

# The Basic Syntax of Beng

## Summary of the thesis

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My thesis describes the basic properties of all the major syntactic constructions of Beng, a South Mande language spoken by about 14,000 people in the center of the Ivory Coast. This work is the first attempt to provide a comprehensive grammatical description of the language; only phonological (Paesler 1991, 1992) and, to some degree, morphological (Paesler 1989, 1992) description had been previously available.

Introductory section outlines encyclopedic data on the language (pp. 4-8), extending to bibliographic remarks and the aims of the work (pp. 8-10). In addition, phonology (pp. 10-20) and morphology (pp. 20-35) of Beng are briefly described. Inflectional morphology, which, as described, consists of a huge system of pronominal series and six aspectual forms of the verb, is to a great extent non-concatenative (tonal).

A section on nominal and adverbial syntax (pp. 36-50) discusses the issue of distinguishing nouns from postpositions and adverbs. Distributional properties allowing separating these lead to more fine-grained distinctions between ordinary nouns, temporal nouns, and locative nouns, of which locative postpositions are a subclass. In this section I also describe the syntax of nominal and postpositional phrases in terms of phrase structure, and their grammatical features such as spatial deixis, person and number.

The next section (pp. 51-93) is dedicated to the syntax of simple sentence in Beng. Like in the previous section, both constituent structure and grammatical features of the sentence are addressed. The first part of the section covers the expression of arguments and adjuncts, including complement and goal clauses, as well as the structure of types of sentences that do not contain a verb. I discuss the issue of lability and the argument/adjunct distinction. I further characterize properties of individual types of clause-level constituents, such as the subject, the direct object, the indirect object in the ditransitive construction, the secondary predicate, and the obliques. The latter part of the section has to do with marking tense, aspect, mood, and polarity, as well as the nature of aspectual and modal distinctions in Beng (Beng formally distinguishes eight TAM values, each having a positive and a negative variants marked in subject pronouns).

A couple of sections (pp. 94-98) briefly sketches major types of polypredicative constructions of Beng, including sentential argument constructions, converb constructions, a serial construction, and the structure of temporal and conditional constructions. Finally, strategies of expressing information structure are outlined on pp. 99-103.

In the Conclusion (pp. 104-105), I give an overview of typologically interesting properties of Beng syntax, such as the tendency towards a shift from the strict SOV order typical to all Mande languages to a more liberal one, or the existence of two positional types of complementizers corresponding to the position of the embedded clause they introduce. As a supplement, I provide a sample Beng text (pp. 106-109) with glossing and grammatical commentary.

### References

- Paesler 1989: *Wolfgang Paesler*, « How to distinguish statement and question in Beng », *Journal of West African Languages*, XIX, 1 (1989) 112
- Paesler 1991: *Wolfgang Paesler*. Principes de l'orthographe beng. Ms: SIL, RCI, 1991.
- Paesler 1992: *Wolfgang Paesler*. Esquisse phonologique de beng parler de Ouassadoukou (Sous-Préfecture de M'Bahiakro, Côte d'Ivoire) // Inge Egner (ed.), *Esquisses phonologiques de trois langues ivoiriennes: beng, dida, yaouré* (Esquisses linguistiques ivoiriennes – 1). Institut de Linguistique Appliquée – ACCT. Abidjan, 1992