

NOUN PHRASE CONJUNCTION IN AKAN: THE GRAMMATICALIZATION PATH*

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Abstract

Noun phrase conjunction in Akan (Niger-Congo, Kwa) is performed by placing a connective between two noun phrases, but there is some variation in the forms used in the major dialects. In the Twi dialects the connective is *ne*, but Fante speakers may use *nye* or *na* depending on whether a comitative or a coordinative interpretation is intended. This paper focuses on the historical origins of the noun phrase connective *n(y)e* in Akan. It suggests that Akan patterns with other sub-saharan African languages such as Ewe, Ga, Yoruba and Hausa, which have noun phrase connectives originating from comitative verbs. This suggestion is based on the morpho-semantics of these connectives. In addition, the paper demonstrates that the origin of the connective *n(y)e* could be further traced to an equative copula in the language. This conclusion is based on syntactic and semantic evidence available in the language and strengthened by the cross-linguistic tendency for copula verbs to develop into noun phrase connectives in a number of unrelated languages.

Keywords: Akan; Comitative; Conjunction; Coordinative; Grammaticalization.

1. Introduction

According to Stassen (2003: 763-764) noun phrase conjunction¹ occurs in a sentence if “(a) it describes a single occurrence of an event (action, state, process, etc.) and (b) if this event is predicated simultaneously of two² (and no more) participant referents, which are conceived of as separate individuals”. Noun phrase conjunction in Akan (Niger-Congo, Kwa), like many other Kwa languages, is performed by using a marker distinct from the one used in conjoining clauses. In many cases, comitative verbal origins have been ascribed to markers of noun phrase conjunction in languages within the West African sub-region. For example, Lord (1973) argues that the Ewe (Niger-Congo, Kwa) noun phrase connective *kple* has the original comitative meaning ‘be together with’. Heine and Reh (1984) argue in similar fashion when they suggest that

* Various versions of this paper have been presented at the following fora: 2nd Scandinavian Ph.D. conference on Linguistics and Philology (June 2007), University of Ghana Department of Linguistics Seminar Series (April 2008), Annual Trondheim-Legon NUFU colloquium (January 2009). I am grateful to members of the various audiences who gave me valuable feedback, and also to my colleagues Evershed Amuzu, Jemima Anderson, Gordon Adika and Kweku Osam, as well as Thorstein Fretheim.

¹ In this paper, I use ‘conjunction’ in particular reference to the whole structure of conjoined phrases or clauses, and use the label ‘connective’ to refer to the lexical item used to link phrases and clauses.

² Stassen notes that limiting the number of participants to two is simply for pragmatic reasons. I follow this trend.

kple originates from the verbs *kpe* (meet) and *ɔe* (get to). In like manner, Trutenau (1973: 85) suggests that even though *kple* cannot be used as a main verb, it can be “shown to have verbal characteristics”. With regard to the Ga (Niger-Congo, Kwa) noun phrase connective *ke*, Trutenau discounts that it is a “true conjunction” and says that it is some sort of multifunctional verb; its semantics can be unified and glossed as ‘take, join with, together with’. Abdoulaye (2004) proposes that the Hausa (Afro-Asiatic, Chadic) noun phrase connective *da* is essentially comitative in meaning.

Amfo (2007a) suggested a comitative verbal origin for the Akan noun phrase connective *n(y)e* and hinted at possibly tracing this marker further to a copula verb. This paper explores these ideas further. It focuses on the origin of the noun phrase connective *n(y)e* and investigates the grammaticalization path. It examines how Hopper’s (1991) principles of grammaticalization apply to this marker, and claims that its suggested comitative origin can be further traced to an equative copula in the language. The analyses of the origins of these markers are crucial in the appreciation of their present semantics, and consequently, the pragmatics evoked by the use of these noun phrase connectives.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: In section 2, I outline the Hopper’s principles of grammaticalization. Section 3 deals with noun phrase conjunction encoding strategies, as suggested by Stassen (2000, 2003), which result in the typological classification of languages into AND- and WITH-languages. Section 4 focuses on the noun phrase conjunction strategies in Akan. The differences between the Twi dialects³ on one hand and the Fante dialect on the other are highlighted; in the Twi dialects a single marker *ne* does the job of connecting noun phrases but Fante has the option of choosing between two markers *nye* and *na* depending on the intended relevance that a particular token of noun phrase conjunction is expected to achieve. In section 5, I turn to the grammaticalization path. I first look at the Fante and Twi forms, focusing on the semantic and morpho-syntactic properties that are suggestive of the grammaticalization process. I then look at the extent to which Hopper’s (1991) principles of grammaticalization apply to the gram (the lexical item formed out of the process of grammaticalization) under investigation. I conclude that section by suggesting that the noun phrase connective *n(y)e* can be further traced to a copula verb. This suggestion is based on intra-language evidence as well as cross-linguistic generalizations. Section 6 is the conclusion.

2. Grammaticalization

The term grammaticalization is attributed to Meillet. He defines it as “the attribution of grammatical character to a previously autonomous word” (Meillet 1912: 131). McMahon (1994: 160) suggests that it is the process whereby “words from major lexical categories, such as nouns, verbs and adjectives, become minor, grammatical categories such as prepositions, adverbs and auxiliaries, which in turn may be further grammaticalised into affixes”. In their recent work, Hopper and Traugott (2003: 1) refer to grammaticalization as “that part of the study of language change that is concerned

³ Akan has several dialects; they include Fante, Asante, Akuapem, Bono, Kwahu, Akwamu, Wassa, Akyem, Ahafo, Assin. The non-Fante dialects are usually referred to collectively as Twi. I use Twi in this paper as a super-ordinate label for the Akuapem and Asante dialects.

with such questions as how lexical items and constructions come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions or how grammatical items develop new grammatical functions”.

One major characteristic of grammaticalized forms is a class shift: From a lexical to a functional one. However, as Hopper and Traugott’s definition suggests an already grammatical word, may develop new grammatical functions.

Forms which are grammaticalized can be identified using certain intra-language principles. Lehmann (1985), cited in Hopper (1991: 20-21) suggested the following:

- Paradigmatization (the tendency for grammaticized forms to be arranged into paradigms);
- Obligatorification (the tendency for optional forms to become obligatory);
- Condensation (the shortening of forms);
- Coalescence (collapsing together of adjacent forms);
- Fixation (free linear orders becoming fixed ones).

Lehmann’s principles, though useful, are relevant for advanced stages of grammaticalization. Since the process of grammaticalization is thought to be a gradual one it is important that intra-language evidence is available for the researcher to identify even at a fairly early stage. Also, as Hopper (1991) points out, some of these principles are not always applicable in various languages. It is against this background that Hopper (1991) proposed the following five principles of grammaticalization. These processes, he suggests, are intended to supplement Lehmann’s principles, and crucially they help identify a form which may be undergoing the process of grammaticalization, even at a fairly early stage:

- Layering: Within a broad functional domain, new layers are continually emerging. As this happens, the older layers are not necessarily discarded, but may remain to coexist with and interact with the newer layers.
 - Divergence: When a lexical form undergoes grammaticization to a clitic or affix, the original lexical form may remain as an autonomous element and undergo the same changes as ordinary lexical items.
 - Specialization: Within a functional domain, at one stage a variety of forms with different nuances may be possible; as grammaticization takes place, this variety of formal choices narrows and the smaller number of forms selected assume more general grammatical meanings.
 - Persistence: When a form undergoes grammaticization from a lexical to a grammatical function, so long as it is viable some traces of its original meanings tend to adhere to it, and traces of its lexical history may be reflected in constraints on its grammatical distribution.
 - De-categorialization: Forms undergoing grammaticization tend to lose or neutralize the morphological markers and syntactic privileges characteristic of the full categories Noun and Verb, and to assume attributes characteristic of secondary categories such as Adjective, Participle, Preposition, etc.
- Hopper (1991: 22)

In addition to identifying these principles within the language as an indication of a grammaticalization process, Hopper also notes the importance of cross-linguistic generalizations as a critical tool in identifying a grammaticalized form in a particular language. This is especially beneficial when the language lacks direct historical data in that regard.

Hopper and Traugott (2003) note that a concrete noun like *back* which denotes a specific part of the body, through the process of grammaticalization, comes to be used to express a spatial relation in the phrase *in/at the back of*. In this latter role, it may be used as an adverb or an adposition in certain languages. Indeed, this phenomenon is well documented. For example, Svorou (1994) in her cross-linguistic study of spatial relations describes the relation between the concrete noun *back* and the adposition derived from it. The following Ewe example from Heine, Claudi and Hünemeyer (1991: 161, 163) is illustrative of this phenomenon.

- (1) *E-fe megbe fa.*⁴
 3 SG-POSS back be.cold
 ‘His back is cold.’
- (2) *E le xɔ-a megbe.*
 3SG be house-DEF behind
 ‘He is at the back of the house.’

Another cross-linguistic example of grammaticalization, involves the verb meaning ‘to say’ which has come to function as a complementizer introducing a lower level clause (cf. Lord 1993; Osam 1994, 1996; Amfo 2007b). The Ewe examples in (3) and (4) are from Lord (1993: 185), and (5) and (6) are Akan examples.

- (3) *Me-be me-wɔ-e.*
 I-say I-do-it
 ‘I said, “I did it.”’
- (4) *Me-gblɔ be me-wɔ-e.*
 I-say COMP I-do-it
 ‘I said that I did it.’
- (5) *Me se Akosua re-didi.*
 I say Akosua PROG-eat.RED
 ‘I say Akosua is eating.’
- (6) *Me-ka-a sɛ Akosua re-didi.*
 I-say-COMPL COMP Akosua PROG-eat
 ‘I said that Akosua was eating.’

⁴ The abbreviations used in this paper are as followings: COM=Comitative marker; COMP=Complementizer; COMPL=Completive aspect; CONJ=Coordinative connective; DCM=Dependent clause marker; DEF=Definite article; FUT=Future tense; NEG=Negation marker; OPT=Optative marker; PL=Plural; POSS=Possessive; PROG=Progressive aspect; RED=Reduplication; REL=Relative clause; SG=Singular.

Lord (1993) suggests that the Ewe complementizer *be* grammaticalized out of the identical lexical verb, which means to say. Similarly, Osam (1994, 1996) argues that the Akan complementizer *se* evolved out of the verb *se* ‘to say’.

3. Noun phrase conjunction: The encoding strategies

Stassen (2000, 2003) suggests two encoding strategies for noun phrase conjunction: The coordinative and the comitative strategies. He summarizes the morphological, lexical and syntactic characteristics of the two strategies as follows:

Coordinative Strategy

NPs have same structural rank
 Unique coordinative particle
 NPs form a constituent
 Plural/dual agreement on verbs

Comitative Strategy

NPs differ in structural rank
 Unique comitative marker
 NPs do not form a constituent
 Singular agreement on verbs

A classic example of the coordinative strategy is coordination involving the use of English *and*, and the use of English *with* typically exemplifies the comitative strategy. The coordinative and comitative strategies are exemplified in (7) and (8), respectively.

(7) [[Peter and Mary] [[walk] [to school]]].

(8) [[Peter] [[walks] [[to school] [with Mary]]]].

As we can see from the bracketing of the sentences in (7) and (8) above, Peter and Mary in (7) are of the same structural rank, whereas they differ in structural rank in (8). Peter and Mary form a close constituent in (7); the subject noun phrase. In (8), they belong to different constituents; Peter is the subject noun phrase, and Mary is a noun phrase within the adjunct prepositional phrase. The fact that Peter and Mary form a constituent in (7) and not in (8) is reflected by the singular agreement represented by the inflectional suffix ‘-s’ on the verb form in (8) and the absence of the suffix in (7) indicating singularity of the subject noun phrase.

Stassen typologizes languages into WITH- and AND-languages, based on the encoding strategies they exhibit in noun phrase conjunction. WITH-languages, according to him are languages in which “the only way to encode the situation in which a single event is ascribed simultaneously to two different participants is to use a non-balanced non-constituent construal of the two noun phrases involved.” AND-languages, on the other hand, are languages which clearly differentiate between the comitative and the coordinative encoding of the domain (Stassen 2003: 781).

I have argued elsewhere (Amfo 2007a) that even though Stassen cites Akan as an example of a WITH-language, I disagree with that position and suggest that Akan is both a WITH- and an AND-language. Indeed this suggestion is in line with his concession that the coordinative/comitative dichotomy cannot always be strictly adhered to.⁵

⁵ Stassen does admit that ‘pure’ instances of WITH-languages are uncommon. Very often, there is what he calls a diachronic shift from a comitative to a coordinative strategy which results in a two

4. Noun phrase conjunction in Akan

Akan, like a number of sub-Saharan African languages, uses disparate forms for conjoining noun phrases and clauses.⁶ The situation, however, differs between the major dialects. Whereas Twi uses *ne*⁷ for noun phrases and *na* exclusively for clauses, Fante combines the use of *nye* and *na* in noun phrase conjunction. Let us consider the following attested Twi (Akuapem) examples⁸:

- (9) *ɔhene ne ne man-fo bɔ-ɔ hu.*
 Chief CONJ POSS country-PLhuman.suffix hit-COMPL fear
 ‘Chief and his townsfolk became afraid.’
- (10) *Agoru a Nana Aberewa ne abofra no di-i*
 Game REL Nana Aberewa CONJ child DEF eat-COMPL
no....
 DCM
 ‘The game which Nana Aberewa and the child played.../ The game which Nana Aberewa played with the child...’
- (11) *ɔ-ne no bɛ-tena.*
 She-CONJ her FUT-stay
 ‘She will stay with her’

In each of the examples (9) to (11), two noun phrases are conjoined with *ne*. *Ne*, according to Amfo (2007a) is underdetermined between a coordinative and a comitative meaning. In (9), one can only interpret *ne* as coordinative. Fear is not something that can be performed with another person or group of persons. But, two individuals or two groups of people can be afraid and have a similar source for their fear, which is the case in (9); the chief as well as the people of the town were both terrified by the treacherous behavior of a blacksmith living in the town, mentioned earlier in the story. (10) could be interpreted comitatively or coordinatively depending on contextual information. In this particular case, I will go for a comitative interpretation since it was Nana Aberewa who initiated what is being described here as a game, and indeed the child had no choice than to comply.⁹ In (11), the referent of the pronoun *ɔ-* takes the decision to accept the

strategy encoding of the domain, using an identical marker. As demonstrated in the following section, the situation in Akan is not quite the same.

⁶ Sub-Saharan African languages which use separate forms for conjoining noun phrases and clauses include Ewe and Ga (both Kwa languages) and (Ghanaian) Hausa (Chadic). Ewe uses *kple* for noun phrases and *eye* for clauses; in Ga *ke* and *ni* are used for noun phrase and clauses respectively; and (Ghanaian Hausa) employs *da* for noun phrases and *shei* for clauses.

⁷ In the Asante dialect *ne* takes a high tone, whereas it is low-toned in Akuapem and Bono dialects. Even though tone may be used as a sole criterion in distinguishing between words, there is no reason to believe that in spite of the differences in tone, we are dealing with different lexical items here, rather the differences in tone are considered as distinguishing dialectal features.

⁸ Examples (9) to (11) are taken from an Akuapem collection of stories and fables, entitled *Ananse Akuamo* (1961, Accra, Bureau of Ghana Languages).

⁹ The child being referred to here had run away from home, due to ill treatment from her mother, and this old lady decided to take her in. The deal, which is referred to in (10) as a game is that unless the

little girl (referred to as *no*) into her home, she takes the initiative to live with the girl. Within this context, *ne* can only be interpreted comitatively.

Let's consider the Fante equivalents of (9) to (11). In Fante, *na* is the appropriate connective for the two subject noun phrases in (9), as illustrated in (12):

(12) *ɔhen na ne man-fo bɔɔ hu.*

Even though *na* used as a noun phrase connective is strictly speaking underdetermined between a coordinative and a comitative meaning, the existence of a strictly comitative marker in this dialect suggests a weaker coordinative interpretation whenever *na* is used, as one will expect the speaker to use *nye* if a comitative interpretation was intended (cf. Amfo 2007a).

Given the context within which (10) and (11) were uttered, *nye* is the pragmatically appropriate Fante connective for the utterances as shown in (13) and (14).

(13) *Agor a Nana Aberewa nye abofra no dzi-i no ...*

(14) *ɔnye no bɛ-tsenɔ.*

The point of these examples is to demonstrate that whereas the Twi speaker uses *ne* in all cases of noun phrase conjunction, leaving the addressee to rely on contextual information as to whether a coordinative or a comitative interpretation was intended, the Fante speaker has a choice between a strictly comitative marker *nye* or an underdetermined connective *na*, which in most cases suggests that a coordinative interpretation is intended.

5. The grammaticalization path

Noun phrase connectives in a number of languages are thought to have been derived from various sources through the process of grammaticalization. Mithun (1988) suggests that noun phrase connectives may derive from comitative (verbal) constructions, or sentence adverbials meaning *also, too, as well*. As indicated in section 1, Lord (1973) argues in favor of verbal origins for the noun phrase connectives in Ga and Ewe among others. Stassen proposes other diachronic possibilities, such as, numerals and quantifiers like *two, both* and *all*.

It is quite obvious that the Akan noun phrase connective *n(y)e*¹⁰ has evolved from what can be called a comitative verb, but the grammaticalization stages are different in Fante and Twi. Let us consider the Fante situation.

child mentioned the name of that old lady she (the child) would not have any food – a task which was almost insurmountable since they lived in a secluded place.

¹⁰ It is plausible and reasonable to proceed on the assumption that we are dealing with the same lexical item in the various dialects in spite of the segmental difference. Consistently an alveolar nasal in the Twi dialects, which is followed by a high front vowel, corresponds to a palatal nasal, represented orthographically as 'ny' in the Fante dialects. As a result Asante *ne* (to defecate), *onipa* (human being), *sukuuni* (student/pupil), correspond to Fante *nye, onyipa, sukuunyi*.

5.1. *Fante*

Two major pieces of intra-language (or, in this case, intra-dialect) evidence can be provided for the (comitative) verbal origin for Fante *nye*, they are semantic and morphosyntactic.

First, the use of *nye* consistently gives rise to a comitative interpretation, as demonstrated in (13) and (14), contrasted with (12). The original comitative meaning continues to constrain the use of *nye*. Hopper's principle of persistence is evident in the use of this marker. The existence of an alternative noun phrase connective, mainly for coordinative purposes, reinforces its comitative meaning.

Second, the form *nye* still exhibits traces of verbal morphology. In Akan, verbs take on tense, aspect, mood, polarity, and pronominal affixes. In accordance with Hopper's de-categorialization principle, *nye* does not inflect for the full range of tense, aspect, mood, polarity and pronominal affixes; some, however, remain. Consider the following:

- (15) *Ama nye Kofi kɔ-ɔ guam.*
 Ama COM Kofi go-COMPL market
 'Ama went to the market with Kofi.'
- (16) *Ama nye Kofi bɛ-kɔ guam.*
 Ama COM Kofi FUT-go market
 'Ama will go to the market with Kofi.'
- (17) *Ama a-n-nye Kofi a-n-kɔ guam.*
 Ama COMPL-NEG-COM Kofi COMPL-NEG-go market
 'Ama did not go to the market with Kofi.'
- (18) *Ama n-nye Kofi re-n-kɔ guam.*
 Ama NEG-COM Kofi PROG-NEG-go market
 'Ama will not go to the market with Kofi.'
- (19) *ɔnye Kofi kɔ-ɔ guam.*
 She-COM Kofi go-COMPL market
 'She went to the market with Kofi.'
- (20) *Me nye Kofi kɔ-ɔ guam.*
 I COM Kofi go-COMPL market
 'I went to the market with Kofi.'

In Akan, when a clause contains a series of verbs (serial verb construction), typically all the verbs in the series inflect for the indicated tense, aspect and polarity affixes, as illustrated in (21).¹¹

¹¹ In cases where the initial verb in a serial verb construction inflects for the future tense or the progressive aspect, subsequent verbs carry what has been termed in the literature (for example, Osam 2004) as the consecutive marker: A low-toned a- prefix.

- (21) *Me-a-n-tɔ a-m-pam a-m-ma no.*
 I-COMPL-NEG-buy COMPL-NEG-sew COMPL-NEG-give her/him.
 ‘I did not buy, sew and give (it) to her/him.’

As we see in (15), (16), (19) and (20), there is no tense-aspect inflection on *nye* in positive polarity clauses. On the other hand, *nye* always inflects for negation when the main lexical verb is in the negative polarity, as seen in (17) and (18). In the negative polarity, *nye* inflects for completive aspect if the main verb is completive, this is illustrated in (17).

Orthographically, not all the subject pronouns get affixed to *nye* as is typical of full lexical verbs. The third person pronoun *ɔ* is still consistently affixed to *nye* as in (19), but some writers present the other subject pronouns as separate words. This tendency of not prefixing most of the subject pronouns to *nye* can be taken as a reflection of a cognitive recognition that *nye* is no longer a fully fledged verb.

In the imperative, specifically the optative mood,¹² *nye* inflects in the language of Fante speakers, as illustrated in (22).

- (22) *Ma Kofi n-nye Ama n-kɔ guam.*
 Let Kofi OPT-COM Ama OPT-go market
 ‘Let Kofi go to the market with Ama.’

5.2. Twi

The situation with regards to *ne*, the Twi equivalent of *nye*, is quite different. First, *ne* is the only noun phrase connective in Twi. Unlike Fante *nye*, it does not encode comitativity. It is underdetermined between a comitative and a coordinative meaning. As a result, the addressee will have to rely heavily on contextual information in determining whether a given token of *ne* is intended to be interpreted comitatively or coordinatively. Granted that *ne* and *nye* have identical sources, the conclusion is that *ne* is at a later stage in the grammaticalization process; the original comitative meaning does no longer exclusively constrain its use. In other words, it has gone beyond the ‘Persistence’ stage.

Again, in terms of verbal morphology, Twi *ne* has reached a more advanced stage in the grammaticalization process. The only verbal affix it takes is the third person subject pronoun. Thus the equivalent of Fante (17) and (18) will be (23) and (24) respectively.

- (23) *Ama ne Kofi a-n-kɔ dwam.*
 (24) *Ama ne Kofi re-n-kɔ dwam.*

¹² The optative is morphologically marked with a high-toned homorganic nasal prefix, while the negation marker is a low-toned homorganic nasal.

5.3. Principles

Some of Hopper's (1991: 22) principles of grammaticalization are relevant in identifying the noun phrase connective *n(y)e* as a gram.

Layering refers to the phenomenon where “within a broad functional domain, new layers are continually emerging. As this happens, the older layers are not necessarily discarded, but may remain to coexist with and interact with the newer layers”. This principle is particularly evident in Fante. *Na* is the mundane clausal connective in Akan (Amfo 2007c), and it probably might have been the general connective roughly corresponding to English *and*. With the emergence of *nye* as a noun phrase connective, *na* has not completely given up its function in noun phrase conjunction, and the two forms, *na* and *nye*, coexist within the specific function of noun phrase conjunction.

However, we can see that in the Twi dialects, the process has moved on further, and what we find is Specialization. This principle is evident when “within a functional domain, at one stage a variety of forms with different nuances may be possible; as grammaticization takes place, this variety of formal choices narrows and the smaller number of forms selected assume more general grammatical meanings”. It is probable, that in earlier varieties of Asante and Akuapem *na* and *ne* were both noun phrase connectives (as it is the case in present day Fante). However, at present, in Asante and Akuapem, *na* is reserved for clauses, whereas *ne* is used in noun phrases as a general connective underdetermined between a comitative and a coordinative meaning. *Ne* has thus assumed a general meaning at this point in Asante and Akuapem grammar.

We talk of Persistence “when a form undergoes grammaticalization from a lexical to a grammatical function, so long as it is viable some traces of its original meanings tend to adhere to it, and traces of its lexical history may be reflected in constraints on its grammatical distribution”. In Fante, the comitative verb origin of *nye* is still prevalent in its present semantics; *nye* is only used when a comitative interpretation is intended. Also, the original copula verb slot, NP_NP (see section 5.4.1), of *n(y)e* is reflected in the fact that *n(y)e* functions exclusively in the grammatical environment of noun phrases, and not clauses.

De-categorialization is when “forms undergoing grammaticization tend to lose or neutralize the morphological markers and syntactic privileges characteristic of full categories Noun and Verb, and to assume attributes characteristic of secondary categories such as Adjective, Participle, Preposition, etc”. This principle is evident, to a certain extent, when we do a cross-dialectal analysis. As a comitative verb, Fante *nye* takes on the negation marker, the optative mood marker, and in the completive aspect (negative polarity clauses). The situation in Twi where *ne* is stripped of all tense, aspect and polarity markers is indicative of a de-categorialization process.

5.4. From copula verb to comitative verb

It has been established in the previous subsections that the Akan noun phrase connective *n(y)e* has its origin in a comitative verb. The purpose of this subsection is to demonstrate that the history of this connective can be traced even further to an identical equative copula verb. The conclusion that the Akan noun phrase connective originates from a copula verb is arrived at as a result of both intra-language evidence and cross-linguistic generalization.

5.4.1. Intra-language evidence

Akan has four copula verbs¹³, one of which is identical with the noun phrase connective *n(y)e*. Following Lyons (1977: 472), copula *n(y)e* is classified as an equative copula since it “identifies the referent of one expression with the referent of another”, while *yε* is an ascriptive copula because it “ascribes to the referent of the subject-expression a certain property”. The referent of the nominal which *n(y)e* introduces is always presupposed; the speaker takes it for granted that the addressee presumes the existence of the referent of such a nominal. The same cannot be said for the use of *yε*, which is the preferred copula in general introductions. Thus a *n(y)e*-introduced nominal is often grammatically marked as definite,¹⁴ whereas a *yε*-introduced nominal need not be. The utterance in (25) is perfectly felicitous without the definite article *no*, on the other hand, (26) is ungrammatical without *no*.

(25) *Me yε kyerεkyerεni.*
 I be teacher
 ‘I am a teacher.’

(26) *Me ne kyerεkyerεni *(no).*
 I be teacher DEF
 ‘I am the teacher.’

A natural consequence of *n(y)e* being an equative copula is that in *n(y)e*-clauses, the complement is a noun phrase and that the subject and complement are permutable. Ascriptive *yε* has a wider range of complements, including an indefinite noun phrase, an adjective and a numeral. Ellis and Boadi (1969) note that the syntactic frame for *n(y)e* is NP _ NP, whereas *yε* can be found in any of the following frames: NP _ NP, NP _ Adjective or NP _ Numeral. The various syntactic frames for *n(y)e* and *yε* are exemplified in (27), and (28) to (30) respectively.

(27) *Adjoa ne osikani no.*
 Adjoa be rich.person DEF
 ‘Adjoa is the rich one.’

(28) *Adjoa yε osikani.*

¹³ The four Akan copulas are the equative copulas *n(y)e* and *de*, the ascriptive copula *yε* and the locative copula *wɔ*. *De* and *n(y)e* are both equative copulas, but the complement of the *de* copula is restricted to proper names, while that of *n(y)e* covers a wider range of (usually) definite noun phrases. Also, it is presupposed that the addressee is already familiar with the existence of the referent of the *n(y)e*-complement. For the purposes of this paper, I will concentrate on the relevant copulas: *n(y)e* and to a lesser extent *yε*.

¹⁴ There are a few discourse situations where a *n(y)e* complement is not grammatically marked as definite as in the following sentences: (i) *Me ne ɔbaa, wo ne barima, yε w’asede* (I am the woman, you are the man, do what is expected of you); (ii) *Onyame ne hene* (God is King). My assumption is that the complement of *n(y)e* in such utterances are still presented as presupposed.

Adjoa be rich.person
‘Adjoa is rich.’

(29) *Adjoa ye tenten.*

Adjoa be tall
‘Adjoa is tall.’

(30) *Ahɔhoɔ no ye nsia.*

Visitors DEF be six
‘The visitors are six.’

Another syntactic restriction that occurs in *n(y)e*-copula constructions relates to humanness. Ellis and Boadi refer to it as a “human versus non-human” restriction. The subject and complement nouns in such constructions should both be human or non-human as illustrated by examples (31) and (32) adapted from Ellis and Boadi (1969: 24).

(31) *ɔbarima no ne onipa no.*

Man DEF be human.being DEF
‘That man is the person.’

(32) *ɛ-ne aɛm no.*

It-be matter DEF
‘That is the matter.’

The example in (33) where the first noun phrase is human and the second is non-human (in this case inanimate) is ungrammatical and consequently pragmatically unacceptable.

(33) **ɔbarima no ne boɔ no.*

Man DEF be stone DEF
‘The man is the stone.’

What we notice then is that the syntactic frame for the noun phrase connective is the same as that of the equative copula; they both occur in the environment of nouns. In addition, the humanness restriction found in *n(y)e*-copulas is reflected as an animacy restriction in *n(y)e*-conjunctions. In *n(y)e*-conjunctions, both conjunct noun phrases have to be either animate or inanimate. The conjunct noun phrases are both animate and inanimate in (34) and (35) respectively.¹⁵

¹⁵ Languages such as Ewe, Yoruba and Fon, use a single marker for comitative, instrumental and manner functions. As a result, the semantic nature (and sometimes the position) of the noun phrases involved in the construction will determine the specific function intended. For example, in Ewe an animate noun phrase in clause final position following *kple* indicates comitativity, an inanimate concrete noun in that position will indicate instrument, and an abstract (inanimate) noun will indicate manner. Akan is different in this regard since it uses the defective serial verb *de* (take) to indicate an instrumental or manner function as in the following: *Kofi de sekan kuu kraman no* (Kofi killed the dog with a knife) and *Kofi de awerehoɔ kɔɔ fie* (Kofi went home sorrowfully).

- (34) *Kofi ne ne kraman re-tu mpasa.*
 Kofi CONJ POSS dog PROG-embark walk
 ‘Kofi is going on a walk with his dog’
- (35) *Osu ne awerɛhoɔ yi nyinaa akyi no...*
 Cries CONJ sorrow this all back DEF...
 ‘After all the tears and sorrow...’

It sounds reasonable then to speculate that copula *n(y)e* is historically related to the noun phrase connective *n(y)e*. In addition, the comitative semantics of particularly the Fante form *nye* is suggestive that the transformation from a copula verb to a noun phrase connective is via a comitative verb. This speculation is strengthened by cross-linguistic evidence about the diachronic relation between noun phrase connectives and the copula verb ‘to be’, and also the prevalence among sub-Saharan African languages to derive noun phrase connectives from comitative verbs.

5.4.2. Cross-linguistic evidence

Various sources have been suggested for noun phrase connectives. In addition to sentence adverbial meaning *also, too, as well* that Mithun (1988) suggests, Stassen (2003) proposes that numerals or quantifiers, such as, *two, both, all*, could be added to the list. In addition to this, he proposes that noun phrase connectives could be traced to verbs meaning ‘to be’ or ‘to exist’.

Stassen points out that the Choctaw noun phrase connective *mi-cha* is a participial or switch referential form of the verb *mi* ‘to be’. The Korean verb *ha* ‘to be, to do’ is the source of one of its noun phrase connectives. Classical Mongolian uses converbal forms of the verb stems *bol/bu* ‘to be, to exist’ or *ki* ‘to do’ as noun phrase connectives.

Abdoulaye (2004) argues that the Hausa noun phrase comitative connective *da* originates from the identical existential verb ‘to be, to exist’.

Given the cross-linguistic tendency for noun phrase connectives to evolve out of the verb ‘to be’, plus the identical syntactic environment of the Akan noun phrase connective *n(y)e* and the copula verb *n(y)e*, it is reasonable to extrapolate that the Akan noun phrase connective must have originated from the identical copula verb.

6. Conclusion

The general trend of noun phrase connectives in some sub-Saharan African languages originating from verbs have long been established, as demonstrated in studies such as Lord (1973), Trutenau (1973), Dakubu (1970), Abdoulaye (2004). This paper makes a contribution to this discussion by establishing that Akan belongs to the group of languages whose noun phrase connective, *n(y)e*, originated as a verb. It demonstrates that this marker can be traced to a comitative verb. This is borne out by the scanty verbal inflection that the form exhibits as a noun phrase connective. The association of the noun phrase connective to an earlier comitative verb is again attested particularly by the restrictive semantics of the Fante form *nye*, which gives rise exclusively to a comitative interpretation when it is used. This contrasts, on one hand, with the Twi

dialects counterpart *ne* which may result in either a comitative or coordinative interpretation, and on the other hand, with the other Fante noun phrase connective *na* which is also strictly speaking underdetermined between a comitative and a coordinative meaning.

The occurrence of an identical equative copula is not considered as a mere coincidence; the intra-language and cross-linguistic facts available point to a diachronic relation between the equative copula and the noun phrase connective, which are formally identical.

The phenomenon of languages having distinct markers for linking noun phrases and clauses is prevalent in the West African sub-region. Research has demonstrated that very often the noun phrase connectives have comitative verbal origins. This paper, following Abdoulaye (2004), has shown that copula verbs could be another probable source of noun phrase connectives in the sub-region.

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