One, but not the same: Clausal determiners in Akan

In many Kwa (Niger-Congo) languages, the distribution of definite determiners goes beyond the nominal domain and may accompany clausal constructions (see Korsah 2017). In some languages, there are different determiners that occur in the nominal and clausal domains, e.g., Nzema, while in others, the determiners that occur in clauses and with nominal descriptions are identical in form, e.g., Ewe. These determiners, which may appear at the edges of relative clauses, clefts, adverbial clauses, subject complement clauses, and main clauses, have been referred to as 'clausal determiners' and are often analyzed invariably as the same (Lefebvre 1992; Saah 1994). In this paper, we focus on the Akan definite *no*, specifically its occurrence as a clausal determiner in relative clauses (RC-no) (cf. Arko and Mathewson 2013). There are two theories on RC-*no*: (i) Owusu (2022), who argues that it is a "true" clausal determiner, conveying familiarity of the RC-proposition; and (ii) Bombi et al. (2019), who treat it as a positional variant of the "regular" *no*, analyzed as a Fregean uniqueness definite (NP-*no*).

We tested the above approaches in a ternary acceptability judgment task. We manipulated two factors in the experiment: SENTENCE TYPE and CONTEXT. The SENTENCE TYPE consisted of a relative clause with either (i) NP-*no* (the regular definite) (1); (ii) RC-*no* (2); or (iii) BARE NOUN (negative baseline) (3), and the CONTEXT presented in form of pictures involved: (i) UNIQUENESS, satisfying NP+RC uniqueness; (ii) and NON -UNIQUENESS, see Fig. 1.

(1) papa no [a ɔ-gyina hɔ] hyɛ Ghana ataadeɛ NP-*no*
man DEF REL 3SG.SBJ-stand there wear Ghana shirt
'Man NO who is standing wears a Ghana shirt.'

(2) papa ø [a ɔ-gyina hɔ] no hyɛ Ghana ataadeɛ RC-*no*
man REL 3SG.SBJ-stand there DEF wear Ghana shirt
'Man who is standing NO wears a Ghana shirt.'

(3) papa ø [a ɔ-gyina hɔ] hyɛ Ghana ataadeɛ BARE NOUN
man REL 3SG.SBJ-stand there wear Ghana shirt
'Man who is standing wears a Ghana shirt.'

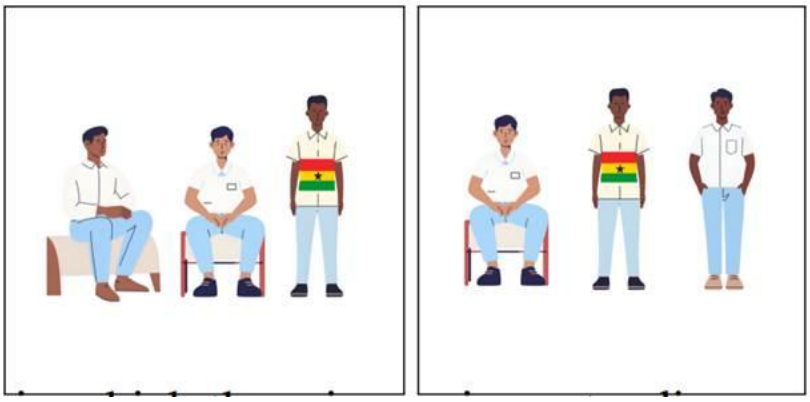

Figure 1: Target images in which there is a unique standing man, uniqueness condition (left), and in which there are two men standing, non-uniqueness condition (right).

Thirty (30) Akan speakers were presented with sentences paired with pictures. Their task was to judge on a scale 1–3 whether the sentence was a good description of the picture. In total, the participants saw 6 critical targets (one in each condition) and two controls containing only to make sure that the participants are sensitive to exhaustivity. The controls were presented in a block at the end of the experiment.

Bombi et al. (2019) predict a lower acceptability of both (1) and (2) in NON-UNIQUENESS contexts compared to the UNIQUENESS one. By contrast, Owusu (2022) predicts acceptability of (2) across UNIQUENESS and NON-UNIQUENESS conditions, which both supply the required familiarity of the (existentially bound) RC-proposition. In addition, Bombi et al. (2019) predict a similar pattern of responses between NP-*no* and RC-*no*.

The results, presented in Figure 2, show that both NP-*no* and RC-*no* are accepted in UNIQUENESS contexts (high proportion of 3), and judged as odd in NON-UNIQUENESS pictures (high proportion of 2, consistent with presupposition failure). Logit model fitted to the data revealed a significant effect of context ($\beta = 1.23$, $z = 1.9$, $p < 0.05$): the use of no´ is sensitive to the uniqueness. No effect of the sentence type was found: RC-*no* shows a parallel behavior to the NP-*no*.

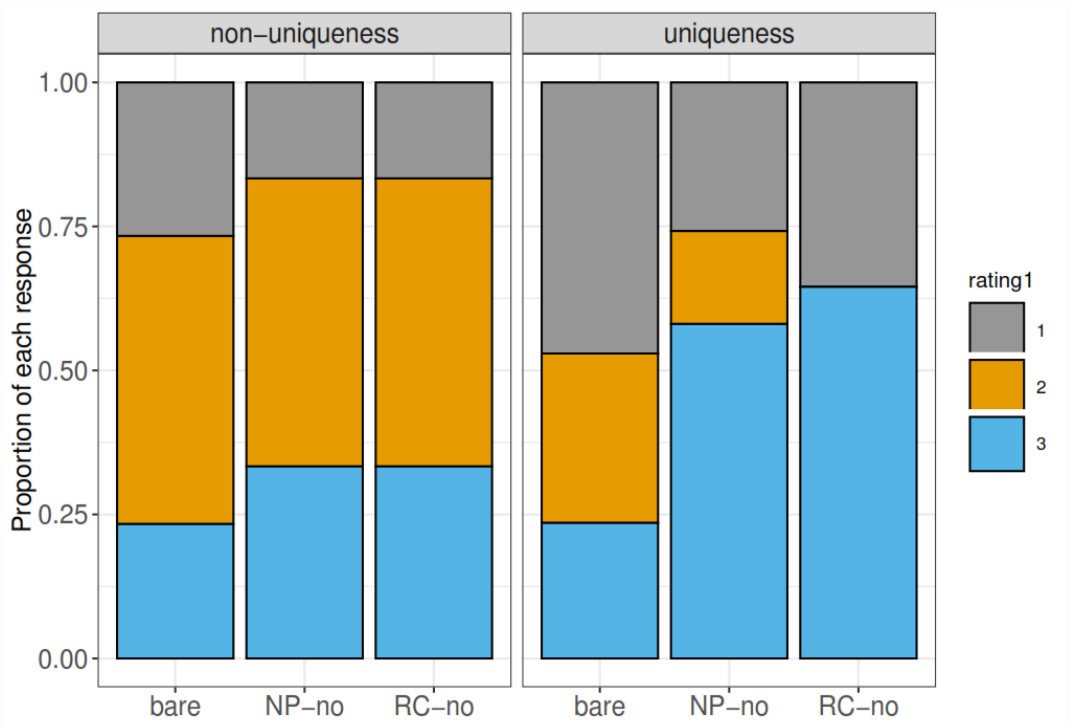

Figure 2: Percentage of 1, 3, and 3 responses across uniqueness and non-uniqueness conditions and sentence types (bare, NP-no, and RC-no)

These results are in line with Bombi et al.'s (2019) predictions, while posing serious challenges for Owusu (2022). The results suggest a division of labor of so-called clausal determiners in Akan. Some genuinely work on the clausal denotation and encode familiarity (e.g. cleft-*no*, main clause-*no*, a la Owusu 2022). Others, like RC-*no*, operate on the NP-denotations, just as the nominal definite determiner in Akan. The study points to the conclusion that clausal determiners across languages might not form as homogenous group as it might have seemed at first glance.