

Zach Wellstood

Field Methods

Spring 2015

Language: Danyigbe

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Snippet: The *àɸé* Genitive

In eliciting pronominal data in Danyi Ewe (Danyigbe), an especially interesting genitive structure has arisen. Compare the four genitive structures in (1):

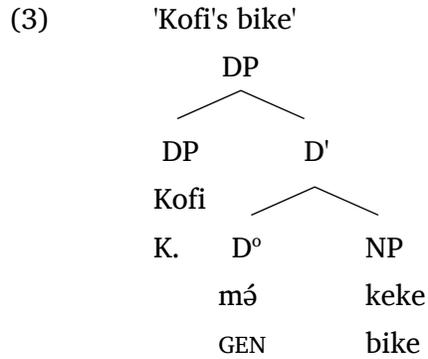
- (1)
- | | | | | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------|------|---------|----------|--------|--------|
| a. | mì | lò | xóɓ | -ɲə. | | |
| | 1PL.NOM | like | friend | -1SG.GEN | | |
| | 'We like my friend.' | | | | | |
| b. | mì | lò | àɸé | -ɲə | mé | xóɓ. |
| | 1PL.NOM | like | home | -1SG.GEN | GEN | friend |
| | 'We like my friend.' | | | | | |
| c. | mì | lò | mìà | | xóɓ. | |
| | 1PL.NOM | like | 1PL.GEN | | friend | |
| | 'We like our friend.' (inalienable) | | | | | |
| d. | mì | lò | mìà | | mé | xóɓ. |
| | 1PL.NOM | like | 1PL.GEN | | GEN | friend |
| | 'We like our friend.' (alienable) | | | | | |

The sentences in (1) model the breadth of Danyigbe's possessive structures. (1a) and (1b) show two parallel genitive structures for the first person. (1c) and (1d) show that in/alienability is manifested as the absence or presence (respectively) of *mé*. *Xóɓ*, 'friend' therefore belongs to a class of nouns of ambivalent alienability – it is grammatical with either an inalienable possessive structure or an alienable one. Thus, (2b-d) are striking:

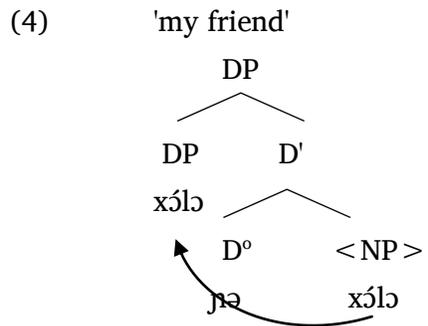
- (2)
- a. *mì* *lò* *naná* -*ɲə*.
 1PL.NOM like mother-1SG.GEN
 'We like my mother.' (inalienable)
- b. **mì* *lò* *ɲə* *naná*.
 1PL.NOM like 1SG.GEN mother
 Intended: 'We like my mother.' (inalienable)
- c. **mì* *lò* *ɲə* *má* *naná*.
 1PL.NOM like 1SG.GEN GEN mother
 Intended: 'We like my mother.' (alienable)
- d. **mì* *lò* *àɸá* -*ɲə* *má* *naná*.
 1PL.NOM like home -1SG.GEN GEN mother
 Intended: 'We like my mother.' (alienable)

Naná, 'mother' appears to belong to the class of inalienable nouns. In addition, (2b-d) show a difference from (1b-d): it appears in the first person, the only option to express the possession of an inalienable noun is to encliticize it to the possessum. Therefore, (1b) and (2d) as a pair provide evidence that *àɸá*-GEN is an alienable genitive structure which is restricted to the first and second persons; in fact, this is not surprising, since the first and second persons pattern uniquely in many pronominal paradigms of Danyigbe. However, deriving the an *àɸá* genitive's phrase structure is not a trivial task.

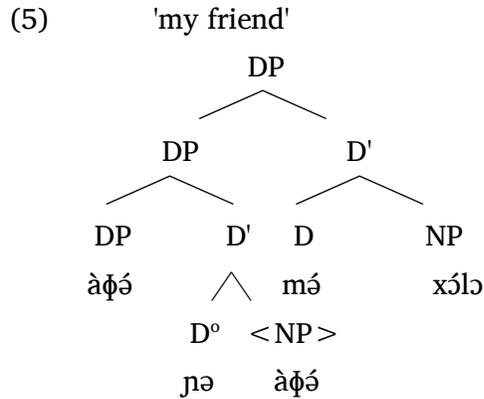
Collins (1993:170) assumes the following structure for an alienable genitive construction with the particle *má*:



In addition to this, extensive discussion of Ewe possession structures is given in Ameka (1991, ch. 7), though no structure is provided for possessions and there is no mention of the àɸá genitive. Thus, assuming a structure like (3), perhaps we could derive the first and second person genitive structures as follows:



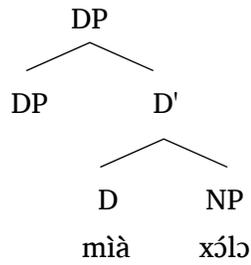
The next, more challenging step, would be to derive an àɸá genitive. We would expect a structure like this (because the àɸá structure is alienable):



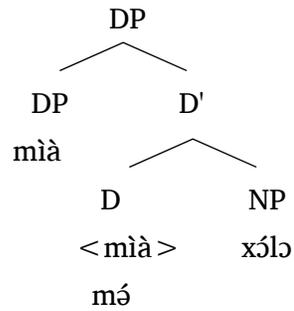
Such a first past seems dubious to me. One may expect the structure in (5) to output a sentence like, 'my home's friend,' rather than 'my friend.' Because the *àφé* form itself means 'home,' but the *àφé* genitive does not mean 'my home's [possessum],' rather 'my [possessum], it seems reasonable that *àφé* is merged purely for structural reasons (like *do*-support) and that the possessor and possessum are initially merged at the same level of structure.

To capture this, a more preferable structure would be one in which *xólɔ* is merged as the complement of *ɲə* and then *ɲə* is internally merged at a higher level of structure. To explore this hypothesis, maybe *má* would be a trace of movement rather than an externally merged D° . Then the in/alienable genitives of *xólɔ* would begin as structurally parallel. Instead of (4) we would have:

(6) 'our friend' (inalienable)



'our friend' (alienable)



What this means is that D° of alienable nouns would undergo obligatory raising to SpecDP.

In there place, *ḿ* is left as a trace of movement. This could explain how it *ḿ* arises in the *àǝǎ* genitive construction: Since the first and second person pronouns would start in D° and raise out, *ḿ* would necessarily be present (as it is).

There is still difficulty in determining the landing site of *nə/wo* movement and where *àǝǎ* would merge. In addition, the structures of (6) would have to be paired or unified with that of (4) to explain how the first and second person genitives are encliticized.

References

- Ameka, Felix Kofi. (1991) *Ewe: Its Grammatical Constructions and Illocutionary Devices*. PhD Thesis: Australian National University.
- Collins, Chris. (1993) *Topics in Ewe Syntax*. PhD Thesis: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Duthie, A.S. (1996) *Introducing Ewe Linguistic Patterns*. Accra: Ghana Universities Press.