Noun Phrase in Mesqan

Ousman Shafi *
(Wollo University, Ethiopia)

Abstract：Mesqan is a South Ethio-Semitic tonguewhich 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 elicited 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 *mäsk'an*. The term could be related to the local *Mäsk'älä ʔIjäsus* Church that was built in the 16th century ad (Dïnbäru, 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 Ethiosemitic, 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;

---

* Dr. Ousman Shafi: Assistant Professor of Linguistics, Dean, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Wollo University, Dessie, Ethiopia. Email: aousmanshafi@yahoo.com; aousmanshafi@gmail.com.

1977:20-24) unites them into the areal-typological unit *Gunnän Gurage* (for lexical similarities, cf. Hudson, 2013:284-290).

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 live style and culture of the Mesqan.

Figure 1. Gurage Zone with Mesqan Woreda

Mesqan is easily understood by speakers of other Gunnän Gurage varieties (Fekede, 2015:194-198). Most Mesqan are bilingual in Amharic, the official language in the Gurage Zone (Getu, 2012:74). Despite few literary pieces in Ajämi 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.[①] 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 thendatas 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:

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.

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

---

[①] 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*   *wäddäd-ä-{ʷ-nn}*   *(ziwäddädänn.)*
    PROX   love.PFV-3SG.M.SBJ-3SG.M.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) *nä-zi*   *näčč'ä*   *ät'e-očč*   *(näzinäčč'äät'ewočč)*
    ASSOC-PROX   white   sheep-PL
    'these whitesheep'

(3) *nä-zi*   *näč'ačč'ä*   *ät'e-očč*   *(näzinäč'ačč'äät'ewočč)*
    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*   *näggade-no*   *(zinäggadeno.)*
    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*   *säb-očč*   *wär-o*   *(xʷetsäβočč wäro.)*
    two   person-PL   go.PFV-3PL.M
    'Two people went (away).'

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

(6) *bïžžä*   *fek'*   *sïy-ä*   *(bïžžäfek' sïyä.)*
    many   goat   buy.PFV-3SG.M
    'He bought many goats.'

(7) *bïžžä*   *fek'-očč*   *sïy-ä*   *(bïžžäfek'oččsïyä.)*
    many   goat-PL   buy.PFV-3SG.M
    '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'

(9) *xʷet   sahïn   zär*
    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) *nïk'-i   bet   (nïk'i bet)*
    big-DEF   house
    'the big house'

(11) *nïk'   bet-äwta   (nïk' betäwta)*
    big   house-POSS.3SG.M
    'his big house'

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

(12) *yä-ab-äňňa   äram   (yaβäňňa äram)*
    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) *nïk'-i   bet-äwta   (nïk'ibetäwta)*
    big-DEF   house-POSS.3SG.M
    'his big house'

(14) *yä-ab-äňňa-y   äram   (yaβäňňay äram)*
    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 comitativemarker tä-, in particular for connecting two nouns which form a semantic unit, as in the following examples:

(15) *mïss   tä-mïšt   (mïsstämïšt)*
    man   COM-woman
    'husband and wife'

(16) *ab   tä-ïmm   (ab tämm)*

father   COM-mother

'father and mother'

(17) *ättäm   tä-gobbe   (ättämtägobbe)*

sister   COM-brother

'sister and brother'

(18) *k'ädan   sänbät   tä-wïr   sänbät   (k'ädansänbättäwïrsänbät)*

antecede   sabbath   COM-main   sabbath

'Saturday and Sunday'

(19) *ğäbän   tä-sini   (ğäβän täsini)*

coffee_kettle   COM-cup

'coffee kettle and cup(s)'

It is also possible to coordinate two noun phrases by attaching the contrastive focus marker *-m* which has expanding/additive meaning to the firstentity 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-šäwa   wussïtt'   bet   k'urb-e-m   xän-ä*

LOC-Addis_Ababa   inside   house   near-DIR-FOC   be(come).PFV-3SG.M

äruk'-e   č'um-u   (bäšäwawussïtt' bet k'urbemxänääruk'eč'umu.)

far-DIR   expensive-COP.3SG.M

'(The price of) a house in Addis Ababa is expensive be it nearor (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 firstentity in an enumeration which is immediately followed by the the jussive of the verb *xänä*'He/It be(came).', *yäxïn* 'It should be!'. Such combination may function as disjunctive coordination, as in the following examples:

(21) *ärša   k'äl-m   yä-xn-ø   nïk'   fäyya-u   (äršak'älïmyäxïnnïk' fäyyawu.)*

farm   small-FOC   3-be(come).JUS-SG.M   big   good-COP.3SG.M

'Farm (land) is good be it is small or big.'

In addition to the conjunction *č'ïn* '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-ø   ali   nännä*

LOC-1PL   house   Sara   SUB-NEG-3-be(come).IPFV-SG.F   Ali   exist.PRS.3SG.M

(binna bet saratattïxänalinännä.)

'At our house there is Ali but not Sara.'

In exclusive constructions like (22), the noun following the verb *xänä* '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

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

References

Abduljebar, A. 1988. *Phonology of Mesqan* [D]. BA. thesis, Addis Ababa University (unpublished).

Cohen, M. 1931. *Studies of Southern Ethiopian* [M]. Paris: Paul Geuthner.

Dïnbäru, A., Mängïstu, H. M., Fïk're, H. M, et al. 1987. *Gogot: The Nation, History, Culture and Language of the Gurage* [M]. Wolkite: Artistic Printers.

Endale, N. 1986. *The Syntax of the Mesqan Noun Phrase* [D]. BA. thesis, Addis Ababa University (unpublished).

Getu, S. 1989. *Verb Morphology of Masqan* [D]. BA. thesis, Addis Ababa University (unpublished).

Getu, S. 2004. *The Socio-Cultural Milieu, Language Use, Language Attitude and Ethnolinguistic Identity in Mesqan* [D]. PhD dissertation, Addis AbabaUniversity (unpublished).

Hetzron, R. 1972. *Ethiopian Semitic Studies in Classification* [M]. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Hetzron, R. 1977. *The Gunnän-Gurage Languages* [M]. Naples: Don Bosco.

Hudson, G. 1991. A and B-Type Verbs in Ethiopian and Proto-Semitic [A]. In A. S. Kaye (ed.), *Semitic Studies in Honor of Wolf Leslau on the Occasion of His Eighty-Fifth Birthday – November 14th* [C], Volume 1. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 679-689.

Leslau, W. 1969. Towards the Classification of the Gurage Dialects [J]. *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 14: 96-109.

Leslau, W. 1979. *Etymological Dictionary of Gurage (Ethiopia). Volume 1 Individuel Dictionaries* [M]. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Leslau, W. 1992 [1982]. The Jussive in the Gurage Dialects of Muher and Masqan [A]. In W. Leslau (ed.), *Gurage Studies: Collected Articles* [C]. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 538-550.

Leslau, W. 2004. *The Verb in Mäsqan as Compared with Other Gurage Dialects* [M]. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Meseret, E. 2004. *Tense, Aspect and Mood in Mesqan* [D]. MA. thesis, Addis Ababa University (unpublished).

Meyer, R. 2007. Mäsqan [A]. In S. Uhlig (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* [C]. Volume 3. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 845-847.

Ullendroff, E. 1955. *The Semitic Language of Ethiopia: A Comparative Phonology* [M]. London: Taylor's Foreign Press.

Yitbarek, K. 1992. *The Syntax of the Mesqan Verb Phrase* [D]. BA. thesis, Addis Ababa University (unpublished).