

What contrastively focused anticausatives and reciprocals say about each other in Ibibio

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1 Introduction

Contrastive verb focus (CVF) in Ibibio (Niger-Congo; Nigeria) displays a predictable alternation based on polarity.

- Affirmative forms have what looks like a prefixal CVV- "reduplicant" (Akinlabi & Urua, 2000, 2002) on a verb (1a)
- Negative forms have what looks like two full copies of the verb (1b)¹

- (1) a. \acute{N} -ké-**dèé-dép**.
1SG-PST.FOC-buy-buy
'I BOUGHT it.'
- b. \acute{N} -kí-**dép-pé-dép**.
1SG-PST.FOC.I-
'I didn't BUY it.'

In agreement with insights from Essien (1985), Duncan (2016) explains such variation by appealing to a unified syntax:

- The input to CVF is always two full copies of the verb,
- Ibibio disprefers adjacent copies that are too similar, and
- Post-syntactic operations reduce the leftmost (= higher) copy under certain conditions, unless additional material (e.g., the negative suffix in (1b)) intervenes between verb copies

Data from contrastively focused reciprocals, which, like negation, bear suffixal material, support this view (Duncan, 2016). However, contrastively focused anticausatives, which are also formed by suffixation, provide *prima facie* counterevidence to Duncan's claims.

- (2) a. Èsìò á-ké-**bòó-bòm-mó**.
pot 3SG-PST.FOC-break-break-ANTIC
'The pot BROKE.'
- b. Èsìò í-kí-**bòm-mó-ké-bòm-mó**.
pot I-PST.FOC.I-break-ANTIC-NEG-break-ANTIC
'The pot didn't BREAK.'

I am deeply indebted to Mfon Udoinyang for his help and endless patience. Unless otherwise noted, data used throughout this handout come from work with Mfon, and reflect (my interpretation of) his judgments. This talk is an extension of a collaborative project on focus in Ibibio with Mfon and Travis Major.

¹Abbreviations used in this paper are as follows: 1 = 1st person, 2 = 2nd person, 3 = 3rd person, ANTIC = anticausative, COMP = complementizer, COND = conditional, FOC = focus, I = default agreement marker /í/, NEG = negative, NOM = nominative, PL = plural, PST = past, PROG = progressive aspect, RECIP = reciprocal, SE = Spanish/Romance *se* morpheme, SG = singular, ST = Icelandic *-st* morpheme.

Goals of this talk:

- Discuss some general properties of Ibibio reciprocals and anticausatives
- Use CVF as a diagnostic for structure within the verbal domain
- Propose an initial analysis to account for the differential behavior of contrastively focused complex verb stems

Claims:

- Ibibio CVF is uniformly derived from multiple copies that the syntax generates
- Anticausative verbal structures still generate copies that are too similar because they are formed by pure head movement (like standard verbal structures)
- Reciprocal verbal structures are sufficiently dissimilar because they require head movement + cliticization

Broader significance:

- Composition of the verbal domain
- Nature and syntax of anticausatives and reciprocals
- Existence of a low focus phrase

2 Language background

Ibibio is spoken in both Akwa Ibom and Cross River states in southeastern Nigeria. Closely related languages include Efik and Anaañ.

Ibibio is head-initial (VO, P-NP, N-Rel, etc.) with SVO order in declarative clauses. Subject agreement can occur “all the way down” (3a) (Baker & Willie, 2010), and object marking is only possible on the verb (3b).

- (3) a. $\dot{\text{A}}$ -kpá $\dot{\text{a}}$ -sàk $\dot{\text{a}}$ -nyóŋ...
2SG-COND 2SG-PROG 2SG-leave
‘You ought to leave...’
- b. $\dot{\text{A}}$ -(* $\dot{\text{n}}$)-mà á- $\dot{\text{n}}$ -kóm.
3SG-PST 3SG-1SG-greet
‘S/he greeted me.’

3 Anticausatives & reciprocals

Cross-linguistically, reflexive/reciprocal/anticausative polysemy is common (Haspelmath, 1993). Consider, e.g., Icelandic, which uses *-st* across these constructions, and Spanish, which uses *se*:

- (4) Icelandic (Wood, 2015, 178, 275)
- a. Figure Reflexive
Bjartur tróðst gegnum mannþröngina.
Bjartur.NOM squeezed-ST through crowd.the
‘Bjartur squeezed through the crowd.’
- b. Anticausative
Bjartur tróðst undir.
Bjartur.NOM squeezed-ST under
‘Bjartur got trampled.’

- c. Reciprocal
 Jóna og Siggi kysstust.
 Jóna and Siggi kissed-ST
 ‘Jóna and Siggi kissed.’
- (5) Spanish (Schäfer & Vivanco, 2016, 2, 3)
- a. Reflexive
 El niño **se** lavó.
 the boy SE washed
 ‘The boy washed.’
- b. Anticausative
 El vaso **se** rompió.
 the glass SE broke
 ‘The glass broke.’
- c. Reciprocal
 Ellos **se** abrazaron.
 they SE hugged
 ‘They hugged each other.’

Ibibio also showcases polysemy for these functions/constructions, as well as nearly all of its “verbal extensions,” which commonly surface as a -CV suffix whose form is shaped by the root/stem to which it attaches (Essien, 1990; Urua, 1999; Akinlabi & Urua, 2002).

- (6) a. Reflexive
 díb ‘hide’ → díb-**bé** ‘hide yourself’
- b. Reciprocal
 nyìm ‘consent’ → dú-nyìm-**mè** ‘consent to each other’
- c. Anticausative
 wàk ‘tear’ → wàk-**ká** ‘be torn’
- d. Reversive
 fák ‘cover’ → fák-**kó** ‘uncover’
- e. Negative
 dép ‘buy’ → dép-**pé** ‘not buy’
- f. Relative
 bìm ‘remove’ → bìm-**mé** ‘who/which/that removed’
- g. Verbalizer
 $\sqrt{\text{DAP}}$ $\sqrt{\text{DREAM}}$ → dáp-**pá** ‘to dream’

The type of Ibibio anticausatives that are the focus of this talk are “marked”—the transitive forms are basic, and morphological marking signals the intransitive form.

- (7) a. M̀-**mà** á-wàk òfòn.
 1SG-PST 3SG-tear cloth
 ‘I tore the cloth.’
- b. òfòn á-**mà** á-wàk-**ká**
 cloth 3SG-PST 3SG-tore-ANTIC
 ‘The cloth tore.’

Reciprocals are also marked morphologically, and bear suffixal morphology akin to anticausatives. However, reciprocal marking is bipartite, formed with a -CV suffix and the preverbal marker *dú-*.

- (8) È-**mà** è-**dú**-wàì-**yà**.
 3PL-PST 3PL-tear.PL-ANTIC
 ‘They tore (at) each other.’

Additionally, some reciprocals, like the one in (8), require a plural form of the verb.

What is the nature of the verbal material in anticausatives/reciprocals?

- b. Ę-dú-má-**há**-dú-má*(-**há**).
 3PL-DU-love-RECIP-love
 ‘They LOVE each other.’

This distinct behavior of contrastively focused negated and reciprocal verbs suggests that the amount of material copied/doubled is predicted by its position relative to LFoc⁰. This can be captured in the following generalization.

- (13) Only verbal material below LFoc⁰ gets doubled.

The generalization in (13) leads to some predictions about anticausatives:

- If -ANTIC attaches below LFoc⁰, the anticausative suffix will surface twice in CVF (like the reciprocal suffix)
- If -ANTIC attaches above LFoc⁰, the anticausative suffix will surface once in CVF (like the negative suffix)

In fact, contrastively focused anticausatives are hybrid, showing both of these possibilities depending on polarity.

- The anticausative suffix appears once in affirmative CVF, and the leftmost/highest verb copy is phonologically reduced
- The anticausative suffix appears twice in negative CVF, and two full verb forms surface

- (14) a. ĘsÁĥ á-sèè-sí-**rè**.
 road 3SG-block-block-ANTIC
 ‘The road is BLOCKED.’
 b. ĘsÁĥ í-sí-**rè**-ké-sí-**rè**.
 road 1-block-NEG-block
 ‘The road isn’t BLOCKED.’

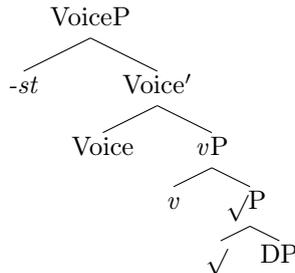
5 Toward an analysis

5.1 Anticausative & reciprocal syntax

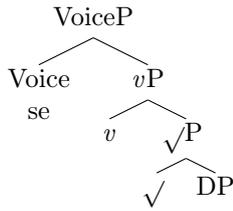
One recent family of approaches to “marked” anticausatives form an anticausative from an inchoative/stative base (Alexiadou, 2010; Schäfer & Vivanco, 2016).

- Causative structures are syntactically built but not lexically built
- Anticausative markers are valency-reducing, either
 - (a) A clitic merging in Spec,VoiceP with no semantic role, or
 - (b) A Voice head (Kratzer, 1996) that blocks insertion of an external argument (i.e., it’s passive-esque)

- (15) a. Icelandic *-st* anticausatives



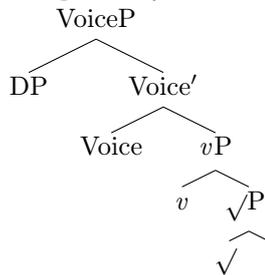
b. Spanish SE anticausatives



Anticausative structures overlap with the structure of a transitive causative; the main difference is that there is no external argument.

Reciprocal structures can be accounted for with similar structure: we can “treat the reciprocal morpheme as a type of Voice head (Kratzer, 1996) that combines with an open predicate” (Bruening, 2006) (i.e., like an unergative).

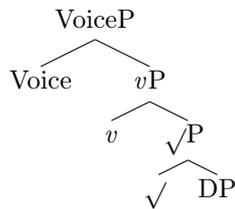
(16) Reciprocal syntax



5.2 Accounting for Ibibio

Anticausative suffixes can be treated as a Voice head, which blocks insertion of an external argument (= causer).

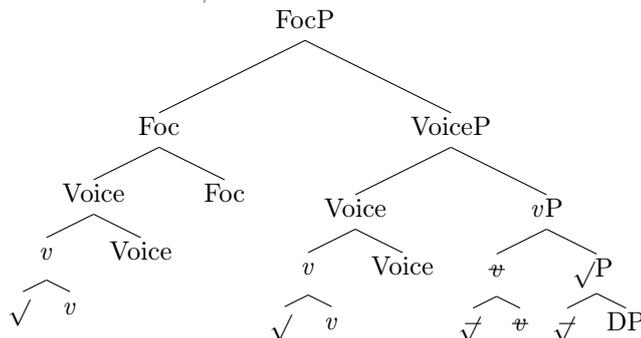
(17) Ibibio anticausative



If we assume that the low FocP can be above VoiceP, but still be considered part of the verbal domain, we derive the following via parallel chain formation:

- Two copies of the verb with the anticausative suffix underlyingly
- Result: too similar & higher copy *still* gets targeted for reduction (but the anticausative suffix still there underlyingly)
- Actually a nice outcome, b/c the verb morphology will be the same with a simplex verb form
- If the higher copy undergoes raising-to-Neg, both copies of the anticausative suffix will surface

(18) Anticausative w/ CVF



- (19) a. $\check{U}s\acute{\alpha}\eta\ \acute{a}\text{-}s\grave{e}\acute{e}\text{-}s\acute{\imath}\text{-}r\acute{e}$.
road 3SG-block-block-ANTIC
‘The road is BLOCKED.’
- b. $\check{U}s\acute{\alpha}\eta\ \acute{\imath}\text{-}s\acute{\imath}\text{-}r\acute{e}\text{-}k\acute{e}\text{-}s\acute{\imath}\text{-}r\acute{e}$.
road 1-block-NEG-block
‘The road isn’t BLOCKED.’

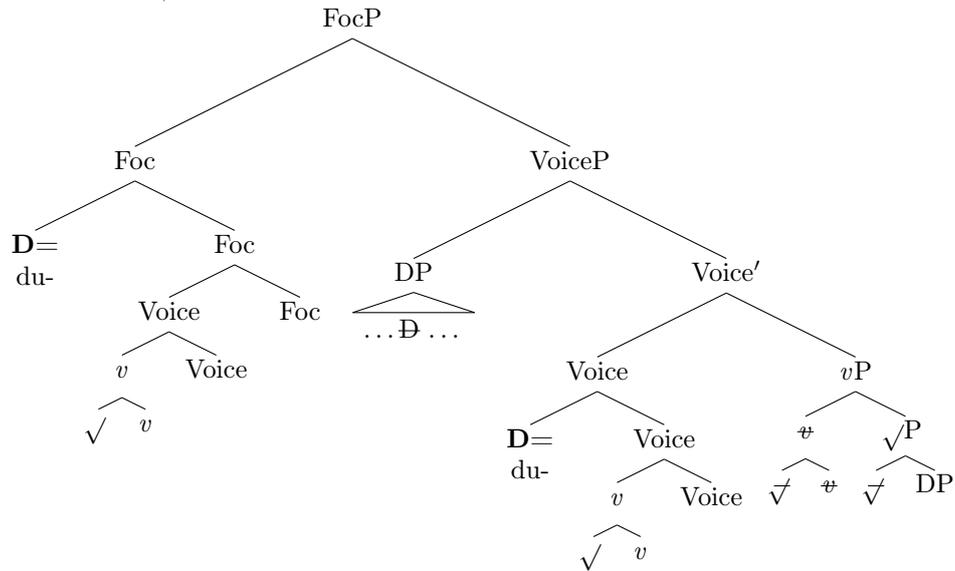
Why aren’t CVF reciprocals subject to phonological reduction? **Key differences in the composition of the verb complex.**

Proposal:

- Ibibio reciprocals have the same (or quite similar) detransitivizing Voice⁰ as anticausatives
- The DP in Spec, VoiceP cliticizes onto Voice⁰
- Foc⁰ copies the material in Voice⁰, which includes the Voice⁰ suffix + the pronominal clitic
- Whether affirmative or negative CVF, the verbal prefix and suffix are always doubled

The pronominal clitic permits the copies to be “different” enough

- (20) Reciprocal w/ CVF



6 Conclusion

Contrastively focused anticausatives in Ibibio display hybrid characteristics when compared to other complex CVF stems.

- They behave partly like verbs without suffixal material for affirmative CVF, in that the higher verb copy is targeted for reduction (which suffixal material attached VP-internally can block)
- They also behave like verbs with suffixal material for negative CVF, in that both the higher & lower copies bear verbal suffixes

Such behavior *seems* to contradict claims from [Duncan \(2016\)](#) that post-syntactic processes drive CVF allomorphy by targeting the higher verb copy for reduction when it is too similar.

- Anticausatives help refine what being “too similar” means
- Complex verbal heads can still be reduced, even if they comprise the input to low Foc⁰
- Pronominal material does not get reduced post-syntactically, which allows the reciprocal suffixes to always appear

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