

ON EFIK NOUNS.

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates nouns, and other constructions with nouns as heads (noun phrases) in Efik, using the framework of one of the modules of universal grammar, Binding Theory (BT). It examines among other things, the grammatical properties of nouns, their various projections and application to BT in the language. The study discovers that pronominal elements and referential expressions are free in their respective governing categories, in relation to the Binding of NP structures in Efik.

KEY WORDS: Binding, Government, Grammar, Noun and Noun Phrase

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Ordinarily, a noun is the name of a person, place or thing. Technically, a noun is said to be a class of lexical item whose membership denotes persons, places and things (Lyons 1968:317). Robins (1989:264) says that nouns are used to refer to discrete things, persons and abstractions. Crystal (1992:273) views a noun as a word class traditionally defined as a name of a person, place or thing, and described linguistically in terms of grammatical properties. He further argues that these grammatical properties include a noun's ability to act as subject or object of a clause (or sentence) and can be analysed in terms of number, gender, case and countability.

On the basis of the above descriptions of nouns, some analytical assumptions can be made, that is, a noun is a grammatical category that names a person, place, thing, and other abstract notions, and can act as the subject or object of a verb or object of a preposition, and can also be used to bear some grammatical categories. Robins (1989:214) identifies nouns as open class membership since they are in principle unlimited, varying from time to time between one speaker and another. This is more so because nouns accommodate more loaned words and newly created ones, in contrast to the closed membership which contain fixed and usually small number of member words, which are the same for all the speakers of a language or dialect, and do not add or lose membership without a structural alteration in the grammar of the

language as a whole. Members of the closed class include pronouns, propositions, and conjunctions, while the open class membership has in addition to nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives.

The following abbreviations have been employed in our analyses, and need to be interpreted for easy comprehension. A (Adjective), A – Position (Argument-Position), AP (Adjectival Phrase), BT (Binding Theory), N (Noun) N-bar (Noun – Bar), NP (Noun Phrase), NPS (Noun Phrases) O (Object), P (Preposition), PP (Prepositional Phrase), R-expression (Referential expression), S (Sentence) V (Verb) and VP (Verb Phrase). In what follows we will examine the grammatical properties of Efik nouns.

2.0 THE GRAMMATICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF EFIK NOUNS

Nouns in Efik can perform some grammatical functions. Essien (1990:30) submits that a noun or a nominal expression can be identified in a sentence if it can be given as an answer to a question containing words such as:

1. (a) Ànié ówò? – 'who or which person?'
- (b) Nsò ñkpò? – 'what or which thing?'

This evidence can be observed in the following sentences!

2. (a) *Ànlé ówò íwèd ñkpó?* - 'who is writing?'
 (b) *Ekaete éwèd ñkpó* - 'Ekaete is writing?'

Because *Ekaete* in 2(b) can be used to answer the *ànlé* type of question in 2(a), it is said to be a noun.

From our investigation, a noun can occur as the subject of a verb. The subject has to agree in number and in person with the verbal element.

3. *Effiong ké ànám útóm* - 'Effiong is working.'

4. *Úfòk-ñwèd ásùaná* - 'The school is over'.
 From the perspective of traditional grammar, *Effiong* and *Úfòk-ñwèd* are the subjects in sentences (3) and (4) respectively. When a subject has been satisfactorily defined in a sentence, predicate may be used to refer to the rest of the sentence. In Efik, the identification of the subject elements in the sentence is through word order, which is a relevant factor, and the concord between the noun and the verb is much more in evidence:

5. (a) *Ènyé ké ádiä ñkpó* - 'He is eating'
 (b) *Ñnyìn ké ì-diä ñkpó* - 'We are is eating'
 (c) *Mmò ké é-diä ñkpó* - 'They are is eating'

The person involved predicts the subject concord marker that will harmonise the noun with the verb. While the third person singular selects /á-/, the first and the third person plural take /i-/ and /é-/ morphemes respectively to qualify the verb *dia* 'eat'. This state of affairs confirms Essien's (1974:43) observation that the concord between the subject and verb in Efik can trigger phonological and tonal details, for instance, the first person prefix is always a nasal, and bears a high tone, the first person plural is always /i-/, and the tone on it is usually low. The second and the third persons singular carry low tone and high or falling tone respectively, while the second person plural prefix /é-/ has a how tone. The third person singular prefix /é-/ bears a low or falling tone. Essien (1974) also says that some of the auxiliary elements, like the past tense marker /-má-/, can equally show the concord between the subject and the verb:

6. *Ñnyìn imaika nwèd mfin* - 'we had gone to school today'.

7. *Ènyé á-má-á-ka nwèd mfin* - 'He/she had gone to school today'

Observe the alteration of the prefixes with the root vowels in indicating the first person plural and the third person singular /i-/ and /a-/ as used in examples (6) and (7) respectively.

Efik nouns can also occur as the object of a verb. The object can be defined by reference to word order:

8. *Bassey éyèt ùsàn* - 'Bassey is washing a plate'

In (8), *usan* 'plate', which occupies a post-verbal position will be classified as the object of the verb *yèt* 'to wash'. Efik nouns can also act as objects of prepositions depending on the word order of the sentences.

9. *Asari étìé ké ífúm* - 'Asari is sitting on a stool'.

Ifúm 'stool' has been identified as the object in (9). It is preceded by a preposition *ke* 'on', hence, it is said to be the object of the preposition. In immediate constituent terms, the major division is found to fall between the subject noun and the verb, with object noun. Word order, the overt grammatical relations referred to above is important not so much for itself as for its serving as the mark of syntactic relationships within constructions. Robins (1989:224) maintains that sometimes, word classes may be in part defined by prepositional criteria relative to other words, as in the case with prepositions, but even so, the syntactic relevance of their position lies in their obligatory occupancy of it when forming part of a particular syntactic structure. Our study has also revealed that the normal word order in Efik is the subject - verb - object (SVO) principle. This implies that a simple sentence in Efik requires the occurrence of a subject (usually a noun), a verb and an object. Though it is fallacious to say that all proper sentences in the language must be of this type.

Phonologically, most Efik nouns begin with either vowel sounds or syllabic nasal sounds:

- | | | | |
|---------|--------------|---|----------|
| 10. (a) | <i>ófòn</i> | - | 'cloth' |
| (b) | <i>ñwèd</i> | - | 'book' |
| (c) | <i>íkán</i> | - | 'fire' |
| (d) | <i>áràn</i> | - | 'oil' |
| (e) | <i>mbóró</i> | - | 'banana' |

However, there are few exceptions, most coined or borrowed nouns may begin with consonant sounds:

- | | | | |
|---------|--------------|---|-------------|
| 11. (a) | <i>tíán</i> | - | 'zinc' |
| (b) | <i>sùóp</i> | - | 'soap' |
| (c) | <i>bábru</i> | - | 'newspaper' |

- (d) síód - 'shirt'
 (e) tíandè - 'candle'

There are other nouns of Efik origin that begin with consonant sounds, and need not be borrowed or coined (cf Essien 1974).

12. (a) bia - 'yam'
 (b) sókòrò - 'orange'
 (c) túébé - 'cold'
 (d) kòkó - 'namesake'
 (e) dá - 'pal'

Morphologically, Efik nouns can be inflected to mark number:

13. **Singular plural**
 óbón mbón 'king'
 àkpàráwà mkpàráwà 'youth(male)'
 éyén nditò 'child'
 ídém ndém 'god'

Essien (1990:132) submits that such nouns alternate the vowel prefix with syllabic nasals to indicate plurality.

Nouns in Efik can also be derived from verbs as our findings can reveal:

14. **Verb Noun**
 (a) kéré - 'think' ékikéré 'thought'
 (b) diá - 'eat' ùdiá 'food'
 (c) brè - 'play' mbrè 'masquerade'
 (d) wèd - 'write' ñwèd 'book'
 (e) kpá - 'die' mkpá 'death'

This process involves the prefixation of syllabic nasal sounds and vowel sounds to the verbal element to create a new word class, noun. Compound words in Efik are as a result of concatenation of nouns, which are lexicalised to somewhat different constructions. The following types of compounding are found in Efik: N+N, V+N and A+N:

15. **Noun + Noun**
 (a) énan - úkwák cattle + iron
 = 'bicycle'
 (b) úfòk - ìbòk house + medicine
 = 'hospital'
 (c) èká - èká mother + mother
 = 'grandmother'
16. **Verb + Noun**
 (a) Bò-mí nò-kó take here + give
 there = 'messenger'
 (b) Kèn-ínúá report + month
 = 'gossip'
 (c) tát-ényin open + eye
 = 'enlightenment'

17. **Adjective + Noun**
 Ósón - ényin strong + eye = 'Insulting'
 Ósón - ìbùòt strong + head = 'stubborn'
 èlit - útón stiff + ear = 'disobedience'

Most animals of the mammalian species characteristically begin with the sound /e-/ in Efik (cf Essien 1990):

18. (a) ébót - 'goat'
 (b) énan - 'cow/cattle'
 (c) éròn - 'sheep'
 (d) ébòk - 'monkey'
 (e) ébúá - 'dog'.

Syntactically, Efik nouns can occur with constituents known as nominal modifiers. The modifiers limit a particular noun to a definite entity and form a major category called the Noun phrase (NP).

19. Áfiá éyèn órò ákpá - 'The fair complexioned child is dead.'

The NP in (19) has an adjectival modifier *áfiá* 'fair-complexioned', a noun *éyèn* 'child' and a determiner *oro* 'the', which also modifies the N. Efik nouns can also be modified by PP, as a complement and adjunct, which denote grammatical functions as could be revealed from our investigation:

20. Óbón ké Bakassi - A king in Bakassi.
 In (20), the PP *ke Bakassi* 'in Bakassi' is the complement of the N *obon* 'king', because it tells us where the individual concerned is king. The adjunct also serves as a nominal modifier in Efik:

21. Éyèn úfòk-nwèd yé anyàn idèt - 'A student with long hairs'.
 Here, the PP *yé anyàn idèt* 'with long hairs' modifies the noun *Éyèn úfòk-nwèd* 'student', and is said to be an adjunct, because it merely gives additional information about the student.

3.0 NOUN AND ITS PROJECTIONS IN EFIK

A projection is a constituent which is an expansion of a head word (Radford 1977:524). Earlier, we had established that Efik has a subject-verb- + object-(SVO) sentence structure, and that the NP constitutes the subject, while the VP consists of the predicate (that is, the verb and object). The head noun in Efik can be expanded into various projections. Let us consider, for instance, the NP in (22) below.

22. Ákámhá óbúbít ébót 'A big black goat'.
 This phrase is a projection of the head

noun *ébòt* 'goat'. Similarly, it can be said here that the noun *ébòt* 'goat' is projected into the NP *Ákámhá óbúbít ébòt* 'A big black goat'. What (22) tells us is that the overall phrase *Ákámhá óbúbít ébòt* 'a big black goat' is a maximum projection, and that it comprises a pre-modifying adjective, an AP, which consists of an Adjective and a noun.

The noun *ébòt* 'goat' is the head of the overall phrase, and the adjectives *ákámhá* 'big' and *óbúbít* 'black' are traditionally said to fulfil the grammatical role of being the complement of the noun *ébòt* 'goat'. The phrase in (22) can further be expanded by a continuous introduction of adjectival elements:

23. (a) *Ñkón - ñkón ákámhá óbúbít ébòt* 'The tall big black goat'.

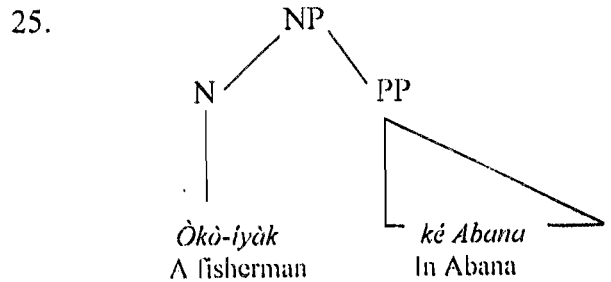
(b) *Ñkón - ñkón ákámhá ùdónó ùdónó óbúbít ébòt* 'The tall big sickly black goat'.

The post nominal PP can also expand the head noun in Efik. Let us consider the following example:

24. *Òkò-iyàk ké Abana*. 'A fisherman in Abana'

In an NP such as 24, the PP *ké Abana*. 'in Abana' expands the head N *Òkò-iyàk* 'a fisherman' into *Òkò-iyàk ké Abana* 'A fisherman in Abana'. Now, we may seem to conclude that the PP has essentially the same constituent

structure status, and thus serves to expand N into N-bar. The structure in (24) can alternatively be represented in terms of a labeled tree or phrase marker thus:

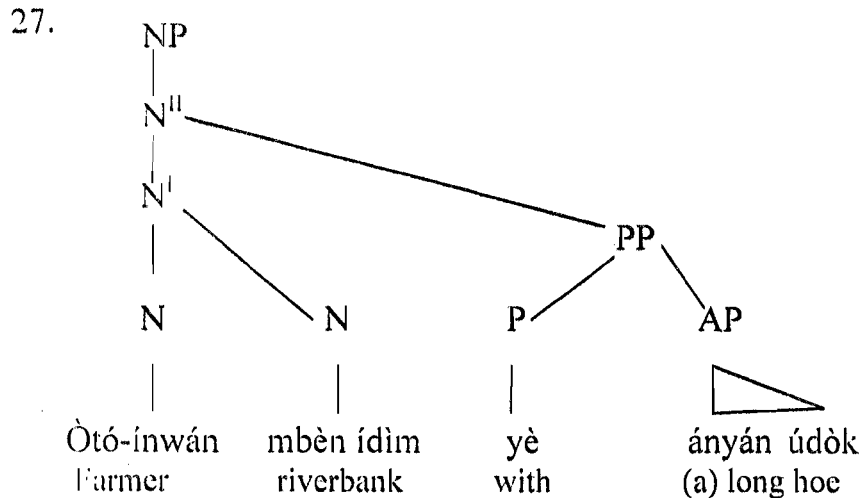


And we say that *òkò-iyàk* 'fisherman' is an N, *òkò-iyàk ké Abana*. 'A fishman in Abana' is a N-bar, where N-bar corresponds to the traditional category of NP.

Our Examination has also discovered that Efik nouns can be expanded by the Adjunct rule, which according to Radford (1988:181) states that "we can expand a N-bar into another N-bar plus a PP Adjunct. Hence, we can apply this rule to the construction below:

26. *Òtò-inwán mbèn ídìm yè ányán Údòk* - 'A riverbank farmer with a long hoe'.

This structure can be represented in a phrase marker tree in this way:



Here, the PP *yè ányán údòk* 'with a long hoe' tends to expand the head *Òtò-inwán* 'farmer', which is a N-bar, into another N-bar *mbèn ídìm* 'river bank', and into the N^{II} (N-double bar) *Òtò-inwán mbèn ídìm yè ányán údòk* 'A riverbank farmer with a long hoe'.

4.0 Efik NPs in Binding Theory (BT)

The module of universal grammar regulating the interpretation of NP is the Binding Theory. It assigns appropriate interpretation to NPs in sentences.

Let us consider carefully the following types of sentences:

28. *Etim édép óbúfa úfòk* – 'Etim has bought a new house'
 29. *Ènyé óbòń àkàm* – 'He/she is praying'
 30. *Eyo ónò ìdèm ésié únán* – 'Eyo has wounded himself'.

We wish to identify three types of NPs from the set of sentences above:

- (i) Full NP such as *Etim* in (28), which refers independently as the subject of the sentence.
 (ii) Pronoun such as *Enye* in (29) which selects a reference from the universe of discourse (Haegeman 1994) and
 (iii) Reflexive element such as *idem esie* 'himself' in (30), which is dependent on the subject NP.

According to Haegeman (1994:205), BT contains three principles each of which will regulate the distribution and interpretation of a specific type of NP. Principle A is the one that regulates the interpretation of elements, which are referentially dependent, such as reflexives.

The principle upholds that reflexive elements are linked to or bound by an NP in an A-position within a certain domain known as Binding domain. In (30), *ìdèm ésié* 'himself' must be bound to the subject NP *Eyo*. It is said to be co-referential with the subject NP *Eyo*, and must also be interpreted as dependent on the NP *Eyo*.

Principle B contains the interpretation of pronouns. Pronouns should not be linked to an NP in an A-position within the Binding domain. In this concern, we agree that while the reflexive element in (30) must be bound to the subject NP, the pronoun *enye* in (31) must also be bound by the subject NP.

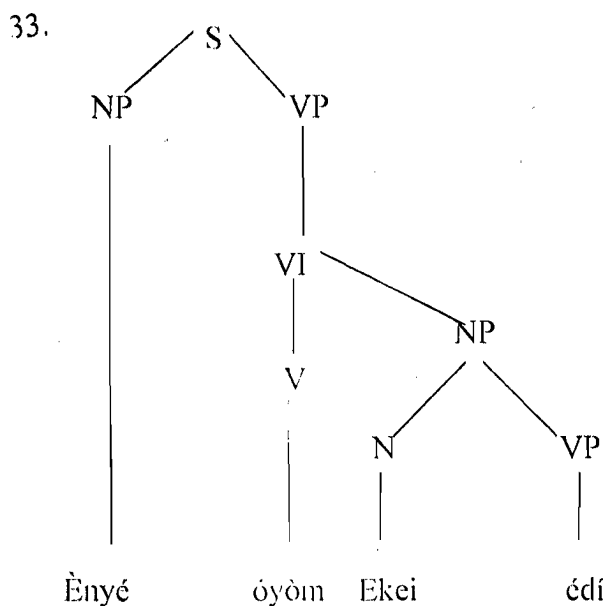
31. *Affiong áamá ènyé* – 'Affiong love her'
Enye in (31) is pronominal and is bound by *Affiong*, which is its governing category. The

interpretation of the pronoun is independent of the context. This implies that it does not refer to or dependent on the subject NP. The subject NP *Affiong* and the pronoun, *ènyé* are not co-referential. In other words, *ènyé* 'her' has no syntactic antecedent in the sentence.

Principle C determines the distribution and interpretation of referential expression (R-expression) like the NP *Etim* in (28). The principle states that referential expressions must be bound by NPs in A-position. Let us consider the example in (32):

32. *Ènyé óyòm Ekei édí* – 'He/she wants Ekei to come'.

The structure in (32) can be represented in a phrase marker thus:



From our analysis, *Ekei* cannot be interpreted as being co-referential with *enye* 'He/she'. Hudson (1990:301) says that an R-expression is free. It contains NP with head that are in some sense potentially referential. The claim therefore follows that any NP which is not covered in Principle A or B must be unbound, that is, it must have antecedent of any kind unlike personal pronoun.

5.0 CONCLUSION

In this analysis, the study reveals some peculiarities of Efik nouns, among which is that most determiners come after the noun, and that

syntactic relations hold between constituents and not individual words. These constituents are labeled in phrasal terms like NP. An anaphor such as reflexives, reciprocals and relative pronouns are bound by their respective governing category and a pronominal element and an R-expression are free in their governing category. On the whole, we can say that the noun or NP is an essential part of the sentence, and its structure is relatively complex and interwoven with other major classes or categories.

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