

AKAN GRAMMATICAL RELATIONS REVISITED

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Abstract

Morphological case languages do not necessarily depend on word order to determine their grammatical relations. However, structural case languages depend largely on word order to determine the various grammatical relations. For most configurational languages, the agent/experiencer usually precedes the patient/theme in a simple clause (in the active voice). In the passive voice, the patient/theme occupies the subject position while the agent becomes an object of a preposition (oblique) or omitted as evident in English. Akan, a Kwa language of the Niger-Congo family, being a nominative-accusative language, allows the agent/experiencer to precede the patient/theme in the active construction. In the passive-like construction, however, unlike a language like English, an impersonal pronoun occupies the subject position while the patient or theme remains at the object position. This implies that agents/experiencers do not occur at the oblique position in Akan; neither do patients/

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themes occur at the subject position. Certain verbs (symmetrical verbs), however, may allow the experiencer and the theme arguments to switch positions in the active construction without affecting the meaning of the sentence in the language. This paper seeks to highlight these marked grammatical relations in Akan within the framework of Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG).

Key words: Grammatical relations, thematic relations, case, switched positions, Lexical Functional Grammar.

Introduction

Grammatical relations (GRs) are relations between words (specifically verbs and their arguments) in sentences. The term refers to the morphosyntactic properties that relate an argument to a clause, as, for example, its subject or its object. Alternative terms include ‘syntactic function’ and ‘syntactic role’; and they highlight the fact that GRs are defined by the way in which arguments are integrated syntactically into a clause. Woolford (2003) states that the term GR can be used to refer to almost any relationship within grammar or at least within Syntax and Morphology. However, in its narrowest sense, Woolford (2003) asserts that GR is a cover term for grammatical subjects, objects, indirect objects, and the like. According to Bickel (2007:1), what is crucial about the traditional notion of GRs is that they are identified by syntactic properties and that they relate an argument to the clause. This differentiates GRs from semantic roles (SRs). Bickel (2007:1) continues by saying that “Rs are semantic, not syntactic relations, and they hold between arguments and predicates (typically verbs), rather than between arguments and clauses” (see also Woolford (2003); Bresnan (2001) and Kroeger (2004) for similar analysis).

The distinction between GRs and SRs is very significant to this work. It is very important for this distinction to be made in order not to confuse ourselves with the different roles that these Noun Phrases (NPs) play; that is, syntactic and semantic roles. The English examples below throw more light on the different roles of the NPs.

- (1) a. The girl beat the boy. (Active voice)
- b. The boy was beaten by the girl. (Passive voice)

In example (1a), the girl is the subject of the sentence while the boy is the object. The thematic role of ‘the girl’ is *an agent* since it is the entity that intentionally initiated the action expressed by the predicate. The NP, ‘the boy’, on the other hand, is *the patient* since it is the entity that underwent the action or suffered from the action expressed by the predicate. However, in (1b), although the thematic roles of the various NPs remain the same as those in (1a), ‘the boy’ is now the subject of the construction while ‘the girl’ is the object of the preposition ‘by’. In other words, the two NPs play different syntactic roles but the same semantic roles in the two sentences. This explains why the two sentences have the same interpretation irrespective of the differences in the syntactic positions of the NPs.

In this paper, we highlight the relationship between GR and SR in Akan. Data for the paper came from three (3) main sources: (i) Eleven (11) students of Akan (Level 400 Akan Syntax class) from the Department of Ghanaian Languages and Linguistics, University of Cape Coast were interviewed and their responses were recorded and transcribed; (ii) Three (3) Akan lecturers (from the same Department) were also interviewed and their responses were recorded and transcribed; (iii) the researchers, as competent native speakers, also used the introspective method for data collection. The paper is in four sections. Section 1 is the introductory section, section 2 and 3 are devoted for unmarked and marked grammatical relations respectively, and section 4 is the concluding section.

The unmarked grammatical relations in Akan

Some languages are so rich morphologically to the extent that irrespective of the position of the various participants in a sentence, one can easily identify the grammatical subject and the object. However, Akan, like most other Kwa languages, is a configurational language and thus, depends mostly on word order in determining the subject, the direct object and the indirect object. Osam (1994a, 1996, 1997, 2000 and 2004), following Comrie (1978) and Dixon (1979a) stated that “Akan is a nominative-accusative language in which the (A) argument precedes the verb and the (P) argument follows the verb in a simple clause. In an intransitive clause, the single argument (S) argument also precedes the verb just like the (A) argument” (Osam

2004:23)¹⁰. This implies that, in the hierarchy of participant roles, the (A) argument occupies the highest position and thus occurs in the subject position while the (P) argument is among those at the bottom and for that matter occupies the object position in a simple sentence. This assertion is in line with LFG's position on the ranking of the various syntactic and semantics roles of the NPs. In LFG, the Subject is ranked above all the other syntactic functions followed by the Object, the Object Theta, the Oblique, the Xcomp and the Comp. Likewise, the Agent is ranked higher than the other roles followed by the Beneficiary, the Experiencer or Goal, the Instrument, the Patient or Theme, and the Locative as illustrated below:

SUBJ > OBJ > OBJ_T > OBL > XCOMP > COMP

Agent > beneficiary > experiencer/goal > instrument patient/theme > locative

(Kroeger 2004:181)

Since both the subject and the agent are the highest ranked roles, where there is an Agent in a sentence, it occurs at the subject position; then the other semantic roles may occur in the other syntactic positions. In the absence of an Agent, the Beneficiary, if any, occupies the subject position. In the case where there is no Agent or Beneficiary, the subject position can be occupied by the Experiencer. In English, for instance, when the sentence is in the active voice, the Agent occupies the subject position while the Patient occupies the object position. However, in the passive construction, the object of the active construction (the Patient) becomes the subject of the passive construction as the examples in (1) portray. This implies that the (P) argument can only occur at the subject position when there is no (A) argument or where the (A) argument is an argument of a preposition. In view of this, we can argue that Akan does not differ much from English, in that, in the active voice construction, the Agent-like NPs occupy the subject position while the Patient-like NPs occupy the object position in both languages. Let us consider the Akan examples below:

(2) a. Afua pia-a Kofi.

A. push-PST K.

‘Afua pushed Kofi.’

¹⁰Osam (2004:48) following Comrie (1978) and Payne (1997) defines (A) argument as the most agent-like entity (including the agent, beneficiary, experiencer) in a two-argument clause, the (P) argument as the most patient-like entity (including the patient, theme, locative) and the (S) argument as the single argument in a one argument clause.

b. Kofi pia-a Afua.

c. push-PST A.

‘Kofi pushed Afua.’

c. Afua re-su

A. PROG.cry

‘Afua is crying.’

In (2a) ‘Afua’ is the agent because it is the NP that intentionally initiated the action expressed by the predicate, while ‘Kofi’ is the patient since it is the NP that suffered from the action expressed by the predicate. Thus, ‘Afua’ occupies the subject position while ‘Kofi’ occupies the object position. As soon as the two NP switch positions, their thematic roles as well as syntactic roles change as seen in (2b). ‘Kofi’ becomes the subject and ‘Afua’, the object in (2b). Thus, ‘Kofi’ becomes the agent and ‘Afua’, the patient. In (2c), ‘Afua’, which is the single argument, occupies the subject position.

The difference between English and Akan so far as the unmarked GR is concerned appears in the passive constructions. In Akan passive-like constructions, the object of the active voice (i.e. the patient/theme) does not become the subject but remains at the object position as exemplified below.

(3) a. Kofi ate the food. (Active) English

b. The food was eaten. (Passive)

(4) a. **Kofi di-I aduane no.** Akan

K eat-PST food DEF

‘Kofi ate the food’

b. ***Aduane no di-ie**

food DEF eat-PST

‘The food ate (it)’

c. **Ye-di-iaduane no.**

IMP-eat-PST food DET

‘The food was eaten’

We can realize from (4b) that an attempt to move the theme to the subject position renders the sentence ungrammatical. For the sentence to be acceptable the theme must remain in the object position while a dummy pronoun occupies the subject position as in (4c). In other words, *aduane no* ‘the food’ is base generated in the object position of the verb in (4c); there is no movement. This implies that the Akan passive-like constructions are completely different from that of English. The English passive verbs are said to lack the ability to assign case (Bošković 2013:96), and therefore cannot accept objects. In Akan, the verb forms do not change in the formation of passive-like constructions, and they do assign the accusative case to their objects.

What makes both (3b) and (4c) semantically the same, however, is the fact that the NPs *the food* in (3b) and *aduane no* ‘the food’ in (4c) have the same thematic roles though they have different GRs. The NP in (3b) is a subject while that of (4c) is an object. In terms of case, the NP in (3b) is nominative while that of (4c) is accusative. Yet, since they both play the same semantic role (i.e. theme) and also the fact that the subject of (4c) is semantically empty, the two sentences have the same interpretation. Let us look at the graphical representations of (3a) and (4a) as well as (3b) and (4c) in (5) and (6) respectively:

(5) a. [S [NP**Kofi**] [VP**ate** [NP**the food**]]]

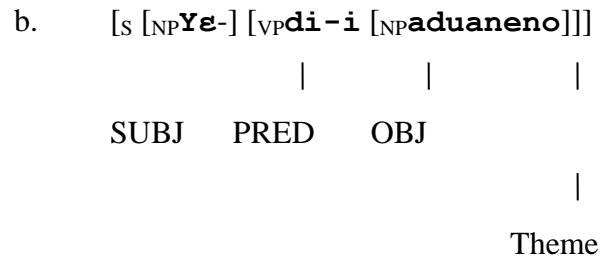
SUBJ	PRED	OBJ
Agent		Theme

b. [S [NP**Kofi**] [VP**di-i** [NP**aduane no**]]]

SUBJ	PRED	OBJ
Agent		Theme

(6) a. [S [NP**The food**] [VP**was eaten**]]

SUBJ	PRED
Theme	



It can be observed from examples (5a) and (5b) that the Agent and the Theme NPs occupy the subject and object positions respectively in the active construction in both languages. This confirms that in the unmarked constructions in Akan, just like in English, the (A) argument is linked to the subject and the (P) argument, to the object. However, in the passive construction, the theme NP is fronted to occupy the subject position in English while it remains at the object position in Akan. We can also see that though the passive construction in English has no direct object, the construction in Akan has a direct object (i.e., the theme). This confirms that in the unmarked GR, the patient/theme argument does not occur at the subject position in Akan; not even in the passive-like construction as portrayed in (6b).

The LFG representations of (4a) and (4c) are seen in (7) and (8) respectively.

(7) **The Lexicon**

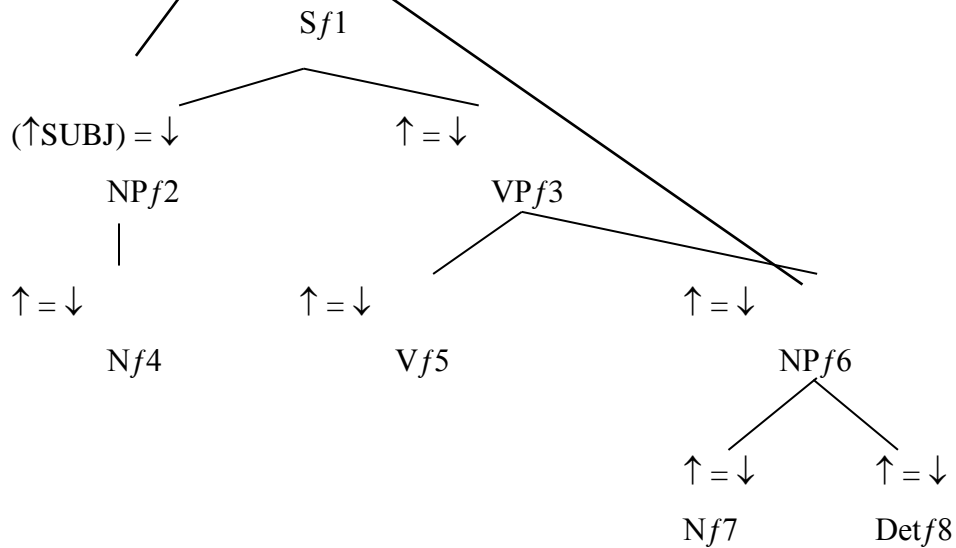
Kofi di-iaduane no.

- Kofi: PN (↑ SUBJ) PRED ‘NAMED kofi’
 di: V (↑ PRED) ‘eat <(↑ SUBJ), (↑ OBJ)>’
 -i: (↑ TENSE) PAST
 aduane: N (↑ OBJ) ‘food’
 (↑ NUM) SG
 no: Det (↑ DEF) +

The A-Structure

'eat <Agent, Theme>'

The C-Structure



<p>Kofi</p> <p>(↑ PRED) 'NAMED kofi'</p> <p>(↑ NUM) SG</p>	<p>dii</p> <p>(↑ PRED) 'eat <... >'</p> <p>(↑ TENSE) PAST</p>	<p>aduane</p> <p>(↑ PRED) 'food'</p> <p>(↑ NUM) 'SG'</p> <p>(↑ DEF) '+'</p>	<p>no</p>
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Functional Description

(f1 SUBJ) = f2	f1 = f3	(f1 OBJ) = f6
f2 = f4	f3 = f5	f6 = f7
		f6 = f8

F-Structure

$f1, f3, f5 :$	SUBJ	$f2, f4 :$	PRED 'NAMED kofi' NUM SG
PRED 'eat <(f1 SUBJ), (f1 OBJ)>' TENSE PAST			
		$f6, f7, f8 :$	PRED 'food' NUM SG
DEF +			

We can see the three main structures of LFG, the A-structure, the C-structure and the F-structure in addition to the Lexicon and the Functional description of sentence (4a) in 7. The lexicon shows the various words that come together to form the sentence, showing their categories and their functions. For instance, it is evident in the *lexicon* that **Kofi** is a proper noun, and it functions as the subject of the verb (i.e. \uparrow SUBJ) in (9). We also see that the word **di** ‘to eat’ is a verb, it is in the past tense, and it subcategorizes with the NP **aduane no** ‘the food’ as its complement or object. We also observe that the object is a singular NP, and it has a definite article.

It is portrayed in the A-structure that the verb *eat* has two arguments: the Agent, which corresponds to the subject in the C-structure, and the Theme, which corresponds to the object in the C-structure. The C-structure shows the linear order of the sentence. We also realize that the subject precedes the verb and the object follows the verb. The F-structure more or less sums up what have been said already in the lexicon and the C-structure. It shows the functions of the various constituents. We observe within the F-structure that the verb, *eat*, which is in the past tense requires a subject and an object, and that *Kofi* functions as the subject and *the food*, the object.

(8) **The Lexicon:**

Ye-di-iaduane no.

ye-: Pro (\uparrow SUBJ) PRED ‘PRO_{ye}’

(\uparrow IMP) +

di: V (\uparrow PRED) ‘eat <(\uparrow SUBJ), (\uparrow OBJ)>

-i: (\uparrow TENSE) PAST

(\uparrow SUBJ) PRED ‘PRO’

aduane: N (\uparrow OBJ) PRED ‘food’

(\uparrow NUM) SG

no: Det (\uparrow DEF) +

It is clear from the structures above that though the sentence in (8) has both a subject and an object just like (7), there is only one argument as depicted in the A-structure (i.e. the theme). This implies that, like the English passive verb ‘eaten’, which requires only one argument, the verb in the passive-like construction in Akan also requires only one argument, the theme. However, since the theme NP cannot occur at the subject position in such constructions in Akan, a dummy pronoun fills the subject slot (to satisfy the EPP requirement; a requirement that states that every sentence should have a subject).

3. The Marked Grammatical Relations in Akan

We have already seen from section 1 that the (P) arguments do not occur in the subject position in a transitive clause; not even in the passive-like constructions. Nevertheless, there are instances where we see the (P) argument at the subject position in both the active and passive-like constructions in Akan, and they are acceptable in the language. Let us consider some of these instances.

3.1 (P) argument at subject positions in Passive-like Constructions

Some verbs, generally referred to as change of-state-verbs (Osam 2004), may allow the (P) arguments to occur at the subject position in passive-like constructions. These verbs include, **bɔ** ‘to break’, **te** ‘to tear’, **hye** ‘to burn’ and **sɛɛ** ‘to destroy’. Let us consider the examples below:

- (9) a. **Kofi bɛ-bɔtoa no.**
 K FUT-break bottle DEF
 ‘Kofi will break the bottle.’
- b. **Abɔfra no a-teataadeɛ no.**
 child DEF PERF-tear dress DEF
 ‘The child has torn the dress.’
- c. **Papa no hye-e afuono.**
 man DEF burn-PST farm DEF
 ‘The man burnt the farm.’

- (10) a. ¹¹**Toa no be-bo.**
 bottle DEFFUT-break
 ?‘The bottle will be broken (or the bottle will break)’
- b. **Ataadee no a-te.**
 dress DEF PERF-tear
 ?‘The dress has been torn (or the dress is torn)’
- c. **Afuo nohye-ee.**
 farm DEF burn-PST
 ?‘The farm has been burnt (or the farm got burnt).’

The structures in (9) are the active constructions and those in (10) are what some of our informants considered as their respective passive constructions. However, some of the speakers indicated that the structures in (10) are not passive-like constructions at all. In fact, we can argue that the verbs in (10) have been ‘detransitivised’ and thus, the NP’s that occur at the subject position in the constructions are not really (P) arguments but (S) arguments. In that case, one would not consider those sentences as passive-like constructions but active constructions with single arguments. However, if we consider them as passive constructions (which is another interpretation some of the informants gave), then we can say those NPs contradict our earlier assertion that the (P) arguments cannot occur at the subject position even in the passive-like construction in Akan. Nonetheless, most speakers consider the structures in (11) below to be the actual passive counterparts of (9).

- (11) a. **Ye-be-bo toa no.**
 IMP-FUT-break bottle DEF
 ‘The bottle will be broken.’
- b. **Ye-a-teataadee no.**
 IMP-PERF-tear dress DEF
 ‘The dress has been torn.’
- c. **Ye-hye-e afuo no.**
 IMP-burn-PST farm DEF.
 ‘The farm was burnt.’

¹¹When the students were asked to give the passive counterparts of (9), five (5) of them gave the structures in (10) while the other six (6) gave the structures in (11) as the passive counterparts of the sentences in (9). Interestingly, one lecturer also considered the structures in (10) as the passive counterparts of (9) while the other two stated that the structures in (11) are the only possible passive counterparts of (11).

It can be observed from (11) that the (P) arguments remain at the object position while a dummy subject occupies the subject position. It is therefore not surprising that some speakers of the language equate the sentences in (10) to those in (11) since they have the same number of participant roles and in fact the same theta roles as illustrated in (12).

12. a. [S [NP **Toa** no] [VP **bɛbo**]] ‘The bottle will break / will be broken.’
- | | | | | | |
|-------|------|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | |
| SUBJ | PRED | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| Theme | | | | | |
-
- b. [S [NP **Yɛ-**] [VP **bɛ-bo** [NP **toa no**]]] ‘The bottle will be broken.’
- | | | | | | |
|------|------|-----|--|-------|--|
| | | | | | |
| SUBJ | PRED | OBJ | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | Theme | |

We can see from (12a) and (12b) that though they have different structures, the participants have the same thematic roles. Although (12b) has both a subject and an object, the subject has no thematic role because it is semantically vacuous. The object, on the other hand, is the (P) argument, which happens to play same semantic role as the subject in (12a); rendering both sentences semantically the same. Nevertheless, there is some pragmatic difference between (12a) and (12b). For instance, though the Agent is not seen in both sentences, (12a) could mean that the bottle will be broken either by itself or by an Agent that is [+/- human]. On the other hand, in (12b), the impersonal pronoun **yɛ-** can only indicate that there is an Agent that is [+ human].

3.2 Switched argument positions (in active voice constructions)

Certain verbs in Akan may allow the (A) argument and the (P) argument to switch positions in the active construction without affecting the meaning of the sentence. These verbs are popularly known as symmetrical verbs (Awobuluyi, 1978; Nwachukwu, 1987; Uwalaka, 1988; Ilori and Olaogun, 2013; Iloene and Ileone 2013). In this paper, we will group these verbs into three (3) types: the Unrestricted Switched Argument Positions (USAP) – those that allow their (A) and (P) arguments to switch positions irrespective of the tense/aspect of the verbs, the Conditional Switched Argument Positions (CSAP) – those that allow the switch position only when the verb is in the stative or continuative aspect, and the Restricted Switch Argument

Position (RSAP) – those that restrict the (A) argument to the object position and the (P) argument to the subject position.

2.2.1 The unconditional switched argument positions (USAP)

The symmetrical verbs under USAP allow their arguments to switch positions without any restrictions or conditions. These verbs allow their (A) and (P) arguments to switch positions irrespective of the tense/aspect of the verbs without affecting the meaning of the sentence. The examples below throw more light on this assertion.

- (13) a. **Mfifire re- teabɔfra no.**
 sweat PROG-fall childDEF
 ‘The child is sweating’
 b. **Abɔfra no re- temfifire.**
 child DEF PROG-fall sweat
 ‘The child is sweating’
- (14) a. **Efia- yɛ papa no ho.**
 dirt PERF-make man DEF body
 ‘The man is dirty.’
 b. **Papano hoayɛefi.**
 man DEF body PERF-makedirt
 ‘The dress is stained.’
- (15) a. **Mogyafiri-imaamenohwene mu.**
 Blood ooze – PST woman DEF nose POSTP
 ‘Blood oozed out of the woman’s nose.’
 b. **Maame no hwene mu firi-imogya.**
 woman DEF nose POSTP ooze-PST blood
 ‘Blood oozed out of the woman’s nose.’

It can be observed from the examples above that irrespective of the positions of the various participants the meanings remain the same. For instance, in (13), though the subject of (13a) has become the object of (13b) and vice versa, the meanings of the two sentences are the same. Again, we can see that the verbs are in the progressive form in (13), in the perfect form (14) and in the past form in (15); yet the meanings of the sentences are not affected. This is not the case in the CSAPs in section 3.2.2 below.

It should, however, be noted that so far as the thematic roles are concerned, none of these NPs functions as an Agent or a Patient. For instance, *abɔfra no* ‘the child’ in (13) is an

experiencer, *papa no* ‘the man’ in (14) is a theme, while *maame no* ‘the woman’ in (15) is an experiencer (i.e. if we consider the English translation); but it is obvious that both *papa no* and *maame no* are qualifying their respective heads, *ho* ‘body’ and *hwene mu* ‘inside the nose’ in (14) and (15) respectively; thus, both NPs play the thematic role of locations.

3.2.2 The conditional switched argument position (CSAP)

The verbs under the CSAP are usually those that denote an act of ‘putting on’ something (such as clothing, ornaments, footwear, etc.) and those that denote an act of carrying or holding something. Examples of such verbs include **hye** ‘to wear’, **fira** ‘to put on’, and **kuta** ‘to hold’ as the examples below depict.

- (16) a. **Kofi hyeekye.**
 K wear.CONT¹²hat
 ‘Kofi is wearing a hat.’
 b. **EkyehyeKofi.**
 hat wear.CONTK
 ‘Kofi is wearing a hat’

- (17) a. **Abɔfranoso kenten.**
 child DEF carry.CONT basket
 ‘The child is carrying a basket.’
 b. **Kenten so abɔfra no.**
 basket carry.Cont child DEF
 ‘The child is carrying a basket.’

- (18) a. **Maame nofirantomafeefe bi.**
 woman DEF wear.CONT cloth beautiful INDEF
 ‘The woman is in a beautiful cloth.’
 b. **Ntomafeefebi firamaame no.**
 cloth beautiful INDEF wear/CONT woman DEF
 ‘The woman is in a beautiful cloth.’

It can be realized from examples (16) through (18) that just like the USAPs, the SRs remain the same even when the NPs change their syntactic positions. For instance, in (18b), though **Kofi** and **ekye** ‘a hat’ have switched positions the meaning remains the same as the

¹²What Dolphyne (1988) refers to as stative tense is what Osam (2004) refers to as continuative aspect. Osam (2004) treats the continuative aspect as a secondary aspect. This is because it is an alternative to the progressive where stative verbs are concerned. The continuative aspect indicates a persisting state coded by a stative verb (see Osam 2004:15).

one in (18a). **Kofi**, which is the (A) argument, occupies the subject position while **ekye** ‘a hat’, the (P) argument occupies the object position in (16a). However, in (16b), **ekye** ‘a hat’ which is the (P) argument rather occupies the subject position while **Kofi**, the (A) argument, occupies the object position; yet the meaning of (16b) remains the same as (16a). Let us look at the graphical representation of (16).

- (19) a. [S [NP**Kofi**] [VP**hye** [NP**ekye**]]] ‘Kofi is wearing a hat.’
 | | |
 SUBJ PREDOBJ
 | |
 ?Agent Theme
- b. [S [NP**ekye**] [VP**hye** [NP**Kofi**]]] ‘Kofi is wearing a hat.’
 | | |
 SUBJ PRED OBJ
 | |
 Theme ?Agent

It should be noted that it is not always the case that these symmetrical verbs allow the participants to switch positions without affecting the meaning of the sentence in Akan. There is a particular condition that needs to be met for the participants to be allowed to switch positions as far as the CSAPs are concerned. Let us consider the sentences below:

- (20) a. ***Ekvehye-ε Kofi**.
 hat wear-PST K
 ‘A hat wore Kofi.’
- b. ***Kentenbe-soaabofra no**.
 basket FUT-carry child DEF
 ‘A basket will carry the child.’
- c. ***Ntoma re-firamaame no**.
 cloth PROG-wear woman DEF
 ‘A cloth is wearing the woman.’
- (21) a. Kofi **hye-εekye**
 K wear-PST K
 ‘Kofi wore a hat.’

b. **Abɔfra no be-soakenten.**

child DEFFUT-carrybasket

‘The child will carry a basket.’

c. **Maame no re-firaNtoma.**

woman DEF PROG-wear cloth

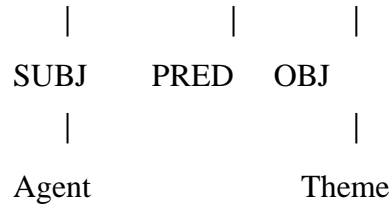
‘The woman is putting on cloth.’

The verbs in (20 a, b & c) are the past, future and progressive tense/aspects counterparts of (16b), (17b) and (18b) respectively. However, the latter are well acceptable structures in the language but the former are not. The reason could only be attributed to the change of the tense/aspect of the verbs since that is the only difference between the sentences in (20) and their counterparts above. The fact is that, as soon as the tense/aspect of the verb changes from continuative (stative) to any other tense aspect, an attempt to switch the positions of the (A) and (P) arguments renders the sentence bizarre. When we inquired from our informants why a sentence like (20a) is not acceptable, they responded by saying, “how can a hat wear a human being?” Interestingly, the same speakers didn’t see anything wrong with (16a). This implies that as soon as the tense/aspect changes, the NP that comes before the verb is considered an Agent, and the one after the verb, a Patient/Theme. This brings us to the question as to whether, for instance, the thematic role of **Kofi** in (16a) is the same as that of (21a). In fact, though the verb ‘to wear’ requires an Agent and a Theme, in (16), **Kofi** is not actively involved in any activity and therefore cannot be considered as a true Agent.

Let us consider the graphical representations of (17b) and (20b) below:

- (22) a. [S [NP**Kenten**] [VP**so** [NP**abɔfra no**]]] ‘The child is carrying a basket.’
- | | | |
|-------|------|--------|
| | | |
| SUBJ | PRED | OBJ |
| | | |
| Theme | | ?Agent |
- b. *[S [NP**Kenten**] [VP**be-soa** [NP**abɔfra no**]]] ‘A basket is carrying the child.’
- | | | |
|-------|-------|-----|
| | | |
| SUBJ | PRED | OBJ |
| | | |
| Agent | Theme | |

b. *[_S [_{NP} **kɛntɛn**] [_{VP} **bɛ-soa** [_{NP} **abɔfra no**]]] ‘A basket is carrying the child.’



It can be seen from (22b) that unlike (22a), **kɛntɛn** ‘basket’ is rather considered as the Agent and **abɔfra no** as the Theme, and this makes the sentence unacceptable in the language. The reason is that as soon as the tense/aspect changes from continuative, the NP that precedes the verb becomes the Agent while the one that follows the verb becomes the Theme. This makes the sentence unusual in the language since *the basket* does not have the semantic properties to carry a human.

It should be noted that these types of constructions are not peculiar to Akan alone. In fact, though some of the other Kwa languages like Ewe and Ga do not exhibit this kind of scenario, some Guan languages like Kyerepong and Larteh have similar constructions as exemplified below:

(23) a. **Kofi werɛataade** (Kyerepong)
 K wear.CONT attire
 ‘Kofi is wearing attire.’

b. **AtaadewerɛKofi**
 attire wear.CONT K
 ‘Kofi is wearing attire.’

(24) a. **Onyine a werɛkoto** (Larteh)
 man DEF wear.CON That
 ‘The man is wearing a hat.’

b. **Koto werɛonyinea**
 hat wear.CONT man DEF
 ‘The man is wearing a hat.’

As portrayed in (23) and (24), both Kyerepong and Larteh can alternate the positions of the (A) and (P) arguments without affecting the meaning of the sentence just like Akan. In these languages too whenever the tense/aspect changes from the continuative to any other tense/aspects, it becomes impossible for the (P) argument to precede the (A) argument in the sentence as the examples in (25) below depict:

- (25) a. **Onyinea le-were koto.**
 man DEF PROG-wear hat
 ‘The man is (in the process of) wearing a hat.’
 b. ***Koto le-wereonyinea.**
 hat PROG-wear man DEF
 ‘A hat is (in the process of) wearing a man.’

Example(25a) is acceptable in the language but (25b) is not. This is due to the fact that the tense/aspect of the verb has changed from continuative to the progressive, and therefore **koto** ‘a hat’ has become the agent and **onyinea** ‘the man’, the theme.

Let us now consider the LFG analysis of the marked grammatical relation:

- (26) **Abɔfra no hyɛɛkyɛ.** ‘The child is wearing a hat.’

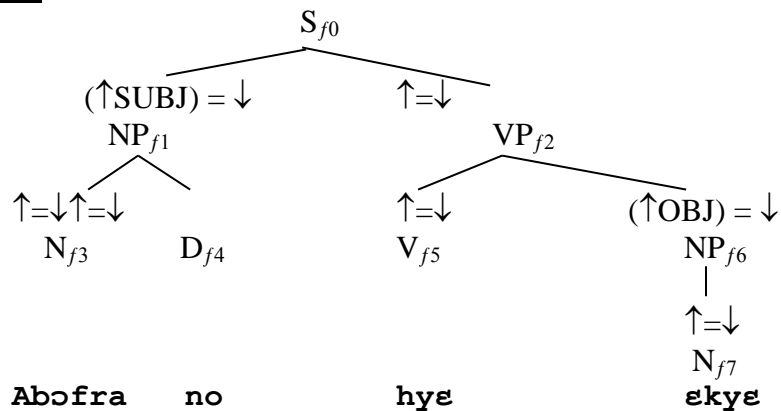
The Lexicon

abɔfra:	N	(↑SUBJ) PRED ‘child’ (↑NUM) SG
no:	Det	(↑DEF) +
hyɛ:	V	PRED ‘wear < (↑SUBJ), (↑OBJ)>’ TENSE/ASPECT CONT
ɛkyɛ:	N	PRED ‘hat’ (↑NUM) SG

The A-structure:

‘wear <?Agent, Theme>’

The C-structure:



F-Structure:

f_0, f_2, f_3 :	PRED 'wear <(f0 SUBJ), (f0 OBJ)> TENSE CONT
SUBJ f_1, f_3, f_4 :	PRED 'hat' NUM SG
OBJ f_6, f_7 :	PRED 'child' NUM SG DEF +

(27) **ɛkyɛhyɛabɔfra no.** 'The child is wearing a hat.'

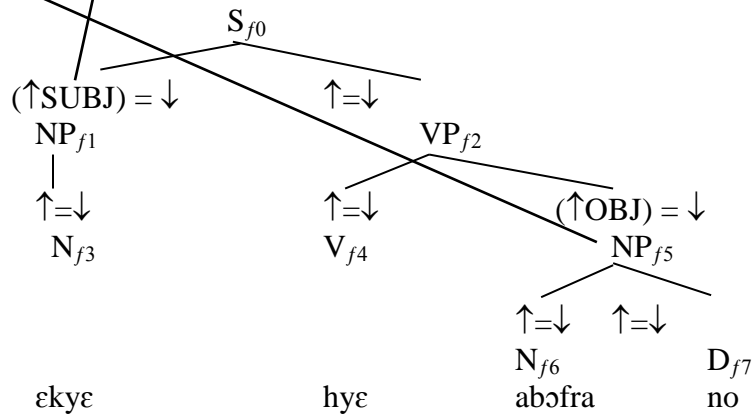
The Lexicon:

ɛkyɛ: N	(↑SUBJ) PRED 'hat' (↑NUM) SG
hyɛ: V	PRED 'wear <(↑SUBJ), (↑OBJ)> TENSE/ASPECT CONT
abɔfra: N	PRED 'child' (↑NUM) SG
no: Det	(↑DEF) +

The A-structure:

'wear <?Agent, Theme>'

The C-structure:



F-Structure:

f_0, f_2, f_3 :	PRED 'wear <(f0 SUBJ), (f0 OBJ)> TENSE CONT
SUBJ f_1, f_3 :	PRED 'hat' NUM SG
OBJ f_5, f_6, f_7 :	PRED 'child' NUM SG DEF +

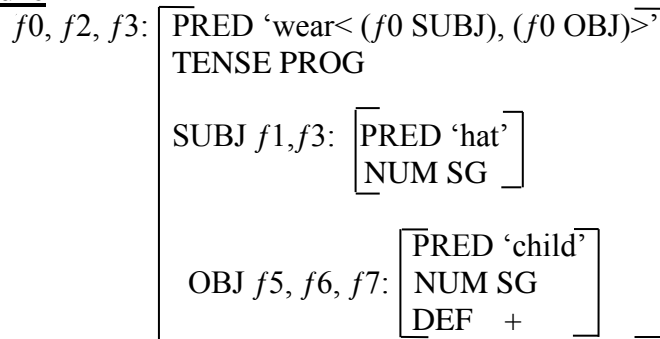
It is evident in (26) and (27) that as far as the tense/aspect remains continuative, the (A) argument and (P) argument can switch their positions in the sentence without affecting the participant roles. As seen from the A-structures in both (26) and (27), the verb, *hyɛ* ‘to wear’, requires an (A) argument and a (P) argument; and that in both structures the (A) argument performs or experiences the action initiated by the predicate (intuitively) irrespective of their position in structural terms. However, as (28) depicts, as soon as the tense/aspect changes, the NP that occurs at the subject position becomes the Actor/Agent of the action; therefore, if the arguments switch positions, it renders the sentence unacceptable in the language.

(28) ***ɛkyɛ re-hyɛabɔfra no.** ‘The hat is (in the process of) wearing the child’

The Lexicon

ɛkyɛ:	N	(↑SUBJ) PRED ‘hat’ (↑NUM) SG
hyɛ:	V	PRED ‘wear < (↑SUBJ), (↑OBJ)>’ TENSE/ASPECT PROG
abɔfra:	N	PRED ‘child’ (↑NUM) SG
no:	Det	(↑DEF) +

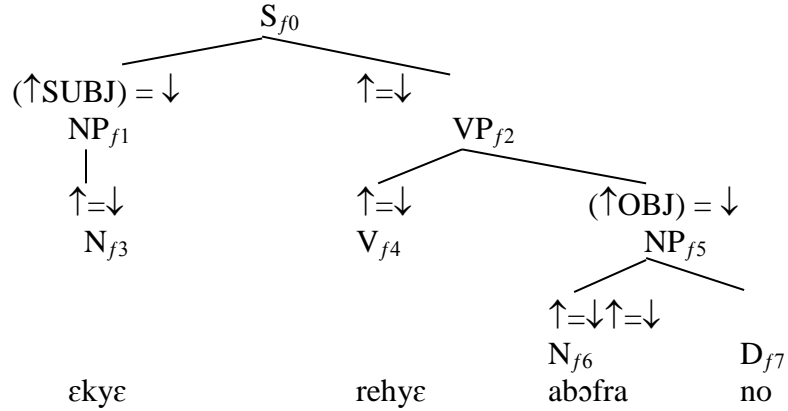
F-Structure



The A-Structure

*‘wear <Theme, Agent>’

The C-structure



3.2.3 The restricted switched argument position (RSAP)

There is a particular verb in Akan (i.e. *de*¹³ ‘be’) which always restricts its (A) argument to the object position and the (P) argument to the subject position irrespective of the tense/aspect. An attempt to switch the positions of the (A) & (P) arguments would either change the meaning of the sentence completely or render the sentence meaningless. Let us look at the examples below:

- (29) a. **Dwonsɔ de abɔfra no.**
 urine be child DEF
 ‘The child feels like urinating.’
 b. **?Abɔfra no de dwonsɔ.**
 child DEFbe urine
 ‘The child is called urine (instead of ‘The child feels like urinating.’).’

- (30) a. **Ɛkɔmre-de me.**
 hunger PROG-be 1SG OBJ
 ‘I am getting hungry.’
 b. ***Me-re-de kɔm.**
 1SG SUBJ-PROG-be hunger
 ‘I am getting hungry’

- (31) a. **Awɔ de Kofi.**
 cold be Kofi
 ‘Kofi is cold.’

¹³ This verb is homonymous in Akan. The other *de* which can also be interpreted as ‘be’ or ‘use/take’ do not behave like the *de* in question. For example, *mede* Kofi but not *Kofi *de* me ‘I am called Kofi’ or *Abɔfra no dede* ‘the child has taken it away.’

- b. ?**Kofi de awɔ**.
 Kofi be cold
 ‘Kofi is called cold (instead of ‘Kofi is cold’).’

- (32) a. **Ahuhuro a-de me nne**.
 hot/warm PERF-be 1SG OBJ today
 ‘I have been feeling hot today’
 b. ***M-a-de ahuhuronne**.
 1SG SUBJ-PERF-be hot/warm today
 ‘I have been feeling hot today.’

It is evident in the examples above that when we change the positions of the participants, the meaning of the sentence changes completely. This implies that, for the sentence to be acceptable, the (A)-argument should be restricted to the complement position. Again, this scenario is not unique to Akan; in fact, Bresnan (2001:7) states that “in some ergative languages the grammatical subject may correspond to the patient rather than the agent.” This implies that it is possible for the (A) argument to occur at the object position and the (P) argument at the subject position without affecting the meaning of the sentence. It should, however, be noted that in Akan, for a symmetrical verb to allow its arguments to switch positions without affecting the meaning of the sentence, the (A) argument must not be an Agent.

4. Conclusion

So far, we have highlighted the different grammatical relations in Akan. We have seen that the unmarked GR in Akan, just like in many other languages, is for the (A) argument to precede the verb and the (P) argument to follow the verb. However, some few verbs can allow the (A) argument to switch positions with the (P) argument without marring the meaning of the sentence; and this situation has been referred to as the marked GRs in this paper. Three of them have been identified: the USAPs that allow the (A) and (P) arguments to switch position irrespective of the tense/aspect, the CSAPs that only allow the (A) and (P) arguments to switch position when the verb is in the continuative tense/aspect, and the RSAP that ensures that the (A) argument is restricted to the complement position while the (P) argument is restricted to the subject position for the sentence to be acceptable. However, it is evident that when the (A) argument is an Agent, it cannot occur at the object position; likewise, a Patient cannot occur at

the subject position. But the Experiencer and the Theme can switch positions without affecting the meaning of the sentence.

We also postulate that, though structurally, the arguments may switch positions, intuitively, it is the (A) argument that is perceived by the native speakers as the actor of the action but not the (P) argument. Thus, for some verbs, an NP does not need to occur at the subject position before it becomes the Experiencer, and likewise, it does not need to occur at the object position before it performs the role of a Theme.

The implication is that grammatical relations and semantic relations have separate roles, and thus, they should be treated as such, though they coincidentally have some specified positions in the configurational languages. For instance, usually the (A) argument occurs at the subject position while the (P) argument occurs at the object position (in the active construction). However, we have seen from Akan and other languages that it is possible for the various participant roles to occur at different positions in the sentence without affecting meaning.

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