A Comparative Study of the Simple Clause in Akan, Dagaare and English

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Abstract
The paper compares how the simple clause is expressed in Akan (Kwa, Niger-Congo), Dagaare (Gur, Niger-Congo) and English. It examines the simple clause in relation to noun phrase, verbal phrases, adpositional phrases, basic word order in declarative and focus constructions, and the basic locative construction. Basically, the study reveals that despite the differences, Akan and Dagaare have a lot in common as compared to English. This of course shows how distant English is from the two African languages. Certain linguistic features such as serial verb construction and focus constructions were unique to Akan and Dagaare and this, is not surprising since languages within the same language family (Niger Congo) tend to share certain lexical, phonological, morphological and syntactic features. The significant variation between these languages shows where Akan and Dagaare languages diverge into other sub-family groups: Kwa and Gur, respectively.
1. Introduction

A simple clause is a sentence that basically contains one independent clause. This paper compares how the simple clause is expressed in Akan, Dagaare and English. Cross-linguistic studies of the structure of sentences in varied languages (Payne, 1997; Creissels, 2000; Dryer, 2007) reveal that all languages have a basic word order that serves as the most common way to form a sentence. Payne (1997, p. 71), for instance, notes that “individual languages form their clauses in distinctive ways; some prefer to position the verb at the end of a clause, others at the beginning, and others place it in the centre somewhere. Lastly, many languages seem to put the verb almost everywhere”. The main aim of this paper is to examine how words and morphemes combine to form a simple grammatical sentence in these three languages. It examines and compares how the subject, verb and object are basically ordered in the simple clause structures of these languages. It describes how noun/noun phrases, verbs, adjectives, and adpositions are used in the simple sentence construction of these languages.

The paper is structured as follows: section 1 is an introduction. Section 2 provides a brief linguistic information on the languages under study (Note 1), the data collection and methods used. The words and phrases that form the internal structure of the simple sentence are examined in section 3. It looks at the noun phrases, verb phrases and adpositional phrases. Section 4 discusses the basic word order in simple declarative and interrogative sentences. Section 5 discusses the basic locative structures of the languages. Section 6 is the summary and conclusion.

2. Language Background, Data and Method

Akan belongs to the Kwa Sub-group of Niger-Congo. It has many dialects and sub-dialects but Asante, Akuapem, and Fante are the three documented standard dialects. The Akan people are predominantly in Ashanti, Ahafo, Bono, Eastern, Central and Western regions of Ghana.

Dagaare is a Mabia (Note 2) (Oti-Volta) language of the Gur branch of the Niger-Congo family spoken in the Upper-West region of Ghana (Dakubu, 1988; Bodomo, 2000). The language is closely related to other Niger-Congo languages of the Gur family, such as Safaliba, Moore, Gurune, Mampruli, Dagbani, Buli and Kusaal. There are four dialects of Dagaare – Southern Dagaare, Western Dagaare, Central Dagaare and Northern Dagaare. This research is based largely on the central dialect since it has been the basis of literacy work in the language.

The data used in this paper are drawn from elicited sources. Paradigms of clauses and sentence structures were constructed and elicited based on the native speaker intuition of the authors. The first and second authors provided data on Akan and the third author provided data on Dagaare. We also relied on other native speakers for data verification. For the discussion on adpositional phrases, we resorted to the Topological Relation Picture Series (TPRS) (Bowerman & Pederson, 1993) elicitation tools. The TRPS helps identify the strategies employed by language speakers for encoding static topological relation between ‘Figures’: the entity whose location is at stake and ‘Ground’: where the figure is located. We observed and described some selected TRPS pictures in Akan and Dagaare. The TRPS has
been adopted in a number of works (Ameka et al., 1999; Levinson & Wilkins, 2006; Dorvlo, 2008; Bobuafor, 2013, and Owusu et al., 2015).

3. The Internal Structure of the Simple Clause

Grammatical sentences are basically formed from various classes of words. These include nouns, verbs, adjectives, adpositions, adverbs, pronouns, determiners, conjunctions, intensifiers and interjections. However, as cross-linguistics studies by Watters (2000, p. 195) inform us, “the specific ways in which these word classes are used, need to be defined for each language rather than forming assumptions from their use in English or other European languages.” Here, the sub-sections discuss and compare some of these word classes in the three languages.

3.1 The Noun Phrase

Nouns are the heads of noun phrases and they act as the subject and objects of clauses. Nouns in Akan bear noun class prefixes. These prefixes partition the set of nouns into subsets, each of which has its own distinctive marking which shows agreement with nouns in terms of number and animacy. In Akan, as Osam (1996) observes, the nouns in the singular have a specific prefix and form their plural by using a different prefix (Note 3) as illustrated in (1).

(1) a. ɛ-dan
    CL4.SG-house
    ‘A house’

  b. ɔ-nipa
    CL1.SG-person
    ‘A person/human being’

  c. a-dan
    CL6.PL-house
    ‘houses’

  d. n-nipa
    CL5.PL-person
    ‘persons/human beings’

Based on this evidence one can conclude that Akan is a noun class language which is a common feature of Niger-Congo languages (Schachter & Shopen, 2007, pp. 7-8)

Interestingly, Dagaare which also belongs to the Niger Congo family behaves differently. As indicated by Grimm (2009), Dagaare exhibits an inverse number marking system. He shows that “the core of the number marking system in Dagaare is centred on the little but prevalent semantic principle of individuation, the tendency for an object to appear as a distinct unit” (Grimm, 2009, p. 170). He demonstrates that the distribution of the inverse number marker in Dagaare –ri correlates with various levels of individuation: nouns unmarked in the singular pattern with highly individuated entities whereas nouns unmarked in the plural pattern with entities which are less individuated and/or tend to appear in groups. The number marker is the suffix -ri. Based on semantic individuation, the suffix -ri marks singularity for entities that are highly individuated and marks plurality for entities that are less individuated. The singular nouns marked by -ri is pluralized with a vowel suffix.

(2) a. ku-ri
    ‘gourd’
    - kɔɛ
    ‘gourds’

  b. bi-ri
    ‘seed’
    - bi-e
    ‘seeds’
c. nubi-ri ‘finger’ - nubi-e ‘fingers’
d. pimpe-ri ‘nail’ - pimpe-e ‘nails’

(3) a. zu-ø ‘head’ - zur-ri ‘heads’
b. baa-ø ‘dog’ - baa-ri ‘dogs’
c. tuɤ-ø ‘tree’ - tu-ri ‘trees’
d. tepa-ø ‘community’- ten-ni ‘communities’

Note how -tri goes through nasal assimilation in (3d) which results in the allomorph –ni. Notice also the harmony in the vowels. The vowel of the plural suffix assimilates the ATR status of the vowels in the singular nouns.

Nouns in English, unlike Akan and Dagaare, do not have a noun class system. Generally regular nouns are pluralized by suffixing ‘-s’ (which is phonologically conditioned) to singular nouns. The suffix assimilates the voicing feature of the sound it follows. This is illustrated in example (4):

(4) a. Dog /dɒg/ - ‘dogs /dɔgz/’
   b. Cat /kæt/ - ‘cats /kæتس/’
   c. Horse /hɔːs/ - ‘horses /hɔː siz/’

3.1.1 Nouns and Determiners

Let us now turn to the constituents that modify the noun heads. The structure of the NP in Akan simple clause is:

(5) Possessive Modifier-[Noun]- Adjectival Modifier – Numeral-Determiner/Demonstratives

In Akan NP, determiners and demonstratives follow the noun head as illustrated in (6):

(6) a. ṣ-kra no b. a-homa yi
   SG-cat DET SG-robe DEM.PROX
   ‘The cat’ ‘This robe’

c. n-kra akese mmiensa no
   SG-cat fat three DET
   ‘The three fat cats’

In Akan, adjectives follow the noun head when they are used attributively and they agree in number with the nouns they modify as seen in (7):

(7) a. a-kokɔ fitaa b. n-kokɔ e-fitaa
   SG-chicken white PL-chicken PL-white
   ‘A white chicken’ ‘white chickens’
The structure of Dagaare NP is as follows:

(8) Determiner-[Noun]-Adjectival Modifier-Numeral-Demonstrative

In Dagaare, the determiner precedes the noun head whereas the demonstrative follows it as in (9a) and (9b) respectively.

(9) a. a baa b. bie ƞa
    DET dog child DEM.PROX
    ‘The dog’ ‘This child’

Adjectives post-modify the NP in Dagaare as illustrated in (9):

(10) a. ti-wogi b. bi-deŋ
    tree-tall child-first
    ‘A tall tree’ ‘first child’

The structure of the English NP is:

(11) Determiner/Demonstrative-Numeral-Adjectival Modifier-Noun

In English all the constituents that modify the noun precede the head noun.

(12) The two beautiful girls
    DET NUM Adj N

Notice that whereas English head nouns occur at phrase final position, the position of the head nouns in Akan and Dagaare do not hold neatly, although they appear to be more of head initial. What is clear is that Akan and Dagaare head nouns precede demonstratives, numerals, and adjectival modifiers. It is worth stating that the order of elements Akan and Dagaare NPs exhibit is typologically attested. Thus, Creissels (2000) points out that “in all African languages, NPs whose nominal head precedes demonstrative, numeral and adjectival modifiers are more prevalent than N-final NPs; and in Africa than elsewhere in the world, the N-initial order is more common”.

3.2 The Verb Phrase

The verb word in Akan is usually complex. It carries subject, tense, aspect, modal and negative markers. The structure of the Akan verb in a simple clause might be represented as:

(13) (Subject marker)-(Negation)-tense/aspect prefixes-ROOT-tense/aspect suffixes

In (13), we realize that subject markers and TAMP morphologically operate on the verbs and it is often difficult to tease them apart by tense, aspect, and mood.

(14) ɔ-fre-ɛ ne a-danfo ɔkɔɛɛ
    3SG.SUBJ-call-PST 3SG.POSS SG-friend crab
‘He called his crab friend.’

The VP əfree ‘he called’ in (14) contains a prefix that expresses inflection for person and number of subject, and a suffix that inflects for past tense. Verbs in Dagaare are not complex since tense and aspects are not morphologically marked. Tense and aspect are expressed analytically as structured in (15a) and illustrated in (15b):

(15) a. TENSE-VERB-POST PARTICLE
   b. Badere  poø  da  sàà  la

   Spider  stomach  PST  spoil  PART

   ‘Spider became angry.’

In (15b) the past tense marker da precedes the verb sàà ‘spoil’, then, followed by the post-verbal particle la. The structure of a verb in English may be expressed as:

(16) ROOT-TENSE/AGR  (Payne, 1997, p. 61)

English has no subject affixes. Tense is morphologically marked on verbs but aspect is not; instead, it is analytically expressed by the combination of predicates as illustrated in (16).

(17) a. He has come (Perfect)  b. He is coming (progressive)

3.3 Serial Verb Constructions

Akan verb phrases in a simple clause may be complex consisting of two or more verbs which may conceptualise a single event as demonstrated in examples (18 and 19):

(18) ɔ-san-n  ba-e

   3SG.SUBJ-return  come-PST

   ‘He returned (again).’

(19) ɔ-ka-kyere-ɛ  ne  a-danfo  Kɔɔɔ

   3SG.SUBJ-tell-show-PST3  SG.POSS  SG-friend  crab

   ‘He told his friend Crab.’

Note how the verbs share the same subject in (18), and how subject and object is also shared in (19). Serial verb construction is also evident in Dagaare as seen in (20):

(20) a. v  na  bɔ  la  yeli  nyøge.

   3SG.SUBJ  FUT  search  PART  say  hold.

   ‘He will plan what to do.’

b. v  gaŋ  gbire  la

   3SG.SUBJ  lie  sleep-IMP  PART
‘He is sleeping.’

Note how the three verbs bɔ ‘search’, yeli ‘say’ and nyɔge ‘hold’ share the same subject in (20a).

3.4 Verb Particles

Akan has verbal particles which form an idiomatic lexical unit with verbs and they do not carry any separable meanings for example ase ‘under’ and so ‘top’ in (21a) and (21b) respectively. These particles also occur as postpositions in Akan as discussed in section 3.

(21) a. Wɔn ɛ-tena ase ɛ-kye-ɛ paa.
    3PL.SUBJ SM-live under SM-long-PST well.
‘They lived together for a very long period of time.’

b. Ăkɔtɔ gye-e Anaanse so
    crab collect-PST spider top
‘Crab answered Spider.’

English also has such particles as wake up, give up and hurry up. Verbs may be used to express adverbs such as again. Consider example (22).

(22) ɔ-san-n ba-e
    3SG.SUBJ-return-PST come-PST
‘He came (again).’

The verb san (Note 4) ‘return’ in (22) carries the sense of ‘again’. English has distinct class of adverbs.

3.5 Adpositions and Adpositional Phrases

Adposition is used as a cover word for prepositions and postpositions. The nature or source of adpositions and where they occur is of concern to linguists. Payne (1997, p. 86) for instance, points out that “adpositions may be particles, clitics or substantives (nouns/verbs), that say something about an adjacent noun phrase's semantic role in the clause”. They are termed prepositions when they occur before the noun phrase and postposition when they occur after the noun phrase. Regarding the source of adpositions, Payne (1997, p. 87) indicates that “Adpositions are derived historically from nouns that refer to parts of the body and verbs with locative or existential meanings”. Cross-linguistic study (Watters 2000, p. 196) informs us that African languages tend to have fewer prepositions/postpositions than European languages.

Akan has both prepositions and postpositions. A study of Akan prepositions by Osam (1994) indicates that Akan prepositions are historically derived from verbs. In (23a) the form wɔ is a lexical verb meaning ‘to be at’ but in (23b) wɔ ‘at’ functions as locative preposition. Others
include fi ‘from’, kɔ ‘towards’, gu ‘down’, ma ‘for’ from the verbs fi ‘to be from’, kɔ ‘to go’,
gu ‘to fall and ma ‘to give’ respectively.

(23) a. Kofi wɔ Kumi
Kofi be.at Kumi
‘Kofi is in Kumasi.’

b. Ye-n-kɔ n-ka asem no wɔ ahen-fie
3PL.SUBJ-OPT-go OPT-tell matter DET be king-house
‘Let’s go settle the matter at the palace.’

Postpositions in Akan include ase ‘under’, so ‘on’, nkyen ‘side’, akyi ‘back’ anim ‘face/front’
and they all function to indicate location.

(24) bɔl no da a-konnwa no ase
Ball DET lie.STAT SG-chair DET under
‘The ball is under the chair.’ [TRPS 16]

(25) Kofi akyi ye no ya
Kofi back COP.be DEF pain
‘Kofi’s back is paining him.’

(26) a-bofra no koto a-konnwa no akyi.
SG-child DET squat.STAT SG-chair DET back
‘The child is squatting behind the chair.’ [TRPS 64]

Most postpositions are originated from spatial body parts. In (26) akyi ‘back’ part of body is
metaphorically extended to give the abstract meaning of location.

Dagaare, like Akan, has postpositions which are derived from body part nouns as the
following examples show:

(27) a kɔpo be la a tabole zu
DET cup be.STAT PART DET table head
‘The cup is on the table.’ [TRPS1]

(28) a te-wɔnee be la a laa pɔɔ
DET tree-fruit be.STAT PART DET bowl stomach
‘The fruit is in the bowl.’ [TRPS 2]

(29) a badere mare la a dasere eŋa
The body part noun zu ‘head’ in (27), poɔ ‘stomach’ in (28) and eŋa ‘body’ in (29) function as postpositions ‘on’, ‘in/inside’ and ‘on’ respectively. English, however, has prepositions which include in, under, of, to, and among others. English may also have complex prepositions consisting of nouns such as on top of, at the bottom of and among others. The use of postpositions derived from body part nouns is also attested in Safaliba (Note 5) (Gur, Niger Congo), a language closely related to Dagaare (Owusu et al., 2015).

Having discussed the elements that constitute the structure of the simple clause, we now turn our attention to the basic word order of the simple sentences in these languages.

4. Word Order

Languages may differ from one another in the way in which the constituents are ordered. This section discusses the order of elements in the simple clause.

Word ordering in clauses concerns how the subject, object and verbs occur in the clause. Let us first consider the word order of Akan simple clause.

Akan has a strict SVO word order. The subject precedes the verb in a transitive clause and a direct object follows the verb, as seen in example (30):

(30) Anaanse ka-a asem no.

Spider tell-PST matter DET

‘Spider told the story.’

In example (30), the subject anaanse ‘spider’ precedes the verb kaa ‘told’ and the object asem no ‘the story’ follows the verb kaa ‘told’. The Goal precedes the Theme in a double object construction and the adjunct occurs at clause final position. Example (31) shows the linear order of constituents in a simple double object clause and (32) provides an instance.

(31) SUBJECT – VERB – GOAL – THEME – ADJUNCT

(32) ɔ-baa no kyere papa no nnwom wo fie

SG-woman DET teach man DET songs at home

SUBJ V GOAL THEME ADJ

‘The woman teaches the man songs at home.’

It is worth stating however, that the basic constituent order is usually modified when a constituent in a sentence is focused. In Akan, focus constructions involve the fronting of a non-verbal constituent in the clause, followed by the focus marker na, the subject and the
verb as illustrated in (34 b and c). A simple clause is structured when focus slots are filled. This is shown in example (33):

(33): Simple clause with focus slots filled

(FOCUS) →SUBJECT→V

Consider the word order of the declarative sentence in (34a) and the focus construction (34b). The constituent (Object) ɔkɔti ‘crab’s head’ in (34a) is fronted to the sentence initial position in (34b) followed by the subject and the verb leading to an OSV order of a sort. When a constituent is also questioned as shown in (34c) the declarative word order is maintained.

(34) a. Anaanse gye-e ɔkɔti ti

Spider collect-PST crab head

‘Spider collected crab’s head.’

b. ɔkɔti ti na Anaanse gye-e

crab head FM spider collect-PST

‘It was crab’s head that spider collected.’

c. Hena na ɔ-gye-e ɔkɔti ti?

who FM 3SG.SUBJ-collect-PST crab head

‘Who collected crab’s head?’

Dagaare, like Akan, has a fixed SVO word order. As observed in Dagaare transitive clause (see example 35), the subject Badere ‘spider’ precedes the verb da de ‘took’ while the object a koore ‘the gourd’ follows the verb.

(35) Badere da de la a kuori.

Spider PST take PART DET gourd

S V O

‘The spider took the gourd.’

In a simple double object clause in Dagaare, the linear order of constituents is shown in (36a) with example in (36b):

(36) a. SUBJECT – VERB – GOAL – THEME – (ADJUNCT)

b. Deri ku ma la gan

Deri give 1SG.OBJ PART book

‘Deri gave me book.’
The basic constituent order in Dagaare can also be modified when a constituent in a sentence is focused. Focus constructions in Dagaare involve the fronting of a non-verbal constituent in the clause followed by the focus marker la, the subject and the verb as illustrated in (37c and d). When focus slots are filled a simple clause is as shown in (37a). Example (37b) is the basic form of (37c and d).

(37)  
   a. (FOCUS) → SUBJECT → V
   b. Badere  do la tie
      Spider  climb  PERF  tree
      ‘The spider climbed the tree.’
   c. a tie la ka badere do
      DET tree FOC that spider climb
      ‘It was the tree that spider climbed.’
   d. an la do a tie?
      who Foc climb  DEF  tree?
      ‘Who climbed the tree?’

English, similarly, has a strict SVO word order. In transitive clauses; the subject precedes the verb and the direct object follows the verb as illustrated in (38). In a di-transitive clause, there are two argument structures: one is the (NP, NP), as in (39b), and two (NP, PP) as in (39a).

(38) The child broke the plate.
   S V O

(39) a. The boy gave the book to Kofi.
   b. The boy gave Kofi the book.

We observe in (38) that the subject the child precedes the verb broke while, the object the plate follows the verb broke.

5. Basic Locative Construction

This section discusses how location is grounded in space. The Basic Locative Construction (BLC) is the construction used in the answer to the question ‘where is the X?’ in which X is a known spatial entity and its location the unknown information being sought. (Grinevald, 2006, p. 32). This section is meant to illustrate the kinds of verbs used in responding to ‘where is the X’ questions in the three languages and the order of elements in the locative construction. Let us begin with Akan.

Akan has the locative verb wo ‘be located’ which is the unmarked form and other dispositional verbs used in the BLC. The verbs used in the locative construction include: wo
‘be located’, te ‘sit’, sen ‘hang’, da ‘lie’, tare ‘paste’, hye ‘wear’. The fixed order of elements in Akan locative construction is:

(40) NP V [LOC] [NP Postp]

The subject NP position denotes the FIGURE. This is followed by the locative verb and a postpositional phrase which denotes the GROUND where the figure is located. The postposition as already discussed above is in most cases a grammaticalized body part noun. The following examples (41) illustrate some of the verbs used in locative construction.

(41) n-nuaba no wɔ a-dua no so

PL-fruit DET be.at SG-tree DET top

‘The fruits are on the tree.’ [TRPS-45]

Wɔ is the unmarked form and it specifies the general location of the figure. As a result, it collocates a lot with postpositions such as so ‘top’ mu ‘inside’, nkyen ‘beside’ which helps to restrict the space the object occupies. The use of so in (41) shows the contact relationship between the nnuaba ‘fruits’ and the adua ‘tree’. Postpositions, therefore, add meaning to the locative construction. It specifies the exact position of the figure. Wɔ can also be used with mu ‘inside’ to express containment relationship as in (42).

(42) Aduaba no wɔ nkyense no mu.

fruit DET be.STAT bowl DET inside

‘The fruit is in the bowl’.

Dispositional verbs are the marked forms and they are usually used to specify the portion of the figure. For instance in (43) da ‘lie’ indicates that an object horizontally placed somewhere, with the entire body in direct contact with the ground or floor. Da ‘lie’ is juxtaposed with the postposition mu ‘inside’ which describes the containment relationship of the figure and the ground.

(43) e-kɔnmuade no da ne kɔn mu

SG-necklace DET lie.STAT 3SG.POSS neck inside

‘The necklace is on her neck.’ [TRPS-51]

(44) a-beremaa no te e-gya no nkyɛn

SG-boy DET sit.STAT SG.fire DET beside

‘The boy is sitting beside the fire/the boy sits beside the fire.’ [TRPS 38]

Dagaare, like Akan, has a locative verb be ‘be located’ which is the unmarked form. Be can also be used with pare ‘under’ as in (46) and with other postpositions like zu ‘on’ as in (47) poɛ ‘inside’, and ɛya ‘body’. The fixed order of elements in Dagaare locative construction is:
(45) NP V [LOC] [NP Postp]

The subject NP position represents the FIGURE. This is followed by the locative verb and a postpositional phrase which defines the GROUND where the figure is situated. The postposition as already discussed above is a grammaticalized body part noun in most instances.

(46) a boole be la a kogi pare
DET ball be.STAT PART DET chair anus
‘The ball is under the chair.’ [TRPS 16]

(47) a kɔpo be la a tabole zu
DET cup be.STAT PART DET table head
‘The cup is on the table.’ [TRPS 1]

In (47), kɔpo functions as the Figure, the locative verb be ‘be’ marks the location, tabole ‘table’ functions as the Ground and the postposition is the search domain. Dagaare, like Akan, has dispositional verbs which specify the position of the figure. They include mare ‘paste’, yagele ‘hang’ delle ‘lean’, yere ‘spread’.

(48) a kparoo yagele la pimperi ena
DET shirt hang PART nail body
‘The shirt hangs on the hook.’ [TRPS 9]

In (48), the verb yagele ‘hang’ defines Figures that are connected by suspension to their reference objects. Yagele ‘hang’ is used with the postposition ena ‘body’. The verb mare ‘be pasted’ in (49) describes the locative relationships in which the figure is securely attached to a reference object such that it cannot be detached easily. This verb is used for describing ‘a spider on a ceiling’ and it takes the postposition ena ‘body’.

(49) a badere mare la a dasere ena
DET spider paste PART DET ceiling body
‘The spider is on the ceiling.’

The verb delle ‘lean’ in (50) is used to describe locative relations involving a leaning position. Here, the part of the figure is directly in contact with the upper part of the reference object and it is supported at another end. Delle does not take any postposition as observed in the others. This could be due to the fact that the verb itself carries the spatial information and so the search domain becomes redundant.

(50) a dere delle la a daŋkyeni
DET ladder lean PART DET wall
‘The ladder is leaning on the wall.’ [TRPS 58]

The basic locative construction in English follows the usual word order and uses the spatially neutral existential copula, with the spatial information found in the choice of preposition (Grinevald, 2006, p. 32).

The fixed order of elements in English locative construction is:

(51) NP V [COP] [Prep NP]

The subject NP position represents the FIGURE. This is followed by the existential copula verb and a prepositional phrase which specifies the GROUND where the figure is located. The preposition provides the spatial information.

This section has shown that English does not have verbal operations expressing spatial grounding. It uses the copula ‘be’ to ground spatial location. However, Akan and Dagaare employ dispositional verbs to express spatial grounding.

6. Conclusion

This paper has considered the similarities and differences of the simple clause structures in three languages: English, Akan and Dagaare. First, we discussed the noun phrases. It was shown that Akan and Dagaare, unlike English, have noun class system. Nouns typically follow determiners in Dagaare and English whereas nouns precede determiners in Akan. Akan and Dagaare have a similar NP structure where nominal heads precede demonstrative, numeral and adjectival modifiers whereas in English nominal heads occur at phrase-final position.

Second, in the discussion of the verb phrase we noted the existence of serial verb construction is unique to Akan and Dagaare. Third, adpositional phrase was examined. We noted that Akan has both prepositions derived from verbs and postpositions derived from body part nouns; Dagaare has postpositions also derived from body part nouns whereas English employs prepositions only.

With regards to the basic word order, we demonstrated that all the three languages have a similar SVO word order. However, Akan and Dagaare word order is modified in focus constructions. Again, the basic locative construction was discussed. It was revealed that both Akan and Dagaare employ one unmarked locative verb and other dispositional verbs and postpositions in locative constructions whereas English employs a locative copula and prepositions to form locative constructions.

Generally, the paper observed that despite the differences, Akan and Dagaare have a lot in common as compared to English. This, of course, shows how distant English, an Indo-European language, is from the two African languages. Certain linguistic features such as serial verb construction and focus constructions were unique to Akan and Dagaare and this, is not surprising since languages within the same language family (Niger Congo) tend to share certain lexical, phonological, morphological and syntactic features. It is important to note, however, that there are also areas of significant variation between these languages.
These differences show where Akan and Dagaare languages diverge into other sub-family groups: Kwa and Gur, respectively.

List of Abbreviations

1. First person
2. Second person
3. Third person
ADJ
ATR
COMP
COND
CONJ
COP
CL
DEF
DEM
DET
FOC
FM
FUT
INTW
LOC
N
NEG
NP
NUM
PART
PL
POSS
POST
PREP
PROX
PST
REL
SG
SM
STAT
SUBJ
V
VP
Negative
Noun Phrase
Numeral
Focus Particle
Plural
Possessive
Postposition
Preposition
Proximity
Past
Relative Marker
Singular
Subject marker
Stative
Subject
Subject Verb Object
Optative
Verb
Verb Phrase

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Notes

Note 1. English is not included because it is a well-known language/meta-language.

Note 2. Bodomo (2000) refers to these languages as Mabia, literally meaning the mother’s child

Note 3. Osam (1996) identified six noun class prefixes: CL 1: o-/ɔ, CL 2: e-/a-, CL 3: i-/ɛ-, CL4: e-, CL 5: n- and CL 6: e-/a-. The last two are plural prefixes. These noun classes according to him are sensitive to animacy distinction.

Note 4. Amfo (2005, p. 156-161) considers san as a recurrence marker and argues that san is an output of a grammaticalization process which has as its historical input a phonological identical lexical verb with a restoration meaning.

Note 5. Safaliba is spoken in the western part of the Northern region of Ghana.
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