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## Morpho-Syntactic Analysis of Temporal Realities in Esan and English Languages

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### ABSTRACT

Temporal realities/expressions are crucial in human conversations, and are uniquely different. This study assesses temporal realities in English and Esan languages. It examines how tense and aspect are marked in both languages, uncovering different expressions. Esan language, an indigenous language within the Edo linguistic group in Nigeria, exhibits a different structural system of tense, aspect, and tonal variations from that of the English language. The different representations, usage, and flow of these elements may possibly impinge on usage which could result in limited exploration by Esan-English learners. Theoretical insights are drawn from Chomsky's Principles and Parameters of the Universal Grammar. The descriptive method of analysis was used to analyse data drawn from English texts, and native speakers of the Esan language. Findings revealed that temporal realities in both languages vary in representation and usage. Identifying the differences would enable effective usage and avoidance of morphosyntactic errors. With the insights the study provides, it recommends teaching strategies including useful resources that would aid correct usage of the Esan and English tense, aspect, and tones. This should be adequately handled to enable improved learning and effective usage, as well as avoid challenging morphosyntactic analysis in tense, aspect and tonal variations. The study concludes that the understanding of varying temporal realities of both languages would enhance effective usage and curb unnecessary generalisations.

**Keywords:** Tense; Aspect; Esan and English Languages; Principles and Parameters

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#### ARTICLE INFO

Received: 6 January 2025 | Revised: 25 March 2025 | Accepted: 21 April 2025 | Published Online: 24 April 2025  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i5.8322>

#### CITATION

Ehibor, O.J., Osimen, G.U., Adesiyon, R.U., 2025. Morpho-Syntactic Analysis of Temporal Realities in Esan and English Languages. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 7(5): 181–190. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.0564/fls.v7i5.8322>

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# 1. Introduction

Language is an integral part of human nature. It is adaptive and elastic. With language, one can capture a new reality with a new name, hence, expands, and the new reality becomes part of the lived experiences of humans. As such, language is not only an integral aspect of the human nature, but in fact, the principle element of cultural identity<sup>[1]</sup>. The ability to use language distinguishes man from lower animals. Every natural language is uniquely structured in an orderly manner with distinct rules and principles. The order in which words are combined to produce phrases and sentences is very important because it shows that language, though abstract, is patterned<sup>[2]</sup>. Language comprises symbols, signs and vocal acts, indiscriminately formed and conventionally employed to express ideas, thoughts and emotions<sup>[3]</sup>. The use of signs and symbols refers to a set of signals, having its activity translating into one signal in such a way that the giver and receiver of the symbols come into translation, interpretation or response, as the case may be. Languages are different in the way meaningful elements are put together, how words are made up, and how they are combined into phrases and sentences<sup>[4]</sup>.

In every human language, morphemes/words are not randomly combined; rules and principles define their combinations. It is in syntax that these rules and principles are clearly defined. The knowledge of the syntax of a language gives one the linguistic competence to know which word in a sentence goes with, or modifies the other. As every human language is unique, so are the structures unique and differently put to conform to rules that guide each formation<sup>[5]</sup>. The syntactic structure of any language is entirely the result of properly combined elements of a language. This is what the syntax of every language establishes – selection, combination and ordering of different grammatical categories to form phrases, clauses and sentences. Going by the behaviours of morphology and syntax in any natural language, this study examines Esan and English morpho-syntactic representations of temporal realities in Esan and English languages.

## 1.1. Esan Language

Esan language is as old as the Esan tribe itself<sup>[6]</sup>. It is a tonal Edoid language<sup>[7]</sup>. The Edoid languages are some

two to three dozen languages spoken in Southern Nigeria, predominantly in the former Bendel State, with few speakers in Bayelsa, Ondo, Rivers and Delta States. Esan language is spoken in Edo State, Nigeria. In the Nigerian politico-linguistic scheme, Esan is a minority language spoken in five local government areas in Edo State.

## 1.2. English Language

English is a member of the Indo-European family of languages<sup>[8]</sup>. As the language of communication, it has helped to weld the multiethnic groups in Nigeria. Nigeria, being a multilingual setting, communication would have been difficult without the English language. The English language is a tool of instruction in most Nigerian schools, and any climb on the educational ladder is determined by one's competence and proficiency in its usage. English is the yardstick with which the quality and quantity of education possessed by a speaker or writer in Nigeria is measured<sup>[9]</sup>. English, as an analytic language, is stress-patterned, employs function and lexical words, and depends on word order to signify grammatical relations. It is characterised by its adaptability, creativity, flexibility and openness to the influence of other languages<sup>[10]</sup>. English has a system of liberal hospitality to the structure of other languages.

# 2. Theoretical Framework

This study draws insights from Chomsky<sup>[11]</sup>. Principles and Parameters of the Universal Grammar. Principles and Parameters (P&P) is a framework in generative linguistics that is used to depict the syntax of a natural language by employing overarching principles and parameters that can be transferred on or off the characteristics of individual languages. The fundamental concept of principle and parameter theory is to differentiate between the main areas of cross-linguistic variation (the parameter) and the invariants of human language (the principles).

Universal Grammar (henceforth UG) characterises human language and explains shared ideologies from which languages select their list<sup>[12]</sup>. It is supposed that, since UG defines common core principles of language that serve as a pool from which each language selects its ingredients, one will conclusively assume that human languages

should be the same no matter who and where they are spoken. This is not entirely so because principles describe potentially universal attributes of natural languages or properties of grammatical operations, but the application of the elements of languages differ compositionally since each language selects items and applies them differently, as required of each language.

The difference in human language has been described as sets of parameters which specify a finite set of alternatives. The non-shared features of particular languages mark the cross-linguistic parameterised difference of grammar. The parameterised variations are generated by some features of UG, unavailable to certain linguistic groups; in essence, parameters refer to the dimension of grammatical variations among natural languages such as the Esan and the English languages in this study

## 2.1. The Inflection

This study examines two important elements of language—tense and aspect (inflections). Inflection is abbreviated as INFL. In some recent works, inflection is represented with I, but this study sticks to the INFL abbreviation. The INFL is a node which contains all verbal inflections including person and number. In a sentence, INFL is a constituent that contains other constituents when expanded. In the traditional grammar, INFL was not mentioned. It was the auxiliary (AUX) that showcased tense, agreement, modal, aspect, etc., in grammar. In order to accommodate other aspects in this category, INFL was introduced and used as the cover term for all forms of verbal inflections such as tense, aspect, mood, number, person, voice, etc. <sup>[13]</sup>. These are essential grammatical categories that are expressed by inflectional affixes. INFL describes amendment of a word to reveal diverse structural categories (tense, case, aspect, person, number, etc.). INFL uses internal adjustment, such as a change in vowel, or a prefix, suffix, or infix to represent one or more categories. Several nouns are modified for number with the inflectional plural suffix “-s” and some English verbs change tense with inflectional past tense suffix “-ed”, and many others which are not far-fetched in this study.

According to Radford <sup>[14]</sup>, INFL is a category devised by Chomsky, whose members include finite auxiliary inflections for tense, agreement and infinitival particles.

This definition conceives INFL as a category that contains information of verbs such as tense, mood, agreement features and affixes. The rule that governs the linear occurrence of ordering these verbal grammatical categories was Auxiliary Expansion Rule <sup>[15]</sup>; but presently in most languages, the INFL helps the main verb bear markers of tense, aspect, mood, negation, etc. INFL has two obligatory features: Agreement and Tense. It also has optional features such as Modals, Aspects, etc.

Tense, aspect, mood, etc., are different instances and processes of the operation of the verb. Their uses are as old as the verb itself <sup>[16]</sup>, but their genuine operational meanings are either misconstrued or misunderstood. With the use of auxiliaries, it is always easy to mark tense, aspect and mood. Characteristically, the auxiliary verbs yield to numerous grammatical behaviours and undergo negative contraction whenever a marker (not) comes immediately after them; for instance, *can't*, *shouldn't*, *wouldn't*, *haven't*, etc.; they are also used in polar questions, e.g.,

- 1a. *Mary has gone to the market.*
- 1b. *Has Mary gone to the market?*
- 2a. *The boys are playing football.*
- 2b. *Are the boys playing football?*

## 2.2. Tense

Tense (French, ‘tens’), which means ‘time, showing category of aspect <sup>[17]</sup>, expresses time reference, relative to the period of speaking. It is the form of verb that shows the time an event or action happened. Tense is manifested by engaging specific forms of verbs. Tense in contemporary linguistics theory expresses or grammaticalises time reference that replaces action in time. However, in some descriptive languages, such as the European grammar, the term tense is useful in series of verb forms that expresses not just position in time but added properties of the act <sup>[18]</sup>. Tense is a non-linguistic concept because it explains time <sup>[10]</sup>.

Tenses in most languages are the past, present and future tenses. Others are past and non-past, or future and non-future, etc. Tense can be easily shown by changing the spelling form of a verb. In English, for instance, the “Be” verb can change its form to “am”, “is” and “are” for the present form, and “was”, and “were” for the past form. To explain further, tense relates the period of a situation to the period of an utterance. Situation is used as a cover term

for action, event or state of affairs. This situation is said to be deictic. According to Lyon <sup>[19]</sup>, deixis denotes location and identification of persons, objects, situations such as events, processes and activities being talked about, or referred to in an utterance. Tense is indeed deictic because it locates the time of the situation with speech time and is referred to as “Absolute Tense” <sup>[20]</sup>. Tense, as a deictic category, is expressed in the verb form which reflects or specifies time reference. When this situation occurs, tense is said to be grammaticalised, and such language in which it is found is said to be “tensed” <sup>[19]</sup>. Although not all languages have tense, many have various morphemes of time by which temporal specification is made. Ndimele submits that “languages which have no overt correlation between verbal morphology and time are said to be tenseless” <sup>[21]</sup>, while languages that exhibit this correlation between verbal morphology and time reference are said to have tense”; for example, the English language. Esan language is also a language where tense is grammaticalised because there is evidence that it has distinct grammatical morphemes for past and future time reference in addition to some diacritical symbols. Nwala mentions that “tense is a linguistic category that shows how verbs transform to respond to changes in time” <sup>[22]</sup>. Nwala, in a rather practical form, observes that ‘a verb can change its form without any change in time reference’ <sup>[23]</sup>. He notes that tenses must not be necessarily marked whenever a verb changes its form.

Examples:

3. *The little boy is being flogged (present tense)*

4. *The little boy shall be flogged (future tense)*

Sentence 3 expresses a present continuous tense, while sentence 4 expresses futurity, even though both engaged same inflected verb form “flogged”.

### 2.3. Aspect

Aspect is a function of the verb that defines the duration such as completion and continuation <sup>[24]</sup>. As a grammatical category, it reveals the manner in which the verbal action, event, or state denoted by a verb spread over time. English Aspects are progressive (imperfective) and perfective. Progressive, as the name indicates, shows an ongoing action, expressing existing continuous or repetitive situations as time flows. For instance, “*He was assisting her*”. The progressive expresses an on-going action with the

“-ing” morpheme added to the action word. Perfective shows the completion of an action considered as a single whole. The “-ed” morpheme expresses this, alongside other linguistic changes, used to denote an event conceived as bound and unitary, without reference to any flow of time, for example, “*I helped him*”. According to Igwebuike and Chimunya <sup>[25]</sup>, perfective expresses an action considered as a single whole, while the imperfective (progressive) expresses an action considered only from the point of view of its concrete denotative features, without reference to its totality. Aspect is chiefly concerned with the manner in which the verbal action is expressed. It deals with the description of an action by a verb, whether in progress or in completion <sup>[19]</sup>.

The distinguishing fact of both the imperfective and perfective aspect is that, imperfective is associated with actions that are processes, while perfective aspect is considered as a complete whole action. The main factor that differentiates these two types of aspects depends on how the time it occurs is viewed (complete, ongoing, consequentially, planned, etc.). According to Comrie <sup>[26]</sup>, some aspectual differences show a relation in time between the event and the time reference. This is the case with the perfect aspect, which indicates that, event occurred prior to (but has continuing reference at) the time of reference.

### 2.4. Tense Versus Aspect

Tense and aspect are belongings of the verb. They are two different properties that indicate verb’s position in time, but closely related grammatical categories used in temporal specification, which according to Ejele (2000b) and Ejele (1990) <sup>[27,28]</sup>, are difficult to clearly define, but can be distinguished. Temporal specification refers to a formal specification ordering of events. Thus, while both involve temporal specification, the deictic nature of tense yields specific reference to time, while aspect being non-deictic, in contrast, makes non-specific or definite reference to time. However, there is no doubt that tense and aspect are so close that they impinge on each other <sup>[29]</sup>. While tense overtly involves the concept of time, aspect, more subtly, also depends on this concept. According to Essien <sup>[30]</sup>, many African languages such as Isekiri <sup>[31]</sup>, Ibibio <sup>[32]</sup>, Esan <sup>[28]</sup>, distinguish between these categories.

Though tense and aspect both convey information

about time, they remain different. While tense relates the time of referent to some other time, commonly the speech event, aspect conveys other temporal information such as duration, completion or frequency, as it relates to the time of an action. Thus, tense refers to “temporally when”, and aspect refers to “temporally how”. Tense indicates the location in time; aspect describes the texture of the time in which a situation occurs, a continuous range of time, a sequence of discrete points in time, etc. <sup>[33]</sup>.

According to Ejele <sup>[33]</sup>, tense, aspect, and mood are identified grammatical categories in the Esan language, although not all have morphological representations. Some are represented with the unmarked case and others with a diacritic (tone mark). For instance, the present tense is indicated with an unmarked case, alongside a particular syntactic structure “*o*” together with a tone mark placed on top. Verbs do not have (underlying) tones, but depend on other factors such as the tone on the surrounding constituents, the tense, aspect, or mood in which they are used. In Esan language, aside from morphemes that are used to indicate tenses, it is generally the case that a non-high (usually low) tone is used to indicate both the present and future tenses and a high tone for the past tense. To these, Esan language exhibits the high (H), low (L), rising (LH), and falling (HL) tones at the systematic phonetic level <sup>[34]</sup>. The Esan language is dominated with the high tone.

Esan language has inflectional changes but is not all morphologically represented. For example, the present tense is not represented by a particular morpheme; it is usually expressed through a syntactic structure “*o*” which represents a pronoun, placed after the subjects of sentences; also accompanied by a low tone mark. The past is represented with the “*ka*” morpheme placed before the verb with a high tone; and the future tense is expressed with the “*dè*” morpheme that acts as a preverbal morpheme, alongside a particular syntactic structure “*o*” the low tone. It occurs with zero or unmarked verb form, that is, with no affix directly placed before it. By these, tense in Esan language is grammaticalised based on the fact that it has distinct grammatical morphemes for past and future time reference in addition to tones. Ejele posits that, Esan has verbal morphemes corresponding to the past and future tenses, though not the present tense, which exists, but in an unmarked form <sup>[34]</sup>. Braimah et al. further explain that,

this distinction suggests that, instead of the traditional grammatical tripartite distinction on the deictic temporal reference scale: Point of Speech, Event, and Reference (ST, EP, RP), the basic distinction in the tense system may be between future and non-future, or past and non-past, or both <sup>[35,36]</sup>.

Esan language further has what is described as “immediate” past and future tenses <sup>[36]</sup>. The term “immediate” is used to refer to actions that have just happened or will soon happen or take place after the sentence has been uttered. This is linguistically represented as “*laa*” with different tones attached to express different instances. Thus:

5. “*lāa*” (high-mid tone) expresses situations being initiated but not completed

6. “*làà*” (high-low tone) expresses situations that have just taken place

7. “*lāá*” (high-high tone) expresses futurity as well as the speaker’s confidence or certainty in what is expressed.

The first two representations of the immediate past are different in the sense that “*lāa*” (high mid) describes an action that has been initiated (but not yet completed), while “*làà*” (high low) describes an action that has just taken place. In contrast with the immediate past tenses, the immediate future represented by “*lāá*” (high high) expresses speaker’s confidence/certainty of what is being expressed. “*Laa*” is treated as a morpheme that expresses immediacy in tenses with different tones indicating the different tenses instead of being treated as three separate markers <sup>[36]</sup>. With these illustrations, tense is, therefore, grammaticalised in Esan language because it has morphemes at the morpho-syntactic level that express both past and future tenses.

Apart from morphemes and tone marks used to indicate past and future tenses in Esan, tones are independently used to reveal their presence in some peculiar contexts. Basic tones identified to express tenses in Esan are the high and low tones and most rarely, mid-low tones. To indicate the past in this regard, the high tone is used on the first syllable of the zero/unmarked verb form, and the low tone is used on the first syllable of the verb for the present and future. Below are some examples where tone marks are used to identify tenses, though in limited contextual usages.

8. Ínode, ímhen wénna (past tense with a high tone).  
‘Yesterday, I worked’.

9. Élena, ímhen wenna (present tense with a low tone).  
‘Today, I work’.



10. *ákhór, imhen de wenna* (future tense with a low tone)

*'Tomorrow, I will work'.*

In the aspectual system in Esan language, progressive present and progressive past exist. The progressive present is not indicated with a morpheme but with the use of a low tone mark placed on the verb. The progressive past is realised with the “a” morpheme as a preverbal morpheme, thus, “a-VP”. This comes after the ‘ka’ past morpheme in sentences. The progressive present is not overtly represented by a morpheme but is realised in the tone, being non-high (usually low) <sup>[36]</sup>. In contrast, the progressive past is morphologised, being realised as “a-”. This comes in the “a-VP” form, where a- is a prefix and VP is the verb phrase, with the verb in its base form. The morpheme used to indicate the perfective in Esan is “fo” and is positioned at the end of each construction in its functions. These are illustrated in sentences as the study progresses.

### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1. Past Tense in Esan and English Languages

Past tense in Esan language is indicated with the ‘ka’ morpheme. It is placed after the subject and before the verb in sentences. When this happens, the verb assumes the unmarked form.

11. *O ká yen ebai.*

*[NP (PAST) cook food].*

*'He/she cooked food'.*

12. *Ehi ká dagbare.*

*[NP (PAST) go out].*

*'Ehi went out'.*

“Ká” as a morpheme is directly placed before the verbs, indicating the past form in Esan language. It acts as a preverbal morpheme in the language; when it does, the verb form that accompanies it assumes the present state. This is not the same English where it is indicated with an internal change or an additional affix (sit – sat; eat – ate; cut – cut; cook – cooked, etc.).

#### 3.2. Present Tense in Esan and English Languages

As mentioned earlier, the present tense is not overtly

represented by a morpheme or a word in Esan language but is indicated with the use of a tone on a syntactic structure “ô”, which represents a pronoun placed between the subject and the verb of a sentence. This is expressed in the examples below.

13. *Ómo ô gbikilen.*

*[NP he dance].*

*'Omo dances'.*

14. *Ómoye ô hoemo ikpia.*

*[NP she like men].*

*'Omoye likes men'.*

Examples show that the present tense is not overtly represented, rather, the pronoun (ô) is used before the verbs which indicates he/she must be accompanied with a falling tone to indicate the present tense. The pronoun serves as a particulariser in the sentence. It is used to lay emphasis, pointing directly to specific persons or things.

In the English language, the present tense is indicated differently from that of Esan language. Morphemes represent it. These are the “is” and “are” morphemes of the “Be” verb.

15. *Fred cooks.*

16. *My sister is cooking.*

17. *He plays football every Saturday.*

18. *Rachael and Bola are sweeping.*

#### 3.3. Future Tense in Esan and English Languages

The future tense is represented with the “dè” morpheme in Esan language. It acts as a preverbal morpheme. This morpheme also occurs with the zero or unmarked verb form that is, without added affix or internal change in the verb word, and is placed directly before the verb, as it is with the past tense in the language. In addition, it takes the special syntactic structure “ô” as it does in the present tense usage. It is used to lay emphasis.

19. *Ómo ô de wenna.*

*[Omo he (FUT) work].*

*'Omo will work'.*

20. *Ómo ô de daghe.*

*[Omo he (FUT) see].*

*'Omo will see'.*

In the English language, the morpheme “will” (and other auxiliaries) are used to show futurity and are employed as preverbal words, same as in the Esan language.

The difference is the additional syntactic structure “o” examples in (26, 27, 28 and 29) which is situated after the subject and before the future tense morpheme “de” in the Esan utterances. This is not represented in this form in the English language.

### 3.4. Immediate Past and Future Tenses in Esan Language

21. *Omo láa yen ebai.*  
[Omo gone cook food].  
'Omo has gone to cook food' (Omo is going to cook food).
22. *Omo láà yen ebai.*  
[Omo just cook food].  
'Omo has just cooked food'
23. *Omo láá yen ebai.*  
'Omo will cook food' (It is Omo who will cook food).

The two descriptions of the immediate past are differently ordered. This is because “láa” (high-mid) describes an action that has been initiated and not yet completed. Thus, *Omo has gone/is going to cook food but has not returned*; while in “láà” (high-low), *Omo has gone and has only just returned from cooking*. In contrast with the immediate past tenses, the immediate future, represented by “láá” (high-high), expresses the speaker's confidence/certainty that “it is Omo that will cook the food”. In the immediate tenses, “laa” represents immediacy with different tone marks attached to it express tenses (high-mid (láa) or high-low (láà) for past tense and high-high (láá) for the future).

### 3.5. Aspect in Esan and English Languages

In the aspectual system of Esan language, the progressive present is not morphologically represented, but realised with a tone, being non-high (usually low), attached to the verb in utterances.

24. *Omo lé eyan.*  
[Omo eating yam].  
'Omo is eating yam'.
25. *Omo wo lé eyan.*  
[Omo really eating yam].  
'Omo is really eating yam'.

The progressive past in Esan language is morphologised, thus realised as “á-VP”, where “á-” is a prefix and “VP” is the verb phrase, with the verb in its base form. See

26. *Omo kâ á-lé eyan.*  
[Omo PAST PROG-eat yam].  
'Omo was eating yam'.
27. *Omo kâ á-gbikilen.*  
[Omo PAST PROG-dance].  
'Omo was dancing'.
28. *Omo kâ á-yen ebai.*  
[Omo PAST PROG-cook food].  
'Omo was cooking food'.
29. *Omo kâ á-vie.*  
[Omo PAST PROG cry].  
'Omo was crying'.

The situation referred to by the verbs in (26, 27, 28, 29) is in the progressive past form indicated with the morpheme “a-VP” placed after the past morpheme ‘ká’; while the progressive present has no morphological form to show action in progress, but indicated with a low tone attached to the verb.

The notion of completion (perfective) is lexicalised with the fo ‘finish’ morpheme in the Esan language. This is placed at the end of every sentence that establishes the notion of completion. Sentences below put in sets, illustrate this in comparison with the present and past usages.

30. *Ehi ô gbikilen.*  
[Ehi he dances].  
'Ehi dances'.
31. *Ehi kâ gbikilen.*  
[Ehi (PAST) dance].  
'Ehi danced'.
32. *Ehi gbikilen fo.*  
[Ehi dance finish].  
'Ehi has finished dancing/Ehi has danced'.
33. *Osaremei ô wanre.*  
[Osareme he grown].  
'Osareme has grown'.
34. *Osareme kâ wanre.*  
[Osareme (PAST) grown].  
'Osareme has grown'.
35. *Osareme wanre fo.*  
[Osareme grown finish].  
'Osareme has finished growing/Ehi has grown'.
36. *Efe ô wenna.*  
[Efe he works].  
'Efe works'.

37. *E e â wenna.*  
[Efe (PAST) work].  
'Efe worked'.
38. *Efe wenna fo.*  
[Efe worked finish].  
'Efe has finished working/ Efe has worked'.
39. *Omoye ô neromo.*  
[Omoye she prays].  
'Omoye prays'.
40. *Omoye kê neromo.*  
[Omoye (PAST) pray].  
'Omoye prayed'.
41. *Omoye neromo fo.*  
[Omoye prayed finish].  
'Omoye has finished praying/Omoye has prayed'.

'Omoye has finished praying/Omoye has prayed'.

The verb *gbikilen* 'dance', *wénna* 'work' and *néromo* 'pray' are activities, while *wanre* 'grow up' is an accomplishment. Esan language does not make a distinction between activities and accomplishments but treats both as processes since they behave in the same way as the concept of completeness.

Aspect in the English language is not morphologically or syntactically represented same way as in the Esan language. The progressive inflection is represented with the "-ing" suffix, indicating an on-going action or event, existing frequently as time flows; while the perfective inflection which shows completion of an action considered as a whole, is represented with the "-ed" suffix, alongside other linguistic changes that occur. Thus, the difference in the Esan and the English aspectual systems discussed so far, lies particularly on the morpho-syntactic structural representations in both languages. In Esan language, the progressive present is not overtly represented but realised with a low tone attached to verbs in sentences; and the progressive past is realized by a-VP, placed in the midst of sentences, just after the past morpheme. In the English language, they are represented differently by indicating the progressive form with an "-ing" suffix attached to verb words, indicating continuous action. The Esan perfective indicated with the "*fo*" morpheme is placed at the end of every sentence that indicates the notion of completion, while the English perfective is expressed with the "-ed" past morpheme, attached as suffix to verb words, showing

completion deprived of reference to any flow of time; signals a single whole (beginning, middle and end).

Temporal realities (Tense and aspect), the fundamental human experience of time, do not only boost linguistic understanding but also enhance cross-cultural dialogue and appreciation, revealing how linguistic categories express deeper cultural, cognitive, and ontological concepts. Tense and aspect in English have a well-defined system that emphasises linear time (past, present, future) influenced by Western thought's sequential view of events showing time as fixed and measurable, while the Esan language, like many other African indigenous languages, prioritises aspectual distinction such as ongoing versus completed actions over explicit marking. This indicates event-based perception of time common to many African cultures. The differences in both languages show contrasting worldviews and cognition patterns because language is a communication tool, as well as a means through which societies interpret and recognise experiences in the world. The distinction provides insights into wider cultural and cognitive orientations. The differences in both languages show cultural orientation – a sequential, time-linear worldview versus an event-based perception of time. These linguistic structures shape the respective cultural context, influencing cognition social practices and worldviews, and show the interplay between language structure and cultural values.

## 4. Conclusions

This study, based on its purpose and findings concludes that morphological and syntactical representations in languages are different and unique. The grammar of any language is unique, and forms the bulk of the linguistic competence of the user of the language. A cross linguistic study of languages shows the universality of human language, as well as parametric variations. The study has shown the universality of linguistic items and placements in languages. It has very importantly shown the morpho-syntactic peculiarities of temporal realities in English and Esan languages, revealing areas of different verbal representations, how words are uniquely modified to express various temporal realities, with the usefulness of language variations, which enabled the study to systematically showcased differences that exist in languages. In the philosophy of language, tense and aspect reveal how linguis-



tic categories embody cultural, cognitive and logical concepts. The assessment of these aspects provides insights into how different languages and their speakers navigate and articulate the fundamental human experiences of time. This study enhances linguistic understanding and enriches cross-cultural dialogues and appreciation. The observations and findings of the study are, therefore, Esan-English learner friendly. This is because it would improve teaching, learning, and usage strategies, in avoidance of enormous generalisations. Due to the fact that Esan speakers are used to aspectual distinction rather than tense sequences, the direct teaching of English tenses may result in confusion. Thus, the study recommends the creation of teaching resources that explicitly compare the two systems to enable learners to understand the shift in temporal realities, and avoid any form of transfer. The study further recommends the development of exercises that stress practical application of tense in English, while acknowledging the underlying aspectual logic in Esan. Language educators may lack such cognitive and linguistic differences in both languages, so professional development should be encouraged with a focus on cross-linguistic temporal frameworks and techniques for teaching tense and aspect in multilingual classrooms. Language education programs should incorporate comparative insights, contextualised learning materials, and teacher training to ensure that learners navigate these differences, fostering improved comprehension and communication skills.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization: O.J.E.; methodology; G.U.O. and O.J.E.; validation: O.J.E. and R.U.A.; formal analysis: O.J.E. and G.U.O.; investigation; R.U.A.; resources; R.U.A. and G.U.O.; data curation; G.U.O. and O.J.E.; writing—original draft preparation; O.J.E. and G.U.O.; writing—review and editing: R.U.A. and O.J.E.; visualization; G.U.O.; supervision; O.J.E.; project administration; R.U.A.; funding acquisition: O.J.E., G.U.O., and R.U.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## Funding

This work was supported by Covenant University

Centre for Research, Innovation and Discovery grant number: Not available

## Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Covenant University, Nigeria (protocol code: None).

## Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

## Data Availability Statement

No new data was created.

## Acknowledgments

The authors appreciate the Covenant University Centre for Research, Innovation, and Discovery (CUCRID) for supporting the APC of this work.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

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