

Analysing Number morphosyntax in Embosi

KIBA NGAPOULA

Université Marien Ngouabi, Congo
kibangapoula@yahoo.fr

Yvon Pierre NDONGO IBARA

Universisté Marien Ngouabi
yvon.ndongo-ibara@umng.cg

Ferlie OKOULOU ETONOKANI

Universisté Marien Ngouabi

Abstract

This work is concerned with the morphosyntactic analysis of number in Embósi under Chomsky's Transformational Generative Framework. A scrutiny of the morphosyntax of number proves that Embósi shows singular and plural contrast. This contrast is morphosyntactically observable through agreement concord patterns. In this respect, there is an agreement between a noun and demonstratives, adjectives, possessives, and quantifiers in singular and plural. Secondly, when two nouns have different prefixes, the noun with + Animate feature governs the subject verb agreement. Finally, the noun and number agreement is selective since it concerns only the first five cardinal numbers, whereas the remaining as well as the ordinal number does not show agreement.

Keywords: agreement, phrase, sentence, noun, singular, plural

Résumé

Ce travail de recherche examine la morphosyntaxe du trait nombre en Embósi sous le cadre de la grammaire generative transformative de Chomsky. Un examen minitieux de la morphosyntaxe du nombre prouve que qu'en Embósi, il y'a un contrast singulier et pluriel. Ce contrast est morphosyntaxiquement observable à travers des concordances d'accord. A cet égard, il existe un accord entre un nom et des démonstratifs, des adjectifs, des possessifs et des quantificateurs au singular et au pluriel. Esuite, lorsque deux noms ont des prefixes differents, le nom ayant le trait + animée régit l'accord du sujet avec le verbe. Enfin, l'accord du nombre cardinal est sélectif puisqu'il ne concerne que les cinq premiers nombres cardinaux alors que les autres ainsi que les nombres ordinaux ne montrent pas d'accord.

Mots clés: Accord, syntagme, phrase, Nom, Singulier, Pluriel.

Introduction

This piece of research work examines the syntactic and morphological features of Number in Embósi. This research has two main purposes. The first is to analyze the spreading of the morphosyntactic features "number" within a phrase as well within a sentence. The second concerns the analysis of numerals in Embósi. As a matter of fact, a set of works prove that there are fewer studies on morphosyntax of number, showing the relevance of OMANCHONU (2011:84) writes "counting of numbering is an integral and inseparable part of the grammar of any language because there is hardly any meaningful discourse in a language that does not make reference to quantity, size, time, distance and weight in define numbers". That is the reason why the main objective of this work is to analyze a noun in Embósi in a number context. As such, the work addresses the following research questions: (i) How does Embósi express singularity within a Noun Phrase (NP) and a Sentence? (ii) How does Embósi express Plurality within a Noun Phrase (NP) and a Sentence? (iii) What is the impact of number on a noun in a phrase and sentence?

The linguistic domain that this work falls in is syntax and morphology, which are respectively the study of the rules governing the way words are combined to form such larger units as phrases, clauses and sentences in a languages (Crystal 1991:341) and the study of the internal structure of word forms, it means the goal of morphology is to describe and explain the morphological patterns of human languages.

I- Singularity in Embósi.

This section is devoted to the scurry of the singularity in Embósi phrases and sentences. This singularity morpho syntactic analysis concerns demonstratives, adjectives, possessives, and quantifiers. The objective of this section is to point out the way singularity is expressed morphosyntactically Embósi language. In this respect, a series of examples is going to show a noun with a determiner, an adjective, a quantifier, a possessive.

(1)

a- Munda lamp 'This lamp is new'	mu this	o-di 3 rd Singular –be –Present	ma with	pu new
b- Oyulu Child 'That woman is big'	wó this	bò there	a-di 3 rd Singular–be –Present	oné big
c- Mwana Child 'My child'	yà of	ngá		
d- Pɛ give 'Give me a piece of bread'	ngá me	ékyéni a half	ya of	mapa bread
e- Pɛ give 'Give me one cassava'	ngá me	ékó Cassava	eβòò one	

The examples in (1) show that Embósi attests post nominal determiners. Ndongo Ibara (2012:29) said that: “word order in Embosi noun phrase is pre and post nominal. When a determiner is pre nominal, it does not show agreement with a noun, whilst a post nominal determiner must agree with its head”.

At phrasal level, the agreement between the noun and its determiners is dominated by the head noun. Put otherwise, at morphological level, one can observe that the demonstrative pronoun *this* in (1a) is a copy of the noun class prefix of the noun *munda* ‘lamp’. This shows that it is the noun which c-commands the determiner. Yet, the first noun class prefix related to +human does generate its copy to show agreement, this is the reason why there is the demonstrative pronoun ‘wo’ instead of mu in the example (1b).

In addition, if adjectives in modern English are inflected with comparatives (Bider, Conard, and Leech (2002:188) and Quirk (2010:129); in Embósi, they can be inflected in number as illustrated in (1b) where the adjective big ‘-né’ inherits the singular noun class prefix of the noun woman ‘oyulu’. We should confess that there is another kind of adjectives which do not show any agreement in number with the noun they qualify. Guy Noel KOUARATA (2014:46) assumes that invariable adjectives are a class of adjectives that do not vary in any way under any circumstance of use; this includes adjectives like *píi* (calm), *mbya* (silent), *βoo* (open), etc.

Next, an Embósi cardinal number can show singular agreement with the noun it shows the quantity. This is exemplified in (1e) where the number ‘one’ takes a singular form carrying the prefix e-. There is a word of cautious to be echoed here. In fact, the noun-cardinal number is restricted to the first five cardinal numbers, whilst with the other, the cardinal number remains invariable.

The quantifiers are viewed as nouns themselves. When used with a singular noun, the quantifier take a singular form, on the contrary, it would change its morphological form.

Finally, the possessive in Embósi is a construction implying the possessee and the possessor under the formula:

(2) Possessee + ya (Singular) + Possessor

Moreover, at sentential level, the singularity concerns the subject verb agreement. Ndongo Ibara (2022) summarises subject pronoun prefixes in the following:

Chart 1: Embosi Initial subject pronoun prefixes

Initial Prefixes as subject pronoun				Verb stem
Person	Pronoun	Initial Pronoun 1	Initial Pronoun 2	
First	Ngá	í-		
Second	Nò	ò-		
Third singular	Wà	à-	è-, ì, ò-	
First plural	Bísí	lè-		
Second plural	Bíní	lè-		
Third plural	bá	bá/á-	í	

There is an important aspect worthy of attention; this concerns the distinction between the Initial pronoun 1 and the Initial pronoun 2. The former is used with the pronouns in Pronoun column in the chart, whereas the latter is used in case of agreement implying noun classes. In fact, the agreement between the noun *munda* and the finite verb *o-di* is overt through the prefix *o-* which is Initial Pronoun 2.

II- Plurality in Embósi

This section analyses the plurality in an Embósi phrase and sentence. In this connection, we are going to see the plural marker of demonstratives, Adjectives, possessives and quantifiers.

(3)

a- **Mi**-nda **mi** **i**-di ma pu
 PL.lamp these 3rd Plural–be –Present with new
 'These lamps are new'

b- **a**-yulu **ba** **bò** **a**-di ané
 PL.Woman this there 3rd Singular–be –Present big
 'Those women are big'

c- **bana** à ngá
 PL.Child of
 'My children'

d- Pε ngá ikyéni ma mapa
 give me halves of bread
 'Give me pieces of bread'

e- Pε ngá ikó ibà
 give me PL.Cassava PL.two
 'Give me two cassavas'

It appears from the examples above that the plurality of nouns is morphological. It is the noun that imposes its plural features to the determiners. In this connection, when the noun is in plural in Embósi, the demonstrative (3a & 3b), the connector (3c, 3d), the adjective (3B) and the cardinal number (3e) which are related to it take a plural form. The chart that follows illustrates the plural of demonstratives according to Embósi noun class typology.

Chart 2: Embósi demonstrative per noun class

CLASS	Simple Proximal	Very Proximal	Simple distal	Very distal
1	Ba (these)	Ba bò (these)	Ba pé (those)	Ba péé (those)
2	Mi (these)	Mi bò (these)	Mi pé (those)	Mi péé (those)
3	Ma (these)	Ma bò (these)	Ma pé (these)	Ma péé (these)
4	Bi (these)	bi bò (these)	Mi pé (those)	Mi péé (those)
5	Ma /Ba (these)	Ma/Babò(these)	Ma/Bépé(those)	Ma/bepéé (that)
6	Ye (these)	Ye bò (these)	Ye pé(those)	Ye péé (those)
7	Ma (these)	Ma bò(these)	Ma pé (these)	Ma péé (that)

In some Embósi dialects, the plural of adjective is made by the reduplication of the adjective as illustrated hereafter.

(4)

a	Ba-na PL.child 'Grown up children'	ba of	a-né-ané PL.big-big
b	Minda PL.lamp 'big lamps'	ma of	i-né-iné PL.big big
c	Béa PL.thing 'Bad things/objects'	ba of	i-bé-ibé PL.bad bad
d	pó PL.problem 'bad problems'	ya of	mbé-mbé PL.bad bad
e	Maré PL.canoe 'long canoe'	ma of	a-la-ala long long

The plural of the noun with the first cardinal number is shown in the following examples.

(5)

a	a-lomi PL.husband 'two husbands'	a-ba PL.two	
b	ika PL.furrow 'three furrows'	i-sari PL.three	
c	a-kò PL.banana 'four bananas'	a-na PL.four	
d	i-léngé PL.face 'five faces'	i-taani PL.five	
e	kasi PL.leaf 'three leaves'	tsaré PL.three	
f	baré PL.person 'ten persons'	ndzomi PL.ten	
g	a-ndai PL.house 'a hundred houses'	kama hundred	
h	bana, minga, misi, bea, manga PL.child, tail, eye, thing, dance 'two children, tails, eyes, things, dances'	a-ba/i-ba/a-ba/i-ba/a-sare PL.two	

It is worth signalling that when the plural of the noun class is made of the CV-, there is no copy of that plural marker on the cardinal number as illustrated in (8h). Actually, each noun class is made of two syllabic patterns

namely CV- and V-. However, if it happens that a noun class lacks a V-typology, there is either the usage of the default a-plural marker or some irregular plural as highlighted in (4d) and (5e).

Next, when there is a combination of a noun with many specifiers, all of them will carry the plural marker of the noun which dominates them as in:

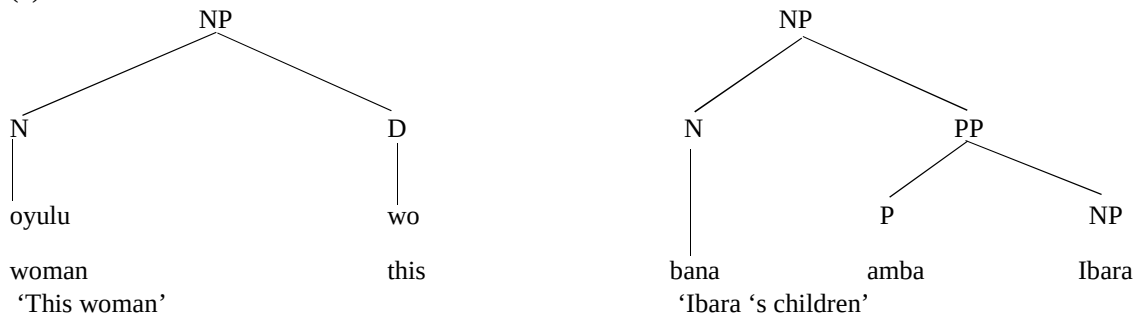
(6)

a- basi asari ba alami-alami ba
 PL.wife PL.three PL.of PL.good good PL.this
 ‘These three nice women’

b- ilangi isari ma iti iti mi
 PL.bottle PL.three PL.of PL.small small PL.this
 ‘These three small bottles’

If Abney’s (1987) postulation of Determiner Phrase has been motivated by the fact that the absence of a determiner can lead to ungrammaticality in some Indo-European languages, in Embósi, on the contrary, the determiner is accessory. In fact, in Embósi, it is the noun which selects every material which depends on it. So, Embósi should be more akin to NP than to DP. Consider:

(7)



In the following, we are going to analyse the subject-verb when the subject is composed of two nouns with two different noun classes.

(8)

a- Olangé la mwana oyulu avé sa maa
 SG.Bottle and SG.child girl 3PL-Fall-Past in water
 ‘A bottle and a girl fell in water’

b- bana la angoo baléa o ndzé
 PL.child and PL.mother 3PL-cry-Present at outside
 ‘Children and mothers are crying outdoors’

c- bana la angoo aléi o ndzé
 PL.child and PL.mother 3PL-cry-Past at outside
 ‘Children and mothers cried outdoors’

It appears that the form of the verb changes according to the subject. Potter Henry (1990:6) said: « not only does a verb change its form to tell time, but it also can change its form to indicate how many subjects it has ». In Embósi, when the subject is alone, the agreement is realized according to the chart 1 aforementioned.

Singular-subject verb agreement

Mu#ana a † lea
 SG.child s/he † cry
 A child is crying

mu#nda o † we
 SG.lamp it. turn off
 a lamp turns off

Plural-subject verb agreement

ba#na ba † lea
 PL.child 3PL † cry
 children(they) are crying

mi#nda I † we
 PL.lamp 3PL. turn off
 lamps (they) turn off

di#na I † tsoli
SG.tooth it † fall down
A tooth falls down

i#ko I † bengi
SG. Banana it † ripe
A banana get ripe

e#yea e † lembi
SG. Something it † lose –past
something (it) lost

nde e † be
SG -house it † fall
A house (it) fell down

le#kasi i † tsoli
SG. Leaf it † fall
a leaf fell

bu#ari o † bondzimi
SG. Canoe it † break
A canoe (it) is broken

mi#na a † tsoli
PL.tooth they † fall down
teeth (they) falls down

a#ko a † bengi
PL. Banana they † ripe
bananas get ripe

be#ea I † lembi
PL. thing they † lose –past
Things (they) are lost

a#nde a † bve
PL -house they † fall
Houses (they) fell

kasi e † tsoli
PL. Leaf they † fall
leaves fell down

ma#ri a † bondzimi
PL † canoe they † buak
Canoes (they) are broken

But, if it happens that there are two or more subjects, the subject-verb agreement has some restrictions. In fact, in case of two nouns with the features +Human and –Human, the +Human noun is going to dominate the agreement. This is illustrated in the example (1a). But, if the two nouns have the features +Human, there could be two possibilities related to the time of reference. In this connection, the distinction between *balea* and *aléi* in (8b) and (8c) is time based. It appears that when referring to an on-going actions, either *bana* or *angoo* will be conjugated alike, whereas they would also be alike in case of completed actions.

The last issue we want to examine collective or group nouns. A collective noun is a noun that represents a group of individuals, or things as one entity. In this connection, many authors gave a point of view about collective nouns, Chalker and Weiner (1994:69) says that: “the choice of singular or plural verb and corresponding pronouns and determiners depends on whether the group is considered as a single unit or as a collection of individuals, and this explanation we found in most grammars”. Levin (2001:1) mentions Jespersen who discusses a theory about animacy when it comes to collective nouns. According to Jespersen’s theory, plural agreement is only used with collective nouns denoting animate beings. This means that even though a collective noun is grammatically singular, it is used with plural agreement when the semantic meaning is that of a group of living being. Jespersson (1989:2) discusses some collective nouns that denote group of animate beings which can have variable concord and others cannot have variable concord. Therefore, he argues that the question of animacy is not sufficient explanation and says that volition (if the subject has the intention to do something) and mobility (when the subject has the ability to move) are features that could be taken into consideration when defining collective nouns. Actually, he argues that a collective noun can refer to referents who can act on their own will to form a group of referents. This can justify why the word can’t be a collective noun because trees have no decision nor will to act. Bauer (1994:2) investigated collective nouns used in editorials in The Times during the twentieth century and found that there was an increasing tendency to use singular agreement with collective noun. In her research, she found words that were used with plural concord in the beginning of the century, but later in the century the same word is used with singular concord, for example army was last used with plural agreement in 1990. In fact, the language used in the editorials in The Times is very formal English, so the results Bauer found does not account for less formal styles of English.

(9)

a- Mwala ma andzoi mo-lea pé
a group of elephants pass-Present there
‘A group of elephant is passing there’

b- Eyomba bisi ye bèlè imbyengi
Team-play-future-tomorrow
Our team will play tomorrow

c- Akondzi ba opami ma apili amisi tsala kwelé
 Jury-3SG-to have-present proclaimed outcome
 Jury has already proclaimed outcome

As things stand, it appears that Embósi offers only one possibility. If the collective nouns imply a singular subject like in (9a, 9b), the subject-verb agreement is in singular. However, if the noun is in plural, like in (9c), the verb takes a plural affix.

Conclusion

To conclude, this research work dealt with phrasal and sentential analysis of singularity and plurality in Embósi. Put otherwise, we dealt with the morpho syntactic account of number features. Further to the examples complied with our discussion, it comes out that number feature is overt through phrasal and sentential categories. The singularity and the plurality in a phrase or a sentence closely depend on a head noun. It's the number feature of a head noun which spreads cross lexicon. The forms of a lexicon caring the number feature can change when cardinal; ordinal numbers agree with the head, it is one of the first five numbers whose form can change, whereas the other numbers remain invariable.

Bibliographical References

- Abbie Potter Henry, 1990, 12 rules of Subject-verb agreement <https://valenciacollege.edu/students/learning-support/osceola/labs/documents/13RulesofSubject-VerbAgreement.pdf>
- Ambarita, Eson, Robert Sibarani, Dwi Widayati, Eddy Setia, 2017, Deverbal Nominals in Toba Batak Language: A Generative Transformational Study. *International Journal of Research & Review*, p.183-191.
- Biber, Douglas, Conrad, Susan, & Leech, Geoffrey, 2002, *Longman student grammar of spoken and written English*. White Plains, NY: Pearson.
- Brinton, Laurel, J. and Dona Brinton, 2010, *The Linguistic structure of Modern English*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Chomsky, Noam, 2002, *Syntactic structures* (2nd ed.). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Crystal, David, 2008, *A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics* (6th ed.). New York: Wiley Blackwell.
- Diessel, H. 1999, *Demonstratives in spatial language and social interaction: Form, Function and Grammaticalization*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Dissel, 2013, Intentional and Incidental Vocabulary learning: the Role of Historical Linguistics in the Second Language classroom.
- Guthrie M. 1953, *The Bantu Languages of Western Equatorial Africa*, Oxford University Press for International African Institute.
- Kiba Ngapoula, 2015, *The Semantics and Pragmatics of Demonstratives in English and Embosi*, PhD dissertation.
- Kouarata, Guy Noel, 2014, Variations de formes dans la langue Mbochi Bantu C25, mémoire de DEA.
- Kumar Ranjit, 1999, *Research Methodology: A Step -by Step Guide for Beginners*.
- Levin Henry M. 2001, An Event structure Account of English Resultatives / Educating for a common wealth.
- Mberi Ngakala, Robon Perrin, 2014, A comparative study of internal structure of the noun phrase in English and Laali. Mémoire de Master d'enseignement. ENS : Université Marien Ngouabi.
- Ndinga Oba, A. 2003, *Les langues bantoues du Congo Brazzaville : étude typologique des langues du groupe C20*, Tome 2. Paris : Le Harmattan.
- Ndongo Ibara, Y.P. 2012, *Embosi-English Dictionary*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Ndongo Ibara, Y.P. 2021, *Dictionnaire embosi-français*, Paris: L'Harmattan
- Nouwen Rick, 2008, Syntax and Semantics of spatial edited by Anna Asbury and Jakub.
- Omachonu, G. S. 2011, Derivational processes in Igala numeral system: Some universal considerations. *Journal of universal language* 12/2: 81–101
- Rialland Annie, Martial Embanga Aborobongui, Martine Adda-Decker, and Lori Lamel, 2015, Dropping of the class-Prefix Consonant, Vowel Elision and Automatic phonology mining in Embosi bantu C25. *Selected Proceedings of the 44th Annual Conference on African Linguistics*, ed. Ruth Kramer et al., 221-230. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.
- Watson, Rachel, 2015, Language as category: Using prototype theory to create reference points for the study of multilingual data.
- Winkler Elisabeth Grace, 2007, *Understanding Language: A Basic Course in Linguistics*, Bloomsbury Academic.