



Mandenkan

Bulletin semestriel d'études linguistiques mandé

51 | 2014

Grammatical Sketch of Beng

Noun phrase structure

Section 8

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/mandenkan/561>

DOI: 10.4000/mandenkan.561

ISSN: 2104-371X

Publisher

Llacan UMR 8135 CNRS/Inalco

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 June 2014

Number of pages: 47-49

ISSN: 0752-5443

Electronic reference

Denis Paperno, "Noun phrase structure", *Mandenkan* [Online], 51 | 2014, Online since 01 June 2014, connection on 03 March 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/mandenkan/561> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/mandenkan.561>

This text was automatically generated on 3 March 2021.



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Noun phrase structure

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- 1 The order of constituents in the (maximal) noun phrase structure is as follows: possessor + nominal modifiers + head noun and appositive modifiers + adjectives + determiners + relative clause.

8.1. Possessors and nominal modifiers

- 2 Possessor is expressed with a noun phrase and / or a personal pronoun. There is no special possession or alienability marking, so possessor NPs are distinguished from e.g. direct object NPs only in syntactic position.

Nominal modifiers can:

- refer to matter, as in *pēñj̄ srē* ‘iron needle’, or
- be adverbial noun phrases, pointing to the relation of an object to a particular time or place, e.g. *gblē zùndlí* ‘yesterday’s newspaper’, or (70a):

(70a)	<i>klÉj̄</i>	<i>n̄j̄</i>	<i>wó</i>	<i>sōj̄</i>
	forest	DEF	IN	animal
	‘forest animal’ (<i>literally</i> : ‘animal in the forest’).			

(70b)	<i>Bíè</i>	<i>lòm̄lé</i>	<i>lè</i>	<i>à</i>	<i>klÉj̄</i>	<i>wó</i>	<i>pō</i>	<i>wé.</i>
	elephant	lemon	Def	3SG	forest	IN	thing	exist
	‘There’s a wild variety of grapefruit’ (<i>lit.</i> : ‘Grapefruit, its thing in the forest exists’).							

(70c)	ḡ	dē	pō	drōḡḡ
	1SG	father	thing	older.brother
	'my father's elder brother' (<i>literally</i> : 'My father's thing older brother').			

- 3 All preposed modifiers, including possessors, locative modifiers, etc., can be accompanied with the semantically empty noun *pō* 'thing', which nominalizes premodifiers (70b) and can turn them structurally into appositive modifiers (70c). Combination of non-subject pronouns with *pō* 'thing' gives rise to the possessive pronoun series.

8.2. Adjectives and appositives in noun phrases

- 4 Adjectives can not only modify nouns but can also function as the head of a noun phrase in the absence of a noun. Adjectival modifiers – as well as adjectives in other positions – can have degree modifiers, for example:

(71)	sḡḡ	gēḡ	kpà
	person	beautiful	very
	'very nice person'		

- 5 A special usage of adjectives (or numerals, as a subclass of adjectives) as effective NP heads is the partitive construction, whereby an adjective or a numeral is accompanied by a definite NP with the postposition *wó*, compare:

(72a)	ḡ	bábá	ḡḡḡ	(nì)
	1SG	sheep	three	DEF
	'my three sheep'			

(72b)	ḡ	bábá	ḡò	wó	ḡḡḡ
	1SG	sheep	3PL	IN	three
	'three of my sheep'				

- 6 The partitive construction with an adjective head and a definite article is the way to express **superlative degree** in Beng:

(73)	Sḡḡ	nḡḡ	ḡò	wó	sòklò	lè
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	person	PL	3PL	IN	inert	DEF
	'the most inert person' (<i>literally</i> 'the inert among the people').					

- 7 An appositive modifier can be any NP without determiners. The order of appositive modifiers and the head is free, but for nouns indicating the gender of a person or an animal postposition is preferable:

(74)	sḡḡ	púú	gḡḡ	dḡ
	person	white	man	one
	'a white man'.			

8.3. Determiners

- 8 NP-final determiners follow the linear sequence

$bì > tè > DEF > nḡḡ > dḡ$

- 9 The determiners in this sequence have the following functions. *bì* is a deictic marker 'this / that'; *tè* is an intensifier 'even, one/him/her/itself'. Both require the presence of a definite article, which can then be absent only under the influence of overriding factors: before a relative clause or in a plural NP. Both cases block the definite article *lè*.
- 10 DEF stands for the definite article. Overt definite article is generally optional, unless preceded by *bì* or *tè*. There are two overt allomorphs of the definite article in Beng: *ḡ* is used after *ḡ* (in singular or plural NPs), and *lè* is used after vowels, but only in singular NPs. In plural NPs after a vowel no overt article is used.
- 11 *nḡḡ* is a plural marker. In most cases it is also optional, see more on the expression of number below.
- 12 *dḡ* is the numeral 'one', which doubles as an indefinite article. It can also accompany a plural NP:

(75)	ḡ	lḡḡ	(nḡḡ)	dḡ	ḡò	yè.
	1SG:PST+	woman	PL	one	3PL	see
	'I saw (some) women' (plural interpretation even in the absence of <i>nḡḡ</i>).					

The article *dḡ* is incompatible with determiners other than the plural marker.

- 13 In the absence of any determiners a noun phrase can receive the 'non-arithmetic' interpretation (Polivanova 1983), i.e. the number of objects in question can only be inferred from the context.

- 14 Names of substances usually occur without determiners, but can also be used with determiners, including articles and the plural marker: *yí lè* ‘the water’, *yí nùḡ* ‘water in several containers’. Some of these cases are clearly instances of productive conversion ‘substance X’ > ‘mass of substance X’ or ‘object made of X’. This conversion is quite regular. For example, *gḡ* ‘plastic’ can also be a name for a plastic bucket, a plastic pin, etc., functioning as a count noun.
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