The syntactic computation of the laali Noun phrase

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Résumé

Cet article traite de la structure interne du syntagme nominal en laali selon l'approche générative de la grammaire Chomskyenne. En tant que tel, il met l'accent sur l'un des concepts de cette grammaire, à savoir la fusion. À la lumière de l'opération de fusion, je suis principalement concerné à la fois par le Paramètre de Position du spécificateur et celui de la tête du syntagme. Il ressort de la discussion qu'en termes de Paramètre du spécificateur, le laali atteste à la fois déterminants prés nominaux et ceux apparaissant en position post nominale. En ce qui concerne le paramètre de tête, la tête nominale laali domine son complément en apparaissant en position pre-complement dans un syntagme nominal.

Mots clés : Laali, Phrase nominale, Fusion, Grammaire générative

Abstract

This article analyses the syntactic operation that govern the derivation of noun phrase in Laali[141] under Chomsky's generative approach of grammar. As such, it lays

[141] Laali is a Bantu language spoken in the South-West of Congo Brazzaville specially in Bouenza and Lekoumou regions.

emphasis on one of the steeping stones of generative grammar namely Merger. In the light of Merger operation, I am mainly concerned with both Specifier Position Parameter and Head Position Parameter. It comes out from the discussion that in terms of Specifier Parameter, Laali is both a specifier first and a specifier last language. Indeed, some of its specifiers/determiners occur in pre nominal position and others in post nominal one. As regards the Headness Parameter, Laali is a head first language as its head noun c-commands its complements.

Key words: Laali, Noun Phrase, Merger, Generative Grammar

Introduction

This paper deals with the NP Merger in Laali (B73b). Indeed, besides, Move, Merger is one the cornerstones of Chomsky's generative syntax mainly used in Minimalist Program. As a matter of fact, Merger looks at rules or constraints governing the construction/derivation of eventual structures of language (L). According to Chomsky's Generative Grammar hypothesis, "languages resemble men in this respect, that though each has peculiarities whereby it is distinguished from every other, yet all have certain qualities in common" (Chomsky, 1965:5). Consequently, this work is in the line with reinforcing Chomsky's Universal Grammar hypothesis which claims languages to share common and parametric properties. In fact, it is devoted to showing how far or near Laali is with other world languages in terms NP operation. The syntactic aspects tackled in this work include the specifier position parameter and the head position parameter. At issue are the following questions: What are the possible constraints governing NP merger in Laali? How does Laali distance itself from other Bantu languages as regards the derivation of the NP? The work is structured as follows: Section (1) deals with the overview about the NP. Section (2) looks at the NP operation in a number of Bantu languages. The NP derivation in Laali is the concern of section (3). The paper ends with a conclusion which presents its main results.

1. research methodology and theoretical framework:

To undertake this research work, we resorted to primary data, i.e. to every day occurring speech. We emerged in events wherein Laali speakers intensively use the language purely. In order not to take everything for granted, we selected a number of informants with

whom we worked permanently. These informants with a good command of Laali language, issued us with some trustful information as regards Laali structures, especially noun phrase structures. In fact, we mainly took part in Laali cultural ceremonies as well as their main traditional dances namely *Lesyawa, Mopaba, Yoro, Mobobo* in order to have trusted data. Based on Ulrike Mosel and Jost Gippert (2006), Mberi Ngakala argues the following:

> If we take a close look at why researchers and indigenous people engage in linguistic fieldwork, we can distinguish between research aims and personal motivation. In most general terms, the linguists research aim is to contribute to our scientific knowledge of the world's languages or to linguistic theory, while the local workers aim is to do something for the maintenance and development of their language and culture. (Mberi Ngakala, 2017:8)

Accordingly, in addition to contributing to the linguistic research field, this work also aims at preventing the disappearance of the Laali dialect. As a matter of fact, much on Laali language is still unsaid and unknown, and if a language is not spoken or recorded, it runs a risk of vanishing as it is the case for the majority of Bantu languages. Thus, if we do not really take to describing our languages, we will lose them, and eventually lose our cultures. In this respect, Nkara points out that 'People who have forsaken their culture or utterly ignore it may be likened to a tree without roots' (Nkara, 2007:7). Obviously language mirrors culture and ignoring it is compared to being uprooted from the culture. Consequently approaching a research work on Laali is not only a way to know the functioning its noun phrase, but also and more importantly to safeguard, preserve and promote African languages in general and Bantu languages in particular.

The undertaking of this work is also motivated by the desire to reinforce Chomsky's Universal Grammar approach. In fact, according to Chomsky, the fact that any infant can acquire any language that s/he is exposed within no time proves that we only have one basic language in the world. In this respect, Smith opines:

> Why is Chomsky important? He has shown that there is really only one language: that the immense complexity of innumerable languages we hear around us must be variations

> on a single theme. (...). Each language is a particular example of a universal faculty of mind whose basic properties are innate. (Smith 1999:1, 8)

Correspondingly, all languages around the world are according to Chomsky dialects which evolve from one common language. In fact, Chomsky thinks that though languages display idiosyncrasies at the Phonetic Form, they deeply share the same universals at the Logical Form.

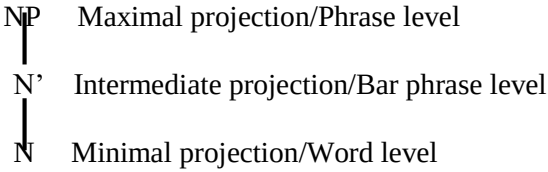
2. noun phrase: an overview

This section provides an insight into the notion of noun phrase. As a matter of fact, diverse studies have been carried out on the noun phrase in different world languages. Authors like Chomsky (1957, 1965, 1981), Abney (1987), Chista et al (1989), Ofosu (2012), Haegeman (1991), Hans and Dikken (2012), Leung and Wurff (2018), Alphonce (2022) to quote but a few have leaned on the NP internal structure. Ndimangwa (2020 : 4) argues that the NP is the grammatical unity which is available in almost all living languages. However, according Radford,

> The NP is the syntactic category which is available in every human living languages, and the most occurring phrase than other phrases. (…). It is a general (indeed, universal) property of phrases that every phrase has a head word which determines the nature of the overall phrase. For example, an expression such as ***students of philosophy*** is a plural noun phrase because its head word (i.e. the key word in the phrase whose nature determines the properties of the overall phrase) is the plural noun ***students***: the noun ***students*** (and not the noun ***philosophy***) is the head word because the phrase ***students of philosophy*** denotes kinds of ***student***, not kinds of ***philosophy*** (Radford, 2004: 13, 348).

To borrow Chomsky's generative grammar terminology, the noun phrase (NP) is a principle as it is universally attested in all world languages. It is headed by the noun which is its most momentous word. Indeed, within a noun phrase, the noun assigns its nominal identity from the minimal projection up to the maximal projection passing

through the intermediate projection which stands between the word and the phrase levels. This can be diagrammed as follows:

(1)


However, Radford specifies that due to Abney's (1987) work on the English Noun Phrase, what was referred to as NP earlier than the mid-1980s is now known as determiner phrase (DP) (Radford, Op.cit.: 448). Consequently, two hypotheses emerge when talking about words clustering around the noun. These include the NP hypothesis and the DP hypothesis (Ndimangwa, Op.cit. 10). Advocates of the NP hypothesis think that the noun is the core element of that dominates other elements occurring along with it. This is because it bears the most important meaning within the phrase. In fact, the NP hypothesis is mainly defended by lexicalists who opine that head words of syntactic categories (phrases) should be contentive or lexical words such as nouns, verbs adjectives and adverbs.

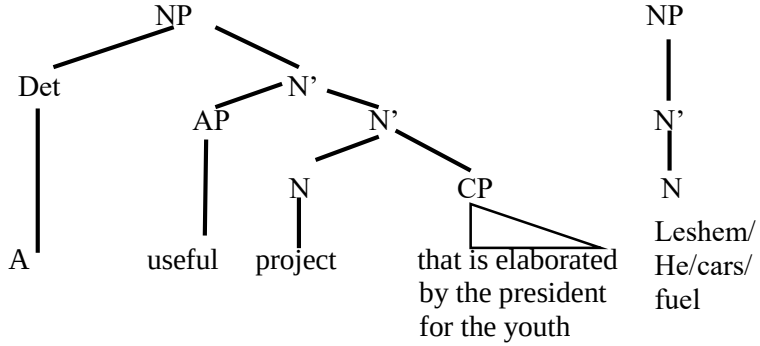
However, sustainers of the DP hypothesis aver that the determiner is the core word of the phrase within which it occurs and the overall phrase being dominated by the determiner will be projected as Determiner Phrase rather than Noun Phrase. Mainly sustained by functionalists among which Abney (1987), DP hypothesis defenders assert that a determiner is more momentous than a noun within a DP because it determines or assigns functional properties (agreement and gender) to the noun it goes along with in the same phrase. According to them, if nodes such as T (ense), AGR(eement), AsP(ect), C(omplementizer) and I(nflection) are attested functional heads in language, D(eterminer) would also be regarded as a functional head. Furthermore, since these functional heads select complements in their c-commanded domains (complement), then the noun is also counted as complement of the determiner rather than the head of the NP. Consequently, the structure like ***the students of linguistics*** can be termed either as NP or DP. Yet, the label selected for this work is the former one (i.e., NP) because that is the one I think is suitable for a

Bantu language like Laali whose nouns mostly occur before determiners.
However, Burton-Roberts argues that an NP/DP can be complex i.e., made of a head and dependents or single when it is denoted by a pronoun, name or a bare noun (Burton-Roberts, 2016: 141) as shown below:

(2) a- ***A useful project that is elaborated by the president for the youth***
b- ***Leshem*** is my son.
c- ***He*** is my son.
d- ***Cars*** use up.

As one can notice, the bold italicized are NPs. In (2a) the NP is complex because it is made up of the head noun ***project*** which is surrounded by the dependent elements namely the specifier ***a***, the premodifier ***useful*** before and the postmodifier ***that is elaborated by the president for the youth*** after. In (2b) the NP is expressed by the name ***Leshem***. In (2c), it is the pronoun ***He*** which fills the NP category. However, in (2d) the NPs are expressed by the bare nouns ***Cars*** and ***fuel***. Single though they are, the latter NPs i.e., (2b), (2c) and (2d) are counted as full NPs in the same way as the one in (2a). Indeed, all eventual operations applied to (2a) are also applicable the four last ones. Based on Chomsky's (1981) X-bar schema, (2) structures can be diagrammed as follows:

(3)



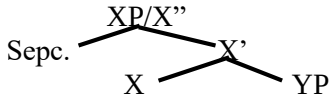
2.1. noun Modification

This subsection looks at constituents that make up a noun phrase cross-linguistically. Indeed, modification is "a term used in syntax to refer to the structural dependence of one grammatical unit upon another (…); e.g. **in the big man in the garden**, both **the big** and **in the garden** modify **man**" (Crystal, 2008:309). Put otherwise, modification refers to head noun dependent elements occurring before and after it. Ndimangwa goes one step further and asserts what follows:

> A complex NP is made by a noun and noun modifications. Noun modifications may comprise a determiner, a premodifier, and post modifiers. Pre-modifiers are often, adjective which normally, appear before the head while, post modifiers involve; relative clause, prepositional clauses, adverbs, adjectives, (…) located after the head (Ndimangwa, Op.cit.12).

Consequently, modification is threefold. It concerns specification, premodifcation and postmodification. Specification covers all elements that co-occur with a head noun so as to specify or determine it in terms of phi-features like gender and number. With regard to X-bar theory of phrase structure representation, specifiers are seen as combining with a single-bar category to form the related double-bar category (Crystal 2009: 445). Similarly, Newson (2006:449) and Fromckin (2000: 714) argue that the specifier is sister to X' and daughter of XP. What Crystal, Newson and Fromckin's advance can be summarized in the following phrase marker :

(4)



In other words, the XP/X" is the phrasal level, X' which is sister of the Spec. is the intermediate projection and X the zero or word level. The latter one constitutes the essential part of the phrase as it defines and determines its properties to the whole phrase. To make a parallelism with the present paper, XP or X double bar (X") is the NP which is usually specified by a word belonging to the class of determiners and possibly followed by a YP which stands for a complement of any kind (CP, PP, AP).

In a language like English, specifiers occur in a syntagmatic relationship, i.e., they are arranged in a static and ready-made order which when absent, makes the noun phrase illegible at the semantic level of the structure derivation. That is the reason why they are classified in terms sub-categories including predeterminers, central determiners and postdeterminers. This linear relationship among specifiers is presented in the chart below:

(5) *English specifiers chart*

Function	**Specifiers**			**Head**
Category	**Predeterminers**	**Central determiners**	**Post determiners**	
Examples	**a:** all, both, half, etc **b:** double, twice, etc **c:** one-third, etc **d:** what, such, etc	**Articles:** a, an, the **Demonstratives:** this, that, these, those **Quantifiers:** some, any, no, every, each, either, neither, enough, much, etc **Possessives:** my, your, John's **Wh-determiners:** Whatever, whichever, whoever, whose, etc	**Cardinal Numbers:** One, two, etc **Ordinal numbers:** First, second, etc **General ordinary:** Next, last, other, etc **Quantifiers:** Many, few, little, several, more, less, etc	**Noun**

(Djamba, 2013: 37; Mpambou 2014: 43)

Premodification in a number of languages is usually fulfilled by adjective phrases and nouns whereas post modification is realized by complementizer phrases, prepositional phrases and adjective phrases. To sum up, constituents that a head noun needs to occur with in world languages are mainly specifiers, pre-modifiers and post modifiers. The following section looks at the merger of the noun phrase in Bantu languages.

3. bantu noun phrase merger

This section sheds light on how the noun phrase is computed or merged in different Bantu languages. Indeed, the issue about NP has interested a very good deal of bantuists such as Nurse and Philippson (2003), Ngonyani (2003), Ndomba (2006), Rugemalira (2007), Lusekelo (2009), Diercks (2010), Crane et al (2011), Mirjam (2011), Bakuku (2012), Djamba (2013), Nkaya (2014), Mpambou (2014), Julius and Mreta (2017), Alphonce (2022) and Ndimangwa (2022). Most of these authors agree that the noun phrase in Bantu languages is almost merged by the same elements including the head noun and its dependents namely possessives, demonstratives, distributives, adjectives, associative relatives, quantifiers, numerals, and specifiers. If distributives occur before the head, possessives are always placed immediately after the head. However, other dependents position is flexible in a Bantu complex NP. In this connection, let us consider Ndimangwa and Rugemarila's noun modification based on a number of Bantu languages.

(6) Kagulu G12: N + (Poss) + (Dem) + (Num) + (Adj/Ass) (Petzell, 2008).
Samatengo N13: N + (Poss/Dem) + other constituents + (Rel) (Ndomba, 2006).
Chingoni N12: N + (Poss) + (A) + (Quant) + (Dem) (Ngonyani, 2003).
Shimwela: (Dem/Distr) + N + (Poss) + (Num) + (A) + (Int) + (Rel) + (Ass) + (Quant) + (Int). (John, 2010).
Makhuwa P30: (Dem) + N + (Poss) + (Dem) + (Other constituents) (Kisseberth, 2003).
Basaa A43: (Poss. /Dem) + N (Poss. /Dem) + (Other constituents) + (Dem) (Hymen, 2003).

(Ndimangwa Op.cit.: 14).

(7)

a. **Language**	**Noun**	**Dem**	**Poss.**	**Dem**
Mashami	bhandu	bhalyá	bhakyá	-
	"Those people of mine"			
Shwahili	kitabu	-	changu	kile
	"That book of mine"			
Nyambo	Omuti	-	gwanje	ogu
	"This tree of mine"			

b. Language	**each**	**noun**	**Gloss**
Mashami	wó	nndu	"each person"
Shwahili	kila	ntu	"each person"
Ha	buri	muntu	"each person"

Rugemarila (Op.cit.: 137, 138)

We notice from the above examples that the NP in Bantu languages is nearly constituted of the same constituents. Also, we can see from (6) examples that the possessive immediately occurs after the head noun. Likewise, in (7b) it is noticeable that the distributive *each* counterpart in the illustrated Bantu languages appears in pre head noun position. However, these authors emphasize that even though the NP is a universal category, its computation varies considerably from one language to another. Indeed, even among Bantu languages, we observe idiosyncrasies as regards the merger of the NP; what means that it is not because languages share the same family that they must automatically attest similar properties. Accordingly, Pollock avers that "les languegs sont à la fois semblables et dissemblables, uniformes et labiles"[142] (Pollock, 1994:205), and Neil to add: *"*each language is a particular example of a universal faculty of mind whose basic properties are innate'" (Neil, 1999:8). As a matter of fact, similar though can they be at the underlying form, languages usually show parametric variations as regards the operation of many of their aspects. So, basic languages universals do not save languages from uncommonness in terms of computation. As such, the distribution of noun dependents within an NP is not the same in Bantu languages. Due to that fact, a particular attention should be paid to its structure in each language in order to see how parametric and specific each language is regarding the sequence of this phrasal category. Consequently, leading an analysis on the NP in other Bantu languages is still topical as not all languages of them attest the same NP structure. As a matter of fact, this helps to see how some Bantu languages demarcate from others. Likewise, Laali cannot be pretended to have a similar NP word arrangement with other Bantu languages though they share the same family. This work then tends to widen the literature on

[142] Languages are both similar and dissimilar, unvarying and varying (My translation)

Bantu NP derivation to see how far or near Bantu languages are among them.

4. Laali noun phrase merger.

The main aim of this section is to present the underlying structure of the NP in Laali. Basically, it seeks to find out the basic distribution of the head noun dependents in a Laali NP. In nutshell, it looks at basic pre or post noun constituents occurring within a Laali NP in addition to discussing about the recursion/recursivity of NP units in Laali.

4.1. Laali noun specification

This subsection is concerned with basic pre noun elements within an NP in Laali. Put otherwise, it looks at Laali determiners distribution and their co-occurrence in case a Laali head noun is specified by multiple determiners. Additionally, it tends to discover the kind of language that Laali is with regard to Chomsky's headedness principle and how it distances itself from other world languages. The following part focuses on predeterminers before shifting to post postdeterminers subsequently.

4.1.1. predeterminers

The determiners that occur pre-nominally within a Laali noun phrase include ***mwa*** (some), ***ndaamba*** (little/few), ***nki*** (which/what), ***mpèsè*** (each/every/any), ***mbala*** (time). As such, they are referred to as predeterminers. The following examples illustrate predeterminers within noun phrases in Laali:

(8) **a-** **Mwa** *maamba*
Some water
"some water"

b- **Ndaamba** *nyama*
little meat
"little meat"

c- **Nki** *mwana*?
Which child
"which child"

d-	**Mpese**	*bola*	ba	balɛɛle
	Each/every/any	village	of	Laali
	"Each/every/any village of Laali people"			
e-	**Mbala**	*tata*		
	Time	three		
	"Three times"			
f-	**Mwa**	**ndaamba**	ntsama	
	Some	few/little	palm wine	
	"Some little palm wine"			
g	***Ndaamba**	**mwa**	ntsama	
	Few/little	some	palm wine	

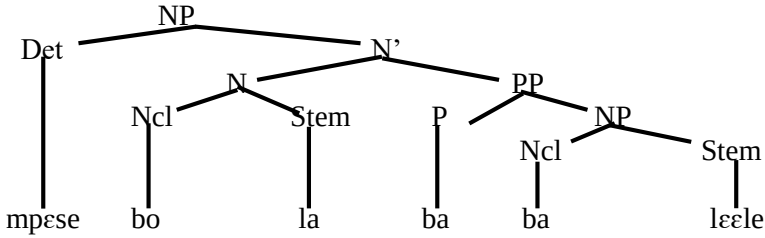
In bold are predeterminers and in italicized head nouns. The formers specify the latters. In (8a) for example, the quantifier ***mwa***[143] (some) specifies the head noun ***maamba*** (water), in (8b), the quantifier ***ndaamba*** (little) specifies the head noun ***nyama*** (meat). In (8c), the head noun ***mwana*** is specified by the interrogative determiner ***nki*** (which). Crane et al (2011: 100) argue that the same reality is attested in Nzadi (a Bantu language spoken in RDC) where the interrogative word occurring before the head noun is ***iŋki*** (which). In (8e) ***tata*** (three) is specified by the determiner ***mbala*** (time) which always predetermines head nouns denoting number. In (8f) two determiners namely ***mwa*** and ***ndamba*** co-occur to specify the noun ***ntsaama*** (palm wine). It is noticeably perceived that these predeterminers occur in a syntagmatic relationship and that their reverse order results in a crashed structure, whence the illformedness of the (8g) structure. It is worthwhile stating that the conception of predeterminer adopted in this paper is far from the one usually adopted in European languages where they refer to determiners occurring before central determiners which in turn precede post ones. Indeed, if in English or French, a head noun can be specified by a number of determiners co-occurring in a linear order before a given head noun; in Laali however, except the case mentioned in (8f) with ***mwa ndaamba***, that co-occurrence is hardly attested. As a consequence, Laali determiners occurring before the head noun are not subcategorized in terms of pre, central or post

[143] Out of quantifier, ***mwa*** can also be used as a qualifier especially when it precedes an animate entity as in ***mwa mobaala*** (***a little/insignificant boy***), ***mwa muunto (a little/insignificant person***).

determiners but rather as predeterminers**1** and predeterminers**2**. Consequently, ***mwa*** in (8f) would be considered as a predeterminers**1** and ***ndaamba*** as a predeterminer**2**.

The examples in (8) calls into question Rugemalira's point of view stating that "nominal dependents in Bantu languages are post-head with a frequent exception, viz the distributive determiner **each/every**" (Rugemalira, 2007:138). Indeed, if Rugemalira restricts Bantu pre-nominal elements to the only quantifier *every/each* which is the equivalent of the Laali ***mpese***, out of the latter, Laali attests others as mentioned in (8). The tree diagram that we propose for the (8d) structure is as follows:

(9)



4.1.2. postdeterminers

This part looks at determiners occurring in post nominal position. Let us specify that a number of Batuists among which Nurse and Philippson (2003), Rugemalira (2007), Crane et al (2011) and Bukuku (2012) consider all words occurring in the post nominal position as modifiers. However, this work will not follow their hypothesis. It will instead follow the one proposed by Djamba (2013), Mpambou (2014) and Nkaya (2014) in Bekwel, Dondo and Bembe respectively. Indeed, though a good deal of noun dependents occur post nominally in Bantu languages, the latter authors make the difference between determiners whose function is to specify a head noun and qualifiers whose function is to modify it. The following examples illustrate postmodifiers in Laali.

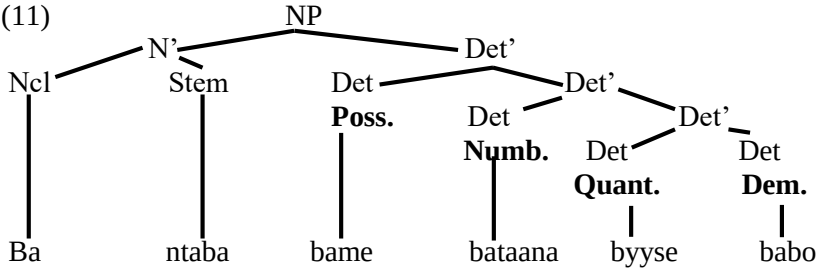
(10)	**Ba**nt	**b**amè	**g-**	**ba**	**ba**
a-	aba		**Ba**ndza ba	mè	
	Goats	poss.	Goats	poss.	these

	" Goats of mine"			"These nephews/nieces of mine"			
	Bant	**boolo**	**h-**	**ba**	**ba**vul	**be**ne?	
b-	aba		**Ba**ntaba	mè	ulo		
	Goats	two	Goats	poss.	many	which	
	"two goats"			"which several goats of mine?"			
	Bant	**ba/ba**bo	**i-**	**ba**	**ba**vul	**ba**na	
c-	aba		**Ba**ntaba	mè	ulo		
	Goats	these/those	Goats	poss.	many	those	
	"these/those goats"			"All these several goats of mine"			
	Bant	**ba**vululo	**j-**	**ba**	**ba**taa	**b**yy	**ba**bo
d-	aba		**Ba**ntaba	mè	na	se	
	Goats	many/several	Goats	poss.	five	all	those
	"many/several goats"			"All those five goats of mine"			
	Bant	**b**enè?	**k-**	**ba**	**b**oolo	**ba**ts	**ba**kimè
e-	aba		**Ba**ntaba	mè		yme	
	Goats	which	Goats	poss.	two	first	others
	"which goats?"			"These two other first goats of mine"			
	Bant	**ba**kimè	**l-**	**ba**	**b**oo	**ba**ts	**ba**bo
f-	aba		**Ba**ntaba	mè	lo	ymè	
	Goats	others	Goats	poss.	two	first	those
	"Other goats"		"Those two first goats of mine"				

It comes out from the above examples that the head noun in Laali can be postspecified by one up to four determiners. These determiners can appear in the form of possessive, number demonstrative, quantifier, interrogative and indefinite determiner as shown in (10a), (10b), (10c), (10d), (10e) and (10f) respectively. If a head noun is postspecified by two or more determiners, these will occur in a syntagmatic relationship and will be subcategorized in terms of *postdeterminers**1***, *postdeterminers**2*** and *postdeterminers**3***. These postdeterminers are classified as such because they occur in a certain basic linear order like the English determiners. In other words, they occur after one another

in that one category underlyingly sets before or after the other within a noun phrase. The above examples for instance show that, in case of multiple determination, the nearest or closest determiner to the head noun is the possessive and is usually followed the cardinal number. In this case, both the possessive and the cardinal number belong to subclass of what is referred to as postdeterminers**1**. The possessive and/or the cardinal number is/are usually followed either by the quantifier as in (10i) and (10j) or by the ordinal number as in (10k). As a result, the two refer to postdeterminers**2** subcategory. Finally, the quantifier or the ordinal number are often followed either by the interrogative determiner, indefinite determiner or the demonstrative which constitute the subgroup of postdeterminers**3**. What is noticeable is that the head noun c-commands all its determinative dependents through its noun class in terms of number feature. Put otherwise, the noun class spreads its feature on the determiners occurring in the post nominal position. Indeed, there is a certain cataphoric relationship between the head noun and its dependents, what really proves headedness of the noun in comparison with the other elements of the phrase. To illustrate, the noun class **2** which is **ba** is displayed on the remaining words standing after the noun. The representation of (10j) will look like the following:

(11)



The following chart summarizes the linear arrangement of the head noun along with its determinative dependent

(12) *the Laali specifiers chart*

Function	**Prespecifiers**		**Head**	**Postspecifiers**		
Category	**Predet1**	**Predet1**	**Noun**	**Postdet1**	**Postdet2**	**Postdet3**
	mwa (some)	**nki** (which); **ndaamba** (little/few; **mpɛse** (each/every/ any) ; **mbala** (time), **ngo** (much/many		**Poss.; Cardinal number**	**Quant**; **Ordinal number**	**Interrogative det**; **Indefinite det**; **Dem**.
Examples	*Mwa* Some	*ndaamba* little *Ngo* Many	***Bakaata*** Women All	*bataata* three those	*byyse* all three	*bana* those women
			maamba water ***baata*** people			

It results from this chart that Radford (Op.cit: 477) and Fromckin's (Op.cit: 714) definitions of the term specifier have to be reviewed. Indeed, the former considers specifier as the grammatical function fulfilled by certain types of constituent which ***precede*** the head of their containing phrase and the latter views it as being positioned in the ***leftmost*** immediate constituent of XP. Based on Chomsky's specifier parameter and with regard to the data at our disposal, we can assert that Laali is both specifier first and specifier last language. Indeed many of what Chomsky and his associate refer to as universal is in fact parametric. Apart from specifiers, modifiers also constitute a class of dependents which go along with head noun nouns. They are the concern of the subsection below.

4.2. Laali noun modifiers

This subsection deals with Laali head noun modifiers. That is to say, words or phrases that modify or change the status of the head noun in terms of its quality. Indeed, X is said to modify Y if only if the former assigns some property to the latter. Bussmann (1998:757) posits that in English, nouns are typically modified by adjectives (e.g., ***long*** *book*)

or prepositional phrases (e.g. *the book* ***on the table***). Like specifiers, modifiers are also split up into sub-groups which include premodifiers and postmodifiers. Premodifiers is the main concern of the following part.

4.2.1. premodifiers

Premodifiers are those elements that stand in the prenominal position of the head noun so as to modify its status. The following examples illustrate noun premodifiers in Laali.

(13)**a-** *Ndzo* **ngolo**
House silurid
"The house of silurid/water"

b- *Mobwe* **mokaata**
Pretty woman
"A pretty lady"

c- *Dzuba* **muunto**
Idiot person
"An idiot person"

d- *Mwa* **mounto** wunuu
Little person that
"Tha little person"

e- *Mola* **mwana**
Tall child
"A tall child"

It appears from the above that a head noun can be premodified by another noun as in (13a) and an adjective as in the remaining examples (13b-e). Of interest is that there is no agreement between a premodifier and its head noun.

4.2.2. postmodifiers

Laali postmodifiers are instantiated in the examples hereafter:

(14) **Mala** **ma**nkele
a-
Drink of bitter
" Bitter drink"

b- **Baata** **ba**yele

Persons of intelligent
"Intelligent persons"
Mbaa *ya* *ntɛɛre*

c-

Fire of snakes
"The serpents' fire"
Moba *ngaa* *bokiine*

d- **ala**
Man of/with courage
Mandzo ***ma*** *bo* ***ba****tuuŋɔ*

e-

Houses that them they-steal
"The money that they stole"
Bantsü ***ba*** *bise* ***da****soolo*

f-

Fish that us we-choose
"The fish that we chose"

What results from the above examples is that the head noun can be postmodified either by a prepositional phrase as in (14a-b) and a relative clause as in (14e-f). Since postmodifiers in (14) complete their head nouns, they are viewed as their complements of the latters. What is remarkable is that prepositional phrases in (14a) and (14b) denote the adjectiveness. That is the reason why the associative morphemes ***ma*** and ***ba*** are attached to the stem adjective ***-nkele*** and *–yele*. Consequently, when the noun is postmodified by such a prepositional phrase expressing adjectiveness, there is agreement concord between the head noun and the prepositional phrase via the class prefix setting in pre-adjectival position. This is the case with the class prefix 6 ***ma*** and the class prefix 2 ***ba*** in (14a) and (14b) respectively. Likewise, if the head noun is postmodified by a relative clause, the relative marker appears as a copy of class prefix of the head noun as it is the case with relativizers ***ma*** and ***ba*** in (14e-f) which refer back to the noun classs of their head nouns ***ma****ndzo* and ***ba****nts***ü** respectively. With reference to Chomsky headedness principle, Laali can be admitted to be a head first language owing to the fact that its complements follow its heads.

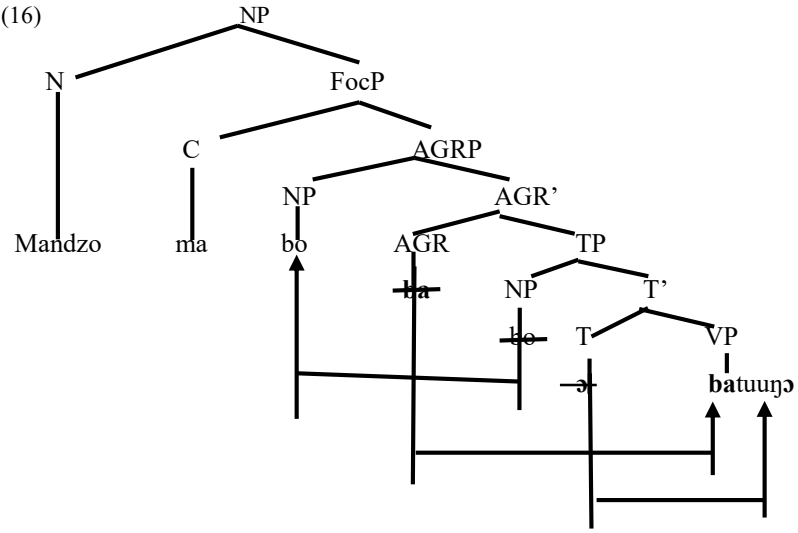
The chart below sums up the co-occurrence of head nouns along with its modifiers.

(15) *the Laali modifiers chart*

Function	**Premodifiers**	**Head**	**Postmodifiers**
Category	**Noun, Adjective**	**Noun**	**Relative phrases, Prepositional phrase**
Examples	*Monuno* Terrible/big A terrible *Mokuuto* Head The head	***mobaala*** man man ***kaana*** family of the family	
		Muunto *Person* A big ***Baata*** People People ***Mokaata*** Woman A problematic	*wa monine* of big person *bo nwa maamba* who drink water who drink water *ngaa mendondo* of/with problems woman

The structure representation of (15e) looks like the one proposed hereafter:

(16)



Conclusion

In this work, I have been interested in analyzing the internal structure of the noun phrase in Laali. It has been argued that the Laali head noun can be specified by determiners occurring in both its pre and post position. If the pre nominal position only allows the co-occurrence of two determiners namely *mwa ndaamba (some little/few)*, in the post nominal position, the head noun can be specified by one up to four determiners occurring in a syntagmatic relationship. In addition, the head can be premodified by an adjective or another noun and postmodified by a prepositional phrase or a relative clause.

Indeed, undertaking an analysis on the noun phrase is essential as it is one the syntactic categories which plays an important part in that it helps understand the semantic and syntactic contents of language larger structures. From a semantic point of view for example, theta roles in language (L) are fulfilled by NPs. From the syntactic angle, most of grammatical functions are performed by NPs. As such, a particular attention deserves to be paid to the analysis of the NP when it comes to focus on a given language grammar. With regard to Chomsky's UG postulate, it has been shown that Laali order of words within the noun phrase is somewhat similar to my predecessors'

hypotheses. However, Laali demarcates from other Bantu languages in that out of the distributive *mpɛse* (each), Laali attests other predeterminers like *nki*? (which?), *mwa* (some), *ndaamba* (some little/few), *mbala* (time). Accordingly, Ndimangwa opines that "NPs differ across languages. […] Research on Bantu languages reveals a significant variations among NPs. The variations are evident even in the languages stemming from one language family. These variations are observed in the order of NP elements, flexibilities of the elements and co-occurrence restrictions" (Ndimangwa, 2020: 4-5). Even though, the NP seems to be a universal principle attested in all languages, its operation is language specific. Indeed, even among Bantu languages, we observe idiosyncrasies as regards its functioning. Consequently, the sameness of languages identity does not automatically show their similarity as regards language functioning properties. Put differently, it is not because languages share the same family that they will necessarily attest similar points.

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