

Inalienable Possession Constructions in Akan and Kiswahili

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Abstract

*This paper examines the extent to which Akan and Kiswahili are comparable in aspects of grammatical representation of inalienable possession relationship. Both Akan and Kiswahili belong to the Niger-Congo language family, however they belong to different sub-groups. Kiswahili belongs to the Bantu subgroup and Akan the Kwa sub-group. In the literature, it has been established that diachronically, Akan manifests some Bantu traits in terms of attributive adjective sequence and noun class system (Welmers 1963; Osam 1993). By comparing data from the two languages, the paper establishes that there are some similarities and differences in the grammatical encoding of inalienability in their argument structure as in *me tiyε me ya* ‘my head aches (me)’ in Akan and; *kichwa kinaniuma* ‘head aches (me)’ in Kiswahili. The study also reveals that the boundaries of these privileged constructions referred to in the paper as affective are wider in Kiswahili than in Akan. The study strengthens further the claim of a probable genetic link between Akan and Bantu.*

1.0 Introduction

This paper seeks to highlight the parallels between intimate possessive constructions in Akan and Kiswahili. It examines the extent to which Akan¹ and Kiswahili are comparable in aspects of grammatical representation of inalienable possession relationship. Comparing data from the two languages, the paper examines the similarities and differences in their grammatical encoding of inalienability in their argument structure as in *me tiyε me ya* ‘my head aches (me)’ in Akan and; *kichwa kinaniuma* ‘head aches (me)’ in Kiswahili. The study reveals that inalienable possession construction is more productive in Kiswahili than Akan. Again, in Kiswahili often ordinary possessive constructions can be used to express inalienable possession relationship. With data drawn from a native speaker’s intuition in Akan, and a Kiswahili text corpus in Dzahene-Quarshie (2010), using a descriptive approach, the paper seeks to establish that beyond the diachronic link between the two languages pointed out by Welmers (1963) and Osam (1993), there is a similarity in their grammatical encoding of inalienability.

¹ The dialect of Akan used here is Asante Twi.

First, the paper describes the language affiliation of each language and goes on to discuss briefly the grammatical encoding of inalienability as a cross-linguistic phenomenon. The next section discusses the structure of the various inalienable possession (affective) construction types in Akan and Kiswahili, providing a novel combination of data from the two languages. Section five looks at the boundaries of inalienable possession constructions in the two languages and a conclusion is drawn in the final section.

2. Language Affiliation and Diachronic Affinity

Akan and Kiswahili belong to the Niger-Congo language family; however they belong to different sub-groups. Kiswahili belongs to the Bantu sub group and Akan the Kwa subgroup, never the less it has been established in the literature that diachronically, Akan manifests some similar traits as Bantu in terms of attributive adjective sequence and noun class system (Welmers, 1963; Osam, 1993).

More interestingly, (Osam, 1993) argues that currently Akan has a nominal prefix system indicating that the language once had a noun class system comparable to the Bantu noun class system.

He argues that this claim is supported by genetic, morphological, morpho-syntactic and semantic evidence. However he points out that currently the noun class system in Akan has decayed and that it is arguable that a new noun class system which is built around plural marking may be emerging. Kiswahili on the other hand is a typical Bantu language which has retained most of the Proto-Bantu noun classes. Of the 18 distinct noun classes in Bantu, it has retained 16.

In this study we point out that a further parallel can be drawn between the two languages in terms of the special grammatical encoding of inalienability which is the focus of the next Section.

3. Encoding Inalienability

The special or privileged grammatically distinct encoding of inalienability in the syntax of languages is to some extent cross-linguistic. It is manifest in many languages of the world such as Haya Hyman (1977) and Sotho Voeltz (1972) which are Bantu; BauleLarson (1999) and several other Kwa languages spoken in Ghana including Ga, Akan and Ewe. It also occurs in European languages like French and Norwegian as well as Asian languages such as Korean, Tomioka and Sim (2007) and Q'eqchi-Maya a Melanesian language Kockleman (2009). However, the boundaries of distinctiveness differ from language to language.

Akan and Kiswahili share to some extent a common encoding of inalienability in their argument structure.

Generally, languages that share this special encoding of inalienability often do so in respect of body-parts and kinship terms. In both Akan and Kiswahili special encoding of inalienability goes beyond body-parts and kinship terms to include other nouns that are equally intimately connected to a person such as emotions and mental states Dzahene-Quarshie (2010). In Kiswahili the nouns that participate in this particular grammatical encoding of inalienability are sub-categorized into five groups in Dzahene-Quarshie (2010). In Table 1 below six sub-groups are identified in both Akan and Kiswahili.

Table 1. *Nouns that encode inalienability in Akan and Kiswahili*

Inalienable/Intimate Possessions	Akan	Kiswahili	English
Body parts	ti	kichwa	head
Body fluids/gases	mogya	damu	blood
Emotions/abstract sensations	awereho	jitimai	grief
clothing	ahaadee	nguo	dress
Other abstract nouns	adwendwen	akili	mind

As illustrated in Table 1 above, Dzahene-Quarshie (2010: 162) argues that since only body parts fit the description ‘inalienable,’ the term ‘intimate possession’ should be used as a cover term for the other nouns such as listed in Table 1 above, which although cannot be described as inalienable, are however equally intimately connected with the possessor (affected person).

4. The structure of Inalienable Possession Constructions in Akan and Kiswahili

Inalienable possession constructions in Akan and Kiswahili involve the featuring of a person affected (patient) by the action of the verb and a part of the body or other thing intimately connected with them (property) as two independent arguments of the verb rather than components of a single noun phrase Keach & Rochemont (1994); Dzahene-Quarshie (2010). Kockleman (2009: 29) describes this construction type as one in which inalienable possessions occur as direct objects but their ‘possessee’ are marked through dative or accusative case rather than genitive. Dzahene-Quarshie (2010) refers to such constructions collectively as affective. In this paper the terms inalienable possession construction is used interchangeably with affective construction.

The similarities in the grammatical representation of inalienability in the two languages are illustrated in the following parallel pairs of constructions; (1a), (1b)

and (2a), (2b).

- (1a) **Kichwa** **ki-na-ni-uma**²
 7-Head 7SM-PRES-1OM-hurt³

²The following abbreviations and notations are used for the interlinear annotations.

Interlinear annotations

Tenses

PERF	-me-	perfect tense
PRES	-na-	presenttense
PST	-li-	pasttense

Verbal elements

SM	subject marker preceded by noun class number in Kiswahili examples. Eg. 1SM
OM	object marker preceded by noun class number and followed by grammatical person if animate in Kiswahili examples. Eg. 1OM3
PASS	passive extension

³The following table is a guide to the Kiswahili concord system.

noun class number	noun class prefix	subject marker	object marker	Associative marker
1 (1 pers) (2 pers) (3 pers)	m- or ø	ni- u- a-	-ni- -ku- -m-	wa
2 (1 pers) (2 pers) (3 pers)	wa-	tu- m- wa-	-tu- -wa- -wa-	wa
3	m-	u-	u-	wa
4	mi-	i-	i-	ya
5	j(i)- or ø	li-	li-	la
6	ma-	ya-	ya-	ya
7	ki-	ki-	ki-	cha
8	vi-	vi-	vi-	vya
9	n-	i-	i-	ya
10	n-	zi-	zi-	za
11	u-	u-	u-	wa
14	u-	u-	u-	wa
15	ku-	ku-	ku-	kwa

Head is aching me
 ‘My head is aching.’

(1b) **Me ti ye me ya⁴**
 POSS head be PRES me OM painful
 My head is arching me
 ‘My head is aching.’

(2a) **Mgongo u-na-ni-pwita**
 3-back 3SM-PRES-1OM-throb
 Back is throbbing me
 ‘My back is throbbing.’

(2b) **Me akyi tutu me**
 POSS back throb PRES meOM
 my back is throbbing me
 ‘my back is throbbing.’

In the Kiswahili examples (1a) and (2a), the subject NPs (the intimate possession) are not qualified by the possessive marker but the possessor is marked in the verb by an object marker.

In the Akan examples (1b) and (2b), the subject NPs is qualified by the possessive marker and in addition, the possessor of the subject occurs as an object pronoun next to the verb. Apart from the fact that in the Akan examples the intimate possession (subject) is qualified by possessive marker, the argument structure is parallel to that of the Kiswahili examples. Both have the structure:

Subject (intimate possession) + verb + object (possessor)

except that in the Akan counterpart, the Subject (intimate possession) is qualified by a possessive marker as shown in (1b) and (2b) respectively, by *Me ti* ‘my head’ and *me akyi* ‘my back’ compared to *kichwa* ‘head’ and *mgongo* ‘back’ in the Kiswahili examples (1a) and (1b) respectively.

16		pa-	pa-	pa
17		ku-	ku-	kwa
18		m-	m-	mwa

⁴ Although Akan is a tone language, tones are not marked in the orthography. They have been left out here because they do not play any role in the discussion.

In the next section, we examine in more detail the similarities and differences in the affective constructions in the two languages.

5. Similarities and Differences in the Boundaries of Affective Constructions in Akan and Kiswahili

As stated above, the boundaries of grammatical distinctiveness of inalienability differ from language to language. We observe that in Akan if, the intimate possession involved is a body-part, the possessive marker must necessarily qualify the Subject that is the affected person. On the other hand if the intimate possession in question is not strictly inalienable as in the case of emotions, it is not qualified by the possessive. Contrary to Akan, in Kiswahili normally no possessive markers are used concomitantly with the inalienable possession as in (1a) and (2a). The phenomenon of non-use of possessive markers with intimate possessions in affective constructions is referred to as possessor deletion in the literature. By virtue of the intimate relationship between the inalienable possession and the possessor the use of the possessive marker is deemed unnecessary and is therefore omitted. It is thus interesting that in Akan the possessive marker is used concomitantly with affective constructions where body-parts are concerned. This marks one of the structural differences in the encoding of inalienability in Kiswahili and Akan. This is further illustrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2. *Intimate possessions in Akan and Kiswahili and their occurrence or non-occurrence with the possessive marker in affective constructions.*

Intimate Possessions	Kiswahili +/- possessive	Akan +/- possessive
Body-parts	-	+
Body fluids/gases	-	-
Emotions /mental states	-	-
sensations	-	+/-
clothing	-	+/-
Other abstract nouns	-	-

The occurrence or non-occurrence of the possessive marker with the intimate possession as seen in Table 2 is further illustrated in examples (3a) – (3b).

- (3a) chozi hali-ku-m-tiririka
5-tears NEG SM-NEG PAST-1OM-trickle
tears did not trickle from her [eyes].

‘She did not shed tears.’

- (3b) Ani-nsuo en-gu no
 Eye -water PST NEG-shed him OM
 Eye water did not fall him
 ‘He did not shed tears.’

In both examples, the intimate possession does not occur with a possessive marker. Thus in both Akan and Kiswahili affective constructions, the not strictly inalienable possessions such as body fluids (in this case tears) and elaborate emotions (the subject NP which is the intimate possession) are not qualified by a possessive marker, but are promoted to the status of an independent object of the verb. On the other hand in the parallel examples (1a) and (1b) as well as (2a) and (2b) the intimate possessions ‘head’ and ‘back’ which are body parts do not occur with possessive markers in the Kiswahili examples while the Akan examples are qualified by the possessive pronoun as explained above.

It can be inferred from the Akan illustrations that as pointed out by Kockleman (2009); Larson(1999); Lichtenberk (2003) and others, there seems to be a cognitive hierarchical ranking of what is considered more intimately connected to the affected person and therefore must participate in affective construction with a concomitant qualification of the intimate possession with a possessive marker. The conclusion drawn here is that in Akan where the subject is not a body-part but still intimately connected with a person affected, it is not qualified by the possessive just as is the case in Kiswahili. On the contrary where the intimate possession is a body-part there is a concomitant use of possessive marker with the affective construction, establishing that there is some distinction in the encoding of inalienability between the two languages depending on which kind of intimate possession is involved. It must also be pointed out that the concomitant use of possessive marker with affective constructions is not shared by many languages in which this special encoding of inalienability occurs.

An important fact is that, in Kiswahili as well as in many languages in which affective constructions occur, such as Sotho Voeltz (1972), it is not possible to have a non-affective counterpart of the affective construction. However, in Kiswahili to some extent, especially, where body-parts are concerned, one has the choice of affective construction or ordinary possessive construction, depending on the intended discourse function. Compare the following pairs of examples (4a) and (4b) and (5a) and (5b).

- (4a) Kichwa ki-na-ni-uma
 7-Head 7SM-PRES-1OM-hurt

head it is aching me
 ‘My head is aching.’

- (4b) Kichwa changu ki-na-uma
 7-Head 7POSS 1SM-PRES-hurt
 My head is aching
 ‘My head is aching.’

Example (4a) is an affective construction therefore the possessor features as an object to the verb and (4b) is a possessive construction therefore the possessor is represented in the subject by the possessive marker *changu* ‘my’.

Semantically the two constructions are the same except that in (4a), the focus is on the affected person and in (4b), the focus is on the intimate possession. On the contrary in Akan the affective construction is the only choice as in (5a), a non-affective counterpart is not possible at all as indicated in (5b). This marks another difference in encoding of inalienability between Akan and Kiswahili.

- (5a) Me ti yε me ya
 POSS head be PRES me OM painful
 ‘My head is aching.’

- (5b) *Me ti yε ya
 POSS head be PRES painful
 ‘My head is aching.’

This fact notwithstanding, in Kiswahili where non-body-part intimate possessions are concerned, the non-affective counterpart is usually not possible as illustrated by (6a) and (6b) below.

- (6a) jitimai li-me-m-vaa.
 5-grief 5SM-PERF-1OM-wear
 grief has wornhim
 ‘Grief has enveloped him.’

- (6b) *jitimai yake li-me-vaa.
 His grief has worn
 grief POSS SM-PERF-wear

Also in Kiswahili it is possible to have the passive inversion of some affective constructions. Example (7b) is a passive counterpart of (7a).

(7a) akili zi-me-m-ruka
 9-mind 9SM-PERF-1OM-jump
 mind has jumped him
 ‘He is out of his mind.’

(7b) a-li-ruk-wa na akili
 1SM-PST-jump-PASS by 9-mind
 he was jumped by his mind.
 ‘He went out of his mind.’

This does not happen in Akan. However, there is an interesting phenomenon that occurs in both languages; an active inversion of the affective construction. This involves the transposition of the subject of the affective construction which is the intimate possession and the affected person which is in object position without making the verb passive. Compare (8a) and (8b), the Kiswahili examples with (9a) and (9b) their Akan counterparts.

(8a) Jasho li-na-ni-toka.
 5-Sweat 5SM-PRES-1OM-go out
 I am sweating.

(8b) Ni-na-toka jasho
 I am sweating.

(9a) Enfire ete me
 Sweat excrete PRES me OM
 Sweat is coming out of me
 I am sweating.

(9b) Me-ete enfifre
 Me-excrete PRES sweat
 I am excreting sweat.
 I am sweating.

In the (b) examples, instead of promoting the possessor from a qualifier to an object, it is rather promoted to subject position. There is a transposition of subject and object without passivizing the verb. Normally such transpositions are possible

with sentences with locative objects in both languages. Never the less this occurrence is not a regular feature in both languages. The current study has however not established the conditions that account for this phenomenon.

It is important to note that there is another distinct affective construction that occurs in Kiswahili but does not occur in Akan at all. It is referred to as the transitive affective construction in Dzahene-Quarshie (2010). In this construction, the possessive relationship between an the object which can be considered to be a whole, and its body-part, that can be considered to be a part of that whole are grammatically marked by the introduction of an extra object NP without a possessive marker as in (10a) below. The possessive relationship between *mkono* “hand” and *Tamima* should normally be marked by the possessive and therefore constitute a single NP as illustrated in (10b) *mkono wa Tamima* “Tamima’s hand” however by virtue of the inalienable relationship between the two, *Tamima* features as an additional argument to the verb *kamata* “get hold of” independent of *mkono* “hand.” This affective construction type occurs in Sotho, Haya and Korean Voeltz (1972; Hyman (1977); Tomioko and Sim (2007). *Tamima* as an animate object is represented in the verb by an object marker as in (10a). In Kiswahili the intimate possessions that participate in this type of construction are restricted to body parts and clothing worn on the body. Other intimate possessions such as body fluids and emotions do not participate in it.

(10a) BitiKocho a-li-m-kamata mkono Tamima
 BitiKocho 1SM-PST -1OM-hold 3-hand Tamima
 ‘BitiKocho held Tamima’s hand.’

(10b) BitiKocho alikamata mkono wa
 Tamima
 BitiKocho 1SM-PST-hold 3-hand of
 Tamima
 ‘BitiKocho held Tamima’s hand.’

Unlike in Kiswahili where both the genitive and affective construction occurs, in Akan only the ordinary possessive construction is possible; thus (11a) is not grammatically acceptable in Akan. In (11b) although there is no overt grammatical marking of the possessive relationship between *Ama* and *nsa* “hand,” it is the norm in Akan. It is not peculiar to inalienable possession relation.

(11a) *Kofi sɔɔ nsa Ama
 Kofi hold-PST hand Ama
 Kofi held Ama’s hand.

- (11b) Kofi sɔɔ Ama nsa
 Kofi hold-PST Ama hand POSS
 ‘Kofi held Ama’s hand.’

Another construction in which there is a special encoding of inalienability is the auto-referential affective construction. In this case in constructions that involve an affected person performing an action on himself, the possessive marker is not used to indicate the possessive relationship between him and the intimate possession. Kockleman (2009: 29) describes it as a phenomenon in which inalienable possessions appear with no markers of grammatical possession when they are objects of transitive verbs as in (12a) below. They have been described as auto-referential because the subject (affected person) and object (intimate possession) of the verb are co-referential and the subject (affected person) is both the instigator and recipient of the action of the verb, in other words it involves ‘auto-referentiality’ an automatic reference to the affected person (Dzahene-Quarshie 2007).

Although the phenomenon occurs in both Akan and Kiswahili, again there is some distinction where boundaries of the construction are concerned. Similar to the distinction between the two languages where the first affective construction type is concerned, in Kiswahili possessor deletion occurs with all intimate possessions, body-parts and non-body-parts. However, in Akan possessor deletion does not occur with body parts as indicated in (12b) and (12c) respectively. It only occurs with non-body part intimate possessions as in (13) where the intimate possession is *ntesuo* ‘saliva.’

- (12a) A-li-tikisa kichwa
 SM-PST-shake head
 ‘He shook (his) head.’
- * (12b) ɔ-wosoo Ø ti
 He-shake-PST head
 ‘He shook head.’
- (12c) ɔ-wosoo ne ti
 He-shake-PST his POSS head
 ‘He shook his head.’
- (13) ɔ-menee ntesuo
 He-swallow-PST saliva
 ‘He swallowed saliva.’

6. Conclusion

From the above account, the study has established that another area in which there is affinity between Akan and Bantu and for that matter Kiswahili is the area of encoding of inalienability manifested syntactically by affective constructions. Of the three construction types discussed, only two occur in Akan. Thus the phenomenon is more extensive and has more flexibility in Kiswahili in terms of choice between affective and ordinary possessive or genitive construction. It is much more restrictive and less productive in Akan. A clear distinction between Akan and Kiswahili is the concomitant use of the possessive marker in affective construction where the intimate possession involved is a body-part. The similarities between the phenomenon in Akan and Kiswahili confirms further claims by Welmers (1963) and Osam (1993) of historical connection through the encoding of inalienability although the phenomenon is more productive in Kiswahili than Akan.

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