6.1 The Nominal Clump

The Nominal Clump is a notion Haiman (2011: 141 ff) uses for his analysis of Khmer. He proposes it as “a unit midway between phrases and clauses with respect to the criterion of fixity [of the constituents]” (Haiman 2011: 153). The constraints on relative order of the constituents in a word is greater than they are in a phrase. In a phrase, these constraints are greater than in a clause. The Nominal Clump is a referential unit that consists of one or more phrases, none of which is obligatory and “each is perfectly capable of occurring alone” (Haiman 2011: 141). The order of the elements within the Nominal Clump is not entirely fixed.

Since all the phrases in the Clump can occur on their own and refer on their own, it is not possible to say what the head of the Nominal Clump is. It is possible to say what the heads of the phrases are, namely either deictic words or the words that denote the entity that the phrase is about, which may be overt or have to be inferred.

This notion of Nominal Clump proves useful to describe the way Atong uses material to indicate referents in clauses. The structure of the Nominal Clump (or NC) can be presented by a phase-structure rule where the brackets indicate the non-obligatoriness of the constituents:

\[ NC \rightarrow (\text{Deictic phrase}) (\text{Noun phrase}) (\text{Quantifier phrase}) \]

Deictic phrases consist of a demonstrative or personal pronoun and are always the first element in an NC, except for one recorded instance treated below. Deictic phrases consisting of a demonstrative can attract the phrasal enclitics away from the Noun Phrase with which they corefer (see §1.1.1). The Quantifier Phrase consists of a classifier and a quantifier and usually follows but may also precede the Noun Phrase. There is one recorded instance of a Quantifier Phrase preceding a Deictic Phrase, but the deictic word was a personal pronoun (see example (269) in §11.1). Quantifier Phrases that precede demonstratives have not been recorded. The Noun Phrase will be described in the next section.

A big difference between the NC in Khmer and Atong has to do with continuity. The Nominal Clump in Khmer can be discontinuous. This is illustrated by example (92) (my numbering) from Haiman (2011: 150, example 12g), where NP is Noun Phrase and MP is measure phrase; both phrases belonging to the same Nominal Clump, the MP quantifying the NP from afar.
The Atong NC cannot be broken up in this way; the elements that are expressed have to be contiguous. It is noteworthy that the Deictic phrases in both Atong and Khmer have a more or less fixed position at the edge of the clump: in Khmer it is the last element (Haiman 2011: 174) and in Atong the first.

There are plenty of examples of differently formed Nominal Clumps all throughout this grammar; therefore I will limit myself to just a few examples here. In (93), we see a lonely Deictic Phrase (DP) functioning as the Topic of the sentence, viz. geʔtheytheyj, which is separated intentionally (with a pause), and morphologically (through topic marking) from the following NC, but is coreferential with it: bobarara məŋʔni. The NC consists of an NP with only the head, boba, and a Quantifier Phrase (QTFP). The meaning of the classifier məŋʔ (classifier for humans) is a good indication that the Quantifier Phrase belongs to the same NC as boba ‘crazy person’ and has no semantic connection to golpho ‘story’, which is a separate NP.

(93) teʔdo geʔtheytheyjdo, bobarara məŋʔni golpho kaʔrukokno.
    teʔ =do [geʔtheytheyj]DP =do
    now =TOP 3PL =TOP
    [[boba]NP =rara [məŋʔ ni]QTFP ]NC
    crazy.person =AMONGST CLF:HUMANS 2
    [golpho]NP khaʔ -ruk =ok =no
    story do -RECP =ASP =QUOT
‘Now as for them, the two crazy persons gossiped amongst each other.’

In (94) we see a clause that starts off with a goal-marked Deictic Phrase referring to a first person singular Beneficiary. This DP is followed by an Nominal Clump with a different referent, viz. the children of the speaker. This NC consists of a Quantifier Phrase followed by a Noun Phrase. The fact that the accusative enclitic is represented inside the NC brackets means that I think that it has scope only over the NP, not the whole NC. I think that because, as we can see in (95), two constituents within the NC can be marked with the same phrasal enclitic, which makes an enclitic that has scope over the whole NC seem superfluous. In (95) the repeated enclitic is the accusative <aw> (ACC).

(94) aŋna məŋʔ tham naŋʔ saʔaw poraykhalna watetboto.
    1SG =GOAL CLF:HUMANS three 2SG child =ACC
    poray -khal =na watet =bo =to
    study -MORE =GOAL send =IMP =IMPEMPH
‘For my benefit, do send three of your children to study more.’