GENITIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN NIGER–CONGO

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Order of Genitive and Noun in Niger-Congo (Dryer 2005)
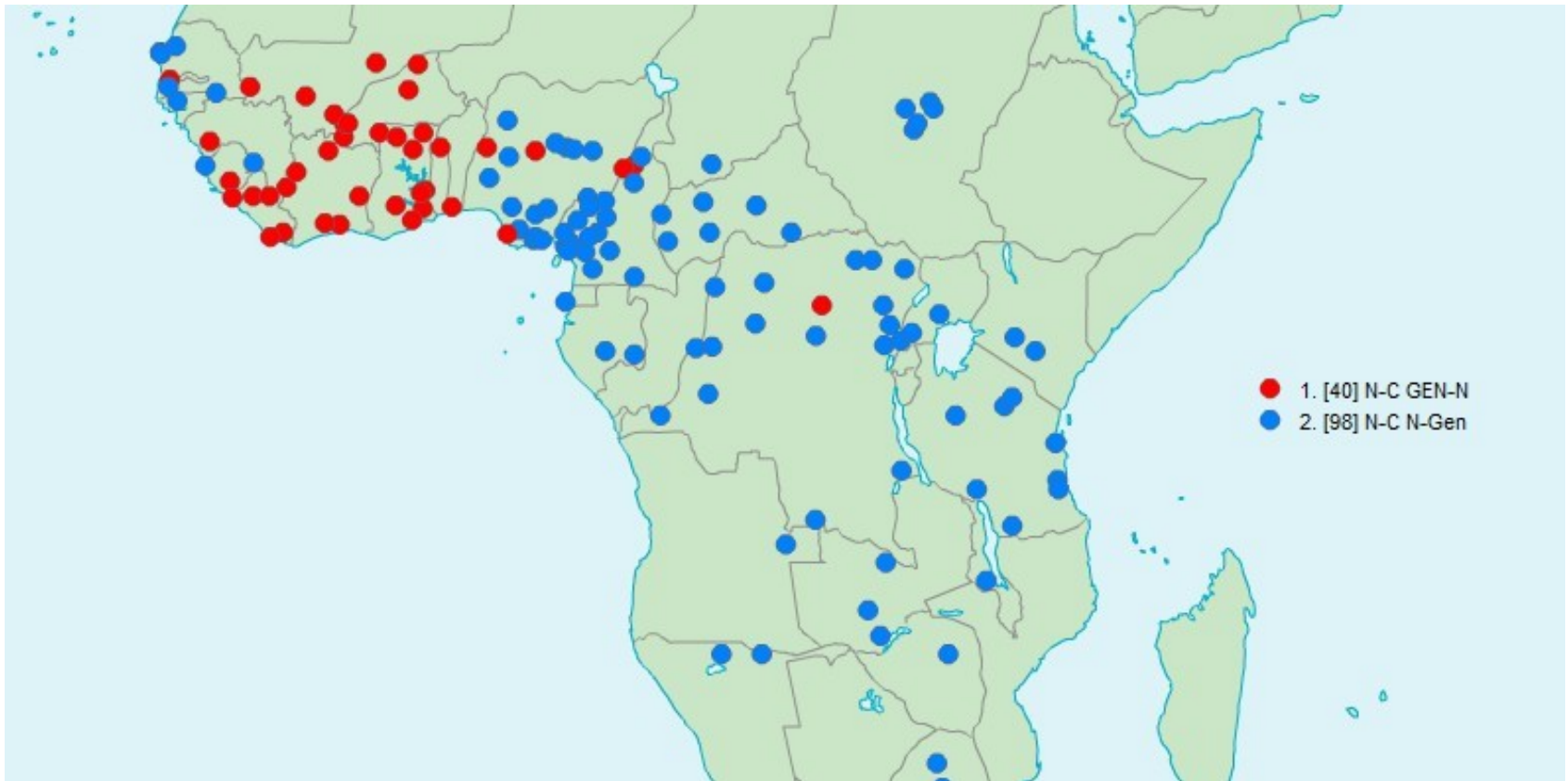
Conceptual and terminological preliminaries:

- **Genitive constructions** are constructions in which a nominal expression modifies another nominal expression

- They change the propositional act function of a nominal expression from reference to modification.

Modification by means of genitive constructions can serve to:

- classify

  a man of God

- qualify

  a thing of beauty

- identify

  a picture of Salka / Salka's picture

- **Possessive constructions** are genitive constructions that are used to identify the intended referent of the head noun.

- Possessive constructions restrict the potential referents of the possessee to those that have a link with a well identified possessor, without specifying the nature of that link.

- Prototypical possessors are inherently identifiable in a discourse context, such as proper names, kin terms and prototypical owners are also human.

▪ One possible link between possessee and possessor is ownership:

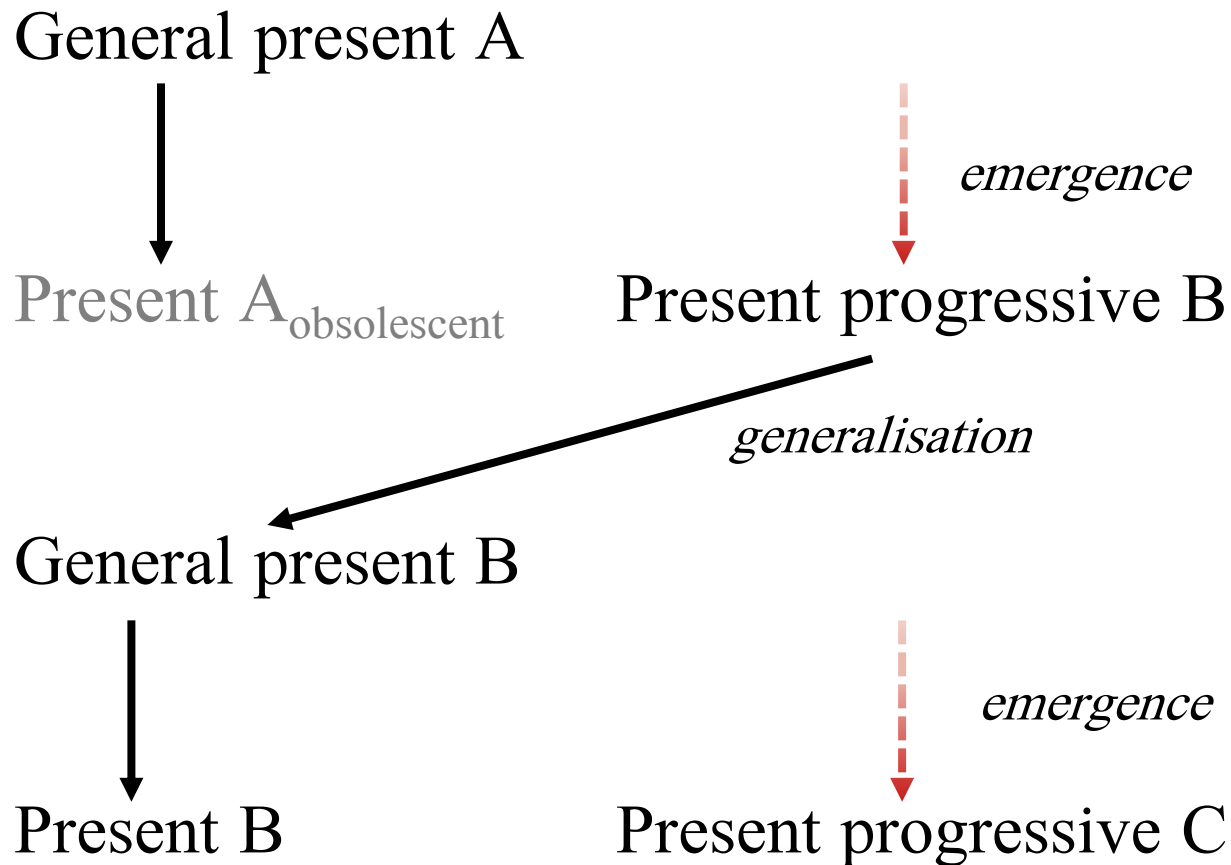*Salka's picture* → a picture owned by Salka

(versus, e.g., *depicting Salka, taken by Salka* as other possible possessive links)

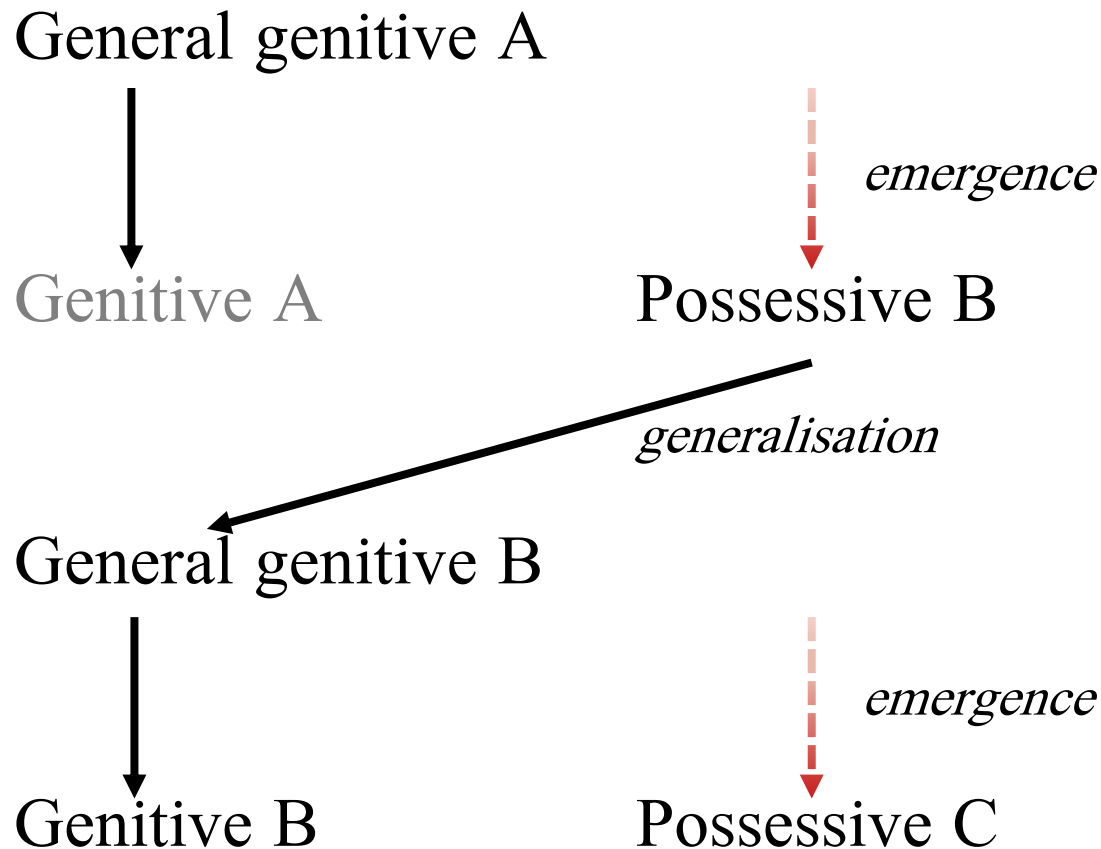Genitive: type of construction

Possessive: type of genitive construction, used to identify

Ownership: type of possessive link

Well-known **cycle of TAM innovation** in Niger-Congo:

General present A

$\downarrow$

Present A$_{\text{obsolescent}}$ Present progressive B

emergence

generalisation

General present B

$\downarrow$

Present B   Present progressive C

emergence

We find the same recurrent evolution in the domain of genitives all over Niger-Congo (albeit at a slower pace):

General genitive A

Genitive A   Possessive B

emergence

generalisation

General genitive B

Genitive B   Possessive C

emergence

Two main types of genitive constructions that emerge to express linguistic possession or ownership:

1) AMAR: the modifier is turned into a referential expression ("nominalised") and put in apposition with the head nominal: *'X, the one of Y'*

2) The modifier is expressed by a relative clauses of the type *'that is at/with/like Y'*

☞ Origin of the Bantu connective / associative construction.

(✋ Both are not mutually incompatible: **'X, the one that is at Y'**)

The innovative possessive constructions:

- may or may not change word order;

- are never less morphologically marked than the original, and never show stronger prosodic integration;

- may add head marking or dependent marking.

(1) Moba [mfq]; Central Gur (Kantchoa 2005)

    a. sàngbán-jú-l^L
       dog-head-10
       'a dog head'   [GenN] (classification)

    b. sàngbán-l-^{M} jù-l^L
       dog-10-GEN   head-10
       'the head of the dog'
       (*lit. 'that of the dog, the head') [GenN] (possession)

(2) Aja [ajg]; Gbe (Morley 2010)

    a. byàgù
       byà   ègù
       'beer bottle'   [GenN] (classification)

    b. fòtò   Kójó   tò
       photo Kojo   GEN
       'Kojo's photo'
       (*lit. 'the photo, that of Kojo')   [NGen] (possession)

(2) Aja [ajg]; Gbe (Morley 2010)

    a. byàgù   *èsù byà tò

       byà   èsù

       'beer bottle'

    b. fòtò   Kójó tò   or: Kójó fòtò

       photo Kojo GEN

       'Kojo's photo'

(3) Àshíbá fòtò Kójó tò

    'Kojo's photo of Ashiba'   [[GenN]Gen] (possession)

    * 'Ashiba's photo of Kojo'   *[Gen[NGen]]

(4) Mwera [mwe]; Bantu (Harries 1950)

    a. n͡y-umba   j-aːkwe   a-tati
       9-house   9-3SG.POSS   1a-my.father
       'my father's house'

    b. ci-lambo   c-aːkwe   Nankambe
       7-village   7-3SG.POSS   Nankambe
       'Nankambe's village'

    c. n͡y-umba   j-aːkwe
       9-house   9-3SG.POSS
       'his house'

(5) Mwera [mwe]; Bantu (Harries 1950: 60)

    a. n-twe   gw-aː=ŋombe

        3-head   3-CON=1a.cow

        'a cow head'   (classification)

    b. u-kulu   gw-aː=kwe   cuːla

        14-size   14-CON=3SG.POSS   1a-frog

         'the size of the frog'   (possession)

(6) Akoose [bss]; Bantu (Hedinger 2008)

Nzumɛ́   áwi   mwǎn

Nzume   his   child

'Nzume's child'

How can we identify the original word order in Niger-Congo branches?

Look at:

1) the genitive construction that is not dedicated to possession (and is the least marked);

2) the order of positional adpositions ('behind', 'inside', …);

3) the order of stems in petrified N-N compounds.

(7) Fam [fam]; unclassified Bantoid (data by Tope Olagunjo)

    a. jál   tāgbē   á
       yard chief   GEN
       'the yard of the chief'   NGen

    b. ɲīm   tɛ̄̃i
       liquid bone
       'bone marrow'   NGen

    c. vwá gàr
       arm nail
       'fingernail'   GenN

- *NGen order has been reconstructed in Proto-Bantu

- The Proto-Bantu *lexicon* contains clear reflexes of pre-Proto-Bantu compounds with GenN order

(8) Proto-Bantu (Bastin et al: 2003)

   a. *gùndà 'forest, garden, luxuriant vegetation'

      < **gǔn 'tree'   + (ǹ-)dá 'house, hut'
   or: *dà 'abdomen, inside'

   b. *budu 'dust'

      < *bú 'soil' + *tù 'flour' (DER 'dust')

- Niger-Congo branches are quite coherent in terms of word order in their genitive constructions

- Groups that are mixed, like Gbe, GenN > NGen

- Groups that have NGen order: AMAR or REL morphology tends to be recognisable in the genitive construction

- Examples of multiple genitive constructions in which a formally more marked one is dedicated to expressing possession can be found all over Niger-Congo.

The evidence points overwhelmingly to an original *GenN order in Niger-Congo

1. [40] N-C GEN-N
2. [98] N-C N-Gen
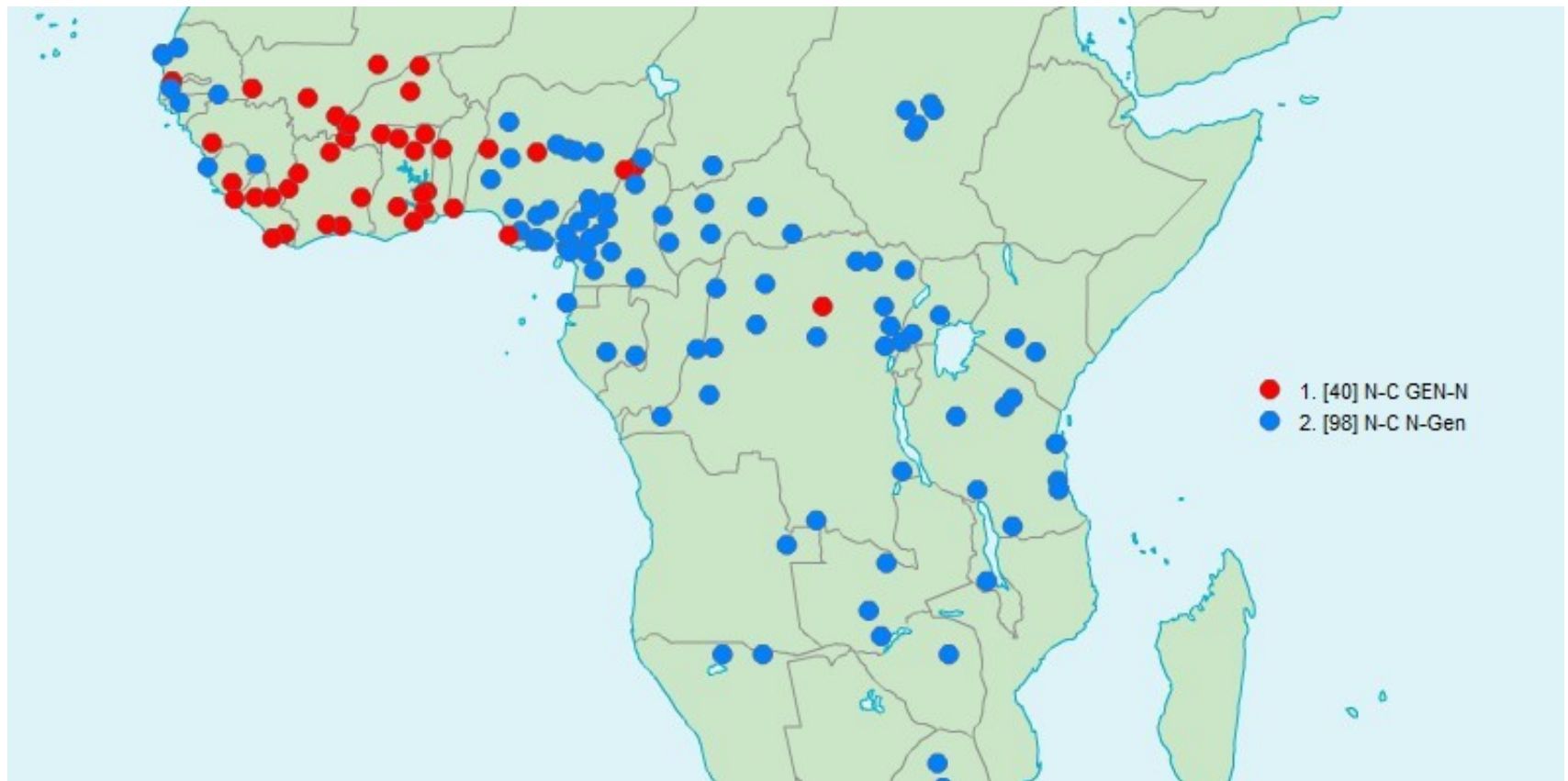
- Meeussen (1967) reconstructs *[N PP-a˜ Gen] in Proto-Bantu

- Welmers (1963) gives *a and *ka as alternative stems of the associative relator in Bantu, and claims that both are reflexes of a Proto Niger-Congo genitive morpheme.

  ☞ very common Niger-Congo situation of short lookalikes

✋ However:

- There is overwhelming evidence that the Bantu connective relator has multiple source constructions all involving a **relative 'be' verb**

    ☞ Many parallels between connective relators and relative verb forms have been pointed out by Nsuka-Nkutsi (1982)

- PP-ã may not be reconstructible in PB.

I. Some Bantu languages have possessive constructions in which the genitive marker is **synchronically a relative 'be'-verb**

(9) Bobangi (cited via Nsuka-Nkutsi 1982)

   a. mwasi o mondele 'the white woman'

   b. mwasi o-mbɛ mondele 'the woman of the white man'

   c. mwasi oliki mondele*

      mu-asi   o-li-akî   mo-ndele
      1-woman PP_1-be-PST.REL   1-white
      'the former/deceased wife of the white man'

      *constructed by replacing 'chief' by 'white man', tentative glossing of noun classes.

(10) Mongo (Hulstaert 1966: 145)

    a. li-sála   lǐ-ki   ngóya
       5-field RP_5-CON.PST   my-mother
       'the field that my mother planted'

    b. ts-ǎ   tǒ-kî   'mí
       13-fire RP_{13}-CON.PST   1SG
       'the fire I lighted' (lit. 'which was me'?)

II. Burssens' Rule: a *syntactically conditioned* rule of tonal assimilation HL $\rightarrow$ HH / _ # H {CON, POSS, REL}

III. Tonal harmony between Initial and Final

IV. Many other details:

- rising tone on "PP" in Mongo
- *na/ŋga* followed by possessive pronoun
- …

Thank you for listening!