

## CROSS-LINGUISTIC STUDY OF TENSE AND ASPECT IN ENGLISH AND KHANA LANGUAGES

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### **Abstract**

*Whenever there are conflicting language specific rules inherent in two languages, there is bound to be a learning problem. Thus, this study contrasted conflicting tense and aspectual features of the English and Khana languages with the aim of ascertaining potential problems Khana users of the English language may experience as they learn the English language. This study is theoretically anchored on Chomsky's Minimalist Program and Lado's Contrastive Analysis. The methodology was descriptive. Data which were predominantly primary were supplied and translated by native speakers of Khana. Findings revealed the overt, elaborate and complicated nature of the English tense and aspectual features against the rather covert nature of Khana. The dissimilarities hamper the Khana/English bilinguals' proficiency in speech and writing. This study, therefore, recommends among other things that teachers of the English language should plan lessons in a way that areas that constitute problems in the target language as a result of the dissimilarities between the target and native languages are given better attention. This study concluded that a cross-linguistic study such as this is a crucial panacea that uncovers the hidden secrets behind the unending linguistic challenges of non-native speakers of the English language.*

**Keywords:** Language, aspect, tense, language, overt, covert, Khana

### **Introduction**

Every ethno-linguistic space is endowed with a unique linguistic property that makes communication and association among members achievable. This linguistic property creates in a group of people an underlying idea of linguistic oneness. This natural endowment therefore, is exclusive and differs from one group to another. Despite the fact that several languages abound, the English

language plays a key role in communication in such a highly multilingual terrain like Nigeria. This is because the English language is given the credit for its intelligibility in a multilingual Nigeria and has thus assumed the role of a lingua franca. As the lingua franca, it serves as the language of politics, commerce, sports and most importantly, education.

As the language of education, the English language is taught from the cradle to the university, yet, the ineptitude of learner's manifest in transparent dimensions especially as it relates to aspects of grammar which are present in the indigenous languages of learners but absent in the English language and vice versa. This has necessitated the linguistic inquiry of studying the grammatical configurations of the English language tense and aspect against those of the Khana language.

The grammatical category which deals with tense and aspect is the verb. In any grammatical utterance, the verb is an obligatory element for the configuration of meaningful structures. Verbs are not arbitrarily truded in sentences rather they are obligatorily tense marked (Charlotte, 1993). The verb is the core part of any linguistic construction. Little wonder Palmer (2014) asserted that 'learning a language is to a very large degree learning how to operate the verbal forms of that language (1).

The verb class is the most important class among the lexical categories. They are another quintessential class after the nominal class. Baker (2003) named verbs as licensers of subject. This suggests that they exude important responsibilities whenever they are paired with the nominal class. They illustrate the action carried out by the subject and in some situations they tell the state of being of the subject. In fact, one can boldly say this: without verbs, the formation of a correct sentence is impossible. Similarly, Finch (2003) identified verbs as predicators. Verbs are the most essential elements in the predicate and they determine the outcome of other elements in the predicate to a large extent. As predicators, verbs can stand independently as to make up a meaningful sentence. The verb class like the nominal class manifests morphological changes depending on the nature of the sentence. Although there are several definitions of this class, they are generally defined as words that work directly with subjects to carry out the function instantiated by their subjects. They are also marked by complexity in relation to the sentence. Verbs as core members of the lexical category are universal. They are present in every human language but their internal structures and concatenations differ cross-linguistically.

Significant linguistic constraints are placed on the second language learner whenever the first language and the target language are juxtaposed. This is a

natural phenomenon because of the presence of language specific rules among languages as revealed by Chomsky (1995). Thus, this work is motivated by the need to solve the problem of the second language learner by carrying out a cross-linguistic study which will further reveal the parallel structures that create problems for the second language learner. Also, the study expounds the dissimilarities in both the English and Khana languages as a novel learning material for the English/Khana bilinguals.

### **A Synopsis of the Khana Language and Its People**

The Khana language pronounced and spelt as /kana/ by natives is spoken by a group of people who reside in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Specifically, the Khana linguistic group dwells in the South-Eastern part of Rivers State. Numbering over two hundred thousand (200,000) speakers according to Ethnologue (2018), Khana is one of the languages spoken in the Ogonoid language group. The basic traditional occupation practised by this group of people is farming and fishing. After several years of environmental degradation, this language group has been in the news lately agitating the right processes for a clean-up of their land. The Ogonis are popular for their activism against oil exploitation and degradation of their land.

The actual origin of the Ogonis is unknown. However, Oyinlade and Vincent (2002) advanced two anthropological theories of the origin of the Ogonis. First, Oyinlade and Vincent (2002) observed that the Ogonis migrated in the eighteenth century to their present location from the Imo River. This theory advanced that the Khana area was the first place of settlement of the Ogonis. Secondly, it is said that they drove in via boats from Ghana. Adherents to the second school of thought state that Khana which serves as the nomenclature of the Ogonis originated from the name 'Ghana.' It is a common practice in Ogoni to ask in the native tongue, 'O lu Kana?' which is translated 'Are you an Ogoni?' This implies that irrespective of the district or kingdom, Kana is a general name for the Ogonis as it is used interchangeably by Olson (1996), Stokes, Goman and Newman (2009)

There are six districts or kingdoms in Ogoniland namely: Nyo-Khana, Ken-Khana, Gokana, Babbe, Tai and Eleme. Ngulube (2013) outlined five languages spoken in this area. They are Baan, Gokana, Tai, Eleme and Kana. These languages are mutually unintelligible. Blench (2008) stated that the Ogoni languages are regarded as part of the Cross-River collection of Benue Congo languages.

Khana language is sub-divided into two dialects namely, Southern Khana (Ken-Khana) and Northern Khana (Nyo-Khana). These dialects are mutually intelligible. However, Frawley (2003) grouped Tai as a dialect of Khana but Ngulube (2013) factored Tai as a language in itself. It is important to note therefore that among the five languages in the Ogonoid group, Tai is linguistically closer to Khana than the others. Nevertheless, the basic area of divergence in Ken-Khana and Nyo-Khanais mainly in the use of minimal pairs. Northern Khana (Nyo-Khana) predominantly uses /i/ whereas Southern Khana (Ke-Khana) speakers use /é/. There are other areas of minimal pairs in both dialects. There are also several words with sameness in production and yet others are produced totally differently in both dialects. These slight variations in both dialects only reveal the place of birth of the speakers. Above all, there is no overt difference in the syntax of both dialects.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **The Minimalist Program**

The Minimalist Program is the newest language description model introduced by Chomsky in 1995. Its basic aim is to minimise linguistic representations which had been elaborated in Chomsky's Principles and Parameters. It however, shares some core principles with his earlier works. It believes that a part of the human brain is dedicated to language. This aspect of the brain which Chomsky refers to as the language faculty contains two systems: the cognitive system as well as the performance system.

In the Minimalist Program, Chomsky's four levels of grammatical interpretation proposed in his earlier model, the D-Structure, the S-Structure, the logical form (LF) and phonetic form (PF) are minimised into just two concepts namely: the LF (meaning) and the PF (sounds) (Nwala 2016). The LF and PF simply imply that constructions simply represent sound and meaning.

Chomsky (1995) believed that every human possesses a lexicon, a language storehouse which contains the total items of a particular language. This can also be defined as the content of a person's knowledge of a language. Jakendoff (1997) enumerated certain information that constitute the lexical entries of a language. They are the phonological component, the morphological component which contains (inflections, derivation etc.) semantic component and the syntactic component. Radford (2004) also observed that during word formation, relevant words are extracted from the lexicon. In line with this, Chomsky (1995) presented language as a computational system that picks linguistic elements from the

lexicon and arranges them in meaningful patterns by using specific operations which Chomsky (1995) referred to as operation select, merge and move. This eventually forms a syntactic structure of that language. Linguistic items are selected from the lexicon and used to create structures by a computational combining system which is called 'merge.' In this case, the selected items are said to converge and reach full interpretation if the combination is legitimate but crash should the items be illegitimate.

### **Contrastive Analysis**

Contrastive Analysis is a theory that compares two distinct languages with the aim of predicting language problems. Introduced by Lado in 1957, Contrastive Analysis aims at revealing the meeting point as well as the points of divergence of two languages. Lado (1951) cited in Carrasquillo (1994) stated that the points of departure in a native and a target language is likely going to pose a linguistic challenge to the L<sub>2</sub> learner while the similarities in both languages may be harmless.

Proponents of this theory believe that language learning is a process of habit formation. As a result of this, the habits formed while acquiring the first language significantly affect second language learning. In line with this, Yang and Xu (2001) blamed the errors committed in L<sub>2</sub> learning on the learner's native language transfer. Transfer in Contrastive Analysis could either be positive or negative (Ringbom, 2007). Positive transfer refers to the transfer of elements that are similar in both languages while negative transfer refers to the transfer of items that are dissimilar. Proponents of the Contrastive Analysis Theory assert that the transfer of the features of the L<sub>1</sub> may affect the learning of the L<sub>2</sub> and eventually produce errors.

### **The Concept of Tense and Aspect**

Tense and aspect are two interrelated linguistic phenomena that deal with time related issues. These two play a significant role in the construction of grammatical sentences. Tense refers to the appearance a verb assumes to indicate time. It deals with the form of a verb at the time of speech (Ndimele 1992; Dahl & Bergman 2011). Thus verbs metamorphose in appearance as the time of action changes. Leech (2014) observed that some of the most problematic yet fascinating challenges a learner encounters in the English language is tense related. This can be traced to how a specific verb challenges its orthographic or morphological representation with respect to time implications in constructions. For example, the verb 'swing' is represented as 'swing, swings, swinging,

swung,; 'ring' is represented as 'ring, rings, ringing, rang, rung. Also, 'sell' is represented as 'sell, sells, selling and sold.' The unpredictable orthographic and morphological changes of English verbs pose challenges to second language learners.

Languages across the world differ in the types of tenses they allow. Generally, three types of tenses are notable cross-linguistically: the present, past and future tense. Comrie (1985) cited in Genetti (2009) claimed that some languages exhibit beyond three tense categories. Not all languages of the world contain the three. For example, Trask (2004) stated that a language such as Chinese is a zero tense language. This is in contrast with the English language which uses the present and past tense to express actions (Nwala, 2016). However, Trask (2004) further observed that despite the fact that Chinese is tenseless, its speakers are capable of expressing thoughts using concepts that are relative or time locative. The implication is that whatever can be expressed in one language can also be expressed in another.

The number of tenses in the English language has been a source of argument over the years. While some scholars argue for three tenses, Dockick (2008), Hewson (2012) and Nwala (2016) advanced that two tenses are in existence. Dockick (2008) argued that only two forms of morphological patterns are recognised in the English language, viz, the form which enacts the present and that which establishes the past. Therefore, the tense which is attributed as the future only emphasizes the present or past in a different dimension.

It is established that tense is expressed through the verb class, however, not all verbs are tensed. In the English language, only finite verbs are the locus of grammatical evidence on tense. Also, finite verbs represent the simple present and simple past tense forms of verbs. This implies that a verb changes in respect to present and past time. Wyldeck (2007) observed that a construction will obligatorily contain a finite verb for it to be meaningful.

In addition to the foregoing, Schneider (2010) contrasted tense and aspect stating that tense is 'deictic' as well as a relational grammatical category while aspect is neither deictic nor relational. According to him, tense places an activity on a time line in tandem with the time of speech. Aspect on the other hand deals with the temporal nature of the situation.

Aspect which is closely related to tense is a grammatical feature which expresses the pattern of verb extension over time. Hewson (2012) stated that aspect

supplies information on the internal and temporary pattern of situations in a language.

Two aspects are recognised by Comrie (1976), the imperfective and the perfective aspect. The imperfective which is otherwise known as the progressive denotes an action that is yet to be completed. In the English language, the '-ing' morphological marker is used to indicate the progressive aspect. Also, relevant auxiliary verbs precede the main verb in the process of expressing aspectual forms:

6. Chief Emejuru is travelling to Dubai.
7. I am eating.
8. The boys are going home.
9. He was fighting in school.

In the above sentences, it is observed that the 'BE' auxiliary verbs assist main verbs in the expression of the progressive aspect. In addition, Hewson (2012) noted that the use of the 'HAVE' auxiliary verb indicates aspectual reference and not tense. Therefore, the expressions below:

10. The boys *have gone* home.
11. The boys *have eaten*.

The above sentences are expressions of aspect and not tense. The aspectual form attached to the 'HAVE' auxiliary verb is the perfective aspect. The perfective aspect is conceived in terms of completion. It represents an action that is completed. In addition, Omotosho (2015, p. 567) summarised the structure of the perfective aspect in this manner, 'Subject+Auxiliary (have)+base -ed.' The implication of the structure is that the perfective aspect is instantiated using two verbs which appear immediately after the subject NP, the 'have' auxiliary verb and the lexical verb which must be in the past.

From the foregoing, the necessity of a critical contrastive study is exposed. The colossal and confusing nature of English verbs necessitates a cross-linguistic study. First, at the surface level, the English 'to BE' verbs do not realise inflections but their distinctions rely on their applications in sentences. Also, the dissimilarity in the numerical pattern of grammatical merging of verbs with other grammatical elements is a potential problem. Verb forms range from three to eight patterns and also, no rule specifies the inflection of the verb 'to BE.' Therefore, a cross-linguistic study is expedient as it will aid the second language learners to focus on problematic areas.

## Methodology

The methodology adopted for this study is descriptive. Data were obtained from primary sources. The Khana data were supplied by competent speakers of Khana and translated into English. The data were eventually analysed by comparing the tense and aspectual features in both languages.

## Analysis

### Data 1

#### The Simple Present Tense

| English   | Khana  |
|---|--|
| 1. Asiga walks to work.                               | Asiga wee kia kii wee tam.<br>[Asiga always walk (go) to work.]      |
| 2. Zina sings beautifully.                            | Zina para ue yor lee le.<br>[She can sing song good]                 |
| 3. Tordum goes to the farm every morning.             | Tordum si wii deedene lore.<br>[Tordum go farm every morning.]       |
| 4. Pat dances in church on Sundays.<br>deedene deekai | Pat wee yebyeb torBari<br>[Pat always dance church every<br>Sunday.] |

The agreement parameter in the English language is a syntactic relationship between linguistic constituents which make a particular item compulsorily behave in a particular way because of the existence of another. In the English examples above, there is an obligatory symmetry between subjects and their verbs. Significantly, verbs experience some form of morphological transformations in order to bond with their singular subjects. In English, verbs undergo this form of morphological transformations in order to bond in number and person with their subject elements.

In the English examples numbered 1-4, the inflectional -s is conspicuous in all the sentences. Thus, we have the following:

1. Asiga walks to work.
2. Zina sings beautifully.

3. Tordum goes to the farm every morning.
4. Pat dances in church on Sundays.

In the above constructions extracted from data 1-4, all the subjects are in their singular forms; also, there is a recurring inflectional –s attached to all the verbs as well. The implication is that the sentences above explicate a numerical bonding where verbs bond with their subjects in number. The rule is that if a subject is in its singular form the verb that governs it must inflect otherwise the derivation will crash. Also, if the subject is plural, the verb which merges with the subject must maintain its base form or else the derivation will not converge.

Consider the ill forms of the above excerpt:

5. *Asiga walk to work.\**
6. *Zina sing beautifully.\**
7. *Tordum go to the farm every morning.\**
8. *Pat dance in church on Sundays.\**
9. *Sun rise in the mornings.\**

The illicit English constructions above will only be termed well-formed if the subjects are plural such as:

10. Asiga and his wife walk to work.
11. Zina and other members of the choir sing beautifully.
12. Tordum and her sister go to the farm every morning etc.

In contrast to the inflectional processes that depict numerical bonding of English subjects and their verbs above, the Khana equivalents of the verbs in data 10-12 behave in a different manner. For clearer comprehension, the verbs in both languages are tabularised below:

**Table 1: Khana Verbs in Examples 1-4 and Their English Equivalents**

| English Verbs | Khana<br>Equivalents | Gloss    |
|---------------|----------------------|----------|
| 1. Walks      | Kia                  | Walk     |
| 2. Sings      | Para ue yoo          | Can sing |
| 3. Goes       | Si                   | Go       |
| 4. Dances     | Yebyeb               | Dance    |

(The Researcher's Creation)

In the above table, the Khana verbs are extracted from the sentences in our data numbered 1-4. Although the verbs are merged with singular subjects, in the data, they all retain their base forms. On the other hand, the verbs in English obligatorily inflect to bond with singular subjects as shown on the above table while the Khana verbs that express the simple present tense retain their original forms irrespective of the subject type.

### The Simple Past Tense

The simple past tense is a tense form that is utilised for completed actions. In the English language, the regular inflectional process is marked by the orthographic representation '-ed' while the irregular verbs inflect in unspecified ways. In the data, the regular verbs are displayed in data 10-11 while the irregular forms are shown in data 12-13.

| English                                | Khana  |
|--|--|
| 10. She danced in church.              | A beè yeb torbari<br>[She (past) dance in church.]                   |
| 11. The mechanic worked on my car.     | Neekwa fa beè kwa na fa.<br>[The mechanic (past) work my car.]       |
| 12. The maid broke the plate.          | Lo nwitor beè fe lo elala.<br>[The maid (past) break the plate.]     |
| 13. He went home to collect something. | A beè si tor wee su nu.<br>[He (past) go home to collect something.] |

The '-ed' inflectional marker is added to the base form in data 10-11 to reflect past actions, thus, we have the following words reflected below;

10. danced

11. worked

Interestingly, data 12-13 contain irregular verbs. Therefore, their simple past tense forms do not accept the '-ed' inflectional marker, rather, their inflections manifest in irregular ways as can be seen below;

12-broke

13-went

On the other hand, the simple past tense in Khana is instantiated by the morpheme 'beè.' The morpheme 'beè' in Khana premodifies the verb. Also, it is an optional element of the past tense construction. Thus, it can be voluntarily eliminated by the speaker. This is the reason it is omitted in some sentences in the Khana language data numbered 10-13. Concerning the main verbs in the Khana data, verb inflection is not an element of the Khana grammar. Thus, the past tense verbs in data 10-13 are similar to their base forms. The table below expounds the statements.

**Table 2: Khana Verbs on Data 10-13 and Their English Equivalents**

| English Verbs | Khana<br>Equivalents<br>(Simple<br>Past) | Base Form |
|---------------|--|-----------|
| 10. Danced    | Yebyeb                                   | Yebyeb    |
| 11. Worked    | Si                                       | Si        |
| 12. Broke     | Fe                                       | Fe        |
| 13. Went      | Si                                       | Si        |

(The Researcher's Creation)

### Aspect

Aspect is a linguistic feature which is closely related to tense. While tense expresses the pattern of verb extension over time, aspect supplies information with respect to the temporary pattern of situations in a language.

### The Progressive Aspect

The progressive aspect is a grammatical feature that expresses an action that is still in progress, In the English language the -ing inflectional marker instantiates the progressive aspect. Also, relevant auxiliary verbs precede the main verb in the process of expressing aspectual forms. The auxiliary verbs that support the -ing progressive markers obligatorily inflect to agree with their subject NPs as highlighted on the data 14-19 below. In data 14, the 'be' form of the auxiliary verb adopts the form 'is' which obligatorily merges with the singular subject DP, 'My mother.' Whereas in data 15, the same 'be' verb automatically changes to 'are.' The word 'are' is a constituent of the 'be' verb which agrees with its plural

subject, 'are' bonds with the plural subject DP, 'Kara and Chinwe.' In addition to the examples, all the lexical verbs on the data numbered 14-19 have the inflectional -ing added to their base forms. Consequently, there are the following; eating, playing, crying, ringing and going as shown below:

14. My mother is eating rice

Nda ka a de rice

[My mother be (+prog) eat rice.]

15. Kara and Chinwe are playing.

Kara le Chinwe a birabii.

[Kara le Chinwe be (+prog) play.]

16. My baby is crying.

Nda nwi a to.

[My baby be (+prog) cry.]

17. He is ringing the bell.

A zib gen.

[He (+prog) ring bell]

18. The boys are ringing the bell.

Lo miongo a zib gen.

[The boys be (+prog) ring bell.]

19. Tamka is going to the market.

Tamka a si du.

[Tamka be (+prog) go market.]

One striking similarity between the progressive aspect in the English language and that of the Khana language is that two verbs are used to express the progressive aspect in both languages. In the English language as described earlier, the auxiliary verb and the lexical verb express the progressive aspect. Likewise, in Khana language, two verbs express the progressive aspect. The word 'á' in Khana is the bare form of the 'be' verb and it precedes the lexical verb as well.

However, the progressive aspect is grammatically expressed differently in both languages. In Khana language 'á' is predominant in all the constructions on our

data numbered 20-25. The word ‘á’ in Khana premodifies the base form of the lexical verb to express the progressive aspect unlike the English language where verbs inflect to indicate the progressive aspect. The table below expounds the concept:

**Table 3: Progressive Aspect in English Extracted from Data 20-25 and Their Khana Equivalentents**

|     | English Form | Base English Progressive Aspect | Khana Form | Base Khana Progressive Aspect |
|-----|--------------|---------------------------------|------------|-------------------------------|
| 20. | Be+ eat      | Is eating                       | A denu     | A denu                        |
| 21. | Be +play     | Are playing                     | A birabii  | A birabii                     |
| 22. | Be+ cry      | Is crying                       | A to       | A to                          |
| 23. | Be+ring      | Is ringing                      | A zib      | A zib                         |
| 24. | Be+ring      | Are ringing                     | A zib      | A zib                         |
| 25. | Be+go        | Is going                        | A si       | A si                          |

(The Researcher’s Creation)

### The Perfective Aspect

There is a variation across both languages under study in the way the perfective aspect is grammaticised. The perfective emphasizes the present importance of past activities either by revealing the continuation of its effect on the present situation. With respect to combinatorial properties, the perfective is not structured like the progressive. While the progressive could be said to adopt the BE auxiliary + -ing lexical verb, the perfective adopts the HAVE auxiliary+ -en Lexical Verb. The implication of the structure is that the perfective aspect is instantiated using two verbs which appear immediately after the subject NP, the ‘have’ auxiliary verb and the lexical verb which must be in the past. The data numbered 26-30 contrast the perfective in both languages under study. Consider the constructions below:

| English                 | Khana   |
|-------------------------|---|
| 26. She has eaten rice. | e de a olosi<br>[She eat (+pst) rice.]<br>She has eaten rice. |
| 27. She has gone home.  | e kii ra tor  |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | [She go (+pst) home.]<br>She has gone home.   |
| 28. The boy has rung the bell.           | Lo nwi e zib a lo gen.<br>[The boy (+have) ring (+pst) the bell.]<br>The boy has rang the bell.                         |
| 29. The girls have slept.<br><br>(+pst)] | Pya lo gbobia e daa ra.<br>[(+pl +quant) the girl have sleep<br><br>The girls have slept.                               |
| 30. The men have drunk the palmwine.     | Pya lo gbara e ò a lo mii.<br>[ (+pl+quant) the man (+have) drink<br>the palmwine.]<br>The men have drunk the palmwine. |

The excerpt above contains the verbs which express the present perfective aspect of English. In our data, the agreement parameter which is a quintessential aspect of minimalist syntax is evident. In data numbered 26-30, the primary auxiliary verb 'has' merges acceptably with the individual subjects. The verb 'has' is the singular form of 'have.' It is stated in the literature that for a construction to converge, the linguistic items that necessitate agreement must be in place. Thus, the constructions on data 26-28 converge. Similarly, 'have' is conspicuous in data 29 and 30. Grammatically, 'have' merges acceptably with plural subjects as we can see above. Whatever falls short of 'have' merging with a plural subject produces illicit constructions.

Apart from the agreement forms noticed within the auxiliary verb category in 26-30 above, it is observed that the forms are both morphologically and syntactically well-formed in order to express the perfective aspect. The table below reveals the base form of the lexical verbs from which the inflected forms on data 26-30 are realised.

**Table 4: Base and Inflected Forms of English Verbs on Data 26-30**

| S/No. | Base Form | Inflected Form |
|-------|-----------|----------------|
| 26.   | Eat       | Eaten          |
| 27.   | Go        | Gone           |
| 28.   | Ring      | Rung           |
| 29.   | Sleep     | Slept          |

30. Drink Drunk

(The Researchers' Creation)

In comparison, Khana equivalents of the verbs on the data numbered 26-30 do not metamorphose from their base forms. This implies that the base form and that which is used in expressing the perfective are similar. In Khana language, three expressions are used to express the perfective, the pre-modifying auxiliary verb 'è', the lexical verb and the morpheme 'á' which post modifies the lexical verb. The word 'è' in the Khana sentences is equivalent to the auxiliary verb 'to have.' Like the English auxiliary verb, it premodifies the lexical verbs. This is shown on our sentential examples numbered 26-30 above.

Another word that is combined with the Khana lexical verb to express the perfective aspect is 'á.' In Khana, 'á' is a past tense marker. It has no independent meaning, rather, it is attached to lexical verbs to instantiate past forms. There are two forms of this past tense marker. In some sentences, it is written as 'á' while in others an approximant consonant sound /r/ precedes it and it is written as 'rá.' The difference in both sounds does not affect their usage. They are both past tense markers. Unlike the English language where the auxiliary (helping) verb premodifies the lexical verb and inflects to agree with the subject, the 'á' or 'rá' in Khana post modifies the main verb and retains its original state irrespective of the subject NP. This can be seen in our examples 26-30. The three expressions that constitute the perfective aspect in Khana are expounded below:

26b. e+de+a

to have+eat+pst

[have eaten]

27b. e+kii+ra

to have+go+pst

[have gone]

28b. e+zib+a

to have+ring+pst

[have rung]

29b. e+daa+ra

to have+sleep+pst

[have slept]

30b. e+õ+ a

to have+drink+pst

[have drunk]

Another significant disparity between the present perfective aspect of both languages is that their lexical verbs behave differently. Whereas the English lexical verbs obligatorily inflect, the Khana lexical verbs retain their base forms because they have no other form apart from the base form. To expatiate this further, the table below contains the Khana lexical verbs which express the perfective as extracted from our examples 26-30.

**Table 5: Khana Verbs on Data 26-30**

| S/No. | Khana Verbs<br>(Base Forms) | Perfective<br>Aspect | Gloss |
|-------|-----------------------------|----------------------|-------|
| 26.   | De                          | De                   | Eat   |
| 27.   | Kii                         | Kii                  | Go    |
| 28.   | Zib                         | Zib                  | Ring  |
| 29.   | Daa                         | Daa                  | Sleep |
| 30.   | Õ                           | Õ                    | Drink |

(The Researchers' Creation)

Closely related to the present perfective aspect is the past perfective aspect. In the English language, the only difference between both is in the overt appearance of the auxiliary verb. While the present perfective aspect uses auxiliary verbs in the present, the past perfective utilises auxiliary verbs in the past. This assents the wealth of inflectional morphology of the English verbs as compared to their Khana counterparts. Consider the following sentences from data 31-35 below:

31. The barber had closed for the day before we came.

32. Neka had finished the food.

33. Dorka had worn the dress.

34. The wrestlers had fought already.

35. The ladies had eaten.

The researcher has earlier on stated that the verb 'to have' is an auxiliary verb which expresses the perfective. While it changes its form acceptably to merge with its subject NP in the present perfective, it assumes its simple past form 'had' in the past perfective aspect as shown in the sentences on our data 31-35 above. In the constructions above, the following verb phrases express the past perfective aspect; 'had closed, had finished, had worn, had fought and had eaten.'

Unlike the English VPs above, the Khana variants of the verbs do not display any form of alteration or change. The implication is that the base form and the form used in expressing the perfective are similar. As a result, there is no overt dissimilarity between the present perfective and the past perfective VPs in Khana.

In Khana language, three expressions are utilised to express the past perfective aspect:

- i. the pre-modifying auxiliary verb 'è',
- ii. the lexical verb and
- iii. the morpheme 'á' which post modifies the lexical verb.

The word 'è' in the Khana sentences is equivalent to the auxiliary verb 'to have' and does not inflect from its original state to instantiate the past. Also, the lexical verbs behave differently from their English equivalent because they do not undergo inflection to indicate their past forms. Consider the combinations extracted from examples 31-35 below:

31. e+kpen+a  
to have+ close+ pst  
[had closed]
32. e+de+a  
to have+eat+past  
[had eaten]
33. e+yaa+ra  
to have+ wear+pst  
[had worn]
34. E+bé+a  
to have+fight+pst  
[had fought]
35. e+de+a  
to have +eat+pst  
[had eaten]

### **Implication for Second Language Learners**

The findings of this study have so far revealed that the primary area of divergence in both languages lies in their overt-covert dichotomy. While the concept of tense and aspect remains an overt construct in the English language, in Khana, tense and aspect are covertly realised. The implication therefore, is that in course of learning the English language, Khana/English bilinguals will transfer the principles of Khana into the English language. For example, an expression such as 'she goes to the market on Saturdays' will be realised as \*she go to the market on Saturdays. Going by the tenets of contrastive analysis, language transfer is inevitable in bilingual situations and also the divergence between languages is the basic cause of erroneous utterances. The Khana/English bilingual already possesses a mental grammar of their language where tense and aspect are covertly realised. It should be noted here that verbs are fully inflected in the deep structure in Khana language but dropped prior to spell-out, that is why it is not realised in overt syntax. Therefore, a Khana/English bilingual will only transfer the principles of the Khana language to the English language.

Similarly, the notion of strong and weak features is brought to fore in this study. From the Minimalist viewpoint, the researcher asserts that the morphological property of Khana tense and aspect is a weak feature that can only be interpretable at the LF (meaning) while the morphological property of the English tense and aspect is a strong feature, interpretable and realised at both the PF and the LF (sound and meaning). This is because in the English language, verbs display overt morphological pattern of bonding with their subjects. Thus, the agreement parameter is a prerequisite for numerical bonding of verbs and their subjects in English but in Khana agreement is realised in covert syntax.

### **Conclusion**

This study has beamed its light on tense and aspect in two distinct languages. It has revealed potential problems Khana users of the English language may face in course of learning the target language. It has further elaborated the fact that although Khana language may not be as agreement-rich as the English language, it still has its way of marking agreement in covert syntax. Above all, this study is a panacea to the unending problems of second language learners which are verb related. This study therefore recommends that areas which constitute fundamental problems for second language learners be given priority.

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