

The Dynamics of the Past and Future Tense Expressions in Dagbani



Memunatu Sheini

ABSTRACT: This paper discusses the degree of remoteness in Dagbani, a Mabia (Gur) language of the Niger-Congo language family spoken in Northern Ghana. The degree of remoteness has been discussed in Dagbani (Olawsky1999; Bodomo 2001; Botne 2012; Bodomo 2018). According to the scholars mentioned above, the verbal particles; *sa*, *di* and *daa* mark degree of remoteness in Dagbani. However, these scholars have not discussed all the possible means degree of remoteness can be expressed in the language. The time adverbials, the proximity markers, *yên* and *yólí*, and others are not looked at. This paper, therefore, moves a step further to discuss the possible remoteness distinctions that are part of the ways tense is expressed in Dagbani. The paper uses Comrie's (1985) conceptualisation of tense in human language in the discussion. Comrie's explanation of the phenomenon shows that in some languages, the degree of remoteness is expressed using the time adverbials and other particles. Eliciting data from eight people in Tamale and Yendi, and existing literature, I support my intuition as a native speaker to demonstrate that the time adverbials and other particles either than only *daa*, *sa* and *di* express degree of remoteness in both past and future tenses in Dagbani.

1. INTRODUCTION

Using Comrie's (1985) theory of tense as a reference point, this paper aims at building on (Olawsky 1999; Bodomo 2001; 2018; Botne 2012) degree of remoteness in Dagbani or metrical tense as Bodomo (2001) terms it. Dagbani belongs to the Mabia group of languages. Mabia is under the Niger-Congo language Phylum (see Bodomo 2017;2020). Dagbani is spoken in the Northern Region of Ghana by the Dagomba. It is part of the major languages included in the school system as a subject and sometimes used as medium of instruction at the lower primary. Dagbani has an SVO sentence structure; this suggests that a sentence is commenced with a subject (noun, pronoun, and noun phrase) in the language. However, other structures of the sentence are a possibility. As an aspect prominent language, Dagbani has two verb forms, the perfective and imperfective. This notion explains that every Dagbani verb has two forms, the perfective and imperfective verb forms (see also Olawsky 1999). Thus, the Dagbani aspect is expressed through the perfective and imperfective forms. In this case, the expressions of linguistic time (tense) are carried out through the Perfective and imperfective aspects. However, the perfective and imperfective aspects are not the only ways through which time (tense) is expressed in Dagbani. According to Bodomo (2001), the Mabia group of languages have different ways of expressing tense. This observation confirms Comrie's (1985) assertion that there are different ways of tense expressions in languages that have no verbal forms of expressing tense. Common among these tense expressions in tenseless languages are the degree of remoteness or remoteness distinctions. Remoteness distinctions have been investigated and termed differently in Dagbani by scholars. For example, Olawsky (1999) terms it as temporal clause expressions, with time-depth markers, Bodomo (2001), metrical tense, which is expressed with time-depth particles, remoteness distinctions in Botne (2012); and in this paper, it is termed as degree of remoteness. It is observed that these scholars only look at a section of remoteness distinctions in Dagbani. For instance, the section of degree of remoteness the scholars mentioned above discuss concerns the aspect of degree of remoteness that is expressed with, *dì* (*hodiernal*), *sà* (*hesternal*), and, *dáá* (*pre-hesternal*) (cf Bodomo 2001). The other degree of remoteness markers, lexical expressions, lexically composite expressions, and other rigidity remoteness markers, the aspectual particles **yên (just about to)** and **yólí (has just)**, which are termed as proximity marker in this paper have not been discussed. This paper, therefore, examines the degree of remoteness, by using the other remoteness markers as part of tense markers in Dagbani. Hence, the questions answered are, are they previous works on degree of remoteness in Dagbani? What are the other remoteness markers that were not discussed? How are these remoteness markers used in the Dagbani? Yendi and Tamale are considered the traditional and administrative cities of Dagbon (the Dagomba land), where the two dialects Nayahili and Tomosili, respectively are spoken. This was the main reason for eliciting data from those two areas of Dagbon. Using thematic qualitative analysis, I asked respondents the various ways they could make simple past and future tense statements, especially when they want to indicate the precise time of the action. When they do not mention any of the remoteness markers, I would ask them whether it is possible to have those aspectual in the past tense and future tense expressions. Respondents were then asked to construct sentences to illustrate how the concern particles are used. Sentences that respondents constructed were labeled past tense and future tense depending on which aspectual used. in The paper is

The Dynamics of the Past and Future Tense Expressions in Dagbani

divided into four sections; the first section discusses previous literature on the phenomenon. Dagbani The second section concerns Comrie's (1985) theory of tense, the third section takes care of the discussion on the degree of remoteness, and the last section presents the conclusion.

2. PREVIOUS WORKS ON REMOTENESS DISTINCTIONS

As mentioned in the introduction,¹ Olawsky (1999), Bodomo (2001; 2018), and Botne (2012) have studied in-depth a section of remoteness distinctions in Dagbani. Olawsky (1999), for example, observes that Dagbani has three grammatical time markers, which indicate the proximity of time depth of events. These temporal time markers are *dì*, *sà*, and *dáá* that mark tense in Dagbani. Olawsky maintains that *dì* marks past for "earlier same day" (only with past), *sà* marks past or future for "one day away" ('yesterday' or 'tomorrow'), and *dáá* past or future; *dáá* marks past for "two or more days away" (the day before yesterday or earlier; the day after tomorrow or later) (see Olawsky 1999:38). Olawsky's explanation indicates that apart from *dì*, the other two-time depth markers, *sà* and *dáá*, mark both past and future tenses and degree of remoteness in the language. These tense and time-depth makers precede other tense-aspect markers to express remoteness distinctions in Dagbani. Olawsky clarifies that the time depth markers, express temporal clause as illustrated in the following sentences.

- 1) <O di chaŋ Tamali.> [o də tʃaŋ Tamali] (He went to Tamale today.) He TD go Tamale.
- 2) <O sa chaŋ Tamali.> [o sa tʃaŋ Tamali] (He went to Tamale yesterday.) He TD go Tamale.
- 3) <O sa ni chaŋ Tamali.> [o sa nə tʃaŋ Tamali] (He will go to Tamale.)
- 4) <O daa chaŋ Tamali.> [o da; tʃaŋ Tamali] (He went to T., at least 2 days ago.) He TD go Tamale.
- 5) <O daa yen chaŋ Tamali.> [o da; jen tʃaŋ Tamali] (He was about to go to Tamale.) He TD about_to go Tamale.

Olawsky (1999:39)

Bodomo (2001) was second to discuss and give an in-depth description of the degree of remoteness as part of tense markers in Dagaare and Dagbani. Before Bodomo's (2001) discussion on the phenomenon were (Bendor Samuel 1971; Bodomo 1996;1997;2000) on the time-depth, in Dagaare. It has become necessary to mention these scholars' works due to the relatedness of the phenomenon in Dagaare and Dagbani. However, their works are not further discussed. We consider Bodomo (2001) since he particularly looks at Dagaare and Dagbani and his work is considered the latest among the discussion on the phenomenon that concerns Dagaare and Dagbani. Using Whorf's (1935) linguistic reality, based on the structure Hopi language, Bodomo explains the metrical tense in Dagaare and Dagbani. Whorf (1935) did a comparative study on tense expressions of English and Hopi languages. Using Hopi language's concept of time, Whorf's explains that an individual encodes time, based on the individual's culture. According to Bodomo (2001), tense in Dagaare Dagbani, Frafra, Mampruli, Kusaal and other Mabilia languages is expressed by the preverbal particles and the main verbs in those languages. He identifies a list of preverbal tense marks as presented in the following table.

Tense, Aspect, Modal Particles	Dagaare	Dagbane
today, also: once upon a time	dà	d≡, daa
one da away	zàá	sa
two days away	Dáá	daa
Habitual	máng	yí
still yet	nàng	na
once again, as usual	Yàà	Yaa
suddenly, just	déè	dii
Non-future negative	Bá	b≡
Future particles	Nà	n≡
Future negative	kòng	ku
Imperative, subjunctive negative	Tá	d≡
Again	La	lah

Adapted from Bodomo (2001:45).

¹ List of abbreviations; DET= Determiner, PFV=perfective, IMPFV=imperfective, FOC=focus marker, 3SG=3rd person singular, TDP= time-depth particle, 1PL=1st person Plural, FUT=future time marker, CON=conjunction, 3PL=3rd person plural, ADV=adverb, ASP=aspectual, 2PL=2nd person plural, APROX=approximation marker, EMP=emphatic marker.

The Dynamics of the Past and Future Tense Expressions in Dagbani

Among these various tense markers are the time-depth particles that mark degree of remoteness. Bodomo's (2001) discussion of the time-depth particles is not totally different from Olawsky's explanation of the phenomenon in tense expressions in Dagbani. Referring to Dahl (1985) and Schweter (1998), Bodomo, relates the time-depth particles, *dì*, *sà*, and *dáá* to terms hodiernal (Latin *hodie* 'today'), hesternal (from Latin *hesternus* 'related to yesterday'), and pre-hesternal, respectively (see Bodomo 2001:45). Confirming Olawsky (1999) assertion, Bodomo (2001) explains that except *dì*, the time-depth particles mark metrical tense in both past and future tense in Dagbani. For an illustration of the time-depth particles, see Bodomo (2001).

Botne (2012) also discussed remoteness distinction using the time -depth particles or markers in the language. Botne adopts Comrie's (1985) term remoteness distinctions to explain the phenomenon. Botne's illustration of the phenomenon goes to confirm Olawsky's (1999) and Bodomo's (2001) discussions of the subject. As stated above, the time-depth particles are not the only markers of degree of remoteness in Dagbani; there are still other ways metrical tense or degree of remoteness can be expressed in Dagbani. Therefore, this paper aims to illustrate the degree of remoteness using the other markers that have not been discussed in the above-mentioned scholarly works.

3. COMRIE'S (1985) THEORY OF TENSE²

Tense is a complex phenomenon that is expressed differently in different languages. Whereas some languages have various means of expressing tense, including remoteness distinctions (degree of remoteness), others have limited means of expressing it. Other languages have verbal and morphological means of expressing tense. Given these, it has become challenging to determine tense expressions in one language based on the tense expressions of another language. Comrie's (1985) theory of tense explains the different ways of expressing tense in human language. According to Comrie, tense is the grammaticalization of location in time. He explains tense in human language three expressions. These are lexically composite expressions (two minutes before, five minutes ago and in a minute.), lexical expressions (now, yesterday, tomorrow), and grammatical categories (past, present, and future, which are mostly morphologically marked). Comrie posits that the lexically composite expressions and the lexical expression are unlimited for languages with linguistic means of measuring time intervals; this remains part of the foci of this paper. Lexical expressions and lexically composite expressions do not only form part of the many tense markers in Dagbani, but they help express the degree of remoteness in Dagbani, which is illustrated in the next section. The third, grammatical categories occur in the form of tense inflections '- e(s)', '-e(d)', which mark present and past grammatically and obligatorily. In Dagbani, the grammatical tense markers, though not strictly obligatory are, *dì*, *sà*, and *dáá*. These tense markers, as mentioned above also mark the degree of remoteness.

Comrie explains absolute tense as a type of tense which reference point is the present moment; relative tense is one whose referent point is a finite verb and not directly the present moment. The present tense, past tense, and future time, have the present moment as their reference point. Therefore, present, past, and future tenses are examples of absolute tense. In this case, the degree of remoteness is an aspect of absolute since the reference point of a situation in degree of remoteness is the present moment.

Discussing the degree of remoteness, Comrie (1985) posits that in degree of remoteness, situations are located more accurately before or after the actual reference point. Comrie notes that the perfect and the pluperfect can distinguish recent and remote situations in English, even though that is not the primary function of these categories. The author explains further that it is possible to express the degree of remoteness using lexically composite expressions, lexical expressions, and grammatical categories. This assertion has already established time adverbials as tense markers in some languages, including Dagbani. .

Comrie notes that the lexically composite expressions, as expressed in; *He finished the work a minute ago; He will be here in two hours* have the underlined parts of the sentences as the lexically composite expressions. In this case, the underlined lexically composite expressions give more accurate time specifications the situations occur in the past and future times, respectively. The degree of remoteness can also be expressed with lexical expressions, as in; *He left yesterday; I used it today*; with the underlined adverbials as lexical expressions marking specific times in the week.

Although it is not possible for some languages to express degree of remoteness by grammatical means, many languages worldwide have other means of expressing the degree of remoteness. Comrie (1985) observes, for instance, that temporal distance is one of the grammatical meanings. Such interpretations are independent of other meanings. Here, Comrie maintains that the perfect refers to recent past, whereas the past tense refers to the remote past. Compared to the perfect and past tense, the pluperfect relates to situations that seem more distant in the past than recent past. The perfect can express the degree of remoteness grammatically when it occurs with adverbials like *just* and *recently* in English. According to Comrie's illustrations, *I have just seen John; I have recently made my way through* create temporal distance. Thus, English has limited expressions of the degree of remoteness. The perfect in Spanish can also have current relevance of past a situation and recent past meanings. For example, *today, I have opened the window at six o'clock and have closed it at seven o'clock*, translated from Italian (Comrie 1985: 85).

² This section was taken from the theoretical chapter of my PhD dissertation, since this theory of tense was the same theory used to explain categories and subcategories of tense in the dissertation.

The Dynamics of the Past and Future Tense Expressions in Dagbani

Aside from temporal distance, Comrie explains some parameters that lead to a better understanding of the degree of remoteness. They are reference point, the distinction between temporal distance, and the number of distinctions. The reference point from which the degree of remoteness is measured should be specified. Languages that make distinctions in remoteness use the deictic centre, but a relative reference point is also possible. According to Comrie (1985), Bamileke Dchang, for instance, expresses the relative temporal distance. For example, the arrangement of auxiliaries in some languages indicates time reference. The preceding auxiliary of the two auxiliaries allowed in the sentence establishes time reference relative to the present moment. There also exist temporal distance that indicates a point relative to another point far into the future. An example of the future time, on the same day, is: *He will travel later today*. Degree of remoteness in Dagbani uses this parameter as part of tense expressions, which is illustrated later in this article. Another parameter Comrie discusses is the number of distinctions. The number of distinctions is mainly about the number of temporal distance positions that mark remoteness in the future and past situations. This explanation suggests that there should be a distinction in the temporal distance between the past and the future. For instance, some languages have an equal number of distinctions for the future and past; others differ in the number of distinctions for both sides (future/past). According to Comrie, Bamileke-Dgyemboon has four distinctions in both past and future, while Bamileke Dchang has five distinctions on both sides (past and future). Meaning, an example like; *He wrote an article*; could be expressing four or five distinctions in the past, and that of the future. According to Comrie, the distinctions must have a cut-off point for long ago and recently (today and before today). He exemplifies that in Burera language, there is an item for marking a situation that happens earlier on the day that cannot be used for any other time specification, as in; '*Ngupa-ngal*'- '*I ate within the last few days*' (Comrie 1985:88). Comrie calls them as follows: 1) the tense expressing what happened earlier that day is called "hodiernal," the tense expressing what happened yesterday as "hesternal" and a day before yesterday, pre-hesternal. These resemble the expression of time in Dagbani, where *dí*, *sá*, and *dáá* express tense, respectively see Olawsky (1999), Bodomo (2001), and Botne (2012). The only difference between these remoteness markers and those of the Dagbani language is that the remoteness distinction markers of Dagbani expressions combine future time and past time. Thus, those particles help express tense and make the distinctions between recent and distance past and futures situations, as seen in scholarly works above. In this case, the only Dagbani particles that mark tense in language express the degree of remoteness.

Another essential point about remoteness distinction is the rigidity of the cut-off point. Comrie (1985) highlights that rigidity of the cut-off point involves the precise establishment of a cut-off point such as divisions within days, and in another, a few days ago and more days ago. With rigidity, an element used for a situation in the past or future can only be used for that tense without the insertion of time adverbials. Some examples are in Bamileka Dgyemboon or Bamileke Dchang; the P1 (past one) is only used for situations with such time specifications. That means P1 cannot be used for p2 or p3 in the Bamileke Dgyemboon and the Bamileke Dchang languages (cf Comrie 1985). When rigidity is considered, the time adverbials, today and tomorrow, the latter becomes relative time adverbials and do not mark remoteness distinctions. However, there can be a subjective use, where recent past tense can be used with the time adverbials in some languages. In such uses, the intention is on the recent time reference, but the adverbial makes the expression past (the objective meaning). These, therefore, prove that languages differ in terms of rigidity in temporal distance cut-off. Per Comrie's (1985) assertion, cut-off points in degree of remoteness are culturally specific. They cannot easily be determined since all cultures of every nation have different perceptions about when the various time specifications of an event begin and end.

According to Comrie, most languages that express remoteness distinctions through grammatical categories distinguish two kinds of distinctions, as in, *He left yesterday morning*; *I went to school earlier today*. It is also used in the future, where a closer future tense starts from today, and the distant future covers any day after tomorrow. Comrie also assessed the binary position in the future to be less rigid than in the past.

4. DEGREE OF REMOTENESS IN DAGBANI

Apart from the time depth particles (Olawsky 1999; Bodomo 2001; Botne 2012) discussed, there are other ways degree of remoteness and temporal distance can be created in the Dagbani. "Temporal distance refers to the amount of time that will pass between the moment of speech and the realization of the action referred to" (Osborne 2008:33). In degree of remoteness, past and future situations could be immediate, within a day, within a week, more distant than a week, among others. The lexically composite expressions and lexical expressions, including *yên* 'just a moment before the action', *yólí* 'just a moment ago or before the time of speaking', *pún* 'already', and *kúlí* 'just' are other particles that can help express degree of remoteness in Dagbani. Moreover, as Comrie (1985) indicates, the adverbials (lexical expressions and lexically composite expressions) will become general time markers when rigidity is considered. However, it should be noted that sometimes, the time-depth particles (*dí*, *sà*, *dáá*) need the particles, *yólí* and *yên* as proximity marker, to create more specific distance in past and future tenses. In this case, *yên* is not just a future time marker, but it is a marker of temporal distance (see also Olawsky 1999). Therefore, *yólí*, *yên*, *pún* and *kúlí* help mark specific times situations occur in this case, they give , more specific time specification of situations in the past and future in Dagbani. Where *yólí*, *yên* only mark proximity in the past and future tense respective and not any.

The Dynamics of the Past and Future Tense Expressions in Dagbani

According to Comrie, within rigidity cut-off point, there are markers of tense for today, yesterday, and so forth, that are the only time markers of the tense of those specific times. In this section, we will first look at the general degree of remoteness with, the lexical expressions and lexical expressions, the use of pluperfect, the number distinctions, rigidity after the cut-off point, remoteness far into the future or past. All these supporting Comrie's assertion of the phenomenon.

4.1 Lexical (simple and composite) expressions as degree of remoteness markers

As stated above, Comrie (1985) believes that language that can express the degree of remoteness can do so using the time adverbials. The use of adverbials to express tense and degree of remoteness is common with languages with no verbal means of expressing tense but have different ways of expressing tense. This includes the use of lexical expressions lexically composite expressions to express tense. The lexically composite expressions are two more words adverbial phrases that can help express degree of remoteness. They include *gólí dìn gàrìlá* 'last month', *àsibá ñó* 'this morning', *Bákòì dìn kànná* 'next week', *dáí lá nì* 'exactly two days ago', *dààntáí lá* 'exactly three days ago, among others. These indicate the exact time in the past situations occur in tense xpressions in the language. The lexical expressions are one-word adverbials; they include *bìeyúní* 'tomorrow', *Púmpóhò* 'now', *zúhó* 'today', *dáí* 'exactly in two days, *dààntáí* 'exactly in three in three days, *àsibááshí* 'early morning'. *Biékááí* 'early dawn', among others. These single word adverbials also express specific times in the language. As Comrie (1985) posits, the lexically composite expressions are unlimited group of tense markers for languages with linguistic means of measuring time intervals. With this statement, Comrie is referring to metrical tense or a degree of remoteness. Consider the following illustrations.

6) *Dáí máá* kà ó káná. Two days ago the FOC 3SG come.PFV S/he came two days ago.

7) *Dààntáí kà* ó chána Three days ago FOC 3SG go.IMPFV S/he will leave in three days.

8) *Àsibpóllì ñó* kà bé dí. Early morning DEMO FOC 3PL eat.PFV They ate early this morning.

9) *Gólí ñùn bè púní* kà tí kúnná. Next month FOC 1PL Come.home-IMPFV

We will come home next month.

As indicated in the above sentences, Dagbani has specific lexical expressions (single word adverbials) for precisely two days ago and three days ago time reference that can be used to express the future and past tenses. Sentences 6 and 7, therefore, express future and past tense, and the degree of remoteness in both tenses. The adverbials in the above sentences are the only elements that express tense in the sentences They do not only become relative time markers as Comrie (1985) assesses, but they also become general tense markers when rigidity is taken into consideration. However, it is clearly demonstrated in the above sentences that apart from the lexical composite expressions (adverbial phrase) that can express those specific times in the future and past, no adverbial does these specifications³. Inferences drawn from Olawsky (1999), Bodomo (2001), and Botne's (2012) illustrations of *dáá* show that not even the degree of remoteness marker *dáá* expresses this specificity of time expressions in the language. When this specificity (rigidity of time expressions) is considered. the time-depth particle *dáá*, which marks the rigidity cut-off point, also becomes a general time marker two days after the present moment. This is because, *dáá* expresses tense of a day after tomorrow and beyond and a day before yesterday and beyond. However, the lexical expressions give more specification in terms of which time after tomorrow or before yesterday a situation occurs.

Similarly, in sentences 8 and 9 the lexically composite expressions (adverbial phrases) also mark specific times the concerned situations are expressed, just after and before the present moment (reference point). For instance, as sentence 8 marks the exact time of that today's morning (early morning) the situation occurred, sentence 9 marks a specific time (next month) after the present moment, as the specific time of the occurrence of the situation. Again, not even the degree of remoteness markers (time-depth particles) *dì* and *dáá* give these time specifications in the future and past tenses in the language. It is already evident that Comrie's (1985) assertion that Lexical (simple and Complex expressions) mark degree of remoteness in human language applies in Dagbani. It is also the case that in Mofu-Gudur, a language spoken in Cameroon, verb phrases do not morphologically mark tense. Therefore, speakers of the language resorts to using time adverbials to express future, past, progressive, and habitual meanings (cf Hollingsworth 1991: 10). It is, therefore, common to have time adverbials like the above-stated lexically composite expressions and lexical expressions marking tense and degree of remoteness in some languages. Moreover, aside from the time adverbials expressing remoteness distinction, "the basic assumption is that the presence of a time-specific adverb can mark an action as more certain to occur than a non-specific adverb" (Osborne 2008:6).

4.2 Pluperfect in Degree of Remoteness in Dagbani

Pluperfect (past perfect) explains situations that are done and completed at a given point in time in the past. Pluperfect creates temporal distance in the past, described as 'past, past' or a past situation in the past. In Dagbani, this time specification is possible and seems to mark the degree of remoteness expression in the language. According to Alhassan (1988), the particle *pún* plus the

³ Of course, the lexically composite expressions (*dábááyí dinkànnà* 'in two days', *dábáátá dìn kànná* 'in three days') could be used in place of these time specifications that are considered as the expanded forms of the adverbials in 6 and 7. However, these lexically composite expressions are not frequently used to express mark tense.

The Dynamics of the Past and Future Tense Expressions in Dagbani

Dagbani main verbs expresses perfect, specifically distant past (see Alhassan 1988:28). Therefore, the unmarked form of the verb, the particle *-lá* plus the article *pún* could be equated to the English pluperfect, which marks degree of remoteness in the past and in the future, when the future time markers are added. Also, the time-depth particles can be used with the same particle to express the remote past in a past situation. Some examples are as follows.

10) *Tí tí yèn káná là kà ó pún cháŋ.* 1PL CON FUT PFV FOC CON 3SG DRM go-PFV

Before we arrived, s/he had left.

11) *Yí dí tí yèn páái là kà bè gbá pún páái.* 2PL TDP CON FUT arrive-IMP FOC
CON 3PL ADV ASP arrive-PFV

Before you could arrive, they would have also arrived.

As demonstrated, sentence 10 as a whole expresses a past situation, which contains two situations. The first part of the sentence contains an idea of a recent past than the second part of the sentence. As indicated, the second part of the sentence expresses past perfect, which reveals distant past in the sentence. The first part of the sentence; *Tí tí yèn káná là* (before we arrived) expresses recent past and the second part of the sentence; *ó pún cháŋ* (s/he had gone), expresses more distant past. In this case, sentence 10 proves to contain a temporal distance, which shows the expression of degree of remoteness in the meaning of the sentence. Sentence 11 has the time-depth *dí* as marker of past in the day, the future marker *yèn*. In this case, the first part of the sentence expresses past future tense. This means that the first part of the sentence; *Yí dí tí yèn páái lá* (before we would arrive) marks past future within any day. The last part of the sentence; *bè gbá pún páái* (they too would have arrived) moves more distant into the past future. Therefore, the second and last part of the sentence contains a linguistic element, which makes that part express remote future past. Schwenter (1998) notices same occurrence in Dagaare, where the second and last part of the sentence suggests remote past of a past future, which is presented as a whole sentence. Schwenter observes that particles that mark tense in Dagaare combines both perfective and imperfective verb forms including other mood and aspect forms. In Dagbani, as the particles *dí* and *pún* help sentence 11 express future past perfect, so do particles help speakers to specifically locate past situations in dagaare. (see schwenter 1998:87) for the illustration of the phenomenon in Dagaare.

4.3 Distinctions in Degree of Remoteness Cut-off Points

Comrie (1985) posits that there should be a number of distinctions and cut-off points in degree of remoteness before or after the reference point. The number distinctions after the reference point are number specification in the future tense and the number of distinctions before the reference point are the number of specifications in the past tense. Thus, the number of specifications in the past and future tenses of degree of remoteness is language specific. As Comrie asserts, different cultures have different perception of the beginning and end of the cut-off point of rigidity. In rigidity, the tense marker only expresses tense for that time and no other. Many languages have an equal number of distinctions in both past and future tense expressions, but some have unequal number of distinctions. As stated above, Comrie refers to these markers of rigidity cut-off points in degree of remoteness as “hodiernal” (today’s past) “, hesternal” (yesterday’s past), and pre-hesternal (a day before yesterday’s past). These respectively resemble the expression of time-depth (*dí*, *sá*, and *dáá*) in Dagbani that only mark those specific times in the past and future (cf Olawsky 1999; Bodomo 2001; Botne 2012).

With the number of distinctions, Dagbani has an unequal number of distinctions before and after the reference point. Only two (*sá* and *dáá*) can express degree of remoteness in the future, as against all the three in past tense expressions. In this case, *dí* only express tense and degree of remoteness in the past and not future. Consider the illustrations below.

12) *Ò sà dáya.*

3SG TDP buy.PFV

S/he bought yesterday.

13) *Ò sà nì dá.*

3SG TDP FUT buy.IMPFV

S/he Will buy tomorrow.

14) *Ò dì dáya.*

3SG TDP buy.PFV

She bought it today.

15) *Ò díí nì dá.*

3SG TDP FUT buy.IMPFV

I will just buy.

Sentences 12 and 13 express past situation in the day before and the day after the time of speaking, respectively with the same preverbal particle. However, while sentences 14 express past in the same day, sentence 15 expresses a general future time. *Dáá*, as stated above also expresses degree of remoteness in both past and future tense in Dagbani.

Kula (20017) also observes that most Bantu languages have several degrees of tense-aspect markers, but the past tense has more distinctions than the future tense in most languages. See page 2 for more illustrations of degree of remoteness with the time-depth

The Dynamics of the Past and Future Tense Expressions in Dagbani

marker, *dì*, *sà*, and *dáá* (see also Olawsky 1999; Bodomo 2001; Botne 2012). Other rigidity after the cut-off point of the degree of remoteness expressions are possible in Dagbani. the rigidity cut-off point is discussed in the next section

4.4 Rigidity after the Cut-off Point of the Degree of Remoteness

Although the time-depth particles mark rigidity in remoteness distinctions in Dagbani, when rigidity of the time specifications is taken into consideration, they tend to be general time markers within those specific periods in Dagbani. This is because the time-depth particles only express those specific times as a range, can also have further specifications within those periods with other particles. As stated above, *yólí*⁴ and *yên* also mark rigidity since they can only express approximation in the past and future times, respectively. Rigidity in time (tense) expressions can be done by using proximity particles (approximants) like *yên* ‘just about to’, *yólí* ‘just or most recent’. The time adverbial or the lexical (simple and complex) expressions can also occur with the time-depth particles to express this phenomenon. Before the illustrations of rigidity in degree of remoteness expressions, let us consider the degree of remoteness with the proximity particles in 16 to 19 below.

16) Ò yên zó.

3SG PROX run.IMPFV

S/he is about to run.

17) Ò yên cháŋ.

3SG PROX go.IMPFV

18) Tí yólí dúgí mí náái

1PL PROX cook-PFV EMP finish-PFV

We have just finished cooking.

19) Bè yólí gári lá kpè

3PL PROX pass-PFV FOC here

They have just passed here.

Sentences 16-19 express past and future tenses that tend to be very close to the present moment (reference point). In 16 and 17, the proximity marker *yên* express future time, an immediate future tense, which is just an ‘inch’ after the present moment; thus, when the situation is just about to take effect. Therefore, proximity explains the approximation of the action, situation, or event to the reference point (present moment or the time of speaking). In this case, *yên* performs a function more than just a future time marker in the sentence. expressions of these nature are also most likely to be expressing certainty, as the situation is just about a step away from taking effect. In 18 and 19, the proximity remoteness maker *yólí* marks time in the past, very close to the present moment. Thus, sentences 16-19 give specific times the situations expressed take place right before or after the present moment. Therefore, the particles *yên* and *yólí* in the sentences mark the degree of remoteness (remoteness distinctions or metric tense). These proximity particles plus *kúlí* can occur with the time-depth particles to express rigidity after the cut-off point in the degree of remoteness distinctions. Some examples are as follows.

20) Ò dáá kúlí yên yíyísí mí ká tí páái.

3SG TDP just PROX get-up.IMPFV EMP FOC 3PL arrive.PFV

S/he was about to leave when we arrived.

21) O sà kúlí yên yó mí kà bé bá kpíénà.

3SG TDP just PROX pay.IMPFV EMP FOC 3PL Father enter.PFV

s/he was just about to pay when their father came in.

22) Ò dì kúlí yólí yíyísí mí kà à gbà pááná lá.

3SG TDP just PROX get.upPFV EMP FOC 2SG also arrive.IMPV FOC.

S/he just got today when you also arrived.

23) Tí sà kúlí yólí bóli ó mí kà sáhá páái.

1PL TDP just PROX call.IMPFV 3SG EMP FOC time reach.PFV

We had just called her/him and time elapsed.

As illustrated in sentences 16 – 19, the time-depth particles *dáá*, *sà*, *dì* (past for two or more days ago, past for yesterday, and past for today), respectively mark degree of remoteness by specifying the particular times in the past the situations took place. These time-depth particles mark rigidity in the degree of remoteness in the sentences. This is because they only mark the or express those times the situations occur and not any other time in the past or future. However, the aspectual markers *kúlí* plus *yên* and *kúlí* plus *yólí* in the above sentences move further to mark specific times within the specified times marked by *dáá*, *sà*, and *dì* in the past. It is, therefore, clear that *kúlí* plus *yên* and *kúlí* plus *yólí* are tense rigidity markers that give more specificity to the time a situation took place in the past. Thus, in 16 and 17, the aspectual *kúlí* plus *yên*, and *dáá* and *sà* together express the times in two or more

⁴ Yólí could also mark immediacy or approximation in recent times.

The Dynamics of the Past and Future Tense Expressions in Dagbani

days ago, and the past within yesterday, specifying the time the situations were just about to take place. In this case, the situations took place very close to the time of speaking (the present moment or reference time). Also, sentence 18 and 19 show that *kúli* and *yóli* together express situations that took place just before the reference point (present moment) within the specified time in the past.

These aspectual markers express rigidity within another specific time in the past. Comrie (1985) posits that when rigidity is taken into consideration, the time adverbial becomes general time markers. However, it can be pointed out from the above illustrations that when rigidity is considered in the degree of remoteness expressions, the *hodiernal*, *hesternal*, and *pre-hesternal* can become general time markers within the specified times they express in some languages. As 16 and 17 illustrate, the specified future times in the past, 18 and 19 illustrate the past within the specified times in the past. This section suggests Dagbani as a unique language, which has time expression far into the future. Thus, apart from the above ways through which Dagbani can express the degree of remoteness, there are other ways degree of remoteness can be expressed in Dagbani. The following section presents a degree of remoteness far into the past and into the future.

4.5 Degree of Remoteness Far into the Future or Past

Inferences drawn from Comrie (1985) suggest that languages that do not have verbal means of expressing tense have different ways of expressing it. These tense expressions do not exclude the degree of remoteness (metric tense, remoteness distinction) expressions. As stated above, there are still different ways rigidity within the degree of remoteness can be expressed. These expressions involve using the time adverbials (lexical expressions and lexically composite expressions), as seen in the following examples.

24) *Bíéyúni* *ásíbáshíí* *ká* *tí* *yíyísírà.*

Tomorrow early-morning FOC 1PL get.up-IMPV

We will leave very early tomorrow morning.

25) *Dààntáli* *zááwúni ñmállí* *kà* *bè* *chána.*

Next three days early evening FOC 3PL go-IMPV

They will go in the early part of evening in the next three days.

26) *Ò* *sà* *sábíyá* *wúntán* *lá* *nì.*

3SG TDP write-PFV afternoon DEF in

S/he wrote yesterday in the afternoon.

27) *Ò* *dì* *làbíyá* *wúntánpóllí* *lá.*

3SG TDP return.PFV early afternoon DEF

S/he returned in the part early of the afternoon today.

28) *Ò* *dáá* *kánà* *dállá* *nì* *àsíbóllí* *lá.*

3SG TDP Come-PFV three days ago in early morning DEF.

S/he came three days ago's late morning.

The illustrations from 20-24 express situations farther into the past and future in different degrees. These illustrations are made possible through the time depth particles and the different time adverbials that mark specific times or tense into the future and past. In 20, for instance, *bíéyúni* (tomorrow) marks a specific time in the future, but the underlined part of the sentence, *ásíbáshíí*, does not only tell the particular time in the tomorrow, but the specific time of tomorrow morning the situation takes place. In sentence 21, *Dààntáli* specifically marks tense for three days go and not any other day. Still, the lexically composite expression *zááwúni ñmállí* 'early part of evening' indicates the specific time in three day's evening the situation takes place. Therefore, *zááwúni ñmállí* expresses specific time far into the future the situation takes place. 22 and 23 contain the time-depth *sà* and *dì* that mark metric tense, precisely yesterday and today in the sentences. However, while 22 indicate the specific time of yesterday, which is in the morning the situation took place, 23 contains *dì*, which mark tense for yesterday and the lexically composite expression *zááwúni ñmállí* 'early evening', which further indicates the specific time in the evening the situation takes place. 24 comprises the time - depth particle *dáá*, which specifically express tense for two and more days ago. With dallani, 24 further moves far into the past to show the specific day of the event, within the two or more days period. Sentence 24 still contains an element, which probes further into the future to indicate the exact time of the day in the two or more days period of the situation, with the lexical expression, *àsíbóllí*. Comparatively, sentence 23 contains the lexical expression *wúntánpóllí* (early afternoon), a specific time in the day and the particular moment in the afternoon the situation occurs, while sentence 24 comprises *àsíbóllí*, a specific time in the morning in exactly the three days the situation occurred.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper investigated the expressions of degree of remoteness as part of the different ways tense is expressed in Dagbani. Eight people were interviewed in Tamale and Yendi to gather data to complement my intuition as a native speaker and to support Comrie's (1985) assertion that some languages have several ways of expressing tense, including the degree of remoteness. Part of the findings is that Olawsky (1999) time-depth markers, Bodomó's (2001) time-depth particles, Botne's (2012) remoteness distinction markers, *dì* *sà*, and *dáá* are not the only degree of remoteness markers in Dagbani. The paper found out that proximity particles (*yén*, *yóli*, and both plus *kúli*), lexical expressions and lexically composite expressions mark degree of remoteness in Dagbani. Also, findings

The Dynamics of the Past and Future Tense Expressions in Dagbani

show that in Dagbani, the rigidity of degree remoteness is possible through the time depth-particles, but the proximity particles and the lexical (simple and complex) expressions could perform this function. The paper found out that even when rigidity is considered in the degree of remoteness expressions, the time-depth particles that fall within Comrie's (1985) Lantinate terms *hodiernal*, *hesternal* and *pre-hestinal* become general time parkers on specific days. Findings confirm Comrie's (1985) view that when rigidity is considered, the time adverbials become general time markers. Moreover, the paper demonstrates that the time adverbials are also specific time markers than the time-depth in Dagbani when rigidity is considered.

REFERENCES

- 1) Alhassan, A. A. (1988). Pamphlet on Dagbani for wider communication (unpublished). *Ghana Institute of Linguistic Literacy and Bible Translation (GIIBT)* archives.
- 2) Bhat, D. N. S. (1999). *The prominence of tense, aspect and mood*: Amsterdam/Philadelphia. John Benjamins.
- 3) Bodomo, A. (1996). Linguistic relativity and the Mabia temporal system: evidence from Dagaare and Dagbani. *Cahiers voltaïques/Gur papers* 1. 95-103.
- 4) Bodomo, A. (1997). The structure of Dagaare. Stanford Monograph in African Languages Stanford, California: CSLI.
- 5) Bodomo, A. (2000). Dàgáàrè. Languages of the World Materials, 165. München: Lincom Europa.
- 6) Bodomo, A. (2001). The Temporal systems of Dagaare and Dagbani: Re-Appraising Philosophy of Linguistic Relativity. *Journal of Cultural Studies* 3.1; 2001; ProQuest of Sociology, pp. 43-45.
- 7) Bodomo, A. and Abubakari H. (2017). Towards the harmonization of writing technology in the Mabia Languages of West Africa. In Prah, K. and Lazarus Miti. (eds) 2017 *Deconstructing the African Tower of Babel: Between the Harmonization and Fragmentation of African Language Orthographies*. CASAS Book Series No. 120.
- 8) Bodomo, A. (2018). Tense and Time-Depth in the Mabia Languages of West Africa: Testing the philosophy of Linguistic Reality. In A., Agwuele, A., Bodomo (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of African Linguistics*, pp. 438-449. London: Routledge.
- 9) Bodomo, A. (2020). Mabia: Its etymological genesis, geographical spread, and some salient genetic features. In Adams Bodomo, Hasiyatu Abubakari, Samuel Alhassan Issah (eds.), *Handbook of the Mabia Languages of West Africa*. Glienicke, Galda Verlag.
- 10) Botne, R. (2012). Remoteness distinctions. In the Oxford handbook of tense and Aspect. ed. Robert I. Binnick (ed). 536-562. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 11) Comrie, B. (1985). *Tense*. New York: Cambridge University.
- 12) Hollingwood (1991). Tense and Aspect of Mofu-Gudur language. In S.C. Anderson, B. Comrie (eds), *Tense and Aspect in Eight Cameroon Languages* the Summer School of Linguistics. Pp.239-255. The University of Texas: Arlington.
- 13) Kula, C.N. (2017). Reduction in Remoteness Distinctions and Reconfiguration in The Bemba Past Tense. *Transactions of the Philological Society* Vol. 115:1 (2017) Pp 27–57.
- 14) Olawsky, K. J. (1999). *Aspects of Dagbani Grammar*: with special emphasis on phonology and morphology. LINCOM Europa.
- 15) Osborne (2008) *Variable Future Tense Expression in Andalusian Spanish*. A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.
- 16) Scwenter, S. (1998). Discontinuous remoteness in Dagaare. In Maddieson and Hinnebusch (eds) language History Linguistic Description in Africa. *Trends in African Linguistics*. Vol.2. New York: African World Press, Inc. 87-93.



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.