

## The KENYANG SYNTAX: ADJECTIVES

---

Mbu Martha Njui

*Department of Linguistics & African Literature*

*University of Douala, Cameroon*

*Email: [mbumatha80@yahoo.fr](mailto:mbumatha80@yahoo.fr)*

---

### ABSTRACT

One of the most important components of a sentence is the adjective. This part of speech is so common that people use it almost automatically, both in speech and in writing. An adjective is a part of speech which describes, identifies, or qualifies a noun or a pronoun. So basically, the function of an adjective is to modify a noun or a pronoun so that it will become more specific and interesting. The term "adjective", as applied to Kenyang and most Bantu languages, usually applies only to a rather restricted set of words. However, in the wider sense, it can refer to any word that modifies a noun. The wider sense is used here. Kenyang adjectives have invariable forms, that is, they do not take concord markers, but instead, they remain constant regardless of the class of the noun they modify. All adjectives have one thing in common: they all follow the noun they modify, and require some kind of prefix whose class matches the preceding noun. This paper describes the uses, types, and functions of adjectives as used in Kenyang, a Bantu Language spoken in the South West Region of Cameroon. The structural approach is adopted in the data presentation to highlight some of the cross-linguistic universals on the use of adjectives in order to properly characterize this linguistic feature in Kenyang.

**Keywords:** Adjectives, Pure Adjectives, Categorical Function, Numeral Adjectives.

## INTRODUCTION

An adjective, in grammar, is a word whose main syntactic role is to modify a noun or pronoun, by giving more information about reference, what noun or pronoun. Collectively, adjectives form one of the traditional eight parts of speech, though linguists today distinguish adjectives from words such as determiners that used to be considered adjectives but that are now recognized as different. It derives from the Latin words *ad* and *iacere* (Latin words that start with an *I* change to a *J* in English); literally, *to throw to*. Adjective can be classified into two types in terms of syntax, attributive adjectives and predicate adjectives. Attributive adjectives directly modify a noun while predicative adjectives appear "*in the compliment a copula*" (Hofherr and Matushansky, 2010: 10) and as secondary predicate. Bhat (1994: 16) discusses how adjective feature as "*property in semantic class and modification in pragmatic function*" in terms of syntactic categories. Feist (2012) classifies the descriptive meaning of adjectives into two types, perceptual and conceptual. Feist (2012) defines the perceptual meaning as *approximating either sense perception* (as in 'red balloon'), or "*perception of the mind's own state*" (as in anger and conceptual meaning are "*general and abstract*" being comparatively far from perception (as in elementary). Fashion-related terms are classified as having a perceptual meaning as they are subjective. The pronominal attributive position, adjective + noun, is noticeable "among the basic types of phrases used in English" (Ferris, 1993: 20). Ferris (1993) argues that the adjective is employed to supplement the process because the noun alone is not enough to "identify the entity under consideration by the speaker" Ferris (1993) discusses how words are fundamental linguistic expressions, assuming the listener does not specifically concentrate on particular phrases or morphemes. Ferris (1993) defines entities as "*elements of a specifically linguistic construction*" and properties as elements in the intentional level "*used by speakers in constructing their acts of linguistic communication*". According to Mutaka and Tamanji (2000: 203), in many African languages, adjectives are mostly

derived from verbs. Generally speaking, there exist pure adjectives, nominal adjectives and verbal adjectives. Pure adjectives are also termed as real or true adjectives. These are the type of adjectives which are non-derived; they do not originate from another part of speech. The nominal and verbal adjectives originate from nouns or verbs and that is why they are termed as derived adjectives. Adjectival Phrases (APs) and the subset of adjectives with which AP are formed can often be specified semantically, derivationally and/or morphologically; on the same way, APs regularly involve adjectives lexically derived from nouns or verbs. Syntactically, adjectives have two uses: a predicative use, as predicates and an attributive use, as modifiers. The objective of this paper is to identify the types, position, functions, and numerals as adjectives in the Kenyang language. In order to examine this grammatical element, this paper has been divided into five sections. Section one is focused on the types of adjective in Kenyang, while section two discusses the position of adjectives, section three dwells on the functions of adjectives in the language in question. Section four focuses on numerals as adjectives in the language under study; the last section is the conclusion.

### **Types of Adjectives in Kenyang**

Kenyang has the structure S.V.O. Adjectives in this language pattern falls into two categories namely pure adjectives and noun derived adjectives.

### **Pure Adjectives**

As in the majority of African languages, pure adjectives are very few and might be said to form a closed class, in the sense that one can easily list all of them. By pure adjectives, we refer to lexical items that are specified in the lexicon as belonging to a category of adjectives as opposed to derived ones. In Kenyang, pure adjectives are for the most part limited in size or dimension. We are able to find only four true adjectives in the Kenyang language. They are [chú] for red [páè páèp] meaning "white", [pyóè] meaning "black",

and [mα□vduà] meaning "few" or "small" or "little". Let us look at the examples below.

|             |            |
|-------------|------------|
| 1) bakoà    | páàpáàp    |
| beans       | white"     |
| "white      | beans"     |
| 2) m̀- máòn | pyóè       |
| goat        | black      |
| "black      | goat"      |
| 3) atΣ"iù   | Chuà       |
| Verhicle    | red        |
| "red        | vercide"   |
| 4 ) ná-kóñ  | óà pyoà    |
| C5 spear    | A.p black  |
| "black      | spear"     |
| 5) bá-kát   | áà páàpáàp |
| house       | A.p white  |
| "white      | houses"    |

From the examples above, the adjective, is found in the noun phrase directly following the noun that it modifies. It is joined to it by an association particle.

### Nominal Adjectives

According to Tamanji (2000) "Nominal adjectives are pure nouns which are made to function like attributive adjectives in an N1-N2 construction type" position where they modify the head noun let us consider the following examples

|               |        |
|---------------|--------|
| 6) á-cháñtiù  | m-móè  |
| fool          | child  |
| "folish       | child" |
| 7) á-rĪ' tiùù | n-noàk |
| fine          | soup   |
| "good         | soup"  |

These adjectives typically denote qualities and physical properties

## Position of Adjectives in a Noun Phrase

Adjectives in kenyang can occur at two different positions. While some adjectives precede the noun they modify some follow the noun they modify. This is what has been referred to as pre-nominal and post-nominal adjectives. The next sub sections treat pre-nominal and post-nominal adjectives respectively.

### Pre-Nominal Adjectives

Pre-nominal adjectives occur before the noun they modify in a noun phrase. Some examples of these adjectives are given below.

|               |           |
|---------------|-----------|
| 8) mbĩĩñ      | Ánóàk     |
| short         | stick     |
| "short        | stick"    |
| 9) bárám      | batuà     |
| large         | ears      |
| "large        | ears"     |
| 10) á-rĩ' tíù | m- mó'    |
| Beautiful     | Baby      |
| "Beautiful    | Baby"     |
| 11) )* añwaè  | mbĩĩñ     |
| cut           | short     |
| "short        | cut"      |
| 12) ñgóèràè   | ndĩnùdĩ'  |
| woman         | beautiful |
| "beautiful    | woman"    |

The ungrammaticality of (d) resides in the fact that the adjective has been post-posed instead of being pre-posed. Note that the adjective is immediately adjacent to the noun it modifies.

### Post-nominal adjectives

As opposed to the former, post-posed adjectives only occur after the nouns they modify. The following are examples of nouns modified by post nominal adjectives.

|           |           |
|-----------|-----------|
| 13) ε-rĩñ | ñgoà ñgoà |
| pistle    | big       |

|            |           |
|------------|-----------|
| "big       | pistle"   |
| 14) kánán  | á chuò    |
| birds      | A.p red   |
| "red       | birds"    |
| 15) aĩgwaà | mbĩù mbĩù |
| cat        | wicked    |
| "wicket    | cat"      |
| 16)* pyóè  | námbeà    |
| black      | star      |
| "black     | star"     |
| 17) *chuù  | báèsáèñáè |
| red        | ant       |
| "red       | ant"      |

Examples (16) and (17) are ungrammatical because the adjectives have been pre-posed instead of being posed-posed, some post-posed adjectives in kenyang can be reduplicated. Reduplication however does not alter the semantic content, it simply emphasizes the degree of the quality. The phenomenon of reduplication occurs mostly with pure adjectives as shown below.

|            |                |
|------------|----------------|
| 18) ká-nán | á chuàchuà     |
| birds      | A.p red        |
| "red       | birds"         |
| 19) bákóèk | báòtaòñ-a-taòñ |
| bed        | strong         |
| "strong    | bed"           |
| 19) ñgóràè | ndĩù ndĩù      |
| girl       | beautiful      |
| "beautiful | girl"          |
| 20) amĩùk  | aè mĩòk        |
|            | a⊗o' a⊗o       |
| eyes       | a.p big big    |
| "big       | eyes"          |

Whether pre-posed or post-posed, adjectives basically play the same role in any given noun phrase in which they occur. However, we found it difficult to predict which adjective will precede and which will follow the noun because some adjectives occupy both positions

## Categorical Functions of Adjectives

Two functions can be achieved by adjectives in kenyang namely the attributive and the predicative functions.

### Attributive Functions of Adjectives in Kenyang

Adjectives that attribute qualities to noun are known as attributives. Attributive adjectives are placed immediately after the noun they qualify. This ordering of the noun and the adjective is illustrated in the following.

#### Examples

|             |           |
|-------------|-----------|
| 21) áβaà    | chuà      |
| bag         | red       |
| "red        | bag"      |
| 22) á kaàk  | a pyóè    |
| Foot        | A.p black |
| "black      | book"     |
| 23) εòkañiù | chiù      |
| School/book | red       |
| "red        | book"     |

### Predicative Functions of Adjectives

Predicative adjectives give information about the noun they modify. Generally, two major elements separate the head noun from the predicative adjective, these are the copular and the subject marker. In kenyang they are separated from the noun they modify by the copular verb "be". Let us consider the following.

#### Examples

|                      |             |
|----------------------|-------------|
| 24) nárañ            | neriù       |
| Pineapple            | is good     |
| "the pineapple       | is good "   |
| 25) paèmpaàm yóà     | Á chIùketiù |
| Grasshoppers those   | sm big      |
| "those grass hoppers | are big "   |

### Numeral Adjectives

Numeral adjectives also known as adjectives of numbers are one among seven types of Adjectives. Numeral adjectives are those adjectives which are used to denote the number of nouns or the

order in which they stand. They are also commonly called Adjectives of Number. In simpler terms we can say that adjective of numbers tell us the number of people or things and maintain clarity by giving exact information.

### Nouns Modified by Numerals

Numerals are noun modifiers which express a concord, amount or quantity. As in other languages the general pattern in most Bantu and bantoid languages are that the numerals one through nine takes concord markers unless they are compounds, while numerals above nine do not. This pattern holds true in kenyang. Numerals seven and nine are compounds and these therefore do not take concord maker. Numerals ten remains constant regardless of the class of the head noun. Below is a list of some of the kenyang numeral.

### Cardinal Numerals

A Cardinal numeral is a number used for counting. In kenyang cardinal numerals can be divided into two categories, the simple cardinals and the complex cardinals

### Simple Cardinals

Simple cardinals are members made up of one morpheme. In kenyang, simple cardinals range from one to ten

|                      |         |
|----------------------|---------|
| á-mót                | "one"   |
| bá-pay               | "two"   |
| bá-raàt              | "three" |
| bá-n <sup>w</sup> iù | "four"  |
| bá-tay               | "five"  |
| bá taàndaàt          | Six!    |

tandandatamót « Seven »

má-nán « eight »

náèènamót « nine »

=

Byoà « ten »



The forms, from one to ten all have the morpheme (á) and from two to six have a common prefix (bàò). The following are examples of noun phrases modified by simple cardinal numbers. The association between the nouns and its modifier is bridged by the association particle.

|               |      |            |
|---------------|------|------------|
| 131) Mán      | ε    | Pay        |
| goat          | a.p  | Two        |
| "two goats"   |      |            |
| 132) Ba       | ⊗órá | ba'        |
| S.m girls     | a.p  | Three      |
| "three women" |      |            |
| 133) Bákát    | á    | bá nwiù    |
| house         | A.p  | four       |
| "four houses" |      |            |
| 134) Bóñkóèp  | á    | tadanamòat |
| Sm cup        | A.p  | seven      |
| "seven cups"  |      |            |
| 135) nò       | jáè  | nánánamót  |
| hill          |      | nine       |
| "nine hills"  |      |            |

From the above examples, we can conclude that numerals in the kenyang language are post-posed to the noun they modify.

### Complex Cardinals

A complex cardinal is a numeral that is made up of two simple cardinals. They can be classified into three specific groups with reference to their structure. The group is made up of complex cardinals obtained via addition in which [nEΞ] Is placed before the numbers and means "add". This group includes the following numerals

|                |     |        |
|----------------|-----|--------|
| 136) byoè      | ná  | aè mót |
| ten and        | A.p | one    |
| "eleven"       |     |        |
| m' -men byoè   | ná  | aè mót |
| "eleven goats" |     |        |
| 137) ná-kuà    | ná  | Ápaày  |
| fifteen        | and | two    |
| "seventeen"    |     |        |

138) byòà            ná        árat  
       ten            and        three  
 "thirteen"

The second group is made up of two simple cardinals without any associative marker. The numerals are obtained via multiplication of the adjacent numbers below are some examples

139) á-saà  
 "twenty"  
 140) á-sa        nsem        byòà  
 twenty        and        ten  
 "thirty"  
 141) bá-saà                    bá-paày  
 twenty                        tw o  
 "fourty"  
 142) bá-saà                    -bá-taày  
 twenty                        fives  
 "one hundred"

Here the cardinal twenty[á-saòj] changes its plural form [bá-saòj] before being associated to the other cardinal. The third group includes cardinals that are made up of three simple numbers linked by [nɛ] "plus" here. The numerals are obtained through mathematical processes namely multiplication and addition. Let us consider the following examples

143) á-sa        -ase' m            be pay  
 twenty        plus            two  
 "twenty two"  
 144) bá-        bápay nseàm        be nwíù  
       saày  
 twenty        twos plus        four  
 "fourty four"  
 145) bá saày    bá rat nsáààm byo    ná amót  
 twenty        three plus tens    With one  
 "seventy three"  
 146) bá saày    bá rat nsáààm byo    ná bátaày  
 twenty        four plus tens    with one  
 "ninety five"

From the above, we suggest that the third group is the association of the second group to another ordinal numeral by a linker. Moreover, we realize that a change occurs. At the level of the simple cardinal where new morphemes are added. But it should be borne in mind that this change occurs when one counts. Let us consider the following example

147) ba Φó araàt  
 tail three  
 "three tails"

### Ordinal Numerals

An ordinal numeral is a number that is used to indicate an order, or a sequence. They do not agree in class and number with the nouns they modify and generally appear pre-nominally. Kenyang uses relative constructions to express ordinal numerals. As for the ordinal numbers themselves, there is a special form for the ordinal numbers, "first and last, but for all other ordinal numbers, the cardinal form is used. The word meaning first is [mb→□⊗] and the word meaning last is [nsem]. There are two basic ways to express order in Kenyang. The first is to simply state which place and object fills in a sequence of objects (ie where does it fall, first, second, third etc). With this type of construction, Kenyang most often uses the verb meaning "to fill". Below is an example

148) á-kaâtiù á- ná áò-jwí báà -rat  
 sm book Sm this sm pro.fill three  
 "third book"

The second way Kenyang expresses order is to state an object follows (eg "the book following the second" meaning "the third book" when this type of construction is used, it is most often with the verb meaning "to follow". Below is an example

149 nònywóp á-n ààn-á náâ-koàño á-náàn-á mbĭ' à  
 day sm-this Sm + prog.follow sm this first  
 "second day"

Of the two methods of expressing order, discussed above, I have found that the first method (using the verb "to fill") is by far most common. The second method (using the verb to follow") is most often used with the ordinal numbers "second", however, we have counted "ákatiù áná áâkoàñoè áná jwí bá pay" meaning the book following the second (ie "third book). It is also important to note that we have also researched on the use of ordinal numbers with both human and non-human reference and have also compared animate to inanimate retreats. As of now, we have seen no difference in the types of constructions used in each case. For example, Frist wife" uses the same construction as "first day" as you can see below.

150) ñ-gòeràà a-ná mbĭ' ⊗  
 Woman/wife this first  
 "First wife"

151) nò-nywóp Á- náàn-áà mbĭ' ⊗  
 sm day sm this first  
 "First day"

### Definite Numeral Adjectives

Definite Numeral Adjectives are the set of cardinal and ordinal numbers. The word definite itself tells us that these adjectives tell us the exact number of people or things. Definite

| Numeral Adjectives are: | Kenyang | Ordinal numbers | Kenyang          |
|-------------------------|---------|-----------------|------------------|
| One                     | á-mót   | first           | mbĭ' ⊗           |
| Two                     | bá-pay  | second          | á-tswià bá-pay   |
| Three                   | bá-raàt | third           | á-tswià bá-raàt  |
| Five                    | bá-taàh | fith            | á-tswià bá- taày |

Examples:

Ayuk achià mó ñórá a ná mbĭ' ⊗

Ayuk is small woman sm first

"Ayuk is the first girlp

### **Indefinite Numeral Adjective**

Indefinite numeral Adjectives unlike Definite Numeral Adjectives only give tentative numeral idea of nouns. They do not give us exact number. Some of the Indefinite Numeral Adjectives in Kenyang are:

Baòruà      ýfewp

Baòñkáòm "all"

Mbáâ "several"

Bájaà "many"

Mbóòk "some"

Indefinite Numerals can also be used as adjectives of quantity since both have same set of words.

### **CONCLUSION**

To conclude, it can be said that we distinguish in Kenyang two types of adjectives: real/ pure adjectives which are non-derived and derived ones. Adjectives in Kenyang can occupy the pre-nominal and post-nominal positions. Specifically, 'derived adjectives' appear before the noun they modify and pure or real adjectives, which are only four in the language, are positioned after the noun they modify. Real adjectives agree according to the noun they modify but derived adjectives are linked to the noun they modify by an associative marker. The two different morphemes also attest the fact that it is not the elements of the same nature which are used to reach that objective of qualifying a noun. Even if they were elements of the same nature, despite their relative position to the noun, the agreement morpheme or the associative marker would not have been different or behave differently. These two positions are recognized to be attested in many Bantu languages with the difference that when the adjective appears post-nominally, it is postulated that the noun has moved across the adjective to land before it.

### **REFERENCES**

Bhat, D.N.S, 1994 The Adjectival category: Criteria for differentiation and identification. Amsterdam /Philadelphia: Benjamin.

- Bakia, J.A, (1986). *An Introduction to Kenyang Syntax*. Jos: University of Jos.
- Bangbose, Ayo, 1974 on Serial Verbs and Verbs Status. *Journal of West African Languages* 9, 17-48
- Blackmore, Diane. (1987), *Semantics Constrains on Relevance* Oxford: Blackwell
- Blackmore, Diane.( 2002) . *Relevance and Linguistic Meaning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Blakemore, Diane. (2005) and Pafenthticals. *Journals of pragmatics* 35: 165 -1181
- Blackmore, Diane. and Carston, Robyn (2005). *Introduction to Coordination: Syntax, Semantics and pragmatics [Lingualls]*
- Carston, Robyn (2002). *Thought and Utterances*. London: Blackwell.
- Cristotaro, Sonia,(2003). *Subordination*. Oxford: University Press.
- Feist, J. 2012 *Pre-modifiers in English: Their structure and significance*. Cambridge/Tokyo: Cambridge University press.
- Ferris, C. 1993. *The meaning of Syntax:a study in the adjective of English*, London/new York : Longman
- Goldsmith, John. (1985). *A Principled Exception to the Coordinate Structure Constraint*.
- In William Eilfort, Paul Kroeber, and Karen Peterson (eds), *\_Papers from the 21st Meeting of the Chicago Linguistics Society\_*.
- Givoàn T. ( 1984). *Syntax : A Typological Functional Introduction ,Vol 1*.Amsterdam :John Benjamin.
- Givoàn T. ( 1990). *Syntax : A Typological Functional Introduction ,Vol 2*..Amsterdam :John Benjamin.

- Haiman, John and Thomas, Sandra D (ed) (1998). *Clausal Combination Discourse*. Amsterdam John Benjamin's
- Haris, A. C., and Cambell, L (.1995), *Historical Syntax in Cross - Linguistic Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Haspelmath, Martin.(2004). *Coordinating Constructions: An over view*. In *Coordinating Constructions [Typological Studies in Language 58]*. Martin Haspelmathed 3-40. Amsteldam: Benjamin's
- Hofherr, P. C and Matushansky, O. (ed) 2010. *Adjectives: Formal analysis in Syntax and Semantics*. Amsterdam /Philadelphia: Benjamin
- Huddleston, Rodney and Pullurn, Geofferey K.(2002). *The Cambridge Grammar of English Language: Canbridge University press*.
- Kehler, A. ( 2002). *-Coherence, Reference and the Theory of Grammar -Stanford: CSLI Publication*.
- Lang, Ewald(.1984). *The Senantics of Coordination [Studies in Language Companion Series 9]*.
- Authorised English translation from Lang (1997): Amsterdam: John Benjamin
- Lehmann, W. P. (1985). *Papers on Diachronic Syntax: Six Case Studies*.Lingual,67,344- 346,
- Lehmann, W. P. (1993). *Historical Linguistics: An Introduction*. New York : Halt Rinehart And Winston
- Lehmann, Christian (1998). *Towards a Typology of Clause Linkage*. In *Clause Combining*
- In *Grammar and Discourse*, John Haiman and Sandra D.Thomson (eds),181-226. Amsteerdam: John Benjamin.

- Liink, G. (1998). Algebraic Semantics in Language and Philosophy. Hcsli Lecture Notes-No.74.
- McCawley, J. D. 1988. The Syntactic Phenomanon of English (second ed.) Chicago: University of Chicago press.
- Mulleer, M.F.(18 75) Lectures on the Sciense of Language. London: Longman, Green and Company.
- Ngessimo M and Tamanji P. 2000.Introduction to African linguistics. LINCOM Europa: Munich
- Ramirez, C.(1998) The Kenyang Noun Phrase Cameroon: SIL Publications
- Schmerling, S. (1975).Asymmetric conjunction and rules of conversation.
- In P. Cole and J. L. Morgan (Eds.), \_Syntax and Semantics, Volume 3: Speech Acts\_, pp. 211-231. Academic Press, New York.
- Tamanji ,P. 2000. Nominal Adjectives and the Binominal NP in Nweh. University of Yaounde 1
- Tanyi, E.M.(1998) Kenyang Lexicon Yaoundé : CABTAL
- Tanyi, E.M.(2002) Kenyang Segmental Phonology. Yaounde S.I.L
- Tyhust J. (1985) Tone in Kenyang Noun Phrase MA.Theses, University of California.

---

**References** to this paper should be made as follows: Mbu Martha Njui (2017), The Kenyang Syntax: Adjectives. *J. of Arts and Contemporary Society*, Vol. 9, No. 3, Pp. 1-16

---