

Koene

The Ugare Verb System

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1. Introduction

Ugare is a Tivoid language spoken by about 5,000 people along the Cameroon-Nigeria border. Ugare speakers call themselves either the Ugare or Binangeli people, but outsiders generally call them the Messaka people. Neighboring language groups include Tiv to the north and west, Esimbi to the east, Assaka to the southeast, and Oliti to the south. Ugare is closely related to all of these languages, and to other Tivoid languages, but more study needs to be done to determine just how close these relationships are. Probably 75-80% of Ugare speakers live on the Cameroon side of the border, in the Akwaya subdivision of Cameroon's Southwest Province. The Ugare speakers who live in Nigeria are primarily in the Benue and Taraba States. There is also a large settlement of Ugare speakers in the New Town Berumbe district of Kumba in Cameroon's Southwest Province.

We first came to the Ugare people in June of 1992, and we will soon leave for an extended furlough that is due to begin September, 1994. This paper will briefly summarize what we have learned about the Ugare verb system so far. While our knowledge is far from complete, we thought it would be best to record what we know at this point. We hope that we and/or others can build on this knowledge in the future.

2. Overview of Ugare Phonology

Ugare has 25 consonant phonemes, which are shown in the following table. The symbols used in this table will be used throughout this paper.

| | Bilabial | Labiovelar | Labiodental | Alveolar | Alveopalatal | Palatal | Velar |
|---------------|----------|------------|-------------|----------|--------------|---------|-------|
| VI. Stop | p | kp | | t | | | k |
| Vd. Stop | b | gb | | d | | | g |
| VI. Affricate | | | | ts | c | | |
| Vd. Affricate | | | | z | j | | |
| VI. Fricative | | | f | s | sh | | |
| Vd. Fricative | | | v | | | | gh |
| Nasal | m | | | n | ny | | ŋ |
| Liquid | | | | l | | | |
| Semivowel | w | | | | | y | h |

Ugare has 8 vowel phonemes, which are shown in the following table. Again, the symbols in this table will be used throughout this paper. It should be noted, however, that ϵ and $\dot{\text{ɨ}}$ are both allophones of e , in addition to being phonemes in their own right. This situation stems from ongoing phonological change in Ugare. Due to uncertainty about how to represent these vowels orthographically, this paper will use a phonetic representation for them.

| | Front | Central | Back |
|------|------------|------------------|------|
| High | i | $\dot{\text{ɨ}}$ | u |
| Mid | \dot{e} | | o |
| Low | ϵ | a | ɔ |

Ugare has two tones, high and low. These sometimes end up on the same syllable, producing a rising or falling tone. Ugare has a downstep after any low or floating low tone, and an upstep which occurs in high-low noun stems when a high tone prefix is added. Upstep is also quite common in the verb phrase, as will be seen later in the paper. We do not mark low tone in the orthography, but for clarity, every vowel will have a tone mark in this paper:

- ˊ high tone
- ˋ low tone
- ˊˋ rising tone
- ˋˋ falling tone

3. Subject Markers

Ugare has a Bantu-style noun class system, so most verb forms take a subject marker prefix that agrees with the noun class of the subject. In general, Ugare prefixes consist of a single vowel, either *í-*, *a-*, or *u-*. Both high and low tone prefixes are found, giving a total of six common prefixes: *í-*, *ì-*, *á-*, *à-*, *ú-*, *ù-*. These six prefixes are all found as subject markers in the third person. Three plural classes optionally add a *v* to the front of the prefix, including the class which is used for people. Due to ongoing linguistic change, younger speakers add this *v* more commonly than do older speakers.

The following table shows the subject markers used for first and second person:

| | Singular | Plural |
|------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| 1st Person | (<i>m̂</i>) <i>m-</i> | <i>bìhì ì-</i> |
| 2nd Person | (<i>yè</i>) <i>ì-</i> | <i>bèn ì-</i> |

Each square of this table lists the object pronoun, followed by a space and then the subject marker. So for 1st person singular, the object pronoun is *m̂*, which is glossed 'me', and the subject marker is *m-*. Note that the first person singular subject marker, *m-*, has no vowel. It has a low tone, though its tone is not marked here. All the other person/number combinations shown use *ì-* as their subject marker. In the plural, the subject marker must be preceded by the object pronoun; in the singular this is optional and its use adds emphasis.

4. Verb Classes

Ugare has two classes of verb stems; we presently call them high-tone verbs and low-tone verbs. The naming is based on the fact that in all forms, high-tone verbs have a high tone somewhere in their stem, while low-tone verbs have a low-tone somewhere in their stem. Since we have not yet analyzed all the floating tone morphemes responsible for the various surface forms, this naming scheme may need revision someday. For example, we may find it more accurate to label them "high-tone" and "toneless", or "high-low" and "low-high", etc. Whatever the names, the two classes are a very important distinction for they differ in tonal morphology. Given any verb stem, to correctly derive any of the various inflected forms you need to know whether it is a high-tone or a low-tone verb.

There is a further subcategory of high-tone verbs. This group has the form *á-* stem, where *á-* looks like a subject marker, but it is invariable. There is no noun class agreement in these verbs; *á-* seems to take the place of the subject marker.

5. Tense, Aspect and Mood

Ugare has four tenses: past, perfect, present, and future. The perfect tense refers to a completed action that has present relevance. In most cases, the action occurred very recently, but this does not need to be so.

We have identified special forms for continuous and habitual aspect; there may be morphemes for other aspects which we have not yet discovered. In the past tense, an action may either be continuous or completed. The completed form is very simple, while the continuous form has additional morphemes. The present tense has both continuous and habitual forms. There seems to be only one aspectual form of the perfect and future tenses.

Ugare has several morphological forms to express various moods. There are two imperative forms: one for singular and another for plural. In the future tense, there are at least three different forms. One denotes an action that will definitely happen, and the other two are for actions which may or may not happen. We do not yet know how these two "possibility" forms differ in meaning. Finally, there is a form which we are calling perfect subjunctive. It is properly translated "would have" in English, and denotes an action that was intended to be done, were it not for some hindrance that prevented it.

6. Charts of Verb Forms

The following tables summarize how to form Ugare verb phrases with the various tenses, moods, and aspects discussed so far. The infinitive is also shown. The first table shows forms for high-tone verbs, the second is for low-tone verbs. These charts show falling and rising tones, as well as four distinct levels of surface tone. Arrows indicate upstep and downstep, but there is no analysis of the floating tones responsible for the various forms.

The charts also show an orthographic example, with gloss, for each form, using a high-tone subject marker. These examples have more detail than is needed in the orthography; low tones are marked, and morphemes are separated by a hyphen. They give an idea however, of what these forms look like when written. Note that neither upstep nor downstep is ever written; there is enough other redundant information to distinguish the various forms.

| | High-Tone Stem | | | |
|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| | Example | Gloss | High-Tone SM | Low-Tone SM |
| Past | í - vá | he came | - . - | - . ↓ - |
| Past Cont. | í - zé ú - vâ | he was coming | - . ↑ - ↓ - . - | - . - ↓ - . - |
| Perfect | í - vâ | he has come | ↑ - . - - | - . - - - |
| Perfect Subj. | á - vî | he would have come | ↑ - . ↓ - | - . - |
| Present Cont. | í - nyí ú - vâ | he is coming | ↑ - . - ↓ - . - | ↑ - . - ↓ - . - |
| Present Habitual | â - vî | he comes | ↑ \ . - | - . ↓ - |
| Future | í - nyî vǎ | he will come | ↑ - . - . ↓ - | ↑ - . - . ↓ - |
| Future Poss. 1 | í - yà vá | he may come | ↑ - . . ↓ - | - . . ↓ - |
| Future Poss. 2 | í - mǎhélí í - vâ | he may come | ↑ - . ↓ - - ↑ - . ↓ - | - . ↓ - - ↑ - . ↓ - |
| Infinitive | ù - vâ | to come | - . ↓ - | |
| Imperative Sing. | vâ | Come! | - | |
| Imperative Plur. | vân | Come! | - | |

| | Low-Tone Stem | | | |
|------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| | Example | Gloss | High-Tone SM | Low-Tone SM |
| Past | í - dǎ | he closed | • - ↓ - - | • - ↓ - - |
| Past Cont. | í - zÉ ú - dà | he was closing | • - ↑ - ↓ - • - | • - ↓ - ↓ - • - |
| Perfect | í - dà | he has closed | ↑ - • - | - • - |
| Perfect Subj. | á - dǎ | he would have closed | ↑ - • - ↓ - | - • - ↓ - |
| Present Cont. | í - nyí ú - dà | he is coming | ↑ - • - ↓ - • - | ↑ - • - ↓ - • - |
| Present Habitual | â - dî | he comes | ↑ \ • - | - • - |
| Future | í - nyî dà | he will come | ↑ - • - • - | ↑ - • - • - ↓ - |
| Future Poss. 1 | í - yà dà | he may come | ↑ - • - • - | - • - • - |
| Future Poss. 2 | í - mǎhélí í - dà | he may come | ↑ - • - ↓ - - ↑ - • - | - • - ↓ - - ↑ - • - |
| Infinitive | ù - dà | to come | - • - | |
| Imperative Sing. | dâ | Come! | - | |
| Imperative Plur. | dân | Come! | - | |

A few additional notes may help clarify conventions used in the charts. First of all, the up and down arrows represent upstep and downstep. Ugare has an automatic downstep, but a down arrow occurs at each low-high tone transition anyway, just for clarity, unless the downstep isn't observed. Notice that many verb forms have more than one tone on the stem. As shown in the examples, this produces a rising or falling tone on a monosyllabic stem. In the example column, morpheme boundaries are separated by a hyphen - but in the pitch pattern columns, a bullet • is used since the hyphen would look like a mid tone. Finally, although the glosses use 'he' for subject, ì - is used for a singular noun class, while í - is used for both singular and plural classes. A more accurate gloss would be 'he/she/it' for ì - and 'he/she/it/they' for í -. Another possible gloss for ì - is 'you'.

7. Notes about the Verb Forms

The **past tense** is the simplest of the forms. It just consists of the subject marker (SM) and the stem, with the tone patterns shown. It is the easiest form to use in distinguishing high-tone verbs from low-tone verbs.

In the **past continuous**, the zÉ morpheme only is upstepped; this upstep seems to be cancelled at the end of this morpheme. With a high-tone SM, zÉ comes out with an extra high tone; with a low-tone SM, zÉ is a normal high tone (i.e. the low-tone SM fails to produce the expected downstep).

In the **perfect tense**, the SM is upstepped. A high-tone SM is extra high, and a low-tone SM gets a high tone.

In the **perfect subjunctive**, the á - prefix only is upstepped; the upstep seems to be cancelled after this prefix. As with upstep in the perfect, if the preceding word's final tone was high, á - will be extra high; if it was low, á - will be a normal (not downstepped) high-tone. Note that this prefix is not a subject marker; this form has no SM.

In the **present continuous** and the **future**, the SM-nyí complex only is upstepped; the upstep is cancelled after this complex. Note that a low-tone SM comes out as upstepped low; this is the only case we have encountered so far in Ugare where a low tone is upstepped.

In the **present habitual**, the a - prefix has a falling tone when the preceding word ends with a high tone, and a low tone otherwise.

In the **future possible 1**, the SM only is upstepped. A high-tone SM will be extra high, a low-tone SM will be normal high.

In the **future possible 2**, the verb complex SM-m̄hélí is placed before the SM-verb complex. In both verbs, the SM only is upstepped. If the preceding word ends with a high tone, the SM will be extra high; if preceded by a low tone, it will be normal high.

Like the past tense, the **infinitive** is also a very simple form. A low-tone noun class marker ù - is prefixed, and each verb class has a distinctive tone pattern on its stem.

The **imperative** forms consist of the verb stem with a high-low tone pattern and no prefix. This is the only form where both verb classes have the same tone pattern on the stem. The plural has an -n suffix added. If the verb stem ends with a consonant, a vowel is inserted before this suffix. If the final vowel in the verb stem is high, then this epenthetic vowel will match it; otherwise è will be used. This behavior is summarized in the table below.

| Final Stem Vowel | Inserted Vowel | Example | Gloss |
|------------------|----------------|---------|------------|
| i | -ì- | shímìn | Be still! |
| ɨ | -ɨ- | kɨŋɨn | Corner it! |
| u | -ù- | túmùn | Shoot! |
| e, ε, a, ɔ, o | -è- | tóŋèn | Push! |

8. Derivation

We have not studied derivation in detail, but one type we have seen takes a verb and produces an adjective. This is done by adding the suffix -n to the past tense stem. If the verb stem ends with a consonant, a vowel is inserted before the suffix according to the above table.

The resulting adjective usually has the meaning of regularly doing the verb's action. At least two verbs we've seen, however, yield adjectives that mean the verb's action has only happened to the noun once; these are the verbs for 'die' and 'rot'. The following table shows a few examples of verb stems and the adjective stems produced by this derivation process:

| Past Tense Stem | Gloss | Adjective Stem | Gloss |
|-----------------|--------|----------------|-------------|
| áwú | swam | áwún | swimmer |
| fó | rotted | fón | rotten |
| fùŋgúlú | talked | fùŋgúlún | talkative |
| kpɨ | died | kpɨn | dead |
| kúndú | jumped | kúndún | jumper |
| lé | cried | lén | cries a lot |
| sé | walked | sén | walker |

9. Negation

Ugare uses two different forms for negation. One places the morpheme gbɨ between the subject marker and the verb, and the other form places the morpheme sâ in this position.

With either form, *gá* may be added to the end of the sentence to add emphasis. It should be noted that in Tiv, negation is primarily accomplished by adding *gá* to the end of the sentence.

These two negation forms have different meanings and usage, but we haven't worked out all the various meanings yet. The following sentences show examples of these forms:

Í-sóhó í-gbî vá (gá).
 pl-animal SM-neg1 come neg

The animals didn't come.

Í-sóhó í-sâ vá (gá).
 pl-animal SM-neg2 come neg

The animals will never come.

10. Residue

As indicated in the introduction to this paper, we have only a basic understanding of the Ugare verb system at this time. Here I'll mention some of the areas where we know more research is needed.

There are certainly other verb forms we have not yet discovered. It will be interesting to look for a future continuous, for example. It would also be good to check for a subjunctive form in tenses other than perfect. One verb form we've heard but haven't had time to document is another future tense with a "possibility" mood. This is formed by adding the morpheme *bán* between the subject marker and verb stem.

To this point, we have mostly been involved in documenting surface forms, but these need to be analyzed so that their underlying morphemes can be identified. The tonal complexity of the verb phrase suggests that there is a number of floating tone morphemes, but we have yet to identify them. We also need to identify the environments which produce upstep.

A final area of research that is needed is that of meaning. We don't know all the fine meaning distinctions for the various forms that have been shown. For example, we don't know the difference in meaning between the future tense forms with a possibility mood. We also don't know the full range of meanings for each of the two negation forms.

11. Verb List

To conclude this paper, this section will list a small number of Ugare verb stems, with gloss. High-tone stems have their vowels marked with high tones, and low-tone stems have vowels marked with low tones. All stems begin with a consonant, except for the high-tone stems which have an *á* - fused on the front in place of the subject marker; these begin with *á*. The list is sorted so that high-tone stems are shown first. Within a verb class, words are arranged alphabetically by Ugare spelling.

| High-tone Stems with <i>á</i> Prefix | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| Stem | Gloss |
| á é | split (firewood) |
| á ú | hear |
| áwú | swim |
| éwú | kill |

It should be noted that Ugare is undergoing a change in its vowel system. When the *a* - prefix is added to a stem, it usually changes to agree in height, and sometimes place of the

first stem vowel. The stem vowel then usually becomes high. This identical process occurs to a much fuller extent in another of the Tivoid languages, Esimbi. In underlying form, then, éwú consists of the morphemes á-wó. We suspect álé consists of the underlying morphemes á-lá, and the surface form should be álí, but for some reason it comes out as álé. We attribute this to the fact that this vowel change is not complete, and e and í are allophones in the former vowel system. Someday, the surface form may become álí, as expected.

| High-tone Stems | | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|--------|------------------------------|
| Stem | Gloss | Stem | Gloss |
| bó | throw (target is nearby) | ná lé | lick (e.g. honey) |
| búlú | open | ndá | see |
| cé lé | know | ndú | climb |
| cí | fear | nú | drink |
| cím | dig | nyí | eat |
| có | sell | nyím | quench (fire) |
| dú | blow on fire to fan the flame | ngúlú | smell |
| dúlú | exit | sá | beat a drum/lose something |
| fá | give | ságh | quarrel |
| fó | rot | sá lé | snap a twig off a tree |
| fómbó | shave | sé | walk |
| gbílí | hit | són | say (used for direct quote) |
| ká | clear bush | shí | remain in one place |
| ká há | hoe | shílí | weed |
| kám | knead | tón | skewer/stab, creating a hole |
| kán | roast | té élí | greet |
| kémbí | break firewood | tó | insult |
| kóhó | enter | tó | load a gun |
| kó lé | catch, hold | téndé | refuse |
| kúndú | jump | túm | shoot |
| kyándé | return | tsógh | scold |
| kpí | die | tsó lé | descend |
| kpílé | ignite | vá | come |
| lé | cry | vé lé | go |
| mbá lé | pass | vém | accept |
| méndé | ascend | vílí | ask |
| mígh | leave, move | wúlú | sweep |
| mó | stay | yán | put juju |

| Low-tone Stems | | | |
|----------------|---------------|---------|------------------------------|
| Stem | Gloss | Stem | Gloss |
| bòŋ | touch | nòhò | throw |
| cìghìlì | set fire | nyòn | depart |
| dà | close | ngèlì | write |
| fàlè | hang up | pàm | fly |
| fùlù | pour | sàgh | untie |
| fùngùlù | talk | sàhà | comb |
| fyàgh | trap | sàndè | run |
| gòòlù | take | shìm | stay still |
| gùhù | forget | sòlè | stab (into an existing hole) |
| kàŋ | tie | tè | take, hold, carry |
| kìmbìlì | repeat | tègh | send, show |
| kìgh | slaughter | tòŋ | push |
| kìŋ | trap/corner | tòòlè | give back |
| kòndò | cook | tùlù | uproot |
| kpàhà | help | tsèlè | say |
| lì | lock | wùlù | discard |
| màlè | discard | yàm | buy |
| mbìlè | fetch (water) | zàmbìlì | plead |
| mìhèlì | do | zèmbìlì | chase |
| nèlè | hide | zòòlè | bother |
| njàhà | excrete | | |