

Chapter 4 Function and features of the NP and NP head

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the Bisu noun phrase (NP) as a unit within a phrase or clause. Section 4.2 discusses the functions of the NP. Section 4.3 discusses the words which can function as NP heads. Section 4.4 discusses atypical NP types, specifically pronouns and phrases that lack an explicit head noun. Section 4.5 discusses conjoined NPs. The internal structure of the NP will be discussed in Chapter five.

4.2 Functions

The Bisu NP may serve one of three functions within a particular clause. First, a NP may function as a subject or object in a clause. Second, a NP may function as the object of a postposition in a postposition phrase. Third, a NP may function as a predicate in an intransitive clause.

4.2.1 Clausal subject or object

Bisu has three basic clause types categorized by the number of subjects and objects that occur with the predicate.

4.2.1.1 Intransitive clauses

Intransitive clauses have one NP functioning as the subject, and no object(s). In Example 46), the NP *a hu* “grandfather” is the subject of the predicate *duing* “sit.”

Example 46) P7,8.032

<i>a hu</i>	<i>tang i</i>	<i>hta</i>	<i>veu</i>	<i>duing</i>	<i>chi</i>
grandfather	chair	on/above	at	sit	PRT

FT: Grandfather sits on a chair

In Example 47), the NP *ya ke mu ui* “group of children” is the subject of the predicate *uin hku* “(all?) laugh.”

Example 47) P4.010

ya ke mu ui uin hku chi
 child group 3+ laugh all? PRT
 FT: the group of children (all?) laugh

In Example 48), the NP *cha la mang* “tiger” is the subject of the predicate *huin lae* “ran away.”

Example 48) E&T.055a

cha la mang huin lae
 tiger 1spec run go(up,N)
 FT: the tiger ran away

4.2.1.2 Transitive clauses

In transitive clauses both a subject and an object occur with the predicate. In Example 49), the NP *ya ke hka hpa ya htui mang* “one boy” functions as the subject, while the NP *hka lao nae tuing chawn angpaw* “white shirt and trousers” functions as the object of the predicate *ka tum* “wear.”

Example 49) P7,8.022

ya ke hka hpa ya htui mang hka lao nae tuing chawn angpaw ka tum lae chi
 child male one 1spec shirt and trousers
 white wear PRT PRT
 FT: one boy is wearing a white shirt and trousers

In some transitive clauses the subject NP may be omitted. In Example 50), the subject NP *ga* “1S” is omitted.

Example 50) SAL.003

a -myang ui na na veu shuiy laeng ae ngae
 cow 3+ OBJ field at take tie.in.a.field go(down,S) PRT
 FT: [I] took the cows down to a field to tie [them] [in a grazing area]

4.2.1.3 Ditransitive clauses

In ditransitive clauses, three NPs may occur with the predicate: a subject, a primary object, and a secondary object. In Example 51), *angya mang* “the child (lit. offspring)” functions as the subject, *ang-bong mang na* “the father” functions as the primary object, and *veya* “flower” functions as the secondary object of the predicate *pi* “give.”

Example 51) GN1:45

Angya mang ang-bong mang na vey a pi nga e
child 1spec father 1spec OBJ flower give PRT
FT: the child gives the father a flower

Both the subject and the secondary object may be omitted in ditransitive clauses. In Example 52), the subject is omitted, and from context is “the boy walking the bicycle,” the primary object is *ya ke hka hpa ya hka lao si-fa' mang na* “blue-shirted boy,” and the secondary object is omitted, and may be inferred from context to be “guavas.” It may be that the primary object can also be omitted in appropriate contexts, but there are no examples of this in the data collected for this thesis.

Example 52) PS.114

ya -ke hka -hpa -ya hka lao si-fa' mang na pi chi
child male shirt colour.light.blue 1spec OBJ give PRT
FT: [the boy walking the bicycle] gives the light blue-shirted boy [guavas]

4.2.2 Object of a postposition

In Example 53), the NP *kawngkhong' angtaen tui* “cleared yard-area” functions as the object of the postposition *veu* “at.”

Example 53) P7,8.003

Amui' a hu' nae ya ke angmu ui kawng hkong' angtaen tui'
Now grandfather and child group 3+ yard-area cleared

veu baw hku chi
at play all? PRT

FT: Now grandfather and the group of children are (all?) playing in the clearing

4.2.2.1 Postposition functions

Postposition phrases typically function as adjuncts in clauses. Occasionally a postposition phrase may function as a subject or a predicate.

Adjuncts

In most clauses where they occur, postposition phrases provide (non-essential) information about the location of a subject, object or activity. As with many other languages, these phrases can occur in more than one position within the clause. In Example 54), the postposition phrase occurs clause-initial.

Example 54) P7,8.051

Vaeya ka htang kawng htang veu ya ke hka baya 2 hku
flower pot beside at child female 2 CLF:person

ka pawng htolasap taeng yao ci baw chi
can telephone make then speak play PRT

FT: beside the flower pot, 2 girls are making and then play-talking with can-telephones

In Example 55), the postposition phrase occurs just after the subject *a hu'* "grandfather."

Example 55) P7,8.032

a hu' tang i hta veu duing chi
grandfather chair on/above at sit PRT

FT: grandfather is sitting on a chair

In Example 56), the postposition phrase occurs between the subject *yang* “3S” and the object *hkanum* “candy.”

Example 56) P7,8.044

Yang la pu la ma veu hkanum' htam lae chi
 3S hand right at candy hold PRT PRT
 FT: He is holding candy in his right hand

Subject or predicate

In some clauses temporal or locational information is essential (rather than peripheral). In such cases the postposition phrase may function as the subject in an equational clause or as part of the predicate. In Example 57) *van htit veu* “(At) Sunday” is the subject of the nominal predicate *wan mae* “Mother’s Day” in the equational clause “Sunday [is] Mother’s Day.”

Example 57) L1:49

Van htit veu wan mae
 Sunday at Day Mother
 FT: Sunday [is] Mother’s Day

In Example 58), the location *to awk' veu* “under the table” is an essential specifier of the verb *ca* “exists, is.”

Example 58) P7,8.035

to awk' veu hkui htui to ca ngae
 table under/below at dog one clf: "legged" things exist PRT
 FT: There is a dog under the table -or- a dog is under the table

4.2.3 Nominal predicate

NPs may function as predicates to form intransitive clauses. In the following example, the possessive NP *Pattanan ang-bong* “Pattanan’s father” is the clausal predicate.

Example 59) Mar.13 data

yawhka ma' Pattanan ang-bong
headman FOC Pattanan's father
FT: the headman [is] Pattanan's father

4.3 Heads

The head of a NP may take one of three forms. First, a noun head may be a simple noun (see section 4.3.1). Second, a noun head may be a nominalization (see section 4.3.2). Finally, a noun head may be a compound noun (see section 4.3.3). As noted in section 3.5, pronouns do not function as noun heads but rather as NPs.

4.3.1 Simple nouns

Simple nouns, both common nouns and proper names, may function as heads of NPs. In the following example, the common noun *yaba* “elephant” is the head of the subject NP in the quote margin. The common noun *cha la* “tiger” is the head of the object NP within the quoted speech.

Example 60) ET.006

yaba mang ci ye cha la mang na
elephant lspec speak QUOT tiger lspec object

chae ca nae
bite eat PRT

FT: the elephant said, “[I will] devour the tiger”

In Example 61, the proper name *Somchai* is the subject of the clause *Somchai ya ke nae ha* “Somchai was a child.” This clause is the object of the time adverb *meu* “when” and together they form a temporal adverbial phrase.

Example 61) PRS.001

Somchai ya ke nae ha meu a myang paw' ngae
Somchai child is do when cow tend PRT
FT: When Somchai was a child, he tended cows

In Example 62), the common noun *kat* “market” is the head of the NP which functions as the object of the postposition *veu* “at.”

Example 62) P7,8.027

Kat veu hkanum' nae ca keung angbya kawng ngaē
 market at candy and food a lot sell PRT
 FT: lots of candy and food are for sale at the market

4.3.2 Nominalizations

Classifiers and verbs may be nominalized and function as NP heads. Sometimes words are nominalized by adding the prefix *-ang*. Examples follow.

4.3.2.1 Classifiers nominalized by *ang-*

Some classifiers can be nominalized by *ang*. In Example 63), *to* is the classifier for bodies. In Example 64), *ang-* is prefixed to form the noun *ang-to* ‘body,’ which functions as the noun head in each of two juxtaposed clauses.

Example 63) E&T.083

Mi nuing Cha la to 5 sha pi lang
 today tiger clf: "legged" things 5 find give ***
a la
 correct Q

FT: Today [you will] bring 5 tigers, right?

Example 64) E&T.062

Ang-to ba hui ang-to ang-i' nya
 body not big body little only

FT: Not a big one, only a little one (LitT: [its] body [is] not big, [its] body [is] only little)

4.3.2.2 Verbs nominalized by *ang-*

Ang- may also nominalize verbs, as shown in the following examples. First, in Example 65), the unmodified verb *ka tum* “wear” functions as a predicate. Then, in

Example 66) *ka tum* “wear” is nominalized with the addition of *ang-* and becomes the object noun *ang-ka tum* “clothes.”

Example 65) P7,8.022

htui mang ma' hka lao nae tuing'chawng' angpawŋ
 one 1spec FOC shirt and trousers white

ka tum lae chi
 wear PRT PRT

FT: ONE is wearing a white shirt and trousers

Example 66) P7,8.011b

ang-ka tum ba tum lae
 clothes NEG wear(shirt) PRT

FT: [he is] not wearing clothes

4.3.2.3 Other constructions that function as subject

In Example 67), the verb phrase *ce ka* “argue together” functions as the clausal subject. Its role is indicated by the subject marker *yang*. A full analysis of *yang* may be found in section 5.6.1.

Example 67) E&T.008

Ce ka yang laeng meu yet ma lang-ka
 argue each other SUBJ go (up, N) time.when 3D tell each other

chi
 PRT

FT: when the arguing had continued [for a while], they told each other...

A postposition phrase may function as the subject of an equational clause. In Example 68), *wan hti 19 veu* “(at) the 19th (day)” is the subject of the nominal predicate *ga wan guit* “my birthday.”

Example 68) L1:49

wan hti 19 veu ga wan guit
 CLF:day ORD at 1POS birthday

FT: The 19th (day) is my birthday

4.3.3 Compound nouns

Within the NP, head nouns may be both preceded and followed by modifying nouns and NPs. Formal criteria are needed to distinguish compound nouns (what Dryer (2007:175) calls “lexical compounds”) from simple sequences of nouns. One indicator is that the original meanings of the individual constituents are often lost in a compound. Another indicator is whether another item may be inserted between the constituents of a possible compound. If the constituents are inseparable, then they are likely a compound.

4.3.3.1 Compounds and meaning loss

One possible compound is *yum chang*. The constituent *yum* means “house.” The constituent *chang* means “friend(s)” or “person(s).” Together they mean “family.” In the compound the constituent *yum* “house” loses its meaning, since no physical building need be involved when using the term “family.”

4.3.3.2 Compounds and insertion

When a NP includes a head plus a deictic expression (DE) and classifier (CLF), HEAD + DE + CLF is the typical word order for these NP constituents. Example 69) illustrates this typical word order: the deictic expression *hae* “that” occurs between the head noun *yum* “house” and the classifier *lang* “building.”

Example 69) Mar.10 data

Yum hae lang yawhka heu
House that CLF:building headman owns
FT: the headman owns that house

However, atypical examples of HEAD + CLF + DE word order also occur. In Example 70) and Example 71), each taken from a different retelling of the same story, the *kaw* “rice” classifiers *tsuing* “stalk” and *pang* “stalk” precede the deictic expression *haeng* “those.” One possible explanation for this unusual word order is that *kaw-tsuing* and *kaw-pang* are compound words (as they are glossed here).

Example 70) PRS.004

Yao kaw-tsuing haeng' tawn pi pi taeng mi baw, ngae
then rice.stalk those cut whistle make blow play PRT
FT: then [we] cut those rice stalks to make whistles to blow

Example 71) SRS.004

Nae kaw-pang haeng' tawn yao pi-pi taeng mi baw, ngae
and rice.stalk those cut then whistle make blow play PRT
FT: and [we] cut those rice stalks, then made whistles to blow

In contrast, an unambiguous example of *tsuing* “stalk, trunk” functioning as a classifier follows in Example 72):

Example 72) PS.002

Ba-koe-tsuing htui tsuing ca ngae
guava tree one CLF:stalk,trunk exist PRT
FT: there is a guava tree

On the basis of these examples of meaning loss and of atypical word order that implies inseparability, I conclude that some noun sequences in Bisu are compounds.

4.4 Atypical NPs

In some clauses, NP roles may be filled by words or phrases which are not prototypical NPs. One previously mentioned example is pronouns, which “look like” words but function as NPs. Another example is phrases which lack a head noun.

4.4.1 Pronouns

Several types of pronouns may function as NPs: personal, deictic, interrogative and indefinite. Possessive pronouns may not. In the following example, both the subject *ga* “1S” and the object *nang* “2S” are personal pronouns. They refer anaphorically to the tiger (subject) and the elephant (object).

Example 73) E&T.019

ni kam ga nang na ga chae ca lang pe
this time 1S 2S OBJ able bite eat PRT insist
FT: "Now I can devour you."

In Example 74), the deictic pronoun *ning* “this” functions anaphorically as the object (the antecedent, discussed in the conversation previously, is a particular food dish at a meal).

Example 74) Mar.14 data

Ning ga taeng bu ae
This 1S make EMPH PRT
FT: I made this myself

In Example 75), the deictic pronoun *nu* “here” functions as the object of the postposition *veu* “at.” The referent is a pair of houses in a picture that the speaker is pointing to.

Example 75) GN1:5

nu veu yum 2 lang ca nga
here at house 2 CLF:building exist PRT
FT: There are 2 houses here

In Example 76), the interrogative pronoun *baceu* “what” functions as the object of the clause.

Example 76) L1:5

baceu ca ae
what eat PRT
FT: what did [you] eat?

In Example 77), the indefinite pronoun *asang* “whoever” functions as the subject of a clause.

Example 77) E&T.010

Asang ang-seng buing meu anyam anyik ui
Whoever makes noise animal cry time when noisy bugs 3+

kyap yao hae mang ga ca ngae
quiet then that 1spec able eat PRT

FT: Whoever, when he roars, silences the noisy forest bugs, (then) that one can eat [the other].

4.4.2 Phrases which lack a head noun

Typically the NPs that function as subjects or objects have explicit head nouns. However, occasionally a phrase which lacks a head noun will function in these roles. These phrases typically consist of a deictic expression plus either a classifier or a number marker.

4.4.2.1 Deictic expression plus classifier

Sometimes a phrase consisting of a deictic expression and a classifier will function as a subject or object. In the following example, the phrase *ni mae* “this thing” or “it” functions as the subject. The previous three clauses introduce and describe “it,” a rabbit.

Example 78) E&T.063

ni mae ci ngae
this thing speak PRT

FT: It spoke

In the following example, *hae mae* “that thing” or “it” functions as an object. It refers to a question asked in the preceding clause *cha la veu baceu na huin ngae* “Tiger, why are you running?”

Example 79) E&T.059

hae mae kya meu yang huin yang sao chi
that thing hear time when 3S run 3S rest PRT

FT: when [he] heard it [i.e. the question], he stopped running and rested

In The Elephant, tiger, rabbit and monkey story, the elephant and the tiger each say to the other “I am going to devour you.” In Example 80), *ni mae* “this thing” or “it” refers to these competing intentions.

Example 80) E&T.009

ni mae yao gai' la hti hkaeng lang-ka ca
 this thing then 1D power compete each other ***

FT: [If] it [is like this; i.e. I'm going to eat you or you're going to eat me], then you and I [must] test our strength against each other

4.4.2.2 Deictic expression plus number marker

Occasionally a phrase consisting of a deictic expression and the singular marker *mang* will function as a subject or object. This is fairly rare; in the data collected for this thesis there is only one instance of a DE + NUM phrase substituting for a NP. In this example, the phrase *hae mang* “that one” functions as the subject of the main clause. It refers to the “someone” mentioned in the previous subordinate clause, which the context specifies as two competing animals, a tiger and an elephant.

Example 81) E&T.010

Asang ang-seng buing meu anyam anyik ui
 Whoever makes noise animal cry time when noisy bugs 3+

kyap yao hae mang ga ca ngae
 quiet then that 1spec able eat PRT

FT: Whoever, when he roars, silences the noisy forest bugs, (then) that one can eat [the other].

4.5 Conjoined NPs

NPs may consist of two or more constituent NPs that are linked by a coordinating conjunction. In Example 82), two NPs *cha la htui to* “one tiger” and *yaba htui to* “one elephant” are conjoined by *nae* “and” to form a larger NP which functions as the subject.

Example 82) E&T.003

Cha la htui to nae Yaba htui
tiger one CLF:"legged"things and elephant one

to ca ngae
CLF:"legged"things exist PRT
FT: there was a tiger and an elephant

Modifying phrases may also be coordinated. In the following example, two classifier phrases *kaen hti 1* "first CLF:container" and *kaen hti 2* "second CLF:container" are conjoined by *nae* "and" to form a complex modification of the head noun *salawng* "basket."

Example 83) PS.030

salawng kaen hti 1 nae kaen hti 2 mang yet
basket CLF:container ORD and CLF:container ORD dual

kawng ba-koe kan pluing chi
*** guava add, put in full PRT
FT: The first and second baskets are full of guavas

4.6 Summary

This chapter has introduced the Bisu NP by explaining its functions and the contexts in which it occurs, explaining the range of constructions that may function as NP heads, and describing the constructions that may function as NP substitutes. This chapter has also shown how NPs may be coordinated. Having presented this "top-down" introduction to the NP in Chapter four, the constituents and internal structure of the NP are the subjects of Chapter five.