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Part of speech criteria

Section 7

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Part of speech criteria

Section 7

Denis Paperno

- 1 Inflectional criteria differentiate only three classes of words in Beng: personal pronouns, verbs, and inflectionally invariable words (I'm setting aside the problematic inflectional status of reduplication for the moment). Let me now turn to the distributional criteria that allow us to distinguish parts of speech within the inflectionally invariable class.
- 2 I avoid here any discussion of ideophones in Beng which may constitute one or several additional grammatical classes. Let me note only the existence of onomatopoeic words that imitate various noises, e.g. *cóco* 'gnash', *kúkù* 'cry of wild pigeon', *bà* 'sound of machete' and that seem to be able to be included in larger syntactic structures, and of interjections like *bócé* and *cróló* 'exactly!', or *èé* 'oh really!'. There is also a pattern, probably of Baule origin, of apparently onomatopoeic adjectives CVClVCV where all consonants (stops), vowels and tones have to match, e.g. *kàklàkà* 'enormous,' *gbègbèlègbè* 'big and flat', *jàjràjà* 'huge' (of a person), *kékléké* 'thin', *kèklèkè* 'hard on the inside', *pàplàpà* 'wide and flat', *píplípí/pìplipì* 'fat and short'.

7.1. Nouns vs. Adverbs vs. Postpositions

- 3 Beng lacks dedicated nominal morphology that would mark case, number, definiteness, or agreement, even if some of those notions are not entirely alien to Beng grammar (see 8.3, 9 below). Therefore part of speech criteria have to be purely distributional. Let me now proceed to the description of distributional classes of Beng nominals and adverbials.
- 4 I take the direct object position as the distinctively nominal position in Beng. One could also rely on other nominal positions such as the subject position; however, the subject slot is less appropriate to use in an operational definition of nominal status because, being leftmost in the clause, it is not always superficially distinct from the topic slot.

- 5 The postverbal modifier position is characteristic for adverbs, and for postpositions the core context is combination with a noun phrase into a postverbal sentential modifier. All postverbal modifiers can also function as predicates in locative sentences, see 12.4. (We count as postverbal modifiers all phrases that occur after the sentence's main verb, with the exception of several special cases discussed in 12.2 below where noun phrases without a postposition can occur postverbally in a number of functions: secondary object, nominal predicate, floating quantifiers, and arguments of *gūḡ* 'to stay, to be left'. Indeed none of those are sentential modifiers semantically but rather arguments or predicates, so we ignore them here).
- 6 However, the distinctions between the three a priori classes (nouns, adverbs, and postpositions) are not as straightforward empirically. Some words that typically occur in adverbial contexts are also found in nominal ones, compare:

(58a)	ŋ̃	nú	wē.
	1SG :PST+	come:L	there
	'I came there'.		

(58b)	ŋ̃	wē	yè.
	1SG :PST+	there	see:L
	'I saw that place'.		

- 7 Several postpositions exhibit similar position variability:

(59a)	ŋ̃	nú	kléŋ̃	ñi	wó.
	1SG :PST+	come	forest	DEF	in
	'I came to the forest'.				

(59b)	ŋ̃	kléŋ̃	ñi	wó	yè.
	1SG:PST+	forest	DEF	in	see:L
	'I saw the space of the forest'.				

- 8 Lastly, some words occur in all three kinds of context – both as direct objects and as sentential modifiers, and furthermore, either with a dependent noun phrase or without one:

(60a)	ŋ̃	p̃ú	lù.
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	1SG :PST+	field	buy
	'I bought a field'.		

(60b)	ĩ	nũ	pũú.
	1SG :PST+	come:L	field
	'I came to a field'.		

(60c)	ĩ	nũ	mĩ	pũú.
	1SG :PST+	come:L	2SG	field
	'I came to your field'.			

- 9 So there are two criteria for distinguishing nouns from adverbs and postpositions: position in the sentence (object, modifier, or both) and dependent NP (none, obligatory, or optional). The two three-valued criteria give rise to three potential classes shown in Table 6 below. For each class, Table 6 lists examples and an estimate of class size.

Table 6. Logically possible classes of nominal and adverbial elements

		dependent NP		
		impossible	optional	obligatory
syntactic position	only nominal: NOUNS	1. deictic noun <i>ĩrĩĩ</i> 'this' (< 5)	2. absolute noun <i>bábá</i> 'sheep', <i>Kòlā</i> 'Kola' (name) (>1000)	3. (relational noun)
	nominal or adverbial: ADVERBIAL NOUNS	4. adverbial deictic noun <i>wē</i> 'there', <i>gbĩ</i> 'yesterday' (<20)	5. absolute adverbial noun <i>Bùàkê</i> 'Bouake', <i>wlá</i> 'house', <i>fĩĩ</i> 'day' (>100)	6. locative postposition <i>ló</i> 'on', <i>wó</i> 'in' (<20)
	adverbial only: ADVERBS AND POSTPOSITIONS	7. PURE ADVERB <i>bátú</i> 'soon', <i>dĩĩĩĩ</i> 'nearby' (<50)	8. adverb / postposition	9. PURE POSTPOSITION <i>ĩĩ</i> 'for', <i>lō</i> 'with' (<10)

- 10 As indicated in the table, Beng has only seven out of the nine potential classes. There are no relational nouns with an obligatory possessor, and no items that have only

sentence modifier uses and oscilate between pure adverbs and postpositions. This observation is non-trivial as both of the classes absent in Beng are attested in other languages; absence of relational nouns is unexpected for a Mande language.

- 11 Among absolute adverbial nouns there are two groups with distinct syntactic properties: temporal nouns and locative nouns. Temporal nouns are found in the adverbial position with dependants such as adjectives, determiners, and quantifiers:

(61)	ŋ̃	nú	kùé	gē̃ŋ̃	bì-lè.
	1SG :PST+	come:L	year	good	this-DEF
'I arrived in this good year'.					

(62)	ŋ̃	nú	kùé	sēkpá.
	1SG :PST+	come:L	year	every
'I came every year'.				

- 12 In contrast, whenever locative nouns combine with an adjective, a determiner, or a quantifier, they cannot be used in an adverbial position unless accompanied with a postposition:

(63a)	Ǿ	p̄ú	bì-lè	*(wó).
	3SG:ST+	field	this-DEF	IN
'He is in this field'.				

(63b)	Ǿ	p̄ú	sēkpá	*(wó).
	3SG:ST+	field	every	IN
'He is in every field'.				

(64)	ŋ̃	tá	Àságbě.
	1SG :PST+	go	Ouassadougou
'I went to Ouassadougou'.			

(65)	ŋ̃	tá	Àságbě	bàmâ	lè	*(wó).
	1SG :PST+	go:L	Ouassadougou	great	DEF	IN

	'I went to the great Ouassadouougou'.
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- 13 The incompatibility of postmodification with adverbial modifier position (without a supplemental postposition) also characterizes locative postpositions:

(66)	Ẓẓẓ	ḷè	ǒ	tàbàlí	ló	tīi	ḷè	*(ló)
	mosquito	DEF	3SG:ST+	table	SUPER	black	DEF	SUPER
	'The mosquito is on the black surface of the table'.							

7.2. Adjectives vs. nouns

- 14 In many languages of the world the distinction between nouns and adjectives is based on rather subtle criteria. In some languages morphology comes to help, for instance, adjectives can have gender agreement markers absent in nouns in gender. However, in Beng morphology does not reliably differentiate nouns from adjectives.
- 15 Syntactic criteria are also often unsatisfactory. Prototypical adjectives modify head nouns while a prototypical noun is a head of its own noun phrase. But then adjectives can more or less routinely undergo substantivation, thereby functioning as NP heads, while nouns can be appositive modifiers of other nouns.
- 16 For Beng, two criteria are found differentiating nouns from adjectives. First, in the predicative position nouns (except for locative ones) require a copula verb, while adjectives can be predicated without a verbal copula, cf. (67) vs. (68a,b):

(67)	ò	gēñ.
	3SG:HAB+	beautiful
	'He is handsome'.	

(68a)	ó	lé	ñ	dē-gbó.
	3SG:PST+	COP:L	1SG	father-old
	'He is my father's elder brother'.			

(68b)	ó	lé	bēñ.
	3SG:PST+	COP:L	Beng
	'He is Beng'.		

- 17 Predicative adjectives contrast with verbs in that they lack typical verbal morphology. For example, if there were a verb meaning ‘to be handsome’, it would have to bear a low grammatical tone in examples like (67), to mark habitual aspect. Also, sentences with predicative adjectives are always indicative and have default time reference to the present. To express e.g. future tense or imperative, a copula verb has to be injected into a sentence with a predicative adjective, see 12.1.
- 18 Another contrast between nouns and adjectives is that in the modifier function, adjectives always follow the head noun while nouns can precede or follow the noun they modify:

(69a)	<i>klúǵǵí</i>	<i>gēŋ</i>	//	<i>*gēŋ</i>	<i>klúǵǵí</i>
	thief	beautiful		beautiful	thief
	‘handsome thief’				

(69b)	<i>Dēlà</i>	<i>klúǵǵí</i>	//	<i>klúǵǵí</i>	<i>Dēlà</i>
	Dela	thief		thief	Dela
	‘Dela the thief’				

- 19 According to these criteria, as well as in other aspects, cardinal numerals are a special case of adjectives, compare the fixed order of the numeral *plāŋ* ‘two’ and the head noun *sǝŋ* ‘person’: *sǝŋ plāŋ* vs. **plāŋ sǝŋ*. Like adjectives, numerals occur in the predicative position without a copula verb, and participate in the partitive construction (8.2). What distinguishes cardinal numerals from adjectives is special behavior with respect to number (9.1), the ability to form complex numerals and to trigger the float of quantified NPs (12.2.6).

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