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Review of: Conversational Strategies in Akan: Prosodic Features and Discourse Categories

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accusative, and active languages are distinguished from each other.

In P's terminology, 'accusative' designates those languages that are more commonly classified elsewhere as *nominative* languages. Invoking the principle of morphosyntactic expression of thematic information and its ergative parameter, P argues that 'the canonical case of the agent is the ergative, that of the patient is the nominative/absolutive. . . . In canonical accusative constructions the agent is in the nominative and the patient in the accusative' (238). Accordingly, if we accept the label 'ergative' for one group of languages, then nominative languages should properly be called 'accusative' since 'the nominative and the absolutive, on the one hand, and the accusative and the ergative, on the other hand, have the same morphosyntactic function within their respective case systems' (13).

As for active languages, P accepts this term from Klimov for those languages that exhibit split intransitivity (Georgij A. Klimov. 'On the character of active languages', *Linguistics* 131.11–23, 1974) although she notes that properties often imputed to active languages in general can be ascribed, for the most part, only to 'active languages on the American continent' (112).

Among P's more interesting findings is that antipassive transformation is not associated simply with derived intransitivity. Although the primary function of the passive is patient promotion, and the primary function of the antipassive is AGENT promotion, P persuasively argues that agent promotion 'cannot be implemented in accusative languages' (248) and that the passive and the antipassive construction are therefore not the 'mirror image' of each other that one often assumes (251).

P also challenges the commonly accepted notion of split ergativity. Languages like the ergative Indic languages (Hindi, Punjabi), Basque, and various languages of the Caucasus (e.g. Georgian) are commonly considered to exhibit a 'tense-aspect split in their case system' (202), i.e. ergative constructions with respect to some verbal aspects and/or tenses and accusative constructions with respect to others. Relying largely on Icelandic data, P concludes that 'multi-factor rules determined by cases and structural relations occur in both ergative and accusative languages' and that 'syntactic split behavior' cannot justifiably be viewed, therefore, as a feature of ergative languages alone (209).

As with many ambitious typological studies that focus on the establishment of linguistic universals, it is not always clear that the author has accurately grasped certain grammatical phenomena in the wide range of languages that are cited. In the present work it is somewhat surprising to read, for example, that '[t]he coding of a Proto-Patient by an oblique function . . . is associated with . . . imperfective meanings referring to an incomplete effect on the patient' and that '[t]his semantic change is paralleled by the nominative-genitive alternation in Russian and Lithuanian' (246). Nevertheless, it does appear that, on the whole, P has a command of the linguistic facts that is adequate for her to provide us here with an engaging and enlightening discussion of cases and thematic roles. [GARY H. TOOPS, *Wichita State University.*]

Conversational strategies in Akan: Prosodic features and discourse categories. By SAMUEL GYASI OBENG. (Wortkunst und Dokumentartekste in afrikanische Sprachen 7.) Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 1999. Pp. xv, 174.

The existing literature on conversation analysis (CA) has largely ignored the prosodic features that characterize spontaneous dialog, focusing instead on 'spoken prose, "invented" discourse, or written text' (2). In addition, most previous studies of CA deal with English or other major Indo-European languages, with pioneering studies of Thai (Michael Moerman. *Talking culture: ethnography and conversation analysis*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1988) and Swahili (Reinhard Klein-Ahrendt. *Gesprächsstrategien im Swahili. Linguistisch-pragmatische Analysen von Dialogtexten einer Stegreiftheatergruppe*, Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 1992) standing out as the odd exception. Samuel Obeng's monograph is therefore doubly welcome since it explores the conversational prosody of Akan (Twi), a register tone language of the Kwa subgroup of Niger-Congo spoken in the southern half of Ghana and adjacent parts of Côte d'Ivoire.

O's main aim is to investigate the pragmatics of prosody in natural speech interactions between native speakers. O is careful to emphasize that the analytical claims he is making are based on objective, empirical data rather than on his own subjective native-speaker intuitions (2). The book's database consists of a series of unscripted dialogs, recorded on cassette tape during the previous two decades for various other purposes and only later selected for use in the present study. All of the conversations examined represent the Asante dialect of Akan.

The introduction (1–24) provides a brief overview of the most important previous work in the field of CA and also gives rudimentary sociolinguistic data on Akan. A map of Ghana showing the language's dialectal distribution appears before the table of contents. Some basic information on the language's phonological system of tones and vowel harmony might have made another welcome addition since many of the conversational prosodic traits discussed in the body of the book interact with lexical prosodic fea-

tures in nontrivial ways. This omission is partly recti-
fied by the fact that the dialogs under analysis, while
presented in the Latin-based alphabet used to write
Asante, contain additional diacritics showing lexical
tonal distinctions.

Individual chapters discuss the prosodic tech-
niques and strategies Akan speakers use to mark turn
taking (25–53), turn-competitive overlap (54–76),
turn noncompetitive overlap (77–94), repair
(95–126), and backchannel sequences (127–50). O
is especially concerned with juncture, segment dura-
tion, and tempo. He uses a fine-grained system of
descriptive terms borrowed in part from musical no-
tation to capture specific distinctions in length of
pauses or the speed at which a message is delivered.
The full inventory of these prosodic conversational
notations and terminology appears in the preface
(xiii–xv). For example, tempo gradations range from
'allegrissimo' (very fast) to 'lentissimo' (very slow)
and include 'accelerando' (getting faster) and 'rallen-
tando' (getting slower). The phonetic and pragmatic
nature of Akan verbal gestures analogous to English
'um' 'mhm', etc., are also described. O provides
analysis of how all of these features systematically
affect the intended exchange of information.

This study is valuable both for the typological per-
spective its subject language brings to the study of
CA, as well as for its innovative examination of a
maximally wide range of prosodic features used in
natural conversation—features that have all too often
been ignored even in more intensively studied lan-
guages. [EDWARD J. VAJDA, *Western Washington
University*.]

A paradigmatic grammar of Gĩkũyũ.
By JOHN M. MUGANE. (Stanford mono-
graphs in African languages.) Stanford,
CA: CSLI Publications, 1997. Pp. x,
180.

It should not be thought that a volume of this size
attempts an exhaustive analysis of Gikuyu grammar.
However, it is admirable for the amount of new infor-
mation it does contain, along with its adequate sketch
of the general features of Gikuyu, a major Kenyan
Bantu language. A misstatement about the book is
quickly passed by in the introduction, where Mugane,
apparently daunted by some of the older extensive
studies that preceded his work, states as his motiva-
tion 'it is undisputed that language does change over
time and the necessity for new grammars is always
of paramount importance' (1–2). His book has noth-
ing to do with any changes that have taken place in
Gikuyu between the time of those older studies and
his work. Rather, a more apt statement would have
been about changes that have taken place in the de-
scription of languages, especially with regard to par-

ticular features, e.g. syntax. Thus, Ch. 9, 'The
sentence' (141–60), includes a number of observa-
tions on permissible and impermissible word orders
that were not treated in those earlier works. Similarly,
Ch. 6, 'Synthetic compounds' (71–92), treats the dif-
ferential syntactic aspects of two Gikuyu word for-
mation processes in a much more thorough way than
they had been treated previously.

The general organization of the book's ten chap-
ters is fairly traditional, starting with a sketch of pho-
nology and then on to the word, with the greatest
amount of attention paid to the noun and noun phrase,
Chs. 3–7 (22–92). M is quite innovative in discus-
sing the agglutinative verb extensions of Gikuyu in
the context of nominalizations, Ch. 5, 'Deverbal
noun extensions' (59–71). In that context he takes
advantage of the capacity of verbs to be nominalized
to discuss the complexities of the verb extensional
system before he discusses the morphology of verbs
in the context of verb phrases. This allows him to
address the ordering of extensions within the verb
complex without treating the syntactic consequences
of those extensions for nominal arguments allowed
by those extensions. By discussing verb extensions
in this context he remains true to his title of PARADIG-
MATIC grammar and to his major interest in nominal
morphology. Verb structure is then treated almost
exclusively in terms of tense and aspect, Ch. 8 'Tense
and aspect' (118–41).

Each of the grammatical chapters (2–9) builds up
a general problem, analyzes it extensively, and ends
with a summary. The final chapter (161–74) deviates
to introduce some aspects of Gikuyu culture by list-
ing the vocabulary for a number of cultural domains,
e.g. rites of passage, followed by some brief discus-
sion and summary conclusions about the importance
of viewing a language in its cultural context. The
book concludes with a list of references and then an
index of grammatical terms.

There are occasional weird editing errors for some
morpheme glosses, e.g. *ciũngũyũ* is glossed as
'9school' in two successive examples but translated
correctly as 'fish' (152), where the '9' refers to the
noun class of 'school' (but not 'fish'). Such errors
seem to be characteristic of the series in which this
volume appears but are more the exception than the
rule and are generally detectable and correctable by
the alert reader. Less easily recovered is that the noun
class of *ciũngũyũ* is '8', indicating that it is the plural,
not the singular, form of 'fish'.

M's book is a welcome addition to studies of Gi-
kuyu grammar. It does not replace the earlier compre-
hensive studies but supplements them. In many
instances where M shows particular interest in mor-
phological or syntactic details, his book goes well
beyond the earlier more comprehensive studies.
[BENJI WALD, *University of California, Los Angeles*.]