What grammar for Bamileke languages? A common grammar or a 'library' of grammars?

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes and then compares tense-aspect features in three Bamileke languages, viz. Ghomalaʔ, Ngiemboon, and Ngombale, with a view to (1) providing a detailed description of the mechanisms for expressing tense-aspect categories in three Bamileke languages and (2) testing the assumption that Bamileke languages could be described in a common grammar. The study shows that there is an extensive inventory of tense-aspect markings in each of the languages under investigation, which enables speakers to refer to situations that are distinct with respect to tense (past, present, future) and aspect (perfective, imperfective, progressive, habitual). The comparison of the investigated languages with respect to the structure of tense-aspect categories, the form of tense-aspect markers, and the function of tense-aspect categories reveals that the languages analysed show similarities, but also huge differences with respect to tense-aspect categories. I conclude from this that Bamileke languages are not suitable candidates for inclusion in a common grammar.

KEY WORDS: Bamileke languages, Grassfields, grammar, tense, aspect

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1. Introduction[1]

Bamileke languages are mainly spoken in the Western Region of Cameroon. WATTERS (2003: 232-233) lists eleven Bamileke languages (Ngombale, Megaka, Ngomba, Ngiemboon, Yemba, Nweh, Ghomalaʔ, Feʔfeʔ, Kwaʔ, Ndaʔndaʔ, Medumba) and classifies them as follows:
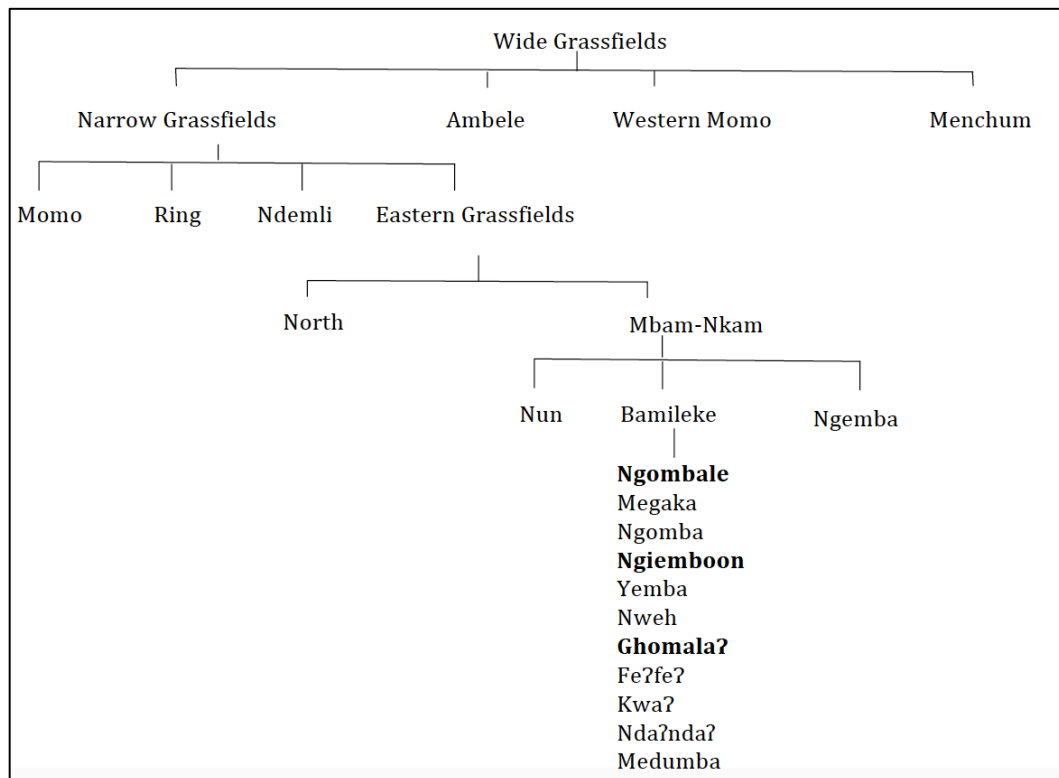

Figure 1 – Genetic classification of the investigated languages[2]

[2] The classification by WATTERS (2003) follows various classifications proposed by previous researchers (ELIAS, LEROY and VOORHOEVE 1984, WATTERS and LEROY 1989, PIRON 1995). This

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The initial assumption of this paper, namely, that Bamileke languages could be eventually described in a common grammar, stems from three main observations: (1) to unify Bamileke languages for educational purposes at the University of Yaounde, NISSIM (1975) attempted to describe Bamileke languages in a common grammar and provided a grammar sketch based on a preliminary treatment of some aspects of the grammar of three Bamileke languages: Feʔfeʔ, Medumba, and Ghomalaʔ,[3] (2) previous scholars have indicated reasonable mutual intelligibility (WATTERS 2003: 233) and certain phonological, as well as noun class similarities (HYMAN 1972: 7-9) between Bamileke languages, (3) specialists of the Ngemba group –a language group genetically closely related to the Bamileke group; see figure 1 above– have launched a project for a unified common grammatical description of all Ngemba languages (TAMANJI 2009) to create a sense of national unity and prepare the Ngemba languages for use in the school system. The notion of common grammar in this paper is taken to refer to a grammar that describes two or more languages as one, highlighting the common features and including the differences between them, on the basis that these languages actually share the same grammar.

The data analysed were collected in the following Bamileke villages: Bandjoun (for the Ghomalaʔ language), Bangang (for the Ngiemboon language), and Babadjou (for the Ngombale language). The data collection involved four and a half months of fieldwork divided into two fieldtrip. The first lasted three and a half months: from September 2015 to December 2015. The second was from December 2017 to January 2018. I worked with 6 main language consultants and about 10 occasional language consultants. The main language consultants were particular active in the research during the first field trip, while the occasional language consultants mostly intervened during the second field trip and they mainly helped to check the material collected from the main language consultants. The data analysed were gathered through one principal method: working sessions with language consultants. The working sessions with the

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classification is adopted because it is recent compared to other classifications, for example, RICHARDSON (1957).

[3] In his discussion of tense, aspect, and mood in Bamileke languages, Nissim does not provide concrete data for the validity of his analysis to be clear. For instance, he argues that there are at least five past tenses and six future tenses in each Bamileke languages: "le système des temps est plus complexe qu'un français par exemple. Au mode indicatif, le plus développé de ce point de vue, on doit distinguer deux actuels, au moins cinq temps du passé et au moins six temps du futur" (NISSIM 1975: 150). However, all the tenses acknowledged by Nissim are limited to a listing of tense labels. In other words, no information is provided about the form(s) and function(s) of the tenses listed.

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language consultants were guided by one principal tool, namely, a questionnaire, which I formulated based on DAHL's (1985) questionnaire that was used for a study investigating what tense-aspect categories are typically found in the languages of the world. The language consultants were instructed to orally produced in their native language the appropriate sentences from the questionnaire taking as a basis contextual information.

The idea behind the use of a questionnaire for this study is that, unlike, for instance, the observation of native speakers using their language in real-life dialogues which is time-consuming and might give rather limited information (most native speakers do not use all the available tense-aspect forms of their language in daily conversations), working with native speakers using tools such as questionnaires stimulates the native speaker and, thus, enables the researcher to quickly discover a wide range of forms. Like any method of data collection, the main method used for this research has limitations. For instance, the sentences elicited from the questionnaire are controlled by specific contexts provided by the researcher. This might trigger artificial language use, such as the inappropriate coining of structures by the native speakers in their language just to please the researcher. To overcome the questionnaire's drawbacks, I collected short oral texts in order to have data in which the native speakers use their language in a natural context as much as possible.

The choice of the languages presented in this paper is practical, that is, these are the three Bamileke languages on which I have already carried out ample research. Note, however, that there is much contact between them: Ngiemboon and Ngombale are both found in the Western part of the Bamileke area and Ghomalaʔ is analysed as a bridge between the Bamileke languages spoken in the Western part of the Bamileke area and those spoken in the Eastern part (HYMAN 1972: 7). Only declarative verbal main clauses that are in the positive form are considered. Also, my evaluation of the common grammar idea of Bamileke languages is restricted to the analysis of tense-aspect features in Ghomalaʔ, Ngiemboon and Ngombale. The paper is organised as follows: section 1 provides an introduction to the paper. Section 2 presents an overview of the structure of the declarative verbal main clause in the investigated languages. In section 3, I focus on the description of the tense-aspect categories in each individual language of the study. Section 4 provides a comparison of tense-aspect categories across the investigated languages. Section 5 concludes the paper.

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2. Structure of the declarative verbal main clause in the languages under investigation

The basic ordering of elements within the declarative verbal main clause in the investigated languages may be schematized as in (1) below.

(1)   1SBJ + 2T + 3AA + 4A + 5N- + 6Root + 7EXT + 8SUFF + 9OBJ[4]

The elements in (1) are not all necessarily present in a given declarative verbal main clause but always appear in a fixed order. Many of the positions described, for example, position 1/subject of the clause, position 5/nasal consonant prefix, position 6/verb root, etc. have been identified and described while discussing the structure of the declarative verbal main clause in Mengaka[5] (see Sonkoue 2019: 2-4). The sentence in (2) below shows an example in Ngiemboon with all slots filled.

(2) à   kà   ɲétà   nè   ń-dzàʔ-tê: ɲɔ́:nsè
     she   P₂   AA   PROG   N-cut-EXT.IPFV   1.onion
     'She was still chopping the onion'
     Context: The speaker is talking about something his/her sister was doing when he arrived home yesterday night.

Position 1. This position is occupied by the subject of the clause. This might be a subject noun or a subject pronoun. It will be shown in section 3 that tense-aspect meaning in Ghomalaʔ and Ngiemboon, may be signalled by a tone alternation on the subject of the clause.

Position 2. Position 2 is occupied by a tense marker. For example, the hodiernal past marker jǎ/tě in Ngombale.

Position 3. At position 3, one finds adverbial auxiliaries. This refers to a set of words which express meanings commonly expressed by adverbs in European languages. Adverbial auxiliaries have verbal properties. This means that just like verbs, they may be marked for tense or aspect. Also, they may take a nasal consonant prefix (see position 4 below). Some of the adverbial auxiliaries in the

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[4] Abbreviations used in this paper are as follows: 1, 7, 9 noun class numbering, 1SG first person singular, 2SG second person singular, 3SG third person singular, 3PL third person plural, A aspect, AA adverbial auxiliary, C consonant, EXT verbal extension, F₁ future 1, F₂ future 2, F₃ future 3, H high tone, HAB habitual, HL high-low tone, IPFV imperfective, LH low-high tone, N- nasal consonant prefix, NEG negation marker, NMLZ nominalization marker, OBJ object, P₁ past 1, P₂ past 2, P₃ past 3, PRF perfect, PROG progressive, Q question, QPTCL question particle, SBJ subject, SUFF suffix, T tense, UTA unmarked tense-aspect, V vowel, vb verb, VC vowel-copying.

[5] Mengaka is a language of the Bamileke group.

target languages, such as ʧɨ́ʔù...wɔ́ 'no longer' (in Ngiemboon) or pjɛ́ 'still' (in Ngombale) may be classified under the grammatical category 'phasal polarity', that has been recently acknowledged by KRAMER (2017: 1).

Position 4. This slot is occupied by an aspect marker. For example, the progressive marker wɔ́ in Ghomalaʔ. As will be shown in section 3, the tense and the aspect markers may merge in Ngiemboon and surface as a single marker.

Position 5. This position is occupied by a nasal consonant prefix which must accompany some tense and/or aspect markers and typically occurs before the verb. This nasal consonant prefix which is symbolised by the archiphoneme /N-/ throughout the paper is realised as a syllabic nasal whose tone may vary from one Bamileke language to another. Moreover, it is homorganic with the consonant it follows, that is, the nasal and the consonant following the nasal have the same place of articulation, and this is attributable to a place feature assimilation of the nasal to the following consonant. Also, the presence of the nasal consonant prefix before the verb may occasion the consonant alternation of the initial consonant of the verb as shown in (3) below.

(3)[6]   p→b / N-_, ɣ→g / N-_, ʒ→ʤ / N-_, v→bv / N-_, z→dz / N-_, l→d / N-_

The striking fact about the nasal prefix described is that its function(s) is/are still unclear. I therefore simply gloss it as 'N-'. In fact, in each of the investigated languages, it has proven difficult to attribute a function to the nasal prefix discussed in this paper. ANDERSON (1983) makes a similar observation when talking about Ngiemboon's verbal markers: "in the preceding chart, the /ne/ marker clearly signals progressive meaning and the imperfective verb suffix (symbolized by 'I') signals imperfective aspect, but the homorganic nasal consonant verb prefix (symbolized by 'N-') has a more vague meaning" (ANDERSON 1983: 60-61). Research on the diachronic source of the nasal consonant prefix in the languages analysed, as well as related languages outside the Bamileke group where a similar nasal prefix is observed, for instance, the Bafut language of the Ngemba group (TAMANJI 2009: 212-215) might help to shed light on its function(s). However, this will not be covered in this paper.

Position 6. Position six is occupied by the verb root. Verb roots in the investigated languages are basically mono-syllabic, with one of the following two major

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[6] The arrow '→' means 'changes to', the slash '/' means 'in the environment of', '_' positions the input in relation to other elements in the phonological environment. p→b / N-_ , therefore, means 'p' changes to 'b' when it occurs after 'N-'. Concrete illustrations of these rules are provided in the examples in section 3 below.

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syllable structures: CVC (for example, fòʔ, fừʔ, fìʔ 'measure' in Ghomalaʔ, Ngiemboon, and Ngombale, respectively) and CV (for example, há, ná, ŋá 'give' in Ghomalaʔ, Ngiemboon, and Ngombale, respectively). On the basis of their lexical tones, two classes of verb roots are distinguished in each of the investigated languages, namely, high and low tone verb roots.

Position 7. This position is occupied by a verbal extension. Two verbal extensions are distinguished in each of the investigated languages, namely, -tə and -ɲə in Ghomalaʔ (MBA 1997: 81), -tɛ and vowel-lengthening/copying in Ngiemboon (MBA and DJIAFEUA 2003: 125), and -tə and vowel-lengthening/copying in Ngombale. The extension -tə, in Ghomalaʔ, is roughly associated with the plural meaning, for example, the verb kə́m 'scratch' becomes kə́mtə́ 'scratch several times'. The extension -ɲə basically yields the following meanings: reflexivity, stativity, reciprocity, valency change, or prolongation of the action. For instance, the verb từm 'hide' becomes từmɲə̀ 'hide oneself'; the extension -ɲə adds the meaning of reflexivity to the verb. The extension -tɛ, in Ngiembon, may be associated with the meanings of reciprocity, valency-change, and plural (for example, the verb kxwé 'die' becomes kxwété 'die in great numbers'; the extension -té adds a plural meaning to the verb or indicates that the situation described is experienced by several people), whereas vowel lengthening or copying roughly yields the meanings of stativity, reflexivity, valency change, and reciprocity (for example, the verb kwòŋ 'love' becomes kwòŋò 'love each other'; the copied vowel -ò adds the meaning of reciprocity to the verb). The extension -tə, in Ngombale, is roughly associated with the plural meaning. For example, the verb kwú 'die' becomes kwútə́ 'die in great numbers'. As for the verbal extension represented by a process of vowel-lengthening/copying, it basically yields the meaning of reciprocity. For example, the verb búʔ 'hit' in Ngombale becomes búʔú 'fight'. Verbal extensions have no inherent tone in the investigated languages, but rather take their tone from the vowel of the preceding syllable by tone spreading. Moreover, only one extension may occur on a single verb.

Position 8. This position is relevant only for Ghomalaʔ and Ngiemboon. It is occupied by a verbal suffix. Based on the data analysis, one can say that while in Ghomalaʔ the verbal suffix is exclusively attached to CVC verbs and is always a copy of the vowel of the verb, in Ngiemboon, the verbal suffix may occur following CV or CVC verbs and is mainly identical to the vowel of the verb. Moreover, while in Ngiemboon the addition of the verbal suffix to the verb is obligatory and the verbal suffix has a clear function, that is, imperfective or perfect marker, in Ghomalaʔ, the addition of the verbal suffix to the verb is optional. This means that the speaker deliberately chooses to add it or not. Also, the verbal suffix does not have a clear function in Ghomalaʔ.

Position 9. This position is occupied by the object of the clause. This might be a nominal or a pronominal object.

3. Tense-aspect categories in each of the languages under investigation

In this section, an attempt is made to describe all the means employed to express tense-aspect categories in the three languages under investigation. The basic functions of the tense-aspect categories established are also discussed. This means that the paper is not concerned with the semantics and pragmatics of the tense-aspect markings.

To determine the basic functions of the tense-aspect categories, I posited that the use of a grammatical marking may be defined in terms of the structural linguistic environment or the contextual linguistic environment. Also, I argue that the basic function(s) of a grammatical marking refer(s) to the function(s) derived from the structural linguistic environment, while its secondary function(s) is/are the function(s) derived from the contextual linguistic environment. By structural linguistic environment of a grammatical marking, I refer, for instance, to the distribution of the grammatical marking in relation to the other elements of the clause or the words with which a grammatical marking occurs together. For example, expressions of time such as 'today', 'yesterday', 'next year', 'presently' or 'usually'. The contextual linguistic environment has to do with the particular circumstances in which a grammatical marking is uttered. For example, the construction kɔ̀ nè N-vb-VLᴸ, -VCᴸ is basically used in Ngiemboon to describe a situation which was ongoing on the day the utterance is made, but before the moment of speech (see 3.2.2.1 below). However, it could be used to describe a remote past progressive situation, that is, a situation which took place a month ago or any time before that if the speaker is telling a story and wants to make a remote past situation seem a bit more temporally near.

The term 'tense' is used in this study to refer to a grammatical category that locates situations in time in relation to a reference point (COMRIE 1985:9), while 'aspect' refers to a grammatical category which is concerned with the different ways of viewing the internal temporal structure of a situation (COMRIE 1976:3). COMRIE (1985: 36, 56) makes a distinction between absolute and relative tenses. An absolute tense includes "as part of its meaning the present moment as deictic centre" while a relative tense "does not include as part of its meaning the present moment as deictic centre". In other words, an absolute tense takes the time of speaking as its reference point, whereas a relative tense relates situations to a point in time other than the time of speaking. In this paper, except for the Unmarked Tense-Aspect where the reference point for the location of situations

in time is the previous situations, the various tenses discussed take the time of speaking as their reference point.

The tenses distinguished in the target languages are: past tenses, a present tense, and future tenses. In the aspectual domain, a three-way aspectual division is observed in Ghomalaʔ and Ngiemboon. That is, perfective, imperfective, and progressive in Ghomalaʔ and perfective, habitual, and progressive in Ngiemboon. Ngombale shows a two-way aspectual division, that is, perfective and imperfective. The definition of the perfective adopted for this study is that of (COMRIE 1976: 12): "the term 'perfective' contrasts with 'imperfective', and denotes a situation viewed in its entirety, without regard to internal temporal constituency". In my understanding this means that when there is no explicit reference to the internal temporal structure of a situation, it is in the perfective. For example, the sentence ē gɔ̄ tsɛ́ʔ gɜ̀fɜ̀ 'he is going to cultivate maize today' in Ghomalaʔ describes a perfective situation in the future. The speaker does not provide information about whether the situation described is going to be in progress at a specific time or habitual. Rather, he represents the situation as a complete situation in the future. The perfective is unmarked in the three languages analysed. The habitual represents "a situation which is characteristic of an extended period of time, so extended in fact that the situation referred to is viewed not as an incidental property of the moment, but precisely, as a characteristic feature of a whole period" (COMRIE 1976: 27-28). Note that this characterisation does not hold for present states in the languages analysed. That is, while Ghomlaʔ uses the form of the Perfect to describe current states, Ngiemboon and Ngombale use the Unmarked Tense-Aspect to talk about current states. More will be said about this below. As for the progressive, it describes a situation in progress at a specific time. Ghomalaʔ and Ngiemboon also distinguish a Perfect category. Moreover, an Unmarked Tense-Aspect is identified in all three languages analysed.

In section 2 above, it has been noted that in two of the investigated languages, that is, Ghomalaʔ and Ngiemboon, tense-aspect meaning may be signalled by a tone alternation on the subject of the clause. I posit two tonal tense-aspect markers in this study, namely, a replacive low-high tone (LH) and a replacive high-low tone (HL). These tonal markers may be realised on the subject or the verb of the clause.[7] Moreover, they completely delete the lexical tone of the

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[7] When the subject or the verb of the clause has more than one syllable, the tonal alternation indicating tense-aspect meaning is realised on the last syllable. The realisation on the subject is observed in both Ghomalaʔ and Ngiemboon and may express the Imperfective, the Habitual or the Perfect. The realisation on the verb is limited to Ngiemboon and is used to express the Perfect.

syllable on which they are realised. The origin of tonal tense-aspect markers in the investigated languages might be attributable to the loss of original segmental tense-aspect markers that existed at some point of time in the past and left their traces in the form of replacive tones. Support for the claim about the historical source of the replacive tonal tense-aspect markers described is that in Ngiemboon, the general future marker (ɣè) may be replaced by a low-high tone realised on the subject of the clause, in rapid speech among native speakers.

The analysis of the verb in this study with a replacive rising or falling tone that may appear in certain tense-aspect structures is justified by the fact that there seems to be no tone rule (for instance, spreading or shifting) which could transparently account for the surface neutralisation of lexical tone contrasts of verbs, as well as the unusual surface tone patterns which are associated with the subject of the clause in the investigated languages. In other words, I find it a good solution to explain the unusual surface tone patterns which are associated with the verb or the subject of the clause in the investigated languages.

A decision has been made in this paper not to discuss tense separately from aspect. In effect, although (COMRIE 1985: 6-7) observes that the notions of tense and aspect are conceptually separable (aspect involves the internal temporal constituency of a situation, while tense is concerned with the placement of a situation on the timeline relative to a reference point), it should be admitted that these two notions have intersecting meanings in that they both characterise the verb with respect to time. Moreover, the two categories appear to be intricately related in the languages analysed. For example, the absence of an aspect marker in a clause where the verb occurs together with a marker that clearly indicates tense is the best indication that the situation denoted by the verb is in the perfective. Similarly, the absence of a tense marker in a clause where the verb occurs together with a marker that clearly expresses the category of aspect clearly indicates that the situation denoted by the verb is in the present tense. In Ngiemboon, there are some markers that clearly indicate tense and aspect simultaneously and appear to be markers which arose from the fusion of a tense marker and an aspect marker.

3.1 Tense-aspect categories in Ghomalaʔ

The markings used to indicate the tense-aspect categories in Ghomalaʔ are listed in the overview in Table 1 below.

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LABELS	TA MARKERS	N-	VERB	(-SUFF)[8]
Hodiernal Past[9]	ê	N-[10]	vb	---[11]
Near Past	kā	---	vb	---
Near Past, Imperfective	kā bɔ́	N-	vb	(-SUFF)
Near Past, Progressive	kā bɔ́ wɔ́	N-	vb	(-SUFF)
Remote Past	lā	---	vb	---
Remote Past, Imperfective	lā bɔ́	N-	vb	(-SUFF)
Remote Past, Progressive	lā bɔ́ wɔ́	N-	vb	(-SUFF)
Imperfective	HL tone	N-	vb	(-SUFF)
Progressive	bɔ́ wɔ́	N-	vb	(-SUFF)
General Future	gɔ̄	---	vb	---
General Future, Imperfective	gɔ̄ pɔ́	---	vb	(-SUFF)
General Future, Progressive	gɔ̄ pɔ́ wɔ́	---	vb	(-SUFF)
Near Future	gɔ̄ tí	---	vb	---
Near Future, Imperfective	gɔ̄ tí pɔ́	---	vb	(-SUFF)
Near Future, Progressive	gɔ̄ tí pɔ́ wɔ́	---	vb	(-SUFF)
Remote Future	gɔ̄ t͡ʃwɔ́	---	vb	---
Remote Future, Imperfective	gɔ̄ t͡ʃwɔ́ pɔ́	---	vb	(-SUFF)
Remote Future, Progressive	gɔ̄ t͡ʃwɔ́ pɔ́ wɔ́	---	vb	(-SUFF)
Perfect	LH tone	---	vb	---
Unmarked Tense-Aspect	[12]	---	vb	---

Table 1 – Tense-aspect markings in Ghomalaʔ

3.1.1 Hodiernal Past (P₁)[13] ê (N-) vb

The Hodiernal Past is expressed by a construction which consists of two pre-verbal elements, namely, the hodiernal past marker **ê** and the nasal consonant

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[8] The use of brackets here is justified by the fact that the addition of the verbal suffix to the verb is optional in Ghomalaʔ (see section 2). The verbal suffix is, therefore, added in this table just for information.

[9] Initial capitalisation is used throughout this paper when writing tense-aspect category labels. This is to make a distinction between tense-aspect categories and tense-aspect functions or markings.

[10] The nasal consonant prefix that occurs before the verb in Ghomalaʔ is always deleted when followed by a voiced plosive sound (for example, [b, d, g]) or a voiced affricate sound (for example, [bv, dʒ, dz]).

[11] The use of hyphens here, as well as in all the other tables in this paper means not available or not applicable.

[12] The empty cell in this table and all the other tables in this paper means unmarked verb.

[13] The Pₙ (pastₙ) and Fₙ (futureₙ) notation used throughout this paper is borrowed from ANDERSON's (1983: 250) study. It should be interpreted as follows: P₂ is more remote in the past than P₁, P₃ is more remote in the past than P₂, etc.

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prefix **N**-, in that order. It is used to describe past perfective situations[14] of the day of speaking.[15] This is shown in the example in (4) below.

(4) wáp   ê   dzɨ́ʔ   gɔ̀fɔ̀[16]
     wáp   ê   N-tsɨ́ʔ   gɔ̀fɔ̀
     3PL   P₁   N-cultivate   maize
     'They cultivated maize'
     Context: The speaker is talking about something his/her brothers have done early today.

3.1.2 Near Past (P₂) **kɔ̄** vb

The Near Past is indicated by the marker **kɔ̄** which precedes the verb. It is used to describe past perfective situations that took place less than one month before the moment of speech, except situations that occurred on the day the utterance is made.

(5) tá   ǎ   kɔ̄   vɨ̄   ʃjɔ̄
     father my   P₂   fall   water
     'My father fell into the (river) water'
     Context: The speaker is talking about something that happened about a week ago.

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[14] Recall that a situation in the perfective is one presented without regard to its internal temporal constituency (COMRIE 1976: 3). That is, when there is no explicit reference to the internal temporal constituency of a situation, it is understood as being in the perfective.

[15] The tense-aspect markings discussed in this paper have (relatively) well-defined basic uses in that it will, for instance, be a collocational clash to use the hodiernal past marker with time adverbials, such as 'yesterday', 'last week' or 'last month' in each of the investigated languages. However, it is important to specify that there is a certain degree of flexibility in the use of the tense-aspect markings identified in the study. It is, for instance, possible to use a hodiernal/today past construction in Ngiemboon for a temporal interval broader than 'today' in certain contexts. For example, to talk about a situation which went on for a long period of time, such as a whole farming season, within the year the utterance of the speaker is made. The same goes for the perfect marker in Ngiemboon which is basically used to describe a past situation whose end is interpreted as just having occurred, but may be used to express imminent future situations. These shifts from the basic functions of tense-aspect markings are considered here as special or secondary uses of tense-aspect markings. Note that only the basic functions of tense-aspect markings are discussed in this paper. Also, some of the basic uses of the tense-aspect categories discussed in this paper, for example, the Hodiernal Past's use in Ghomalaʔ or the Hodiernal Past Progressive's use in Ngiemboon have been identified in an analysis of the tense-aspect system of Mengaka (see SONKOUE 2019: 7-15).

[16] Adverbials of time may co-occur with tense-aspect markings, where necessary, in order to pinpoint the event's location in time.

3.1.3 Near Past Imperfective (P₂ IPFV) **kɔ̄ bɔ́ N-**vb

The Near Past Imperfective is expressed by a construction which consists of three pre-verbal elements, namely, the near past marker **kɔ̄**, the imperfective marker **bɔ́**, and the nasal consonant prefix **N-**, in that order. It is used to describe a habitual situation which terminated in the near past. That is, approximately less than one month ago. This is shown in (6) below.

(6) ē   kɔ̄   bɔ́   dzɛ́ʔ   gɔ̀fɔ̀
     ē   kɔ̄   N-pɔ́   N-tsɛ́ʔ   gɔ̀fɔ̀
     3SG   P₂   N-IPFV   N-cultivate maize
     'He used to cultivate maize'
     Context: The speaker is talking about the profession of his/her brother when he (the brother of the speaker) was still living in the village. (It is known that the speaker's brother left the village not long ago).

Although this category indicates habitual as opposed to progressive situations, it has been analysed as an imperfective rather than a habitual. This is justified by the fact that the form that indicates it must be used together with a more specific progressive form to describe progressive situations. In other words, when used on its own, the form 'pɔ́/bɔ́' functions exclusively as a habitual but when used together with the progressive form (see 3.1.4 below) it functions as an imperfective.

3.1.4 Near Past Progressive (P₂ PROG) **kɔ̄ bɔ́ wɔ́ N-**vb

The Near Past Progressive is expressed by a construction which consists of four pre-verbal elements, namely, the near past marker **kɔ̄**, the imperfective marker **bɔ́**, the progressive marker **wɔ́**, and the nasal consonant prefix **N-**, in that order. It is used to describe situations which were ongoing in a near past. That is, less than one month ago.

(7) ē   kɔ̄   bɔ́   wɔ́   gíŋ   tɛ́m   ɣɛ́…
     ē   kɔ̄   N-pɔ́   wɔ́   N-ɣíŋ   tɛ́m   ɣɛ́
     3SG   P₂   N-IPFV   PROG   N-walk   in   forest
     'He was walking in the forest…'
     Context: The speaker is talking about something that happened to his/her brother yesterday.

3.1.5 Remote Past (P₃) **lɔ̄** vb

The Remote Past is expressed by the marker **lɔ̄** which precedes the verb. It is used to describe past perfective situations which took place either a month ago

or any time before that time. Below is an example that illustrates the use of the Remote Past in Ghomalaʔ.

(8) ē   lɔ̄   tsɨ́ʔ   gɔ̀fə̄
     3SG   P3   cultivate maize
     'He cultivated maize.'
     Context: The speaker is talking about something his/her brother did last year.

3.1.6 Remote Past Imperfective (P3 IPFV) lɔ̄ bə́ N-vb

The Remote Past Imperfective is expressed by a construction which consists of three pre-verbal elements, namely, the remote past marker lɔ̄, the imperfective marker bə́, and the nasal consonant prefix N-, in that order. It is used to describe a habitual situation which terminated in the remote past. That is, a month ago or any time before that time.

(9) ē   lɔ̄   bə́   dzɨ́ʔ   gɔ̀fə̄
     ē   lɔ̄   N-pə́   N-tsɨ́ʔ   gɔ̀fə̄
     3SG   P3   N-IPFV   N-cultivate maize
     'He used to cultivate maize'
     Context: The speaker is talking about the profession of his/her brother when he (the brother of the speaker) was still living in the village. (It is known that the speaker's brother left the village long ago).

3.1.7 Remote Past Progressive (P3 PROG) lɔ̄ bə́ wə́ N-vb

The Remote Past Progressive is expressed by a construction which consists of four pre-verbal elements, namely, the remote past marker lɔ̄, the imperfective marker bə́, the progressive marker wə́, and the nasal consonant prefix N-, in that order. It is used to describe situations which were ongoing in a remote past. That is, one month ago or any time before that time.

(10) ē   lɔ̄   bə́   wə́   dzɨ́ʔ   gɔ̀fə̄
     ē   lɔ̄   N-pə́   wə́   N-tsɨ́ʔ   gɔ̀fə̄
     3SG   P3   N-IPFV   PROG   N-cultivate maize
     'He was cultivating maize'
     Context: Q: What was your brother doing when a mid-wife phoned him last year at this very time to inform him that his wife gave birth to a baby boy? (Do you remember the activity he was engaged in?)

3.1.8 Imperfective (IPFV) HL tone N-vb

The Imperfective is expressed by a replacive high-low tone which is realised on the last (or only) syllable of the subject pronoun or noun preceding the verb. In addition to this, a nasal consonant prefix N- is attached to the verb. It is

employed to describe events or actions performed on multiple occasions over an extended period of time.

(11) ê   gàp   kʰáp
     ē   ˆ   N-ɣàp   kʰáp
     3SG   IPFV N-distribute money
     'She distributes money (as a habit)'
     Context: Q: What does your sister usually do when she is happy?

(12) kāmdôm   gàp   kʰáp   téʔ
     kāmdōm   ˆ   N-ɣàp   kʰáp   téʔ
     kamdom   IPFV   N-distribute money   a.lot
     'Kamdom distributes money regularly'
     Context: The speaker is talking about someone who usually distributes money.

Two examples are provided here, as well as in 3.1.19 below to show where the falling tone docks.

3.1.9 Progressive (PROG) bə́ wə́ N-vb

The Progressive is expressed by a construction which consists of three pre-verbal elements, namely, the imperfective marker bə́, the progressive marker wə́, and the nasal consonant prefix N-, in that order. It is used to describe present progressive situations. That is, situations ongoing at the time of speaking.

(13) ē   bə́   wə́   ǹtí
     ē   N-pə́   wə́   N-tí
     3SG   N-IPFV   PROG   N-sleep
     'He is sleeping'
     Context: Q: What is your brother doing right now?

Just like the perfective, the present tense is unmarked in the investigated languages. Also, the markers bə́ and wə́, are often replaced by a single marker, namely, bó in daily conversations among Ghomalaʔ's speakers. One can, therefore, assume that the marker bó in Ghomalaʔ is a short form of the merge of the imperfective marker bə́ with the progressive marker wə́.

3.1.10 General Future (F$_1$) gɔ̄ vb

The General Future is expressed by the marker gɔ̄ which precedes the verb. It is used to describe future perfective situations of the day of speaking.

(14)	gā	gɔ̄	ɣɔ̄	tʃə̂tə̀
	gā	N-ɣɔ̄	ɣɔ̄	tʃə̂tə̀
	1SG	N-F₁	go	meeting

'I am going to go to a meeting'
Context: The speaker is talking about what s/he is planning to do today.

3.1.11 General Future Imperfective (F₁ IPFV) gɔ̄ pə́ vb

The General Future Imperfective is expressed by means of two pre-verbal elements, namely, the general future marker gɔ̄ and the imperfective marker pə́, in that order. It is used to express the fact that an action will be performed on a regular basis or routinely as from the day of the utterance.

(15)	ē	gɔ̄	pə́	tsɨ́ʔ	gə̀fə̀
	ē	N-ɣɔ̄	pə́	tsɨ́ʔ	gə̀fə̀
	3SG	N-F₁	IPFV	cultivate	maize

'He is going to cultivate maize (routinely)'
Context: Your brother has got a new work contract and he is going to start working today. Q: What will be your brother's occupation at his work place?

3.1.12 General Future Progressive (F₁ PROG) gɔ̄ pə́ wə́ vb

The General Future Progressive is expressed by means of three pre-verbal elements, namely, the general future marker gɔ̄, the imperfective marker pə́, and the progressive marker wə́, in that order. It is used to describe situations which will be in progress on the day of speaking. This is shown in (16) below.

(16)	ē	gɔ̄	pə́	wə́	tsɨ́ʔ	gə̀fə̀
	ē	N-ɣɔ̄	pə́	wə́	tsɨ́ʔ	gə̀fə̀
	3SG	N-F₁	IPFV	PROG	cultivate	maize

'He is going to be cultivating maize'
Context: Q: What do you think your brother is going to be doing when we arrive tonight? (What activity will he be engaged in?)

3.1.13 Near Future (F₂) gɔ̄ tí vb

The Near Future is expressed by the marker tí which must co-occur with the general future marker gɔ̄. It is used to describe future perfective situations that are going to take place either the day after the speech moment or any time before a year as from the day after the speech moment.

(17) ē   gɔ̄   tí   ɣɔ̄   sə̄kú
       ē   N-ɣɔ̄   tí   ɣɔ̄   sə̄kú
       3SG N- F_1 F_2 go   school
       'He is going to go to school'
       Context: The speaker is talking about something his/her son is going to do tomorrow.

3.1.14 Near Future Imperfective (F_2 IPFV) gɔ̄ tí pɔ́ vb

The Near Future Imperfective is expressed by means of three pre-verbal elements, namely, the general future marker **gɔ̄**, the near future marker **tí**, and the imperfective marker **pɔ́**, in that order. It is used to express the fact that an action will be performed on a regular basis or routinely as from the day after the time of speaking.

(18) ē   gɔ̄   tí   pɔ́   tsɨ́ʔ   gɔ̀fə̀
       ē   N-ɣɔ̄   tí   pɔ́   tsɨ́ʔ   gɔ̀fə̀
       3SG N-F_1 F_2 IPFV cultivate   maize
       'He is going to cultivate maize (routinely)'
       Context: Your brother has got a work contract and he is going to start working tomorrow. Q: What will be your brother's occupation at his work place?

3.1.15 Near Future Progressive (F_2 PROG) gɔ̄ tí pɔ́ wɔ́ vb

The Near Future Progressive is expressed by means of four pre-verbal elements, namely, the general future marker **gɔ̄**, the near future marker **tí**, the imperfective marker **pɔ́**, and the progressive marker **wɔ́**, in that order. It is used to describe situations which will be in progress in the near future. That is, either the day after the time of speaking or any time before a year as from the day after the time of speaking. This is illustrated in (19) below.

(19) ē   gɔ̄   tí   pɔ́   wɔ́   tsɨ́ʔ   gɔ̀fə̀
       ē   N-ɣɔ̄   tí   pɔ́   wɔ́   tsɨ́ʔ   gɔ̀fə̀
       3SG N-F_1 F_2 IPFV PROG   cultivate   maize
       'He is going to be cultivating maize'
       Context: Q: What do you think your brother is going to be doing when we arrive tomorrow? (What activity will he be engaged in?)

3.1.16 Remote Future (F_3) gɔ̄ ʧwɔ́ vb

The Remote Future is expressed by the marker **ʧwɔ́** which must co-occur with the general future marker **gɔ̄**. It is used to describe future perfective situations that are going to take place either within a year or any time thereafter.

(20)	ē	gɔ̄	ʧwɔ́	ɣɔ̄	gwūŋ	á	dɔ̄kɔ́
	ē	N₁-ɣɔ̄	ʧwɔ́	ɣɔ̄	gwūŋ	á	dɔ̄kɔ́
	3SG	N-F₁	F₃		go	kingdom of	white.men

He is going to go to Europe.'
Context: The speaker is talking about something his/her son is going to do in two years' time (when he obtains his Bachelor's degree).

3.1.17 Remote Future Imperfective (F₃ IPFV) gɔ̄ ʧwɔ́ pɔ́ vb

The Remote Future Imperfective is expressed by means of three pre-verbal elements, namely, the general future marker gɔ̄, the remote future marker ʧwɔ́, and the imperfective marker pɔ́, in that order. It is used to express the fact that an action will be performed on a regular basis or routinely as from one year after the time of speaking.

(21)	ē	gɔ̄	ʧwɔ́	pɔ́	tsú?	gɒ̀fɒ̀
	ē	N-ɣɔ̄	ʧwɔ́	pɔ́	tsú?	gɒ̀fɒ̀
	3SG	N-F₁	F₃	IPFV	cultivate	maize

'He is going to cultivate maize (routinely)'
Context: Your brother has got a work contract and he is going to start working next year. Q: What will be your brother's occupation at his work place?

3.1.18 Remote Future Progressive (F₃ PROG) gɔ̄ ʧwɔ́ pɔ́ wɔ́ vb

The Remote Future Progressive is expressed by means of four pre-verbal elements, namely, the general future marker gɔ̄, the remote future marker ʧwɔ́, the imperfective marker pɔ́, and the progressive marker wɔ́ in that order. It is used to describe situations which will be in progress in the remote future. That is, within a year or any time thereafter.

(22)	ē	gɔ̄	ʧwɔ́	pɔ́	wɔ́	tsú?	gɒ̀fɒ̀
	ē	N-ɣɔ̄	ʧwɔ́	pɔ́	wɔ́	tsú?	gɒ̀fɒ̀
	3SG	N-F₁	F₃	IPFV	PROG	cultivate	maize

'He is going to be cultivating maize'
Context: Q: What do you think your brother is going to be doing when we visit him next year during Christmas holidays? (What activity will he be engaged in?)

3.1.19 Perfect (PRF) LH tone vb

The Perfect is indicated by a replacive low-high tone which is realised on the last (or only) syllable of the subject pronoun or noun preceding the verb. It is used to describe a past situation whose end is interpreted as just having occurred. The Perfect may also be used to present a current state without any implication of

how this state came about. The following sentences illustrate the use of the Perfect in Ghomalaʔ.

(23) kāmdɔ̌m   kɛ́   pə̀pún
      kāmdɔ̄m ˇ   kɛ́   pə̀pún
      kamdom PRF read well
      'Kamdom has read well.'
      Context: The speaker is talking about someone who has just finished reading a passage from the bible.

(24) ð   ʒjɔ́   tá   kɔ́mɲɔ́   ā
      ō   ˇ   ʒjɔ́   tá   kɔ́mɲɔ́   ā
      2SG   PRF know father   komgne   QPTCL
      'Do you know Mr. Komgne?'
      Context: A father is talking to his son.

In example (23), the Perfect describes a past action whose end is interpreted as just having occurred, whereas in (24), it has a present state interpretation.

3.1.20 Unmarked Tense-Aspect (UTA) vb

The Unmarked Tense-Aspect is marked for neither tense nor aspect. It is signalled in the transcription by an empty set symbol (Ø) before the verb. The Unmarked Tense-Aspect is used in discourse (narrations, descriptions, expositions, etc.) to replace a tense-aspect marking already mentioned, either explicitly, that is, using an explicit tense-aspect marking or implicitly, that is, without any explicit tense-aspect marking since the participants already know the context.

(25) gā   gɔ̄   ʧwɔ́ lə̄ŋdzɔ̄ jó   mə̀twâ pīŋ   Ø   ɣɔ̄   dwǎlā   kɔ́ká
      gā   N$_1$-ɣɔ̄ ʧwɔ́ lə̄ŋdzɔ̄ jó mə̀twâ pīŋ   Ø   ɣɔ̄   dwǎlā   kɔ́ká
      1SG N-F$_1$ F$_3$ first buy   car   then UTA go   Douala   visit
      'I am going to buy a car first, then I am going to go and visit Douala'
      Context: The speaker is talking about what s/he is planning to do when s/he receives his/her first salary.

In example (25) above, the Unmarked Tense-Aspect is used to replace the construction gɔ̄ ʧwɔ́.

Before closing this section, a number of details deserve comment. The marker pɔ́ which alternates with bɔ́ has been analysed as an imperfective marker in Ghomalaʔ. A curiosity about this marker is that it is sufficient to express the habitual meaning, but must co-occur with another marker, that is, the progressive marker, to convey the progressive meaning. In other words,

Ghomalaʔ distinguishes a special progressive form, and the use of the imperfective marker without that special progressive form excludes progressive meaning.

As shown in the discussion above, future tense markers in Ghomalaʔ are all free-standing markers. It emerged from discussions with language consultants that each of the future tense markers in Ghomalaʔ can be formally related to a verb which has full lexical meaning. The general future marker **gɔ̄** is formally closely similar to the verb ɣɔ̄ 'go', the near future marker **tí** is identical in form to the verb **tí** 'sleep', the remote future marker **ʧwɔ́** is identical in form to the verb **ʧwɔ́** 'stay'. The fact that each of the future tense markers in Ghomalaʔ can be formally related to a verb which has full lexical meaning, and most importantly, that one of these verbs ('go') is a movement verb, might suggest that future tense markers in Ghomalaʔ are cases of grammaticalization of verb.[17] However, the developmental pathways leading to future tense markers remain to be traced. This explains why I have opted to use the term 'marker' instead of 'auxiliary/verbal auxiliary' to refer to them, keeping in mind that they might be cases of grammaticalization of verbs. The clear formal relatedness of Ghomalaʔ's future tense markers to verbs with full lexical meaning might also suggest that what I have analysed in this paper as future markers could also be analysed as serial verb constructions. However, in my opinion, future tense markers in Ghomalaʔ are not instances of serial verb constructions. This is explained by the fact that in all of the examples cited in 3.1 above, the markers **gɔ̄**, **tí**, **ʧwɔ́** do not function as verbs, that is, they do not describe an action, an event or a state, but rather provide temporal specifications. As shown below, the formal relatedness of future tense markers to lexical verbs described here is also observed in the other languages under investigation. The afore-mentioned assumptions about the formal relatedness of tense markers to lexical verbs could, therefore, also be made in Ngiemboon and Ngombale.

Also worth noting is that the hodiernal past meaning is not compatible with the habitual meaning in Ghomalaʔ. In other words, it is not possible to have a hodiernal past habitual interpretation in Ghomalaʔ. This is certainly due to the fact that an event occurring over a very short period of time, that is, today is not long enough to be considered as a past habit. Moreover, the present tense meaning is not compatible with the perfective meaning in Ghomalaʔ. This is

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[17] According to BYBEE, PERKINS and PAGLIUCA (1994: 253), the most frequent sources of grammatical morphemes expressing the future meaning cross-linguistically are movement verb constructions.

likely due to the fact that situations that refer to the present time have an inherent imperfective component, that is, there are either going on now or hold true for the moment of speaking.

3.2 Tense-aspect categories in Ngiemboon

The markings that are used to indicate the tense-aspect categories in Ngiemboon are listed in the overview in Table 2 below.

LABELS	TA MARKERS	N-	VERB	-SUFF[18]
Hodiernal Past	ně	N-	vb	---
Hodiernal Past, Progressive	kɔ̀ nè	N-	vb	-VL^L, -VC^L
Near Past	kà	---	vb	---
Near Past, Habitual	kɔ̌:	N-	vb	-VL^L, -VC^L
Near Past, Progressive	kà nè	N-	vb	-VL^L, -VC^L
Remote Past	là	---	vb	---
Remote Past, Habitual	lɔ̌:	N-	vb	-VL^L, -VC^L
Remote Past, Progressive	là nè	N-	vb	-VL^L, -VC^L
Habitual	LH tone	N-	vb	-VL^L, -VC^L
Progressive	nè	N-	vb	-VL^L, -VC^L
General Future	ɣè	---	vb	---
General Future, Progressive	ɣè kú nè	N-	vb	-VL^L, -VC^L
Near future	ɣè ɣxɰò/tó/lù[19]	---	vb	---
Near Future, Progressive	ɣè ɣxɰò/tó/lù nè	N-	vb	-VL^L, -VC^L
Remote Future	ɣè láʔ	---	vb	---
Remote Future, Progressive	ɣè láʔ nè	N-	vb	-VL^L, -VC^L
Perfect	---	---	vb	LH tone, H tone , -VC^H
Unmarked Tense-Aspect		---	vb	---

Table 2 – Tense-aspect markings in Ngiemboon

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[18] As indicated in section 2, the verbal suffix in Ngiemboon has a clear function, that is, imperfective marker or perfect marker. The verbal suffix that expresses the imperfective has an underlying low tone, whereas the one expressing the perfect has an underlying high tone. Also, based on the data collected, it can be said that the suffix that indicates the Perfect does not occur with other tense-aspect markers. In other words, forms such as 'past perfect' or 'future perfect' forms have not been identified in the study. Also note that in an analysis of the tense-aspect system of Mengaka (a language of the Bamileke group), Sonkoue (2019: 4) discusses a verb suffix which has almost the same features as the imperfective verb suffix in Ngiemboon.

[19] The use of the slash (/) here and in all the other tables in the paper means markers used interchangeably.

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3.2.1 Ngiemboon's tense-aspect categories, with semantically related tense-aspect category in Ghomalaʔ

In this sub-section, I focus on Ngiemboon's tense-aspect categories which have semantically corresponding tense-aspect categories in Ghomalaʔ. Only the markings of these tense-aspect categories are provided here since their functions have already been described when discussing the data in Ghomalaʔ. Also, relevant data in Ghomalaʔ are repeated here.

LABELS[20]	NGIEMBOON	GHOMALAʔ	
Hodiernal Past	**ně** N-vb	**ê** N-vb	(3.1.1)
Near Past	**kà** vb	**kā** vb	(3.1.2)
Near Past, Habitual	**kɔ̌:** N-vb-VL$^\text{L}$, -VC$^\text{L}$	**kā bɔ́** N-vb	(3.1.3)
Remote Past	**là** vb	**lā** vb	(3.1.5)
Remote Past, Habitual	**lɔ̌:** N-vb-VL$^\text{L}$, -VC$^\text{L}$	**lā bɔ́** N-vb	(3.1.6)
Remote Past, Progressive	**là nè** N-vb-VL$^\text{L}$, -VC$^\text{L}$	**lā bɔ́ wɔ́** N-vb	(3.1.7)
Habitual	LH tone	HL tone	(3.1.8)
Progressive	**nè** N-vb-VL$^\text{L}$, -VC$^\text{L}$	**bɔ́ wɔ́** N-vb	(3.1.9)
General Future	**ɣè** vb	**gɔ̄** vb	(3.1.10)
General Future, Progressive	**ɣè kú nè** N-vb-VL$^\text{L}$, -VC$^\text{L}$	**gɔ̄ pɔ́ wɔ́** vb	(3.1.12)
Near Future	**ɣè ɣxɯ̀ò/tó/lù** vb	**gɔ̄ tí** vb	(3.1.13)
Near Future, Progressive	**ɣè ɣxɯ̀ò/tó/lù nè** N-vb-VL$^\text{L}$, -VC$^\text{L}$	**gɔ̄ tí pɔ́ wɔ́** vb	(3.1.15)
Remote Future	**ɣè láʔ** vb	**gɔ̄ ʧwɔ́** vb	(3.1.16)
Remote Future, Progressive	**ɣè láʔ nè** N-vb-VL$^\text{L}$, -VC$^\text{L}$	**gɔ̄ ʧwɔ́ pɔ́ wɔ́** vb	(3.1.18)

Table 3 – Semantically corresponding tense-aspect categories across Ngiemboon and Ghomalaʔ

3.2.2 Ngiemboon's tense-aspect categories, with no semantically corresponding tense-aspect category in Ghomalaʔ

This sub-section examines Ngiemboon's tense-aspect categories which do not have a semantically corresponding tense-aspect category in Ghomalaʔ. A general comment about the organisation of the paper should be made here. To avoid making the exposition repetitious, the differences between the investigated languages with respect to the functions of the tense-aspect categories are not discussed here, as well as in 3.3.2 below. In other words, each language is treated separately. However, these differences are explicitly expressed in the comparative analysis below (see sub-section 4.3).

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[20] The labels here only apply to the Ngiemboon language. For the labels in Ghomalaʔ, see 3.1.

3.2.2.1 Hodiernal Past Progressive (P₁ PROG) *kɔ̀ nè N-vb-VLᴸ, -VCᴸ*

The Hodiernal Past Progressive is expressed by a construction which consists of three pre-verbal elements and the underlying low tone imperfective verb suffix. The pre-verbal elements are the hodiernal past marker kɔ̀ which is regarded as a grammatically conditioned allomorph of the Ngiemboon's hodiernal past marker nɛ̌,[21] the progressive marker nè, and the nasal consonant prefix N-, in that order. It is used to describe situations which were ongoing on the day of the utterance, but before the moment of speaking.

(26) à   kɔ̀   nè   ḿbwɔ́ʔɔ̀   ŋ̀gɜ̀sáŋ
à   kɔ̀   nè   N-pwɔ́ʔ-ɔ̀   ŋ̀-gɜ̀sáŋ
3SG P₁ PROG N-harvest-IPFV 9-maize
'He was harvesting maize'
Context: Q: What was your brother doing when I phoned him this morning? (What activity was he engaged in? He did not answer my call.)

3.2.2.2 Near Past Progressive (P₂ PROG) *kà nè N-vb-VLᴸ, -VCᴸ*

The Near Past Progressive is expressed by a construction which consists of three pre-verbal elements and the underlying low tone imperfective verb suffix. The pre-verbal elements are the near past marker kà, the progressive marker nè, and the nasal consonant prefix N- in that order. It is used to describe situations which were ongoing in the near past. That is, yesterday or some time before yesterday, but not up to one month before the time of speaking.

(27) à   kà   nè   ḿbwɔ́ʔɔ̀   ŋ̀gɜ̀sáŋ
à   kà   nè   N- pwɔ́ʔ-ɔ̀   ŋ̀-gɜ̀sáŋ
3SG P₂ PROG N-harvest-IPFV 9-maize
'He was harvesting maize'
Context: Q: What was your brother doing when I phoned him yesterday? (What activity was he engaged in? He did not answer my call.)

3.2.2.3 Perfect (PRF) *LH tone, -VCᴴ, H tone*

Three strategies are used to indicate the Perfect in Ngiemboon. One of them involves the use of a replacive low-high tone which is realised on the vowel of the verb root. This causes the neutralisation of the distinction between lexical high and low tone verbs. This way of indicating the perfect is by far the most commonly encountered in the language. Another means used to indicate the

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[21] The markers nɛ̌ and kɔ̀ are considered as grammatically-conditioned allomorphs because their selection is determined by a grammatical feature, namely, whether the verb following them co-occurs or does not co-occur with a progressive marker.

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Perfect in Ngiemboon involves the addition of an underlying high tone verb suffix (-VCᴴ) to the verb root. This way of indicating the perfect is exclusively used when the verb root has a closed syllable structure, that is, CVC and is followed by an object which belongs to the noun class 1[22] (for example, ǹ-dúm 'husband') or 7 (for example, (à)-ʧúʔtè 'meeting'). The third means employed to indicate the Perfect in Ngiemboon involves the alternation of the tone of the verbal extension into a high tone. Recall that verbal extensions in Ngiemboon have no inherent tone, but take their tone from the vowel of the preceding syllable by tone spreading. This means that the tonal alternation that indicates the Perfect occurs after the spreading of the tone of the verb root to the verbal extension. This strategy is exclusively used when the verb has a root and a verbal extension. The Perfect is used to describe a past situation whose end is interpreted as just having occurred. The Perfect may also be used to present a current state as being the result of some past situation. The following sentences illustrate the use of the Perfect in Ngiemboon.

(28) à   lɔ̌   ʃúm   léʒʃɥó
  à   lɔ́   ˇ   (à)-ʃúm   lé-ʒʃɥó
  3SG cook PRF 7-food   NMLZ-eat   (lexical tone of the verb: lɔ́)
  'She has cooked the food'
  Context: The speaker is talking about something his/her sister has just done.

(29) ò   fǎŋ   tèʔ
  ò   fáŋ   ˇ   tèʔ
  2SG be.big PRF many   (lexical tone of the verb: fáŋ)
  'You have put on too much weight'
  Context: The speaker is talking to a friend.

In example (28), the Perfect describes a past action whose end is interpreted as just having occurred, whereas in (29), it presents a state as being the result of some past situation.

3.2.2.4 Unmarked Tense-Aspect (UTA) Ø vb

The Unmarked Tense-Aspect is neither marked for tense nor aspect. It is used in discourse (narrations, descriptions, expositions, etc.) to replace a tense-aspect marking already mentioned, either explicitly, that is, using an explicit tense-aspect making or implicitly, that is, without an explicit tense-aspect marking since the participants already know the context. The Unmarked Tense-Aspect

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[22] According to LONFO (2014: 56-61), there are five singular noun classes (classes 1, 3, 5, 7, 9) and five plural noun classes (classes 2, 4, 6, 8, 10) in Ngiemboon.

may also be used to present a current state without any implication of how this state came about.

(30) è   Ø   fáŋ
    it   UTA   be.big
    'It is big'
    Context: The speaker is talking about the house in which s/he lives.

(31) mɛ́   là   kà: jé   ńná   lɔ́qtà   à   Ø   ké   tè   ɣɰé   wɔ́
    mɛ́   là   kà: jé   N-ná   lɔ́qtà   à   Ø   ké   tè   ɣɰé   wɔ́
    'Some people carried him to the hospital, he did not die, all the same.'
    Context: The speaker is talking about an accident that happened one year ago.

In example (30), the Unmarked Tense-Aspect has a present state interpretation, whereas in (31), it replaces the remote past (P3) marker **là**.

The following comments should be made here. On the basis of verb paradigms collected for his primarily phonological study, ANDERSON (1983: 246-305) identifies nine tenses in Ngiemboon: four past tenses, a zero tense, and four future tenses. The four past tenses (today past, yesterday past, distant past, and remote past) are interpreted as realis and subdivided into perfective and imperfective constructions. The four future tenses (today future, tomorrow future, distant future, and remote future) are interpreted as irrealis and subdivided into perfective and imperfective constructions. The zero tense shows five constructions: a realis perfective construction, a realis non-progressive imperfective construction, a realis progressive imperfective construction, an irrealis non-progressive imperfective construction, and an irrealis progressive imperfective construction. There are some differences between Anderson's description of Ngiemboon tense-aspect features and the description presented in this paper. For instance, in Anderson's study, the second degree of future (F2) is indicated by the maker **tó** or **gyò** and the third degree of future (F3) by the marker **lù**, whereas in this paper these three makers (**tó**, **gyò**, **lù**) are considered as freely interchangeable markers of the second degree of future. These differences are due to several factors: differences in the interpretation of the data, dialectal differences, and probably language change over the past 37 years. Also note that following some electronic communication with Anderson in September 2017, it appeared that the remote past marker (P4) **là láʔ** discussed in Anderson's study does not exist at all. Rather, it is a modified form of the P3 marker using the form **láʔ** which means 'before' and is used in the same slot with same meaning with other past tense markers.

Just like in Ghomalaʔ, the future tense markers in Ngiemboon are formally related to verbs which have full lexical meaning. The general future marker ɣè is formally closely similar to the verb ɣùà 'go', the hodiernal future marker kú is formally identical to the verb kú 'enter', the near future markers ɣxɯò/tó/lù are identical, or formally closely similar to the verbs ɣxɯò 'do', tó 'come', and lùsé 'stand up', respectively, the remote future marker láʔ is identical in form to the verb láʔ 'spend the night'. The formal relatedness between Ngiemboon's future tense markers and verbs with full lexical meaning may trigger certain assumptions that have already been discussed in 3.1 above.

The free-standing markers kɔ̌: and lɔ̌: in Table 2 are used to indicate the near past habitual and the remote past habitual, respectively. This means that each of these markers clearly expresses two notions at the same time: past tense meaning and habitual meaning. It is argued in this paper that the markers kɔ̌: and lɔ̌: arose out of the fusion of a past tense marker, that is, kà for near past habitual marker kɔ̌: and là for the remote past habitual marker lɔ̌:, with a habitual marker which once (at some point earlier in the history of the Ngiemboon language) consisted of a segment with a tone, but disappeared through the development of the language over time.

A hodiernal/today past habitual interpretation is not possible in Ngiemboon. Also, Ngiemboon does not allow the combination of the habitual meaning with the future tense meaning. In section 3.1 above, I posited a hypothesis to explain the incompatibility between the hodiernal past tense meaning and the habitual meaning in Ghomalaʔ. That hypothesis also holds for Ngiemboon. The incompatibility between the habitual meaning and the future tense meaning in Ngiemboon might be explained by the fact that a given event is readily perceived as a habit if it has occurred regularly over a certain period of time; what seems somehow contradictory to future events which are described as events which have not yet taken place. Note, however, that such a meaning (future habitual) is perfectly possible in the closely related Ghomalaʔ language (see 3.1 above). The present tense meaning also appears to be incompatible with the perfective meaning in Ngiemboon. An explanation for this can be found in 3.1 above.

3.3 Tense-aspect categories in Ngombale

The markings that are used to encode the tense-aspect categories in Ngombale are listed in the overview in Table 4 below.

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LABELS	TA MARKERS	N-	VERB
Hodiernal Past	jǎ/tɛ̌	N-	vb
Hodiernal Past, Imperfective	jǎ/tɛ̌ mɔ́	N-	vb
Near Past	kɘ̀	---	vb
Near Past, Imperfective	kɘ̀ pɔ́	N-	vb
Remote Past	lɘ̀	---	vb
Remote Past, Imperfective	lɘ̀ pɔ́	N-	vb
Imperfective	mɔ́~pɔ́	N-	vb
General Future	ɣwɔ̀	---	vb
General Future, Imperfective	ɣwɔ̀ pɔ́	---	vb
Remote Future	ɣwɔ̀ ɣɯ̄	---	vb
Remote Future, Imperfective	ɣwɔ̀ ɣɯ̄ pɔ́	---	vb
Unmarked Tense-Aspect		---	vb

Table 4 – Tense-aspect markings in Ngombale

3.3.1 Ngombale's tense-aspect categories, with semantically related tense-aspect categories in Ghomalaʔ and/Ngiemboon

In this sub-section, I display on Ngombale's tense-aspect categories which have semantically corresponding tense-aspect categories in both Ghomalaʔ and Ngiemboon or exclusively, in Ngiemboon. Only the structure and markings of these tense-aspect categories is provided since their functions have already been described in 3.1 or 3.2.2 above. Also, relevant data in Ghomlaʔ and/Ngiemboon are repeated here.

LABELS[23]	NGOMBALE	GHOMALAʔ	NGIEMBOON
Hodiernal Past	jǎ/tɛ̌ N-vb	ê N- vb	nɛ̌ N-vb
Hodiernal Past, Imperfective	jǎ/tɛ̌ mɔ́ N-vb	---	kɘ̀ nɛ̀ N-vb-SUFF
Near Past	kɘ̀ vb	kɘ̄ vb	kà vb
Near Past, Imperfective	kɘ̀ pɔ́ N-vb	---	kà nɛ̀ N-vb-SUFF
Remote Past	lɘ̀ vb	lɘ̄ vb	là vb
General Future	ɣwɔ̀ vb	gɔ̄ vb	ɣè vb
General Future, Imperfective	ɣwɔ̀ pɔ́ vb	gɔ̄ pɔ́ wɔ́ vb	ɣè kú nɛ̀ N-vb-SUFF

Table 5 – Semantically corresponding tense-aspect categories across Ngombale, Ghomalaʔ, and Ngiemboon

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[23] The labels in this table only apply to Ngombale. For the labels in Ghomalaʔ and Ngiemboon, see 3.1 and 3.2.2, respectively.

3.3.2 Ngombale's tense-aspect categories, with no semantically corresponding tense-aspect category in Ghomalaʔ/Ngiemboon

This sub-section focuses on Ngombale's tense-aspect categories which do not have a semantically corresponding tense-aspect category in Ghomalaʔ or Ngiemboon.

3.3.2.1 Remote Past Imperfective (*P₃ IPFV*) *là pɔ́ N-vb*

The Remote Past Imperfective is expressed by a construction which consists of three pre-verbal elements, namely, the remote past marker *là*, the imperfective marker *pɔ́*, and the nasal consonant prefix *N-* in that order. It is used to describe on the one hand situations which were ongoing in the remote past, that is, one month ago or any time before that time, and on the other hand past habitual situations.

(32) à   là   pɔ́   m̀bí   ŋ̄gə̄sáŋ
     à   là   pɔ́   N-pí   ŋ̀gə̄sáŋ
     3SG   P₃   IPFV   N-sow   maize
     'He was sowing maize'
     Context: Q: What was your brother doing when a mid-wife phoned him last year at this very time to inform him that his wife gave birth to a baby boy? (Do you remember the activity he was engaged in?)

(33) à   là   pɔ́   ńdʒúʔ   ŋ̄gə̄sáŋ
     à   là   pɔ́   N-ʒúʔ   ŋ̄gə̄sáŋ
     3SG   P₃   IPFV   N-cultivate   maize
     'He used to cultivate maize'
     Context: Q: What was your brother doing as a profession when he was still living in the village?

3.3.2.2 Imperfective (*IPFV*) *mɔ́~pɔ́ N-vb*

The Imperfective is expressed by a construction which consists of two pre-verbal elements, namely, the imperfective marker *mɔ́~pɔ́* and the nasal consonant prefix *N-* in that order. It is used to describe on the one hand actions or events performed on multiple occasions over an extended period of time, and on the other hand situations going on at the time of speaking. The examples in (34) and (35) below illustrate the use of the imperfective in Ngombale.

(34) à   pɔ́   m̀bí   ŋ̄gə̄sáŋ
     à   pɔ́   N-pí   ŋ̀gə̄sáŋ
     3SG   IPFV   N-sow   maize
     'He is sowing maize.'
     Context: Q: What is your brother doing right now?

(35) à   pɔ́   ŋ́gāptɔ̄   ŋ̀káp
      à   pɔ́   N-ɣāp-tɔ̄   ŋ̀káp
      3SG   IPFV   N-distribute-EXT   money
      'He distributes money.'
      Context: Q: What does your brother usually do when he is happy?

3.3.2.3 Remote Future (F₂) *ɣwɔ̀ ɣʉ̄ vb*

The Remote Future is expressed by the marker ɣʉ̄ which must co-occur with the general future marker ɣwɔ̀. It is employed to describe future perfective situations which will take place in the remote future. That is, either the day after the time of speaking or any time thereafter.

(36) à   ɣwɔ̀   ɣʉ̄   pí   ŋgɔ̄sáŋ
      3SG   F₁   F₂   sow   maize
      'He is going to sow maize'
      Context: The speaker is talking about something his/her brother is planning to do next week.

3.3.2.4 Remote Future Imperfective (*F₂ IPFV*) *ɣwɔ̀ ɣʉ̄ pɔ́ vb*

The Remote Future Imperfective is expressed by means of three pre-verbal elements, namely, the general future marker ɣwɔ̀, the remote future marker ɣʉ̄, and the imperfective marker pɔ́ in that order. It is used to describe situations which will be in progress in the remote future.

(37) à   ɣwɔ̀   ɣʉ̄   pɔ́   pí   ŋgɔ̄sáŋ
      3SG   F₁   F₂   IPFV   sow   maize
      'He is going to be sowing maize'
      Context: Q: What do you think your brother is going to be doing when we visit him next Sunday? (What activity will he be engaged when we arrive?)

3.3.2.5 Unmarked tense-aspect (*UTA*) *Ø vb*

The Unmarked Tense-Aspect is neither marked for tense nor aspect. It is noteworthy for its range of functions. It may be used to describe a past situation whose end is interpreted as just having occurred. Also, it may serve to present a current state without any implication of how this state came about. When used in discourse (narrations, descriptions, expositions, etc.), the Unmarked Tense-Aspect replaces a tense-aspect marking already mentioned, either explicitly, that is, using an explicit tense-aspect marking or implicitly, that is, without an explicit tense-aspect marking since the participants already know the context.

(38) ò   Ø   ŋɔ́   mɐ̀zʉ́ mbō   mɔ̂
     2SG   UTA   give   food   to   child
     'Have you fed the baby?'
     Context: The speaker is talking about a baby who looks hungry.

(39) ə̀   Ø   ɣúʔ
     it   UTA   be.big
     'It is big'
     Context: The speaker is talking about the house in which s/he lives.

(40) à   lə̀ pɔ́ ŋ́ŋé   tʃɔ̄   mə̄ndò ndḛ̌ʔʒwómí à   Ø   tɔ̄ʔ kù   jé   ǹdù
     à   lə̀ pɔ́ N-ŋé   tʃɔ̄   mə̄ndò ndḛ̌ʔʒwómí à   Ø   tɔ̄ʔ kù   jé   ndù
     3SG P3 IPFV N-walk in   forest suddenly   he UTA lay   foot his on
     'He was walking in the forest suddenly, (and) suddenly, he laid his foot on…'
     Context: The speaker is talking about something that happened to his/her brother
     about a year ago.

In example (38), the Unmarked Tense-Aspect is used to refer to a past action whose end is interpreted as just having occurred. In (39), it has a present state interpretation. Example (40) shows a case where the Unmarked Tense-Aspect replaces an already mentioned tense-aspect marking, namely, the remote past tense marker lə̀.

The following final comments should be made here. Just like Ghomalaʔ and Ngiemboon, Ngombale shows a clear formal relatedness between future tense markers and verbs which have full lexical meaning. The general future marker ɣwɔ̀ is identical in form to the verb ɣwɔ̀ 'go', the remote future marker ɣʉ̄ is identical in form to the verb ɣʉ̄ 'do'.

As shown in Table 4, there are two variants of the imperfective marker in Ngombale, namely, mɔ́ and pɔ́. The selection of one or the other of these two variants is conditioned by either the grammatical context or the lexical context of the imperfective marker. Talking about the grammatical context, it can be said that the imperfective marker in Ngombale is realised as [mɔ́] after the hodiernal past marker jǎ/tě, and [pɔ́] after all other tense markers. As for the lexical context, one can say that the imperfective marker is realised as [mɔ́] after the first person singular subject pronoun and [pɔ́] after all nouns and all subject pronouns except the first person singular subject pronoun.

Ngombale does not allow the combination of the habitual meaning with the future tense meaning. Also, the combination of the habitual meaning with the hodiernal past meaning, as well as the near past meaning is not possible in Ngombale. The present tense meaning also appears to be incompatible with the

perfective meaning in Ngombale. Possible reasons for these incompatibilities can be found in 3.1 and 3.2 above.

Also worth noting is the fact that the imperfective marker in Ngombale has a progressive interpretation when co-occurring with future tense markings or the markers of the first and second degrees of remoteness in the past, whereas when co-occurring with the remote past marker or when used alone, it has either the progressive meaning or the habitual meaning.

4. A comparison of tense-aspect categories across Ghomalaʔ, Ngiemboon, and Ngombale

In this section, I undertake a synchronic comparison of the investigated languages with respect to the structure of tense-aspect categories, the form of tense-aspect markers, and the function of tense-aspect categories.

4.1 Structure of tense-aspect categories

A comparison of the languages analysed with respect to the structure of tense-aspect categories shows that in Ghomalaʔ, Ngiemboon, and Ngombale, the tense marker always precedes the aspect marker when both elements occur together. Each of the languages analysed distinguishes an Unmarked Tense-Aspect which is manifested by the lack of a tense and an aspect marking. In other words, the verb appears in the clause with no tense or aspect marking. Also, in each of the investigated languages, it is possible to have one or two tense markers (following each other) before the verb. The structure 'T T vb', that is, two tense markers following each other before the verb exclusively occurs in clauses where the Near Future or the Remote Future is used.

In Ghomalaʔ and Ngombale, aspect markers typically appear in pre-verbal position, whereas in Ngiemboon, they occur before or after the verb. Also, while in Ngiemboon and Ngombale only one aspect marker may occur before the verb, in Ghomalaʔ, it is possible to have two aspect markers following each other before the verb. The structure 'A A vb', that is, two aspect markers following each other before the verb is observed in clauses where a tense-aspect category that describes a progressive situation is used. Ghomalaʔ and Ngiemboon both mark the Perfect category. However, while in Ghomalaʔ the perfect marker appears before the verb, in Ngiemboon, it occurs after the verb.

Each of the target languages distinguishes a nasal consonant prefix that must accompany some tense and/or aspect markers. This nasal prefix, which typically occurs before the verb, does not have the same distribution from one language of the study to another. For instance, while in Ngiemboon a nasal consonant prefix

always occurs before the verb when the verb is preceded by the progressive marker (**nè**), in Ghomalaʔ, a nasal consonant prefix occurs before the verb when the verb is preceded by the progressive marker (**wɔ́**), except when the progressive marker is preceded by a future tense marker.

4.2 Form of tense-aspect markers

As shown in section 3, the tense-aspect markers that occur in the investigated languages may have any of the following four forms: (1) a free-standing marker, for example, the hodiernal past marker **jǎ/tě** in Ngombale, (2) a tonal marker, for example, the Imperfective in Ghomalaʔ is indicated by a high-low tone realised on the subject of the clause, (3) an affix, for example, the imperfective verb suffix in Ngiemboon, and (4) a portmanteau realisation of a tense marker and an aspect marker, for example, the Ngiemboon's near past habitual marker **kɔ̌:**. However, these four forms are not attested in all of the investigated languages. While in Ghomalaʔ the tense-aspect marker may be a free-standing marker or a tonal marker, in Ngiemboon, the tense-aspect marker may be a free-standing marker, a tonal marker, an affix or a portmanteau realisation of a tense marker and an aspect marker. Ngombale, on its part, only distinguishes free-standing tense-aspect markers.

4.3 Function of tense-aspect categories

In Ghomalaʔ and Ngiemboon, three distinct tense-aspect categories are used to talk about future perfective situations. These are: General Future, Near Future, and Remote Future. Ngombale makes use of two distinct tense-aspect categories to refer to future perfective situations: General Future and Remote Future. Worthy of note is that the function of the Remote Future in Ngombale, that is, the Remote Future describes future perfective situations that are going to take place either the day after the speech moment or any time thereafter, is identical to the functions of both the Near Future and Remote Future in Ghomalaʔ and Ngiemboon. In other words, a difference is observed between the investigated languages with respect to the function of the tense-aspect categories in that a single category in Ngombale, that is, the Remote Future, works as two distinct categories in Ghomalaʔ and Ngiemboon, namely the Near Future and the Remote Future.

In Ngombale, a single tense-aspect category, namely the Imperfective, is used to describe present progressive and present habitual situations. Ghomalaʔ and Ngiemboon use two distinct tense-aspect categories to describe present progressive and present habitual situations. That is, Ghomalaʔ distinguishes an Imperfective category and a Progressive category that are used to describe

present habitual and present progressive situations, respectively. Ngiemboon has a Habitual category and a Progressive category which are used to describe present habitual and present progressive situations, respectively.

In order to talk about past habitual situations, Ghomalaʔ and Ngiemboon make use of two distinct tense-aspect categories. In Ghomalaʔ, there is a Near Past Imperfective and a Remote Past Imperfective which are used to describe near past habitual and remote past habitual situations, respectively. In Ngiemboon, there is a Near Past Habitual and Remote Past Habitual which are used to describe near past habitual and remote past habitual situations, respectively. Ngombale stands out as unique among the investigated languages as far as the description of past habitual situations is concerned. In fact, based on my data analysis, I argue that past habitual situations concerned only remote past situations in Ngombale. That is, a hodiernal or a near past habitual interpretation is not possible in Ngombale. A single category, namely the Remote Past Imperfective is, therefore, used to describe past habitual situations in Ngombale.

In Ngiemboon and Ngombale, three distinct tense-aspect categories are used to talk about past progressive situations. These are the Hodienal Past Progressive, the Near Past Progressive, and the Remote Past Progressive in Ngiemboon, the Hodiernal Past Imperfective, the Near Past Imperfective, and the Remote Past Imperfective in Ngombale. Ghomalaʔ uses two distinct categories to describe past progressive situations: the Near Past Progressive and the Remote Past Progressive. Interestingly, the function of the Near Past Progressive in Ghomalaʔ, namely description of situations that were ongoing less than one month ago, is identical to the functions of both the Hodiernal Past Progressive and the Near Past Progressive in Ngiemboon or the Hodiernal Past Imperfective and the Near Past Imperfective in Ngombale. In other words, a single category in Ghomalaʔ, that is, the Near Past Progressive, operates as two distinct categories in Ngiemboon and Ngombale.

Ghomalaʔ and Ngiemboon are both analysed as having a Perfect category. However, while in Ghomalaʔ the Perfect may be used to present a state without any implication of how this state came about, in Ngiemboon, the Perfect may be used to present a current state as being the result of some past situation. No Perfect category has been established in Ngombale. However, the Unmarked Tense-Aspect in Ngombale may function as the Perfect in Ghomalaʔ.

Each of the three languages analysed distinguishes an Unmarked Tense-Aspect. While in Ghomalaʔ the Unmarked Tense-Aspect is used to replace a tense-aspect category already mentioned in a preceding sentence, in Ngiemboon, the Unmarked Tense-Aspect is used to describe a present state without any

implication of how this state came about or to replace a tense-aspect category already mentioned in a preceding sentence. Ngombale on its part uses the Unmarked Tense-Aspect in three different ways: (1) to express a past situation whose end is interpreted as just having occurred, (2) to present a current state without any implication of how this state came about, and (3) to replace a tense-aspect category mentioned in a preceding sentence.

In all, the comparison of the investigated languages with respect to the structure of tense-aspect categories, the form of tense-aspect markers, and the function of tense-aspect categories reveals that the languages analysed show similarities, but also huge differences with respect to tense-aspect categories.

5. Conclusion

This paper set out to describe and then compare tense-aspect features in three Bamileke languages, with a view to (1) providing a detailed description of the mechanisms for expressing tense-aspect categories in three Bamileke languages and (2) testing the hypothesis that Bamileke languages could be described in a common grammar. The study has demonstrated that there is an extensive inventory of tense-aspect markings in each of the languages analysed and that most of these markings (for example, the remote past marker lɔ̄ in Ghomlaʔ) seem to have a clear, single, basic function. The comparison of the investigated languages with respect to (1) the structure of tense-aspect categories, (2) the form of tense-aspect markers, and (3) the function of tense-aspect categories has revealed that the languages analysed show similarities, but also huge differences with respect to the tense-aspect categories. The paper neatly illustrates the fact that languages that are closely related can still have major differences at the verbal level (Nurse 2008: 25). Furthermore, it concludes with the observation that while it might be possible that at some point of time in the past Bamileke languages had the same grammar, (this assumption is based on the similarities between the investigated languages described in this paper, as well as the findings of previous scholars; see section 1) the differences currently observed between them, with respect to tense-aspect features, are so important that one has to acknowledge that Bamileke languages are not suitable candidates for inclusion in a common grammar. It would, therefore, be reasonable to describe different Bamileke languages in different grammar books. Similar research on the entire verbal system, as well as other aspects of grammar in the three languages compared in this paper and an extended number of Bamileke languages, will certainly provide useful information to substantiate these concluding remarks.

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