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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

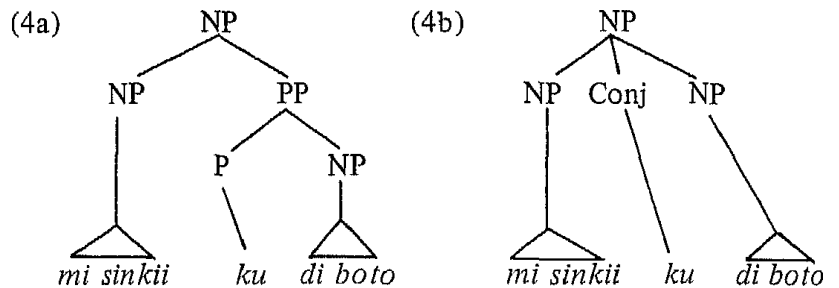
In addition to a class of clear prepositions that take a noun phrase complement, there are cases, somewhat less clear, that take a clausal complement. We will discuss them in turn.

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) | <i>a ta faa di pau ku matjau</i> | INSTRUMENTAL |
|     | he ASP fell the tree with axe    |              |
|     | "he fells the tree with an axe"  |              |

- (2) *u o go ku di womi aki* COMITATIVE  
 we ASP go with the man here  
 “we will go with this man”
- (3) *mi sinkii ku di boto, ja o paka u de* COORDINATING  
 MARKER  
 my services with the boat, you-not ASP pay for them  
 “my services and the boat, you don’t need to pay for  
 them”

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  
 I 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 dee-wei di wajamaka ta pai di obo f'en a di sandu*  
 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* POSSESSION  
 the house of doctor  
 “the doctor’s house”

A second use involves marking benefactive or purposive:

- (14) *di womi ta wooko faa feni moni* BENEFACTIVE/  
PURPOSIVE  
 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) *di womi mi bi bai di soni da*  
the man I TNS buy the thing give  
“the man I bought the things for”

- (18) *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) \**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) *fu di boto i o paka*  
“for the boat you will pay”
- (21) \**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) *mi o da i moni*  
I ASP give you money  
“I will give you money”
- (23) *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", *boiti* "except", *ufo*, *bifo u* "before":

- (25) *mi wasi en tee mi kaba* UNTIL  
 "I washed it till I was finished"
- (26) *te boto u mi bigi, mi ta waka a di bia-bia-wata sondo*  
*panta* WITHOUT  
 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* EXCEPT  
 I ASP go, but except him  
 "I shall go, but not he"
- (29) *ufo aiti juu m'e nango a doo* BEFORE  
 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 kai 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) *futu u mi ta ati mi, bika mi bi djombo subi 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 *mbei* “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* (locative) + NP + N (locational element)

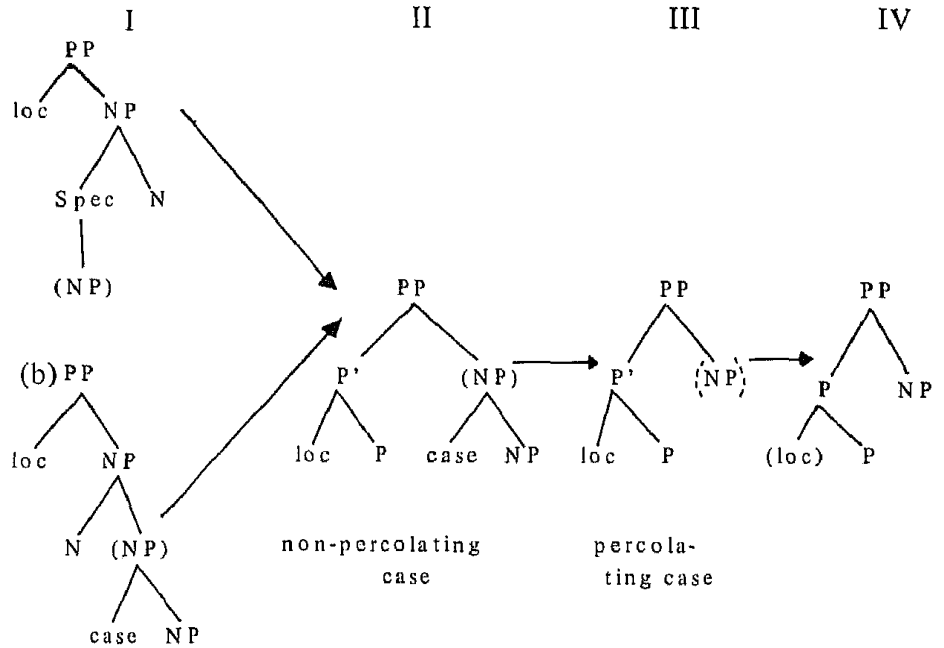
The relevant examples are given in (41), which includes all cases that I have been able to discover:

- (41)a. *a ta de a di wosu baka*      *a X baka* (Eng. “back”)  
“he is behind the house”  
*a bi fan a mi baka*  
“he spoke after me”  
*a baka u Gaan-Gadu*      *a baka u X*  
“after God”  
*a baka di mi bi njan kaa*      *a baka di S*  
“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"  
      *a 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"      *a X liba*  
      *mi nango a basu-se*                      *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*      *a fesi fu X*  
      "I came here before him"  
      *a bi ko dou a wan gaan doo-buka fesi-se*      *fesi-se*  
      "he came up to a great big doorway"
- m'e'bi ke ko, ma fi-i edi mi o ko*      *fu X edi*  
      "I didn't want to come but for your sake I will"
- h.    *ka fu a heepi mi, noo a bi bia baka da mi*      *ka fu S*  
 "Instead of helping me he has turned his back on me"

The development of these forms, seen diachronically, can be represented as in (42):

(42)a



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 bi 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) *a biti fa* NP      outside of NP  
 LOC outside of  
*a bini fa* NP      inside NP  
 LOC inside of

In these languages nominal possession is not marked with a prenominal specifier, as in Saramaccan, but with an *of* phrase. For the rest, however, the structures in (Ia) and (Ib) 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 complement. 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 descriptions 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 obligatoriness of case marking.

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

- (45) *na ini oso*  
 LOC inside house  
 "inside the house"  
*na ondro a bangi*  
 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. Examples include the use of *kote* or *kot* as a general preposition meaning "at" in the French creoles, such as Haitian, Guyanais and Seychellois.

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 Saramaccan has elements that correspond to stage IV, such as simple prepositions, and it may well be that not in all cases can the earlier stages 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.

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