

SOME GENITIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN AKYEM/ASANTE TWI

(ONI/O'NI, OSE/O'SE, ETC.)*

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1. Introduction:

"Oni" or "O'ni" (his or her mother) belongs to a class of Akan genitive constructions found in Akyem-Asante Twi. Such constructions invariably consist of a possessive pronoun followed by a possessed noun, usually a kinship term. Formerly, such grammatical constructions were written without the apostrophe. The Akan Orthography Committee set up by the Institute of African Studies and the Language Centre, Legon, at one of its meetings, decided to write the possessive pronoun as "O" with an apostrophe between it and the possessed noun. "oni" or "Oni" was from that time written with "O" plus the apostrophe.

At a later meeting, it was again decided that the form "O'ni", "O'se", "O'wofa" etc. should be regarded as "colloquial". The non-colloquial correlative of the possessive pronoun is "ne", as in "ne se", "ne ni", "ne wofa" etc. It may be inferred from this decision then that if this "O" plus the apostrophe type of possessive pronoun should appear in a written play or poetry, the agreed written form should be used.

2. The Committee's decision to standardize the written form of the possessive pronoun to be "O'ni" etc. was a move in the right direction; because the "O" here may be regarded as the contracted form of "Ono". The following examples illustrate this point:

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(a) "Ono" (nominative):

(i) Ono nam ha na me nso menam do.O-nam ha na me nso menam do.

(While he/she came this way, I went that way)

(ii) Ono ps fufuo, wo nso wo kyiri fufuo.O-ps fufuo, wo nso wo kyiri fufuo.

(He/she likes fufuo, whereas you don't take it.)

(b) "Ono" (possessive):

((i) Ono akyi na wo die.((... N'-akyi na wodie.

You are his/her follower.

(ii) Ono ho na manya amanes no.Ne ho na manya amanes no.

(I am in trouble because of him/her)

3. In example 2(a), "Ono" contracts to "O". In example 2(b) "Ono", functioning as a possessive pronoun, transmutes into a "no" or "Ne". This transmutation sometimes gives rise to the interchange of "No" and "Ne" as the possessive in the same context. For instance, in the Bible, at 2 Kings chapter 9 verse 25, we read "...laid this...upon him", the expression "upon him" is translated "no do" (Fante), "no so" (Akwapem), "ne so" (Akyem-Asante). The point here is that "O-no" drops the prefix "O" and retains "No" or its transmuted form "Ne", and in other contexts drops the nominal root form "No" or "Ne" and retains the prefix "O".

4. The retention of the "O" as a possessive pronoun occurs in Akyem-Asante Twi, and perhaps in Nzema. The occurrence of this "O" possessive in Akyem-Asante takes place in contexts which are characterized by three main properties: First, it is used in connection with about fourteen words. They are:-

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| (a) ɔ'nanana | (b) ɔ'maame |
| ɔ'ni | ɔ'papa |
| ɔ'se | (c) ɔ'niwaa (ɔ'niwaa: found in dirges). |
| ɔ'wɔfa | (d) ɔ'nɔkwa (ɔ'ɛ nɔkwa). |
| ɔ'nua | (e) ɔ'wɔra. |
| ɔ'sewaa | |
| ɔ'kunu | |
| ɔ'kɔra | |
| ɔ'wura (ɔ'wura) | |

- NOTE: i. In the list, "ɔ'nanana-prenu", "ɔ'nanana-prasa", "ɔ'nanana-sunkwakwa", "ɔ'nanana-damsaa" and "ɔ'nanana-nkaasowa", being extensions of the term "ɔ'nanana", have been taken to follow the pattern of the initial term "ɔ'nanana"; so have the extensions of the others (e.g. - ɔ'se - ɔ'se-kuma, ɔ'se-panin etc.) not been found necessary for inclusion.
- ii. "ɔ'maame" and "ɔ'papa" are new adoptions.
- iii. "ɔ'nɔkwa" ("By his/her nature") follows the pattern:- me nɔkwa, mo nɔkwa etc.

Secondly, the expressions in question are mainly kinship terms, except (d) and (e). "Nɔkwa" relates to "Self" (me nɔkwa, wo nɔkwa, ɔ'nɔkwa). "Wɔra" (me wɔra, wo wɔra, ɔ'wɔra, Kofi wɔra etc.) seems to belong to the "Nɔkwa" group, though it is not the same in character. "Wɔra" may be described as a term in opposition to "Me", "wo" etc. It needs a further study.

Thirdly, if the referent of the two items in the genitival construction in Akyem-Asante Twi are relatives, the referent of the possessive pronoun "ɔ" is always the younger (diminutive), of the two. For instance, we can attest "ɔ'se" (His/Her father), but never "ɔ'ba" (his/her son or daughter), ~~Except in the case of ɔ'wura~~ (his/her master, mistress or owner), the rule does not extend to such relationship terms as "his chief", "his Bishop" etc. Where the rule applies, if the two relations are equal in status or by right of birth, the "ɔ" possessive can function for either side,

e.g. "O'nua" or "O'nuanom" (his/her sibling or siblings) and "O'kora" (his/her partner in marriage: "Kora" is applied to two or more men who are married to sisters respectively; and to any of a group of women who are wives of one man).

5. One advantage of the use of the "O" with apostrophe is the elimination of a possible confusion which otherwise would occur in some expressions. Pairs of instances are:

- i (a) O'nua Paul wo ha: His/Her brother Paul is here.
 (b) Onua Paul wo ha: Brother Paul is here.
- ii (a) O'nana aba kuro yi mu: His/Her grandparent has come to this town.
- iii (a) O'wura no nim: His/Her master knows it.
 (b) Owura no nim: The gentleman knows about it.

6. The "O" possessive pronoun which has been discussed does not occur in Fante or Akwapem Twi or Bron; it is however understood by speakers of Akan when used by an Akyem-Asante speaker.