Noun Phrase in Mesqan

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Abstract: Mesqan is a South Ethio-Semitic tongue which is mainly worn in day-to-day message by a people of on 179,737 communities in the Gurage Zone, Ethiopia, whose linguistic skin were not well expressed. The inner aspire of this paper is to offer a complete account of noun phrase structures of the Mesqan tongue. The paper is expressive in character, as the lessons is mostly worried with telling what is really being in the tongue, and mostly relies on main linguistic facts. The linguistic facts, i.e. the elicted grammatical facts regarding noun phrases, was composed from local speakers of the tongue during 12 months of fieldwork mannered among 2011 and 2012 in four Mesqan villages and in Butajira, the managerial hub of the Mesqan Woreda. The head of a NP can be a pronoun, a noun or an adjective. The head alone can constitute a full noun phrase. Adjectives, nouns in the genitive, or relative clauses function as modifiers of head nouns. Quantifiers are numerals, unspecific quantifiers, determiners include the definite marker, demonstrative pronouns, and possessive suffixes occur in two positions to the head noun. Only the demonstrative pronouns and the number ‘one’ when used as indefinite marker occur in phrase-initial position, while all other determiners follow the head.

Keywords: quantifiers, numerals, determiners, demonstrative, suffixes, genitive, phrase, possessive, genitive

1. Introduction

The Mesqan refer to their group and home area as māsk ‘an. The term could be related to the local Māsk’ilā ʔIjūsus Church that was built in the 16th century ad (Dinbāru, et al. 1987:32; Meyer, 2007:845). Mesqan seems to have no major dialects (Getu, 2012:15), although Urib is mentioned as an assumed Mesqan variety in early descriptions (cf. Hudson, 2013:13). Genetically, Mesqan is part of Outer South Ethiosemantic, in which Hetzron (1972:6, 119) classifies it as independent sub-branch of Western Gurage, whereas Leslau (1969:152) groups it together with Dobbi and Muher (Northern Gurage). As Western and Northern Gurage share many grammatical features, Hetzron (1972:1, 8-10;

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Mesqan is spoken by about 200,000 people who mainly reside in the Gurage Zone, particularly in the Mesqan Woreda and the nearby Butajira town, which is also their administrative center (cf. Getu, 2012:13-14). Islam is the dominating religion, which also shapes the lifestyle and culture of the Mesqan.

Figure 1. Gurre Zone with Mesqan Woreda

Mesqan is easily understood by speakers of other Gurren Gurage varieties (Fekede, 2015:194-198). Most Mesqan are bilingual in Amharic, the official language in the Gurre Zone (Getu, 2012:74). Despite few literary pieces in Ajami or Fidäl (Wagner, 1983:363; Hetzron, 1968:156 fn. 4), Mesqan is not used for writing.

Early comparative works including data on Mesqan focus on the lexicon and inflectional paradigms (e.g. Cohen, 1931:216-230; Ullendorff, 1955; Leslau, 1969; 1982). Leslau (2004) describes the verb morphology of Mesqan by comparing it to other Gurage languages. A Mesqan–English vocabulary is found in Leslau (1979:751-831). Scattered information on all parts of Mesqan grammar including interlinearized text samples is found in Hetzron (1977:184-195), a preliminary grammar sketch is given in Meyer (2007). Several theses prepared at Addis Ababa University deal with specific topics of Mesqan grammar, like its phonology (Abduljebar, 1988), verb (Getu, 1989; Yitbarek, 1992; Meseret, 2012), or noun (Endale, 1986).
2. Research methodology

The study is qualitative and empirical in nature, and mainly relies on primary linguistic data. Since the researcher is not a speaker of Mesqan, native speakers of the language were consulted. The data were gathered from seven native speakers of Mesqan during 12 months of fieldwork conducted between 2010 and 2012 in Butajira, MisraqImbor, MirabImbor, MisraqMesqan and MirabMesqan. During my fieldwork, I had five male and two female language consultants whose first native language was Mesqan and who had a good knowledge of Amharic. They all were born within the speech community of Mesqan where they also obtained their primary and secondary school education. Besides their native language and Amharic, they speak English. During my fieldwork, I spent most of my time in Butajira which is the administrative center of the Mesqan Woreda, but I also undertook several shorter trips to MisraqImbor, MirabImbor, MisraqMesqan and MirabMesqan. I started my fieldwork by eliciting words and sentences. Next, I recorded free speech texts then data were transcribed, edited and translated. The presentation of the data is not based on a single linguistic model or theory, but is intentionally eclectic descriptive. I used a structural approach for identifying phonemes and morphemes. Morpho-syntactic phenomena were described on the basis of major findings in linguistics typology. Based on The Leipzig Glossing Rules, most of the data are presented in an interlinear morpheme-by-morpheme version with four lines. The first line represents the actual utterance. The second line contains underlying or hypothetical morphemes or morpheme combinations which are glossed in the third line; the fourth line is an English translation usually in a literary style.

3. Structure of the noun phrase

The basic structure (word order) of the noun phrase in Mesqan is:

\[ \text{demonstrative} - \text{quantifier} - \text{modifier} - \text{HEAD} - \text{determiner} \]

The head of a NP can be a pronoun, a noun or an adjective. The head alone can constitute a full noun phrase. Adjectives, nouns in the genitive, or relative clauses function as modifiers of head nouns. Quantifiers are numerals, unspecific quantifiers, determiners include the definite marker, demonstrative pronouns, and possessive suffixes occur in two positions to the head noun. Only the demonstrative pronouns and the number ‘one’ when used as indefinite marker occur in phrase-initial position, while all other determiners follow the head.

A demonstrative alone can function as head of a noun phrase, when it is used in its

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\[ \text{The Mesqan people consider the area containing MisraqImbor, MirabImbor, MisraqMesqan and MirabMesqan as their original place.} \]
pronominal functions, as in the following example:

(1) zi wàddàd-ā-[^m] (ziwàddàdànn.)
   PROX love.PFV-3SGM.SBJ-3SGM.OBJ
   'He loved this.'

The modifying adjective to a plural head noun can be marked (3) or unmarked (2) for plural number, without a clear difference in meaning:

(2) nà-zi nàčč'āt'e-očč (nàzinàčč'āt'ëwočč)
   ASSOC-PROX white sheep-PL
   'these whitesheep'

(3) nà-zi nàč'āčč'āt'e-očč (nàzinàč'āčč'āt'ëwočč)
   ASSOC-PROX white.PL sheep-PL
   'these whitesheep'

Even if the head noun semantically refers to more than one entity, it can occur in its unmarked general number form. Plural is then implied by context, or expressed morphologically on the verb or copula, as in the following example:

(4) zi nàggade-no (zinàggadeno.)
   PROX merchant-COP.3PL.M
   'They are these merchants.'

The head noun usually occurs in the morphologically marked plural form when it modified by a numeral above one:

(5) xʷet sàb-očč wà-r-o (xʷetsàb'očč wàro.)
   two person-PL go.PFV-3PL.M
   'Two people went (away).'

Head nouns that are modified by an unspecified quantifier may or may not be marked for plural number:

(6) bìžžā fek'= sìy-ā (bìžžāfek'=sìyā.)
   many goat buy.PFV-3SGM
   'He bought many goats.'

(7) bìžžā fek'=očč sìy-ā (bìžžāfek'=oččsìyā.)
   many goat-PL buy.PFV-3SGM
   'He bought many goats.'

When a numeral and a quantifying measure noun modify a head, the quantifying noun and the head are not marked for plural:

(8) xʷet kilo sukkar
   two kilogram sugar
   'two kilogram of sugar'
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(9) xʷet sahín zūr
  two dish seed
  ‘two dish of seeds’

In a phrase consisting of a head noun and a modifier, the definite marker is not attached to the head noun, but to the modifier, as in (10). However, the entire noun phrases – but not only the modifying noun – are in scope of the definite marker. A possessive suffix, in contrast, is attached to the head noun, as in (11):

(10) nik’-i  bet (nik’i bet)
    big-DEF   house
    ‘the big house’

(11) nik’   bet-āwta (nik’betāwta)
    big       house-POSS.3SGM
    ‘his big house’

Only when the modifier explicitly refers to an individual, the possessive suffix is attached to the modifying noun:

(12) yā-ab-ānhā  āram (yaβānhā āram)
    GEN-father-POSS.1PL cow
    ‘my father’s cow’

When the definite marker and a possessive suffix co-occur in a phrase, the definite marker is always suffixed to the modifier and the possessive suffix to the head, as in (13). The only exceptions are modifying nouns which explicitly refer to an individual. In this case the definite marker and the possessive suffix are attached to the modifier, as in (14):

(13) nik’-i  bet-āwta (nik’ibetāwta)
    big-DEF  house-POSS.3SGM
    ‘his big house’

(14) yā-ab-ānhā-y  āram (yaβānhhay āram)
    GEN-father-POSS.1PL-DEF cow
    ‘my father’s cow’

4. Coordination of noun phrases

The common coordinative conjunction in Mesqan is wa ‘and’. However, this conjunction can be replaced by the comitative marker tā-, in particular for connecting two nouns which form a semantic unit, as in the following examples:

(15) miss  tā-mīšt (misstāmišt)
    man  COM-woman
    ‘husband and wife’
It is also possible to coordinate two noun phrases by attaching the contrastive focus marker -m which has expanding/additive meaning to the first entity in an enumeration which is immediately followed by the verb xänä ‘He/It be(came).’ in the perfective aspect. Such arrangement may gather as disjunctive coordination, as in the following examples:

20) bä-säwa wussït’ bet k’urb-em xän-ä
LOC-Addis_Ababa inside house near-DIR-FOC be(come).PFV-3SGM
ärak’e c’um-u (bäśäwawussïtt’ bet k’urbemxänärük’eč’umu.)
far-DIR expensive-COP.3SGM
‘(The price of) a house in Addis Ababa is expensive be it near or (lit. and) far.’

Furthermore, it is also possible to coordinating two noun phrases by attaching the contrastive focus marker -m which has expanding/additive meaning to the first entity in an enumeration which is immediately followed by the the jussive of the verb xänä’He/It be(came).’, yäxän ‘It should be!’. Such combination may function as disjunctive coordination, as in the following examples:

21) ärša k’äl-m yä-xn-φ nïk’ jäyya-u (äršak’älimyäxünik’jäyyawu.)
farm small-FOC 3-be(come).JUS-3SGM big good-COP.3SGM
‘Farm (land) is good be it is small or big.’

In addition to the conjunction c’in ‘but’, exclusion can also be expressed by a construction in which the two coordinated NPs are connected by the subordinated negated imperfective of the verb xänä ‘He/It be(came).’ Note that in this construction the subject of the verb xänä ‘He/It be(came).’ must be co-referential with the preceding noun:

22) bä-inna bet sara t-a-t-xän-φ ali nämnä
LOC-1PL house Sara SUB-NEG-3-be(come).IPFV-SGF Ali exist.PRS.3SGM
(binna bet sarattätxännalinännä.)
‘At our house there is Ali but not Sara.’
In exclusive constructions like (22), the noun following the verb xi₃n₃ ‘He/It be(came).’ is confirmed as fulfilling the intended proposition of the speaker, while the noun preceding it does not.

5. Summary and conclusion

This chapter summarizes the findings from the previous section on the introduction and Noun Phrase of Mesqan – a language which has not been well studied previously. Thus, the major aim of this study was to present a comprehensive Noun Phrase description of this language. To this effect the study is divided into three main sections: section one is introduction which contains the people and their language, and research methodology, section two is the structure of Noun Phrase, section three is co-ordination of Noun Phrase. The basic structure (word order) of the noun phrase in Mesqan is: demonstrative - quantifier - modifier - HEAD - determiner. The head of a NP can be a pronoun, a noun or an adjective. The head alone can constitute a full noun phrase. Adjectives, nouns in the genitive, or relative clauses function as modifiers of head nouns. Quantifiers are numerals, unspecific quantifiers, determiners include the definite marker, demonstrative pronouns, and possessive suffixes occur in two positions to the head noun. Only the demonstrative pronouns and the number ‘one’ when used as indefinite marker occur in phrase-initial position, while all other determiners follow the head.

To conclude, this study provides a comprehensive description of the Noun Phrase of Mesqan. However, the study does not treat properties, types and Noun Phrase constructions in different languages – this remains a task for further research.

Abbreviations

| Abbreviation | Meaning                      |
|--------------|-----------------------------|
| 3            | Third person                |
| ASSOC        | Associative                 |
| COM          | Comitative                  |
| COP          | Copula                      |
| DEF          | Definite                    |
| DIR          | Directional                 |
| FOC          | Contrastive Focus           |
| GEN          | Genitive                    |
| IPFV         | Imperfective                |
| JUS          | Jussive                     |
| LOC          | Locative                    |
| M            | Masculine                   |
| NP           | Noun Phrase                 |
| OBJ          | Object                      |
| PFV          | Perfective                  |
| PL           | Plural                      |
| POSS         | Possessive                  |
| PROX         | Proximal                    |
| PRS          | Present                     |
| SBJ          | Subject                     |
| SG           | Singular                    |
| SUB          | Subordinating Prefix        |

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