

THE STRUCTURE OF THE VERBAL CLAUSE IN BIMOBA

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper sets out to give a preliminary description of verbal clauses in Bimoba.¹ This is attempted within the general framework of an hierarchical description. The clause is set up as the unit at the level of analysis between the phrase level and the sentence level. In structure the clause is composed of phrases.² In function the clause operates as an element of the sentence.

There are two main types of clause in Bimoba, the verbal clause and the non-verbal clause. This paper is limited to a description of the verbal clause.

2. NUCLEUS AND CORE

The clause can be divided into two main parts, termed the nucleus and the core.

2.1 THE NUCLEUS

The nucleus consists of a nominal phrase subject (symbolised as NPs).

Examples:³

1. n nimbiyeni kaa
 my eye one is not
 NPs
2. ɲɔɔ nan sapaan nɪŋfɔk tan tɔk
 he and girl one eyed then walk together
 NPs

2.2 THE CORE

The core consists of two parts, an obligatory head and an optional expansion. The obligatory head is always a verbal phrase (symbolized as VP). The expansion may consist of up to two nominal phrases object (NPo) and up to four adverbial phrases (AP).⁴

¹This paper was first presented at the Fifth West African Languages Congress in April, 1965. The material used in the paper has been gathered over a period of nine months between December 1963 and December 1964, while living in Bunkpurugu with my colleague, Miss Sonia Hine. This analysis has been worked out in discussion with Dr. John T. Bendor-Samuel. The field work has been undertaken in cooperation with the Institute of African Studies of the University of Ghana.

Bimoba is one of the Gurma languages which are closely related to the Mole-Dagbani group within the Gur family. The Bimoba people live in northeastern Ghana and northwest Togo. They extend from Nakpanduri eastwards across the border. The 1960 census showed that there were 32,000 Bimobas living in Ghana. It is estimated that there are 70,000 Bimobas in Togoland.

²Though the majority of elements in the clause are clearly phrases in their structure, not infrequently elements are found which correspond in structure to whole clauses or sentences. These elements are termed sentence or clause constructs and such constructs are regarded as units which have descended the grammatical hierarchy to function at a lower level than the level at which they usually operate.

³In these examples a semi-phonemic transcription is used. My colleague has almost completed the phonemic analysis apart from certain features of nasalization and tone. Since these aspects of the analysis are not complete, for the purposes of this paper nasalization features are written phonetically and tone is not marked.

⁴There are four types of adverbial phrase: nominal phrase preceded by a preposition, nominal phrase followed by a post-position, nominal phrase temporal, and an adverb.

3. b	dí	wan	ət	yenu	labaal	maŋ	taŋ	gben
they	past	taught	us	God's	message	that	then	finished
<u>NPs</u>	<u>VP</u>	<u>NPo</u>		<u>NPo</u>			<u>VP</u>	
<u>Nucleus</u>	<u>Core</u>						<u>Core</u>	

4. u	saan	daak	ni	saa	baal	sɔɔ	pieli	lə	yoo	na
he	went	market	in	future	came	found	antelopes	then		
<u>NPs</u>	<u>VP</u>	<u>Adv.P</u>		<u>VP</u>		<u>VP</u>	<u>NPo</u>		<u>Adv.P</u>	
<u>Nucleus</u>	<u>Core</u>			<u>Core</u>		<u>Core</u>		<u>Core</u>		<u>Core</u>

3. CLAUSE TYPES

Verbal clauses can be divided into six types on the basis of their structure.

3.1. FAVOURITE CLAUSE TYPE

The favourite clause type consists of an obligatory nucleus followed by an obligatory core. There may be a second and third core, forming a serial construction in the way that has just been described.

It may be noted that the favourite clause type may have an interrogative meaning. There is, in fact, no difference in the internal structure of clauses which may be regarded as statements and clauses which may be termed questions. The difference between these two is made by an intonation feature.

Examples:

1. loobuk	ŋaanən	dig	kə	yiiŋ	sɔɔ
elephant	rather	past	not	call	anyone
<u>NPs</u>		<u>VP</u>		<u>NPo</u>	
<u>Nucleus</u>		<u>Core</u>			

2. u	poŋ	tuu	loon	tii	ñunu	hei
he	usually	habitual	likes	tea	drinking	very much
<u>NPs</u>	<u>VP</u>			<u>NPo</u>		<u>Adv.P</u>
<u>Nucleus</u>			<u>Core</u>			

3. bə	saa	saan	sul	jani?
they	future	go	catch	fish
<u>NPs</u>	<u>VP</u>		<u>VP</u>	<u>NPo</u>
<u>Nucleus</u>	<u>Core</u>		<u>Core</u>	

3.2 THE CONCOMITANT CLAUSE TYPE

The concomitant clause type is distinguished by the absence of a nucleus. It consists of an obligatory core. There may be up to three such cores in this clause. The concomitant clause type occurs frequently in Bimoba texts, after the sentence connective *kə* 'and' or *ŋaan* 'and then'. This clause cannot occur initial in the sentence. From data so far studied, it would appear that the nominal phrase temporal cannot occur clause initial in this type of clause.

Examples:

1. (kə)	doo
and	came up
	<u>VP (Core)</u>

2. (kə)	din	tan	sik		kpenu	ni
and	past	then	descended		river	in
	<u>VP</u>				<u>Adv. P</u>	
	<u>Core</u>					

3. (kə)	kpan	kinkatl	gaal	jani	na
and	deceived	wolf	received	fish	the
	<u>VP</u>	<u>NPO</u>	<u>VP</u>	<u>NPO</u>	
	<u>Core</u>		<u>Core</u>		

4. (ɔaən)	din	wan	ɔ	u	ɔaəbɔŋkɔbɛ
	past	showed	him	his	house animals
	<u>VP</u>		<u>NPO</u>		<u>NPO</u>
	<u>Core</u>				

3.3 IMPERATIVE CLAUSE TYPE 1

The imperative clause type 1 consists of a core. The verbal phrase which is the head of this core always contains the verb in the imperative form.⁶ No nucleus occurs in this clause type.

There may be a second and third core in this clause type but the verbal phrases in the second and third core do not contain the verb in the imperative form.

Examples:

1. IMPERATIVE

tam	mɔnt	ɲum	maŋ
now	throw out	water	that
	VP	NPo	
Core			

2. IMPERATIVE

ɲmatl	sik	saa	mii	ɲun	ni
turn	descend	future	dip	water	in
<u>VP</u>	<u>VP</u>	<u>VP</u>		<u>Adv. P</u>	
<u>Core</u>	<u>Core</u>	<u>Core</u>			

3.4 IMPERATIVE CLAUSE TYPE 2

The imperative clause type 2 consists of a core which is preceded by the particle *i* or *daa*. These particles occur immediately before the verbal phrase in the core. The verb phrase which is the head of the core always contains a verb in the imperfective form. There may be up to three cores in this clause type.

Examples:

1. i	saa	jě
	go	come
	<u>VP</u>	<u>VP</u>
Clause	Core	Core
Feature		

⁶Bimoba verbs are found in three forms which have been labelled perfective, imperfective and imperative.

2. I won sil mok pal peen nan o
tomorrow future have heart white with him
(happy)
Clause VP NPo Adv. P
Feature Core

3. daa plak motana
do not speak now
VP Adv. P
Clause Core
Feature

3.5 INTRODUCTORY CLAUSE TYPE

The introductory clause type parallels each of the previous four clauses. It is marked by two distinguishing features. The head of the core consists of a verbal phrase of type I. Verbal phrases type I have as head of the phrase a verb of the small sub-class of introducing verbs. Secondly, the expansion of the core is limited to one nominal phrase object. Apart from these distinguishing features the basic structure of the clause is identical to one of the four clause types already described.

This clause is usually followed by a favourite or intention clause or by a sentence construct.

There may be more than one core in the introductory clause type. In this case it is the last core which always contains the verbal phrase type I, and the limited expansion.

Examples:

1. u	saan	daak	nie	saa	baal	soo ...
he	went	market	in	went	came	discovered
NP _s	VP	Adv. P		VP	VPI	
Nucleus	Core			Core		

Parallels favourite clause type

2. motana	u	loon	(u	m	ban)
now	she	wants	she	should	know
<u>Adv. P</u>	<u>NPs</u>	<u>VPI</u>			
	<u>Nucleus</u>	<u>Core</u>			

Parallels favourite clause type

3. (kə) dɪn tən sɑ:n jət . . .
and past then came said
 VP VPI
 Core Core

Parallels concomitant clause type

4. yetl jɔɔ maŋ . . .
say to man that
VPI NPo
Core

Parallels imperative clause type 1

5. i saa bet ɔ ...
 go ask him
Clause VP VPI NPo
Feature Core Core

Parallels imperative clause type 2

3.6 INTENTION CLAUSE TYPE

The intention clause type parallels either the favourite or concomitant or introductory clause types. It is marked by the following distinguishing features: the occurrence of *yaa*, the clause marker, followed by a pronoun immediately before the core of the clause and after *yaa*. The pronoun is in agreement with the NPs of the clause, or if the clause has no such phrase, with the last preceding NPs. There may be up to three cores but this clause feature and the pronoun only occur once.

yaa seems best handled as a syntagmatic feature of the clause. Since *yaa* cannot occur as head of the verbal phrase and does not function as a verb in any way, an alternative analysis setting up two clauses to cover this structure seems less adequate.

Examples:

i. n	sɔb	yaa	u	m	paak	a	sɔb	na
my	husband	is about	he	should	conquer	your	husband	this
		to						
NPs		yaa	Pro	VP		NPo		
Nucleus		Clause	(Pro)	Core		Core		
Feature								

Parallels favourite clause type

2. (kə)	yaa	m	ban	yenu	banumbai	na
	and about to	I	understand	God	like	this
	yaa	Pro	VP	NPo	Adv. P	
	Clause	Pro	Core		Core	
	Feature					

Parallels concomitant clause type

3. u	yaa	u	m	bla	saam	boi
he	is about	he	should	again	go	ask
	to					
NPs		yaa	Pro	VP		VP
Nucleus		Clause	Pro	Core		Core
Feature						

Parallels introductory clause type

4. METHODS OF STATEMENT

A complete grammatical description of Bimoba may lead to some alterations in this analysis, but undoubtedly the vast majority of Bimoba clauses may be referred to these six patterns. It should be added that there are other clauses which at first sight appear to have structures which differ from these six types, but they are in fact regarded as having the same structure as these since the features which mark them as different are handled, not at clause level but as syntagmatic features of the sentence. For instance, clauses which can be labelled as 'subordinative' occur in multiple or single clause sentence types with the specific particles between the nucleus and core of the clause and with a subordinative sentence final particle, and as such could be set up as a separate clause type. In this analysis, however, these particles are treated as a syntagmatic feature of the sentence marking the relationship of two clauses within a certain type of sentence.⁷

⁷For a discussion of this analysis see 'Problems in the Analysis of Sentences and Clauses in Bimoba' by Dr. J. T. Bendor-Samuel, an unpublished paper obtainable from the Institute of Linguistics, West Africa.

A preliminary examination immediately reveals the very considerable similarities between the various clause types. It would be a simple procedure to derive some clause types from a previous type by means of transformational statements. For instance, the concomitant clause type would be derived from the favourite clause type by the deletion of the NPs.

Similarly the introductory clause type could be derived from the four other clause types (favourite, concomitant, imperative 1 and 2) by a statement detailing the substitution of the verbal phrase of type I for the final verbal phrase in the clause and the restriction of any expansion following this verbal phrase to the nominal phrase object. This type of description brings out the parallelism with the other clause types rather well.

It would seem quite useful to employ such transformational type statements to describe different structures which function at the same level within an hierarchical description.

This preliminary description of the verbal clause has handled the structure of the clause in terms of certain elements, i.e. phrases. Implicit in the description, however, is the assumption that other aspects of structure must also be included in any description of the clause. Thus for instance, in imperative clause type 2 the particles *i* and *daa* are not assigned to any of the phrases which function as elements of the clause, but are rather treated as features of the clause as a whole. Such features can conveniently be termed 'syntagmatic features'.

A fuller description of the clause would need to treat these syntagmatic features at greater length making them more explicit than has been done in this initial study.