
THE SYNTAX AND SEMANTICS OF MOOD IN GOKANA

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ABSTRACT

*Every natural language provides a systematic structure for the expression of the truth value of the speakers' assertion within discourse structure. This paper described the syntax and semantics of mood within a formal linguistic framework. The study found that two types of mood: the imperative and the indicative are attested in Gokana. The imperative mood is expressed in the form of commands and requests, while the indicative occur as an unmarked mood in the language. The paper showed that the imperative mood in Gokana can be overtly or covertly marked in surface syntax depending on the number features of the subject. The study reported that request structures are distinguished from commands in the language by the insertion of the politeness markers *sóosóo* or *zẹẹ* in sentence-initial position of the construction. And noted that for a greater degree of politeness, these markers can co-occur as *sóosóo zẹẹ* but the linear sequence of the markers cannot be inverted. The study re-analyzed what Wolff (1964) identified as the aorist tense in Gokana as the simple form of the indicative mood as time contrasts are not grammaticalized in the simple indicative mood.*

KEYWORDS: Gokana, Mood, Syntax, Imperative, Indicative, Modality, Grammatical Structure.

Introduction

This paper analyzed the grammar of mood in Gokana. Gokana is spoken in Gokana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria by approximately 200,000 people. It is closely related to Baan, Eleme, Tee and Kana. These languages form a genetic unity and Williamson and Blench (2000:33) classify them in Delta-Cross of Cross River within the Bantoid-Cross of the East Benue-Congo branch of Benue-Congo.

Defining Mood

The syntactic as well as semantic analysis of mood as a grammatical category and the study of the distribution and function of modal elements have attracted significant attention in linguistics.

According to Crystal (1997:247) mood is:

“A term used in the theoretical and descriptive study of sentence/clause types, and especially of the verbs they contain. Mood (‘modality’) or (‘mode’) refers to a set of syntactic and semantic contrasts signaled by alternative paradigms of the verb, e.g. indicative (the unmarked form), subjunctive, imperative... Semantically, a wide range of meanings is involved, especially

attitudes on the part of the speaker towards the factual content of the utterance”.

Mood is the verbal category whose function is to relate a verbal action to the speaker’s attitude towards a situation. The speaker’s attitude may be that of certainty, ability, necessity, prohibition, possibility, compulsion, etc. (Ndimele 1993:88).

Huddleston (1988:79) and Isaac (2003:174) distinguish grammatical mood from semantic modality. The area of meaning termed modality contrasts with the meaning involved in an assured factual assertion. Modality is expressed by a variety of linguistics devices, lexical, grammatical and prosodic.

Methodology

The researcher collected data from fluent native speakers of Gokana with the help of field assistants. The researcher also relied on his intuition as a native speaker of the language but where any given set of data contradicted his intuition, direct oral interview was used to elicit comparative data from other native speakers of the language. Secondary sources of data such as texts and library materials were also utilized.

Analyzing Mood in Gokana

Two types of mood are attested in the grammatical structure of Gokana: the imperative mood and the indicative mood.

A. The Imperative Mood

The imperative mood “is used in requests, which according to circumstances may range from brusque commands to humble entreaties, the tone generally serving as key to the exact meaning” (Zandvoort 1963). Lyons (1968:307) also states that the imperative is not only used to express commands but to give instructions.

In Gokana, commands and requests are expressed in the imperative mood.

i. Commands

Generally, statements that express commands in Gokana may or may not have an overt subject. The covert or overt marking of the subject depends on the grammatical category of number and person.

Examples:

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- | | | | |
|----|-----------------|------|-----|
| 1) | tú | ní | í |
| | Take(sg) | this | one |
| | ‘Take this one’ | | |

- | | | | |
|----|-----------------|------|-----|
| 2) | dé | ní | á |
| | Eat(sg) | that | one |
| | 'Eat that!' | | |
| 3) | tu-i | níí | í |
| | take(pl).suff | this | one |
| | 'Take this one' | | |
| 4) | dé-i | ní | á |
| | Eat(pl).suff | that | one |
| | 'Eat that' | | |

The commands expressed by the constructions in (1-2) have a singular subject, while those in (3-4) have a plural subject. This accounts for the presence of the second person plural suffix -i in (3-4), while it is lacking in (1-2). Thus, in Gokana, a plural imperative subject is not deleted in surface syntax. It is marked on the verb. By contrast, a singular subject is not overtly marked.

Occasionally, for an emphatic command, the second person pronoun is used as the subject of the imperative sentence in both singular and plural.

Examples:

- | | | |
|----|------------------------|------|
| 5) | oro | sì |
| | you(sg) | go |
| | 'You go!' | |
| 6) | booro | tu-i |
| | you(pl) take(pl). suff | |
| | 'You take!' | |

Unlike the constructions in (1-2), a singular imperative subject is overtly marked as in (5) when an emphatic command is intended.

ii. Request

When in Gokana a request is intended, **sóosóo** or **zẹẹ** but not **zẹẹ sóosóo** is used to begin the construction. These expressions are stronger in meaning than 'please'. They can be called politeness markers. A construction that begins with **sóosóo zẹẹ** has a greater degree of politeness than one, which begins with either **sóosóo** or **zẹẹ**.

Examples:

- | | | | | |
|----|------------------------|-----|------|----|
| 7) | zẹẹ | gbá | nè | m |
| | please | sew | give | me |
| | 'Please sew it for me' | | | |
| 8) | sóosóo | gbá | nè | m |
| | please | sew | give | me |
| | 'Please sew it for me' | | | |

9)	sóosóo	zẹẹ	gbá	nè	m
	please	please	sew	give	me
	'PLEASE sew it for me'				

B. Indicative Mood

"... It is customary to refer to the unmarked sentences as also being in a certain mood; and the traditional term for this unmarked mood is indicative (or declarative)" (Lyons 1968:307).

I would rather argue that sentences that are unqualified with respect to the attitude of the speaker towards what he is saying also portray a certain mood. It is appropriate to classify such expressions under mood since they are inherently factual, even though they lack morphological markers that semantically indicate the speaker's attitude.

In this paper, I have re-analyzed what Wolff (1964:46) identified as the aorist in Gokana as the simple form of the indicative mood. According to Wolff, "the aorist is a verbal construction in which a simple verb occurs preceded by a noun or pronoun subject and whose meaning is a statement of fact". The aorist is used when the speaker wishes to assert the truth value or fact of what he is saying. Such sentences do not relate a situation (action, event, state etc.) to time (tense), neither do they indicate the internal temporal constituency of a situation (aspect). It is on this basis that I re-classify the aorist as the simple form of the indicative mood in Gokana.

There is no deictic reference in the simple form of the Gokana indicative structure.

"It is now generally accepted that tense involves, not just temporal reference as such, but deictic temporal reference: i.e. that it involves reference to a point or interval of time which is determined in relation to the moment of utterance". (Lyons 1995:313).

No grammatical marker (whether segmental or suprasegmental) or lexical item occurs to signal time contrasts in the simple form of the indicative structures. So time contrasts are not grammaticalized or lexicalized in the simple form of the Gokana indicative mood.

Examples:

10)	Víkóò	fé	gbógó	
	PN	kill	dog	
	'Vikoo killed a dog'			
11)	Lédùm	di	bon	í
	PN	be	village	this
	'Ledum is in this village'			

The disparity in the deictic reference of the English glosses of (10-11) is another piece of evidence in support of this analysis. Observe that the verbs in (10-11) have no grammatical marker to show a difference in interpretation. Why the English glosses in (10) and (11) differ will remain a puzzle if we consider such constructions to be rendered in a given tense. But the problem is resolved when we consider these constructions as 'tenseless' and 'aspectless'. The simple form of the indicative mood is 'tenseless' because it does not relate a situation to time.

On the other hand, it is 'aspectless' because it does not indicate the internal temporal constituency of a situation.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have analyzed the syntax and semantics of mood as a verbal category in Gokana. Two sub-types of mood: the imperative and the indicative are attested in the grammatical structure of the language.

The paper reported that the imperative mood is expressed in the form of commands and requests. The study found that the imperative in Gokana can be overtly or covertly marked depending on the number features of the subject. If the subject is singular, then its overt realization in the command structure is suppressed in surface syntax. On the other hand, if the subject is plural, then it is overtly realized as a suffix in the verbal morphology of the command structure.

The study reported that request structures are distinguished from commands in Gokana by the insertion of the politeness markers *sóosóo* or *zẹẹ* in sentence-initial position of the construction. The paper showed that a greater degree of politeness is achieved when these markers are combined but noted that the permitted linear sequence of the politeness markers is *sóosóo zẹẹ* and not *zẹẹ sóosóo*.

The study re-analyzed what Wolff (1964:46) identified as the aorist tense in Gokana as the simple form of the indicative mood, on the basis that the aorist does not relate a situation (action, event, state, etc.) to time, neither does it indicate the internal temporal constituency of a situation. Thus, time references are not grammaticalized in the simple form of the Gokana indicative mood.

Recommendations

- 1) The study recommended a detailed investigation of the semantics of modal verbs in Gokana.
- 2) The study also recommended a grammatical analysis of the interface relations between mood and modality in Gokana.

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