ANIMACY IN NKAMI

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Abstract

Drawing from a large corpus of synchronic natural data, this paper provides a detailed descriptive account of animacy distinctions in Nkami, an endangered Ghanaian language, spoken in the Afram Plains of Ghana. It demonstrates the remarkable linguistic resources that speakers employ to distinguish animates from inanimates, to a large extent, and humans from non-humans, to a lesser extent. The phenomenon is ubiquitous in forms and behaviours of pronouns, demonstratives, nominal affixes, nominal modifiers, dispositional verbs in basic locative constructions, inter alia. Some cases of animacy neutralization are also discussed.

Key words: animacy, nominal affixes, pronouns, dispositional verbs, neutralization.

1. Introduction

This paper attempts to provide a comprehensive description of animacy distinctions in Nkami. Animacy distinction is one of the most characteristic features of Nkami, and we believe of other Kwa languages of Ghana, particularly those of the Tano branch (Williamson and Blench 2000), which have not been given the needed attention. While almost every linguist who has discussed Akan pronouns talks about animacy distinctions in Akan (cf. Christaller 1875, Stewart 1963, Boadi 1976, Saah 1992, 1995; Osam 1994, 1996), perhaps one of the most comprehensive and systematic assays is Osam (1996). Osam (1996) presents evidence from the forms of pronouns and nominal affixes to demonstrate how Akan speakers distinguish between animate and inanimate entities. On the basis of the linguistic closeness of the two languages, Osam’s account forms a good reference point for our discussion and it is severally referred to where necessary. Howbeit, this paper is not meant to be a comparison between Nkami and Akan; neither does it seek the provenance of the

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1 The first author wishes to thank the Chinese Scholarship Council and the Endangered Language Development Project (ELDP) for sponsoring his PhD programme and fieldwork project respectively.

2 This article has benefited immensely from the helpful comments and suggestions of an anonymous reviewer and the editor of this journal, Prof. Dakubu. The usual disclaimers apply.
structures/forms of Nkami, though we acknowledge that, looking at some of the striking lexical/structural similarities between the two languages, as would be observed in this paper, any future work in those directions may be necessary to ascertain how much of the similarities shared by the two languages are cognates or result from diffusion.  

The paper comprehensively enumerates and systematically canvasses linguistic resources that Nkami speakers employ to distinguish humans from non-humans and animates from inanimates. It would be evident that these distinctions are particularly overwhelming in forms and behaviours of pronouns, demonstratives, nominal affixes, nominal modifiers, and some dispositional verbs in basic locative constructions (BLCs). Domains in the language where some of the animacy distinctions have been neutralized are also canvassed. Due to the endangered nature of Nkami, as we observe in the ensuing section, our primary purpose in this paper is aimed at descriptive adequacy (cf. Dixon 1997, 2010). Portions of the data are taken from an on-going PhD dissertation which is part of a larger documentation project on Nkami. The database includes spontaneous spoken and elicited texts collected from about hundred speakers of varied backgrounds in the field. Annotation and verification of media data and texts were done in conjunction with a team of two adult Nkami speakers and several other language consultants.  

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Sections three and four respectively discuss the forms, nature and behaviours of linguistic resources that Nkami speakers employ to distinguish between humans and non-humans, and animates and inanimates. Section five examines data from three domains where animate-inanimate distinctions have been neutralized, while section six provides a summary of the entire piece. Since Nkami is a little-known endangered language, the ensuing section briefly introduces the background of the language and people.

2. Nkami Language and People

The name ‘Nkami’ refers to both a group of people and an endangered language spoken by about four hundred people residing in Amankwa, a resettlement community, which is a few kilometres away from the western shore of the Volta Lake in the North Afram Plains constituency of Ghana. There is however a greater number of Nkamifuo ‘Nkamis’ living outside the language region. Currently, the majority of Nkami children do not acquire Nkami as their first language; they first acquire Akan and

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3 Such an enterprise would require not only an adequate knowledge of Nkami and Akan, but also of other Guang and Tano languages in general, and probably Ewe, another dominant language in the Nkami speaking community.

4 The first author is indebted to my team members, Enoch Akuamoah and Kwaku Ketewa, and the entire people of Nkami for their warm reception and cooperation during the period in the field.
sometimes Ewe before they acquire Nkami.\textsuperscript{5}

The orthography being used in this article conforms to the orthography developed recently for the Nkami language project, and is one of the efforts to present the language to the linguistic world. Until the first author started documenting Nkami very recently, linguists including foremost Ghanaian language documenters did not know the name ‘Nkami’.\textsuperscript{6} There is enough linguistic evidence that supports the fact that Nkami should be placed in the South branch of the Guang languages group, a sub-family of the Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo phylum (Asante, in preparation). Apart from the language or more probably before it, the greatest thing that unites the Nkami people is the institution of Afram.\textsuperscript{7} Presently, it is only through the worship and matters related to the Afram deity that the Nkami language is always used as the only medium of communication.

Linguistically, Nkami shares with neighbouring languages most of the areal-typological linguistic features. Like other South-Guang, but unlike North-Guang languages,\textsuperscript{8} Nkami has both phonemic oral and nasal vowels. Consonants are produced at seven different places of articulation, and it has a phonemic voiceless double-articulated stop /\textit{kp}/, unlike most Guang languages which have the voiced counterpart /\textit{gb}/ too. It has two basic level tones (high and low) and manifests both lexical and grammatical functions of tone. It has a dominant CV syllable structure with other minor types: V, CVC and VC (where final C is a nasal or /\textit{w}/) in descending frequency. It shows evidence of three major vowel harmonic processes, ATR, labial, and height, where the first is the dominant and the last two are epiphenomenal. Typical of most Guang languages (cf. Casali 2002, 2008), [+ATR] is the dominant feature, manifesting archetypical regressive assimilation within and across word boundaries. Words belonging to the well-known major word classes and several others such as adpositions, ideophones, interjections, routines and particles are all available in the language. It has no synchronic viable noun class system; one can at best talk about remnants of it. Like in other Kwa languages (cf. Dakubu 1988), affixation, reduplication and compounding are the dominant morphological processes, with verb features expressed by prefixes and verbal particles. The position of nominal modifiers, both word-level and clause-level, is post-nominal. Coding of ‘predicative’ properties is prototypically expressed through possessive/locative constructions (and

\textsuperscript{5} Notwithstanding, almost all adult Nkamis in Amankwa speak at least a little Nkami.
\textsuperscript{6} The first author acknowledges the help of Mr. and Mrs. Peacock and the Nkonya Language Committee members for introducing Nkami to him.
\textsuperscript{7} Afram is the name of a river and a powerful deity in Ghana. It is worshipped in many parts of Ghana but the head of Afram, Aframhemaa ‘wife of Afram’, comes from Nkami.
\textsuperscript{8} We use South-Guang to refer to languages belonging to the Southern branch (e.g. Awutu, Efutu, Anum (Gwa), and North-Guang to refer to those belonging to the Northern branch (e.g. Gonja, Nawuri, Chumburung, Krachi) of the Guang family.
less via adjectives, verbs and nouns), while ‘attributive’ properties are mainly expressed through relative clause constructions. It has dominant AVO and SV clause types, and it is basically isolating with some agglutinating and a handful of fusional tendencies. It shows rich and archetypical cases of constructions involving multi-verbs and clause combinations such as serial verb, relative clause, complement clause and adverbial clause constructions. For instance, it manifests the very rare feature of relative clause constructions, known to occur in a handful of languages (probably less than ten universally and mainly Kwa languages), where the resumptive pronoun retention strategy is employed to obligatorily state relativized NPs in subject function within the relative clause.

3. **Animate-Inanimate Distinctions**

This section focuses on areas in the grammar where animate and inanimate distinctions are made. It is divided into two broad parts: the first relates to nouns and related items and the second is on dispositional verbs in basic locative constructions.

3.1 **Nouns and Related Items**

3.1.1 **Subject pronoun**

Nkami has a subject pronominal system that makes 1st, 2nd and 3rd person distinctions. Number distinction is also made for all persons. In (1) is a list of the subject pronouns in the language.\(^9\)

(1) Subject Pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>mɪ ‘I’</td>
<td>ani ‘we’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>wʊ ‘you’</td>
<td>mɪn ‘you’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd animate</td>
<td>o- ‘she/he’</td>
<td>b ‘they’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd inanimate</td>
<td>e- ‘it’</td>
<td>e- ‘they’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we observe in (1), Nkami distinguishes between animates and inanimates based on the forms of the third person subject pronouns. Thus, whenever a pronoun substitutes for a singular animate noun in subject slot of a clause, the pronominal form o- ‘she/he/it’ is employed, while e- ‘it’ replaces inanimate referents. This is exemplified in (2-3).

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\(^9\) The following abbreviations are used: AGR = agreement, ANM = animate, ATR = advanced tongue root, DEF = definite article, DDD = distal demonstrative determiner, DDP = distal demonstrative pronoun, DEM = demonstrative, FOC = focus, FUT = future, HAB = habitual, IDENT = identity, INANM = inanimate, INDEF = indefinite, INTJ = interjection, NEG = negation, NOML = nominalizer, OBJ = object, PDD = proximal demonstrative determiner, PDP = proximal demonstrative pronoun, PDP = proximate distal prefix, PST = past, PRF = perfect, PL = plural, POSS = possessive, PRS = present, PROG = progressive, REL = relative marker, SG = singular subject.
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(2) a. ɔkpli amu be-ba. → b. ɔ-be-ba.
    dog DET FUT-come 3SG.ANM-FUT-come
   ‘The dog will come.’
   ‘It will come.’

(3) a. ṅaw amu be-ba. → b. ɛ-be-ba.
    rain DET FUT-come 3SG.ANM-FUT-come
   ‘The rain will come/it will rain.’
   ‘It will rain/come.’

Thus, in (2b) ɔ- is used to replace the subject ɔkpli ‘dog’ in subject position because dog is animate, while ɛ- replaces ṅaw ‘rain’ in (3b) because rain is inanimate. Note that, out of context, the instigator of the event in (2b) can only refer to an animate entity while that of (3b) can only refer to an inanimate entity.

3.1.2 Lack of number distinction

Another animacy contrast that can be made about the personal subject pronominal system relates to number distinction of the third person. As shown in (1), whereas the third person animate subject pronoun has distinct forms ɔ- and ɛ- for singular and plural contrasts respectively, the inanimate counterpart has one form ɛ- for both singular and plural functions. Consider (3-4).

(4) a. Oyebi amu be-di. → b. ɔ-be-di.
    child DET FUT-sleep 3SG.ANM-FUT-sleep
   ‘The child will sleep.’
   ‘He will sleep.’

(5) a. ṅ-ɲebi amu be-di. → b. ɛ-be-di.
    PL-child DET FUT-sleep 3PL.ANM-FUT-sleep
   ‘The children will sleep.’
   ‘They will sleep.’

Thus, because the subject position of (4a) is occupied by a singular animate noun oyebi ‘child’, it is replaced with the singular animate pronoun ɔ-. On the other hand, the plural subject animate pronoun be- substitutes for ṅebi ‘children’ in (5) because children is a plural animate noun. Conversely, in (6-7) the same form ɛ- is employed to supplant both the singular and plural subject nouns oyi ‘tree’ and ṇi ‘trees’ because tree(s) is inanimate.

(6) a. Oyi amu be-duidui. → b. ɛ-be-duidui.10
    tree DET FUT-burn 3SG.ANM-FUT-burn
   ‘The tree will burn.’
   ‘It will burn.’

10 As we mentioned earlier, Nkami exhibits ATR harmony. As a result, there are two sets of vowels, [+ATR] [i, e, o, u] and [-ATR] [ɪ, ɛ, ɔ, ʊ], based on tongue root position. Typically, only vowels of a set pattern together in a phonological word. The dominant [+ATR] feature may assimilate regressively to preceding [-ATR] vowel(s). So, for instance, ɛ-be-duidui is expressed as [ebeduidui] in surface form. However, for the purposes of clarity and consistency, this and many other phonetic details that do not have direct bearing on the discussion are ignored.
(7) b. p-\text{-}pi \text{ amu \ be-duidui.} \rightarrow \ b. \ e\text{-}be-duidui.

PL-tree DET FUT-burn 3SGINANM-FUT-burn

‘The trees will burn.’

‘They will burn.’

3.1.3 Concordant subject marking

Another related distinction concerns subject agreement marking in Nkami. The third person plural subject pronoun be- may be prefixed to a verb stem in a clause that already has a full plural noun in subject position, as shown in (8).

(8) a. Anansi mma obu amu yu

spider stick/be fixed building DET self

‘There is spider is on the wall.’

b. Anansi bebiiree be-mma obu amu yu

spider many 3PL-stick/be fixed building DET self

‘There are many spiders on the wall.’

Thus, be- can serve as a bound pronoun in (8b) and be attached to the predicate mma ‘stick/be fixed’ to co-reference the plural subject anansi bebiiree ‘many spiders’. It must be stated that this system of concordant subject marking is not obligatory in the language. Nonetheless, it is only acceptable if the plural subject NP is animate, as we have in (8b). In cases where the NP is inanimate, as (9b) illustrates, subject agreement marking is unacceptable.

(9) a. Ntntai bebiiree mma obu amu yu

cobweb many stick/be fixed building DET self

‘There are many cobwebs on the wall.’

b. *Ntntai bebiiree be-mma obu amu yu

Thus, because the subject NP ntntai bebiiree ‘many cobwebs’ is inanimate, be- cannot be attached to the predicate mma for cross-referencing. Notwithstanding, speakers may show number agreement between the plural subject and the verb by reduplicating the verb stem, as shown in (9c).

(9c) a. Ntntai bebiiree mma \text{ mma} obu amu yu

‘There are many cobwebs on the wall.’

All things being equal, the use of the reduplicated form mma \text{ mma}, instead of the simple form of the verb mma, indicates a greater amount/larger size of cobwebs than vice versa.

3.1.4 Possessive pronouns

Nkami has three persons in possessive pronouns, just like its subject pronouns.
There are also singular-plural number distinctions except for the third person inanimate, as shown in (10).

(10) Possessive Pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>w(ʊ)</td>
<td>mɪn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd animate</td>
<td>m(ʊ)</td>
<td>amu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd inanimate</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Just as Osam (1996) notes on Akan, animacy distinction on possessive pronouns is best demonstrated in a type of possessive phrases that has relational nouns such as eyu ‘body/skin/self’ elo ‘inside’ nkilelo ‘side’ asi ‘under/beneath’ ama ‘back/behind’, apesito ‘face/front’ as possessed nouns. In such phrases, whenever the possessor noun is animate, an independent possessive pronoun mʊ is overtly juxtaposed after the possessor noun to mark possession; however, when the possessor noun is inanimate, mʊ does not appear. Consider the examples in (11).

(11) a. Oyebi amu mʊ yʊ lɛ-waa efi.
    child DET POSS body PERF-wear dirty
    ‘The child is dirty.’

    b. Adaka amu Ø yʊ lɛ-waa efi.
       box DET body PERF-wear dirty
       ‘The box is dirty.’

Thus, because (11a) has an animate possessor noun oyebi ‘child’, possession is overtly marked by placing an independent possessive pronominal marker mʊ after it and before the possessed noun yʊ ‘body’. However, because the possessor noun adaka ‘box’ (11b) is inanimate, possession is covertly marked, indicated by the null symbol “Ø”. Moreover, the possessor NPs oyebi ‘child’ and adaka ‘box’ can be omitted and replaced with pronouns, as in (12a-b).

    POSS body PERF-wear dirty
    ‘She/he is dirty.’

    b. Ø eyu lɛ-waa efi.
       body PRF-wear dirty
       ‘It is dirty.’

Predictably, in (12a) because the antecedent possessor NP oyebi ‘child’ is animate, the possessive pronoun mʊ substitutes for it; however, in (12b) adaka ‘box’ attracts null representation because it is inanimate. In other words, out of context, the antecedent of mʊ in (12a) can only refer to an animate entity, but speakers will
understand the possessive construction in (12b) *eyu lewaa efi* ‘it is dirty’ to be talking about an inanimate referent because it does not have an overt possessive pronoun. The analysis here is quite different from that by Osam (1996) for similar data in Akan. Making an observation about the phenomenon, Osam (1996: 195) notes that “when the possessor noun is animate, a full pronoun is used; but when it is inanimate we only get a pronominal prefix which incidentally is of the same form as the subject pronominal prefix”. He went on to provide the following set of examples (13-14) to demonstrate the difference.

Kofi body PRF-be dirty 3POSS
‘Kofi is dirty.’ ‘He is dirty.’

(14)a. Adaka no ho a-ye fi. → b. e-ho a-ye fi.
box DET body PRF-be dirty it-body
‘The box is dirty.’ ‘It is dirty.’

The difference between the two analyses lies in the treatment of the representation of the inanimate antecedent adaka ‘box’ in (12b) and (14b). If we were to go by Osam’s analysis, the initial vowel *e-* of *eyu* ‘body/skin’ would be treated as a pronominal prefix just as it is done for Akan in (14b). For us, the initial vowel is an inanimate nominal prefix and not a pronominal prefix. Just like other nominals beginning with the nominal prefix *e-* in both languages, *e-* is deleted in (11, 12a) and (14a) because *eyu* and *eho* appear within utterances. However, in cases where nominals containing the prefix *e-* appear at sentence-initial position, such as those in (12b) and (14b), *e-* is always overtly realized. This analysis is given further support when additional data involving possessed relational nouns that do not begin with the *e-* prefix in both languages are brought forth in (15-16).

(15) Nkami
a. waase amo ama le-waa efi. → a’. ama le-waa efi.
dress DET back PRF-wear dirty ‘The back part of the dress is dirty.’ ‘It (back) is dirty.’

b. waase amo nkilelo le-waa efi. → b’. nkilelo lewaa efi.
side ‘The side of the dress is dirty.’ ‘It (side) is dirty.’

(16) Akan
a. ataade no akyi a-ye fi. → a’. akyi a-ye fi.
dress DET back PRF-be dirty ‘The back part of the dress is dirty.’ ‘It (back) is dirty.’
b. ataade no nkyem a-ye fi. → b’. nkyem a-ye fi.
‘The side of the dress is dirty.’ ‘It (side) is dirty.’

In (15-16) the possessed nouns (i.e. ama ‘back’ and nkilelo ‘side’ in Nkami; and akyi ‘back’ and nkyem ‘side’ in Akan) maintain their forms when they occur both within utterance and sentence-initial positions, because they inherently do not contain the nominal prefix e-. If e- was a pronominal prefix, rather than a nominal prefix, then one would have expected that it would have been prefixed to the possessed relational nouns in (15b1, 16b1) when they occur without their possessor nouns. For instance, nkilelo ‘side’ and nkyem ‘back’ should have been realized as e-nkilelo (15b1) and e-nkyem (16b1) in Nkami and Akan respectively. Thus, the difficulty in treating e- as either a pronominal prefix or nominal prefix is erased when further data are added.

3.1.5 The quantifier feefe ‘all’

One intriguing distinction that struck me\(^{11}\) at the initial stages of fieldwork relates to the behaviour of the quantifier feefe ‘all’. Like the possessive construction, whenever an animate subject NP modified with feefe in a clause is pronominalized, an independent 3PL pronominal form amu replaces it. However, when the subject NP is inanimate, it receives zero marking. This is exemplified below where mmu ‘animals’ is replaced with amu (17b), while kääse ‘car’ is supplanted by Ø (18b).

animals DET all PRF-come 3PL.POSS/OBJ
‘All the animals have come.’ ‘They have all arrived.’

(18)a. Kääse amu feefe le-ba. → b. Ø feefe le-ba.
car DET all PRF-come ‘All the lorries have arrived.’ ‘They have all arrived.’

Nkami’s behaviour is distinct from Akan’s. There is no difference when the subject is animate since Akan also replaces animate entities in subject position with an independent 3PL pronoun won, as shown in (19).

(19)a. Mmoa no nyinaa a-ba. → b. Won nyinaa a-ba.
animals DET all PRF-come 3PL.POSS/OBJ
‘All the animals have come.’ ‘They have all arrived.’

However, unlike Nkami which uses zero marking when the subject NP is inanimate, in Akan the 3SG possessive pronoun ne ‘his/her/it’ is overtly employed to replace its antecedent, as (20) illustrates.

\(^{11}\) First author.
Thus, whereas Nkami employs zero marking, Akan overtly marks inanimate subject NPs modified by the quantifier *feefe ‘all’ with the 3SG possessive pronoun *ne ‘his/her/it’.

3.1.6 The third person object pronouns

One source of animacy distinction that has received much attention, especially in Akan (cf. Christaller 1875, Stewart 1963, Boadi 1976, Saah 1992, Osam 1994, 1996) is the behaviour of the third person object pronoun. Nkami’s object pronominal forms are the same as those of possessive pronouns in (9). As occurs in Akan (and probably in most Tano languages of the Kwa branch), whenever an animate object noun is pronominalized, the pronoun is always overt and co-references its antecedent in number; however, when an inanimate object is pronominalized, it is always null. Consider the examples in (21-22).

(21) a. Kofi be-so *okpli amu. → Kofi be-so *mu.
Kofi FUT-buy dog DET Kofi FUT-buy 3SG.ANIM.OBJ
‘Kofi will buy the dog.’ ‘Kofi will buy it.’

b. Kofi be-so *mkpli amu. → Kofi be-so *amu.
Kofi FUT-buy PL-dog DET Kofi FUT-buy 3PL.ANIM.OBJ
‘Kofi will buy the dogs.’ ‘Kofi will buy them.’

(22) a. Kofi be-so *ofodji amu. → Kofi be-so ø.
Kofi FUT-buy broom DET Kofi FUT-buy
‘Kofi will buy the broom.’ ‘Kofi will buy it.’

b. Kofi be-so *mfodji amu. → Kofi be-so ø.
Kofi FUT-buy PL-broom DET Kofi FUT-buy
‘Kofi will buy the brooms.’ ‘Kofi will buy them.’

As the data reveal, while the animate object pronouns *mu ‘she/he/it’ and *amu ‘them’ replace their antecedents *okpli ‘dog’ and *mkpli ‘dogs’ in (21a-b), both *ofodji ‘broom’ and *mfodji ‘brooms’ receive zero marking in (22a-b) because *broom is inanimate.

Osam (1996) makes an interesting observation about a limitation on this distinction in Akan which is worth commenting. Like Nkami, in Akan the animate noun *odwan ‘sheep’ is replaced by *no ‘him/her/it’ in (23), but the site of the antecedent *dua ‘tree’ is null in (24) because *tree is inanimate.

Kofi FUT-buy sheep DET Kofi FUT-buy 3SG.ANIM.OBJ
‘Kofi will sell the sheep.’ ‘Kofi will sell it.’
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    Kofi FUT-buy tree DET
    ‘Kofi will sell the tree.’
    Kofi FUT-buy
    ‘Kofi will sell it.’

Osam observes that this distinction is compromised when an inanimate direct object noun is immediately followed by a temporal or locative adverb in a sentence, as shown in (25).

    Kofi FUT-buy tree DET tomorrow
    ‘Kofi will sell the tree tomorrow.’
    K. FUT-buy 3INANM.OBJ tomorrow
    ‘Kofi will sell it tomorrow.’

Thus, because the inanimate object dua ‘tree’ is followed by the temporal adverb ɔkyena ‘tomorrow’, its site is required to be overtly expressed by the pronoun no in (25b). In other words, out of context, Kofi bɔ-tɔn no ɔkyena is ambiguous in Akan since no could either refer to an animate or inanimate antecedent, contrary to the observation in (24) that no substitutes for only animate object antecedents. Following Givon’s (1984) functional framework on pragmatic notion of topicality, Osam offers an explanation for the phenomenon. He notes:

The reason the presence of an adverbial element in the post object position … triggers the presence of the inanimate object pronoun is that since the direct object is more topical than an adverbial item, and since the immediate postverbal position defines direct objecthood in Akan, if the pronoun is not overtly present it would create the impression that the adverbial element is more topical than the direct object NP. It is as if the inanimate object pronoun finds its topicality status threatened and so it has to make a physical appearance in order to assert its status. (Osam 1996: 162).

Though the functional explanation provided by Osam sounds apt for the phenomenon in Akan, it is inappropriate for Nkami since the site of an inanimate object in Nkami is always covertly marked even when it (the object) is immediately followed by an adverb. This is exemplified in (26).

(26) a. Kofi bɛ-fe oyi amo ɔtʃɛ.
    Kofi FUT-buy tree DET tomorrow
    ‘Kofi will sell the tree tomorrow.’

    Kofi FUT-buy tomorrow
    ‘Kofi will sell it tomorrow.’

Thus, in Nkami the presence of the temporal adverb ɔtʃɛ ‘tomorrow’ does not
trigger the presence of the inanimate object pronoun mu, with the view of entrenching the object’s position as more topical than the adverb’s position. Thus, the distinction is necessitated by the different rankings of two constraints by the languages:

i. TOPICALITY - requires that the overt statement of constituents in a clause be based on topicality hierarchy.

ii. ANIMACY - requires that the overt statement of constituents in a clause be based on animacy hierarchy.

Thus, whereas Akan considers the constraint on TOPICITY to be ‘very crucial’ and therefore ranks it higher than the constraint on ANIMACY, Nkami considers the constraint on TOPICALITY to be ‘less crucial’ and thus ranks it lower than the ‘more crucial’ one on ANIMACY.

3.1.7 Demonstrative Pronouns

The next source of animacy distinction is based on the structure and behaviour of demonstrative pronouns. Demonstrative pronouns in Nkami are deictic words that can function as the only element in an argument position of a clause (cf. Diesel 1999, Dixon 2010). Nkami has a relatively large set of four demonstrative pronouns which are divided into two pairs, proximal: eɲa/ɔɲa and distal: mu/maamu, based on their spatial semantics. The proximal demonstrative pronouns (PDP) eɲa/ɔɲa indicate some relative closeness to the deictic centre while the distal demonstrative pronouns (DDP) mu/maamu denote the opposite. More importantly, based on the semantic notion of animacy, a distinction can be made for each pair, as (27) illustrates.

   1SG-like goat PDD 1SG-like ANM.PDP
   ‘I like this goat.’ ‘I like this.’

   1SG-like dress PDD 1SG-like INANM.PDP
   ‘I like this dress.’ ‘I like this.’

Thus, the PDP ɲa is used for animate referents, while eɲa is used for inanimate referents, as shown in (27a) and (27b) respectively. Likewise, an identical distinction can be made for the distal demonstratives; mu and maamu are used for animate (28a) and inanimate (28b) referents respectively.

(28) a. Mί-kpa tili amu → Mί-kpa mu
   1SG-like goat DDD 1SG-like ANM.DDP
   ‘I like that goat.’ ‘I like that.’
Thus, ṣna and mu replace the animate referent tīl ‘goat’ in (26a and 27a), while ṣna and maamu substitute for the inanimate waase ‘dress’ in (26b and 27b).

3.2 Dispositional Verbs in Basic Locative Constructions

Ameka (2007: 1066) defines a basic locative construction (BLC) as “a non-elliptical clause that represents the answer to a ‘where-search’ question”. Nkami employs approximately twenty contrasting locative verbs in BLCs and hence may be classified as a multi-verb language on the basis of the number and types of verbs used in BLCs (cf. Levinson and Wilkins 2006, Ameka and Levinson 2007). Similar to an essay by Ameka (2007) on Likpe, there are several factors that come into play when deciding on ‘competing’ verbs to localize specific locative scenes: number, speaker’s competence, speaker’s desire to be referentially precise, animacy, inter alia. We only examine the role animacy plays in the selection of verbs for localizing entities (Figures) on reference objects (Grounds).

3.2.1 Tige versus tie ‘be.located on base’

Both tige and tie ‘be.located on base’ are ‘sitting’ verbs that are used to talk about Figures that take support on the surface from their base. Thus, the Figure is generally seen as one that assumes a sitting position. The difference between the two is that tige is used to talk about inanimate Figures while tie is employed for animate Figures. Typically, tige is used to describe locative configurations such as ‘utensil on fire’, ‘chair on its base’, ‘cup on a table’, as (29) illustrates.

(29) Kɔɔpʊ/adjuro amu tige ɔkpùnù/odzₐ amu su. cup/food DET be.located table/fire DET on

‘The cup/food is on the table/fire.’

Conversely, tie localizes a person on a sitting position, whether on a wall, chair, table, tree, etc., or an animal sitting on its base.

(30) Naampi Anto/ŋkpl amu tie obu amu on. grandfather NAME/dog DET be.located building DET mouth

‘Grandpa Anto/the dog is sitting at the entrance of the house.’

3.2.2 Yirr versus yi ‘be.standing/stand’

Nkami has two ‘standing’ verbs yi and yirr that are used to characterize entities in relatively upright/vertical positions in relation to horizontal surface. The difference between the two is that generally yi is used for inanimate entities, while yirr for
For instance, yi is used to describe trees and erected structures such as buildings, flag poles, and referents of relatively high heights such as vehicles, bicycles, and fridges, as exemplified in (31).

(31) a. Oyi yi bipo amu yu.
   tree stand mountain DET self
   ‘There is a tree standing on the mountain.’

   b. Obu yi ebɔ amu ło.
   building stand fence DET inside
   ‘There is a building (standing) in the fence.’

Yirĩ, on the other hand, is used to localize animates of relatively upright positions such as a person or an animal standing on its feet, as illustrated in (32).

(32) a. ñama amu yirĩ obu amu so.
   man DET stand building DET on
   ‘The man is standing on the building (roof).’

   b. okpli amu yirĩ efal amu ło
   dog DET stand bush DET inside
   ‘The dog is standing in the bush.’

3.2.3 Dee ‘be.lying/lie’ versus wudʒi ‘lie/spread/coil’

Unlike the previous pair of locative verbs which may be said to constitute animacy or near animacy pairs, dee and wudʒi do not. Among other things, dee ‘be.lying/lie’ is used to characterize both animate and inanimate objects in horizontal position with whole or larger part of the body touching the reference object (e.g. table top and bed surface). Thus, it typically characterizes scenarios such as ‘pen lying on table’, ‘dog lying on its side’ and ‘a person lying on a mat’, as exemplified in (33).

(33) Oyebi/pen amu dee okpuno amu so.
   boy/pen DET lie table DET on
   ‘The boy/pen is lying on the table.’

Howbeit, wudʒi ‘lie/spread/coil’ is prototypically employed to localize flexible entities like a fabric on a surface (34a), and unquantifiable substances and particles such as liquids, grains, and sand/gravels, as (34b) illustrates.

(34) a. Otʃebi/ʃago amu wudʒi mpa amu so.
   cloth/rag DET lie bed DET on
   ‘The cloth/rag is (lying) on the bed.’
b. **Ntʃu/ŋas wudʒ1 tankɪ amu lɔ.**  
water/sand lie barrel DET inside  
‘There is water/sand in the tank.’

Apart from these prototypical characterizations, it appears that in all other situations the two verbs contrast (Asante, in preparation). For our purpose here, however, we only focus on their difference in terms of animacy. Thus, although we have indicated that *dɛɛ* ‘be.lying/lie’ is used to localize both animate and inanimate Figures in horizontal configuration with whole or larger part of the body touching the Ground, whenever the inanimate Figure being localized is non-singular or unquantifiable, *wudʒ1*, rather than *dɛɛ*, is employed. For example, observe in (35) that the same verb *dɛɛ* is used for both singular (35a) and plural (35b) referents because the Figure *ɔsa* ‘human being’ is animate.

(35)a. **ɔsa ku dɛɛ esuɔ.**  
human being INDEF lie ground  
‘There is a person lying on the floor.’

b. **Asa bebiree be-dɛɛ esuɔ.**  
human being many 3PL-lie ground  
‘There are many people lying on the floor.’

Like animates, if an inanimate Figure (here ‘pen’) being localized is singular, as shown in (36a), *dɛɛ* is again used. The use of *wudʒ1* is inappropriate in such situations, as indicated by the asterisk on the sentence in brackets. However, whenever the inanimate Figure is non-singular *pen bebiree* ‘many pens’, as shown in (36b), *wudʒ1* rather than *dɛɛ* is employed.

(36)  
a. **pen dɛɛ esuɔ. (**pen wudʒ1 esuɔ.**)  
pen lie ground  
‘There is a pen (lying) on the floor.’

b. **pen bebiree wudʒ1 esuɔ. (**pen bebiree dɛɛ esuɔ.**)  
pen many lie ground  
‘There are many pens on the floor.’

In a nutshell, *wudʒ1* complements *dɛɛ* to localize non-singular/unquantifiable inanimate Figures that are deemed to be in lying position.

4. **Human versus Non-human Distinctions**

This section focuses on items speakers use to talk about and distinguish between human and non-human referents. Specific areas looked at include: nominal prefixes, concordant subject marking, identity suffixes **amaamu/neemu**, indefinite pronouns **oku/eku**, numeral modifier **ba-**, indefinite possessor particle **ke**, and the sitting verbs **tie/ʃma** ‘live’.
4.1 Nominal Prefixes

In congruence with the general tendency, majority of the linguistic items identified in our database are nouns. Synchronically, there is no clearly distinct noun class system in Nkami; at best, one can talk about residues of it. Most nouns have a nominal prefix, which is a vowel or a homorganic nasal. Generally, the following vowels /ɛ, ɛ, ɔ, o/ are selected for singular nominal prefix marking, while /a/ and homorganic nasals /m, m, n, n/ are selected for plural marking. An /ɪ, i, u, u/ do not serve as nominal prefixes, unlike other South-Guang languages such as Nkonya where the front high vowels /ɪ, i/ occur as prefixes of some nouns, though sparingly. Looking at the behaviour of nominal prefix marking in Nkami, a generalization can be made that nouns that refer to humans only take ɔ/-o- singular prefixes, while non-human nouns may take any of the singular nominal prefixes. Thus, whereas human nouns do not take e-, ɛ-, a- nominal prefixes, non-human nouns do in addition to ɔ-, o-.

Consider the following human nouns.

(37) Human nouns only take ɔ/-o- prefixes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nominal Prefix</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ɔ-bi</td>
<td>‘child’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ɔ-sa</td>
<td>‘human being’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ɔ-juni</td>
<td>‘man’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ɔ-kunu</td>
<td>‘husband’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ɔ-ka</td>
<td>‘wife’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ɔ-daamu</td>
<td>‘friend’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ɔ-kua</td>
<td>‘co-wife’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o-bi</td>
<td>‘god’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o-kisi</td>
<td>‘visitor’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o-fo</td>
<td>‘woman’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o-ni</td>
<td>‘mother’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o-si</td>
<td>‘father’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o-sia</td>
<td>‘in-law’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o-tabu</td>
<td>‘hunter’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though there are several nouns referring to animals that also take ɔ/-o- prefixes, as exemplified in (38a), there are also some others that take e/-e- in (38b), and a- in (38c).

(38) a. Nouns referring to animals that take ɔ/-o- prefixes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nominal Prefix</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o-boobi</td>
<td>‘bird’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o-nini</td>
<td>‘python’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ɔ-kiletr</td>
<td>‘cat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ɔ-kwaabi</td>
<td>‘a type of fish’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ɔ-kpli</td>
<td>‘dog’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. Nouns referring to animals that take e/-e- prefixes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nominal Prefix</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o-boobi</td>
<td>‘bird’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o-nini</td>
<td>‘python’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ɔ-kiletr</td>
<td>‘cat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ɔ-kwaabi</td>
<td>‘a type of fish’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ɔ-kpli</td>
<td>‘dog’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o-nini</td>
<td>‘python’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ɔ-kiletr</td>
<td>‘cat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ɔ-kwaabi</td>
<td>‘a type of fish’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ɔ-kpli</td>
<td>‘dog’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13 The use of vowel (V) nominal prefix similarly to South-Guang languages, rather than the CV nominal prefix system of the North-Guang languages (cf. Stewart 1970, Snider 1990), is one of the reasons we adduce for the placement of Nkami in the South-Guang.
14 Adako ‘concubine/girl friend’ is an exception.
15 As in many Ghanaian cultures such as Akan, there are some entities in Nkami such as okisi ‘god’ and atjofua ‘ghost’ which are culturally believed to be ‘(super) human beings’ and so do take the human prefixes.
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c. Nouns referring to animals that take a- prefix

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{abi} & \quad \text{‘grasshopper’} \\
\text{api} & \quad \text{‘a yellowish fish’} \\
\text{apofra} & \quad \text{‘a type of fish’}
\end{align*}
\]

Similarly to nouns referring to animals, inanimate nouns may take ɔ-/o- prefixes in (39a), e-/e- in (38b) or a- in (39c)

(39) a. Inanimate nouns that take ɔ-/o- prefixes:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{odi} & \quad \text{‘heart’} \\
\text{ɔdida} & \quad \text{‘chin’} \\
\text{odo} & \quad \text{‘age/year’} \\
\text{otuga} & \quad \text{‘buttocks’} \\
\text{ofi} & \quad \text{‘soup’} \\
\text{okpesie} & \quad \text{‘mortar’}
\end{align*}
\]

b. Inanimate nouns that take e-/e- prefixes:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ewias} & \quad \text{‘earth/world’} \\
\text{ebi} & \quad \text{‘time’} \\
\text{eka} & \quad \text{‘debt’} \\
\text{egu} & \quad \text{‘head’} \\
\text{ewu} & \quad \text{‘testicles’} \\
\text{ewe} & \quad \text{‘home’}
\end{align*}
\]

c. Inanimate nouns that take a- prefix:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ama} & \quad \text{‘back’} \\
\text{abow} & \quad \text{‘thorns’} \\
\text{aya} & \quad \text{‘leg’}
\end{align*}
\]

To reiterate the point thus far, Nkami shows the human-nonhuman distinction here because while human nouns take only ɔ-/o- as prefixes, non-human nouns may take any of the singular nominal prefixes in the language.

A further distinction can be made for the plural nominal prefixes. Generally, whereas human nouns take a-, non-human animate nouns take homorganic nasal N- as plural nominal prefixes. In (40a) are pairs of singular-plural human nouns, while (40b) are non-human.

(40) a. Human nouns take a- plural prefix:

\[
\begin{array}{llllll}
\text{SG} & \text{PL} & \text{Gloss} & \text{SG} & \text{PL} & \text{Gloss} \\
\text{o-bi} & \text{a-bi} & \text{‘child’} & \text{o-kisi} & \text{a-kisi} & \text{‘deity’} \\
\text{o-sa} & \text{a-sa} & \text{‘human being’} & \text{o-fɔ} & \text{a-fɔ} & \text{‘visitor’} \\
\text{o-jumi} & \text{a-jumi} & \text{‘man’} & \text{o-tʃi} & \text{a-tʃi} & \text{‘woman’}
\end{array}
\]
b. Non-human animate nouns take N- plural prefix:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SG</th>
<th>PL</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>oboobi</td>
<td>m-boobi</td>
<td>'bird'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o-dabo</td>
<td>n-dabo</td>
<td>'duiker'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-moli</td>
<td>m-moli</td>
<td>'termite'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-bibe</td>
<td>m-bibe</td>
<td>'grasshopper'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Loss of Nominal Prefixes

Synchronically, there is a sizable number of nouns in Nkami which do not have nominal prefixes, as exemplified in the following human and non-human nouns below.

(41a) Human nouns without prefixes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>blepaw</td>
<td>‘chief’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nifahmi</td>
<td>‘sub-chief’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naqimi</td>
<td>‘grandpa/chief’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(41b) Non-human nouns without prefixes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fawie</td>
<td>‘tiger’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kilebi</td>
<td>‘chicken’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>klogoli</td>
<td>‘mouse’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>latje</td>
<td>‘gorilla’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stali</td>
<td>‘monkey’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sani</td>
<td>‘sheep’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tbli</td>
<td>‘goat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frelu</td>
<td>‘bush cattle’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the data in (41) exemplify, the dominant majority of nouns that have lost their prefixes are non-human animate nouns. In fact, except for nouns relating to chieftaincy titles, as exemplified in (41a), one does not find human nouns that have lost their prefixes. Moreover, the chieftaincy nouns may not be considered exceptions at all because with the exception of blepaw ‘chief’ the others are all traceable loanwords from Akan.

---

16 Generally, whereas animals that are close to home, e.g. akleti ‘cat’, akpilo ‘dog’ and oboobi ‘bird’, have forms that are different from Akan, those that reside in the forest such as addabo ‘duiker’, ahibe ‘grasshopper’ and ahwia ‘a game animal’ have similar/same forms with Akan. It looks likely that not only are the names of the latter loanwords from Akan, but also the original settlement of Nkamis did not have those ‘forest/wild’ animals. Another possibility, though less likely, is that Nkami speakers have replaced the native names of such ‘forest/wild’ animals with Akan names.
4.3 The Identity Suffixes -anaamu/-neemu

Nkami, like some other Kwa languages such as Akan and Nkonya, has some nominals that have dual affixes; that is, some nominals simultaneously take prefix and suffix. This is so because the presence of a nominal suffix is dependent on the presence of a nominal prefix. Thus, all native nouns that have suffixes also have prefixes. There are a couple of nominal suffixes in the language but our attention here is on the identity suffixes -anaamu/-neemu, which help classify entities that share similar qualities. The suffix -anaamu is employed to identify nominal categories of human reference (42a), while -neemu classifies non-humans (42b).17

(42) a. -anaamu goes on human nouns:

ayu-anaamu ‘thieves’  mbiri-anaamu ‘elders’
afumpa-anaamu ‘ghosts’  asr-anaamu ‘in-laws’
afo-anaamu ‘siblings’  mblepaw-anaamu ‘chiefs’

b. -neemu goes on non-human nouns:

ntil-neemu ‘goats’  mkpil-neemu ‘dogs’
bagg-neemu ‘bags’  amangu-neemu ‘mangoes’

The distinction is well captured in an excerpt of a text provided by our main hunting consultant, Wofa Kimpo. After a catch of onini ‘python’, he demonstrates in a video the techniques for catching the python and other general information such as their habitat, eating habits and how they prey on other animals including humans. When he was asked about the benefits/uses of pythons, this is what he said:

(43) āā, Ntabu-anaamu ku be-ba a baa-be-sɔ.
INTJ NAME-IDENT INDEF 3PL-come CFM 3PL.HAB-PDP-buy
Na mu bo lo ke be-yεε baa-fu ku bo
CONJ POSS do inside as.for 3PL-say 3PL.HAB-take INDEF do

bag-neemu… ena tku pa ee beeti-neemu, ehɛɛ.
bag-IDENT CONJ thing DEM INTJ belt-IDENT INTJ

‘Well, some of the Northerners when they come, they buy. And as for what they use it to do, they say they use some for bags…and this thing… belts, yeah.’

4.4 Ba- and Numerical Modifiers

Nkami, like many Ghanaian language such as Akan, Logba and Nkonya, employs a decimal (base ten) number system. This is probably because speakers reckon quantities of items using their fingers, though the etymology of the word edu ‘ten’ has

17 Note that, like some other words ending with rounded high vowel U, final U is usually not pronounced in fast speech, as happens in most Guang languages.
no phonetic relation with atle ‘hand’. The cardinal numbers from one to ten, which have cognates in many Kwa languages, are provided in (44).

(44)  
\begin{align*}
\text{okulì} & \quad \text{‘one’} \\
\text{año} & \quad \text{‘two’} \\
\text{asa} & \quad \text{‘three’} \\
\text{anà} & \quad \text{‘four’} \\
\text{anù} & \quad \text{‘five’} \\
\text{asì} & \quad \text{‘six’} \\
\text{asunù} & \quad \text{‘seven’} \\
\text{etwe} & \quad \text{‘eight’} \\
\text{aŋpò} & \quad \text{‘nine’} \\
\text{edu} & \quad \text{‘ten’}
\end{align*}

When counting or when the cardinal numbers are used as post-head modifiers of non-human nouns, they maintain the same form, as (45) exemplifies.

(45)  
\begin{align*}
\text{(45a) } & \quad \text{okplì okulì ke nò ni ò-be-de tʃùn?}
\quad \text{dog one as.for what FOC 3SG-FUT-be able catch} \\
& \quad \text{‘As for only one dog, what (bush animal) can it catch?’}
\text{(45b) } & \quad \text{Mì a-st-anaamù be-bù obù aŋpo}
\quad \text{1POSS PL-in-law-IDENT 3PL-have house two} \\
& \quad \text{‘My in-laws have two houses.’}
\end{align*}

The same forms okulì ‘one’ and aŋpo ‘two’ are used in (45a-b) because they occur as post-head modifiers of non-human nouns okplì ‘dog’ and obu ‘house’ respectively. However, when the modifying head noun is human, a functional word (a classifier) ba is attached to the numeral, as shown in (46).\(^{18}\)

(46)  
\begin{align*}
\text{Tʃù-se} & \quad \text{ba-ana ke be-be-de bò nò?}
\quad \text{catch-NOML AGR-four as.for 3PL-FUT-be.able do what} \\
& \quad \text{‘As for four policemen, what can they do?’}
\end{align*}

Thus, ba is attached to ana ‘four’ in (46) because the modifying noun Tʃùse ‘policeman’ is a human noun. Moreover, when the numeral slot is occupied by the numeral question word ammù ‘how many/much’, ba is introduced provided the head noun has human reference, as (47) demonstrates.

(47)  
\begin{align*}
\text{Mìnì a-sa ba-ammù ni mìnì-bà?}
\quad \text{2PL.OBJ PL-person AGR-how.many FOC 2PL-come} \\
& \quad \text{‘How many of you (people) did come?’}
\end{align*}

In most of these constructions, the head noun could be omitted leaving ba- alone. Observe, for instance, the omission of òsa/asa ‘person/people’ (indicated by ø) in

\(^{18}\) Akan has a similar form ba with similar function, which according to Osam (1996) traces its source from the Akan noun ba [ɔba] ‘child’. Looking at their similarity in form and semantics (i.e. ɔba ‘child’ and ba ‘human agreement marker/classifier’), that thesis sounds reasonable. However, one is not certain if same can be said about Nkami since the word for child in Nkami is obi, not ɔba. As a reviewer rightly suggests, it looks likely though that ba is one of the several items borrowed from Akan. The irony, however, is that it appears to the first author that synchronically the use of ba is more frequent and entrenched in Nkami than Akan.
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(48a-b).

(48) a. Mɪ ɪ nɪ ɪmɪɪ ɪmɪ-ba?
   2PL.OBJ PL-AGR how many FOC 2PL-come
   ‘How many of you (people) did come?’

   b. Mɪ ɔ-ʊ ɔ-kʊlɪ ke ɪɛ-ɛ-ɛ bɔ nɔ?
   1SG.OBJ SG-AGR one as for 1SG-FUR-be able do what
   ‘As for me (alone), what can I do?’

Note that when ba occurs without the modifying head nouns oɔsa/asa ‘person/people’ in (48a-b), it acquires the plural a- and singular o- nominal prefixes of its head nouns. Moreover, a-ba and o-ba appear more independent in (48a-b) as they are not pronounced as part of the following numeral amɪɪ ‘how much’ and o-kʊlɪ.

Nonetheless, the reader should not misconstrue a-ba and o-ba as independent nouns meaning ‘person/people’ since they cannot occur independently without a numeral or the numeral question word amɪɪ. For instance, though the sentences in (49a-50a) are acceptable because asa ‘people’ is the head noun, those in (49b-50b) are infelicitous because aba appears alone as the head noun without modifying numeral.

(49) a. A-sa yʊ bʊ mfaso.  
   PL-person body have importance
   ‘Human beings/people are important/useful.’

   b. *A-ba yʊ bʊ mfaso.  
   PL-AGR body have importance
   ‘Human beings/people are important/useful.’

(50) a. Kofi ma-a-kpa a-sa koraa.  
   Kofi 1SG-NEG-like PL-person at.all
   ‘Kofi does not like human beings at all (he is antisocial).’

   *Kofi ma-a-kpa a-ba koraa.  
   Kofi 1SG-NEG-like PL-AGR at.all
   ‘Kofi does not like human beings at all.’

4.5 The Non-human Possessed Particle ke

Additional evidence of human-nonhuman distinction comes from one of the several uses of the multi-functional particle ke. Ke may be used as a possessed pronoun in place of a possessed noun, as shown in (51).

(51) a. Mɪ ɪbʊ nɪ.  
   1POSS house is this
   ‘This is my house.’

   b. Mɪ ke nɪ.  
   1POSS PART is this
   ‘This is mine (my own is this).’
Thus, ke here translates to mean something like ‘own’ and it can substitute for possessed nouns. For instance, it replaces obu ‘house’ (51a) and okpli ‘dog’ in (51b). However, this function of ke is limited to only non-human nouns, as shown in (51). For instance, observe that (52b) and (52c) are infelicitous because ke substitutes for obi ‘child’ and ɔtʃibi ‘girl’ respectively.

   1POSS child is.this 1POSS PART is.this
   ‘This is my child.’ ‘This is mine (my own is this).’

c. *ɔtʃibi amu dʒi Kofi ke.
   girl DET be Kofi PART
   ‘The girl is for Kofi (Kofi’s own).’

4.6 Indefinite Pronouns ɔku/eku

Yet more evidence of human-nonhuman distinction is seen in the behaviour of the indefinite pronouns ɔku and eku. They are based on the form ku ‘indefinite determiner’ used to specify unknown or unspecified quantities of entities. ɔku is used for entities of human reference while eku is used for inanimates, as illustrated in (53).

(53)a. ɔku ba mɪ.
   someone come.PST here
   ‘Someone came here.’

b. eku baalɛ.
   some be.good
   ‘Some are good.’

ɔku in (53a) can only index a human being, while eku in (53b) can only index a non-human item. Moreover, an enclitic ɛdʒɛ may be attached to the indefinite pronouns to derive ɔkuɛdʒɛ ‘everyone’ and ekuɛdʒɛ ‘each one’. Examples (53a-b) are altered here as (54a-b).

(54)a. ɔku = ɛdʒɛ ba mɪ.
   someone=PART come.PST here
   ‘Everyone came here.’

b. eku = ɛdʒɛ baalɛ.
   some=PART be.good
   ‘Each one is good.’

4.7 The ‘Sitting’ Verbs tie/tjɪma

In section 3.2.1, we observed that the two ‘sitting’ verbs tɪgɛ and tie differ on the basis of animacy; tɪgɛ is generally used to localize inanimate Figures while tie localizes animate Figures. Nonetheless, we show here a situation where tie localizes only humans but not non-human animates. Tie has an allolexical form tjɪma which is used in all other situations save the present continuative. As happens in some

¹⁹ Human noun prefixes ɔ/-o- delete when they occur after possessive pronouns.
languages such as Akan, Logba (Dorvlo 2008), and Likpe (Ameka 2007), tie and tfina can both be extended to talk about settlements in which case they index ‘live/settle in a place’, rather than the postural meaning of ‘be.located on base/sit’, as we saw in section 3.2.1 above. Consider the following.

(55) a. Kofi tie Shanghai.
   Kofi live.PRS Shanghai
   ‘Kofi lives in Shanghai (?Kofi is sitting in Shanghai).’

   b. Kofi tfina Shanghai.
   Kofi live.PST Shanghai
   ‘Kofi lived in Shanghai (*Kofi sat in/at Shanghai).’

When tie and tfina are extended to talk about settlements, it appears that the category of referents that can be localized with tie is limited to humans. Thus, native speakers generally disapprove of (56a), for instance, where the referent that does the ‘living’ is ɔkplɪ ‘dog’, a non-human. In order to characterize a similar scenario for animals, the verb tfu ‘come from/originate’ is used, as (56b) illustrates.

(56) a. *ɔkplɪ amu tie Kimpo mu ewie.
    dog DET live.PRS Kimpo POSS house
    ‘The dog lives in Kimpo’s house.’

   b. ɔkplɪ amu tfu Kimpo mu ewie.
    dog DET come.from Kimpo POSS house
    ‘The dog comes from/lives in Kimpo’s house (It is for Kimpo).’

Thus, Nkami speakers appear to have the conception that living, in the sense of settlement, is a purposeful act that requires creatures of ‘higher minds’ to undertake. The dog, as well as all other animals, does not have that capacity and so can only ‘originate from’ a place (or be owned), and thus cannot be said to be ‘living/settling’ in a place.

5. **Neutralization**

This section canvasses three domains where some of the animacy distinctions discussed in this article have been compromised in the grammar. They relate specifically to the forms and behaviours of the third person subject and object pronouns.

5.1 **3SG Pronoun ɔɔ- in the Habitual**

Unlike the future, progressive and perfect, the habitual is not morphologically marked in Nkami. Syllables in a grammatical/phonological word, consisting of a

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20 This interpretation (sitting) appears to be only appropriate if the distance between Shanghai and the speaker’s location is not far, and the Figure (Kofi) will return to the deictic center a short period (most likely within the same day) after the speech.
subject pronoun and a verb stem, generally associate with high tones when a sentence is said in the habitual, as (57) exemplifies, where *pwie* is ‘leave/exit’ and the initial items are subject pronouns.

(57) a. * mí-pwíé*  
    ‘I leave (go out).’

   b. *wó-pwíé*  
    ‘You leave (go out).’

Besides, there appears to be an emerging habitual marker ɔɔ- which we suspect to be a fusion of the third person singular pronominal prefix ɔ- and a previously existing habitual marker. It is incipient because, apart from the third person, many speakers also use it when the subject of a sentence is the first person plural pronoun ami ‘we’, as (58) illustrates.  

(58) a. Ama ɔɔ-pwie.  
    ‘Ama leaves (goes out).’

   b. ami-ɔɔ-pwie.  
    ‘We leave (go out).’

Away from the excursus, as we observed in section 3.1.1, Nkami makes animacy distinctions in 3SG subject pronouns through the usage of ɔ- for an animate referent and ɛ- for an inanimate referent. For convenience, the distinction is further illustrated in (59), where ɔ- substitutes for the animate referent ɔtʃɪ ‘woman’ (59a), while ɛ-supplants the inanimate owi ‘sun’ (59b).

    woman DET PROG-leave 3ANM-PROG-leave
    ‘The woman is leaving.’
    ‘She is leaving.’

    sun DET PROG-leave 3INANM-PROG-leave
    ‘The sun is appearing.’
    ‘It is appearing.’

This distinction is upheld in all tense-aspects save the habitual. Currently, the 3SG subject pronoun for both animate and inanimate referents is realized as ɔɔ- in the habitual. Consider (60) which is a reproduction of (59) in the habitual.

(60) a. * ɔtʃɪ amu ɔɔ-pwie.  → ɔɔ-pwie.*
    woman DET AGR.HAB-leave 3SG-HAB-leave
    ‘The woman leaves/goes out.’
    ‘She leaves/goes out/appears.’

   b. * Owì amu ɔɔ-pwie.  → ɔɔ-pwie.*
    sun DET AGR.HAB-leave 3SG-HAB-leave
    ‘The sun appears.’
    ‘It appears.’

Thus, presently speakers of Nkami use ɔɔ- for both animate and inanimate

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21 Some speakers, especially the elderly, show dislike for the use of ɔɔ- with the first person plural pronoun ami- ‘we’.  

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referents in the habitual, such that Ṫop weave in (60) could either index ‘she (woman) goes out/leaves/appears’ or ‘it (sun) appears’.

5.2 3SG Pronoun a in the Future and the Habitual Negatives

Another source of animacy neutralization in the 3SG subject pronominal forms is evident in the future and habitual negative situations. Precisely, both the third person animate and inanimate subject pronouns ɔ and e are realized as a- in both the future and habitual negatives. Consider the following.

(61) a. ɔtɔ amu må-ba. → a-må-ba (*ɔ-må-ba).
   woman DET FUT.NEG-com e ‘The woman will not come.’

b. paw amu må-ba. → a-må-ba (*e-må-ba).
   rain DET FUT.NEG-come 3SG-FUT.NEG-come ‘The rain (it) will not rain.’

As we observe in (61), the distinction between ɔ- and e is neutralized in the future negative since both are currently produced as a-. Unlike the habitual aspect as treated in Section 5.1, the trigger of change from ɔ/e to a is deducible from the phonological environment. Thus, the pronominal mid vowels ɔ/e are realized low a- because of the influence from the low vowel in the future negative morpheme må. Identical phenomenon occurs in the habitual negative here.

   woman DET HAB.NEG-come 3SG-HAB.NEG-come ‘The woman does not come.’

b. paw amu må-ba. → a-må-ba (*e-må-ba).
   rain DET HAB.NEG-come 3SG-HAB.NEG-come ‘It does not rain.’

Observe that the difference between the future and habitual negatives is one of tone; while the future negative morpheme må associates with a low tone, that of the

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22 The reader should not misconstrue that anytime ɔ- and e- precede a Ca syllable (e.g. ɔsa ‘human being’ ɔ-ba ‘he should come’ and e-ba ‘it should come’), ɔ- and e- change to become a-. As we have already indicated above, the domain of application of this lowering process is the habitual and future negative clauses, where the trigger of assimilation is the habitual/future negative markers må/-må and the target(s) of assimilation is the third person singular subject pronouns ɔ/-e. We suggest that the low vowel of må/-må triggers the change of ɔ- and e- to become a- in (62) because when må/-må are replaced with the progressive mon-/e, perfect mont/- and the past mon- negatives, as shown in (1a), (1b) and (1c) respectively, ɔ- and e- remain unchanged.

(1) a. ɔ-mone-ba *[a-mone-ba] ‘She/he is not coming.’
   b. ɔ-montei-ba *[a-montei-ba] ‘she/he has not come.’
   c. e-mon-ba *[a-mon-ba] ‘It did not come.’

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habitual negative má associates with a high tone.

5.3 The 3SG Object Pronoun versus Ambitransitive Verbs

The final source of animacy neutralization adduced here comes from the form and behaviour of the 3SG object pronoun mu. Recall from section 3.1.6 that, generally, whereas the site of an animate object NP is obligatorily replaced with the object pronoun mu when pronominalized, that of an inanimate object receives zero marking ø. For the sake of convenience, we repeat examples (20a-21a) here as (63a-b), where mu replaces okpli ‘dog’ (animate), and ø substitutes for ofɔdʒi ‘broom’ (inanimate).

(63) a. Kofi be-so okpli amu. → Kofi be-so mu.  
Kofi FUT-buy dog DET Kofi FUT-buy 3SG.AN.M.OBJ  
‘Kofi will buy the dog.’ ‘Kofi will buy it.’

  b. Kofi be-so ofɔdʒi amu. → Kofi be-so ø.  
Kofi FUT-buy broom DET Kofi FUT-buy  
‘Kofi will buy the broom.’ ‘Kofi will buy it.’

This distinction is however curtailed when the main verb in the clause is an ambitransitive verb. The phenomenon is illustrated with the verb fɪɪ ‘lose/disappear’; where (64a) is the underlying sentence and (64b-c) derive from it.

(64) a. Kofi le-fi edalo amu.  
Kofi PRF-lose money DET  
‘Kofi has lost the money’

  b. *Kofi le-fi ø.  
‘Kofi has lost it.’

  c. Kofi le-fi mu.  
‘Kofi has lost it.

  d. Kofi le-fi ø.  
‘Kofi is lost/has disappeared.’

Based on the animacy constraint regarding the 3SG object pronoun, example (64b) Kofi le-fi which has a null representation of the antecedent object NP edalo ‘money’ should have been the appropriate replacement of the underlying sentence Kofi le-fi edalo amu (64a). However, this is not so; rather, it is (64c) Kofi le-fi mu, which overtly replaces the antecedent object with mu, which appropriately indexes the meaning contained in (64a) (i.e. ‘Kofi has lost the money’). However, since example (64c) has an overt object pronoun mu ‘him/her/it’, it is ambiguous. That is, out of context, mu could refer to an animate or inanimate referent; hence, Kofi le-fi mu could either index: ‘Kofi has lost it (e.g. money: inanimate)’ or ‘Kofi has lost it (e.g. sheep: animate)’. In other words, the constraint on animacy distinction requiring that
only the site of an animate object NP receives an overt object pronominal marking while that of an inanimate receives zero marking is compromised, since the verb \textit{fii} ‘lose/disappear’ requires speakers to obligatory fill the slot of an antecedent object NP with the object pronoun \textit{mu} irrespective of its animacy status.

The ambiguity/neutralization created by the violation of the animacy constraint on object pronominalization is, however, permitted because of the transitivity value of the verb involved, \textit{fii} ‘lose/disappear’. \textit{Fii} is an ambitransitive verb which can be used both transitively (64a) and in transitively (64d). Like other ambitransitive verbs in the language, \textit{fii} has different interpretations depending on whether it is used transitively or in transitively in a clause. For instance, when used in transitively in (64d) (i.e. \textit{Kofi lefi} ‘Kofi has disappeared/is lost’), the understanding is that it the intransitive subject (S) \textit{Kofi} who has undergone the change/state expressed by the verb \textit{fii} ‘lose/disappear’. However, when used transitively (64a, c), it is the object argument (O) \textit{edalo} ‘money’ which undergoes the change/state denoted by the verb. Put differently, in order to avoid the ambiguity or difficulty of deciding whether it is the (S) or (O) which undergoes a change/state expressed by \textit{fi}, Nkami speakers rather violate the constraint on animacy by overtly stating the position of an inanimate antecedent object NP. Thus, the constraint requiring that the transitivity value of \textit{fi} be obeyed ranks higher than one that requires animacy status of objects be maintained in the language. Other verbs that behave like \textit{fi} include: \textit{mumunu} ‘crumble/squeeze’, \textit{klaga} ‘tilt’, \textit{bie} ‘burst’, \textit{duidui} ‘char’ to ‘burn’, \textit{bina} ‘break’, \textit{tjindza} ‘spoil’, \textit{pira} ‘injure/wound’, \textit{suru} ‘be of age/spoil’, \textit{dang} ‘soak’, \textit{na} ‘grimace/go bad’, \textit{wili} ‘become cold’, \textit{taj} ‘plug’, \textit{wu} ‘blunt/die’, \textit{pon} ‘close’ and \textit{tjini} ‘wake’.

6. Conclusion

An attempt has been made in this paper to reckon and explain in detail the range of linguistic resources that Nkami speakers employ to distinguish humans from non-humans, and animates from inanimates. It has provided rich and varied evidence particularly in forms, nature and behaviours of pronouns, demonstratives, nominal affixes, nominal modifiers, dispositional verbs in basic locative constructions, among others. Areas where some of the animacy distinctions have been neutralized were also canvassed.

References


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