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Modification within a Noun Phrase in Sidaama (Sidamo)¹

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0. Introduction

This study shows that the notion of modification within a noun phrase in Sidaama (Sidamo), a Cushitic language of Ethiopia, is often somewhat different from this notion as traditionally used in linguistics. In this language, although there are a few cases where modification in its ordinary sense, which is syntactic, is relevant, a grammatical distinction is made in several portions of the grammar in terms of whether or not a noun is Modified (henceforth, Modified and related words such as Unmodified, Modify, Modification, and Modifiers are capitalized for Sidaama grammar) by the possessive pronominal suffix, as well as a syntactic modifier like an adjective, a numeral, an adnominal demonstrative, an adnominal interrogative, a genitive noun phrase, and a relative clause.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 briefly discusses how the notion of modification is used in linguistics. Section 3 describes the ways in which Sidaama makes a distinction between Modified and Unmodified common nouns in noun phrases. Section 4 looks at constructions in other languages that appear to make distinctions in terms of modification to examine whether any of them are similar to the Modification distinction in Sidaama. Section 5 concludes the paper.

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List of Abbreviations. [ACC]: Accusative (marked with the suprafix), (ACC): Accusative (not marked with the suprafix), ALL: Allative, EP: Epenthetic vowel, EZ: Ezafe suffix, [GEN]: Genitive (marked with the suprafix), (GEN): Genitive (not marked with the suprafix), MOD: Modified, NPC: Noun-phrase clitic, [OBL]: Oblique (marked with the suprafix), UMD: Unmodified.

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1. The Notion of Modification in Traditional Terms in Linguistics

When a non-polysynthetic language is dealt with, in traditional terms, modification within a noun phrase means the attribution of a property to or the restriction of the meaning of the head noun by using another syntactic constituent within that noun phrase. It is a syntactic notion, and excludes the morphological notion of affixation. Thus, an affix bound to a noun, which is not a syntactic constituent, is not regarded as a modifier. In grammatical descriptions, modifiers of nouns normally include such constituents as adjectives, numerals, adnominal demonstratives, adnominal interrogatives, (commonly, genitive) noun phrases, articles, relative clauses, adpositional phrases, and locative adverbials (Dryer 2007). In most syntactic frameworks, modifiers have to be phrasal constituents. For example, Stowell (1981) posits that every modifier must be a maximal projection of some phrasal category. Rubin (1994) proposes a model where modifiers are headed by a functional category, MOD, which takes as its complement the material denoting the content of the modification.

2. Modification within a Noun Phrase in Sidaama

Sidaama is a Highland East Cushitic language spoken in South Central Ethiopia (Kawachi 2007). Its case system is accusative. This language is a verb-final language whose word order is predominantly SOV, and uses suffixation (and also suprafixation for marking some grammatical cases, as discussed later). The location of high pitch in a word is usually predictable; high pitch normally falls on the penultimate vowel segments of the citation forms of most nouns and adjectives.

Modification within a noun phrase in Sidaama usually concerns whether or not a common noun is accompanied not only by an adnominal (such as an adjective, a numeral, an adnominal demonstrative, an adnominal interrogative, or a relative clause) or a genitive noun phrase, but also by the possessive pronominal suffix (1SG: -'ya, 2SG: -kki, 3SG.F: -se, 3SG.M: -si, 1PL: -nke, 2PL: -'ne, 3PL: -nsa), which is bound to the noun.² The distinction between Unmodified common nouns (those accompanied neither by a syntactic modifier nor the possessive pronominal suffix) and Modified common nouns (those accompanied by a syntactic modifier/syntactic modifiers, the possessive pronominal suffix, or both) emerges in the following seven places in the grammar of this language.³

² When the possessor of a noun is expressed by a genitive NP, the possessive pronominal suffix cannot attach to the noun.

³ Note that this distinction cannot be reduced to a distinction of definiteness. Although the definite suffix *-nni* occurs in limited contexts (see (vi) and (vii)), Sidaama common nouns do not make a definiteness distinction morphologically in other cases (for example, in (1), the subject NP can be interpreted either as definite or indefinite). The indefiniteness of the referent of a noun phrase can be indicated by the use of an idiomatic expression where the relative clause with the verb *ikk-* 'to become' modifies the head common noun (in the form of *ikk-i-t-ino* [become-EP-3SG.F/3PL-PERF.3] for the third-person singular feminine and the third-person plural or *ikk-ø-ino* [become-3SG.M-PERF.3] for the third-person singular masculine) (e.g. *ikk-ø-ino beett-i*

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2.1. Different allomorphs of the nominative case suffix on masculine common nouns

The nominative case suffix on masculine common nouns has different allomorphs: *-u* for Unmodified ones, as in (1), and *-i* for Modified ones, as in (2a) and (2b). Each allomorph replaces the final vowel of the stem (e.g. *o* of *beetto* ‘child’).⁴

- (1) beett-u da-∅-ino.
child-NOM.M.UMD come-3SG.M-PERF.3
‘The boy came.’
- (2) $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{(a) seed-u beett-i} \\ \text{tall-NOM.M child-NOM.M.MOD} \\ \text{(b) beett-i-se} \\ \text{child-NOM.M.MOD-3SG.F.POSS} \end{array} \right\} \begin{array}{l} \text{da-∅-ino.} \\ \text{come-3SG.M-PERF.3} \end{array}$
‘(a) The tall boy/(b) Her son came.’

2.2. Different allomorphs of the genitive case suffix on common nouns

The genitive case suffix has two different sets of allomorphs, which are distinctively used for Unmodified common nouns (FEM: *-te*/MASC: *-u*) and Modified ones (FEM: *∅*/MASC: *-i*); *-te* is added to the stem, whereas *-u* and *-i* each replace the final vowel of the stem. Examples of genitive forms of Unmodified feminine and masculine common nouns are shown in (3), and those of Modified feminine and masculine common nouns are shown in (4) and (5). As indicated in (3) (*min-ú*) and (5) (*beettó-se*, *min-í-si*), roughly speaking, the genitive forms of syntactically unmodified common nouns (Unmodified nouns as well as those having the possessive pronominal suffix but no syntactic modifier) are additionally marked with a suprafixed, which is realized as high pitch on their final vowel segments (see the end of the present section for a discussion on the genitive suprafixed).

- (3) beettó-te uddano min-ú
child[GEN]-GEN.F.UMD clothes(NOM.F) house-GEN.M.UMD[GEN]
giddo no.
inside exist.3
‘The girl’s clothes are in the house.’
- (4) hatté beetto uddano
that.F.GEN[GEN] child(GEN.F.MOD) clothes(NOM.F)
insá min-i giddo no.
3PL.GEN[GEN] house-GEN.M.MOD inside exist.3
‘That girl’s clothes are in their house.’

da-∅-ino. [become-3SG.M-PERF.3 child-NOM.M.MOD come-3SG.M-PERF.3] ‘A boy came.’)

⁴ The nominative suffix on feminine common nouns is zero, regardless of Modification.

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- (13) kuni min-i
 this.M.NOM house-NOM.M.MOD
 beett-ú-nni = ho.
 child-GEN.M.UMD[GEN]-DEF=NPC.PRED.UMD.M
 ‘This house is the boy’s.’

- (14) kuni min-i
 this.M.NOM house-NOM.M.MOD
 { (a) busul-ú beett-í = ho.
 smart-GEN.M[GEN] child-GEN.M.MOD[GEN]=NPC.PRED.UMD.M }
 { (b) beett-í-si = ho.
 child-GEN.M.MOD[GEN]-3SG.M.POSS=NPC.PRED.UMD.M }
 ‘This house is (a) the smart boy’s/(b) his son’s.’

2.7. Use vs. non-use of the definite suffix *-nni* between a genitive masculine common noun and the noun-phrase clitic = *wa*

Sidaama has another noun-phrase clitic, which literally means ‘place’. One use of this clitic is to attach to a noun phrase referring to an object (rather than a location) to make it express a location or goal where the object is located (‘at/to the place of the object’). When this clitic attaches to an Unmodified masculine common noun, the definite suffix *-nni* is obligatorily used between the genitive form of the noun and the clitic, as in (15). On the other hand, when this clitic attaches to a Modified masculine common noun, the definite suffix *-nni* may or may not occur between the genitive form of the noun and the clitic, as in (16a) and (16b).⁶

- (15) ise t’arap’ees-ú-nni = wa hadf-d-ino.
 3SG.F.NOM table-GEN.M.UMD[GEN]-DEF=place go-3SG.F-PERF.3
 ‘She went to the table.’
- (16) ise
 3SG.F.NOM
 { (a) insá t’arap’ees-í(-nni) = wa
 3PL.GEN[GEN] table-GEN.M.MOD[GEN](-DEF)=place }
 { (b) t’arap’ees-í-nsa(-nni) = wa
 table-GEN.M.MOD[GEN]-3PL.POSS(-DEF)=place }
 hadf-d-ino.
 go-3SG.F-PERF.3
 (a)&(b): ‘She went to their table.’

⁶ When this clitic is used with a feminine common noun, it attaches to its genitive form either directly or with the definite suffix *-nni* intervening between them, regardless of whether it is Unmodified (e.g. *hakk’iččo-te = wa/hakk’iččo-nni = wa* ‘at/to the tree’) or Modified (e.g. *hatté hakk’iččo = wa/hatté hakk’iččo-nni = wa* ‘at/to that tree’).

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So far, we have described the seven cases where Sidaama makes the distinction between Unmodified and Modified common nouns. However, there are three cases where Sidaama makes a distinction in terms of (syntactic) modification in its ordinary sense, as well as (morpho-syntactic) Modification.

First, the accusative-oblique case on syntactically unmodified common nouns is marked with a suprafix, which occurs as high pitch on the final vowel segment, as in (17a) and (17b), whereas that on syntactically modified common nouns that are not accompanied by the possessive pronominal suffix has no marking, as in (18a) and (18b) (though, as in (18a), the suprafix occurs on the adnominal modifying the accusative-oblique noun). However, the accusative-oblique suprafix occurs on syntactically modified common nouns with the possessive pronominal suffix, as in (17c).

- (17) { (a) beettó
 child[ACC]
ani { (b) beettó-se
1SG.NOM { child[ACC]-3SG.F.POSS } la'-o-mm-o.
 (c) seedá beettó-se
 tall[ACC] child[ACC]-3SG.F.POSS } see-PERF.1-1SG-M
 'I (MASC) saw (a) the child/(b) her child/(c) her tall child.'
- (18) { (a) seedá beetto
 tall[ACC] child(ACC)
ani { (b) isé beetto
1SG.NOM { 3SG.F.GEN[GEN]child(ACC) } la'-o-mm-o.
 see-PERF.1-1SG-M
 'I (MASC) saw (a) the tall child/(b) her child.'

Second, similar to the accusative-oblique case suprafix, the genitive case suprafix is used for syntactically unmodified common nouns, but is not used for nouns accompanied by a syntactic modifier nor by the possessive pronominal suffix. For example, in (3), the genitive nouns, which are unmodified, are marked with the suprafix (*beettó-te*, *min-û*).⁷ Also in (5), the genitive nouns, which are

⁷High pitch also occurs on the final vowel segment of a noun stem (the final vowel of either a basic or genitive stem) when accompanied by that case suffix allomorph which is added to the stem (specifically, the dative-locative suffix *-te* (UMD.FEM)/-*ho* (UMD.MASC)/-*ra* (MOD, PROP), the allative suffix *-ra*, which is used for Modified masculine common nouns and masculine proper nouns, and the instrumental suffix *-nni*), rather than replacing the final vowel of the stem. When the allomorph of the genitive suffix for an Unmodified feminine common noun *-te* is used, it is not clear whether high pitch on the vowel immediately preceding it is due to the use of high pitch on the stem-final noun with an adding suffix, to the genitive case marking on the unmodified noun, or to their co-occurrence. Nevertheless, the present study assumes that high pitch comes from the genitive case marking (e.g. *beettó-te* in (3)). When a common noun in the genitive case is modified by a syntactic modifier, the genitive suprafix does not occur on the head noun, but when it is followed by an adding suffix, high pitch occurs on the final vowel segment of its stem (e.g. *t'aw-f-ra* in (10a)). High pitch that does not contain the accusative-oblique or genitive suprafix is not indicated in the present study (e.g. *saada-te* and *t'awo-ho* in (6)).

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accompanied by the possessive pronominal suffixes but are not modified by any syntactic modifier, are marked with the suprafix (*beettó-se*, *min-í-nsa*). On the other hand, in (4), the genitive nouns, which are modified by the adnominal demonstrative or the genitive pronoun, are not marked with the suprafix (*hatté beetto*, *insá min-i*). However, the genitive suprafix occurs on syntactically modified common nouns with the possessive pronominal suffix (e.g. *beettó-se* in *hatté beettó-se uddano min-ú giddo no*. ‘The clothes belonging to that daughter of hers are in the house.’)

Third, Sidaama makes a distinction between Unmodified nouns, unmodified but Modified nouns (unmodified nouns with the possessive pronominal suffix), and modified nouns (either with or without the possessive pronominal suffix) in regard to the use of the noun-phrase clitic starting in *t* (FEM)/*h* (MASC) between a relative clause and its head. If the head noun of a relative clause is Unmodified (in other words, if the noun is only modified/Modified by the relative clause), the head noun has to follow the relative clause immediately, as in (19). If the head noun of a relative clause is accompanied by the possessive pronominal suffix and is (syntactically) unmodified (in other words, if the noun is only Modified by the relative clause and the possessive pronominal suffix), the noun-phrase clitic (FEM: =*ti*/MASC: =*hu* when it is in the nominative case or when the head is a predicate; FEM: =*ta*/MASC: =*ha* when in the accusative case; FEM: =*te*/MASC: =*hu* when in the genitive case), which agrees in case and gender with the head noun, can optionally occur between the relative clause and the head noun, as in (20). If the head noun of a relative clause is (syntactically) modified (in other words, modified by a modifier other than the relative clause), the noun-phrase clitic is required between the relative clause and the head noun, as in (21).

- (19) ise isi seekk-ø-ino midaano
3SG.F.NOM 3SG.M.NOM repair-3SG.M-PERF.3 clay.container(ACC)
hiikk’-i-t-ino.
break-EP-3SGF-PERF.3
‘She broke the clay container that he repaired.’
- (20) ise isi seekk-ø-ino(=ta)
3SG.F.NOM 3SG.M.NOM repair-3SG.M-PERF.3(=NPC.F.ACC)
midaanó-nsa hiikk’-i-t-ino.
clay.container[ACC]-3PL.POSS break-EP-3SGF-PERF.3
‘She broke their clay container that he repaired.’
- (21) ise isi seekk-ø-ino=ta
3SG.F.NOM 3SG.M.NOM repair-3SG.M-PERF.3=NPC.F.ACC
- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| { | (a) insá midaano | } | hiikk’-i-t-ino.
break-EP-3SGF-PERF.3 |
| | 3PL.GEN[GEN] clay.container(ACC) | | |
| | (b) dančá midaano | | |
| | good[ACC] clay.container(ACC) | | |
| | (c) dančá midaanó-nsa | | |
| | good[ACC] clay.container[ACC]-3PL.POSS | | |

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- (a) ‘She broke their clay container that he repaired.’
- (b) ‘She broke the good clay container that he repaired.’
- (c) ‘She broke their good clay container that he repaired.’

Therefore, even within Sidaama, the notion of Modification is not exclusively the criterion for the distinction made in a noun phrase. It makes the Modification distinction in the first seven cases outlined above, while it makes the distinction in terms of both Modification and modification in the last three cases.

3. Differences from Constructions in Other Languages

There are two grammatical phenomena in other languages to which the modification of a common noun seems to be relevant. One is the construct state (status constructus) in Semitic languages, which are, though distantly, related to Sidaama, and the other is the Ezafe construction in Iranian languages. This section examines whether any of these constructions makes a distinction similar to the one made by Sidaama noun phrases. Notice that the question asked here is not what level of a grammatical model (e.g. in, prior to, or subsequent to the syntax) these phenomena should be analyzed as occurring, as is the focus of interest to many investigators of them (e.g. Borer 1988, 1996, Ghomesi 1997), but rather whether the modification within a noun phrase that is relevant to any of the phenomena is purely syntactic, or morphological as well as syntactic.

3.1. Construct state in Semitic languages (e.g. Borer 1988, 1996, Benmamoun 2005)

The construct state, which is a nominal complex found in Semitic languages, is a syntactic phrase, though it constitutes a prosodic unit and behaves as a phonological word. It shows some properties concerning syntactic modification, but the Modification distinction in Sidaama is relevant to none of them. For example, the construct state in Arabic exhibits characteristics such as the following (e.g. Benmamoun 2005). First, the (in)definiteness of the noun phrase is only marked by its last genitive noun, but is not marked by any other noun in it, as in (22a) and (22b).

(22) *Arabic*

kitāb-u	bn-i	’amm-i	ṣadiq-i	}	(a) ṭ-ṭālib-i
book-NOM	son-GEN	uncle-GEN	friend-GEN		DEF-student-GEN
					(b) ṭālib-in
					student-GEN.INDEF

(a) ‘the book of the son of the uncle of the friend of the student’

(b) ‘a book of a son of an uncle of a friend of a student’ (Benmamoun 2005:478)

Thus, when a construct state noun phrase is made up of only two nouns, it has (in)definiteness marking on its second noun, but not on its first noun. Second, an adjective modifying one of the nouns in a construct state noun phrase has to occur

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(25) *Persian*

- (a) ketâb-am (b) lebâs-e sefid-e bi âstin-am
 book-1SG.POSS dress-EZ white-EZ without sleeve-1SG.POSS
 ‘my book’ ‘my white dress without sleeves’ (Samvelian 2007:621)
- (c) ketâb-e barâdar-e dust-e xâhar-am
 book-EZ brother-EZ friend-EZ sister-1SG.POSS
 ‘the book of the brother of the friend of my sister’ (Samvelian 1983:59)

Thus, the modification distinction made in the Persian Ezafe construction is also syntactic.

4. Conclusion

As shown in section 3, in Sidaama, a distinction within a noun phrase is made in terms of Modification in seven cases. On the other hand, there are also three cases where the distinction is both syntactic and morphological. Therefore, the notion of Modification/modification is not always consistent even in Sidaama.

There does not seem to be any other language that makes a Modification distinction like Sidaama. As seen in section 4, both the construct state in Semitic languages and the Ezafe construction in Iranian languages are sensitive to the modification of a noun, but they are syntactically defined, and do not include affixation.

One might be tempted to resort to the notion of headedness, rather than Modification, to describe the Modification distinction in Sidaama, but this also creates some fundamental problems. First of all, the notion of headedness is also usually used for syntactic dependency. For example, Nichols (1986), who conducted cross-linguistic studies of morphological marking of syntactic relations, explicitly states that “syntactic relations are absolutely independent of the morphology (or other means) that signal them” (p.57).⁹ Second, the notion of the heads of noun phrases is controversial, as pointed out by Dryer (2004).

In conclusion, the notion of modification is not universal as traditionally assumed, and needs to be expanded to include morphological affixation in addi-

⁹ In Nichols’s analysis, most of the phenomena in Sidaama involving Modification would be treated as instances of double-marking. On one hand, the dependent bears some marking in most cases. Adnominals such as adjectives, numerals, adnominal demonstratives, and adnominal interrogatives agree with the head noun in case and gender, as in (2a), (4), (7), (13), and (14a). Genitive NPs mark possession with the genitive suffix on themselves, as in (4), (16a), and (16b). Relativization is formed by means of gapping or pronominal retention, either of which can be treated as dependent-marking. On the other hand, the head noun is marked as having a dependent whenever it is modified by a syntactic modifier, as in (i)-(vii). Thus, these can be regarded as double-marking examples. However, all the Sidaama phenomena involving Modification cannot be double-marking of syntactic relations in the following respects. First, marking of possession with the possessive pronominal suffix is not dependent-marking. Second, (viii) does not show any head-marking; relativization can be formed by gapping, which is an instance of dependent-marking, but the existence of a dependent of the head noun other than the relative clause is also marked on the dependent, specifically on the verb at the end of the relative clause.

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tion to syntactic phenomena in order to account for the distinction made by common nouns at least in Sidaama by means of this term.

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