On genitive linking in Songhay

Maarten Kossmann (Leiden)

Résumé

Dans les langues songhay, plusieurs constructions sont employés pour exprimer une relation génitive. Dans les langues appelées ici « mainstream », comme les langues parlées aux bords du fleuve Niger, la construction la plus employée est la simple préposition du possesseur au possédé. Dans les langues dites septentrionales, parlées au Sahara, la construction non-marquée a un élément *n* qui se met entre le possesseur et le possédé. Dans la littérature, il a été proposé que cet élément *n* soit un emprunt au touareg, qui a une préposition génitivale *n*. Cette dérivation n'est pas sans problèmes, surtout parce qu'en touareg l'on emploie l'ordre « possédé *n* possesseur », c'est-à-dire, l'ordre invers du songhay septentrional. Dans cet article, nous étudierons les possibilités d'une dérivation interne au songhay. Deux pistes seront empruntés. Selon une première explication, *n* serait une abbréviation d'un ancien élément génitival **ánè* qui serait encore préservé dans le pronom *wane* « celui de ». Selon une deuxième explication, *n* serait un ancien élément syntaxique pour disjoindre les NPs. En songhay mainstream, cet élément se serait développé en élément « transitivant » du perfectif, tandis qu'en songhay septentrional, il se serait spécialisé en marqueur de la relation génitivale.

Zusammenfassung

Die Songhaysprachen verwenden unterschiedliche Konstruktionen, um Genitivbeziehungen auszudrücken. In den hier 'Mainstream' genannten Songhaysprachen findet sich vornehmlich eine Konstruktion ohne weitere Verbindungselemente mit dem Possessor an erster Stellung. In den so genannten nördlichen Songhaysprachen findet sich die gleiche Reihenfolge von Possessor und Possessum, dort werden sie jedoch durch eine Adposition *n* getrennt. Die Forschung hat bisher meistens die Ansicht vertreten, dieses *n* sei aus dem Tuareg entlehnt worden, wo man ja eine Genitivpräposition *n* hat. Diese Ableitung ist jedoch problematisch, da im Tuareg der Possessor dem Possessum folgt, also eine umgekehrte Reihenfolge wie im Songhay vorliegt. In diesem Artikel werde ich versuchen, für eine songhay-interne Ableitung von *n* zu argumentieren. Zwei verschiedene Lösungen werden vorgeschlagen. Der erste Ansatz geht davon aus, dass es sich um das Relikt einer alten Genitivpartikel, *ánè*, handelt, die sich noch im Pronomen *wane* 'der von' finden lässt. Im zweiten Ansatz wird angenommen, dass *n* ursprünglich die Trennung von zwei NPs markierte. Im Mainstream Songhay hätte sich dieses Element zum Transitivmarkierer im Perfektiv entwickelt, im nördlichen Songhay dagegen zum Markierer von Genetivkonstruktionen haben.

Introduction

<1>

Songhay languages constitute a close-knit language family, spoken in the Sahel and the Sahara, mainly in Mali and Niger. This family consists of two subgroups, a small number of languages spoken in the desert, called Northern Songhay,[1] and the rest of the Songhay languages. As some of the major languages of this group are spoken on the banks of the Niger river, I will refer to them as Mainstream Songhay. While the genetic viability of this subgrouping is uncertain, the two groups are clearly different from each other because of the enormous influence Northern Songhay languages have undergone from Tuareg, a Berber language.

<2>

In genitival constructions, there exists a scission between the Northern Songhay languages on the one hand, which regularly use a genitive postposition, and the other Songhay languages on the other hand, which normally have no linking device. All these languages have POSSESSOR – POSSESSED as their basic order. It is generally assumed that the Northern Songhay <u>postposition</u> *n* is a borrowing from Tuareg (or another Berber language), which has a genitival <u>preposition</u> *n*. In this article, I will study these constructions in some detail, and propose different solutions for the etymoogical problem.

1. Mainstream Songhay genitives

<3>

In Mainstream Songhay, two types of genitive construction are found. The major type consists of simple pre-head adjunction, without any special linking devices of a segmental or a tonal nature:

> POSSESSOR - POSSESSED

Examples:

> 1. Gao *[[ay] čer-oo]* *hãyš-oo*
>
>   1sg friend-def:sg dog- def:sg
>
>   my friend's dog [Heath 1999a: 117]

> 2. Zarma *[tùúr-òó]* *kàmb-àá*
>
>   tree- def:sg arm- def:sg
>
>   the branch of the tree (Oumarou Yaro 1993: 222)

<4>

The possessed element may be pronominalized using an element, which in all Mainstream Songhay languages is *wane* or something similar (cf. for a comparative table Nicolaï 1981: 154, 163). This pronoun is used to mark a pronominal head of a genitival clause, e.g.

> 3. Gao *[[ay] čer-oo]* *wan-ey*
>
>   1s friend- def:sg that.of- def:pl
>
>   my friend's (Pl.) (lit. those of my friend) [Heath 1999a: 118]

> 4. Zarma *[ábdù]* *wón-òó*
>
>   Abdou that.of- def:sg
>
>   Abdou's (lit. that of Abdou) [Oumarou Yaro 1993: 222]

<5>

In addition to this, in a number of Mainstream Songhay languages - Timbuktu, Gao, Kaado - *wane* (etc.) is also used as an overt marker of a genitival relation between a genitival clause and the head noun. The basic structure is:

POSSESSOR - *wane* - POSSESSED

Examples:

5.   Gao   *[[ay] čer-oo   wane]   hãyš-oo*

                    1sg   friend-def:sg   that.of   dog- def:sg

                    my friend's dog [Heath 1999a: 117]

6.   Kaado   *[Ali   wane]   far-oo*

                    Ali   that.of   field- def:sg

                    Ali's field [Seydou Hanafiou 2005]

<6>
This is different from Zarma and Tondi Songhay Kiini, where *wánè*, *wⁿɔ́nɛ̀* is only used as a pronominal head of a genitival clause (cf. Oumarou Yaro 1993: 221, Bernard & White-Kaba 1994: 302, Heath 2005: 124).

2. Tuareg genitives
<7>
Tuareg has post-nominal genitives which use the genitive preposition *n*:[2]

POSSESSED - (DEMONSTRATIVE) - *n* - POSSESSOR

The pronouns used in this construction are those used as a basis for a determination (see Galand 1974a, Kossmann ms., chapter 10.2-10.4). At this point, genitive constructions are similar to constructions with other modifiers, such as relative clauses (cf. Galand 1974b: 35). It should be noted that most pronouns in question are also used as markers of definiteness with nouns which are not followed by modifying clauses.
<8>
The exact semantic difference between constructions with and without pronouns is difficult to define, and seems to be linked to a willingness to express (in)determination, which is achieved by means of the different pronouns (cf. Galand 1974a: 213). Examples (Ayer Tuareg, cf. Galand 1974b: 37):

7.   *edir   [n   ešik]*

            basis   of   tree

            the/a basis of a/the tree [Ramada Elghamis p.c.]

8.   *edir   wa   [nn   ešik]*

            basis   that.m   of   tree

            <u>the</u> basis of the tree the/a basis of a/the tree
            [Ramada Elghamis p.c.]

3. Genitives in Northern Songhay

<9>

In Northern Songhay there exist two different genitival constructions, one with a genitive linker *n*, the other using the genitival head pronoun wane (etc.).

<10>

The genitival linker is *n* in all Northern Songhay languages. In Tasawaq, which is the only Northern Songhay language which has preserved tone, it bears a Low tone, preceded by a floating High tone. When the preceding word ends in a vowel, the floating High is attached to this vowel. When it ends in a consonant, because of a general phonological rule, an epenthetic vowel *i* is inserted, which carries the floating tone. The element *n* loses its inherent tone when combined with personal pronouns. The syntactic construction with *n* is as shown in examples 9-12:

POSSESSOR - *n* - POSSESSED

9.   Tadaksahak   *[toruft   n]   cay*

car   of   foot

the inner tube of the car (lit. foot of the car) [Christiansen fc.]

10.   Tasawaq   *[bààbá   ǹ]   tùgúzì   (<bààbà ^{H}ǹ tùgúzì)*

father   of   wood

the wood of the father

11.   Tasawaq   *[wây   ín]   gáású   (< wây ^{H}ǹ gáású)*

woman   of   calabash

the woman's calabash [N]

12.   Tabelbala   *[heyni   n]   ks-iu*

wheat   of   cut-VN

the cutting of the wheat [Champault 1969: 144]

<11>

Genitival phrases with a pronominal head are constructed in a different manner, using the porte-manteau genitive pronoun Tadaksahak *wani*, Tasawaq *wánè*, Tabelbala *wani ~ wini*. The genitival marker *n* is not used in this construction. Examples:

13.   Tadaksahak   *[ni]   wani*

2sg   that.of

yours [Christiansen fc.]

14.   Tasawaq   *[ɣá(w)   wánè*

1sg   that.of

mine [fieldnotes by the author]

15. Tabelbala   *[nə n] benḍa mar [ayma wani] ɣi-si* [3]

2sg of back like mother that.of 1sg-dat

may your back be to me like that of (my) mother
(repudiation formula) [Champault 1969: 309]

<12>
Constructions with *wane*, etc. also occur in possessive constructions in which both the possessor and the possessed are expressed lexically. In this case the structure is as follows:

POSSESSED - POSSESSOR - WANE

<13>
In this structure the head is followed by an appositional genitival phrase, consisting of the pronominal-head *wane* and its genitival clause. A literal translation of this construction would be "X, that of Y".
<14>
This construction is well-attested in Northern Songhay. Some examples:

16. Tasawaq   *àlxít [[ɣá n] húgù wánè]*

wall 1sg gen house that.of

the wall of my house (lit. the wall, that of my house)
[fieldnotes by the author]

17. Tabelbala   *fun' [adra wini]*

hole mountain that.of

cave (lit. hole that of the mountain) [Champault ms.]

18. Tadaksahak   *alžimaʕa [arw-en wani]*

assembly man-pl that.of

a group of men [Christiansen fc.]

<15>
The semantic and syntactic contexts in which this construction is used may be different from that of the genitive construction with *n*. Christiansen remarks that in Tadaksahak the *wani*-construction is "most often used for relationship other than possession and if it is possession it is a marked form". In Tasawaq, the construction with *wánè* is often found when there are several genitive phrases attached to a head noun, e.g.

19.   *á mày táznè [[àlɣásá ǹ] tè wánè]* [4]

3sg have habitude evening of coming that.of

he usually comes in the evening (lit. he has the habitude, that of coming of the evening)" [fieldnotes by the author]

<16>

In Tadaksahak, *wani* may also occur between the possessor and the possessed:

> POSSESSOR - WANI - POSSESSED

In this case the construction conveys "kind of" or "of the character of", e.g.

> 20. *[aɣ   wani]   feeji*
>
> 1sg   that.of   sheep
>
> my kind of sheep [Christiansen fc.]

<17>

In addition to these productive syntactic processes of genitive formation, Tasawaq has a few compound nouns, which show a genitival relationship without a marker, e.g.

> 21. *[ṭáárá]   hánsì*
>
> bush   dog
>
> wild dog (lit. dog (of) bush) [fieldnotes by the author]

<18>

A similar marginal genitival construction without a marker is attested in Tabelbala (Lameen Souag p.c.).

4. The history of the Northern Songhay genitival phrases

<19>

Two out of three basic Northern Songhay genitival constructions are similar to mainstream Songhay patterns: The fixed expressions without a marker of the genitive, as found in Tasawaq, are identical to the general Mainstream Songhay pattern of genitival linking. The use of the pronoun *wane*, etc. as a genitive marker is also found in Malian Mainstream Songhay. The syntactic construction of Northern Songhay *wane* genitives, however, is different from that in Timbuktu and Gao, as *wane* phrases are appositional to the head noun in Northern Songhay, while *wane* occurs between the genitive phrase and the head noun in the Mainstream variants -a construction only known in Tadaksahak, where it has a very restricted usage:

> Northern Songhay: POSSESSED - POSSESSOR - *wane*
>
> Timbuktu, Gao: POSSESSOR - *wane* - POSSESSED

<20>

Because of this syntactic difference it is reasonable to assume that these constructions constitute independent innovations from a Zarma-like structure with *wane* functioning only as a head-pronoun in a genitive construction.

<21>

The origin of the construction with *n*, which is the default option for possessives in Northern Songhay, is a difficult question. One remarks that it is similar in structure to Mainstream Songhay and in form to Tuareg:

Northern Songhay	POSSESSOR - *n* - POSSESSED
Mainstream Songhay	POSSESSOR - POSSESSED
Tuareg	POSSESSED - *n* - POSSESSOR

<22>

Northern Songhay shares with Mainstream Songhay the pre-head position of the genitival phrase, but with Tuareg the existence and the form of the genitival linker. This situation has incited Alidou (1988) and later Wolff & Alidou (2001) to consider *n* a borrowing from Tuareg. As the basic order of the elements remained Songhay, this means that *n* changed from a preposition preceding the possessor phrase into an element following the possessor phrase. This analysis entails a number of problems, which will be enumerated below.

<23>

1 - The change the element *n* would have undergone in its relative position to the possessor is rather unexpected. It should be stressed that Songhay languages are not strictly postpositional. All Songhay languages have at least one preposition (or noun linker), the comitative / instrumental preposition *nda* (etc.).

Moreover, the basic Songhay POSSESSOR – POSSESSED word order could have been preserved without changing the preposition to a postposition in a construction such as **[*n* - POSSESSOR - POSSESSED]. There is no reason to assume the need for a linking element between the two phrases, as in Northern Songhay the alternative [POSSESSED – POSSESSOR – *wane*] construction does not provide such a linkage either.

<24>

2 - In Northern Songhay, the construction of higher numerals is a calque on Tuareg (or other Berber languages) using the element *n*:

HIGHER NUMERAL - N - NOUN

In Northern Songhay constructions of this type, the same construction is used as in Tuareg, i.e. the numeral precedes *n*, e.g.

22.	Tuareg	*sənatăt təmărwen [n taṛṛăyt]*
		two:f tens of road
		twenty roads (lit. two tens of road) [Ramada Elghamis p.c]

23.	Tasawaq	*ɣàssìrín [în ṭáṛṛày]*
		twenty of road
		twenty roads (lit. twenty of road) [fieldnotes by the author]

Thus, while in genitive constructions *n* there would have been a complete restructuring of the Tuareg noun phrase, it has been preserved as such in numeral constructions with *n*.

<25>
3 - In Tasawaq, the genitive postposition *n* is accompanied by a HL tonal contour (i.e. $^H\grave{n}$). There is no way to explain this contour from a Tuareg source, as Falling tone is not attested in Tasawaq in words of Tuareg origin.

Because of these problems, it is necessary to look at the possibility of a Songhay-internal explanation of the genitival element. We shall explore two possibilities.

a. The origin of the pronoun *wane* "that of" is far from clear. It constitutes the only porte-manteau element that combines pronominal features with the expression of syntactic relations. Because of this, it is not unreasonable to look for the possibility that *wane* (etc.) is originally an amalgam of a pronoun and an element expressing a genitival relationship. In fact, a *w-* initial element is the basis of demonstrative pronouns in Mainstream Songhay languages. Thus Zarma uses *wóò* (pl. *wóò-yáŋ*) as a demonstrative pronoun, used both in apposition to a noun, and independently. The following phrases illustrate its independent use:

24. *ày   sí   báà   wô*

     1s   perf:neg   love   this

     I do not like this one [Oumarou Yaro 1993: 167]

25. *wóò   fúmbú*

     this   rot

     this one is rotten [Oumarou Yaro 1993: 167]

Similar uses are attested elsewhere (cf. Heath 1999a: 127-131 for Gao, and Heath 1999b: 97-98 for Timbuktu).

One may assume that the demonstrative element *wóò* in Zarma (etc.) is a composite form, consisting of a pronominal element *w-* and a demonstrative element *-óò* (< **ógò*, cf. Tabelbala *uɣu*, Lameen Souag p.c.).[5] This would allow us to analyze Tasawaq *wánè* as a composition of *w-*, followed by a second element *ánè*. As *w-* would be the carrier of the pronominal information, *ánè* should be the marker of the genitival relationship. If in *wánè* the element *ánè* is really a marker of the genitive, it is conceivable that the same element was used when connecting two genitival phrases. Thus one would reconstruct a construction:

> * POSSESSOR - ÁNÈ - POSSESSED

Due to phonological reduction, such a construction could have become the attested Northern Songhay construction:

> POSSESSOR - $^H\grave{n}$ - POSSESSED

A major problem in this analysis is the question, why the Mainstream Songhay languages show no trace at all of this construction.[6] One could assume that both constructions with and without *(á)nè* were possible in Proto-Songhay, and that different languages generalized different options, but this is completely *ad hoc*.

This whole analysis depends on the analysis of *wane* as a compound pronoun. Of course, other origins are conceivable, e.g. that *wane* was originally a noun meaning "possession", as suggested by Heath (2005: 124).

b. Those Mainstream Songhay languages that have SOV word order, use a disjunctive element *na* (Gao), *nà* (Zarma). This element is only used when two noun phrases, one of which is the Subject, the other of which is the Direct Object, would follow each other without any intervening element. Because of its restriction to transitive constructions, it has been baptized a "transitivizer" by Heath (1999a: 212). In practice, this situation only holds in the perfective indicative positive, as this is the only aspect which has no (overt) Mood-Aspect-Negation marker. Example:

26.   Zarma   *ábdù   nà   fèèjì   wí*

Abdou   trans   sheep   kill

Abdou has killed the sheep [Oumaro Yaro 1993: 99]

Northern Songhay languages, which are all SVO, do not have this construction, but a similar element *n* is used as a disjunctive element between different oblique pronouns (+ postpositions) in Tadaksahak, e.g.

27.   *koy   ni-m-da   a-se   n-a-ka   n-a*

go   2sg-subj-put   3sg-DAT   DISJ-3sg-loc   DISJ-3sg

go and put it in it for him [Christiansen fc.]

<26>
One may argue that *na* is an ancient morpheme used to keep noun phrases apart which would otherwise be contiguous. If one reformulates its use in this manner, it is not a large step to consider genitival constructions as possible objects for such a disjunction. As shown above, the normal Mainstream Songhay pattern has the genitive precede the head noun without any linking element, and this means that two nouns of different syntactic status are contiguous. Although the situation is different from the one found in Mainstream Songhay *na* and Tadaksahak *n-* syntactically the genitival phrase is part of the same NP as the head noun -a certain similarity cannot be denied. Thus, one could posit that in Proto-Songhay the disjunctive element *na* was (optionally?) inserted between two nouns of different syntactic status, among others between the genitival phrase and the head noun. In Mainstream Songhay the element *na* became more and more reinterpreted as a transitive marker, filling an empty slot in the system of the Mood-Aspect-Negation particles, and was obliterated from the genitival construction.[7] In Northern Songhay, the element *na* became generalized as the main genitival marker, albeit in a reduced form, *n.* Of course, there is no objection in considering the influence of neighboring Tuareg a factor in the choice for this generalization.
<27>
Both proposals have their flaws. However, in the absence of a convincing borrowing scenario, I think a Songhay-internal explanation is to be preferred.

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Notes

[1] Tasawaq data in this article (see also Kossmann 2007a, 2007b) come from two sources. Part of it were provided to me in Fall 2003 by Mrs. Ibrahim, born Nana Mariama Aweïssou, a school teacher in her twenties, originary from In-Gall, now resident in Agadez. I wish to thank her for her time and patience. Other data, marked [N], stem from recordings made by Robert Nicolaï in the 1970s. I am very grateful for his permission to listen to these recordings and use them. Tadaksahak data come from Regula Christiansen's draft version of her PhD Thesis. I thank her for her permission to use these unpublished data here. The Tuareg examples were kindly provided to me by Ramada Elghamis (Niamey/Leiden). Tabelbala data have been taken from Champault (1969) and the unfinished manuscript vocabulary Champault (ms.). Tabelbala transcriptions have been normalized and adapted where necessary. Concerning the philological problems related to these sources, see Kossmann (2006). The article was written in the framework of the NWO (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) research project "Tuareg and the Central Sahelian Languages. A History of Language Contact". I wish to thank Thilo Schadeberg and Lameen Souag for their valuable comments. All responsibility for errors or flaws in the argument of course remains with the author.

[2] Some minority patterns only found with a restricted set of head nouns will be left out of consideration here. Cf. Galand (1974b: 34ff.).

[3] Champault: <*risi*>.

[4] From *àlɣásà* ^{H}*ǹ tè*.

[5] An alternative analysis would consider the post-nominal Definite Singular marker *-óò* as a phonological reduction of a unitary pronominal form *wóò*.

[6] Note that in Tondi Songhway Kiini, one occasionally finds nominal compounds with a linker *ŋ* (Heath 2005: 113) which could be analyzed as a remnant of an older genitival marker (Lameen Souag p.c.).

[7] One might argue that in Gao and Timbuktu Songhay the pronoun *wane* filled the original slot of *na* in the genitive construction.