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Master's Thesis in Language Science

Adposition Phrases in Dagara

Tohoku University (Sendai, Japan)

Graduate School of International Cultural Studies

International Graduate Program in Language Sciences

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Abstract

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The purpose of this thesis is to propose a novel analysis of adposition phrases in Dagara. Indeed, it is observed in the literature that adpositions consist of two types in Dagara: a preposition and postpositions. The preposition, *ni* ‘with’, is said to express comitative and instrument while the postpositions express locations.

However, Dagara is considered to be a head-initial language. Then, assuming the existence of postpositions will pose a problem to any theory of phrase structure based on the head parameter. In the present thesis, I show that what are analyzed as postpositions in Dagara do not have any characteristics of adpositions and should be analyzed as nouns. I provide four pieces of evidence for this claim:

(i) P-stranding constructions. While a preposition can be stranded in Dagara, alleged postpositions cannot. Accordingly, I argue that so-called postpositions cannot be stranded because they are noun phrases functioning as possessives, and that their complement nominal phrases, henceforth complement DPs (i.e. DPs functioning as possessors), cannot undergo movement. Moving a possessor noun phrase out of a possessive nominal phrase in Dagara violates the Left Branch Condition.

(ii) I argue that case assignment also provides evidence that so-called adpositions are nouns. I show that while prepositions *ni* ‘with’ assigns oblique case, which is identical to accusative case, alleged postpositions can only assign genitive case to their complement DPs. Since genitive case is assigned by nouns, the ability of so-called postpositions to assign genitive case, and not oblique case, indicates that they are nouns.

(iii) Focalization of preposition phrases in Dagara provides additional evidence for the nominal status of alleged postpositions as well. Note that focalization is solely a property of noun phrases in Dagara. However, while preposition phrases cannot be focalized, alleged postposition phrases can. This clearly indicates that they are noun phrases and can undergo focus movement.

(iv) Number marking. As in many languages, the preposition *ni* ‘with’ is invariable in Dagara. However, alleged postpositions can take a number marker. Then, since number marking is a property of nouns, I assume that the possibility for those so-called postpositions to take a number marker evidences that they are nouns.

After showing that apparent postpositions in Dagara are nouns, I propose a new analysis for them. In fact, I argue that they should be analyzed as nouns heading noun phrases selected by empty prepositions (P), which are directional or locative prepositions. Adposition phrases in Dagara then consists of two types: overt prepositions and null prepositions, all of which are licensed by verbs.

I also provide evidence for the existence of empty prepositions in Dagara by assuming that no element can intervene between a verb and an adposition phrase headed by a null P. This restriction comes from the Empty Category Principle.

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Alain Noindonmon Hien