

COMPARATIVE SENTENCES IN TWI-FANTE¹

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A comparative sentence is formed in Twi-Fante by means of (a) the relative adverbial *sɛnɛ́ɛ́* (Twi)/*dɛ́mbrɛ́* (Fante)² meaning 'in a manner similar to', and (b) the verbs *sɛ́ŋ* and *kʷɛ́ŋ* meaning 'excel'. Comparative sentences of the latter type are subject to an optional transformation resulting in a deletion of the relative adverbial.

The aim of this paper is to describe rules for producing sentences of both types. Part of the task consists in building a number of constraints into the grammar. We should, for example, require that the rules for comparatives produce a sentence like

1. ɔ́ nóm nsá sɛnɛ́ɛ́ ne ágya nóm nsá³
he drinks wine like his father drinks wine

but not

2. ɔ́ nóm nsá sɛnɛ́ɛ́ ne ágya ń nórɛ́ nsá
he drinks wine like his father does not drink wine

because the latter is ungrammatical although

3. ɔ́ n nórɛ́ nsá sɛnɛ́ɛ́ ne ágya nórɛ́ nsá
he does not drink wine like his father drinks wine

4. ɔ́ n kasá sɛnɛ́ɛ́ biribí ńyérááé
he does not speak like something was not lost

and

5. ɔ́ n nórɛ́ nsá n sɛ́ŋ me
he does not drink wine does not excel me
(i.e. he does not drink more than I do)

are all perfectly correct sentences. Each of the sentences 2-5 contains, at least, one negative morpheme, yet 2 alone is ungrammatical, and for this reason.

Secondly, the grammar should be constructed in such a way as to account for the fact that 6 and 7 are understood in more than one way:

6. ɔ́ pɛ siká sɛŋ nɛ́ nṹnóń
he likes money excels his brothers

¹For the general theory of generative grammar on which this description is based see Chomsky, N., *SYNTACTIC STRUCTURES* (The Hague, 1957).

²Twi and Fante are variants of the same language spoken in Ghana. The examples are quoted in Twi orthography (with minor modifications) but the more abstract rules apply equally well to Fante. The Twi form *sɛnɛ́ɛ́* appears in the examples. In a complete grammar the Fante form *dɛ́mbrɛ́* could easily be introduced by a morphophonemic rule.

³Low tones are not marked. The symbols ' and ' are used for non-low tones, the former indicating either the first high tone to appear in the sentence or a tone as high as the immediately preceding non-low while the latter indicates a pitch lower than a previous non-low. This system of tone marking, of course, does not go beyond the syllable and is certainly inadequate. It assumes that successive syllables form a descending sequence of pitches, rather like a terrace. This characterization of the tonal system of Twi-Fante is largely true but unless it is supplemented by statements whose relevance has a domain beyond the syllable (and covering, say, the sentence) certain pitch phenomena are not accounted for. How could, for example, the pitch behaviour in sentence 6a be satisfactorily explained unless statements about intonation were resorted to?

English translations are literal.

7. ɔ n fré me sɛ ɔhɛnɛ
he does not call me like a chief

6 can mean either

- 6a. ɔ pɛ sɪká seŋ sɛnɛɛ ɔ pɛ nɛ nũánóh
he likes money excels how he likes his brothers

or

- 6b. ɔ pɛ sɪká seŋ sɛnɛɛ nɛ nũánóh pɛ sɪká
he likes money excels how his brothers like money

In much the same way 7 is interpretable either as

- 7a. ɔ n fré me sɛnɛɛ ɔ fré ɔhɛnɛ
he does not call me like he calls a chief

or

- 7b. ɔ n fré me sɛnɛɛ ɔhɛnɛ fré mé
he does not call me like a chief calls me

In 6a and 7a *nũánóh* and *ɔhɛnɛ* are object complements; in 6b and 7b they are subjects – an important difference in syntactic relation obscured by superficial structure.

Related to this is the requirement that 8 and 9 be analysed differently in spite of the apparent similarity between them:

8. ɔ nɔ́á aduaŋ seŋ sɛnɛɛ me nɔ́á ádúáŋ
he cooks food excels how I cook food
9. ɔ nim sɛnɛɛ me nɔ́á ádúáŋ
he knows how I cook food

8 is a comparative sentence but 9 is not. It is clear from evidence elsewhere in the language that *sɛnɛɛ* . . . *aduaŋ* in 9 is the object complement of *nim*.

Now, compare the following two sentences:

10. Kwasi nɔ́á aduaŋ sɛ́h mé
Kwasi cooks food excels me
11. Kwasi nɔ́á aduaŋ srá mé
Kwasi cooks food visits me

On the surface both 10 and 11 are made up of the sequence Noun + Verb + Noun + Verb + Pronoun. The similarity makes it tempting to put the two sentences together under the same heading, presumably, serial co-ordinate constructions, without further specification. It can, however, be shown that 10 and 11a are different structurally by comparing the relation between *sɛ́h* and *mé* on the one hand and *srá* and *mé* on the other. 10 is really a stylistic abbreviation of

12. ɔ nɔ́á aduaŋ seŋ sɛnɛɛ me nɔ́á aduaŋ
he cooks food excels how I cook food

and not until we take into account the relations between constituents in the deep structure do we discover signals for a comparative sentence. Notice, for example, that *mé* is not in an object complement position at all: it is the subject of a clause. In 11, however, *mé* is in object complement position as the underlying sentences make it clear:

- | | | |
|----------------------|-----|----------------------------|
| 13. Kwasi nɔ́á aduaŋ | } ⇒ | Kwasi nɔ́á aduaŋ srá mé |
| Kwasi cooks food | | Kwasi cooks food visits me |
| Kwasi srá mé | | |
| Kwasi visits me | | |

To treat the two relations *séj mé* in 10 and *srá mé* in 11 as equivalent, then, would meet serious objections.

Note further that 10 and 6 can be reduced to the same set of underlying sentences. To argue that 10 and 11 be assigned the same set of underlying markers amounts to insisting that 11 and 6 be analysed in the same way. As has been pointed out, however, 6 is ambiguous in a sense that 11 is not. A reasonable conclusion to draw from all this is that the similarity between 10 and 11 is only superficial.

The two verbs *séj* and *kyéj* share some of the commonest syntactic characteristics that typify all other verbs (e.g. ability to participate in serial co-ordinate constructions; tense-mood-polarity selectional restrictions that most verbs are subject to in such constructions etc.). This, however, does not preclude unique syntactic behaviour among verbs; hence the ungrammaticalness of

14. $\text{ɔ nɔ́á aduaŋ srá sɛ́nɛ́á mé nɔ́á áduaf}$
he cooks food visits like I cook food

in spite of 1, 3-8, etc. *Séj* and *kyéj* constitute a unique subclass in that they alone of the verbs are used in forming comparative sentences. This is different from saying that every sentence containing either of or both these verbs is comparative, for we are here interested in more than lexical meaning. Reliance on dictionary meaning alone would pass

15. ɔ kyɛŋ mé
he excels me

as comparative. The rules below, however, do not generate 15. It is probably true that native speakers of Twi-Fante are intuitively aware of implications of comparison when they use these two verbs or hear them used in a sentence. An explanation of this awareness, as far as the grammar is concerned, however, should be sought outside lexical connotation. The rules below make it very clear that there are structural regularities that relate all comparative sentences in the most natural way. Every such sentence, for example, either contains an adverbial of manner (the exact shape of which is to be specified in the rules) or can be traced back to a string containing one.

Before going on to state the rules it is appropriate to mention one or two features of the constituent structure component of the grammar and to explain some of the symbols used in explaining the rules:

(1) The constituent structure rules are developed in such a way as to provide, at some point, a node for an optional REL(ative) which acts as a point of attachment during certain embedding transformations, especially Relativisation. When the comparative transformation is applied REL is shifted from its position to the extreme right of the adverb of manner where it acts as a conjoining point for the two source strings for a comparative sentence;

(b) the node labelled adverb of manner has, as one of its branchings, *sé enɔ́*. Below is a truncated version of the constituent structure rules:⁴

- CS 1. $\# S \# \rightarrow NP + REL + VP + \text{Adverb};$ (Boundary, Sentence, Noun
Phrase, Verb Phrase)

- CS 2. $NP \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Noun} \\ \text{Pronoun} \end{array} \right\} (+ \text{Modifier})$

⁴For a fuller set of constituent structure rules see my 'Some Twi Phrase Structure Rules', J.W.A.L., Vol. II, No. 1, 1965.

$$\text{CS 3. VP} \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{Imp} \\ \text{Tsc} \end{array} \right\} (+ \text{Neg}) \left\{ \begin{array}{c} V_t + \text{NP} \\ V_{\text{int}} \end{array} \right\} \begin{array}{l} (\text{Imperative, Tense,} \\ \text{Negative, Transitive verb,} \\ \text{Intransitive verb}) \end{array}$$

$$\text{CS 4. Tse} \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{Pres} \\ \text{Past} \\ \text{Perf} \\ \text{Fut} \end{array} \right\} \quad (\text{Present, Perfect, Future})$$

$$\text{CS 5. Adverb} \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{Ad} \\ \text{Ad Manner} \end{array} \right\}$$

$$\text{CS 6. Ad Manner} \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{Ad Man} \\ \text{sé enō} \\ \dots \end{array} \right\}$$

TRANSFORMATIONS

The first rule produces sentences like

4. ɔ n kasá sɛnɛ́ǎ biribí ń yérááé

16. n kasá sɛnɛ́ǎ biribí ń yérááé

don't speak like something was not lost

$$\text{T 1.} \quad \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{SD: } \left[\text{NP - REL - } \left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{Tsc} \\ \text{Imp} \end{array} \right\} + \text{Neg - V - sé enō} \right] \\ \text{NP + Tse + Neg - V - X} \end{array} \right]$$

SC: 1 ... 8 ⇒ 1-3-4-5-2-6-7-8

Condition: 4 ≠ 7

Example:

$$\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{ɔnō - REL - Pres + n - kasa - sé enō} \\ \text{he - REL - Pres + not - speak - like that} \\ \text{biribí + Perf + n - yera} \\ \text{something + Perf + not - lost} \end{array} \right\} \Rightarrow$$

ɔnō - Pres + n - kasa - sé enō - REL - biribí + Perf + n - yera
he - Pres + not-speak - like that-which-something + Perf + not-lost

which, by morphophonemics, becomes 4.

The next rule produces sentences like

7a. ɔ n fré me sɛnɛ́ǎ ɔ fré ɔhɛ́nɛ́

17. ɔ fré me sɛnɛ́ǎ ɔ fré ɔhɛ́nɛ́

he calls me like he calls a chief

$$\text{T 2.} \quad \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{SD: } \left[\text{NP - REL - } \left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{Tsc} \\ \text{Imp} \end{array} \right\} (+ \text{Neg}) - V_1 - X + sé enō} \right] \\ \text{NP - Tse - V}_1 - Z \end{array} \right]$$

SC: 1...9 $\Rightarrow$ 1-3-4-5-2-6-7-8-9

Condition: 1 = 6

4 = 8

Example:

ɔnɔ - REL - Pres + n - frɛ - me + sɛ ɛnɔ	} $\Rightarrow$
he - REL - Pres + not - call - me + like that	
ɔnɔ - Pres - frɛ - ɔhɛnɛ	
he - Pres - call - a chief	
ɔnɔ - Pres + n - frɛ - me + sɛ ɛnɔ - REL - ɔnɔ - Pres - frɛ - ɔhɛnɛ	
he - Pres + not-call-me + like that-which-he- Pres- call - a chief	

which, by morphophonemics, becomes 7a.

The third rule produces sentences of the type

7b. ɔ n frɛ me sɛnɛɛ ɔhɛnɛ frɛ me

18. ɔ frɛ me sɛnɛɛ ɔhɛnɛ frɛ me

he calls me like a chief calls me

T 3.

$$SD: \left[\begin{array}{l} NP - REL - \left\{ \begin{array}{l} Tse \\ Imp \end{array} \right\} + Neg - \left\{ \begin{array}{l} V_t + NP \\ V_{int} \end{array} \right\} - sɛ ɛnɔ \\ NP - Tse - \left\{ \begin{array}{l} V_t + NP \\ V_{int} \end{array} \right\} - Z \end{array} \right]$$
SC: 1...9 $\Rightarrow$ 1-3-4-5-2-6-7-8-9

Condition: 1 = 6

4 = 8

Example:

ɔnɔ - REL - Pres + n - frɛ + me - sɛ ɛnɔ	} $\Rightarrow$
he - REL - Pres + not-call + me - like that	
ɔhɛnɛ - Pres - frɛ + me	
a chief - Pres - call + me	
ɔnɔ - Pres + n - frɛ + me - sɛ ɛnɔ - REL - ɔhɛnɛ - Pres - frɛ + me	
he - Pres + not-call + me - like that-which-a chief-Pres - call + me	

which becomes 7b by morphophonemics.

The next rule produces sentences of the type

19. sɛnɛɛ yɛ bɔɔɛ nɔ, sɔɔ nɛ mɔ bɛ kɔ

in the manner that we came, so it is that you will go

(i.e. just as we came so will you go)

T 4.

$$SD: \left[\begin{array}{l} NP - REL - Tse + X + V + Y - sɛ ɛnɔ \\ NP + \left\{ \begin{array}{l} Tse \\ Imp \end{array} \right\} + V + Z \end{array} \right]$$
SC: 1...5 $\Rightarrow$ 4-2-1-3 + Determiner + # - 4 + nɛ - 5

Condition: X contains Neg if and only if Z does.

Example:

$$\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{yeŋ - REL - Past + bra - se enō} \\ \text{we - REL - Past + come - like that} \\ \text{mō + Fut + kō} \\ \text{you + will + go} \end{array} \right\} \Rightarrow$$

se enō - REL - yeŋ - Past + bra + nō + # - se enō + na - mō + Fut + kō
like that - which - we - Past + come + that + # - like it + that - you + will + go

and, by morphophonemics, becomes 19.

The next rule produces sentences of the type

6a. ɔ pe sika seŋ sēnēā ɔ pé nē nūānóm

T 5.
$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{NP - REL - } \left[\begin{array}{c} \text{Tse} \\ \text{Imp} \end{array} \right] + \text{X - V}_t - \text{NP - } \left[\begin{array}{c} \text{Tse} \\ \text{Imp} \end{array} \right] + \text{Y - seŋ + se enō} \\ \text{NP - Tse + V}_t + \text{NP} \end{array} \right]$$

SC: 1 . . . 9 $\Rightarrow$ 1-3-4-5-6-2-7-8-9

Condition: 1 = 8

3 = 6

X contains Neg if and only if Y does.

Example:

$$\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{ɔnō - REL - Pres - pe - sika - Pres - seŋ + se enō} \\ \text{he - REL - Pres - like - money-Pres - excel + like that} \\ \text{ɔnō - Pres - pe + ne nūānom} \\ \text{he - Pres - like + his brothers} \end{array} \right\} \Rightarrow$$

ɔnō - Pres - pe + sika - Pres - seŋ + se enō - REL - ɔnō + Pres -
he - Pres - like + money-Pres - excel + like that - which - he - Pres
pe + ne nūānom
like + his brothers

which, by morphophonemics, becomes 6a.

The next rule produces sentences of the type

6b. ɔ pe sika seŋ sēnēā nē nūānóm pé sika

T 6.
$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{NP - REL - } \left[\begin{array}{c} \text{Tse} \\ \text{Imp} \end{array} \right] + \text{X - } \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{V}_t + \text{NP} \\ \text{V}_{int} \end{array} \right\} - \left[\begin{array}{c} \text{Tse} \\ \text{Imp} \end{array} \right] + \text{Y - seŋ + se enō} \\ \text{NP - Tse - } \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{V}_t + \text{NP} \\ \text{V}_{int} \end{array} \right\} - \text{Z} \end{array} \right]$$

SC: 1 . . . 10 $\Rightarrow$ 1-3-4-5-6-2-7-8-9-10

Condition: 1 $\neq$ 7

3 = 5

4 = 9

X contains Neg if and only if Y does.

Example:

ɔnɔ - REL - Pres - pɛ + sika - Pres - sɛŋ + sɛ ɛnɔ	} ⇒
he - REL - Pres - like + money - Pres - excel + like that	
ne nũānom - Pres - pɛ + sika	
his brothers - Pres - like + money	
ɔnɔ - Pres - pɛ + sika - Pres - sɛŋ + sɛ ɛnɔ - REL - ne nũānom - Pres -	
he - Pres - like + money - Pres - excel + like taht - REL - his brothers - Pres -	
pɛ + sika	
like + money	

which, by morphophonemics, becomes 6b.

The next four rules operate on the outputs of T₂, T₃, T₅, and T₆ respectively to produce the ambiguous sentences of the types

7. ɔ n frɛ me sɛ ɔhɛnɛ

and

6. ɔ pɛ sika sɛŋ nɛ nũānɔrɔ

T₇. SD: X + sɛ - ɛnɔ + Y + V_t - NP + Z

SC: 1 . . . 3 ⇒ 1-3

Condition: as in T₂.

Example:

ɔnɔ frɛ me sɛ - ɛnɔ + REL + ɔnɔ frɛ - ɔhɛnɛ	} ⇒
he calls me like - that + which + he calls a chief	
ɔnɔ frɛ me sɛ - ɔhɛnɛ	
he calls me like - a chief	

which becomes 7 by morphophonemics.

T₈. SD: X + sɛ - ɛnɔ + Y - NP - Z + V_t + W

SC: 1 . . . 4 ⇒ 1-3

Condition: as in T₃.

Example:

ɔnɔ frɛ me sɛ - ɛnɔ + REL + ɔhɛnɛ - frɛ + me	} ⇒
he calls me like - that + which - a chief - calls + me	
ɔnɔ frɛ me sɛ - ɔhɛnɛ	
he calls me like - a chief	

which becomes 7 by morphophonemics.

T₉. SD: X + sɛŋ - sɛ ɛnɔ + Y + V_t - NP + Z

SC: 1 . . . 3 ⇒ 1-3

Condition: as in T₅.

Example:

ɔnɔ pɛ sika + sɛŋ - sɛ ɛnɔ + REL + ɔnɔ + pɛ - ne nũānom	} ⇒
he likes money + excels - that + which + he + pɛ - his brothers	

ɔnɔ pɛ sika + sɛŋ - ne nūānom
 he likes money + excels - his brothers

which becomes 6 by morphophonemics.

T 10. SD: X + sɛŋ - sɛ ɛnɔ + Y - NP - Z + V_i + W

SC: 1 . . . 4 ⇒ 1-3

Condition: as in T 6.

Example:

ɔnɔ pɛ sika + sɛŋ - sɛ ɛnɔ + REL + ɔnɔ + pɛ - ne nūānom
 he likes money + excels - like that + which + he + likes - his brothers } ⇒

ɔnɔ pɛ sika + sɛŋ - ne nūānom
 he likes money + excels - his brothers

which becomes 6 by morphophonemics.

The last transformational rule operates on the output of T 4 to produce sentences of the type

20. sɛnɔ̄ā me kàsà n̄ɔ wó n kasà saà
 in the manner that I speak you do not speak so

T 11. SD: # sɛ ɛnɔ + REL + X + Determiner # - sɛ ɛnɔ - nā - Y

SC: 1 . . . 4 ⇒ 1-4-2

Condition: X does not contain Neg and/or Imp
 Y contains Neg

Example:

sɛ ɛnɔ + REL - yɛŋ - Past + bra - nɔ + # - sɛ ɛnɔ - nā - mɔ -
 like that + which - we - Past + come - that + # - like it - that-you-

Fut + n - kɔ
 will + not - go } ⇒

sɛ ɛnɔ + REL - yɛŋ - Past + bra - nɔ + # - mɔ - Fut + n - kɔ - sɛ ɛnɔ
 like that + which - we - Past + come - that + # - you - will + not - go -
 like it

which, by morphophonemics, becomes 20.

MORPHOPHONEMICS

M1. X + sɛ ɛnɔ + REL + Y → X + sɛnɔ̄ā + Y

M2. X + sɛ ɛnɔ + Y → X + saa + Y