HISTORICAL CHANGE
IN
SERIAL VERB CONSTRUCTIONS

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CONTENTS

PREFACE

Serial verb constructions occur in various language families scattered around the globe. In these constructions, a sentence typically contains two or more verb phrases without overt connective morphemes. The semantic/pragmatic relationship between the verb phrases varies somewhat from one language to another. In some languages, serial constructions are used to express case-role relationships such as Locative, Recipient, Benefactive, Comitative, Instrument, and Patient; their morphological and syntactic properties tend to show a continuum from fully verbal to highly defective.

Comparison of serial verb constructions in several languages supports the view that the case-marking functions of verbs have developed in the serial construction context. The verbs have lost lexical semantic content through a "bleaching" or "desemanticization" process, and have lost morphological and syntactic capabilities as a result. The change has been directional, from major category (verb) to minor category (preposition) to grammatical morpheme (case-marking affix) along a grammaticalization continuum. This same grammaticalization process has resulted in the development of complementizers, adverbial subordinators, conjunctions, adverbs and auxiliaries from verbs.

Works that have focused on serial verb constructions in a single language have sometimes mistakenly assumed that all other serial verb languages work the same way. Similarly, generalizations about the properties of a few serial verb combinations have sometimes been assumed to be true for all serial verb combinations in a given language. The cross-language descriptions and analyses here will, I hope, contribute to our understanding of the range of serial verb constructions as well as the linguistic structures which evolve from serial constructions. The data here illustrate the sweep of grammaticalization and show how shifts in meaning and usage result in syntactic, morphological, and lexical change. I have tried to avoid the assumptions and terminology of any single theoretical

persuasion, in the hope that the discussion here will be accessible to students of language as well as of interest to theoreticians.

I want to acknowledge the important contributions of several indispensable people in the publication of this work. I am deeply indebted to the many teachers and speakers of West African languages who have helped me study their languages. My work has received special inspiration and support from Sandra Thompson and Talmy Givón. I have greatly appreciated the patient assistance of editor Yola de Lusenet on this project. And, finally, this volume would never have emerged without the encouragement, expertise and persistence of Jack Lord in tinkering with computer formats, fonts and page-layout programs.

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CHAPTER I

SERIAL VERBS

The label "serial verb" has been applied to a range of linguistic constructions in a variety of languages. Generalizations about a set of verb phrase sequences in one language do not necessarily apply to superficially similar constructions in another language. Within a single language, one group of serial verb constructions may show a certain property, while another group may not. This situation has encouraged a blossoming of claims and counterclaims about serial verb constructions. It is not my purpose here to argue for or against a particular synchronic analysis. Rather, in the spirit of this series, I hope to shed some light on the behavior of serial verbs at a problematic stage of their diachronic development—when they begin to lose their identity as verbs.[1]

In any study of language structure, we catch the structure at a particular point in its historical development. For languages for which we are lucky enough to have written historical records of a sufficient time depth, we can identify earlier and later forms of the structure, and often can identify patterns of change. For languages for which written records are limited, we can compare structures in related languages and identify likely paths of change. In studying serial verb constructions, both approaches can be used. For Mandarin Chinese, we have historical records. For languages of West Africa, we have a large set of related languages, as well as Africa-based pidgin and creole languages.

Defining serial verb constructions is a sticky business. Most definitions include a string of verb phrases sharing the same tense, aspect, mood and polarity, where the understood subject of a non-initial verb is the subject or object of the preceding verb. If we focus on surface form, we can limit prototypical serial verb constructions to successive verb phrases without overt connective morphemes. This definition rules out Igbo and Fe'fe' consecutive constructions, as well as Twi verb sequences with the sequential prefix. However, the meanings communicated by the Twi struc-

tures are comparable to meanings communicated elsewhere and in related languages by verb sequences without overt connectives. This makes the "no overt connectives" criterion look rather arbitrary.

We can relax the restrictions on surface form and instead try to characterize serial verb constructions in terms of the meanings they convey. In a number of West African languages, verb phrases in an unmarked sequence all refer to subparts or aspects of a single overall event. The action or state denoted by the second (or non-initial) verb phrase is an outgrowth of the action denoted by the first verb phrase; the following verb phrase represents a further development, a consequence, result, goal, or culmination of the action named by the previous verb. In Yoruba, this action-result interpretation typically applies to verb phrase sequences without overt connectives. However, in Igbo it is verb compound structures that typically require an action-result interpretation; the Igbo consecutive constructions do not require an action-result interpretation. Furthermore, in Mandarin Chinese, verb compound structures imply an action-result interpretation, while Mandarin serial verb structures (unmarked verb phrase sequences) are used in a range of contexts, where possible inferences include consecutive actions, simultaneous actions, alternative actions, or purposive action.

It is clear that an action-result interpretation is by no means universally associated with a given syntactic configuration, and that the grammar of each language must specify the semantic interpretation carried by a particular syntactic structure.

There is a considerable range of surface forms, associated meanings, and syntactic properties among those structures people have called "serial verbs", from West Africa to China to Papua New Guinea. But we do not need to cross continents or even dialect boundaries to find variation. Within a single language such as Ewe, some serial constructions contain long strings of verb phrases naming successive actions, and other serial constructions contain defective verblike morphemes, Ansre's "verbids", with impaired syntactic capacity, having the function of adverbial modifiers.

Verb sequences, then, come in a variety of surface forms and carry a range of interpretations, and some of these form/meaning correspondences have been called serial verb constructions. It has been suggested that, rather than a separate universal category, serialization is more accurately characterized as a syndrome of features and phenomena (Seuren 1990).

However, from a diachronic viewpoint, the choice of features we decide to rule in or out of our syndrome's definition is not crucial. And, with a diachronic perspective, much of the range and diversity of the structures can be shown to fit into an ordered continuum. Features that are problems for a static description become parts of the diachronic explanation.

Linguists have found one subset of serial constructions to be particularly troublesome (or particularly interesting, depending on one's objectives). These are the constructions in which one of the verbs is defective in some respect, such as phonological assimilation, failure to take the usual verb inflections or negation affixes, or showing unexpected syntactic properties, for example with respect to movement. There are strong parallels across languages in the meanings of the verbs that make up this set, and in the functions they come to mark. The universality of the pathways of change arises from the way humans perceive events in their world and communicate about them to each other. It is this set of serial verb constructions that I focus on here.

1.1 Grammaticalization

Over time, certain verbs have undergone historical reanalysis as prepositions, adverbs, auxiliaries, conjunctions, complementizers, and adverbial subordinators. The results of this process can include typological shifts to other sentence structure types, as well as changes in the organization of the lexicon. The direction of this historical reanalysis is along a continuum from lexical function to grammatical function. This continuum was recognized by Sapir (1921), who saw it as two poles, material content and relation, which tend to be connected by a long series of transitional concepts. As Gleason (1961:156) has described it, "There is a complete inter-gradation from items which are almost purely structural markers, to ones which have considerable lexical meaning and for which the function of marking structure is incidental. A function word is any word near one end of this continuum." Lexical verbs typically name events, processes, actions, or states. Over time, speakers may come to employ a verb for other functions, and the verb's loss of verbal semantic content can be described in terms of a "bleaching" or "desemanticization" process. Losing semantic specificity, a verb may also lose the ability to occur in contexts where a verb would normally be expected, and may undergo phonological erosion

or assimilation processes in ways uncharacteristic of verbs in the language. Such a verb, with limited distribution or loss of phonological viability, can be described as "defective".

When a verb has moved towards the grammatical end of the lexical/grammatical function continuum, it can be described as having undergone "grammaticalization". This term apparently was first used by Meillet (1912) for the attribution of grammatical character to a word which was formerly autonomous. As described by Kurylowicz (1965), "...grammaticalization consists in the increase of the range of a morpheme advancing from a lexical to a grammatical or from a less grammatical to a more grammatical status...." Carrying the definition a bit further, Traugott and Konig (1991) refer to grammaticalization as "the dynamic, unidirectional historical process whereby lexical items in the course of time acquire a new status as grammatical, morphosyntactic forms, and in the process come to code relations that either were not coded before or were coded differently." (For discussion, see Lehmann 1985, Traugott and Heine 1991, and Heine, Claudi & Hunnemeyer 1991). Traugott and Heine distinguish between grammaticalization and reanalysis: grammaticalization is unidirectional, but reanalysis is not necessarily, since subordinate clauses can become reanalyzed as main clauses "by default" when a main clause subject and verb become grammaticalized as focus-placement markers. This is observable in Benue-Kwa languages in contexts such as 'It is John (who) has come', where the 'It is' takes on the grammatical function of focus marking.

1.2 Case and topic

What characterizes the set of verbs that change from major lexical category to minor category, from lexical content morpheme to form word or grammatical morpheme? There are no particular formal criteria which these verbs share. Looked at across languages, the set of verbs is largely characterizable in terms of meaning. One can find de-verbal case markers associated with nominals in many case roles and, in general, cross-linguistic consistency as to the meanings of the verbs that give rise to them, as observed by Givón (1975). But a defective verb does not necessarily mark a recognized deep case notion, and two different verbs in different languages may develop similar grammatical functions. In examining here the

paths of change in meaning and form that arise with verbs in serial constructions, I have ordered the presentation according to verb meanings and functions of defective verbs, but because of the nature of the data the chapters overlap somewhat.

The case role terms used here derive from Fillmore (1968). According to Fillmore, the sentence in its basic structure typically consists of a verb and one or more noun phrases, each associated with the verb in a particular case relationship. The case role, or underlying syntactic-semantic relationship, is distinguished from its expression in a particular language in a particular case form, which can be indicated by inflections, affixes, prepositions, postpositions, particles, or constraints on word order. Verbs can be classified according to the number and kinds of case roles they can occur with.

The set of case roles reflects how speakers perceive events and interactions. Following are the case roles I have found most useful (adapted from Fillmore 1968:24, 81).

Agent: the typically animate perceived instigator of the action identified by the verb.

Instrument: the inanimate force or object causally involved in the action or state identified by the verb.

Recipient: the animate being affected by the state or action identified by the verb (not used for animate subjects; Fillmore and Givón use "Dative").

Factitive: the object or being resulting from the action or state identified by the verb, or understood as a part of the meaning of the verb.

Locative: the location or spatial orientation of the state or action identified by the verb.

Patient: the thing affected by the action or state identified by the verb, or whose role is identified by the semantic interpretation of the verb itself. (Fillmore 1968 called this case role "Objective", but I have avoided this term because it invites confusion with the term "object" or "direct object". Givón uses the term "Accusative", but others prefer to reserve that to label the surface case form.)

Comitative: expresses accompaniment; marked by the preposition *with* in English, the postposition *to* in Japanese; may be related to NP conjunction.

Additional case roles may be found to be useful. There may be utterances in the language in which a semantic case role for an NP is not

readily determinable, or where elements of more than one semantic role are identifiable. We can distinguish between paradigm instances and non-paradigm instances of a given case role. The notion of agency, for example, is discussed by Lyons (1977:483). He notes that a paradigm instance of agency may include features like animacy, intention, responsibility and the use of its own internal energy source, but that non-paradigm instances might not include all of these elements. According to Lyons, one can fairly assume that languages are designed to handle the paradigm instances, and it is only to be expected that the applicability of notions like agency should be unclear in nonparadigm instances.

Givón (1984b) sees case roles as prototypes, with metaphoric extension from these prototypes. He notes that, in principle, there are as many case roles as there are verbs, so that the most common ones are merely the most likely, the most general classes of case roles.

The concept of clause topic is also useful (developed in Chafe 1976, Schachter 1976, and Li and Thompson 1976). Subject and topic do not necessarily coincide for all languages. But for many of the languages discussed here, the primary clausal topic is coded as subject. For the SVO languages discussed here, direct object position is typically the immediate postverb position. Givón (1984b) identifies direct object position as that position whose grammatical coding is otherwise characteristic of Patient objects. Then, "promotion to direct object" is the placing of a non-Patient object into direct object position. The term "dative shift" has been used to describe this, but the possibility is not always limited to Datives. (As Givón points out, Bemba obligatorily promotes Dative/Benefactive objects, and KinyaRwanda allows promotion of objects other than Dative/Benefactive.)

It can be argued that case roles can be broken down into more basic semantic features such as animacy or responsibility, and that they are merely ad hoc collections which rather messily combine noun features and properties of abstract predicates. This may be demonstrable to some extent; however, the value of Fillmorean case roles lies in the extent to which they help us describe and explain how people use their languages and how linguistic changes arise out of language use. I use the concept of case roles here because I find it useful in describing and explaining the diachronic shift from verb to case marker in the context of serial verb constructions.

1.3 Data

Among the earliest descriptions of serial verb constructions are those by two German missionaries working in West Africa at the Basel Mission on the Gold Coast in the middle of the nineteenth century (Riis 1854 and Christaller 1875; see Lord 1989 for discussion). These early grammars are notable for their insights.[2] A century later, Twi verb structures were re-examined in important work by Stewart (1963), Boadi (1966b), and Schachter (1974a). Because the facts of Twi are fairly well established, I use Twi (Akan) here as a starting point for getting at patterns of reanalysis. In each of the chapters that follow I describe a case of reanalysis in Akan, and then draw parallels with similar developments in other languages, some of which are related to Akan.

I have used data from nineteenth century authors, current studies, and my own research. These data span more than a century, and reflect different dialects and orthographies. In citing language data, I generally use standard orthography or the orthographic conventions of the source cited. By lumping data together in some insances, I may have obscured some facts. However, any corpus–even a single idiolect–will show variation; indeed, variation is central to the kind of language change described here.

Scholars differ in the groupings they set up for West African languages. They also differ in the degree to which they attribute similarities to borrowing or bilingual interference or creolization or "areal" factors rather than a common forbear. However, the many resemblances among the West African languages discussed here is not at issue. There are typological similarities, common morphological and syntactic patterns, as well as regular sound correspondences among languages, even those that are separated by considerable distances geographically. Many of these languages show instances of verb reanalysis in the serial verb context, and are included here.

West African morphemes and syntactic structures, such as serial verb constructions, are present in pidgin and creole languages in West Africa and the Caribbean. How we choose to describe the nature of the relationship between West African languages and Caribbean creoles may be controversial. However, since these languages echo the West African structural patterns, I have included them in the discussion.

I have also included data from languages with no known historical relationship to West African languages, such as Mandarin Chinese and languages of Southeast Asia and the Pacific, because these typologically-similar languages show evidence of the same verb reanalysis phenomenon.

Each of the following chapters has a particular focus: verbs with place noun objects and their corresponding Locative prepositions (chapter 2); the verb 'give' as a preposition marking Recipient and Benefactive NPs (chapter 3); conjunctions, often traceable to a verb such as 'be with' (chapter 4); the verb 'take' as prepositional marker of Instrument, Patient, transitivity/causativity, and definiteness (chapter 5); miscellaneous de-verbal prepositions and particles that don't fit any particular category but are clearly instances of the reanalysis phenomenon (chapter 6); verbs which have become complementizers and subordinating conjunctions (chapter 7); and de-verbal adverbs and auxiliaries (chapter 8). Chapter 9 addresses issues of typology, meaning, ordering, directionality and motivation.

CHAPTER 2

LOCATIVE VERBS AND PREPOSITIONS

In terms of semantic class, verbs of motion[3] and location are among the most likely to occur in serial constructions, and most likely to undergo "semantic devaluation" and often even syntactic defectivization. In some languages the verb and its Locative noun object gradually take on the character of a Locative prepositional phrase. In some cases the preposition is eroded and becomes a consonantal prefix, which may then be lost.

I begin with a discussion of locative verbs and prepositions in several Benue-Kwa languages spoken in Ghana, Togo and Nigeria. Section 2.1 looks at locative prepositions in Twi, and section 2.2 examines them in Ewe, Ga, Yoruba, Igbo, Engenni and Idoma, drawing parallels with unrelated languages. Section 2.3 follows the development of Yoruba *ni* from locative preposition to generalized marker of oblique arguments and prepositional marker for arguments which are not utterance topics. Section 2.4 concludes.

2.1　Locatives in Twi

Riis (1854) alludes to a number of locative verbs with prepositional functions in his Twi grammar. For example, *fi* 'be from' occurs as a verb in (1a) and as a preposition in (1b):

(1)　(a) *ohinne no fi akwam*　　　　　　　　　[Riis 1854:91]
　　　　chief　this be-from Akwam
　　　　'This chief is from Akwam.'

　　　(b) *oyi　　ho　　fi　dompem na odi*　　　[Riis 1854:93]
　　　　he-take-off marrow from bone-in and he-eat
　　　　'He took the marrow out of the bone and ate it.'

In (1b) the meaning of *fi* has faded from 'be from' to 'from', and with another verb preceding it in this serial-like configuration, it does not inflect; we would expect a verb in this position to take the third person singular subject prefix *o-*.

The verb *wɔ* 'be at' (*vo* for Riis) occurs in (2a). It is used as a preposition in (2b), where it is translated 'at'. As a preposition it does not occur with construction markers for tense-aspect, subject agreement, or negation, and is even omittable, as in (2c).

(2) (a) *tā   bi   vo   kotokum*   [Riis 1854:91]
         tobacco some be-at bag-in
         'There is some tobacco in the bag.'

     (b) *magyaw   me poma vo ne daŋm*   [Riis 1854:92]
         I-PERF-leave my stick at his house-in
         'I have left my stick in his house.'

     (c) *mmofrá gòru (wo) abɔnté sò*   [Christaller 1875:132]
         children play be-at street top
         'Children are playing in the street.'

Other motion/direction verbs taking place nouns as objects also occur in prepositional contexts, as in (3).

(3)   FORM   VERB MEANING   PREPOSITIONAL MEANING
         ko   'go'   'to, into, towards'
         ba   'come'   'to'
         to   'fall'   'to'
         gu   'fall'   'to'
         tya   'pass through' 'through'

But while all these verbal prepositions have "faded" semantically, only *fi* 'from' and *wɔ* 'at' have lost syntactic properties as indicated by their failure to take affixes like verbs do. There are no instances here of loss of syntactic properties without loss of meaning; this suggests that the semantic decline precedes the syntactic and makes it possible.

2.2 Locative verbs, prepositions and prefixes

In other Benue-Kwa languages we can find locative verb/preposition pairs similar to those found in Twi. Ewe and Ga are Twi's neighbors in southeastern Ghana (and in Togo), and both have morphemes with verb and preposition functions paralleling those of the Twi locative *wɔ* described above. Evidence suggests that there were probably locative verb counterparts for locative prepositions and/or prefixes in Yoruba, Igbo, Engenni and Idoma. Similar patterns are found in languages unrelated to Benue-Kwa, such as Mandarin Chinese and Khmer.

In Ewe a locative verb, *lè* 'be at', occurs as the verb in (4).

(4)   *agbalēa lè   kplɔa   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 (5) and (6).

(5)   *me fle agbalē le   keta*
         I   buy book be-at Keta
         'I bought a book in Keta.'

(6)   *me kpɔ lɔri le   mɔ   dzi*
         I   see lorry be-at street top
         'I saw a lorry on the street.'

The *lè* in (5) and (6) is homophonous with the verb in (4), but it does not inflect. The *lè* in (5) and (6) is similar to the verb in that it takes object pronouns, and takes the same semantic range of object words. But in (5) and (6) the *lè* and its object form a phrase which adverbially modifies the other verb in the sentence. Ansre (1966a) identifies *lè* and four other Ewe words words with parallel characteristics (they all have preposition-like translations in English) and labels them **verbids**, a term he chose in order to recognize their verbal quality, at least in historical origin, while acknowledging their special semantic/syntactic characteristics. The phenomenon was also observed and described by Westermann (1930a: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."

Paralleling Ewe *lè* and Twi *wɔ* is the Ga locative verb *yè*, as in (7) and (8).

(7)   *tètè yè   ʃìa*
       Tete <u>be-at</u> house
       'Tete is at home.'

(8)   *tètè bàá-hé wòlò yè   òsú*
       Tete FUT-buy book <u>be-at</u> Osu
       'Tete will buy a book at Osu.'

Ordinarily, in a serial construction both verbs take the same tense-aspect and negation markers; but the preposition *yè* does not, as seen in (8). But even when *yè* occurs as the only verb in a sentence, as in (7), 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 verb morphemes are used. It may be that *yè* was formerly fully verbal and is now going through a transition stage to a solely prepositional identity.

The Yoruba language, also a member of the Bènue-Kwa family, has structures comparable to (5), (6) and (8), with the locative *nì*, a preposition-like word that takes a noun phrase object and is often translatable as 'in' or 'at', as in (9).

(9)   *ó ṣe   iṣé   nì ilè*
       he do work <u>at</u> house
       'He worked at home.'

This particle *nì* does not occur as a locative main verb. In serial-like constructions like (9), 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 *nì* does not. Verbs can undergo a form of focus-placement transformation, but locative *nì* can not. Thus, in (10) *mú* and *wá* are both verbs and can be fronted in *mímúwá*; however in (11) *ṣe* is a verb but *nì* is not, and there is no analogous **ṣíṣenì*.

(10)   *mo mú ìwé wá   ilé ⇒   mímúwá ni mo mú ìwé wá ilé*
       I   take book come house
       'I brought a book home.'

(11)   *mo ṣe isé   nì oko   ⇒   *ṣíṣenì ni mo ṣe iṣɛ nì oko*
       I do work <u>at</u> farm
       'I worked at the farm.'

Locative *nì* is clearly not a verb. But *nì* does occur as a main verb meaning 'have, possess' as in (12).

(12)   *ó   nì   owó*
       he <u>have</u> money
       'He has money.'

The use of the same morpheme for location and possession is not just a quirk of Yoruba. The 'have, possess' gloss is also valid for the locative verbs Twi *wɔ* and Ga *yè*, for a possessive idiom with Ewe *lè*, and for several unrelated languages. In fact, a good case can be made for a universal relationship between location and posession, as described in Lord (1973). The evidence suggests that the Yoruba locative preposition *nì* is historically derived from a former locative verb *nì*, related to the homophonous verb of possession. (A possible cognate is the verb *ni* in Akan, used for location and possession in the negative instead of *wɔ*.)

Bamgbose (1966:78) calls *nì* 'in' a post verb. According to Bamgbose, the five words in this class do not function as free verbs; they must be preceded by a free verb in a serial verb construction. Three others are locative: *sí* 'into', *kà* 'on', and *lé* 'on', possibly cognate with Ewe *lè*. One is directional: *dè* 'for one's arrival'.

Awobuluyi (1982) lists *nì* as a postverbal preposition, along with "at least" two others—the Locational/Directional *sí* 'to, at', and Dative/Benefactive *fún* 'for, on behalf of' (see section 3.2 below). He lists as a preverbal preposition another locative, *tì* 'from', along with the Instrumental *fi* 'with, by means of' and Benefactive *bá* 'on behalf of' (which is homophonous with the verb *bá* 'join the company of'). Awobuluyi differentiates between verbs and prepositions in Yoruba according to several criteria:

(a) A word that can function as a predicate in a simple sentence should not be considered a preposition.

(b) Verbs and prepositions both select nouns as objects (e.g., *ní* 'at' selects objects denoting location, manner, or time), and many verbs select nouns as subjects, but no preposition selects nouns as subjects.[+]

(c) Verbs can be questioned, but prepositions can't.

(d) Verbs can be emphasized and relativized, but some prepositions can't, and for other prepositions the grammaticality judgments of speakers are mixed.

The Yoruba Locative *ní* meets all these preposition criteria.

One of the few words in Igbo that can be called prepositions is *ná*, translatable as 'at, on, in, to,' as in (13).

(13) ó bì ná ɔ́kà
     he live <u>at</u> Awka
     'He lives at Awka.'

In Igbo there is an incompletive aspect marker *ná*, as in (14) (as well as a locative verb *nɔ̀*, a verb of possession *ŋwé*, and a verb *ná* 'receive').

(14) ɔ́ nà èrí ńri ná àŋú ḿmànyá
     he <u>INC</u> eat food <u>INC</u> drink wine
     'He is eating and drinking.'

Welmers (1973:312) makes a good case for relating this aspect marker historically to a locative verb reconstructed *ná* 'be at'. The same historical relationship is suggested by the similarity of the Yoruba locative *ní* and incompletive marker *ń*, the homophony of forms for location, possession and incompletive aspect in Ewe (*lè*), and the use of homophonous forms for location, possession and incompleted action in other languages, as described in Lord (1973). Progressives frequently have syntactic features in common with locatives (Comrie 1976). The locative 'be at' is stative, and it can be argued that clauses in the progressive are also stative (Vlach 1981). The semantic, syntactic, and phonological similarities support a historical relationship.

Engenni, another Kwa language of southern Nigeria, has locative and incompletive morphemes similar in form and function to those in Igbo, for which a historical relationship is probable. Engenni has a locative prefix *n'* which occurs with locative nouns and time nouns, as in (from Thomas 1978:14,42):

(15) mí ta   ka mi wúru iyo n' omù à
     I not-go SEQ I will-do what <u>in</u> house Q
     'If I don't go, what shall I do in the house?'

(16) mì ta ûkwo n' udhè
     I went farm (<u>at</u>) yesterday
     'I went to the farm yesterday.'

The corresponding incompletive aspect particle *nà* (with allomorph *nò*) occurs at the beginning of the verb phrase, which is where we would expect to find a fossilized verb marking aspect, as in (from Thomas 1978:99):

(17) ị   nà yìa ....
     they <u>INC</u> come
     'They were approaching ....'

The Engenni prefix *n'* is probably historically related to the incompletive aspect particle, just as the Igbo preposition *ná* is probably related to the Igbo incompletive aspect morpheme, and a former verb is the likely historical source for the aspect morpheme, the preposition and the prefix.

Data from the Senufo language group (some of which are northern neighbors of Kwa languages) show a similar pattern of related locative verbs, progressive markers and locative case markers. Carlson (1991) has compiled data from several sources on Senufo languages. He finds evidence that the locative postposition *na* 'at, on' developed from a verb or locative copula 'be at' in serial verb constructions, as in Supyire (from Carlson 1991):

(18) u a   vɛéribíí taanna tabalini <u>na</u>
     s/he PERF glasses line-up table   <u>on</u>
     'S/he lined the glasses up on the table.'

The postposition's tonal behavior is verblike rather than nounlike, and it is found as a progressive aspect marker in two languages. The Senufo languages have OV (object-verb) order rather than VO (verb-object) order. (There is evidence that OV was the prevailing word order in Niger-Congo languages at a much earlier stage–see, for example, Givón 1975 and Hyman 1975.) In a language with VO typology, the verb bleaching process will result in the sequence preposition-NP; however, in a language with OV typology, the process will produce the sequence NP-postposition. The results in both instances are de-verbal adpositions marking locative case. The Senufo languages show parallels with the Kwa data, but they reflect an OV typology. If the basic clausal word order in Kwa languages was formerly OV, the change to VO must have preceded the development of deverbal *na* and *ni* case markers (or else they would be postpositions as in Senufo).

Another locative postposition, *ni* 'in, at' is widespread in Senufo languages, according to Carlson (1991). One Senufo language, Jimini, has *ni* as a verb of location and possession as well as locative postposition. In some Senufo languages there is a cognate progressive aspect marker *ni* or *i*. Carlson (1991) also cites data from nearby Gur languages: Wara has *ni* as locative verb, and Tyurama has *na* as locative verb, progressive aspect marker, and locative postposition.

The relationship between locative verb, preposition, and incompletive aspect is not limited to Benue-Kwa languages; it is clearly not explainable as an areal phenomenon. Mandarin Chinese is similar to Benue-Kwa languages typologically, with serial verb constructions and verblike prepositions which are typically called coverbs. In Mandarin *zai* functions as a verb, a preposition, and a marker of progressive aspect (Matisoff 1991:415):

(19)   *tā   xiànzài zài   bù   zài jiā*
        3SG now   <u>be-at</u> NEG be-at home
        'Is he at home now?'

(20)   *tā   zài   jiā   lǐ   kàn zhe   zázhì*
        3SG <u>PREP</u> house interior read PROG magazine
        'He's reading magazines in the house.'

(21)   *tā   zài   fúshuǐ*
        3SG <u>ASP</u> swim
        'She is swimming.'

According to Matisoff, among languages of Southeast Asia, verbs meaning 'dwell, be in/at a place' sometimes can function as locative prepositions and typically develop into progresssive auxiliaries; he cites Vietnamese *o ʔ*, Yao Samsao *yiəm*, and Hmong *nyob* (Matisoff 1991).

Data from Khmer shows a similar pattern, where *nəu* can be analyzed as a main verb, a preposition, or somewhere in between (Schiller 1990):

(22)   *sokh nəu phteah*
        Sokh <u>be-in</u> house
        'Sok is home.'

(23)   *sokh roah nəu srok   srae*
        Sokh reside <u>in</u>   province ricefield
        'Sok lives in the boonies.'

(24)   *nəu tunlee saap sokh cap   trəi*
        <u>in</u> lake   fresh Sokh catches fish
        'In the Tonlee Saap, Sok catches fish.'

In the latter example, the *nəu* phrase has been unhooked from the verb phrase and moved to the beginning of the sentence. The same morpheme also marks incompletive aspect, as in

(25)   *sokh nəu roah nəu srok   srae*
        Sokh <u>still</u> reside in   province ricefield
        'Sok still lives in the boonies.'

Using internal and comparative evidence, we have documented a probable path from verb to preposition to prefix. We can think of these forms as stages in one possible life cycle of a morpheme. When it reaches the prefix stage, we might well ask what lies ahead for the morpheme. Because of its diminished phonological status, we might not hold much confidence in the staying power of a prefix. Will speakers simply drop it?

Replace it with a more robust form? Dialect data from Idoma suggest one scenario.

Idoma is spoken in the Benue Province of Nigeria. Southern Idoma has a locative prefix *l-*, which Armstrong (1963) suggests is likely to be a cognate reflex of the Yoruba verb and preposition *ni*. The Yoruba preposition becomes the prefix *l'* before a noun beginning with any vowel except *i*. The corresponding structures in Southern Idoma have a locative prefix *l-*. Examples here are from Armstrong (1963).

(26) *m̀ mọ̀tsɛ́   l-ìdōmà*
      I see-chief in-Idoma
      'I saw a chief in Idoma.'

(27) *n lā   l-ōtrùkpó*
      I live in-Oturkpo
      'I live in Oturkpo.'

However, the corresponding structures in Central Idoma do not have the *l-* prefix:

(28) *m mɔ́cɛ́   ìdōmā*
      I see-chief Idoma
      'I saw a chief in Idoma.'

(29) *ǹ lā   òtùkpó*
      I live Oturkpo
      'I live in Oturkpo.'

In other constructions as well, the Southern dialect appears to be the more conservative historically; for example, the Southern dialect retains reduplicated consonants in verbal nouns, where they have been lost in the Central dialect, according to Armstrong (1963:131). It is likely that the Central dialect has lost the reduplicated consonants and the *l-* prefix, not that the Southern dialect has inserted them.

But has the locative morpheme simply been lost in Central Idoma? Armstrong (1963:144) suggests that its effect is still felt in the language, as a zero-element suspending the elision that ordinarily takes place between two nouns in typical speech: compare (30), where elision has

occurred between 'chief' and 'Idoma', with (28), where it has not occurred.

(30) *ó mɔ́cídōmá·*   (*má + ɔ́cɛ́ + idōmà*)
      he see-chief-Idoma   (see chief Idoma)
      'He saw the Chief of Idoma.'

According to this interpretation, the zero-preposition also suspends the linkage between verb and noun in (29); compare (31), where there is no zero-preposition and linkage has occurred (in the linked form the vowel quality of the verb assimilates to the initial vowel of the following noun).

(31) *ó ŋmóòtùkpó*   (*ŋmá 'come from'*)
      he come-from-Oturkpo
      'He came from Oturkpo.'

To extend the life-cycle metaphor, we can regard the ghost-prefix as exerting its influence from the morpheme graveyard in its blockage of elision and linkage. An alternative view would consider the absence of elision and linkage to be the unmarked situation. The elision in (30) would then follow from the genitive relationship between the two nouns, with the lack of word boundary an iconic reflection of the closeness of the genitive relationship. Similarly, the linkage of verb and noun in (31) would be attributable to the fact that the place noun is an obligatory argument of the verb *ŋmá* 'come from'. This latter interpretation is consistent with the linkage data for Idoma constructions with the verb 'take', discussed below at the end of section 5.4.

Whichever point of view we adopt, the Idoma dialect data suggest that a possible ultimate consequence of the defectivization process is the physical disappearance of the former verb morpheme, and the birth of a new sentence configuration like (28) with a place noun as a bare adverbial instead of as object of a locative verb in a serial verb construction.

To summarize the events: In Twi, Ewe, Ga, Mandarin Chinese and Khmer, evidence suggests that the locative preposition has developed historically from a homophonous locative verb in a serial construction. In Yoruba, Igbo, Engenni and Idoma the historical development has proceeded similarly, but the locative verb is no longer present. In Engenni and

Southern Idoma the surviving morpheme is a prefix, and in Central Idoma the prefix has been lost.

2.3 The Locative extended: Yoruba *ní*

Of all the semantic role relationships, the Locative is most readily found marked by a de-verbal preposition in serial verb languages. It may well be the case that, if a serial verb language contains *any* de-verbal prepositions, it will contain a Locative preposition.

Yoruba grammarians differ on criteria for verb-hood, but most regard the Locative *ní* as a preposition or as a verb with special characteristics; if any morpheme were to be selected for prepositionhood in Yoruba, *ní* would probably be first choice. It is likely that the morpheme has been functioning as a preposition for a long time, since it is no longer used as a Locative verb in Yoruba.

The function of *ní* has been extended beyond marking of spatial location. In (11), repeated here, its object is a place noun. But it also marks nominals of time and quality, as in (32) and (33) (from Awobuluyi 1978:77).

(11)   *mo ṣé iṣé   ní oko*
          I   do work <u>at</u> farm
          'I worked at the farm.'

(32)   *ó   wá   ní àárọ̀*
          he came <u>at</u> morning
          'He came in the morning.'

(33)   *ayé ń   lọ ní mẹ̀lọmẹ̀lọ*
          life PROG go <u>at</u> smoothness
          'Life went on smoothly.'

The locative sense of *ní* can be seen in (34) if we give it a reading like 'I slapped him on the ear.' (Here *l'étí* is a contraction, typical of verb-object phrases in Yoruba speech, of *ní* + *etí*, in which the *n* is realized as *l*.)

(34)   *mo gba a   l'etí*   [Ward 1952:132]
          I   slap him (*ní*)ear
          'I boxed his ears.'

But a literal locative reading for *ní* doesn't quite fit the sense of (35)-(38).

(35)   *là   wọ́n l'ójú*   [Bamgbose 1966:78]
          open them (*ní*)eye
          'Open their eyes.'

(36)   *òjó pa mí ní ajá*   [Ogunbowale 1970:93]
          Ojo kill me (*ní*) dog
          'Ojo killed my dog.'

(37)   *ó   ṣá a   ní ɔgbé*   [Ward 1952:145]
          he cut him (*ní*) wound
          'He wounded him.'

(38)   *ó   ṣá mi ní àdá*   [Awobuluyi 1978:119]
          he cut me (*ní*) cutlass
          'He inflicted a cutlass wound on me.'

It is difficult to find one case role description that would accommodate all the objects of *ní*. In (37), *ní* introduces the NP *ɔgbé* 'wound', which is a result of the action of the verb *ṣa* 'cut'; but in (38) *ní* introduces the NP *àdá* 'cutlass', which is in an instrument relationship to the same verb *ṣa* 'cut'. In contexts like these, *ní* becomes difficult to characterize.

Generalizing about the range of functions served by *ní* is difficult; some other examples of its uses are (from Ogunbowale 1970:94):

(39)   *a   mọ̀   ọkùnrin náà ní olóye*
          we know man   the (*ní*) clever-person
          'We know the man to be clever.'

(40)   *nwọn kùn àwọn ilé   ní pupa*
          they paint PL   house (*ní*) red
          'They painted the houses red.'