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**The usage of phrasal verbs**  
*(emu) ye den, (emu) ye duru and (emu) ye hare*  
**in Akan Twi Asante**

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## Introduction

Akan Twi is one of the Niger-Congo languages, spoken in West Africa, particularly in Ghana. This paper is dedicated to the usage of three phrasal verbs in one of the biggest dialects of Akan Twi – Asante. This paper was written in the framework of the seminar „Urbane Feldforschung“ at HU Berlin.

According to the informant Frank Obeng, Akan Twi Asante is represented in Berlin only by individuals, and as far as the informant is concerned, there is no community of native Twi speakers in Berlin.

This paper documents the results of one elicitation session, during which six sample sentences in Akan Twi Asante were recorded, created for the purpose of studying the usage of phrasal verbs *emu ye den*, *emu ye duru*, and *emu ye hare*.

This paper discusses whether the constructions *emu ye den*, *emu ye duru*, and *emu ye hare* are used as phrasal verbs in spoken Akan. The six recorded sample sentences, as well as their approximate morphological and syntactical analysis and possible conclusions, are detailed here as well.

### 1.1. Formulation of a question and strategies by creating sentence samples

One of the distinctive features of Akan Twi Asante is that it has no verbal endings, indicating person, number and tense. This function is taken by enclitic pronouns, which are usually prefixed, but not suffixed, to the verb stem. (See verb paradigms [4, pp. 47-28]). That's why "verbs occur with a number of affixes which are used to indicate tense and aspect" [5, p. 83]. These affixes undergo vowel harmonization and change their pronunciation depending on the stem vowel. The most frequent verbal affixes are listed in the table below, including all the tenses and moods of Akan:

Grammatical Meaning	Affix	Example
Habitual	No overt affix	Kofi di. (Kofi eats)
Progressive	re-	Kofi redi. (Kofi is eating)
Simple Future	be-/be-	Kofi bedi (Kofi will eat)
Immediate Future	-e-/i-	Kofi dii (Kofi will eat now)
Perfect	a-	Kofi adi (Kofi has eaten)
Imperative	No overt affix	Kofi, di. (Kofi eat)
Optative	m/n-	Monnidi (I want to eat it)
Consecutive	-a-	Me tɔ adwane adi (I'll buy food and eat it)

Table C, [5, p. 83].

Since the verbal system of Akan doesn't contain any auxiliary verbs, there are two verb types: stative and dynamic verbs, which express a state of being or having some exact characteristic, and explicating actions of all types, respectively.

Due to the lack of verbal inflexion in Akan, other ways to convey verbal meanings are used quite frequently. One of these is the use of phrasal verbs. Phrasal verbs in Akan are usually „made up of two verbs or of a verb and a noun“. [3, p. 103].

This small research was inspired by phrasal verb examples, given by Christaller in his Grammar of Twi: „A third kind of verbal phrases is that in which a *specific subject*, being a *noun of place*, usually *referring to some noun or pronoun in the possessive case*, gives a *specific meaning of the succeeding verb*“ (italics added) [3, p. 124].

These examples were provided by Christaller [3, p. 123] (italics and numbering added):

- a. *Emu ye den* – it is difficult, different from b. *eye den* – it is hard  
 c. *Emu ye duru* – it is important, different from d. *eye duru* – it is heavy  
 e. *Emu ye hare* – it is easy, different from f. *eye hare* – it is light”

The first phrase of Christaller’s example is constructed with the phrasal verb, and the second contains only the ordinary active verb. The aim of this research was to analyse these two constructions and to determine how they are used in a spoken language: whether the first meaning can only be conveyed by the corresponding phrasal verb, or if there are other possible and, perhaps, more natural ways to express the first meaning.

Here are the glosses to Christaller’s examples (italics added):

- a. *e-*            *mu ye den* – it is difficult

pers.pron.3sg.pos inside.nom be strong

- b. *e-*            *ye den* – it is hard

pers.pron.3sg be            strong

- c. *e-*            *mu ye duru* – it is important

pers.pron.3sg.pos inside.nom be heavy

- d. *e*            *-ye duru* – it is heavy

pers.pron.3sg.pos be heavy

- e. *e-*            *mu ye hare* – it is easy

it.pos. inside.nom be light

- f. *e-*            *ye hare* – it is light

pers.pron.3sg.pos be light

What is meant in Christaller’s text by „A third kind of verbal phrases is that in which a *specific subject*, being a *noun of place*, usually referring to some noun or pronoun in the *possessive case*, gives a *specific meaning of the succeeding verb*“ [3, p. 124] is not absolutely clear. Akan Twi is mildly inflectional, the subject and the verb do not agree, but there is some agreement with the nominal head of NP [2]. The cases are marked with by word order. „A noun in the possessive case stands always before another noun which may be in the nominative or objective or locative or likewise in the possessive case“.

[3, p. 36-37]. From this it can be concluded that the noun of place (*mu*) (translated with an adverb „inside“ into English) is the subject in Akan construction, and refers to the enclitic personal pronoun *e-* (3sg.nom), which remains in a possessive case. Though it should be mentioned that this analysis is quite rough and may need to be adjusted.

## 1.2. Strategies by conducting and analyzing elicitation sessions

The main aim was to receive the closest to natural language reproduction of six sentences (it is difficult, it is hard, it is heavy, it is important, it is easy, it is light). The purpose was to receive two paired sentences, one – with the literal and the other one with the figurative meaning. That's why subscript translation wasn't a good way out. I briefly depicted the situation, describing, for instance, for the last pair of sentences either an easy work, or a light bag to carry, and asked the informant to express his attitude to the situation, using an Akan construction, which in his opinion matches the English „it is“ construction. For the first pair, I asked the informant to describe a laborious and time-consuming work, with a lot of details, and a work, which is difficult to accomplish. For the sentence “it is heavy” I referred to a big stone, and to receive the sentence “it is important” I referred to the meeting, that can't be missed under any circumstances.

As the informant Frank Obeng is bilingual (Akan Twi-English) the elicitation session was conducted in the following way: after I pronounced the sentence in English, the informant said the sentence with the same meaning in Akan Twi. All sentences, both in English and in Akan, were recorded as an audio file. The spelling, which I proposed after the analysis of the recording was checked by the informant, who writes both in Akan and in English. The revised version, where the tones are omitted, is shown here. The following aspects were considered during the session analysis:

1. The usage of the same adjective in paired sentences.
2. Presence or absence of the noun *mu* in the first sentence of each pair.
3. Presence or absence of the enclitic pronoun *e-* in both sentences.

As Table D makes clear, the results were far from expectations. Only two sentences out of six coincided with the examples given by Christaller. Brief and approximate glosses of the received sentences are included in [Table D](#).

Comparison between sample sentences and received sentences		
Given sentence	Expected sentence	Received sentence
1. <u>It is difficult.</u>	<i>e-mu ye den</i> pers.pron.3sg.pos inside.nom be strong	<i>ye den</i> be strong
2. It is hard.	<i>e-ye den</i> pers.pron.3sg be strong	<i>e-ye den</i> pers.pron.3sg be strong
3. <u>It is important.</u>	<i>e-mu ye duru</i> pers.pron.3sg.pos inside.nom be heavy	<i>ε-ho hia</i> pers.pron.3sg.-body need
4. It is heavy.	<i>e-ye duru</i> pers.pron.3sg.pos be heavy	<i>emu ye duru</i> pers.pron.3sg.pos inside.nom be heavy
5. <u>It is easy.</u>	<i>e-mu ye hare</i> pers.pron.3sg.pos inside.nom be light	<i>eye fo</i> pers.pron.3sg.pos easy
6. It is light.	<i>e-ye hare</i> pers.pron.3sg.pos be light	<i>eye hare</i> pers.pron.3sg.pos be light

Table D. [2, p.123]

The enclitic pronoun *e-* is separated from the copula by the hyphen for clarity, in written language they are written together.

The received sentences for “it is difficult”, “it is important” and “it is easy” don’t meet expectations in any of the cases.

There are no phrasal verbs with *mu*, used by the informant to express the meanings of phrases with more abstract meanings (it is difficult, it is important, it is easy). The only phrase with „mu“ (*emu ye duru*) is used to express a concrete, not an abstract, meaning „it is heavy“.



From this can be concluded that these particular meanings (to be difficult, to be important, to be easy) are not currently expressed with the help of phrasal verbs in Akan Twi Asante, as the noun *mu* is possible, but unnecessary in the construction. Although the most natural way to express the meaning „it is important“ is the usage of the other phrasal verb *ε-ho hia*, the literal meaning is „that, what the body needs“.

However, the phrasal verbs *ye den* and *ye duru* are used and can't be replaced with other verbs in some figurative expressions in Akan. These are expressions confirmed as sounding natural by the informant (the Informant was asked to estimate the following phrasal sentences after the recording the elicitation session, so there are no records preserved):

1. *Tiri mu ye den* – (lit. inside the head is hard) – to be wicked [1, p.127], informant: to act crazy.
2. *Aso ye den* – (lit. the ear is hard) – to be stubborn [1, p.127]
3. *Usa ye den* (lit. the hand (palm) is heavy) – to be not generous with money [1, p.123], informant: to be greedy.
4. *Koko ye duru* (lit. the chest is heavy) – to be brave [1, p.123].

From this brief examination of received materials it becomes clear, that although the usage of *ye den* and *ye duru* as phrasal verbs is possible in some figurative expressions, but in a modern spoken Akan they don't really convey more abstract meanings, as asserted by Christaller.

## Conclusions

1. The same adjectives, as the ones given by Christaller, are used by the informant in four cases out of six, the meaning „it is important“ is expressed by another phrasal verb *eho hia*, informant evaluated Christaller’s example *emu ye duru* as „sounding strange, perhaps inappropriate“. The meaning „it is easy“ was expressed with the help of the adjective *fo*. Informant estimated *e-mu ye hare* variant as „possible, but old fashioned“.
2. Construction with noun *mu*, according to Christaller, should have been used for expressing more abstract meanings (the first member of each pair: it is difficult, it is important, it is easy), but the received sentences don’t meet expectations in a single case. Christaller’s examples were estimated as „weird“ („you wouldn’t really say so“).
3. The presence of the pronoun *e-* was claimed to be quite necessary. „That’s not obligatory, but with *e-* it sounds much better“, but the sentence „it is difficult“, pronounced *ye den* was claimed to be slightly more natural as *eye den*.
4. The comment received on *emu ye duru* for „it is heavy“ was: „you would say *mu duru*, when it’s heavy, heavy inside“, but the variant *eye duru* was estimated as normal as well.

## Bibliography

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