

On the Structure of the Qualifier System in Ọkọ-Ọsànyèn

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Abstract

The paper identifies the different types of qualifiers in Ọkọ-Ọsànyèn, one of the endangered African languages spoken in Ọgòrì-Màgóngò Local Government in Nigeria. It also examines and explains in detail the sequential co-occurrence of the qualifiers within the noun phrases. The paper believes that the language still retains the relics of the old patterning of the Qualifier-Qualified sequence of the Proto-language to the African languages under the sub-phylum of West-Benue-Congo which it belongs.

1. Introduction

Ọkọ-Ọsànyèn is a member of the West Benue Congo of the sub-phylum Niger-Congo family of the African languages (Heine and Nurse 2001:31). It is the main language of the Ọkúrò and Ọsànyèn people living at Ọgòrì-Màgóngò Local Government Area in Kogi State of Nigeria. It is one of the endangered languages in the world and it has received a little recent serious scholarly academic attention. (Chumbow 1982a&b; Adégbijà 1993, 2001, Sáláwù 2005, 2006a&b). The data for this study are drawn from many native speakers who served willingly as our informants.

The purpose of this paper is to look at the qualifier system in Ọkọ-Ọsànyèn by identifying different types of qualifiers in the language and discussing the sequential co-occurrence of these qualifiers in phrases.

2. Headhood and Qualifier

Ọkọ-Ọsànyèn is a SVO language and it is a head-first language. The Head parameter within the theoretical framework of Principles and Parameters as propounded by Chomsky (1981, 1986) deals with the position of heads within the phrases (NP, VP etc). A particular language consistently has its heads on the same side of the complements in all its phrases. In fact, head has been employed to divide the languages of the

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world into two. A language can be head-first or head-last. Chomsky (1981:6) has this to say:

Ideally, we hope to find that complexes of properties differentiating otherwise similar languages are reducible to a single parameters, fixed in one or another way.

Chomsky & Lasnik 1993: 527 comment further on the issue:

The phrase structure system for a particular language is largely restricted to specification of the parameters that determine the ordering of head-complement, head-adjunct and SPEC-head.

For instance, while Epira and English are head-first languages, Japanese is a head-last language. (1) shows this clearly.

(1) a. **Èbìrà**

- | | | | | |
|------|-----|-----------------|--------|-----------------|
| (i) | NP: | <i>Òhinóyyì</i> | Okene | 'King of Okene' |
| | | King | Okene | |
| (ii) | VP: | <i>re</i> | Òchòku | 'buy rice' |
| | | Buy | rice | |

b. **English**

- | | | | | |
|-----|-----|------------------------|-----|--------------------------|
| (i) | NP: | <i>King of England</i> | ii. | <i>Brought the chair</i> |
|-----|-----|------------------------|-----|--------------------------|

c. **Japanese**

- | | | | | |
|-----|-----|--------|--------------|--------------------|
| (i) | VP: | Hon -o | <i>Katta</i> | 'He bought a book' |
| | | Book | buy | |

- (ii) PP: [Fune] *ní* 'on the boat'
 Boat on

Òkọ-Òsànyèn is a head-first language as shown in (2).

- (2)a. NP: *Ípílésò* *ònókónòkónòrò* 'The eight car'
 Car eight

- b. VP: *Wán* *údúdò* 'kill.slaughter a sheep'
 kill sheep

(2b) assumes that the Noun (N) – Qualifier (Q) sequence should be the pattern in any Òkọ-Òsànyèn noun phrase that consists of a qualifier and a qualified item. But it seems that there are some exceptions to this general format. This will be discussed fully in the next section of this study.

3. Noun Qualifiers in Òkọ-Òsànyèn

The focus of this section is to identify and discuss different types of qualifiers for the nouns in Òkọ-Òsànyèn with relevant data. Awóbùlúyì (1978:30) defines a qualifier as follows:

Any word or grammatical (i.e. acceptable) combination of words which qualifies a noun is a qualifier. Therefore the actual work of qualifiers is to narrow down the conceptual range of meanings of nouns.

From this definition, one can deduce first, that any linguistic item that will be classified as a qualifier cannot occur in isolation in any sentence containing it. Second, a qualifier co-occurs with nouns only. Third, a qualifier in a noun phrase can be represented by a single word, or a phrase or by a clause. Both semantic and syntactic criteria can be employed to classify the qualifiers in Òkọ-Òsànyèn into different groups. All these observations shall be substantiated with relevant data as we progress in this paper.

3.1 Adjectival Qualifier

In Ọkọ-Ọsànyèn, adjectives are usually used to qualify nouns. Unlike many African Languages such as Yorùbá, Edó where their adjectives begin with consonantal segments, it is discovered that all Ọkọ-Ọsànyèn adjectives start with vowels and end with vowels. The language has an open-ended syllabic structure system. (3) presents the data for the adjectival qualifiers.

(3) a.	ẹ̀sà	<i>òrìnrin</i>	'Black cloth'
	Cloth	black	
b.	úbó	<i>òkẹ̀kẹ̀</i>	'large house'
	house	large	
c.	ówún	<i>òránrán</i>	'sweet soup'
	soup	sweet	
d.	àgán	<i>òyànyàn</i>	'red hoe'
	hoe	red	
e.	emumu	<i>òkùkùrù</i>	'white book'
	book	white	

The italicized words are the qualifiers following the qualified nouns: ẹ̀sà, úbó, ówún, àgán and emumu.

3.2 Numeral Qualifier

Numerals in Ọkọ-Ọsànyèn can be grouped under two main headings namely cardinal and ordinal. We present these numerals in (4).

4.	A		B	
	Òiré	'one'	òsóro	'first'
	Èbòrè	'two'	ububuorò	'second'
	Èta	'three'	òtétárò	'third'
	(è)èna	'four'	ònénárò	'fourth'
	Upi	'five'	upupirò	'fifth'
	Òpónọọrè	'six'	òpónọọrèrò	'sixth'
	Ufòmbòrè	'seven'	ufòmbòrèrò	'seventh'
	Ònókónòkónò	'eight'	ònókónòkónòrò	'eighth'
	Ubuore	'nine'	ubuorero	'ninth'
	Gúléfó/ẹfó	'ten'	ẹfórò	'tenth'

The cardinal numerals are the ones under column A and they are used to indicate the exact quantity or number of nouns that they occur with. The data in (5) illustrate this:

- (5) a. úbó ẹbòrè 'two houses'
 House two
- b. ahéré èta 'three fish'
 fish three
- c. àgán ònókónòkónò 'eight hoes'
 hoe eight

The numerals in Column B are the ordinal ones which generally indicate the exact position of an object in a series. The phrases illustrating this are in (6).

- (6)a. emumu òtètárò 'The third book'
 Book third
- b. ujun upupirò 'The fifth door'
 door fifth
- c. òsèn ufombòrèrò 'The seventh month'
 month seventh

The structural position of these numeral qualifiers (both cardinal and ordinal) in relation to nouns they are qualifying is that the nouns – the head-words, occur in the initial position, then the qualifiers come after them.

In addition; the ordinal qualifiers have different phonological structures from their cardinal ones. Looking at the data in (4) very closely, one can infer that some ordinal qualifiers are formed from the cardinal qualifiers through the morphological processes of reduplication, suffixation and prefixation as shown in (7)

(7)

Root	Partial Reduplication	Suffixation	Prefixation	Result
a. èta 'three'	tèta ->	tèta + -rò ->	ò-+tètárò ->	òtètárò
b. èna 'four'	nèna ->	nèna + -rò ->	ò-+nèna+-rò ->	ònènarò
c. upi 'five'	pupi ->	pupi + -rò ->	ù-+pupi+-rò ->	ùpupirò

Meanwhile, some are formed only through the process of suffixation as presented in (8).

(8)

	Root	Suffixation	Result
a.	opó.nqóřç 'seven	-> opónqóřç + rò ->	opónqóřçrò 'seventh'
b.	ònókónòkónò 'cight'	-> ònókónòkónò + rò ->	ònókónòkónòrò 'cighth'
c.	ẹfọ 'ten'	-> ẹfọ + rò ->	ẹfọrò 'tenth'

3.3 Demonstrative Qualifier

Demonstrative qualifiers in Ọkọ-Ọsànyèn are specifiers of number. They indicate the number in terms of singular or plural. They are few in number. They are presented in (9).

(9)a.	úbó	ònẹ	'this house'
	house	this	
b.	úbó	ẹnánẹ	'these houses'
	house	these	
c.	érúnrò	ònábẹ	'that farmer'
	farmer	that	
d.	érúnrò	ẹnàbẹ	'those farmers'
	farmer	those	

From the data in (9), it is shown clearly that **ònẹ** and **ònábẹ** are the singular demonstrative qualifiers while **ẹnánẹ** and **ẹnàbẹ** are the plural demonstrative qualifiers. Also, the structural position of these demonstrative qualifiers in relation to the nouns is such that the nouns being qualified occur before these qualifiers. In addition, this language has only one definite article **áyẹ**.

- (10)a. iyá áyè yin úwó áyè 'the mother buys/bought the goat'
 Mother the buy goat the
- b. Ètólá búè ni erùmékà áyè 'Tólá sleeps/slept in the afternoon'
 Tólá sleep in afternoon the

3.4 Appositive Qualifier

Appositive qualifier is one of the qualifiers in Òkọ-Òsànyèn. Quirk and Greenbaum (1973:276) outline the criteria for appositive constructions as follows:

Four units to be appositives, they must normally be identical in reference or else the reference of one must be included in the reference of the other... In many cases, the co-reference and grammatical similarity will permit the omission of either appositive unit with a resultant acceptable and synonymous sentence.

From this explanation, it means that for a constituent to be regarded as an appositive, it must satisfy the criteria of co-reference and similarity in syntactic status. We present the data in (11) to show-case the appositive constructions in Òkọ-Òsànyèn.

- (11)a. Ìjímò yín isuru, ígìlà òkèkà
 Jímò buy a type of bitter edible tuber yam big
 'Jímò buys/bought isuru, a big yam'.
- b. Òkí, érúnrò áyè sù Ìbímpé
 Òkí, farmer the marry Bímpé
- c. Áúdù, Ìkógí Ègómìnà pílá sà ké
 Áúdù Kogí Governor arrive come has
 'Áúdù, Governor of Kogi state has arrived'

In all the examples in (11), **Ìsuru**, **ìgilà ọkẹkà**, **òkí**, **ẹrúnrò áyẹ**, **Áúdù** and **Ìkógí Ẹgómìnà** are the appositives but they have different syntactic status. **Ìsuru**, **Òkí** and **Áúdù** are the head-words of the noun phrases where the appositives: **Ìgilà ọkẹkà**, **ẹrúnrò áyẹ** and **Ìkógí Ẹgómìnà** function as their qualifiers.

Using the criterion of co-reference as hinted by Quirk and Greenbaum (1973), we can generate two different sentences having the same semantic output from the data in (11) as in (12).

- (12)a. **Ìjímò yín isuru** 'Jímò buys/bought and edible yam'
Ìjímò yín ìgilà ọkẹkà 'Jímò buys/bought a big yam'
- b. **Òkí sù Ìbímpé** 'Òkí marries/married Bímpé'
Ẹrúnrò áyẹ sù Ìbímpé 'the farmer marries/married Bímpé'
- c. **Áúdù pílà sà ké** 'Áúdù has arrived'
Ìkógí Ẹgómìnà pílà sà ké 'Governor of Kogi State has arrived'

3.5 Relative Clause Qualifier

Another qualifier of the nominal items in **Ọkọ-Ọsanyèn** is the relative clause qualifier. The markers of the relative clause qualifier in the language are **nẹ** or **nẹnẹ**. All constituents that can perform the functions of subject, object or qualifier can be relativized in this language as presented in (13).

- (13)a. **Ayọ sù Ìdélé ógbèn**
Ayọ marry Déle child
 'Ayọ marries/married Dele's child'

- b. Ayò nẹ(nẹ) sú Ìdélé ogben
 Ayò REL marry Dele child
 'Ayò who marries/married Dele's child'
- c. Ìdélé ógbèn nẹ(nẹ) Ayò sú
 Dele child REL Ayò marry
 'Dele's child whome Ayò marries/married'
- d. Ìdélé nẹ(nẹ) Ayò sú yógbèn
 Dele REL Ayò marries his child
 "Dele whose Ayò marries/married his child"

(13a) is the kernel sentence. It is the subject of (13a) that takes the relative clause qualifier in (13b); while the object of (13a) is qualified by the relative clause qualifier in (13c). and, the nominal qualifier **Ìdélé** in (13a) takes the relative clause qualifier in (13d). in (13b – d), the relative clause qualifiers follow their head-words: **Ayò**, **Ìdélé**, **Ógbèn** and **Ìdélé** respectively.

3.6 Genitival Qualifier

Ọkọ-Ọsànyèn has some grammatical items that do function as genitival qualifiers in noun phrases. They have grammatical categories of number and person as presented in (14).

(14)a.

	Singular	Plural
1st person	Mẹẹkà	Tẹẹkà
2nd person	Wẹẹkà	Nẹẹkà
3rd person	Yẹẹkà	Bẹẹkà

- b. i. Íkíà mẹ̀ẹ̀kà
 ii. Íkíà tẹ̀ẹ̀kà
 iii. Íkíà wẹ̀ẹ̀kà
 iv. Íkíà nẹ̀ẹ̀kà
 v. Íkíà yẹ̀ẹ̀kà
 vi. Íkíà bẹ̀ẹ̀kà

As shown in (14b), the structural position of these genitival qualifiers in a noun phrase is that they always follow the nouns (head-words) to be qualified. Another observation is in the morphological composition of these genitival qualifiers. They are composed of the short pronouns in the language such as **mò**, **tì**, **wò**, **nẹ**, **yẹ**, **bẹ** and the lexical item 'ẹ̀kà' in the language.

3.7 Pronoun Qualifier

In Ọ̀kọ-Ọ̀sànyẹ̀n, there are two types of pronouns: short and long ones. Either of the two can be used as qualifiers in the language. On the short pronouns functioning as qualifiers, they are monosyllabic and they also have allomorphic variations as a result of the operation of the vowel harmony in the language. (15) displays these pronoun qualifiers while (16) contain their usage in grammatical constructions.

(15)

	Singular		Plural	
	SET A	SET B	SET A	SET B
1st person	mí	mọ	t í	tẹ
2nd person	w ú	wọ	n í	nẹ.
3rd person	y ú	yẹ	b í	bẹ

- (16)a. i. Òkí gbá mí emumu 'Òkí sees/saw my book'
 Òkí see my book
 ii. Òkí gbà mọ ọrẹ 'Òkí sees/saw my friend'
 Òkí see my friend
 b. i. Òkí gbá tí égbèlè 'Òkí sees/saw our cutlass'
 Òkí see our cutlass

On the long pronouns functioning as qualifiers, they are bisyllabic and they have no allomorphic variations like the short pronoun because the harmonic constraints on or the tenseness or laxness of the vowel of the verbs do not have any influence on them. They have a system of number like their short counterparts. These long pronouns are presented as follows in (17):

(17)

	Singular	Plural
1st person	Àmẹ	Àtọ
2nd person	Àwọ	Ànọ
3rd person	Àyẹ	Àbẹ

The following sentences in (18) will reveal their structural positions in relation to the nouns that they are qualifying.

(18)

- a. iyá bẹ. àtọ ísúdà 'A mother beat/beats our brothers'
 mother beat our brother
 b. àmẹ ẹsa àyẹ Èşadé jó 'It is my cloth that Sadé sold'
 my cloth FOC Şadé sell

There is one glaring observation to be noted in the data in (16) & (18) as regards the structural position of the short and long pronouns. The N-Q sequence is not followed at all. We have an inverted version of sequence. The qualifier **mí, mọ́, ti tẹ́, àtó** and **àmẹ́** are placed before the nouns **'emumu, ọ́rẹ́, égbèlẹ́, ẹ̀sa, ísúdà** and **ẹ̀sa** – the head words of the noun phrases where the qualifiers function.

3.8 Nominal Qualifier

As in other languages, Ọ̀kọ-Ọ̀sanyen does permit some nouns to qualify other nouns. These are labeled in this paper as nominal qualifiers. They may be human or non-human nouns. Anytime, we have grammatical structures involving these nominal qualifiers and qualified nouns, the N-Q sequence order is changed to Q – N order as we have in (3.7). (19) presents the data to buttress this syntactic observation.

- | | | | | |
|------|----|--------------|------------|--------------------|
| (19) | a. | ówún | ọtẹ̀lẹ̀ | 'The soup's pot' |
| | | Soup | pot | |
| | b. | ọ̀tun | ọ̀dòrẹ̀ | 'The ear's hole' |
| | | ear | hole | |
| | c. | úwó | ọ̀mọ̀dòrẹ̀ | 'dog's nose' |
| | | dog | nose | |
| | d. | Íbísí | ìwà | 'Bisi's behaviour' |
| | | Bisi | behaviour | |
| | e. | Íkòkò | otí | 'Cocoa's tree' |
| | | cocoa | tree | |
| | f. | Èkó | ógbén | 'Lagos child' |
| | | Lagos | child | |

g.	Ìkẹ̀mì	ẹ̀sa	'Kemi's cloth'
	Kẹ̀mì	cloth	

One may try to find out the genesis of the difference in the qualifier – qualified sequence in Ọ̀kọ-Ọ̀sànyẹ̀n. This paper subscribes to Sàláwù's (2006a) reconstruction proposal to the effect that the proto-language to the African languages under the sub-phylum of West Benue-Congo which Ọ̀kọ-Ọ̀sànyẹ̀n belongs to (Heine & Nurse 2001:31), must have permitted the N-Q and Q-N patternings at one time before. This suggestion is a product of analysis of the cross-linguistic data. In all languages relating to Ọ̀kọ-Ọ̀sànyẹ̀n such as Ìgbò, Yorùbá, Èdó and Èbirà, the N-Q sequence is generally chosen as shown in (20)

(20) a. **Èbirà**

ìrèhì	àmì	'my house'
house	my	
ẹ̀nu	òzòzà	'good yam'
yam	good	
ònọ̀ru	ẹ̀pàpà	'first man'
man	first	

b. **Yorùbá**

aṣọ	mi	'my cloth'
cloth	my	
obìnrin	pupa	'A fair woman'
woman	red	
ilé	owó	'A bank'
house	money	

c.	Edó		
	àkàkà	mẹ	'my grasshopper'
	grasshopper	my	
	ọhà	Èghósà	'Ègbósà's wife'
	wife	Èghósà	
	àmẹ	íwin	'coconut's water'
	water	coconut	
d.	nwanyin	ge	'your wife'
	wife	your	
	úlọ	egwo	'A bank'
	house	money	
	ọfẹ	nmanu	'oily soup'
	soup	oil	

Our assumption is that Òkọ-Òsànyèn still retains the relics of the old patterning in the short and long pronoun qualifiers and the nominal qualifiers.

4. The Sequential Co-occurrence of the Noun Qualifiers in Òkọ-Òsànyèn

The focus of this section is to show the distributional patterning of the different noun qualifiers discussed in (3 – 3.8). Awóbùlúyì (1978):42 has this to say on the sequence of the qualifiers in language:

The order in which qualifiers occur with themselves is partially free and partially fixed.

It is possible in the language to have a cluster of qualifiers in an orderly manner after a noun that will be functioning as the head-word of a phrase. We shall use the table in (21) to explain the sequential co-occurrence of these qualifiers in Òkò-Òsànyèn.

(21)

		Descriptive ¹	Numeral ²	Relative clause ³	Demonstrative ⁴
a	Descriptive ₁	+	+	+	+
b	Numeral ₂	+	-	+	+
c	Relative clauses ₃	-	-	+	+
d	Demonstrative ₄	-	-	+	+

(21a) says that if the descriptive qualifier follows the head-word closely then descriptive, numeral, relative clause and demonstrative qualifiers can co-occur with it as shown in (22).

(22)

a.	úwó	òyànyàn	òfọ	'A tall red dog'
		1	1	
	Dog	red	tall	
b.	úwó	òyànyàn	èta	'Three red dogs'
		1	2	
	Dog	red	three	
c.	úwó	òyànyàn	nẹ(nẹ) Àyọ sù	'A red dog which Àyọ has'
		1	3	
	Dog	red	RELAyọ have	
d.	úwó	òyànyàn	ònẹbẹ	'that red dog'
		1	4	
	Dog	red	that	

e. ígìlà ọ̀lọ̀lọ̀rẹ̀ tẹ́ẹ́rẹ̀ ńfọ̀mbọ̀rẹ̀ 'seven long thin tubers
of yam'

	1	1	2
	yam long	thin	seven

(21b) introduces numeral qualifiers as being the closest to the head-word and requires it to be followed by descriptive, relative clause and demonstrative qualifiers. It cannot be followed by another numeral. The distributional patterns are presented below:

(23)a. ńbọ́ upupiròńẹ̀ Ayọ́ yín 'The fifth house that Ayo bought'

	2	3	
	House fifth	REL Ayọ́	buy

b. ńbọ́ upupirò ọ̀nábẹ̀ "The fifth house"

	2	4
	House fifth	that

(21c) introduces the relative clause qualifier immediately following the head-word and states that it can only be followed by another relative clause and demonstrative qualifiers. The data in (24) buttress this co-occurrence.

(24)a. Adé nẹ̀ fọ́, nẹ̀ tíyẹ̀ egúrú, sá enran

Adé REL tall REL sing song come yesterday

'Ade who is tall, who sang, came yesterday'

b. aláńkẹ̀tá nẹ̀ Olú yín ọ̀ńẹ̀

cassava REL Olu buy this

'This cassava which Olú bought'

(21d) introduces the demonstrative qualifier immediately following the head-word and stipulates that it can only be followed by relative clause and demonstrative qualifiers as shown in (25).

- (25) a. úmú ònábé nẹ tẹ wán 'That goat that we killed'
 Goat that REL we kill
- b. ógbèn ònábé gèdègèdè
 child that exact

The table in (21) does not account for the pronoun and nominal qualifiers because of their own parametric positioning. In addition, we must state categorically that not all demonstrative qualifiers can co-occur. The demonstratives such as **áyẹ**, **òné**, **òbábẹ**, **ẹnábẹ**, **ẹnánẹ** can not function together as shown in

- (26) *úmú ònábé áyẹ
 Goat that the

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have looked at the eight different types of noun qualifiers in Ọkọ-Ọsányèn and also we have been able to discuss the sequential co-occurrence of these qualifiers within the noun phrases in the language.

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