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SHORT COMMUNICATION

Genitive Construction in Àhàn and Àyèré

Michael A. Abiọdun, Jelili A. Adeoye* and **Idris O. Allison**

Department of Linguistics & Nigerian Languages, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

*E-mail address: adeoyejelly@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Àhàn and Àyèré are two endangered languages spoken respectively in Nigeria. This paper describes the process of genitive construction in the two languages showing how close they are to some Benue – Congo languages in the derivation of genitive. Findings show that genitive marker in both Àhàn and Àyèré is / **ólí** / as found in some Benue-Congo languages such as Yorùbá, Igede, Èbìrà and Ukaan. The paper further reports that Àyèré has another marker /**óní**/ that appears to perform the function of deriving genitive ,however the marker, along with the nominal prefix /**a**/, derive a form that has the semantic coding of "a person who does a particular thing".

*Keywords***:** endangered languages, Benue - Congo languages, Ahan, Ayere

1. INTRODUCTION

Àhàn is spoken by a group of migrants located in two quarters; Obádóore and Ìkọta in Òmùò-Èkìtì, a Yoruba speaking community in Èkìtì State of Nigeria. Àyèré, on the hand, is spoken in a community also called Àyèré in Kogí State also in Nigeria. The two linguistic communities are separated by about fifty kilometres with a number of communities that speak different languages between them. Such communities include Ìgáṣí, Èrìtì and Àjọwá.

Speakers of Àhàn and Àyèré speak Yorùbá fluently because they live within the Yorùbá territory and interact with Yorùbá speakers on daily basis. The two languages are endangered because Yorùbá language has encroached on them, and Yorùbá has become the language used in almost all domains. The two languages are reserved for the home domain when intimate matters are being discussed, (Abiọdun 2007). Neither of these languages is mutually intelligible with Yorùbá, and as scholars have noted the level of mutual intelligibility between the two languages is very low (Abiọdun 2007, Fadoro 2013).

Very little is published on these two languages. However, there are unpublished research works that describe aspects of the grammar of the languages. Such works include Fadọrọ (2013). Other scholars who have worked on the genetic classification of the languages include Blench (2012), Adeniyi and Ojo (2005) and Elugbe (2007). A detailed work on the morphology of the languages is yet to be carried out. The present paper is an effort to fill the gap by looking at an aspect of the morphology of the languages. Specifically, the paper describes the derivation of the genitive nouns in the two languages.

Apart from documenting aspects of the language, this paper is motivated by the need to compare the grammatical structures of these languages with those of languages around them. This is important because it has the potential of helping linguists present a classification that is based on data. As would be shown in the paper genitive construction in Àhàn and Àyèré is much more similar to what obtains in some Benue-Congo languages that include Èbìrà, Igede, Ùkàán and Yorùbá.

2. GENITIVE NOUNS

Genitive nouns are formed in a number of Benue-Congo languages through the prefixation of a morpheme that semantically denotes ownership, dealership, vocation, attributes and some other meanings. Abiọdun (2005) demonstrates that this process is robust in four Benue-congo languages, namely Èbìrà, Igede, Ukaan and Yorùbá. One important point noticed in Abiọdun (2005) is that the prefix in the four languages alternates between/oní/and /olí/. /oli/ is predominantly used in Igede while the other three languages use /oni/. It is also reported in the study that Yorùbá has two variants of the morpheme /oni/. One is realised with final mid tone while the other is realised with final high tone. The two variants: /oní/ and /oni/ are used for different semantic purposes. The realization of the morpheme in the languages is demonstrated in the examples below:

1) a. Ebira

oní̃ # iresi	→ oníresi	owner of\ dealer in rice
oní̃ # úrómì	→ onúrómì	owner of\ dealer in orange
oní̃ # apapa	→ anapapa	owner of\dealer in maize
oní̃ # ètṣúká	→ ẹnètṣúkà	owner of\ dealer in cassava

b. Igede

oli # idzu	→ olidzu	owner of\dealer in yam
oli # ogbi	→ ologbi	owner of\dealer in guinea-corn
oli # ọlẹma	→ ọlẹma	owner of\ dealer in salt
oli # ọlagbụ	→ ọlagbụ	owner of\ dealer in ashes

c. Ukaań

ọnî́ # ìkàs	→ ọníkas	king\owner of a town
ọnî́ # èkèrè	→ ọnékèrè	owner of\ dealer in pots
ọnî́ # ụfa	→ ọnụ́fà	owner of\ dealer in leaves
ọnî́ # èǹ̰do	→ ọnèǹ̰àdó	owner of\dealer in maize

d. Yorùbá

i.

oní # ewé	→ eléwé	owner of\dealer in leaves
oní # aṣọ	→ aláṣọ	owner of\ dealer in clothes
oní # ọsàn	→ ọlọ́sàn	owner of \dealer in oranges
oní # èwà	→ ẹlẹ́wà	owner of \dealer in beans

ii.

oni # òṣì	→ olóṣì	a pauper
oni # èṣù	→ elésù	devil's incarnate
oni # ọ́tè̩	→ ọlọ́tè̩	a rebel

A number of phonological processes are noticed in the derivation Abiọdun (2005: 9) lists the processes to include:

  (i).   The final vowel of the morphemes is deleted in the four languages

  (ii).   There is allomorphic variation of the genitive marker along full vowel harmony constraint in Èbìrà and Igede

 (iii).   There is tone realignment in Yorùbá and Ukaan after vowel deletion, a process not operative in Èbìrà and Igede

 (iv).   Nasalization of the initial vowel of the stem occurs in cases where /n/ does not change to /l/ [onî́ # íresi → onî́resi] "owner of/ dealer in rice" (see (1a))

  (v).   Assimilation across segment occurs in Yorùbá and Èbìrà ([oni # ewé → enewe → eléwé] "owner of \ dealer in leaves").

A major observation in the derivation of genitive nouns in the four languages is that the process is robust and systematic. This observation leads Abiọdun (2005: 10) to conclude that the languages share a common origin. "The similarity in the derivation of genitive noun in the languages is further evidence that they have a common origin".

2. 1. Genitive construction in Àhàn

A critical observation in the derivation of genitive nouns in Àhàn shows that it shares a number of similarities with what obtains in the languages mentioned in section 2 above. For instance, the morpheme is consistently /ólí/, which differs only in the area of tone from what obtains in Igede. Unlike Igede however, the morpheme does not manifest allomorphic variation, something similar to Yorùbá and Ùkàán. We present data in (3) to illustrate the derivation.

3a.

ólí # áṣá	→ álásá	owner of\ dealer in dog
ólí # atṣọ	→ álátṣọ	owner of \ dealer in clothes
ólí # ethu	→ éléthu	owner of \ dealer in fish
ólí # éléó	→ éléó	owner of money \ wealthy person
ólí # ekpu	→ élékpu	owner of \dealer in palmoil

ólí # órírò → ólórírò	owner of \ dealer in pepper
ólí # ode → ólóde	owner of \ dealer in house
ólí # ibata → ólíbata	owner of \ dealer in shoes
ólí # uṣu → ólúṣu	owner of \ dealer in yam
ólí # ùjù → ólújù	owner of \ dealer in farm
ólí # ẹmọ → ẹlẹmo	owner of \ dealer in palm wine
ólí # èkpà → ẹlẹ́kpà	owner of \ dealer in groundnut

b.

ólí # ẹ́ngbá → ẹlẹ́gbá	wise person
ólí #ìmọ̀ → ólímọ̀	wise\knowledgeable person
ólí # àràn → áláràn	drummer
ólí # òhò → ólóhò	trader
ólí # yèyẹ́ → ólíyèyè	jester
ólí # òsòsó → ólósòsò	gossip
ólí # ifá → ólífá	diviner

Three phonological processes are in operation in the derivations in (3) above, as stated in 4.

4 (i).   deletion of the final vowel of the genitive marker and vowel assimilation across segment where the root begins a vowel other than /i/ and /or /u/

ólí # usu → ólúsu	'owner of/dealer in yam'
ólí # ẹ́ngbá → ẹ́lẹ́ngbá	'wise person'
ólí # aran → áláran	'drummer'
ólí # ethu → éléthu	'owner/dealer in fish'

(ii).   realignment of tone of the deleted final vowel of the genitive marker

ólí # òhò → ólóhò	'trader'
ólí # usu → ólúsu	owner of / dealer in yam

Looking back at the data in (3), attention is called to the fact that the morpheme (genitive morpheme) has the semantic denotation of ownership, dealership, vocation and attributes as found in Yorùbá, (Taiwo 2011, Abiodun and Ajiboye 2015).

The examples in (5) attest to this:

5. (i)   Ownership/Dealership

ólí # áṣá → álaṣá	owner of\ dealer in dog
ólí # atṣọ → álátṣọ	owner of \ dealer in clothes
ólí # ethu → éléthu	owner of \ dealer in fish
ólí # éléó → éléó	owner of money \ wealthy person
ólí # ekpu → élékpu	owner of \dealer in palm oil
ólí # órírò → ólórírò	owner of \ dealer in pepper
ólí # ode → ólóde	owner of\dealer in house

(ii) Vocation

          ólí # árán → áláràn   'drummer'
          ólí # ífá → ólífá   'diviner'
          ólí # íjú → ólíjú   'dancer'

(iii) Attributes

          ólí # yèyẹ́ → ólíyẹ̀yẹ̀   'a jester'
          ólí # òsòsó → ólósòsò   'person who gossips'
          ólí # ẹ́ngbá → ẹ́lẹ́ngbá   'wise person'

2. 2. Genitive construction in Àyèré

     Àyèré like Àhàn manifests /ólí/ as a genitive marker. However, Àyèré uses additional morpheme / óní / which may suggest to a casual observer to as a second genitive morpheme. As would be argued in this paper,/ólí/ is the only genitive morpheme in Àyèré. We present data below to show the manifestation of both /ólí/ and /óní/.

6a. ólí- prefix

          ólí # ùbọ́ → ólúbọ́   'owner of/ dealer in guns'
          ólí # alè → ólálè   'owner of/dealer in land(sales)'
          ólí # èlè → ólélè   'owner of /dealer in beans'
          ólí # àjá → ólájà   'owner of house/landlord'
          ólí # ẹna → ólẹ́na   'owner of /dealer in meat (butcher)'
          ólí # owù → ólówù   'owner of /dealer in salt
          ólí # ekpu → ólékpu   'owner of / dealer in (palm) oil'
          ólí # ọwà→ ólọ́wà   'owner of / dealer in farm'
          ólí # áʃwá → óláʃwá   'owner of / dealer in dogs'
          ólí # ùlò → ólúlò   'drummer'
          ólí # àkì → óláki   'owner of/dealer in cloth'
          ólí # ẹ́lẹ́ → ólẹ́lẹ́   'owner of money/ wealthy person'

     Allison (2015) presents what he considers a second genitive form in the examples below,

6b. óní- prefix

          óní # àkirin → ónaᷓkirin   'person who/that sings(singer)'
          óní # àlulo → ónaᷓlulu   'person who/that drums (drummer)'
          óní # àjiju → ónaᷓjiju   'person who /that dances(dancer)'
          óní # àpojina → ónaᷓpojinà   'person who /that tell lies'
          óní # apenata → ónaᷓpenatá   'person that sells slaughtered animal(butcher)'
          óní # àbògú → ónaᷓbògú   'person who /that worship god of iron'
          óní # àdífá → ónaᷓdífá   'person who/that practises divination'
          óní # àtaja → ónaᷓtaja   'person who /that sells products'
          óní # àsòfofo → ónaᷓsòfófó   'person who /that gossips'
          óní # àsolòwù → ónaᷓsolowu   'person who/ that secures the road'

Looking at the data in (6a), the prefixed morpheme /ólí/ behaves like the morpheme in Àhàn. It indicates ownership, as in[ólí + ọwà→ olọ́wà] *owner of farm*, dealership as in [ólí + aki → óláki] *dealer in clothes*, and vocation as in [ólí + ulo → ólúlo] *drummer*. The derivation goes through two of the phonological processes mentioned in respect of Àhàn in (4) above. They are:

(i) deletion of the final vowel of the genitive prefix
(ii) tone realignment after the vowel deletion

Assimilation across segment does not operate in the derivation as was observed in respect of Ukaan and Igede in section 2.0 above.

The morpheme in (6a) differs from the one in (6b) in the sense that the morpheme has the alveolar nasal /n/ in 6b, but the alveolar lateral /l/ in 6a. In addition to /l-n/ segments interchange, the two forms (6a & 6b) do not reflect similar meaning. Whereas the morpheme semantically reflects ownership/dealership in 6a, it reflects the performer of an action or a person who does something either as a vocation or an attribute in 6b. For instance, in relation to vocation we have /óní + apenatá → ónàpenatá/ *butcher*, /óní + atajà → ónátajà/ *trader*, and in terms of attribute we have /óní + àpojinà → ónápojinà/ *liar*, /óní + àsòfòfò → ónásòfòfò/ *a gossip*. Another interesting thing about the morpheme / óní -/ is that it is normally attached to an intermediate form that is derived through the prefixation of a nominal prefix /a-/ to a verb phrase, e.g.

(7)   a   +   lu   #   ùlò → *alùlò 'that/who beat drum'
    Nom. prefix   beat   drum

    a   +   tá   #   ajá → *atájá 'that/who sell goods'
    Nom. prefix   sell   goods

The intermediate forms in (7) do not reflect the art or act of actions like /alùlò/ *who beat drum*, /atájá/ *who/that sell goods*. It does not point to a specific person involved in the art or act. By merging /óní/, which means person in the language to the derived forms in (7) we get a full meaning "person who does x" where x denotes the art or act, e.g.

(8)   óní   #   a   +   lùlò   →   person who beats drums.
    Agentive prefix   Nom. prefix   beat drum(art/act)

    óní   #   a   +   tájá   →   person who sells goods
    Agentive prefix   Nom. prefix   sell goods

The addition of /óní/ 'person' makes the references specific. Interestingly, the form of derivation contained in (7) is found in the Yorùbá language, as in (9).

(9a) Agentive/Nom. Prefix   VP
        a   +   dífá   →   adífá   'diviner'
        a   +   bọ̀gún   →   abọ̀gún   'ògún worshipper'
        a   +   gbẹ́dó   →   agbẹ́dó   'mortal carver'
        a   +   sẹ́wó   →   asẹ́wó   'sex worker/prostitute'

a	+	kòwe	→	akòwé	'secretary'
a	+	sọ̀nà	→	asọ̀nà	'usher'
a	+	kọrin	→	akọrin	'singer'

The derived forms are well-formed lexical items in Yorùbá, unlike in Àyèré where similar derivations are intermediate forms. These derived forms in Yorùbá refer to agents of something, art or act without being specific about a person. The forms would have to take a modifier such as 'yẹn' *that*, 'yìí' *this*, to make specific reference, e.g.

(9b)   adífá yìí   'this diviner'
         akọrin yẹn   'that singer'
         alùlù yẹn   'that drummer'
         akòwé yìí   'this secretary'

The question that comes to mind is whether /óní-/ in Àyèré should be considered a genitive marker, thereby positing /ólí/ and /óní/ as the two genitive morphemes in the language. While such postulation is quite possible based on the manifestation of the two forms across Benue-Congo languages as discussed in section 2 of this paper, we, however, found that /óní/ behaves more like an agentive marker than a genitive marker in Àyèré. Consistently it maintains the meaning of a person who performs a given action. Its environment of occurrence is different from the genitive morpheme /ólí/ which occurs mainly with basic nouns. The /óní/ on the other hand is prefixed to an intermediate form derived from the prefixation of /a/ to a verb phrase as illustrated in (7) above. The submission based on the differences between /ólí/ and /óní/ leads us to postulate that /óní/ is not a genitive marker; rather it is an agentive marker.

3. GENERAL OVERVIEW

The presentations so far show that Àhàn and Àyèré share a lot of similarities with Èbìrà, Igede, Ùkàán and Yorùbá, as far as genitive construction is concerned. It was mentioned in section 1. of this paper that some scholars, relying on similarities in some areas in the grammatical structures of Àhàn, Àyèré and Yorùbá suggest that the languages are dialects of Yorùbá, (Adeniyi and Ojo 2005). Our contention here is that such similarities should be investigated beyond the languages being compared; we should venture into the possibility of a common origin by looking at other languages in the family group. We have made reference, in this paper, to Abiọdun (2005) that states that similarities in the derivation of genitive construction in Èbìrà, Igede, Ùkàán and Yorùbá should be traced to the ancestor language; we share this position in this paper that the mode of derivation of genitive nouns in Àhàn and Àyèré be traced to Benue –Congo rather than the Yorùbá language. It must be noted that while other Benue- Congo languages use /ólí/ and /óní/ as genitive morpheme, Àyèré uses only /ólí/ for the purpose; however, /óní/ in the language in addition to a nominal prefix/a/ performs agentive function. Reference was also made to the suggestion that Àhàn and Àyèré should be classified under Edoid. We contend here that findings in this paper do not support the suggestion that Àhàn and Àyèré are Edoid languages. Relying on the derivation of genitive nouns presented in this paper, one may be tempted to declare that the languages fall

under Yoruboid. Edoid languages do not form genitive nouns through prefixation, rather it is reflected in sentence form. The authors (Abiodun, Adeoye & Allison) collected data on Bìní and Ẹsan/Ishan two Edoid languages. We illustrate in Ẹsan/Ishan

(11) Ẹsan/Ishan

(i)	ọnọ	mọ	amẹ̀	'owner of water'
	person	owns	water	

(ii)	ọnọ	mọ	iyan	'owner of yam'
	person	owns	yam	

(iii)	ọnọ	mọ	isàìwè	'owner of groundnut'
	person	owns	groundnut	

(iv)	ọnọ	mọ	úpọn	'owner of cloth/gown'
	Person	owns	cloth	

One cannot deny the resemblance between /óní/ólí/ in Yorùbá and /ọnọ/ in Ẹsan, however, the mode of derivation differs. Yoruba derives the genitive form through prefixation, Ẹsan and other Edoid languages that we studied derive genitive forms through construction of full sentences. More comparative work is required in different areas of the grammars of these languages with other Yoruboid and Edoid languages so as to get a clearer picture.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper serves as a documentation of an aspect of the morphology of two endangered languages that do not have codified forms. The paper also reveals the similarities of /ólí/ as gentive morpheme in Àyèré and Àhàn. Furthermore, the paper contributes to the thesis in Abiodun (2005) that the derivation of genitive nouns through the prefixation of /oní, óní/, ólí/ọlị̀ may be a feature that is traceable to the Proto-Benue-Congo language. The paper demonstrates that not only Èbìrà, Igede, Ùkàán and Yorùbá share /oní/, /olí/ and /ọ́lị́/ forms, Àyèré and Àhàn also manifest the morpheme/ólí/,and similar phonological processes are invoked to derive genitive nouns.

Finally, the paper calls for further investigation into the similarities between Àhàn, Àyèré and Edoid languages on the one hand , and between these languages and Yorubiod languages on the other hand so as to have useful pieces of evidence on which their classification could be based.

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