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CHAPTER 5

Moving from verbs to prepositions in Gbe

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Gbe languages have two classes of adpositions, namely prepositions and postpositions that have been argued to have developed from verbs and nouns, respectively. Focusing on the former, we highlight the functions of the forms across Gbe using examples from Eastern Gbe (e.g., Gungbe) and Western Gbe (e.g., Ewegbe). We further show that verb-to-preposition shift is gradual: some of the forms (e.g., ablative) are not fully grammaticalised in all the languages. Likewise, the process is associated with a semantic change from “temporal predicate” in Serial Verb Constructions (SVC) to a more abstract atemporal predicate, which is also reflected in the loss of the power of the verbal element to take aspectual inflections or markers.

Keywords: adpositions, prepositions, postpositions, SVC, grammaticalization

Gbe languages have two classes of adpositions, namely prepositions and postpositions, that have been argued to have developed from verbs and nouns, respectively. Not unexpectedly, it is some members of the preposition class that have a movement semantics; the postposition class, broadly speaking, rather designates spatial regions and parts (Ameka 1995, 2003). Since Ansre (1966), data from a variety of Gbe languages have been presented in support of the claim that verbs may develop into prepositions. Ansre’s discussion involves the behaviour of some verbal elements after the V₁ in Ewegbe, a serialising language, that is to say a language in which two or more independent verbs can occur in a clause (see Essegbey 2004; Ameka 2005, 2006; Aboh 2009; Kotowski et al., this volume). Ansre shows that some of the verbal forms that occur in this position do not display verbal properties. He argues, therefore, that such clauses do not constitute serial verb constructions (SVCs) and that the post-V₁ elements should be labelled as verbids or prepositions. Within the general context of grammaticalisation, Heine et al. (1991) and Lord (1989, 1993), among others, argue that what they refer to as the allative and ablative prepositions in Ewegbe are grammaticalised forms of verbs. In this paper, we put the spotlight on these two forms, not only in Ewegbe but in

another Gbe language, namely Gungbe, highlighting the functions of the forms in the two variants. Although the allative and ablative prepositions in Ewegbe still have verbal counterparts, in Gungbe they do not (Aboh 2004, 2005, 2010). The facts in Gungbe are similar to those of Fongbe. Lefebvre and Brousseau (2002: 319), based on the situation in Fongbe, write: “there is scarcity of evidence supporting the claim that prepositions evolved from verbs”. In this paper we take the opposite position: we argue that from the broader perspective of Gbe, one can identify a process of grammaticalisation from verbs to prepositions which is still on-going in some variants of Gbe (e.g., Ewegbe) but apparently complete in others (e.g., Gungbe). In the Ewegbe variety, the process is evidenced by the presence of some verbal forms that also behave as prepositions. For Gungbe, we argue that the facts from Ewegbe indirectly support the claim that the prepositions are actually grammaticalised from verbs. The paper is organised as follows: in Section 1, we introduce the Gbe variants as well as the forms that we discuss in this paper and, in Section 2, we discuss the properties that determine verbhood in Ewegbe and Gungbe. Section 3 discusses the prepositional forms in the two languages, and Section 4 presents evidence to link prepositions to verbs in Gungbe (see also Kotowski et al., this volume). Section 5 concludes the paper.

1. The Gbe languages

The Gbe languages are spoken in an area that extends from Lower Volta (in southern Ghana) across Togo, Benin and as far as western Nigeria to Lower Weme; that is, from the Greenwich Meridian to 3°E and from the Atlantic coast to about 8°N (Capo 1991). They belong to the Kwa family of Niger-Congo (Stewart 1989; Capo 1991; Williamson & Blench 2000). Ewegbe, the westernmost variety, is a major dialect cluster that is spoken by about three million people in the south-eastern part of the Volta Region of Ghana across to parts of southern Togo as far as, and just across, the Togo-Benin border. Gungbe, probably a dialect of Aladagbe, is said to belong to the Fon cluster (Capo 1991). It is spoken in Porto-Novo and its environs in the Republic of Benin and in different localities of Ogun State and Lagos State in Nigeria. Ofulue (2013) reports some 579 000 speakers, but this seems an underestimation. According to Capo (1991), the other major clusters of Gbe are Gen (spoken in Togo and Benin), Aja (spoken in Togo and Benin) and Phla-Phera (spoken in Benin and south western Nigeria).¹

1. Capo (1991) and Duthie (1996) note that the word for voice and language in all these languages is GBE. They all have *gbe* as part of their name although, in the literature, the languages are often written without it (e.g., Ewe instead of Ewegbe and Gun instead of Gungbe). The inter-

Just like the forms which we discuss in this paper, the history of the Gbe people is characterised by a lot of movement. Oral traditions suggest that they once lived in Ketu, a Yoruba town in present day Republic of Benin. They moved from there in three groups: two subdivisions of one group went due South, one to Tado near River Mono, the other founded a settlement in Notsie. The second group first went to settle in Adele in Togo before joining the rest later in Notsie. Of the people that settled in Tado, a group moved later to form the Alada kingdom which was succeeded by the kingdoms of Danxome and Xogbonu. Historically then, there were three kingdoms associated with the Gbe speaking peoples around each of which evolved a name for the major dialect clusters of Gbe: Tado is associated with Aja, Alada, with its related kingdoms of Danxome, and Xogbonu associated with Fon, to which our Gungbe variant is said to be related (but see below), and Notsie associated with Ewegbe. The two varieties with which we are concerned here lie at the extreme ends of the Gbe continuum. With regard to the Ewe dialect clusters we discuss two divisions namely, the inland and the coastal dialects.

After the brief introduction to the Gbe people and their languages, we now present the forms which we intend to discuss in this paper. These are *són* ABLATIVE and *xlán* ALLATIVE in Gungbe, and their respective counterparts *tsó* and *dé* in Ewegbe. The Gungbe forms are exemplified below:

Gungbe

- (1) a. *Kòfí sá són xò ló mè.*
Kofi crawl from room DET in
'Kofi crawled from the room.'
- b. *Kòfí nyìn wémà xlán Àlúkú.*
Kofi throw paper towards Àlúkú
'Kofi threw a piece of paper to Aluku.'
- c. *Kòfí sá bí s xò ló mè.*
Kofi crawl enter room DET in
'Kofi crawled and entered the room.'
- d. *Kòfí nyìn wémà bí s xò ló mè.*
Kofi throw paper enter room DET in
'Kofi threw a piece of paper into the room.'

Observe that *són* follows the verb *sá* 'crawl' in (1a) while *xlán* follows the verb *nyìn* 'throw' in (1b). These constructions are similar to SVCs in Gungbe because the forms *són* and *xlán* surface in the same position as the second verb *bí s* 'enter' in a series as indicated in the Examples (1c)–(d).

ested reader is also referred to Kluge (2000, 2005) and Stewart (1994) for a later classification of the Gbe subfamilies.

The same holds for the Ewegbe forms *tsó* and *dé* (2a)–(b), which occur in the same position as second verbs *do* ‘exit’ and *dé* ‘put’ in an SVC in Ewegbe (2c)–(d).

Ewegbe

- (1) a. *Kofí tá tsó xɔ-a me.*
Kofi crawl from room-DET in
‘Kofi crawled from the room.’
- b. *Kofí kɔ aha dé anyígá.*
Kofi pour drink towards ground
‘Kofi poured the drink on the ground.’
- c. *Kofí tá-ná do-na le xɔ-a me.*
Kofi crawl-HAB exit-HAB LOC room-DET in
‘Kofi crawls and exits the room.’
- d. *Kofí ku-na tsi dé-ná atukpá me.*
Kofi fetch-HAB water put-HAB bottle in
‘Kofi fetches water and pours it into bottle(s).’

We argue in this paper that when they occur in constructions such as (1a)–(b) and (2a)–(b), these forms (i.e., *sín* vs. *xlán* in Gungbe, and *tsó* vs. *dé* in Ewegbe) do not have verbal properties, but function as well-behaved adpositions (i.e., prepositions). In order to show why we do not consider them as verbs in other contexts, we first discuss the properties of verbs in the two languages.

2. Establishing verbhood

In this section we discuss verbal properties in Gungbe and Ewegbe. For both languages, this involves (i) their basic morphology, (ii) the position they occupy in a clause, (iii) their ability to undergo reduplication, and (iv) their distribution in predicate focus constructions.²

2.1 Morphology

An interesting aspect of most verbs in Gbe is that the citation forms are monosyllabic, as indicated by the Gungbe verbs (*nyìn*, *sá*, *bíw*) in the examples under (1) and Ewegbe verbs (*tá*, *kɔ*, *ku*, *do*, *dé*) in the examples in (2). This morphological restriction does not hold for nouns, as can be seen from the Gungbe equivalents of ‘paper’, or the Ewegbe equivalents of ‘ground’ and ‘bottle’. While monosyllabicity is not unique to verbs in Gbe (other grammatical elements also tend to be mono-

2. It is important to accept the properties in their totality.

syllabic), it certainly distinguishes them from nouns and, possibly, other lexical categories (e.g., ideophones).³

2.2 Position

The Gbe languages typically display an SVO order in neutral declarative clauses. In Gungbe and Ewegbe neutral declarative sentences, therefore, verbs occur after the subject, and are usually preceded by TAM elements. This is illustrated by the sentences below:

(2) Gungbe

- a. *Kòfí ná t́n.*
Kofi FUT exit
'Kofi will go out'

Ewegbe

- b. *Kofí â-do.*
Kofi POT-exit
'Kofi may go out'

Both Gungbe *t́n* and Ewegbe *do* 'exit' occur after the subject in a position following the TAM elements *ná* and *a-*, which are referred to by Aboh (2004) and Essegbey (1999) as future and potential elements, respectively. Ewegbe has the additional morphological property that the verb can occur with the habitual suffix *-na*, while in Gungbe the habitual element has to occur in preverbal position. The difference is illustrated below:

(3) Gungbe

- a. *Kòfí ǹ t́n hwèhwè.*
Kofi HAB exit regularly
'Kofi goes out regularly'

Ewegbe

- b. *Kofí do-na énuénu.*
Kofi exit-HAB regularly
'Kofi goes out regularly'

In sum, verbs in Gungbe and Ewegbe occur after the subject, and are sometimes preceded by a TAM element. Additionally, in Ewegbe (and related languages), the verb can also occur with the habitual suffix.

3. There are bisyllabic verbs as well, which are admittedly derived or borrowed. Historically it appears most verbs in Gbe are monosyllabic, but there have also been processes, for example, of univerbation of VN collocations which are synchronically bisyllabic.

2.3 Reduplication

Verbs in Gungbe and Ewegbe can be reduplicated either alone or with their complements for nominal and adjectival derivation. Generally, reduplication in these languages involves the left-adjunction of a copy of the verb stem with some minor modifications depending on the variety: in Gungbe, all back vowels of the copied stem, with the exception of the high vowels, are replaced with /-i/. In Ewegbe, by contrast, the vowel remains the same (see Ameka 1999 for an overview of reduplication in Ewegbe). Consider the examples below:

(4) **Gungbe**

- a. *Tí-tón hwèhwè má nyón.*
 RED-exit regularly NEG be.good
 ‘Going out regularly is not good.’

Ewegbe

- b. *Do-do sésé ná-m ηutó.*
 RED-exit be.hard for-1SG INT
 ‘Going out is very hard for me.’

(5) **Gungbe**

- a. *Gbádó òù-òù nyón.*
 maize RED-eat be.good
 ‘Eating maize is good.’

Ewegbe

- b. *Akplé òu-òu ko wò-nyá.*
 akple RED-eat alone 3SG-know
 ‘He only knows how to eat *akple*.’

(6) **Gungbe**

- a. *Kpón àfò tì-tè étón.*
 look foot RED-swell POSS
 ‘Look at his swollen foot.’

Ewegbe

- b. *Kpó é-fé afò te-te òá.*
 look 3SG-POSS foot RED-swell in.the.distance
 ‘Look at his swollen foot.’

The examples in (5) are nominal derivations involving intransitive verbs while those in (6) involve transitive verbs. Observe that the complements of the reduplicated verbs are preposed, thus deriving OVV patterns. Examples (7a) and (7b) are instances of reduplication for the purpose of deriving adjectives. Thus, verbs in Ewegbe and Gungbe can be reduplicated to derive nominals or adjectives (see Aboh 2004, 2007, 2009 and Ameka 1999 for a detailed discussion).

2.4 Verb focus in Gungbe and Ewegbe

Like in other Gbe languages, verbs can be focussed in Gungbe and Ewegbe. In Gungbe, focused verbs occur in the left peripheral focus position in the clause. In such constructions, the verb precedes the subject, and can be marked with the particle *wɛ* glossed here as FOC. A copy of the verb is retained inside the proposition.

Gungbe

- (7) *yì wɛ̀ Àlúkú *(yì) xwégbè.*
 go FOC Aluku go home
 ‘What Aluku did was go home.’

In Ewegbe, predicate focus displays a different pattern, referred to as nominalized verb strategy in Ameka (2010:159). In these constructions, a reduplicated verb is placed in the clausal left periphery where it precedes a focus marker. A non-reduplicated copy of the verb remains in situ as illustrated in (9).

- (8) *Sí-sí-é wò-sí.*
 RED-escape-FOC 3SG-escape
 ‘They did escape.’

Aside verbs, various constituents can be focus-marked in Gungbe and Ewegbe. The sentences below illustrate this for DP-object focus in Gungbe (9a) and Ewegbe (9b), respectively.

(9) Gungbe

- a. *Singbó wɛ̀ Àlúkú m̀n tò xwégbè.*
 Singbo FOC Aluku see LOC house/home
 ‘SINGBO, Aluku saw at home.’

Ewegbe

- b. *Kwame-e Kofi kpó le afe-a me.*
 Kwame-FOC Kofi see LOC house-DET in
 ‘KWAME, Kofi saw in the house.’

A comparison of the examples in (9) and those in (7) and (8) reveal that it is only verbs that use the doubling strategy in focus constructions. Since Koopman’s (1984) seminal study of these constructions in Niger-Congo, there has been a wealth of analyses proposed (e.g., Ameka 1992, Koopman 2000; Aboh 2004; Kandibowicz 2007, 2008; Aboh & Dyakonova 2009, and much related work). We refer the interested reader to these studies and references therein.

The discussion in these sections shows that verbhood in Gbe can be diagnosed on the basis of morphology and position within the clause, the capacity to undergo reduplication (such as for nominalization) and focusing. In the following section,

we show that these properties apply to verbs that occur in V₁ position in serial verb constructions, but they fail to distinguish between verbs and prepositions that appear in post-V₁ position.

3. Distinguishing between the V₁ position and following verb positions

The previous discussion suggests that Gbe lexical verbs can be reduplicated in various contexts, such as in the OVV patterns discussed in Section 2.2 which involved nominal or adjectival derivations (5)–(7).

However, when verbs occur in an SVC (1c)–(d) in Gungbe and (2c)–(d) in Ewegbe), it is only the verb that occurs in V₁ position that can be reduplicated to achieve the nominalization of the SVC. The verb in V₂ position and other adjuncts are adjoined to the reduplicated verb in the nominalisation process. This is even more remarkable for Ewegbe and similar varieties in which such examples as listed under (2c)–(d) above show that both verbs must be marked with the habitual aspect marker. In such languages, one would expect a grammatical process affecting V₁ to also apply to all subsequent verbs in the series. The Ewegbe example below involving an instance of nominalization shows that this is not the case. The sentence under (10a) represents the base form to which nominalization applies in (11b). In this sentence V₁ but not V₂ reduplicates:

Ewegbe

- (10) a. *Kofí tá yi xɔ-a me.*
 Kofi crawl go room-DET in
 ‘Kofi crawled into the room.’
- b. *Kofí fé ta-tá yi xɔ-a me.*
 Kofi POSS RED-crawl go room-DET in
 ‘Kofi’s crawling into the room’
- c. **Kofí fé tá yi-yi xɔ-a me.*
 Kofi POSS crawl RED-go room-DET in
 ‘Kofi’s entry into the room crawling.’
- d. **Kofí fé ta-tá yi-yi xɔ-a me.*
 Kofi POSS RED-crawl RED-go room-DET in
 ‘Kofi’s crawling into the room’
- e. **Kofí fé xɔ-a me ta-tá yiyi.*
 Kofi POSS room-DET in RED-crawl RED-go
 ‘Kofi’s crawling into the room’

Example (10b) is the proper way to nominalise this SVC consisting of a manner verb and a second verb, V₂. Note that only the manner verb is reduplicated while the V₂ remains in the same form. The latter is followed by a locative DP which we

consider in this paper as the complement for expository reasons. Example (10c) shows that when V2 only is reduplicated, the resulting form is ungrammatical. Example (10d) indicates that the sentence is not improved by reduplicating both verbs in the series. Finally, Example (10e) illustrates the fact that even when one fronts the locative DP associated with V2, as one would for transitives, the sentence would still be ungrammatical. The following sentences involving an obligatory complement verb (analysed by Essegbey 1999 as a transitive verb) show that the restriction applies to such verbs as well:

Ewegbe

- (11) a. *Kofi ɖa nú ɖu.*
Kofi cook food eat
'Kofi cooked (food) and ate.'
- b. *Kofi fé nú ɖa-ɖa ɖu.*
Kofi POSS thing RED-cook eat
'Kofi's cooking and eating.'
- c. **Kofi fé nú ɖa-ɖa ɖu-ɖu.*
Kofi POSS thing RED-cook RED-eat
'Kofi's cooking and eating.'

The form *ɖu* 'eat' is obviously a full transitive verb when it follows another verb in an SVC and takes a full DP as complement. Yet, as (11c) shows, it is not acceptable to reduplicate this form together with the first verb.

These facts undermine a view along the lines of Heine et al. (1991) or Lord (1989, 1993) according to which verbs like *yi* 'go' in (10) function as verbal adpositions encoding direction when they follow a V1 in SVCs. The examples below from Gungbe show that the facts just described for Ewegbe can be replicated in this language as well:

Gungbe

- (12) a. *Kòfí sá yì xò lɔ̀ mè.*
Kofi crawl go room DET in
'Kofi crawled into the room.'
- b. *Kòfí sín sí-sá yì xò lɔ̀ mè*
Kofi POSS RED-crawl go room DET in
'Kofi's crawling into the room.'
- c. **Kòfí sín sí-sá yì-yì xò lɔ̀ mè*
Kofi POSS RED-crawl RED-go room DET in
'Kofi's crawling into the room.'
- d. **Kòfí sín sí-sá xò lɔ̀ mè yì-yì.*
Kofi POSS RED-crawl room DET in RED-go
'Kofi's crawling into the room.'

In both languages, verbs in V2 position to a large extent resist morphosyntactic processes typical of verbs in monoverbal clauses or the V1 in SVCs. In this respect, the V2 behaves similarly to prepositions, which naturally occur in post-V1 position, but cannot be reduplicated. This is illustrated below:

Ewegbe

- (12) a. *Dze ná gasó-á.*
 Make.way for bicycle-DET
 ‘Make way for the bicycle.’
- b. *Dze-dze ná gasó le Amsterdam le vévié.*
 RED-make.way for bicycle LOC Amsterdam LOC important
 ‘Making way for bicycles in Amsterdam is important.’
- c. **dze-dze ná-ná gasó le Amsterdam le vévié.*
 RED-make.way RED-for bicycle LOC Amsterdam LOC important
 ‘Making way for bicycles in Amsterdam is important.’
- d. **dze-dze gasó ná-ná le Amsterdam le vévié.*
 RED-make.way bicycle RED-for LOC Amsterdam LOC important
 ‘Making way for bicycles in Amsterdam is important.’

Gungbe

- (13) a. *zè ná kèké ló.*
 Make.way for bicycle DET
 ‘Make way for the bicycle.’
- b. *zì-zè ná kèké tò Amsterdam má fá.*
 RED-make.way for bicycle LOC Amsterdam NEG easy
 ‘Making way for bicycles in Amsterdam is not easy.’
- c. **zì-zè ní-ná kèké tò Amsterdam má fá.*
 RED-make.way RED-for bicycle LOC Amsterdam NEG easy
 ‘Making way for bicycles in Amsterdam is not easy.’
- d. **zì-zè kèké ní-ná tò Amsterdam má fá.*
 RED-make.way bicycle RED-for LOC Amsterdam NEG easy
 ‘Making way for bicycles in Amsterdam is not easy.’

The preposition at issue here is *ná* ‘for’. Examples (12b) and (13b) in Ewegbe and Gungbe respectively show that this element behaves just like the second verb in an SVC: it cannot be reduplicated and neither can its complement be preposed. In sum, while the verb in V1 position can be reduplicated and the complement of transitive verbs fronted in the process, predicates in subsequent post-V1 positions, including verbs and prepositions do not allow for this kind of process. These elements appear to be immune to morphosyntactic operations.

Additional evidence comes from focus constructions in Gungbe. Just as we have shown for reduplication, verbs that occur in post-V1 position in an SVC cannot be focussed, unlike verbs in V1 position. Thus although *yì* is focussed in the

monoverbal construction in (8a), it cannot be focussed in (14) in which it occurs as the second verb in an SVC. Observe from (14c) that the first verb in an SVC can be focussed:

Gungbe

- (14) a. *Kòfi sá yì xwégbè.*
 Kofi crawl go home
 ‘Kofi crawled home.’
- b. **yì wè Kòfi sá yì xwégbè.*
 go FOC Kofi crawl go home
 ‘What Kofi did was crawl home.’
- c. *Sá wè Kòfi sá yì xwégbè.*
 crawl FOC Kofi crawl go home
 ‘What Kofi did was crawl home.’

This focus strategy also exists in some variants of the Ewegbe dialect cluster (cf. Collins 1993 on Kpele). However, it does not exist in the ones which are the object of study in this paper. Note that, like the reduplication criterion, the focus strategy shows a similarity between verbs which occur in post-V₁ position and prepositions.

Thus far we have discussed properties which verbs do possess. In the process, we have shown that some do not apply to verbs as well as other grammatical elements which occur in post-V₁ position and that this makes verbs in that position appear to be like prepositions (cf. Kotowski et al. this volume). In the next section we discuss another property that verbs in V₂ position share with most prepositions namely their inability to be displaced alongside with their complement.

3.1 Pied-piping

In Gungbe and Ewegbe, verbs and most prepositions resist pied-piping because they cannot be fronted together with their complement, as the sentences below illustrate.

Ewegbe

- (15) a. **[fo Ami] Kofi tsó atí t_[fo Ami]*
 beat Ami Kofi take stick
 ‘Kofi **beat Ami** with a stick.’
- b. *[Ami] Kofi tsó atí fo t_[Ami]*
 Ami Kofi take stick beat
 ‘Kofi beat **Ami** with a stick.’

Ewegbe

- (16) a. **[ná Kofi] Ami dzi ha t_[ná Kofi]*
 for Kofi Ami sing song
 ‘Ami sang *for Kofi*’
 b. *Kofi Ami dzi ha na t_[Kofi]*
 Kofi Ami sing song for
 ‘Ami sang for Kofi.’

The data in (17) further show that verbal phrase pied-piping is prohibited with motion verbs as well, an indication that Gbe languages disallow verb phrase fronting regardless of the argument structure or the semantic type of the verb.

(17) **Ewegbe**

- a. **Yi aféme lá, me-zɔ.*
 go home TP 1SG-walk
 ‘What I did was walk home.’

Gungbe

- b. **Yi xwégbè yà ùn-sá.*
 go home TOP 1SG-crawl
 ‘What I did was crawl home.’

While this characterisation holds for most prepositions, some, however, do allow pied-piping, unlike verbs. In both Ewegbe and Gungbe, for instance, the LOCATIVE prepositions *le* and *tò* respectively can be fronted with their complement. This is illustrated by (18a) and (18b) respectively.

(18) **Ewegbe**

- a. *Le afé-á me lá, me-kpó Kofi.*
 LOC house-DET in TP 1SG-see Kofi
 ‘In the house, I saw Kofi.’

Gungbe

- b. *Tò xwégbè fí mè dé má ná jè àjò.*
 LOC house here no one NEG FUT commit theft
 ‘In this house, no one will steal.’

Given that not all prepositions can be topicalised in this fashion, we hypothesize that the data in (15)–(18) are an indication that some prepositional forms have been more grammaticalised than others.⁴

It should be evident from the discussion so far that while there is an identifiable class of prepositions in the Gbe languages, the latter sometimes group with

4. For instance, the allative *dé* can only marginally occur in some particular contexts in Ewe.

verbs thus suggesting that they might not have lost their verbal properties completely. The main distinguishing properties are summed up in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Verbs and prepositions compared in Gbe

	General properties					Language specific properties		
	Position		Reduplication		Pied-pipe	Verb focus (Gungbe)		Habitual (Ewegbe)
	Subject-V ₁	Post-V ₁	Subject-V ₁	Post-V ₁		Subject-V ₁	Post-V ₁	
Verb	+	+	+	-	-	+	-	+
Prep	-	+	Not applicable	-	%	-	-	-

In the Table, a “+” indicates that the feature applies while a “-” shows that it does not apply. A “%” indicates that some members of the class allow a limited application of the feature and others don’t. The table shows that in post-V₁ position, verbs are indistinguishable from prepositions. These data are compatible with grammaticalisation theories that assume that the development from verb to preposition occurs in the context of the serial verb construction (cf. Heine et al. 1991; Lord 1989, 1993; Ansre 1966). Under such an analysis, the post-V₁ region imposes restrictions on verbal forms occurring there. Nevertheless, there are properties that distinguish prepositions from verbs in this position. In the next section, we look at what makes a genuine preposition in these Gbe languages.

4. Becoming a preposition

According to the position we take in this paper, the Gbe prepositions belong to a fairly restricted (and presumably recent) class that has developed from verbs. As such, they do not have clear distinguishing properties. Instead, they are mostly characterised negatively by the verbal properties which they lack (or which they have lost due to grammaticalisation). Building on this, the following discussion shows that the allative and ablative forms cannot be considered to be lexical verbs in Ewegbe and Gungbe (see also Kotowski et al. this volume). In order to best illustrate the shift from verb into these preposition forms, we start with the forms that still behave like verbs and then move to the ones that do not.

4.1 From verbs to ablative prepositions

In this section we discuss the ablative forms in the two varieties. While the form in Ewegbe still behaves as a verb in some contexts, its counterpart in Gungbe does not. We take this to be evidence of grammaticalisation in progress in Ewegbe.

4.1.1 *Tsó*

In Section 2.1 we stated that Ewegbe verbs can occur as the sole predicate after the subject and, possibly, a TAM element. We also mentioned that they can occur with the habitual suffix. Example (19a) below shows that *tsó* can occur alone as the main predicate. Moreover, when it occurs as the only predicate in a construction that expresses a habitual state of affairs, it has to take the habitual suffix. However, when it occurs in a post-V₁ position in a series, it can occur with or without the suffix. This is illustrated below:

Ewegbe

- (19) a. *Kofi a-tsó Ho.*
 Kofi POT-come.from Ho
 ‘Kofi may come from Ho.’
- b. *Deha si Ami dźrá-ná lá tsó*(-na) Vui.*
 Palm-wine REL Ami sell-HAB TP come.from-HAB Vui
 ‘The palm wine that Ami sells comes from Vui.’
- c. *Kofi zɔ-na tsó(-ná) aféme ɲdí síá ɲdí.*
 Kofi walk-HAB come.from-HAB home morning every morning
 ‘Kofi walks from home every morning.’

Tsó takes a potential prefix in (19a) and, in (19b) where the relative clause gives an indication that the sentence expresses a habitual state of affairs, it has to occur with the habitual morpheme. In both sentences, *tsó* behaves like a full verb. In (19c) by contrast, where it occurs in post V₁ position, the suffix is optional. That is to say many speakers say one could either use *tsó* with or without the habitual marker. This could be evidence of grammaticalisation in progress (cf. Lord 1989, 1993). In other words, when it occurs with the habitual suffix, *tsó* is treated as a verb whereas when it occurs without the affix, it is treated as a preposition. This would mean that *tsó* is ambivalent between a verb and a preposition. That a scenario like this is most likely is suggested by the fact that, in other contexts, *tsó* behaves like a full preposition in that it cannot take the habitual morpheme. When it introduces a temporal adjunct, for instance, *tsó* disallows the habitual marker, as shown in (20).

Ewegbe

- (20) *Kofi dɔ́-na alɔ́ tsó(*-na)⁵ ηdí yi*(-na) fiě.*
 Kofi sleep-HAB sleep from-HAB morning go-HAB evening
 ‘Kofi sleeps from morning to evening.’

Although *tsó* occurs after the verb in V1 position, which takes the habitual suffix, it cannot take the habitual suffix because it has a temporal interpretation. For Heine et al. (1991), this would be evidence that this instance of *tsó* is more grammaticalised than the locative form in (19). Note also that *yi* ‘go’, which follows *tsó* in post V1 position has to take the habitual suffix because it is a lexical verb.

Tsó is one of the prepositions in Ewegbe that can occur in topicalised phrases. Heine et al. (1991) assume that this property only applies to the temporal use of the form as in (21a). But, as (21b) shows, that is not the case in the varieties under study here. Such variation may be interpreted as further evidence for the grammaticalization process across the Gbe varieties.

Ewegbe

- (21) a. *Tsó é-fé ɖeví-me mé-kpɔ́-a nú o.*
 From 3SG-POSS child-in NEG-see-HAB thing NEG
 ‘Since his childhood he does not see.’
 b. *Tsó da-nye gbɔ́ lá, me-yi mama-nye gbɔ́.*
 From mother-1SG place TP 1SG-go grandma-1SG place
 ‘From my mother’s place I went to my grandmother’s.’

The evidence we have here suggests that *tsó* has not fully grammaticalised in the sense that it has not lost all its verbal properties, but it has developed certain syntactic properties (e.g., pied-piping), which verbs lack. As a verbal form, *tsó* occurs as the main predicate in a monoverbal construction and, in post-V1 position, it can take the habitual suffix. As a developing preposition, however, it introduces temporal adjuncts and may undergo pied-piping.

By contrast, the ablative form in Gungbe to which we now turn has lost all its verbal properties including the fact that it cannot occur in a V1 position.

4.1.2 Són

Unlike *tsó*, *són* neither occurs as the sole predicate in a clause nor as V1 in an SVC. This is illustrated by the sentences below:

5. A reviewer asked why *tsó* is glossed here as ‘from’ instead of ‘come.from’. This is because we want to show that it has grammaticalised fully.

Gungbe

- (22) a. *Àtàn dé Séná nò sà nò trón/*són Àdjrá*
 wine REL Sena HAB sell HAB come.from Adjra
 ‘The wine that Ami sells comes from Adjra.’
- b. *Kòfí trón/*són yòvòtòmè wá*
 Kofi come/from Europe come
 ‘Kofi has returned from abroad.’
 (lit. Kofi from Europe come)

Observe that a completely different verb (i.e. *trón*) is needed to express ‘come.from’ in Gungbe. Thus *són* neither occurs as the sole verb in a monoverbal construction nor as the V1 in an SVC. Similarly, *són* manifests none of the properties associated with verbhood: it cannot be reduplicated or nominalized, and it cannot be focused. In Section 5, we argue that *són* derives from **tsó* which is also the proto-Gbe form for *tsó* in Ewegbe (cf. Capo 1991 and Section 5 below). Before then, we discuss the allative forms.

4.2 From verbs to allative position

In this section we discuss *dé* in Ewegbe and *xlán* in Gungbe. While *dé* occurs as a verb with motion semantics in some dialects of Ewegbe, *xlán* only occurs as a preposition in Gungbe. Interestingly, however, it does occur as a verb with motion semantics in Ewegbe. We argue that the fact that both forms occur as verbs with motion semantics either within the specific variety in which they occur as prepositions or in other Gbe varieties is evidence that the prepositions derive from the verbs.

4.2.1 Dé

Dé is interesting for us in the sense that while it occurs as a verb in the Inland dialects of Ewegbe, it only occurs as an allative preposition in the coastal dialects. Because its verbal use is not across all dialects, Westermann (1928, 1930) only describes it as an auxiliary verb. The semantics of the verbal form, although it involves motion, is somewhat different from the allative preposition, so it is possible for us to determine which verbal properties go with which meaning. Informally, the semantics of the verb form is that a figure moves and comes to be in the interior or containing region of the reference object. In (23a), for example, Kofi moves to be in the enclosed region of the room. By contrast, the meaning of the allative preposition does not itself contain a movement feature, rather the preposition signals a place as a point towards which a motion or action is directed. Thus in (23b) the allative preposition marks the room as the place to which the action of dropping is directed. Compare the sentences below:

(23) **Inland Ewegbe**

- a. *Kofi dɛ́-*(ɛ́) xɔ-ɔ me wesíáwe.*
 Kofi enter-HAB room-DET in always
 ‘Kofi enters the room always.’

Coastal Ewegbe

- b. *Kofi gé-ná dɛ́(*-ná) xɔ-a me yesíayi.*
 Kofi drop-HAB ALL-HAB room-DET in always
 ‘Kofi enters the room always.’

We have maintained the forms for expressing the habitual and definiteness in the inland dialects instead of the standard forms because they do not sound well together. Note that because of the adverb *wesíáwe* ‘always’, the *dɛ́* form in (23a) has to occur with a habitual suffix. In the other dialects, by contrast, ‘enter’ is expressed by a combination of *gé* ‘drop’ and the allative preposition, and in these varieties, the form cannot occur with the suffix. The examples below show that when the verbal form occurs in post-V1 position it still takes the suffix:

(24) **Inland Ewegbe**

- a. *éfú-ɔ du dɛ́-ɛ́ xɔ-ɔ me.*
 3SG-move_limb course enter-HAB room-DET in
 ‘He runs into the room.’

Coastal Ewegbe

- b. *éfú-ná du- gé-ná dɛ́ xɔ-a me.*
 3SG-move_limb course drop-HAB ALL room-DET in
 ‘He runs into the room.’

It can be observed from (24b) that in the coastal dialects, it is the verb *gé* ‘drop’ and not the allative preposition that takes the habitual suffix. Note that the restriction on *dɛ́* in such cases is not because it forms what one might consider a compound with *gé* ‘drop’. In all Ewegbe dialects, including the inland dialects, it occurs as a preposition in examples like the ones in (25):

(25) **Inland Ewegbe**

- a. *Kofi da-a ga dɛ́(*-ɛ) kplɔ́ dzí.*
 Kofi move-HAB money ALL-(HAB) table top
 ‘Kofi puts money on the table.’

Coastal Ewegbe

- b. *Kofi da-na ga dɛ́(*-na) kplɔ́-a dzí.*
 Kofi move-HAB money ALL-(HAB) table-DEF top
 ‘Kofi puts money on the table.’

Not surprisingly, it is only in the inland dialects that *dɛ́* can be reduplicated. This is illustrated below:

(26) **Inland Ewegbe**

- a. *xɔ-ɔ me dɛ́-dɛ́.*
 room-DET in RED-enter
 ‘Entering the room’

Coastal Ewegbe

- b. *ge-gé dɛ xɔ-a me.*
 RED-drop ALL room-DET in
 ‘Entering the room’

What we have here is therefore a situation where *dɛ́* has completely grammaticalised into a preposition in the coastal dialects but has only been partially grammaticalised in the inland dialects. This is unlike *tsó* whose grammaticalisation process is partial in all the dialects. We now discuss *xlán* ALLATIVE in Gungbe.

4.2.2 *Xlán*

Like *són*, *xlán* has also completely grammaticalised in Gungbe: it cannot occur as the sole predicate in a monoverbal clause as the unacceptability of the sentence (27) illustrates:

Gungbe

- (27) **Kòfí xlán xò ló mè.*
 Kofi ALL room DET in

Instead, as (1b) repeated below illustrates, it only occurs in post-V₁ position:

Gungbe

- (1) b. *Kòfí nyìn bólu xlán Àfíá.*
 Kofi throw ball towards Afia
 ‘Kofi threw a ball to Afia.’

Not surprisingly, *xlán* can neither be reduplicated nor focussed like a true verb in Gungbe.

One question that arises is why we suppose that *xlán* grammaticalised from a verb if it does not have a verbal counterpart in Gungbe. We argue that the form is related to the verb *xlá* in Ewegbe which Westermann (1928, 1930) characterises as ‘to throw, strike (violently)’. Our conjecture is that there was a proto-Gbe verb form **xlán* which has remained in the Ewegbe varieties but has grammaticalised into a preposition in Gungbe. The semantic relation between the verb form, as we have it in the Ewegbe dialects, and the allative preposition form in Gungbe is quite transparent, and suggests a plausible grammaticalisation path: the verb entails an action directed at another entity. The allative preposition focuses on the direction of an action or a motion, but does not entail a goal. Interestingly, the verb in Ewegbe does not show signs of following the grammaticalisation path which its

cognate form has followed in Gungbe. In the next section we show why we make a similar claim for *sín*.

5. On the verbal origin of *Sɔn*

As noted in Section 1, the Ewegbe dialect cluster is the westernmost Gbe language and Gungbe, which belongs to the Fon cluster, is at the easternmost end of the Gbe continuum. Be that as it may, there are systematic synchronic correspondences between the Ewegbe (and, in this case, we shall say the coastal variety and the inland dialects) as well as Gungbe varieties. With respect to the ablative forms, we can show that both the Ewegbe form *tsó* and the Gungbe form *sín* can be traced to a historical source. One correspondence which has been amply argued for by Capo (e.g., 1991) is that a proto consonant **tʰ* has reflexes of *tʃ* in Anlo and some Ewegbe varieties, *tʰ* in the Inland dialects and *s* in other Gbe varieties including Gungbe. For example:

* *tʰs* *tʃó* (Anlo) *tsó* (Inland) *só* (Gen) *só* (Fon) *só* (Gungbe) ‘take/reach’

* *tʰa* *tʃa* (Anlo) *tʰa* (Inland) *sa* (Gen) *sa* (Fon) *sa* (Gungbe) ‘move about’

Thus, the initial consonants in the forms in the varieties (i.e. *ts* and *s*) are diachronically related. At first sight it may not seem entirely obvious why the forms for the ablative *tsó* and *sín* could be derived from the same source especially given the differences in the nasalisation and the quality of the vowels. However, there is a correspondence among the dialects where a proto-Gbe nasalised half closed back vowel with high tone /**ó̃*/ has reflexes of a non-nasalised half closed back vowel /*ó*/ in Ewegbe and the central Gbe dialects but has a nasalised half-open vowel /*õ̃*/ in eastern Gbe, including Fon and Gungbe. Consider the examples below (cf Capo 1991: 72):

**tõ* (Proto-Gbe) *tó* (Anlo) *tó* (Inland) *tõ* (Fon) *tõ* (Gungbe) ‘to germinate’

These correspondences suggest to us that we can postulate a proto-Gbe **tõ* ‘to come from, originate’. We venture to suggest further that Proto Eastern Gbe had a verb form reflex **sín* while proto Central and Western Gbe had **tsó*.⁶ In the course of the languages moving from this intermediate subgroup stage to the present day varieties, the verb forms developed adpositional uses as we have outlined. However, in Eastern Gbe the verb forms have been lost. Citing Segurola

6. The division of Gbe languages into Western, Central and Eastern follows Kluge (2000) and Stewart (1989, 1994).

(1963), Lefebvre and Brousseau (2002: 321) report Fongbe examples such as (28a) where *sín*, the Fongbe reflex of *sɔn, appears as main predicate. Sentence (28b) is a similar example presented in the new edition by Segurola & Rassinoux (2000) where *sín* appears to have a verbal function.

Fon

- (28) a. *É sín jí towe*
 3SG originate top 2SG.POSS
 ‘It is your turn’ (Lefebvre & Brousseau 2002: 321)
- b. *Été wú é ká sín?*
 what body 3SG ADV originate
 ‘What does it come from?’

As Lefebvre & Brousseau show, however, their present-day informants reject a monoverbal clause in which the sole predicate is *sín*. Instead, speakers treat *sín* as a preposition and suggest the alternate (28c) for (28a). Note that in (28c), the preposition follows the Fongbe equivalent of the verb begin.⁷

Fon

- c. *É be sín jí towe.*
 3SG begin from top 2SG.POSS
 ‘It is your turn.’

Given that examples such as (28a)–(b) including verbal *sín* were recorded in Segurola’s earlier work, we conjecture that Fongbe did have a verbal *sín* that was lost in the course of grammaticalisation, leaving only the preposition in the present day grammar. There must of course have been a stage where both the verb form and the preposition co-existed as we have shown for the Ewegbe item *tsó*.

We suggest that a similar development might have taken place in Gungbe where *sín* would have been a verb but then lost the verb usage leaving the preposition in the present-day language. The vacuum left by this loss is filled by another item, as illustrated in sentence (22a) above. In western, Gbe including the Ewegbe varieties, the verb form has not been lost and a grammaticalised form of the verb co-exists with it. The ablative forms examined here show that there is variation in the outcomes and processes of grammaticalisation in the same semantic domain across varieties of the same language cluster. In eastern Gbe the original verb forms have been lost and we can only reconstruct them from a comparison with the Ewegbe forms. In Ewegbe, however, a heterosemic verb and preposition

7. The vowel quality of the Fon form can be demonstrated to follow from correspondence rules between Fon and Gun and proto Gbe, but this need not be demonstrated here. The interested reader is referred to Capo 1991 and Kluge 2000 for the details

set (Lichtenberk 1991) has emerged as a result of the grammaticalisation process. There is no indication at present from discourse that the verb forms are being used less.

The properties of the verbs and prepositions that we have discussed can therefore be summed up as in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Summary of features of movement forms in Ewegbe and Gungbe

	Position		Reduplication		Verb focus (Gungbe)		Habitual (Ewegbe)
	Subject- V ₁	Post- V ₁	Subject- V ₁	Post- V ₁	Subject- V ₁	Post- V ₁	
tsó Ewegbe	%	+	+	–			%
dé Inland	%	+	+	–			%
dé Coastal	–	+	Not applicable	–			–
xlán Gungbe	–	+	Not applicable	–	Not applicable	–	
són Gungbe	–	+	Not applicable	–	Not applicable	–	

Table 2 displays the features that characterise the movement forms in Ewegbe and Gungbe. It immediately shows that the Ewegbe form *tsó* does double duty, functioning as verb and preposition across the dialects. Similarly, *dé* functions both as a verb and a preposition in Inland Ewegbe while it functions only as a preposition in the coastal dialects. Hence it functions as a preposition across all Ewegbe dialects. The Gungbe forms, however, only function as prepositions.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we have defended the position argued for several decades ago by Ansre (1966) that prepositions in the Gbe languages have developed and/or are developing from verbs. We have demonstrated this on the basis of the development of prepositions of movement in two varieties of Gbe, namely Ewegbe and Gungbe. The analyses we provide support some of the findings in the grammaticalisation literature: that grammatical change is gradual (eg. Heine et al. 1991; Lord 1989, 1993; Hopper & Traugott 1993). For example, the ablative form in

Ewegbe has not fully grammaticalised into a preposition. Our findings also support the position that grammaticalisation involves a shift from less abstract to more abstract meanings: the verb to preposition-shift is associated with a semantic change from “temporal predicate” to a more abstract atemporal predicate (cf. Langacker 1992) which is also reflected in the loss of the power to take aspectual inflections or markers. We have also shown that the development occurs in the context of a specific construction- serial verb construction- and with respect to a specific position in the construction namely, the post-V₁ position (cf. e.g., Bisang 1998 on constructions and positions in grammaticalisation).

The function of the forms we have discussed in the two varieties can be represented along the cline below:

	Verb-----	Verb/Preposition-----	Preposition
→		→	
ABLATIVE		Ewegbe <i>tsó</i>	Gungbe <i>sɔn</i>
ALLATIVE		Inland Ewegbe <i>dé</i>	Coastal Ewegbe <i>dé</i> , Gungbe <i>xlán</i>

This suggests that grammaticalisation studies should take variation and heterogeneity in linguistic communities into account. The predominant models of grammaticalisation, like most linguistic theories, are rather homogeneous in their approach. The case study of prepositions of movement in varieties of a cluster of languages shows that the grammaticalisation process can vary not only across languages but also across dialects and within dialects.

Abbreviations

ADV	Adverb
ALL	Allative
DET	Determiner
FOC	Focus
FUT	Future
HAB	Habitual
INT	Intensifier
LOC	Locative
NEG	Negation
POSS	Possessive
POT	Potential
RED	Reduplication
SG	Singular
TP	Topic

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