F(i) morpheme in Igala

Introduction. This paper discusses the morpheme *f(i)* in Igala (Benue-Congo), an isolating tenseless language of Nigeria. I argue that (i) *f(i)* has perfective meaning and (ii) is not an aspectual morpheme, but rather a grammaticalized serial verb construction (SVC).

Perfective meaning. Completed events in Igala occur with *f(i)*, which cannot be used in ongoing or habitual situations (1).

(1) ù   f(i)   òdʒ(e) àbă̆tʃà hì
     1SG PERF morsel cassava cook
     'I {have cooked}/{*habitually cook}/{*am cooking} mashed cassava.'

Most perfectives are bounded events, with initial and final points within the reference time (Kratzer 1998). In structures with *f(i)*, the event occurs completely within the time frame of the adverbial phrase (2).

(2) í   f(i)   ùŋì   ŋʷū   kʷɔ́   nǎ nâ   gò
     3SG PERF house 3SG.POSS paint 1SG PROG look/watch
     'She painted her house while I watched.'

The perfective may have termination or culmination entailments (Toews 2015). Perfectives of atelic verbs may lack final points as opposed to telic verbs which have culmination/termination entailments (Bar-el 2005, Toews 2015). This distinction holds in Igala; *f(i)* can occur in *She danced all night and is still dancing*, but not in *#I wrote a book and I'm still writing it.*

F(i) is also incompatible with negation, which is more common for perfectives than other aspects, particularly in Nigerian languages (Mietsamo & van der Auwera 2011). Even outside of Niger-Congo (eg. Russian), imperfective aspect is preferred under negation (*ibid.*).

Syntax of *f(i)***.** In contrast to the progressive and imperfective aspects, *f(i)* does not behave like a regular aspectual morpheme: it is incompatible with intransitive verbs and it causes a change in word order, from VO to OV (compare progressive in (3) with *f(i)* in (1)).

(3) ù   nâ   hʲ   òdʒ(e) àbátʃà
     1SG PROG cook mashed cassava
     'I was cooking mashed cassava.'

Finally, *f(i)* cannot be used with all transitive verbs; for example, *ka* 'take ' occurs with the morpheme *m(u)* which appears to have a similar meaning, and can additionally occur with some intransitive verbs. (I focus on *f(i)* so I don't propose an analysis for *m(u)*).

Given that *f(i)* occurs with a subset of verbs, is in complementary distribution with another morpheme with similar meaning and triggers word order change, I propose that it is not a real aspectual morpheme, but a grammaticalized SVC. SVCs (4) act as a single predicate without any overt marker and tend to undergo grammaticalization, including into TAM categories (Aikhenvald 2006).

(4) álādì l(a)   ádʒūwē̄ hì
     aladi buy chicken cook

'Aladi bought a chicken and cooked it.'

The behaviour of *f(i)* is close to similar constructions in Sinitic languages, for example, the Mandarin *ba*-construction, often used in sentences with a perfective meaning (Liu 1997), and sometimes argued to be a SVC. As *f(i)*, it requires an object (Sun 2018).

Conclusion. In this paper, I analyse Igala constructions with *f(i)* as grammaticalized SVC with perfective meaning. My analysis provides cross-linguistic support for the grammaticalization of SVCs by showing close similarities between aspects in unrelated isolating languages.

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