

ARE *le* AND *li* DIALECTAL VARIANTS IN THE EWE LANGUAGE?

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The topic discussed in this article concerns problems pertaining to the eventual semantic relation between *le* 'to be' and *li* 'to be there'. This article considers these two forms from both the syntactic and the semantic points of view and suggests that the two forms be considered as two separate entities.

Le sujet traité dans cet article a trait aux problèmes liés à la relation sémantique éventuelle entre *le* 'être' et *li* 'être là'. Dans cet article, les deux formes ont été analysées aussi bien du point de vue syntaxique que sémantique et il y est suggéré qu'elles soient considérées comme deux entités distinctes.

0. INTRODUCTION

The focus in this article will be mainly on the distributional difference(s) between *le* and *li*. One can define *le* as 'to be somewhere'. The definition of *li* will be postponed to the latter part of the article; its definition is closely linked with the subject matter to be considered here.

The method of analysis used in this article falls within the framework of 'la linguistique énonciative', elaborated by the French linguist A. Culioli. This school believes that to analyze any statement, one should take into account the physico-cultural aspect of the language, the syntactic as well as the semantic level of the statement. It also recommends strongly the search for the invariant aspect of every linguistic marker. Those who use this pattern of analysis consider both possible and impossible statements with greater emphasis on the latter because they often prove to be more revealing.

1. SOME EXAMPLES GIVEN BY RONGIER ON *le* AND *li*

According to J. Rongier (1979), a French linguist who worked on these two forms, *li* should probably be considered as a dialectal variant of *le*. The purpose of this article is to show that the distributional differences between the two forms do not lead to such a conclusion. *li* is rather *le* + *e* (where *e* refers to the 3rd-person singular pronoun).

Rongier (1979:248) states that:

"*Le* (être, se trouver) . . . devient parfois *li* dans les salamales et avec la négation: [*Le* (to be, to be situated) . . . sometimes becomes *li* in the traditional salutation and with the negative statement:]

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 9) Afeametswo dé? | Comment ça va à la maison? [How is it at home?] |
| Woli | Ça va bien (= Ils sont). [It is alright (= They are).] |
| 10) Deviawo dé? | Et les enfants? [How about the children?] |
| Woli | Ils vont bien. [They are alright.] |
| 11) Srɔ̃wɔa dé? | Et ta femme? [How about your wife?] |
| Eli | Elle va bien (= Elle est . . .)." |
| | [She is alright (= She is).] |

He gives the following example to indicate the presence of *li* in the negative statement:

"(12) koklozi meli o - Il n'y a pas d'oeufs." (p. 248) [There are no eggs.]

The conclusion Rongier draws from the above is "Mais peut-être vaut-il mieux considérer ces formes comme de simples variantes dialectales en particulier Anɔ ou

GĒ." (1979:248) [But we should probably consider these forms as simple dialectal variants, especially Anlo or GĒ.]

It is useful to note that in GĒ (spoken in Togo), the form *li* does not exist and in the standard Ewe, Anlo (spoken in Ghana and Togo) both forms, *le* and *li* coexist but they do not have the same distribution. Thus, in the examples cited above, one cannot replace *li* with *le*.

2. THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE FORMS *le* AND *li*

Let us examine a series of examples to better understand the distribution of these two forms:

- (1) Kofi *le* *afe* *me*
 be house inside
 Kofi is at home.
- (2) *Kofi *li* *afe* *me*¹
 be^there house inside
 Kofi is there at home.
- (3) Kofi *le* *afuta*
 be beach
 Kofi is at the beach.
- (4) *Kofi *li* *afuta*
 be^there beach
 Kofi is there at the beach.
- (5) Kofi *le* *afuta-a*
 be beach-INTEROG²
 Is Kofi at the beach?

The possible and impossible answers to the question in (5) are (6a) and (6b) respectively.

- (6) a. *ee* *é*³ *li*
 yes 3s be^there
 Yes, he is there.
- b. **ee* *é* *le* . . .
 yes 3s be
 Yes, he is . . .

One can notice that in (2) and (4), where the use of *li* is incorrect, we have a relation of the form *X *li* Y. Inversely, *le* is not compatible with a relation of the form *X *le* as seen in (6b).

2.1 CONSIDERATION OF OTHER VERBAL FORMS ENDING IN *e*

Before attempting to explain the syntactic behaviour of *le* and *li*, some examples are given comprising the verbs *fle* 'to buy' and *tre* 'to patch', which like *le*, end in *e*.

- (7) Kofi *fle* *gas-a*
 buy bike-INTEROG
 Has Kofi bought a bike?

¹ The sign ** means that the statement is not acceptable.

² Abbreviations used in this article are: conjunction - CONJ; deictic - DEI; focalizer - FOC; identification marker - ID; interrogative marker - INTEROG; negation marker 1st part - NEG1; negation marker 2nd part - NEG2; plural marker - PL; topicalizer - TOP.

³ *é* refers to the 3rd-person singular pronoun (subject) irrespective of gender or nature (animate/ inanimate)

It would be incorrect to replace *fle* with *fli* in this question as shown in (8).

- (8) *Kofi *fli* *gaso-a*
 buy^{it} bike-INTEROG
 Has Kofi bought it a bike?

The possible answers to question (7) are (9a), (10a) and (10b) and the impossible answers to this question are (9b), (10c) and (10d).

- (9) a. *ao é-fle sɔ*
 no 3s-buy horse
 No, he has bought a horse.
 b. **ao é-fli sɔ*
 no 3s-buy^{it} horse
 No, he has bought it a horse.
 (10) a. *ee é-fle-e⁴*
 yes 3s-buy-it
 Yes, he has bought it.
 b. *ee é-fli*
 yes he-buy^{it}
 Yes, he has bought it.
 c. **ee é-fli-e*
 yes he-buy^{it}-it
 Yes, he has bought it it.
 d. **ee é-fle*
 yes he-buy
 Yes, he has bought.
 (11) Kofi *tre adɔvi la a*
 patch inner^{tube} ID INTEROG
 Has Kofi patched the inner tube?

It will be incorrect to replace *tre* with *tri* in this question.

- (12) *Kofi *tri adɔvi la a*
 patch^{it} inner^{tube} ID INTEROG
 Has Kofi patched it the inner tube?

The possible answers to question (11) are (13a) and (13b) and the impossible answers to this question are (13c) and (13d).

- (13) a. *ee é-tre-e*
 yes he-patch-it
 Yes, he has patched it.
 b. *ee é-tri*
 yes he-patch^{it}
 Yes, he has patched it.

⁴ *e* refers to the 3rd-person singular pronoun (object) irrespective of gender or nature (animate/ inanimate).

I strongly believe that this pronoun is not different from *é* in footnote 3. This is because there is generally no difference between the subject form and the object form of the other pronouns (example: *mikpa* 'Esinam' 'you have seen Esinam'; *Esinam kpa mi* 'Esinam has seen you'). The form *mi* applies both to the subject pronoun and the object pronoun.

Adzomada (1983:174) also holds this view. He states that: "é utilisé comme préfixe au verbe ou à l'adjectif est un pronom sujet, au singulier . . . Mais lorsque le 'e' est employé comme suffixe au verbe, il devient pronom objet". [*é* used as prefix to the verb or to the adjective is a pronoun subject in the singular form . . . But when 'e' is used as suffix to the verb, it becomes object pronoun.]

- c. *ee é-tri-e
yes he-patch^{it}-it
Yes, he has patched it it.
- d. *ee é-tre
yes he-patch
Yes, he has patched.

In the examples (7-10), there are two relations comprising *fle* and two others comprising *fli*, namely:

- i) X *fle* Y ((7), (9a) and (10a))
ii) *X *fle* (10d)
iii) *X *fli* Y ((8), (9b) and (10c))
iv) X *fli* (10b)

It follows that from the syntactic point of view, *fle* is compatible only with a relation of the form X *fle* Y. This indicates that it is a two place predicative verb. The relation *X *fle* is not acceptable precisely because the place of Y is not validated and the sequence thus formed is incomplete.

The relation *X *fli* Y is inadmissible because the place of Y is validated twice since this form actually corresponds to X *fle* + e + Y (where e is an anaphoric element that stands for an object which has been identified in a prior statement). It is because *fle* is presented in this relation as a three place predicative verb (instead of a two place predicative verb) that this relation is unacceptable. The inadmissibility of *X *fli* Y is shown in the English interpretation by the presence of two 'it' in (10c).

The above discussion suggests that X *fli* is acceptable since in this relation *fle* is presented as a two place predicative verb (i.e., X *fle* + e). It should however be noted that the form *fli* is used only in standard Ewe and in spoken form only. The only written form in standard Ewe is *fle* + e. In Gē, the dialect spoken in Togo, the form *fli* does not exist either in the written or the spoken form. Only the form *fle* + e is used in both written and spoken statements.

The procedure leading to the distinction between *fle* and *fle* + e (pronounced [fli]) can be shown in (14).

- (14) *fle* nu⁵
buy thing
to buy something

When the buyable is specified, nu disappears in the sequence in (15).

- (15) *fle* gaso
buy bike
to buy a bike

When one wants to refer to this specified object by using the anaphoric element e, the sequence becomes as in (16).

- (16) *fle-e* (pronounced [fli])
buy-it
to buy it

The analysis here is that the e at the end of *fle* combines with the anaphoric element e to give i in the form *fli*.

⁵ nu is the marker of transitivity for non humans in the Ewe language. The marker of transitivity for humans is ame (i.e., person).

The same observations can be made about the relations *X tre Y*, **X tre*, **X tri Y*, and *X tri* as was seen in (11)–(13).

2.2 DERIVATION OF THE FORM *li* FROM THE FORM *le* + *e*

This analysis is that, in the same way as *fle* + *e* gives *fli*, so does *le* + *e* give *li*. Like *fle*, *le* is a two place predicative verb. This explains why (1), (3) and (5) above are acceptable and (6b) is not. As in the case of *fli*, the anaphoric element *e* included in *li*, saturates the second place (i.e., *Y*) in the relation *X li* which really corresponds to *X le* + *e*. Consequently, the relation **X li Y* in (2) and (4) is not admissible. But the relation *X li* in (6a) is acceptable.

It should however be noted that unlike *fle* + *e* which is written in standard Ewe but pronounced [fli], **le* + *e* is neither written nor spoken in standard Ewe. It is *li* that stands for both the written and the spoken forms of **le* + *e*. As in the case of *fli*, the form *li* does not exist either in the written or the spoken form in Gɛ, the dialect spoken in Togo. Only the form *le* + *e* (generally shortened to *le* as in *mawule* 'God is there, God exists', for instance) is used in both written and spoken statements.

Even though *le* is not a transitive verb, the procedure leading to the distinction between *fle* and *fle* + *e* pronounced [fli] can be applied to *le* and *li* as well. What is important here is that like *fle*, *le* is a two place predicate verb (i.e., *X le Y*) as shown in (17)–(20).

- (17) *le* *afi* *aɖe*
 be place a^certain
 to be somewhere

If the localizer is specified, we will have the construction in (18).

- (18) *le* *suku*
 be school
 to be at school

When one wants to refer to this specified localizer by using the anaphoric element *e*, the sequence becomes as in (19).

- (19) *li*
 be^there
 to be there/ to be at the aforementioned place

The difference between *le* and *li* is also clearly depicted in the formation of phrasal verbs like those in (18) and (19).

- (20) a. *le* *asi*
 be hand
 to have (lit., be in the hand)
- b. **li* *asi*
 be^there hand
 to be there in the hand
- c. † *li*⁶
 be^there
 to be there
- (21) a. *le* *agbe*
 be life
 to be alive (lit., to be in life)

⁶ The sign '†' indicates that the statement is correct but it does not fit the context.

b. *li agbe
 be^there life
 to be there in life

c. † li
 be^there
 to be there

The constructions (20b) and (21b) are not admissible for the same reason stated above, namely the place of Y in X le Y is already validated by the use of e, the anaphoric element in X li. If (20c) and (21c) are not acceptable in this context, it is because *asi* 'hand' and *agbe* 'life' are not specified. As stated earlier, the anaphoric element e included in li can only replace a specified Y in the relation X le Y as in (22b) and (23b).

(22) a. ga le asi-nye
 money be hand-1s^POSS
 I have money. (lit., money is in my hand)

b. ga li
 money be^there
 There is money. (lit., money is there)

(23) a. dzidzɔkpɔkpɔ le agbe me
 happiness be life inside
 There is happiness in life. (lit., happiness is in life)

b. dzidzɔkpɔkpɔ li
 happiness be^there
 There is happiness. (lit., happiness is there)

As we can see from (22) and (23) by specifying *asi* 'hand' by *nye* 'my' in (22a) and *agbe* by *me* 'inside' in (23a), it has become possible to replace these localizers with the anaphoric element e through the use of li.

2.3 PRESENCE OF li IN NEGATIVE STATEMENTS

Let's now consider the example given by Rongier (1979) about the presence of li in the negative statement.

(24) Ama me-de kuku tɔ koklozi na-m
 1s-remove hat fry egg for-1s
 Ama, please prepare me an omelet !

The possible responses to (24) are (25a) and (25c) and the impossible ones are (25b) and (25d).

.(25) a. koklozi me-li o
 egg NEG1-be^there NEG2
 There are no eggs.

b. *koklozi me-le o
 egg NEG1-be NEG2
 eggs are not . . .

c. koklozi me-le afe-a me o
 egg NEG1-be house-ID inside NEG2
 There are no eggs in the house.

d. *koklozi	me-li	afe-a	me	o
egg	NEG1-be^there	house-ID	inside	NEG2
Eggs are not there in the house.				

The example (24) presupposes the following statement 'there are eggs in the house'. This implies that the house should be taken as the specified localizer of the eggs. In (25a), the anaphoric element *e* that refers to 'the house' is included in *li*, and the statement is acceptable per se. The unacceptability of (25b) is due to the fact that the localizer is not specified. The statement is therefore incomplete. When the localizer is specified within the statement as in (25c), the example becomes acceptable. In (25d), the localizer is stated twice: through *li* and through *afeame* 'in the house'. This tautology is the cause of the unacceptability of the example.

The above examples show that both *le* and *li* can appear in a negative statement. This means that the notion of negation can not be used as a criterion to distinguish between the two verbal forms.

2.4 THE INTERROGATIVE MARKER *dé*

The particle *dé* will be presented briefly in order to understand the specificity of questions comprising *le*, and also the link between the presence of *dé* in an interrogative sequence and the presence of *li* in the corresponding answer. As we shall see in the examples below, *dé* appears in a locative interrogative statement which has neither a verb nor a localizer. It therefore tends to function as a multi-purpose marker assuming the functions of a localizer, a verb and an interrogative marker. It can be glossed as 'where is Y?' (where Y refers to the object to be identified). It should however be noted that it is not possible to conjugate *dé* as a verb (*medé*, *edé* 'I *dé*, you *dé*' are not possible).

- (26) *me-dé* *kuku* *me-dzi* *be* *ma'-kpɔ* *Kofi*
 1s-remove hat 1s-wish CONJ 1s-see
 Please, I would like to see Kofi.
- (27) *e-yi* *agble*
 3s-go farm
 He is gone to the farm.
- (28) *me-dé* *kuku* *kplɔ-m* *yi* *é-gbɔ*
 1s-remove hat take~to-1s go 3s-side
 Please, take me to him.

As they got to the farm and Kofi was not there, the possible question (26) would ask (27) would be (29). Question (30) though correct, is inappropriate in this context.

- (29) *Kofi-a* *dé*
 Kofi-ID INTEROG
 But where is this Kofi you said was on the farm?
- (30) † *afika-ka* *Kofi-a* *le*
 place-which Kofi-ID be
 Where is this Kofi located?

In (29), with the interrogative sequence comprising *dé*, the questioner calls into question the statement made earlier in (27), namely 'the farm is the localizer of Kofi'. In fact, the question depicts the discrepancy between 'Kofi is localized by the farm' predicated by (27) and 'Kofi is not localized by the farm' actually verified.

⁷ *ma* is composed of *me* '1s' + *a* 'MODAL MARKER'.

- b. *wo-le ...
3p-be
They are in/at ...
- c. † wo-le afe-a-me
3p-be house-ID-inside
They are at home.
- (36) a. devi-a-wo dɛ́
child-ID-PL INTEROG
How are the children? (lit., Where are the children?)
- b. wo-li
3p-be^there
They are alright. (lit., They are there.)
- (37) a. srɔ̃-wò-a dɛ́
spouse-2s-ID INTEROG
How is your wife? (lit., Where is your wife?)
- b. e-li
3s-be^there
She is alright. (lit., She is there.)
- (36) a. † wò ɣuts dɛ́
2s self INTEROG
How about yourself? (lit., Where is yourself?)
- b. † me-li
1s-be^there
I am alright. (lit., I am there.)

The examples (34)–(36) which refer to the use of *dɛ́* and *li* in the traditional salutation, cited by Rongier (1979), poses a problem of translation. In fact, the translation of statements including *dɛ́* by 'how is it?' and of statements including *li* by 'it is alright' (to say things simply) does not correspond to the uses of *dɛ́* and *li* that we have seen above.

It should be noted that the interrogative sequences comprising *dɛ́* in the traditional salutation and their corresponding answers comprising *li*, pertain only to the third-person, that is to say, the person who is not present in the framework of communication, the person Benveniste (1966) refers to as the non-person precisely because he/she does not participate directly in the communication. It is clear that if we maintain the translation of such sequences to mean 'how is it?' and their corresponding answers to mean 'it is alright' they should normally apply to the second and first persons respectively, but such is not the case as seen in (36). In fact, at the beginning of the salutation, the two interlocutors greet each other by saying one after the other *ɣdi* 'good morning' (lit., morning), *ɣdɔ* 'good afternoon' (lit., afternoon), or *fie* 'good evening' (lit., evening).

(34) appears in a context which presupposes a prior statement, namely, 'Senyo and the others are localized by the house of Senyo'. As a result, the house of Senyo is given as a specified localizer in this context. The literal interpretation of (34) is 'I have seen you, but where are the other members of the house?'. The corresponding answer in (35a) signifies that 'they are there' (where 'there' refers to the house previously specified as the localizer of the family of Senyo).

The subsequent questions (36a) and (37a) appear as questions that tend to check the validity of the answer in (35a) given by the interlocutor. In these subsequent

questions, the questioner now asks about each member of the family and the answers (36b) and (37b) then come to support (35a).

It follows that the main theme in the Ewe traditional salutation is the quest for the assurance that people are where they are supposed to be (i.e., in their house). This explains why the locative verb 'to be there' *li* and the locative interrogative marker *dé* are present in this context. One could see that the problem of translation evoked earlier on is due to the fact that in French (and English as well), the questions asked within the framework of salutation are 'comment-questions' (i.e., 'how-questions') whereas in Ewe, the questions are rather 'where questions'.

There is of course, a deeper meaning of such questions, given by the context itself, namely the interest shown by the questioner as regards the state of health of the family of his interlocutor. If the example (35c) is not fully acceptable, it is because the sequence *le afeá me* 'be in the house' does not seem to take into consideration this deeper meaning. Note that *li* per se, unlike *le* conveys the meaning of existence. For *le* means 'to be localized in a place yet to be specified' and *li* means 'to be localized in a place which has been previously specified'. The primary meaning of this specified place, in the absence of any context, is the 'earth'. Hence, *meli* means 'I exist'.

3. CONCLUSION

This article has tried to show:

- that *le* and *li* are not dialectal variants, mainly because they both coexist in the standard Ewe and they do not have the same distribution;
- that *li* is the phonetic realization of (*le* + *e*, where *e* is an anaphoric element that refers to a localizer previously specified);
- that the form *le* + *e* is replaced by *li* in the standard Ewe, but it is present in Gɛ, one of the dialects spoken in Togo. It is generally shortened in this dialect as *le*;
- that *le* appears in the relation of the form *X le Y* and *li* in the relation of the form *X li*;
- that both *le* and *li* can appear in negative statements;
- that the questions in the traditional Ewe salutation are 'where-questions' and not 'how-questions' as it is the case in French and English.

It also reveals at least one shortcoming of the graphic representation of the Ewe language. This is due to the fact that the method of representation tends to conform the written form to the spoken form and sometimes leads to the transcription of certain contracted words (in this case, the transcription of *lee* to *li*) in the same manner as they are pronounced. The result is that the transcription of these contracted words tends to obscure the importance of some linguistic markers (in this case, *e* in *le* + *e*), all the more because Ewe is an agglutinative language. This article therefore tends to suggest the conservation of such markers in written Ewe, even if that leads to a discrepancy between the graphic representation and the pronunciation of a given word.

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