

**Tense and Aspect in Central Dàgáárè**  
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**Background:**



Dàgáárè is a Mabia (Gur) language spoken in Northern Ghana and South Burkina Faso. This handout will focus on the Central dialect of Dàgáárè. Our consultant is a speaker-linguist of Central Dàgáárè from Wa, marked on the map.

Aspect is obligatorily marked on every Dàgáárè VP (Bodomo 1997, Saanchi 2003, Dakubu 2005). There are distinct pre-verbal morphemes to part both past and future but they are not obligatory in most contexts. There is no overtly marked present tense, and present tense is conveyed through the use of temporal adverbs. The two aspects are Perfective (PFV) and Imperfective (IPFV), with the PFV being the same as the citation form of the verb.

(Dichaine & Angsongna 2019)

**Part 1: Overview of sentence structure & aspectual morphology**

Sentence structure:

1. Dèré mán̄ táá lá mbááaré.  
 Déri mán̄ táá lá mbááári.  
 Deri HAB have.PFV AFF laziness  
 ‘Deri is always lazy,’ lit. ‘Deri always has laziness.’

Tense particles used for testing:

- Past: *dà*
- Future: *nà*
- Present: unmarked, or *pàmpánà* ‘now’/ *zínè* ‘today’

Perfective Aspect

2. Ò kyéréé là.  
 ò ʃír-éé là  
 3SG.S sneeze.PFV-INTR AFF  
 ‘He has sneezed.’

3. À pógó nyú lá à kòòŋ.  
 à póg-ó nú lá à kòòŋ

D woman-SG drink.PFV AFF D water  
 ‘The woman has drunk the water.’

### Imperfective Aspect

4. À dóó vééré lá à bóì.  
 à dó-ó vír-é lá à bóì-ì  
 D man-SG kick-IPFV AFF D ball-SG  
 ‘The man is kicking the ball.’

5. À dóó kònóŋ.  
 à dó-ó kòn-ó-ŋ  
 D man-SG cry-IPFV-AFF  
 ‘The man is crying.’

### Part 2: Perfective vs. Past

*Tests developed from Toews (2015) to elicit contexts in which perfective aspect is felicitous but past tense marking will not be.*

#### 1a. Default past interpretation (✓ past; ✓ perfective)

6a. Ì dà kó lá à kpáglé.  
 ì dà kó lá à kpág-lí  
 1SG.S PST kill.PFV AFF D bug-SG  
 ‘I killed the bug.’ (anytime before today)

6b. Ì kó lá à kpáglé.  
 ì kó lá à kpág-lí  
 1SG.S kill.PFV AFF D bug-SG  
 ‘I have killed the bug.’ (today, recently)

#### 2a. Acceptable in non-past contexts (✗ past; ✓ perfective)

7a. Ì kó lá à kpáglá pàmpánà.  
 ì kó lá à kpáglá pàmpánà  
 1SG.S kill.PFV AFF D bug-PL now  
 ‘I have killed the bugs now.’

7b. \*Ò dà ðí lá ñmímáá sèémáá pàmpánà.  
 ò dà ðí lá ñmímáá sìmáá pàmpánà  
 3SG.S PST eat.PFV AFF sun food now  
 ‘S/he ate lunch now.’

#### 2b. Not required in past contexts (✗ past; ✓ perfective)

8. Ò dà mèéré lá dió.  
 ò dà mîé-ré lá dió  
 3SG.S PST build-IPFV AFF house  
 ‘S/he was building a house’

9. Ò zààmêṅ mèéré lá dió.

ò	zààmîṅ	mìé-ré	lá	dió
3SG.S	yesterday	build-IPFV	AFF	house

‘S/he was building a house yesterday.’

2c. Combines with past (✗ past; ✓ perfective)

10. À dós dà wà lá UBC.

à	dós	dà	wà	lá	UBC
D	man-SG	PST	come.PFV	AFF	UBC

‘The man arrived at UBC.’

3a. Incompatible with imperfective (✗ past; ✓ perfective)

11a. \*Ò mére lá à dió.

ò	mé-ré	lá	à	dió
3SG.S	build.PFV-IPFV	AFF	D	house

‘\*S/he has built-ing a house.’

11b. \*Ò mè mèéré lá dió.

ò	mè	mìé-ré	lá	dió
3SG.S	build.PFV	build-IPFV	AFF	house

\*‘S/he has built-ing a house.’

3b. Event time contained in temporal adverbial boundaries (✗ past; ✓ perfective)

12. À dós ségé lá ò gáne ṅmén sógó.

à	dós	ségí	lá	ò	gán-í	ṅmín sógó
D	man-SG	write.PFV	AFF	3SG.POSS	book-SG	afternoon

‘The man has written his (whole) book in the afternoon/midday.’

13. À dós ségé lá ò gáne ṅmén sógó.

à	dós	dà	ségrè	lá	ò	gán-í	ṅmín sógó
D	man-SG	PST	write-IPFV	AFF	3SG.POSS	book-SG	afternoon

‘The man was writing his book in the afternoon/midday.’ (writing occurred in the afternoon, but is not complete)

14. À dós ségé lá ò gáne ṅmén sógó.

à	dós	dà	ségí	lá	ò	gán-í	ṅmín sógó
D	man-SG	PST	write.PFV	AFF	3SG.POSS	book-SG	afternoon

‘The man has written his (whole) book in the afternoon/midday.’ (perceived to have started and finished in the afternoon)

3c. Continuation Entailments (✓ past; ✓ perfective)

15. Ò yíeli lá bébío, kyé ò nàṅ yíélé lá.

#ò	jíeli	lá	bé‘bíó, tǽ	ò	nàṅ	jíé-!lé	lá	
3SG.S	sing.PFV	AFF	today	CNJ	3SG.S	still	sing-IPFV	AFF

‘S/he sang in the morning and s/he is still singing.’

16. Ò yíeli lá bébío, kyé ò là nàṅ yíélé lá.

ò	jíeli	lá	bé‘bíó, tǽ	ò	là	nàṅ	jíé-!lé	lá	
3SG.S	sing.PFV	AFF	today	CNJ	3SG.S	REP	still	sing-IPFV	AFF

‘S/he sang in the morning and s/he is singing again.’

3d. Event completion clause - tests for completion entailments (✗ past; ✓ perfective)

3e. No interruption interpretation - tests for culmination entailment (✗ past; ✓ perfective)

17. Ò kó lá à kpáglá kyé ká à fón kòṅ.

ò kó lá à kpág-lá tǽ ká à fón kòṅ  
3SG.S kill.PFV AFF D bug-PL CNJ C D phone cry.PFV

‘S/he had killed (all) the bugs before the phone rang.’

\*‘S/he had killed the bugs and the phone rang (but not all the bugs were killed).’

18. Ò dà kóórò lá à kpáglá kyé ká à fón kòṅ.

ò dà kóó -rò lá à kpág-lá tǽ ká à fón kòṅ  
3SG.S PST kill-IPFV AFF D bug-PL CNJ C D phone cry.PFV

S/he was killing the bugs (some) and the phone rang.’

3f. Inceptive reading with punctual adverbs (✗ past; ✓ perfective)

19a. À bééré kyèrè lá báá zè mááné wágrè/gbèlìṅè átà nê kyé léé.

à bíí-<sup>1</sup>rí tǽrì lá báá zì-máán’í wágrì/gbèlìṅè átà nî tǽlìí  
D child-PL play.PFV AFF báá place-cool time/hour three CNJ half

‘The children have played báá at 3:30.’ (same day)

19b. À bééré dà kyèrè lá báá zè mááné wágrè/gbèlìṅè átà nê kyé léé.

à bíí-<sup>1</sup>rí dà tǽrì-<sup>1</sup>é lá báá zì-máán’í wágrì/gbèlìṅè átà nî tǽlìí  
D child-PL PST play-IPFV AFF báá place-cool time/hour three CNJ half

‘The children were playing báá at 3:30.’ (a day before or more)

### Part 3: Perfective vs. Present

*Tests developed from Toews (2015) to elicit contexts in which imperfective aspect is felicitous but present tense will not be. Please note that there is no true present tense in Dàgáárè.*

1a. Default present interpretation (✗ present; ✓ imperfective)

20. À wáábó dèé òò lá à òṅó pàmpánà.

à wáá!-bú dìé òò lá à òṅ-ó pàmpánà  
D snake-SG just eat.PFV AFF D mouse-SG now

‘The snake has just eaten the mouse.’

21. À wáábó òòró lá à ònné.

à wáá-!bú òò-ró lá à òn-ní  
D snake-SG eat-IPFV AFF D mouse-PL

‘The snake is eating the mice.’

2a. Acceptable in non-present contexts (✗ present; ✓ imperfective)

22. À dós zààmèṅ jíélé lá.

à dós zààmîṅ jíé-lé lá  
D man-SG yesterday sing-IPFV AFF

‘The man was singing yesterday.’

23. \*N̄ dà kó lá à kpáglé pàmpánà.

n̄ dà kó lá à kpág-lí pàmpánà  
1SG.S PST kill.PFV AFF D bug-SG now

‘#I killed the bug right now.’

2b. Not required in present contexts

24. Dèré dì lá sáo pàmpánà.

Déri dì lá sáo pàmpánà  
Déri eat.PFV AFF sáo now  
‘Deri has eaten sáo now’ (just a few minutes ago)

2c. Combines with past (✗ present; ✓ imperfective)

25. Ñ dà kóóró lá à kpáglá.

Ñ dà kóóró lá à kpáglá  
1SG.S PST kill-IPFV AFF D bug-PL  
‘I was killing the bugs’

26. \*Ò dà dĩ lá ñmímáá sèemáá pàmpánà.

\*ò dà dĩ lá ñmímáá sèemáá pàmpánà  
3SG.S PST eat.PFV AFF sun food now  
‘S/he ate lunch now.’

3a. Incompatible with perfective aspect (✗ present; ✓ imperfective)

27a. \*Ò méré lá à dió.

\*ò méré lá à dió  
3SG.S build.PFV-IPFV AFF D house  
‘\*S/he has built-ing a house.’

27b. \*Ò mè mèéré lá dió.

\*ò mè mèéré lá dió  
3SG.S build.PFV build-IPFV AFF house  
‘\*S/he has built-ing a house.’

3b. Event time exceeds temporal adverbial boundaries (✗ present; ✓ imperfective)

*Imperfective*

28. Ò sègré lá ò gánè zénè, ò ná ségé ò báárè lá yùòn zíe.

ò sègré lá ò gán-ì zínè, ò ná ségí ò  
3SG.S write-IPFV AFF 3SG.POSS book-SG today 3SG.S FUT write.PFV 3SG.O  
báárì lá jùòn zíe  
finish.PFV AFF year next

‘She is writing her book today, and she will finish it next year.’

*Present*

29. \*Ò sègé lá ò gánè zénè, ò ná sègé ò báárè yùòn zíe.

\*ò sègí lá ò gán-ì zínè, ó ná ségí ò báárì  
3SG.S write.PFV AFF 3SG.POSS book-SG today 3SG.S FUT write.PFV 3SG.O finish.PFV  
jùòn zíe  
year next

‘She wrote her book today, and she will finish it next year.’

3c. No culmination/termination entailment (✗ present; ✓ imperfective)

30. À yí bébìó(zàá) á wà tá pàmpánà ò nà sègré lá.

à jí bé'bíó-(zàá) á wà tá pàmpánà ò nà sègré lá  
D from morning-all CNJ come.PFV reach.PFV now 3SG.S still dance-IPFV AFF

‘From morning until now s/he is dancing,’ lit. ‘Leaving morning and come reach now s/he is dancing.’

31. Ò sègè lá pàmpánà kyé ò nàṅ bá sègè báárè.

ò sègí lá pàmpánà (ʔé) ò nàṅ bá sègɪ báárɪ  
3SG.S dance.PFV AFF now (CNJ) 3SG.S still NEG dance.PFV finish.PFV  
‘S/he has danced now, and s/he is not yet finished dancing.’

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