

# TENSE IS ASPECT IN TELUGU

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**Abstract:** Telugu is one of the Dravidian languages spoken mainly by people of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Yanam (a town located in Yanam District, Puducherry). Telugu is a head-final language, the verb agrees with the nominative subject, and Tense is not indicated overtly. In Telugu, Tense is indicated periphrastically whereas Aspect is indicated morphologically. The aim of the present study is to analyse that Tense is Aspect in Telugu.

**Keywords:** *Dravidian, Telugu, Tense, Aspect*

## Introduction

Telugu belongs to south-central and is sub-branch of Proto-Dravidian language family. It is SOV word-order language. It is the official language of the Indian states - Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Yanam and the third largest spoken of all Indian languages. Along with Telugu, the other Dravidian languages Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam belong to Proto-Dravidian family. All these languages share some common features hence called sister languages. Telugu is rich in inflectional morphology and very similar to Kannada. In Telugu, Tamil and Kannada the finite verb inflects for both tense and agreement, but in Malayalam the finite verb inflects only for tense. In all these Dravidian languages, Tense is realized as Aspect. Amritavalli and Jayaseelan (2005) discussed that finiteness in both Kannada and Malayalam cannot be tense but is labelled as aspect and also claimed that Tense in Dravidian is actually Aspect. In addition to this, Stowell(1982) analyzed as Tense in infinitives is actually Aspect.

## ‘Tense is Aspect’ in Telugu

According to Comrie (1976), in the languages of the world, time is expressed with tense that relates events, situations with moments of speaking, whereas aspect represents the ways of viewing “internal chronological constituency of a situation”. Thus the purpose of tense is to situate events in the time line with reference to the event. Aspect on the other hand reflects the speaker’s internal point of view on a given situation.

The languages of the world vary in tense systems. Many languages do not have tense inflections, although, all languages of the world can invariably lexicalize time reference i.e. have temporal adverbials that locate situations in time. Telugu has temporal adverbials such as *ninna* ‘yesterday’, *ivāḷa* ‘today’, *rēpu* ‘tomorrow’ etc. to mark time reference. English also has temporal adverbs such as yesterday, today, tomorrow, etc.

There are two ways to mark tense i.e. morphological and lexical. Some languages grammaticalize a category to express time reference; some languages express time reference lexically. English has morphological tense and aspect is indicated by the main verb in collaboration with auxiliaries *be* and *have*.

Many languages make two-way distinctions in Tense with an opposition either between Past vs Non-Past between Future vs Non-Future. It is generally observed that Telugu makes a two-way distinction between past and non-past since the non-past refers to both present and future and also habitual-present. It is generally believed that

aspect in Telugu is indicated periphrastically as in English. The researcher will argue that Tense in Telugu is an abstract feature and that it has only aspect indicated morphologically. Look at the verbal paradigm.

**Past****Non-Past(Present&Future)****1<sup>st</sup> Person**

Singular:	Nenu cusānu	I saw	Nenu custānu	I see/will see
Plural:	Memu cusāmu	We(excl.) saw	Memu custāmu	We(excl.) see /will see
	Manamu cusāmu	We(incl.) saw	Manamu custāmu	We(incl.) see/will see

Note: For 1<sup>st</sup> Person Plural, Pronoun distinguishes between exclusive and inclusive. There is no change in verb.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Person**

Singular:	Nuvvu cusāvu	You saw	Nuvvu custāvu	You see/will see
Plural:	Mīru cusāru	You saw	Mīru custāru	You see/will see

**3<sup>rd</sup> Person**

Singular:	Ataḍu cusāḍu	He saw	Ataḍu custāḍu	He sees/will see
	Āmecusindi	She saw	Āme custundi	She sees/will see
	Adi cusindi	It saw	Āme custundi	It sees/will see
Plural:	Vāru cusāru	They(+human)saw	Vāru custāru	They(+human)see/will see
	Avi cusāyi	They(-human) saw	Avi custāyi	They(-human) see/will see

Note: For 3<sup>rd</sup> Person Plural, Pronoun distinguishes between Human and Non-human, but the agreement marker changes.

From all above examples, Past tense is indicated by the doubling the final consonant of the main verb and the Non-Past tense is indicated by addition of 'tā' to the main verb.

Tense may be indicated morphologically through inflections, or periphrastically in collaboration with an auxiliary verb or lexically by an adverb, etc. In English, tense is morphologically realised invariably on the auxiliary verbs except in simple tenses.

Consider the examples below:

- 1 (a) She writes/wrote a letter. (Simple Present/Past)
- (b) She has/had written the letter. (Present/Past Perfect)
- (c) \*yesterday, she has written a letter.

- 2 (a) She is/was planting trees. (Present/Past progressive)
- (b) She has/had been planting trees. (Present/Past perfect progressive).

As we notice, tense is realized on the main verb in simple tenses while it is indicated periphrastically in non-simple tenses. We notice that English makes a distinction between simple past and present perfect/past perfect. In other words past time adverb cannot be used with present perfect tense as shown in the ungrammatical (1c). This shows that there is a clear morphological distinction between past and present tenses, although the sentences in (1a-b) refer to completion of an event, activity, etc., at a point of time in a past or by a point of time in past or present.

In Telugu, on the other hand, such tense distinctions are not indicated on the verbal inflection; rather tense/time distinctions are indicated through temporal adverbs.

Look at examples in (3).

- 3) rāju ninna/ī rōju ūriki vaccāḍu  
Raju yesterday/today town-to come-past-3SM

This sentence can mean

- 4) Raju **came/had come/has come** to town **yesterday/today**.

The Telugu sentence does indicate the tense distinction morphologically on the verb. It only indicates completion of an activity, etc., which means tense distinctions are not indicated overtly, and only aspect is realized morphologically. In short, *vaccāḍu* in (3) stands for completion of an event at a point of time/by a point of time in the past or by a point of time in the present.

Similarly, English has two forms to indicate future and present/timeless present while Telugu has only one form, as shown in the examples (5-6).

- 5 a) I go to school every day.

- b) I will go to school tomorrow.

- 6) nēnu baḍiki rōjū/rēpu/ippuḍu veLtānu. (habitual/future/present )

I school-to every day/tomorrow/now go-npst-1S

I (will) go to school every day/tomorrow/now.

The morpheme ‘-tā-’ in Telugu denotes the possibility of the action on the part of the doer with a future time adverbials i.e. the sense of ‘shall and will’ and with the frequency adverb ‘everyday’, it is timeless. And with the adverb ‘now’ it refers to the immediate present. Full agreement is shown only on third person-singular forms.

Let us look at the progressive aspect in English and Telugu.

- 7 a) Raju is sleeping now.

- b) Raju was sleeping yesterday when I went there.

- 8) sīta ippuḍu/ninna pāḍutūndi.

Sita now/yesterday sing-prog-3SF

Sita is/was singing now/yesterday.

In these sentences also time distinctions are indicated through the adverbs and the auxiliary verb does not vary for tense. Again in these sentences only aspect is indicated morphologically. Here, progressive aspect can also be taken to denote non-completion of an event, etc. What can be understood from these examples is that aspect is indicated morphologically in Telugu and can be assumed two aspects: ‘perfective and imperfective’. Perfective indicates the completed actions whereas Imperfective indicates the progression, the instantaneous present and future time. In a way, time is indicated through aspect i.e. through completed or incomplete actions, events, etc.

Since tense is not indicated overtly in these sentences, the researcher would like to assume an abstract tense feature for the following reasons: Firstly, these sentences have a nominative subject and secondly, cross-linguistically it has been shown that tense assigns nominative case. In sum, **Tense is Aspect** in Telugu.

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