

2. GRAMMAR

2.1 Word Classes

Mödö has 7 word classes: verb, noun, adverb, qualifier, conjunction, exclamation, question marker.

Pronouns and prepositions may be viewed as subclasses of the noun since their function is like that of nouns. There are also some words of syntactic importance which do not belong to any class but have unique functions.

The word classes are defined mainly by their function in the clause, a typical Mödö verbal clause consisting of:

subject - verb - object - adjunct

and a non-verbal clause of:

subject - adjunct

2.1.1 Verbs

The distinguishing feature of verbs as they appear in the dictionary is that they all begin with a vowel, whereas the majority of other words begin with a consonant. However, close study shows that trisyllabic and some quadrisyllabic verbs beginning with /i, ī, o, u/ can be analysed as consisting of a consonant initial root and a vowel prefix.

írìcà	<----- i-rica	“to tear”
ìlèyè	<----- ì-lèyè	“to play”
ó'dòkò	<----- o-'dòkò	“to need”
ùtú'bó	<----- u-tu'bó	“to cover”

The above examples illustrate another rule in the formation of these verb stems with consonant initial roots: the vowel prefix can be predicted from the vowel of the first root syllable.

/i/	<-----	front Set 2 /a,e,i/
/ĩ/	<-----	front Set 1 /ĩ,ẽ/
/o/	<-----	back Set 2 /a,o,ɔ/
/u/	<-----	back Set 1 /õ,u/

In other words, the vowel prefix is inherently high but its other phonetic properties are determined by the root.

An exception to the above rule is that roots beginning with /y/ cause fronting of the prefix.

íy'ódò	"to squat"
íyórú	"to make a pattern"

Other exceptions have no obvious explanation.

Vowel initial verb roots also exist, are all disyllabic and do not take a prefix.

ákó	"to come"
ò'bò	"to be wide"
ébè	"to exceed"
òcò	"to turn aside"
èpí	"to be tasteless"

Disyllabic verbs beginning with /o/ or /u/ pose a problem. Are they monosyllabic roots beginning with a consonant and prefixed with /o/ or /u/? Or are they vowel initial roots? Is ònyò "to eat" o-nyo or onyo? No disyllabic verbs beginning with i- or ï- have been found.

It may be worth noting that those roots which begin with non-high vowels are all transitive, either descriptive or verbs of motion, whereas those beginning with high vowels may be either transitive or intransitive, so the evidence is in favour of regarding onyo and verbs like it as prefix plus root. However, there are no morphological changes in the present language to throw light on the matter.

2.1.1.1 Derivation

There are a few cases of verbs clearly derived from other verbs, especially transitives formed from intransitives by adding a prefix consisting of a front high vowel and a consonant (most commonly /y/).

èyí	"to be cool"	----->	ìyéyì	"to make cool"
àpà	"to be sharp"	----->	ìkápà	"to sharpen"

One also finds a few derivatives where the derived form implies a plural subject, whereas the simple form is unmarked as to number and can have either a singular or a plural subject.

àkpà	"to be long"	----->	ìdákpá	(pl.)
ò'bò	"to be wide"	----->	ùdò'bò	(pl.)

Such derivations are not active processes in the present language.

2.1.1.2 Inflexion

Mödö has very few affixes, tense and person being mostly expressed by separate words. Verb prefixes are **k-** 'dependent', **t-** 'purpose', **m-** 1st singular, **d-** 1st plural.

2.1.1.3 Verb function

As in other languages verbs in Mödö have a semantic function of expressing actions and states. Each verb has an independent and a dependent form: the independent form consists of the stem alone, as given in the dictionary, and the dependent form is stem prefixed with **k-**.

ònyò kònyò "to eat"

The form of stem alone occurs as main verb in independent clauses or first verb in a sequence, whereas the **k-** form occurs in dependent clauses or wherever it is conceived of as dependent on a previous verb.

bìláká nàgà nìmà ìtìtì kómó
 people pl. that ask hare
 "Those people asked hare."

bìláká nàgà nìmà árí kítìtì kómó
 people pl. that go ask hare
 "Those people went and asked hare."

In the second sentence above the verb **ìtìtì** "ask" is prefixed with **k-** because it is dependent on the verb **árí** "go".

lìjè ù'dú pèrí mà 'bènní gà bèrí ná kùyì
 they throw stick which their pl. down then turn
rònní ñgì gbí rò múré
 body-their disc. again body snake
 "They threw down their sticks which then turned into snakes."

The first verb in the above example, **ù'dú** "throw" is in its stem only form because it is the main verb of an independent clause whereas **kùyì** "turn" occurs in the **k-** form because it is in a dependent clause introduced by **ná** "then".

The distinction between these two verb forms is neutralised in the first person by the first person pronoun prefixes, which are **m-** in the singular and **d-** in the plural. In both independent and dependent contexts "I go" will be **márí** and "we go" **dárí**.

An important use of the **k-** form of the verb is with the verb **èdí**, which means roughly "to be at": **èdí** followed by another verb in its **k-** form functions as an auxiliary to create a continuous aspect.

bò èdí kárí "he is going"

The **k-** form of descriptive verbs frequently occurs in a relative clause introduced by **mà** with a function like that of an adjective in European languages.

yàlí ma kànmí "white bird"

2.1.1.3.1 t- purpose

In addition to the independent and dependent forms of the verb described above there is a third form consisting of stem prefixed with **t-**. This **t-** form functions like the infinitive in European languages, indicating the purpose of an action, especially with verbs of motion.

mòñì èdí bìcì mǎtà tòsonó mbóró
 mother-his is under granary to grind red-ochre

"His mother was under the granary to grind red ochre."

Tòsonó here expresses the purpose for which the mother was under the granary.

As will be described in section 2.1.2.2 the t- form of the verb also functions as a verbal noun in other contexts.

2.1.2 Nouns

Some writers on Bongo-Bagirmi languages refer to noun prefixes, by which they apparently mean historical prefixes, not ones active in the modern languages. Since a disproportionately large number of Mödö nouns begin with /k/ it is possible that there was once a k- prefix of nouns but it has no lexical or syntactic function nowadays. The only noun prefix is the t- of verbal nouns. Apart from some compounds Mödö nouns are simple, taking no affixes and undergoing no internal changes. The same form is used for both singular and plural nouns, with the exception of pronouns and a very few nouns which have separate tone patterns for singular and plural.

2.1.2.1 Compounds

The most common process of compounding is that of adding to a noun or verb stem another word with little lexical content but more of a functional meaning, particularly dǎ "head/on", mà relative marker and á "thing".

dǎgilití	"tail"	<-----	dǎ + gilití	"tail" (detached from owner)
mǎmúrè	"heron"	<-----	mǎ + múrè	"snake"
ǎndí	"shoes"	<-----	á + ndí	"foot"
ǎkíkékí	"stores"	<-----	á + kíkékí	"to store"

Note that the tone can change when a word is compounded. Compounding with á is certainly a productive process even today.

Another type of compound is that consisting of two words of full lexical content and is mostly found in the realm of nature, names of plants or birds etc.

kǎtǎlikè'dè	"species of tree"	<-----	òtǎlì	"to glance off"
			+ kè'dè	"elephant"
mǎkú'dǎdǎmèè	"redstart (bird)"	<-----	ú'dǎdǎ	"to balance"
			+ mèè	"spear"
tǎjàlǎkpǎ	"resin"	<-----	tǎgì	"honey" + ǎ "of" (other dialects or archaic) + lǎkpǎ
				"lizard"

2.1.2.2 Derivation

The regular way of deriving nouns from verbs is by prefixing t- to the verb stem.

tǎsǎlì	"beautifying"	<-----	ìsǎlì	"to beautify"
tǎtǎ	"removing, removal"	<-----	òtǎ	"to remove"

Any verb can be so prefixed and function as a noun but it still retains the verbal function of taking an object.

tí tòbǎ ngǎlǎ "with singing songs"

There are also nouns which have clearly been derived from verbs in the past even though the process is no longer an active one. The most common pattern is that a consonant initial verb root functions as a noun without its verbal prefix,

'bólú	"cheating"	<-----	ù'bólú	"to cheat"
sùsù	"accusation"	<-----	ùsùsù	"to accuse"

and a vowel initial verb root is prefixed with either I- or nd-

lámà	"beating"	<-----	ómà	"to beat"
ndògò	"trading"	<-----	úgò	"to trade"

2.1.2.3 Noun function

Mödö nouns occur in the subject, object and adjunct of a sentence. Nouns referring to a location may occur alone in the adjunct but other nouns only occur in the adjunct in a prepositional phrase.

The noun class is a large one with a number of subclasses: noun, pronoun, preposition, demonstrative and vocative. Of these subclasses, pronouns, demonstratives and vocatives cannot be qualified, nor can prepositions when functioning as prepositions. However, those prepositions which refer to body parts may be qualified when they have a full noun function.

2.1.2.3.1 Vocatives

Vocatives are nouns which can only be used as terms of address and which function in the vocative slot at the beginning of a sentence in direct speech.

ábá	term of address between men of the same age
bónè	term of address by men and women to friends

2.1.2.3.2 Prepositions

This is a small subclass consisting mainly of certain body parts which are also used to indicate the position of one thing in relation to another.

rò	"body, as"	gò	"back, behind"
dò	"head, on"	bìcì	"bottom, under"
kòmò	"face, eye, in front"	kpà	"mouth, at"
mì	"belly, inside"		

The difference between them and other words referring to body parts is that they can function in a preposition-like way in the adjunct.

'jà	nìmà	árí	gò	tìk'ódó
woman	that	go	behind	salt
<i>"That woman went for salt."</i>				

lìjè	úsù	pà'dò	dò	kúrúkù
they	put	fire	on	fierce-creature
<i>"They set the fierce creature on fire."</i>				

A few words belonging to the preposition class are not body parts and function only as prepositions.

tí	"with"	dì	"from"	zí	"to"
----	--------	----	--------	----	------

following low tone it takes high tone, so that in all cases there is a tone glide from the verb to its object *yí*.

bò kòdá yí ǔǔì
 he waits you disc.
 "He is waiting for you."
bò kùpò yí ǔǔì
 he kills you disc.
 "He will kill you."

The 3rd sg. distinction between masculine and feminine pronouns is agreed by native speakers to be correct language and is preferred in written communications, but in conversation it is rarely observed. The masculine and feminine pronouns are mixed up, some speakers never using *lǎkó* and many people showing a preference for *nì* over *bò* in possessive constructions. In particular, reflexive meaning is nearly always conveyed by *rònì* <----- *rò nì* "body his/her", whether the person is male or female.

bò ùrógò rònì 'déní
 he wash himself compl.
 "He washed himself."

Inanimate things tend to figure less often in subject position but if they do occur as subjects they can be referred to by *bò*, never *lǎkó*. In object position they are most commonly referred to by *mò*, though again *bò* is possible.

The pronoun *mò* requires further comment. It does not appear on the chart of pronouns because it does not fit clearly into the categories represented there. It is an anaphoric 3rd sg. pronoun, occurring as object or possessive but without gender distinction. It can refer to the animate or the inanimate. In contrast to the other 3rd person pronouns it is never combined with *'bà* in the possessive and it seems to be used of things or persons that are out of focus in a narrative or situation.

2.1.3 Adverbs

Adverbs form a large class in *Mödö*, expressing many ideas which in European languages would be expressed by adjectives. What distinguishes the formation of adverbs from other classes is reduplication. A large number of adverbs, though not those referring to time or place, can be reduplicated, and the reduplicated forms are either of a plural or repetitive nature or intensified. This is not to say that the unreduplicated form cannot apply to things plural but that it is unmarked for number whereas the reduplicated form is definitely marked for plural subject or for repeated or intensified action.

kpà Júrú 'bérí dì gò 'bà Kòrì
 mouth Jur different from back of Dinka
 "The language of the Jur is different from that of the Dinka."
kínè bilàkà méé rò 'bérí'bérí
 appearance people all as different
 "All people are different from one another in appearance."
bò ògà yòki òkú kòbó kíló
 he strike side rock shine flickering-red
 "He struck the side of the rock and it flashed red."

dòkú àmè ná kó'bo ndúwé tòbó kílókíló
 rock this top. remains always to-shine flickering-red
"This rock keeps on always flashing red."

Adverbs function on their own in the adjunct. Like adverbs in other languages they modify the meaning of a verb or another adverb in a verbal clause, or they modify the meaning of the subject or of another adverb in a non-verbal clause.

bò ényì kílà'bà ngì gòrò'dà
 he get-up fall disc. on-hands-and-knees
"He went and fell on his hands and knees."

kpà Mòdó 'bérí dì gò 'bà Kòrì
 mouth Mòdò different from back of Dinka
"The language of the Mòdò is different from that of the Dinka."

Several adverbs may occur in the same clause or together with one or more prepositional phrases modifying the same verb.

ótò m̀lì nì mà té kòtò liyè dáyì
 take-out grass that so only singly from-here
"Take out one piece of grass from here like this."

In the above example *té*, *kòtò*, *liyè* and *dáyì* are all adverbs.

lòkó ómbí kólè 'bèni 'déní ngèè d̀ gòlò nì
 she lifts child her compl. carefully on thigh her
"She carefully lifted her child onto her lap."

Here the adverb *ngèè* co-occurs with a prepositional phrase *d̀ gòlò nì* "on her thighs."

A small subclass of adverbs, besides functioning in the adjunct, also occur sometimes immediately following a conjunction at the beginning of the clause or sentence, for example *'jáà* "later"

bò èdí kòdò 'jáà yágà r̀ m̀ kòròndò
 he is-at come-out later outside body in night
"He comes out later at night."

kíná 'jáà l̀jè k̀dék̀ bò kákó
 then later they call him come
"Then later they call him to come."

A few words deserve mention for their special functions, even though their position in the clause and other considerations lead one to classify them as adverbs. These are *'déní* "completive marker", *r̀á* "negative conditional marker" and *d̀é* "negative marker". In many languages the concepts expressed by these adverbs would be realised in the verb or at least in the verb phrase but in Mòdò they occur in the adjunct, separated from the verb by the object.

kìrábà òpè kómó 'déní dì m̀ m̀l̀bìwù
 jackal release hare compl. from in snare
"Jackal released Hare from the snare."

dúwòkè léndé 'bà r̀ kómà'jò àbò dé gbí yó
 we-hear matter of body humbling his not also against-
"We did not listen to his urgent plea." expectation

2.1.4 Qualifiers

Qualifiers are words that occur in noun phrases qualifying a noun and also following rò “as” in the adjunct.

bò ndí bìyárí tóné ná mé 'dé
 person foot emaciated that top. this over-there

“That is the person I told you about with emaciated legs over there.”

In the above example bìyárí is a qualifier.

tòrò á'dì 'déní ḡḡì rò mbémbé
 rain fall compl. disc. as great

“There was heavy rain.”

It could be asked why the term ‘adjective’ is not used for this class since it functions in a similar way to adjectives in English and other languages. The main reason is that Mödö qualifiers can not occur in an existential clause, that is, there is no Mödö construction grammatically identical to an English sentence such as “The roses are red”. The qualifier class is in fact a fairly small one and it seems likely that many, if not all, of its members were nouns which have lost currency except in some very restricted environments. The descriptive ideas which in European languages are expressed by adjectives are expressed in Mödö by adverbs or descriptive verbs. For example, many colour words are verbs.

àsí “red”

òlù “black, dark”

èsè “green/blue”

àḡmí “white, light-coloured”

2.1.5 Conjunctions

Most conjunctions occur at the beginning of a clause with the function of introducing it and showing its logical relations with other clauses in the same sentence or with other sentences in the text.

kíná lìjè kótà kpènní ḡḡì
 then they knock mouths-their disc.

“Then they fought each other.”

Kíná “then” indicates temporal sequence, one action simply following another.

bò íricà bḡḡó yágà dì rò bò ròmòyì léndé
 he tear cloth out from body his because affair

nimà átà 'déní dòkí'dì bò sòwà
 that was-bitter compl. heart his very

“He tore off his clothes because he was so upset about the affair.”

Ròmòyì “because” shows that the second clause gives the reason for the action in the first clause. Reason clauses always occur after the main clause which they modify.

A conjunction which regularly occurs at the end of a clause instead of the beginning is tìnè when it is associated with òdḡ. òdḡ . . . tìnè means “when” whereas tìnè alone at the beginning of a clause means roughly “but”.

2.1.6 Exclamations

Exclamations normally occur in direct speech only, as one might expect, and always at the beginning of a sentence.

éè	refusing something not wanted
yó	exclamation of helplessness
m'm	exclamation of pain
m'm	"no!"

2.2 Phrase Structure

2.2.1 Noun Phrase

There are three types of noun phrase:

1. the basic phrase consisting of noun plus qualifying elements
2. the possessive phrase
3. the vocative phrase.

2.2.1.1 Basic phrase

The order of elements is as follows:

noun + poss.pron. + ma rel. cl. + numeral + plural + tóné + nímé/nimà
+ marker of association

However, it would be very unusual to find all these elements in a single phrase.

Nouns, possessive pronouns and qualifiers have already been described. Relative clauses will be dealt with under the section on clause structure and numerals do not need comment but something needs to be said about the demonstratives, the plural marker and the marker of association.

2.2.1.1.1 Demonstratives

The demonstratives described in section 2.1.2.3.3 are demonstratives functioning in the noun class, namely mé "this one", mà "that one" and tóné "the one previously mentioned". The same three demonstratives also function in the noun phrase modifying the noun, but there mé and mà are prefixed with ni-

'jà nímé "this woman" kólé nìmà "that child"

nì- does not occur elsewhere in the language.

2.2.1.1.2 Plural Marker gà

As already explained, Mödö nouns have the same form in both singular and plural. In fact, in many instances plural is not marked at all. Where a speaker desires to mark it, gà is used, together with a demonstrative or other qualifying elements.

kúpó yí gà
descendant your(sg.) plural
"your descendants"

bò kósó gò bò gà
person follow after him plural
"his followers"

biláká kònzì nàgà nìmà
 people many plural that
 "those numerous people"

The above examples show how gà comes after possessive pronouns and qualifiers but before the demonstratives nímé and nìmà in the noun phrase. With these demonstratives it takes the form nàgà. With the demonstrative tóné, however, it follows them and takes the basic form gà.

kúrúkú lóbù tóné gà
 fierce-creature big that plural
 "those fierce creatures mentioned before"

2.2.1.1.3 Marker of association nì

This word indicates that the noun which it follows is associated with other nouns with which it is conjoined as separate members of one group or list.

'bù nì nì tí mà bò
 father his assoc. with mother his
 "his father and mother"

Bòkò'bá ò'bá mî̀tòrò nì tí d̀̀lìg̀̀ò
 God created sky assoc. with earth
 "God created the sky and the earth."

It is not essential to have another noun conjoined with the first. Nì alone indicates that the speaker is referring to several different people or things.

'bù nì nì
 father his assoc.
 "his father and . . ."

which implies in the particular text from which it is taken "his father and mother" because "mother" is naturally associated with "father" in the context of the story.

In another text we find

nzùnzù 'bà ngéí nì
 rotten-pieces of wood/tree assoc.
 "rotten pieces of wood"

The nì here implies that the wood is from different kinds of trees, not all of one sort.

2.2.1.2 Possessive phrase

There are two types of possessive phrase in Mödö, the alienable and the inalienable.

Alienable possessive phrases take the form:

noun(possessed) + 'bà + noun(possessor)

mbò'dà 'bà Nyikénzé "Nyikenze's bag"

When 'bà is followed by a pronoun its form is modified by that pronoun, so that we have:

'bámá	"my"	'bèzé	"our"
'bèyí	"your(sg.)"	'bèyé	"your(pl.)"
'bà bò	"his"	'bèní*	"their"
'bèní	"her"	*in the orthography 'bènnī	

The inalienable construction juxtaposes the two nouns without 'bà.

'bù yí	"your father"
kpà bà'dó	"the warthog's mouth"

The difference in function between alienable and inalienable is that the relationship in an inalienable construction is one where the thing possessed is an integral part of the whole and cannot be alienated from the possessor. It therefore particularly often refers to body parts or to blood relatives who always retain the same relationship to one another, but it can also be found in many other expressions. In contrast, the alienable possessive indicates a more temporary or loose connection between possessor and possessd.

Stevenson ("Bagirmi Grammar"; 1969, Khartoum) describes the same two types of possessive (or genitive) construction for Bagirmi. He also mentions that the Bagirmi possessive marker *an*, equivalent to Mödö 'bà, has a second, emphatic, function. The same is true for 'bà.

2.2.1.3 Vocative phrase

The vocative phrase consists either of a specific vocative word as described in section 2.1.2.3.1, or of a personal name or of any noun which can be used to address someone.

2.2.2 Verb Phrase

The verb phrase in Mödö consists of only two possible elements: future particle *tí* + verb. The future particle is the only aspect marker belonging strictly to the verb phrase, since the other aspect markers, 'déní and rá, and the negative marker dè, function as adverbs in the adjunct.

Tí occurs immediately before the verb and following the subject if there is a free subject.

lóbù	tí	kúwó	dòyí
elder	fut.	hear	head-your(sg.)
"The elders will obey you."			

However, if the subject is a verbal prefix, *tí* comes first.

tí	mókònyì	yí
fut.	I-rescue	you
"I will rescue you."		

The exception is where the speaker wishes to convey a greater degree of certainty than is usual with the future tense, in which case *tí* precedes the free subject.

tí	bò	kójà	'déní	ngì	'dò	kákó	ziyé
fut.	he	send	compl.	disc.	so-that	come	to-you
"He will definitely send him to you."							

As will be seen from the above example, future particle *tí* can co-occur with completive *'déní*.

This *tí* is not to be confused with the adverb *tí* "warningly", which can also come before the subject with a conjunction, for example *kíná tí*.

It should be noted that with *tí* the verb always appears in its *k-* form. If the aspect of the verb is not future there will of course be no future marker and the form of the verb may be with or without *k-*, according to the rules described in section 2.1.1.3.

2.3 Clause Structure

The basic order of Mödö verbal clauses, as already mentioned, is:

subject + verb + object + adjunct

In the case of non-verbal clauses it is:

subject + adjunct

Conjunctions occur at the beginning of the clause.

Whether or not there is an object depends on the meaning of the verb and has no grammatical implications. The transitive/intransitive distinction has therefore no particular significance in Mödö.

2.3.1 Absence of a subject

The absence of a subject is of rather more interest and occurs under three conditions:

2.3.1.1 Shared subject

When several clauses share a common subject, it may be referred to only once, in the initial clause.

<i>kíná kúrúkù</i>	<i>lóbù tóné kùtì</i>	<i>ngì</i>				
then fierce-creature	big that answered	disc.				
<i>kíná kùggóggó</i>	<i>rònì ngì dì</i>	<i>mì mé'dí</i>	<i>kòdò</i>	<i>yága</i>		
then moved	itself disc. from in	forest	come-out	outside		
<i>k'p'dí</i>	<i>tílápó</i>	<i>bì 'bà</i>	<i>dékí</i>	<i>nimà</i>	<i>ngì</i>	
begin	approach	place of	call that		disc.	

*"Then that great monster answered and heaved itself up in the forest.
It came out and went in the direction of that call."*

Above are four clauses with four different verbs but with one subject, *kúrúkù lóbù tóné* "that great monster". Constructions of this kind are common in narrative, especially in fast-moving, dramatic episodes.

2.3.1.2 Actor in focus

The subject is often omitted where the actor or agent is in focus and is clear from the context.

<i>bì 'bà</i>	<i>túkòrì</i>	<i>mò ó'bò</i>	<i>gbúró</i>	<i>mì ró</i>	<i>tòrò</i>
place of	spending-day	his remain	always	in house	up

èdí kòdò 'jáà yágà rò mǐ kòróndó
is-at come-out later outside body in night

"His whole day was always spent inside a raised house and he only went outside at night."

The verb èdí has no overt subject nor does it share a subject with the preceding clause, but in the context the clause clearly refers to the behaviour of the story's hero.

2.3.1.3 Agent not in focus

In clauses of this type the agent is either unknown or out of focus. Their function is therefore semantically similar to that of the passive in European languages but has no distinctive grammatical feature apart from absence of subject.

kùlèmè yòbì pílí zí Dòkùrù
show young-man all to Dòkuru

"Dòkuru was shown all the young men."

Here the agents of "show" are known but the focus is on Dòkuru and his reaction to events, so the subject is omitted.

2.3.2 Fronting of nominals

Omission of the subject depends on considerations largely, though not exclusively, to do with the context. Contextual considerations also produce other variations in the basic order of the clause. Fronting and repetition of one of the nominal elements indicates a thematic link with previous clauses or sentences.

léndé m̀t̀s g̀à b̀ò úwó ỳimò mbòwàmbòwà
word some pl. he hear in-it a-little

m̀t̀s g̀à b̀ò úwó d̀é
some pl. he hear not

"He understood some of the words a little but others he did not understand."

The description in the above example is of someone being addressed in a strange language which he only partially understands. In both clauses the object, léndé m̀t̀s g̀à "some words", is fronted in order to connect it clearly with the previous sentence in which the strange language was first mentioned. The object is then repeated in the first clause by the phrase ỳimò "in it". There is also an element of contrast in this example between the actor's understanding some words but not understanding others.

Even the subject can be 'fronted' in the sense that a noun phrase is given and then repeated immediately by a pronoun subject.

b̀ò ǹimé b̀ò ényì 'déní
person this he get-up compl.

"This person got up."

The subject, b̀ò ǹimé "this person", referring to the chief actor in an anecdote, is repeated by the pronoun b̀ò "he" for emphasis, probably because the speaker, having explained how the person in question made preparations for a wedding, is now going on to tell what happened on the day of the wedding. He wants to emphasise that he is still talking about the same man.

The fronting of nominal elements can happen in non-verbal clauses as much as in verbal ones.

d̀̀ỳ̀ỳ̀	'b̀̀	b̀̀	b̀̀r̀̀	ỳ̀ỳ̀	k̀̀ǹ̀	̀̀g̀̀r̀̀
land	of	person	under	there	appearance	tree
m̀̀	g̀̀	t̀̀	m̀̀l̀̀	m̀̀	g̀̀	̀̀g̀̀
its	pl.	with	grass	its	pl.	disc.
						'b̀̀r̀̀
						different

"The appearance of the trees and grass in the land of the underground people was different."

The context of the above sentence is that of an adventure underground. Someone has arrived in the underground land and now we are given a description of it. **D̀̀ỳ̀ỳ̀ 'b̀̀ b̀̀ b̀̀r̀̀** "land of the underground people" connects the clause clearly with the preceding one and is repeated in the normal clause order by the possessive pronoun **m̀̀**. To say **k̀̀ǹ̀ ̀̀g̀̀r̀̀ 'b̀̀ d̀̀ỳ̀ỳ̀ 'b̀̀ b̀̀ b̀̀r̀̀** here is possible but reduces the thematic connection.

Fronting of temporal phrases from adjunct position is used in narrative to give the setting or mark a new episode.

m̀̀	k̀̀d̀̀	ǹ̀m̀̀	d̀̀r̀̀	b̀̀	l̀̀k̀̀
in	day	that	we-go	place	hunting

"On that day we went off hunting."

m̀̀	k̀̀m̀̀	k̀̀s̀̀	m̀̀t̀̀	s̀̀ỳ̀	'b̀̀	k̀̀d̀̀	m̀̀ǹ̀	̀̀k̀̀	d̀̀ỳ̀ỳ̀
in	eye	year	other	disaster	of	seek	water	come	land

"One year there was a terrible drought."

2.3.3 Topicalisation with **ǹ̀**

For contrastive emphasis a nominal is fronted and followed by **ǹ̀**, the topicalising particle, in both verbal and non-verbal clauses.

k̀̀d̀̀	ǹ̀	k̀̀l̀̀	'b̀̀	'd̀̀ǹ̀	b̀̀r̀̀	d̀̀	m̀̀t̀̀r̀̀
sun	top.	fall		compl.	down	from	sky

"It was the sun that had fallen down from the sky."

k̀̀t̀̀	'b̀̀	m̀̀ǹ̀	ǹ̀	l̀̀k̀̀	k̀̀t̀̀k̀̀
pot	of	mother-her	top.	she	smash

"It was her mother's pot she had smashed."

m̀̀l̀̀	g̀̀t̀̀	ǹ̀	r̀̀	b̀̀	k̀̀p̀̀ǹ̀
grass	tough	top.	body	place	mouth-their

"Tough grass is their favourite food."

2.3.4 The Adjunct

Nominal and verbal phrases have been described in sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 but some comment is needed on the adjunct. The adjunct consists of one or more adverbs and/or prepositional phrases modifying the verb in a verbal clause, or, in a non-verbal clause, functioning as predicate to the subject. The most common preposition to occur is **r̀̀** "body", which in its function as a preposition can mean "as" but in non-verbal clauses more often fulfils the same purpose as a copula verb would in other languages.

góló rò yèrí
eland animal

"The eland is an animal."

Even in verbal clauses the same copula function of rò often appears, as in the sentence below.

bò ùyì rònì 'déní rò yèrí
he turn body-his compl. to-be animal

"He turned himself into an animal."

2.3.5 Questions

So far I have given examples only of statements. A statement can be turned into a question simply by means of a question intonation without changing the word order or the form of the verb. Question intonation involves a rising pitch at the end of the sentence instead of the falling pitch associated with statements. However, questions containing an interrogative word such as wà'dí "what", yé "who" etc. do not usually take the rising pitch intonation. These interrogative words occur at the end of the clause.

mòyì lóndò yí nìmà rò yé?
name brother your(sg.) that who?

"What is your brother's name?"

If a question is an open one where the speaker simply seeks information, or if he expects a negative answer, there is no marker apart from intonation, but certain other types of question contain a question marker word. There are only two members of this class: 'dì, yá. Where the speaker expects the answer 'yes' 'dì occurs at the end of the sentence.

kòzò mó'jà yí gbí ò dī mī nyáká 'dè yáyì tí
as I-see you also from in field over there with

Goli 'dì?

Goli qu.-m.

"Didn't I see you over there in the field with Goli?"

This form of question can also be used to express a polite request where something has already been offered.

Yá marks questions where the content is known and has already been mentioned or discussed but the speaker seeks confirmation of its truth or clarification of details.

kúrukù mò nìmà ná mé gbí kíyá té
fierce-creature its that top. this also you-say thus

índíyó bàbá nè yá?
swallow Dad rel. qu.-m.

"So did you say it was that fierce creature which swallowed Dad?"

Yá can also occur in combination with other interrogative words such as yé "who" and tóndó "how", apparently without the above significance but simply to mark the sentence as a question.

2.3.6 Commands

There is no special form of the verb or clause for commands. A clause with a second person verb and statement intonation is most often a command.

árí kònyòkè kíígbá bò yágà
 you-go eat(pl.) bone his out
 “Go and eat up his bones.”

2.4 Sentence Structure

Besides simple one-clause sentences as described in the previous section Mödö has many complex sentences consisting of two or more clauses. There are three types of complexity:

1. Sentences with one subject governing several clauses
2. Sentences with subordinate clauses
3. Embedding of clauses

2.4.1 One subject governing several clauses

As described in section 2.3.1.1 it is not necessary to repeat the subject in every clause. The example given in that section is of a sentence with four clauses but only one subject. It would still be correct grammar to repeat the subject in each clause but its omission makes for a more fast-moving narrative.

2.4.2 Subordinate clauses

Sentences expressing logical relations other than a straightforward chronological sequence have one or more subordinate clauses introduced by a conjunction. The subordinating conjunctions and their logical relations are:

'dós, gò	purpose/intention
tínè, nè	“but”, a relation that does not follow logically from main clause
òdós	“when, if” at the same or future time
dénè	“lest” introduces might-have-beens
téjè/tégè	“when” introducing speech
ròmòyì	“because” introducing both cause and reason
mé	introduces example given as the ground for the previous statement
mà	“when, as” at a time earlier than the main clause

Some conjunctions can be combined with others:

téjè mé ròmòyì 'dós

There is no grammatical difference between a main and a subordinate clause. The verb forms are the same and so is the word order within the clause. Only the conjunction marks the logical distinction.

As regards the order of clauses within the sentence, temporal clauses, (and in fact any kind of temporal expression, whether clause, phrase or word), tend to occur first. The temporal clauses are the ones beginning with *òdó*, *téjè*, *mà*. Other subordinate clauses usually follow the main clause.

2.4.3 Embedded clauses

There are two types of embedded clause:

1. Relative clauses
2. Clauses beginning with *'dó*

2.4.3.1 Relative clauses

Relative clauses are either general, in which case they are introduced by *mà*, or they are specific and have both an initial and a final marker. The initial markers are either *ámé* or one of the demonstratives *nímé* "this", *nìmà* "that" or *tóné* "the one previously referred to". The final marker is *nè*. In speech the final marker is often dropped but that is felt to be careless language.

Below are some examples of general relative clauses introduced by *mà*:

yòbì *'bèyí* *mà* *kótà* *dòmò* *ìnzá?*
 young-man your(sg.) rel-m you-swear on-him is-not
 "Haven't you got a young man to swear by?"

kàpà yítùtù *mà kárí kpà ró* *tòrò*
 side kitchen rel-m goes at house up
 "the side of the kitchen facing the raised house"

bò ényì *kárí tómá* *wá mà kindìlì*
 he gets-up goes to-see thing rel-m is-sweet
 "He went out to look for some sweet things."

Many descriptive expressions in *Mödö* are of this form, *mà* followed by a verb with descriptive meaning such as "sweet", "red", "old", "hard" etc.

Examples of the specific relative clause ending in *nè* follow below:

bò kítètè *ngè ngúlú* *rò gò bì ámé* *bò kèdì*
 he circled only round body back place which he is-at
kídèyì *gbá'dá* *ábò tèyí nè*
 put stool his there

"He circled round only on the (particular) place where he used to set his stool."

bò *ámé 'bèni* *rò bò* *dórí* *nè*
 person who his body person right-hand
 "the person who was the right-handed one"
 (out of two, the other being left-handed)

kàráma *lóbù nímé kèdí kárí yimò* *ngè tí kàzò nè*
 party big this is-at go in-it only with horn
 "this big party which one can only go to if one has horns"
 (in contrast to other parties which have no such requirement)

2.4.3.2 Embedded clauses with 'dɔ 'purpose'

When 'dɔ introduces a clause dependent on a noun or noun phrase it still has purpose meaning.

kúrúkù	'dɔ	kíndá'bá	yídá kòzò	mà dògbá	tóné	inzá
fierce-animal		catch	meat like	rel-m first	that	are-not

"There are no fierce animals to catch meat as formerly."

2.5 Discourse considerations

There are some distinct grammatical differences between narrative and non-narrative discourse which deserve mention even in a sketch such as this.

One is that there is a marked preference in narrative for a straightforward sequence of events with a minimum of subordinate clauses. Most clauses are introduced by *kíná* "then" unless they contain some temporal expression, and only the first clause in each episode has a verb in the independent form (see section 2.1.1.3), the rest taking the dependent verb form beginning with *k-*. Non-narrative shows much greater variation of clause types and many more subordinate clauses.

Another noticeable feature of narrative is the use of the particle *ngì* to mark the main event line. Every main clause in the event line contains *ngì* whereas background material or subsidiary matters are not marked by *ngì*. In contrast, *ngì* in non-narrative is used simply for emphasis and occurs much more sparsely.

Thirdly, in narrative, even though a story is set in the past, *'déní*, the completive marker, rarely occurs in the main event line but only in background material or direct speech. Non-narrative discourses and conversation tend to put *'déní* in every clause referring to action which is already past and finished.

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