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# Noun Phrase Constructions in Nubian Languages: A Comparative Study

Suzan Alamin

## 1. Introduction

Most of historical-comparative studies of Nubian languages deal with sound correspondences and lexical similarities in order to reconstruct the Proto-Nubian sound system and lexicon, Proto-Nubian being the assumed ancestor of the Nubian languages.<sup>1</sup> The present paper attempts to reconstruct the Proto-Nubian noun phrase. According to Payne, “noun phrases are traditionally thought of as consisting minimally of a head noun, together with any number of noun phrase modifiers”<sup>2</sup> such as an adjective, numeral, quantifier, determiner, possessive adjective, genitive, and/or a relative clause. (Note that relative clauses are not included in this study). This study investigates noun phrases in the Nubian languages, that is, to find out which elements may modify noun phrases and how these modifiers are distributed within a noun phrase (hereafter NP). Also number agreement between the noun and its modifiers is considered. The ultimate aim is to infer from the comparison of NP constituent order in the various modern Nubian languages what the constituent order of the Proto-Nubian NP looks like.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 gives a short background of the Nubian language classification, data sources, the aim of the study, and the method of data analysis. In addition, some typological features of modern Nubian languages are presented. Section 3 describes the internal structure of NPs including NPs represented by a personal pronoun, determiner, or quantifier, and NPs

1 Cf. JAKOBI, “The Loss of Syllable-Final Proto-Nubian Consonants”; ZYHLARZ, “Die Lautverschiebungen des Nubischen”; BECHHAUS-GERST, “‘Nile-Nubian’ Reconsidered”; id., *The (Hi)story of Nubiin*; RILLY, *Le Méroïtique et sa famille linguistique*.

2 PAYNE, “Noun Phrases,” p. 714.

represented by a noun with or without modifiers. It includes nominal modifiers of the head noun: possessive adjectives, determiners, adjectives, numerals, quantifiers and nouns in genitive constructions. Section 4 presents some more complex forms of Nubian NP constructions.

## 2. The Nubian languages

The Nubian languages are scattered over a vast area comprising eastern Darfur and the northern Nuba Mountains of Sudan, and the Nile valley of northern Sudan and southern Egypt.<sup>3</sup> Nubian is part of the Eastern Sudanic branch of the Nilo-Saharan phylum.<sup>4</sup> According to Rilly, Nubian – along with Taman, Nyimang, Nara and the extinct Meroitic language – belongs to the northern branch of the Eastern Sudanic family.<sup>5</sup>

Nubian is a cluster of closely related languages. The Nubian language family is thought of as having three geographically defined subgroups, Nile Nubian, Kordofan Nubian, and Darfur Nubian. Nile Nubian is spoken in the Nile Valley roughly between the First and the Third Cataract. It consists of two languages, Nobiin and Kenzi-Dongolawi. Nobiin includes the dialects Halfawi, Sukkoth, and Mahas, which are all spoken in Sudan, and Fadija spoken in Egypt. Old Nubian is a Nile Nubian language, too. Bechhaus-Gerst considers Old Nubian to be ancestral to modern Nobiin.<sup>6</sup> The second language of the Nile Nubian subgroup is Kenzi-Dongolawi (Dongolawi and Kenzi are two dialects of the same language, Kenzi being spoken north of Nobiin in Egypt and Dongolawi being spoken south of Nobiin in Sudan).

The second subgroup is Kordofan Nubian, spoken in the Nuba Mountains. It consists of a number of dialects. It is also referred to as Ajar language.<sup>7</sup> The dialects include Ghulfan, Dilling, Karko, Tabaq, Kadaru, Al-Hugeirat, Dair, Wali, Kasha, Kujurja, Fanda, Abu Jinuk, Kudur, Kururu, Dabatna and Debri.<sup>8</sup> In this paper, data are provided from Tabaq and Ghulfan. The extinct language of Jebel Haraza was not spoken in the Nuba Mountains but 300 km west of Khartoum. Despite its proximity to the Nile it is considered to be more closely related to the Kordofan Nubian languages than to the Nile Nubian languages. Haraza data are not included in this paper because they comprise only about 30 lexical items.

3 JAKOBI, "The Loss of Syllable-Final Proto-Nubian Consonants."

4 GREENBERG, *The Languages of Africa*.

5 RILLY, *Le Méroïtique et sa famille linguistique*, p. 401.

6 BECHHAUS-GERST, *The (Hi)story of Nobiin*.

7 THELWALL, "The Linguistic Settlement of the Nuba Mountains," p. 221.

8 JAKOBI, *Kordofan Nubian*.

The third subgroup is Darfur Nubian spoken in the Darfur region. It comprises Midob and Birgid. Birgid is considered to be a nearly extinct language and is poorly documented. In fact, the only published studies are MacMichael's and Thelwall's Birgid vocabulary of 1918 and 1977, respectively. So this is the reason why examples of Birgid NPs are mostly unavailable.

### 2.1 Data sources

All examples and data used in this comparative study have been taken from published and unpublished sources. The Dongolawi data are taken from Armbruster<sup>9</sup> and Satti,<sup>10</sup> the Nubian data are from Ayoub,<sup>11</sup> the Nobiin data are from Werner<sup>12</sup> and Mohamoud,<sup>13</sup> the Midob data are from Werner,<sup>14</sup> Alamin,<sup>15</sup> Thelwall,<sup>16</sup> and an unpublished manuscript prepared by Werner on Midob sentences.<sup>17</sup> The Kenzi data is from Abdel-Hafiz.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the Kordofan data are taken from unpublished sources and ongoing research from Williams and Comfort (Ghulfan documentation project), and Hellwig and Schneider-Blum (a documentation project on Tabaq). The paper focuses on NPs in the modern Nubian languages. Thus, Old Nubian NP constructions are not considered.

### 2.2 The aim of this study

The study aims at moving a step ahead in the description and the analysis of the internal structure of the NPs in the Nubian languages. The main research questions of this study are: 1) how are the modifiers distributed in relation to the head noun and in relation to each other and 2) is there number agreement between the head noun and its modifiers? The outcome is to set out rules for Nubian NP constructions from a synchronic point of view as well as setting rules for Proto-Nubian NP constructions. The outcome of this paper is a reconstruction of the Proto-Nubian NP constituent order at a syntactic level.

### 2.3 Method of data analysis

The NP constructions are compared throughout the paper in the various Nubian languages in respect to the order of constituents in a NP. This method helps to find out about common constituent or-

9 ARMBRUSTER, *Dongolese Nubian: A Grammar*.

10 SATTI, *Grammatical Analysis of Dongolese Phrases and Clauses*.

11 AYOUB, *The Verbal System in a Dialect of Nubian*.

12 WERNER, *Grammatik des Nobiin*.

13 MOHAMOUD, "Grammatical Properties of Nouns and Adjectives in Nobiin."

14 WERNER, *Tidn-aal*.

15 ALAMIN, "Midob Nominal Structure."

16 THELWALL, "Midob Nubian."

17 Werner, ms.

18 ABDEL-HAFIZ, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian*.

der patterns and about deviations from these common patterns. The findings from this simple comparison allows us to assume that the common constituent order patterns attested in all Nubian can be of great help in reconstruction of the Proto-Nubian language.

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#### 2.4 Some typological features of the modern Nubian Languages

This paragraph shows some common typological characteristics of the modern Nubian languages. *sov* is the basic word order in all Nubian languages. A tonal system has been found in Mahas,<sup>19</sup> Dongolese,<sup>20</sup> Kordofan Nubian,<sup>21</sup> and in Midob,<sup>22</sup> whereas stress is found in Kenzi.<sup>23</sup> As for number marking on nouns, the Nubian languages have different systems. While the Nile Nubian languages and Midob employ plural suffixes, Birgid and Kordofan Nubian have a more complex number marking system, involving singular and/or plural suffixes. There is no grammatical gender distinction. The Nubian languages are characterized by postpositions rather than prepositions. The case markers, for example, are postpositions that are placed at the end of the NP, as can be seen in the examples below.

### 3. The internal structure of the NP

It is worth mentioning here that there are basically two types of NPs in Nubian: a) NPs consisting of a noun with or without nominal modifiers, as shown in section 3.2 and b) NPs consisting of a single person pronoun, determiner or even a single quantifier which cannot take any nominal modifiers, as illustrated in section 3.1.<sup>24</sup>

#### 3.1 NPs represented by a person pronoun, determiner or quantifier

1	əy	na	say-re	kəl-m
Midob	1SG	3SG	morning-LOC	see-PST.3SG
	‘I saw him in the morning’ <sup>25</sup>			
2	suttee		tek-ki	wart-a
Dongolawi	quickly		3SG-ACC	cut-let
	‘let him cut (it) quickly’ <sup>26</sup>			

19 BELL, “The Tone System of Mahas Nubian.”

20 SATTI, *Grammatical Analysis of Dongolese Phrases and Clauses*.

21 JAKOBI, *Kordofan Nubian*.

22 WERNER, *Tidn-aal*.

23 ABDEL-HAFIZ, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian*, p. 21.

24 Abbreviations: 1 - first person; 2 - second person; 3 - third person; ACC - accusative; CAUS - causative; DET - determiner; GEN - genitive; IMP - imperative; INS - instrumental; LOC - locative; NP - noun phrase; PL - plural; PN - Proto-Nubian; PRED - predicate; PROSP - prospective; PRS - present; PST - past; SG - singular.

25 WERNER, ms.

26 SATTI, *Grammatical Analysis of Dongolese Phrases and Clauses*. p. 91.

Examples 1 and 2 represent a type of NP that presents personal pronouns (1SG and 3SG) only without any modifiers. This type of NP is referred to as a minimal NP, i.e. a simple NP. It fills the slot and takes the place of the NP that contains a noun plus other modifiers. Other examples of the single NP in Nubian languages are shown in examples 3-5, where the determiners can fill the slot of an NP by themselves without any modifiers. This case occurs when the determiners are used elliptically.

in	nal-s-u	3
DET	see-PST-3SG	Kenzi
	'this (one) did see [him/her]' <sup>27</sup>	

in-gi	sunde	4
DET-ACC	smell.IMP.2SG	Dongolawi
	'smell this' <sup>28</sup>	

an-e		5
DET-bound morpheme		Midob
	'that one' <sup>29</sup>	

The bound morpheme -e in example 5 above is added to the determiners when it is used independently.<sup>30</sup>

Quantifiers can be used independently and in this case, they can represent a simple NP, as shown in (6) and (7).

malle	taa-s-a	6
all	come-PST-3PL	Kenzi
	'all came' <sup>31</sup>	

weeri	taa-s-a	7
some	come-PST-3PL	Kenzi
	'some came' <sup>32</sup>	

### 3.2 NPs represented by a noun with or without modifiers

The second type of Nubian NP involves a noun with or without nominal modifiers. These modifiers can involve possessive adjectives, determiners, adjectives, numerals, quantifiers and another noun in a genitive construction.

27 ABDEL-HAFIZ, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian*, p. 206.

28 JAKOBI & EL-GUZUULI, "Perception Verbs and their Semantics in Dongolawi," p. 208.

29 WERNER, *Tidn-aal*, p. 38.

30 WERNER, *Tidn-aal*.

31 ABDEL-HAFIZ, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian*, p. 210.

32 Ibid.

The following examples show the NPs that appear as a single noun without modifiers, irrespective of their syntactic function as a subject or an object. The single NPs below are underlined.

208	8 Kenzi	<u>elum</u> crocodile 'the crocodile is at the river' <sup>33</sup>	essi-r river-LOC	da exist.3SG
	9 Dongolawi	<u>aru</u> rain 'rain is about to cause that wall fall down' <sup>34</sup>	man DET	katre-gi wall-ACC
	10 Nobiin	<u>Nura</u> Nura 'Nura hit the drum' <sup>35</sup>	taar-ka drum-ACC	nall-o(n) hit-PST-3SG
	11 Ghulfan	<u>tono</u> boy 'the boy is burning the wood' <sup>36</sup>	or-gi wood-ACC	lil-iŋ burn-PRS.3SG
	12 Midob	əi 1SG	<u>əəci</u> water	tiiwa drink.1SG 'I drink water' <sup>37</sup>

### 3.2.1 Possessive adjective + noun

Nubian possessive adjectives are derived from the personal pronouns by adding the genitive linker -n, as shown in table 1.<sup>38</sup>

Table 1. Nubian possessive adjectives

	Kenzi/ Dongolawi	Nobiin	Kordofan Nubian/ Tabaq	Darfur Nubian/ Midob
1SG	an/ann	ayiin	an	əən
2SG	en/enn	iriin	ʊn	nan
3SG	tɛn/tɛnn	tariin	tɛn/tan	nan
1PL	an/ann	uuiin	ʊn	aŋan (incl.)/ adin (excl.)
2PL	in/inn	uriin	wun	uŋun
3PL	tin/tinn	teriin	tɪn	aŋŋan

33 ABDEL-HAFIZ, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian*, p. 204.

34 JAKOBI & EL-GUZUULI, "Perception Verbs and their Semantics in Dongolawi," p. 196.

35 MOHAMOUD, "Grammatical Properties of Nouns and Adjectives in Nobiin," p. 175.

36 Williams & Comfort, p.c.

37 THELWALL, "Midob Nubian," p. 109.

38 Kenzi data are from ABDEL-HAFIZ, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian*, p. 82; Dongolawi data are from ARMBRUSTER, *Dongolese Nubian: A Grammar*, p. 172; Nobiin data are from Werner 1978, p. 118; Tabaq data are from Hellwig and Schneider-Blum, p.c.; and Midob data are from Thelwall 1983, p. 107.

In table 1, the possessive adjectives in Kenzi and Dongolawi seem to have two forms in each case. This is phonologically conditioned. The possessive adjectives with a single *n* are used when the following noun starts with a consonant as in examples 13–15 below, whereas the other possessive adjectives with double *nn* are used when the following noun starts with a vowel as in 16–18. Notice that the nasal *n* of the possessive adjective in example 13 is assimilated to the labial stop /*b*/ of the following noun, and then the nasal is realized as labial *m*.<sup>39</sup>

am	bes	13
1SG.GEN	brother	Kenzi
'my brother' <sup>40</sup>		
tɛn	dung(i)	14
3SG.GEN	money	Dongolawi
'his/her money' <sup>41</sup>		
an	daa-n-di	15
1SG.GEN	home-GEN-appertaining.to	Dongolawi
'[the language] of my home/our home' <sup>42</sup>		
ann	id	16
1SG.GEN	husband	Kenzi
'my husband' <sup>43</sup>		
ann	ossi	17
1SG.GEN	leg	Dongolawi
'my leg' <sup>44</sup>		
tɛnn	ed	18
3SG.GEN	tongue	Dongolawi
'his tongue' <sup>45</sup>		

Midob in table 1 has a distinction with regard to the 1PL. On the one hand, it has an inclusive possessive adjective *aŋan* which includes both the speaker and the listener. On the other hand, it has an exclusive possessive adjective *adin*, which excludes the listener. Midob is the only Nubian language that has this distinction for 1PL.

39 ABDEL-HAFIZ, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian*, p. 35.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 83

41 ARMBRUSTER, *Dongolese Nubian: A Grammar*, p. 172.

42 JAKOBI & EL-GUZUULI, "Perception Verbs and their Semantics in Dongolawi," p. 193.

43 ABDEL-HAFIZ, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian*, p. 83.

44 ARMBRUSTER, *Dongolese Nubian: A Grammar*, p. 172.

45 SATTI, *Grammatical Analysis of Dongolese Phrases and Clauses*, p. 74.



The examples above show the position of possessive adjectives in the NP. They are always placed before the head noun. Other Nubian languages also display the same constituents order for possessive adjectives that precede the head nouns in the NP as shown in 19–21.

210	19 Nobiin	ayiin 1SG.GEN 'my house' <sup>46</sup>	noog house
	20 Tabaq	an 1SG.GEN 'my goat' <sup>47</sup>	uudo goat
	21 Midob	əən 1SG.GEN 'my house' <sup>48</sup>	əd house

The rule for the above examples is **personal pronoun + genitive linker -n + noun**. Across the Nubian languages, the possessor is consistently marked by the genitive linker and it precedes the possessed. Therefore, we can assume that the same is true for Proto-Nubian: **\*personal pronoun + genitive linker -n + noun**.

It has been found in the Nobiin data that it is also possible for the possessive adjective to follow the head noun in the NP, as shown in example 22.

22	Nobiin	noog house 'my house' <sup>49</sup>	anni 1SG.GEN
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Moreover, in Nobiin there is number agreement between the possessive adjective and the head noun. Compare example 22 above with example 23 below.

23	Nobiin	noog-ri house-PL 'my houses' <sup>50</sup>	anni-ri 1SG.GEN-PL
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### 3.2.2 Determiner + noun

#### 3.2.2a Determiners in the Nubian languages

46 Werner, *Grammatik des Nobiin*, p. 118.

47 Hellwig & Schneider-Blum, p.c.

48 WERNER, *Tidn-aal*, p. 37.

49 MOHAMOUD, "Grammatical Properties of Nouns and Adjectives in Nobiin," p. 180.

50 Ibid.

	Kenzi/ Dongolawi	Nobiin	Kordofan Nubian/ Tabaq	Darfur Nubian/ Midob
this	in	in	iŋ	nen
these	in-gu	in-gu	ɛnɛ	neen
that	man	man	waŋ	an
those	man-gu	man-gu	wanɛ	aan

Table 2. Nubian determiners

In Nubian, determiners precede the head noun in an NP, as seen in the following examples.

in	id	24	
DET.SG	man	Kenzi	
‘this man’ <sup>51</sup>			
in	essi	25	
DET.SG	water	Dongolawi	
‘this water’ <sup>52</sup>			
in	buru	26	
DET.SG	girl	Nobiin	
‘this girl’ <sup>53</sup>			
iŋ	dul	27	
DET.SG	granary	Tabaq	
‘this granary’ <sup>54</sup>			
ŋo	moz	wajat-iŋ	28
DET.SG	banana	rotten-PRS.3SG	Gulfan
‘this banana is rotten’ <sup>55</sup>			

The rule is NP → **determiner** + **noun**. This rule suggests a similar syntactic pattern in Proto-Nubian: \*NP → **determiner** + **noun**.

### 3.2.2b Noun + determiner

It is noticeable that there is no number agreement between the head noun and the determiner in Nubian as shown in examples 29–31. However, the Nubian determiner can be inflected for number when it is used elliptically or in a predicate position only as in example 32.

51 ABDEL-HAFIZ, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian*, p. 206.

52 SATTI, *Grammatical Analysis of Dongolese Phrases and Clauses*, p. 74.

53 MOHAMOUD, “Grammatical Properties of Nouns and Adjectives in Nobiin,” p. 180.

54 Hellwig & Schneider-Blum, p.c.

55 Williams & Comfort, p.c.

	29	in	wel-i	mushindili	
	Dongolawi	DET.SG	dog-PL	ugly	
		'these ugly dogs' <sup>56</sup>			
	30	in	burw-i		
212	Nobiin	DET.SG	girl-PL		
		'these girls' <sup>57</sup>			
	31	nen	ir-eti		
	Midob	DET.SG	man-PL		
		'these people' <sup>58</sup>			
	32	in-gu	Nuba	amena	
	Nobiin	DET-PL	Nubians	PRED.3PL	
		'these are Nubians' <sup>59</sup>			

### 3.2.3 Noun + adjective

In Nubian, adjectives always occur after the head noun they modify. Examples are:

	33	id	adel	
	Kenzi	man	good	
		'the good man' <sup>60</sup>		
	34	buru	ashri	
	Nobiin	girl	beautiful	
		'a beautiful girl' <sup>61</sup>		
	35	birε-tu	ʃer-du	
	Ghulfan	worm-SG	short-SG	
		'short worm' <sup>62</sup>		
	36	ir	dujur	
	Midob	man	blind	
		'a blind man' <sup>63</sup>		

The rule is **NP** → **noun + adjective**. Accordingly, we can assume that this was also the case in PN: **\*NP** → **noun + adjective**.

56 SATTI, *Grammatical Analysis of Dongolese Phrases and Clauses*, p. 110.

57 MOHAMOUD, "Grammatical Properties of Nouns and Adjectives in Nobiin," p. 180.

58 ALAMIN, "Midob Nominal Structure," p. 53.

59 MOHAMOUD, "Grammatical Properties of Nouns and Adjectives in Nobiin," p. 181.

60 ABDEL-HAFIZ, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian*, p. 207.

61 MOHAMOUD, "Grammatical Properties of Nouns and Adjectives in Nobiin," p. 180.

62 Williams & Comfort, p.c.

63 Werner, ms.

It has been found in the data that this rule does not apply in Midob. The adjective in Midob precedes the head noun. The rule is **NP** → **determiner + adjective + noun**. This order of NP as consisting of determiner + adjective + noun in Midob is unusual in comparison to the common noun + adjective order but it has been found in Midob in a number of examples; compare example 65 below.

nen	tiinin	əcci	37
DET.SG	dead	donkey	Midob
‘this dead donkey’ <sup>64</sup>			

nen	imannir	iddi	38
DET.SG	young	man	Midob
‘this young man’ <sup>65</sup>			

### 3.2.4 Noun + numeral

Numerals in Nubian follow the head noun. Consider the following examples.

kitab	wər	39
book	one	Dongolawi
‘one book’ <sup>66</sup>		

kaj	wee	40
donkey	one	Nobiin
‘one donkey’ <sup>67</sup>		

idu	bəra	41
person	one	Tabaq
‘one person’ <sup>68</sup>		

ir	parci	42
man/person	one	Midob
‘one man/person’ <sup>69</sup>		

The rule for this NP construction is: **NP** → **noun + numeral**. The same constituent order can be true for PN: **\*NP** → **noun + numeral**.

When the numeral refers to several entities the head noun is not marked for plural, as illustrated in examples 43–8.

64 WERNER, *Tidn-aal*, p. 72.

65 Ibid.

66 ARMBRUSTER, *Dongolese Nubian: A Grammar*, p. 179.

67 AYOUB, *The Verbal System in a Dialect of Nubian*, p. 37.

68 Hellwig & Schneider-Blum, p.c.

69 Werner, ms.

	43	id	owwi	
	Kenzi	man	two	
		'two men' <sup>70</sup>		
214	44	kaj	uwwo	
	Nobiin	donkey	two	
		'two donkeys' <sup>71</sup>		
	45	id	kemso	ka-s-a
	Nobiin	man.SG	four	come.PL-PST-3PL
		'four men came' <sup>72</sup>		
	46	ʊdʊ	kimij	kɔɔ
	Tabaq	month	four	HAVE.3SG
		's/he has four months' <sup>73</sup>		
	47	urgj	əddi	
	Midob	shoulder	two	
		'the two shoulders' <sup>74</sup>		
	48	nen	kuud	əddi
	Midob	DET.SG	ox	two
		'these two oxen' <sup>75</sup>		

### 3.2.5 Noun + quantifier

Nubian quantifiers occur after the head noun they modify. The examples are:

	49	burw-i	digri
	Kenzi	girl-PL	many
		'many girls' <sup>76</sup>	
	50	wel-i	weer
	Dongolawi	dog-PL	some
		'some dogs' <sup>77</sup>	

70 ABDEL-HAFIZ, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian*, p. 209.

71 AYOUB, *The Verbal System in a Dialect of Nubian*, p. 37.

72 MOHAMOUD, "Grammatical Properties of Nouns and Adjectives in Nobiin," p. 181.

73 Hellwig & Schneider-Blum, p.c.

74 WERNER, *Tidn-aal*, p. 138.

75 Werner, ms.

76 ABDEL-HAFIZ, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian*, p. 210.

77 SATTI, *Grammatical Analysis of Dongolese Phrases and Clauses*, p. 110.

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kiira	taani	kutεε	fıındin	51	
kujuur	Tabaq.people	all	tell	Tabaq	
'then the kujuur would tell all the people' <sup>78</sup>					
ir	pocici			52	
man	all			Midob	215
'all men/people' <sup>79</sup>					
uud	poccici-r			53	
day	every-LOC			Midob	
'every day' <sup>80</sup>					

The rule is **NP** → **noun + quantifier**. The data at hand show that the quantifiers in Nubian always follow the head noun. Therefore, we may assume that the syntactic pattern of this construction in PN is **\*NP** → **noun + quantifier**.

3.2.6 *Genitive construction: noun + genitive linker + noun*

Concerning the genitive, Nubian always employs the genitive linker -n. It links two nouns by -n, the first noun having the role of possessor and the second one having the role of possessed. Thus, the genitive in Nubian precedes the head noun of the NP. The examples are:

een-n	agil	54	
woman-GEN	mouth	Kenzi	
'the woman's mouth' <sup>81</sup>			
illee-n	urti	55	
wheat-GEN	flour	Nobiin	
'wheat flour' <sup>82</sup>			
afa-n	ildu	56	
father-GEN	wife	Tabaq	
'father's wife' (i.e. mother's co-wife) <sup>83</sup>			
əd-n	ardi	57	
house-GEN	friend	Midob	
'friend of the house' <sup>84</sup>			

78 Hellwig & Schneider-Blum, p.c.

79 ALAMIN, "Midob Nominal Structure," p. 53.

80 WERNER, *Tidn-aal*, p. 117.

81 ABDEL-HAFIZ, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian*, p. 205.

82 AYOUB, *The Verbal System in a Dialect of Nubian*, p. 201.

83 Hellwig & Schneider-Blum, p.c.

84 WERNER, *Tidn-aal*, p. 82.

58	aale-n	ur
Birgid	rain-GEN	head
	'sky' <sup>85</sup>	

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The rule is **NP** → **possessor + genitive linker + possessed**. The PN reconstruction for this construction would be \***NP** → **possessor + genitive linker + possessed**.

#### 4. Complex NP constructions

The Nubian NPs can be complex when they consist of more than one modifier, as illustrated in the examples below.

59	id	doro	gele	kemis
Kenzi	man	fat	red	four
	'four fat red men' <sup>86</sup>			

The rule is **NP** → **noun + adjective of size + adjective of color + numeral**

60	wel	mushindili	owwi
Dongolawi	dog	ugly	two
	'two ugly dogs' <sup>87</sup>		

The rule is **NP** → **noun + adjective + numeral**.

61	in	hage-gi	wart-e
Dongolawi	DET.SG	maize-ACC	cut-IMP.2SG
	'please cut this maize' <sup>88</sup>		

The rule is **NP** → **determiner + noun + case marker**.

62	buru	geele-gi	nall-e
Dongolawi	girl	red-ACC	look.at-IMP.2SG
	'please look at the red girl' <sup>89</sup>		

The rule is **NP** → **noun + adjective + case marker**.

85 THELWALL, "A Birgid Vocabulary List and its Links with Daju," p. 205.

86 ABDEL-HAFIZ, *A Reference Grammar of Kunuz Nubian*, p. 209.

87 SATTI, *Grammatical Analysis of Dongolese Phrases and Clauses*, p. 110.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 71.

ay	wilid	kuduud	uus-ka	nas-s	63
1SG	boy	little	bad-ACC	see-PST.1SG	Nobiin
'I saw the bad little boy' <sup>90</sup>					

The rule is **NP** → **noun + adjective of size + adjective of quality + case marker**

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ενε	Jaaldɔ	wate	urɔ	kenre	64
DET.SG	house.SG	big	two	are.nice	Tabaq
'these two big houses are nice' <sup>91</sup>					

The rule is **NP** → **determiner + noun + adjective of size + number**.

aanyir	keel	keeci-re	əd	konnyiyum	65
people	red	grass-INS	house	build.PRS.3PL	Midob
'people build the house with red grass' <sup>92</sup>					

The rule is **NP** → **adjective + noun + case marker**.

According to the complex construction of NPs in Nubian, there is some evidence that adjectival modifiers expressing size precede adjectival modifiers expressing quality or color; see examples 59 and 63. Moreover, numerals always occur at the end of the NP as in examples 59, 63, and 64. Concerning the syntactic functions of NPs, they are marked by the accusative -gi in example 62 or the instrumental -re, as in example 65. The case marker attaches at the last element of the NP. It positions at the end of the whole NP, i.e. at the last element of the NP as shown in examples 61–3.

## 5. Conclusion

The paper concludes with the following findings about the Nubian NP construction. Nubian NPs may be simple or complex. They are simple when they are represented by a single person pronoun, determiner or quantifier. These simple NPs cannot be modified. By contrast, complex NPs contain a head noun that can be modified by possessive adjectives, determiners, adjectives, numerals, quantifiers and another noun in a genitive construction. The classification of Nubian NPs depends on the position of the head noun in an NP construction. Thus, the NPs in Nubian languages are classified as having both pre-modifiers and post-modifiers; the pre-modifiers<sup>93</sup> include possessive adjectives and determiners, while the post-

90 AYOUN, *The Verbal System in a Dialect of Nubian*, p. 25.

91 Hellwig & Schneider-Blum, p.c.

92 Werner, ms.

93 PAYNE, "Noun Phrases."



modifiers comprise adjectives, numerals and quantifiers. There are very few variations in the NP constituents' order in the Nubian languages. The only deviation from the common constituent order is attested in Midob. In this language the adjective precedes the noun rather than having the order noun + adjective, as is common in the other Nubian languages.

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