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NOUN PHRASES WITHOUT NOUNS IN SIDAAMA (SIDAMO)

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Abstract: This study examines noun phrases without nouns in Sidaama (Sidamo), a Cushitic language of Ethiopia. This language has two types of noun phrases without nouns. One type could be analyzed as involving ellipsis of the head noun, thus might not invalidate the notion of head in noun phrases. However, as for the other type of noun phrase without a noun, which is formed with a clitic, it is questionable whether the notion of head should be posited.

Keywords: head, noun phrases, Sidaama (Sidamo)

Languages: English, Sidaama (Sidamo), Indo-European, Cushitic

1. THE NOTION OF HEAD IN NOUN PHRASES. The head of a phrase is usually considered to be that component which determines the syntactic properties of the phrase. For example, the head of a noun phrase is normally regarded as a noun. Since the development of X-bar theory in the 1970s, it has often been assumed that the constituent of a phrasal category is a projection of the lexical category of its head (for example, a noun phrase is a maximal projection of the lexical category Noun), and that the head is obligatory in a phrase. Since the 1980s, there have been issues involving the notion of head, particularly, how to define head (e.g., Zwicky 1985, Hudson 1987), what the head of a constituent is (e.g., Muysken 1982, Hudson 1984), and whether a head exists in a particular type of constituent (e.g., Hawkins 1993). In fact, Dryer (2004) argues that all noun phrases are headless.

Dryer (2004) examines noun phrases without nouns in various languages, and questions the notion of head in a noun phrase.1 Noun phrases without nouns are “noun phrases that do not contain a noun or pronoun, but only words that otherwise occur as modifiers of nouns” (Dryer 2004:43); to put it another way, they are “noun phrases lacking a noun which denotes the kind of thing that the referent of the noun phrase belongs to, in other words, a noun that would generally be considered the head of the noun phrase rather than as a modifier” (Dryer 2004:47) (for example, English four in I want [these] four or John’s in I saw John’s). Many languages have such noun phrases. Dryer compares the hypotheses about the notion of head in noun phrases without nouns in (1), and concludes that hypothesis

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1 As Dryer (2004) points out, the term ‘noun phrase’ is misleading because it might give nouns a privileged status. The present study also uses this term only because there is no other term that could replace it.
(1)f, namely, that the notion of head does not apply to noun phrases in general and all noun phrases are headless, is more convincing in most cases than any other hypothesis in (1).

(1)  
  a. Noun phrases without nouns involve ellipsis of nouns. (The speaker can provide the ellipted noun.)  
  b. In noun phrases without nouns, the apparent modifiers are actually nouns. (They contain nouns, which are their heads.)  
  c. Noun phrases without nouns do not contain nouns, but one of the modifiers is the head of the noun phrase. (They do not contain nouns, but have a head.)  
  d. So-called noun phrases are determiner phrases, whose head is the determiner, not the noun. (Hudson 1984)  
  e. Noun phrases without nouns are headless, unlike noun phrases with nouns, which are headed.  
  f. All noun phrases (not only noun phrases without nouns but also noun phrases with nouns) are headless.

According to Dryer, the hypotheses in (1)a–e have problems such as in (2)a–e, respectively (only one problem is listed for each hypothesis; see Dryer 2004 for more problems), and are not convincing.

(2)  
  a. Although (1)a may be plausible in some cases, it is not always the case that the speaker has to be able to provide an appropriate noun. There are cases where noun phrases without nouns are used even when the speaker cannot provide an appropriate noun (English those in I want those, which may be said when the speaker talks in the darkness about the referents, which s/he cannot identify).  
  b. (1)b cannot show why it is incorrect to say that nouns do not exist in noun phrases without nouns.  
  c. (1)c would violate the notion of head. It would be problematic to attempt to apply this hypothesis more generally.  
  d. (1)d is not attractive for languages lacking definite or indefinite articles.  
  e. (1)e would violate the obligatoriness of heads.

Dryer argues that unlike (1)a–e, (1)f is applicable to languages where noun phrases may or may not contain nouns, as well as to languages where noun phrases have to contain nouns. He argues that nouns occur the most frequently in noun phrases, because noun phrases tend to refer to particular things in the world, and nouns have advantages over other parts of speech in performing this task – they often have rich meaning and express a permanent rather than temporary property, and the kinds that they denote are likely to remain in memory and become part of a classificatory system. In languages where noun phrases have to contain nouns, the high frequency pattern is grammaticalized. Therefore, he concludes, in order to explain the high frequency of nouns in noun phrases, the notion of head does not need to be posited.
Dryer states that there are two types of cases where noun phrases without nouns can be used. One is cases where the speaker does not know what kind of thing the referent of the noun phrase is. The other type is cases where it is so obvious to the hearer what kind of thing the referent of the noun phrase is that the speaker does not need to mention it. According to Dryer, the hypothesis in (1)f (that noun phrases are always headless) applies to the former type of cases, whereas the ellipsis hypothesis in (1)a is plausible in the latter type of cases. As shown below, in Sidaama, which has two types of noun phrases without nouns, they are both used only for the latter type of cases, but (1)a can apply only to one of them, and does not apply to the other type, for which (1)f is appropriate.

2. Noun phrases without nouns in Sidaama (Sidamo). Sidaama belongs to the Highland-East branch of the Cushitic language family (Kawachi 2007a, 2007b, 2008, in press a, b, c). It is spoken in the Sidaama Zone, whose capital, Awaasa, is located 273 km south of Addis Ababa. According to the 1994 Ethiopian Census, the population of the Sidaama people was about 1.8 million, but many Sidaama people consider their current population to be at least four or five million.

The case system of this language is accusative. Its word order is predominantly SOV. Noun phrases can make case distinctions with a suffix and/or a suprafixed (high pitch on the final vowel segment), and make number and gender distinctions with suffixes. Noun phrases with nouns are sensitive to whether the noun is accompanied by a modifier/modifiers or by the possessive pronominal suffix or by neither, and make several grammatical distinctions (e.g., allomorphs of a case suffix) in terms of this criterion (Kawachi & Tekeleselassie in press). The order of the constituents in a noun phrase with a noun is normally: adnominal demonstrative – numeral – adjective – genitive noun phrase – relative clause – noun, as in (3).

(3) hakkuri lam-u kolid-d-u
that.m.nom/that.m.pl.nom two-nom.m black-pl-nom.m
dangur-i ise la’-’ino hand-i
Dangura-gen.prop.m 3sg.f.nom see-3sg.f-peef3 oxen-nom.m.mod
ba’-ø-ino.
disappear-3sg.m-perf3
‘Those two black oxen of Dagura that she saw disappeared.’

The adjective agrees with the noun phrase in case, number, and gender, and the numeral and adnominal demonstrative each agree with the noun phrase in case and gender (the adnominal demonstrative, whose optionally used plural form may or may not exist, depending on the combinations of gender, case, and deictic information, sometimes shows a number agreement as well, as in (3) with the plural form hakkuri). A relative clause is formed by

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2 Abbreviations. ep: Epenthesis, mod: modified by a modifier/modifiers and/or accompanied by the possessive pronominal suffix
means of gapping or pronominal retention. In (3), the direct object hando ‘oxen’ is relativized by means of the gapping strategy to form the relative clause ise la’-’-ino.

Sidaama has two types of noun phrases without nouns. One type is made up only of an adjective or a numeral, as in (4) and (5), where the adjective or the numeral agrees in case, number, and gender with the referent of the noun phrase. Such noun phrases without nouns are used only when the kind of the referent of the noun phrase is so obvious to the hearer that the noun does not need to be used. They cannot be used when the speaker cannot provide an appropriate noun that denotes the kind of the referent. In such a case, a noun phrase where riččo ‘thing’/re ‘things’ or mančo ‘person’/manna ‘people’ follows the modifier has to be used.

(4)

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{ise} & \begin{cases} 
\text{a. } \text{jawaaššó} & \text{thin.ACC} \\
\text{b. } \text{lamé} & \text{two.ACC} 
\end{cases} \rightarrow \text{get-3SG.F-PERF.3} \\
3\text{SG.F.NOM} & \text{af-f-ino.}
\end{array}
\]

‘She has (a) a thin one/(b) two.’ (lit., ‘She got (a) thin/(b) two.’)

(5)

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{a. } \text{busul-u} & \text{smart-NOM.M} \\
\text{b. } \text{sas-u} & \text{three-NOM.M} \rightarrow \text{da-ø-ino.} \\
\text{da-ø-ino.} & \text{come-3SG.M-PERF.3}
\end{array}
\]

‘(a) The smart one (MASC)/(b) The three (MASC) came.’ (lit., ‘(a) Smart (MASC) / (b) Three (MASC) came.’)

Since a noun that would be modified by such a modifier constituent could always be provided, this type of noun phrase without a noun seems capable of analysis in terms of ellipsis of the head noun, as stated in hypothesis (1a), and does not seem to invalidate the notion of head in noun phrases.

The other type of noun phrase without a noun, which is the main concern of the rest of the present study, is formed with a clitic (a noun-phrase clitic, henceforth NPC). This NPC starts with t (FEM) or h (MASC), and seems to originate from the Afro-Asiatic demonstrative containing t (FEM) or k (MASC) (G. Hudson 1976). The Sidaama NPC shows the forms

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{3SG.F.NOM} & \text{af-f-ino.} \\
\text{3SG.M-PERF.3} & \text{da-ø-ino.} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{tini} (\text{fem.nom}) & \text{vs. kuni} (\text{masc.nom}) 'this', \\
\text{hatti} (\text{fem.nom}) & \text{vs. hakku} (\text{masc.nom}) 'that (spatial: close to the hearer, non-spatial: already mentioned)'.
\end{array}
\]

\footnote{The adjectives in (4)a and (5)a, jawaaššo ‘thin’ and busule ‘smart’, are both singular.}

\footnote{Examples are shown below:}

(4) a. ise jawaaššó saa af-f-ino. ‘She has a thin cow.’

(5) a. sas-u wosin-i da-ø-ino. ‘The three guests came.’

\footnote{The contrast between t (FEM) and k (MASC) still exists in the demonstrative system in Sidaama, where the adnominal and nominal demonstratives could be analyzed as containing the forms of the NPC for the corresponding gender and case (e.g., tini (FEM.NOM) vs. kuni (MASC.NOM) ‘this’, batti (FEM.NOM) vs. bakku (MASC.NOM) ‘that (spatial: close to the hearer, non-spatial: already mentioned)’.}
in Table 1, depending on the gender of the referent of the noun phrase and the syntactic role or case of the noun phrase. The predicate forms \(=te\) (FEM)/\(=ho\) (MASC) are attached to an adjective, to a common noun accompanied by neither a modifier nor the possessive pronominal suffix, or to a genitive noun phrase (see one of the uses of the NPC in (ii) below), whereas the predicate form \(=ti\) is used when attaching to a common noun with a modifier/modifiers and/or the possessive pronominal suffix, a proper noun, or the predicate form of a pronoun.

The six main uses of the NPC are shown in (i)–(vi), which are illustrated with (6)–(14).

(i) The NPC attaches to the end of the predicate form of an adjective phrase or noun phrase to form a predicate.

\[
\begin{align*}
tii'i & \quad man\,\tilde{c}\,o \\
\text{that.F.NOM} & \quad \text{person.NOM.F} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
a. \quad \text{dan\,\acute{c}a}=te. & \quad \text{good}=\text{NPC.F.PRED} \\
b. \quad \text{t\,\'agisaan\,\tilde{c}o}=te. & \quad \text{healer}=\text{NPC.F.PRED} \\
c. \quad \text{dan\,\acute{c}a\,t\,\'agisaan\,\tilde{c}o}=ti & \quad \text{good healer}=\text{NPC.MOD.PRED} \\
d. \quad \text{rodo}-si=ti. & \quad \text{sibling-3SG.M.POSS}=\text{NPC.MOD.PRED} \\
\end{align*}
\]

‘That woman (a) is good/(b) is a healer/(c) is a good healer/(d) is his sister.’

(ii) The NPC attaches to the end of a genitive noun phrase or a relative clause to form a predicate.

\textbf{Table 1.} Forms of the Sidaama NPC with \(t\) (FEM)/\(h\) (MASC).

\begin{table}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Gender} & \textbf{Syntactic Role/Case} & \\
\hline
\textbf{FEM} & \textbf{MASC} & \\
\hline
\textbf{PRED} & \(=te\) & \(=ho\) \hline
\textbf{NOM} & \(=ti\) & \(=hu\) \hline
\textbf{GEN} & \(=te\) & \(=hu\) \hline
\textbf{ACC} & \(=ta\) & \(=ha\) \hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}
Noun Phrases Without Nouns in Sidaama (Sidamo)

(7)  
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{tii'i} & \quad \text{saa} \\
\text{that.F.NOM} & \quad \text{cow.NOM.F}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
a. & \quad \text{isi=te.} \\
& \quad 3\text{SG.M.GEN=NPC.F.PRED}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
b. & \quad \text{ise} \quad \text{t'ur-t-ino=te.} \\
& \quad 3\text{SG.F.NOM} \quad \text{milk-3SG.F-PERF.3=NPC.F.PRED}
\end{align*}
\]

'That cow (a) is his (fem) (b) is the one (fem) that she milked.'

(iii) The NPC attaches to the end of a genitive noun phrase or a relative clause to form a noun phrase without a noun.

(8)  
\[
\begin{align*}
a. & \quad \text{isi=ti} \\
& \quad 3\text{SG.M.GEN=NPC.F.NOM}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
b. & \quad \text{ise} \quad \text{t'ur-t-ino=ti} \\
& \quad 3\text{SG.F.NOM} \quad \text{milk-3SG.F-PERF.3=NPC.F.NOM}
\end{align*}
\]

‘(a) His (fem) (b) The one (fem) that she milked disappeared.’

(9)  
\[
\begin{align*}
a. & \quad \text{ku'ui} \quad \text{beett-i=ta} \\
& \quad \text{that.M.GEN} \quad \text{child-GEN.M.MOD=} \quad \text{NPC.F.ACC}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
b. & \quad \text{ise} \quad \text{hiikk'-i-t-ino=ta} \\
& \quad 3\text{SG.F.NOM} \quad \text{break-EP-3SG.F-PERF.3=NPC.F.ACC}
\end{align*}
\]

‘I (masc) repaired (a) that boy's (fem) (b) the one (fem) that she broke.’

(iv) The NPC attaches to the end of a genitive noun phrase or a relative clause when there is another modifier immediately before the noun modified by the genitive noun phrase or the relative clause.\(^7\)

(10)  
\[
\begin{align*}
a. & \quad \text{dan ur-i=ti} \\
& \quad \text{Dangura-GEN.PROP.M=NPC.F.NOM}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
b. & \quad \text{iw-an-t-ino=ti} \\
& \quad \text{cause.sickness-PASS-3SG.F-PERF.3=NPC.F.NOM}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
awaaasio & \quad \text{saa} \\
\text{thin.NOM.F} & \quad \text{cow.NOM.F}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{re-t-ino.} \\
die-3SG.F-PERF.3
\end{align*}
\]

‘The thin cow (a) of Dangura/(b) that got sick died.’

\(^7\) The NPC does not occur when constituents in a noun phrase follow the normal order mentioned earlier: adnominal demonstrative – numeral – adjective – genitive noun phrase – relative clause – noun (e.g. awaaasio dan ur-i saa re-t-ino. instead of (10)a; lame isi iw-an-t-ino saada re-t-ino. instead of (11)). There does not seem to be any difference in meaning between these two types of constructions, but it remains to be investigated whether they exhibit any difference in discourse.
(11) \[ isi=ti \quad iw-an-t-ino=ti \]
\[
3SG.M GEN=NPC.F NOM \quad cause.sickness-PASS-3SG.F PERF.3=NPC.F NOM
\]
\[
lame\quad saada\quad re-t-ino.\]
\[
two.NOM.F\quad cows.NOM.F\quad die-3SG.F PERF.3
\]

'His two cows that got sick died.'

(v) The NPC forms a complement clause as a complementizer.

(12) \[ ise\quad dan\quad ur-i\quad da-ø-ino=ta \]
\[
3SG.F NOM\quad Dangura-NOM.M\quad come-3SG.M PERF.3=NPC.F ACC
\]
\[
aff-ino.\quad come.to.know-3SG.F PERF.3
\]

'She knows that Dangura came.' (lit. ‘She came to know that Dangura came.’)

(vi) The NPC forms the cleft construction: ...=hu ...=ti.

(13) \[ ise\quad t’ur-t-ino=hu\quad tenné\quad saa=ti. \]
\[
3SG.F NOM\quad milk-3SG.F PERF.3=NPC.M NOM\quad this.FACC\quad cow.ACC=NPC.MOD.PRED
\]

'It is this cow that she milked.'

(14) \[ ise\quad da\quad -ino=hu \]
\[
3SG.F NOM\quad come-3SG.F PERF.3=NPC.M NOM
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
a.\quad & dan\quad ur-i-ra=ti. \\
& Dangura-GEN.PROP.M-DAT.PROP=NPC.MOD.PRED
\end{align*}
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
b.\quad & dod-d-a-nni=ti. \\
& run-3SG.F-INF-MANNER=NPC.MOD.PRED
\end{align*}
\]

'(a) It is for Dangura/(b) It is by running that she came.'

Note that in (v), the NPC normally has the feminine accusative form =ta, and that in (vi), the pair of NPCs always take the forms ...=hu ...=ti: the masculine nominative form =hu for the subject, regardless of the gender of the clefted noun phrase or the noun (if there is one) included in the clefted adverbial, and one of the predicate forms =ti for the predicate.

The type of host to which the NPC attaches differs depending on its usage. In (i), the NPC attaches to the noun at the end of a noun phrase in the predicate or the adjective at the end of an adjective phrase in the predicate. In (ii), (iii), and (iv), the NPC attaches to the genitive noun at the end of a genitive noun phrase or the verb at the end of a relative clause. In (v), the NPC attaches to the verb at the end of a complement clause. In (vi), the NPC in the subject attaches to a relative clause, and the NPC in the predicate can attach to any type of constituent that is not the subject of the relative clause formed in the subject of the cleft construction.
The type of constituent formed with the NPC is usually a noun phrase, but may not always be a noun phrase. In (i) and (ii), when the NPC attaches to an adjective phrase, a noun phrase, a genitive noun phrase, or a relative clause to form a predicate, it is not clear whether the predicate is a noun phrase or a constituent of some other category. Also, when it is clearly an argument noun phrase that is formed with the NPC, the noun phrase may be a noun phrase without a noun, as in (iii), or a noun phrase with a noun, as in (iv). In (v), the NPC forms a complement clause, or a “noun clause” (Dryer 2007), which is usually the object of a verb such as the following and could be regarded as a type of noun phrase without a noun: af- ‘to come to know that ...’, kul- ‘to tell that ...’, odeess- ‘to announce that ...’, kiil- ‘to prophesy that ...’, masaal- ‘to prophesy that ...’, amman- ‘to believe/admit that ...’, baaki’ir- ‘to dream that ...’, kaad- ‘to deny that ...’, k’att’ar- ‘to complain that ...’, la’- ‘to check that ...’, mačč’išš- ‘to hear that ...’, k’a’aa - ‘to remember that ...’, bab- ‘to forget that ...’, bat’- ‘to like the fact that ...’, ib- ‘to dislike the fact that ...’.

When a noun phrase without a noun is formed with the NPC as in (iii), both the speaker and the hearer know its referent, and the speaker could provide a noun that denotes the kind of thing into which the referent is classified. Thus, the condition for the use of this type of noun phrase without a noun is the same as that for the use of the other type, namely, a noun phrase consisting only of an adjective or a numeral, which was exemplified in (4) and (5). (When the speaker cannot provide an appropriate noun that denotes the kind of the referent, a noun phrase where the adjective or numeral is followed by the noun for ‘thing(s)’ or ‘person/people’ has to be used.) Therefore, the two types of noun phrases without nouns in Sidaama are formed in different ways. One is formed only with an adjective or a numeral, and the other is made up of a genitive noun phrase or a relative clause and the NPC. Both types are used only when the speaker does not need to use a noun for the kind of referent, which s/he could provide.8

3. Analysis and Discussion. This section deals mainly with noun phrases without nouns formed with the NPC as in usage (iii), namely, those argument noun phrases in which the NPC attaches to the end of a genitive noun phrase or a relative clause. The discussion considers whether the hypotheses in (i) are each applicable to such noun phrases.

First, hypothesis (1)a (the ellipsis hypothesis) does not apply to this type of noun phrase without a noun, because, although the speaker always has to be able to provide an appropriate noun, if the noun were actually provided for the noun phrase, the sentence would be ungrammatical (e.g., instead of (8)a *isí=ti saa ba’-ino. [3SG.M.GEN=NPC.F.NOM cow. NOM.F disappear-3SG.F-PERF.3] to mean, ‘His cow disappeared.’; correctly, isí saa ba’-ino.).

8 The adnominal and nominal demonstratives have different forms based on deictic information (‘this’, that (spatial: distant from the speaker and close to the hearer, non-spatial: already mentioned), ‘that (distant from both the speaker and the hearer)’), gender, and case, and share the same forms for most combinations of these. A noun phrase made only of the demonstrative form that the adnominal demonstrative shares with its corresponding nominal demonstrative (e.g. batti ‘that.F.NOM’/bakku ‘that.M.NOM’) could be regarded as a noun phrase without a noun, which seem to be similar to the type formed only with an adjective or a numeral in not requiring the NPC (additionally), although it already contains the NPC (e.g. =ti in batti, =hu in bakku).

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Hypothesis (1)b (that one of the apparent modifiers is actually a noun, and thus the head of such a noun phrase) does not work, either. A genitive noun phrase may consist of a noun, but the referent of the genitive noun phrase (possessor; e.g., ‘that boy’ in (9)a) is different from that of the noun phrase without a noun (possessum; e.g., ‘(that boy’s) drum’). A relative clause may contain a noun or pronoun (e.g., the third-person singular feminine pronoun in (9)b), yet it is not a noun but a clause; also, the referent of the pronoun is different from that of the noun phrase without a noun (e.g., ‘the drum that she broke’).

Hypothesis (1)c (that one of the apparent modifiers is the head, though it is not a noun) is also problematic, because, if the head of a phrase is a constituent other than a noun (e.g. the verb of a relative clause or the relative clause itself), that phrase should not be a noun phrase.

Hypothesis (1)d (that the determiner is the head) is not convincing at all. First, this language has so-called determiners (adnominal demonstratives, quantifiers, genitive pronouns), but does not always use them. Second, the existence of a determiner cannot be posited when the NPC attaches to the end of a clause. Third, because the contexts where the NPC occurs are limited, the NPC itself cannot be considered to be a determiner.

Finally, hypothesis (1)e (that noun phrases without nouns are headless, unlike those with nouns, which are headed) is also unattractive. The NPC cannot be regarded as a marker of noun phrases without nouns. Adjectives and numerals form noun phrases without nouns by themselves, without the NPC. Moreover, as in (iv), the NPC can also be used to form noun phrases with nouns.

In support of (1)e, one may claim that in prototypical cases, noun phrases are headed and their heads are nouns, whereas in rare cases, where noun phrases do not contain nouns, they are headless. However, it remains to be explained why nouns have the privilege of being the heads of noun phrases in the former case, and why there are no heads in the latter case. Also, the assumption of the inherent necessity of head would need to be abandoned.

Unlike these hypotheses, hypothesis (1)f (that all noun phrases are headless) does not seem to have any problem. Like a noun phrase without a noun consisting only of an adjective or a numeral, a noun phrase without a noun consisting only of a genitive noun phrase or a relative clause is used only when the kind of the referent of the noun phrase is so obvious to the hearer that the speaker does not need to mention it. In such a case, the ellipsis hypothesis may usually be plausible, but in the case of Sidaama, it can apply to a noun phrase without a noun consisting only of an adjective or a numeral, but cannot apply to a noun phrase without a noun consisting only of a genitive noun phrase or a relative clause. For the latter type, (1)f is convincing. Therefore, if a general applicability to noun phrases with nouns as well as the two types of noun phrases without nouns in Sidaama is taken into account, (1)f seems to be the least problematic.

It is often the case that heads are described in association with the notion of modification. Heads are commonly contrasted with modifiers. However, the notion of head concerns a relationship between a phrasal category and its head, which is a mother-daughter relation. On the other hand, the notion of modification concerns a relationship between a modifier and a modified word, which is not a mother-daughter relation. The notion of modification can emerge as a grammatical distinction, though this notion might differ
slightly from language to language. Morphosyntactic distinctions made in terms of whether or not a noun is modified (e.g., Ezafe construction in Iranian languages), or whether a noun is accompanied by a modifier/modifiers or by the possessive pronominal suffix or by both or neither (e.g., allomorphs of the case markers in Sidaama). On the other hand, the notion of head does not seem to provide a grammatical distinction. There does not seem to be any morphosyntactic phenomenon that shows that the head of a noun phrase (if any) is a noun.

4. Conclusion. The present study has shown that Dryer’s hypothesis that all noun phrases are headless applies to noun phrases in Sidaama more fittingly than any other hypothesis. Even though noun phrases without nouns are used only when the speaker does not use a noun for the kind of the referent that is obvious to the hearer, the ellipsis hypothesis does not apply to one type of them. Unlike modification, the notion of head does not seem to emerge as a grammatical distinction.

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