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PREPOSITIONS AND POSTPOSITIONS IN SARAMACCAN

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This paper discusses the category of prepositions and postpositions in Saramaccan. This category has been neglected in Saramaccan as much as in the general literature on creoles, but is interesting for a number of reasons:

(a) it is closely linked to the central grammatical issues of case marking, theta marking, and grammatical relations;
(b) it interacts with the question of whether creole verbs are 2-place predicates and with the study of serial verbs;
(c) it interacts with the study of complementation in creole languages, particularly with fu, pou, pa, fo, fi, long, etc. and with the problem of conjunction, particularly with nanga, ku, etc.
(d) it gives us an insight into the problem of lexical expansion in creole languages through semantic extension, compounding, affixation, etc.
(e) in European languages, the study of prepositional phrases has proved to be the source of interesting parametric variation, particularly with respect to the possibility of stranding and of directionality of case assignment.

I will describe both prepositions and postpositions, discussing these issues as they show up in the study of P in Saramaccan, and, towards the end, relating them to other creoles.

1. Prepositions

In addition to a class of clear prepositions that take a noun phrase complement, there are cases, somewhat less clear, that take a clausal complement. We will discuss them in turn.

The core of the prepositional system is formed by ku, a, and fu. Ku, lexically related to Portuguese com “with”, functions as an instrumental, a comitative marker, a subcategorized preposition, and as a coordination marker. Some examples:

(1) a ta faa di pau ku matjau
he ASP fell the tree with axe
“he fells the tree with an axe”
I will assume that even in the last case we have a preposition rather than a conjunction, i.e. that the structure in (3) is more like (4a) than like (4b):

Arguments for this analysis include:

a. After *ku* we always get the pronominal object form, even when the conjoined phrases stand in subject position:

(5a)  *i ku en fu go*

you with him should go
"you and he should go"

(5b)  *i ku a fu go*

you with he should go

The ungrammaticality of (5b) is accounted for when we take *ku* in (5) to be a preposition.

b. *ku* can only adjoin nominal constituents, not clauses, as in (6):

(6)  *i fu go ku di Gaama fu ko*

you should go and the chief should come.
c. *ku* has a very general meaning of linking marker even when it is a preposition. It can also express circumstances, as in (7), and occurs in many uses with specific verbs, as illustrated in (8):

(7) \[ mi \ bi \ de \ ku \ someni \ soni \ u \ du \]  
CIRCUMSTANCE
IT TNS be with so many things to do
“I had so many things to do”

(8) \[ kule \ ku \ “run after” \]
\[ buta \ ku \ “get after” \]
\[ fan \ ku \ “speak to, with” \]
\[ du \ ku \ “do something to” \]
\[ nama \ ku \ “side with” \]
\[ seeka \ ku \ “make arrangements with” \]

In conclusion, *ku* is a very general preposition in Saramaccan, indicating the presence of a certain nominal expression with respect to a certain action or other nominal. This presence can be entirely neutral, or can contribute to the action or event in some way.

The preposition *a* is much more specific: it marks location or direction:

(9) \[ a \ bi \ ko \ a \ u \ aki \]  
DIRECTION
he TNS come LOC us here
“he came to us”

(10) \[ a \ di \ gee-wej \ di \ wajamaka \ ta \ pai \ di \ obo \ f’en \ a \ di \ sanfu \]  
LOCATION
LOC the dry season the iguana ASP lay the egg of it LOC the sand
“In the dry season the iguana lays its eggs in the sand”

Example (10) shows that location here should be seen also as marking location in time. Many times the difference between location and direction is marked with a serial verb, as in (11):

(11) \[ a \ bi \ kai \ go \ a \ di \ baaku \]  
he TNS fall go LOC the hole
“he fell into the hole”
When *go* is absent, the meaning is different:

(12) \[ a \ bi \ kai \ a \ di \ baaku \]
he TNS fall LOC the hole
“he fell (while) inside the hole”

I will return to locative *a* when discussing the compound preposition/post-position combinations in section 2.

The third central preposition is *fu*, which has been discussed with considerable detail in Byrne (1984). Aspects of *fu* morphophonemics are treated in this volume by Kouwenberg, and the full categorial range of *fu* is dealt with by Wijnen and Alleyne. As a preposition, its first use is marking possession or belonging, relating two noun phrases:

(13) \[ di \ wosu \ u \ data \]
the house of doctor
“the doctor's house”

A second use involves marking benefactive or purposive:

(14) \[ di \ womi \ ta \ wooko \ faa \ feni \ moni \]
the man ASP work for-he find money
“the man works to get money”

This use has led to the development of *fu* as a complementizer-like element and eventually as a modality marker. This development has parallels in many other creole languages. I will not go into this problem here, however, given the complexity of the issue.

Related in meaning to the benefactive use of *fu* is the serial verb *da*, used in sentences such as (15):

(15) \[ go \ tei \ di \ soni \ tja \ ko \ da \ mi \]
go take the things carry come give me
“go and get the things for me”

The verb has lost its literal meaning in its serial use, as can be seen from examples such as:

(16) \[ i \ fustan \ andi \ mi \ taki \ da \ i \ o \]
you understand what I talk give you Q
“do you understand what I said to you?”
Although its meaning may be abstract, *da* cannot however be equated with a preposition, unlike *gi* in Sranan (Voorhoeve, 1975). As (17) and (18) show, *da* can strand, whereas prepositions in Saramaccan cannot.

(17)  
\[ \text{di womi mi bi bai di soni da} \]  
the man I TNS buy the thing give  
"the man I bought the things for"  

(18)  
\[ \text{ju nomo mi ke heepi wooko da} \]  
you alone I want help work give  
"for you alone I want to work"  

Contrast these with ungrammatical (19):

(19)  
\[ *\text{di boto i o paka fu} \]  
the boat you ASP pay for  
"the boat you will pay for"  

At the same time, *fu* must be fronted together with its noun phrase, (20) while *da* is not:

(20)  
\[ \text{fu di boto i o paka} \]  
"for the boat you will pay"  

(21)  
\[ *\text{da di womi mi ke wooko} \]  
give the man I want work  
"for the man I want to work"  

It has been claimed repeatedly in the literature that serial verbs emerged in creole languages, perhaps in languages in general, because these languages allow only one object next to the verb. We should note, however, that in Saramaccan, as in other creole languages, there are double object constructions:

(22)  
\[ \text{mi o da i moni} \]  
I ASP give you money  
"I will give you money"  

(23)  
\[ \text{mi ke pindja i wan soni} \]  
I want tell you something  
"I want to tell you something (in secret)"
(24) *fii paka mi teni golu*
   *fu*-you pay me ten guilder
   "you must pay me ten guilders"

The precise extent to which Saramaccan verbs take double objects still has to be investigated, but a preliminary survey shows that it is more than just a few verbs. The result of this is that we have to find a different explanation for the emergence of serial constructions in Saramaccan.

In addition to the three core prepositions *ku, fu, a*, each with a very general meaning, we find more specific prepositions such as *tee* "until", *sondo* "without", *botti* "except", *ufo, bifo u* "before":

(25) *mi wasi en tee mi kaba*
    "I washed it till I was finished"

(26) *te bo to u mi bigi, mi ta waka di bia-bia-wata sondo panta*
    "when boat of me big, I ASP walk LOC the turn-turn water without fear"
    "When my boat is big, I cross the rapids without fear"

(27) *a go sondo an taki wan soni da mi*
    "he go without he-NEG say a thing give me"
    "he went without saying anything to me"

(28) *mi o go, ma boiti hen*
    "I ASP go, but except him"
    "I shall go, but not he"

(29) *ufo aiti juu m'e nango a doo*
    "before eight hours I-NEG ASP-go LOC door"
    "before eight o'clock I won't leave the house"

(30) *bifo u i taki wan soni noo fi-i meni en bunu*
    "before *fu* you say a thing DEL *fu*-you think it well"
    "before you say something, you must think it over well"
More work is needed to understand how the alternation between *ufo* and *bifo* is conditioned. In any case, it is evident that prepositions of this group can introduce clauses as well as noun phrases. In (25) *tee* introduces a clause, likewise in (27) *sondo*, and in (30) *bifo u*. This possibility raises the question as to how the clause-introducing particles *fa, nda, bika* and *kuma* should be analyzed. They could be seen as prepositions that take only clauses as their complement. Consider first some examples:

(30)  
unu sabi fa mi a kina u m’e go a di kamia ala       
FA
“you all know that I am not allowed to go that way”

(31)  
fa di mii weti so, de bi kat en bakaa                   
“because the child was so white, they called it a white person”

(32)  
a’n dou a u aki fa u ta du di soni aki               
“he has not been here while we were at work”

(The conjunction *fa* can mean “how”, but also “as”, “when”).

(33)  
a fika kuma hunja, noo a bi kii en               
KUMA
“just a bit and he would have killed him”

(34)  
an taanga kuma mi taanga                        
“he is not as strong as I am”

(35)  
mi si kuma wan fu dee kau lusu                   
“it seems that one of the cows is loose”
The conjunction *kuma* is a comparative marker in most cases.

(36)  
nda i-a bi ke en, noo i-a musu paka fe-en       
NDA
since you-NEG TNS want it, you-NEG must pay for it
“since you didn’t want it, you don’t need to pay for it”

(37)  
i o njan di njannjan, nda i boi en
you ASP eat the food, since you cook it
“you’ll eat the food, since you cooked it”
The conjunction *nda* marks reason, and the conjunction *bika* cause:

(38) \[ \text{futu u mi ta atti mi, bika mi bi djombo subl go a wan booko bata liba} \]

“my foot hurts because I jumped on a broken bottle”

In any case, there is a rich conjunction system, separate still from the complementizers, which may, as well, be part of the prepositional system. Here more work is needed, particularly to study the division of labor between the conjunction and verbs such as *mbel* “make”, which also function to mark causality.

Far from being marginal, prepositions are a crucial system of the Saramaccan grammar. They have important lexical functions as well. Consider the three-way contrast in (39):

(39)a. \[ di omi djula ku mi \]

“the man went against me”

b. \[ mi ta djula da i \]

“I swear it to you”

c. \[ di bubu ta djula \]

“the tiger is preparing itself for the jump”

The impression of richness is further increased when we look at postpositional structures in the next section.

2. Postpositions

To form complex locative expressions, Saramaccan has developed compounds, which have the following form:

(40) \[ a \text{ (locative)} + \text{NP} + \text{N (locational element)} \]

The relevant examples are given in (41), which includes all cases that I have been able to discover:

(41)a. \[ a \text{ ta de a di wosu baka} \quad a X baka \text{ (Eng. “back”)} \]

“he is behind the house”

\[ a \text{ bi fan a mi baka} \]

“he spoke after me”

\[ a \text{ baka u Gaan-Gadu} \]

“after God”

\[ a \text{ baka di mi bi njan kaa} \]

“after having finished eating”
b. go a dendu  
a X dendu (Port. “dentro”)  
“go inside”

c. a de a di wata bandja  
a X bandja (Port. “banda”)  
“he is near the river”

a mi bandja  
“next to me”

da di wooko bandja  
“during the work”

d. a bi luku en a basu te dou a liba  
a X basu  
“he looked at him from bottom to top”

mi nango a basu-se  
“I am going downstream”

e. a bi ta de a di pau edi  
a X edi (Eng. “head”)  
“he was sitting in the top of the tree”

f. de de a di kununu mindi-edi  
a X mindi-edi  
“They are on the top of the mountain”

g. a ta waka a mi fesi  
a X fesi. (Eng. “face”)  
“he is walking in front of me”

mi bi dou aki a fesi f’en  
“I came here before him”

a bi ko dou a wan gaan doo-buka fesi-se  
“he came up to a great big doorway”

m’e bi ke ko, ma fi-i edi mi o ko  
“Instead of helping me he has turned his back on me”

h. ka fu a heepi mi, noo a bi bia baka da mi  
ka fu S
The development of these forms, seen diachronically, can be represented as in (42):

(42)  

Stage I(a) represents the Saramaccan examples given in (41). We can analyze the NP as the possessive specifier of the locative noun, just as in ordinary nominal expressions this is possible. Here the noun phrase is optional, and we have both (43a) and (43b):

(43) a. *mi hi djombo subi go a wan booko bata liba*  
    I TNS jump go-up go LOC one broken bottle top  
    "I stepped on a broken bottle"  

b. *di ventu bua azowawa go a liba*  
    "the wind blew sparks upwards"

Stage I(b) does not exist for Saramaccan generally, but it does for other creole languages such as Negerhollands:

(44)  

"LOC outside of"
In these languages nominal possession is not marked with a prenomi-
nal specifier, as in Saramaccan, but with an of phrase. For the rest, 
however, the structures in (1a) and (1b) resemble each other closely.

In the second stage, the locative element and the preposition of 
location have been reanalyzed as one unit, with an optional comple-
ment. I could not find any clear examples of this stage among the 
creole languages, but this may well be due to the absence of good de-
scriptions on this point. We could postulate that the optionality of 
the complement at this point is due to the fact that the case marking 
of the P does not percolate up to the P' node necessarily, assuming in 
any case that the obligatoriness of a complement is due to the obliga-
toriness of case marking.

Perhaps an example of stage III is provided by Sranan preposi-
tional phrases, as in (45):

(45) na ini oso
    LOC inside house
    “inside the house”
na ondro a hangi
    LOC under the bench
    “underneath the bench”

Here the prepositional complex na + ini, na + ondro assigns a case to 
the complement. Typically, when the complement is unspecified, we 
get a compound preposition with se “side”:

(46) ondrose  “below”
    inise   “inside”

It is plausible to assume that the nominal element se is assigned the 
case of the preposition or absorbs it.

For the final stage, IV, we do not get a consistent pattern for 
the whole class of locative elements, but rather isolated cases. Exam-
pies include the use of kote or kot as a general preposition meaning 
“at” in the French creoles, such as Haitian, Guyanais and Seychelo-
lois.

In (42) I have represented the four stages as a development. It 
is not so obvious, however, without thorough historical research, 
that this development has in fact taken place. Notice that even Sара-
maccan has elements that correspond to stage IV, such as simple pre-
positions, and it may well be that not in all cases can the earlier sta-
ges be attested for a given creole language. It is possible, however, to
see the development in (42) as a logically possible one, both within creole and within non-creole languages.

3. Conclusion

Both within the system of simple prepositions and within that of more complex postpositional expressions, we find that Saramaccan has developed a grammar of considerable complexity. Thus it is simply not true that the category P is absent or marginal in the language under study, as is suggested by Bickerton & Byrne (in preparation). Nor is it true for any other creole languages, as far as is known. For the same reason, we do not have to postulate that serial verbs have replaced prepositions, as many authors have claimed. As in examples (43a) and many others, they complement one another. However, we still have to account for the difference between, say, English and Saramaccan, with respect to serial verbs. Consider once again a fragment of (43a):

(47) djombo subi go a X liba
    jump       go-up go LOC X top

Why can we not have (48), with the same meaning as (47)?

(48) *djombo a X liba
    jump   LOC X top

In fact, we can have (48), but it means "jump while on top of X". The serial verb go in (47) adds directionality to the action, a meaning which remains implicit in the English structure. In the same vein, the serial verb subi marks the spatial orientation of the jumping, which also remains without expression in English. The use of serial verbs has to do then, at least in this case, with the amount of ambiguity tolerated in lexical items, rather than with the absence of prepositions directly. It does of course have to do with the interpretation of individual prepositions. In English, the preposition in does not have a directional interpretation (and has to be replaced by into in directional contexts). The same holds for locative a in Saramaccan. This is not the same thing, however, as saying that serial verbs function like prepositions in Saramaccan; that is only rarely the case.
REFERENCES

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