

THE BAMBARA CAUSATIVE CONSTRUCTION

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We demonstrate that in Bambara, a postpositional phrase plays a decisive role in the causative construction with three arguments. Furthermore, the causative prefix *la-* does not function for transitive verbs. In addition to Comrie's (1989) three types of causatives, we propose a new type which may be called 'the syntactic causative' in which a syntactic element licenses a verb to have a causative meaning.

Nous démontrons qu'une postpositionnel joue un rôle décisif dans la construction causative en bambara. D'ailleurs, le préfixe *la-* ne fonctionne pas comme un marqueur causative pour les verbes transitifs. En plus de les trois distinctions causatives par Comrie (1989), nous proposons un type nouveau causative qui peut s'appeler 'la causative syntactique' dans laquelle un élément syntactique autorise un verbe à avoir une signification causative.

O. INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned with the Bambara¹ causative construction. In Bambara, one way to express causative meaning is to attach a prefix *la-* to a main verb: i.e. *lataa* (*la* + *taa* 'go'). Of the three types of causatives that Comrie (1981) proposes (analytic, morphological, and lexical causatives) the *la-* causative verbs of Bambara may be regarded as belonging to the morphological causative, which '... is related to the non-causative predicate by morphological means, for instance by affixation . . .' (Comrie, 1989:160).

Based on the data I collected,² I argue that the Bambara causative construction does not fit completely into the morphological type, since its morphological causative prefix *la-* has lost its status as a causative marker when it attaches to all transitive verbs. Even if a verb is prefixed with *la-*, it functions as a transitive when the postpositional phrase (PP) including the causee is absent from the sentence. As a result, the *la-* causative verb functions as a transitive as well as a causative.

Furthermore, a noncausative predicate can function as a causative when the causee expressed in the PP is present in the sentence. Thus it can be claimed that on account of the weakening of the causative meaning of the prefix *la-*, causation can be expressed only if the PP which includes the causee is present.

In other words, the presence of the causee is obligatory in Bambara causative sentences, while the presence of the prefix *la-* is not. Therefore we may be able to propose a new type of causative called 'the syntactic causative', which can be added to Comrie's three typological causative distinctions. In this new type of causative, the oblique case or the PP licenses the verb to acquire the semantic interpretation of causation.

1. PRELIMINARIES

The problem of the prefix *la-* is that many verbs of Bambara have acquired a different meaning which we are not able to predict from the original meaning of the verb stem. For example, we have the following pairs:

¹ Bambara is one of the principal dialects of Mandekan, a major northern Mande language of the Niger-Congo family.

² My informant is Mr. Sidiki Traore who taught Bambara at Indiana University. He is a native speaker of Bambara. Without his patience and kind help, I would not have been able to write this paper.

1.	dege	'teach'	ladege	'imitate'
	gosi	'beat'	lagosi	'despise'
	bèn	'meet'	labèn	'prepare'
	diya	'please'	ladiya	'reward'

In this paper, attention will only be focused on those verbs with the *la-* prefix which are used in the causative construction. The *la-* verbs grouped above will not be handled here.

The basic syntactic characteristics of Bambara are as follows. First, Bambara has a strict word order of SOV. The subject must always be present, and if a transitive verb is used, the object has to precede the verb. The indirect object, however, follows the verb and is expressed with a postposition. Secondly, Bambara does not need to have either an indefinite or a definite article, so that a noun, even when it is not plural, can appear in a sentence without an overt determiner. The context shows whether a noun without an article should be regarded as definite or indefinite. Thirdly, unlike English, Bambara exclusively uses postpositions.

2. CAUSATIVES WITH TWO ARGUMENTS

Before presenting the data relevant to our discussion, we look at causative sentences with two arguments (i.e. agent and patient) along with their non-causative counterparts:

2.	Mary be	taa	'Mary goes'
	Aux-pres	go	
3.	N be	Mary la-taa	'I cause Mary to go'
	I Aux-pres	cause-go	
4.	Mary na-na		'Mary came'
	come-past	marker	
5.	A ye	Mary la-na	'He/she caused Mary to come'
	he/she Aux-past	cause-come	

Sentences 2-5 show that *la-* is the causative marker which is prefixed to the intransitive verb *taa* 'go' and *na* 'come' in the causative construction. The prefix *la-* increases the valency of intransitive verbs since the verb prefixed with *la-* can take an object.³ As far as the Bambara causative construction with two arguments is concerned, *la-* functions as a causative marker which is prefixed to an intransitive verb. Therefore we can claim that Bambara intransitive verbs have resort to the morphological means of expressing causation.

3. CAUSATIVES WITH THREE ARGUMENTS

In this section, we will see Bambara causative sentences which involve three arguments (an agent, a recipient, and a patient).⁴ The data are grouped into three types

³ Comrie (1989:175) comments: 'The morphological causative normally has a valency one higher than that of the corresponding non-causative ...' See Comrie (1985:312-330) and Comrie (1989:174-183) for more detail on changes in valency.

⁴ My findings oppose Bird et al. (1977) who maintain that Bambara cannot express causative with three arguments. They say that in Bambara the three arguments that a causative verb is supposed to take must be reduced to two, because it is impossible for Bambara grammar to have three. The examples given in this paper

depending on the nature of the main verb. It will be clear from the following that the **la-** verbs present both transitive and causative meaning in all three types of causatives to be discussed.

3.1 TYPE I

The first causative sentence type has main verbs that behave only as intransitives, with their corresponding causative forms acting either as transitives or causatives. Notice that the prefix **la-** increases the valency of the intransitive verb because intransitive verbs of this type are changed into transitives by prefixation. There are four verbs of this type: **kunun** 'wake up', **wuli** 'wake up', **don** 'enter', and **se** 'arrive'. The first two verbs can be regarded as synonyms and will be dealt with together. Sentences 6 and 7 illustrate **kunun** (**wuli**):

6. N be kunun (wuli) 'I wake up'
I Aux-pres wake up
7. *N be Baba kunun (wuli) 'I wake up Baba'
I Aux-pres wake up

The above examples show that **kunun** or **wuli** behave only intransitively unlike English 'wake up' which behaves both intransitively and transitively. Note that in Bambara, the **la-** form can act as a transitive:

8. N be Baba la-kunun (la-wuli) 'I wake up Baba'
I Aux-pres cause-wake up

8 indicates that the prefix **la-** increases the valency of **kunun** and **wuli** because **la-** form can take an object: the main verb themselves cannot take any objects. Therefore **la-** in the above example is regarded as a causative marker. Interestingly enough, the **la-** form acts as a causative if a PP follows it. Notice that we have three arguments here (I, Baba, and Fanta) with the **la-** verb:

9. N ye Baba la-kunun (la-wuli) Fanta fè⁵
I Aux-past cause-wake up by
'I caused Fanta to wake up Baba'

From sentence 9, it is clear that the PP including the causee is obligatorily present when expressing causation in Bambara.

Another example of this type involves the verb **don** 'enter'. We have the following sentences:

10. N be don 'I enter'
I Aux-pres enter
11. *N be n ka⁶ bore don 'I bring in my bag'
I Aux-pres my bag enter

offer sufficient evidence that their statement is inadequate.

⁵ The Bambara postposition **fè** has no exact correspondence in English. It has many meanings, but here, 'by' is considered to be an appropriate translation. Besides **fè**, **bolo** 'hand' is sometimes used if the causee is supposed to use a hand as is implied by a predicate (ex. **dila** 'fix', **mene** 'light').

⁶ Bambara has two possessive constructions. In the first, a noun or pronoun immediately precedes the possessed noun. In the second, a noun or pronoun plus **ka** immediately precedes the possessed noun. For more detail, see Bird et al. (1977:63-64).

12. N be n ka bore la-don 'I bring in my bag'
I Aux-pres my bag cause-enter

As already mentioned, a PP must follow the verb **ladon** if sentence 12 is to be changed into a causative. Unlike **lakunun** 'CAUSATIVE-wake up', **ladon** takes the postposition **bolo** (literally 'hand'):

13. N ye n ka bore la-don Baba bolo
I Aux-past my bag cause-enter by
'I caused Baba to bring in my bag'

The reason why **bolo** instead of **fè** is used may be that the causee (i.e. Baba in this case) is supposed to use his hand in the action of bringing the bag.

The third example of this type behaves a little differently. The verb **se** 'arrive' has its prefixed form **lase**, which acts as a causative not as a transitive unlike the other three verbs:

14. N be se lakoli la 'I arrive at school'
I Aux-pres arrive school at
15. *N be n ka ci se 'I deliver my message'
I Aux-pres my message arrive
16. N be n ka ci la-se
I Aux-pres my message cause-arrive
'I cause somebody to deliver my message' (not 'I deliver my message')⁷
17. N be n ka ci la-se Baba fè
I Aux-pres my message cause-arrive by
'I cause Baba to deliver my message'

The above sentences indicate that **se** acts only as an intransitive and that **lase** acts only as a causative. Unlike the causative forms **lakunun**, **lawuli**, and **ladon**, **lase** has a causative meaning, even though there is no PP in the sentence. It can, however, take the PP as in 17. In the present study, it seems better to regard 16 as an exception: as far as my data is concerned, no other verbs behaving like **lase** have been identified.

3.2. TYPE II

In the second type of causative sentence, the main verbs and their corresponding **la**-forms behave syntactically and semantically exactly alike, i.e. all the verbs and their **la**-forms act as both transitives and causatives. Main verbs of type II include **faga** 'extinguish', **dila** 'fix', **kolosi** 'look after', and **mene** 'light'. These verbs do not function as intransitives. They and their derived causative forms behave as causatives if they co-occur with the PP expressing a causee. Otherwise, they function as transitives. The following table illustrates how these main verbs and their prefixed forms have the same roles:

⁷ In Bambara culture, a message is supposed to be spoken, so that the sentence 'I deliver my message' does not exist at all. This may be the reason why sentence 16, which does not co-occur with a PP, is interpreted as a causative.

(1) Main verbs and <i>la-</i> forms as transitives		
N ye	tasuman (la-)faga	
I Aux-past	fire (cause-) extinguish	
'I extinguished the fire'		
N ye	n ka negeso (la-)dila	
I Aux-past	my bicycle (cause-) fix	
'I fixed my bicycle'		
N be	Baba (la-)kolosi	
I Aux-present	(cause-) look after	
'I look after Baba'		
N ye	n ka lampan (la-)mene	
I Aux-past	my lamp (cause-) light	
'I lighted my lamp'		
(2) Main verbs and <i>la-</i> forms as causatives		
N ye	tasuman (la-)faga	Baba bolo
I Aux-past	fire (cause-) extinguish	by
'I caused Baba to extinguish the fire'		
N ye	n ka negeso (la-)dila	Baba fè
I Aux-past	my bicycle (cause-) fix	by
'I caused Baba to fix my bicycle'		
N be	Baba (la-)kolosi	Fanta fè
I Aux-present	(cause-) look after	by
'I cause Fanta to look after Baba'		
N ye	n ka lampan (la-)mene	Baba bolo ⁸
I Aux-past	my lamp (cause-) light	by
'I caused Baba to light my lamp'		

TABLE 1

Another verb *tige* ('cut') shows a slight difference in meaning between the main verb form and its causative counterpart:

18. *N be tige 'I cut'
I Aux-pres cut

⁸ If the postposition *fè* is used instead of *bolo*, the meaning would be changed:
N ye n ka lampan (la-)mene Baba fè 'I lighted my lamp with Baba'.

19. N be sogo tige 'I cut the meat'
I Aux-pres meat cut
20. N be sogo la-tige 'I cut the meat into small pieces'
I Aux-pres meat cause-cut

The sentences 18-20 suggest that **tige** is a transitive verb and its causative counterpart acts as transitive with a more emphatic meaning. The following sentence with a postpositional phrase sounds odd, however:

21. ??N be sogo (la-)tige Baba fè
I Aux-pres meat (cause-) cut by
'I cause Baba to cut the meat'

My informant attributes the unnaturalness of the above sentence to Bambara culture; one should not order someone to cut meat, because one is supposed to cut meat together with other people.

In addition to these verbs, there is another verb **ta** ('take') which might be considered to belong to type II, although its causative form does not exist. Consider the following:

22. *N be ta 'I take'
I Aux-pres take
23. N be foto ta 'I take a picture'
I Aux-pres picture take
24. *N be n° foto la-ta
I Aux-pres my picture cause-take
'I cause someone to take my picture'

It is clear that **ta** is a transitive and **lata** does not exist as a causative. It might appear that **lata** could behave as a causative with the PP, but this is not so:

25. *N be n foto la-ta Baba bolo
I Aux-pres my picture cause-take by
'I cause Baba to take my picture'

Instead, **ta** without the prefix **la-** acts as a causative:

26. N be n foto ta Baba bolo 'I cause Baba to take my picture'

Thus **ta** functions both as a transitive and as a causative like the other verbs of type II, but the derived causative form **lata** does not exist at all.

3.3 TYPE III

In the third type of causative sentence, the main verb has three functions: it behaves as an intransitive, a transitive and a causative. Its causative form, on the other hand, acts as a transitive and a causative. Notice first the behavior of the verb **balo** ('live' and 'feed'):

27. A be balo Mali la 'He lives in Mali'
he Aux-pres live Mali in

⁹ This possessive construction is characterized as inalienable possession; therefore, **ka** is not present.

28. N be Baba balo nburu la 'I feed Balo with bread'
I Aux-pres feed bread with
29. N be Baba balo Fanta fè 'I have Fanta feed Baba'
I Aux-pres feed by

These sentences indicate that **balo** performs three functions: i.e. intransitive, transitive, and causative. Notice next how **labalo** behaves:

30. N be Baba la-balo nburu la 'I feed Baba with bread'
I Aux-pres cause-live bread with
31. N be Baba la-balo Fanta fè nburu la
I Aux-pres cause-feed by bread with
'I have Fanta feed Baba with bread'

30 and 31 suggest **labalo** behaves both as a transitive and as a causative. Likewise, the verb **tilen** plays three roles as in:

32. N be tilen min sira fè 'I go along this road'
I Aux-pres go straight this road along
33. N be bere tilen 'I straighten the stick'
I Aux-pres stick straighten
34. N be bere tilen Baba bolo
I Aux-pres stick straighten by
'I cause Baba to straighten the stick'

Here, too, the main verb **tilen** functions as an intransitive, a transitive and a causative. The behavior of **latilen** is exactly the same as **labalo**:

35. N be bere la-tilen 'I straighten the stick'
I Aux-pres stick cause-go straight
36. N be bere la-tilen Baba bolo
I Aux-pres stick cause-straighten by
'I cause Baba to straighten the stick'

3.4 SUMMARY OF THE DATA

So far we have observed three types of verbs that have three different patterns, summarized as follows:

TYPE	main verb	la- + main verb	examples
I	intransitive	transitive causative	kunun, wuli don, se
II	transitive causative	transitive causative	faga, dila, kolosi mene, (ta)
III	intransitive transitive causative	transitive causative	balo, tilen

TABLE 2

The above findings indicate that transitive main verbs as well as their corresponding causative forms can function as causatives if they are followed by a PP. Conversely, both forms (i.e. main verbs and their derived causative forms) behave as transitive verbs without a PP. What attracts our attention is that in Bambara, the syntactic element PP, rather than the verb itself, plays a decisive role in giving causative meaning.

4. BAMBARA CAUSATIVE CONSTRUCTION TYPE

We begin this section by discussing briefly the typological characteristics of three kinds of causatives. As already mentioned in Sect. O, Comrie (1989) maintains that there are three distinct types of causatives on the morphological parameter; analytic, morphological, and lexical. Although analytic and lexical causatives are not directly relevant to our discussion, we will look at their prototypical case first.

According to Comrie, the sentences below are considered typical examples of analytic causatives:

37. John caused Mary to come
38. John brought it about that Mary cried

Here we find that the verb showing 'cause' (i.e. cause, bring it about) and the verb denoting 'effect' (i.e. come, cry) are expressed separately. This type of pure analytic causative is comparatively rare.

On the other hand, the suppletive pairs of English 'die' and 'kill' are typical example of lexical causatives. That is, the relation between cause and effect is expressed lexically and no productive process is involved in its expression. Comrie says: 'Suppletion forms the clearest instance of lexical causatives in that there is, by definition, no regularity to the formal relationship between the two members of the pair' (1989:168).

The prototypical morphological causative should have the following two characteristics:

39. The relation between the causative and non-causative predicate is done morphologically.
49. The morphological process of relating causative to non-causative predicates is productive.

An ideal example showing the above two characteristics comes from Turkish. In this language, any verb can be attached to the causative suffixes **-t** and **-dir**. One can form a transitive verb and a causative in the following manner:

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| 41. | öl | 'die' |
| | öl-dür ¹⁰ | 'kill' |
| | öl-dür-t | 'cause to kill' |

Comrie states, however, that there are limitations on this productive morphological process.

If we compare the Turkish case with Bambara, we recognize that the Bambara causative marker **la-** partially satisfies the first characteristic (39), because the Bambara causative construction with two arguments (examples 3 and 5 in Sect. 2) clearly

¹⁰ **-dir** changes to **-dür** because of vowel harmony.

demonstrates that **la-** functions as a causative marker.

The causative construction with three arguments, however, does not show either characteristic: the relation between the causative and non-causative predicate is determined by the presence of a PP. This is because a syntactic element plays the main role in producing causative meaning in transitive verbs which appear with or without the prefix **la-**. Since this type of causative is not classified among Comrie's three distinctions, we may claim to have discovered a new type of causative construction, 'the syntactic causative' in which a syntactic element licenses a verb to have causative meaning.

At this point, we must be aware of Comrie's (1989:168-70) remark that there are many intermediate types, like the French construction which falls between analytic and morphological, and the Japanese which falls between morphological and lexical. Likewise, it is reasonable to regard the Bambara construction as intermediate between morphological and syntactic. The reason why a syntactic element is required in producing causative meaning may be the weakening of the causative meaning of the prefix **la-**. To put it differently, we surmise that the weakening of the causative marker resulted in dependence on syntactic property to draw causative meaning from the verb.

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have seen that the Bambara causative construction with three arguments presents a new causative type to be called 'the syntactic causative'. This requires a syntactic element in order to derive causative meaning from the verb, whether it appears with the prefix **la-** or not. The prefix **la-** has lost its function as a causative marker. At the same time, we have to acknowledge that **la-** still functions as a causative marker for pure intransitive verbs like **na** ('come') or **taa** ('go'). Thus we can conclude that the Bambara causative construction is a type intermediate between morphological and syntactic.

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Revision received June, 1991.