Gebregziabher, Keffyalew. 2012. The Alienable-Inalienable Asymmetry: Evidence from Tigrinya. In the *Proceedings of the 42nd ACAL*, 161–182.

Lecture 10

October 4, 2023

1 Introduction

Recall that Tigrinya has various means by which possession can be expressed in the nominal domain:

(1) *Prepositional Possessor Construction*

a. naj təsfaj məts'ħaf
of Tesfay book
'book of Tesfay'

b. naj joni gəza
of John house
'house of John'

(2) *Post-Nominal Possessor Construction*

a. wəddi-t-i məmhir
son-that-MS teacher
'the teacher's son'

b. ʕarki joni
friend John
'John's friend'

(3) *"Possessive Pronoun" Construction*

a. nat-u məts'ħaf
POSS-3MS book
'his book'

b. ʔit-i nat-a məts'ħaf
that-MS POSS-3FS book
'the book of hers'

(4) *Suffixal Possessor Construction*

a. məts'ħaf-u
book-POSS.3MS
'his book'

b. məts'ħaf-əj
book-POSS.1S
'my book'

Gebregziabher (2012, 2013) is interested in demonstrating that the possessive strategies in (1) and (2) are derived via two independent syntactic structures.

The proposal presented in Gebregziabher 2012, which is refined and further articulated in Gebregziabher 2013:ch.3,4, is as follows:

(3) a. $[_{DP}$ ʔit-i $[_{FP}$ $[_{PP}$ nəj-t-i məmhir] $[_{NP}$ məts'ħaf]]]
that-MS NAJ-that-MS teacher book
'the book of the teacher' (*Alienable Posession*)

b. $[_{DP}$ ʔit-a $[_{NP}$ ħafti $[_{DP}$ ʔit-i məmhir]]]
that-FS sister that-MS teacher
'the teacher's sister' (*Inalienable Possession*)

This is as opposed to a derivational approach to possessive constructions, as illustrated for English:

(4) a. [$_{DP}$ the [$_{NP}$ daughter [$_{PP}$ of Regina]]]

b. [$_{DP}$ [$_{DP}$ Regina] 's [$_{NP}$ daughter [$_{PP}$ ~~of Regina~~]]]

2 ALP and IAP Asymmetries in Tigrinya

Gebregziabher (2012) presets a series of arguments that alienable and inalienable possessors are introduced by way of distinct syntactic representations.

2.1 Frame Availability

Gebregziabher (2012) notes that:

- the prepositional construction is primarily used for alienable possession and
- the post-nominal construction is primarily used for inalienable possession.

(5) *Prepositional Possessor (PP) Construction*

a. naj-t-i məmhir məts'ħaf
NAJ-that-MS teacher book
'the teacher's book'

b. *naj-t-i məmhir wəddi
NAJ-that-MS teacher book
'the teacher's son'

(6) *Post-Nominal (PN) Possessor Construction*

a. *məts'ħaf-t-i məmhir
book-that-MS teacher
'the teacher's book'

b. wəddi-t-i məmhir
son-that-MS teacher
'the teacher's son'

This makes Tigrinya one of the few languages in which alienability may be encoded structurally (cf. Kifle 2011).

2.2 Possessor Predicates

Gebregziabher (2012) notes that:

- alienable possessors in the prepositional frame can be copular predicates but
- inalienable possessors in the post-nominal frame cannot be copular predicates.

(7) ʔiz-i məts'ħaf naj-t-i məmhir ʔijj-u
this-MS book NAJ-that-MS teacher BE-S3MS
'This book is the teacher's.' (*PP; Alienable*)

(8) *ʔiz-i wədi ʔit-i məmhir ʔijj-u
this-MS book NAJ-that-MS teacher BE-S3MS
'This son is the teacher's.' (*PN; Inlienable*)

This suggests that the two types of possessors and their frames must be syntactically differentiated.

2.3 Order of Possessor and Modifiers

Gebregziabher (2012) observes that the different possessor frames are subject to different ordering requirements within their host DP.

Adjectives. Gebregziabher (2012) notes that:

- alienable possessors in the prepositional frame can precede or follow an adjective but
- inalienable possessors in the post-nominal frame must follow an adjective.

(9) a. ʔɨt-i [$_{PP}$ naj-t-i məmhɨr] [$_{AP}$ ʔabɨji] məts'ħaf
that-MS NAJ-that-MS teacher big.MS book
'the teacher's big book' (*PP; Alienable*)

b. ʔɨt-i [$_{AP}$ ʔabɨji] [$_{PP}$ naj-t-i məmhɨr] məts'ħaf
that-MS big.MS NAJ-that-MS teacher book
'the teacher's big book' (*PP; Alienable*)

(10) a. ʔɨt-i [$_{AP}$ ʔabɨji] [$_{NP}$ wədd-t-i məmhɨr]
that-MS big.MS son-that-MS teacher
'the teacher's big son' (*PN; Inlienable*)

b. *ʔɨt-i [$_{NP}$ wədd-t-i məmhɨr] [$_{AP}$ ʔabɨji]
that-MS son-that-MS teacher big.MS
'the teacher's big son' (*PN; Inlienable*)

c. *ʔɨt-i [$_{NP}$ wədd-t-i [$_{AP}$ ʔabɨji] məmhɨr]
that-MS son-that-MS big.MS teacher
'the teacher's big son' (*PN; Inlienable*)

Relative Clauses. Gebregziabher (2012) notes that:

- alienable possessors in the prepositional frame can precede or follow a relative clause but
- inalienable possessors in the post-nominal frame must follow a relative clause.

(11) a. [$_{CP}$ joni zɨ-fətw-o] [$_{PP}$ naj-t-i məmhɨr] məts'ħaf
John REL-PRF.like-O3MS NAJ-that-MS teacher book
'the teacher's book that John liked' (*PP; Alienable*)

b. [$_{PP}$ naj-t-i məmhɨr]$_1$ [$_{CP}$ joni zɨ-fətw-o] t_1 məts'ħaf
NAJ-that-MS teacher John REL-PRF.like-O3MS book
'the teacher's book that John liked' (*PP; Alienable*)

(12) a. [$_{CP}$ joni zi-fətw-a] [$_{NP}$ g^{w}al [$_{DP}$ ʔit-i məmhir]]
John REL-PRF.like-O3FS daughter that-MS teacher
'the teacher's daughter who John liked' (*PN; Inlienable*)

b. *[$_{NP}$ g^{w}al [$_{DP}$ ʔit-i məmhir]]$_1$ [$_{CP}$ joni zi-fətw-a] t_1
daughter that-MS teacher John REL-PRF.like-O3FS
'the teacher's daughter who John liked' (*PN; Inlienable*)

c. *[$_{NP}$ g^{w}al t_1]$_2$ [$_{CP}$ joni zi-fətw-a] [$_{DP}$ ʔit-i məmhir]$_1$ t_2
daughter John REL-PRF.like-O3FS that-MS teacher
'the teacher's daughter who John liked' (*PN; Inlienable*)

These observations reveal that the alienable possessor of the prepositional frame is freely orderable with respect to modifiers while the inalienable possessor of the post-nominal frame is not.

This suggests that the two types of possessor frames are syntactically encoded in different ways.

2.4 Ellipsis

Gebregziabher (2012) notes that:

- alienable possessees in the prepositional frame can be elided but
- inalienable possessees in the post-nominal frame cannot be elided.

(13) [[naj-ħagos] məts'ħaf] ʔanbib-ə-jjo [[naj-joni] ~~məts'ħaf~~] gɨnna
NAJ-Hagos book read.GER-S1S-O3MS NAJ-John book but
ʔajə-nbəb-ku-wwo-n
NEG-read.PFV-S1S-O3MS-NEG
'I have read Hagos's book, but I haven't read John's ~~book~~.' (*PP; Alienable*)

(14) *[ħafti [ħagos]] rəxib-ə-jja [~~ħafti~~ [joni]] gɨnna ʔaj-rəxəb-ku-wwa-n
sister Hagos find.GER-S1S-O3MS sister John but NEG-find.PFV-S1S-O3MS-NEG
'I have met Hagos's sister, but I haven't met John's ~~sister~~.' (*PN; Inlienable*)

This suggests that the two types of possessors and their frames must be syntactically differentiated.

3 The Analysis

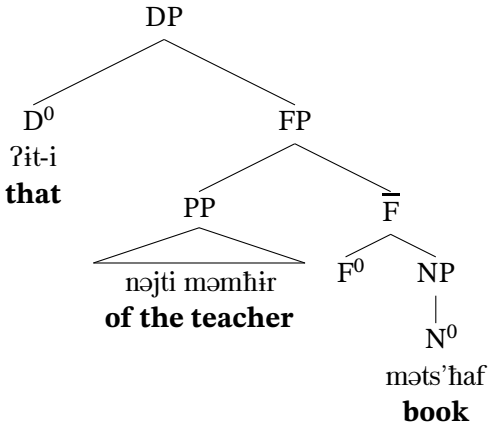
Gebregziabher (2012) proposes that the differences above can be understood as symptoms of the two different syntactic representations that are responsible for each type of possession.

The primary theoretical claims are that:

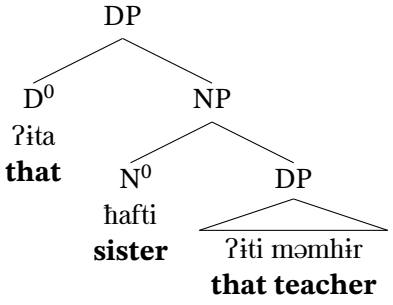
- **Adjuncts :** Inalienable possessors in the prepositional frame are modifiers of the head noun and
- **Complement :** Alienable possessors in the post-nominal frame are arguments of the head noun

Thus, the proposed structure for each possessive frame is as follows:

(15) a. [$_{DP}$ ʔɨt-i [$_{FP}$ [$_{PP}$ nəj-t-i məmħɨr] [$_{NP}$ məts'ħaf]]]
that-MS NAJ-that-MS teacher book
'the book of the teacher' (*PP; Alienable; Adjunct*)

b. 

(16) a. [$_{DP}$ ʔɨt-a [$_{NP}$ ħafti [$_{DP}$ ʔɨt-i məmhɨr]]]
that-FS sister that-MS teacher
'the teacher's sister' (*PN; Inalienable; Argument*)

b. 

3.1 Post-Nominal Possessors are Complements

Gebregziabher (2012) argues that the properties of post-positional possessors can be understood given their role as arguments:

- **Inalienability :** Their syntactic selection by the head ensures their semantic dependency.
- **Predication :** Their syntactic selection by the head permits them to appear in predication relationships.
- **Strict Word Order :** Their syntactic selection by the head ensures their resistance to re-ordering.
- **No NP-Ellipsis :** Only the NP-complement of a genitive D can be elided, which necessarily results in deletion of the possessor N^0.

This is a position that is refined in Gebregziabher 2013:ch.4 where the post-positional frame is reanalyzed as an iteration of the Construct State.

3.2 Pre-nominal Prepositional Possessors are Adjuncts

Gebregziabher (2012) argues that the properties of prepositional possessors can be understood given their role as adjuncts:

- **Alienability :** Their syntactic independence from the head reflects their semantic independence.
- **Non-predication :** Their syntactic independence from the head prevents them from being in predication relationships.
- **Free Word Order :** Their status as adjuncts reflects their ability to be re-ordered.
- **NP-Ellipsis :** The NP-complement of genitive D can be elided stranding the PP

This is a position that is refined in Gebregziabher 2013:ch.3 where the prepositional frame is reanalyzed as a Linker configuration (den Dikken 2006).

The element [naj] is a nominal copula that creates a predication relationship between the head and the possessor.

4 Back to the Suffixes

It is not obvious to me that the facts regarding the suffixal strategies are entirely expected by the proposed analysis.

(17) a. nat-u mətsʼħaf
NAJ-3MS book
b. mətsʼħaf-u
book-POSS.3MS
'his book'

(18) a. *nat-u wəddi
NAJ-3MS son
b. wədd-u
son-POSS.3MS
'his son'

Part of the problem comes from the fact we don't have an explicit theory of how these forms are generated. But the ideas here, alongside the cooccurrence facts below, may provide some direction:

(19) *nat-u mətsʼħaf-u
POSS-3MS book-POSS.3MS
'his book of his'

(20) ni-tesfaj mətsʼħaf-u
DOM-Tesfay book-POSS.3MS
'Tesfay's book / Lit. his book to Tesfay'

References

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