

## Floating genitives and possessive framing in Northern Akhvakh

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### 1. Introduction

This paper establishes the specificity of a particular type of construction involving the genitives of Northern Akhvakh, designated here as *floating genitive construction*, describes the function of this construction in terms of *possessive framing*, and analyzes it from a typological perspective.

Akhvakh (*aš<sup>w</sup>aī mič<sup>i</sup>*, Russian *axvaxskij jazyk*) belongs to the Andic (sub-)branch of the Northeast Caucasian (or Nakh-Daghestanian) family.<sup>1</sup> According to Magomedova & Abdulaeva (2007), Akhvakh has approximately 20 000 speakers. Four dialects are traditionally recognized. One of them is designated as Northern Akhvakh, whereas the other three are grouped under the label of Southern Akhvakh.

Northern Akhvakh is spoken in four villages of the Axvaxskij Rajon in the western part of Daghestan (Tadmagitl', Lologonitl', Kudijab-Roso, and Izani), in recent settlements in the lowlands of Daghestan, and in Axaxdərə near Zaqatala (Azerbaijan). The variety of Akhvakh spoken in Axaxdərə, where I have carried most of my field work, does not differ significantly from the varieties of Northern Akhvakh spoken in the Axvaxskij Rajon, and it would not be justified to treat it as a separate dialect. The Southern Akhvakh dialects are spoken in one village each (Cegob, Tljanub and Ratlub), all situated in the Šamil'skij Rajon of Daghestan.

(Magomedbekova 1967) and (Magomedova & Abdulaeva 2007) are the main references on Akhvakh. The analysis proposed in this paper is based on field work carried in Axaxdərə and Tadmagitl'. Like the other Andic languages, Akhvakh has no writing tradition. The transcription used in this paper departs from the IPA conventions on the following points: alveolar voiceless affricate *c*; palato-alveolar fricatives *š* (voiceless) and *ž* (voiced); palato-alveolar affricates *č* (voiceless) and *č̣* (voiced); lateral voiceless affricate *l*; the macron is used for long vowel and strong consonants.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the basics of Northern Akhvakh morphosyntax. Section 3 describes the formation and morphological properties of Northern Akhvakh genitives. Section 4 reviews the functions fulfilled by genitives in Northern Akhvakh syntax. Section 5 deals with the floating genitives

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<sup>1</sup> The other Andic languages are Andi, Bagvalal, Botlikh, Chamala, Godoberi, Karata, and Tindi. None of them has a particularly close relationship to Akhvakh. Andic languages are traditionally grouped with Avar and Tsezic languages into a single branch of the Northeast Caucasian family. The other branches of the Northeast Caucasian family are Lak, Dargi (or Dargwa), Lezgi, Khinalug (sometimes considered a marginal member of the Lezgi branch), and Nakh.

of Northern Akhvakh, which constitute the main topic of this paper. In section 6, some parallels are proposed between the floating genitives of Northern Akhvakh and functionally comparable phenomena found in other languages.

## 2. General remarks on Akhvakh morphosyntax

### 2.1. Clause structure

Akhvakh clause structure is characterized by flexible constituent order. Case marking and gender-number agreement between the verb and its core arguments are consistently ergative. In contrast, assertive agreement (see section 2.3) follows a split intransitive pattern.

Arguments whose identity is recoverable from the context can freely be omitted, and unexpressed arguments receiving an arbitrary interpretation are common too.

Causative is the only valency-changing mechanism systematically expressed via verb morphology or grammaticalized periphrases.

### 2.2 Nouns and noun phrases

Three semantically transparent agreement classes of nouns are distinguished in the singular: human masculine (M), human feminine (F), and non-human (N). The only exceptions to the semantic rule of class assignment are *ãde* ‘person’ and *mik’e* ‘child’, which in the singular trigger N agreement, whereas the corresponding plural forms *ãdo* and *mik’eli* regularly trigger HPL agreement. In the plural, the distinction *masculine* vs. *feminine* is neutralized, resulting in a binary opposition *human plural* (HPL) vs. *non-human plural* (NPL). Noun morphology shows only frozen vestiges of class prefixes.

In canonical NPs, the head noun is in final position and is inflected for number and case. In headless NPs (i.e., in NPs the interpretation of which requires retrieving from the context a notion that could be expressed as the head of a canonical NP), class, number and case marks attach to the last word of the NP, whatever its nature.

All noun dependents in canonical NPs optionally take class suffixes agreeing with the head noun, and some adjectives have obligatory class agreement prefixes. However, not all adjectives have class agreement prefixes, noun dependents other than adjectives very rarely occur with agreement suffixes in canonical NPs, and suffixal agreement of adjectives is usual only in the HPL class. Akhvakh ignores case agreement.

Number inflection of nouns is irregular and involves considerable free variation.

The 1st and 2nd person pronouns show irregularities in their case inflection, but they distinguish the same cases as nouns. They are not marked for gender, but an inclusive vs. exclusive distinction is found in the 1st person plural. Akhvakh has no 3rd person pronouns, and uses demonstratives in the discursive function fulfilled by dedicated 3rd person pronouns in other languages.

The absolute form of nominals (used in the extra-syntactic function of quotation or designation and in S or P roles) has no overt mark. Case suffixes may attach to a stem identical with the absolute form, or to a special *oblique stem*. For a discussion of the historical significance of the oblique stem, see Alekseev 2003:30-82. In the singular, the formation of the oblique stem is very irregular and involves

considerable free variation. In the plural, the formation of the oblique stem is more regular. In particular, ‘oblique stem markers’ expressing class distinctions (M *-šu-*, F/N *-šī-*, HPL *-lo-*, NPL *-le-*) are more systematically used in the plural than in the singular. In headless NPs, the use of these oblique stem markers is systematic.

Case inflection includes the following cases directly attached to the oblique stem of the noun:

- ERG (ergative): *-de*
- DAT (dative): *-la*
- GEN (genitive):  $\emptyset$  or *-ī*
- COM (comitative) *-k’ena*
- five series of spatial cases encoding different spatial configurations,<sup>2</sup> with three cases in each series: ESS (essive) *-i* or *-e*, LAT (lative) *-a*, and EL (elative) *-u(ne)*; *-u* was identified by Magomedbekova (1967) as ablative proper, and *-une* as perlative, with however a tendency to free variation, and the free variation seems to have generalized.

The purposive case (*-bana*) is an extension of the dative.

The distinction between three spatial cases applies to locative adverbs too.

There are two possible constructions for NP coordination: either “NP<sub>1</sub>-*k’ena* NP<sub>2</sub>”, where *-k’ena* is the suffix of the comitative case (also used for comitative or instrumental adjuncts), or “NP<sub>1</sub>-*la* NP<sub>2</sub>-*la*”, where *-la* is an additive particle (glossed ADD) also found in contexts in which it corresponds to English ‘also’, ‘in turn’, or ‘even’.

### 2.3. Verb inflection

Akhvakh verbs differ from all other categories by the fact that they always show an overt inflectional suffix: verbal inflection includes no form that would coincide with the bare stem, or whose inflection would not involve suffixation. There is however a distinction between two classes of verbs: those who obligatorily include a prefixal slot, and those devoid of it.

Suffixal inflection is identical for all verbs and expresses TAM, evidentiality/mirativity, polarity, finiteness, and class agreement with the absolutive argument. Person variations are found in one tense only (the perfective positive), and follow a typologically rare pattern for which I propose the term ‘assertive agreement’. For a detailed presentation of this aspect of the verbal system of Akhvakh, see (Creissels 2008a & 2008b).

The prefixal inflection of the verbs that take inflectional prefixes is entirely independent from the distinctions of TAM, evidentiality/mirativity, polarity or

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<sup>2</sup> The system of spatial cases of Akhvakh departs from the typical Daghestanian pattern in that one of the series (the *-g-* series) is a default series that does not encode a particular spatial configuration, and spatial configurations tend to be encoded by combining NPs showing default configuration marking with locative adverbs showing parallel spatial case inflection, rather than by using semantically marked configuration markers. Moreover, the characteristic consonant of the *-g-* series is not always apparent, due to morphophonological processes (for example, *šaha-šī-ga* ‘to the town’ can optionally be realized *šaha-šī-a*).

finiteness expressed by suffixes. Prefixes invariably express class agreement with the absolutive argument.

The synthetic verb forms that have the ability to head independent clauses are characterized by the following paradigm of suffixes (or combinations of suffixes):<sup>3</sup>

- PF<sub>1</sub> (perfective<sub>1</sub>): HPL *-iri*, other classes *-ari* or *-eri*
- PF<sub>2</sub> (perfective<sub>2</sub>): HPL *-idi*, other classes *-ada(-CL)*
- PF.NEG (perfective negative): *-ila (-CL)*
- IPF<sub>1</sub> (imperfective<sub>1</sub>): *-iri*
- IPF<sub>2</sub> (imperfective<sub>2</sub>): *-ida(-CL)*
- IPF.NEG<sub>1</sub> (imperfective negative<sub>1</sub>): *-iki*
- IPF.NEG<sub>2</sub> (imperfective negative<sub>2</sub>): *-ika(-CL)*
- UW (past unwitnessed): M *-u-wudi*, F *-i-wudi*, N *-a-wudi* or *-e-wudi*, NPL *-ari-wudi* or *-eri-wudi*
- UW.NEG (past unwitnessed negative): M *-il-u-wudi*, F *-il-i-wudi*, N *-il-a-wudi* or *-il-e-wudi*, NPL *-il-ari-wudi* or *-il-eri-wudi*
- MIR (mirative): M *-u-wa*, F *-i-wa*, N *-a-wa*, HPL *-aji*, NPL *-ari-wa*
- MIR.NEG (mirative negative): M *-uš-u-wa*, F *-uš-i-wa*, N *-uš-a-wa*, HPL *-uš-aji*, NPL *-uš-ari-wa*
- POT (potential): M/N *-u-wa*, F *-i-wa*, HPL *-oji*, NPL *-uri-wa*
- IMP (imperative): *-a*
- PROH (prohibitive): *-uba*
- OPT (optative): *-a-l̄'a*
- OPT.NEG (optative negative): *-uba-l̄'a*

Additional semantic distinctions are expressed by analytic verb forms in which the auxiliary function is assumed by the copula *godī*, the verb *bik'urula* 'be', or the verb *mičunula* 'be found'.

The list of independent synthetic verb forms given above calls for the following remarks:

- a. The forms labeled 'perfective<sub>1</sub>' and 'perfective<sub>2</sub>' carry distinctions in the involvement of the assertor (i.e., the speaker in assertive clauses, the addressee in questions) in the event referred to: in assertions, PF<sub>2</sub> is typically used with transitive verbs involving a 1st person A, or intransitive verbs representing controllable events involving a 1st person S, whereas in questions, PF<sub>2</sub> is typically used with transitive verbs involving a 2nd person A, or intransitive verbs representing controllable events involving a 2nd person S – see (Creissels 2008a & 2008b) for more details. This distinction is neutralized in the negative.
- b. The distinctions PF<sub>1</sub> vs. PF<sub>2</sub> and IPF<sub>1</sub> vs. IPF<sub>2</sub> seem to be historically related, since the PF<sub>1</sub> and IPF<sub>1</sub> suffixes have in common the ending *ri*, contrasting with *da*

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<sup>3</sup> In cases of allomorphic variation, whenever possible I have selected a single quotation form that can be analyzed as a relatively direct representation of the underlying form. Variants are however mentioned in cases of allomorphic variations whose analysis is still problematic at this stage of the investigation. (-CL) signals forms characterized by the optional addition of class agreement markers that may, either occur as separate suffixes, or merge with the last vowel of the preceding suffix.

common to the PF<sub>2</sub> and IPF<sub>2</sub> suffixes. Moreover, PF<sub>2</sub> and IPF<sub>2</sub> share the possibility to be used as participles, whereas PF<sub>1</sub> and IPF<sub>1</sub> are strictly finite verb forms. However, functionally, the choice between IPF<sub>1</sub> and IPF<sub>2</sub> in their use as independent verb forms clearly puts into play aspecto-modal distinctions, and has nothing to do with distinctions in assertor's involvement, or more generally with person distinctions: both forms can express a habitual meaning, but there is a clear tendency to prefer IPF<sub>2</sub> as the marker of habitual aspect, whereas IPF<sub>1</sub> is used in modal contexts in which it is impossible to substitute IPF<sub>2</sub> for it.

- c. UW (past unwitnessed) is typically used to refer to events known by hearsay. It occurs in inferential contexts too, but this use is much less common. UW has no HPL form, and in contexts in which an HPL form of this tense could be expected to occur, Akhvakh speakers use the form of the perfect (an analytic tense consisting of the general converb HPL of the auxiliated verb and the copula in auxiliary function).
- d. I use the label 'mirative' for a verb form encountered mainly (but not exclusively) in questions. This form is particular common (in fact, almost obligatory) in *why*-questions, which suggests analyzing it as expressing surprise.

Northern Akhvakh has four participles. Each of them is characterized by a stem homonymous with one of the independent verb forms listed above, and the distinction between the four participles can be described as the combination of two binary distinctions *perfective vs. imperfective* and *positive vs. negative*. It is interesting to observe that the four independent verb forms coinciding with participles are precisely those characterized by the optional suffixation of a class marker: perfective<sub>2</sub>, perfective negative, imperfective<sub>2</sub>, and imperfective negative<sub>2</sub>. On the participles of Northern Akhvakh, see (Creissels In press).

Strictly dependent verb forms include a verbal noun (or masdar), an infinitive, a general converb, a progressive converb, and several specialized converbs expressing various semantic types of adverbial subordination. On the converbs of Northern Akhvakh, see (Creissels Submitted).

### 3. Genitive formation in Northern Akhvakh

#### 3.1. Genitives with and without the genitive suffix *-li*

Morphologically, Northern Akhvakh has two variants of the genitive case: a variant in which no specific marker of the genitive case is added to the oblique stem of the noun, and a variant marked by the suffix *-li*, homonymous with the suffix of the inessive case.

The use of the two morphological variants of the genitive involves no semantic distinction in the relation between the genitive and its head. Their distribution is automatically conditioned by the class of the noun in genitive function, with however some amount of free variation which will be commented below.

### 3.2. Zero-marked genitives

The variant of the genitive case including no specific marker is used in principle with M and HPL nouns. It corresponds to the formation of the genitive described in other Andic languages as a formation of the genitive in which the function of marker of the genitive case is fulfilled by a class suffix expressing class agreement with the head of the genitive, as in the following example from Andi (Cercvadze 1965:331):<sup>4</sup>

(1) *Class suffixes as genitive markers in Andi*

- a. *ima* ‘father’, oblique stem *imu-*
- b. *imu-w woči* ‘the father’s brother’  
*imu-j joči* ‘the father’s sister’  
*imu-b k’otu* ‘the father’s horse’  
*imu-r haq’u* ‘the father’s house’

However, such a characterization of the first variant of the genitive would be questionable for Akhvakh, due to a general tendency to eliminate class agreement between the noun and its dependents, including attributive genitives, as shown in (2).

(2) *Optional class suffixes attached to Northern Akhvakh genitives in the absence of the genitive suffix -li*

- a. *ima* ‘father’, oblique stem *imo-*
- b. *imo wači* ~ *imo-we wači* ‘the father’s brother (M)’  
*imo jači* ~ *imo-je jači* ‘the father’s sister (F)’  
*imo x̄ʷani* ~ *imo-be x̄ʷani* ‘the father’s horse (N)’

In the case of the genitive, the result of this tendency is that attributive genitives including no specific marker rarely include any marker at all. Consequently, in Akhvakh, class markers attached to genitives must be described as agreement markers added to genitive forms homonymous with the oblique stem, since forms consisting of the oblique stem devoid of any overt mark have the ability to fulfill the function considered most typical for genitives (the attributive function), and are in fact much more common in this function than forms including a class suffix. Synchronically, the notion of zero-marked genitives coinciding with the oblique stem and to which agreement markers may be attached provides a better account of

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<sup>4</sup> Attributive genitives agreeing with their head are attested in other language families, for example in Bantu languages. However, in the genitive markers of Bantu languages, the class agreement marker can generally be isolated from a segment *-a-* that remains constant, and therefore can be analyzed as the genitive marker proper, whereas in Andic genitives of the type illustrated in (1), no genitive marker can be isolated from the class marker, and consequently the class marker itself can be viewed as fulfilling the function of genitive marker.

this type of formation of Akhvakh genitives than the notion of genitives in which the function of genitive marker is fulfilled by a class agreement marker, traditional in descriptions of Andic languages.

The tendency to eliminate the class markers that initially characterized the first variant of the genitive in Akhvakh has however an interesting consequence for the analysis of the genitive, since it contributes to make apparent an important functional distinction. The point is that the elimination of the class markers characteristic of the first variant of the genitive depends on the syntactic function of the genitive: as will be developed in 5.2, ‘floating’ genitives (i.e., genitives in possessive framing function), if they are not formed by means of the genitive marker *-li*, obligatorily maintain their class suffix, even for speakers that never use class suffixes with attributive genitives.

In the examples, genitive forms coinciding with the oblique stem are glossed as ‘(GEN)’, irrespective of the presence or absence of a class suffix.

### 3.3 Genitives marked by the suffix *-li*

The genitive suffix *-li* is used in principle with F, N or NPL nouns. Its homonymy with the inessive suffix is not peculiar to Northern Akhvakh: the same homonymy is found in other Andic languages. A plausible scenario is that the original function of *-li* was of spatial nature, and that it started being reanalyzed as a genitive marker with inanimate nouns, which typically occur in genitival constructions expressing whole-part relationships – see (Alekseev 2003:100-110).

No phonological process occurs at the junction between the oblique stem and the genitive suffix *-li*.

Contrary to zero-marked genitives, in most of their functions, *li*-marked genitives are incompatible with class suffixes. They take class suffixes in nominalized function only, in conformity with the general behavior of noun dependents used as headless NPs in anaphorical contexts.

### 3.4. Variations in the distribution of the two variants of the genitive

As already mentioned above, the distribution of the two variants of the genitive is not strict, and speakers may be more or less liberal in their judgments about genitive forms that do not respect the traditional norm. In principle, the zero-marked genitive with optional class markers must be used for M or HPL nouns, whereas the suffix *-li* homonymous with the inessive marker is used with F, N or NPL nouns, but this rule is not always respected. Some F nouns with an oblique stem of a non-standard type may occur in the zero-marked genitive. In ex. (14) below, *ak̄'i* ‘wife’ occurs in its regular genitive form *ak̄'o-li*, but in ex. (3), the same noun *ak̄'i* ‘wife’ occurs in a zero-marked genitive form. But it is much more common to find M or HPL nouns with the genitive suffix *-li*, in particular in the case of nouns the oblique stem of which coincides with the absolute form. The tendency to generalize the *li*-marked genitive even with nouns the oblique stem of which is different from the absolute form seems to be characteristic of children’s speech, especially in Axaxdərə.

1st and 2nd person pronouns are the only nominals that never occur with the genitive marker *-l̄i*, and for which the only possible genitive form is the zero-marked genitive, even in the speech of children that otherwise tend to generalize the use of *-l̄i* to M and HPL nouns:

<i>dene</i>	1st pers. sing.	→	oblique stem <i>di-</i>	genitive <i>di</i>
<i>mene</i>	2nd pers. sing.	→	oblique stem <i>du-</i>	genitive <i>du</i>
<i>īši</i>	1st pers. pl. excl.	→	oblique stem <i>eše-</i>	genitive <i>eše</i>
<i>īli</i>	1st pers. pl. incl.	→	oblique stem <i>elē-</i>	genitive <i>elē</i>
<i>ušti</i>	2nd pers. pl.	→	oblique stem <i>ošte-</i>	genitive <i>ošte</i>

The impossibility to use the genitive marker *-l̄i* with 1st or 2nd person pronouns is consistent with the hypothesis that the use *-l̄i* a genitive marker started with inanimate nouns and was extended progressively to nouns standing higher on indexability hierarchy.

## 4. Attributive genitives and other syntactic uses of genitives in Northern Akhvakh

### 4.1. Attributive genitives

By definition, the use of genitives as noun dependents is crucial in the notion of genitive: the recognition of noun forms as genitives implies minimally that the forms in question can be used as noun dependents referring to an individual whose personal sphere includes the referent of the head noun (Creissels 1979: 127-176, Creissels 2006:141-160).

Akhvakh genitives fulfill this prototypical function of genitives without any particular complication. They are not sensitive to alienability distinctions, and the same construction *genitive + noun* is used with reference to the following three types of relationships, considered central in the notion of personal sphere:

- person-bodyparts (*jašo-l̄i koso* ‘the girl’s hair’),
- person-relatives (*jašo-l̄i ima* ‘the girl’s father’),
- person-objects (*jašo-l̄i šišal’e* ‘the girl’s dress’).

Attributive genitives are also productively used with reference to the following types of relationships:

- whole-part relationships (*mašina-l̄i ič’o* ‘the door of the car’),
- members-group relationships (*x<sup>w</sup>anale-l̄i rešet’i* ‘a herd of horses’),
- material-object relationships (*ič’e-l̄i q’ēda* ‘stone wall’),
- object/person-quality relationships (*īē-l̄i t’āṣa* ‘the taste of the water’, *jašo-l̄i ṣama* ‘the girl’s personality’),
- quality-object/person relationships (*koša t’āṣa-l̄i īē* ‘bad-tasting water’, lit. ‘water of bad taste’),
- time-event relationships (*cībero-l̄i žaho* ‘winter cold’),

- place-object relationships (*beča-lī cīcī* ‘mountain flower’),
  - destination-object relationships (*jašo-lī šišal’e* quoted above with the meaning ‘the girl’s dress’ is in fact ambiguous between this meaning and ‘a dress for girls’),
  - author-creation or origin-phenomenon relationships (*jašo-lī kava* ‘the letter written by the girl’, *cīcī-lī šʷani* ‘the smell of the flower’),
  - product-origin relationships (*ʒeče-lī ruša* ‘apple-tree’)
- etc.

The genitive may also be used with reference to substance-measure relationships, as in *k’eda mina raži-lī* ‘two cloves (lit. heads) of garlic’, but in this construction, the genitive *raži-lī* follows *mina* ‘head’ which might be analyzed as its head (whereas in uncontroversial cases of attributive genitives, the only possible order is *genitive - head noun*). Moreover, in this construction, the noun referring to the substance measured is not necessarily in the genitive: *k’eda mina raži*, lit. ‘two head garlic’ is possible with the same meaning.

#### 4.2. Other syntactic uses of genitives in Northern Akhvakh

In Northern Akhvakh, the use of genitives in a function similar to the canonical function of other cases, i.e., as verb dependents denoting participants in the event encoded by the verb, is very marginal. The only two cases I am aware of are genitive NPs in the construction of the verb *beč’urula* ‘be full of something’ (and its causative *beč’ōrula* ‘fill with something’), and in the construction of verbs of speech with the meaning ‘speak about something’.

As illustrated by ex. (3), like nouns or adjectives, genitives can fulfill the predicate function in a construction in which they immediately precede the non-verbal copula *godī* or the copulative verb *bik’urula* ‘be’. Due to their fixed position with respect to the copula, there can be no ambiguity in the recognition of predicative genitives.

(3) *di-be goLe, ak’o-be gʷede.*

AXD<sup>5</sup> 1SG(GEN)-N COP.NEG.N wife(GEN)-N COP<sub>2</sub>.N

‘It is not mine, it belongs to my wife.’ (lit. ‘it is my wife’s’)

(4) *χadašqe iga dibe bik’ari.*

AXD following.day turn 1SG(GEN)-N N-be-PF<sub>1</sub>

‘The following day it was my turn.’ (lit. ‘the turn was mine’)

Like other noun dependents (adjectives or determiners), genitives can nominalize, i.e., constitute by themselves headless NPs the interpretation of which requires retrieving from the context a notion participating in the interpretation of the NP in the same way as if it were expressed as the head of the NP in question. Like other

<sup>5</sup> The origin of the examples is indicated as follows: AXD = texts collected in Axaxdərə, TDM = texts collected in Tadmagitl’, ELIC = elicited.

noun dependents nominalized in a similar way, nominalized genitives obligatorily take, either a class suffix (in syntactic contexts in which nouns occur in the absolute form), or an oblique stem formative (in contexts requiring the use of a case suffix). Ex. (5) illustrates the first possibility. In this example, the nominalized genitives *eše-be* ‘ours (N)’ and *eše-re* ‘ours (NPL)’ are interpreted as the reduced form of the full NPs *eše boč’o* ‘our moon’ and *eše č<sup>w</sup>ariba* ‘our stars’, respectively.

(5) *ošte boč’o-la eše-be-gula godi,*  
 AXD 2PL(GEN) moon-ADD 1PLE-N-like COP<sub>1,N</sub>  
 ‘Your moon is like ours,

*ošte č<sup>w</sup>ari-ba-la eše-re-gula gedi.*  
 2PL(GEN) star-PL-ADD 1PLE-NPL-like COP<sub>1,NPL</sub>  
 and your stars are like ours.’

In ex. (6), taken from an anecdote in which the miller sees Molla taking wheat from other people’s bags to put it into his own bag, *du-ġi-gune* ‘from yours’ and *ek’o-ġi-ga* ‘into other people’s’ are nominalized genitives interpreted in this context as the reduced form of the full NPs *du q’ēleno-gune* ‘from your bag’ and *ek’o q’ēleno-ga* ‘into other people’s bag’, respectively.

(6) *mene hušte řadada w-ũč-ala,*  
 AXD 2SG thus mad M-be.found-COND  
 ‘If you are as mad [as you pretend to be],

*du-ġi-gune ek’o-ġi-ga čugu t’-ōš-a-wa?*  
 2SG(GEN)-N-EL other.people(GEN)-N-LAT why put-NEG-N-MIR  
 why don’t you put [wheat] from your [bag] into [the bag] of other people?’

The uses of Northern Akhvakh genitives enumerated up to now are cross-linguistically common. Floating genitives, which will be described in the following section, are less common, and an interesting peculiarity of Northern Akhvakh is that variations in the use of class suffixes in the different possible functions fulfilled by genitives contribute to make the distinction between floating genitives and other uses of genitives relatively easy to recognize.

## 5. Floating genitives

### 5.1. The notion of floating genitive

Ex. (7) to (11) provide a first illustration of what I call floating genitives. This term is justified by the fact that, semantically speaking, there is clearly a possessive relationship between the genitive and another word in the same sentence, but this possessive relationship is not encoded as a head-dependent relation in the construction of a noun phrase.

- (7) *ĩĉ'o ĉ'or-ere b-ik'-a-wi ĉe ek<sup>w</sup>a-s̄<sup>w</sup>-e moġa rasadi-be.*  
 AXD door knock-PROG N-be-N-UW one man-M-ERG Molla Rasadi(GEN)-N  
 'A man knocked at Molla Rasadi's door.'  
 lit. 'The door was hit by a man, of Molla Rasadi.'
- (8) *ħã-s̄u-be šakiba-ge šimi b-eq'-a-wi.*  
 AXD khan-M(GEN)-N bird-ESS anger N-come-N-UW  
 'The khan got angry with the bird.'  
 lit. 'Of the khan, with the bird anger came.'
- (9) *ĉaka k'eha b-oL'-ere godi di-be.*  
 AXD much eye N-ache-PROG COP<sub>1</sub>.N 1SG(GEN)-N  
 'My eye is giving me much pain.'  
 lit. 'The eye is giving much pain, of me'
- (10) *ĉ'ek'i vade q<sup>w</sup>-ēne r-ik'-a-wi hu-s̄u-re.*  
 AXD leg.PL on.the.ground.ESS reach-PROG NPL-be-N-UW DEM-M(GEN)-NPL  
 'His legs reached the ground.'  
 lit. 'The legs reached the ground, of him.'
- (11) *ve-ġi jaše-ti-qe k'eha b-uġ-ari ha-s̄u-be.*  
 AXD neighborhood-GEN girl-F-ESS eye N-fall-PF<sub>1</sub> DEM-M(GEN)-N  
 'He noticed a young girl from the neighborhood.'  
 lit. 'The eye fell on a girl, of him'

The fact that such genitives can freely occur at the beginning or at the end of the sentence, irrespective of the position of the noun to which they are semantically related, is particularly significant in a language like Akhvakh, in which the extreme flexibility of constituent order at clause level sharply contrasts with the rigidity of noun phrase structure.

## 5.2. Class agreement of floating genitives

In Northern Akhvakh, class agreement supports the recognition of floating genitives as involving a specific construction, and provides evidence against an analysis according to which floating genitives would simply be attributive genitives moved from their canonical position within the noun phrase.

As already explained, Akhvakh has two morphological types of genitives: zero-marked genitives and *ġi*-marked genitives. In attributive function, *ġi*-marked genitives do not take class suffixes, whereas zero-marked genitives may express agreement with their head, but I have no unambiguous example of attributive genitives with class suffixes in the texts I collected in Axaxdərə, and very few examples in my texts from Tadmagitl'. By contrast, zero-marked genitives in the construction illustrated by ex. (7) to (11) above invariably show class suffixes.

Additional evidence that floating genitives involve a specific type of construction comes from the fact that the class suffixes attached to floating genitives that do not belong to the *l̄i*-marked type invariably express agreement with the absolutive argument of the clause, i.e., the NP in the absolute form (P in transitive constructions and S in intransitive constructions) governing the class agreement of the verb. In the case of *l̄i*-marked genitives, no agreement mark is present, but semantically, the other term of the possessive relationship is necessarily the absolutive argument. Such a constraint would not be expected if floating genitives were noun dependents extracted from the NP to which they belong.

At this point, it is important to mention that Northern Akhvakh has several cases of ‘adverbial concord’, i.e., of adjunct phrases agreeing with the absolutive argument of the clause. This is for example the case of many manner adverbs, such as *ihahime* (M *ihahimo*, HPL *ihahimi*) ‘slowly’, *hušte* (M *hušto*, HPL *hušti*) ‘thus’, *čʷige* (M *čʷigo*, HPL *čʷigi*) ‘how?’, etc.

(12) a. *čʷig-o me-de hudu ekʷa tʷubal-o w-ukʷ-ada?*

TDM how-M 2SG-ERG DEM man bury-CVB.M M-be-PF<sub>2</sub>

‘How(M) did you bury that man?’

ELIC b. *čʷig-i me-de hudu ādo tʷubal-i ba-kʷ-idi?*

how-HPL 2SG-ERG DEM person.PL bury-CVB.HPL HPL-be-PF<sub>2</sub>.HPL

‘How(HPL) did you bury those people?’

Given this background, floating genitives are best analyzed syntactically as a special variety of adjuncts involved in adverbial agreement.

### 5.3. Definiteness effects

In addition to the morphosyntactic evidence presented above, an analysis of floating genitives that would not recognize them as involved in a construction different from those accounting for the other uses of genitives would be problematic from the point of view of the syntax-semantics interface, due in particular to definiteness effects in the interpretation of floating genitives. Akhvakh has no systematic expression of definiteness contrasts at NP level, but very often, floating genitives clearly contrast with attributive genitives from this point of view, as illustrated by ex. (13).

(13) a. *ištuda lāgi b-uq-ari di-be.*

AXD five sheep N-get.lost-PF<sub>1</sub> 1SG(GEN)-N

‘Five of my sheep got lost’

lit. ‘Five sheep got lost, of me.’ (floating genitive)

- b. *di ištuda lāgi b-uq-ari.*  
 1SG(GEN) five sheep N-get.lost-PF<sub>1</sub>  
 ‘My five sheep got lost’ (attributive genitive)

The following example with a floating genitive is particularly significant, not only because of the situation referred to, but also because of the presence of *če* ‘one’ emphasizing indefiniteness.

- (14) *di ak̄'o-lī če waša w-už-ari.*  
 AXD 1SG(GEN) wife-GEN one boy M-be.born-PF<sub>1</sub>  
 ‘My wife has given birth to a boy.’  
 lit. ‘Of my wife, a boy is born.’

#### 5.4. Empathy effects

In other cases, the difference in meaning between attributive genitives and floating genitives is not as clearcut as in the preceding examples, but a difference in empathy can nevertheless be recognized. Let us consider the following minimal pair:

- (15) a. *eše-je ila j-il'-e gida.*  
 AXD 1PLE(GEN)-F grandmother F-die-CVB.F COP<sub>2</sub>.F  
 lit. ‘Of us, a/the grandmother has died.’ (floating genitive)

- b. *eše ila j-il'-e gida.*  
 1PLE(GEN) grandmother F-die-CVB.F COP<sub>2</sub>.F  
 ‘Our grandmother has died.’

At least for speakers that never use class suffixes with attributive genitives, this is unambiguously an instance of the contrast between floating and attributive genitive (and for speakers who sometimes use class suffixes with attributive genitives, a variant of sentence (a) with the genitive in final position would unambiguously involve a floating genitive: *ila jil'e gida ešeje*). In English, it is difficult to find a satisfying translational equivalent of sentence (15a). By contrast, equivalents of this sentence can be proposed for French (*Nous avons notre grand-mère qui est morte* vs. *Notre grand-mère est morte*), Spanish (*Se nos ha muerto la abuela* vs. *Nuestra abuela se ha muerto*), Basque (*Hil zaigu amona* vs. *Gure amona hil da*) or Russian (*У нас бабушка умерла* vs. *Наша бабушка умерла*). We will return to this point in section 6, but note immediately that such translations correctly reflect the fact that, in Akhvakh, an empathy effect follows from the fact that sentence (a) considers the situation from the point of view of the possessor, whereas sentence (b) can be viewed as a matter-of-fact way to inform about the grandmother’s death.

#### 5.4. Possessive predication, a particular case of the floating genitive construction

Possessive predications are constructions that, if no particular discourse device is applied, are interpreted as attributing to an individual (the possessor) the presence of an entity (the possessee) in their personal sphere.

Possessive predications in which the NP representing the possessor shows genitive marking are found among others in Turkic languages, and there has been a lot of debate among scholars about the analysis of this type of possessive predication, either as a construction involving two distinct core NPs, or as constructions in which a single core NP representing the possessee includes a genitival dependant representing the possessor (something like ‘X’s Y exists’).

This is in particular the kind of possessive predication found in Northern Akhvakh, as illustrated by ex. (16) to (20).

- (16) *ošte-be k'eq'ədoda reše-Īi q'āc'a b-ik'-ida-č'i?*  
 AXD 2PL(GEN)-N forty year-GEN vinegar N-be-IPF<sub>2</sub>-Q  
 ‘Do you have some forty-year vinegar?’  
 lit. ‘Of you, does forty-year vinegar exist?’

- (17) *hu bač'a-Īi L<sup>w</sup>ada baša b-ik'-a-wi.*  
 AXD DEM wolf-GEN three cub N-be-N-UW  
 ‘This wolf had three cubs.’  
 lit. ‘Of this wolf, three cubs existed.’

- (18) *Īē-Īi koša t'āṣa b-ik'-a-wi.*  
 AXD water-GEN bad taste N-be-N-UW  
 ‘The water had a bad taste.’  
 lit. ‘Of the water, a bad taste existed.’

- (19) *du-be čami reše g<sup>w</sup>eda ?*  
 AXD 2SG(GEN)-N how.much year COP<sub>2</sub>.N  
 ‘How old are you?’  
 lit. ‘Of you, how many years exist?’

- (20) *ṣosma-be χ<sup>w</sup>aba g-ū χija godi.*  
 AXD Osman(GEN)-N mill make-INF thought COP<sub>1</sub>.N  
 ‘Osman is thinking of making a mill.’  
 lit. ‘Of Osman, the thought of making a mill exists.’

Whatever the arguments invoked in the analysis of similar constructions in other languages, what is crucial for Northern Akhvakh is that, in this language, possessive predication is very clearly a particular case of the floating genitive construction, in which the floating genitive behaves exactly in the way described in the preceding sections, and consequently must be analyzed syntactically as an adjunct the syntactic status of which is characterized by adverbial agreement.

## 5.5. Conclusion of section 5

Before turning to typological considerations, let me briefly summarize the main results of the analysis of the floating genitives of Akhvakh. I have presented evidence, both morphological and syntactic, that floating genitives are involved in a specific type of construction, not amenable to the other constructions in which genitives can be found. In this construction, the floating genitive is syntactically in adjunct function, and the observations on the meaning of the construction can be summarized by saying that floating genitives have a framing function: they restrict the scope of the predication to the personal sphere of their referent, implying that the absolute argument of the clause belongs to the personal sphere of the referent of the genitive in frame function.

In other words, the floating genitives of Akhvakh are a particular subtype of the general category of frame adjuncts. In the literature, the notion of frame adjunct has mainly been applied to spatial or temporal expressions,<sup>6</sup> but the example of Akhvakh shows that it may prove useful to recognize other subtypes of frame adjuncts, in particular, of genitival adjuncts fulfilling a function of possessive framing.

## 6. The floating genitives of Akhvakh in typological perspective

From a functional and typological point of view, the floating genitives of Akhvakh stand at the intersection of two types of phenomena. It follows from the discussion in section 5 that they belong to a type of adjuncts that do not contribute to the meaning of the sentence by modifying the meaning of the verb, but by restricting the scope of the predication. But at the same time, they constitute an instance of external possession, since the floating genitive construction implies considering the referent of the genitive in frame adjunct function as a possessor whose personal sphere includes the referent of the absolute argument of the clause.

Constructions in which a possessor is encoded by a dative NP in the same way as participants assuming a role of recipient/beneficiary in the event constitute the commonest type of external possession constructions.<sup>7</sup> Their functional motivation is essentially semantic in nature. As developed by Creissels (1979:535-551),<sup>8</sup> the explanation of the cross-linguistic variation between attributive genitives and dative NPs in external possession constructions is that a possessor is always at least to some extent concerned by events in which entities belonging to his/her personal sphere are involved, and consequently can be conceptualized as a participant in beneficiary/maleficiary role.

Possessive framing, like other types of framing, has a pragmatic motivation. A separate statement of restrictions on the scope of the predication contributes to limit the complexity of the information that must be encoded within the predicative

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<sup>6</sup> On frame adjuncts, see (Charolles & Péry-Woodley (eds.) 2005), (Charolles & Prevost (eds.) 2003), (Lang & al. (eds.) 2003).

<sup>7</sup> On external possession, see (Payne & Barshi 1999).

<sup>8</sup> A summary of the discussion can be found in (Creissels 2006b:104-107).

construction proper, and permits making more explicit the way the utterance articulates with the preceding discourse. But by identifying the scope of the predication to the personal sphere of an individual, possessive framing highlights the involvement of this person in an event in which (s)he does not fulfill a core participant role, resulting in effects similar to those produced by other types of external possession, as already suggested by the parallelism proposed in section 5.4 between the floating genitive construction of Akhvakh and the dative constructions of Spanish and Basque.

Languages making a wide use of a possessive framing construction similar to the floating genitive construction of Akhvakh do not seem to be very numerous. However, interesting parallels can be proposed with other languages having possessive framing constructions in which the person whose personal sphere delimits the domain of predication is encoded like the possessor in possessive predication. Russian and French are two cases in point.

In Russian, *u* is a spatial preposition expressing location of the figure in the vicinity of the ground – ex. (21). Interestingly, this preposition is mainly used with human nouns, expressing ‘at N’s place’ – ex. (22). Preposition phrases headed by this preposition are also used to encode the possessor in possessive predication – ex. (23). Russian also has a widely used framing construction in which a preposition phrase headed by *u* shows all properties typical of preposition phrases in frame adjunct function – (24), to be compared with (25), which conveys the same denotative meaning with the possessor encoded as an attributive genitive NP.

(21) *Dom stoit u reki.*  
 house.SG stand.PRS.3SG by river.SG.GEN  
 ‘The house stands by the river.’

(22) *On ostalsja u nas.*  
 3SGM remain.PFV.PST.SGM by 1PL.GEN  
 ‘He stayed at our place.’

(23) *U nego est’ mašina.*  
 by 3SGM.GEN there.is car.SG  
 ‘He has a car.’

(24) *U nego zagorelis’ glaza.*  
 by 3SGM.GEN light.up.PFV.PST.PL eye.PL  
 ‘His eyes lit up.’, lit. ‘By him lit up the eyes.’

(25) *Ego glaza zagorelis’.*  
 3SGM.GEN eye.PL light.up.PFV.PST.PL  
 ‘His eyes lit up.’

The possessive predication of Russian can be analyzed as a variety of existential predication the domain of which is the personal sphere of the referent of the *u*-

phrase, and the meaning of possessive framing characterizes more generally *u*-phrases in frame adjunct function.

The other case in point is a French construction combining the transitive verb of possession *avoir* ‘have’ with another verb in the way illustrated by ex. (26), to be compared with the possessive predication (27) and the encoding of the same event without possessive framing (28).

(26) *Jean a un fils.*  
 Jean have.PRS.3SG one son.SG  
 ‘Jean has a son.’

(27) *Le fils de Jean se marie demain.*  
 DEF.SGM son.SG of Jean REFL marry.PRS.2SG tomorrow  
 ‘Jean’s son is marrying tomorrow.’

(28) *Jean a son fils qui se marie demain.*  
 Jean have.PRS.3SG POSS3SG.3SGM son.SG COMP<sup>9</sup>REFL marry.PRS.2SG tomorrow  
 ‘Jean’s son is marrying tomorrow.’  
 lit. ‘Jean has his son that is marrying tomorrow.’

The French construction illustrated by ex. (28) has exactly the same function as the Russian construction with an *u*-phrase in frame adjunct function. However, syntactically, the French construction involves an operation more complex than the mere fronting of a frame adjunct. A possible analysis consists in positing a parallelism with a construction in which the object NP in the construction of *avoir* ‘have’ is followed by an adjective in secondary predicate function (in the terminology of French traditional grammar: ‘attribut de l’objet’), as in (29).

(29) *Jean a son fils malade.*  
 Jean have.PRS.3SG POSS3SG.3SGM son.SG sick  
 ‘Jean’s son is sick.’, lit. ‘Jean has his son sick.’

It has long been observed by French grammarians that this construction belongs to a subclass of ‘attribut de l’objet’ constructions in which the suppression of the ‘attribut de l’objet’ is not possible, or implies important changes in the meaning of the construction. Using the notions of modern linguistics, this can be accounted for by a raising-to-object analysis: in this construction, the object of *avoir* does not receive the role of possessee it would be assigned in the absence of the ‘attribut de l’objet’; the morphosyntactic slot of the object NP does not receive any role from *avoir*, and the only semantic role assigned to the NP occupying this slot comes from the adjective.

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<sup>9</sup> Traditional French grammar would identify *qui* as a relative pronoun. However, it can be shown that, in modern French, *qui* as a relative pronoun subsists only in free (or antecedentless) relatives, whereas *qui* introducing postnominal relatives has been reanalyzed as a contextual variant of the complementizer *que* – for a summary of the discussion about the status of *qui*, see (Creissels 2006b:233-235)

Similarly, the possessive framing construction illustrated by ex. (28) can be accounted for by positing a raising-to-object construction in which:

- *avoir* has two complements,
- *avoir* assigns the role of frame (historically derived from the role of possessor) to its subject, but has no role to assign to an object NP,
- the second complement of *avoir* is a subjectless complement clause,
- the first complement of *avoir* is an NP to which the embedded verb assigns the role that cannot be assigned to the missing subject.

## 8. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to show that Akhvakh has a possessive framing construction that functionally combines the pragmatic motivations of framing constructions with the semantic effects common to other types of external possession constructions. In comparison with other languages making a relatively wide use of a possessive framing construction, like French or Russian, the originality of Akhvakh is that it straightforwardly uses genitives in frame adjunct function, with however a morphosyntactic device contributing to prevent possible ambiguities between attributive genitives and floating genitives, since these two syntactic varieties of genitive NPs do not put into play the same rules of class agreement.

## Abbreviations

- 1SG: 1st person singular
- 2SG: 2nd person singular
- 1PLE: 1st person plural, exclusive
- 1PLI: 1st person plural, inclusive
- 2PL: 2nd person plural
- 3SG: 3rd person singular
- 3SGM: 3rd person singular, masculine
- ADD: additive particle
- COND: conditional converb
- COP: copula
- CVB: general converb
- DEM: demonstrative
- EL: elative
- ERG: ergative
- ESS: essive
- F: human singular feminine
- GEN: genitive
- HPL: human plural
- IPF: imperfective
- LAT: lative

M: human singular masculine  
MIR: mirative  
N: non-human  
NEG  
NPL: non-human plural  
PF: perfective (inflectional)  
PFV: perfective (derivational)  
PL: plural  
PROG: progressive converb  
PRS: present  
PST: past  
UW: past unwitnessed

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