GENITIVAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN EASTERN DAN

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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 every-where.

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 disappearence. 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

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[1] This argument has been advanced by Denis Creissels (p.c.).

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 yǎn* <human

eye> 'human eye, an eye of a human', *yäbhä fìi* <onion smell> 'smell of onion', *zēnỹ pínŋ̀* <mosquito trail> 'gnat bite'.

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. **ɨ̄ɨ̄**   **tàä̀-dhɛ̀**   *yà*   *kā̄*   *dhɨ̀i-sɯ̈.*
         2SG.NSBJ   back-CMM   3SG.PRF   do   dirt-ADJ
         'Your back is dirty.'

   b.   *Slä̀ʌ*   *yɤ̀*   *bhɔ̄-sīʌ*   **n̄**   **bhɛ̄ɛ́-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 IZF: *bhlɔ̄ɔ dhɨ̀aŋ* (← *dhīaŋ*) <challenge talk\IZF> 'outrage', *bhúä̀ʌ bhɛ̀n* (← *bhēn*) <beard human\IZF> 'bearded man', *bhlǎ́ dhä* (← *dhā*) <flying.termite rain\IZF> '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 (*dhǐ* 'mouth', *sɛ̌* 'earth, ground' and *yǎn* '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) *Yɤ̏*   *n̄*   *dhēɛ́-kpɔ̀*   ***kwāà̏***   ***kɔ́-dhí***
    3SG.EXI 1SG.NSBJ question-spread\NEUT 1PL.INCL.POSS house- mouth
    gú   ***bhēn-dhṳ̀n***   ***wɔ̏n***   *ká*   *dhɛ́ǵhɛ́*   *plɛ̀*   *píɤ*.
    inside   human-PL   matter\IZF with   hour   two   at
    'He went on asking me about members of our family for two hours.'

(3) *<…>kɛ́ɛ* ***Bhàndhî bhā à***   ***wɔ̏n***   *yä̀*   *sēë̀*.
    but   Marie   ART 3SG.NSBJ matter\IZF 3SG.PRF spoil
    '… despite everything, Mary had died', lit. '… but Marie's matter had spoilt'. (Dūūwɔ̏n)

(4) *Yɤ̏*   *n̄*   *dhēɛ́-kpɔ̀*   ***ū̏***   ***wɔ̏n***
    3SG.EXI 1SG.NSBJ question-spread\NEUT 2SG.NSBJ matter\IZF
    ká   *yāandhíɤ*.
    with   yesterday
    'Yesterday he asked me about you.' (f11:13)

(5) *À̏*   *kɔ̏*   *kpɑ́ʌkpʌ̏ʌ-sṳ̀*   *dhʌ̀n*   *ɤ́*
    3SG.NSBJ hand.CMM   numb-SLA   FOC   REL\3SG.JNT
    à̏   ***dhɤ̏aŋ***   *zɑ̄*.
    3SG.NSBJ talk\IZF   kill\JNT
    'He speaks of his hand that is numb.'

The rules for tonal head marking in Eastern Dan are difficult to formulate, 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.: *gwē dhṳ̀* 'trunk of ceiba tree' — *gwē dhṳ̀* 'ceiba tree', *bīɤ sɔ́n* 'elephant tusk' — *bīɤ wṳ̀* (← *wū̄*) 'elephant carcass'.

(ii) generic nouns are more prone to display head marking, e.g. *tɛ̄ä̀n wɔ̌n* (← *wɔ́n*) <truth matter> 'truth, true matter', *sūà bhɛ̏n* (← *bhɛ̄n*) <untruth human> 'liar' vs. *blűn sɛ̋ŋ* 'porcupine quill', *kɔ́ kpǎn* '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) *báä* 'bottomland' (where Dan people usually plant their rice) does not change its tone after *dɛ̀ɛ* 'today', but it does change tone in a practically identical syntactic context after the word *yäandhíɤ̌* 'yesterday'. Otherwise, *dɛ̀ɛ* by itself does not impede tone lowering on the head word, e.g. *dɛ̀ɛ pä̀ŋ* (← *pà̀ŋ*) 'today's pants', *dɛ̀ɛ tä̀œŋ* (← *tɛ̋œ̏ŋ*) 'today's laws'.

(6) *Dɛ̀ɛ   báä   yáa   dhɛ̀   yāandhíɤ̌*
    today   bottom.land   3SG.NEG.IPFV   that   yesterday
    bäa   dhɤ́.
    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 *gwɛ̄ dhù̀* 'ceiba tree' vs. *gwɛ̄ dhű* '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 *yä̀bhä̀ fìi* 'smell of onion'), and the dependent noun in a headmaked 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 *wɔ́n/wɔ̀n* 'matter', *bhēn/bhɛ̀n* 'human being', *pɑ̄/pɑ̀* '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.
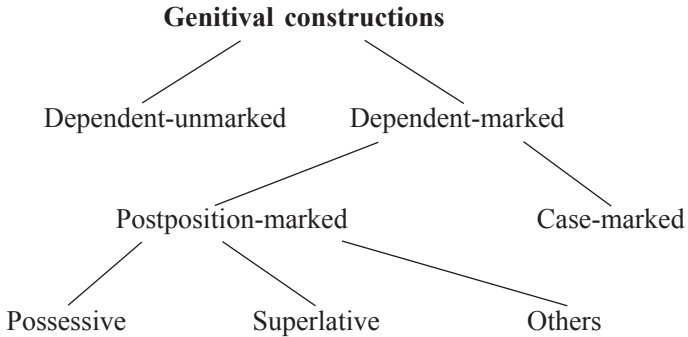
Figure 1. Formal types of dependence marking in genitival constructions

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   ɤ́   gō   Tökpȁplɤ̀ɤ   **Bhlɑ̋ŋ̏zɑ̄***
        Jean   3SG.JNT go.away\JNT Tokpapleu   Blangzeu

   píɤ   kwɑ̋nɤ̏-dhɤ̄.
   at   compound-LOC

   'Jean left Tokpapleu, the compound of Blangzeu.' (Sumaoro.148)

(8) *Sá   ȁ   tȁ   bhɛ̋ɛ   yȁ   gɔ̏*.
   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):

bhlʌ̀ʌ-gú-bhɛ̈n <respect-in-human\ɪᴢꜰ> 'respectable person'
kwĭ-plɤ̀ɤ-bhɛ̈n <white.person-at-human\ɪᴢꜰ> 'city-dweller'
kä̀sò̀-gú-bhɛ̈n <prison-in-human\ɪᴢꜰ> '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, *bhä̀* and *gɔ̋* (see §4.2.3), and in the formal variability of the postposition *bhä̀* in the possessive construction:

- after the mid-tone personal pronouns *ū* 2ꜱɢ.ɴꜱʙᴊ and *ɤ̄* ʀᴇꜰʟ.ꜱɢ, the tone of the postposition *bhä̀* 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, *bhä̀ ~ ä̀* (10).[4] In Eastern Dan the variant *ä̀* 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 *ä̀* maintains its morphophonological autonomy and does not merge with the preceding foot. In particular, it is not nasalized by the preceding nasal vowel (*gɔ̋ɔ̈n ä̀ gblöo* [gɔ̋ɔ̃̈ ä̀ gblöö] 'a man's stool' (d138: 7)), and no resyllabification occurs if the preceding foot ends in *-ŋ* (*bhȳnɲ́ ä̀ sɔ̄* 'a Jula's cloth' (d138: 9)).

- if preceded by the plural word *dhùn,* the possessive marker *bhä̀*
  merges with this to give *dhäan* (12).

(9) *Yà   dū   dɔ̄   ɨ̄̄   **bhā**   bhláà-dhɛ̏   tä̀.*
3SG.PRF   sorcery   put   REFL.SG   POSS   field-CMM   on
'He has installed a protective fetish in his field.' (f68: 13)

(10) *gèe   bhä̀ ~ ä̀   kǐ́ʌʌ*
mask   on   messenger
'mask's assistant'

(11) *Yǖa   yáa   ä̀   zūʌ́gā   bhä̀ / *ä̀.*
illness   3SG.NEG.IPFV   3SG.NSBJ   heart   on
'His heart is healthy (lit. Illness is not on his heart).'

(12) *Kwǐ́-**dhäan**   bèdhɛ̋   bhá*
white.person-3SG.NSBJ-PL.POSS   medicine   certain
yɨ̀   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 bhä̀ kɔ́* 'house of a man, man's
house' vs. *bhäan kɔ́* 'bird's nest', cf. (13)–(14). In other words, from
the grammatical standpoint, only humans are viewed as true owners.[5]

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[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 *bhä̀*. On the other hand, the postposition *bhä̀* 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: *bùu bhä̀ tɨ̋ŋ* <harmattan on
time> 'the period of harmattan', *dhūɨɨ bhä̀ gbīnŋgā* <raffia on caterpillar> 'mag-
got living in raffia palms'.

(13) *Wūū*   *�*   *bhā*   *yɤ̀*   **ɤ̄**   **yùun**   *gɔ̄ɔn-sīʌ.*
      meat   REL   ART   3SG.EXI   REFL.SG   maggot   fight-DUR
      'Maggots have appeared on the meat', lit. 'The meat fights its
       maggots'.

(14) *Bhäan*   *ŕ*   *yā*   *yɤ̀*   **ɤ̄**   **kɔ́*   *dɔ̀*
      bird   REL   this   3SG.EXI   REFL.SG   house   build
      sı̋āa.
      ground.SUP
      '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 (*bhä̀* or *gɔ̀*), 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 gɛ̀n* 'my foot/leg', *Yɔ̀ tődhɛ̋* 'Yo's ear'), kinship terms
and semantically close words (*n̄ zláä* 'my younger sibling', *ä yɶ̀ɶ̀* 'his
enemy', *ä tɔ̋ŋ* 'his namesake', *ä tɔ́* '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

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[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 *dhēbʌ̏* 'wife', *dhʌ́n* 'child' (15) and *béɛ̏* 'nephew (sister's son)' (16), while *dhìnbhɔ̀ɔ̀n* 'marriageable in-law', *gɔ̀n* 'husband', *bhāŋ* 'child' (an archaic word in Gwɛɛtaa), *dhú* 'daughter' and *gbɤ̄* 'son' are inalienable (17). *Wūn* 'chevelure, head of hair' is alienable (18), while *kāä* '(body) hair' is inalienable (19). *Gwān* 'blood draining from a bleeding nose' and *fɤ̃yǐ* 'sweat' are alienable, while *gbō* 'excrement', *wēé* 'urine', *yɔ̀ɔn* 'blood' are inalienable.

(15) *Ä̀*   ***bhʌ̀***   ***dhʌ́n***   *bhā*   *yɤ̀*   *bhɔ̀*
     3SG.NSBJ   POSS   child   ART   3SG.EXI   appear\NEUT
     kɤ̄   *yɤ̀*   *tʉ̀n*   *Kläaplɤ̀ɤ.*
     SMLT   3SG.EXI   be.still\NEUT   Klaapleu
     'This child of his was born when he was in Klaapleu.'

(16) ***Kwāʌ̀***   ***béɛ̏***   *bhā*   *yɤ́*   *wó*
     1PL.INCL.POSS   nephew   ART   CONS   3PL.JNT/3SG.NSBJ
     dhɛ̏   *Gbádhīʌʌ.*
     call\JNT   Gbadieu
     'Our nephew was named Gbadieu.'

(17) ***Gbāan***   ***gbɤ̄***   *ä̀*   *sʌ̋nŋ*   *gā*   *pɔ̋*   *yɤ̀*
     Gban   son   POSS   gold   bone   loan   3SG.EXI
     gʉ̀n   *ä̀*   *bhʌ̈.*
     be.PST\NEUT   3SG.NSBJ   on
     'He owed a piece of gold to Gban's son.'

(18) *Wä*   ***ä̀***   ***bhʌ̀***   ***wūn***   *bɔ̄.*
     3PL.PRF   3SG.NSBJ   POSS   chevelure   pass
     'Her hair has been plaited.'

(19) *Bhán*   ***n̄***   ***kāа̏***   *gā*   *sɔ́ɔdhű́*   *wȍ*.
      1SG.PRF   1SG.NSBJ   hair   bone   five   appear
      'I have pulled out five of my bodyhairs.'

The class membership of certain nouns can be unstable. *Yέɛn* 'dream' is treated as alienable in some contexts and as inalienable in others. The noun *dhǐʌŋ* 'life' and its synonym *tȍsǽæ* appear equally able to behave as alienable or inalienable in any context: *ä bhä̀ dhǐʌŋ =* *= ä dhǐʌŋ* '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, *bhä̀* and *gɔ̀*

As already mentioned, Eastern Dan has two postpositions used as possessive markers in nominal constructions, *bhä̀* and *gɔ̀*.

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

(20) a. ***Tìa*** ***bhä̀*** ***gɔ̄nŋ-dhɛ̏***   *yà*   *gɤ̋*.
      Tia   POSS   shed-CMM   3SG.PRF   burn
      'Tio's straw shed has burnt.' (d189: 14)

b.   *Kwä̀*   *kwā*   *kó*   *yɤ̄* ***Tìa gɔ̀***   ***gɔ̄nŋ-dhɤ̄***.
      1PL.INCL.IMP 1PL.INCL.NSBJ RECP.CMM see Tia POSS.LOC shed-LOC
      'Let us meet in Tia's shed.'

(21) a. *Yɤ̀*   *ɤ̄*   ***bhā*** ***dhɛ̄ŋ̏-dhɛ̏***   *gɛ́ɛ*   *sú-sīʌ*.
      3SG.EXI REFL.SG POSS hamlet-CMM unburnt.grass take-DUR
      'He is piling up unburnt brushwood on his farm.'

b.   *Kèsɛ̋*   *yɤ̀*   *dɤ̄ŋ* *dhɤ̀ɤ-sṳ̀*   *ká*   *ɤ̄*
      Kese   3SG.EXI   trap   set-GER   with   REFL.SG
      gɔ̀   ***dhɛ̄ŋ-dhɤ̄***   *dɛ̌dɛ̌-wō*.
      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 *gɔ̀* is the locative case possessive marker, and *bhä* 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 *gɔ̀*, although preferable, can still be replaced by *bhä*. Some speakers perceive a stylistic and/or pragmatic difference between the two variants of the possessive construction: the construction with *gɔ̀* may (optionally) express a negative attitude on the part of the speaker, and it tends to describe an actual situation, whereas *bhä* is neutral.

(22) a. *Bhēn   gbɛ́   ø   ä̀   gɔ̀   kwɑ̃́nŋ̈-dhɤ̀.*
         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.   *Bhēn   gbɛ́   ø   ä̀   bhä̀   kwɑ̃́nŋ̈-dhɤ̀.*
         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 *gɔ̀* appears in constructions with the possessee in another oblique case, e.g. superessive (23a), although in other cases, *bhä* can go with the same case form (23b).

(23) a. *Yà   séŋ̈   zīɤ   Yɔ̀   gɔ̀   kɔ́ɔ̀.*
         3SG.PRF   charcoal   pass   Yo   POSS.LOC   house.SUP
         'He left traces of charcoal on the wall of Yo's house.'

    b.   *Dhìin   yɤ̀   kpɔ́-sīʌ   ū̀   bhā   kɔ́ɔ̀.*
         mildew   3SG.EXI   spread-DUR   2SG.NSBJ   POSS   house.SUP
         'The walls of your house have gone mouldy (lit. Mould has
         spread on the wall).'

Gɔ̀ can be found (in free variation with *bhä*, 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) *Yȓ*   *gä*   *r̄*   **gɔ̀**   *dhîì*   *tä.*
    3SG.EXI   die\NEUT   REFL.SG   POSS.LOC   bed   on
    'He died in his bed.' (e27: 6)

(25) *Bhán*   *wʌ́ʌ̀gā*   *dä*   *ä̀*   **bhà̀ / gɔ̀**   *glɛ̄ɛ́*   *gú.*
    1SG.PRF   money   go.up   3SG.NSBJ   POSS / POSS.LOC   bag   in
    'I have put money into his bag.' (d76: 2)

(26) *Bhán*   *wʌ́ʌ̀gā*   *yä*   *ä̀*   **bhà̀ / gɔ̀**   *bɛ́ɛ̀*   *tä.*
    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, *gɔ̀* is not admissible, e.g. (27)–(28).

(27) *Bīȓ*   *yà*   *tāä̀*   *ä̀*   **bhà̀ / *gɔ̀**   *bɛ́ɛ̀*   *tä.*
    elephant   3SG.PRF   tread   3SG.NSBJ   POSS / POSS.LOC   nephew   on
    'An elephant has trodden on his nephew.' (d76: 4)

(28) *Bhán*   *kpä̀n*   *ū*   **bhā̄/*gɔ̀**   *pàŋ*   *bhä̀.*
    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 *gɔ̀*. I believe it to be a reinterpretation of a predicative construction with two oblique constituents, the first introduced by the possessive locative postposition *gɔ̀* '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, *tä*, appears in a context where two readings are possible, 'into my house' or 'at my place, in the house'.

(29) *Yɤ̀*   *zùa*   *n̄*   *tä*   *kɔ́ɔ-dhɤ̄*   *kɤ̄*   *ä̀*   *dhó*
     3SG.EXI pierce\NEUT 1SG.NSBJ on   house-LOC SMLT 3SG.NSBJ go

     dhɛ̀̈   *wɛ́̈ɛ*   *bhá*   *yáa*   *dhɤ́*   *yāandhíɤ.*
     place   other   certain   3SG.NEG.IPFV be   yesterday
     'Yesterday he burst into my house when he had no other place
     to go.'

In any case, if we consider the examples above in this perspective, it turns out that in those sentences where the possessive marker *gɔ̌* is not accepted (27), (28), the "two obliques reading" is not applicable, while it is well suited to those phrases where *gɔ̌* is accepted.

If we adopt this hypothesis, it can be said that the locative possessive construction with *gɔ̌* and the possessive construction with *bhä* are quite different in origin. Their current case-like distribution has emerged more or less accidentally. However, in the modern language, the correlation between the locative case of the head noun and the choice of the possessive marker seems fairly strong (even if the use of *gɔ̌* in constructions with indeclinable nouns is also possible), so a case agreement interpretation becomes plausible.

4.2.4. Emphatic possessive construction

The current variant of the emphatic possessive construction is as follows: the possessor is followed by the determiner *dë* 'self' followed by a connector *gāä*: *n̄ dë gāä kɔ́* 'my own house'. The connector *gāä* results from fusion of *gā* 'bone', non-subject 3sg. pronoun *ä,* and the possessive marker *bhä.* A full (non-contracted) version is also available (30).

(30) *n̄*   *dë*   *gā*   *ä̀*   *bhä*   *kɔ́*
     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 *tà* 'on': *kāŋ tà kʌ̀ŋ* 'hundreds', *gblú tà gblù̀* 'thousands', *gblú bhēɛn tà bhɛ̀ɛn* 'thousands and thousands; many thousands' (*bhēɛn* is an archaic word which can be approximately translated as 'multitude, great number'; it is used only in combination with *gblú* 'thousand');

–   with some kinship terms it is used (with postposition *bhä* 'on' or *gú* '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: *zláä bhä zläa* 'Ego's next younger sibling by one', *zláä bhä zláä bhä zläa* 'Ego's next younger sibling by two'; *zíʏ̌ʏ gú zìʏʏ gú zíʏ̌ʏ* or *zíʏ̌ʏ bhä zíʏ̌ʏ bhä zíʏ̌ʏ* (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) *Sĭʏ*   *yä*   **pʏ̂-dhʏ̄**   **gűnŋ**   *bhʏ̌*.
      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$_{dep}$-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) *Dhɑ́n-dhǎan*   **kɛ̀e-dhɤ̄**   **yɯ̀a**   *yáa*   *sɑ̏.*
       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.

Acknowledgements

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 (*yɨ́*)
PL – plural
DO – direct object
POSS – possessive marker (*bhä̀, gɔ̈́*); possessive pronoun
DUR – durative verbal suffix *-sɪ̄ɑ̄*
PP – postposition
EXI – existential series of predicative markers
PRF – perfect series of predicative markers
FOC – focalization particle (*dhạ̀ ~ dhụ̄*)
RECP – reciprocal pronoun
GER – gerundive suffix *-sü̈*
REFL – reflexive pronoun
IMP – imperative series of predicative markers
REL – relativization marker (*ɨ́*)
INCL – inclusive pronoun
S – subject
INT – intensive
SG – singular
IPFV – imperfective
SLA – selective marker (*-sü̈*)
IZF – status-constructus (izafet) marker (an extralow tone on the head noun)
SMLT – a multifunctional conjunction (*kɨ̄*)
JNT – conjoint series of predicative markers; tonal modification on the verbal stem in the conjoint construction
SUP – superessive case or postposition (*bhä̀*)
LOC – locative case
V – verb
N_d – dependent noun
X – post-verbal arguments and circonstants
N_h – head noun
xH – extra-high tone
NEG – negative
xL – extra-low tone

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