

Possession without possessives (but with verbs): the view from Äiwoo

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Main claim I argue that Äiwoo (Oceanic) doesn't have real nominal possessives like 'my' in English, drawing on published data (Næss 2018 a.o.) and a fieldwork corpus. Instead, I show that despite their previous analysis as nominal, all possessive constructions involve the presence of a 'have'-like verb in undergoer voice (UV), whose theme can be extracted. Informally put, "my dogs" is really "the dogs [that I have ___]". I discuss some implications of this for our understanding of possession beyond Äiwoo, including predicative possessive constructions and the definiteness effect of English *have*.

Basic facts Äiwoo shows an alienability split. Inalienable nouns (kinship nouns and body parts) directly take a suffix marking the possessor's ϕ -features (1a). Alienable nouns (the rest) are followed by a possessive classifier, which takes the same type of ϕ -marking (possessor-indexing suffixes; (1b,c)). There is a series of six possessive classifiers, whose use depends on the (construal of the) possessum.

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| (1) a. <i>gino-mu</i> | b. <i>nenu numo-mu</i> | c. <i>nenu na-mu</i> |
| son-2MIN | coconut POSS:DRINK-2MIN | coconut POSS:FOOD-2MIN |
| 'Your son' | 'Your coconut (to drink)' | 'Your coconut (to eat)' |

These suffixes are (almost) the same that are found on UV verbs, whereas actor voice (AV) verbs and intransitives take a different paradigm of prefixes. In what follows, by "possessives" I refer to both the classifiers in (1b,c) and to whatever structural sub-part of inalienable nouns expresses possession.

Possessive structures contain a UV relative clause I argue that all these structures involve a single transitive (UV) possession predicate, with the possessor as the external argument and the possessum as the internal argument, akin to 'have' (I only use 'have' as a practical informal translation, as the Äiwoo predicate shows important differences from English *have*; see below). This possessive predicate is then modified by additional roots with richer semantics ('have-as-food', etc.) or by inalienable noun roots ('have-as-son', etc.). Since this possession predicate is a UV verb, its theme – potentially *pro* – can be extracted to form a relative clause, in line with the canonical Austronesian extraction restriction. This is what results in possessed DPs: (1b) is underlyingly 'the coconut [that you have-as-drink ___]'; (1a) is '*pro* [whom you have-as-son ___]'. I reject an analysis of the latter in which the theme being extracted is the kinship noun itself ('the son [that you have ___]'), on the basis of evidence from predicative possession structures, where the possessum can be 1st/2nd person (see (9a)-(10a) below).

Voice morphology Evidence for the verbal nature of possessives comes from their sharing stark similarities with UV verbs in their morphological makeup. Äiwoo often combines several stems and modifiers within one verb complex; the so-formed complex stem only takes one set of TAM and ϕ -marking. If the first stem is UV, all modifiers take a suffix *-i* (2a); this doesn't happen with AV (2b) and intransitives:

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| (2) a. <i>ki-[ââ-mana-i]-mu=wâ</i> | b. <i>mu-ki-[âwââ-mana]=kâ</i> |
| IPFV-pull.UV-very-UV-2MIN=DIST | 2MIN-IPFV-pull.AV-very=DIST |
| 'You catch a lot (of fish)' | 'You catch a lot (of fish)' |

Possessives can also be modified in the same way, and crucially they show this same *-i* suffix (3a). Notably, other (alienable) nouns can also be used as predicates and be modified (3b), but importantly they behave like intransitive/AV verbs, taking ϕ -prefixes (*mu-* in (3b)) and no *-i* suffix on their modifiers.

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| (3) a. <i>ile sime-enge [Gino une-i] God</i> | b. <i>iumu=wâ mu-[Kraes une]</i> |
| this person-PROX son.3MIN true-UV God | 2MIN=DIST 2MIN-Christ true |
| 'This man is the true Son of God' | 'You are the true Christ!' |

Possessum agreement mirrors object agreement Verbs in UV always carry subject agreement, but they can also carry object agreement, depending on the ϕ -features of both arguments (Roversi 2020). If there is no object agreement, the object is realised as a full pronoun in post-verbal position. Compare in this respect (4a), with object agreement, to (4b), where the object is realised as a pronoun.

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| (4) a. <i>i-togulo-gu-i=laa</i> | b. <i>i-togulo-mu=waa ijii</i> |
| PFV-hit.UV-3MIN-3AUG=FUT | PFV-hit.UV-2MIN=FUT 3AUG |
| 'S/he will hit them' | 'You will hit them' |

If Äiwoo possessive structures originate as transitive UV clauses of the form "POSSessor have POSSESSUM", we predict to find agreement indexing the possessum on the possessives in exactly all and only the configurations that result in object agreement. This is precisely what we find; compare (5)-(6) to (4). Not only do we see object agreement in the (a.) sentences, but we also see an overt 3AUG pronoun

in the (b.) sentences. In (4b) this is clearly the object, but in the possessive cases (5b)-(6b) this pronoun would be hard to explain if the possessives themselves weren't verbal in nature.

- (5) a. *kuli no-gu-i* dog POSS:GEN-3MIN-3AUG 'His/her dogs'
 b. *kuli no-mu ijii* dog POSS:GEN-2MIN 3AUG 'Your dogs'
- (6) a. *gino-gu-i* son-3MIN-3AUG 'His/her sons'
 b. *gino-mu ijii* son-2MIN 3AUG 'Your sons'

Possession verbs without extraction: predicative possession In addition to possessed DPs being formed via relativization, I also argue that we can actually see these possession predicates being used as canonical transitive UV verbs, without any extraction; this is the case in predicative possessive constructions. For a sentence like (7a) we don't need to assume any kind of intransitive predicate structure involving a null copula: the possessive is simply a UV verb meaning 'have-as-tool', and the object is in its canonical position (UV clauses have unmarked OVS order (7b)). The reading then is 'DP is POSSESSOR's'.

- (7) a. *boat nogo-i* boat POSS:TOOL-3AUG 'The boat is theirs'
 b. *nuduwo ki-ngä-i=lâ* wild.yam IPFV-eat.UV-3AUG=DIST 'They ate wild yam'

Further evidence that these are standard transitive UV predicates comes from sentences where we can see both the possessum and the possessor as overt DPs. First of all, the two DPs occur in the expected order (OVS). The behaviour of negation also shows that the position of an UV subject and that of a possessor DP is indeed the same. Negation is expressed via the bipartite structure *ba VP=gu*. An UV subject occurs to the left of *=gu* (8a); the possessor DP is in the exact same position (8b).

- (8) a. *sii ba i-ngä [Pita]=gu* fish NEG PFV-eat.UV Peter=NEG 'Peter didn't eat fish'
 b. *lovävei-enge ba nogo [miluwopa]=gu* system-PROX NEG POSS:TOOL.3MIN Europeans=NEG 'This system is not of the Europeans'

Predicative possession and inalienables Inalienable nouns also show the same UV verb behaviour; this is clearest when the possessum is 1st or 2nd person. Sentence (9a) has a 3MIN possessor and a 2MIN possessum, a combination that triggers object agreement on verbs (cf. (9b)), and here it triggers possessum agreement. In (10a) we have a 2AUG possessor ('unit-augmented', chiefly equivalent to a dual) and a 1MIN possessum, which blocks object agreement on verbs (cf. (10b)), and consistently we see no possessum agreement, but an overt pronoun in the corresponding position.

- (9) a. *[Gino une-i]-gu-mu God* son true-UV-3MIN-2MIN God 'You're the true Son of God'; lit. 'God truly has you_i as a son'
 b. *i-togulo-gu-mu* PFV-hit.UV-3MIN-2MIN 'S/he hit you'
- (10) a. *[gino]-mi-le iu* son-2AUG-UA 1MIN 'I'm you two's son'; lit. 'You two have me_i as a son'
 b. *i-togulo-mi(-le) iu* PFV-hit.UV-2AUG-UA 1MIN 'You (two) hit me'

'Have' in Äiwoo and the definiteness effect Despite my informal translation, these possession predicates can't by themselves express the equivalent of English *have*. As shown in (7a), the reading obtained by using them transitively is 'DP is POSSESSOR's' (although the possessor is really the external argument). In order to say 'I have a boat', an existential predicate is additionally required (11). I speculate

- (11) *boat nugu i-to* boat POSS:TOOL.1MIN PFV-exist 'I have a boat', lit. 'a boat of mine exists' that this is due to a definiteness effect similar, but opposite, to the one known for *have*, which in its ordinary meaning – excluding temporary possession – cannot take a definite object (*I have a/the tree in the garden*; see Myler 2016). I assume that the Äiwoo possessive predicates have the opposite effect, and cannot have an indefinite object. The only solution then is to extract the object, leaving thus a trace of type *e* in situ (i.e. abstracting and creating a predicate λx . SUBJECT has *x*), which satisfies the definiteness requirement. However, after extraction we only have a DP, and a vacuous existential predicate is necessary to form a full clause.

Implications The clear verbal nature of Äiwoo possessives raises the question of whether other languages work like this too, but have thus far gone unnoticed. I consider whether this analysis could be extended to more familiar structures, like English 's, which also relates two DPs in a similar way.

References ► Myler, N. 2016. *Building and Interpreting Possession Sentences*. ► Næss, Å. 2018. Plural-marking strategies in Äiwoo. ► Roversi, G. 2020. How to satisfy probes: person/number hierarchy effects in Äiwoo.