

## Possessive constructions and nominalizations in Kove

HIROKO SATO

*The University of Tokyo*

**Abstract:** This paper discusses basic features of Kove possessive constructions, and then investigates the correlations between possessive constructions and nominalized verbs. As with Proto-Oceanic and many of its other daughter languages, Kove has a rich system of possessive constructions. It makes a formal distinction between direct and indirect possessive constructions. Moreover, in the indirect constructions, two different possessive markers, *a* and *le*, are utilized. The choice of construction depends on the relation between the possessor and the possessum. Some Kove nouns can occur in the possessum position of more than one type of possessive construction with different semantics. This phenomenon appears with nominalized verbs. Any argument of a nominalized verb can be expressed as a possessor, but different possessive constructions may be chosen depending on the notional grammatical relations of the arguments. Furthermore, multiple arguments can be expressed as possessors within one clause, but with some restrictions. This paper highlights how those arguments are expressed by means of possessive constructions.\*

**Key words:** possessive construction, possessive marker, nominalization, Austro-nesian languages, Papua New Guinea

### 1. Introduction

Most Oceanic languages have a formal distinction between direct and indirect possessive constructions. In a direct possessive construction, the pronominal affix that indexes the possessor occurs on the possessum (possessed noun). Example (1) from Vitu illustrates a direct possessive construction where the pronominal possessor affix, *-gu*, occurs on the possessum.<sup>1</sup>

---

\* I owe immense gratitude to the late Dr. Robert Blust for his longtime support, and for his encouragement on an early version of this paper. I also wish to thank Duhai Zhou, Mai Hayashi, Mizuki Tanigawa, Naonori Nagaya, Sakura Ishikawa, Shigeki Yoshida, Yui Suzuki, and Yuko Morokuma for their valuable comments. I thank two anonymous referees for their valuable comments as well. I am extremely grateful to the communities of Kapo village and Nutanovua village, particularly Mr. Luke Mara, my primary language consultant. This research is funded by the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (ELDP) and the National Science Foundation (NSF).

<sup>1</sup> In addition to the Leipzig Glossing Rules standard abbreviations, the following abbreviations are used: A.POSS, *a*-type possessive classifier; GENP, general preposition; INTR, intransitive marker; LE.POSS, *le*-type possessive classifier; NPAST, non-past; PREP, preposition;

- (1) tama-gu  
 father-1SG.POSS  
 'my father' (van den Berg and Bachet 2006: 54)

In an indirect possessive construction, the possessor-indexing affix occurs on a possessive classifier (marker), as in example (2) from Vitu, in which the possessive classifier *ka* carries the possessor-indexing affix *-gu*.

- (2) ka-gu malala  
 POSS.MRK-1SG.POSS village  
 'my village' (van den Berg and Bachet 2006: 57)

Languages that have any possessive classifiers typically have more than one. For example, as with many of the languages of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, Vitu, spoken in Papua New Guinea, has two possessive classifiers: *ba*, used for items that are consumed, and *ka*, used for other items (van den Berg and Bachet 2006: 57, 60). Most languages spoken in Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and Fiji have between four and six possessive classifiers, while Micronesian languages are known for having even more classifiers.

The choice between the constructions depends upon the semantics of the possessed, or on the nature of the relationship between the possessor and the possessed, and varies across languages. In general, the direct construction tends to appear in inalienable possessive relationships, such as body parts, part-whole relations, and kinship relations, while the indirect construction tends to encode less permanent possessive relationships (i.e., alienable relationships). In other words, the possessive classifiers usually denote “different kinds of real-world relations between the possessum and the possessor” (Lichtenberk 2009: 380).

Possessive constructions may also have “additional meanings and extensions” that are not directly related to possession or ownership, such as marking purposes or beneficiaries, or serving as grammatical elements of deverbal nominalization (Aikhenvald 2013: 6, 41). For example, in many languages around the world possessive markers may encode grammatical relations of nominalized verbs, such as in *John's arrival* (Aikhenvald 2013: 6). Given that Oceanic languages have such rich systems of possessive constructions, questions arise about how and what kinds of possessive constructions are used in nominalizations in these languages. However, while possessive constructions of Oceanic languages have been well described, their usage in nominalization is barely described and little studied.

This paper provides an investigation into the correlations between possessive constructions and nominalized verbs in Kove, an Austronesian language spoken

---

POSS.MRK, possessive marker; SPEC, specific article. In examples from other authors, the morpheme and word glosses are those of the sources, except that in some cases the original glosses have been adjusted for the sake of uniformity and in accordance with the Leipzig Glossing Rules.

in Papua New Guinea.<sup>2</sup> Kove is an SVO, nominative-accusative language.<sup>3</sup> The paper discusses how possessive constructions are used in nominalization and also highlights how multiple possessive constructions are used within a single nominalized clause. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 gives an overview of Kove possessive constructions. Section 3 discusses how possessive constructions are used with nominalization at phrasal levels. Section 4 is the conclusion. Note that I use the term “possessive markers” throughout this paper in order to avoid confusion, although the status of this category is open to debate. Note further that I refer to the two indirect possessive constructions as the “*a*-type possessive construction” and the “*le*-type possessive construction,” based only on whether the construction uses the marker *a* or the marker *le*.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Possessive constructions

Like many Oceanic languages, Kove makes a formal distinction between direct and indirect possessive constructions. Example (3) illustrates the direct construction, where the possessum carries a possessive affix that cross-references the possessor. The possessive affixes are suffixes, except for the third person singular *-ai*, which is a prefix (see section 3.1). There may be a separate possessor phrase before the possessed noun. The direct possessive constructions generally encode some degree of inalienable possession.

- (3) (yau) tama-**ghu**  
 1SG father-1SG.POSS  
 ‘my father’

In the indirect construction, a possessive marker, rather than the possessum noun, carries a possessive affix. The indirect possessive constructions utilize two different possessive markers, *a* and *le*. The marker *a* appears with items of food and drink,<sup>5</sup> but also with a wide range of other items, including animals that are eaten; hair lice; utensils in daily use (e.g., pan, tongs); items related to food (e.g., garden,

<sup>2</sup> Kove is spoken primarily in the Kove area of the West New Britain province in Papua New Guinea (PNG). As of 2010, the total population in the area was 9,809 (National Statistical Office 2011). Many people from the Kove area have migrated to the provincial capital, Kimbe, as well as to other places in PNG. As in other parts of PNG, most members of the community use Tok Pisin in their daily lives.

<sup>3</sup> In Kove, the subject pronoun in both intransitive and transitive sentences is the same in form, but the object pronoun is different. For example, the first person singular subject pronoun is *yau* in both intransitive and transitive sentences. The first person singular object pronoun is *-ghau*.

<sup>4</sup> While the status of possessive markers is often a topic of debate (Lichtenberk 1983, 2009, Palmer and Brown 2007: 205–208), it is not directly related to the theme of this paper. I will not, therefore, discuss their status in detail.

<sup>5</sup> In Oceanic linguistics, the traditional term for drink and food categories is “edible.” However, in Kove, *le* is used for items that are clearly edible but are not eaten by the possessor. Therefore, I do not use the term “edible” for this category.

kitchen); traditional items (e.g., basket, clan symbol); ornaments worn above the neck; illnesses, diseases, and symptoms; and parts of a whole, including some body parts and house foundations. It is also used for passive possession, in which the possessor is an undergoer in an event, or is in a certain state. The other marker, *le*, is used for everything else.

These possessive markers always precede the possessed noun. In addition, if there is a possessor phrase, it precedes the marker, except in topicalization.<sup>6</sup> Example (4) shows the *a*-type possessive construction, while example (5) shows the *le*-type possessive construction.

- (4) (yau) **a-ghu** moi  
 1SG A.POSS-1SG.POSS taro  
 ‘my taro (for eating)’
- (5) (yau) **le-ghu** luma  
 1SG LE.POSS-1SG.POSS house  
 ‘my house’

As mentioned in section 1, many Oceanic languages have both direct and indirect possessive constructions. Traditionally, these have been called the “inalienable” constructions and the “alienable” constructions, respectively, because the former type tends to appear in inalienable possessive relationships such as body parts or kinship, while the latter type tends to encode less permanent possessive relationships (i.e., alienable relationships). However, as Geraghty (1983: 242–243) pointed out, these terms are problematic. First of all, the terms “inalienable” and “alienable” are semantic notions, but the distinctions discussed here are grammatical. Second, some inalienable possessive relationships such as some body parts are expressed with indirect possession, and some alienable possessive relationships may be expressed as direct possession. Therefore, I refer to this grammatical distinction as “direct possession” versus “indirect possession” in this paper.

One of the distinctive semantic characteristics of the Kove possessive constructions is their capacity for “overlap” (Lynch 1973: 74–89), or fluidity (Lichtenberk 2010: 273); that is, certain nouns can occur in more than one type of possessive construction with some semantic difference. For example, nouns for food and drink, including animals that are eaten, are marked by the *a*-marker. However, if they are neither eaten nor intended to be eaten by the possessor, for example because they are for selling, for planting, or for giving to others, the *le*-marker is used. In example (6a), the possessed noun, *ghaya* ‘pig’, appears with the possessive marker *a*, and it is considered something to be eaten. On the other hand, in example (6b), the same possessed noun appears with the possessive marker *le*, and it is not intended to be eaten. Rather, for instance, it may be being kept for selling.

<sup>6</sup> In topicalization, the possessum noun precedes the possessive marker, as follows.

moi (yau) **a-ghu**  
 taro 1SG A.POSS-1SG.POSS  
 ‘As for the taro, it’s my taro (for eating).’

- (6) a. **a-ghu**                      ghaya      b. **le-ghu**                      ghaya  
       A.POSS-1SG.POSS pig                      LE.POSS-1SG.POSS pig  
       ‘my pig to eat’                                      ‘my pig (not to eat)’

This semantic fluidity often involves a contrast between “active” and “passive” possession. This contrast has been discussed by Geraghty (1983) in his work on Fijian, and by others such as Lynch (2001) in work on other Oceanic languages. Geraghty defined the notion of active possession as a construction in which the possessor is the actor of an event or a deverbal noun (nominalized verb) derived from an underlying structure, and the notion of passive possession as a construction in which the possessor is not the actor of an event or a deverbal noun derived from an underlying structure (246, 269).

Like many other Oceanic languages, Kove has a grammatical distinction between passive and active possession. Passive possession is marked by the *a*-marker, while active possession is marked by the *le*-marker. This is shown in the following pairs of examples. In (7a) and (8a), *kaipu* and *kaukau* occur with the *a*-marker, and the possessor is an undergoer in the event, and further, is affected by an external activity. In (7b) and (8b), *kaipu* and *kaukau* occur with the *le*-marker, and the possessor is an agent in the event.

- (7) a. **a-ghu**                      kaipu                      b. **le-ghu**                      kaipu  
       A.POSS-1SG.POSS punch                      LE.POSS-1SG.POSS punch  
       ‘my punch (my being hit)’                      ‘my punch (my hitting)’
- (8) a. **a-ghu**                      kaukau  
       A.POSS-1SG.POSS argument  
       ‘my argument (an argument about me)’
- b. **le-ghu**                      kaukau  
       LE.POSS-1SG.POSS argument  
       ‘my argument (an argument that I make)’

Similarly, the next pair of examples shows the contrast between passive and active possession. *Matapapau* is a traditional ceremony in Kove culture, where a newborn is officially introduced to the village. *Matapapau* with the *a*-marker as in (9a) refers to the possessor as the newborn being introduced. On the other hand, *matapapau* with the *le*-marker as in (9b) refers to the possessor as the person holding the ceremony. The possessor in the latter case would usually be the parent of the newborn.

- (9) a. **a-ghu**                      mata-pa-pau  
       A.POSS-1SG.POSS eye-RED-new  
       ‘my *matapapau* (*matapapau* that I receive)’
- b. **le-ghu**                      mata-pa-pau  
       LE.POSS-1SG.POSS eye-RED-new  
       ‘my *matapapau* (*matapapau* that I hold)’

This grammatical distinction very often appears to express arguments of nominalized verbs, which will be discussed in the next section.



patient is expressed in a prepositional phrase (Lichtenberk 2011: 702–703). In (12), the agent *qoe* ‘2SG’ appears as the possessor of the nominalization, while the patient *baqu* ‘bananas’ is expressed with the general preposition *qana*.

- (12) *fasi-laa qoe qana baqu qena ki*  
 plant-NMLZ 2SG GENP banana that PL  
 ‘your planting (of) those bananas’ (Lichtenberk 2011: 703)

In the case of ergative languages, like some Polynesian languages, the absolutive argument is expressed as the possessor, while the ergative argument remains in the ergative case. In (13), from East Uvean, the argument referring to the agent, *Sosefo* ‘personal name’, appears with the ergative case marker *e*, but the absolutive argument referring to the patient, *mei* ‘breadfruit’, is expressed, with the inalienable possessive marker *o*, as the possessor.

- (13) ‘E sio’i e Malia te kai o te mo’i  
 NPAST look.at ERG Malia SPEC eat POSS SPEC CLF  
*mei e Sosefo.*  
 breadfruit ERG Sosefo  
 ‘Malia is looking at Sosefo eating a piece of breadfruit.’ (lit., ‘Malia is looking at the eating of a piece of breadfruit by Sosefo.’) (Moyses-Faurie 2016: 196)

Thus, if there is more than one argument, one of them is chosen for the possessor. Nevertheless, it is possible, albeit uncommon, for all argument types to be expressed as possessors (Koptjevskaja-Tamm 1993: 80).

With respect to the expression of the arguments, the Kove system can be characterized as having a mixture of the accusative and ergative patterns, as well as the double possessive, in that all arguments can be treated as possessors. While the notional subject of a nominalized intransitive verb is expressed as the possessor, either the notional subject or the notional object (or the notional oblique) can also be a possessor with a nominalized transitive verb. One question arises: When a language allows two arguments to appear as possessors—which is very uncommon among languages—are there any restrictions on these arguments? This paper highlights three issues: (1) the strategy for treating two arguments as possessors; (2) the possibility of multiple possessive constructions within a single clause; and (3) some constraints on multiple possessive constructions.<sup>7</sup>

### 3.1. Nominalization

Kove has two deverbal nominalizers, *-nga* and *-ra*. The verbs that take *-ra* are only two: *ngingi* ‘laugh’ and *tangi* ‘cry’. All other verbs, including loanwords, take *-nga*.

A nominalized verb can occur either as a subject or as an object. In example (14), the nominalization functions as the subject, and in (15), the nominalized verb functions as the direct object.

<sup>7</sup> “Multiple possessive constructions” refers to cases in which more than one possessive construction is used within a single clause.

- (14) **Hau-nga** sasi.  
hit-NMLZ bad  
'Hitting is bad.'
- (15) Nga-watai **waya-nga** mao.  
1SG.SBJ-know swim-NMLZ NEG  
'I don't know how to swim.' (lit., 'I don't know swimming.')

In a Kove verb phrase, the verb is obligatorily prefixed by a subject pronominal form, which indexes the subject and agrees with its person and number. In addition, if a verb is transitive, the direct object appears after the verb. The word order is SVO. The direct object can be expressed by means of an object suffix on the verb. Table 1 shows dependent pronouns including possessive affixes. Note that the table includes only singular pronouns that are relevant to the topic of this paper.

Table 1 Personal dependent pronouns

	1	2	3
Subject marker	nga-	u-	i-
Object	-ghau	-gho	-ni, (Ø)
Possessive	-ghu	-mu	ai-, e- <sup>8</sup>

While verbs obligatorily carry a subject marker, the marker cannot attach to a nominalized verb, as illustrated by the ungrammatical constructions in (16) and (17).

- (16) \***nga**-hau-nga  
1SG.SBJ-hit-NMLZ  
(‘my hitting [something]’)
- (17) \***tamine** hau-nga  
woman hit-NMLZ  
(‘hitting by the woman’)

However, unlike the subject marker, a direct object pronominal form can attach to a nominalized verb. The pronominal form occurs after the nominalizer (except with a ditransitive verb), as in (18).

- (18) hau-nga-**gho**  
hit-NMLZ-2SG.OBJ  
(‘someone’s) hitting of you’

If a direct object is a lexical noun phrase, it can also occur after the nominalized verb, as (19) and (20) illustrate.

<sup>8</sup> The third person singular possessive markers *e-* and *ai-* are allomorphs; *e-* is used only with the possessive marker *le*, and *ai-* is used with everything else.

- (19) hau-nga **ghaya**  
 hit-NMLZ pig  
 '(someone's) hitting of a pig'
- (20) hau-nga-ri<sup>9</sup> **ghaya**  
 hit-NMLZ-PL pig  
 '(someone's) hitting of pigs'

Kove has middle voice verbs such as *roa* 'sit down' and *ghunu* 'stand up'. They always take co-referential subjects and direct objects, as in (21). They look like transitive verbs. However, unlike transitive verbs, they do not take a direct object pronominal form when they are nominalized, as (22) and (23) demonstrate. Instead, as these examples show, these verbs take the intransitive suffix *-i* between the verb and nominalizer.

- (21) Nga-roa-ghau.  
 1SG.SBJ-sit.down-1SG.OBJ  
 'I sit down.'
- (22) roa-**i-nga**  
 sit.down-INTR-NMLZ  
 'sitting'
- (23) \*roa-i-nga-**ghau**  
 sit.down-INTR-NMLZ-1SG.OBJ  
 ('my sitting')

There is only one ditransitive verb in Kove that takes two objects without prepositions, a direct object and a recipient object. The verb is *pa* 'give'. This verb has to take an object pronominal suffix for the recipient. The order in the verbal clause is subject-verb-recipient-direct object, as in (24), where the verb *pa* carries the second person singular object suffix, which marks the recipient.

- (24) Nga-pa-**gho**            niu.  
 1SG.SBJ-give-2SG.OBJ coconut  
 'I give you a coconut.'

In example (25), the verb *pa* 'give' carries the object pronominal suffix *-ni*, which marks the recipient, *Stacey*, and the direct object follows the recipient.

- (25) Nga-pa-**ni**            Stacey    niu.  
 1SG.SBJ-give-3SG.OBJ    Stacey    coconut  
 'I give Stacey a coconut.'

In the nominalization of the verb *pa*, the nominalizer occurs after an object pronominal form for a recipient, unlike in the nominalization of transitive verbs, as shown in example (18). It is obligatory for a recipient to take the object form

<sup>9</sup> *-ri* in the example is a plural marker. It has the same form as the third person plural possessive marker *-ri*, but a different meaning.

before a nominalizer. In (26), both the theme and recipient occur after the nominalized element.

- (26) pa-**ni**-nga                      **Stacey**    niu  
       give-3SG.OBJ-NMLZ    Stacey    coconut  
       ‘giving Stacey a coconut’

Thus, while a nominalized verb cannot occur with a subject pronominal form, it may occur with an object pronominal form, which comes “after” a nominalizer on transitive verbs. With the ditransitive verb, the object pronominal form for a recipient obligatorily occurs “before” the nominalizer.

### 3.2. Arguments in nominalized clauses

#### 3.2.1. Subjects

The notional subject is always expressed by means of the *le*-marker regardless of thematic relations such as agent, patient, or theme. This is demonstrated in the nominalization of both intransitive and transitive verbs in examples (27) and (28), where a notional agentive subject is expressed as the possessor in the *le*-marked possessive construction. The sentence in (27) means that the way in which the speaker runs is bad, so for example, he or she may fall down or hurt his or her leg.

- (27) **Le-ghu**                      laro-nga    sisi.  
       LE.POSS-1SG.POSS    run-NMLZ    bad  
       ‘My running is bad.’

Similarly, the sentence in (28) means the way in which the speaker hits the patient is bad, so that the patient may be injured or fall down.

- (28) **Le-ghu**                      hau-nga    sisi.  
       LE.POSS-1SG.POSS    hit-NMLZ    bad  
       ‘My hitting (something/somebody) is bad.’

In addition to agentive subjects, subjects in other types of thematic roles are also expressed. The following three examples show a notional subject as the theme in (29), as the experiencer in (30), and as the non-agentive actor in (31).

- (29) Patu    **e-le**                      tapu-nga    sisi.  
       stone 3SG.POSS-LE.POSS    fall-NMLZ    bad  
       ‘A stone’s falling down is bad.’
- (30) Pana    tosalai **le-ri**                      nana-nga    sisi.  
       people many LE.POSS-3PL.POSS    think-NMLZ    bad  
       ‘Many people’s thinking (of something/somebody) is bad.’
- (31) Hai                      **e-le**                      lele-nga    sisi.  
       southwest.wind 3SG.POSS-LE.POSS    blow-NMLZ    bad  
       ‘The southwest wind’s blowing is bad.’

Thus, the choice of the possessive marker for the notional subject depends on grammatical relations. The notional subject is expressed as a possessor only by the

*le*-type marker.

### 3.2.2. Verbal objects

While the notional object of a nominalized verb may be expressed by means of a pronoun or a lexical noun phrase, as seen in section 3.1, it can also be expressed with the *a*-marker as the possessor, as in (32). The possessor ‘you’ corresponds to the object of the verb. This example shows a contrast with example (28), where the notional subject is expressed with the *le*-type marker.

- (32) **a-mu**                      hau-nga  
       A.POSS-2SG.POSS    hit-NMLZ  
       ‘your being hit’

It should be noted that examples (18) and (32) are semantically the same, but the constructions are different: while the notional object of a nominalized verb is expressed by means of a pronoun in (18), it is expressed by means of a possessive construction in (32) (see Section 3.1).

As with the notional subjects of intransitive verbs, the choice of the possessive construction with transitive verbs does not depend on thematic relations, but on grammatical relations. In (33), the notional direct object, which denotes a stimulus, is expressed with the *a*-type construction. Note that this example contrasts with example (30), where the notional subject (experiencer) of an intransitive verb is expressed with the *le*-type construction as the possessor.

- (33) pana    tosalai    **a-ri**                      nana-nga  
       people    many    A.POSS-3PL.POSS    think-NMLZ  
       ‘many people’s being thought about’

As mentioned in section 3.1, Kove has one ditransitive verb. The notional object can be expressed by means of the *a*-marker; it can be either the theme, such as *niu* ‘coconut’ in (34), or the recipient, such as *ghaya* ‘pig’ in (35). Note that the nominalized verb still carries the object suffix for the recipient.

- (34) **niu**    **ai-a**                      pa-**ni**-nga                      Neti  
       coconut    3SG.POSS-A.POSS    give-3SG.OBJ-NMLZ    Neti  
       ‘giving Neti a coconut’
- (35) **ghaya**    **ai-a**                      pa-**ni**-nga                      niu  
       pig    3SG.POSS-A.POSS    give-3SG.OBJ-NMLZ    coconut  
       ‘giving a pig a coconut’

However, if the recipient is a high-animacy noun, like a personal pronoun or proper noun, it cannot be expressed with a possessive construction (36–37), but instead is expressed with an object pronominal attached to the nominalized verb (38–39).

- (36) \***a-mu** pa-gho-nga niu  
 A.POSS-2SG.POSS give-2SG.OBJ-NMLZ coconut  
 Intended: 'giving you a coconut'
- (37) \***Neti ai-a** pa-ni-nga niu  
 Neti 3SG.POSS-A.POSS give-3SG.OBJ-NMLZ coconut  
 Intended: 'giving Neti a coconut'
- (38) pa-gho-nga niu  
 give-2SG.OBJ-NMLZ coconut  
 'giving you a coconut'
- (39) pa-ni-nga **Neti** niu  
 give-3SG.OBJ-NMLZ Neti coconut  
 'giving Neti a coconut'

Furthermore, if its lexical noun phrase is omitted because the recipient is clear from the context, it is not possible for an *a*-marker to appear to express the recipient, as in example (40).

- (40) \***ai-a** pa-ni-nga niu  
 3SG.POSS-A.POSS give-3SG.OBJ-NMLZ coconut  
 Intended: 'giving him/her a coconut'

Thus, if the recipient is expressed by means of the *a*-marker, it is always a lexical noun phrase. Personal names or high-animacy lexical nouns referring to a recipient cannot be expressed as possessors. That is, only low-animacy or inanimate nouns are expressed as possessors.

While middle verbs take the object suffix as co-referential with the subject, they cannot take the *a*-marker to express the notional object, as shown by (41). They only take the *le*-marker, as in (42). The argument of a middle verb is treated as the same as the subject with nominalized verbs.

- (41) \***a-ghu** roa-i-nga  
 A.POSS-1SG.POSS sit.down-INTR-NMLZ  
 Intended: 'my sitting'
- (42) **le-ghu** roa-i-nga  
 LE.POSS-1SG.POSS sit.down-INTR-NMLZ  
 'my sitting'

Thus, the notional object can be expressed by means of the *a*-marker. However, this construction cannot be used for the recipient of a ditransitive verb unless it is a low-animacy lexical noun phrase, nor can it be used with middle verbs.

### 3.2.3. Obliques

Nominalized verbs may take obliques, as in the following examples. In (43), the oblique *pa tari* denotes the location, and in (44), the oblique *nga vula* denotes the theme. Note that these examples are all non-verbal sentences.

- (43) Bila-ghu waya-nga **pa tari**.  
 always-1SG.POSS swim-NMLZ PREP sea  
 ‘I always swim in the sea.’ (lit., ‘My frequent activity is swimming in the sea.’)
- (44) Bila-ghu pasolani-nga-gho **nga vula**.  
 always-1SG.POSS show-NMLZ-2SG.OBJ PREP shell.necklace  
 ‘I always show you a shell necklace.’ (lit., ‘My frequent activity is showing you a shell necklace.’)

Obliques for any thematic relation can be expressed using possessive constructions with nominalized verbs in the same construction as notional objects. Example (45) shows a locative oblique, which is expressed by means of a possessive construction. Note that examples (43) and (45) have different constructions, but are semantically the same.

- (45) Bila-ghu [**tari ai-a** waya-nga].  
 always-1SG.POSS sea 3SG.POSS-A.POSS swim-NMLZ  
 ‘I always swim in the sea.’ (lit., ‘My frequent activity is swimming in the sea.’)

Here are two more examples: an instrument oblique (46) and a goal oblique (47). Note that these examples are non-verbal sentences where *bilaghu* is the subject and the possessive phrases are the predicates, as shown by square brackets.

- (46) Bila-ghu [**avei ai-a** waya-nga].  
 always-1SG.POSS wood 3SG.POSS-A.POSS swim-NMLZ  
 ‘I always swim with a piece of wood.’ (lit., ‘My frequent activity is swimming with a piece of wood.’)
- (47) Bila-ghu [**tuanga ai-a** lalao-nga].  
 always-1SG.POSS village 3SG.POSS-A.POSS walk-NMLZ  
 ‘I always go to the village.’ (lit., ‘My frequent activity is going to the village.’)

In Kove, place names do not occur with a preposition. They stand by themselves, as shown by the place name *Kimbe* in (48a). However, as with obliques, they can take the *a*-type construction, as in (48b).

- (48) a. Nga-la nga-lalao Kimbe.  
 1SG.SBJ-go 1SG.SBJ-walk Kimbe.  
 ‘I go to Kimbe.’
- b. **Kimbe ai-a** lalao-nga  
 Kimbe 3SG.POSS-A.POSS walk-NMLZ  
 ‘a trip to Kimbe’ (lit., ‘walking to Kimbe’)

In all of the above examples, obliques and location names are expressed by means of possessive constructions if the verbs are intransitive. If obliques appear with overt arguments of transitive verbs, they cannot be expressed in the same way. For example, *pasolani* ‘show’ is a transitive verb. If it takes both a theme and a goal

(recipient), one of them appears as a direct object, and the other one is expressed by an oblique in a finite construction. In the following examples, the goal is expressed by an oblique with the preposition *pa* in (49), while the theme is expressed by an oblique with the preposition *nga* in (50).

- (49) Nga-pasolani vula pa Neti.  
 1SG.SBJ-show shell.necklace PREP Neti  
 'I showed a shell necklace to Neti.'
- (50) Nga-pasolani Neti nga vula.  
 1SG.SBJ-show Neti PREP shell.necklace  
 'I showed Neti a shell necklace.'

If both a notional direct object and a notional oblique appear in a clause, it is always the notional direct object that is expressed as the possessor, as in (51) where the theme is the notional direct object and (52) where the goal is the notional direct object. Note that in example (52), a proper noun is the notional direct object that is expressed by means of a possessive construction. However, it would be ungrammatical for a proper noun or personal pronoun to be the notional direct object of a ditransitive verb, as shown in (37).

- (51) vula ai-a pasolani-nga pa Neti  
 shell.necklace 3SG.POSS-A.POSS show-NMLZ PREP Neti  
 'showing a shell necklace to Neti'
- (52) Neti ai-a pasolani-nga nga vula  
 Neti 3SG.POSS-A.POSS show-NMLZ PREP shell.necklace  
 'showing Neti a shell necklace'

The notional obliques in such phrases cannot be expressed with a possessive construction; in (53) and (54), both phrases are ungrammatical.

- (53) \*Neti ai-a pasolani-nga vula  
 Neti 3SG.POSS-A.POSS show-NMLZ shell.necklace  
 ('showing a shell necklace to Neti')
- (54) \*vula ai-a pasolani-nga Neti  
 shell.necklace 3SG.POSS-A.POSS show-NMLZ Neti  
 ('showing Neti a shell necklace')

Thus, with notional subjects and objects, obliques (examples (45), (46) and (47)) or place names (example (48)) are expressed as the possessor in nominalized constructions. However, with transitive verbs, the notional direct object has priority to be chosen as the argument expressed by means of *a*-type possessive constructions (examples (51) and (52)), and it is ungrammatical for the notional oblique or a place name to be expressed by a possessive construction in transitive constructions.

### 3.3. Complex possessive constructions with nominalizations

As we have seen in section 3.2.1, the notional subject is expressed by means of the *le*-type possessive construction, while the notional object or oblique is expressed

by means of the *a*-type possessive construction. One question is how two or three arguments can be expressed within a single clause in Kove. In this section, I will discuss how multiple arguments are expressed in nominalizations of different types of verbs. For convenience, I will categorize verbs into three groups: intransitive and middle verbs, transitive verbs, and ditransitive verbs. Although intransitive and middle verbs are generally categorized as different types, I deal with them together in this section because both behave in the same way in nominalization in Kove.

### 3.3.1. Notional subjects and objects

Kove has some constraints that apply to two arguments expressed as possessors in nominalized clauses. If a notional subject is expressed by means of a possessive with the *le*-marker, the notional verbal object or oblique is expressed by a pronominal object suffix (55) or prepositional phrase (57). A pronominal notional object of a transitive verb (56) or a pronominal notional oblique (58) in the same clause cannot be expressed by means of a possessive construction.

- (55) *le-ghu*                      *hau-nga-gho*  
 LE.POSS-1SG.POSS    hit-NMLZ-2SG.OBJ  
 ‘my hitting you’
- (56) \**le-ghu*                      **a-mu**                      *hau-nga*  
 LE.POSS-1SG.POSS    A.POSS-2SG.POSS    hit-NMLZ  
 Intended: ‘my hitting you’
- (57) *kekele e-le*                      *tapu-nga*                      *pa-gho*  
 child    3SG.POSS-LE.POSS    fall.down-NMLZ    PREP-2SG.OBJ  
 ‘a child’s falling out of your hands’ (lit., ‘a child’s falling from you’)
- (58) \**kekele e-le*                      **a-mu**                      *tapu-nga*  
 child    3SG.POSS-LE.POSS    A.POSS-2SG.POSS    fall.down-NMLZ  
 Intended: ‘a child’s falling out of your hands’ (lit., ‘a child’s falling from you’)

However, when the notional object is a lexical noun phrase, both the notional subject and object are expressed as possessors within a single clause.<sup>10</sup> Example (59) is an intransitive sentence where the notional subject ‘I’ and the notional oblique ‘in the sea’ are expressed by means of possessive constructions with different markers, and the *le*- and *a*-markers appear within a single clause. Similarly, in (60), the notional subject ‘you’ and the notional direct object ‘my back’ are expressed by means of possessive constructions with different markers within a single clause.

- (59) **le-ghu**                      [**tari ai-a**                      *waya-nga*]  
 LE.POSS-1SG.POSS    sea    3SG.POSS-A.POSS    swim-NMLZ  
 ‘my swimming in the sea’

<sup>10</sup> It is also possible for a lexical noun phrase as the notional direct object to occur after the nominalized verb, e.g.:

**le-ghu**                      *riri-nga*                      *malo*  
 LE.POSS-1SG.POSS    sew-NMLZ    clothes  
 ‘my sewing clothes’

- (60) **Le-mu** [turu-ghu ai-a kaho-nga] sasi.  
 LE.POSS-2SG.POSS back-1SG.POSS 3SG.POSS-A.POSS scratch-NMLZ bad  
 'You scratched my back badly.' (lit., 'Your scratching my back was bad.')

Although *tari* 'sea' in (59) and *turu* 'back' in (60) immediately follow the *le*-marker phrase, the *le*-marker phrase does not modify these nouns, for two reasons. First, these examples are not about 'my sea' or 'your back'. There is no ownership between the possessor with the *le*-marker and its following noun. Second, the *le*-marker phrase is followed by the directly possessed noun *turu* 'back' in (60). *Turu* 'back' has the first person singular possessive suffix *-ghu*, but the *le*-marker has the second person singular possessive suffix *-mu*. Clearly, the *le*-marker is not related to the following noun. Rather, the *le*-marker has scope over the whole possessive construction *turu-ghu ai-a kaho-nga* 'scratching my back', as shown by the square brackets.

Here is one more example illustrating the lack of a direct connection between the *le*-marker and the following noun. In (61), the *le*-marker phrase and the noun 'food' stand next to each other, but there is not a direct connection between them. Rather, the *le*-marker phrase has the whole possessive construction *haninga ai-a nono-nga* 'cooking food' in its scope, as shown by the square brackets. If *haninga* 'food' has a possessor, it should be marked by the *a*-marker in possessive relations unless the possessor only temporarily owns it, for example, to sell.

- (61) **Le-ghu** [haninga ai-a nono-nga] doko.  
 LE.POSS-1SG.POSS food 3SG.POSS-A.POSS cook-NMLZ good  
 'My cooking of food is good.'

In the next example, there are two nominalized verbs. The first *a*-marker, in *aia*, marks *haninga*, which is the notional object of the nominalized verb *nononga* 'cooking'; the phrase *haninga aia nononga* refers to 'cooked food'. The second *a*-marker marks the whole phrase *haninga aia nononga*, which is the notional object of the nominalized verb *aninga*. The phrase, *haninga aia nononga aia aninga*, refers to 'eating cooked food'. The *le*-type possessive phrase has the entire possessive construction *haninga aia nononga aia aninga* in its scope. In this example, the agent of 'eating' is 'I'. The agent eats food cooked by someone. This example refers to a situation of the agent's style of eating food that is cooked (by someone).

- (62) le-ghu [[haninga ai-a nono-nga]  
 LE.POSS-1SG.POSS food 3SG.POSS-A.POSS cook-NMLZ  
**ai-a** ani-nga]  
 3SG.POSS-A.POSS eat-NMLZ  
 'my eating of cooked food' (i.e., 'my manner of eating cooked food')

Hence, two arguments can be expressed as possessors within a single clause. The *a*-marker and the *le*-marker can co-occur if the notional object is a lexical noun phrase. However, as just noted, they occur at different levels. The *le*-marker has in its scope the whole possessive construction, which contains two instances of the

*a*-marker. The *le*-marker corresponds to the subject of the verb, *ani* ‘eat’.

While the *a*-type construction can be used for the notional verbal object or oblique when it is a lexical noun phrase, this construction seems not to be preferred if the notional verbal object or oblique is a personal name, as in (63), though it is not ungrammatical. Theoretically, the *le*-marker corresponds to the subject of the verb, but according to my language consultants, this construction gives the impression to them that the *le*-marker modifies the following proper noun, which would be ‘my Neti’; that is, it seems as if the notional subject “owns” a person, and this sounds strange. Instead, it is preferred that the notional object occur after the nominalized verb as in (64).

- (63) ?\**Le*-ghu                      **Neti ai-a**                      hau-nga    sasi.  
           LE.POSS-1SG.POSS    Neti    3SG.POSS-A.POSS    hit-NMLZ    bad  
           ‘My hitting Neti is bad.’
- (64) *Le*-ghu                      hau-nga    **Neti**    sasi.  
           LE.POSS-1SG.POSS    hit-NMLZ    Neti    bad  
           ‘My hitting Neti is bad.’

However, this misperception seems not to occur with a place name, as in (65), which is acceptable and would be interpreted as ‘my walking to Kimbe’, instead of ‘my Kimbe’.

- (65) *le*-ghu                      [**Kimbe ai-a**                      lalao-nga]  
           LE.POSS-1SG.POSS    Kimbe    3SG.POSS-A.POSS    walk-NMLZ  
           ‘my trip to Kimbe’ (lit., ‘my walking to Kimbe’)

Furthermore, common nouns of high animacy, such as ‘people’ or ‘child’, also can occur in this construction without any misconceptions. In the following example (66), while the *le*-type marker phrase and *kekele* ‘child’ stand next to each other, the *le*-type marker phrase does not modify *kekele* as in ‘my child’. Instead, *leghu* indicates that the agent of the action ‘hit’ is the first person singular. The patient ‘child’ is anyone’s child.

- (66) *le*-ghu                      **kekele ai-a**                      hau-nga  
           LE.POSS-1SG.POSS    child    3SG.POSS-A.POSS    hit-NMLZ  
           ‘my hitting a child’

Thus, both the notional subject and the notional verbal object or oblique can be expressed as a possessor within a single nominalized clause if the notional verbal object or oblique is a lexical noun phrase, except for personal names.

### 3.3.2. Two notional objects<sup>11</sup>

There are two possibilities for two notional objects to occur within a single nominalized clause. One is a ditransitive construction where two objects, a theme object and a recipient object, appear without prepositions, as in (67a). As mentioned in

<sup>11</sup> Objects include both verbal objects and prepositional objects.

section 3.2.2, a notional object can be expressed with the *a*-marker as the possessor. However, there is a morpho-syntactic constraint that these objects cannot both be expressed by the *a*-marker within a single clause. Thus, (67b), where *niu aia* is the notional object for the theme in the first set of square brackets and *ghaya ari* is the notional object for the recipient in the second set of square brackets, is ungrammatical.

- (67) a. Nga-pa-ri                      ghaya niu.  
           1SG.SBJ-give-3PL.OBJ pig    coconut  
           'I gave pigs a coconut.'  
       b. \*[niu            ai-a]                      [ghaya a-ri]                      pa-ri-nga  
           coconut 3SG.POSS-A.POSS pig    A.POSS-3PL.POSS give-3PL.OBJ-NMLZ  
           Intended: 'giving pigs a coconut'

Only one of the objects can occur with the *a*-marker. This suggests that a nominalized verb cannot take more than one *a*-marker phrase for notional objects that occur at the same level. While either the theme or the recipient can be expressed with the *a*-marker, it is more common and natural for it to be the theme, as in (68), though the recipient can be expressed by the *a*-marker, as in (69). This is probably due to a preference for the ditransitive verb to have the recipient closer to it than the theme.

- (68) le-ghu                      niu            ai-a                      pa-ri-nga                      ghaya  
       LE.POSS-1SG.POSS coconut 3SG.POSS-A.POSS give-3PL.OBJ-NMLZ pig  
       'my giving pigs a coconut'  
       (69) le-ghu                      ghaya a-ri                      pa-ri-nga                      niu  
       LE.POSS-1SG.POSS pig    A.POSS-3PL.POSS give-3PL.OBJ-NMLZ coconut  
       'my giving pigs a coconut'

The other possibility for having two notional objects within a single clause is when a transitive verb appears with an oblique. As stated in section 3.2.3, a notional oblique is expressed by means of the *a*-type construction as possessor. However, a notional verbal object and oblique cannot co-occur within a single nominalized clause. In example (70), both the notional object, *tue* 'clam', and the notional oblique, *tamine tona* 'that woman', are expressed by means of the *a*-marker, and this phrase is ungrammatical.

- (70) \*[tue    ai-a]                      [tamine tona    ai-a]                      oli-nga  
       clam 3SG.POSS-A.POSS woman ART 3SG.POSS-A.POSS buy-NMLZ  
       Intended: 'buying clams from that woman'

Instead, in a nominalized clause, the notional verbal object is always chosen for the *a*-type construction and the notional oblique is expressed with a preposition, as (71) illustrates.

- (71) [tue            ai-a                      oli-nga]                      pa            tamine    tona  
       clam    3SG.POSS-A.POSS    buy-NMLZ    PREP    woman    ART

‘buying clams from that woman’

As with the case of the ditransitive construction, the two notional verbal objects occur at the same level, where only one argument can be expressed as the possessor.

#### 4. Summary and conclusion

This paper has discussed possessive constructions with nominalized verbs as possessors. Like other Oceanic languages, Kove has a grammatical distinction between direct and indirect possessive constructions. In addition, the indirect constructions utilize two possessive markers, *a* and *le*. The choice of possessive constructions is based on the type of relations between possessor and possessum. While the possessive constructions denote ownership, they can be used to express grammatical elements of nominalized verbs. Regardless of thematic roles, notional subjects can be expressed as possessors by means of *le*-type possessive constructions, and notional verbal objects and obliques by means of *a*-type possessive constructions. If both a notional subject and a notional verbal object or oblique appear with one nominalized verb, it is always the notional subject that is expressed by means of the possessive construction. If both a notional verbal object and oblique appear with one nominalized verb, it is the notional verbal object that is chosen to be expressed by means of the possessive construction. However, when notional verbal objects or obliques are lexical noun phrases, both the notional subjects and objects are expressed as possessors within a single clause.

These features draw attention to three typologically important aspects of possessive constructions in nominalization that have not been clearly explicated in the existing literature, particularly for Oceanic languages. First, multiple possessive markers can appear within a single clause. While the topic of possessive constructions in Oceanic linguistics has received a fair amount of attention, there has been little consideration of the possibility of multiple possessive markers within one clause. This paper shows that Kove disprefers two possessive markers standing next to each other, but will allow this situation if at least one of them marks a lexical noun phrase. That means, as mentioned in section 3.3.2, that the *le*-marker has in its scope the whole possessive construction, which contains the *a*-marker and its possessed noun. Thus, the *le*-marker and the *a*-marker occur at different levels.

The second important point concerns a hierarchy in the choice of possessive constructions. The facts that notional subjects are chosen among all the arguments for possessors and that notional objects are chosen over obliques suggest the following hierarchy for the choice of possessive constructions in nominalization (‘>’ indicates that the element on the left is preferred over the one on the right): subject > verbal object > oblique. This is the same arrangement as the grammatical relation hierarchy (or obliqueness hierarchy) that “indicates relative ‘accessibility’ to various syntactic processes and phenomena” (O’Grady 2007: 47). The notion of the grammatical relation hierarchy is described by Van Valin (2001: 46) as follows: “if there is a single privileged syntactic argument in a construction, it is the subject. If there are two privileged arguments, they are subject and direct object. If there are

three, then they are subject, direct object and indirect object. Hence if a syntactic phenomenon targets more than one term type it will always include subjects." The choice of arguments as possessors in nominalization of Kove fits this description.

The third important observation in this paper is that the choice of Kove's possessive markers shows a mixture of the accusative and ergative patterns in this accusative language. As mentioned in section 3, nominative arguments are treated as possessors in accusative languages, while absolutive arguments are treated as possessors in ergative languages. Given that Kove is a nominative-accusative language where the subject pronoun in both intransitive and transitive sentences is the same in form, while the object pronoun is different, we would expect subjects to be expressed as possessors. However, what we find is that all arguments can be treated as possessors, and that their selection mixes both patterns. This is typologically very uncommon across languages (see section 3).

Possessive constructions have been of great interest in Oceanic linguistics for the last few decades, and many studies have discussed this topic. However, not much research has included details of the co-occurrence of possessive constructions and nominalization. Furthermore, there has been very little discussion of how multiple possessive arguments are expressed within a single nominalized clause. This paper sheds light on the appearance of possessive constructions in nominalization, in particular, for multiple arguments of nominalized verbs as possessors. It further describes Kove possessives within a typological framework, observing that Kove displays some idiosyncratic typological features. It is hoped that future research will include more typological work on the behaviors of possessive constructions, and on multiple possessive constructions in nominalization.

## References

- Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. (2013) Possession and ownership: A cross-linguistic perspective. In: Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald and R. M. W. Dixon (eds.) *Possession and ownership: A cross-linguistic typology*, 1–64. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Geraghty, Paul A. (1983) *The history of the Fijian languages*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Koptjevskaja-Tamm, Maria (1993) *Nominalizations*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Koptjevskaja-Tamm, Maria (2005) Action nominal constructions. In: Martin Haspelmath, Matthew S. Dryer, David Gil and Bernard Comrie with the collaboration of Hans-Jörg Bibiko, Hagen Jung and Claudia Schmidt (eds.) *The world atlas of language structures*, 254–257. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lichtenberk, Frantisek (1983) Relational classifiers. *Lingua* 60: 147–176.
- Lichtenberk, Frantisek (2009) Oceanic possessive classifiers. *Oceanic Linguistics* 48: 379–402.
- Lichtenberk, Frantisek (2010) Attributive possessive constructions in Oceanic. In: William B. McGregor (ed.) *The expression of possession*, 249–292. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Lichtenberk, Frantisek (2011) Nominalizations in Toqabaqita and closely related languages. In: Foong Ha Yap, Karen Grunow-Härsta and Janick Wrona (eds.) *Nominalization in Asian languages: Diachronic and typological perspectives*, 685–720. Amsterdam/Philadel-

- phia: John Benjamins.
- Lynch, John (1973) Verbal aspects of possession in Melanesian languages. *Oceanic Linguistics* 12: 69–102.
- Lynch, John (2001) Passive and food possession in Oceanic languages. In: Andrew Pawley, Malcolm Ross and Darrell Tryon (eds.) *The boy from Bundaberg: Studies in Melanesian linguistics in honour of Tom Dutton*, 193–214. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics.
- Lynch, John, Malcolm Ross and Terry Crowley (2002) *The Oceanic languages*. Richmond, UK: Curzon Press.
- Moyse-Faurie, Claire (2011) Nominalization and exclamation in Oceanic languages. In: Claire Moyse-Faurie and Joachim Sabel (eds.) *Topics in Oceanic morphosyntax*, 135–160. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Moyse-Faurie, Claire (2016) Referential markers in Oceanic nominalized constructions. In: Claudine Chamoreau and Zarina Estrada-Fernández (eds.) *Finiteness and nominalization*, 171–203. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- National Statistical Office (2011) *Papua New Guinea national census*. Port Moresby: National Statistical Office.
- O'Grady, William (2007) *The syntax files*. Manuscript. University of Hawai'i Linguistics Department.
- Palmer, Bill and Dunstan Brown (2007) Heads in Oceanic indirect possession. *Oceanic Linguistics* 46: 199–209.
- van den Berg, René and Peter Bachet (2006) *Vitu grammar sketch*. Ukarumpa: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- Van Valin, Robert Jr. (2001) *An introduction to syntax*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Department of Linguistics  
The University of Tokyo  
e-mail: hirokosa@hawaii.edu

[Received 15 January 2022;  
Accepted 27 November 2025]

## 【要 旨】

### コーヴェ語における所有構文と名詞化

佐藤 寛子

東京大学

本論文では、パプアニューギニアで話されているコーヴェ語の所有構文および所有構文と動名詞の関わりについて考察する。コーヴェ語の所有構文には、名詞に所有格代名詞が直接付加する直接所有構文と分類詞に所有格代名詞が付加する間接所有構文がある。間接所有構文では、所有分類詞は a と le の 2 種類が使われる。どの所有構文が使用されるかは、所有される名詞と所有者との関係性により決まる。所有構文は、動名詞節でも見られ、動名詞の意味上の主語や目的語を表す際に所有構造が使われるが、項の文法関係により異なる所有分類詞が使われる。本稿では、どのような所有構文が動名詞節に使用されるのか、また、1 つの動名詞節に対して 2 つ以上の所有構文が使用されることは可能かどうか追求する。