

# snippets

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# On unexpected exceptions to prosodic vacuity and verbal resumption in Akan

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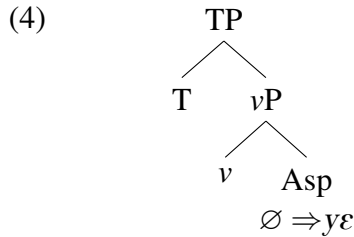
A topic that has seen a sustained debate in the Akan (Niger-Congo) morphosyntax literature for, at least, the past fifty years (see Boadi 1966; Schachter and Fromkin 1968; Essilfie 1986; Dolphyne 1988; Saah 1994) is: What constitutes the right analysis of the *yɛ* that is generally found in simple affirmative sentences in past tense involving intransitive verbs (1a), or transitive verbs with an omitted object (2b)? Data such as (1a) and (2a, b) led some earlier proposals (e.g., Ofori 2006) to assume one form of linear account or another.

- (1) a. kofi **sa-a** \***(yɛ)**  
 Kofi dance-PST YE  
 ‘Kofi danced.’ (cf. Kandybowicz 2015:244, ex. 1)
- b. kofi **á-n-sá** (\***yɛ**)  
 Kofi PERF-NEG-dance YE  
 ‘Kofi didn’t dance.’ (cf. Kandybowicz 2015:245, ex. 4)
- (2) a. kofi **bɔ-ɔ** Ama (\***yɛ**)  
 Kofi hit-PST Ama YE  
 ‘Kofi hit Ama.’ (cf. Kandybowicz 2015:244, ex. 5)
- b. kofi **bɔ-ɔ** \***(yɛ)**  
 Kofi hit-PST YE  
 ‘Kofi hit it.’

However, Kandybowicz (2015) argues that, for the Asante Twi dialect, the occurrence of *yɛ* may be sensitive to hierarchical structure, proposing the structure in (3) for Akan. To account for the distribution of *yɛ*, he treats *yɛ* in contexts like (1a) and (2b) as a case of default verbal resumption meant to satisfy a PF constraint that bans prosodic vacuity in the spell-out domain of the *v*-phase within a phase-based approach (Chomsky 2001).

- (3) [TP T [<sub>VP</sub> v [<sub>AspP</sub> Asp [<sub>NegP</sub> Neg [<sub>VP</sub> V DP]]]]] (cf. Kandybowicz 2015:257, ex. 24)

On this account, assuming there is V-to-T movement, *yɛ* is inserted only when AspP, the complement of *v*, is empty (4). The implication of this architecture is that, in (1a), V has raised to T, leaving behind a vacant AspP which feeds *yɛ* insertion, and in (2b), V raises to T, and a null object in AspP gives rise to a vacuous AspP at Spell-Out, thus feeding insertion.



Conversely, in (1b), the presence of Neg/Asp blocks V from raising out of VP, yielding a filled AspP at PF, and thus blocking *yɛ* insertion, while in (2a), even though V raises to T, AspP is not vacant at PF due to the presence of the overt object *Ama*, and hence *yɛ* insertion is blocked. One motivation for Kandybowicz’s proposal is the observation that in certain contexts *yɛ* is obligatory with post-verbal phonological material, but these are contexts where the post-verbal material can be independently argued to occupy a structurally higher position. This was shown to be true for, at least, adverbs like *ámpá* ‘truly’, as in (5).

- (5) kofi sa-a            **\*(yɛ) ámpá**  
 Kofi dance-PST    YE true  
 ‘Kofi truly danced.’ (cf. Kandybowicz 2015:261)

Kandybowicz’s account appeared to have put to rest the matter of *yɛ*. His analysis supports the intuition by speakers that *yɛ* in transitive (6a, b) is infelicitous, the crucial factor here being the presence of Neg/Asp in the clause relative to the assumed structural architecture in (3).

- (6) a. kofi **á-n-hú**            **ámá \*(yɛ)**  
 Kofi PERF-NEG-see Ama    YE  
 ‘Kofi didn’t see Ama.’  
 b. kofi **á-n-hú**            né    maamé né    né    núá    kétéwáá nó **\*(yɛ)**  
 Kofi PERF-NEG-see POSS mum    CONJ POSS sibling small    DEF    YE  
 ‘Kofi didn’t see his mum and his younger sibling.’

However, we point to previously unnoticed data involving Neg+Past morphology that suggest that this may, in fact, not be the case. For certain speakers of Asante Twi, the generalization is that *yɛ* is required in both intransitive and transitive constructions, as illustrated in (7) and (8).

- (7) a. kofi **ń-hu-u**            **\*(yɛ)**  
 Kofi NEG-see-PST    YE  
 ‘Kofi hasn’t seen it.’  
 b. kofi **ń-su-u**            **\*(yɛ)**  
 Kofi NEG-cry-PST    YE  
 ‘Kofi hasn’t cried.’  
 (8) a. kofi **ń-hu-u**            **ámá \*(yɛ)**  
 Kofi NEG-see-PST Ama    YE  
 ‘Kofi hasn’t seen Ama.’  
 b. kofi **ń-hu-u**            né    maamé né    né    núá    kétéwáá nó **\*(yɛ)**  
 Kofi NEG-see-PST POSS mum    CONJ POSS sibling small    DEF    YE  
 ‘Kofi hasn’t seen his mum and his younger sibling.’

It is not obvious how Kandybowicz's (2015) analysis applies to the full observed data pattern in (7) and (8). The fact that they all require *yɛ* is unexpected, as the complement of Asp should be filled – either because Neg blocks V-raising in (7)/(8), and/or because of the overt direct objects in (8). Now, Kandybowicz (2015:249, n. 10) does appear to suggest that in such Neg+Past examples, the verb can exceptionally raise through Neg to T; this would make (7a) and (7b) parallel to (2b) and (1a) respectively. However, this would still leave unexplained the examples in (8), where the complement of transitive V is pronounced, and which contrast with (2a)/(6). In fact, data involving Neg+Past receive almost no attention in Kandybowicz's work, the footnote cited above being a notable exception. Thus, we believe it is plausible that the pattern displayed in (7) and (8) could have been missed.

Our general impression is that the variety reported in (7)/(8) is common among younger speakers (including an author of this snippet) in urban areas, such as the national capital, Accra. Even though a more thorough socio-linguistic survey may be needed to ascertain this, that there may be micro-variation even within Asante Twi is not surprising, given that it is the most widely used indigenous Ghanaian language. It also is worth mentioning here that Asante Twi has a well-known puzzle of a reversed mismatch between the morphology and the semantics of tense/aspect in the context of negation (see, e.g., Stump 2009 and Paster 2010). Specifically, while Neg+Perfective morphological markings yield a negative past interpretation in the language, as in (1b) and (6), Neg+Past morphological markings yield a negative perfective interpretation, as in (7) and (8).

In sum, supposing that the *yɛ* in these contexts is the same as the one described in earlier literature, then Kandybowicz's characterization may not be entirely accurate. It has also been suggested (by an anonymous reviewer) that, given the known semantic broadness of the morphological object *yɛ* in the language, its instantiation in (7) and (8) may, in fact, be unrelated to the one in (1), (2), and (5). Independent of the final analysis, it is evident that additional research is required to better comprehend clause-final *yɛ* in Akan.

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