

## POSSESSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN SUMI

### Full Presentation

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Sreedhar (1980) claims that Sumi, a Tibeto-Burman language of Nagaland, has grammaticalised the distinction between *de jure* and *de facto* possession. He argues that this distinction, corresponding to the difference between ‘ownership’ and ‘possession’ in their legal senses, is marked by the morpheme *-wu* for *de jure* possession, as demonstrated here:

1. *pawu kaku* ‘his book’ (i.e. he is the owner of the book)
2. *pa kaku* ‘his book’ (i.e. the book is in his possession but he may or may not own it) (1980: 112)

In the first part of this paper I will argue that this distinction is not made in Sumi and suggest an alternative analysis of the possessive *-wu*, looking at discourse factors in particular. In the process, I will also relate its usage to similar markers found in related languages such as Meithei (Chelliah 1997).

In the second part I will then highlight two distinctions that have been grammaticalised in Sumi attributive possessive constructions, thus adding new data to our knowledge of the Southern Naga languages and providing a better understanding of their general typology.

Firstly, with kinship relations, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person possessive *pa-* is used in a periphrastic construction when the ‘possessee’ is a person of higher status than the ‘possessor’:

3. *Hekato-thikùzúú* ‘Hekato’s younger brother’  
Hekato-younger.brother’
4. *Hekato pa-mú* ‘Hekato’s older brother’ (lit. ‘Hekato his older brother’)  
Hekato his-older.brother

Secondly, Sumi obligatorily marks possessives which are collectively owned, or related to in a collective sense:

5. *ì-zá-nó-làghà* ‘my mother’s clan’  
my-mother-group.poss-clan

Of these two grammaticalised distinctions, the former seems to manifest itself in Meithei with second person possessive pronouns (Chelliah 1997), while the latter appears in at least one other Naga language: Mongsen Ao (Coupe 2007) and has also been reported in the Bantu language Tswana (Cole 1955). It is possible that these distinctions are common features found in other Naga languages as well as other languages of the world, even though they remain unattested in many existing grammars. I hope therefore that this work will draw attention to these features that researchers of such languages may not have previously considered.

### References

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