

Evidentiality and the Ulwa sentential *ka*¹

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1 Introduction: The three morphemes *ka*

In Ulwa a morpheme of phonological shape /ka/ appears in a number of morphosyntactic contexts which are illustrated in (1).

- (1) a. Francisco wahai-**ka**
Francisco brother-KA
'Francisco's brother'
- b. Yang wahai-ki
1SING brother-1SING
'My brother'
- c. Bikiska balna wahai-kana
child PL brother-3PL
'The childrens' brother'
- (2) Muih saya-**ka** dî dut-**ka** tal-yang.
person lazy-KA thing bad-KA see-1SING.PRES
'I don't think highly of lazy people.' (lit: I see lazy people badly., notes, 157)
- (3) Amak baka dapi amak sikka bik damaska kau lau *(**ka**).
bee small and bee big also bush in sit KA
'There are (there sit) both small and big bees in the bush.' (dict.)
- (4) Yang laih walta-sing **ka**, kal bau-dai.
I TOP want-1SING.NEG KA RECIP fight.3PL
'I do not like it, their fighting with one another.' (notes, 674; naturally occurring)
- (5) Tûruh ya tam-ka bânghka bahangh waya daknaka **ka**.
cow the horn sharp-pointed so little cut KA
'Because the cow's horns are sharp, they must be cut.' (dict.)

In (1a) *ka* marks the possessive relation, at once realizing third person singular agreement, as evidenced by the fact that suffix on the possessed noun in a possessive NP differs according to the

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The Ulwa data in the discussion that follows come from several sources: (a) the Ulwa dictionary (Green 1999), (b) sentences constructed by members of the UYUTMUBAL for the purposes of illustrating a particular lexeme in carrying out subsequent work on the dictionary, (c) changes made by me to these naturally occurring examples in order to elicit a judgement on a slightly altered sentence, (d) for very simple illustrations of a particular point to avoid unnecessary obfuscation of the main point, sentences or phrases constructed by me based on my knowledge of the language, and (e) naturally occurring examples overheard in the community.

person/number features of the possessor, a fact illustrated by the data in (1b) and (1c). This use of *ka*, which I call possessive *ka*, is discussed in further detail by Green (1999:78).

The *ka* morphemes in (2) illustrate another use of *ka* in Ulwa in which the morpheme appears suffixed to roots with meanings that translate as adjectives in languages with that lexical category (such meanings are called “property concept states” in the pioneering work of Dixon 1982). As discussed by Green (1999:134) and in more detail in Koontz-Garboden (2007:Chapter 6), it is not the case that words with these meanings always appear suffixed with *ka*. There are certain reasonably well-defined contexts, laid out by Koontz-Garboden (2007:Chapter 6), in which *ka* does not necessarily appear with words with these meanings. These are generally contexts in which the unaffixed property concept denoting root can cliticize to material in surrounding syntactic context of a minimal prosodic weight.

A final set of contexts in which a morpheme with the phonological shape *ka* appears is illustrated by the data in (3)–(5). This particular use is somewhat more difficult to characterize than the other two. Superficially, these uses illustrate the fact that in certain cases *ka* can be found linearly adjacent to the matrix predicate of a non-embedded clause.² More specifically, (3) illustrates the fact that *ka* is used (and indeed, obligatory) in present tense matrix clauses where the subject is third person and the main predicate is one of a small set of posture verbs, e.g., *wit* ‘hang’, *kut* ‘lie’, *lau* ‘sit’, *sak* ‘stand’ etc. (see Green 1999:140 for a comprehensive list of posture predicates, or what he calls “stative verbs”).³ The data in (4) illustrate another environment where *ka* appears adjacent to the matrix predicate. This use, however, contrasts with the use in (3) in that in this particular case, although it was indeed used in this naturally occurring example, it is not obligatory with (this form of) this verb. As discussed further below, presence/absence of *ka* in this context leads to subtle changes in the meaning of the sentence. Finally, the data in (5) illustrate yet another type of context in which *ka* appears next to the matrix predicate of a sentence. In this particular use, *ka* is used alongside an infinitival form of the verb in order to yield a deontic modal reading of the verb. Such uses of the infinitival form of the verb (though without attention to the importance of the presence of *ka*) are briefly discussed by Green (1999:92) and in more detail for Mayangna by Benedicto (2007), where the facts appear to be similar, and certainly related in a non-trivial way. In the remainder of this paper I follow Green (1999) in referring to the different, if perhaps related, kinds of uses illustrated in (3)–(5) as instances of the sentential use of *ka*.

The various uses of *ka* illustrated in (1)–(5) are neither obviously related nor unrelated to one another, and a major project in the understanding of Ulwa grammar is disentangling the function of these various uses and their relation to one another. Reaching an understanding of the relationship between these various uses of *ka*, however, presupposes having a solid understanding of each of these uses themselves in their own right. While the genitive use in (1a) is reasonably self-

²Green (1999:140) asserts, albeit without argumentation, that in such cases *ka* is syntactically a complementizer.

³As implied in the preceding, *ka* is not required in sentences like (3) where the subject is either first or second person or in the past tense, facts illustrated by the data in (i).

- (6) a. Lauwani-ki kau lau yang.
 chair-1SING in sit 1SING
 ‘I’m sitting in my chair.’ (dict)
 b. Al ya alas asung aslah lau dai.
 man the he heart one sit PAST
 ‘The man sat alone.’ (Wayah Bas)

explanatory, at least in that possession is a well studied (if not well-understood) topic (on which see Barker 1995 and Partee 1997 among others), the adjectival use in (2), discussed at length in Koontz-Garboden (2007:Chapter 6), and particularly the sentential uses in (3)–(5) are more mysterious. In this paper, I lay out the facts of the sentential use illustrated by the data in (4), with the goal of reaching an adequate pretheoretical description of the function of this use of sentential *ka*.

I begin the discussion by showing what sentential *ka* is not, namely a copular element, by laying out a series of arguments that I believe point conclusively to this conclusion. I then go on to lay out data that are more suggestive as to the true nature of *ka*, showing data collected in collaboration with the UYUTMUBAL which illustrate certain contexts in which the use of *ka* is appropriate and others in which it is not appropriate. As I detail, these arguments suggest that sentential *ka*, at least certain uses of it, has evidential functions.

2 Sentential *ka* is non-copular

In Ulwa both nouns and property concept state words can be used predicatively, with copular support. Copular support is also needed with posture predicates (sitting, standing, floating, hanging, etc.) and the modals *it* ‘be possible’ and *sip* ‘be possible’. Each of these three types of predicate is illustrated in (7) in a first or second person context.

- (7) a. Mining muih yak.
 1PL.INCL human COP.1PL.INCL
 ‘We are human.’ (Green 1999:137)
- b. Adah-ka yang.
 short-ADJ COP.1SING
 ‘I am short.’ (notes, 1007)
- c. Sau kau lau yang.
 dirt on sit COP.1SING
 ‘I am sitting on dirt.’ (dict)

The entire copular paradigm is given in (8) (cf. Green 1999:136).

- (8) Marking of non-verbal predicates
- | | | |
|------------|----------|---------------------------------------|
| | singular | plural |
| 1st person | yang | yangna (exclusive)
yak (inclusive) |
| 2nd person | man | manna |
| 3rd person | – | – |

A salient feature of the paradigm in (8), and a feature that is of primary concern in this paper, is the null realization of the 3rd person inflection of the Ulwa copula. Despite the null realization, 3rd person copular constructions do not always show up completely bare, void of anything other than the predicate and its subject. Instead sentential *ka* is often found in this context. Some examples are given in (9).

- (9) a. Ũ-ki dangkat kau asang tarat as lau ka.
 house-1SING behind at hill tall one sit SENT.KA

‘Behind my house there is/sits a hill.’ (dict.)

- b. Dî as yam-ka lau kat abal-naka ya dut-ka ka.
 thing one good-ADJ sit when ruin-3SING.INF DEF bad-ADJ SENT.KA
 ‘It is bad to ruin a good thing (lit: a thing that is sitting well).’ (dict.)

Initially, it would appear that the sentential *ka* in sentences such as those in (9) is actually the 3rd person manifestation of the Ulwa copula. There are several arguments against this position, however.

First, sentential *ka* is sometimes used in non-copular-verb contexts. In these cases, it can appear alongside a verb that has a non-third person subject. Some examples are given in (10).

- (10) a. Yang laih walta-sing **ka**, kal bau-dai.
 I TOP want-1SING.NEG SENT.KA RECIP fight.3PL
 ‘I do not like it, their fighting with one another.’ (notes, 674; naturally occurring)
 b. Yang laih wilih lipin-ka kas-sing (**ka**).
 I TOP green.turtle fin-3SING eat-1SING.NEG SENT.KA
 ‘I don’t eat green turtle fins.’ (Green 1999:139)
 c. Dî ing-ka ya bai kaupak tal-wai **ka**.
 thing light-ADJ DEF far from see-1PL.INCL SENT.KA
 ‘Bright things can be seen from afar/We can see bright things from afar.’ (dict.)

Although the negative verbs in (10a,b) both have first person subjects, the matrix verb can appear alongside sentential *ka*. This suggests that *ka* is not the third person manifestation of the copula, since it would fail to agree in person and number with its subject, unlike the first and second person manifestations of the Ulwa copula.

In addition to the fact that sentential *ka* can appear in non-third person contexts with verbal predicates, though rare, it seems that even with non-verbal predicates, it may also be possible in non-third person contexts (contrary to claims in Green 1999:139)—the sentence in (11) is a naturally occurring example from the Ulwa dictionary.

- (11) Mining it sa yak **ka**.
 1PL.INCL can NEG COP.1PL.INCL SENT.KA
 ‘We can’t.’ (dict.)

The predicate *it* ‘be possible’ is non-verbal as evidenced by the fact that it requires copular support. In (11), though it appears with a first person inclusive subject, and with first person inclusive agreement, it still takes sentential *ka*. Like the data in (10), the data in (11) force the conclusion that *ka* serves some function other than that of a copular element.

An additional argument that sentential *ka* is not part of the copular paradigm comes from the fact that it cannot co-occur with question words, such as *pih*, while the first and second person copular elements can. The relevant data are given in (12).

- (12) a. Andrew, sangka kut **man** **pih**?
 Andrew, awake lie COP.2SING INTERR
 ‘Andrew, are you lying there awake?’ (notes, 995)
 b. Pâpangh-ma lau pih?
 father-2SING sit INTERR

‘Is your father around?’ (dict.)

c. ?Pâpanghma lau **ka pih**? (unattested)

The sentence in (12a) shows that the second person copula can co-occur with the question marker *pih*, while (12b,c) show that this is not the case for sentential *ka*. While sentences with the interrogative *pih* that lack sentential *ka*, like (12b) are commonplace, I have never heard a sentence like (12c).⁴ This fact also suggests that sentential *ka* and the copula belong in different classes.

In addition to not co-occurring with the question marker *pih*, sentential *ka* also cannot appear next to an article, for example in an internally headed relative clause (IHRC) where the predicate of the IHRC might be expected to occur with sentential *ka*. This fact is illustrated by the data in (13).

- (13) Al Ulwa û-ka kau kut (*ka) ya Ulwa yamka yultai.
 man Ulwa house-3SING in lie SENT.KA DEF Ulwa well speak-TA-3SING.PRES
 ‘The man lying down in the Ulwa house speaks Ulwa well.’ (notes, 526)

By contrast, second (14a) and first person (14b) copulas *can* have a following article or demonstrative when appearing e.g., inside an internally headed relative clause, a fact illustrated by the data in (14).

- (14) a. Yâka tulh-ka watah **man** ya yai-ka pal-ka ka.
 that machete-3SING have 2SING DEF sharp-ADJ very-ADJ SENT.KA
 ‘That machete of yours if very sharp.’ (notes, 756)
 b. Âka kirit-ka watah **yang** âka walta-sa man?
 this saw-3SING have 1SING this want-NEG 2SING
 ‘Do you want this saw that I have?’ (notes, 756)

These data lead to the conclusion that sentential *ka* is outside of the copular system of the language.⁵ Showing what sentential *ka* isn’t, of course, doesn’t say much about what it actually *is*, however. In the next section, I take the first steps toward outlining what at least one of the functions of sentential *ka* is.

3 Evidential-like functions of sentential *ka*

As discussed in the introduction, there are certain contexts where the presence of sentential *ka* is obligatory and others in which it is not obligatory. In this section I restrict myself solely to those contexts in which it is not obligatory, with the goal of understanding in such cases what its presence adds to the meaning of the sentence. The data suggest that what sentential *ka* does in such cases, which involve exclusively declarative contexts, is to indicate that the source of knowledge from which the assertion is derived is from direct. Some examples illustrating this descriptive generalization follow.

A couple of boats arrive on a somewhat regular schedule in Karawala, delivering provisions, etc. for the town. One of the mainstay boats of Karawala life is called Doña Cándida (DC), named for the mestizo owner of the boat. DC’s regular schedule is that she leaves the town of Bluefields

⁴It is perhaps worth noting that neither have I tried to elicit one. For this reason, I give it a question mark rather than a star, though I am fairly certain that such sentences are not licensed by the grammar of the language.

⁵This is the same conclusion reached by Green (1999), though without providing the arguments given here.

on Friday mornings, arriving Karawala sometime on Saturday, and making it back to Bluefields on Monday evening. Despite this schedule, there are any number of factors that may cause her to arrive later, perhaps on Sunday, Monday, or later. Given this state of affairs, it is often the case that if someone is in Bluefields early in the week, say between Tuesday and Friday, they might go talk to DC herself to find out when she's leaving for Karawala (perhaps because they want to send something with her, etc.). This person that talked with DC, say on a Tuesday, might then take the Wednesday speedboat back to Karawala. Upon arriving in Karawala, people in town will want to hear news from this person, among other things, perhaps if the person spoke with DC regarding her plans for travel to Karawala. That said, consider now the two sentences in (15).

- (15) a. DC Saturday wâ-rang **ka.**
 DC Saturday come-3SING.IRR SENT.KA
 'DC will come Saturday.' (notes, 744)
 b. DC Saturday wâ-rang.
 DC Saturday come-3SING.IRR
 'DC will come Saturday.' (notes, 744)

According to one of my consultants, (15a), with sentential *ka* could only be uttered by a person who has spoken directly with DC, e.g. when in Bluefields. The sentence in (15b), on the other hand, could be uttered by a random person in town who expects DC to come simply based on the fact that she generally (though not at all without fail) comes on Saturdays.

Similarly, most people in Karawala have no direct experience with snow, though I do. If we had, then, something like a workshop on snow, where I gave a lecture all about snow, and in particular how cold it is, in this workshop, I might utter something like (16).

- (16) Snow ya dî rip-ka **ka.**
 snow DEF thing cold-ADJ SENT.KA
 'Snow is cold.' (notes, 744)

Though I can say (16), with sentential *ka*, according to one of my consultants, *he* could not say it, e.g. in reporting what he learned at the workshop back to his family members. Instead, he would have to say something like (17), with the quotative/reportative verb *atnaka*, appearing as *atdai*.

- (17) Snow yaka dî rip-ka **at-dai.**
 snow DEF thing cold-ADJ say-3PRES.PL
 'They say that snow is cold.' (notes, 744)

The observation, again, is that sentential *ka* is used to mark an assertion for which the speaker has direct knowledge. If the speaker lacks such first-hand knowledge, then it cannot be used.

A final example involves some repairs at the Ulwa Language House. During the time the fieldwork reported on here was being carried out, there was an old frame of a desk there that needed a new surface. One of the members of the committee had the idea that we could use something like particle board to fix it up. My partner Melissa and I happened to have a random piece, so I took it over there, measured both it and the desk, and observed that it would be big enough to repair the desk. While taking a break with another consultant a couple of days after doing this, the consultant asked about the desk and the piece of particle board, in particular whether it was big enough to fit

the desk. I responded with the sentence in (18), notably using sentential *ka*.

- (18) Amang-ka **ka**.
 enough-ADJ SENT.KA
 ‘It is big enough.’ (notes, 747)

Upon hearing this, she responded by asking if I had measured it, to which I responded that I had. We then went on to discuss the example in more detail. She told me that if I had measured the desk and board, then using (18), with sentential *ka* would be appropriate. She, on the other hand, since she had not measured the desk and board, could not respond with (18), even if it appeared to her that the particle board would be enough to get the job done; her response would have to be without sentential *ka*, or perhaps with another particle that hedges her response.

From what I can tell, sentential *ka* is not obligatory in cases of direct experience, but is used instead in cases where the speaker wants to make unambiguous the source of knowledge for his/her assertion.⁶ My sense, then, is that declarative sentences without sentential *ka* are underspecified for the speaker’s source of knowledge in making the declaration, while a sentence *with* sentential *ka* has it unambiguously that the speaker has some direct source of knowledge for making the assertion.

To a first approximation, then, it would appear that sentential *ka* serves some kind of evidentiality marking function in the language. This would not be entirely surprising, given the fact that Ulwa does have at least one unambiguous marker of evidentiality, a verb form which can be used just in case the speaker’s source of knowledge about the event named by the verb marked in this fashion is aural and not visual. This kind of verb form, which Green (1999:103) calls the audative, is illustrated by the data in (21).

- (21) a. Wai kawa-**rî** sah?
 who laugh-AUD IRREV
 ‘Who on earth is that laughing?’ (Green 1999:103)
 b. Pauh-**tî** manah dai.
 pound-AUD PLUR PAST.AUX
 ‘One could hear them hammering.’ (Green 1999:104)

⁶A possible exception to this statement is, again, with posture verbs and their kin (e.g., *it* ‘to be possible’, *watah* ‘have’, etc.), with which *ka* is obligatory, at least in matrix predicate present tense sentences like (i).

- (19) Andrew ya sînak watah *(ka).
 Andrew DEF rice have SENT.KA
 ‘Andrew has rice.’ (notes, 745)

This contrasts with the situation with words naming property concept predicates, for which sentential *ka* is optional in the same position (with the difference in meaning illustrated above), as shown in (ii).

- (20) Snow ya rip-ka (ka).
 Snow DEF cold-ADJ SENT-KA
 ‘Snow is cold.’ (notes, 746)

It is unclear to me why there should be this difference; it is definitely something that should be pursued, in the context of further study of sentential *ka*, and more broadly, in the context of the grammar of evidentiality/modality in the language.

Despite the existence of an unambiguous evidential in the language, it is not entirely clear that sentential *ka* is part of this system, as it appears to have other uses in the language which remain to be explored in detail, and which do not transparently have to do with evidentiality, e.g., its use with posture predicates, possessive NPs, and property concept words, as illustrated in the introduction. Future work should explore the extent to which these functions might be tied together.

4 Concluding remarks

In the preceding discussion I have given a description of but one of the various uses of /*ka*/ in Ulwa laid out in the introduction, showing that one of the uses of the sentential *ka* illustrated in the introduction is an evidential-like use that indicates that the information that a declarative assertion is based upon comes from direct experience. As the data in the introduction illustrate, however, this is but one of the uses of the *ka* morpheme in Ulwa, and but one of the sentential *ka* uses at that. Indeed, there are other uses of sentential *ka* that unlike the evidential use, are not optional, but are instead obligatory. Such is the case with certain kinds of predicates in certain contexts. Future work should focus on understanding the relationship of the evidential uses with these other uses of sentential *ka*. Moving beyond this, the relationship of these uses to the genitive and property concept *ka* remain to be elucidated. Of course, this syncretism could simply be an accident. I suspect, however, that it is not, in particular in light of similar syncretisms observed in other language groups discussed by Matisoff (1972). At issue then is more than simply an adequate description of Ulwa, itself a goal of utmost importance. Beyond this, however, lie larger typological and theoretical issues about the relationship of nominal and clausal syntax and morphology to one another. Further study of these facts of Ulwa, then, will not only lead to a better description of the language, but will also likely shed light on larger typological and theoretical issues in this domain.

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