DEGEMA SUBJECT MARKERS: ARE THEY PREFIXES OR PROCLITICS?

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What used to be considered subject prefixes attached to verbs in Degema[1] are reanalysed as subject clitics. This reanalysis is based on the fact that the so-called prefixes attach to more than one grammatical category. From the comments of some reviewers, it seems that not everyone is convinced by the later analysis. In this paper,[2] fresh evidence is presented in support of the claim that the so-called prefixes are indeed subject clitics. This fresh evidence comes from the deletion and optionality of the so-called subject prefixes. Whereas noun class prefixes, for instance, attach to nouns only and constitute an obligatory part of the morphology of nouns, the so-called subject prefixes, like independent words, are observed to undergo deletion or are optionally present in certain constructions. This behaviour suggests that the so-called subject prefixes do not constitute an obligatory part of Degema verb morphology, even though they are bound and so require the presence of a host to attach themselves to. For the fact that the so-called subject prefixes can be deleted or that they are optional suggests that they are (subject) clitics rather than (subject) prefixes, in spite of their bound nature.

Les éléments qui ont jusqu'ici été vus comme préfixes sujet rattachés aux verbes en degema sont ici réanalysés comme clitiques sujet. Cette réanalyse se base sur le fait que ces éléments dits préfixes se rattachent à des item de plus d'une catégorie grammaticale. D'après les remarques de certains de nos lecteurs, il semble que tous ne sont pas convaincus par cette dernière analyse. Nous présentons ici de nouvelles données qui supportent notre proposition que les éléments dits préfixes sont en fait des clitiques sujet. Tandis que par exemple les préfixes des classes nominales se rattachent uniquement à des substantifs et font donc obligatoirement partie de la morphologie des noms, les éléments dits préfixes sujet, tout comme certains item indépendants, peuvent être effacés, et sont facultatifs dans certaines tournures. Ce comportement donne à penser que les éléments dits préfixes sujet ne constituent nullement une composante obligatoire de la morphologie verbale du degema, bien qu'étant dépendants et exigeant donc la présence d'un item hôte auquel se rattacher. En somme, le fait que les éléments dits préfixes sujet peuvent être effacés donne à penser qu'il s'agit de clitiques (sujet) plutôt que de préfixes (sujet).

0. INTRODUCTION

What we call clitics (see Kari 1997, 2003a, 2004b, among other works by the same author) used to be considered affixes (cf. Thomas 1966 and Kari 1991). The reanalysis is based on the fact that the so-called affixes attach to more than one grammatical category (cf. Zwicky 1977 and Zwicky and Pullum 1983). These categories are auxiliary verbs, preverbal adverbs, pronouns and main verbs. Kari discusses two types of clitics, proclitics[3] (subject clitics) and enclitics (non-subject) clitics. Subject

[1] Degema is an endangered Delta Edoid language of the Niger-Congo phylum. It has two highly mutually intelligible dialects—Usokun and Atala—spoken in Usokun-Degema and Degema Town communities respectively in Degema Local Government Area of Rivers State of Nigeria. The population that speaks Degema is slightly above 20,000 (going by the 1991 Nigerian population census figures). The linguistic data in this paper are drawn from the Usokun dialect. Our discussion in this paper is eclectic.

[2] I am grateful to the anonymous JWAL reviewer for his invaluable comments. I am also grateful to the same JWAL reviewer for translating the abstract for me into French. Furthermore, my gratitude goes to Ozo-mekuri Ndimele. I have benefited immensely from his wealth of knowledge about language and linguistics. All shortcomings in this paper are entirely mine.

[3] Proclitics in Degema cannot be considered as merely free forms that are affected by surface harmony. If we understand free forms to be forms that can occur in isolation, like free roots, with identifiable meanings, then proclitics in Degema are not free forms, since they cannot occur in isolation with any identifiable meanings but must obligatorily attach to a host for the full realization of their meanings. In other words, the meanings of these proclitics are compositional, fully realized only in the context of a host. Furthermore,

clitics[4] are said to attach before main verbs, auxiliary verbs and preverbal adverbs, while non-subject clitics are said to attach after main verbs and pronouns, particularly transitive object pronouns that begin with a consonant. Examples (1)–(5) show the attachment of clitics to their respective hosts:

(1) **tatanᵃ mó = kpéÊ ísama**[5]
Tatane 3SgSCL[6] = wash shirts
Tatane washes shirts.

(2) **tatanᵃ † = kó kpéÊ ísama**
Tatane 3SgSCL = EPAUX wash shirts
Tatane did wash shirts.

(3) **tatanᵃ n² moðʷ`ne ‡ = s® ta**
Tatane and Monwane 3PLSCL.NEG = still go
Tatane and Monwane still did not go.

(4) **†m† j¯ ¯ = sá = n óhiðʷ**
child the 3SgSCL = kick = FE stone
The child kicked a stone.

(5) **†m† j¯ ¯ = sá m‡ = ˡ‡n**
child the 3SgSCL = kick me = FE
The child kicked me.

In (1), the subject clitic attaches to a main verb; in (2) it attaches to an auxiliary verb, while in (3) it attaches to a preverbal adverb. The non-subject clitic—factative clitic[7]—attaches to a main verb in (4) but to a pronoun in (5).

Table 1. Forms of Degema clitics

	Subject clitics		Non-subject clitics	
Number	*Person*	*Forms*	*Factative*	*Vn*
Singular	1st	**me/mᵃ, mi/m®**[8]	perfect	**te/tᵃ**
	2nd	**mu/m², u/², e/ᵃ**	negative imperative	**tu t²**
	3rd	**mo/m¯, o/¯, mi/m®, i/®**	discontinuation	**munu/m²n²**

proclitics do not show word internal harmony basically because they are monosyllabic and form a phonological word with a host (cf. Kari 2003a:175ff).

[4] Subject clitics agree with a substantive subject noun phrase (NP) in number and person, and in human/non-human semantic feature of subject NPs (see Kari 2001, 2003a and 2004b for a detailed discussion).

[5] Degema data are transcribed using phonetic symbols that have IPA values. Only the high tone and the downstepped-high tone are marked. Low tone is not marked for the sake of convenience. Proper names are also not tone-marked. Noun class prefixes are separated from stems with '-', the so-called subject prefixes and non-subject clitics are separated from the word they attach to with '='.

[6] For the meanings of abbreviations used in this paper, please see the list on p. 19.

[7] The factative clitic in Degema '…is used to denote a fact, which may be a dynamic situation that has already been completed or a state that once existed or still exists at the present time' (Jenewari 1980:133).

[8] The vowels of clitics are determined by the advanced tongue root (ATR) quality of the vowels of their hosts. In other words, if the vowels of their hosts are +ATR, the vowels of clitics will also be +ATR, conversely if the vowels of their hosts are –ATR, those of clitics will also be –ATR. For a discussion of vowel harmony in Degema, see Fulop et al. (1998) and Kari (2003a, 2004b and 2006b).

Plural	1st	**me/mᵃ, e/ᵃ**	excessive	**βire/βʊrᵃ**
	2nd	**m`/ma, `/a**	request	**ani/anʊ**
	3rd	**me/mᵃ, e/ᵃ, mi/mʊ, i/ʊ**		

Whereas the status of non-subject clitics is non-controversial, given that they attach to verbs and (object) pronouns—two distinct grammatical categories, not everyone seems to agree that what we call subject clitics are indeed clitics, at least from the comments of anonymous reviewers of some papers of the present author. Some of these reviewers argue that since auxiliaries are a type of verb and that since preverbal adverbs look like some of the auxiliaries, (and that if preverbal adverbs[9] are analysed as auxiliary verbs and not as adverbs) the so-called subject clitics occur before one grammatical category—verbs, either main or auxiliary—only. In the opinion of one reviewer 'this weakens the distinction between proclitics and prefixes, although not that between enclitics and suffixes. The 'proclitics' would then be a particular kind of prefix restricted to verbs', he concluded.

Some reviewers, on the basis of the behaviour of Bantu subject prefixes, argue that what occur in Degema are subject markers or subject prefixes, not subject clitics. Even if these views are tenable, it would be right to argue that these so-called subject prefixes attach before verbs, either main or auxiliary because they have no choice, as nothing else can come between them and the verb. Were it possible for something else to stand between the so-called subject prefixes and the verb, as in the case of the verb and non-subject clitics (cf. example (4) and (5)), the so-called subject prefixes would have had the option of attaching to the verb or to the 'something else' (Ozo-mekuri Ndimele, personal communication).

Fresh evidence that we present in this paper to show that that subject clitics are indeed clitics, not prefixes, comes from deletion and the optionality of the so-called subject prefixes in certain constructions. Our focus, as far as this paper is concerned, is on subject clitics, the so-called subject prefixes, since they are the controversial elements. We shall demonstrate this by looking at the morphology of nouns. Later, we shall consider the behaviour of the so-called subject prefixes in serial verb constructions.

1. MORPHOLOGY OF NOUNS

The majority of nouns in Degema have a structure that consists of a vowel prefix and a bound stem that begins with a consonant (cf. Elugbe 1976, Kari 1997, 2002a, 2002b, 2003a and 2004b), as the following examples show:

(6) **e-ní** elephant
i-ní elephants

(7) **o-dú↓mínˆ** sheep
i-dú↓mínˆ sheep

(8) **ú-↓Àbó** chewing stick
ˆ-↓Àbó chewing sticks

[9] Whether preverbal adverb **si** 'still' in (3) (see Kari 2003a and 2004b) is considered an adverb or an auxiliary does not invalidate or vitiate the arguments put forward in this paper in defense of the position that the so-called subject prefixes are not prefixes but pro(clitics).

The singular and plural forms of a given noun differ only in the prefix attached to the noun stems. The tone of the prefix is invariable in both singular and plural (see Kari 2006a). In general, prefixes in Degema are associated with nouns only. Let us consider these nouns in the following sentences:

(9) a. **e-ní j¯ o = síré = ˡté**
elephant the 3PlX[10] = run = PE
The elephant has run.

b. **tatanª o = ÀúÀú = té é-ní j¯**
Tatane 3SgX = chase.away = PE elephant the
Tatane has chased the elephant away.

(10) a. **o-dúmínˆ j¯ ¯ = m‡s‡ = ˡt‡**
sheep the 3SgX = sleep = PE
The sheep is asleep.

b. **moðʷ`ne † = ma m¯n ó-dúmínˆ j¯**
Monwane 3SgX.NEG = IMAUX see sheep the
Monwane has not seen the sheep yet.

(11) a. **ˆ-Àbó tatanª i = βóˡóβ**
chewing.sticks Tatane 3PlX = be.long.FE
Tatane's chewing sticks are long.

b. **m‡ª m® = ¼‡ = n ˆ-Àbó tatanª**
I 1SgX = buy = FE chewing.sticks Tatane
I bought Tatane's chewing sticks.

Examples (9) – (11) reveal that the prefixes that attach to noun stems remain with the nouns irrespective of the syntactic position of the nouns. In other words, these prefixes never get deleted no matter where the nouns occur in relation to other words in a sentence. This suggests that the noun prefixes are an integral part of the morphology of nouns (cf. Zwicky 1985:288).

2. BEHAVIOUR OF SO-CALLED SUBJECT PREFIXES IN SERIAL VERB CONSTRUCTIONS

We have considered noun prefixes and their behaviour in sentences. Let us now consider the so-called subject prefixes in serial verb constructions (SVCs):

(12) a. **e-ní j¯ ó = síré = ˡén**
elephant the 3SgX = run = FE
The elephant ran.

b. **e-ní j¯ ¯ = j†kórˡ† = ˡ†n**
elephant the 3SgX = leave = FE
The elephant left.

[10] 'X' in the abbreviation, '3PlX' is used to designate the so-called subject prefixes.

c. **e-ní j¯ ó = síré j†kór† = ˡ†n**
elephant the 3SgX = run leave = FE
The elephant ran away.

Kari (2003b) regards SVCs in Degema as deriving from a transformation that deletes all but the first subject NP in clause sequences having a common subject referent. To derive the SVC in (12c), we claim that a deletion transformation applies to delete the substantive subject of the non-initial clause (cf. 12b) due to identity of reference[11] (cf. Chomsky 1965:137f, Horrocks 1987:70ff and Ndimele 1999:207). Another deletion transformation applies (optionally) to delete the so-called subject prefix that attaches to the non-initial verb, as we shall explain in due course. Next, another deletion transformation applies to delete the factative enclitic in (12a). Following these deletions, the SVC in (12c) is left with only one substantive subject and one so-called subject prefix co-referencing it. The sentence is also left with only one manifestation of the factative enclitic. What these deletions suggest is that the so-called subject prefixes are not an integral part of the morphology of verbs in Degema (cf. Nida 1949:97). In this respect these so-called subject prefixes behave like independent words, in spite of the fact that they are bound elements that require the presence of a host. The behaviour of these so-called subject prefixes agrees with Spencer's definition of clitics as '…elements which share certain properties of fully-fledged words, but which lack the independence usually associated with words. In particular, they can't stand alone, but have to be attached phonologically to a host. This makes them look a little like affixes, in particular, inflectional affixes' (Spencer 1991:350). Their behaviour is also in consonance with Zwicky's view of clitics as '…elements with some properties of inflectional morphology and some of independent words' (Zwicky 1992:269).

Substantive subject NPs and so-called subject prefixes of non-initial verbs in a serial construction seem to delete under different and intriguing conditions. Subject NPs of non-initial verbs delete under identity of reference, whereas the deletion of so-called subject prefixes is determined by whether the word that immediately precedes them begins with a consonant or vowel. In Degema, it is observed that so-called subject prefixes undergo deletion or are optionally deleted when they are immediately preceded by words that begin with a consonant. When these so-called prefixes are immediately preceded by a word that begins with a vowel, they have the tendency to be obligatorily present. A notable observation regarding the deletion in (12c) is that the so-called subject prefixes before the non-initial verb (cf. 12b) deletes because it considers the immediately preceding word as beginning with a consonant and not with a vowel. The implication here is that the so-called subject prefix that attaches before the non-initial verb does not consider the one that attaches to the initial verb as being an integral part of the verb (cf. 13). According to Zwicky (1985:288), 'proper parts of words are not subject to deletion…; but whole words may … undergo… deletions'.

[11] This kind of transformation is often referred to as Equi-NP deletion. 'Equi-NP deletion is an obligatory operation which deletes an NP from a position…in the sentence if the NP in question is identical in meaning (coreferential) with another NP elsewhere in the sentence' (Ndimele 1999:207). This obligatory operation, in some cases, appears not to affect these so-called subject prefixes that attach to non-initial verbs in a serial construction, as the so-called prefixes before the non-initial verbs are obligatorily present under one condition (even after the deletion of the non-initial substantive subject NP due to identity of reference) but optionally present under another condition (cf. 14 and 15).

For the fact that the so-called subject prefixes can delete suggests that they are not a proper part of words, unlike noun prefixes that cannot delete because they are a proper part of words (cf. Kari 2002c).

Furthermore, let us consider the benefactive SVC in (13a) and (13b):

(13) a. **tatanᵃ o = Àbíjé = n ˡ‡-nám ¯ = kíj‡ = n †j®**
Tatane 3SgX = kill = FE animal 3SgX = give = FE him
Tatane killed an animal for him.

b. **tatanᵃ o = Àbíjé k‡[12] = n †j® ᵃ-nam**
Tatane 3SgX = kill give = FE him animal
Tatane killed an animal for him.

In (13a), there is an obligatory presence of the so-called subject prefix before the non-initial verb **k®j‡** 'give', whereas in (13b) where the object NPs of the respective verbs are switched around, the so-called subject prefix before the non-initial verb deletes. The interesting facts that emerge from (13a) and (13b) are that in (13a) the obligatory presence of the so-called subject prefix before the non-initial verb results from the fact that the so-called subject prefix considers the immediately preceding word as beginning with a vowel. And this is correct given that the preceding word is a noun which, as we noted in section 1, begins with a vowel prefix. In (13b) where the object of the initial verb is moved to the end of the construction, the so-called subject prefix that attaches to the non-initial verb deletes because it sees the immediately preceding word as beginning with a consonant. This is actually confirmed by a fact of the language that verbs begin with a consonant. The foregoing observations support our claim that the so-called subject prefix is not an integral part of the morphology of the verb.

Consider the following negative SVCs in (14) and (15):

(14) **tatanᵃ ó = kotu †j® ¯ = kp‡rí ínúm**
Tatane 3SgX.NEG = call him 3SgX = tell something
Tatane did not call him and tell (him) something.

(15) **tatanᵃ ó = kotu me (¯ =)kpᵃr® inum**
Tatane 3SgX.NEG = call me (3SgX =)tell something
Tatane did not call me and tell (me) something.

A noteworthy observation that can be made regarding (14) and (15) is that the so-called subject prefix preceding the non-initial verb is obligatorily present in (14) but optionally present in (15).[13]

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[12] This is an allomorph of the verb **k®j‡** 'give', which occurs before object pronouns that begin with a vowel.

[13] See Kari (2003b:275) for comments on the behaviour of the tone of the non-initial verb and its complement. The reason for the behaviour of the so-called subject prefix preceding the non-initial verb in (14) and (15) is phonological. This has already been pointed out in our discussion relating to (12) and (13). The so-called subject prefix preceding the non-initial verb in (14) is obligatorily present when the word immediately preceding it begins with a vowel. In this case, the word immediately preceding the so-called subject prefix that attaches to the non-initial verb is an object pronoun that begins with a vowel. The so called subject prefix preceding the non-initial verb in (15) is optionally present when the word immediately preceding it begins with a consonant. In this case, the word immediately preceding the so-called subject prefix that attaches to the non-initial verb is an object pronoun that begins with a consonant. For the forms of Degema pronouns, see Kari (2003a:69 and 2004b:258).

The optional nature of the so-called subject prefix in (15) suggests that the so-called subject prefix is not an integral part of the verb morphology. If linguistic elements are obligatory in some cases but optional in other cases, one wonders whether

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