

# Tracing the history of the Gã future morphemes: Tense, modality, and the principle of layering

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This paper explores the origin and functions of the Gã (Niger-Congo, Kwa) future prefixes *bàá-* and *àá-*. *bàá-* is the most pervasive marker of future time synchronically (1). It has marginal epistemic modal and habitual aspectual functions. *àá-* is the archaic future morpheme currently restricted to subordinate constructions, where it indexes epistemic modality. It may also be used in main clauses in very formal registers.

1) è=bàá-!mế

3SG=FUT-wait

“She will wait.” (Campbell 2017: 215)

2) nĩ

è=kéé

gbèé=!é á!ké

gbèé=!é

á-!féé

díóó á!ké

and 3SG=tell

dog=DEF

NMLZ

dog=DEF

SBJV-do

quiet NMLZ

àléénǎ

kòkòdé!n é=è

àá-!hĩ

jémế

ló

perhaps frog=DEF

FUT-be.located

there

QP

“And he told the dog that the dog should be quiet, that perhaps the frog would be there.”

*bàá-* is hypothesized to have grammaticalized from the verb, *ba* ‘come’ (Rask 1828, Hansen 1853, Zimmerman 1858, Dakubu 2008), an uncontroversial position, except for the need to account for the addition of phonetic material rather than the reduction expected of the grammaticalization process. One hypothesis put forward by Dakubu (2008) is that *bàá-* is a result of the fusion of the ventive auxiliary *ba* and the older future marker, *àá-*. A similar trajectory is suggested for the prospective future prefix, *yàá-*, said to be a fusion of *ya* ‘go’ and *àá-*. This suggests that *àá-* preceded *bàá-* diachronically. However, I will show that (variants of) the two forms have co-existed for as long as the oldest records show and that they shared the future temporal function for centuries until *àá-* was recently specialized for subordinate and epistemic modal uses. A third related form, *á-* is the present-day subjunctive – marking weak obligation in main clauses and occurring in some complement constructions and on V2 verbs in serial verb constructions whose V1 is marked for future. Its semantic and formal relation to the future forms is apparent but its historical developmental path is less certain. This work attempts a historical analysis of future markers in a lesser-known language and in so-doing contributes to the literatures on typological variation and grammaticalization.

**References:** Dakubu, Mary Esther Kropp (2008). Ga verb features. In M.E Kropp Dakubu & Felix K. Ameka (eds.), *Aspect and modality in Kwa languages*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 91–134. Hanson, A.W. (1853). On the Grammatical Principles of the Ghã (Accra) language. *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London* 4, 84–97. Rask, Rasmus (1828). *Guide to the Akra Language with an appendix on Akvambu*. Translated by M.E Kropp Dakubu. Copenhagen: S.L Møllers Printing House. Zimmerman, Johann (1858). A grammatical sketch of the Akra or Ga language including vocabulary of the Akra or Ga language with an Adanme appendix. Stuttgart.

AG 7