Empty, wrong, redundant: Addressees in Guinean Kpelle quotative constructions

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This paper explores how addressees are encoded in quotative constructions, the phenomenon which is somewhat peripheral for the studies of reported speech but is nevertheless important for describing quotative constructions. I show how a particular strategy in the marking of addressees may be transferred to other constructions in the course of grammaticalization of quotative markers. My evidence comes from Guinean Kpelle, a Southwestern Mande language spoken by ca. 500 000 people in the Republic of Guinea (West Africa). The study is based on the narratives collected during my field trips to Guinea in 2008–2014, as well as on the Protestant Bible translations available online.[1]

In Guinean Kpelle, reported speech can be introduced by two major types of constructions involving multifunctional quotatives: a quotative predicator agreeing with its subject (1); a speech predicate followed by a grammaticalized quotative marker (2). In most cases, the speech predicate is a transitive verb *ɓó* 'say', which appears in the alternated form *mo* encoding 3SG direct object.

(1)   *Nu*   *yɛ*QPredicator   *mạ:*   "*Ŋ́ạ́ạ́*   *ɔ́*   *woo*   *mɛn…*"
     man   3SG.QU   3SG.on   1SG.PRF   2SG   voice   hear
     'He said, "I heard the sound of you …"' [Genesis 3:10]

(2)   *Nạ́ạlɔwai,*   *Yai-Laa*   *ɔ*   *mo*SpeechVerb   *nɛɛnu*   *ɓa,*   *yɛ*QMarker   *mạ:*
     then   Yahweh   3SG   3SG\say\L   woman   on   3SG.QU   3SG.on
     "*Nɛɛnu!*   *Lɔ*   *mɛnị*   *ɓa*   *ɔ́*   *yili*   *kɛ*   *tii?*"
     woman   what   thing\L   on   2SG   this   do   like_this
     'Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?"' [Genesis 3:13]

As shown in (1–2), speech verbs, quotative predicators and even quotative markers can license overt addressees, which can be lexical or pronominal. The addressees are introduced by the postposition *ɓà* 'on'. In this paper, I focus on two non-trivial properties of quotative constructions in Guinean Kpelle.

First, a quantitave study of the Bible translations revealed that addressees tend to be encoded differently after quotative predicators as opposed to the speech verb *ɓó* 'say'. While quotative predicators are more likely to license pronominal than lexical addressees, the speech verb tends to co-occur with zero or lexical addressees, rather than with pronominal ones. This correlation suggests that the choice between the two quotative construction types can be linked to the discourse properties of the addressees, and, presumably, to the degree of activation of the whole communicative situation.

The second surprising property of quotative constructions in Guinean Kpelle is that pronominal addressees co-occuring with quotative predicators are often semantically empty, and sometimes they have a wrong number feature, e.g., 3SG instead of 3PL. Crucially, quotative markers also co-occur with semantically empty or redundant pronominal addressees in Guinean Kpelle, even when quotative markers appear outside of prototypical reported speech contexts, e.g., as complementizers after mental predicates. I argue that this property could be inherited from quotative predicators, which have been claimed to be diachronically primary in literature (Heine, Kuteva 2002; Idiatov 2010: 850).

Abbreviations
L – grammatical low tone; PRF – perfect; SG – singular; QU – quotative

References
Heine, Bernard and Tanya Kuteva. World lexicon of grammaticalization. Cambridge: CUP, 2002.
Idiatov, Dmitry. 2010. Person–number agreement on clause linking markers in Mande. Studies in language. 34(4). P. 832–868.

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[1] https://www.bible.com/versions/1395-bkpg-yala-laawoo-h.