

## The Kensiu Noun Phrase

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### ABSTRACT

Austroasiatic languages in Malaysia are considered as moribund languages because these languages are experiencing extinction. With regard to this issue, this writing focusses on one of the moribund languages in Peninsular Malaysia, namely the Kensiu Language, which currently is in an alarming state of disuse. The fact that the language is heading towards extinction led to this study as an effort to prevent this unique language from dying off. This language is spoken by the Kensiu people of Baling, Kedah. For the purpose of this paper, the researchers placed emphasis on the discussion of the noun phrase (NP) of the Kensiu Language. The analysis of the noun phrase of the Kensiu Language in this working paper comprises two aspects, namely, the descriptive and syntactic aspects. For the former aspect, the analysis describes the noun phrase of the Kensiu Language and all sequences that form a noun phrase. Based on the descriptive analysis, the researchers outline arguments on the X' syntactic structure of Kensiu's noun phrase using the X-bar theory. The analysis reveal that in the NP of the Kensiu Language, the complements and adjuncts are always on the right-hand side of the NP.

*Keywords:* Auatroasiatics, Kensiu, X-bar, moribund, Peninsular Malaysia, Baling

### INTRODUCTION

Indigenous languages in Malaysia are divided into Austronesia and Austroasiatic

languages (Fazal Mohamed Mohamed Sultan, 2011; Fazal Mohamed Mohamed Sultan & Mohd Romzi Ramli, 2015). The Austroasiatic family is further divided into several different languages. One of the languages spoken in the peninsula is composed of languages from the Mon-Khmer family. According to Benjamin and Chou (2003), there are only about 65,000 people in Peninsular Malaysia who still

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speak languages from the Mon-Khmer family. In general, there are 18 languages comprising the Mon-Khmer family in Peninsular Malaysia (Burenhult, 2002). However, this paper only focusses on one of the Austroasiatic language families in Peninsular Malaysia, namely, the Kensiu Language, which currently is an endangered language (Fazal Mohamed Mohamed Sultan, 2011). The total number of native speakers of the language is less than 200 people (Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli, 2015). This paper focusses on the discussion of the noun phrase (NP) in the Kensiu Language. The analysis of the NP of the Kensiu Language is divided into two aspects, namely, the descriptive and the syntactic aspects of the language. The descriptive analysis provided in this paper describes the noun phrase of the Kensiu Language while the syntactic analysis utilised the X-Bar theory (Chomsky, 2000) to explicate the syntactic phrase of the Kensiu noun phrase (NP) structure.

#### *Kensiu Noun Phrase*

For too long now, the verb phrase has been the dominant focus of attention of any syntactic analysis. This analysis chose to focus on the NP instead and all the lexical and functional words that form it. The establishment of the NP involves all the words that follow and precede the head noun of the NP of the Kensiu Language. Consequently, data analysis of the NP involved both the descriptive and syntactic analysis using the X-Bar theory.

A field study involving five informants aged between 50 and 70 years was conducted as a means of obtaining relevant data.

#### *Words that Precede a Noun in Kensiu*

This section discusses the parts of speech that precede a noun in the Kensiu Language. In the discussion, an argument arose: In the Kensiu Language, a noun can be preceded by two types of words that are known as numerals or quantifiers and classifiers. The initial discussion highlights the identification of nouns and the types of words that precede them. The researcher found that masculine words of the Kensiu Language cannot be pluralised with certain adjustments. Alternatively, it uses the quantifier *jenuh*, which means 'many' to pluralise a noun. Therefore, all the masculine words are pluralised by the presence of this quantifier as in given in (1 a-b). In fact, such a quantifier always precedes a noun in the Kensiu Language:

- (1) a. *jenuh hihuk*  
a lot of woods
- b. *jenuh betiu*  
a lot of water

The NP in the Kensiu language can also be preceded by classifiers. The Kensiu Language uses only one type of classifier and no differences or agreement occurs in this language, as shown in (2):

- (2) a. *biya kebek naka*  
two class jackfruits
- b. *biya kebek lembu*  
two class cows

The presence of classifiers is not mandatory and can be optional, instead. The optional nature is described below:

- (3) a. biya (kebek) naka  
two (*class*) jackfruits
- b. biya (kebek) lembu  
two (*class*) cows

(1) to (3) reveal that the presence of classifiers and numerals/quantifiers is based on a fixed order. Classifiers always precede a noun and numerals/quantifiers precede the classifiers in the NP of the Kensiu Language. Therefore, the order of the NP of the Kensiu Language can be arranged as given in (4):

(4) numerals/quantifiers - classifiers – noun

The order of the NP as shown above forms a sequence that alludes to three points that deserve careful attention. The first point is that the numerals/quantifiers and classifiers form a strict order where the numerals/quantifiers precede the classifiers and the classifiers precede the noun head as described in (4). The second point is that the classifiers cannot exist without the numerals/quantifiers but, on the other hand, numerals/quantifiers may be present without classifiers in an NP. This shows that the presence of classifiers is optional. The third point is that an agreement is absent in any encounter between a head noun with classifiers, which can precede the noun. Furthermore, classifiers in the Kensiu Language are not productive. There is only one type of classifier, which is known as *kebek*.

*Words that Follow a Noun in the NP of the Kensiu Language*

In the Kensiu Language, a noun is not necessarily preceded by a group of words. The head noun in this language also consists of a group of words that follow the noun to form an NP. Nouns may be followed by a possessive marker and determiner. The possessive marker in this language can be represented by pronouns.

The use of pronouns in this language is not productive. Unlike the English Language, Kensiu as a language does not contain a large number of personal pronouns. The pronouns in this language are listed in (5) as follows:

(5)

Pronouns	Pronouns in Kensiu Language
I	yek
He	tak (lelaki)
She	yak (perempuan)
We	yam
You	bok

This language does not use specific words for the pronouns I and you as is the case in the English Language. Even so, the pronouns for male and female are distinguished. This indicates that the Kensiu Language marks gender differences in third-person pronouns as described in (6):

- (6) a. tak Nasir  
He[+man] Nasir  
He is Nasir.

- b. yak Aminah  
She[+woman] Aminah  
She is Aminah.

Words that form the NP in the Kensiu Language do not necessarily precede the head noun but there are also words that follow it such as the possessive pronouns in phrase (7) and (8):

- (7) heyak yak  
hut I  
'My hut'

- (8) cas yak  
hand I  
'My hand'

In addition to this order, this language also contains determiners. This language has only one determiner, which is *on*. This determiner usually follows the noun as portrayed in (9):

- (9) a. awe on  
bamboo the  
'The bamboo'  
b. menek on  
human the  
'The human/people'

The discussion in (7), (8) and (9) above illustrates a meaningful sequence in which there are two groups of words that follow the noun; they are the determiner and the possessive marker. However, this language does not allow the concurrent presence of both NPs:

- (10)\*a. yak yek on  
She I the  
\*b. yak on yek

The example given in (10b), nonetheless, illustrates that the determiner and the possessive marker complement each other in the Kensiu Language.

In general, the NP in the Kensiu Language may consist of numerals/quantifiers, classifiers, nouns, possessive markers and determiners. All four parts of speech have a fixed/obligatory order in the Kensiu Language. The sequence that these four parts of speech should follow is the following order:

- (11) numeral/quantifier - classifier -  
noun - possessive / determiner

## SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS OF THE NOUN PHRASE

### *X-Bar Theory*

A mechanism that is assumed to be a structural representation of a sentence is the phrase structure rule (FSR) called the X-Bar theory. This theory follows a principle known as the Projection Principle, which ensures that every word in a sentence is correctly projected at every level of syntax:

- (12) Projection Principle (Chomsky, 1981)

Representation at every level of syntax is projected from the lexicon based on subcategorisation of each lexical item.

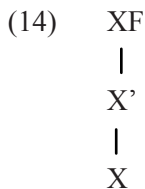
This principle is based on conditions rather than a formula in order to produce a structural representation of a lexical item. This principle has two conditions; first, the representation of each lexical item must be guided by subcategorisation of each lexical item, and second, a representation

by subcategorisation that is represented by the X-Bar theory must be scrutinised at every level of syntax (L-Structure and Logical Form).

The projection principle only becomes a regulation that is followed for representation of each lexical item in the structure of a sentence but this principle does not state the way to delegate each lexical item in the tree diagram. This role is covered by a different principle, namely, the X-Bar Principle. This principle is also concerned with the conditions and not the rules to represent each item in the lexical representation of a sentence. This principle was introduced by Chomsky (1970) and was later modified by Jackendoff (1977) and subsequently by Stowell (1981). This formula has three conditions, namely:

- (13)
- a. The existence of every phrase must be endocentric.
  - b. The presence of three levels of FX, X and X
  - c. Head position (X) is one level below the X-Bar (X ‘) organised directly by the phrase node (FX)

The conclusion of the discussion of the three conditions in (13) is illustrated in (14):



However, the X-Bar theory has a position known as the adjunct and it forms a rule called adjunct rules:

(15) a.  $X' \longrightarrow X'; ZF$

In (14) and rule (15) can be encapsulated to form a phrase structure rule for a phrase, namely:

- (16)
- a.  $XF \longrightarrow Spec; X'$
  - b.  $X' \longrightarrow X'; ZF$
  - c.  $X' \longrightarrow X; YF$

In this section, three conditions essential to the X-Bar theory is discussed. As a result of this discussion, frameworks (16a) to (16c) were designed and they can be used as a basis for the representation of a sentence.

### ANALYSIS OF NP IN KENSIU

Discussions in the early part of the section claimed that the NP of the Kensiu Language can be divided into two parts; a NP that consists of words that follow and words that precede the head noun. The analysis in the next section argues that numerals/quantifiers and classifiers can precede the head noun in the Kensiu language. The numerals may consist of words like *biya*, ‘two’, and *nai*, ‘one’, or the quantifier *jenuh*, ‘many’. There is only one classifier known so far, which is *kebek*. Words such as the possessive *yak*, ‘I’, and the determiner ‘on’, ‘the’, may follow the head noun in the Kensiu Language.

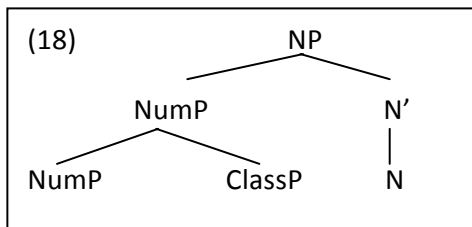
Therefore, the syntactic analysis of the NP in Kensiu would involve all the elements that precede and follow the head noun of the NP.

*Elements that Precede an NP*

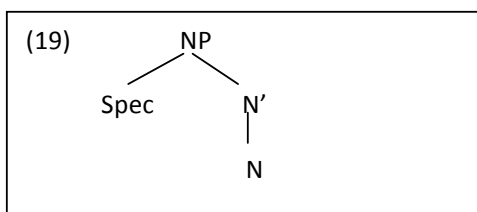
In the preliminary discussion, we were aware that the elements that precede the head noun are the numerals/quantifiers and classifiers in which an NP has three significant points. The first point is that the numerals/quantifiers and classifiers follow a stringent word order. Secondly, the presence of classifiers requires numeral/quantifier words to exist concurrently. Lastly, the semantic features of the head noun do not determine the presence of classifiers that precede the head noun of the NP. This eventually leads to the notion that no agreement exists between the head noun and classifiers. The first point that involves a strict word order for numerals/quantifiers, classifiers and head noun can be arranged as shown in (17):

- (17) numeral / quantifier - classifier  
- head noun

In Example (17), guided by the X-Bar theory regarding conditions for the presence of quantifiers and classifiers before the head noun, the researchers suggested an NP structure as shown in (18):

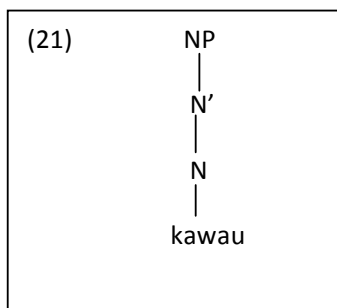


Next, the study discusses the validity of the presence of each constituent in structure (18) in order to conform to the structure of X-Bar theory. According to the theory of the X-Bar, every phrase must be endocentric. In other words, every phrase must have a head and be in the position of a specifier. An NP structure that meets the requirements of the X-Bar theory is illustrated in Example (19):



Example (19) reflects the endocentric nature of the NP because the phrase consists of a head, which is a noun known as a head noun. Therefore, the noun (20) *kawau* may be illustrated as in diagram (21):

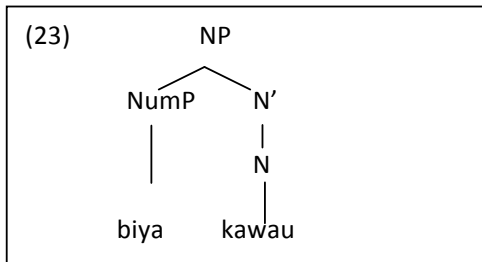
- (20) *kawau*  
bird



Next, the head noun in diagram (21) can also be followed by another noun. This noun is positioned at the specifier position following the X-Bar theory. The NP *biya kawau* ‘two birds’ consists of two words,

which are known as the numeral *biya* and a head noun, *kawau*. The quantifier *biya* in (22) is assigned to a specifier position and is represented by numeral phrase (NumP) to establish a structure as described in (23):

- (22) *biya kawau*  
many birds



The NP structure in (23) is in line with the explanation by Chomsky (1986) and Abney (1987), who proposed that a head noun can mark a theta. As a head noun, the constituent has a theta role, which has to be marked on the argument. Therefore, the head can ‘theta mark’ its argument. The researchers suggest that the theta is to be marked on the specifier position, which is occupied by the NumP. This proposal has similarities with the theta marking of a verb on its external arguments, which occupies the Specifier INFLP or the Specifier VP in the hypothesis Subject-Verb-Phrase hypothesis (VP Subject Hypothesis) in a sentence. Consequently, the NumP position is considered as an external argument and complies with the requirements of the head noun. This discussion has reflected the first point of the word order of the numeral and

the head noun as well as the presence of each constituent in the NP in the Kensiu Language. The presence of classifiers is discussed in the following section.

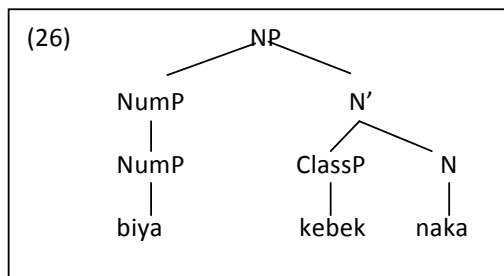
This section further discusses the presence of two classifiers in the NP. The presence of these classifiers has to meet all the three points that have been discussed above, that not all classifiers are obligatory and they do not depend on the semantic features of the noun as in (3a-b) and are repeated as (24a-b):

- (24) a. *biya kebek naka*  
two class jackfruit  
b. *biya kebek lembu*  
two class cows

That being said, the presence of classifiers requires numerals as reflected in the differences between (25a) and (25b):

- (25) \*a. *kebek naka*  
\*b. *kebek lembu*

There are two observations worth noting here: 1) the presence of classifiers requires numerals/quantifiers; 2) the absence of agreement between classifiers and the head nouns.



The researcher suggests that based on structure (19) and the assertion on structure (23) above, the NP in (24a) may be described as (26). Efficacy of the syntactic structure of (26) may be debated in accordance with the three points described above.

NumP in (26) is known as an adjoined structure. The presence of an adjoined structure does not violate the X-Bar theory and the Principle Structure Preservation (Chomsky, 1986) because its presence does not destroy any of the structures that were determined by the X-Bar theory. In contrast, the structure only faces an additional structure (Heagemann, 1994). The claim by the researchers of this study has its own implications. The researcher intends to claim that the NP structure in the Kensiu Language partakes of this structure. However, not all phrases have the adjunct structure. Such a structure is not universal but is specific to a particular language only.

However, the adjunct structure is acceptable if the structure such as in (26) can explain the second and third points as discussed about the presence of classifiers and numerals/quantifiers in the Kensiu Language. The second point claims that the presence of classifiers is not obligatory and does not depend on the type of head noun. The writer believes that this is caused by the absence of the semantic features [ $\pm$  animate,  $\pm$  human] on a noun such as those that exist in the Malay Language, which determines the type of classifier that may be present with the noun (Fazal Mohamed Mohamed Sultan, 2008). Therefore, the brackets used in structure (27) are to reflect the situation

due to the third point, which refers to the lack of agreement between numerals/quantifiers and classifiers.

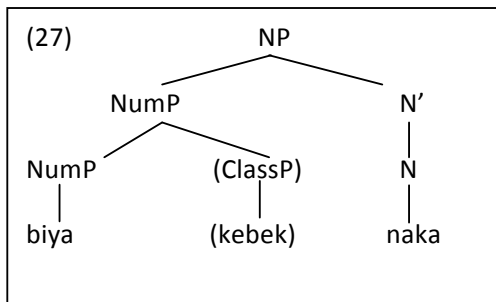


Diagram (27) supports the point that two classifiers require the presence of numerals/quantifiers. Furthermore, this structure could explain the ungrammaticality of phrase as seen in (25a) and (25b). This, obviously, is due to the presence of a classifier that forms the adjunct structure. Therefore, if numerals/quantifiers do not appear in phrase (25a) and (25b), the adjunct structure would not be formed and the classifiers would not have a position to present in the syntactic structure of the NP. This would cause the phrase to be marked as ungrammatical. Conversely, the absence of the classifiers would cause the NumP to project a structure without adjunct position as shown in (23) without any problem. The brackets support the third point, which is that there is no agreement that requires the presence of classifiers.

*Element that Follows an NP*

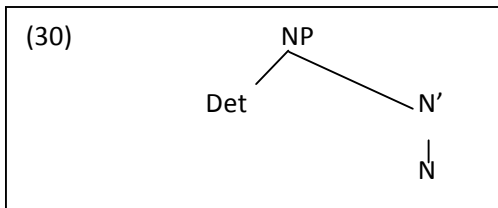
The discussion in section 4.2 explains that there are two elements that follow the head noun of the NP in the Kensiu Language. This element consists of a determiner, on, such as shown in phrase (28) and a possessive



marker like *yak* as shown in the phrase (29):

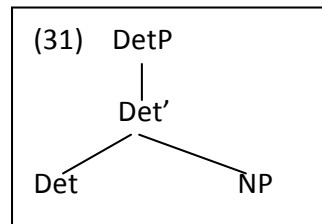
- (28)    *awe*    *on*  
           *bamboo* *the*
- (29)    *awe* *yak*  
           *house* *my*

Both of the phrases follow a fixed order similar to other elements that precede the noun in the Kensiu Language as shown in (28) and (29). Conventionally, the noun phrase is considered the result of the maximum projection of a noun (N) (Jackendoff, 1977), as illustrated in (30):



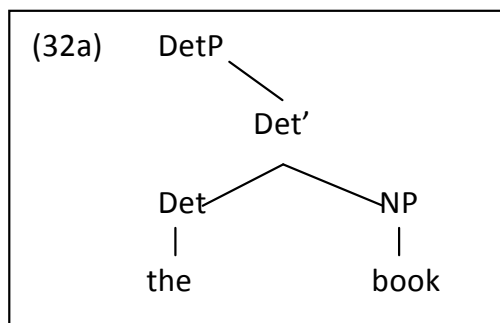
Recent developments in theory in the 20th century such as expressed in the structure in (30) have been widely debated. Development of the theory of the X-Bar (Chomsky, 1986) and head movement (Baker, 1988) has enabled the current changes to the structure of the NP in (30). Fukui and Speas (1986), Abney (1987) and Horrocks and Stavrou (1987) argued in detail that the NP in a clause must be preceded by a functional element. Horrocks and Stavrou (1987) gave a label to this functional head i.e. ‘Art’ while Abney (1987) also provided a label, ‘Det’, and suggested that the noun phrase was the maximum projection of ‘Det’, which is the basic position for an

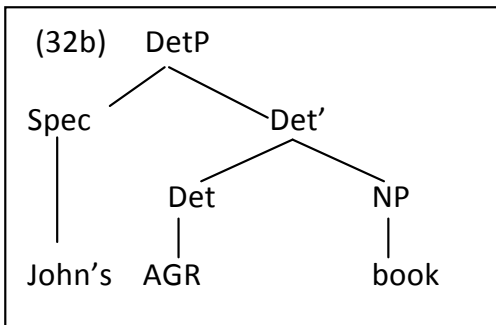
article. Abney’s allegations are based on a symmetrical relation between the NP and the projection clause. A clause is a VP, which is dominated by a functional projection known as INFLP. Abney believes that the NP can also be seen as a projection of N dominated by the functional projection as shown in (31):



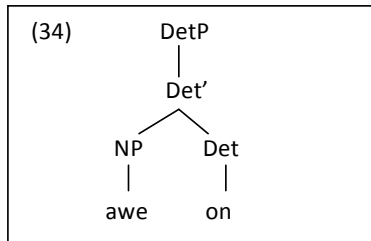
The proposal to introduce a functional category in the NP has been well received in a variety of studies (Ritter, 1991; Ouhalla, 1991). Most studies involve the romance languages. Therefore, this paper also applies the hypothesis DP (determiner phrase) in the analysis of the NP in Kensiu.

Abney proposed that the determiner and AGR exist under Det in a noun phrase. This situation is very clear in English, for instance, in the determiner being used in (32a) and the possessive marker in (32b):

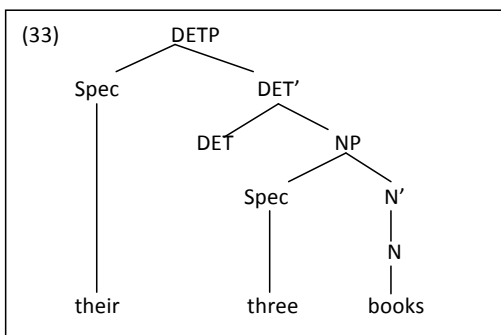
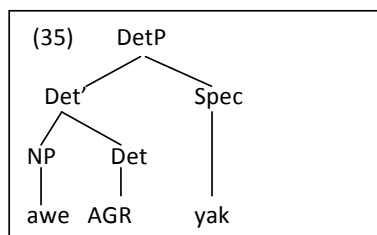




phrases (28) and (29), the structure would be as follows:



Abney also devised a more open structure to complete the sequence involving the presence of numerals and classifiers in phrases such as “their three books”. He suggested two position specs for possession and one for the numeral phrase. The numerals and classifiers are known as the numeral phrase. He also suggested for the quantifiers to hold the position of [Specs FN] i.e. the possessive marker, numeral phrase and the quantifiers are considered explanatory phrases to the head noun as shown in example (33):



Structure (35) shows the existence of AGR in structure DetP of the Kensiu Language. AGR existence can be proved by different possessive markers according to their characteristics as shown in (5). This proves that the presence of AGR is important in invalidating the presence of the [+ total] feature at its least. At the same time, AGR also has the feature [+ possessive]. The presence of *on*, the determiner, triggers the non-existence of the feature [+ number, + owner], which does not allow for the presence of a possessive. Owing to this, phrase (36) is marked as ungrammatical:

If structure (33) is applied to the possessive marker and the determiner in

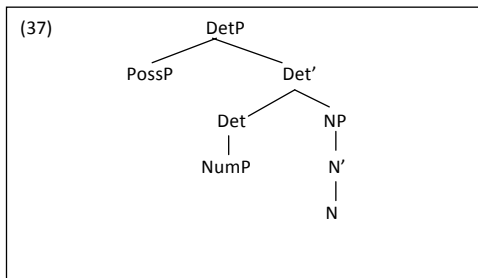
- (36) \*a. hiyak yak on  
          hut my the
- \*b. hiyak on yak

The structure above shows that the presence of a possessive marker and determiner follows a certain order. In fact, its position is different in the English Language. However, the structure of the X-Bar does not preclude the differences being shown in the theory of the X-Bar.

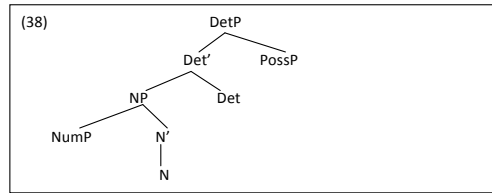
*NP in the Kensiu Language as DetP*

The syntactic analysis of the NP of the Kensiu Language revealed that there is a fixed order of NP in the Kensiu Language. The order of the NP shows that the head noun may be preceded by numerals and classifiers. Furthermore, the head noun can also be followed by a determiner or possessive marker.

Abney (1987) suggested that the NP represents the DetP. Therefore, the DetP, which was proposed by Abney (1987), is applicable in order to prepare the overall analysis of the NP of the Kensiu language as portrayed in structure (37):

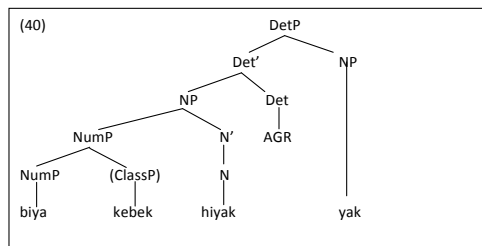


Due to different sequences, the researcher proposed a slight change in (37) in order to produce structure (38):

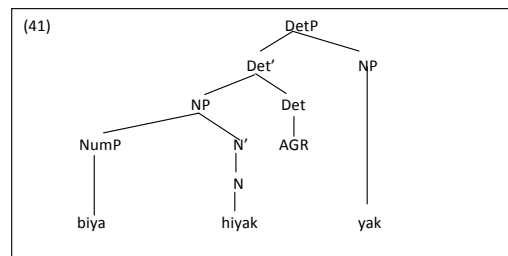


Structure (38) can be applied to phrase (39) to produce a structure of the NP in (40):

(39) biya kebek hiyak yak  
 two class hut my  
 ‘My two huts.’



The whole structure of the Kensiu NP is described in (40). The bracket on the ClassP indicates that the phrase is optional. If ClassP is present, then the adjunct structure would exist but if the ClassP is absent, then the adjunct structure would not exist, as in (41):



## CONCLUSION

This article explicated all the elements that precede and follow an NP in the Kensiu Language. Elements that preceded the NP in the Kensiu Language are the numerals/quantifiers and classifiers. Analyses of these two elements are based on three points: 1) the firm order of the numerals/quantifiers and classifiers that make up the NP; 2) the nature of non-compulsory existence of classifiers; and 3) the presence of numerals/quantifiers is necessary in order to allow for the presence of classifiers. All of these are reflected in the structure of the proposed NP by suggesting the adjunction structure of ClassP in order to accommodate the classifiers accurately. This structure is able to explain every fact that is connected to the presence of numerals/quantifiers and classifiers. Further analysis of the elements that follow the noun has been discussed according to the DetP structure introduced by Abney (1987). This analysis has enabled the DetP structure to be utilised to describe all the elements that precede and follow the head noun of the Kensiu Language.

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