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# Attributive Modifiers in Taglennaa (Kordofan Nubian)

Ali Ibrahim and Angelika Jakobi\*

## 1. Introduction

Taglennaa is spoken in the northern Nuba Mountains. It is part of the Kordofan Nubian<sup>1</sup> cluster comprising a group of closely related languages that are also known in the scientific literature as Hill Nubian<sup>2</sup> or by the corresponding German term “Bergnubisch”<sup>3</sup>; locally they are also referred to by the term “Ajang” languages. These languages are part of the Nubian family. According to Rilly’s recent genetic language classification,<sup>4</sup> Nubian along with Taman of Darfur, Ama (Nyimang) of the Nuba Mountains, Nara of Eritrea, and the extinct Meroitic language forms the northern branch of Eastern Sudanic. Eastern Sudanic, in turn, is a primary branch of Nilo-Saharan.

In typological perspective, Taglennaa represents a verb-final language. While the subject noun phrase is unmarked for case (i.e. the nominative is zero-marked), the semanto-syntactic roles of other noun phrases are indicated by clitic case-markers, including =gɪ for the accusative, =kɔ for the instrumental, and =(V)r for the locative. That is, these dependent noun phrases are marked for case. Moreover, the subject is cross-referenced by person and number

\* We are grateful to Gertrud Schneider-Blum and Vincent van Gerven Oei for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

- 1 The term Kordofan Nubian (German “Kordofannubisch”) is already used in MEINHOF’s *Eine Studienfahrt nach Kordofan* (chapter 10 “Die nubische Sprache”), p. 82, and in his “Sprachstudien im ägyptischen Sudan,” p. 258.
- 2 The term “Hill Nubian” is introduced in the MACDIARMIDS’ article “The Languages of the Nuba Mountains.” Stevenson continues to use this term in his PhD thesis “A Survey of the Phonetics and Grammatical Structure of the Nuba Mountain Languages.” The term “Hill Nubian” is also used in TUCKER & BRYAN’s grammatical sketch of the Nubian languages published in *Linguistic Analyses*, pp. 313–328.
- 3 The corresponding German term “Bergnubisch” is used in KAUCZOR’s grammar of the Dilling dialect *Die bergnubische Sprache*, and KAUCZOR’s wordlist of the Dilling language, “Bergnubisches Wörterverzeichnis.”
- 4 RILLY, *Le méroïtique et sa famille linguistique*.

suffixes on the finite verb. The subject-verb agreement represents head-marking because the subject requires certain inflectional suffixes to appear on the head of the clause, i.e. on the finite verb.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Taglennaa grammar is considered to be both head-marking and dependent marking on the clause level. We will come back to this point when drawing the conclusions at the end of this paper.

Taglennaa<sup>6</sup> is named after the village Tagle. To outsiders and in previous linguistic literature this village and the language is known by the term Kururu (also spelled Kororo).<sup>7</sup> The village is situated in the Six Mountains (Ar. *jibaal as-sitta*),<sup>8</sup> in the northeastern Nuba Mountains of Southern Kordofan, Sudan. Apart from Tagle/Kururu, there are five further villages in the Six Mountains, Kurtala, Dabatna, Koldegi (also spelt Kuldeji), Kadero (Kadaru), and Kafer. The languages spoken in these villages languages are said to be mutually intelligible.

The first linguistic study of Taglennaa, a phonological sketch, was published in 2007.<sup>9</sup> Further studies of Taglennaa comprise the comparative study “Structure of Ajang Verbs,”<sup>10</sup> as well as “Relative Clauses in Taglennaa (Kordofan Nubian),”<sup>11</sup> and “Converbs in Tagle (Kordofan Nubian).”<sup>12</sup> Moreover, in the present volume there is Gumma Ibrahim Gulfan’s paper on “Possessor Ascension in Taglennaa.”

All data for the present paper were provided by the first author who is a mother-tongue speaker of Taglennaa.<sup>13</sup>

5 NICHOLS & BICKEL, “Locus of Marking in the Clause.”

6 The language name Taglennaa is composed of several morphemes. Two alternative morpheme analyses are proposed. The first one suggests that [taglennaa] is composed of two possessive noun phrases, /taglɛ-n-ini-n-aa/, i.e. Tagle-GEN-people-GEN-language, literally “Tagle’s people’s language.” However, this morpheme analysis, proposed by G. Ibrahim (p.c.), raises the question why /ini/ does not show any traces in the surface phonetic realization [taglennaa]. The other analysis considers the fact that /taglennaa/ is alternatively realized as [taglɛmmaa]. This pronunciation suggests the morpheme parsing /taglɛ-n-maa/, i.e. Tagle-GEN-language, where maa is interpreted as a reflex of Proto Kordofan Nubian \*fai “language.” The labial \*f is usually lost in the Tagle language but probably retained here due to the “protected” word-medial position. We presume that \*f is realized as labial nasal m due to the assimilation of the nasal feature of the preceding genitive marker n. This morphological analysis of /taglɛ-n-maa/, is supported by other Kordofan Nubian language names which have the same pattern, e.g. Warki-m-bee “Dilling language,” Uŋcu-n-wee “Ghulfan language,” and Kaak-n-jiɛ “Karko language.”

7 STEVENSON, “A Survey of the Phonetics and Grammatical Structure of the Nuba Mountain Languages,” p. 113.

8 Abbreviations used: \* - unattested; ADV - adverbializer; AM - attributive modifier; AN - agent noun; Ar. - (Sudanese) Arabic; CORR - correlation suffix; DIM - diminutive; INS - instrumental; INTENS - intensifier; N - noun; OJ - object; PL - plural; PLR - verbal plural; PTCP - participle; REL - relative clause marker; SG - singular; SGL - verbal singular; SJ - subject.

9 IBRAHIM & HUTTENG, “The Phoneme System of Tagle, a Kordofan Nubian Language.”

10 GULFAN, “Structure of Ajang Verbs.”

11 IBRAHIM & JAKOBI, “Relative Clauses in Taglennaa.”

12 GULFAN, “Converbs in Tagle.”

13 We wish to thank Gumma Ibrahim Gulfan and El-Kheir Hagar for checking the Taglennaa data and discussing them with us.

Our paper focuses on lexical items used as attributive modifiers (hereafter abbreviated as AMS, singular AM) of noun phrases. It is concerned with AMS that are characterized by specific syntactic, morphosyntactic, and semantic properties in Taglennaa.

1. AMS follow the head noun, i.e. the constituent order is N + AM (in English, by contrast, AMS precede the head noun, i.e. AM + N, e.g. “small child”).
2. AMS agree in number with the head noun they modify (by contrast, English AMS - termed “adjectives” - do not agree in number with the head noun, e.g. “old tree / old trees.”)
3. AMS render adjectival/property concepts, i.e. they denote more or less timestable properties/qualities of the referents of those head nouns.<sup>14</sup> AMS denoting male or female gender, for instance, render a completely timestable property.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, AMS such as “warm” or “pregnant” express transient properties which do not last for a long time.

Although the function of AMS is commonly associated with the notion “adjective” we will apply this term only to a small subgroup of AMS in Taglennaa whose morphological properties render this subgroup distinct from the other modifiers.<sup>16</sup> We suggest to apply the cover term “attributive modifiers” to all words that share the three features listed above. In spite of these shared features, AMS do not form a uniform class of grammatically homogeneous words but rather comprise six subsets defined by their morphological features and morphosyntactic behavior which will be described in more detail in the following sections. As briefly illustrated in table 1, these six groups include “true” adjectives, noun-like adjectives, quality verbs, participles, words designating gender and age, and agent nouns. Except for agent nouns and words denoting gender and age, AMS do not function as heads of noun phrases or arguments.

word class	example	gloss
“true” adjectives	kòrán fíné spear.SG pointed.SG	sharp, pointed spear
noun-like adjectives	fíl-ì kén-è chief-PL good-PL	good chiefs
relative clauses	kāl úú-r asiida.SG be.warm.SG-REL	warm <i>asiida</i> <sup>17</sup>

Table 1.  
Classes of  
AMS

14 Note that our paper is neither concerned with attributive demonstratives and quantifiers nor with the predicative use of the lexical items that render adjectival/property concepts. Apart from lexical items expressing more or less timestable properties of the referents of noun phrases, Taglennaa also employs diminutive suffixes which serve as morphological means expressing such properties, see section 2 and 3.

15 See section 6.

16 See section 2.1

17 Sudan Arabic term řařiiida denotes a stiff porridge made from sorghum or pennisetum (millet) flour.

word class	example	gloss
participles	íd tī-àdù person.SG die-PTCP.SG	dead person
nouns expressing gender or age	ònù ídú donkey.SG woman.SG	female donkey
agentive nouns	bòl kàŋŋ-àr dog.SG hunter-AN.SG	hunting dog

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The distinction of these six groups may not be immediately apparent from the glosses in table 1, since, except for the last example, the modifiers are all rendered by English adjectives. However, some examples show that the AMS have distinct morphological features. The suffix *-r* on *úŋ-r* “warm,” for instance, marks relative clauses, the suffix *-àdù* on *tī-àdù* “dead” derives participles from verbs, and the suffix *-àr* on *kàŋŋ-àr* “hunter” derives agent nouns from verbs. These suffixes provide evidence of the fact that AMS in Taglennaa are encoded in distinct word classes (also known as “parts of speech”). As indicated in the second column of table 1, we claim that some AMS have noun-like properties, whereas other AMS rather behave like verbs.<sup>18</sup> In the following six sections we try to provide evidence of the semantic, phonological and morphological properties and the specific morphosyntactic behavior of each of these six types of AMS.

The fact that AMS are associated with distinct word classes – commonly either with nouns, adjectives or verbs – is well-known from typological studies. They suggest that the reason why AMS grammatically tend to behave either like nouns, adjectives or verbs is due to the difference in the prototypical meaning between these word classes. According to Wierzbicka,<sup>19</sup> nouns typically indicate “a kind of (person, thing, or whatever),” i.e. a categorization, a cluster of properties, while adjectives typically indicate single properties. Colors or sizes, for example, are most likely described by adjectives, but shapes like “round” or “square” tend to be conceived of as clusters of properties and therefore tend to be expressed by nouns.<sup>20</sup> Unlike nouns, adjectives may have morphological means for the expression of degree, such as “smaller,” “smallest,” “greenish.” Also adjectives express more or less permanent states of affairs. Verbs, by contrast, typically denote temporary, transient states. This may be the reason why lexical items denoting physical properties like “hot” or “heavy” are most likely expressed by verbs rather than adjectives.

18 DIXON, “Adjective Classes in Typological Perspective,” p. 1.

19 WIERZBICKA, “What’s in a Noun?” p. 359.

20 Ibid., p. 366. The fact that Taglennaa “round, coiled” is expressed by the participle *kààr-àdù* does not contradict Wierzbicka’s hypothesis since participles have noun-like characteristics, e.g. participles take singular and plural replacive suffixes. A lexical item rendering the meaning “square” is not attested in Taglennaa.

This is true for Taglennaa, too. Thus, there tends to be a correlation between the prototypical meaning of a specific word class, the lexical items that are associated with that class, and their grammatical behavior or form.<sup>21</sup> However, the assignment of AMS sharing specific semantic properties (dimension, color, etc.) to a specific word class is not predictable, as we will see.

## 2. Adjectives

The question of whether every language has a distinct adjective class is contested. Sasse, for instance, maintains that “a class of adjectives cannot be made out in all languages.”<sup>22</sup> Dixon, by contrast, claims “that an adjective class can be recognized for every language, although sometimes the criteria for distinguishing adjectives from nouns, or adjectives from verbs, are rather subtle.”<sup>23</sup> The properties of the class of adjectives are particular to each language, i.e. in some languages this class may be small, in others large, in some languages the adjective class may be open, in others closed. In Taglennaa, as we will show, there is a very small and closed class of true adjectives (see below), and a large and open class of noun-like adjectives into which even borrowings from Arabic are incorporated, see section 3.

No matter how large or small an adjective class is, according to Dixon, it is typically associated with four core semantic types, dimension (“big,” “long,” “tall,” “wide,” etc.), age (“new,” “young,” etc.), value (“good,” “bad,” etc.), and color (“black,” “white,” etc.).<sup>24</sup> By contrast, peripheral semantic types expressing physical properties (“warm,” “hard,” “heavy,” etc.), human propensity (“angry,” “happy”), and speed (“slow,” “fast”) are associated with large adjective classes. Otherwise, in the absence of a large adjective class, these peripheral, these peripheral semantic types tend to be expressed by nouns or verbs rather than by adjectives.

As for Taglennaa, we claim that a very small closed class of “true” adjectives can be identified due to their specific morphological features that are not found in other word classes. One common feature shared by these adjectives is that they end in *-ε* both in their singular and plural form, see table 2 and 3. So these final vowels cannot serve as a number marker distinguishing these forms. Rather, number is either solely marked by tonal contrast, as shown in table 2, or by tonal contrast combined with the alternation of the root vowel, as seen in table 3.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 381.

22 SASSE, “Syntactic Phenomena in the World’s Languages I,” p. 661.

23 DIXON, “Adjective Classes in Typological Perspective,” p. 1.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Table 2.  
Tonal  
contrast as  
sole number  
marking  
device

SG/PL	gloss
ájè / àjé	wide
ṭóḷè / ṭòḷé	deep
ḡíṅé / ḡīṅé	sharp, pointed, peaked

194 Table 3.  
Tonal  
contrast  
plus  
alteration  
of the root  
vowel

SG/PL	gloss
kélè / kílé	red
ṭéjè / ṭìjé; ṭìjè <sup>25</sup>	green; unripe, uncooked, immature

The alternation of root vowels is also attested on many verbs and some nouns. On nouns, however, the vowel alternations are commonly triggered by the plural suffix  $-i$  ( $\sim-i$ ),<sup>26</sup> for instance,  $t̃ɛr$  /  $t̃ɛr-i$  “girl” and  $òddú$  ( $< *òg-dú$ ) /  $ég-i$  “goat.” However, these alternations differ from those attested by  $kélè$  /  $kílé$  and  $ṭéjè$  /  $ṭìjé$ ;  $ṭìjè$  whose final vowel in the plural form is realized as  $\epsilon$  rather than  $i$ . On verbs, root vowel alternations occur in several patterns associated with verbal number, for instance:

- ▶  $i / \epsilon$  as in  $jír-$  /  $jér-$  “lie, lie down (SG SJ / PL SJ),”  $tíg-ír-$  /  $tég-ér-$  “wear (SG OJ / PL OJ);”
- ▶  $i / \epsilon$  as in  $t̃ɛy-$  /  $t̃éy-$  “keep standing (SG SJ / PL SJ);”
- ▶  $u / o$  as attested in  $ḡòg-ír-$  /  $ḡòg-èr-$  “take up, carry (SG OJ / PL OJ);” and
- ▶  $u / \text{ɔ}$  as attested in  $ḡóṅ-k-$  /  $ḡɔṅ-k-$  “dry (SG SJ / PL SJ).”

Due to the similarity between the vowel alternations attested in these verbs and in the adjectives  $kélè$  /  $kílé$  and  $ṭéjè$  /  $ṭìjé$ ;  $ṭìjè$ , these items may be said to have verb-like rather than noun-like phonological features. The motivation for the vowel alternations in these adjectives and in the verbs addressed in this section is yet unclear.

In respect to the range of meanings expected to be attested in the two closed adjective subclasses illustrated in table 2 and 3, the adjectives denoting dimensions (“wide” and “deep”), value (“bad”) and color (“red” and “green”) corroborate Dixon’s claim that the adjective class is typically associated with these semantic notions. However, the fact that the small closed class of Taglennaa adjectives contains  $ḡíṅé$  /  $ḡīṅé$  denoting the physical property “sharp, pointed” provides counter evidence to his claim that this semantic type is associated with a large adjective class.

The number agreement between the head noun and the adjective and the position of the attributive adjective after the noun are briefly illustrated in exx. 1 and 2.

25 Two morphologically and semantically distinct plural forms are also attested on several noun-like adjectives, see table 4 and 5.

26 Due to vowel harmony determined by the ATR feature of the root vowel, syllabic Taglennaa suffixes have two allomorphs, a [+ATR] and a [-ATR] one.



- 7 kî-nî úggùnkò kîlé  
 garment-PL INTENS.INS red.PL  
 “very red garments”

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The diminished or reduced degree of a property attributed by an adjective is either morphologically expressed by diminutive suffixes or by lexical means using the adverbial wàttà-kò “a little bit,” “slightly” which is derived by the adverbializer -kò from the quantifier wàttà “little, few” which is also used in the diminutive form wàttà-nú. The diminutive suffixes -ndu (SG), -ni (PL) (and their allomorphs) are attached both to the singular or plural form of the head noun and to the singular or plural form of the AM, respectively. For this reason both the head noun and the AM are doubly marked for number, as illustrated in exx. 8 and 9.

- 8 kù-dú-nù fîŋ-é-nù  
 hill-SG-DIM.SG peaked-SG-DIM.SG  
 “a slightly peaked hill”

The noun “urine” in ex. 9 is inherently plural. When taking diminutive suffixes it is doubly marked for plural and – due to number agreement – the AM, too.

- 9 ékk-é-nì wàttàkò kîlé-nî  
 urine-PL-DIM.PL little.INS red.PL-DIM.PL  
 “slightly red urine”

The expression of degree may be associated with a comparison of qualities. This is lexically expressed by the transitive verb éŋ-í-kò / éŋ-é-kò “surpass, exceed” appearing in the same-subject converb form. It takes either an -i or -e suffix reflecting the singular or plural object, respectively. The final suffix -kò is the instrumental case marker indicating simultaneousness when attached to a verb.<sup>28</sup>

- 10 kî-tù úŋú-ní kî-nî=gì éŋ-é-kò kélè-nî  
 cloth-SG this-COP cloth-PL=ACC exceed-SSC.PLR-INS red.SG-COP  
 “This garment is redder than any other garments (lit. This garment is red surpassing [any other] garments)”

Ex. 10 shows that in comparative constructions the lexical item expressing the gradable property is no longer used as AM but rather shifted to the predicate position and marked by the copula.

28 GULFAN, “Converbs in Taglennaa,” pp. 374–75.

### 3. Noun-like adjectives

Noun-like adjectives share some morphological characteristics with nouns. The number-marking patterns and suffixes are similar or even identical to those of nouns. Often these suffixes are combined with tonal contrast. As illustrated in table 4 and 5, there are two basic patterns for number marking on noun-like adjectives, i) the use of plural suffixes (the singular forms being unmarked), and ii) a replacive pattern which involves singular and plural suffixes replacing each other. These two patterns are attested on nouns, too. However, singulative marking – a third pattern attested on Taglennaa nouns – is absent from noun-like adjectives in Taglennaa.<sup>29</sup>

As shown in table 4, there are five plural suffixes attested on noun-like adjectives, *-ɪ*, *-ɛ*, *-V-ɲí*, *-dú*, and *-íl*. The suffixes *-ɪ* and *-ɛ* are attached to the unmarked consonant-final singular form of AMS. They are also attested on nouns, e.g. *kùl / kùl-ɪ* “well” and *bídíl / bídíl-ê* “bat.” The *-ɪ* suffix is, in fact, the most frequent plural suffix on nouns.

Unlike the plural suffixes *-ɪ* and *-ɛ*, the suffix *-V-ɲí* is attached to a marked singular form whose vowel-suffix *-V* is not replaced but rather retained. The resulting morphologically complex number suffix *-V-ɲí* suffix is therefore considered to be composed of a singular and plural morpheme.<sup>30</sup> It is attested both on noun-like adjectives (see table 4) and nouns, e.g. *ʃúl-á / ʃúl-á-ɲí* “roof.” The suffix *-V-ɲí* is associated with a high tone pattern.

The high-tone plural suffix *-ndú* is attested on consonant-final AMS (including a borrowing from Arabic) and also on nouns. When the root ends in the lateral *l* the nasal of *-ndú* is deleted, e.g. *bórùl / bórúl-dú* “jackal” but the nasal is retained after other consonants, e.g. *ɲér / ɲér-ndú* “placenta.”

The high-tone plural suffix *-íl* is attested on consonant-final AMS (including borrowings from Arabic), the singular form being unmarked. However, on nouns, *-íl* is attested as a replacive plural suffix, e.g. *ʃàl-è / ʃál-íl* “Acacia sp.,” *bícc-ù / bícc-íl* “mat,” and *kàt-ù / kát-íl* “field.” The distinct distribution of *-íl* on nouns and AMS is another indication of the subtle difference between these word classes.

29 According to DIMMENDAAL’s seminal paper “Number Marking and Noun Categorization in Nilo-Saharan Languages,” there are three basic number marking patterns, singulative marking, plural marking and a replacement pattern. They are widely attested in many Nilo-Saharan languages, including the Kordofan Nubian languages, as attested in Karko (JAKOBI & HAMDAN, this volume) and Taglennaa (IBRAHIM & JAKOBI, in preparation).

30 This analysis of the somewhat surprising morphological composition is suggested because roots are commonly monosyllabic. So the final vowel *V* is conceived of as a suffix rather than as a part of the root.

Some noun-like adjectives have more than one plural form.<sup>31</sup> This is another feature they share with nouns, e.g. *dùl / d̀ùl-ì, d̀ùl-ì-ńí* “granary” and *f̀âl / f̀âl-ì, f̀âl-dí, f̀âl-dú* “compound.” In table 4, there are noun-like adjectives with two alternative plural forms, e.g. *kùgùl-ì, kùgùl-dú* and *dàtt-á-ńí, dàtt-íl*. Two plural forms are also attested on the borrowings *jùhál-é, jáhíl-dú*<sup>32</sup> and *kùbár-é, kùbár-íl*. There appears to be no semantic difference between the plural forms of these items. This is, however, not true for the two plural forms of *wólj-é* and *ẁólj-é*, see table 5. These forms are only distinguished by their tone patterns, high-high versus mid-high. The selection between these two plural forms appears to be semantically motivated. The form *wólj-é* is used as AM of count nouns, e.g. *ìfí wóljé* “weak hands,” whereas *ẁólj-é* is used as AM of mass nouns, e.g. *ɲàlè ẁóljé* “weak (type of) dough.”

Table 4.  
Plural  
suffixes on  
noun-like  
adjectives

suffix	SG / PL	gloss
-ɪ ~ ɪ	ér / ér-í	new
-ɪ ~ ɪ	f̀ââl / f̀ââl-ì	transparent
-ɪ ~ ɪ	úgùr / úgùr-î	big, large
-ɪ ~ ɪ	kùgùl / kùgùl-ì, kùgùl-dú	brave
-ɛ ~ e	ɲôr / ɲôr-ê	big, old
-ɛ ~ e	kēn / kēn-è	good, fine
-ɛ ~ e	jáhíl / jùhál-é, jáhíl-dú (Ar.)	ignorant, immature
-ɛ ~ e	kùbár / kùbár-é, kùbár-íl, kùbàràd-é <sup>33</sup> (Ar.)	big, important
-V-ńí ~ V-ńí	f̀ér-è / f̀ér-é-ńí	short
-V-ńí ~ V-ńí	dàtt-à / dàtt-á-ńí, dàtt-íl	shallow
-V-ńí ~ V-ńí	t̀ùr-à / t̀ùr-á-ńí	old
-ndú	f̀ââl / f̀ââl-dú	transparent
-ndú	kír / kín-ndú	thick, dense
-ndú	jáhíl / jáhíl-dú, jùhál-é (Ar.)	ignorant, immature
-íl	dàtt-à / dàtt-íl, dàtt-á-ńí	shallow
-íl	kùbár / kùbár-íl, kùbár-é (Ar.)	big, important

The replacive pattern is illustrated in table 5. The singular/plural suffixes *-i / -e* are solely attested on noun-like adjectives and thus provide evidence of the morphologically very subtle difference between adjectives and nouns. By contrast, the singular/plural suffixes *-u / -ɪ* and the diminutive suffixes *-ndu / -nr*, are attested both on

31 In the following examples, singular and plural forms are separated by a slash. Alternative plural forms are separated by a comma.

32 Apart from having different plural suffixes, the borrowings *jùhál-é* and *jáhíl-dú* additionally reflect the vowel patterns of the donor language, Sudanese Arabic.

33 The Arabic female plural form *kubaraat* represents the source for the Taglennaa plural form *kùbàràd-é*. It is used for both genders, male and female.

nouns, e.g. kùgg-ú / kùgg-í “crow” and ònù-nú / ónú-ní-ní “small donkey,” and also on noun-like adjectives, see table 5.

suffix	SG/PL	gloss
-I / -ε	úr-ì / úr-é	black
-I / -ε	ér-í / èr-é	white
-I / -ε	fír-ì / fír-é	dirty, grey
-I / -ε	déj-í / dēj-é	long, tall, high
-I / -ε	ηέη-í / ηēη-é	fat, thick
-I / -ε	étt-ì / étt-é	wet, soft
-I / -ε	kéη-ì / kēη-é	coarse, harsh, rough
-I / -ε	téη-ì / tēη-é	thick, stiff, heavy
-I / -ε	wólj-ì / wólj-é, wólj-é	loose, bland, weak
-I / -ε	dúr-ì / dūr-é	fine, smooth
-U / -I	dùkk-ù / dùkk-î	blunt, not pointed, hornless
-U / -I	ηόcc-ú / ηόcc-î <sup>32</sup>	old [only used for women]
-U / -I	tún-ù / tún-ú; tún-î	blind; blind, new, unopened
-U / -I	tógg-ú / tógg-î	deaf
-ndu / -ni	ηól-dù / ηól-dì	big, old
-ndu / -ni	díyáá-nù / díyáá-nì	small

Table 5.  
Replacive  
suffixes on  
noun-like  
adjectives

The noun-like adjectives listed in table 4 and 5 are not restricted to the four core semantic types, dimension (“big, large,” “short,” “shallow,” “long, tall, high”), age (“new,” “old,” “old (woman),” “big, old”), color (“white,” “black”), and value (“good, fine”). As expected, the group of noun-like adjectives also comprises several lexical items denoting physical properties which are usually considered to represent peripheral semantic types (“fat, thick,” “stiff, heavy,” “wet, soft,” “coarse, harsh, rough,” “fine, smooth,” “loose, bland, weak”).

There is number agreement between head nouns and noun-like adjectives. Also the head noun precedes the modifier, as briefly illustrated in exx. 11 and 12 using just one noun-like adjective from table 4 and 5, respectively.

kēl            ér  
house.sg    new.sg  
“new house”

34 The noun-like adjective ηόcc-ú / ηόcc-í “old” is restricted to modify the noun ídú / ílí “woman.” As it cannot be used as a head noun, it is not part of the AMS denoting gender and age that are discussed in section 6.

- 12 kél-ì ḡól-dì  
house-PL big.PL-DIM.PL  
“big houses”

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Like the true adjectives discussed in section 2, noun-like adjectives express a high degree of the property either by phonological, morphological or lexical means, i.e. by lengthening the intervocalic or even syllable-final consonant, as seen in exx. 13 and 14, lengthening the root vowel (ex. 15), reduplication of the lexical item (ex. 16), or by using an adverbial intensifier (exx. 17 to 19). Some noun-like adjectives can express intensity in two ways, either by lengthening the root vowel or by lengthening the first intervocalic consonant, e.g. jírí or jírrí “very dirty (SG),” éérí / èèré or érrí / èrré “very white (SG/PL),” and kóór-àdù / kóór-àní, kórr-àdù / kórr-àní “very yellow (SG/PL).”

- ▶ Lengthening of the intervocalic consonant
- 13 kól dàttà<sup>35</sup>  
well.SG very.shallow.SG  
“very shallow well”
- ▶ Lengthening the syllable-final consonant
- 14 kél-ì ḡóll-dì  
house-PL very.big.PL-DIM.PL  
“very big houses”
- ▶ Lengthening the vowel of the root
- 15 kàr-è dǫúr-è  
flour-PL very.fine-PL  
“very fine flour”
- ▶ Reduplication of the noun-like adjective
- 16 íní fǣr-é-ńí fǣr-é-ńí  
person.PL short-SG-PL short-SG-PL  
“very short people”
- ▶ The adverbial intensifier plus noun-like adjective
- 17 kél-ì ájjén ḡól-dì  
house-PL INTENS.ADV big.PL-DIM.PL  
“very big houses”

35 This item originates in the CVCCV-shaped AM dàrtà. Due to assimilation of rt to tt and the lengthening of these consonants, the intensified form is realized by an extra long t as [dattta].

íyà ájjénkò déj-í 18  
 neck.SG INTENS.INS long-SG  
 “very long neck”

kél úggùnkò ñól-dù 19  
 house.SG INTENS.INS big.SG-DIM.SG  
 “very big house” 201

Some noun-like adjectives are always used in their intensive form marked by the lengthened intervocalic consonant, e.g. étt-ì / étt-é “wet, soft.” (However, the geminate kk in dùkk-ù / dùkk-î “blunt, not pointed, hornless” is a realization of rk in dùrkù / dùrkî, as attested in Dabatna, a neighboring Kordofan Nubian language.) Some noun-like adjectives always appear with the diminutive suffix, e.g. ñól-dù / ñól-dì “big”<sup>36</sup> and díyáá-nù / díyáá-nì “small.” The basic form of díyáá-nù / díyáá-nì without the diminutive suffix is not attested. The diminutive suffixes on these noun-like adjectives appear to be lexicalized, they do not co-occur with diminutive suffixes on the head noun of a noun phrase, as seen in exx. 17 and 19.

The reduced degree of the property denoted by noun-like adjectives is either expressed by diminutive suffixes – additionally intensified by lengthening the syllable-final consonant – as seen in ex. 20, or by the intensifier wàttà-kò, as in ex. 21. These means are the same as those employed for true adjectives.

íd ʃɛ̀ɛ̀-ndnú 20  
 person.SG short-INTENS.DIM.SG  
 “very short person”

éénà wàttàkò kéɲ-ì 21  
 soil.SG little.INS rough-SG  
 “slightly rough soil”

When a property denoted by a noun-like adjective is associated with a comparison of degree it is expressed by the converb éɲ-í-kò / éɲ-é-kò which precedes the noun-like adjective, see ex. 22.

ʃíl ànná ùnná-gí éɲ-í-kò kén-ndɪ 22  
 leader.SG our your.PL-ACC exceed-SSC.SGL-INS good.SG-COP  
 “Our leader is better than yours”

36 The noun-like adjective, ñól-dù / ñól-dì “big” is derived by diminutive suffixes from ñóɾ / ñóɾ-ɛ̀.

#### 4. AMS expressed by relative clauses

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Relative clauses based on “quality verbs”<sup>37</sup> offer another possibility to express AMS. We prefer the term quality verbs to “stative verbs” because quality verbs often denote physical properties, human propensities, or speed. These properties may be conceived of as changing over time, rather than being static. This is probably the reason why such transient properties are expressed by verbs rather than by adjectives or nouns.<sup>38</sup>

When quality verbs are employed as AMS they are inflected for present tense,<sup>39</sup> number, and 3rd person. Additionally they are marked by the relative clause marker *-r*.<sup>40</sup> Some verbs take the inflectional suffix *-(u)n* both in the 3rd person singular and plural form, others take *-(u)n* in the singular form and *-(e)n* in the plural form.<sup>41</sup> The vowel of *-un* or *-en* is required when preceded by a consonant, e.g. *kòyè ìḡḡ-ùn* “the meat is delicious.” The vowel of *-un* or *-en* is deleted when it is preceded by a vowel, e.g. *ótù ʒʒ-n* “the water is warm.” The final nasal of the inflectional suffixes *-(u)n* and *-(e)n* is deleted when the relative clause marker *-r* is attached.

Relative clauses based on quality verbs follow the noun they modify and agree in number with it. The singular and plural forms of these relative clauses are often distinguished by tonal contrast, as seen when comparing exx. 23 to 24 and exx. 25 to 26, but vowel alternation with verbal number marking function is attested in these relative clauses, too, as seen in exx. 27 and 28, and in *ḡáár / ḡéér* in table 6.

- |    |                 |                  |                  |
|----|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| 23 | <i>kòyè</i>     | <i>ìḡḡ-ù-r</i>   |                  |
|    | meat.SG         | be.sweet-3SG-REL | “delicious meat” |
| 24 | <i>ótù</i>      | <i>ìḡḡ-ù-r</i>   |                  |
|    | water.PL        | be.sweet-3PL-REL | “sweet water”    |
| 25 | <i>tù-ù-nú</i>  | <i>ḡíld-ù-r</i>  |                  |
|    | child.SG-DIM.SG | be.heavy-3SG-REL | “heavy child”    |

37 The term “quality verb” is adopted from ELDERS, TRÖBS & METTOUCHI’s “Questionnaire for quality verbs in African languages.

38 See the discussion of prototypical verbs in Section 1.

39 “Present tense” is a preliminary term for a suffix which may turn out as imperfective aspect marker.

40 IBRAHIM & JAKOBI, “The relative clause in Taglennaa.”

41 The choice between *-un* and *-en* needs further research.



3SG	3PL	gloss
kúyík-ú-r	kúyík-é-r	scented
fálf-ù-r	fálf-é-r	glittering
kétìg-ù-r	kétìg-ù-r	shaking
ηétìg-ú-r	ηétìg-é-r	bending
fākk-ú-r < *fārk-ú-r	fākk-ê-r	fearful, afraid

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AMS encoded in relative clauses can express a high degree of a certain property either by repetition, see exx. 30 and 31, or by using an intensifier preceding the relative clause, see exx. 32 and 33.

- 30      ìfí            fígg-é-r                                      fígg-é-r  
hand.PL unpleasant.smell-PLR-REL    unpleasant.smell-PLR-REL  
“very unpleasantly smelling hands”
- 31      ótù            ỳỳ-r                                      ỳỳ-r  
water.PL hot.PL-REL hot.PL-REL  
“very hot water”
- 32      kèèdá        ájjènkò                                      búù-r  
bone.SG INTENS.INS hard.SGL-REL  
“very hard bone”
- 33      íni            úggùnkò                                      ìη-ù-r  
people INTENS.INS different-PLR-REL  
“very different people”

The reduced or diminished degree of a property is expressed by adding the adverbial intensifier wàttà-kò which precedes the relative clause.

- 34      kàl            wàttàkò                                      úú-r  
asiida.SG little.INS be.warm.SGL-REL  
“slightly warm *asiida*”

AMS expressed by quality verbs and encoded in relative clause forms may be employed to compare degrees of properties, as seen in exx. 35 and 36. Like exx. 10 and 22, these constructions involve the same-subject converb form of the verb “exceed, surpass.”

- 35      tùù-nú                                      úηù intàn-gì  
boy.SG-DIM.SG this brother.SG-ACC  
éη-í-kò                                      fíld-ù-r  
exceed-SSC.SGL-INS heavy-3SG-REL  
“this child who is heavier than his brother ...”

ónú-ńí	íńì	tí-gí	éń-é-kò	36
donkey-PL	these	those-ACC	exceed-SSC.PL-INS	
ńéé-ńdí-r				
walk.PL-NEG.3PL-REL				
“These donkeys which are not faster than those ...”				

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Thus, when AMS are encoded by relative clauses and when they are employed to express a high(er) or low(er) degree of a certain property they grammatically behave like true adjectives and noun-like adjectives.

## 5. Participles

AMS are also often encoded in participles. Participles have both verb-like and noun-like properties. They resemble nouns as they mark number by replative suffixes involving the low tone singular suffix -àdù and the low tone plural suffix -àńì. Participles are based on verb stems but they do not take inflectional morphemes reflecting person, number, and tense. However, they often take derivational suffixes, e.g. the causative morpheme with its various allomorphs -ìg, -k, -ńk, -c, as attested in exx. 38, 39, 40, and 41, respectively.

íkà	ṭì-àdù	37
fire.SG	die-PTCP.SG	
“extinct fire”		
íkà	ṭì-ìg-àdù	38
fire.SG	die-CAUS-PTCP.SG	
“extinguished fire”		
ór	ʃóń-k-ádù	39
wood.SG	be.dry-CAUS-PTCP.SG	
“dried wood”		
kí-tú	èt-ìńk-àdù	40
door-SG	close-CAUS-PTCP.SG	
“closed door”		
túr-í-ńí	èń-c-àńì	41
pot-SG-PL	be.filled-CAUS-PTCP.PL	
“filled pots”		

The high degree of a property encoded in a participle is expressed by adverbial intensifiers preceding the participle. They are marked

by the low tone adverbializer suffix *-̀n*, as attested in *bàll-̀n* (ex. 42), *ḍìbìll-̀n* (ex. 43), and *ḡècc-̀n* (ex. 44). This suffix is obviously associated with aspectual notions. The selection of one of the various intensifiers appears to be lexically determined by the participle.

- 206      42      *tùr-í*    *bàll̀n*            *̀ɛn-c-àdù*  
                  pot-SG INTENS.ADV fill-CAUS-PTCP.SG  
                  “almost completely filled pot”
- 43      *kàlḍ̀ŋ*                    *ḍìbìll̀n*      *kòy-àdù*  
                  asiida.GEN.gourd INTENS.ADV pile.up-PTCP.SG  
                  “gourd with highly piled up *asiida*”
- 44      *tùr-í*    *ḡècc̀n*            *tóó-r*            *̀uj-ɪŋk-àdù*  
                  pot-SG INTENS.ADV ground-LOC put-CAUS-PTCP.SG  
                  “pot put exactly on the ground”

The low degree of a property encoded in a participle may be expressed by adding a relative clause based on the negated copula, compare ex. 45 to 42.

- 45      *tùr-í*    *̀ɛn-c-àdù*                    *mí-dì-r*  
                  pot-SG fill-CAUS-PTCP.SG NEG-COP.3-REL  
                  “incompletely filled pot (lit. a pot which is not filled)”

## 6. Nouns denoting gender and age

Taglennaa has two nouns denoting gender, *kùt-tù* / *kùr-ù* “man, male” and *ídú* / *íí* “woman, female.” Furthermore there are a number of nouns denoting both gender and age, such as *têr* / *tìr-ì* “girl, young female,” *tù-̀nù* / *tí-̀nì* “young boy, child,” *kèjír* / *kèjír-ì* “young man” and *kòjír* / *kòjír-ì* “old man.” All these nouns can be used either as AMS, see exx. 46, 48, 50, and 52, or as heads of noun phrases, see exx. 47, 49, and 51. As AMS they follow their head noun and agree in number with that head noun. Some of these nouns exhibit number markers typical of nouns, such as the singular marker *-̀tù* in *kùt-tù* (ex. 46). As this suffix, which may also be employed as singulative suffix, is not attested on noun-like adjectives<sup>44</sup> it suggests that AMS denoting gender and age are nouns rather than noun-like adjectives.

- 46      *òn-ù*            *kùt-tù*  
                  donkey-SG man-SG  
                  “male donkey”

<sup>44</sup> See section 3.

kùt-tù	kēn	47	
man-SG	good.SG		
“good man”			
túd-àn <sup>45</sup>	têr	48	
child-CORR.SG	girl.SG		207
“daughter”			
tér	kòjè	49	
girl.SG	beautiful.SG		
“very beautiful girl”			
ínt-àn	tùù-nû	50	
sibling-CORR.SG	boy.SG-DIM.SG		
“little brother”			
tùù-nû	kùt-tù-nû	51	
child.SG-DIM.SG	man-SG-DIM.SG		
“young boy”			

As seen in ex. 52 and 53, nouns denoting gender can take an AM denoting gender and age. So in these noun phrases gender is doubly expressed by lexical means.

kúr-ú	kòjír-ì	52	
man-PL	old.man-PL		
“old men”			
í-dú	têr	53	
woman-SG	girl.SG		
“young woman”			

Nouns expressing gender (kùt-tù “man, male,” í-dú “woman, female”) are conceived of as expressing timestable rather than transient properties. Therefore, when employed as AMs, they are not used with intensifiers such as ájjén or wàttà-kò. However, nouns expressing both gender and age (têr “girl,” kòjír “old man,” tùù-nû “boy”) have two semantic components, i) gender, which represents a timestable property, and ii) age representing a property which is conceived of as changing over time. For this reason, only this

45 The suffix -an (SG), -aan (PL) is attested on many terms of social relationship (including kinship terms). As shown in ЯКОБИ, “Nubian Kinship Terms,” this suffix has cognates in other Nubian languages, such as Birgid and Midob. Following КАУЦЗОР, *Die bergnubische Sprache*, who coined the German term “Korrelationsendung,” we suggest the term “correlation suffix,” abbreviated CORR.

changeable property is gradable, being modified by adverbials expressing aspectual notions, such as *bàll-̀̀n* “almost completely” and *éì-tùr-n* “still,” “not yet.”

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- 54      *kùr-ú*    *bàll̀̀n*                              *kòʃir-ì*  
 man-PL almost.completely.ADV old.man-PL  
 “almost old men”
- 55      *ídũ*            *éìtùrn*            *té-ndù*  
 woman.SG not.yet.ADV girl-DIM.SG  
 “a yet immature woman”

Note that noun phrases constructed of noun plus noun are admitted only when the second (modifying) noun either designates gender and age<sup>46</sup> or when it represents an agent noun. Such noun phrases differ from noun plus noun constructions representing possessive noun phrases in which the possessor (dependent) being marked by the genitive clitic =*n* precedes the possessed (head), as attested in *àccè=n ên* “mother of twins,” lit. “twins’ mother.”

## 7. Agent nouns

Apart from words denoting gender or age, agent nouns can be used both as AMS of noun phrases but also as heads of noun phrases. Agent nouns are derived from verbs by the suffix *-àr* and by assigning a low tone pattern to the agent noun, e.g. *tìr-àr* “farmer,” *àn-àr* “dancer,” *ìtig-àr* “quarreler.” They are inherently singular and take the low tone plural suffix *-ì*. When used as AMS they agree in number with the preceding head noun.

- 56      *íd*            *tìr-àr*  
 person.SG sow-AN.SG  
 “farmer”
- 57      *ból-i*        *kàŋŋ-àr-ì*  
 dog-PL hunter-AN-PL  
 “hunting dogs”
- 58      *ín-í*        *ʃɛk-àr-ì*<sup>47</sup>  
 person-PL carve-AN-PL  
 “carpenters”

46 Noun plus noun constructions are frequently used in kinship terms. This is also attested in ISMAIL’s paper in this volume.

47 “Carpenter” may also be expressed by *èd-àr* / *èd-àr-ì*.

Interestingly, by means of a tonal alternation on the last syllable it is possible for agent nouns to attribute an intensified or habitual quality (“very good,” “quarrelsome”) to their referent.

íd	t̄ir-âr	59	
person.SG	SOW-AN.SG.INTENS		209
“very good farmer”			
ból-ì	kàŋjâr-î	60	
dog-PL	hunter-AN-PL.INTENS		
“very good hunting dogs”			
ín-í	ìtig-âr-î	61	
person-PL	quarrel-AN-PL.INTENS		
“quarrelsome people”			

## 8. Conclusions

In our paper we have been concerned with AMS, i.e. attributive modifiers of nouns. Such AMS render adjectival meanings and are therefore often indiscriminately referred to as “adjectives.” In Taglennaa, however, AMS do not form a uniform word class. Rather they comprise six distinct word classes (“parts of speech”).

1. a very small and closed class of five “true” adjectives,
2. a class of noun-like adjectives which is open for borrowings,
3. relative clauses based on quality verbs,
4. participles,
5. nouns denoting age and gender, and
6. agent nouns.

Although AMS may be assigned to six word classes and differ in respect to their morphological structure, they share the following syntactic, morphosyntactic, and semantic features: they follow the head noun, they agree in number with the head noun, and they render more or less timestable semantic properties to the referent of a noun phrase.

As for their morphological features, true adjectives all end in *-ε*, their singular and plural forms being distinguished solely by tonal contrast or additionally by the alternation of the root vowel. By contrast, noun-like adjectives take number suffixes which are similar to those of nouns, as they occur in basically two patterns, plural marking (the singular being unmarked) or a replacive pattern in which both the singular and the plural are marked. The number marking suffixes on noun-like adjectives are often the same as those on nouns. However, there are some exceptions: First, the singular/

plural pair of suffixes, *-i / -e* is exclusively attested on noun-like adjectives but not on nouns. Second, the plural suffix *-il* is employed on AMS unmarked in their singular forms. On nouns, however, *-il* replaces various singular suffixes. Third, the singular or singulative suffix *-tu* occurs on nouns only but never on noun-like adjectives. These findings confirm Dixon stating that the distinction of adjectives and nouns (or adjectives and verbs) may be very subtle.<sup>48</sup>

Some AMS have morphological traits clearly indicating the membership in a specific word class. Thus, AMS marked by *-r* represent relative clauses based on quality verbs. AMS marked by *-àdù* (SG) and *-ànì* (PL) are participles. AMS marked by a low tone pattern and the suffix *-àr* represent agent nouns.

As for their syntactic characteristics, nouns denoting age and gender as well as agent nouns may function both as AMS and as heads of noun phrases. Thus these items are characterized by their membership in two word classes. The question whether true adjectives, noun-like adjectives, relative clauses, and participles can be employed as head nouns, too, has not been explored in our paper.

There tends to be a correlation between the prototypical meaning of a specific word class, as Wierzbicka claims.<sup>49</sup> The Taglennaa data partly corroborate this claim: AMS conceived of as denoting transient states, for instance, physical qualities (“cold,” “hard,” “salty”) are often encoded by quality verbs – except for the physical property “pointed” which is expressed by a true adjective rather than by a quality verb. AMS denoting single properties like “wide,” “deep,” and the color terms “red” and “green” are encoded as true adjectives. However, two other color terms, “white” and “black,” do not appear in that group. Rather, their morphological composition suggests that they are part of the class of noun-like adjectives. This finding suggests that in Taglennaa the membership of an AM in a specific word class is not predictable.

The means to express the gradability of a property depends of the various classes of AMS. We have shown that degrees of properties encoded in “true” adjectives and noun-like adjectives can be expressed by i) phonological modification (e.g. lengthening of the root vowel or gemination of the syllable-final consonant), ii) morphological modification (e.g. reduplication of the AM), and iii) lexical modification (e.g. addition of an intensifier). As for AMS encoded by quality verbs, the expression of high or low degree is more limited involving either the reduplication of the AM or its lexical modification by an adverbial intensifier derived from an AM denoting dimension. Often these intensifiers are marked by *-kò*, e.g. high degree by *ájjé-*

48 DIXON, “Adjective Classes in Typological Perspective,” p. 1.

49 WIERZBICKA, “What’s in a Noun?,” p. 359.

n-kò, úggù-n-kò, and low degree by wàttà-kò. The same intensifiers are used on true adjectives and noun-like adjectives. They are, however, not employed on participles. Rather, properties expressed by participles are gradable by means of adverbial intensifiers ending in -òn, such as bàllòn, òibillòn, and ηèccòn, which have aspectual connotations. The choice between these latter intensifiers appears to be determined by the semantics of the participle.

While properties rendered by completely timestable notions such as gender are not gradable, AMs denoting age, i.e. a transient property may be rendered by adverbials associated with aspectual notions, such as éltórn “still,” “not yet,” or bàllòn “almost completely.” Agent nouns, in turn, have a specific means for expressing a high degree of the property they attribute to the head noun: They use tonal modification.

In the introductory section we have pointed out that Taglennaa grammar is both head-marking and dependent-marking. According to Dixon,<sup>50</sup> head-marking languages and dependent-marking languages differ in respect to the characteristics with which their adjective classes are correlated. In head-marking languages the adjective class tends to be grammatically very similar to verbs, in dependent-marking languages the adjective class tends to be grammatically very similar to nouns. Since Taglennaa is both head-marking and dependent-marking, we encounter both groups, AMs that are grammatically similar to verbs, as attested by the group of quality verbs, and AMs that are similar to nouns, as attested by agent nouns and nouns expressing gender and age. If we consider verbs and nouns as representing two word classes with opposite semantic and grammatical values, the other AM classes, i.e. participles, true adjectives, and noun-like adjectives, due to their more-or-less verb-like or noun-like features, may be conceived of as representing intermediate values between verbs and nouns.

50 DIXON, *The Rise and Fall of Languages*, p. 125.

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