

Competing Babanki anaphors: Theoretical implications

Pius W. Akumbu

University of Buea, Cameroon

Abstract

This paper explores the anaphora strategies used in Babanki, a Grassfields language of Northwest Cameroon. It identifies up to six strategies, namely, Body-Part, Pronoun-Pronoun Self-Pronoun, Pronoun, Yi, and Null Object. It is illustrated in this paper that Body-Part anaphor is in complementary distribution with Pronoun-Pronoun for local reciprocal readings, with Self-Pronoun, and Pronoun for local reflexive readings. It is also shown that the Null Object is in fact the absence of Pronoun-Pronoun. This paper explores the similarities and differences between the contexts where the Body-Part anaphor and the Pronouns are acceptable bringing into focus the reflexive and/or reciprocal interpretations the strategies command. While the Body-Part anaphor can have both reflexive and reciprocal readings (1), the Pronoun-Pronoun strategy has only a reciprocal reading (2), while Self-Pronoun, and Pronoun can have only reflexive interpretations (3).

1a) dzöyn yì kòŋ àwén é wén

dzöyn	yì	kòŋ	à-wén	é	wén
John	P2	admire	c5-body	AM	3s

‘John admired himself.’

b) vèwé ná ghá?á tèténté vèwé(ná)

vèwé	ná	ghá?á	tè-wén	té	vèwé(ná)
3P	always	hold	c13-body	AM	them

‘They always criticize each other/They always criticize themselves.’

2a) kyĩ vyí né shìtè mánshí? à vèwé vèwé

kyĩ	vyí	né	shìtè	má-nshí?	à	vèwé	vèwé
c2.woman	c2.the	F2	arrange	c6-oil	for	them	them

‘The women will make oil for each other.’

b) nshè?tèshìsá zhú lí mètítì byì vèwé vèwé

nshè?tè-shì-sá	zhú	lí	mè-títì	byì	vèwé	vèwé
priest-the-c10	hear	P1	c6-story	about	3p	3p

‘The priests heard stories about each other.’

3a) dzöyn yì gà? á zhí? ηkà wén
 dzöyn yì gà? á è-zhí? ηkà wén
 John P2 speak for c5-name self 3s
 ‘John spoke for himself.’

b) ják é kílí lá jós kù è wén
 ják é kílí lá jós kù è wén
 Jack PRES know that George like PRES him
 ‘Jack knows that George likes him.’

In (2 and 3) the Body-Part anaphor is either unnatural or will derive a different meaning. If used in (3b) for example it will rather mean that ‘Jack knows that George likes himself’. This suggests that the rest of the strategies are used only when the Body-Part anaphor is not available, that is, when it loses the competition. This complementarity is viewed as the result of a competition of forms to represent an interpretation in a specific syntactic context, in keeping with the Competition-based theory (Safir, 2004).

The relationship between the anaphor and pronouns provides support for the Competition-based theory. For example where Body-Pronoun and Pronoun-Pronoun can be used in the same syntactic contexts they are given different interpretations, as expected within the theory. The body part strategy is possible if the interpretation is reflexive, but if the interpretation that is sought is reciprocal then only the pronoun-pronoun strategy is used as shown in (4).

4a) tèsó? tó vèwé vèwé kô yì lán
 tè-só? tó vèwé vèwé kô yì lán
 c13-law AM 3p 3p NEG P2 clear
 ‘Their instructions to each other were not clear.’

b) mèrí yì dzì? vwú lyúmá vyí à vèwé vèwé
 mèrí yì dzì? vwú lyúmá vyí à vèwé vèwé
 Mary P2 show c2.child c2.male c2.the to 3p 3p
 ‘Mary introduced the boys to each other.’

The pronoun-pronoun strategy is preferred for reciprocal interpretations, but it is

only licensed in a small number of environments. The body part strategy appears only where the duplicate pronoun strategy is not available (and this is in most places). Therefore, the strategies have contexts where only they can appear as shown in (5).

- 5a) dzöyn tèt nè vwú lyumá vyí shù tèt-wén tót vèt-wá(ná)
 dzöyn tèt nè vwú lyumá vyí shù tèt-wén tót vèt-wá(ná)
 John P3 do c2.child c2.male c2.the wash c13-body AM 3ps
 ‘John made the boys wash themselves.’
- b) dzöyn nè mèrí yì kù?só tà vèt-wé vót-wé
 dzöyn nè mèrí yì kù?só tà vèt-wé vót-wé
 John and Mary P2 praise only 3p 3p
 ‘John and Mary praised only each other.’

However, instances where Body-Pronoun and other pronouns overlap by allowing the same reflexive reading have been found in violation of the prediction of the theory that there should be no domains where both anaphors and pronouns overlap, in keeping with their exclusivity. This situation is illustrated in (6) where Body-Part and Self-Pronoun are shown to have the same interpretation.

- 6a1) dzöyn tèt dzì? ηgèη yì à è-wén ó wén
 dzöyn tèt dzì? ηgèη yì à è-wén ó wén
 John P3 show c9.house c9.the to c5-body AM 3s
 ‘John showed the house to himself.’
- 6a2) dzöyn tèt dzì? ηgèη yì à ηkà wén
 dzöyn tèt dzì? ηgèη yì à ηkà wén
 John P3 show c9.house c9.the PREP self 3s
 ‘John showed the house to himself.’
- 6b1) lámá vyí tèt wù kètó kyì à tèt-wén tót vèt-wé
 lámá vyí tèt wù è-fó vyí à tèt-wén tót vèt-wé
 men c2.the P3 keep c8-thing c8.the PREP c13-body AM 3p
 ‘The men kept the things for themselves.’
- 6b2) lámá vyí tèt wù kètó kyì à ηkà vèt-wé
 lámá vyí tèt wù è-fó vyí à ηkà vèt-wé

men c2.the P3 keep c8-thing c8.the PREP self 3p
'The men kept the things for themselves.'

This raises the question of why both strategies are coconstructed with the same antecedent whereas the theory assumes 'that a 'less anaphoric' form cannot be coconstructed with the antecedent if a 'more anaphoric' form is available (Burzio, 1989; Richards, 1997, Williams, 2003, and Safir, 2004, amongst others). The distribution of these morphemes points to a weakness in the Competition-based theory in that they can co-occur in some contexts with the same meaning, but they each have contexts where only they can appear.

The paper concludes that the one true anaphor that occurs in most contexts, and is capable of having both reflexive and reciprocal interpretations – the Body-Part anaphor can take many shapes which apparently compete with it.

Reference

- Burzio, Luigi. 1989. On the non-existence of disjoint reference principles. *Rivista di Grammatica Generativa*, 14.
- Richards, Norvin. 1997. Competition and disjoint reference. *Linguistic Inquiry* 28:178-186.
- Safir, Ken. (2004). *The Syntax of Anaphora*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Williams, Edwin. 2003. *Representation theory*. Cambridge: MIT Press.