

The category P in Gbe

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What follows partially illustrates the exciting and insightful discussions I’ve been having with Hans over the past three years. I really hope we will continue such discussions, as I’m sure that, as a good wine, his knowledge of language will get finer as he gets older.

A salient property of the Gbe languages is that they involve two types of adpositions: P₁ involves elements that precede the DP-complement, while P₂ involves elements that follow the DP, as shown in (1).

(1) P₁ > DP > P₂

P₁ and P₂ manifest discrete positions because they freely co-occur. The following table further indicates the differences between these categories.

	Case assignment	Pied-piped P	Stranded P	Verbal origin	Nominal origin
P ₁	+	–	+	+	–
P ₂	–	+	–	–	+

As the table shows, P₁ and P₂ oppose each other in every respect. It is commonly assumed that certain verbs may grammaticalize into prepositions, or case assigners to form P₁. A supporting argument for this is that P₁ surfaces in a similar position to that of the second verb in a serial verb construction. This is shown in (2).

(2) V₁ > (DP) > V₂ > (DP) versus V > (DP) > P₁ > (DP)

On the other hand, the status of elements of the type P₂ has not yet been clarified. In previous works I have suggested that these elements are functional items that derive from nouns, and are licensed in a spec-head configuration. This requirement is met in Gbe by moving the DP-complement into the specifier of the head encoded by P₂. This was meant to account for the surface order of P₂ (i.e., DP-P₂), and explain the fact that these elements have a similar distribution as determiners, which also occur post-nominally, and fail to assign case.

However, a more promising approach could be that sequences of the type DP-P₂ derive from possessive constructions (FP), where the post-nominal noun phrase, that is, a bare NP lacking all projections hosting nominal modifiers, merges as the complement of a functional head F°, whose specifier hosts the DP functioning as subject of the possessive predicate (3). I further propose that what surfaces as P₂ is actually the head of the bare NP-complement, which is subsequently incorporated into F°, as represented in (3) for *àtín ló jí* “On top of the tree”. In this approach P₂ derives from the noun (*ò*)*jí*, which means “above or sky”.

(3) [FP [DP *àtín ló*] [F° *jí* [NP *t_{ji}*]]]

This analysis is corroborated with the fact that elements of the type P₂ lack the noun class initial vowel—here the vowel *o*, encode possessive semantics, and fail to assign case. Note that the lack of the initial vowel could constitute a motivation for an incorporation process into an inflectional

head. This analysis has clear consequences for the treatment of certain N-N compounds as involving more complex structures than the N-N adjunction approach would suggest. In addition, the proposed scenario captures the distribution of the Gbe derivational morphemes NP-*tɔ́/nɔ́* (e.g., *gbé-tɔ́* /bush-father/“hunter”; *kpò-nɔ́* /stick-mother/“policeman”, where the nouns *tɔ́* ‘father’ and *nɔ́* ‘mother’ might have taken the same route as elements of the type P₂. This analysis needs to be refined, but Hans never refused to discuss rough ideas and always came up with insightful comments and examples.