

# Possession in Sheko

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The notion and expression of possession

Possession is a notion which seems simple at first, but is semantically complex at closer inspection. At its simplest, possession is the relation between a possessor and a possessed item, the possessum. The central type of relation seems to be one of ownership (permanent possession), but part-whole (inalienable possession), abstract possession, and other relations also fall under the domain of possession (Herslund & Baron 2001: 11).

- (1) a. He has a gun (ownership)  
b. He has long hair, a cube has six sides (inalienable possession)  
c. He has a problem (abstract possession)

The linguistic constructions used for prototypical possessive relations are often also used for non-possessive notions, such as location or goal. (See Heine 1997: 47, for a list of sources of possessive constructions.)

Sheko (Omotic, Ethiopia) has three different constructions which can express a possessor-possessum relation. They go along “the three major dimensions which constitute the principal linguistic realisations of possession: predicative possession, attributive possession and (...) external possession or possessor ascension,” (Herslund & Baron 2001: 4). Each of them is of interest from a typological or historical-comparative point of view.

### 1.2 Overview

Section 2 discusses attributive possession, e.g. possessive noun phrases. The head noun (the possessum) is marked tonally. Then a subgroup of possessive noun phrases is discussed of which the head is formed by **baab** ‘father’ or **bé** ‘mother’. The grammaticalization of these morphemes is illustrated and their role for the expression of gender is investigated. Curiously, when a possessive noun phrase headed by **baab** is

made definite, **bé** has to be used. This could be evidence that in the past, the default gender was feminine, whereas currently the default gender is masculine. Grammatical gender is a recurring topic in Omotic studies (e.g. Fleming 1976: 36, Bender 1990, 2007: 736-42).

Section 3 compares possessive clauses to existential and locative clauses, and shows that predicative possession in Sheko looks like existential predication. The three types of predicate nominals are similar, which is expected from a typological point of view. According to Herslund & Baron (2001: 9), predicative possession can be divided into two types, of which one has the possessor as a topic and subject, and the other the possessum. Sheko happens to use only one of these types: only the possessum can be the subject in predicative possession. Significantly, the possessum cannot be marked for definiteness. The asymmetry is caused by the properties of the predicative construction, which typically introduces a new participant.

Finally, section 4 concerns possessor ascension. It compares the ascension construction and the attributive construction in relation to body part nouns, taking into consideration the discussion about inalienable possession in the related language Dizi (Alan 1976; Claudi & Serzisko 1985). It is shown that possessor ascension is the neutral way of presenting body part nouns and that spatial terms related to body part nouns behave in the same way. Essential in the analysis is the semantic difference of the two constructions involved. In opposition to a possessive noun phrase, which more or less focuses on the possessor, i.e. the whole, possessor ascension basically centralizes the possessed, i.e. the part. Section 5 presents the conclusions of the discussion contained in this paper.

### 1.3 The Sheko language

Sheko (called **şókú nōōgù** by the speakers) is an Omotic language of the Majoid branch, also called the Dizoid branch after its better-known language Dizi. It is spoken by approximately 40,000 people (estimate provided by the language consultants). The Sheko people are subsistence farmers, producing coffee and honey for extra income. They live in the forested hills between Mizan Teferi and Tepi, and on the Guraferda plateau in Southwest Ethiopia. The main research area was Boyta, a village close to Sheko town.

Some characteristics of the Sheko language are the following: the language displays four level tones, written here  $\hat{v}$  (lowest),  $\bar{v}$  (mid-low),

v (mid-high), and ǎ (highest). Tone plays an important role in person and aspect/mood marking. Nouns can be marked for gender-definiteness in the singular by **-n-s** (DEF-M), <i>-n</i> (F-DEF). Most inanimate nouns are masculine.

- |     |             |       |                |           |
|-----|-------------|-------|----------------|-----------|
| (2) | <b>zegu</b> | ‘ox’  | <b>zeg-n-s</b> | ‘the ox’  |
|     | <b>otì</b>  | ‘cow’ | <b>oyt-n</b>   | ‘the cow’ |

For plural referents, gender marking consists of a vowel **-u** for masculine and **-i** for feminine. These occur only with a handful of words which end in a consonant.

- |     |             |          |   |                |           |
|-----|-------------|----------|---|----------------|-----------|
| (3) | <b>tosa</b> | ‘myth’   | M | <b>tosa-s</b>  | ‘myths’   |
|     | <b>ááb</b>  | ‘fruit’  | M | <b>ááb-ùs</b>  | ‘fruits’  |
|     | <b>túún</b> | ‘spring’ | F | <b>túún-ìs</b> | ‘springs’ |

Gender is also marked in demonstratives, adjectives, relative clauses, and in 3<sup>rd</sup> pers. pronominal elements. NPs are marked for case, with nominative unmarked. Sheko employs different verbal morphology for final (main) verbs and for converbs, i.e. non-final verbs in a clause chain. Furthermore, the final main verbs carry a modality marker which gives information on the type of utterance, i.e. realis declarative, irrealis declarative, negative, imperative/jussive and optative. Sheko is verb-final, and dependent clauses precede the main clause, but next to suffixes the language uses prefixes as well, and some modifiers follow the head noun.

## 2. Attributive possession

### 2.1 The characteristics of attributive possession

In attributive possession, the possessor always precedes the possessum. Both can be expressed in an NP (4-5), or the possessor can be expressed anaphorically by a possessor prefix, as is shown in table 1 below. The relation between the possessor and the possessum is not necessarily one of ownership, and one could also call this construction an associative or genitive construction.

- (4) *yì-s*     *endriyàs*   *fèmà*     *tā-kō*  
 DEM-M   Endrias   clothes   COP-REAL.STI  
 ‘These are Endrias’s clothes.’
- (5) *ōtì*   *bāācī*   *án-ŋ-kì-b*     *tengì*   *bàtà ífì-sok’-u-kì-b-i-s*  
 cow skin   put-NEG2-be-REL tree.sp on 3pl-sleep-u-be-REL-DEM-M  
 ‘those who didn’t use a cow hide, what they were sleeping on was  
*tengi*.’

The head of the NP is marked tonally, as is every head which is preceded by a modifier. The following table shows the tonal changes in disyllabic nouns for all six tonal melodies. The numbers in brackets indicate the tone level of the two syllables of the noun. Tone 4 is replaced by tone 2 and all other tones are replaced by tone 1. Note that four of the six contrastive melodies are neutralized by this replacement.

noun in isolation		pre-modified noun	
<i>kábí</i> (44)	‘axe’	<i>há-kābī</i> (22)	‘his axe’
<i>fót’ì</i> (41)	‘maize’	<i>há-fōt’ì</i> (21)	‘his maize’
<i>fema</i> (33)	‘clothing’	<i>há-fèmà</i> (11)	‘his clothing’
<i>budà</i> (31)	‘pumpkin’	<i>há-bùdà</i> (11)	‘his pumpkin’
<i>kāfà</i> (21)	‘bird’	<i>há-kàfà</i> (11)	‘his bird’
<i>t’ètʃu</i> (13)	‘pebble’	<i>há-t’ètʃù</i> (11)	‘his pebble’

Table 1. Tonal changes of head noun

It is of course possible to put more than two NPs together, in which case each modified head undergoes the change in tone. In example (6) the nouns **baab** ‘father’ and **náánú** ‘elder brother’ are modified.

- (6) *dād-n̄-s*     *bààb*   *nāānū*-*rā*     *ōʃk-ít-ē*  
 child-DEF-M   father   elder\_brother-ACC   call.IMP-PL-STI  
 ‘Call the elder brother of the boys’ father.’

A possessive noun phrase is distinguishable from a compound, even though in compounds the same tonal process takes place. The difference is that in compounds the first noun cannot be made definite or plural or be otherwise modified. This is shown in example (7). (Example (8) proves that **írú** ‘rain’ can be made definite when it is not in a compound.)

- (7) írú bèngì-k'à gáydí anga kì-á-kō  
 rain year-LOC problem very be-3ms-REAL.STI  
 'In the rainy season there are many problems.'  
 \*ír-ń-s bèngì  
 rain-DEF-M year  
 intended: 'the rainy season' (in any context)
- (8) ír-ń-s m̄-bàtà nǎfa há-k'yār-ū-k  
 rain-DEF-M 1SG.POSS-on firmly.ELAT 3ms-beat-u-REAL  
 'The rain drenched me.' (lit. the rain beat firmly on me)

## 2.2 Attributive possession with baab 'father' / bé 'mother'

### 2.2.1 Function and distribution

Possessive noun phrases may use **baab** 'father' and **bé** 'mother' as the second element. **baab** 'father' has an allomorph **bab** and **bé** 'mother' has an allomorph **báy** ~ **béy**. The **baab** / **bé** construction can be used to express or assert 'ownership' (9). It is also used to denote a characterizing property of an entity or group of entities (10).

- (9) íncù bààb dàtà n̄-téé-tō n̄-ás-a óóc'-á-mō  
 wood father near 1sg-go-SS 1sg-3MS-ACC ask-POT-IRR.STI  
 'I'll go to the owner of the wood and ask him.'
- (10) yi-nì úfń bē tē-kō  
 DEM-F flower mother COP-REAL.STI  
 'This one has flowers.' (lit. this is a mother of flower)

Besides in possessive constructions, **baab** 'father' and **bé** 'mother' are employed in a range of other constructions. In fact, one can consider **baab** and **bé** nominalizers. They are used to form agent nouns (11) and nominalize time expressions (12, 13) and adverbs (13). These morphemes are also used in Irrealis complement clauses (14) and after case-marked noun phrases (15). Without **baab**, the word **yistà** 'at that' would be interpreted as referring to time (16) instead of location. In the examples below, **baab** and **bé** are written as suffixes, even if the distinction between suffix and separable noun is difficult to draw.

- (11) wūnk'ù-bààb há-kòb-kō  
stealing-father 3ms-take-REAL.STI  
'A thief took it'
- (12) gonà-bēy-rā fē-bàr-kìy-à  
yesterday-mother-ACC forget-throw\_away-be-2sg.Q  
'Did you forget yesterdays' ?'
- (13) yì-s-kh̄n adik'à únà-bàb-kh̄n góri-tà  
DEM-M-DAT after long\_ago-father-DAT head-LOC2  
anga-bàb yāāb kay-ñ-s ífì-ʔāmān-kō  
very-father man god-DEF-M 3pl-believe-REAL.STI  
'After that, many more people than before believed in God.'
- (14) nātā ífì-bààb nōōgù-rā íf-ʔyáz-m-bàb-ērā  
1SG 3PL.POSS-father word-ACC 3pl-be.able-IRR-father-ACC  
anga m-bààs-kì-kō  
very 1sg-want-be-REAL.STI  
'I want very much that they can (speak) their father's language.'
- (15) yì-s-tà-bààb ìnf-ñ ááb-ara há-ʔūm-t-á  
DEM-M-LOC2-father wood:DEF:M-DAT fruit-ACC 3ms-eat-SS-3ms  
kùf-ù-kō  
be.ill-u-REAL.STI  
'He ate berries of that tree and became ill.'
- (16) yì-s-tà ìnf-ñ ááb-ara há-ʔūm-t-á  
DEM-M-LOC2 wood:DEF:M-DAT fruit-ACC 3ms-eat-SS-3ms  
kùf-ù-kō  
be.ill-u-REAL.STI  
'Then he ate berries of the tree and became ill.'

Ideophones (17) and forms derived from adjectival verbs (18) cannot feed this nominalization. The forms derived from adjectival verbs are already nominalized by the definiteness-gender marking and function as adjectives.

- (17) \*óʃʃʔóʃ-bààb  
IDEO[look\_intently]-father

- (18) kyanu ts'aa-n-s / ts'aa-n-s-ðb kyànù  
 dog become.black-DEF-M become.black-DEF-M-REL dog  
 'black dog'  
 \*ts'aans-bààb

Only **-bé** is acceptable in negative sentences. This might be due to the semantics of the feminine gender, which can be used as a diminutive, whereas masculine is neutral with regard to size. The use of the feminine/diminutive form emphasizes that even the least of what might be expected did not take place.

- (19) yír-bē-rā ats-ar-á-kì-kō  
 what-mother-ACC give-NEG-3ms-be-REAL.STI  
 'He didn't give anything whatsoever.'

Furthermore, many plant and animal names are compounds with **-bé** ~ **-báy** as the second element. In most cases, the first half does not occur without **-bé**, therefore the names are written as a whole.

- |      |                   |                                |
|------|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| (20) | <b>kúʃm̄bē</b>    | 'ant, sp. (tiny)'              |
|      | <b>c'ínc'úbē</b>  | 'mosquito'                     |
|      | <b>háánhanubē</b> | 'bird of prey, sp.'            |
|      | <b>sántàbē</b>    | 'bird, sp.'                    |
|      | <b>wōp'm̄bē</b>   | 'chameleon'                    |
|      | <b>zúngúbēy</b>   | 'plant with blue flowers, sp.' |
|      | <b>írkùbē</b>     | 'yam sp. with sharp taste'     |
|      | <b>óngúbāy</b>    | 'yam sp.'                      |
|      | <b>ʃibē</b>       | 'water taro'                   |

Sheko is not the only language showing the grammaticalization of the terms for 'father' and 'mother'. For instance, the cognate forms of Sheko **baab** / **bé** show a similar behavior in the Omotic languages Dime and Bench. In Dime, agentive nominals are derived by **-bab** (with a H tone). The word for 'father' in Dime is **bábe** (Mulugeta 2008: 58). In Bench, the geographical neighbour language of Sheko, **-bày** occurs in names of plants and animals, **bāb** and **bày** are used with the semantics of 'owner', and nouns and adjectives can be bases for a nominalization process that suffixes **-u-bāb**, **u.bày** (Rapold 2006: 213ff).

2.2.2 On gender in constructions with **baab** 'father' / **be** 'mother'

As a nominalizer, **baab** 'father' and **bé** 'mother' have lost their connotation of 'ownership' and only convey that the referent of the nominalization is masculine or feminine. The present section returns to the possessive noun phrases with **baab** 'father' and **bé** 'mother' in order to show a fascinating grammatical property of possessive noun phrases, namely that masculine definite NPs take the feminine **bé** instead of **baab**, while still adding a masculine marker after the definiteness marker. Gender is evidently not straightforward in the case of definite possessive noun phrases.

The construction with **baab** 'father' and **bé** 'mother' can be pluralized. In the plural, nothing special happens. Just like other nouns, the masculine takes the suffix **-ùs** and the feminine the suffix **-is**.

- (21) a. eki      bààb-ùs  
           money father-M.PL  
           'rich men'  
       b. eki      bē-is  
           money mother-F.PL  
           'rich women'

The 'mismatch' between masculine and feminine gender appears when constructions with **baab** 'father' and **bé** 'mother' are made definite. (The category of definiteness is confined to the singular.) When **baab** 'father' is made definite, the construction becomes ungrammatical; instead, **bé** 'mother' plus the masculine definiteness marking must be used. Thus, in table 2 below the odd one out is the masculine definite form.

	indefinite		definite	
M	eki	bààb	eki	bēy-ù-s
	money	father	money	mother-DEF-M
		'rich man'		'the rich man'
F	eki	bē	eki	bēy-ì
	money	mother	money	mother:F-DEF
		'rich woman'		'the rich woman'

Table 2. Gender in definite possessive noun phrases



Below, two sentential examples are given. Sentence (22) illustrates definiteness with feminine gender, sentence (23) with masculine gender. Evidently, the meaning of **-bé** ‘mother’ is sufficiently bleached in this context to allow masculine gender agreement.

- (22) *íncù hà-nì tiirà bēy-ḥ t̄-k̄*  
 wood PROX-F shadow mother.F-DEF COP-REAL.STI  
 ‘This tree here (f) is shadow-giving.’
- (23) *āāptù bē-ḥ-s koḥ-s-ōrā*  
 intoxication mother-DEF-M chief:DEF-M-ACC  
*há-gāsk-ū-k̄*  
 3ms-insult-u-REAL.STI  
 ‘The drunkard (m) insulted the chief.’

The construction given above represents the only instance in the Sheko language where feminine gender morphology (**-bé**) is used with both feminine and masculine nouns. Could it be a proof for a historical shift from feminine to masculine as the default gender? Another possible piece of evidence for such a shift is reported for Bench, the geographical neighbour of Sheko. In contemporary Bench, the default gender is masculine, while the plural demonstratives are more similar to the feminine than to the masculine gender (Rapold 2006: 389). While it may be hasty to draw conclusions from these isolated facts, they should be considered elements in the discussion about gender in (Proto-)Omotic. The gender situation for Proto-Omotic is unclear, because present-day Omotic languages vary in their function of gender. For some languages, gender is reported to be non-grammatical, i.e. only some words display inherent gender, based on biological distinctions (Fleming 1976: 36). Other languages have feminine gender as the default gender, e.g. Maale (Amha 2001: 45), whereas yet others, like Sheko, have masculine gender as the default gender.

### 3. Predicate possession

Many languages use the same kind of constructions for existential, locative and possessive predicate nominals, because all express a stative situation in which something is situated with respect to a location (Payne 1997: 127). In other words, location, being a fundamental and concrete

notion, is a basic ingredient of possession (Herslund & Baron 2001: 22). In the case of possessive clauses the location, i.e. the possessor, is often animate.

### 3.1 The possessive clause in Sheko

In Sheko, the possessive clause best compares with an existential clause. Existentials make use of the verb **ki** (L) 'be present, exist, live'. An example of an existential clause is given in example (24).

- (24) gyanu kî-á-k̄  
 coffee be-3ms-REAL.STI  
 'There is coffee.'

In a possessive predicate, the possessor NP is in the dative case and the possessum NP occurs as the subject of the predicate 'be present, exist'.

- (25) gyanu íñ-k̄ kî-á-k̄  
 coffee 3PL-DAT be-3ms-REAL.STI  
 'They have coffee.' (lit. coffee exists to them)
- (26) bāzà yí-nàṣà-k̄ kî-ñtā, ...  
 work 3FS.POSS-husband-DAT be-COND  
 'If her husband has work,...' (lit. if there is work to her husband)

In Sheko, the dative case is used on NPs expressing Benefactive and Recipient roles (27). According to Belle & Van Langendonck (1996, introduction) the dative marks the target or 'pole' to which an action is oriented. The target can be a goal in a case of transfer or an interested party which experiences the outcome of an action to his advantage or detriment.

- (27) ii-ñ-s yi-z-k'à kî-b yāb-m̄-s-k̄  
 house-DEF-M DEM-M-LOC be-REL man-DEF-M-DAT  
 m̄-baṣ-a-m̄  
 1pl-work-POT-IRR.STI  
 'We will work for the man who lives in that house.'

A locative clause is also existential in Sheko and contains a noun phrase marked by one of the case markers **-k'à** (for 'containment') or **-tà** (for a more general location).

- (28) goydù                    kar-k'à            há-kìy-ṅ            ṅ-sēē-kō  
 guereza\_monkey forest-LOC 3ms-be-DS 1sg-see-REAL.STI  
 'I saw a guereza monkey in the forest.' (lit. there was a guereza in the forest; I saw it)

In locative expressions using a body part noun both dative and locative case are present (29). Note that the locative expression as a whole must be marked by locative case.<sup>1</sup> The locative expressions are discussed in section 4 on body part nouns/ possessor ascension.

- (29) ēēz-ṅ-s            bāc-ṅ-s-kṅ            bow-k'à            kì-í-kō  
 cat-DEF-M bed-DEF-M-DAT belly-LOC be-3fs-REAL.STI  
 'The cat is under the bed.'

### 3.2 Definiteness marking and the function of predicative possession

According to Herslund & Baron (2001: 9), predicative possession branches into HAVE-like possession, i.e. a construction in which the possessor is the topic and grammatical subject, and BELONG-like possession, i.e. a construction in which the possessum is the topic and grammatical subject. This distinction is valid cross-linguistically (Heine 1997: 33). Sheko has only a BELONG-like construction.

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<sup>1</sup> It is ungrammatical to use only a dative case to mark a place in Sheko, as is demonstrated in the sentence below. This is unlike the cognate in Dizi, where a NP marked by **-kṅ** can be interpreted as denoting a place (Claudi & Serzisko 1985: 149).

\*bac-ṅ-s-kṅ            kì-á-kō  
 bed-DEF-M-DAT be-3ms-REAL.STI  
 intended: 'It/he is at the bed'

In the predicative possession construction, only the possessum can be the grammatical subject. It is possible to change the order of possessor and possessum, but this does not affect the grammatical marking (cf. example (25), repeated here as (30) for convenience, and (31) below).

- (30) gyanu ífi-k̀n k̀i-á-k̄  
 coffee 3PL-DAT be-3ms-REAL.STI  
 ‘They have coffee.’ (lit. coffee is to them)
- (31) m̄-bāād-̀n-s-k̀n gyanu p’úć’á k̀i-á-k  
 1SG.POSS-younger\_sibling-DEF-M-DAT coffee a\_lot be-3ms-REAL  
 ‘My brother has a lot of coffee.’

Interestingly, the subject cannot be marked for definiteness, as shown in example (32). Asymmetry in definiteness between possessor and possessum is to be expected, although an indefinite possessum in a BELONG-construction may not be usual (cf. Heine 1997: 30).

- (32) <sup>?</sup>\* gyan-n-s m̄-bāād-̀n-s-k̀n k̀i-á-k  
 coffee-DEF-M 1SG.POSS-younger\_sibling-DEF-M-DAT be-3ms-REAL  
 intended: ‘The coffee is to my brother’, i.e. ‘the coffee belongs to my brother.’

The systematic absence on the subject of definiteness marking is related to the type of construction and its function. Possessive predication typically asserts possession, whereas in attributive possession the possession is typically presupposed (Heine 1997: 26). Thus, in possessive predication the possessum is presented as a newly introduced referent, just like existential predication also characteristically introduces a new referent and is not normally used to provide given or known information.

If one wants to present the possessor as the grammatical subject, it is possible to use a copula-construction, with which it is possible to have either the possessor (33) or the possessum (34) as the topic. In this construction, the subject is easily marked as definite, hence it can refer to known, topical referents.

- (33) m̄-bāād-̀n-s gyanu bààb t̄-k̄  
 1SG.POSS-younger\_sibling-DEF-M coffee father COP-REAL.STI  
 ‘My brother is a coffee-owner/ owns coffee’

- (34) gyan-n-s      yi-s      kéta      m̀̀ngistì-k̀̀n-bààb      t̄-k̄<sup>2</sup>  
 coffee-DEF-M DEM-M all      government-DAT-father COP-REAL.STI  
 ‘All this coffee belongs to the government’ (lit. is father of ‘to the  
 government’)

Note that, strictly speaking, the above construction is not a case of predicative possession, but of equation. It is only the copula complement, i.e. **gyanu bààb** or **m̀̀ngistìk̀̀n-bààb**, which involves an NP expressing a possessive relation. This type of NP is discussed in section 2.2.

#### 4. Body part nouns/ possessor ascension

In the past, there has been some controversy about inalienable possession in Dizi, the closest relative of the Sheko language. While Allan (1976) stated that body parts are inalienably possessed, this is contested by Claudi & Serzisko (1985), who claim that the Dizi possessive constructions involving body part nouns represent the phenomenon of possessor promotion in which the possessor occurs with locative case. Recently, the idea of possessor promotion or possessor ascension has come under attack itself. More precisely, the underlying assumption that the alienable (‘normal’) construction and the inalienable (‘promoted’) construction have the same meaning appears not to hold (Chappel & McGregor 1996: 7). The inalienable construction expresses that the person, i.e. the whole, is affected, whereas the alienable construction does not take the whole into account but focusses on the part. Since the semantics are different, both constructions are equal and a speaker can describe a situation with regard to the whole or the part by choosing one or the other. In other words, discourse features play a role in the choice between a ‘normal’ possessive and a ‘promoted’ possessive construction. The term possessor ascension is used here as a label for the construction described in section 4.1 below.

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<sup>2</sup> Without **-baab** one gets a benefactive/recipient reading.

gyan-n-s      yi-s      kéta      m̀̀ngistì-k̀̀n      t̄-k̄  
 coffee-DEF-M DEM-M all      government-DAT COP-REAL.STI  
 ‘All this coffee is for the government’ (e.g. to be given as a form of  
 taxes)

The following section shows that possessor ascension is the neutral way of presenting body part nouns in Sheko. It also illustrates the different semantics of possessor ascension and attributive possession constructions with examples.

#### 4.1 Possessor ascension in Sheko

Possessor ascension occurs not only with persons and their body parts, but also with inanimate possessors and their parts. These parts are often expressed by the same body part noun, as in the examples (35-36). Body part nouns in Sheko occur almost never in a possessive noun phrase, but nearly always in a construction with dative case marking on the possessor (35-36). Thus, a construction with possessed body part nouns can be compared with a predicative clause denoting a possessive relation (37), also illustrated in section 3 above.

- (35) bakaf-ñ-s-kñ      aʃu ʃān-á-kō  
 stool-DEF-M-DAT leg be\_broken-3ms-REAL.STI  
 ‘The stools’ leg is broken.’
- (36) endriyàs-kñ      aʃu ʃān-á-kō  
 Endrias-DAT leg be\_broken-3ms-REAL.STI  
 ‘Endrias’ leg is broken.’
- (37) endriyàs-kñ      mèkinì      kì-á-kō  
 Endrias-DAT car be-3ms-REAL.STI  
 ‘Endrias has a car.’ (lit. to Endriyas there is a car)

Word order may be changed in predicative possessive clauses, but not in possessor ascension. Compare example (36) with (38).

- (38) \*aʃu endriyàs-kñ ʃān-á-kō  
 leg Endrias-DAT be\_broken-3ms-REAL.STI  
 intended ‘Endrias’ leg is broken.’  
 possible with benefactive interpretation ? ‘a leg has been broken for Endrias’

Let us first observe that, unlike in other languages, in Sheko and Dizi only body part nouns are expressed with the inalienable possessive construction, whereas in most other languages, according to Payne (1997: 105) even in *all* other languages, also kinship terms are included. The

two examples below show that Sheko encodes both ordinary (alienable) things and kinship terms by possessive noun phrases.

- (39) endriyàs byàk'̀n̄ f̄ān-á-k̄  
 Endrias spear be\_broken-3ms-REAL.STI  
 'Endrias' spear is broken.'
- (40) endriyàs dādù s̄āg-ítî  
 Endrias child see-2pl.Q  
 'Have you seen Endrias' child?'

However, Sheko is not alone in treating kin and body parts differently. In their typological survey, Chappel & McGregor (1996) conclude that languages differ regarding the categories they treat as inalienable. Kin, body parts, bodily fluids and spatial relations terms may all be viewed as inalienable, but languages may consider only a subset as inalienable. Like Sheko, many Australian languages treat body parts but not kin as inalienable (Dixon 1980: 293). In other languages, such as Ewe, kin and spatial terms but not body parts are inalienable (Ameka 1996: 827f).

Secondly, a construction employed with inalienable possession is usually morphologically less marked/complex than a construction employed with alienable possession. However, the reverse holds in the Dizoid languages, as was already noted by Claudi & Serzisko (1985: 134). In Sheko, the construction with body part nouns makes use of a dative case marker on the possessor noun phrase, whereas in constructions with other nouns the two noun phrases are juxtaposed without intervening phonological material. The 'markedness' of the inalienable construction in Dizi was one of the reasons why Claudi and Serzisko analysed it as possessor promotion. However, Claudi and Serzisko's analysis of possessor promotion to a locative case is equally not in line with what one usually finds in languages: possessors are commonly "promoted to" a direct object or an indirect object, not to a locative (1985: 141). The Dizi case marker in question is **-kɲ**. Without going into much detail, the latest description of Dizi gives **-kɲ** as a genitive, not a locative, and **-is** as a dative case. For an overview of Dizi case marking, see Beachy (2005). While a genitive or dative case are frequently attested in possessive constructions in the languages of the world, the marking of inalienable possession by a case marker in the Dizoid languages remains

atypical. Therefore, future research should look for an explanation of how this came to be.

#### 4.2 Semantic differences between possessor ascension and attributive possession

As was said above, body parts often occur in the possessor ascension construction. Two more Sheko examples are given below. Sentence (41) is about traditional Sheko marriage customs and sentence (42) is taken from a fable.

- (41) yí-nàswà-k̀ǹ                      ááb-a              séé-r-í-k'yá-m  
 3FS.POSS-husband-DAT eye-ACC see-NEG-3fs-leave-IRR  
 ‘She didn’t see her husbands’ face.’
- (42) ás-k̀ǹ      éd-k'̀à              yí-bàr-ñ              twèèt-wèè      ás-k̀ǹ  
 3MS-DAT mouth-LOC 3fs-throw-DS IDEO              3MS-DAT  
foori-k'̀à      há-gé-b-àà-s-tà  
 throat-LOC 3ms-say-REL-PROX-M-LOC2  
 ‘She threw [the hot pebble] in his mouth, and while it said ‘tweet-wee’ in his throat (while his throat got burned)...’

There are basically two contexts in which body parts occur in attributive possessive noun phrases. The first context is where the body part is alienable, i.e. there is no part-whole relation between the possessor and the possessum, but a different one, e.g. a relation of ownership. Thus, the bone in (43) is not part of the body of the speaker, but it is an animal bone which the subject had given to the addressee to eat. Another example is (16), repeated here as (44) for convenience. The sentence tells about a tanned cow hide, not about the skin of a living cow.

- (43) ñ-ūūs-ñ-s-ā                                      āts-ē              yí-gē-ñ  
 1SG.POSS-bone-DEF-M-ACC give.IMP-STI 3fs-say-DS  
 ‘“Give my bone,” she said...’
- (44) ōtì      bāācī      án-ṅ-kì-b              tengì      bàtà  
 cow skin put-NEG2-be-REL tree.sp on  
íjī-sok'-u-kì-b-is  
 3pl-sleep-u-be-REL-DEM.M  
 ‘those who didn’t use a cow hide, what they were sleeping on was *tengi*.’



The second context in which a possessive noun phrase is used, places emphasis on the possessor. Example (45) below makes this very clear: only clause (b) can follow (a) as an explanation, (c) cannot. It is of course possible to use a possessor ascension construction, but then again the semantics change (46).

- (45) a. wosa hà-z n̄-kùʃsū-kā n̄-ts'áf-ù-kō  
 letter PROX-M 1SG.POSS-hand-INSTR 1sg-write-u-REAL.STI  
 'I wrote this letter by my (own) hand.'
- b. ts'àhafi-n̄-s nā-ŋ ts'af-ar-á-kì-kō  
 clerk-DEF-M 1SG-DAT write-NEG-3ms-be-REAL.STI  
 'The clerk didn't write it for me.'
- c. \*n̄-kòmpùtèrì-kā ts'af-en-kì-kō  
 1SG.POSS-computer-INSTR write-NEG:1sg-be-REAL.STI  
 'I didn't write it on the computer.'
- (46) wosa hà-z nā-ŋ kùʃsú-ka n̄-ts'áf-ù-kō  
 letter PROX-M 1SG-DAT hand-INSTR 1sg-write-u-REAL.STI  
 'I wrote this letter by (my) hand.' (not on the computer)

Another example is given in (47).

- (47) íʃ-gāyd-n̄-s ʔyáát-n̄-s-əb há-fòòt-àb-ērā  
 3PL.POSS-problem-DEF-M be\_big-DEF-M-REL 3ms-become-REL-ACC  
n̄-ʔāāb-kā n̄-sēē-kō  
 1SG.POSS-eye-INSTR 1sg-see-REAL.STI  
 'I saw with my own eyes that their problem is enormous.'

Notice that in the examples (45a) and (47) the possessor is the same as the subject/agent of the verb. It may not surprise that a reflexive in Sheko makes use of a possessor prefix and the noun for 'head' (48). Here too, the sentence is not about the part (the head) but very much about the whole, i.e. the possessor, who is at the same time the subject/agent. Compare (48) with the idiomatic (49), which is used as a warning for unruly children.

- (48) hā-gērì kóót-ə  
 2SG.POSS-head watch.IMP-STI  
 'Watch (it) yourself' / 'Look after it yourself'

- (49) yē-k̀n̄      g̀r̀i      k̀óót  
 2SG-DAT head watch.IMP  
 ‘Watch your head’ (i.e. ‘Beware’)

Thus, it appears that possessor ascension is an unmarked way to talk about possessed body parts, whereas a possessive noun phrase with body parts puts emphasis on the possessor or indicates that the body part is alienable.

### 4.3 Spatial terms

In Sheko, as in many other languages, most spatial terms (locational nouns) are related to body parts. A table is given below.

g̀r̀i	‘head’	g̀r̀i-k’`à	‘on top of’
bow	‘belly’	bow-k’`à	‘in, under’
ʃíʃú	‘side’	ʃíʃ-tà	‘at the side of, near’
adi	‘footprint’	adi-k’`à	‘after, behind’
s̄n̄	‘forehead’	saantà	‘in front of, before’

Table 3. Locational body part nouns

Spatial terms occur with possessor ascension.<sup>3</sup> Two examples are given in (50) and (51).

- (50) kyaan-s      ás-k̀n̄      g̀r̀i-r̄ā      ʔyááná-k̀n̄      bow-k’`à  
 dog:DEF-M 3MS-DAT head-ACC pot-DAT belly-LOC  
 tóórá      há-ẁusk-ù-t̄  
 downward 3ms-enter-u-SS  
 ‘The dog entered his head down in the pot and he...’
- (51) téréʃ-n̄-s-ā      taamu-k̀n̄      ʃíʃ-tà      tóót-ō  
 coffee\_pot-DEF-M-ACC fire-DAT side-LOC2 erect.IMP-STI  
 ‘Put the coffee pot next to the fire’

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<sup>3</sup> Since spatial terms are often derived from body parts, it is plausible that a language treats both as inalienable, but not necessarily so: Ewe distinguishes the two, treating spatial terms as ‘inalienable’ and body parts as ‘alienable’ (see Ameka 1996: 810ff for an explanation).

Likewise, inherent parts of a location may be treated as a body part.

- (52) *hàà-z kyaan-s kàcawó-k'à [eʔi-k̀n]*  
 PROX-M dog:DEF-M still up.there-LOC stone-DAT  
*kop'arà-k'̀à há-bààs-k̀i-k*  
 open.space.in.forest.or.stone-LOC 3ms-want-be-REAL  
 'Here the dog is still searching over there at the rock's crevices.'

Locational body parts are not only used in the spatial frame, but also in the time frame, as shown in example (53).

- (53) *íʃ-ts'yāāts'-ū-t-íʃi c'òr-ʃ-àb-k̀n adi-k'̀à*  
 3pl-tie-u-SS-3pl finish-CAUS-REL-DAT footprint-LOC  
*p'èet'̀à búúts-ú-t̄*  
 thatch mow-u-SS  
 'after they finish tying they cut the thatch and...' (lit. in the foot-prints to their finishing)

## 5. Conclusion

Attributive possession in Sheko takes the form of possessive noun phrases, in which the head, i.e. the possessum, is marked tonally for being modified. Possessive noun phrases headed by **baab** 'father' or **bé** 'mother' are discussed in particular. This construction can be utilized to assert ownership, a central relationship between possessor and possessum. **baab** 'father' and **bé** 'mother' are grammaticalized to nominalizers and thus occur also in other constructions. Possessive noun phrases with **baab** show a peculiarity in gender marking. When **baab** 'father' is made definite, the construction becomes ungrammatical; instead, **bé** 'mother' plus the masculine definiteness marking must be used. The use of **bé** irrespective of gender is peculiar since the language has masculine as its default gender. The gender situation for Proto-Omotic is unclear, because present-day Omotic languages vary in their use of grammatical gender (e.g. Bender 2007: 736-742). Some languages have feminine as their default gender, others, like Sheko, masculine. The behavior of **bé** might point to a historical shift in default gender.

Predicative possession is similar to existential predication, which corroborates typological findings. The possessum is the subject of the

predicate whereas the possessor is marked by the dative. According to Herslund & Baron (2001: 9), predicative possession can be divided into two types, of which one has the possessor as a topic, and the other the possessum. Sheko happens to use only one of these types: only the possessum can be the subject in predicative possession. Moreover, it is not a topic, which is proven by the absence of definiteness marking. The asymmetry is caused by the function of predicative possession, which typically asserts possession and thus presents the possessum as a new referent, similar to the existential construction, which also typically introduces a new participant.

The possessor ascension construction in Sheko makes use of a dative case marker on the possessor noun phrase, whereas in constructions with other nouns the two noun phrases are juxtaposed without intervening phonological material. Besides, possession ascension is grammatically different from the predicative possession construction, in that the order possessor-possessum may not be reversed. Body parts occur frequently in the possessor ascension construction. A similar situation occurs in the related language Dizi, which gave rise to an discussion in which Alan (1976) claimed that Dizi shows inalienable possession, whereas Claudi & Serzisko (1985) argued Dizi employs possessor promotion. However, the underlying assumption in the argument appears not to hold, i.e. the alienable ('normal') construction and the inalienable (ascension) construction do not have the same meaning (Chappel & McGregor 1996: 7). In opposition to a possessive noun phrase, which more or less focuses on the possessor, i.e. the whole, possessor ascension basically centralizes the possessed, i.e. the part. This has been demonstrated with body part nouns: possessor ascension is the means to present (inalienable) possessed body parts, whereas a possessive noun phrase with body parts puts emphasis on the possessor or indicates that the body part is alienable. Spatial terms involving body part nouns behave in the same way. The marking of inalienable possession by a case marker in the Dizoid languages remains atypical, since a construction employed with inalienable possession is usually morphologically less marked/complex than one employed with alienable possession.

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### Abbreviations

ACC	accusative	<b>-əra</b>	LOC2	general locative	<b>-ta</b>
CAUS	causative	<b>-s</b>	M	masculine	
COND	conditional	<b>-nta</b>	NEG	negation marker	<b>ara</b>
COP	copula	<b>tə</b>	NEG2	negation marker	<b>n</b>
DAT	dative	<b>kn</b>	PASS	passive	<b>-t'</b>
DEF	definiteness	<b>-n</b>	PL	plural	
DEM	demonstrative		POSS	possessor	
DS	different subject converb	<b>-n</b>	POT	potential	<b>-a</b>
F	feminine		PROX	proximal demon- strative	<b>ha</b>
H	High tone		Q	question marking	
IDEO	ideophone		REAL	realis declarative	<b>-k</b>
ELAT	elative		REL	relative	
IMP	imperative		SG	singular	
INSTR	instrumental	<b>-ka</b>	SS	same subject con- verb	<b>-tə</b>
IRR	irrealis declara- tive	<b>-m</b>	STI	indirect stance	
L	Low tone		TPCLZ	topicalizer	
LOC	locative	<b>-k'a</b>			

Pronouns and possessor prefixes are written in SMALL CAPITALS, verbal subject clitics in normal small letters.

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