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A Comparative Study of the Simple Clause in Akan, Dagaare and English

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Abstract

The paper compares how the simple clause is expressed in Akan (Kwa, Niger-Congo), Dagaare (Gur, Niger-Congo) and English. It examines the simple clause in relation to noun phrase, verbal phrases, adpositional phrases, basic word order in declarative and focus constructions, and the basic locative construction. Basically, the study reveals that despite the differences, Akan and Dagaare have a lot in common as compared to English. This of course shows how distant English is from the two African languages. Certain linguistic features such as serial verb construction and focus constructions were unique to Akan and Dagaare and this, is not surprising since languages within the same language family (Niger Congo) tend to share certain lexical, phonological, morphological and syntactic features. The significant variation between these languages shows where Akan and Dagaare languages diverge into other sub-family groups: Kwa and Gur, respectively.

Keywords: Akan, Dagaare, Simple clause, Kwa, Gur

1. Introduction

A simple clause is a sentence that basically contains one independent clause. This paper compares how the simple clause is expressed in Akan, Dagaare and English. Cross-linguistic studies of the structure of sentences in varied languages (Payne, 1997; Creissels, 2000; Dryer, 2007) reveal that all languages have a basic word order that serves as the most common way to form a sentence. Payne (1997, p. 71), for instance, notes that "individual languages form their clauses in distinctive ways; some prefer to position the verb at the end of a clause, others at the beginning, and others place it in the centre somewhere. Lastly, many languages seem to put the verb almost everywhere". The main aim of this paper is to examine how words and morphemes combine to form a simple grammatical sentence in these three languages. It examines and compares how the subject, verb and object are basically ordered in the simple clause structures of these languages. It describes how noun/noun phrases, verbs, adjectives, and adpositions are used in the simple sentence construction of these languages.

The paper is structured as follows: section 1 is an introduction. Section 2 provides a brief linguistic information on the languages under study (Note 1), the data collection and methods used. The words and phrases that form the internal structure of the simple sentence are examined in section 3. It looks at the noun phrases, verb phrases and adpositional phrases. Section 4 discusses the basic word order in simple declarative and interrogative sentences. Section 5 discusses the basic locative structures of the languages. Section 6 is the summary and conclusion.

2. Language Background, Data and Method

Akan belongs to the Kwa Sub-group of Niger-Congo. It has many dialects and sub-dialects but Asante, Akuapem, and Fante are the three documented standard dialects. The Akan people are predominantly in Ashanti, Ahafo, Bono, Eastern, Central and Western regions of Ghana.

Dagaare is a Mabia (Note 2) (Oti-Volta) language of the Gur branch of the Niger-Congo family spoken in the Upper-West region of Ghana (Dakubu, 1988; Bodomo, 2000). The language is closely related to other Niger-Congo languages of the Gur family, such as Safaliba, Moore, Gurune, Mampruli, Dagbani, Buli and Kusaal. There are four dialects of Dagaare – Southern Dagaare, Western Dagaare, Central Dagaare and Northern Dagaare. This research is based largely on the central dialect since it has been the basis of literacy work in the language.

The data used in this paper are drawn from elicited sources. Paradigms of clauses and sentence structures were constructed and elicited based on the native speaker intuition of the authors. The first and second authors provided data on Akan and the third author provided data on Dagaare. We also relied on other native speakers for data verification. For the discussion on adpositional phrases, we resorted to the Topological Relation Picture Series (TPRS) (Bowerman & Pederson, 1993) elicitation tools. The TRPS helps identify the strategies employed by language speakers for encoding static topological relation between 'Figures': the entity whose location is at stake and 'Ground': where the figure is located. We observed and described some selected TRPS pictures in Akan and Dagaare. The TRPS has

been adopted in a number of works (Ameka et al., 1999; Levinson & Wilkins, 2006; Dorvlo, 2008; Bobuafor, 2013, and Owusu et al., 2015).

3. The Internal Structure of the Simple Clause

Grammatical sentences are basically formed from various classes of words. These include nouns, verbs, adjectives, adpositions, adverbs, pronouns, determiners, conjunctions, intensifiers and interjections. However, as cross-linguistics studies by Watters (2000, p. 195) inform us, "the specific ways in which these word classes are used, need to be defined for each language rather than forming assumptions from their use in English or other European languages." Here, the sub-sections discuss and compare some of these word classes in the three languages.

3.1 The Noun Phrase

Nouns are the heads of noun phrases and they act as the subject and objects of clauses. Nouns in Akan bear noun class prefixes. These prefixes partition the set of nouns into subsets, each of which has its own distinctive marking which shows agreement with nouns in terms of number and animacy. In Akan, as Osam (1996) observes, the nouns in the singular have a specific prefix and form their plural by using a different prefix (Note 3) as illustrated in (1).

(1)	a.	ɛ-dan	c.	a-dan	-	Akan
		CL4.SG-house		CL6.PL-house		
		'A house'		'houses'		
	b.	ɔ-nipa	d.	n-nipa		
		CL1.SG-person		CL5.PL-person		
		'A person/human being'		'persons/human beings'		

Based on this evidence one can conclude that Akan is a noun class language which is a common feature of Niger-Congo languages (Schachter & Shopen, 2007, pp. 7-8)

Interestingly, Dagaare which also belongs to the Niger Congo family behaves differently. As indicated by Grimm (2009), Dagaare exhibits an inverse number marking system. He shows that "the core of the number marking system in Dagaare is centred on the little but prevalent semantic principle of individuation, the tendency for an object to appear as a distinct unit" (Grimm, 2009, p. 170). He demonstrates that the distribution of the inverse number marker in Dagaare *–ri* correlates with various levels of individuation: nouns unmarked in the singular pattern with highly individuated entities whereas nouns unmarked in the plural pattern with entities which are less individuated and/or tend to appear in groups. The number marker is the suffix *-rɪ*. Based on semantic individuation, the suffix *-rɪ* marks singularity for entities that are highly individuated and marks plurality for entities that are less individuated. The singular nouns marked by *-ri* is pluralized with a vowel suffix.

(2)	a.	kʊ-rɪ	'gourd'	-	kɔɛ	'gourds'
	b.	bi-ri	'seed'	-	bi-e	'seeds'

	c.	nubi-ri	‘finger’	-	nubi-e	‘fingers’
	d.	pimpe-ri	‘nail’	-	pimpe-ɛ	‘nails’
(3)	a.	zu-ø	‘head’	-	zur-ri	‘heads’
	b.	baa-ø	‘dog’	-	baa-ri	‘dogs’
	c.	tɪɛ-ø	‘tree’	-	tɪɪ-rɪ	‘trees’
	d.	teŋa-ø	‘community’	-	ten-ni	‘communities’

Note how *-ri* goes through nasal assimilation in (3d) which results in the allomorph *–ni*. Notice also the harmony in the vowels. The vowel of the plural suffix assimilates the ATR status of the vowels in the singular nouns.

Nouns in English, unlike Akan and Dagaare, do not have a noun class system. Generally regular nouns are pluralized by suffixing ‘-s’ (which is phonologically conditioned) to singular nouns. The suffix assimilates the voicing feature of the sound it follows. This is illustrated in example (4):

(4) a. Dog /dɒg/ - ‘dogs /dɒgz/’
b. Cat /kæt/ - ‘cats /kæts/’
c. Horse /hɔ:s/ - ‘horses /hɔ:sɪz/’

3.1.1 Nouns and Determiners

Let us now turn to the constituents that modify the noun heads. The structure of the NP in Akan simple clause is:

(5) Possessive Modifier-[Noun]- Adjectival Modifier – Numeral-Determiner/Demonstratives

In Akan NP, determiners and demonstratives follow the noun head as illustrated in (6):

(6)	a.	ɔ-kra	no	b.	a-homa	yi
		SG-cat	DET		SG-robe	DEM.PROX
		‘The cat’			‘This robe’	

c.	n-kra	akɛse	mmiɛnsa	no
	SG-cat	fat	three	DET
	‘The three fat cats’			

In Akan, adjectives follow the noun head when they are used attributively and they agree in number with the nouns they modify as seen in (7):

(7)	a.	a-kokɔ	fitaa	b.	n-kokɔ	e-fitaa
		SG-chicken	white		PL-chicken	PL-white
		‘A white chicken’			‘white chickens’	

The structure of Dagaare NP is as follows:

(8) Determiner-[Noun]-Adjectival Modifier-Numeral-Demonstrative

In Dagaare, the determiner precedes the noun head whereas the demonstrative follows it as in (9a) and (9b) respectively.

(9)	a.	a	baa	b.	bie	ŋa
		DET	dog		child	DEM.PROX
		'The dog'			'This child'	

Adjectives post-modify the NP in Dagaare as illustrated in (9):

(10)	a.	ti-wogi	b.	bi-deŋ	
		tree-tall		child-first	
		'A tall tree'		'first child'	

The structure of the English NP is:

(11) Determiner/Demonstrative-Numeral-Adjectival Modifier-Noun

In English all the constituents that modify the noun precede the head noun.

(12)	The	two	beautiful	girls
	DET	NUM	Adj	N

Notice that whereas English head nouns occur at phrase final position, the position of the head nouns in Akan and Dagaare do not hold neatly, although they appear to be more of head initial. What is clear is that Akan and Dagaare head nouns precede demonstratives, numerals, and adjectival modifiers. It is worth stating that the order of elements Akan and Dagaare NPs exhibit is typologically attested. Thus, Creissels (2000) points out that "in all African languages, NPs whose nominal head precedes demonstrative, numeral and adjectival modifiers are more prevalent than N-final NPs; and in Africa than elsewhere in the world, the N-initial order is more common".

3.2 The Verb Phrase

The verb word in Akan is usually complex. It carries subject, tense, aspect, modal and negative markers. The structure of the Akan verb in a simple clause might be represented as:

(13) (Subject marker)-(Negation)-tense/aspect prefixes-ROOT-tense/aspect suffixes

In (13), we realize that subject markers and TAMP morphologically operate on the verbs and it is often difficult to tease them apart by tense, aspect, and mood.

(14)	ɔ-frɛ-ɛ	ne	a-danfo	ɔkɔtɔ
	3SG.SUBJ-call-PST	3SG.POSS	SG-friend	crab

'He called his crab friend.'

The VP *ɔfrɛɛ* 'he called' in (14) contains a prefix that expresses inflection for person and number of subject, and a suffix that inflects for past tense. Verbs in Dagaare are not complex since tense and aspects are not morphologically marked. Tense and aspect are expressed analytically as structured in (15a) and illustrated in (15b):

(15) a. TENSE-VERB-POST PARTICLE

b.

Badɛre	poɔ	da	sàà	la
Spider	stomach	PST	spoil	PART

'Spider became angry.'

In (15b) the past tense marker *da* precedes the verb *sàà* 'spoil', then, followed by the post-verbal particle *la*. The structure of a verb in English may be expressed as:

(16) ROOT-TENSE/AGR (Payne, 1997, p. 61)

English has no subject affixes. Tense is morphologically marked on verbs but aspect is not; instead, it is analytically expressed by the combination of predicates as illustrated in (16).

(17) a. He has come (Perfect) b. He is coming (progressive)

3.3 Serial Verb Constructions

Akan verb phrases in a simple clause may be complex consisting of two or more verbs which may conceptualise a single event as demonstrated in examples (18 and 19):

(18)

ɔ-san-n	ba-e
3SG.SUBJ-return	come-PST

'He returned (again).'

(19)

ɔ-ka-kyerɛ-ɛ	ne	a-danfo	Kɔtɔ
3SG.SUBJ-tell-show-PST3	SG.POSS	SG-friend	crab

'He told his friend Crab.'

Note how the verbs share the same subject in (18), and how subject and object is also shared in (19). Serial verb construction is also evident in Dagaare as seen in (20):

(20) a.

ʊ	na	bɔ	la	yeli	nyɔge.
3SG.SUBJ	FUT	search	PART	say	hold.

'He will plan what to do.'

b.

ʊ	gaŋ	gbire	la
3SG.SUBJ	lie	sleep-IMP	PART

‘He is sleeping.’

Note how the three verbs *bɔ* ‘search’, *yeli* ‘say’ and *nyɔge* ‘hold’ share the same subject in (20a).

3.4 Verb Particles

Akan has verbal particles which form an idiomatic lexical unit with verbs and they do not carry any separable meanings for example *ase* ‘under’ and *so* ‘top’ in (21a) and (21b) respectively. These particles also occur as postpositions in Akan as discussed in section 3.

(21) a. Wɔn ɛ-tena ase ɛ-kyɛ-ɛ paa.
3PL.SUBJ SM-live under SM-long-PST well.
‘They lived together for a very long period of time.’

b. Ɔkɔtɔ gye-e Anaanse so
crab collect-PST spider top
‘Crab answered Spider.’

English also has such particles as wake up, give up and hurry up. Verbs may be used to express adverbs such as *again*. Consider example (22).

(22) ɔ-san-n ba-e
3SG.SUBJ-return-PST come-PST
‘He came (again).’

The verb *san* (Note 4) ‘return’ in (22) carries the sense of ‘again’. English has distinct class of adverbs.

3.5 Adpositions and Adpositional Phrases

Adposition is used as a cover word for prepositions and postpositions. The nature or source of adpositions and where they occur is of concern to linguists. Payne (1997, p. 86) for instance, points out that “adpositions may be particles, clitics or substantives (nouns/verbs), that say something about an adjacent noun phrase's semantic role in the clause”. They are termed prepositions when they occur before the noun phrase and postposition when they occur after the noun phrase. Regarding the source of adpositions, Payne (1997, p. 87) indicates that “Adpositions are derived historically from nouns that refer to parts of the body and verbs with locative or existential meanings”. Cross-linguistic study (Watters 2000, p. 196) informs us that African languages tend to have fewer prepositions/postpositions than European languages.

Akan has both prepositions and postpositions. A study of Akan prepositions by Osam (1994) indicates that Akan prepositions are historically derived from verbs. In (23a) the form *wɔ* is a lexical verb meaning ‘to be at’ but in (23b) *wɔ* ‘at’ functions as locative preposition. Others

include *fi* 'from', *kɔ* 'towards', *gu* 'down', *ma* 'for' from the verbs *fi* 'to be from', *kɔ* 'to go', *gu* 'to fall and *ma* 'to give' respectively.

(23) a. Kofi wɔ Kumasi

Kofi be.at Kumasi
'Kofi is in Kumasi.'

b. Yɛ-n-kɔ n-ka asɛm no wɔ ahen-fie

3PL.SUBJ-OPT-go OPT-tell matter DET be king-house

'Let's go settle the matter at the palace.'

Postpositions in Akan include *ase* 'under', *so* 'on', *nkyɛn* 'side', *akyi* 'back' *anim* 'face/front' and they all function to indicate location.

(24) bɔl no da a-konnwa no **ase**

Ball DET lie.STAT SG-chair DET under

'The ball is under the chair.' [TRPS 16]

(25) Kofi **akyi** yɛ no ya

Kofi back COP.be DEF pain

'Kofi's back is paining him.'

(26) a-bofra no koto a-konnwa no akyi.

SG-child DET squat.STAT SG-chair DET back

'The child is squatting behind the chair.' [TRPS 64]

Most postpositions are originated from spatial body parts. In (26) *akyi* 'back' part of body is metaphorically extended to give the abstract meaning of location.

Dagaare, like Akan, has postpositions which are derived from body part nouns as the following examples show:

(27) a kɔpo be la a tabole **zu**

DET cup be.STAT PART DET table head

'The cup is on the table.' [TRPS1]

(28) a te-wɔnee be la a laa **poɔ**

DET tree-fruit be.STAT PART DET bowl stomach

'The fruit is in the bowl.' [TRPS 2]

(29) a badɛre mare la a dasɛrɛ **eŋa**

DET spider paste PART DET ceiling body

'The spider is on the ceiling.' [TRPS 7]

The body part noun *zu* 'head' in (27), *poɔ* 'stomach' in (28) and *eŋa* 'body' in (29) function as postpositions 'on', 'in/inside' and 'on' respectively. English, however, has prepositions which include *in, under, of, to,* and among others. English may also have complex prepositions consisting of nouns such as *on top of, at the bottom of* and among others. The use of postpositions derived from body part nouns is also attested in Safaliba (Note 5) (Gur, Niger Congo), a language closely related to Dagaare (Owusu et al., 2015).

Having discussed the elements that constitute the structure of the simple clause, we now turn our attention to the basic word order of the simple sentences in these languages.

4. Word Order

Languages may differ from one another in the way in which the constituents are ordered. This section discusses the order of elements in the simple clause.
Word ordering in clauses concerns how the subject, object and verbs occur in the clause. Let us first consider the word order of Akan simple clause.

Akan has a strict SVO word order. The subject precedes the verb in a transitive clause and a direct object follows the verb, as seen in example (30):

(30) Anaanse ka-a asɛm no.
S V O
Spider tell-PST matter DET
'Spider told the story.'

In example (30), the subject *anaanse* 'spider' precedes the verb *kaa* 'told' and the object *asem no* 'the story' follows the verb *kaa* 'told'. The Goal precedes the Theme in a double object construction and the adjunct occurs at clause final position. Example (31) shows the linear order of constituents in a simple double object clause and (32) provides an instance.

(31) SUBJECT – VERB – GOAL – THEME – ADJUNCT

(32) ɔ-baa no kyerɛ papa no nnwom wɔ fie
SG-woman DET teach man DET songs at home
SUBJ V GOAL THEME ADJ
'The woman teaches the man songs at home.'

It is worth stating however, that the basic constituent order is usually modified when a constituent in a sentence is focused. In Akan, focus constructions involve the fronting of a non-verbal constituent in the clause, followed by the focus marker *na*, the subject and the

verb as illustrated in (34 b and c). A simple clause is structured when focus slots are filled. This is shown in example (33):

(33): Simple clause with focus slots filled

(FOCUS) →SUBJECT→V

Consider the word order of the declarative sentence in (34a) and the focus construction (34b). The constituent (Object) *Kɔtɔti* 'crab's head' in (34a) is fronted to the sentence initial position in (34b) followed by the subject and the verb leading to an OSV order of a sort. When a constituent is also questioned as shown in (34c) the declarative word order is maintained.

(34) a. Anaanse gye-e ɔkɔtɔ ti

Spider collect-PST crab head

'Spider collected crab's head.'

b. Ɔkɔtɔ ti na Anaanse gye-e

crab head FM spider collect-PST

'It was crab's head that spider collected.'

c. Hena na ɔ-gye-e ɔkɔtɔ ti?

who FM 3SG.SUBJ-collect-PST crab head

'Who collected crab's head?'

Dagaare, like Akan, has a fixed SVO word order. As observed in Dagaare transitive clause (see example 35), the subject *Badɛre* 'spider' precedes the verb *da de* 'took' while the object *a koɔre* 'the gourd' follows the verb.

(35) Badɛre da de la a kʊɔri.

Spider PST take PART DET gourd

S V O

'The spider took the gourd.'

In a simple double object clause in Dagaare, the linear order of constituents is shown in (36a) with example in (36b):

(36) a. SUBJECT – VERB – GOAL – THEME – (ADJUNCT)

b. Deri ku ma la gan
Deri give 1SG.OBJ PART book
'Deri gave me book.'

The basic constituent order in Dagaare can also be modified when a constituent in a sentence is focused. Focus constructions in Dagaare involve the fronting of a non-verbal constituent in the clause followed by the focus marker *la*, the subject and the verb as illustrated in (37c and d). When focus slots are filled a simple clause is as shown in (37a). Example (37b) is the basic form of (37c and d).

(37) a. (FOCUS) →SUBJECT→V

b. Badɛre do la tiɛ

Spider climb PERF tree

'The spider climbed the tree.'

c. a tiɛ la ka badɛre do

DET tree FOC that spider climb

'It was the tree that spider climbed.'

d. aŋ la do a tiɛ?
who Foc climb DEF tree?

'Who climbed the tree?'

English, similarly, has a strict SVO word order. In transitive clauses; the subject precedes the verb and the direct object follows the verb as illustrated in (38). In a di-transitive clause, there are two argument structures: one is the (NP, NP), as in (39b), and two (NP, PP) as in (39a).

(38) The child broke the plate.

S V O

(39) a. The boy gave the book to Kofi.

b. The boy gave Kofi the book.

We observe in (38) that the subject *the child* precedes the verb *broke* while, the object *the plate* follows the verb *broke*.

5. Basic Locative Construction

This section discusses how location is grounded in space. The Basic Locative Construction (BLC) is the construction used in the answer to the question 'where is the X?' in which X is a known spatial entity and its location the unknown information being sought. (Grinevald, 2006, p. 32). This section is meant to illustrate the kinds of *verbs* used in responding to 'where is the X' questions in the three languages and the order of elements in the locative construction. Let us begin with Akan.

Akan has the locative verb *wɔ* 'be located' which is the unmarked form and other dispositional verbs used in the BLC. The verbs used in the locative construction include: *wɔ*

'be located', *te* 'sit', *sɛn* 'hang', *da* 'lie', *tare* 'paste', *hyɛ* 'wear'. The fixed order of elements in Akan locative construction is:

(40) NP V [LOC] [NP Postp]

The subject NP position denotes the FIGURE. This is followed by the locative verb and a postpositional phrase which denotes the GROUND where the figure is located. The postposition as already discussed above is in most cases a grammaticalized body part noun. The following examples (41) illustrate some of the verbs used in locative construction.

(41)	n-nuaba	no	**wɔ**	a-dua	no	so
	PL-fruit	DET	be.at	SG-tree	DET	top
	'The fruits are on the tree.'			**[**TRPS-45]		

Wɔ is the unmarked form and it specifies the general location of the figure. As a result, it collocates a lot with postpositions such as *so* 'top' *mu* 'inside', *nkyɛn* 'beside' which helps to restrict the space the object occupies. The use of *so* in (41) shows the contact relationship between the *nnuaba* 'fruits' and the *adua* 'tree'. Postpositions, therefore, add meaning to the locative construction. It specifies the exact position of the figure. *Wɔ* can also be used with *mu* 'inside' to express containment relationship as in (42).

(42)	Aduaba	no	wɔ	nkyense	no	mu.
	fruit	DET	be.STAT	bowl	DET	inside
	'The fruit is in the bowl'.					

Dispositional verbs are the marked forms and they are usually used to specify the portion of the figure. For instance in (43) *da* 'lie' indicates that an object horizontally placed somewhere, with the entire body in direct contact with the ground or floor. *Da* 'lie' is juxtaposed with the postposition *mu* 'inside' which describes the containment relationship of the figure and the ground.

(43)	ɛ-kɔnmuade	no	**da**	ne	kɔn	mu
	SG-necklace	DET	lie.STAT	3SG.POSS	neck	inside
	'The necklace is on her neck.'			[TRPS-51]		

(44)	a-beremaa	no	te	e-gya	no	nkyɛn
	SG-boy	DET	sit.STAT	SG.fire	DET	beside
	'The boy is sitting beside the fire/the boy sits beside the fire.' [TRPS 38]					

Dagaare, like Akan, has a locative verb *be* 'be located' which is the unmarked form. *Be* can also be used with *pare* 'under' as in (46) and with other postpositions like *zu* 'on' as in (47) *poɔ* 'inside', and *eŋa* 'body'. The fixed order of elements in Dagaare locative construction is:

(45) NP V [LOC] [NP Postp]

The subject NP position represents the FIGURE. This is followed by the locative verb and a postpositional phrase which defines the GROUND where the figure is situated. The postposition as already discussed above is a grammaticalized body part noun in most instances.

(46)	a	bɔɔle	be	la	a	kogi	pare
	DET	ball	be.STAT	PART	DET	chair	anus
	'The ball is under the chair.'			[TRPS 16]			
(47)	a	kɔpo	be	la	a	tabole	zu
	DET	cup	be.STAT	PART	DET	table	head
	'The cup is on the table.'			[TRPS 1]			

In (47), *kɔpo* functions as the Figure, the locative verb *be* 'be' marks the location, *tabole* 'table' functions as the Ground and the postposition is the search domain. Dagaare, like Akan, has dispositional verbs which specify the position of the figure. They include *mare* 'paste', *yagele* 'hang' *dɛlle* 'lean', *yɛre* 'spread'.

(48)	a	kparoo	yagele	la	pimperi	eŋa
	DET	shirt	hang	PART	nail	body
	'The shirt hangs on the hook.'			[TRPS 9]		

In (48), the verb *yagele* 'hang' defines Figures that are connected by suspension to their reference objects. *Yagele* 'hang' is used with the postposition *eŋa* 'body'. The verb *mare* 'be pasted' in (49) describes the locative relationships in which the figure is securely attached to a reference object such that it cannot be detached easily. This verb is used for describing 'a spider on a ceiling' and it takes the postposition *eŋa* 'body'.

(49)	a	badɛre	mare	la	a	dasɛrɛ	eŋa
	DET	spider	paste	PART	DET	ceiling	body
	'The spider is on the ceiling.'						

The verb *dɛlle* 'lean' in (50) is used to describe locative relations involving a leaning position. Here, the part of the figure is directly in contact with the upper part of the reference object and it is supported at another end. *Dɛlle* does not take any postposition as observed in the others. This could be due to the fact that the verb itself carries the spatial information and so the search domain becomes redundant.

(50)	a	dɛre	dɛlle	la	a	daŋkyeni
	DET	ladder	lean	PART	DET	wall

'The ladder is leaning on the wall.' [TRPS 58]

The basic locative construction in English follows the usual word order and uses the spatially neutral existential copula, with the spatial information found in the choice of preposition (Grinevald, 2006, p. 32).

The fixed order of elements in English locative construction is:

(51) NP V [COP] [Prep NP]

The subject NP position represents the FIGURE. This is followed by the existential copula verb and a prepositional phrase which specifies the GROUND where the figure is located. The preposition provides the spatial information.

This section has shown that English does not have verbal operations expressing spatial grounding. It uses the copula 'be' to ground spatial location. However, Akan and Dagaare employ dispositional verbs to express spatial grounding.

6. Conclusion

This paper has considered the similarities and differences of the simple clause structures in three languages: English, Akan and Dagaare. First, we discussed the noun phrases. It was shown that Akan and Dagaare, unlike English, have noun class system. Nouns typically follow determiners in Dagaare and English whereas nouns precede determiners in Akan. Akan and Dagaare have a similar NP structure where nominal heads precede demonstrative, numeral and adjectival modifiers whereas in English nominal heads occur at phrase-final position.

Second, in the discussion of the verb phrase we noted the existence of serial verb construction is unique to Akan and Dagaare. Third, adpositional phrase was examined. We noted that Akan has both prepositions derived from verbs and postpositions derived from body part nouns; Dagaare has postpositions also derived from body part nouns whereas English employs prepositions only.

With regards to the basic word order, we demonstrated that all the three languages have a similar SVO word order. However, Akan and Dagaare word order is modified in focus constructions. Again, the basic locative construction was discussed. It was revealed that both Akan and Dagaare employ one unmarked locative verb and other dispositional verbs and postpositions in locative constructions whereas English employs a locative copula and prepositions to form locative constructions.

Generally, the paper observed that despite the differences, Akan and Dagaare have a lot in common as compared to English. This, of course, shows how distant English, an Indo-European language, is from the two African languages. Certain linguistic features such as serial verb construction and focus constructions were unique to Akan and Dagaare and this, is not surprising since languages within the same language family (Niger Congo) tend to share certain lexical, phonological, morphological and syntactic features. It is important to note, however, that there are also areas of significant variation between these languages.

These differences show where Akan and Dagaare languages diverge into other sub-family groups: Kwa and Gur, respectively.

List of Abbreviations

1	First person	NEG	Negative
2	Second person	NP	Noun Phrase
3	Third person	NUM	Numeral
ADJ	Adjective	PART	Focus Particle
ATR	Advanced Tongue Root	PL	Plural
COMP	Complementizer	POSS	Possessive
COND	Conditional	POST	Postposition
CONJ	Conjunction	PREP	Preposition
COP	Copula	PROX	Proximity
CL	Noun Class	PST	Past
DEF	Definite	REL	Relative Marker
DEM	Demonstrative	SG	Singular
DET	Determiner	SM	Subject marker
FOC	Focus	STAT	Stative
FM	Focus Marker	SUBJ	Subject
FUT	Future	SVO	Subject Verb Object
INTW	Interrogative Word	OPT	Optative
LOC	Locative	V	Verb
N	Noun	VP	Verb Phrase

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Notes

Note 1. English is not included because it is a well-known language/meta-language.

Note 2. Bodomo (2000) refers to these languages as Mabia, literally meaning the mother's child

Note 3. Osam (1996) identified six noun class prefixes: CL 1: o-/ɔ, CL 2: e-/a-, CL 3: i-/ɪ-, CL4: ɛ-, CL 5: n- and CL 6: e-/a-. The last two are plural prefixes. These noun classes according to him are sensitive to animacy distinction.

Note 4. Amfo (2005, p. 156-161) considers *san* as a recurrence marker and argues that *san* is an output of a grammaticalization process which has as its historical input a phonological identical lexical verb with a restoration meaning.

Note 5. Safaliba is spoken in the western part of the Northern region of Ghana.