

INFLECTIONAL FORMS OF TENSE AND ASPECT IN ATESO

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This paper is an analysis of tense and aspect in Ateso, an Eastern Nilotic language. Ateso distinguishes between past and non-past tenses: the past tense is marked by a low tone on the syllable peaks of the verb, while the non-past is marked by a high tone on the verb nucleus. With regard to aspect, it distinguishes between the following: imperfective, perfective, consecutive, perfect, habitual, and iterative. The first five aspects are marked morphologically by the morphemes *-i*, *-it*, *ko-*, *a-* and *-nene* respectively. The iterative is marked by reduplication of the verb root. Since tone, tense and aspect are assigned differently in each of the Teso-Turkana subgroups, it is important that they are analysed separately for a clear view of these concepts and how they are represented specifically in Ateso.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Ateso language belongs to the Teso-Turkana sub-group of the Eastern Nilotic group of Nilotic languages, which, according to Koehler (1955: 85), also comprises the Western and Southern Nilotic sub-groups. Greenberg (1963: 85) assigns its membership to the Eastern Sudanic branch of the Nilo-Saharan phylum.

A number of linguists have already written on some aspects of Ateso. However, about a decade ago Noske and Otaala (2006) noted that the documentation of it was incomplete and outdated. Notable linguistic publications essentially consist of the following: *A Handbook of the Ateso Language*, by Kitching (1915); *An Introduction to Ateso Grammar*, by Hilders and Lawrance (1956) - two books primarily designed as an introduction to the Ateso language; and the *English-Ateso, Ateso-English Vocabulary*, by Hilders and Lawrance (1958), and *A Dictionary of English-Ateso and Ateso-English*, by Kiggen (1953).

Since the literature on Ateso is arguably not abundant, the present study will benefit from referring to the literature on Toposa and Turkana, two

languages with close family links [with Ateso]. They have been studied by H. Schroeder and G. Dimmendaal (e.g. Dimmendaal, 1983 and Schroeder, 2008). The present paper will draw upon Schroeder's (2008) extensive analysis of the verb morphology in Toposa and Dimmendaal's (1983) analysis of tense and aspect inflections in Turkana. However, while Schroeder (2008) focused on verb derivation, the present study focuses on the inflectional verb forms that mark tense and aspect in Ateso.

The outline of this paper is as follows: with the verb being the basis for any study of tense and aspect, the paper first describes the basic verb form in Ateso, focusing on the verb root and the key phenomena that affect it, such as verb classes, subject and object marking, and the infinitive verb forms. Secondly, it discusses tense in Ateso, beginning with the non-past and then moving to the past tense. Finally, it analyses aspect, a notion which, in this particular language, covers a wide spectrum ranging from the imperfective to the perfective, perfect, habitual, iterative and the consecutive types of aspect.

2. THE VERB MORPHOLOGY IN ATESO

Ateso has a highly productive system of inflectional and derivational morphemes that can be attached to the verb by way of prefixation, suffixation and reduplication of the root morpheme. The various morphological forms, together with tone, indicate number agreement, tense, aspect, and other forms of grammatical meaning such as applicative, passive voice and middle voice. These latter forms will not be discussed in this paper, even though they affect agreement marking and, indirectly, aspect marking.

In Ateso, tone assignment in the verbal system is significant in marking tense. There are three contrastive tones: high, low, and falling. The identification of tone is important to the extent that one major concern in this paper will be the placement of tone on verbal units. The sequence of high and low tones is the most common in Ateso, while falling tones (at verb ends) are quite rare. Tone assignment is predictable since it is triggered by

tense. Ateso verbs do not have lexical tone; they only have grammatical tone.

Before proceeding with the discussion of tense and aspect proper, some basic observations on the structure of the Ateso verb need to be made about verb classes, subject and person marking, the form of the infinitive, and the verb root.

2.1. Verb classes in Ateso and person marking

In my analysis, Ateso verbs can be divided into two morphological classes: “class 1” and “class 2”. The first class uses the prefix *á-* to mark the first person, as in the verb forms *á-nó̂m* (‘I hit’) and *á-lɛ́jî* (‘I dance’). The prefix *e-* is used to mark the other persons in the same class, as in *é-lɛ́jî* (‘he/she dances’). The second class uses the prefix *e-* to mark the first person and *i-* to mark all the other persons, as in *í-ró̂m* (‘he/she holds’) and *é-lípî* (‘I pray’). Dimmendaal (1983: 99) in his analysis of Eastern Nilotic languages, of which Ateso is one, made a similar distinction.

Consider the following examples:

- (1) a) *á-nó̂m*
 1PS-hit
 ‘I hit’
- b) *é-nó̂m*
 3PL-hit
 ‘They hit’
- c) *é-lípî*
 1PS-pray
 ‘I pray’
- d) *í-lípî*
 3PL-pray
 ‘They pray’

In the structure (1a) the subject-cum-first person singular is marked by the morpheme *a-*. The subject/person marker is prefixed to the verb root. For class-1 verbs, the first person singular is marked by *a-* while *e-* marks all the other persons, as in (1a) and (1b) respectively. But when it comes to class-2 verbs, it is the prefix *e-* that marks the first person, while *i-* marks the other persons, as in (1c) and (1d). This is summarized in Table (1) below.

Table 1: Subject- and person- marking in Ateso

Class-1						Class-2					
1SG	2SG	3SG	1PL	2PL	3PL	1SG	2SG	3SG	1PL	2PL	3PL
a-	e-	e-	ka-	e...te	e...te	e-	i-	i-	ki-	i...te	i...te

Table 1 indicates that the subject is in number agreement with the person marker. For plurals, the suffix *-te* is used together with the subject/person marker.

2.2. The infinitive

In Ateso, the infinitive is marked by the prefix *a-*. In addition to this *a-*, class-2 infinitive verbs have the prefix *ki-*, while in class-1 infinitive verbs *ki-* only precedes verbs with a monosyllabic root, as is the case with the verb *-nám* in the table below. The polysyllabic verbs are preceded by the infinitive *a-*.

Table 2: The infinitive verb form in Ateso

For class-1 verbs	For class-2 verbs
<i>á-náráùn</i> 'to call'	<i>á-kí-málá</i> 'to greet'
<i>á-túkɔ́nòkín</i> 'to collect'	<i>á-kí-dáká</i> 'to carry'
<i>á-kí-nám</i> 'to eat'	<i>á-kí-pɔ́tó</i> 'to beat'

2.3. The verb root

The verb structure in Ateso is composed of either the verb root alone, as in (2) below, or the verb root together with the person marker and aspect

markers, as in (3). In addition, a finite verb contains a tense marker. All these features are illustrated in the following examples.

- (2) *á-mɔ́ʝ*
 1SG-cry:NPAST
 ‘I cry’
- (3) *é-bóé-néné*
 3SG-stay: NPAST-HAB
 ‘He/she stays’
- (4) *-íʝéki ní*
 ‘leave’
- (5) *-kwéna-kwéna*
 ‘laugh repeatedly’
- (6) *-ítúkóríàn*
 ‘threaten’

The prefix *a-* in (2) is the first person singular marker, while *e-* in (3) marks the third person singular, and *néné* the habitual aspect. The high tone on *bóé* and *néné* marks tense. The verb root can start with a vowel, as is the case of *-i-* in the verb *á-íʝéki ní* in (4), or with a consonant, as is the case in *-mɔ́ʝ* in (2). It can end either with a consonant, still as in (2), where the verb root *-mɔ́ʝ* ends with the consonant *-ʝ-*, or with a vowel, as in *é-bóé* in (3). The verb root can also undergo reduplication in the formation of the iterative aspect, as in (5). Furthermore, the verb root exists in different syllables: it can be monosyllabic, as in (2), or have two or more syllables, as in (6), which has three syllables. No phonological changes are realized on the verb due to affixation. The V.CVC sequence is the most prominent occurrence. (The dot separates the two syllables in the sequence.) A vowel occurs word-finally or word-initially.

3. TENSE MARKING IN ATESO

Tense is marked by tone, which distinguishes between past and non-past forms. “Non-past” refers to present time and future time. To mark the present, a high tone is marked on the vowel units of the verb stem. However, to mark the future, a future-time adverbial has to be added to the relevant verbs of the non-past form. And as will be seen below, the contrast between the high and the low tone serves to contrast the past and the non-past tense as well.

3.1 The notion of tense in Ateso

Grammar books and dictionaries offer several definitions of what tense is. But, as Crystal (2003: 460) comments, “... tense forms, if they exist, regularly display analytical difficulties, because of overlaps between tense and other verbal functions, such as aspect or mood”. Without going into the details of it, tense is the marker of the time of action denoted by the verb. Ateso has a two-way opposition of tense: the past vs. the non-past. As already pointed out, the term “non-past” subsumes both the notion of present and that of future. Having these two with each one on its own would be misleading in the case of Ateso because the future is formed by adding future-time adverbials to present-tense verb affixes.

3.1.1 *The non-past tense*

Ateso marks the non-past tense with a high tone marked on the root vowels of the verb. Example (7) illustrates this for class-1 verbs, while example (8) does it for class-2 verbs.

- (7) a) *á-mɔ́ɲ-i*
 1PS-cry:NPAST-IPFV¹
 ‘I am crying’

¹ The *-i* is an aspect marker but this will be dealt with later in subsection 4.1.2.

- b) *é-mɔ́ŋ-í-té*
 3PL-cry:NPAST-IPFV-PL
 ‘They are crying’
- c) *é-mɔ́ŋ-í-té* *mòí*
 3PL-cry:NPAST-IPFV-PL tomorrow
 ‘They will be crying tomorrow’

- (8) a) *é-gír-í*
 1SG-write:NPAST-IPFV
 ‘I am writing’
- b) *í-gír-í-té*
 3PL-write:NPAST-IPFV-PL
 ‘They will be writing’
- c) *í-gír-í-té* *ébóŋ*
 3PL-write:NPAST-IPFV-PL evening
 ‘They will writing in the evening’

The lexical items *mòí* (‘tomorrow’) and *ébóŋ* (‘evening’), distinguish between the present and future time. The examples above show that the future tense markers are not grammatical but are lexical.

3.1.2 The past tense

The past tense is marked with a low tone on the verb root, as illustrated in the example below:

- (9) a) *é-ŋàm* *ékárú ɹ é*
 2SG-eat:PAST year last
 ‘You ate last year’
- b) *é-ŋàm* *íŋámɛ̀nè tùpùrúcû*
 3PL-eat:PAST food morning
 ‘They ate food in the morning’

The low tone on the verb root is always enough to indicate past tense; adverbials are only used to specify which time of the past.

Table 4 summarises the discussion so far about tense marking in Ateso.

Table 4: Summary of tense marking in Ateso

Tense	Marker
Non-past	Present: ´ (high tone) on the verb nucleus Future: ´ (high tone) + future-time adverbial
Past	` (low tone) on the verb root vowel(s)

The tone expressed on the verb root spreads to the other syllables in the verb in the case of non-past forms as in *é-mɔ́ɲ-í-té* in 7(b). In that of past tense, the tone spread does not occur as shown in 9.

4. ASPECT MARKING IN ATESO

Ateso distinguishes between the following aspects: imperfective, perfective, consecutive, perfect, habitual, and iterative. (The consecutive is commonly used in narratives.) Aspect markers carry the tone of the tense.

4.1 The imperfective aspect

The imperfective aspect is used to indicate an ongoing activity or state. Comrie (1976: 16) says that it “pays essential attention to the internal structure of a situation”. Thus, it essentially serves to indicate the agent or the event in the middle of a situation and has no reference to the end point. In Ateso, the imperfective aspect is marked by the suffix *-i*, but the tone on this suffix will be different depending on whether the verb is in the past or the non-past tense.

4.1.1 *The imperfective past*

This aspect explains an ongoing process that took place and continued within an unspecified time in the past. In Ateso, it is marked by the suffix *-i*, with the low tone on *-i* marking the past tense. This is exemplified by example

(10) in the case of class-1 verbs and by example (11) in the case of class-2 verbs.

- (10) a) *é-mɔ̀ŋ-í*
3SG-cry:PAST-IPFV
'He/she was crying'
- b) *é-mɔ̀ŋ-í-tè*
3PL-cry:PAST-IPFV-PL
'They were crying'
- (11) a) *í-lɛ̀ɣ-í*
3SG-dance:PAST-IPFV
'He or she is dancing'
- b) *í-lɛ̀ɣ-í-tè*
3PL-dance:PAST-IPFV-PL
'They were dancing'

One more observation about tone marking in the imperfective past is that the low tone does not spread across the verb but is restricted to the verb root and the plural morpheme at the end.

4.1.2 The imperfective non-past

There are two forms of imperfective non-past: one that refers to the present and another that refers to the future.

4.1.2.1 The imperfective non-past indicating the present

This form of imperfective non-past indicates an ongoing process at the moment when an utterance is being made. In Ateso, it is marked by the suffix *-í*, with a high tone placed on it to mark the non-past tense. In the plural, the suffix *-í* is followed by the plural marker *-tè*. Example (12) illustrates the case of class-1 verbs, while example (13) illustrates that of class-2 verbs.

(12) a) *á-mɔ́ʝ-í*
 1SG-cry:NPAST-IPFV
 ‘I am crying’

b) *á-mɔ́ʝ-í-té*
 3PL-cry:NPAST-IPFV-PL
 ‘They are crying’

(13) a) *í-lɛ́ɟ-i*
 1SG-dance:NPAST-IPFV
 ‘I am dancing’

b) *í-lɛ́ɟ-í-té*
 3PL-dance:NPAST-IPFV-PL
 ‘They are dancing’

The high tone which marks the non-past tense spreads to the whole verb.

4.1.2.2 *The imperfective non-past indicating the future*

To mark the imperfective future in Ateso, the *-í* morpheme marking the imperfective non-past is used together with future-time adverbials such as *móí* (‘tomorrow’), *élapâ ɲóló* (‘next month’) or *ékárû ɲóló* (‘next year’). Example (14) illustrates the case of class-1 verbs, while example (15) illustrates that of class-2 verbs.

(14) a) *á-ɲám-í* *móí*
 1SG-eat:NPAST-IPFV tomorrow
 ‘I will be eating tomorrow’

b) *é-ɲám-í* *ékárû ɲóló*
 3SG-eat:NPAST-IPFV year next
 ‘He/she will be eating next year’

(15) a) *é-típ-í* *ékárû ɲóló*
 1SG-pray:NPAST-IPFV year next
 ‘I will be praying next year’

- b) *í-líp-í* *ébo'ŋ*
 3SG-pray:NPAST-IPFV evening
 'He/she will be praying in the evening'

The time adverbials are not affected by the verb tone, even though in the examples (14) and (15) above they have a similar tone marking. This is purely coincidental.

4.2 The perfective aspect

The perfective is used to indicate an action that is complete. And as Payne (1997: 239) observes, “the situation is viewed in its entirety independently of tense”. In Ateso, the perfective is marked by the suffix *-it*. Example (16) illustrates this for class-1 verbs, while example (17) does it for class-2 verbs.

- (16) a) *á-mɔ̀ŋ-it* *ló'ó*
 3SG-cry-PFV today
 'He/she cried today'

- b) *é-mɔ̀ŋ-ité* *díàní*
 3PL-cry-PFV/PL yesterday
 'They cried yesterday'

- (17) a) *í-líp-it* *ló'ó*
 3SG-pray-PFV today
 'They cried yesterday'

- b) *í-líp-ité* *díàní*
 3PL-pray-PFV/PL yesterday
 'They prayed yesterday'

The low tone on the perfective aspect indicates past tense.

4.3 The consecutive aspect

The consecutive aspect is an extension of the perfective. It is used in talking about consecutive events in the past, mostly narratives describing past events. The consecutive aspect in constructions of multiple verbs is a feature of clause chaining. Matthews (1997: 55) defines clause chaining as a “variety of constructions in which clauses are linked in ways unlike those characteristic of European languages.” Clause chaining is a common feature of African languages, especially verb initial ones, like Ateso. Ateso makes extensive use of clause chaining. It does not express a specific time orientation but instead receives this from the preceding verb. In Ateso, the consecutive aspect is marked by the prefix morpheme *kó-* attached to the verb. Consider the following example:

- (18) *á-lòsì t òtáw̄nî, kò-gwèlì ákíríà, kò-mási ájónó, kò-ikári òré*
 3SG-walk town, CONS-buy flour, CONS-drink beer, CONS-go home
 ‘He went to town, bought some flour, drank some beer, and went home’

The person marking prefix *á-* only appears on the first verb and does not get repeated in the following verbs. Instead, it is replaced by the consecutive marker *kò-*.

4.4 The perfect aspect

There is a “blurred” difference between the perfect aspect and the perfective one. In the discussion that follows, the perfect aspect is treated as a past situation with some relevance in the present. This is different from the perfective which has no such time contrasts.

The perfect aspect in Ateso is characterised by the prefix *á-*. In the non-past form of the verb, only the root and the prefix *á-* mark it. This is illustrated by example (19).

- (19) a) *á-gír*
 PFV-write
 ‘He/she has written’

- b) *à-ró'k*
 PFV-sing
 'He/she has sung'

Note that the vowel in the verb root carries a high tone.

In the perfect past, the root and the perfect marker are maintained, but a lexical form for the specific time in the past is added, as in the following example:

- (20) a) *à-gír díàní*
 PFV-write yesterday
 'I had written yesterday'

- b) *à-dùké-té ì-tògòò kés èlàpâ ɹ é*
 PFV-built-PL house their month last
 'They had built month.'

The lexical forms *díàní* ('yesterday') and *èlàpâ ɹ é* ('last month') indicate the specific time in the past. Further, a low tone is placed on the perfect prefix morpheme *à-*.

4.5 The habitual aspect

The habitual aspect indicates a regular occurrence of a situation in the past, present or future. This section distinguishes between the habitual aspect in the non-past tense and the past tense.

4.5.1 The habitual aspect in the non-past tense

The habitual non-past in Ateso is marked by the morpheme *-néné*, together with a high tone on the whole verb stretch for non-past tense. The difference between the habitual non-past and the habitual past lies in tone: the past is marked by a low tone while the non-past is marked by a high tone on the habitual marker. The two examples in (21) illustrate the habitual aspect in the present time while those in (22) illustrate the future time.

- (21) a) *é-sísíà-néné Letisia èmúsúgútú*
 3SG-teach-HAB Letisia English
 'Letisia teaches English.'

b) *é-minà-néné-té áràamá*

3PL-like-HAB-PL music

‘They like music’

(22) a) *é-bútó átúkónókin dúcúdúcú*

3PL-aux meet regularly

‘They will meet regularly’

b) *á-bútó ágír dúcúdúcú*

3PL-aux write regularly

‘I will write regularly’

The habitual occurrence is marked lexically by the words *dúcúdúcú* (‘regularly’) and the auxiliary verbs *é-bútó* and *á-bútó*.

4.5.2 *The habitual aspect in the past tense*

The habitual aspect in the past tense indicates situations that took place in the past regularly. In Ateso, this aspect is marked by the grammatical morpheme *-nènè* carrying a low tone on its two syllables, as illustrated in the following examples.

(23) a) *á-lòsè-nènè ínàgái ékárû ɹ é*

1SG-wash-HAB clothes year last

‘I used to wash clothes last year’

b) *é-malè-nènè-té ékárû ɹ é*

3PL-greet-HAB-PL year last

‘They used to greet him last year’

The low tone does not spread over the whole verb. The person marker retains its high tone

4.6 *The iterative aspect*

This aspect refers to an action/event that takes place repeatedly. In Ateso, this is indicated by a complete reduplication of the verb root. Below is an illustration of the iterative aspect both in the past and non-past tenses.

4.6.1 *The iterative aspect in the non-past tense*

Consider the following example:

- (24) a) *é-bí l-í-bí l-í* *John ákítóì* *sáálò*
 3SG-break-EV-break-IPFV John building poles now
 ‘John is breaking building poles repeatedly’
- b) *é-pé t-é-pé t-í* *nèsí* *sáálò*
 3SG-kick-EV-kick-IPFV him/her now
 ‘He/she is kicking him/her now repeatedly’
- c) *é-pé t-é-pé t-í* *kèsí* *éboŋ*
 3PL-kick-EV-kick-IPFV them evening
 ‘They will be kicking them in the evening repeatedly’

The abbreviation *EV* stands for epenthetic vowel, which is used for the syllable structure CV. It is inserted in order to syllabify consonants which would otherwise remain unsyllabified. The morphological forms *-bí l* (‘break’) and *-pé t* (‘kick’) undergo reduplication to mark the iterative aspect. The high tone, stretching over the verb, marks the non-past tense.

4.6.2 *The iterative aspect in the past tense*

Consider the following example:

- (25) a) *á-bí l-í-bí l-í* *àbàó-í* *ékárû ɣ é*
 1SG-break-EV-break-IPFV board-PL year last
 ‘I broke the boards repeatedly last year’
- b) *è-pé t-è-pé t-ì* *nèsí* *ékárû ɣ é*
 3SG-kick-EV-kick-IPFV him/her year last
 ‘She kicked him/her repeatedly last year’

In both (a) and (b), the past tense is marked by the low tone spreading over the reduplicated verb root, together with the past-time adverbial *ékárû* ɹ é ('last year').

4.7 Co-occurrence of aspects

In Ateso, there is co-occurrence of the habitual and the iterative aspects on the one hand, and that of the habitual and the imperfective aspects on the other hand.

4.7.1 Co-occurrence of the iterative and the habitual aspects

4.7.1.1 Co-occurrence in the non-past tense

When there is such co-occurrence, the habitual marker *-néné* is used together with lexical items expressing repetition. Sometimes reduplication occurs in some verbs. And when it does, the habitual marker is not used; instead, it is represented lexically. For instance, the lexical forms *ɳíní pákî*, in example (26) are used to indicate the repeated action in both cases.

(26) a) *é-lósé-néné ètógó ɳíní pákî*
 3SG-clean-HAB house repeatedly
 'He/she cleans the house repeatedly'

b) *é-gwán-gwán àcùpái ɳíní pákî*
 3PL-break-break bottles repeatedly
 'They break bottles repeatedly'

When the verb root is reduplicated, as in (26b) the marker *néné* is omitted. The habitual meaning is recovered from the repeated action.

4.7.1.2 Co-occurrence in the past tense

To mark this type of co-occurrence, the perfective marker *-it* is merged with the habitual marker *-nènè* to form *-nété*. This, in turn, together with the frequentative marker *ɳíní pákî* ('frequently'), marks the iterative and the habitual aspect in the past, as illustrated in the following example.

- (27) a) *é-riàmàkí-nètè* *kà* *nèsí* *ńíní pákî*
 1SG-meet-ITER/HABPST with them(ACC) frequently
 ‘I used to meet them frequently’
- b) *é-mɔ̀n-è-nètè* *ńíní pákî*
 2SG-cry-EV-ITER/HABPST frequently
 ‘He used to cry frequently’

4.7.1.3 Co-occurrence in the future

To indicate this type of co-occurrence, the auxiliary verb forms *abuto* and *ebuto* (corresponding to ‘will’ in either case, but corresponding to different grammatical persons) are used together with the lexical item *ńíní pákî* (‘repeatedly’). The reduplicated verb root *-bíl-í-bíl-í* marks the iterative form, while the high tone stretching over the whole verb marks the future time.

- (28) a) *á-bútó* *ábíl-í-bíl-í* *àcúpà-í* *ńíní pákî*
 1SG-AUX break-EV-break-IPFV bottle-PL repeatedly
 ‘I will break bottles repeatedly’
- b) *é-bútó* *ábíl-í-bíl-í* *àcúpà-í* *ńíní pákî*
 3PL-AUX break-EV-break-IPFV bottle-PL repeatedly
 ‘They will break bottles repeatedly’

The auxiliary form *á-bútó* is used with the first person singular, while *é-bútó* is used with the third person plural in the present case but may also be used with the third person singular with second person verb forms as well.

4.7.2 Co-occurrence of the iterative and the perfective aspects

This type of co-occurrence indicates a completed action in the past that was done repeatedly. It is marked by the perfective *-ít* together with the lexical item *ńíní pákî* (‘repeatedly’).

(29) a) *é-mɔ̀ŋ-it* *ŋíni pákî*
 3SG-cry-PFV repeatedly
 ‘They cried repeatedly’

b) *í-gir-it* *ŋíni pákî*
 3PL-write-PFV repeatedly
 ‘They wrote repeatedly’

4.7.3 Co-occurrence of the iterative and the imperfective aspects

This type of co-occurrence occurs both in the past and the non-past tense, with this latter covering the habitual present and the future.

4.7.3.1 Co-occurrence in the habitual present tense

This is marked by the habitual morpheme *-néné* and the imperfective morpheme *-í*, with the high tone on the latter marking the non-past tense. The lexical form *ŋíni pákî* marks the iterative aspect.

(30) a) *é-mɔ̀ŋ-é-néné-í* *ŋíni pákî*
 1SG-cry-EV-HAB-IPFV repeatedly
 ‘I cry repeatedly’

b) *é-ŋòb-é-néné-í-te* *ŋíni pákî*
 3SG-smile-EV-HB-IPFV-PL repeatedly
 ‘They smile repeatedly’

The high tone marking the non-past tense spreads over the whole verb.

4.7.3.2 Co-occurrence in the future tense

This is marked by a combination of the future auxiliary *abuto* (or *ebuto*) and the iterative lexical item *dúcúdúcú*².

² The habitual lexical item *dúcúdúcú* is used interchangeably with *ŋíni pákî*.

(31)a) *á-bútó ámé, á dúcúdúcú*

3PL-AUX hunt repeatedly

‘They will be hunting repeatedly’

b) *é-bútó ádáká à-kábwà dúcúdúcú*

3PL-AUX carry SG-bow repeatedly

‘He or she will be carrying a bow repeatedly’

The high tone, which marks tense, spreads over both the auxiliary and the main verb.

4.7.3.3 Co-occurrence in the past tense

This is marked by the imperfective morpheme *-i* (on which the low tone marks the past tense) in combination with the habitual suffix *-nènè*, and the habitual lexical item *dúcúdúcú* (‘repeatedly’).

(32) a) *á-gwèlé-nènè-i dúcúdúcú*

1SG-buy-HAB-IPFV repeatedly

‘I bought repeatedly’

b) *é-nèmé-nènè-i-té dúcúdúcú*

3PL-eat-HB-IPFV-PL repeatedly

‘They ate repeatedly’

A low tone is marked on the syllable peaks of verb root, the habitual marker *-nènè*, and the imperfective morpheme *-i*.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper set out to describe how Ateso, an Eastern Nilotic language, marks tense and aspect. It subdivided the Ateso tense system into past and non-past. The non-past tense subsumes the present and the future. The past tense is marked by a low tone on the verb, while the non-past tense is marked by a high tone on the verb root. The distribution of high and low tones for both tenses is the same for both class-one and class-two verbs.

The aspect system in Ateso covers the six following types: imperfective, perfective, consecutive, perfect, habitual, and iterative. Each of these interacts with the non-past tense, the past tense, or both. The imperfective past and imperfective non-past are distinguished by tone: the imperfective past is marked by the suffix *-i* with a low tone for past tense, while the imperfective non-past is marked by the suffix *-í* with a high tone for non-past tense. The perfective aspect is marked by the suffix *-it*, while the perfect aspect is marked by the prefix *á-*. The consecutive aspect, which is an extension of the perfective aspect, indicating consecutive events, is marked by the consecutive marker *kò-* prefixed to the verb. The habitual aspect in Ateso exists in two forms: the habitual past, which is marked by the morpheme *-nènè* carrying a low tone and the habitual non-past, which is marked by the same morpheme *-néné* with the high tone. The iterative aspect is marked by reduplication of the verb root. Lastly, there is co-occurrence of the iterative and the habitual aspects, the iterative and the imperfective aspects, and the iterative and the perfective aspects.

This paper focused on describing tense and aspect in Ateso. However, the picture of verb inflectional morphemes would not be complete in this language without describing aspects of mood as well. That is why the next paper on the same topic should be about mood.

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