

Research Article

The Syntax and Semantics Interface of Auxiliary Verbs in Embosi

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Abstract

This contribution tackles the scrutiny of the syntax and semantics interface of auxiliary verbs in Embosi, a Bantu language spoken in the northern part of the Republic of Congo. This paper draws data from observation, traditional folklore and some written books on the language under discussion. It comes out from the analysis that Embosi has three types of auxiliaries: the primary auxiliaries, modals, and semi-modals. The work proves that Embosi has two primary auxiliaries: *idzà* “be” and *idià* “have”; four pure modals: *kà* “duty with hesitation”, *kòmi* “obligation”, *onami* “condition”, and *pènà* “probability”; and five semi-modals: *ikòngàà* “futurity”, *ipèrà* “capacity”, *ipùrà* “desire”, *itáá* “prohibition”, and *iwénà* “progressive aspect”. It also demonstrates that Embosi primary auxiliaries and semi-modals are pre-verbal, whereas the pure modals are pre and post-verbal, and some of them (*onami* and *pènà*) may occur before the subject without affecting the semantics of the sentence. The analysis also specifies that two pure modals (*kà* and *kòmi*) may precede the subject and keep the same meaning. The study also attests that primary auxiliaries and semi-modals, in Embosi, have the morphosyntactic properties of finite-based auxiliaries, whilst pure modals are non-finite-based. Finally, the study proves that the negative auxiliary invariably parallels the syntactic function of a dummy auxiliary, regardless of verb type.

Keywords

Embosi, Auxiliary, Modals, Pure Modals, Semi-modals

1. Introduction

The study of auxiliary verbs is a central issue in linguistic inquiry, as they have a prominent function in the expression of tense, aspect, mood and voice. Embosi is a Bantu language spoken in the north of the Republic of Congo. Classified in the group C20, it is a C25 language, with five dialects (Guthrie [1]). This research work tackles the construction of the Embosi auxiliary system. Not only does the study aim at documenting and analysing auxiliary verb construction in Embosi, but it also contributes to highlighting the syntactic and morphosyntactic patterns of auxiliaries within that language.

Therefore, it addresses the following research questions: 1) How is the auxiliary system constructed in Embosi? 2) What are the syntactic properties of Embosi auxiliaries? 3) Which morphosyntactic features characterise auxiliaries in Embosi? This research work is carried out under the X-bar theory and Minimalist Program (Chomsky [2, 3]). The study provides background information, followed by the typology of Embosi auxiliaries and their syntactic and morphosyntactic approaches. For this analysis, we collect data from key inform-

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ants and participant observation, traditional folklore and written documentation.

2. Background Information

2.1. Embosi Language

This section provides the linguistic classification of the Embosi language. Actually, Embosi is a Bantu language spoken in the north of the Republic of Congo, particularly in the divisions of Nkeni-Alima and Cuvette. Ndongo Ibara [4] claims that Embosi is spoken in the following subprefectures: Abala, Allembe, Boundji, Makoua, Ngoko, Ntokou, Ollombo, Ongoni, Owando, Oyo, and Tchikapika. Classified as C25 by Guthrie [1], it belongs to the C20 group that has five dialects: Mboko (21), Akwa (C22), Ngare (23), Koyo (C24), Embosi (C25), Likwala (C26) and Likuba (27). However, as Ngapoula Kiba [5] claims, the classification of Embosi and its dialects is the subject of debates among linguists. Accordingly, Ndongo Ibara [6] “the two last languages must not be considered as varieties of the Embosi language, but rather as separate languages which share the same linguistic origin.” Embosi C25, on which this study is based has about ten subdialects: Bokwele, Bonyala, Eboyi, Mbondzi, Ngae, Ngilima, Obaa, Oléé, Ondinga, and Tsambitso (Ngapoula Kiba [7]).

2.2. Auxiliary Verb

This section provides the typology of auxiliaries. To begin with, auxiliary verbs, also known as helping verbs, play a central role in the grammatical organisation of Embosi. They are used not to convey lexical meaning but to express grammatical categories such as tense, aspect, mood, and voice. Accordingly, Quirk et al. [8] approach auxiliary verbs as “verbs which occur with another verb form and have the function of marking distinctions in tense, aspect, mood, and voice.” It amounts from this quotation that the author emphasises the utility of auxiliary verbs and distinguishes them from lexical verbs, which mainly provide the semantic content.

However, auxiliary verbs in Embosi are classified into three main categories: primary auxiliaries, modal auxiliaries and semi-modals or marginal auxiliaries. Each group displays distinct syntactic behaviours and functional characteristics.

Indeed, the primary auxiliaries in Embosi are *idzà* “be” and *idià* “have”. These verbs serve a range of grammatical functions. Both auxiliaries are mainly used to express the progressive aspect in the past, with the reduplication of the last vowels: *idzàà* and *idiàà* “was/were + ing form”. Quirk et al. [8] note that these verbs are called “primary” because they “can function both as auxiliaries and as main verbs”. For example, *idzà* “be” may serve an auxiliary function as in (1) and may function as a lexical verb in (2):

(1) *Mbùà à-dzà-à là-nô.*

Rain 3_{SG}-be-Past 3_{SG}-IMPERF-rain

“It was raining.”

(2) *Ngá i-dzà-à ò mbòà.*

Me 1_{SG}-be-Past at village

“I was at the village.”

Otherwise, modal auxiliaries express modality, which refers to the speaker’s judgement about possibility, necessity, ability, permission, or obligation. These auxiliaries differ from primaries in that they are defective verbs. In fact, Embosi attests to about nine modal auxiliaries. We have *ikòngàà /isià/ilòngàà/ibòndàà* “futurity”, which are all synonymous, and their use is sometimes dialect dependent; they are used to express the future, *ipèrà* “capacity”, *ipùrà / iyéngà* “desire”, *itàà* “prohibition”, *iwéna* “progressive”, *Kà* “duty with hesitation”, *kòmi* “duty”, *onami* “condition”, and *pèna* “probability”. However, in Embosi, some modal auxiliaries are also marginal auxiliaries or semi-modals.

Indeed, marginal auxiliaries include verbs that function partly like modals and partly like lexical verbs. Talking about the English language, Carter and McCarthy [9] explain that “some verbs, such as *need* and *dare*, function partly like modal auxiliaries and partly like lexical verbs, depending on context.” It comes out from the above quotation that we may have verbs that function simultaneously as modals and lexical verbs. In Embosi, semi-modals include all modals starting with the vowel “i” expressing the infinitive. Their semi-modality is highlighted in 3.3.

Thus, auxiliary verbs occupy an important place in the grammatical structure of the Embosi language. Their classification into three types, that is, primary, modal, and semi-modal, is relevant to their syntactic and semantic properties. The auxiliary distribution depends on properties in terms of structure that differentiate them from main verbs. Understanding auxiliary verb construction is crucial in the analysis of Embosi syntax and semantics, and it is better carried out through a generative framework such as Transformational-Generative Grammar.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

One of the main contributions to the modern theory of syntax is the Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) of Noam Chomsky. He first tackled this theory in his *Syntactic Structures* [10], before elaborating it later in his *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* [11]. From this contribution, Chomsky provides a clear rule-based account of syntax which included the complex behaviour and contribution of auxiliaries. TGG highlighted how auxiliary verbs are placed in different syntactic structures. Accordingly, he [10] claims that “a transformational grammar is a device for generating the sentences of a language and assigning to each a structural description”.

Indeed, the analysis of auxiliary distribution in Chomsky’s TGG enables the understanding of the distinction between the surface sentence forms and the basic sentence order, that is, subject-verb-object. It provides foundations for later theories such as X-Bar Theory and the Minimalist Program that brought a remarkable development in generative grammar.

Dealing with the role of auxiliary verbs, Chomsky [11] asserts that “an auxiliary verb is inserted in the presence of not or in the formation of questions when there is no other tense-carrying element.” This statement amounts to saying that when a tense is required and the main verb cannot carry its properties, the auxiliary is inserted to express that tense.

Furthermore, TTG’s rule-based framework for auxiliary verbs has a crucial impact on the pedagogical approaches in the teaching of grammar across languages. So, let us explore the typology of Embosi auxiliaries.

3. Embosi Auxiliary Typology

This section discusses the linguistic typology of Embosi auxiliaries. Actually, Embosi mainly attests to three types of auxiliaries: primary auxiliaries, modal auxiliaries and semi-modal or marginal auxiliaries.

3.1. Primary Auxiliaries

Primary auxiliaries usually help to form verb tenses. In Embosi, we distinguish two of them: *idzà* “be” and *idià* “have”. They are both used to express the progressive aspect, indicating ongoing actions or states in the present or past. This concept is illustrated in the following examples.

(3) *Ngá i-di-I li-yémbà.*

Me 1_{SG}-Have- Past 1_{SG}-IMPERF-sing

“I was singing.”

(4) *Oko à-dzà-à là-yémbà.*

Oko 3_{SG}-be-Past 3_{SG}-IMPERF-sing

“Oko was singing.”

According to the examples above, both primaries are used to form the progressive past. However, in their semantics, (3) is distinguished from (4) in the expression of the past action. Indeed, in (3), the continuous action expressed with the auxiliary *idià* “have” is proximal in the past, whereas, with the auxiliary *idzà* “be”, the progressive action is distal in the past. Let us notice that to form the progressive past, the main verb is preceded by the morpheme *la* or *li*, depending on the noun class of the subject. So, *idià* “have” expresses proximity of a continuous action in the past, and *idzà* “be”, its distance. Put otherwise, we are in front of remote past and near-past progressive tenses.

Otherwise, *idià* “have” forms the present perfect, with no morpheme between the auxiliary and the main verb. The sentence below highlights this argumentation.

(5) *Ondongo à-di-i à-làmb-i. tsósó.*

Ondongo 3_{SG}-have-Past 3_{SG}-cook-Past chicken

“Ondongo has cooked chicken.”

Indeed, the use of the auxiliary *idià* “have” in (5) expresses a past action with present relevance. However, the same sentence used with the auxiliary *idzà* “be” and main verb agreement expresses a completed action in the past.

(6) *Ondongo à-dzà-à à-làmb-á tsósó*

Ondongo 3_{SG}-have-Past 3_{SG}-cook-Past chicken

“Ondongo cooked chicken.”/“Ondongo had been cooking chicken.”

In fact, the primary auxiliary *idzà* “be” in (6) is used, with the main verb agreement, to form the simple past tense, expressing a past action which is finished and disconnected from now. Let us now examine modals.

3.2. Modal Auxiliaries

Modal auxiliaries, also called pure modals, are a type of auxiliary verb used to express modality and cannot serve as full verbs. Their role is primarily grammatical rather than lexical, in that they signal the speaker’s attitude toward the proposition rather than describe concrete actions. Huddleston and Pullum [12] observe that modals are “central in expressing epistemic, deontic, and dynamic modality”. This means that they provide a highly grammaticalised means of encoding modality. In Embosi, we distinguish four pure modals: *ka*, *komi*, *onami*, and *pena*.

3.2.1. Kà

Kà is a pure modal, used in Embosi to express a duty with hesitation, a duty which requires a kind of allowance to be expressed. Let us exemplify with the following sentence:

(7) *Wà ká làwòlà*

Him/her have to speak

“He has to speak.”

In fact, (7) does not express a formal obligation where the subject must perform an act of speaking, but rather a duty to speak with the particularity of excepting for a permission or a situation that enables the subject to do so. Embosi also attests *kòmi* as a pure modal.

3.2.2. Kòmi

Kòmi is an Embosi modal used to express obligation, which refers to a necessity imposed on the subject. The speaker signals that an action is required rather than optional. Huddleston and Pullum [12] define obligation as “the necessity of a situation brought about by some normative source, such as law, custom, or personal authority.” Let us examine the following sentence:

(8) *Ibara kòmi à-p-é mbóngò yà ngá páà.*

Ibara must 3_{SG}-give-Non-Past money of me today

“Ibara must give my money today.”

It amounts from (8) that the obligation, as expressed through the use of Embosi modal *kòmi*, represents the necessity of carrying out an action under normative authority. It often encodes duties imposed either by the speaker or by external authority. Otherwise, in Embosi, the condition is expressed through the modal *onami*.

3.2.3. Onami

Condition is one of the domains in which Embosi modal

verbs operate, particularly within the framework of conditional constructions. The condition refers to a hypothetical situation whose fulfilment guarantees the realisation of another proposition. As Palmer [13] observes, modality in conditional clauses reflects “the speaker’s assessment of reality versus possibility”. In Embosi, the condition is expressed by the modal *onami*, as it is highlighted in the following example:

(9) *Onami Andura à-yà-à imbyéngi, wàà ngòli kò ngá i-búr-ù mbóà.*

Unless Andura 3_{SG}-come-Non-Past tomorrow, or else me 1_{SG}-go back-Non-Past village.

“Unless Andura comes tomorrow, I go back to the village.”

In fact, as Kiba Ngapoula [14] claims, “the condition expression with modals illustrates how language encodes contingency, inference, and hypothetical reasoning, providing a bridge between modality and conditional semantics.” Indeed, the use of the modal *onami* proves the expression of the condition where the fulfilment of the subject action of going to the village depends on the condition of Andura’s absence tomorrow. However, probability in Embosi is expressed by the modal *pènà*.

3.2.4. Pènà

In Embosi, modal auxiliaries are not limited to expressing duties, obligations, or conditions; they also play a vital role in signalling the speaker’s assessment of the likelihood or probability of a proposition. This use is typically classified as epistemic modality, which Huddleston and Pullum [12] define as “modality concerned with the speaker’s assessment of the likelihood that the proposition is true”. This probability is characterised by the use of the modal *pènà* in Embosi, as it is exemplified below.

(10) *Pènà Oyombi à-yà-à imbyéngi; lè mòkóngà sáà.*

May Oyombi 3_{SG}-come-Non-Past tomorrow, let wait first
“Oyombi may come tomorrow; let us wait first.”

In fact, through the use of the modal *pènà* in (10), the speaker indicates the degree of certainty, ranging from near-certainty to weak possibility. It expresses possibility without commitment to certainty. However, the modal *pènà*, never preceded by a vowel, must not be confused with the Embosi ordinary verb *ipènà*, which means ‘to lack’, as illustrated in the following sentence:

(11) *Bá á-pèn-i mbóngò.*

Them 3_{PL}-lack-Past money
“They lacked money.”

In (11), the verb *àpèni* ‘lacked’ from the infinitive *ipènà* ‘to lack’ is different from the pure modal *pènà*, expressing probability. Otherwise, apart from primary auxiliaries and pure modals, the Embosi auxiliary system also attests to marginal or semi-modals.

3.3. Semi-modal

In the grammar of Embosi, the category of modal auxiliaries extends beyond the central set to include a group of verbs

often referred to as semi-modals or marginal modals. These items occupy an intermediate position between pure auxiliaries and lexical verbs (Huddleston and Pullum [12]). Unlike core modals, semi-modals typically combine features of both auxiliaries and full verbs.

Semi-modals contribute to the expressive richness of the Embosi modality. They observe a kind of flexibility, which reflects what Palmer [13] calls the “periphery of modality”, where lexical verbs evolve into auxiliary-like constructions in response to communicative needs. In Embosi, we distinguish five semi-modals with the particularity of starting with the infinitive vowel “i”; they are *ikòngàà*, *ipèrà*, *ipùrà*, *itàà*, and *iwénà*.

3.3.1. Ikongàà

The semi-modal *ikòngàà*, with its synonyms *isià*, *ilòngàà*, and *ibòndàà*, the conceptual category of time that has not yet occurred, that is, events, actions, or states that will happen after the moment of speaking. In Embosi, the use of one of these semi-modals is dialect-dependent. They are used to depict the prediction, future intention or to plan for future actions, as illustrated in the following examples:

(12) *Àmbúà bà-kòngà ònó mò èyèngà èpóð.*

Rains 3_{PL}-FUT rain in week one
“It will rain in a week.”

(13) *Ngá i-lòngà òsúngà Andzèlè*

Me 1_{SG}-FUT help Andzele
“I will help Andzèlè.”

(14) *Ngá i-sià òtóngá ndái yà èné*

Me 1_{SG}-FUT build house of big
“I will build a big house.”

Indeed, in (12), the marginal modal *ikòngàà* is used to express a prediction; in (13), *ilòngà* is used to describe an intention in the future, while in (14), *isià* depicts the planification for a future action.

However, the auxiliary *ikòngàà* with its synonyms is qualified as a marginal modal because it can behave as a lexical verb and has the meaning of ‘to wait for’. This is highlighted with the following sentence:

(15) *Ngá i-kòngà-à mwána yà nõ.*

Me 1_{SG}-wait-Non-Past of you
“I wait for your child.”

In fact, in (15), *ikòngàà* is no longer an auxiliary expressing futurity, but rather an ordinary verb with a different meaning. Let us examine the semi modal *ipèrà*.

3.3.2. Ipèrà

One of the central semantic domains of modality is the expression of capacity, often discussed under the broader heading of dynamic modality. Capacity refers to a subject’s inherent ability, potential, or power to perform an action, either due to physical, mental, or circumstantial factors (Palmer 2001, 9). In Embosi, this is encoded through the semi-modal *ipèrà*. Moreover, this semi-modal is also used in Embosi to express probability. This is exemplified below:

(16) Itua a-pèrà òwòlà Embosi

Itua 3_{SG}-can speak Embosi

“Itoua can speak Embosi.”

(17) Andura à-pèrà òyáá imbyéngi.

Andoura 3_{SG}-may come tomorrow

“Andoura may come tomorrow.”

In fact, in (16), the modal *ipèrà* expresses the capacity of speaking the Embosi language, while in (17), it describes the probability for Andura to come the day after the day of utterance. However, let us examine the following sentence:

(18) Itua à-pèr-I èkindzàmè.

Itua 3_{SG}-pass-Past exam

“Itoua passed an exam.”

Indeed, the examination of (18) proves that *ipèrà* does not act as an auxiliary anymore, but rather as a lexical verb, meaning ‘to pass’ or ‘to succeed’. Embosi also attest to *ipura* as a semi-modal.

3.3.3. Ipùrà

In Embosi, *ipùrà* or *iyéngà* is a marginal modal used to express the will or the desire, which is understood as a mental attitude that expresses a speaker’s wish or willingness toward a possible state of affairs that does not yet exist. Unlike obligation or probability, which are central to modality, desire belongs to what is considered as part of the volitional domain of modality (Palmer [13]). It reveals the speaker’s internal state, projecting a preferred outcome into the future. This argumentation is illustrated below.

(19) Oko à-pùr-à (àyéngà) òdzà ikò.

Oko 3_{SG}-desire-Non-Past eat banana

“Oko would like to eat a banana.”

In fact, the use of *ipùrà* or *iyéngà*, which are dialect dependent, expresses the desire of Oko to eat a banana. However, this auxiliary is marginal because it may be used as a lexical verb and has the meaning of “to look for” or “to seek”. This is exemplified in the following.

(20) Oko à-pùr-à mwánà yà wà

Oko 3_{SG}-look-Non-Past child of him/her

“Oko looks for his child.”

It amounts from (20) that *ipùrà* or *iyéngà* may act as an ordinary verb, with its meaning different from its auxiliary form in (19). Let us now examine the Embosi semi-modal *itàà* in the following.

3.3.4. Itàà

The marginal modal *itàà* is used in Embosi to express a negative obligation. In modality, obligation refers to the necessity for a subject to perform an action, often arising from external authority, rules, or moral duty. When this obligation is negated, we speak of a negative obligation, that is, the requirement to refrain from performing an action. Let us consider the example below:

(21) Òtàà òkàrà míyà.

2_{SG}-Must not touch fire

“You must not touch the fire.”

The use of the modal *itàà* in (21) is to express a prohibition or the requirement not to do something. But *itàà* may also be used as a lexical verb, with the meaning of ‘to observe’, as illustrated in the next sentence:

(22) Ngá i-tá-à. òdzémílí à nò.

Me 1_{SG}-observe-Non-Past behaviour of you

“I observe your behaviour.”

Indeed, in (22), *itàà* is no longer a modal expressing negative obligation, but rather an ordinary verb, meaning “to observe”; hence its qualification as a marginal modal. This is also the case of the semi-modal *iwénà*.

3.3.5. Iwénà

In Embosi, *iwénà* is a semi-modal used to express continuity or a progressive aspect. According to Cornie [15], the progressive (also called continuous) aspect indicates that an action or state is ongoing, in progress, or unfolding over a period of time, rather than being completed or habitual. Let us illustrate this argumentation with the following sentence:

(23) Oba à-wén-à òwòlà lépòrò

Oba 3_{SG}-PROG-Non-Past speak French

“Oba is speaking French.”

From (23), *iwénà* combined with the main verb, expresses the progressive aspect of the action of speaking French. But, *iwénà* is considered a semi-modal because it may act as a lexical verb, having the meaning of “to manage”. The sentence below proves that.

(24) Oba à-wén-à là àbándzà ò mbòà.

Oba 3_{SG}-manage-Non-Past with problems at village

“Oba manages problems at the village.”

In (24), *iwénà* is an ordinary verb, meaning “to observe”. It is not used as an auxiliary that can be combined with a main verb to express continuity, but rather it is a lexical verb with a different meaning.

4. Syntactic Properties of Embosi Auxiliaries

Embosi auxiliaries have different syntactic properties. They are pre-verbal or post-verbal or pre and post verbal.

4.1. Pre-verbal Auxiliary

The Embosi primary auxiliaries and semi-modals are always placed before the main verb, so their position is pre-verbal only. This is observed in the sentences (from 1 to 6), (12), (16), (17), (19), (21), and (23). Let us consider, for instance, (12) and (23):

(12) Àmbúà bà-kòngà ònó mò èyéngà èpóò.

Rains 3_{PL}-FUT rain in week one

“It will rain in a week.”

*Àmbúà ònó bà-kòngà mò èyéngà èpóò.

(23) Oba à-wén-à òwòlà lépòrò

Oba 3_{SG}-PROG-Non-Past speak French

“Oba is speaking French.”

**Oba òwólà à-wén-à lépòrò*

From the above examples, we notice that semi-modals are all post-verbal in Embosi. However, only two pure modals (*ka* and *komi*) are only pre-verbal and may be placed before the subject. Let us illustrate with (7) and (8):

(7) *Wà kà làwólà.*

kà wà làwólà.

**Wà làwólà kà.*

“He has to speak.”

(8) *Ibara kòmi àpé mbóngò yà ngá páà.*

Kòmi Ibara apé mbóngò yà ngá páà.

**Ibara àpé kòmi mbóngò yà ngá páà.*

“Ibara must give my money today.”

It amounts from both examples that the pure modal *kà* and *kòmi* are pre verbal, but may also precede the subject, but this is not the case for the other pure modals that may be post-verbal.

4.2. Post-verbal Auxiliary

In Embosi, the pure modals *onami* and *pènà* may be both pre and post-verbal, or precede the subject without affecting the semantics of the sentence. Let us illustrate with (9) and (10):

(9) *Onami Andura àyàà imbyéngi, wàà ngòli kò ngá ibùrù mbóà.*

Andura onami àyàà imbyéngi, wàà ngòli kò ngá ibùrù mbóà.

Andura àyàà onami imbyéngi, wàà ngòli kò ngá ibùrù mbóà.

“Unless Andura comes tomorrow, I go back to the village.”

(10) *Pènà Oyombi àyàà imbyéngi; lè mò kóngàà sàà.*

Oyombi pènà àyàà imbyéngi; lè mò kóngàà sàà.

Oyombi ayaa pènà imbyéngi; lè mò kóngàà sàà.

“Oyombi may come tomorrow, let us wait first.”

Indeed, from (9) and (10), the pure modals *onami* and *pènà* may precede the subject or be placed before or after the main verb, without influencing the meaning of the sentence. Let us now examine the morphosyntactic features of Embosi auxiliaries.

5. Morphosyntactic Features of Embosi Auxiliaries

The Embosi auxiliary system attests to finite and non-finite-based auxiliary verbs.

5.1. Finite Based Auxiliary

A finite-based auxiliary is understood as an auxiliary verb that appears in its finite form, which means that it is marked for tense, person, and number and therefore, functions as the grammatical nucleus of the clause. In Embosi, all primary auxiliaries and all semi-modals are finite-based auxiliaries. They are inflected depending on the number or the noun class

of the subject. The following examples prove that argumentation:

(25a) *Ngà i-dii libinà.*

I was dance.

“I was dancing.”

(25b) *Ondongo à-dii làbinà.*

Ondongo was dance.

“Ondongo was dancing.”

(25c) *Bisi lé-dii lébinà.*

We were dance.

“We were dancing.”

(26a) *Ngà i-pèrà obinà.*

I can dance

“I can dance.”

(26b) *Ondongo a-pèrà obinà.*

Ondongo can dance

“Ondongo can dance.”

(26c) *Bisi lé-pèrà obinà.*

We can dance

“We can dance.”

It comes from the examples above that primary auxiliaries and semi-modals, all auxiliaries with “*i*” in their infinitive forms, are finite auxiliaries. This corroborates the *Predicate Argument Hypothesis*, henceforth (PAH), postulated by Ndongo-Ibara, which reads as follows: “All predicates in the finite clause have to agree in number with their external argument at D-structure”. (Ndongo-Ibara, [16]).

As things stand, primary auxiliaries and semi-modals agree in number with their subject in the same way as ordinary verbs do. The phrase-marker, based on (25a), illustrated in Figure 1 that follows, shows the representation of auxiliaries in Embosi.

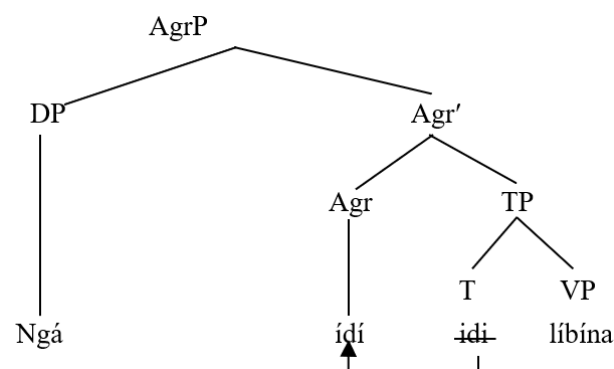


Figure 1. Phrase marker of Embosi primary auxiliaries and semi-modals agreement.

These morphosyntactic features are not observed with Embosi pure modals.

5.2. Infinite Based Auxiliary

Embosi pure modals are non-finite auxiliaries; they can be inflected whatever the noun class or the number is. This is

demonstrated with the following examples:

(27a) Ngá onami i-bíní.

Me must 1_{SG}-dance

“I must dance.”

(27b) Ondongo onami à-bíní.

Ondongo can 3_{SG}-dance

“Ondongo must dance.”

(27c) Bísí onami lé-bíní

Us can 1_{PL}-dance

“We must dance.”

Despite the change of the subject in terms of noun class or number, the pure modal *onami* “must” is invariable, so pure modals in Embosi are all non-finite-based verbs.

6. Auxiliary and Negation in Embosi

The Embosi auxiliaries are worthy when turning an affirmative sentence into a negative sentence.

Consider:

(28a) Mbúà à-di-I ònó kò

Rain 3_{SG}-be-Past rain not

“It was not raining.”

(28b) Mbúà à-di à-wénà ònó kò

Rain 3_{SG}-be-PRS3_{SG}-PROG rain not

“It is not raining.”

(28c) Mbúà à-di ò-kóngà ònó kò

Rain 3_{SG}-be-PRS INF-FUT rain not

“It will not rain.”

What is interesting from the above examples is that the negative construction uses the same auxiliary for both ordinary and auxiliary verbs in Embosi. In this respect, the negative auxiliary behaves like a dummy auxiliary, whatever be the category of the verbs. The Figure 2 represents the tree diagram that shows the representation of negation in Embosi.

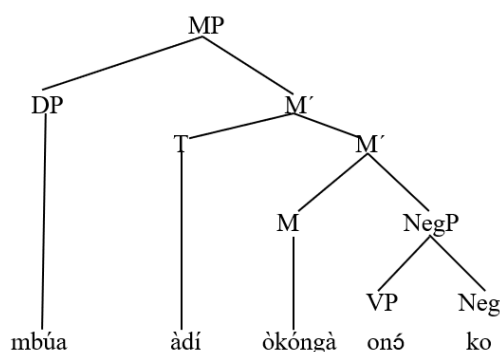


Figure 2. The representation of Embosi auxiliary negation.

7. Conclusions

This study has revealed that the Embosi auxiliary system is made of two primary auxiliaries: *idzà* “be” and *idià* “have”; four pure modals: *ka* “duty with hesitation”, *kòmi* “obligation”,

onami “condition”, and *pènà* “probability”; and five semi-modals: *ikòngàà* “futuraity”, *ipèrà* “capacity”, *ipùrà* “desire”, *itàà* “prohibition”, and *iwénà* “progressive aspect”. The analysis has also demonstrated that primary auxiliaries and semi-modals have the syntactic property of pre-verbal. It has also shown that two pure modals *kà* and *kòmi*, are also pre-verbal, but may also precede the subject. In addition, the work has proved that the pure modals *onami* and *pènà* may be pre or post-verbal or even precede the subject without affecting the semantics of the sentence. The analysis has also attested that on the morphosyntactic angle, in Embosi, all primary auxiliaries and semi-modals are finite-based auxiliaries, whereas the pure modals are non-finite. Finally, the work has proved that the negative auxiliary functions as a dummy auxiliary, regardless of the verb category.

However, this work only tackles the Embosi auxiliary system, based on the typology, the syntactic properties as well as the morphosyntactic features. Future research works are invited to tackle the context-dependent as well as independent aspects of the meaning of Embosi auxiliaries so as to have their overall understanding.

Abbreviations

1SG	First Person Singular
3SG	Third Person Singular
1PL	First Person Plural
2PL	Second Person Plural
Agr	Agreement
AgrP	Agreement Phrase
DP	Determiner Phrase
FUT	Future
IMPERF	Imperfective
INF	Infinitive
M	Mood
MP	Mood Phrase
Neg	Negative
NegP	Negative Phrase
PAH	Predicate Argument Hypothesis
PROG	Progressive
PRS	Present
T	Tense
TP	Tense Phrase
VP	Verb Phrase

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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