

On the strong-weak status of the Akan definite determiner

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Introduction

Language Information

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- At least eight dialects spoken in Ghana: Agona, Bono, Akuapem, Asante, Asen, Dankyira, Fante, and Kwahu.
- Data is primarily from the Asante-Twi dialect. Examples from other dialects are indicated.

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- The basic word order is SVO, as shown in (1).

(1) Papa **nó** hu-u maame **nó**.
man DEF see-PST woman DEF
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- But DPs (2) are head-final

(2) Kruwa ketewa kòkòò **nó**
cup small red DEF
'The small red cup'

The phenomenon

- Akan definite determiner, *nɔ́* occurs in a regular DP such as (3), where it contrasts with the indefinite determiner *bí* (4).

(3) Kofi hu-u [DP maame **nɔ́**].
 Kofi see-PST woman DEF
 'Kofi saw the woman.'

nominal definite determiner

(4) Kofi hu-u [DP maame **bí**].
 Kofi see-PST woman INDEF
 'Kofi saw a (certain) woman.'

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- It is also found clause finally, as in (5).

(5) Kofi a-didi **nó**.
 Kofi PERF-eat DEF
 'Kofi has eaten (as we asked him to).'

clausal definite determiner

The phenomenon

- Following (Saah, 2004, 2010; Arkoh & Matthewson, 2013; Korsah, 2017), I will refer to the clause final determiner as a *clausal determiner*
- Similar phenomenon is found in related languages such as Ga (Renans, 2016; Korsah, 2017), Ewe, Fongbe (Lefebvre, 1998; Larson, 2003), and Haitian Creole (Lefebvre, 1998; Wespel, 2008).

The nominal definite determiner in Akan

- Since Christaller (1875), *nó* has been treated as the equivalent of the English definite determiner *the*.

(6) The man came here.

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- But there are differences between the distribution of *nó* and *the*. For instance, *the* is obligatory in (8), but *nó* is optional in Akan (9).

(8) *(The) sun is shining.

(9) Awia (**nó**) re-bɔ.
sun DEF PROG-shine
'The sun is shining.'

Previous analyses

Amfo (2006, 2007); Fretheim & Amfo (2008); Amfo (2010); Arkoh & Matthewson (2013); Bombi (2018).

Uses of the Akan nominal definite determiner

Anaphoric use

- Hawkins (1978) identifies three main contexts where definite determiners are licensed: *anaphoric*, *immediate situation*, *larger situation* contexts.

Anaphoric use

- The definite determiner is licensed by a preceding linguistic antecedent

- (10) Ama hu-u ɔkyerekyerɛni bi ne sogyani bi.
 Ama see-PST teacher INDEF CONJ soldier INDEF
 ɔ-kyea-a sogyani **nó**.
 3SG.SUBJ-greet-PST teacher DEF
 ‘Ama saw a teacher and a soldier. He greeted the soldier.’

Immediate situation uses

- The antecedent is in the utterance situation, visible or not visible.

- (11) Context: A man and a woman are arguing in the street. Ama and Kwame are sitting in front of their house where they can see but not hear them. Kofi walks in and sees them staring. He says oh...

Papa **nó** de maame **nó** ka.
man DEF owe woman DEF debt

‘The man owes the woman money.’

Larger situation uses

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 - Country, community: we can talk about *the president (of Ghana), the king of a town*

(12) Context: A newscaster in Ghana is talking about the Ghanaian president

ɔmanpanin (*nɔ) bɛ bleme obi.
 president DEF FUT. blame someone

'The president will blame someone.'

Larger situation uses

- Global: *sun* and *moon* (*nó* is optional)

(13) Context: Afia is sitting on a bus, when a woman she doesn't know sits down beside her. The woman says:

Awia (**nó**) re-bɔ ɛnnɛ.
sun DEF PROG-hit today

'The sun is shining today.'

(Bombi, 2018, 150)

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 sun DEF COP star
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- Context 1: The beginning of a documentary on the solar system
 ⇒ **nó** = *infelicitous* bare = *felicitous*
- Context 2: A parent is showing a child a book on the solar system.
 They open a page with a picture of the sun...
 ⇒ **nó** = *felicitous* bare = *felicitous*

Optionality in global contexts

- (15) Context: There is a children's show on TV about colors. They have a picture of the sun but it is painted green. A parent points to the sun on the TV and says...

Awia (**nó**) ye green.
sun DEF COP green

'The sun is green.

- a. **nó** ⇒ True! Interpreted as a statement about the sun in the picture.

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Awia (**nó**) yε green.
 sun DEF COP green

'The sun is green.

- a. **nó** ⇒ True! Interpreted as a statement about the sun in the picture.
- b. **Bare** ⇒ False! Interpreted as a statement about the sun in the world.

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Nó is not licensed in larger situation contexts.

Demonstrative uses

- *Nó* is used as a distal demonstrative (17) [a] which contrasts with the proximal demonstrative *yi* (17) [b].
- Both forms may co-occur with a pre-nominal form *saa*

(17) a. (Saa) abofra **nó** nim adeε paa.

DEM child DEM know thing INT.

‘That child is very intelligent.’

b. (Saa) abofra **yi** nim adeε paa.

DEM child DEM know thing INT.

‘This child is very intelligent.’

(Amfo, 2010, 185)

Demonstrative uses

- As a demonstrative NP, it is possible for a predicate and its negation to be true for a *saa...nó* NP (Löbner, 1985).

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(18) **Saa** abofra **nó** nim adeε paa εna **saa** abofra **nó** abɔn.
DEM child DEM know thing INT. CONJ DEM child DEM not.smart
'That child is very intelligent and that child is not smart.'

Demonstrative uses

- **Nó** DPs are not compatible with a predicate and its negation. (19) [a] and (19) [b] are contradictory.

- (19) a. #Abofra **nó** nim adeε paa εna abofra **nó** abɔn.
 child DEF know thing INT. CONJ child DEF not.smart
 ‘The child is very intelligent and the child is not smart.’
- b. #Me-pε car **nó** nanso me-m-pε car **nó** .
 1SG-like car DEF but 1SG-NEG-like car DEF
 ‘I like that car [pointing at Audi] but I don’t like that car [pointing at Renault].’
 (Bombi, 2018, 152)

Properties of *nó*

- *Nó* can be licensed by an linguistic antecedent or a non-linguistic antecedent in the immediate discourse situation
- It patterns with definites —it is incompatible with a predicate and its negation

Distribution of German, Akan, and English definite determiners

Category	UNIQUENESS		FAMILIARITY	DEMONSTRATIVE
	Global	situational	anaphora	deixis
Akan	null	<i>nó</i>	<i>nó</i>	<i>saa...nó</i>
German	<i>vom</i>		<i>von dem</i>	<i>von DÉM</i>
English	<i>the</i>			<i>that</i>

Two Types of definite determiners

- Weak definite article: uniqueness

- (20) Der Empfang wurde **vom** / #**von dem** **Bürgermeister**
 the reception was by-the_{weak} / by the_{strong} mayor
 eröffnet
 opened
 'The reception was opened by the mayor.'

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- Strong definite article: anaphoricity

- (21) Hans hat einen Schriftsteller und einen Politiker interviewt. Er hat
 Hans has a writer and a politician interviewed He has
 #**vom/** **von dem** **Politiker** keine interessanten Antworten
 from-the_{weak}/ from the_{strong} politician no interesting answers
 bekommen.
 gotten
 'Hans interviewed a writer and a politician. He didn't get any interesting
 answers from the politician.' German (Schwarz, 2009, 24)

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- Akan definite determiner *nó* is a strong definite article
- The bare noun encodes the weak definiteness

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- (22) Context: A man and a woman are arguing in the street. Ama and Kwame are sitting in front of their house where they can see but not hear them. Kofi walks in and sees them staring. He says oh...

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- Bombi (2018): contends that the distribution of definite determiners in Akan does not support the strong-weak distinction.

Proposal

Familiarity

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 - *Strong familiarity/Anaphoricity*: definites are licensed by linguistic antecedents (Schwarz, 2009, 2013)
 - *Weak familiarity*: definites are licensed by linguistic antecedents, perceptually accessible antecedents and antecedents made available by sensory or cultural experience (Roberts, 2003, 2010).

Familiarity presupposition

- *Nó* as a weak familiarity definite (Arkoh & Matthewson, 2013)

$$(23) \llbracket D_y \text{ familiar} \rrbracket = \lambda s \lambda P : \exists ! x (P(x)(s_r) \wedge x = y) . \iota x (P(x)(s_r) \wedge x = y)$$

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(Schwarz, 2009)

- Anaphoric uses

- (24) Ama hu-u ɔkyerɛkyerɛni bi ne sogyani bi.
 Ama see-PST teacher INDEF CONJ soldier INDEF
 ɔ-kyea-a sogyani **nó**.
 3SG.SUBJ-greet-PST soldier DEF
 'Ama saw a teacher and a soldier. He greeted the soldier.'

Familiarity presupposition

■ Immediate situation uses

(25) Kofi hu-u [maame **nó**].
Kofi see-PST woman DEF
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(25) Kofi hu-u [maame **nó**].
Kofi see-PST woman DEF
'Kofi saw the woman.'

- The lexical entry in 23 does not, however, rule out the larger situation uses.

Familiarity presupposition

- Weak familiarity cannot explain the difference between (26) [a] and (26) [b]

(26) Kwame maame ne ne nua ba-a ha...
 Kwame mother CONJ 3SG.POSS sibling come-PST here
 'Kwame's mother and his sister/brother came here.'

a. Na ne maame (*nó) yε tumtum.
 PRT 3SG.POSS mother DEF COP. dark.skin

'Kwame's mother came here. His mother was dark-skinned.'

b. Na ne nua nó yε tumtum.
 PRT 3SG.POSS sibling DEF COP. dark.skin

'Kwame's mother came here. His sibling dark-skinned.'

Non-uniqueness presupposition

Non-uniqueness:

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(28) #**That/the** highest mountain in the world is Everest.

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(28) #**That/the** highest mountain in the world is Everest.

- Formularized by Dayal & Jiang (2020) in (29)

(29) $[[\text{Dem}_y]]^g = \lambda s \lambda P : \exists s' s \leq s' \mid P(s') \mid > 1. \iota x [P(x)(s) \wedge x = g(y)]$
the demonstrative denotes a unique individual that is identical to the value of y assigned by the assignment function in the situation under discussion and presupposes that the cardinality of P in an extended situation (s') is greater than 1. (Dayal & Jiang, 2020, 14).

Lexical entry for *nó*

- Proposed lexical combines the familiarity presupposition in Arkoh & Matthewson (2013) via Schwarz (2009) of definites with the non-uniqueness presupposition of demonstratives in Dayal & Jiang (2020)

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$$(30) \quad \llbracket \text{no}_y \rrbracket^g = \lambda s \lambda P : \underline{\exists! x [P(x)(s) \wedge x = g(y)] \wedge \exists s' s \leq s' | P(s') | > 1} . \iota x [P(x)(s) \wedge x = g(y)]$$

Presuppose that x is familiar and that the cardinality of P in an extended situation (s') is greater than 1.

Lexical entry for *nó*

- (31) $\llbracket \text{soldier } n\acute{o}_y \rrbracket : \frac{\exists! x[\text{soldier}(x)(s) \wedge x = g(y)] \wedge \exists s' s \leq s' \mid \{x \mid \text{soldier}(x)(s)\} \mid > 1.}{\iota x(\text{soldier}(x)(s) \wedge x = g(y))} \approx$
the unique individual x such that x is a soldier in situation s and x is identical to the value of y assigned by the assignment and the cardinality of P is in an extended situation is greater than 1.

Definite bare nouns

- Most bare nouns in Akan have an indefinite reading

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(32) Kofi tɔ-ɔ **aponkye. Aponkye #(nɔ́)** boɔ yɛ den.
 Kofi buy-PST goat goat DEF price COP expensive
 'Kofi bought a goat. The goat is expensive.'

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 'Kofi bought a goat. The goat is expensive.'

- Only inherently unique nouns have bare definite readings

Summary

- The nominal definite determiner *nó* has two presuppositions: familiarity and non-uniqueness
- Like demonstratives, it is incompatible with semantically unique nouns

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