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# THE INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF THE NOUN PHRASE IN NAIJA

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## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the internal structure of the noun phrase in the Naija. The dominant role of the noun phrase in the Naija clause structure is imposing since the competent speaker of the language encounters it in the subject, object and compliment structures of the sentence. The subtypes of determiners which precede the 'head' of the noun phrase; including stative verbs functioning as descriptive adjectives within the noun phrase are also discussed. It analyzes in addition, the co-occurrence restrictions on determiners showing that they do not occur haphazardly. While focusing on the multifunctional nature of the relative clause introducer *we*, the embedding process of relativisation is also discussed. The paper then shows that in addition to covert structural complexities, the extension of the semantic functions of *we* interestingly, is an overt signal of the complexity of the internal structure of the noun phrase in Naija.

### 1.0 Introduction

The Noun phrase (henceforth referred to as NP) is an imposing form in language because the language user encounters and uses it very often. Even within sentence and clause structure, the NP has the capacity to function as subject, object and complement; thus, dominating other forms/classes within the structure of the sentence.

Naija exhibits NP usages which like other languages, show the recursive properties and possibilities of language through structural embedding and complexities. The apparent complexity displayed by the Naija structure of the NP is one that should be revisited especially in the light of the stigma and the rating of the grammar of pidgins as "simplified" "*baby-talk*". This paper does so by examining again the internal structure of the NP of Naija.

Mafeni (1971) observed the relative complexities exhibited by Naija in form and function from region to region and from community to community. Since then, it has become quite obvious that the grammar of Naija is a unique one; related to the base language (English) and the substrates (Heine 1979, Faraclas 1996, Ofuani 1984).

### 2.0 The Internal Structure of the NP

By its very nature then, Naija is constrained to be structurally complex arising from similarities with the complexities from English which allows for multiple embedding; integrating other form classes (such as prepositional, adjectival, verbal) and even clausal and sentential structures. Since there are more than one substrate, the structures of other languages naturally come to play. This hybridization of some aspects of the interweaving by which Naija retains its own structural identity, is examined here. The variety of Naija used here is Warri-based and the River Radio News Bulletin samples. The study is essentially descriptive. A diagrammatic illustration of its internal structure rewrite rule is modeled after Chomsky, (1965) standard model of transformational grammar thus:

<b>NP – (DET) (ADJ) N (Quant) (S)</b>
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From the re-write rule above, NP obligatorily contains a noun and it may be preceded by either a determiner or an adjective or both and it can be followed by a quantifier functioning as a plural marker and a dependent clause (S). The dependent clause discussed in this paper is the relative clause (RCL).

Based on their semantic properties, nouns in Naija are classified into proper and common ones. The common nouns are further classified into count and non count ones. The proper nouns, mass nouns and plural count nouns can occur alone without modifiers as shown below:

- 1a. **Jɔn travul yestade** (proper noun)  
*John* traveled yesterday.
- b. **Garri diẹ** (mass noun)  
*Garri* is expensive
- c. **Dog(s, dem) tu chọp** (plural count noun)  
*Dogs* are voracious

### 3.0 Form Class of Determiners in Naija

Determiners in Naija are subdivided into three viz: pre-determiners, determiners and post determiners. The table below shows the sub-groups:

**Table I: Form Class of Determiners In Naija**

Pre-determiners	Determiners	Post-determiners
<b>ɔl</b> (all) <b>haf</b> (half)	A) <i>articles</i> (I) definite: <b>di</b> (the) (ii) indefinite: <b>wɔn</b> (a(n))	A) <i>numerals</i> : (I) cardinals: <b>wɔn</b> (one) <b>tu</b> (two) (ii) ordinals: <b>fɔst</b> (first) <b>sekɔnd</b> (second)
	B) <i>demonstratives</i> : <b>dis</b> (this) <b>dat</b> (that-those)	
	C) <i>possessive pronouns</i> : <b>im</b> (his/her) <b>dem/dia</b> (them/their)	C) <i>quantifiers</i> (i) Indefinite: <b>sɔm</b> (some); <b>mɛni</b> (several/many) (ii) partitives: <b>plɛnti</b> (much); <b>smɔl</b> (a little) (iii) universals: <b>evri</b> (every) (iv) phrasals : <b>plɛnti</b> (plenty of)
	D) <i>possessive nouns or genitives</i> : <b>im</b> + N + poss. + N as in: <b>di man im tith</b> The man's teeth	

The two pre-determiners in Naija can co-occur with singular count nouns, plural count nouns and non count nouns. They can also co-occur with definite articles and demonstratives as shown below.

- 2a. **A dɔn si ɔl di mɔni** (pre-det+def. art+N)  
I have seen *all the money*
- b. **A kil ɔl di snek (-s, dem)** (Pre-det + det. Art + N + PL)  
I killed all the snakes

Pre-determiners and qualifiers cannot co-occur in Naija because pre-determiners are also qualifiers. So (3) below is ungrammatical.

3. \**ol sòm m̀ni dòn l̀s* (pre+det+qualifier + N)  
 \*All some money is missing

The fact that (3) is ungrammatical shows that grammatical constituents within the Naija are structured. Their occurrence are not haphazard.

### 3.1 Articles

The table above, shows that articles are divided into definite and indefinite. The definite article can co-occur with singular and plural count nouns and non count nouns. Below are some examples

- 4a. *Di b̀oi wẹl* (def art+N)  
 The boy is healthy
- b. *Di b̀oi (-s, dem) de ple* (Def. art + N + PL)  
 The boys are playing

Indefinite articles are expressed in Naija through the use of the numeral *ẁn*, it is derivationally related to English cardinal numeral *one* and is easily recognizable through the phonetic shape. *Ẁn* is extended to function as indefinite article in this context and as a cardinal numeral in other contexts. Below are two examples of *ẁn* functioning as an indefinite article.

- 5a. *Ẁn man de k̀m awa haus* (Indef. Art + N)  
 A man is coming to our house
- b. *Ẁn got dòn l̀s* (indef. art + N)  
 A goat is missing

### 3.2 Demonstratives

Naija has the two subtypes of demonstratives in the singular number. They are *dis* (*this*) and *dat* (*that*). The plural counterpart however has two types based on the speaker's sociolect. *Stand up* comedians use the acrolectal sociolect while plying their trade. Highly educated speakers of Naija also use this sociolect. They use the plural counterpart of demonstratives which are *dese* (*these*) *dos* (*those*).

In the basilectal and mesolectal sociolects however, pluralization of demonstratives is derived through the pluralization of the noun that the demonstrative follows. The plural marker in these sociolects is lexicalized. It is written thus N+(dem). Below is a table for pluralization of demonstratives in the basilectal and mesolectal sociolects.

**Table 2: Pluralization in Basilectal and mesolectal Sociolects of Naija**

<i>English</i>	<i>Naija</i>
this	<b>dis</b>
these	<b>dis+N+(dem)</b>
that	<b>dat</b>
those	<b>dat+N+(dem)</b>

- 6a. **Dis ẹg dọn rọtin** (Dem + N)  
*This egg is rotten*
- b. **Dis ẹg (dem) dọn rotin** (Dem + N + PL)  
*These eggs are rotten*
- 7a. **Dat bọi de slip** (Dem +N)  
*That boy is sleeping*
- b. **Dat bọi dem dey slip** (Dem + N + PL)  
*Those boys are sleeping*

### 3.3 Possessive Pronouns and Genitives

Possessive pronouns function as determiners in Naija, however, they have no gender markings in basilectal and mesolectal sociolects. The possessive pronoun *im* is used for both masculine and feminine gender as shown in the examples below.

- 8a. **Im dọg nọr wẹl** (poss + N)  
*Her dog is ill*
- b. **Im brọda dọn kọm** (poss+N)  
*His brother has come*

Genitives are lexicalized in Naija as shown in (9) below.

- 9a. **Di dọg im nos de bring blọd** (Def+N+poss+N)  
*The dog's nose is bleeding*

There is, however, another method of genitivation in Naija where the genitive marker is covert. The noun that precedes the genitive marker as in (9a) above then occurs without the genitive marker (*im*) following it. What follows is the noun functioning as the head of the NP. The noun preceding the head of the NP is however, not a nominator but a genitive. So (9a) can still be realized thus.

- 9b. **Di dọg nos de bring blọd** (Def art+gen +N)  
*The dog's nose is bleeding*

While (9a) is the basic genitivation process in Naija, (9b) is a compact form of (9a) due to the deletion of the lexicalized possessive marker (*im*). From our observation of (*im*) the possessive pronoun, and (*im*) the genitive marker, we note that they are not homonyms in Naija. The two forms constitute a polysemous word with two senses. Polysemy and Multifunctionality are common lexico-semantic processes in Naija lexicon.

### 3.4 Quantifiers

The three types of quantifiers in Naija are:

- 10(i) Indefinites **sọm** (some) and **mẹni** (many)
- (ii) Partitives **plẹnti** (plenty) and **sọm** (some)

(iii) Universals **ɛvri** (every) and phrasal **plenti ɔf** (very many) .

Table I above, shows **sɔm** functioning as modifier and it precedes the head of the NP. Below are examples of **sɔm** and **mɛni** in a clause structure.

- 11a. **Mɛni pipul kɔm mai pati** (Indef Quan+N)  
*Many guests attended my party*
- b. **Sɔm pipul kɔm mai pati** (Indef Quan+N)  
*Some/few guests attended my party*

The partitive **plenti** has acquired extended meaning like the locative preposition **fɔ** in Naija. **Plenti** in Naija functions as (a lot of, much, several, and plenty of) in English. So, **plenti** is polysemous and some of the extended meanings that it has acquired are shown in the examples below:

- 12a. **A gɛt plenti mɔni** (part. Quant + N)  
*I have a lot of money*
- b. **Plenti pipul kɔm chɔch tode** (Part. Quant + N)  
*Several worshippers attended church service today*
- c. **Giv mi plenti wɔta** (part. Quant + N)  
*Give me much water*

#### 4.0 Adjectives

There are few true adjectives in Naija. Faraclas (1996:221) however took an extreme view that there are no adjectives at all in Naija when he states that:

*There is no motivation for any separate category adjective in Nigerian pidgin. Almost all lexical items whose meanings correspond to items classified as adjectives in many indo-European language and whose functions is to describe certain qualities of noun may occupy the same sentential slot normally occupied by verbs and may take any of all auxiliaries, modals, objects, adverbial modifiers, ideophones are normally taken by verbs in the language.*

Based on Faraclas's analysis of adjectives in Naija, adjectives are verbs, modifier nouns or pronominal objects. Predicative adjectives in Naija are truly stative verbs while attributive adjectives are modifier nouns derived from stative verbs. In this paper, attributive adjectives such as *fain* (fine), *old* (old) and *wait* (white) will be treated as adjectives. In addition to these overt attributes, there are a few stative verbs which can also function as attributive adjectives in Naija. Their sequence of occurrence if they co-occur in a complex NP is shown in (13).

13	A	B	C
	Attributive/ Adjective	Adjective	Adjective
i.	(descriptive)	age/size	(colour)
ii.	<b>fain</b> (beautiful/colourful)	<b>old</b> (old)	<b>wait</b> (white)

- |      |                     |                  |                   |
|------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| iii. | <b>wọwọ</b> (ugly)  | <b>niu</b> (new) | <b>rẹd</b> (red)  |
| iv.  | <b>klin</b> (clean) | <b>big</b> (big) | <b>blu</b> (blue) |

The adjectives in (13) above can be sub-modified by intensifiers in two ways. First, an adjective can be sub modified or intensified through reduplication. Below is an example.

14. **Mai sista de laik fain fain bọi (-s, dem)**(Adj + Adj + N + PL)  
My sister likes *very handsome boys*

Secondly, **so-so** can function as an intensifier. Although Elugbe and Omamor (1991) observed that **so-so** can function as *very*, we are of the opinion that it is polysemous because it can function as *very* and *only*. In the two examples below, **so-so** functions as *very* and *only* respectively in 15a and b.

- 15a. **Na so-so fain bọi (dem) mai sista de laik.** (Int+Int+Adj+N+Pl)  
It is mainly *very handsome boys* that my sister likes

- b. **Na so-so ẹba a de chọp** (Int+Int+N)  
It is *only eba* I eat

Finally, adjectives in Naija can be modified through a co-occurrence of the two intensifiers described above. Below is an example

16. **Mai sista laik so-so fain fain bọi dem** (Int + Adj + Adj + N + PL)  
My sister likes *mainly very handsome boys*

If adjectives co-occur in NP, they are in the A – B – C sequence arranged in (13) above. Below is an example of the sequential ordering of adjectives in a Naija clause

17. **A jọs bai wọn fain niu blak bag** (Descript + Age + Colour + N)  
I have just bought one *beautiful new black bag*

This is unlike the case of English where comparisons can be morphological or lexicalised as shown in the example below. Degree of comparison of adjectives in Naija is always lexicalized. The comparative degree is **pas** and it follows the adjective as in (18a, b and c).

Naija	English
Tall pas	taller (morphological)
Fain pas	more beautiful (lexicalised)
Fat pas o!	Fattest (morphological)
<b>big pas</b>	bigger (morphological)
<b>smọl pas</b>	smaller

The superlative degree is derived from the comparative degree with the pre-determiner **ɔl** occurring after **pas**,

- 19 a. **big pas ɔl** biggest  
 b. **smɔl pas ɔl** smallest  
 c. **fain pas ɔl** most beautiful

The co-occurrence restrictions on Naija modifiers and the head word of the NP is as follows:

**Pre-det + dem + gen + num + adj + head**

Example:

19. **ɔl mai tu big blak dog (dɛm) de slip** (predet+poss+card+Adj+Adj+N+pl)  
*My two big black dogs are sleeping*

## 5.0 Relativisation

Relativisation is a sub-part of the embedding process in Naija. Relative clauses function as ‘qualifier’ in complex NP. They are usually introduced by the relative clause introducer *we*, as shown in examples 20-23 below.

The fact that the relativizer **we** is derivationally related to English *who* and *where* cannot be gainsaid. However, **we** bears a closer phonological affinity as *where* than to *who*. The relativizer permeates all English based pidgins and creoles as attested to by Muhlhauser:

*The fact that pidgins often develop strikingly similar solutions to the same problem of grammatical expansion has led observers to postulate historical relationships between them, where in fact we are dealing with independent development. An interesting example is the case of the relativizer **we** (English where) which is found in, among other pidgins, West African Pidgin English (WAPE), Solomon islands pidgin English, Tok Pisin, Kirio, Torres Strait Broken and Northern Territory Kriol. (1986:190).*

The head of the complex NP in which the relative clause occurs can be human, non human or inanimate noun:

- 20a. **A no di man we yu giv di moni** (Def art + N + Relf (Rcl [s+p+c (Det + N))))  
*I know the man that you gave the money*
- b. **Jɔn si di kat we chop di fish** (Det+N + Relf (RCL(s+p+c (det + N))))  
*John saw the cat that ate the fish*
- c. **Di shɛt we yu bai yestade fain wɛl wɛl**  
*The shirt which you bought yesterday is very fine*

In Naija, the use of the relative clause introducer is, however, optional. So, it is possible to generate a complex NP with a relativizer **we** omitted; yet, such a sentence is still grammatical. This fact was reaffirmed by Faraclas (1996:36) when he asserts:

*Relative clauses generally begin with relative clause introducer we but the use of we is always optional except there is no other marker of relativisation present between the head noun phrase of the verb phrase of the relative clause.*

Two examples of complex NP with omitted relativizer are shown below

- 21a. **Di haus we mai papa gɛt dɔn old** (Det + N + Relf RCL (s(det +N)+p))  
The house that my father owns is old

Omitted relativiser **we**

**Di haus my papa gɛt dɔn old** (Det + N RCL [s + p])  
*The house my father owns* is old

- b. **Di gɛl we mai brɔda mari nɔr fain** (Det + N + Relf RCL s(det +N)+ p))  
The lady that my brother married is not beautiful

To infinite and *-ing participial* non-finite clauses, can also be introduced by the relativiser **we**. So, the semantic scope of **we** has been extended to introduce non-finite clauses in Naija. This phenomenon is alien to the lexifier language that **we** was borrowed from. It is pertinent to note, here, however, that the difference between dependent finite and non-finite clauses functioning as the qualifier of a complex NP is quite tenuous as shown below

- 22a. **Di man we go sain di pepa nɔr kɔm** (Det + N + Rel introducer + Nfcl (p+ c(det+N)))  
The man *to sign the document* did not come
- b. **Di man we de draiv di ka na mai brɔda** (Dety N+we+ing pat+ (p+c(det+N)))  
The man *driving the car* is my brother

The relative clauses 22a and b can have dual meanings derived from each of them. So, 22a can be translated as: (i) *who is to sign the document* and (ii) *to sign the document*. The dual interpretations of 22b are: (i) *who is driving the car* and (ii) *driving the car*.

23. **Di i-beta-pas-mai-nebɔ-we I bai fɔ Igbudu makɛt de bifo yɛstade dɔn kpafuka**  
(Det + N (s(SPC(Adj)C(NPs(Gen+N))) RCL(s+p+A(Prp+N+N)+N(N+Prp+N)))  
The very small generator which I bought at Igbudu market two days ago, is malfunctioning.

Finally, the relative clause introducer can also introduce a prepositional phrase in Naija. It is apparently derived from the substrate languages. Examples include

- 24a. **Di buk we de fɔ tebul na mai own** (Det + N + introducer + pp)  
*The book on the table/the book which is on the table* belongs to me
- b. **The man we de di moto** (Det + N + Introducer + pp)  
The man in the car/the man who is in the car

## 6.0 Conclusion

The rising profile of Naija in the Nigerian linguistics ecology has accentuated the need for further structural description of the language. In this paper, we have shown that the NP is the most imposing form in Naija clause structure since it functions as its subject, object and complement. NP can be, and are indeed, structurally complex and the grammatical constituents occurring within it are systematically structured. The recursiveness of NP is further enhanced by inherent multiple embedding of prepositional phrases, relative and participial clauses. The semantic scope of the relative clause introducer *we* is extended in the NP since it also introduces prepositional phrases, infinitive and participial clauses. Our description then of the overt and covert structural delicacy of NP in this growing and expanded pidgin, shows indeed that the structure is complex enough to attract further description.

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