

THE DEFINITE PARTICLE nĩ IN BAULE¹

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1. Introduction

Philosophers have devoted much attention to the problem of definite referring expressions - a definite referring expression being one that informs the addressee that a specific entity is being referred to while also providing enough information for the addressee to identify the entity in question. This uniqueness of reference is always context-dependent and therefore depends on the use of such deictic elements as pronouns, demonstratives, place and time adverbs, and the definite article (cf. Lyons 1977: 636ff.). The definite particle nĩ in Baule shares some of the characteristics of the definite article in English but many of its functions are quite dissimilar.

2. The phonetic aspects of the particle nĩ.

The particle nĩ is realized phonetically in three ways:

2.1. Preceding vowels it is realized in its full form, although it coalesces with the vowel to form a single (slightly longer) syllable:

1) akɔ nĩ a wu [àkɔ nĩ^h wū] 'The chicken has died.'

2) alwa ye ɔ kũnĩ akɔ nĩ ɔ [...àkɔ nĩ^hɔ]
'It was a dog that killed the chicken.'

3) se ɔ kũnĩ akɔ nĩ ɔ [...àkɔ nĩ^hɔ]
'Perhaps he killed the chicken.'

4) kũ akɔ nĩ e [...àkɔ nĩ^he]
'So kill the chicken!'

2.2. Preceding consonants it is realized as a homorganic nasal consonant. (This and the following realization are written as 'n'):

1 Baule is a western Kwa language spoken in central Ivory Coast. The data presented here are taken from the dialect of Baule spoken south of Bouaké among the Saafuz. The transcription of the Baule data is in the International Phonetic Alphabet with the exception of y which is equivalent to IPA j.

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| 5) waka'n bo | [wākām bō] | 'under the tree' |
| 6) tabli'n su | [táblīn sū] | 'on the table' |
| 7) ako'n kū | [àkōŋ kū] | 'one of the chickens' |
| 8) si bese'n kpa | [sī bēsēŋm kpā] | 'Sharpen the machet well' |

2.3. Preceding a pause it is realized as a nasalized vowel, $\bar{i}$ following front and central vowels, $\bar{u}$ following back vowels - which coalesces with the preceding vowel, and effectively lengthens the syllable.

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| 9) fa kpasī'n. | [fā kpāsī̃r] | 'Take the match.' |
| 10) fa se'n. | [fā sēī] | 'Take the pot.' |
| 11) fa ba'n. | [fā bāī] | 'Take the child.' |
| 12) fa so'n. | [fā sōū] | 'Take the pail.' |
| 13) fa luku'n. | [fā lūkūū] | 'Take the kerchief.' |

2.4. Tonally ni has the effect of changing a preceding falling tone to a level tone, a characteristic of a low tone. It does not, however, always behave as a low tone; rather it copies the tone of the syllable with which it coalesces and lengthens it.² For example:

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| 14) tãñí | | 'cloth' |
| tãñí'n | [tãñí̃] | 'the cloth' |
| 15) bājē | | 'sack' |
| bājē'n | [bājē̃] | 'the sack' |
| 16) mândā | | 'banana' |
| mândā'n | [mândā̃] | 'the banana' |

3. Some of the syntactic and semantic characteristics of $\bar{n}\bar{i}$.

Substantives are distinguished as a lexical class from verbs, adverbs, and adjectives by their ability to occur with the definite particle $\bar{n}\bar{i}$. Substantives are further divided into five sub-classes according to the precise semantic value that $\bar{n}\bar{i}$ carries when occurring with the substantives of

2 Although Creissels and Kouadio (1977) describe instances where the definite particle $\bar{n}\bar{i}$ is realized only tonally, we have always found a segmental realization of $\bar{n}\bar{i}$, albeit in some instances only the lengthening of a vowel.

each sub-class.³ The five sub-classes are: names, place names, pronouns, kin terms and common nouns. The first four of these sub-classes have in common the fact that they are inherently definite; that is, they refer unambiguously to a specific referent in a given context of utterance. This fact, of course, is not unique to Baule, and has long been recognized by philosophers (cf. the discussion in Lyons 1977:177ff.) who have traditionally considered an expression containing a proper name, a place name, or a pronoun to be a definite referring expression. In Baule, kin terms must also be considered inherently definite because they obligatorily occur with a name or a pronoun, thus forming a compound noun which names a specific person in the context of utterance.

Opposed to these four sub-classes of inherently definite substantives are the common nouns which cannot be used in definite referring expressions without the definite particle nĩ or the demonstrative nga. When nĩ occurs with a common noun it has the effect of making the noun a definite uniquely referring expression and thus similar in function to the inherently definite substantives (i.e. names, place names, pronouns and kin terms). The making definite of a common noun is the primary function of nĩ. However, nĩ also occurs with proper names, place names and pronouns where its function is obviously something other than that of making definite. This secondary function of nĩ is one of focus or emphasis. For example:

- 17) Name: Konā'n timā kpaɪ
 'That Konan is not a good person!'
- 18) Place name: Abijā'n timā klo bɔ be trā su'n
 'Abidjan is no place to live.'
- 19) Pronoun: wɔ'n? ɔ bɔbɔ'n ye a yo like nga?
 'You? You yourself did this thing?'
- 20) Kin term: Kofi yi'n o klo lo
 'Kofi's wife is in the village' (as opposed to his children, perhaps).

3 cf. Timyan (1977) for a discussion of other criteria determining the sub-classification of substantives.

In each of these examples the noun phrase without nī already refers to a unique person or place; the addition of nī makes the expression emphatic. This usage is not unlike the non-deictic use of the demonstrative "that" with proper names in English:

21. That Johnny is very mischievous!

3.1. nī and the attributive construction.

The attributive construction in Baule has the structure head + modifier(s). The definite particle nī, which normally occurs suffixed to the last word of the attributive construction, makes definite not only the common noun which is the head of the construction but also all of the descriptive information contained therein.⁴ When a Baule speaker uses a name, pronoun or a kin term to refer to a specific individual he is providing enough information to unambiguously identify the individual in question. However, when a common noun is used in a definite referring expression, the speaker must provide whatever additional descriptive information is necessary for the addressee to be able to establish the identity of the referent. It is this information which is made definite by the particle nī. For example:

22) akonīmā okwɛ dā nūmā klo'n su.

'There are no big red roosters in the village.'

23) akonīmā okwɛ dā'n nūmā klo'n su.

'The big red rooster isn't in the village' (said of a specific lost rooster).

24) n toli amango blowa.

'I bought (some) ripe mangoes.'

4 In attributive constructions of the type "part of a whole", the unspecified "part" is outside the scope of the definite particle nī which occurs suffixed to the specified, definite "whole". Thus the meaning of the noun phrase is non-definite. For example:

a) ako kāsā'n kū wuli.

One of the small chickens died' (of a group of only small chickens).

b) ako'n kāsā kū wuli.

'One of the small chickens died' (of a group of both large and small chickens).

- 25) n toli amango blowa'n.
'I bought the ripe mangoes.'

A relative clause, which is used to further describe and define a noun head, is obligatorily followed by the particle nī:

- 26) kwe bə n toli i anūmū'n a mlī.
'The knife which I bought yesterday is lost.'

- 27) n su mindətalwa nga n wūū be atī nū lo'n.
'I am waiting for the young girls whom I saw on the road.'

3.2. nī and the associative construction.⁵

In general the associative construction involves two substanti A and B, that are in a specific relation one to the other, such as:

- B belongs to A;
- B is part of A;
- B is in the possession of A;
- B is attributed to A;
- B is for A;
- B is destined for A; etc.

In Baule the order of the elements in the associative construction is modifier + head, the structure being:

MODIFIER + (pronoun) + HEAD + (nī)

The characteristics of each of these four elements are as follows:

3.2.1. The modifier substantive is obligatorily definite, i.e. either an inherently definite substantive or a common noun plus the definite particle nī. Should the first of two juxtaposed common nouns not be suffixed by nī, the resultant construction is a compound noun rather than an associative construction. For example:

⁵ The term associative is preferred to "possessive" or "genitive"; the former term is too restrictive for the range of meaning of this construction, and the latter brings to mind noun case systems (cf. Welmers 1973:275ff.).

28) non-definite compound noun:

dootra swa	'hospital'
swa anwā	'house-door'

definite compound noun:

dootro swa'n	'the hospital'
swa anwā'n	'the house-door'

associative construction:

dootro'n swa'n	'the doctor's house'
swa'n i anwā'n	'the door of the house'

3.2.2. The second element of the associative construction is an optional (pleonastic) pronoun when the first element is other than a pronoun. For example:

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| 29) | Kofi alwa'n | 'Kofi's dog' |
| | Kofi i alwa'n | 'Kofi's dog' |
| 30) | gbāflē'n kpango'n | 'the youth's bicycle' |
| | gbāflē'n i kpango'n | 'the youth's bicycle' |

The third person plural pronoun be is obligatory, however, when the first element is suffixed by the plural marker mū. (mū, although used primarily to indicate plurality, also has the effect of making definite the common noun to which it is suffixed and thus it is not necessary in such expressions to use the particle nī to indicate definiteness.)⁶ For example:

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| 31) | kpēngbē mū <u>be</u> nde'n | 'the old men's affair' |
| 32) | aofwe mū <u>be</u> tro'n | 'the strangers' baggage' |

3.2.3. The third element of the associative construction may be any substantive other than a pronoun, i.e. it may be a name, a place name, a kin term or

⁶ nī suffixed to a noun marked for plurality with mū has a focussing or emphatic effect, similar to its effect on the inherently definite substantives. Typically there is a pause (for emphasis) after such a noun phrase. For example:

kpēngbē mū'n, be nd 'n wye'a mīsmīsl
'The old men, their affairs never finish!'

a common noun.

3.2.4. The final element of the associative construction is an optional definite particle. The presence or absence of this final definite particle in most cases marks the difference between a definite and a non-definite associative construction. For example:

33) Yao tralɛ ye

'Here is Yao's shirt.' (i.e. Here is a shirt of Yao's/Here is a shirt for Yao.)

34) Yao tralɛ'n ye

'Here is Yao's shirt.' (i.e. Here is the shirt of Yao's.)

35) be su kã n swa i ayɛ

'They're painting my house.' (i.e. They're painting a house of mine.)

36) be su kã n swa'n i ayɛ

'They're painting my house.' (i.e. They're painting the house of mine.)

37) klɔ kpɛngbɛ'n i nãɪ a saci fye'n

'The chief's cows ruined the garden.' (i.e. The speaker identifies the cows as belonging to the chief but they remain unspecified: 'cows of the chief'.)

38) klɔ kpɛngbɛ'n i nãɪ'n a saci fye'n

'The chief's cows ruined the garden.' (i.e. The cows of the chief which are known to the speaker and the addressee)

In the above associative constructions the relationship of association between the two principal elements is established by the use of the construction. In addition to such constructions there are those in which the relationship of association between the two elements is contained in the meaning of the elements themselves. Included in this category are constructions such as n ti 'my head', n wũ 'my husband', and Bouaké gwa bo 'Bouaké's market'. Constructions of this type are inherently definite and thus are most frequently used without a final definite particle. (In other words, one does

not make the distinction between 'a head of mine' and 'the head of mine'; nor, since Bouaké has only one principal market, does one speak of 'a market of Bouaké',⁷ The addition of the final definite particle to constructions such as these has a contrastive effect. For example:

39) Bouaké gwa bo ti dā. 'Bouaké-market is big.'

40) Bouaké gwa bo'n ti dā. 'The market at Bouaké (and not somewhere else) is big.'

41) Kōnā i yi Aya le ba nsā.

'Konan's-wife-Aya has three children.' (The compound name names the woman in question.)

42) Kōnā i yi Aya'n le ba nsā.

'Konan's wife Aya (and not his other wife) has three children.'

43) n ti yo n ya.

'My head hurts.' (i.e. I have a headache.)

44) n ti'n yo n ya.

'My head (and not my belly) hurts.'

3.3. nī and the locative construction.

A locative construction involves two substantives, the second of which is a member of a closed sub-set of nouns called locatives which indicates a location in relation to the first substantive. When the first element of a locative construction is definite, i.e. either an inherently definite substantive or a common noun plus the definite particle nī, the resultant expression is an associative construction. For example:

45. tñnī'n o i ti'n su.

'The cloth is on her head.' (i.e. On the top of her head.)

46. n yacili kpongbo nzwe'n nū.

'I left the basin in the water.' (i.e. In the interior of the water.)

7 Most of the members of this category are nouns that are considered to be inalienably possessed.

47) lakle'n o o sa'n sī.

'The key is behind your hand.' (i.e. At the back of your hand.)

When the first element of a locative construction is not definite the resulting expression is a compound noun which often takes on idiomatic meaning.

For example:

48) tānī'n o i ti su.

'The cloth is in her baggage.'

49) be woli nzwe nū.

'They went to the well/the river/the watering place.'

50) lakle'n o o sa sī.

'The key is already in your possession.'

4. Conclusions

The purpose of this paper has been to present the definite particle nī in Baule and to examine some of its basic characteristics. We have seen that its semantic function depends upon the definiteness of the expression with which it occurs. It makes definite a common noun, an attributive construction or a non-definite associative construction. Suffixed to noun phrases which are already definite referring expressions (personal names, place names, pronouns, kin terms or inherently definite associative constructions) nī has a contrastive or focussing effect.

The current analysis of the definite article has been necessarily limited. We have not, for example, discussed the relationship between nī and the demonstrative nga or between nī and the numerals and quantifiers. The particle also plays a role in forming the superlative of adjectives. These and other functions of nī will be the subject of forthcoming contributions.

References

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