

The Pragmatics of the Marker ‘Kule’ in Utterance Interpretation: The Case of Ga

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Abstract

The paper looks at the marker, *kule*, in Ga (Niger-Congo, Kwa branch), which has a variety of uses. Using a relevance-theoretic approach, I argue that ‘*kule*’ exhibits modal features and different meanings in utterance. In spite of the variety of uses of this word, *kule* for instance, has been presented as resulting in various semantic polysemies (Schwenter and Traugott 2000), instead of a number of functions that are defined by the context and that can be brought back to a lexical item as I propose – which would entail the idea of a core meaning. Other lexical elements probably developed differently and should therefore be explained by means of a semantic core meaning with pragmatic polysemy (see Aijmer and Simon-Vandenberg 2003). Looking at the interplay between the encoded meaning of *kule* and pragmatically derived information in natural speech situations indicate that the cognitive plausible way of accounting for the communicative function of this Ga marker *kule* is seen as a lexical semantics.

Keywords: Encoded meaning; explicature; Higher-level Implicature; Indirect requests; Modality; Relevance;

1. Introduction

The paper examines the Ga marker *kule* (would have) hence *ku’ε*. This marker is used in different forms. The aim of this study is to look at how the different uses of the word *ku’ε* are closely related and if there is a possibility of a form of unification, taking into consideration the fact that “senses are not to be multiplied beyond necessity”. First I consider the various ways in which *ku’ε* is used: (a) as a politeness marker in the performance of indirect requests, (b) as a marker in communicating someone’s unfulfilled intentions and desires, (c) as a marker communicating the existence of a state of affairs which belongs to the past and do not exist, (d) as a marker which indicates that what is described did not actually happen but almost happened, and finally (e) as a marker which inquires an intention which is unknown.

Our next concern is with the lexical meaning that *ku’ε* encodes. We claim that *ku’ε* has a lexical meaning, which serves as a basis for context-dependent pragmatic enrichment in various directions. In all its uses it indicates that the proposition expressed represents a state of affairs that is not in existence at the time of utterance. The specific meaning of *ku’ε* in a given utterance is a function of the interaction of its core meaning with other semantically encoded information as well as pragmatically derived information, which the principle of relevance Sperber and Wilson (1995: 271) stated in Amfo (2011) makes readily available to the recipient. The marker *ku’ε* interacts regularly with other items in certain utterances to bring out its particular pragmatic relevance in these utterances; we will attempt to give an account of some of such items which *ku’ε* interacts with in this paper and will attract attention on the main focus of this paper. 1. We claim that *ku’ε* plays a role as modal marker, because it encodes a specific epistemic attitude to the proposition expressed by the clause in which it appears. More particularly, it encodes the assumption that the state of affairs described by the propositional content is not true at the time of speaking. 2. Cognitive effects and procedural meaning.

The analysis used for the study is based on Relevance Theory (Wilson and Sperber, 2004; Clark, 2013) which is also known as the cognitive inferential theory of communication.

2. Relevance Theory:

According to this theory, an utterance is relevant when it combines with contextual assumptions to yield contextual effects. Such effects can be achieved in three ways. (1) a new piece of information is relevant when it combines with existing assumptions to derive contextual implications. (2) a new piece of information may strengthen an existing assumption and (3) a new piece of information may be relevant when it is inconsistent with an existing assumption and as a result one of the pieces of information will have to be dropped in favour of the other. We interpret an utterance within a specific context. Context is an important concept of interpreting utterance, most importantly, with in the field of language and communication studies. It is defined differently depending on the discipline in which the scholar comes from. “Recent work in a number of different fields has questioned the adequacy of earlier definitions of context in favor of a more dynamic view of the relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic dimensions of communicative events. Instead of viewing context as a set of variables that statically surround strips of talk, context and talk are now argued to stand in a mutually reflexive relationship to each other, with talk, and the interpretive work it generates, shaping context as much as context shapes talk.” (Goodwin and Duranti 1992) They admit that researchers need not agree on a single definition of context, as different notions of context may be appropriate to different levels of organization. Grundy (2008)

made it clear that: “You need to take a lot of context into accounts in order to determine what the speaker meant by their utterance” These ideas put up are significant, in that there is a demonstration of a shift from the notion of context as a frame that surrounds talk to one in which talk constitutes a main source for the organization of context. Billy Clark (2013), saw context as “an adjustment to the way an individual represents the world”. This simple definition of their notion of context is an attempt not to favour a variable of context over another. To them, all the ethnographic, social, cultural and participant variables which affect context do so by shaping the assumptions that the interlocutor uses in the interpretation of an utterance. In a particular interpretation process, the set of assumptions used is the context of the utterance. One may ask how do participants in conversation chose the context for an utterance? Certain linguistic indicators in an utterance direct the interlocutor to a set of assumptions that he brings to bear in the interpretation process. (Amfo 2014) described these indicators as linguistic items in relevance-theoretic terms as encoders of procedural meaning. Such linguistic items are contrasted with the majority set of words and expressions, that encode concepts which the interlocutor uses in constructing the

truth-conditional content of the utterance. This relevance-theoretic procedural/conceptual distinction was introduced by Blakemore (1987) with her re-analysis of some of Grice’s conventional implicatures as semantic constraints on implicatures. Further research (Amfo, 2004; Ifantidou (2001); Wilson and Sperber,2012; Carston &Hall 2012) has revealed that markers of procedural meaning do not only aid the interpretation process by constraining comprehension at the implicit level; but they influence comprehension explicitly. Grundy (2008) and Ifantidou’s (2001) work also confirms Amfo , Wilson and Sperber’s findings that markers of procedural meaning do not only aid interpretation , but it also constraints comprehension at the implicit level. The Ga marker *ku’ε* that I consider in this paper encodes a procedure by which the utterance which contains *ku’ε* is to be considered as representing a state of affairs which does not exist at the time of utterance. This state of non-existence becomes part of the assumptions constraining the interpretation of the utterance. The “hearer’s assumption about the world” includes all the pieces of information brought into the interpretation process, including what the hearer believes are the assumptions the speaker had in mind in the production of a particular utterance (Clark, 2013; Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 15–16.). The goal of a pragmatic theory must be to account for utterance comprehension, a ‘mind-reading’ process based on whatever evidence the speaker’s stimulus gives the interlocutor to derive contextual effects from it. Following from the presumption of optimal relevance (Wilson and Sperber, 2004: 612), the speaker in producing an utterance takes into consideration what she believes to be the assumptions held by the interlocutor in the context,

Abbreviations: CM, Conditional marker; COMP, Complementizer; COMPL, Completive aspect; CONJ,

Conjunction; CONV; Conversation, DET, Determiner; EMPH, Emphatic FUT, Future tense; FOC, Focus; H, Hearer/Interlocutor; ICV, Inherent Complement Verb, IM, Interpretive use marker; MP, Motional prefix; NEG, Negation marker; OBJ, Object position; P, Proposition; PERF, Perfective aspect; POS, Possessive pronoun ; PROG, Progressive aspect; REL. M, Relative Marker; S. Speaker, 1 SG, First Person Singular; 2SG, Second person singular; 3SG; Third person singular

3. Uses of *ku’ε*

Ku’ε is used in many ways. The examples below illustrate five main areas where it is found:

Politeness:

1(a) Nyε- tee? *ku’ε* ma ya .

You-go? *ku’ε* I- go .

‘Are you gone? I would have liked to go.’

(b) *Ku’ε* ma- kpa fai ni o ma mi o- wolo fioo.

Ku’ε I-like ICV beg CONJ 2SG borrow 1SG 2SG Pos book little.

‘I would have liked to borrow your book for a while.’

(Could I borrow your book please?)

Unfulfilled expectation and desires:

2 (a) *Ku’ε* ma-ha le no ko shi e- je-kpo.

Ku’ε I-give him/her something CONJ he/she-ICV go outCOMPL .

‘I would have like to give him/her something but he/she is gone out.’

(b) *Kε* jee hela neε, *ku’ε* ma tse le kwraa.

It-NEG-be sickness this, *ku’ε* 1SG adopt 3SG OBJ .

‘Had it not been this sickness, I would have adopted him/her (child).’

(c) *Mi* ni *ku’ε* sani ma – tsu nitsumε neε.

1SG *ku’ε* it-be 1SG do work this.

‘I am the one who should have done this work.’

A past state of affairs:

3(a) *Ku’ε* manjεε e- yoo.

Ku'ε abroad s/he- live.

'S/he used to live in abroad.'

(b) Blema le ku'ε gbɔmɛi fɛɛ wiew wiemɔ kome.

Ancient DET ku'ε human all speak language one.

'Formerly all human beings speak one language.'

Acts perceived as almost happening:

4(a) Sane le dɔ yoo le aahu akɛ

Case DET hot.prick-COMPL woman DET so-much-so COMP

ku'ε nɔ mii-tao anyɔ e - nɔ

ku'ε thing PROG-be fall 3SG top.

'The case pained the woman so much so that she nearly collapsed.'

(b) Ado ηmɔ le aahu ku'ε e- mli mii-he afu.

Ado laugh 3SG-OBJ.COMPL her so-much-so that ku'ε 3SG-POS inside PROG-annoy.

'Ado laughed at him so much so that he almost got annoyed.'

Act perceived as rhetorical inquiry:

5(a) Asáfòátsè le yà - nà Nii ní ku'ε?

Asáfòátsè DET MPgo see chief REL.M ku'ε?

'The leader of asafo company wet to see the chief so that?'

3.1. Ku'ε as a politeness marker in indirect requests

Obeng (1999) cited in Amfo (2004) categorises Akan requests into direct and indirect ones. Indirect requests can further be either conventional or non-conventional. For conventional indirect requests, Weizman (1989), as quoted in Obeng (ibid.), notes that in English, the speaker makes use of some grammatical or semantic device used conventionally for the purpose of requesting; such devices guide the interlocutor in the recovery process. Among the devices are (a) the grammatical structure of questions with modals such as 'can' or 'could'; and (b) the semantic meaning of apologetic expressions such as 'please'. Such grammatical or semantic devices to signal the indirectness of a request are found in a number of languages, and my argument in this section is that *ku'ε* should be considered as such a conventional indirect request marking device; *ku'ε* is a sort of hedge which tones down an otherwise direct request. *Ku'ε* lexically encodes the procedure that the proposition encoded by the utterance in which it is contained should be considered not real. However, the examples given in (1) are only pragmatically appropriate as indirect requests. The request interpretation is not due to the presence of *ku'ε*; *ku'ε* is a semantic device used to mitigate the directness of the request. In (1a), if the speaker had simply said *maya* (I will go), it would still be understood as a request but in this case a direct one. (1a) thus serves as an indirect request as a result of the presence of *ku'ε*. In (1b), the semantic content of the verbs used (that is *ma* (I would) and *kpa fai* (beg)) contributes to the indirectness, with the presence of *ku'ε* making the indirectness strong. A characteristic of pragmatic markers is that they very often work in tandem with other linguistic items in an utterance to achieve the desired results; the fact that they are highly context sensitive accounts for the apparent difficulty in their semantic categorization. There are several ways of achieving indirectness and in (1) it is done by the speaker presenting the situation described as not existing due to the lexical meaning of *ku'ε*. In Ga and many other languages, indirection is one of the ways in which politeness uses the expression *ku'ε* in such instances, it can be termed as a politeness marker. The pragmatically inferred meaning of *ku'ε* in these examples is reminiscent of the way that Sperber and Wilson (1995) and Boadi (2005) handle imperatives. According to these authors, imperatives describe a state of affairs, which is desirable (mostly, to the speaker). In (1a), going is described as desirable to the speaker, but the proposition expressed describes a state of affairs which is only desired.

Direct requests in Ga are in the form of command sentences, that is, imperatives. This category can, however, be expanded to include declaratives which state the speaker's desire. Direct request has been defined as a request performed by virtue of the meaning that the sentence encodes, while the term 'indirect request' is reserved for cases where understanding of the illocutionary act as a request depends crucially on the inferential processing informed by the encoded logical form of the sentence not factual. Even though the sentence without *ku'ε* still describes a non-factual state of affairs, the speaker's use of *ku'ε* is significant in that it signals that he cannot take it for granted that the state of affairs described by the proposition will exist, even after the utterance has been uttered. The speaker's propositional attitude can be inferred to be one of desire; it also comprises the hope that going is a potential state of affairs which could be brought into reality by the interlocutor acting in such a way that fruition is accomplished. This process seems to be outside the speaker's own control, and it is therefore up to the interlocutor to decide what to do in this situation. The utterance is understood as a request, and the use of *ku'ε* makes a considerable contribution to the polite nature of this request. The state of affairs described in (1b) is likewise unreal in the sense of unfulfilled (but at the same time is desirable). Taken literally, these utterances seem to say that my intention is for X to come true, where X unfortunately represents a state of

affairs which may not come into existence. However, a native interlocutor will not stop drawing inferences at this point. Every native speaker that I presented with a form similar to those in (1), such as *ku'ε masumɔ ake mawo otade le* (I had wanted to use your dress) or *ku'ε mike bo baaya* (I had wanted to go with you), either immediately made an offer (such as *naa no* 'here you are', *yoo* 'okay'), or declined, giving an explanation as (*ofaine miyaaa he ko* 'sorry I'm not moving anywhere'). According to relevance-theoretic interpretation, an assumption is relevant when it achieves contextual effects in a given context Sperber and Wilson, (1995:112); however, achieving the required contextual effects demands a processing effort. The smaller the processing effort, the more relevant the assumption, and an added function word like *ku'ε*, in what is already a grammatical sentence, means added processing effect. Why, then, will a Ga speaker use *ku'ε*, when its relevance in the utterance requires extra processing effort, as compared to simply making a direct request (without *ku'ε*)? The reason is that using *ku'ε* yields certain contextual effects which would not be achieved if the speaker had chosen to use a linguistic form which simply describes the assumption of being polite, as does the phrase *ofaine* or *miikpa bo fai* (please). This is a set phrase whose conventional meaning does not allow for much variation in its impact on the comprehension process with regard to context-based factors. In contrast, the inclusion of *ku'ε* in (1) makes manifest a set of assumptions forming part of the context within which the utterance is expected to be processed. These assumptions may include one or more of the following: (i) The speaker realizes that the request is not something that the hearer will normally expect from the speaker. (ii) The speaker suspects that the hearer may not yield easily due to (i) some other reason which will have to be deduced contextually. (ii) The speaker acknowledges that the speaker and the hearer are in an (extra-linguistic) environment in which the hearer's right to exert an influence on the practical consequences of the verbal interaction overrides the speaker's right to do so.

According Amfo (2004.) quoting Obeng (ibid), in Akan society, requests are usually not considered impositions on the requestees, due to the society's collective culture and social interdependence. For this reason, certain (direct) requests, which would be deemed impolite and probably inappropriate, even face-threatening in other societies, are generally not perceived as such in Ga context. By extension, requests in Ga society, compared to Akan society, is non-imposing linguistic acts. This holds true to a large extent for rural Ga communities, where a high level of dependence among members is to be expected. In urban and semi-urban Ga communities (such as Pokuase and the villages around), social interdependence is gradually on the decline and as a result, the way the Ga conceptualize requests may vary, depending on certain socio-pragmatic circumstances. But also here, the interpersonal relationship between the requester and the requestee should not be overlooked. The requester in (1) certainly ignores his interpersonal relationship with the requestee as well as other socio-pragmatic considerations. A group of friends were to embark on a mission; one person in the group asks whether they've left for someone who may only qualify as a mere acquaintance certainly threatens the interlocutor's negative face. And note that the request was not made because the requester saw the requestee leaving or being about to leave; it was made simply on the assumption that the requestee had left. Now, let us see how the above assumptions work with respect to example (1a). This utterance was said by a middle age woman (Awo Diŋ) to a cousin of the friend she was visiting almost of the same age (Kai). The woman with a minimal interaction having occurred between them. I reproduce (1a) below, including Kai's reply as (5). Awo Diŋ began by asking Kai if her parents had left home and then continued:

(5) AD: Nye- tee? ku'ε ma ya ee.

You-go? ku'ε I- go .

'Are you gone? I would have liked to go.'

K: Oo! ku'ε wɔ wɔ - nye o-nɔ dani o - ya.

Oo! ku'ε we EMPH force 2SG on before 2SG go

'Oh should we force you before you go?'

(Is it our responsibility to force you before you go?)

I will refer to Awo Diŋ as 'AD' and Kai as 'K' for the explanations below.

Given the not-so-close interpersonal relationship between AD and K, a request to attend a function in the above-mentioned circumstances is not something that AD would normally expect from K, and AD is probably aware that, as a result of this, K will not agree to his request, especially if it is made directly. Even a request that is toned down by the use of *ku'ε* would, in this particular case, not only come unexpected for K, but appear unexpected as well, something which her reply confirms. In using *ku'ε*, AD implies that he is aware of all these assumptions, which would normally have prevented him from making such a request directly. However, since she prefers to disregard the socio-cultural assumptions in order to have his desire fulfilled, she makes the awareness of the social inappropriateness of his request manifest, and hopes that in doing so, he will cause K to yield to his request. Presumably, she felt that this might be the only way to make K recognize his communicative intentions and at the same time give herself a chance to achieve his goal. The use of *ku'ε* as a politeness marker is further illustrated by the following examples from a discussion at a traditional court. This discussion took place when the accused person had been found guilty. A relative of the accused person made this

statement; however, the statement was not made publicly. In (6), one of the relative appeals to the relevant authorities to make such case open so that people will stop speculating what they do not know about the case. In (7) another member requested that the questions should be made straight forward.

- (6) D' kɛɛ ku'ɛ ma – bi ake, Nii fee sane lɛ faŋŋ ?
 I-say ku'ɛ 1SG –FUT- ask COMP Nii made case DET clear? .
 'I would like to ask whether Nii made the case clear?'
- (7) Ku'ɛ ma- kpa- fai ni ku'ɛ Nii afee sanebimɔ-i faŋŋ.
 Ku'ɛ 1SG-FUT-beg CONJ ku'ɛ Nii make question- PL clear
 'I would ask that Nii should make the questions clear'.

In both (6) and (7), the speakers use *ku'ɛ* as a downtoning marker while making their requests, since they know that unless the interlocutors act as suggested, there is nothing that they can do practically about the situations. In (7), note that *ku'ɛ* is used both in the main clause and in the complement clause. The first *ku'ɛ* used in the utterance is an indication that the speaker is making an indirect request with an apology, that is, begging for Nii (chief)to make his case clear. The second *ku'ɛ* directs the interlocutor to a particular implicature,—that the chief is not making his questions clear. In the request, the proposition that the chief should make the questions clear (which is the message explicated without *ku'ɛ*), is not true at the time of utterance. This particular implicature becomes part of the context within which the utterance is interpreted. This particular usage of *ku'ɛ*, where the speaker states what will be desirable if the pragmatic conditions are or (in counterfactual situations) were fulfilled, is comparable to a familiar pattern of the usage in English, where a potentially face-threatening act is prefaced with an expression involving the past tense form of modals.

(8) I would have liked to ask you. . .

The speaker will often times go ahead with her (indirect) question or request in spite of her apparently counterfactual preface, having first expressed her realisation that the request might be unsuitable under the circumstances. An utterance like (9), from the Ga Bible would normally be relevant beyond what seems to be literally an example of wishful thought.

- (9) Mi – na ni ku'ɛ ma - nyɛ mi – he mii ma - sheje ye
 1SG-see CONJ ku'ɛ 1SG could 1SG POS self heart 1SG make in
 mi - werɛho lɛ mli
 1SG sorrow DET inside
 'I would have wished to comfort myself in my sorrows'. (Jer 8:18) Ga Bible

3.2. *Ku'ɛ* in communicating unfulfilled expectation and desires

Another use of *ku'ɛ* is found in utterances expressing intentions or desires which cannot be, or have not been fulfilled (as exemplified in (2), repeated here for convenience). The reason for the unfulfilled expectation or desire is often, though not always, given in a

conjoined clause (as in (2a)) or a conditional clause (as in (2b)). The *ku'ɛ*-clauses in (2), unlike those in (1), are not interpreted as requests or entreaties, due to the general sentence constructions. The forms in (2) are counterfactual conditionals with the protasis introduced by *ku'ɛ*. However as in (1), they describe a desirable and a potential state of affairs.

- (2) (a) Ku'ɛ ma-ha lɛ nɔ ko shi e- je-kpo.
 Ku'ɛ I-give him/her something CONJ he-ICV go out COMPL .
 'I would have like to give him something but he has gone out.' (CONV)
- (b) Kɛ je-ee ake hela nɛɛ, ku'ɛ ma tse lɛ kwraa.
 It-be- NEG CM sickness this, ku'ɛ 1SG adopt 3SG OBJ .
 'Had it not been this sickness, I would have adopted her (child).'(CONV)
- (c) Mi ni ku'ɛ sa ake ma – tsu nitsumɔ nɛɛ.
 1SG FOC ku'ɛ it-be COMP 1SG do work this.
 'I am the one who should have done this work.'

In (2a), the clause expressing the intention starts the utterance, before an explanation is given for the failure to carry out the action. The *ku'ɛ*-clause describes a desirable and potential state of affairs, or at least so it seemed to the referent of the pronominal /e / (he), until in the conjoined clause, he was informed of his absence, which went against what was implicitly assumed. The relevance of the *ku'ɛ*-construction is that while it expresses a potential and desirable state of affairs, at the same time it implicates that the actual performance of this state of affairs is hindered by something. What *ku'ɛ* does is to make more manifest a specific implicature of (2a). As the state of affairs referred to in the clause modified by *ku'ɛ* does not exist at the time of utterance, and as the state of affairs described would have belonged to the future in any case, the inferred meaning is that the referent of /e/ (he) is not there. In (2b), the reason for the inability to carry out the desire is given before the intention is expressed. The situation described in the main clause is desirable, and it would also have been potential if it were not for the fact that the negative proposition expressed in the preceding conditional clause is

presented as counterfactual (due to the co-occurrence of *ke jeee* ‘had it not’, and the conditional marker *ake*. . .).

In (2c), the assumption expressed is that the potential and desirable state of affairs described by that utterance is indeed desirable to the speaker, and is furthermore presented by the speaker as being probably desirable to the interlocutor as well. This is in spite of some apparent contrary evidence, which the interactants may have taken to imply that the state of affairs cannot be fulfilled. (2c) was said by class representative to one of the classmates concerning an assignment given to them, when he realized their poor performance.

This meeting has not yet taken place, but both the speaker (class representative) and the interlocutor (one of the classmates) are aware that the interlocutor does not intend to leave the assignment; this explains the use of the first *ake* in the utterance. It is a marker which indicates that the information that I’m about to share is not new information, and you know that as well as I do. What is explicitly communicated in (2c) is that the interlocutor should be able to do the work. The combination of *ake* and *ku’ε* guides the interlocutor to the assumption in (10), which forms part of the context within which (2c) is processed:

(10) Y knows that I know that he is aware I am not going to do the work, but it is desirable (to him) that I do it, and both of us know that. If *ku’ε* is used in these instances, it gives rise to the contextual assumptions that some desire cannot be achieved.

The following two examples illustrate the use of *ku’ε* in unfulfilled desires and potentials.

(11) *Mi – na ni mi - yε fiji tamɔ okpo, ku’ε ma – filiki*
1SG see CONJ 1SG have wing like dove KU’E 1SG fly
ni ma – ya - jɔɔ mi – he

CONJ 1SG go rest 1SG POS self (Psalm 55: 6) Ga Bible

‘I wish I had wings like a dove, I would have fly to escape and take a rest’.

(12) *Ku’ε ma – ye oyai ma – jo lasuogbele*
Ku’ε 1SG eatMPquick 1SG run smoke death
ke ahum le naa foi ma – ya – tao abobaaha
CON windstormDET mouth 1SG go find shelter
ma – ha mi - he. (Psalm 55 : 8) Ga Bible
1SG give 1SG POS self.

‘I would have quickly find myself a shelter from the raging wind and storm’.

In (11), the referent *ma* i.e the speaker could not fulfill his or her desire of flying to escape and take a rest, when he was actually in a state that has made him/ her utter that statement. Probably the speaker might have been in a terrible state. In interpreting the utterance, *ku’ε* leads one to the assumption that there was a desire which could not be fulfilled. Example (12) also illustrates this potential which cannot be fulfilled, again due to the agony he/ she might be going through.

3.3. *Ku’ε* in communicating the existence of a past state of affairs

The role that *ku’ε* plays in (3), appears to be quite different from the cases already discussed in Sections 3.1 and 3.2. In combination with other lexical items (*shi*)

13 *Adaawe* is one of the games played by women in the Ga traditional setup. It is also the game that ushers the women into marriage.

i.e., ‘then’ in (3b) and *blema le* i.e., ‘in the olden days’ in (3a)), *ku’ε* introduces a state of affairs that existed at some point in time, but does no longer do so at the time of utterance. *Shi +ku’ε* refers to a past time. The uses of *blema* and *le*, respectively, make it easier for the interlocutor to infer that the reference in (3) is something in the past.

(3a) *Shi ku’ε maɲsεε e - yɔɔ.*

CONJ *ku’ε* abroad 3SG - live.

‘S/he used to live in abroad.’

(b) *Blema le ku’ε gbɔmɛi fεε wieɔ wiemɔ kome.*

Ancient DET *ku’ε* human all speak language one.

‘Formerly all human beings speak one language.’

As the state of affairs described no longer exists at the time of utterance, it is inadequate to translate (3) using the simple past tense, i.e., translating (3a) as she did not live in town and (3b) as all human beings speak one language. As mentioned earlier, utterances of this nature communicate more than a simple negative proposition, as in she does not live in town and all human beings do not speak one language ((3a) and (3b), respectively). The relevance of the utterances lies in the fact that a certain state of affairs was true in the past, but that is no longer the case—which is exactly what *ku’ε* does in collaboration with *blema le*. As already mentioned, the use of *ku’ε* in (3) deviates from its uses in (1) and (2), in that the state of affairs being described is not desirable, let alone potential.

3.4. *Ku'ε* in communicating acts perceived to be very close to happening

The fourth use of *ku'ε*, unlike the first, cannot be interpreted as a politeness marker. Also, this use differs from the use shown in (2) in that it is not found in utterances expressing expectation and desires. Moreover, since there is no indication of the existence of a past state of affairs, as described in these utterances, the use of *ku'ε* in (4) cannot be said to be identical to its use in (3) either. Admittedly, with regard to this fourth use of *ku'ε*, one can talk about a semblance of a potential which was not fulfilled, as in (1) and (2). And also, there is an affinity to the examples in (3), to the extent that these utterances are set in the past. Nonetheless, this fourth use warrants categorization in a separate section because of the peculiarity of *ku'ε* occurring in narrated past events, where there were expectations which were never realised. It is not the case that the events talked about here are states of affairs which existed at some time in the past, but are no more (cf. Section 3.3); nor does the narration refer to propositions that are desirable and or potential (cf. Sections 3.1 and 3.2). The events described are completed, even though the expectations that were raised as a result of perceiving certain things, were not met. What is happening in (4), repeated below, is that in combination with the present progressive aspect (PROG) represented as *mii*, *ku'ε* indicates that what is described did not actually happen, but was perceived as very close to happening.

(4a) Sane le dɔ yoo le aahu ake
Case DET HOT.prick-COMPL woman DET so-much-so that
ku'ε nɔ mii-tao anyɔ e- nɔ
ku'ε thing PROG-be PERF-fall 3SG top.

'The case pained the woman so much so that she nearly collapsed.'

(b) Ado ŋmɔ le aahu ku'ε e- mli
Ado laugh 3SG-OBJ.COMPL her so-much-so that ku'ε 3SG-POS \

mii-he afu.
inside PROG-annoy.

'Ado laughed at him so much so that he almost got annoyed.'

The use of the present progressive prefix *mii* would usually suggest that this was something which the subject(s) was (were) in the process of doing. The presence of *ku'ε*, however, suggests that the referents never arrived at the 'expected end'. For instance in (4a), Ado laughed at him to such an extent that anyone looking on expected something horrible (like annoyance) to happen. Still, even though he looked like annoyed, in the final analysis he did not; however, getting annoyed was what one would have expected in that circumstance.

The *ku'ε*-clause in (4b) *ku'ε e- mli miihe afu* ('he almost got annoyed') is a hyperbole. To the writer, that was the best way to describe the extent to which Ado laughed. He did not get annoyed, but he laughed so much that one would not have been surprised if it actually had come to that. The speaker relates his interpretation of some perceived stimuli, which (hyperbolically speaking) indicated to him at that time, due to Ado's uncontrolled laughter, he almost got annoyed; but again, by the time of utterance it has become clear to the speaker that, after all, things were not all that bad. The *ku'ε*-clauses thus express a kind of 'expectation' of which the referents fall short; this explains the use of 'almost' in the glosses. Even so, I would hesitate to gloss *ku'ε* by itself as 'almost'. The 'almost' interpretation is made available to the interlocutor as a result of the encoded meaning of *ku'ε* in its interaction with the present progressive prefix *mii* and other pragmatic information derived from the context, such as what the speaker physically perceived (as in the examples in (4)). This special use of *ku'ε* is restricted to references to past events described (and indeed interpreted) by the speaker. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, this fourth use of *ku'ε* is unlike the third use, which also deviates from the first and second uses. Common to all these instances ((1) to (4)) is that what is described by means of the clause containing *ku'ε* does not exist as a factual state of affairs at the time of utterance. All other meaning components that arguably enter into the pragmatic interpretation of the linguistic structures illustrated above came about by the presence of *ku'ε* (in conjunction with certain other indicators, like the tense aspect marker *mii* in (4), temporal expressions *blema* and *le* in (3), and general sentence structures in (2) and (1).

3.5 Act perceived as rhetorical inquiry:

The *ku'ε*-clause thus express a kind of 'question' of which the referents did not know; this explains the use of 'inquiry'. Even so, I would hesitate to gloss *ku'ε* by itself as 'a question tag'. The 'question tag' interpretation is made available to the interlocutor as a result of the encoded meaning of *ku'ε* in its interaction and other pragmatic information derived from the context, such as what the speaker physically perceived (as in example (5)). This special use of *ku'ε* is restricted to reference of events described as unknown to both the speaker and the interlocutor. In this case the marker '*ku'ε*' is used in word final position and serves as a rhetorical inquiry in the proposition as presented in (5) above repeated below.

- (5) Asàfòátsè lé yà - nà Nii ní ku'è?
Asàfòátsè DET MPgo see chief REL.M ku'è?

'The leader of asaf company went to see the chief so that?'

In the above example, the proposition gives rise to higher level explicature in relevance theoretical terms. One needs to take a lot of context into account in order to determine what the speaker meant by the utterance. The speaker who was a relative and who knows that the family has a case with the Asafatse, might be asking such question (**explicature**) and the utterance might be taken as a demand for its return and it is taken as a rhetorical inquiry (higher level explicature) as to whether she is involve in the case (explicature) implying that if she is, she'd have to find out what information the Asafatse wants from the chief.

4. Meaning of ku'è

Dakubu (2009) defines ku'è as follows:

“This word is put at the head of a sentence to indicate that the idea expressed in the sentence is no reality at the present time of speaking, but either (a) a thing of the past, or (b) otherwise, its reality being made impossible by another fact. . .” According to Dakubu, *ku'è* expresses conditionality at the time. Dakubu's definition covers examples like those in (2) and (3). Other categories like (1) and (4) are not accounted for adequately. To describe the examples in (1) as ideas which are “no present reality” is not sufficient since they represent concrete desires of the speakers. Though the propositions described in (4) are in reference to past events, what *ku'è* encodes is not the reference to the past, but the fact that the events described were perceived as almost happening. Quite apart from the varied ways in which it is used, a lot of interaction goes on between *ku'è* and other lexical items in specific utterances, which work in tandem with *ku'è* and help to add contextual information. In addition to what has been suggested that *ku'è* encodes, much of its meaning in a given utterance will have to be contextually determined; and the problem remains if there is a principled basis for deciding whether this marker is either lexically ambiguous between its different uses, or else lexically monosemous with a potential to be enriched in accordance with those contextual assumptions which are most accessible to the interactant. In the following, I will suggest some preliminary answers to these questions.

In combination with expressions like *masumɔ mabi* (I would like to ask) and contextually derived assumptions, *ku'è* in (1) is understood to describe potential FUT states of affairs which are desirable to the speaker, and thus these utterances are easily interpretable as requests. In (2), the desirable and potential states of affairs are described as being contrary to the facts. In (2a), *ku'è* interacts with the *shi*-clause to communicate an unreal but desirable state of affairs; the *shi*-clause gives a reason why the desired state of affairs could not be accomplished. In (2b), *kejee* (be not) co-occurring with the conditional marker *ake*. . .a, presents a counterfactuality that prevents the desire expressed in the *ku'è* clause from being fulfilled. In (3), *ku'è* combines with the lexical item *blema* and the expression *le* to present states of affairs which no longer exist. In (4), there is interaction between the present progressive marker *mii* and *ku'è* to describe something that did not actually happen, but got very close to happening. Finally in (5), *ku'è* in clause final position communicates a rhetorical inquiry which gives way to higher level explicatures and implicatures. Do these five different uses of *ku'è* mentioned above make the word lexically ambiguous? It is quite simple to reconcile the uses in (1) and (2), based on the fact that the states of affairs described in both instances are desirable and potential (unless a reason is given for inability of fulfilling it), while (3), (4) and (5) appear quite different. I would like to claim that there is a core meaning of *ku'è* that runs through all the above mentioned uses. It is that the proposition expressed represents a state of affairs which is not real at the time of utterance; the state of affairs is not factual; rather, it is hypothetical or unreal. This core meaning does not include the information why the state of affairs is unreal at the time of utterance, or how the speaker relates to its non-existence. Since, in fact, the specific meaning conveyed by *ku'è* in a particular utterance is context-dependent, the further question may be raised whether the utterance containing *ku'è* is (a) an indirect request, (b) an unfulfilled expectation or desire, (c) the existence of a state of affairs in the past, or (d) an act which was perceived to be very close to happening. This contextual dependence represents an under-determination which disappears when the encoded meaning of *ku'è* combines with other linguistic expressions as well as with extralinguistic information retrieved from a variety of perceptual and cognitive sources.

5. Ku'è: a modal marker

Based on the preceding, I propose *ku'è* as a modal marker. A modal linguistic device relates to mood and modality, which have to do with the speaker's attitude to the proposition expressed or manner as contrasted with substance (Gbegble 2014). The attitude could be epistemic, including certainty, possibility and doubt, or deontic, having to do with obligation and permission, or it could relate to the speaker's (or someone else's) intentions, desires or hopes (Nuyts & Diepeveen 2010). These attitudes may be expressed differently in the European languages, The speakers attitude are usually encoded by means of bound morphemes, like subjunctive suffixes attached to verb forms in some languages e.g French. This does not appear to be the case in Ga. Ga *ku'è*, as we

have seen above, plays the role of a marker conveying a modal meaning. It encodes what relevance theory refers to as a higher-level explicature which, in relation to a speaker S and a proposition P, conveys that in S's opinion P is not factual. A higher level explicature is "a particular kind of explicature which involves embedding the propositional form of the utterance or one of its constituent propositional forms under a higher-level description such as a speech-act description, a propositional attitude description or some other comment on the embedded proposition. Carston (2002: 377) mentioned in the previous section, what takes P not factual, and what determines the speaker's attitude to the fact that P is not factual, are considerations of relevance in the current context. Using this encoded, higher-level explicature as a basis, the interlocutor in specific utterances includes contextual information to make specific inferences. In (1) and (2), the specifically inferred higher-level explicature communicated is (14): (14) I desire that P. In (3), the positive proposition P (respectively s/he lives abroad, and at first all people speak one language) is rejected. The inferred higher level explicature thus communicated is (15): (15) I disbelieve that P. In (4), the inferred higher level explicature communicated is the interpretation or metarepresentation of (16), projected to sometime in the past, with *ku'ε* triggering the inference that the expectation was not fulfilled. (16) I expected that P.

In (2), what is further communicated by the modal marker *ku'ε* is the failure to bring to fulfillment the assumption communicated by P. For example in (2a), the assumption that he will come is understood to be denied. The same goes for (2b) as well as for (2c).

The assumptions that she will come and see the child and that he will go are denied. In (3), although the speaker at present believes that \neg P, what is communicated, in addition to that epistemic attitude is that she believes that P was true at a certain time in the past. *Ku'ε* occurs clause-initially, except when it co-occurs with other markers (compare the examples in (2c) and (3)), which is when the other markers take the initial position before *ku'ε*. It takes scope over the clause within which it occurs; however, when this clause is embedded in a conditional, the modal element encoded by *ku'ε* takes control over the whole utterance. Consequently, this forces the insertion of the same marker *ku'ε* in the main clause, as illustrated in (17). (In Ga, conditionality is expressed using the expression *keji*. . ., where *keji* can be optional).

(17) *keji ma-sumɔ, ku'ε ma-kεε bo.*

CM I- like, *ku'ε* I-say 2SG.

'If I would have liked it, I would have told you.'

Another point to consider is what happens when *ku'ε* is used in the same utterance with a negation, since the encoded meaning of *ku'ε* has got something to do with negation, more specifically counterfactuality. In (1) and (2), what happens is simple. The communicated propositional attitude (i.e., higher-level explicature) that would be recovered from negated *ku'ε* clauses is the opposite of what is recovered from the non-negative *ku'ε* clauses appearing in (1) and (2), though most of the examples (with the possible or probable exception of (2a)), would end up sounding pragmatically normal. What happens when utterances such as (3) are negated is more interesting. In Ga, negation is realized by adding two of the vowels that the verb has which is suffixed to a verb and is orthographically represented as /ee/ as in the verb *ye* (eat) becomes /ye-ee/ (did not eat). When (3a) and (3b) are negated the result is as in (18) and (19):

(18) *Ku'ε je- ee maŋsεε e - yɔɔ.*

Ku'ε is NEG abroad 3SG- live.

'S/he used not to live in abroad.'

(19) *Blema lε ku'ε je- ee gbɔmɛi fεε wiewi wiemɔ kome.*

Accient DET *ku'ε* is NEG human all speak language one.

'Formerly not all human beings speak one language'

As statements, (18) and (19) are grammatically correct. They are only acceptable as negative questions, which give a specific interpretation of the speaker's thought. The utterances will be numbered as (20) and (21). The declarative form represents the speaker's belief (propositional attitude), while the negative polarity of the proposition expressed by (20) and (21) represents a thought attributed to someone other than the speaker.

(20) S/he used to live in abroad, didn't she?

(21) 'formerly all human beings use to speak one language, didn't they?'

20) *Ku'ε maŋsεε e - yɔɔ.*

Ku'ε abroad s/he- live.

'S/he used to live in abroad.'

(21) *Blema lε ku'ε gbɔmɛi fεε wiewi wiemɔ kome.*

Accient DET *ku'ε* human all speak language one.

'Formerly all human beings use to speak one language, didn't they?'

In (4), like in most of the cases in (1) and (2), an attempt to negate the *ku'ε*-clauses never change the clause to be odd in the Ga language.

6. Summary

In this paper, I have considered some uses of *ku'ε* in the Ga language, (a) as a politeness marker, (b) in communicating unfulfilled desires and intentions, (c) in communicating the existence of a state of affairs which no longer exists, (d) in communicating acts which were thought to have been very close to happening but did not actually happen and (e) as a rhetorical enquiry of a proposition. The marker *ku'ε* is a plausible way of accounting for encoded meaning of utterances. I claim that *ku'ε* is not ambiguous in terms of its uses. The marker encodes the assumption that the proposition expressed by the utterance in which it occurs, is not true. This is because *ku'ε* encodes a higher-level explicature, which tells us that, the proposition, in Speaker's opinion, at the time of speaking is not a fact, it is therefore considered as a modal marker.

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