

The Meaning of DEF-marking, INDEF-Marking, and Bare NPs in Hausa and Akan: A Micro-Comparative Analysis

In this talk, I will provide a comprehensive semantic analysis of the meaning of definite and indefinite determiners and bare NPs in two West African languages, namely Akan (Kwa, Niger Congo) and Hausa (Chadic, Afroasiatic). The distribution and interpretation of overt determiners in both languages, differs in interesting - and at first sight similar ways - from their English counterparts, but the correct formal analysis has proven difficult. The literature offers three different analyses of the definite determiner *nó* in Akan, none of it without problems. Likewise, both choice-function-based and E-quantifier-based analyses seem to be able to account for the empirical behavior of indefinite determiners in both Akan and Hausa, but it is unclear how to choose between them when looking at the individual languages in isolation. The same holds for bare NPs.

In this talk, I will show that a micro-comparative direct analysis of Hausa and Akan, and a language-internal comparison of overtly marked forms and bare NPs provides a better basis for the formal semantic analysis of definiteness and indefiniteness marking in Akan and Hausa. We will show that, despite superficial similarities, the distribution and interpretation of definite determiners, indefinite determiners and bare NPs differs in interesting ways. Based on these differences, we will propose different semantic analyses for overt DEF- and INDEF-markers in the two languages. The observable differences in the distribution and interpretation of bare NPs in the two languages then follow from general principles of blocking and competition (Chierchia 1998 et al.)