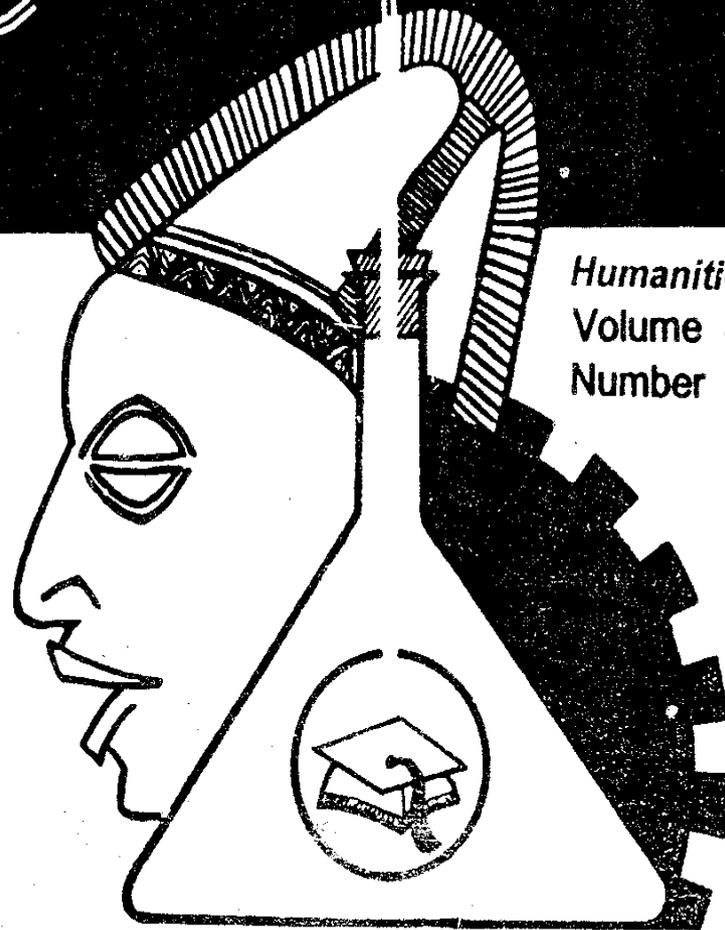


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# GENITIVE CASE - MARKING IN BATONU

*BY*

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## **Abstract**

This paper presents illuminating data from Batonu (a Gur (voltaic) language)) to show how genitive case' is overtly marked in the language. Efforts are made to describe, exemplify, and illustrate all the attested morphemic alternants of the genitive case-maker in the language. The phenomenon of homorganic nasal assimilation between the possessive marker and the initial consonant of a possessed noun, within a genitive phrase, is also discussed and exemplified. For the purpose of comparison, the paper also examines genitive case-making in Yoruba - a language of the Kwa sub-group of the Niger-Congo family.

The theoretical framework assumed for our analysis is that of the Government and Binding (GB) theory otherwise known as 'Principles and Parameters' theory, as developed in Chomsky (1981) and other subsequent relevant works.

## **1. Introduction**

Native speakers call the language 'Batonu', while non-native speakers refer to the language as 'Bariba' or 'Baruba. Batonu is spoken as first language in two adjacent countries in West Africa (i.e. Nigeria and the Republic of Benin). Linguists like Welmers (1952, 1973), Greenberg (1970). Comrie (1987) and Sanusi (1983, 1995) agree, that Batonu belongs to the Gur (Voltaic) sub-family of the Niger-Kordofanian family of language.

Morphologically, Batonu is a noun class language with seven prominent noun classes. Unlike Kiswahili, Batonu exhibits suffixes rather than prefixes as noun class markers (CM)<sup>1</sup>. Syntactically, the language displays an SOV word order in its basic clause structure.

That is, in declarative sentences, main verbs occur in sentence final position as exemplified in

(1) below.

(1) 1    Woru u nim-mɛ    noru –mo]  
         woruAgr-S water CM. drink + prog  
         'Woru is drinking water.

ii        [Sabi ui din-ni di]  
         Sabi Agr-S food CM. eat  
         'Sabi ate food<sup>1</sup>.

- iii. [na demunu-ye kEEr-a ]  
ISG. orange CM. peel + PAST  
'I peeled the orange'<sup>1</sup>.
- iv. [ tonduro -wi ui tire-ru dwu-a ]  
Man CM Agr-S book SG. Buy +PAST  
'The man bought a book'.
- v. [alimotu weke-te kor-a]  
Alimotu Agr-S pot CM break + PAST  
'Alimotu broke the pot'<sup>1</sup>.

### 1.1 On the Nature of Genitive Case-Marking

According to Ouhalla (1994:177), genitive case is said to be assigned to subjects of noun phrases. In other words, unlike nominative or accusative Case, genitive case is realized morphologically by affixation of some element to the noun phrase in English ) Cf. Chomsky (1986:194), Pink and Thomas (1970:31) Ouhalla (1994:177). The case takes, two forms in English as described in (2) below:

- (2)a. Specifier - Head (Spec-Head) affixation, as in John's book  
(where the genitive noun John carries a possessive marker '-s to indicate possession.
- b. Oblique Genitive, as in the top of the table (where the genitive case is assigned by the preposition 'of).

As in English, the genitive case marking of non-pronominal Noun Phrases (NPs) / Determiner Phrases (DPs) in Bat6nu is carried out by inflecting a possessive marker (normally a syllabic nasal consonant) to the genitive nouns in the language (see Isa (1997:29). However, Batonu does not have a 'Case-phrase'<sup>1</sup> that is similar to the English oblique genitive-equivalent described in (2b) above.

Unlike in English and Batonu, possessive maker in Yoruba (a kwa language) is always associated with the possessed noun rather than with the possessor. For the purpose, of comparison, examples of such genitive construction In Yoriiba<sup>1</sup> are presented in (2.3) below.

### 2. Genitive Case-Marking In Batonu

As in English, (see (2a) above), genitive nouns in Batonu always carry genitive case-marker to indicate possession as exemplified in (3) below:

- (3) (i) [ali-m boo-ge]<sup>2</sup>  
ali poss. goat CM  
'Ali's goat'
- (ii) [bake-n duro wi]  
bake poss. husband CM  
'Bake's husband'.
- (iii) [musa-rl guno-ge]  
musa poss. bird CM  
'Musa's bird'.
- (iv) [tonkura- wi- rm bii bu]  
woman CM. poss. child-PL

The woman's children'.

- (ii) [tonburo-wi- n gbee-te]  
Man CM poss. farm CM  
'The man's farm'
- (vi) [bio-m. bii- wi]  
bio poss. child CM.  
'Bio's child'.
- (vii) [tire- te- n n6ru]  
book CM. poss. end  
'End of the book/The book's cover<sup>1</sup>.'
- (viii) [sabi -n *gobl-* ye]  
sabi poss. money CM  
'Sabi's money'. °
- (ix) [woru -m wonu]  
woru poss. younger brother  
Woru's younger brother<sup>1</sup>, ' '
- (x) (nem baa -n duma-ye]  
my father poss. horse  
CM 'My father's horse'.
- (xi) [yaa- mu -n dia -ni]  
animal PL. poss. food CM  
'Animals' food'.
- (xii) [bEsEm moo -bu -n. gobi -ye]  
our parents PL poss. money CM  
'Our parents' money'.
- (xiii) [doya -ba -n. gbaburu -ye]  
lawyer PL. poss. room CM  
'Lawyer's chamber<sup>1</sup>.'
- (xiv) [tonduro-bu -m furo-si]  
man PL. poss. cap CM  
'Men's cap'.
- (xv) [tonduro -bu -m boo -te]  
woman PL. poss bag CM .  
'Women's bag<sup>1</sup>'.

The morpho-phonemic condition under which any of the three allomorphs -m, n, and n is selected as a genitive case marker, in Batons, is discussed in (2.1) below.

2.1 **Homorganic Nasal Assimilation between a Genitive Case-Marker and a Possessed Noun.**

As could be observed in genitive case-marking in (3) above, the three syllabic nasal consonants: /m, n, n/ are allomorphs of the same morpheme. And each of them functions as a genitive case-marker in the language. The choice of a particular allomorph, in a given genitive construction in Batonu, is conditioned by homorganic nasal assimilation between the possessive marker and the following adjacent word-initial consonant of the possessed noun. For instance, where the possessed noun begins with a bilabial stop consonant, the genitive case-marker assimilates the features of that bilabial stop consonant to agree with the place of articulation of that consonant.

Similar homorganic nasal assimilation could be observed between the final nasal consonant of a possessive adjective and the initial consonant of a noun that is qualified by that possessive adjective, as exemplified in (5) below.

(4) **Possessive Adjectives.**

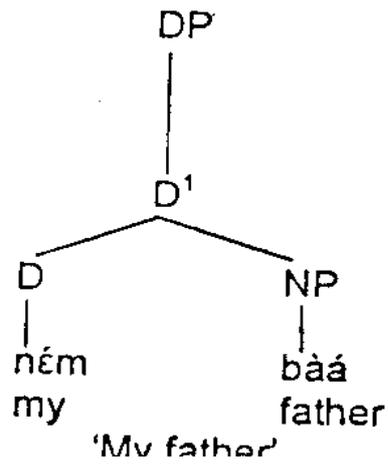
- (i) [nEn], 'My'
- (ii) [wunɛn. 'Your' (SG).
- (iii) [win]. 'His/her'.
- (iv) [bEsEn]. 'Our'
- (v) [bEEn] 'Your' (PL.)
- (v) [ben]. 'Their'

(5) Co-occurrence of possessive Adjective with Nouns

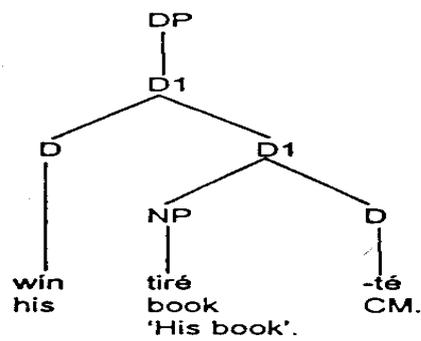
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| <p>(i) [nɛm baa -wi<br/>my father Cm<br/>'My father'</p>                  | <p>(vi) [bEsEm bii bu]<br/>'Our Child -PL<br/>'Our Children'</p>      |
| <p>(ii) (wuner) gobi -ye]<br/>your (SG). money Cm.<br/>'Your money' '</p> | <p>(v) [bɛn dii -te]<br/>your (PL) house CM.<br/>Your house'</p>      |
| <p>(iii) [win tire -te]<br/>his book CM.<br/>'His book'</p>               | <p>(vi) [ben duro -wi]<br/>their husband CM.<br/>'Their husband'.</p> |

The structure of the DPs in (5) above can be shown diagrammatically with the phrases in (6) below;

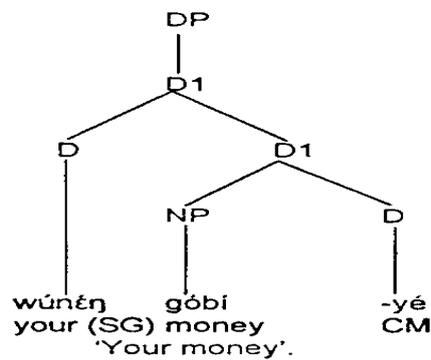
(6) a.



(b)



(c)



### Genitive Case-Marking and the Structure of DP

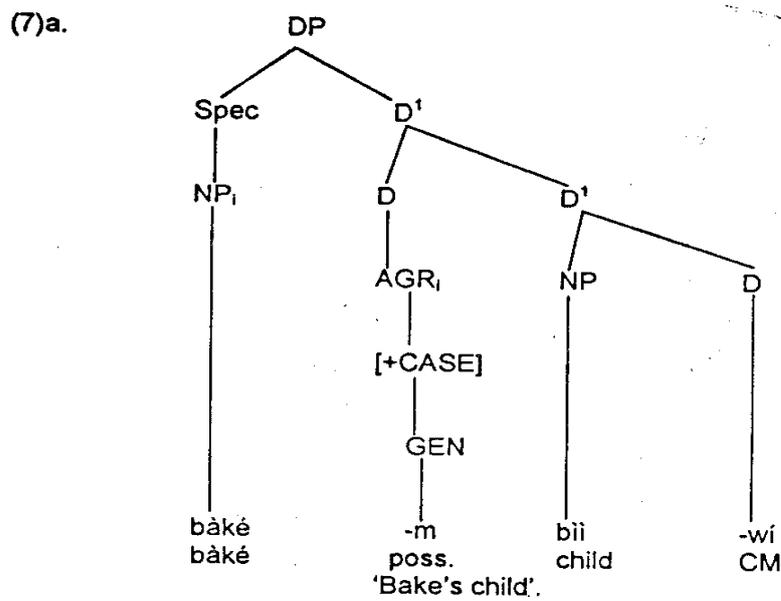
Given the assumption that every instance of a noun phrase (NP) is a determiner phrase (DP), Abney (1987) argues that the new functional category '(D)eterminer' provides a

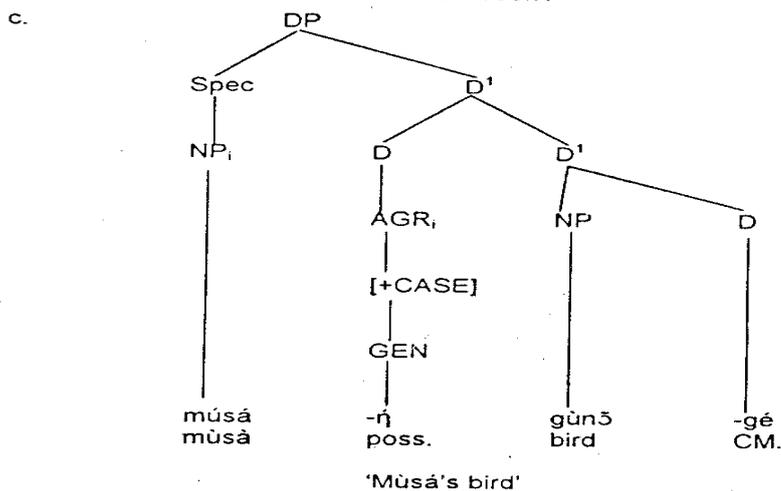
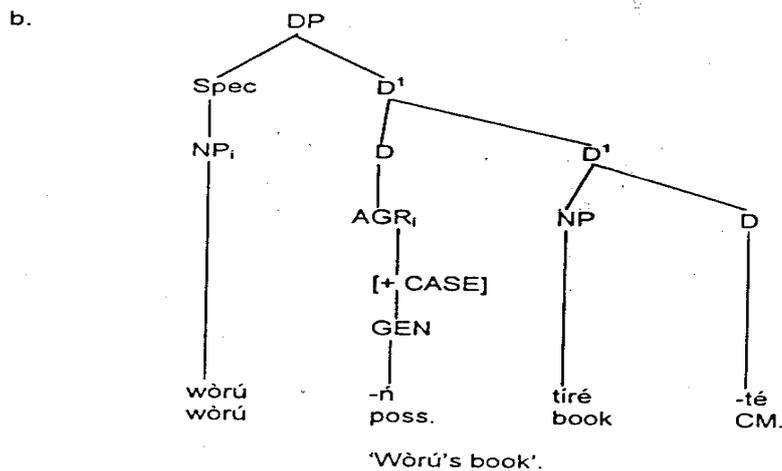
position to account for noun phrase internal agreement and Case assignment, so that the noun phrase (or DP) can match the verb phrase (IP) and the sentence (CP) in structure.

Following Abney's (1987) assumption about the function of a determiner within a DP, Ouhalla (1994:180) makes the following assertion about genitive case assignment

Genitive **case** is assigned to subjects of 'noun phrases' under Spec-Head Agreement with (the Agr category of) D, just as nominative case is assigned to subjects of finite clauses under Spec-Head Agreement with (the Agr category of) I.

Accordingly, we can depict the structure of each of the genitive constructions (i.e., DPs in (3)) above, using the attested morphemic alternants of the genitive case-maker, as in (7) below.





The concept of DP, as assumed within the framework of 'Principles and Parameters' theory, has been employed in this paper to analyse the structures of genitive construction in Batónu (see (4) and (7) above).

In conclusion, we have observed that genitive case marking takes two forms in English, as described in (2) above, while it takes a single form in Batónu and some other Niger-Congo languages like Yoruba'. That single process of marking genitive case in Batónu involves inflecting a syllabic nasal consonant to a genitive noun (i.e. the possessor); whereas it is the last vowel of a possessed noun, in a genitive construction, that functions as a genitive case-marker in Yoruba.

## NOTES

1. Noun class markers in Batónu occur as suffixes rather than prefixes. Their co-occurrence with nouns in the language can be exemplified as follows:

Class 1:      bii   -wi; The child  
                  child CM

Class 2: tire   -te. The book'  
                  book CM

Class 3:       nim -mɛ. The water  
                  water CM

Class-4:       boo -gee   The goat'  
                  goat CM

Class 5:       dɛka -ye. The stick'  
                  stick CM

Class 6:       gbere-ni. The corn'  
                  corn CM

Class 7:       yaka-si. The grass

2.       Batonu is a tone language. It has three tone -levels. -Our system of tone marking in this paper reflects the I.P.A. convention:

High tone: [/]

Mid tone: [- ]

Low tone: [ \ ]

3.       It should be noted that the derivation of the vowel morpheme that functions as a genitive case-marker in Yoruba has been a subject of controversy among scholars working on Yoruba grammar. For instance, Bamgbose (1966, 1990) proposed that the vowel that functions as a genitive case-marker in Yoruba could be derived either - by vowel lengthening or vowel assimilation, depending on the phonological environment in which the genitive construction is taking place. But Awobuluyi (1982), using language internal evidence, argued that the vowel functioning as a genitive case-marker, in any Yoruba genitive construction, is derived through a single process of 'Vowel assimilation' rather than vowel lengthening. Be that as it may, we do not intend to revisit that controversy in the present study.

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