



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## **Possessive constructions in Tongugbe, an Ewe dialect**

Kpoglu, P.D.

### **Citation**

Kpoglu, P. D. (2019, February 28). *Possessive constructions in Tongugbe, an Ewe dialect*. LOT dissertation series. LOT, Utrecht. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/69313>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/69313>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/69313> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

**Author:** Kpoglu, P.D.

**Title:** Possessive constructions in Tongugbe, an Ewe dialect

**Issue Date:** 2019-02-28

### 1. Subject of this research

This thesis presents a study of the different types of possessive constructions in Tɔ̀ŋúgbe (written as Tongugbe in English); and explores their relationship with locative and existential constructions. It is the outcome of research based on data collected over a six-month period.

As will be shown in chapter (2), possession has been extensively studied in a typological perspective (Seiler 1981, Chappell & McGregor 1989, Velazquez-Castillo 1996, Heine 1997, Croft 2003, Stassen 2009, Creissels 2006, Haspelmath 2008, Aikhenvald 2012 etc.); and three fundamental types have been distinguished: the attributive possessive (or adnominal) construction, the predicative possessive construction and the external possessor construction. These three types can also be identified in the Ewe language. The following examples illustrate the three kinds of possessive construction in the Aɲlo dialect of the Ewe language.

Adnominal or attributive

1. **Kofi fé vú**  
Kofi POSS vehicle  
'Kofi's car'

Predicative

2. **vu lè Kofi sí**  
vehicle be.at Kofi hand  
'Kofi has a car'

External

3. **Kofi gbà ɲkú**  
Kofi destroy eye  
'Lit. Kofi damaged his eye'  
'(Kofi is blind)'

In Ewe, these different possessive construction types do not only exhibit various relationships among each other, but also are in relationships with other construction types. For instance the most common form of the predicative possessive construction involves the

## 2 POSSESSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN TONGUGBE

same predicate that is present in locative and existential constructions. Also, constituent order in predicative possessive constructions is similar to constituent order in locative and existential constructions. Witness the word order in the following examples (again, the examples are from the Aɲɔ dialect of the Ewe language):

### Possessive

4. **bólu** **le** **Kofi** **sí**  
ball be.at Kofi hand  
'Kofi has a ball'

### Locative

5. **bólu-á** **le** **kplɔ-á** **dzi**  
ball-ART.DEF be.at table-ART.DEF top  
'The ball is on the table'

### Existential

6. *bóluá líí*  
**bólu-á** **le-é**  
ball-ART.DEF be.at-PRO.3SG  
'The ball exists'

These similarities between predicative possessive, locative and existential constructions have been observed in earlier studies on the Ewe language. Indeed, Ameka (1991), in his groundbreaking thesis, aiming at accounting for the range of constructions encoding possession in Ewe, highlights the structural and semantic similarity that characterizes the three construction types. He continues the line of research initiated by Benveniste (1966) and Akuatsey (1989), who have sought to characterize the use of the predicate that is involved in the three types of construction. Finally, Heine (1997) observes that the predicative possessive construction of the language results from a grammaticalization process taking as its source the locative construction, and thus, he also acknowledges the link between the three types of constructions.

However, as elaborate as these studies are, they take as primary data the standardized version of the Ewe language, and take less into

account the variation that exists within the language (at the exception of Ameka 1991). Consequently, they are deprived of the possibility of analyzing the finer morphosyntactic distinctions characterizing the possessive constructions in the dialects in comparison with the standardized data, and accounting for the more subtle distinctions in the meanings expressed by these constructions.

In this study, I concentrate on one dialect of the language, Tɔ̀nùgbe, and bring its ‘flavor’ into the picture. I demonstrate that, possessive constructions of this dialect exhibit much more variability in comparison with the standard language, both from a morpho-syntactic viewpoint and from a semantic viewpoint. I go beyond the predicative possessive construction, and show that, at all levels (*i.e.* attributive, predicative and external possessor), Tɔ̀nùgbe has some very distinct morpho-syntactic and semantic properties. Also, it shall be shown that at two levels: the use of the locative predicate, and the occurrence of a dative-oblique in clause-final position, clausal possessive constructions (predicative possessive constructions and external possessor constructions) exhibit interesting relations with locative and existential constructions. However, I shall argue that although clausal possessive constructions, locative constructions and the existential construction of Tɔ̀nùgbe share certain morpho-syntactic and semantic properties, they differ from each other in different ways; and should thus, from a synchronic viewpoint, be considered as distinct constructions.

The objectives of this study are therefore twofold: description of linguistic structures and analysis of the relationships between various linguistic structures. A third objective is however to be noted: pointing out the differences that exist between Tɔ̀nùgbe and other dialects of the Ewe language. This third objective is motivated by the fact that Tɔ̀nùgbe, to my knowledge, has not been the subject of a comprehensive linguistic description although the dialect manifests various phonetic, syntactic and semantic specificities in comparison to other dialects of the Ewe language. Hence, before the description of the structures that encode possession, I provide a sketch grammar of Tɔ̀nùgbe.

Nevertheless, in the framework of this PhD thesis, it is impossible to present an exhaustive and detailed grammatical description of Tɔ̀ŋúgbè. Therefore, this sketch grammar shall predominantly bear on those aspects that distinguish the dialect with respect to the standard language and will select specifically the properties that are relevant to the subsequent chapters. In sum, the sketch grammar is the first major attempt to describe the distinctive properties of Tɔ̀ŋúgbè and will moreover serve as a background to the work undertaken in subsequent chapters.

### 1.1. Theoretical assumptions

This study will adopt the “basic linguistic theory” (Dixon 1997, Dixon 2010a) as its theoretical framework. Basic linguistic theory is the most widely employed framework in studies in language typology and for grammar writing. Adopting a basic linguistic approach to language description presumes that the formal and semantic aspects of language that are under study are presented in detail with special emphasis on the role context plays in shaping the meaning of linguistic expressions (Dryer 2006:128). It also involves the use of terminology and abbreviations that are accessible to audience of different theoretical orientations. Therefore, terminology that is employed in this work relies heavily on traditional grammar and borrowings from other theoretical approaches; especially, typological linguistics and the structuralist tradition (especially in the area of phonology and morphology). In addition, some concepts of early generative grammar and notions from functional approaches to linguistic analysis are also relied upon.

This latter fact, *i.e.* the reliance on notions adapted from functional approaches to linguistic analysis, shall be very prominent in this work. Indeed, in describing the linguistic structures, I take as basic “constructions” in the sense that the term takes in Construction Grammar theory. Constructions as used here therefore refer to conventionalized learned form-function pairings (Goldberg 2013). Every linguistic form is thus associated with a meaning. Constructions are assumed to range from atomic units, *i. e.* morphemes, to more elaborate structures (Goldberg 1995). Simple morphological units such as **nature** as well as more complex structures constructed in

morphology (*e.g.* unnatural) or in syntax (phrases, clause etc.) such as **the Xer, the Yer** are all considered constructions. These constructions can be highly substantive, *i.e.* instantiated by concrete lexical items (*e.g.* kick the bucket), semi-schematic *i.e.* composed of slots in which a variety of lexical items can be found (*e.g.* **Xer, the Yer** (the bigger, the better)), or highly schematic *i.e.* the slots do not involve concrete lexical items (*e.g.* the ditransitive construction associated with the meaning of ‘transfer’, exemplified by the French clause **il lui a glissé un billet sous la porte** ‘he slipped a note under the door for him’)

Also, in order to understand the motivations for the forms, I shall take advantage of the explanatory power offered by the basic assumptions of functional notions such as grammaticalization, iconicity and egocentricity. I assume grammaticalization to include different types of language change in which form and meaning pairings evolve from a lexical meaning towards a grammatical meaning or from a less grammatical meaning to a more grammatical meaning (Meillet 1912; Kurylowicz 1965; Lehmann 1985; Traugott 2011). Iconicity is taken to involve the bi-unique diagrammatic correspondence between linguistic forms and the meanings that they evoke (Haiman 1980), as opposed to the structural concept of arbitrariness. Finally, I take egocentricity to mean the indication of the participation of speech act participants (first and second person) in discourse (Dahl 1997). These notions shall be at the heart of the explanations I offer for not only the configurations of the constructions that are described, but also the meanings and conceptual relations evoked by the different constructions.

## 1.2. Data and methodology

This work is carried out on the basis of data principally obtained from fieldwork. Data were obtained partially by elicitation and partially through narrations. Data collection was carried out over a six-month period at Mepe, a Tɔ̀nùgbe speaking community, located in the North Tongu district of the Volta region. The material that was used in elicitation included the circle of dirt story that was developed by Eisenbeiss & al (1999), the topological relation pictures developed by the Max Planck institute and two other materials that I developed.

The first material that I developed (*i.e.* the arrow material) consists of a series of pictures and arrows. The arrows point to parts of the pictures. The respondents were then asked where the arrow pointed to. The second material that I developed was a ‘deaf play’<sup>1</sup>. In this material, I wrote a little play which was acted out by the drama club of the St. Kizito Secondary Technical School in Mepe. The play was acted without speech. I then filmed the play<sup>2</sup>. The film was then played to respondents and they were tasked with narrating what they had seen. Finally, pictures of some of the items in the play were shown to respondents and they were asked to describe the relationship between the items they saw and the man in the play. In addition to this, folktale narrations were also recorded.

The data obtained<sup>3</sup> were in the form of audio and video recordings. I therefore transcribed them using the ELAN software. After segmentation and transcription, I transferred the files from ELAN into FLEX software. I annotated the data in FLEX, and then observed the regularity in the linguistic structures. For phonetic and tonal analysis, I segmented morphemes using the Audacity software. I then analyzed the segmented form with the PRAAT software. Thus, the claims made in this study are results of critical observation using the aforementioned softwares.

The data that were obtained from the use of the arrow material is named ARR in the database. The data that were obtained from the narration of the deaf play is named NAR in the database. Data that were produced when the images from the deaf play were shown to the respondents has been named ATR in the database. Data that were obtained using the circle of dirt has been named EXT in the database.

---

<sup>1</sup> The written play can be found at <https://doi.org/10.17026/dans-xxr-4sug>

<sup>2</sup> Due to privacy reasons, I am unable to upload the film and the pictures

<sup>3</sup> I have had permission from respondents that the data can be used for academic purposes. Consequently, the transcribed and annotated data, in ELAN and FLEX formats can be assessed from <https://doi.org/10.17026/dans-xxr-4sug>. Due to reasons of privacy, video recordings are not uploaded; and data that involve mention of personal information (*i.e.* the Sto\_Azi dataset) of respondents have also not been uploaded.



Finally, the narration data (folktales and historical narrations) have been named STO in the database (See Annex for two samples of the transcribed data).

Data from folktale narrations served in part to draw up the sketch grammar. The data obtained from the use of the circle of dirt material are used to describe external possessor constructions. The data obtained as a result of the deaf play, and the arrow materials are used in the description of attributive possessive constructions. Finally, data obtained as a result of the elicitation done with the topological relation pictures developed by the Max Planck Institute are used to describe the locative and, to a lesser extent, the existential construction. Data for the predicative possessive constructions are drawn from the different above-mentioned sources.

In addition to this, I made use of social media in order to test the grammaticality of many structures. The grammaticality test involved constructions that I generated myself, and for which I needed confirmation or information. More concretely, I created a closed group called Tɔ̀ɔ̀ɔ̀ɔ̀ɔ̀ on Facebook<sup>4</sup>. I then selected speakers who met a minimum criterion of having Tɔ̀ɔ̀ɔ̀ɔ̀ɔ̀ as native dialect. I proposed constructions, and demanded they confirm or infirm the grammaticality of the constructions. This methodology had its disadvantages and advantages. As Modan (2016) rightly observes, I was limited to a sub-category of Tɔ̀ɔ̀ɔ̀ɔ̀ɔ̀ speakers *i.e.* speakers that were young, urban and connected; and some speakers, being educated, were unaware of the influence of standard Ewe on the positions they adopted *vis-à-vis* the constructions I submitted. On the technical level, consultants accessed the page mainly via mobile phone connections. Given that they had no Ewe keyboard installed (there is the Kasahoro keyboard on Google App store for free), they typed their propositions using the English QWERTY keyboard.

---

<sup>4</sup> The group and the discussions we had can be assessed at (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/573169486353869/>)

### 1.3. Fieldwork location

As mentioned earlier, data were collected from Mepe. Mepe is a Tɔ̀nɔ̀gbe speaking community mainly located on the western side of the lower basin of the Volta River in the North Tongu district of the Volta region in Ghana. Several reasons motivated this choice.

In the first place, this community is representative of the ethnic heterogeneity of Tɔ̀nɔ̀gbe speaking people. From information I gathered on the field, the majority of Mepes are historically related to the general Ewe ethnic group. However, the five clans of Mepe (Adzigo, Gbanv́e, Sev́e, Dzagbaku and Akɔ̀v́e) trace their origins to different sources. The Adzigo clan, the Gbanv́e clan and the Sev́e clan trace their history to one of the major migratory groups of the Ewe people. Mepes of the Dzagbaku clan, the Akɔ̀v́e clan and those that are born out of mixed marriages between Mepe indigenes and partners from other ethnic groups trace their history to Ga-Adagme, Akan or any other major ethnic group in Ghana. Thus, Mepe alone epitomizes the general fabric of the Tɔ̀nɔ̀ people.

Apart from this ethnic representativeness, the Mepe area is also representative of the linguistic diversity that is displayed in Tɔ̀nɔ̀gbe (Tɔ̀nɔ̀gbe varies considerably from one traditional community to another). The different clans of Mepe live in specific neighborhoods or villages of the Mepe Township; and minimal lexical and phonetic variation is noticed in the Tɔ̀nɔ̀gbe spoken by each clan. The Tɔ̀nɔ̀gbe spoken in Akɔ̀v́e displays some variation in relation to the Tɔ̀nɔ̀gbe spoken in Adzigo; the Tɔ̀nɔ̀gbe in Degɔ̀me (an Akɔ̀v́e village) varies from the Tɔ̀nɔ̀gbe spoken in Lukúńú (a Gbanv́e community village). Witness some of the lexical variations that can occur between speakers from the Mepe villages of Degɔ̀me and Lukúńú:

<u>Degɔ̀me</u>	<u>Lukúńú</u>	<u>English</u>
sr̀nyí/ nyìǹéyóví	nyìǹéyóví	‘nephew’
kpólú/ agbā	agbā	‘bowl’
kòdzóé/ agblènú	agblènú	‘hoe’
v̀klì/ zānūv́é	zānūv́é	‘driver ants’

The third and final reason that informed the choice of Mepe for data elicitation concerns my familiarity with the area and its environs. I have Sokpoé and Mepe origins, but I lived a greater part of my life in Mepe. I therefore know Mepe better than any other Tɔ̀húgbe speaking community. This allowed me easy access to respondents during the fieldwork.

#### **1.4. Outline and presentation**

The work is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 contains the sketch grammar of the dialect. In this chapter, I offer a description of the phonetics, the morphology and the syntax of Tɔ̀húgbe. On the phonetic level, I describe the sounds, tones and most common phonological processes that occur in Tɔ̀húgbe. Concerning the morphology of Tɔ̀húgbe, I present the morphological processes that operate within the dialect *i.e.* reduplication, compounding and suffixation. With respect to syntax, I survey the various categories that fill the slots of the noun phrase structure and the verb phrase structure. Finally, I survey the adpositions and the strategies that are available for focusing constituents of the clause.

Chapter 2 serves as a transition chapter between the sketch grammar of Tɔ̀húgbe and the study of the possessive constructions of the dialect. The chapter offers the definition of possession that is retained in this work. It also presents a survey of the range of possessive constructions in typology and their relationship with existential and locative constructions. The final part of this chapter presents the analytical approaches that have been adopted in accounting for this latter relationship, and the analytical approach adopted in this work.

Chapter 3 offers a description of attributive possessive constructions of Tɔ̀húgbe. It details the two types of attributive possessive constructions of Tɔ̀húgbe: constructions that are processed in syntax and constructions that are processed at the syntax/morphology interface (or simply in morphology). The chapter also attempts to examine the motivations that underlie the formal configurations of the different constructions. Functional concepts such as iconicity and egocentricity are at the centre of the explanations offered. The chapter ends with an attempt to situate the constructions noted for Tɔ̀húgbe

within the framework of general Ewe grammar and typological studies.

Chapter 4 describes the predicative possessive constructions of Tɔ̀ɣúgbe. It identifies two main construction types: copular possessive constructions and locative possessive constructions. The chapter attempts to also capture the meanings expressed by each of these construction types. It also tries to distinguish these constructions from other constructions that are structurally similar to them. Finally, the chapter ends with a study of the predicative possessive constructions of Tɔ̀ɣúgbe in relation to the predicative possessive constructions of other Ewe dialects

Chapter 5 studies the external possessor constructions of Tɔ̀ɣúgbe. The chapter first of all describes the structural types of external possessor constructions of Tɔ̀ɣúgbe. It then continues to present the meanings that are expressed by each of the structural types of external possessor constructions. It also examines the conceptual relationships that are inherent in the meanings expressed by the different structural types of external possessor constructions and discusses the implications of the findings for Ewe comparative syntax.

The final chapter is devoted to the relationship between clausal possessive constructions of Tɔ̀ɣúgbe (*i. e.* predicative possessive constructions and external possessor constructions) and the relationship they exhibit with locative and existential constructions. I first of all detail the existential construction in Tɔ̀ɣúgbe. I then continue to present the locative constructions. Finally, I examine the relationship between possessive constructions, the existential construction and the different locative constructions in Tɔ̀ɣúgbe.