

Book Review

Lawrence Addai Boadi, 2010. *The Akan Noun Phrase: Its Structure and Meaning*. Cantonments-Accra: Black Mask Ltd. 286 pages. ISBN 978-9988-8489-5-8

The book, which is primarily on the noun phrase of Akan and perhaps the first that is devoted to that topic, is made up of ten chapters. It gives a detailed look at the noun in Akan and indicates the author's enormous insight into the Akan language and grammar. Although the book is not purposely on Akan phonetics and phonology, the author recognizes and provides correct forms of the language (in terms of orthography) and takes pains to present them. One such case is his presentation of the third person singular pronoun in Akan as /ɔ-/ as in **ɔ-aba** 'he has come' and not /w-/ as in **w-aba**, which has commonly been given in the orthography and found in many books and, therefore, has become the norm. Indeed, this is a must-read book for every Akan scholar and student. Each chapter of the ten is devoted to a particular aspect of the Akan noun phrase (NP), which is then comprehensively and clearly presented.

Generally, the book is well structured and coherently presents various aspects of the NP. Chapter One, which is titled 'General Properties of the Noun Phrase', looks at the universality of the noun and notes the major constituents that could be part of the noun phrase (NP). 'The Akan Noun Phrase' is the title of Chapter Two of the book, which briefly looks at the phrase structure of the NP. The rest of the book takes a close look at the major constituents within the NP in separate chapters. In this direction, Chapter Three continues on the topic 'The Associative Phrase', and here the semantics of the genitival phrase is the subject matter. Chapter Four, entitled 'The Participle', is also on the participle and, to some extent, how it is different from 'The Adjective', which is the topic of Chapter Five. Chapter Six is on the topic 'The Determiner', where various types of the determiner are explored in terms of the relationship between them and the noun. 'The Quantifier' takes the centre stage of Chapter Seven, where two types of the quantifier are observed. 'The Lexical Noun' is concentrated on in connection with its semantics and syntax in Chapters Eight, Nine and Ten under the respective sub-topics of 'Space and Individual', 'Animacy and Definiteness', and 'Inalienability, Direction and Kinship'.

Observing the chapters in some detail, Chapter One underscores the distinctiveness of the noun as a word class and also gives insight into the lexical nature of the noun in Akan, following the observation that the universality of the noun

may not be acceptable cross-linguistically. The prototypical nature of the noun, while some exceptions are noted, is also established on the bases of a number of properties including its stability – e.g. Givon’s (2001) *Temporal Stability* – as compared to the verb. The Chapter also notes the noun and the verb as the two most important universal categories. Further, on the basis of semantic evidence corresponding to specific syntactic environments, Akan is described with respect to four types of noun phrases as Type I, with the specifications Numeral, Noun, Plural affix (no Classifier).

Turning to the noun and its modifiers briefly, the Chapter identifies six modifiers that occur with the noun in a particular linear order. The modifiers are noted as playing three functions; localizing, quantifying and qualitative. The chapter ends with some explorations of the adjective-noun connection.

Chapter Two begins the main part of the book with a general discussion of the NP in Akan in connection with the specific modifiers of the noun that are individually observed from Chapter Three through Chapter Seven. It looks at the structure of the NP in terms of modification of the noun where aspects of pre-modification and post-modification of the noun are explained. Concerning post-modifiers, the book notes one of interest as the participle, which is described as a non-finite form of the verb and which has to be distinguished from the adjective. However, considering its internal structure, it could also be noted that this so-called participle is rather a noun, which has been derived from a verb as the author seems to suggest later and indeed notes in Section 3.4 of Chapter Three. So, it is only a nominalized verb in isolation (with the suffix /-eɛ/ being the nominalizing morpheme). However, when it comes after a ‘true’ noun, just as in the examples given in the book, it functions as a modifier. In no attempt to undermine the option of structural presentation in the book, it is worthy of note that the constituent (c-) structures (or the tree diagrams) given in this Chapter and, perhaps, through the book could benefit from the use of some current options in c-structure presentation.

Chapter Three is also devoted to pre-modifier(s), which the author calls the Associative or Genitival Phrase (as complements to NP). Here, the book gives extensive coverage of the phrases and how they are structurally derived in some of the varieties that constitute Akan, e.g. Twi and Fante. Various Associative Phrases, including the recursive associative phrase and constructions that involve left-dislocation (e.g. focus marking), all of which are captured with the scheme [ASP [N1_{AS} N2]] are noted and explored. Particularly, this chapter provides a lot of information on various forms of genitival expressions that researchers on the Akan language might like to observe and, perhaps, look into for further insights and understanding.

Chapter Four discusses the participle, which the author notes as unmentioned in the literature on syntax and semantics of Akan. This participle is described as a verb in the chapter for the reason that it assigns semantic roles. The author makes some remarks here that are rather doubtful and would need some further clarifications. In introducing the idea of semantic role assignment, one would have expected that feature specifications of argument function could be spelled out, such that an inanimate noun could not possibly be described as patient-of-cause, a case which runs through the Chapter. Also, the point that a noun complement retains the semantic role of patient if it moves to another syntactic position is questionable. This is because, particularly on example (11) of the author, which is given below as (1a), if the noun is placed before the verb, it only becomes a modifier to a nominalized verb and retains no semantic role, as he rightly indicate in the examples in (12) and (14), given below as (1b) and (1c); in fact, the two are then contained in a NP that has no embedded VP.

1. a. [NP_e [VP sunsuan [N ntama]]] => [NP ntama [VP sunsuan [N t]]]
- b. Kwasi kyiri [NP **ntama sunsuan(-eε)]**
Kwasi hate.Stat. cloth tear up-Part.
'Kwasi hates the act of tearing up a cloth into pieces'
- c. [NP **aduan (ε-) noa]**
food (Nom) cook
'the act of cooking food'.

Thus, the c-structure given is one way or another deceptive. What follows is a long explication, but round-about, of the noted participle and its connection with the verb and the noun, which is not really the focus in the Chapter. These said, there is no doubt that the book continues to enlighten the reader on issues relating to the Akan NP.

The adjective phrase, as a modifier to the noun, is discussed in Chapter Five in great detail. Here, the adjective and how it combines with other expressions are observed. One point though which the author could have noted is that, besides the adjective's use with the intensifier, the other expressions with the adjective he identifies are possible only in the predicate case. The author, however, notes several semantic relations in connection with the adjective in predication – where the copula verb, **yε**, is in use – such as causation, point-of-view, and bodily sensation and mental disposition, some of which border on the distinction between an adjective, an adverb (of place or manner), and a pseudo-verb. The connection between morphology and

syntax of the adjective is also observed with a comment that it has not received much attention in previous works.

The determiner in Akan – made up of articles, demonstratives, and the pronominals – is the subject of Chapter Six, particularly its place and functions, and the relation of one determiner class with the other. On the pronouns, and particularly on the Third Person, which the author notes as having a bearing on the development of the determiners and demonstratives, he notes in particular how different pronouns are from nouns (and, sometimes, determiners, articles and demonstratives) with respect to person, number, gender, reference and case. Detailed as this Chapter is, in the discussions of the various determiners in Akan, the author's understanding of the realization of the free variant [weji/wei] leaves room for argument. While the author acknowledges that it is in free variation with [oji, eji], he also claims by appealing to paradigmatic syncretism (Hopper and Traugott 1993) that [weji/wei] was realized from a merger between [o-] and [ε-] in [oji] and [eji] respectively. This is farfetched, considering the fact that they all remain as variants of the same morpheme. Also, a question could be asked as to why different forms that convey a common meaning and indeed do not come one after the other could merge (from different words – i.e. [oji] and [eji]) to evolve what the author is claiming? Indeed, this syncretism seems to rather explain the realization of [ɔ] as [w] and [ε] as [∅] in respective subject situations like **ɔ-akɔ**, which is now commonly written as **w-akɔ** and **ε-akɔ**, which is (phonetically) realized as /-akɔ/, as the author seems to be saying with examples (14a) through (14c) in this chapter. I would suggest a second look at the present case. Perhaps, an analysis based on a consideration of dialectal differences in the use of the morpheme between Asante, Akuapem, Fante and the other varieties of Akan would be most suitable.

In the same chapter – Chapter Six – the author neatly draws a distinction between some of the determiners, particularly the use of **no** as a distal deictic and as determiner article and the use of **bi** as a determiner and quantifier, which makes the use of them in the language very clear. What is even more interesting is the author's analysis of grammaticalization of some of the 'determiner' forms, particularly **bi**, which he identifies as both a determiner and quantifier following his appeal to the process of poly-grammaticalization (Craig 1991), with **bi** having been reduced from **obi/εbi**.

Still in Chapter Six, among other determiners, the author identifies what he terms a Zero determiner, and claims its existence by the realization of generic reference on a head noun, making the noun a universal representation of objects. He explains this

zero determiner by the use of the past affix in Akan, which he suggests refers to situations viewed as episodic unitary events. However, he also suggests further research into the role of the predicate in the generic status on a noun. His suggestion of further research is indeed timely considering that, although I cannot point to any literature here, zero determination has also been considered as indefinite article in Akan. In this wise, we have contrasted the zero determiner with **no**, as the definite article, in particular. The author contrasts the zero determiner with the overt determiners and a case of ‘zero-but-not-generic’ determination. Using the author’s example in (37), given as (2a) below for illustration, the use of **no** in (2b) takes away the universal content of **ɔpɔnkɔ** and defines its reference as specific.

2. a. **ɔpɔnkɔ tumi huri εban**
 horse Ø Hab.be.able Hab.jump fence
 ‘A horse can jump over a fence’.
- b. **ɔpɔnkɔ no tumi huri εban**
 horse DET.def. Hab.be.able Hab.jump fence
 ‘The horse can jump over a fence’.

The use of zero determiner and **no** will then roughly correspond to “a/an” and “the” articles in English respectively. But, as noted by the author, perhaps, detailed research here is necessary to explore these further and conclusively.

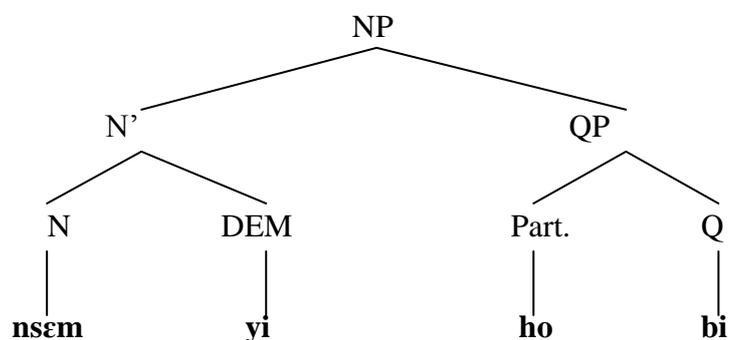
Quite understandably, the use of **ko** as a determiner is emphasized by the author in the sense that it is not considered as one of the common or ‘traditional’ determiners in the language and, as the author notes, many students would probably not consider it as a determiner. However, the author convincingly shows it to be such. Personally and on the basis of a little survey I did in the course of reviewing this book, however, the author’s position that **ko** does not co-occur with proper names (like **Yaw**, **Mensah**) and heavenly bodies (like **owia**) is not conclusive. He notes that its use with these nouns would be otiose in an unmarked discourse situation. While this may be true, it is important to note that marked discourse situations contribute to the general understanding of languages. So, we could not write them off. In the present case of the use of **ko** as determiner, when it is used with the proper names and heavenly bodies, it imputes the idea of particular/kind/manner (of an attribute that may be in discussion). Furthermore, some speakers do not consider this usage as marked at all, but as normal (unmarked) as its use in the so-called acceptable cases. Accordingly, the author’s example in (57) and (58), noted below as (3a) and (3b), could be deemed acceptable.

- 3 a. **Me-nim** **Yaw ko áà ɔ-wɔ** **ha**
 1SG-know.ST. Yaw particular who 3SG.ST.-be here
 ‘I know the particular Yaw who is here’ (I know the kind/sort of Yaw ...).
- b. **Ɔ-kyeré-è** **awia ko áà** **è-bɔ́-è-ε**
 3SG-show-PAST sun particular which it shines-PAST-SCP
 ‘She indicated the particular sun that appeared’ (she indicated the kind/sort of sun...).

What I have noted here as what **ko** inputs to the construction is apparently enforced by the author in Section 6.5.1 with examples (61) and (62), although the noun here is not from any of the semantic classes the author notes. Also, **ko** seems to have been grammaticalized from **koro**, which also means ‘one’, and considering that the author had traced the source of the other determiners, perhaps, he could have noted this fact; i.e. if he accepts this as a fact. One might also suspect that the use of **ko** and **koro** could be due to dialectal differences.

Considering the extensive discussions on function of **ko** in the book, there is no doubt that it is a determiner. But, perhaps, it is also important to note, per the enormous or varied semantic relations between it and a variety of lexemic and phrasal classes and the implications that come to bear that **ko** could be looked at as a grammatical unit that is more than a determiner. Indeed, it is in order to recommend that its information structure in relation to a variety of lexemic and phrasal classes should be looked into in detail.

Chapter Seven addresses quantifiers and quantification in Akan and distinguishes between definite quantifiers as numerals on one side and non-definite quantifiers on the other side. Some restrictions on the quantifiers are also noted and clarified. Considering current trends in syntax and that the quantifiers, including the partitives the author identifies, ultimately define the head noun, however, I think the c-structure of the NP could be simplified in terms of minimalism (Chomsky 1995 & 1998) rather than what the author presents from Section 7.5, which seems unnecessarily complex and not appealing to economy of expression (Bresnan 2001). For instance, the author’s c-structure for the phrase **nsɛm yi ho bi** in (25) could have been simplified as follows.



Also, with the author's c-structure, noted as (37), it is important to note that it is the whole left dislocated NP that is co-indexed with the resumptive pronoun, since it is the whole NP that was 'moved' from the (now embedded) canonical clause; i.e.

[_{IP} NP [_{VP} V]].

Thus, except where this representation is an oversight, considering that the right thing is done in example (45), the author's indexing of only the head noun with the resumptive pronoun violates some aspects of the binding theory and, indeed, it cannot explain the dislocation resulting in the 'derived' extra-sentential clause.

Chapter Eight deals with the lexical noun, particularly the relevance of nominal aspect in statements of subject-predicate selection, and affixation and semantic classes. The author begins the Chapter by considering the grouping of nouns into classes. In this respect, various semantic-based features for class specification are considered for Akan nouns. For instance, he conveniently relates count and mass nouns in parallel with inherently perfective and imperfective verbs respectively in the course of positing his universal category of aspect. Further, among other descriptions of the noun, but still in terms of semantics, with his identification of existential-locative verbs of two classes and aspectual properties of the noun subject, which govern them in the clause, the author discusses in great detail two nouns in terms of the contact assumed by an object with a surface. These are i) objects with contours or outlines that cannot be described as well-defined or spatially bonded (e.g. **nsuo**, **mmogya**) and ii) objects that cover limited and well-defined spaces (e.g. **dadee**, **dua**).

Still in Chapter Eight, the author strays from the main subject matter of lexical nouns into the discussion of the morpho-semantics of reduplication of existential-locative verbs. Although there is an attempt to bring in the subject matter of lexical nouns as singular count noun, plural count noun, and mass noun in connection with the verb, this section and several others only adds to the number of pages of the book. Indeed, this particular section (8.2.1) is briefly and conveniently captured under section 8.2 and one wonders why its inclusion for further details is necessary. This, however, does not overshadow the fact that the author continues to initiate and revive

specific issues/topics as areas worthy of further research. This section probably contains issues for such further research; for instance, the subject agent of cause and its connection with various actual forms and tenses of the verb besides the stative aspect. In this Chapter, the author also presents a noun class system for Akan, different from Osam (1993: 85) and Bodomo and Marfo (2006: 214-217), which he suggests illustrates the vestigial nature of the present-day Akan noun-class system. One wonders though as to why separate classes are delineated for birds besides the six classes and why the nominal suffixes /-ni/ and /-foɔ/ are not immediately considered in his six classes.

Chapter Nine of the book continues with the exploration of the lexical noun in Akan but, here, the concentration is on two features of grammar; animacy and definiteness. In this direction, he explores the use of the resumptive pronoun and its connection to animacy and definiteness. In the exploration, the author's clarity of exposition makes the issues raised easy to fathom. As the author notes, many works, including Marfo (2009), have noted that the third person singular and plural personal pronouns have overt and phonetically-null forms in accusative-case position, depending on the animacy of an antecedent NP – i.e. an animate NP is resumed by overt pronoun and an inanimate NP is not resumed by overt pronoun. However, the author further notes with illustrations in Section 9.1.3 that there are some cases where the resumptive pronoun is overt, irrespective of the animacy-gender specification of the antecedent NP. This and other keen observations in this chapter ignite research into antecedent-anaphor relations in Akan.

Further, under Section 9.2, where the author talks about human nouns, among other things, he brings to the fore the connection between definiteness, argument function, hierarchical positioning and semantic role. Related to this is the remark by the author that a compensatory rearrangement, involving a subject becoming definite and verbal form change with respect to tone, reflects the process of passivization in English. But, I believe this suggested reflection is not to imply that English passivization is the model for this case in Akan. Some of the author's examples on the compensatory rearrangement, which are part of his examples in (35) and (38), are given as (4a) and (4b) below.

- 4 a. **Me wɔ̃ kraman** → **Ɔkraman no wɔ̃ me**
 1SG. have dog dog DEF have 1SG.
 'I have a dog. 'The dog belongs to me.'

- b. **Kwadwo wò nneɛma** → **Nneɛma no wó Kwadwo**
 Kwadwo have goods goods DEF have Kwadwo
 ‘Kwadwo has goods.’ ‘The goods belong to Kwadwo.’

The author’s position that the processes do not affect the semantic content in both languages, quoting Levinson (1983: 41) for example, however, cannot be true in Akan. For the fact that at the subject position ‘object-turned-subject’ nouns – i.e. **sika** and **nneɛma** – co-occur with the definite determiner, **no**, adds definiteness to the semantic structure (and/or information structure (e.g. Lambrecht 1994)) of the construction. Thus, it could be explained that, with the nouns’ co-occurrence with the definite determiner, specific **sika** and **nneɛma** becomes the subject matter.

Ending the book, Chapter Ten also concentrates on and continues to explore the lexical noun in Akan with respect to inalienability, direction and kinship. Here, two semantic sub-classes are distinguished with respect to inalienability in particular: relation nouns and free nouns, and the author discusses these in great detail with an observation among others that kinship nouns are more similar to nouns of inalienable possession than they are to nouns of alienable possession. There is also detailed discussion on postpositions in this Chapter. The author notes the location expressive nature of the postposition in Akan, and clearly underscores this with semantic feature distinctions through a system of coordinates. Furthermore, among other points and sub-topics of interest, kinship nouns are noted and explained as relational nouns of a distinct semantic paradigm with sub-paradigms on the basis of semantic feature distinctions.

In a nutshell, the book discusses the Akan NP by considering, perhaps, everything that has to do with the noun as a phrasal head. Thus, almost nothing relating to the structure of the noun phrase is left out. As I indicated earlier, for every aspect of linguistics and even paralinguistics, this book is a great source and a must-read for students of Akan and scholars of the languages as well.

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