

APPENDIX 12

Simple Affirmative Propositions

in Kpelle  
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0. This outline is an effort to outline the types of sentences in Kpelle which may be logically described as expressing a single predication. Only predications in the sense of declaring that something is true are included; excluded are sentences referring to future, desired, or obligatory action. At least some of the latter might indirectly be incorporated into a refinement of this statement; for example, the "desiderative" /èi pà/ 'I wish he would come' might be restated as "His coming is desirable". Such refinements, however, can later be added on the basis of other discussions and outlines accompanying this one. The following sections, then, discuss and illustrate the most irreducible types of affirmative propositions in Kpelle.

1. Action.

1.1. Any simple verbal construction of the "real" type as outlined in the accompanying paper numbered 4. The following examples parallel those in that paper, but include noun subjects, and objects in some cases.

Past:	nûaĩ dí páre tòo.	The people built a house.
Customary:	nón a sá mìi.	My child eats rice.
Experiential:	nâp à lí Dukôo.	My father has been to
Completive:	gâloõ aâ saa.	The chief has died. <sup>Monrovia.</sup>
Present:	hênfi a pâi.	The woman is coming.

1.2. Any verbal construction composed of the imperative form /-kaa/ 'see it' or a construction with the verb /ké/ 'happen, be' plus a verb stem with the formative /-l/.

̀nenĩĩ káa pái.	The woman is coming.
̀nenĩĩ è kè pái.	The woman was coming.
̀nenĩĩ aâ ké tíi kái.	The woman has been working.

2. State. The stative construction, which is used with only a few verbs, contrasts with action propositions which indicate motion into the position described.

2.1. Simple.

̀núui tí a láâni.	That man is lying down.
̀núui tí a seêni.	That man is seated.
̀núui tí a toôni.	That man is standing.

2.2. Parallel constructions with /-káa/ and /ké/.

̀núui tí káa seêni.	That man is seated.
̀núui tí è kè seêni.	That man was seated.

Aspect.

3. The predicative construction with an adjectival consists of a noun or pronoun form (of the type used as dependent possessive or as object) with an adjectival base and the formative /-i/. Kpelle appears to have only one stem, /két̃s/ 'big', which can be used in this way; all other adjectivals are derived from verbs with a suffix, the form of which is conditioned by the final phonemes of the verb stem. This construction is used only to describe a present situation; parallels for past etc. are "descriptive" constructions described in 6 below.

̀nélsâi.	It is good.
̀dámaâi.	It is much. It is plentiful.
̀gétâi.	It is big.
̀náwi ní <del>EE</del> neêi.	This "soup" is delicious.
̀zevei tí lélsâi.	That cloth is fine.
̀núai támaâi.	There are a lot of people.
̀bêrsi kêtâi.	The house is big.

4. Identification. These expressions are used only to name or label a person or thing, not to describe

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a known noun in any new way.

4.1. With /ká/ and demonstrative.

pérs ká tí.	That's a house.
vápérsi ká ví.	That's my house.

4.2. With /se/ alone or with a demonstrative. To this should be compared contrastive emphatic constructions with /sə/ folloed by a complete sentence.

lé se tí.	What's that?
pérs se.	It's a house.

5. Location. Unmarked complements indicating place may be used after verbal expressions, but such constructions involve double predication. The expressions we are concerned with here merely predicate the location of something in a place. Possession of a free noun is a specialized location expression. Possession of a dependent free noun is another location expression, which is also used to indicate bare existence.

5.1. With /sé/ and an expression for location. This construction may well be an apocopated form of an emphatic construction, of which the full form would have a construction like that described in 5.2. below after /sé/.

lé sé daai sù.	What's in town?
nya sé bérsi mù.	It's he in the house.

5.2. With /káa/ or /kə/ (as in previous combinations) and an expression for location.

gáloñ káa daai sù.	The chief is in town.
ínuaī káa naa?	Are your people there? (where we would say "How are your people?")
díkáa gbálañ vá.	They are on the farm.



sóá káá nyéêi.	I have a knife. (Knife is at my hand.)
ógóó feere káá má.	I have two feet. (My two feet are on me.)
níani feere káá má.	I have two older siblings. (My two o. s. are on me.)
râla káá mà.	God exists. (God is on it.)
è kè daai sù.	He was in town.
tás è kè nyéêi.	I had a chicken.

6. Description. Remaining simple predications are various types of descriptive sentences. Their classification by grammatical construction at least partially parallels differences in the nature of the description.

6.1. With /sà/, a contraction of /sé/ with the complement marker /à/.

íláá sà gbeê.	Your name is what? (who?)
náa sà sumo.	My name is Sumo.

6.2. With /-káa/ or /ké/ followed by the complement marker /à/ and a nominal.

díkáa à tíi ké-sèla.	They are workmen.
è kè à núu sáa.	He was a fair man.

6.3. With /-káa/ or /ké/ followed by the complement marker /à/ and an adjectival in the "referred" form; this may be considered a special type of nominal, and thus like the preceding. However, this is also related to the aspectual construction described in 3 above, and in fact the first sentence below is interchangeable with the first sentence in 3.

gáa à nésé.	It is good.
è kè à nésé.	It was good.

6.4. With /-káa/ or /ké/ followed directly by an "ideophone". Ideophones are a peculiar class of words in

Kpelle, as in many African languages. In Kpelle, most if not all of them are reduplicatives, and a large proportion of them have low tone. They tend to indicate complicated qualities difficult to define precisely. Their grammatical function is also peculiar. While all other descriptive predications involve marked complements with /à/, ideophones are used directly after /-káa/ or /kè/ as locative expressions are. However, they are not locatives either in meaning or in function; in compounds with nouns, a locative is the first member of a compound, but an ideophone is the second. Finally, there are some reduplicated forms which superficially resemble ideophones, but which function as adjectivals. These can be used in the predicative aspect construction described in § above, and are used in marked complements. If it seems vague or even irrelevant to say that ideophones indicate complicated qualities difficult to define precisely, it may well be observed that the similarly-formed adjectivals are generally simple to define: "big, little, old, slippery". Known ideophones in Kpelle are the following, the first few used in sentences to illustrate their construction.

díkáa pùtuputu.	They are scattered around.
è kè kàlakala.	It was rough. (of a hard surface)
lèxèlèxè / nèvèvèvè	wet and soft, or muddy, but not sticky.
pùtèputè	powdered and soft (as of dirt)
kpèrèkpèrè	soft (of cooked food), muddy, roiled (will not hold shape)
kpòlowèkpòlowè	(somewhat similar in meaning)
nèènéè	smooth (of a surface, -vá)
nùanua	under-cooked
pùòpùò	crumbly
kpùlukpulu	broken into fine pieces (as of rice too much pounded)

kátikati hard, hard-packed (would apply  
also to cement)  
tòntòb obese

A few compounds and other uses of ideophones give some suggestion of their use; this aspect of Kpelle grammar and usage is one of the least fully analyzed, and it is difficult to elicit material using ideophones, and insufficient time has been available to catch them in random use.

nɛya-pûtaputa very fine sand  
kpólo-pûtsputa fine rice meal  
molon-pûtsputa rice with few whole kernels  
pâra-lèvelèva quicksand  
nîa-pèlè kpúlukpulu very little children, tykes  
(this is not a compound, so perhaps others are not either; their tone is that of a compounded element in any case)

nûai díkâa díi wá pùtuputu The people are disorganized  
in their work.

a lónôî pùtuputu He's chattering away at random.

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