Possessive constructions in Tongugbe, an Ewe dialect
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THE LINGUISTICS OF POSSESSION

1. The notion of possession

The notion of possession is difficult to capture in a single definition. It is widely accepted that the everyday use of the term "possession" is too narrow to account for the relationships established by markers of possession, such as possessive adjectives or pronouns, *e.g. my neighbor, I have a neighbor etc.*

Indeed, while in the everyday sense of the word, possession is conceived of as a *rapport d'appartenance* (belongingness relationship) between a possessor and a possessee (cf.Tesnière 1959, Junker & Martineau 1987), the notion has been recently redefined in a functional perspective (cf. Creissels 1984, Langacker 1987, Seiler 2001).

Creissels (1984, 2006: 139-144) defines possession − in a more abstract way − as evoking the participation of an item, labeled as the *possessee*, in the 'personal' sphere of another entity, corresponding to the *possessor*. In the English phrase **John's book** for instance, the possessor is **John**, and the possessee is **book**. Creissels highlights the asymmetry between possessee and possessor by suggesting that the possessor is more salient than the possessee (since it has a higher degree of individuation). Thus for him, relating the possessed entity *i.e.* the possessee, to the possessor, offers a way of access to the former entity.

 Seiler (2001) on the other hand, insists on the dynamic character of the possessive relationship and conceives the notion of possession as a functional relation under permanent construction in which an ego proactively and retroactively appropriates the things of the external world.

In these functionally inspired proposed definitions of the notion of possession, it is agreed that the relationships signaled by the notion of possession involves the meanings of ownership, kinship and part-whole relations (Gries & Stewanowitsch 2005). These meanings can

therefore be taken as the core meanings that are captured by the notion of possession (Dixon 2010b: 263, Aikhenvald et al. 2012).

2. Possessive constructions
In accordance with the definition of possession adopted above, I take as a possessive construction any construction that establishes a relationship between two entities, *viz.* the possessor and the possessee, which corresponds to any of the three core possessive meanings: ownership, kinship and part-whole relations.

As mentioned in the introduction, the typological literature distinguishes three fundamental syntactic patterns for possessive constructions: attributive possessive constructions, predicative possessive constructions and external possessor constructions.

The following examples from French, illustrate these three types of possessive constructions respectively: example (1) is an attributive possessive construction (often referred to as adnominal possessive constructions), example (2) is a predicative possessive construction, and example (3) is an external possessor construction.

French (Indo-European, Romance)

1. **la**   **voiture**   **de**   **Pierre**
    ART.DEF   car   of   Peter
    'Peter's car'

2. **Pierre**   **a**   **une**   **voiture**
    Peter   have   ART.INDF   car
    'Peter has a car'

3. **Jean**   **lui**   **a**   **coupé**   **les**
    John   3SG.CLIT.DAT   have   cut:PST   ART.DEF.PL
    cheveux
    hair.PL
    'John cut his hair (for a third person)'

Within each syntactic pattern (*i.e.* attributive, predicative or external possessor), various strategies can be used in encoding the possessive relation, *e.g* the presence or absence of a marker of possessive

relationship in attributive possessive constructions. In the next sections, I survey the three fundamental syntactic patterns and the strategies that are involved in each syntactic pattern. I start with the attributive possessive construction (section 2.1). I continue with the predicative possessive construction (section 2.2). I then proceed to present the strategies involved in external possessor constructions (section 2.3).

2.1.   Attributive possessive constructions

Attributive possessive constructions refer to possessive constructions in which the possessor and the possessee are contained in the same nominal phrase. However, other constructions that encode meanings other than the ones retained here for possession (see section 1. above for details on the core meanings retained as possessive in this work) can also be expressed by complex nominal constructions (Nikiforidou 1991); and can also involve the same markers that occur in attributive possessive constructions (Dixon 2010b: 291). The following examples demonstrate how the same structure and the same marker in Swahili, conveying a meaning of ownership (4), can be used to encode nominal determination (5).

Swahili (Bantu, Niger-congo)

4. **kisu**   <u>**cha**</u>   **Hamisi**
    knife   POSS   Hamisi
    'Hamisi's knife'

5. **chakula**   <u>**cha**</u>   **kutosha**
    food   with   be-enough
    'enough food'   (Welmers 1974: 276)

In such instances when the same structure or structures in which the same marker occurs express core possessive meanings, but can also express some other meanings, I focus on the description of the possessive use of the construction.

Attributive possessive constructions can vary according to formal parameters *i.e.* syntactic or morphological, and to semantic parameters stratifying the domain (Hammaberg & Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2003).

Below, I survey the formal variation that characterizes attributive possessive construction (section 2.1.1) and the semantic parameters that stratify the domain (section 2.1.2).

2.1.1. Formal variation of attributive possessive constructions

Attributive possessive constructions can vary according to the relative order possessor / possessee (Creissels 2006: 146) and on the basis of morphological characteristics. The typology of attributive possessive constructions has however been motivated by the latter variation *i.e.* morphological characteristics. I illustrate this with attributive possessive constructions in Madinka, German and Turkish.

In Mandinka, a Niger-Congo language spoken across West-Africa, the possessor and the possessee of an attributive possessive construction can be juxtaposed (6) (Creissels 2001); in German, in the attributive possessive construction, the possessor can carry a genitive marker whereas the possessee is unmarked (7) (Lindauer 1998:110); in Turkish, both the possessor and the possessee in an attributive possessive construction can carry a marker: the possessor takes a genitive marker and the possessee takes a marker that Dixon (2010b: 268) refers to as a pertensive marker (8). Witness the examples that illustrate the scenario in each of these languages:

Mandinka (Niger-Congo, Mande)
  6. **Mùsoo   kuŋo**
     woman   head
     'The woman's head' (Creissels 2001:5)

German (Indo-European, Germanic)
  7. **Anna   -s   Bücher**
     Anna   GEN   books
     'Anna's books' (Lindauer 1998:110)

Turkish (Turkic, Oghuz)
  8. **kitab   -in   kab   -i**
     book   GEN   cover   PER
     'the cover of the book' (Yükseker 1998: 458)

The various strategies that are recognized typologically as operating within attributive possessive constructions are classifier strategies, indexical strategies, relational strategies, grammatical (markers of possession) strategies, and and simple strategies (Croft 2003:31).

Classifier strategies involve the use of classifiers. To demonstrate the use of classifiers in the construction of attributive possessive constructions, I use a possessive construction of Tariana, a language from the Arawak family spoken in South-America. In the possessive construction of this language, a classifier is affixed to the possessor noun to form an attributive possessive construction (Aikhenvald 2000: 2). Witness an example of an attributive possessive construction of Tariana below:

Tariana (Arawak, Northern Maipuran)

9. **tfinu   nu   -te**
   dog   PRO. 1SG   -CLF:ANIMATE
   'my dog'

For a useful discussion of how the use of classifiers in possessive constructions interacts with other strategies, consult Lichtenberk (2009).

Indexical strategies involve some form of concord with a controller, which in the case of the attributive possessive constructions, corresponds usually to the head noun or the possessee. In Swahili for instance, the possessive connective **a** varies in order to agree to the appropriate class of the possessee noun (Welmers 1974: 275). Witness the change in form of the possessive connective in the examples below:

Swahili (Niger-Congo, Bantu)

10. **Kisu   cha   Hamisi**
    knife   POSS   Hamisi
    'Hamisi's knife'

11. **nyumba   ya   mtu   yule**
    house   POSS   person   DEM
    'That person's house'

12. **mkono** <u>**wa**</u> **mtu** **yule**
    hand   POSS person DEM
    'That person's hand'

In a **relational strategy**, a case marker is involved in the possessive construction. This case marker can be a bound form, *i.e.* a case affix, or a free form, *i.e* an adposition. In Latin for instance, a genitive case affix is used to encode a possessive relationship between two noun phrases. Witness the example below:

Latin (Indo-european, Italic)
13. **Tauri-i** **cori-um** **protuli-t**
    bull-GEN.M.SG   hide-ACC.SG   bring-PRF.3SG
    'He brought the hide of the bull.'
                        (Carlier & Verstraete 2013: 3)

It should be noted that a case marker, such as the genitive affix, involved in the relational strategy of attributive possession marking, can be used to encode other types of meanings or relations such as the partitive and comparative (Nikiforidou 1991). They are in this way distinct from **grammatical markers of possession** or possessive connectives.

Possessive connectives are also a relational strategy, but unlike case markers, they are specialized in the expression of possessive relationships. In Mandinka for instance, a dedicated possessive connective, glossed as POSS, is used to encode the possessive relationship.

Mandinka (Niger-Congo, Mande)
14. **mùsoo** <u>**la**</u> **buŋoo**
    woman   POSS   house
    'The woman's house'   (Creissels 2001: 5).

In **simple strategies** (juxtaposition, concatenation, fusion), the construction consists of only the possessor and the possessee, without an explicit morphological marking of the possessive relationship.

Example (15) below, a construction of Twi[12], a language spoken in Ghana, illustrates the use of a simple strategy *i.e.* juxtaposition.

Twi (Niger-Congo, Kwa)
  15. **Ama   Papa**
       Ama   father
       'Ama's father'

The distinction between the three simple strategies consists in the degree of autonomy of the possessor with respect to the possessee: no morphological attachment or alteration in the case of **juxtaposition**, affixation or compounding in the case of **concatenation** and **fusion** into one unit.

In this study, I shall be concerned with the last two strategies *i.e.*grammatical and simple strategies. In chapter (3) I study extensively how the two strategies operate in Tɔŋúgbe, and the relationship that exists between the use of each strategy and the meaning expressed by each construction.

2.1.2. Semantic parameters in attributive possessive constructions
The second parameter along which attributive possessive constructions vary is of a semantic nature. This variation can concern the nature of the possessive relationship, the possessor noun type and the possessee noun type (Dixon 2010b, Karvovskaya 2018).

With respect to the nature of the possessive relationship, it can be physical, temporal, permanent, abstract etc. (Heine 1997: 34). The English phrase **my car**, for instance, can refer to a car that belongs to me legally (permanent possession), a car that I have rented for a determined period of time (temporary possession), a car that I intend to buy and of which I have spoken a lot about to my friends and family (abstract possession) etc.

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[12]All examples from Twi have been subjected to confirmation by native speakers of the language.

In some languages, these semantic distinctions correspond to formal differences in the attributive possessive construction. In Dyirbal for instance, temporal possession and permanent possession are distinguished from each other by the use of distinct genitive markers. Witness the following examples:

Dyirbal (Pama-Nyungan, Desert Nyungic)
16. **Tami-ŋu**   **waŋal**
    Tom-GEN   boomerang
    'Tom's boomerang (temporary possession)

17. **Jani-mi**   **waŋal**
    John-GEN   boomerang
    'John's boomerang' (Dixon 2010b: 275)

In a similar way, with respect to the nature of the possessor, semantic distinctions can be correlated to formal differences. In the Aŋlɔ dialect of the Ewe language, for instance, where the feature of egocentricity is relevant, first and second person singular pronominal possessor is juxtaposed to the possessee (18), whereas other pronominal possessors occur in constructions involving a possessive connective (19).

18. **nye**   **ʋú**
    PRO.1SG   vehicle
    'My vehicle'

19. **miá**   **f̲é**   **ʋú**
    PRO.1PL   POSS   vehicle
    'Our vehicle'

A third semantic parameter concerns the nature of the possessee noun: in many languages, certain groups of nouns (often including but not restricted to kinship and body-part terms) are encoded differently from other noun types (Nichols 1988). In some Mandinka dialects for instance, possessees corresponding to kinship terms, body-part terms and spatial relational terms are juxtaposed to the possessor noun in an attributive possessive construction, whereas there is a possessive

connective when the possessee corresponds to other nouns (Welmers 1974: 279).

Mandinka (Niger-Congo, Mande)
20. **muso   dén**
    woman   child
    'The woman's child'

21. **muso   ká   fani**
    woman   POSS   cloth
    'The woman's cloth'

This latter split has been explained in the literature in terms of alienability (Hyman et al 1970, Seiler 1981, Chappell & McGregor 1989, Velazquez-Castillo 1996,). Thus, the split is often qualified as an alienability split (Haspelmath 2008). The alienability split, similar to the two preceding lines of variations, has implications on the meanings expressed by the constructions.

It is argued that inalienable constructions express a close conceptual relation between possessor and possessee, while alienable constructions mark a conceptual distance between possessor and possessee (Haiman 1983). This split exists in Tɔŋúgbe; and it will be discussed extensively in chapter 3, section 2.4.2.1.

2.2.   Predicative possessive constructions.
The second type of possessive constructions identified typologically is predicative possessive constructions. Predicative possessive constructions are possessive constructions that establish a possessive relationship (Dixon 2010b: 298). Predicative possessive constructions encode the possessor and the possessee as arguments of the verb. Witness a predicative possessive construction in Twi below:

Twi (Niger-congo, Kwa)
22. **Kofi   wɔ   akɔɖa**
    Kofi   be.at   child
    'Kofi has a child'

Thus, the principal difference that exists between prototypical instances of the predicative possessive constructions and prototypical instances of attributive possessive constructions is that the former make use of verbs, while attributive possessive constructions are encoded within a noun phrase.

The verbs that occur in predicative possessive constructions can be transitive verbs that can be translated into English as 'grasp', 'hold' and 'get' or intransitive verbs meaning 'be', 'exist' and 'stay'. The predicative possessive construction in West-African Pidgin English[13] (as spoken in Ghana) for instance involves a verb meaning 'get' while in Logba, a verb meaning 'stay' is used.

West African Pidgin English (Pidgin, English-based pidgin)
   23. **I**   **gɛ**   **kaa**
        PRO.1SG   get   car
        'I have a car'

Logba (Niger-Congo, Kwa)
   24. **a-susú**   **ɖúkpá**   **á-<u>bo</u>**   **Esi**
        CM-brain   good   SM.SG-stay   Esi
        'Esi has good ideas'   (Dorvlo 2008: 109).

Semantically, the different predicative possessive constructions correspond to either 'X *has Y*' or '*Y belongs to X'*, (Heine 1997). This semantic dichotomy has thus motivated a typological classification of possessive constructions into two categories: *Belong-possessive constructions* and *Have-possessive constructions*.

Have-constructions (which I refer to henceforth as H-possessive constructions) are sub-divided into different sub-constructions depending on the features associated with them (Heine 1997, Stassen 1995, Creissels 2006, Dixon 2010b). Four main sub-constructions have been identified for H-possessive constructions: have possessive

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[13] I speak West African Pidgin English. However, all examples cited for West African pidgin have been corroborated by other speakers from both Ghana and Nigeria.

constructions, locative possessive constructions, comitative possessive constructions and topic possessive constructions.

2.2.1. Have possessive constructions

In this type of construction, word order is such that the possessor (PR) occurs in subject position while the possessee (PD) occurs in complement position. Often labeled as "Action schema construction" (Heine 1997) or "Have construction" (Stassen 2009), Have possessive constructions can be summarized as POSSESSOR-VERB-POSSESSEE (PR V PD). In Portuguese for example, the predicative possessive construction is a Have construction.

Portuguese (Indo-European, Romance)
25. **O   Pedro   tem   dinheiro**
    ART.DEF Pedro   has   money
    'Pedro has money'   (Avelar 2009: 141)

Verbs that occur in have possessive constructions can be verbs that have the meaning of "get", "seize", "grab", "put" etc. In Fongbé for instance the verb that occurs in the predicative possessive construction is "put" (Lefebvre & Brousseau 2002: 252).

Fongbé (Niger-Congo, Kwa)
26. **kòkú   ɖó   wémâ**
    Koku   put   book
    'Koku has a book'

2.2.2. Locative possessive constructions

Locative possessive constructions are distinguished from have possessive constructions by the type of verbal element that is involved in the construction. In locative possessive constructions, typically, the verb that is involved is a locative/existential predicate that has the meaning of 'be' (Stassen 2009: 995). In Mandinka, for instance, the verb that is involved is **bɛ**, an operator that has the meaning 'be.at'.

Mandinka (Niger-Congo, Mande)
27. **wari**   **bɛ**   **Seku**   **bolo**
     money.DEF   be.at   Seku   POSTP
     'Seku has money'   (Creissels 2006: 98)

Thus, syntactically, in this predicative possessive construction type, the possessee is constructed as the grammatical subject and the possessor as an oblique or adverbial case form. The construction can thus be stated as POSSESSEE-BE.AT-POSSESSOR (PD BE.AT PR). Semantically, the possessee is construed as located relative to the possessor. Tɔŋúgbe, similar to what pertains in other dialects of the Ewe language, has a locative possessive construction. Thus, among the constructions surveyed in chapter (4), these constructions feature prominently.

2.2.3. Comitative Possessive Constructions
The third type of H-possessive constructions is the comitative possessive construction. Similar to locative possessive constructions, in comitative constructions, locative/existential predicates that have the meaning of 'be.at' are involved. However, in the comitative construction, the predicate (the verbal element) can be eliminated. In Hausa for instance, the verb, **yanà dà** 'be.with', which occurs in the H-possessive construction can be omitted (Newman 2000:222).

Hausa (Afro-Asiatic, Chadic)
28. **yãrò**   **yanà**   **dà**   **fensìr̄**
     boy   be.CONT   with   pencil
     'The boy has a pencil'

Syntactically, in comitative possessive constructions, the possessor occurs as the subject of the construction and the possessee occurs as a complement. Semantically, the possessee is construed as 'being with' the possessor. Witness the comitative possessive construction in *Maltese* as well:

Maltese (Afro-Asiatic, Semitic)
29. ɣand   -kom   ziemel
    at/with -you   horse
    'You have a horse'   (Ultan 1978: 38)

2.2.4. Topic Possessive constructions

Topic possessive constructions, similar to locative possessive constructions and comitative possessive constructions, involve existential/locative predicates. In Mandarin Chinese for instance, the same predicate that is involved in the construction of existential sentences (30) is also used to construct predicative possessive constructions (31).

Mandarin Chinese (Sino-Tibetan, Sinitic)
30. **yǒu**   yi   zhi   gou   zai   yuanzi-li
    exist   one   CLF   dog   LOC   yard-inside
    'There is a dog in the yard'

31. **Ta**   **yǒu**   yi   ge   meimei
    3SG   **exist**   one   CLF   younger-sister
    'S/he has a younger sister ' (LaPolla 1995: 311-314)

The syntactic arrangement in topic possessive constructions is such that the possessor acts as the topic of the construction while the possessee is in complement position. Semantically, the construction can be stated as 'As for PR, PD exists for PR'. This syntactic arrangement is more clearly marked in Japanese, where the possessor (topic) is marked with the topic maker **ga**.

Japanese (Japonic, japanesic)
32. **zoo**   **wa**   hana   ga   nagai
    elephant   TOP   nose   SUB   long
    'the elephant has a long nose'   (Comrie 2011: 272)

Three comments need to be made about the survey of H-predicative possessives as it has been presented above. Firstly, the four basic H-predicative possessive construction types that have been surveyed are meant to take into account the most common forms of the construction

that have been noted typologically. The survey that I present above therefore does not presume that other types of this construction cannot exist (cf. Feuillet 2006: 188 for a description of some variant constructions).

Secondly, the survey does not exclude the fact that variations of these 'common' construction types can occur in different languages (Stassen 2009). Finally, and more importantly, the constructions noted above exhibit various relationships with locative and existential constructions (Heine 1997; Stassen 2009).   This relationship is surveyed in section 2.4.

2.3.   External possessor constructions
The final formal type of possessive constructions is external possessor constructions. External possessor constructions are possessive constructions in which there is a misalignment in semantic dependency and syntactic dependency (Deal 2003). In external possessor constructions, the possessor is syntactically encoded as a verbal dependent but semantically understood as dependent on the possessee (similar to what pertains in attributive possessive constructions).

In the German construction in (33) for instance, although the possessive relation is in the form X's Y, the possessee and the possessor are not encoded in the same phrase. Instead, the possessee is in object position and the possessor is in the dative case.

German (Indo-European, Germanic)
   33. **mir   brennt   das   Gesicht**
          to.me   burn   ART.DEF   face
          'My face is burning me' (König & Haspelmath 1997: 526)

External possessor constructions can assume different configurations. The commonest configuration found in the literature is the type of external possessor constructions that are commonly refered to as possessor raising constructions (Blake 1990: 79-83). In these constructions, the possessor is analyzed as ascending to the position that the possessee occupies in the corresponding attributive possessive

construction. Witness the positions of the first person pronominal possessor and the possessee **relka** 'head' in the following examples:

Lardil (Pama-Nyungan, Lardil)

34. **<u>ngithum</u>**   **<u>relka</u>**   **kalka**   **kun**
    me:GEN   head   ache   EV
    'My head aches'

35. **<u>ngata</u>**   **kalka**   **kun**   **<u>relka</u>**
    I   ache   ev   head
    'My head aches'   (Klokeid 1976:265ff cf. Blake 1990: 80)

The second type of external possessor constructions is constructions in which the possessor is encoded as a dative and the possessee encoded as a direct object (see König & Haspelmath 1997 for a useful discussion of these constructions). This configuration is illustrated by dative possessive constructions of French. In these constructions, the possessor, a dative pronominal, although not lexically selected by the verb, is incorporated into the predicate frame, *i.e.* it is syntactically dependent upon the verb (Lamiroy & Delbecque 1998: 31). The possessee on the other hand occurs in object position.

French (Indo-European, Romance)

36. **je**   **<u>lui</u>**   **ai**   **pris**   **<u>la</u>**
    PRO.1SG   3SG.CLIT.DAT   have   take:PST   ART.DEF
    <u>main</u>
    hand
    'I took his hands'

Also, in this later type of external possessor constructions, the possessor can be encoded in a kind of locative structure. In Norwegian for instance, the possessor is encoded in a locative structure; it is thus introduced by the morpheme **på** which literally means 'on' (Lødrup 2009: 221).

Norwegian (Indo-European, Germanic)
>   37. **de   barberte   hodet   på   ham**
>   PRO.3PL   shave:PST   head.DEF   on   him
>   'They shaved his head'

The third type of external possessor constructions is constructions in which the possessor is encoded by the use of applicatives. In the Oluta Popoluca language for instance, the applicative prefix **küj** is used to introduce the possessor into the construction (Zavala 1999:340); hence allowing the possessor to be expressed in two positions: within the noun phrase (**tan**[14]), and as an incorporated noun phrase external of the attributive construction (**ta**[15]).

Oluta Popoluca (Mixe-Zoque, Mixe)
>   38. **ta=küj-ʔo:k-ü-w=ak**   **tan=majaw**
>   B1(ABS)=APPL2–die-INV-CMPL=ANIM   A1(POSS)=wife
>   'My wife died on me' (Zavala 1999:340)

External possessor constructions occur in languages from diverse linguistic families across the world; featuring prominently in the languages of Asia (Sinitic languages) through the Pacific region (Austronesian), Australia (Nyulnyulan), the Americas and Africa (Benue-Congo) (Payne & Barshi 1999).

Certain features have however been noted as characterizing all external possessor constructions. The first characteristic noted for external possessor constructions is that they express the idea that someone is affected by an action due to the fact that an entity he/she possesses has been affected by the events expressed by the predicate (Croft 1985). As such, they generally involve dynamic verbs.

Also, it has been observed that external possessor constructions evoke part-whole relations between possessor and possessee (Baron & Helsund 2001: 15). Witness the difference between the manner in which the body-part term **áka** 'arm' is encoded differently from the

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[14] the possessor *tan* occurs as a modifier of the possessee *majaw*

[15] Syntactically, the newly incorporated morpheme, which is the first-person absolutive proclitic, is a direct dependent of the verb (Zavala 1999)

non-part term **ósisi** 'stick' in Igbo, a language spoken in West Africa, principally in Nigeria.

Igbo (Niger-congo, Igboid)

39. **ó   gbàjiri   m   áka**
    he   broke   to.me   arm
    'he broke my arm'

40. **ó   gbàjiri   ósisi   ḿ**
    he   broke   stick   my
    'he broke my stick'   (Hyman et al. 1970: 86)

Thus, external possessor constructions offer an ideal environment for the verification of hypotheses that are formulated on alienability in attributive possessive constructions, especially on the ideas expressed about part-whole relations (see section 2.1.2. above for details on the notion of alienability in attributive possessive constructions). The type of nouns that are encoded in alienable and inalienable constructions and the conceptual relations that are encoded by each of these constructions should be supported or infirmed by data from external possessor constructions. These discussions feature prominently in chapter (5) where I survey the external possessor constructions of Tɔŋúgbe.

2.4.   Possessive, Locative and Existential constructions

In section (2.2) above, it was noted that predicative possessive constructions exhibit special relationships with locative and existential constructions. Below, I present a survey of these relationships, and how they have been accounted for in typological studies. However, before the details of the relationships, I present locative and existential constructions.

2.4.1. Locative and existential constructions

Locative constructions refer to English constructions such as **the book is on the table**. They establish the location of an entity present in discourse (Zeitoun *et al* 1999: 2). They therefore are prototypic of figure-ground constructions (Talmy 1975); and thus encode figure-

ground relationships[16]. In the English sentence **the book is on the table**, **book** acts as the 'figure' while **table** acts as the reference object. Example (41) illustrates a locative construction in Russian.

Russian (Indo-European, Balto-slavic)
 41. **kniga** **byla** **na** **stole**
   book.NOM.F was on table.LOC
   'The book was on the table'   (Freeze 1992: 553)

Existential constructions on the other hand refer to English sentences such as **there are people in the village.** These constructions introduce an indefinite entity by asserting its existence (Zeitoun *et al* 1999: 2). Thus both existential and locative constructions encode a relationship between a figure and a ground.

In the English existential construction **there are people in the village, people** functions as the 'figure' while **village** functions as reference object. The example below illustrates an existential construction in Somali.

Somali (Afro-Asiatic, Cushitic)
 42. **dad** **badan** **oo** **madluumiin-a'** **baa**
   people many REL unhappy.PL-be FOC
   jira'
   exist.PRS.HAB
   'There are many unhappy people' (Koch 2012: 540)

The difference between the two constructions *i.e.* existential and locative lies in the fact that while locative constructions establish the location of an entity, existential constructions introduce an entity into discourse *i.e.* locative constructions zoom in on the location of the figure; existential constructions highlight the figure that is located (Creissels 2015).

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[16] By figure-ground relationship, I draw on Creissels (2015)'s definition: 'episodic spatial relationships between a concrete entity conceived as movable (the figure) and another concrete entity (the ground) conceived as occupying a fixed position in the space, or at least as being less easily movable than the figure'

2.4.2. Relationship between locative and existential constructions

Locative constructions and existential constructions, as noted earlier, have in common the ability to encode figure-ground relationships (Creissels 2014:5). Hence, it has sometimes been argued that they express the same state of affairs (Wang & Xu 2013: 6). This proximity between both construction types is not only semantic in nature, but may also be reflected in morpho-syntax. As such, it is not uncommon that the same predicate is used in both constructions (Koch 2012). The following examples from West-African Pidgin English as it is spoken in Ghana illustrate the use of the same predicate in both the locative and existential constructions.

West African Pidgin English (Pidgin, English-based pidgin)
Locative

43. **də   boy   dé   school**
    ART.DEF   boy   COP   school
    'The boy is in school'

Existential

44. **də   búk   dé**
    ART.DEF   book   COP
    'The book exists'

Also, both locative and existential constructions may exhibit essentially the same constituent order. In Ga-Dagme, a Kwa language, for instance, the same constituent order that is used in the locative construction is also used in the existential construction. The following examples illustrate a locative construction and an existential construction in Ga-Dagme[17].

Ga-Adagme (Niger-Congo, Kwa)
Locational

45. **kpóto ŋɛ   kpatá   mi**
    pig   be.at   kitchen   inside
    'The pig is in the kitchen'

---

[17] These examples were elicited during my visit to Sege.

Existential

    46. **kpóto**   **ŋɛ**
           pig   be.at
           'There are pigs'

Despite these lexical and structural similarities, locative and existential constructions exhibit morphosyntactic differences as well (Clark 1978).

In some languages, the predicate used to encode the locative construction is not same as the one used in existential constructions. This is the case in Brazilian Portuguese in which the predicate that is used to encode the locative construction is **estar** 'be (in a state)/be somewhere' whereas the predicate that is used to encode the existential construction is **tener** 'have'.

Portuguese (Indo-European, Romance)
Locative

    47. **o**   **livr-o**   **<u>est</u>-á**   **sobre**   **a**
           ART.DEF.M book-M   be-PRS.3SG   upon   ART.DEF.F
           mes-a
           table-F
           'The book is on the table'

Existential

    48. **<u>tem</u>**   **um**   **livr-o**
           have.PRS.3SG   INDF.M   book-M
           'There is a book'   (Koch 2012: 536)

The word order of the elements present in both constructions can also differ. In Breton, a Celtic language spoken in France, for instance, the word order in the existential construction is different from the word order in the locative construction. While the figure, *i.e*. **vehicle** is not clause final in the existential construction, in the locative construction, it is clause-final.

Breton (Indo-European, Celtic)
Locative
49. **eman   ar   <u>voetur</u>   amañ**
    COP   ART.DEF   vehicle   here
    'The vehicle is here'

Existential
50. **amañ   ezeus   eur   <u>voetur</u>**
    here   COP   ART.INDF   vehicle
    'There is a vehicle here'   (Feuillet 1998: 691)

2.4.3. Relations between possessive, locative and existential constructions

Possessive constructions (predicative) share many properties with locative and existential constructions. Semantically, the three constructions have been argued to be fundamentally locative in meaning (Herslund & Baron 2011). This semantic commonality finds expression in the morphosyntax of the three construction types.

Indeed, in many languages, the same predicate can be used in the different construction types. In French for example, the same predicate, **avoir,** occurs in both predicative possessive constructions and existential constructions.

French (Indo-European, Romance)
Possessive
51. **Jean   <u>a</u>   une   voiture**
    Jean   have:PRS   ART.INDF   vehicle
    'Jean has a car'

Existential
52. **Il   y   <u>a</u>   une   voiture   ici**
    PRO.3SG   PRO.COMPL   have   ART.INDF   vehicle   here
    'There is a car here'

Apart from the use of the same predicate, constituent order can be the same for the predicative possessive construction, the locative construction or the existential construction. The examples from

French illustrate the same constituent order for possessive and locative constructions.

French (Indo-European, Romance)
Possessive

53. **La   voiture   est   à   Jean**
    ART.DEF   vehicle   COP   to   Jean
    'The car is John's

Locative

54. **La   voiture   est   au   parking**
    ART.DEF   vehicle   COP   to.ART.DEF   car.park
    'The car is at the car park'

Crucially however, the three constructions can have the same predicate and the same word order. In Akan, a Niger-Congo language, the possessive construction, the locative construction and the existential construction can be constructed with the same predicate **wɔ** 'be.at'*;* the constituent order of the three constructions can also be essentially similar (SUBJECT-VERB-COMPLEMENT). Witness the following examples of a predicative possessive construction, a locative construction and an existential construction in Akan:

Akan (Niger-Congo, Kwa)
Possessive

55. **nwoma   nó   wɔ   Kwaku   nkyɛn**
    book   ART.DEF   be.at   Kwaku   side
    'Kwaku has the book'
    'The book is with Kwaku'

Locative

56. **nwoma   no   wɔ   edan   nó   mú**
    book   ART.DEF   be.at   house   ART.DEF   inside
    'The book is in the room'

Existential

57. **nwoma   bi   wɔ   hɔ**
    book   ART.INDF   be.at   DEM
    'There is a book (A book exists)'

2.4.4. Accounting for the relationships: approaches

The relationships between these three construction types have been the study of many typological studies (Lyons 1967, Back 1967, Clark 1978, Freeze 1992, Koch 2012, Wang & Xu 2013, Creissels 2014). Two major approaches emerge from the multitude of studies on the subject: the derivational approach and the functional approach.

a.   The derivational approach: studies that have sought to account for the asymmetry between predicative possessive constructions, locative constructions and existential constructions with derivational approaches consider that the three construction types can be reduced to one single deep structure. The hypothesis, put forward by Lyons (1967), Bach (1967), Freeze (1992) etc., is to consider that possessive constructions, existential constructions and locative constructions can be reduced to a single basic construction (D-structure), and that the three constructions are derived from this D-structure by rules that involve features such as animacy and definiteness (Freeze 1992).

b.   The functional approach: Studies that have relied on functional approaches to account for the asymmetry between possessive, existential and locative constructions consider the three constructions as evidence of cognitive operations. Such approaches are thus not only often couched in cognitive approaches to linguistics (Langacker 1995, Creissels 2014), but also seek to draw 'universality' from a typological perspective in order to formulate hypotheses about the cognitive sources of linguistic structures (Koch 2002 and Heine 1997 for instance). Although the functional approaches recognize the relation between the three constructions (Heine 1997 for instance postulates a diachronic link), they do not assume that the three constructions are reducible to a single construction.

These two approaches of accounting for the asymmetry between the three constructions have some similarities, but also differ substantially. Touching on the similarities between the two approaches, both approaches recognize the syntactic and semantic relationship between the three types of constructions. For instance, on a syntactic level, the definiteness/indefiniteness alternation of the

figure in existential and locative constructions (Clark 1978) is duly recognized. On the semantic level, both approaches recognize the link between the meanings expressed by the three construction types (Stassen 2009: 5).

The major difference between both approaches can however be summarized in the following question: owing to the syntactic and semantic similarities between the three constructions, are the three constructions synchronically reducible to a single basic construction? To this question, derivational approaches respond in the affirmative while functional approaches disagree. Thus, instead of a single syntactic base structure transformable into locative, possessive and existential constructions, functional approaches, although recognizing the link between the three constructions, rather postulate independent synchronic constructions. The approach adopted in this study is a functional approach.