

SHORT NOTES

A NOTE ON *SIKI*

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In Seuren 1986a I defended the view that, at least in Sranan (and also in Mauritian Creole, although the argument was not centered on that), words with adjectival meanings (adjectivals) are grammatically adjectives and not stative verbs, as is commonly held. I summarized the argument in a paper presented at the 6th Biennial Conference of the Society for Caribbean Linguistics, held in Trinidad in August 1986 (Seuren, 1986b), which sparked off an interesting discussion resulting in one or two worthwhile conclusions. In this short note I will sum up the salient points of that discussion, with special reference to the contributions made by Christiaan Eersel, who provided the material on the Sranan word *siki*, which I provisionally gloss as 'sick' or 'ill'.

The argument for adjective status of adjectivals is, strictly speaking, limited to Sranan and Mauritian Creole, the only languages I have seriously studied from this point of view. In both these languages the copula has a zero representation in so-called "prototypical" constructions, i.e., constructions made up of subject, copula, and adjective, in that order. In Sranan the overt copula *de* appears obligatorily when the copula is not immediately followed by the adjective, usually due to a movement or deletion rule, and optionally when the subject is missing, as in infinitivals. In Mauritian Creole there is likewise a zero copula in prototypical constructions, but the overt copula *ete* appears when the copula is VP-final (see Seuren 1985, 1986a). Yet, in spite of its limited scope, the argument has some significance for other creole languages as well, and in general for the overall claim, made by some creolists, that adjectivals are stative verbs in all creole languages. This is so because all such claims have been made on the basis of prototypical constructions only, and the kinds of phenomena that are the basis for my

argument against such claims for Sranan and Mauritian Creole have invariably been left out of account. It would seem, therefore, that such claims are insufficiently supported as long as copula behavior in nonprototypical cases is not investigated. As long as this point has not been clarified for the languages concerned, the question of the grammatical status of adjectivals in these languages is wide open.

This applies in particular to Mervyn Alleyne's admirable paper "Predicate structures in Saramaccan," presented at the same SCL conference in Trinidad. Here Alleyne proposes that what looks like adjectival copula constructions are in fact resultative perfects of either intransitive verbs ('to become ADJ') or causatives ('to make ADJ'). It must be noted straightaway that this analysis in no way contradicts mine. It is generally known that many creole languages, including Sranan and Saramaccan, allow for intransitive and causative verbs to be derived from adjectives. For Sranan (and analogously for Saramaccan), this means that a sentence like *A man langa* can mean 'the man is tall', but also 'the man has become tall' and 'the man has been made tall', since neither the resultative perfect nor the passive require overt markers. The question is whether Alleyne's analysis has exclusive rights or whether it represents no more than two derived categories and would thus be relatively marginal. As long as no account has been taken of the data found in nonprototypical cases in Saramaccan, this issue cannot be considered settled.

So far for the general issue. What strikes one, however, is that the Saramaccan word *siki* is by far the most frequently used in Alleyne's examples, but *siki* differs from all or most other adjectivals in at least one respect: as Alleyne shows convincingly, Saramaccan has a reduplication rule whereby adjectivized past participles are derived from verbs:

di	diki-diki	kasaba	di	koti-koti	fisi
the	dug	cassava	the	cut-up	fish

(Sranan has a similar process, as is shown by *wan lobi-lobi uma*, 'a well-beloved woman', a phrase occurring in Trefossa's story "Owrukuku ben kari"; see Voorhoeve and Lichtveld 1975:208). Now we find in Saramaccan *di siki-siki womi*, 'the sick man' (*di siki womi* has the specialized meaning of 'the crazy man'). But, as appears from Alleyne's examples, other adjectivals occur unreduplicated in attributive position:

di	dede	womi	di	bigi	wosu	di	bunu / hanso /
the	dead	man	the	big	house	the	good / handsome /

waiti mii
pretty child

One just wonders, therefore, whether *siki* might not be in some way different from the other adjectivals: it might be a real verb meaning 'to get ill' or 'to be made ill'. Alleyne refers, significantly, to his earlier paper (Alleyne 1984), where he shows that in mesolectal Jamaican the analogous *sik* takes the negative form *dont*, normally reserved for perfective and habitual aspect verbs, and not the normal *no*, and he proposes that a sentence like *him dont sik* should be glossed as 'he doesn't get ill' or 'he never gets ill'.

The suspicion that *siki* might be different from other adjectivals is dramatically strengthened for Sranan by a number of observations made by Christiaan Eersel. He observed, during the discussion at the 1986 SCL conference, that not all forms that are normal for adjectival comparatives are possible for *siki*. Whereas we find:

- (1) a. A man gridi moro (leki) a uma.
the man greedy more (than) the woman
b. A man moro gridi leki a uma.
the man more greedy than the woman

with *siki* only the (a)-form is possible:

- (2) a. A uma siki moro (leki) en sisa.
the woman ill more (than) her sister
b. *A uma moro siki leki en sisa.

Eersel also pointed out that in verbal comparatives only the (a)-form is grammatical:

- (3) a. A asi lon moro (leki) den man.
the horse run more (than) the men.
b. *A asi moro lon leki den man.

He assured us, furthermore, that of the pair (4a, b), (4a) is ambiguous between 'the house is cleaner than the garden' and 'the house has been better cleaned than the garden,' whereas (4b) only has the former, i.e., the adjectival, reading:

- (4) a. A oso krin moro leki a dyari.
b. A oso moro krin leki a dyari.

All this strongly suggests that the (b)-comparatives are truly adjectival and

the (a)-forms either verbal or adjectival. If this is so, *siki* is not an adjective in Sranan, but a verb meaning 'to get ill' or 'to be made ill', just as what was suggested above for Jamaican *sik*. (Eersel ventured that the passive-causative meaning seemed dominant to him, given his native understanding: *A siki* has for him the primary meaning 'he/she has been made ill,' whereby some hidden force is tacitly held responsible.)

The temptation to treat *siki* as a verb and not as an adjective becomes well-nigh irresistible when we consider the following observations, also brought up by Eersel. As in many other languages, Sranan comparatives can be presented in reduced NP-form, as in (1) - (4), but also in full clausal form, with the predicate either repeated or replaced by a pro-verb, in this case the copula *de*. Thus we have, for example:

- (5) A boy langa moro leki en brada $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{langa} \\ \text{de} \\ \emptyset \end{array} \right\}$
 the boy tall more than his brother

(where the form with *langa* is somewhat stilted, just as the English version is with *tall* repeated). Significantly, however, with *siki* only the repetition of *siki* is possible (besides, of course, the reduced NP-form), without it sounding stilted, and the overt copula *de* cannot be used:

- (6) A siki moro leki en sisa $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{e siki}^1 \\ *de \\ \emptyset \end{array} \right\}$

The issue is clinched, it seems, by the fact that the tests that formed the basis of my argument for adjective status of Sranan adjectivals are negative for *siki*, as Eersel assured me when I asked him privately. Thus, whereas (7a, b) are both good Sranan, only (8b) is:

- (7) a. O bradi a liba de?
 how wide the river is
 b. O bradi a liba bradi?
 (8) a. *O siki a uma de?
 how ill the woman is
 b. O siki a uma e siki?
 how ill the woman is getting ill

Likewise, whereas (9a, b) are both correct, only (10b) is:

- (9) a. A man no de so langa.
 the man not is so tall
 b. A man no langa so.
- (10) a. *A man no de so siki.
 b. A man no e siki so.²

All this being so, I feel one must conclude that Sranan *siki* is indeed a verb and not an adjective, contrary to most other adjectivals, which are real adjectives. It must be glossed, roughly, as either 'to get ill' or 'to be made ill', or both. The case for *siki* having precisely that status in Saramaccan is strong and deserves further study. Likewise for Jamaican and, who knows, other (Caribbean) Creoles. The clear contrast between *siki* and the real adjectives makes it all the more clear that adjectives are adjectives in Sranan, even though *siki* is not.³

NOTES

1) Eersel prefers the sentence with the present tense marker for nonstative *e* preceding *siki*. I take it that the comparative clause should be glossed something like 'than his sister is getting ill / is being made ill'.

2) Eersel gave the forms of (8b) and (10b) with *e*. I am not certain whether he would accept them without *e*, which, in my analysis, should be possible.

3) Apart from cases like *siki*, which, probably on grounds of *weltanschauung*, function as verbs and fall outside the class of adjectivals altogether, there are also historical derivations of real verbs from what was (is) an adjective in the source language. Thus, in most French-based Creoles there is a verb *kôitâ* ('love, like'), from the French adjective *content* ('happy, satisfied').

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