

Predicative possession in Bantu languages

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Abstract. This paper first compares the variety observed in the predicative possession constructions of Bantu languages to that observed in the languages of the world, and particularly across Sub-Saharan languages, and then discusses the possible historical relationships between the Comit Possessive type, strongly predominant in Bantu, and the Have Possessive type. The Have Possessive constructions found among Bantu languages may result not only from the semantic evolution of verbs such as ‘catch’, ‘take’, or ‘hold’, but also from the reanalysis of either a sequence ‘be with’ or a preposition ‘with’ as a verb ‘have’. Finally, this article discusses the duality observed in the behavior of possessive *nà* in Sotho-Tswana languages.

Keywords: Bantu, Sotho-Tswana, predicative possession, comitative possessive, have possessive

1. Introduction

The most obvious characteristic of Bantu languages in the domain of predicative possession is the strong predominance of the Comit Possessive type (i.e., constructions that are literally ‘Possessor is with Possessee’), not particularly common elsewhere in the world. This predominance of the comitative-possessive type is illustrated by the six Narrow-Bantu languages included in Stassen’s (2009) sample (Nkore-Kiga, Duala, Ganda, Luba, Swahili, and Shona), since all of them have this type of predicative possession. However, according to Stassen (2009: 768), Nkore-Kiga has an alternative Have Possessive construction, and the Comit Possessive constructions of Duala and Ganda show evidence of a reanalysis process in progress.

The aim of this paper is to compare the variation in the expression of predicative possession across Bantu languages to that observed elsewhere in the world, and especially in the other language groups of Sub-Saharan Africa, and to discuss the possible contribution of Bantu languages to a better understanding of the development and evolution of transitive verbs of possession.

The article is organized as follows. Section 2 puts forward a general typology of predicative possession in which five main types are distinguished: the Have Possessive type, the Incorp Possessive type, the Comit Possessive type, the Exist Possessive type with genitive coding, and the Exist Possessive type with oblique coding of the possessor. Section 3 examines the distribution of the five main types of predicative possession in the languages of Sub-Saharan Africa. Section 4 examines their distribution among Bantu languages, characterized by a strong predominance of the Comit Possessive type. Section 5 discusses the evolution by which constructions that initially belong to the Comit Possessive type acquire characteristics that make them more and more similar to Have Possessive constructions, and may eventually be reanalyzed as Have Possessive constructions. Section 6 analyzes the

puzzling situation found in Tswana and other Sotho-Tswana varieties, in which possessive clauses involve a predicator that behaves sometimes as a ‘have’ verb, and sometimes as a copula. Section 7 summarizes the conclusions.

2. The typology of predicative possession

In Stassen’s (2009) account of the typology of predicative possession, four basic types are distinguished: the Locational Possessive type, the With-Possessive type, the Topic Possessive type, and the Have-Possessive type. The typology of predicative possession sketched in this section differs from Stassen’s proposal on the following points:

- I propose a basic binary distinction between *possessor-centered* and *possessee-centered* types of predicative possession (Section 2.1).
- I propose to split the With-Possessive type into two distinct types designated as *Incorp Possessive* and *Comit Possessive* (Sections 2.2 & 2.6).
- I do not agree with the inclusion of a ‘Topic Possessive’ type among the basic types of predicative possession (Section 2.5).

2.1. The possessee-centered and possessor-centered types of predicative possession

In accordance with common practice, ‘predicative possession’ is used here as an abbreviation for ‘direct/plain predicative possession’, i.e. predicative constructions encoding a wide range of possessor-possessee relationships with the unmarked perspectivization ‘possessor > possessee’, illustrated by English *John has a book* (as opposed to inverse predicative possession expressing the alternative perspective ‘possessee > possessor’, illustrated by English *The book is John’s*).

In general, languages have a limited number of predicative constructions (often just one) available to express a relatively wide range of possessive relationships. With very few exceptions,¹ the alignment relationships between predicative possession and other more basic types of predicative constructions make it possible to classify predicative possession constructions into two broad types defined as follows:

- in the *possessor-centered* type of predicative possession, the coding of the possessor is aligned with that of either S or A in verbal predication, or with that of the argument of a non-verbal predicate, whereas the possessee may be encoded as P (if the possessor is encoded as A), encoded as an oblique, or incorporated;
- the *possessee-centered* type of predicative possession may include a predicator also found in locational/existential predication, or include no overt predicator in languages in which locational/existential predication may involve no overt predicator; the coding properties of the possessor are those of non-core terms in verbal predication (either

¹ Finnish is a case in point: in the possessive clauses of Finnish, the possessor is in the adessive case, which suggests that the construction should be analyzed as possessee-centered, but the case marking of the possessee is not that which is expected in a possessee-centered construction, since personal pronouns in possessee function appear in the accusative case (Creissels 2013).

obliques, or adnominal possessors), whereas the possessee is encoded like the figure in locational predication.

This distinction is particularly apparent in languages in which both options are available, for example Mandinka. Example (1b) (to be compared to the typical transitive clause (1a)) illustrates the possessor-centered type with the possessor encoded as A, whereas (1d) (to be compared to the locational clause (1c)) illustrates the possessee-centered type with the possessee encoded like the figure in locational predication.

(1) Mandinka (pers. doc.)

- a. *Fàatú yè kìnò tábì lúntáṅòlú yè.*
 Fatou CPL.TR meal.DEF cook visitor.DEF.PL for
 ‘Fatou cooked the meal for the visitors.’
- b. *Fàatú yè báadiṅòlú sòtó jěe.*
 Fatou CPL.TR relative.DEF.PL have there
 ‘Fatou has relatives there.’
- c. *Yírí fùlá bè kúnkò tēemá.*
 tree two LCOP field.DEF in_the_middle
 ‘There are two trees in the middle of the field.’
- d. *Dóokée fùlá bé Fàatú búlú.*
 younger_brother two LCOP Fatou in_the_sphere_of
 ‘Fatou has two younger brothers.’
 lit. ‘There are two younger brothers in Fatou’s personal sphere.’

2.2. Subtypes of the possessor-centered type of predicative possession

The possessor-centered type can be further divided into three main subtypes:²

- the *Have Possessive* type, in which the coding of the possessor and the possessee aligns with that of A and P in transitive predication, as in (1b) above;
- the *Incorp Possessive* type, in which the possessor is encoded as the S argument of a proprietive predicate (either verb or adjective) morphologically derived from the noun designating the possessee, as in example (2);
- the *Comit Possessive* type, in which the possessee shows the same marking as the companion NP in comitative predication, as in ex. (3).

² The predicative possession construction of Georgian, in which a verb of possession assigns nominative coding to the possessee NP, and dative coding to the possessor NP, meets the general definition of the possessor-centered type, since Georgian has a class of intransitive verbs that assign dative marking to an argument semantically characterizable as an experiencer. However, this construction cannot be classified as belonging to one of the three varieties of possessor-centered constructions widely attested in the languages of the world.

(2) Kalaallisut (Van Geenhoven 1998: 25)

Angut taana illu-qar-puq.
 man that house-PROPR-IND.3SG
 ‘That man has a house.’ lit. ‘That man house-owns.’

(3) Amele (Roberts 2016:290)

Dana hatin-na nij-ina eu sab=ca qee...
 man cave-in lie-3SG.NOM.PRS that food=with not
 ‘The man that lives in the cave had no food...’ lit. ‘was not with food’

With a view to the questions that will be discussed in the remainder of this article, two remarks are in order about the Have Possessive type. The first one is that the definition of the Have Possessive type as formulated above refers only to the coding characteristics of the possessor and the possessee, and consequently does not necessarily imply that the verbs found in Have Possessive constructions behave in all respects like typical transitive verbs. This precision is crucial, since the verbs found in Have Possessive constructions, even those whose transitive origin is unquestionable, are rarely if ever perfectly canonical transitive verbs. A case in point is Spanish *tener* ‘have’, whose properties with respect to differential object marking differ from those of typical transitive verbs (Creissels 2013).

The second remark is that diachronic changes in predicative possession do not necessarily result from the emergence of new predicative possession constructions due to an extension of the uses of locational/existential predication, or to semantic changes affecting verbs such as ‘take’, ‘hold’, ‘get’, or ‘bear’ (as widely attested, among others, in various branches of Indo-European). Diachronic changes in predicative possession may also result from purely formal changes in constructions that already have the function of expressing predicative possession. As rightly highlighted by Stassen (2009: 208-243), the *have-drift*, by which predicative possession constructions of other types tend to acquire characteristics of the Have Possessive type, is a very common type of evolution in the domain of predicative possession. Maltese, analyzed by Comrie (1989: 219-225), constitutes a well-known case of such an evolution, which is pervasive in the vernacular varieties of Arabic.³

2.3. Subtypes of the possessee-centered type of predicative possession

As a general rule, the predicative possession constructions meeting the definition of the possessee-centered type formulated above (non-core marking of the possessor NP), either include a predicator also found in locational or existential predication, or include no overt predicator in languages in which locational or existential predication may involve no overt predicator. This type of predicative possession can be designated as the *Exist Possessive* type.

³ On the have-drift in Arabic, see (Creissels 2022). A radical case of have-drift is attested in Juba Arabic (the Arabic-based Creole spoken in South Sudan), where the possessive predicator *énu* ‘have’ (originally the 3rd person masculine form of an adessive preposition: ‘at him’) lacks several properties typical of transitive verbs, but occurs in a coding frame ‘Possessor – *énu* – Possessee’, with rigid constituent order and no flagging or indexation of either the possessor or the possessee, identical in all respects to the ‘Agent – Verb – Patient’ coding frame selected by prototypical transitive verbs (Manfredi 2017: 120).

The Exist Possessive type can be further divided into two subtypes according to the coding of the possessor NP:

- in some constructions meeting the definition of the Exist Possessive type, the possessor shows the same locative marking as the ground NP in locational predication, or some other kind of oblique-like marking, such as comitative, benefactive, etc. (as in (1d) above, in which the possessor phrase is marked by a postposition glossable as ‘in the sphere of’ (cognate with the noun ‘hand’));
- in others, the possessor and the possessee in possessive clauses show the same coding characteristics (depending on the individual languages: genitive marking of the possessor phrase, construct marking of the possessee phrase, indexation of the possessor on the possessee phrase) as in the adnominal possession construction, as in example (4b), where the possessor phrase is in the genitive case and the possessee phrase is in the construct form, exactly like the modifier and its head in the adnominal possession construction (1a).

(4) Turkish (Kornfilt 1997: 230)

- a. *Hasan’ın kitab-ı*
 Hasan-GEN book-CSTR
 ‘Hasan’s book’ (noun phrase including a genitival modifier)
- b. *Hasan’ın çok kitab-ı var.*
 Hasan-GEN many book-CSTR there.be
 ‘Hasan has many books.’ (possessive clause)

Note that the definition of this latter type of predicative possession refers only to the coding properties of the possessor and possessee NPs, and does not imply that, in predicative possession, the possessor NP forms a phrase with the possessee. On the contrary, in Turkish for example, it is very easy to find possessive clauses in which the possessor NP and the possessee NP are separated from each other by elements that could not be inserted in an adnominal possession construction. This is, in particular, the case in example (5), where a locative adjunct is inserted between the possessor NP and the possessee NP.

(5) Turkish (Göksel & Kerslake: 112)

- Ayten-in İstanbul’da iki arkadaş-ı var.*
 Ayten-GEN İstanbul-LOC two friend-CSTR there.be
 ‘Ayten has two friends in İstanbul.’

2.4. The so-called Topic Possessive type of predicative possession

The typology of predicative possession summarized in sections 2.2 and 2.3 includes no basic type corresponding to Stassen’s (2009) Topic Possessive type (‘as for possessor, there is possessee’).

Unquestionably, in many languages in which the major type of predicative possession belongs to the possessee-centered type, possessive clauses commonly involve topicalization of the possessor phrase, and diachronically, this plays a crucial role in the process of have-drift. However, possessive clauses with the possessor encoded as a ‘dangling’ or ‘aboutness’ topic can hardly be the only possible type of possessive predication available in a given language. The point is that NPs in a dedicated topic position are not accessible to some operations, in particular questioning, and one can hardly imagine a language in which for example the possessor in predicative possession could not be questioned. Consequently, possessive clauses with the possessor encoded as a topic are best analyzed as resulting from the combination of the topicalization construction with a construction in which the possessor NP occupies an argumental position, used in the same language to encode predicative possession with non-topicalizable possessors. It is probable that, in the languages listed by Stassen (2009) as having the ‘Topic Possessive’ type of predicative possession as the only possible option, either there is another possible type of possessive clause in which the possessor is accessible to the operations to which clause-external topics are not accessible, or the analysis of the possessor phrase as occupying a dedicated topic position is erroneous.

For example, as discussed by Chappell and Creissels (2019) in Mandarin Chinese, *yǒu* ‘have’ also has an existential use (as in (6a)), and behaves in many respects differently from typical transitive verbs. Consequently, it may be tempting to analyze (6b) as resulting from the addition of a dangling topic to a clause involving a monovalent existential predicate: ‘As for him/her, there is a book.’ However, if *tā* in (6b) were a dangling topic, (6c) should not be possible. The fact that the identity of the possessor can be questioned by means of a construction in which *yǒu* is preceded by *shéi* ‘who’ rules out the analysis of the possessive reading of *yǒu* as resulting from the addition of a dangling topic representing an individual to an existential clause. Possessive *yǒu* must be analyzed as a transitive verb of possession,⁴ and (6b) must be analyzed as belonging to the same type of existential predication as that found in the European languages in which ‘have’ is used impersonally as an existential predicator.

(6) Mandarin Chinese (Chappell & Creissels 2019: 486, 491)

- a. (Zài) huāyuán-li yǒu yì-qún hái-zi zài fàng fēngzhēng.
 (at) garden-in have one-CLF child at let.go kite
 ‘There is a group of children flying kites in the garden.’
- b. Tā yǒu shū.
 3SG have book
 ‘He/she has a book.’

⁴ It is true that *yǒu* behaves in several respects differently from typical transitive verbs, but cross-linguistically, this is a very general property of ‘have’ verbs. In descriptions of European languages, verbs such as English *have*, French *avoir*, or Spanish *tener*, are identified as transitive on the basis of the coding frame they select, in spite of behavioral properties (for example in passivization, or differential object marking) that depart more or less from those of prototypical transitive verbs. On the same basis, there is no reason to deny Mandarin *yǒu* the quality of transitive verb.

- c. *Shéi yǒu shū.*
 who have book
 ‘Who has a book?’

2.5. The distinction between the Incorp Possessive and Comit Possessive types of predicative possession

Another important difference between Stassen’s (2009) typology of predicative possession and that put forward in this paper is the distinction between the Incorp Possessive and Comit Possessive types, conflated by Stassen into his With Possessive type. The simplest way to establish the distinction between comitative flagging of possessee NPs (Comit Possessive type) and derivation of proprietive verbs or adjectives (Incorp possessive type), is that, in comitative constructions, the role of companion can be assigned to human individuals referred to by means of proper names, personal pronouns, or interrogative pronouns, whereas proprietive derivation can only operate on common nouns referring to kinds. For example, in Amele, the identification of the construction in example (3) above (repeated here as (7a)) as a Comit Possessive construction (and not an Incorp Possessive construction) follows from the possibility of finding the same marker =*ca* ‘with’ in constructions such as those illustrated in (7b-c), in which =*ca* cannot be analyzed as a derivational element forming proprietive verbs or adjectives from nouns.

(7) Amele (Roberts 2016:290, 111, 240)

- a. *Dana hatin-na nij-ina eu sab=ca qee...*
 man cave-in lie-3SG.NOM.PRS that food=with not
 ‘The man that lives in the cave had no food...’ lit. ‘was not with food’
- b. *In=ca h-osi-a?*
 who.SG=with come-2DU.NOM-TP
 ‘With whom did you come?’
- c. *Ija uqa=ca h-ow-a.*
 1SG 3SG=with come-1PL.NOM-TP
 ‘I came with him.’

It is difficult to comment on the distribution of these two types of predicative possession in the languages of the world, since Stassen (2009), which constitutes so far the most extensive cross-linguistic survey of predicative possession, does not clearly distinguish the Incorp Possessive and the Comit Possessive types. However, it seems that the Incorp Possessive type is particularly common in the languages of North East Asia and of the Americas.

3. Types of predicative possession in the languages of Sub-Saharan Africa

In section 2, I proposed five main types of predicative possession: the Have Possessive type, the Incorp Possessive type, the Comit Possessive type, the Exist Possessive type with genitive

coding, and the Exist Possessive type with oblique coding of the possessor. Two of these five types (the Incorp Possessive type and the Exist Possessive type with Genitive coding) are extremely rare in Sub-Saharan Africa, whereas the other three (the Have Possessive type, the Comit Possessive type, and the Exist Possessive type with oblique coding of the possessor) are widely attested, and are not limited to any particular language families or areas (although they may be particularly common in some areas or language families, and relatively rare in some others).

3.1. The Exist Possessive type with genitive marking in the languages of Sub-Saharan Africa

The Exist Possessive type with genitive marking is extremely rare among the languages of Sub-Saharan Africa. It occurs in some Mande languages in competition with the Exist Possessive type with oblique coding of the possessor, but outside Mande, Dime (Omotic), Hamar (Omotic), and !Xun (Kx'a) are the only attestations I have found in the documentation I have been able to consult.

(8) Dime (Mulugeta 2008: 149)

ʔis-ko nīts ʔahó-b déén.
 1SG-GEN child good-M there.is
 'I have a good child.'

3.2. The Incorp Possessive type in the languages of Sub-Saharan Africa

Sandawe is to the best of my knowledge the only Sub-Saharan language in which this type of predicative possession has been signaled. In Sandawe, predicative possession is standardly expressed by means of intransitive proprietive verbs derived from nouns via suffixation of *-sí* 'be owner of', such as *dʒàní* 'arrow' > *dʒàní-sí* 'have an arrow' (Steeaman 2012: 201).

(9) Sandawe (Steeaman 2012: 202)

fàréy dógó-s-ê=ts'é.
 liar relative-PROPR-SI:3SG.M-NEG
 'A liar has no relatives.' (Saying; 'People don't want to be associated with liars')

Stassen (2009: 164) analyzes Kanuri as another instance of predicative possession expressed by means of proprietive adjectives, but the 'derivational suffix' *-a* he mentions, designated as 'associative suffix/postposition' in recent descriptions of Kanuri, is basically a comitative marker (as in (10a)), also used for NP coordination (as in (10b)). Consequently, the predicative possession construction in (10c) rather meets the definition of the Comit Possessive type.

(10) Kanuri (Cyffer 1991: 97, 65, 95)

- a. *Áli kámú-nzǎ-a íshin.*
 Ali wife-3SG-with come.ICPL.SI:3SG
 ‘Ali is coming with his wife.’
- b. *Wú-a nyí-a rókkó lènyên.*
 1SG-and 2SG-and together go.ICPL.SI:1PL
 ‘You and I will go together.’
- c. *Músa keké-a wá?*
 Musa bicycle-with Q
 ‘Does Musa have a bicycle?’

3.3. The Exist Possessive type with oblique marking of the possessor in the languages of Sub-Saharan Africa

The Exist Possessive type with oblique marking of the possessor is very common in the northern part of Sub-Saharan Africa (i.e., in the part of Sub-Saharan Africa situated between the Bantu area and the Sahara. It is particularly predominant in the Mande family, where the other types are relatively marginal.⁵

(11) Fongbe (Segurola & Rassinoux 2000: 32)

- Akwé gegé d(o) así tǎn.*
 money much be in_the_sphere_of 3SG
 ‘He has much money.’ lit. ‘Much money is in his personal sphere.’

(12) Anywa (Reh 1996: 303)

- Jír-ā bǎŋ ɲwèl.*
 to-1SG there.is.not money
 ‘I have no money.’

(13) Ik (Schrock 2014: 313)

- Iya ɲokitina lebetse ncik.*
 be.REAL dog.PL.NOM two 1SG.DAT
 ‘I have two dogs.’

⁵ The presence of the Have Possessive type in Mandinka (cf. example (1b) above) is probably a consequence of contact with Atlantic languages, since even in the closest relatives of Mandinka (Bambara, etc.), the cognates of *sòtó* ‘have’ express acquisition rather than possession, and cannot be used to express the equivalent of (1b).

3.4. The Have Possessive type in the languages of Sub-Saharan Africa

The Have Possessive type is also well-attested across the Northern part of Sub-Saharan Africa, from the Atlantic languages in the West to the Nilotic and Cushitic languages in the East. It is also found among Bantu languages (see section 4), and in the non-Bantu languages of Southern Africa (Nama, Khwe, !Xung, N|uuki). It is particularly predominant in the Atlantic family, where the other types are extremely marginal.⁶

(14) Jóola Banjal (Bassène 2007: 142)

Atejo na-baj-ε y-anj.
Atéjo SI:CLa-have-CPL CLe-house
'Atéjo has a house.'

(15) Igbo (Onumajuru 1985: 123)

Òké nwè-rè é'zè.
rat have-CPL tooth
'Rats have teeth.'

(16) N|uuki (Collins & Namaseb 2011:71)

Kea leeki ki laxe.
that woman have sister
'That woman had a sister.'

3.5. The Comit Possessive type in the languages of Sub-Saharan Africa

The Comit Possessive type, particularly prominent among Bantu languages (see Section 4), is also well-attested in the Northern part of Sub-Saharan Africa, especially (but not exclusively) in the central part of the Sudanic Belt, as illustrated by example (10) above and examples (17) and (18) below.

(17) Hausa (Newman 2000: 222)

Yārò yanà dà fensìr̃.
boy SI:3SG.M.ICPL with pencil
'The boy has a pencil.' lit. 'The boy is with pencil.'

⁶ The Kentohe variety of Balant is to the best of my knowledge the only Atlantic language that has been described as having no 'have' verb. In Balant Kentohe, predicative possession is standardly expressed by means of a construction of the Comit Possessive type (Doneux 1984a-b). Note that a 'have' verb is found in closely related Balant Ganja (Creissels & Biaye 2016: 244).

(18) Ngambay (Chata et al. 2015: 36)

Jèě̃ j-àw̄ gì ngán jē àí.
 1PL SI:1PL-go with child PL NEG
 ‘We don’t have children.’

4. Types of predicative possession in Bantu languages

4.1. Introductory remarks

Of the three types of predicative possession well-attested across Sub-Saharan languages, two only are widespread among Bantu languages: the Have Possessive type and the Comit Possessive type. The Exist Possessive type with oblique marking of the possessor is very common in the Northern part of Sub-Saharan Africa, but the documentation I have been able to consult on Bantu languages includes no instance of this type.

Moreover, of the two types found among Bantu languages, the Comit Possessive type is quite obviously strongly predominant, whereas in the Northern part of Sub-Saharan African and in the non-Bantu languages of Southern Africa, it is much less common than the Have Possessive type.

4.2. The Comit Possessive type as the standard expression of predicative possession in Bantu

The predicative possession construction most commonly found in Bantu languages can be schematized as follows:⁷

(NP_{POSSESSOR}) SI_{POSSESSOR}-COP with NP_{POSSESSEE}

The copula may be a reflex of Proto-Bantu **li* ‘be’, a reflex of Proto-Bantu **bá* ‘be’, or any verb whose meaning is compatible with the development of uses in copula function via semantic bleaching (a situation already illustrated above by the use of ‘go’ in the Comit Possessive construction of Ngambay, cf. example (18)). The choice of the element fulfilling the copula function is not necessarily uniquely determined in a given language, and may be conditioned by a variety of factors, most commonly TAM and/or polarity, or involve more or less free variation.

Examples (19) and (20) illustrate this type of construction in Lingala and Lòmóngò.

(19) Lingala (pers. doc.)

To-zalí na-bǎna míngi.
 SI:1PL-be with-CL2.child many
 ‘We have many children.’

⁷ NP = noun phrase, SI = subject index, COP = copula

(20) Lòmóngò (Hulstaert 1966: 374)

- a. *To-le l(a) i-lɔmbɛ.*
SI:1PL-be with CL19-house
'We have a house.'
- b. *Tó-fa la w-áto.*
SI:1PL-be.NEG with CL3-boat
'We don't have a boat.'

4.3. Comit Possessive constructions with a zero-form of the copula in the present

In some Bantu languages, a Comit Possessive construction of the type presented in the previous section alternates with a construction that, superficially, differs from a plain Comit Possessive construction by the absence of the copular verb, depending on the TAM value expressed by the possessive clause. This is in particular the case in Swahili. As illustrated in (21), in tenses other than the present, the predicative possession construction of Swahili is a typical Comit Possessive construction in which the copular verb *-kuwa* 'be' is followed by the prepositional clitic *na* 'with' introducing the possessee phrase, whereas in the present, no form of the copular verb is present, and subject indexes directly attach to *na*.

(21) Swahili (Schadeberg 1973: 31)

- a. *A-li-kuwa na ki-tabu.*
SI:CL1-PST-be with CL7-book
'S/he had a book.'
- b. *A-na ki-tabu.*
SI:CL1-with CL7-book
'S/he has a book.'

Before discussing the analysis of this alternation in the possessive clauses of Swahili and other Bantu languages, it is useful to remind that, cross-linguistically, this is a very common type of TAM-driven alternation in non-verbal predications.

4.3.1. *Non-verbal predications without copula: some typological parallels*

In the languages of the world, it is common that non-verbal predications show a paradigmatic organization in which a construction with an overt copula alternates with a construction analyzable as involving a zero form of the copula, the occurrence of the zero form of the copula being typically conditioned by TAM (indicative present vs. other tenses). Russian is a typical example.

(22) Russian (pers. knowl.)

- a. *Kniga byla na stole.*
 book(F).SG be.PST.SG.F on table(M).SG.LOC
 ‘The book was on the table.’
- b. *Kniga budet na stole.*
 book(F).SG be.FUT.3SG on table(M).SG.LOC
 ‘The book will be on the table.’
- c. *Kniga ∅ na stole.*
 book(F).SG on table(M).SG.LOC
 ‘The book is on the table.’

It may also occur that subject indexes identical to those found with verbs also attach to non-verbal predicates. This, however, does not necessarily imply full alignment of non-verbal predicates with verbs, since the other elements that constitute the verbal inflection (for example, TAM markers) may be incompatible with non-verbal predicates. As discussed at great length by Launey (1994), Classical Nahuatl provides a good illustration of this situation, which can be described in a straightforward and consistent way by analyzing subject indexes as transcategorial markers that participate in verb inflection but (contrary to the other types of markers that constitute verb inflection) can also be used to index the argument of non-verbal predicates. Note that, in Classical Nahuatl, the TAM values other than indicative present require the use of a copula, but subject indexes attach to non-verbal predicates even in the presence of a copula.

(23) Classical Nahuatl (Launey 1994: 54)

- | | |
|---|---|
| a. <i>Ni-tīcītl.</i>
1SG-doctor
‘I am a doctor.’ | cf. <i>Ni-chōca.</i>
1SG-cry
‘I am crying.’ |
| b. <i>Ni-tīcītl ni-ye-z.</i>
1SG-doctor 1SG-be-FUT
‘I shall be a doctor.’ | cf. <i>Ni-chōca-z.</i>
1SG-cry-FUT
‘I shall cry.’ |
| c. <i>Ni-tīcītl ni-catca.</i>
1SG.doctor 1SG-be.PRF
‘I was a doctor.’ | cf. <i>Ni-chōca-c.</i>
1SG-cry-PRF
‘I cried.’ |

This is precisely a situation of this type that can be observed in the predicative possession construction of Swahili and some other Bantu languages.

4.3.2. *The analysis of the predicative possession construction of Swahili*

As illustrated in (21) above, repeated here as (24), in tenses other than the present, the predicative possession construction of Swahili is an unproblematic Comit Possessive construction, whereas in the present, no form of the copular verb is present, and subject indexes directly attach to *na* ‘with’.

(24) Swahili (Schadeberg 1973: 31)

- a. *A-li-kuwa na ki-tabu.*
 SI:CL1-PST-be with CL7-book
 ‘S/he had a book.’

- b. *A-na ki-tabu.*
 SI:CL1-with CL7-book
 ‘S/he has a book.’

Quite obviously, the presence of a subject index attached to *na* in (24b) creates the conditions for the reanalysis of *na* as a verb stem. However, in all other constructions in which it occurs, *na* is unambiguously a comitative preposition (or prepositional clitic), and in the absence of any other morphological evidence of reanalysis, there is no reason not to analyze *na* as a preposition in (24b) too, since the attachment of subject indexes, not only to verbs, but also to non-verbal predicates, is not typologically exceptional.

In the construction illustrated in (24b), Swahili *na* is often designated as ‘possessive copula’. This label is, however, in contradiction with the current definition of copulas as grammatical words (or clitics) that fulfill the function of a linker between subject and predicate (cf. for example Pustet 2003: 167). The point is that this definition is compatible for example with the possibility that verbal inflectional categories attach to copulas, but excludes that copulas might play a role in the determination of the argument structure expressed by the constructions in which they are involved (otherwise they should be considered as forming part of the predicate, rather than linking elements between subject and predicate).

In non-verbal predications involving copulas, the argument structure is entirely determined by the non-verbal phrase that constitutes, syntactically, the complement of the copula.

In constructions with equative copulas, the predicative element (complement of the copula) is typically a noun, and nouns are intrinsically one-place predicates (or two-place predicates in the case of relational nouns). For example, in *John is a student*, the lexical meaning of *student* is the set of properties required for an individual to be categorized as a student. In English and some other languages, a noun can only manifest its predicative nature in combination with a copula, but the predicative relationship follows from the lexical meaning of the noun, not from the presence of a copula.

In constructions with locational copulas, the predicative element is a locative expression whose meaning implies a figure-ground relationship. For example, in *The cat is under the bed*, the argument structure <Figure, Ground> entirely follows from the lexical meaning of the preposition *under*.

The situation is completely different in Swahili clauses such as (24b), since in such constructions, there is nothing in the complement of *na* (i.e. the noun *kitabu* ‘book’) that

evokes a possessive relationship, and the argument structure expressed by the construction is clearly determined by *na*. Consequently, one may discuss whether *na* should be categorized as a preposition or as a verb, but its semantic contribution to the construction excludes categorizing it as a copula.

My position on this point is that, as far as the comitative preposition does not manifest morphological properties that can only be analyzed as implying a change in its categorial status, constructions such as (24b) are best analyzed as non-verbal predications in which a proclitic subject index attaches to the prepositional phrase in predicate function.

Moreover, I would like to emphasize that the notion of ‘possessive copula’ commonly used to characterize the status of *na* in *A-na kitabu* ‘(S)he has a book’ is inconsistent with the current analysis of a type of equative clauses variously attested across Bantu languages, in which a subject prefix attaches to the noun in predicate function such as Tswana *ló-bàná* ‘You are children’, or Swahili *Tu wapishi* ‘We are cooks’ (Ashton 1947: 92).⁸ If one admits that the attachment of bound person forms implies a change in the categorial status of the preposition *na* in possessive clauses, the same reasoning should lead to the conclusion that, in this type of equative clause, the noun in predicate function is not a noun anymore, but a verb. Such an analysis has, to the best of my knowledge, never been proposed for Bantu languages.

4.4. ‘Have’ verbs that show no evidence of a comitative origin

In Bantu languages, uncontroversial instances of the Have Possessive type can be found in the languages that have a ‘have’ verb showing no evidence of being the result of reanalysis of a Comit Possessive construction.

‘Have’ verbs that do not seem to result from the evolution of a Comit Possessive construction are not very common in Bantu languages, but they have a wide geographical distribution, since in the documentation I have been able to consult, ‘have’ verbs whose form does not suggest a comitative origin are signaled in languages belonging to zones A, B, F, H, JD, JE, K, M, and N.

I did not try to systematically track the historical source of these ‘have’ verbs, since this could not have been done without first establishing the regular correspondences between each of the languages in question and Proto-Bantu reconstructions. Some of these ‘have’ verbs are plausible reflexes of a root glossed ‘seize’, which points to a semantic evolution of a type widely attested in various branches of the Indo-European family (Creissels 1996).

For example, Bemba has a verb *-kwát-* ‘have’ whose plausible etymon is the Bantu reconstruction **kóat* ‘seize, grasp’.

(25) Bemba (Nancy Kula, pers.com.)

na-tu-kwát-a *in-kónde* *ishi-súma* *ne* *sha-lowá.*
 TP-SI:1PL-have-FV CL10-banana CL10-good and CL10-sweet
 ‘We have good and sweet bananas.’

⁸ In Swahili, this construction is in competition with a construction involving a free person form and the invariable copula *ni*, whereas in Tswana, the use of the invariable copula *ke* is restricted to the 3rd person. On variation in Bantu copular constructions, cf. Gibson & al. (2019).

According to Van de Velde (2008), Eton has a ‘have’ verb *gbélé* which is analyzable as the resultative form of *gbè* ‘catch, grasp’.

(26) Eton (Van de Velde 2008: 162)

mègbélâ *kál* *púpwágó*.
SI:1SG.have.RES CL9.sister CL9.single
‘I have only one sister.’

**kóat* is also a plausible etymon for this Eton verb, although the lack of clear regularities in the correspondences between Bantu reconstructions and Eton precludes a definitive conclusion (Mark Van de Velde, pers. com.).

In addition to Bemba (M42) and Eton (A71), I have found ‘have’ verbs constituting plausible reflexes of **kóat* ‘seize, grasp’ in Shi (JD53), Fwe (K402), and Kunda (N42).

A similar relationship between ‘have’ and ‘catch’, but apparently with a different root, is found in Tonga, where the Comit Possessive construction is in competition with a construction whose nucleus is *-jisi*, the completive of *-jata* ‘catch, hold’.

(27) Tonga (Carter 2002: 70)

Bákájisí *maanú* *mánji*.
SI:CL2.PST.have wisdom much
‘They had much wisdom.’

There is also some resemblance between Bena *nya* ‘have’ and *nyaga* ‘seize’, but this resemblance may be due to mere chance, and Morrison (2011) does not comment on it.

4.5. The ‘grey zone’ between Comit Possessive and Have Possessive constructions in Bantu

Most of the ‘have’ verbs mentioned in descriptions of Bantu languages are quite obviously cognate with ‘(be) with’, which raises the question of the criteria on the basis of which the predicative constructions of the languages in question can be analyzed as departing from the Comit Possessive type. Contrary to the creation of ‘have’ verbs from action verbs such as ‘catch’ or ‘hold’, the creation of ‘have’ verbs from constructions of the Comit Possessive type is a purely formal process, in which the meaning of the source construction is not affected by the evolution.

There are also unclear cases, such as Kagulu *-ina* ‘have’ (Petzell 2008): a thorough investigation of Kagulu historical phonology would be necessary before deciding whether a relationship with **li na* is plausible or not.

As rightly observed by Stassen (2009), in Bantu languages, it is often difficult to classify predicative possessive constructions as belonging to the Comit Possessive or to the Have Possessive type, due to a widespread tendency to reanalyze ‘(be) with’ expressing possession as a verb stem. All the six Bantu languages included in Stassen’s sample have a construction that belongs to the Comit Possessive type, at least etymologically, but for two of them (Duala and Ganda), a construction in which a copula and the comitative preposition are still

recognizable shows evidence of a reanalysis process. In Ganda, “the complex stem *li-na* is transitive; the possessee NP is its direct object and may be indexed on the predicate by means of object prefixes (Ashton et al. 1954: 234).” For example, in *n-ki-ri-na* (etymologically: 1SG-CL7-be-with) ‘I have it (class 7)’, the index of class 7 *-ki-* representing the possessee occurs in a position that can only be analyzed as that of an object index prefixed to a verb stem.

The question of predicative possession constructions ambiguous between a Comit Possessive analysis and a Have Possessive analysis will be dealt with in general terms in section 5, and section 6 will be devoted to the detailed presentation of the situation of Sotho-Tswana languages, whose predicative possession construction is particularly problematic, both from a synchronic and diachronic perspective.

5. The reanalysis of Comit Possessive constructions

5.1. Reanalysis of the sequence ‘copula + comitative preposition’ as a verbal stem

In the standard form of the Comit Possessive construction, nothing can interrupt the sequence formed by the copula and the comitative preposition, and the copula typically includes prefixal elements (in particular, a subject index) also found in verb forms. This quite obviously favors the reanalysis of the sequence ‘copula + comitative preposition’ as a single unit with the categorial status of verb stem. However, the reanalysis can only be considered as effective after TAM marking has been reorganized in such a way that the former sequence ‘copula + comitative preposition’ lends itself to TAM marking exactly like unanalyzable verb stems, and consequently cannot be decomposed as ‘copula + comitative preposition’ anymore.

Guérois (2015: 445-6) provides a good example of such a reanalysis in Cuwabo. This language has a verb *okáana* etymologically decomposable as *okála* ‘stay, remain’ + *na* ‘with’. The clearest evidence that this decomposition is not possible anymore in a synchronic analysis of Cuwabo comes from the fact that the last vowel of *okáana* behaves as the final vowel of a verb. In particular, it becomes *e* in the subjunctive.

(28) Cuwabo (Guérois 2015: 446)

<i>Míyô</i>	<i>maásikini</i>	<i>ddi-kaán-ê</i>	<i>dálá</i>	<i>dhaaví</i>	<i>ójá</i>	<i>múkucé?</i>	<i>Néé!</i>
1SG	even_if	SI:1SG-have-SBJV	hunger	how	CL16.eat	CL3.leftover	no
‘I am very hungry, but to eat the leftovers? No way!’							

Similarly, a distinction between *ukána* ‘have’ and *uká na* ‘be with’ is mentioned by Madi (2005: 542) for Maore. The distinction is not immediately apparent in the infinitive, but for example *tsiná* ‘I have’ is formally distinct from *tsá na* ‘I am with’.

5.2. Reanalysis of comitative prepositions as ‘have’ verbs in Comit Possessive constructions with a zero-form of the copula

Cuwabo provides a good example of a comitative preposition that has been reanalyzed as a ‘have’ verb in a construction that, originally, was probably a Comit Possessive construction with no overt copula.

Cuwabo, already mentioned in section 5.1 as illustrating the reanalysis of a former ‘be + with’ sequence as a ‘have’ verb (*okáâna*), also has a synonymous ‘have’ verb (*ona*) which is most probably a direct reflex of *na* ‘with’ reanalyzed as a verb in a construction that, originally, was probably similar to the Swahili construction illustrated in (24b) above.

In Cuwabo, *ona* is restricted in terms of how it can be inflected in comparison with *okáâna* (Guérois 2015: 447), but the possibility of using it with the pre-final habitual suffix *-ag-* is a decisive proof of its reanalysis as a verb.

(29) Cuwabo (Guérois 2015: 446)

<i>Kaázîwá</i>	<i>ddí</i>	<i>mbáaláwa</i>
NEG.SI:CL2.PST.IPFV.know	CL1.COP	CL1.sister.3PL
‘They did not know she was their sister,		
<i>óllé</i>	<i>o-á-nága</i>	<i>péle.</i>
CL1.DEM	CL1-PST.IPFV-have.HAB	CL1a.scabies
the one who had scabies.’		

Unfortunately, the available documentation does not make it possible to evaluate the extent of this reanalysis process across Bantu languages. The point is that many descriptions mention the existence of predicative possession constructions superficially identical to the Swahili construction in (24b), and even gloss the comitative preposition as ‘have’, without, however, providing the information on the basis of which it would be possible to decide whether the construction is still analyzable as a non-verbal predication with a prepositional phrase in predicate function (as in Swahili), or shows properties implying that the former preposition has been reanalyzed as a ‘have’ verb (as in Cuwabo).

5.3. Deletion of the comitative preposition leading to the emergence of a ‘be/have’ verb

The mere deletion of the comitative preposition in a Comit Possessive construction may convert a copula into a ‘be/have’ verb, i.e., a verb able to act, not only as a copula, but also as a ‘have’ verb occurring in a construction at least superficially similar to a transitive construction, with a Possessor phrase in subject role and the Possessee encoded as an unflagged noun phrase in immediate postverbal position. This possibility is attested in Kikuyu, where the original Comit Possessive construction ‘Possessor *rĩ na* Possessee’ (*rĩ* [rɪ] being the reflex of the Bantu copula **di*) is in competition with a construction ‘Possessor *rĩ* Possessee’. In the possessive clauses of Kikuyu, “the presence of *na* highlights the immediateness of the possession, so that a possessive clause lacking *na* indicates more permanent possession”, as in *n-dĩ na mbuku* ‘I have a book (in my possession at the moment)’ vs. *n-dĩ mbuku* ‘I own a book’ (Li & Navarro 2015: 92).

6. The Sotho-Tswana puzzle

As a rule, in Southern Bantu languages (Nguni, Venda, Tsonga, etc.), the comitative preposition is a reflex of **na*, and the predicative possession construction is of the type illustrated above by Swahili. Tswana and other Sotho-Tswana (S30) varieties show a different configuration, with a predicator *na* probably cognate with the comitative preposition *na* attested elsewhere in Bantu, but synchronically distinct from the Sotho-Tswana comitative preposition *lí*. Moreover, this predicator *na* occurs in two completely different constructions, depending on polarity: in one of its two possible constructions, it has the behavior expected from a ‘have’ verb originating from the reanalysis of a comitative preposition, whereas in the other one, its behavior is rather that of a copula introducing a prepositional phrase in predicate function, which raises the question of the historical evolution that has resulted in this very atypical situation.

6.1. The synchronic data

6.1.1. ‘Be’ in Sotho-Tswana

In the present positive, the general rule in Sotho-Tswana varieties, illustrated in (30) by Tswana, is that the nucleus of equative (30a), ascriptive (30b) and locational (30c) clauses is formed by the noun, adjective or locative in predicate function, and a proclitic subject index identical to the subject indexes that attach to verbs in the positive forms of the indicative mood. As illustrated in (30d-e), a noun phrase coreferent with the subject index can be present, but its presence is syntactically optional.

(30) Tswana (pers. doc.)⁹

- a. *Ke monna.*
kì-mò-ń:nà.
SI:1SG-CL1-man
‘I am a man.’
- b. *Re baša.*
rì-bà:-fǎ.
SI:1PL-CL2-young
‘We are young.’
- c. *Lo kae?*
lò-kâ:i
SI:2PL-where
‘Where are you (plural)?’

⁹ In the presentation of the Tswana examples, the first line gives the orthographic representation of the sentences.

d. *Motse o o mogolo.*

Mò-tsi ó ó-mù-χô:lò.
 CL3-village CL3.DEM SI:CL3-CL3-big
 ‘This village is big.’

e. *Lobone lo mo godimo ga tafole.*

Lò-bònè ló-mó χòdíímò χá-táfù:lí.
 CL11-lamp SI:CL11-LOC¹⁰ on_top CL17.GEN-(CL9)table
 ‘The lamp is on the table.’

However, with nouns in predicate function (but not with adjectives or locatives) and 3rd person subjects (but not with 1st or 2nd person subjects), an invariable predicator *kí* ‘it is’ precedes the noun in predicate function, and the construction involves no subject index. Note that the decision to analyze the subject indexes as proclitics, but the invariable predicator *kí* as a distinct word, relies on the observation of tone sandhi processes that, in Tswana, provide clear criteria for distinguishing word-internal morpheme boundaries from boundaries between words (Creissels et al. 1997: 20-23).

(31) Tswana (pers. doc.)

a. *Monna yo ke sefofu.*

mò-ínà jó ¹kí sí-fò:fù.
 CL1-man CL1.DEM ECOP CL7-blind_person
 ‘This man is blind.’

b. *Lekau le ke moaki.*

lì-káù lé ¹kí mó-à:kì.
 CL5-young_man CL5.DEM ECOP CL1-liar
 ‘This young man is a liar.’

In the indicative present negative, the general rule is that non-verbal predicates are preceded by a predicator ‘*χà* + H-toned subject index’ that constitutes a distinct word. However, an invariable predicator *χà-sí* ‘it is not’ occurs in the same conditions as *kí* in the positive, so that *sí* in *χà-sí* can be analyzed as an allomorph of the equative copula *kí*. Note that the negation marker *χà-* also occurs in verbal inflection, in the indicative present and indicative perfect.

¹⁰ In this construction, *mó* (historically the demonstrative of locative class 18) is synchronically analyzable as a preposition, and the class 17 prefix of *χòdíímó* can be analyzed as frozen, since Tswana has generalized class 17 agreement to all locative expressions. Synchronically, *χòdíímó* is best analyzed as a locative adverb (hence the gloss ‘on top’), since ‘top’ as a noun is expressed as *lì-χòdíímó* (class 5). On the analysis of Tswana locatives, see Creissels (2011).

(32) Tswana (pers. doc.)

a. *Ga ke ngwana.*

χà-kí ηw-à:ná.
 NEG-SI:1SG CL1-child
 ‘I am not a child.’

b. *Lepodisi ga le kwano.*

lì-pòdísí χà-lí 'kwâ:nò.
 CL5-policeman NEG-SI:CL5 here
 ‘The policeman is not here.’

c. *Mosadi yo ga se moaki.*

mò-sádi jó χà-sí mó-à:kì.
 CL1-woman CL1.DEM NEG-ECOP CL1-liar
 ‘This woman is not a liar.’

In tenses other than the indicative present, Tswana uses the verb *lì* ‘be’ or its negative counterpart *sì* ‘not to be’. These two verbs are strongly defective, since *lì* has only two synthetic forms (persistentive ‘still be’ and circumstantial present ‘being’), and *sì* just one (the circumstantial present ‘not being’). However, this does not affect the possibility of expressing all kinds of TAM values in clauses whose nucleus is *lì* or *sì* combined with a non-verbal predicate. As can be observed in (33), the circumstantial form of *lì* or *sì* (*kí-lí* in (33a), *ó-lí* in (33b), *χó-lí* in (33b)) can combine with a large array of auxiliaries, giving thus rise to all possible nuances of TAM.

(33) Tswana (pers. doc.)

a. *Ke tlaa bo ke le monna.*

kì-tlâà-bò kí-lí mò-ñ:nà.
 SI:1SG-FUT-AUX SI:1SG-be CL1-man
 ‘I will be a man.’

b. *O ne o le ngwana.*

ò-nè ó-lí ηw-à:ná.
 SI:2SG-AUX SI:2SG-be CL1-child
 ‘You were a child.’

c. *Golo mo go ne go ka bo go le gontle.*

χò-lò mó χó-nè χó-ká-bò χó-lí χó-ñ:tìè.
 CL17-place CL17.DEM SI:CL17-AUX SI:CL17-POT-AUX SI:CL17-be CL17-nice
 ‘This place might have been nice.’

Sotho-Tswana varieties also have a copular verb with full verbal inflection. In Southern Sotho and Pedi, as illustrated in (34), the copular verb with full verbal inflection is *bá* (glossed as

‘become’ by Doke & Mofokeng (1957)), reflex of a root reconstructed as **bá* ‘dwell, be, become’.

(34) Southern Sotho (Doke & Mofokeng 1957: 308)

Kē-tla-ba mōrèna.
 SI:1SG-FUT-become CL1.chief
 ‘I shall become a chief.’

In Tswana, *bá* has ceased to be used in copulative function, and only subsists in various grammaticalized forms (auxiliaries, but also for example the conjunction *íbilé* ‘and in addition to that’, etymologically a circumstantial form of *bá* glossable as ‘it having been’). The Tswana equivalent of Southern Sotho *bá* (i.e., a morphologically regular verb that can be used as a copula) is *íná*. In the other S30 varieties, *íná* (written *’na* in Southern Sotho traditional orthography) is also attested, but only with the meanings ‘sit’ and (in combination with another verb) ‘continue’. In Tswana, in addition to its use as a full verb with the meaning ‘sit, settle’, it can fulfill all the functions of a copula, in clauses fully synonymous with those presented in the first part of this section (examples (30) to (33)).

(35) Tswana (pers. doc.)

Ke tlaa nna mogakolodi wa gago.
kì-tlāà-ńn-á mō-χákólódì wá-χâ:χò.
 SI:1SG-FUT-be-FV CL1-advisor CL1.GEN-2SG
 ‘I will be your advisor.’

There is nothing strange in this evolution of a verb whose original meaning was ‘sit’. What is surprising for a verb with a basic meaning ‘sit’ is that *íná* has to the best of my knowledge no obvious cognates outside S30, and I am aware of no Bantu reconstruction to which it could be related.

6.1.2. ‘With’ in Sotho-Tswana

Sotho-Tswana languages have a comitative prepositional clitic *lí* ‘with’ (also used for NP coordination, and as an additive particle ‘too’, ‘even’).¹¹ Its use in the function of comitative adjunct marker is illustrated by example (36).

(36) Tswana (pers. doc.)

O ka ya le Kitso.
ò-ká-j-à lí-kî:tsò.
 SI:2SG-POT-go-FV with-Kitso
 ‘You may go with Kitso.’

¹¹ The comitative preposition has the form *ni* in Lozi (a Sotho-Tswana variety with some influence from the neighboring zone K languages, referenced as K20 by Guthrie because of its geographical location).

In Tswana (but not for example in Southern Sotho, where *lí-* is the only possible form of the comitative preposition), *lí* ‘with’ has an optional variant *nà ~ ná* with a very restricted distribution. This variant can be used exclusively in combination with third person pronouns of all classes (*lí-èné / nà-é* ‘with him/her’, *lí-bòné / nà-bó* ‘with them (cl.2)’, *lí-òné / nà-ó* ‘with it (cl. 3)’, etc.), or with the second person singular pronoun (*lí-wèná / ná-ò* ‘with you’). It can combine with no other nominal, and even with the pronouns compatible with it, its use is never obligatory.¹²

6.1.3. *Predicative possession in Sotho-Tswana*

In all Sotho-Tswana varieties, predicative possession can be expressed by means of a plain Comit Possessive construction involving the morphologically regular copular verb, *bá* (Sotho) or *nná* (Tswana).

(37) Southern Sotho (Doke & Mofokeng 1957: 308)

Ba-tla-ba lē-ngóana.
 SI:1SG-FUT-become with-CL1.child
 ‘They will have a child.’

(38) Tswana (pers. doc.)

Go tshwanetse gore o nne le thipa fa a ya go tsoma.
 χó-ts^hwánéts-í χóri ó-ńn-è lí-t^hipá
 SI:CL17-be_necessary-FV that SI:2SG-be-FV with-(CL9)knife
 †fá †ó-j-á χò-tsô:m-à.
 if SI:2SG-go-FV CL15-hunt-FV
 ‘You must have a knife if you go hunting.’

In addition to this Comit Possessive construction, Tswana and the other Sotho-Tswana varieties have a verb *nà* with a very limited and irregular inflection, found exclusively in possessive clauses – example (39).

(39) Tswana (pers. doc.)

Ga ke na madi.
 χà-kí-ná mà:-dí.
 NEG-SI:1SG-have CL6-money
 ‘I don’t have money.’

In spite of its very limited inflection, *nà* can only be analyzed as a defective and irregular verb distinct from the *nà ~ ná* variant of the comitative preposition. The point is that, in Sotho-Tswana languages, *nà* as a comitative preposition either has completely disappeared (as in

¹² To the best of my knowledge, the historical scenario responsible for the coexistence between these two variants of the comitative preposition in Tswana has never been discussed, and I am aware of no evidence supporting a particular scenario among those that can be imagined.

Southern Sotho), or subsists only as an optional variant of *lí* found exclusively in combination with some pronouns, whereas *nà* in possessive clauses can be followed by any noun phrase. For example, in Tswana, the prepositional phrase ‘with money’ can only be *lí-mà-dí*, and in no case can it appear as **ná-mà-dí*, whereas in example (39) above, *nà* ‘have’ is followed by *mà-dí* ‘money’.

The problem is that the verb *nà* has two completely different constructions in complementary distribution. In the negative, and if the possessee is not represented by a pronoun, *nà* is immediately followed by a noun phrase representing the possessee, as illustrated by example (39) above. In contrast, in the positive, its complement can only have the form of a comitative prepositional phrase, which means that its behavior is that of a copula introducing a prepositional phrase in predicate function (40), not of a ‘have’ verb immediately followed by a noun phrase to which is assigns the role of possessee.

(40) Tswana (pers. doc.)

Ke na le madi.

Kì-nà lí-mà:-dí.

SI:1SG-be with-CL6-money

‘I have some money.’

Similarly, in the negative, if the possessee is pronominal, the complement of *nà* is a with-phrase – example (41).

(41) Tswana (pers. doc.)

Ga ke na nao.

χà-kí-ná nà:-ó.

NEG-SI:1SG-be with-PRO.CL6

‘I don’t have any (money).’

The same configuration is found in Southern Sotho (42) and Lozi (43).

(42) Southern Sotho (Doke & Mofokeng 1957: 309)

a. *Kē-na lē-ngōana.*

SI:1SG-be with-CL1.child

‘I have a child.’

b. *Ha-kē-na ngōana.*

NEG-SI:1SG-have CL1.child

‘I don’t have any child.’

(43) Lozi (Fortune 2001: 42)

- a. *Ni-na ni-celete yeηata.*
 SI:1SG-be with-CL9.money CL9.much
 ‘I have a lot of money.’
- b. *Ha-ni-na celete yeηata.*
 NEG-SI:1SG-have CL9.money CL9.much
 ‘I don’t have any money.’

6.2. Discussion

It is hardly disputable that the Sotho-Tswana predicator *nà* presented in section 6.1.3 is a reflex of **na* ‘with’. On the basis of the Tswana data, a relationship between *nà* and the verb *íná* ‘sit’ > ‘be’ could be imagined, given the formal resemblance, but comparison with other Sotho-Tswana varieties shows that the grammaticalization of *íná* ‘sit’ as a copula is recent and limited to Tswana, whereas possessive clauses involving the same predicator *nà* with the same strange properties are found in other Sotho-Tswana varieties.

Since *nà* as a comitative preposition has completely disappeared in some Sotho-Tswana varieties, and subsists only marginally in others, the reanalysis of *nà* as a ‘have’ verb must have preceded the substitution of *lí* to *nà* as the productive form of the comitative preposition in Sotho-Tswana varieties.

What is completely unexpected is that, depending on polarity, in the predicative possession construction with *nà*, the possessee NP is sometimes directly postposed to *nà*, and sometimes introduced by the comitative preposition. One can hardly imagine a source construction including two successive comitative prepositions, and consequently, the construction in which the complement of *nà* is introduced by *lí* must result from a secondary development.

A possible explanation (at least, the only one that comes to my mind) is that the Have Possessive construction that resulted from the reanalysis of *nà* coexisted with a plain Comit Possessive construction involving the copular verb *bá* (Sotho) or *íná* (Tswana) and the new comitative preposition *lí* (as in (35) above). Starting from that, the synonymy between the two predicative possession constructions may have resulted in a tendency to align the *nà*-construction with the Comit Possessive construction. Here again, on the basis of the Tswana data alone, it could be tempting to imagine that the formal similarity between *nà* and *íná* played a role in this alignment process, but this explanation cannot hold for Sotho, where the nucleus of the Comit Possessive construction is *bá*, and *nà* shows exactly the same duality in its syntactic behavior as in Tswana.

Moreover, I have no explanation to put forward for the fact that the change in the construction of *nà* occurred in the positive, but not in the negative.

However, it seems difficult to contest that, in Sotho-Tswana languages, the expected result of the evolution of a ‘(be) with’ construction has been for some reason partially canceled by the reintroduction of the new comitative preposition *lí* between the former comitative preposition *na* reanalyzed as a ‘have’ verb and its complement. In other words, the Sotho-Tswana languages constitute an exception to the well-known (and otherwise robust) generalization according to which the changes that affect predicative possession tend to

introduce characteristics of the Have Possessive type in constructions initially belonging to other types (have-drift) rather than the other way around.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, after sketching a general typology of predicative possession (section 2), I have first shown that three of the five basic types recognized in this typology are commonly found among the languages of Sub-Saharan Africa, whereas the other two are very marginal (section 3). In Bantu languages (section 4), the strong predominance of the Comit Possessive type is obvious, and the only other type attested is the Have Possessive type. The Have Possessive constructions found among Bantu languages may result not only from the semantic evolution of verbs such as ‘catch’, ‘take’, or ‘hold’, but also from the reanalysis of a Comit Possessive construction. In section 5, I have discussed the criteria according to which a sequence ‘be with’ or a preposition ‘with’ can be viewed as having been reanalyzed as a ‘have’ verb, and concluded that the available documentation does not make it possible to evaluate the exact extent of these reanalysis processes in Bantu. In section 6, I have analyzed the situation of Sotho-Tswana languages and concluded that the only possible explanation of the duality in the behavior of possessive *na* is that, in contradiction to the tendencies generally observed in the evolution of predicative possession, the conversion of a former comitative preposition into a ‘have’ verb has been partially canceled in Sotho-Tswana languages by the reintroduction of the new comitative preposition *li* between *na* and its complement.

Abbreviations

The glosses follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules, additional abbreviations are as follows:

CL = noun class, CPL = completive, CSTR = construct, ECOP = equative copula, FV = final vowel, HAB = habitual, LCOP: locational copula, POT = potential, PRO = pronoun, PROPR = proprietive, REAL = realis, SI = subject index, TP = today’s past.

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