
Lessons from the field: How to tackle challenges of cross-linguistic fieldwork on understudied languages

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In this talk, I will report on a series of elicitation and experimental studies (Bimpeh et al. 2024, Silleresi et al. 2026, Bassi et al. 2026) investigating logophoric pronouns in three West African languages: Ewe, Yoruba and Igbo. A logophoric pronoun is a pronominal form dedicated to occur only under attitude predicates and it must refer to the attitude holder, see (1) for *yè* in Ewe. Much less agreement is found in the literature about the co-reference profile of the non-logophoric 3rd person pronouns in these languages, with some studies reporting that they cannot co-refer with the attitude holder, e.g., *è* in Ewe (1).

- (1) Kòfí₁ gblɔ bé yè₁ / *é₁ dzó. (Bimpeh et al. 2024)
Kofi say that LOG / 3SG leave
'Kofi said that he left.'

Our one-on-one elicitation study (Bimpeh et al. 2024) showed a cross-linguistic split between Ewe on the side and Yoruba and Igbo on the other, the latter permitting co-reference with the non-logophoric pronoun. However, our quantitative acceptability judgement study (Silleresi et al. 2026) showed a different cross-linguistic split, in that Yoruba patterned with Ewe and not Igbo. The demographic data collected along with the judgements reveal that dialectal variation and educational level play significant roles in interpreting the results. We argue in Bassi et al. (2026) for a free pronoun analysis of logophors, for which the logophoric inference is derived from a presuppositional LOG feature, based on the observation that logophors allow for strict readings in focus and ellipsis contexts in all three languages. All else being equal, we would expect disjoint readings of all non-logophoric 3rd person pronouns with the attitude holder in sentence like (1) in these languages, following the principle of Maximize Presupposition! and the assumption that non-logophoric 3rd person pronouns lack the LOG feature. The aim of this talk is to tease apart the reasons why we did not find this picture with all speakers in Ewe and Yoruba across both studies, and why we never find it in Igbo.

References: • Silleresi et al. (2026). *Pronoun preferences unmasked: An experiment study on the interpretation of logophors and pronouns in Ewe, Igbo and Yoruba*. Ms. • Bimpeh et al. (2024). Obligatory de se logophors in Ewe, Yoruba and Igbo: variation and competition. In J. Lu et al. (eds.). *Proceedings of the 40th West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics*. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project, 1–10. • Bassi et al. (2026). Decomposing logophoric pronouns: a presuppositional account of logophoric dependencies. *Natural Language Semantics*, to appear.