Possessors as Subjects and Objects: Different Ways of Possessors Act as Subject and Object Arguments on Verbs in the Languages of Papua

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ABSTRACT

This paper surveys a morpho-syntactic construction in which the possessors of possessive morphology on nouns are used to index subject and object arguments on verbs in some languages in Papua. Naturally, possessive morphology treats person markers as possessors in ownership or any kinds of relations such as *my book, his house* and *my friend* in English. Thus, the possessor marker in this construction is restricted to the nominal possessive construction. In some languages in Papua, the possessor of the possessive morphology is not just restricted to the nominal possessive construction possessors. It may also act as subject and object markers on verbs. This survey found that possessors acting as subject markers are common among Austronesian languages such as Wooi Sawaki [1], Biak Heuvel [2] and Mofu [3], Wamensa/Wandamen Gasser [4], and Matbat (Remijsen 2010). As for Papuan languages such as Yali Sawaki [5], Lower Grand Valley Dani (Bromley [6], Sawaki [5]), Hatam (Reesink [7]), Yaben (Sawaki [8]), the possessor marker can function as subject and/or object on verbs. The survey found out that only certain verb classes can take the possessor as subject and/or object markers. Both Papuan and Austronesian languages tend to have the possessor-subject on the inner-psychological or cognitive verbs. Further, Papuan languages also operate the possessor as the object agreement on transitive verb constructions. In summary, the possessor that is mainly restricted semantically to nominal possessive constructions extends its semantic and morpho-syntactic function to the subject and/or object arguments on verbal constructions in Austronesian and Papuan languages in Papua.

Keywords: *Possessor, functional roles, subject and object, inner-psychological verbs, languages of Papua*

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the grammatical features commonly found in languages of Papua, both Austronesian and Papuan languages, is a complex system of possessive constructions. Many studies such as Bromley [6], Reesink [7], Heuvel [2], Sawaki [5], [1], [8], Donohue & Schapper [9], Mofu [3] has shown such a complex grammatical feature. Naturally, possessive constructions belong to the noun class feature, by which they mark a possessive relation or any kind of relation to a noun such as *my book, his house* and *my friend* in English. Thus, the possessor marker in this construction is mainly restricted to the nominal possessive construction.

This study is a typological study in which I use data from languages of different groups across Papua to investigate a particular linguistic feature, i.e.

different functional roles of possessor across word classes and to investigate their common features. This study includes 8 languages from three different language groups.

2. POSSESSION OF NOUNS

Semantically, possession of nouns shows any kind of relation between a possessor and a possessed noun. Structurally, the relation of the possessor and the possessed noun is marked by certain kinds of morphosyntactic features. The morphosyntactic features of possession of nouns range from simple to complex across languages of Papua. The followings are some constructions in some languages of Papua.

Lower Grand Valley Dani [6]:
304-305)
1) ***n-***oppase   2) ***in-***asu

1sg-father
'my father'

3pl-net'
'their net'

Yeben [8])
3) **neng**-*kaka*
1sg-aunt
'my aunt

4) **nani**-*noba*
1pl-house
'our house'

Matbat (Remijsen 2010)
5) *fa*-**ng**
husband-1sg
'my husband'

6) *ba*-**ng**
shoulder-1sg
'my shoulder'

There are also variations of possessive constructions such as:

7) **ne**-*mu*   *manu*
poss-2sg   house
'your house' (Wooi - Sawaki [1])

8) **hen***tapumi*
he-tapu-m-i
3pl-PSRgrantparent-PSR.NSG-PSS.SG
'their grantparent' (Wooi –Sawaki [1])

9) **nani** *wawo*
our   father
'our father' (Yaben – Sawaki [8])

10) **di**-*cig*   **ni**-*de*   *micim*
1sg-father   3sg-POS   spear
'my father's spear'(Hatam-Reesink [7])

Different kinds of possessive constructions showing the relation between the possessor and the possessed noun indicate alienable (1, 3, 5, 6, 8) and inalienable (2, 4, 7) relations and example 10 shows a combination of both alienable and inalienable relations. In example 9, the possessor and the possessed noun is juxtaposed. Alienable possessions are always marked on body parts, kinship terms, and some culturally related nouns. Inalienable possessions refer to any kinds of common nouns that are not counted as those that belong to the alienable possession.

Common terms used to describe these constructions are alienable vs. inalienable possessions [6]; [2]; [3] and direct and indirect possessions [10], [1].

3. FUNCTIONAL ROLES OF THE POSSESSOR

In some languages of Papua, the functional roles of the possessor are shown in this functional hierarchy:

POSSESSOR > SUBJECT {ACT/AGT/EXPR} > OBJECT {PAT/EXPR}

The possessor functions as an object are the lowest in the hierarchy meaning that only some languages (i.e. TNG) apply for this functional role and only for a certain type of verbs, which is the transitive verbs. All languages in the survey apply the possessor as the subject markers in different verb predicates.

The followings are languages that apply some functional roles of possessor markers in the verbal predicates.

Language	Family	Functional roles		
		Possessor	Sbj	Obj
LGVD	TNG	Yes	Yes	Yes
Yali	TNG	Yes	Yes	Yes
Yaben	TNG	Yes	Yes	-
Hatam	WP	Yes	Yes	-
Wooi	Austronesian	Yes	Yes	-
Matbat	Austronesian	Yes	Yes	-
Wandamen	Austronesian	Yes	Yes	-
Biak	Austronesian	Yes	Yes	-

The followings are some examples:

11) **n**-*inom*   (Bromley [6])
1sg-together
'together with me'

12) **n**-*elu*   (Sawaki [1])
1sg-know
'I know'

13) **n**-*athe*   (Bromley [6])
1sg-hit.PST.3sg
'he hit me'

In Lower Grand Valley Dani, the same possessor marker on nouns marks the prefixed-subject on verbs as in 11 and 12 and the object of a verb as in 13. Yali [5]) also have the same features as Lower Grand Valley Dani [6]; [5] where the possessor functions as the subject and the object in different types of verbs.

In Hatam, Reesink [7] mentions that verbs of emotion take the inalienable noun construction. The possessor marker functions as the subject marker in emotion verbs.

14) *Leu   nyeni   **ni-ngon dut***
    from   we   1EXC-heart   hot
    nani   ni-ndig bibor
    you   3SG-big very
    'For we appreciate you very much.'

15) ***Ni-ngon   sibui   sut   gi   po***
    3SG-heart   twist   about   NOM   ANA
    da dihig   pia
    I   1SG-ask   QUOT
    'She was angry that I asked her...'

Likewise, Yaben Mayor [11] also has the same construction as Hatam by which the possessor functions as subject marker on the emotion and state verbal predicates.

16) *Ne e-sepya   **ne-netoro**   suri*
    1sg 2sg-see 1sg-stomach   very
    'I saw you so I am very happy'

17) ***ne-suburu*** *beage*
    1sg-neck   manner
    'I think in this way'

In some Austronesian languages such as Biak (Heuvel [2]), Wandamen (Gasser, [10], pc), Matbat (Remijsen 2010), Wooi (Sawaki [1]) also have the construction in which the possessor functions as the subject marker on sensory and emotion verbs.

18) ***Nusnesna***
    Nu-sne-s-na
    1DU.EXC-belly-NSG.AN-3PL.INAN
    nro   i
    n-ro   i
    3.PL.INAN-LOC   3SG
    'The two of us love him.' (Lit: 'Our bellies are with him.')   [2])

19) *Yau **i-sane-vesie***
    I   1sg.PSR-stomach-good
    y-unu   karumas   kopi
    1SG-drink   hot.water   coffee
    'I like to drink hot coffee' [10], pc)

20) *ya²¹k   **lɔ³ŋ-de¹²¹**   ya²¹wa*
    1s   want:1s-sick   2s
    'I hate you' (Matbat, Remijsen 2006)

21) *ya²¹k   **lɔ³ŋ**   i-fi³*
    1s   want:1s 3s-good
    'I am happy' (Matbat, Remijsen 2006)

22) ***Masaneho***
    ma-hane-ho
    1PL.EXC.PSR-stomach-HO
    mantamami   kong
    ma-tama-m-i   kong
    1PL.EXC.PSR-father-NSG-SG COM

masinyami   haru
ma-hinya-m-i   haru
1PL.EXC.PSR-mother-NSG-SG   3DU
'We love/remember our father and mother.'
[1]

4. TYPES OF VERBS OF VERBS TAKING THE POSSESSOR AS THE SUBJECT AND OBJECT MARKERS

Verbs that can take the possessor as a subject marker or object marker semantically range from action verbs to more stative verbs such as state, emotion, cognitive, and sensory verbs. The possessor functioning as the object only occurs with transitive active action verbs as in LGVD and Yali. Other types of verbs which are classified as stative verbs (state, emotion, cognitive, sensory verbs) take the possessor functioning only as the subject.

Languages	Types of verbs and functional roles of the possessor				
	ACT	STAT			
	Act	state	emo	cog	sens
LGVD (TNG)	obj	sbj	sbj	sbj	sbj
Yali (TNG)	obj	sbj	sbj	sbj	sbj
Yaben (TNG)	-	-	sbj	-	sbj
Hatam (WP)	-	-	sbj	-	-
Wooi (AN)	-	-	-	-	sbj
Biak (AN)	-	-	-	-	sbj
Wandamen (AN)	-	-	-	-	sbj
Matbat (AN)	-	-	-	-	sbj

5. SEMANTIC ROLES OF THE POSSESSOR

There are two ways in interpreting semantic roles of the possessor:
   a) active vs stative roles of the actor
      whether as the subject or object, and
   b) inner-psychological events that are seen as parts of body-part activities.

Languages of Papua distinguish verbs into active vs. stative categories. In regards to person markings on verbs, the more stative is a verb; it tends to take the possessor-possessed noun construction in its grammatical relation (subject vs. object). Note that the 'stative' notion refers to any kinds of verbs that indicate inner-psychological or cognitive expressions

of human activities. Inner-psychological or cognitive expressions of human activities are categorized as inner-human possession. Thus, a verb that structurally represents such an expression must take possessive construction as that of possessive of human body parts.

6. CONCLUSION

Different ways of the possessors of possessor morphology behave as the subject and object arguments on different types of verbal predicates are predictably common across languages in Papua, regardless of their linguistic affiliations. It is shown that the linguistic features are found across language groups whether they are Papuan or Austronesian languages. Where do these features come from? My preliminary argumentation states that these features derive from Papuan substrate where the distribution of the functional roles of the possessor is based on the semantic definition and are found across different types of verbs in different languages regardless of their genetic groupings. This feature is still found in other languages (Austronesian and Papuan languages of the Bird's Head region). This could be a prototypical areal feature of the languages of Papua. Further investigation is needed by looking at more data from languages representing different language groups.

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