Dogon verb inflection: perfective positive

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Dogon indicative verbs are marked for aspect-negation categories. The basic four-way split is perfective versus imperfective crossed with positive versus negative. This piece describes perfective positive verb forms, constituing one of the four major quadrants. For the closely related experiential perfect and recent perfect/completive, see separate pieces. Pronominal-subject suffixes, enclitics, proclitics, or clause-initial independent pronouns are added to the verbs, but are not specifically considered here. The deictic center can be shifted backward in time by adding clitics to the primary aspect-negation marking; see the separate piece on past time.

simple perfective

All Dogon languages except Toro Tegu have a simple perfective stem, where "simple" means that there is no syllabic perfective suffix. In some languages, the simple perfective consists segmentally of the **bare stem** plus a **tone overlay** such as {L}, {LH}, or {HL}. The tones are often sensitive to pronominal-subject category. In other languages, the simple perfective also involves an ablaut-like **mutation** of the stem-final vowel. The mutation, if present, is always to a front unrounded vowel {*i e ɛ*}. In some languages, one subset of verbs (often at least partially predictable from stem vowel quality or syllabic/moraic heaviness) shifts the stem-final vowel to *i*, while the other subset shifts it to either *e* or *ɛ* depending on lexical ATR-harmonic class. This can be loosely called the **E/I-stem** (i.e. for some verbs the E-stem, for others the I-stem). In some other languages the shifted vowel is always *e* or *ɛ* rather than *i* ; this can be called the **E-stem**. In these labels, "E" stands for any combination of *e* and *ɛ*. In some languages the E- or E/I-stem is also used in some or even most other inflectional categories, but in others it is confined to the perfective positive or to just the 3Sg perfective. Some languages with rich stem-ablaut systems use a distinct mutated stem, the **A/O-stem** (ending in *a*, *o*, or *ɔ*) in the 3Pl.

Functionally, the simple perfective may be the basic, all-purpose perfective positive form unaffected by constituent focalization. Alternatively, it may be restricted to occurrence in clauses with at least one more or less focalized preceding constituent, while marked perfective forms with *-Cv* suffixes are usual in the absence of such a constituent. In effect, the post-focus verb is **defocalized**, or more accurately it is part of the defocalized background to the focus. The details are summarized in (1).

(1) Simple perfective

language	stem	tones		function
		1st/2nd	3rd	
eastern				
Toro Tegu	[simple perfective absent]			
Ben Tey [see discussion below]				
main variant	bare stem	{L}	{L}	post-focus
{HL} type	bare stem	—	{HL}	
"participial"	bare stem	lexical	lexical	(narrative)
Bankan Tey	bare stem	{LH}	{HL}	??
Nanga				
3Sg	E-stem		{L}	post-focus
3Pl	A/O-stem		{L}	
others	bare stem	{L}		
Jamsay	bare stem	{L(H)}	{L}	post-focus
Togo Kan				
1/2/3Sg	E-stem	lexical		all-purpose
1/2/3Pl	bare stem [1]	lexical		
Tommo So	E/I-stem	{LH}	{HL}	post-focus
Donno So	E/I-stem	{LH}	{HL}	all-purpose
Yorno So	chaining stem	{L}	{L}	post-focus
Tomo Kan				
3Pl	E-stem [2]		{HL}	all-purpose
others	E-stem	lexical	lexical	
northwestern				
Najamba				
3Sg	E-stem		{HL} [3]	all-purpose
3Pl	A/O-stem		{HL}	
1st/2nd	E-stem	{LH}		
Tiranige [4]				
1Sg/2Sg	E/I-stem	{HL}		all-purpose
1Pl/2Pl	E/I-stem	{L}		
3Sg	E/I-stem		{L}	
3Pl	E/I-stem		{L} or {LHL}	

[1] plus suffix *-sɛ̂ⁿ*, originally from the S-perfective.
[2] plus suffix *-è:* ~ *-è:*.
[3] 3Sg and 3Pl {HL}-toned in isolation but {L}-toned post-focus and before 'if' particle.
[4] 1Sg and 2Sg are suffixes; 1Pl and 2Pl are proclitic; 3Sg is zero; 3Pl is suffixed.

Dogul Dom				
1st/2nd	E/I-stem	{LH}		all-purpose
3rd	E/I-stem		{HL}	
Tebul Ure				
3Sg	E/I-stem		{L}	post-focus
3Pl	bare stem [5]		{L}	
1st/2nd	bare stem	[LH}		
Yanda Dom				
after *yà* [6]	E-stem	lexical	lexical	all-purpose
not after *yà*	E-stem	{L}	{L}	
southwestern [7]				
Bunoge [8]				
3rd	E/I-stem		{HL}	all-purpose
1Sg/2Sg	E/I-stem	{HL}		
1Pl/2Pl	E/I-stem	{L}		
Mombo	??			
Ampari	??			
Penange [9]				
3rd	E/I-stem		{HL}	all-purpose
1Sg/2Sg	E/I-stem	{LHL}		
1Pl/2Pl	E/I-stem	{HL}		

The wide distribution of E- and E/I-stems suggests that these stem mutations are ancient. Languages that use the bare stem may simply have replaced the mutated stem with the bare stem, since forms other than the simple perfective have distinct suffixes (e.g. imperfective positive, perfective negative, imperfective negative). The restriction of the E- or E/I-stem to the 3Sg, i.e. the unmarked pronominal subject, in Nanga and Tebul Ure is suggestive. It raises the question whether the E- or E/I-stem has partially eroded in these languages, or whether they represent the diachronic starting point.

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[5] Compatible with A/O-stem due to contraction of stem-final and suffixal vowels.

[6] *yà* is a preverbal particle. The verb has lexical tones if *yà* is immediately preverbal. If it is absent or separated by an intervening chained verb, the verb has {L} overlay.

[7] In southwestern languages, 1st/2nd person subjects are indicated by preverbal proclitics, so the tone overlay formulae apply only to the stem.

[8] Bunoge 1Sg and 2Sg proclitics are L-toned. 1Pl and 2Pl proclitics are H-toned. Including the proclitic, the tone patterns are therefore {LHL} and {HL}, respectively

[9] Penange 1Sg and 2Sg proclitics are H-toned. 1Pl and 2Pl proclitics are L-toned. Including the proclitic, the tone patterns are therefore {HLHL} and {LHL}, respectively. These patterns are reduced for short stems.

Ben Tey has three different variants of the simple perfective, which in this language is not really "simple" at all, except in the sense that there are no syllable perfective suffixes. The high-frequency variant is {L}-toned and has the productive pronominal-subject suffixes, including 3Sg zero and 3Pl *-bɔ*. A second variant, used in narratives, is lexically toned, with regular 1st/2nd person suffixes but participle-like 3Sg *-wˋ* and 3Pl *-màˋ*. For monosyllabic *Cv-* verbs, in the third person only, there is a third option with {HL} tone. It has low text-frequency but may be the historical source of the falling tone in some marked perfective suffixes (see below).

preverbal perfective aspectual proclitic (Yanda Dom)

The only language that makes systematic use of a nonpronominal aspectual proclitic in the simple perfective is Yanda Dom. Here the particle *yàˋ* obligatorily precedes unchained perfective positive verbs of any pronominal-subject category in the absence of other preverbal constituents. After *yàˋ*, the perfective verb has its lexical tones, usually /H/ or /LH/. The proclitic is optional if any other constituent (NP etc.) other than a pronominal-subject proclitic precedes the verb. If there are two or more chained verbs, *yàˋ* precedes the first verb and is therefore not adjacent to the inflected verb. In all cases where the inflected verb is not immediately preceded by the proclitic, it takes {L} tone overlay.

yàˋ is likely a functionally specialized offshoot of an "existential" proclitic that in other Dogon languages is associated mainly with stative verbs and quasi-verbs; see the separate piece "Dogon existential proclitic yv".

marked perfective positive forms (overview)

As noted above, in some languages the simple perfective is an all-purpose perfective that is common with or without preceding constituents such as subject and object NPs. Indeed, in southwestern and some northwestern languages and in Tomo Kan this is the only perfective positive form available (if the experiential perfect and recent perfect/completive are disregarded). However, in several eastern Dogon languages and in Tebul Ure the simple perfective is not obligatory, and in some languages not even disallowed, in single-word clauses ('I came', 'you sat'). Toro Tegu completely lacks a simple perfective.

The marked perfective positive forms are of two types: reduplicated and suffixed. **Reduplication** is initial, normally *Cv-*. The suffixed forms have syllabic suffixes usually of *-Cv* shape, preceding any pronominal-subject suffixes. The common suffixes are *-ti, -ya* or *-ːrɛ* or other variant, and *-sa/-so*. I will refer to these as **T-perfective**, **Y/R-perfective**, and **S-perfective**. Reduplication and syllabic perfective suffixes do not co-occur. (2) summarizes the distribution of the various marked perfectives ("x" indicates presence).

(2)

language	reduplicated	T	Y/R	S
eastern				
Toro Tegu	—	? (*-wÒsi*)	x (*-wÒrè*)	—
Ben Tey	x	x	x	x
Bankan Tey	??			
Nanga	x	x	x	x
Jamsay	x	x	x	x
Yorno So	x [10]	x	x	—
Togo Kan	x	—	—	—
Tommo So	x	—	—	—
Donno So	x	—	—	—
Tomo Kan	—	—	—	—
northwestern				
Najamba	—	—	—	—
Tiranige	—	—	—	x
Dogul Dom	—	—	—	—
Tebul Ure	—	x	x	x
Yanda Dom	—	—	—	x
southwestern				
Bunoge	—	—	—	—
Mombo	—	—	—	—
Ampari	—	—	—	—
Penange	—	—	—	—

Negative forms of marked perfectives are generally disallowed or rare.

Periphrastic combinations of a subordinated verb plus an auxiliary (often ‘be’ or ‘have’) are not considered in this piece. They often have resultative or other perfect sense. See the separate piece on “Dogon verb inflection: perfect” for discussion.

reduplicated perfective

In languages that have this category (all from eastern Dogon), the reduplicant is initial *Cv-* (with both consonant and vowel copied from the base) or *Ci-* with fixed vowel. In (3), in the “form” column the schematic form of reduplicant plus *CvCv* base is given. In the “same stem?” column, “x” means that the reduplicated perfective has the same segmental stem shape (i.e. the same vocalism) as the simple perfective.

[10] In a past irrealis construction.

(3)	language	form	same stem?	tones Rdp+{Stem}	3Sg subject
	Ben Tey	*Cì-CvCv̀*	x	L+{HL}	(unmarked)
	Jamsay	*Cì-CvCv̀*	x	L+{HL}	(unmarked)
	Togo Kan	*Cv̀-CvCv̀*	x	L+{HL}	(unmarked)
	Tommo So	*Cv̀-CvCv̀*	x	L+{HL}	(unmarked)
	Nanga	*Cv́-CvCv̀*	x	H+{L}	(unmarked)
	Donno So	*Cv̌:Cv̀*	x	{LHL}	(unmarked)

Cì- usually has a variant *Cù-* if the first vowel of the base is back and rounded. If the base is vowel-initial, the reduplicant is *v-* (for *Cv-*) or *i* (for *Ci-*) and a glottal stop (not part of the regular consonantal inventory) is inserted between the reduplicant vowel and the stem-initial vowel.

In Donno So, original reduplicated forms have generally contracted for nonmonosyllabic stems. *Cv̀-Cv́Cv̀ now appears as *Cv̌:*. That is, instead of a reduplicative add-on, the stem-initial vowel is lengthened (along with a tone change). Reduplication as such still occurs with Donno So monosyllabic verbs.

Reduplication is not allowed when another constituent in the clause is overtly focalized, and it is uncommon in the presence of any nonpronominal preverbal constituent such as a noun-headed NP (subject, object, or in a PP). Reduplication is absent from relative claues, and is rare under negation. These distributional patterns suggest that reduplication is a kind of verb focalizer, as claimed by McPherson. This analysis is applicable to all verb reduplications (perfective, imperfective, stative). Since there are other verb-focalizing options, this is not the whole story, however. Further study and text analysis are needed to clarify this.

The three reduplications (perfective, imperfective, and stative) are often but not always distinguishable by tone, vocalic mutations (E- or E/I-stem versus A/O-stem versus bare stem), special 3rd person suffixes (stative), and/or the presence of an aspectual suffix (imperfective).

In Yorno So, a reduplicated form of the simple past (not simple perfective) form with =bé is attested in past irrealis sense (‘would have VPed’). For *CvCv* stems the forms are *Cì-CvCv́=bé* from /H/-toned stem and *Cì-CvCv̀=bé* from /LH/-toned stem.

T-perfective *-*ti*

The T-perfective occurs in a number of eastern Dogon languages (Ben Tey, Nanga, Jamsay, Yorno So, and possibly Toro Tegu), and rather surprisingly in one northwestern language, Tebul Ure. It is normally paired with the Y/R-perfective, so that some verbs have the T-perfective while others have the Y/R-perfective (and a third set of verbs lack both). The T-perfective occurs with most transitives including all classic impact

transitives (‘hit’, ‘break’, ‘cut’) and with some active intransitives. The forms of the T-perfective are in (4).

(4)

language	T-perfective	phonological comments
eastern		
Ben Tey	*-tî-*	3Sg *-tî:-∅* lengthened for contour tone
Nanga	*-tì-*	2Sg *-tì-w* ~ *-tù-w*
Jamsay	*-tì-*	1Sg *-tù-m*, 2Sg *-tù-w*
Yorno So	*-tì-*	1Sg *-tù-m*, 2Sg *-tù-w*
Toro Tegu	*-wɔ̀si* ~ *-wòsì*	[discussion below]
northwestern		
Tebul Ure	*-tì-*	

The *i* ~ *u* alternations involve assimilation to *-w* or *-m* suffix. Since 3Sg is the unmarked subject category and always shows *i*, I take it to be underlying.

Toro Tegu *-wɔ̀sì-* ~ *-wòsì-* (depending on the ATR class of the stem) is obscurely related to the T-perfective in the other languages. Like the other T-perfectives, it is mostly transitive and is opposed to a mostly intransitive rival suffix *-wɔ̀rè-* ~ *-wòrè-*, which functions as the Toro Tegu Y/R-perfective. If the *-wɔ̀-* ~ *-wò-* syllable at least in *-wɔ̀sì-* ~ *-wòsì-* can be accounted for separately (cliticized human 3Sg pronominal?, original chained verb?), the resulting opposition of *-sì-* to *-wɔ̀rè-* ~ *-wòrè* would look similar to that between e.g. *-tì-* ~ *-tî-* and *-ːrɛ̀* in Ben Tey and Nanga. However, a shift *t to *s* is not regular, so the case is not closed.

Leaving this open, at least the remaining T-perfectives are likely related to a transitive verb *tí(ː) meaning ‘send’. Transitional between ‘send’ and fully grammaticalized perfective are cases with *tí(ː)* as a medial element in what appears to be a verb chain. Schematically, a sequence like [X leave *tí* run] is found in Jamsay and a few of the other languages in the sense ‘leave X and (then) run’. That is, the basic function of *tí* here is chronological separation of two events, essentially the same thing as perfectivity of the first event. ‘Send’ might seem to be a strange lexical source for a perfective, but a progression ‘send’ → ‘away’ (directionality, in chains) → completion → chronological separation (in chains) → perfective (with simple verbs) is reasonable. The ‘away’ stage is clearly observed in Donno So chains with *tê:* ‘send’, for example following verbs meaning ‘throw’ and ‘leave (abandon)’.

Shift from the original H-tone of *tí(ː) ‘send’ to the L-toned suffixal *-tì* in several languages is not surprising. There are even cases in Jamsay and other languages of tone-dropping even of medial verbs in long chains, and loss of a H-tone can occur spontaneously when a verb stem is reduced to an affix. The falling tone in Ben Tey *-tî-* (1Sg /-tî-y/ → *-tí-ỳ*, 2Sg /-tî-w/ → *-tú-ẁ*, 3Sg /-tî-∅/→ *-tî:-∅*) and other perfective

suffixes is harder to explain. However, this languages does have a variant {HL}-toned simple perfective for *Cv-* verb stems, as indicated in (1) above.

Y/R-perfective

This label covers what may be two or even three etymologically distinct forms that function as the intransitive (or low-impact) counterpart to the T-perfective in several languages. The Y/R-perfective occurs with most intransitives including motion verbs, stance verbs ('sit'), and deadjectival inchoatives. It can also occur with some non-impact transitives such as 'forget'. The basic forms are in (5).

(5)

language	Y/R-perfective	phonological comments
eastern		
Toro Tegu	*-wɔ̀rè* ~ *-wòrè*	ɔ/o depending on ATR category of stem
Ben Tey	:*-rɛ̀-*	*stem-final vowel lengthened*
Nanga	*-ɛ̀rɛ̀-*	
Jamsay		
short	*-yà-* ~ *-yɛ̀-*	
long	*-â:-*	
Yorno So	*-à:y-* ~ -â:y-	
northwestern		
Tebul Ure		
short	*-yà-*	*-yà-* also after mediopassive *-í:-*
long	*-à:-* ~ *-â:-*	

The surprising agreement between Jamsay and Tebul Ure, supported in part by Yorno So, suggests time depth for a pattern with allomorph *-yà-* after *Cv:-* or *CvC-* (including CvC- syncopated from *Cvlv-/Cvrv-*) and a distinct allomorph -a:(y)- contracting with the final short vowel of other *CvCv-* stems and all longer stems. The main question is whether this pattern can be reconciled historically with the data from Toro Tegu, Ben Tey, and Nanga, which point to a prototype *-wɔlɛ̀, or *-vlɛ̀ with undetermined initial vowel if the *-wɔ̀* ~ *-wò* syllable in Toro Tegu can be accounted for separately.

Tentative hypothesis: a) the long-voweled variants *-a:(y)-* reflect *-wɔlɛ̀ or *-ɛ̀lɛ̀ with **l* dropped, and are cognate with the Toro Tegu/Ben Tey/Nanga suffixes; b) the *-yà* variants have a different source, namely the 'go' verb (Jamsay *yă:*, Tebul Ure *yăy* and allomorphs). More generally, the idea is that the opposition of T-perfective to a paired mostly intransitive perfective is ancient, but the latter may have been subject to formal renewal using new morphological material.

S-perfective

The S-perfective is not specifically paired with a competing perfective form, in the fashion of the T- and Y/R-perfectives. The suffix has a form like *-sà-* or *-sò-*, added directly to the verb stem. The suffix is usually indentical in form to the 'have' quasi-verb in the same language. In some languages, this quasi-verb occurs as an auxiliary in periphrastic constructions with a subordinated form of the verb, usually with a present perfect or resultative sense (roughly as in English perfects). I do not consider such periphrases to be cases of the S-perfective, but they are likely etymological sources for them. See the separate piece on "Dogon verb inflection: perfect".

(6)	language	'have'	S-perfective	comments
	eastern			
	Ben Tey	*só-* ~ *sò-*	*-sô-*	resultative
	Nanga	*sò- (só-)*	*-só-*	
	Jamsay	*sà- (sá-)*	*-sà-*	
	northwestern			
	Tiranige	*sâ-*	*-sà-*	resultative
	Tebul Ure	*sɔ̀-*	*-sɔ̀-*	
	Yanda Dom	*zó-*	*-zò-* ~ *-zó-*	

In most if not all of these languages, the S-perfective is the perfective of choice for verbs of perception ('see', 'hear'), which do not lend themselves semantically to either the T- or Y/R-perfective. However, unlike the lexically restricted T- and Y/R-perfectives, the S-perfective is compatible with any verb. There is a resultative nuance, strongly in some languages (Ben Tey, Tiranige) and weakly in others. The specific association with 'see' and 'hear' may reflect the uptake (awareness and knowledge) that results from perception.

In some languages the S-perfective is the basis for perfective positive participles in relative clauses.