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A typology of relative and possessive constructions in Oromo: Syncretism, grammaticalization, and word order

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Abstract

This study is a description, analysis, and contextualization of relative clauses and adnominal possessive constructions in the Cushitic language Oromo (*Afaan Oromoo*) spoken in Ethiopia, which are of interest for language typology. First, SOV order is combined with postnominal possessors, which is only attested in a few languages, such as Kurdish. Second, both relative clauses and adnominal possessive constructions involve the uninflected particle *kan*, which represents a relatively rare conflation pattern. The study shows that the first feature is inherited and can be observed in many other Lowland East Cushitic languages. The particle *kan* represents a recent grammaticalization from the demonstrative *kana* ‘this’. The study argues that a weak morphosyntactic differentiation between relative clauses and adnominal possession is a likely source of both the emergence and, in the case of Oromo, the retention of cross-linguistically rare word order patterns. A parallel can be found in East Asian languages such as Mandarin, which exhibit an even rarer and complementary combination of (S)VO order with prenominal relative clauses and also show syncretism of relative and genitive markers.

Keywords: Lowland East Cushitic, relative clause typology, adnominal possession, word order, grammaticalization

1 Introduction¹

It has often been observed that externally headed relative clauses and adnominal possessive constructions exhibit structural similarities in Afro-Asiatic languages, such as Semitic (Watson & Retsö 2009). For

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instance, in Amharic spoken in Ethiopia, the prefix *jə-* exhibits the functions of both a relativizer (1a) and a genitive (1b) (Yri 2009; Zhang 2021).²

(1) Amharic

- a. [*tʃamma jə-gəzz-a-w*] *lidʒ*
 shoes REL-buy.PFV-3SG.M.SBJ-3SG.M.OBJ boy
 ‘the boy who bought shoes’
- b. [*jə-lidʒ-u*] *tʃamma*
 GEN-boy-DEF shoes
 ‘the boy’s shoes’

The old liturgical Ethiosemitic language Ge’ez also uses the prefix *zä-* for both relative clauses and adnominal possessors, both of which follow the head noun (Butts 2019: 136). This pattern is cross-linguistically rare (Retsö 2009; Gil 2013) but was also briefly mentioned in descriptions of languages belonging to the Cushitic branch of Afro-Asiatic (Tosco 1994), including Bayso (Hayward 1979: 115–116), Dahalo (Tosco 1991: 81, 83), Dhaasanac (Sasse 1976: 206), Rendille (Heine 1976: 229), or Konso (Ongaye 2013: 115, 202). However, this topic has not been investigated in sufficient detail so far, and relatively little is known about the morphosyntactic and semantic relations between the possessive and the relative constructions in Cushitic languages. To address this phenomenon, we focus on the Lowland East Cushitic language Oromo, which exhibits the same pattern but for this particular feature has not been studied in depth.

- (2) a. *kop’ee* [*kan gurb-ittf-i bit-e*]
 shoe REL boy-DEF-NOM buy-3SG.M.PFV
 ‘shoes that the boy bought’

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² Examples from Amharic and Oromo without source are based on the knowledge of the first author as a native speaker. Examples from Mandarin are based on the personal knowledge of the second author and were confirmed by a native speaker.

- b. *kop'ee* [***kan*** *gurb-ittfaa*]
 shoe POSS boy-DEF.GEN
 'the boy's shoes'

In this language, the element *kan* is both a relativizer (marking an adnominal clause in 2a) and a marker of adnominal possession (marking an adnominal noun phrase in 2b). In the latter function, it combines with the final vowel length on the possessor NP. This marker *kan* is among the most frequent elements in the language (Tucho et al. 1996: xviii), and its analysis consequently plays a crucial role for the understanding of the grammar of Oromo.

Thus, Oromo combines OV word order with postnominal relative clauses (NRel) and genitives (NGen) as illustrated in (2). The same was also observed for Konso, a language most closely related to Oromo (Bliese & Gignarta 1986). A combination of OV and NRel is cross-linguistically not uncommon, although NRel is much more prevalent in VO languages (Dryer 2011: 340, 2013a, 2013c). The combination OV & NGen, however, is typologically unusual. It can only be found in a small number of languages in the Near East, in Northern Australia, in Northern New Guinea as well as in Eastern and Central Africa (e.g., Tigré). Only 23 of Dryer's extensive global sample of 740 languages share the combination OV & NGen as well as NRel, including the Cushitic languages Arbore and Iraqw (Dryer 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). Two of these languages are varieties of Oromo: Harar in Ethiopia (Eastern), Waata in Kenya (Southern). Additionally, only a subset of the 23 languages share the same marking for possession and relative clauses as in Oromo, including Jewish Arbel Aramaic. A detailed study of the possessive and relative construction in Oromo, therefore, can offer valuable insights into two rare typological traits.

Oromo belongs to the Cushitic branch of Afro-Asiatic (Hayward 2003; Appleyard 2012; Mous 2012). Cushitic consists of four branches referred to as Beja or North(ern) Cushitic (Vanhove 2017, 2020), Central Cushitic (Zealelem 2020), East(ern) Cushitic (Tosco 2020), and South(ern) Cushitic (Kießling 2020). Within this traditional classification, Eastern Cushitic consists of Highland East Cushitic (HEC), Yaaku-Dullay, and Lowland East Cushitic (LEC). The latter is usually considered to include Omo-Tana, Saho-'Afar, and Oromoid as immediate sister branches. Oromo is part of the Oromoid group, which also includes the Konsoid languages Bussa, Diraasha or Dirayta (Gidole), and Konso (Hayward 1981; Ongaye 2013; Tosco 2000, 2020).

Cushitic languages are usually verb-final but exhibit a difference in headedness in the noun phrase (Mous 2012: 382–385). HEC languages like Hadiyya as well as Saho-‘Afar are usually head-final (AdjN, GenN, DemN, NumN, RelN) while the opposite is true for other LEC languages like Oromo (NAdj, NGen, NDem, NNum, NRel) (Tosco 1994: 418). The head-final pattern could be an innovation due to contact with surrounding languages (e.g., Semitic, Nilo-Saharan) while the head-initial typology is usually considered to be a retention from older stages. Thus, many LEC languages share the typologically peculiar word order observed above for Oromo.

Tosco (2020: 298) recently proposed a revised classification of East Cushitic in which Saho-‘Afar is a sister branch of Southern LEC. Within this Southern subbranch, Dullay-Yaaku possibly forms a separate peripheral subbranch. Southern LEC defined like this coincides with the group of languages that exhibit noun-modifier order, as Dullay shares the head-initial NP (Tosco 1994: 418).³ Other LEC languages will be briefly addressed in Section 6.3.

In 2007, Oromo was spoken by approximately 33% of the population of Ethiopia (Feda 2015: 2). The language covers a vast area in central Ethiopia stretching to the western and southern borders. A large number of speakers can also be found in Kenya. Previous studies of Oromo dialects disagree about the exact dialectal classification and often exclude the varieties in Kenya (see Kebede 2009 for a discussion). The dialects of Ethiopia have recently been classified into a Western (Wollega, Jimma, Illubabor), Central (Showa), Northern (Rayya, Wollo), Southeastern (Arsi, Bale), Southern (Borena, Guji), and Eastern (Harar) dialects (Feda 2015). The Western dialect is also often referred to as Mecha (or Macha) and the Central dialect as Tulama. The Mecha dialect has the largest number of speakers and is the variety used in media and instruction. This study focuses on the Central and Western varieties, although some others like Waata in southeastern Kenya will be included (Heine 1981).

The main aim of this study is to describe and analyse the relative and genitive constructions in Oromo from a typological perspective. The syntactic properties as well as the diachronic development of the particle *kan* in Oromo will be the central issue of discussion. Oromo examples without source are based on the personal knowledge of

3 Dullay includes varieties like Harso, Ts’amakko (Tsamai), or Gawwada (Amborn et al. 1980; Savà 2005; Tosco 2021).

one of the authors. Additional data were obtained from published sources (Krapf 1840, 1841, 1842; Tutschek 1841, 1844, 1845; Scolart 1885; Viterbo 1887a, 1887b; Praetorius 1893; Hodson & Walker 1922; Moreno 1939; Launhardt 1973; Gragg 1976; Heine 1981; Owens 1985; Baye 1986, 1987; Lloret 1989, 1997; Mohammed & Zaborski 1990; Stroomer 1995; Tucho et al. 1996; Griefenow-Mewis 2001; Teferi 2019; Eba 2020). Examples taken from or based on the 2016 Oromo web corpus (WaC) will be indicated with Token number (of the first word of the example) and Document number (Tok/Doc) (HaBiT project. 2016).

Including the introduction (Section 1), this paper has six sections. Sections 2 and 3 provide a typology of relative clauses and adnominal possessive constructions in Oromo, respectively. Sections 4 and 5 discuss synchronic and diachronic properties of *kan*. Section 6 presents some genealogical and typological comparisons. The final Section 7 outlines the essential findings of this study and draws some conclusions.

2 Relative clauses

The typology of relative clauses distinguishes between several different types (Lehmann 1986; de Vries 2002; Dryer 2013c), most of which are absent in Oromo. Oromo has no head-internal (circumnominal) relative clauses, adjoined relative clauses external to the main clause, or relative-correlative constructions. Oromo also lacks relative clauses based on special verb forms, such as participles. There are only headless (or free) relative clauses as well as different types of externally headed ones that usually follow the head noun.

Oromo relative clauses can remain unmarked, which results in a gapping strategy. The gap, corresponding to the noun *gurbaa* ‘boy’ in (3) is indicated in (4) with the underscore. This type of relative clause is always postnominal and cannot be headless.

- (3) *baratt-oot-ni* [*gurbaa* *itti*] *gaʔis-an-i*
 student-PL-NOM boy LOC ridicule-3PL-PFV
 ‘The students ridiculed the boy.’

- (4) *gurbaa-n* [$\emptyset$ *baratt-oot-ni* [$_$ *itti*] *gaʔis-an-i*]
 boy-NOM (REL) student-PL-NOM LOC ridicule-3PL-PFV
 ‘the boy whom the students ridiculed ...’ (based on Tok:3380184 /Doc:5551)

This strategy appears to be a variant of an overtly marked relative clause in which the relativizer was omitted. This is indicated with the zero morpheme. Oromo has three types of overtly marked relative clause constructions that differ in the relativizer and a few other properties.

The first type of relative clause makes use of relative pronouns derived from personal pronouns (5). The second type exhibits the lexical items *warra* ‘parents’ (for groups of humans and animals) or *waan* ~ *wanta* ‘thing’ (for plants and things) (6).⁴ The third type employs the relativizer *kan* (7).

- (5) *gurbaa-n* [(*inni*) *baratt-oot-ni* [$_$ *itti*]
 boy-NOM 3SG.M.NOM student-PL-NOM LOC
gaʔis-an-i
 ridicule-3PL-PFV
 ‘the boy whom the students ridiculed at...’

- (6) (*idzoollee-n*) [(*warri*) *baratt-oot-ni* [$_$ *itti*]
 children-NOM parents.NOM student-PL-NOM LOC
gaʔis-an-i
 ridicule-3PL-PFV
 ‘the boys whom the students ridiculed at...’

- (7) (*gurbaa-n*) [(*kan*) *baratt-oot-ni* [$_$ *itti*]
 boy-NOM REL student-PL-NOM LOC
gaʔis-an-i
 ridicule-3PL-PFV
 ‘the boy whom the students ridiculed at...’

4 The noun *gurbaa* ‘boy’ has a suppletive plural form *idzoollee*.

Table 1. The three types of relativizers in Oromo and some of their properties.⁵

Types	Optionality	Can be head-less	Word order	Initial position	Second position	Case attraction
Pro-nouns	+	-	NRel (RelN)	+	-	+
Lexical items	+ (if + head)	+	NRel (RelN?)	+	+	+
kan	+ (if + head)	+	NRel (RelN)	+	+	-

As in this case, all three different relativizers can occur as free alternations and all three are optional, also in other functions, such as the relativization of S or A arguments. The strategies are similarly common in the language but *kan* is the most frequent. The three types exhibit synchronic differences shown in Table 1. For instance, as indicated in the examples (5–7) above, the head noun is optional with the lexical items and *kan*, but is obligatory with the personal pronouns used as relative pronouns.

Another difference concerns the syntactic properties. All three types usually follow the head noun (NRel). However, the personal pronouns used as relativizers (8) and the use of *kan* (10) occasionally allow the head noun to follow the relative clause. This seems to be less common for the lexical items as relativizers but is acceptable for some speakers (9).

(8) [*inni* *baratt-oot-ni* [__ *itti*] *gaʔis-an-i*]
3SG.M.NOM student-PL-NOM LOC ridicule-3PL-PFV
gurbaa-n
boy-NOM
‘the boy whom the students ridiculed at...’

(9) ?[*warri* *baratt-oot-ni* [__ *itti*] *gaʔis-an-i*]
parents.NOM student-PL-NOM LOC ridicule-3PL-PFV

5 “Position” refers to the placement of the relativizer within the relative clause.

(idzoollee-n)

children-NOM

‘the boys whom the students ridiculed at...’

- (10) [**kan** *baratt-oot-ni* [_ *itti*] *gaʔis-an-i*] **gurbaa-n**
 REL student-PL-NOM LOC ridicule-3PL-PFV boy-NOM
 ‘the boy whom the students ridiculed at...’

Example (8) with the pronoun *inni* would only be used in a context where the referent of the head noun is contextually given or familiar.

All three types of relativizers are usually in the initial position of the relative clause, however, the lexical items (12) and *kan* (13) can occur in second position, while this is not the case for the pronouns (11). Note that *warri* in second position is only fully grammatical without a head noun, under the condition that it has already been introduced in previous discourse (12).

- (11) ***gurbaa-n** [*baratt-oot-ni* **inni** [_ *itti*]]
 boy-NOM student-PL-NOM 3SG.M.NOM LOC
gaʔis-an-i
 ridicule-3PL-PFV
 ‘the boy whom the students ridiculed at...’

- (12) (??**idzoollee-n**) [*baratt-oot-ni* **warri** [_ *itti*]]
 children-NOM student-PL-NOM parents.NOM loc
gaʔis-an-i
 ridicule-3PL-PFV
 ‘(the boys) whom the students ridiculed at...’

- (13) **gurbaa-n** [*baratt-oot-ni* **kan** [_ *itti*]]
 boy-NOM student-PL-NOM REL LOC
gaʔis-an-i
 ridicule-3PL-PFV
 ‘the boy whom the students ridiculed at...’

The omission of either the relativizer or the head noun is very frequent in Oromo. If one of them is absent, the other is obligatory.

A major difference between the three types of relativizers concerns the fact that the first two are inflected while *kan* is not (Tables 2, 3).

Only third person pronouns can be used as relativizers and the singular shows a gender distinction. The lexical items exhibit a defective paradigm. For instance, *warra* is always plural and the plural forms of *wanta* (NOM *wantoonni*, ABS *wantoota*) are not used as relativizers.⁶

Table 2. Inflectional forms of the pronouns used as relativizers

	Nominative	Absolute
3SG.M	<i>inni</i>	<i>isa</i>
3SG.F	<i>ifeen</i>	<i>ifee</i>
3PL	<i>isaan</i>	<i>isaan</i>

Table 3. Inflectional forms of the lexical items used as relativizers

		Nominative	Absolute
plants, things	SG	<i>waan ~ wanti</i>	<i>waan ~ wanta</i>
human, animals	PL	<i>warri</i>	<i>warra</i>

There is case attraction of the pronoun with the head noun. In other words, the case of the pronouns is determined by the head noun, independent of their syntactic role within the relative clause. In (14) the pronoun exhibits the nominative case while in (15) it mirrors the “absolute” case of the head noun.

(14) *nam-ittf-i* [*inni* *k’arfii* *lik’eeff-at-e*]
man-DEF-NOM 3SG.M.NOM money loan.V-MID-3SG.M.PFV
‘the man (nominative) who borrowed money’

(15) *nam-ittfa* [*isa* *k’arfii* *lik’eeff-at-e*]
man-DEF.ABS 3SG.M.ABS money loan.V-MID-3SG.M.PFV
‘the man (absolute) who borrowed money’

The same pattern exists for the lexical items used as relativizers (16–17).

(16) *nam-oot-ni* [*warri* *k’arfii* *lik’eeff-at-an-i*]
man-PL-NOM parents.nom money loan.V-MID-3PL-PFV
‘the men (nominative) who borrowed money’

6 The case termed “absolute” (ABS) is the citation form also employed for O and T arguments and should not be confused with an “absolutive” in languages with ergativity.

- (17) *nam-oota* [warra k'arfii lik'eeff-at-an-i]
 man-PL.ABS parents.ABS money loan.V-MID-3PL-PFV
 'the men (absolute) who borrowed money'

But the same is not attested for *kan*, which is not marked for case.

Concerning accessibility, all three relativization strategies can relativize all elements on the noun phrase accessibility hierarchy (Keenan & Comrie 1977). The relativization of possessors and standards in comparative constructions requires an additional resumptive pronoun in the relative clause. The following is an example for a plain adnominal possessive construction (18).

- (18) [*sareen nam-ittfaa*] *bad-e*.
 dog man-DEF.GEN disappear-3SG.M.PFV
 'The man's dog disappeared.'

If the possessor is relativized, the resumptive takes the original position of the relativized element following the possessed noun (19–21).

- (19) *nam-ittf-i* [*inni* [*saree-n isaa*]
 man-DEF-NOM 3SG.M.NOM dog-NOM 3SG.M.GEN
bad-e]
 disappear-3SG.M.PFV
 'the man, whose dog disappeared'

- (20) *namoot-ni* [*warri* [*saree-n isaanii*]
 man.PL-NOM parents.NOM dog-NOM 3PL.GEN
bad-e]
 disappear-3SG.M.PFV
 'the men whose dog disappeared'

- (21) *nami-ttf-i* [*kan* [*saree-n isaa*]
 man-DEF-NOM REL dog-NOM 3SG.M.GEN
bad-e]
 disappear-3SG.M.PFV
 'the man, whose dog disappeared'

The standard in a plain comparative construction in Oromo is marked with the postposition *irra* 'on' (22).

- (22) *Tolaa-n* [**Baacaa** *irra*] (*caalaa*) *deeraa* = *da*.
 Tolaa-NOM Baacaa on more tall = COP.PRS
 ‘Tolaa is taller than Baacaa.’

This postposition requires a resumptive pronoun preceding the postposition if the standard is relativized (23)–(25).

- (23) *Baacaa-n* [**inni** *Tolaa-n* [**isa** *irra*]
 Baacaa-NOM 3SG.M.NOM Tolaa-NOM 3SG.M on
deeraa ta?e]
 tall is
 ‘*Baacaa who Tolaa is taller than’

- (24) *Baacaa-n-faa* [**warri** *Tolaa-n* [**isaan**
 Baacaa-NOM-ASSOC parents.NOM Tolaa-NOM 3PL
irra] *deeraa ta?e*]
 on tall is
 ‘*Baacaa and others who Tolaa is taller than’

- (25) *Baacaa-n* [**kan** *Tolaa-n* [**isa** *irra*] *deeraa*
 Baacaa-NOM REL Tolaa-NOM 3SG.M on tall
ta?e]
 is
 ‘*Baacaa who Tolaa is taller than’

Thus, Oromo employs a form of pronoun retention, rather than pied piping or adposition stranding. This might speak in favour of all three types of relativizers having non-pronominal properties.

In imperfective subordinate clauses, including relative clauses, the verb takes a special verb form called the “-u mood” by Hodson & Walker (1922: 90) or the “subjunctive” by Heine (1981: 40). Note the contrast between the verb form in examples (26) and (27). The marking on the verbs might indicate that *kan* is a later addition to an already existing postnominal relative clause (see Section 5).⁷

⁷ The imperfective form is preferably used with the focus marker *hin* on the verb.

(26) *nam-ittf-i* (*hin*) *deem-a*.
man-DEF-NOM FOC go-3SG.M.IPFV
‘The man goes.’

(27) *nam-ittf-i* [(*kan*) *deem-u*]
man-DEF-NOM REL go-3SG.M.IPFV.SUB
‘the man who goes’

The perfective aspect makes no such distinction and remains identical in the relative clause (28)–(29).

(28) *nam-ittf-i* *deem-e*.
man-DEF-NOM go-3SG.M.PFV
‘The man went.’

(29) *nam-ittf-i* [(*kan*) *deem-e*]
man-DEF-NOM REL go-3SG.M.PFV
‘the man who went’

The special subordinate forms only exist for the singular and the first person plural. In the second and third person plural, the forms are identical to the perfective ones (Table 4).

Table 4. Selected paradigms for aspect markers

	PFV	IPFV	IPFV.SUB
1SG	-e	-a	-u
2SG	-t-e ‘-2-PFV’	-t-a ‘-2-IPFV’	-t-u
3SG.M	-e	-a	-u
3SG.F	-t-e ‘3SG.F-PFV’	-t-i ‘3SG.F-IPFV’	-t-u
1PL	-n-e ‘-PL-PFV’	-n-a ‘-PL-IPFV’	-n-u
2PL	-t-an-i ‘-2-PL-PFV’	-t-u ‘-2-IPFV’	-t-an-i
3PL	-an-i	-u	-an-i

3 Adnominal possession

Cross-linguistically, adnominal possessors or “genitives” (Gen) can precede or follow the head noun (GenN/NGen). The possessive relationship can remain unmarked (juxtaposition) but can also be expressed with head-marking (nominal person marking), dependent-

marking (genitive case), or both (Nichols & Bickel 2013). There is the partly overlapping terminology of indexing and flagging introduced by Haspelmath (2019) as designations for different types of argument marking. Flagging is a convenient cover term for both case marking and adpositions. Indexing includes both nominal and verbal person marking (traditionally referred to as verb agreement). Both terminologies have certain advantages and problems, which is why both will be used here, depending on the intended level of description.

Adnominal possession in Oromo either remains unmarked (juxtaposition) or shows flagging on the possessor (Gragg 1976: 183; Griefenow-Mewis 2001: 43–45). There is no head-marking (or nominal person indexing) on the possessed noun. The most common marking is by vowel length on the final vowel of the last word of the possessor phrase. In the following example (30), *namaa* has a long vowel indicating the genitive as opposed to the citation form *nama* with a short vowel.

- (30) *farda* [(kan) *namaa*]
 horse POSS man.GEN
 ‘someone’s horse’

This vowel length corresponds to a tone change in several other Cushitic languages (see Section 6.3). If the final vowel of the possessor is already long, vowel lengthening applies vacuously (31):

- (31) *farda* [(kan) *Tolaa*]
 horse POSS Tola[.GEN]
 ‘Tola’s horse’

However, according to Lloret (1989: 76–78, 1997: 497) long vowels in Oromo in final position are usually pronounced with medium length and a glottal stop, i.e. [tʰɔlaʔ]. In possessive constructions, the vowel is realised as fully long vowel and without glottal stop, i.e. [tʰɔla:]. This distinction is not visible in the orthography, which is why we indicate the presence of the genitive with brackets. Some words, especially loanwords, remain unmarked as in (32) and (33) (citation forms *Ahmad*, *Harar*).

- (32) *k’arfii* [(kan) *Ahmad*]
 money POSS Ahmed
 ‘Ahmed’s money’

- (33) *aadaa* [(*kan*) *Harar*]
 culture POSS Harar
 ‘the culture of the Harar’

According to Griefenow-Mewis (2001: 43), words ending in final *n* add a long vowel *ii* at the end. However, the same can also be observed for other consonants, such as *l*, *r*, *t*, *m*, or *s*, all of which admittedly are rare: *loon* ‘cow’ (*loonii*), *sagal* ‘nine’ (*sagalii*), *afur* ‘four’ (*afurii*), *saddeet* ‘eight’ (*saddeetii*), *akkam* ‘like what’ (*akkamii*), *akkas* ‘like that’ (*akkasii*). This should not be interpreted as a genitive suffix *-ii*, however, but perhaps rather as the resurfacing of a vowel. Lloret (1997: 498) shows that a final *i* is often reduced or lost. The *i* is still present as a devoiced vowel in the Waata dialect (Heine 1981): *lawoon*ⁱ ‘cow (ABS)’, *ságal*ⁱ ‘nine’, *afur*ⁱ ‘four’, *saddeet*ⁱ ‘eight’, *káám*ⁱ ‘which’. Note that the word *akkam* is a contraction of *akka* ‘like’ + *kam* ‘which’. Older sources, too, contain evidence for the former presence of the final vowel: *lon(i)* ‘cattle’, *afur(i)* ‘four’, and *kami* ‘which’ in Tutschek (1844: 8, 32, 160).⁸ The lengthened *i* can perhaps be considered a dummy vowel in some cases like *akkas-ii* ‘like that (GEN)’. The word *akkas* is a contraction of *akka sana* ‘like that’. However, for the parallel contraction *gamas* ‘over there, that place’ from *gama sana* ‘that place, that side’, Tutschek (1844: 58) mentions the form *gamazi* with the expected vowel.

In the pronominal system of Oromo, third person forms do exhibit the same genitive marking as in the description above. Note that the third person plural pronoun *isaan* in Waata has the form *isaan*ⁱ with a final vowel (34).

- (34) *k’arfii* [(*kan*) *ifee/isaa/isaanii*]
 money POSS 3SG.F[.GEN]/3SG.M.GEN/3PL.GEN
 ‘her/his/their money’

First and second person pronouns have suppletive possessive forms (Table 5). If used without a head noun, the genitive forms combine with *kan* as host: *kan* = *koo* ‘my, mine’. For instance, these pronominal forms function as the complement of a copula. Usually, the copula = *ti* is used if the complement is a possessor (35).

⁸ For currently unknown reasons, *zagal(a)* ‘nine’ and *zadeta* ‘eight’ contain a different initial consonant and final vowel (Tutschek 1844: 180, 181).

- (35) *fardi-ttf-i* [**kan** = *koo*] = *ti*.
horse-DEF-NOM POSS = 1SG.POSS = COP
‘The horse is mine.’

The third person forms have two variants that differ in their degree of fusion or bonding: *kan isaanii* ~ *kan = saanii* ‘their, theirs’.

Table 5. Citation (or “absolute”) and possessive forms of pronouns

Meaning	Absolute	Attributive form	Pronominal/Emphatic forms
1SG	(a)na	ko(o)	kan = ko(o)
2SG	si	ke(e)	kan = ke(e)
3SG.M	isa	isaa	kan = saa
3SG.F	ifee	ifee	kan = fee
1PL	(u)nu	keejɲa	kan = keejɲa
2PL	isin	keessan	kan = keessan
3PL	isaan	isaanii	kan = saanii

As indicated in the above examples (30)–(35), adnominal possessive constructions optionally, albeit infrequently, add the particle *kan*. This is not possible for all of the above examples. For instance, it is impossible with the adnominal demonstrative *akkasii* or the interrogative *akkamii*. These are rather examples of adjectival modification, which in a few cases also exhibits the genitive but cannot take *kan* (see Section 6.2). If *kan* is added, it is always in the initial position of the possessor NP. While the possessor always follows the head noun in the above constructions, it can occasionally precede the head noun if *kan* is present.

The fact that *kan* can co-occur with the genitive indicates that it was added to an already existing system of adnominal possession. Perhaps *kan* was included for reasons of reinforcement. Vowel length can be difficult to differentiate, especially in the case of already long vowels. The addition of an overt marker allows to clearly differentiate and stress the possessive relationship. Today, this stress is especially pronounced with possessive pronouns: *farda* [**kan** = *keejɲa*] ‘OUR horse’. In actual discourse, the occurrence of *kan* between the possessum and the possessor together with the final vowel length on the possessor is relatively rare, which is why it is in parentheses in most of the examples above. However, the use of *kan* is certainly pos-

sible and examples are also known from older materials of the language (transcription unchanged, equal signs added): *horii* [**kan** = *kee*] ‘your (sg.) cattle’ (Krapf 1841: 45) or *abbân* [**kan** = *kô*] ‘my father’ (Moreno 1939: 246). Adnominal possession is often encountered in copula clauses. In the following example (36), the possessive phrase is the copula complement. In this example with a head noun, *kan* is optional.

- (36) *kuni* [*sangaa* [(**kan**) *k’annoo*]] = *ti*.
 this.NOM ox POSS K’anno.GEN = COP
 ‘This is Kanno’s ox.’

However, if the head noun is absent, *kan* is obligatory (as in 37), which makes the construction reminiscent of the free relative clauses without a head noun (see examples (6) and (7) in Section 2), but also suggests some sort of nominalizing function of *kan*.

- (37) *kitaab-ittf-i* [**kan** *tolaa*] = *ti*.
 book-DEF-NOM POSS/REL Tola.GEN = COP
 ‘The book is Tola’s.’

Adnominal possession exhibits interactions with the animacy hierarchy and types of possessive relationships. As seen above, *kan* is obligatory without a head noun (*kan* = *koo* ‘mine’) and if the possessor precedes the head noun. In other cases it is usually optional and in fact often avoided if a head noun is present. It can be used to mark possession of inanimate and animate nouns (*mana* (**kan** =) *koo* ‘(this is) my house’, *farda* (**kan** =) *koo* ‘my horse’). It can also be used for a descending kinship relation involving children: *mutf’aa* (**kan** =) *koo* ‘my child’. However, there are cases where *kan* cannot be used, including other social or kinship relations (i.e., with human nouns as possessed items: *hiriyaa* (***kan** =) *koo* ‘my friend’ or *obboleessa* (***kan** =) *koo* ‘my brother’). It also cannot be used for body part terms (*harka* (***kan** =) *koo* ‘my hand’), other whole-part relations, as a linker for adpositions, etc. Oromo thus exhibits possessive classification with two categories differentiated by whether they can combine with *kan*.

4 Morphosyntactic aspects of *kan*

This section looks at morphosyntactic properties of *kan*, including its status as a particle (Section 4.1) and its word order properties (Section 4.2).

4.1 *kan* as a particle

Previous accounts of Oromo do not agree on the morphosyntactic status of *kan*, possibly due to its multifunctional nature (Sections 2 and 3) or its gender-sensitivity in some varieties. As shown in more detail in Section 5, in some varieties, *kan* is restricted to masculine gender and thus contrasts with the feminine form *tan*. In those varieties in which *kan* (masc.) and *tan* (fem.) are both found, they represent the gender of the relativized or possessed element (Praetorius 1893: iv, 87f.). However, after *tan* was lost, *kan* no longer fulfilled this function in the Central and Western varieties. In the former case, *kan* and *tan* are therefore more akin to relative pronouns while in the latter case *kan* is more like a relativizer or relativizing particle. Consequently, there are several mutually exclusive views concerning the identity of this element. Table 6 presents a selection of forms and terms used for their description. For instance, while some authors identify *kan* as a relative pronoun (Krapf 1840: ix, 3; Tutschek 1841: 451, 464; 1844: xiii; Scolart 1885: 18; Viterbo 1887a: 16, 207; Launhardt 1973: 238), Baye (1987: 60f.) explicitly denies its pronominal status. Given the absence of gender or case distinctions and its generally invariable nature, we also consider *kan* a particle.⁹

Table 6. Dialectal differences and selected terminological choices with respect to *kan* and *tan*

Dialect	Term	Form	Source
Tulama	“pronome relativo”	<i>kan, (tan)</i>	Moreno (1939: 20, 58)
Mecha	“relative pronoun”	<i>kan</i>	Gragg (1976: 183, 191)
Munyo	“relative pronouns”	<i>ka, ta</i>	Heine (1980a: 151)
Waata	“relative pronouns”	<i>ka, ta</i>	Heine (1981: 29, 40)
Harar	“associative morpheme”	<i>xan, tan</i>	Owens (1985: 131)

9 Note that especially the older sources do not necessarily have a clear-cut definition of relative pronouns.

Dialect	Term	Form	Source
	“relative”	<i>kan, (tan)</i>	Mohammed & Zaborski (1990: ix, 33)
Borana	“deictic elements”	<i>kaa, taa</i>	Stroomer (1995: 97)
written	“relative pronoun”	<i>kan, (tan)</i>	Tucho et al. (1996: 168)
	“relative particle”	<i>kan, tan</i>	Griefenow-Mewis (2001: 43)
Rayya	“relative clause marker”	<i>kan</i>	Teferi (2019: xviii, 228)

4.2 Word order properties

This section addresses syntactic properties, including the position of *kan* in relative clauses and adnominal possession (Section 4.2.1) and the position of clauses or phrases marked with *kan* with respect to the head noun (Section 4.2.2).

4.2.1 Placement of *kan*

In adnominal possessive constructions, *kan* always remains in the initial position of the possessor phrase (38).

- (38) a. *farda* [*kan* *nam-ittfa* *deeraa sanaa*]
horse POSS man-DEF.ABS tall that.GEN
‘that tall man’s horse’
- b. **farda* [*nam-ittfa* *kan* *deeraa sanaa*]
horse man-DEF.ABS POSS tall that.GEN
- c. **farda* [*nam-ittfa* *deeraa kan sanaa*]
horse man-DEF.ABS tall POSS that.GEN
- d. **farda* [*nam-ittfa* *deeraa sanaa kan*]
horse man-DEF.ABS tall that.GEN POSS

The situation is different in relative clauses. Although *kan* usually is in the initial position of the relative clause as well (39a), it can also appear in the second position (39b).¹⁰

10 *nam-oot-ni* is often pronounced as *namoonni* (spelled *namónni* in ex. 40).

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- (39) a. *nam-oot-ni* [***kan*** *ati* (*isaan*) *arg-i-t-e*]
 man-PL-NOM REL 2SG.NOM 3PL.ABS see-EP-2SG-PFV
 ‘The men that you saw.’

- b. *nam-oot-ni* [*ati* ***kan*** *isaan* *arg-i-t-e*]
 man-PL-NOM 2SG.NOM REL 3PL.ABS see-EP-2SG-PFV

Moreno recorded a further position of *kan* (40). This placement of *kan* in third position after both the A and the O arguments is not possible in modern Oromo.

- (40) *namónni* [*ati isâni* ***kan*** *árg-i-t-e*]
 man.PL.NOM 2SG 3PL.ABS REL see-EP-2SG-PFV
 ‘the men that you have seen’ (Moreno 1939: 58)

The first element of the relative clause preceding *kan* can also be an O argument (41a), an adverb (41b), a complex adverbial (41c), or a converb form (41d), among other things.

- (41) a. [*appilii* ***kan*** *naat-e*]
 apple REL eat-3SG.M.PFV
 ‘(someone) who ate an apple’
- b. [*kaleessa* ***kan*** *katab-am-aa* *tur-e*]
 yesterday REL write-PASS-PROG AUX.PST-3SG.M.PFV
 ‘(something) that was being written yesterday.’
 (Tok:2164934/Doc:3263)
- c. [*[akka tasaa]* ***kan*** *duf-an-i*]
 like chance.GEN REL come-3PL-PFV
 ‘(someone) who came suddenly’ (Tok:4408301/Doc:7522)
- d. [*daf-ee* ***kan*** *aar-e*]
 be.quick-PFV.CVB REL be_angry-3SG.M.PFV
 ‘(someone) who was quick to be angry’ (based on Tok:
 3141437/Doc:5074)

However, in all of these examples, having *kan* in the initial position within the relative clause would be preferred in a neutral context. If *kan* is in second position, the word immediately following it is usually salient or emphasized.

4.2.2 Placement of *kan*-marked phrases and clauses

Relative clauses in Oromo have to be adjacent to the head noun, whether they are prenominal (43) or postnominal (42). The prenominal position is marked and the postnominal position is strongly preferred.

- (42) *nam-ittf-i* [(*kan*) *gaangee gurgur-e*] *kaleessa*
 man-DEF-NOM REL mule sell-3SG.M.PFV yesterday
deem-e.
 go-3SG.M.PFV
 ‘The man who sold a mule left yesterday.’

- (43) [*kan gaangee gurgur-e*] (*nam-ittf-i*) *kaleessa*
 REL mule sell-3SG.M.PFV man-DEF-NOM yesterday
deem-e.
 go-3SG.M.PFV
 ‘The man WHO SOLD A MULE left yesterday.’

A similar phenomenon is known from Beja, which has normal NRel order but can have RelN order for pragmatic reasons (Vanhove 2017: 164–174).

The relative clause cannot occur after the main clause. In the following it is separated from the head noun by the verb (44). If *kan* would be left out, the sentence would be grammatical but *deem-e* would become the relative clause instead (‘The man who left sold a mule yesterday.’).

- (44) **kaleessa nam-ittf-i deem-e* [*kan gaangee*
 yesterday man-DEF-NOM go-3SG.M.PFV REL mule
gurgur-e].
 sell-3SG.M.PFV
 ‘The man who sold a mule left yesterday.’

The relative clause cannot precede the main clause either. In the following example (45), it is separated from the head noun by an adverb.

- (45) *[*kan gaangee gurgur-e*] *kaleessa nam-ittf-i*
 REL mule sell-3SG.M.PFV yesterday man-DEF-NOM

deem-e.

go-3SG.M.PFV

‘The man who sold a mule left yesterday.’

That the position of the relative clause but not the position of the adverb makes the example (45) ungrammatical can be seen in the following examples without a relative clause (46). In this case, the adverb is preferred in the position after the S argument but can also occur in front of it.

(46) a. ***nam-ittf-i*** *kaleessa* *duf-e.*
 man-DEF-NOM yesterday come-3SG.M.PFV
 ‘The man came yesterday.’

b. *kaleessa* ***nam-ittf-i*** *duf-e.*
 yesterday man-DEF-NOM come-3SG.M.PFV
 ‘The man came yesterday.’

In a few cases, a relative clause can appear to be adjoined (preposed or postposed) as a complement of an equational copula clause that lacks an overt copula. The same is true for the other relativization strategies (47).

(47) a. ***nam-ittf-i*** *kuni* [***isa*** *hoolaa*
 man-DEF-NOM this.NOM 3SG.M.ABS sheep
bit-e] Ø.
 buy-3SG.M.PFV COP
 ‘This man is the one who bought sheep.’

b. ***nam-oot-ni*** *kuni* [***warra*** *hoolaa*
 man-DEF-NOM this.NOM parents.ABS sheep
bit-an-i] Ø.
 buy-3PL-PFV COP
 ‘These men are the ones who bought sheep.’

c. ***nam-ittf-i*** *kuni* [***kan*** *hoolaa*
 man-DEF-NOM this.NOM REL sheep

bit-e] Ø.

buy-3SG.M.PFV COP

‘This man is the one who bought sheep.’

A very similar pattern can be observed for *kan* in adnominal possessive constructions. Normally, the possessor and the possessum occur adjacent to each other without any other modifiers like adjectives, numerals, or demonstratives intervening (48).

- (48) a. *konkolaataa [(kan) nam-ittfaa] haaraa*
 car POSS man-DEF.GEN new
 ‘the man’s new car’

- b. **konkolaataa haaraa [(kan) nam-ittfaa]*
 car new POSS man-DEF.GEN

As in the case of the relative clauses, when the possessor precedes the head, *kan* is obligatory. This usually happens when the possessor is topical and the possessum is an S or A argument (49).

- (49) a. [*kan nam-ittfaa*] *konkolaataa-n*
 POSS man-DEF.GEN car-NOM
 ‘the man’s car’/lit.: ‘of the man, the car...’

- b. **nam-ittfaa konkolaataa-n*
 man-DEF.GEN car-NOM

kan is obligatory if the head noun is shared with the preceding possessive phrase. In two such phrases that share a possessed noun, the latter usually occurs as *kan* + possessor NP + long vowel while the former tends to avoid *kan*. If the possessum from the preceding phrase is repeated, *kan* is optional:

- (50) *k’aam-ni idzoollee* — [*kan nama guddaa*]
 body-NOM child.PL[.GEN] POSS man big[.GEN]
 tʃ’aalaa biʃaan k’ab-at-a
 big.CMPR water hold-MID-3SG.M.IPFV
 ‘Children’s bodies hold more water than those of adults.’
 (Tok:213022/Doc:44)

- (51) *k'aam-ni idzoollee k'aama [(kan) nama*
 body-NOM child.PL[.GEN] body POSS man
guddaa] tf'aalaa bifaan k'ab-at-a
 big[.GEN] big.CMPR water hold-MID-3SG.M.IPFV
 'Children's bodies hold more water than those of adults.'

Similar to free relative clauses, the particle *kan* can occasionally also occur without the head noun in adnominal possessive constructions. This usage is restricted to cases of ellipsis (as in ex. 50), elliptic answers to questions, copula complements (see ex. 37), etc.

5 The diachrony of *kan* (and *tan*)

This section will demonstrate that the particle *kan* can be traced to the proximal demonstrative *kana*. This was already pointed out by Tutschek (1841: 464, 1845: 75), Praetorius (1893: 87), Hodson & Walker (1922: 76), or Heine (1981: 40) but has never been investigated in detail. Given that few historical materials from Oromo are available, the development by and large must be inferred from data available since the 1840s and from a comparison with related languages.

To understand the origin and grammaticalization of *kan*, it is necessary to include the parallel development of the marker *tan*, which is still present in Oromo outside of Central and Western varieties (Section 4.1). In those varieties in which *tan* is still attested, it exhibits behavior analogous to *kan*. But *kan* is used for masculine and *tan* for feminine gender. In the modern Central and Western varieties, where *tan* was lost, *kan* was generalised and is no longer restricted to marking masculine gender. The gender distinction between *kan* and *tan* has an analogy in the demonstrative system shown in Table 7. Note that the distal demonstrative *sana* has no gender distinction, which may have contributed to the loss of *tana*.

Table 7. Tulama Oromo demonstratives (Moreno 1939: 56, accents removed)

	Proximal		Distal
	Masculine	Feminine	
this (nom)	<i>kuni(i)</i>	<i>tuni(i)</i>	<i>sun(i)</i>
this (abs)	<i>kana</i>	<i>tana</i>	<i>sana</i>
these	<i>kani</i>	<i>tani</i>	<i>sani</i>

Apart from these obvious formal similarities between the demonstratives *kana* and *tana* and the relativizers *kan* and *tan*, there is an analogous generalisation of the masculine form. The same is also observed in the personal possessive forms. While Central and Western Oromo again generalised the masc. personal possessive forms, Eastern Oromo (Harar) preserved distinct masc. and fem. forms (Table 8). Since the loss of the fem. forms is not restricted to the relativizer, the generalisation of *kan* can be interpreted as the result of a more general change. In a relative chronology, this change must have occurred after the grammaticalization of *kan* and *tan*.

Table 8. Possessive forms in Eastern Oromo (Harar) (Mohammed & Zaborski 1990: 11)

	Masculine	Feminine
1SG	<i>kíyya</i>	<i>tíyya</i>
2SG	<i>kée</i>	<i>tée</i>
3SG.M	<i>(kán) isáa</i>	<i>(tán) isáa</i>
3SG.F	<i>(kán) isîi</i>	<i>(tan) isîi</i>
1PL	<i>kéennya</i>	<i>téennya</i>
2PL	<i>kéessani</i>	<i>téessani</i>
3PL	<i>(kán) isáani</i>	<i>(tan) isáani</i>

The development from *kana* and *tana* to *kan* and *tan*, respectively, involves changes in (i) form, (ii) meaning, and (iii) structure. First, there is evidence for phonetic erosion. Not only did *kan* lose the final unstressed vowel of *kána*, but in some varieties, *kan* is further reduced to *ka* (see Table 6). In the Waata dialect in Kenya, there is *ka* for masc. and *ta* for fem. nouns while the proximal demonstratives still have the form *ka(n)* and *ta(n)* with optional nasal (Heine 1981: 40). In other words, there is a reduction in substance (*kana* > *kan* > *ka*, *tana* > *tan* > *ta*).

Second, there is also evidence of the loss of semantic content (de-semanticization), i.e. the meaning of a spatial demonstrative is no longer present. The demonstrative *kana* entails the meaning of proximity and as such contrasts with the distal demonstrative: *farda kana* ‘this horse’ vs. *farda sana* ‘that horse’. Furthermore, there is decategorialization and deparadigmatization because the particles *kan* and *tan* are no longer used attributively and can no longer inflect (see Sections 2–4). As opposed to this, the demonstratives *kana* and *tana* still exhibit a complete inflectional paradigm: *nama kana* ‘this person (ABS)’, *namni kuni* ‘this person (NOM)’ (see Table 7).

Third, and most importantly, there is restructuring from a post-nominal demonstrative to an initial particle (52).

- (52) a. [*kaayyoo kana*] *irra-tti walii*
 objective this on-LOC Each_other.DAT
gal-n-e
 enter-1PL-PFV
 ‘We agree upon this objective.’ (based on Tok:697841/
 Doc:1075)
- b. *kaayyoo [(kan) irra-tti walii*
 objective REL on-LOC each_other.DAT
gal-n-e]
 enter-1PL-PFV
 ‘the objective that we agree upon...’

Additionally, the polyfunctionality of the markers for both relative clauses and adnominal possession is in need of an explanation. These two interrelated points will be discussed in the remainder of this section.

Schapper (2023: 397) has argued that possessive markers can develop into attributive markers in the context of headless or nominalizing constructions. If a similar development took place in Oromo, the most likely starting point would perhaps be the use as a host for possessive pronouns and a subsequent extension to other contexts. But given the less common usage and still partly emphatic character of *kan* in adnominal possessive constructions with pronouns in Oromo (Section 3), a primary grammaticalization as a relativizer and

later extension to a possessive marker is perhaps more plausible (see also Yri 2009: 227 on a parallel in Amharic).

According to Heine and Kuteva (2007: 225), the grammaticalization of demonstratives is the cross-linguistically most frequent source of relativizers. The development often follows the so-called “demonstrative channel” (Heine & Kuteva 2007: 225–229; see also Givón 2012: 11–14). For English *that*, they described the development as reinterpretation from the juxtaposition of two clauses to the subordination of the second clause to the first. This subordinate clause contains a relativizer that may have started out as anaphoric pro-form referring back to an element of the main clause. The change also entails the emergence of a single intonation contour of the two clauses as in the following schematic examples (53):

- (53) a. *There is the car; **that** (one) I like.*
b. *There is the car [**that** I like].*

However, there is very little evidence for this scenario from the synchronic structure of Oromo or from related languages (see Section 6.3). In fact, the SOV-structure requires an additional shift of the relative clause to a position before the verb that would have to be explained.

We propose a different and more complex scenario for Oromo summarized in Table 9. Note that the additional and more strongly grammaticalized marking in both relative clauses (“subjunctive”) and adnominal possession (vowel length or final *-ii*) suggest that *kan* and *tan* might be later additions to already existing constructions. The grammaticalization of *kana* and *tana* must have taken place within one or both of these specific constructions.

Table 9. Hypothetical development of [N *kana/tana*] in Oromo

determiner stage	meaning change	shared rebracketing	shared head deletion
*1 [N <i>kan/tan</i>] Clause	*1.a Det > Rel	4 N [<i>kan/tan</i> Clause]	7 [<i>kan/tan</i> Clause]
*2 [N <i>kan/tan</i>] NP	*2.a Rel > Gen	5 N [<i>kan/tan</i> NP]	8 [<i>kan/tan</i> NP]
*3 [N <i>kan/tan</i>] Pro	*3.a spread of Gen	6 N [<i>kan/tan</i> Pro]	9 [<i>kan/tan</i> Pro]

The development probably proceeded along the following lines. First, the demonstratives changed to determiners (points 1, 2, 3 in Table

9), which is a cross-linguistically very common development (Kuteva et al. 2019: 137–139) and has parallels in LEC (see below). These determiners could be used on head nouns in the already existing relative and possessive constructions. This led to a position of the determiners between the head noun and the modifier. Second, within this syntactic environment, the determiner was reanalyzed as a relative clause marker (point 1.a) and, probably as an extension of this, as a possessive marker (point 2.a, 3.a). Third, following this, there was rebracketing of these markers as belonging to the modifier. For the relative clauses, this can be illustrated as follows (54):

- (54) a. [N *kan(a)*] Rel > N [*ka(n)* Rel]
 b. [N *tan(a)*] Rel > N [*ta(n)* Rel]

Fourth, after the rebracketing, the head noun could be deleted. Note that the internal relative chronology of the rebracketing (points 4, 5, 6) and subsequent possibility of head deletion (points 7, 8, 9) remains uncertain (but see below).

Unlike the development proposed by Heine and Kuteva (2007), this scenario requires no additional integration into the main clause, such as a movement of the verb. It is also in accordance with the frequent head-initial position of the relative clause marker. Under this assumption, the demonstratives that became relativizers were originally adnominal rather than anaphoric. According to Tosco (1994), adnominal demonstratives in Proto-East-Cushitic preceded the noun (DemN). The change from this prenominal to a postnominal position (NDem) is a prerequisite for the grammaticalization scenario sketched above.

While the early stages of the proposed development are unattested in Oromo (and hence marked by asterisks in Table 9), there is some evidence for their plausibility. For instance, Heine (1981: 40) notes that the presence of *ka* or *ta* makes the relativized noun definite in the Waata dialect. Somali and Girirra provide further details that make the scenario more plausible.

For instance, Somali has two determiner suffixes *-ka* (masc.) and *-ta* (fem.), e.g. *nín-ka* ‘the man’ (Saeed 1999: 28–29) that are likely related to the proximal demonstratives *kán* (masc.) and *tán* (fem.), e.g., *nín-kán* ‘this man (ABS)’ (Saeed 1999: 113). As such, they are

also related to *kan(a)* and *tan(a)* in Oromo (cf. Tosco 1994: 427).¹¹ A very similar pattern can also be observed in Girirra (Mekonnen 2015: 66), a language related with Somali where the determiners have the form *-ki/-ka* (masc.) or *-ti/-ta* (fem.), e.g. *nan-ki* ‘the man’ (Mekonnen 2015: 66). In this language, there is no longer a similarity to the demonstratives that may have already been replaced by a new system: *nan hikkaj* ‘this man’, *islaan hittaj* ‘this woman’ (Mekonnen 2015: 274).

Girirra relative clauses take subordinate verb forms (*-o* in ex. 55a)¹² and adnominal possession is marked with the genitive *-e* (55b), which could be a cognate of Oromo *-ii* (Section 3). Note that the determiners can occur on the head noun in both constructions. Similar patterns can also be observed in Somali (Green 2021: 363).

(55) Girirra

- a. [*nan-ki* [*irii-di* *afke* *sadiki-j-o*]]
 man-DEF.M door-DEF.F in.front stand-EP-REL
awu-kej-o.
 father-1SG.M.POSS-COP
 ‘The man who stands in front of the door is my father.’
 (Mekonnen 2015: 230)
- b. [*lug-ki* [*libaag-e*]] *adag-j-a*.
 leg-DEF.M lion-GEN strong-3SG.M.POSS-COP
 ‘The leg of the lion is strong.’ (Mekonnen 2015: 73)

11 According to Heine (1978: 27), the initial consonants in Somali *kan* and *tan* might have been gender prefixes attached to the proximal (and other) demonstratives (i.e., *k-an, *t-an). If accurate, the same must be true for Oromo *kan(a)* and *tan(a)*. However, in Oromo the demonstratives are no longer clearly analyzable synchronically. The loss of the feminine forms might have contributed to the loss of analyzability.

12 The suffix *-o* in Girirra seems to be a cognate of Oromo *-u* (Section 2). Mekonnen (2015: 230) does not present full paradigms for the subordinate verb forms, but the overall pattern appears to be similar to Oromo (Table 4). Girirra makes a distinction between perfective and imperfective forms. In the declarative, the perfective takes the suffix *-ej* (*-en* in 2/3PL) while the imperfective has the suffix *-i* (*-an* in 2/3PL) (Mekonnen 2015: 252, 254). As in Oromo, only the imperfective has a subordinate form *-o* that replaces *-i* whereas the perfective retains the same marking as in declarative main clauses.

Note that a few details of the development necessarily remain uncertain given the lack of evidence from older stages of Oromo. For instance, evidence from Girirra might suggest that the rebracketing may have started with the personal possessive forms. Note that personal possessive marking in Girirra can involve the same determiners: *min-ki-nood* ‘our house (masc.)’, *min-ti-nood* ‘our house (fem.)’ (Mekonnen 2015: 106). This pattern is already almost identical to the one in Oromo (Section 3), cf. Munyo Oromo *mín* [*kan-kéèn*] ‘our house’ (Heine 1980a: 149). Note that these forms can also occur in a very similar copula construction as in Oromo.

(56) Girirra

hattaj min-ki-ka-Ø.

DIST.SG.F house-DEF.M-2SG.M.POSS-COP

‘That is your house.’ (Mekonnen 2015: 112)

Crucially, the head noun can be absent as in Oromo, which speaks in favor of a similar reanalysis of *ki/ti* as belonging to the modifier: *hattaj* [*ki-nood*]-Ø ‘that is ours’ (Mekonnen 2015: 112).

Oromo *kan* and *tan* exhibit many similarities with so-called “connectors” in LEC languages (Tosco 1994: 426–434). In many cases, these also exhibit gender distinctions, such as Bayso masc. *ka-* and fem. *ta-*. As such, they share a common background but in most cases probably represent separate cases of grammaticalization (see Section 6.3).

6 Typological comparisons

Having provided synchronic and diachronic details of the relevant constructions in Oromo, this section will address them from a cross-linguistic and genealogical perspective, focusing on word order correlations, marking patterns, evidence from other LEC languages, and a complementary pattern found in Southeast Asian languages.

6.1 Word order correlations

Both adnominal possession and relative clauses are correlated with basic word order. However, the correlations take rather different forms in the two cases. Table 10 shows the relevant frequencies of the relative order of genitive and noun in languages with OV and VO word order in Dryer’s sample (ignoring types not relevant here). The

data can be interpreted as the following two unidirectional implicational tendencies (57) (Dryer 2011):

- (57) a. if OV then GenN
- b. if NGen then VO

Languages with SVO exhibit a somewhat mixed pattern (Dryer 2019).¹³

Table 10. Matrix showing OV/VO and the order of genitive and noun (Dryer 2013a, 2013b)

	OV	VO	Total
NGen	32	398	430
GenN	493	122	615
Total	525	520	1045

In this approach, there is thus a strong correlation between (S)OV order and head-final adnominal possessive constructions (Givón 1979: 215; Dryer 1992: 91). For instance, the Northern Cushitic language Beja conforms to this prediction in showing SOV and GenN order (Vanhove 2017: 40, 153). However, head-initial genitive structures (NGen) in languages with SOV order are observable among several languages of Ethiopia, especially in Lowland East Cushitic (Tosco 1994: 418; Hayward 2006: 160). The small group of only 32 languages in Dryer’s sample that violate both predictions includes Harar and Waata Oromo.

Relative clauses also exhibit a unidirectional correlation with the order of OV/VO. Table 11 shows the relevant data from Dryer’s sample (again ignoring non-relevant types). Here the predictions are mirror images of the ones seen above for adnominal possession (58) (Dryer 2007: 97):

- (58) a. if VO then NRel
- b. if RelN then OV

Note that there is a strong preference for postnominal relative clauses that is unrelated to the order of O and V (Dryer 2011: 342). Oromo, combining OV and RelN order is thus in accordance with both predictions.

Table 11. Matrix showing OV/VO and the order of relative clause and noun (Dryer 2013a, 2013c)

	OV	VO	Total
NRel	113	415	528
RelN	132	5	137
Total	245	420	665

The combination of relative clauses and genitives into one typology leads to a more complex picture (Table 12). First, there is a set of predictions that is unrelated to the order of O and V (59):

- (59)
- a.

b.
- if NGen then NRel

if RelN then GenN

These predictions can be interpreted as a tendency for a harmonic ordering of adnominal possession and relative clauses, the only attested non-harmonic type being GenN & NRel. Again, Oromo NGen & NRel is in accordance with these predictions. Second, there is another set of predictions that is related to the order of O and V (60).

- (60)
- a.

b.
- if GenN & RelN then OV

if NGen & NRel then VO

Mandarin, Cantonese, and Bai are the three languages mentioned for East Asia that violate the first prediction and Harar and Waata Oromo belong to a group of only 23 out of a sample of altogether 740 languages that violate the second. For both OV and VO, NGen & RelN is almost absent (59) while the non-harmonic type GenN & NRel is common in both. These correlations are connected to marking patterns for both categories that are addressed in the next section.

Table 12. Matrix showing OV/VO and the order of genitive and noun as well as of relative clause and noun (Dryer 2013a, 2013b, 2013c), excluding non-relevant types

(other: 162)	OV	VO
NGen & RelN	1	1
NGen & NRel	23	287
GenN & RelN	121	3
GenN & NRel	72	70

6.2 Relation between relative clauses, genitives, and adjectives

Cross-linguistically, adnominal relative clauses, genitives, and adjectives can show some overlap in morphosyntactic marking (Retsö 2009; Gil 2013; Schapper 2023). For example, Mandarin Chinese uses the same attributive marker for all three categories (61).

(61) Mandarin

- a. [*mǎi de*] *shū*
buy ATTR book
'the book (that someone) bought'
- b. [*tā de*] *shū*
3SG ATTR book
'her book'
- c. [*xīn de*] *shū*
new ATTR book
'(a) new book'

This overlap in marking suggests some sort of conceptual or other connection between these categories. Languages vary based on their preferences of coding them by different or similar morphosyntax, and the similarity may involve all three or only two of the categories.

Gil (2013) categorises the 138 languages of his small sample into six types depending on whether and how they differentiate among adnominal relative clauses, genitives, and adjectives (see Table 13 and Figure 1): (i) weakly differentiated, (ii) collapsed genitives and adjectives, (iii) collapsed genitives and relative clauses, (iv) collapsed adjectives and relative clauses, (v) moderately differentiated in some other way, and (vi) highly differentiated ones. As shown above, Mandarin is a language of Type (i) with weak differentiation because it uses the same particle *de* for all three functions. As opposed to this, English is a representative of the most common Type (vi) that shows no similarity in marking.

Table 13. Differentiation of relative clauses (Rel), genitives (Gen), and adjectives (Adj) (Gil 2013)

Type	Representation	Languages	Example
i	Rel = Gen = Adj	15	Mandarin
ii	Rel; Gen = Adj	8	Persian
iii	Rel = Gen; Adj	2	Neo-Aramaic (Arbel Jewish)
iv	Rel = Adj; Gen	33	Tagalog
v	mixed, e.g. Rel = Adj; Gen = Adj	3	Thai
vi	Rel; Gen; Adj	77	English

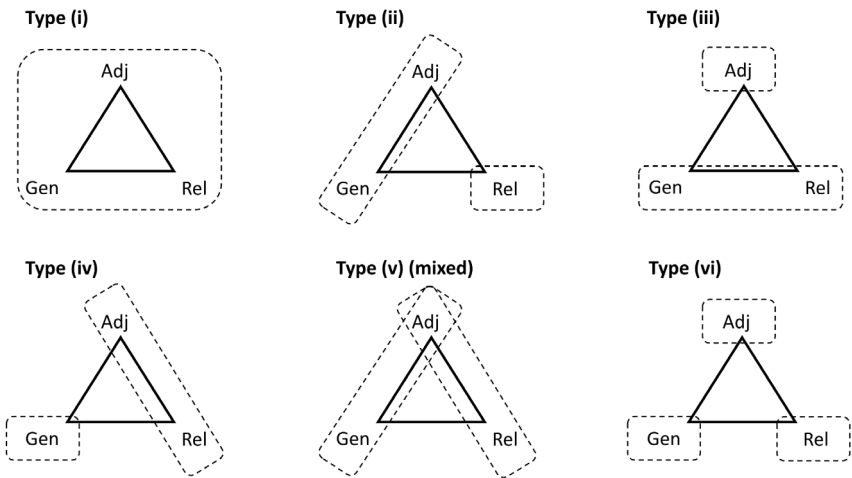


Figure 1. Schematic illustration of the six types shown in Table 13 (created by the authors)

Oromo is of the cross-linguistically rare type (iii), marking both relative clauses and adnominal possession (but not adjectives) with *kan*. However, a few items, such as the adjective-like word *korma* ‘male’ (derived from the word *korma* ‘(young) bull’) behave like genitives in showing vowel length. *korma* can also precede the noun, which sets it even further apart from normal postnominal adjectives (cf. *korma gurraattfa* ‘black bull’), e.g. both *handaa**k’oo kormaa* and *kormaa handaa**k’oo* mean ‘rooster’.

Given the additional vowel lengthening for genitives and the special verb form for subordinate clauses, Oromo potentially could also be classified as the most common Type (vi) in Gil's classification. However, such a classification would obscure the fact that the same marker *kan* is present in both adnominal possession and in relative clauses. Cushitic languages other than Oromo also exhibit rare types of word order and conflation that are addressed in the following Section 6.3.

6.3 Lowland East Cushitic

The following addresses selected LEC languages, excluding some languages such as Dirayta or Boni for lack of sufficient data. Since Saho (Esayas 2015) and Afar (Hassan Kamil 2015) use prenominal modifiers, these languages will be left aside as well.

Table 14 summarises the word order and marking patterns found in Lowland East Cushitic languages. At least eleven of these languages, excluding Saho and Afar in the North (Tosco 1994: 418), share the cross-linguistically unexpected word order combination OV & NGen, which suggests a strong phylogenetic signal. If Tosco's (2020) reclassification of LEC is correct, the word order pattern can be traced at least to Southern LEC. Overall, the word order appears to be much more stable than the actual marking, which shows more variation in both form and type. This is in accordance with the proposed recent grammaticalization of *kan* and *tan* in Oromo based on already existing postnominal relative clauses.

The following discussion is restricted to those languages that also exhibit the same marking for relative clauses and adnominal possession as in Oromo (see also Section 5 on Somali and Girirra). The Oromoid language Konso, often said to be the closest relative of Oromo, has the same marker *?a* for relative clauses and adnominal possession (but not for adjectives). Like adjectives, both follow the head noun. Unlike Oromo, there is no synchronic similarity to the demonstrative system. A glottal stop is not phonemic in initial position and is often subject to processes of elision or assimilation (62) (Ongaye 2013: 15, 42, 50–54, 128–131).

Table 14. Marking types and word order patterns in selected Lowland East Cushitic languages¹⁴

Language	Type	Rela- tive	Genitive	Adjective
Oromo	Rel = Gen ; Adj	NRel (RelN)	NGen (GenN)	NAdj
Konso	Rel = Gen ; Adj	NRel	NGen	NAdj
Dhaasanac	Rel = Gen = Adj	NRel	NGen	NAdj
Arbore	Rel = Adj; Gen	NRel	NGen	NAdj
Elmolo	Rel; Gen; Adj	NRel	NGen	NAdj
Bayso	Rel = Gen = Adj	RelN	NGen	NAdj
Rendille	Rel = Gen = Adj	NRel	NGen	NAdj
Somali	Rel; Gen; Adj	NRel	NGen (GenN)	NAdj
Girirra	Rel; Gen; Adj	NRel	NGen	NAdj
Gawwada	Rel; Gen; Adj	NRel	NGen	NAdj
Ts’amakko	Rel; Gen; Adj	NRel	NGen	NAdj
Yaaku	Rel; Gen; Adj	NRel	NGen	NAdj

(62) Konso

- a.

inanta [*a* *dey-t-i*] *i = der-i*
girl REL come-3F-PFV 3 = be.tall-PFV
‘The girl who came is tall.’ (Ongaye 2013: 204)
- b.

tika [*a* *Antú*] *i = pald-i*
house GEN Anto 3 = be.wide-PFV
‘Anto’s house is wide.’ (Ongaye 2013: 116)

Konso exhibits a high tone on the last syllable of the possessor and, for non-human possessors and proper names with final *aa* such as *kaabaa*, a final glottal stop (63).

14 Data from Ongaye (2013); Sasse (1976); Hayward (1984); Tosco (1994); Heine (1980b); Hayward (1979); Lemmi (2018); Heine (1980c); Heine (1976); Saeed (1999); Green (2021); Mekonnen (2015); Tosco (2021); Savà (2005); Heine (1974/75); all languages are SOV, only Yaaku might be SVO (Heine 1974/75: 38).

(63) Konso

tika [a *kaabaá-ʔ*]

house GEN Kaabaa-GEN

‘Kaabaa’s house’ (Ongaye 2013: 116)

The use of *ʔa* together with the high tone and the glottal stop is reminiscent of the combination of *kan* with the final vowel length in Oromo. However, we are currently uncertain whether *ʔa* is a cognate of *kan*. Konso would be expected to retain a fricative consonant, cf. *χorma* ‘ox’ (cf. Oromo *korma*), *χarra* ‘door’ (cf. Oromo *karra*), or *χonso* ‘Konso’ (cf. Oromo *konso*). Thus, a more plausible cognate of *ka(n)* can be found in the “noun space filler” *χa*, which is used to form possessive pronouns similarly to Oromo, e.g. Konso *χa-yyu* ‘mine’ (Ongaye 2013: 133). Unless *χa* is borrowed, it might have been generalised in a similar way to Oromo where there is no gender distinction.

The Western Omo-Tana language Dhaasanac has a similar marker *-ka*, which is used for all three categories and also lacks a gender distinction (Sasse 1976: 206). It is found in the final position of the possessor or the relative clause, apparently suffixed to the noun, verb, or adjective (64).

(64) Dhaasanac

a. *ʔaf* *veel-ka*

mouth child-GEN

‘the mouth of the child’

b. *ʔaf* [*yáá* *ʔargi-ka*]

mouth 1SG.PERF saw-REL

‘the mouth which I saw’

c. *Bil* *Gor-ka*

house wooden-REL

‘a wooden house’ (Sasse 1976: 206)

The Central Omo-Tana language Bayso has three different relativizers: *ka-* for masc. singular and plural nouns, *ta-* for fem. singular nouns, and *o-* for paucal nouns (Lemmi 2018: 120). According to Hayward (1979: 102), *o-* is used in the plural. Unlike Oromo, the

relativizers attach to the verb and the relative clause precedes the head noun (RelN) (65).

(65) Bayso

ani [*kele* ***ka-emet-e***] *ibaaddo-ti* *dee*.

1SG yesterday REL.M-come-PFV man-SG see.PFV

‘I saw the man who came yesterday.’ (Lemmi 2018: 120)

The same three markers are also used for adnominal possession. However, similar to Oromo, genitives follow the head noun (NGen).

(66) Bayso

min ***ka-baallamoo***

house GEN.M-Ballamo

‘Ballamo’s house’ (Lemmi 2018: 94)

According to Hayward (1979: 107), the final vowel of the possessor noun is lengthened as in Oromo. In words with final consonants, the preceding vowel is lengthened or a long vowel *-ee* (or *-oo*) is added: *ta lubaan*, *ta luban-ee* ‘(something (f.)) of a lion’ (cf. *luban* ‘lion’). The relation to the demonstrative system is synchronically opaque although it also has a gender distinction in the singular. Masc. gender is expressed with a suffix *-ki* and fem. gender with *-ti* (e.g., *hikki lúban* ‘this (masc., subject) lion’, Hayward 1979: 103, 111).

Unlike Oromo *kan* and *tan*, the relativizers or possessive markers in Bayso are not freestanding elements but prefixes or perhaps proclitics on the verb and noun, respectively. In addition, *ka-* and *ta-* are also used on numerals and adjectives, which represents a further difference to Oromo (Lemmi 2018: 176). They combine with the gender suffixes (67).

(67) Bayso

ababbo ***ka-džin-ki***

grandfather REL.M-big-M

‘the big grandfather’ (Lemmi 2018: 83)

A similarity to Oromo or Konso is the use on possessive pronouns: *ka-ke*, *ta-ke* ‘mine’ (Lemmi 2018: 111–114, see also Hayward 1979: 112).

In the Eastern Omo-Tana language Rendille, all adjectives, adnominal possessives and relative clauses are marked by *kí(ye)* (masc.) and *tí(ye)* (fem.), or *hí(ye)* (masc., plural) (Heine 1976: 242). Some

possessor nouns additionally take a genitive marker *-et*, *-at*, or, in the plural, *-ot* (Heine 1980c: 227) (68). Some adjectives require an additional subjunctive copula, which makes the construction more akin to a relative clause (Heine 1980c: 229).

(68) Rendille

- a. *ínam* [*kí* *y.amít*] *árg-a*
 boy REL.M comes see-1SG
 ‘I see the boy who comes’ (Heine 1980c: 229)
- b. *bárbar* [*hí(ye)* *cimbir-et*]
 wing POSS.M bird-GEN
 ‘the bird’s wing’ (Heine 1980c: 227)
- c. *ínan* [*kí* *búúr-e*]
 boy REL.M fat-SUBJ
 ‘a fat boy’ (Heine 1980c: 229)

The head noun in relative and possessive constructions can be absent as in Oromo. In possessive pronouns, the markers are apparently reduced to *k-*, *t-*, and *h-*, e.g. *kêy* ‘my’, *káya* ‘mine (focused, pronominal)’ (Heine 1976: 227).

6.4 Prenominal relative clauses in VO and postnominal possession in OV

This paper has shown that the combination of the features OV (& NRel) & NGen in Oromo is cross-linguistically rare (Section 6.1) but also exists in many other LEC languages (Section 6.3). This section will compare this pattern with the complementary but cross-linguistically even rarer combination (S)VO & RelN (& GenN) as found, for instance, in Sinitic. Based on the observation about marking in Section 6.2, a tentative hypothesis is formulated that potentially can explain both patterns.

Prenominal relative clauses in VO languages are exceedingly rare (Comrie 2008; Wu 2011; Sposato 2014). The pattern is by and large restricted to Southeast Asia and can be found in Hmong-Mien (Xong, Sposato 2021), Baic (Zhaozhuang Bai, Zhao & Dai 2012), Sinitic languages like Mandarin (see above), Gan (Li 2018), or Min (Ngai 2021), and a few Austronesian languages like Pazih (Li & Tsuchida 2001). All of these languages have SVO order, except for Pazih, which has

VOS. With few exceptions such as the archaic Sinitic language Caijia (Lü 2022), these languages have the same marking for relative clauses and adnominal possession. However, even Caijia allows the relativizer $s\eta^{21}$ to occur in possessive constructions and with certain adjectives. Like Mandarin *de*, the same markers are usually also employed for a wide variety of other functions that will not be discussed here in detail. For instance, Pazih can use the same marker for adjectives (Li & Tsuchida 2001: 119). Except for Xong, this is the case at least for a subset of the adjectives in all of the above-mentioned languages (Table 15). The combination of features (VO & RelN) represents a very strong phylogenetic signal in Sinitic (perhaps including Baic). However, similar to the case of LEC the individual markers are of different and often opaque origin. For instance, the relativizer/possessive marker $k\grave{a}i^{213}$ or $k\grave{a}^0$ in Shaowu Min Chinese is still formally identical to and probably derived from the general numeral classifier (Ngai 2021: 4). Zhaozhuang Bai $n\grave{o}^{44}$ derives from a postposition meaning ‘above’ (Zhao & Dai 2012: 151), etc.

Table 15. Marking types and word order patterns in selected Southeast Asian languages

Language	Type	Relative	Genitive	Adjective
Caijia	Rel = /;Gen = /;Adj	RelN	GenN	AdjN
Gan	Rel = Gen = /;Adj	RelN	GenN	AdjN
Mandarin	Rel = Gen = Adj	RelN	GenN	AdjN
Pazih	Rel = Gen = Adj	RelN	GenN	AdjN
Shaowu Min	Rel = Gen = Adj	RelN	GenN	AdjN
Xong	Rel = Gen; Adj	RelN	GenN	NAdj
Zhaozhuang Bai	Rel = Gen = /;Adj	RelN	GenN	AdjN

In comparison, postnominal genitives in OV languages are slightly more common than prenominal relative clauses in VO, but they are still cross-linguistically rare (Section 6.1). Many of these languages appear to show the same conflation of marking for relative clauses and adnominal possession (see Section 6.3 on LEC). Figure 2 illustrates the complementary nature of the two patterns. A plus sign means that a certain pattern is cross-linguistically widespread (like OV & NRel) and a minus that it is cross-linguistically rare (like OV & NGen). In Oromo, the combination (S)OV & NGen is the unusual

one whereas in Chinese it is (S)VO & RelN. NRel is common in (S)OV languages and NGen in (S)VO. In this regard, the two patterns are complementary.

	OV	VO
NRel	+	+
RelN	+	-
Oromo		Chinese
	OV	VO
NGen	-	+
GenN	+	+

Figure 2. Synchronic marking patterns in relation with word order

In both cases, language contact may have been an important factor. The Chinese pattern is found between a large area with predominant OV & RelN & GenN order towards the north and west (e.g., Tibetic, Turkic, Mongolic, Tungusic) and an area with predominant VO & NRel & NGen order to the south (e.g., Khmer, Lao, Thai, Vietnamese).

VO & NRel & NGen is the dominant pattern to the West of Ethiopia, but within Ethiopia itself, there is a compact area with OV & RelN & GenN as represented by Amharic. Like Chinese, Oromo is located at the intersection between these two coherent and harmonic types.

These patterns also allow two tentative assumptions: (a) the problematic prenominal relative clauses in (S)VO languages are more likely if prenominal genitives share the same marking. (b) the rare postnominal genitives in OV are more likely under the condition that postnominal relative clauses share the same headedness and the same marking (69).

- (69) a. (S)VO & RelN | GenN & Rel = Gen
- b. OV & NGen | NRel & Rel = Gen

In other words, weak differentiation between the two categories can lead to the emergence and the retention of rare word order patterns. Diachronically, the first assumption might imply a potential development (perhaps via intermediary stages) from possessive marker to

relativizer and the second assumption the opposite (and possibly less controversial) development. If correct, this means that there is not a unidirectional grammaticalization path from one category to the other but that both directions might be somehow possible. Of course, this is a simplification since other features such as adjectives have not been taken into account so far. For instance, Schapper (2023) recently argued that possessive markers can develop into relative clause markers via the intermediary step of adjectival attribution. Another possibility is the independent development of both categories from a third category (e.g., nominalization). The expected outcome of these developments would be either Type i (Rel = Gen = Adj) or Type iii (Rel = Gen; Adj). In the case of Oromo, both scenarios might be possible, although the direction Rel > Gen seems generally more likely (Section 5). Paradoxically, in Sinitic and LEC the word order seems diachronically more stable than the actual marking, which suggests repeated innovation within an existing system, and perhaps the relabeling or replacement of markers in some cyclic pattern.

We leave the testing and the modification of the hypotheses in (69) to language-specific needs to future studies. Given the limited space, we restrict ourselves to a discussion of the so-called *ezāfe* in Iranian languages like Tajik and Kurdish, which highlights both similarities and differences with respect to Oromo. For instance, Tajik and Oromo share the word order combination OV & NGen & NRel as well as a similar marking. However, while Oromo shows marking with *kan* on the dependent (70), the *ezāfe* in Tajik is usually considered a form of head-marking (71) (Samvelian 2018: 235–236). However, if the development from a determiner laid out in Section 5 is accurate, *kan* might have also marked the head noun before having been incorporated into the modifier.

(70) Oromo

kitaaba [(*kan*) *Hasan*]
 book POSS Hasan
 ‘Hasan’s book’

(71) Tajik

kitob-i Hasan
 book-EZ Hasan

‘Hasan’s book’ (Windfuhr & Perry 2009: 474)

Nevertheless, the two markers also share several properties, including a similar origin. The Tajik *ezāfe* can likely be traced to Old Persian *haya* (masc.), *taya* (neuter), and *hayā* (fem.) – a combination of the demonstrative with the original relativizer *ya* (Skjærvø 2009: 82; Haig 2011: 385; Samvelian 2018: 228).

At a first glance, the gender contrast between *kan* and *tan* represents a difference with respect to Tajik. However, other Iranian languages do preserve gender marking that depends on the head noun. Examples can be found in Zazaki (Paul 2009: 563) or Northern Kurdish (Haig 2011). The latter uses *-(y)ê* for masc., *-(y)a* for fem., and *-(y)ê(n)* or *-(y)ê(t)* (in the Bahdînî dialect) for plural nouns. The *ezāfe* in Northern Kurdish is highly polysemous and, among other things, can mark adnominal possessors (NGen, 72a), attributive adjectives (NAdj, 72b), and, unlike modern Persian, relative clauses (NRel, 72c) (Rel = Gen = Adj). The relative clause can take an additional initial complementizer *ku*.

(72) Northern Kurdish

- a. *dest-ê* *te*
 hand[M]-EZ.M 2SG.OBL
 ‘your hand’ (Haig 2011: 365)
- b. *mal-a* *mezin*
 house[F]-EZ.F big
 ‘big house’ (Haig 2011: 365)
- c. *tişt’-ê* [*min* *day-av* *hinga*]
 thing-EZ.PL 1SG.OBL give.PST-POSTV 2PL.OBL
 ‘the things I gave to you (pl)’ (Bahdînî) (Haig 2011: 366)

A feature that makes the Northern Kurdish *ezāfe* even more akin to Oromo is the use in a nominalizing function without a head noun, e.g. *yê te* ‘yours (that of you)’ (Haig 2011: 367), cf. Oromo *kan = ke(e)* ‘yours’. In Kurdish, this can lead to ambiguous patterns, such as the following in which the adjective is interpreted either as modifier of the head noun (73a) or as copula complement (73b).

(73) Northern Kurdish

- a. [*bira-yê min ê mezin*]-e.
 brother-EZ.M 1SG.OBL EZ.M big-COP.3SG
 ‘(It) is my big brother.’ (Haig 2011: 369)
- b. [*bira-yê min*] [*ê mezin*]-e.
 brother-EZ.M 1SG.OBL EZ.M big-COP.3SG
 ‘My brother is the big one.’ (Haig 2011: 369)

A similar ambiguity also exists in Oromo. In (74a), the head noun has two modifiers marked with *kan* while in (74b) the second *kan* has a nominalizing function.

(74) Oromo

- a. *kuni* [*mana [kan = koo] [kan nam-ittf-i*
 this.NOM house POSS = 1SG.POSS REL man-DEF-NOM
idzaar-e]] = *da*.
 build-PFV = COP
 ‘This is the house that’s mine and that the man built.’
- b. [*man-ni [kan = koo]] [kan nam-ittf-i*
 house-NOM POSS = 1SG.POSS REL man-DEF-NOM
idzaar-e] = *da*.
 build-PFV = COP
 ‘My house is the one which the man built.’

Both Cushitic and Iranian had contact with Afro-Asiatic languages in their past (e.g., Amharic, Aramaic). While this may have contributed to their similarities, the parallels between Oromo and Kurdish—despite the different locus of marking—are nevertheless striking. They strongly suggest that the proposed predictions in (69) may be generalisable to languages outside of Cushitic and Southeast Asia and that the syncretism is more important than the morphosyntactic details.

7 Conclusion

This study has investigated adnominal possessive constructions and relative clauses in the Lowland East Cushitic language Oromo, focusing

on the function and origin of the particle *kan*. Synchronically, *kan* is employed in both the relative and adnominal possessive construction. Without *kan*, relative clauses are either of the gapping type or make use of other relativizers derived from personal pronouns or lexical items. In the imperfective aspect, relative clauses exhibit a special verbal inflection. Adnominal possession is additionally marked by final vowel length on the possessor noun phrase, which is probably connected to the Cushitic high tone found in related languages. The particle *kan* has a nominalizing function in headless relative clauses and possessive constructions. It is usually found in the initial position of the relative clause or the possessive phrase but in the former may also take the second position to mark the discourse salience of the following element.

Historically, *kan* was used for masc. gender and stood in contrast to the fem. form *tan*, a pattern that can still be observed in some dialects of Oromo. The historical source of *kan* and *tan* can be found in the proximal demonstratives *kana* and *tana*. The grammaticalization entails several changes summarised in the following:

- (75) a. Desemanticization: the spatial meaning of a demonstrative is no longer present
- b. Decategorialization: no longer usable attributively and no longer inflected
- c. Erosion: reduction of form (*kana* > *kan* > *ka*, *tana* > *tan* > *ta*)
- d. Deparadigmatization: contrast with other demonstratives is lost
- e. Restructuring: from postnominal demonstrative to phrase/clause initial marker

The loss of gender in some dialects is not part of the grammaticalization but rather is a general simplification of the grammatical system which, in a relative chronology of changes, must have occurred after the grammaticalization of *kan* and *tan*. The search for further details of the development is hampered by the absence of historical data and requires further research. The oldest data for Oromo from the first half of the 19th century already show the same pattern as today. The most likely scenario that is corroborated by evidence from some related languages such as Somali and Girirra is the reanalysis

of attributive demonstratives used as determiners that belong to the following modifiers.

The syncretism of relative and possessive markers (Rel=Gen) is cross-linguistically rare but also found, among others, in LEC languages as well as in Semitic, Iranian, and several Southeast Asian languages. A comparison with these languages in Asia suggests a correlation of the multifunctional marking with two cross-linguistically atypical word order patterns, OV & NGen (& NRel) in the case of Oromo or Kurdish and VO & RelN (& GenN) in the case of Southeast Asia. Syncretism is a factor in the retention or emergence of the atypical word order features. However, at the same time, the rare word order combinations are diachronically more stable than the actual marking strategies. Future studies should address these issues in more depth, focusing on those languages that, like Oromo, exhibit both features.

List of abbreviations

* ungrammatical (before example); reconstructed (not attested), ? grammaticality questionable (before example), & and (used between typological features, e.g., GenN & RelN), = marked the same way (e.g., Rel=Gen), ; marked differently (e.g., Rel; Gen), [] covert marker present (in glossing), 1 first person, 2 second person, 3 third person, ABS absolute form, ADJN/NADJ relative order of adnominal adjective and noun, ATTR attributive marker, AUX auxiliary, CMPR comparative, COP copular, CVB converb, DEF definite, DEMN/NDEM relative order of adnominal demonstrative and noun, DET determiner, DIST distal, EP epenthetic, EZ ezāfe, F feminine FEM. feminine (outside glossing), FOC focus marker, GENN/NGEN relative order of adnominal possessor (genitive) and noun, GEN genitive case marker, HEC Highland East Cushitic, IPFV imperfective, LEC Lowland East Cushitic, LOC locative, M masculine, MASC. masculine (outside glossing), MID middle, N noun, NP noun phrase, NOM nominative, NUMN/NUM relative order of adnominal numeral and noun, PERF perfect, PFV perfective, POSS possessive marker, PRO pronoun, PRS present, PST past, O object in transitive clauses (O argument), OBJ object, OV/VO relative order of object and verb, PL plural, RELN/NREL relative order of externally-headed relative clause and noun, REL relative clause marker, relativizer, SBJ subject, SG singular, SUB subordinate form, SUBJ subjunctive, T direct object in transitive clauses (T argument), v verbalizer.

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