

Emergence of alternate argument alignment patterns in Northwest Kainji

Northwest Kainji (NWK, Nigeria; Benue-Congo) languages display at least two argument alignment patterns: accusative and neutral. Head nouns in NWK occur with either prefixed or suffixed adnominal gender marking in most noun phrases (see Hoffmann 1967 and Dettwelier 2015 for Dakakari/C’Lela [dri]; Bendor-Samuel et al. 1973 for Duka/Ut-Hun [uth]; Author (2007, 2019) for Ut-Ma’in [gel], and D. Heath 2020 for Us-Saare [uss]). Labeled as ambifixes by Arkadiev (2022, mention of Ut-Ma’in [gel]) and typed as “clitic-like” by Güldemann & Fiedler (2022, mention of Dakakari/C’Lela [dri]), these powerhouse morphemes manifest grammatical categories of number (singular/plural/mass), class membership (including derivational functions adding designations of humanness, animacy, size, and shape), and, in certain morphosyntactic configurations, they flag grammatical role. However, affix placement, i.e., where, and whether or not, a particular form of adnominal marker occurs, is governed by the morphosyntactic configuration of the noun phrase. Further, the argument alignment pattern that occurs in any given clause also depends on the internal structure of a particular NP, see (i) and (ii), agnostic of grammatical role. That is, the argument flagging function on the adnominal markers is present, but potentially secondary to other referential functions.

- (i) Unexpanded NPs display **accusative alignment** by means of adnominal marking:
 - a. Unexpanded **subject** NPs occur with an adnominal gender **suffix** (nominative), (1–2);
 - b. Unexpanded **object** NPs occur with an adnominal gender **prefix** (accusative), as in (3).
- (ii) NPs that are expanded in any way, i.e., contain modifiers, display **neutral alignment** (4–6).

Two alignment patterns also exist to varying degrees within the pronominal system. In some NWK, noun class agreement pronouns manifest accusative alignment with distinct forms for subject and object. Most personal pronouns display neutral alignment; however, first person singular pronouns have distinct forms for subject.

- (1) *sē* [kó:t-jǝ] *rwōn* *ōr-vástè*
 then guinea.fowl-C7.NOM exit C5-last
 ‘Then a guinea fowl exited last.’ (Ut-Ma’in [gel], Author 2019: 104)
- (2) *kòná* [kó:t-jǝ] *zǝ-t.è...* *ōr-kjàt ...*
 there guinea.fowl-C7.NOM say-PRF C5-difficult
 ‘There a guinea fowl has said, “Difficult...”’ (Ut-Ma’in [gel], Author 2019: 104)
- (3) *á=b* *hján* [*ū-kó:t*]
 COND=2SG see C7.ACC-guinea.fowl
 ‘If you see a guinea fowl, ...’ (Ut-Ma’in [gel], Author 2019: 104)
- (4) [*jà=t-ǝ=s-té=tǝ*] *āzgōsè*
 fruit=C6-ASSOC=C4-tree=C6.DEF roll.out
 ‘Those fruit rolled out.’ (Ut-Ma’in [gel], Author 2019: 102)
- (5) [*jà=t-ǝ=s-té=tǝ*] *fámǝ* *t-móŋǝré*
 fruit=C6-ASSOC=C4-tree=C6.DEF resemble C6-mango.fruit
 ‘Those fruits resemble mangoes.’ (Ut-Ma’in [gel], Author 2019: 102)
- (6) *é=kár-g-ǝs:* [*jà=t-ǝ=s-té=tǝ*]
 C2.SUBJ=pick-PST-ITR fruit=C6-ASSOC=C4-tree=C6.DEF
 ‘They gathered those fruits.’ (Ut-Ma’in [gel], Author 2019: 102)

All NPs that demonstrate traditionally understood accusative alignment, may better be understood as demonstrating König’s (2008: 8, 158) Type 2 Marked Nominative system, crucially because of the wide range of functions that the accusative (prefix) form fills. In contrast, the nominative form has a very restricted set of functions. In this paper I present the morphosyntax of these alignment systems across four NWK languages, survey the morphosyntactic conditions that determine when the alternate patterns arise in each language, and propose rationale for the development of the suffixed marked nominative pattern.

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