SERIAL VERBS IN TRANSITION

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1. Introduction

Serial verb constructions are widespread in the Kwa languages of West Africa. Often these constructions are relatable to two independent sentences, but in the serial construction the verb phrases necessarily refer to sub-parts or aspects of a single overall event. Consider an example in Ewe (from Ansre [1966b]):

(1) é nò tsi
    'He drank water.'
(2) é ku
    'He died.'
(3) é nò tsi éyé wò ku
    'He drank water, and he died.'
(4) é nò tsi ku
    'He drank water died'
    'He drowned.'

If (1) and (2) occur in a coordinate construction, as in (3), a close contextual relationship between the two verb phrases is not necessarily implied. However, when the two verb phrases occur in a serial construction, as in (4) they represent components of a single event, in this case a drowning.

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1 For helpful discussions and comments on an earlier draft, I am indebted to Karen Courtenay, Talmy Givón, Larry Hyman, Michael Noonan, Sandra Thompson and William Welmers. Special appreciation goes to Enoch Aryee and Yemisi Oluṣola for sharing their intuitions on Ga and Yoruba, and to my Ewe teachers Gilbert Ansre and Fue Gbedemah.

2 Tones are marked as follows, except where unmarked in my sources: ' high, ' low, - mid, \ lowered mid, ' downstepped high.
Often the meaning of a verb in a serial construction can be identified in terms of case relationship and can be translated with a preposition in English. E.g., in Igbo \( \text{jì} \) expresses Instrumental relationship (from Welmers and Welmers [1968]).

(5) \( \text{ọ jì nàmà à bëè ànlụ} \)

he have knife this cut meat

'He cut the meat with this knife.'

In Twi \( \text{ma} \) expresses Dative and Benefactive relationship (from Christaller [1881]):

(6) \( \text{ọ yè adwuma ma me} \)

he does work give me

'He works for me.'

Other case-type concepts often expressed by serial constructions include Locative, Manner, Comitative, Accusative, Direction and Comparison.

Linguists do not agree on a synchronic derivation for such constructions. Stahlke [1970] notes that serial verb constructions can be differentiated syntactically and semantically from coordinate structures, and that verbs in serial constructions must agree in tense, aspect, mood and polarity. He considers the possibility that verbs in series are case markers, but his data and interpretations do not support this as a synchronic analysis.

Bamgboše [1972] differentiates between two types of serial verbal construction: a **linking** type which can be derived from two or more underlying sentences, and a **modifying** type which can only be derived from a single underlying sentence. In the second type, the modifying verb does not have the full range of verbal characteristics, and it merely modifies the meaning of the main verb.

Awobuluyi [1973] challenges the category of modifying verbs for Yoruba. He notes that, in comparing a verb occurring as the only verb in a sentence with the same verb in a serial construction, the primary difference may be in the English translation. He suggests that most of the so-called modifying verbs are better analyzed as
plain verbs, adverbs, prepositions or components of 'splitting verbs'.

In a language like Yoruba today, there are a variety of complicated serial-type constructions. Although prepositions are rare in these languages, they do exist. So do constructions for which the choice between verb in series and preposition (or adverb) is not clear. I would like to consider how the language may have arrived at its present situation. Although written records for these languages do not go back very far in time, we can make inferences about earlier forms based on a comparison of structures in related languages, guided by our knowledge of linguistic universals.

First, I will consider the evidence for Locative prepositions having evolved from Locative verbs in serial constructions. Then I will consider the possibility that a Comitative verb is a historical source for Comitative, Instrumental and Manner prepositions, as well as conjunctions and adverbs.

2. Verbs in series becoming prepositional case-markers: Locatives as evidence.

Locative prepositions in Kwa are often homophonous with locative verbs, verbs of possession, and incompletive aspect markers. Evidence suggests that this homophony is not accidental, and that locative prepositions have developed historically from verbs in serial constructions.

2.1. Locative verb and verbid/preposition in Ewe, Twi and Gā. Ewe has a locative verb, lè 'be at', as in:

(7) agbalèa lè kplōa dzi
    book-the be-at table-the top
    'The book is on the table.'

The same word occurs in a serial-like construction as in:

(8) me fle agbalè lè kēta
    I buy book be-at Kēta
    'I bought a book in Kēta.'
Ansre [1966a] distinguishes (8) and (9) from regular serial verb constructions. He says that \( \textbf{I} \) in sentences like (8) and (9) combines with the following nominal group to form an adverbial group. This \( \textbf{I} \) does not inflect; it has a homophone which is a verb, to which it may be historically related. Ansre identifies four other Ewe words with parallel characteristics (they all have preposition-like translations in English) and gives them the name verbid.

Each of Ansre's verbids is similar in meaning to its homophonomous verb. Both verbs and verbids take object pronouns, and each verbid takes the same range of object words as its corresponding verb does. \( \textbf{I} \) can occur in the frame \( S_{[NP \textit{NP}]} \) like a verb. When \( \textbf{I} \) occurs in the frame \( S_{[NP \textit{VP} \textit{NP}]} \), it does not inflect, and it does not carry the main message of the sentence as a main verb does; this \( \textbf{I} \) and its noun phrase object form a phrase which adverbially modifies the main verb. Such semantic and syntactic differences have been represented elsewhere by the grammatical terms verb and preposition. Why does Ansre coin the term verbid instead of using preposition? Ansre doesn't discuss this, but I assume that he wishes to recognize the verbal quality of \( \textbf{I} \) (at least in historical origin) while acknowledging that the \( \textbf{I}-\text{NP} \) phrase in (8) and (9) is differentiated from a verb phrase syntactically.

Note that an option open to Ansre is to call \( \textbf{I} \) a verb in sentences like (8) and (9) as well as (7), and to attribute its semantic and syntactic restrictions in the frame \( S_{[NP \textit{VP} \textit{NP}]} \) to its occurrence in this particular environment. From Ansre's choice of verbid rather than verb, we can infer that he regards the differences between the \( \textbf{I}-\text{NP} \) phrase in (7) as opposed to (8) and (9) as due to grammatical category differences.

Ansre does not explicitly identify verbid as a grammatical category. He provides no trees or labeled bracketings for either type of sentence.
But I infer from his discussion that, for sentences like (8) and (9), a surface structure like (10) is rejected:

(10)  

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S
  /\  
NP VP VP
  /\  /\ 
N  V NP V NP
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me fle agbalë le keta
I buy book be-at Keta

in favor of something like:

(11)  

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S
  /\  
NP VP ADV
  /\  /\  
N  V NP VERBID NP
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me fle agbale le keta
I buy book (be)at Keta

The label preposition would serve just as well as verbid in (11); but the use of the label verbid serves to acknowledge that the category is related to the category verb. As described by Westermann [1930a, p. 129], "Many verbs when they stand next to others play the part of English prepositions, adverbs, or conjunctions. Now many of these verbs, in playing the part of prepositions, etc., begin to lose their verbal characteristics in that they are no longer conjugated: they thus begin to become form words."

Twi has a locative verb wo which is semantically comparable to Ewe le E.g.,

(12)  

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0 wo mamfe
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he be-at Mamfe

'He is at Mamfe.'
(13) ɔ wo ɔdan mu
he be-at house inside
'He is in the house.'

(where mu is a noun, as is dzi in (7)). Like Ewe lè in (8) and (9), this verb also occurs in the frame:

(14) S[NP VP____NP]S

as in:

(15) me hũũ no wo mamfē
I saw him be-at Mamfe
'I saw him at Mamfe.'

(16) ɔ ye adwuma wo ɔdan mu
he do work be-at house inside
'He is working in the house.'

Ordinarily, Twi verbs in frame (14) show a range of verb-like characteristics—i.e., they are conjugated for tense and aspect, take pronominal prefixes, and take negative prefixes. However, wo is one of a very limited number of verbs (Christaller lists three) that "have so far stripped off their verbal character and have become mere particles, as they do not assume any prefixes, not even the pronominal prefix me, nor the negative prefix, except when they are used, not as prepositional auxiliary verbs or particles, but as principal verbs" (Christaller [1875, p. 76]).

The Twi locative situation parallels Ewe; to the extent that lè as a verbid in frame (14) can be distinguished from lè as a main verb, the same distinction applies to wo. For wo and the other Twi verbs which have lost their verbal character, a verbid or prepositional phrase configuration like (11) reflects the extent to which they have drifted from the serial pattern of other verbs.

Like Ewe and Twi, Gā has a Locative preposition homophous with a Locative verb, e.g.,
Ordinarily, in a serial construction both verbs take the same tense-aspect and negation markers; but the preposition ye does not, as seen in (18). But even when ye occurs as the only verb in a sentence, as in (17), it appears to be missing some verb capabilities. It doesn't take the usual range of tense-aspect and negation markers; to express these meanings, other verbs are used. It may be that ye was formerly fully verbal and is now going through a transition stage to a solely prepositional identity.

In Ewe, Twi and Gã, the evidence for historical relationship between the locative verb and the locative verbid/preposition is fairly substantial (identical phonological shape and identical sets of co-occurring object noun phrases). In two related languages, Yoruba and Igbo, there are locative words which are quite clearly prepositional, but the relationship between these prepositions and verbs is not firmly established. I would like to discuss evidence for such a relationship and suggest that Yoruba and Igbo represent later stages of the process that Ewe, Twi and Gã are in now.

2.2. Locative preposition in Yoruba and Igbo. In Yoruba, ní is a preposition-like word that takes a noun phrase object and is often translatable as 'in' or 'at'. E.g.,

(19) ò se ìṣe ní îlè
   he do work at house
   'He worked at home.'

(20) ò wà ní îbádá
   he be at Ibadan
   'He is at Ibadan.'
The particle ní does not occur as a locative main verb. In serial-like constructions like (19) and (20), it doesn't conjugate for tense or aspect, and it doesn't negate. Transitive true verbs take a third person pronoun object in the form of a repeated stem vowel on a predictable tone, but Locative ní doesn't. Verbs can undergo a form of focus-placement transformation, but locative ní can't. Thus, in (21) mú and wá are both verbs and can be fronted in mimúwá; however in (22) së is a verb but ní is not, and there is no analogous *șišení.

(21) mō múiwē wā Tlē ➞ mimúwá nī mō mú iwē wā Tlē
I take book come house
'I brought a book home.'

(22) mō sē ışé nī ıko ➞ *șišení nī mō sē ışé nī ıko
I do work at farm
'I worked at the farm.'

Locative ní is clearly not a verb. But ní does occur as a main verb meaning 'have', 'possess', 'be at', as in:

(23) ó ní ıwō
he have money
'He has money.'

To the English speaker, the locative preposition at and the verb have don't appear to have much in common. However, a number of languages do show parallel forms for location and possession. Twi, for example, uses the verb wō for both location and possession: 3

(24) mewō ıdan no mu
I-be-at house the inside
I am in the house.

(25) mewō ıdan bi
I-possess house a
'I have a house.'

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3 This relationship is discussed in detail in Ellis and Boadi [1969].
In Ga, the locative verb ye also indicates possession, as in:

(17) tetë ye j'la
Tete be-at house
'Tete is at home.'
can also be glossed as 'Tete has a house.' And in Ewe the Locative
verb le occurs in an idiom expressing possession, as in:

(27) agbale le asinye
book be-at hand-my
'I have a book.'

This use of parallel forms for location and possession is by no means
limited to Kwa languages. Other instances include the verb van in
Hungarian, the suffix lla in Finnish, ag in Irish and u in Russian. 4
This parallel is too widespread to be coincidence; a historical relation­
ship is suggested. Lyons [1967] claims that in many and perhaps
all languages existential and possessive constructions derive (both
synchronously and diachronically) from locatives. Other studies
strongly support a universal relationship between location and possession.5

The data from the related languages Ewe, Ga and Twi, plus strong
evidence for a universal linguistic relationship, then, suggests

4 Data from Edith Moravcsik, Helen Martucci and Michael Noonan,
personal communication.

5 Lyons [1967] suggests that, where locatives and possessives are
distinct, the development has arisen based on syntactic differences
corresponding to animate and inanimate nouns. He discusses the rela­
tionship further in Lyons [1968] and gives examples. Data from thirty­five languages in Clark [1970] support the locative-possessive rela­
tionship and relate the parameters of animacy, definiteness and word
order. The relationship is explored further in Anderson [1971], who
notes that studies have pointed out the comparative recent-ness of
have-type constructions in various Indo-European languages, and the
existence of earlier 'possessive' constructions more obviously parallel
to 'ordinary' locative clauses.
that the homophony between the Yoruba locative preposition and verb of possession reflects a historical relationship. Both have probably developed from an earlier locative verb form, reconstructed \( ní \) 'be at.'

One of the few words in Igbo that can be called prepositions is \( ná \), translatable as 'at', 'on', 'in', 'to', as in:

\[
(28) \quad \delta \text{ bì } ná \text{ áká }
\]

'He lives at Awka.'

The verb root 'possess' in Igbo is unfortunately \( ðwè \), not \( ná \), and the closest locative verb is \( nà \). There is, however, a verb \( ná \) meaning 'take' or 'receive,' which is semantically not too distant from 'have.' There is also an incomplete aspect marker \( ná \), as in:

\[
(29) \quad \delta \text{ nà } ðdî \text{ ndî } ná \text{ áŋù } ðmànyà
\]

'He is eating and drinking.'

Welmers (in press) makes a good case for relating this aspect marker historically to a locative verb reconstructed \( ná \) 'be at'. The semantic relationship can be seen if we think of (29) as meaning something like 'He is at eating and drinking'. Compare this with the a prefix in the archaic English he went a-hunting which comes from the Old English locative on (Robert Stockwell, personal communication).

Parallel to Igbo incomplete marker \( ná \) in (29) is the Yoruba incomplete marker \( ná \), which is probably similarly related to the Yoruba locative \( ní \). Homophonous forms for location, possession and incomplete aspect occur also in Ewe; \(^7\) compare \( lè \) in (7), (27) and (30):

\(^6\) The vowel in \( ná \) is deleted when the following word begins with a vowel. Before consonants its tone is low.

\(^7\) Evidence for the development of auxiliaries from verbs is not uncommon in Kwa languages, so the similarity of verb and aspect marker should not surprise us. Stahlke [1970] shows auxiliaries just beginning to be differentiated from verbs in series in Yatye—e.g., \( ãgà \) as principal verb means 'wander', but in a serial construction is a Habitual auxiliary.
Homophonous forms for location, possession and incompleted action are also found in unrelated languages, suggesting a possible universal relationship. It occurs, for example, in Mandarin Chinese and Thai (both of which, like Kwa languages, have verbs in series). Mandarin has zài as a Locative verb and preposition and as an aspect marker. Thai has yùu as Locative verb and as aspect marker. (Data from Sandra Thompson and Rasami Karnchanachari, personal communication.) Irish uses ag for location, possession and incompleted action; Finnish has ssa as a locative ending and in a construction indicating incompleted action (data from Michael Noonan and Helen Martucci; personal communication).

Thus, data from related languages and evidence for a possible linguistic universal support the analysis that the Igbo preposition nà (as well as the incompletion aspect marker nà) has evolved from a locative verb.

To summarize: Locative prepositions are homophous with Locative verbs in Ewe, Twi and Gâ. The prepositions have developed historically from verbs in serial constructions. The Locative in a serial construction has lost its verb properties—it no longer takes tense-aspect and negation markers, and it no longer undergoes transformations that regularly apply to verbs—leaving us with a preposition. Yoruba and Igbo represent a later stage of a parallel historical development, where the homophous Locative verb is no longer present.

3. From Comitative verb to preposition and beyond

Evidence suggests that, just as the Locative verb phrase has become a prepositional phrase, so has the Comitative verb phrase. Because of its Comitative semantics, this phrase has also come to be treated as part of a noun phrase, with the former Comitative verb now functioning as a subordinating conjunction. The preposition, minus its object,
also occurs as an adverb.

3.1. Comitative verb and preposition in Yoruba, Ewe, Fon and Ga.

Yoruba has a verb kp\l6 'be included among, be together with', as in:

(31) ́iwé náà \ kp\l6 àw\ó tí mó ra

book the SHT be-included-among those that I buy
'The book is included in those that I bought'.

(32) fèmí \ kp\l6 àw\ó olè

Femi SHT be-included-among PL thief
'Femi is one of the thieves'.

Since the verb status of kp\l6 is not always recognized, it is worth noting that it has the following verb characteristics:

(i) A non-pronoun subject preceding it ends in a high tone, referred to here as Subject High Tone (SHT), in some constructions, as in (31) and (32).

(ii) It is subject to the focus-placement transformation; compare (32) and (33).

(iii) It takes tense-aspect markers, as in (34).

(33) kpíkp\l6 ní fèmí \ kp\l6 àw\ó olè

Femi SHT be-included-among PL thief
'Femi is really one of the thieves'.

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8I follow Courtenay's [1968] phonological analysis in representing Yoruba; a tone marked high is phonetically rising after low; a tone marked low is phonetically falling after high.

9Abraham [1958] considers kp\l6 to be an abbreviation for wà kp\l6 in sentences like (31). However, kp\l6 and wà kp\l6 are not always synonymous. Thus, (31) and (35) are not necessarily synonymous:

(35) ́iwé náà \ wà kp\l6 àw\ó tí mó ra

book the SHT be with those that I buy
'The book is with those that I bought'.

Kp\l6 is a distinct verb, not derived from wà kp\l6
Kpélú has other properties that parallel those of a limited set of Yoruba verbs that are apparently derived historically from verb+noun combinations:

(i) It takes the possessive rather than the object pronoun as its semantic object.

(ii) A mid tone precedes consonant-initial object nouns. (A common example of this set of verbs is kpári 'finish', which is apparently derived historically from kpâ 'kill' + ōrî 'head'; thus 'finish the work' is comparable to 'kill the head of the work'.) As is the case with many verbs in this set, verb and noun source components are no longer readily identifiable. Semantically comparable forms include kpé 'assemble', 'collect', 'gather'; and lù ú come into contact with it', 'mix it'; whether these are related to kpélú or not is open to speculation.

This word kpélú occurs in serial-like constructions where it has a Comitative meaning, as in:

(36) mó wà níbè kpélú ăkî
    I be there with Akin
    'I was there with Akin'.

It also occurs in Instrumental and Manner contexts, as in (38) and (39):

(37) ő gé ĕră kpélú ăkî
    he cut meat with Akin
    'He cut the meat with Akin'.

(38) ő gé ĕră kpélú ḍbē
    he cut meat with knife
    'He cut the meat with a knife'.

(34) kpíkpélú ní fémí màs kpélú àwâ ọlè
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    he cut meat with knife
    'He cut the meat with a knife'.
Although the kpɛlù-NP phrase can have Comitative, Instrumental or Manner meaning, confusion of meaning is unlikely, because in general a [+Concrete, +Animate] NP indicates a Comitative reading, a [+Concrete, -Animate] NP indicates an Instrumental reading, and a [-Concrete, -Animate] NP indicates a Manner reading. (Note that English also uses a single preposition, with, for Comitative, Instrumental and Manner, as illustrated by the English glosses for (37) - (39).) In a sentence with an Agentive subject, like (37), the broadening of the meaning of kpɛlù to include Instrumental when followed by a [-Animate] NP, as in (38), is plausible. A quick check shows that within Kwa the same form is used for both Comitative and Instrument in (at least) Ewe, Gã, Fon, Twi, Igbo and Gwari; outside Kwa the same is true for Fe?fe?, Dagbani, Hausa, French, Romanian, German and Hungarian; the ease with which examples can be found suggests that this relationship is widespread in languages of the world. The further semantic extension of kpɛlù to take abstract nouns in Manner phrases as in (39) is equally plausible; at least ten of the thirteen languages listed use the same form for Manner.10

Historically, the semantic extension of kpɛlù may have taken this route, from Comitative to Instrument to Manner. Syntactically, kpɛlù in a serial verb construction lost its verb properties and survived as a preposition, semantically subordinate to the principal verb.

The preposition kpɛlù can be distinguished from the verb. When kpɛlù-NP functions as a Comitative, Instrumental or Manner phrase, it can be fronted and questioned, unlike a verb phrase, e.g.,

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10 Fon data from Alapini [1969]; Gwari and Fe?fe? from Hyman [1971]; Dagbani from Wilson [1970]; Hausa from Paul Schachter, personal communication; French, Romanian and German from Georgette Silva, personal communication; Hungarian from Edith Moravcsik, personal communication.
Was it with respect that they greeted him?'
The conjunction ati 'and' conjoins noun phrases but not verb phrases; it also conjoins prepositional phrases, as in:

(41)   daa se ooju ni ilé ati ni sa jà
we-Fut cook food at home and at market
'We will cook at home and at the market'.

It also conjoins kpélú-NP phrases, as in

(42)   daa kí i kpélú ɔwọ ati kpélú irlè
we-FUT greet him with respect and with humility
'We shall greet him with respect and with humility'.

This indicates that when kpélú functions as a case marker, as in (36) - (42), it is a preposition rather than a verb.

The preposition kpélú is clearly related to the verb kpélú in Yoruba. There is a phonologically similar preposition, kple , in Ewe, which occurs with the same range of meaning: Comitative, Instrumental and Manner, as in:

(43)   kofi yi asime kple akuwa
Kofi go-to market with Akuwa
'Kofi went to market with Akuwa'.

(44)   akuwa gbà frese la kple kpe
Akuwa break window the with stone
'Akuwa broke the window with a stone'.

(45)   mawo kple dzidzo gà
I-FUT-do-it with delight great
'I shall do it with the greatest delight'.

However, in Ewe there is no verb kple. Ansre [1966a] classifies kple as a verbid, the only one without a homophonous verb partner. Like Ansre's other verbids, it occurs in serial-like constructions and does not inflect; with its NP object it forms an adverbial group. Since all
the other verbids have related meanings as regular verbs, and since
the syntactic behavior of kplé parallels that of the other verbids,
it is possible that kplé was a regular verb at an earlier point in
time. Paralleling Yoruba kpélú, it may have meant something like
'be together with'. There are phonologically and semantically similar
verbs in Ewe and related languages:

(46) Ewe: kpé 'meet', 'come in contact'
      Ga: kpe 'meet', 'collide'
      kplé 'agree with'
      Fon: kple 'assemble', 'bring together'
      Yoruba: kpé 'assemble', 'collect'
      Igbo: kpá 'collect', 'keep'
      kpọ 'accompany', 'take along'

It is possible that some of these verbs may be ultimately related
historically to Ewe kplé and Yoruba kpélú.\footnote{11}

Fon has a similar preposition, kpôdô···kpan, for Comitative,
Instrumental and Manner phrases, as in:

(47) n na l kpôdô kakpô kpan \footnote{12}
      I FUT go with Kakpo
      'I will go with Kakpo'.

(48) e hou dan kpôdô kpô kpan
      he hit snake with stick
      'He hit the snake with a stick'.

\footnote{11}{In Gã there is a 'multiple' verb form, CV \(\rightarrow\) CVlV \(\rightarrow\) ClV; this process may be responsible historically for the l in the Gã verb
form kplé 'agree with', and a similar process in Ewe could conceivably
have produced Ewe kplé from kpé 'meet'. It is tempting to speculate that
the Fon preposition kpôdô (see below) could have resulted from a mono-
syllabic verb by a similar process, since l and d are plausible phono-
logical correspondences.}

\footnote{12}{The only Fon source available to me is Alapini [1969]; the Fon
examples here are as Alapini gives them, with French glosses translated.
He does not mark tone; ð represents a vowel between [o] and [u], and
Vn represents a nasal vowel; ou represents [u].}
There appears to be no homophonous verb in Fon. Sometimes kpôdô occurs as a preposition without kpan, and under certain circumstances the kpan occurs as kpô. (Looking for possible cognates, it is interesting to note that in certain uses Ewe kpîlé occurs as kpákpîlé; and Zimmermann [1858] lists the Gã verb kpã 'bind each other', 'make a covenant'.)

Since Fon is also a serializing language, and the function and properties of the preposition parallel those in Yoruba and Ewe, it is likely that this preposition too evolved from a verb in a serial construction.

Not surprisingly, Gã has a similar preposition, kê, occurring with Comitative, Instrumental and Manner noun phrases in the same serial like construction, _S[NP VP ___ NP]_S. Kê patterns with verbs in Gã syntactically to some extent; it takes object pronouns, and an inanimate third person singular pronoun object is realized as zero, as demonstrated by Trutenau [1973]. In fact, Trutenau argues for an analysis of kê as a verb, and Zimmermann [1858] and Dakubu [1970] call it an auxiliary verb. But kê has a number of properties that distinguish it from regular verbs. For example, it does not occur without another verb in the sentence, and it does not inflect. Also, the kê-NP phrase can occur either before or after the VP; when it occurs before the VP, the following verb never has a subject pronoun; and when kê occurs followed by a high tone verb prefix (e.g., perfect or subjunctive) it assimilates to the high tone and the prefix vowel is deleted. Kê has more idiosyncrasies, occurring in constructions where no regular verb occurs (see below). Native speaker intuitions conflict regarding verb status for kê. In a synchronic analysis kê would be a defective verb at best, and a number of special features and exceptions would be needed to account for its idiosyncrasies. Given its wide range of occurrences in the language today, we can't satisfactorily categorize kê as a verb, and such a radical extension is not motivated by other facts of the language. But kê does have many characteristics that are unmistakably verb-like,
and they provide strong evidence that its historical source was a verb.

To summarize, the Yoruba Comitative verb kpélú in a serial construction lost its verb properties, functioning as a Comitative preposition with animate nouns. Later, it occurred with inanimate nouns with Instrumental meaning, and then with abstract nouns in Manner phrases. A parallel historical development probably accounts for the semantically similar prepositions Ewe kplá, Fon kpódo ... kpan and Gā kē, even though there are not homophonous verbs today in these languages. As case-marking prepositions without homophonous verbs, they are analogous to the Locative prepositions in Yoruba and Igbo discussed in section 2.2. above.

3.2 Comitative verb and conjunction in Yoruba, Ewe, Fon and Gā. When the preposition kpélú in Yoruba precedes a Comitative (animate) NP in a transitive\textsuperscript{13} sentence like (37), it is preferable for the kpélú-NP phrase to follow the subject and precede the verb phrase, as in:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{l}
(50) ò kpélú ákī gē ṣrā \\
he with Akin cut meat \\
He cut the meat with Akin.
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

In post-VP positions as in (37) the prepositional phrase is semantically and syntactically adverbial. However, it may be that, in pre-VP position as in (50) the kpélú-NP phrase is part of the subject NP. Compare the placement of the Subject High Tone in (51) and (52):

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{l}
(51) #fēmī kpélú ákī gē ṣrā \\
Femi SHT with Akin cut meat \\
(52) fēmī kpélú ákī ' gē ṣrā \\
Femi with Akin SHT cut meat \\
'Femi cut the meat with Akin'. ('Femi and Akin cut the meat').
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{13}Transitive is used in the 'notional' sense of Lyons [1968], with an Agentive animate subject.
The ungrammaticality of (51) and the placement of the Subject High Tone in (52) indicates that femTi kpêlû ãkî is the subject, not just femî. The possibility of translating the subject of (52) as 'Femi and Akin' or 'Femi with Akin' suggests that the Comitative verb kpêlû has extended its role to serve as a subordinating conjunction.

The situation is comparable in Ewe; Comitative phrases like kpîle akuwa 'with Akuwa' in (44) can occur before the VP, as in:

(53) kofi kpîle akuwa yi asime
    Kofi with Akuwa go-to market
    'Kofi went to market with Akuwa', 'Kofi and Akuwa went to market'.

In this environment kpîle is usually translated as 'and'. Ansre [1966b] differentiates between kpîle as a verbid (preposition) in an adverbial group and kpîle as an additive linker in a nominal group. This additive linker translates the English noun phrase conjunction 'and'. It appears that, paralleling Yoruba, a Comitative verb has become a conjunction. In Yoruba there is another word, âtî 'and', which functions as a coordinating conjunction; kpêlû is semantically subordinating, even within noun phrases. In Ewe there is no other word functioning as a coordinating conjunction, so kpêlû has moved further than kpêlû, taking on coordinating as well as subordinating function.

I do not have sufficient data on Fon to determine whether the verb-to-conjunction development has taken place, but it is interesting to note that apparently Comitative but not Instrumental or Manner phrases can precede the VP, as in:

(54) to tche kpôdô no tche kpô na wa
    male parent with female parent FUT come
    'My father and mother will come'.

It may be that post-VP kpôdô ... kpàn is semantically adverbial, and pre-VP kpôdô ... kpô is semantically conjunctive. The development in Fon appears to resemble Yoruba.

In Gâ the kî-NP phrase can occur before the VP when the NP is Comitative as well as Instrumental or Manner. In a sentence with a
Comitative NP (when the subject and the object of \( k' \) are both animate) like (55), both adverbial and conjunctive readings are possible:

(55)  
\[
\underline{\text{\( ayi \)}} \ k' \ t'ett\ f' \ w'\text{\( n'\)}
\]

Ayi with Tete drink soup

(a) 'Ayi drank soup with Tete'.
(b) 'Ayi and Tete drank soup'.

The ambiguity of (55) suggests that different syntactic structures underlie the (a) and (b) readings. \( k' \ t'ett\) as an adverbial phrase underlies (a), and \( ayi \ k' t'ett\) as a subject noun phrase underlies (b). As in Ewe, the Comitative verb has become a conjunction joining nouns within noun phrases.

Like \( kpl' \) in Ewe, Ga \( k' \) functions as a noun phrase linker. In (55) and (57), for example, the \( k'\text{-NP} \) phrase is not adverbial; \( k' \) conjoins nouns here.

(56)  
\[
\underline{\text{\( t'ett\)}} \ n' \ \underline{\text{\( ayi \)}} \ k' \ k'\text{\( k'\)}
\]

'Tete saw Ayi and Koko'.

(57)  
\[
\underline{\text{\( k'f' \)}} \ k' \ \underline{\text{\( a'm' \)}} \ ts' \ d'z' \ \underline{\text{\( w'u'l' \)}} \ \underline{\text{\( ag'\)}}
\]

Kofi and Ama father is Mr. Ago

'Mr. Ago is the father of (both) Kofi and Ama'.

But even within NP structures, there is evidence of the verb origins of \( k' \). Thus:

(i) \( k' \) is preceded by subject pronouns and is followed by object pronouns, regardless of whether the \( \text{NP[pronoun} \ k' \text{pronoun]} \text{NP} \) is functioning as the subject or object in the sentence.

(ii) Singular subjects take singular verbs, and plural subjects, take multiple verbs, but when two singular nouns are conjoined as subjects by \( k' \), they take singular verbs (e.g., \( \underline{\text{\( mi \) t'\( a'\)}} \ 'I sit', \( w'\text{\( o'\) \( r'\) \( a'\) 'we sit,' but \( m' \ k' \ \underline{\text{\( l'\) t'\( a'\)}} \ 'I and he sit'. Thus, \( m' \ k' \ l' \ 'I and he' is not treated like a plural noun phrase). This reflects the earlier situation when \( k'\text{-NP} \) was a verb phrase or adverbial phrase.

(iii) When two noun phrases occur in the associative construction, there is a prefix \( \text{\( a'\)} \) on the second noun only when the first noun phrase
is plural. But when the first noun phrase is, say kófí kè ìmáá as in (57), there is no prefix à on the second noun (in (57) it is tsè, not òtsè). Thus, 'Kofi and Ama' is not treated like a plural noun phrase in this construction. 

(iv) Either noun in a [N kè-N]NP structure can be fronted in a focus-placement transformation, violating Ross's coordinate structure constraint.

Because of the historical development of kè, it is difficult to reconcile the data on it as a conjunction and come up with an unambiguous synchronic analysis. The best approximation is probably to recognize kè-NP as a constituent in a [NP kè-NP]NP structure, reflecting its origins, and to call kè a subordinating conjunction in such a structure.

To summarize: the Comitative verb kpèlú in Yoruba has developed conjunction-like functions. Ewe kpé and Gà kè have had analogous developments, and have taken on roles as conjoiners of noun phrases to an even greater extent than Yoruba kpèlú.

3.3. Comitative verb and adverb in Yoruba and Gà. Recall that the Yoruba Comitative verb kpèlú is glossed as 'be together with', 'be included among'. When it occurs without an object, its meaning is comparable: 'together with', 'also':

(58) fémí ní òrúkù mì kpèlú
Femi FOCUS name my also
'Femi is my name too' (as well as someone else's).

(59) èmí kpèlú 15
I also go
'I also went' (along with someone else).

Objectless kpèlú has similar meaning when reduplicated:

(60) kpèlúkpèlú n kò fèè 15
also also I NEG wish go
'Moreover, I do not wish to go.'

Neither verbs nor prepositions ordinarily show this behavior in Yoruba. The usages in (58) and (59) may have evolved from Comitative prepositional
phrases from which the object NP was dropped, (60) could conceivably have developed by a similar route. The result is an adverb with roughly Comitative semantics, homophonous with the Comitative verb.

Recall that in Gà with an abstract NP, kè-NP can be a Manner adverbial:

(61) ɗyí kè hàjìtswà lá fà wónù
Ayi with haste drink soup
'Ayi hastily drank soup'.

Objectless kè is found in Gà sentences like:

(62) iṣẹ̀ nyíɛ kè bà
Tete walk with come
'Tete came on foot'.

which means something like 'Tete came by walking' or 'Tete came walking-ly'. Although kè has no object in (62), the semantic object is understood as equivalent to a nominalization of the preceding VP (nyíɛ 'walk'). A synchronic analysis might consider this kè as a general Manner preposition meaning 'in the manner of'. It probably has developed historically from the Manner adverbial usage, as in (61).

Recapitulating, then: evidence suggests that Comitative verbs in serial constructions lost verb status and became prepositions, accepting a range of objects and thereby taking on Instrumental and Manner as well as Comitative semantics. The Comitative preposition later developed into a noun phrase component with conjunction-like meaning; in other contexts the preposition lost its object and became an adverbial particle.

4. Evolution of prepositions as a continuing process.

Since the Comitative, Instrumental and Manner prepositions evolved from serial verb constructions, it is not surprising that sentences with these prepositional phrases have near-paraphrases using other verbs in serial constructions. For example, a Yoruba sentence like (37), with kpèlú in a Comitative phrase, has the near-paraphrase (63) with the verb bá 'meet' in a serial construction:
Here bá 'meet' is a verb, not a preposition. It inflects, and it can serve as the only verb in a sentence. Also, sentences like (38) and (39), with preposition kpêlú in Instrumental and Manner phrases, are similar in meaning to sentences with serial verb constructions, but the verb 'take, put' is used, not bá 'meet.'

(64) ó fî 3bê gé ērā
    he take knife cut meat
    'He cut the meat with a knife.'

(65) ó fî 3s̀3 gé ērā
    he take care cut meat
    'He cut the meat with care.'

In Ewe also, sentences with kpêlú in Instrumental and Manner phrases can be paraphrased by sentences with the fully verbal ts̀3 'take' in a serial construction. And in Gā, sentences with k̀ in Instrumental and Manner phrases are semantically similar to sentences using the verb k̀ 'take' or .nativeElement where a verb evolving like lāh in Fe-même? (the Igbo verbs wè 'take' and jì 'have' express this range of meaning as verbs in series).

I have discussed the process by which Locative and Comitative/Instrumental/Manner prepositions may have evolved from verbs in serial constructions. Hyman suggests a process by which prepositions are eliminated and their semantic functions taken over by verbs. To find out
whether something like this may be happening to the prepositions discussed here, we can look at the prepositions and their verb paraphrases cited above for indications that a given paraphrasing verb is beginning to lose its verb properties, becoming 'defective'. We note that Yoruba fT 'take, put' exhibits considerable syntactic irregularity. It can not stand as the only verb in a sentence; it must occur in a serial construction with another verb or with a de-verbal preposition like kpélu 'with' or si 'to' (which is comparable to the de-verbal Locative preposition ní 'at', discussed above). In some dialects it doesn't inflect Verbs take object pronouns, but ní 'at' doesn't, and fT usually doesn't either. An unemphatic 'him/her/it' is not usually expressed after it, in contrast to regular verbs. FÍ 'take' looks like a likely candidate to follow the path from verb to prepositional case marker. It might be beginning the process of replacing kpélu for Instrumental and Manner meaning, conceivably establishing a preposition contrasting with the Comitative kpélu.

In the case of Ewe, kpé has a heavy functional load—Comitative, Instrumental and Manner marker as well as conjunction—but the paraphrasing verb tsó 'take' is fully verbal and shows no sign of retiring to prepositional status. Not yet, anyway.

5. From verb to preposition in Mandarin Chinese and Thai.

In non-African languages with serial verb constructions, there is evidence that prepositions have developed from verbs. Mandarin Chinese has serial verb constructions analogous to those in Kwa. As in Kwa, they are of the form S[NP VP VP]S; the two verb phrases are related semantically. Certain verbs in serial constructions no longer take the full range of verb affixes, and are called co-verbs. Some co-verbs have homophonous verbs, some do not. Since written records for Mandarin do exist, it has been established that the present-day co-verbs were transitive verbs at earlier stages of the language. As Li and Thompson [1973] have argued, the Mandarin co-verbs are best viewed as prepositions which are still in the process of changing from earlier verbs.
Verbs also occur in serial constructions in Thai. For certain verbs, e.g., ᵇʰ’y ‘give’, Warutamasintop [1973] argues that in the context S[N P V N P ____ N P]S a prepositional analysis is preferable to a verb analysis (compare the use of the verb ‘give’ in Twi in (6)).

It appears that this pattern of evolution from verb to preposition in serial verb constructions may represent a valid generalization about human language.

6. Conclusion.

Why do certain verbs, like Locatives, undergo this change of grammatical category? A Locative verb in a true serial construction corresponds to an aspect of the single overall event that the sentence is about (see section 1.). Because location is generally considered to be less significant than other aspects of events, in the serial construction the Locative verb phrase is not as important as the other verb phrase semantically (the meaning of the sentence is clear and the location phrase doesn't need to be fully verbal). Accordingly, it loses status syntactically; i.e., it loses its verb properties, remaining as a mere function word. And if serial verb constructions are more prevalent than prepositional phrase constructions in the language, new speakers may prefer using a semantically equivalent serial verb construction; consequently, the preposition is heard infrequently and finally disappears.

Man tends to comprehend an event in terms of its location, the means employed to bring it about, the manner in which it occurs, and the recipient or beneficiary. This is reflected in the structures man uses in communication. It is these semantic case relationships that are most likely to be expressed in serial constructions—and then, are most likely to be indicated by a new category, preposition.

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