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Do Akans eat almost everything? Expounding the word sense multiplicity of the Akan verb "di"

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Abstract
This paper has explored the multiple meanings of the Akan verb *di*. It has emphasized the homonyms and their polysemes as well as the extended meanings that have emerged from each basic sense. The morphological structure and syntactic properties of the various senses has also been considered in order to bring out how grammatical structure affects the realization of meaning. Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primarily, speeches, conversations and songs were recorded and transcribed to solicit occurrences and usages of the verb. Secondary data was collected from novels, bibles, dictionaries, lexicons and grammars that are written in Akan. Published dates of these books were between 1969 and 2004 so that there could be a diachronic comparison of the usage of the verb over the years. Through descriptive analysis, this paper has established that the verb *di* in Akan does not always denote "to eat" or "to have sex". Other denotations such as "to converse", "to be in a situation", "to perform and activity", "to work" and many more are identified and dichotomized by their distinct syntactic structures and morphological orientations. Their synonyms have also been brought to light to support the distinctiveness of each sense of the verb.

Keywords: homonymy, polysemy, semantics, syntactic structure, word sense multiplicity

Public Interest Statement
The Akan verb *di* has different, meanings depending on its context. Some of the meanings are related while others are entirely different. Although native and non-native speakers use the verb to express different meanings, they usually associate only two meanings to it. However, a closer look at this verb reveals that it has other (basic) meanings which are independent, with each distinct sense having related and extended senses.

Introduction

Words with multiple meanings are a phenomenon inherent to any natural language. This is possible with any member of the major and minor word classes. It is possible to derive several distinct, as well as related meanings from a single word, as in the case of homonyms and polysemes respectively. As a result, a number of ambiguities arise in daily conversations. Hence, what a speaker might want to put across may be perceived differently by listeners. It is, therefore, not rare to find situations in which listeners misinterpret messages given by speakers. The Akan verb *di* within specific contexts expresses diverse meanings which most speakers are aware of, yet if any native speaker of Akan, irrespective of age or level of education, is asked of its English equivalent, the most probable response to be expected is 'to eat'. The perceived unitariness of the sense of *di* as 'eat' is evident in the way it has been glossed by some scholars of Akan in their linguistic analysis (see sentence 1-3).

1. *asɛm* + *di*   *asɛnnie*
   message + eat   'judgment' (Abrefa, 2003, p.59)

2. *gye*   + *di*   *gyedi*
   receive + eat   'faith'   (Dolphyne, 2006, p.124)

3. *Kofi*   *gye-e*   *asɛm no*   *di-i*
   Kofi   collect-PST   story DET   eat-PST
   'Kofi believed the story'.   (Agyeman, 2002, p.6)

The notion of *di* having only one basic sense is also realized in Ghanaian Pidgin English (GPE) where speakers would use the word *chop* to represent any idea that involves an activity which in Akan would be represented by the word *di*. For instance, in GPE, one *chops* tenure, *chops* food, *chops* position, *chops* cash, *chops* a woman and so on. In support of this assertion, Sekyi-Baidoo (2006) writes: 'It is, however, common to find people transliterate *di akonnwa* as 'eat a stool' or 'chop a stool' in GPE as though *di* here meant 'to eat'. The adoption of 'chop' in GPE draws further attention to the fact that the sense 'eat' has been adopted as the representative sense of the word *di*, which has influenced the pidgin expressions. Examples like *I dey go **chop** X'mas* (GPE)- *Me-re-kɔ-**di** Buronya* (Akan)- "I am going to celebrate Christmas" (English) exist in Ghanaian conversations.

Literature Review

Lexical semantics studies how and what the words of a language denote (Pustejovsky, 1995; Sekyi-Baidoo, 2002). Lexical semantics covers areas such as classification and decomposition of word meaning, the differences and similarities in lexical semantic structure between different languages, and the relationship of word meaning to sentence meaning and syntax. One issue that is of greater concern in lexical semantics is whether the meaning of a lexical unit is instituted by looking at its environment in the semantic net (by looking at the other words it collocates with within natural sentences), or if the meaning is already locally contained in the lexical unit. The former proposition is seen within the principle that the meaning of a lexical item should be looked for within the context it is placed. The latter also supports the principle that lexical items are individually endowed with meaning. Therefore, to derive the meaning of a sentence, its components should be analyzed. Another topic that is explored in lexical semantics as a theory is the mapping of words to concepts. Under this, issues like lexical or sense relations (defined as patterns of association that exist between lexical items in a language) are discussed. Two types of sense relations – homonymy, and polysemy are relevant to this paper and are discussed below.

Homonymy

Words are considered to be homonymous if they have the same form and pronunciation but differ in meaning. To Sekyi-Baidoo (2002, p.171), homonymy refers to 'a situation in which two or more words have the same physical manifestation but have different or unrelated senses or meaning'. This means that the words involved are spelt and pronounced in the same way, but considering the context they find themselves, they do not relate in meaning. In the dictionaries, homonyms are listed separately although they have the same spellings. This implies that homonyms have different lexemes. For example, the

words *minute* and *minute* are homonyms in English. Nonetheless they have the same orthography and pronunciation, one is related to time while the other is related to a summary or record of what is said or decided at a formal meeting. Klepousniotou (2002) also views homonyms as words that appear to have several distinct mental representations, one for each meaning or sense. Naturally, homonymous forms need not be adjusted in a language system at a given evolutionary stage. In analyzing the function of cases, two general aspects must be considered: either a case may be embedded in one form more than one syntactic function or one syntactic function may have several forms in a given language (Lyons, 1968).

Polysemy

Polysemy refers to the existence of several related meanings for a single word. Thakur (2007, p.37) presents this notion in the following words: "In every language there are words which have a number of cognitive meanings and each of these words has a primary meaning and also has one or more secondary meanings". These secondary meanings are seen as the metaphorical extensions of their primary meaning (Agyekum, 2001; Yule, 2007). The above proposition is in line with the definition of polysemy given by Sekyi-Baidoo (2002) as "the different related meanings of a lexical unit or a word or the main sense of a word in different contexts or conditions" (p. 176). The different related senses of the lexical unit realized in different contexts are invariably the application of the main sense. For example, the primary meaning of the English word *head* refers to the part of the body on top of the neck and it also has other related meanings like the head of an institution or department, the head of a table, the head of a family, of a group and so on. These senses are polysemes because they share the characteristics of the core meaning. These characteristics include being on top, being upright and being in control. This might have informed Kilgarriff (1992; 1997) to describe polysemy as a situation in which two senses of a word are related in that they share membership of a subsuming semantic classification. With this explanation, the word *mouth* as "part of the body" and *mouth* as "an outlet of a river" will be considered polysemous because both meanings are subsumed by a higher concept - an opening. The dictionary, therefore, will give these two senses one entry under a prototype homonym.

Cruse (2000) identified two broad varieties of polysemic relations. These are linear relations between polysemy and non-linear relations between polysemy. Cruse asserts that senses have a linear relation if one is a specialization of the other. Linear relations between polysemy include auto-hyponymy, auto-meronymy, auto-superordination and auto-holonymy. *Auto-hyponymy* occurs when a word has a default general sense and a contextually restricted sense which is more specific in that, it denotes a sub-variety of the general sense. For example, the verb *drink* has two senses: a general sense of "intake of a liquid into the mouth and swallow" and a more specific sense which is "the intake of alcohol. *Auto-meronymy* occurs in a parallel way to auto-hyponymy except that the more specific meaning denotes sub-part rather than sub-type, that is, it is not easy to identify the one which is the more basic meaning. For instance, the sentence *Ama leads them* could mean "Ama is in front" (as in a queue) or 'Ama is leading' (as in a race or controlling affairs or directing people). *Auto-superordination* is also the case in which a word refers to a sub-group of a species and the entire group. For example, the word *man* may refer to the human race (both males and females) and man as the gender opposed to woman. The last, *auto-holonymy*, refers to the case where a word refers to a part of a whole as well as the whole. In the sentences *Ama loves to show off her body* and *Ama received some serious injuries to her body*, the first body refers to the entire body whiles the second sense refers to a part of the body. The non-linear relations between polysemy listed by Cruse (2000) include metaphors, metonymy, lexical, systematic and contextual. Systematic polysemy is a situation where several senses of at least two words regularly imply a similar semantic structure. Some cases of polysemy are systematic in the sense that the relationship between the meanings recurs over a range of lexical items that is at least partly predictable on semantic grounds (Cruse, 2000, p.113). The related senses of words that are predictable occur on the basis of a general pattern of sense alternation observed for words denoting objects of the same category. In *Metonymical polysemy*, one term is used for another on the basis of a real-world connection between the two underlying concepts. This real-world relation, according to Gorp (1980, p.253), is called "a relation of contiguity or proximity". The literal meaning of a metonymical word

is, therefore, said to be contiguous with another concept, which is actually interpreted in the text. *Contextual polysemy* occurs when two or more senses are related in that, looking at the context each sense is situated, the same result exists. A word that is lexically polysemous has different senses that are related to each other by means of regular shifts or extension from the basic meaning (Taylor, 1995). Lyons (1977) provides the following criteria for identifying lexical polysemy: (a) there must be a clear derived sense relation between the polysemic senses of a word; (b) the polysemic sense of a word must be shown to be etymologically related to the same original source word; (c) The lexical polysemy is a sense relation within a particular syntactic category, that is, lexical polysemy does not cut across syntactic word class boundary.

Methods and Finding

This research is purely qualitative, a kind of research that studies the nature of phenomena in terms of their quality, manifestations context or perspective (Busetto et al, 2020:1). Data was drawn from eight written texts which include readers, lexicons, bibles and grammars written in Akan. Conversations and other speech from were recorded via radio broadcasts, songs and human interactions. Verbal data was transcribed into written text and added to already gathered texts for analysis and discussion. Multiple occurrences were given single entries in instances where a particular sense was used in different contexts. The corpus was codified with superscript numbers. For instance, aa senses connoting "to speak" were superscripted [s] so they could all be placed under one homonym. In all, eleven senses were gathered. These were 'to consume', 'to have sex', 'to spend', 'to be in a position', 'to move, 'to work', 'to speak', 'to be in a situation, 'to behave', 'to perform an activity' and 'to deserve something'. Based on the data, these senses were further broken into polysemes. There were other sensed that could not be grouped under any homonym. However, five of the senses are discussed in this paper as seen in the subsequent section.

Discussion

Based on analysis of transcribed data, it has been realized that *di* has a number of different senses which constitute different lexemes. Attention is drawn to grammatical evidence which supports the distinction of the senses of *di* as a way of establishing them as different homonyms. The different senses are discussed below.

Di as 'to consume'

According to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, to consume means to eat, drink or ingest. 'Eating', in this context, is considered as a process, as a culture and as a frequent intake of food substance. The verb *di* (as a process), therefore, can signify an act of putting food or an edible substance into the stomach, usually through the mouth. This is the most basic or common meaning that native speakers easily acknowledge. *Di* in this sense is a transitive verb and, therefore, requires two arguments; a subject and an object. It has an intransitive variant *didi*. Syntactically the verb phrase (VP) has the structure, VP ☐ V (NP) as seen in example 4 below:

4. *Kofi   re-di   fufuo*
   Kofi   PROG-eat   fufuo
   'Kofi is eating fufuo.'

Di as a process has many cognitive synonyms with each concentrating on different aspects of the totality of the sense 'eat'. For instance, the lexemes *nom*, *we*, *tafere*, *hwe*, *fe* and *twe* may be used to refer to the act of eating when the process involves different kinds of food. Figure 2 illustrates this point.
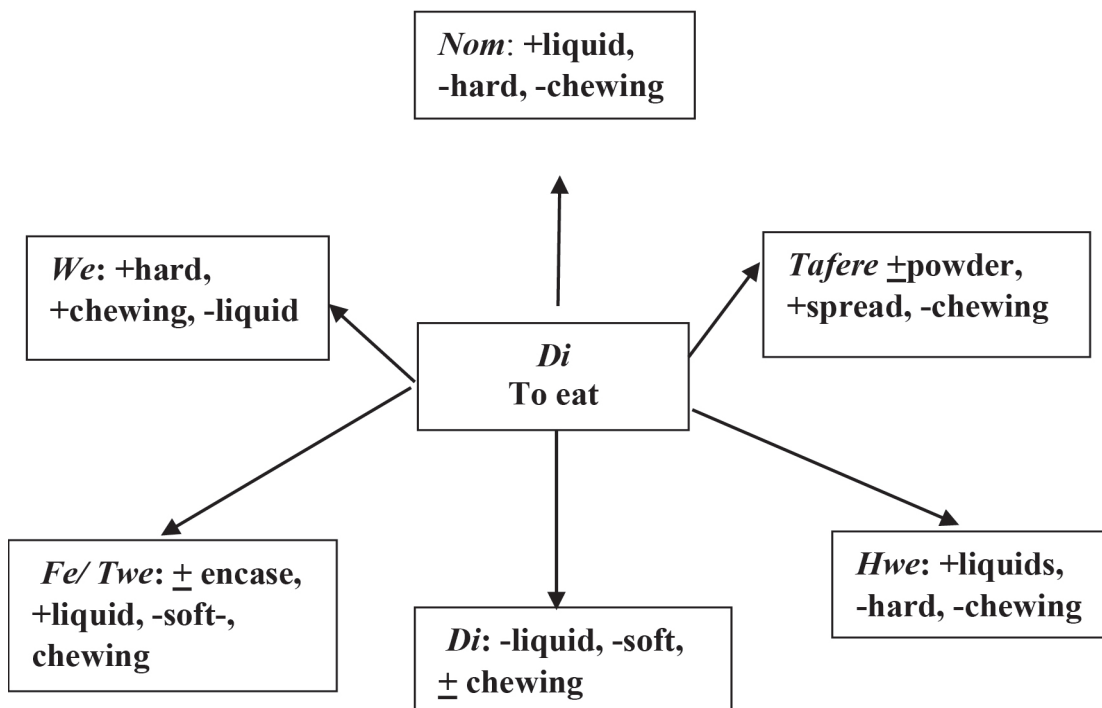
Figure 1: Cognitive Synonyms of the 'Eat' Sense of *Di*

It is seen from the above diagram that *di* as a generic term is realized differently when the eating process involves specific foods and different mode of eating. For instance, when a person takes in liquid foods such as porridge, soup, tea, etc. he or she prefers to use the lexeme *nom* 'drink' to *di* 'eat' as in sentence 5 Below:

> 5. *Abena   a-nom[a-hwe]   koko/nkwan/tii   a-wie*
>   Abena   PERF-drink   porridge/soup/tea   PERF-finish
>   'Abena has finished eating porridge / soup / tea every day'.

The verb *nom* is used to describe the action yet when the person is asked to translate the sentence into English, he or she will not say, 'I have drunk porridge', rather, 'I have eaten/taken porridge. Such foods possess the semantic features +liquid, -hard, -soft and they are not required to be chewed before swallowing. Sometimes, speakers use the verb *hwe* (encased in 5) to refer to the intake of soup, however this is not surprising since both verbs share the same semantic features. When the lexeme *tafere* 'lick' is used in place of *di*, then the food that is being eaten is either in powder or liquid form and that can spread on one's hands or in a bowl. Example is seen in sentence 6 below.

> 6. *Yaa   a-tafere   kooko/nkwan/aburosiam   no   nyinaa*
>   Yaa   PERF-lick   porridge/soup/roasted corn flour   DET   all
>   Yaa has eaten all the porridge/soup/roasted corn flour.

Twe/fe 'suck' is used when speakers refer to foods that are encased in bottles and plastic containers. For instance, since foods like porridge or mashed *kenkey* are served in polythene bags, eaters usually suck them if they want to eat directly from the containers. It is therefore possible to hear construction like sentence 7 below. This also applies to fruits like mangoes and oranges that are sucked to ooze the juice out of them.

> 7. *Abɔfra   no   re-fe   kooko/ankaa/nufoɔ   no   feefee*
>   *Abɔfra*   DET   PROG-suck   porridge/orange/breast   DET   DEG

'The child is sucking the (encased) porridge/orange/breast milk vigorously.'

Finally, the verb *we* 'chew' is used when hard foods like plantain, yam or bread are eaten. Here, it is obvious that these foods have to be chewed before swallowing. In this regard, the use of *we* can be said to be centered on an activity of the eating process because eating a food like plantain, yam, bread involve biting, chewing and swallowing. The chewing aspect is metonymically used to represent the entire eating process.

The verb *di* 'eat' could also be regarded as what a group of people accept as delicacy or edible in their culture. In this case, Akan speakers do not consider the verb as a process (an action) that begins and completes as was seen in the earlier sense.

8. *Ghana-foɔ   di kusie*
   Ghana-people   eat   rat

   'Ghanaians eat rat.'

In example 8, the sentence means that Ghanaians do not abhor eating rat. The eating of rat, therefore, becomes part of their custom or culture. Since it is a culture they live with, there is no natural end-point to actions.

Di as 'to have sex'
The second lexeme of the verb *di* means to have sex. This sense is also transitive. However, unlike the first lexeme, it has no intransitive counterpart. Syntactically, the VP has a structure, VP □ V NP, as the examples below depict.

9. *Yaw di-i   ne   yere nnora*
   Yaw sex-PAST POS wife yesterday
   'Yaw had sex with his wife yesterday.'

It is obvious from examples 9 that *di* does not mean 'to eat' but 'to have sex'. This is because the object NP the verb collocates with in both instances are not edible. Sex among the Akan is considered obscene and so when one is forced to explicitly mention the act using the verb *di*, one is required to precede an utterance with the euphemistic word *sɛbe* 'excuse me' to demystify the taboo nature of the sexual connotation. As a result of this, some people intentionally prefix their sentences containing the verb with *sɛbe* irrespective of the context. For instance, construction like sentence 10 is usually heard. Eating, obviously, is not a forbidden act and should not attract any euphemism but one may argue that since the sentence 10 is a di-transitive and the direct object is *yere* 'wife' when a speaker decides to pause before adding the oblique [*aduane*] 'food' the meaning connotes sex more than food.

10. *Sɛbe, me-re-kɔ-di   me yere aduane*
    EUPH 1SG-PROG-go-eat PRO wife food
    'Excuse me to say I'm going to eat my wife's food'.

This sense of the verb is synonymous with verbs like *hu* 'see', *hyia* 'meet', *fa* 'take' and *da* 'lay' or 'sleep'. They are absolute and thus, do not alter sentence structure and meaning except Sentence 14. Examples are seen from different versions of the Akan Bible (11-14).

11. *Na Adam **hunu-u**   ne   yere Hawa, na   ɔ-nyinsɛne-e...*
    and Adam know-PST POSS wife Eve   and 1SG-pregnant-PST...
    And Adam knew his wife Eve and she became pregnant... (Metaphorical)
    And Adam had sex with his wife Eve and she became pregnant (Gen. 4:1ᵃ BSG, 1964)

12. *Na Adam ne   ne   yere Hawa **hyia-a**   mu,   na   ɔ-nyinsɛne-e...*

and Adam CONJ POSS wife Eve meet-PST PostP and 1SG-pregnant-PST

And Adam met with his wife Eve and she became pregnant... (Metaphorical)
And Adam had sex with his wife Eve and she became pregnant (Gen. 4:1ᵃ BSG, 2017)

13. *Na Adam **fa-a** ne yere Hawa, na ɔ-nyinsɛne-e...*
and Adam take-PST POSS wife Eve and 1SG-pregnant-PST...

And Adam took in his wife Eve and she became pregnant... (Metaphorical)
'And Adam had sex with his wife Eve and she became pregnant.'

14. *Na Adam ne ne yere Hawa **da-eɛ** na ɔ-nyinsɛne-e...*
and Adam CONJ POSS wife Eve sleep-PST and 1SG-pregnant-PST

And Adam slept with his wife Eve and she became pregnant... (Gen. 4:1ᵃ BSG, 2018)
'And Adam had sex with his wife Eve and she became pregnant,'

Preferably, sentences 11-14 would be used to describe the act of sexual intercourse because sex is considered a sacred act within the Akan culture. This synonymous relation, according to Cruse is propositional because 'this type seems to be the commonest in areas of special emotive significance, especially taboo areas where a finely graded set of terms is often available, occupying different points on the euphemism-dysphemism scale' (Cruse 2000, p.158).

Di as 'to speak'
The third lexeme of the Akan verb *di* is 'to speak'. This sense signifies an act of speaking or conversing. It is also a transitive verb and has the syntactic structure, VP ☐ V NP (NP), as seen in sentence 15 to 17 below:

15. *M-panim-foɔ no di-i asɛm no*
PLU-adult-people DET speak-PST issue DET

'The elders settled the dispute.'

16. *Ɔ-ne n'a-wo-foɔ di-i nkɔmmɔ*
3SG-CONJ POS'PLU-birth-people hit-PST message

'He conversed with his parents.'

17. *Awuraa yi re-di a-torɔ*
lady DET PROG-speak PLU-lie

'This lady is telling lies.'

It can be seen from examples 15 to 17 that each of the sentences involves an act of speaking. This is because words are used to settle dispute, converse and to tell lies. This verb has synonyms like *ka* 'say', *bɔ* 'hit' and *twa* 'cut' which can replace the verb *di* in specific contexts, although these synonyms have limited uses so far as this sense is concerned. The sentences below illustrate how these synonyms can replace the verb *di*.

18. *M-panim-foɔ no **ka-a** asɛm no*
PLU-adult-people DET say-PST issue DET

'The elders settled the dispute.'

19. *Ɔ-ne n'a-wo-foɔ **bɔ-ɔ** nkɔmmɔ*
3SG-CONJ POS'PLU-birth-people hit-PST message

'He conversed with his parents.'

20. *Awuraa* *yi* **re-twa** *a-torɔ*
    lady DET PROG-cut PLU-lie

'This lady is telling lies.'

This sense is categorized into three polysemes namely *legality*, *single subjecthood* and *multiple subjecthood*. Under legality, the speakers may swear an oath, usually in court, palace or any other place they deem necessary to swear. This act can be performed by just one person or a group of people. Settling of dispute or taking of oath in court, at the palace, at the shrine, at home or bearing witness fall under legality. Examples include; *di adanseɛ* 'bear witness', *di agyinamu* 'guarantee for', *di nse* 'swear an oath', etc. All these examples involve a person or persons making utterances under a formal jurisdiction in which the speaker(s) is/are aware of the consequences to face if things do not go as expected. It is usually considered as a fragile form of speech; therefore, speakers are always conscious of what they say. For instance, oaths are taken to prove one's innocence on an issue. The consequence of oath-taking can involve taking one's life; therefore, people are cautious when swearing oaths. In our law courts, people (especially, witnesses) are made to swear oaths as a pledge that they are going to speak the truth, failure of which one can be charged with perjury. Again, married couples take vows to show their willingness to stay together perpetually. Finally, people in secret cults also swear an oath of secrecy and dedication to profess their binding interest. As stated by (Agyekum 2010, p.91), 'in swearing an oath (*nsedie*), a person not only assumes an obligation but also becomes liable to prosecution'. People involved are made aware of the consequences of their utterances and so confirm their readiness and courage before involving themselves in those 'speech acts' (oath-taking). Again, serving as a guarantor or bearing witness for another person involves saying something to vindicate another person.

In terms of subjecthood, there could be a single subject or multiple subjects based on participation; but in either case, there is the need to consider the message that is being delivered as well as the listeners. When both interlocutors take active part in the conversation both are regarded as multiple subjects, but when one of the interlocutors takes active part in the delivery while the other just listens, they are considered it as a single subject.

Di as 'being in a position'

There is another sense of the verb *di* that is related to the state of being in terms of position. For this paper, consideration is given to the first three definitions of position given by Soanes and Stevenson (2006, p.1119), as (a) a place where someone or something is located or has been put. (b) a way in which someone or something is placed or arranged. (c) situation or sets of circumstances which involves the state of being advantageously placed in a competitive situation as well as a person's place or rank in relation to others. This sense of *di* always goes with a post positional phrase and usually appears as a phrasal verb. It has the syntactic structure: VP□ V, PP; the prepositional phrase also has the structure, PP□ (NP) P. The first sub-sense of the lexeme 'position', refers to 'one's location in a queue'. the verb collocates with post-positional like *anim* 'front', *akyiri* 'back', *mfimfini* 'middle' *ɛhɔ* 'there' *ɛha* 'here' to indicate a person's position in a queue. The act of queuing is a very important practice in our cultural and social setting. This is due to the fact that it ensures orderliness and, therefore, avoids any unnecessary chaos among a group of people waiting for their turns. Two forms of direction in terms of one's position in an arrangement are considered here. These are the horizontal and vertical directions.
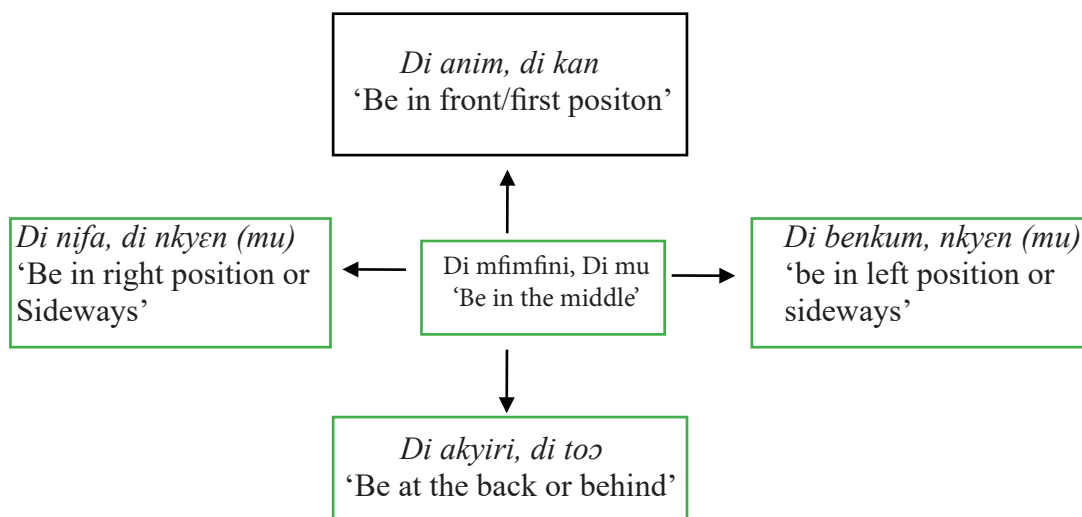
```
                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                    │     Di anim, di kan          │
                    │  'Be in front/first positon' │
                    └─────────────────────────────┘
                                 ▲
                                 │
┌──────────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────────┐
│ Di nifa, di nkyɛn (mu)│◄──│ Di mfimfini, Di mu│──►│ Di benkum, nkyɛn (mu)│
│ 'Be in right position │   │ 'Be in the middle'│   │ 'be in left position │
│ or Sideways'          │   └──────────────────┘   │ or sideways'         │
└──────────────────────┘           │               └──────────────────────┘
                                    ▼
                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                    │     Di akyiri, di toɔ        │
                    │ 'Be at the back or behind'   │
                    └─────────────────────────────┘
```

Figure 2: Cardinal Directions of the Sense 'Being in a Position'

Vertical position can either be 'northward' or 'southward' and can be referred here as 'cardinal' positions. These positions are concrete although they could be extended to other non-concrete senses. Examples are seen in 21 to 23 above. Sometimes a person's position in a queue goes beyond his or her place of location - it can also indicate the position competitively. The sentence *Kofi di kan* is ambiguous because it might mean any of the two denotations; that is, 'Kofi is in front' and 'Kofi is in first position. However, this sentence can be disambiguated when the sentence is extended with the postpositional phrase …*wɔ akansie no mu* '…in the competition' to clarify that Kofi's position is related to first position.

> 21. *Aberante   no   di   anim*
>   young man   DET   position   front
>
>   'The young man is in front.'
>
> 22. *Ɔ-di   papa   no   akyi   kɔ   afuom*
>   1SG-position man   DET   back   go   front
>
>   'S/he follows the man to the farm.'
>
> 23. *Ɔ-di   ne   nkyɛn*
>   1SG-position POS   side
>
>   'S/he is walking beside him/her.'

This sense is sometimes used metaphorically to mean to lead. Here, the sense of position does not necessarily mean the elderly man was the one in front as they entered the palace; he could even be the last person to enter but since he is the leader of the delegates, the verb *di anim* can still be used to denote his role as a leader among the delegates. In the process of metaphorizing the phrasal verb *di anim* which denotes 'in front', the verb loses its concreteness or visual perception and assumes an abstract or a 'non-visual' perception which denotes 'to pilot' as in 24. Also, *di kan*, in a more specific sense, could mean to go ahead, not in a race but travel earlier than planned with others as in 25.

> 24. *Ɔpanin no   di-i   wɔn anim   kɔ-huu ɔhene no*
>   Elder   DET position-PST   3PL front   go-see chief DET

'The elderly man led the people to the chief.'

25. *Kofi   a-di   kan   Nkran*
    Kofi   PERF-position   front   Accra
    'Kofi has taken the lead to Accra'

The southward vertical position, on the other hand, depicts the subject NP having some people rather in front, this means that some people come before him or her in a queue. The basic sense of this position in Akan is *di akyiri* as in sentence 26 below.

26. *Kofi   di   Ama   akyi*
    Kofi   position   Ama   back
    'Kofi is behind Ama'.

Though this sense is considered as basic, it has other extensional senses. As stated earlier, during metaphorical extensions, there is always a complete situation or a prototypical sense from which the metaphorical extension and other forms are formed (Lipka 1992, p.124). One sense that emerges from the basic sense is associated with genealogy, therefore in 26, if Kofi and his siblings are arranged in descending order, Ama will come right 'before' Kofi (conversely, Kofi is the next child *after* Ama). Based on this arrangement, linearity names such as *Piesie* 'first born', *Maanu* 'second born' *Mansa* 'third born', etc. are formed in Akan. This sense can also be constructed differently as in sentence 27 below.

27. *Kofi   yɛ   Ama   akyiri-ba*
    Kofi   be   Ama   back-child
    'Kofi is Ama's backbone (Kofi comes right after Ama).'

The issue of genealogical position in Akan is 'frontal' in nature, that is, positions are always illustrated from front to back and not from back to front. Let us consider the illustration below:
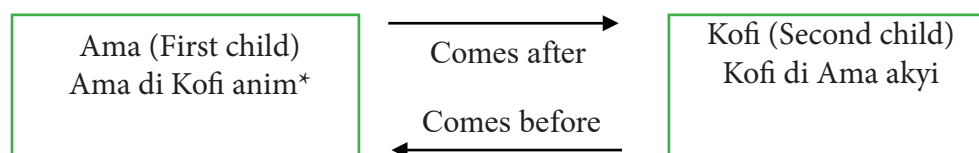

Figure 3: Emphasis of Frontal Position in Genealogy among the Akan

It is seen from the illustration that, if Kofi comes after Ama, then Ama comes before Kofi, but that expression is not used in Akan. If it is true that Kofi comes after Ama, then one may argue that it is logical to say **Ama di Kofi anim* but that will be a marked construction in Akan. If *Ama* still has to be the subject NP, then construction like 28 and 29 are considered appropriate.

28. *Ama   akyiri-ba   ne   Kofi*
    Ama   back-child   be   Kofi
    'Kofi comes directly after Ama.'

29. *Ama   na   Kofi   di   n'akyi*
    Ama   FOC   Kofi   position   POS'back
    'It is Ama that Kofi comes after.'

Other metaphorical extensions can be drawn from this sense which are more abstract than the genealogy. Here, one does not follow the other in a queue or in kinship sense, rather this sense denotes 'to follow' or to support' one's ideology behavior. This sense is expressive, rather than action and it is psychological or philosophical. Examples are seen in 30 and 31 below.

30. *Sɛ ne ba yɛ biribi a, na ɔ-di n'akyi.*
    if POS child do something PART PART 1SG-position POS'back
    'If his/her child does something, s/he supports him/her.' (literal)

    'She supports whatever her child does.'

31. *N-nipa no nyinaa di amanyɛkuo no akyi.*
    PLU-person DET all position political party DET back

    'The people follow the political party.' (They are following its ideology)

The support or follow sub-sense of position is synonymous with the verb *tae* 'cling'. Thus, *di akyi* can absolutely be replaced with *tae akyi*. However, inasmuch as these two verbs can be used interchangeably, the latter expresses a much stronger support than the former. This is seen clearly in the nominalized words *akyidifo* 'followers' and *akyitaafo* 'supporters'. A person's follower may not necessarily support him or her. In terms of concreteness of the position sense, a continuum can be formed from the meaning extension of the southward vertical position such that the farther the movement on the continuum, the more abstract the sense will be. This can be illustrated with figure 5 below:
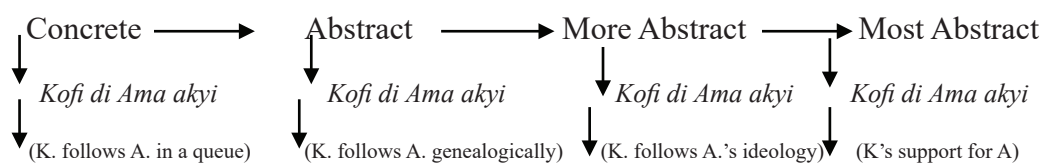
Concrete ⟶ Abstract ⟶ More Abstract ⟶ Most Abstract

Kofi di Ama akyi   *Kofi di Ama akyi*   *Kofi di Ama akyi*   *Kofi di Ama akyi*

(K. follows A. in a queue)   (K. follows A. genealogically)   (K. follows A.'s ideology)   (K's support for A)

Figure 4: Southward Vertical Position Continuum

The horizontal position can also be either eastward or westward. This means that when people are to file horizontally (shoulder to shoulder), each one will at least have someone standing beside them either on the left or right side. Examples of these horizontal positions include; *di bɛnkum* 'be on the left', *di nifa* 'be on the right', *di nkyɛn (mu)* 'be beside', *di ntɛntɛnoa* 'be alongside (a road)'. These horizontal positions depend on the perspective from which the position is viewed. Supposing Ama stands on the left side of Kofi and Kofi turns to the opposite direction, although Ama's position remains unchanged she is now on the right side of Kofi. *Di nkyɛn mu* 'be beside' can also be used when position is unspecified. Hence, 'Kofi is standing beside Ama' could either be 'on her left' or her right'. This verb can be reduplicated to show a person's closeness to another as in 32. The reduplicated form is synonymous to *hyehyɛ…ho* or *batatata…ho* 'attached to' as seen in 34 and 33 respectively.

32. *Abɔfra no di-di ne maame nkyɛn mu*
    child DET position-position POS mother side PostP
    'The child is always closer to the mother.'

33. *Abɔfra no bata-bata ne maame ho*
    child DET attach-attach mother self
    'The child is (always) closer to the mother.'

34. *Abɔfra no hye-hyɛ ne maame nkyɛn*
    child DET enter-enter POS mother side
    'The child is (always) closer to the mother.'

Position can also be medial as in *di mfimfini* 'be in the middle' and *di mu* 'to be within' as seen in 35. This is synonymous with *fra* 'mix' and *ka* 'stir' as seen in 36 and 37. It should be noted that *di mu* can literally signify 'to be among' or metaphorically signify 'to be significant.

35. *Kofi   di   wɔn   mfimfini/mu*
    Kofi   position 3PL   middle/inside
    'Kofi is in their midst.'
    'Kofi is between them.'

36. *Kofi   fra   wɔn   mu*
    Kofi   mix   3PL   PostP

    'Kofi is among.'

37. *Kofi   ka   wɔn   ho*
    Kofi   stir 3PL   PostP
    'Kofi is among them.'

Di as 'being in a situation'

The word 'situation' is defined by Soanes and Stevenson (2006, p. 1348) as 'a set of identifiable circumstances in which one finds one's self in'. Syntactically, this stative verb has the structure: VP ☐ V (NP) AP. This sense can be categorized into judgmental state, hapless state and favorable state. A state is described as *judgmental* when a verdict is declared after a contest has been among people. Two common states in Akan are *nkonim* 'win' (derived from the verbs *ko* 'to fight' and *nim* 'win') and *nkoguo* 'defeat' (derived from the verbs *ko* 'to fight' and *gu* 'to fall'. Examples of judgmental situation are seen below:

38. *Azumah   a-di   n-ko-nim.*
    Azumah   PERF-situation   NOM-fight-win

    'Azumah has won the fight/contest.'

39. *Kofi   a-di   n-ko-guo*
    Kofi   PERF-situation   NOM-fight-fall

    'Kofi has lost the fight/contest.'

40. *Maame   no   di   bem / fɔ*
    woman   DET situation innocence / guilt

    'The woman is innocent / guilty'.

Judgmental situation is, most of the time, as a result of adjudication. Usually, disputes are settled in courts, palaces, homes and shrines and when it becomes necessary for a verdict to be passed, the verb *di* is used (40).

A hapless situation is an unfortunate, unlucky or a miserable situation a person finds himself in, but has little or no control to change it. Examples include being in pain (41), deformity (42), poverty (43), and misery.

41. *Aberewa   yi   re-di   yea*
    Old woman DET PROG-situation   pain
    'This old woman is in pain, grief or agony.'

42. *Abɔfra no   a-di   dɛm*
    child   DET   PERF-situation deformity

    'The child has a deformity.'

43. *O-kua-ni   no   re-di   hia*
    SG-farm-person   DET PROG-situation poverty
    'The farmer is poor.'

In all the sentences, it is seen that each of the subject NPs is in an unfortunate state with awful experiences. For instance, among the Akan, expressions like *di abene* or *di amia* is used to describe a person is who is affected with a dreadful or prolonged disease, poverty, or even job loss to mean 'he or she has suffered a lot. This can place the person in a grieving or distressed state. Another hapless situation di is used to describe is bachelorhood or spinsterhood. In the Akan community, as well as many other African communities, when an adult, especially a woman, remains unmarried at a certain age, it is seen as an anomaly. Gyekye (2003) points out that marriage among the Akan is not something one (an adult) can choose to observe or not; rather, it is an obligation. Spinsters are seen as victims of mockery and so sentence 44 puts a spinster who is desperately looking for a husband in a state of frustration. However, in recent times, due to education, globalization and women's exposure to the western world and the concept of human rights, some African women have chosen to be single; to them, marriage is stressful so if one stays away, then, one avoids the frustrations of marriage. Thus, if a woman chooses to stay single, *sigyadie* 'spinsterhood' cannot be considered a hapless situation.

44. *Ababaawa   no   di   sigya*
    young woman   DET situation unmarried

    'The lady is single / a spinster.'

The third category of situation which contradicts hapless situation is 'enjoyable situation'. It is a situation that is to the advantage of someone or something. It is actually a situation one wishes to experience and remain in forever. The following are examples of enjoyable/pleasant situations.

45. *Kwabena di   dɛ.*
    Kwabena   situation   sweet
    'Kwabena enjoys life.'

46. *A-dɔ-fo   no   re-di   dɔ.*
    PLU-love-people DET PROG-situation love
    'The lovers are petting.'

47. *Yaa re-di   yie.*
    Yaa PROG-situation well
    'Yaa is prosperous.'

48. *Ghana-foɔ   re-di   ahurisie.*
    Ghana-people PROG-situation joy
    'Ghanaians are jubilating.'

It is obvious that, anyone who finds himself in any of the above situations will not wish for its ending. The Akan adages *Ateyie ma awirefire* (literally means 'good living breeds forgetfulness') and *obiara nkyiri fa w'asɛmpa kɔ do* (literally, 'no one rejects good things') confirms that people enjoy being in such pleasant situations and will not reject them coming into their lives. One thing worth noting is that these situations can be temporary or permanent.

Conclusion

This paper has demystified the misconstrued notion most speakers and non-speakers of Akan have about the meaning of the verb *di*. A prior study showed that most speakers translate or glossed the verb as 'eat' irrespective of the context they are situated in and the words they collocate with. Based on the corpus consisting of usages of the verb in written texts and speech recording, the present study has established that *di* is one of the highly homonymous verbs in Akan. It has several unrelated meanings which are realized by looking at the company it keeps. These, among others include 'to consume', 'to have sex', 'to speak', 'to be in a position' and 'to be in a situation'. With this in mind, it can explicitly be said that Akans do not eat everything, rather, they have other verbs that are spelt and pronounced as *di* 'to eat'. It is therefore recommended that each of these senses must be appropriately represented as a distinct lexeme. This might aide lexicographers to manage polysemes and homonym aptly.

Disclaimer Statement
This paper is part of an M.Phil. thesis submitted to the Department of Ghanaian Languages and Linguistics, University of Cape Coast in 2012 by Juliet Oppong-Asare. The title of the thesis was "Semantics of the Akan Verb *Di*" and it was supervised Professor Yaw Sekyi Baidoo an Dr. Kofi Busia Abrefa. The present paper discusses five out of eleven senses of the verb identified at the thesis level. The candidate, together with both supervisors agreed and worked on this paper to be extracted from the 150-paged thesis.

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Authorship and Level of Contribution
Juliet Oppong-Asare Ansah: Conceived the research idea and contributed to the design of the study, acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation of data. Authors also played a major role in the manuscript preparation and revision prior to submission and publication respectively. **Yaw Sekyi Baidoo**: Being the principal supervisor of the thesis the paper emanated from, the author contributed in the conception of the topic, data interpretation and analysis. Author also played major role in the manuscript preparation and revision prior to submission and publication respectively. **Kofi Busia Abrefa**: Being the co-supervisor of the thesis the paper emanated from, the author contributed in the conception of the topic, data interpretation and analysis. Author also played major role in the manuscript preparation and revision prior to submission and publication respectively.

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