

The Verbal Category in Defaka: A Functional and Structural Description

Inoma Nsima Georg Essien
University of Benin, Benin City

Abstract

Language change due to, social, cultural and group loyalty; multilingualism and globalization may gradually lead to language shift or place the shifting language in an endangered state or outright extinction. This is the precarious state of Defaka, a tiny Ijoid language spoken in the share community of Nkoro in the Niger Delta Region of Rivers State, Nigeria. The purpose of this study is to provide a synchronic description of the functional and structural patterns of the Defaka verbal category. The qualitative research design was adopted. The data for this work was got through elicitations based on the 1700 SIL Comparative African Word List. Our primary consultants were fluent native speakers of the language between ages 45 and 78. The paper combined morphology and function in the description of the characteristics of the verbal category in Defaka. The description relied chiefly on the tenets of morphosyntactic theory. For the analysis of data however, we drew insight from Payne, (1997) and Halliday's 1985 Systemic functional theory of Grammar. The predicate phrase /clause in Defaka consists of obligatory tense-aspect markers and a verb. Because Defaka is an isolating language, TAM is associated with the phrase and not necessarily the verbal word. The basic experiential structure of the Defaka verbal category is S (AUX) F/P. F/P standing for the finite verb and predicator since they are always fused. Mood is not discussed in this paper.

Introduction

Defaka is a tiny endangered language spoken in the eastern fringe of the Niger Delta region in Rivers State, Nigeria. They occupy a single ward in a shared community with a dominant population of the Nkoro (traditionally known as Kirika by its indigenes), whose linguistic relatives are the Kalabari, Okrika and Iban. The immediate neighbours of Nkoro are the Opobo, Andoni, Ogoni and the Bonny people of Rivers State. A fragmented portion of the Defaka speaking community live on an island called Iwoma and some fishing settlements around Nkoro. Their predominant occupation is fishing, but they also engage in traditional crafts such as basket weaving, thatch making and petty trading. The Defaka are bilingual. They speak Defaka and Kirika. For some political reasons, the Defaka have ceded their political and linguistic rights to the Nkoro. Intergenerational transmission has long ceased and the language has reduced in its functional domains over the years. Defaka is barely spoken within the Defaka ward in Nkoro. The documentation of Defaka was partly for the purpose for possible revitalisation of the language, but the language suffers such relegation from the younger generation that its death is imminent.

The population of Defaka speakers as cited by Ethnologue is put at 2000 Lewis, (2009). The estimated number of fluent Defaka speakers since the last major research was carried out within and outside Nkoro is put at less than 50. The language may be extinct in another three or four decades. The youngest fluent speakers are within the ages of 40 and 50 years.

Previous Studies

Essien, 2013, 'A Grammar of Defaka' appears to be the only detailed grammatical description of Defaka presently. Jenewari (1989, pp8-9) however, examined lexical items in Defaka and its six linguistic neighbours for the purpose of linguistic classification. Based on his findings, he concluded that Defaka shares with these languages viz: (1) Ijo group, (2) Lower Niger group, (3) Delta Edo group, (4) Ogoni group, (5) Central Delta group and (6) Lower Cross group taken as a whole, a fairly large number of apparent cognates. To subgroup Ijo and Defaka, he provided substantial lexical evidence, even when obvious borrowings were excluded. Some of the grammatical similarity that provided evidence for the claim are the following: Defaka has an SOV word order; other generalizations consistent with typical SOV languages such as modifiers preceding their heads, tense markers occurring finally. Defaka like other Ijo lects has sex gender distinction in its pronominal system. These structural evidences gave credence to the classification of Defaka as an Ijoid language. Ijoid is all of the Ijo language cluster and Defaka. The other two linguistic descriptions of the sound system of Defaka were done by Bob-Manuel (1990), a long essay for the B.A degree and 'The Phonetic Structure of Defaka by Ladefoged, et (1990/97) and Ladefoged et al (1996/97).

Methodology

The qualitative research design is adopted. According to Neuman (2007:89) qualitative data involves documenting real events. Recording what people say, observing specific behaviours, studying written texts etc. Denscombe (2007:248) asserts that, qualitative research is closely related to the use of words to make a larger unit like text as the subject of analysis. This research aims to describe both structure and function of the verbal category in the Defaka language. The data for this work was got through elicitation based on the 1700 SIL Comparative African Word List. Our primary consultants were fluent native speakers of the language between ages 45 and 78. This paper is part a larger work done on the language. The field work lasted for a period of three years which involved documentation of aspects of the culture of the people. Audio and video recorders were used to both elicit and document data. Data extracted for the This paper combines morphology and function in the description of the characteristics of the verbal category in Defaka. The description relies chiefly on the tenets of morphosyntactic theory. For the analysis of data however, we have drawn insight from Payne, (1997) and Halliday's 1985 Systemic functional theory of Grammar. Discussion in the paper include, a description of the verb morphology and inflectional processes in the verbal system of Defaka.

Theoretical Framework

This paper combines morphology and function in the description of the characteristics of the verbal category in Defaka. The description relies chiefly on the tenets of morphosyntactic theory. For the analysis of data however, we have drawn insight from Payne, (1997) and Halliday's 1985 Systemic functional theory of Grammar. According to Payne (1997: p5) 'grammatical description commonly assume that language consists of form that people employ to 'mean' 'express' 'code' 'represent' or 'refer to' other things.' In this paper, our focus is to present the structural and functional characteristics of the verbal group in Defaka as a means of contributing to language universals. The structural framework describes the morphosyntax of the verbal system while the systemic functional theory of grammar is applicable for instantiating the text type; function in this instance, is not just the way the language is used, but function as an integral part of the analysis of the text type. According to Halliday, M. A.K. & Christian M.I.M. Matthiessen (1914: p30), writing a description of a grammar entails constant

shunting between the perspective of the system and the perspective of the instance. Combining these theoretic frameworks will provide insight into the structural patterns and functional system of the verbal group in Defaka.

Tone Realization

Defaka is a register tone language with two level tones, high and low. The high tone is marked with an acute accent (´), and the low tone with a grave accent (`). There are no contrastive or phonemic contour tones in Defaka. The Low-High (LH) and High-Low (HL) contour tones found on sequences of identical or unidentical vowels are considered to be phonetic realizations of different combinations of the two level tones. Contour tones do not occur on V- syllables, they are predictably found only on sequences of vowels. Bimoraic syllables do not bear contour tones.

Two pitch levels are identified in Defaka; downdrift and downstep. These are both phonetic processes involving register lowering. Evidence for downstep in Defaka is seen in the behaviour of clitics in the language. Grammatical or functional morphemes such as the progressive aspect marker, the negation marker, the possessive marker, the perfective aspect marker, and the locative, cliticize with a preceding host. Clitics are said to be void of prosody. They take on the tone of their host. In Defaka, when a clitic morpheme follows a low-toned host, it bears a low tone, but when it follows a high-toned host, it bears a downstepped high tone.

Basic Sentence Structure

Defaka is an SOV language, (subject-object-verb). The main syntactic means used for indicating semantic roles such as agent and patient is the grammatical role of subject and object. A basic sentence in Defaka consists of a subject and predicate. The subject is always a noun or a pronoun. Nouns or pronouns are not marked for case. There is, however, gender distinction in the third person singular pronoun. Verbs do not show agreement features with nouns or pronouns. As an SOV language, Defaka is ranked as a head final language. It, however, exhibits some characteristics of head initial languages. The definite article precedes its complement, demonstratives are pre-nominal, focus marking is head initial, auxiliaries are pre verbal, quantifiers and numerals are both pre and post nominal,

Defaka is a subject prominent language. Any element which precedes the predicate is the subject. The subject is never omissible except in some constructions such as the impersonal passive and imperative constructions where the subject is understood (passive and imperative constructions are not included in this discussion)

Empirical Review

The class of verbs in any language is the grammatical category that includes lexemes which express the least time-stable concepts e.g. events such as. Die, run, break, etc. (Givon 1984:51,54). Like nouns, verbs are prototypically defined in relation to the concept of time. according to Payn, (1997: p47) the morphosyntactic properties of verbs fall into two groups: distributional and structural. Distributional properties have to do with how words function in phrases, clauses etc. for instance verbs can serve as heads of verb phrases, predicates of clauses and they code events in a text. Structural properties have to do with the internal structure of the verb itself such as exhibiting subject verb agreement, tense, aspect and mode marking etc. Huddleston, R (1988: p. 37) describes the verb, as having amongst its most central members

the morphologically simplest words denoting actions, processes or events.... Members of this class carry inflections of tense, aspect and mood if the language has these as inflectional categories.

Thomas Bloor and Meriel Bloor (2013: p25) asserts that verbs show the greatest degree of variation in form (morphology) of any of the word classes. They can be subdivided in many different ways. Introduction to Functional Grammar (IFG) lists three basic subclasses- lexical, auxiliary and finite. Some fusional languages with very rich inflectional morphology may exhibit a wide range of variation in form, Defaka, however is an isolating or analytic language with minimal inflectional morphology. In this paper, we are limiting our discussion to tense and aspect primarily. Mood is only mentioned in passing for now. A detailed discussion will be done in another paper.

Jenewari, (1977, p. 440-441) discussed tense and aspect in Kalabari, an (eastern) Ijoid language. He says that most languages of the world have morphemes or combination of morphemes which are mutually dependent with the main verb and which express any of the following semantic categories (a) time (b) aspect denoting the initiation, duration, completion, repetition etc of a situation (c) mood, denoting the speaker's attitude towards a situation. Some languages use two separate sets of morphemes to express temporal and modal meaning. Languages like this are said to have a tense system and a modal system. Other languages such as Tarascan (Forster 1969:54) cited in Jenewari, (1977:440), use one set of morphemes or combinations of morphemes to express time and aspect and another set to express mode. Languages like this are said to have tense and aspect. Again, other languages use a single set of morphemes or combinations of morphemes to express time, aspect and mode; to this class of languages belong Kalabari. Thus, the term tense marker as applied to Kalabari in his work is an abbreviation for tense, aspect and modal marker.

In a further discussion of semantic distinctions expressed by the tense markers, he says that, the features pertaining to time and aspect involve binary (or bilateral) applications, while those pertaining to mode generally involve multilateral opposition. The distinction of time reference in Kalabari is future versus non-future. (see examples in Jenewari, 1977:441). Defaka exhibits a similar time reference-future and non- future. The discussion on tense in 1.8. and examples provided will attest to this claim.

According to Kekai (2019, p. 4), Izon tenses can be divided into present, past and future tenses conforming to the time line proposed in Comrie, 1985 with aspect clearly delineated as perfective and imperfective. While **-mé** marks past time, and indicates location in time, that is prior to the moment of speaking **-íí** codes the point in time coinciding with the moment of speech. The future tense which locates a situation in time subsequent to the time of an utterance is marked with the suffix **-minimi** and distinguished from the factitive marker **-nimi**. She concludes that Izon morphologises the time of events around the deictic centre. Hence a distinction can be made between the present as against past and future events. A factitive marker, **nimi** indicating the state of affairs as realis or present indicative mood at speech time is also interpreted. Aspectual markers however, may be post or pre-verbal and contribute to argument selection and event distribution. Some imperfective markers may function as base forms in isolation, but when used in company of other verbs they contribute to the temporal distinction of the verbs. (Kekai, 2016, p. 97).

From the foregoing, we observe that Ijoid languages mark tense and aspect morphologically. Whereas Kalabari and Defaka encode a two- way distinction of time

reference, Izon, (a southern Ijoid variety) exhibits a three- way time reference. Aspectual markers however, may be pre or post verbal in all cases.

Basic Characteristics and Tonal Manifestations of the Defaka Verb Form

This paper provides a description of the verb morphology and verbal system of Defaka. The description is concerned with the structural patterns and inflectional processes that operate within the system. Serial verb construction and other verbal processes which interact with certain syntactically-based phenomena will not be discussed

A verb root in its citation form is not distinguishable from a noun in terms of its phonological make up as in some languages, such as the Central Delta languages where verbs always begin with consonants and nouns with vowels. Such distinction is not applicable in Defaka. Morphologically, however, only verbs take inflectional suffixes which mark tense, aspect and mood. Verbs in the language can be sub-divided into dynamic and stative verbs. Stative verbs may bear a variety of tone patterns as the following examples show.

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1) óómà ‘be wide’ | náángá ‘be long’ |
| ìtì ‘swell’ | í!bá ‘be short’ |
| órúò ‘smell’ | sííkè ‘be low’ |
| íjókó ‘be beautiful’ | ìbò ‘be big/ fat’ |
| òrè ‘be black’ | máámáá ‘be dim’ |

Stative verbs have very few aspectual markings. When they occur in the progressive and in the future tense, they have an inceptive meaning as in (2 a and b); in the factitive however, the stative verb always has a present tense meaning as in (2c). The tone of the stative verb does not change in any of these verbal conjugations

- 2a) á!rí párà=rì ìbò-mà
her leg =PROG big-FACT
‘Her leg in becoming big’
- b) á ìbò-kà
3fem fat-FUT
‘She will become fat’
- c) á ìbò-mà
3fem fat-FACT
‘she is fat’

Action or dynamic verbs almost always bear low tones in the imperative. There are only few exceptions to this. Examples of such verbs are **ńgíè** ‘run’, **síá** ‘go’ **ísò** ‘come’ **íkúrí** ‘crawl’ **ńbú** ‘drink’ **ítá** ‘take’ Dynamic verbs do not have aspectual restrictions. Generally, when dynamic verbs occur without an object in the past and future tenses, and in the perfect(ive) aspect, their tones are always low, with the exception of a few verbs with inherently high tones; but when they occur with an object, they almost always bear high low tonal pattern. Some aspectual paradigms, however, have tonal patterns that are unique to them like the habitual aspect, as shown in 1.8.4.2 below. Most verbs in Defaka are bi-moraic. There are only few

exceptions to this as well; the majority of which copy the vowels of the verb stem as we observe in (3). (not that the examples below are not exhaustive)

Vowel Copying trisyllabic

- 3) kákárí (be) 'dry'
kpókpròró 'roll'
èkèkè (be) 'flat'
pérèré 'stumble'

There are hardly any polysyllabic verbs attested from the available data except ònìòmà 'send' and òkùnòmà 'end'. Others are verbs derived via compounding as we find in example (4)

- 4) òfòrò lèlè 'blow away' èzé isó 'descend'
'blow sell' 'drop come'
évé àkúma 'throw away' jàkìmà sià 'return'
'throw loose' 'change go'

Tense

We shall discuss verbal conjugations in Defaka with reference to tense and aspect. Tense is a deictic category which locates situations in time. In terms of situational location in time, we can identify two time reference: future and non-future. Aspect, on the hand, is not concerned with relating the time of a situation to any other time point, but rather with the internal temporal organization of the situation described by the verb; it is concerned with the manner in which the verbal action is expressed. (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973, p, 40). The interaction of tense and aspect produces various aspectual contrasts in the language.

Formal marking of tense distinction

The formal marking of tense distinction includes the use of affixal and non-affixal clitic auxiliaries. With dynamic verbs, the past tense and the present tense are indistinguishable. In other words, the present tense is not overtly marked in constructions involving dynamic verbs. The future tense stands out clearly. Other aspectual distinctions are marked by a combination of affixes attached to the verb stem and clitic auxiliaries, which copy the tone of a preceding lexical item which is most often the subject of the sentence. Verb inflections attached to the verb stem always bear low tones, except the perfect (ive) aspect marker which is a toneless morpheme.

According to Payn, (1997, p. 84) auxiliary verbs satisfy the morphosyntactic definition of verbs and they carry at least some of the inflectional information normally associated with verbs. However, they are auxiliary in that they do not embody the major conceptual relation, state, or activity expressed by the clause. They are often semantically empty. A common feature with the non-affixal clitic auxiliaries in Defaka is that, they are always of the form **ri** and their tonal behaviour is the same. They bear low tones when they follow a low-toned host and a down-stepped high- tone when they follow a high toned host. It is most likely that these auxiliaries have the same verbal origin.

Declarative Sentences and Tense Distinction

Declarative sentences involving stative verbs have an inherent present tense meaning. When they occur in the future tense they have an inceptive meaning. With dynamic verbs, however, the present tense is not overtly marked. In other words, whether the meaning of the sentence is

in the present or past tense depends on speaker-hearer orientation. The sentences in (5 & 6) below are usually given a past tense interpretation by native speakers, but they could also convey a present tense meaning depending on the context. We will therefore conclude that there is no overt marker for the present tense with dynamic verbs while a dynamic verb to which the factitive marker **mà**, is attached, primarily indicates past tense.

- 5a) ì tìnà sònó-mà
1sg fish buy-FACT
'I buy/bought fish'
- b) í tìnà sònó-mà
2sg fish buy-FACT
'you buy/bought fish'
- c) á tìnà sònó-mà
3sgf fish buy-FACT
'she buy/bought fish'

Stative Verbs

- 6a) ì ìbò-mà
1sg fat-FACT
'I am fat'
- b) á ìbò-mà
3sgf fat-FACT
'she is fat'
- c) í ìbò-mà
2sg fat-FACT
'you are fat'

Future Tense

The future tense is marked by an invariable low-toned suffix **kà**. There are two ways futurity can be expressed; suffixing the future tense marker **ka** to the verb indicates an imminent future situation, as shown in (7a) while the other (7b) indicates futurity without any implication of imminent futurity;-desiderative.

- 7a) ì áruá túà-kà
1sg soup cook-FUT
'I will cook soup'
- wá áruá túà-kà
1pl soup cook-FUT
'We will cook soup'

Other forms

- 7b) ì sò tìnà sònò-mà
1sg DES fish buy-FACT
'I intend to buy fish'
- c) *ì sò tìnà sònò-kà
1sg DES fish buy-FUT
'I intend to buy fish will'

The sentences in (7a&b) express futurity and intention. **sò** in (b) is derived from the lexical verb **ísò** ‘come’. Note that **sò** and **kà** cannot co-occur in a simple sentence, therefore a sentence like (7c) is ungrammatical. A similar situation has been cited in Akan by (Osam,2002:121), where the lexical verb **ba** ‘come’ has developed into an aspectual marker of futurity in the affirmative. **sò** in Defaka can occur both in the affirmative and negative as in (8 a &b) respectively.

- 8a) ì sò jáà túà-mà
 1sg DES something cook-FACT
 ‘I intend to cook something’
b) ì sò jáà túà=rè
 1sg DES something cook=NEG
 ‘I don’t intend to cook something’

Aspect

Aspect in Defaka is marked by the interaction of clitic auxiliary verbs, tense markers and some lexicalized formatives. According to Payn (1997, p. 242) aspect marking frequently is located in various positions in the clause. For example, Ewe aspect markers occur as a verbal suffix, a clause final particle and an auxiliary combined with a word order change. Furthermore, Payn (1997, pp. 233,234) describes tense, aspect and mood (TAM for short) as operations that anchor or ground the information expressed in a clause according to its sequential, temporal or epistemological orientation. Tense is associated with the sequence of events in real time, aspect with the internal temporal structure of a situation, while mode relates the speaker’s attitude towards the situation etc. Bybee (1985, p. 31) cited in Payn (1997, p. 234) states that 74 percent of the languages in her randomized sample have morphological manifestation of aspect in the verb. Defaka marks TAM morphologically as we observed in the examples for tense above and as shown in the examples in 1.9.1 and others below.

Perfect/perfective aspect

The perfect and perfective aspects are morphologically indistinguishable with dynamic verbs since they are marked by a combination of the clitic auxiliary = **ri** and the toneless perfective suffix **a**. Semantically, however, they might be distinguished based on contextual interpretation. The perfect aspect indicates a past situation with present relevance, while the perfective aspect views a situation as a whole regardless of the time contrast which may be part of it. (Crystal 1997). While =**ri** occurs before the verb, between the subject and the object, **a** is suffixed to the verb. See below for a discussion on the status of =**ri**

- 9) ì=rì síá-!á
 1sg =PRE go-PF
 ‘I have gone’
 á=!rí ééńáà èè=à
 3sgf=PRE food eat-PF
 ‘She has eaten’
 ní!rí ómgbìńàà súkù=à
 3pl =PRE dress wash-PF
 ‘They have washed the dresses’

The present perfect aspect exists in the present perfect verb form with dynamic verbs only. Stative verbs occur only in the perfective present verb form, because the perfective aspect views a situation from its terminal point. To mark the perfective aspect in the sentences in (10), a lexical item **bíà** ‘past’ which denotes a completed action is introduced.

- 10) ì=rì bíà ísò ñirè=à
 1sg =PRE past come black=PF
 ‘I have become black’
 wá=!rí bíà ísò ìbò=à
 1pl =PRE past come fat =PF
 ‘We have become fat’
 ní=!rí bíà ísò náńgá=!á
 3pl =PRE past come tall PF
 ‘They have become tall’

Perfective past

Both dynamic and stative verbs can occur in the perfective past. The perfective past indicates an action that has been completed prior to the moment of speaking. The difference between the perfective present and the perfective past is the absence of the lexical item **ísò** ‘come’ in the latter. **ísò** ‘come’ is what marks the state of being or becoming.

- 11) à ǵáí=!rí bíà ǵéké=!á
 DEF man =PF past fall =PF
 ‘The man had fallen’
 à álà=rì bíà tùà=à
 DEF woman =PF past cook =PF
 ‘The woman had cooked’

Perfective Future

The perfective future occurs only in conditional clauses. The perfective future hosts the unfulfilled aspect maker **sòǵá** and the subordinator **mbíá** ‘before’. **sòǵá** is a modal auxiliary verb derived from the verb **ísò** ‘come’ and the correlative conjunction **í!ǵá** ‘also’ while **mbíá** is a locative adverb. The presence of **sòǵá** in the subordinate clause indicates an action yet to be carried out at some future time. The main clause hosts the perfective aspect. Verb stem tones in the main clause are same as for the perfective aspect.

- 12a) Í sòǵá ísò-mà mbíá ì=rì tùà múmá=!á
 2sg UNAUX come-FACT before 1sg =PRE cook finish =PF
 ‘Before you arrive, I would have finished cooking’

 b) í sòǵá à áńdù jàà múmá-mà mbíá ì=rì ǵùòééńáà =tè ísò=à
 2sg UNAUX DEF boat do finish-FACT before 1sg =PRE fishing =LOC come =PF
 ‘Before you finish mending the boat, I would have returned from fishing’

Imperfective Aspect

The imperfective is concerned with the internal time structuring of a verbal act. Tense and aspect combine in various ways to produce the following aspectual forms.

Progressive Aspect

The progressive aspect expresses a single unbroken action that began in the past and is still continuing at the moment of speaking. The progressive is marked by a combination of the clitic auxiliary **ri** which occurs after the subject and an invariable low-toned factitive **mà** which is suffixed to the verb. The final tone of the verb root preceding the factitive marker is almost always high except for lexical items such as **ńgíè** ‘run’ in (13a) with an inherent tone pattern that hardly undergoes change.

- 13a) ì=rì ńgíè-mà
 1sg =PROG run-FACT
 ‘I am running’
 ì=rì ńgíè dzírí dzíkà òjá-mà
 1sg =PROG run book house go-FACT
 ‘I am running to school’
- b) bómà=!rí àngá-mà
 PN =PROG build-FACT
 ‘Boma is building’
 bómá=!rí dzíkà àngá-mà
 PN =PROG house build-FACT
 ‘Boma is building a house’

As stated earlier in 1.8.2, when stative verbs occur in the progressive, they have an inchoative or inceptive meaning as shown in the examples in 14.

- 14) àmàpà=rì ìbò-mà
 PN =PROG fat-FACT
 ‘Amanyà is becoming fat’
- gògò ójò=rì pìrà káà m̀bá-mà
 PN face =PROG red-manner stay-FACT
 ‘Gogo’s face is becoming red’

Factitive

Following Nwigwe, (2003:37), the factitive or factive describes situations which are either fully developed at the moment of speaking or have reached a point of stable development at the moment of speaking, so the result is a past tense meaning. In Defaka, the factitive is primarily interpreted as past with dynamic verbs, and present with stative verbs. The factitive marker is an invariable low-toned morpheme **mà**, see examples in (13 and 14) above.

Habitual

The habitual and iterative aspects are not marked by means of any bound or free morphemes unique to them in Defaka. They are expressed by reduplication of the verb with the factitive marker attached to the reduplicated verb. They express events that repeatedly occur without time lag; actions or events which used to take place in the past, present but not necessarily at the moment of speaking. The tone of the verb depends on the presence or absence of an object.NP, although some verbs do not change their inherent tone pattern.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 15a) –obj NP | + obj NP |
| ò lèlèlèlè-mà | ò jáà lélélélé-mà |
| 3sgm sell sell-FACT | 3sgm something sell sell-FACT |
| ‘He sells or used to sell’ | ‘He used to sell things’ |
| b) à tùàtùà-mà | á jáà túátúá-mà |
| 3sgf cook cook-FACT | 3sgf something cook cook-FACT |
| ‘She sells or used to sell’ | ‘she used to cook something’ |
| c) wá ìbìbì-mà | wá ìbìjàà tòò=tè ìbìbì-mà |
| 1pl sleep sleep-FACT | 1pl mat top =LOC sleep sleep-FACT |
| ‘We sleep or used to sleep’ | ‘We used to sleep on the mat’ |

In the sentences (15) above, we observe tonal alternations between construction with an object NP and those without one. The reduplicated verbs in constructions without an object NP maintain low tones. Those with an object NP vary their tones depending on the phonological nature of the verb. Reduplicated verbs with an initial consonant take on high tones while those which begin with vowels copy the final tone of the object. Generally, verb stem tones are raised in the habitual aspect, when there is an object NP.

Past Progressive

The past progressive indicates a progressive action which held at some point in the past. It is usually expressed in a subordinate clause which forms a background to the action expressed in the main clause. The past progressive combines two inflectional paradigms –the progressive aspect and the past tense. The past progressive aspect can be framed with the subordinate clause occurring in sentence-initial position or sentence final position. When it occurs in sentence initial position, the raising of the subordinate clause triggers cleftivization. The non-subject focus marker **ndò** occurs and the complimentizer **ke**, which occurs with the non-subject focus marker to mark scope, takes on the function of the factitive morpheme in the main clause. Note that Dekaf has a clitic subject focus marker =**kə** and a low toned non subject focus marker **ndò**

- 16a) í!bá=té ì à ówú líkí-mà
yesterday =LOC 1sg DEF masquerade look-FACT
‘Yesterday, I watched the masquerade’
- b) ì=rì à ówú ésé-mà kía ndò á ísò kè
1sg =PROG DEF masquerade see-FACT time NSFOC 3sgf come COMP
‘When I was watching the masquerade, she came’
- c) í=!rí à ídò íjá-mà kía ndò ò dzíkà nsúá kè
2sg =PROG DEF farm go-FACT time NSFOC 3msc house enter COMP
‘When you were going to the farm, he entered into the house’

In the sentences in (17), the main clause occurs sentence initially and there is no cleftivization

- 17a) á ísò-mà kìà ì=rì à ówú é̀sè-mà
 3sg come-FACT time 1sg DEF masquerade see-FACT
 ‘she came, when I was watching the masquerade’
- b) ò dzíkà òsúá-mà í!rí à ídò òjá-mà kìà
 3sgm house enter-FACT 2sg=PROG DEF farm go-FACT time
 ‘He entered into the house when you were going to the farm’

Discussion

The predicate phrase /clause in Defaka consists of obligatory tense-aspect markers and a verb. (because Defaka is an isolating language TAM is associated with the phrase and not necessarily the verbal word). This is what Halliday and Matthiessen (2014:396) refer to as lexical, finite and auxiliary verb. The auxiliary verb comes in between the finite verb and the lexical verb. In Defaka, an OV language, the auxiliary verb precedes the lexical verb; the tensed lexical verb standing for both the finite operator and the event. The low toned factitive finite operator **ma**, the low toned future tense marker **ka** and the clitic perfective aspect marker **=a** are the only finite operators in the language. These are suffixes/clitic attached the lexical verb. They combine with the clitic homophone **=ri** which is the only typical auxiliary verb in the language to express various tense and aspectual forms. The unfulfilled auxiliary **soba** and other lexicalized formatives instantiate various aspectual and modal operations. The other marker of futurity is the low toned **so** (desiderative) which expresses intention. The tense aspect markers follow the verb or as in some aspectual paradigms, the auxiliary verbs precede the main verb.

The verb may also be preceded by a modal verb as shown in (18d)

- 18a) à tùà-mà
 3sgf cook-FACT
 ‘She cooked’
- b) ní=!rí tùà=a
 3pl =PRE cook=PF
 ‘They have cooked’
- c) wá=!rí tùà-mà
 1pl =PROG cook-FACT
 ‘We are cooking’
- d) wá mbékè tùà-kà
 1pl mod cook-FUT
 ‘We can cook OR We will be able to cook’

The basic experiential structure of the Defaka verbal category is S (AUX) F/P. F/P standing for the finite verb and predicator since they are always fused together.

Conclusion.

Language death or loss is a wide spread phenomenon. Quoting (Tsunoda 2005, p. 1), in almost every part of the world, minority peoples' languages are disappearing and this is taking place at an alarming speed. Also, a great many languages have already become extinct.' When a language dies, all of its cultural wisdom dies with it. Documentation and description of such endangered languages is a worthwhile venture. Such descriptions will definitely preserve the gap that their exit will create in the knowledge of linguistic universals. Describing the grammar of Defaka, which this paper forms a part has proved to be an endeavour in the right direction and has further buttressed the Ijoid classification. The verbal structure of Defaka falls very much in place with that of Ijo. Defaka has an SOV word order, tense and aspect are marked morphologically within the phrase; tense markers occur finally. We only mentioned modal operations in passing in this paper. A more detailed discussion will be done on mood in Defaka in another paper.

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List of Abbreviations and Conventions

!	= phonetic representation of downstep
*	= ungrammatical
-	= morpheme break
=	= clitic break
1sg	= first person singular pronoun
2sg	= second person singular pronoun
3sgf	= third person singular feminine pronoun
3sgm	= third person singular masculine pronoun
1pl	= first person plural pronoun
2pl	= second person plural pronoun
3pl	= third person plural pronoun
FACT	= factitive
NEG	= negative
DEF	= definite
LOC	= locative
PN	=personal name
FUT	= future
PF	= perfective
DES	= desiderative
PROG	=progressive
PRE	= present
REL	= relative
SER	=serializer
MOD	= modal auxiliary verb
COMPL	= complimentizer
SFOC	= subject focus marker
NSFOC	= non-subject focus marker