

ON KINSHIP TERMS AND ADMONINAL POSSESSIVE
CONSTRUCTIONS: INSIGHTS FROM TONGUGBE, A RIVERINE
DIALECT OF EWE

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Abstract

This paper explores the distribution of kinship terms in a dialect of the Ewe language, Tongugbe. I attempt to account for the idiosyncracies that can be noted in the distribution of the terms in the adnominal possessive constructions of the dialect via functional notions such as linguistic conventionalization, iconicity and semantics of control. The aim is to present a coherent account of the distribution. Thus, I first of all present the different kinds of kinship terms in Tongugbe. I then present the distribution of the kinship terms in possessee slots of adnominal possessive constructions. I show that the different terms distribute differently in the alienable and the inalienable constructions. I then attempt to account for the distribution, and argue that the distribution of kinship terms in Tongugbe is motivated by an interaction of various functional factors.

Totolamə (Tɔŋúgbə)

Ənügòməkukúgbàlavi yié ku ló fomənyakuí yiéó lə Tɔŋúgbə, Ewəgbəgbətágbəgbəgbloó dómətó dəká mə ŋú. Mə dzə agbagba bé má bù fomənyakuíó dzədzié lə nütənyényé ŋkónyakəsəkəsóó mə ŋú kónta. Me mié así əgbəgòməkukusó alówó habé nyagbənusəsə, nyagbə wó nukpókpo dídjii, kplí dzizizi lə nyagbégòməsəsó nügòməkúkú mə. Lə ákiyié tae, gbəe, mə fo nú tsó Tɔŋúgbə fomənyakuíwó ŋú. Eməgbée, mə də alé fomənyakuíó dzié lə ŋkónyakəsəkəsóó mə fié. Mə dá dzəsí bē, fomənyakuíwó dzədzié lə nütənyényé ŋkónyakəsəkəsóó kiyiéó mə nyakúí lə tó vovo ná wó dzədzié lə nütənyényé ŋkónyakəsəkəsóó kiyiéó mə nyakúí má lə ó. Lə ákiyié məgbée, mə tró kə ló fomənyakuíó dzədzié lə nütənyényé ŋkónyakəsəkəsóó mə kóntabubu ŋú. Mə dóé lá bē, əgbəgòməkukusó vovovowó kpá ta kafá ná bē Tɔŋúgbə fomənyakuíwó dzié lə nütənyényé ŋkónyakəsəkəsóó mə.

Keywords : Kinship terms, Tongugbe, adnominal constructions, possessive constructions

1. Introduction

Kinship terms as possessives in adnominal possessive constructions provide a fertile ground for investigations relating to the phenomenon commonly referred to as alienability. This paper explores the distribution of kinship terms in possessive constructions in a dialect of the Ewe language, Tongugbe (a riverine dialect spoken in Ghana along the lower banks of the Volta River). The idea is to attempt to account for the idiosyncracies that can be observed in the distribution of the terms in the adnominal possessive constructions of the dialect via functional notions such as linguistic conventionalization, iconicity and semantics of control. The ultimate aim is to present a coherent account of the distribution.

2. Kinship terms: relationships and distinctions

Kinship terms generally refer to terms used to address or refer to a person to whom an individual is related, such as English **mother** and **father**. These terms are used to designate proximity of relationships and/or order or classify the relationships between members of a given community (Greenberg 1966, Ballweg 1969). Thus, apart from prototypical terms such as **mother** and **father**, terms such as **aunt** and **uncle** are also integral parts of the kinship class (Dahl & Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2001). The relationships that are signaled by the various kinship terms can be classified according to both vertical and horizontal lines. For instance, while the relationship between a father and a child can be termed vertical, the relationship between **cousins** can be understood as being horizontal. However, according to the kinship relationship that is taken as a point of departure (anchor), a vertical relationship can be either ascending or descending. Thus, while the speaker in **my father** construes the kinship relation as ascending, the speaker in **my son** views the relationship as descending.

Also, the different kinship relationships can be classified according to the ‘directness’ of the various relations. The relationship between an **uncle** and his **nephew** can be described as more consanguineously distant than the relationship between the

same person and his **son**, which relationship can be described as being more consanguineously direct. Generally, terms that signal direct consanguineous relationships are referred to as lineal terms while terms that reference more distant consanguineous relationships are referred to as collateral terms (cf. Dahl & Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2001).

Following from the above discussion, the various kinship terms can be classified, from the point of view of a discourse neutral anchor (which I take to be **child**) according to four major parameters: on the one hand, verticality and horizontality; and on the other hand, lineality and collaterality. The relationship between the discourse neutral anchor (child) and the **father** is vertical lineal; and that between him/her and his/her **uncle** is vertical collateral; the relationship between him/her and his/her **cousins** is horizontal collateral.

Further specifications can be brought to bear on the description of the relationship signaled by the various kinship terms. For instance, a kinship term in relation to a discourse neutral anchor (child) cannot only be vertically lineal, but also parental (e.g. **father**) or non-parental (e.g. **grand-father**). The difference between the relationship signaled by **brother** in relation to the discourse neutral anchor (without taking into consideration the order of birth) and the relationship signaled by **cousin** in relationship to the discourse neutral anchor can also be captured in the specification “consanguineous” i.e. while the former is a consanguineous horizontal term, the latter is a non-consanguineous horizontal term.

2.1. Kinship terms and alienability splits

By the relationships that they signal, kinship terms have been considered a central part of the class of nouns commonly referred to as relational nouns (De Bruin & Scha 1988, Staroverov 2007, Newell & Cheung 2018). Relational nouns are generally considered as nouns that evoke an association with some other nominal referent. For example, the English word **mother**, as opposed to **table**, entails **mother of someone**. Relational nouns include kinship terms, and also body-part terms and spatial relational terms.

Relational nouns have special treatment in the grammar of many languages (See Lefebvre & Brousseau 2002: 71 for an overview of the situation in Fongbé for instance). In (adnominal) possessive constructions for instance, typically, relational nouns are encoded differently from non-relational nouns (Hyman et al. 1970). Typologically, relational nouns are often encoded in what is commonly referred to as inalienable constructions while non-relational nouns are encoded in alienable constructions (Nichols 1988). In some Mandinka dialects for instance, possessives corresponding to kinship terms, body-part terms and spatial relational terms are juxtaposed to the possessor noun in adnominal possessive constructions, whereas there is a possessive connective when the possessee corresponds to other nouns (Welmers 1973: 279).

Mandinka (Niger-Congo, Mande)

1. **muso dén**
 woman child
 ‘The woman’s child’

2. **muso ká fani**
 woman POSS cloth
 ‘The woman’s cloth’

In the typological literature, such a split in the manner of encoding nouns that function as possessives is often qualified as an alienability split (See Haspelmath 2008 for a typological overview, Aboh 2010 for an overview of the case in various Kwa languages). The alienability split, in many languages, can be explained as being functionally motivated (Creissels 2001). This paper is concerned with how different

functional principles interact to account for the distribution of kinship terms in Tongugbe, a dialect that has an alienability split.

The discussions are structured as follows: I first of all present the Tongugbe dialect, some of its relevant typological features, and detail its kinship terms. I continue to present the alienability split in Tongugbe. I then show the distribution of the kinship terms in the different types of Tongugbe adnominal possessive constructions. Finally, I attempt to account for the distribution of the kinship terms.

3. Tongugbe: typological features

The Ewe language is spoken in different dialects across Ghana, Togo and Benin (Kluge 2000). The different dialects of the Ewe language as spoken in Ghana can be grouped into three main dialectal zones: coastal, inland (Ansre 2000) and riverine (which consists of Tongugbe and Agavégbe). The different dialects share various properties, but also vary on different scores. I present some of these properties and specify the distinctiveness of Tongugbe in these respects.

Ewe is a tonal language (Westermann 1930, Odden 1996). The different tones of the language have been analyzed as being underlying of two tonemes (Ansre 1961). The tonemes are, however, realized differently in the different dialects (Duthie 1996). In Tongugbe, three level tones *viz.* the high tone (´), the low tone (˘), the mid tone (ˉ), and one contour tone i.e. the rising tone (ˆ) can be identified. These are illustrated by the tones of the root nouns below:

3. **ətó** **ətò** **ətō** **ətǒ**
 ‘mortar’ ‘buffalo’ ‘ear’ ‘mountain’

Generally, in Ewe orthography, only some few tones are marked. In this paper, I mark all tones, except for the tones on nominal prefixes. I also make a distinction between the representation of the schwa ə and the mid front vowel e.

Morphologically, Tongugbe, similar to other Ewe dialects, is isolating, but with agglutinative features (Ameka 1991:7). Syntactically, constituent order is of a subject-verb-object constituent order (Essegbey 1999) as is illustrated in (4).

4. **Kòfí** **qù** **ayí**
 Kofi eat beans
 ‘Kofi ate beans’

Noun phrases in Ewe comprise one or more nuclei optionally accompanied by other elements. Panlectally, the underlying phrase structure can be represented as in (5) below (Ameka 1991: 45).

5. (INT) { N } (ADJ) *(QT) (DET) (PL) (INT)*
 { PRO }
 { QT }

Differences exist between dialects in respect of the units that fill the slots of the structure. For example, while proximal demonstrative determiners of coastal dialects are two forms, in Tongugbe there are four forms.

- | | | | | |
|----|----------------|------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 6. | <i>Coastal</i> | | <i>Tongugbe</i> | |
| | q̀əví | yì | q̀əví | yì/kè |
| | child | this | child | this |
| | q̀əví | yíá | q̀əví | yíé/kìyíé |
| | child | this | child | this/this.very |
| | ‘This child’ | | ‘This child’ | |

In Ewe noun phrases that express a possessive relationship, the construction can be either dependent-initial i.e. a possessor-possessee word order or head-initial i.e. possessee-possessor word order (Amuzu 2002). However, some semantic groups of nouns that occur in possessee slot can distribute differently in different dialects (Karvoskaya 2018). Therefore, while body-part terms can occur in head-initial constructions when the possessor is the first-person singular pronoun in some inland dialects, in Tongugbe, in this construction, body-part terms occur in dependent-initial constructions.

7.	<i>Inland</i>		<i>Tongugbe</i>	
	afɔ nyə		nyə afɔ	
	leg PRO.1SG		PRO.1SG leg	
	‘My leg’		‘My leg’	

This paper is concerned with the distribution of kinship terms in only the Tongugbe dialect. Where necessary, arguments are drawn from studies on other varieties of the language (for instance, the discussions in Ameka 1995).

3.1. Typology of Tongugbe adnominal possessive constructions

Adnominal possessive constructions of Tongugbe (in which a nominal functions as a possessor) can be of four different structural types: a construction in which a possessive linker occurs between the possessor noun and the possessee noun – the connective construction; a construction in which the possessor noun and the possessee noun are juxtaposed (this can be head-initial or dependent-initial) – the juxtaposed construction; a construction which involves suffixation – the suffixed construction, and a construction in which the possessor noun and the possessee noun are compounded – the compounded construction.

- Connective: NP POSS NP
- Juxtaposed: NP NP
- Suffixed: NP -PRO.PR
- Compounded: N - N

For a comprehensive discussion of the typology of adnominal possessive constructions of Tongugbe, see Kpoglu (2019). The following examples illustrate the different constructions respectively:

8. **Kòfí wó kplɔ́**
Kofi POSS table
‘Kofi’s table’
9. **Kòfí nàné**
Kofi mother
‘Kofi’s mother’
10. **adzà-tɔ́**
witchcraft-PRO.PR
Lit: ‘Witchcraft owner’
‘Wizard/witch’
11. **ɲùtsù-gágó**
man-bucket
Lit: ‘The bucket of a man’
‘The bucket that is meant for use by men’

Depending on the nature of the form that functions as possessor in connective and juxtaposed constructions, various idiosyncrasies can be observed. For instance, when the possessor is either the first or second person singular pronominal form, the construction can only be juxtaposed (12). Also, when the possessor is the third person singular pronominal, and the noun that functions as possessee is a kinship term, three constructions can be used to express the relation: (a) a ‘reduced connective construction’ in which the possessive linker and the possessee noun occur (13); (b) a ‘reduced juxtaposed construction’ in which the definite article occurs with the possessee noun while the pronominal form does not occur at all (14), or (c) an ‘elaborate juxtaposed construction’ in which the third person subject singular pronominal form occurs in possessor slot, the kinship term, to which the definite article is cliticised, occurs in possessee slot (15)

12. **nyə** (*wó) **kplí**
 PRO.1SG POSS table
 ‘My table’
13. [**wó tɛ**] **sí**
 POSS junior.brother flee
 ‘His/her younger brother has fled’¹
14. **nàñě -á**
 mother-ART.DEF
 ‘His/her mother’
15. **é** **tógá-á**
 PRO.3SG uncle-ART.DEF
 ‘His/her uncle’

In this paper, I shall be generally concerned with connective and juxtaposed constructions in which the form that functions as possessor is a nominal. Thus, although sporadically mentioned, constructions such as (12) and (13) do not feature prominently in the discussions that follow. Also, in the discussions that follow, I refer to the juxtaposed construction as the *inalienable construction*, and to the connective construction as the *alienable construction*.

4. Kinship terms in Tongugbe

The relationships signaled by kinship terms of Tongugbe, as compared to the relationships signaled by kinship terms of English, can be considered as much more detailed. A term such as **tàsívínýínđévíwó** ‘aunt-child-uncle-child-PL’, properly glossed, refers to ‘people that are related in such a way that the father of one of the participants is the brother of the mother of the other participant’. Despite the relative detail involved in their signaled relationships, I shall use the labels noted in the typological literature as outlined in section (2) above.

Thus, taking **əví** ‘child’ as anchor, I refer to some terms as collateral kinship terms, and others as lineal terms, according to the relationship stated relative to the anchor. Therefore, while a term such as **nyínđé** ‘mother’s brother’ and **tógá** ‘father’s elder brother’ can be termed collateral, the terms **nàñě** ‘mother’ and **tàtě** ‘father’ can be called lineal terms. The terms are also referred to as ascending, descending or

¹ Given the right context, this construction can also mean ‘their junior brother fled’. In this case, the construction is a juxtaposed construction in which **wó** is the third person plural pronominal that functions as a possessor.

horizontal according to the hierarchical relationship that they express in relation to the anchor *əvi* ‘child’. While ascending terms include terms such as *tɔ́dɛ́* ‘father’s junior brother’ and *tasí* ‘Lit. father-wife (father’s sister)’, descending terms involve terms such as *nyìnɔ́yóví* ‘nephew/niece’ and *ətsé* ‘younger brother’; horizontal terms, on the other hand, include terms that infer a relationship that is on the same axis as the anchor *əvi* ‘child’. Thus, terms such as *nòví* ‘sibling’ and *nànéví* ‘sibling’ will be referred to as such.

Table 1: a list of common kinship terms in Tongugbe

	LINEAL	COLLATERAL
ASCENDING	<i>tɔ́gbé</i> ‘grandfather’ <i>màmǎ</i> ‘grandmother’ <i>nàně</i> ‘mother’ <i>tàtɛ́</i> ‘father’ <i>fòfó/dàdǎ</i> ‘big sibling’	<i>tɔ́gǎ/nɔ́gǎ</i> ‘paternal uncle/maternal aunt’ <i>tɔ́dɛ́/nɔ́dɛ́</i> ‘paternal uncle/maternal aunt’ <i>nyìnɔ́</i> ‘maternal uncle’ <i>tàsí</i> ‘paternal aunt’
DESCENDING	<i>əvi</i> ‘child’ <i>ətsé</i> ‘junior.brother’ ² <i>əfé</i> ‘junior.sister’	<i>srɔ́nyí</i> ‘nephew’ <i>A+ yóví</i> ‘nephew/niece’
HORIZONTAL	<i>nòví</i> ‘sibling’ <i>nànéví</i> ‘sibling’ <i>tàtèví</i> ‘step-sibling’	

It should be noted that the relationships signaled by the different kinship term types are not mutually exclusive of each other. They can be in various intersecting relations. For instance a term such as *fòfó* can refer to a ‘father’, but can also refer to ‘an elder brother’ or ‘any respected man’ in a community. Similarly, the term *dàdǎ* can refer not only to ‘elder sister’, but also to ‘mother’ or ‘a respected woman’ in the community.

4.1. Kinship terms and Tongugbe adnominal possessive constructions

When the different kinship terms occur to function as possessees in adnominal possessive constructions (in which the form that functions as a possessor is a nominal), the constructions assume different configurations. While some typically occur in one kind of construction, others alternate between constructions. I first present the terms that typically occur in the alienable construction. I continue with terms that typically occur in the inalienable construction. I then present the terms that typically alternate between both construction types. Finally, I present a summary of the distribution of the terms across the two construction types.

Collateral descending terms typically occur in alienable constructions (constructions involving the possessive linker). Witness the construction types in which *tɔ́gbéyóví* ‘grand-child’ and *nyìnɔ́yóví* ‘nephew/niece’ occur.

² I consider that the terms for ‘junior brother/sister’ in Tongugbe, are used to mark relationships that are closer to the ‘lineal’ end of the spectrum than to the ‘collateral’ end. Also, I consider that the terms for ‘sibling’, mark relationships that are construed as lineal. This latter consideration gets support from the distribution of the terms; they occur in the inalienable construction.

16. *Akólíó tógbéyóví Ama nyá*
[Akólí wó tógbéyóví] Ama nyá
 Akorli POSS grand-child Ama be
 ‘Ama is Akorli’s grand-child’

17. *ηùtsuó wó nyìnṣéyóví vá*
[ηùtsu-á wó nyìnṣéyóví] vá
 man-ART.DEF POSS nephew/niece come
 ‘The man’s nephew/niece has come’

Collateral ascending kinship terms and horizontal kinship terms (which are all grouped as lineal) occur in inalienable constructions. The terms **tṣḍé** ‘junior brother of father’ and **tāsí** ‘sister of father’, relative to **əví** ‘child’, can be considered as collateral ascending terms. When both terms occur to function as possessors in the adnominal possessive construction, the construction is typically of the inalienable form, as in examples (18) and (19) respectively. Similarly, the terms **nànéví** ‘sibling of the same mother’ and **nòví** ‘sibling’ which, relative to **əví** ‘child’, can be considered horizontal terms, also occur in the inalienable construction, as in examples (20) and (21).

18. *Kòdzó tóḍié dzó*
[Kòdzó tṣḍé-á] dzó
 Kodzo uncle-ART.DEF leave
 ‘Kodzo’s uncle has left’

19. *ḍəvié tásié kú*
[ḍəví-á tāsí -á] kú
 child-ART.DEF aunt -ART.DEF die
 ‘The child’s aunt is dead’

20. *Kòfí nànévíé gbò*
[Kòfí nànéví -á] gbò
 Kofi sibling-ART.DEF be.back
 ‘Kofi’s sibling is back’

21. *nyanùó nòvié dè*
[nyanù-á nòví -á] dè
 woman-ART.DEF sibling-ART.DEF reach
 ‘The woman’s sibling has arrived at destination’

Lineal ascending (including parental) terms and lineal descending terms can function as possessors in both alienable and inalienable constructions. Lineal ascending terms typically occur in both constructions when the possessor is a common noun. Thus, while **nàné** ‘mother’ can occur in both constructions when the possessor is a common noun such as **ḍəví** ‘child’ (22), often, it occurs in only the inalienable construction when the possessor is a proper noun such as **Kòkú** (23).

22. *ḍəvié(ó) nàné lé*
[ḍəví-á (wó) nàné] lè i
 child-ART.DEF POSS mother be.at PRO.3SG
 ‘The child’s mother is around’

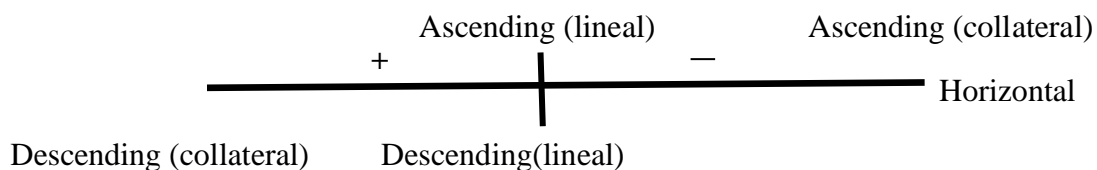
23. *Kòkú (?wó) nàné lé*
[Kòkú (?wó) nàné] lè i
 Koku POSS mother be.at PRO.3SG
 ‘Koku’s mother is around’

Lineal descending terms, on the other hand, can occur in both constructions irrespective of the type of noun that occurs as a possessor. Thus, a term such as *òtsé* ‘junior brother’ can function as possessee in both the alienable and inalienable constructions³.

24. *də̀vìé (ó) tsé sí*
[də̀vĩ-á (wó) tsé] sí
 child-ART.DEF POSS junior.brother flee
 ‘The child’s younger brother has fled’

25. **[Ama (wó) tsé] sí**
 Ama POSS junior.brother flee
 ‘Ama’s younger brother has fled’

The distribution of the various kinship terms of Tongugbe in the various types of adnominal possessive constructions can be represented on an alienability scale (by alienability, I refer to the capacity of the term to occur as a possessee in either alienable – represented by the plus symbol - or inalienable construction – represented by the minus symbol) as presented below:



4.2. Motivations for the distribution of kinship terms in adnominal possessive constructions

Typologically, various functional motivations have been postulated as underlying alienability splits. Two main hypotheses, which are not mutually exclusive of each other, stand out:

- a. The iconicity of distance hypothesis (Haiman 1980, 1983)
- b. The conventionalization hypothesis (Haspelmath 1999, 2017)

Iconicity, as opposed to the structural concept of arbitrariness, involves the bi-unique diagrammatic correspondence between linguistic forms and the meanings that they evoke (Haiman 1980). Applied to alienability splits, it is considered that the split is reflective of iconic distance. Thus, the bigger the conceived distance between the possessor and the possessee, the more elaborate the linguistic material that encodes the relation between the possessor and the possessee; the shorter the conceived distance between the possessor and the possessee, the more reduced the linguistic material that

³ This seems to correspond to a distinction between allonymic (the inalienable construction) and non-allonymic forms (the alienable construction).

encodes the relation between the possessor and the possessee. Alienable constructions such as the Madinka phrase in example (2) above are analyzed as encoding non-intimate relationships (iconically distant relations) between the possessor and the possessee, while the inalienable construction such as example (1) above expresses an intimate relation (iconically close relation) between the possessor and possessee. It should be added that iconicity also involves the idea of linguistic economy.

The conventionalization hypothesis, on the other hand, is grounded in usage-based principles. The idea is that alienability splits are the result of the exploitation of linguistic economy. Thus, the more it can be predicted that a particular noun occurs with a determiner (in this instance a ‘possessor’); the more likely this noun is to occur in a more reduced construction (in this case, an inalienable construction). On the other hand, the less likely the prediction, the more likely it is that an alienable construction will occur. Thus, given that a noun such as **father** is more likely to occur with a possessor, it has a higher probability of occurring in an inalienable construction. On the other hand, a noun such as **goat** is less likely to occur with a possessor, hence, the probability that this will occur in an alienable construction.

Moreover, other functional motivations such as egocentricity and socio-cultural value systems can also be advanced to account for the distribution of nouns as possesseees in adnominal possessive constructions (Dixon 2010). Also, typologically, it is not rare to observe different functional principles interacting to explain the configuration of adnominal possessive constructions (Aikhenvald 2019).

4.3. Accounting for the distribution of kinship terms in Tongugbe adnominal possessive constructions

Each of the functional principles detailed above, exclusive of each other, seems not to be able to account for the totality of the distribution of kinship terms in Tongugbe adnominal possessive constructions. In other words, each principle accounts for part of the data.

Following from the fact that kinship terms are a central part of relational nouns (see sub-section 2.1. above), the conventionalization principle will predict that they occur in constructions that are comparatively less elaborate. The distribution of Tongugbe ascending collateral terms and horizontal terms follow the expected tendency i.e. they occur in the inalienable construction. The distribution of lineal terms (both descending and ascending) and descending terms does not, however, follow the expected distribution i.e. they respectively alternate in either construction type, and occur in the alienable construction.

The principle of iconicity of distance accounts for the alternation of lineal terms in both the alienable and inalienable construction. Indeed, it can be argued that the terms alternate in each construction according to the distance a speaker conceives between a possessor noun and the kinship term that functions as a possessee. An argument that supports this assertion comes from the individuation of nouns in constructions that instantiate the same kind of relationship as in the adnominal possessive construction. Indeed, it has been observed that constituents in an attributive possessive relation i.e. the kind of relation instantiated by adnominal possessive constructions, that are construed as not in an intimate relationship, can be individuated (Ameka 1995). Evidence in support of this observation is adduced from standard Ewe.

In external possessor constructions of standard Ewe, the relationship between the possessor and the possessee is of the type *x*’s *y* (the same relation that pertains in adnominal possessive constructions). However, the possessor and possessee are conceptualized as being independent of each other. Consequently, the syntactic properties associated with the possessee correlates with the iconic relation holding between possessee and possessor. Thus, the possessee can be individuated as an indicator of its conceptual independence (Ameka 1995: 821) i.e. the possessee can be modified. Observe the modifiers that occur with the possessee noun ‘leg’ in the standard Ewe external possessor construction below:

26. **ka blá afò (ɣɛɣé lá) ná alēa á**
 cord tie leg broken DEF to sheep DEF
 ‘The (broken) leg of the sheep is entangled by a cord.’ (Literally: ‘A cord has entangled the (broken) leg for the sheep’) (Ameka 1995: 817)

In Tongugbe adnominal possessive constructions, conceptualized independence of the participating entities is reflected in the possibility of modifiers co-occurring with both the noun that functions as the possessor and the noun that functions as a possessee. In alienable constructions, both constituents can co-occur with any modifier of an endocentric noun phrase. Witness the example below:

27. *ɲùtsu kiyiéó nyìnɔ́éyóví má vá*
[ɲùtsu kiyié wó nyìnɔ́éyóví má] vá
 man this POSS nephew/niece that come
 ‘That nephew/niece of the man has come’

In inalienable constructions, (apart from the definite article that occurs in grammaticalized contexts such as when the third person singular functions as a possessor -see section 3.1. above), prototypically, both constituents cannot be modified by demonstratives for instance. Thus, example (28), in which only the possessor noun occurs with the demonstrative, is acceptable, while example (29), in which both possessor noun and possessee noun co-occur with demonstratives, is anomalous.

28. **[ɲùtsu kiyié ví] m̀ kpó**
 man this child PRO.1SG see:PST
 ‘It is this man’s child that I saw’
29. ***[ɲùtsu kiyié ví má] m̀ kpó**
 man this child that PRO.1SG see:PST
 ‘It is that child of this man that I saw’

Thus, when lineal terms occur as possesseees in an inalienable construction, only one of the participating elements can co-occur with a modifier; when they occur in the alienable construction, both elements can co-occur with modifiers. The suggestion I am putting across is that this syntactic preference is indicative of a conceptualized relationship: in the inalienable construction, possessor and possessee instantiate a close relationship; in the alienable construction, possessor and possessee instantiate a less intimate relationship.

The discussions so far have sought to advance the idea that the distribution of kinship terms in either alienable or inalienable constructions is motivated by the interaction between a conventionalization principle and an iconicity of distance principle. We have so far accounted for the distribution of ascending collateral terms, horizontal terms and lineal terms. This leaves the distribution of descending (collateral) terms unaccounted for. Moreover, the confluence between the conventionalization account and the iconicity account leaves a potentially incongruous impression: that ascending collateral terms such as **uncle** and horizontal terms such as **sibling** are construed as closer to the possessor than lineal terms such as **mother** and **father**. Such an interpretation violates common knowledge, and thus necessitates an explanation. This explanation can be found in the semantics of the constructions within which the terms distribute. In other words, the distribution of descending collateral terms and the potentially incongruous confluence can be resolved within a semantics framework.

The basis of the semantics idea is that adnominal possessive constructions express particular meanings (Chappel & McGregor 1989). These meanings involve not only conceptualized distance between the possessor and the possessee, but also socio-cultural value systems. In Ewe, the meanings expressed in adnominal possessive

constructions involve a ‘semantics of control’ interpretation (Ameka 1991). The understanding is that, the alienable construction of Ewe expresses not only a non-intimate relationship between possessor and possessee, but also includes the idea that the possessor exercises some form of control over the possessee. The inalienable construction, on the other hand, expresses an intimate relationship between the possessor and possessee, and also includes the idea that the possessor does not exercise control over the possessee.

Evidence for the manifestation of the semantics of control in Ewe adnominal possessive constructions comes from the distribution of body-part terms as possessee. Indeed, in many Ewe dialects (including Tongugbe), body-part terms occur in alienable constructions – body part terms are prototypical instances of relational nouns, and so are expected to occur in the inalienable construction – (30). The hypothesis then is that, in Ewe, the distribution of body-parts is only but reflective of the semantics of the constructions they occur in i.e. body-part terms occur in the alienable construction due to the fact that speakers conceptualize them as under the control of the possessor; the possessor “can do things with” them (Ameka 1991: 165).

30. *Kòfi wá f̂ ñá*
[Kòfi wó af̂] ñá
 Kofi POSS leg break
 ‘Kofi’s leg has broken’

31. **Kòfi f̂ ñá*
[Kòfi af̂] ñá
 Kofi leg break
 ‘Kofi leg has broken’

Integrated into our account of the distribution of kinship terms in Tongugbe, the position is that the kinship terms that occur as possessee in alienable constructions are not only construed as existing in a non-intimate relationship with the possessor, but also are assumed to be ‘controllable’ by the possessor; kinship terms that occur as possessee in inalienable constructions are construed as being in an intimate relationship with the possessor, but are not controlled by the possessor. Pitched against the socio-cultural norms of the Tongu people, this interpretation accounts for the difficulty posed by the distribution of descending collateral terms, and perfectly handles the interaction between the conventionalization and iconicity accounts.

Socio-culturally, Tongu societies are, among other factors, ordered according to age. Thus, relationships between kin members are dictated in part by age: older members have authority over younger members; put differently, older members ‘control’ younger members. The grammatical expression of this sociological arrangement, it can be argued, explains the distribution of descending terms. The idea I am driving at is that, given that the discourse neutral anchor is *əvī* ‘child’, ascending terms are construed by speakers as terms that can have control, but not be controlled; and that this motivates their occurrence in the inalienable construction. Descending terms are construed by speakers as lacking control, but can be controlled; this motivates their occurrence in the alienable construction. Lineal terms are construed by speakers as given; and this explains their alternation between both construction types.

5. Conclusion

Kinship terms are relational terms that are expected to occur in adnominal possessive constructions that have been labeled in the typological literature as inalienable constructions. The kinship terms of Tongugbe, however, distribute across two types of adnominal possessive constructions in which nominals occur to function as possessee: the alienable construction and the inalienable construction. Ascending

collateral and horizontal terms occur in the inalienable construction; descending collateral terms occur in the alienable construction; and lineal kinship terms (both ascending and descending) can occur in any of the two construction types. The factors that motivate such a distribution cannot be limited to only conventionalization and iconicity of distance principles, but also has to do with the meaning, which has socio-cultural basis, of the constructions in which each of the terms occur i.e. the idea of semantics of control.

Thus, this paper argues that various factors i.e. conventionalization, iconicity, socio-cultural factors, interact to account for the distribution of kinship terms in possessee slots of Tongugbe adnominal possessive constructions. Therefore, it can be noted that Aikhenvald (2019)'s observation that typologically, different motivations can interact to explain the form of adnominal possessive constructions, finds a place in the Tongugbe data. More importantly, however, all of the factors posited as interacting in explaining the data, are functional in nature; hence the view that functional principles explain the distribution of kinship terms in possessee slots of Tongugbe adnominal possessive constructions. Such an account presents two advantages: it provides a unified functional explanation for a distribution that at first sight can seem haphazard, and presupposes that the meanings and conceptualizations established by constructions can be critical to the distribution of lexical items in different syntactic contexts. As to which level of linguistic analysis, i.e. diachronic, synchronic or panchronic, the different motivational factors operate at is a question that will need to be further researched.

List of Abbreviations

1	First Person
2	Second Person
3	Third Person
ART	Article
CFM	Clause Final Marker
DEF	Definite
DEM	Demonstrative
NP	Noun phrase
PL	Plural
POSS	Possessive Linker
PR	Possessor
PRO	Pronoun
PST	Past
REL	Relativizer
SG	Singular

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