

PERFECTIVITY AND PREDICATE-CENTERED FOCUS IN NARRATIVE: FUNCTIONS OF “STRONG” FORMS IN KOYRABORO SENNI

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Abstract: Koyraboro Senni (KS), a Malian language of Songhay family, has a system of TAM markers that distinguish two aspectual categories – the perfective and the imperfective and three series – the “weak” series used in neutral declarative clauses and clauses with a non-subject focus, the subject-focus series, and the “strong” series, which is used for predicate-centered focus. The paper studies the use of the strong in-focus forms in a corpus of narrative texts and shows that the strong perfectives in most cases are used to describe real events, while strong imperfectives are irrealis-oriented. Contrary to implications of our current knowledge of poly-functionality of in-focus forms the strong imperfective is not used for present progressive and is relatively frequent in narrative texts. I also argue that while the perfective part of the system is better understood as the result of development of typical intrinsically-focused reading – the perfect, its imperfective part is better explained in line with Tatevosov’s (2005) proposal of direct development of the habitual to the prospective.

Key words: Songhay, predicate-centered focus, perfective, imperfective, narrative

1. Introduction

In a number of studies over the last few decades it has been shown that such aspectual categories as the perfect and the present progressive have predicate-centered focus (henceforth PCF) as a natural component of their semantics. Hyman & Watters (1984) in their study of “auxiliary focus” indicate that many African languages, which oppose *in-focus* forms (i.e. verbal forms used to mark the predicate-centered focus) to *out-of-focus* forms (i.e. verbal forms used then the predicate is not in focus), do not have this opposition in the perfect and the present progressive. At the same time these forms pattern with in-focus forms in other categories. They explain this fact by an assumption that these categories are “intrinsically focused”.

Güldemann (2003) elaborates the hypothesis of inherently focused nature of the present progressive on Bantu material. In his analysis the present progressive combines imperfectivity with focus on the predicate. He also proposes a grammaticalization path whereby the imperfective (or present) forms used in predicate-centered focus constructions develop into the present progressive.

Similarly, the perfect can be seen as a combination the perfective semantic and the predicate-centered focus. The out-of-focus counterparts of these categories are the perfective and the imperfective that have similar aspectual meaning but lack intrinsic predicate-centered focus component. Cf. Table 1.

Table 1

In-focus and out-of-focus aspectual categories

	perfectivity	focus
perfective	+	-
imperfective	-	-
perfect	+	+
progressive	-	+

On the other hand, it is known that in-focus and out-of-focus aspectual categories differ in the role they play in narrative. The out-of-focus forms are crucial for the narrative since the perfective acts

like an “event sequencer” (Hopper 1982: 9) moving the storyline forward, while imperfective forms provide the background information. Koyraboro Senni, the language under consideration in this paper, is not an exception from this general principle as the distribution of so-called “weak” aspectual forms suggests (see §3.2.2 for details).

- (1) *halq* *a* ***ga*** ***too*** *jiiri* *hiŋka*,¹
 all.way.to 3S W.IPFV arrive year two
- a* *kul* *ŋgi* *haw* *iz-ey*
 3S EVERY 3S.F cow child-DEF.P
- kaŋ* *i* ***ga*** ***i*** ***haw*** *ŋgey* *hug-oo*
 that 3P W.IPFV 3P be.tied 3P.F house-DEF.S
- mijŋ-oo* *ga*,
 mouth-DEF.S on
- haw* *iz-ey* *din* *no* *ka* *dira*
 cow child-DEF.P same TF SF walk
- ha* *kaq* *a* *doo*,
 INF come 3S place
- haw* *iz-ey* *din* ***kaq*** *a* *doo*
 cow child-DEF.P same come 3S place
- a* ***na*** *haw* *ize* *foo* *kambu-banda*
 3S W.PFV.TR cow child one hit.with.hand
- ka* *a* *žeb*,
 INF 3S smack
- hala* *haw* *iz-oo* ***buu*** *a* ***kogu***
 all.way.to cow child-DEF.S die 3S become.dry

‘When he was reaching (the age of) two years, their calves, which they tied in front of their house, the calves were what were walking

¹ In KS examples, I follow Heath’s (1998b; 1999) orthography. In particular, *ʃ* is IPA [ʃ] and *ž* is IPA [ʒ].

around and came to his house. (When) the calves came to his house, he smacked one of the calves with his hand, so that the calf died (and) it became stiff.² (Heath 1998b: 22–23)

In the passage (1), the events of the main storyline are coded by weak perfective forms with zero marking in intransitive clauses and marker *na* in transitive: ‘the calves came’; ‘he smacked one with the back of his hand’; ‘the calf died and became stiff’.³ The simultaneous background events are coded by marker *ga*: ‘he was reaching two years’; ‘they tied calves’.

The role of the in-focus forms in narrative discourse is more modest. The perfect is frequently responsible for regressive movements in narration that effect the background information. As (Li et al. 1983: 21) state it, “the Perfect functions to inject background comments which are *relevant* to the situation existing at a *given point* in the narrations” (italics in the original). Consider the following example from Mandarin Chinese illustrating the narrative use of the perfect particle *le* (2).

(2) Mandarin Chinese (Li et al. 1983: 27)

<i>nèi-shí</i>	<i>wǒ</i>	<i>zhèng</i>	<i>huái-zhe</i>	<i>lǎo-er</i>
that-time	I	precisely	bear-DUR	old-two
<i>yǐjīng</i>	<i>bā-ge</i>	<i>yuè</i>	<i>le</i>	
already	eight-CL	month	PRF	

‘At that time, I was already 8 months pregnant with my child’.

² Heath (1998b: 23) wrongly translates *kambu-banda ka a žeb* as ‘followed and seized it’. According to his dictionary (Heath 1998c), verb *kambu-banda* means ‘hit with back of hand’ while *žeb* means ‘smack, whip’. In (1), I changed the translation accordingly. My translation is confirmed by another occurrence of *kambu-banda* in the same text a few lines after (1); in this latter sentence Heath (1998b: 23) translates it as “hit with back of the hand”.

³ The subject-focus perfective (*ka* ‘SF’ in glosses) also codes an event of the story line (‘calves were walking around and came’). The use of *ka* instead of the weak perfective here is dictated by the need to introduce a new discourse referent (calves).

The final perfect particle *le* expresses here a relation between the reference time of the narrative introduced by temporal adverbial *nèi-shí* ‘at that time’ and the time before that, during which the narrator was pregnant. We also can assume that these eight months of pregnancy have a special relevance for the narrative and introduces a serious change into the background information.⁴

As for the present progressive Güldemann (2003: 354) mentions that this category is “rare in narrative texts (reported discourse aside), but occur regularly in direct communicative interaction of dialogues etc.” Following Güldemann’s observation one can propose a relative frequency scale⁵ of the four categories discussed (Figure 1), which reflects the relative importance of their role in narrative. The perfective is expected to be the most frequent, since its main function is to move the storyline forward. The imperfective should be less frequent, since it only provides the background information and scene setting for the main events. The perfect is used selectively for past events that are out of the main storyline but have a special importance for the narration; the perfect forms do contribute to the background information but much less, than imperfective forms do and their frequency is thus expected to be lower than that of the imperfective. Finally, the present progressive forms should be even less frequent (if not absent at all), since they are used for description of events that are simultaneous to the moment of speech and their use in narrative which typically presents a sequence of past events is problematic.

PERFECTIVE > IMPERFECTIVE > PERFECT > PROGRESSIVE

Figure 1. Relative frequency scale

⁴ Unfortunately, Li et al. (1983) don’t give a wider context to tell how exactly this state of affairs is relevant for the development of the story line.

⁵ I’m not aware of any previous study comparing real text frequency counts of in-focus and out-of-focus perfective and imperfective verb forms. My KS counts are given in §4.2.

Table 2 summarizes the hypotheses about the aspectual categories, their information-structural and narrative functions and their expected relative frequencies in a narrative text. The Latin numbers I–IV correspond to position on the relative frequency scale from left to right.

Table 2

Aspectual categories in narrative

category	PCF	narrative function	frequency
perfective	out of focus	event sequencer	I
imperfective	out of focus	simultaneous events, background information	II
perfect	in focus	“injection” of background comments, events that happen before the reference time	III
present progressive	in focus	rare, more prone to dialogues	IV

Table 2 suggests in particular a correlation between predicate-centered focus and a set of certain narrative functions. It also predicts that forms with inherent predicate-centered focus should be less frequent than out-of-focus forms and that the forms that combine perfectivity with predicate-centered focus should be more frequent than their imperfective counterparts.

Koyraboro Senni (KS), a language spoken in northern Mali, provides a good material for testing these correlations, because of a system of tense, aspect and mood (TAM) markers that also used for focus marking and a significant corpus of narrative texts at our disposal owing to the work of Jeffrey Heath (1998b).

As I show in this paper KS confirms the correlations and frequency predictions presented in Table 2 in its perfective part but contradicts them in the imperfective. The in-focus imperfective forms (“strong imperfective” in Heath’s 1999 terminology) play a more important role in the narrative and their frequency goes beyond the expectation. I explain this by the fact that those forms by contrast to the in-focus

forms in languages studied by Hyman & Watters (1984) and Güldemann (2003) are not used for the present progressive but rather code habitual, prospective other irrealis situations.

Before proceeding with a discussion of the KS material I have to introduce the framework (§2) and discuss basic typological features of the language, including the system of focus making (§3). § 4.2 presents a statistical study of use of in-focus and out-of-focus forms. §4.3 and §4.4 consider uses of in-focus TAM forms in the narrative. The conclusion is drawn in §5.

2. Framework

I follow Dik (1989) in defining focus as: “information that is relatively the most important or salient in the given communication setting, and considered by S (=Speaker) to be the most essential for A (=Addressee) to integrate into his pragmatic information” (Dik 1989: 277).

Focus has a *scope* which characterizes the entity the focus ranges over. In this paper the following classification of scope categories will be used (Cf. Dik 1989; Güldemann 2009).

Term focus
 Subject-focus
 Non-subject focus
 Predicate-centered focus
 State-of-affaires focus
 Truth-value focus
 TAM focus

Figure 2. Scope of focus

Following (Dik 1989; Güldemann 2009), I distinguish term focus and predicate-centered focus. Term focus ranges over a ‘term’ that is a non-predicative (e.g. nominal, adverbial) constituent. The term-focus domain needs to be further divided into subject and non-subject focus. This distinction is widely attested cross-linguistically and is relevant

for the languages under consideration as well. The predicate-centered focus, on the other hand, is a group of focus types that are characterized by a focus scope over semantic components typically hosted by the predicate, such as the lexical meaning of verb or state of affairs (SoA), the truth-value and the TAM meaning.

3. Koyraboro Senni and its typological features

3.1 Koyraboro Senni and its speakers

Koyraboro Senni (KS) also known as Songhay of Gao is a language of the Songhay family spoken in north-eastern Mali in Gao region, along Niger river. According to the classification proposed by Robert Nicolai (1981) KS belongs to the southern group of Songhay languages together with two Malian languages Humburi Senni and Tondi Songway Kiini (Heath 2005) spoken in towns of Hombori and Kikara, Zarma in Niger and Dendi in Benin (Harrison et al. 1997).⁶

It has been proposed by Greenberg (1966) that Songhay is a branch of Nilo-Saharan phylum. However, this hypothesis has caused many doubts among the researchers (Nicolai 1981; Heath 1999: 2; Dimendaal 2008: 843) and now the Nilo-Saharan affiliation of Songhay is supported by the minority of them.⁷

According to (Eberhard et al. 2023), KS is spoken by up to 850,000 people.

⁶ Other groups are western, represented by one Malian Songhay language, Koyra Chiini (Heath 1998a), spoken in towns of Timbuktu and Djenne, and northern which includes Tasawaq in Niger, Koranjé in Tabelbala oasis in southwestern Algeria (Souag 2010) and Tadaksahak in Mali (Christinsen-Bolli 2010). All languages of the northern group are heavily influenced by Berber and/or Arabic. Usually, western Songhay is classified together with Southern languages (cf. Lewis 2010). Suag (2010), however, put forward some evidence in favor of a closer relationship between the western and the northern groups.

⁷ Arguments pro classification of Songhay with Nilo-Saharan are summarized in (Ehret 2001).

3.2 Typological profile

3.2.1 Basic word order.

The basic word order in KS can be schematically represented as done in Figure 3.

S TAM (O) V (O) X

Figure 3. Basic word order template

TAM here stands for an auxiliary used to mark tense, aspect, mood and negation. X is any constituent other than subject (S), direct object (O), TAM marker or verb (V). The two object positions in the parentheses in Figure 3 capture the fact that a direct object can either precede or follow the verb. More specifically there are two lexical classes of transitive verbs: “OV verbs” with the preposed object and “VO verbs” that select a postposed object, as Heath’s (1999: 8–9) describes them.

(3) *ay ga i kar*
 1S W.IPFV 3P hit
 ‘I’m hitting them’ (Heath 1999: 9.)

(4) *a mana dii agey*
 3S PFV.NEG see 1S.F
 ‘He didn’t see me’ (Heath 1999: 9.)

(3) has an OV verb *kar* ‘hit’ the object expressed by 3P pronoun *i* and occurs before the verb. In (4) verb *dii* ‘see’ is a VO verb and so its object, the full 1S pronoun *agey*, follows it.

VO verbs are less numerous and can be claimed to be semantically less transitive⁸ than OV verbs (Heath 1999: 9; Galiamina 2006). In

⁸ “Transitive” is used here in a sense of the cross-linguistic semantic category of Transitivity (Hopper & Thomson 1980), which is opposed to language-specific

particular, like intransitive verbs (5), transitive VO verbs (6) lack overt TAM marker in perfective positive clauses, while OV verbs require marker *na* (7).

(5) Intransitive clause

ay kaa nee

1s come here

‘I came here’. (Heath 1999: 9)

(6) VO-transitive clause

a *dii* *agey*

3s see 1s.F

‘He/she saw me’. (own fieldnotes)

(7) OV-transitive clause

a *nq* *ay* *kar*

3s W.PFV.TR 1s hit

‘He/she hit me’. (own fieldnotes)

This split-transitivity system is found only in the perfective positive. In all other cases including the perfective negative there is an overt TAM marker. An overt marker is also present in all clauses marked for subject and predicate-centered focus (see §3.2.2).

Among OV verbs are canonical transitives, like *kar* ‘hit’, *širi* ‘bend’ and *ŋaa*, ‘eat’, among VO verbs – non-canonical ones, e.g. *dii* ‘see’, *waani* ‘know’, *humbur* ‘be afraid of’, *baa* ‘want, love’.

category, typically including two values “transitive” and “intransitive”. Transitivity in the former sense is not a binary category but rather a scale, on which the position of a particular construction is defined by a number of semantic parameters describing the situation, such as number of participants, aspect, affectedness of the complement of the verb etc. In the latter sense, the word “transitive” is used below when discussing the auxiliaries and transitive marker *na*.

3.2.2 TAM markers.

Tense, aspect, negation and information-structural configuration of the clause are expressed by the TAM markers given in Table 3.

Table 3

TAM markers

	PFV		PFV.NEG	IPFV	IPFV.NEG
	TR	ITR			
Weak	<i>na</i>	<i>Ø</i>	<i>mana</i>	<i>ga</i>	<i>si</i>
Strong	<i>ŋka</i>		<i>ŋka mana</i>	<i>mma~mba</i>	<i>ŋka si</i>
SBJ focus	<i>ka</i>		<i>ka mana</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>ka si</i>

There are three series of TAM markers – “weak”, “strong” and “subject focus”.⁹ Strong and subject-focus subparadigms differ structurally from that of the “weak” series. First, weak series has a remarkable split between intransitive and transitive clauses in the perfective, which is absent in subject-focus and strong series. Second, in both subject-focus and weak series the negative forms are based on the perfective positive marker (*ka* – in subject-focus, *ŋka* – strong series) while the weak negative forms are suppletive (*ši* ‘IPFV.NEG’ and *mana* ‘PFV.NEG’). Moreover, strong and subject-focus negatives are formed by adding those negative markers after strong *ŋka* and subject-focus *ka*.¹⁰ That is why when glossing the strong and subject-focus TAM markers in the perfective positive clauses I use glosses ST

⁹ Terms “strong” and “subject-focus” are used in (Heath 1999). I use term “weak” to refer to the unmarked series by analogy to term “strong”.

¹⁰ A curious fact for a diachronic study is that, apparently, the strong series is not only structurally similar to the subject-focus series but might be historically derived from it. The nasal element that makes the difference between a subject-focus auxiliary and strong auxiliaries within the same TAM/negation category (cf. *ka* ‘SF’ vs. *ŋka* [*<*n-ka*] ‘ST’, *ma* ‘SF.IPFV’ vs. *mma ~ mba* ‘ST.IPFV’ [*<*n-ma*]) might be related to the term focus-particle *no* (cf. examples in §3.2.4). The issue, though, needs more investigation and discussing it in detail clearly lies beyond the purposes of this paper.

“strong” and SF ‘subject focus’ without an indication of the aspect. On the other hand the negative morphemes *ši* and *mana* are glossed without indication of the series, since these markers occur in all of them and it’s only the presence or the absence of the preceding series marker that makes difference. The resulting glossing conventions are given in Table 4.

Table 4

Glossing conventions for TAM markers

from	gloss	reading
∅	–	“weak” perfective positive intransitive
<i>na</i>	W.PFV.TR	“weak” perfective positive intransitive
<i>ga</i>	W.IPFV	“weak” imperfective positive
<i>mana</i>	PFV.NEG	perfective negative
<i>si</i>	IPFV.NEG	imperfective negative
<i>ka</i>	SF	subject-focus
<i>ma</i>	SF.IPFV	subject-focus imperfective
<i>ŋka</i>	ST	“strong”
<i>mma~mba</i>	ST.IPFV	“strong” imperfective positive

In dialogues, the weak series of TAM markers is used in the declarative default clause type with topic-comment structure. It is also used in clauses adjacent to focalized non-subject constituents. The strong series is used in clauses with predicate-centered focus. Finally, as the name suggests the subject-focus series is used in subject-focus constructions. See §3.2.4 for details.

Non-indicative categories expressed by TAM markers are the subjunctive and the imperative. The subjunctive is signaled by marker *ma* in the positive and *ma si* in the negative and is used in a number of subordinated clause types. The imperative (positive) clauses lack overt TAM markers. Negative imperatives are generally expressed by negative subjunctive clauses.

(8) Imperative positive

huru!

enter

‘(You-S) Go/come in!’ (Heath 1999: 213)

(9) Negative subjunctive as prohibitive

*war**ma**ši**yadda!*

2P.SBJ

SBJV

NEG

consent

‘Don’t allow (it)!’ (Heath 1999: 214)

(10) Subjunctive in complement clauses

*ay**ga**baa**mā**a**neere**yane*

1S

IPFV

want

SBJV

3S

sell

1S.DAT

{He said to her, “aha! Me, I said to you, the chicken is not—, it’s not (as though) it’s a chicken whose equal does not exist}; ‘I just want it; I want you to sell it to me’.”} (Heath 1998b: 204–205)

Neither the subjunctive nor the imperative is sensitive to changes in the information structure by contrast to the indicative forms.

3.2.3 Variants of strong morphemes

Strong morphemes show some variation in the phonological and morphological form. *ŋka* sometimes occur as *nha* before velar-initial words¹¹. *mma* and *mba* according to (Heath 1998c) are two full dialectal variants of the strong imperfective morpheme.

In addition there is a reduced allomorph of the strong imperfective *ma* (cf. example (43) in §4.4.2) that is used in clauses adjacent to the main clause with a full *mma* ~ *mba*. This *ma* is problematic because it is homonymous to the subjunctive *ma* which is also common in dependent clauses. The difference in function of the strong imperfective

¹¹ A similar change is much more regular in case of infinitive *ka*, which usually occurs as *ha* before velar stops, cf. *ha koy* ‘INF go’.

and subjunctive is discernable (see Heath 1999: 208–210; 324–333) but it might well be that the two morphemes are historically related.

Both the *ɲka* and *mma* ~ *mba* have “augmented” forms with segmentable prefix: *na-mma* ~ *na-mba* and *na-ɲka*. These forms don’t show any difference from non-augmented variants so I treat them as free allomorphs of the same morphemes.

3.2.4 Focus constructions

The general split in KS *term focus* constructions is that between the subject and non-subject focus. In both constructions the term-focus marker *no* optionally follows the focalized constituent and pronominal participants are expressed by special full forms of pronouns. However, the two constructions differ syntactically and in use of different series of TAM markers. In the subject-focus construction the focalized constituent remains in-situ and the subject-focus series of TAM markers is used.

(11) Subject-focus construction: perfective

<i>woy-oo</i>	<i>woo</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>maŋgor-ey</i>	<i>wey</i>	<i>ɲaa</i>
woman-DEF.S	DEM.S	TF	SF	mango-DEF.P	DEM.P	eat

{Who ate the mangoes?} ‘This WOMAN ate the mangoes.’
(own fieldnotes)

(12) Subject-focus construction: imperfective

<i>Maryam</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>baa</i>	<i>ka</i>	<i>maŋgor-oo</i>	<i>ɲaa</i>
PN	TF	SF.IPFV	want	INF	mango-DEF.S	eat

{Who wants to eat mangoes?} ‘MARYAM wants/likes to eat mangoes.’
(own fieldnotes)

The non-subject focus construction involves extraction of the focalized noun phrase into the preclausal position. The focalized constituent can be optionally followed by the term-focus marker *no*. The clause proper has a resumptive pronoun referring to the extracted constituent and a TAM marker of the weak series.

(13) Non-subject focus construction

mangoro wooy no a n=i ηaa
 mango DEM.P TF 3S W.PFV.TR=3P eat
 {What did A. eat?} ‘He ate the MANGOES.’ (own fieldnotes)

Clauses with strong TAM markers in their basic function are used for predicated-centered focus. Truth-value, TAM and SoA focus subtypes are expressed in a single construction.

(14) SoA

mm! a ηka ay vel-oo dey
 no 3S ST.PFV 1S bicycle-DEF.S buy
 {Did Fanta take your bicycle?} ‘No, she BOUGHT my bicycle.’
 (own fieldnotes)

(15) TAM focus: alternative questions

Fanta ηka ċorkos-aa ηaa wala a mba kaa
 PN ST.PFV lunch-3S eat or 3S ST.IPFV come
k=a ηaa
 INF=3S eat
 ‘Has Fanta eaten her lunch or she is going to eat it?’ (own fieldnotes)

(16) TAM focus: answers

a mba kaa k=a ηaa.
 3S ST.IPFV come INF=3S eat
 ‘She WILL eat (it).’ (own fieldnotes).

(17) Truth-value focus: questions

Fanta ηka moto dey?
 PN ST motorcycle buy
 ‘Did Fanta buy a motorcycle?’ (own fieldnotes)

(18) Truth-value focus: questions

see *S.* *hundey* *kaŋ* *goo* *Bamako*,
and.then PN EMPH that be Bamako

ni *ŋka* *si* *haya* *dey* *a* *se?*
2S ST NEG thing buy 3S DAT

{A child has just listed several relatives to whom she planned to take gifts, but has omitted mention of S. Her father asks:} ‘What about S, who is in Bamako? You won’t buy anything for her?’ (Heath 1999: 206).

4. A study of ‘strong’ TAM markers in narrative

4.1 Corpus

This section presents a study of use of strong forms in a text corpus consisting of personal narratives and legends gathered by Heath (1998b). Those are relatively long stories told by a single narrator to a native-speaker interviewer, with whom he has short exchanges from time to time to clarify the storyline, check the hearer’s attention, make a joke etc.

§ 4.2 presents statistics of occurrences on strong forms in the corpus of Gao narratives (Heath 1998b: 2–217). In §4.3, I discuss the uses of strong forms in narrative discourse.

4.2 Frequency of aspectual forms in narratives

Table 5 presents the total number of tokens of each morpheme. The strong TAM markers are compared here to the weak series. The subject-focus, non-indicative (imperative and subjunctive) and infinitive markers are not taken into the account.

Table 5

Total number of tokens

		weak series		strong series		TOTAL
Perfective	POS.ITR	∅	1617	<i>ηka</i>	45	2155
	POS.TR	<i>na</i>	493			
	NEG	<i>mana</i>	148	<i>ηka mana</i>	2	
Imperfective	POS	<i>ga</i>	829	<i>mma~mba</i>	114	943
	NEG	<i>si</i>	307	<i>ηka si</i>	5	312
Total (weak series):			3394	Total (strong series):	166	-
- incl. positive			2939	- incl. positive	159	3098
- incl. negative			455	- incl. negative	7	462
TOTAL (all finite clauses)						3560

The numbers given in this table only partially confirm the frequency scale presented in Figure 3. The weak (out-of-focus) perfective is indeed the most frequent aspectual form with 2110 occurrences in the positive and 148 in the negative. The weak imperfective presented by 829 occurrences in the positive and 307 in the negative is the second most frequent category. However contrary to the predication of the frequency scale the strong (in-focus) imperfective is more frequent in the corpus than the perfective (114 vs. 43 in the positive and 5 vs. 2 in negative). In the rest of the paper I deal with explaining this mismatch by considering the uses the functions of string forms in narrative.

In the following discussion I consider mainly the strong positive markers *ηka* and *mma*. As can be seen from the Table 5 the strong negative *ηka mana* and *ηka si* are very infrequent in narratives. In fact,

most of these occurrences belong to the reported speech and don't show significant differences in their function compare to dialogs.

4.3 Strong *ɲka* in narrative

4.3.1 Perfect meaning of *ɲka*

As pointed out above, marker *ɲka* is used for marking of predicate-centered focus in perfective (both positive and negative) and imperfective negative clauses. Heath (1999: 203) states that *ɲka* is also used for the perfect aspect. Compare (19) and (20).

(19) *ɲka* for perfect (positive)

žin-oo neg a še man ti [a ɲka duu ize]?
 djinn-DEF.S say 3S DAT NEG it.is 3S ST.PFV get child
 'The djinn said to him, was it not true that he (=man) had gotten a child?' (Heath 1998b: 210–211)

(20) *ɲka* for perfect (negative)

H: *ã {noo din} fond-aa ga laala,*
 Ah! DEM ANA road-DEF.S W.IPFV be.bad,

onsoŋo nda lanzan̄aa gam-oo
 A. with L. middle-DEF.S

fond-aw-ey kul ɲga ka laala nd-ey
 road-DEF.P all 3S.F SF be.bad with-3P.PV

H: 'Ah! The road there is bad. (Of) all the roads between Ansongo and Labbezanga, it (= that one) is the worst of them.'

A: *irkoy beeri, ɲga woo ɲka mana gutoroy*
 God be.great 3S.F DEM ST NEG.PFV be.paved

A: 'God is great! It (= that one) **has not** (even) been re-paved.'
 (Heath 1999: 204).

In a narrative the use of *ɲka* in narrative is very similar to the pluperfect. That is, it refers to an event that precedes the reference

time of the narrative and its result or consequences are relevant in some way for the following storyline. Thus (21) is the final sentence in a vast passage describing the town where the protagonist came in, its chief's family and the problem it had.

(21) *a* *goo* *nda* *ηga* *ize* *aru* *foo* *kay* —
 3s be with 3S.F child man one that

a ***ηka*** *dana*.
 3S ST.PFV become.blind

‘His (chief’s) junior wife, she had one of her sons who — he had gone blind (Heath 1998a: 150–151)’.

Verb *dana* ‘become blind’ preceded by *ηka* relates the current reference time (=the time of the narrative) to the anterior plane where the event (‘he had become blind’) took place. The special importance of this event becomes clear from the consequent portion of narrative which tells a story of the protagonist curing the child’s disease.

It is interesting that in this example the *ηka*-clause follows an unfinished relative clause represented solely by the subordinator *kay* ‘that’. The narrator, who first wanted to describe the situation using a relative clause, uses a *ηka*-clause instead to attract speaker attention to the situation.

4.3.2 Immediate perfect reading of *ηka*

Similar to perfect forms in many languages (Comrie 1976: 60; Dahl 1985: 136) *ηka* is also used in antecedent clauses with a reading of the immediate character of the following action (so-called “immediate perfect”), usually translated in English with ‘as soon as’ clauses with the verb in the perfective past. This construction involves clause-final morpheme *hinne* ‘only, just’ (22).

(22) *irkoo* *hin-oo* *ra* *ya* ***ηka*** *zumbu* *hinne*,
 God power-DEF.S LOC 1S.SBJ ST.PFV go.down only

ay *dii-ay* *bor-ey*
 1S see-1S person-DEF.P

‘Immediately, by the power of God, as soon as **I had gotten** out (of the taxi), I saw my relatives.’ (Heath 1999: 20)

(22) describes a taxi ride taken by the protagonist. The final event in this episode is marked by *ŋka* antecedent clause. The immediate character of the following event is induced by the use of clause-final particle *hinne* ‘only, just, alone’. This particle is in a way similar to English particle *just*. Besides the clausal scope exemplified in (22) *hinne* can take a scope over a nominal constituent in which case it has meaning ‘just NP’ or ‘NP alone’ as in example (23) where it follows the extraclausal topic.

(23) *hinne* ‘only’ with constituent scope

a *kul* *i* *ši* *maar-aa,*
 3S every 3P IPFV.NEG listen-3S.PV

[*ŋgey* *boro* *beer-ey* ***hinne***] *ŋgey* *no* *moo* *maa.*

3P.F person big-DEF.P only 3P.F TF too understand

‘They didn’t understand any of it. Their adults alone, it was they who understood {the language of Gao}.’ (Heath 1998b: 64–65).

4.3.3 Resultative construction *hala*+ *ŋka*

ŋka is also found in clauses with clause-initial conjunction *hala* ‘until, all the way to’. Heath (1999: 314–315; 330–331) doesn’t analyze this as a separate construction,¹² describing only two types of *hala* clauses.¹³

¹² Heath (1999: 331) does cite an example with *hala* and a reduced form of strong imperfective *ma*. His main concern however is delimiting this *ma* from the subjunctive *ma*. Apparently, he considers *hala* plus strong imperfective to be an instantiation of *hala* plus indicative construction.

¹³ In addition to the construction discussed in this section *hala* is used in conditional antecedent clauses. See §4.4.1.

hala + indicative is provides “straightforward temporal boundary” for the event expressed in the antecedent clause, which is not dependent from one’s (speaker’s or protagonist’s) mental world (24). *hala* + subjunctive is rather used when *hala* clause expresses an outcome of the event in the antecedent clause, which is an object of his hopes, fears etc. (25).

- (24) *a hoy a ga goro*
 3S spend.day 3S W.IPFV sit
hala *woyn-aa kaj.*
until sun-DEF.S fall

‘He spent the day sitting (waiting) until the sun set.’
 (Heath 1999: 340)

- (25) *bor-ey kul koy soolq i goo no*
 person-DEF.P all go get-ready 3P be there
i ga larb-ey batu
 3P W.IPFV Touré-DEF.P await

[***hala*** *i ma fatta*] [*ŋgey ma i wii*].
until 3P SBJV exit 3P.F SBJV 3P kill

‘All the people_i went and got ready (for battle); they_i were waiting for the Tourés_j to come out so they_i could kill them_j.’
 (Heath 1999: 330).

hala +*ŋka* construction found in (Heath 1998b) shows a different interpretation (26).

- (26) *a žen, hala a ŋka faraa.*
 3S be.old all.way.to 3S ST be.tired

{There was no strength in her.} ‘She had gotten (so) old that she **was weary** (=had no strength).’ (Heath 1998b: 178–179)

- (27) [zaq i ga fja] [hala,
 when 3P W.IPFV dig.graves until
 boŋ-koyŋ-oo hundey sōhoo da,
 head-owner-DEF.S self now exactly
 a ŋka hambur hundi garow]
 3S ST.PFV be.afraid.of soul credit
 ‘They kept digging graves, until the chief himself now, he **became fearful** of his responsibility for life (=of the grooms).’ (Heath 1998b: 188–189)

In this construction *hala* clause marks neither the straightforward time boundary nor the object of one’s hopes or wishes to but rather the result of the event which is described in the antecedent clause. In this sense such uses of *ŋka* can be called “the resultative” or “the perfect of the result”.

The resultative is similar to the perfect in that it also evokes two planes: that of the reference time (including the moment of speech in dialogues) and the anterior plane. However, unlike the perfect the resultative emphasizes the plane of the reference time, i.e. the result or the consequences of what happened in the anterior plane.

4.3.4 Counterfactual reading of *ŋka*

Heath (1999: 306) also points out that *ŋka* construction is obligatory used in counterfactual condition clauses:

- (28) *ŋka* with counterfactual-condition reading
 nda ya ŋka diy-aa,
 with 1SG.SBJ ST see-3S.PV
 ay ga a wii dog-oo ra
 1SG. W.IPFV 3S kill place-DEF.S LOC
 ‘Had I seen him, I’d have killed him on the spot.’
 (Heath 1999: 306)

(29) *ŋka mana* with counterfactual-condition reading

nda ni ŋka mana hāyš-oo wii,
if 2S.SBJ ST PFV.NEG dog-DEF.S kill

ay ga a ŋaa
1S.SBJ W.IPFV 3S eat

‘If you **hadn’t** killed the dog, I would have eaten it.’

(Heath 1999: 306)

Heath (1999: 205) notices here another parallelism between KS and European languages like English and German: in both cases the form that has the pluperfect reading also marks counterfactual condition (cf. English translations of (28) and (29)).

4.3.5 Restrictions on use of *ŋka*

We have seen so far that in addition to marking of predicate-centered focus in perfective clauses *ŋka* shows several uses associated with the perfect and adjacent meanings of the pluperfect, resultative and counterfactual condition. However, *ŋka* is used not in all contexts where one would expect perfect or pluperfect marking. Thus, in the following example the event expressed in the relative clause precedes the reference time of the main clause, but it is the weak perfective which occurs in it.

(30) *waati din, a bang-andi i še kan ti*
time ANA 3S appear-CAUS 3P DAT that EQU

ŋga woo, woy-oo woo [kan ŋga diy-aa,
3S.F DEM.S woman-DEF.S DEM.S that 3S.F see-3S.PV

a huru hug-oo woo ra bii]
3S enter house-DEF.S DEM.S LOC yesterday

ŋga ši baa woy kul kala ŋga
3S.F IPFV.NEG want woman every except 3S.F

‘Then he informed them that, as for him, the woman that he had seen (as) she entered this house the previous day, he wanted no woman other than her.’ (Heath 1998b: 12–13)

The man had seen the woman entering the house before he informed the people about that fact. In English translation this temporal relation is expressed by the past perfect form of the verb in the relative clause. However, it is the zero weak perfective that is used in Koyraboro Senni, but not *ŋka*.

ŋka is also absent in adverbial clauses with clause-initial *kaŋ* (cf. relativizer *kaŋ*). Such clauses are typically used in tail-head linkage discourse strategy (de Vries 2005; Guillaume 2011 among others), in the “head” clause. Compare example (31).

- (31) *a na i noo a še*
 3S W.PFV.TR 3P give 3S DAT
kaŋ a na i noo a še,
 that 3S W.PFV.TR 3P give 3S DAT
a kani hala moo ga boo.
 3S lie.down all.the.way.to too W.IPFV day.break
 ‘He gave them (coins) to her. When he had given them to her, she slept until the day was breaking.’ (Heath 1998b: 14–15)

The first clause in the second sentence repeats the material of the first sentence. The event described in the antecedent clause precedes the reference time of the main clause, so a form with a pluperfect reading is expected (compare the English translation). However here, just like in relative clauses a weak perfective form is used.

The absence of *ŋka* in the two pluperfect contexts just discussed can be explained by the fact that in both cases we deal with clauses with weakened assertion, while *ŋka* is a strong assertive morpheme. Recall, however, that *ŋka* is used in antecedent clauses with immediate perfect reading and in counterfactual conditional clauses. Those contexts of course cannot be called assertive in a proper sense. However, it might well be that in KS the line that separates stronger assertions from weaker ones is drawn exactly so that the counterfactual conditions and the immediate perfect clauses with final *hinne* are treated as more

assertive while the rest including the relatives and the adverbial clauses with initial *kaŋ* as less assertive. This seems to me quite plausible, but the issue needs more investigation.

In addition to weak assertions *ŋka* is not used in clauses marked for the term focus.

- (32) *i kaa ka <woy-oo¹⁴> arm-ey hãã*
 3P come INF woman-DEF.S brother-DEF.P ask
 [[*wala sooro-hug-oo woo*],
 or floor-house-DEF.S DEM.S
wala mačín ka a čín nonŋur-oo woo ra?
 or what SF 3S build place-DEF.S DEM.S LOC
 ‘They came and asked the woman’s brothers, <this two-story house¹⁵> what had built it in that place?’ (Heath 1998b: 16–17)

The quotative clause in (32) describes a pluperfect event; it happened before the reference-time and its consequences are of some importance at the reference time. *ŋka* is not used in this clause because it has subject focus and the subject-focus perfective has to be used instead.

The same is true for non-subject focus clauses, as example (33) shows.

- (34) *a neŋ a se [[ganda filaana ra] ŋga hun]*.
 3S say 3S DAT ground so.and.so LOC 3S.F leave
 {He asked him, where had he come from?} ‘He said that it was from such-and-such a country that he had come.’
 (Heath 1998b: 152–153)

¹⁴ The KS text in Heath (1998b: 16) has a typo in this sentence. *koy-oo* ‘master-DEF’ occurs instead of the *woy-oo* ‘woman-DEF’. The translation and the contexts however indicate that the latter is correct.

¹⁵ In Heath’s (1998b: 17) translation this embedded topic NP is omitted.

The clause-initial position of the locative phrase indicates that this phrase is in the focus of the clause. In spite of the fact that the event described in this clause qualifies for the perfect, *ɲka* doesn't occur and the weak perfective form is used instead.

As can be seen from this section the restrictions on the use of *ɲka* are defined by its relation to the predicate-centered focus. This dictates its absence in non-assertive contexts and its incompatibility with the term focus.

4.4 Strong *mma* ~ *mba* in narrative

4.4.1 *mma* ~ *mba* as habitual

As indicated above, I take marking of predicate-centered focus in imperfective clauses to be the main function of *mma*~*mba*. In narrative discourse however, this marker shows a number of aspectual and modal readings that are quite different from those typically found in clauses with weak imperfective *ga*. This fact explains its higher frequency in narrative.

Most of narrative uses of *mma*~*mba* show habitual reading. They describe a set of identical events that take place regularly in a certain context.

- (35) *jiiri kul i mba a yantan.*
 year every 3P ST.IPFV 3s plaster
 {...until now, one hundred years after, until now it is (still) there being a mosque, it is healthy (=sound).} 'Every year they (re-)plaster it.' (Heath 1998b: 34–35)

(35) describes the mosque of Gao which is built of sun-dried mud-bricks and needs plastering every year. So, this regular habitual event of is expressed by a *mma*-clause.

(35) is an independent clause not chained (syntactically or semantically) with the clause that precedes it. However, in most of the cases of the habitual reading of *mma*~*mba* is found in consecutive clauses

that have a special semantic and sometimes syntactic relation with the antecedent clause. One example of such constructions is given in (36).

- (36) *a na i henna tee, a mma* a kar,
 3S W.PFV.TR 3P good do 3S ST.IPFV 3S hit
a na i laala tee, a mma a kar.
 3S W.PFV.TR 3P bad do 3S ST.IPFV 3S hit
 {... that man had no activity for her other than him beating her.
 <...> } '(If) she had done something good, he would beat her.
 (If) she had done something bad, he would beat her.' (Heath
 1998b: 162)

(36) is a passage from the set-up of the story of a woman who suffered from domestic violence. The two parallel sentences describing repetitive batteries of her husband both consist of two clauses that denote two consecutive events. These events are semantically chained since from narrator's perspective it is the behavior of one's wife that normally leads or doesn't lead to a battery by her husband. On the other hand (36) doesn't have any indication of syntactic subordination of the two clauses in neither of the sentences.

In other cases, the antecedent clause is a subordinate clause, as in (37) describing the interior of the Gao Mosque.

- (37) *ammaa nga hug-ey hundey,*
 but 3S.F room-3P self
 [*hala n ga huru i ra*]
 all.way.to 2S W.IPFV enter 3P LOC
 [*ni mba karikari zaa ka zumbu i ra*],
 2S ST.IPFV ladder take INF go.down 3P loc
 'But its rooms, if you enter them sometimes, you will take a ladder
 to go down into them.' (Heath 1998b: 34–35)

The subordinate status of the antecedent clause is marked by the conjunction *hala* that is to be translated in such constructions as “when” or “if” as done here. By contrast to constructions with *hala* in the consequent clause (see §4.3.3) here it occurs in the antecedent clause and shows quite a different reading. As Heath (1999: 315) points out: “In this case, *hala* clause doesn’t set an endpoint for the time reference of the other clause, rather it specifies a background prior (occasionally, simultaneous) eventuality”.

The habitual character of the two consecutive events described in (37) is indicated by the use of weak imperfective *ga* in the antecedent clause (cf. adverbial *sometimes* in English translation). Thus, the consecutive event denoted by *mma* clause is interpreted as habitual too. Unlike in (37), in this example semantically chained events are coded iconically through clause-subordination.

Another context for the habitual consecutive reading of *mma* can be found in pseudo-temporal constructions of the type presented in (38).

- (38) [waati kul [kan wang-oo kaa ka šintin]],
 time every that war-DEF.S come INF begin
a-kul, *ngey kus-oo mba fur ganda*
 3s-every 3P pot-DEF.S ST.IPFV put.down ground
nun-aa ga
 fire-DEF.S on

‘Whenever the fighting was about to begin, each (time), their pot would be put down on the fire.’ (Heath 1998b: 44–45)

In this example the antecedent event is expressed in a relative clause that modifies noun *waati* ‘time’. The subsequent event is expressed by *mma* clause.

As examples (37–38) show, the habitual consecutive reading of *mma* is not connected to any particular syntactic structure.

mma is also found in the apodosis of conditional constructions, compare (39).

- (39) *ay ga nee sōhoo,*
 1s W.IPFV say now
 [*nda ay ŋaa i ra*] *i mba kaa ka ben.*
 if 1s eat 3P LOC 3P ST.IPFV come INF end
 ‘I was saying (=thinking) now, if I ate¹⁶ (anything) from it, they (=coins) would be all gone.’ (Heath 1998b: 102–103)

The protasis in (39) is marked with clause-initial conjunction *nda* ‘if’, while the following *mma* clause forms the apodosis. Though (39) has a hypothetical conditional but not habitual reading of *mma*, the two uses of the morpheme can be seen as two instantiations of one and the same meaning. Since in both cases we deal with events that follow other events this meaning has to be called “consecutive”. On the other hand, the habitual and the hypothetical condition can be seen as belonging to the irrealis domain (cf. Givón 1994; Cristofaro 2004)]; crucially, the both of event types are characterized by a weakened temporal specification as is the case in other irrealis categories. In other words, these (and other irrealis) categories do not “pertain to any actualized instance of the relevant events” (Cristofaro 2004: 261) As shown below the irrealis readings of *mma* are not restricted to consecutive contexts.

4.4.2 *mma ~ mba* as prospective

Another group of irrealis readings that *mma ~ mba* is frequently used for can be called prospective. By prospective I understand the category that establishes a relation between the reference time and the state of affairs that follows it.

¹⁶ Heath’s translation here is quite literal. Verb *ŋaa* ‘eat’ also has meaning ‘spend (money)’.

- (40) *soŋoy bor-ey kaa ka nee,*
 Songhay person-DEF.P come INF say
ŋgey mba kaa hin-oo taq i kone.
 3P ST.IPFV come power-DEF.S take 3P in.hands.
 ‘The Songhay came and thought (=decided) that they must come
 and take it (=power) from them.’ (Heath 1998b: 48–49)

In (40), *mma* occurs in the subordinate clause following the verb *nee* ‘say, think’. The events belonging to the reference time (including the act of making the decision) are expressed in the main clause. The state of affairs coded in the subordinate clause constitutes a part of participants’ mental world, more specifically their intention to make this state of affairs become the case.

Typically, prospective readings are found in subordinate clauses preceded by verb *nee* ‘say, think’ as in the example above. This verb has a wider semantics than verbs of speech in English, which includes mental activities like thinking and taking decisions.

Prospective readings of *mma ~ mba* are also possible in independent clauses. Compare example (41).

- (41) *kombitar-oo da no ni mba réchaud¹⁷ diin-andi,*
 potato-DEF.S exactly there 2S ST.IPFV stove be.burned-PASS
 [*ma hamoo dumbu*] [*ma a daŋ a ra*]
 SBJV meat-DEF.S cut ST.IPFV 3S put 3S LOC
 [*ma kombitar-oo feferi*] [*ma a daŋ a ra*]
 SBJV potato-DEF.S peel ST.IPFV 3S put 3S LOC
 {Now you should look (=try) to cook for yourself.} ‘The potatoes
 are there; you will turn on this stove, you will cut up the meat
 and put it in it (=pot), you will peel the potatoes and put them
 in it.’ (Heath 1998b: 130_131)

¹⁷ Cf. French *réchaud* ‘portable stove’.

This example is from a direct quotation of one of the participants of the narrative who gives instructions to the protagonist on how to cook potatoes, using *mma* and its reduced form *ma* in subsequent clauses.

Examples (40) and (41) show variability with respect to modal nuances of the prospective reading *mma* ~ *mba*. In (40) expresses the intention, while in (41) it is used for imperative-like instructions. In fact, the range of variation is even wider and even goes beyond the prospective domain in the proper sense. Thought, those readings seem to be derivable from the core prospective uses. Compare examples (42) and (43).

In (42), the narrator-protagonist (A) is interrupted by the listener (B) who anticipates the following part of the narrative by adding another quotation that he thinks should belong to the narrator-protagonist. The both uses of *mma*–*mba* show obligational reading. In (43), *mma* ~ *mba* clause expresses epistemic possibility.

(42)

A: *ay neę a še “ni mba koy telefon yaa”*
 1s say 3s DAT 2s ST.IPFV go telephone EMPH

B: “*nda n ši koy telefon key,*
 with 2s IPFV.NEG go telephone EMPH
ni mba ey naŋ ya koy”
 2s ST.IPFV 1s let.go 1s go

A: ‘I told him, “you must go and phone”.’

B: ‘If you won’t go and phone, you must let me go.’

(Heath 1998b: 84–85)

(43) *ay neę a še élève no, a mba čow nee ra.*
 1s say 3s DAT student it.is 3s ST.IPFV study here LOC
 {He asked me, “what is he?”} ‘I told him, “he is a pupil, he should be studying here”.’ (Heath 1998b: 118–119)

4.4.3 *mma ~ mba* in manner ‘as if’ clauses

An example of this construction is given in (44).

- (44) *a na takub-aa jer.*
 3S PFV.TR sword-DEF.S lift
 ‘He raised the saber’.
- a tee [sanda ŋga mma a zafa tak-aa din]*
 3S do like 3S.F ST.IPFV 3S cut.down manner-DEF.S same
 ‘He made as though he would cut (the body) in that way’. (Heath 1998b: 212–213).

The strong imperfective is used in the embedded clause, whose dependent status is signaled by the use of the full form of third person singular pronoun *ŋga* (cf. 3s *a* in the main clause). Particle *sanda* here functions as a conjunction that introducing the embedded clause. *sanda* is also used in comparative constructions with clauses and NP’s (see Heath 1999: 273–274).

4.4.4 Restriction on use of *mma~mba*

Now let’s look at the contexts where *mma ~ mba* is not used albeit expected.

Like strong perfective *ŋka*, *mma ~ mba* is absent from relative clauses and clauses with term focus, where the weak perfective *ga* is used instead. Thus in (45) one might expect the use of *mma ~ mba*, since the event coded in the relative clause qualifies for the prospective. Nevertheless the weak *ga* is used.

- (45) *zaa ŋga hundey na haa kul wiri [kan]*
 as.soon.as 3S.F self W.PFV.TR thing every look.for that
- ga ni daabu]*
 W.IPFV 2S lock

kal dee a mana duu fondo jina.

except only 3S PFV.NEG get road first

‘Since he himself had tried everything (=every strategem) which would lock you up, only he had not yet found a way.’ (Heath 1998b: 86–87).

(46) is similar to typical contexts for habitual consecutive. There two consequent habitual events, one of which (the antecedent event) is expressed in a relative clause attached to a noun in the extracausal topic position, while the other one (the consecutive event) – in the main clause.

(46) *boro kul [kay ga bana]*
 person every that W.IPFV pay

ɲga no ma noor-oo taa.

3S.F TF SF.IPFV money-DEF.S take

‘When anyone paid, it was he who would receive the money.’
 (Heath 1998b: 82–83)

One would expect an occurrence *mma ~ mba* in the main clause, but notably the clause is marked for subject focus so the subject-focus imperfective *ma* I used instead.

Examples (45) and (46) show that *mma ~ mba* is not tolerated in clauses with a weakened assertion and those with term focus, exactly as its perfective counterpart *ɲka*.

5. Conclusion

Table 6 summarizes and compares the functions of *ηka* and *mma~mba* in narrative.

Table 6

Uses of strong TAM marker in narrative

	<i>ηka</i> (perfective)	<i>mma ~ mba</i> (imperfective)
realis	perfect (and pluperfect)	
	immediate perfect	
	resultative	
irrealis	counterfactual condition	
		habitual
		hypothetical (apodosis)
		prospective
		epistemic possibility
	‘as if’ clauses	

As can be seen from this table *ηka* is used for a number of readings associated with the perfect zone. In terms of realis / irrealis distinction most of these readings are realis with one exception of counterfactual condition. By contrast the uses of *mma ~ mba* are irrealis with habitual-prospective core and the periphery that includes the epistemic possibility and manner ‘as if’ clauses.

Such a distribution of strong perfective *ηka* is expected from what we know about the perfective in-focus forms in other languages (cf. Hyman & Watters 1984; Güldemann 2003). From the same perspective the irrealis orientation of *mma ~ mba* is indeed curious. Recall that according to Güldemann (2003) imperfective in-focus markers develop into the present progressive – a prototypically realis category.

Constructing a detailed scenario of how the development irrealis readings of *mma ~ mba* might have happened is not an easy task, because one must deal with the problem of habitual-prospective polysemy.¹⁸

¹⁸ In the literature this phenomenon is usually called “habitual-future polysemy” (Bybee et al. 1994; Haspelmath 1998; Tatevosov 2005). However, as far as the dis-

This phenomenon found in quite a few languages is usually explained by a parallel development of the prospective and habitual reading out of a single grammatical unit with present progressive semantics (Bybee et al. 1994; Haspelmath 1998), as shown in Figure 4. Tatevosov (2005) argues for an alternative diachronic scenario, whereby prospective readings develop directly out of habituais.

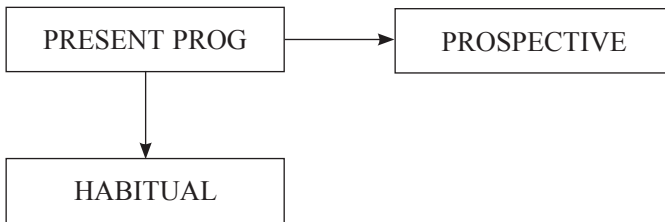


Figure 4. Development of habitual-prospective polysemy (Bybee et al. 1994; Haspelmath 1998)



Figure 5. Development of habitual-prospective polysemy (Tatevosov 2005)

The latter scenario is more in line with the use of KS strong imperfective forms, since it allows the direct development of the prospective from the habitual. *mma* ~ *mba* is not used for the present progressive. In KS this function is fulfilled by weak imperfective *ga*. There is also a number of periphrastic progressive constructions with locational verb *goo* (*sii* in negative) ‘be at’ (see Heath 1999: 211–212). The verb itself is the most probable source for weak imperfective markers *ga* ‘W.IPFV’ and *ši* ‘IPFV.NEG’ (Heath 1999: 181–182).

Thus, KS provides the evidence for a new type of polyfunctionality of the predicate-centered focus markers and shows that their evolution

cussion concerns the difference between the future tense and the prospective aspect seems to be not relevant.

can lead different results being construed by the concrete properties of TAM system of a language. It also shows in particular that such an evolution can lead to a frequency increase in a narrative discourse because the newly developed readings of the predicate-centered focus marker can be recruited by the narrative discourse for certain functions.

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Abbreviations

AUG – augment	P – patient-like argument of a transitive verb
ANA – anaphoric	PFV – perfective
CAUS – causative	PRF – perfect
CL – classifier	PROG – progressive
DAT – dative	PROSP – prospective
DEF – definite	PV – postverbal pronominal object
DUR – durative	R – recipient-like argument of a ditransitive verb
DEM – demonstrative	S – sole argument of an intransitive verb
EMPH – emphatic	SBJ – subject
EQU – equational	SBJV – subjunctive
F – full series of pronouns	SF – subject-focus series of TAM markers
INF – infinitive	ST – “strong” series of TAM markers
IPFV – imperfective	S – singular
ITR – intransitive	T – theme-like argument of a ditransitive verb
NEG – negative	TF – term focus
OBJ – object	TR – transitive
	W – “weak” series of TAM markers

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