

## SOME ASPECTS OF AKAN DEEP SYNTAX

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1.0. In this paper, I shall discuss a number of syntactic relations in Akan with a view to bringing out some of the differences between DEEP and SURFACE structure and showing the necessity to recognize these differences in making descriptive statements. The distinction between deep and surface structure, I believe, is a universal one and should provide students of West African languages interesting insights into the languages that they are studying.

1.1. Looking at descriptions of West African languages I think it is largely true to say that the relation between the two types of structure has hardly been clearly defined. This state of affairs can be attributed to the prevalent view that syntactic analysis is a set of operations whereby abstractions are made from transcribed texts in such a way that the units of abstraction themselves occur linearly in the same sequence as the segments from which the abstraction was made. It is very often argued that a syntactic element cannot exist because there is nothing to correspond to it in audible speech. Those who hold this view have sometimes been led to ask, 'But how do you know that certain kinds of syntactic relation exist when they are not found in objective data?', the assumption being, of course, that there is a one-to-one correspondence between speech utterances and deeper abstract relations. If we took this assumption seriously we would be required to accept the suggestion, for example, that the difference between phonological units and those of syntax was merely that of size. One need not go into the implications of such a view for linguistic descriptions at the moment, but they are certainly serious.<sup>1</sup>

1.2. I shall restrict myself to co-ordination and, to some extent, embedding to exemplify the relationship between the two types of structure. I have chosen co-ordination because it has been studied in detail by students of West African languages.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the implications of this view, see C. F. Hockett, *A MANUAL OF PHONOLOGY*, Bloomington, 1955, Linguistic elements and their relations, *LANGUAGE*, vol. xxxvii; F. R. Palmer, 'Grammatical elements and their phonetic exponents', *PROCEEDINGS OF THE NINTH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF LINGUISTICS*, ed. H. G. Lunt (Mouton, 1964), pp. 338-45; "Sequence" and "order", *GEORGETOWN MONOGRAPH SERIES ON LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS*, ed. C. I. J. M. Stuart, vol. xvii (1964), pp. 123-30.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, J. M. Stewart, 'Some restrictions on objects in Twi', *JOURNAL OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES*, vol. II (1963), pp. 145-9; G. Ansre, 'The Verbid—a caveat to "serial verbs"', *J.W.A.L.* III (1966), pp. 29-32. Ansre's paper is concerned to distinguish between real verbs which participate in serial or co-ordinated verbal constructions, and deceptively verb-like items (his verbids). He is right in pointing out that his 'verbids' are not verbs and that past students of West African languages have confused the two sets of homophonous items. His reason for making the distinction between verbs and 'verbids', however, is not a valid one. We cannot justifiably exclude items from a syntactic class (verbs, in this case) merely because they do not inflect. It is a fact that in a good many of the world's inflectional languages members of the same syntactic class may have different morphological properties. Ansre gives *wɔ* as the only example of the class of 'verbids' in Twi that he knows of. I, like him, would say *wɔ* is not a verb. But I would add that *wɔ* is not a verb not because it does not inflect (as he would argue) but because it lacks the syntactic properties common to all verbs, e.g. participation in serial constructions. If, as he points out, *wɔ* is the only item in

