Tense and aspect in Esan: Preliminary findings from fieldwork

This talk: Presents results from initial phase of an ongoing investigation of the tense/aspect system of Esan, an Edoid language of Nigeria

Goal of project:
1. Develop an accurate description of the expression of tense and aspect in the Ogwa dialect of Esan
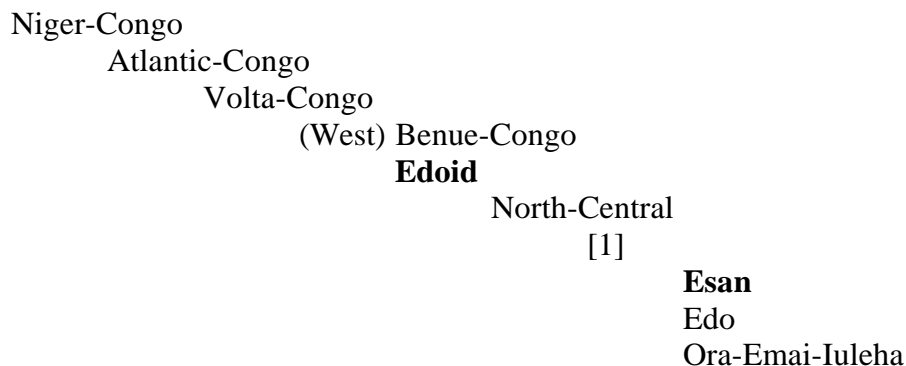2. Situate this dialect's T/A system appropriately within what is known of other Edoid varieties

Contents

1. Part One – Esan Tense and Aspect

1.1. Background on Esan

Esan (ISO-code [ish]; Lewis 2009): Edoid language, in the south-south geopolitical zone of Edo State, Nigeria
- **North-Central** branch of **Edoid** (Elugbe 1989b:22)
- Forms a sub-group with **Edo** (the language of the famous Benin Kingdom) and the **Ora-Emai-Iuleha** language cluster.

Niger-Congo
  Atlantic-Congo
    Volta-Congo
      (West) Benue-Congo
        Edoid
          North-Central
            [1]
              Esan
              Edo
              Ora-Emai-Iuleha

Esanland:
- Within longitudes 6.05E (6°3'E) and 6.66E (6°40'E), latitudes 6.40N (6°24'N) and 6.87N (6°52'N)
- Roughly 2,900 square kilometers (approximately 1,100 square miles) (Bradbury 1957:62; Okojie 1994:2)
- Current population estimated to be between 500,000 and 700,000 people
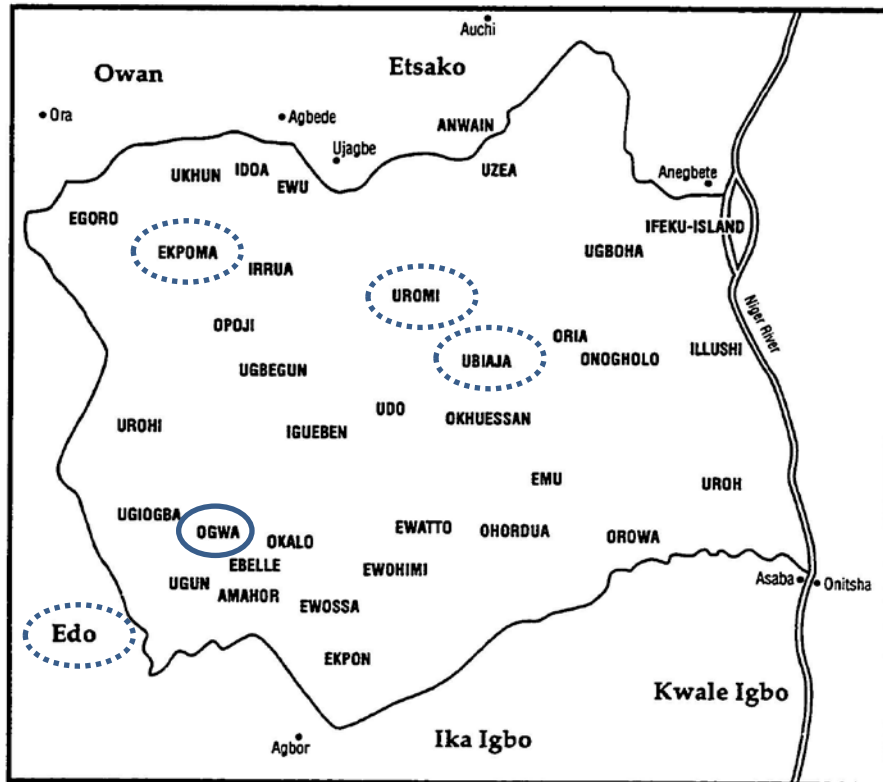
Map of the Ishan Area

Map from Lorenz (1995:418). Ogwa dialect within solid line, the dialect of this study. Other dialects/languages used for comparison within dashed line.
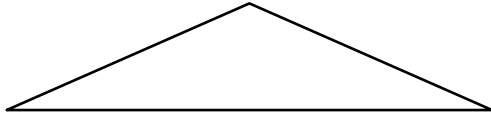
Area of Detail

Structure:
- SVO language
- Little segmental morphology (typical of the region)

1. <u>Clause structure:</u>
subject – subject marker – P.V.M. - adverbial - continuousness marker - V - O - V - O – adjunct

<u>Pre-Verbal Markers (Tense/Aspect/Polarity/Realis/Among Others):</u>
irrealis marker | negation markers | future markers | etc.
----------------------------------- grammatical tone patterns --------------------------------

Tone:
- Basic High/Low tonal contrast at the phonological level
  o Realized as H, L, !H, R, F
- Nouns have inherent lexical tonal pattern
- Verbs in Edoid languages are inherently toneless
  o (Possible exception of Epie-Atisa; Elugbe 1989a:299)
- Tone on verb is grammatical tone

Underdocumentation:
- Esan severely underdocumented, as is the entire Edoid branch (Schaefer & Egbokhare 2007)

1.2. Mini-project on Esan tense/aspect

Procedure:
1. Going through the our corpus of data we have collected
   a. One speaker of Ogwa Esan living abroad in Canada, and 5 speakers living in Nigeria
2. Extracted tokens of temporal/aspectual marking
3. Formulated into a number of working tables which demarcate the data into specific temporal/aspectual categories
4. Compared this initial system to the tense/aspect systems in 3 dialects of Esan, 5 descriptions of Edo

Later phases:
- Target specific areas of the system for further clarification/refinement
- Greater text collection and stories which are designed to elicit a variety of tense/aspect types
- Conduct fieldwork with speakers in the SF Bay area and Nigeria
- Identify relevant theoretically- and typologically-oriented literature

1.3. Tense and Aspect Overview

Tense: Relating the time of the situation (event or state) being referred to with some other time, typically the moment of speaking (Comrie 1976)
- Past/Present/Future

Aspect: "different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation" (Comrie 1976: 3)
- Completed, ongoing, etc.

Surface realization of tense/aspect in Esan depend on verb type

Eventive verbs: denote an event, such as a process or action (e.g. *gbe* "to dance")
Stative verbs: denote an internal or external state of an entity (i.e. what something is, e.g. *tan* "to be tall")

Aspectual distinction:
- **Perfective**: "the view of a situation as a whole" (Comrie 1976:16), often denoting complete events
- Cf. **Imperfective**: "pays essential attention to the internal structure of the situation"
  - o **Progressive** (I was playing) and **habitual** (I used to play)
- Typical aspectual distinction in West Africa (e.g. Yoruba, argued to be "tenseless" - Comrie 1976:82-83; Ajayi 2001).

In parentheses below: (*ọ*) stands for a subject marker
- Analyzed as a resumptive pronoun in Rolle (2010) – left aside for now

Basic T/A Distinctions		Stative verbs			Eventive verbs		
		Marking	**Type**	**Example below**	**Marking**	**Type**	**Example below**
Perfective	**Past**				(*ọ*) [^{H}…]$_{Verb}$	Tone	
	Present	-			-		
	Future				(*ọ*) *khian*	Pre-verbal marker	
Imperfective (Progressive, Habitual)	**Past**	(*ka*) *gha*	Pre-verbal markers		(*ọ*) *gha*	Pre-verbal marker	
	Present	(*ọ*) [^{H}…]$_{Verb}$	Tone		1. *gha* 2. [^{L}…]$_{Verb}$	1. Pre-verbal marker 2. Tone	
	Future	(*ọ*) *khian* (*gha*)	Pre-verbal markers		*khian gha*	Pre-verbal markers	

2. <u>Eventive – Past perfective – High tone on verb</u>
   Ébaì   mè̩   lé.
   Food   1SG   **eat**
   "It was food I **ate**."

3. <u>Eventive – Present imperfective – Pre-verbal marker *gha*</u>
   *Àgbòn **á** tìmẹ̩̀*
   *Agbon **gha**   tie   imẹ*
   Agbon IPFV   call   1SG.FULL
   "Agbon is **calling** me."

4. <u>Eventive – Present imperfective – Low tone on verb</u>
*É̩baì mȩ̂ **lè**.*
*ebai mȩ   **le***
food 1SG   **eat**
"It is food I am **eating**."

5. <u>Stative – Present imperfective – High tone on verb</u>
*È̩bhò **bún**.*
*ȩbho   **bun***
people   **be many**
"There **are many** people (here)." (More lit.: people are many)

6. <u>Eventive – Past imperfective – Pre-verbal marker *gha*</u>
*Mǒ̩ ꞌ**á** lébài.*
*mȩ   ọ   **gha**   le   ebai*
1SG   3SG   **IPFV**   eat   food
'I was **eating**.'

7. <u>Stative - Past imperfective – Pre-verbal marker *gha*</u>
*Enafiamȩna e **gha** ghọnghọn.*
*eni   afiamȩ na   e   **gha**   ghọnghọn*
DEF   bird   these   3PL   **IPFV**   be happy
'These birds **were** happy.'

8. <u>Stative - Past imperfective –Pre-verbal markers *ka...gha*</u>
*Mè̩ ọ̩ **kâ** rè̩ **á** lò̩nébài.*
*mȩ   ọ   **ka**   rȩ   **gha**   le   ọni   ebai*
1SG   3SG   **formerly**   although   **IPFV**   eat   DEF   food
"I **used to eat** the food.'

9. <u>Eventive – Future perfective(?) – Pre-verbal marker *khian*</u>
*Mȩ ọ **khian** sienȩmila.*
*Mȩ   ọ   **khian** si   eni   ȩmila.*
1SG   3SG   **FUT**   pull   DEF   cattle
'I **will** pull the cattle.'

10. <u>Eventive – Future imperfective - Pre-verbal markers *khian gha*</u>
*Mȩ ọ **khian gha** lebai.*
*mȩ   ọ   **khian gha**   lȩ   ebai*
1SG   3SG   **FUT   IPFV**   eat   food
"I **will be** eating."

11. <u>Stative – Future imperfective – Pre-verbal markers *khian gha*</u>
  *Ọnawa ọ **khian gha** kpọlọ.*
  *ọni awa ọ **khian gha** kpọlọ.*
  DEF dog 3SG **FUT IPFV** be big
  'The dog will be big.'

Khian also used:
1. **Intention**: *Mẹ̀ ọ́ ꞌkhián kpà* "I **plan to** leave"
2. **Inception**: *Ọ̀ **khiań** sènẹ̀mìlá.* "He **is about to** pull the cattle"
3. **Agent-oriented modality** - obligation from some outside force: *Mọ khian kpoluwa.* "I **must** sweep the house today"
4. **Epistemic modality** - certainty from evidence and/or reasoning: *Omon ọ **khian** gha ri bhẹkọwa.* "Omon **has to be** in the room" (he is expected to be there, because he usually is there)

Additional words/constructions with temporal/aspectual meaning					
Type	**T/A meaning**	**Esan**	**Form**	**English**	**Example**
Temporal	Relative past	*ọ kẹ* [ ]_{Subordinate Clause}	Expletive + verb	"had already, will have already"	*Ọ̀ kọ́!lé yù fó, wẹ̀ kô vài.* 'He **had already** died before you arrived.' (Lit. It is **quick** [that he die finish]…)
	Remote past	*ọ bue* [ ]_{Subordinate clause}	Expletive + Verb	"has a long time ago"	*Ọ̀ **bué** nâmẹ̀ kẹ̀ rọ̀* 'It **has been** raining.' (Lit. It is **long** [that water after falling])
	Contrastive/habitual past	*ka* [ ]_V	Pre-verbal marker	"before, used to"	*Ọ **ka** khọriọn.* "He **used to be** ugly."
	Contrastive/habitual past	*mọ* [ ]_V	Pre-verbal marker	"formerly, used to"	*Uwanea ọwẹ **mọ** khin?* *Uwa ọnea ọwẹ **mọ** khin* house which yours formerly be 'Which house **used to be** yours?'
	Recent past	*dan* [ ]_V	Pre-verbal marker	"just, recently"	*Mẹ ọ **dan** bho lebai.* 'I **just** ate.'
Aspectual	Completion	[ ]_{VerbPhrase} *fo*	V2 in SVC	"has finished V"	*Ọ bọnuwa **fo**.* 'He **has finished** building the house already.'
	Inception	*mu hẹn gha* [ ]_V	V + *gha*	"begin to, start to"	*Ibhokhan na **mu hẹn gha** tiebe.* 'The children **started** to read a book.'
	Continuousness	*sẹ yẹ*	Pre-verbal markers	"still"	*Ọ tita, ọ **sẹ yẹ** tita nia.* 'She sat down and is **still** sitting now.'

1.3.1. Factativity

Basic T/A Distinctions		Stative verbs		Eventive verbs	
		Marking	Type	Marking	Type
Perfective	Past	-		$(\varrho)\ [^{\text{H}}...]_{\text{Verb}}$	Tone
	Present			-	
Imperfective	Past	(ka) gha	Pre-verbal markers	(ǫ) gha	Pre-verbal marker
	Present	$(\varrho)\ [^{\text{H}}...]_{\text{Verb}}$	Tone	1. gha 2. $[^{\text{L}}...]_{\text{Verb}}$	1. Pre-verbal marker 2. Tone

Factative marking: Interpretation depends on the verb type

"Factativity": Welmers (1973) African language structures (preceded by Welmers & Welmers 1968:75-76)
- "Expresses the most obvious fact about the verb in question, which in the case of active verbs is that the action was observed or took place, but for the stative verbs is that the situation obtains at present." (1973:346-347)

12. Factative (default) tense/aspect/modality (Faraclas 1996:188 for Nigerian Pidgin)
    [−stative] → [+past], [+completive], [+realis]
    [+stative] → [−past], [−completive], [+realis]

13. Eventive – Past perfective - Factative marked – High tone on Verb
    a. Ọ̀ **wọ́n** bhọ́namẹ̀.
       'He has **drunk** some of the water.' (cf. *Ọ́ wọ̀n bhọ́nàmẹ̀* 'He is **drinking** some of the water.')
    b. ọ̀ **tuá**
       "It **burnt**"
    c. Énókhuô **wẹ́** ọ̀lè **kpâ**
       "The woman **said** she **left**"
    d. Ọ́mọ̀n **gbí**khiẹ̀n.
       "The child has **killed** a fly."
    e. Énọ́mọ̀n **bhiẹ́** nòsẹ́n násọ̀n.
       "The baby **slept** well all night."

14. Stative – Present Imperfective - Factative marked – High tone on Verb
    a. Ọ̀ **bí**. "It **is** black"
    b. Énébài **riẹ́n**riẹn gbé. "The food **is** delicious."
    c. Ọ́nàlìmô **kẹ́**kẹ̀ á. "The orange **is** rotten."
    d. Àkhérè ọ́ **!fé**. "Akhere **is** rich."

Distribution of surface tonal patterns with factative tense/aspect

	Verb + non-factative T/A	Noun with lexical tones	Verb phrase with surface tones	Verb + factative T/A	Noun with lexical tones	Verb phrase with surface tones	Surface T/A pattern
Tones	L	LL	LH	H	LL	HL	
Esan	wòn	àmɛ̀	wànmɛ́	wón	àmɛ̀	wánmɛ̀	Distinct
English	drink	water	'is drinking water'	drink\FACT	water	'has drunk water'	
Tones	L	HL	HL	H	HL	HL	
Esan	yèn	ìzɛ̀	yìnzɛ̀	yén	ìzɛ̀	yínzɛ̀	Non-distinct
English	cook	rice	'is cooking rice'	cook\FACT	rice	'has cooked rice'	
Tones	L	LH	LH	H	LH	HLH	
Esan	ghè	òghó	ghòghó	ghé	òghó	ghôghó~ghóghó	Distinct
English	look at	bottle	'is looking at a bottle'	look at\FACT	bottle	'has looked at a bottle'	
Tones		HH			HH		
Esan							

Factativity with [Low-Low] noun - *ìkhìẹ̀n* 'dance, play'

a. **Factative - [High-Low] surface pattern**
Ómòn **gbíkhìẹ̀n**.
Ómòn **gbé** **ìkhìẹ̀n**
Omon **dance\FACT** **dance**
'Omon danced.', 'Omon has danced.'

b. **Non-factative - [Low-High] surface pattern**
Ómòn **gbìkhìẹ̀n**.
Ómòn **gbe** **ìkhìẹ̀n**
Omon **dance** **dance**
'Omon is dancing.' (I see it happening)

Factativity with [Low-Low] noun - *àsẹ̀n* 'spittle'

a. **Factative - [High-Low] surface pattern**
Mɛ̀ **tuâsẹ̀n**.
mẹ **tú** **àsẹ̀n**
1SG **spit\FACT** **spittle**
'I spat spittle.'

b. **Non-factative - [Low-High] surface pattern**
Ọ̀ **tuàsẹ́n**.
ọ **tu** **àsẹ̀n**
3SG **spit** **spittle**
'He is spitting spittle.'

1.3.2. Complicating Data

15. <u>Eventive – Present imperfective - Unexpected high tone with "non-factative" meaning</u>
    a. Mè **khián**. "I am going away".
    b. Mè **kpâ**. "I am leaving."

Interpreted as "performative"?

16. <u>Verbs of possession and factativity</u>
    a. <u>In situ object - Expected high tone expressing present imperfective</u>
       Àkhérè ọ́ bhọ́ọ̀ngộ.

Àkhérè	*ọ́*	***bhọ́n***	*ọ̀gọ́*
Akhere	3SG	**have\FACT?**	bottle

       "Akhere **has** a bottle."
    b. <u>Ex situ object - Unexpected low tone expressing present imperfective</u>
       Ọ̀gọ́ Àkhéré bhọ̀n.

ọ̀gọ́	*Àkhéré*	***bhọ̀n***
bottle	Akhere	**have\FACT?**

       "It is a bottle that Akhere **has.**"

2. Part Two – Comparison to previous studies on Esan and Edo

Previous proposals of factative in Edoid: Emai and Degema
- **Emai**: a verbal suffix *–ì* occurs which indicates a "present state or completion of a process or activity [only in absence of auxiliaries or pre-verbal adverbs]" (Schaefer & Egbokhare 2007:178)

17. <u>Emai - Present state (imperfective)</u>
    Ọ́lí ọ̀mọ̀hè   dá**ì**
            …tall\FACT
    "The man **is tall**"

18. <u>Emai - Past activity (perfective)</u>
    Ọ́lí órán nà lí ọ́lí ọ́mọ̀hè   híán**ì**.
                                    …cut\FACT
    "It **was** this tree that the man **cut**"

- Degema: a suffix *–ín* exists which is glossed as factative and marks past in dynamic verbs but past/non-past in stative verbs (from Nurse et al. n.d:15, citing Kari 2002:179):

19. <u>Degema - Eventive – Past perfective</u>
    mɪ-dí-ˈ**ín**
    1s-eat-**FAC**
    "I **ate**."

20. <u>Degema - Stative – Imperfective</u>
    o-mí-ˈ**ín**
    3s-be wet-**FAC**
    "It **became** wet"/ "It **is** wet."

Additional T/A studies:
- 3 in Esan, 5 in Edo
- No author adopted notion of factativity in their description

Basic T/A Distinction in Ekpoma Esan		Stative verbs	Eventive verbs
Perfective	**Past**	?	1. ^{H} 2. ^{H} …-le 3. dâ 4. rè
	Present		^{H} : momentary (??)
Imperfective	**Past**	1. re á 2. rè	1. dâ á 2. ā 3. da 4. rè á
	Present	1. ^{M} 2. ^{H}	^{L} : non-momentary (??)

Basic T/A Distinction in Uromi Esan		Stative verbs	Eventive verbs
Perfective	**Past**	?	H/F
	Present		?
Imperfective	**Past**	kă / kà	?
	Present	?	1. $^{(L)H}$: intransitive 2. ^{L} : transitive

Basic T/A Distinction in Ubiaja Esan		Stative verbs	Eventive verbs
Perfective	**Past**	?	mí... ^{F} : intransitive $^{HL / HH}$: transitive
	Present		^{F}
Imperfective	**Past**	?	?
	Present		á : continuous mí... ^{L} : habitual

Edo may be best candidate for factativity :

Basic T/A Distinction in Edo		Stative verbs	Eventive verbs
Perfective	**Past**	?	1. $^{(L)H}$ *–lè* 2. ^{HL}
	Present		?
Imperfective	**Past**	1. $^{(L)H}$ *–lè* 2. *ghárá~gháā*	*ghárá*
	Present	$^{(L)H}$ *–lè*	1. $^{L(H)}$ 2. *ghá*

Wescott (1963:136-155):
- Verbal suffix *–rle[1]:* calls this suffix the "perfective suffix" (*-rle* is a spelling variant)
  - o **Dynamic verbs**: past perfective
  - o **Stative verbs**: (1) present imperfective (i.e. "is X") or (2) incipient (i.e. "becoming X")

21. <u>Edo – Eventive – Past perfective – ^{LH} *-rlè*</u>
    Ọ̀ **bàárlè**. "It **shone**." (Wescott 1963: 145)

22. <u>Edo – Stative – Present imperfective – ^{LH} *–rlè*</u>
    Ọ̀ **bhòórlò**. "It **is** ripe." (Wescott 1963: 145)

Complications:

23. <u>Edo – Stative – Past imperfective - ^{LH} *–re*</u>
    rhiẹ̀nrhiẹ́ẹ̀n
    rhiẹ̀nrhiẹ́n-rè   (*-re* is a spelling variant)
    be sweet-*rè*
    '**was** sweet/**became** sweet' (Agheyisi 1990: 73)

Language		Variables looked at relevant for T/A surface realization				Source(s)
		Verb type (E.g. Eventive vs. stative)	Transitivity	Lexical tones of object(s)	Number of syllables in verb	
Esan	**Ogwa**	X		X		Rolle, Toronto Esan Grammar Project notes
	Ekpoma	X				Ejele (1986, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2003b)
	Uromi	$(X)^2$	X	X		Klomp (1993)
	Ubiaja		X			Osiruemu (2005)
Edo	**Edo₁**	X			X	Wescott (1963)
	Edo₂				$(X)^2$	Amayo (1975)
	Edo₃		X		$(X)^2$	Aikhionbare (1988)
	Edo₄	X			$(X)^2$	Agheyisi (1990)
	Edo₅	X	X		$(X)^2$	Omoruyi (1991)

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[1] Osiruemu (2005:71) actually calls this marker a "verbal factorial" for Ubiaja Esan, whose form is *-lV* (with a harmonizing vowel), deleted in fast speech. Little other information is presented about this morpheme, and it is not known if her use of label "factorial" is the same as the notion of factative. I will correspond with her this summer (hopefully); I have been unsuccessful at contacting her from North America.

[2] This is not as systematically discussed as other variables.

Verb type			Eventive										Other types
Transitivity			**Transitive**							**Intransitive**		**Ditransitive**	**Other types**
Syllables in verb			1 (*ghe* 'look at')				2 (*hibhin* 'save')			1 (*gua* 'swim')	2 (*tita* 'sit')	…	…
Tones of DP			LL (*àmè* 'water')	LH (*ògó* 'bottle')	HL (*ìzè* 'rice')	3… (*àkilé* 'frog')	LL (*àmè* 'water')	LH (*ògó* 'bottle')	HL (*ìzè* 'rice')	3… (*àkilé* 'frog')	-	-	…	…
Imperfective	Past										-	-	…	…
	Present													
	Future													
Perfective	Past													
	Present													
	Future													
Other types…														

This same type of chart to be used for:
- Additional verb types
- Additional aspectual/temporal distinctions
- Will be modified as data requires

Only then one can move to more complex constructions
- Negation
- Counterfactuals
- Grammatical tone assigned by adverbials
- Etc.

3. Part Three – Situating Esan within West Africa

If this is indeed factative marking, two issues:
- How common is factativity across West Africa?
- Can this be understood as
    a. Areal spread
    b. Genetic inheritance
    c. An emergent property of impoverished tense/aspect structures or systems (a "factativity effect" as argued for in Déchaine 1993 and Fitzpatrick 2006),
    d. Some combination of the above
    e. Something else

Similar things asked by Nurse et al. (2012:7):
- "Factative stretches across Niger-Congo from west to east"
    o "Is Factative an original Niger-Congo category, or did it spread across West and Central Africa, replacing [pure] Perfective? If so, was it an internal Niger-Congo development or was it transferred from another African phylum? If so, which one, and what is the distribution of Factative in Africa outside Niger-Congo?" (Nurse et al. 2012:7)

| Factativity across West Africa		
Family	**Language(s)**	**Source(s)**
Edoid, Benue-Congo	Emai	Schaefer & Egbokhare (2007: 178)
Edoid, Benue-Congo	Degema	Kari (2004) Kari (2008: xlii)
Igboid, Benue-Congo	Igbo	Welmers (1973: 346-347) Déchaine (1993: 562) Manfredi (1991: 175)
Defoid, Benue-Congo	Yoruba	Ajani (2001: 35)
Bantoid, Benue-Congo	Ejagham	Nurse *et al.* (n.d.)
Ijoid	Kalabari	Nurse *et al.* (n.d.)
Kwa	Tuwuli	Harley (2008: 307)
Gbe	Fon [Fɔn-gbè]	Déchaine (1993: 562)
Gbe	Ewe	Ameka (2008: 140)
Kru	Godie Vata Krahn Dewoin ...among others	Marchese (1986) Déchaine (1993: 562) Nurse *et al.* (n.d.)
Creole/Pidgin	Nigerian Pidgin English	Faraclas (1996: 188)

Map to show extent of factativity[3]:

Languages analyzed as factative across West Africa

Area which Factative marking occurs: **Macro Sudan Belt** (Güldemann 2008, 2010) – III on map below:

A number of areal features have already been noted (Güldemann 2010):
1. Implosive consonants
2. Labial-velar consonants
3. Three and more level tones
4. ATR vowel harmony
5. Nasalized vowels
6. "Lax" question prosody
7. SBJ-(AUX)-OBJ-V-X order
8. '(Sur)pass' comparative
9. Logophoricity system
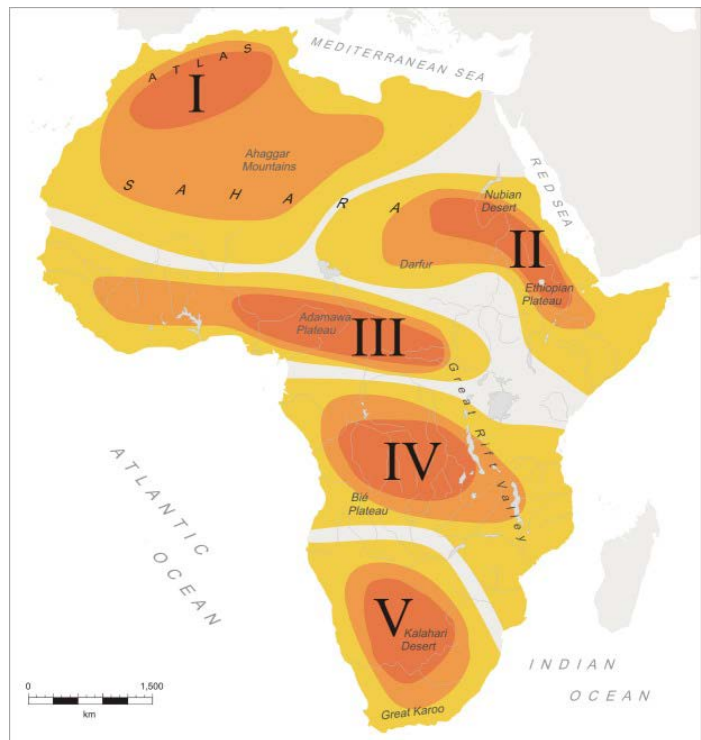
3 Map by Steve Huffman, Data from World Language Mapping System v.3.2 (Ethnologue 15th ed.) www.gmi.org/wlms

Concluding remarks:
- If languages such as Edo and Esan ultimately exhibit factative marking which they were not described as exhibiting before, this may represent a trend in West African description more broadly
- Understanding the exact nature of Esan and Edoid tense, aspect, and factativity has the potential to
    o Allow further understanding of differences between factative systems and traditional perfective/imperfective systems
    o Contribute to the understanding of the areal diffusion of linguistic structure and categories in this area of the world

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Contact

Contact me to discuss any details further. I have a draft of a description of tense and aspect in Ogwa Esan, too, if one is interested. And I also have a significant body of resources on Esan and Edoid languages, and have compiled a linguistic bibliography of Edoid linguistics (going beyond what one would find on WorldCat, LLBA), which I'd love to share if anyone is interested.

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