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PHRASAL VERBS, PROGRESSIVES, AND SVO/SOV ORDER IN PERE (CÔTE D'IVOIRE)

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Abstract: The severely endangered and genetically semi-isolated language Pere (aka Bere, Mbre) in Côte d'Ivoire, with thirty active speakers as of fieldwork in 2018, shares with some other West African languages an aspectually-governed alternation between S-V-O… and S-Aux-O-V… clauses. In Pere the latter takes the approximate form S-'be'-[[O-V]-Loc]…, and functions as progressive, while S-V-O is regular for (habitual) imperfectives and all perfectives. Imperatives are likewise V-O. Progressive S-'be'-[[O-V]-Loc]… reconstructs internally to S-'be'-[[O-VblN]-Loc]… with a verbal noun, an incorporated object noun, and a locative postposition. However, the structure is now opaque since O is an open-ended NP, there is no overt VblN morphology, and even 'be' and the locative postposition are subject to reinterpretation as progressive morphemes: S-Prog-O-V.Prog-Prog… The progressive makes it possible to distinguish a clause with a true postpositional phrase S-V-[NP-P] from an English-like phrasal-verb construction with a pseudo-postposition P´, namely S-V-O-P´…. Because O in S-V-O-P´… is a real direct object, it shifts to preverbal position in the progressive, leaving P´ encliticized to the verb: S-Prog-O-V.Prog-P´… Three regular postpositions (locative, instrumental, 'in front of') have homophonous pseudo-postpositions. As in English, the meaning of a Pere phrasal verb combination is lexicalized and semantically unpredictable.

Key words: phrasal verb; constituent order; progressive; pseudo-postposition; Pere language

1. Introduction

Pere (péré), known in previous literature as Bere and Mbre, is a severely endangered language of Côte d'Ivoire in West Africa.[1] As of 2018 it was spoken actively by about thirty speakers including no children in Bonosso, a small satellite village on the outskirts of the town Tiéningboué. The latter is located in the long stretch between Korhogo and Bouaké (two important cities of interior Côte d'Ivoire).

The local adoption of Islam by the community several decades ago has led to a lack of enthusiasm for a distinctive Pere cultural identity, as opposed to a regional identity with substantial Islamic content. For the same reason, there is limited local interest in maintaining or reviving the language. The dominant language of the surrounding zone including Tiéningboué is Koro. This is a variety of the Manding division of the Mande language family, and fairly closely related to Bambara and Jula although mutual comprehension is difficult. Koro, like other Mande languages, is strictly S-(infl-)O-V-… and is not a significant factor in the OV/VO constituent-order alternation in Pere that is described here.

Pere was "discovered" for the international scientific community by Denis Creissels, a Mande specialist who was in the zone to study Koro (Creissels 2016). Roger Blench then called the attention of linguists to the need for field study (2017). Neither Creissels nor Blench, nor the other Africanists that Creissels consulted, could connect Pere with known language families in West Africa, suggesting that it may be an isolated very early branch of Niger-Congo. Creissels specifically denied a connection with Mande. A possible distant connection with Kwa, or some subdivision thereof (since the genetic integrity of Kwa is now widely doubted), warrants further consideration. Recognizing the importance of this language, fieldwork was undertaken in several short sojourns stays in Bonosso by the author and Ivoirean graduate

[1] Endonyms for the language and ethnicity are based on the stem *péré-*. The exonym used in the Koro language is *bèré*. The spelling "Mbre" used by Ethnologue is of unclear origin.

student Brahima Tioté between 2016 and 2018. This resulted in a reference grammar (Heath & Tioté 2019) and associated lexical documents and videos.

Only brief background in Pere grammar is needed to follow the argument here, which in particular does not require reference to the internal structure of NPs. The basic constituent order in perfectives and habitual imperfectives is S-V…, including S-V (simple intransitive), S-V-PP (intransitive plus postpositional phrases), S-V-O (simple transitive), and S-V-O-PP (transitive plus postpositional phrase). The verb is marked for aspect (perfective-imperfective). Negation is by a clause-final particle. Three tone levels are marked in the transcription, but M-tone (e.g., *ā*) is a predictable development from L-tone (e.g., *à*).

Example (1a) is a simple intransitive and (1b) is a simple transitive (SVO). A postverbal PP is added to an intransitive in (1c) and to a transitive in (1d). The glosses for verb stems and for postpositions are bolded. The syntactic formulae are shown in the first interlinear, with *S* for subject. PFV and IPFV aspect are marked on the verb, but these aspectual categories can be disregarded here.[2]

(1)

a. *wó* *yà*
   S - verb
   1PL **come**.IPFV
   'We come.'

b. *wó* *dī* [*à* *ní*]
   S - verb - object
   1PL **eat**.IPFV [3SG DEM],
   'We eat that.'

[2] Interlinear abbreviations are based on the Leipzig glossing rules (https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/pdf/Glossing-Rules.pdf) with the following exceptions or additions: ABS = "absolute" (undetermined nouns); INAN = "inanimate"; PS = pseudo-postposition.

c. *yà* *wó* *fō* [*làtó-dī-yā* *lɔ̀*]
future - S - verb - PP
FUT 1PL **go**.IPFV [vehicle-Ø-ABS **INS**]
'We'll go with (=in) the vehicle.'

d. *mī* *sɔ̀ⁿ* *páá-lā-à* [*nā-à* *yí*]
S - verb - object - PP
2SG **set**.PFV pot-Ø-ABS [fire-ABS **in.front.of**]
'You-SG set the pot on the fire.'

Pronouns other than 3SG are presented in (2). If fused PPs (2d) and possessors (2e) are factored out, the key division is that between preverbal proclitics (2b) and postverbal proclitics (2c). Preverbal proclitics can function as subjects, but also (as will be shown) as preverbal objects in the progressive construction. Postverbal pronouns are direct objects (in all clause types other than progressive), and postpositional proclitics (PPs are always postverbal). Not accidentally, preverbal proclitics are related in segmental form to possessors (though they differ in tone), and postverbal pronouns are related in segmental and tonal form to independent (i.e. nonclitic) pronouns. Minor tone sandhi processes apply in some examples, raising L-tone one notch to M-tone (e.g., *kè* → *kē*), but they can be disregarded here.

(2)	**1Sg**	**1Pl**	**2Sg**	**2Pl**	**3Pl**
a. independent	*kɔ̀*	*wɔ̀*	*mwⁿɔ̀*	*ɲɛ̀*	*byɛ̀*
b. preverbal proclitic	*kè*	*wó*	*mì*	*ɲì ... nì*[3]	*bè*
c. postverbal pronouns					
postverbal object	*kɔ̀*	*wɔ̀*	*mù*	*ɲì*	*bɛ̀*
postpositional proclitic	*kɔ̀*	*wɔ̀*	*mù*	*ɲì*	*bɛ̀*
d. fused dative PP	*kə̄-rē*	*wə̄-rē*	*mə̄-rē*	*ɲɛ̄-rē*	*bə̄-rē*
e. possessor	*ké*	*wó*	*mí*	*ɲí*	*bé*

The situation is different with 3SG. An animacy distinction is expressed in postverbal objects (which are suffixed to the verb), and in fused PP paradigms where *à* (becoming *ā* by tone sandhi) is

[3] The bipartite 2pl *ɲì ... nì* is exemplified in (16c) below.

inanimate while the fused form (beginning *yə̄-*) is animate. Elsewhere *à* (proclitic) and *yū-wà* (independent) are unmarked for animacy.

(3)	**3SgAn**	**3SgInan**
a. independent	*yū-wà*	
b. preverbal proclitic	*à*	
c. postverbal pronouns		
postverbal object	*-è*	*-à*
postpositional proclitic	*ā*	
d. fused dative PP	*yə̄-rē*	*ā lè*
e. possessor	*à*	

The postverbal object pronominals fuse phonologically to verbs and are transcribed as suffixes. Any adjuncts that may be present follow the suffixed verb (4).

(4) *kē* *sō-wà* [[*ké* *tɔ́gbē*] *lè*]
1SG give.PFV-**3SG.INAN.OBJ** [[1SG friend] DAT]
'I gave it to my friend.'

2. Three key postpositions and their characteristics

Of the numerous postpositions in Pere, three (dative *lè*, locative *lɔ̀*, and *yí* 'in front of, before') stand out for two reasons. First, unlike other postpositions, they fuse with pronouns to form pronominal paradigms in head-marking style. In (5), for example, the combination of 1SG pronoun (elsewhere *kɔ̀*, *kè*, *ké*) and dative postposition *lè* results not in the compositionally expected *kə̄ lè* or variant, rather in the fused form *kə̄-rē*. 3Sg inanimate *ā* does not fuse (e.g., dative *ā lè*).

(5) *ā* *pò* *té-yà* *kə̄-rē*
3SG do.PFV tea-ABS **1SG-DAT**
'He/She made tea for me.'

Second, and more importantly for this paper, the three postpositions (and no other postpositions) correspond to homophonous **pseudo-postpositional** alter egos that colexicalize with verbs in semantically unpredictable ways. They are roughly comparable to pseudo-prepositional

particles (*up*, *down*, *on*, *off*, *in*, *out*, *away*, *over*, *under*) in the notorious English phrasal-verb construction. None of the three resembles any known noun in form and meaning.

The vast majority of bipartite verb constructions in West African languages are serial-verb combinations in which both elements are (or descend from) lexical verbs. Stumbling on an English-like phrasal-verb construction in Pere, where a lexical verb combines with a postposition-like morpheme, was quite unexpected.

In formulae, this paper uses P to represent true postpositions and P′ to represent pseudo-postpositions. The following sections illustrate dative *lè*, locative *lɔ̀*, and *yí* 'in front of, before' as true postpositions.

2.1. Dative *lè*

Dative PPs with postposition *lè* occur with ditransitives like 'give' (6). They also occur with many other verbs in benefactive function. The complement is usually human. Pronominal combinations are fused, as in (5) above.

(6) *kē* *sō-wà* [[*ké* *tɔ́gbē*] *lè*]
1SG give.PFV-3SG.INAN.OBJ [[1SG friend] **DAT**]
'I gave it to my friend.'

2.2. Locative *lɔ̀*

Postposition *lɔ̀* is usually locative (7) but it can drift into instrumental function. The complement in these senses is almost always inanimate.

(7) *kē* *fō* [*sɛ̄yⁿā-ā* *lɔ̀*]
1SG go.IPFV [the.bush-ABS **LOC**]
'I am going out to the bush (=outback).'

The only pronominal combination in common use in true PPs is inanimate *ā lɔ̀* 'in/at it'. All other pronominal categories fuse with *lɔ̀*, but the fused combinations are attested only for the corresponding pseudo-postposition as illustrated later in this paper.

2.3. *yí* 'in front of'

This postposition expresses 'in front of' and related senses like 'on this side of', '(say/show) to (someone)', 'on (the fire)' and 'on (the road)'.

(8)

a. [*ké* *tɔ́ŋá-á*] *wɔ̀* [*ségá-à* *yí*]
[1SG field-ABS] be [river-ABS **in.front.of**]
'My field is (on) this side of the river.'

b. *à* *té* *dɛ́ɛ́* *kì-í* *wó*
3SG say.PFV nothing 1SG-**in.front.of** NEG
'He/She didn't say anything to me.'

c. *kè* *ŋmárᵐɔ́* [*ké* *ɲíná-á*] *bì-í*
1SG show.PFV [1SG house-ABS] 3PL-**in.front.of**
'I showed them my house.'

d. *à* *fó* [*nāŋā-à* *yí*]
3SG go.PFV [road-ABS **in.front.of**]
'He went on the road.'

e. *wó* *sɔ̄-ŋā* [*nā-à* *yí*]
1PL set.IPFV-3SG.INAN.OBJ [fire-ABS **in.front.of**]
'We (often) set it (=pot) on the fire.'

Postposition *yí* combines with pronominal complements to form fused PPs, e.g., *kì-í* 'in front of me', *wì-í* 'in front of us'.

2.4. Other postpositions

Other postpositions include *nù* 'in(to)', *yɛ̀* 'on', and *kíŋgè* 'under'. None of these has a fused pronominal paradigm, and none has a pseudo-postpositional alter ego.

3. Pseudo-postpositions and phrasal-verb combinations

This section presents some examples of the pseudo-postpositions P′ that mimic the three true postpositions just described and their colexification with verbs. The clearest evidence for the syntactic

distinction between postpositions and pseudo-postpositions is brought out by their interaction with the progressive construction, which will be covered in subsequent sections.

3.1. Pseudo-dative *lè*

Pseudo-dative lè immediately follows intransitive verbs, and fuses with them as a derivational suffix *-lé*/*-lè*, or *(n)-dé*/*(n)dè* after nasal syllables. The tones vary by aspect (perfective, imperfective) and can be disregarded here. The combinations are lexicalized and not transparently segmentable. The original verbal root either does not occur elsewhere, or it occurs in related transitive-causative clauses.

The known intransitive combinations for which there is at least some synchronic evidence of segmentability are in (9a). Other intransitives that end in *-lé*/*-lè* or *(n)-dé*/*(n)-dè* and might have originated as pseudo-datives are in (9b). Only the PFV form of each verb is shown.

(9)	**PFV**	**gloss**	**related forms**
a.	*bògò-lé*	‘whiten’	*bòò* ‘white’, *bògò-lé-yà* ‘whitened it’
	pìn-dé	‘lie down’	*píí^{n} yə̄-rē* ‘put him/her to bed’
	sìn-dé	‘descend’	*sí^{n}-y^{n}ā-ndè* ‘took it down’
b.	*gbàndé*	‘pray’	
	sɔ̀gɔ̀lé	‘slip, slide’	
	tɔ̀lé	‘be patient’	
	wòlé	‘become cold’	
	wùlé	‘(heart) get angry’	

That the pseudo-dative is suffixed is confirmed by the fact that the second part of 2PL subject *ɲī … nì* follows the fused verb: *ɲī sìn-dé nì* ‘you-PL went down’.

Although there is no possibility of parsing the pseudo-dative as the true dative postposition in these intransitive cases, the fusion of intransitive verb and pseudo-dative makes segmentation opaque. Some individuals could learn all of the forms in (9a–b) as bipartite, while others could learn all of them as unsegmentable intransitive stems, and we would have no way to tell them apart.

This is not the case with transitives since the pseudo-dative morpheme follows the object, making morpheme recognition transparent. The known transitive combinations are in (10), where X represents the object. Transitive *síín* X *lè* 'unload X, take X down' is related to intransitive *sìn-dé* 'descend' in (9).

(10) PFV	gloss	related forms
fɛ́ɛ́ X *lè*	'let X go, release X'	
jè X *lè*	'knock X down; lay out (mat)'	
ɲáá X *lè*	'see X'	
sɛ́n X *lè*	'flip and put down X'	*sɛ̀n* X lɔ̀, see (13a) below
síí X *lè*	'catch X, take hold of X'	
síín X *lè*	'unload X, take down X'	*síín* X *lɔ̀*, see (13a) below
tùn X *lè*	'put X down'	
wí X *lè*	'spill X; shave (head)'	
séŋɛ́ X *lè*	'put pressure on X'	

In some transitives, *lè* is optionally omitted after a nonpronominal NP, as in (24a) below.

The analytical problem with the transitives is not a blurry to opaque stem-suffix fusion as with intransitives, rather how to distinguish pseudo-dative *lè* from true dative *lè*. Both of them occur in the slot …V NP __. For example, how do we know that *lè* in (11) is pseudo-dative and not true dative?

(11) *kè ɲáá [séédū lè]*
1SG see.PFV [S **(PS)DAT**]
'I saw Seydou.'

The only reliable test for the distinction involves progressives, as shown in a later section. But there is also a hint of the distinction in the phonology of combinations with 3SG inanimate pronominals. The true 3SG inanimate dative is *ā lè* regardless of the preceding verb. By contrast, in the pseudo-dative construction X is a direct object, and 3SG inanimate *-à* is a suffix on the verb. The pseudo-dative morpheme is then suffixed to this *-à*, resulting in *-ā-lè*. For some of the verbs in (10), suffixed *-ā-lè* is audibly distinct from

postverbal PP *ā lè*. In the case of *jè* ‘knock down’, the suffix combination gets an extra *g (jē-gā-lè* ‘knocked it down’). For *tùⁿ* ‘put down’, *sɛ́ⁿ* ‘flip’, and *sííⁿ* ‘unload’, the nasality spreads rightward through the suffix complex, which surfaces as *-ān-dè* or variant (*tū-wⁿā-ndè* ‘did put it down’, *sɛ́-ŋā-ndè* ‘flipped it’, *sí-yā-ndè* ‘unloaded it’). This test doesn’t work for the other stems (*wí*, *síí*, *ɲáá*, *fɛ̋ɛ́*), but where it does apply it confirms the distinction between pseudo-dative and true dative.

There is no obvious semantic connection between dative and the combinations in (9-10). For starters, true dative PPs have predominantly human complements, but the transitives in (10) readily combine with nonhuman objects. Comparing the senses of the various combinations in (9) and (10) does not result in a clear semantic thread, but a subset does appear to form a semantic cluster ‘(be) put down’. This is relevant to intransitive ‘lie down’ and ‘descend’ (9), and to at least five of the transitives (10).

3.2. Pseudo-locative *lɔ̀*

lɔ̀ as pseudo-postposition is in part morphosyntactically parallel to pseudo-dative *lè*, but they differ in some points. Whereas true dative PPs have mostly human complements and pseudo-datives have objects of any animacy, the situation is partially reversed for locatives. True locative PPs almost always have inanimate complements (places, houses, containers), but pseudo-locatives have a wider range of object types.

The pseudo-locative construction appears to be losing its productivity. As will be shown later, its interaction with the progressive construction is inconsistent. With this caveat, relatively clear intransitive pseudo-locatives are in (12a). The first three in (12a) have *…n-dɔ̀* parallel to pseudo-dative *…n-dé*, while *só-lɔ̀* is segmented by comparison to simple transitive *só*. However, the position of the suffixal boundary is questionable in *ɲɛ̀n-dɔ́* and *ŋmɔ̀n-dɔ́* since the bare stems (in the related forms column do not have nasalized vowels) Possible but uncertain pseudo-locatives are in (12b).

(12) PFV	gloss	related form
a. clear cases		
ɲɛ̀n-dɔ́	'wake up'	transitive *ɲɛ́ɛ́ yà-rɔ̀* 'woke him up'
ŋmɔ̀n-dɔ́	'escape'	transitive *ŋmɔ̀ yà-rɔ̀* 'rescued him/her'
sɛ̀n-dɔ́	'change' (intr.)	transitives *sɛ̀ⁿ* X *lɔ̀* (13) and *sɛ́ⁿ* X *lɛ̀* (10)
sɔ́-lɔ̀	'shine'	*sɔ́* 'catch fire' or transitive 'light (a fire)'
b. possible cases		
kɔ̀lɔ́	'waste away'	
kɔ̀rɔ̀ndɔ́	'bend'	also transitive 'bend (it)'
pɔ̀gɔ̀lɔ́	'help'	also transitive 'help (sb)'

As with pseudo-datives, the intransitive verb and the pseudo-locative morpheme cannot be separated by another morpheme, except as noted below. The second part of 2PL *ɲī … nì*, when present, follows the fused verb plus pseudo-postposition: *ɲī ɲɛ̀-ndɔ́* (*nì*) 'you-PL woke up'.

The known transitive pseudo-locatives are in (13). 'Rescue' and 'flip' are transitive counterparts to two of the intransitives in (12a) above.

(13) PFV	gloss	related form
a. clear cases		
fə́ré X *lɔ̀*	'leave X, abandon X'	*fə́ré* 'stay'
lá X *lɔ̀*	'tear X, rip X; separate X'	
lágá X *lɔ̀*	'share X'	
ɲɛ́ɛ́ X *lɔ̀*	'awaken X'	
ɲí X *lɔ̀*	'extinguish (fire)'	
ɲú X *lɔ̀*	'hear'	
ŋmɔ́ X *lɔ̀*	'rescue X'	
sé X *lɔ̀*	'set out X to dry'	
sɛ̀ⁿ X *lɔ̀*	'flip X to pour out'	*sɛ̀n-dɔ́* (12)
sííⁿ X lɔ̀	'load X, fill X'	
tó X *lɔ̀* ~ *tógó* X *lɔ̀* 'oversow X'		
b. possible cases, discussed below and in §5		
púlɔ̀ X *lɔ̀*	'scold X'	
sú X *ɔ̀*	'resemble X'	

With transitive ‘separate’, ‘rescue’, ‘awaken’, or ‘flip, change’, if the object is pronominal it fuses with the pseudo-locative morpheme, e.g., 1SG *kə̀-rɔ̀*. 3Sg inanimate *ā lɔ̀* is not fused. However, ‘scold’ and ‘resemble’ take unfused pronominal objects plus the pseudo-locative morpheme, e.g., 1SG *kē lɔ̀*. ‘Rescue’ has the further oddity that *lɔ̀* merges with dative *lè* after nonpronominal NPs. Clearly pseudo-locative *lɔ̀* is being pulled in different directions and is somewhat unstable at the margins.

Again, there is no overall semantic connection between ‘locative’ and the glosses in (12–13). There is also limited semantic connection among the glosses, but some clues are provided by antonymy relations between pseudo-dative and pseudo-locative combinations. The same verb *síiⁿ* occurs in *síiⁿ* X *lè* ‘unload, take down’ (10) and its antonym *síiⁿ* X *lɔ̀* ‘load, fill’ (13). Here the downward motion theme mentioned above for several pseudo-datives might contrast with outward motion (‘away, out of’) as a theme linking several pseudo-locatives. Likewise, if *sɛ́ⁿ* and *sɛ̀ⁿ* are tonal variants of the “same” verb, *sɛ́ⁿ* X *lè* ‘flip and put down X’ contrasts with *sɛ̀ⁿ* X *lɔ̀* ‘flip X to pour out’, as in dumping from a bucket or calabash. Also suggestive is the contrast of pseudo-dative ‘see’ (*ɲáá* X *lè*) with pseudo-locative ‘hear’ (*ɲú* X *lɔ̀*), though it is difficult to connect this with the down/away distinction.

3.3. Pseudo-‘in front of’ *yí*

This pseudo-postposition occurs chiefly in transitive clauses. Attested intransitives in (14) are mediopassive intransitives related to and arguably derived from transitive verbs.

(14)

PFV	gloss	related form
káá-yí	‘(sth) close’	*káá* X *yí* (15)
kɔ́-yí	‘(sth) snap’	*kɔ́* X *yí* (15)

Before a prosodic boundary, suffixed *-yí* reduces to *-ý*.

The known transitive combinations are (15).

(15)

PFV	gloss	related form
káá X *yí*	‘shut X, cover X’	*káá-yí* (14)

kɔ́ X *yí*	'break X, snap X'	*kɔ́-yí* (14)
máá X *yí*	'build (a fire)'	
pú X *yí*	'pound (maize, to separate skin from seed)	
sá X *yí*	'cut X'	(*sá* 'attach [woman's wrap]' ?)
sú X *yí*	'open X'	*sú* 'remove, take out'
sàà-líí X *yí*	'cut up X'	*sá* X *yí* (15)
tó X *yí*	'lock X'	(tó 'appear' ?)
tùⁿ X *yí*	'cook X'	*tùⁿ* X *lé* 'put X down'

Recall that the true postposition *yí* 'in front of' has a range of senses including the addressee of 'say' and 'show', plus 'on (the road)' and 'on (the fire)' (§2.3). The gloss 'build (a fire)' connects with the last of these; perhaps 'cook' can be added, since cooking is by boiling or roasting in pots over a fire. The remaining senses can be organized into two themes: forceful separation ('break', 'pound to separate', 'cut', 'cut up') and opening/shutting ('shut', 'open', 'lock'). The two themes share a common thread insofar as opening (a door, the mouth, the eyes) involves partial separation. However, neither of these themes has more than a tenuous semantic connection to 'in front of' or its semantic extensions as a true postposition.

yí is also required by two verbs that have evaluative adjectival senses: 'be good' and its antonym 'be bad' (16a–b). Any semantic connection to 'in front of' or the glosses in (14–15) is elusive. (16c) with *sàà-líí* 'cut up', cf. (15), shows that the pseudo-postposition *yí* follows 3SG.INAN object *-à*, which itself follows the *nì* of bipartite 2PL subject *ɲì … nì*, cf. (2b) above.

(16)

a. *à* *ŋmá* *=ý*
3SG be.good.PFV =PS.in.front.of
'It is good (pleasing, well-made; done, well-cooked)' or 'He/She is pretty.'

b. *à* *sááⁿ* *=ý*
3SG be.bad =PS.in.front.of
'It is bad (unpleasant, badly-made, defective)' or 'He/She is ugly.'

c. *ɲī* *sàà-líí* *nī-yà* *=yí* [*tìnì* yɛ́ɛ̀]
2PL cut.up.PFV 2PL-3SG.INAN =PS.in.front.of [time DEM]
'(when) you-Pl have cut it up, …'

3.4. Phrasal verbs in other West African languages?

Pere-type phrasal verbs, combining a verb with a free particle that is homophonous to a postposition in the same language, are not mentioned in African or West African typological surveys. They do not occur to my knowledge elsewhere in the zone I am familiar with in interior West Africa (Mali, Burkina Faso, and the Mande-language zone. However, parallels do occur in some languages closer to the Atlantic coast.

The clearest description of phrasal verbs that I have seen for a Kwa language is for Akan (Sekyi-Baidoo 2006, 2008). Here indeed forms meaning 'in', 'on', 'under', and 'in front of' can function as postpositions (with NP complements) or as free particles in phrasal verbs.

A reviewer states that the phrasal-verb construction is "extremely productive in Baule, as one can easily convince oneself by consulting Tymian et al.'s Baulé dictionary, where phrasal verbs are tagged 'loc. verb.' (abbreviation for 'locution verbale'). For example, in Baulé, *to ... nun* 'lock' is a phrasal verb consisting of the verb to 'throw' and the (pseudo-)postposition *nun* 'in' (Tymian et al. 2003: 348)."

It would be good to have a clearer description of the Baoulé phenomenon in updated terminology. In the only full-length grammar of Baulé available to me, namely Creissels & Kouadio (1977), forms like *nú* 'inside' (*dedans*) and *sú* 'above' (*dessus*) that sometimes translate as adpositions are analysed syntactically as nouns (Creissels & Kouadio 1977: 628). *nú* occurs in a PP-like combination *sá nú* 'in the hand of', which itself occurs in locutions with specific verbs: *to ... sá nú* 'buy', *yo ... sá nú* 'sell' (Creissels & Kouadio 1977: 261–262) with noun *sá* 'hand' and (in the second combination) verb *yo* 'do'. *nú* occurs by itself in the locution *kpaci ... nú* 'separate into two' (Creissels & Kouadio 1977: 626) with verb *kpaci* 'split'. *sú* 'above' occurs in *si ... sú* 'give

a hard blow onto' (*donner un grand coup sur*, Creissels & Kouadio 1977: 628), with verb *si* 'bump; pound'. Although *kpaci ... nú* and *si ... sú* resemble the Pere phrasal-verb construction, Creissels & Kouadio classify all "locutions verbales" (including these) as tightly-knit verb-noun (not verb-adposition) combinations (Creissels & Kouadio 1977: 446). The preceding examples therefore are grouped with transparent verb-noun locutions like *wun ... wlé* 'understand' (reissels & Kouadio 1977: 628), consisting of *wun* 'see' and *wlé* 'sense, reason'. Classifying *nú* and *sú* as pseudo-postpositions as opposed to semi-fused noun stems can be questioned based on this evidence.

In any event, Baoulé and Akan progressives are SVO, like other clause types, so Pere-style interaction between phrasal verbs and transitive progressives (see below) does not occur in them. However, we should be on the lookout for other Kwa languages that do have Pere-like transitive progressives with 'be' plus a PP with O-Vbl complement.

4. Progressive construction

As in many languages globally, the Pere progressive construction is a slightly evolved version of the proto-schema (17).

(17) *X be [[N-VblN] LOC]

Compare English *X is deer-hunting*, originally **X is in deer-hunting*, cf. dialectal English *X is a-hunting (deer)*. The *-ing* derivative was originally the verbal noun. It was reinterpreted as a progressive participle once the locative preposition was lost (Smith 2007).

A recurrent process in West African languages is for the construction (17) to be degraded phonetically, resulting in morphemic regrammaticalizations (Greenberg 1991) and deletions. The degradation can eliminate or disguise the nominalization morphology on the verb, the locative postposition, and/or the 'be' copula (Bybee et al. 1994: chapter 5). An important trigger of reanalysis, inevitable when (17) becomes established as the primary progressive construction, is the expansion of O from just a noun stem (as usual with incorporated

objects) to a full NP that may include determiners, plural marking, possessors, and/or other modifiers. When this happens, it becomes difficult or impossible to parse the verb as a verbal noun, and every component of the construction becomes subject to reanalysis or phonetic degradation. The categorial structure in (17) may evolve into (18), and some of the "Prog" morphemes may be attritted to zero (cf. Claudi 1994: 217–218).

(18) X PROG NP V-PROG PROG

'Be', if phonologically persistent, has been reanalysed in (18) as a progressive morpheme. The verbal noun has been reanalysed as a true verb (no longer a nominal), with progressive inflection (affixal or tonal). The locative postposition has been reanalysed as another progressive morpheme. If the progressive construction expands further to become the all-purpose imperfective (including nonpast habitual), all of the "Prog" forms are further relabeled accordingly (19).

(19) X IPFV NP V-IPFV IPFV

If the prior type of the language was SVO, the result can be a split between SVO perfective (plus VO imperative) on the one hand, and S(infl)OVX imperfective on the other, as for example in Bangime (Heath & Hantgan 2018).

The synchronic progressive in Pere is illustrated in (20). The post-subject form *wɔ̀*, originally 'be', is in the process of being reanalysed as a progressive particle. The open-ended verb (here 'jump', 'cut up', or 'sell') has no clear morphemic or tonal marking as a verbal noun, but differs tonally from perfective and imperfective verb stems in a manner suggesting specialization as a progressive verb form. The progressive verb always ends in H-tone, hence PFV and IPFV *kɔ̀ⁿ* 'be born', but PROG *kɔ́ɔ́ⁿ lɔ̀*. Productively formed VblNs are bisyllabic or longer, have an LH tone overlay, and freely allow the absolute suffix *-à* which does not occur in progressives, Since the PROG verb is no longer clearly nominal, the original locative postposition can no longer be easily parsed as such, and is itself well on the way to being recast as a progressive morpheme.

(20)

a. *ā* *wɔ̄* [*yèlí* *lɔ̀*]
3SG **be/PROG** [jump.**PROG** **LOC/PROG**]
'He/She is jumping.'

b. *kē* *wɔ̀* [[*námw^{n}-ā* *sàà-líí*] *lɔ̀*]
1SG **be/PROG** [[meat-ABS cut.up.**PROG**] **LOC/PROG**]
'I am cutting up the meat.'

c. *kē* *wɔ̀* [[[*ké* *sōgā-à* *gbó*] *jéé*] lɔ̀]
1SG **be/PROG** [[[1SG yam-ABS all] sell.**PROG**] **LOC/PROG**]
'I am selling all my yams.'

This Pere construction is still squarely progressive; it has not spread to become a general imperfective as in Bangime. The fact that the transitive subtype (20b–c) positions the object before the verb creates stresses in what is otherwise a firmly SVO language. Moreover, the object now has full NP form, including the possessor and universal quantifier in (20c), as well as the absolute suffix in (20b) which would not occur in a true compound initial. Similar stress occurs in VblNs in other languages, unless there is a syntactically flexible alternative VblN construction, thus compare English *duck-hunting* (compound that does not allow object expansion) with *hunting those black ducks*.

5. Progressive construction meets phrasal-verb construction

The progressive construction just described places a true direct object in immediate preverbal position, but does not affect PPs and other adjuncts, which remain postverbal. In most cases, the phrasal-verb construction with postverbal object NP and one of the pseudo-postpositions P′ feeds into the progressive construction. Schematically, perfective or general imperfective (21a) corresponds to progressive (21b). As explained above, in (21b) *wɔ̀* is ambiguously 'be' or PROG, and *lɔ̀* is ambiguously LOC or PROG. The NP object is bolded.

(21) a. subject - $V_{PFV/IPFV}$ - **NP** - P′
b. subject - *wɔ̀* - **NP** - V_{PROG} - P′ - *lɔ̀*

(21a–b) are exemplified in (22), using *sá* X *yí* ‘cut X’ from (15) above. In perfective (22a) and imperative (22b), postverbal *námw-à yí* (bolded) might be mistaken for a true PP following an intransitive verb. Such a misparsing is quickly disproven by progressive (22c). Here *námw-à* is in the preverbal object slot, stranding *yí* still in postverbal position where it ends up suffixed to the verb.

(22)

a. *kè* *sá* *námw-à* *yí*
1SG cut.PFV **meat-ABS** **PS.in.front.of**
‘I cut-PAST the meat.’

b. *sá* *námw-à* *yí*
cut.IMPRT **meat-ABS** **PS.in.front.of**
‘Cut the meat!’

c. *kē* *wɔ̀* *námw-à* *sà-yí* *lɔ̀*
1SG be/PROG **meat-ABS** cut.PROG-**PS.in.front.of** LOC/PROG
‘I am cutting the meat.’

The same constructions occur with pseudo-locative lɔ̀, illustrated in (23) by *síí*^{n} X *lɔ̀* ‘load X, fill X’ from (13). Unlike other pseudo-postpositions, *lɔ̀* is optionally omitted in some combinations after a nonpronominal NP (23a). This may be related to speakers’ discomfort with adjacent *lɔ̀* (pseudo-locative) and *lɔ̀* (locative becoming progressive). The pseudo-postposition is more robust with a pronominal object (23b) or when nasalized (23c), compare intransitive *ɲèn-dɔ́* ‘wake up’ (12a). (23c) is the progressive with preverbal object.

(23)

a. *kè* *síí*^{n} *ɲīŋā-ā* (*lɔ̀*)
1sg LOAD.PFV baggage-ABS (PS.LOC)
‘I loaded the baggage.’

b. *kè* *sí*^{n}*-y*^{n}*ā-ndɔ̀*
1SG load.PFV-**3SG.INAN.OBJ-PS.LOC**
‘I loaded it’ (~ ʃĩ^{n}-y^{n}ā-ndɔ̀)

c. *kē* *wɔ̀* *ɲīŋā-ā* *sìì-ndɔ́* *lɔ̀*
1SG be/PROG **baggage-ABS** load.PROG-**PS.LOC** LOC/PROG
'I am loading the baggage.'

One reason for questioning whether *sú* X *lɔ̀* 'resemble X' and *púlɔ̀* X *lɔ̀* 'scold X' from (13b) are really pseudo-postpositions is that X (the NP) does not shift to preverbal position in the progressive for these verbs.

Pseudo-dative *lè* is illustrated in (24), using *síí*^{n} X *lè* 'unload' from (10). (24c) is the PROG

(24)
a. *kè* *síí*^{n} *ɲīŋā-ā* (*lè*)
1SG load.PFV **baggage-ABS** (**PS.DAT**)
'I unloaded the baggage.'
b. *kè* *sí-yā-ndè*
1SG load.PFV-**3SG.INAN.OBJ-PS.DAT**
'I unloaded it.'
c. *kē* *wɔ̀* [[*ɲīŋā-ā* *sìì-ndé*] *lɔ̀*]
1SG be/PROG [[**baggage-ABS** load.PROG-**PS.DAT**] LOC/PROG]
'I am unloading the baggage.'

The progressive test has confirmed the pseudo-postpositional status of *yí* (22c), *lɔ̀* (23c), and *lè* (24c). In each case the NP (X) appears in preverbal position and strands the pseudo-postposition. By contrast, a true PP remains intact and postverbal in the progressive. (25b) is clearly distinct from (21b) above.

(25) a. subject - $V_{PFV/IPFV}$ - [**NP P**]
b. subject - *wɔ̀* - V_{PROG} - *lɔ̀* - [**NP P**]

In (26a–b), the PP (bolded) remains intact in the progressive. The NP (X) is a postpositional complement, not a direct object.

(26)
a. *tíyé-lā-ā* *wɔ̀* *byé* *lɔ̀* [*yá* *dɔ̀ŋgɔ́*] *nà*
child-Ø-ABS be/PROG weep.PROG LOC/PROG [**what? because.of**] Q
'Why is the child weeping?'

b. [*ké déŋgɔ̄-mwⁿ-ā*] *wɔ̀* [*fóó lɔ̀*] [*jòní-pōō-jìʃy-áā lɔ̀*]
[1SG peer-PL-ABS] be/PROG [go.PROG LOC] [**fun-do-place-ABS LOC**]
'My peers are going to the recreation place.'

6. Conclusion

Typology is about data points, checklists, and numbers. Grammatical analysis is about interactions. This is why there is always some friction between typologists and grammarians, in spite of their symbiotic relationships. There is nowhere in the typological literature where the content of this paper can be placed.

To recap, a Pere system of phrasal verbs (combinations of a verb stem and a postposition-like morpheme) has been documented. Separately, the Pere progressive construction has been described. The Pere progressive is typologically unremarkable on its own. However, it interacts in an interesting way with the phrasal-verb system.

One might go so far as to say that the progressive gives the phrasal-verb system the oxygen it needs to survive, by dramatically distinguishing pseudo-postpositions from homophonous true postpositions. Phrasal verbs get no support from language contact; they are absent in Koro, the local lingua franca. Pere intransitive phrasal verbs are structurally opaque due to fusion of stem and pseudo-postposition. The survival of the phrasal-verb system therefore depends on transitives. But without the progressive, transitive […V X P′] is vulnerable to reinterpretation as […V [X P]] with a true postposition. More likely, it can easily be simplified to simple transitive […V X] by omitting the pseudo-postposition, which is already optional in some cases after nonpronominal NPs.

So Pere is not just a tough problem for phylogenetic classification. It teaches us something about how grammars work.

Postscript: Since submitting this paper I have observed similar phrasal verbs in Paleni (closely related to Wara and Natioro) in far southwestern Burkina Faso.

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