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A grammar of Gaahmg, a Nilo-Saharan language of Sudan
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15 Sentence-level syntax

There is morphological marking in subordinate and interrogative clauses, and a discussion of sentence-level syntax is needed to understand these morphemes. In this chapter, we discuss types of clauses in sentences (15.1), coordinating and subordinating conjunctions (15.2), interrogative structures (15.3), as well as focus (15.4).

15.1 Clause combinations

Clauses may be nuclear (main, independent), pre-nuclear (dependent clause preceding a nuclear clause), or post-nuclear (dependent clause following a nuclear clause).

As in (1a), foregrounded nuclear clauses of narrative texts most commonly use infinitive verbs. However, in non-fiction narratives, a completive verb is also common, as shown in (b).

- (1a) $\bar{a}l\bar{d} = \acute{a}$ \bar{e} **d\bar{o}s-s** \bar{e} **b\bar{a}d-d** $b\bar{a}\bar{e} = n$ \acute{e} $s\bar{a}l\bar{a}d = \grave{a}$
 fox = 3sN start-INF 3sN break-INF jug = DEF GP hyena.
 DEF GEN = DEF
 ‘Fox punctured a hole in Hyena’s jug.’ (Nyee21)

- (b) $j\bar{a}d\bar{e}\bar{e}r = \bar{a}$ **w\bar{a}r-s\bar{a}** $k\bar{a}\eta$ $\hat{u}n\bar{i} = n$ \bar{e} $m\bar{a}d\bar{a}$
 Jader = DEF carried-COMP group 3sPs = DEF with big.size
 ‘Jadar led his very big group.’ (Fand23-24)

Pre-nuclear clauses are introduced with subordinate conjunctions, the most common of which is the conjunction \acute{e} *g\bar{a}r\acute{a}* ‘when’ which often introduces tail-head linkage. In the second line of (2), the subordinate clause refers to ‘an arrival at the well’ implied by the previous nuclear clause, before continuing with the next nuclear clause in the third line. In this way, the subordinate clause links new information with old information contained in the subordinate clause. The verbs of tail-head linkage are most commonly completive verbs, but can also be incomplete or past-continuous.

- (2) \bar{e} $d\bar{o}s-s$ \bar{e} $w\bar{a}j-j$ $\bar{d}\bar{u}m\bar{u}n$ $w\bar{a}\bar{a} = l\bar{g}$ \bar{a}
 3sN start-INF 3sN go-INF towards water.source = in SBJV
 ‘He set out for the well in order to

mā-ḍ = é fēgg. é gārā líj-j=ì wāā = lg = é,
 drink- water GP when /léj/went- water =
 SBJV = IPF COMP = SBO1 in = SBO
 get a drink. When he arrived at the well,

ē gōms-óggō fēgg = á ē nāā é fōl tód-ì.
 3sN found- water = 3sN lay. GP hole. down-
 D.COMP DEF INCPO GEN 3sO
 he discovered that the water was very far down in the well.’ (Goat2-4)

Post-nuclear clauses are introduced by a subordinate conjunction as in (3a) or by a subjunctive verb as in (b). In (b), three subjunctive verbs in three separate post-nuclear clauses are introduced by the subjunctive particle *ā* and give the purpose of the nuclear clause. A further subjunctive clause (*ā māḍé fēgg* ‘to drink water’) is found in the first two lines of (2). Clauses may also be embedded such as the clause *fēgg-á ē nāā é fōl tód-ì* ‘water lay down in the hole’ of the final line of (2) which is a complement of the verb *gōms-óggō* ‘found’.

(3a) á wír-ōn áfād mān tād tē,
 1sN /wír/slaughter-CONT.P blood certain down here
 ‘I am making a sacrifice here because

é kōrá é mósí néé nór-r-ōn tē.
 GP because GP insect this /nár/drool-CAUS-CONT.N here
 because this insect drools here.’ (Jooj9-10)

(b) ānēndá ē dōs- ē bàg-g áḡé = n
 then 3pN start-INF 3pN grab-INF elephant = DEF
 ‘Then they elicited the help of an elephant

ā gəl-ḍ = ḡggèn é ūfú = n tād
 SBJV /gəl/ram-SBJV.3sN = 3pD GP Tabaldi.tree = DEF down
 in order to break down the Tabaldi tree for them

ā gār-rā ā nám-ḍá nālg é jēērēmā = n.
 SBJV be.able- SBJV eat-SBJV.3sN children GP devil.GEN =
 SBJV.3sN DEF
 so as to eat the nyeerma offspring.’ (Nye8-10)

15.2 Conjunctions

Conjunctions are a further lexical category, introducing either nuclear or non-nuclear (subordinate) clauses. The coordinate conjunctions of (4) are found to introduce nuclear clauses. Some references in texts from chapter 17 are listed for the

conjunctions. In addition, it is also possible to juxtapose nuclear clauses without any conjunction.

Table 60: Coordinate conjunctions

ð	‘and’	Nyee4, 27, Fand13, Assa1, 3, 9, 12
ɖɛ̀	‘then, since’	Fand20, 22, Womn11
tāén	‘then’	Fand28, Minj13
ānēndá	‘then, therefore’	Minj12, Womn11, 17, 24
énná	‘therefore, thus’	Fand5
mìntààðéé	‘thereafter’	Thng4
gâl	‘in that way’	Nyee28
lôŋ	‘then, until’	Goat6, 12, 16, Nyee15, Thng10

The conjunctions *ɖɛ̀* ‘then, since’ and *lôŋ* ‘then, until’ are analyzed as coordinate conjunctions, since subordinate marking in the clause never occurs with them. The conjunctions *ānēndá* ‘therefore’ and *ɖɛ̀* ‘then, since’ are shown in (4c); the conjunction *lôŋ* ‘then, until’ is shown in (5e).

(4) **Coordinate conjunctions**

- (a) jīnná wā-in = ñggè tú = í é kōrá
 that go-INCP = IPF out = SBO GP because
 ‘They remarry because’
- (b) ðððgg = ó nà óŋ tɛ̄ jīs-ān = ñggè bèèndɔ̄ = éé = n.
 women = REL bad here /jīs/make- wrongdoing =
 DEF CONT.N = 3pA SBO = DEF
 bad women (their first wives) make them do wrong.
- (c) **ānēndá**, bìì bìì-ɖə̀ bèèndɔ̄ = á àwɖàmàlɔ̄ **ɖɛ̀**
 therefore /bìj/let. /bèè/say- wrongdoing = please since
 IMP IMP.PL DEF
 So let us please stop the wrongdoing since
- (d) bèèndɔ̄ = á t̄él ná t̄ál-ɖ̄ áāgg = é jónm = ì wá.
 wrongdoing = God REL /t̄ál/create-COMP /jónm/want. not
 DEF 1pA = RDM INCP = 3sAM
 God who created us doesn’t want us to do wrong.’ (Womn9-12)

The subordinate conjunction *wār* ‘but’ of table 61 has only been attested to introduce post-nuclear clauses, but the other conjunctions of table 61 introduce pre-nuclear and post-nuclear clauses.

Table 61: Subordinate conjunctions

é gārā	‘when, while’	Goat3, 7, 17, Fand 1, 7, 8, 15
é kārā	‘because’	Jooj9, Assa5, Tifa6, Womn9
(ār)	‘if’	Goat14, 15, Fand20, Thng21, Womn21
wār	‘but’	Nyee13

The subordinate marking in the clause occurs along with these conjunctions as a clitic on the verb, or clause finally, or both. It is more common for the conjunction *ār* ‘if’ to be absent from the clause than to be present, although there is subordinate marking regardless. As shown in 10.7, the verb-final subordinate clitic attached in ‘if’ clauses differs in tone from the clitic attached to verbs of other subordinate clauses.

In (5c), the conjunction *wār* ‘but’ occurs along with the verb-final subordinate clitic =*ī* (SBO3). In (d), the conjunction *é gārā* ‘when’ occurs along with the verb-final subordinate clitic =*ī* (SBO1) and the clause-final subordinate clitic =*É* (SBO). In (4a), the conjunction *é kārā* ‘because’ occurs along with the clause-final subordinate clitic =*É* on *bèènāq* = *éé* = *n* ‘wrongdoing = SBO = DEF’ where the definite clitic =*n* for vowel-final stems is also attached.

(5) **Subordinating conjunctions**

- (a) ē dōs-s ē bāgg kár = á dí
 3pN /dōs/start- 3pN /bāg/grab. wild.cow = also
 INF SBJV DEF
 ‘They also elicited the help of the buffalo

- (b) ē gəl-ḍ = īn ḍ-éēn ná tād dí,
 3sN /gəl/ram- PP-3sO REL down also
 SBJV.3sN = 3sD
 in order to break it down for them,

- (c) wār ā gār-rā ē gəl-ḍ = ī ḍ-éēn ná tād wá.
 but SBJV /gār/able- 3sN /gəl/ram- PP-3sO REL down not
 SBJV.3sN SBJV.3pN =
 SBO3
 but she was not able to break it down.

- (d) é gārā kāhs-s = ī ūfú = n = í, ē dōs-s
 GP when /kān/strike- hijliij.tree = 3sN /dōs/start-INF
 COMP = SBO1 DEF = SBO
 When she struck the tree,

- (e) l̄əŋ ē wāŋ-ŋ s̄im ūfú ǝǝŋ.
 until 3sN /wāŋ/go-INF down tree body
 (her horns) went deep into the tree.’ (Nyeel 1-15)

15.3 Interrogatives

Questions are constructed using the question marker *à* or an interrogative pronoun. Only the interrogative pronouns of (6b-e) agree in number with the noun phrase which they replace. Some interrogative pronouns have a marked form when they replace words which occur in an uncommon position in the clause, but are otherwise unmarked. Other interrogative pronouns only have one form regardless of its position in the clause. When any of the interrogative pronouns are pre-verbal, the clause-final subordinate clitic =É (SBO) of 7.7 and 8.3.8 attaches sentence-finally. When an interrogative pronoun replacing an adverb is pre-verbal, the verb-final subordinate clitic =ī (SBO1) of 10.7 is attached to the verb.

(6) Interrogatives

Unmarked		Marked		
SG	PL	SG	PL	
(a) à	à			QM
(b) ŋān	ŋānóǝǝ			‘who’
(c) ŋānān	ŋānāǝǝ			‘for whom’
(d) é ŋān	é ŋānāǝ		é ŋǝnǝ	‘whose’
(e) níí	níígg	níínā	nííggǝ	‘what’
(f) ná ís̄ín	nà ís̄ín			‘which’
(g) t̄ā ís̄í	t̄ā ís̄í			‘which’
(h) ǝǝì		ǝǝȳín		‘when’
(i) (fān) ǝǝ		fān ǝǝēn		‘where’
(j) (fān) ís̄í				‘how’
(k) ǝrǝŋ				‘why’

In the example questions to follow, typical answers to the questions are in parentheses. The examples are all with singular interrogatives; plural interrogatives take similar constructions.

As discussed in 14.6.6, questions with yes/no responses have the question marker *à* sentence-finally.

- (7) j̄āā = n bānǝāl t̄ír-sǝ t̄óó ná s̄èggār = één à
 person = DEF weak kill-COMP cow REL strong = RDM QM
 ‘Did the weak person kill the strong cow?’ (Yes./No.)

The relativizer *ná* along with the interrogative pronoun *isín* ‘which’ takes the place of a relative clause. When taking the place of a relative clause modifying a subject, it can be pre-verbal as in (12a) or post-verbal as in (b). When taking the place of a relative clause modifying an object, it can be post-verbal as in (c) or pre-verbal in (d). Another way of replacing a relative clause is with the copula *ǵā* and the interrogative pronoun *isí* ‘how’ as in (e).

- (12a) *jāā ná isín ǵír-só ǵḍḍ = n = ē*
 person REL which kill-COMP cow.GEN = DEF = SBO
 ‘Which person killed the cow?’ (The weak person killed the cow.)
- (b) *ǵḍḍ = n ǵír-s = ǵ jāā ná isín*
 cow = DEF kill-COMP = PAS.A person.GEN REL which
 ‘Which person killed the cow?’ (The weak person killed the cow.)
- (c) *jāā = n ǵír-só ǵḍḍ ná isín*
 person = DEF kill-COMP cow REL which
 ‘Which cow did the person kill?’ (The person killed the strong cow.)
- (d) *ǵḍḍ ná isín ǵír-s = ǵ jáā = n = ē*
 cow REL which kill-COMP = PAS.A person.GEN = DEF = SBO
 ‘Which cow did the person kill?’ (The person killed the strong cow.)
- (e) *ǵḍḍ = n ǵā isí ǵír-s = ǵ jáā = n = ē*
 cow = DEF COP how kill-COMP = PAS.A person.GEN = DEF = SBO
 ‘Which cow did the person kill?’ (The person killed the strong cow.)

The interrogative pronoun *ǵḍḍ* ‘when’ takes the place of adverbs of time. It is unmarked post-verbally as in (13a), but has a marked form in (b). As in (13b), when an interrogative pronoun replacing an adverb is pre-verbal, the verb-final subordinate clitic =*ǵ* (SBO1) used on ‘when’ clauses in 10.7 is attached to the verb *ǵír-s* ‘kill-COMP’.

- (13a) *jāā = n ǵír-só ǵḍḍ = n ǵḍḍ*
 person = DEF kill-COMP cow = DEF when
 ‘When did the person kill the cow?’
 (The person killed the cow yesterday.)
- (b) *ǵḍḍ yīn jāā = n ǵír-s = ǵ ǵḍḍ = n = ē*
 when person = DEF kill-COMP = SBO1 cow.GEN = DEF = SBO
 ‘When did the person kill the cow?’
 (The person killed the cow yesterday.)

Similarly, the interrogative pronoun (*fān*) *ǰá* ‘where’ is a substitute for adverbs of place. It is unmarked post-verbally as in (14a), but has a marked form in (b), again with the verb-final subordinate clitic =*ɿ* (SBO1) attached to the verb *fír-sǰ* ‘kill-COMP’.

- (14a) *jāā* = n *fír-sǰ* *ǰó* = n (***fān***) ***ǰá***
 person = DEF kill-COMP cow = DEF towards where
 ‘Where did the person kill the cow?’
 (The person killed the cow near the house.)

- (b) ***fān*** ***ǰáēn*** *jāā* = n *fír-s = ɿ* *ǰǝ* = n = ***ē***
 towards where person = DEF kill-COMP = SBO1 cow.GEN = DEF = SBO
 ‘Where did the person kill the cow?’
 (The person killed the cow near the house.)

The interrogative pronoun (*fān*) *īsí* ‘how’ is a substitute for adverbs of manner. The interrogative pronoun *ǎrǎŋ* ‘why’ is a substitute for other verbal adjuncts.

- (15a) *jāā* = n *fír-sǰ* *ǰó* = n (***fān***) ***īsí***
 person = DEF kill-COMP cow = DEF towards how
 ‘How did the person kill the cow?’
 (The person killed the cow with force.)

- (b) *jāā* = n *fír-sǰ* *ǰó* = n ***ǎrǎŋ***
 person = DEF kill-COMP cow = DEF why
 ‘Why did the person kill the cow?’
 (The person killed the cow because it was ill.)

15.4 Focus

Focus is constructed by fronting the constituent which the speaker deems as the most important bit of information for the clause. Both subjects and objects can be fronted in focus.

Normally, prepositional phrases used as adjunct conjunctions such as *ē mūn náán* ‘at that time’ occur sentence-initially or following a conjunction.

- (16a) *ǝ* ***ē*** ***mūn*** ***náá = n***,
 and with time that = DEF
 ‘At that time,

- (b) *bāárg = á* *ŋáó-ǎ`n* *ŋā-lg* *nà* *ǎn-g = ì*
 Baggara = DEF /ŋáw/search.for-CONT.P girl-PL REL young-PL = RDM
 the Baggara (people group) were kidnapping young girls.’ (Minj1-2)

However, subjects are brought into focus when placed before such phrases, as in (17). In this concluding sentence of a narrative where a fox and hyena try throughout to capture and eat him, the devil creature is fronted in order to emphasize him as being the victor.

- (17) **jéérèmà = n** é gāránǎ ē áǎ-ǎǎ gā̀nà
 devil = DEF GP that.time 3sN became-SBJV.3sN laughing
 ‘The nyeerma, at that time, went on laughing.’ (Nyee34)

In the first line of the *Fandi* text, the main participant is marked as being salient, or most important, by fronting it. The noun subject *Fǎ̀ndi-n* which normally follows the subordinate conjunction *é gārǎ* ‘when’ is sentence-initial.

- (18) **fǎ̀ndi = n** é gārǎ ǎǎ-s = ð mǎ̀rǎǎ-gg = ē = né
 Fandi = DEF GP when fight- COMP = IPF government-PL = ACM = SBO
 ‘When Fandi fought with the government, . . .’ (Fand1)

Objects are brought into focus by moving them to a pre-verbal position. The object *mí-n* ‘chicken’ in (19) is out of its normal post-verbal position to emphasize that it is the ‘chicken’ being thrown away and not the ‘goat’.

- (19) **mí = n** á gǎn tú
 chicken = DEF 1sN throw.INCP out
 ‘The chicken I am throwing away.’ (Jafr11)

In (20), the relative clause, describing a certain group of women, and functioning as the recipient of the transitive verb /gǎf/ ‘give’, is brought to the beginning of the sentence. The meaning is ‘It is those kinds of women and not others whom God blesses.’

- (20) **nà ǎn tǎ-yǎgg = ì** tǎl gǎf = ñggǎn jǎgg
 REL stay.INCP doors-theirs = RDM God gives.INCP = 3pD things
 ‘To those who stay in their homes, God gives them things.’ (Womn13)

Pre-verbal objects are emphasized when there is a post-verbal subject and agentive passive clitic attached to the verb. The sentence of (21) is the concluding remark of a personal story where a creature repeatedly tries to attack the narrator and other participants. The construction emphasizes the outcome of the object *jǎām* ‘someone’ (‘no one’ with negation).

- (21) **jǎām kǎ̀m-s = ì** ǎ-éēn wá.
 someone /káām/bothered.CAUS-COMP = PAS.A PP-3sO not
 ‘No one was bothered by it.’ (Thng25)

