GENITIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN SOUTH BAUCHI (WEST CHADIC) LANGUAGES, ZUL AND POLCHI, WITH COMPARISONS TO ANCIENT EGYPTIAN

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Abstract

A distinctive construction found in many Chadic languages (and others—e.g., Ancient Egyptian) is the direct genitive, i.e., the juxtaposition of two nouns without a genitival particle. These Chadic languages make use of both the direct genitive and the linked genitive constructions. It has been suggested in the literature that these constructions differ semantically, according to the alienability of possession. Our research shows that in these South Bauchi languages, as well as Egyptian, the direct and marked genitives do occur, but the relevant semantic distinctions are not primarily focussed on alienability. Semantic distinctions coded by these types of genitive constructions include location, possession, specificity of referent, animal/human/material, and degree of lexicalization. It appears that we cannot make the generalization that alienability is the key semantic distinction coded into genitival constructions.

Introduction

The universality of grammatical constructions and associated semantic distinctions has been the subject of much research and discussion. It has been proposed that a widespread semantic distinction in north-

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ern Africa is that between alienable and inalienable possession. Schuh (1981) illustrates this contrast with an example from Kanakuru (Newman, 1974):

(a) bi! kimne “the buffalo’s horn” (inalienable)
   horn  buffalo
(b) bi! -i ma lowo -i “the boy’s horn” (alienable)
   horn the of boy the

Inalienable possession implies that the *nomen regens* is an inherent and inseparable attribute of the *nomen rectum*, whereas in alienable possession, the *nomen regens* can be merely temporarily associated with the possessor.

Schuh observes that syntactically “the alienable construction requires some sort of overt genitival ‘linking’ morpheme between N1 and N2, whereas the inalienable construction involves mere juxtaposition of the nouns . . .” He identifies these construction types specifically with Chadic languages, but in a 1989 paper, Claudi and Heine suggest that this pattern is characteristic of many northern African languages, and give examples from Kabiye (Gur) and Acholi (Western Nilotic). Theoretically, Schuh is interested in the development of the genitival linker from demonstratives, while Claudi and Heine show the grammaticalization of the linker from a locative noun and preposition, and discuss the metaphorical shift in semantics from location to possession.

**Genitive Constructions in Zul**

Zul is a South Bauchi West Chadic language of the Afro-Asiatic family mainly spoken in Zul village near Zaranda Mountain in Nigeria.⁴ Like the languages discussed above, Zul has two types of genitive

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⁴ The languages is also spoken in four Zulawa settlement areas (houses) around Tashan-Durmi, Zaranda, Tintin and Wom villages in Toro Local Government Area of Bauchi State in Nigeria. It is one of the South Bauchi group of languages (i.e., Geji, Polci, Buli, Jimi, etc.), many of which are endangered due to the spread of Hausa and their small numbers of native speakers. Data were collected in Zul village in 1995. Research was funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada.