



## Lete verbal morphology and inflectional affixes

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### Abstract

The paper describes how verb stems in Lete<sup>1</sup>, (Kwa: Ghana) inflect for grammatical categories of tense/aspect, person, negation, mood and motion by employing prefixes. Studies of this nature have been documented with respect to related Kwa languages (Ameka & Kropp-Dakubu, 2008), but no such study has been published on Lete, an under-documented language, hence the significance of this paper. Verbal prefixes which are employed to mark the categories include the future morpheme, /bÉ-/; the progressive marker, /dÉ-/; the perfect aspect prefix, /yÉÉ-/; and for negation, the prefix/ bÉ-/. Similarly, other verbal prefixes are used to signal person, mood and motion. Furthermore, the paper demonstrates the influence of the [+/-ATR] vowel harmony principles; homorganic assimilation, and the phonological structure of the verb stem on the surface representation of the prefixes. Data for the study are drawn from a database of Lete verb lists and folktales recorded in the speech community by the author, and supplemented with elicitations. The paper adds novel data to the existing literature on the function of verbal affixes in marking inflectional categories in Kwa languages in particular, and the world's languages in general.

*Keywords:* verbal prefixes; inflection; tense/ aspect; negation; person; mood; motion

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## 1. Introduction

The paper aims to describe verbal affixes in Lete, and their function in marking verbal categories in the language via inflection. Work of this nature has been carried out in a number of related Kwa languages, but in the case of Lete, there has not been any documentation covering this subject. Significant works in other Kwa languages include the following: Agyeman (2016) on Efutu; the edited works by Ameka & Kropp-Dakubu (2008) on Akan, Ewe, Ga and Tuwuli; Hansford (1990) on Chumburung, and Sherwood (1982) on Nawuri. Also on Akan, the following publications are noteworthy, Dolphyne (2006) and Osam (2003). Given that Lete is under-documented, and no detailed

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<sup>1</sup> Other spellings of the language's name are Leteh, Larteh, Late. The town where the language is spoken is spelt, Larteh.

work on verbal affixes and inflection has been published, this paper seeks to contribute to the literature in that area of study.

Generally speaking, ‘inflectional categories are more sensitive to the morphological environment in which they appear’ (Balthasar & Nichols, 2007, p. 2). This paper corroborates that observation. In languages where verbal prefixes have been noted to mark grammatical categories, it is the verb stems which inflect for the categories through prefixation. Whilst verbal affixes (prefixes and suffixes) are central in the grammar of some languages in marking grammatical categories (Boadi, 2008; Harley, 2008; Kropp-Dakubu, 2008), others rely on a combination of pre-verbal markers and some periphrastic strategies to perform that function (e.g Ewe in Ameka, 2008). A survey of the role of verbal affixes in marking verbal categories in Kwa languages suggests that prefixes predominantly perform that function, and rarely do suffixes. In Lete, it has been noted that through the interplay of the verb stem and verbal prefixes, a notion is marked, for example, tense/aspect, negation, person, modality and motion. This paper will explore the nature of Lete verbal affixes and their function in verbal inflection to express grammatical categories.

Data for the paper were sourced from wordlists of Lete verbs and recorded folktales which can be found at the University of Ghana Digital Collections. The data form part of the author’s collection during her Ph. D research from 2006-2009. Elicitations and folktales were audio-recorded in the Larteh community and transcribed with help from some Lete speakers. The paper is descriptive; it contributes novel data to the existing literature on the interaction between verbal affixes and inflectional categories of Kwa languages in particular, and of the world’s languages in general. The remaining part of the paper is structured as follows: notes on relevant aspects of Lete grammar are given in section two, followed by a broad section which describes Lete verbal prefixes and verbal inflection. This broad section has sub sections which describe five types of verbal prefixes (person; tense/aspect; negation; mood; motion) and their roles in marking various verbal categories in Lete. The discussion is summarized and concluded in section four.

## **2. Basic Typological features of Lete**

This section will focus on some relevant features of the language under discussion, concentrating on the structure of the verb stem. Eberhard, Simons and Fennig (2019) sub-classifies Guan (Kwa, Niger-Congo) into two language clusters: North Guan and South Guan. Lete belongs to the South Guan group.

Lete has a symmetrical set of nine oral vowels, 4 front ones produced with an advanced tongue root position [+ATR] (1a) and four back vowels produced with a retracted tongue root position [-ATR] (1b). The ninth vowel, a low central vowel, /ə/, produced with an advanced tongue root position, does not have a corresponding back vowel. (1). The principle of tongue root vowel harmony stipulates that in any word of two or more syllables, vowels belonging to one set, either set A (1a) or B (1b) occur together. Author (2009) notes that there are a few exceptions to the rule; there are a few instances of co-occurrences of advanced and unadvanced vowels. However, it has been observed that whenever there is a mixture, advanced vowels precede unadvanced vowels. In Lete, when a verb stem occurs with a prefix, the vowel harmony principle requires vowel harmonization which leads to regressive assimilation whereby the [+/- ATR] feature of the vowel in the prefix is assimilated by the [+/- ATR] quality of the vowel in the verb stem; thus, vowel harmonization is prevalent in verbal prefixation. Homorganic nasal assimilation is also prevalent in Lete. When a nasal precedes a consonant sound, there is regressive assimilation whereby the nasal acquires the place of articulation of the consonant sound (find examples in 28a, b, and c).

In the few studies that have been conducted on Lete, the Akan<sup>2</sup> orthography, specifically that of Akuapem Twi which is based on seven vowels<sup>3</sup> (2) has been employed, because Lete does not have an official orthography.

(1)a. +ATR vowels /i, e, o, u, ə/

b. – ATR vowels /ɪ, ɛ, ɔ, ʊ/

(2). /i, e, ɛ, ɔ, o, u, a/

The basic syllable structure of Lete is CV, although syllabic nasals are also found in the language. Lete is a tone language with two level tones: high and low. The lexical tone helps to distinguish meanings of words which otherwise are the same in terms of their constituents (3), whereas the grammatical tone, coupled with some verbal prefixes, is employed in making tense and aspectual distinctions (4). As examples in (3) and elsewhere in the paper demonstrate, the syllable is the tone-bearing unit in Lete.

- (3) a. *bà* ‘sew’                      *bá* ‘hand’  
       b. *kù* ‘cut’                        *kú* ‘mountain’  
       c. *bè* ‘come’                      *bé* ‘proverb’

- (4) a. *Afi* *bìè*                      *nyàà*.  
       PN    PRES.bathe    slowly  
       ‘Afi bathes slowly’.

- b. *Afi*    *bîè*                      *nyàà*.  
       PN    PST.bathe    slowly  
       ‘Afi bathed slowly’.

Akin to the majority of Kwa languages, the morphology of Lete displays agglutinating features. An unmarked Lete clause displays Subject, Verb, Object (SVO) order (5).

<sup>2</sup> Akan is a Ghanaian language with major dialects like Akuapem Twi, Asante and Fante

<sup>3</sup> The Akan orthography which is phonemic has been used throughout the paper. In this paper, Leteh high vowels variants are not differentiated except where a distinction is made between [+ATR] and [-ATR] vowels.

(5) *Kwame twú [síká á].*

S            V            O

‘Kwame took the money’.

Available data on Lete demonstrate that both prepositions and postpositions operate in Lete grammar (Akrofi Ansah, 2009). Negation is marked through the prefixation of the main verb by a negation morpheme, bÉ-. The use of the negation prefix is demonstrated subsequently in the paper.

Verb stems in Lete are made up of from one (CV) to four syllables (CV.CV.N.CV). The CV serves as the base form of all the other structures. Author (2015/16, pp. 102-104) describes six types of verbal structures with their distinct tonal patterns that are identified in Lete. The first stem that is described is the CV stem (6) which bears a low tone in its underlying form.

- (6) a.     *nù*            drink            *nè*            give  
       b.     *gyì*            eat              *mḁ*            kill  
       c.     *dù*              bite              *bà*            sew  
       d.     *kù*              cut               *kè*            pay

The CV.CV stem manifests low-high tonal pattern as illustrated by (7).

- (7) a.     *wòré*    wear            *sòkyí*    search  
       b.     *bèté*    take            *lèlé*    repair  
       c.     *fùrí*    collect        *kèré*    catch  
       d.     *fòkyé*    sweep         *kèté*    hold

The CV.V verb stem displays two different tonal patterns: a low-high pattern and a low-low tonal pattern. Examples are found in (8).

- | (8) CV.V <sub>1</sub> Low-High | CV.V <sub>2</sub> Low-Low |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| a. <i>yìé</i> remove           | <i>kùè</i> grind          |
| b. <i>bìé</i> bathe            | <i>fḁ</i> dissolve        |
| c. <i>fḁé</i> stop             | <i>wùḁ</i> descend        |
| d. <i>dàé</i> turn             | <i>bùè</i> do/make        |

The trisyllabic, CV.CV.CV and CV.N.CV verb stems bear the same tonal pattern, a low-low-high pattern as demonstrated by (9).

(9)	CV.CV.CV <sub>1</sub> stems		CV.N.CV <sub>2</sub> stems	
	Low-Low-High		Low-Low-High	
a.	<i>kpòràkyé</i>	throw up	<i>fù̀̀̀kyí</i>	open
b.	<i>bù̀̀̀fù̀̀̀ré</i>	urinate	<i>bù̀̀̀̀kyí</i>	return
c.	<i>kpò̀̀̀rò̀̀̀kyé</i>	descend	<i>dà̀̀̀̀̀ké</i>	cook
d.	<i>sì̀̀̀̀̀nà̀̀̀̀ké</i>	meet	<i>fè̀̀̀̀̀té</i>	jump

The longest verbal stem has the structure CV.CV.N.CV; this is an uncommon structure; hence the only lexeme identified with this composition is what is shown in (10).

(10) CV.CV.N.CV stem

Low-Low-Low-High tone pattern

*fì̀̀̀̀̀rà̀̀̀̀̀̀kyé* peel

As the tonal patterns indicate, apart from the CV.V stem which manifests two different tonal patterns, the patterns are regular with corresponding syllable structures.

Tense and aspectual marking in Lɛtɛ is done using prefixes and also tone pattern changes. It has also been observed that the syllable structure of the verb stem plays a role. Tonal patterns which distinguish tense/aspect are quite regular except for monosyllabic verb stems. The present and past distinction in CV stems is dependent on the subject. When the subject is a singular pronominal, a High-tone pronominal indicates present tense whereas a Low-tone pronominal signals past tense.

With the exception of the tone of monosyllabic verbs which remains Low in both present and past tenses, the rest of the verb forms seem to follow some regular tonal patterns in distinguishing the present and past tenses.

Whereas tone plays a significant role in distinguishing past/present tenses in the affirmative (11a), it is not the case in negative constructions where past tense is marked by a homorganic nasal (12b).

(11) a. *Kofi sòkyè sika.*

PN PRES.search money

‘Kofi searches for money’.

b. *Kofī bé-sòkyè sika.*

PN NEG-PRES.search money

‘Kofi does not look for money’.

(12) a. *Kofī sókyè sika.*

PN PST.search money

‘Kofi searched for money’.

b. *Kofī mé-ń-sókyè sika.*

PN NEG-PST-search money

‘Kofi did not search for money’.

### 3. Lete Verbal Affixation and Inflection

Akin to a number of Kwa languages, Lete verbal affixes are predominantly prefixal. In Lete, as the ensuing discussion will demonstrate, most inflectional categories are signaled by verbal prefixes. The section will describe the verbal prefixes and their role in marking five inflectional categories: person; tense/aspect; negation; mood and motion.

#### 3.1 Verbal prefixes as person Markers.

Participants in speech activities are either active actors, or addressees or those who are made reference to. The roles are often distributed as speaker, addressee, and the third person, that is the participant to whom reference is made. The speaker, addressee and the 3<sup>rd</sup> person form a triad, a concept which is attested cross-linguistically. Again in many languages, within the 3<sup>rd</sup> person paradigm, further distinctions are often made: animate/inanimate; human/non-human as well as generic/specific person (Balthasar & Nichols, 2007). Within the 3<sup>rd</sup> person paradigm in Lete, there is animate/inanimate distinction between the person markers. Furthermore, a distinction is made between the generic and specific person, a type which is similar to the French, *on* and Akuapem, *wó* (Osam, 2003). The generic/non-specific person marker *é* -/ *é*- in Lete does not make a specific reference; it usually makes reference to more than one person, and the agent of the action denoted by the verb is unknown.

Additionally, the use of the generic person marker connotes mood; this function is fully discussed later in the paper. In Lete, verbal prefixes which signal the inflectional category, person, are the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular pronominal and the generic person marker; the rest of the morphemes occur as free forms. In table 1, we find the underlying forms of Lete person markers/prefixes.

**Table 1. Underlying forms of person markers in Lete**

Person	Subject Pronominals
1SG	<i>N-</i>
2SG	<i>wú</i>
3SG	<i>á</i> (animate)/ <i>í</i> (inanimate)
1PL	<i>èní</i>
2PL	<i>wúné</i>
3PL	<i>ámú</i> (animate)/ <i>í</i> (inanimate)
Generic	<i>É-</i>

Examples 13a-c illustrate that the 1SG assumes the place of articulation of the first consonant of the verb stem. In the case of the generic person marker, it assimilates to the [ATR] quality of the first vowel in the verbal prefix (14a-b).

(13)a. *ń-kỳrè*                      *kwààdí.*

1SG-PRES.like    bananas.

‘I like bananas’.

b. *m-bìrì*                      *Lete òkósé.*

1SG-PRES.speak    Lete    well

‘I speak Leteh well’.

c. *Ñ-tìrì*                      *à-yìrèbí*      *á.*

1SG-PST.call      SG-child      DEF

‘I called the child’.

(14) a. *è-bé-ní*                                      *mò*                      *nyíné.*

GENR-NEG-PRES.know      3SG.POSS      name

‘His/her name is not known/ No one knows his/her name’.

b. *è-dí-bitì*                                      *sika*                      *a*                      *pεε.*

GENR-PROG-take      money      DEF      all

‘All the money is being taken’.

As examples 13(a-c) depict, the 1SG manifests in different surface forms depending on the place of articulation of the first consonant, thus we have the palatal nasal (13a), the bilabial nasal (13b) and the alveolar nasal (13c) respectively. In 13c, one may notice that the tone of the prefix becomes low in conformity with past tense marking. As previously stated, the rest of the person markers (pronominals) are free morphemes whose occurrence is contingent on the verb stem.

### 3.2 Verbal prefixes as tense/aspect Markers.

In Lete, tense and aspectual distinctions are marked by prefixes and varying tone patterns. In this section, we are concerned with verbal prefixes and their grammatical role in signaling tense and aspect. Table 2 displays verbal prefixes which function to mark the future tense; progressive aspect, the perfect aspect and the past tense in negative sentences in Lete.



**Table 2. Tense and aspectual prefixes in Lete**

Tense/Aspect	Underlying forms of prefixes
Future tense	<i>bè</i>
Progressive aspect	<i>dí</i>
Perfect aspect	<i>yEE</i>
Past tense in negative sentences	<i>N-</i>

The prefixes *bè-/bè-* (15a & b) and *dí-/dí-* (16a & b) mark future tense and progressive aspect, respectively. The perfect aspect is marked by a disyllabic morpheme, *yéè-/yéè* (17a-f). A choice of any of the two in a set is informed by the [+/-ATR] vowel quality in the verb stem. In example (15b), the initial consonant, /b/ of the future marker, merges with the 1<sup>st</sup> person marker, /N=/ resulting in a bilabial /M=/. Also the 1SG alveolar nasal becomes a bilabial assuming the place of articulation of the initial consonant of the future prefix. This is the case whenever the first person singular pronoun is prefixed to the future prefix, then to the verb stem. In consonance with the ATR harmony principle, all the vowels in the verb complex have the [-ATR] value; likewise in (15a), all the vowels in the verb complex exhibit the [+ATR] feature. In the case of the progressive prefix, its form does not change except for the tongue root vowel assimilation of the prefix vowel (16a). It is further observed that the surface representation of the perfect aspect prefix differs with person as demonstrated in (17a-f) (cited from Author, 2015/2016, p. 110).

(15) a. *Ata bè-gyí kwaadi.*

PN FUT-eat bananas

‘Ata will eat bananas’.

b. *M=è-bítì sika a.*

1SG-FUT-take money DEF

‘I will take the money’.

(16) a. *Enu dí-sùà ete.*

1PL PROG-learn thing.

‘We are learning (thing)’.

b. *Ayirebi a dí-sù.*

child DEF PROG-weep

‘The child is weeping’.

(17) a. *N=éè-bè.*

1SG=PERF-come

‘I have come’.

b. *W-óò-bè.*

2SG-PERF-come

‘You have come’.

c. *À áà-bè.*

3SG-PERF-come

‘He/ she has come’.

d. *èné yéè -bè.*

1PL PERF-come

‘We have come’.

e. *wóné yéè- bè.*

2PL PERF-come

‘You have come’.

f. *ámó yéè- bè.*

3PL PERF-come

‘They have come’.

When singular pronominals function as subjects, the perfect prefix is reduced; the semivowel /y/ is deleted and the forms /éè-, óò-/ for 1SG and 2SG, respectively, and /áà-/ for 3SG are used; see (17a-c). With plural pronominal subjects, the full form of the perfect prefix is used when the verb is monosyllabic (17d-f), however, with the other verbal structures, a high tone prefix /yé-/ is employed (18a-b).

(18). a. *èné yé-búńkyì.*

1PL PERF-return

‘We have returned’.

b. *ámó yé-fíránkyè kwààdí á.*

3SG PERF-peel banana DEF

‘They have peeled the banana’.

In all instances, the prefix vowel agrees with the vowel of the verb stem in tongue root harmony, except, when it occurs with the 3SG pronominal where its form changes to /áà-/ (17c) in which case the initial sound is deleted. The syllable structure is very critical in tense/aspectual marking Lete; it determines the form of the verbal prefix as the foregoing examples have demonstrated.

### 3.3 The negation Prefix

In Lete, the verb stem inflects for negation through the prefixation of the high tone morpheme *bé-/bé-* to the verb. It is important to note the difference between the future marker which is low tone, *bè-/bè-* and the negation prefix which bears a high tone. We have seen that the future prefix bears an invariant low tone, regardless of the tonal properties of the verb stem; the same applies to the negation

morpheme. Similar to the tense/aspectual prefixes, the vowel of the negation prefix assimilates to the vowel quality of the initial vowel of the verb stem. In the instance where another inflectional prefix, for example, a tense/aspect prefix co-occurs with the negative prefix, the former occurs closer to the verb stem (19a-b). In (19a), it is shown that the initial consonant of the future prefix is deleted when it follows the negation prefix.

(19). a. *Kofi bé-è-gyí été.*

PN NEG-FUT-eat thing

‘Kofi will not eat (thing/food)’.

b. *Kofi bé-yèè-gyí été.*

PN NEG-PERF-eat thing

‘Kofi has not eaten (thing/food)’.

The following sets of sentences (20a-b) are expressed in the affirmative, whereas (21a-b) are expressed in the negative. The form of the negation prefix may however change under a number of circumstances, for instance, the morphological structure of the verb and also the tense/aspectual form of the verb (see examples 22-26). The sentences further illustrate the co-occurrence of the negation prefix and tense/aspectual prefixes with various verb structures. With regard to the morphological structure of the verb, there are a few verbs in Lɛtɛ, which are categorized as irregular (Author, 2009; Ofori, 2001). Their tense and aspectual forms do not seem to follow known patterns; most of these are monosyllabic. When they are negated, the form of the negation prefix changes.

(20) a. *Kofi gyí ayirebi.*

PN PRES.be child

‘Kofi is a child’.

b. *A lîlê mpaboa.*

3SG PRES.mend shoes

‘He mends shoes’.

(21). a. *Kofi bé-gyí ayirebi.*

Name NEG-PRES.be child

‘Kofi is not a child’.

b. *Kofi bé-lilè mpaboa.*

Name NEG-PRES.mend shoes

‘Kofi does not mend shoes’.

CV verb in the present tense

(22). a. *Á bé-kù.*

3SG NEG-PRES.cut

‘He/she doesn’t cut (it)’.

CV verb in the past tense

b. *Á mé-ŋ-kù.*

3SG NEG-PST-cut

‘He/she didn’t cut (it)’.

CV verb in the future tense

c. *Á bé-è-kú.*

3SG NEG-FUT-cut

‘He/she will not cut (it)’.

CV verb in the progressive aspect

d. *À bé-dí-kù*

3SG NEG-PROG-cut

'He/she is not cutting (it)'.

CV verb in the perfect aspect

e. *À bé-kù.*

3SG NEG-PERF.cut

'He/she has not cut (it)'.

CV.CV verb in the present tense

(23). a. *À bé-bìrì..*

3SG NEG-talk

'He/she doesn't talk'.

CV.CV verb in the past tense

b. *À mé-mbìrì..*

3SG NEG-PST.talk

'He/she didn't talk'.

CV.CV verb in the future tense

c. *À bé-è-bìrì.*

3SG NEG-FUT-talk

'He/she will not talk'.

CV.CV verb in the progressive aspect

d. *À bé-dí-bìrì.*

3SG NEG-PROG-talk

'He/she is not talking'.

CV.CV verb in perfect aspect

e. *À bé-bìrì.*

3SG NEG-PERF.talk

'He/she hasn't talked'.

CV.V verb in the present tense

(24.) a. *À bé-biè.*

3SG NEG-PRES.bathe

'He/she doesn't bathe'.

CV.V verb in the past tense.

b. *À mé-m-biè.*

3SG NEG-PST-bathe

'He/she didn't bathe'.

CV.V verb in the future tense.

c. *À bé-è-biè.*

3SG NEG-FUT-bathe

'He/she will not bathe'.

CV.V verb in the progressive aspect.

d. *À bé-dí-biè.*

3SG NEG-PROG-bathe

‘He/she is not bathing’.

CV.V verb in perfect aspect.

e. *À bé-biè.*

3SG NEG-PERF.bathe

‘He/she hasn’t bathed’.

CV.CV.CV verb in present tense.

(25). a. *À bé-sinàkè mv.*

3SG NEG-PRES.meet 3SG

‘He/she doesn’t meet’ him/her’.

CV.CV.CV verb in past tense.

b. *À mé-nsinàkè mv.*

3SG NEG-PST.meet 3SG

‘He/she didn’t meet him/her’.

CV.CV.CV verb in future tense.

c. *À bé-è-sinàkè mv.*

3SG NEG-FUT-meet 3SG

‘He/she will not meet him/her’.







marked. A verb may inflect for the Imperative II mood by the prefixation of the prefix *é-/é-* (27a-b); in both examples, the principle of the [+/-ATR] harmony is illustrated. It is worth noting that the prefix is similar to the generic person marker.

(27) a. *É-gyì!*

IMP-eat

‘Eat’!

b. *É-wúsv*

IMP-stand

‘Stand’!

A verb stem inflects for the subjunctive through the prefixation of the morpheme */dèn-/*. The morpheme resembles that which occurs in Efutu for marking the subjunctive. However, Agyeman (2016, p. 183) reports that in Efutu, the habitual marker precedes the subjunctive prefix to indicate the subjunctive mood. In Lete, the verb complex which is made up of */dèn-/* and a verb stem signals a possibility, permission or agreement for an action designated by the verb to be carried out (28a & b). In its surface form, *dèn-bè* (28a) becomes *dèmɛ̃*; the nasal consonant blocks the spread of the [+/-ATR] vowel harmony features, hence the vowel in the prefix is invariant.

(28) a. *Á dèn-bè.*

3SG SUB-come

‘He/She can/may come’.

b. *Ɔsɛ ɔkoara dèn-twú akutu nyɔ.*

Person each SUB-take orange two

‘Each person may take two oranges’.

Finally, the verb stem inflects for the conditional mood by a disjoint marker. The marker is made up of a homorganic nasal which is homorganic with the initial sound of the verb stem. The nasal is prefixed to the verb stem and followed by an optional NP, terminated by the particle ‘a’, an order which may be represented as N-V (NP) PART (29a-c). The verb complex indicates a proposition, (in the second clause) whose validity depends on some condition situated in the ‘if’ clause which is the initial clause.

(29) a. *Wɔ́ n̄-twú sika á, m-è-dé wɔ́.*

2SG COND-take money PART 1SG-FUT-hit OBJ

‘If you take the money I will hit/beat you’.

b. *Á n̄-gyí á, á bè-lo.*

3SG COND-eat PART 3SG FUT-sick

‘If he/she eats (it), he/she will get sick’.

c. *Kofi m̄-bítí o-wure á, Ama bè-sú.*

PN COND-take SG-book PART PN FUT-weep

‘If Kofi takes the book, Ama will cry’.

### 3.5 Motional prefixes.

Through inflection, a verb stem in Lete can signal the direction of movement, either from or to a deictic centre. The two prefixes which signal direction are *bè-/bè* and *nə̄-/nà-*. When the proximal prefix, *bè-/bè* is used, it indicates that the action specified by a verb stem is moving towards the speaker at a deictic centre (30a-c). On the other hand, the distal prefix, *nə̄-/nà-* connotes a movement from a deictic centre (31a-c). It is important to note that in a number of Kwa languages, for example, Akan and Ewe, their motional prefixes are said to be derived from full verbs meaning ‘come’ and ‘go’ (Osam, 2003, p. 114) and (Adjei, 2013), respectively. In Lete, it has been noted that *bè-/bè* resembles the future tense prefix; secondly, its derivation from the verb *bɛ* ‘come’ is similar to what is attested in related languages such as Akan and Ewe. Similarly, the distal prefix, *nə̄-/nà-* meaning ‘depart’ may also have been derived from the verb, *na* meaning ‘go’. With respect to the source of the motional prefixes, we appeal to grammaticalization, “...a research framework which accounts for language phenomena...” with emphasis on “...how lexical items and constructions come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions or how grammatical items develop new grammatical functions” (Hopper & Traugott, 2003, p. 1). In line with grammaticalization we construe that the morphemes *bè-/bè-* and *nə̄-/nà-* function as full verbs in some contexts, but in other linguistic contexts, they signal direction of movement, thereby serving the grammatical function of motion indicators.

It has been observed that when a tense/aspect prefix co-occurs with a motion prefix, the tense/aspect prefix precedes the motion prefix in the verb complex (see 30 a-c & 31a-c). It has also been detected that whenever the future prefix occurs with any of the motion prefixes, their tone changes from a low

tone to a high tone (30c & 31c). It has however not been possible at this stage to account for the tonal change; future studies will account for it.

(30) a. *Kofi dí-bè-búńkyì ɔkpɔnv a.*

PN PROG-PROX-open door DEF

‘Kofi is coming to open the door’.

b. *Ámó yé-bè-bítì sika a.*

3PL PERF-PROX-take money DEF

‘They have come to take the money’.

c. *A-yirebi a bè-bé-twú sika a.*

SG- child DEF FUT-PROX-take money DEF

‘The child will come and take the money’.

(31) a. *Kofi dí-nà-búńkyì ɔkpɔnv a.*

PN PROG-DIST-open door DEF

‘Kofi is going to open the door’.

b. *Ámó yé-nà-bítì sika a.*

3PL PERF-DIST-take money DEF

‘They have gone to take the money’.

c. *A-yirebi a bè-ná-twú sika a.*

SG- child DEF FUT-DIST-take money DEF

‘The child will go and take the money’.

#### 4. Conclusion

The paper has described verbal prefixes and their function in marking inflectional categories in Lete. It has been demonstrated that in Lete, it is largely prefixes which mark inflectional categories such as person, tense/aspect, negation, mood and motion. During the process, the surface representation of the prefixes may change based on the syllable structure of the verb; the tense/aspect form of the verb; homorganic nasal assimilation and also tongue root harmony principles. With respect to co-occurrence of the prefixes, it was noted that with the exception of motion prefixes, whenever verbal prefixes which mark inflectional categories co-occur, the tense/aspect marker was closer to the verb stem. The paper has hinted that similar to related languages like Akan and Ewe, Lete motional prefixes may have originated from full verbs. The paper has contributed novel data to the literature on the interaction of verbal affixes and verbal inflectional categories in Kwa languages specifically, and the world's languages in general.

#### Abbreviations

ANIM	animate
+ATR	advanced tongue root
-ATR	unadvanced tongue root
COND	conditional
CV	consonant, vowel
DEF	definite
DIST	distal
FUT	future
GENR	generic
INAN	inanimate
NEG	negation
OBJ	object
PART	particle
PERF	perfect
1/ 2/ 3/ PL	1 <sup>st</sup> / 2 <sup>nd</sup> / 3 <sup>rd</sup> person plural
PN	personal name
PRES	present tense

PROG	progressive
PROX	proximal
PST	past tense
S	subject
1/2/3 SG	1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup> person singular
TAM	tense, aspect, mood

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