

TAM-Full Object-Verb Order in the Mbam languages of Cameroon^{*}

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Nen and Nyokon are unique among the Bantu languages in allowing full nominal objects between the tense/aspect marker and the verb. Despite the fact that the two languages are neighbours and related they make different use of this positional option. In Nen the position is the default one for objects and the post-verbal position renders an object discrete and suitable for quantified objects and for contrast. In Nyokon the position before the verb is functionally equivalent to the one after the verb. The difference is related to the fact that Nyokon allows the preverbal object only in certain tenses whereas in Nen it is not restricted. But contrasted objects in Nyokon too appear after the verb. There is a construction in which both positions are filled with a constituent. This construction is modelled on a secondary predication construction.

1 Introduction

Bantu languages are predominantly SVO with the possibility of different positions of S and O for pragmatic reasons. The two Bantu languages that I concentrate on, Nyokon and Nen, are different in this respect. Both allow for a full NP object between the subject plus tense/aspect marking and the verb. The pragmatic properties of object placement in Nen have been discussed in Mous (1996) but I repeat and expand on it here using the excellent documentation of the language by Dugast and in particular her text collection (Dugast 1975), referred to as DC in this article, and a more recent study (Kendall 2007) containing two of Dugast's texts, fully glossed. The data on Nyokon come from a period of two weeks of intensive cooperation in Yaounde with Viviane Kigno, a student of linguistics and mother tongue speaker of the language. The data on Nyokon are far more restricted, mainly elicitation and contain only three texts.

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An analysis of the tense/aspect system (and the essence of tonology) can be found in Mous & Kigno (in prep.); the phonology is covered in Lovstrand (2011); I also use an earlier source for Nyokon, Barreteau (n.d.). Nen and Nyokon are neighbours and related languages (both Mbam, 511 and 514 in the ALCAM classification). They are clearly different languages; Ethnologue (Lewis et.al. 2014) is wrong in presenting them as dialects of one language. Nyokon is heavily influenced by their other neighbours: the more distantly related Bamileke. The other languages of the Mbam subgroup of Bantu languages do not show TAM-full.object-Verb order but have some other interesting phenomena in the preverbal domain which I briefly touch upon in section 6. The Mbam languages are spoken in the Sanaga province of Cameroon. Their phonologies, in particular vowel harmony, are analysed in Boyd (in prep.).

Both languages allow full objects to either precede or follow the verb; an object preceding the verb follows subject pronoun and tense/aspect marking and I call this position the Immediately Before Verb position IBV, in order to differentiate it from the position preceding the subject and TAM marking. The position after the verb is called Immediately After Verb or IAV position. Although the two languages are neighbours, and both unique within Bantu in allowing the full object between TAM marking and the Verb, their pragmatic use of this word order option is different. Nen uses the IBV position for new information. Nyokon has IAV as the default object position for new information and IBV as an equivalent option for those tenses that allow it. The difference in default positions for objects is related to tense-limited versus unlimited options for object in IBV in Nyokon and Nen respectively. This difference in default position is also the source of the differences of functions for constructions in which both IBV and IAV are filled. Ultimately these differences between Nen and Nyokon must relate to a difference in the historical origin of the word order options.

2 The default object position: IBV for Nen, IAV for Nyokon

The expectation for Bantu languages is that the focussed object occurs in the position immediately after the verb (IAV). This has been argued for Aghem by Watters (1979), Hyman & Polinsky (2009); but also for core Bantu languages in eastern and southern Africa, Makhua (van der Wal 2009); Zulu (Cheng & Downing 2009). In Nen IBV is the position for the object when it is mentioned first in a story; it is used for the introduction of a participant as in (1).¹ If the

¹ I continue to use the phonological representation for Nen as presented in Dugast's work (1971) even though it has become evident now that the recessive and dominant version of

introduction is a specific NP, marked by a possessive such as ‘their child’, this NP is still preverbal.

- (1) à n-ímbindí òn (Nen)
 CL1 PAST-antelope kill
 Beginning of story: [A man went hunting,] ‘He killed an antelope.’
 (DC109)

But in fact the IBV position is the default position for any object in stories. Because after the introduction, when the object is discourse given, it is still preverbal.

The IBV position is also the position of the object in an answer to a question asking for the object. However, a question word asking for the object does not occur in the IBV position; instead question words are placed in pre subject position, see section 5.

- (2) a. yǎtè ó-ndò nén ê (Nen)
 what 2SG-PRES eat Q
 ‘What are you eating?’
 b. mé-ndò pòniàk nén
 1SG-PRES yam eat
 ‘I eat yam’

The IBV position is used when the object is predictable from the context, the expected entity.

/o/ are actually different vowels, both phonetically and phonologically, and that the /e/ in the Nen examples in this article has now completely merged with /ɛ/. Both Nen and Nyokon are terraced level tone languages with High, Low, Downdrift and Downstep (↓). I use the following abbreviations ALL for allative, APPL for applicative, CL for noun class (I use 3SG in Nyokon but CL1 in Nen subject pronouns because in Nyokon there is no class agreement in third person subject in my data); otherwise classes are marked by their standard Bantu number and without the addition CL, COMPL for complementiser, CONTR for contrast, DEM for demonstrative, EMPH for emphatic, COP for copula, D for depictive constituent, DO for direct object, FUT for future, H for high tone, HAB for habitual, IAV for immediately after verb, IBV for immediately before verb, INF for infinitive, INJ for interjection, IO for recipient object, \K for the verb stem shape including the marker -a’ (Nyokon), LOC for locative, Mod for modifier, N for noun, NARR for narrative, NEG for negative, Num for numeral, O for object, OBL for oblique (preposition), \PA for the past tense tonal shape of the verb, \PR for the present tense tonal shape of the verb, PF for perfect, pres for progressive present tense (Nen), POSS for the possessive, PREP for preposition, PRO for pronoun, PROX for proximal, R for reference point in past for tense, REC for recent, REL for relative, S for subject, T/A for tense/aspect, V for verb, Q for final question marker.

- (3) é+yáné wéy á-ndò híkòkó †súb †é (Nen)
 who he 1-PRES drum beat Q
 ‘Who is it who beats the drum?’ (DC 129)

The object in Nen is in the IBV position in negative clauses, (4) and (18b) below.²

- (4) ó sá miàṅó sìn (Nen)
 2SG NEG.PAST O1SG see
 ‘You did not see me.’ (Dugast 1971: 179)

Thus, for Nen the object is almost always in the IBV position and when it is not, this is for very specific semantic effects which I discuss in section 3. A major difference with Nen is that Nyokon puts the object after the verb in an answer to a what?-question. The object appears in the IAV position, (5b), and the same construction is used in a corrective answer too, (5d), as becomes evident in the following staged conversational sequence.

- (5) a. à yâ ìcósó á kà’á têt (Nyokon)
 2SG put what OBL top table
 ‘What did you put on the table?’
 b. ì yâ mìr nìpíí á kà’á têt
 1SG put wine palm OBL top table
 ‘I’ve put palm wine on the table.’
 c. à yâ májní á kà’á têt ì
 2SG put water OBL top table Q
 ‘Did you put water on the table?’
 d. mbéè, ì yâ mìr nìpíí á kà’á têt
 no 1SG put wine palm OBL top table
 ‘No, I put PALM WINE on the table.’

In fact, both the IAV and the IBV positions are used in Nyokon for the answer of a what?-question, (6a and b) below are equivalent answers to (44).

- (6) a. yé tâ àyóò yóò (Nyokon)
 1:2SG.POSS father kill snake
 ‘Your father killed a snake.’

² Occasionally, we encounter an object in IAV in a negative clause; for example when the object is in parallel contrastive focus to an object in the next clause: ‘I should not kill a *weak* man; I should kill a *strong* man.’ (DC 307) has the object in both clauses IAV.

- b. yé t̂ yóó áyóò
 1:2SG.POSS father snake kill
 ‘Your father killed a snake.’

But in Nyokon certain tenses do not allow an object in IBV position. This includes all negative tenses. Where Nen predominantly has the object in IBV in negative tenses, Nyokon does not, never.

The tenses in Nyokon that do not allow the object in IBV are presented in the Table 1. The common denominator is that all the “tenses” that do not allow an IBV object involve a segmental Tense/Aspect marker. However, the narrative tense which has a segmental tense/aspect marker *pí* does allow for a preverbal object, (7). Those tenses that do not have a segmental tense/aspect marker show tonal changes consistent with supposing a tonal tense/aspect marker in the same position. An IBV object in those tenses is preceded by a subject pronoun. This subject pronoun is left out if the subject is a full noun.³

There is no clear semantic common denominator for tenses that allow or do not allow an object in IBV: the Past tense does but the semantically very similar Perfect does not. A historical study is needed to understand the grammaticalisation of the Nyokon tenses and how their origin can explain their syntactic qualities; the auxiliary *mbiə*, for example, is the verb ‘to be’.

Table 1: Table of Nyokon tenses which exclude an object in IBV

“tense” label	formula
perfect	nòó +V\PA (O)
present continuous	nǎ +V\PR (O)
conditional future	nó + V (O)
Past Imperfective	S mbíó S V(\PR?) (O)
Past Imperfective2	S mbíó ku V\PA (O)
Background	S mbíè V(\PR?) (O)
Background before R in past	S mbíó V (O)
Future	mè =Spro V\PA (O)
Present Subject Focus	Compl INF-V- à ’ (O)
Recent Past Subject Focus:	Compl INF-V (O)
Perfect Subject Focus:	Compl nóò / nákú V\PA (O).
Far Past Subject Focus	Compl Verb\PA (O)
Remote Past Subject Focus	Compl Verb-K\PA (O)
Negative general present	S sí V\H (O) other á

³ Except in one tense, the Future; I don’t know whether full noun subjects can be moved to other positions, nor whether a subject pronoun becomes needed in that case.

“tense” label	formula
Negative present	S nà V (O) á nǎ (nəkə)
Negative background	S mbíó V (O) á
Negative Past	S mbíó V\PA (O) á

- (7) ké kìcà'ápòr pí v́ lyès (Nyokon)
 7:3SG.POSS 7.frog NARR O3SG notice
 ‘His frog notices him.’

The possibility for object placement depends on the “tense” in Nyokon. In tenses where there is no choice, IAV is automatically the object position. In tenses where there is a choice this choice often does not reflect any difference in meaning. For example, an object when it is mentioned first can be either in IAV or in IBV position. Sentence (8) is from the beginning of the Frog story introducing two of the main characters as objects in IAV position.⁴ In (9) the hole was discovered first in a narration of the same Frog story, in IBV position.

- (8) ò-mbíó ñgér yǐ̀p ǹ kìcà'j̀r (Nyokon)
 3SG-PAST possess dog and frog
 ‘He had a dog and a frog.’

- (9) ò kyě kìỳỳ ndìk (Nyokon)
 3SG INDEF hole see
 ‘He saw a hole.’

When there is a choice in object position this is not guided by definiteness; definite and indefinite objects can occur in IBV and in IAV in Nyokon. Example (10) has an indefinite object in IBV. Definite objects can occur in IBV, e.g. an object pronoun in (7) above, even objects with a restrictive relative clause occur preverbally, (11). Also an object with a general quantifier ‘all’ may occur preverbally as in (12). All types of objects can occur post-verbally, and they need to in certain tenses.

- (10) á pìpyê káp v̀ (Nyokon)
 2SG things buy\PR 3SG.IO
 ‘You buy him things.’

⁴ The Frog story is a cartoon story commonly used for eliciting narrative text, Meyer (1969).

(11) m̀ ándwóm àyí ìt́ káp píí jà’ (Nyokon)
 1SG REC.PAST:sheep REL father buy yday eat
 ‘I have eaten the sheep that my father bought yesterday.’

(12) pí mbíó pí índíj pinòm (Nyokon)
 3PL PAST 3PL REC.PAST:intestines stomach
 ájè̀m ìkìm ndìgìn
 H:animal all see
 ‘They see all the intestines of the stomach of the animal’

There are two restrictions on object placement in Nyokon for when there is a choice: Contrasted objects have to occur in IAV, see section 3, and the object is in IAV position for statements of general truth, placing ‘monkey’ before the verb is not natural in (13).⁵

(13) v̀s àyí ò k̄r k̄tiè mòó kwá k̀n (Nyokon)
 O3SG REL 3SG bite monkey FUT fall ill
 ‘He who eats monkey will be ill.’

In Nyokon the default and only object position is IAV for the tenses in Table 1; IAV is also the default object position for those tenses that allow an object to be in IBV with no apparent difference in meaning. In Nen the default object position is IBV and placing the object in IAV is restricted to certain pragmatic functions, a prominent one being contrast.

I have used the term Immediate After Verb for the post-verbal position and indeed the object is placed immediately after the verb and before any following obliques. There are also phonological arguments to distinguish the IAV position from post-verbal in general. Nen has a rule of High tone spread that operates between the verb and an object that is in IAV position (Mous 2003a: 287-288); Nyokon has a rule of High tone bridge between the verb and the constituent in IAV position, (Mous & Kigno in prep).

If an object is obvious from context it need not be expressed and this includes object of usually transitive verbs such as the applicative verb in (14).

(14) níkó ndò-ǹèn (Nen)
 cold PRES-struggle:APPL
 ‘The cold has taken [them]’ (DC 303)

⁵ The depictive ‘ill’ in the second clause cannot be placed before the verb, see section 4.

Nyokon is similar to Nen in that objects with excluding particles can only occur in IAV position, (19); placing the object in IBV would render the utterances ungrammatical while without the contrastive particle *nó* these objects can occur in IBV in these sentences. The unexpectedness of ‘even’ in (20) invokes a contrast class (Berckmans 1993) and since ‘even’ seems to pattern with ‘only’ I prefer the term contrast to exclusivity. Also the IAV position can be used for contrast: Example (21a) is a neutral question checking the presupposition that you eat cassava; in reaction, answer (21b) corrects that presupposition and places the object after the verb for contrast.

- (19) a. *m̀ ḿ nó mǎjí* (Nyokon)
 1SG drink only water
 ‘I have drunk only water.’
 b. *ò ndìk nó pìcà’jòr*
 3SG see\K only frogs
 ‘He sees only frogs.’
- (20) a. *m̀ mǎngòrà jé yò’ àwár* (Nyokon)
 1SG mangoes eat even ten
 ‘I eat even ten mangos.’
 b. not: *m̀ yò’ mǎngòrà jé.*
- (21) a. *á kàángè jǎ’-ì* (Nyokon)
 2SG cassava eat-Q
 ‘Do you eat cassava?’
 b. *mbéè ḿ jǎ’ píjǎá*
 no 1SG eat yam
 ‘No, I eat YAM.’

3.1 Quantified objects

In both Nen and Nyokon the IAV position is often filled with quantifiers. Nen uses the IBV position to introduce participants (first mention) in a story (if they are introduced as objects). However, whenever these participants are quantified, the object is in IAV: “he got child one” (DC 49), “the bat got children five” (DC 79), “he married wives three” (DC 87), etc. In fact, the IAV position is the most common construction if quantifiers on objects are involved. A rare example of a quantified NP in IBV position is (22). Rat is reporting to Crab; the information is old in the story and for Rat; the fact that it is all the animals is not crucial at this point. The information is given; the information is not about quantification and therefore it appears in IBV.

- (25) *bô àbáká mé sùlú ámé bómók* (Nen)
 no HAB 1SG often 1SG.EMPH bark
 ‘No, I bark a lot.’ (Kendall 2007:214 AN9)

In Nen, an oblique nominal phrase like ‘this moment’ can occur in IBV position as it does in (26) where it refers to the crucial moment in the story that Rat had dealt with all other animals. What is expressed is emphasis maybe even contrast, as against after all the beatings of animals, now Rat went to the last opponent.

- (26) *mě́lọ́ ná y’ íkúlí ákán á niàná?* (Nen)
 rat PAST 9:DEM.PROX time go PREP crab
 ‘Then the rat went to the crab.’ (DC 305)

4 IBV+IAV and secondary predication

It is possible for the object to be split with one part before the verb and the second part after the verb. The post-verbal constituent is often a numeral. I argue that this construction involves two constituents and not one. I consider these constructions of both IBV and IAV filled to be instantiations or extensions of secondary predication constructions. There are again differences across Nen and Nyokon in the properties of the construction because the basic secondary predication construction is different: X Verb Y in Nyokon and Verb X Y in Nen, while in Nen the object noun can freely move to IBV resulting in a IBV+V+IAV construction.

In Nen the modifier that is in IAV position is interpreted as contrastive when compared to a construction with noun plus modifier in preverbal IBV position, (27).

- (27) *mèná ìmítá yè mwènífí índi mè-ṅèṅ* (Nen)
 1SG:PAST 9:calabash 9:of 6:water give 9-big
 ò hẹ̀lóbátò
 LOC 19:child
 ‘I gave the BIG water calabash to the child.’

These properties are also valid for Nyokon. In (28) the modifier is in IAV position and receives contrast. The same is true for (29) where the modifier is the numeral ‘one’.

- (28) *m̄ ándwôm ndà’ f̄i’* (Nyokon)
 1SG REC.PAST:sheep give black
 ‘I have given a black sheep (i.e. not a white one).’

- (29) m̐ ándwôm ndà' àmò (Nyokon)
 1SG REC.PAST:sheep give one
 'I have given one sheep (not two).'

There is a difference between Nen and Nyokon here: In Nyokon a N+V+Num construction renders the numeral contrastive as in (29) above, and see also (23). In Nen, however, the split construction with a numeral after the verb seems to be pragmatically equivalent to one with head noun plus numeral in IAV position. For example, in the story “The man and his children” (DC 387-396 repeated as “Orphan” in Kendall 2007: 186-213) the same episode is repeated with the same sentences apart from this difference in word order, (30b) which is a repetition of (30a).⁷ In Nen a constituent with a number cannot occur in IBV.

- (30) a. à ná-⁺ká-níbó híkúmúkúmú hí mòti (Nen)
 CL1 PAST-ALL-meet old.person one
 ‘He came upon an old woman.’ (Kendall 2007:187, OR 19 = DC 387)
 b. à ná-⁺ká híkúmúkúmú ní bè hí mòti
 CL1 PAST-ALL old.person meet one
 ‘He came upon an old woman.’ (Kendall 2007:202, OR 161 = DC 391)

I link the functions of contrast and the use of a number as modifier to the fact that both imply the semantic operation of viewing the range of referents that the object evokes as organised in discrete units. Number expression requires such a view and contrast singles one out.

In certain sentences it is not possible to separate the object noun phrase in a pre-verbal and a post-verbal part. This is never possible for a genitive phrase within a noun phrase. Thus ‘of the chief’ in (31) cannot be moved to the IAV position in Nen. In Nyokon, the genitive phrase ‘of the leopard’ in (15) above cannot be put in IAV position with the head, ‘claws’, in IBV position; the only possible interpretation of such a clause is that ‘the leopard’ appears after an intonation break and as an addressee, no longer as the possessor of the claws.

The equivalent of Nen example (27) was not accepted in Nyokon because the object of giving would be conceived not as a calabash that is simply big in size but as specific (big) type of calabash and such a division in types of calabashes to size does not exist in the Nyokon lexicon. It does for ‘yam’ for which there are big and small types and hence example (21b) above is acceptable. Likewise, there are white and black types of sheep, (28). Thus, the

⁷ It is possible that the split construction in (30b) is chosen because the sentence continues with an infinitival constituent while this information is in a separate clause in (30a).

constituent in the IAV position cannot be parsed as a dependent modifier of the constituent in IAV. It must be parsed as a separate constituent but this constituent must be interpreted as having the same referent as the constituent in IBV position not modifying it in a gradual manner but singling out a discrete specimen.

- (31) a. mèná òndómbá wú m̀̀ǹ̀ǹ̀ǹ̀ sì̀k̀̀in (Nen)
 1SG:PAST sheep of chief see
 ‘I saw the sheep of the chief.’
 b. * m̀̀ǹ̀a ɔ̀ndɔ̀mba sì̀k̀̀in wu muǹ̀ni

Thus, the “split” construction is not “split” but consists of a construction with two constituents, one in IBV and one in IAV, that share one referent. This is in fact a secondary predicate or depictive construction (Schultze-Berndt and Himmelmann 2004). Typical depictive secondary predicate constructions involving the object for Nyokon indeed make use of such a construction of object in IBV and depiction in IAV, (32).

- (32) a. t̀̀ǹ̀ ỳ̀òò ngà’ Kìj̀̀ǹ̀ (Nyokon)
 1PL child call K
 ‘We call the child Kigno.’
 b. p̀̀í ỳ̀íp t̀̀s̀̀k p̀̀úm
 3PL house paint white
 ‘They paint the house white.’
 c. p̀̀íỳ̀ìd̀̀ǹ̀ ỳ̀é ỳ̀ís ỳ̀ím̀̀k p̀̀ìl̀̀énp̀̀ìl̀̀én
 8.thoughts 9:3SG.POSS 9.eyes make\K\PR tear
 ‘Sadness makes his eyes wet.’

In Nen, however, a typical secondary predicate involving an object is constructed by placing two NPs after the verb as in (33).

- (33) a-na-somba mukoli ikut (Nen)
 CL1-PAST-cut rope piece
 ‘She/He cut the rope in pieces.’

The constituent in IAV does not only refer to objects in IBV. As is common with secondary predicate constructions, the depictive can have wider scope. In (34) the IAV numeral agrees with and refers to the subject.⁸

⁸ In the second example, from Nyokon, the numeral may not be exactly in IAV.

- (34) a. ǎ mwósé ʼná-tómbá màlánù? (Nen)
 ? 6:days PAST-pass 6:five
 ‘Five days passed.’ (DC:403)
- b. nyàás nè pàá àyí pí pîn pê pá-fòò (Nyokon)
 twin COP 2.child REL 3PL born 3PL 2-two
 ‘Twins are children that are born two.’

An adjective in the IAV position can be interpreted as having scope over the entire clause rather than being equated to the IBV phrase, as in (35) where the adjective ‘big’ can signify ‘a lot’ modifying the whole VP in interpretation (ii) rather than ‘big’, singling out a big branch in interpretation (i).

- (35) mèn-ndò mòkàsà sìnà mò-ɲèn (Nen)
 1SG-PRES 3:branch see 3-big
 i) ‘I see a BIG branch’; ii) ‘I see the branch too much.’

I have suggested that the IAV position is needed for the interpretation of the object as being represented as discrete and hence countable and susceptible for contrast reading. This is reinforced by the secondary predicate construction. In Nyokon the secondary predicate construction has the depictive in IAV and that constituent shares the referent of the object in IBV. Therefore a numeral in IAV will be interpreted as modifying the noun object in IBV, and as contrastive. An adjective in IAV in the secondary predicate construction will be interpreted as identifying a discrete subtype of the object in the IBV; hence the big type of yam in (21b) or the black type of sheep in (28). Schultze-Berndt (2002) observes that restrictive particles such as ‘just’ and ‘only’ are often combined with depictives to exclude other possible events from the one expressed by the depictive sub-event.

There is additional evidence that the construction with both IBV and IAV filled acts as a secondary predicate construction. In both Nen and Nyokon it is possible to have one part of a coordinated noun phrase in IBV and the second part, the PP with the coordinating preposition, in IAV position. This construction expresses that the two constituents are together. If the addition is constructed as a depictive both entities of the coordination need to refer to the same referent and hence they have to constitute one event and the two coordinants have to be together. The equivalent sentence with a coordinated NP

in IBV is neutral and does not insist on the fact that the two entities are together.⁹

- (36) mèná èndómbá siàkíná ná miðkò ò nyòni (Nen)
 1SG:PAST sheep see and chickens LOC market
 ‘I saw sheep together with chicken on the market.’

- (37) a. mí ípún ndìk nè ìndwómá (Nyokon)
 1SG PA:goats see and sheep:F
 ‘I saw the goats and the sheep.’
 b. mí ípún nè ìndwóm ndìk
 1SG PA:goats and sheep see
 ‘I saw the goats and the sheep.’

The element in IAV position is a separate constituent for both Nen and Nyokon. For both, Nyokon and Nen, the IAV position involves discrete entities, selecting one, equating to the IBV constituent if present. In Nen, the N+Num in IAV is equivalent to the N V Num construction and a construction with two constituents in IAV position is interpreted as a secondary predicate construction, including the V N Num construction. Since the default position for the object in Nen is IBV such N of the V N Num construction can move without a semantic effect to IBV position if it is an object.

There is one instance of the construction with both IBV and IAV filled which is possibly only motivated by reasons of information processing: Relative clauses to the object head noun are sometimes placed after the verb to avoid a preverbal object that is too heavy, (38).

- (38) mé-ndò mòná òwá a-nà (Nen)
 1SG-PRES child REL CL1-PAST
 mòníá má wàmíá mùńínè ôb màny
 6.money 6:of 1:1SG.POSS brother steal know
 ‘I know the child that stole the money of my brother.’

Sentence (39) show that the relative clause to the object head noun can either precede the verb (39b) or follow the verb (39a) in IAV position with the head

⁹ In Nyokon this construction requires a clause final marker *á* which is no longer needed if the coordinated noun phrase is formed as PP, *pí ìndwóm*, with the preposition *pí* ‘with’ instead of the coordinator *nè*.

noun still in IBV. Interestingly, in that construction the relative pronoun can no longer be left out.¹⁰

- (39) a. m̀ì ándwóm ɲà' àyí itê káp píí (Nyokon)
 1SG sheep eat REL father buy yday
 'I have eaten the sheep that my father had bought yesterday.'
- b. m̀ì ándwóm (àyí) itê káp píí ɲà'
 1SG sheep (REL) father buy yday eat
 'I have eaten the sheep that my father had bought yesterday.'

5 The clause initial position

The clause initial position is used for topics. There is a clear intonation break after this topic position which is in Nen often realised by a glottal stop. In Nen, all kinds of noun phrases can occur in the topic position: objects, locative phrases (complement or not), and adjuncts. Such topics are actually quite rare in texts. What we find in texts occasionally as topics are time adverbials such as 'at that time' (40), 'once upon a time' (41) in the topic position. Objects can occur in topic position too, (42).

- (40) ò y' íkùli? ǎ hìsólì (Nen)
 LOC 9:PROX.DEM time CONTR antelope
 ná-bá h̀è-lóm-àtó yí míímè?
 PAST-be 19-send-part of house
 'At that time, it was antelope who was his servant.' (Kendall 2007:219 AN55)

- (41) ùósé bó-m̀òtè? m̀ènyàmà ná-k̀òtàkáná (Nen)
 14.day 14-one animals PAST-get.together
 'One day the animals got together' (Kendall 2007:214 AN1)

- (42) ònd̀omb̀ò m̀ònàṅàṅà m̀èná síákín (Nen)
 sheep white 1SG:PAST see
 'A white sheep, I saw.'

Question words are preferred to be put in pre-subject position in both languages. Hamlaoui and Makasso (2011:50-51) report for neighbouring Basaa too that the question words tend to be fronted.

¹⁰ Which is an extra indication that the IAV string is a separate constituent

- (43) a. yǎtè ó-ndò nén ê (Nen)
 what 2SG-PRES eat Q
 ‘What are you eating?’
- b. ícósò ò yǎp í (Nyokon)
 what 3SG steal Q
 ‘What did he steal?’

The question word asking for the object can occur postverbally, (44a), but mostly occurs sentence initially, (44b). Question word in the preverbal object position is either an echo question or sounds childish, (44c).

- (44) a. yé t̂h nòò yóó ícósò (Nyokon)
 1:2SG.POSS father PF kill:PAST what
 ‘What did your father kill?’
- b. ìcósò yé t̂h nòò yóó
 what 1:2SG.POSS father PF kill:PAST
 ‘What did your father kill?’
- c. *? yé t̂h nòò ìcósò yóó
 1:2SG.POSS father PF what kill:PAST
 ‘Your father killed what?’

In the pre subject position we find apart from question words, also complementisers like *mbà* ‘then, thus’, *ákà* ‘if’, *ékè* ‘when’, *há* ‘then’ also when an interjection precedes (45,46). I have not investigated how many and which pre-subject positions need to be distinguished.

- (45) êy êy éyàṅè miàṅó bétòtò kòndòṅàk (Nen)
 INJ INJ who 1SG buti.fruit remove
 ‘Hey, hey Who will take the buti fruit off me?’ (Kendall 2007:191 OR56)
- (46) wê hóní hí hènókónókó (Nen)
 INJ where 19:PROX.DEM 19.young.man
 nǎ-húl †é
 PAST-come.from Q
 ‘Hey! Where did this young man come from?’ (Kendall 2007:194 OR83)

- (47) bó búsíè? ábá mé ndò-fìn (Nen)
 of first if 1SG PRES-enter
 ò nèmànènà
 LOC leadership
 ‘But first, if I go into leadership, ...’ (Kendall 2007:215 AN16)

6 The preverbal domain in Nen and some thoughts on history

In Nen, and many other Mbam languages, the subject agreement and tense/aspect markers are separate words and not prefixes to the verb. The only true prefix to the verb is the “passive” or middle prefix *bé-*.¹¹ Nen has full ATR vowel harmony and that provides clues for word boundaries. From the optional or compulsory nature of harmony we can deduct that the slots in Table 1 are indeed separate words (except for the middle prefix). The optional harmony shows that there is a strong tendency to cliticization of non-lexical morphemes to the right, Boyd (in prep). The subject and tense/aspect marker are always adjacent; if the subject is a full noun there is no agreeing subject marker. The structure of the preverbal domain in Nen is summarised in the following table.

Table 2: The preverbal domain of Nen

Topic	PreS	S	T/A	adv	IO+DO S	Directional	Middle	V
topics	question words	nominal subject	<i>ndò</i> PRES, <i>ná</i> PAST etc.	<i>quickly</i> <i>often</i> etc., time adverbials	nominal IO, DO, S (emphatic) independent pronoun IO, DO, S	allative, ventive clitics	<i>bé-</i>	
interjections	complementizers: then, when, if,	pronominal subject						

The IBV position in Nen can have two constituents. Both an Indirect Object and a Direct object can be in IBV in that order in Nen, (49). In Nyokon, it is impossible for an Indirect Object to be in IBV position. In Nen we can have verbal adverbs such as *hítú* ‘quickly’, *súlú* ‘often’ in IBV position; also in addition to an object, (48).¹²

¹¹ See Mous (2008) for a discussion of the middle prefix.

¹² I do not know whether that is possible for Nyokon; I have no such examples.

	V O Num	V O Num
		* O Num V
negation	IAV	IBV
	*IBV	(IAV) rare
position ‘what?’	preS, IAV, *IBV	preS
locative object	V LOC	V LOC
depictive qual	O V D	V O D

Table 4: Interpretation in Nyokon and Nen of word order options for objects

dimension	Nyokon	Nen
O in IBV	only possible certain tenses only DO not in negative clause not contrast unspecific	always possible IO +DO default: indef, def, first mention, answer to what?
S in IBV	?	contrast
O in IAV (IBV empty)	i. default: answer to what? ii. contrast general statement	contrast
N Num V	neutral	-- (does not occur)
N V Num	i. neutral ii. contrast on Num	neutral N V Num ~ V N Num
V N Num	emphasis on N	neutral
N V + N	both together	both together
N + N V	neutral	neutral
N V Mod	modifier cannot be genitive modifier expresses discrete option & contrast on Mod	modifier cannot be genitive i. contrast on Mod ii Mod has scope over clause
N Mod V	neutral	neutral
N V X	N=X (depictive/sec pred)	
V N X		N=X (depictive/sec pred)
S - V Num	Num refers to S	Num refers to S
S_i T/A s_i V X		contrast on S

In Nen IBV is the default position of object but in Nyokon this is IAV. This positional difference is reflected in where objects occur in negative clauses. In Nen the IAV position is reserved for contrast; in Nyokon a contrast interpretation is possible but a neutral or selective focus interpretation is equally possible. This difference is linked to the fact that in Nen the restrictions on where objects can be placed depend only on the properties of the objects while in Nyokon this depends first of all on the “tense” that is used. The IAV position allows for an interpretation in which the constituent in this position is viewed as a discrete unit that is quantified or contrasted, particularly when it is the depictive part of a secondary predicate construction with the other constituent with the shared referent is an object preceding the verb.

Any element in IAV is a constituent that is not part of the IBV constituent. But the constituent in IAV has the constituent in IBV in its semantic scope. In Nyokon any construction with IBV and IAV filled is in fact a secondary predicate type of construction in which both constituents share a referent. In Nen the secondary predication construction is formed by two constituents in the IAV position but the first one being the object can be moved into IBV position without a semantic effect as that is the default object position.

Clause initial (topic) position is used for topics. Question words are in a pre-subject position. Movement of subject to IBV invokes comparison with other comparable possibilities and hence contrast.¹³

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¹³ This can be compared to movement of modifier to pre-nominal position, see Mous (1997).

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