

Definite indefinite stacking in Akan¹

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1 Introduction

- In many languages, the definite and the indefinite determiner cannot co-occur

(1) *A **the** / **the a** boy who came here is my favorite.

- Different accounts for the co-occurrence restriction:

Syntactic: the determiners are both instantiations of the same head and are therefore in complementary distribution.

Semantic/Pragmatic: principles such as Heim's (1983) *Novelty/Familiarity Condition* and *Maximize Presupposition* (Heim, 1991) also rule out the co-occurrence of these determiners

Phonological (Lyons, 1999)

Puzzle:

- Akan allows definite indefinite stacking in either order; the definite determiner may precede the indefinite determiner *NP bí nó* (2) or the indefinite determiner precede the definite determiner *NP nó bí* (3).²

(2) Papa **bí** **nó** bisa me me noma.
man INDEF DEF ask-PST 1SG 1SG.POSS number
After the party, that certain man asked me for my number. (Bombi *et al.*, 2019,

187)

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²(Kwa, Niger Congo —spoken in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire)

- (3) Nkorofɔ **nó** **bí** ka-a sɛ ɔ-re-m-pene.
 people DEF INDEF say-PST COMP 3PL-PROG-NEG-agree
 ‘Some of the people said they will not agree.’ (Amfo, 2010, 1796)

Goal of this talk

Present the meaning contributions of each determiner and how they meanings combine when the determiners co-occur. Sketch a preliminary compositional analysis of the co-occurrence facts.

2 Outline of Talk

- Introduction
- The nominal definite determiner
 - Uses of the nominal definite determiner
 - Analysis
 - * I argue that *nó* encodes a familiarity and non-uniqueness presupposition
 - * I propose that that *nó* does not lexicalize *iota*
- The indefinite determiner
 - *Bí* as a specific indefinite
 - Analysis
 - * Skolemized choice function with a skolem world variable
 - The ignorance inference of *bí*
- The co-occurrence of the definite and indefinite determiners
 - *Bí nó*— the definite interpretation
 - *Nó bí*— the partitive interpretation

3 The Akan definite determiner

- Akan has a particle *nó* that is assumed to be the translational equivalent of the English definite determiner *no*. The English sentence (4) is translated in Akan as (5).

(4) The man came here.

(5) Papa **nó** ba-a ha.
 man DEF come-PST here
 ‘The man came here.’

- Analyses of *nó* can be divided into the *uniqueness-analysis* (Amfo, 2006, 2007; Fretheim & Amfo, 2008; Amfo, 2010; Bombi, 2018) and the *familiarity-analysis* (Arkoh & Matthewson, 2013)

The analysis I will present in this talk falls under the **familiarity analysis** —*nó* encodes the presupposition that there is a discourse referent in the context with similar descriptive content.

3.1 Uses of the *nó*

Classification of uses of definite descriptions (Hawkins, 1978, 2015). Hawkins (1991) identifies four uses of definite determiners: *anaphoric*, *immediate situation*, *larger situation*, and *associative anaphora uses*.

- Anaphoric use: depends on a linguistic antecedent

(6) Ama hu-u ɔkyerekyereni bi ne sogyani bi. ɔ-kyea-a
 Ama see-PST teacher INDEF CONJ soldier INDEF 3SG.SUBJ-greet-PST
 sogyani **nó**.
 teacher DEF
 ‘Ama saw a teacher and a soldier. He greeted the soldier.’³

- Immediate situation use: the antecedent is in the utterance situation, visible or not visible.

³This is a variation of the examples in Arkoh & Matthewson (2013).

- (7) Context: A man and a woman are arguing in the street. Ama and Kwame are sitting in front of their house where they can see but not hear them. Kofi walks in and sees them staring. He says oh...

Papa **nó** de maame **nó** ka.
 man DEF owe woman DEF debt
 ‘The man owes the woman money.’

- Larger situation use: the antecedent is part of the shared experiences of the discourse participants, the referent may or may not be in the immediate discourse context.

– Country, community: we can talk about the president (of Ghana), a chief of a town,

- (8) The president(of the US) will be here.

- (9) ɔmanpanin (#**nó**) be blame obi.
 president DEF FUT. blame someone
 ‘The president will blame someone.’⁴

– Global: *sun* and *moon*

In English the definite determiner is obligatory (10)

- (10) The sun is shining.

The definite determiner is optional in (11); optionality cannot be attributed to salient/non-salient context distinction.

- (11) Context: Afia is sitting on a bus, when a woman she doesn’t know sits down beside her. The woman says:

Ewia (**nó**) re-bɔ ɛnɛ.
 sun DEF PROG-hit today
 ‘The sun is shining today.’

(Bombi, 2018, 150)

⁴ The use of the definite determiner here has an emotive reading similar to what is described by Lakoff (1974) for English demonstratives

True optionality?

Are bare nouns and definite determiners equally accepted in all contexts? **No.**

(12) Ewia (**nó**) ye nsoroma.
sun DEF COP star
'The sun is a star.'

- a. Context 1: The beginning of a documentary on the solar system
⇒ **nó** = *infelicitous* bare = *felicitous*
- b. Context 2: A parent is showing a child a book on the solar system. They open a page with a picture of the sun... ⇒ **nó** = *felicitous* bare = *felicitous*

(13) Context: There is a children show on TV about colors. They have a picture of the sun but it is painted green. A parent points to the sun on the TV and says...

Ewia (**nó**) ye green.
sun DEF COP green
'The sun is green.'

- a. **nó** ⇒ True! Interpreted as a statement about the sun in the book.
- b. Bare ⇒ False! Interpreted as a statement about the sun in the world.

If a context forces the referent of *sun* to be the unique sun in our solar system, the bare noun is used.⁵

3.2 The semantics of **nó**

Main Claim: *nó* is nominal modifier (type $\langle\langle e, st \rangle\langle e, st \rangle\rangle$), which encodes a familiarity and non-uniqueness presupposition.

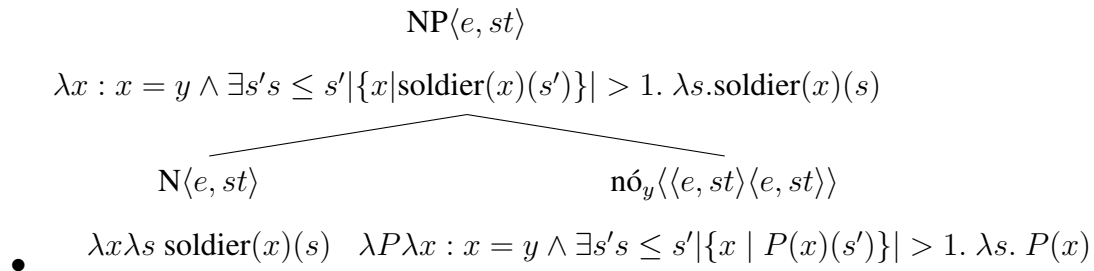
- Familiarity presupposition captures the anaphoric and immediate situation uses of *nó*

⁵For (11) it is possible that speakers differentiate between the unique sun in the solar system and the sun of today vs the sun of tomorrow

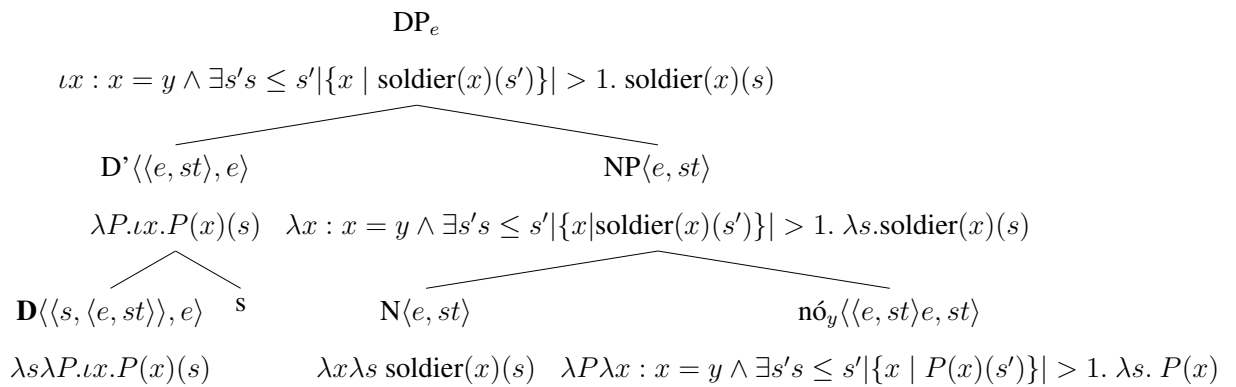
- Non-uniqueness presupposition captures the incompatibility with inherently unique nouns

$[[\text{nó}_y]] = \lambda P \lambda x : x = y \wedge \exists s' s \leq s' |\{x \mid P(x)(s')\}| > 1. \lambda s. P(x)$

Presuppose that there is x is familiar and that the cardinality of P in an extended situation (s') is not greater than 1



- *Nó* does not encode *iota*; *iota* is introduced by a covert D head. Covert D introduces a situation pronoun, which is set to the default situation



• **Familiarity:**

– definite descriptions denote entities that are “known to discourse participants (Christophersen, 1939)

* Anaphoric: familiar definites are licensed by linguistic antecedents (Schwarz, 2009, 2013)

- * Weak familiarity: familiar definites are licensed by linguistic antecedents, perceptually accessible antecedents and antecedents made available by sensory or cultural experience (Roberts, 2003, 2010).

Non-uniqueness:

- the demonstrative may not be used when its referent is known to be the only entity which fits its descriptive content in the domain of reference. (Robinson, 2005, 50)

Summary of the properties of *nó*

- *Nó* is licensed by an linguistic antecedent or a non-linguistic antecedent in the immediate discourse situation
- The antecedents that license the use of *nó* is a hybrid between those that license the English *the* and the German strong definite determiner (Schwarz, 2009, 2013)
- *Nó* encodes two presuppositions: familiarity and non-uniqueness

4 The indefinite determiner *bí*

Akan has two strategies to mark indefinites — bare nouns and the indefinite determiner *bí*

- (14) a. Me-re-kɔ-tɔ mpaboa **bí**.
 1 SG-PROG-go-buy shoes INDEF
 ‘I am going to buy a (certain) pair of shoes.’
- b. Me-re-kɔ-tɔ mpaboa.
 1 SG-PROG-go-buy shoes
 ‘I am going to buy a pair of shoes. (Amfo, 2010, 1787)

- Previous analyses of *bí* include Amfo’s (2010) quantificational analysis and Arkoh’s (2011) choice function analysis

4.1 B́i and specificity

- Epistemic-specific: speaker has a particular referent in mind (Karttunen, 1968; Farkas, 1994; von Heusinger, 2011).

- (15) a. Sukuuni **b́i** wɔ Kofi class a-wia adeɛ. Yɛ-frɛ no
 student INDEF be.located Kofi class PERF-steal thing 3PL-call 3SG.OBJ
 Kofi.
 Kofi
 ‘A (certain) student in Kofi’s class stole something. He is Kofi.’
- b. Sukuuni **b́i** wɔ Kofi class a-wia adeɛ. Nanso
 student INDEF be.located Kofi class PERF-steal thing but
 me-n-nim nipa koro.
 1SG-NEG-know person one
 ‘A student in Kofi’s class stole something. But I do not know who it is.’

- Scopal specificity: wide-scope readings (Fodor & Sag, 1982; Farkas, 2002a; Reinhart, 1997; Winter, 1997; Kratzer, 1998; Matthewson, 1999; Schwarz, 2001, 2013; Schwarzschild, 2002; Charlow, 2014, 2019, among others).

- (16) Sɛ ɔpanyin **b́i** ba a, yɛ-bɛ-hyɛ mmra nó.
 if elder INDEF come COND 1PL-FUT-force law DEF
- a. *Wide scope reading*: For a certain elder; if that elder comes, the law will be passed.
- b. *Narrow scope reading*: If any of the elders come, the law will be passed (Bombi *et al.*, 2019, 192)
- (17) ɔbaa biara kane-e nhoma **b́i**.
 woman every read-PST book INDEF
 ‘Every woman read a book.’
- a. *Wide scope reading*: $\exists y[\text{book}(y)] \wedge \forall x[\text{woman}(x) \rightarrow x \text{ read } y]$
- b. *Narrow scope reading*: $\forall x[\text{woman}(x) \rightarrow \exists y[\text{book}(y) \wedge x \text{ read } y]]$

- Referential-specificity

- (18) Ama pɛ sɛ ɔkyerɛkyerɛni bí ware nó.
 Ama want COMP teacher INDEF marry 3SG.OBJ
 ‘Ama wants a teacher to marry her.’ (Bombi *et al.*, 2019, 192)

- a. *Transparent*: Ama dislikes most teachers, but she knows one teacher, Kwame, that she likes very much, and she wants him to marry her.⁶
- b. *Opaque*: Ama doesn’t know any teacher, but she believes that she would be happy as the wife of a teacher - no matter which teacher.

- Discourse prominence

- (19) Da #(bi), ɔ-bea #(bi) ne ne ba ɔsoɔdenfo #(bi) tena-a
 day INDEF woman INDEF CONJ 3SG.POSS child stubborn INDEF stay-PST
 ase.
 under
 ‘Once upon a time, there was a certain woman and her stubborn child’
 (Lit: A certain day, a certain woman and her stubborn child lived.) (Amfo, 2010, 1786)

4.2 Semantics bí

Main Claim: *nó* is a skolemized choice function with implicit world arguments

- The so-called narrow-scope readings in the scope of quantifiers are functional readings derived when the quantifier binds the individual skolem index.
- *Bí* has an implicit world variable that can be bound or remain free (Mirrazi, 2019). When the world variable is bound, the indefinite receives a narrow scope reading.

***bí* is skolemized choice function with both individual and world skolem variables**

$$\llbracket \mathbf{b\acute{i}} \rrbracket = \lambda P.f(P)$$

⁶Unlike the English sentence with *a*, (25) is not compatible with a context where Ama does not know that Kwame is a teacher.

- Choice function analyses of indefinites include Reinhart (1997); Winter (1997); Kratzer (1998); Matthewson (1999).

(20) A function f is a choice function ($CH(f)$) if it applies to any non-empty set and yields a member of that set.

4.3 An ignorance reference

- Some indefinites signal a speaker's ignorance or indifference about some property of the witness of an existential claim (Becker, 1999; Farkas, 2002b; Kratzer & Shimoyama, 2002; Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito, 2003; Aloni & Port, 2011; Aloni, 2012)
- *bi* has an ignorance inference, according to Owusu (2019). The use of *bi* signals that the speaker has a particular referent in mind, but is ignorant of important identifying characteristics about the referent.
- Aloni & Port (2011, 2015) based on Aloni (2001, 2008) propose epistemic indefinites are licensed when what is required to identify a referent in a context differs from the one introduced by the indefinite.

(21) Scenario: You are visiting a foreign university and you want to meet a professor.

Me- re- hwehwɛ professor **bi**, ɔno na ɔ- yɛ head of department, me-
 1SG- PROG- search professor IND, 3SG FOC. 3SG- COP. head of department, 1SG-
 n- nim ne din.
 NEG- know 3SG-POSS name.

'I am looking for some professor, he is the head of department but I don't know his name.'

Speaker-can-identify → [Description], unknown → [Naming]

In this scenario, the method of identification contextually required for knowledge is naming, but the referent of the epistemic indefinite can only be identified by description.

Summary of the properties of *bí*

- *Bí* NPs patterns with English *a*, not specific indefinites such as the Salish no-polarity indefinites (Matthewson, 1999) and English *a certain* (Kratzer, 1998).
- *Bí* is a specific indefinite, which is analyzed as a skolemized choice function with implicit world arguments
- *Bí* has an ignorance presupposition inference

5 Co-occurrence of *nó* and *bí*

- Akan allows the co-occurrence on the definite and indefinite determiners in either order.

(22) *Bí nó*

Papa **bí** **nó** bisa me me nɔma.
man INDEF DEF ask-PST 1SG 1SG.POSS number

After the party, that certain man asked me for my number. (Bombi *et al.*, 2019, 187)

(23) *Nó bí*

Nkorofɔ **nó** **bí** ka-a sɛ ɔ-re-m-pene.
people DEF INDEF say-PST COMP 3PL-PROG-NEG-agree

‘Some of the people said they will not agree.’ (Amfo, 2010, 1796)

5.1 *Bí nó*- the definite interpretation

- *Bí nó* cannot introduce new discourse referents

(24) Context: At the beginning of a story ...

a. #Papa **bí** **nó** bisa me me nɔma.
man INDEF DEF ask-PST 1SG 1SG.POSS number
‘That certain man asked me for my number.’

- b. #Papa **nó** bisa me me nɔma.
 man NO ask-PST 1SG 1SG.POSS number
 ‘AThe party, the man asked me for my number.’
- c. Papa **bí** bisa me me nɔma.
 man INDEF ask-PST 1SG 1SG.POSS number
 ‘A certain party, some man asked me for my number.’

- *Bí nó* is licensed by a previously introduced discourse referent (26).

(25) Context: Dufie and Priscilla go to a party. During the party, they watch one man dancing. The following day, Dufie says to Priscilla:

- a. Papa **bí nó** bisa me me nɔma.
 man INDEF DEF ask-PST 1SG 1SG.POSS number
 ‘That certain man asked me for my number.’
- b. Papa **nó** bisa me me nɔma.
 man NO ask-PST 1SG 1SG.POSS number
 ‘The man asked me for my number.’
- c. #Papa **bí** bisa me me nɔma.
 man INDEF ask-PST 1SG 1SG.POSS number
 ‘A certian party, some man asked me for my number.’

- *Bí nó* patterns with definites and not indefinites (Amfo, 2006; Bombi *et al.* , 2019)
- But *bí nó* ≠ *nó*
- Not every context that license *nó* but licenses *NP bí nó*.

(26) Context: Dufie and Priscilla go to a party. During the party, they watched one man dancing. At the end of the party, they realized that the man was their former classmate, Kofi. Later in the evening, the man gave his number to Dufie. The following day, Dufie says to Priscilla.⁷

- a. Abrantie **nó** bisa me me nɔma.
 man NO ask-PST 1SG 1SG.POSS number
 The man asked me for my number.

⁷Slightly modified variation of the context in Bombi *et al.* (2019)

b. #Abrantie **bí** **nó** bisa me me nɔma.
 man INDEF NO ask-PST 1SG 1SG.POSS number
 That certain man asked me for my number.

- What is the difference between the context in (25) and (26)? **An ignorance implication**

Summary of the properties of *bí nó*

- Inherits the familiarity presupposition from *nó*
- Inherits the ignorance implication from *bí*

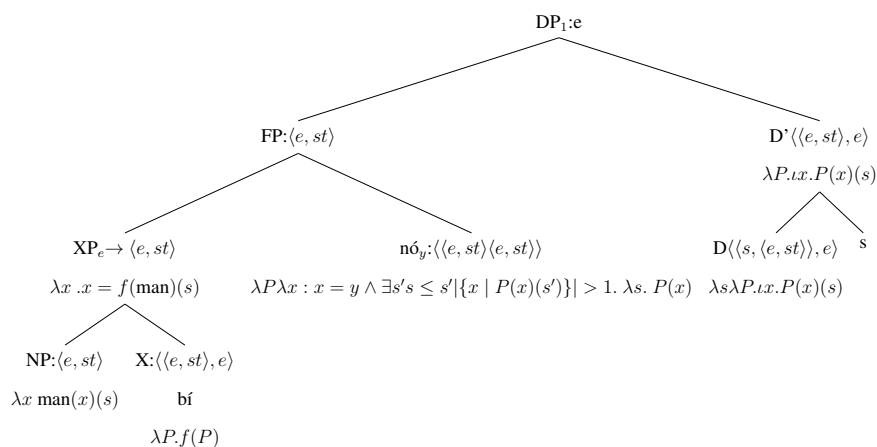
Previous analysis

- Bombi *et al.* (2019, 188) argue that the *bí nó* NP “receives the additional import that the addressee has to make an effort to retrieve the referent (so called ‘recognitional use’ of the definite ...”
- The recognitional use helps to highlight the piece of information that is already common knowledge which has some significance to the present conversation (Himmelman, 1996)

Syntactic Sketch

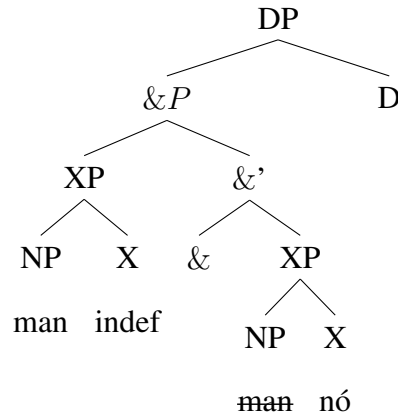
- Probable syntax but wrong semantics

(27)

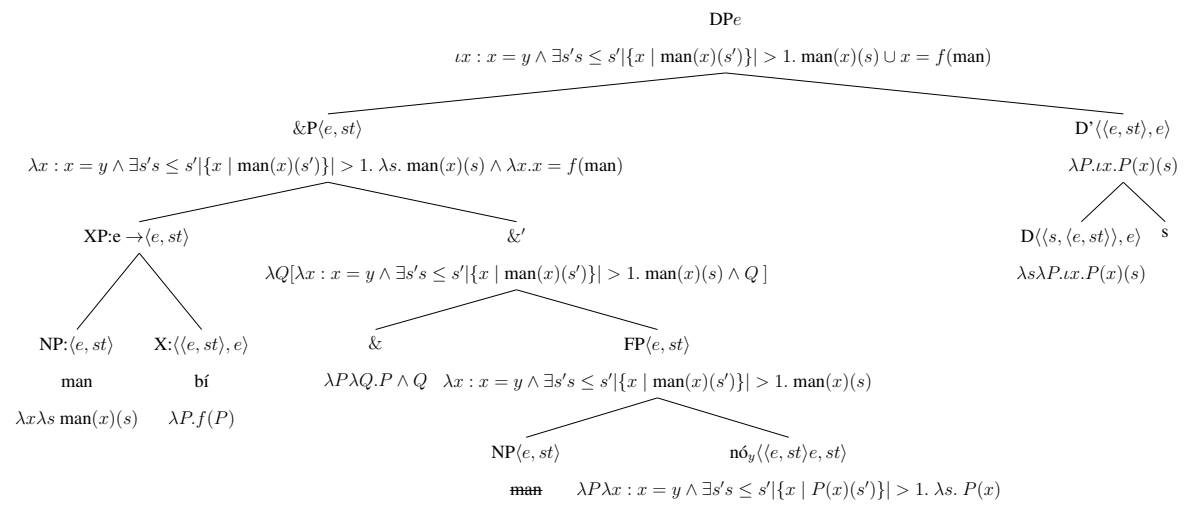


- Possible LF for interpretation ⁸

(28)



(29)



5.2 *N\u0304o b\u0304i-the partitive interpretation*

The *NP b\u0304i n\u0304o* order has a partitive reading parallel to partitives in English.

- (30) a. Some of the boys are weak.
 b. One of the issue has been solved.

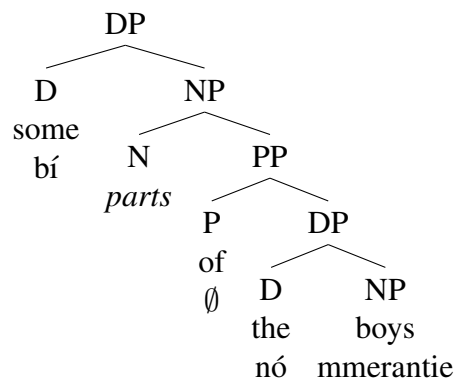
⁸Thank you to Veneeta Dayal for proposing this syntax

- c. All the students are present.
- (31) a. Mmerantie **nó** **bí** ka-a se ɔ-re-m-pene.
 pl.boy DEF INDEF say-PST COMP 3PL-PROG-NEG-agree
 ‘Some of the boys said they will not agree.’
- b. Mmerantie **nó** mu **bí** ka-a se ɔ-re-m-pene.
 pl.boy DEF in INDEF say-PST COMP 3PL-PROG-NEG-agree
 ‘Some of the boys said they will not agree.’

Features of partitives

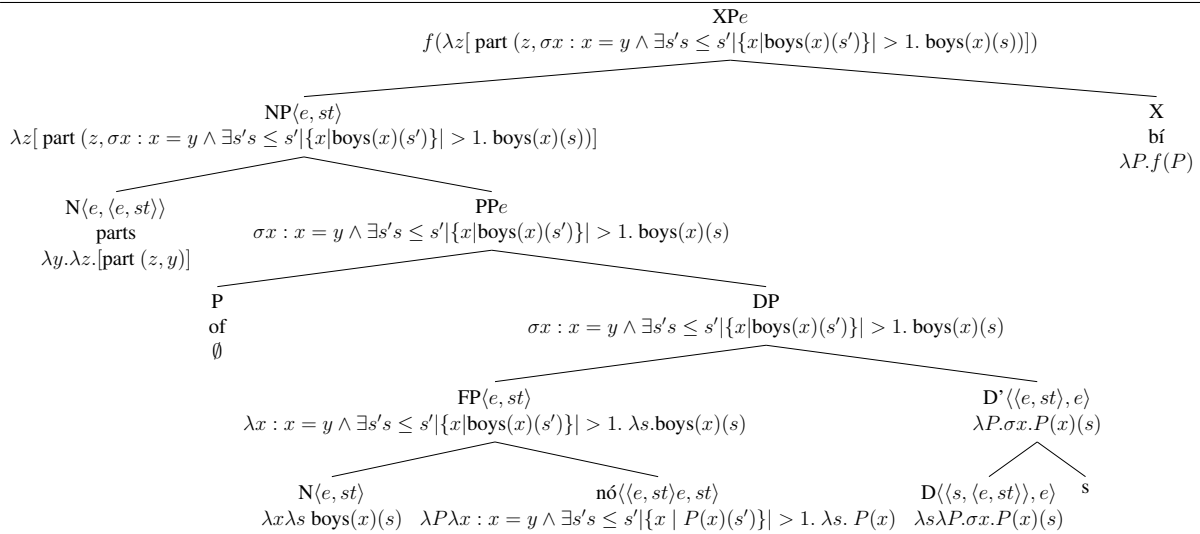
- The inner determiner is a definite (Jackendoff’s (1968) *Partitive Constraint*)
- A null nominal head, *parts*, a relational noun in partitives, which takes the PP as complement.(Chierchia, 1997; Arsenijević, 2006)
- *of* is semantically void (Chierchia, 1997) or its is the source of the partitive meaning (Barker, 1998)

(32)



The composition of the partitive construction in Akan proceeds as in (34).

(33)



6 Conclusion

- Akan allows the stacking of the definite determiner *nó* and the indefinite *bí* in a DP
- When the indefinite determiner precedes the indefinite, the sequence has a familiarity presupposition from the definite and an ignorance inference from the indefinite
- The order, definite indefinite is a partitive construction with a null preposition.

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