Abstract

Reports in the linguistic literature indicate that inflection (Infl) is the layer that freezes elements like tense, aspect, agreement, modal, and negator and they are capable of projecting independent X^O (Ilọri 2010). This article examines some functional categories such as tense [+TNS] and aspect [+ASP] in Ọ̀họ̀rí Yorùbá. Ọ̀họ̀rí is a dialect of Yorùbá which is spoken in Kétu and its environs in West Yorùbá (Oyelaran 1976; Adeniyi 2000), precisely in Yewa North Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. The data used in this study were elicited from eight adult native speakers of Ọ̀họ̀rí in Kétu, Ègùwà, and Asá in Yewa North Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria via interviews using digital device. The analysis was done within the minimalist program of Chomsky (1993, 1995, 1998, and 2002) with Split Infl-hypothesis of Pollock (1989). The study shows that future tense and aspect are syntactically marked in Ọ̀họ̀rí. The paper further reveals that Ọ̀họ̀rí has a single element that marks both habitual and progressive aspects. The article proposes structures for the projection of TP and AspP in Ọ̀họ̀rí. The paper conclusively affirms that future tense markers can co-occur with perfective aspect marker in Ọ̀họ̀rí.

Keywords: Aspect, Infl, Minimalist Program, Tense, Ọ̀họ̀rí

1. Introduction

Word categories in natural language are divided into two: lexical and functional (Chomsky 1981, 1995). Lexical items are said to have idiosyncratic property, i.e., word items that have inherent semantic denotation. Functional or grammatical items on the other hand lack idiosyncratic and intrinsic features. However, tense and aspect, which this article discusses in Ọ̀họ̀rí have been grouped under functional categories (Chomsky 1981, 1995). Tense [+TNS] and Aspect [+ASP] are items frozen under inflection (Infl). Infl is a layer that hosts elements like tense, aspect, agreement, modal, and negator (Ilọri, 2010:226). Infl are auxilliaries in layman term. Native speakers explore linguistic

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elements, such as auxilliaries, to express either future or present thoughts (Adekola, 2024:351). However, diverse scholars like Adétúgbọ̀ (1967), Akínkúgbé (1976), Oyèláràn (1976), Olúmúyìwá (1994), Awóbùlúyì (1998), Adéníyì (2000) have done extensive work on the classifications of the Yorùbá dialects. Among these scholars, only Oyèláràn (1976) and Adéníyì (2000) captured Ọ̀họrí in their classifications. For instance, Adétúgbọ̀ (1967:14) classified Yorùbá dialects into three areas: (i) Northwest Yorùbá (NWY) which consists of Ọ̀yọ́, Ìbàdàn, Ọ̀sun; (ii) Southeast Yorùbá (SEY) comprising Rémọ, Ọ̀ndó, Ìkálẹ̀, Ọwọ̀ and Ìkàrẹ́; (iii) Central Yorùbá (CY) consists of Ifẹ̀, Ìjẹ̀sà and Èkìtì. Oyèláràn (1976:628) divided Yorùbá dialects into four groups: (i) West Yorùbá (WY) which consists of Ọ̀yọ́, Ìbàdàn, Ẹ̀gbá, Ọ̀họrí-Ìfọ̀nhìn; Upper Ògùn-Ṣakí, Ijió, Kétu, Sábẹ̀ẹ́, Benin and Togo-Ifẹ̀ (Togo), Idâìsà, Mànígrì; (ii) Southeast Yorùbá (SEY) comprising Ọ̀ndó, Ọwọ̀, Ìjẹ̀bú, Ìkálẹ̀ and Ìlàjẹ; (iii) Central Yorùbá (CY) comprising Ilé-Ifẹ̀, Ìjẹ̀sà and Èkìtì; (iv) Northwest Yorùbá (NWY) comprising Ìgbómìnà, Kákáńdá, Ìgbọ̀lọ́, Jùmú, Bùnú, Ọ̀wọ́rọ̀, Owé and Ẹ̀gbẹ̀. Adéníyì (2000:44) grouped Yorùbá dialects into seven major areas: (i) North-Southwest Yorùbá (NSWY) which consists of Ọ̀yọ́, Ọ̀nkò, Ọ̀sun, Ìbọlọ̀, Ìgbómìnà; (ii) Northeast Yorùbá (NEY) consists of Ìyàgbà, Bùnú, Jùmú, Owé, Gbẹ̀dẹ̀, Àyèé; (iii) West Yorùbá (WY) which has Ànàgó, Kétu, Ifẹ̀ (Togo), Ọ̀họrí, Tsabẹ; (iv) Central Yorùbá (CY) has Ifẹ̀, Ìjẹ̀sà, Àkúrẹ́, Èkìtì, Mọ̀bà; (v) East Yorùbá (EY) has Ùkàrẹ́ dialects, Ọ̀bà, Ìdó-Àní; (vi) Southwest Yorùbá (SWY) comprising Ẹ̀gbá, Àwórì, Èkó, Yewa; (vii) Southeast Yorùbá (SEY) which has Ìjẹ̀bú, Ọ̀ndó, Ìkálẹ̀, Ìlàjẹ, Ọwọ̀, Ijo (Apor).

However, the thrust of this study is not only to pinpoint the elements that mark tense and aspect in Ọ̀họrí, but to propose structures for the projection of tense and aspect in Ọ̀họrí, which in turn, serves as means of documenting tense and aspect information in Ọ̀họrí for future reference. The paper is grouped into six sections. Section two discusses tenses in Ọ̀họrí; section three concentrates on aspect in Ọ̀họrí; section four examines co-occurrence of tense and aspectual markers in Ọ̀họrí; section five focuses on the projections of the tense phrase (TP) and aspect phrase (AspP) in Ọ̀họrí, and section six concludes the paper.

2.   Tense in Ọ̀họrí

Tense is the specification of event to the time of speaking about it. Tense is a functional category that relates the time of an event to the moment of utterance[1]. Tense shows relation between the events. Lyons (1968:305) sees tense as the element that relates the

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[1]Tense and Aspect have been a controversial issue among the Yorùbá scholars.
[2]Awóyalé (1986:3) postulates that tense does not exist in Yorùbá. According to him, the language does not have any systematic mechanism exclusively reserved for varying the structure of the sentence with reference to the time of speaking.
[3]Oyèláràn (1982:36) opines that tense is not a grammatical category in Yorùbá but aspect is grammatical in the language and it is a sub-category of AUX.
[4]Bámgbóṣé (1990:67) establishes that tense and aspect are inseparable in Yorùbá.

time of an action, event or state of affairs referred to in the sentence to the time of utterance. Comrie (1985) opines that tense is a grammaticalised expression of location in time. Tense[2] can also be a means through which native speakers use linguistic basis to transmit their present thought (Ogbeide-Ihama, 2015:93). However, Ilọri (2010:227) reports that tense[3] in Yorùbá polarises future and non-future. He submits that non-future covers both past and present[5] tenses while the future covers only the future tense.

In the case of non-future, the only phonetically visible item is *ó* generally referred to as high tone syllable[6] (HTS) in the literature. Like other dialects of Yorùbá, tense in Ọ̀họ̀rí is marked. The items that mark tense in Ọ̀họ̀rí include *áà*, *mọ́ọ*, *yọ́ọ*. *Yọ́ọ* and *mọ́ọ* have other variants, which are *ẹ́ẹ* and *ńṣe* respectively. A careful look at these tense markers, they are polymorphemic elements, which show the future of an event, as illustrated in (1).

(1)   a.   Olú   *yọ́ọ*   jẹùn   lí   ńné
               Olu   FUT   eat-something   LOC   house
               'Olu will eat at home.'

        b.   Ààrẹ   *yọ́ọ*   fọ̀họ̀n
               President   FUT   to-talk
               'The president will talk.'

        c.   Báyọ̀   *mọ́ọ*   sù   sínné
               Báyọ̀   FUT   sleep   LOC-house
               'Bayo will sleep at home.'

        d.   Ẹ̀ìhin   *mọ́ọ*   kpariwo
               2pl   FUT   make-noise
               'You will make noise.'

        e.   Olùkọ́   *áà*   kọ́   akẹ́nkọ̀ọ́
               Teacher   FUT   teach   students
               'The teacher will teach the students.'

        f.   Aiyé   *áà*   kpa   ọ̀nììàn   sáíyé
               People   FUT   kill   people   LOC-earth
               'Evil people will render one useless.'

All the examples in (1a-f) show the future action of an event. In other words, all the examples in (1) indicate actions that will take place after the utterance. The other variants of *yọ́ọ* and *mọ́ọ* are *ẹ́ẹ* and *ńṣe* respectively. This is shown in (2).

(2)   a.   Ṣadé   *ẹ́ẹ*   fọṣọọ   è
               Ṣadé   FUT   wash-cloth   3SG-Gen
               'Sade will wash her cloth.'

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b.   Ọbẹ̀   yèé   ẹ́ẹ   dọ̀n
      Soup   DEM   FUT   sweet
      'This soup will be sweet.'

c.   Ayọọ̀   ńṣe   kọ́-kpa   ọ̀nìàn
      Joy   FUT   kill   person
      'Overjoyous will kill person.'

di.   Àwàa   ńṣe   khá-jẹùn
      1PL   FUT   to-eat
      'We will eat.'

ii.   Olú   ńṣe   kọ́-kọrin
      Olu   FUT   to-sing-song
      'Olu will sing.'

iii. Àwàa   ńṣe   khá-bọ̀   lọ́sọ̀n-ọ́n
      1PL   FUT   to-come   LOC-afternoon
      'We will come at noon.'

While ẹ́ẹ is used alternatively with yọ́ọ́ in Ọ̀họ̀rí, ńṣe is substituted with mọ́ọ. The two variants do not change the semantic interpretation of the expressions as future actions. An observation is quickly noted in (2c-2diii). Ọ̀họ̀rí regularly attach a morpheme, khá/kọ́ to the verb that follows it wherever ńṣe is used as future tense marker. The morpheme khá/kọ́ constantly starts with the voiceless velar plosive consonant /k/ and it is high tone. The vowel of the morpheme can either be oral unrounded central low /a/ or oral rounded back mid-low vowel /ɔ/. Either of the morphemes in question is attached to the beginning of a verb; if the morpheme is detached where ńṣe is used as future action marker, the sentence would be ill-formed in Ọ̀họ̀rí.

3.   Aspectual Expressions in Ọ̀họ̀rí

Omamor (1982:104-105) describes aspect as an internal temporal contour of a situation. It shows the temporal relationship between the point of initiation of utterance and the internal temporal structure of a specific background situation described by one element and the totality of the situation referred to by another. Comrie (1976:3) conceives aspect as element that specifies the way internal constituency of a situation is viewed. Aspect states whether the action of a verb[8] is completive or continuative. Completive[7] means that the action is perfected, while the continuative means the action is still ongoing. Cross-linguistically, aspect can further be divided into two: perfective and imperfective.

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[7]Adéwọlé (1988:55-56) cites Bisang and Sonaiya (1999) that "the HTS has nothing to do with tense, as it only marks an action already completed by the subject.

[8]Awóbùlúyì (1978) claimed that two types of verbs play key roles when it comes to tense: stative and action verbs. While stative verbs are unmarked for tenses, action verbs are marked for tenses.

Imperfective can on the other hand be divided into habitual and progressive. These are expantiated in the following sub-sections.

3.1. Perfective Aspect in Ọ̀họ̀rí

Comrie (1976:16) defines perfective aspect as a situation of a single whole, without distinction of the various separate phases that make up that situation. Perfective aspect often marks the completion of an event, distinguishing it from ongoing or habitual actions (Bybee, Joan, Perkins, and Pagliuca, 1994:124). In Ọ̀họ̀rí for instance, perfective aspect [+PERF] is marked by *tin*. This item *tin* is similar to *ti* [+PERF] in Standard Yorùbá (SY). The only difference there is the nasal vowel in that of Ọ̀họ̀rí, while the SY has oral vowel. This is exemplified in (3).

(3)   a.   Adé   *tin*   nọ   ńné
          Ade   PERF   go   house
          'Ade has gone home.'

      b.   Adé   *tin*   kha   ìwé   ẹ̀
          Ade   PERF   read   book   3SG-Gen
          'Ade has read his book.'

      c.   Ọbẹ̀   kọ̀   dọ̀n.
          Soup   NEG   sweet
          'The soup is not sweet.'

      d.   Ọbẹ̀   kọ̀   lèè   dọ̀n.
          Soup   NEG   FUT   sweet.
          'The soup will not be sweet.'

      e.   Ọbẹ̀   kọ̀   *tin*   dọ̀n
          Soup   NEG   PERF   sweet
          'The soup is not sweet yet.'

The expressions in (3a-b) are affirmatives, which indicate that the actions of the verbs are perfective. (3c-d) are negative constructions, with the (3d) indicating future situation. (3e) is a perfective situation within a negative construction. All the expressions in (3a,b&e) reflect that the actions have been completed already. (3d) shows the future marker *lèè* that is used in Ọ̀họ̀rí negative expressions.

3.2. Imperfective Aspect in Ọ̀họ̀rí

Imperfective aspect concerns with viewing a situation from within. Dahl (1985:68) remarks that imperfective aspect covers both progressive and habitual meanings, depending on context and language-specific distinctions. Smith (1991:112) submits that

imperfective aspect allows the speaker to highlight part of an event, rather than treating it as a whole. Imperfective Aspect can be divided into - habitual and progressive aspects. We explain and illustrate the habitual and progressive aspects in the following sub-sections.

3.2.1.   Habitual Aspect in Ọ̀họ̀rí

This aspectual type expresses actions or states occurring regularly or repeatedly (Comrie, 1986:27). The marker that indicates habitual aspect in Ọ̀họ̀rí is ń [+HAB]. This is the same with the standard variety, as shown below in (4).

(4)   a.   Ọ̀mi   kpọn   omin
              1SG   fetch   water
              'I fetched water.'

       b.   Ọ̀mi   kọ̀   kpọn   omin
              1SG   NEG   fetch   water
              'I did not fetch water.'

       c.   Ọ̀mi   ń   kpọn   omin
              1SG   PROG   fetch   water
              'I am fetching water.'

       d.   Ọ̀mi   kọ̀   ń   kpọn   omin
              1SG   NEG   PROG   fetch   water
              'I am not fetching water.'

Evidently in (4a-b) are affirmative and negative constructions of actions already completed but (4c-d) indicate habitual situations within affirmative and negative constructions respectively.

3.2.2.   Progressive Aspect in Ọ̀họ̀rí

This indicates an action that is taking place or ongoing. It is traditionally referred to as continuous action. The element that marks progressive aspect in Ọ̀họ̀rí is also ń, as illustrated in (5).

(5)   a.   Ọdẹ   ń   kpa   ẹiran
              Hunter   PROG   kill   animal
              'The hunter is killing animals.'

       b.   Hòn   ń   nọ   ńné.
              3SG   PROG   go   house
              'S/he is going home.'

c.   Ṣọlá   kò̩   *ń*   fò̩hò̩n.
     Ṣọla   NEG   PROG   to-talk
     'Sola is not talking.'

d.   Hò̩n   kò̩   *ń*   nọ   ńné.
     3SG   NEG   PROG   go   house
     'S/he is not going home.'

As shown in (5a-b) are affirmative sentences indicating that the action is ongoing. Example (5c-d) are negative constructions in an ongoing action. However, as evident in (4) and (5), the same marker *ń* is used to mark habitual and progressive aspects [+HAB-PROG]. The implication of this is that Ò̩hò̩rí is a dialect that does not distinguish between habitual and progressive actions, unlike other dialects of Yorùbá that have separate elements that mark habitual and progressive aspect. Probably this is what motivated Ọduntan (2000:136-140) to agree that *máa ń* (habitual marker in standard variety) is a combination of the durative aspect *máa* and the progressive aspect *ń* in Standard Yorùbá. Hence, he suggested progressive and durative (in place of habitual) aspects for Standard Yorùbá.

3.3. Co-occurrence of Aspectual Markers in Ò̩hò̩rí

Another interesting discovery is that perfective item *tin* and imperfective habitual and progressive elements can co-occur in Ò̩hò̩rí, as shown in (6).

(6)   a.   Olùkó̩   *tin*   *ń*   pe   ni.
           Teacher   PERF   HAB-PROG   call   1PL
           'The teacher has been calling us.'

       b.   Ọmọ   (i)ni   *tin*   *ń*   fò̩hò̩n.
           Child   1PL-Gen   PERF   HAB-PROG   to-talk
           'Our child has been talking.'

       c.   Báyò̩   *tin*   *ń*   jẹùn.
           Bayo   PERF   HAB-PROG   eat-something
           'Bayo has been eating.'

Evidently in (6), the perfective marker *tin* combines together with the habitual and progressive marker *ń* gallantly. The expressions in (6a-c) indicate that the actions have started already and are still ongoing. Observe that we regularly used 'HAB-PROG' for the glossing of *ń* in (6a-c). This shows that the actions there cover both habitual and progressive situations.

4.   Co-occurrence of Tense and Aspectual Markers in Ọ̀họ̀rí

In a related development, we observed that the future tense markers identified in (1), e.g., *mọ́ọ, áà, yọ́ọ́* can co-occur with the perfective aspect marker *tin* in Ọ̀họ̀rí, as exemplified in (7).

(7)   a.   Olú   *áà*   *tin*   nọ   ńné.
              Olu   FUT   PERF   go   house
              'Olu would have gone home.'

       b.   Ṣadé   *yọ́ọ́*   *tin*   fọṣọọ̀   ẹ̀.
              Ṣade   FUT   PERF   wash-cloth   3SG-Gen
              'Sade would have washed her clothes.'

       c.   Olùkọ́   *mọ́ọ*   *tin*   pe   ni.
              Teacher   FUT   PERF   call   1PL-Gen
              'The teacher would have called us.'

Obviously in (7a-d), the future tense elements freely co-occurred with the perfective aspect. The reading of the expressions there indicates that the actions have started and have been completed, which may be tagged as "past-perfect". These future tense items cannot co-occur with the habitual-progressive marker *ń* in Ọ̀họ̀rí, lest it yields ill-formed constructions, as shown in (8).

(8)   a.   *Olú   *áà*   *ń*   nọ   ńné.
              Olu   FUT   HAB-PROG   go   house

       b.   *Ṣadé   *yọ́ọ́*   *ń*   fọṣọọ̀   ẹ̀.
              Ṣade   FUT   HAB-PROG   wash-cloth   3SG-Gen

       c.   *Olùkọ́   *mọ́ọ*   *ń*   pe   ni.
              Teacher   FUT   HAB-PROG   call   1PL-Gen

All the examples in (8) are ill-formed; that is why they are being starred there. With this, we conclude explanations on tense and aspect. We shall now navigate to the projections of tense and aspect in Ọ̀họ̀rí.

5.   Tense and Aspect Projections in Ọ̀họ̀rí

Following the Split-Infl-Hypothesis (Pollock 1989), MP assumes that each Infl element possesses the capability to project maximally as independent X^0 functional categories. Consequently, tense phrase (TP), aspect phrase (AspP), etc., now replaced the unified IP of earlier versions of Government Binding and Principles and Parameters Theory as maximal projections of the Split-Infl. In line with the above assumption, we propose that tense and aspect, which are core elements of Infl in Ọ̀họ̀rí[9] are functional

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[9]Akinwande (2022) claims that Ọ̀họ̀rí regularly elide consonant /r/ in genitive pronoun *rẹ̀* as shown in (2a), (3b) & (7b) above.

heads, which select VP adjunct as complement to project maximally. We discuss tense and aspect projections in the following sub-sections.

5.1. Tense Projections in Ọ̀họ̀rí

Going by the insights given in (1)-(3) above, where future tense occurs in affirmative constructions (1&2) and in negative constructions (3), we propose the structural representation of such constructions in figure (1a & b).
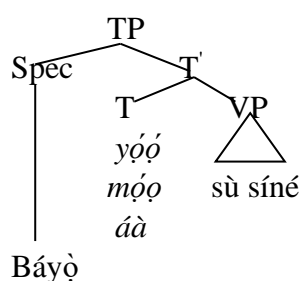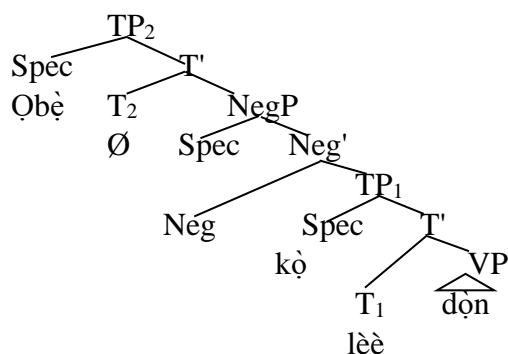
Figure 1a

Figure 1b

Apparently, figure 1a captured affirmative constructions, where there are future tense markers and in that order, the T *yọ́ọ́/mọ́ọ/áà,* which is the probe of the construction selects the goal, VP *sù síné* as complement to project T' and T' projects into TP *yọ́ọ́/mọ́ọ/áà sù síné*. The TP thereafter attracts the subject DP to Spec-TP to derive *Báyọ̀ yọ́ọ́/mọ́ọ/áà sù síné*. Figure 1b captured negative constructions, where future tense marker occurred as T_1. In this kind of word order, the T_1 *lèè* is selected from the lexicon and merged with the VP *dọ̀n* as complement to project T' and T' projects into TP_1 *lèè dọ̀n*. The NEG head automatically becomes a potential probe; the NEG *kọ̀* quickly selects and merges with the TP_1 as complement to project Neg' and Neg' projects into NegP *kọ̀ lèè dọ̀n*. The T_2, which has null spell-out, selects and merges with the NegP to project into TP_2 Ø *kọ̀ lèè dọ̀n*. The TP_2 attracts the subject DP to Spec-TP_2 in order to satisfy Extended Projection Principle (EPP) which derives *Ọbẹ̀ Ø kọ̀ lèè dọ̀n*.

5.2. Aspect Projections in Ọ̀họ̀rí

The following configurations captured the data given in (4)-(6). Figure 2a accounts for the perfective and habitual-progressive aspects in (3)-(5) while figure 2b accounts for the co-occurrence of the perfective and habitual-progressive aspects in (6).
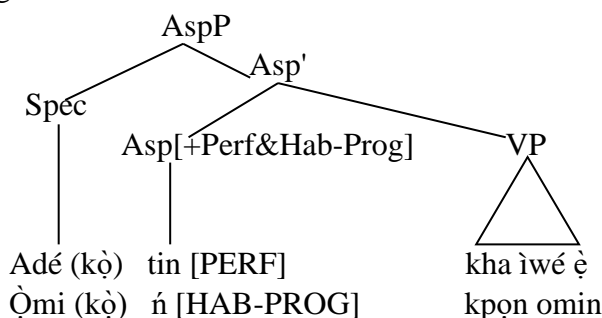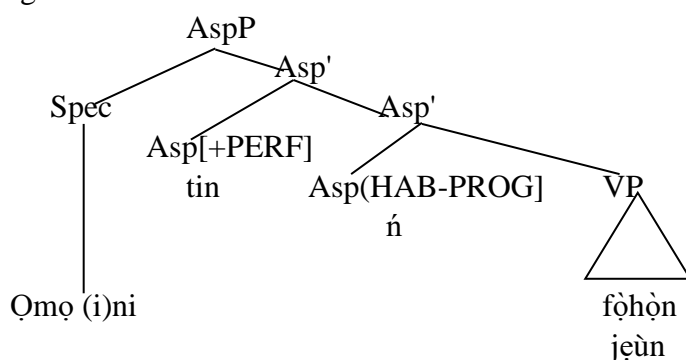
Figure 2a

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                  AspP
                 /    \
               /      Asp'
             /       /    \
          Spec      /      \
            |      /        \
            |   Asp[+Perf&Hab-Prog]   VP
            |      |              /\
            |      |             /  \
            |      |            /____\
        Adé (kò)  tin [PERF]    kha ìwé ẹ̀
        Ọ̀mi (kò)  ń [HAB-PROG]  kpọn omin
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Figure 2b

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                  AspP
                 /    \
               /      Asp'
             /       /    \
          Spec      /      Asp'
            |      /       /    \
            |  Asp[+PERF] /      \
            |     |      /        \
            |    tin   Asp(HAB-PROG]   VP
            |            ń           /\
            |                       /  \
            |                      /____\
        Ọmọ (i)ni                  fọ̀họ̀n
                                   jẹùn
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In figure 2a, the ASP *tin* [+PERF], *ń* [+HAB-PROG] selects and merges with the VP, *kha ìwé ẹ̀/kpọn omin* as complement to project Asp' and Asp' projects into AspP *tin/ń kha ìwé ẹ̀/kpọn omin*. The AspP attracts the subject DP to Spec-AspP to satisfy EPP which derives *ọ̀mi tin/ń kha ìwé ẹ̀/kpọn omin.* In figure 2b, ASP *ń* [+HAB-PROG] first selects and merges with the VP, *fọ̀họ̀n/jẹùn*, as complement. This makes ASP *tin* [+PERF] becomes a potential probe and straightforwardly attracts and merges with ASP *ń fọ̀họ̀n/jẹùn* to project Asp' and Asp' projects into AspP *tin ń fọ̀họ̀n/jẹùn*. Consequently, the AspP attracts the subject DP to Spec-AspP to derive *ọmọ tin ń fọ̀họ̀n/jẹùn*. To account for the co-occurrence of future tense and aspectual elements in (7), we propose the structure below.

Figure 3
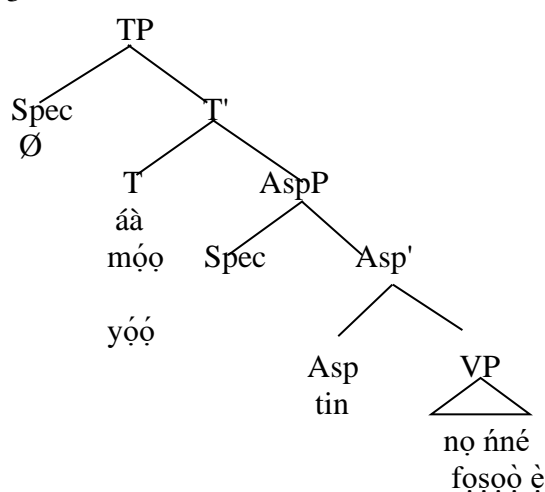
In this type of linear occurrence, the ASP, *tin* is selected from the lexicon and merged with the VP *nọ ńné/fọṣọ̀ ẹ̀,* as complement to project Asp' and Asp' projects into AspP *tin nọ ńné/fọṣọ̀ ẹ̀*. Thereafter, the T head *áà/mọ́ọ/yọ́ọ́* selects and merges with the AspP to project into the TP *áà/mọ́ọ/yọ́ọ́ tin nọ ńné/fọṣọ̀ ẹ̀* (recall we stated in (8) that habitual-progressive *ń* cannot co-occur with the future tense in Ọ̀họ̀rí, lest it yields ungrammatical constructions; that is why *ń* [+HAB-PROG] is not included in figure 3.

6.   Conclusion

This article has examined tense and aspect in Ọ̀họ̀rí. It established that just as non-future tense is unmarked in Standard Yorùbá, Ọ̀họ̀rí does not mark non-future tense as well. The paper further showed that the future tense markers, as well as aspectual elements can collocate together gallantly in Ọ̀họ̀rí. The article discovered that Ọ̀họ̀rí employs a single marker *ń* to express both habitual and progressive aspects. The study equally showed the co-occurrence of tense and aspect markers in Ọ̀họ̀rí. Thereafter, it proposed structures for the projections of the TP and AspP in the dialect.

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