

REVIEW

SEPARATION VERBS IN GA AND DANGME

The aim of the paper is to “investigate separation verbs that is, cut, break and tear verbs, in two Kwa languages, Ga and Dangme. The paper examines the syntactic and semantic properties of these verbs”.

General Comments

1. The paper does not do justice to the aims outlined. It lacks an adequate syntactic and semantic analysis. Also, the paper is flawed by vague statements which are not substantiated.
2. The paper has too many typographical and grammatical errors. A good proofreading is required to improve the quality of this paper.

In this review, I provide a section by section commentary focusing on examples of such vague statements as well as areas that are somewhat problematic for studies such as this.

1. Introduction

P1- “The lexical category, verbs, is part of our everyday speech as they denote events that are undertaken daily. **In speech**, they normally occur with arguments. Various types of verbs require specific arguments **to be saturated**”.

The first line of this statement also holds true for lexical categories such as nouns too, so one is not so sure the importance of this statement. By indicating **in speech**, is the author(s) implying that this doesn't happen in written forms involving verbs? What do the author(s) mean by the expression **to be saturated**?

“Works on separation have postulated how these verbs function in languages, indicating that the instrument involved may cause a change in the choice of verb use and what is being separated. It therefore confirms that there is a link or a relation between the instrument and the object being separated.”

There are no studies mentioned to support this claim.

“Separation events have been examined by scholars such as Majid et al (2008)”.

Majid et al (2008) is the only work cited here. Can the author(s) provide other relevant studies.

2. Methodology

The methodology adopted in this study is problematic. First of all, the author(s) seem to rely solely on data gathered through a written description of video stimuli that participants watched. One cannot help but wonder whether the author(s) is equating written language to spoken language. A better approach would have been to allow participants to orally produce these descriptions. I suggest the author(s) read the methodology outlined in Majid et al (2007), Essegbey (2007), Essegbey and Ameka 2007, Agyepong (2017) as well as other CUT and BREAK studies.

Secondly, not much is said on the language repertoire of the consultants, apart from the fact that “The participants were all native speakers of Ga and Dangme studying at the University of Education Winneba in the final year of their studies in 2017.”

“The morphological properties were then compared and syntactic analysis was made on the data available. This was done in relation to the instrument used in the separation event.”

Does this mean that nothing was done on agent-involvement, manner of event etc.?

3. Related Literature

Correct the spelling of the name Schaefer and **Ogbokhare** (2012) to Egbokhare.

“Majid et al (2004) opines that separation events that occur in those languages can be codified with different verbs **unlike English that may use cut and break for most events**”.

Is this really true about English? Remember that English has verbs like slice, chop, dice, shred etc. for describing various cutting activities.

4. Data and Discussion

In this section, the author(s) provide 6 tables showing the verbs gathered with the 61 video clips.

- I. No English translation is provided for the Ga and Dangme words (here and elsewhere)
- II. Apart from showing that these are the Ga and Dangme equivalents of the verbs, what is the relevance of all the tables?

5. Grammatical Analysis

In this section, the author(s) point out that “Cut verbs can be grouped into three main groups following the analysis of Ogbokhare (2012) and Bowerman (2007). This includes PEEL, OPEN, CUT and BREAK consist of SNAP, SMASH, CHOP, SLICE AND BREAK. For our discussion in this paper, we analyse the verbs under Ogbokhare (2012) and Bowerman (2007) classifications. The groups are based on their transitivity and **their semantics**.”

- I. What accounts for the three main groups? Also, please note that this classification was actually done by Levin (1993) for English verbs and not Egbokhare (2012) and Bowerman (2007) as indicated.
- II. The paper is silent on the actual semantics of the verbs. The author(s) just provide the verbs being used in transitive and intransitive constructions without clearly stating what the verbs mean in both languages.

Below are a few examples of vague statements:

“The verbs employed in the construction in example (1a-c) are *kpɔ* and *gumɔ*. These verbs have been used transitively. **It must be noted that it will be ungrammatical to use this intransitively and this was confirmed by the Ga participants as in (1c)**”

- I. No clear semantic distinction is made between the verbs *kpɔ* and *gumɔ*. Should we assume they are the same and can be used interchangeably?

II. No explanation is provided for why an intransitive use of this verb is considered ungrammatical.

P 9- “It must be noted that the verbs in both cases occur with *he* ‘body’ which cannot be left out in the construction otherwise it becomes incorrect for this particular event in example (1c). *He* ‘body/skin’ can however, be left out in the construction when it concerns the peeling of cassava.”

What is the reason for this?

“*Kpɔ* peel’ and *gumɔ* ‘peel’ can however, not be interchanged as that would be unacceptable to the native speaker.”

Why is it unacceptable?

“The choice of the verb depended on the object”.

What is it about the object that allows one to select one verb over the other? Has the choice of verb got anything to do with the material make-up of the object under separation?

In relation to the Syntax, nothing is said about the verb’s behaviour in argument structure alternations. Simply indicating the subjects and objects of the sentences does not give the full picture of the verb’s syntactic behaviour.

Pg10- “If an instrument used in the peeling event is not the hand, the verb employed will not be the same as when a different verb is used to explain the separation event”.

No example is provided to support this claim.

Pg11- “From the discussion with the participants, the verb used for opening of the eyes *gbele* cannot be interchanged with the verb used for the opening of the pen. However, if the verb used for the opening of a palm is employed in the opening of the eyes, gives two meanings. First, it means the eyes were opened very widely and the second meaning which is metaphorical, implies that the person was extra careful and alert in doing something. The verbs *fa* ‘open’ and *gbɛ* ‘open’ cannot occur intransitively as exemplified in (3f-g) as well as *jie* ‘remove’ unlike *gbele*. The verb *gbɛ* cannot be used with instrument involved in the action but *jie* can be used with an instrument”.

Why is this the case?

p12- “In the above examples (3-4), the verbs which occurred transitively in (3a) and (3b) in the Ga data”

Why are examples (3-4) being discussed under examples (5a-b)?

P13 -In example (6a), the sentence consists of a verbid and a main verb. In this instance the action involved an instrument *samfee* ‘key’ with an agent and theme. The main verb *gbele* ‘open’ shows a material destruction which is reversible.

In what way is opening a door with a key material destruction? Can this be clarified?

In examples (6e-f), it will be helpful to know when the intransitive is used and the semantics associated with such intransitive uses.

“Break verbs can be grouped into two SMASH and **SNAP** events semantically. We examine verbs that denote smash/snap events”.

- I. Nothing is mentioned about SNAP events in the discussion.
- II. Does this mean that Ga and Dangme do not have the category BREAK? If that is the case, then what accounts for the use of the English word Break in examples 7a and 8a-c?

Again, in the data, we see the extensive use of postpositions yet almost nothing is about the role they play in the constructions i.e. does the appearance of the postpositions contribute anything at all to the overall semantics of the sentence? Remember that Postpositions play an essential role in Kwa languages.

P 14- “In this SMASH events, the construction is transitive for both verbs but *ba* in Ga and *tslɔtslɔ* ‘into pieces’ in Dangme. cannot be used intransitively unlike *ku* ‘break’ seen in stimuli 16 for both Ga and Dangme as seen in example (9)”.

This paragraph is not clear.

“In stimuli 31 the event depicts break also but the choice of verb was different as *jwa* was used:”

What accounts for this?

p-15 “**Cut verbs exhibit events of cut, slice and chop.** In the stimuli, verbs like *fo* ‘cut’ *folo* ‘chop’ denote these activities in Ga”

Not sure what the author(s) means by this.

P17- “The verbs in Ga that were used to denote tear events were *tse* and *gba*, and in Dangme *tsɔ* and *fɛ*.”

Are both verbs the same semantically? Can they be used interchangeably?

The expression **mli enyɔ** contributes an additional meaning which has been ignored in example 18. Any reason why even though both sentences have these words, it is only in example 19 that it has been included in the overall translation i.e. into two.

6. Summary of Findings

Pg-18 “*Ku* ‘break’ was used to denote a hair cutting event in Ga and *ku* ‘break’ and *sã* ‘trim’ were used in the Dangme constructions”.

This is not discussed anywhere in the text?

Suggestions

From the line of arguments put across in this paper, it appears the issues in the area of separation events have not been well understood and appreciated.

It will be helpful if the whole research behind this work is recast to reflect the discussions in the literature. The semantics of the verbs should also be well explained. Listing the English equivalents of these verbs in Ga and Dangme is simply not enough. One needs to understand what Ga and Dangme speakers mean when they use each of the separation verbs discussed in the study. Also, attention must be paid to the properties associated with the internal arguments the verbs collocate with. How does the choice of a particular type of argument contribute to the entire interpretation of construction? In this study, there is nothing that shows that Ga and Dangme separation verbs manifest anything special that needs to be investigated. Note that what the author(s) discuss under the syntax i.e. transitivity, subject/object appearance etc, are not peculiar to separation verbs. The question therefore is, what is so special about Ga and Dangme event separation? The author(s) has not successfully demonstrated this in the study.

Recommendation

The paper in its present form cannot be published.