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Fritz Serzisko, *Der Ausdruck der Possessivität im Somali*. (Continuum: Schriftenreihe zur Linguistik, 1.) Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1984. 214 pp. DM 48.

Reviewed by Annarita Puglielli

This book is an application of Seiler's theory of possession (e.g. Seiler 1972, 1981) to the description of Somali, and it is written within the general framework of the Cologne project for the study of language universals and typology. It is also a witness to the increasing general interest of linguists and Africanists in the languages of East Africa.

The author states right at the beginning the object of his work: it concerns the linguistic realization of semantic "possession" and therefore does not include, for example, all genitive constructions that might be considered possessive in a wide sense as opposed to *strictu sensu*. Following Seiler's hypothesis, possession is considered to be realized by a set of syntactic constructions expressing a "bio-cultural" relationship between two nominals. This relationship can be more or less explicit in its structural realization and more or less inherent to the possessor. The implicit construction is given by two nouns in sequence, and is the expression of an inherent possession. In the most explicit construction the two nouns are connected by means of a verb of possession and this is the expression of a non-inherent relationship.

In the following section (part 2) Serzisko presents a general sketch of some parts of Somali phonemics, morphology and syntax. While the author's intention is to give the necessary background for understanding the analyses that follow, it seems to be redundant for people who already have some knowledge of Somali, and is probably not detailed enough for those readers who do not know Somali at all and who would approach this book with a completely different attitude. Our impression is that somehow there is a sharp contrast between this part and the core of the book where the analysis is conducted in great depth and with undoubted mastery.

The central part of the book (part 3) presents a very careful analysis of those Somali constructions in which possession is realized: juxtaposition (3.1.), adverbial construction (3.2.), and "have" predicates (3.3.). Juxtaposition includes constructions such as: *inan-kay-ga* (N + Poss) 'my son', *guuri-ga nin-ka* (N + N) 'the man's house', and *inan-ka faraskiis-a* (N + N Poss) 'the man's horse' (literally 'the man his horse'). Each of these constructions is investigated in thorough detail, and some interesting facts are pointed out by Serzisko: the obligatory occurrence of possessive suffixes with kinship terms when used referentially and the peculiar structure of sentences where relational nouns are present (already noticed by Andrzejewski 1979). A few words more on the treatment of sentences like *Cali Ceebla ay-ay wallalo yihiin* 'Cali is the brother of Ceebla' (literally 'Cali Ceebla they are brothers'). These constructions still need a deeper syntactic analysis since the hypothesis of a double subject formulated by Serzisko does not appear completely satisfactory. For instance, some facts remain unexplained; only the first one of the nouns, both of which are considered subjects, is put in the nominative case.

Both for the second and third type of construction the author offers a number of syntactic criteria for distinguishing (1) between possessive N + N constructions (*kaab-ta naag-ta* 'the woman's shoe') and non-possessive N + N constructions (*Kacaan-ta warshadd-da* 'the industrial revolution') and (2) between truly possessive constructions like *niin-ka guuri-giis-a* 'the man's house' and partitive constructions like *niman-kii gardood* 'some of the men' or locative constructions like *miis-ka host-tiis-a* 'under the table'.

The adverbial constructions, i.e. structures in which the two nouns involved in the possessive relationship are two separate arguments of the verb, are discussed in detail by Serzisko in terms of case grammar and functional sentence perspective.

The final part deals with "have" constructions in Somali, and the author notices that in this language the possessor must be the subject of all possession verbs. There is no verb with the structure 'A is the possessum of B' like in Italian *appartenere* or *essere di* or in English *belong*. He sug-

gests that the change in sentence perspective – which in languages like English and Italian is realized by means of a different verb – is realized in Somali by means of word order and focus. The facts that he analyses in this part of the description seem to us to need further investigation, since the problem of word order as well as its relation to focus is one of the most complex aspects of Somali syntax, and has not received a completely adequate treatment up till now.

We could still add many comments on several points of the description, given the wealth of details in Serzisko's book. As in many other works on Somali or other exotic languages there are some misspelled forms, as well as wrong glosses that appear; but we would rather like to conclude with some general remarks. The approach adopted in this work, which starts from a semantic notion and looks for all its linguistic realizations seems to be very interesting and productive. On the one hand it gives an idea of how certain notions are conceptualized in different languages, and on the other hand it shows what kinds of morphological and syntactic means are used and can be used for their linguistic expression. From this point of view Serzisko's book is an extremely good example of how this kind of work can be conducted on a complex language like Somali.

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With a remarkable efficiency the papers of the Second International Congress of Somali Studies have appeared in four volumes soon after the Congress. Volume 2 deals with archeology and history, volume 3 with