

Toward a typology of Niger-Congo complementation

Subordinate constituents as verb arguments, i.e. complement clauses, whether S-like (*that Kofi killed the chicken*) or truncated (*Kofi's killing a chicken, to kill a chicken, killing a chicken*), have attracted some attention in the crosslinguistic literature (Noonan 1985, 2007, Ransom 1986, Wierzbicka 1988, Dixon 1991). Noonan, in particular, has advanced an initial typology, maintaining that while all languages exhibit complementation not all employ equal numbers and types of complementizers. Languages differentiate S-like from I-like (infinitive) complements and distinguish, within and among these types (relative to a matrix clause), dependency functions related to independent/dependent time reference, assertive/non-assertive epistemic commitment or realis/irrealis discourse assumption.

Within Niger-Congo, however, less attention has been devoted to clausal arguments. For example, Watters (2000) provides an initial and general overview of complementation in Africa. He highlights the relative frequency of parataxis and coordination over subordination. But with respect to the latter, he notes that sentence complements occur more often than truncated ones and that multiple S-like complements occur in some languages. He also claims that truncated clauses in subject and direct object positions, while uncommon (relative clauses being favored), do occur in I-like shapes. This complex set of impressions informs but does not determine our pursuit of subordinated arguments in Niger Congo.

Our overarching goal is to survey subfamilies within Niger Congo using available grammars, dictionaries and text collections. We seek to ascertain the nature of complementation systems existing among these families and to postulate a resulting system for Niger Congo. As a first step toward these goals, we note the broad character of complementation in West Africa.

Anchoring our analysis is the rather robust system of complementation in West Benue Congo's Edoid language Emai compared to the more streamlined system in Kwa's Akan and Ewe. Emai, for example, distinguishes three S-like complements with particles for indicative *khi*, subjunctive *li* and conditional *si*, the former two occurring in subject and direct object positions. It also evinces I-like infinitival and gerundive forms, the former in direct object position and the latter in subject and direct object positions. Functions related to these forms bear on independent/dependent time reference for *khi/li*, non-assertive epistemic condition for *si* and realis/irrealis discourse assumptions for infinitivals and gerundives.

Akan, by contrast, maintains a single S-like complement with *se* as well as an I-like infinitival complement. As a consequence, its formal marking of argument complementation fails to differentiate among time, epistemic and discourse functions. A similar situation appears to characterize Ewe's S-like *bé* complement and its I-like forms.

While our findings at this juncture are preliminary, our initial impression is that Niger Congo showed both S-like and I-like complementation. Beyond this, however, it is not yet clear what functions are associated with verb argument complements. Does the S-like vs I-like split constitute an indicative/subjunctive mood split with contrastive functions related to time reference, epistemicity and discourse presumption subsumed thereby or might there be additional formal differentiation of functions. Further data is intended to clarify this situation.