

Bare Nouns in Akan Revisited

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1 Introduction

One of the innovations of Schwarz (2009) is that it argued that uniqueness and familiarity are distinct definite readings.

- Either interpretation is distinctly marked in German. Consider (1).

(1) German (Schwarz 2009:24)

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

- Uniqueness is marked by the weak definite (1-a), and familiarity is marked by the strong definite (1-b).

Schwarz's claim has been shown to be true for other typologically distinct languages.

Akan is a well-known example of a language that is supposed to support this theory. (See Jenks 2015, 2018; Grubic 2015, and Ingason 2016, a.o., for other languages.)

- The claim for Akan is that familiarity is marked by the definite determiner **nó**, and uniqueness by the bare noun (Arkoh & Matthewson (2013), henceforth A&M.)

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Main Claim of This Talk

We argue that bare singular nouns in Akan **do not have a definite reading**, contra A&M.

Goal

Provide independent evidence in support of the above claim.

Suggest a reanalysis of the Akan pattern á la Coppock and Beaver's (2015).

- Specifically, following Coppock and Beaver's (2015) notion of determinacy verses definiteness, we argue that bare nouns in Akan are always indefinite, but can have a determinate reading.¹
- Provide an analysis of bare plural nouns, i.e. that they have a kind reading.

2 The Facts

2.1 Determiners in Akan

- Akan (Kwa, Niger-Congo; spoken in Ghana), like English has a definite determiner (2-a) and an indefinite determiner (2-b).

(2) Definite & Indefinite

- Kofi tɔ-ɔ ataadeɛ nó
Kofi buy-PST shirt DEF
'Kofi bought the shirt.'
- Kofi tɔ-ɔ ataadeɛ. bi
Kofi buy-PST shirt INDEF
'Kofi bought a (certain) shirt.'

- But, unlike English, Akan allows bare singular nouns (BN) (3-a).

(3) Singular BN

- Kofi tɔ-ɔ ataadeɛ.
Kofi buy-PST shirt
'Kofi bought a shirt.'
- *Kofi bought shirt.

2.1.1 The definite determiner *nó*

There are two competing analysis of the definite determiner.

- A&M argue that it marks familiarity, and Bombi (2018) claims it marks uniqueness, based on data like (4).

- Mmɔfrà nó wɔ̀ dān nó mù.
children the be room the in
'The children are in the room.'

¹Note: This claim is substantially different from that which we proposed originally in our abstract.

- b. **Awia** (nó) a-pue.
 sun DEF PERF-come.out
 ‘The sun is out.’

2.1.2 The indefinite determiner **bi**

The indefinite determiner, **bi**, allows for both wide and narrow scope readings.

- (5) Osikanni biara tɔ-ɔ dan **bi**
 rich.person every buy-PST house INDEF
 ‘Every rich person bought a (certain) house’
- $\forall x. \text{Richperson}(x) \rightarrow [\exists y \text{ house}(y) \wedge \text{buy}(x,y)]$
 - $\exists y. \text{house}(y) \wedge [\forall(x)[\text{Richperson}(x) \rightarrow \text{buy}(x,y)]]$
- (6) Sogyani bi gyina pono biara ano.
 soldier INDEF stand door every mouth
 ‘A soldier is guarding every door.’
- $\# \exists x. \text{Soldier}(x) \wedge [\forall(y)[\text{door}(y) \rightarrow \text{guard}(x,y)]]$
 - $\forall y. \text{Door}(y) \rightarrow [\exists x \text{ soldier}(x) \wedge \text{guard}(x,y)]$

2.2 Bare Nouns

The **bare noun** is preferred for the low scope reading.

- (7) Osikanni biara tɔ-ɔ dan
 rich.person every buy-PST house
 ‘Every rich person bought a (certain) house’
- $\forall x. \text{Richperson}(x) \rightarrow [\exists y \text{ house}(y) \wedge \text{buy}(x,y)]$
 - $*\exists y. \text{house}(y) \wedge [\forall(x)\text{Richperson}(x) \rightarrow \text{buy}(x,y)]$
 - (7) does not have the interpretation that there is a single house such that all the rich men bought.
- (8) Sogyani gyina ɛpono biara ano.
 soldier stand door every mouth
 ‘A soldier is guarding every door.’
- $*\exists x. \text{Soldier}(x) \wedge [\forall(y)[\text{door}(y) \rightarrow \text{guard}(x,y)]]$
 - $\forall y. \text{Door}(y) \rightarrow [\exists x \text{ soldier}(x) \wedge \text{guard}(x,y)]$
 - There is a different soldier guarding each door; it doesn’t have the weird meaning.²

²The bare noun has a subset of the readings of the indefinite *bi*. This is interesting on its own but not for today’s purposes.

Bare Singular Nouns in Akan are NOT Definites

- The claim that bare nouns in Akan have a definite reading is prevalent in the literature though it is not really supported empirically.
- This claim was first reported by A&M (*in a footnote*), and has been repeated in the literature by Schwarz 2013, Bombi 2018, Jenks 2018 *inter alios*.
- We will show that only a small subset of bare nouns in Akan get this so-called definite reading. Consider the following:

- (9) Me-hu-u **kraman**
 1SG-see-PST SG-dog
 ‘I saw a dog.’
- (10) Me-hu-u **ɔmanpayin.**
 1SG-see-PST president
 ‘I saw the president.’
- (11) a. **Abofra no maame** (*nó) ba-a ha
 child DEF mother DEF come-PST here
 ‘The child’s mother came here.’
 b. **Abofra no nua** (nó) ba-a ha.
 child DEF sibling DEF come-PST here
 ‘The child’s sibling came here.’

2.3 Generalization

A bare noun gets a “definite” reading if it is semantically unique, i.e., the denotation in the context is singleton set e.g. *sun*, *president*, *mother*, as in (10-b).

- Löbner (2011) argues that these types of nouns are already type e so they do not need any operation to turn them to type e unlike NPs of type $e \rightarrow t$.
- He argues that using the definite determiner with these nouns in English is superfluous.
- In addition, in languages with definite bare nouns, typically, all noun types can have the definite reading

- (12) Mandarin
 Hufei he-wan-le tang.
 Hufei drink-finish-PERF soup
 ‘Hufei finished the soup.’
- (13) Hindi
Bacca khel rahaa hai.
 kid play PROG PR
 ‘The kid/*a kid is playing.’

- In both the Mandarin and Hindi example, the nouns are regular $e \rightarrow t$ nouns which do not denote singleton sets but they still have a definite reading.

This shows we cannot keep grouping Akan with these languages.

3 Going Forward

The empirical facts do not support the analysis that bare nouns in Akan have a definite reading

But we acknowledge that a subset of nouns have this so-called definite reading. We will account for this interpretation.

To do this, we will adopt some ideas from Coppock and Beaver's (2015) analysis of the the definite determiner in English

- We will show that separating definiteness from determinacy will help account for the facts in Akan.

4 Determinacy vs Definiteness (DvD)

- Coppock and Beaver (2015) have a theory of definiteness that separates Definiteness from Determinacy.
- It proposed to account for data such (14) where the use of the definite determiner does not presuppose existence, i.e. there is no referent for *only invited talk*.

(14) Anna didn't give the only invited talk.

- To account for this data, they argue that we need to separate denoting an entity (determinacy), from the meaning of the definite determiner.

Determinacy consists in denoting an individual

Definiteness is seen as a morphological category which, in English, marks a (weak) uniqueness presupposition, and in Akan **marks a familiarity presupposition**

- They propose the following as the interpretation of the English determiners THE and A. Crucially, they are both identity functions.
- THE = $\lambda P. \lambda x. [\partial (|P| \leq 1 \wedge P(x))]$
The cardinality of P is at least one (*weak uniqueness presupposition but no existence presupposition*)

- A = $\lambda P. P$ (Winter 2001)

- In addition to these determiners, there are two type shifters that are freely available

(15) IOTA = $\lambda P. \iota x. P(x)$

IOTA: denotes the unique individual satisfying the description of the noun, thus giving a determinate interpretation.

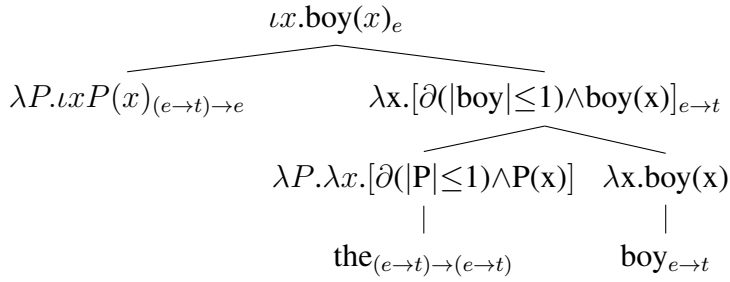
(16) EX = $\lambda P. \lambda Q. \exists x. [P(x) \wedge Q(x)]$

EX: introduces an existential quantifier, giving an indeterminate interpretation.

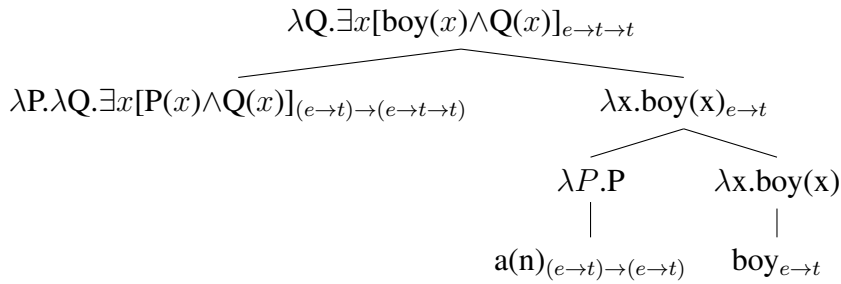
In principle both the definite and the indefinite determiner are compatible with an iota and EX type-shifter. Consequence of this analysis is that the definite determiner does not block ι type-shift, contra Chierchia (1998). The fact that the presence of a definite determiner does not block ι type-shift is also argued for by Jenks (2018).

Determiners and Type-shifting

(17) *the boy*: determinate (type e)



(18) *a boy*: indeterminate (type $e \rightarrow t \rightarrow t$)



a(n) NPs in English do not get a determinate interpretation because...

- ι denotes a special ‘undefined individual’, if there fails to be exactly one satisfier of the predicate. The undefined individual is denoted as \sharp_e (Haug 2013)
- **Semantic interpretation rule:** ι
 $\llbracket \iota u \phi \rrbracket = d$ if $\{ x : \llbracket \phi \rrbracket^{M,w,g[u \rightarrow x]} = T \} = d$; \sharp_e otherwise
- *iota* shift is applicable in a given context if existence and uniqueness are in the common ground.

For instance, the speaker could have used a definite DP with a uniqueness projection, (19) presuppose uniqueness is not satisfied in the context.

(19) I saw a student

- Maximize Presupposition (Heim 1991, Sauerland 2003, Sauerland 2008, Chemla 2008, Percus 2006, Schlenker 2012)
- In addition, a determinate reading for *a(n)* is also ruled by the **Type Simplicity** constraint
 - Principle: **Type Simplicity** (Coppock and Beaver 2015)
Given a choice between two type-shifting operations, a hearer should choose the one resulting in the simpler type and accommodate any associated presuppositions if they are consistent with the available evidence as to what the speaker presupposes.

- * e is a simpler type than $e \rightarrow t \rightarrow t$
- * $\iota > EX$ which is consistent with Dayal's (2004) ranking of type-shifters, $\{\iota, \cap\} > \exists$.

5 Extending the analysis to Akan

The bare noun in Akan gets a “definite” reading if it is semantically unique.³ Therefore (20) is interpreted as indefinite while (21) is interpreted as definite.

- (20) Me-hu-u **kraman**.
 1SG-see-PST SG-dog
 ‘I saw a dog.’
- (21) Me-hu-u **ɔmanpayin**.
 1SG-see-PST president
 ‘I saw the president.’

- Now, we are going to restate this in the new terminology we have learned from Coppock and Beaver
- Bare nouns in Akan do not have a definite reading; because definiteness is reserved for the definite determiner
- Bare nouns in Akan can have a **determinate** or **indeterminate** reading
- In a bare noun construction, both IOTA and EX shift are available

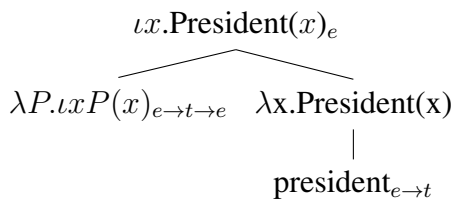
5.1 Determinate reading of bare nouns

The bare noun is type $e \rightarrow t$, applying the ι type-shifter, type $(e \rightarrow t) \rightarrow e$ derives the determinate reading of type e

- (22) Me-hu-u **ɔmanpayin**.
 1SG-see-PST president
 ‘I saw the president.’

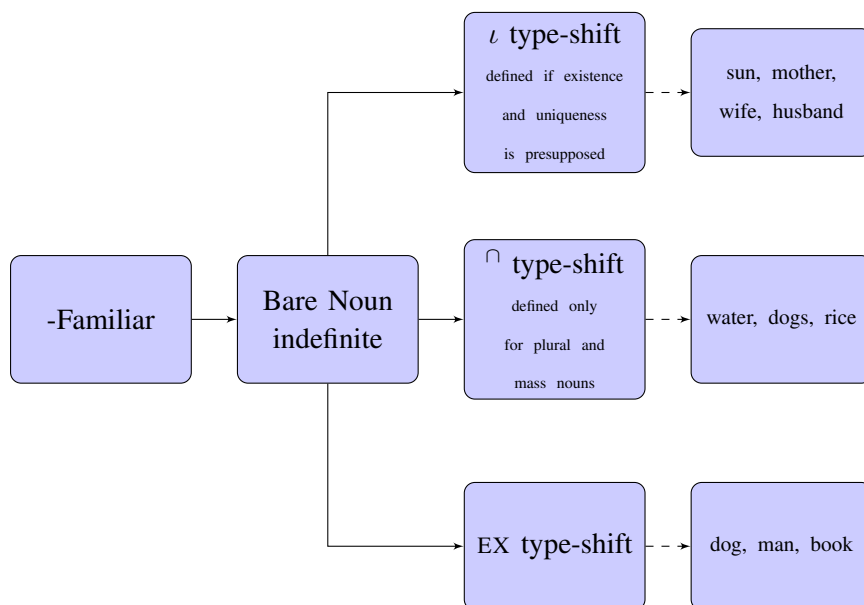
1. **Step One:** Choose a type-shifter
 The *type-simplicity* principle prefers ι over EX
2. **Step Two:** If ι is the type-shifter chosen, check if uniqueness presupposition is satisfied.
 The denotation of *president* is a singleton: uniqueness and existence is thus presupposed
3. Therefore, we shift with ι

- (23) *president*: determinate (e)



³By semantic uniqueness it is meant that the reference of an NP is unambiguous for reasons independent of the context or situation

Summary



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