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Locative adjuncts and their latent verbs*

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1. Introduction

Adverbials are well-known for their structural adaptability and flexibility within a clause (Hasselgard 2010, Meinborn and Schäfer 2019). Often classified according to lexical semantics (e.g. locative, manner, temporal), adverbials can be encoded by different structural phrase types: noun, preposition, or adverb.

For this paper we explore the behavior of adverbial adjuncts in a language of West Africa. Initially we compare locative and temporal adjuncts in Emai of the Edoid group in the Benue Congo family. We then zero in on locative adjuncts as our primary target, examining their distributional behavior in canonical and non-canonical constructions.

Emai exhibits a basic SVO structure. Although it has minimal inflectional morphology, Emai displays both lexical and grammatical tone. Its clausal structures manifest basic transitivity types as well as complex predicates with verbs in series or in phrasal constructions with prepositions.

The canonical position for adjuncts in Emai is the right periphery. When an adjunct is in focus, it is fronted and appears in the left periphery of a clause. When a locative adjunct is in focus, it not only occupies a left periphery position but also triggers a latent verb element in the verb phrase. A similar latency condition prevails when a locative adjunct corresponds to a WH-question-word of place. Under either condition the latent verb *za* occupies initial position in the verb phrase. To account for *za* that is induced by a locative adjunct, we consider various structural representations provided by Role and Reference Grammar (RRG). We conclude that *za* is a verb in a subordinate nexus relation to a core verb at the nuclear layer. This allows for the fact that *za*, while being marked for tense by tone, affects neither core participant meanings, as operators do, nor licenses a core argument, as main verbs do.

2. Locative and temporal adjuncts

The canonical position for locative and temporal adjuncts in RRG is core right periphery: immediate-after-core. This position is exemplified in (1-2), respectively, for phrases locative *ví ímè* ‘at the farm’ and temporal *vbí úkpédé lí ńzèèà* ‘on the third day.’ Both show preposition *vi* preceding a nominally headed phrase.

- (1) *ójé ɔ̀gbé ófě ví ímè.*
Oje:DST PST:kill rat LOC farm
‘Oje killed a rat at the farm.’

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- (2) *ójé ↓hián órán ví úkpédé lí ́zèéà.*
 Oje:DST PST:cut wood LOC day R third
 ‘Oje cut wood on the third day.’

When either locative or temporal adjunct is in focus, its nominal complement phrase is fronted and appears in pre-core position: immediate-before-core. Under this fronting condition, the preposition *vi* is omitted. Following the fronted nominal phrase is contrastive focus (CF) particle *li*. It prosodically phrases with following not-in-focus clausal elements (3-4) as evidenced by elision of particle *li*’s vowel (e.g. *lí ójé > lójé*).

- (3) *ólí ímè lí ójé ↓zá gbé ́fè.*
 ART farm CF Oje:DST PST:BE.AT kill rat
 ‘On the farm it was that Oje killed a rat.’

- (4) *úkpédé lí ́zèéà lí ójé ↓hián óràn.*
 day R third CF Oje:DST PST:cut wood
 ‘On the third day it was that Oje cut wood.’

Comparison of clauses (3-4) reveals a notable contrast in verbal elements. The clause in (3) shows form *za*, whereas the clause in (4) shows neither *za* nor any other additional verb. In (3) *za* is obligatory; it precedes core verb *gbe* ‘kill,’ which expresses clausal main event. In (4) *za* is prohibited, despite the marking of both locative and temporal adjuncts by preposition *vi* (1-2). In addition, the WH-question of place corresponding to (1) and (3), which shows interrogative word *é↓bé* ‘where,’ also displays obligatory *za*, as in (5).

- (5) *é↓bé ójé ↓zá gbé ́lí ́fè?*
 where Oje:DST PST:BE.AT kill ART rat
 ‘Where did Oje kill a rat?’

However, when a place nominal topicalizes (6a-b) and appears in left detached position, *za* is prohibited. The comment clause following the topic requires a locative phrase (headed by *vi*) with pronominal *ò* as complement. This pronoun semantically corresponds to the erstwhile nominal complement in topic position.

- (6) a. *ímè, ójé ↓gbé ́fè ví ò.*
 farm Oje:DST PST:kill rat LOC 3SG
 ‘As for the farm, Oje killed a rat on it.’
 b. **ímè, ójé ↓zá gbé ́fè ví ò.*
 farm Oje:DST PST:BE.AT kill rat LOC 3SG
 ‘As for the farm, Oje killed a rat on it.’

As we have seen, the occurrence of *za* is limited to pragmatic conditions where a nominal complement of an adverbial locative adjunct occupies focus position. There are other locative nominal complements marked by preposition *vi* that do not give rise to latent verb *za*.

Verbal arguments marked by locative *vi*, as with *ìwè* ‘house’ in (7a), can also occupy focus position. When they do, the out-of-focus clause does not permit *za* (7d). This is evident in the contrastive focus constructions and content interrogatives of place in (7b-

c), where nominal complement of *vi* corresponds to the fronted focus constituent or the interrogative of place.

- (7) a. *òjè ó vî iwè.*
 Oje:PRX PST:enter:PFV LOC house
 ‘Oje entered the house.’
 b. *iwè nà lí ójé ó-ì.*
 house this CF Oje:DST PST:enter-PFV
 ‘It was this house that Oje entered.’
 c. *é^hbé ójé ó-ì?*
 where Oje:DST PST:enter-PFV
 ‘Where did Oje enter?’
 d. **iwè nà lí ójé zá ó-ì.*
 house this CF Oje:DST PST:BE.AT enter-PFV
 ‘It was this house that Oje entered.’

Focus conditions aside, *za* followed by preposition *vi* and its complement appears in series with verb elements expressing directional motion. For example, in (8a-b) *za* occurs in series with manner of motion verbs (*la* ‘run’) and directional/path verb (*dianre* ‘move out from’) or it appears only with a directional/path verb. For both motion events, *za* and its phrase express point of departure or source.

- (8) a. *ójé ↓zá vî iwè lá diànré.*
 Oje:DST PST:BE.AT LOC house run move.out
 ‘Oje has run out of the house.’
 b. *ójé ↓zá vî iwè diànré.*
 Oje:DST PST:BE.AT LOC house move.out
 ‘Oje came out of the house.’

Furthermore, in the expression of both motion events *za* and its preposition marked complement precede the main verb or verbs in series. *za* never follows a directional verb or a directional verb in series. In motion constructions, verb *za* participates in the expression of action events rather than stative locative conditions of place, as it did in (1). One additional point is that form *za* never occurs in the core layer of a clause as the sole main verb (9). It is consistently a dependent verbal element in motion events.

- (9) **ójé ↓zá vî iwè.*
 Oje:DST PST:BE.AT LOC house
 ‘Oje moved from the house.’

3. Canonical and focus representations for *za*

Returning to focus constructions from the outset, how are we to understand the distributional behavior of *za*? What kind of form is it? What conditions govern its occurrence? What is the relationship that holds between focus and non-focus clauses that involve an adjunct that expresses a stative locative condition? Why is *za* obligatory in pre-verbal position of focus constructions, whereas it fails to appear in corresponding non-focus indicative constructions?

Let's clarify the essential linear patterns of focus and non-focus where we find *za* before we assess possible hierarchical representations from RRG that might account for the constraints on its presence and its clausal positioning.

Canonical non-focus: S V O ADJUNCT_{PHRASE}

Focus: PLACE_{NOMINAL}: NP_{PLACE} [*li* S *za* V O]

PLACE_{QUESTION}: *é[↓]bé*_{PLACE} [S *za* V O]

To prepare for the next sections, we should briefly review some pertinent RRG representations for constructions associated with the distribution of *za*. First, we take a brief look at a simple indicative clause with a locative adjunct. Figure 1 is a representation of the canonical structure employed for locative adjuncts in RRG. In it, the locative adjunct appears under the right periphery unit.

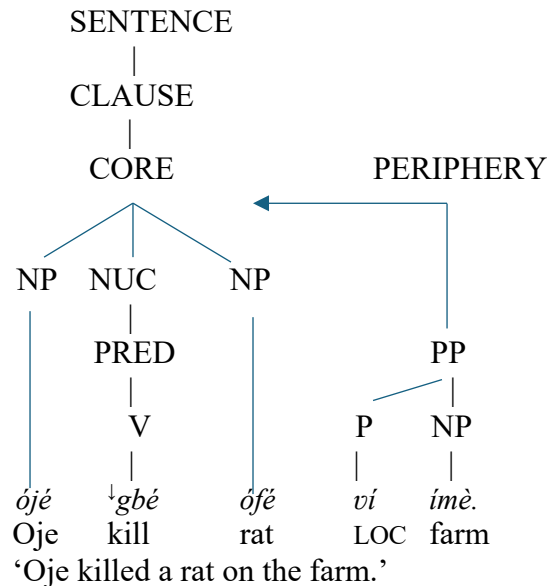


Figure 1 Canonical structure for a locative adjunct

Next, we present two figures, each of which provides a hierarchical representation of *za* in non-canonical constructions. In both representations, Figure 2 and Figure 3, the form *za* appears under the core unit but remains unattached to essential core units.

Figure 2 is a hierarchical representation of a contrastive focus construction where the nominal from the adjunct phrase appears in the pre-core clausal slot (PrCS).

Figure 3 is a hierarchical representation for an interrogative Wh-question construction. In Figure 3 the nominal complement from the adjunct phrase corresponds referentially to the question-word of place *é[↓]bé* 'where.'

4. Structural positioning of *za*

Relative to non-canonical focus constructions, there are several potential representations which we might consider to better account for *za*. Our ultimate goal is to determine where *za* would occur in a clausal hierarchical representation.

4.1. Candidate structural representations for *za*

An initial hypothesis would be to consider *za* as a support verb of some sort, like English DO. One prominent role of English DO concerns its function as a placeholder for tense (e.g. *did*) in interrogatives like (10a-b).

- (10) a. When did John eat the bread?
b. Did John eat the bread?

In RRG, DO with this placeholder function is viewed as unattached to any upper node. It is not part of the nucleus, core, or periphery. Although the tone of *za* in Emai expresses tense, *za* is not a general placeholder for tense, as English ‘do’ is. Tone of the other verb in the clause with *za* also is tone marked for tense. Moreover, *za* is limited to a locative adjunct construction, as shown earlier in (3) and (4).

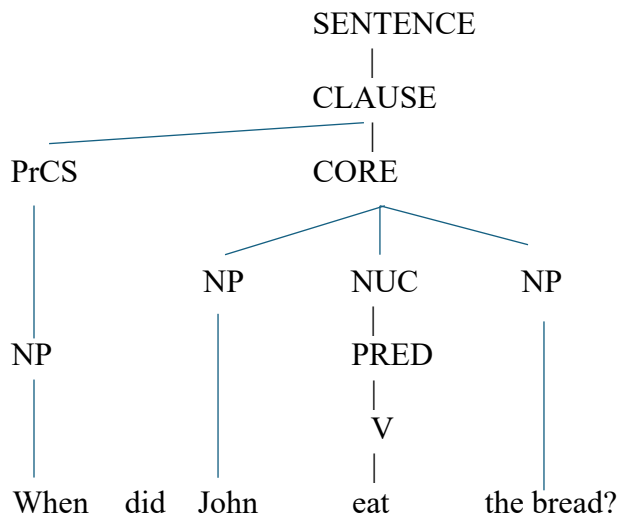


Figure 4 Representation of temporal interrogative

In the following we present alternative hypotheses that appear more fruitful. In sharp contrast to Figures 3 and 4, one might consider *za* to be a clause-level operator. If so, what would be the operator for this function of *za*? What grammatical content or meaning does it provide? Since *za* is limited in Emai to focus constructions for locative adjuncts, its content as an operator, whatever it might be, is severely limited.

What kind of meaning would operator *za* contribute to its clause? In RRG, operators function at one of three layers: nuclear, core, or clause (Van Valin 2005). In Emai, clausal operators include tense, epistemic modality, and negation. Nuclear operators include aspect.

Core operators also convey the orientation or motion of one participant toward the speaker or another participant. Operators of the latter type would correspond to Emai’s deictic directional forms, which are postverbal, namely itive *a* and ventive *re*. Operators

at none of these layers appear similar in meaning to *za* in focus constructions for locative adjuncts. We conclude that *za* is not an operator.

Since Emai is a serial verb language with constructions such as (11), where we find the two verb forms *fī* ‘throw’ and *gbe* ‘hit’ in a single clause, one might view verb *za* as part of the core unit in a co-subordinate relation.

- (11) *ólì òkpòsò fī úkpóràn gbé ùdékèn.*
 ART woman:PRX PST:throw:PFV stick hit wall
 ‘The woman threw a stick against the wall.’

According to RRG, a co-subordinate relationship in the CORE layer of a clause can be represented as in Figure 5. Form *za* is not only within the core unit but it is shown as co-equal to the verb *gbe* ‘hit’ that expresses a main clause event.

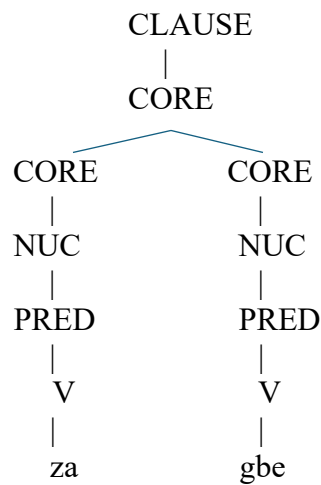


Figure 5 Representation of co-subordinate relation

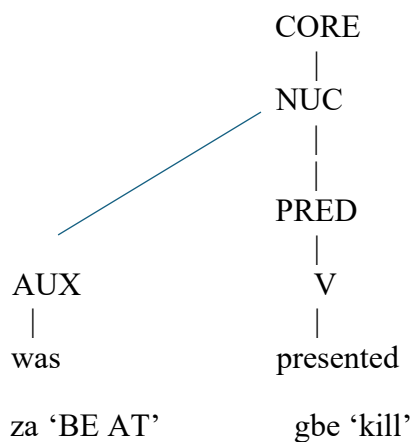


Figure 6 Representation of BE and *za* as an auxiliary

In a co-subordinate arrangement of clausal verbs, each verb contributes to the overall meaning of the clause. For example, in the projected contact event of (11), verb *fī* contributes a throwing sense, while verb *gbe* adds a sense of contact. If *za* were in a co-

subordinate relationship, it should contribute some element of meaning to event action. It would take its own argument or share an argument with the other clausal verb. Form *za* does neither. It does not contribute to the clausal event as do the verbs in (11) and even in earlier clauses such as (3) and (4).

Another alternative for *za* pertains to its potential status as an auxiliary (Figure 6). In RRG representations, a BE form as an auxiliary occurs at the nuclear level only when required for nucleus formation. In such instances, BE serves as an auxiliary at the nuclear layer, but it is not part of the predicate in the nucleus. If we apply this same representation to Emai, *za* would have to be an auxiliary and thus exhibit auxiliary properties. Emai auxiliaries include subject index, tense, modality types (deontic, epistemic, dynamic), intensifiers of argument categories, and others. Form *za* fits into none of these categories.

As a point of background, Emai shows a *za* form that serves as an auxiliary. Relative to an event in preceding discourse, *za* in an indicative clause expresses a resultative (RST) meaning, as in (12).

- (12) *ólí ókpósó ↓zá é ólí émàè.*
 ART woman:DST PST.RST eat:PFV ART food
 ‘As a result / So the woman ate the food.’

But a resultative sense is unrelated to the static locative sense associated with locative adjuncts in focus constructions and by extension with the presence of locative *za*. If *za* were a resultative auxiliary, it would be limited to focus clauses, where it cannot show an overt nominal complement. Semantically, auxiliary *za* with resultative meaning is distinct from static locative *za*. Non-auxiliary *za* associated with locative adjuncts is required for nucleus formation in focus clauses such as we saw in (3).

4.2. Representation of nuclear subordination for *za*

A different version of the configuration in Figure 6 is shown in Figure 7, adapted from Bentley and Vincent (2017).

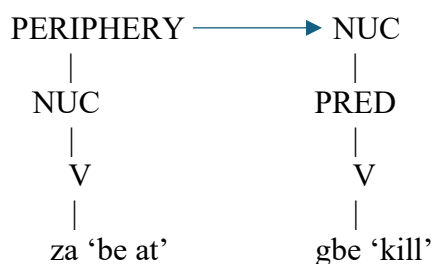


Figure 7 Representation of nuclear subordination for *za*

Figure 7 views *za* as a verb in a subordinate nexus relation to a core verb at the nuclear layer. This allows for the fact that *za* affects neither core participant meanings, as operators do, nor does it designate a core argument. In addition, form *za* in Figure 7 is not an element under the predicate. However, it is necessary to form the nucleus of a focus clause for locative adjuncts, and it is related to the nuclear level. Like other Emai verbs at the nuclear layer, it must be marked for tense by tone. Figure 7 allows this condition. In representation 7, it becomes clearer that *za* is not an auxiliary or an auxiliary verb but a verb in a subordinate relation to the main verb.

4.3. Another latent form

Interestingly, *za* is not the only latent verb or quasi-verb in Emai. There are other adjunct types that exhibit a verb or verb-like form in focus constructions but that do not occur in canonical indicatives.

Manner demonstrative adjuncts (*íná* ‘like this,’ *ìyó* ‘like that’), when focused, evince a latent form *i*. Each manner demonstrative form refers to a condition or manner of existence in the immediate deictic field, as in (13) and (14).

- (13) *ójé ↓dín ọ́lì éwé íná.*
 Oje:DST PST:tie ART goat PMD
 ‘Oje tied the goat like this (as you see).’

- (14) *ójé ↓dín ọ́lì éwé ìyó.*
 Oje:DST PST:tie ART goat DMD
 ‘Oje tied the goat like that (as you see).’

Akin to *za*, form *i* occurs in a clausal verb phrase when a manner demonstrative adjunct occupies either focus position (15) and (16) or corresponds to a WH-question word (17) and (18). Form *i* does not appear in a preverbal position when a manner demonstrative adjunct occupies its canonical post-verbal position (13-14). Since non-demonstrative manner adjuncts such as *dàbìdàbí* ‘staggeringly’ and *súnésúné* ‘sluggishly’ do not permit focus or WH-questions, form *i* does not appear with non-demonstrative manner adjuncts.

- (15) *íná lí ójé ↓i dín ọ́lì éwè.*
 PMD PF Oje:DST PST:MAN tie ART goat
 ‘It was like this that Oje tied the goat.’

- (16) *ìyó lí ójé ↓i dín ọ́lì éwè.*
 DMD PF Oje:DST PST:MAN tie ART goat
 ‘It was like that that Oje tied the goat.’

- (17) *é↓bé ójé ↓i dín ọ́lì éwè?*
 how Oje:DST PST:MAN tie ART goat
 ‘How did Oje tie the goat?’

- (18) *é↓bé ójé ↓i dín ọ́lì éwè?*
 how Oje:DST PST:MAN tie ART goat
 ‘How did Oje tie the goat?’

We assume that form *i*, as a mark of manner demonstrative, is also in a subordinate relationship with the clausal verb at the nuclear layer.

5. Information structure and focus

But there is still a nagging question about *za* and *i*. What motivates their presence? Why do they surface only in focus constructions and not in non-focus constructions? There are some additional features of focus constructions that suggest still another perspective.

Let's look back on Emai focus constructions for a moment. Focus constructions exhibit several key features. The lexical item in focus is fronted relative to other syntactic elements in the clause. The contrastive focus clitic *li* precedes and prosodically phrases with out-of-focus elements in the clause. Relative to the positioning of locative adjuncts in focus, the form *za* appears in pre-verbal position, whereas it does not appear in a corresponding non-focus clause. From this short list of features, it seems that focus is doubly marked: Fronting of the focus term in syntax and prosodic phrasing of particle *li* with out-of-focus elements.

Interestingly, *za* in a focus construction appears among the out-of-focus clausal elements. For us a natural follow up question is, why are focus constructions doubly marked in this fashion? And how might double marking contribute to the presence of *za*?

In a canonical indicative clause, the verb and its direct object can either be in-focus or out-of-focus. In this respect, *za* occurs when the verb is not in focus, but it does not occur when the verb is in focus. It is thus the marking of a lexical item or phrase as out of focus, which is provided by particle *li*, that establishes the information context in which *za* can occur.

For those familiar with the Bantu languages of Africa, this appears reminiscent of the distinction between conjoint (CJ) and disjoint (DJ) inflectional marking and its relation to information structure (van der Wal and Hyman 2017).

Prototypically, the essence of the Conjoint/Disjoint distinction is an alternation in the inflectional marking of tenses on the verb. One tense form, the one labeled CJ, correlates with the information structure condition of focus and phonological phrasing. Phonological phrasing pertains to whether the verb and following elements constitute a single phonological phrase or multiple phonological phrases. CJ characterizes the condition where there is a single phrase, i.e. an extended phonological phrase, and DJ the condition where there are multiple phonological phrases, a non-extended phonological phrase.

For Emai locative adjuncts, the alternations between focus and non-focus constructions does not involve inflection. Instead, it concerns alternation in the verbal make-up of the predicate phrase.

In the canonical indicative for locative adjuncts, the nucleus consists of a single verb while in focus the nucleus consists of V_{za} V. There is thus an alternation between V and V_{za} V. Phrasing of syntactic verb elements varies between these alternates.

Under the V condition the locative adjunct phrases with the verb and its direct object since the direct object element preceding the locative adjunct undergoes low tone raising. Under the V_{za} V condition where the nominal complement of the locative adjunct is fronted, there is no low tone raising on the same element that showed raising in the V condition. Specifically, the verb direct object *ófě* with a high high tone sequence in (19a) shows as *ófě* with a high low tone sequence in (19b).

- (19) a. *ójé ↓gbé ófě vbí imè.*
 Oje:DST PST:kill rat LOC farm
 'Oje killed a rat at the farm.'
- b. *ólí imè lí ójé ↓zá gbé ófè.*
 ART farm CF Oje:DST PST:BE.AT kill rat
 'On the farm it was that Oje killed a rat.'

We can now ask, do the phonological phrasing alternatives in Emai correlate with differences in information structure? Yes is the response, but the correlation seems opposite to that in Bantu, at least when utilizing the terminology of the Bantu tradition. In (19a) the locative adjunct is prosodically conjoined with the verb and its direct object, as signaled by the high high tone of *ófě*.

In Bantu, the CJ structure correlates with term focus, DJ does not correlate with term focus. In Emai, however, the CJ structure does not correlate with term focus. Now look at (19b). Here the locative adjunct is not conjoined with the verb and its direct object. The locative adjunct is disjoined from the verb and its direct object. This is signaled by the lexical or high low tone of *ófě*. Therefore, it is the DJ condition that correlates with information term focus, while the CJ condition correlates with a default value for predicate focus.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, we have reviewed contrasting syntactic constructions associated with adjunct adverbials that have locative significance. Canonical locative adjuncts appear in post-verbal position. They are marked by preposition *vi*, which precedes a complement that consists of a locative nominal. In non-canonical constructions such as contrastive focus and information questions of place, the locative adjunct nominal occurs in pre-verbal position. It is either fronted in the focus clause or corresponds to the fronted question-word of place. In both focus and question constructions, the main verb from the canonical construction is preceded by a second verb that assumes the shape *za*. In canonical constructions with a locative adjunct, there is no verb *za*.

A similar set of contrasting positional conditions obtain for manner adjuncts. Both locative and manner adjunct nominals appear as in-focus elements that are fronted relative to out-of-focus elements that essentially constitute the core units of a clause or the matrix clause. We have hypothesized that in focus and question constructions *za* presence in the nuclear layer is permitted by its inclusion in the clausal out-of-focus domain. With respect to the nuclear layer of the clausal out-of-focus domain, we also hypothesized that verb *za* and its core verb exist in a condition of nuclear subordination.

It is therefore our conclusion that an out-of-focus condition allows for the occurrence of Emai's latent forms in the verb phrase. Our future investigations of information structure within a clause should therefore be aimed at identifying not only in-focus domains but also out-of-focus domains.

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