
DP/NP-meaning in Akan and Hausa – a micro-comparative approach

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This talk makes a plea for the systematic micro-comparative semantic analysis of West African languages, as opposed to a pointwise comparison of these languages against typologically more remote English. We investigate the meaning of DEF and INDEF determiners and bare NPs in the West African languages Akan (Kwa) and Hausa (Chadic). The distribution and interpretation of overt determiners in both languages, differs in interesting - and at first sight parallel ways - from their English counterparts, but the correct formal analysis has proven difficult. The literature offers three different analyses of the DEF determiner *nó* in Akan, none of it without problems. Likewise, both choice-function-based and $\exists$ -quantifier-based analyses seem to account for the empirical behaviour of INDEF determiners in Akan and Hausa, but it is unclear how to choose between them when looking at the individual languages in isolation. The same holds for bare NPs.

It will be shown that a micro-comparative direct analysis of Hausa and Akan, and a language-internal comparison of overtly marked forms and bare NPs provides deeper insights into the formal semantic analysis of DEF and INDEF marking in Akan and Hausa. We show that, despite superficial similarities, the distribution and interpretation of DEF and INDEF determiners and bare NPs differs in interesting ways. For instance, the DEF determiner can attach to anaphorically references proper names and pronouns in Hausa (1), but not in Akan. Second, DPs with INDEF-markers must take scope over clause-mate negation in Akan, but not in Hausa, cf. (2). And bare NPs can freely receive uniqueness-based DEF-interpretations in Hausa, but not in Akan, where they express INDEF meaning.

- (1) kaa ga Audù-**n**? [Hausa] (Jaggar 2001: 319)
2SG.M.PFV see Audu-DEF
‘Did you see (the prementioned) Audu?’
- (2) Ama a-**n**-kan nwoma **bi**. [Akan] (Amfo 2010)
Ama PERF-NEG-read book INDEF
‘Ama didn’t read SOME book.’ NOT: ‘Ama didn’t read any book.’

Based on these differences, we will propose different semantic analyses of the overt DEF- and INDEF-markers in Akan and Hausa as uniqueness- and familiarity-based, and choice-function-based and $\exists$ -based, respectively. The differences in the distribution and interpretation of bare NPs in the two languages then follow from general principles of blocking and competition (Chierchia 1998).

References: • Amfo, N. A. (2010). Indefiniteness marking and Akan *bi*. *Journal of Pragmatics* 42, 1786-1798. • Chierchia, G. (1998). Reference to kinds across languages. *Natural Language Semantics* 6, 339–405. • Jaggar, P. J. (2001). *Hausa*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.