

Complex predicates in Gã: Applicatives and compounds

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The term “complex predicate” covers a broad range of syntactic phenomena where two or more predicates appear within a single clause. Serial verb constructions (SVC), for example, are defined as a sequence of verbs that act as a single predicate without any overt marker of coordination, subordination, or syntactic dependency of any other sort (Aikhenvald 2018). The predicate *ke* in Gã, a Kwa language spoken in Ghana, appears to participate in SVCs (Beermann and Hellan 2018), as in (1a). We propose, however, that *ke* is an applicative head in (1a,b), adopting Georgala (2012). In (1c), *ke* appears in a verbal compound.

The data below illustrate the distribution of *ke* in thematic applicatives (1a), raising applicatives (1b) and compounds (1c).

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|-----|----|---|----------------------|
| (1) | a. | e-ke kakla fo brodo | THEMATIC APPLICATIVE |
| | | 3s-ke knife cut bread | |
| | | ‘She cut the bread with a knife.’ | |
| | b. | e-ke shika lε ha mi | RAISING APPLICATIVE |
| | | 3s-ke money DET give 1s | |
| | | ‘She gave me money.’ | |
| | c. | Aku he fofoi ke-ha mi | COMPOUND |
| | | Aku buy flowers ke-give 1s | |
| | | ‘Aku bought flowers for me.’ | |

We argue that *ke* is associated with a distinct syntactic structure in the above examples.

While (1a) and (1b) share surface similarities, there are important syntactic differences. First, in (1a), *ke* adds an argument, typically an instrument but also a comitative argument, while in (1b), it does not. Instead, in (1b) *ke* licenses the definiteness of the theme argument (it must be indefinite in the absence of *ke*). Second, *ke* is optional in (1b) but obligatory in (1a). Third, in (1a), it is possible to cleft the second verb *fo* ‘cut’ together with the direct object. In (1b), on the other hand, clefting of the second verb and its object is ungrammatical.

We adopt Georgala’s (2012) applicative analysis, where applicative heads always merge high, as the sister to VP. In (1a) *ke* heads a thematic applicative phrase (ApplTP) and the added argument *kakla* ‘knife’ is generated in the specifier. ApplT patterns with “high” applicatives and relates an individual to an event (Pylkkänen 2008). In (1b), however, *ke* heads an expletive (raising) applicative phrase (ApplEP). The direct object of *ha* ‘give’ raises to the specifier of this projection, where definiteness is licensed. Like other “low” applicatives (Pylkkänen 2008), the raising applicative is only possible with verbs that encode a change of possession, whether literal or figurative (e.g. *ha* ‘give’, *tsɔɔ* ‘teach’). In both applicatives, *ke* undergoes head movement to *v*. Clefting of the second verb and its object is ungrammatical in (1b) because it involves remnant movement. The clefted constituent would contain the trace of the moved theme *shika* ‘money’. Such movement is always ungrammatical in Gã. Finally, (1c) involves compounding of *ke* with another verb, as the second predicate within a larger SVC. We treat compounding as syntactic, but occurring low in the structure: *ke* and *ha* form a layered VP dominated by a single vP.

We also provide arguments against a SVC analysis of (1a). For example, *ke* can never appear on its own as an independent predicate and cannot take tense or aspect marking and *ke* can never be clefted (with or without a complement).

The data from Gã provide further support for Georgala’s two types of applicatives, but also illustrate a new pattern where the same vocabulary item can head the two different projections.

References

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