

Eleme cognate objects: the source for denominalized unergative verbs?

Oliver Bond

London University, SOAS - UK

*The Cognate Object Construction (COC) is the use of an inflected verb in combination with a noun phrase containing an element that (i) exhibits an isomorphism with, or a derivationally or suppletively related form to, the verb with which it is associated, and (ii) has only some of the syntactic or morphological properties of a 'regular' well-formed syntactic object formation. For example, in the Eleme (Ogonoid, Benue-Congo) construction m̀-*bé* *òbe* 'I fought (a fight)', the inflected verb root *bé* 'fight' is followed by a cognate form *òbe* in object position. The use of the COC is particularly well developed among the languages of Africa, being found in unrelated language groups of northern, eastern and western Africa (and indeed in languages in other parts of the world) but the cross-linguistic properties of COCs are yet to be fully explored.*

In this paper, I examine Hale and Keyser's (1993, 2002) claims that unergative verbs are denominal in languages like English and Basque, in relation to languages like Eleme, in which verbs that are typically unergative in other languages require a 'deverbal' cognate object. In particular, I discuss the vestigial noun-class marking that distinguishes cognate objects from verbal forms, and the aspectual restrictions that interact with argument realization. Explanations are provided with reference to the strength of collocational dependencies between the cognate objects and the verbal series with which they are semantically and grammatically associated. Data is drawn from the authors' fieldnotes on Eleme and published materials on related Cross-River languages, in order to capture similarities and variation in this domain.