Is Anii Tenseless?

Anii does not have unmarked clauses with specific temporal reference: Unmarked Eventive Clause (past temporal reference):

(1) Situation: Mardjanatou is telling her friend that she lost her bucket down the well yesterday, but also got it back yesterday. Her friend asks how she got it back, and Mardjanatou says:

āŋ ñi 1.SG.SUBJ.REAL jump well into

"I jumped into the well."

Unmarked Static Clause (past temporal reference—present also possibly):

(2) Situation: I am talking to my mother, who asks me how I felt about my boyfriend yesterday (my feelings change frequently). My response is:

āŋ ñi 1.SG.SUBJ.REAL love 3.SG.OBJ

"I loved him."

Question: Is there a null tense marker here? • This is unlikely if there are overt tenses in Anii

Possibly Tensed Clauses in Anii (and why they are not tensed):

The Future:
Future is marked with irrealis (different set of pronouns and different tone pattern):

(3) Situation: Answering the question “what will you do tomorrow?”

gātšiŋ nā, mā fēr

tomorrow FOC 1.SG.SUBJ.BRR sweep

"Tomorrow, I will sweep."

To illustrate this form is irrealis, not future tense marking, see the negation of (1) and (2):

(4) Situation: Mardjanatou is telling her friend that she lost her bucket down the well yesterday. Her friend asks her if she got it out by jumping into the well:

āā, kī mā dʒām lęk ni nā

no NEG 1.SG.SUBJ.BRR jump well into NEG

"No, I did not jump into the well."

(5) Situation: I am talking to my mother, who asks me how I felt about my boyfriend yesterday (my feelings change):

kī mā sāl's 3.nā nā

NEG 1.SG.SUBJ.BRR love 3.SG.OBJ NEG

"I did not love him."

The Past:

Clauses marked with the marker /bʊ̀ ŋà/ have the interpretation that the eventuality referred to by that clause occurred far in the past (more than about two weeks), as shown here. This is the only marker used in past contexts that could possibly be a tense:

(6) Situation: We are talking in 2013 about my consultant’s trip to Ghana, which occurred in 2003. He says:

ń bʊ̀ ŋà tsi gānā

1.SG.SUBJ.REAL.PST go CL.B.Ghana

"I went to Ghana long ago."

This form looks like a past tense, because it is acceptable in this case where the TT precedes the UT. An unmarked clause would also be acceptable here (but the perfect marker /fē/ would not—the clause has perfective, not perfect, aspectual reference).

However, /bʊ̀ ŋà/ is also acceptable in circumstances where the UT is the TT (where a past tense marker would not be). Specifically, /bʊ̀ ŋà/ can be used in some of the same situations as the perfect marker /fē/:

(7) Situation: While driving, you pass a house where a friend has lived, but where the person does not live anymore. You mention this to a fellow traveller by saying:

āmū-sōrō l 1.SG.PASS.CL.A-friend AGR.CLA.A PERF be.there here now NEG again
dā ātjjā, pāmā kā 3k5

"My friend has lived here, but now he does not live here anymore."

(8) Situation: While driving, you pass a house where a friend has lived, but where the person does not live anymore. You mention this to a fellow traveller by saying:

āmū-sōrō l 1.SG.PASS.CL.A-friend AGR.CLA.A PST be.there here now NEG again
dā ātjjā, pāmā kā 3k5

be.there here NEG

"My friend lived here long ago, but now he does not live here anymore."