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LACUS FORUM XXXVII

COMMUNICATION AND COGNITION: MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

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PROGRESSIVE AND HABITUAL ASPECT
IN C'LELA OF NORTHWEST NIGERIA

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Abstract. This study describes the structure of the verb phrase used for two cat-egories of imperfective aspect in C'lela, a West Kainji language of northwest Nigeria. C'lela shows progressive aspect using the metaphor of location in con-junction with verbal nouns marked according to the noun class system. The main verb in the progressive verbal phrase is the same stative copula that is used in any locative statement. Habitual aspect in C'lela is also described, with examples drawn from a variety of texts. The stative copula is optional and the verb express-ing habitual action is not nominalized as it is for the progressive aspect. With either category of imperfective, the time interpretation of clauses is established in the context. Use of texts in studying the interaction of tense and aspect is thus shown to be crucial.

Keywords: Aspect, Text, Context, Habitual, Imperfective, Progressive, Tense, Kainji, Nigeria

Languages: C'lela (Dakarkari), English, Cishingini, Hun-Saare (Dukanci), Yoruba, Igbo, Kpelle, Shona, Swahili, Akoose, Kisi

C'LELA IS A LANGUAGE OF THE WEST KAINJI SUBGROUP, which belongs to the Benue-Congo family of the Benue-Congo language phylum. This paper explores the linguis-tic resources used by C'lela to convey two common subcategories of the imperfective aspect, namely progressive and habitual.

The author worked for over ten years with some of the peoples and languages of Kebbi and Niger States in northwest Nigeria. This work focused initially on a soci-olinguistic survey of eight West Kainji languages (1991-93), then on a more detailed analysis of C'lela (phonetically [tʃəlélà]) for the purposes of language development and Bible translation (1995-2005).

Map 1 (following page) shows the geographic location[1] of the West Kainji sub-group. West Kainji languages have active noun class systems and their verbal sys-tems are interesting to compare with those of other Benue-Congo subgroups, includ-ing the well-studied Bantu languages. The map also clarifies the extent of overlap in northern Nigeria among the numerous subgroups of the Benue-Congo and Chadic language families.

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[1] The location of these languages in northwestern Nigeria is indicated on Map 1 by the white rectangle around the name West Kainji. Two smaller rectangles indicate the locations of the East Kainji and Plateau languages. These are the subgroups of Benue-Congo most closely related to West Kainji. Roger Blench (p.c. 2011) feels the division between East Kainji and West Kainji is based more on geography than on linguistics.
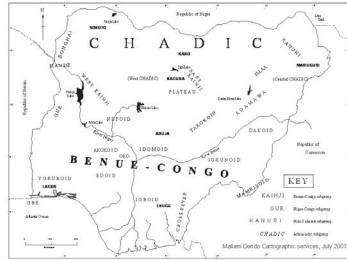
Map 1. Benue-Congo subgroups and Chadic subgroups in Nigeria (Blench 2007:Slide 3).

Appendix 1 gives information on all C'lela texts from which examples are cited in this paper. Appendix 2 gives the glossing abbreviations used and Appendix 3 gives the conventions followed when representing the phonemes of C'lela in examples.

1. STUDYING IMPERFECTIVE ASPECT. Comrie (1976:24-25) gives the general semantic characterization of imperfectivity as "explicit reference to the internal temporal structure of a situation, viewing a situation from within." Many languages have "a single category to express imperfectivity", but in others "imperfectivity is subdivided into a number of distinct categories."

This paper contends that C'lela is a language of the latter type, with clear grammatical distinction between two categories of the imperfective, progressive and habitual.

1.1. THE INSUFFICIENCY OF ELICITED DATA. In writing about verbal constructions, Welmers (1973:344-45) cautions those beginning to research the verbal predications of a Niger-Congo language. Naive elicitation, he warns, will likely proceed with the assumption that African languages have a simple present tense matching that of English. But when one's language tutor gives an "alleged equivalent" to the statement 'I build a house', what does that equivalent mean? The two strongest contenders for the English gloss are 'I am building a house' (progressive) or 'I build houses' (customary). Welmers (1973:345) says the elicitor must distinguish between these two meanings "since many African languages have quite distinct constructions to indicate customary and present continuing action".

The author's old field research notes many times display this kind of naive assumption concerning C'lela verbs. This study proceeds from the premise that initial glosses of elicited data should not be given too much weight in grammatical analysis.[2] An understanding of elicited data, particularly for verbal constructions, should be shaped by observations of those constructions in the context of natural text.

1.2. THE POWER OF NATURAL TEXT. Realizations of imperfective aspect are not as abundant in natural text as examples of perfective aspect are. In narratives, progressive and habitual aspect are usually found off the main line of events, in such non-

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[2] Of course there are methods more suitable to eliciting data than asking a bilingual language consultant to translate sentences from English. For example, one could outline a situation involving progressive action and ask how the consultant would describe it in the language. The author does not wish to imply that all elicited data is bad.

event material as participant orientation, setting and explanation (Dooley & Levinsohn 2001:81). The content of reported speech in a narrative is also fruitful ground for examples of imperfective, since such content is also "a type of nonevent" (83).

Exploration of expository texts often furnishes a wealth of descriptive statements, which may employ the grammatical resources of the language for conveying imperfective aspect. Natural text has the considerable advantage over elicited data of providing a complete context for the verbal constructions being studied. According to Dooley & Levinsohn (2001:51), the composer of a text constructs a mental representation of whatever their discourse is about. The audience of the discourse must then use expectation structures to arrive at an understanding of the composer's mental representation. These expectation structures arise from "two principal sources: experience (either personal or collective, which we call culture) and … the text itself" (2000:52). Thus, there are many elements assumed by the audience of a text to be part of the context of any statement in the text.

We predict that we will frequently rely on context as a check on the semantics of progressive and habitual aspects. This should keep us from reading into verbal constructions something we expect to find there which may actually be carried by the context.

2. PROGRESSIVE ASPECT IN C'LELA. Comrie (1976:38) states as a "general linguistic definition" that progressivity is "the combination of continuous meaning and non-stativity." Verbs in a language tend to divide into two disjoint classes, stative verbs and nonstative verbs, with respect to the question of whether they have a progressive form. Stative verbs (such as 'want', 'be tall', 'know') do not have progressive forms "since this would involve an internal contradiction between the stativity of the verb and the nonstativity essential to the progressive" (35). From the standpoint of cognitive grammar, Taylor (2002:404) agrees with Comrie: "The reason … why the progressive is unacceptable with truly stative situations is that the progressive and 'true' stativity are conceptually incompatible."

Comrie demonstrates that different languages give different answers to the question of whether to view raining, seeing, hearing, thinking, etc. as states or as dynamic situations (1976:35). Thus it is helpful to learn for any given language which verbs can be marked as progressive in the grammar of the language, and which cannot. This is essentially a conceptual decision and not a linguistic one.

2.1. EXAMPLES FROM RESEARCH NOTES. Elicited examples, though devoid of a context, are useful for displaying the usual syntactic structure for clauses in progressive aspect in C'lela. The examples of (1) are drawn from the author's field research notes.[3]

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[3] All data in this paper is presented phonemically, except that epenthetic schwa is also shown where required by C'lela syllabification rules (cf. Appendix 2). Abbreviations used for the grammatical meaning of morphemes are also listed in Appendix 2. Less common abbreviations are footnoted at their first occurrence in the paper.

(1) Elicited examples – intransitive verbs, progressive aspect[4]

    a. u   el-ə́n   s-kán.
        3s   be-PROG   PL.NC[5]-cry.out
        'S/he is crying out.'

    b. u   el-ə́n   c-waago.
        3s   be-PROG   PL.NC-sweeping
        'S/he is sweeping.'

    c. u   el-ə́n   d-hwerâ.
        3s   be-PROG   PL.NC-resting
        'S/he is resting.'

    d. u   el   nə́-m-ləvə.
        3s   be-PROG   MS[6].NC-sleeping
        'S/he is sleeping.'

    e. u   el   n-á-yomko.
        3s   be-PROG   SG.NC-working
        'S/he is working.'

    To show progressive aspect in C'lela, the strategy is periphrasis rather than inflection on the verb. The verbal phrase starts with the copula *el*, followed by the particle *n* (augmented by epenthetic schwa as needed for pronunciation). The final element in the verbal phrase is a verbal noun which conveys the action as being in progress. The particle should not be seen as an inflectional suffix on the copula; it can be linked with the coda of the copula or with the noun class marker, depending on normal syllabification processes. In the examples so far, a high tone is linked to the syllable into which the particle is incorporated.

    The elicited examples of (2) show that Yes-No questions with the progressive aspect employ a copulative element *lá*, glossed 'be?', which may be a suppletive allomorph of *el*. There are also other copulative elements used to convey negation (*za*), conditionality (*wa*), prior time (*la*), and subordination (*re*).[7]

(2) Elicited examples – progressive aspect in Yes-No questions[8]

    a. u   lá-ən   s-kân?
        3s   be?-PROG   PL.NC-cry.out\Q   (cf. (1a))
        'Is s/he crying out?'

    b. u   lá-ən   c-waagê?
        3s   be?-PROG   PL.NC-sweep\Q   (cf. (1b))
        'Is s/he sweeping?'

    c. u   lá-ən   d-hwerâ?
        3s   be?-PROG   PL.NC-rest\Q   (cf. (1c))
        'Is s/he resting?'

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[4] (Dettweiler 2000:25)

[5] NC = noun class marker

[6] MS = mass/noncount noun, distinct from Plural

[7] Examples of all these can be found in C'lela texts, but space to present examples for all is lacking.

[8] (Dettweiler 2000:64)

d. u lá   nə-m-ləvî?
   3s be?-PROG PL.NC-sleep\Q   (cf. (1d))
   'Is s/he sleeping?'

e. u lá   n-ayomkê?
   3s be?-PROG PL.NC-work\Q   (cf. (1e))
   'Is s/he working?'

The order of the periphrastic construction in the examples of (2) is identical to the order in the corresponding examples of (1). The three differences that characterize the Yes-No interrogative are the change in form of the copula, the association of high tone with the copula instead of with the *n* particle, and the change of vowel quality and tone on the final vowel of the clause, at least for examples (2b), (2d), and (2e).[9] With regard to the second difference, there is evidence that the initial high tone should be considered as a grammatical tone rather than as a lexical tone associated with either the copula or the particle.

It may be noted that all examples in (1) and (2) involve intransitive verbs. Set (3) of elicited examples illustrates how the direct objects of transitive verbs are included in the verbal phrase.

(3) Elicited examples–transitive verbs, progressive aspect[10]

a. u   el-ə́n   waag-mə   d-baa.   (16)
   3s   be-PROG   sweep-MS.NC   SG.NC-place   (cf. (1b))
   'S/he is sweeping a place.'

b. u   el-ə́n   guz-mə-n   kus-í   ri.   (16)
   3s   be-PROG   wash-MS.NC-of shirt-SG.NC   1s.POSS
   'S/he is washing my shirt.'

c. c   el-ə́n   bɔm-c   róvo.
   1P-EXCL   be-PROG   praise-PL.NC   2SPOSS   (57)
   'We are praising you.'

d. u   lá-ə̀n   goo-də-n   φ-híì?   (64)
   3s   be?-PROG   sow-SG.NC-of   PL.NC-sorghum
   'Is s/he planting sorghum?'

The syntactic pattern of the verbal phrase is the same with a transitive action as with an intransitive: copula followed by aspect particle followed by verbal noun. The main difference is that the nominalized form of the transitive verb becomes the head of a noun phrase, with the remaining part of the phrase indicating the recipient of the action expressed in the verbal noun. The kind of noun phrase so formed could be called a genitival or associative construction of the form N_{head} + NP. This genitival construction is widely used in C'lela, with no requirement that the head of the phrase be a verbal noun as it is in the examples of (3). The glue that holds the phrase together in the middle is composed of up to three elements: first, the noun class marker of

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9 The tone on the final vowel of (2a) and (2c) is phonetically (though not phonemically) different from the tone on the final vowel of (1a) and (1c) respectively. Vowel quality remains the same.

10 (Dettweiler 2000)

the head noun (this has been postposed from its usual position as prefix); second, a linking particle *n*, which is present under certain well-defined conditions,[11] as in (3b) and (3d), where it is glossed as 'of'; third, the noun class prefix on the object NP (if such exists and has not been postposed, as in example (3b)).

The noun class marker most common on verbal nouns is *m-*, postposed in (3a) and (3b) as *-mə* where the vowel is epenthetic. This may have semantic significance: *m-* is the marker of mass nouns and a transitive action such as 'sweeping' a place (3a) or 'washing' a shirt may be construed as a mass of action that accomplishes a particular purpose. Verbal nouns have been observed, however, to take a variety of class prefixes other than *m-* , especially when they are nominalized forms of intransitive verbs but even here as nominalizations of transitives (as in (3c) and (3d)). There is good evidence that the class marker used on a verbal noun is semantically significant (cf. iterativity of *s-*, to be discussed in example (7)).

2.2. EXAMPLES FROM TEXTS. Citing Welmers' exposition (1973:345-47) of Yoruba and Igbo imperfective, Comrie (1976:82) says that many West African languages are "tenseless." His meaning, he says, is that "there are no specific markers of past versus present tense, though there are markers of aspect."

The tendency for a linguist who is coming at a Niger-Congo language with the grammar grid of a language like English is to confuse imperfective aspect marking on the verbal phrase for the present tense, and perfective aspect marking on the verb for the past tense. This is not far wrong as a sort of default interpretation of the aspects—that is, speakers of the language are likely themselves to make this interpretation "in the absence of any contextual indication of time reference" (Comrie 1976:82). But "in the presence of an overt indication of time" such as a time adverbial, imperfective forms such as the progressive can be correctly understand as referring to a past period or a future period and perfective forms can equally be correctly understood as referring to present time or even future time (1976:82-83), under the pressure of the appropriate context.

The tenseless nature of C'lela can be demonstrated by turning our attention to how progressive and habitual aspects are used in natural text. The hypothesis is that the same clause we have interpreted as present progressive, 's/he is hoeing'. could equally well mean 's/he was hoeing', given a different time setting. The interpretation of imperfective aspects is straightforward when we pay attention to the time information given in the context of textual examples. For each example, the relevant time information is provided along with a reference to the sentence in which it is given.

(4) Examples from *Farmer* text – progressive aspect, time setting in context

    a. u   el   gɛ́   n-u-gɔvó.   (farmer02)
       3s   be   EMPH   PROG-SG.NC-hoe
      'He was hoeing away.'
      (*time adverbial*,'one day', farmer01)

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[11] Having to do with the existence and identity of the third element (see Dettweiler 2008:29-30)

b. Netá-u-nló,   u   el   n-ə́m-gɔtɔ…   ai…   (farmer09)
    wife-SG.NC-that   3s   be   PROG-MS.NC-think   that
    'Concerning his wife, he was thinking that'…
    (*point of departure* – 'he had left his wife at home', farmer08)

The statement of (4a) is repeated several times in establishing the setting of the *Farmer* narrative, which stars a hardworking K'Lela farmer. This statement, early in the narrative, points to the farmer's devotion to his work. The mainline action of the narrative concerns how he cleverly handles the interruption to his work threatened by a would-be thief. (4b) also constitutes part of the background information provided before the thief appears on the scene. It explains that one thing on the farmer's mind is that his wife is very soon to deliver a child. This circumstance is later woven into the farmer's strategy to defeat the thief in his intentions.

(5) Examples from *Smith* text – progressive aspect, time setting in context

a. … a   el   n-á-zɔɔ.   (smith04)
        3P   be   PROG-SG.NC-smith
    '…they were working in the smithy.'
    (*time adverbial* – 'it happened one day', smith04)

b. a   el-ə́n   pɔɔsɔ-m   rû   (smith14)
    3P   be-PROG   greet-MS.NC   3S.POSS
    'They were greeting her.'
    (*prior clauses*–'about to reach their hometown, they came aside', smith13)

Both of these statements describe background action immediately prior to mainline action in the *Smith* narrative. This narrative gives three short vignettes of a well-known but tyrannical blacksmith, told to portray his character. (5a) is from the first vignette and (5b) from the third. In both cases the mainline action (marked by perfective) breaks into the ongoing process described by progressive (imperfective). The time reference is set in both cases by prior context – it is past relative to the time of narration but in the present of the storyline.

(6) Examples from *Modern* text – progressive aspect, time setting in context

a. ak-ə́n   el-ə́n   kaa-m   c-hwén.   (modern43)
    child-PL.NC   be-PROG   root-MS.NC   PL.NC-day
    'The children are forgetting.'
    (*time adverbial*- 'in this present age', modern37)

b. na   el-ə́n   soot …   ən   lə́ətə-m   c-dɛbɛ. (modern33)
    1P.INCL   be -PROG   sit   in   lie.down-MS.NC   PL.NC-liver
    'We were dwelling in peace.'
    (*time adverbial*- 'in that time', modern33)

c. ríin-ə́n   íyayɛ́-n   re-in   n-ú-vato   (modern19)
    thing-that   parents-PL.NC   be.REL-SUB[12]   PROG-SG.NC-say
    'what their parents are saying'
    (*subject*- 'these children [of the present]', modern17)

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[12] SUB = subordinator

The dialogue entitled *Modern* is a conversation between husband and wife, who are both of the grandparent generation. They compare standards of social relations in the days of their youth with standards in the present day. In (6a) and (6b) use the same form of the copula, *el*, to refer to the present day and the past respectively. The time distinction is made only by the time adverbial given in both cases in a prior clause. Note that it need not be immediately prior (in (6a) the time adverbial is 6 sentences earlier), since the coherence of the conversation makes it clear that the time setting has not changed. In (6c) we have the *re* copula, which is used (as here) in relative clauses and also in some other subordinate clauses. The time setting of this statement is present, made clear by the use of the deictic 'these' in the subject NP. Like *el*, the *re* copula carries the idea that the period of progressive action includes whatever time the speaker has in focus, whether the genre is narrative or conversation (as here).

It seems that in all three examples of (6), the discourse function of the progressive aspect describes a period of time by generalization. The conversation also gives examples to illustrate these generalizations, which tend to use perfective or habitual aspect.

(7) Example from *Gɔlmɔ* text – progressive aspect, time setting in context

…	na	el-ə́n	bii-s	róvo.	(gɔlmɔ18)
	1P.INCL	be-PROG	beat-PL.NC	2S.POSS	

'…you would be (being) beaten.' / *lit.* 'We would be beating you.'

(*prior two clauses* – 'From the time you entered *gɔlmɔ*, you would spend 28 days…', *gɔlmɔ17*)

The *gɔlmɔ* text is primarily expository (descriptive): the speaker is giving an insider's perspective of how he and his age-mates experienced the Lelna cultural practice called *gɔlmɔ*. There is much comparison with the current practice of the same custom, emphasizing how much degeneration there has been in the quality of the experience. *Gɔlmɔ*, which could be glossed 'bride service', is the system by which traditional Lelna train their young men (approximately 16 to 22 years of age) to prepare them for marriage and responsible participation in traditional society. There is a strong Spartan element to it, as (7) shows in its description of the first month.

In terms of tense and aspect, the key is to ask what time period is in focus for the speaker. He gives this in the prior two clauses. First the inception of the period is described with a subordinate clause, where the verb 'enter' is marked with perfective aspect. Then the duration of the period as 28 days is given in a clause marked for habitual aspect (cf. Section 3). So the time in focus in the speaker's description is primarily the entire first month of *gɔlmɔ,* but secondarily the day on which *gɔlmɔ* began (giving the progressive an element of inceptivity). So indeed the obvious choice is an imperfective aspect, paying attention to the internal time structure of the event – beginning, middle, and end.

The class marker on the verbal noun should be noted. It is the plural marker *-s* rather than the more common mass noun marker *-m*. This adds the notion of iterativity to the action of the nominalized verb example. Iterative action is in focus whenever a verbal noun is used with the *s-* noun class marker. An example with in-

transitive action is (1a), *u elə́n s-kan* 'he is crying out', which can be used to describe the repeated crowing of a rooster.

It is interesting that the speaker expresses the dynamic process of (7) using progressive rather than habitual (though in a sense both are present by juxtaposition to the preceding clause, which is marked as habitual). The likely implication of using habitual in the exposition here would be that the beatings came regularly, day by day, and thereby characterized this initial period of *gɔlmɔ*. But with the progressive the speaker emphasizes iterativity rather than characteristic regularity. The beatings are seen as a necessary test to pass through for the sake of winning your wife and a place of respect in society, not as an essential characteristic of this first stage of *gɔlmɔ*.

2.3. SUMMARY: C'LELA PROGRESSIVE ASPECT AND THE LOCATION METAPHOR. The most obvious syntactic feature of a clause in the progressive aspect in C'lela is that in every respect it matches a clause that describes the *location* of a given subject. The unmarked order of the locative statement is a subject noun phrase, followed by a copula (frequently *el*), followed by the preposition *n* 'in', followed by the object of the preposition, a noun phrase (Dettweiler 2008:32-34). The examples in (8) illustrate this, with the highlighted portion showing the common clause construction.

(8) Examples – structure of locative statements

a. a   el-ə́n   lɛ́-i   utu   (Dettweiler 2000:167)
    3P   be-in   hometown-SG.NC   old
    SBJ   V_cop PREP[13]   NP
    'They are/were in an old hometown.'

b. u   zá   n-a-is   dá.   (Dettweiler 2000:167)
    3S   be.not   in-SG.NC-outside   NEG
    SBJ   V_cop   PREP-N   NEG
    'S/he is not outside.'

c. á   waa   wántá   wa   n-ú-buu,   (modern26)
    if   child   girl   be.COND   in-SG.NC-compound
    CONJ[14] SBJ   V_cop   PREP-N
    'If a girl is in the household, …'

This close link between a clause expressing action in progress and a clause describing location is quite widespread in the world's languages. Comrie (1976:98-101) cites a number of languages "belonging to various genetic and geographical groupings" which show marked similarity "between the formal expression of imperfective aspect, especially progressive aspect, and various locative adverbial phrases." With data drawn from Welmers (1973), he shows that Yoruba, Igbo, Kpelle, and Shona have "locative expressions of progressive aspect" with, however, some "differences of detail between progressive and locative constructions" (Comrie 1976:101-102) . Clearly, C'lela can be added to the long list of languages which take this route for formal expression of the progressive aspect. The author's perusal of a few texts in Dukanci (Heath & Heath 2002) and Cishingini (Crozier 1984:280-319) have yielded

[13] PREP = preposition
[14] CONJ = conjunction

examples of this type of progressive in those West Kainji languages also.[15] In choosing the location metaphor to indicate the containment of the main action within the background action, C'lela resembles Hausa and many other languages both African and otherwise.

It is of interest to compare the form of C'lela verbal phrases with that of Bantu languages. Mutaka & Tamanji (2000:186) state that the imperfective aspect of "highly inflectional languages" such as Swahili and Akoose (of Cameroon) is marked by a verbal inflection. They further show an example of the Akoose progressive suffix in verb-final position. The C'lela use of a free morpheme (the copula) and a nominalized form of the verb is quite different from standard Bantu practice, employing syntax rather than verbal morphology. C'lela, using the widespread metaphor of viewing progressive action as analogous to spatial location, is able to exploit its still robust noun class system to include nuances such as iterativity within the progressive, as in example (7).

3. Habitual aspect in C'lela. Comrie (1976:27-28), in exploring the characteristics of habitual action cross-linguistically, points out that mere repetition of action (iterativity) is not enough. The conclusion of his exploration is that "all habituals, whether or not they are also iterative, … describe a situation which is characteristic of an extended period of time."

Taylor says that a process is "construed as habitual … when [it] … occurs at more or less regular intervals over an unspecified period of time" (2002:403). He further contends that habits are presented as "static and unchanging", with a "stative character" (2002:403-404).

These, then, are the clues we seek in textual context to help in deciding whether a verbal construction, however marked, is meant to describe a habitual situation.

3.1. Full construction. As was the case for progressive aspect, the habitual aspect is shown in a periphrastic construction, not by inflection on the verb. The full construction is introduced with the same stative copula *el* (or other copulative element) that is used in progressive aspect. However, this is not a mandatory part of the construction and is not commonly included in clauses with habitual aspect. In example set (9), the seemingly optional component is shaded, and for each example we ask whether the presence of the stative verb fulfills a discourse function.

Two things have been observed as essential to marking habitual aspect in C'lela. One is the distinctive form of the subject pronoun, which is the usual subject pronoun (used for all other aspects) plus (in most cases) a *t*- prefix.[16] This pronoun is mandatorily present before the verb. The second mark of habitual aspect is tonal – a high tone on the pronoun which sometimes spreads to the first syllable of the verb.

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[15] We are not claiming, though, that these languages have only this means of expressing the progressive. Crozier presents inflection on the verb as the main Cishingini strategy of showing progressive, though mentioning "nominalisations" also (1984:163-164).

[16] The exceptions are the first person plural pronouns: the habitual form of *na* (1p.INCL) is *nan* and a free variant of the habitual form of *c* (1p.EXCL) is *cən* (*tən* being the other variant).

(9) Text examples – habitual aspect, full construction

    a. u   lá-k   tú   ém   a-zɔɔ.   (smith01c)

        3s   be.PST-PFV   3S.HAB   do   SG.NC-smithing

        'He used to do smithing work.'

    b. Cet-mé   lá-k   tú   gwáa   c-lɔn   táhna. (monkey10)

        father-1s.POSS   be.PST-PFV   3S.HAB   plant   yams   here

        'My father used to plant yams here.'

    c. rihi-c-ə́n   c-u   re-in   tú   kumu   (monkey03)

        thing-PL.NC-that   PL.NC-3s   be.REL-SUB   3S.HAB   obtain

        'the things [good crops] that he kept getting'

Both (9a) and (9b) use the *la* form of the stative copula ('be.PST') inflected with the perfective suffix *-k*. Taken together, these put the entire habitual situation in the past, conveying the message that the situation no longer holds at the time of speaking/narration. (9a) is the first time setting information given in the *Smith* story. The preceding two clauses, introducing the central character of the story with presentational focus, are ambiguous in their time reference: 'There is/was a certain senior brother of ours, whom we have/had …' (smith01a-b). The inflected stative verb tells the audience that the man's smithing activity is a thing of the past (likely because he has died) and also establishes the days of his smithing as the time period of the story.

The same inflected form of the stative is used by Mosquito to give a past time setting to the period in which his father farmed the land where Monkey was so hard at work. This is part of Mosquito's direct speech and sets the time frame for his discouraging information, which implies that this particular land yields very thin yams. If the *lák* form is omitted, the time period of *Babá* Mosquito's farming would be ambiguous: it could be thought to include the present, in which case Monkey would be encroaching on *Babá's* farm; it could even be a future period, in which case the idea is that *Babá* Mosquito will succeed Monkey as the cultivator of this land.

The third example, (9c), comes from an earlier point in the Monkey-Mosquito story. The grammatical structure used is a relative clause embedded in an adverbial. This adverbial gives the reason why Monkey was so happy with his farm that he decided to expand to new territory. As in the previous two, it would be grammatically possible to omit the stative verb component (shaded material). However, this omission would introduce an ambiguity regarding whether the period of bountiful crops referred to is present or future. Given the nature of the preceding context, the more likely interpretation would be that Monkey was happy because he would be getting good crops on a regular basis in the future.[17] The use of the *re* (be.REL) allomorph[18] in the relative clause is a clear signal that Monkey is happy, based on bumper crops in the discourse present, as translated–'Monkey was happy with the crops he kept getting.'

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[17] The possibility of construing C'lela habitual marking as referring to a future expectation is outside the scope of this paper, but nonetheless a phenomenon of great interest.

[18] The *la* allomorph could be used in place of *re* to indicate that the good crops were solely a phenomenon of the past, with the resulting verb form *laine*. This would not make sense in the context, however.

3.2. Reduced construction. So the stative copula component is present to disambiguate the time period referred to by the habitual marking. Its absence in the reduced construction would suggest that there are other elements in the context that make the time period of the habitual clear. This is our hypothesis as we proceed.

(10) Example from *Monkey* text – habitual aspect, time setting in context

> Tə́mə́   tə́c   émá   gɛ́   c-dámrá…   (monkey11)
> moreover   3P.NC.HAB   do   EMPH   AGR[19]-big
>
> 'What's more, they [the yams] would get really big …'
>
> (*time setting* – 'My father used to plant yams here.' monkey10)

This is the continuation of Mosquito's disturbing revelation to Monkey, so we are already familiar with the time setting established in the prior clause of Mosquito's speech. Mosquito contends that in his father's farming days the yams would year after year grow to be really big. This sets up the enthusiastic farmer, Monkey, for the disappointment of the message's conclusion – 'yes, as big as my thigh.' Since no change of time is even hinted at in Mosquito's words, the habitual aspect is assumed to still refer to the same time period. Notice the presence of the two mandatory features of habitual marking – the augmented subject pronoun (in accord with the noun class of 'yams') and the high tone on the pronoun that extends through the verb (citation form *emá* 'do').

(11) Examples from *Hyena* text – habitual aspect, time setting in context

> a. Unwá   tú   bálə́m   dwiri.   (hyena04)
>   3S.INDEP   3S.HAB   turn.into   hyena
>
>   'Now he, he used to turn into a hyena.'
>
>   (*time setting* – 'A long time ago, there lived a man in our village.', hyena01)
>
> b. málé   tú   hán   ən   rig   baa   cet-áco   (ref. hyena08)
>   always   3S.HAB   come   in   visit place father-1P.EXCL.POSS
>
>   '… he always used to come visiting at our father's house.'
>
>   (*time clause* – 'When he went out …', hyena07)

The examples in (11) are from the same narrative, and both give explanatory background information before the mainline action of the narrative begins. From the time setting information of (11a) we see that two sentences intervene between the time setting clauses at the beginning of the narrative and the clause marked with habitual aspect. One gives the name of the main character and the other makes a statement about his character, marked with the perfective aspect. So the time setting is maintained throughout and there is no potential ambiguity to resolve.

In (11b) a time clause, 'when he went out', immediately precedes the clause marked with habitual aspect. The fronted time adverb *málé* 'always' also serves to convey the idea that the habitual situation is in the discourse present. The explanatory background goes on to give details of the man/hyena's regular strategy for catching and consuming big goats being kept by his neighbors, which habitual activity naturally sets things up for the mainline action of the story.

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[19] AGR=NC agreement

(12) Examples from *Smith* text – habitual aspect, time setting in context

a. tú   zɔɔ   c-kwintə,   tú   zɔɔ   c-kərmə,[20]
3S.HAB   forge   PL.NC-hoe   3S.HAB   forge   PL.NC-hand.plow,

tú   zɔɔ   m-gyuru, …   tú   bábá   cə.
3S.HAB   forge   PL.NC-axe, …   3S.HAB   sell   3P.NC

'… he would make hoes, he would make hand plows, he would make axes, … [3 more items
], and he would sell them.'

(time *adverbial* (fronted) – 'after that incident', smith06)

b. tá   tɔɔ-ré   ən   gyəə-m   n-i-lɛ.   (ref. smith18)
3P.HAB   leave.DISTR   in   go.home-MS.NC   of-SG.NC-hometown

'… they kept leaving one by one, going on to [the burial in] the hometown.'

(*time adverbial* (fronted) – 'in the midst of that situation', smith17)

The examples in (12) are taken from the narrative characterizing the K'Lela black-smith. While the first and third vignettes each give an incident showing his wicked treatment of his children and his wife, the short middle vignette in (12) is a descrip-tion of his general lifestyle. The main point of this vignette is that he works hard and makes money at smithing, to the extent that he does not need to grow crops like his neighbors. It is not surprising that habitual aspect is marked or at least implied throughout this section of the narrative. (12a) introduces it with a list of the items that the blacksmith was accustomed to making and selling. The time adverbial which comes immediately before this list links it to the previous vignette and makes it clear that we are still in the same time period, the man's working life as a blacksmith.

The statement of (12b) comes at the very end of the third and most powerful vi-gnette in the *Smith* narrative. It is not the marked peak of the vignette, which occurs several clauses earlier, but concludes the explanation of the peak clause – 'those women really did a great thing.' The time adverbial immediately *before* the peak (given in translation at the end of the example) controls the interpretation of the ha-bitual aspect in the final clause of the story. It is not a habitual situation in the usual sense of the word, as the time period where the women 'kept leaving one by one' is not even as long as a day. However, it does at least partially meet Comrie's criterion for habitual situations referred to in the introduction of this section: it is action which is *characteristic* of an extended period of time (Comrie 1976:27-28, emphasis mine). That the length of the period is hardly as extended as would usually be required of habituality probably adds to the humor of its construal as a long period. The action of going off one or two at a time with portions of the food surplus of the husband-tyran-nized wife is certainly what characterizes the elderly women's heroic performance. And all done according to proper Lelna custom in such circumstances!

3.3. SUMMARY: HABITUAL ASPECT IN C'LELA. As was earlier shown to be the case for the progressive, a C'lela clause marked with habitual aspect draws the necessary tense distinctions from its context. We have shown how this works for each example in the previous sub-section. For example, in set (9) we contended that the stative

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[20] *Ref.* smith06-07, final clause simplified

copula's presence at the beginning of the clause is not optional in these kinds of cases but provides an unambiguous interpretation of what time period the habitual is referring to.

The usual C'lela strategy for marking habitual aspect, as we have seen, is to augment the usual subject pronoun with a *t-* prefix and a high tone. It is good to consider briefly how this compares to strategies in other West African languages. Tucker (2003:110) explains how Kisi, a Niger-Congo language in the Atlantic group, marks a past habitual morpheme on its subject pronouns. A cursory look at a collection of texts in Dukanci (Heath & Heath 2002), a close relative of C'lela in the West Kainji group, brought up the use of an auxiliary verb *sɛngɛ* to express habitual meaning. Cishingini, a more distant West Kainji relative, uses a strategy of verbal inflection to convey habitual aspect. This takes the form of a prefix *tsì-* "immediately before the verb root and after the subject/topic agreement prefix" Crozier (1984:161-62).

One common way of conveying a future happening in C'lela seems to follow a strategy identical to that for marking habitual aspect, except that contextual time information clearly indicates a strictly future period rather than (as for habitual) a strictly past period or a period that includes the present. My hypothesis is that this is a logical extension (by projection into a future time period) of the use of the habitual aspect to indicate customary ways of acting, whether for cultural or personal reasons. I suggest that research across various Kainji languages to look for similarities in how concepts of future and habitual are marked could bring interesting results.[21]

4. COMPARISON OF PROGRESSIVE AND HABITUAL. What, then, are the similarities and differences that can be observed between progressive and habitual aspect in C'lela?

We have seen similarities and differences in syntactic constructions. Both progressive and habitual involve periphrastic construction rather than inflection on the verb. Both may involve the stative copula. However, a prime difference we have seen between the two is that the progressive aspect requires the stative copula as main verb, whereas it is only present in the habitual construction in order to provide time setting information that would be otherwise lacking. A second syntactic difference in the two constructions is that the action is expressed by a verbal noun in the progressive but by a verb in the habitual.

Semantically, neither progressive nor habitual marking inherently give tense information. Both rather signal attention to the internal structure of a particular period of time in which the action occurs, thus validating their interpretation as two types of imperfective aspect.

In terms of discourse function, we have seen that both progressive and habitual are found in various types of background statements, including reported speech. Progressive aspect tends to be used when describing a period of time or when giving an action as background to the mainline verb. Habitual aspect tends to be used when an

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[21] To mark future, Swahili uses an inflection *-tá-* between the subject agreement marker and the verb (Mutaka and Tamanji 2000:184). This seems similar to the two necessary components of C'lela habitual (and future) marking.

action characteristic of a period of time is being pointed out, often as explanation for mainline action.

5. CONCLUSIONS. This study seeks to remind linguists pursuing field research of the utility of exploring a language on its own terms rather than superimposing the grammatical categories and mental constructs of a meta language such as English. This is not by any means a new idea or practice, but one worth strengthening. We have explored the C'lela system for making time distinctions in narratives and other kinds of texts, especially in relation to progressive and habitual aspects. The methodology of analyzing clauses in the context of complete texts reveals that C'lela follows a remarkably different strategy for making time distinctions than English does. This paper also supports the notion, again not new to linguists or anthropologists, that the study of texts is a good springboard for exploring cultures. Even the small selection of C'lela texts we have studied here takes us into Lelna burial customs, subsistence economics, rules of male-female interaction, and cultural and personal expectations when visiting in someone's home. Study of discourse originating in a different culture necessarily takes us far beyond the fine points of grammar, semantics and pragmatics.

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APPENDIX 1 – C'LELA TEXTS[22]

Abbrev.	Genre	Speaker & Dialect	Language Consultant
Farmer	Narrative	Matthew Ibrahim, Isgogo	Sunday Ango K'Bancho
Smith	Narrative	Wade Dasa, Senchi	Peter Nasoma Senchi
Modern	Dialogue - Conversation	Ret'd Captain Ango Pəni Mrs. Anna Ango, Pəni	Bulus Doro Rikoto Sunday Ango K'Bancho
Gəlmə	Expository	Deacon Samaila Shamaki, Pəni	Bulus Doro Rikoto Sunday Ango K'Bancho
Monkey	Narrative – Fable	Andrew Chəri, Rumu	Danladi Sanche
Hyena	Narrative	Sibə Isa, Manga	Danladi Sanche

APPENDIX 2 – GLOSSING ABBREVIATIONS

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
s	singular
p	plural
INDEP	independent/emphatic pronoun
AGR	NC agreement
COND	conditional
COMP	complementizer
CONJ	conjunction
COP	copula
DEV	development of author's purpose
DISTR	distributive
EMPH	emphasis
EXCL	exclusive
HAB	habitual
INCL	inclusive
IPFV	imperfective
MS	mass/non-count noun
NC	noun class marker
NEG	negation, negative
PFV	perfective
PFV2	highlighting perfective
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PREP	preposition
PROG	progressive
PST	past
Q	question particle/marker
REL	relative
SBJ	subject
SG	singular
SUB	subordinator

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[22] Language Consultants: primary help in glossing & explaining, cultural background

APPENDIX 3 - TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

/r/ for [ɾ] ; /c/ for [tʃ] ; /j/ for [dʒ] ; /y/ for [j] ;

/ə/for [ə]–that is, this central vowel is more close than [ə], more open than [ɨ];

/aa/ for [aː]–other long vowels are similarly written double.

Labialized and palatalized consonants are written as /Cw/, /Cy/ respectively.

Tone: An unmarked vowel has emically low tone. The one exception to this is that when the second vowel of a double is unmarked, it matches the first vowel of the double in tone. e.g. /káa/ is written for [káː]

The one exception to phonemic transcription, followed consistently by the author and by the proposed orthography, is that epenthetic schwa /ə/ is shown wherever required by C'lela syllabification rules. Schwa occurs predictably in these settings but contrastively in others. The author considers it preferable in a paper focusing on syntax rather than morphophonology to show a single pronounceable line of C'lela in each example.