

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

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The papers in this volume focus on aspects of the semantics of verbs in Akan. The subject matter reflects some of the changing trends in Akan linguistic research.

1. Akan Linguistics—History of Research

Among Ghanaian languages, Akan is one of those which have received extensive research output. This is very clear from the extensive bibliographic work on the language carried out by Warren (1976). Since the publication of Warren's work, much more research has been done. As indicated in Warren (1976), initial efforts towards work on the language came in the form of word lists collected by European travellers to what became known as the Gold Coast during the colonial period. According to historical records, the first very limited wordlist in Akan (based obviously on the Mfantse dialect on the coast) was put together by Eustache de la Fosse (1479-1480). According to Konadu and Campbell (2016), de la Fosse was a Flemish-speaking merchant and sailor who travelled to the West African Coast with Spanish sailors.

Konadu and Campbell (2016:87) state that: “de la Fosse's account of 1479–80 provides early evidence, possibly the earliest, for the Akan language as spoken in the late fifteenth century and something about the indigenous peoples he observed and the commerce in which he participated.” In an excerpt of de la Fosse's narrative translated by Konadu and Campbell (2016), the following is captured:

In this land “merchants” are called *berenbues*, “gold” *chocqua*; “water” *enchou*; for “you are welcome” you say *berre bene*, and for “love-play” *chocque chocque*; *barbero* means “a child,” *baa*, “white,” *barbero baa*, “a white child”; “cloth” is *fouffe*, *concque roncq* means “a chicken,” *concque ronconcq agnio* “eggs,” *bora* a ring to wear on the arm made of brass, *dede* “good,” *fanionna* “bad,” etc.

(de la Fosse 1479-80; translated by Konadu (2016:87-88))

Other early vocabulary collections from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as captured in Warren (1976), include Marees (1602), Muller (1673), Barbot (1732), Oldendorp (1777), Isert (1788). Warren points out that:

The number of books containing Akan vocabularies proliferated in the first half of the nineteenth century and include Labarthe (1803), Robertson (1819), Bowdich (1819), Hutton (1821), Kilham (1827-1828), Beecham (1841), Norris (1841), Chapman (1944-45), Clarke (1848), Wilson (1849), and Koelle (1854). In addition to general vocabularies, there are early specialized word lists such as names of herbs (Petiver 1697, Tedlie 1819) and names of plants in general (Schumacher 1828).
(Warren 1976:xvi)

In chapter 6 of Bowdich (Bowdich 1819:344-512), titled *Language*, he provides a description of what he sees as features of Fante and Asante and Ga and provides a wordlist as well. In describing plurality in Fante, this is what he says:

In the Fantee the plural number is distinguished by the prefix en, though generally, if they can, (in a glance whilst speaking (discover the number of objects, they use a numeral with the noun singular; or, if they cannot be so precise in the instant, they substitute many to mark an indefinite number.
(Bowdich 1819:351)

As part of his basic grammatical sketch of the language, Bowdich also provides a list of about 254 words. Examples are given below:

<u>English</u>	<u>Ashantee/Fantee</u>				
afraid	osooroh	ear	assoor	man	binin
alike	oninnise	eat	edee	many	peenarra
all	nenarra	face	wynim	mend	pam
alone	waunkoo	fear	sooroo	neck	ekhone
another	ebissoo	fight	orrokoo	nest	animaboo
back	wakee	go	kaw	new	fofoor
bad	omoo	gold	sikka	oil	engoo
bead	aonee	hang	osesan	open	boi

beard	aboidwee	heavy	oiadoor	play	agoor
catch	makin	iron	dadee	poison	otoowadoo
change	wahseesun	kill	coom	rain	osooriba
child	ebbah	king	ohennie	ring	inkaa
cold	oiwoo	knot	eppo	salt	inkkim
dance	saw	learn	akirren	sea	eppo
dark	oiheesoom	long	ohwar	tail	dooah
daughter	mebaba	look	fway	thief	krumfoe

By far, the work that marked the departure from primarily vocabulary listings to some level of linguistic analysis is Koelle's (1854) *Polyglotta Africana*. Preceding Koelle (1854), is Protten's (1764) grammar of Ga and the Fante dialect of Akan (*En nyttig Grammaticalsk Indledning til Tvende hidintil gandske ubekjendte Sprog, Fanteisk og Acraisk* [A Useful Grammatical Introduction to the Ga and Fante languages]). The excerpt below is from Protten's translation of the Ten Commandments from Exodus 12:1-17. The excerpt cover Exodus 20:4-7. The Mfantse text is in the original Protten orthography:

Maenjae o fonini, anna maensua bribiso ajae vo Njamemu vosoro hormu, anna vo asase ha, anna vo ensumu assasi ne asse; maensorevaen, maensomovaen.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. (Exodus 20:4)

Na minde aurude, o Njankompong anninkunufoa otua nanna num addeboni vere vo vaenni mbaso, vo aa aprensa na aprenang mu, vo vaenna vae tang min; na non o uhu vaen mbobre vo aa appim mu, opae no na ojae na No asem (ote ne a No asaem).

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. (Exodus 20:5&6)

Maenka aurade o Niankompong ding Gianggiang, Na auurade baemma adinsoeni nu oka nidding Gianggiang.

Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. (Exodus 20:7)

The nineteenth century brought with it an acceleration of analytical works on Akan. As pointed out by Osam (1994a):

The acceleration in scholarly work on Akan came with the work of the Basel Mission, and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society. While the former concentrated on the Akuapem dialect in the interior, the latter limited their work among the Fante speaking population of the coast. The work of the missionary organisations led to the establishment of literacy programmes and literacy materials as early as the 1840's. The production of literacy materials went alongside serious linguistic work. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the first result of scholarly grammatical description of the language started coming out. Notable among these were Riis (1854), Carr and Brown (1868). In 1875, Christaller came out with the first most comprehensive grammar of Akan (based on the Akuapem dialect) which is currently the only such work available about the language. The first dictionary of the language was also published by Christaller (1881). (Osam 1994a:38-39)

The works on Akan in the nineteenth century included oral literature and ethnographic work. According to Warren (1976):

The scope of interests of the Basel Mission was wide. In addition to their religious texts, primers, and linguistic works, the Mission published the first Akan oral history collected in Ghana (Christaller, 1884) and the first oral literature in the form of proverbs (268 proverbs were included in Riis' [1854] grammar) and folktales (Christaller, 1887). The first accurate ethnographic account of Akan religion was published in 1862 by the Basel Missionary, Mader; this was followed by the comprehensive ethnographic studies of the Asante (1899-1906) by the Reverend Edmund Perregaux. The first Akan agricultural texts came out at the beginning of the twentieth century under the auspices of the Basel Mission. (Warren 1976:xvii)

Following the upsurge in Akan linguistic and literacy works from the second half of the nineteenth century, the twentieth century brought with it an explosion in the research and publications on Akan linguistic analysis. In the first half of the twentieth century, there were remarkable works such as the detailed descriptive grammar of the Fante dialect by Balmer and Grant (1929), *A Grammar of the Fante-Akan Language*, as well as Welmers (1946). Welmers' *A Descriptive Grammar of Fanti*, his PhD dissertation, was published as a supplement to *Language*, the journal of the Linguistics Society of America. In 1937, Akrofi (1937) had published his *Twi Kasa Mmara* (Twi Grammar). Akrofi's *Twi Kasa Mmara* was based on the Akuapem dialect and written wholly in Twi. In 1946, another Fante grammar book, *Mfantse Nkasafua Dwumadzi (Fante Grammar of Function)* was published by Bartels and Annobil (1946). In 1962, the publisher of this work, Methodist Book Depot, Cape Coast, published the Asante Twi equivalent titled: *Asante Twi Nsem Dwumadie (An Asante Twi Grammar of Function)*.

An event that caused an upsurge in the works dealing with the linguistic analysis of the language was the establishment of the Department of Linguistics and Ghanaian Languages at the University of Ghana in 1964. Two people in the department who were crucial in pushing research on Akan forward were Prof. Lawrence A. Boadi and Prof. Florence A. Dolphyne. Boadi's works (1965, 1966, 1968, 1971a, 1971b, 1972, 1974b, 1974a, 1975a, 1975b, 1976, 1990a, 1990b) focused on the syntax of Akan, and Dolphyne (1965, 1967, 1971, 1976, 1979, 1982, 1984, 1986a, 1986b, 1988a, 1988b) dealt with the phonetics and phonology of the language. In the 1960s and 70s, pertinent publications on the language included works by Stewart (1962, 1963, 1964a, 1964b, 1966a, 1966b, 1966c, 1967, 1976, 1983a, 1983b), Schachter (1961, 1969, 1974), and Schachter and Fromkin (1968).

The establishment of linguistics as an academic discipline at the University of Ghana and research into Akan done by other linguists around the world resulted in an incredible number of publications and student research work on the language. As research on Akan phonetics, phonology, and syntax continued, major breakouts in ethnographic works were coming on board, following earlier works by scholars like Nketia (1955, 1958, 1963, 1964). Notable among such works were Kwesi Yankah's (1989) *The Proverb in the Context of Akan Rhetoric: A Theory of Proverb Praxis*.

2. Classification of Akan and its Dialects

While the term “Akan” has gained currency as an umbrella term to classify mutually intelligible dialects and culturally related people, this was not always the case. According to Kambon (2021) “while non-Blacks came to the area now known as Ghana back in 1471 CE, the first known use of the term Akan was in 1694 CE—well over two hundred (200) years later—and it did not gain currency as a supposed ethnonym until the 1950s when linguists decided to use it as ‘an umbrella term for the language to delineate mutually intelligible dialects of the people’” (Dolphyne 1988a:xi, Kambon 2002:4, Kambon 2021:60). Nonetheless, we will address the classification and placement of these mutually intelligible dialects of the Akan language as it has come to be known.

The currently dominant model of the Akan language’s genealogy places it in Tano, Central, Potou-Tano, Nyo, Kwa, Volta-Congo, Niger-Congo and, ultimately, Niger-Kordofanian. Important works on the Akan linguistic family tree include Williamson and Blench (2000), Stewart (1989), Dakubu (2020).

According to Greenberg (1963), the Akan language is classified as a member of the Kwa group, which is part of the larger Niger-Congo language family. Over time, the composition of the Kwa group has undergone significant changes, as documented by Stewart (1989) and Williamson (1989), who provide the most recent analysis of Kwa's position within the Niger-Congo family. For our current purpose, it suffices to mention that Greenberg's (1963) original Kwa group has been extensively modified. Greenberg's (ibid.) Eastern Kwa, along with Kru, Ijo, and the Togo Remnant languages, have been removed from his original Kwa group and reclassified as part of his original Benue-Congo group. Based on this proposal, what is now referred to as "new-fangled" Kwa essentially corresponds to Greenberg's Western Kwa.

It should be noted, however, that Niger-Kordofanian is not the ultimate node, but is subsumed under the mother tongue from which other related language phyla are also descended. Scholars, such as Obenga (1993), subsume Niger-Kordofanian ultimately inside of Negro-Egyptian with sister languages to Niger-Kordofanian including Chadic, Kushitic, Nilo-Saharan and Egyptian (Obenga 1993: 350-354). Below is the currently accepted model of where Akan fits up to the Niger-Kordofanian language phylum (Kambon 2002).

Currently Dominant Model of the Akan Language's Genealogy

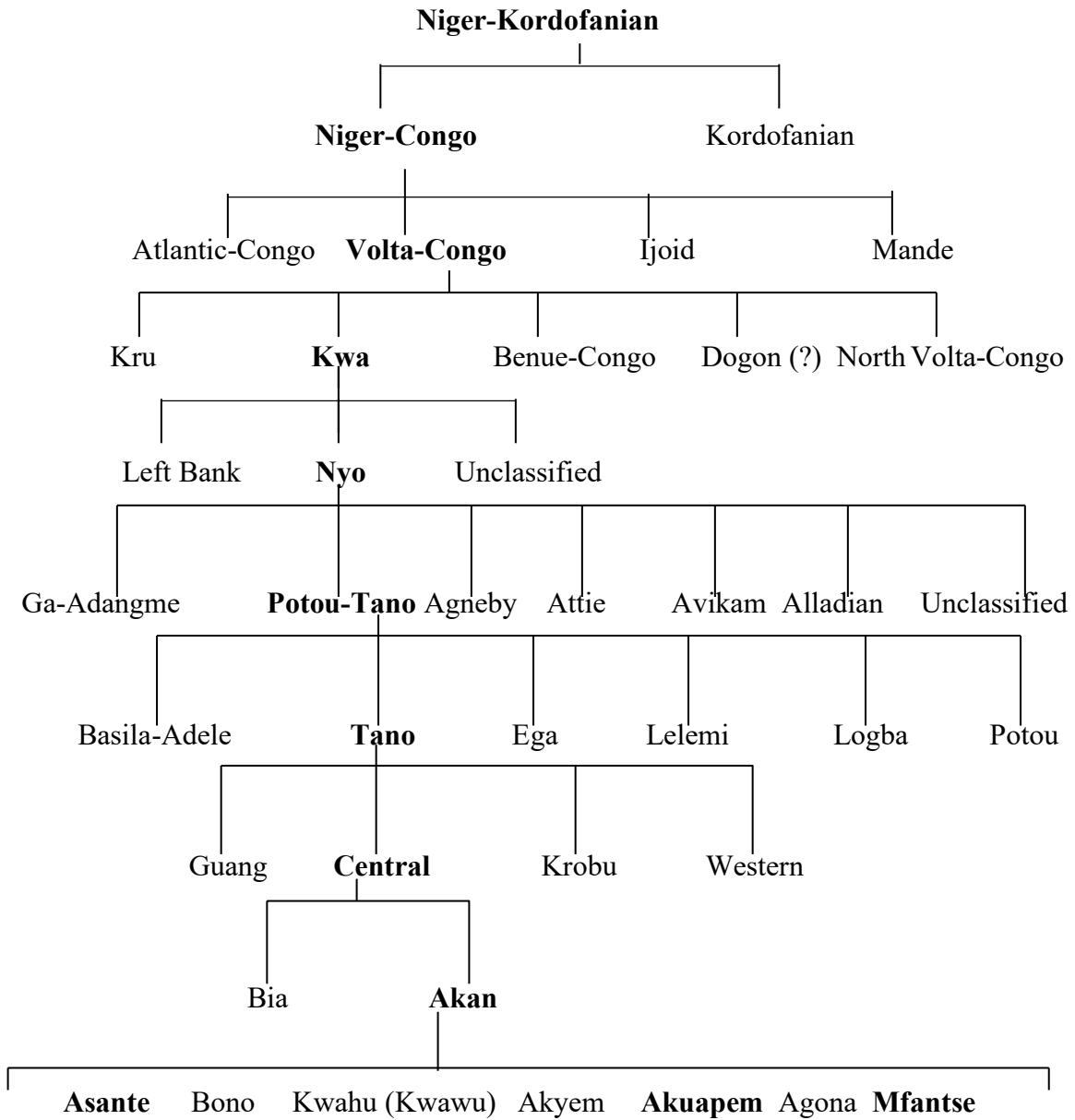


Figure 1: Linguistic Tree of Akan Dialects (Kambon 2002)

As reflected in the linguistic tree above, dialects include the three literary dialects in **bold**: Asante Twi, Akuapem Twi, and Mfantse (which in and of itself includes sub-dialects like Gomua, Anomabo Mfantse and Abura Mfantse). Apart from these, there is also Agona, Akyem, Asen, Dankyira, Kwawu (Kwahu), Akwamu, and Ahafo among others. As mentioned, all dialects, including Mfantse and the Twi dialects, are mutually intelligible to varying degrees (Dolphyne 1986a, Dolphyne 1988b).

Per available statistics from the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), the total number of Akan speakers in Ghana amounts to 12,781,424 comprising 47.5% of a population of 26,908,262, while Ethnologue places the population of Ghana at the much higher 31,073,000 (Ethnologue 2023b, GSS 2023). According to Ethnologue (2023), this includes 8,100,000 L1 users in Ghana. Broken down by dialect, this speaker population includes:

Dialect	Number of Speakers
Agona	111,000
Ahafo	85,900
Akuapem	626,000
Asante	3,820,000
Asen	142,000
Dankyira	124,000
Kwawu	443,000
Mfantse	2,730,000
All other dialects	15,400

Again, per statistics available from Ethnologue, the number of users of Akan in all countries totals 9,329,800 with 8,329,800 L1 speakers and upwards of 1,000,000 L2 speakers.

Akan is considered a language of wider communication as evinced by television and radio broadcasts and it serves as the de facto national working language (Ethnologue 2023b).

In terms of typology, Akan is an SVO. It has what may be referred to as postpositions or relator nouns that, like modifiers, appear after the initial noun head (Osam et al. 2011). In

Akan, verb affixes mark person and number, with tense, aspect, mood, and polarity markers typically attaching to the verb. Causatives in Akan can be made syntactically or through duplication of the verb (Duah 2013, Duah and Kambon 2020).

There are 21 consonant and 10 vowel phonemes (with some variation dependent on the dialect in question). Akan is also tonal with two basic tones and a restricted downstep high tone. Vowel harmony (ATR) also plays a major role in the realization of sounds in Akan at the word and sentential levels (Dolphyne 1988a).

Akan has an estimated literacy rate as an L1 ranging from 30%–60%. Its literacy rate as an L2 ranges from just 5%–10%. Nonetheless, Akan is taught in primary and secondary schools through grade 3 and as subject thereafter. The aforementioned literary dialects have a wide array of literature, dictionaries, grammars and other scholarship in the language and about the language (Ethnologue 2023a).

From the map below, it is clear that much of central and southern Ghana are populated by Akan speakers. It is thus possible to speak of Akan as the dominant indigenous language of Ghana and in international language in that a dialect of Bono spills over into La Côte D'Ivoire. Beyond this, in the diaspora, there are vestigial elements of Akan as spoken in Suriname, Jamaica, Antigua and other places in the Caribbean (Konadu 2010).

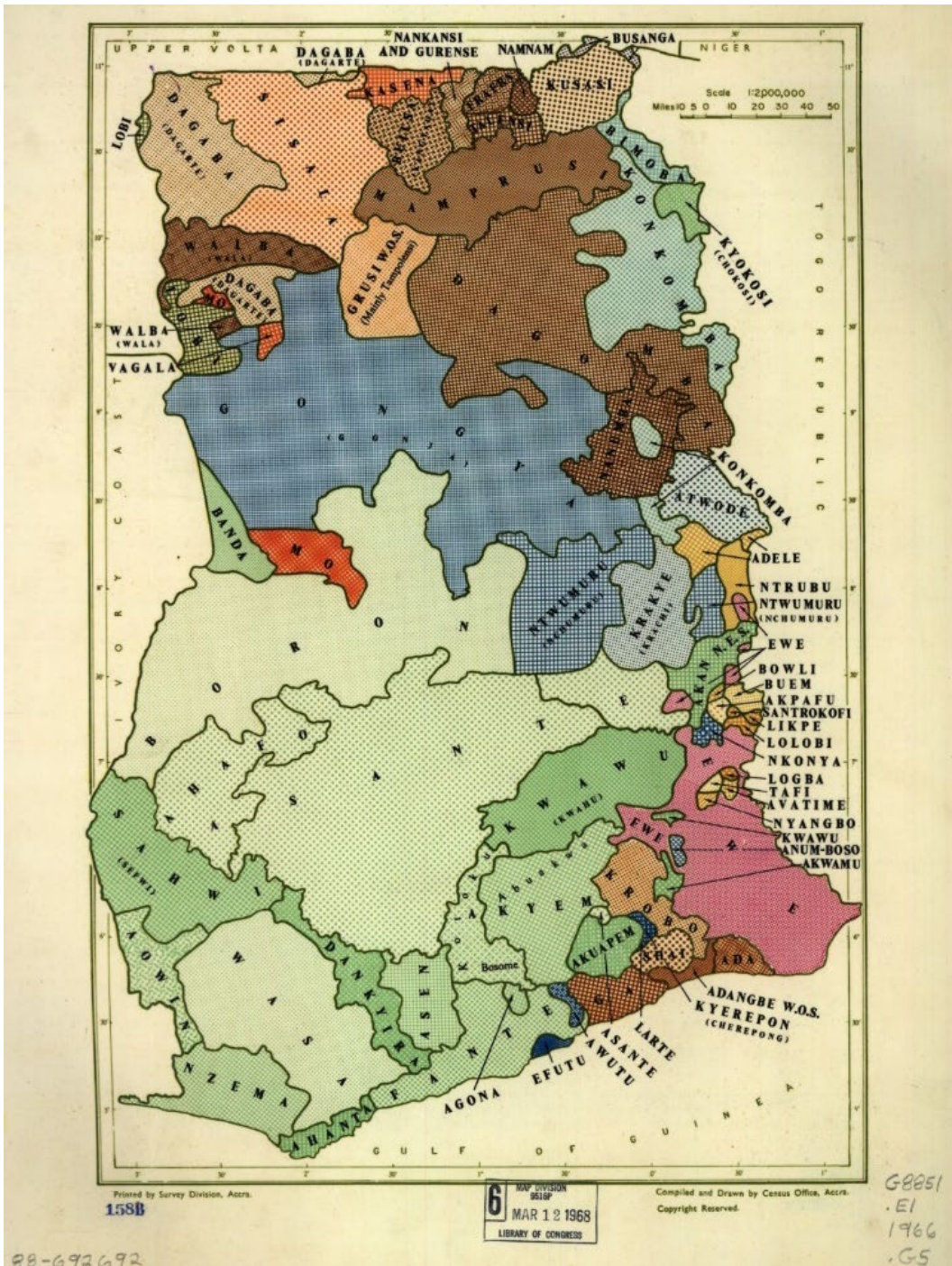


Figure 2: A map of Ghana's ethno-linguistic areas. Akan areas (light green) extend west about halfway into Ivory Coast. (GCO 1966)

Above is a language map of Ghana with Akan represented in various shades of green

We will now turn our attention to recent research trends into Akan linguistics with a particular focus on the semantics of the Akan language across a broad range of categories.

3. New Research Trends

In recent years, there have been major new research trends in the semantics of Akan verbs that can be categorized broadly in terms of studies in three primary categories. These are:

1. Formal semantics: logical aspects of meaning
2. Lexical semantics: word meanings and their relations¹
3. Conceptual semantics: cognitive structure of meaning

We will look briefly at each of these categories in turn below. In terms of formal semantics, studies of that may be grouped in terms of formal semantics in Akan include studies on Focus, exhaustivity and existence (Grubic et al. 2019). Other recent studies include Pfeil et al. (2015) dealing, once again, with topics of focus and exhaustivity in Akan. Amfo (2007, 2010) also deals with information structure in Akan. Akan language formal semantics has also been dealt with by Duah et al. (2021) with regard to causation and indirectness. Owusu's (2022) doctoral dissertation is also noteworthy in terms of applying formal semantics to Akan.

This volume primarily falls more under the purview of the second category of semantic inquiry—namely lexical semantics dealing with polyvalent word meanings and relationships between words. Examples of recent scholarship in this regard include event semantics studies such as those of Agyepong (2017, 2022) and Agyepong and Osam (2020) dealing with cutting and breaking events in Akan. Other studies have delved into the semantics of modal markers such as *anka* 'would' (Amfo 2005) while, yet others deal with verbs and content words like *di* 'eat' (Ansah et al. 2021). Also, other papers have used Akan data of polysemic terms like *di* 'eat' and *bu* 'break' advance theories

¹ For our purposes, we will subsume analyses of morphemes in this broader category.

pertaining to The Homonymic Chain Model (HCM) as a tool for multiple sense analysis (Oppong-Asare et al. 2017).

Other studies have looked into the polysemy of verbs like *hunu* ‘see’ (Agyekum 2005), and nouns like *ohia* ‘poverty’ (Agyekum 2017), *yam* ‘stomach’ (Agyekum 2015a) and *ho* ‘body’ (Agyekum 2016). Studies such as these delve into semantic extensions, metaphor and the semantics/pragmatics interface.

Studies on the semantics of lexemes are complemented by studies analysing morphemes such as diminutive *-ba/-wa* (Appah and Amfo 2011, Adomako 2017, Amfo and Appah 2019), *bi* (indefinite article) and *no* (definite article) (Arkoh et al. 2011, Arkoh and Matthewson 2013) and focus markers such as *na* (Marfo and Bodomo 2005, Ofori 2011, Duah 2015, Pfeil et al. 2015).

In terms of conceptual semantics, notable research has emerged in recent years dealing with a Natural Semantic Metalanguage of Akan (2022). Other studies that draw from a conceptual semantics framework include Thompson (2019a) and (2019b). Other noteworthy studies deal more broadly with metaphors and conceptual matters more broadly in terms of conceptual metaphors as encoded in body part expressions and beyond including Afreh (2011), Agyekum (2013), Ansah 2013, Ansah 2014, Agyekum (2015a, 2015b, 2016), Owiredu 2020, Kambon and Songsore 2021). Recent studies on modality and evidentiality are also worthy of note (Sakyi 2019).

While the above is merely a cursory glance at recent research, the depth and breadth of research on Akan strictly dealing with semantics and/or the semantics/pragmatics interface is increasing yearly. This volume is set to contribute to this burgeoning body of literature with a wide diversity of topics that fall under the purview of the semantics of Akan verbs. As such, in the next section, we will present a brief overview of the chapters within this volume.

Outside of semantics, notable works have also been done on Akan syntax, morphology, and phonology over the last few decades. Notable among these in the area of syntax are Saah (1989, 1994, 2004, 2010), Saah and Goodluck (1995), Osam (1994a, 1994b, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2003, 2004, 2008), and Marfo (2003, 2005a, 2005b) to name just a few. At the forefront of works on Akan morphology are multiple works by Appah and various co-authors (2005a, 2005b, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2017a, 2017b, 2020) and Appah et al.

(2017) are worthy of note. In terms of Akan phonology, noteworthy works include Eshun (1993) Abakah (1993, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2013, 2015), Adomako (2008, 2012, 2015a, 2015b, 2018a, 2018b) as well as recent works by Amoako (2020, 2020, 2022a, 2022b). While necessarily non-exhaustive, it is our fervent hope that this brief overview of trends in Akan linguistics in general and Akan semantics in particular will direct the reader to the burgeoning body of works in these and related fields of inquiry.

4. Overview of Papers

The paper by Duah examines various ways in which pain sensations are expressed in Akan. It argues that pain expressions in the language follow patterns known about the expressions of tastes, visions, and other instantiations of perception. He establishes that pain expressions behave structurally like causative constructions.

Agyepong's paper focuses on analysing Akan (Asante-Twi dialect) verbs that deal with the removal of the external coverings of various items. It examines the semantic characteristics and the argument alternation possibilities that such verbs participate in. She further explores the factors that determine the interpretation of such verbs in Akan.

In Afreh's paper, she explores the syntax and semantics of posture verbs in Akan in what has become known as the Basic Locative Constructions (BLC), using data from the Asante dialect. Situated in the cognitive semantics framework of Talmy (2000), her paper shows that the predication of the location of the Figure entity in constructions involving posture verbs is crucial.

The paper by Eshun centres on the verbs of perception in Akan: *hú* 'see' and *hwé* 'look'. Using data from the Mfantse dialect and adopting a cognitive linguistics approach in her analysis, she demonstrates that these two verbs have overlapping usage determined by the context of use and argument selection criteria.

In the final paper in the volume, even though Kambon does not deal with the direct semantics of a set of verbs in Akan, he takes an angle that merges the syntax and semantics of verbs in serial verb constructions in the language. Based on the concept of emergence in the natural sciences, and using data from three dialects of the language, he explores the notion of semantic integration in Akan serial verb nominalizations.

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