

Modal Adverbs and Predicative Modal Adjectives in Akan

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1. Introduction

The paper explores and discusses the expression of epistemic modality and evidentiality by the use of adverbs and predicative adjectives in Akan discourse. (Akan is a Niger-Congo Kwa language, widely spoken by both natives and non-natives in Ghana, and part of Cote d'Ivoire). Although the paper gives a basic analysis of the topic, it also attempts to establish the scope of such constructions in utterances, and it points out how structures considered to be epistemic modal adverbs/adjectives or evidential adverbs/adjectives in English are rendered in Akan. Such structures of interest in the paper include forms exemplified below:

1. **Gyama** wo-be-gyina-a ha akye? (CORP)
Probably 2SG-come-stand-COMPL here keep long
Have you, probably been standing here for long?
2. ε-yε **ampa** sε ɔ-wɔ dan no mu. (SELF)
3SG-be true that 3SG-be room DET in
It is true that he is in the room.

These show the level of a speaker's attitude towards the truth value of the proposition given.

The morphology, syntax and semantics of adjectives, on one hand, have been discussed to some extent in Akan and other languages. Some of the in-depth-study in adjectives in the languages of the world include the seminal work of Dixon (1977, 1982, 1999 and 2004). These works have shed a lot of light on this word class. His extensive study made him conclude that at least one adjective class can be identified in all languages of the world. Based on these works and other studies in other languages, writers have made a lot of efforts to describe and discuss this word class in Akan. Specifically, works of interest to this study are those by some Akan writers mentioned below. Following Dixon (1982), Osam, (1999) classified Akan adjectives into semantic classes. Osam, (2003), again did a comparative study of derived adjectives in Akan and Ewe, also a Kwa language spoken in Ghana. Pokuaa, Osam, and Saah, (2005) Further did a preliminary investigation into the sequencing of adjectives in Akan, so as to establish the most acceptable way of stringing adjectives together in a noun phrase. Amfo, Boateng, and Otoo (2005), also conducted a comparative investigation in Akan, Ga and Ewe in order to explore an adjectival typology in Ghanaian languages, based on earlier studies in the individual

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1. Abbreviations used in this paper are explained below: DET = determiner; 1sg = 1st person singular; 3sg = 3rd person singular; NEG = negation; PERF = perfect aspect; COMPL = completive aspect; FUT = future tense; DEM = demonstrative; REDPL = reduplication; ? = ungrammatical sentence; - = morpheme boundary; CORP = Examples from author's corpus made up of examples from journals, books and long essays; SELF = examples created by author; OBS = examples from observation and questionnaire.

languages. Antwi-Danso (2010), also gave the morphological processes involved in adjectives and adverbs and showed their relationship to nouns and verbs. In all the aforementioned, however, not a single study or aspect of those studies have shown the expression of epistemic modality or evidentiality by the use of adjectives in the language.

Dixon (1999)'s semantic classification of English adjectives mentioned the class known as 'qualification'. This semantic type has not been studied in the language. The current study is therefore undertaken to show how adjectives can express modality and evidentiality in Akan.

Comparatively, adverbs in general, on the other hand, has not been studied extensively in the language, not even so with the other African languages. As noted in Saah and Agbedor (2004), a search through the index of volumes 1-30 of the JWAL (1964-2003) yielded only two results, both dealing with adverbs in Yoruba. This can attest to the scanty literature we may have as regards this word class. Saah and Agbedor (2004) contributed to the general knowledge of adverbs, which can help in a cross-linguistic study by comparing data from Akan and Ewe. In their paper, they classified adverbs semantically and showed the differences and similarities that exist between the two languages. It is in this paper, that some epistemic adverbs are mentioned. Also, Amfo (2005) discussed the use of 'anka' a conditional particle in Akan, and suggested that apart from its numerous functions, it should be analyzed as a modal marker.

Evidentiality as a category in linguistics, which expresses a speaker's source of information has not at all been studied in the language. All these issues mentioned, support the inevitable study and possible inclusion of epistemic modality and evidentiality into the grammar of Akan. I present these two parts of speech together because of their close relationship and also because of their seemingly inseparable or unclear nature in meaning when it comes to modality and evidentiality. They often overlap in so many instances. Because of this, it is argued that there is not much significant difference between the meaning these two word classes express as regards epistemic modality or evidentiality.

In studies of such nature, the type of data gaining much grounds is the use of corpus. This is because the evasive nature of the subject can easily elude the researcher when he is only dependent on native speaker's intuition for examples and analyses. It is however unfortunate in Akan, and in most African languages in general, that no corpus exist for use. Data was therefore created manually from Akan literature made up of prose, poetry and drama. It must be mentioned here that, languages that have established corpus, cover all aspects of study or discipline. This is partly because in such languages, almost all subjects in their field of study are written in their own languages. In Akan, and in all other Ghanaian languages, such materials do not exist because all subjects are written and studied in English, except local language textbooks, literature books and the Holy Bible/religious books. It therefore becomes difficult to get written materials spanning a wide range of study and or discipline. The majority of the structures identified were found in drama books, since they often occur in dialogues and conversations. In addition to Akan books, drama books written in English by Akan speakers, with Akan settings were used. Structures of interest were taken and transcribed based on the pragmatics and other background cues. Also for our data were examples cited in existing journals and books. Aside the manually created corpus from books, results from experiment, observation and questionnaire that was conducted on Akan speakers were included. This became necessary considering the somewhat skewed literature used. It also became important after considering comments received from colleagues at ACAL 43. A number of examples were also created from author's native speaker's intuition to supplement the current corpus.

The structure of the paper is given below: In section 2 epistemic modal adverbs and adjectives are discussed. Section 3 discusses these parts of speech and their interplay with evidentiality. The object of section 4 is how forms considered to be epistemic modal adverbs and adjectives, or evidentials in English are rendered in Akan. The conclusion is presented in section 5.

2. Epistemic Modal Adverbs and Adjectives

It has been observed in Nuyts (2001:29) that despite the numerous discussions modality has received in the literatures, one often encounters the tendency of some writers equating modality to the study of modal verbs only. He further pointed out that modality can be expressed by the use of modal

adverbs, predicatively used modal adjectives, mental state predicates and by modal auxiliaries. Other forms of expression are also possible in some languages, though. This section discusses expressions of epistemic modality by the use of Akan modal adverbs and adjectives.

Due to its evasive nature, there has been a lot of ideas and definitions of modality. Lyons (1977:452) in defining what modality is says that ‘it is the opinion or attitude of the speaker.’

Bybee (1985:165) explains that modality is a semantic – grammatical category expressed in English by the modal verbs. This explanation does not in any way mean that it is only through modal verbs that modality can be expressed.

As Givon 1993:74; 2001:92) indicates, epistemic modality conveys the speaker’s attitude toward the truth, certainty or probability of the proposition.

Epistemic modality has been explained in Halliday (1970:349), as the speaker’s assessment of probability and predictability. It is external to the content, being a part of the attitude taken up by the speaker: his attitude, in this case, towards his own speech role as ‘declarer’.

Epistemics express the speaker’s “degree of confidence about the truth of the proposition (based on the kind of information he/she has”. Cingue (1999:87)

In his monograph which offers an in depth empirical investigation into the semantic domain of epistemic modality, Nuyts (2001:xv) sees epistemic modality as a speaker’s evaluation of the likelihood of a state of affairs, as expressed in language. Nuyts (2001:21) again defines epistemic modality as “(the linguistic expression of) an evaluation of the chances that a certain hypothetical state of affairs under consideration (or some aspect of it) will occur, is occurring, or has occurred in a possible world which serves as the universe of interpretation for the evaluation process, and which, in the default case, is the real world (or rather, the evaluator’s interpretation of it).

To express the ideas enshrined in the various definitions, Akans use modal adverbs including those below:

Sesɛɛ (probably/perhaps)

- 3a. **Sesɛɛ** ɔ-kɔ ne Kwabena Dwomo no hɔ. (CORP)
perhaps 3sg-go his Kwabena Dwomo Det. there
Perhaps/probably he is gone to Kabena Dwomo.

Sesɛɛ as has been used here, is mainly classified as a modal adverb that expresses the notion of uncertainty. The speaker made this utterance because, she called the addressee but she did not hear of him and she did not know where he was for sure. But as a deduction and with the speaker’s experience, she had the obvious belief that if the addressee was not around at that particular moment, then it was possible that he might be with his friend Kwabena Dwomo. The speaker uses ‘sesɛɛ’ to show that she is not sure of or certain about this state of affairs. The form **sesɛɛ** also means *by this time*, which is an adverb of time. The same utterance above could be interpreted to mean ‘*By this time, he is gone to Kwabena Dwomo.*’ This meaning is viable if the addressee has a particular time of visiting Kwabena Domomo and that it was the same time the speaker called on him. **Sesɛɛ** is ambiguous between the epistemic adverb and adverb of time. Sometimes, the ambiguity is removed when the speaker adds *bere* to **sesɛɛ**. If the speaker wants to talk about the where about of the addressee at a particular time, she could simply say;

- b. **Sesɛɛ/saa bere yi** ɔ-kɔ ne Kwabena Dwomo no hɔ. (SELF)
By this time 3sg-go his Kwabena Dwomo Det there
By this time, he is gone to Kwabena Dwomo.

Gyama – perhaps/probably is another modal adverb that expresses epistemic modality. **Gyama** also has a similar meaning with **sesɛɛ**. It however does not express time. In the sentences below, the speakers are using **gyama** to show that they are not sure of their assertions. They qualify their assertion with this item to make it clear that it is a deduction.

- 4a. **Gyama** wo-be-gyina-a ha akyɛ? (CORP)
Probably 2SG-come-stand-COMPL here keep long
Have you, probably been standing here for long?
- b. **Gyama** wo-n-te Asante? (CORP)
probably 2sg-NEG-hear Asante
Don't you probably understand Asante?

The speakers in the sentences above are using their utterances to achieve two different goals. In the first place, the speaker speculates with the state of affairs in the utterance, and secondly, he uses the utterance to question the addressee to ascertain the fact in his speculation. As noted in Nuyts (2001:57), not many epistemic modal adverbs can be used in questioning. This phenomenon is also true in Akan. According to our current data, this is the only epistemic modal adverb that can be used in questioning. The sentences below do not contain questioning.

- c. **Gyama** waba. (CORP)
Probably 3sg-PERF-come
He has probably come.

Some unusual observations made during field trips include a few instances where **gyama** was put in combination with other modal adverbs.

- d. **Gyama ebia** o-n-ni hɔ. (OBS)
probably maybe 3sg-NEG-be there
?probably maybe he is not there.
- e. **Gyama** ne maame kɔ afuom **gyama**. (OBS)
perhaps his mother go farm probably
?Perhaps his mother is probably not there.

These utterances sound unusual because normally, since only one form is enough to express whichever idea the speaker wishes to express, the use of two forms makes it clumsy and the other meaning in the second form becomes redundant. Putting **gyama** at the end of a sentence is also not acceptable because except for 'ampa' *truly* which can occur both sentence initial and sentence final position, all the other modal adverbs occur sentence initial position only.

- f. **Seseɛ de ebia** o-n-ni hɔ. (OBS)
by this time maybe 3sg-NEG-be there
He may not be there by this time.

(f) is acceptable because **seseɛ** in this sentence is an adverb of time. It can therefore be combined with any of the modal adverbs.

Another modal adverb used in Akan is *Ebia* (maybe). This also, as the others exemplified above, show that the speaker is not certain about his/her claim. He merely speculates with this adverb.

5. **Ebia** yɛ-bɛ-to no. (CORP)
maybe 1pl-FUT-meet him
We may meet him.

The modal adverbs discussed here do not have adjectival counterparts. Because of this phenomenon, there are more modal adverb forms than modal adjective forms identified in these two word classes. This phenomenon also support an issue pointed out in Nuyts (2001:56), that adverbs are used more frequently than adjectives when it comes to epistemic modality.

Very few forms have been identified as epistemic modal adjectives, according to our current data. They are exemplified below;

- 6a. $\text{E-y}\epsilon$ **nokware** sɛ ɔ-boroo abofra no. (CORP)
 it be **true** that 3sg-beat-COMPL child DET
 It is true that he beat the child.
- b. $\text{E-y}\epsilon$ **ampa** sɛ wɔn nyinaa a-ba. (SELF)
 it-be true that they all PERF-come
 It is true that all of them have come.
- c. Wɔn nyinaa a-ba **ampa**. (CORP)
 they all PERF-come true
 It is true that they have all come.
 Truly they have come.

Both **Nokware** and **ampa** mean *true*. When a speaker uses any of them, it shows a strong commitment to the truth value of the proposition. These two forms can be used as epistemic modal adverbs as well, as in (6c). Their meanings in both environments are similar, if not the same.

3. Expression of Evidentiality by Adverbs and Adjectives

Aikhenvald (2003: 1) explains; “Evidentiality proper is understood as stating the existence of a source of evidence for some information; that included stating that there is some evidence, and also specifying what type of evidence there is.”

In trying to differentiate between epistemic and evidentiality, de Haan (2005:380) points out that; “Evidentiality *asserts* the evidence, while epistemic modality *evaluates* the evidence.”

Aikhenvald (2004:7) also supports the distinctions between evidentiality and epistemic modality. He indicates that; “Evidentiality is a category in its own right, and not a subcategory of any modality.”

Akans value sources of information to judge the authenticity or otherwise of utterances. They therefore, often use evidentials to make claims or speculations. One adjective that is used as complement taking predicate to express evidentiality is **pefee** (clear, evident).

- 7a. $\text{E-y}\epsilon$ **pefee** sɛ ɔno na o-dii kan. (OBS)
 It-be clear that he that 3sg-COMPL-be first
 It is *clear* that he was first.

This expression is often used when every doubt about a situation has been cleared by existing evidence. The use of this item does not express epistemic modality. It only serves as the basis or source of information to make the complement part of the clause reasonable and more authentic. The inherent meaning of ‘pefee’ makes it stronger to make bold claims or assertions in an issue, rather than just speculating.

It is therefore not often possible to say:

- b. $\text{E-y}\epsilon$ **pefee** sɛ **ebia** ɔno na o-dii kan. (SELF)
 It-be clear that maybe he that 3sg-COMPL-be first
 It is clear that maybe he was first.

4. Some English Epistemic and Evidential Adverbs and Adjectives and how they are Realized in Akan

One of the difficult issues encountered when collecting data on forms believed to be epistemic modal adverb or adjective on one hand and evidential adverb and adjective on the other was that there

were not many forms found in Akan. There was a vast difference between the amount of forms in English and those in Akan. The task then was to find out how Akans express those ideas found in English. Series of activities, including translation of utterances containing those forms, were carried out. Analysis of the activities revealed that although most structures exist in English but not in Akan, Akan uses different word class to express the same idea. Whereas English and other languages like Dutch, French etc, use adjectives and adverbs to express the notion under consideration, Akan turns to use verbs to express the same notion. Further analysis of these forms suggested that these English adjectives and or adverbs are derived from verbs. Akans, therefore, use the original form of the word to talk about the same issue. Some of the English examples include;

8a. It **seems** he is in his office. (CORP)

Wo-**hwɛ** a ɔwɔ ne ɔfese.

2sg-look (when) 3sg-be his office

When you look, he is in his office (literal translation)

b. I am **sure** the government built this bridge. (CORP)

Mi-**gye di** sɛ aban na ɔ-yɛɛ twene yi.

1sg-believe that government that 3sg-do bridge DEM

I believe that the government built this bridge. (literal translation)

c. It is **possible** that they have run out of fuel. (CORP)

Ebetumi aba sɛ wɔn fango asa.

It-FUT-can come that they fuel finished

It can be that their fuel is finished. (literal translation)

The adverb counterparts of the same sentences were also translated with the same basic meaning of the item in question;

d. They have **possibly** run out of fuel. (CORP)

Ebetumi aba sɛ wɔn fuel asa.

It-FUT-can come that they fuel finished

It can be that their fuel is finished. (literal translation)

To ascertain whether this process is comparable with any other Ghanaian language, the same sentences were translated into Ga, also a Kwa language in Ghana. The results were not different from those in Akan. In Ga the verb counterparts of those adverbs and adjectives were used. For example;

e. It is **possible** that they have run out of fuel. (CORP)

Ebanyɛ eba mli akɛ amɛ fuel eta. (Ga)

It-FUT-can come in that their fuel finish

One important and or most frequently used phrase in Akan, Ga and some of the Ghanaian languages to indicate evidence of hearsay is 'wose', 'yese'(Akan) akɛɛ (Ga). It is alleged that/allegedly. Speaker use this expression to back their claims or speculations. It is always based on what the speaker has heard from which ever source. For example;

9a. It is alleged that she poisoned her rival. (CORP)

Allegedly, she poisoned her rival. (SELF)

Wose ɔde adubɔne kum-m ne kora.

3pl-say 3sg-use poison kill-COMPL her rival

They say she poisoned her rival. (literal translation)

- b. It is **alleged** that she **probably** poisoned her rival. (SELF)
Allegedly she **probably** poisoned her rival.
Wose ebia ɔde aduru kum ne kora no.

It is alleged/allegedly are adverb and adjectives in English. However, the translation in Akan has the form of a verb and not an adverb or an adjective.

- c. It is **evident** that he stole the things. (OBS)
Evidently, he stole the things.
Biribiara kyere sɛ ɔno na o-wia-a ade no.
 everything show that 3SG that 3SG-steal-COMPL thing DET

Other forms like ‘it is presumed’, ‘it is apparent’ etc, also strives on the same phenomenon, and they are discussed in subsequent papers.

5. Conclusion

This paper has discussed the use of adverbs and adjectives to express epistemic modality and evidentiality in Akan. Some basic epistemic adverbs do not have adjectival counterparts in the language. There are therefore more modal adverbs than modal adjectives. Modal adjectives identified in this paper have adverb counterparts. Only one evidential adjective was found according to our present data. The same form is also used as an evidential adverb.

The notion of some English epistemic adverbs or adjectives on one hand and evidential adverbs or adjectives on the other, have been found to be expressed in Akan by verbs. These forms have been identified as those whose basic morphemes are verbs. Akans use the original words to express the said notion.

Comparatively, the semantics of Akan modal adverbs and adjectives and or evidential adverbs and adjectives in a discourse do not have much significant difference. Any of the two forms are used in similar situations to achieve similar effects.

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