The grammaticalization of directional verbs in Fon¹

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1. Introduction

Fon
- West African language, mainly spoken in Benin, but also in Togo, Nigeria, and Ghana (more than 2M speakers) (Grimes, 1996)
- Gbe dialect cluster; Kwa phylum (Niger-Congo family)

1.1. Lexicalization of directionality

Different ways of encoding directionality:

Yiddish (Talmy, 2000:127)
1) ikh hob nichtvilndik ayn-geshokhn dos ferd mit a dorn
   I have accidentally in-stuck the horse with a thorn
   I stuck the horse (in) with a thorn.

2) The pencil rolled off the table.

Classical Greek (Lambert, 2003: 55-56)
3a) ek d’eunas ebalon
    out the.stones they.threw

3b) pʰugein ek polemoio
    to.flee out the.fight:Gen

3c) ek-bainō ek neōs
    out-walk out boat:Gen

Basque (Slobin, 2004:241)
4) eta zas! sagu kanpo-ra
   and zas! mouse outside-All
   and suddenly a mouse (comes) out.

Tamil (Bisang,1995:158)
5) pāpu avalai orumurai nimir-ntu pär-tt-ān
   Babu she:ACC strangely lift-CONV look-PAST-3sm
   Babu looked up at her strangely.

Thai (Zlatev & Yangklang, 2004:160)
6) chán dsaŋ khām thanōn khāw paj naj sūn
   I walk cross road enter go in park
   I walked across the road into the park.

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1.2. Definition of serial verb constructions (SVCs)

It is a construction composed of two (or more) verbs forming a complex predicate. Verbs in a SVC are not separated by any dependency marker and the construction is interpreted as a single event. (cf. Sebba 1987; Collins 1993; Givón 1995; among others)

1.3. Hypothesis

Verbs appearing with a high frequency in SVCs tend to lose their semantic properties following a grammaticalization continuum, that is they change from a lexical state to a grammatical state (Lord 1976, 1993; Heine & Reh 1984; Givón 1995; among others).

Yabem (Ross, 2004)
(7) a. lau s-è waŋ anga saləŋ ke-sa ge-meŋ
   people S:3P-pull cane from forest S:3S-ascend S:3S-go:1
   The people pulled the cane up here out of the forest.

   b. se-balan bo? sa
   S:3P-carry on.shoulders pig upwards
   They lifted the pole with the pig tied to it.

2. Expression of space in Fon

(from Ameka, 1995 :141)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Relation</th>
<th>Ground</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noun V and/or Prep</td>
<td>Reference Object</td>
<td>Domain Postp</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
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<th>Ground</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>youngs</td>
<td>PL sit</td>
<td>Def next to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(9) dɔŋpɛvú wè dɛ lɛ jʊŋjɛn tàvɔ s kɔn
Two youngsters sat at the table.

(10) dɔŋpɛvú wè dɛ lɛ jʊŋjɛn ayɪ dɔ tàvɔ s kɔn
Two youngsters sat next to the table.

2.1. Postpositions

26 postpositions – 22 locatives
Nominal source.

2.2. Prepositions

4 prepositions

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2 The number of prepositions varies following the authors. For example, Anonymous (1983) stipulates that what is translated by a preposition is systematically a verb in Fon, except for káká, Lefebvre & Brousseau (2002) maintain that there are 5 prepositions, adding dɔ to our list, and Höftmann (2003) presents 4 prepositions including mi and kpó(ḍo), but adding two prepositions different than ours, dɔ ‘against’ and xa ‘with’. In our belief, we present here the prepositions that are the most grammaticalized in their function.
Table 1. List of prepositions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PREPOSITIONS</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>káká</td>
<td>káká = so (much)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nù</td>
<td>ná = give</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sín</td>
<td>sín = come from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kpó(dô)</td>
<td>??</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Verbal source (except for káká = adverbial source)

Lord (1973) stipulates that adpositional elements are a recent development in West African languages. The small number of preposition and their verbal origin seems to verify this hypothesis for Fon.

3. Directional SVCs

V1 = motion verbs
V2 = directional verbs

3 directional verbs will be studied:
- yi ‘go’ → deictic path
- gbôn ‘pass.by’ → non-deictic path
- tân ‘exit’ → boundary-crossing path

3.1. Semantic properties

3.1.1. As lexical verbs

yi = Represents a movement of the figure away from an initial site.

(11) a. mè ṭèbû kò tùn ṭô ̀azwè kò yi ̀ ì
    person not Ant know that hare Ant go Neg
    Nobody noticed that the hare had left.

b. bó wá mí ní yi tô-xísù gbô
    Exhort come 1plS Subj go country-king at
    Come, we will go to the king’s place.

c. gbôn skô sîn gbê ̀ ̀ kîlô ná yi nîkôn ̀ ̀
    harmony of groupe Def want Def.Fut go in.front Def
    The ‘harmony’ association wants to progress.

gbôn = Represents a movement of the figure through a medial site.

(12) a. någán Avlèsì gbôn éné gbàmè
    paternal.aunt Avlesi pass.by Dem between
    Lit. The paternal aunt Avlesi passed by this situation.

b. cûkû ̀ gbôn gûdô
    dog Def pass.by behind
    The dog passed behind.
\( t.\text{sn} = \) Represents a movement of the figure from inside to outside.

(13) a. kánln d̀xó d̀vò dò f̀̀nè bò zò t̀n t̀n animal big other be.at there and horn Gen exit
Another big animal was there and its horns were out (visible).

b. ǹcỳvi ṣ̀ nà t̀n kòxò orphan Def Def.Fut exit outside
The orphan will go outside.

c. gbèjà d̀k̀pò t̀n s̀n d̀ ṣ̀ mè rat one exit from hole Def inside
One rat came out of the hole.

Meaning as main verbs: MOTION + PATH

3.1.2. As directional verbs

(14) a. yè t̀n kò z̀n yì shadow Gen already fly go
His shadow already flew away.

b. àxì-gbè lè ṣ̀ ún nà ṣ̀-sà yì Kávè market-day PL Def 1sgS Hab flow-ride go Covè
On market days, I take a ride to Covè.

c. ê nà sè yì dò kpè̀dè 3sgS Def.Fut move go down a.bit
It will move a bit down.

(15) a. ê sà gbòn kò mè 3sgS crawl pass.by sand inside
He crawled in the sand.

b. tègbè-tègbè ṣ̀ é jèn nò wà gbòn gùdò Red-always Def 3sgS only Hab come pass.by behind Always, it is only her that comes the latest.

(16) a. mè xwè t̀n. person move.towards exit
A person appeared.

b. vì ṣ̀ d̀̀sù l̀n t̀n kòxò child Def Refl jump exit outside
The child himself jumped outside.

c. sùn zè gbòn flè̀tè t̀n nù moon raise pass.by window Gen edge
The moon rose up by the window.

\begin{tabular}{c c c}
\textbf{FIGURE} & \textbf{RELATION} & \textbf{GROUND} \\
\hline
(17) yè bì nò kò [kàn-wè̀zùn yì] [glè ṣ̀ tà] 3plS all Hab already run go field Def top \\
All of them have already run into the field.
\end{tabular}
(18) a. Il est allé au marché en courant.
   * He went to the market running.

b. Il court au marché.
   * He ran to the market.

Table 2. Semantic combinations of V1 and Vdir.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V1</th>
<th>V2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manner</td>
<td>Motion</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Path</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manner</td>
<td>Path</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motion</td>
<td>Path</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(19) a. *làn fànsí yì gbë mè beast shout go bush inside
   A beast went in the bush shouting.

b. *yé dũ-wè tīn śín xwë 5 mè 3plS move-dance exit from house Def inside
   They went out of the house dancing.

(20) àkpátá-lógózò lë yí xó gbôn gùdò turtle also receive word pass.by behind
   The turtle also spoke the last.

Meaning as directional verbs: PATH

3.2. Syntactic properties

3.2.1. Prepositions

Extraction:

(21) nńywyé 5 fān mè śín ãgblixì mè knowledge Def awaken person from ignorance inside
   Knowledge awoke people of ignorance.

   a. ãgblixì mè wè nńywyé 5 fān śín ignorence inside Foc knowledge Def awaken from
   b. śín ãgblixì mè wè nńywyé 5 fān śín from ignorance inside Foc knowledge Def awaken from
   c. *śín ãgblixì mè wè nńywyé 5 fān from ignorance inside Foc knowledge Def awaken

   It is from ignorance that knowledge awoke people.

3 The speakers in Lefebvre & Brousseau (2002) admit the two following statements instead of those in (21) a) and b), with the lengthening of the vowel in the preposition śín, indicating the presence of a resumptive pronoun resulting from the extraction of the complement.

   i. ãkú wè Kōkù wá śěn market Foc Koku come from.Res
   ii. śín ãkú wè Kōkù wá śěn from market Foc Koku come from.Res

   Our informants don’t accept these data.
Progressive:

(22) a. jí ʂ qò jìà sín zànzàn wè
   rain Def be.at Red-fall from morning Prog
b. jí ʂ qò jìà wè sín zànzàn
   rain Def be.at Red-fall Prog from morning

It is raining since the morning.

Predicate Cleft:

(23) ̀ǹ nò wá sín Kávè
   1sgS Hab come from Cové
   I come from Cové.

a. wá wè ̀ǹ nò wá sín Kávè
   come Foc 1sgS Hab come from Cové
   I COME from Cové.

b. *sín wè ̀ǹ nò wá sín Kávè
   from Foc 1sgS Hab come from Cové

3.2.2. Directional verbs

Extraction:

(24) ́tòw n yì tòxò mè
   3sgS exit go town inside
   He went out in town.

a. tòxò mè wè ́tòw n yì
   town inside Foc 3sgS exit go
b. #yì tòxò mè wè ́tòw n yì
   go town inside Foc 3sgS exit go

c. *yì tòxò mè wè ́tòw n yì
   go town inside Foc 3sgS exit

It is in town that he went out.

(25) ̀kùkù ʂ lòn gbò̀n flétéé ʂ nù
    dog Def jump pass.by window Def edge
    The dog jumped out of the window.

a. flétéé ʂ nù wè ̀kùkù ʂ lòn gbò̀n
   window Def edge Foc dog Def jump pass.by
b. #gbò̀n flétéé ʂ nù wè ̀kùkù ʂ lòn gbò̀n
   pass.by window Def edge Foc dog Def jump pass.by

c. *gbò̀n flétéé ʂ nù wè ̀kùkù ʂ lòn
   pass.by window Def edge Foc dog Def jump

It is out of the window that the dog jumped.
(26) nyà ʒ dį-zənlən tàn sín xɔ ʒ mɛ
man Def flow-walk exit from room Def inside
The man walked out of the room.

a. xɔ ʒ mɛ wɛ nyà ʒ dį-zənlən tàn sín
room Def inside Foc man Def flow-walk exit from
b. sín xɔ ʒ mɛ wɛ nyà ʒ dį-zənlən tàn sín
from room Def inside Foc man Def flow-walk exit from
c. # tàn sín xɔ ʒ mɛ wɛ nyà ʒ dį-zənlən tàn sín
exit from room Def inside Foc man Def flow-walk exit from
d. *tàn sín xɔ ʒ mɛ wɛ nyà ʒ dį-zənlən tàn
exit from room Def inside Foc man Def flow-walk exit

e. *tàn sín xɔ ʒ mɛ wɛ nyà ʒ dį-zənlən
exit from room Def inside Foc man Def flow-walk

It is out of the room that the man walked.

Progressive:

(27) a. tô ʒ dį sısə yi ɡlé tên mɛ wɛ
river Def be.at Red.flow go field Gen inside Prog
b. tô ʒ dį sısə wɛ yi ɡlé tên mɛ
river Def be.at Red.flow Prog go field Gen inside

The river is flowing into the field.

(28) a. yɛ nɔ dį sà-dį gbən tôxɔ mɛ wɛ
3pIS Hab be.at ride-flow pass.by town inside Prog
b. yɛ nɔ dį sà-dį wɛ gbən tôxɔ mɛ
3pIS Hab be.at ride-flow Prog pass.by town inside

They are strolling in the city.

(29) a. xə ʒ dį zınzən técn sín ąjà ʒ mɛ wɛ
bird Def be.at Red.fly exit from cage Def inside Prog
b. xə ʒ dį zınzən técn wɛ sín ąjà ʒ mɛ
bird Def be.at Red.fly exit Prog from cage Def inside

c. xə ʒ dį zınzən wɛ técn sín ąjà ʒ mɛ
bird Def be.at Red.fly Prog exit from cage Def inside

The bird is flying out of the cage.

Predicate cleft:

(30) è ná sè yì dɔ kɛ̀dəj
3sgS Def.Fut move go down a.bit
It will move a bit down.

a. sè wɛ è ná sè yì dɔ kɛ̀dəj
move Foc 3sgS Def.Fut move go down a.bit
It will MOVE a bit down.

b. *yì wɛ è ná sè yì dɔ kɛ̀dəj
go Foc 3sgS Def.Fut move go down a.bit
(31) 3sgS crawl pass.by sand inside
He crawled in the sand.

a. 3sgS crawl Foc pass.by sand inside
He CRAWLED in the sand.

b. pass.by Foc 3sgS crawl pass.by sand inside

(32) Def Refl jump exit outside
The child himself jumped outside.

a. jump Foc child Def Refl jump exit outside
The child himself JUMPED outside.

b. exit Foc child Def Refl jump exit outside

Prepositions and directional verbs share common syntactic properties:
⇒ they do not form a constituent with the ‘main’ verb.

4. Conclusion

Grammaticalization hypothesis:

\[ \text{Verb}_{\text{MEOTION + PATH}} \rightarrow \text{VDIR} \rightarrow \text{Preposition}_{\text{PATH}} \]

The directional verbs in Fon seem to be on their way to grammaticalization and gradually develop into directional prepositions.
ABBREVIATIONS

1: First person  
3: Third person  
sg: Singular  
pl: Plural  
Def: Definite determiner  
Def.Fut: Definite future marker  
Foc: Focus marker  
Gen: Genitive marker  
Hab: Habitual  
PL: Plural determiner  
Prog: Progressive postposition  
Red: Reduplication  
Refl: Reflexive  
Res: Resumptive pronoun  
S: Subject

REFERENCES

Höffmann, H., 2003, Dictionnaire Fon - Français avec une esquisse grammaticale, Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, Cologne.