# Tense, Aspect, Mood and Aktionsart in Mesqan: A South Ethio-Semitic language spoken in Ethiopia

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**Abstract**：Mesqan is a South Ethio-Semitic tongue which is mainly worn in day-to-day message by a people of 179,737 communities in the Gurage Zone, Ethiopia, whose linguistic skin was not well expressed. The inner aspire of this paper is to offer a complete account of tense, aspect, mood and aktionsart structures of the Mesqan tongue. The paper is expressive in character, as the lessons are mostly worried with telling what is really being in the tongue, and mostly rely on main linguistic facts. The linguistic facts, i.e. the elicited grammatical facts regarding tense, aspect, mood and aktionsart, were composed from local speakers of the tongue during 12 months of fieldwork mannered among 2011 and 2012 in four Mesqan villages and in Butajira, the managerial hub of the Mesqan Woreda. The perfective aspect in the tongue emphasizes the endpoint of the oral state with dynamic verbs, but the imperfective aspect relates with the lexical semantics of the verb, which can be practical when their purposes with stative and dynamic verbs are evaluated. Concerning tense, the past and the non-past tense in the tongue are distinguished by assisting verbs and a verb in the imperfective aspect is able to happen with states in the past and in the non-past, i.e. present or future. Future time can also be uttered by an anticipated act throughout the grouping of the future. In addition, an action happening in the past and still around in the tongue is marked by a zero morpheme in the present perfect. Concerning mood, the language has agent-oriented moods that are articulated by verb inflection, and speaker-oriented moods that are articulated by a periphrastic structure. Regarding aktionsart that denotes a specific phase in a verbal condition, like period, regularity, etc. Mesqan has two aktionsarten which are noticeable by periphrastic structures, that is the progressive and the prospective.

**Keywords:** aktionsart, aspect, dynamic, imperfective, mood, periphrastic, perfective, stative, tense

## 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 The people

The etymology of the name Mesqan is uncertain. Alämu et al. (1987) state that senior populace are of the view that the name Mesqan creates from the word *mäsk'äl* 'cross' as fraction of the name of the *Mäsk'älä Iyäsus* Church which was constructed at Bidara in the start of the 16th century. The Mesqan communities' names themselves and their residence region by this name. They are also named by other racial sets by this name. The Mesqan exists in the Southern Nation, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State (SNNPRS) in the Gurage Zone, Haikochina Butajira Woreda, in the locality of the town Butajira which is the directorial hub of the Gurage Zone.

The Mesqan have their possess Woreda in the Gurage Zone, which includes forty-one code villages. The landscape of the locale is mountainous in the west but bare in the east. The western part has ample of rain for agricultural from *wäto* 'March' to *mäskäroß* 'September', whereas the rain in the eastern part is odd. The major town within the Mesqan area is Butajira. The Mesqan communities often convene with their neighbors in markets within and in the shut environs of their dwelling district. Famed market seats, in addition Butajira, are Inseno and Dobbi.

According to the Central Statistical Agency (2007), the whole number of Gurage is 1,280,483 of which 179,737 are Mesqan. Amid them, 88,062 are female and 91,675 are male. The majority of the Mesqan speakers are bi- or multilingual (cf. Shikur, 1989; Meyer, 2007). Most often they identify Amharic as next tongue, which is used as the functioning tongue in the management and as the way of lessons in primary education in the Gurage Zone of Mesqan Woreda. Monolingual Mesqan speakers do live but they are normally incredibly aged.

In addition to Amharic, the Mesqan frequently identify the tongues of their instant neighbors, akin to Dobbi, Silt'e, Mareqo, Mesqan or Säbat Bet Gurage diversities. The Mesqan build their livelihood by humanizing plants, by propagating animals and by buy and sell (Hassän, 1980). Ensete edulis or 'fake banana' is the mainly ordinary steady food of the region. The Mesqan also farm crops like barely, teff, beans and wheat. Cows, oxen, sheep and goats fit in to the animals they strain. Along with the diverse farming goods, pepper acts a very important part in supporting the confined community. In addition to the above fragile food stuff, Mesqan farmers get a vast sum of money from khat, i.e. catha edulis. The figure of Mesqan traders is extremely little contrasted to other Gurage. The cause for this is that the soil of the Mesqan area is awfully productive so that most of them are busy in farming.

Most of the Mesqan people are followers of Islam. As a result, the Islamic religion greatly influences the culture as well as the living style of the society. Only some Mesqan are Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, and a very few are Protestants. Beside the

Mesqan-speaking area proper, a considerable number of Mesqan live in the capital Addis Ababa, where they earn their livelihood as merchants at the Merkato.

## 1.2 The language

Mesqan is a Gurage tongue belonging to the South Ethio-Semitic partition of the Ethio-Semitic language cluster. The Mesqan-speaking region is bordered by Dobbi speakers in the north, by Wolane and Mesqan speakers in the west, by Mareqo speakers in the east and by Silt'e speakers in the south. The Mesqan tongue is said to have no local dialectal difference (cf. Ernst-August, 1980). It is not a printed language, but mostly used for spoken communication.

There are diverse classifications of the Gurage languages amid which Hetzron (1972) is usually conventional until nowadays. Hetzron (1972, 1977) divides the Gurage languages into two main typological groups, Gunnän-Gurage versus Eastern Gurage. Eastern Gurage contains Zay, Silt'e and Wolane. Gunnän-Gurage is more subdivided into two twigs: Northern Gurage (mostly also a typological separation) and Western Gurage. In genetic conditions, Northern Gurage contains only Kistane, Dobbi and possibly the dead †Gälila. In typological terms, Mesqan is also incorporated in Northern Gurage since all these languages have a diverse place of morphemes that are close to the verb in positive analytic major clauses. The Western Gurage cluster, a genetic unit, contains Mesqan against Central and Peripheral Western Gurage.

The Central Western Gurage group contains Chaha, Gumer, Ezha and Gura, while the Peripheral Western Gurage group contains Gyeto, Inor, Ener and Endegagn. The varieties as fraction of Central and Peripheral Western Gurage are commonly supposed to signify dialects fit in to two languages. Hetzron's (1972) classification of Ethio-Semitic languages with some modifications with reference to the Gurage languages by Meyer (2011), the place of Mesqan is also under Western Gurage cluster and puts alone since it is a two tense cluster language. Leslau (1969, 1992) more states that Mesqan and Dobbi may form a divide separation in Western Gurage.

At first, Hetzron (1969) and afterwards also Hetzron & Bender (1976) suggest that the Gurage languages are not a uniform cluster from a linguistic point of view since Northern Gurage, i.e., Kistane, Dobbi and †Gälila, shape a part in Outer South Ethio-Semitic which is closer to †Gafat than to other Gurage languages. Moreover, Eastern Gurage is closer to Harari than to any other Gurage language. Thus, Hetzron (1969, 1972, 1996) proposes that the name Gurage is not a major linguistic name but quite denotes the environmental area from the Gibe River in the west to Lake Zway in the east, and from the Awash River in the north to the Gibe River in the southwest. As such, it refers to the collection of Semitic-speaking society who are bounded by Cushitic-speaking community to the southwest of Addis Ababa. The inherited categorization of Mesqan as West Gurage

language is usually customary (cf. Cohen, 1931; Bender, 1971; Hetzron, 1972, 1977, 1997) while Leslau (1969, 1992) is of the view that its sub-classification is still notorious.

## 2. Method of the study

The cram is qualitative and experiential in character, and mostly relies on main linguistic facts. As the researcher is not a speaker of Mesqan, inhabitant speakers of the tongue were consulted. The data were gathered from seven native speakers of Mesqan through 12 months of fieldwork made among 2011 and 2012 in Butajira, Misraq Imbor, Mirab Imbor, Misraq Mesqan and Mirab Mesqan. Through my fieldwork, I had five male and two female language consultants whose first local tongue was Mesqan and who had a fine familiarity of Amharic. They were all born within the language society of Mesqan where they also get their primary and secondary school education. As well their native tongue and Amharic, they speak English. Through my fieldwork, I exhausted most of my time in Butajira which is the managerial hub of the Mesqan Woreda, but I also undertook numerous shorter trips to Misraq Imbor, Mirab Imbor, Misraq Mesqan and Mirab Mesqan. I was ongoing my fieldwork by eliciting words and sentences. After that, I recorded gratis speech texts then datum were transcribed, edited and translated. The arrangement of the data is not based on a lone linguistic mock-up or hypothesis, other than is deliberately assorted expressive. I used a structural loom for identifying phonemes and morphemes. Morpho-syntactic phenomena were described on the base of main results in linguistics typology. Based on The Leipzig Glossing Rules, most of the facts are obtainable in an interlinear morpheme-by-morpheme account with four lines. The first line represents the real word. The second line contains original or theoretical morphemes or morpheme combinations which are glossed in the third line; the fourth line is an English translation typically in a literary way.

## 3. Aspect, tense, mood and aktionsart

This section deals with the tense, aspect and mood system of Mesqan, i.e. perfective and imperfective aspect, past and present/non-past tense, jussive and imperative mood (agent-oriented mood), and the mood categories, obligation and ability (speaker-oriented mood). Furthermore, the perfect, the progressive and prospective aktionsarten, and negation are discussed.

### 3.1 Aspect

The aspectual opposition between perfective and imperfective is expressed through separate verb bases with particular vowel and gemination patterns in Mesqan. Furthermore, subject agreement markers help to differentiate between the two aspects: A perfective verb marks its subject by a set of suffixes, while an imperfective verb uses a combination of pre-

and suffixes. According to Comrie (1976), aspect is concerned with the internal temporal constituency of the situation. The perfective marks a situation as a single whole, with no separation of the different phases that make up that situation. In contrary, the imperfective centers on the internal duration of the situation. Concerning aspect types, Comrie (1976) states, "perfective looks at the situation from outside, without necessarily distinguishing any of the internal structure of the situation from inside and as such is crucially concerned with the internal structure of the situation." Therefore, the perfective describes the situation as having limits, while the grammatical category of the imperfective aspect, according to Comrie (1976), makes "explicit reference to the internal temporal structure of a situation, viewing a situation from within" or it denotes an action or event with reference to its inner composition. Payne (1997:239), furthermore, mentions that the imperfective presents a situation as an ongoing process. Therefore, it describes a situation as having only continuity with no limits. According to Comrie (1976), the imperfective aspect includes a number of semantic sub-categories, like habituality, progressivity or continuity. Several languages express these semantic sub-categories by a single imperfective verb form, while the imperfective in other languages is subdivided into a number of separate morphological sub-categories that correspond only to parts of the meaning of imperfective. The most common sub-divisions of the imperfective aspect are presented in Figure 1.
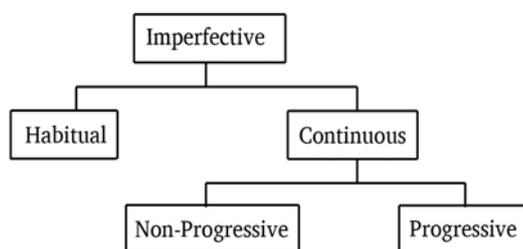


Figure 1. Semantic Sub-Classifications in the Imperfective Aspect

(Comrie, 1976)

In Figure 1, the plain imperfective is the broadest category, with habitual and continuous as possible subdivisions. The continuous, in turn, can be divided into progressive (for dynamic verbs) and non-progressive (for stative verbs). This suggests that a progressive could become a continuous by using it for static verbs as well.

In Mesqan, the perfective aspect emphasizes the endpoint of the verbal situation with dynamic verbs, as with the verb *k'ätt'ärä* 'He killed.' in the following example:

(1) *kamil       ambäsa      k'ätt'ärä.*
    kamil       anbäsa      k'ätt'är-ä
    Kamil       lion        kill.PFV-3SG.M

'Kamil killed a lion.'

The sentence in example (1) indicates that the act of killing is completed due to emphasizing its right border. Therefore, it is assumed that the killing was performed prior to the moment of speech, i.e. in the past. However, past is not the only time implication with verbs in the perfective aspect, as will be shown below.

The imperfective aspect with dynamic verbs denotes continuity, as in the following example:

(2) *kamil       tïmhïrt bete       yar.*
    kamil       tïmhïrt_bet-e       y-ar-ø
    Kamil       school-DIR       3-go.IPFV-SG.M
    i. 'Kamil goes to school.'
    ii. 'Kamil will go to school.'
    iii. 'Kamil (usually) goes to school.' (habitual)

The imperfective in (2) presents the situation without any boundary, i.e. it indicates that the situation is still not completed. This usually implies a non-past context, i.e. a present with an ongoing action (2i), as well as a future (2ii) or a habitual situation (2iii).

In order to differentiate between continuity and habituality, adverbs can be used to focus on the habitual reading, as *ïnnïm gïzyä* 'always' in (3).

(3) *kamil       ïnnïm       gïzyä       yïßära.*
    kamil       ïnnïm       gïzyä       y-bära-ø
    Kamil       all       time       3-eat.IPFV-SG.M
    'Kamil always eats.'

The use of habitual adverbs, like 'always', is limited to the imperfective aspect, as shown in the following examples:

(4) *kamil       ïnnïm       gïzyä       ambäsa       yïk'ät'ïr.*
    kamil       ïnnïm       gïzyä       anbäsa       y-k'ät'r-ø
    Kamil       all       time       lion       3-kill.IPFV-SG.M
    'Kamil always kills lions.'

(5) *\*kamil       ïnnïm       gïzyä       ambäsa       k'ätt'ärä.*
    kamil       ïnnïm       gïzyä       anbäsa       k'ätt'är-ä
    Kamil       all       time       lion       kill.PFV-3SG.M
    'Kamil always killed lions.'

The ungrammaticality of (5) due to the habitual adverb is a strong indicator for the fact that the main clause verb is indeed in the perfective aspect. As the perfective emphasizes the boundary of a situation, it is not combinable with adverbs focusing on its internal constituency. If the verb in (5) encoded only past tense, there would be no such constraint, as past tense – as a grammatical morpheme – does not interact with the verb semantics.

Aspect morphemes in Mesqan, however, interact with the lexical semantics of the verb, which can be observed when their functions with stative and dynamic verbs are compared. If the perfective aspect is applied to stative verbs, it usually emphasizes the starting point of the state but also encompasses its following continuation, as shown in the (i) translations of the following examples:

(6)   *näggade     xänä.*
      näggade     xän-ä
      merchant    be(come).PFV-3SG.M
      i. 'He is a merchant (lit. He became and still is a merchant).'
      ii. '[After school] he became/was a merchant [but now he retired].'

(7)   *tägäddärä.*
      tägäddär-ä
      sleep.PFV-3SG.M
      i. 'He is sleeping (lit. He took a lying position and still is in this position).'
      ii. '[After school] he slept [but now he is playing football].'

Contrary to dynamic verbs (see (3) above), the interpretation of the perfective with stative verbs is ambiguous. With reference to an actual situation at the moment of speech (or without any context), (6) and (7) imply a present situation, as indicated in the (i) translation. As with dynamic verbs, the perfective emphasizes the boundary of the situation. With stative verbs, however, the boundary the starting point of the situation and the subsequent state. Only in specific contexts – for instance, in reporting former events, as in the (ii) translation of (5) and (7) – the perfective aspect with stative verbs will lack the present tense reading. The different time inferences of stative and dynamic verbs in the perfective aspect are a common feature of grammatical morphemes for the perfective aspect, but not for the past tense.

The imperfective aspect with stative verbs only refers to a future situation, but not to present or habitual one, as shown in the following example:

(8)   *näggade   yïxän.*
      näggade   y-xän-ø
      merchant   3-be(come).IPFV.SG.M
      'He will be a merchant.'

Furthermore, in rare cases, the perfective aspect can refer to future situation, which the speaker considers to be very certain, as in the following examples:

(9)   *čäňňähu              k'ïyä.*
      čäňňä-hʷ              k'ïyä
      come.PFV-1SG          wait.IMP.2SG.M

'Wait, I will come (immediately).' (lit. 'I came.')

(10) *čaw*      *wärku.*

     čaw      wär-kʷ

     bye      go.PFV-1SG

     'Bye, I will go (immediately).' (lit. 'I went.')

In (9) above, the speaker did not complete the act of coming before the moment of speech, but he is very certain that he will come. Likewise, the perfective verb in (10) indicates that the act of going will be done in the instant future. This use of the perfective aspect is limited to these two verbs.

A verb in the imperfective aspect in Mesqan can occur with situations in the past and in the non-past, i.e. present or future. A past imperfective is marked by the past tense auxiliary *bannä*, which is juxtaposed to the imperfective verb, as in the following example:

(11) *kamil*      *yïtmar*          *bannä.*

     kamil      y-tmar-ø          bannä

     kamil      3-learn.IPFV-SG.M      AUX.PST

     i. 'Kamil was learning.' (continuous)

     ii. 'Kamil used to learn.' (habitual)

For the present tense, the invariable 3SG.M copula *-u* is suffixed to the imperfective verb. This construction usually has a progressive reading:

(12) *ïyya*      *bäsär*      *äβärawu.*

     *ïyya*      bäsär      ä-bära-ø-u

     1SG      meat      1-eat.IPFV-SG-COP.3SG.M

     'I am eating meat.'

Based on the above description, it is likely to conclude that the base forms of the verbs in Mesqan represent the aspectual opposition perfective vs. imperfective.

## 3.2 Tense

According to Comrie (1985), tense is a deictic category, which sets a relation to a reference point in time, commonly to the moment of speech. Frequent tenses in the languages of the world are past, present and future (Comrie, 1976; Payne, 1997), which can also be condensed into a bipartite tense distinction in individual languages. Girma & Meyer (2001), for instance, only distinguish between past and non-past tense for Amharic. This also holds true for Mesqan. Past tense stands for a situation that happened before the moment of speaking, while the non-past tense refers to a situation that has not been fulfilled before the moment of speaking (Bybee et al., 1994). Thus, non-past refers to present and future situations.

In Mesqan, past and non-past tense are differentiated by auxiliary verbs. Past is marked by the past tense auxiliary *bannä* that usually occurs with imperfective verbs, as in (13), but it can also merge with the converb form of a perfective verb to form a past perfect, as in (14):

(13) *kamil*    *yïtmar*               *bannä.*

       kamil     y-tmar-ø            bannä

       kamil     3-learn.IPFV-SG.M     AUX.PST

       i. 'Kamil was learning.' (continuous)

       ii. 'Kamil used to learn.' (habitual)

(14) *bännam*                       *bannä.*

       bänna-m                 bannä

       eat.PFV.3SG.M-CNV       AUX.PST

       'He had eaten.'

The past tense auxiliary *bannä* can also be attached to an imperfective verb marked by the directional suffix *–e* for a situation which was proposed to be fulfilled in the past, but actually did not realize, as in the following example:

(15) *yïtmare*                *bannä.*

       y-tmar-ø-e            bannä

       3-learn.IPFV-SG.M-DIR    AUX.PST

       'He had intended to learn.'

The non-past tense with imperfective verbs can be overtly marked by the invariable 3SG.M copula *-u* to refer to the time just at the moment of speech (progressive, as in the following example:

(16) *kamil*    *tïmhïrt bete*      *yaru.*

       kamil     tïmhïrt_bet-e      y-ar-ø-u

       Kamil     school-DIR        3-go.IPFV-SG.M-COP.3SG.M

       'Kamil is going to school.' (progressive)

In the language, future time can be expressed by an intended action through the combination of the prospective (imperfective marked by the suffix *-e* followed by the invariable 3SG.M copula *-u*, as in the following example:

(17) *täxʷät*      *amät*      *ank'ʸä*     *yïčäňewu.*

       tä-xʷät      amät       ank'ʸä    y-čäň-ø-e-u

       ABL-two      year       after       3-come.IPFV-SG.M-DIR-COP.3SG.M

       'He intends to (will) come after two years.'

Furthermore, an act happening in the past and still around in the language is marked by a zero morpheme in the present perfect, as in the following example:

(18) *ali*     *tïrama*     *čäňňäm.*

     ali     tïrama     čäňň-ä-m-ø

     Ali     yesterady     come.PFV-3SG.M-CNV-PRS

     'Ali has come yesterday (is still here).'

Regarding the perfect tense, Comrie (1976) states "The perfect tells us nothing directly about the situation in itself, but rather relates some state to a preceding situation", i.e. the perfect describes a completed situation which is still of importance at the moment of speech.

In Mesqan, the present perfect is expressed by an affirmative perfective verb to which the converb marker *-m* is attached, as in the following example:

(19) *hiyar*     *äkʷa*     *čäňňäm.*

     hiyar     äkʷa     čäňň-ä-m-ø

     Hiyar     today     come.PFV-3SG.M-CNV-PRS

     'Hiyar has come today (and is still here).'

Morpho-syntactically, the construction in (19) is strange, as it lacks a main-clause verb on which the converb dependents. Meseret (2004), therefore, suggests that the converb is followed by a zero-morpheme indicating present perfect. This analysis is adapted here.

Semantically, the combination of the perfective action of coming with the present tense in (19) yields the interpretation that Hiyar is still at the place. In contrary, a bare perfective verb would only state that the action of coming was fulfilled but there would not have been any reference to the moment of speech, so that Hiyar also could have left at the moment of speech.

The present perfect with stative verbs has a present continuous interpretation:

(20) *kamil*     *tägäddäräm.*

     kamil     tägäddär-ä-m-ø

     Kamil     sleep.PFV-3SG.M-CNV-PRS

     'Kamil is sleeping.'

As it was the case with the perfective aspect, the use of stative or dynamic verbs also results in different time interpretation in the present perfect.

The past perfect, which is rarely used, denotes a completed situation before the moment of speech. It is formed by juxtaposing the past tense auxiliary *bannä* to the converb of a perfective verb, as in the following example:

(21) *hiyar*     *äkʷa*     *čäňňäm*           *bannä.*

     hiyar     äkʷa     čäňň-ä-m           bannä

     Hiyar     today     come.PFV-3SG.M-CNV       AUX.PST

     'Hiyar had (earlier) come today (but is not around now).'

### 3.3 Mood

According to Payne (1997), "mood describes the speaker's attitude towards a situation, including the speaker's belief in its realty or likelihood." According to Bybee et al. (1994), "mood is the grammaticization of the speakers' subjective attitudes and opinions." Regarding the meaning difference between mood and modality, Bybee et al. (1994) point out, "modality is the conceptual domain and mood is its inflectional expression." Bybee et al. (1994) recognize four types of modality: agent-oriented, speaker-oriented, epistemic and subordinating modalities. These major types can be sub-divided into particular semantic concepts, like necessity, ability, obligation, imperative, jussive, etc.

In this article only agent-oriented and speaker-oriented moods are considered. In Mesqan, agent-oriented moods (i.e. jussive and imperative) are expressed by verb inflection, while speaker-oriented moods (i.e. obligation and ability) are expressed by a periphrastic construction.

The jussive expresses a command for the first and third persons. It is marked by distinct conjugational patterns of the verb. Leslau (1992b) states that the jussive of triconsonantal verbs in type A has three patterns in Mesqan: $-C_1C_2\ddot{a}C_3-$ for intransitive verbs, but $-C_1C_2C_3-$ or $-C_1\ddot{i}C_2C_3-$ for transitive verbs, whereas I came across only two patterns, i.e., $-C_1C_2\ddot{a}C_3-$ and $-C_1C_2C_3-$ for intransitive and transitive verbs, respectively. In the other verb types (B, C and D), there are no different patterns for transitive and intransitive verbs in the jussive. Verbs in the imperative express an order to the addressee. Though, the imperative and the jussive have identical patterns, imperative verbs apply only the gender/number suffixes for subject agreement to differentiate between male and female gender, and singular and plural number, whereby the 2SG.M is zero-marked.

The obligation is marked by a periphrastic construction with a verbal noun, which indicates the required act, as complement to the existential copula *nännä* 'he/it exists' with an invariable 3SG.M subject. Furthermore, the existential copula is marked by the malefactive marker *-b* and object agreement markers referring to the individual who has to complete the verbal act:

(22) *wäwär*        *nännäβi.*
     wä-wär         nänn-ä-b-i
     VN-go.JUS      exist.PRS-3SG.M.SBJ-MAL-1SG.OBJ
     'I have to go.'

The ability to complete a verbal action is expressed by a periphrastic construction in which the verbal noun indicates the action and the inflected imperfective of the verb *xarä* 'he knew/was able'. The subject of this verb refers to the entity which should be able to complete the verbal action:

(23) *kamil*        *mäsk'anäňňa*      *wäzäng^y*      *yïxïr.*
     kamil          mäsk'anäňňa        wä-zäng^y       y-xr-ø

| Kamil | Mesqan language | VN-speak.JUS | 3-know.IPFV-SG.M |

'Kamil can speak (know) the Mesqan language.'

(24) *hiyar*  *därs*  *wädärs*  *yïxïr.*

hiyar  därs  wä-därs  y-xr-ø

| Hiyar | song | VN-sing.JUS | 3-know.IPFV-SG.M |

'Hiyar can sing (know) (a song).'

## 3.4 Aktionsart

According to Comrie (1976), aktionsart denotes a specific phase in a verbal situation, like duration, punctuality, etc. In Mesqan, two aktionsarten are marked by periphrastic constructions, namely the progressive and the prospective.

The progressive aktionsart denotes an ongoing action, i.e. an action which is performed without interruption for certain duration of time (Bybee et al., 1994; Saeed, 1997).

In Mesqan, there are two progressive constructions, the first and the most common way to form such deed is be combining the inflected imperfective form of a verb with the invariable 3SG.M copula -*u*, as in the following examples:

(25) *ïyya*  *dabbo*  *äβärawu.*

ïyya  dabbo  ä-bära-ø-u

1SG bread 1-eat.IPFV-SG-COP.3SG.M

'I am eating bread.'

(26) *ahä*  *ambäsa*  *tïk'ät'ïru.*

ahä  anbäsa  t-k'ät'r-ø-u

2SG.M  lion  2-kill.IPFV-SG.M-COP.3SG.M

'You are killing a lion.'

In Mesqan, the progressive aktionsart cannot be constructed from stative verbs. Hence, the following example is ungrammatical:

(27) *\*näggade*  *yïxänu.*

näggade  y-xän-ø-u

merchant  3-be(come).IPFV-SG.M-COP.3SG.M

'He is becoming a merchant.'

The progressive can also be constructed by means of a nominal clause with a locative structure in which the copula complement is a verbal noun preceded by the locative marker *bä-* and followed by the postposition *fʷär* 'top':

(28) *kamil*  *bäwäβra*  *fʷäru.*

kamil  bä-wä-bra  fʷär-u

Kamil  LOC-VN-eat.JUS  top-COP.3SG.M

'Kamil is eating.'

This locative structure is the only possibility to express a progress action in the past by replacing the present tense copula with the past tense auxiliary *bannä*, as in (29) and (30):

(29)  *rawda*        *bäwäβra*              *f<sup>w</sup>är*        *bannäčč.*
     rawda        bä-wä-bra              f<sup>w</sup>är        bannä-äčč
     Rawda        LOC-VN-eat.JUS        top        AUX.PST-3SG.M
     'Rawda was eating.'

(30)  *bäkänä*        *känä*        *att*        *gïzyä*        *fäyya*        *wa*        *bušä*        *säβ*        *batt*
     bä-känä        känä        att        gïzyä        fäyya        wa        bušä        säb        bä-att
     LOC-day        day        one        time        good        and        bad        person        LOC-one

     *f<sup>w</sup>är*        *tiyaro*                        *bannä.*
     f<sup>w</sup>är        t-y-ar-o                        bannä
     top        SUB-3-go.IPFV-PL.M        AUX.PST
     'Once upon a time, a good and a bad man were going together (on a journey).'

The agent who is doing the progressive action is referred to by subject agreement on the copula or the past tense auxiliary.

According to Comrie (1976), the prospective aktionsart is used to show an imminent or intended action, or it describes an action which will be fulfilled without any doubt in the near future. In Mesqan, the prospective aktionsart is formed by an imperfective verb marked by the directional suffix *-e* and followed by the present tense copula *-u* or the past tense auxiliary *bannä*, as in the following examples:

(31)  *kamil*        *nägä*        *tätïmhïrt bete*        *yarewu.*
     kamil        nägä        tä-tïmhïrt_bet-e        y-ar-ø-e-u
     Kamil        tomorrow        ABL-school-DIR        3-go.IPFV-SG.M-DIR-COP.3SG.M
     i. 'Kamil intends to go to school tomorrow.'
     ii. 'Kamil is going to (go to) school tomorrow.'

(32)  *kamil*        *tïrama*        *tïmhïrt bete*        *yare*                        *bannä.*
     kamil        tïrama        tïmhïrt_bet-e        y-ar-ø-e                bannä
     Kamil        yesterday        school-DIR        3-go.IPFV-SG.M-DIR        AUX.PST
     'Kamil was intending to go to school yesterday.'

In (32) above, the past tense auxiliary *bannä* attached to an imperfective verb marked by the directional suffix *-e* states a situation which was proposed to be fulfilled in the past, but actually did not realize.

## 4. Summary and conclusion

Mesqan distinguishes between verbs in perfective and imperfective aspect by separate verb bases and two different sets of subject agreement markers. A perfective verb marks its subject by a set of suffixes, while an imperfective verb uses a combination of pre- and

suffixes. With regard to tense, Mesqan also distinguishes between past and non-past tense. The past tense is marked by the past tense auxiliary, whereas the non-past tense is marked by the present tense copula or zero. Agent-oriented moods (jussive and imperative) are expressed by verb inflection, while speaker-oriented moods (obligation and ability) are expressed by periphrastic constructions. Furthermore, the progressive aktionsart is expressed by a periphrastic construction consisting of an imperfective verb and the invariable 3SG.M present tense copula, or by means of a locative construction with a verbal noun. The prospective aktionsart is expressed through a periphrastic construction in which imperfective verb is marked by the directionality suffix *-e* and followed by the copula or by the past tense auxiliary.

## Symbols and abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| † | extinct |
| * | hypothetical/ungrammatical form |
| ø | zero morpheme |
| 1 | first person |
| 2 | second person |
| 3 | third person |
| ABL | ablative |
| AUX | auxiliary |
| CNV | converb |
| COP | copula |
| DIR | directional |
| IMP | imperative |
| IPFV | imperfective |
| JUS | jussive |
| LOC | locative |
| M | masculine |
| MAL | malefactive, and also locative or instrumental |
| OBJ | object |
| PFV | perfective |
| PL | plural |
| PRS | present |
| PST | past |
| SBJ | subject |
| SG | singular |
| SUB | subordinating prefix |
| VN | verbal noun |

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