A Syntactico-semantic Analysis of Possessive Constructions in Kisubi[1]

Ibrahim D. Rwakakindo* and Abel Y. Mreta**

Abstract

This paper intends to explore the way in which possessive constructions in Kisubi can be categorised and examine the extent to which semantic line between the established possessive categories is clearly demarcated. The study is guided by the prototype theory and it is confined to the nominal possessive constructions. It adopted a qualitative approach. Data were collected from six (6) participants who were snowballingly selected from three wards in Biharamulo District. The data were collected using structured interview, introspection and focus group discussion (FGD). Content analysis technique and interlinear glossing approach were used for data analysis. The Prototype Theory was mainly used in categorising possessive constructions. The findings indicate that possessive constructions fall into two broad categories, namely typical and less typical. Typical possessive constructions (TPCs), also known as alienable possessive constructions, display actual/canonical possession. Less typical possessive constructions (LTPCs) on the other hand can be divided into two categories: firstly, inalienable possessive constructions, which essentially display socio-cultural possession; and secondly, neither-alienable-nor-inalienable possessive constructions. The latter category has three aspects: generic possessive constructions, part-whole-like possessive constructions and other-relations possessive constructions. The findings of the study demonstrate that there is a thin line between alienable and inalienable possessive constructions: the semantic features of both categories tend to overlap in some occurrences.

Key words: *alienable, inalienable, prototype theory, possessive constructions, possessor, possessee, typical and less typical, concept*

---

[1] Kisubi is a non-classified Bantu language spoken natively in Biharamulo District located in the northwestern part of Kagera Region, Tanzania. It is genetically closer to languages in zone JE20 – the Haya-Jita group of the narrow Bantu, but distant to languages in zone D60 (Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, Kihangaza, Kiha and Kishubi). In the available literature, Kisubi and Kishubi are mistakenly not differentiated; scholars think that the languages are the same (see, for example, Guthrie, 1967/71; Maho, 1999; Nkumbulwa, 2015), while in actual fact they are not – they are genetically and geographically distant.

* Assistant Lecturer, Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, The University of Dodoma, P.O. Box 626, Dodoma, Tanzania, E-mail: rwakakindo@yahoo.com

** Senior Lecturer, Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics, University of Dar es Salaam, P.O. Box 35040, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, E-mail: mretaone@yahoo.co.uk

Introduction

Possession as a psycho-cognitive and socio-cultural concept requires an in-depth study to uncover what is canonically possessed and what is socio-culturally embraced. Some items are canonically possessed, i.e. there is an actual sense of ownership. For example, the possessive construction in *Juma's car* is an alienable possessive construction which shows actual/canonical possession. The dependent noun *Juma* (the possessing entity – herein referred to as the possessor) owns the head noun *car* (the possessed item – herein referred to as the possessee). In the context of alienable possessive relations, the head noun is also referred to as the alienable object (cf. Payne, 1997). However, other items are not possessed in the real sense of the word. For example, in an inalienable possessive construction *Juma's wife,* the head noun *wife* (inalienable object) is intrinsically related to the dependent noun *Juma*. Any mention of the word *wife* brings in the sense that there is husband; hence, wife cannot stand independent of husband. In other societies, women are regarded as mere objects that can be canonically possessed; hence, they acquire the alienable status (cf. example (9)). It is, therefore, worth arguing that the possessive status of other items is socio-culturally determined. What is inalienably possessed in one socio-cultural set-up might be alienably possessed in another socio-cultural set-up and the vice versa. Hence, alienability and inalienability are in some other instances not universally perceived. Moreover, scholars such as Payne (1997), Matambirofa (2000) and Alexiadou et al. (2007) have categorised possessive constructions into two groups, alienable and inalienable; but much is still desired under this categorisation. It is in this context that the need to carry out the study on possessive constructions in Kisubi emerged. The study essentially sought to answer two prime questions: firstly, how are possessive constructions categorised in Kisubi? And secondly, is there a clearer semantic dichotomy between different categories of possessive constructions in Kisubi?

Literature Review and Theoretical Orientation

Studies on possessive constructions are numerous and most of them are Euro-centrically based; quite a few studies have been done across Bantu languages. In this article, both Euro-centrically and Afro-centrically based literature on possessive constructions have been reviewed. In both categories of literature, scholars have categorised possessive constructions into two broad groups: alienable and inalienable, and have taken four different routes in dichotomising them. Route one scholars have dichotomised the two possessive

constructions on morphosyntactic basis (see, for example, Mugane, 1997; Den-Dikken, 2006; Gebregziabher, 2012; Helmbrecht, 2016). These scholars, with the exception of Mugane, argue that the insertion of a certain particle is sufficient to set a syntactic difference between the two possessive constructions. Moreover, they argue that the syntactic difference between the two possessive constructions may be attributed to the word order. In contrast, Mugane (1997) argues that the syntactic difference between the two possessive constructions is attributed to the fact that the inalienable object subcategorises for an argument, while the alienable object does not do so. On the other hand, route two scholars represented by Dobler (2008) have set the dichotomy between the two possessive constructions on morphophonological basis. Moreover, while route three scholars have done so using the syntactico-semantic approach (see, for example, Matambirofa, 2000; Alexiadou et al., 2007), route four scholars as represented by Payne (1997) have set the dichotomy between the two possessive constructions on purely semantic basis.

For the scholars who have viewed alienable and inalienable possessive constructions syntactico-semantically, their argument is that "different semantic constraints do govern the syntax of possessive constructions" and that in alienable possessive constructions, the alienable object (the possessee) is in no way inherently related to the possessor while in inalienable possessive construction, the inalienable object is inherently related to the possessor. The latter stance is also taken by Payne (1997) who argues that *"the relation between the possessor and the possessee in alienable constructions can be terminated, while in inalienable constructions cannot"*. This means that, the relation in alienable possessive constructions can be terminated since it is not intrinsic. The alienable object can be replaced by another object or can be abandoned completely and/or can be resumed later. But in inalienable possessive constructions, the relation is intrinsic since the inalienable object semantically depends on the possessor.

In the reviewed studies, scholars have attempted to categorise possessive constructions into alienable and inalienable and a highlight on possessive-like constructions has been made by Matambirofa (2000). However, this is an inadequate attempt; hence, more categorisation of possessive constructions is needed. Moreover, most scholars have tried to argue that the two categories can be dichotomised using either morphosyntactic or morphophonological,

or semantic approaches. However, those who have attempted to dichotomise the two categories using the semantic approach (cf. Payne 1997) have not articulated adequately the extent to which the line between the two possessive constructions is clearer. Therefore, this study strives to find out the way possessive constructions can be categorised in Kisubi as well as examining the extent to which the semantic line between the established possessive categories is clearer. The outputs of the study would fill the gaps inherent in the reviewed literature.

Nevertheless, this study is anchored on the theoretical framework of the Prototype Theory by Rosch (1999). The theory, originating from cognitive psychology, determines membership in a category through possession of particular properties, but group membership does not require possession of all qualities. A concept in this theory is defined in terms of its internal organization: the theory assumes that the concept is internally organized in levels or layers, which are hierarchically arranged. Such levels contain members with different status: some are typical and others are less typical. Typical members are usually closer to the centre/core whereas the less typical ones are successively arranged in the periphery. Moreover, typical members come to mind more readily than the less typical ones; and above all, typical members are more definable than the less typical ones. Hence, this study fitted into this theory in the following manner: possession is a concept enshrined in the psycho-cognitive domain, which is the centre for the architecture of meanings given to different objects, groups of objects, words and groups of words – phrases, clauses and sentences. Possession can also be perceived of as a socio-cultural concept in the sense that it is society-specific. Hence, possession is a psycho-cognitive and socio-cultural concept. Some members (possessive constructions) to the concept of possession may exhibit typical possessive features and others may exhibit less typical possessive features. Therefore, with reference to the theory, in the concept of possession, there are three levels, each of which accommodates members with different statuses. The first level is occupied by typical possessive constructions (alienable possession); the second level is occupied by one category of less typical possessive constructions (inalienable possession); and the third level is occupied by the other category of less typical possessive constructions (neither-alienable-nor-inalienable possessive constructions: generic possessive constructions, part-whole-like possessive constructions and other-relations possessive constructions).

Scope, Methods and Materials

The study was confined to the nominal possessive constructions because elements in such constructions stand out as individual words to such an extent that it can be easier to designate them as the head noun (POSSESSEE), the dependent noun (POSSESSOR) and the functional category – the possessive affix – (LINKER/RELATOR). On the other hand, the data for this study were obtained from the PhD thesis undertaken by the first author of this article under the supervision of the second author. The data, which led to the production of the said thesis, were collected from Biharamulo district in which the target language, Kisubi, is natively spoken. A sample of six[2] (6) participants, distributed proportionally in terms of sex, was obtained from three wards: Nyarubungo, Nyamahanga and Runazi. The wards were purposively chosen for one major reason: they are relatively distant from the headquarters of the district and therefore the language of their inhabitants was supposedly not to be very much corrupted by Kiswahili. Furthermore, the age of the participants who were obtained using snowball sampling technique ranged between fifty (50) years and above. The age issue was necessary since people above fifty (50) years do, to a greater extent, observe and maintain the grammar of the language; and above all, they have a reasonable stock of linguistic knowledge – however informal it may be – concerning their language.

Data were collected using structured interview, focus group discussion (FGD) and introspection. Firstly, structured interview was preferred because of the nature of the data the researchers were intending to get – the interview questions were arranged by starting with canonical possessive constructions, streaming down to the non-canonical ones; secondly, FGD was significant because it acted as a filter or confirmer of the results obtained from structured interview; and thirdly, introspection was necessary because one of the researchers was a native speaker of the target language – he could be able to identify some subtle errors in the data produced by the participants; but more importantly, he was in a position to generate

---

[2] The basic reason for having a sample size of 6 respondents was to get valid and reliable inferences about a language. Newman and Ratliff (2001: 60) argue that, in order to have valid and reliable inferences about a language, multiple respondents are needed. In language documentation, even a single respondent is desirable, but the problem is on how to ascertain the reliability of the information s/he provides. Having two or more respondents maximizes the possibility of getting authentic information. Moreover, 6 respondents were ideal because they were also used in the FGD, and an ideal focused group should have a minimum of six (6) respondents and a maximum of ten (10) respondents, that is, 6 – 10 respondents (Freitas et al., 1998).

other illustrative PNPs in support of the data and examples produced by the participants.

In this article, possessive constructions were categorised using the approach inherent in the prototype theory and were analysed using content analysis and interlinear glossing techniques. These data analysis techniques were preferred to others for two major reasons: firstly, the study itself was largely qualitative; hence, the findings were classified into themes followed by descriptions. And secondly, this study was semantically based – the data, nominal possessive constructions, could appropriately be analysed using interlinear glossing approach where every syntactic unit is assigned its English equivalent; and at the end, the approximate meaning of the entire construction is provided in inverted commas.

Results and Discussion

i) Categories of Possessive Constructions

The study findings show that there are two categories of possessive constructions: typical possessive constructions (TPCs), which display actual/canonical possession, and less typical possessive constructions (LTPCs). The latter category was further divided into two subcategories: inalienable possessive constructions, which mostly display socio-cultural possession, and neither-alienable-nor-inalienable possessive constructions – which include generic possessive constructions, part-whole-like possessive constructions and other-relations possessive constructions.

a) Typical Possessive Constructions (Alienable Possessive Constructions)

In TPCs, there is the owner (the possessing item, also referred to as the possessor) and the owned (the possessed item or sometimes referred to as possessee/possessum). In this article, the possessee and the possessor have been coded N_1 and N_2 respectively. The owner is usually a human being and the owned is usually a non-human being. The latter can be an animate or inanimate. Someone can own an animal, a house, etc; but under normal circumstances cannot own a fellow human being. On the other hand, Langacker (2000: 176) argues that, "the possessor is a human being and the possessed item represents entities of his/her immediate surroundings". This presents a somewhat holistic semantic assumption that, anything in one's surroundings, which is under his/her control and which cannot be taken or be put into use without his/her consent, either by being

sold or given freely, is said to be alienably possessed. Similarly, Alexiadou et al. (2007: 552) view alienable possession as a semantically dependent relation between two asymmetrical entities, the possessor and the possessee. The possessor is more prominent and/or significant and therefore helps to predict the possessee. The possessee in alienable constructions does not semantically depend on the possessor, i.e. it is not intrinsically connected to the possessor as its inherent constituent part. The alienable object can stand in isolation without requiring any semantically obligatory entity. In other words, the relationship between the two nouns in an alienable relation is not relational: one noun is not intrinsically related to the other. For example, in the possessive construction *Juma's table,* the noun *table* is not directly related to anything else. However, in the possessive construction *Juma's hand,* the noun *hand* is directly related to the human body; it is a part of the human body. Hence, there is a permanent or intrinsic relationship between the *hand* and the *human body:* the hand cannot stand independent of the body. Viewed from another perspective, Payne (1997: 105) opines that, "semantically, alienable possession is a kind of possession which can be terminated; for example, one can transfer his worldly goods to someone else". This further suggests that, under normal circumstances, alienably possessed materials can be replaced by other materials; for example, a car can be sold and a different thing can be bought and be possessed such as a piece of land, a farm of crops, a TV set, etc. Hence, replaceability of items in alienable possession is guaranteed under normal circumstances. Moreover, the alienably possessed items can be abandoned and/or be discarded if are out of use, or are exhausted. For example, in shifting cultivation, a peasant may own a piece of land for a couple of years. If its soils get exhausted, he/she may abandon it and resume it later. Along the same vein, if a TV set is out of order, it may be discarded and/or dumped somewhere. Therefore, terminability, replaceability, abandonment and resumability are some of the salient features of alienable possession. Alienable possession is in two categories: *human versus non-human alienable possessive constructions* and *animate versus human alienable possessive constructions.*

Human versus Non-human Alienable Possessive Constructions

According to the study findings, it was revealed that the human versus non-human alienable possessive constructions do convey the sense of *made by, made for, bought by, used by, set aside for, etc.,* besides the canonical semantics of ownership, as in (1).

1 (a) ekitebhe   cha   Juma

chair (N_1)   of   Juma (N_2)

'Juma's chair'

  (b) ekitebhe   cha   katibu

chair (N_1)   of   secretary (N_2)

'Secretary's chair'

Although the canonical semantics of alienable possession is that of ownership, beyond the canonical semantics there can be other parallel semantics. In (1a), the possessee *ekitebhe* 'a chair' is on the one hand canonically owned by Juma, but on the other hand, it was made by Juma and it is in no way possessed by Juma. Juma made the chair to serve other purposes other than his own. Another parallel semantics for the possessive construction in (1a) might be that the chair was bought by Juma for someone else or for an institution, e.g. a school, and it had notable features compared to other chairs; for example, it was either substandardly made or it was superstandardly made to such an extent that it was used as a reference point. The last parallel semantics in relation to (1a) is that of being *used by* or *made for.* In the context of the example in question, Juma uses the chair for specified purposes and no one else can use it; or it was made purposely for Juma and not for anybody else. Similarly, in (1b), the same senses as in (1a) may be implied. In fact, any precise interpretation regarding human versus non-human possessive relationships and other alienable possessive relationships is anchored on the pragmatic context in which the utterance occurs.

Animate versus Human Alienable Possessive Constructions

According to the study findings, the animate-human alienable possessive constructions – depending on the pragmatic context of the utterance – may have multiple parallel semantics besides the canonical one, some of which include: *bought by, emphasis, given as*

a reward, or *part of inheritance, under the custody of, take care as the property is not yours,* etc., as in (2).

(2)   ente   ya   Juma

       cow (N_1)   of   Juma (N_2)

       'Juma's cow'

The alienable possessive construction in (2) may convey multiple senses. In the first place, it may convey the sense of emphasis that the cow belongs to Juma and it should be under his custody; but in the second place, it may mean that the cow is given to Juma (by an authorised person) as a part of inheritance. Moreover, it may mean a precaution that: take care; this cow is Juma's. However, some parallel semantics in this regard may also feature under the human versus non-human alienable possessive semantics. Hence, the parallel semantics for human versus non-human alienable possessive constructions and animate versus human alienable possessive constructions do complement each other. This does not mean that all parallel semantics pertaining to alienable possessive constructions have been exhausted in this study; there can be others depending on the pragmatic context of the occurrence.

b)   Less Typical Possessive Constructions
LTPCs are in two categories: *inalienable possessive constructions* and *neither-alienable-nor-inalienable possessive constructions.*

Inalienable Possessive Constructions
In inalienable possessive constructions (IPCs), the possessor has no absolute control or authority over the possessee. However, in other occurrences, the possessor's control or authority over the possessee may be relative, depending on the socio-cultural nature of a particular society. IPCs usually do express part-whole relationship; natural family ties (kinship relations); social relationships (relations resulting from various associations, e.g. friend, boss, etc. which are less permanent); and sporadic/accidental relationships (brought about by periodic events, e.g. illness, studies, etc; for example, Juma's doctor, Juma's supervisor, etc.). Moreover, it is worth arguing that inalienable possessive relations have a clear-crystal element of dependence; the possessee semantically depends on the possessor. Along the same line, Payne (1997: 105) asserts that, "inalienable possession is the kind of possession that cannot be terminated". This

means that, the relation between the two entities which are inalienably related is permanent, relational, or intrinsic. An entity, more specifically the possessee, cannot stand independent of the other (the possessor) as it is unblinkly argued by Vergnaud & Zubizarreta (1992: 596) and Guéron (2006a) as cited by Alexiadou et al. (2007: 551):

> "In inalienable possession, the two entities in the POSSESSOR relation are semantically dependent: an inalienable object is a dependent entity in the sense that it is intrinsically defined in terms of another object. Typically, part-whole relations such as body parts and kinship relations are treated in terms of inalienable possession. Clearly, parts of human bodies, for instance *nose* in e.g. *John's nose*, are defined with respect to the typical individual, which consists of a nose, two eyes, and a mouth and so on. Similarly, kinship terms such as *mother, father,* etc. are defined by the relation between two entities: when we evoke the entity defined as a *mother* we automatically evoke an entity that is her child. As a consequence of this dependency, nouns associated with inalienable possessors are called relational nouns and they often give degraded results when used in isolation".

From these inalienable possessive clues and from the findings of the study, it is worth arguing that there are three major categories of inalienable possessive constructions: *part-whole IPCs, kinship IPCs* and *institutional-cultural adornments IPCs*.

- **Part-whole Possessive Constructions**

Lyons (1977: 312) asserts that part-whole possessive constructions show the relationship which holds between the separate or separable components of a thing and the whole thing of which they are components. Both Lyons (ibid.) and Sager (1990: 32) give the following as the conceptual formulation or input template of the part-whole possessive constructions:

X is a constituent of A

Or X, Y and Z are constituent parts of A

Or A consists of X

Or A consists of X, Y and Z

Among the IPCs that participants were supposed to provide meanings to were as in (3).

3 (a) omulyango   gw'emotoka

   door (N_1)   of car (N_2)

   'The car's door or the door of the car'

 (b) okuguru   kw'emeza

   leg (N_1)   of table (N_2)

   'The leg of the table'

The responses from virtually all participants with regard to the IPCs in (3) (a) and (b) were roughly clustered into two: *belongs to* and *part of;* that means, N_1 belongs to N_2 or N_1 is a part of N_2. The latter response fits best in the conceptually formulated part-whole input template by Sager (ibid.) and Lyons (ibid.), that N_1 is a constituent of N_2; or N_2 consists of N_1; and if N_I is defined, it should be defined with reference to N_2. i. e. it is semantically attached to N_2. In this case, N_2 is semantically superior relative to N_1. It can also be argued that N_2 is the superordinate or general term and N_1 is the subordinate or specific term. In terms of possession, the *whole* possesses the *part;* but this kind of possession is not analogous to ownership in the strict sense of the word, i.e. the relationship between N_1 and N_2 does not imply that N_2 owns N_1; rather, N_1 is semantically dependent on N_2, and forms a sort of hierarchy in the sense that N_2 is hierarchically higher than N_1.

▪ **Kinship Possessive Constructions**

Langacker (2000: 2) argues that kinship possessive constructions essentially show permanent relations of natural family ties as in (4a) and less permanent social relationships as in (4b), some of which may be sporadic and/or accidental relationships as in (4c).

4 (a) munyanyazi   wa   Juma

   sister (N_1)   of   Juma (N_2)

   'Juma's sister'

(b) munywani   wa   Juma

    friend (N_1)   of   Juma (N_2)

    'Juma's friend'

(c) omwemelelezi   wa Juma

    supervisor (N_1)   of   Juma (N_2)

    'Juma's supervisor'

In 4 (a), (b) and (c), the mention of *munyanyazi* 'sister', *munywani* 'friend', or *omwemelelezi* 'supervisor' imperativizes the mention of persons to whom they are related. In other words, the conceptual possessive link between the two nouns involved in the possessive relationship is obligatory. This, therefore, justifies that inalienable objects (in this case *munyanyazi, munywani* and *omwemelelezi*) cannot semantically stand alone without conceptually leaning towards other closely related nouns with which they are modified.

According to the study findings, the relationship between N_1 and N_2 in (4a) – as is presented by Langacker (2000) – is permanent: the sisterhood and brotherhood between the two persons is naturally tied and can therefore not be terminated. In terms of possession, N_2 does not, in any way, possess N_1, but the possession in other societal set-ups is culturally structured. In the discussion with some participants, it was made clear that, in other cultural set-ups, female children are extremely subordinate to their brothers as the brothers can control and intervene the relationships that their sisters establish with boyfriends. When the head of the family (father) dies, it is the male children who negotiate dowry for their sisters; and above all, sisters should greet their brothers by genuflecting irrespective of the age. So, these seemingly subordinating cultural tendencies compelled the participants to assert that the concept of possession between brothers and sisters is socio-culturally constructed. On the other hand, in (4b), the social relationship between N_1 and N_2 is less permanent as Langacker (2000) has asserted. It is less permanent in the sense that there is no natural family tie between the two persons involved in the relationship.

However, some of the study findings reveal that some social relationships, such as friendship, are to a greater percentage closer to natural family ties and are therefore permanent. One of the participants stated that:

> "In *Rusubhi*[3], before the advent of deadly diseases like AIDS, real friendship was made by drinking each other's naval blood. Two people, usually men, wishing to become eternal friends had to hold razor blades and a cut was made on each other's naval. Then, some drops of blood were allowed into a calabash of well-prepared *rubhisi*[4] and the contents in the calabash were stirred thoroughly. Finally, the friends to-be had to drink the mixture in the calabash in turn until it was finished. After this event, a celebration was held to mark the irreversible friendship and/or relativeness between the two people and their families. Children in both families became brothers and sisters and no any marriage was allowed between the two families. If it happened that there was any sort of sexual relationship between children from the two families, then the responsibles were cursed and/or ostracized and were permanently expunged from the list of members of the two families".

On the basis of the participants' revelations, the question of permanence or temporariness in terms of social relationships between two people cannot be hastily judged. In some cultures, the relationships are virtually naturalised and become permanent. Moreover, in (4c), the relationship between N_1 and N_2 is termed as sporadic or accidental, because N_2 got into relationship with N_1 because of the presence of a certain work, research-oriented study, or a certain social event which called for supervision.

- ▪ **Institutional and Cultural Adornments Possessive Constructions**

---

[3] *Rusubhi*, in the context in which it has been used, refers to the society of Subi speaking people; but in another context, it may mean the language of Subi speaking people especially when preceded by the "**o**" vowel.

[4] *Rubhisi* is a locally brewed drink from ripe bananas, common in the Subi, Haya and Nyambo societies of Kagera region in Tanzania. In *Rusubhi*, the bananas for brewing this kind of drink are those which cannot be used as food; they are extremely sour with a sort of bitterness. These bananas are in two principal species: *embire* and *kisubhi*. Nowadays, given the fact that many banana plants have withered away, other banana species like *mtwishe* and a variety of many others are used for brewing *Rubhisi*.

The study findings reveal that other inalienable nouns such as head, priest, etc. are conceptually linked to institutions or groups of people, as in (5).

5 (a) mkulu   w'eshule

   head (N_1)   of school (N_2)

   'Head of school'

(b) omusaserodoti wa   Mtakatifu Anna

   Priest (N_1)   of   Saint Anna (N_2)

   'The Priest of Saint Anna'

In (5a), the noun *mkulu* 'head' is intrinsically related to a certain institution like school, church, family, etc. Hence, it is semantically dependent on another noun. Any mention of *mkulu* automatically requires the mention of an entity to which it is attached. Moreover, in (5b), *omusaserodoti* 'priest' is intrinsically related to the Catholic Church or the Anglican High Church. It is this intrinsic relationship that classifies nouns of this nature into inalienable nouns.

Moreover, it was revealed that there are animate and inanimate entities which are inalienably possessed, i.e. there is a closer conceptual possessive link between the animate-inanimate nouns and cultural adornments on the one hand, and the human nouns on the other hand. The mention of personal and/or cultural adornments, for example, evokes a direct semantic relationship with human beings, as is thus articulated by Payne (1997: 105):

> "Apart from body parts and kinship terms, some languages include certain culturally important items within the class of inalienable possessions, such as cows, canoes, machetes, etc. Finally, there are usually a few items that semantically seem to go with one class…"

In Payne's (ibid.) perspective, such cultural adornments are accorded a human value to such an extent that they become part and parcel of a human being.

It is therefore worth noting that categorisation of nouns into either alienable or inalienable, in addition to the conventionally established

parameters (terminability vs. non-terminability, replaceability vs. non-replaceability, abandonment vs. non-abandonment, etc.), is a cultural function.

Neither-alienable-nor-inalienable Possessive Constructions

It is practically unbecoming to capture all possessive constructions within the alienable-inalienable conceptual framework; neither is there a general notion of possession that covers all relations expressed by possessive constructions (Helmbrecht, 2016: 424). Moreover, Kumar & Chandra (2012: 35) argue that, "possessive relations are often exploited by a language to denote even non-possessive relations such as emotive states of hunger, anger and pain". With all these contending views pertaining to the conceptual mapping of categories of possession in the world languages, the findings of this study showed that a plethora of possessive-like relations can be discussed under one cover term called *neither-alienable-nor-inalienable possessive constructions.* In an attempt to narrow down the diverse possessive relations existing under this category, three subcategories were established: *generic possessive constructions*, *part-whole-like possessive constructions* (expressing emotional, physical and mental/psychological states) and *other-relations possessive constructions.* The latter subcategory encompasses a plethora of uncategorisable possessive-like relations, i.e. the subcategory has an indefinite list of possessive-like constructions in virtually all world languages.

- ## Generic Possessive Constructions

In generic possessive constructions, the relationship between N_2 and N_1 is that of superordinate and subordinate terms in which the latter is semantically viewed as hierarchically lower than the former, i.e. a superordinate term, which is usually a general term, semantically controls the subordinate terms – which are usually *types of* the superordinate term. In other semantics literature, they are called hyponyms and the relation is called hyponymy (see Syal & Jindal 2007: 147), and constructions displaying such a relation are referred to as hyponymic constructions.

According to Sager (1990) as cited by Matambirofa (2000: 76), the relationship between the superordinate (general) and subordinate terms has been defined in the following manner:

> "The generic relationship establishes a hierarchical order; it identifies concepts as belonging to the same category in which there is a broader (generic) concept which is said to be superordinate to the narrower (specific), subordinated concept/concepts".

The broader (generic) concept, as Sager (1990) puts it, is the major source of most attributes that semantically define the subordinate concepts, i.e. each subordinate concept is defined with reference to the superordinate concept; for example, X is the type of Y; therefore, X has some attributes of Y. Hence, Y is a pool of several semantic primitives or semantic features from which X and other subordinate concepts may pick some. Moreover, this kind of X-Y relationship has been detailed by Matambirofa (2000) in an attempt to establish a formal input template for generic possessive relationships as follows:

X is a type of Y

Or X, Z, P and M are types of Y

Or Y has the specific concept of X, Z, P and M

Or Y has the subtype X.

Matambirofa's templatic view of generic possessive relationship is largely reflected in the findings of this study as an example in (6) depicts.

(6)   ebhilato   bhy'eraba

        shoes (N_2)   of rubber (N_1)

        'Rubber shoes'

In (6), *ebhilato* 'shoes' is a superordinate entity and *eraba* 'rubber' is a subordinate entity, which is semantically a *type of* shoes; hence, *moccasin, raise-on, rubber, safari boot, etc.* are all types of shoes and are therefore semantically subordinate to the generic term *shoes*, which stands out as a "possessor".

Therefore, it is worth arguing that generic possessive relationships do not in the real sense of the word display ownership, kinship, or part-whole semantics, but they do largely show a "polished"

possessive conceptual link[5] between two statusly unequal NPs, one of which controls the other, in the same way as the owner controls the owned in the ownership semantics. Moreover, the subordinate terms in the generic possessive semantics cannot semantically exist independent of the generic term; therefore, the two are interwovenly linked in the sense that the subordinate terms inherit some attributes from the superordinate term thereby displaying an intrinsic relationship. In other words, there is an inherent or tighter semantic relationship between the generic concept and the subordinate concept; hence, there is possessiveness of some kind besides the apparent possessive display of the generic syntactic structure, i.e. the presence of the possessive material – the linker/relator – between the generic NP and the subordinate NP.

- **Part-whole-like Possessive Constructions**

An intriguing question in this subsection is that: *can mental/psychological, physical, or emotional states be regarded as parts of the whole and therefore qualify to fall into inalienables?* In answering this question, it is worth considering examples in (7).

> 7 (a) ekiniga   cha   Juma
>   anger (N_1)   of   Juma (N_2)
>   'Juma's anger'
>
> (b) igayane   lya   Juma
>   contempt (N_1)   of   Juma (N_2)
>   'Juma's contempt'
>
> (c) obhurwaire   bhwa   Juma
>   illness (N_1)   of   Juma (N_2)
>   'Juma's illness'
>
> (d) ekilonda   cha   Juma
>   ulcer (N_1)   of   Juma (N_2)
>   'The ulcer of Juma/Juma's ulcer'

---

[5] In this study, the polished possessive conceptual link has been used to refer to the reduced possessive semantics, i.e. not showing the actual possession but with some traceable minor elements of possession.

The nouns in (7) can be classified as emotional, mental/psychological, and/or physical. For example, the noun *ekiniga* 'anger' in (7a) belongs to the emotional class rather than to the mental/psychological class; the noun *igayane* 'contempt' in (7b) is more of a mental/psychological class than of an emotional class; the noun *obhurwaire* 'illness' in (7c) is more of a mental/psychological class than of the emotional class (however, the noun may also fall into the physical class in case it is an external illness like fungus); and the noun *ekilonda* 'ulcer' in (7d) is more of a physical class. Hence, the findings pertaining to examples in (7) reveal that all nouns coded N_1 hastily seem to be inalienable, but is it possible to articulate that they are parts of the human body and that there is a permanent semantic relationship between N_1 and N_2 in (7)? In order for something to qualify to be a part of something else, there must be an unquestionable or intrinsic/inherent relationship between the two; one cannot exist independent of the other. *Obhurwaire* 'illness' is associated with human beings, but is it a permanent entity? Some illnesses are permanent and others are not; for example, malaria infects a person and goes off upon medication; cancer is a permanent disease, but does it form part of a human being to such an extent that without it, he/she can be physically impaired? Similarly, for emotional/psychological cases, anger comes in and goes away; and contempt is subject to time and to the nature of the interactants. Hence, anger and contempt do not form part of the human being. To be precise, things considered as parts should be absolutely tangible and/or concrete: intangible and/or abstract entities are not parts of the whole, i.e. they are not constitutive elements of the whole without which the entity is in an abnormal state or in an unacceptable shape. If everything that is in human being, for example, were taken as constitutive parts, then all would be relational. However, this is quite unbecoming. This line of argumentation is supported by Chandra and Kumar (2012: 38) when they argue that:

> "…..one could claim that these states could be viewed as parts contained within us as wholes; we cognize them as being related to each other as parts are to the whole of a part-whole relationship…if that were to be the case, then every term could be relational, especially when we get into the domain of part-whole relationships. What then is not related to something else or is not part of something else? It is also tempting to think that just about any relation between two

entities can be expressed as a possession. This, however, is false. I relate to you right now, but it makes no sense to say "I have you." Numbers relate to each other, in a sense inalienably; yet what does it mean that 3 has 1.2?"

According to Chandra & Kumar (2012: 38), anything that is related to something else should not necessarily be termed as relational, especially with regard to the part-whole semantics.

Therefore, with reference to 7 (a), (b), (c) and (d), possessive constructions in which uninflected NPs are characteristically emotional, mental/psychological, and/or physical fall into the category of possessive-like constructions; they are neither alienable nor inalienable.

- **Other-relations Possessive Constructions**

This subcategory of neither-alienable-nor-inalienable possessive constructions is extremely broad and does record a plethora of relationships between N_1 and N_2, as in (8).

8 (a)　omwalimu　　wa　　Jenny
　　　　teacher (N_1)　of　　Jenny (N_2)
　　　　'Jenny's teacher'

　(b)　echupa　　　ya　　mazuta
　　　　bottle (N_1)　of　　oil (N_2)
　　　　'A bottle of oil'

　(c)　enyungu　　y'obhugali
　　　　pot (N_1)　　of stiff porridge (N_2)
　　　　'A pot of stiff porridge'

　(d)　ekilo　　　y'omuchele
　　　　kilo (N_1)　of rice (N_2)
　　　　'A kilo of rice'

　(e)　ekikombe　ch'ibhati
　　　　cup (N_1)　of tin (N_2)
　　　　'A cup of tin'

The study findings reveal that each lettered item in (8) displays a unique relationship between N_1 and N_2, as in Table 1.

Table: Semantic Relationships between N_1 and N_2 in (8)

Relationship	Lettered items in (8)
Knowledge giver-Knowledge receiver	a
Container-Contents	b
Object-Purpose	c
Quantification	d
Product-Material	e

Source: Field Data, 2016

The findings in Table 1 reflect closely what Ingle (2013: 92) had found when she was exploring the structure of noun phrase in Bamunka[6] especially under the category of associative constructions. In Ingle's (ibid.) semantic analysis of associative constructions, she observed that the relationship between N_1 and N_2 may be in the following categories: part-whole, product-material, quantification, general-specific, container-contents, object-purpose, kinship, and owner-owned. In her analysis, she did not specifically consider concepts such as alienable, inalienable and neither-alienable-nor-inalienable associative relationships. However, such concepts were implied in the example associative constructions provided together with their associated semantics.

Therefore, the few examples in (8) are possessive-like constructions, each of which displays a unique semantic relationship between N_1 and N_2.

ii) Semantic Distinction between Alienable and Inalienable Possessive

Constructions

In the two possessive constructions, the key terms – alienable and inalienable – are antonymically related, i.e. one is the opposite of the other. Moreover, in alienable possessive constructions, the alienable

---

[6] Bamunka is a language spoken in Ndop Central Sub-Division, Ngoketunjia Division, in the North West Region of Cameroon (Ingle, 2013: 2).

object, as hinted at earlier on, is not intrinsically related to the possessor; hence, its precise meaning can be captured by the aid of the pragmatic context in which the utterance occurs. In contrast, in inalienable possessive constructions, the inalienable object is intrinsically related to the possessor and such an intrinsicality is partly associated with the genetic bond between the entities in an inalienable possessive relation. Similarly, the intrinsicality may be attributed to the part-whole relation and socio-cultural induced relation between the two entities in the inalienable possessive relation. On the basis of these semantic differences between alienable and inalienable possessive constructions, one can provisionally articulate that there is a clearer line between the two possessive constructions. However, examples in (9) depict a picture that may be used as a basis for certainly arguing that the line between alienable and inalienable possessive constructions is not so much clear.

> 9 (a) omukazi   wa   Juma
>
>   wife (N_1)   of   Juma (N_2)
>
>   Juma's wife'
>
>   (b) omuzaana   w'omukama
>
>   servant (N_1)   of King (N_2)
>
>   'The servant of the King'

In (9a), the two parties in a possessive relationship are socio-culturally bound and such a relationship is relatively permanent in accordance with some religious dictates. In Roman Catholic, for example, the union between a man and a woman is of a permanent nature; no one over and above can separate what God has united together. Along the same line, in other Bantu societies, a married woman is supposed to endure whatever happens in the course of her marriage – however unpleasant it is. It is this kind of "loophole" which men use to absolutely possess their wives and turn them into object-like materials. There are cases in some Bantu societies where it has been witnessed that men do sometimes cross the lines of humanity and brutally punish their wives and even kill them as if they are mere animals; the Tarime-Rorya societies in Mara region in Tanzania are good examples in this regard. It is these socio-culturally constructed African tendencies which objectivise/commoditise women and accord them subordinate status

as opposed to men who do largely enjoy the superordinate status. In the possessive language, men are canonically possessing women. In this context, men and women are alienably related. On the other hand, in (9b), *omuzaana* 'servant/serf' may be accorded an alienable status since the possessive relationship between the two entities is that of the owner and the owned: the King has absolute rights and power over the servant and the latter is regarded as a mere property.

Therefore, with reference to the examples in (9), it is worth articulating that the line between alienable and inalienable possessive constructions is to some extent less clear; it is extremely thin or non-existent in the sense that the semantic features of alienable and inalienable objects do, in other instances, overlap thus rendering difficulties in setting a dichotomy between the two. Hence, the bottom line argument could be that, in deciding whether certain possessive constructions are alienable or inalienable, the socio-culturally constructed dimensions need to be taken into consideration.

Conclusion
The study strived to analyse possessive constructions in Kisubi focusing on the possible categories of possessive constructions and the presence or absence of a differentiation semantic line between the established categories. It was structured within the framework of the prototype theory. The study findings demonstrate that there are two categories of possessive constructions in Kisubi. According to the prototype theory, the categories are labeled as typical possessive constructions and less typical possessive constructions. Furthermore, it was established that the semantic line between typical possessive constructions (alienable possessive constructions) and less typical possessive constructions (with attention to inalienable possessive constructions) is in other scenarios less clear or completely non-existent. Hence, it would not be semantically healthy to generalise that there is a clear dichotomy between alienable and inalienable possessive constructions across world languages like what other scholars have been impliedly taking it to be (cf. Alexiadou et al., 2007; Payne, 1997).

References

Alexiadou, A., Haegeman, L. & Stavrou, M. (2007), *Noun Phrase in the Generative Perspective*. Berlin: Walter de Gyuyter GmbH & Co.

Austin, J. L. (1960). *How to do things with Words*. Cambridge-Mass: Harvard University Press.

Chandra, P. Kumar, R. (2012). Alienable-inalienable Possession Distinctions: From Syntax to Semantics. *Indian Linguistics*, 73(1–4): 35–45.

Den Dikken, M. (2006). *Relators and Linkers*, MIT Press.

Dobler, E. (2008). The Morpho-phonology of (in)alienable Possession, *The Proceedings of the 2008 Annual Conference of the Canadian Linguistic Association*.

Ethnologue. (2013). *Languages of the World.*

Freitas, H., Oliveira, M., Jenkins, M. & Popjoy, O. (1998). The Focus Group, a Qualitative Research Method: Reviewing the Theory and Providing Guidelines to its Planning. *ISRC Working Papers*, 22.

Gebregziabher, K. (2012), The Alienable-inalienable Asymmetry: Evidence from Tigrinya. In R. M. Michael et al. (eds.). *Selected Proceedings of the 42nd Annual Conference on African Linguistics*. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project: 161–182.

Guéron, J. (2006a). Inalienable Possession, In M. Everaert & H. van Riemsdijk (eds.). *The Blackwell Companion to Syntax*, 2, 589–638, Boston/Oxford: Blackwell.

Guthrie, M. (1967-71).*Comparative Bantu: An Introduction to Comparative Linguistics and the Prehistory of the Bantu Languages,* 4, Farnborough: Gregg Press.

Helmbrecht, J. (2016), NP-internal Possessive Constructions in Hoocąk and other Siouan Languages. In c. Rudin & B. J. Gordon (eds.). *Advances in the Study of Siouan Languages and Linguistics*. Berlin: Language Science Press: 425–463.

Ingle, J. (2013). The Bamunka Noun Phrase. *SIL,* Yaoundé: Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation.

Langacker, R. W. (2000). *Grammar and Conceptualization*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Lyons, J. (1997). *Semantics II,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Maho, J. F. (1999). *A Comparative Study of Bantu Noun Classes*, *Orientalia et Africana Gothoburgensia,* 13, Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis

Matambirofa, F. (2000). Some Aspects of the Architecture of the Possessive Noun Phrase in Bantu. *Zambezia*, XXVII (I), University of Zimbabwe.

Mugane, J. M. (1997). *A Paradigmatic Grammar of Gikuyu*. Stanford: CSLI Publications

Newman, P. & Ratliff, M. (eds.) (2001). *Linguistic Fieldwork*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nkumbulwa, J. (2015). Endangered African Proverbs Collections: Subi (Tanzania) Proverbs. Retrieved from www.afriprov-org/bibliography/373-endangered-african-proverbs-collections-subi-tanzania-proverbs-html

Payne, T. E. (1997). *Describing Morphosyntax: A Guide for Field Linguistics*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Radford, A. (2004). *Minimalist Syntax: Exploring the Structure of English*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Rosch, E. (1999). Reclaiming Cognition: The Primacy of Action, Intention and Emotion: *The Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 6(11–12): 61–77.

Rugemalira, J. M. & Muzale, H. R. T. (2008). Researching and Documenting the Languages of Tanzania. *Language Documentation and Conservation*, 2(1) Tanzania: LOT Project: 68–108.

Sager, J. C. (1990). A *Practical Course in Terminology Processing*. Amsterdam: John Benjamin Publishing Company.

Syal, D. V. & Jindal, D. V. (2007). *An Introduction to Linguistics: Language, Grammar and Semantics*. New Delhi: Prentice Hall.

Vergnaud, J. & Zubizarreta, M. (1992). The Definite Determiner and the Inalienable Constructions in French and English. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 23: 595–652.