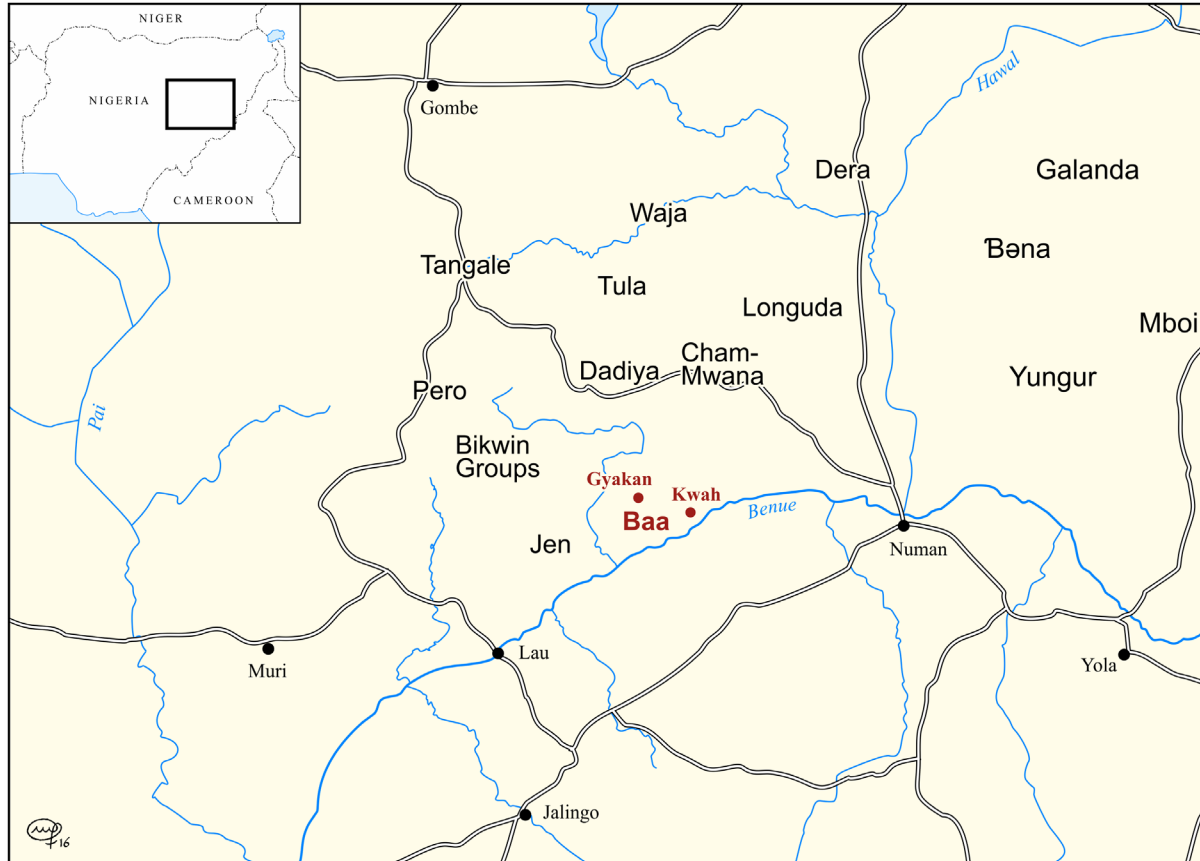


The noun phrase in Baa

0. Pre-amble



- The Baa **heartland** is in Adamawa State, in Lamurde Local Government, on the Northern (right) bank of the Benue river. Most of the speakers live in a triangle-shaped area between the Benue to the southeast, one of its smaller tributaries to the west, and hills/mountains to the north and northeast. The Baa are farmers, fishers, and hunters.
- Kwah, the old **name** of Baa, refers to one of the main villages where Baa is spoken. The speakers call their language Baa and they're happy to represent it that way to the international community. We also want to avoid confusion with the Kwa language group, which Baa is not a member of. So, that's why we call it Baa here.
- Based on **speaker estimates**, a missionary report in Ethnologue, and demographic changes in Nigeria since those were recorded, we estimate that there are currently between 5,000 and 16,000 Baa community members, with not all community members speaking the language. Maybe it's reasonable to say that there are between 3,000 and 10,000 Baa speakers.

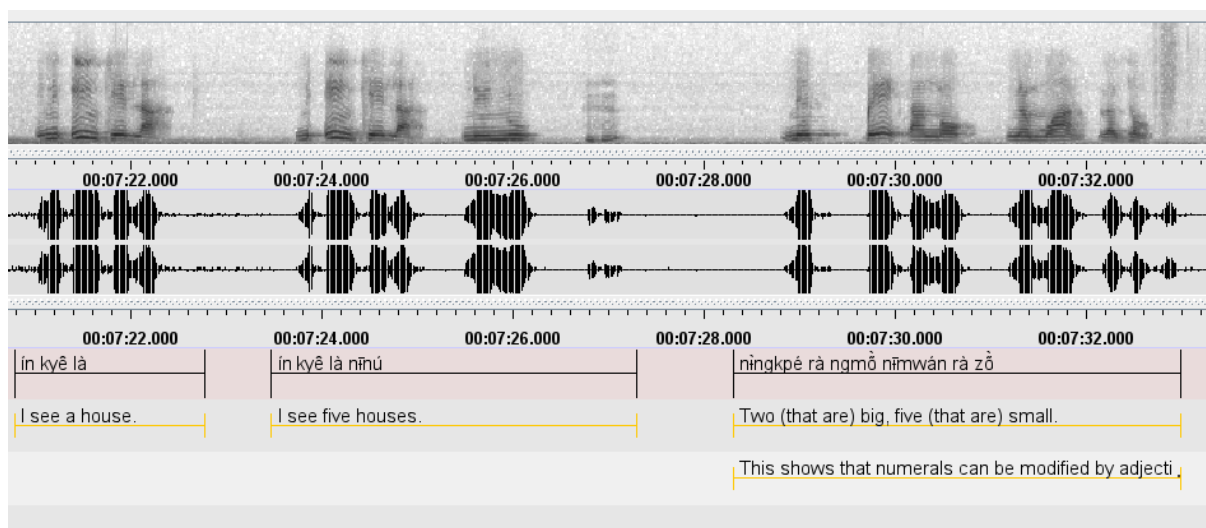
- Baa speakers **interact** with major language groups like Hausa, Dza, and Mumuye (past multilingualism) and with smaller neighboring groups. For example, there is interaction between Baa and Isam through burial ceremonies and trade, and also reported religious interaction: Baa is used as a spiritual language in Isam ceremonies and Baa gods play a role in Isam traditional religion, and vice versa. Some versions of oral history reportedly claim common ancestry.
- **Classification:** traditionally, since Greenberg 1963, Baa is classified as an outlier of Adamawa. But that's in need of revision or corroboration: it may for instance be closer to Benue-Congo or it may be a separate branch of Niger-Congo. Most recent classifications still follow the old statements. We didn't make any attempt to contribute to the classification for this talk.
- Relevant features of the language
 - Three **tones**: H, M, L; **not much interaction between tones**, and tones are **not that complex from a nominal morphology perspective**.
 - **Not much morphology**. No extensive gender system.
 - Modifiers always follow the noun.
 - Pre-nominal plural marker. Which is an interesting variable in the area.
 - There is no need to posit dependency reversal.
 - Baa has STAMP morphs.
- This is a part of **research is in progress**, the description of Baa.
 - It is a long term project and progress is relatively slow because nobody can currently dedicate a full- or half-time job to it.
 - This presentation intends to rework and release some data and research that has remained under-developed until now, while also giving an impetus to further research on Baa.

[Project a QR code to the handout]

1. Introduction

- In this talk, I will give an overview of noun phrase morphosyntax in Baa.
- Previous work done on Baa is mostly **language documentation**: in 2017, Mirjam and her consultants collected 17.5 hours of spontaneous Baa data, so there is a lot of natural data available.

- However, trying to sketch the structure of the noun phrase was very challenging with spontaneous data.
 - We could not control the data, it's very difficult to actually get answers to specific research questions, and it's easy to get side-tracked by many issues that have to remain unsolved.
 - Specific to the noun phrase: it's close to impossible to get the kind of data you need to investigate e.g. nominal modification, or the topics that one is most likely to write about in a grammar sketch.
- Example of this: the initial description of the noun phrase, which *did* try to base itself on spontaneous data, got stuck at possessive phrases and compounds, which are the most common types of 'complex' noun phrases you'll find in a text.
- Solution: elicitation
 - Remote work with Elisha Yunana
 - WhatsApp elicitation – Mirjam, through WhatsApp, relatively slow.
 - WhatsApp elicitation – Jakob, through the phone, recorded.



2. Definitions

- Baa nouns can encode an argument – a subject, an object, or a copula subject or complement – in a verbal and non-verbal phrase, without needing additional morphosyntactic modification
- This neatly distinguishes the noun category from verbs and roots that express properties (the classical 'adjectives'), which are verbs in Baa.

- (1) **kpá-nát** tyé rí kán **Àkíshén** **krà**
old.person-woman FOC FUT show **Akishen** **road**
 ‘The old woman will show Akishen the road.’

- (2) kyè **ténggì**
 COP **elephant**
 ‘It is an elephant.’

- (3) íyè kyè **ákánnì**
 3SG COP **teacher**
 ‘He is a teacher.’

- Such property concepts function as verbs in predicative functions, and need to be embedded in a noun phrase (e.g. through nominalization) when they express arguments. Just like verbs

- (4) gbán yè **shwèl**
 hole 3SG.IPFV **deep**
 ‘The hole is deep.’

- (5) íyè bá vî **nìng-kán-nì**
 3pl come **place** **NMLZ-teach-thing**
 ‘He comes from teaching.’

- (6) **nìng-kán-nì** yè hàn
NMLZ-teach-thing 3SG.IPFV good
 ‘Teaching is good.’

- (7) ín yèkyê rà **ngmò**
 1SG like ATTR **big**
 ‘I like the big one.’ (when offered the choice between two things of different sizes)

3. Number

There’s an optional prenominal plural marker *rí*. Apart from marking plurality, it also derives mass nouns from other nouns as ‘mass associated with X’, and is present in lexicalized instances of these, which synchronically count as pluralia tantum.

- (8) **Plural:** *nǎ* ‘mother’ → *rí nǎ* ‘mothers’ *gbán* ‘hole’ → *rí gbán* ‘holes’; *kpèt* ‘in-law of a man’ → *rí-kpèt* ‘in-laws of a man’; *kyū* ‘cobra, sp.’ → *rí kyū* ‘cobras, sp.’.
Derived mass nouns: *ntávì* ‘bee’ → *rí ntávì* ‘honey’; *yīn* ‘ground’ → *rí yīn* ‘dirt’
Pluralia tantum: *ríhũ* ‘soup’; *rínkwíl* ‘sand’; *rímát* ‘wax’

- With proper names, the plural does not take on an associative function, but just means ‘multiple people with the same name.’

(9)	<i>rí</i>	<i>Sáfiyà</i>	<i>mǎ́</i>	<i>Júméy</i>
	PL	Safiya	COM	Jumai
	‘(the) Safiyas and Jumai’			

- Minimal comparative notes (very speculative)
 - *rí* can be used by itself meaning ‘multiple ones’ and in that sense may be interpreted as a ‘plural word’.
 - *rV* plural marker in some Mbumic languages (*rā* in Mundang after the noun phrase [Elders 2000], Yendang + plural index *rí* (?) in Nyong [Zhel'tov 2020: 134]), possibly suggesting a shared nominal or pronominal origin. All of these follow their host, however. Which suggest that if they're related, at the very least they had different grammaticalization paths.

Suppletive plurals for the usual suspects (note: v-z alternation): *nàà* ‘person’ → *nyàà* ‘people’ (tone?); *mvàl* ‘man’ → *nzàà* ‘men’; *váá* ‘child’ → *záá* ‘children’; *nát* ‘woman’ → *nyá* ‘women’

A special instance of number marking: agentive nominalizers, *rā-* SG vs. *nyā-* PL, which is a transparently grammaticalized form of *nyàà* ‘people’. Note: possibly, *ā-* is the nominalizer, *r-* is the singular marker, and *ny-* is the pluralizer here. Note also the (possible) tone change in *nì* ‘thing’. This construction can be analyzed as having characteristics of a compound, derivation, and a verbal clause at the same time.

(10)	<i>rā-gbál-nī</i>	[A.NMLZ.SG-rear-thing]	‘herdsman’
	<i>nyā-gbál-nī</i>	[A.NMLZ.PL-rear-thing]	‘herdsmen’
	<i>rā-kwén-fō</i>	[A.NMLZ.SG-steal-thing]	‘thief’
	<i>nyā-kwén-fō</i>	[A.NMLZ.PL-steal-thing]	‘thieves’

4. Possession

There's a lexically determined distinction between alienable and inalienable possession, both if the possessor is a noun and if the possessor is a pronoun.

- Inalienable possession is unmarked and features simple juxtaposition.

(11)	<i>zín kí</i>	[name tree] ‘name of tree’
	<i>nyā kí</i>	[mouth tree] ‘mouth of tree’
	<i>byèl kí</i>	[skin tree] ‘skin of tree, bark’

- According to the current analysis, alienable possession with a possessor noun is marked in two ways: (1) vowel lengthening and (2) a floating L tone. This floating L tone doesn't always surface, but it is usually visible after a H tone, where it results in a HL contour.

(12)	gbán 'hole'	gbáàn vwú	[hole:POSS excrement] 'hole of excrement'
	kyèn 'prisoner'	kyèèn kí	[prisoner:POSS tree] 'prisoner of the tree'
	sīn 'debt'	sīn vǎá	[debt:POSS child] 'debt of the child'
	kǎá 'bow'	kǎáá vǎá	[bow:POSS child] 'bow of the child'

(Note: ^L only surfaces in the first example.)

- There are different sets of pronouns for alienable and inalienable possession. First person alienable pronouns feature a downstepped H tone after H nouns. We could hypothesize that, like in N+N possession, pronominal alienable possession includes a floating L tone, but rather than causing contour tones, this floating L tone seems to be realized through downstep. Note 2PL and 3PL alienable pronouns. They are actually lexicalized forms of 'house + inalienable pronoun' – which might mean that *là*, the word for house, may have been the source of the floating L tone in alienable possession constructions.¹

	Inalienable	Alienable
1SG	mí	⁺ mí
2SG	mù	mù
3SG	ì	ʔà
1PL	vī	⁺ lít
2PL	ìn	lìn
3PL	mìn	lìmìn

5. Diminutive and augmentative

The singular and plural diminutive prefixes *vá-* and *zá-* are transparently related to the words for 'child' *vǎá* and 'children' *záà*. The prefixes are shortened forms.

(13)	vá-gbá	[DIM.SG-horn] 'small horn'	zá-gbá 'small horns'
	vá-krá	[DIM.SG-horn] 'small road'	zá-krá 'small roads'
	vá-shwín	[DIM.SG-fufu] 'small fufu'	zá-shwín 'small bits of food'

The augmentative marker *gbò-* doesn't have a plural equivalent.

¹ It's not clear if there's also vowel lengthening. Possibly, if there's no vowel lengthening, this explains why there's downstep and no contour.

- (14) gbò-nà [AUG-leg] ‘big leg’
 gbò-shē [AUG-monkey] ‘big monkey’
 gbò-kí [AUG-tree] ‘big tree’

6. Other nominal modification

- Demonstratives/articles

There are two distance contrasts in the Baa demonstrative system. There’s also something we currently call a ‘definite article’, which is often interchangeable with the proximal demonstrative but may be a purely anaphoric demonstrative (i.e. referring to something that was recently mentioned rather than what is physically close by).

	Form	Example
Proximal demonstrative	nì	là nì ‘this house (in front of us)’
Distal demonstrative	rò	fàl rò ‘that (distant) past’
Definite article	rè	záá rè ‘the children’ (known from context)

When added to a proper name, demonstratives acquire an expressive function which can carry either positive or negative emotion.

- (15) Àkíshén rò kyè gbò-rā-kwòn-gwél
 Akishen DIST COP AUG-A.NMLZ-cultivate-farm
 ‘That Akishen is a great farmer.’

- (16) Àkíshén nì wè gyūū lit
 Akishen PROX steal knife 1PL.POSS
 ‘This Akishen stole our knife.’

- (Existential quantifier *nákó* ‘some’)

- (17) vánát nákó yè yíwó
 girl certain 3SG.IPFV there
 ‘There is one/a certain girl...’

- (18) nì nákó nyí rà gwíà vìnì
 thing some COP² ATTR different here
 ‘Something is different here.’

- Property phrases (‘Adjectives’)

² Variant of *ní* ‘copula’?

Property phrases are characterized by an attributive marker, *rà*, which allows verbs to function as attributive modifiers to nouns. Such property phrases can function as the head of a noun phrase, so in that sense they are syntactically related to nominalized verbs. One could call *rà* a nominalizer, but since it always derives properties and is so frequent in nominal modification, for now I call it an attritivizer. This type of phrase is different from relative clauses, which are formed with the relativizer *-wó*

(19) là rà ngmò

house ATTR big

‘a big house’

(20) ín wùù tébìl rà kúlúù

1SG buy table ATTR round

‘I bought a round table.’

(21) yè ngmò

COP big

‘It is big.’

(22) rà ngmò

ATTR big

‘the big one’

(23) vs. relative clause

tyé nīm̀v̀al rò wó ñ kyè àzòò

3SG.FOC man DIST REL 1SG.PFV see yesterday

‘The man that I saw yesterday.’

- Numerals.

All numerals look morphologically complex with a marker *n̄n* often occurring in numerals below 20. *n̄n* looks like some other morphology and like the word *nì* ‘thing’, but it could be a numeral-specific item that’s simply the result of analogical change (cf. Pozdniakov 2010).

1	nīngkō	
2	nīngkpé	
3	nīmwán	
4	nīnnāt	
5	nīnnú	
6	nīnwén nīngkù	from ‘three’ or ‘five’ and ‘one’?
7	nīnwáā kpé	from ‘three’ or ‘five’ and ‘two’ nīn- before kpé, before analogy?
8	nīnfwāāfwàt	reduplication
9	nīngkwó(t) lá nīngkō	10-1
10	nīngkwót	
20	ká nīngkù	‘one unit of 20’
50	kāā kpé ál nīngkwót	from ‘2 units of 20 + 10’

- Numerals can occur as the head of a noun phrase without additional modification and in that sense fit the definition of a noun.

(24) ín kyê nīnnú
I see five
‘I see five (of something).’

(25) nīngkpé rà ngmò, nīmwán rà zò
two ATTR big three ATTR small
‘two (that are) big, three (that are) small’ (not ‘three big ones, three small ones’)

- Other nominal word classes.
 - Quantifiers look similar to attributive phrases.

(26) m̀v̀al ní kàt kí rà gbàl ráà g̀ǹ
man PROX cut.down tree ATTR tall ATTR? many
‘This man cut down many tall trees.’

- Pronouns.

There are different types of pronouns, some of them STAMP markers, some of them ‘classic’ pronouns.

	PFV	IPFV.REAL	IPFV.IRR	Object	Free
1SG	nín ^L	ín	ní	ó	íyó
2SG	yìì	ìn	nì	mù	úmù
3SG	yèè	yè	rí	Ṽ	íyè
1PL	nyán ^L	nyà	nyá	vì	ínyít
2PL	yèè	yè	yé	Ṽn	ínyìn
3PL	mín ^L	mìn	mín	mìn	ímìn

- Pronouns and STAMP morphs could be considered a type of noun (?).
 - They are not obligatory when a noun occurs in a verbal clause (?)

- (27) só fàlò váákùn mí (yè) ‘át iyìn àìngwíl
 year last younger.brother POSS (IPFV) do work farm
 ‘Last year, my brother worked on the farm.’

7. Complex noun phrases

PL + DIM/AUG-Noun^{Head} + (Pro)noun^{Modifier*} + Attribute|Quantifier|Numeral* + Demonstrative

- (28) àkání³ záákùn mí nīmwan rà zò rò
 teacher brother my five ATTR small DIST
 ‘Those five small teachers of my brother.’

- (29) nì rífùù rà nyìl ràà gùn
 thing silver ATTR shiny ATTR many
 ‘many shiny silver things’

- (30) rí vâ-gyà rà zò rà vâl nīmwan
 PL DIM-dog ATTR small ATTR male five
 ‘five small male dogs’

PL + Head + Classifying modifier* + Qualifying modifier* + Demonstrative

See e.g. McGregor (2004); Rijkhoff (2008)

- The qualifying modifiers can occur in any order.
- This word order scheme shows that, although attributive phrases and numerals can function as nouns (i.e. they can be the head of a noun phrase), they still should be considered different classes based on their order in complex noun phrases.
- Numerals and attributivized verbs are clearly distinct types, but they functionally they occupy the same slots.

8. Conclusions

- Some specifics of Baa
 - SG and PL marking in nominalizations, only plural marking elsewhere.
 - Reported marking of alienability with vowel length.
 - Free word order among ‘qualifying modifiers’.

³ I couldn’t hear a longer vowel here.

- What questions remain to be answered?
 - The alienability contrast with nouns needs more measurement.
 - Definiteness/specificity is poorly understood.
 - The status of STAMP morphs and the different types of pronoun need more work.

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