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Absolute and construct form of nouns: typological tendencies supplemented by novel data from Kibiri, a highly endangered language from Papua New Guinea.

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Absolute and construct form (or state) of nouns is a morphosyntactic phenomenon found in Semitic, Berber (Mettouchi 2014), and in a number of African languages like Tswana and Wolof: it generally consists of head nouns bearing a marker in the case of nominal modification, in which case the noun is said to take the construct form. Outside of modification, the absolute (e.g. citation form) form is used. In a typological survey, Creissels (2017), makes different cross-linguistic observations based on a larger sample which also adds other languages like Anejom from Oceania and Hungarian from Eurasia: There are no cross-referencing features of the modifier on the noun; the construct form can co-occur with other marked features of the noun (e.g. number); cross-linguistic variation exists in the type of modifiers that trigger the construct form and in the morphological nature of the construct marking.

This paper will present novel data from Kibiri, an underresearched severely endangered language spoken by 32 people at Kikori district in southern Papua New Guinea; it forms, with the dialect Porome [prm], the Kibiri-Porome isolate. So far, the phenomenon has only been identified in Porome among Papuan languages (Petterson 2019). Ongoing analysis shows that Kibiri also exhibits such a phenomenon and that it confirms the previous typological observations. However, what sets Kibiri apart is the fact that the absolute and construct forms are sensitive to word order and that they are optional in the case of modification with adjectives (1a,b), numerals (2) – (5) and quantifiers (6) – (7), but construct form is obligatory and word order is rigid in possessive (8), relative and compounding (9) constructions; also there are very rare cases where a construct-marked noun has been lexicalized as a verb (10).

The talk will be based on already existing descriptions of construct form from other languages (Anejom, Nêlêmwa, Eton, Hebrew, etc), with a comparison with new data from original fieldwork on Kibiri, taking a variationist approach (optionality and word order).

Examples

- (1) a. ivari mapi-ro
 big house-CSTR
 'Big house' (*mapi-ro ivari* also possible)

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- b. ivari mapi
big house.ABST
'Big house' (*mapi ivari* also possible)
- (2) da wakuteri wakuteri kima eire-a
3SG three three head.CSTR see-3PRS
'He sees six heads' (ABST *kimi*)
- (3) wakuteri kotobiri buai kumi ikarawo-a
three frog.ABST two dog.ABST chase-3PRS
'Three frogs chase two dogs' (CSTR *kotobiro/kumo*)
- (4) perui buai iname ete-bo-ro
year.ABST two and stay-3-FPST
'Two years, and he stayed' (CSTR *peruro*)
- (5) amakei kabo buai
1D canoe.CSTR two
'Our two canoes' (ABST *kabui*)
- (6) keu wai kuro-bu
many NEG village.CSTR-PL
'A few villages' (ABST *kuri*)
- (7) auapa kotobiri wakuteri kumi ikarawo-a
all frog.ABST three dog.ABST chase-3PRS
'All the frogs chase three dogs' (CSTR *kotobiro*)
- (8) di-da akei di-ro=ba
coconut.ABST-DEF.SG 2D coconut-CSTR=DECL
'The coconut is your coconut' (**akei di*)
- (9) oi mapi-ro
sick house-CSTR
'Hospital' (**mapi-ro oi, *oi mapi, *mapi oi*)
- (10) a-pumuro dabui-da
1SG-heart.CSTR place.ABST-DEF.SG
'I like the place' (ABST *pumi*)

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