Competing Babanki anaphors: Theoretical implications

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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, Yì, 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) dʒọ̀yn yi kɔŋ à-wén ɔ wén
   dʒọ̀yn yi kɔŋ à-wén ɔ wén
   John P2 admire c5-body AM 3s
   ‘John admired himself.’

b) vəwó ná gháʔá təwéntó vəwó(ńó)
   vəwó ná gháʔá tə-wén tó vəwó(ńó)
   3P always hold c13-body AM them
   ‘They always criticize each other/They always criticize themselves.’

2a) kyí vyí né shitɔ mâŋshíʔ ə vəwó vəwó
   kyí vyí né shitɔ mâ-ñshíʔ ə vəwó vəwó
   c2.woman c2.the F2 arrange c6-oil for them them
   ‘The women will make oil for each other.’

b) nshàʔtèshísó zhú lí mə-títi byi vəwé vəwó
   nshàʔtè-shí-só zhú lí mə-títi byi vəwó vəwó
   priest-the-c10 hear P1 c6-story about 3p 3p
   ‘The priests heard stories about each other.’
3a) dʒɔyn yì gàʔ á zhíʔ ɲkà wén
dʒɔyn yì gàʔ á ə-zA zhíʔ ɲkà wén
John P2 speak for c5-name self 3s
‘John spoke for himself.’

b) ják ə kílf lá jós kù ə wén
ják ə kílf lá jós kù ə 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) təsʔ? tó vəwó vəwó kò yì lán
tə-sʔ? tó vəwó vəwó kò yì lán
c13-law AM 3p 3p NEG P2 clear
‘Their instructions to each other were not clear.’

b) mèrí yì dʒiʔ vvú lyúmó vyí à vəwó vəwó
mèrí yì dʒiʔ vvú lyúmó vyí à vəwó vəwó
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)  dʒǒyn tè nè vvú lyumó vỳ́ shù tòwèntó vòwò(nò)
   dʒǒyn tè nè vvú lyumó vỳ́ shù tè-wén tó vòwò(nò)
   John P3 do c2.child c2.male c2.wash c13-body AM 3ps
   ‘John made the boys wash themselves.’

b)  dʒǒyn nè mèrí yi kùsó tà vòwè vòwè
   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)  dʒǒyn tè dʒìʔ ngàŋ yì à òwèn ó wèn
   dʒǒyn tè dʒìʔ ngàŋ yì à ò-wén ó wèn
   John P3 show c9.house c9.the to c5-body AM 3s
   ‘John showed the house to himself.’

6a2)  dʒǒyn tè dʒìʔ ngàŋ yì à ŋà wèn
   dʒǒyn tè dʒìʔ ngàŋ yì à ŋà wèn
   John P3 show c9.house c9.the PREP self 3s
   ‘John showed the house to himself.’

6b1)  lùmó vỳ́ tò wù kàfó kyì à tòwèntó vòwè
   lùmó vỳ́ tò wù ò-fò vỳ́ à tè-wén tó vòwè
   men c2.the P3 keep c8-thing c8.the PREP c13-body AM 3p
   ‘The men kept the things for themselves.’

6b2)  lùmó vỳ́ tò wù kàfó kyì à ŋà vòwè
   lùmó vỳ́ tò wù ò-fò vỳ́ à ŋà vòwè
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 coconstrued with the same antecedent whereas the theory assumes ‘that a ‘less anaphoric’ form cannot be coconstrued 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