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The syntax/discourse interface of predicative markers: the case of Tura *ké*

Thomas Bearth
University of Zurich

1. In Bearth (2009), I have examined the role of the predicative marker (PM) in Tura as an element of syntax rather than of TAM, a decision which could be defended on at least two accounts: (i) the PM subcategorizes rather independently of the usual TAM categories (with one exception, see below); (ii) the PM fulfils a watershed role in organizing what I called “split and shift grammar”, where PMs function as “pivots” of syntactic processes which involve change of relative position of constituents while at the same time preserving canonical word order.

Indeed, PM licenses a paradigm ranging over properties attributed to sentential expressions, i.e. polarity, modality, dependency, and focalization, which may be called the PM paradigm as opposed to the TAM paradigm, the latter being mostly, though not exclusively marked on the verb. If we allow for some overlap between these two paradigms, it is because e.g. the past/non-past, or more accurately, factual vs. non-factual opposition, while not relying entirely on PM for its expression, is reflected in (or co-expressed by) the PM tone alternation of the dependent mode.

The purpose of the present paper is not to discuss the whole of Tura PM but the apparently innocuous predicative marker *ké*. *ké* easily qualifies as default expression of PM. In respect to three of the four defining parameters mentioned above, it confers the unmarked value upon the predicate with which it is associated: *affirmative* by contrast to negation (polarity); *assertive* rather than directive (modality, Bearth 1971), and, thirdly, it marks the clause as being syntactically independent, as syntactic head of a construction, or, what is even more relevant in African languages with a highly formalized sequential syntax, as in Tura, as *non-sequential*:

- (1) mεε ké zé ‘There is a snake here.’
snake PM here (I just discovered it. Action needs to be taken.)
- (2) góó ké gie ‘There is traffic.’
car PM pass

(2) was said by someone caught in a threatening situation and looking for an escape from it. The fact that cars were circulating showed that security had improved and might allow to leave one’s hideout in the threatened zone and travel to a safer place.

ké being the obligatory representation of the default value of all these parameters, its ultimate *raison d’être* would then be the exclusion of the privative or zero option (privileged in most of the world’s languages), by virtue of the typological requirement specified for Mande languages as “suppletive formation of negative and positive paradigms” (Aikhenvald 2006:27). To supply it with positive content, one might refer to it as an instance of sentence modality expressing “presentative mode”, described as “the weakest, most basic one, because it is at the core of every illocutionary act with a propositional content” (Zaefferer 1990, 233). In terms of information structure,

its alternation with tonal or pronominal PMs may be found to correlate with different framing conditions imposed on the context for which the predication may hold: a global statement illustrating thetic mode (Sasse 1987; see (3) below), varying with the context of either thematic (4 below) or rhematic exclusion (Bearth 2005: 6; (5) below).

2. Attempts at defining the role of *ké* by investing it with theoretical status in various analytical frameworks all fall short (i) of accounting for the full range of its recurrently observed uses; (ii) of providing a functionally coherent explanation for the emergence (or retention?) of *ké* in Tura, and the characteristic scope of its uses, to which, to the best of my knowledge, no parallel has so far been described for other Mande languages. Earlier explorations identified *ké* as assertive marker (Bearth 1971), as *verum* focus marker (Bearth 1992), or as narrative suspense marker (Bearth 1986). The latter occurrence is a case in point, for in the narrative context, obviously, the sequential syntax is the unmarked option, and the use of *ké* the marked option relative to it. On the other hand, it is true that the *verum* focus interpretation of *ké* is supported by its complementary distribution with constituent focus markers, but interpreting it that way does not justice to its frequent occurrence in background material where it serves to identify states-of-affairs elucidating some other statement which may be considered to be “in focus” and to which it is, in terms of communicative relevance, clearly subordinate. From a discourse perspective, the occurrence of *ké*, more often than not, represents a non-trivial choice in need of explanation.

3. Among the conditions of its occurrence, one which strikes the eye in contradistinction to predicative markers e.g. in Manding is the restriction of *ké* to the position following a NP subject. Its occurrence is mutually exclusive with subject pronoun paradigms whose tone alternations partially reflect the distinctions carried by the PM particle. In some cases, there is a choice between topicalization by extraposition (frontshifting), where the NP is followed by a resumptive pronoun. By contrast with related languages, e.g. Dan, the NP+pronoun configuration assigns a marked (or contrastive) topic status to the NP: the proposition is valid for a domain denoted by NP to the exclusion of another, or to a broader domain equally in the scope of ambient discourse, an instance of thematic exclusion (Bearth 2005).

(3) náò ké suo lètɔ̀lɔ̀ gòn ‘Children are afraid of the doctor.’
 children PM be-afraid.HAB doctor of

(4) náò (/) wo suo lètɔ̀lɔ̀ gòn ‘As to the children,
 children PrS be-afraid.HAB doctor of they are afraid of the doctor.’

(5) náò’ suo lètɔ̀lɔ̀ gòn le. ‘(Only) children are afraid of the doctor.’
 (*Rhematic exclusion*: someone assumed that me adult, I am afraid of the doctor.)

What then is the NP + *ké* sequence? Calling it new or derived topic fits a great number of occurrences, but still leaves us with cases where there is no change of topic such as:

(6) Ko náá ké nuyèa, à lòn ké mənó kêèl. ‘Our grand-mother has come, her
 love PM affects all of us (= we all love her).

4. The first purpose of this paper is to explore a number of diagnostic occurrences of *ké* and bring in line assumptions about its intensional properties with extensional meaning as observed in discourse, resulting hopefully in a unitary description with

some reasonable degree of predictability of its occurrence. A preliminary hypothesis, which seems to fit, is its description as a marker of referential discontinuity, co-defined by marked subjective intervention into the process of interactional construction of discourse (or inferential) meaning.

5. A second purpose of the paper is to attempt to give substance to earlier speculations about its role as part of what might be called a discourse-grammar of Tura, building on a heuristics which makes the default assumption – open to revision – that « Where there is relatedness of form, look for relatedness of function. » (Zaefferer 1990:221). We may observe that a homophonous *ké* – or *é* in its more colloquial form – occurs as an utterance-final deictic marker with scope over the sentence (Bearth 1971). Nothing in fact would prevent us from calling it a sentence-final PM. Its occurrence is mutually exclusive with PM in its canonical position but its function is different:

(7) àbà né' zá baaì (k)é.

His child-FOC play do-PR0G

The case here is one of a family who had fled their home. One neighbor says they are not back yet. Another neighbour, recognizing one of the children of that family playing in the courtyard, uses (7) to claim that they are in fact back.

ké in sentence-final position constitutes part of an evidential paradigm. Its relation with the semantic properties of predicative *ké* seems to be consistent with the general and somewhat abstract assumption made on the basis of referential discontinuity and subjective commitment.

6. There is also a discourse-pragmatic marker *ké* which introduces the concluding statement by a participant in a discussion which at the point where *ké* is introduced has not led to a mutually agreed consensus, or, more subtly, said by an elder, it introduces the statement which he considers to represent as consensus, which may be paraphrased as subjective appropriation of a discourse.

7. Extending the search for convergence between particle morphology and discourse function to tonally differentiated homonyms, I shall conclude by adding the quasi-homonym *kê* (mid-high tone) which I have described elsewhere as indicating “commonality of viewpoint” (Bearth 1986, chapter 2). A way of paraphrasing this is to say that two sentences, connected by *kê*, whatever their tense-aspect characteristics, are “simultaneously relevant” by virtue of the presence of the marker between them. In inferential terms, the speaker tells the hearer that in order to correctly interpret what he or she is saying, the audience has to take into account both statements. The two juxtaposed statements are not usually sequentially related.

By contrast, *ké* indicates independent relevance. The speaker tells the hearer that in order to correctly interpret what he or she is saying, he or she should rely on the *ké*-marked statement alone, as illustrated in (1-2) above. Thus, by contrasting *ké* and *kê* from the standpoint of their inferential properties, we come to a conclusion which corroborates the hypothesis advanced at the end of 5. above.

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