

The origin and spread of possessee-like qualifiers in Central Africa.

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1. Introduction: possessee-like qualifiers

In a number of central African languages attributive NPs have the form of possessive constructions headed by the qualifier, e.g. example (1 b-c) from Basaa (Benue-Congo, Bantu; Cameroon; Larry Hyman 2003).

(1) Connective (genitive) construction used to express a possessive relation:

- a. li-wándá lí = kíŋê
5-friend V.GEN = chief
'the friend of the chief'

Connective construction with possessee-like qualifier:

- b. li-kéŋgé lí = m-ût
5-clever V.GEN = 1-person
'a clever person'
- c. mà-kéŋgé má = 6-ôt
6-clever VI.GEN = 2-persons
'clever people'

Similar constructions have been observed in Aleut (Paleosiberian), Chinook (Penutian) and the Oceanic languages of northwestern Melanesia and are claimed to be rare crosslinguistically (Andrej Malchukov 2000).

Alternative names for possessee-like qualifiers or possessee-like qualifier constructions:

Andrej Malchukov (2000): *dependency-reversal-in-noun-attributive constructions* (DRNA)

Malcolm Ross (1998): *possessive-like-attribute-constructions* (PLACs): but this term is ambiguous.

also: *adjectival nouns, nominal adjectives, ...*

Possessee-like qualifiers have to be distinguished from possessor-like qualifiers and expressive binominal NPs:

PLACs but not possessee-like qualifiers

(2) Makwe (Benue-Congo, Bantu; Mozambique; Maud Devos 2008: 136)

muú-nu w-á = ki-búúli

1-person I-GEN = 7-silent

‘a silent person’ (literally: ‘person of silent’)

(3) Zaar (Afro-Asiatic, Chadic, West B3; Nigeria; Bernard Caron 2005: 227)

lât kó mū:rī

skin GEN new

‘a new skin’ (literally: ‘skin of new’)

Expressive binominal NPs (EBNPs) (Ad Foolen 2004)

(4) Shingazidja (Benue-Congo, Bantu; Grande Comore; Michel Lafon 1997: 161)

a. trombe l-a = m-ndru

[5]avorted_seed V-GEN = 1-person

‘a dead loss’

b. dji-ndru l-a = meza

5-giant V-GEN = table

‘a huge table’

2. Examples from Benue-Congo languages

Eton (Bantu A70; Cameroon; Mark Van de Velde 2008)

(5) èbèŋ é lòn

è-bèŋ é = lòn

5-beauty V.GEN = [5]hair

‘beautiful hair’

(6) ìṅgúṅwál í môd
 ì-ṅgúṅwál í = m-òd
 7-miserable VII.GEN = 1-person
 ‘a miserable person’

(7) a. ìvèṅvèz ípég í'té kù
 ì-vèṅvèz ^H=N-pég í-^Lté ^L-kù
 7-light VII.GEN = 3-bag VII.PR INF-fall
 ‘The light bag falls.’

b. mèté 'yén yô
 mè-^Lté ^L-jén j-ǝ
 1SG-PR INF-see VII-PRO
 ‘I see it.’

3 Examples from Ubangian languages

Gbaya (mainly CAR; Paulette Roulon-Doko 1997, 2008, p.c.)

Four types of adnominal qualifiers: seventeen underived adjectives (8), an open class of derived adjectives (9), seventy five qualifying relational nouns (10) & eighteen non-relational nouns (11). For the latter, qualification involves metaphor or metonymy.

(8) gbà'á fò
 gbà'á-^H fò
 old-REL field
 ‘an old field (waste land)’

(9) gásá tùà
 gási-á(-^H) tùà
 be.big-ADJ-(REL) house
 ‘a big house’

(10) bàfá ndàè
 bàfá-^H ndàè
 male-REL cow
 ‘a bull’

(11) wèé yì
wèè-^H yì
fire-REL water
'hot water'

(12) gásáà
gásí-á-^H-à
be.big-ADJ-REL-REL.PRO
'the big one'

(13) gàsì kó tùà
bigness REL house
'the bigness of the house'

4. Examples from Chadic languages

4.1. Hausa (West Chadic; Nigeria)

(14) kàaká-an yáaròò
grandfather-LK.MS boy[MS]
'the boy's grandfather'

(15) rìigáa fár-áa
gown[FS] white-FS
'white gown'

(16) a. fár-á-r rìigáa
white-FS-LK.FS gown[FS]
'white gown'
b. fár-i-n zánèè
white-MS-LK.MS cloth[MS]
'white cloth'

4.2. Podoko (Biu Mandara; Cameroon; Elizabeth Jarvis 1989)

Two types of attributive NPs do not involve DRNA: postposed, reduplicated adjectives (17) and postposed qualifying nouns (18).

(17) v̀àgà z̀àṅgèz̀àṅgà
place distant
'a distant place'

(18) ùdz̀ər̀è m̀às̀èf̀à
child laziness
'a lazy child'

But four so-called adjectival nominals are construed as the head of a DRNA construction, viz. *mudé* 'old', *ʸdálə* 'good, beautiful', *matá* 'big' & *ʸudzə* 'small' (19). Evidence for this comes from their independent use (20-21).

(19) ʸd̀àl̀è ʸt̀àkẁàs̀à
good thing
'a good thing'

(20) mùd̀è-ṅ̀à
old-3SG.KIN.POS
'the old one'

(21) ʸd̀àl̀è-g̀à m̀èná
good-? 3SG.POS
'the good one'

5. Examples from Central Sudanic languages

Bongo (Central Sudanic; Sudan; Pierre Nougayrol 2008)

(22) f̀ír k̀ɛ̀ɲ̀à
speech bad
'bad words'

(23) mà-kə̀nà fɪr
?-badness speech
'bad words'

(24) fɪr ká kə̀nàa
speech with badness_of_it
'mauvaise parole, mauvaise action'

6. Discussion and analysis

Compact geographical distribution across families and phyla, typologically rare phenomenon: clearly an areal phenomenon, spread via contact. But given the important typological diversity, which feature spread?

An abstract constructional scheme: use the same strategy for expressing possessives and qualities.

Striking evidence for the analogy between possessives and qualities can be found in Zande (Ubangian) and in Kwakum (Bantu).

Zande (Ubangian, DR Congo; Raymond Boyd 1987, ms.)

(25) mēmē nyā
bone animal
'The bone of an animal'

(26) gà gbíá 'kúmbá
GEN chief man
'the chief's man'

(27) pàràngá 'kúmbá
young man
'a boy'

(28) bàkéré ré ngàa gbíá
big 1SG.POSS COP chief
'My authority derives from the chief.' (literally: 'my importance is the chief')

(29) gù gbíá ré à-dú nī gbēgbèrè kōò
 DEM chief DEM PST-COP as/with bad 3.M.SG.POSS
 ‘That chief was bad.’

(30) a. gbāngā ngūà´ nāà gūrū ngūà
 long tree with short tree
 ‘the long stick and the short stick’
 b. gbāngā ngūǎ nāà gūrū hé
 long tree with short 3SG.INAN.POSS
 ‘the long stick and the short one’

(31) a. fỳà bòrǒ wà fỳà ángó té
 track person like track dog NEG
 ‘A person’s track is not like a dog’s track.’
 b. fỳà bòrǒ wà gà ángó té
 track person like GEN dog NEG
 ‘A person’s track is not like a dog’s.’

(32) a. gbīnzà kúmbá wà gbīnzà dē´ té
 old man like old woman NEG
 ‘An old man is not like an old woman.’
 b. gbīnzà kúmbá wà gà dē´ té
 old man like GEN woman NEG
 ‘Old men and women are not the same.’

Kwakum (Bantu A93; Cameroon; Belliard 2006)

(33) a. páá myáǎí
 good 3-voice
 ‘a beautiful voice’
 b. ngúmbà kōndù
 entire3-month
 ‘an entire month’

(34) a. càláàwè ‘fast, sharp’ < cál ‘speed’

ɔ̀dómáàwè ‘dry’ < ɔ̀mó ‘to dry’

b. ì-déló bùláàwè

8-clothes many

‘many clothes’

A tentative scenario: possessee-like qualifiers arose as nominalisation constructions in the Ubangi languages and spread through contact.

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