

## Phrasal Verbs and Noun Incorporation Along the Ethio-Sudan Borderlands

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A handful of Nilo-Saharan (N-S) languages along the Ethio-Sudan border exhibit a construction not common to African languages but fairly common in Indo-European (IE) languages – that of phrasal verbs. Phrasal verbs in IE languages comprise a verb root plus a “particle” which is typically cognate with a preposition. The verb of the construction carries most of the semantic content and the phrasal verb construction as a whole is non-compositional. Examples of these in English are ‘pick up’ or ‘write down’. These complex verbs are unusual in that a direct object can intervene between the verb root and the particle: *I’ll pick you up at 8:00pm* or *Write it down*. In the same way, Uduk, Opo, Berta, Gwama, and Komo have phrasal verbs comprised of a verb root plus a particle which is historically a noun. All of these languages form part of the Koman language family save Berta which most recently has been classified as an Eastern Sudanic language (Dimmendaal et al 2019). The latter two Koman languages, Gwama and Komo, however, have few known examples of these phrasal verbs (Dimmendaal et al. 2019: 340). Below are examples of these phrasal verb constructions in Uduk (1) and Berta (2). Similar to IE languages, other elements of the phrase can intervene between the verb root and the particle. Note that the particle in each instance is cognate with a body part term.

- 1) Uduk (Killian 2015) wàthí? **’cìth-í’**d ā yí’**d** **īs**  
man cross:PFV-3SG CL2.ACC pelt body  
‘The man trimmed the animal skin.’ (lit: the man crossed the skin body)
- 2) Berta (Neudorf 2015) fámíilí **gag-í** gali **alú**  
people chase-PRES dog head  
‘The people are chasing the dogs away.’

The B’aga languages of the Ethio-Sudan border area – namely Daats’iin, Southern Gumuz, and Northern Gumuz – have historically incorporated body part terms which resemble these phrasal verb constructions. However, these nouns are fully incorporated into the verb stem and have become part of the verbal morphology (3-5). This verb + noun complex is similar to the Koman languages and Berta in that other morphemes can intervene.

- 3) Daats’iin (Ahland 2016) ná=gats’ar k-u-**gám-b-áts** jáhú  
loc=old.days AFF-3PL.TR-know-PST-BODY reedbuck  
‘In the old days, they saw reedbuck.’
- 4) Southern Gumuz (Ahland 2012) íjgafa b-a-η-**gá**l-agá-c opá ká=kóa  
woman AFF-3SG.TR-PL-grind-NFUT-CL1:eye opa.bean BEN=sauce  
‘The woman ground opa (beans) for the sauce’
- 5) Northern Gumuz (Ahland 2012) dua ná=amariká d-a-**fag-á-é-k’w**  
child LOC=north.america AFF-3SG-grow-MV-TWRD-HEAD  
‘The child grew up in North America.’

Due to these similarities, I have hypothesized that both the complex verbal stems of the B’aga languages and the phrasal verbs of the Koman languages and Berta historically arose from Noun-Noun associative constructions. In other words, phrasal verbs such as **’cìth-í’**d** **īs**** (cross/cut body) ‘trim’ of Uduk arose from

'cross/cut the body of the skin' for example (1). Likewise, B'aga examples such as **gáf- c** (grind-eye/seed) of Southern Gumuz arose from 'grind the eye/seed of the bean (plant)' as per example (5). Such a development is similar to "possessor raising" or a type of external possession construction (see Payne and Barshi 1996:6).

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