Polysemy patterns of two postpositions marking class-inclusion and property assignment in Jeli (Central-Mande)

The concepts of class inclusion (Musa is a hunter) and property assignment (Musa is president) on the one hand and equation or identification (Musa is the winner) on the other are formally differentiated in Jeli. Whereas class-inclusion and property assignment are expressed by a copula and a postpositional phrase containing a predicate nominal and a postposition (i.e., kɔŋ or rɛ), the predicate nominal in nominal sentences expressing equational or identificational function is linked to the subject only by a copula, but is not further marked by a postposition.

The paper investigates the polysemy pattern of the two postpositions involved in marking class-inclusion and property assignment. It is shown that besides their primarily locative meaning and their systematic use with predicate nominals, the two postpositions show a different functional range. Whereas the inessive postposition kɔŋ also marks predicative arguments of verbs expressing quality (e.g., to consider as) or transformation (to become), the adessive postposition rɛ expresses associative meaning (comitative, instrumental) and is also employed to mark comparison.