

POSTPOSITIONS IN AWUTU

Zygmunt Frajzyngier  
University of Colorado

ABSTRACT

The distribution and function of postpositions in Awutu, a language from the Guang subgroup of Kwa languages are described. Similar morpheme classes, sometimes called locative nouns, exist in other Kwa languages.

The main function of these morphemes is that of marker of case. All of the postpositions can function as markers of the locative case. One postposition,  $\delta$ , can also function as a marker of the "topical" case.

1. Introduction. The aim of this paper is to describe the postpositions in Awutu,<sup>1</sup> a language belonging to the southern branch of the Guang group of Kwa languages.<sup>2</sup>

Such morphemes exist in other Kwa languages, and in the older grammars they were dealt with rather extensively--though not always with sufficient clarity. In Twi, Christaller (1875) described them as a subclass of substantives, and they were called "nouns of place and relation serving as adverbs and postpositions." A similar approach for Ewe is to be found in Westerman (1930). The approach has been carried over in contemporary works as well.<sup>3</sup>

The postpositions we are concerned with are sò, tò, and ò. Although they are etymologically related to the nouns meaning "upper part", "inside, inner part", and most probably "body", they have to be considered as a separate class of morphemes. While nouns having the above stems may appear with or without prefix, i.e. é-sò, é-tò, the postpositions never do. Those three morphemes are mutually exclusive.<sup>4</sup>

2. Distribution of postpositions. All of the three postpositions may follow a. direct object, b. adverb of place, or time, c. after subject of quasi-passive sentence, d. verb.

2.1 Following direct object. The type of sentence in which a postposition follows a direct object in the S.V.O. structure is common to a number of Kwa languages.

In this type of sentence, the postposition specifies which part of an object undergoes the action. By part is meant one of the elements in the following spatial setting: top, inside, outside, of the object concerned. Consider the following examples:

-F3-

- (1) m̀ɔ̀b́íá m̀ɔ̀nábí t̀ɔ̀ ɛ̀dɛ́  
lit. 'he broke his leg in yesterday' 'he broke his leg yesterday'.
- (2) m̀ɔ̀fó pápáhùè ò  
'he/she washed the towel'<sup>5</sup>
- (3) m̀ɔ̀búkì kɛ́ntɛ̀jè s̀ò  
'he opened the basket'
- (4) àj́ánè hwírè̀m m̀ò t̀ɔ̀ bò m̀òk̀òsó  
'the arrow pierced him through his back'

Whenever a postposition occurs in final position of the S.V.O. sentence its semantical load is rather light, but consider the following examples:

- (5) m̀ɔ̀gólí mím̀fánòè ò  
'he cracked my eggs' (action concerns only the surface of the object), but:
- (6) m̀ɔ̀gólí mím̀fánòè  
'he broke my eggs (completely)'

Not always, however, does the presence of a postposition indicate that part of the object being affected by the action. Consider the following examples:

- (7) m̀ɔ̀ééf́ gá́ríè s̀ò  
'she is sieving gari'
- (8) f́éé m̀ì t̀ɔ̀  
'leave me, let me alone'
- (9) m̀ìlíaádò ñcúè s̀ò ná m̀ò  
'I will boil water for him'

In example (8), the postposition t̀ɔ̀ seems to be the only postposition allowed by the verb f́e, and quite possibly it is obligatory with this verb

if the meaning is that of 'release', 'drop', etc.

2.2 Following adverb of place or time. Another major occurrence of post-positions is with adverbial phrases. The adverbial phrase might consist of either adverb of place or adverb of time.

There are two main environments for the occurrence of an adverbial phrase. The first one is with an intransitive verb, which might be a stative verb or a verb of motion.

Example:

- (10) mǎjírè èkúlé ò  
'he is standing by the door'
- (11) àníyò áwíko sò  
'we went to a certain house'
- (12) mǎyò pábíè sò  
'he went down the road'
- (13) né àkùráà cú àlòbíè tò  
'and the mouse came out of the drinking pot'
- (14) mǎán!cínà mǎsé sò<sup>6</sup>  
'she has sat on her father's lap'

The second environment is where the verb is transitive with the object expressed. In such sentences the adverbial phrase must be introduced by the copulative verb *bo* 'to be', or by one of its equivalents. Compare sentences (15) and (16), which are taken from the same text:

- (15) òhíè mǎó!kǔ pábí ò  
'the man is digging by the roadside'
- (16) óhíkò sǎmò bò pábíè sò  
'a certain man met him on the road'

-F5-

The following are further examples for insertion of the copulative

verb:

(17) mǒpá mǐfò bò mǐwíre sò

'he put a pomade on his skin'

(18) mǒja càlé bò m`kòtòkú tò

'he took cola nuts from his pocket'

(19) àmòhũ éyìbíkò kà pábíè sò

'they saw a certain tree lying on the road'

The copulative verb *bo* is introduced when the adverb of place is further modified by another locative phrase, e.g.

(20) mǒbò áwìkò sò bò lólè pábí ò

'he is in a certain house on the lorry road (main street in Awutu)'

When the direct object is shifted before the verb, then the verb *bo* is deleted, e.g.

(21) ó nè mǐfánǒè táa jáà sò

lit. 'you and eggs put fire on' 'put the eggs on the fire'

(22) mǒámpìè á nè tũ jáà tò

lit. 'when he agreed one and (it) put into the fire'

(23) bǐ ó nè mǒ mǐpò éyìbí ò

lit. 'then you with it hang tree on' 'then you hang it on the tree' (refers to an animate object)

(24) mǒámbà pè né àcù òsánìè tũ ádáka tò

'as soon as he came one took the person put (him) into the coffin'

Whenever the head of an adverbial phrase is further modified, the postposition occurs after the last modifier, e.g.

(25) àmòcínà míwòrà áwì dádàbíè sò

'they live in my uncle's old house'

(26) àmòbétè bò sǝmpò ébíbíè tǝ mídí éhéè tǝ

'they took it from the black pot (and) not from the red one'

Note that in the last example, (observe) the deletion of head in the second adverbial phrase, just as in English.

Postpositions mark the adverb of place, even when it is moved for emphasis to the sentence initial position, e.g.

(27) áwì éfúfúrí mǝ sò né òláácínà

'it is in this white house that you will be living'

This sentence is derived through simple transformation from the sentence

òláácínà áwì éfúfúrí mǝ sò

'you will live in this white house'

2.3 After subject of a quasi-passive sentence. Postpositions may also occur after the subjects of quasi-passive sentences in Awutu, which may be derived from sentences with the following structure:

$NP_1$  Vtrans  $NP_2$

in which  $NP_1$  and  $NP_2$  are, respectively, subject and object. Now, to obtain the only possible passive sentence, we must delete  $NP_1$ , i.e. the subject, and move  $NP_2$  before the verb. The verb in such sentences is in the perfective aspect. Through such transformations are derived the following sentences:

(28) mǝránǝ è ò ñgǝlí

'the eggs are cracked' -- which is derived from

án!gǝlí mǝránǝ è ò

'one cracked the eggs'

-F7-

(29) òníntírì ò m̀b̀ò f̀é̀ò

'your head has become nice' (said after a haircut) -- which

may be derived from

ám̀b̀ò òníntírì ò f̀é̀ò

'one made your head nice'

(30) m̀òs̀éyè m̀h̀é́bì ò m̀b̀ò f̀é̀ò éé

'his father said: hey, my son has become nice!'

Postpositions occur also after the subject of a nominal sentence, i.e. a sentence with nominal or adjectival predicate which, in Awutu, may have the copulative verb *bo*, e.g.

(31) àlé áwìlè sò b̀ò f̀ádífí

'this house is clean'

2.4 Following verb. Sentences with postpositions occurring after the verb are derived from several underlying structures. I shall deal first with the type of sentence derived from the two previous major subdivisions, i.e. sentences with a postposition following the direct object and, second, postposition following the adverb of place. From these structures, through deletion of the direct object or of the adverbial phrase, we obtain a structure in which the postposition follows the verb directly.

$$NP_1 \text{ Vtr } NP_2 \text{ Postp.}$$

$$1 \ 2 \ 3 \ 4 \longrightarrow 1 \ 2 \ 4$$

$$\text{and } NP_1 \text{ V Adv. Postp.}$$

place

$$1 \ 2 \ 3 \ 4 \longrightarrow 1 \ 2 \ 4$$

Sentences having the structure on the right side of the formula occur only if the deleted object or adverbial phrase was mentioned previously in the discourse or in the same (usually) conjunctive sentence.

(32) m̀̀ ǹ̀ éwúrl̀̀è bóà k̀̀énté̀̀n àyíns̀̀è né m̀̀gùá s̀̀

'he gathered the bones under the basket and covered (it)'

This sentence is derived from the two sentences:

(33) m̀̀ ǹ̀ éwúrl̀̀è bóà k̀̀énté̀̀n àyíns̀̀è

'he gathered the bones under the basket', and

(34) m̀̀ gùá k̀̀énté̀̀n s̀̀

'he covered the basket'

The following sentence is an example of the deletion of an adverbial phrase:

(35) éb̀̀ ágb̀̀ k̀̀ò ká ñt̀̀rá né m̀̀ cú àt̀̀bíè né m̀̀ǹ̀ né wùrá t̀̀

'a certain big hole was there and he picked up the child and put him in'

The following examples illustrate when the direct object was mentioned previously in the discourse.

(36) m̀̀cá s̀̀ ñǹ̀

'he stepped on (it) today'

(37) m̀̀yè ó ǹ̀ wíré klé ò k̀̀è miabét̀̀

'he said: wrap it in the paper and I will take it'

Deletion of the direct object and/or of the noun in the adverbial phrase is merely a surface phenomenon. This rule works only when the direct object or a nominal in the adverbial phrase is an inanimate noun. In the underlying structure the noun is replaced by an object or anaphoric pronoun. For inanimate nouns, however, no object or anaphoric pronoun can follow the verb, whereas they can do so for animate nouns. Compare the phrase *féé t̀̀* 'leave it', from the following example:

(38) òámá èwóǹ̀fè féé t̀̀ ná òk̀̀



-F9-

'if you do not have strength leave it for tomorrow'

with sentence (8) fée m̀ t̀ 'leave me'

Most sentences in which a postposition follows the verb directly can be accounted for as having an underlying structure V Pro. Postp. In only a few cases does it appear more reasonable to treat a postposition as a particle which, together with the preceding verb, constitutes one lexical item, e.g.

(39) m̀ ǹntírìè túá s̀

'its head hangs down' (lit. on)

(40) ébè ntékét̀ òjá

'the time passed quickly'

### 3. The locative function of postpositions.

In the hitherto described environments, postpositions have had the locative function. Within this function, however, there was a difference, depending upon whether the postposition occurred after the adverbial phrase or whether it appeared after the direct object of the sentence.

If the postposition occurs after the direct object, it simply specifies which part of the object is involved. It may be contrasted with the sentence in which there is no postposition following an object, meaning that the whole object is involved. Compare sentences (5) and (6) ('he cracked my eggs' vs. 'he broke my eggs completely').

The use of postpositions after a direct object is sometimes redundant. Compare sentence (41) (with postposition) and sentence (42) (without postposition), both meaning 'he cut a piece of bread':

(41) m̀tè bídàsè ò m̀plóbí

(42) m̀tè bídàsè m̀plóbí

While occurring with a Noun Phrase following a verb of motion or state, it is the adverbial marker which, together with the preceding noun, forms the adverb of place. The postposition adds the feature [+ locative] to any noun preceding it. Note that place names (nouns meaning "here", "there" and for some reason, the noun "home") do not take postpositions in the locative function, e.g.

(43) ámánfiè mí bò ñklá

'last year I spent in Accra'

(44) èbóólè bé òbáciná šìmpà

'it is better for you to live in Winneba'

(45) nēè bé mò bò ñwáá ñtò

'find out if he is there'

(46) òšì mé né ócù à wusò yó šìmpa

'how do you get from Awutu to Winneba?'

(47) m̀òc̀ò̀ bò m̀ìh̀é̀è̀ é̀d̀é̀

'he passed by my home yesterday'

A similar situation exists in Swahili, in which the locative suffix -ni does not follow the place of nouns (cf. Gregersen 1967:33).

#### 4. 'Topical' function of postposition.

One major function of the postposition has been excluded from the preceding analysis. That function consists of marking the object of verbs for which we may posit a feature [+ mental activity], as opposed to all preceding verbs which had the feature [+ physical]. The verbs in question are those meaning "inform", "quarrel", "think", "describe", "count", "forget", "discuss", "ask", etc.

Only one postposition è is used in this function. The rules for

-F11-

syntactic distribution are the same as for postpositions in the locative function, especially if we treat the adverbial clause as the "directional object" of the verb of motion.

Examples for when there is only one object following the verb:

(48) àmǎtálè àní ò mbémbèmfà

'they talk about us now'

(50) mbémbèmfà mfejwěŋ mīsùkù ò

'now I am thinking about my school'

If there is a direct object of the verb, then the postpositional object is introduced by the copulative verb, just as for postpositions in the locative function, e.g.

(51) èbò tē óáyè òsè bò jwéè ò

'you have to inform your father about the marriage'

(52) olaaca bisa mi asə bo awutu atale o e

'you will write to ask me questions about Awutu language'

(Since this is a line from a letter by Mr. Paul K. Orleanspobee, there is no tone marking.)

With some verbs the second object may be introduced by a serial verbal construction, e.g.

(53) mǎkàkà mǎmá ò ná né

lit. 'he showed his town give her' 'he described his town to her'

This construction is not peculiar to use of the postposition; in fact, it is the only construction used for rendering the benefactive or dative case. Compare it with examples (9) and (54):

(54) ó nè àtálé ébíbìè ná mì

'give me the black dress'

Note that in this function, i.e., after verbs having the feature [+mentall], place names are followed by the postposition just as are any other nouns.

(55) àmǝéétálè bò kàsúwá ò or àmǝéétálè kàsúwá ò

'they are talking about Kasuwa' (market place and village  
8 miles east of Awutu,  
inhabited mainly by Hausas,  
hence its Hausa name)

Whenever a noun is qualified, the postposition occurs after the last qualifier, e.g.

(56) mǝ jwǝ̀ mǝ àbùsúá fò fùù ò

'he thinks about all his family'

Conditions for occurrence of the postposition directly after a verb are the same as for postpositions in the locative function. An object pronoun in underlying structure should be postulated in order to account for the occurrence of the postposition ò after the verb.

(57) áwí mǝ dí tè mǝátálè ò è

'this is the house that I was talking about'

(58) èpí tè àkò àtò bò sò è àmǝásémpé ò

'they forgot about the grinding stone'; lit. 'the stone on which one grinds they forgot about (it)'

5. Place of postpositions in Awutu grammar. Fillmore (1968) treats prepositions as the surface realization of the underlying element "case". Case identifies the underlying syntactic-semantic relationship.

It seems possible to treat postpositions in Awutu as the surface realization of two underlying cases, viz. of the locative case and of a case which, for the lack of a better term, is tentatively called "topical", since it designates the topic of a verb having the feature [+mentall].

-F13-

The locative case designates the object of a directional or stative verb (Lyons 1968).

As the marker of locative case, the postposition is obligatory unless it is replaced by a noun assuming the function of the postposition.<sup>7</sup> As markers of locative case, postpositions do not occur with nouns already having the feature [+ locative]. As marker of the "topical" case (note that a statement in terms of the direct or indirect object would be less precise), the postposition is obligatory as well, and no other noun or other postposition can be substituted for it. Moreover, in contrast to the markers of locative case, the marker of the "topical" case is semantically empty.

Treating postpositions as markers of case form provides the rule for their usage as well. Whenever the "stative", "directional", or [+ mental] verb is chosen, one of the postpositions must be used. However, sentences (1), (2), (3), (4), (5) exemplify the use of postpositions with the direct object of a transitive verb. It is still a locative function, but use of the postposition is optional, as shown by (6) vs. (5).

As a solution to those structures in which a postposition with the locative meaning may occur after a direct object, the following observation should be made. When there is no postposition following a direct object, the object as a whole is concerned; when the postposition does occur there, however, the part of the object involved is specified.

In such instances the selection of postpositions is usually governed by the verb, e.g. the verb fo 'wash', which requires the postposition ò, with implication that the action applies to the surface of the object, e.g.

(59) fò mì mbàámá ò

'wash my cloth'

The verb *fe* 'to release' occurs with the postpositions *t̂*, e.g. (8), (30); and the verb *kle* 'to wrap' occurs only with the postposition *ò*, e.g.

(60) *m̂ nè wíré klè àkùtú ò*

'he wrapped the oranges with the paper'

Compare also example (37).

6. Selection of postpositions. Three postpositions may occur as markers of the locative case: *sò*, *t̂*, *ò*. They have the same function, but different meanings. It has been shown that occurrence of the postposition depends upon choice of the verb. But the choice of which postposition depends upon several factors.

Since postpositions in the locative function are semantically non-empty, choice among them is essentially arbitrary. There are, nevertheless, examples in which selection of the postposition is governed by the verb or by a nominal phrase preceding the postposition.

For selection governed by a nominal phrase, compare the two following sentences with the same verb *kã* 'to lie'.

(61) *àkùtú kã òpl̂sè sò*

lit. 'an orange lies on the table' 'there is an orange on the table'

(62) *èbámì ñkãní miàl̂bìè ò*

lit. 'cracks lie on my drinking pot' 'my drinking pot is cracked'

Note that in sentence 62 the verb *kã* has "plural form".

For selection of the postposition governed rather by a verb, compare sentence (19) with sentence (63):

(63) *àlé éyì m̂ bíà èpábìè t̂ ò p̂ánk̂ m̂ fà*

'this tree lay across the road only in the morning'

-F15-

I do not pretend to have accounted for all occurrences of postpositions in the Awutu language in this paper. There are a few examples of postpositions as parts of words in some ossified constructions, e.g. *m̄bíàsòábí* 'divisional chiefs', (lit. 'stools - on - people'). Another example is of postpositions in some genitival constructions, e.g. *àmò t̄ò òsònkófà* 'each of them', etc. The above constructions, however, are analyzed as various types of nominal phrases.

## N O T E S

1. This paper is based on material I collected during the summer of 1970, at Awutu, 23 miles west of Accra.

I wish to thank the West African Linguistic Society for the grant-in-aid which made my trip possible. I am also deeply grateful to my friends, Mr. F. B. Armah-Agyeman and Paul Kwao Orleanspobee, for the time and energy they devoted to helping me with my work.

An earlier version of this paper was read before the Linguistic Circle, University of Colorado, in March 1971.

2. In Stewart (1970) Awutu is classified as a member of the Awuto-Larteh subgroup of Guang (Guan) which, in turn, is the third major subdivision within Volta-Comoe languages (Greenberg's Akan).

3. For a similar approach, see Welmers (1946) and Redden et al (1963). This approach may be justified on etymological grounds, since all of those postpositions are related to nouns meaning "top", "inside", "back", "underpart", etc.
4. Cognates of the first two of them are described in Painter's (1970) book on Gonja phonology. The grammatical description is set within the framework of the tagmemic grammar, and the "placers" so and to are said to belong to various slots within the sentence. One of them is the adverbial slot. Remarkably, they are not considered as nouns by Painter.
5. Since there is no gender distinction in Awutu, the examples that follow in 3rd p.sg. will be translated as 'he'.

Unless there is a semantical load linked with a postposition, no literal translation is provided.

6. In accord with current usage in works on African languages, ! stands for downstep.
7. To those nouns belong ñsí - 'back'; áńđ - 'mouth', 'edge'; àhéhé - 'face', and a few others. Despite the following example:

ó nê àbíà tù òplǎéhé ñsí

'put the stool behind the table'

they have not been considered as postpositions on the ground of their distribution. They can be followed by postpositions described in this paper, e.g.

ó nê àbíà mǎ tù áwíéhé àhéhé tǎ

'put this stool in front of the house'



-F17-

REFERENCES

- Christaller, J. G. (1875) A Grammar of the Asante and Fante Language  
Called TSHI. Basel:
- Fillmore, Charles J. (1968) The Case for Case, in Emmon Bach and Robert  
T. Harms, editors, Universals in Linguistic Theory, New York:  
Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Gregersen, Edgar (1967) Prefix and Pronoun in Bantu, Indiana University  
Publications in Anthropology and Linguistics. Memoir 21 of  
the IJAL.
- Lyons, John (1968) Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics. Cambridge:  
Cambridge University Press.
- Painter, Colin (1970) Gonja. A Phonological and Grammatical Study.  
Bloomington: Indiana University Press; The Hague: Mouton.
- Redden, J. E., Owusu N., and associates. (1963) TWI. Basic Course,  
Washington, D. C.: Foreign Service Institute.
- Stewart, John (1970) Tongue root position in the Volta-Comoe languages  
and its significance for the reconstruction of the original  
Bantu vowel sounds. African Language Studies, XI, pp. 340-350.
- Welmers, William Everett, A Descriptive Grammar of Fanti, Language  
Dissertation No. 39, Suppl. to Language, vol. 22, No. 3,  
July-September 1946.
- Westermann, Diedrich (1930) A Study of the Ewe Language, London:  
Oxford University Press.