Abstract: In Eastern Dan (< Southern Mande < Mande < Niger-Congo), the common Mande strategies of marking genitival relations are available, namely head-marking by means of tone, and dependent-marking (by a specialized postposition) in the alienable possession construction. However, against this common background, some important modifications have evolved. The opposition between the head-marked and the head-unmarked constructions, although retained, has become semantically blurred: in the proto-language, the head-marked genitival construction had the semantics of “modification-by-noun”, while in the Eastern Dan, this meaning has undergone erosion. In the dependent-marked constructions, a case-like opposition has emerged in the alienable possession constructions: different possessive markers (postpositions) are used depending on whether the head noun of an NP containing the possessive construction stands in the locative case or not. Other postpositions can also serve as markers of genitival relations. In addition, morphological case can sometimes serve to mark genitival relations.

Key words: genitival construction, possessive construction, case marking, alienable and inalienable possession, Eastern Dan, Mande languages

1. Introduction

1.1. Preliminaries

In the Leningrad / St. Petersburg school of Mande linguistic, the study of genitival relations has been a traditional topic from its very beginning. The founder of this school, Svetlana Tomchina, published a paper on two types of possession in Maninka (Tomčina 1984). Konstantin Pozdniakov, who began his academic career as a Mandeist (Pozdniakov 1978; Pozdniakov 1980; Pozdnâkov & Vydrine 1986;
Pozdnâkov & Vydrin 1988; Pozdniakov 1987), produced research work on possessive constructions in Mande in the course of his undergraduate degree. My present paper can be seen as a continuation of this tradition.

In recent decades, a great deal of research has been carried out on Mande genitival constructions, and accordingly their organization is much clearer today than it was 40 or 50 years ago. It is hardly necessary to present here a detailed survey of all the publications dealing with this topic; I will mention here only the main relevant points.

1.2. Alienable and inalienable possessive constructions

The word order in Mande genitival constructions is highly predictable: the head noun always follows the dependent noun. In most Mande languages, alienable and inalienable constructions are formally opposed: in the inalienable possessive construction, the head noun follows the dependent noun immediately (N_d N_h), while in the alienable possession construction, they are separated by a possessive marker: N_d POSS N_h. This marker can be treated as a postposition (and indeed in many languages it is homonymous with an existing postposition), although it may tend to fuse with dependent nouns and/or pronouns.

It is thus tempting to reconstruct an opposition between the two constructions for Proto-Mande. However, there are at least two serious arguments against this reconstruction.

Firstly, in a considerable number of languages in the Mande family (Soninke, Gban, Ngen, Boko, Burkina Faso Jula, etc.) no distinction is made between these two constructions.

Secondly, the Mande languages have various possessive markers, most often homonymous with actual locative postpositions. It can be supposed therefore that they originated from these postpositions and represent independent recent innovations; otherwise, we would expect to find the reflexes of a single Proto-Mande possessive marker everywhere.

An objection to the first argument is readily found: the absence of possessive markers in Soninke, Gban, Ngen, Boko etc. could result
from their recent disappearance. However, the second is more difficult to deal with. If we reconstruct an alienable possession construction, we should find reflexes of the Proto-Mande possessive marker at least in some of the modern Mande languages; so far, however, nobody has identified such reflexes.¹

On the other hand, it would seem strange for spontaneous independent innovations, producing possessive markers and the opposition of two possessive constructions, to have arisen independently out of nowhere in the majority of the languages of the family. An alternative hypothesis can be advanced: a possessive marker (i.e. postposition) for the alienable possession construction may have existed in Proto-Mande (and its reflexes are yet to be discovered; why not the Bambara possessive marker *ka*?), but it was easily replaced by other postpositions in some daughter languages, while disappearing in others. In any case, this question remains open for further investigation.

### 1.3. Head marking

In many Mande languages, the head noun in a genitival construction can be formally marked: in some languages it carries a low grammatical tone, while in some others it loses its lexical tone and is incorporated into the tonal domain of the dependent noun; for a survey see (Green & Konoshenko 2022a). Constructions with tonal head marking usually belong to the type of “modification by noun”, in the sense of (Nikolaeva & Spencer 2012: 221–225) (with the dependent noun fulfilling the role of modifying noun), while those with a tonally unmarked head have the meaning of inalienable possession.

### 1.4. Introductory notes on Eastern Dan

Eastern Dan is a part of the Dan macrolanguage (< Southern Mande < Southeastern Mande < Mande < Niger-Congo), and is spoken in the West of Côte d’Ivoire. The data dealt with in this paper stem from

¹ This argument has been advanced by Denis Creissels (p.c.).
the Gwɛɛtaa dialect, which is considered the standard variety of Eastern Dan, they were collected during my numerous field trips (2001–2020) and from published literature in this language.²

Eastern Dan has five level tones: extra-high (xH), ā; high (H), ā; mid (M), ā; low (L), ā, extra-low (xL), ā. It also has a high-falling tone, ā. According to the orthographic rules of Eastern Dan, the absence of a tonal mark on a vowel means that the tone is the same as on the preceding vowel, e.g. dɔ̋ɔ /dɔ̄ɔ/ ‘talk’, tàa /tàà/ ‘back’. The letter n signals nasality on preceding vowels, e.g. tɔ̀n /tɔ̃̀/ ‘now’, kāa̋n /kā̃̋/ ‘to mix’. The digraphs bh and dh stand for the implosive consonants /ɓ/ and /ɗ/ respectively. In this paper, Eastern Dan examples are spelled according to the orthographic rules.

The basic word order in a simple verbal sentence is (S) Aux (DO) V (X), where S is the subject, Aux stands for auxiliaries indexed for the person and number of the subject and expressing tense-aspect-mode and polarity meanings (in the Mandeist tradition these auxiliaries are usually referred to as “predicative markers”), DO is the direct object, V is the verbal predicate, and X is an indirect/oblique object or adjunct. Dan is a null-subject language (the explicit presence of a subject NP is not obligatory, the subject being indexed in the Aux). The presence of a DO makes a verb transitive; if the DO position is void, the verb is intransitive. X can be represented by a postpositional phrase (NP + postposition), an adverb or an NP headed by a declinable noun (see below).

Nouns can be subdivided into two classes: declinable and indeclinable. Declinable nouns³ have a default “common case” and from one to three oblique cases resulting from fusion with postpositions.

In Eastern Dan, tonal modifications are widely used in inflection, see (Vydrin 2016).

² See Eastern Dan Corpus http://cormand.huma-num.fr/dan/.
³ In previous publications (Vydrin 2010; 2011), the term “locative nouns” was used.
2. Formal means for the expression of genitival relations: an overview

In a genitival construction, the syntactic relations between the head and the dependent noun can be:

- unmarked (i.e., expressed only by juxtaposition),
- marked on the head word (by grammatical xL tone),
- marked on the dependent word (by an oblique case or a postposition).

Concerning the latter option, one might object that when the syntactic relationship between nouns is marked by a postposition, the form of the dependent noun remains unchanged, and, therefore, this type of construction cannot be regarded as a true case of dependent-marking. This objection can be answered by saying that the structure of the N+N construction with a postposition can be represented as (N pp)+N, i.e. the dependent constituent is represented by a postpositional phrase. The postposition belongs to the dependent constituent (being its head), and therefore we are indeed dealing with an instance of dependent-marking.

Head marking and (different types of) dependent marking are not mutually exclusive: the two can cooccur in a single construction.

There are three main meanings expressed by genitival constructions in Eastern Dan: alienable possession, inalienable possession, and modification by noun (on the semantics and typology of these meanings see, in particular, Nikolaeva & Spencer (2012)). The distribution of these meanings over the formal types of genitival construction in Eastern Dan will be considered in what follows.

3. The dependent-unmarked constructions

3.1. Unmarked genitival construction

In the unmarked genitival construction, the syntactic relation between the two nouns is expressed by simple juxtaposition: bhēn yān <human

When pronominalized, the dependent noun (possessor) is replaced by the pronouns of the non-subject series (1). The head noun (possessee) of the unmarked construction can be inflexible or declinable, in the common (1a) or an oblique case (1b).

(1) a. (mb̃̂ tà̠-dhɛ̀ yà̠ kà̠ dhìi-sù̀).  
2SG.NSBJ back-CMM 3SG.PRF do dirt-ADJ  
‘Your back is dirty.’

b. Slʌ̏ʌ yɤ̏ bhɔ̄-sīʌ̄ n̄ bhɛ̔ ɛ̋-dhɤ̄ .  
pepper 3SG.EXI appear-DUR 1SG.NSBJ neck.LOC  
‘Pepper burns my throat (lit. Pepper appears in my throat).’

3.2. Head-marked genitival construction

In the head-marked construction (izafet/status-constructus), the lexical tone of the second (head) noun is replaced by a grammatical extra-low tone, glossed as iz: bhlɔ̄ɔ dhìaŋ (← dhìaŋ) <challenge talk\iz> ‘outrage’, bhúʌ̏ʌ bhɛ̔ n (← bhɛ̔n) <beard human\iz> ‘bearded man’, bhl̃ k̃ dhà (← dhà) <flying.termite rain\iz> ‘termite rain’ (rain followed by the appearance of flying termites).

The head of this construction is usually an indeclinable noun; only three suffixless declinable nouns (dhì ‘mouth’, sê ‘earth, ground’ and yân ‘eye(s)’) in their common case forms can appear as tonally marked heads.

The head-marked construction in Dan corresponds etymologically to the so-called tonally compact genitival constructions of other Mande languages, cf. for a survey (Green 2018; Green & Konoshenko 2022b). In these other languages, the semantics of the tonally compact genitival constructions is typically modification by noun (rather than possession). However, the head-marking genitival construction in Eastern Dan is less regular than a typical tonally compact genitival construction in Mande: there are numerous nouns which cannot be marked with xL tone.
at all, and when xL tone marking is available, the semantics of the
construction is not necessarily “modification-by-noun”. In particular,
the dependent noun can appear with the plural word (2) and with the
definite article (3), and it can be pronominalized (4), (5), which is
incompatible with the semantics of nominal modification.

(2) \( Ȳ̄n \text{ dhē̄-kp̄} \) \( kwāā \) \( k̄-dh̄ \)
3SG.EXI 1SG.NSBJ question-spread\NEUT 1PL.INCL.Poss house-mouth
\( ḡu \text{ bhēn-dhūn} \) \( w̄n \) \( k̄ \) \( dhēdh̄ \) \( pl̄ \) \( p̄r \).
inside human-PL matter\IZF with hour two at
‘He went on asking me about members of our family for two hours.’

(3) \(<...>k̄́e \text{ Bhàndhī bhā ā w̄n yā sēē.}
but Marie ART 3SG.NSBJ matter\IZF 3SG.PRF spoil
‘... despite everything, Mary had died’, lit. ‘... but Marie’s matter
had spoilt’. (Dùwùn)

(4) \( Ȳ̄n \text{ dhē̄-kp̄} \) \( ú \) \( w̄n \)
3SG.EXI 1SG.NSBJ question-spread\NEUT 2SG.NSBJ matter\IZF
\( k̄ \) \( yāandhī. \)
with yesterday
‘Yesterday he asked me about you.’ (f11:13)

(5) \( Ā \text{ k̄ kp̄ák kp̄á-sù} \) \( dhān \) \( i \)
3SG.NSBJ hand.CMM numb-SLA FOC REL3SG.INT
\( ã \text{ dhēay} \) \( z̄̄ \).
3SG.NSBJ talk\IZF kill\INT
‘He speaks of his hand that is numb.’

The rules for tonal head marking in Eastern Dan are difficult to for-
mulate, and susceptibility to head marking is often a lexicalized property
of a given noun. However, it is possible to observe some tendencies.
(i) if a construction describes the relation “part of a whole”, it is
usually unmarked. If, however, the second component is in some
sense equal to the first (i.e. both refer to the same entity), it is
tone-marked, e.g.: \( gw̄ dh̄ù \) ‘trunk of ceiba tree’ — \( gw̄ dh̄ù \) ‘ceiba
tree’, \( b̄r s̄n \) ‘elephant tusk’ — \( b̄r w̄ (← w̄) \) ‘elephant carcass’.
(ii) generic nouns are more prone to display head marking, e.g. *tēeën wōn* (← *wōn*) <truth matter> ‘truth, true matter’, *sūa bhēn* (← *bhēn*) <untruth human> ‘liar’ vs. *błūn sēŋ* ‘porcupine quill’, *kō kpān* ‘foundations of a house’. A possible explanation of this rule could be that less generic words are more rare in texts, and neutralization of their lexical tones could impede recognition of these lexemes in the text.

(iii) apparently, the type of construction used can also depend on rhythmical factors. Thus, in (6) *bāā* ‘bottomland’ (where Dan people usually plant their rice) does not change its tone after *dēe* ‘today’, but it does change tone in a practically identical syntactic context after the word *yāandhīr* ‘yesterday’. Otherwise, *dēe* by itself does not impede tone lowering on the head word, e.g. *dēe pāŋ* (← *pāŋ*) ‘today’s pants’, *dēe tēœŋ* (← *tēœŋ*) ‘today’s laws’.

(6) *Dēe bāā yāa dhē yāandhīr*

*today bottom.land 3SG.NEG.IPFV that yesterday*

*bāā dhī.*

*bottom.land izf be*

‘Today’s bottomland is not like yesterday’s bottomland (i.e., from olden time).’

It can be hypothesized that originally, the head-marked genitival construction in Eastern Dan (as in other Mande languages) gave the meaning of modification by noun, and the unmarked construction expressed inalienable possession. This semantic opposition has been maintained to some extent (as in the case of *gwē dhūu* ‘ceiba tree’ vs. *gwē dhūu* ‘trunk of ceiba tree’), but in general it has undergone pervasive erosion. In modern Eastern Dan, the unmarked construction can also be used to express modification by noun (as in *yābhā fīī* ‘smell of onion’), and the dependent noun in a headmarked construction can be determined or pronominalized (which is incompatible with the modification-by-noun meaning). In fact, the tonal head-marking in a genitival construction has been lexicalized to a great extent, and
xl-marked nouns with generic meaning (especially wón/wõn ‘matter’, bhên/bhën ‘human being’, pã/pã ‘thing’) are on the way to being grammaticalized as derivative suffixes.

4. Genitival dependent-marked constructions

The formal types of dependent marking are represented in Figure 1.

![Genitival constructions diagram]

Figure 1. Formal types of dependence marking in genitival constructions

4.1. Construction with a postposition (N PP N)

A genitival relation between two nouns can be marked with locative postpositions, e.g. (7), (8).

(7) `<...>` Zân ɣó gõ Tökpäplɤɭ Bhlängzä
    Jean 3SG.JNT go.away\jINT Tokpapleu Blangzeu
    pũn kwănũ-dhũ.
    at compound-LOC
    ‘Jean left Tokpapleu, the compound of Blangzeu.’ (Sumaoro.148)

(8) Sá ā tã bhēe yã gõ.
    still 3SG.NSBJ on shirt 3SG.EXI>3SG.NSBJ PP
    ‘(Geu has not mounted the horse.) And yet, he has a big gown to wear while riding it’.
Examples of this type of construction are not very frequent in texts (if the possessive construction is not counted, see §4.2.3), but they are certainly grammatical.

The head noun can also be marked (by xL tone). Such constructions are often lexicalized and can be regarded as compound nouns (although in Eastern Dan the distinction between nominal compounds and syntactic phrases is elusive):

*bhlâ-gû-bhên* <respect-in-human\IZF> ‘respectable person’

*kwî-plîr-bhên* <white.person-at-human\IZF> ‘city-dweller’

*käsô-gû-bhên* <prison-in-human\IZF> ‘prisoner’

### 4.2. Possessive nominal construction.

#### Free and relational nouns

4.2.1. Specificity of the possessive construction

The possessive nominal construction is a subtype of the genitival construction with a postposition (see §4.1). Its specificity manifests itself in the syntactically conditioned distribution of the two postpositions involved, *bhà* and *gô* (see §4.2.3), and in the formal variability of the postposition *bhà* in the possessive construction:

- after the mid-tone personal pronouns *û* 2SG.NSBJ and *ро* REFLE.SG, the tone of the postposition *bhà* changes to mid (9), and it merges with most other pronouns to produce the possessive pronominal series,

- otherwise, it has two phonetic variants in free variation, *bhà* ~ *ã* (10). In Eastern Dan the variant *ã* is not available in post-verbal position, i.e. when the postposition appears as a NP dependency marker from a verb (11),

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4 There is no reason to postulate fusion of the possessive marker with the possessor noun (which could be interpreted as the emergence of a genitive case form): the variant *ã* maintains its morphophonological autonomy and does not merge with the preceding foot. In particular, it is not nasalized by the preceding nasal vowel (*göûn* *ã* *gblôô* [gôû ã gblôô] ‘a man’s stool’ (d138: 7)), and no resyllabification occurs if the preceding foot ends in -ŋ (*bhânîj* *ã* *sô* ‘a Jula’s cloth’ (d138: 9)).
if preceded by the plural word dhūn, the possessive marker bhā merges with this to give dhāan (12).

(9) Yà  dū d₃ ř  bhā  bhlā-dhɛ̂  tà.
3SG.PRF sorcery put REFL.SG poss field-CMM on
‘He has installed a protective fetish in his field.’ (f68: 13)

(10) gèe  bhā  ~  à  kī̄̄̄ła
mask on messenger
‘mask’s assistant’

(11) Yūa  yáa  à  zūłgā  bhā  /  *à.
illness 3SG.NEG.IPfv 3SG.NSBJ heart on
‘His heart is healthy (lit. Illness is not on his heart).’

(12) Kwī-dhāan  bēdhɛ̂  bhā
white.person-3SG.NSBJ-PL.Poss medicine certain
yʁ  bhūn...
3SG.EXI there
‘White people have a certain medicine… (lit. “There is a medicine
of the Whites …”)’

The dependent noun or pronoun (the owner) in the possessive
construction can refer only to a human; otherwise the unmarked
genitival construction is used, cf. bhēn bhā kó ‘house of a man, man’s
house’ vs. bhāan kó ‘bird’s nest’, cf. (13)–(14). In other words, from
the grammatical standpoint, only humans are viewed as true owners.⁵

⁵ Surely, animals can be anthropomorphized in popular tales, and in that case
they can be “true owners” and appear in possessive constructions with the pos-
sessive marker bhā. On the other hand, the postposition bhā can also appear as
a linker in non-possessive genitival constructions as presented in §4.1, in which
case the dependent noun can designate a non-human: bīu bhā tỳṅ <harmattan on
time> ‘the period of harmattan’, dhūrṣ bhā gbīŋgā <raffia on caterpillar> ‘mag-
got living in raffia palms’.
Maggots have appeared on the meat’, lit. ‘The meat fights its maggots’.

‘This bird builds its nests on the ground’.

The head noun of a possessive construction cannot be marked by xL tone for its relation with the dependent noun.

4.2.2. Alienable (free) and inalienable nouns

When the dependent noun designates a human being, it can be connected to the head noun of the genitival construction either with a postposition (bhả or gô), or without. That is, the construction can be possessive or unmarked. The choice of construction type depends first of all on the semantics of the head noun: alienable nouns (also known as “free” or “autosemantic” nouns,) appear in the possessive construction, and inalienable (or “relational”) nouns in the unmarked construction. 6

The class of inalienable nouns is largely made up of designations of body parts (n̄ gên ‘my foot/leg’, Y3 tōdhē ‘Yo’s ear’), kinship terms and semantically close words (n̄ zlāā ‘my younger sibling’, â yâeë ‘his enemy’, â tōy ‘his namesake’, â tô ‘his name’).

One might wish to say that the distribution of nouns by the classes of alienable and inalienable nouns is purely semantic: when we have

6 Strictly speaking, the two constructions express different types of possessive meaning. I reserve the term “possessive construction” for the one expressing alienable possession, because the unmarked N+N construction also expresses other meanings besides inalienable possession. There is a rich linguistic literature discussing possessive relationships; see in particular (Nikolaeva & Spencer 2012: 215–219).
the semantic relation “part of a whole” or a noun with a strong valency (such as a kinship term), the noun is inalienable and appears in the unmarked genitival construction; otherwise, it is alienable and appears in the possessive construction.

However, in Eastern Dan the true situation is less straightforward. It turns out that in this language some words which, in terms of their semantics, should logically belong to the inalienable class, in fact behave as alienable. Among such grammatically alienable nouns are dhēbä ‘wife’, dhān ‘child’ (15) and béē ‘nephew (sister’s son)’ (16), while dhinbhɔ̀ɔn ‘marriageable in-law’, gɔ̀n ‘husband’, bhān ‘child’ (an archaic word in Gwɛɛtaa), dhū ‘daughter’ and gbũ ‘son’ are inalienable (17). Wũn ‘chevelure, head of hair’ is alienable (18), while kää ‘(body) hair’ is inalienable (19). Gwān ‘blood draining from a bleeding nose’ and fũyũ ‘sweat’ are alienable, while gbô ‘excrement’, wēé ‘urine’, yɔ̀ɔn ‘blood’ are inalienable.

(15) Ā bhā dhān bhā yũ bhũ
3SG.NSBJ poss child ART 3SG.EXI appear\NEUT
kũ yũ tũn Klάaplũr.
SMLT 3SG.EXI be.still\NEUT Klaapleu
‘This child of his was born when he was in Klaapleu.’

(16) Kwāā bēē bhā yũ wũ
1PL.INCL.POSS nephew ART CONJ 3PL.INT/3SG.NSBJ
dhě Gbádhīää.
call\VNT Gbadieu
‘Our nephew was named Gbadieu.’

(17) Gbāan gbũ ā sũŋg gā pũ yũ Gban son poss gold bone loan 3SG.EXI
gũn ā bhā.
be.PST\NEUT 3SG.NSBJ on
‘He owed a piece of gold to Gban’s son.’

(18) Wā ā bhā wũn bũ
3PL.PRF 3SG.NSBJ poss chevelure pass
‘Her hair has been plaited.’
The class membership of certain nouns can be unstable. Yɛn ‘dream’ is treated as alienable in some contexts and as inalienable in others. The noun dhɩŋ ‘life’ and its synonym tɔsãe appear equally able to behave as alienable or inalienable in any context: ã bhã dhɩŋ = = ã dhɩŋ ‘his life’.

Therefore, we should recognize that the division of nouns into alienable and inalienable in Eastern Dan is only partly semantically conditioned; there is a great deal of lexicalization. These two classes should be treated as both lexically and semantically conditioned.

4.2.3. Two possessive markers, bhã and gɔ

As already mentioned, Eastern Dan has two postpositions used as possessive markers in nominal constructions, bhã and gɔ.

To put things simply, gɔ appears as the possessive marker when the possessee is in the locative case, see (20b) and (21b), and bhã appears in all other contexts, see (20a) and (21a).

(20) a. Tîa bhã gɔny-dhɛ̄ yà ɡr̄.
    Tîa poss shed-cmm 3sg.prf burn
    ‘Tio’s straw shed has burnt.’ (d189: 14)

b. Kwâ kwâ kó yɪ Tîa gɔ gɔny-dhɛ̄.
    1pl.incl.imp 1pl.incl.nsbj recp.cmm see Tîa poss.loc shed-loc
    ‘Let us meet in Tia’s shed.’

(21) a. Yɔ ̃ bhã dhɛ̄ŋ-dhɛ̄ ɡɛɛ sú-ɡɔn̄a.
    3sg.exi refl.sg poss hamlet-cmm unburnt.grass take-dur
    ‘He is piling up unburnt brushwood on his farm.’

b. Kèsè yɔ dhɨŋ dhɨs-sù ká ̃
    Kese 3sg.exi trap set-ger with refl.sg
    gɔ dhɨŋ-dhɛ̄ dɛdɛ-wɔ.
    poss.loc hamlet-loc true.int-adv
    ‘Kese has lots of traps set in his remote field.’
Therefore, the distribution of the two possessive markers could be interpreted as case agreement, in which case $g\ddot{o}$ is the locative case possessive marker, and $bh\dot{a}$ is the common case possessive marker.

However, this interpretation is nuanced by additional evidence. Even if the possessee is represented by a declinable noun in the locative case, the possessive marker $g\ddot{o}$, although preferable, can still be replaced by $bh\dot{a}$. Some speakers perceive a stylistic and/or pragmatic difference between the two variants of the possessive construction: the construction with $g\ddot{o}$ may (optionally) express a negative attitude on the part of the speaker, and it tends to describe an actual situation, whereas $bh\dot{a}$ is neutral.

(22) a. $Bh\ddot{e}n$ $gb\acute{e}$ $\varnothing$ $\ddot{a}$ $g\ddot{o}$ $k\ddot{w}\ddot{a}n\ddot{y}$-$dh\ddot{s}$.
   human many 3SG.EXI 3SG.NSBJ POSS.LOC compound-LOC
   ‘There are many people in his compound (at this moment; the
   likely interpretation is that these people are useless).’

b. $Bh\ddot{e}n$ $gb\acute{e}$ $\varnothing$ $\ddot{a}$ $bh\dot{a}$ $k\ddot{w}\ddot{a}n\ddot{y}$-$dh\ddot{s}$.
   human many 3SG.EXI 3SG.NSBJ POSS compound-LOC
   ‘There are many people in his compound (in general, although
   at the moment of speech they may be absent).’

Some instances are found where $g\ddot{o}$ appears in constructions with the possessee in another oblique case, e.g. superessive (23a), although in other cases, $bh\dot{a}$ can go with the same case form (23b).

(23) a. $Y\ddot{a}$ $s\acute{e}i\ddot{y}$ $z\ddot{i}r$ $Y\dot{\ddot{o}}$ $g\ddot{o}$ $k\ddot{\ddot{o}}\ddot{\ddot{o}}$.
   3SG.PRF charcoal pass Yo POSS.LOC house.SUP
   ‘He left traces of charcoal on the wall of Yo’s house.’

b. $Dh\ddot{i}n$ $y\ddot{r}$ $kp\acute{o}$-$s\ddot{\ddot{i}}\ddot{a}$ $\ddot{u}$ $bh\dot{a}$ $k\ddot{\ddot{o}}\ddot{\ddot{o}}$.
   mildew 3SG.EXI spread-DUR 2SG.NSBJ POSS house.SUP
   ‘The walls of your house have gone moudly (lit. Mould has
   spread on the wall).’

$G\ddot{o}$ can be found (in free variation with $bh\dot{a}$, as a rule) in a possessive construction in the post-verbal position even if the possessee is represented by an inflexible noun (24)–(26).
(24) Yɤ̏ gȁ ɤ̄ gɔ̏ dhíȉ tà.
3SG.EXI die\NEUT REFL.SG POSS.LOC bed on
‘He died in his bed.’ (e27: 6)

(25) Bhán wʌ̌ʌ̌gā dȁ ā bhā / gɔ̏ glɛ̋ gû.
1SG.PRF money go.up 3SG.NSBJ POSS / POSS.LOC bag in
‘I have put money into his bag.’ (d76: 2)

(26) Bhán wʌ̌ʌ̌gā yȁ ā bhā / gɔ̏ bɛ̏ɛ̏ tà.
1SG.PRF money go.up 3SG.NSBJ POSS / POSS.LOC shirt on
‘I have put money on top of his shirt.’

However, in many other seemingly similar contexts, gɔ̏ is not admissible, e.g. (27)–(28).

(27) Bīɤ yà tāā ā bhā / *gɔ̏ bɛ̏ɛ̏ tà.
elephant 3SG.PRF tread 3SG.NSBJ POSS / POSS.LOC nephew on
‘An elephant has trodden on his nephew.’ (d76: 4)

(28) Bhán kpȁn ɯ̄ bhā/*gɔ̏ pàŋ bhā.
1SG.PRF see 2SG.NSBJ POSS/POSS.LOC trousers on
‘I have found your trousers.’

As I understand things, the difference between contexts of the type (24)–(25) and (27)–(28) can probably be explained in terms of the etymology of the possessive construction marked by gɔ̏. I believe it to be a reinterpretation of a predicative construction with two oblique constituents, the first introduced by the possessive locative postposition gɔ̏ ‘at (sb.’s place)’, and the second, indicating the localization. If so, the original reading of example (20b) could be ‘They have gathered at Tia’s place, in the shed’; the reading of (23a) ‘He left traces of charcoal at Yo’s place, on the wall’.

My etymological hypothesis seems to be confirmed by examples like (29), where another postposition, tà, appears in a context where two readings are possible, ‘into my house’ or ‘at my place, in the house’.
The current variant of the emphatic possessive construction is as follows: the possessor is followed by the determiner dē ‘self’ followed by a connector gāā: n dē gāā kō ‘my own house’. The connector gāā results from fusion of gā ‘bone’, non-subject 3sg. pronoun ā, and the possessive marker bhā. A full (non-contracted) version is also available (30).

(30) n dē gā ā bhā kō
1SG.NSBJ self bone 3SG.NSBJ POSS house
‘my own house (lit. a house of my own bone)’

4.3. Superlative construction

In the superlative construction two identical nouns are connected by a postposition, while the second noun usually changes its tone to xL.
These constructions are not frequent in texts and seem to be strongly lexicalized. I have identified two types of superlative construction:

- some nouns used with numerals, with the postposition tā ‘on’: kāŋ tā kāŋ ‘hundreds’, gblū tā gblū ‘thousands’, gblū bhēen tā bhēen ‘thousands and thousands; many thousands’ (bhēen is an archaic word which can be approximately translated as ‘multitude, great number’; it is used only in combination with gblū ‘thousand’);
- with some kinship terms it is used (with postposition bhā ‘on’ or gū ‘in’) to express degree of seniority. The term can be repeated several times (each instance designating an additional degree of distance in age), and the tone of kinship terms changes to xL following rather complicated rules: zlāā bhā zlāa ‘Ego’s next younger sibling by one’, zlāā bhā zlāā bhā zlāa ‘Ego’s next younger sibling by two’; zīɤ̏ɤ gū zīɤ̏ɤ gū zīɤ̏ɤ or zīɤ̏ɤ bhā zīɤ̏ɤ bhā zīɤ̏ɤ (in the latter case the tone of the noun remains unchanged) ‘great-grandfather’.

4.4. Case-marked construction

Genitival constructions where the dependent noun appears in an oblique case form are infrequent in texts, but they are nonetheless perfectly grammatical. In my data, only locative case forms of the dependent nouns are attested, e.g. (31).

(31) Sīɣ yā p̃-dh̃ ɣūŋ bh̃.
   fire.CMM 3SG.PRF village-LOC sacred.house eat
   ‘Fire has burnt (lit.: eaten) the sacred house of the village.’

Given that the forms of oblique cases go back to combinations of nouns with postpositions, it might be supposed that this construction is just a variant of the genitival construction with postposition presented in §4.1. Even if this interpretation is etymologically correct, in synchrony the case-marked construction should be regarded as a separate type.
There is a subtype of the case-marked construction where the head noun is tone-marked \((N_{dep}^{-\text{LOC}} N_h^{IZF})\), see (32). In this respect, the case-marked construction does not differ from the genitival construction with postposition in §4.1.

(32) \(\textit{Dhån-dhāan kèe-dhǐ yūa yāa sà̄.} \)

child-PL.POSS occiput-LOC illness\IZF 3SG.NEG.IPFV good

‘Children’s occipital disease is dangerous.’

5. Conclusion

As can be seen, in their general outline the genitival constructions of the Eastern Dan follow the common Mande model, but at the same time numerous innovations have emerged:

– the formal opposition between head-marked and head-unmarked constructions has been retained, but the semantic difference between them has become blurred,
– in the alienable (possessive) construction, the common and locative cases are formally contrasted (with some reservations) by means of the possessive markers (postpositions),
– the genitival relation can be marked on the dependent noun not only by a postposition (as in other Mande languages), but also by morphological case.

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Abbreviations

ADV – adverbial suffix (-wō ~ -bhō)
NEUT – neutral aspect marker (an extra-low tone on the verbal stem)
Aux – auxiliary
NP – noun phrase
CMM – common case
NSBJ – non-subject pronominal series
CONS – consecutive conjunction (ý̱)
PL – plural
DO – direct object
POSS – possessive marker (bhȁ, gọ); possessive pronoun
DUR – durative verbal suffix -sīṭ̌
PP – postposition
EXI – existential series of predicative markers
PRF – perfect series of predicative markers
FOC – focalization particle (dhà ~ dhù)
RECP – reciprocal pronoun
GER – gerundive suffix -sù
REFL – reflexive pronoun
IMP – imperative series of predicative markers
REL – relativization marker (ś)
INCL – inclusive pronoun
S – subject
INT – intensive
SG – singular
IPFV – imperfective
SLA – selective marker (-sù)
IZF – status-constructus (izafet) marker (an extralow tone on the head noun)
SMLT – a multifunctional conjunction (ǩ̌)
JNT – conjoint series of predicative markers; tonal modification on the verbal stem in the conjoint construction
SUP – superessive case or postposition (bhà)
LOC – locative case
V – verb
Nd – dependent noun
X – post-verbal arguments and circonstants
Nh – head noun
xH – extra-high tone
NEG – negative
xL – extra-low tone
References


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