

An initial sketch of the Tagom noun phrase

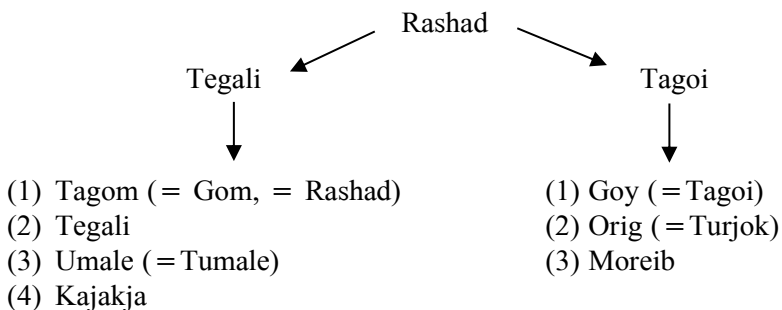
Maha A. Aldawi and Sawsan A. M. Nashid

1. Introduction

This is a descriptive and analytical study that discusses the structure of the Tagom noun phrase (see Dixon (2010) for Basic Linguistic Theory).

Tagom (also known as Gom or Rashad) is a dialect of Tegali, which in turn is a variety in the Rashad group which belongs to Kordofanian, part of the large Niger-Congo phylum (see Greenberg 1963; Schadeberg 1981; Williamson & Blench 2000; Blench 2013). To not confuse group name and dialect name, we use ‘Rashad’ for the former and ‘Tagom’ for the latter (in accordance with Schadeberg (2013)). Actually, the morpheme *ta-* is a locative marker and *-kom* refers to the ethnicity. However, since the dialect Tagom is known by this name, we keep the name of the location rather than the more correct *ḡágóm* with the prefix designating the language (see Schadeberg 2013: 328). The dialect is spoken in Southern Kordofan in the Tegali and Tagom Hills and Rashad town. As stated by Schadeberg (2013: 327), the whole Rashad group, and hence also Tagom, “is the most understudied group of Kordofanian languages – together with Lafofa”.

Figure 1: The Rashad languages (based on Blench 2013: 574)



The field work for this study was carried out with native Tagom speakers living in Khartoum. The primary data was collected during sessions held by the authors between January 2017 and September 2018. Two main informants were involved: Ibrahim Adam Yousif, 45 years of age, and Adil Abdalla Ibrahim Mohamed, 55 years of age.

For the writing of our examples, we use a practical orthography that was developed during a workshop on Tagom segmental phonology held in Khartoum in 2016.¹ The results achieved in terms of the phonemic analysis were supported by the data collected for this paper.

According to our analysis, Tagom has 23 consonants. Table 1 shows their place and manner of articulation:

Table 1: The consonant inventory

	BILABIAL	LABIO-DENTAL	ALVEOLAR	RETROFLEX	PALATAL	VELAR
PLOSIVES	p b		t d	ɖ	c ɟ	k g
PRE-NASALIZED	mb		nd			ŋg
FRICATIVES		f	s		ʃ	
NASAL	m		n		ɲ	ŋ
LATERAL			l			
TRILL			r			
APPROXIMANT	w				j <y>	

Most consonants, i.e. *m, w, r, s, ʃ, t, n, ŋ*, occur in word-initial, intervocalic and final positions. Others have a limited distribution: in word-initial and medial positions *mb, nd, f, l, n*, and *j* are attested, while *p, c, ŋg*, and *k* are only attested in word-initial position, *ɖ, g, d, ʃ* are attested inter-vocalically and *b* is found only in a word-final position. The sound system differs from the one presented by Schadeberg (2013: 328f.), who lists 19 consonants: *ɖ* is missing, instead of *ʃ* he has *h*, and he considers *mb, nd, ŋg* as sequences of consonants. The latter analysis is supported by Hashim (2017: 20): “[...] *ŋágóm* allows consonant sequences in all positions; a nasal followed by stop, i.e. [mb], [nd], [ŋg], are the most common sequences of consonants. E.g. *mbét* (goat), *ŋèndá* (they), and *ŋgít* (eye).” However, Hashim (2017) also lists the retroflex *ɖ* among the obstruents identified: *b, d, ɖ, ʃ, g, p, t, c, k, f, s*. Agreeing with Schadeberg and the analysis in this paper, Hashim (2017) lists the following sonorants: *m, n, ɲ, ŋ, r, l, y, w*.

Tagom vowels can be categorized as the front vowels *ɪ, i, e, e*; the central vowels *ɨ, ə, a, ʌ*; and the back vowels *u, ʊ, o, ɔ*. Although these vowels were identified in the workshop mentioned, their phonemic status is still questionable. Ongoing research might show that some of them may be allophones of the 8 vowels listed by Schadeberg (2013: 328), i.e. *i, e, ε, ə, a, u, o, and ɔ*.

¹ The workshop was one of the activities of the Department of Linguistics within the Tagoi Orthography Development Project, August 10-15, 2016.

This study aims to investigate the following:

- the morphological structure of nouns in Tagom (Section 2.1)
- gender and case (Section 2.2)
- number marking (Section 2.3)
- the semantic group of mass and collective nouns (Section 2.4)
- personal (3.1) and possessive (3.2) pronouns
- the noun phrase (Section 4)
- the order of constituents in a NP (Section 5)

2. The noun

In this section we examine the noun in Tagom. First, we look at the syllable structure and, in the following, we will briefly show that nouns in Tagom are neither differentiated for gender nor for case. We go on to consider in more detail number on nouns, with a special sub-section on the semantic group of mass nouns.

2.1 The syllable structure of the noun in Tagom

Tagom nominal roots are independent forms. The majority have initial consonants except for a few that begin with vowels. These roots are characterized as having monosyllabic, disyllabic or polysyllabic structures. The syllable structures of Tagom nouns are as follows:

Table 2: Canonical shape of nouns in Tagom

	CANONICAL SHAPE	TAGOM	GLOSS
a) Monosyllabic roots	CV	<i>rò</i>	‘chest’
	CVC	<i>fār</i>	‘house’
b) Disyllabic roots	CV.CV	<i>rà.má</i>	‘fence’
	V.CV	<i>à.rá</i>	‘molar teeth’
	V.CVC	<i>ì.ḡéd</i>	‘eye’
	CV.CVC	<i>ndà.gón</i>	‘sorghum’
c) Polysyllabic roots	CV.CV.CVC	<i>ndà.fì.páj</i>	‘aunt’
	V.CV.CVC	<i>ò.gò.món</i>	‘fish’
	CV.CV. CV.CVC	<i>tà.rè.mbú.gét</i>	‘heel’

Some of the nouns in our database have a reduplicated root:

Table 3: Reduplicated nouns

<i>kòlqókólqò</i>	‘calabash pot’
<i>námnpám</i>	‘bug’
<i>làylây</i>	‘medical plant’

Plural marking

The singular of the nouns in this group is an unmarked form (equivalent to the root) while the plural is marked, that is, the plural in this group is derived from the unmarked singular by various affixes. Schadeberg (2013: 331) observed six suffixes (*-ε*, *-εn*, *-εnε*, *-un*, *-n*, *-ndε*) used to mark the plural in Tagom, of which *-ε*, *-εn* and *-εnε* are attached to consonants, and *-un*, *-n*, *-ndε* are attached to vowels. Four of Schadeberg's six suffixes have been supported by our data, i.e. *-e/-ε*, *-ene/-εnε*, *-n*, *-nde/-ndε* (differentiated for height or possibly ATR). With two adjectives (see Section 4.4), *-(y)ɔ* is also attested, the presence of *y* depending on the last root vowel being a consonant or a vowel. In addition, one further suffix is attested in our data: *-ne/-nε*. The first two suffixes, i.e. *-e/-ε*, *-εnε*, are attached to consonants, whereas *-n*, *-ne/ε* and *-nde/-ndε* are attached to vowels, generally supporting Schadeberg's (2013) analysis.

Furthermore, plural prefixes are attested, as already mentioned by Stevenson (1957: 47) for *a-*. Besides *a-*, Schadeberg lists *ε-*, *e-* and *ɔ-*, the latter two occurring only rarely. In our data, the prefix *ɔ-* is not attested. A combination of prefix and suffix, as mentioned by Stevenson, can be confirmed.

In Table 4, all attested plural marking affixes are listed.

Table 4: Plural affixes

SUFFIX	PREFIX	COMBINATION
<i>-e/-ε</i>	<i>a-</i>	<i>a-ROOT-n(e)</i>
<i>-ene/-εnε</i>	<i>e-</i>	
<i>-ne/ε</i>		
<i>-n</i>		
<i>-nde/-ndε</i>		

Tables 5 and 6 contain nouns that exemplify the different suffixes. Some of the examples reveal that voiceless stops in word-final position are voiced intervocally, as also observed by Schadeberg (2013: 329).

Table 5: Plural marking involving the suffix *-e/-ε*

SINGULAR	PLURAL	GLOSS
<i>àjmàmàd-</i>	<i>àjmàmàd-è</i>	'chin'
<i>tàràmbúgét</i>	<i>tàràmbúgéd-é</i>	'heel'
<i>màs</i>	<i>màs-é</i>	'stomach'
<i>ògòmèn</i>	<i>ògòmèn-è</i>	'fish'
<i>àrànj</i>	<i>àrànj-è</i>	'brain'
<i>mìk</i>	<i>mìg-è</i>	'earth'
<i>ngít</i>	<i>ngíd-è</i>	'eye'
<i>óm</i>	<i>óm-è</i>	'person, human being'
<i>òr</i>	<i>òr-è</i>	'moon, month'

Table 6: Plural marking involving the suffix *-éné/-ene*

SINGULAR	PLURAL	GLOSS
<i>áas</i>	<i>áas-éné</i>	‘head’
<i>péér</i>	<i>péér-éné/péer-é²</i>	‘big calabash’
<i>kàl</i>	<i>kàl-éné</i>	‘back of neck’
<i>ndùk</i>	<i>ndùg-éné</i>	‘neck’
<i>lép</i>	<i>lép-éné</i>	‘star’

The suffix *-n*, exemplified in Table 7, is one of the three suffixes that occur attached to nouns ending in vowels.

Table 7: Plural marking involving the suffix *-n*

SINGULAR	PLURAL	GLOSS
<i>mbò</i>	<i>mbò-n</i>	‘knee’
<i>ùù</i>	<i>ùrù-n</i>	‘bone’
<i>ɔ́ré</i>	<i>ɔ́ré-n</i>	‘big basket’
<i>màrì</i>	<i>màrì-n</i>	‘path’

The suffix *-ne/-nɛ* occurs with a low tone and it generally marks nouns ending in vowels:

Table 8: Plural marking involving the suffix *-nè/-nɛ̀*

SINGULAR	PLURAL	GLOSS
<i>kòlqókólqò</i>	<i>kòlqókólqò-nè</i>	‘calabash’
<i>ìndiyé</i>	<i>ìndiyè-nè</i>	‘brother’
<i>íbè</i>	<i>íbè-nè</i>	‘fire’
<i>rɔ́</i>	<i>rɔ́-nè</i>	‘chest’
<i>úrá</i>	<i>úrá-nè</i>	‘upper arm’

The suffix *-ndé/ndé́* attaches to nouns with a high tone and generally occurs after vowel-final roots:

Table 9: Plural marking involving the suffix *-nde/-ndé*

SINGULAR	PLURAL	GLOSS
<i>rámá</i>	<i>rámà-ndé</i>	‘fence’
<i>wélé</i>	<i>wèlè-ndé</i>	‘small calabash pot’
<i>tɔ́gé</i>	<i>tɔ́gè-ndé</i>	‘long calabash pot’
<i>ɲàni</i>	<i>ɲàni-ndé</i>	‘elephant’
<i>ndà</i>	<i>ndá-ndè</i>	‘back of the head’
<i>úgwè</i>	<i>úgwè-ndè</i>	‘night’

² The variation between the suffixes *-e* and *-éné* supports Schadeberg’s (2013: 331) idea that we might be dealing with “a shortened form”, with *-e* based on the longer form *-éné*.

The plural of the examples presented in Table 10 is expressed by prefixation of a vowel. The allomorphs *-a* and *-e* are attested in our data and seem to be morpho-phonologically conditioned. The “prefix is always *a-* before *-CaC*” (Schadeberg 2013: 331). As can be observed with plural prefixing (and with suffixing, as mentioned above), voiceless stops are weakened between vowels and become voiced; see the Tagom singular/plural opposition for ‘leaf’, ‘shoulder’ and ‘child’ in Table 10.

Table 10: Plural marking by prefixing *a-*, *e-*

SINGULAR	PLURAL	GLOSS
<i>rá</i>	<i>á-rà</i>	‘cow’
<i>tàŋ</i>	<i>à-dàŋ / à-dàŋ-è</i>	‘leaf’
<i>tèné</i>	<i>è-déné</i>	‘shoulder’
<i>kíà</i>	<i>á-gíá</i>	‘child’
<i>mbót</i>	<i>è-mbót</i>	‘goat’
<i>ránán</i>	<i>á-ránán</i>	‘stone’
<i>kás</i>	<i>à-gàs</i>	‘root’

A few nouns are marked for plural by both the *a-* prefix and a suffix.

Table 11: Plural marking by prefixation and suffixation

SINGULAR	PLURAL	GLOSS
<i>màrì</i>	<i>á-màrì-n</i>	‘road’
<i>fû</i>	<i>à-fû-n</i>	‘wood’
<i>ták</i>	<i>à-tàg-nè</i>	‘hole’

Replacement pattern

There are a number of nouns of which both the singular and the plural are marked for number. Remarkably, the roots of this group are all monosyllabic and have a root-initial vowel. However, with some plural marked nouns we also find monosyllabic and vowel initial roots. The final vowel that marks the singular *-a*, *-ə* is replaced by the plural suffix *-uən(e)*:

Table 12: The replacement *-a*, *-ə* : *-uən(e)*

SINGULAR	PLURAL	GLOSS
<i>íd-á</i>	<i>íd-uən</i>	‘door’
<i>ðy-ə</i>	<i>ðy-uən</i>	‘shoe’
<i>âr-à</i>	<i>âr-uən/âr-uéné</i>	‘molar teeth’
<i>àŋ-á</i>	<i>àŋ-uən</i>	‘tongue’
<i>ál-à</i>	<i>ál-uən</i>	‘finger’
<i>ón-à</i>	<i>òn-uən</i>	‘hill, mountain’

Irregular number marking

A few nouns have irregular forms, i.e. they do not follow any regular marking rules of the language.

Table 13: Plural marking with irregular forms

SINGULAR	PLURAL	GLOSS
<i>èd</i>	<i>ès</i>	‘man’
<i>yánè</i>	<i>yîn</i>	‘woman/girl/female (n)’

To sum up, the number marking system in Tagom is not a prototypical Nilo-Saharan tripartite number marking system, because it lacks the singulative marking. But generally, the system seems more similar to many systems of Nilo-Saharan languages found in the area than to Niger-Congo systems where one would expect an “elaborate system of noun classification which marks singular/plural alternations with affixes (most commonly prefixes, sometimes suffixes, and occasionally infixes), [...]”. Unlike a typical sex-gender system, where male/female oppositions are extended to inanimates, Niger-Congo semantic classification involves multilateral oppositions: humans, animals, plants, paired body parts, mass nouns and liquids, abstracts and others which are less transparent” (Williamson & Blench 2000: 12). Tagom, as has been shown, has no such an elaborate system and semantics seems to be not correlated to number marking. Nevertheless, in Section 2.4 we will look into the semantic group of mass nouns and collectives to investigate how number is marked.

2.4 Mass and collective nouns:

Some Tagom mass and collective nouns are grammatically singular when unmarked.

Table 14: Inherently Singular

MASS NOUN	GLOSS
<i>rìk</i>	‘sand’
<i>áné</i>	‘sun’
<i>úrák</i>	‘smoke’
<i>ìlì</i>	‘wind’
<i>âw</i>	‘rain’
<i>tólé</i>	‘dust’
<i>púrí</i>	‘ash’
<i>ndáqè̀n</i>	‘sorghum’
<i>ìrì</i>	‘oil’
<i>ígà</i>	‘water’
<i>èpó</i>	‘charcoal’

The following examples, in which the copular verb is singular and agrees in number with the head noun, prove that these nouns are grammatically singular. The demonstrative, by contrast, does not serve to detect the inherent number of the nouns it modifies, since it is itself not differentiated for number (see Section 4.3).

- (6) *tàg yè ôw yùŋ lòd Ø-è(n)*
 year DEM rain POSS3SG a.lot 3SG-COP
 ‘this year’s rain is a lot’
- (7) *èno yè iràm³ Ø-è(n)*
 charcoal DEM black 3SG-COP
 ‘this charcoal is black’
- (8) *ndágèŋ yè áyèb álág Ø-è(n)*
 sorghum DEM sweet very 3SG-COP
 ‘this sorghum is very sweet’
- (9) *ígà yè wíf Ø-è(n)*
 water DEM hot 3SG-COP
 ‘this water is hot’

It is possible, however, for some nouns to form a plural by attaching the suffix *-nde* or *-e* plus a numeral from ‘two’ onwards for the purpose of individualization. Consider the following examples:

- (10) *èno-ndè ndàttá*
 charcoal-PL three
 ‘three pieces of charcoal’
- (11) *ôw-è ndàttá*
 rain-PL three
 ‘three rain showers’

For other nouns, like ‘water’, this seems not to be possible, as (12) shows.

- (12) *ígà wèlê-ndé ndàttá*
 water small.calabash-PL three
 ‘three cups (lit.: calabashes) of water’

Exactly which of the mass/collective nouns can be individualized and which cannot still needs to be investigated.

³ It is *irəm* in Schadeberg (2013: 333).

3. Personal and possessive pronouns

3.1 Personal pronouns

Personal pronouns in Tagom are independent forms with $\eta\grave{i}/\eta\grave{i}^4$ for 1SG, $\eta\grave{o}$ for 2SG, and $\eta\grave{g}\acute{o}$ for 3SG. 1st and 2nd person carry a low tone, while 3rd person $\eta\grave{g}\acute{o}$ has a high tone. The plural forms for 1st and 2nd person consist of the singular form plus $nd\acute{e}$ or $nd\acute{a}$ respectively. All plural forms have a LH tone pattern. In addition to the free forms of the personal pronouns, Tagom has dependent forms attached to the verb (see e.g. (13c) and (14) below). Personal pronouns and their dependent forms referring to the subject are listed in Table 15:

Table 15: Personal Pronouns

PERSON	INDEPENDENT PRONOUN	SUBJECT INDEX ⁵
1SG	$\eta\grave{i}/\eta\grave{i}$	$y-/y(V)-$
2SG	$\eta\grave{o}$	$w-/w(V)-$
3SG	$\eta\grave{g}\acute{o}$	$V-/Ø-$
1PL	$\eta\grave{i}-nd\acute{e}$	$n-/n(V)-$
2PL	$\eta\grave{o}-nd\acute{a}$	$\eta^w-\{+wj\}/\eta^w(V)-\{+w\}$
3PL	$\eta\grave{e}-nd\acute{a}$	$k-/k(V)-$

Nouns are replaceable by personal pronouns in a noun phrase, as for example in (13a) to (13c) below:

- (13) a. *ed* *yè* *àfàndí* $Ø-\grave{e}(n)$
 man DEM teacher SUBJ3SG-COP
 ‘the man is a teacher’
- b. *ηgó* *àfàndí* $Ø-\grave{e}(n)$
 3SG teacher SUBJ3SG-COP
 ‘he is a teacher’
- c. *ηì* *àfàndí* $y-\grave{e}(n)$
 1SG teacher SUBJ1SG-COP
 ‘I am a teacher’

Independent personal pronouns occur in subject and object positions with singular and plural objects; they do not occur in indirect object position. The

⁴ Note that Schadeberg (2013: 332) lists a third allomorph ηe that is not confirmed by our data.

⁵ This information was obtained from the workshop on Tagom Segmental Phonology.

dependent forms are attached to the verb. (For detailed information on the Tagom verb see Aldawi, in preparation.)

- (14) *ŋì ŋèndá yí-lòm*
 1SG 3PL SUBJ1SG-see
 ‘I saw them’

- (15) *ŋgɔ ŋèndá í-lòm*
 3SG 3PL SUBJ3SG-see
 ‘he saw them’

3.2 Possessive pronouns

Possessive pronouns are independent forms that have the monosyllabic structure CVC: *yV̇ŋ* in the singular, and *yV̇n* in the plural. Consider the independent and corresponding dependent forms (the latter are considered again in Section 4.2 on nominal modification) in Table 16:

Table 16: Possessive Pronouns

PERSON	POSSESSIVE PRONOUN	CLITICIZED POSSESSIVE PRONOMINAL
1SG	<i>yèŋ</i>	<i>-(y)èŋ</i>
2SG	<i>yàŋ</i>	<i>-(y)àŋ</i>
3SG	<i>yùŋ</i>	<i>-(y)ùŋ</i>
1PL	<i>yjìn</i>	<i>-(y)ìn</i>
2PL	<i>yàn</i>	<i>-(y)àn</i>
3PL	<i>yèn</i>	<i>-(y)èn</i>

The independent pronoun can stand instead of a noun phrase. Consider the following example, with the possessive pronoun as an answer to a question:

- (16) *mìk yè tá Ø-è(n)? – yèŋ*
 land DEM whose SUBJ3SG-COP – POSS1SG
 ‘whose land is this?’ – ‘mine’

- (17) *faár yè lòq Ø-è(n) yèŋ ítè*
 house DEM big SUBJ3SG-COP POSS1SG small
 ‘this house is big, mine is small’

- (18) *yèŋ k-ás*
 POSS3PL SUBJ3PL-come
 ‘mine came’ (e.g. talking about children)

4. The noun phrase

Structurally, the Tagom noun phrase is made up of an obligatory head, i.e. either a noun or a pronoun or a quantifier, and several optional modifying elements with regard to the noun (see also Payne 2006: 712-20 on noun phrases). These optional elements generally follow the head noun and so are labelled post-head modifiers. Nouns, possessive pronouns, demonstratives, adjectives, and quantifiers are analyzed as the modifiers of the noun phrase in Tagom.

The single noun has been discussed in Section 2, while Section 3 was dedicated to the pronoun. We showed that a single noun, a personal pronoun or a possessive pronoun can function as a full noun phrase. Additionally, quantifiers and demonstrative pronouns can constitute a minimal noun phrase. Consider (19), with a modifying quantifier, and (20), displaying three possible continuations of (19) with quantifiers as minimal noun phrases.

(19) *óm-è* *lót* *ázànf* *ní-ḡér*
 person-PL many invitation SUBJ1PL-invite
 ‘we invited many people’

- (20) a. *tám* *k-ás*
 all SUBJ3PL-come
 ‘all came’
- b. *íté* *k-ás*
 few SUBJ3PL-come
 ‘a few came’
- c. *ndàttá* *k-ás*
 three SUBJ3PL-come
 ‘three came’

An example with a demonstrative used elliptically is presented in (21).

(21) *yè* *lòq* *Ø-è(n)*
 DEM big SUBJ3SG-COP
 ‘this one is big’

⁶ This is an Arabic (Sudanese Colloquial Arabic) borrowing, based on *ʿazuma*; ‘invitation’; usually the invitation is for a meal.

Table 17: The noun and its modifiers

NP	NOUN	MODIFIER	GLOSS
N + N	<i>kíà</i> child	<i>yánè</i> female	‘girl’
N + POSS	<i>è-mbót</i> PL-goat	<i>-àŋ</i> POSS2PL	‘your goats’
N + DEM	<i>kíà</i> child	<i>yè</i> DEM	‘this child’
N + ADJ	<i>yánè</i> female	<i>úqúwàt</i> short	‘short woman’
N + QUAN	<i>rìŋèk</i> food	<i>ítè</i> few	‘some food’
N + NUM	<i>á-gíá</i> PL-child	<i>àmmá</i> five	‘five children’

In addition, the noun phrase may consist of a noun with one or several nominal modifiers, as will be discussed subsequently. An overview is presented in Table 17. The modifier always follows the head.

4.1 The noun as modifier

As is the case in many other African languages, nouns are used to modify other nouns in Tagom: NP ← N + N. Consider the following examples:

- (22) *òn-ùèn* *tágòm* *kàmúr*
 mountain-PL Tagom nice
 ‘the nice mountains of Rashad’

- (23) *faár* *ibráhìim* *yùŋ* *lòt*
 house Ibrahim POSS3SG big
 ‘the big house of Ibrahim’

4.2 The possessive pronoun as a modifier

Possessive pronominal clitics (see Table 16 above) follow the noun (23) or noun phrase (24) they modify: NP ← N + POSS. Judging by the data we collected, it seems that the variation of the pronominals is morpho-phonologically conditioned: if the preceding noun ends with a consonant, the variant without *y* is chosen; if the noun ends with a vowel the variant with *y* is chosen.

- (24) *è-mbót-àŋ* *wî* *k-è(n)*
 PL-goat-POSS2PL sick SUBJ3PL-COP
 ‘your (pl) goats are sick’

- (25) *əhlám ibráhìm yánè-yùŋ èrí kàmúr Ø-è(n)*
 Ahlam Ibrahim female-POSS3SG young beautiful SUBJ3SG-COP
 ‘Ahlam Ibrahim’s young wife is beautiful’

Possessive pronouns are conventionalized elements in the structure of kinship terms so the structure would be NOUN + possessive pronoun; consider the examples below for singular and plural possessum. Note that the possessive pronoun is differentiated from the present tense copula by the context and the syntactic position of each; the possessive follows the head noun and the copula always occupies syntactically the final position of the sentence (see Aldawi, in preparation):

- (26) a. *áná-yèŋ*
 mother-POSS1SG
 ‘my mother’
 b. *áná-ndè-yèn*
 mother-PL-POSS3PL
 ‘their mothers’
- (27) *áná-yèŋ wî Ø-èn*
 mother-POSS1SG sick SUBJ3SG-COP
 ‘my mother is sick’
- (28) a. *kîâ-yòŋ*
 child-POSS2SG
 ‘your child/son’
 b. *áqíá-yèn*
 pl:child-POSS3PL
 ‘their children/sons’
- (29) a. *índí-yèŋ*
 brother-POSS1SG
 ‘my brother’
 b. *índí-y-ènè-yèn*
 brother-EP-PL-POSS3PL
 ‘their brothers’

4.3 Demonstrative modifiers

“The basic function of demonstratives is to point out the spatial position of some entity with regard to the speaker and the hearer. A language usually displays a two or three-way distinction among demonstrative modifiers: near the speaker, near the hearer and/or far from both speaker and hearer” (Croft 1990: 18f.). Tagom differentiates four distances, with the demonstratives *yè* ‘near to speaker’, *yí* ‘near to speaker and hearer’, *íyítí* ‘far from speaker and hearer’ and *íyègò* ‘distant far from speaker and hearer’. The last two forms seem to be composed forms, consisting of a demonstrative and a morpheme referring to a location.

Like other modifiers in Tagom, modifying demonstratives follow the noun in a noun-phrase: NP ← N + DEM. They are not distinguished for number (compare the (a) and (b) sentences of (30) - (33)).

yè/yè ‘near to the speaker’

(30) a. *ìlìg yè abun Ø-è(n)*
 pot DEM clean SUBJ3SG-COP
 ‘this pot is clean’

b. *ìlìg-è yè abun k-è(n)*
 pot-PL DEM clean SUBJ3PL-COP
 ‘these pots are clean’

yì ‘near to both the speaker and hearer’

(31) a. *ón-à yì rìgàl Ø-è(n)*
 mountain-SG DEM2 green SUBJ3SG-COP
 ‘this mountain is green’

b. *òn-òàn yì rìgàl k-è(n)*
 mountain-PL DEM2 green SUBJ3PL-COP
 ‘these mountains are green’

íyítí ‘far from the speaker and hearer’

(32) a. *tàr íyítí àwà Ø-è(n)*
 chair DEM3 new SUBJ3SG-COP
 ‘that chair is new’

b. *tàr-é íyítí àwà k-è(n)*
 chair-PL DEM3 new SUBJ3PL-COP
 ‘those chairs are new’

íyègò ‘very far from the speaker and hearer’

(33) a. *àm íyègò tí Ø-àmè*
 person DEM4 there SUBJ3SG-sit
 ‘that person is sitting over there’

b. *yîn íyègò tí k-àmè*
 girls DEM4 there SUBJ3PL-sit
 ‘those girls are sitting over there’

4.4 Adjectives

“An adjective is a word that can be used in a noun-phrase to specify some property of the head noun of the phrase.” (Payne 1997: 63) Also, adjectives may occur in predication to assign a property to a referent. We will confine ourselves to adjectives as modifiers, since their predicative use, which is also attested in Tagom, does not concern the noun phrase.

Table 18: Number marking with adjectives

SINGULAR	PLURAL	GLOSS
<i>àbbòré</i>	<i>àbbòré-né</i>	‘white’
<i>áryàw</i>	<i>áryàw-è</i>	‘red’
<i>irà̀m</i>	<i>irà̀m-è</i>	‘black’
<i>únú</i>	<i>únú-(w)è</i>	‘ugly’
<i>kàmúr</i>	<i>kàmúr-ó</i>	‘beautiful’
<i>àwà</i>	<i>àwà-n(é)</i>	‘new’
<i>àyèb</i>	<i>àyèb-è</i>	‘sweet’

“The only modifiers that may manifest the same kind of number inflection as nouns in Nilo-Saharan are adjectives.” (Dimmendaal 2000: 218) Similarly, in Tagom, adjectives are marked for plural by the suffix *-é*, *-né*, while the singular is unmarked, and the form agrees in number with the nouns they modify (see examples in Table 18).

Attributive adjectives follow the head noun: NP ← N + ADJ. They agree in number with the noun they modify (see (34) - (36)).

- (34) *ɲì faar àbbòré yì y-ígní*
 1SG house white DEM2 SUBJ.1SG-buy
 ‘I bought this white house’
- (35) *yane àyèb yè é-ndék*
 girl sweet DEM SUBJ.3SG-go
 ‘this sweet girl has left’
- (36) *á-ǵiá kàmúr-ó k-àsè*
 PL-child beautiful-PL SUBJ.3PL-come
 ‘the beautiful girls (lit.: children) are coming’

Tagom uses the adverb *álák* ‘very’ to intensify all adjectives except for the four basic colour terms in the language. Each of these has a distinct ideophonic adverb meaning ‘very’ or ‘totally’ with regard to the relevant colour.

Table 19: Colour adverbs

BASIC COLOUR	IDEOPHONE	GLOSS
<i>aryaw</i>	<i>túr</i>	‘very red’
red	IDEO	
<i>àbbòré</i>	<i>búg</i>	‘very white’
white	IDEO	
<i>riǵàl</i>	<i>sàlàg</i>	‘very green’
green	IDEO	
<i>irà̀m</i>	<i>táb</i>	‘very black’
black	IDEO	

The colour term for ‘yellow’ is not a basic colour term, but is the reduplicated root of ‘sorghum’, i.e. *ndágèñ-*. Thus, the intensifier *álák/álág* is used with it, as demonstrated in (37) (see also (8), (49) and (50)).

- (37) *ilìg-è yè ndágèñndágèñ-é álák àbsùn-è k-è(n)*
 pot-PL DEM yellow-PL very clean-PL SUBJ3PL-COP
 ‘these very yellow pots are clean’

4.5 Quantifiers

Non-numeral quantifiers

Only two non-numeral quantifiers which are used to modify the head noun in a noun-phrase were found in our data: NP ← N+QUAN. Both quantifiers also transmit the notion of size/age and could thus be categorized as adjectives as well.

Table 20: Quantifiers

QUANTIFIER	GLOSS
<i>íté</i>	‘a few, little, a bit; small, young’
<i>lòt/lòd</i>	‘a lot, much, many; big, old’

- (38) *ìgà íté k-èmèn-yá*
 water few SUBJ3PL-spoil-CAUS
 ‘little water has been spoiled (lit.: they spoiled little water)’
- (39) *ìgà lòt cùòr k-èmèn-yá*
 water a.lot without.reason SUBJ3PL-spoil-CAUS
 ‘a lot of water was wasted (lit.: they wasted a lot of water)’
- (40) *fás-è lòt k-únók*
 animal-PL a.lot SUBJ3PL-die
 ‘a lot of animals died’
- (41) *fás-è íté kàrù yèga-dà kà-yè*
 animal-PL few still river-LOC SUBJ3PL-exist
 ‘a few animals remained in the river’
- (42) *á-giá íté álmàdrásá-dà ké-ndé*
 PL-child few school-LOC SUBJ3PL-go
 ‘a few children went to school’

In the following example *íté* is used as a predicative adjective:

- (43) *kíà yè íté Ø-èn*
 child DEM young SUBJ3SG-COP
 ‘this child is young’

Numerals

“Different languages employ different number systems. Almost all natural number systems are either base five (quintenary) or base ten (decimal).” (Payne 1997: 66) Tagom has a base ten number system and has native terms for numbers from one to ten. The language has only two ordinal numbers referring to ‘the first’, *kásá*, and ‘the last’, *tàryaáw*. See the cardinal numerals from one to ten below in Table 21, attested in the present study and confirming Schadeberg’s findings (2013: 338), although the pronunciation differs slightly.

Table 21: Cardinal numbers from 1 to 10

	OWN FINDINGS	SCHADEBERG (2013: 338)
1	<i>indá</i>	<i>(i)ndá; taal</i>
2	<i>(r)àkkò</i>	<i>(a)rkó</i>
3	<i>ndàttá</i>	<i>ndattá</i>
4	<i>ààm/ààrààm</i>	<i>ááráàm</i>
5	<i>òmmá</i>	<i>omma</i>
6	<i>nèrèl</i>	<i>neéféí</i>
7	<i>òməkó</i>	<i>omèrkó</i>
8	<i>tùppá</i>	<i>tuppá</i>
9	<i>fànàssán</i>	<i>fanessân</i>
10	<i>fáŋŋán</i>	<i>fúúŋən</i>

To express the numerals from 11 to 20 the connector *ma* is used (see Table 22).

Table 22: Cardinal numbers from 10 to 20

11	<i>fáŋŋán má indá</i>
12	<i>fáŋŋán má àkkò</i>
13	<i>fáŋŋán má ndàttá</i>
14	<i>fáŋŋán má ààm</i>
15	<i>fáŋŋán má òmmá</i>
16	<i>fáŋŋán má nèrèl</i>
17	<i>fáŋŋán má òməkó</i>
18	<i>fáŋŋán má tùppá</i>
19	<i>fáŋŋán má fànàssán</i>
20	<i>fáŋŋán má fáŋŋán</i>

Cardinal numerals in Tagom are used as noun modifiers. Numerals starting from two onwards are only used with plural nouns. Cardinal numerals are syntactically post-nominal: NP ← N + NUM. Consider the following examples:

- (44) *ɲì á-rà fáɲɲán y-ígnì*
 1SG PL-cow ten SUBJ1SG-buy
 ‘I bought ten cows’
- (45) *ɲgɔ́ úgwè-ndé ràkkò è-ndè*
 3SG night-PL two SUBJ3SG-travel
 ‘he has been travelling for two nights’

Birthnames

A typical areal feature found across a number of Nuba Mountain languages and also in Tagom are birthnames which refer to the position of a child in a family. They are distinguished according to gender (see Table 17).

Table 17: Birthnames

MASCULINE	FEMININE	GLOSS
<i>kèrjá kásá</i>	<i>ɲámá</i>	‘first born’
<i>ɲùdì</i>	<i>ɲání</i>	‘second born’
<i>saábò</i>	<i>ɲùfè</i>	‘third born’
<i>kòmè</i>	<i>ɲàbáj</i>	‘fourth born’
<i>kámáɲ</i>	<i>kádé /kádùn</i>	‘fifth born’
<i>káwà</i>	<i>ɲùdò</i>	‘sixth born’
<i>kòlò</i>	<i>kìdìk</i>	‘seventh born’
<i>kèrjá tàryáw</i>	<i>ɲámá tàryáw</i>	‘eighth born’
<i>ɲùdì tàryáw</i>	<i>ɲání tàryáw</i>	‘ninth born’
<i>kámáɲ tàryáw</i>	<i>kádé/kádùn tàryáw</i>	‘tenth born’

There are distinct names from the first child up to the seventh. From the eighth they start from the beginning by adding *tàryáw* ‘the last’, to the respective name. Thus they say *kèrjá tàryáw* for the eighth and the ninth is referred to as *ɲùdì tàryáw* ‘the second last’. The tenth is referred to as *kámáɲ tàryáw* which means ‘the fifth last’. So there could be two male children in one family called *kèrjá*, *ɲùdì* and *kámáɲ*, as shown in Table 17.

Nowadays, children carry more than one name, i.e. the one based on the order of their birth, and a given name. Thus, we may hear the following statements:

- (46) *ɲání àfà*
 second Asha
 ‘the second born is Asha’
- (47) *saábò ibràhìm*
 third Ibrahim
 ‘the third born is Ibrahim’

5. The Order of NP Constituents

The Tagom noun phrase consists of an obligatory head noun potentially followed by a number of optional modifiers, and shows varying word orders, as the following examples show. Only the position of the head as the phrase-initial constituent is fixed. The demonstrative can either occur immediately following the head or at the end of the noun phrase. Whether there is a difference in meaning still needs to be investigated.

N + two modifiers (example (37) repeated here for convenience)

- | | | | | | | | |
|------|------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|--|
| | NOUN | DEM | ADJECTIVE | | | | |
| (37) | <i>ilìg-è</i> | <i>yè</i> | <i>ndágènddágèñ-é</i> | <i>álág</i> | <i>àbsùn-è</i> | <i>k-è(n)</i> | |
| | pot-PL | DEM | yellow-PL | very | clean-PL | SUBJ3PL-COP | |
| | ‘these very yellow pots are clean’ | | | | | | |

N + two modifiers

- | | | | | | | |
|------|--|-----------|-----------------|------------|---------------|--|
| (48) | NOUN | DEM | NOUN-POSS | | | |
| | <i>èd</i> | <i>yè</i> | <i>tôa-ùŋ</i> | <i>lòq</i> | <i>Ø-è(n)</i> | |
| | man | DEM | talking-POSS3SG | a.lot | SUBJ3SG-COP | |
| | ‘this man’s talking is a lot’ (i.e., this man talks a lot) | | | | | |

N + three modifiers

- | | | | | | | | |
|------|--|---------------|------------|-----------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| (49) | NOUN | ADJ | QUANT | DEM | | | |
| | <i>fáár</i> | <i>àbbòré</i> | <i>lòt</i> | <i>yè</i> | <i>kàmúr</i> | <i>álág</i> | <i>Ø-è(n)</i> |
| | house | white | big | DEM | beautiful | very | SUBJ3SG-COP |
| | ‘this big white house is very beautiful’ | | | | | | |

N + four modifiers

- | | | | | | | |
|------|---|-------------|----------------------------|-------------|-----------|--|
| (50) | NOUN | POSS | ADJ | NUM | DEM | |
| | <i>á-gíá</i> | <i>yèŋ</i> | <i>yánè-yò⁷</i> | <i>àkkò</i> | <i>yè</i> | |
| | PL-child | POSS1SG | female-PL | two | DEM | |
| | <i>kàmúr-ó</i> | <i>álák</i> | <i>k-è(n)</i> | | | |
| | beautiful-PL | very | SUBJ3PL-COP | | | |
| | ‘these my two girls (lit.: female children) are so beautiful’ | | | | | |

⁷ The existing plural forms *yîn* vs. *yánèyò* suggest that the referential noun and the modifier are distinguished: while the plural form for the noun is *yîn*, it is *yánèyò* for the modifier.

N + four modifiers

- (51) NOUN POSS ADJ NUM DEM
á-giá yèŋ yánè-yò àkkò yè
 PL-child POSS1SG female-PL two DEM
íté kàmúr-ó kè(n)
few beautiful-PL SUBJ3PL-COP
 ‘these my two girls (lit.: female children) are a little bit beautiful’

6. Conclusion

The Tagom noun phrase is made up of an obligatory head noun and several optional modifying elements. These optional elements generally follow the head noun of the noun phrase and are hence post-head modifiers. The findings can be summarized as follows:

- The number marking system in Tagom involves plural marking in which several affixes are used to mark nouns. Tagom uses prefixes, suffixes and a combination of both to indicate number. Apart from plural marking, replacement marking is also attested, i.e. that the singular as well as plural forms receive marking, and a few nouns exhibit irregular number marking.
- The language has a fair amount of mass nouns which are grammatically singular unmarked forms.
- There are two sets of personal pronouns: independent forms which replace nouns in a noun phrase, and dependent forms which precliticize to the verb.
- Possessive pronouns may be used in their independent full form when they stand independently, or they can be used as modifiers and as such be attached to the nouns they modify.
- As well as possessive pronouns, Tagom has nouns, demonstratives, adjectives and quantifiers which can be used to modify the head noun in a noun phrase.
- Demonstrative pronouns are not distinguished for number.
- In the structure of the noun phrase, all modifiers follow the head noun.
- The order of NP modifiers in Tagom is relatively free.

Abbreviations

ADJ – adjective; C – consonant; COP – copula; DEM – demonstrative; N – noun; NP – noun phrase; NUM – numeral; PL – plural; POSS – possessive pronoun; QUAN – quantifier; SG – singular; SUBJ – subject; V – vowel.

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