
The structure of determiner phrases and noun phrases in Kanuri: Minimalist approach

Baba Kura Alkali Gazali & Umar Mohammed Gombe

Abstract

This paper examines the structure of determiner phrase (DP) and noun phrase (NP) in Kanuri within the theoretical framework of Minimalist Program (MP) by Chomsky (1995). In conducting the research, the researchers use their native speakers' intuition and other three competent native speakers for data collection and validation of data. The study describes the structure of determiner phrase headed by a covert determiner in Kanuri and the syntactic functions of noun phrase in Kanuri sentence structures. In the structure of determiner phrase, the study identifies head slots and post-head slots in Kanuri as against pre-head slots identified by Fannami et al (1999). On the functions of determiner phrase and noun phrase in Kanuri sentences, the study identifies determiner phrase and noun phrase function as subjects, indirect objects and direct objects in Kanuri sentences. Finally on the Minimalist account, the study identifies Empty Projection Principle [EPP] in a specifier position under the NP moves to a specifier position under the DP in order to check the Phi –features and constraints involved in moving PP node which cannot be merged as specifier due to its selectional properties in Kanuri.

Key words: Kanuri, Determiner, Noun, Minimalist, Specifier

1.0 Introduction

Kanuri is a member of the Saharan branch of the Nilo-Saharan phylum of African languages (Greenberg, 1963, 1977). Bendo (2000:44) presents the Saharan branch according to the following group: Saharan: Kanuri-Kanumbu, Daza, Teda-Tebu, Zaghawa-Bideyat-Berti. Lewis (2009) presents the Saharan branch into three: Eastern, Western and Northern branches. Kanuri, Tebu, Daza and Teda are classified under the western branch. Bulakarima and Shettima (2012) estimated the number of Kanuri speakers in Nigeria between four to five million and those in other countries do not exceed one million speakers.

Kanuri is an amalgamation of several ethnic groups. The ethnic groups that constitute Kanuri language according to Bulakarima (1991), Bulakarima and Shettima (2012) are twenty different ethnic groups. The speech forms of the Kanuri ethnic groups are further classified into six major dialects. The classification of these six major dialects is based on their phonological, phonetic, morphological and semantic differences. The six major dialects according to Bulakarima (1991), Bulakarima and Shettima (2012) are:

- (i) Manga (iv) Dagəra
- (ii) Mowar (v) Bilma
- (iii) Suwurti (vi) Yerwa

The present study is based on Yerwa dialect of Kanuri which is the most widely used dialect of Kanuri and the standard Kanuri Orthography (SKO) is written in Yerwa dialect of Kanuri (Cyffer 1991).

Crystal (2008:140) defines determiner as ‘a term used in some models of grammatical description, referring to a class of items whose main role is to co-occur with nouns to express a wide

range of semantic contrasts, such as quantity or number. In some generative grammar theories, determiner is regarded as the head in combination with a noun, to produce a determiner phrase (DP). The DP hypothesis is the proposal that noun phrases are projections of the determiner'. The noun phrase is a common structural unit, which is usually headed by a noun, or another word which can act as a noun in Kanuri.

The noun takes modifiers of different categories. These categories are mostly optional. Modifiers have the function to describe or qualify the head noun. The demonstratives (DEM) in Kanuri have determiner function and constitute rich source of Kanuri DP (Cyffer 1991, 1998) Bulakarima and Shettima (2012). This paper observes that modifier determiners occur post head modifier and Empty Projection Principle can move to head initial to check Comp features in Kanuri. Therefore this study provides both descriptive and theoretical analysis of Noun phrase and Determiner Phrase (DP) in Kanuri within the purview of Minimalist approach.

2.0 Literature Review

According to Fannami et al (1999:19), the structure of the Kanuri noun phrase is composed of three slots namely: the pre-head, head and post-head slots. The pre-head and the post-head slots contain optional modifiers/ specifiers while the head-slot consists of the obligatory element of the Kanuri NP-structure. Consider the following examples in Fannami et al (1999:19) below.

- 1.a. karwina isəna
Hunter came
'Hunter has come'

- b. wanzama ishin
barber coming
'Barber is coming'

In sentences (1a and b) above, 'Karwina' and 'wanzama' (hunter and barber) are nouns which consists of one lexical item only the heads are neither modified nor specified in both structures. They further argue that noun phrase in Kanuri can take different structures a noun precedes either by determiner 'də' or demonstrative 'adə' (this) 'tudu' (these) or 'tunyi' (those) but this paper examines relationship between the determiners and the nouns they modify that is why we refer to noun phrase (NP) as determiner phrase (DP).

On the structure of noun phrase in Kanuri, Fannami et al (1999:20) observe that the pre-head and post-head slots contain optional modifiers/specifiers whereas the head slot contains the obligatory element noun or pronoun. Consider the following examples in (2a,b and 3a,b) of the pre-head and post-head slots below.

2. a. adə fər
this horse
'This is (a) horse'
b. adə tada-nyi
this boy-my
'This is my boy'
3. a. tada -nyi
boy- my
'My boy'
b. kel -nyi
trap -my
'My trap'

The above examples (2a and b) are rather sentences than a phrase –placement of the modifier ‘adə’ (this) pre-head slot before the head word the structure becomes a copular sentence while examples (3a and b) post-head slot is a noun phrase which consists of the head word and post modifier in Kanuri. This paper describes the syntactic functions of noun phrase and analyzes the relationship between the head word and the modifier types in Kanuri adopting the Minimalist approach.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

The Minimalist Program (MP), a theoretical framework adopted for the present study, is basically a development of the 1981 Principles and Parameters theory by Noam Chomsky in his endeavor to generate a theory of Universal grammar (UG). The MP was fast muted by (Chomsky 1993, 1995). Mose (2012:vi) in her words described the MP as ‘... a theory of grammar whose core assumption is that grammar should be described in terms of the minimal set of theoretical descriptive apparatus’. In a review of the Noam Chomsky’s Minimalist Program (1995), Zwart (1998) argues that Chomsky’s agenda is to relate sounds with meaning in language. He proposes that ‘the language faculty involves a computational system that feeds into the components of the mind/brain dealing with sound and meaning: the articulatory-perceptual system and the conceptual system’. Chomsky notes that there is an interaction between the two levels of interface: the phonetic form (PF) and the logical form (LF) vis-à-vis the computational system of the human language.

Chomsky moves away from the Government and binding syntactic levels, that is, the deep structure, surface structure, logical form and phonological/phonetic form to just two interface

levels; (PF LF). Chomsky's motivation is governed by perception that language is man's natural and innate endowment in his /her brain (Newmeyer 1998). Based on Saussure's 'langue' and 'parole', Chomsky literally expands, his 'competence' and 'performance'. This is the Generative Grammar theoretical basis which as Schroeder (2002) argues culminates to the Minimalist Program (MP). A speaker of a language can be said to have competence if he/she has the generative grammar capability of a native speaker to use language (Chomsky, 1965, Webelhuth, 1995) in real-time social contexts.

In his attempt to develop a simple theory which can be used to describe human language, something which is natural and which literally explains how human being are designed and endowed (Aitcheson, 1999; Cowper 1992; Newmeyer, 1998). Chomsky came up with the reductionist MP. The MP borrows the X –bar theoretical model of the specifier- head, head-head and head-complement relationship (Chomsky 1993). However, in the structure building process of the MP, necessity determines what should be licensed by both morphosyntactic and lexical evidence from the lexicon of the language in question. The MP may be thus defy the maximum projection principle (Chomsky, 1981). The move X theory plays a central role in MP especially in the movement of constituents but perimeters like X-bar theory, theta theory, case theory, case filter, subjacency, move, c- command condition were put in place to manage the movement and over generalization (Cowper 1992:127). Movement in MP is strictly for feature –checking purposes.

4.0 Data Presentation and Analysis

4.1 The syntactic structure of DP in Kanuri

The determiner phrase (DP) is a syntactic unit that is headed by a determiner (D) that takes a noun phrase (NP) as its complement.

Demonstratives like ‘adə’ (this) ‘tudu’ (that) can occupy the D position in the DP. This paper assumes that a DP can be headed by a covert D in Kanuri. A noun phrase is a syntactic constituent headed by a noun when it functions as an argument. The smallest DP/NP that is possible in any language consists of a single pronoun, pronoun determiner or noun that heads the phrase without any other modifying elements. These optional elements can occupy either the specifier position or the complement position. These modifiers in a NP provide additional information about the head noun that they modify. There can be more than one modifier in a NP. A typical NP is the one with a noun and a modifier. The followings are some examples of heads of the DPs/NPs who are bold faced in Kanuri.

4.a. [**kakkadə**_{NP}]

book

‘a book’

b. DP without complement

[**shi**-ga]

him-ACC

‘him’

c. DP with one modifier and a null D

[**kakkadə sələm**_{NP}]

book black

‘a black book’

d. DP with more than one modifier

[maajirwa Jami-abe tunyi]
student PL University-of those
'Those students of University'

DPs/ NPs in Kanuri, like all other languages, can function as the arguments of a verb. They can syntactically function as the subject, direct object, indirect object of a clause. In addition to those DPs/NPs are also complements to a postposition in a postpositional phrase. Below are some more examples of DPs/NPs within the clauses in Kanuri.

5. a. DP functioning as subject:

[**kakkadə-adə**] kakke
book this mine
'This book is mine'

b. DP functioning as indirect object:

Wu [bəri] bukin
I-ACC food eating
'I am eating food'

c. DP functioning as indirect object:

Modu [**Ali-ro**] kakkadəcina
Modu Ali-ro book giveTM
'Modu gave the book to Ali'

d. DP functioning as object to a position

mota adə [**Yerwa-lan**] kadio
car this **Yerwa-from** come^{PST}
'This car came from Yerwa'

An NP can be modified by a number of other constituents. The following are the different types of modifiers found in Kanuri. The study identifies cases where a clause modifies the head noun in the NP. Consider the following example in (6) below.

6. **Hawar** [Mai bazənabedə] kattuwu
News king that died false
‘The news that the king is dearth is not true’

In the above example (6), the head of the NP is bold-faced and the subordinate or the relativizer ‘də’ which is cliticized to the genitive marker –be and the genitive marker –be is cliticized to verb that is already containing inflectional suffix –na to introduces relative clause which serves as a modifier to the head noun “hawar’ (news). Additionally, nouns can also be modified either by adjectives, quantifiers or numerical as indicated in the examples below.

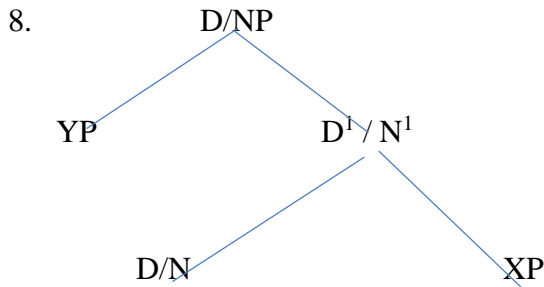
7. a. fero=də
girl-the
‘the girl’
b. fero sələm=də
girl black-the
‘The black girl’
c. fero sələm kuruwu=də
girl black tall -the
‘The tall black girl’
d. njim-wa indi
room PL two
‘Two rooms’

e. manda ngəwu
salt many
'Plenty salt

The above examples in (7a, b, c and d) above show that Kanuri is head initial language where determiners, adjectives, numericals and quantifiers occur post head word modifying the head noun in head initial.

4.2 Minimalist Account of Kanuri DP

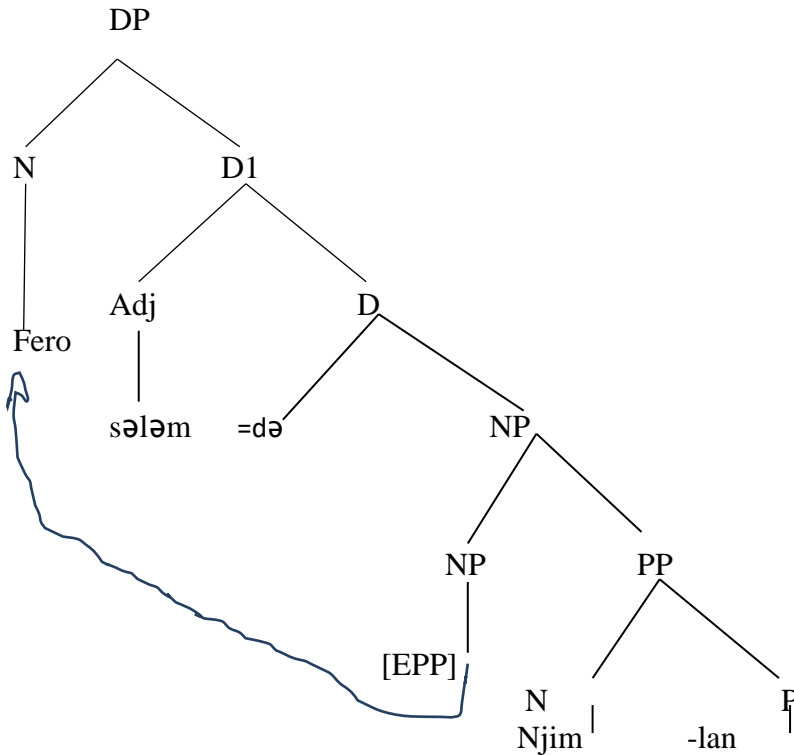
We argue for a universal head initial phrase structure in this paper following Kayne (1994) and Chomsky's (1995) the X-bar notion, a DP and NP in Kanuri looks like the diagram shown in (8) below.



In the above structure, XP and YP are other phrases. The YP occupies the specifier position of the DP/NP. Similarly the XP is occupying the complement position of the DP/NP. Here, the complement of the D is NP hence in a DP, XP = NP. However, a careful look at the phrases show that Kanuri phrases surface as head initial language. Our analysis account for this by assuming that in the head final structure as a result of the operation Move,

the XP in the complement position moves to the specifier position. The [EPP] feature on the head of the noun phrase triggers this movement. Thus resulting in the head-initial phrase. The example in (9) with its structure below illustrates the point.

9. fero sələṃ=də njim=lan
 girl black-the room-in
 ‘The black girl in the room’



The above diagram shows a multiple specifier version of the theory. This is required in order to accommodate more than one modifiers, if present, in the phrase. The above minimalist tree diagram shows that the Empty Projection Principle [EPP] can move to head initial to check Comp features or head initial as the case may be. Phi- features mainly involve person and number features in most languages, and include case and gender and gender-related features in other languages (Chomsky 2001; Radford 2009).

The selection of languages with some phi-features, however, seems to be narrower because Kanuri language lacks typical gender marking system but can be checked for number (singular-plural distinction), person (first-second-third person) as well as case (nominative-accusative distinctions). In the above diagram (fero ‘girl’ has feature +3p singular) as head takes its complements and re-emerge as its specifier in the diagram above and the Postpositional phrase (PP) cannot be merged as specifier in the derivation. This is because the head noun ‘fero’ (girl) has to take the PP as its complement due to its selectional properties.

5.0 Conclusion

This paper examines the structure of noun phrase and determiner phrases in Kanuri adopting both descriptive and minimalist approach of Chomsky (1995) as theoretical approach. The study observes that Kanuri is head-initial language –where the complements come after the head. The study identifies determiner –də as bound morpheme cliticized to nouns, pronouns, adjectives and numericals to modify the head nouns and independent determiner or demonstrative ‘adə’ (this) modifying head nouns in Kanuri. Finally the study provides minimalist account of

determiner phrase (DP) in Kanuri where tree diagram was drawn to show the Empty Projection Principle (EPP) move to head initial to check Comp features.

References

- Bender, M.L. (2000) 'African Languages'. In: Heine and Nurse (ed.) pp 43-73.
- Bulakarima, S.U. (1991) A Study of Kanuri Dialectology, Phonology and Dialect Distribution in Mowar. Unpublished PhD. Thesis, Department of Languages and Linguistics, University of Maiduguri
- Bulakarima, S.U. and Shettima, A.K. (2012) A Sketch of Kanuri Phonology and Tone. Desktop Publisher's co-operative society, Maiduguri.
- Chomsky, N. (1965) *Aspect of the Theory of Syntax*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, Press.
- Chomsky, N. (1981) *Lectures on Government and Binding*. Dordrecht. Foris.
- Chomsky, N. (1995) *The Minimalist Program*. Cambridge. MA MIT, Press.
- Crystal, D. (2008) *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*. Sixth ed. Basil Blackwell, UK
- Cyffer, N. (1991) *We Learn Kanuri*. Köln, Rudiger Koppe Verlag.
- Cyffer, N. (1998) *A Sketch of Kanuri*. Köln, Rudiger Koppe Verlag.
- Fannami, M., Gazali, B. K. &Mele, M.(2017).*Transitivity and ergativity of Kanuri verbs*. Festschrift in honour of Professor Rotimi Badejo, Lincom publication, Germany.
- Greenberg, J.H. (1963) *The Languages of Africa*. The Hague.

- Greeberg, J.H. (1977) *The Languages of Africa*. The Hague.
- Lewis, M. Paul (2009) *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. 16th edition. Dallas.
Online version: <http://WWW.ethnologue.com/>.
- Keyne, R. (1994) *The Auto Symmetry of Syntax*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT, Press
- Radford, A. (2009) *The Sentence Structure of English Minimalist Approach*. Cambridge CUP.
- Mose, E. (2012) *The Structure and Role of the Ekegusii Determiner Phrase: A Minimalist Approach*. Unpublished M.A. dissertation, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya.
- Zwart, C. (1998) *The Minimalist Program* *Journal of Linguistics* 34, 213 -226 Cambridge University, Press.

Baba Kura Alkali Gazali
Department of Languages and Linguistics,
University of Maiduguri
&
Umar Mohammed Gombe
Department of English,
Yobe State University, Damaturu