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Fact-type complements in Gbe and the Surinamese Creoles

Bettina Migge [a,*], Donald Winford [b,1]

[a] *University College Dublin, School of Irish, Celtic Studies, Irish Folklore & Linguistics, Newman Building A 203, Belfield Campus, Dublin 4, Ireland*
[b] *Department of Linguistics, The Ohio State University, Oxley Hall 222, Columbus, OH, United States*

Abstract

Although several researchers have suggested that fact-type complementation in the Surinamese Creoles is modeled on that of their main input languages, the Gbe languages, we still lack precise information on the extent of the similarities and differences. In this paper we provide a broad comparison of fact-type complementation in these two language groups and suggest an explanation for the similarities we find. We explore the syntax and semantics of the complementizers used in both language groups, the kinds of complement-taking predicator (CTP) that select these complements and their syntax and semantics. The analysis reveals close structural and functional similarities between the two language groups suggesting that fact-type complementation in the Surinamese Creoles was largely modeled on that of Gbe.
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1. Introduction

Our goal in this paper is to compare fact-type complements in the Gbe languages and the Surinamese Creoles, with a view to determining how far the former languages may have influenced the grammar of complementation in the latter. Crosslinguistically, the number of complement clause types found in the world's languages range from just one in languages like Jarawara and Goemai, two in languages like Akkadian and Irish, to four in Tariana, five in White Hmong, six in Israeli and seven in English and Pennsylvania German. But there are three recurring types that are found crosslinguistically (Dixon, 2006:23):

- Fact-type complements, which refer to the fact that something has occurred, is occurring, or will occur, e.g., *I know that Kim has left*.
- Activity-type complements, which refer to an ongoing activity or event, e.g., *I saw Kim leave*.
- Potential-type complements, which refer to the potentiality of the subject of the complement becoming involved in some activity or situation, e.g., *I want Kim to leave.*

These are also the major types of complement types that are found in Gbe and the Surinamese Creoles.[2]

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +353 17168477; fax: +353 17161117.
  E-mail address: bettinamigge@ucd.ie (B. Migge).
[1] Tel.: +1 614 292 0362.
[2] These complement types are also found in Akan, another of the substrate languages involved in the formation of the Surinamese Creoles. The range of 'say' complements found in Akan closely matches those found in Gbe and the Surinamese creoles (see Boadi, 2005; Osam, 1998). However, in this paper we only focus on comparing 'say'-complements in the Surinamese Creoles with those of their primary substrate, the Gbe languages.

While there has been a considerable amount of recent research investigating the influence of Gbe languages on various aspects of Surinamese Creole grammar (see Migge and Smith, 2007; introduction to this volume), the contribution of Gbe languages to the grammar of complementation in the Surinamese Creoles has received comparatively little attention and has focused primarily on potential-type complements in Saamaka. For instance, Byrne (1987) discusses various potential-type complements introduced by *fu* in Saamaka, and argues that *fu* in this function is in fact a second verb (V2) in a serial verb construction, and that *fu* complements are similar to other serial verb structures in the language. Though he does not directly compare potential complements in Saamaka with those in its West African substrates, he accepts Bickerton's (1984) language bioprogram account of creole formation, and concludes that serialization (and by implication *fu* complementation) ''is a spontaneous outgrowth of radical creolization, rather than due to any W. African influence'' (1987:252). More recent discussions of *fu* take a different approach to this issue. Lefebvre and Loranger (2006) argue that *fu* is a multifunctional element that functions as a preposition, a complementizer, a mood marker and possibly as a case marker. While there is some overlap between *fu* in Saamaka and *for* in English, their three-way comparison reveals very close similarities between the uses of *fu* in Saamaka and *ni/nu* in Fongbe (Fon). This leads them to reject Byrne's (1987) language bioprogram account. Instead, they argue that *fu* was associated with *nu/ni* through the mechanism of relexification and thus acquired with the lexical entry of its substrate counterpart. A broadly similar view is taken by Aboh (2006), who builds on Damonte's (2002) discussion of *fu* and *táa* in Saamaka, which he labels 'subjunctive' and 'declarative' complementizers respectively. Focusing on potential-type complements in Saamaka and Gungbe (Gun), Aboh argues that the close similarities between the two languages in this area suggest that Gun *ní* influenced the properties of Saamaka *fu*. His account posits that both languages have a single multi-functional item (*fu* in Saamaka and *ní* in Gun) which encodes irrealis mood as head of a Force Phrase, and expresses deontic modality under Fin(iteness).

As far as fact-type complements are concerned, Byrne (1987) and Veenstra (1996) provide brief discussions of them for Saamaka, while Plag (1993, 1995) offers a more detailed look at both fact-type and potential-type complements in Sranan on the basis of diachronic as well as contemporary data. Byrne argues that complementizer *táa*, which introduces fact-type complements in Saamaka, is a reduced form of *taki* 'say, but is essentially a serial verb in the most conservative varieties of Saamaka, though it appears to have undergone some degree of reanalysis as a complementizer in certain contexts, for example in complements to evaluative predicates like *fanondu* 'important.' As in the case of potential-type complements, Byrne appeals to a language bioprogram explanation for the emergence of *táa* in this function, and rules out the possibility of West African influence. Veenstra (1996) also argues that complementizer *táa* was previously a V2 in a serial verb construction, but notes that its reanalysis as a complementizer was ''due to a diachronic process internal to the language itself'' (1996:154). He does not consider the possibility of West African substrate influence as a factor in this development, though he does acknowledge that possibility in the case of the grammaticalization of *da* 'give' into a dative preposition, on the model of substrate items such as Ewe *na* 'give'. With regard to Sranan, Plag (1993, 1995) argues for a grammaticalization process in which *taki* 'say' is reanalyzed from a main verb to quotative verb to a complementizer. He also notes that there are important similarities between the use of *bé* 'say' as a complementizer in Gbe [Ewe] and *taki* in the same function in Sranan, but does not provide a detailed comparison. He concludes that both substrate influence and internal developments played a role in the emergence of the various grammatical functions of *taki*.[3] Both Plag (1993) and van den Berg (2007) also show that in Sranan Tongo, unlike the other Creoles of Suriname, the fact-type complementizer *taki* competes with *dati* (< Dutch *dat*). The use of *dat(i)* as complementizer in Sranan Tongo is likely to be due to sustained contact with Dutch because Dutch also uses *dat* as a complementizer.

Substrate influence is, however, posited as a crucial factor in the emergence of the 'say' complementizer by Migge (1998) for the Eastern Maroon Creole, and by McWhorter (1992) and Lefebvre and Loranger (2008) for Saamaka. Examining constructions involving 'say' functioning as a complementizer in Saamaka and the Eastern Maroon Creole respectively, all three authors demonstrate that the uses of *taki* and *táa* closely resemble their counterparts in West African languages, particularly those from the Kwa family of languages. McWhorter (1992) concludes that ''although there are obvious universal influences on SVC [serial verb construction] formation, the SVCs in SA [Saamaka] most closely resemble the Kwa/Nigerian ones.'' (1992:44). Lefebvre and Loranger (2008) go even further in that they show that the similarities extend beyond the complementizer function; *táa* and its Fon counterpart also show the same behavior in its other functions and in its distribution. We will come back to this below.

Research on fact-type complementation in African languages has mostly focused on how such constructions arose. These studies typically suggest that fact-type complementizers arose gradually from verbs meaning 'say' through processes of grammaticalization. Lord (1976, 1993) and Heine and Reh (1984) argue that complementizer 'say' arose via reanalysis of an erstwhile V2 in a variety of West African languages including Gbe, while Kinyalolo (1993) argues that the putative complementizer *ɖò* in Fon still functions as a V2 that selects a CP complement headed by a phonologically null complementizer.

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[3] Plag also points to parallels with the Kikongo complementizer *vo*, which may have originated from the verb *vova* 'say' (1993:157), but suggests that relating 'say' in the creoles to *vo* might be difficult because it also functions as a demonstrative pronoun.