

NOMINAL MODIFIERS IN OBOLO

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Abstract

This study describes nominal modifiers in Obolo. Obolo native speakers are found in Akwa Ibom and Rivers States of Nigeria. Being a descriptive study, the presented data are drawn from the intuitive knowledge of the author and corroborated by other native speakers of Obolo. Nominal modifiers in Obolo with certain restrictions can occur only at pre-head or post-head and some at both positions in relation to the nominal it qualifies. The paper identifies adjectives, determiners, quantifiers, associative constructions, demonstratives, intensifiers, emphasizees and the relative clause as sub-classes of Obolo nominal modifiers. The data analysis reveals that Obolo modifiers are predominantly post-modifiers.

Keywords: Nominal modifier; pre-nominal; post-nominal; adjectives; determiners.

Introduction

A modifier is a word, phrase or clause that provides information about another word in the sentence. There are different types of modifiers. Nominal modifiers are words that provide information on a noun or nominal. A nominal is a word that can function as a noun. A nominal if not rightly placed can be described as either misplaced or dangling. Nominal modifiers are words that specify the reference of a nominal (Ndimele, 1996). To qualify a nominal, they are found in the vicinity of words that have the grammatical function of nouns. Nominal modifiers are found in constructions of nouns or pronouns because they limit, restrict or specify the reference of nouns and pronouns (Aleruchi, 2017).

The combination of noun modifiers and a noun forms the structure of a noun phrase. The constituents of a noun phrase are modifiers which are either placed before the noun or placed after the noun (Isaac, 2022). When they are placed before the noun, they are termed pre-modifiers and post-modifiers, when placed after the noun which serves as the head of the phrase. In other words, nominal modifiers are found in noun phrases. The head word in a noun phrase is a noun. Nominal modifiers in the construct of a noun phrase provide information that relates to the head of the construction. For example in the English language, the word *beautiful* in the shown sentence is a nominal modifier- *The beautiful girl won the award*. The nominal modifier, *beautiful*, modifies the head- *girl*- in the noun phrase- *the beautiful girl*.

This paper describes the nominal modifiers in Obolo. Obolo is a Lower Cross-language, a sub-phylum of Niger-Congo. Obolo is an East Benue-Congo language in Bantoid-Cross (Eberhard, 2022). The languages of Cross River are bounded by Ijoid, Edoid, Igboid, Idomoid, Bantoid and Bantu speakers (Faraclas, 1989). Obolo is spoken in Eastern Obolo Local Government Area in Akwa Ibom State and Andoni Local Government Area of Rivers State (Ager, 2021; Kari, 2019).

The language can be differentiated into three main dialects: the Eastern Obolo dialect (Okoroete, Ibot Obolo), the Western Obolo dialect (Ataba, Asarama, Unyeada), and the Central dialect (Ngo).

The main aim of this paper is to examine nominal modifiers in Obolo. The specific objectives of the paper are to describe the forms of nominal modifiers and the positions they occur in Obolo. The paper is divided into six sections. Section one contains the introduction. Sections two and three provide empirical review and methodology respectively. Section four has the different forms of nominal modifiers in Obolo. Section five examines noun-modifier order. Section six presents a matrix on the positions of nominal modifiers in Obolo. The next section provides an empirical review of nominal modifiers.

Empirical Review

Dryer (2010) examined noun-modifier order in Africa. The primary thesis of his paper was that languages in Africa exhibit a greater tendency to place modifiers after nouns than other languages in the world. Dryer used data from a database of 1,600 languages by comparing languages in Africa with other areas of the world as well as the distribution of nouns and modifiers. The data presented showed the order and distribution of adjectives and nouns, demonstrative and noun, numeral and noun, genitive and noun, relative clause and noun, and lastly, definite marker and noun. The paper concluded that nearly all categories of modifiers follow the noun and more often in languages in Africa than languages elsewhere in the world. The trend was noted to be well pronounced among the Niger-Congo, the Nilo-Saharan and the Chadic languages.

Aleruchi (2017) presented nominal modifiers in Ikwere, an Igboide language spoken in four (Ikwerre, Emohua, Obio/Akpor and part of Port Harcourt Local Government Areas (LGAs)) of Rivers State of Nigeria. She adopted a descriptive approach in the analysis of nominal modifiers in the language and identified adjectives, qualificatives, demonstratives, quantifiers, numerals, possessives and relative clauses as the seven sub-classes of nominal modifiers in the language. She observed that all nominal modifiers predominantly occur in the post-head position, but few of them, in addition, occur in the pre-head position.

Isaac and Barikpe (2022) studied nominal modifiers in Kana. They observed that there are 10 nominal modifiers in Kana. It was also observed that though all the modifiers freely occur with the noun, there is a constraint on the maximum number of modifiers a noun can co-occur with at a time within a single NP configuration. In Kana, the NP can accommodate five pre-head modifiers and three post-head modifiers at a time. A linear order of the relative position of modifiers when they co-occur within the Kana NP, the relative position of certain word classes is fixed. Isaac and Barikpe (2022) showed the linear order in pre-modification and post-modification of the noun in a noun phrase as follows: pre-head modifiers –quantifiers, pluralizers, possessives, intensifiers and adjectives. For post-head modifiers, the prepositional phrase/demonstrative comes before the relative clause.

Methodology

The data presented are drawn from fluent competent speakers of Obolo to corroborate the intuition of the author. Texts and library materials consulted form the secondary sources of data. The Ngo dialect which is favoured by the Obolo Translation Committee is used in this study.

Modification of Obolo Nominals

Pre-head and post-head modifiers are attested in the grammatical structure of Obolo. Some Obolo nominal modifiers are used only as pre-modifiers or post-modifiers. A few of these modifiers are used as pre-modifiers and post-modifiers. Hereafter, the following nominal modifiers in Obolo are examined: adjectives, intensifiers, comparative forms, associative constructions, demonstratives, qualifiers, numerals and possessive pronouns.

Adjectives

By syntactic function, an adjective modifies a noun. Adjectivals are nominal modifiers because they modify the reference of nominals. Obolo adjectives are in different forms as illustrated.

a. Underived Adjectives- Underived adjectives are adjectivals which are not derived from verbs or nouns.

- (1) i. áyá - new
 ii. sòntíík- small
 iii. uja - beautiful

These underived adjectives are used as pre-modifiers as they can be only placed before the nouns they qualify.

- (2) i. aya íkpá ‘new book’
 mod N

 ii. sòntíík min ‘small drink’
 mod N

 iii. uja gwun ‘beautiful child’
 mod N

c. Partial reduplication of some underived adjectives expresses the quality of ‘very’, intensity of the property or quality expressed by the root adjective. Examples (3)

- | | | | | |
|------|-----------------|---|-----------|--------------|
| i. | áyá – new | > | áyáyá | ‘very new’ |
| ii. | ílé – big | > | ílílé | ‘very big’ |
| iii. | sòntíík – small | > | sòntítíík | ‘very small’ |

These forms can be used either as premodifiers or postmodifiers. Examples (4)

- i. **áyáyá** íkpá 'new book'
 pre-mod N

 ii. íkpá **áyáyá** 'new book'
 N post-mod

 iii. **ílílé** àmà ‘big town’
 pre-mod N

 iv. àmà **ílílé** ‘big town’
 N post-mod

These forms are realisable in the language but are used as topicalised forms. In the use of 4 (i) *áyáyá* íkpá 'new book', a speaker's interest might be on *áyáyá*, the newness of the book. In 4 (ii) íkpá áyáyá 'new book', a speaker's interest is on *íkpá*, the book.

b. Verbal adjectives derived from reduplicated verbs.

- (5)
- | | | | | |
|-----------|-------------|---|---------|------------------|
| i. fit | 'blackened' | → | ófífit | 'black' |
| ii. tèm | 'cook' | → | étètèm | 'what is cooked' |
| iii. kàlà | 'fry' | → | ékâkàlà | 'what is fried' |

Except *ofífit* which can be used at pre-nominal and post-nominal positions, the other adjectives derived from partial reduplicated verbs can only be used at post-nominal positions as shown in example 6.

- (6)
- | | |
|-----------------|-------------|
| i. ofífit otin | 'black pot' |
| mod N | |
| ii. otin ofífit | 'black pot' |
| N mod | |

The examples above show that the modifier can either be placed before or after the noun.

The verbal adjectives derived from reduplicated verbs (5i-iii) when placed before a noun become a simple sentence. In (6iii) the construct is '*what is cooked*' becomes '*they cooked the food*' when the derived adjective is placed before the noun as shown in 6(iii). The construct with a pre-nominal reduplicated verb becomes a simple sentence with an inflected verb + noun. The reason for this is that an inflected verb in Obolo is person-marked (Gladday 2006). In example 6(iv) below, the inflected verb is a person marked by a subject clitic which produces a subject and predicate structure giving rise to a simple sentence.

- iii. onorie etetem 'cooked food'
- | | |
|------|--------|
| food | cooked |
| N | mod |
- iv. etetem inorie
- | | |
|-----------------------|--------|
| e-te-tem | inorie |
| 3PL-ASP-cook | food |
| They cooked the food. | |

Derived adjectives are only used as post-modifiers as shown in 6(iii), there is a change in meaning when the derived adjective is placed before the noun 6(iv). Where the derived adjective is placed before the noun, a simple sentence of SVO is formed.

c. Adjectives derived from verbs through the process of prefixation are represented below

(7).

	Verb	Gloss	Prefixation	Derived Adjective	Gloss
i)	chìlì	open		i- íchìlì	(be) open
ii)	fiéék	cut		i- ífièék	(be) bad
iii)	fiìk	tighten	i-	ífiìk	(be) tight

- iv) kwû die î- îkwù (be) dead
 v) wùwók loosen i- íwùwók (be) loose

These adjectives derived from verbs through the process of prefixation are only placed after the nouns they qualify.

From examples 1- 7, Obolo adjectives are constrained by locality. Underived adjectives are used as pre-modifiers while derived adjectives are used as post-modifiers. They are placed either before or after nouns. More examples are given below:

- 8) Áyilé ìkàríọ̀ń lék ádà íbòt ílé.
 PN NEG know body pepper head big.
 Ayile does not know big pepper.

- 9) Ónyàn ìjàáń.
 moon be beautiful
 The moon is beautiful.

- 10) Írè áyá ónyàn.
 be new moon
 It is a new moon.

Intensifiers

Intensifiers are nominal modifiers derived from adjectives. Intensifiers in Obolo are derived through the prefixation of **m-** to verbal adjectives. In other words, the prefixation of **m-** ‘very’ to verbal adjectives results in the derivation of the following intensifiers. Examples:

11. Verbal Adjectives	Intensifying Prefix	Derivatives
i) ílóbó (be) heavy	m-	mílòbó very heavy
ii) ígwàt (be) fast	m-	mígwàt very fast
iii) íbùbút (be) stupid	m-	míbùbút very stupid
iv) ífùúk (be) fat, (be) thick	m-	mífùúk very fat
v) ísìp small	m-	mísìp very small
vi) ìjàáń beautiful	m-	míjàáń very beautiful
vii) ímìn big	m-	mímìn very big

These intensifiers can only be used as post-modifiers. Examples

12:

- i. gwún míjàán * míjàán gwún
 child very beautiful
 very beautiful child
- ii. ékwút míjòńó * míjòńó ékwút
 cloth very long
 very long cloth

These forms can only be used as post-modifiers.

Emphasizers

In the Kana language, Ikoro (1996) used the term ‘emphasizers’ to express nominal modifiers that can bring a noun into prominence. In Obolo, the phrase ‘*ata lek*’ which literally means ‘good body’ can be used to express the emphasize ‘really’. Emphasizers in Obolo are used as premodifiers. Examples (13), the emphasize are in bold form:

- i. **àtálék** inó ‘a real thief’
 EMP N
- ii. **àtálék** ánàm ‘a real animal’ – a foolish person
 EMP N
- iii. **átálék** íjò mgbo ‘really bad time’
 EMP Adj N
- iv. **àtálék** utop ínóriè ‘a real good meal’
 EMP Adj N
- v. **àtálék** òjó ísí ‘a real ill luck’
 EMP Adj N

Associative Construction

In an associative construction, two or more nouns occur together as a morphological unit. The examples of associative construction presented below show two nouns placed together as a unit. The first noun serves as the head. The noun or nouns that follow the first noun are possessed by the first noun or are associated with the first noun (Akan n. d.). In the examples presented below, the second noun in the associative construction acts as a post-modifier. Some examples are shown below with the head in italics.

- (14) *ókwùn* Ásùk
 basket PROP name ‘Asuk’s basket’
- (15) *ókwùn* irĩñ
 basket fish ‘fish basket’
- (16) *újì* mbòm
 canoe fishing ‘canoe for fishing’

Sometimes, an associative construction can be serial where more than two nouns are used in the construction without an intervening word.

- (17) *újì* mbòm Ásùk
 canoe fishing Asuk ‘Asuk’s fishing canoe’

In example 17, *uji* is the head of the construct. The other nouns act as modifiers which are used for specificity.

Determiners

Determiners are modifiers that also co-occur with nouns. They modify the meaning range of nouns. Articles, possessives, quantifiers, numerals and demonstratives are determiners.

Demonstratives

A demonstrative is a word that refers to the position of a noun. It shows whether the noun is far or distant from the speaker. Demonstratives basically are proximal and non-proximal or distal (Ndimele, 1996). Demonstratives have the attribute of demonstration in their reference. In a discourse, demonstratives have the supplementary gesture where sometimes the act of pointing makes for definiteness. Some English examples are *this, these, that, those, you, he, she*, and *it*.

It is important to note that demonstratives in Obolo are mainly deictic.

The following proximal pronouns and adjectives show the parameter of distance.

- (18)
- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| i) yì | 'this ...' |
| ii) yâ | 'that ...' |
| iii) kényí | 'this very' |
| iv) chî | 'these' |
| v) chà | 'those' |
| vi) kèchî | 'these very' |
| vii) kèchílò | 'those ones' |

These demonstratives are used in the following sentences. They show nouns that are visible and close to the speaker. These sentences can be gestural as the speaker may add the act of pointing to his expression. The demonstratives are used as post-modifiers.

- (19) Énēnwààñ yì ìrè ñgà ñá.
 woman this is mother mine
 This woman is my mother.

Some of these demonstratives act as proximal pronouns. In 19, *yì* acts as a post-modifier, with the prefixation of *e* to *yì*, *éyì* a proximal pronoun is derived. In example 20, *éyì* is a nominal that cannot be further modified.

- (20) Éyì ìrè ókwùn ñá.
 this is basket mine
 This is my basket.

- (21) Ókwùn kényì ìrè èyí kíbàñ.
 basket this very is be theirs
 This basket is theirs.

The demonstratives *yâ* is used for a referent that is far from the speaker and may or may not be visible but is known by the speaker and the addressee. The demonstratives shown in the examples (22-24) presented below which are used for specificity are post modifiers.

- (22) Ókwùn yâ ìrè èyí ñá.
 basket that is be mine
 That basket is mine.

- (23) Ókwùn **éyà** ìrè èyí nǎ.
basket that one be mine
That basket is mine.
- (24) Ògwú **kèyílò** ìrè inó.
person that very is thief.
That person is a thief.

Quantifiers

Quantifiers are nominal modifiers that express the idea of quantity (Ndimele, 1996). The modifiers in the examples presented below are highlighted.

Table 1: Obolo Quantifiers

S/No.	Quantifier	Meaning	Sample
25.	Gê	particular, one	ùwù gê house one ‘a house’
26.	Ùsini	Some	ùsini èné some persons
27.	Géèlék	each, any	èné géèlék person any ‘any person’
28.	Ògbògbò	Many	ògbògbò èné many persons ‘multitude’
29.	Íwà	too many	ádà íwà pepper much ‘much pepper’
30.	Míwà	very many	ádà míwà pepper very much ‘too much pepper’
31.	Òwúwà	Large	òwúwà èné large person ‘so many people’
32.	Sónjà	a little	sónjà ádà a little pepper
33.	sòntíík	a little	sòntíík ádà a little pepper
34.	Òtútúùk	All	òtútúùk èné all persons ‘every body’
35.	Úgà	much, source	úgà ókwààñ mother river ‘big sea’

The highlighted forms (examples 25- 35) show that quantifiers are used as only pre-modifiers or as post-modifiers except example 28- **ògbògbò** – which can be used as a pre-modifier and a post-modifier **ògbògbò èné/ èné ògbògbò**.

Numerals

A nominal can be modified by a number. A number is expressed through a numeral. Numerals modify countable nouns. Obolo nominal can be modified by the two forms of numerals: cardinal and ordinal.

a. The Cardinal

Cardinal numbers are used for counting. At present, Obolo has a modern counting system which is up to a trillion. This is made possible by an additive process through the modification of the basic units, from number one to nine. The table below gives an overview of Obolo's modern counting system.

Table 2: Obolo Basic Numbers to Hundreds

Number	Basic Unit	Tens
Zero	ófòk 0	àkòp
One	gê 1	àkòp (gê) ten (one) 10
Two	Íbà 2	àkòp íbà ten two 20
Three	Ítà 3	àkòp ítà ten three 30
Four	ínî 4	àkòp ínî ten four 40
Five	Gò 5	àkòp gò ten five 50
Six	Gwèrègwèn 6	àkòp gwèrègwèn ten six 60
Seven	Jààbà 7	àkòpjààbà ten seven 70
Eight	Jèètá 8	àkòp jèètá ten eight 80
Nine	ónááñgê 9	àkòp ónááñgê ten nine 90
Ten	àkòp 10	Éfit Hundred
Eleven	àkòp mè gê ten and one 11	éfit mè àkòp hundred and ten 110
Twelve	àkòp mè íbà ten and two 12	éfit mè àkòp íbà hundred and ten two 120
Thirteen	àkòp mè ítà ten and three 13	éfit mè àkòp ítà hundred and ten three 130
Fourteen	àkòp mè ínî ten and four 14	éfit mè àkòp ínî hundred and ten four 140
Fifteen	àkòp mè gò ten and five 15	éfit mè àkòp gò hundred and ten five 150

b. The Ordinal

Ordinal numbers specify items in a series. The specifier 'oso' is used after the first number in a series. Except for the first ordinal that is used as a pre-modifier, other ordinals are used as postmodifiers. This is in line with Efik where cardinal numbers are post-nominal (Mensah 2011). Examples (36):

- i. àdásí > first 'ádásí íkpá > first book'
- ii. òsô íbà > second 'íkpá òsô íbà > second book'

- iii. òsô ítà > third ‘íkpa òsô ítà > third book’
 iv. òsô ínî > fourth ‘íkpa òsô ínî > fourth book’
 v. òsô gò > fifth ‘íkpa òsô gò > fifth book’

Possessive Pronouns

Possessive pronouns are used as nominal modifiers. The examples below show how these pronouns modify nouns. The examples below show possessive pronouns as post-modifiers.

Table 3: Obolo Possessive Pronouns

Person	Possessive Pronoun	Gloss	Example	Gloss
1 (sg)	ñá	My	újí ñá canoe my	my canoe
1 (pl)	Kìjì	Our	újí kìjì	our canoe
2 (sg)	kwùñ	Your	újí kwùñ	your (sg) canoe
2 (pl)	Kìnyì	Your	újí kìnyì	your (pl) canoe
3 (sg)	kàñ	his/her	újí kàñ	his/her canoe
3(pl)	kìbàñ	Their	újí kìbàñ	their canoe

Relative Clauses

A relative clause is a dependent clause that provides more information about a noun or a noun phrase (COBUILD n.d). In English, the relative clause is a post-modifier. The relative clause in Obolo post-modifies the referent noun.

37. Ataije, **ogwuonunu me iyakwut**, ire ogwu ikpa.
 PN person Adverbial be person book
 Ataije, the person who came yesterday is a literate person.

The highlighted construct in example 37, is a relative clause which modifies the proper noun-Ataije. The relative clause is a post-modifier.

Noun-modifier Order

Every language has rules that order nominal modifiers (Lusekelo 2009). A nominal can have more than one modifier. In such instances, some modifiers come before others. The examples presented in 38 show the noun-modifier ordering in Obolo.

Examples 38:

i. one modifier

- (a) **owu** ile ‘big house’
 house big
 N post-mod

- (b) **gwan** mijaan ‘very beautiful child’
 child INTEN beautiful
 N post-mod

- (c) **otin** ofifit / ofifit **otin** ‘black pot’
 pot black black pot
 N post-mod

The examples shown above present modifiers more as post-modifiers of nominal.

ii. more than one modifier

- (d) asabon ofifit **otin** go ‘five small black pots’
 small black pot five
 size colour N Numeral

- (e) usini **alala** okuket ile otatana ‘some big clean white plates’
 some plates white big clean

- (e) usini ikpele okuket **alala** otatana ‘some big clean white plates’
 some big white plates clean

- (f) oka okpa ofifit **otin** kechi ‘these dirty old black pots’
 old dirty black pots these

- (g) uja nsabon ubon **ebibaan** go ‘five rich beautiful young women’
 beautiful young rich women five

Examples (d) and (g) above show that where there is more than one nominal modifier, they are placed before and after the nominal they modify. The placement as either a pre-modifier or post-modifier has constraints. Examples (d) and (g) show that the number modifier can only be used as a post-modifier.

Matrix on the Modification of Obolo Nominal

The placement of Obolo noun modifiers is shown on the matrix presented below.

S/No	Nominal Modifiers	Pre-head	Post-head
1.	Adjectives		
	i. Underived adjectives	+	-
	ii. Partially reduplicated adjectives	+	+
	iii. Verbal adjectives	-	+
2.	Intensifiers	-	+
3.	Emphasizers	+	-
4.	Associative Construction	-	+
5.	Demonstrative	-	+
6.	Quantifiers	-	+
7.	Numerals	-	+
8.	Possessive Pronoun	-	+
9.	Relative Clause	-	+

Summary

In terms of typology, Obolo nominal modifiers are predominantly post-modifiers and align with the observation (Dryer 2010) that most languages in Africa place modifiers after nouns.

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