

Embosi Possessives: A Pragmatic Account

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Abstract

This work broaches the context-dependent aspects of possessives in the Embosi language. The study reveals that Embosi possessives express definiteness with the familiarity aspect of the possessive noun phrase. It also demonstrates that Embosi possessives have the function of personal and social deixis when they are used with entities whose interpretation depends on the situation in which they occur. Used as referential expressions, they serve as both anaphora and associative anaphora. The analysis also proves that in the communication act, possessives in Embosi express the presuppositional information. Depending on the context, possessives in Embosi violate maxims of communication, leading to the emergence of implicature. The analysis finally shows that through the speech act theory, the contextual use of Embosi possessives in speech acts highlights the locution, illocution, and perlocution dimensions with respect to felicity conditions.

Keywords

Embosi, Possessives, Definiteness, Deixis, Reference, Presupposition, Implicature, Speech Act

1. Introduction

Embosi is a Bantu language classified in the C20 group (Guthrie, 1948); it is a C25 language and has five dialects. This research work is based on *Embosi strictly speaking* dialect. The analysis tackles the contextual interpretation of Embosi possessive adjectives and pronouns. The documentation of the Embosi language, which lacks a written form, motivates this study. It also aims at showing the interaction of Embosi possessives with some pragmatic features and addresses the following research questions: 1) What is the Embosi possessive system? 2) Could possessives in that language serve as references to definite entities? 3) How do Embosi possessives act as indexicals? 4) To what extent are Embosi possessives

part of presupposition, implicature, as well as speech act? The cooperative principle and the speech act theory are the main approaches that are used to carry out this study. Based on the pragmatic tenets, this study first provides background information, followed by a pragmatic analysis of Embosi possessives. We collect data from key informants and participant observation for analysis.

2. Background Information

2.1. Embosi Language

Embosi is a Bantu language spoken in the northern part of the Republic of Congo, specifically in the divisions of Plateaux and Cuvette (Ngapoula, 2023: p. 163). Guthrie (1948) classifies it in the group C20, with its seven languages: Mboko C21, Akwa C22, Ngaré C23, Koyo C24, Embosi C25, Likwala C26, and Likuba C27. Some linguists, such as Ndongo Ibara (2018), Ngapoula (2020), and Oba (2024), think that a new classification of the Embosi group or language should be suggested.

Indeed, Ndongo Ibara (2018: p. 29) suggests that language should replace what Guthrie (1948) refers to as group, as well as languages to dialects. Therefore, he makes reference to Embosi languages and their respective dialects. In addition, Ngapoula (2020: p. 81) suggests that Guthrie group C20 should have three languages: Embosi with its five dialects (Mboko, Akwa, Ngaré, Koyo, and Embosi strictly speaking), Likwala, and Likuba. He proposes that a new classification system should be developed. Otherwise, Oba (2024: p. 393) draws attention to the omission of Tohu dialect in Guthrie's classification, which he views not as a sub-dialect of Akwa but rather as a language belonging to the same family as Akwa and Likwala.

Nevertheless, this research work is based on the Embosi C25 language, particularly on the Oléé subdialect, spoken in the Plateaux division, around the Abala, Ollombo, and Ongogni subprefectures. However, let us examine the Embosi possessive system.

2.2. Embosi Possessives

Possessives refer to the notion of ownership. It is the relationship between two entities: the possessor, or the entity that possesses, and the possessum, or the entity that is possessed. Accordingly, Kolkman (2016: p. 14) claims that:

This relationship is called the possessive relation, and despite the fact that the term possessive strongly evokes connotations of legal ownership, it is not limited to it. A possessive relation can comprise any relationship which may feasibly hold between a possessor and a possessum and which may at times resembles the notion of ownership only superficially.

This implies that the possessor assumes control over the possession. However, possessives in Embosi are mainly concerned with possessive adjectives and pronouns. It is important to point out that the lack of abundant written documentation

on the Embosi language in general and particularly on possessives impacted our literature review. Nevertheless, possessives in Embosi are formed from the personal pronouns subject or object, to which an associative morpheme is added. This morpheme varies according to noun classes (Ncl). [Ndongo Ibara \(2012: p. 23\)](#), from singularity to plurality, identifies seven noun classes in the Embosi language.

Thus, the main associative morpheme, always placed before the personal pronoun, is *ya* “of”. Depending on the noun class, this morpheme may vary to either *la* “of” or *a* (of). Attributive and predicative possession distinguishes possessive adjectives from pronouns. Here are some examples to illustrate this:

- 1) *Mwana ya nga adi la ayeli.*
Child of me is of intelligence
“My child is intelligent” (attributive possession).
- 2) *Mwana wo adi ya nga.*
Child this is of me
“This child is mine” (predicative possession).

Indeed, the possessive adjective *ya nga* “my” in 1) denotes attributive possession, typically occupying a prenominal position, while the possessive pronoun *ya nga* “mine” in 2) denotes predicative possession, without the possessum following it. Therefore, we present the general system of Embosi possessives as follows, with a few exceptions discussed below:

Table 1. Embosi possessives system.

Possessive adjectives/pronouns	
Singular	Plural
<i>ya nga</i> (of me) “my/mine”	<i>a nga</i> (of me) “my/mine”
<i>ya no</i> (of you) “your(s)”	<i>a no</i> (of you) “your(s)”
<i>ya wa</i> (of him/her/it) “his/her(s)/its”	<i>a wa</i> (of him/her/it) “his/her(s)/its”
<i>ya bisi</i> (of us) “our(s)”	<i>a bisi</i> (of us) “our(s)”
<i>ya bini</i> (of you) “your(s)”	<i>a bini</i> (of you) “your(s)”
<i>ya ba</i> (of them) “their(s)”	<i>a ba</i> (of them) “their(s)”

Above [Table 1](#) indicates that Embosi possessives exist in both singular and plural forms. This distinction does not depend on the possessor(s), but rather on the possessum(s); that is, when the possessed entity is in the singular or plural form. The following examples illustrate this argumentation:

- 3a) *Mwasi ya no adi la ilongo.*
Wife of you is of beauty
“Your wife is beautiful” (singular possessum).
- 3b) *Basi a no adi la ilongo.*
Wives of you are of beauty

“Your wives are beautiful” (plural possessum).

Indeed, in 3a), the possessum *mwasi* “wife” is in singular, and the possessive adjective is *ya nga* “my”; in 3b), the possessed entity *basi* “wives” is in plural, and the possessive adjective is no longer *ya nga* “my”, but rather a *nga* “my”.

Regarding possessive adjectives, we observe differences in the use of the associative morpheme based on either noun classes or singular or plural aspects. Following *Ndongo Ibara (2012)*’s Embosi noun class classification, the associative morpheme varies from *ya* “of” to a “of” with the noun classes 2 and 7. This morpheme is invariable in the plural. This is illustrated in the examples below:

- 4a) *Munga a no a kiema olembi* (Ncl 2, sg).
Tail of you of monkey lost
“Your monkey tail is lost.”
- 4b) *Minga a no ma kiema ilembi* (Ncl 2, pl).
Tails of you of monkeys lost
“Your monkey tails are lost.”
- 5a) *Bunu a wa odi tsa ndai* (Ncl 7, sg).
Machete of him is in house
“His machete is in the house.”
- 5b) *Mini a wa idi tsa ndai* (Ncl 7, pl).
Machetes of him are in house
“His machetes are in the house.”

Indeed, in 4a), the associative morpheme *a* forms the possessive adjective *a no* “your” with a singular possessum; this morpheme invariably forms a plural possessum in 4b), both sentences belonging to the noun class 2. Similarly, the noun class uses the possessive adjective *a wa* “his/her/it” with a singular possessum in 5a) and a plural possessum in 5b).

In addition, in the Ncl3, the associative morpheme is *la* “of” instead of *ya* “of” with a singular possessum and a “of” with a plural possessum. With the noun class 7, the morpheme is *la* “of” instead of *ya* “of” with a singular possessed entity, but *ya* “of” with a plural possessum. The following examples serve as illustrations:

- 6a) *Dina la nga idi tsètsè* (Ncl3, sg).
Tooth of me is clean
“My tooth is clean.”
- 6b) *Mina a nga adi tsètsè* (Ncl3, pl).
Teeth of me are clean
“My teeth are clean.”
- 7a) *Lekasi la bisi isungu no* (Ncl7, sg).
Letter of we help-ed you
“Our letter helped you.”
- 7b) *Kasi ya bisi esungu no* (Ncl7, pl).
Letters of we help-ed you
“Our letters helped you.”

As a matter of fact, with the noun class 3, the associative morpheme changes from *la* “of” with the singular possessum in 6a) to a “of” with the plural possessum in 6b). Meanwhile, with the noun class 7, the morpheme changes from *la* “of” with the singular possessed entity in 7a) to *ya* “of” with the plural possessum in 7b).

Furthermore, it is worthwhile pointing out that in the practical use of Embosi language, wherever the associative morpheme is *ya* “of”, *y* may be deleted, but never *l* of *la* “of”, as it is exemplified by 3a) and 7a).

3a) Mwasi *ya* no adi *la* ilongo/mwasi *a* no adi lilongo

7a) Lekasi *la* bisi isungu no/*lekasi *a* bisi isungu no

In fact, instead of saying *mwasi ya no* “your wife” in 3a), we may say *mwasi a no* “your wife” with the deletion of *y*. However, due to the association morpheme *la* “of”, we cannot perform this deletion in 7a). Therefore, we say *Lekasi la bisi* “our letter”; we cannot delete the letter *l* from the morpheme *la* “of” to form *lekasi *a* bisi “our letter”.

However, similarly with possessive adjectives, Embosi uses the same possessives for possessive pronouns. The distinction lies in the fact that while possessive adjectives are typically attributive and postnominal, pronouns are predicative, following the verb but not the possessed entity. When used with possessive pronouns, the associative morpheme varies from *ya*, *la*, to a “of” depending on the noun classes that are singular possessum. When we use a possessive pronoun with a plural possessum, all noun classes, apart from noun class 6, which attests *ya* “of”, exhibit a “of” as an associative morpheme. Indeed, noun classes 1, 4, and 5 exhibit the same construction. The noun classes 2 and 7 have their construction, while the noun classes 3 and 6 have, respectively, their own. The following examples highlight this argumentation.

8a) Mwasi wungu adi *ya* nga (Ncl1 sg)./Basi bangi adi *a* nga (Ncl1 pl).

Wife that is of me

Wives those are of me

“That wife is mine.”

“Those wives are mine.”

8b) Éyéa yé edi *ya* bisi (Ncl4 sg)./Béa bi idi *a* bisi (Ncl4 pl).

Thing this is of us

Things these are of us

“This thing is ours.”

“These things are ours.”

8c) Ndai yingi edi *ya* no (Ncl5 sg)./Andai mangi adi *a* no (Ncl5 pl).

House that is of you

Houses those are of you

“That house is yours.”

“Those houses are yours.”

9a) Munda mu odi *a* wa (Ncl2 sg)./Minda mi idi *a* wa (Ncl2 pl).

Lamp this is of her

Lamps these are of her

“This lamp is hers.”

“These lamps are hers.”

9b) Bunu bu odi *a* ba (Ncl7 sg)./Mini mi idi *a* ba (Ncl7 pl).

Machete this is of them

Machetes these are of them

“This machete is theirs.”

“These machetes are theirs.”

10) Iko di idi *la* bini (Ncl3 sg)./Ako ma adi *a* bini (Ncl3 pl).

Banana this is of you

Bananas these are of you

“This banana is yours.”	“These bananas are yours.”
11) Lèkasi di idi <i>la</i> nga (Ncl6 sg)./Kasi yé idi <i>ya</i> nga (Ncl6 pl).	
Letter this is of me	Letters these are of me
“This letter is mine.”	“These letters are mine.”

Indeed, 8a) from noun class 1, 8b) from noun class 4, and 8c) from noun class 5, with a singular possessum, the associative morpheme is *ya* “of”; while, with a plural possessum, this morpheme changes to a “of”. In the case of noun class 2 with 9a) and noun class 7 with 9b), the morpheme is a “of” with a singular possessum, and it remains invariant when used with a plural possessum. The noun class 3 recognises the morpheme *la* “of” in 10) with a singular possessum and a “of” with a plural possessum. The possessive pronoun is formed in Embosi with the associative morpheme *la* “of” with the noun class 6, as in 11), with a singular possessum, and *ya* “of” with a plural possessed entity.

However, despite the notion of appurtenance denoted by Embosi possessives, in a contextual use, they may mean more than what they literally express.

3. The Pragmatic Analysis of Embosi Possessives

The pragmatic analysis addresses the contextual use of Embosi possessives. [Abdurrahman et al. \(2023: p. 4\)](#) claim that “the pragmatics of possession refers to how possession is used in communication to convey various meanings and intentions beyond just the literal relationship of possession.” This implies that with the pragmatic use of possessives, we get more meaning than what is literally said. The pragmatics of Embosi possessives focuses on the pragmatic features of definiteness, deixis, reference, presupposition, implicature, and speech acts.

3.1. Embosi Possessives and Definiteness

The term definiteness refers to the identification of a specific or particular entity. [Cruse \(2006: pp. 42-43\)](#) defines it as a “term usually denotes a noun phrase which refers to a definite entity or group of entities, and which contains descriptive information necessary to identify the entity”. This means that a definite description carries information or details that enable the identification of the referred entity. Possessive noun phrases are definite descriptions. Accordingly, [Abbott \(2006: p. 122\)](#) claims that “*possessive NPs have been included in the table since they are almost universally considered to be definite.*” The author means that possessive noun phrases belong to the whole of definite descriptions.

In addition, as far as definiteness in Embosi is concerned, [Ngapoula \(2023: p. 32\)](#) attests that “even if demonstratives in Embosi take a crucial place in the expression of definiteness, they are not the only determiners to act so. Indeed, definiteness is also tackled when a NP is associated with a possessive.” This means that definiteness in Embosi is mainly expressed by demonstratives, but its expression also includes the use of possessives. Let us examine 7a):

7a) Lekasi *la* bisi isungu no.

Letter of we help-ed you
 “Our letter helped you.”

It amounts from the above sentence that the possessive noun phrase *Lekasi la bisi* “our letter” is a definite description that depicts a specific or particular letter known to both participants. Therefore, Embosi possessives express familiarity. Despite the lack of previous introduction of *lekasi* “letter” in the discourse under indefinite status in order to make it definite in its second mention, the use of the possessive *bisi* “our” involves the fact that participants knew the existence of that letter before the utterance; it is familiar to them.

However, the use of central determiners, particularly definite articles, is typically associated with the expression of definiteness. Embosi language, unlike some other languages, does not have an article system. Depending on the context, noun phrases express definiteness. Demonstratives, along with possessives, are the only central determiners that express definiteness. Otherwise, the contextual use of Embosi possessives is subject to indexicality.

3.2. Embosi Possessives as Deictic Expressions

Deictic expressions, also called indexicals, are referential expressions whose understanding depends on the context in which they occur. Mey (2009: p. 178) claims that “deixis is generally understood to be the encoding of spatiotemporal context and subjective experience of the encoder in an utterance.” This means that they are expressions that have meaning in a particular situation in which they are used according to the place, the time, or the experience of the deictic centre, or to use Bühler (1934)’s term, *the origo or ground zero*.

The relationship between the *origo* and the context is of high prominence. Accordingly, Verschueren (1999: p. 18) attests that “even to determine the deictic center, the point of reference from which the dimension is looked at, information is needed about the deictic context.” Therefore, it is impossible to separate the point of operation from the context of use. With Embosi possessives, we observe the expression of two types of deixis, particularly in socio-cultural interactions: person and discourse.

3.2.1. Embosi Possessives as Person Deixis

Person deixis generally refer to personal pronouns; Valeika & Verikaitė (2010: p. 12) attest that they are based on three dimensions: first person, second person and third person. Let us examine 1):

- 1) *Mwana ya nga* adi la ayeli.
 Child of me is of intelligence
 “My child is intelligent.”

It emerges from 1) that the possessive *ya nga* “my” refers to the first person and helps the addressee to identify to whom the child belongs. In addition, Levinson (2006: p. 97) asserts that “deixis introduces subjective, attentional, intentional, and, of course, context-dependent properties into natural languages.” Indeed, we

can observe the various properties the author addresses in 3a).

3a) Mwasi *ya no* adi la ilongo.

Wife of you is of beauty

“Your wife is beautiful.”

In fact, in 3a), the speaker expresses his subjective intended message by using the attributive possession *mwasi ya no* “your wife”, even though the second person is referenced. Otherwise, it is worthwhile specifying that in both sentences referring to the first and the second persons, the possessive adjectives *ya nga* “my” and *ya no* “your” are qualified as pure person deixis because both possessors are participants directly involved in the communication act. However, let us consider 5a):

5a) Bunu *a wa* odi tsa ndai.

Machete of him is in house

“His machete is in the house.”

As a matter of fact, in 5a), the possessive adjective *a wa* “his/her”, which refers to the third person, is an impure person deixis because the possessor is not directly engaged in the conversation. Furthermore, Embosi possessives also attest to discourse deixis.

3.2.2. Embosi Possessives as Discourse Deixis

Deictic expressions are used by the speaker to refer to or identify entities in both linguistic and non-linguistic situations (Valeika & Verikaité, 2010: p. 12). Indeed, discourse deixis are referential expressions that the speaker uses within an utterance or a text to assist the addressee in clearly identifying the entity under reference. Embosi possessives are used in a linguistic situation to help the entity’s identification. Let us consider the following examples:

12) Bana adzué atsani, *ya nga* (mwana) adi la ndzoro.

Children go-ed play, of me (child) is of sickness

“Children went to play, mine is sick.”

Indeed, in this linguistic situation, the possessive pronoun *ya nga* “mine” in 12) serves as a discourse deixis referring to the entity that possesses the child who was unable to play with other children due to his illness. We have to pinpoint the unusual position of the discourse deictic, which, when used with the noun phrase *ya nga mwana* “my child”, is pre-nominal, and when used without the noun *ya nga* “mine”, is placed before the predicate. In both uses, the speaker emphasises the possessive properties of the possessor in relation to the possessum. Thus, Embosi possessives, which express person and discourse deixis, are first of all referential expressions.

3.3. Embosi Possessives as Reference

Reference is defined by Carlson (2006: p. 76) as “a kind of verbal *pointing to* or

picking out of a certain object or individual that one wishes to say something about”. It consists of an entity encoded by the speaker, who uses linguistic units to help the addressee decode it. Similarly, Valeika & Verikaité (2010: pp. 35-36) argue that “reference, or, to use a clearer term, referencing, is a two-way process: the speaker selects an entity, then he or she selects appropriate linguistic forms which help the addressee to infer what or which entity the speaker had in mind.” In fact, Embosi possessives indicate a co-referential relationship in the expression of anaphora. Let us analyse the following example:

- 13) Bisi lebori bana, ya nga ya ikolo adi elangi yamè.
 We gave birth children, of me of first is bandit very
 “We gave birth to children, *my* first is a very bandit.”

Indeed, the possessive adjective *ya nga* “my” in 13) is referential. In fact, by *ya nga* “my”, the speaker means *ya ga muana* (my child), referring to *bana* (children), previously evoked in the first part of the utterance. We consider the noun phrase *bana* “children”, the object of the first introduction, as the antecedent, and qualify *ya nga* “my”, the entity of the second mention, as anaphoric. Moreover, Embosi possessives also attest associative anaphora. The example below illustrates this:

- 14) Nga ité kiéma ya tei ya no; munga a wa odi bundzele.
 Me saw monkey of father you, tail of it is hairy.
 “I saw the monkey of your father; its tail is hairy.”

In fact, the possessive noun phrase *munga a wa* “its tail” in 14) is not previously introduced in the discourse; in order to be referential in the second mention, it is used for the first time. Referential expressions are usually expressions of the second mention; Ngapoula (2023: p. 167) adds that “the recognition of the reference depends on the linguistic context.” Thus, in 14), *munga a wa* “its tail” is considered an anaphoric expression because it is associated with the monkey referred to in the first part of the sentence. Indeed, from our general knowledge, we know that a monkey always has a tail, so the tail evoked in that sentence is the one belonging to the monkey of the addressee’s father that the speaker saw. We then refer to this referential expression, *munga a wa* “its tail”, as associative anaphora. In the referential relationship, Embosi possessive may serve as a cataphoric function. Let us consider the following sentence:

- 15) Mobonda la nga di, mwana ya wa ya ibaa adzué poro la poa.
 Listen of me this, child of him of man went Europe of yesterday
 Listen to this (mine), his son went to Europe yesterday.

Indeed, the possessive pronoun *la nga* “mine” in 15), which implies my piece of information, was previously used without the first introduction of an antecedent, and it is a referential expression. The subsequent part of the utterance, which qualifies it as referential, determines its understanding, leading to its classification as cataphoric in nature. Alternatively, one of the pragmatic properties inherent in Embosi possessives is presuppositionality.

3.4. Embosi Possessives as Presupposition

Communication is usually taken as an informational exchange between participants. Generally, we distinguish two kinds of information: the shared or old and the new or assertive information. So, what the participants share in common as information before the communication is what is called presupposition. Yule (1996: p. 25) defines it as “something the speaker assumes to be the case prior to making an utterance.” In addition, the old or presuppositional information is considered the basis or ground for a communication act to be successful. Horn & Ward (2006: p. 33) recapitulate the Gricean perspective on presupposition:

A proposition P is a pragmatic presupposition of a speaker in a given context just in case the speaker assumes or believes that P, assumes or believes that his addressee assumes or believes that P, and assumes or believes that his addressee recognizes that he is making these assumptions, or has these beliefs.

It comes out from this quotation that the presupposition is the common background knowledge between the speaker and the addressee. Said differently, it is the shared background assumptions that are taken for granted when we communicate (Griffiths 2006: p. 143). Embosi possessives carry the presuppositional information in a communication act. Let us examine (14):

- 14) Nga ité kiéma ya tei *ya no*; munga *a wa* odi bundzele
 Me saw monkey of father you, tail of it is hairy.
 “I saw the monkey of *your* father; *its* tail is hairy.”

Indeed, in 14), we have two possessive noun phrases: *tei ya no* “your father” and *munga a wa* “its tail”. Both NPs are presuppositions. When the speaker utters *tei ya no* “your father”, he presupposes that the addressee is aware of the existence of his own father; this is considered old information to him. What the speaker knows, but the addressee does not, is the fact that the speaker has seen his father; this is an assertive statement.

Likewise, in the second NP, *munga a wa* “its tail”, the speaker assumes that the addressee is aware that a monkey possesses a tail. The only thing the speaker knows and thinks that the addressee might overlook is the fact that he considers the tail, or the possessed entity of his father’s monkey, to be hairy. Therefore, the information about the monkey’s tail possession is part of the participants background knowledge; it is something the speaker considers the case prior to initiating the communication. In addition, let us consider 1):

- 1) Mwana ya nga adi la ayeli
 Child of me is of intelligence
 “My child is intelligent.”

In fact, in that sentence, the NP *Mwana ya nga* “my child” is the presuppositional information. However, it is possible that the addressee is unaware of the speaker’s alleged intelligent child. When the addressee has previously ignored the

existence of the possessive NP, the question arises as to whether it constitutes a presupposition. As a matter of fact, this information is a presupposition by means of one of the presupposition features, which is accommodation. According to Valeika & Verikaité (2010: p. 62), this term means that the speaker saves the addressee the trouble of participating in the generation of a shared information, which is presented here as a ready-made product. Indeed, even if the addressee did not know that the speaker had a child before the utterance, he adjusts or accommodates to the situation and perceives this information as an old one. Furthermore, depending on the context of use, the speaker, using Embosi possessives, may mean more than what he literally says; that is, he may express implicature.

3.5. Embosi Possessives as Implicature

The term implicature goes back to the philosopher Grice (1989). Mey (2009: p. 265) claims that:

In Grice's approach, both "what is implicated" and "what is said" are part of the speaker's meaning. What is said is that part of the meaning of what is determined by truth-conditional semantics, while what is implicated is that part of meaning that cannot be captured by the truth conditions and therefore belongs to pragmatics.

It comes out from the above quotation that according to Grice, what is said refers to the truth-conditional aspect of meaning, the literal meaning, which is the domain of semantics. However, what is implicated cannot be understood with the truth conditions; it refers to the context-dependent aspect of meaning, the domain of pragmatics. In addition, Horn & Ward (2006: p. 3) affirms that "implicature is a component of speaker meaning that constitutes an aspect of what is meant in a speaker's utterance without being part of what is said." This means that implicature is the extra meaning the speaker imposes on what is said, on the literal meaning of the utterance.

Furthermore, Grice (1989), through his *Cooperative principle*, establishes four maxims that have to be respected in order to have a successful communication. He distinguishes the maxims of quality, quantity, relevance, and manner. A violation of one of the maxims leads to the emergence of implicature. The contextual use of Embosi possessives often leads to the flouting of maxims. Let us consider the following conversation:

16) A: Mwasi ya no awola oyiki mbiyo!
 Wife of you speaks many like this!
 "Your wife speaks a lot like this!"
 B: Ya no ngondo ya mwasi adi mbondo.
 of you beautiful of wife is honest.
 "Your beautiful wife is honest."

In this conversation, speaker A expresses his exclamation about the talkative aspect of speaker B's wife, and speaker B replies by talking about the beauty and

honesty of speaker A's wife. What we can notice is that speaker B's answer is not relevant to speaker A's exclamation. By doing so, B violates the maxim of relevance, which means implicature arises. Indeed, what speaker B says is different from what he meant. The meaning B intends to convey is not visible. That is why doing pragmatics is being capable of seeing what is invisible. Speaker B imposes an invisible meaning on what he says, the meaning that can only be perceived with the pragmatic eyes.

In fact, by talking about A's wife instead of his own, which is the topic of A's utterance, A flouts the maxim of relevance or relation. This implicature invites B to consider his own wife's behaviour before judging that of A. This is the implicature that emerges from the flouting of the relation maxim, that is, the fact that B changed the topic and therefore made his answer not relevant.

Otherwise, speaker B does not flout the maxim of relation only; he also twice violates the maxim of quality by saying what he believes to be false. Indeed, the first quality maxim violation is when he qualifies speaker B's wife to be beautiful. In fact, the sentence meaning is different from the speaker's meaning. B does not think that A's wife is really beautiful; the implicature is that B thinks that despite her talkative aspect tackled by A, his wife is beautiful or more beautiful than B's. Thus, the implicit meaning is richer than the literal one. Accordingly, [Horn & Ward \(2006: p. 3\)](#) adds that "what a speaker intends to communicate is characteristically far richer than what she directly expresses; linguistic meaning radically underdetermines the message conveyed and understood." The author implies that the speaker's intended message goes beyond his literal meaning through implicature.

In addition, speaker B also violates the maxim of quality in his reply by questioning the honesty of A's wife. In fact, he says something he does not believe to be true. The intended message, or the implicature, is that even if my wife (B) may be talkative, she has good behaviour; she is honest, in comparison with A's wife. As a matter of fact, speaker B thinks the contrary of what he says; he thinks that A's wife is not beautiful and she is not honest. So, the generalised conversational implicature in this exchange is that speaker B thinks that, taking into account speaker A's wife's properties, speaker A is not in the position to criticise his possession, that is, his wife. However, Embosi possessives are also used to perform actions, to do things rather than to say things, as [Austin \(1962\)](#) would say with speech acts.

3.6. Embosi Possessives as Speech Acts

The speech act is defined by [Valeika & Verikaité \(2010: p. 100\)](#) as "what the speaker says unless he or she uses language as a linguistic exercise." This means that whenever we utter something, using linguistic units, we produce speech acts. The theory of speech acts is credited to Austin, who develops it in his posthumously published book entitled *How to Do Things with Words* 1962. According to [Cutting \(2008: p. 13\)](#), "Austin defines speech acts as the actions performed in saying something." This amounts to saying that for Austin, to speak is in fact to act by the use

of language.

The analysis of speech acts is based on three dimensions. The first pertains to the locution, also known as the locutionary act, which refers to what is said, the utterance itself. The second level of analysis focuses on the illocution, also known as the illocutionary force, which stands for what is done in saying something, the speaker's intention. The third level of analysis focuses on the perlocution, also known as the perlocutionary effect, which depicts what is done by saying something, the hearer's reaction. For the analysis to succeed, we must consider felicity conditions. Regarding Embosi possessives, let's examine the conversation that follows.

- 17a) A: Buku bu odi obwè.
 Book this is good
 "This book is good."
 B: A nga moro okara ko.
 Of me person take not
 "Mine cannot be touched."

Indeed, in 17a), speaker B uses the possessive pronoun a nga "mine". The utterance he produces through the use of Embosi linguistic units is the locutionary act. Speaker B's intended message, expressing his desire to keep his book untouchable, represents the illocutionary force. Indeed, the speaker B's meaning he wants to transmit, his intention, or what is going to be done in using this possessive in his utterance is the illocution. He even emphasises the possessive features because he could say:

- 17b) B: Moro okara buku a nga ko.
 Person touch—future book of me not
 "Nobody will touch my book."

By using the possessive pronoun a nga "mine" in 17a, not followed by the possessum, as the subject of the sentence instead of using the possessive adjective in an attributive form as in 17b), the speaker B lays stress on the ownership of the book. Speaker B's utterance is an assertive speech act; the speaker believes that the touching of his book should not be the case. Besides, the byproduct of this utterance, the speaker A's reaction is known as the perlocutionary effect. In fact, the perlocution expected by speaker B is that speaker A should not touch the book, but any reaction from speaker A is considered as the perlocutionary effect.

Similarly, the same linguistic phenomenon is observed in Lingala, a Bantu language mainly spoken in the Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo, classified by Guthrie in the group C as a C36d language. Indeed, in Lingala, the conversation would be:

- 18) A: Buku oyo ezali malamu.
 Book this is good

“This book is good.”
B: Ya nga moto asimba té.
Of me person take not
“Mine cannot be touched.”

Indeed, speaker B’s utterance is the locution. The use of the possessive pronoun *ya nga* “mine” at the initial position emphasises the property of the book which must not be touched. This is the locution or the speaker intention. The speaker A’s reaction after B’s utterance is then the perlocution.

However, for this speech act to be felicitous, there are some conditions introduced by Austin and developed by Searle (1969) that have to be met. Both participants should speak the same language in order to be understood; this is the general condition. The content of speaker B’s utterance must align with his intention, specifically his desire that no one touch his book; this constitutes a content condition. In addition, the action of not touching the book will not occur by itself; this action should be carried out by speaker A, and the not touching of the book will have beneficial effects on speaker B; these are preparatory conditions. The sincerity condition should also be respected, the fact that speaker B seriously intends to implement the action of not touching his book in the future. Ultimately, speaker B, by producing this speech act, changes his state from the non-prohibition of his book to the prohibition. This is the essential condition. Therefore, we declare speaker B’s speech act successful when it meets all those felicity conditions. Let us examine the speech act below.

19a) *Pala tsa ndai ya nga.*
Get out in house of me
“Get out of my house.”
19b) *Pala nga tsa ndai !*
Get out me in house
“Get out of my house!”

As a matter of fact, the speech act above consists of two commands: a mild one in 18a), where we can observe the possessive noun phrase *ndai ya nga* “my house”, and a strong one in 18b), where we delete the associative morpheme *ya* (of) to emphasise the order. Let us focus our analysis on 18b). Indeed, this utterance is a directive speech act, where the speaker asks the addressee to do something.

According to the speech act theory, the utterance itself serves as the locution. The illocution is the intention the speaker has in mind, which consists of getting the addressee out. The fact for the addressee to get out from the speaker’s house is the perlocution. For this command to be successful, some conditions have to be respected. The addressee must understand the language used by the speaker; the speaker must have authority over the addressee to order him to get out; the speaker must believe that the addressee can perform this action or is obliged to do so. If these conditions are not respected, this speech act cannot be considered as an order, and therefore making it infelicitous.

4. Conclusion

The analysis has revealed that the Embosi possessive system is mainly made up of possessive adjectives and pronouns. They are attributive and predicative. They are formed from the personal pronouns, associated with the morpheme *ya*, *a*, or *la* “of”, depending on noun classes and the singular or plural aspect of the posses-sum. The pragmatic approach has proved that Embosi possessives express definite descriptions with the familiarity aspect. It has also demonstrated that possessives in that language express indexicality, mainly with person and discourse deixis, and presuppositionality, with the shared information between participants. The contextual use of Embosi possessives has shown that they are used to communicate more than what they literally say. Finally, the analysis has attested that, taking into account the three dimensions of speech act theory and felicity conditions, Embosi possessives contribute to the successfulness of speech acts.

However, this study focused only on the expression of possession through possessive adjectives and pronouns. Future research works on Embosi possession should tackle the other expressions of ownership, such as the use of the adverb *yamba* “of” as in *ndai yamba Mouelenga* “The house of Mouelenga”.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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