



**DGfS-CNRS Summer School on  
Linguistic Typology  
Course “Sign Language Typology”**

***Typology of possessive constructions  
in sign languages***

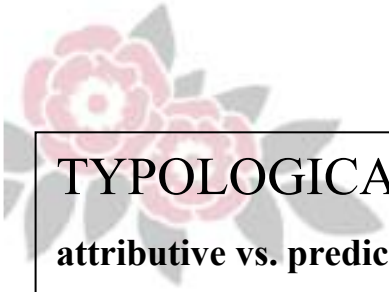


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# ***Methodology of the typological study***



# TYPOLOGICAL PARAMETERS:

**attributive vs. predicative** possession

**possessor and possessum**

**'have'-construction vs. 'belong'-construction**

**alienable vs. inalienable** possession



## DATA COLLECTION

\*A.1.1 What are the possible word orders?

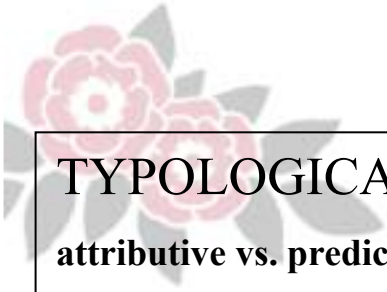
pron - poss

poss - pron

pron - poss - pron

poss - pron - poss

Man - wife	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Woman - husband	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Man - child	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Woman - child	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>



# TYPOLOGICAL PARAMETERS:

**attributive vs. predicative** possession

**possessor and possessum**



**'have'-construction vs. 'belong'-construction**

**alienable vs. inalienable** possession

COMPARISON WITH  
SPOKEN LANGUAGE  
DATA



## DATA COLLECTION

Man-obj	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Woman-obj	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Man-subj	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Woman-subj	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

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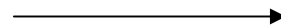
pron - poss

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INDUCTIVE  
GENERALISATIONS





## ***Data***

- 32 sign languages
- Data from fieldwork within the Sign Language Typology Group
- Work with co-researchers
- Very few published materials
- Methodological innovation: Work with standardised elicitation materials



# ***“Picture comparison game”***





## ***“Family tree game”***





# ***The structures in the domain of possession in sign languages***





***Two case studies:***

***Ugandan Sign Language  
Kata Kolok, Bali***



## ***Ugandan Sign Language***

- Two sets of possessive pronouns
- 'have'-construction, with spatial inflection
- Two signs for negative possession



## ***Possessive pronouns***



***Existential with spatial inflection***



## ***Negative possession***

CHILDREN PA

'I don't have children (at the moment).'

IX:2 COME PA WHY?

'Why didn't you come yesterday?'

\*TIME PA

IX:1TIME NONE

'I have no time.'

CHILDREN NONE

'I don't have children (and I never will).'



## ***Kata Kolok***

- No possessive pronouns
- (Almost) no possessive constructions (location, existence and possession express in the same way)
- Sign GOOD can express possession
- No special sign for negative possession.



IX:B BORN FEMALE TWO

' I have two daughters.'

IX:2 COW IX:location?

'Do you have cows there? Are those your cows? Are your cows over there?'

IX:B MARRY FEMALE GOOD / CRAZY

' I have a wife. She is crazy.'

RICE NEG

'There is no rice. I/we/they have no rice. It's not rice.'



## ***Typological summary: Sign languages***

- Three handshapes used in possessive pronouns: A, B, V
- Interesting distribution of V-handshape across sign languages: France, Turkey, Greece, Brazil, Mexico
- Many East Asian sign languages have no possessive pronouns
- Many spatial inflections with possession.
- Often complex differences in meaning with different signs for possession.
- Illnesses, “pain” etc are often not expressed as possession.
- Possession of abstract and concrete items may use different structures.





## ***Typological summary: Signed and spoken languages***

Spoken languages

Sign languages

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Close association between existence and possession

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Equivalent patterns for predicative possession ('have')

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various morphological

mainly spatial or

structures, incl. affixing

isolating morphology

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Many complex language-specific peculiarities in individual structures (e.g. selectional restrictions)

→ There is little evidence for a unified sign language type. Sign language structures in this domain differ radically from each other. A specific sign language may resemble a specific spoken language more than another sign language.