

ASPECTS OF THE SEMANTICS OF THE AKAN PHRASAL VERB

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ABSTRACT

The Akan phrasal verb has not received much analytical attention. There has been little attempt at identifying its form and characteristic structural features, let alone its meaning and discursal use. This paper is a study of the Akan phrasal verb as a semantic and discursal entity. Concentrating on its meaning it looks, first, at the deviation - between the meaning as derived from the meaning of the phrasal verb as a single semantic unit and the aggregate meaning of the component elements - underlies its identification as an idiom, and the degrees of relativity and opacity.

The paper, again, recognises the dual consideration in relationships of form and meaning and identifies polysemous as well as homonymous phrasal verbs. It also draws attention to the effect of tonal arrangement and transitivity on semantic relations between phrasal verbs. Finally, the paper examines the subversion of the phrasal verb form and sense through the replacement of otherwise irreplaceable constituent elements of the phrasal verb for discursal ends such as humour and cheek.

Akan phrasal verb, like all linguistic items, functions basically to give meaning, and it is necessary to understand that an item's semanticity or its capacity to give meaning goes beyond the lexical or the denotative i.e. the basic interpretation associated with the utterance, taking into consideration the associative or the emotive, and all meanings associated with the various things which are factored into the ethnography of any single utterance or speech; and above all, the relationship between its meaning as derived from the meaning of the constituent words and the meaning assigned to it in the language. In addition to this wide semantic resource, it is useful also to see Akan phrasal verbs as existing in sense relations. Like words, they may relate because they cover identical or similar semantic fields (synonyms); bipolar fields (antonyms); complementary fields (hyponyms); or that they only have similar or identical phonetic or orthographical realization without sharing any semantic similarity (homophones or homographs) - Cruse, 1986.

It is these considerations and others which constitute the object of this paper. It focuses primarily on the semanticity of the Akan phrasal verb and especially how it responds to the questions of idiomaticity and transparency or relativity. It examines the issue of sense relations as far as the phrasal verb is concerned, looking specifically at the considerations of polysemy, homonymy and ambiguity. It considers, again, the features of transitivity, complementation and their effects on the meaning of phrasal verbs. Again, it would examine the various ways in which phrasal verbs are harnessed for the purposes of humour and abuse. The discussions for the most part are based on the Asante Twi dialect of Akan.

The Idiomaticity of the Akan Phrasal Verb

We shall at this juncture discuss the relationship between the phrasal verb as a single semantic unit and the surface meaning that could be derived from it as a combination of verb and adposition item, which are independent semantic units. This relationship may be referred to as a phrasal verb's idiomaticity. Idiomaticity may be seen as the level of deviation between the surface meaning of an utterance and the actual meaning or intention it is supposed to convey, (Sekyi-Baidoo, 2002). Idiomaticity considerations are not restricted to such compounds. Balint (1969), Chafe (1968), Makkai (1972), Mc Modie (1972) and Palmer (1981) all recognise that even ordinary words can be said to be idiomatic or non-idiomatic. Such instances of deviation may be as a result of some sociolinguistic or historical significance a word has attracted over time, resulting in different levels of semantic change. With phrasal the phrasal verb, however, whether in English or Akan, idiomaticity is basically on the basis of the fact that the meaning of the phrasal verb as a single semantic unit is different from the meaning of the combination of verb item and adposition element as a syntactic unit composed of independent semantic entities which have separate, independent meanings in or outside the combination, which are factored into the meaning of the resulting phrase. (See Christaller, 1876).

The above does not seek to deny the effect of cultural and social experiences on the meaning of phrasal verbs. However, as intimated above, what identifies them from adposition and verb, or verb and adposition element combinations is that the meaning of phrasal verb cannot be seen as the combination of the meaning of its constituents. Sometimes, there is basically no connection between the aggregate meaning of the constituents and the meaning of the phrasal verbs, which is regarded as a single semantic unit. Herein lies the idiomaticity of the Akan phrasal verb. Closely associated with the issue idiomatically is that of *relativity* which, simply put, is the degree of similarity between the meaning of the phrasal verb and the meaning derived from the combination of the meanings of its constituents. Akan phrasal verbs can be put therefore on a cline of idiomaticity or relativity.

This issue idiomaticity and relativity is essentially equal to the transparency and opacity of words or group of words as established by Ullman (1962:80ff). Palmer (1981:80-2) also establishes that idiomaticity is often a matter of degree. He distinguishes between total idioms and partial idioms, which distinction is pertinent to our discussions.

Some Akan phrasal can be described as *total idioms*. This is because there exists a high degree of deviation between the meaning of the components together and the meaning of the phrasal as a single unit of meaning. They, thus, have a high degree of idiomaticity. A comparison between the two sets of meaning on the table below will establish such deviation.

PHRASAL VERB	MEANING AS PHRASAL VERB	MEANING FROM CONSTITUENTS
B▷ mu	To unite	To hit in/inside
B▷ so	To make mention of	To hit on/up
Ba so	To come off as scheduled/To grow arrogant	To come on top
Hwe so	To be a remarkable success	To hit/fall hard on

Another kind of total idioms involves those with collocative restrictions. Such phrasal verbs involve the non-variability of the direct object. Examples are seen from the table below.

PHRASAL VERB	MEANING AS PHRASAL VERB	MEANING AS FROM CONSTITUENTS
B⊃ NP <i>kyem</i> so	To criticise, attack	To strike on the shield of NP
Tia NP nan so	To hint NP of an issue	To step on NP's feet
K⊃ <i>sie</i> anim	To confront a serious issue	To go in front of an anthill
Fa NP <i>were</i> hyε NP <i>mu</i>	To trust NP	To insert fingers in NP

Some phrasal verbs have appreciable degrees of relativity between the meaning of the phrasal verb as a unit and the aggregate meaning of the component elements or some of the elements – the verb, adposition element or completive element. Palmer (1980:81) calls them *partial idioms*.

PHRASAL VERB	MEANING AS PHRASAL VERB	MEANING FROM CONSTITUENTS
Ba mu	To come into force/To manifest as planned	<i>To come in/inside</i>
Ba so	To be in vogue	<i>To come on</i>
Bu so	To be utterly abundant	To <i>spill</i> on
Hwe so	To concentrate	<i>To look on</i>

In phrasal verbs such as those on the table above, the relativity or transparency is associated with the verb stem which, thus, becomes the pivot for the meaning of the compound as the whole. The adposition item also gives the semantic deviation or idiomaticity. In ‘ba so’ (to come off) and ‘ba mu’ (to manifest) for instance, there is the idea of something which was not in existence coming into force or appearing. This idea is associated with the verb item ‘ba’ (come). On the other hand, however, the addition of the adposition element ‘so’ (on) gives the phrasal verb a meaning which deviates from just ‘come’. This deviation emanates, principally, from the fact that the adposition

element assume a meaning that differs from its original meaning. A noteworthy aspect of this kind of phrasal verbs is, thus, the simultaneous existence or relativity and idiomaticity – associated with the verbal and the adposition elements respectively. It is worthy also to note that as phrasal verbs, such compounds exhibit a semantic unitariness associated with the unit as a whole. A replacement of any of the constituents, in spite of its degree of idiomaticity or relativity would be a replacement of meaning or a creation or absurdity.

The relativity of the verb item is, however, sometimes lost as a result of the fact that often the homonymy of the verb stem is ignored, and attention consequently focussed our discussions on only the most popular or recurrent of the meanings associated with the homonymic verb stem. This usually results in a great deal of deviation between the meaning of the verb stem as used in the phrasal verb and its meaning as an independent semantic entity. The lexical form ‘di’ as a semantic manifestation can be said to be a homonym. This is because of the remarkable semantic distance between its various uses. Some of these are:

- to eat
- to be, in respect of location
-
- to be engaged in a game, or any endeavour of one’s interest or attention
- to hold a position.

It is however common to find people transliterate ‘di akonnowa’ as ‘eat a stool’ or ‘chop a stool’ (Ghanaian Pidgin) as though ‘di’ here meant ‘to eat’. Such interpretation is consequently into phrasal verb analysis, and ‘di n’akyi’ is translated as ‘chop ihn back (Ghanaian Pidgin).

It is evident that because of this association with the wrong verb stem, many verbal compounds may be judged idiomatic, when they are actually not. Again, sometimes their

idiomaticity is seen to manifest in the wrong constituent, or carried rather too far resulting in the weakening or in the loss of their relativity. Let us consider these homonymic structures:

- a) di n'akyi - position behind him
- b) di n'akyi – follow him

It would be realised that it is only (b) which can be seen as a phrasal verb. (A) is an ordinary verb phrase which exhibits a verb + adjunct pattern, in which 'di' is a locative verb which denotes location or position and movement simultaneously. It covers a semantic area complementary or similar to 'gyina' (temporary position) and 'wɔ' (a somehow permanent position or location). The 'A' element in the V + A structure refers to the element of relative positioning. Thus, 'nakyi' (behind him) can be replaced with 'benkum' (left), 'nifa' (right) or 'ekyir' (afar) to yield such sentence as,

'Midi benkum' - I am *positioned* to the left

'Midi nifa 'I am *positioned* to the right

Looking at the use of 'di' in the above examples, it would be anomalous for it to be described as involving semantic deviation, or as an idiom, since that would mean associating the verb with the wrong word, 'di' (to eat).

On the other hand (b) which means 'to follow ideas or principles' or 'to support' can be described as a phrasal verb, and therefore as an idiom, because it involves a semantic deviation or transfer of the original meaning 'di' as 'to be positioned somewhere. It involves the transfer or enhancement of the collocation, which generally has a physical or geographical interpretation, in order to cover the world of ideas, emotions or endeavour. Thus, to move after a person in space has been transferred. In such instances, the idiomaticity or relativity is not associated with any one of the components of the phrasal verb. It is associated with the compound as a whole whose meaning is transferred into a different context. Again, the idiomaticity is realised in the sense that whereas in (a)

the adjunct element can be changed to exhibit different spatial descriptions, the ‘di + akyi’ combination as in (b) is fixed and any attempt to change the adpositional element with the adjunct interpretation will change the meaning of the compound altogether. For instance, to replace ‘akyi’ (behind) with ‘anim’ (in front) or ‘ase’ (below) will result in a compound with a different meaning which may not relate to the idea of ‘following’ in the way in which ‘nkyen’ (beside) and ‘ase’ (below) relate to ‘akyi’ (behind) as locative elements.

Sometimes, however, as hinted earlier on, a phrasal verb is derived from a semantic or metaphorical transfer of the sense of an *verb+ adposition* combination. The idiomaticity of the phrasal verb here lies in the difference or novelty of the context in which it is now being used. On the other hand, the remarkable similarity between the basic meaning of its original use and the meaning as in the metaphorical use gives points to the fact the phrasal verb has a remarkable degree of opacity or idiomaticity. This is evident in the items on the table below.

PHRASAL VERB	MEANING FROM UNITS	MEANING AS PHRASAL VERB
Da nkyen	To lie beside	To be impertinent
Nam so	To pass on/over	To use as

Let us consider ‘da nkyen’, as in

Wei deε eda nkyen. (As for this it is impertinent)

This involves the transfer of a situation in which something does not ‘lie in’ or ‘lie with’ but ‘lies away from another’. ‘Da nkyen’ literally translates ‘to lie away from/beside NP’. Thus, just as

Kwesi da dua no nkyen.

means Kwesi lies beside the tree’. In its idiomatic or metaphorical use,

Kwesi awareε da nkyen.

means similarly ‘Kwesi’s marriage is impertinent or outside the present issue’

Similarly, ‘nam so’ and ‘fa so’ capture the idea of movement and the way by which one reaches a destination. Thus, *Yenam/yɛfaa twene no so na yɛkɔɔ fie* means ‘We passed on the bridge to get home’ Accordingly, *Ama nam adwumwden so na onyaa ne sika* means, literally, ‘Ama passed on hard work to become prosperous’ which is very close in sense to the idiomatic meaning

Ama became prosperous through hard work.

In such instances, the idiomaticity or transparency of the phrasal verb is not associated with any of the components of the phrasal verb. It is associated with the compound as a whole, whose meaning has been transferred to a different context to yield a similar but metaphorical or polysemic interpretation.

Semantic Generalisations about Adposition Elements

The semantic property of Akan phrasal verbs can also be considered also by looking at the loose generalizations that can be made about the use of some of the recurrent or common adposition elements or particles such as ‘ase’ ‘so’ and ‘mu’. As has been hinted earlier on, such generalizations are not rules and may therefore not manifest with all phrasal verbs that use these items.

Ase has the basic interpretations ‘below’, ‘at the bottom of’ or ‘at the hind part of’ which can often be inferred from the meanings of phrasal verbs. . It is necessary to observe, however, that such interpretation is associated with the totality of the sense of the phrasal verb. This means unlike in a verb + adposition combination ‘ase’ does not make a separate independent contribution of the phrasal verb. Let us consider the following:

- hyɛ ase (to start/begin)
- fi ase (to start/begin)
- bɔ ase (to do the beginning)
- te ase (to understand)

- to ase (to deposit for)

In each of the examples on the table, the adverbial interpretation of *ase* denoting place or location or position is evident. This interpretation of is, however, related to the meaning of the phrasal verb in varying degrees of metaphorical transfer. For instance,

- hyé ase (lit) Position oneself at the bottom - start
- fi ase (lit. Come from the bottom - start

depict an instance in which some action occurs at ‘the bottom’ of a phenomenon. In ordinary latitudinal growth, the bottom is associated with the beginning. Both ‘hyé ase’ (lit. to fill or load up bottom) and ‘fi ase’ (to come from the bottom) mean ‘to begin an activity’.

In related meaning, ‘ase’ is emotively associated with the ‘core’ the ‘crust’ or ‘where the real or the basic thing is’. This sense is evident in such phrasal verbs as ‘te ase’ literally ‘to hear the bottom’ or ‘to hear the under part’. Thus, ‘te ase’ means to ‘hear’ or ‘know’ not just the topic or focus, but the foundations of that information, and this precisely is what constitutes ‘understanding’. Similarly, ‘kyeré ase’ means to show the depths or foundations of an issue or phenomenon; and to do so is actually ‘to explain’

The use of ‘ase’ to indicate ‘the foundation’ or ‘the roots’ is evident also in the phrasal verb ‘didi NP ase’ (literally ‘to eat the foundation of NP away’), ‘hye ase’ (burn the foundation of NP out’) and ‘B⊃ ase’ (‘to create or make the foundation of NP). ‘Didi ase’, for instance, depicts literally a situation in which the foundation of someone’s being or his posture is eaten away resulting in his downfall. This imagery captures the practice of undermining someone. Similarly ‘hye ase’ (lit. to burn under’) means ‘to destroy completely’ so as to prevent a regeneration or possible continuity as with a family or lineage. In this phrasal verb also, the idea of ‘the foundation’ or ‘the roots’ is reflected.

‘Ase’ is also used in reference to the lower part of the human body especially the anus. Thus ‘fa ase’ (lit. ‘pass under’ ‘or pass one’s anus’) captures the imagery of someone in a situation of dysentery. The differential references of ‘ase’ is evident in the homonym, ‘fa ase’ (to have dysentery) and ‘fa ase’ (to elude one’s strength, wisdom etc.) Here, the two meanings of ‘ase’ as ‘the hind part or anus of a person or animal’ and as ‘below a person or thing’ respectively both have been exploited.

There also a contrast in the semantic contrast between the use of ‘mu’ and ‘so’ in many Akan phrasal verbs. In this use, ‘so’ does not mean ‘up’ or ‘on top of’ which is its non-idiomatic sense. It is rather associated with incompleteness, continuation, inexhaustible pursuit, or lack of intensity. This is exhibited in such phrasal verbs as:

- Toa so (to continue) – as against ‘to finish
- B \supset so (to mention) – as against ‘to tell’
- Sā so (to move in a file) – as against ‘to stop’

In the examples above, we get the idea of incompleteness and the need for continuity, especially, when we compare the meaning of the phrasal verbs to the ideas with which they are juxtaposed. Certainly, ‘making mention of something’ is not as exhaustive as ‘telling it’. Similarly, whereas ‘moving in a file’ suggests the incompleteness of movement, ‘stopping’ stands for the completion of movement.

On the other hand, ‘mu’ is sometimes associated with intensity or completeness. The action or description denoted by the phrasal verb depicts the idea a most intense form of an endeavour or description as evident in the following phrasal verbs:

- ka mu (scream) as against ‘speaking’
- b \supset mu (tell exhaustively) as against ‘just mentioning’
- sa mu (to characterise the whole group of phenomenon, not part

The comparison of ‘b⊃ so (to mention) and ‘b⊃ mu’ (to recount, or to tell) in a pair and ‘ba so’ (to occur, to happen) and ‘ba mu (to manifest as expected in its fullness) in another, may help in showing this contrasting semantic property of incompleteness and completeness, intense activity and lack of intense activity. ‘B⊃ so’ and ‘b⊃ mu’, are both associated with giving information about an event or happening. ‘B⊃ so’ translated ‘to make mention of’ does not mean ‘to tell’ but refers to just the mentioning of the subject. This suggests incompleteness or lack of intensity or exhaustiveness in dealing with the subject of making information about something known as described ‘B⊃ mu’ (to tell, to recount), on the other hand, suggests completion or exhaustiveness in the sense that as much information as known or as necessary would be given. It, unlike ‘b⊃ so’, denotes a comprehensive account. Similarly, whereas ‘ba so’ (to come off) suggests just the occurrence of something, ‘ba mu’ (to manifest) denotes the occurrence of a happening as a full or complete manifestation of an expectation or prediction. It is in consonance with such a semantic property that ‘so’ in the following phrasal verbs can be appraised:

- Ko so- (to continue), which suggests incompleteness
- Toa so –(to continue from break), which also suggests incompleteness
- ‘Fa so – (to through), which suggests further resultant action
- ‘Da so’ – (to persist), which suggests further prosecution of an action

On the contrary, the following phrasal verbs capture the suggestion of intensity and completeness associated with some use of ‘mu’:

- b⊃. mu (to speak or sing very loudly or loudest).
- ka mu (to scream) which suggests highest/most intense sound production)
- tea mu (to shout/scream)
- d⊃ mu’ (to travel away) suggests complete removal from others such that one cannot be seen or easily heard of.
- tōa mu (to follow one after another without break) which suggest intensity or a completely unified activity.

Polysemy and Homonymy in Akan Phrasal Verbs

One semantic problem which pervades the semantics of compound verb forms is whether a verb + adposition combination is being used to yield the meaning as derived from the word meanings and relationships, or as a phrasal verb whose meaning, thus, differs from the surface meaning of the constituent words. But the problem becomes deeper when the constitution of the verb + adposition compound and that of a phrasal verb coincide, resulting in homonymy. The problem of homonymy may itself become more intricate when we consider the fact that the verb stems of phrasal verbs may themselves be homonymous.

The issue of polysemous and homonymous relationships among Akan phrasal verbs is important as we consider the various ways in which phrasal verbs of same or similar physical realisation differ or relate to one another. The complex nature of the relationship which realise polysemous phrasal verbs is worthy to note. Phrasal verbs are considered polysemous when they relate one another physically and semantically, and when they collectively differ from the meaning derived from the aggregate meaning of their constituent words – which underlies their idiomaticity. Whereas some relativity between them produces their polysemy, their collective deviation from the meaning of the constituents establishes them as a phrasal verb, and therefore as idioms. Phrasal verbs that relate to one another are polysemous whilst those that share only a formal realisation but no semantic relationship are termed homonymous.

As indicated above, in spite of the need for some deviation in the establishment of phrasal verbs, there is also the need for some recognisable degree of relativity between the meanings of the verb or adposition element as used in the phrasal verb and as exists in non idiomatic usage for phrasal verbs to be regarded as polysemous. Thus, where there is a high degree of idiomaticity or opacity between phrasal verbs and their meanings of their constituent words there cannot hold between them

a polysemous relationship. This is because the meanings of the phrasal verbs will be very arbitrary, and predictability, rather than arbitrariness or randomness is an important factor in the realisation of polysemy. Polysemy, here, presupposes a double relativity: first with the constituent words, and second, with the other phrasal verbs which also relate to the non-idiomatic form in meaning.

Often, however, the relativity between contextual and metaphorical manifestations of a phrasal verb as well as the relativity between the meanings of each of the polysemous manifestations and the non-idiomatic sense appears so wide as to blur erase the existence of any transparency. The discussion of the different polysemic uses of ‘gyina so’ can help exemplify this. We may also illustrate this with the discussion of the following phrasal verbs:

- ‘tia so’ (*lit.* step on) - to speed off
- ‘tia so’ (*lit.* step on) - to run away
- ‘tia so’ (*lit.* step on) - to consume something unlawfully, as in ‘squander’ etc.).

The phrasal verb ‘tia so’ is primarily related to the practice of accelerating a vehicle, which is associated with one (the driver) stepping on the accelerator pad, and increasing the speed with deeper pressing. Thus, deeply considered, the original meaning of ‘tia so’ (to speed off) as with vehicles cannot be considered an idiom. The idiom may have started when the idea of ‘speeding off’ was transferred to situations not involving vehicles, pressing nor spatial movement. ‘Tia so’ could be used in such cases to mean ‘to go away fast’ (non-vehicular) or ‘to eat fast’ (non-spatial movement), and in each case, the idea of speed associated with the original non-idiomatic sense of ‘tia so’ is captured. As time went on, the idea of ‘tia so’ meaning ‘to speed off’ even involving vehicles was gradually dissociated from the practice pressing the accelerator pad for increasing speed, rendering the expression non-transparent, and therefore idiomatic. The others, the polysemous manifestations, exploit aspects of the meaning of this original phrasal verb meaning ‘speeding a vehicle’. For

instance, ‘tia so’ (to run away/ escape) exploits the salience of the idea of distance or awayness which is the result of speeding, which is the main feature of the original, ‘tia so’ exploiting the idea that speeding and the resulting creation of distance is a major feature of escaping. Thus, with the original idea of speed and resulting ‘awayness’ as its basis, the phrasal verb ‘tia so’ proceeds to introduce the idea of the reason for the creation of distance - which is the avoidance of an imminent danger. This additional sense, however, becomes the central idea of the meaning of ‘tia so’ as ‘to escape’ departing then from the original polysemic idea of distance. On the other hand, the idea of speed as captured in the original phrasal verb and the idea of the criminal or the illegal combine to give the sense of ‘tia so’ as ‘to consume something illegally or to squander’ as in the following sentences. It is necessary to observe that in this use ‘squander’ shares similar semantic fields as ‘steal’, ‘hide’, ‘destroy’, ‘eat’ all of which suggest some existential or spatial displacement as in the following sentences:

Kofi hwεε a obiara nni h▷ no na otiaa aduane no so.

Lit. Kofi observe-PAST nobody BE-PAST then 3rd Per Pron *step on* food

(When Kofi observed that there was no one around he quickly consumed the food).

Mpaninfo▷ binom taa tia mm▷fra sika so.

Lit. Adults INDEF-Pron frequently step on children-POSS money.

(Some adults usually squander children’s money.)

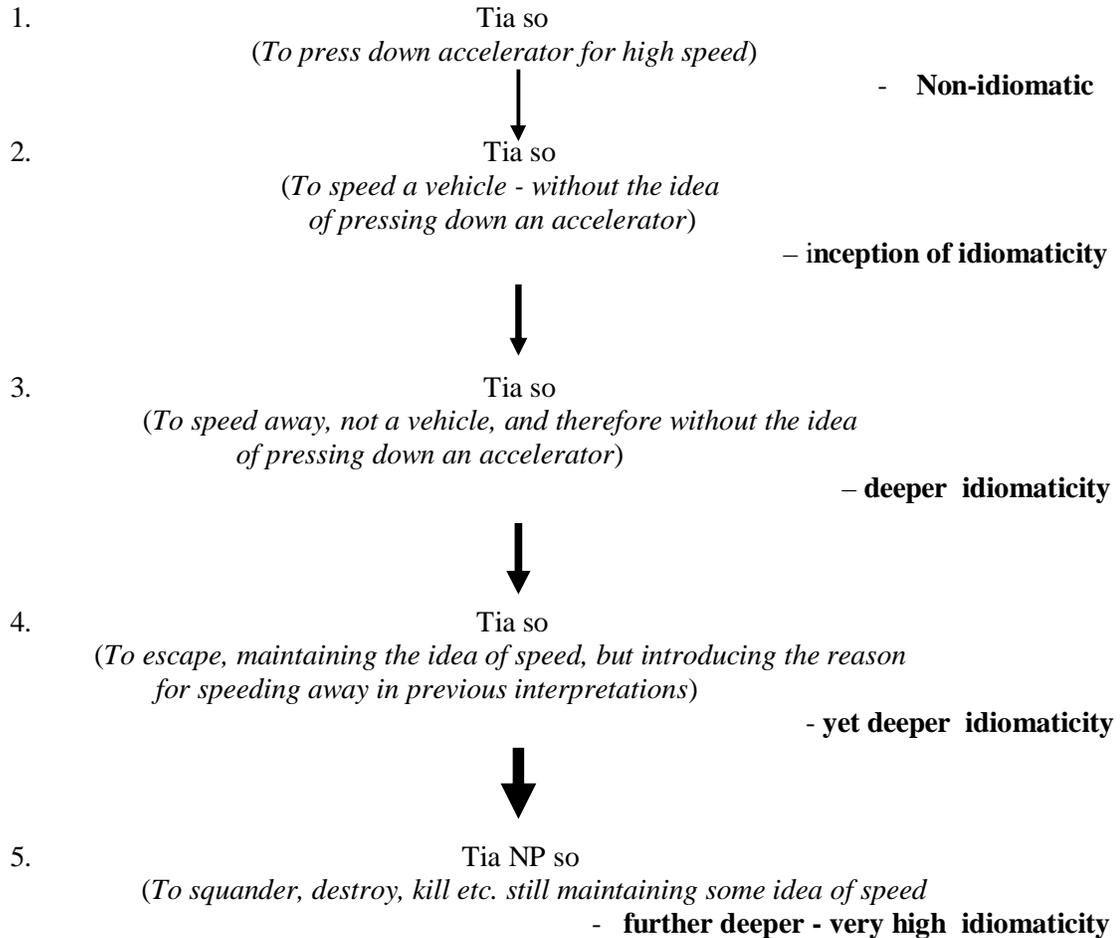
Asogyaf▷ no maa atuo so tiaa akor▷mfo▷ no so.

Lit. DEF-Soldier-PLURAL lift-PAST gun-step-PAST on DEF-thief-PLURAL.)

(The soldiers lifted up their guns and shot the thieves.)

As observed above with ‘tia so’ and also with the discussions of ‘gyina so’ below, the creation of polysemic phrasal verbs follows a complex process of semantic change which sometimes blurs their relationship and also their relativity as phrasal verbs, making them appear as separate, independent

homonymous phrasal verbs. The process of idiomatization and the generation of polysemous senses of the accrued idiom is presented in the diagram below:

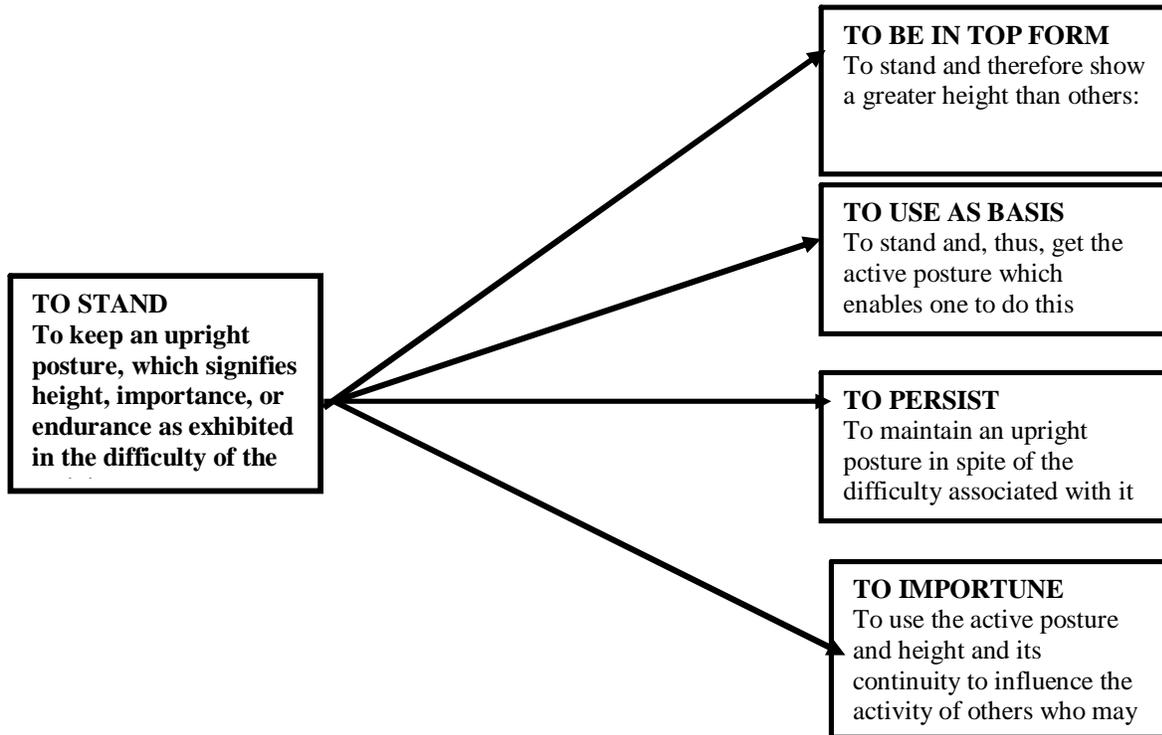


* *The increasing deepness of the arrow is to signify the growing departure from the original meaning.*

In most instances, among Akan, phrasal verbs which we would describe as homonymous have become semantically independent, however, as a result of semantic widening, whereby otherwise polysemic phrasal verbs lose their polysemy as a result of their continual application to different circumstances. For instance, the meanings of ‘gyina so’:

- To be in top form
- To use something as a reason for a further action
- To persist
- To importune

are all associated with the original, non-idiomatic meaning of ‘to stand’, giving the image of one keeping an upright posture and all derived associations, which has been applied to different contextual environments as exhibited in the diagram below.



‘Gyina so’ (to be in top form) presents the picture in which one stands and therefore shows a greater height than others, and can ‘thus’ be seen to be superior or in top form. Similarly, the phrasal verb meaning ‘to use something as a basis for an action’ also is derived from the image of one standing and, thus, getting the active posture which enables him to execute an activity. Again, the meaning ‘to persist’, is derived from the picture associated with ‘standing’ which involves maintaining an erect, upright posture in spite of the difficulty associated with it. The emotive difference between ‘tena so’

(lit. sit on') meaning importune and 'gyina so' may help to illustrate this. Emotively, 'gyina so' with its postural advantage of standing and the pressure involved seems to suggest a greater pressure than 'tena so' which involves less effort. Finally, the meaning of 'gyina so' as 'it importune' is also related the literal idea of standing as it presents the picture of one using the active posture of standing and the continuity of it to influence others to one activity or another. In effect, the different meanings of 'gyina so' could be seen as having started originally together as a family of ideas or senses constituting a kind of lexical unit, and these different meanings as contextual uses of this family of senses.

On the other hand, homonymous phrasal verbs are identical basically in their phonology both in their verb stems and their adposition elements. Thus, homonymy is more homophony-focussed than homography. Homonymous phrasal verbs like all others may also exhibit different degrees of opacity or transparency as far as the relationship between the meaning of the compound and the constituent words are concerned. Where there is semantic relativity, it means the semantic dissimilarity between the transparent phrasal verbs in a homonymous relationship is not as a result of any arbitrary or idiomatic meaning imposed on any of the compounds. Rather, it means that the two or more phrasal verbs in the homonymy are related to different verbs that are themselves homonymous. In such instances, the phrasal verbs inherit the homonymy of their constituent words.

Cases in point are

- b▷ adze – (to begin)
- b▷ adze - (to come to an end).

Here, the two semi-transparent phrasal verbs are related to 'b▷' (to create, to make) and 'b▷' (to fall, or hit strongly) respectively. Similarly, the meanings as of the constituents of the different semantic

manifestations of ‘bɔ̄’ show that they are connected to different verbs which happen to be homonymous.

In Akan, total or absolute homonymy is hampered sometimes as a result of the salience of the phonetic features of tone and nasalization, which affect the articulation of words. Thus, whereas we can talk very easily about total homographs, the indispensability of tone and nasalization may be sources of differentiation between words or compounds of otherwise same verbal or phonemic constitution. This feature, which is evident in the language as a whole, manifests also with its phrasal verbs. In addition to distinguishing phrasal verbs, this phonetic consideration may be useful also in distinguishing ordinary verb + adposition element combinations and phrasal verbs of identical lexical constitution and arrangement. The following are, for instance, distinguished by their tonal arrangements:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| - tè àsè (to live) | - phrasal verb |
| - tè àsé (to live/sit under NP) | - ordinary compound |
| - dà àsè (to thank | - phrasal verb |
| - dà àsé (to lie under NP) | - ordinary compound |

A complex situation occurs when, as with ‘bɔ̄ ase’, tone helps in distinguishing between two phrasal verbs and also a verb + adposition element combination:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| - bɔ̄ àsè (to come into being) | - phrasal verb |
| - bɔ̄ àsè (to start) | - phrasal verb |
| - bɔ̄ àsé (to hit under/below NP) | - verb + adposition |

Sometimes, tone is important even in distinguishing between two phrasal verbs as in ‘tè àsè’ (to live) and ‘tè àsé’ (to understand).

Nasalization also distinguishes otherwise perfect homonyms. In this way, they become homographs, but not homonyms. It is necessary to point out that whereas in English nasality is a smear feature and occurs as a result of secondary articulatory considerations, and is not phonemic, it is a phonemic feature in Akan. In Akan, a vowel may be nasal, where nasality is its natural intrinsic property. It may also be nasalised, in which case it picks up the secondary feature of nasality from a nasal sound in its environment. Nasality can be used as the basis for distinguishing between words, and in Akan phonemic inventory, the nasal vowel is different from its oral counterpart both in their 'emic' and 'etic' value. 'Sa mu' (to select meticulously from a group) and 'sã mu' (to be a characteristic trait of a group) are distinguished by the feature of nasality, which is associated with the vowel in the verb stem. Again, 'ka mu' (to be caught up in a difficult situation) and 'kã mu' (to stir up NP) are distinguished by nasality.

Another noteworthy aspect of the semanticity of Akan phrasal verbs is the deliberate effort at the perception of relativity which then gives way to the substitution of items. In what appears to have been originally neologistic uses, a phrasal verb which is generally considered to have a high degree of opacity is given a sense of transparency through one of its constituent words, which becomes then the basis for exploring paradigmatic senses to create phrasal verbs of complementary senses. Substitution presupposes that items in a paradigm cover same or complementary semantic fields. It is within such a relationship that they can replace one another. But even more crucially, these items must be seen to be transparent since the semantic relation of a word is determined by its interpretation – whether idiomatic or non-idiomatic. Again, idiomatic sense is invariably arbitrary, and takes a word outside of its original meaning and semantic field. For a word to be considered to have synonyms or other such relationships as according to its original meaning, it is necessary that it be interpreted to have this original non-idiomatic sense. Through such relativity interpretations and

replacements, there are several phrasal verbs in same semantic or complementary fields, which maintain their idiomaticity, and yet share transparent relationships with one another. A case in point in Akan phrasal verbs is the existence of the following related phrasal verbs which are associated with the recounting of events:

- ti ho
- wae ho
- were ho. excruciate

The original of them as gathered from this research seems to be ‘ti ho’ (to give a hint of) lit. ‘to scuff’ or ‘to scrape’. There is, on the surface, no semantic connection between ‘scrapping’ and ‘hinting’. Over the times however, relativity develops between the two, with the metaphorical perception of an event or story as a solid substance with scales or layers of skin. In this connection, the nature of activity capturing the removal of the skin or layers determines the details of the message. It is in this context that ‘ti’ is transparently interpreted: ‘ti’ denotes a minimal tampering with the scales or layers of the metaphorical message, which captures the idea ‘giving a hint’ rather than ‘telling’. In this framework, other verbs in the semantic field of tampering with skin ‘were’ (to scratch), ‘wae’ (to peel off), ‘bue’ (to open up) are used in forming new phrasal verbs, each of them reflecting different levels of access to the information as signified in the sense of the verb. Thus, ‘ti ho’, ‘were ho’, ‘wae ho’ and ‘bue ho’ can be seen as constituting a grid showing increasing detail. The creation of the new phrasal verbs with the adoption of words of same semantic field as ‘ti’ started, as we have seen, with the transparent interpretation of the original phrasal verb; and the creation of these new phrasal verbs is an enhancement of the transparency of the phrasal verb, now cluster of complementary phrasal verbs.

Sometimes, the substitution does not create phrasal verbs of different denotative sense such as *ti ho*, *were ho*, *wae ho* and *bue ho*, but synonymous phrasal verbs with only differences in connotation. *Tia so*, with its different meanings as captured above, and *mia so* illustrate such synonymous phrasal verbs. *Mia so* is derived from the original form *tia so*. The replacement of *tia* (to step) with *mia* (to press down) is based on the fact that the two are both in the semantic field of the exertion of downward latitudinal force. The difference between *mia* and *tia* is the connotation of intensity, with *mia* considered to be the more intense or the more sustained. It is this connotation which also differentiates the senses of *tia so* and *mia so* as phrasal verbs. Denotatively, however, the two are considered synonymous, and the different meanings of *mia so* as seen above, are conceptually captured in *mia so*. Phrasal verb neologisms based on the replacement of the verb item with other verbs which cover similar or complementary semantic fields of the literal sense of the verb have been a very frequent way of increasing phrasal verbs in Akan. In addition to the examples above is the phrasal verb *da nkyen* (not among, to be impertinent). The change or creativity is based on the literal sense of the idiom *da nkyen*, which is 'to lie aside'. The verb stem *da* (lie/sleep) is replaced with items of the same semantic field or hyponymy, which also capture locative or postural senses such as *gyina* (stand) *bɔ* (to be fixed) and *pake* (a corruption of 'to park'). Synonymous phrasal verbs derived are:

- *gyina nkyen*
- *pake nkyen*
- *bɔ nkyen*

Such new forms are, however, usually not used in situations of deference or politeness. They are generally used in contexts of familiarity or intimacy where humour plays a very important role in the solidarity of participant.

In addition to their enhancing the phrasal verb lexicon and enhancing sense relations, these derived phrasal verbs function to represent new senses, and they also capture emotive and stylistic meanings. For instance, the new forms above ‘*gyina nkyen*’, ‘*pake nkyen*’ and ‘*bɔ nkyen*’ are used usually by the youth, and it captures their love for adventure and experimentation. Another case in point is the derivation of the following phrasal verbs ‘*te so*’ (Lit. sit on top) and ‘*konkɔn so*’ (lit. to perch on) from the original ‘*gyina so*’ (lit. to stand on top) with meaning ‘to be in top form’ as seen on the diagram above. The phrasal verb can be used to describe situations of remarkable or unbeatable beauty, skill or wealth. As discussed above, the phrasal verb is a metaphorical derivation from a situation in which one stands and therefore towers in height over all others. The synonymous phrasal verb forms are derived from the replacement of the verb stem, ‘*gyina*’ (stand) with other postural verbs – ‘*te*’ (sit) and ‘*konkɔn*’ (perch). The replacement and the creation of the new phrasal verb introduce new affective senses to the meaning of the phrasal verb. In some contexts, such affective differences are so frequently emphasised creating such semantic widening in the senses that the phrasal verbs may be regarded as independent, complementary members of a semantic field rather than as synonyms.

The affective differentiation of ‘*te so*’, ‘*gyina so*’ and ‘*konkɔn so*’ is based on the literal sense of the original as well as the derived verbs. ‘*Gyina*’ (stand) suggests postural or vertical advantage, but it also suggests greater effort and perhaps less comfort than ‘*te*’ (sit) which captures a resting posture. Thus, ‘*te so*’ is used not only to describe situations of superiority, but

those in which one is deemed to be without challenge. Thus, emotively, ‘te so’ captures a more assertive or unparalleled superiority. Against these two, however, is ‘konkon so’ which is derived from the verb ‘konkɔn’, ‘to perch’ ‘or to hang loosely’. Literally, ‘perching’ denotes instability and discomfort. A superiority derived from such a posture will be short-lived or perhaps unreal. Affectively, ‘konkɔn so’ expresses the speaker’s sympathy or disgust – sympathy that one’s superiority will be short-lived; and disgust because such superiority is only assumed or is unreal because the described noun has falsely carried his stature beyond its real magnitude. This idea comes out as in the sentence below:

Gyae. ɔkonkon so kɛkɛ
Lit. Stop. 3rd Pers-PRON just perches.
Don’t worry yourself. He is only pretending; *or* It is just for a short while.

Collocation, Transitivity and the Meaning of Akan Phrasal Verbs

It is evident from the above discussions that in addition to the phonetic features of tone and nasality, the grammatical features of transitivity and collocation are also important in distinguishing phrasal verbs as semantic entities, and as is apparent above, sometimes, one needs both phonetic and grammatical features to distinguish between homonymous phrasal verbs. According to Lyons (1977) homonymy is not just an ortho-phonetic consideration. It involves also the grammatical, including part of speech, grammatical composition, tense as well as morphological structure. By transitivity and collocation, we mean simply the ability of a phrasal verb to admit an object, which makes the action being described possible (transitive and intransitive), the number of objects a phrasal verb has or needs in order to realise its sense (mono or di-transitives) as well as the nature of noun the verb requires as its object (collocation) are not only grammatical but also semantic considerations. (See Cobuild, 1990).

The importance of transitivity in the consideration of phrasal verbs in Akan is evident in the following pairs. The transitive forms are those that have noun phrases, indicated NP:

- *Te NP ase* (to understand)
- *Te ase* (to live)

- *Gyina NP so* (to importune)
- *Gyina so* (to be in top form)

- *Da NP so* (to be NP's problem)
- *Da so* (to come immediately as a matter of course)

- *Ma NP so* (to extol)
- *Ma so* (to dress elegantly)

Sometimes among transitive phrasal verbs, the nature of object a particular phrasal verb collocates with determines the meaning to be associated with it. The pairs or sets below illustrate the role of collocation in the semantic description of phrasal verbs in Akan.

PHRASAL VERB	NATURE OF OBJECT	MEANING
K⊃ so “	tangible object e.g. man, animal, shop action, endeavour e.g. work, trading, speech/speaking	- To attack - To continue
Brε NP ase “ “	- issue, endeavour - human (3 rd person) - subject-reflexive noun	- To cause to reduce intensity, to quell or make to retrogress. - To cause to loose pride, to humiliate. - To be humble
Ma NP so “ “	- Subject-reflexive human object - No-reflexive human object. - Endeavour, work	to be arrogant to glorify to cause to progress

In addition to its use on the table above, ‘brɛ ase’ is used intransitively to mean ‘to reduce in intensity’ as in:

Adwuma no brɛ ase. (The work retrogressed or reduced in intensity.)

Here, it captures only the first meaning above and cannot be used to mean ‘to humiliate or cause to be humiliated’.

It is worthwhile to observe, however, that the ambiguity in the use of the human pronominal object (as direct or indirect object) in ‘kyerɛ ase’ is forestalled one way or the other in Fante. This is done through tonal variation as exemplified below:

- Kyèrɛ n’àsɛ́ (explain the matter to him)
- Kyèrɛ n’ásɛ̀ (to unravel the disgraceful story of one’s beginning).

In the Asante dialect, the meaning ‘to explain’ is marked by way of epenthesis in which the vowel /ɛ/ is added to the adposition element to give the following:

Kyèrɛ n’àsɛ́ɛ (Explain to him.)

as against

Kyèrɛ n’ásɛ̀. (Unravel the story of his beginnings)

The ambiguity can be forestalled also with the introduction of the direct object when the phrasal verb is used to mean ‘to explain’ so that the role of the human pronominal object which is the indirect object and the beneficiary is made very clear:

Kyerɛ *Kwame* asɛm no ase.
Verb Oi Od adpost

The phrasal verb with the meaning ‘to unravel one’s beginnings’ does not take an indirect object denoting the beneficiary, so that whilst one of the homonymous verbs has the full structure: *S+Oi +Od + Adpost.* with the Od sometimes contextually implied, the other has the full structure: **S + Od + Adpost.**

Phrasal Verb Structure Subversion and Discourse

At this section of the essay, we shall consider how the constitution of the phrasal verb is harnessed for such discursal ends as humour, cheeks and abuse. The achievement of these discursal ends is based on the deliberate exploitation of the Akan phrasal verb as a lexical, grammatical and semantic entity. Idioms are generally considered as unanalysable ‘phraseological units’ (Balvit, 1969), and associated with this unanalysability is the fixity of form or constituents. Generally then, a replacement of any of the constituents – except in situations of mutual acceptance – can be seen as a subversion of the form and meaning of the idiom, resulting in semantic absurdity for specific discursal ends.

The use of the Akan phrasal verb for these ends involves changing the verb form, the adposition, the completive element (for transitives) or any of its constituents, or the tonal arrangement of the phrasal verb. The change upstages the meaning and identity of the phrasal verb. Pragmatically, it is a rejection of the place of the idea signified by the phrasal verb in the discourse, and may also be seen as threatening the face of the interlocutor or the person to which the idea of the phrasal verb is associated in the context, or as creating the semantic absurdity or incongruity which produces humour depending on the participant relationship and the key of the interaction. (See Hymes (1964) - *Ethnography of Speech*).

Items and their replacements usually share some sense relationship, whether as antonyms, synonyms, hyperonym/hyponym, co-hyponyms, holonym/meronym etc. Additionally, such replacements must not result in a contextually or semantically acceptable forms such as synonyms, as in ‘gyina so’ and ‘te so’ above. The examples below illustrate the deliberate violation of phrasal verb structure and idiomatic meaning for discursal ends:

Statement: Akwasi aba so (Akwasi has grown arrogant.)

Lit. Akwasi has come up/on.

Subversion: Dabi , \supset k \supset so

Lit. ?He has gone up/on.

Here, the verb stem ‘ba’ (come) is replaced with a converse verb ‘k \supset ’ (go). The resultant ‘k \supset so’, which can also be identified as a phrasal verb is neither syntactically nor semantically congruous, and it is unacceptable in the context. Semantically, the meaning of ‘k \supset so’ (to continue) or ‘to prosper’ has nothing to do with the allegation of arrogance. Grammatically, ‘k \supset so’ with the meaning ‘to continue’ is, unlike ‘ba so’, always completed by an activity denoted by another verb. Where it occurs with the sense ‘to prosper’, it normally does not occur with a human described subject, but rather nouns denoting activity. When used with a human described subject, the phrasal verb is realised deverbally as ‘nk \supset so \supset ’ as a completive noun with the possessive verb ‘nya’ (get, obtain). It is these grammatical and semantic incongruities which underlie the face threatening or humour of the subversion. In the example below, the subversion has been worked on the adposition element:

Statement: Akwasi aba so (Akwasi has grown arrogant.)

Lit. Akwasi has come up/on.

Subversion: Dabi , waba ase.

Lit. ?He has come under.

The closest phrasal verbs to the structure resulting from the subversion, ‘ba ase’, are ‘b \supset ase’ (‘to begin’) or ‘to come into being’; and ‘brɛ ase’ (‘to retrogress’, ‘to be humble’ or ‘to be demoted or to be disgraced’). In addition to the fact that none of these phrasal verb has the exact structure as that resulting from the subversion, none of even the senses of the physically contiguous verbs is semantically acceptable in the context of alleged arrogance. The grammatical contrast between each of these and the resulting structure deepens the unacceptability of none of the senses in the context. Taking ‘brɛ ase’, the meaning ‘to retrogress’ always goes with a deverbal or activity noun as subject,

and not 'Akwasi' which is human. Secondly, the meaning 'to be humble' is used transitively with a subject-reflexive completive. Finally, the meaning 'to be demoted' is a two-place predicate (agentive subject/ affected object) and the 'Akwasi' would most likely have been the affected object, and not subject as in the structure under consideration. With all these semantic and grammatical clashes, one has no choice but to attempt to interpret the resulting structure non-idiomatically, in deed since the subversion was wrought out of a non-idiomatic consideration of the meaning of 'so' (up), which accentuates the incongruity and absurdity on which the humour or cheek is based.

Conclusion

Whilst concluding, it is useful to assert reiterate that like all linguistic structures, the Akan phrasal verb in the view of Halliday (1985) is a 'semantically-conditioned' structure. As a structural as well as semantic entity, it exists in different form of relationships with other structures by way of deviation, similarity, derivation and transfer. As an idiom, however, the most important aspect of its semanticity is its internal structure and the meaning which is usually arbitrarily associated with this form. The salience of this evident in the sense that it is this meaning (as associated with a fixed form) which identifies it as a phraseological unit in the first place, and which becomes basis for the considerations of the relationships of transfer, deviation etc. Finally, the exploitation of the phrasal verb for discursal ends depends on the acknowledgement of the meaning of the idiom, the incongruities of the senses derived out of the subversive exploitation of the structure and meaning of the idiom as well as the clashes between the meaning (and grammar) of structurally contiguous forms, and the meaning established in the phrasal verb in discourse interaction.

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