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)  
a. Ń-ké-déé-dép.  
1sg-pst.foc-buy-buy  
‘I BOUGHT it.’  
b. Ń-kí-dép-pé-dép.  
1sg-pst.foc.i-breakant  
‘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 sufixal 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 å-ké-bóó-bóm-mó.  
pot 3sg-pst.foc-break-break-antic  
‘The pot BROKE.’  
b. Èsìò i-kí-bóm-mó-ké-bóm-mó.  
pot 1pst.foc.i-break-antic-neg-break-antic  
‘The pot didn’t BREAK.’

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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.

Abbreviations 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 /i/, 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 Anaaŋ.

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. À- kpá à-sàlk à-núyáŋ…
   2SG-COND 2SG-PROG 2SG-leave
   ‘You ought to leave…’

b. À-(*ń)-má à-ń-kím.
   3SG-PST 3SG-1SG-greet
   ‘S/he greeted me.’

3 Anticausatives & reciprocals

Cross-linguistically, reflexive/reciprocal/anticausative polysemy is common (Haselmath, 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 mannþróginga.
      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
nyím ‘consent’ → dú-nyím-mé ‘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
√dap √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. M-mà á-wàk bám.
1SG-PST 3SG-tear cloth
‘I tore the cloth.’
b. bám á-mà á-wàk-ká
cloth 3SG-PST 3SG-tear-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-wàk-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?
4 CVF & the composition of the verbal domain

Unlike constituent focus, which involves movement to the left periphery, CVF recruits a low focus projection, which resides inside the verbal domain (Duncan, 2016; Duncan et al., to appeara).

- Constituent focus is incompatible with the “standard” past tense marker, CVF can co-occur with standard tense marking (9)
- Verb-like material outside of the verbal domain cannot undergo CVF (10)²

(9) a. Object focus

Áyìn ké èkà á-kè/*-mà á-fát.
child COMP mother 3SG-PST.FOC/*PST 3SG-HUG
‘It was a child that the mother hugged.’

b. Contrastive verb focus

Èkà á-mà á-fàá-fát áyìn.
mother 3SG-PST 3SG-hug-hug child
‘The mother HUGGED a child.’

(10) Verbal coordination

a. Ìmá á-kpón á-nyàå á-yàåyà.
Ima 3SG-become.big 3SG-and 3SG-become.beautiful
‘Ima grew up and became beautiful.’

Ima 3SG-become.big 3SG-and 3SG-become.beautiful

Duncan (2016)’s analysis for CVF is schematized below. 2 possible mechanisms à la Copy Theory of Movement:

- Single chain w/ multiple copies surviving linearization at Spell-out
- Parallel chain formation (Kandybowica, 2007)

(11) Deriving Ibibio CVF

Because of the low FocP’s location inside the verbal domain, CVF in Ibibio can serve as a potential diagnostic for VP-internal structure.

- VP-internal material below (i.e., content that serves as the input to) LFoc should get copied, whereas
- VP-external material or anything above LFoc should not get copied

This offers an explanation for why negative suffixes never surface twice in CVF, but reciprocal suffixes do.

(12) a. Ñí-kí-féhè-ké-féhè(*-kè).
1SG-PST.FOC.1-run-NEG-run-NEG
‘I didn’t RUN.’

²There may be independent reasons that something like (10b) is impossible, which Duncan et al. (to appearb) acknowledge. Other evidence for situating the FocP that houses CVF inside the verbal domain comes from the behavior of CVF in serial verb constructions: iterated verb phrases yield iterated FocPs, allowing any (or all) verbs in a VP1VP2 sequence to be contrastively focused (Duncan, 2016; Duncan et al., to appearb).
b. É-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 LFoc<sub>0</sub>. This can be captured in the following generalization.

(13) Only verbal material below LFoc<sub>0</sub> gets doubled.

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

- If -antic attaches below LFoc<sub>0</sub>, the anticausative suffix will surface twice in CVF (like the reciprocal suffix)
- If -antic attaches above LFoc<sub>0</sub>, 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. Úsáŋ á-séé-sí-ré.
road 3sg-block-block-antic
‘The road is BLOCKED.’

b. Úsáŋ í-sí-ré-ké-sí-ré.
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

```
      VoiceP
     /   \  -st
    /     \  Voice'
   /       \  Voice
  /         \  vP
 /           \  vP
/             \  DP
```

5
b. Spanish se anticausatives

\[
\text{VoiceP} \\
\text{Voice} \quad \text{vP} \\
\text{se} \quad \text{v} \quad \sqrt{P} \\
\sqrt{DP}
\]

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

\[
\text{VoiceP} \\
\text{DP} \quad \text{Voice}' \\
\text{Voice} \quad \text{vP} \\
\text{v} \quad \sqrt{P} \\
\sqrt{DP}
\]

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

\[
\text{VoiceP} \\
\text{Voice} \quad \text{vP} \\
\text{v} \quad \sqrt{P} \\
\sqrt{DP}
\]

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 underlingly
- Result: too similar & higher copy still gets targeted for reduction (but the anticausative suffix still there underlingly)
- 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

\[
\text{FocP} \\
\text{Foc} \quad \text{VoiceP} \\
\text{Foc} \quad \text{Voice} \quad \text{vP} \\
\text{v} \quad \sqrt{P} \\
\sqrt{DP}
\]
(19) a. Ùsáŋ á-sèé-sí-ré.
road 3SG-block-block-ANTIC
‘The road is BLOCKED.’

b. Ùsáŋ i-sí-ré-kè-sí-ré.
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 Voice\(^0\) as anticausatives
- The DP in Spec,VoiceP cliticizes onto Voice\(^0\)
- Foc\(^0\) copies the material in Voice\(^0\), which includes the Voice\(^0\) suffix + the pronominal clitic
- Whether affirmative or negative CVF, the verbal prefix and suffix are always doubled

(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 Foc\(^0\)
- Pronominal material does not get reduced post-syntactically, which allows the reciprocal suffixes to always appear
References


