

Research Article



Inherent complements as source of disambiguation
of multi-meaning verbs in Bono



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Johnson Baah, Cecilia Agyeiwah Agyemang, Mohammed Issaka & Paul Anning

Department of Languages and General Studies, University of Energy and Natural Resources, Ghana

Correspondence: johnson.baah@uenr.edu.gh

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2391-4767>

Abstract

This study is an investigation of multi-meaning verbs in the Bono dialect of the Akan (Kwa, Niger-Congo) language. The study further explores certain verbs in Bono whose meanings are conditioned by a specific inflectional form. Using Type Craft annotated data from ethnographic investigation of fifteen native speakers of Bono, we discuss issues regarding these verbs and categorize them into homonyms and polysemes based on their relatedness. The findings indicate that many Bono verbs change their meaning as soon as the complement changes which superficially presupposes that the verb is meaningless. However, in reality such verbs are meaningful, but that Bono has many homograph verbs which need linguistic contexts for disambiguation. It was observed that as much as the change of a complement leads to a change in meaning; in the same way the change of a verb brings about a meaning change. It was also established that the verbs *bu* 'respect', *boa* 'lie', *de* 'called', *ho* 'get it', occur only in the present form, and that they form past tense either through a past marker *na* or settle for a synonym. The verb *Ho* cannot form negation and can only occur in an imperative construction. But just like the others it occupies the slot of a verb in a construction.

Keywords: Akan, Bono, Bono verbs, homonyms, inherent complements, multi-meaning verbs, polysemes

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Public Interest Statement

Among the major Akan dialects, Bono has received the least scholarly attention and this work will add to the body of knowledge on the dialect. This investigation of multi-meaning verbs brings to light the crucial role context plays in the determination of meaning in Bono and Akan in general, and draws attention of non-native speakers especially to these nuances of meaning in order to communicate effectively. The findings will serve as a source of motivation for linguists to make further inquiries into the Bono verbal systems, particularly, the generic verbs. Separation of meanings into polysemes and homonyms will guide lexicographers when compiling the meanings of verbs into dictionaries as to which meaning(s) should be under the same lemma or receive independent entry.

1.0 Introduction

Until 2018 when the Bible Society of Ghana started bible translation into Bono, it had remained a spoken dialect with few academic papers written to describe its features and differences between other dialects of Akan. Bono is one of the major dialects of Akan (a Kwa, Niger-Congo) language. The dialect is spoken in the Bono and the Bono East regions of Ghana and part of Ivory Coast where it is called Abron. Osam (2004) ranks Bono as the third largest dialect of Akan after Asante and Fante. Internationally, Bono is listed as part of Abron with language index: Abron – abr – ISO 639-3. (1993 SIL).

1.1. Some Features of the Bono Dialect

There are several features that distinguish Bono from the other dialects of Akan, and the following exemplify few of such differences. The first-person singular pronoun (1SG) is a homorganic nasal in some areas instead of the full form ‘me’ which is generally used in most of the dialects of Akan, especially in Asante.

Table 1: 1SG pronoun of Bono and Asante

Bono	Asante	English
N-da	Me-da	I sleep
M-papa	Me papa	My father

Also, the 2nd and the 3rd person Plural pronouns are different as compared to Asante.

Table 2: Differences in 2PL/3PL Pronoun

Person	Bono	Asante	English
2PL	Ho	Mo	You
3PL	Bε	Wɔn	They

The majority of the speakers use different determiners as compared to the Asante dialect which is both geographically and linguistically closest neighbour.

Table 3: some determiners of Bono and Asante

Bono	Asante	English
Di(e)	Ni(e)	Be this
He	No	The
Wei	Yei	This

1.1 Previous work done on Bono

Although Bono has not received a lot of attention from linguists, some general information can be gathered from works such as Aidoo 1971; Ampah 2004; Tuffour 2020; Baah 2015, 2005; Bota 2002, and journal articles from Dolphyne 1979, 1982. In Aidoo (1971), the subdialect of Bono spoken in Sunyani, the capital of the Brong Ahafo region, is compared with the Asante dialect of Akan with the main aim to find the phonological differences between Asante and the subdialect in question. Dolphyne (1979) describes the Bono dialect generally. The paper explicates the features of the dialect clusters in general and compares it with Asante, Akuapem and Fante, and further discusses some of the differences between the subdialects of Bono. Observations that most Bono speakers use a glottal fricative /h/ where other Akan speakers use a labialized or non-labialized alveolo-palatal fricative /hw/ or /hy/ are made. Bota (2002) focuses on the auto-segmental phonology and emphasizes three aspects of Bono phonology: sound system, some phonological processes, and its tonal structure. The study aims at giving insight into newer phonological developments. The findings indicate that both urban dwellers and highly educated Bono speakers prefix nouns with mid-vowels (e, o, ε, ə), a phenomenon which is common in the Asante dialect. The study also indicates that young Bono speakers use alveolo-palatal fricatives instead of the glottal ones. Ampah (2004) investigates the impact of the Asante dialect on the Bono subdialect spoken in Sunyani, and his findings indicate that lexical items are syntactically borrowed from Asante while their equivalents in Bono are either dropped or used alongside the borrowed ones.

Baah (2005), comparison is made of the Dorma, Sunyani and Techiman subdialects of Bono and it is found out that there are phonological and lexical differences among the dialects. However, in his work of 2015, Baah explains that serial verb constructions of Akan are motivated by iconicity. These were exemplified with principles of iconicity. The most recent publication found on the dialect is Tuffour (2020) which foregrounds the domain of its usage for the determination of its position in the Atebubu community. The findings of the paper indicate that the speakers within the age brackets of eleven and forty-five favour the usage of Asante dialect in variety of contexts due to the prestige it exudes. This finding is in consonance with other academic papers cited earlier including (Aidoo 1971, Bota 2002, Ampah 2004, Baah 2005).

This study is a semantic inquiry of the Bono verbal system with the overarching aim of investigating some inherent complement verbs and how their meanings are determined. The findings, it is hoped, will add to the body of knowledge on Akan language in general and Bono dialect in particular. It is also hoped to serve as a source of motivation for other researchers to make further

inquiries into the Bono verbal systems, particularly, the generic verbs.

2.0 Methodology

This is an ethnographic study based on a fieldwork and participant observation during which fifteen (15) native speakers of Bono were interviewed. The interviewees were presented with a list of verbs and were asked to give their meanings in English or to explain what the verbs mean to them in Bono. In cases where the informants explained a verb's meaning in Bono, we matched the meaning with an equivalent verb in English. The informants were also tasked to form sentences with these verbs and their responses were recorded, transcribed, and the relevant portions coupled with field notes were used as the data for our analyses. Our native-speaker knowledge also guided us of the naturalness and idiomaticity of the sentences. With the aid of Type craft (online resource) the data were annotated. The respondents were drawn from three communities including Sunyani, Dormaa and Techiman. These communities were chosen mainly for convenience. The ages of our informants ranged between eighteen (18) and sixty-five years (65). Among the informants were six females and nine males. However, in the analysis of the data we did not take into consideration the responses of particular genders as time precluded such parameters.

For the analysis of some of the verb meanings, we looked at the semantic kernel running through them and grouped them as either homonyms or polysemes. For example, the five verbs presented in table 3 show some of the multi-meaning verbs which we term as homograph verbs. The informants agreed that these meanings are accessible to them when the verbs occur in citation form. Note that the numbers of the meanings were chosen randomly; they do not constitute the level of accessibility.

Table 3: Five examples of verbs used

Verb	Meaning1	Meaning2	Meaning3	Meaning4	Meaning5
Kye	Catch	Arrest	Fry	-	-
Bu	Break	Respect	Fell	Fold	swindle/ cheat
Hye	Wear	Fill	Force	order	hide
do	Weed	Love	be deep	be hot	-
bo	Hit	Hire	Baptize	Play	Strip

3.0. Verbal Meaning

In Bono and Akan in general, most verbs change their meaning in different contexts dependent on the meaning of their complement. In the literature such verbs are referred to variously as inherent complement verbs (Nwachukwu 1985, Seddoh 1987), obligatory complement verbs (Essegbey 1999), intrinsic complement verbs (Yapo 2006). These verbs behave as though they had no basic meanings and in that sense are semantically empty; and their meanings are taken from their complements. In order to get more precise meaning of such verbs one needs to put the verb in context. For example, the following meanings were given by one of our informants when we gave the verbs below to him in citation forms. The verbs are italicized and the meanings are given to the right, following a dash.

bu – break, respect, swindle
hyε – fill, wear, order, force
dɔ – love, be deep, weed
fe – kiss, miss, vomit

Figure 1: Exemplification of ICV verbs in Bono

Afterwards we found out from him whether one of the meanings was more accessible to him than the others, but his answer was negative, meaning that all the meanings are accessible anytime the verb is mentioned. In his attempt to use the verbs unambiguously, he added complements to the verbs as follows. The complements are italicized and the meanings are within brackets.

bu abaa mu (a stick in) – break
bu adeε (something) – respect
bu obi (someone) – swindle or cheat
hyε aburo (maize) – fill
hyε ataadeε (a dress) – wear
hyε maame no ngo (the woman, oil) – (place) order
hyε no (him/her) – force

Figure 2: Exemplification of disambiguated Bono verbs

Verbs which behave like *bu* and *hyε* acquire new meanings when their inherent complements (ICs) are added since the verbs and the complements form a unit. We argue in this paper that the impression that the root verb without the complement lacks meaning is erroneous since in the case of Bono, the IC only disambiguates the meaning rather than giving it meaning. Another interesting phenomenon we have observed is that for a subclass of verbs, certain meanings are tied to one specific inflectional form of the verb. In the subsequent sections we discuss the two phenomena mentioned above and exemplify the phenomena with examples from the data. We have adopted the term inherent complement verbs (here after ICVs) in this paper. The research was guided by the following questions:

- 1) Are there semantically empty or meaningless verbs in Bono?
- 2) Why do some verbs have so many meanings?
- 3) Why are certain senses of some verbs connected to a specific inflectional form of the verb?

3.1. The two Approaches of ICVs

It can be observed that the example verbs given above in figure 2 and their complements translate into single verbs in English. This has led to two different schools of thought. Whereas one group thinks that the verb and its complement constitute a single lexical item, the other thinks they are made up of two independent categories. Based on these divergent views on the matter, two approaches have been proposed referred to by Essegbey as ‘meaning based’ and ‘form based’ approaches (1999). In the meaning-based approach the syntactic structure proposed for the verb-complement sequence is determined by their resultant interpretation. It is believed that this approach is influenced by the translation equivalence of the sequence in European languages. One of the proponents of this approach is Nwachukwu. His position is that the verb and the nominal complement form a semantic unit and that the ‘inherent complements are constituents of the category verb...’ Nwachukwu (1985). Seddoh (1987) believes that the ICVs are ‘bound forms and their full meaning becomes apparent only when they are combined with other morphemes which are always noun morphemes’.

There is another group of linguists which believes that ICVs-IC sequences should be analyzed based on the syntactic behaviour of the constituents. Among these proponents are Ameka 1994b, Kinyalolo 1991, Ihionu 1992, Manfredi 1991 (all cited in Essegbey 1999). Essegbey (1994b; Ameka 1994; Saethero and Hellan 1996) argue that ICVs possess meaning and that their meanings are invariable in most, if not in all cases whilst Seddoh, a meaning-based proponent, considers ICVs as an ‘idiomatic verb which can assume any semantic property depending on the environment it finds itself’. Essegbey points out that the semantics of arguments plays a crucial role in the interpretation of sentences but there are other factors which influence the interpretation we give to sentences. These include the semantics of the verb, the semantics of the NPs functioning as its arguments, the semantics of the construction in which they occur, and the semantics resulting from compositional rules.

We would like to mention that as much as all these factors contribute to the interpretation of a sentence, it does not only rest on the semantic representation, but also the circumstance and one’s state of mind may contribute significantly to the meaning activated at a given time. For example, the verb *bɔ* has several meanings, but it is likely for it to be interpreted unambiguously in this incomplete sentence *mɛbɔ* ‘I will + ICV’ as ‘slap’ in a context of a heated argument between two supporters of opposing political parties in Ghana. However, on a football pitch, the verb alone, *bɔ*, will be interpreted as ‘kick’ or ‘play’ the ball. In the next section we analyze the ICVs-IC sequence in Bono arguing that in order to understand the meaning expressed by a given sentence one needs to go beyond the semantics of the sentence, and look at the discourse in its appropriate context.

3.3. Complements as main context of meaning change

The meanings of some of the Bono verbs are so general that in order to get more specific meaning one needs a meaning-specifying complement. However, there are some of such verbs which have their basic meaning when in isolation. One of such verbs is *bɔ* ‘kick’. Though this verb has several meanings, according to the informants, ‘kick’ is more easily accessible to Bono and Akan speakers in general. The following are some of the other meanings of *bɔ*. (It is worthy of note that most of the *bɔ*-noun sequence can be nominalized by pre-posing the noun to form the sequence [-N] -*bɔ* as in ‘*bɔ* dua’

to *curse* – ‘duabɔ’ cursing). The verb is in each case followed by a noun, and an English translation of that noun in brackets. The English translation of the verb-noun combination follows it in italics. We start our discussions with our first question: *Are there semantically empty or meaningless verbs in Bono?* To answer the question, we present our data and after each we explain.

- bɔ nkɔmɔ (conversation) – to *converse*
- bɔ dam (madness) – to *become mad*
- bɔ adagya (nakedness) – to *stripe naked*
- bɔ wa (cough) – to *cough*
- bɔ no (him/her) – to *hit*
- bɔ nipa (human being) – to *create*
- bɔ paa (hiring) - to *hire*
- bɔ dua (a curse) – to *curse*
- bɔ asu (baptism) - *baptise*
- bɔ hu (fear) – to *frighten*
- bɔ abaa (stick/cane) – to *cane*
- bɔ kukuo (a pot) – to *break*
- bɔ binim (startled) – *be startled*
- bɔ ani so (on the eyes) – *slap*
- bɔ ko (absenteeism) – *being absent* (from school, church or work) *for a long time*
- bɔ adadaa (stunt) – to *be stunt in growth*
- bɔ pɔ (knot) – to *tie*
- bɔ pɔ (plan) – to *plan*
- bɔ ba (beckon) – to *beckon*, etc.

Figure 3: The ICV *bɔ* and its meanings

When the verb is used ditransitively, in most cases it is the theme NP that is crucial in the determination of the meaning of the verb. For example, in *ɔ-bɔ-m ba* translated ‘*S/he beckons me*’, the meaning is specified by the 2nd NP, *ba* ‘beckon’. Again, we are able to form a noun- verb sequence so that *ba* and *bɔ* become *babɔ* ‘act of beckoning’. When *ba* is deleted the meaning changes to ‘*S/he hits me*’. Despite the contribution of the complement to the meaning of the sentence, we do not in any way doubt the contribution of the verb to the meaning of the sentence. As a case in point let us look at the meaning of the verb *sa*,

(1a): {*sa*, tr, [-NP], give enema}

Papa no saa akoraa no.

Papa	no	saa	akoraa	no papa
no	sa	a	akoraa	no
<i>man</i> .SBJ	<i>the</i> .DEF	<i>give.enema</i>	PAST	<i>child</i> .OBJ
DET	V	N	DET	<i>the</i> .DEF N

"The man gave enema to the child."

In (1a) above the verb has been used transitively without the theme NP but the meaning is clear to any native Bono speaker. In fact, here the patient NP, *abɔfra* 'child' plays a significant role in determining the meaning. If the patient is a male creature, *sa may* mean 'castrate'. This is shown in (1b).

(1b): {sa, tr, [-NP], castrate}

Papa no saa adwanyini no.

Papa	no	saa	adwanyini no papa
no	sa	a	adwanyini no
<i>man</i> .SBJ	<i>the</i> .DEF	<i>castrate</i>	PAST <i>rams</i> .OBJ <i>the</i> .DEF N
DET	V	N	DET

"The man castrated the rams."

Note in addition that giving this context, the transitive use of *sa* can be ambiguous as well especially when it comes to human males. We would like to argue that the deletion of a theme NP really suggests that it does not contribute to the interpretation of the sentence. We believe that native speakers have a stored or implicit knowledge about the verb *sa* though such implicit knowledge can change over time. For example, the transitive use of *sa* may mean something different all together for the youth, especially for soccer fans. This is because the word has taken on a different meaning in recent times. A situation where a player's tackle of an opponent causes him to fall is referred to as *sa*. Besides, enema is not given so often anymore because of the availability of local drug stores, clinics and hospitals where the people can receive medical treatment. The medication meaning of *sa* therefore might not be easily accessible to most urban dwelling-youth since the referenced medical procedure is not known to them.

Apart from the verb *bɔ* mentioned above, there are many other ICVs verbs in Bono. These include *di, boa, da, nya, pɔno, to, fe, bu, pam, tu, gye, tɔ, kye, si, hwe, hye, ware, sa*. etc. The verb *di* alone has more than sixty meanings listed in the Akan dictionary. Notwithstanding its numerous meanings, the verb has the basic meaning 'eat' which comes out clearly anytime the verb is mentioned. As already discussed, also in this case to determine other meanings, a meaning-specifying complement needs to appear. we argue here that although complements of ICVs have meaning which they add to the ICV construction, they are not the sole meaning- determinants. Consider the following sentences:

(2a): {tu, ditr, [-NP NP], advise}

Afia tuu no fo.

afia tuu no fo

afia tu u no fo

SBJ *advise* PAST *him/her*.OBJ.SG *advice*.OBJ2 PN

PRO N

“Afia advised him/her.”

(2b): {tɔ, ditr, [-NP NP], buy}

Afia tɔɔ no fo.

Afia tɔɔ no fo

afia tɔ ɔ no fo

SBJ *bought* PAST *it*.OBJ. *cheap*.OBJ2 PN

PRO N

“Afia bought it at a cheap price

In Bono, the sequence *tu+fo* means ‘to advise’ as shown in example (2a) above. The complement *fo* alone means ‘advice’. It is therefore natural to say that the meaning of the sentence is derived from the complement but not the verb. If care is not taken one can conclude that *tu* is semantically empty. In the sentence that follows (2b), a similar homograph *fo* occurs in almost the same context except for the verb leading to a completely different meaning. We would like to argue that the verb contributes to the meaning in that it specifies the context for the meaning of the complement. If the complement alone is the meaning-determinant then it would mean the same in all verbal contexts. Again, there is a meaning component of *fo* which is not overtly expressed in (2b). That is, it is the price of the commodity which Afia bought the item that is cheap, meaning that *fo* in (2b) belongs to a different word class – adjective. This supports our claim that one’s implicit knowledge plays a crucial role in sentence interpretation. There is, therefore, the need to critically study the meanings of those verbs which assume different meanings in various contexts in order to know which ones are polysemes, and which ones are homonyms. For example, we find it strange to see about sixty meanings listed under one lexeme *di* in the Akan dictionary mentioned above. This gives the impression that all the meanings are related therefore polysemes. Let us consider the following example:

3a: {di, tr, [-NP], eat}

Afia dii aduane no.

Afia dii aduane no

afia di i aduane no A.SBJ eat
 PAST food.OBJ the PN V
 N DET
 "Afia ate the food."

In (3a) *di* is glossed as 'eat' and this is the basic meaning of the verb. Though 'eat' as we have mentioned, is the basic meaning of the verb, we think the complement 'food' also plays a role for the meaning to be possible. Assume the complement was *dua*⁴ 'tree' which cannot collocate with *di* the whole construction would have been unacceptable.

(3b): {di, tr, [-NP], judge Afia

dii asem no.

Afia dii asem no afia di
 i asem no A.SBJ judge PAST case.
 OBJ the PN V NDET
 "Afia judged the case."

In (3b) *di* is glossed as 'judge' since the complement is no longer food but 'case'. In real life situation a case cannot be eaten, therefore any such gloss as 'eat' would be a bad one. It is in this sense that the complement imposes a new meaning onto the verb so that one might want to say that the verb has no meaning by itself. But in the same way when the verb changes there will be a change in meaning. For example, if we substitute the verb in (3b) by *pε* glossed as 'look for' the meaning of the sentence becomes *Afia is curious*. We argue therefore that it is neither the verb nor the complement alone that determines the meaning of the sentence but the construction as a whole. This means the (3c - e) are different constructions with their own collocational restrictions.

(3c)

(3d)

Afia	dii		adeε
afia	di	i	adeε
A.SBJ	succeed	PAST	throne.OBJ
PN	V	N	
"Afia	reigned	/ Afia	inherited a throne."

Afia dii fɔ.

Afia dii adeε

Afia dii fɔ

afia di i fɔ

A.SBJ lose PAST guilt.OBJ

PN V N

'Afia was guilty'

(3e)

Afia dii nkɔmɔ.

Afia dii nkɔmɔ

afia di i nkɔmɔ

A.SBJ converse PAST conversation.OBJ PN V

N

"Afia conversed (with somebody)."

ICVs and their inherent complements can be nominalized through incorporation, and many of such nominal are lexicalized in Bono. In their nominalized forms ICVs have different meanings other than the base meaning. Here, we answer our second question: *why do some verbs have so many meanings?* To answer this question, we present the second part of the data. All the verbs have different meanings, and with the help of our informants we looked for some of the meanings of the verbs known to us, and put them in contexts. The aim of this study is neither to find all the verbs in Bono nor look for all the meanings of the verbs used. The aim is rather to show that a lot of the verbs in Bono and Akan in general have several meanings and that these multi-meaning verbs in the language are either polysemous or homonymous.

4.0. Bono Verbs in Context

We analyze the multiple meanings of the various verbs and attempt to determine which of the verbs are polysemous or homonymous. In fact, there are various tests used to determine whether the meanings of a word or phrase are polysemous or homonymous. One of such tests is relatedness (Azuma 1997, Hino et al. 2006, 2010). We adopt the meaning relatedness for the determination of whether nuances of verb meanings are polyseme or homonym.

tu shows locomotion

(4a)

betuu ho fo.

betuu ho fo

bɛ tu u ho fo

they.SBJ advise PAST you.OBJ.PL advice.OBJ2 V

PRO N

"They advised you."

(4b)

bɛtuu kwane.

bɛtuu kwane
 bɛ tu u kwane *they.SBJ*
travel PAST road.OBJ V
 N
 “They travelled.”

(4c)			
Anomaa no tuuyɛ.			
Anomaa anomaa	no no	tuuyɛ tu	uyɛ
<i>bird.SBJ</i>	<i>The</i>	<i>fly</i>	PAST
N	DET	V	
“The bird flew away.”			

(4d)

Mframa no tuu dua kɛsɛɛ no.

Mframa no tuu dua kɛsɛɛ no mframa
 no tu u dua kɛsɛɛ no *wind.SBJ the*
uproot PAST tree.OBJ big the N DET V N
 ADJ DET
 “The windstorm uprooted the big tree.”

(4e)

Maame no tuu fie hɔ nnora.

Maame no tuu fie hɔ nnora maame
 no tu u fie hɔ nnora *woman.SBJ*
the move PAST house.OBJ there yesterday N
 DET V N ADV ADV
 “The woman moved from the house yesterday.”

(4f)

Yɛtuu amena.

Yɛtuu amena
 yɛ tu u amena *we.SBJ*
dig PAST hole.OBJ V

N

"We dug a hole."

In (4), *tu* has six meanings ‘advise, fly, travel, uproot, move, dig’ occurring in sentences (4a - f) respectively. We observe that all the meanings except (a) ‘advise’, involve locomotion of one of the arguments of the verb. We would like to interpret the locomotion concept as the semantic kernel and the means of relatedness of the verbs or in other words as its core meaning. Consequently, we categorize all meanings of *tu* which express some concept of locomotion as one polysemous verb. The meaning ‘advise’ however is a homonym of the former. Apart from this distinction, there are some of the verb-complement sequences that are nominalised *tu+fo* = *a-fotuo* ‘advice’ and *tu+kwane* = *a-kwantuo* ‘travelling’. Both nominals are preceded by the nominal prefix – a, and are abstract nouns. We argue here that since the verb shows different senses of a clearly identified meaning kernel, it is inappropriate to say that such a verb has no meaning.

Some context of *sosɔ*

(5a)

Yaa sosɔ akoraamono no nfono.

Yaa	sosɔ	akoraamono	no
nfono	yaa	sosɔ	ɔ akoraa mono no
nfono			
Y.SBJ	fondle	PAST child.POSS	new the cheehs.OBJ
		N	DET N

"Yaa fondled the baby."

(5b)

Nnomaa no besosɔ mmo no.

Nnomaa	no	besosɔ	mmo	no	nnomaa
no	bɛ	sosɔ	ɔ mmo	no	birds.SBJ the
come	peck	PAST	rice.OBJ	the	N DET V N
DET					

"The birds came and pecked the rice."

(5c)

nkyensee no sosɔ.

nkyensee	no	sosɔ
nkyensee	no	sosɔ
roofingsheet.SBJ	the	leak
N	DET	V

"The roofing sheets leak."

(5d)

ɔbɛsɔsɔɔ mbokiti.

ɔbɛsɔsɔɔ

mbokiti

ɔ bɛ sɔsɔ ɔ m bokiti *he.SBJ*

come mend PAST my bucket.OBJ V

N

"He came and mended my buckets."

The meanings of *sɔsɔ* can be grouped into two based on related property born by the various contextual meanings. In (5a&b) there is 'touching'. That is, the agent touches the patient/theme though different parts of the body are used, and with different intentions. On the other hand, (c&d) share a concept which is different from that expressed in (a&b). The situation expressed in (c) is about a hole in something metallic whilst in (d) it is being mended. In (5c) liquid passes through the hole. On the bases of these similarities, we will not connect a concept to the latter situation but will assume that groups (a, b) and (c, d) illustrate two distinct meaning. Notice that none of the complements and the verb can be nominalized.

twe showing two major meanings

(6a)

Akokora no anya atwe.

akokora no anya atwe akokora

no a nya a twe *oldman.SBJ the*

PERF *get* PERF *die* N DET V V

"The old man has died finally."

(6b)

Yɛtwee ne bayerɛ no.

yɛtwee ne bayerɛ no yɛ twe

e ne bayerɛ no *we.SBJ cart PAST*

his.POSS yam.OBJ DEF V PRO N

"We carted his yam."

(6c)

Papa no tweem.

papa no tweem

papa no twe e m *maan.SBJ*

the pull PAST me.OBJ N DET V

"The man pulled me."

Two of the meanings of *twe* ‘cart’ and ‘pull’ are related in that the agent moves the patient. The directions of the movements seem similar. In (6b) it is assumed that the yam is being moved home after harvest, meaning that it is being brought closer to the people. Similarly, the one being pulled draws closer to the one doing the pulling. The concept expressed here is forced movement towards the deictic center which in (6b) is understood as home. (6a) is different since *twe* in that context denotes ‘stretching oneself and become stiff’. Here, whilst (6b&c) express one semantic concept and are thus polysemous, (6a) could perhaps be understood as a homonym to that meaning. It is only *twe+bayerε* which can be nominalised as *bayetwe* ‘conveyance of yams’.

Is *sɔ*, touch or light?

(7a)

ɔsɔɔ y’ani.

ɔsɔɔ y’ani
 ɔ sɔ ɔ y’ ani *it.SBJ*
please PAST our.POSS eye.OBJ V
 N
“It pleased us.”

(7b)

Kwaku ɔsɔ ankaa.

Kwaku ɔsɔ ankaa kwaku ɔ
 ɔ sɔ ankaa *K.SBJ he.SBJ PROG*
catch orange.OBJ PNV N
“Kwaku is catching an orange.”

(7c)

Nsɔɔ kanea no.

Nsɔɔ kanea no
 n sɔ ɔ kanea no *I.SBJ*
switch.on PAST light.OBJ the V
 N DET
“I switched on the light.”

(7d)

Afia sɔɔ kenerε no.

Afia sɔɔ kenerε no afia
 sɔ ɔ kenerε no *A.SBJ light PAST*
candle.OBJ the PNV N DET
“Afia lit the candle”

The concept expressed in all the four meanings of *sɔ* provided under (7) can be categorized into

two. In (7a&b) there is a concept of TOUCH whilst in (c&d) LIGHT. In the latter the agent causes a candle, a lantern or a bulb to produce light. On the other hand, in (a) there is no physical contact; it is in abstraction not as it is in (b) where the agent catches the oranges. We would like to argue that whereas in (7c&d) it is the concept of light that matters we consider them as polysemous. (7a) and (7b) however cannot be polysemous even though they express some concepts of TOUCH. We consider them to be separate homonyms. This means *so* will have three entries in a dictionary. Beside the distinctions, it is only (7a) that is nominalized as *so+ani = aniso* 'satisfaction'

Some meanings and nominal of *bo*

(8a)

Beboom.

Beboom

be bo m *They.SBJ hit*

PAST *me.OBJ*

V

"*They hit me.*"

(8b)

Beboom paa.

Beboom paa

be bo o m paa

They.SBJ hire.ICV PAST me.OBJ piece.of.job.OBJ2 V N

"*They hired me.*"

(8c)

Beboom asu.

Beboom asu

be bo o m asu

They.SBJ baptise PAST me.OBJ baptism.OBJ2 V

N

"*They baptised me.*"

(8d)

Beboom ndwom.

Beboom ndwom

be bo o m ndwom *They.SBJ*

play PAST me.OBJ song.OBJ2 V

N

"*They played me a song.*"

"The oil is thickening."

(9d)

Ndaa be ase.

Ndaa be ase

n da a be ase

I.SBJ *lie* PAST *them*.OBJ *under*.OBJ2 V PRO

N

"I thanked them."

In our analysis of *da* we find three sentences expressing the same semantic concept, yet we will assume they are 3 homonyms. (9a) and (9c) seem to share a common semantic feature regarding what happens to the *theme NP* but (9b) and (9d) look different. The 'thickening' of the oil is seen as a form of sleep. Though in (d) *da* literally mean 'lying (down for someone)' it is not the same as the usage in (b). *Da* and *ase* need to occur together to give the meaning 'thank' because neither *da* nor *ase* can express that meaning in isolation. Which of the two is then 'donating the meaning in this case? The two nominalise as *aseda* 'thanksgiving'.

Homonyms of *si*

(10a)

besi be nooma Memeneda anpa.

besi be nooma Memeneda anpa

be si be nooma memeneda anpa *They*.

SBJ *wash* *their*.PROG *things*.OBJ *Saturday* *morning* PRO

PRO N N ADV

"They wash their clothes on Saturday morning."

(10b)

Afia si firii kaa no mu.

Afia si firii kaa no mu

afia si firi i kaa no mu *A.SBJ alight*

leave PAST *car*.OBJ *the in*

PN V V2 N DET PPOST

"Afia alighted from the car."

(10c)

Nkwanhya no sii nnora.

Nkwanhya no sii nnora

nkwanhya no si i nnora *accident*.

SBJ *the* *happen* PAST *yesterday* N DET

V ADV

“The accident happened yesterday.”

(10d)

Bɛɛsi aburo.

Bɛɛsi aburo
 bɛ ɛ si aburo *they.SBJ*
 PROG pound maize.OBJ V
 N
 “They are pounding maize.”

(10e)						
ɔnsi deɛ ɔkaaye no so.						
ɔnsi	deɛ	ɔkaaye			no	so
ɔ n si	deɛ	ɔ	ka	aye	no	so
<i>he.SBJ should.OPT</i> <i>hit</i>	<i>what.</i> OBJ	<i>he.SBJ</i>	<i>say</i>	PAST	<i>it.OBJ</i>	<i>on</i>
V	COMP	V			PRO	PPOST

“He should repeat what he said.”

(10f)

Papa no sii m’ani so.

Papa no sii m’ani so papa
 no si i m’ ani so *man.SBJ the*
slap PAST my.OBJ eye on
 N DET V N PPOST
 “The man slapped me.”

(10d) and (10e) of the six listed examples under *si* relate in the manner the action is carried out – through repetition. The usage in (10e) is a bit different as the verb requires the postposition *so* ‘on’ or literally ‘the surface of’. In (10f) *si* is used in a similar way syntactically but there are other factors which prohibit us from assuming they are polysemes. Although the slap was a severe one, it was not repeated. We will then assume that we look at all the meanings as homonyms. Throughout all the meanings here it is only (10a) that nominalises – *si+ nnoɔma = nnoɔmasie* ‘washing’.

5.0. Verb form and its meaning

Traditionally, verbs inflect for different tense/aspect. Whilst Osam (2003) for example believes Akan verbs inflect for aspect, there are others who believe the language inflect for tense. This is an interesting debate but our concern about the inflection of the language, especially the Bono dialect is that some of the verbs inflect to express certain specific meanings that cannot be expressed in any other form of that same verb. In this section we explore the phenomenon where certain verb forms give some specific meanings that are not expressed in any other form. We answer question 3) *Why*

are certain senses of some verbs connected to a specific inflectional form of the verb?

In fact, these verbs are few but we think they are worth discussing in this paper. First, we present the data which show the contexts the verbs give such meanings and second, to attempt an explanation of why it is so. These verbs express some specific meanings in the present form.

(11a)

Abeemaa no bu nipa biao

Abeemaa no bu nipa biao
abeemaa no bu nipa biao boy.SBJ
the respect person.OBJ anybody N DET
V N ADJ
“The boy respects everybody.”

(11b)

***Abeemaa no buu nipa biao**

*Abeemaa no buu nipa biao
*abeemaa no bu u nipa biao boy.SBJ
the.DEF respect PAST person.OBJ anyone N DET V
N ADJ
“The boy respected everybody.”

In Bono, to express a non-clause-finally verb in the past, the final sound of the verb is lengthened. ‘Where a direct object or an adverbial follows the verb, the completive aspect occurs in the form of the lengthening of the final vowel of the verb stem if the verb ends in a vowel Osam (2003:5)’. In fact, this pattern of past tense/aspect formation occurs in Asante as well. However, in our attempt to express (11a) in the past, the resultant sentence (b) sounds weird as no native speaker of Bono will choose this form over (c) below:

(11c)

Na abeemaa no bu nipa biao

Na abeemaa no bu nipa biao na
abeemaa no bu nipa biao
The boy.SBJ the.DEF respect person.OBJ anyone
N DET V N ADJ
“The boy respected everybody then.”

One of the roles *na* ‘then’ plays is ‘to code past imperfective events’ Osam (ibid). The morpheme is

more than just a past tense marker in this context. Its occurrence in (c) suggests that: (i) the boy does not respect any longer, (ii) the people have received a bad report about the boy. This means that (c) needs a context. To give the background of (c) above, it needs to occur in a larger sentence. Whilst *na* occurs in a matrix clause, the lower clause is expected to state the context or the situation that gave rise to the assertion in the matrix one. This is shown in (d) below:

(11d)

Abeemaa no te ha no na ɔbu nipa biao.

Abeemaa	no	te	ha	no	na	ɔbu	nipa	biaa
abeemaa	no	te	ha	no	na	ɔ bu	nipa	biaa

youngman/boy.S the.DE live here.M CM.DE then he. respect person.OB everyone. M

BJ	F	O	F	J	O			
N	DET	V	ADV	DET	ADV	V	N	ADJ

“When the youngman was living here, he respected everybody.”

The verb can however express the idea of ‘respect’ in a different sense by prefixing it with *be* (FUTURE) but the meaning expressed in (e) is not necessary in the future. It means the boy or young man looks like a respectful person.

(11e)

Abeemaa no bebu nipa biao

Abeemaa	no	bebu	nipa	biaa	abeemaa
no	be	bu	nipa	biaa	boy.SBJ the.DEF
MOD					respect person.OBJ anyone N DET V
N	ADJ				

“The boy may respect everybody.”

Another verb form which gives specific meaning is *boa* ‘lie’. This is shown in (12a) below:

(12a)

panyini no boa. panyini

no	boa	panyini
no	boa	man.SBJ
the	lie	N DET V

“The man is lying.”

Apart from this form, if we want to express the same meaning in sentence (a) in a different tense/aspect, there is the need for a different verb phrase *di toro* ‘make a lie’. Other than that, the meaning will change. For example, when *boa* is used in the past it either means *helped* or *gathered*:

(12b)

Panyini no boaayε. Panyini

no boaayε panyini

no boa ayε *man*.SBJ *the*

help PAST N DET V

"The man helped"

(12c)

Panyini no boaa wuraa no ano.

Panyini no boaa wuraa no ano

panyini no boa a wuraa no ano

man.SBJ *the gather garbage*.OBJ *the together*.OBJ2 N

DET V N DET N

"The man gathered the garbage."

Let us point it out here that whereas in sentence (a) *boa* can also be interpreted as 'help', in (b) it cannot be interpreted as 'lie'. The third verb that falls under this group of verbs is *de* 'called'. This verb has some homonyms. One of them is used in serial verb constructions which Osam calls 'de-serialization' whilst another one is used as a ditransitive verb meaning 'owe'. The ditransitive one can be used in all tense/aspectual forms. Our concern is not about any of these homonyms but the one which is interpreted as 'called' as in (ex13a) below

(13a)

Nde Kwaku.

Nde Kwaku

n de kwaku

I.SBJ *call* *kwaku*.OBJ V

PN

"I am called Kwaku."

(13b)

***Mdee Kwaku.**

*Ndee Kwaku

*m de e kwaku *I*.SBJ *call*

PAST *Kwaku*.OBJ V

PN

"I was called Kwaku."

(13b) is as a result of a past tense/aspect morpheme. The verb does not occur in any form apart

from the one used in (a).

The next and final verb of this nature occurs only in imperative form as in 14a.

(14a)

Ho

Ho

ho

get.it

V

“You get it.”

This verb is used only in the imperative. It can neither be in the past nor be negated. Apart from ‘it’ the verb cannot take any complement. Its only usage is how it occurs in (14a). The following sentence (14b) is never possible in Bono.

(14b)

***Kofi hooyε.**

*Kofi hooyε kofi ho

oyε K.SBJ *get* PAST

PN V

“Kofi got it.”

There is a synonym *gye* which is used anytime there is the need to express the idea in a different tense/aspectual form. In the next subsection we attempt to find out the status of these four verbs *bu*, *boa*, *de*, and *ho* mentioned above.

5.1. The Status of *bu*, *boa*, *de*, and *ho* in Bono

As mentioned earlier, the four verbs are commonly used in the present form when the meanings in the sentences above are intended. The idiomatic Bono sentences are those in (11a), (12a), (13a), and (14a). In order to express these meanings in the past, it is likely that the verbs (*bu*, *boa*, and *de*) will be preceded by a past marker *na*. The verb *ho*, as far as we know in Bono, cannot be used in other tenses apart from the imperative as in (14a). The only option available is to replace it with another verb, *gye* ‘receive’ when one intends to use it in other tense/aspectual forms. However, the sentence (11e) is possible but its object is likely to be *adeε*. The aim of this subsection is to investigate whether these words are truly verbs. The analysis centres on the slot they occupy in a sentence. It is argued that since they occur after an NP, that is occupying the slot of a verb, they can be called verbs. For example, *bu* and *de* take complements *adeε* and *a name* (any name) respectively whilst *ho* takes *it* as a complement though not overtly realized; in Akan in general the inanimate pronoun *it* is not

overtly realized. *Boa* on the other hand is an intransitive verb. Apart from their syntactic behaviour, they can be negated except *ho*. In Akan it is the verb that carries the negative marker. In the following examples (11a), (12a) and (13a) are negated and repeated below as (15a - c) respectively.

(15a)

Panyini no mmoa.

Panyini	no		mmoa
panyini	no	m	moa
<i>man</i> .SBJ	<i>the</i> .DEF NEG.		<i>lie</i>
N	DET		V

“The man is not lying.”

(15b)

Menne Kwaku.

Menne Kwaku
 Me n ne kwaku
Me.SUBJ NEG *call* *kwaku*.OBJ
 V PN

“I am not called Kwaku.”

(15c)

Abeemaa no mmu nipa biao.

Abeemaa no mmu nipa biao
 abeemaa no m mu nipa biao *youngman*.
 SBJ *the*.DEF NEG *respect* *person*.OBJ *anyone*
 N DET V N ADJ

“The youngman does not respect anybody.”

With the exception of *ho* the verbs *bu*, *boa* and *de* discussed under this subsection can be said to be stative in nature. For example, *bu* and *de* are inherent properties of their subjects (11a) and (13a) above. It is further argued that *boa* as used in (12a) suggests that *papa no* ‘the man’ finds himself in a lying state so for calling that verb a stative one is in order. The morpho- syntactic behaviour of the verbs also points to this fact. On the other hand, we find it difficult to accept *ho* as a verb. If it is one then what kind of verb is it? We rather wonder whether it can be called a particle in that there is one particle in Akan *nie* (*ni* in Bono) used for identification. It points out nouns yet it behaves as a verb. Well, as far as we know no one has boldly said that *nie* is an adjective as it occurs as a predicative adjective. *Ho* however, behaves as an action verb occurring only in imperative. Should we call it a verbal or imperative particle? We challenge other linguists to conduct further studies on words like *ho* mentioned in this study.

6.0. Conclusion

Our findings indicate that many Bono verbs change their meaning as soon as the complement changes which superficially seem the verb is meaningless. In reality that is not the case for we observed that as much as the change of a complement leads to a change in meaning; in the same way the change of a verb brings about a meaning change. Apart from that intransitive verbs also distinguish meaning in Bono but they do not have any complements. We argued that the meaning of a sentence is neither given by the verb nor the complement alone but the whole construction. In addition, the implicit knowledge of one plays a major role in one's interpretation of words in an expression. The following findings were made:

- That all Bono verbs have meaning and the verbs have polysemous and/or homonymous counterparts
- That the verbs become ambiguous out of contexts
- That certain ICV-IC sequence has become fixed expressions
- That some ICV-IC sequence nominalize as IC-ICV

We argue that once the nominalized forms express meanings which neither the ICVs nor the ICs alone can express, then, there is a meaning component in both the ICVs and the IC. We recommend that the verbs of Bono and Akan in general need to be critically studied so that homonyms are separated from polysemes. This will go a long way to help lexicographers especially when compiling the meanings of verbs into dictionaries. As this will guide them as to which meaning(s) should be under the same lemma or receive independent entry. Another phenomenon explored in this study is that certain meanings of certain verbs are tied to certain inflectional forms. The verbs *bu* (*adeɛ*) 'respect', *boa* 'lie', *de* 'called', and *ho* 'get it' only occur in the present form. To form the past of *bu*, *boa*, and *de* it requires a past tense marker *na*. We observed that the three verbs can be negated, and they occupy the slot of a verb in a sentence. *Ho* occurs only in an imperative construction. We conclude that *bu*, *boa*, and *de* are verbs. What about *ho*? Why do the verbs behave the way they do? These are fertile grounds which need to be cultivated by linguists.

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Biographies

Johnson Baah holds BA Linguistics with Philosophy, University of Ghana, MA Linguistics (Bergen, Norway), MPhil Linguistics (NTNU, Norway) and currently teaching Academic Writing and Critical Thinking at University of Energy and Natural Resources, Sunyani, Ghana. He has done research in the Bono dialect of Akan including *Iconicity in serial verb construction*, and *Meaning of Bono Verbs*. His research interests include syntax and Semantics of Bono, Student Writing, and Academic Literacies. He is a reviewer of Bono Bible translation, Bible Society of Ghana from 2018 to present, and pursuing his PhD in Applied Linguistics, Rhodes University, South Africa. **Cecilia Agyeiwah Agyemang** is an Academic Staff in the Department of Languages and General Studies, University of Energy and Natural Resources, Sunyani, Ghana. She has eleven years of teaching experience in the pre-tertiary and tertiary institutions in Ghana. She has MPhil degrees in English Language and Educational Leadership. She has research interest in the following areas: language documentation, genre analysis, discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, academic literacy, and sociolinguistics. **Paul Anning** is a Ghanaian scholar who has a passion for language studies. He is a professional teacher and is well-grounded in English and French Languages, Literature and Education. He is a trilingual of Akan, English and French and holds MPhil in French Language, BA in Sociology and Teacher’s Certificate ‘A’ in Education. He is currently an Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Languages and General Studies, University of Energy and Natural Resources, Sunyani, Ghana. His repertoire of knowledge in language studies from the Basic to the tertiary level for the past years has set him to develop research interest in pedagogy. **Mohammed Issaka** is a Systemic Functional Linguist with expertise in Political discourse. He is a seasoned scholar with twenty-one years of teaching experience in English Language Studies. He holds an MPhil degree in English and currently pursuing a doctorate degree in English Language Education. He is an Assistant Lecturer at the Department of Languages and General Studies, University of Energy and Natural Resources, Sunyani, Ghana. His research interest includes; systemic functional linguistics, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, English syntax, semantics, phonetics and phonology.

Authorship and Level of Contribution

Johnson Baah is the principal author of the paper under review since it constitutes a portion of his thesis. **Paul Anning** and **Mohammed Issaka** offered a critical revision of the initial work to make it suitable for publication. **Cecilia Agyeiwah Agyemang** wrote the introduction of this paper.

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