

# Hawaiian *he* as a prenominal / preverbal particle

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**Abstract:** This paper attempts to advance an alternative analysis of the Hawaiian particle *he*. Two distinct *hes* are treated separately. In the first case, the prenominal particle *he* is an indefinite article which is combined with the function of the neutral case preposition 'o. In the second case, the preverbal particle *he* is a tense/aspect marker which indicates 'attribution / characteristic / property'.

**Key words:** Hawaiian, indefinite article, tense/aspect marker, particle *he*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Analysis of *he* in previous works

#### 1.1.1. Co-occurrence with prepositions

The analysis of the particle *he* has been one of the most controversial matters in Hawaiian grammar. In traditional analyses, for example Elbert and Pukui (1979: 156), it has been described as an indefinite article.

- (1) He kumu 'o Pua.  
 ? teacher NC Pua<sup>1</sup>  
 'Pua is a teacher.' (Elbert and Pukui 1979: 156)

However, *he* has to be considered a peculiar article, because its distribution diverges from that of other articles, such as *kalke* (definite article) and *nā* (plural article).

The most significant difference between *he* and other articles is seen in its co-occurrence with prepositions. While other articles can occur after any preposition, *he* does not.

In equational sentences, the definite articles *kalke* and the plural article *nā* are preceded by 'o (neutral case preposition), when they lead a predicate noun phrase.

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- (2) 'O ke 'lii nui ke po'o o ke aupuni;...  
NC AR chief big AR head of AR government  
'The high chief is the head of the government.' (Beckwith 1932: 143)
- (3) 'O nā mea ulu wale nō kāna mea 'ai,..  
NC AR-PL plant only EP his food  
'His foods are only plants,..' (Ho'oilina 2002: 74)

On the other hand, 'o (neutral case preposition) does not occur before *he*.

- (4) He akua anei kēla 'elemakule lauoho loloa?  
? god Q that old man hair long  
'Is that old man with long hair a god?' (Fornander 1916-1917: 265)

The most common multifunctional preposition *i* (Accusative / Dative / Locative) can be frequently found before *ka/ke* (definite article) or *nā* (plural article).

- (5) 'Ōlelo aku la 'o ia i ke Ali'i, ...  
say DR DM he DT AR chief  
'He said to the chief,...' (Beckwith 1911-2: 397)
- (6) Nānā aku la ia i nā kamali'i e noho lalani ana, ...  
look DR DM he AC AR-PL child TA sit line DM  
'And he looked at the children sitting in line,...' (Ke Kumu Kamalii Sep.1837: 100)

However, there is no example of *he* used after *i*. The only preposition that occurs before *he* is *me* 'with'. However, it occurs only in an idiomatic expression *me he* 'like/as if', which can be considered an exception.

- (7) Ka i'a lele me he manu.  
AR fish fly with ? bird  
'The fish that flies like a bird.' (Pukui 1983: 148)

In order to accommodate its deviation from other articles, Carter (1996) advanced an alternative analysis by which *he* is considered a copular verb, but not an article. Since the copular verb is a unique word class, its peculiar distribution needs no further explanation. In opposition to Carter's analysis, Cook (1999: 53) argues in favour of the traditional

analysis, and claims the deviation can be taken care of simply by assuming a rule that *he* cannot be preceded by any preposition other than *me*. Shionoya (1996), modifying the traditional analysis, claims that the function of the neutral case preposition ‘*o*’, and that of the indefinite article, were combined into a word *he*.

### 1.1.2. Co-occurrence with verbs

Another distinguishing feature of *he* is its similarity to preverbal particles, such as tense/aspect markers. In the beginning of a sentence, *he* is often found in the same position as tense/aspect markers, while other articles are not.

(8) He maika‘i loa kēia ‘ano,....  
 ? good very this variety  
 ‘This variety is very good,...’ (Kuokoa 1863/3/14: 1)

(9) Ua maika‘i loa kona ‘ili, .....  
 TA good very its hide  
 ‘His hide is beautiful,...’ (Mookini 1985: 85)

*He* in (8) is in the same position as the tense/aspect marker *ua* in (9). *Maika‘i* is a stative verb which does not take any object. *He* can be also found before a transitive verb which takes an object.

(10) He maka‘u nā ali‘i i ka ‘ōlelo a‘e,....  
 ? fear AR-PL chief AC AR say DIR  
 ‘The rulers fear to say,...’ (Pukui & Green 1995: 133)

(11) ..., ua maka‘u ‘o Keawenuiaumi i ka ‘ōlelo a ke keiki.  
 TA fear NC Keawenuiaumi AC AR word of AR boy  
 ‘...Kewawenuiaumi was afraid of the words of the boy.’ (Fornander 1918-1919: 89)

In (10), *he* is used before the transitive verb *maka‘u* ‘to fear’, which has the object noun phrase *i ka ‘ōlelo a‘e*. In (11), the tense/aspect marker *ua* occurs in the same position.

Again, Carter's analysis does not need any further explanation, since *he* is a copular verb. Cook (1999), considering *he* as an article, claims *he* in (8) and (10) can be adequately explained by assuming there is an optional noun *mea* ‘thing/person’ after *he*. For example, (8) can be analyzed as follows:

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(12)=(8) He (mea) maika'i loa kēia 'ano,....  
? thing good very this variety  
'This variety is a very good thing,...' (Kuokoa 1863/3/14: 1)

In the analysis shown in (12), *he* can be considered an article, since it is used before the noun *mea*. Many instances of *he* used before a verb can be explained in this way. However, this analysis fails to grasp similarity between *he* and tense/aspect markers. Moreover, inserting *mea* can cause difference in interpretation. (13) is another example of *he* used before the verb *maka'u*.

(13) Malia paha ua lapu, he maka'u wau.  
maybe TA ghost ? fear I  
'Maybe it is a ghost, I'm afraid.' (Fornander 1918-1919: 715)

If the noun *mea* 'thing/person' is inserted after *he*, (13) will be analyzed as follows:

(14)=(13) Malia paha ua lapu, he (mea) maka'u wau.  
maybe TA ghost ? thing fear I  
'??Maybe it is a ghost, I'm a person who fears (it).'

However, *mea maka'u* usually means 'thing/person which causes fear', not 'person who fears something'. Compare (13) with (15).

(15) ....., a he mea maka'u loa ia bufalo.  
and ? thing fear very that buffalo  
'and the buffalo is a thing greatly feared.' (Mookini 1985: 47)

In (15), *mea maka'u* means 'thing which causes fear', not 'person who fears something'. The same interpretation applies to instances of *mea maka'u* used after other articles.

(16) ....., e ikeia'ku hoi nā mea maka'u...  
TA seen-DR EP AR-PL thing fear  
'...there will be terrors..' (Luka XXI.11)

Thus, the default interpretation of *mea makau* does not match with the interpretation shown

as (14).

There is another example where inserting *mea* can affect the meaning. *Nui* is a stative verb meaning 'many/big/large' which often occurs after *he*.

- (17) He nui wale nā akua ma ka papa ‘elua, ....  
 ? many EP AR-PL god at AR class two  
 ‘There are very many gods in class two.’ (Beckwith 1932: 11)

*Nui* has a wide range of meaning. In (17), it means 'many'. With the noun *mea* inserted after *he*, (17) will be analyzed as (18) below.

- (18)=(17) He (mea) nui wale nā akua ma ka papa ‘elua,...  
 ? thing many EP AR-PL god at AR class two  
 ‘??The gods in class two are many things<sup>2</sup>.’

However, the common interpretation of *mea nui* is 'a large thing' or 'important thing', not 'many things'.

- (19) He mea nui ka ‘ēleka, ‘u‘uku ka dia.  
 ? thing large AR elk small AR deer  
 ‘The elk is large, the stag is small.’ (Mookini 1985: 85)  
 (20) ....., he mea nui ka ho‘āo ‘ana,  
 ? thing big AR marry NM  
 ‘To get married is an important thing.’ (Beckwith 1932: 13)

In (19) and (20), *mea nui* means 'large thing' and 'important thing', respectively. The analysis shown in (18) forces an uncommon interpretation of *mea nui*. The common way to express 'there are many ....' is *he nui*... without the noun *mea*, as shown in (17).

## 1.2. Purpose of this paper

This paper aims to advance an alternative to those analyses. The main cause of controversy about how to analyze *he* lies in its diverse distribution and function. The analysis presented in this paper assumes two distinct functions of *he*, instead of only one function, in order to explain its peculiarity.

Data used for analysis are from various types of written materials, which include the

Bible, folklore, history, newspaper articles, laws, and so on.

## 2. An alternative analysis

### 2.1. Two distinct functions of *he*

In this paper, two *hes*, each of which has a distinct function and distribution, are assumed as follows:

(21) *he*<sub>1</sub> as a prenominal particle, and

(22) *he*<sub>2</sub> as a preverbal particle.

*He*<sub>1</sub> is a prenominal particle which occurs before a noun, while *he*<sub>2</sub> is a preverbal particle which comes before a verb. Consequently, a phrase preceded by *he*<sub>1</sub> is considered as a noun phrase, and one preceded by *he*<sub>2</sub> as a verb phrase.

In section 2.2 and 2.3, it is shown how this alternative analysis can describe the main usages of *he*.

## 2.2. Prenominal particle *he*<sub>1</sub>

### 2.2.1. Usage

The analysis in Shionoya (1996) is adopted to describe *he*<sub>1</sub>. The prenominal particle *he*<sub>1</sub> is an indefinite article which was combined with the function of the neutral case preposition<sup>3</sup> ‘*o*’.

In Hawaiian, predicate phrases can be broadly divided into two types: (1) verbal predicates, and (2) nominal predicates. Nominal predicates consist of a preposition and a noun phrase. In equational sentences, the neutral case preposition ‘*o*’ occurs before other articles, as seen in (2) and (3).

(23)=(2) ‘O ke 'lii nui ke po'o o ke aupuni;...

NC AR chief big AR head of AR nation

‘The big chief is the head of the nation.’ (Beckwith 1932: 3)

(24)=(3) ‘O nā mea ulu wale nō kāna mea ‘ai,...

NC AR-PL plant only EP his food

‘His foods are only plants,.’ (Ho‘oilina 2002: 74)

On the other hand, ‘*o*’ does not appear before *he*<sub>1</sub>, because the function of the neutral case preposition ‘*o*’ is included in *he*<sub>1</sub>.

- (25) He<sub>1</sub>        ‘ohe kani        kēia;  
           NC-AR    nose flute        this  
           ‘This is a nose flute.’ (Ka hoku o Hawaii 9/24/1908: 3)

Noun phrases preceded by *he*<sub>1</sub> are also found in non-predicate positions. (26) is an example where *he*<sub>1</sub> leads the subject noun phrase.

- (26) ua    hō‘ea    mai    he<sub>1</sub>    mau    kāhuna    e    nānā ...  
           TA    arrive    DR    NC-AR    PL    priest    TA    supervise  
           ‘some priests arrived to supervise...’(Pukui & Green 1995: 133)

The subject noun phrase does not need any preposition before it. Although *he*<sub>1</sub> includes the function of the preposition, it does not cause any conflict, because the function included in it is that of the neutral case.

*He*<sub>1</sub> also occurs before an object noun phrase, as in (27).

- (27) Ia    manawa, hāpai    a‘e    la    ‘oia    he<sub>1</sub>        wahi    mele,    penei: ...  
           that time        raise    DR DM    she    NC-AR    PC    chant    like this  
           ‘Then she raised a chant as follows...’ (Beckwith 1911-2: 487)

The object noun phrase is usually marked by the accusative preposition *i*, which is not found in (27). Compare (27) with (28) below.

- (28) ...., e    hapai    nō    ‘oia    i    ka    lio    ma    kona    mau    pepeiaohao, ...  
           TA    raise    EP    he    AC AR    horse    at    his    PL        horn  
           ‘...he will lift the horse on his horns,...’ (Mookini 1985: 47)

While the accusative preposition *i* occurs before the object noun phrase *ka lio* 'the horse' in (28), it is not found in (27). Since two consecutive prepositions are not allowed in Hawaiian, the accusative preposition *i* cannot be used before *he*<sub>1</sub>, in which the function of the preposition is already included. Again, the neutral case preposition does not cause any conflict with the accusative function.

A noun phrase preceded by any preposition, except *e* 'Agentive', can modify its preceding noun phrase. The preposition ‘*o*’, like other prepositions, can be found in a noun phrase modifying another noun phrase.

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- (29) He ahi na ke kahuna wahine 'o Laea,  
NC-AR fire for AR priestre NC Laea  
'A fire for the priestess Laea,...' (Bacon & Napoka 1995: 40)

In (29), 'o Laea modifies its preceding noun phrase *ke kahuna wahine* 'the priestess'. This can be considered as an example of the appositive use. Since *he*<sub>1</sub> includes the function of the preposition 'o, a noun phrase preceded by *he*<sub>1</sub> can be used to modify another noun.

- (30) Ua noho pū a'e la lāua ma ke 'ano he<sub>1</sub> kāne a he wahine...  
TA live together DR DM they in AR manner NC-AR husband and NC-AR wife  
'They lived together as husband and wife...' (Ka hoku o Hawaii 10/8/1908: 3)
- (31) ...e pili ana no kēia mea he<sub>1</sub> 'ōhelo.  
TA concerning DM about this thing NC-AR ohelo (= a variety of berry)  
'...concerning this thing, an 'ōhelo.' (Fornander 1918-1919: 583)

In (30), *he kāne a he wahine* 'a husband and a wife' modifies *ke ano* 'the manner', and *he ohelo* 'an 'ōhelo berry' in (31) modifies *keia mea* 'this thing'.

## 2.2. *he* as preverbal particle

### 2.2.1. Usage

In this paper, *he*<sub>2</sub> is included in the word class 'tense/aspect markers'. The tense/aspect marker occurs before a predicate verb.

- (32) Ua 'ono kona 'i'o.  
TA be delicious its meat  
'Its meat is delicious.' (Mookini 1985: 17)

In (32), the tense/aspect marker *ua* 'perfect' is used before the verb *ono* 'be delicious'. Since *he*<sub>2</sub> is a tense/aspect marker, it can also be used before a predicate verb. *He*<sub>2</sub>, as a tense/aspect marker, indicates 'attribution / characteristic / property'. It is called 'Attribution Marker' in the following.

- (33) He<sub>2</sub> 'ono loa nō ho'i ka 'i'o o kēia manu,  
TA delicious very EP AR meat of this bird  
'The meat of this bird is very delicious.' (Kuokoa 1863/6/13: 1)



- (34) He<sub>2</sub> hele wale nō ka ‘uhane  
 TA wander EP AR soul  
 ‘The soul wanders.’ (Fornander 1918-1919: 577)

In (33) and (34), *he*<sub>2</sub> is used before the verb *ono* 'be delicious' and the verb *hele wale* 'wander', respectively. (33) describes some bird's attribution / characteristic / property, i.e., 'its meat is delicious.' In a similar way, (34) indicates the soul's attribution / characteristic / property, i.e., 'it wanders'.

A verb phrase preceded by a tense/aspect marker is also used to modify a noun phrase as in (35).

- (35) kēia po‘e i ma‘a ma ia hana  
 these people TA accustomed to that work  
 ‘these people who are accustomed to that work’ (Fornander 1918-1919: 613)

In (35), the verb phrase preceded by the tense aspect marker *i* modifies the noun phrase *keia poe* 'these people'. In the similar way, a verb phrase preceded by *he*<sub>2</sub> can also modify a noun phrase.

- (36) ka po‘e o Kahuwā he<sub>2</sub> ma‘a i ka hoe ma ke kunihi  
 AR people of Kahuwa TA accustomed to AR paddling with AR edge  
 ‘the people of Kahuwā who were in the habit of paddling with the edge of the paddle blade’  
 (Pukui 1983: 87)

In (36), the verb phrase preceded by *he*<sub>2</sub> is modifying its preceding noun phrase *ka po‘e o Kahuwā* 'the people of Kahuwa'.

The stative verb *nui* 'many', preceded by *he*<sub>2</sub>, is often used to modify a noun phrase.

- (37) ua hiki maila ke konohiki me kona ‘ohana, me nā makana he<sub>2</sub> nui.  
 TA arrive DR AR land agent with his family with AR-PL gift TA many  
 ‘...and the land agent arrived with his family, with many gifts.’ (Pukui & Green 1995: 144)

### 3. Final remarks

As seen above, the main usage of *he* can be explained by assuming two distinct *hes*, i.e., *he*<sub>1</sub> and *he*<sub>2</sub>. The function of *he*<sub>1</sub> and that of *he*<sub>2</sub> are summarized as follows.

(38) *he*<sub>1</sub>: the neutral case marker 'o + indefinite article

(39) *he*<sub>2</sub>: the tense/aspect marker which indicates 'attribution / characteristic / property '

By assuming two distinct functions of *he*, its diverse distribution and function can be explained without creating an isolated word class such as 'copular' or forcing an uncommon interpretation caused by insertion of *mea*, shown in (14) and (18). Moreover, this analysis makes it clear that *he* has some similarity to articles, case markers, and tense / aspect markers.

There are many Hawaiian words which can be used both as a verb and as a noun. As a result, the distinction between *he*<sub>1</sub> and *he*<sub>2</sub> often depends on the context. For example, the word *hau'oli* means 'be happy' as a verb and 'happiness' as a noun, respectively.

(40) He<sub>1</sub>      hau'oli    ka   ukali      o      ka    lanakila.  
 NC-AR    happiness AR    follower    of      AR    victory  
 'Gladness follows in the wake of victory.' (Pukui 1983: 66)

(41) Aole    anei he<sub>2</sub>    hau'oli    nā      kanaka    na'aupō?  
 NG    Q    TA    happy    AR-PL    man      ignorant  
 'Are not ignorant men happy?' (Hawaiian Phrase Book: 56)

In (40), *hau'oli* is used as a noun 'happiness', and the noun phrase *he hauoli* is a predicate noun phrase which is preceded by *he*<sub>1</sub>. On the other hand, *hau'oli* in (41) is a verb which, preceded by *he*<sub>2</sub>, indicates ignorant men's attribute, i.e., 'they are happy'. Thus, the function of *he* is determined depending on the context.

## Notes

1. I am really grateful to Michael Johnson and an anonymous referee for useful comments on earlier versions of this paper. All errors and shortcomings in this paper are my own. The abbreviations used in this paper are: AC, accusative case; AR, article; DM, demonstrative; DR, directional; EP, emphasis; NC, neutral case; NG, negation; NM, nominalizer; PC, paucal; PL, plural; PS, passive; Q, question; and TA, tense/aspect marker.
2. Carter (1996: 165) points out insertion of *mea* before *he* often creates a sentence with awkward meaning.
3. Cook (1999: 50) claims 'o is a copular preposition. In this paper, 'o is called a neutral case preposition, since it is used before noun phrases without any specific case. For example, it appears before a complement noun of calling/naming verbs.

... 'o ka pāpa'i li'ili'i i kapa 'ia 'o ka 'alamihi.

NC AR crab small TA call PS NC AR alamihi

'(It is) the small crab called the alamihi.' (Nakoa 1979: 14)

The second 'o, in the example above, appears before a complement noun phrase of *kapa* 'call'.

It can be also used as a topic marker as shown in the example below.

'O kona lō'ihi, mai ka 'īniha me ka hapa ... paha.

NC its length from AR inch and AR half perhaps

'As for its length, it is perhaps from 1 1/2 inch...' (Nakoa 1979: 14)

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