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Number and agreement

Section 9

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Number and agreement

Section 9

Denis Paperno

9.1. Number expression within a noun phrase

- Generally, the number of a noun phrase is not manifested in the head noun. The single exception is the suppletive pair:

(76)	<i>lóklo</i> ‘child’	-	<i>lómleḡ</i> ‘children’
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- It is clear however that historically even this pair contains an invariable noun and a number-marked adjective *kló* (singular) / *plé* (plural) ‘little’. The plural form also incorporates two copies of *ḡ*, probably a reduced version of the plural marker *nùḡ*, so the plural form *lómleḡ* is derived from **ló-ḡ-plé-ḡ*. The same *ḡ*, although not a productive plural marker synchronically, might be responsible for the final consonant in Beng numerals such as *plāḡ* ‘two’, the initial consonant of the 3PL pronoun *ḡò*, and the final consonant of the 1PL pronoun *ḡḡ*. Other South Mande languages have no nasal sonorant in cognate forms, compare for instance Mwan forms *plē* ‘two’, 3PL pronoun *ò*, 1PL exclusive *ó*, Dan-Gwetaa *plè* ‘two’, 3PL pronoun *wò*, 1PL exclusive *yī*, Yaure *fīi* ‘two’, 3PL pronoun *ò*, 1PL exclusive *kù*, etc. (Vydrin 2006, 2009), (Perexval’skaja ms.). The only South Mande language that seems to consistently share the “nasal plural” element with Beng is Wan, with *pīlōḡ* ‘two’, *ḡ* ‘three’, 3PL pronoun *ḡ*, 1PL exclusive *kḡ* (Nikitina ms.); Gban has an odd nasality in *fḡḡ* ‘two’ but not in *yā* ‘three,’ 3PL *ḡ* or 1PL *ù*.

The most universal marker of plurality is *nùḡ*:

(77)	<i>glāḡ</i>	<i>púú</i>	<i>nùḡ</i>
	loincloth	white	PL

	'white loincloths'
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- 3 The plural marker is optional when followed by an NP-doubling plural pronoun (see (Paperno 2005) for more detail):

(78)	ŋ-ó	mlá	(nùŋ)	ŋò	yē-lè.
	1SG-ST+	drum	PL	3PL	see-RES
	'I see drums'.				

- 4 Here's another striking example showing optionality of the plural marker *nùŋ*:

(79)	Bíê	ŋò	ná	cīyà	ŋò	lō	ŋó	nŋ.
	elephant	3PL	and	bushbuck	3PL	with	3PL:PST	come:L
	'Elephants and bushbucks came',							

with three instances of the 3PL pronoun: one doubling the NP 'elephants', another one doubling the NP 'bushbucks', and the third one doubling the coordinate NP 'elephants and bushbucks'. The sentence does not contain a single instance of the plural marker *nùŋ*.

- 5 Noun phrases with numerals behave as singular when semantically indefinite and as plural when definite. This includes numerals used both as attributes within a noun phrase and as predicates.

9.2. Reduplication as number agreement

- 6 Plural number of a noun phrase can be manifested through the reduplication of adjectives in that NP. Plural-marking reduplication is also observed in predicative adjectives and verbs, where reduplication marks the plurality of a direct object or an intransitive subject:

(80)	Bléŋ	nùŋ	ŋò-ó	drà~drá-lè.
	chair	PL	3PL-ST+	fall~PL-RES
	'Chairs are fallen'.			

(81)	*Bléŋ	dō	ò-ó	drà~drá-lè.
	chair	one	3SG-ST+	fall~PL-RES

	(‘A chair is fallen’).
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- 7 So adjective and verb reduplication functions as number agreement. At least in the case of verbs such agreement seems to be semantic in nature; the NP whose plurality is signalled by reduplication can have no other indication of plurality:

(82)	ŋò-ó	kɔ́ŋ	blā~blā.
	3SG-ST+	peg	stick~PL/ITER
	‘They will stick in pegs’.		

(multiple pegs; another possible reading is event plurality whereby the sentence may refer to multiple acts of sticking in the same peg).

(83)	ŋò-ó	kɔ́ŋ	dō	blā.
	3SG-ST+	peg	one	stick
	‘They will stick in a peg’.			

- 8 In most cases, while the reduplicated form may indicate participant plurality, the corresponding stem without reduplication does not imply singular number of the participant. A handful of verbs, however, strictly associate presence or absence of reduplication with plural vs. singular participant, compare:

(84)	ŋ	blànâ	dè	yrí-dră	lè	ló.
	1SG:PST+	banana	put:L	tree-fall	DEF	SUPER
	‘I put a banana/*bananas on the fallen tree’.					

(85)	ŋ	blànâ	dè~dè	yrí-dră	lè	ló.
	1SG:PST+	banana	put~PL:L	tree-fall	DEF	SUPER
	‘I put bananas/*a banana on the fallen tree’.					

- 9 In a similar vein, while many adjectives use reduplication as a form of plural agreement marking, only two have a specialized form restricted to singular NPs: *béē* ‘big’, plural *bébē*, and *kló* ‘little’, plural *plé*.

9.3. Pronominal doubling and the status of pronouns

- 10 Pronominal doubling is widespread in Beng. Personal pronouns are often used after a full NP, as if backing it up. Literal translation of some sentences with pronominal doubling is something like “David he is a pagan”, “I see horses them”, “Kola she goes to her uncle him”.
- 11 So Beng personal pronouns are functionally analogous to agreement affixes of other languages. Can Beng pronouns themselves be analyzed as affixes? The idea has certain appeal; indeed, personal pronouns largely immediately precede their syntactic host: direct object pronouns precede the verb, possessor pronouns precede the head noun, other ones precede postpositions; subject pronouns can be treated as TAMP particles with personal agreement affixes, and similarly for other pronominal series. Unavailability of pronominal doubling (e.g. in the secondary object position – see 12.2 below) can be explained by the lack of syntactic head in those positions that could host agreement markers.
- 12 However, some syntactic facts speak in favor of their autonomous status. First, direct object pronouns can be separated from the verb by certain particles, including *gbò* ‘also’ and *kló* ‘a bit’ (86a,b,c). Second, possessor pronouns are separated from the head noun by temporal and locative modifiers that can be syntactically complex, so we are sure that we are dealing with phrasal modification and not compounding (86d). Third, in nominalization the subject is expressed as a possessor; in particular, it can be instantiated as a non-subject pronoun. Then in nominalization direct object is expressed immediately before the verb stem, just like in a finite clause, so the Subject – Object – Verb order is maintained in nominalization. In addition, in nominalization clausal modifiers can precede the nominalized verb and its direct object (86e), separating them from the pronominal subject. An indirect object with a postposition can also intervene between the subject and the verb stem in nominalization (86f). Since direct and indirect objects, as well as clausal modifiers, can be arbitrarily complex, and can also combine with each other, it turns out that the non-subject pronoun that corresponds to the subject of a nominalized verb can be separated from the head by indefinitely long chunks of syntactic structure (in practice, many of the longer interveners would probably be hard to process because of the center-embedding structures they introduce, but that does not diminish the argument).

(86a)	<i>À</i>	<i>gbò</i>	<i>blē</i> .
	3SG	also	eat
	‘Eat that too’.		

(86b)	<i>Mà</i>	<i>à</i>	<i>kló</i>	<i>yè</i> .
	1SG:HAB+	3SG	little	see:L
	‘I see that a bit’.			

(86c)	À	kló	lĒ	kpèsè.
	3SG	little	make	big
	'Increase it a bit'.			

(86d)	mĭ	kùénġ	pō	sġ	lĒ
	2SG	this.year	POS	field	DEF
	'your field of this year'				

(86e)	Mĭ	pōú	Kòfí	yē-lĒ	ò	gĒĭ.
	2SG	field	Kofi	see-NMLZ	3SG:HAB+	beautiful
	'It's good that I saw Kofi in the field'.					

(86f)	à	blā	nĭ	vĭ-lĒ
	3SG	fight	BENEF	love-NMLZ
	'his fondness of fights'			

9.4. Constraints on the distribution of personal pronouns

13 Factors of overt expression of personal pronouns include:

- syntactic position;
- presence of a noun phrase doubled by the pronoun (if a syntactic position is obligatory to fill by overt material but no full NP is present, a pronoun is unavoidable);
- number and definiteness of the NP to be doubled by a pronoun. Indefinite singular NPs usually aren't doubled by pronouns. Doubling of definite singular NPs is optional, and doubling of plural NPs is almost always obligatory:

(87a)	ŋ-ó	mlġ	lĒ	(à)	yē-lĒ.
	1SG-ST+	drum	DEF	(3SG)	see-RES
	'I see the drum'.				

(87b)	ŋ-ó	mlġ	nĭĭ	ŋò/*∅	yē-lĒ.
	1SG-ST+	drum	PL	3PL	see-RES

	'I see (the) drums'.
--	----------------------

- 14 As already mentioned, a 3PL pronoun can be the only formal exponent of NP plurality, and the plural marker *nùḡ* is optional in the presence of a pronoun.
- 15 Information on pronoun usage in different context are summarized in Table 7. Additional remarks are provided below the table.

Table 7. Pronoun usage

Syntactic positions	NP doubled			
	none	SG indefinite	SG definite	PL
possessor	OK (11.6.5)	OK	OK	!!
direct object, object of postposition, conjunct, contrastive topic	!!	*	OK	!!
subject (except presentative clauses)	!!	OK (see 9.4.1)	OK (see 9.4.1)	!!
focus, non-contrastive topic, subject in presentative clauses, nominal predicate	!! (focus series only)	*	*	*
postpositionless secondary object	*	*	*	*

Notes. * – personal pronoun is ungrammatical; OK – personal pronoun is optional; !! – personal pronoun is obligatory.

9.4.1. Personal pronouns in the subject position

- 16 Subject position must always be filled, so a 3SG pronoun can be omitted only if it doubles a full NP, as in the following example:

(88)	[A	léŋ] _{NP}	(ó)	gā-nḡ.
	3SG	child	3SG:PST+	die-PRF
	'His child has died'.			

- 17 Note however that although the subject pronoun is absent at segmental level, it still leaves a trace: a tonal change in the low tone form of the verb in (89b) (see 4.2.3). It might be preferable to analyze those examples as pronoun elision rather than pronoun optionality.

(89a)		À	lɛ́ɟ	ó	gà	→	À lɛ́ɟ ó gâ.
		3SG	child	3SG:PST+	die:L		
	'His child died'.						

(89b)	À	lɛ́ɟ	gâ.
	3SG	child	die:L
	'His child died'.		

- 18 Recall however that subject pronouns serve in part to express TAMP value of the clause. If they were to be omitted freely, certain TAMP constructions would end up being indistinguishable. The need to differentiate TAMP motivates additional constraints:

- conditional pronouns are always overt; otherwise conditional mood would merge with the optative;
- negative series are always present (except for the stative series);
- 3SG stative pronouns can be freely omitted, but a stative predicative marker is always present:

(90)	À	lɛ́ɟ	ó	gā-àló.
	3SG	child	ST+	die-PROG
	'His child is dying'.			

- (affirmative) preterite and habitual pronouns are omitted only in intransitive clauses, where TAMP value can be inferred from the tone change of the verb stem.

- 19 Imperative is a special case: the 2SG pronoun *m̃* is usually absent in affirmative clauses expressing imperative; the pronoun is obligatory under negation and in embedded uses of the optative/imperative mood.

9.4.2. Possessor

- 20 The possessor position in Beng does not have to be overtly filled even in the case of semantically relational nouns such as kinship terms and body parts, for which the possessor can be inferred. This optionality is the only feature that distinguishes the possessor position from other positions listed in the second row of Table 7, such as the direct object position:

(91)	ŋó	(m̃)	dē	lè	à	yē-lè.
	1SG:ST+	2SG	father	DEF	3SG	see-RES

	'I see (your) father'.
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(92a)	*ŋó	∅	yē-lè.
	1SG:ST+		see-RES
	('I see').		

(92b)	ŋó	dē	lè	(à)	yē-lè.
	1SG:ST+	father	DEF	(3SG)	see-RES
	'I see the father'.				

(92c)	ŋó	*(à)	yē-lè.
	1SG:ST+	3SG	see-RES
	'I see him'.		

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