

## Nominal Phrases in Longuda

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### Abstract

This scholarly endeavor delves into a thorough investigation of nominal phrases in Longuda, a minority indigenous Nigerian language belonging to the Adamawa Eastern group of the Niger-Congo language family and spoken by approximately 100,000 individuals in the Guyuk area of Adamawa State, North-East Nigeria. The primary objective of this study is to elucidate the intricate syntactic structure and functions of nominal phrases within the Longuda language. Our findings showcase the multifaceted nature of nominal phrases in Longuda, encompassing diverse constituents ranging from an array of determiners to other subordinate phrases that nominal phrases subcategorize for in their linguistic domain. The determiner category comprises articles, qualifiers, deictics, numerals, and various other elements. Within the syntactic landscape of Longuda, nominal phrases find themselves occupying distinct positions, including subject (S), direct object (DO), and indirect object (IO) positions. Additionally, these phrases accommodate other components such as adjective phrases and prepositional phrases (PP), which augment the richness of the language's expressive capacity. Furthermore, this study sheds light on the pivotal role nominal phrases play in various transformational processes within Longuda, specifically focusing on constructions for emphasis and relativization. By unraveling the syntactic intricacies of nominal phrases in Longuda, this research offers a deeper understanding of the language's structure, making it an invaluable resource for linguists and scholars interested in the intricate nuances of this unique indigenous language.

**Key words:** Nominal, Preposition, Phrase, Word order, Constituents.

### Introduction

This article embarks on a comprehensive examination of Nominal Phrases (NPs) within the linguistic framework of Longuda, an endangered minority indigenous language of Nigeria primarily spoken in the Guyuk Local Government Area of Adamawa State, North-East Nigeria (Mamman, 2002). Longuda is classified under the Adamawa Eastern group of

languages, as outlined by Ruhlen in 1987, and boasts a population of approximately 100,000 speakers, according to estimates derived from the 2006 Nigeria Population Census Figures. The language's written form was introduced by missionaries as a tool for propagating Christianity, yet a complete grammar of Longuda remains notably absent due to the scarcity of research dedicated to this unique linguistic system.

As Radford (1988:65) posits, sentences are not mere assemblages of individual words; rather, they are intricately constructed from a combination of words that fall under distinct parts of speech, often organized into various phrasal categories. In this context, a "phrase" is defined as a fundamental building block of a sentence, comprising grammatical units that convey specific syntactic roles within a given linguistic structure. Phrasal categories encompass an array of phrase types inherent in the diversity of human languages, including nominal, verbal, adjectival, adverbial, and prepositional categories, all of which play a fundamental role in the realm of syntactic analysis. This study, however, places its primary focus on the intricate landscape of nominal phrases.

The term "nominal" serves as an overarching designation encompassing nouns and pronouns, and, as elucidated by Ndimele (1999:117), "Nominal Phrase (NP)" represents one of the fundamental syntactic categories universally present in all languages. NPs are versatile entities, capable of fulfilling a variety of grammatical functions, including serving as subjects, direct objects, indirect objects, or complements of prepositions. Structurally, they constitute the most extensive expansions or maximal projections of nouns, and may consist of a single noun or pronoun accompanied by a range of modifiers.

This study's exclusive emphasis on the nominal phrasal category aligns with Carnie's (2013) assertion that phrases serve as the cornerstone for exploring the grammatical structures of language. The nominal phrase, as an encapsulating term, thus becomes the focal point for our examination, encapsulating the fundamental structures that underpin the study of grammatical composition and organization in languages worldwide.

## **Methodology**

The study employed a data elicitation approach to gather comprehensive insights into Longuda nominal phrases. Information and pertinent materials were meticulously acquired during the research process. Native speakers of Longuda, who served as invaluable informants, played a pivotal role in the data collection. Four informants, comprising two females and two males, with a balanced representation of both older and young adults, were involved in the study. Notably, three of the informants were literate, while one informant was non-literate. These individuals, fluent in the Longuda language, shared their expertise, contributing to the depth of the research. Importantly, two of the informants were proficient in English, facilitating effective communication with the researcher.

Data elicitation was realized through two primary techniques: audio recording and one-on-one interviews. The informants provided valuable insights into how nominal phrases manifest in their native language. During these interactions, a frame technique which involved a structured task that includes sentence completion exercises, grammaticality judgments and translation tasks especially of the type under investigation was adopted. This prompted the informants to elucidate the nature of phrases and their realization in English. Subsequently, the informants meticulously translated these linguistic concepts into their Longuda equivalents, and these exchanges were diligently recorded and transcribed for analysis.

To ensure the accuracy and credibility of the data, four informants were independently engaged, providing a comprehensive validation mechanism. Interactive interview sessions were conducted, meticulously recorded with an audio recorder, and transcribed. These sessions extended across various instances to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the attestation of nominal phrases in Longuda. Additionally, the informants presented sentential examples from their language to illustrate the phenomenon under study.

The investigator personally conducted and supervised all facets of the data gathering process. This hands-on approach facilitated proper follow-up, enhanced the quality of data collection, and upheld the objectivity of the informant respondents.

Data analysis was carried out using the X-Bar theory, a fundamental component of the Generative grammar model of Syntax developed by renowned linguists such as Chomsky (1970), Jackendoff (1977), and further refined by Carnie (2007, 2013). The analysis involved the construction of phrase structure tree diagrams, a well-established tool in linguistic analysis. These diagrams were instrumental in dissecting the constituent nominal and prepositional phrasal categories within Longuda. By visually representing the structural elements, they provided an explicit and diagrammatic understanding of the nature of these phrases in Longuda, drawing upon the X-Bar theory model's phrase structure rule formal notations. This methodological approach allowed for a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of the collected data.

### **The Nominal Phrase (NP) in Longuda**

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973:17) offer a comprehensive definition of Nominal Phrases (NPs), describing them as intricate, potentially indeterminate structures anchored by a noun as the head. NPs often exhibit a labyrinthine composition, commencing with additional elements such as articles, adjectives, or even other nouns, and culminating with a prepositional phrase.

Yusuf (1997:8) underscores the pivotal role of NPs in linguistic structures, emphasizing their capacity to encode the participants involved in the events or states described by verbs. The noun, serving as the NP's linchpin, epitomizes this essential syntactic category. Across the linguistic landscape, NPs emerge as a fundamental and universal

construct, assuming the role of nouns in various syntactic functions. These versatile structures can seamlessly function as subjects, direct objects, indirect objects, or complements of prepositions. Notably, within the syntactic framework, NPs represent the most expansive expansion of a noun's maximal projection, accommodating a single noun or pronoun along with an array of modifiers. These modifiers encompass a diverse array of linguistic elements, including determiners and adjectives. The pivotal element, invariably the head of an NP, remains the noun.

Zwicky (1985:2) encapsulates the essence of the "HEAD" notion, elucidating that within specific syntactic constructs, a single constituent, in some sense, characterizes or exercises dominance over the entire structure. This concept inherently underscores the hierarchical nature and functional significance of the head element within NPs.

### Identifying the Syntactic Position of NPs in Longuda

Basic word order is a universal feature of human language, especially within syntax, governing the arrangement of fundamental sentence structures. In Longuda, nominal phrases (NPs) occupy distinct syntactic positions:

- i. Subject (S)
- ii. Direct object (DO)
- iii. Indirect object (IO)

The subject NP precedes the verb, adhering to the SVO word order. Conversely, the direct object NP follows the verb. For the indirect object, the NP precedes the preposition. The following examples illustrate these NP placements in alignment with the SVO word order characteristic of Longuda grammar.

- (1) i.        Anjili há góríṭí:lé  
              Anjili is bachelor  
              S     V    DO  
              ‘Anjili is a bachelor’
- ii.        Samuel áfúm godzámúwa  
              Samuel cut yam  
              S            V    O  
              ‘Samuel cut the yam’

## Satellites of the Nominal Phrase

Nominal phrase satellites are elements that can co-occur with nouns within an NP. Nouns within an NP exhibit more constituents available for co-occurrence than other major lexical categories. Within the NP, the noun serves as the core around which other elements revolve.

Following Mathews (1997:328), a satellite is defined as an element at the periphery of a phrase or clause, distinct from its nucleus. Per the X-bar rule schema for NP expansion, the head noun is the sole obligatory element, eliminating the need for parenthesis notation to denote optional elements. Satellites that can be present in an NP include:

- i) Determiner phrase (DP)
- ii) Adjective phrase (AdjP)
- iii) Prepositional Phrase (PP)

The x-bar rule schema for the expansion of the NP is given below:

- (2) NP  $\longrightarrow$  (D) N'
- N'  $\longrightarrow$  (AdjP) N'
- N'  $\longrightarrow$  N (PP)

The arrangement of the constituents on the NP depends on the grammar of the language under study.

The NP in Longuda is made up of a head noun, with or without satellites. All the above-mentioned satellites of an NP are found in Longuda.

### **An NP can be made up of a single noun.**

The NP that contains only the noun is usually proper names, which do not take determiners or modifiers. The phrasal rule in (3) below can be used to represent this as exemplified in Longuda.

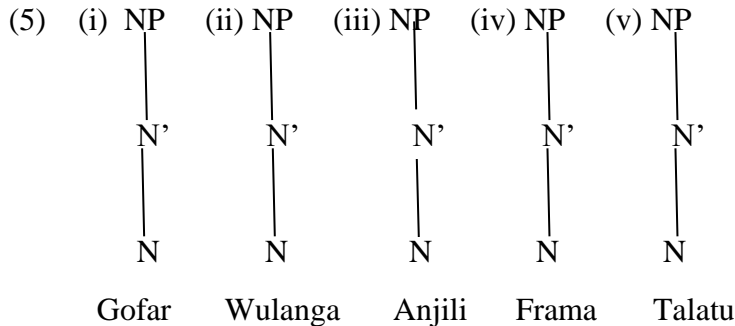
- (3) NP  $\longrightarrow$  N

The NP that contains only the noun is usually applicable to proper names, which do not take determiners or modifiers. Examples of proper nouns in Longuda include:

- (4) i. Gofar 'name of a person'
- ii. Anjili 'name of a person'
- iii. Wulanga 'name of a person'
- iv. Frama 'name of a person'

v. Talatu 'name of a person'

The NPs in this case are non-branching in the tree diagram as exemplified in (5) below:



**An NP can consist of a determiner and a common noun.**

Consider the rule schema given in (6) below:

(6) NP → (D) N

The NP in Longuda sub-categorises for determiners. Matthews (1997:95) defined determiners as ‘any of a class of grammatical units characterized by ones that are seen as limiting the potential referent of an NP’. Determiners are typically used to modify a noun (Radford, 1997: 258).

Determiners serve to stipulate the reference of the noun and are major satellites of the noun nucleus in an NP. These determiners can be articles, quantifiers, deictics, numerals (both ordinal and cardinal), possessives, etc.

**Articles**

Articles are used to show the definiteness or indefiniteness of a noun in an NP. Stockwell (1977) sees the notion ‘definite’ as having to do with a number of possible semantic dimensions. The definite article in Longuda is signified by the word corresponding to ‘the’ in English.

- (7) a. jirù sàkàrájà ‘the hunter’  
       the hunter
- b. jirù ʃíráwá ‘the cat’  
       the cat

## Quantifiers

Stockwell (1977: 58) sees quantifiers as serving the function of providing for the counting events and entities with nouns.

In the words of Mathews (1997: 305) ‘a quantifier is any word or expression which gives a relative or indefinite indication of quantity.

Quantifiers provide the frequency at which an event happens or occurs and their functions with nouns. Examples of quantifiers in English are much, many, some, all, few, little, several, etc. Quantifiers in Longuda are as follow:

- (8)
- |    |       |                |
|----|-------|----------------|
| a. | ábúre | ‘many/several’ |
| b. | kàlà  | ‘some’         |
| c. | jadeí | ‘all’          |

Quantifiers could also be in singular and plural

- |    |          |          |          |           |
|----|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| a. | banawa   | ‘shoe’   | banaha   | ‘shoes’   |
| b. | lòkòrawa | ‘donkey’ | lòkòraha | ‘donkeys’ |

The morphemes *-wa*, *-ha* are bound morphemes that marks singular and plurality.

## Deictics

Deictics, according to Stockwell (1977:57) are ‘pointing words’ like this, that, these, those for definiteness. They are also said to be demonstratives,

- (9)
- |    |            |            |
|----|------------|------------|
| a. | gie beluwe | ‘this cow’ |
|    | this cow   |            |
| b. | ijä belùwε | ‘that cow’ |
|    | that cow   |            |

## Qualifiers

In the sense of Mathews (1997:305), qualifiers are considered as ‘the semantic role characteristic of an element that in syntax stands in a relation of modification’. Qualifiers stand to modify the noun head in an NP.

Qualifiers are found occurring after the head noun in Longuda and they include the following:

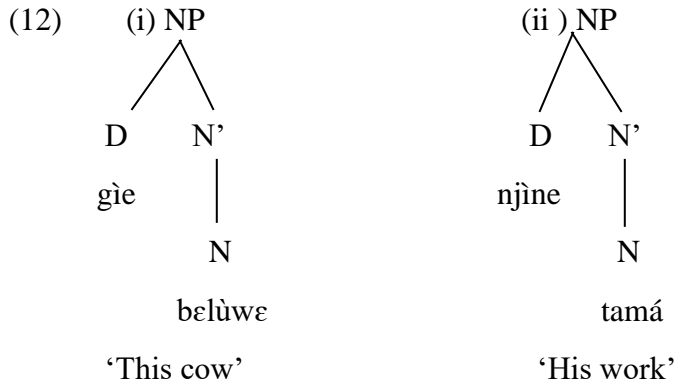
- (10) a. belùwε fàrùwá 'red cow'  
           cow red
- b. tènde nìmàrà 'big house'  
           house big

### Possessives

This is another class of determiners that stipulate the reference of a noun in an NP. It indicates the relationship between someone who possesses something (the possessor) and the thing that is possessed (the possessed) (Mathews, 1997: 288).

- (11) a. zwìn jíé 'my child'  
           Child my
- b. njìne tamá 'his work'  
           his work

Using tree diagrams we can also illustrate some of the above examples in Longuda.



### Numerals

Counting concepts and numeral systems constitute fascinating sociolinguistic phenomena, involving a fundamental human activity that commences in early childhood. Counting employs quantifiers to specify event frequencies.

Mathews (1997:251) defines numerals as expressions conveying precise numbers, or written symbols representing numbers. There exist two numeral types: ordinal (e.g., 'first,'



'second,' 'third') indicating order, and cardinal (e.g., 'one,' 'two,' 'three') answering "how many."

In Longuda, numerals are positioned after head nouns within an NP. For example::

- (13) a.    sɔ:wá            nàkal            ‘a (one) house’  
          house (SG)    one
- b.    sɔ:há            nàser            ‘two houses’  
          house (PL) two
- c.    sɔ:há            kùm             ‘ten houses’  
          house (PL) ten

**Some NPs are made up of a determiner, one or more adjectives and a noun**

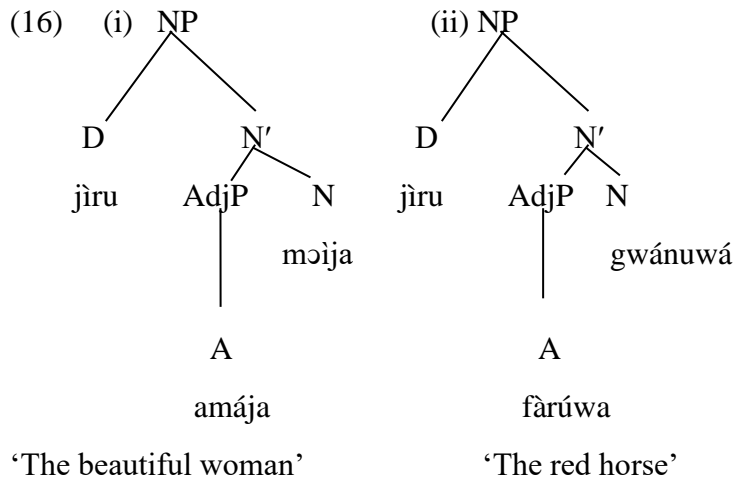
The NP in Longuda also subcategorizes for adjective phrase in the grammar of the language. We can capture the rule schema thus:

- (14) NP ◀ (D) (AdjP) N’

Examples are as follows:

- (15) a.    jìru amajá    mɔija            ‘the beautiful woman’  
          the beautiful female
- b.    jìru faruwa gwánuwá    ‘the red horse’  
          ‘ the red        horse

The tree diagrams below further illustrate this phenomenon



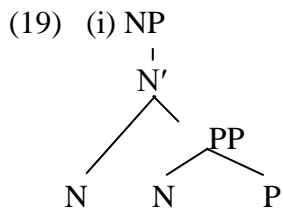
**An NP can consist of a noun followed by prepositional phrase.**

The rule schema is given thus:

(17) NP ▼ N (PP)

The prepositional phrase is another element which can occur within the NP in Longuda as in the following examples:

- (18) a. dúdʒɔ:wá mɔ:tɔ: - milè                      ‘The dog is beside the car’  
           dog        motor (car) beside
- b. ʃírawá atél suràl - rà                      ‘the cat is upon the chair’  
           cat        wood seat on



dúdʒɔ:wá mɔ:tɔ: milè

The dog is beside the car’

## Functions of a Nominal Phrase

NPs perform three basic functions in a sentence. These functions correspond to the syntactic positions they occupy in the sentence. The basic word order of SVO in which the NP occupies the subject and the object positions equates to their functions. These functions are as follows:

- i) Subject of the verb
- ii) Object of the verb (direct object)
- iii) Object of the preposition.

The NP occurring at the subject of the verb functions, as the subject of the verb of the verb. For the NPs functioning as the object of the verb and object of preposition, the NPs are attached to the verbs and prepositions as complements to form verb phrase and prepositional phrase respectively.

The NP in Longuda performs the above highlighted functions. The following sentences show the functions of NPs in various positions in the syntactic structure of the grammar of Longuda.

- (20) a.    njìné           hábúwá           gujé  
          I               catch           thief  
          Subj. NP                           D. Obj. NP  
          ‘I caught the thief’
- b.    Jurema       ajùã       na    jùá    tákàdàhá  
          Jurema       buying   will   buy   book(PL)  
          Subj. NP   D. Obj. NP  
          ‘Jurema will be buying books’

## Syntactic Processes Involving NPs

This section delves into syntactic processes involving NPs, such as focus construction, relativization, nominalization, question formation, and reflexivization.

Transformations, described by Bussmann (1996: 490) as formal operations mediating between deep and surface sentence structures, play a pivotal role. Carnie (2007: 272) defines

transformations as rules altering X-bar generated structures within specific constraints. The D-structure, according to Carnie, represents the initial derivation untouched by transformations, while the S-structure is the output of transformations, representing the final sentence.

Movement, identified by Cook (1996: 153) as the primary transformational component, involves shifting an element from its original position (in situ) as per phrase structure rules to adjoin it to another category.

This section will particularly emphasize focus construction, nominalization, and relativization transformations involving NPs, presented through illustrative tree diagrams of phrase markers.

### **Focus Construction in Longuda NPs**

Focus marking is recognized as a universal linguistic transformation, highlighting the communicative prominence of specific sentence constituents. Stockwell (1977:157) defines focus marking as a method for introducing special markings in the surface structure of a focused element. It doesn't alter the message's substance but instead codes the elements to convey importance or novelty.

Yusuf (1998: 81) describes focus as a mechanism to emphasize an NP in a sentence by positioning it at the sentence's outset. Longuda employs overt focus marking, yielding focus sentences derived from basic ones. These constructions include an overt focus marker 'jina' as exemplified below:

Basic construction

- (21) a. Gofar ajùán banàhá  
Gofar buy shoes  
'Gofar bought a pair of shoes'

Arguably all the constituents of a sentence can be focused. In this work, we shall examine the ones involving NPs

### **Subject NP focus**

Focusing on the subject of the sentence

- b.     jìna Gofar ajùán banàháu  
          Foc Gofar buy shoes  
          ‘It is Gofar that bought the pairs of shoes’

### **Object NP focus**

Focusing on the object of the sentence

- (22) c.     jìna banàháu Gofar ajùán bùwa  
          Foc shoes   Gofar bought them  
          ‘It is shoes that Gofar bought’

### **Indirect object NP focus**

We can also have indirect object focus

- (23) a.     Jacob ajùán òkà nìga Wùlángà (unmarked sentence)  
          Jacob buy cloth give Wùlángà  
          ‘Jacob bought cloth for Wùlángà’

The indirect object ‘Wùlángà’ can be focused.

- (24) jìna Wùlángà Jacob ajùán òkà  
          Foc Wùlángà Jacob buy cloth  
          ‘It is Wùlángà that Jacob bought cloth for’

### **Possessor NP focus**

- (25) jìna John ná dùnà òkà  
          Foc John I see cloth  
          ‘It’s John that I see his cloth’

### Possessed NP focus

- (26) jìna òika Anjìlì ná dùná  
Foc cloth Anjili I saw  
'It's Anjili's cloth that I saw'

In Longuda, focus is conveyed through the explicit focus marker "jìna," typically positioned before the emphasized element. This marker also functions as a movement-trigger, relocating the focalized constituent to the sentence's beginning. When the speaker desires to highlight the subject NP, the focus marker 'jìna' is used, moving the subject NP to the sentence's initial position. The same mechanism applies to Object NP when it's focalized; the focus marker positions it at the sentence's outset. The indirect object NP, possessed NP, and Possessor NP can all undergo focalization, with the focus marker shifting them from their in situ positions to the sentence's starting point.

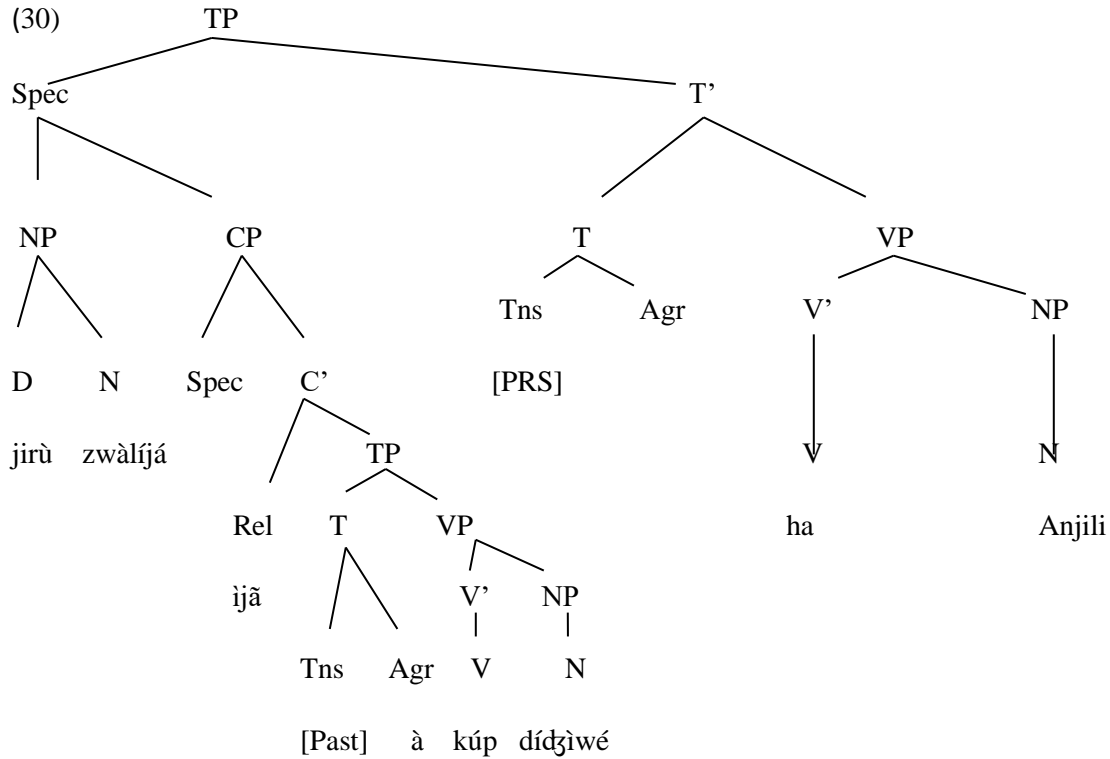
### Relativization in Longuda NPs

Relativization, as defined by Bussmann (1996: 404), is a subordinate clause that depends on a noun or pronoun. It is introduced by a relative pronoun or relative adverb and can refer to various elements, excluding the predicate. Stockwell (1977: 59) describes a relative clause as a sentence embedded in S-structure, serving as a modifier of an NP, with the embedded sentence featuring a WH-pronominal replacement for the D-structure NP, which is, to some extent, identical to the head NP. Relativization is employed by languages to clarify noun references that determiners cannot resolve. In the formation of relative clauses, a clause embedded within another is the constituent clause, while the one containing it is the matrix clause. Longuda introduces relative clauses using the overt marker 'in.'

- (29) a. Mr. Garuba ìn há principal há zà:wɔ  
Mr. Garuba who is principal is come  
'Mr Garuba who is the principal is coming'
- b. Wùlángá ìn ábùl tákádàwá há jǎ  
Wùlángá who write book is here  
'Wùlángá who wrote the book is here'
- c. jirù zwàlìjǎ ìjǎ àkúp dídzìwé há Anjili  
The male (adult) that slaughter goat is Anjili

‘The man that slaughtered the goat is Anjili’

These can be further exemplified with tree diagrams in (30) below:



‘The man that slaughtered the goat is Anjili’

### Discussion

This study, while not exhaustive, delves into significant aspects of sentence grammar within the context of the Longuda language. The primary findings include:

Firstly, Longuda employs an SVO (subject-verb-object) word order in its basic sentence structure, which aligns with the linguistic concept of basic word order found in many languages and represents a linguistic universal. This fundamental word order in Longuda is relatively fixed.

Secondly, nominal phrases are prevalent in Longuda clause structures, with various constituents and syntactic positions. These constituents range from diverse determiners to other subcategorized phrases within the nominal phrase. The analysis encompasses articles, qualifiers, deictics, numerals, and more. Syntactic positions of nominal phrases in Longuda encompass subjects (S), direct objects (DO), and indirect objects (IO), along with the inclusion of adjective and prepositional phrases.

Furthermore, this study unveils that syntactic processes involving nominal phrases, such as focus construction (enabling the focus of Subject NP, Object NP, Indirect Object NP, Possessor NP, and Possessed NP) and relativization (the introduction of embedded clauses into NPs), are active processes in Longuda.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research strives to provide a structural explanation for nominal phrase constructions in the Longuda language. It offers valuable insights into a universal grammatical phenomenon by examining its manifestation in a lesser-studied Nigerian language. Beyond linguistic inquiry, the implications of this study extend to various stakeholders, including the Longuda community and beyond:

**Promoting Literacy:** This research can support literacy efforts within the Longuda community, aiding individuals of all ages in understanding their language's structure and written form. It serves as a foundation for creating literacy materials and teaching Longuda in schools.

**Facilitating Communication:** The study can benefit news broadcasters, translators, and communicators who need to convey information in Longuda. It can enhance the translation of news for radio, television, newspapers, and news bulletins, enabling more effective communication within the Longuda community.

**Agricultural and Health Workers:** Agricultural extension workers and health professionals operating in rural areas among the Longuda population can benefit from this study as it aids in improving communication and understanding.

**Resource for Development:** This work can serve as a foundation for developing instructional materials, dictionaries, and reference guides for Longuda. It can contribute to the preservation and revitalization of this endangered language, guarding it against decline and possible extinction.

In essence, this study adds to the written records of the Longuda language, providing a linguistic description of nominal phrases that can contribute to the safeguarding and development of this language and, by extension, many other minority languages facing similar challenges in the world today.



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