Associate and Possessive Constructions in Oceanic: The Links and the Differences*

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Even though there are some links between associative constructions and possessive constructions in Oceanic languages, those two types of construction are distinct types of noun phrase, rather than the associative one being a subtype of the possessive one, as they are sometimes analysed. Besides obvious formal differences, there are also major semantic differences between the two types of noun phrase. Possessive noun phrases are relational: there are certain types of semantic relation between the possessum entities and the possessor entities. On the other hand, associative noun phrases are not relational in that sense, because the modifier phrases are non-referential. The paper considers associative constructions in a number of Oceanic languages, with a focus on Toqabaqita.

Key words: associative, possessive, Oceanic

1. Introduction

Ross (2001) reconstructs the system of “possessive” constructions in Proto Oceanic shown in Table 1 (see also Ross 1998).

Table 1: Proto Oceanic noun phrases with common noun phrase possessors (Ross 2001:261)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSSESSOR</th>
<th>INALIENABLE</th>
<th>POSSESSED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPECIFIC</td>
<td>ART D ART R</td>
<td>ART D CL ART R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSONAL</td>
<td>* a qaqe-i X</td>
<td>* a Rumaq na-i X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ART leg ART X</td>
<td>ART house CL ART X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘X’s leg’</td>
<td>‘X’s house’</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* It gives me great pleasure to offer this paper to Paul Jen-kuei Li, for whose work I have great respect.
I have no comments to make on the formal aspects of Ross’ reconstructions. My focus will be on what Ross terms constructions with nonspecific (common) possessors, the two bottom cells in the table. For reasons to become apparent as we proceed, those constructions will be referred to as “associative” rather than “possessive”. I will suggest that those constructions are quite different from possessive constructions, those in the upper part of Table 1, not just in terms of their forms but also in terms of their semantics.

In the next section, the salient properties of possessive constructions will be briefly discussed. In section 3, it will be the salient properties of associative constructions that will be the centre of attention. Section 4 will look in detail at associative constructions in one Oceanic language. While there is a kind of link between possessive and associative constructions, they are distinct types of construction, at least in the language considered here. This will be the subject of the concluding section 5.

2. The relational nature of possessive constructions

Possessive constructions are relational in the sense that there are two (sets of) entities that stand in some kind of relation to each other. As is well known, possessive constructions express a variety of relations between entities, true possession, ownership, being just one of them. The range of the relations, even though not open-ended, is quite
large (see Langacker (1995), among many others). Some of the relations are: ownership (see (1) below), part-whole (2), kinship and other kinds of interpersonal relations ((3), (4)), membership (5), modes of behavior and other personal characteristics (6); and there are many others.

Oceanic languages typically have more than one type of possessive construction, whose use is, language-specific exceptions apart, sensitive to the kind of relation that holds between a possessum and its possessor. A common, although not universal, pattern in the Oceanic languages is for the possessum noun to carry a possessive suffix if the possessum-possessor relation is of the “inalienable” type, as in, for example, (2) and (3). When the relation is of an “alienable” type, the possessive suffix is added to a possessive classifier, as in (1). The possessive suffix indexes the possessor, and there may be a separate possessive noun phrase.  

(1) Wayan  
na le-a niu  
ART POSS.CLF-3SG.POSS coconut  
‘his coconuts (as property)’ (Pawley and Sayaba 1990:166)

(2) Hoava  
sa bele-na sa boko  
ART.SG tail-3 SG.POSS ART pig  
‘the pig’s tail’ (Davis 2003:98)

(3) Toqabaqita  
thaina-ku  
mother-1SG.PERS  
‘my mother’

(4) (Standard) Fijian  
na no-na tūraga  
ART POSS.CLF-3SG.POSS chief  
‘his chief’ (Schütz 1985:447)

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1 The following abbreviations and conventions are used in glossing the examples. 1 – first person; 2 – second person; 3 – third person; ADD – additive; ART – article; ASSOC – associative; CLF – classifier; DEIC – deitic; DIM – diminutive; INC – inclusive; k.o. – kind of; LIG – ligature; LOC – locative; NONFUT non-future; NONSG – non-singular; PERS – personal; PL – plural; POSS – possessive; POSS.CLF – possessive classifier; SG – singular. The gloss ASSOC is used uniformly for the associative marker, regardless of its gloss in the original source of data. In some other cases the abbreviations used in the sources have been altered for the sake of uniformity. The Toqabaqita examples come from my own field notes.
The basic patterns of Oceanic possessive constructions are well-known, and there is no need to rehearse the topic in any great detail here. What is relevant in the present context is the relational nature of possessive constructions.

3. The non-relational nature of associative constructions

The constructions that Ross (2001) refers to as possessive with nonspecific (common) possessors and here are referred to as associative are found in many Oceanic languages (see Table 2 in Ross 2001), albeit under different names and with markers of different phonological shapes involved. Before discussing associative constructions in detail, two illustrative examples are given here:

(7) Lolovoli
bubu-i qana
pile-ASSOC timber
‘a pile of timber’ (Hyslop 2001:188)

(8) Toqabaqita
thaalu-qi thaqaro
egg-ASSOC bird
‘bird egg’

Ross (1998, 2001) reconstructs two associative markers for Proto Oceanic, *qi and *ni, which he refers to as “construct” markers (suffixes or enclitics) in his 1998 study. Their use was determined by the head element of the construction. If the head was “inalienable”, *qi was used; if the head was “free”, “alienable”, *ni was used. (Strictly speaking, the terms “alienable” and “inalienable” have to do with relations rather than with single elements.) In the discussion that follows in this section, I will not be concerned so much with the formal aspects of the constructions as with their semantic properties, and examples of constructions with reflexes both of *qi and of *ni will be given.
There is no consistency in the terminology used in the descriptions of what here is referred to as associative constructions. Ross (1998) speaks of “construct markers”, following the usage employed in some grammars. The term “associative construction” is used by, for example, Hill (1992) for Longgu. Hyslop (2001) also speaks of associative constructions in Lolovoli, although she glosses the suffixes ‘CONST(ruct)’ and although she uses the terms “possessee” and “possessor” for the head and the modifier constituents of the construction, respectively. In some other grammars the construction is considered to be of a “genitive” type; for example, Keesing (1985) for Kwaio, and Ivens (1933) for Bugotu. Deck (1934:16) calls Kwara’ae ‘i a “genitive preposition”, but points out that it “expresses not possession but association or designation”. Hooper (1985) speaks of genitive phrases in her detailed study of this type of construction in Oceanic. And Schütz uses the neutral term “ni phrase” for Fijian, after the marker employed, although he does suggest that a “general gloss can be constructed — something on the order of ‘N1 associated with N2’” (Schütz 1985:451).

Sufficiently detailed descriptions of associative constructions in individual languages comment that the modifying element, such as qana ‘timber’ in (7) above from Lolovoli is generic, non-specific, non-referential. For example, Hyslop (2001:187) says that in Lolovoli “[i]n an associative relationship the possessor is non-specific; it refers to a generic class of objects”. This is in contrast to possessive relations, where “the possessor is specific, referential, and usually an animate being” (p.187).

Similarly Hill (1992:194) says this about associative constructions in Longgu: “N2 [i.e. the modifying noun; F.L.] is non-referential, and characterises the concept expressed by the head noun (N1).”. Hooper (1985:159) concludes that “an early stage of Oceanic had a genitive particle *qi, which indicated non-specific or generic possession of inalienable nouns”. And Ross (1998) establishes the specific – nonspecific distinction of common noun possessors as one of the parameters relevant to the Proto Oceanic possessive system.

The contrast between non-specific and specific modifiers in associative and possessive constructions, respectively, is of fundamental importance in the present context.

It needs to be pointed out, however, that the notions of specificity and nonspecificity apply to noun phrases, not to nouns. It is true that in associative constructions the modifier typically consists of just a noun, but this is not necessarily so, as the next two examples demonstrate.

(9) Kwara’ae
faoda ‘i [wae mae]
? ASSOC man be.dead
‘a sepulchre’ (Deck 1934:16)
Deck does not provide a gloss for *faoda*, but in ‘Are’are, which is a very close relative of Kwara’ae, there is *haota* ‘cave, cavern, grotto’ (Geerts 1970). ‘Are’are *haota* and Kwara’ae *faoda* display regular sound correspondences, and the two forms are presumably cognate.

Associative constructions can be recursive:

(10) Fijian

\[
\text{ sala ni [sitima ni vanua]}
\]

\[
\text{ path ASSOC steamer ASSOC land}
\]

‘railway’ (lit.: ‘path of land steamer’) (Schütz 1985:453)

See also examples in section 4.

In spite of the use, in some descriptions, of terms such as “possessee”, “possessor” and “possession” with respect to associative constructions, these constructions are significantly different from possessive constructions. Unlike in possessive constructions, the modifier elements in associative constructions do not refer to entities. In other words, associative constructions do not express relations between two (sets of) entities. Associative constructions are not relational in the way possessive constructions are.

Ross (1998:248) is aware of this: “A nonspecific noun is one that denotes a class or a class member, but not a particular member that the speaker wishes to refer to.”. And:

Semantically, nonspecific “possessors” are often not really possessors at all but generic nouns used attributively. Indeed, one could argue that these constructions are in fact broadly attributive, and that POc [Proto Oceanic; F.L.] nonspecific possession was (and in modern Oceanic languages still is) simply a subfunction of the broader function of attribution. However, I treat these constructions as part of the possession system here because (i) they affect the morphological behavior of directly possessed nouns and (ii) in many Oceanic languages, …., nonspecific “possessor” constructions employ possessive morphosyntax and syntactically are an integral part of the possession system. (Ross 1998:248; original emphasis)

It is not only in associative constructions that the modifier does not denote a possessor; see, for example, ‘his chief’ in (4) from Fijian in section 2.

What kinds of meanings, then, do associative constructions express? A common type of case is for the modifier to characterize the referent of the whole construction as to its type:
(11) Longgu
tatala ni ‘inoni
footprint ASSOC person
‘human footprints’ (Hill 1992:194)

Compare (12), where the noun tatala ‘footprint’ occurs in the possessor position of a possessive construction. There the footprint is attributed to a particular child:

(12) Longgu
tatala-na mwela-ne
footprint-3SG.POSS child-DEIC
‘the child’s footprint’ (Hill 1992:176)

Such uses of associative constructions are found in many other languages:

(13) Bugotu
ulu i fei
head ASSOC fish
‘a fish head’ (Hooper 1985:152)

(14) Kwara’ae
fakala ’i kwaro
egg SSOC k.o.shell
‘a pearl’ (lit.: ‘egg of a kwaro shell’) (Deck 1934:16)

The modifying element in an associative construction may designate the type of entity or entities that occurs in a kind of collectivity, in a certain measure or quantity. Such an entity or entities may be present in a container designated by the head of the construction:

(15) Kwara’ae
binu ’i kafo
cup ASSOC water
‘a cup of water’ (Deck 1934:16)

(16) Lolovoli
tanga-i qana
basket-ASSOC k.o. mat
‘a basket of mats’, or
‘a mat bag (a basket for keeping mats in)’ (Hyslop 2001:188)
In a closely related use, the modifier specifies the type of contents the container is typically used to hold, whether any such contents are present or not. For example, Lolovoli *tanga-i qana* in (16) may designate not only a basket of mats, but also a mat bag, a basket for keeping mats in. Both types of meaning are also expressed by the associative phrase in (17), from Arosi:

(17) Arosi

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{oi (or } o'i?) & \text{ i wai} \\
\text{cup ASSOC water} \\
\text{a. ‘cup of water’} \\
\text{b. ‘water cup’ (Capell 1971:37)}
\end{align*}
\]

(Capell gives the form of the noun ‘cup’ as *oi*, while Fox (1978) gives it as *o’i*.)

In other cases, the associative construction designates a conglomeration, collectivity, measure without there being a container:

(18) Lolovoli

\[
\begin{align*}
bubu-i & \text{ buli} \\
pile-ASSOC timber \\
\text{‘a pile of timber’ (Hyslop 2001:188)}
\end{align*}
\]

(19) Longgu

\[
\begin{align*}
vungu & \text{ ni buai} \\
bunch ASSOC betel.nut \\
\text{‘bunch of betel nut’ (Hill 1992:195)}
\end{align*}
\]

Hyslop (2001:187), following personal communication from Malcom Ross, suggests that “[t]he associative construction is often used to express the purposive in Oceanic languages”. However, it is not clear whether a separate purposive function needs to be recognized, or whether a purpose meaning is just a possible inference from some other meaning. Hyslop herself says that Lolovoli *hinaga-i lagi-ana* ‘wedding food’ (with the associative suffix on *hinaga* ‘food’) could be interpreted purposively as “food which has a particular purpose” or as “a type of food” (p.187). On the other hand, purposive interpretations could be given to associative constructions that express a type of container and its typical contents, even if the container does not contain any at the time; see Lolovoli *tanga-i qana* ‘a mat bag’, ‘a basket for keeping mats in’ in (16) above and Arosi *oi (o’i?)* i wai ‘water cup’ in (17) above.

According to Ross (2001), in some languages the associative marker or what used to be the associative marker occurs with numerals and with classifiers. In (20) from
Kwaio the associative suffix in its form $e$, rather than $?e$, occurs on a “numeral”, and in (21) it occurs as part of the ‘fruit’ classifier:

(20) Kwaio
    rua akwale-e $?ola
    two ten-ASSOC thing
    ‘twenty things’ (Ross 2001:268; originally in Keesing 1985:88)

(21) Kwaio
    oru fe-$?e$ ba?$u
    three fruit banana
    ‘three bananas’ (Ross 2001:267; originally in Keesing 1985:90)

Ross glosses the -$e$ in (20) as ‘$?e$’, while Keesing leaves it without a gloss. For (21) Ross writes $fe$-‘fruit’, while Keesing writes $fe$-‘$e$, $fe$ being a classifier. The glottal stop of -$?e$ is deleted in $akwale-e$ because the noun that immediately follows begins with a glottal stop.

The matter of the uses of the associative markers with numerals and classifiers will be addressed in the next section, where data from Toqabaqita, a close relative of Kwaio, are discussed.

4. Associative noun phrases in Toqabaqita

Toqabaqita has an associative construction that continues, in its formal aspects, the Proto Oceanic construction that Ross (2001) categorizes as possessive with an inalienable possessum and a nonspecific (common) possessor (table 1 in section 1 above), with the marker *qi. It also has a reflex of the marker *ni reconstructed by Ross for possessive constructions with an alienable possessum and a nonspecific (common) possessor, but this element, whose form is $ni$, has developed a new set of functions and will be disregarded here. Our attention will be focussed on the constructions that employ the reflex of *qi. The formal properties of the associative construction will be considered first, and then its semantics.

4.1 The formal properties

In Toqabaqita the associative marker is a suffix that has two basic forms: -$qi$ and -$qe$. (Orthographic $q$ represents the glottal stop.) With one lexical exception (see further below), -$qi$ is used when the final vowel of the base noun is high ($i$ or $u$), and -$qe$ is used when the final vowel of the base noun is non-high ($e$, $o$, or $a$):
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(22) thealu-qi    thaqaro
    egg-ASSOC    bird
    ‘bird egg’
(23) waino-qe    butete
    soup-ASSOC    sweet.potato
    ‘soup made of sweet potatoes’

In nouns that end in a the a is usually (though not always) replaced with e before the associative suffix, and in a few nouns that end in o the o also is usually replaced with e:

(24) qite-qe    alo
    k.o.basket-ASSOC    taro
    ‘qita-basketful of taros’
(25) qoke-qe    qai
    rope-ASSOC    wood
    ‘bundle, pile of (fire)wood (even if not tied with rope)’

Compare qita ‘k.o. basket’ and qoko ‘rope’.

In a few nouns that end in u the u is replaced with i before the associative suffix, in some cases only optionally.

(26) fungi-qi    qota
    cluster-ASSOC    areca.nut
    ‘cluster of areca nuts’
Cf. (27) fungu-na    qota
    cluster-3.PERS    areca.nut
    ‘(all) the clusters of areca nuts (on a tree)’

In a few nouns that end in two vowels, identical or not, the final vowel is deleted before the associative suffix:

(28) bi-qi    ngali
    bamboo.container    canarium.nut
    ‘bamboo-containerful of canarium nuts’
Cf. bii ‘bamboo container’
(29) nga-qi    botho
    excrement-ASSOC    pig
    ‘pig excrement’
Cf. (30) ngae-na botho
   excrement-3.PERS pig
   ‘the pig’s excrement’

The associative suffix is sometimes omitted. Nevertheless, if the noun ends in a or o, the replacement of the a or the o with e may take place:

(31) {thare-qe / thara / thare} qai
   branch-ASSOC / branch / branch tree
   ‘tree branch’

The basic form of the noun ‘branch’ is *thara*.

With one type of exception, the associative suffix is almost always omitted if the noun has q in the final syllable:

(32) {kwaqo / kwaqe} botho
   intestine / intestine pig
   ‘pig intestine(s)’

The basic form of the noun ‘intestine’ is *kwaqo*.

However, when the final syllable of the noun base ends is qu, the suffix, rather than being omitted, may have the form -i:

(33) a. biqu-i wane
     men’s.house-ASSOC man
     ‘a person’s sons (collectively)’

b. biqu wane
   mens’.house man
   ‘a person’s sons (collectively)’

*Biqu* traditionally signified a men’s house. The literal meaning of (32a, b) is ‘men’s-houseful of men (i.e. of sons)’.

In an associative noun phrase, there must be a modifier noun phrase, and that noun phrase must be non-referential. Most commonly, the modifier noun phrase consists of just a noun, as in all the examples above. More complex modifier noun phrases are, however, possible. In (34) and (35) the modifier noun phrases contain (numeral) classifiers:
In (36) the modifier noun phrase contains the diminutive/partitive marker *si*:

(36) ta [ange-qe si malefo] laqu
some small.quantity-ASSOC DIM money ADD
‘another/further small quantity of money’

In (37) the modifier noun phrase consists of a noun modified by a verb. *Oqo bulu*, literally ‘dark drum’, signifies a kind of drum that produces a deep sound. The demonstrative *baa* ‘that’ has the associative noun phrase in its scope.

(37) [linge-qe oqo bulu] baa
sound-ASSOC drum be.dark that
‘the (lit.: that) sound of a deep-sounding drum’

In (38) the modifier noun phrase is a coordinate one:

(38) teqe [maame-qe ngasi, alo ma botho]
one mortuary.feast-ASSOC sugar.cane taro and pig
‘a mortuary feast with sugar cane, taro, and pigs’

And associative phrases can be recursive:

(39) bore-qe [bi-qi doo]
bottom-ASSOC bamboo.container-ASSOC thing
‘food remaining at the bottom of a bamboo container’
(lit.: ‘bottomful of a bamboo-containerful of things’)

*Bii, bi-qi* in an associative construction, designates a length of bamboo in which food is stored and reheated. *Bore-qe bi-qi doo* designates the food remaining at the bottom of such a container after most of the food has been removed.

There has to be a modifier noun phrase in an associative phrase, even if the
modifier is semantically empty. The modifier noun phrase may consist of the general
noun *doo* ‘thing’, which satisfies the requirement on the presence of a modifier, but
provides no information. Thus, in (39) *bi-qi doo* ‘bamboo-containerful of things’ does
not explicitly specify the nature of the contents, even though in the absence of
indication to the contrary the normal interpretation is that the contents are food. In (40)
also the modifying noun phrase consists of *doo* ‘thing’: that which is depicted in the
picture/photograph is left unspecified:

(40) nuu-qi doo
    picture-ASSOC thing
    ‘a picture, a photograph’ (lit.: a picture/photograph of a thing’)

And in (41) a *doo* phrase modifies *kare-qe* ‘heap of’:

(41) kare-qe doo
    heap-ASSOC thing
    ‘a heap’

There are (at least) two cases where what historically is the head of an associative
construction does not have a modifier. One of them is *weleqi* ‘man, guy, chap’; compare
*wela* ‘child’. This form is also exceptional in that the form of the (erstwhile) associative
suffix is *-qi* rather than *-qe* after a non-high vowel. Besides the exceptional *weleqi*, there
is also the regular form *wele-qe*:

(42) wele-qe kini
    child-ASSOC woman
    ‘girl, relatively young woman’ (lit.: ‘child of woman’)

(43) wele-qe wane
    child-ASSOC man
    ‘boy, relatively young man’ (lit.: ‘child of man’)

The other form that is historically the head of an associative construction and can occur
without a modifier is *kukeqe* ‘mature woman’, ‘wife’, which has a rare variant *kukaqe*.
Both *weleqi* and *kukeqe* (and *kukaqe*) have been reinterpreted as monomorphemic.
According to Ross (2001), following Keesing (1985), the Kwaio associative suffix
can be used with numerals and classifiers. Toqabaqita is a close relative of Kwaio, and
although one cannot simply use data from one language to argue about structures in
another language, the facts of Toqabaqita may be instructive. Let us consider “numerals”
first. In Toqabaqita the associative construction can have as its head forms that have a
numerical significance in the sense of designating exact numbers. However, those forms
are nouns rather than true numerals. Most of these “numerical nouns” designate the
quantity 10, more accurately a collection of 10 entities of a certain kind, a tensome. There
are several such nouns, and their use depends on the type of entity involved. Akwala is
used to count people, dolphin teeth (used to make valuables), and by extension pounds
of shilling (used as currency in earlier times):

(44) fai akwale-qe kini
    four tensome-ASSOC woman
‘forty women’

See also (53) further below. And compare (44) above with Kwaio rua akwale-e
?ola ‘twenty things’ in (20) in section 3 (rua ‘two’, ?ola ‘thing’), which contains a
cognate of Toqabaqita akwala/akwale-.

Kobi (less frequently kubi) is used to count tens of sets of traditional shell money:

(45) teqe kobi-qi taafuliqae
    one tensome-ASSOC set.of.shell.money
‘ten sets of shell money’

The noun taafuliqae ‘set of shell money’ consists of the numeral taafuli ‘ten’ and qae
‘leg’; see (50) further below for taafuli.

Finita, usually pronounced finta, is used to count tubers, corms, fruit, nuts, seeds,
pods, medicine pills, and bread rolls, among other things. Except for the words for ‘yam’,
nouns that take finita take the numeral classifier fa elsewhere, but not all nouns that
occur with fa are used with finita.

(46) teqe finte-qe [alo / kai / qota / meresina / bereta]
    one tensome-ASSOC taro / yam / areca.nut / medicine / bread
‘ten [taro corms/yam tubers/areca nuts/medicine pills/bread rolls]’

Qada ‘tensome’ is used to count coconuts (fruit):

(47) roo qade-qe niu
    two tensome-ASSOC coconut
‘twenty coconuts’

And lama is used to count birds, flying foxes, and possums:
(48) teqe lame-qe lakwatho
    one tensome-ASSOC flying.fox
‘ten flying foxes’

There are also two numerical nouns for ‘hundredsome’: talanga and anga. These are not restricted to counting certain entities. Talanga is the usual form.

(49) teqe talange-qe imole
    one hundredsome-ASSOC person
‘one hundred people’

The use of anga to mean ‘hundredsome’ is quite restricted; more commonly it is used with the meaning ‘small number/quantity’; see (36) further above.

None of the true numerals occurs in the associative construction. For example, besides the specialized nouns ‘tensome’, there is also a numeral ‘ten’, which does not occur in the associative construction:

(50) teqe taafuli botho
    one ten pig
‘ten pigs’

Similarly with the other numerals. For example:

(51) ulu fa baqu
    three CLF banana
‘three bananas (fruit)’

The nouns for ‘tensome’ and ‘hundredsome’ combine with the numerals to form complex numeral constructions, but only the former occur in the associative construction:

(52) teqe kobi-qi malefo ma teqe malefo
    one tensome-ASSOC shell.money and one shell.money
‘eleven sets of shell money’

(53) teqe talange-qe wane ma roo akwale-qe wane ma
    one hundredsome-ASSOC man and two tensome-ASSOC man and
    lima wane
      five man
‘one hundred and twenty five men’
In Toqabaqita, then, true numerals do not occur in the head position of the associative construction; only the numerical nouns do. The numerical nouns designate collectivities, and as will be shown in section 4.2, one function of the associative construction is to designate collectivities of types of entities.

Let us now consider the use of the associative construction with classifiers. Toqabaqita does not have possessive classifiers, and the term “classifier” signifies here classifiers that are like numeral classifiers, except that they may also be used in the absence of a numeral in the noun phrase. Toqabaqita has several classifiers, most of which do not occur in the associative construction. Those are: fa, whose core function is to refer to entities that are relatively small and round, roundish; gwa, whose primary use is with nouns that signify certain parts of the head or things associated with the head; and si, used with just a few nouns. (Si also functions as a partitive and diminutive marker; see (36) further above.) There are also two classifiers that (historically) contain the associative suffix, even though in present-day Toqabaqita at least one of those classifiers is best treated as monomorphemic. One of them is noniqi, whose use is highly restricted. It is used, optionally, only with the noun wane ‘man’:

(54) sikwa noniqi wane
    nine CLF man
    ‘nine men’

The classifier never occurs without the final qi, and it is only comparative evidence from closely related languages or dialects that reveals its originally bimorphemic nature. In Lau noni means ‘body’, ‘form’, ‘shape’ (Fox 1974), and in Kwaio noni means ‘body’, ‘person’ (Keesing 1975). Historically, then, noni was a noun, and so its use in the head position of the associative construction is not out of the ordinary.

The other classifier that contains the associative suffix is ma-qe, whose historical development appears to have been quite complex. Ma-qe is best analyzed as bimorphemic, but there is indirect evidence that at some point it may have been interpreted as monomorphemic. Ma-qe is a reflex of the classifier *mata-qi, reconstructed by Pawley (1972) for Proto Eastern Oceanic. According to Pawley (1972:59, note 4), *mata-qi was used “[b]efore unit of time in a series and particular actions when counted”. *Mata is regularly reflected as maa in Toqabaqita. The form of the associative suffix in ma-qe is -qe because the final vowel of the base is non-high. And as discussed further above, there are other cases where the final vowel of the base is deleted before the associative suffix if the base ends in two vowels. The noun maa has a large range of meanings in Toqabaqita, such as ‘focal point, prominent part of something’, including ‘eye’, ‘tip’,
‘blade (of a cutting or chopping instrument)’, ‘opening (such as a doorway or the mouth of a basket)’, front part of something’, ‘lid’, etc.

Forms such as the ones in (55) and (56) suggest that ma-qe is bimorphemic and that it contains the associative suffix:

(55) ma-qe matau
    blade-ASSOC axe
    ‘axe blade’

Compare the use of maa ‘blade’ in a possessive construction:

(56) maa-na matau
    blade-3.PERS axe
    ‘the blade of the/an axe’

However, besides ma-qe there is also maa-qe, with the full form of the base noun. The form maa-qe seems to be restricted only to certain senses of maa, such as ‘lid’:

(57) maa-qe botela
    lid-ASSOC bottle
    ‘bottle cap’

Compare maa in a possessive construction:

(58) maa-na botela
    lid-3.PERS bottle
    ‘the cap of the/a bottle’

To complicate matters further, there is also a form maqa, which can be used in free variation with ma-qe in some, but not all, cases. There ma-qe and maqa seem to have a classifier function:

(59) {maqe / maqa} kwaqo
    CLF / CLF trap
    ‘k.o. trap to catch pigs’
(60) {maqe / maqa} ona
    CLF / CLF spike
    ‘spike fashioned from the vascular tissue of a species of tree fern’
The form *maqa* is most likely a backformation from *ma-qe*. As discussed further above, the associative suffix is usually absent from nouns that contain *q* in the final syllable; nevertheless if such a base ends in *a*, the change of the *a* to *e* takes place. That is, the presence of *maqe* would be perfectly regular if there were a form *maqa*.

The backformation of *maqa* from *maqe* would perhaps have been more likely if *maqe* were perceived as monomorphemic, rather than as *ma-qe*. However, there is evidence that the structure is indeed *ma-qe*. As will be discussed in the next section, one function of the associative construction is to individualize the referents where the whole consists of several such parts, whereas the corresponding possessive construction treats the parts collectively: all such parts of the whole taken together. And this is also what one finds with *ma-qe* and *maqa*. In (62), with the associative construction, the reference is to an individual house post:

(62) {ma-qe / maqa} beta CLF-ASSOC / CLF post
    ‘house post’

In (63), with the possessive construction, the reference is, collectively, to all the posts of a house:

(63) maa-na beta CLF?/prominent.part?-3.PERS post
    ‘(all) the posts (of a house)’

The history of the forms *maa-*, *ma-*, and *maqa* is complex, but what is clear is that at some point in the past the associative suffix was added to a form that had started out as a noun, *mata*. As with *noni-*, then, the presence of the associative suffix on a classifier reflects the nominal origin of the classifier.

In Kwaio, the associative suffix is added to the classifier *fe*:

Kwaio
(64) = (21) oru feʔe baʔu
    three fruit banana
    ‘three bananas’ (Ross 2001:267; originally in Keesing 1985:90)
Keesing (1985) writes \textit{feʔe} as \textit{feʔ-e}. \textit{Feʔ-e} derives historically from Proto Oceanic *puaq ‘fruit’ and *qi (Ross 2001). (Pawley (1972:59) had earlier reconstructed *pua-qi and *po-qi as a “spherical classifier”, “[p]reposed to nouns denoting spherical objects and fruits in numerical constructions” (Pawley 1972:59, note 1)). Toqabaqita also has a classifier reflex of *puaq. Its form is \textit{fa}, but \textit{fa} does not take the associative suffix:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{verbatim}
(65) ulu fa baqu 
    three CLF banana 
    ‘three bananas (fruit)’
\end{verbatim}
\end{footnotesize}

Toqabaqita also has a nominal reflex of *puaq, \textit{foa} ‘fruit’. And \textit{foa} can occur in the head position of an associative construction with the meaning ‘fruit’:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{verbatim}
(66) lima foe-qe thao 
    five fruit-ASSOC sago.palm 
    ‘three ivory nuts’, (lit.: ‘three sago-palm fruits’)
\end{verbatim}
\end{footnotesize}

However, \textit{foe-qe} can also occur with meanings where reference is not to fruit, and where its significance is more classifier-like, designating relatively small, roundish objects, which is also the primary significance of the classifier \textit{fa}:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{verbatim}
(67) foe-qe gasi 
    fruit?/CLF?-ASSOC electric.light 
    ‘lightbulb’
\end{verbatim}
\end{footnotesize}

And in (68) with a semantically general modifier \textit{doo} ‘thing’ (see further above) the reference could be to an unspecified kind of fruit or to a bubble, such as a soap bubble:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{verbatim}
(68) foe-qe doo 
    fruit?/CLF?-ASSOC thing 
    a. ‘fruit’
    b. ‘bubble’, etc.
\end{verbatim}
\end{footnotesize}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{verbatim}
(69) foe-qe do-e busu. 
    fruit?/CLF?-ASSOC thing-3SG.NFUT burst 
    ‘The (soap) bubble burst.’
\end{verbatim}
\end{footnotesize}
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(In (69) doo ‘thing’ and the third person singular non-future subject marker qe have coalesced as do-e.)

It is quite possible that there is a new cycle of development of the reflex of Proto Oceanic *puaq ‘fruit’ into a classifier. Here too the presence of the associative suffix on the classifier would reflect the nominal origin of the classifier.

We can now turn to the semantic properties of the Toqabaqita associative construction.

4.2 The semantics

In one of its functions the associative construction is a counterpart of the possessive construction used to express, loosely speaking, inalienable possession. This type of possessive construction structurally corresponds to what in the descriptions of other Oceanic languages is often termed the “direct” type of possessive construction, where the possessive suffix that indexes the possessor is added to the possessum noun. However, since Toqabaqita does not have “indirect” possessive constructions, where the possessive suffix is added to a possessive classifier, the term “suffixing” possessive construction will be used here instead of “direct”. And for reasons that need not concern us here, the term “personal” suffix is preferred over “possessive” suffix. Besides suffixing possessive constructions, there are also “bare” possessive constructions in Toqabaqita, where the possessum noun does not carry a possessive suffix (see (103) in section 5).

The suffixing possessive construction of Toqabaqita expresses a variety of possessum-possessor relations, such as part-whole relations (‘his belly’), natural “products” of the possessor (‘his sweat’, ‘its sound’), various attributes of possessors (‘her name’, ‘his behavior’), and some others. Some (but not all) kinds of such possessive constructions have associative-phrase counterparts, except that in the associative phrase the modifier phrase signifies a type rather than an entity, as discussed in section 3. A few examples of such associative constructions are given below. In each case there is a corresponding suffixing possessive construction. Only one example of a possessive construction is given here, in (71).

(70) qa-qe qila
  handle-ASSOC knife
  ‘knife handle’

Cf. (71) qae-na qila neqe
  handle-3.PERS knife this
  ‘the handle of this knife’
(In (70) the final e of qae has been deleted before the associative suffix.)

(72) linge-qe bungu
    sound-ASSOC conch.shell
    ‘sound of a conch shell (being blown)’

(73) thate-qe doo
    name-ASSOC thing
    ‘a name’

When a whole consists of several parts of the same kind, the associative construction individuates the parts, whereas the corresponding suffixing possessive construction designates all of them collectively, in the absence of specification to the contrary. An associative construction may designate more than one such part, but not all of them collectively:

(74) ma-qe suta
    point-ASSOC comb
    ‘tooth/teeth of a comb’

Cf. (75) maa-na suta
    point-3.PERS comb
    ‘the teeth of a comb’

(76) ifu-qi thaqaro
    feather-ASSOC bird
    ‘bird feather(s)’

Cf. (77) ifu-na thaqaro naqi
    feather-3.PERS bird this
    ‘this bird’s feathers’

If the number of such parts of a whole is small, a possessive construction can signify one or both/all of them:

(78) qaba-na wane
    hand-3.PERS man
    ‘a/the man’s hand(s)’

On the other hand, associative constructions can be in the scope of an element, such as a numeral, to signal that more than one referent is involved:
Ross (2001) gives (80) below as an example of a Proto Oceanic possessive construction with a nonspecific (common) possessor with a free noun in the possessum position (see table 1 in section 1 above):

(80) *a polo ni niuR
    ART liquid ni coconut
    ‘coconut water’

In Toqabaqita, on the other hand, the relation between the juice or liquid of a fruit and the fruit is treated as an inalienable, part-whole relation, as shown by the use of the suffixing possessive construction in (81).

(81) suul-a niu
    liquid-3.PERS coconut
    ‘the water of the/a coconut’

And there is a corresponding associative construction:

(82) sulu-qi niu
    liquid-ASSOC coconut
    ‘coconut water’

(The basic form of the noun ‘liquid’ is sulu. Most nouns that have l or r in the final syllable undergo metathesis of the l or r and the vowel of that syllable before the third person personal suffix, and the form of the suffix is -a, rather than -na, used elsewhere.)

In another function, the associative construction is used to designate collectivities, conglomerates, sets, groupings of entities of the same kind. The head of the construction designates the kind of collectivity and the modifier the type of entity making up the collectivity. This is different from the inalienable part-whole relation expressed by the suffixing possessive construction. There the modifier, possessor phrase expresses the whole, and the head, possessum phrase its part or parts.
Included here are also the specialized numerical nouns to designate sets of ten and sets of hundred, discussed in section 4.1. And also included are the few nouns that express non-specific quantities:

(85) ngade-qe gwa iqa
small.number-ASSOC CLF fish
‘(a) few fish’

See also (36) in section 4.1.

The collectivity may form the contents of a container:

(86) legu-qi kafo
leaf.cup-ASSOC water
‘leaf-cupful of water’

(legu designates a drinking cup made by rolling up a leaf into a cone shape)

(87) baeke-qe kafara
bag-ASSOC copra
‘bag of copra’

Rather than a collectivity, the head of an associative construction may designate a fragment, portion, unit or measure of an entity or stuff, material:

(88) naanafu-qi alo
fragment-ASSOC taro
‘taro crumb(s)’

(89) roo [qabale-qe kaleko]
two fathom-ASSOC cloth
‘two fathoms of cloth’

With mass nouns in the modifying position, some associative constructions can be viewed from two different perspectives: (i) the modifier designates the type of stuff,
material which the referent of the whole construction consists of or is made out of; or (ii) the head of the construction designates the shape, form in which the type of stuff, material designated by the modifier exists:

(90) kodo-qe thalo
     stick-ASSOC iron
     a. ‘iron rod’, ‘rod made out of iron’
     b. ‘(piece of) iron in the shape of a rod’

(91) nini-qi ongi
     knife-ASSOC bamboo.sp
     a. ‘knife made out of ongi bamboo’
     b. ‘(piece of) ongi bamboo made into a knife’

Sometimes the modifier designates the characteristic, defining material or ingredient:

(92) atha-qe bia
     k.o.pudding-ASSOC cassava
     ‘cassava pudding’, ‘kind of pudding made from grated cassava (and coconut milk)’

(93) sofusofu-qi kai
     soup-ASSOC yam
     ‘yam soup’, ‘soup made out of yams (and other ingredients)’

There are also associative constructions that do not fit neatly into any of the categories mentioned above, although some links can often be discerned. Only a few examples are given below.

(94) fere-qe botho
     family.house-ASSOC pig
     ‘the pigs (collectively) kept by a family’ (lit.: ‘houseful of pigs’, but today at least, pigs are kept in pens, not in family houses’)

(95) kifi-qi botho
     hat-ASSOC pig
     ‘kind of hat made from pig tails’ (pigs, more accurately their tails, as the main, characteristic material)

(96) oqole-qe maama
     garden-ASSOC mortuary.feast
     ‘special garden in which food is grown for a mortuary feast’ (purpose?)
5. Summary and conclusions

Most of the data on associative constructions presented here have come from a single language, Toqabaqita, and so the conclusions reached apply specifically to that language, but I believe they have a more general significance. The main conclusion is that the associative construction is a construction *sui generis*, not a subtype of a more general category of possessive constructions. There are both formal and semantic differences between the associative construction on the one hand and the possessive constructions, specifically the direct possessive construction, on the other. First, the suffixes that occur on the head nouns in the two types of construction are different: personal (“possessive”) suffixes in the possessive construction, and the suffix -qi/-qe in the associative construction. Second, the personal suffixes index the possessor, and a possessor phrase is not grammatically obligatory:

(97) kwara-na wane
    urine-3.PERS man
    ‘the man’ surine’

(98) kwara-na
    urine-3SG.PERS
    ‘his/her/its urine’

(When there is no possessor noun phrase present, the personal suffix -na signals third person singular. When there is a possessor noun phrase present, -na only signals third person, regardless of the grammatical number.)

On the other hand, the associative suffix is not indexing. The modifier noun phrase is non-referential: there is no referent to index. And a modifier phrase is obligatory:

(99) kware-qe wane
    urine-ASSOC person
    ‘human urine’

(*Wane* can designate specifically a man or a person regardless of sex.)

And there are significant semantic differences between the associative and the possessive constructions as well, beyond and above the non-referential versus referential nature of the modifier phrases. At the same time, however, there is a semantic link between the two types of construction. Let us consider the link first. As discussed in section 4.1, some associative noun phrases have possessive-construction counterparts, and there is a regular semantic difference between the two constructions. The associative
construction identifies a type of entity, the type being designated by the modifier. The possessive construction, on the other hand, assigns the entity designated by the construction to some other, particular entity. It is this link between associative and possessive constructions that has partly led Ross (1998) to consider associative constructions to be a subtype of possessive constructions. It is not impossible for the kinds of notions signified by possessive constructions and the kinds signified by associative constructions to be expressed by (basically) the same type of construction in a language; witness English the children’s shoes and children’s shoes (for example, as a section in a department store). However, in the case of the associative and the possessive constructions discussed here there are also significant differences between them.

First, in those cases where a whole consists of several parts of the same type, the associative construction individuates the parts, while the possessive construction treats them collectively, without individuation; see examples (74) and (75), and (76) and (77) in the preceding section.

Second, in some cases there is no possessive counterpart to an associative construction. This is the case, for example, when the modifier signifies the kind of material that the referent of the construction is made of, or its primary, characteristic ingredient:

\[(100) = (92) \quad \text{atha-qe bia} \]
\[\text{k.o.pudding-ASSOC cassava}\]
\[\text{‘cassava pudding’, ‘kind of pudding made from grated cassava (and coconut milk)’}\]

Similarly, there are no possessive-construction counterparts in the case of quantifier nouns:

\[(101) = (85) \quad \text{ngade-qe gwa iqa} \]
\[\text{small.number-ASSOC CLF fish}\]
\[\text{‘(a) few fish’}\]

And there is at least one case where an associative construction has a possessive-construction counterpart, but the possessive construction is not of the suffixing type but of the bare type, where the possessum noun does not carry a personal suffix. The noun in question is wela ‘child’. In (102) it occurs in the associative construction:

\[(102) = (42) \quad \text{wele-qe kini} \]
\[\text{child-ASSOC woman}\]
\[\text{‘girl, relatively young woman’ (lit.: ‘child of woman’)}\]
When *wela* occurs as the head of a possessum phrase, it must occur in the bare possessive construction, even though the relation is of the inalienable type. (There are some other kinship-term nouns that require the bare rather than the suffixing possessive construction.) In (103) the possessor is encoded by means of an independent personal pronoun, not by a personal suffix:

(103)  

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<td>child</td>
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‘his/her child’

Because associative phrases do not always have possessive-construction counterparts or the possessive-construction counterpart is not of the suffixing type, and because of the formal differences between these construction types, the associative phrase in Toqabaqita is not a subtype within the category of possessive constructions.

To what extent this type of analysis is applicable to other languages remains to be seen. To be able to determine that, more detailed analyses of associative noun phrases in individual languages are necessary, as well as analyses of their links with, and differences from, the possessive constructions. This may also give us a better understanding of the status of the associative construction(s) in Proto Oceanic.
References


