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Possession

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1. Introduction

At first sight, the treatment of possession across Australian languages may appear fairly diverse – especially amongst non-Pama-nyungan languages. However, closer scrutiny reveals interesting family resemblances in forms, as well as remarkable similarities in the semantics of inalienable classes – a domain of notable cultural significance.

Pama-nyungan languages follow a relatively unified ‘prototypical’ pattern. This typically includes an adnominal construction (i.e. marking at the level of the noun phrase) where the dependent is marked (i.e. usually a genitive-like suffix on the possessor); as well as another adnominal construction where neither the possessor nor the possessum are marked for possession, but they share case marking. The latter construction is specialized for inalienable possessions, which, in Pama-nyungan languages, is usually limited to parts of wholes, and this construction is labelled (in the literature and in this chapter) the part-whole construction.

Non-Pama-nyungan languages exhibit different and less consistent patterns – in line with their genetic status. Also in line with their general typological characterisation, non-Pama-nyungan adnominal possessive constructions are more often head-marking, albeit with a range of possible strategies. Few non-Pama-nyungan languages have a part-whole construction as such. However, some have traces of it, and others have clausal constructions (e.g. possessor ascension) that contrast alienable vs inalienable classes of nouns. In a number of languages, possessive constructions delineate more than one class, with some relatively complex systems.

The remaining sections of this introduction will discuss methodology and definitions. Section 2 discusses a feature found in a majority of Australian languages across the Pama-nyungan/non-Pama-nyungan divide, namely proprietive and privative suffixes. Section 3 presents the 'prototypical' Pama-nyungan profile, including the part-whole construction; and Section 4 discusses the broader diversity of patterns observed in non-Pama-nyungan families. Of course, the contrast between Pama-nyungan and non-Pama-nyungan languages is not as strict as the division between sections suggests: some non-Pama-nyungan languages display typically Pama-nyungan features, and vice-versa, and the sections on non-Pama-nyungan trends does discuss Pama-nyungan languages as well. Section 5 brings some reconciliation by discussing the status, form and semantics of possession classes across Australian languages, with an emphasis on their semantic resemblances and on the cultural significance of these resemblances.

1.1 *Language sample*

This study relies upon the existing literature on possession in Australian languages (as cited throughout the chapter), as well as upon a formal sample of 30 Australian languages, 17 from the Pama-nyungan family, and 13 from non-Pama-nyungan families. These language were selected among those with satisfying, accessible descriptions, and in order to constitute a diverse sample relative to genetic affiliation and geography. A table listing the languages and some of their properties with respect to possession is given in the appendix. This is a relatively small sample, yet (as apparent in the examples throughout the chapter) many other languages were considered if not formally included. Combined with insights from previous literature on possession in Australian languages, the typological picture provided by these 30 languages was clear enough that I decided not to extend my formal sample.

1.2 Definitions and labels

My definition of possessive constructions is consistent with Koptjevskaja-Tamm's (2002:141–142) or McGregor's (2009:1), among others. Throughout this chapter, I will use the terms *possessor* and *possessum* to designate the dependent and the head of a possessive constructions (McGregor 2009:2). These expressions refer to syntactic roles as opposed to semantic roles, and can therefore be used independent of the specific semantics of a construction – that is, a syntactic possessor can also be a semantic whole for instance. I follow a conventional distinction between *adnominal* possessive constructions (at the level of the noun phrase) and *clausal* possessive constructions (where possession is expressed via the syntactic roles of the possessor and possessum in the clause) (McGregor 2009:2). Most Australian languages also have predicative possession, i.e. possession expressed by verbs meaning *have*, but this is relatively unremarkable typologically and will not be discussed here for reasons of space. Like Koptjevskaja-Tamm's (2002), I will characterise adnominal constructions according to the type of marking they exhibit: head marked, dependent marked, or unmarked. In Australian languages, where word order is often free in adnominal constructions, this is the most relevant property.

Following Lichtenberk (2009:262), I will use the terms *alienable* and *inalienable* to qualify either possessive constructions themselves, or classes of nouns defined by their morphosyntactic behaviour in possession (i.e. whether they attract alienable or inalienable possessive constructions). I will not use these terms to refer to the underlying *semantic relationality* of the nouns. (Inherently) *relational* nouns are nouns that conceptually imply the existence of a possessor – even if the possessor remains implicit in discourse. For instance, a leg implies a body as its whole; a daughter implies a mother, etc. Relationality is the intrinsic

semantic property of nouns that motivate morphosyntactic distinctions between alienable and inalienable constructions; and therefore, syntactic inalienability suggest that speakers construe a concept expressed by a particular noun as relational. However, inalienability is a syntactic property, not a semantic one, and not all semantically relational words receive special syntactic treatment.

2. Proprietary and privative suffixes

Proprietary suffixes are the most widespread and consistent way of expressing possession across the Australian continent (see Dixon 2002:140–142; 178). A majority of Australian languages have suffixes that express accompaniment (and are sometimes glossed ‘comitative’). This usually includes physical properties, often akin to body parts and the like as in (1) and (2) from Diyari and Gooniyandi; as well as alienable possession, illustrated in (3) for Kuku Yalanji and (4) for Emmi. Some languages have several accompaniment suffixes with various specializations. For instance, Kaytetye and Marra both have proprietary suffixes distinct from the accompaniment suffixes.

Diyari (Austin 1981:42)

- (1) *kaṇa ṇanka-ṇṭa-li ṇaṇa ṇanda-yi*
 man beard-PROP-ERG ISgo hit-PRES

‘The bearded man is hitting me’

Gooniyandi (McGregor 1990:187)

- (2) *ngaragnga goornboo gamoo -ngaddi*
 he:made:it woman breast COMIT

'He painted a woman with breasts.'

Kuku Yalanji (Patz 2002:190)

- (3) *Yinya dingkar kalka-ji kulur-ji.*
 that.ABS(S) man.ABS(S?) spear-COMIT three-COMIT

'That man has three spears.' (lit. is a three-spear owner)

Emmi (Ford 1998:112)

- (4) *mudika=widja nginen+dhe+nunggu*
 car=COMIT 1MIN.SR.sit+wear+hand

'I've got a car.' (TB:1)

Such privative suffixes are reported in 21 languages of my 30 languages sample (and such a suffix may be present albeit omitted for more languages: Dixon (2002:140) states that 'almost every Australian language' has it). This figure includes 11 Pama-nyungan languages out of 17, and 10 non-Pama-nyungan languages out of 13.

Of the 21 languages with privative suffixes, 11 are reported to have privative suffixes as well (and again, some privative suffixes may have been omitted in the sources). Privative suffixes express lack of accompaniment, hence they often translate as negative possession: compare (5) (Kaytetye) and (6) (Dalabon) with (3) and (4) above.

Kaytetye (Turpin 2000:66)

- (5) *Ayenge mwetekaye-wanenye*
 I car-without

'I haven't got a car'

Dalabon (Ponsonnet, own data)

- (6) *Mak nga-bo-niyan, nga-h-murdika-dih.*
 NEG 1sg-go-FUT 1sg-R-car-PRIV

'I can't go, I don't have a car.'

3. The Pama-nyungan profile

As expected given their genealogical proximity, languages of the Pama-nyungan family display more uniformity than non-Pama-nyungan languages. Among the 17 languages considered here, a clear prototypical profile emerges, observed in its strict form in at least 11 languages of the sample (plus some modified versions in two more languages). In these languages, alienable possession is expressed by dependent marking (3.1), and inalienable possession by the so-called 'part-whole' construction (3.2). This corresponds to the main features listed by Dixon's (2002:77–79) – but note that Dixon's account does not clearly distinguish between Pama-nyungan and non-Pama-nyungan trends.

3.1 *Dependent-marking constructions*

Matching the typological profile of Pama-nyungan family, in a majority of Pama-nyungan languages alienable possession is dependent-marked: possession is encoded on the dependent possessive NP that expresses the possessor. If the possessor is expressed by a noun, it usually receives a postposition (a suffix), as illustrated in (4) for Bilinarra. Word order is usually free (with some preferences). These constructions are often called 'genitive' in the literature, however it is regularly the case that the purposive-dative marker is used to encode possession (on the dative-purposive/genitive polysemy, see Simpson in this volume and Nordlinger &

Meakins (2017:151) for instance). The most frequent form of these markers (genitive or dative) is given by Dixon (1980:321) as [gu].

Bilinarra (Meakins & Nordlinger 2013:201)

- (7) *Warlagu=∅ wagi gajirri-wu.*
 dog=3MIN.S white woman-DAT

The woman's white dog. (HW/AN: RN fieldnotes 1990)

In languages where possession is dependent-marked, when the possessor is expressed by a pronoun it can be chosen among the corresponding series (genitive or dative), as in (8) for Bilinarra; or alternatively, pronouns from the cardinal series can be marked by a possessive suffix nouns, as illustrated for Yankunytjatjara in (9).

Bilinarra (Meakins & Nordlinger 2013:201)

- (8) *Baya-rni=wuliny [ngayiny warlagu] jiya.*
 bite-PST=3UA.O 1MIN.DAT dog kangaroo

'He killed my dog and a kangaroo.' (HW/AN: RN fieldnotes 1990)

Yankunytjatjara (Goddard 1985:39)

- (9) *uti-ya katji ngayu-ku wanti-ma*
 SHOULD-3pl (ERG) spear (ACC) 1sg-GEN leave.alone-IMP.IMPRF

'They should leave my spears alone'

Four Pama-nyungan languages have head-marking possessive constructions (see 4.1.1) – whether apposed pronouns (three languages) or possessive suffixes (one language), but in each of these four it coexists with dependent marking.

In languages that display a ‘prototypical’ Pama-Nyungan profile, dependent marking typically expresses alienable possession, i.e. all sorts of semantic categories usually subsumed by descriptors under the label ‘possession’ (see Koptjevskaja-Tamm (Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2002), and Goddard (1985:38–40) for a more detailed discussion for Yankunytjatjara), but not part-whole relationships (or inalienable possession, see 4.1.4 and Section 5). However, in some languages (for instance Kuku Yalanji or Paakantyi) this construction is explicitly reported to be generic. That is, the dependent marking construction *can* express part-whole relationships as well as alienable possession, but the language has *in addition* another construction that expresses part-whole relationships only, to the exclusion of alienable possession.

3.2 The part-whole construction

The Pama-Nyungan languages with dependent-marking constructions typically use a different construction to express part-whole relationships – whether the whole is animate (body parts and other attributes of humans and animals, see 5.2) or inanimate. In this construction, illustrated below for Diyari, Nyawaygi, Warlpiri and Bilinearra ((10) to (13)), the possessor (which can be expressed by a pronoun) and the possessum are not marked for possession. They do not need to be adjacent and word order does not matter. Instead, they share the same case. If applicable (given the grammar of the language and the syntactic status of the noun phrase), the whole is cross-referenced as an argument, as illustrated in (13) and (14) Bilinearra.

Diyari (Austin 1981:139)

- (10) *ŋaʔu puluka kunɟara ŋaʔ-yi*
 1sgA bullock-ABS noise-ABS hear-PRES

'I can hear the sound of cattle moving'

Gumbaynggir (Eades 1979:317)

- (11) *ŋa:ŋa buwa:ŋ ga:li*
 1sg-O hit-PAST head-O

translated as 'He hit me on the head.'
 (Literally '(he) hit my head').

Warlipiri (Hale 1981:334)

- (12) *Nama ka langa-kurra yuka-mi kurdu-kurra.*
 ant AUX.PRES ear-ALL enter-NPST child-ALL

'The ant is crawling into the child's ear.'

Bilinarra (Meakins & Nordlinger 2013:205-206)

- (13) *Nyawa=ma-n baya-la nyundu-lu gangarnda-lu.*
 this=TOP=2MIN.S bite-PRS 2MIN-ERG mouth-ERG

'You're biting it with your mouth (Lit. Your mouth is biting it).'
 (HW/AN: RN fieldnotes 1990: 02:022)

- (14) *Yitt-ba=nggu ma-ni gardbi.*
 pull-EP=2MIN.0 do-PST hair

'He pulled your hair.' (IH: RN90-014b: 02:09 min)

This construction is attested for 11 languages out of 17 Pama-nyungan languages in my sample, as well as in 3 non-Pama-nyungan languages out of 13. It is well-identified in many Australian grammars and its syntax has been discussed in some details, for instance by Hale

(1981) for Warlpiri or McGregor (1985) for the non-Pama-nyungan Gooniyandi (spelt Kuniyanti in this publication). These authors referred to this strategy as the ‘favourite construction’, or the ‘part-whole construction’, and many descriptors have characterized it as an ‘apposition’ construction. This label refers to the fact that the pair of words (possessor and possessum/part and whole) constitute a single constituent, without one or the other being a head (Evans (1995:246; 358) for Kayardild, Reece (1970:85) for Warlpiri, and many others, see Tsunoda (1981:202)). The ground for this ‘apposition’ analysis is mostly that no syntactic properties identify one or the other element as a head. Other authors interpret the same construction as a hierarchical one, with the part as a predicate of the whole (Hale 1981), or the whole as a classifier of the part (McGregor 1985). In the latter analysis, the whole (or possessor) is considered ‘raised’ to be treated as an argument of the verb (see 4.2 on possessor raising and clausal strategies to express possession).¹

The typology of possessive constructions invites us to consider the question from another angle. On the one hand, the part-whole construction may be described as an adnominal possessive construction where neither the possessor nor the possessum are marked – in other words, an adnominal construction where the part-whole relation is expressed by the absence of marking on the constituents (Koptjevskaja-Tamm (Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2002)), contrasting with the overtly marked alienable construction. On the other hand, the same construction may be regarded as a clausal possessive construction. In this analysis, the critical property of the construction is that the possessor and the possessum share the same case and therefore the same syntactic role, with the possessor potentially cross-referenced as an argument – as in (13) and (14) above for Bilinarra. In such contexts, the part-whole construction looks just like

¹ While these discrepancies in description may sometimes reflect differences in the grammar of the particular languages under consideration, some authors have proposed different analyses for the same language (e.g. Reece (1970) and Hale (1981) for Warlpiri).

the possessor-ascension clause constructions that will be described in 4.2. In many Pama-nyungan languages, case can also spread between the possessor and the possessum of dependent-marked constructions ((15), Gumbaynggir) (and case-spreading sometimes occur between the head and some modifiers in other types of NPs). In these languages, the true contrast between the alienable possessive construction and the part-whole construction is therefore the absence of adnominal genitive marking: compare (15) and (16). In this situation, the part-whole construction is thus better described as an adnominal construction that is free of marking. This is also in line with the cross-linguistic tendency for inalienable constructions to reduce the ‘formal distance’ between possessor and possessum (Haspelmath 2017). In languages where case spreading does not apply to other constructions, the part-whole construction may be regarded as clausal as well as adnominal, because the transfer of the case-marked syntactic role of the part to the whole is then also a defining characteristics.

Gumbaynggir (Eades 1979:316-317)

- (15) *yaraŋ ni:gar guḏu:* *niyaŋgidam* *gayi* *ŋaŋundiya*
 DEM man-S LOC DEIC 3pl-S talk-PRES 1sg-GEN-LOC
gagu:ŋumbala
 brother-LOC

‘Those men over there are talking to my brother.’

- (16) *gi:n yari ŋaŋumbala* *ḏa:lbada* *wa:ndiŋ*
 ant-S PART 1sing-LOC arm-LOC climb-PAST

‘The ants were climbing my arm.’

Given their semantic range, part-whole constructions are normally characterized as ‘inalienable’ possession – while dependent-marked constructions are characterized as ‘alienable’ possession. Indeed, parts of wholes, and body parts in particular, are typically

relational concepts, and their relation to their whole is often expressed by the morphosyntactic constructions labelled ‘inalienable’ across the world’s languages. Pama-nyungan part-whole constructions do not apply to kin terms, although kin terms also denote inherently relational concepts, and are a frequent targets of inalienable constructions in the world’s languages (more often than parts of wholes in some regions of the world, see Nichols (1988:572) on South American languages). Yet, in most Pama-nyungan languages, kin relations are expressed by dependent-marked, alienable possessive constructions. As implicitly suggested by Dixon (2002:59;77), calling part-whole relations ‘possession’ does not really match the everyday use of this term. Indeed, this label could reflect the fact that English (the language of description) grammatically collapses part-whole relations with other types of possession – but there may be no good reasons to describe the former as a subtype of the latter for languages that do not merge these concepts in their grammar.

4. Non-Pama-nyungan trends

Apart from the fact that a larger proportion of non-Pama-nyungan languages have proprietive and privative suffixes, in other respects there is less consistency within the non-Pama-nyungan group than within the Pama-nyungan family (consistent with the fact that non-Pama-nyungan languages do not form a genetic family). In my sample, three non-Pama-nyungan languages – Alawa, Gooniyandi and Wambaya – match the ‘prototypical’ Pama-nyungan profile described in Section 3. In the rest of the sample, head-marking is predominant over dependent-marking in adnominal possessive constructions (4.1), and the part-whole construction described in 3.2 is absent. Instead, alienable/inalienable contrasts are sometimes realized by richer systems of contrasting constructions (4.1.3) or by clausal constructions

targeting parts of wholes (4.2). It is not uncommon for kin terms to attract distinctive treatment as well (4.3).

4.1 Adnominal strategies

4.1.1 Head-marking constructions

Among adnominal strategies, head marking is predominant in the sample, occurring in 10 languages out of 13. These strategies are realized by possessive affixes: often suffixes ((17), Dalabon), sometimes prefixes ((18), Njébbana); or by apposed pronouns. These can belong to a special possessive series ((19), Emmi), or to the cardinal or oblique series ((20), Nyulnyul). Word order is often flexible.

Dalabon (Ponsonnet, own data)

- (17) *Nga-h-ni* *nidjarra wadda-ngan* *nga-h-naHna-n,* *marrmo-ngan.*
 1sg-R-sit/be:PRES here home-1sgPOSS 1sg>3-R-look.after-PRES land-1sgPOSS

'I'm staying here I look after my home, my land.'

Njébbana (McKay 1996:311)

- (18) *Ngá-wala* *nga-réndjeya* *Graham.*
 1:MIN-name 1:MIN:S-stand Graham

'My name is Graham.'

Emmi (Ford 1998:131)

- (19) *mudika* *ngangu-gurriny+mede* [*ʔaŋuɣuɣimède*]
 car 1/2.POSS+UAUG

'The car belonging to all three of us (including addressee).'

Nyulnyul (McGregor 2011:157)

(20) *arri mi-li-jid way arriyangk-ang jii kumbarr*
 not 2MIN.NOM-IRR-go away nothing-COM 2MIN.OBL money

'Don't go without your money.'

Many non-Pama-nyungan languages combine several strategies with miscellaneous semantic specializations. For instance, Emmi uses possessive pronouns for all sorts of possession, but cardinal pronouns for emphasis on possession (see 4.1.3 on more complex systems).

4.1.2 *Dependent-marking constructions*

Dependent marking is not entirely absent from the non-Pama-nyungan group. Apart from the languages with a 'Pama-nyungan' profile (see above), dependent marking is found in four other languages in the sample (Ungarinyin, Mangarrayi, Wubuy and Dalabon). However, in most languages it cohabits with head-marking: in Dalabon for instance the genitive suffix on the possessor (dependent) is optional, while the possessive suffix on the possessum (head) is obligatory; in Ungarinyin, dependent marking is limited to certain syntactic contexts, with head marking covering the rest. Some of these languages contrast alienable vs inalienable adnominal constructions. Wubuy for instance, has a dependent-marking construction for alienable possession, but a system of prefixed part terms for part-whole relations.

Wubuy (Heath 1984:546)

(21) *nu-ru-n^y in^y un^g ana-lha:l-waj*
 us[ExPl]-Rel country -Pergressive

'in/around our country' (113.1.3)

- (22) *ni-gubulu-wugij* *wini=ma-ni, na-yanʷjug*
 NA_{der}-body-only they get it tree sp.

'They just get the core of /yanʷjug/ tree' (121.1.7)

4.1.3 Complex systems

Finally, some non-Pama-nyungan languages present more complex systems, with a handful of adnominal possessive constructions and less transparent semantic contrasts. Apart from Ungarinyin in the Kimberley region, such languages are also found in Arnhem Land, where some languages contrast at least four adnominal constructions (mostly head marking, with some nuances). For Njébbana, McKay (1996) reports four basic methods of marking possession. Three of them are head-marking adnominal constructions: cardinal pronoun (A, (23)); prefixes of the verb *réndjeyi* 'to stand' (B, (24)), which therefore compares to a possessive classifier (Lichtenberk 2009); possessive suffixes (C, (25)) and possessive prefixes (D, (26)) (of which there are seven). According to McKay (1996:322), these constructions form a continuum of alienability/inalienability proportionate to the iconic proximity displayed in each construction. However, these semantic distinctions are much fuzzier than standard alienable/inalienable contrasts, so that McKay's semantic claims are perhaps less convincing.

Njébbana (McKay 1996:302-305)

Possessive class A

- (23) *nja-ngáyabba* *kíkka*
 3:MIN:F-1:MIN mother

'my mother'

Possessive class B

- (24) *márnabba* *nga-réndjeya*
 chest 1:MIN:S-stand/be
 'my chest'

Possessive class C

- (25) *marnákarna-njabba*
 rib:bone-1:MIN:POSS
 'my rib bone'

Possessive class D4

- (26) *nga-ngardabbámba*
 1:MIN-liver
 'my liver'

For Nakkara, Eather (1990) describes another complex system with possessive/attributive prefixes attaching to different syntactic bases for different words. Body parts are lexically determined to attract one of four different constructions. Eather (Eather 1990) extracts some semantic coherence to the system, although again not clearly related to semantic relationality.

4.1.4 *Part-whole constructions and their historical traces*

Only three non-Pama-nyungan languages in my sample have a part-whole construction as described in (3.2). They are the ones that display a 'prototypical' Pama-nyungan profile: Alawa, Gooniyandi and Wambaya – all sitting at the periphery of the non-Pama-nyungan areas. In the rest of the sample, juxtaposition is occasionally reported for parts of inanimate and non-human wholes, albeit without the case sharing that is typical of part-whole constructions (see 3.2). However, some languages in the Kimberley region have traces of this construction. In

Nyulnyul and several other languages of the Kimberley region (Nyulnyulan and Worroran families, see McGregor (1996:280–285)), a subset of body parts takes a prefix in possessive constructions – in addition to head-marking oblique pronouns.

Nyulnyul (McGregor 2011:157)

(27) *muj* *nga-ni-ny-juluk* *jan* *nga-marl*
 already 1MIN.NOM-CM-PST-clean 1MIN.OBL 1MIN-arm

‘I have already cleaned my hand.’

(28) *jan* *mukurn*
 1MIN.Obl hair

‘my hair’

McGregor (1996) shows that these prefixes are remnants of former part-whole constructions, which are indeed still present in synchrony in Gooniyandi, also in the Kimberley region. Given the distribution of part-whole constructions and their historical traces in non-Pama-nyungan languages, it is possible that the construction used to be more widespread across non-Pama-nyungan families and is gradually being replaced.

4.2 Clausal marking

A number of non-Pama-nyungan languages have clausal possessive constructions (otherwise called external possession), mostly possessor ascension. In such constructions, when a part is a core participant in a clause, the whole (possessor) is cross-referenced as a core argument of the verb instead of its part (possessum) (Chappell & McGregor 1996). This is illustrated here for Dalabon (Gunwinyguan, non-Pama-nyungan). The portmanteau prefix *djila-*

encodes the action of first person upon second person – hence the second argument is ‘you’, the possessor of the face. If the second argument was the face itself, the prefix would be *yila-*, first person acting upon third person.

Dalabon (Ponsonnet 2015:18)

- (29) *Mak mah dje- ngu djila-na-n kahke.*
 NEG and nose/face-2sgPOSS 1pl.excl>2sg-see-PRES NEG

‘And we can’t see your face either.’

Possessor ascension is understood here as the simple morphological cross-referencing of the possessor on the verb independent of underlying structures (Harvey 1996:127). As we can see, this construction does not cancel adnominal possessive marking (which is still expressed by the possessive suffix *-ngu* in (29)), but nevertheless the possessor is *also* treated as an argument. In Dalabon, possessor ascension is grammatical primarily for parts of wholes, and more marginally for kin terms, but not for other nouns: compare the person prefixes in (30) below with (29) above.² Possessor ascension is therefore a clausal inalienable possessive construction, targeting primarily nouns with relational semantics (Ponsonnet 2015) – just like the part-whole construction in Pama-nyungan languages.

Dalabon (Ponsonnet 2015:18)

- (30) *Bula-h-rorrh-minj wadda-ngu.*
 3pl>3-R-clean-PP home-2sgPOSS

‘They cleaned your house.’

² In many non-Pama-nyungan languages, parts of wholes can also incorporate, and possessor ascension often applies to incorporated nouns. However, in some languages at least, the two phenomena are independent (Evans 1996; Ponsonnet 2015).

Recent data collection in Bininj Gun-wok and Rembarrnga has shown that in these two Gunwinyguan languages closely related to Dalabon, an identical construction targets nouns with the same semantics as in Dalabon (see also Saulwick (2003:327–502)). A comparable phenomenon is also reported in Warray, in the Western branch of the Gunwinyguan family (Harvey 1996). Outside of the Gunwinyguan family, possessor ascension is reported in Nyulnyul (Nyulnyulan). They are also detectable in examples (albeit not explicitly flagged as possessor ascension) in Mangarrayi and in Emmi.

As discussed in 3.2, part-whole constructions have a clausal dimension, and a part-whole construction applied to the core argument of a verb looks just like a possessor-ascension construction. In non-Pama-nyungan languages (and some Pama-nyungan languages that do not have a part-whole construction, like Lardil), possessor-ascension constructions have sometimes been described as single-headed apposition constructions like the Pama-nyungan part-whole construction (Evans 1996:89 for Bininj Gun-wok). While the focus on apposition is relevant from the point of view of syntactic constituency, it is somewhat misleading from the point of view of the typology of possessive constructions. Contrary to part-whole constructions, which are mostly better analysed as adnominal possessive constructions (3.2), possessor-ascension constructions in non-Pama-nyungan languages are better described as clausal. Since in the languages in question possessor ascension often combines with the generic (marked) adnominal possessive constructions, possessor-ascension constructions are not apposition adnominal constructions that contrast with overtly marked adnominal possessive constructions. As evident when we compare (29) and (30), the crucial contrast between inalienable parts of whole and alienable nouns in possessive constructions is the cross-referencing of the whole on the predicate, at a clausal level.

In another form of clausal inalienable possessive construction, an action on one's own body-part is described with a reflexive form of the predicate, as illustrated below for Kriol

(Barunga region). This does not involve possessor raising (which does not occur in Kriol), but does delineate an inalienable possession class targeting parts of wholes: as illustrated in (31) and (32), the construction is grammatical for relational nouns but ungrammatical for others.

Kriol (Ponsonnet, own data)

(31) *ai bin washim mijelp tuth*
 1sg PST wash-TR REFL/REC teeth

'I washed my teeth.'

(32) *ai bin wash-im main jampa*
 1sg PST wash-TR 1sgPOSS jumper

'I washed my jumper.'

**ai bin woshim mijelp jampa*

This type of clausal construction seems to be as frequent amongst Pama-nyungan languages as amongst the non-Pama-nyungan group. Apart from Kriol, in my sample it is reported explicitly in the Pama-nyungan Garrwa, and seems to occur in the non-Pama-nyungan Gooniyandi as well (McGregor 1996:272). Overall, clausal possession is as frequent in Pama-nyungan as in non-Pama-nyungan languages, but in the former, it is often subsumed under adnominal possession, as a special configuration of the part-whole construction.

Garrwa (Mushin 2012:102)

(33) *wakadaba nangk=i mulu*
 wash 3sgREFL=PAST nose

'He wiped his (own) nose.' (lit. 'he wiped himself, nose') (20.8.03.1.ER)

Meakins & Nordlinger (2017) report another type of clausal possessive constructions in the Ngumpin-Yapa subgroup of the Pama-nyungan family: possessor dissension. In this construction, illustrated in (34) for Gurindji, both the possessor and the possessum are encoded as arguments on the predicate (as can be seen from the pair of verbal suffixes). This construction is not limited to relational nouns, and therefore is not an inalienable possessive construction. However, Meakins & Nordlinger (2013) mention that in Bilinarra this construction seems to emphasize the affectedness of the possessor, and is particularly frequent with kin terms (which are relational) and cultural possessions.

Gurindji (Meakins & Nordlinger 2017:144)

(34) [*Ngayiny*_{PSR} *karu*_{PSM}]_{PSP} *ngu=yi*_{PSR=UPSP} *warrngun* *karrinya*
 1MIN.DAT child CAT=1MIN.O=3AUG.S ache be.PST

‘The children of mine were aching.’

4.3 Kin terms

Apart from parts of wholes, another set of relational nouns often treated as inalienable possessions across languages are kin terms (Nichols 1988:572). Accordingly, kin terms receive special possessive treatment in 6 of the 13 non-Pama-nyungan languages in my sample. In most cases, the strategy that expresses the inalienable ‘possession’ of kin terms is distinct from the inalienable construction that applies to parts of wholes. Several languages have special series of person-specific kin terms: this occurs in Wubuy and Mangarrayi in the sample (as well as in other languages from the eastern half of the Top End, such as Gaagudju and Marra). At the western end of the non-Pama-Nyungan region, Ungarinyin and Gooniyandi have kin-specific possessive suffixes, while other adnominal constructions are used for other nouns. In

Ungarinyin, this results in a three-way distinction between alienable possessions (35), parts of wholes (36) and kin terms (37) in possession.

Ungarinyin (Rumsey 1978:64; 70; 98)

(35) *modoga* *bolidjman* - *naŋa*
 'motor car' 'policeman' gen.

'A policeman's motorcar'

(36) *raŋgu* *ŋinaŋa*
 'heart' 'my' sg.

'my heart'

(37) *gayi* - *ŋi*

'my granny' ('granny belonga me')

In some other languages, parts of wholes and kin terms attract the same inalienable possessive strategy. In Dalabon (as in Rembarrnga Saulwick 2003:404), kin terms afford possessor ascension, albeit less productively and systematically than parts of wholes (4.3).

Dalabon (Ponsonnet 2015:30)

(38) *Djila-h-nah-bo-ng.*
 3pl>2sg-R-mother-hit-PP

'They killed your mother.'

In Wambaya, one of the two non-Pama-nyungan languages with a 'prototypical' Pama-nyungan profile, the part-whole construction applies to kin terms as well as parts of wholes. By

contrast, many descriptions of Pama-nyungan languages are explicit that kin terms cannot attract the part-whole construction (3.2). The only exception in my sample is Wirangu. Two other PN languages in this sample have an inalienable possessive construction specialized for kin terms. Bilinarra (which otherwise has a typical Pama-nyungan profile) profile has a head-marked possessive construction (i.e. possessive suffixes) for kin terms, and Diyari has a kin-specific proprietive suffix (Section 2). In total, 3 Pama-nyungan languages out of 17 treat kin terms as inalienable possessions – a much smaller proportion than amongst non-Pama-nyungan languages.

4.4 Inalienability in non-Pama-nyungan languages

To conclude, non-Pama-nyungan languages express the contrast between alienable and inalienable possession in a number of ways, including contrasts between several adnominal constructions, as discussed in 4.1 (e.g. Wubuy); or the availability/unavailability of clausal constructions, as discussed in 4.2 (e.g. possessor ascension in Gunwinyguan languages). In addition, in some languages, differences in the productivity of a construction delineate a distinct category of possession. For instance, as mentioned in 4.2, in Dalabon both parts of wholes and kin terms afford possessor raising, but with the former it is practically systematic, while with the latter it is heavily restricted by syntactic as well semantic conditions. In addition, in some languages, some nouns are ‘obligatorily possessed’: using them outside of an adnominal construction is ungrammatical. This applies to parts of wholes in Dalabon and Mangarrayi (and also to kin terms in Dalabon; see Ponsonnet (2015)).

Dalabon (Ponsonnet 2015:16)

(39) [When a kangaroo is killed; the speaker enumerates the parts being shared around.]

| | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Kodj-no,</i> | <i>woley-no</i> | <i>bula-h-ngabbungabbu-n.</i> |
| head-3sgPOSS | side-3sgPOSS | 3pl>3-R-give:REDUP-PRES |

'The head, the rib sides, people give them away.'

**Kodj, woley bulah-ngabbungabbun.*

While parts of wholes are the most frequent semantic class targeted by inalienable constructions in non-Pama-nyungan languages, kin terms are often targeted as well. They are sometimes grouped with parts of wholes under the same inalienable construction, or alternatively there is a second inalienable construction, resulting in a more complex system. Altogether, with respect to the expression of possession, non-Pama-nyungan languages are more complex and more diverse, both formally and semantically, than Pama-nyungan languages.

5. Inalienability and possession classes in Australian languages

5.1 Possession classes vs noun classes

In a significant majority of Australian languages, two or more possessive constructions contrast to delineate classes of inalienable possessions corresponding to (some classes of) semantically relational nouns. Some form of possession classes are attested for 23 languages out of 30 in my sample, against 4 where we can be confident enough that they are absent (and 3 where it is unclear whether they may have gone unreported). The 4 languages with no inalienability contrast at all are Emmi and Murrinh Patha, both from the Daly family, as well as Nhanda and Paakantyi in other regions. Among the 23 languages with some form of alienable contrast, 13 have a bipartite dichotomy. The others have more complex systems, including at least a third class (often kin terms, 4.3). At least 3 languages from Arnhem Land have more

complex systems of possession-classes: Njébbana, Nakkara (4.1.3) and Dalabon (4.2, Ponsonnet 2015).

In spite of their prevalence across the continent, possession classes are not systematically identified and described as such for Australian languages. They have occasionally been associated with slightly different morphosyntactic phenomena. For instance, Evans (2003:454ff) treats the Bininj Gun-wok possession classes as incorporation classes, which is not inaccurate but somewhat misleading. McGregor (1996:287) specifically discusses Nyulnyul possession classes, however he conflates them with morphological noun classes. As pointed out by Harvey (1996) for Warray, possession classes and morphological noun classes can co-exist, but they are two very different morphosyntactic phenomena. The former are strictly morphologically defined, and their semantic grounds are relatively blurred. The latter are defined by the morphosyntactic behaviour of nouns with respect to possessive constructions, and their semantics is (mostly) transparently based on relationality (Lichtenberk 2009). Although languages with semantically opaque possession classes, like Nakkara and Njébbana, suggest possible historical links between possession classes and morphological noun classes, synchronically these classes are distinct in nature. McGregor (1996)(1996) offers some discussion of possession classes for Nyulnyulan languages, and McKay (McKay 1996) for Njébbana. Harvey (1996:112) distinguished ‘nominal’ (morphological) vs ‘verbal’ (possession-related) noun classes for Warray, and Ponsonnet (2015:3) contrasted Dalabon ‘nominal subclasses’ with morphological noun classes. In spite of these tentative accounts, we lack a unified understanding of possession classes for the Australian continent – although it is evident that the phenomenon is reasonably consistent across languages in both form and semantics.

5.2 *Trans-continental semantic patterns*

In addition to family resemblances in form, Australian inalienable classes are remarkably coherent in their semantics. The primary inalienable semantic domain in Australian languages is that of parts of wholes, followed by kinship. In my sample, when a language has a strict bipartite dichotomy, i.e. a single inalienable construction, it targets parts of wholes. Kin terms are only treated as inalienable if parts of wholes are also treated as inalienable. This contrasts with South American languages where kinship takes precedence over parts of wholes for inalienability (Nichols 1988:572).

I have remained intentionally vague in using the label ‘parts of wholes’ to qualify the primary inalienable possession class in Dalabon. McGregor (1996:257) referred to the ‘representations of the person’ and Ponsonnet (2015) to ‘parts and attributes’ of animates: as a matter of fact, in Australian languages this primary inalienable domain is broader than the label ‘parts of wholes’ suggests. Inalienable parts of wholes typically include parts of inanimates ((40), Alawa) as well as body parts (or organs) of humans ((41), Nyawaygi) and animals ((42), Yukulta). Detachable body parts and bodily products are included as well ((43), for Kuku Yalanji).

Alawa (Sharpe 1972:64)

(40) *n-ala* *guyumu-du* *gutar-iř.*
 he-goes nose-at hill-at

‘He goes along the point of the hill.’

Nyawaygi (Dixon 1983:194)

(41) *muymangu* *nan̄ga nigin* *ma:na* *ya:rin*
 boy-ERG 3sg-0 hand-ABS hold-UNMKD girl-ABS

‘The boy is holding the girl’s hand’

Yukulta (Keen 1983:232)

- (42) *kunawuna-liŋka* *wiṭit^{ya}* *paŋaya* *kiṭili*
 child-they+PAST sit+IND turtle+ERG back+ERG

'The children were sitting on the turtle's back'

Kuku Yalanji (Patz 2002:186)

- (43) *Nyungu* *mungka* *duna.*
 3sg.POSS.ABS(S) hair.ABS(S) wet

'His hair is wet.'

In addition to these strictly physical parts and attributes of wholes, more abstract ones are also included. These are more abstract physical attributes such as voice or noises of animals ((44), Diyari), indices such as tracks ((45), Dalabon), as well as mental attributes such as feelings, spirit or conscience ((46), Yindjibardi), or social attributes such as names ((47), Wambaya) or totems.

Diyari (Austin 1981:139)

- (44) *ŋaṭu* *puluka* *kunṅara* *ŋaṛa-yi*
 1sgA bullock-ABS noise-ABS hear-PRES

'I can hear the sound of cattle moving'

Dalabon (Ponsonnet, own data)

- (45) *Buka-h-bolh-were-mu.*
 3sg>3sg,h-r-track-erase-pres

'He erased his track.'

Yindjibardi (Wordick 1982:144)

- (46) *Ngayi wirrart* *mirtawatyi.*
 I feelings good

'I am in good spirits.'

Wambaya (Nordlinger 1998:136)

(47) *Gayina* *nyamirni* *yurula?*
 what.IV(NOM) 2SG.NOM name.IV(NOM)

'What's your name?'

Abstract attributes of animates commonly reported as inalienable in my sample are, in order of frequency: name, spirit and consciousness, track, voice, feelings, reflection or image (lexically merged with spirit in some languages), and some cultural attributes such as country, language or totems. In some languages that do not treat country and estate as inalienable strictly speaking, these nouns display borderline behaviors suggesting a historical process of creation of a new inalienable class for these items (Ponsonnet 2015; Meakins & Nordlinger 2013).

Overall, Australian languages display remarkable semantic consistency in their treatment of abstract attributes of animates as inalienable. This treatment is reported for at least 9 languages out of the 23 that have an inalienable construction – but it is more than likely that it was often present albeit not reported (it is also reported in many languages not included in the sample such as Warlpiri (Hale 1981), Kayardild (Evans 1995), and see individual chapters in Chappell & McGregor (1996) for more attestations). In my sample, inalienable treatment of abstract attributes of the person seems proportionally more frequent in non-Pama-nyungan than for Pama-nyungan languages, but overall, the phenomenon is widespread through-out the continent, and applies to a very coherent semantic range. The noun 'name' alone is used to illustrate the phenomenon for 7 languages, both Pama-nyungan and non-Pama-nyungan, and as distant as Djuundawu/WakaWaka near Brisbane and Nyulnyul in the Kimberley. The inalienable treatment of abstract attributes of animates is independent of genetic affiliation, and of the type of inalienable possessive constructions: part-whole

constructions (e.g. Wambaya or Bilinarra), head-marking constructions (e.g. prefixing in Wubuy), clausal constructions (e.g. possessor ascension in Dalabon). This may suggest that the semantic coherence of Australian inalienable classes is not inherited but inspired by the semantics of nouns in each language/family independently. This in turn suggests significant consistency in the conceptualization of abstract attributes of animates, including culturally specific concepts that greatly contribute to define the person such as feelings, image, name or totem (Evans & Wilkins 2001; Ponsonnet 2009; McConvell & Ponsonnet 2018).

Appendix

Table 1. Sampled languages and their characteristics. White cells: Pama-nyunga family; grey cells: non-Pama-nyungan group.

| Language | DPDT-MKD | HEAD-MKD, pronouns | HEAD-MKD, affixes | NO MRKG, part-whole | NO MRKG, apposition | CLAUSAL | Proprietary | Kin specific construction | In/alineble cat | abstract attributes reported as inalienable |
|--|----------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------|-------------|---------------------------|-----------------|---|
| LANGUAGES WITH A 'TYPICALLY PAMA-NYUNGAN' PROFILE | | | | | | | | | | |
| Bilinarra (Ngumpin) | Y | | | Y | | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Diyari (Karnic) | Y | | | Y | | | Y + PRIV | | Y | Y |
| Garrwa (Garrwan) | Y | | | Y | | Y | Y | | Y | |
| Gumbaynggir (Gumbaynggari) | Y | | | Y | | | | | Y | |
| Kuku Yalanji (Paman?) | Y | | | Y | | | Y + PRIV | | Y | |
| Muruwari (Muruwaric) | Y | | | Y | | Y? | Y + PRIV | | Y | |
| Nyawaygi (Dyirbalic) | Y | | | Y | | | | | Y | |
| Uradhi (Paman) | Y | | | Y | Y | | Y + PRIV | | Y | |
| Yankunytjatjara (Wati) | Y | | | Y | | | Y + PRIV | | Y | |
| Yindjibarndi (Ngayarda) | Y | | | Y | | | Y | | Y | |
| Yukulta (Tangkic) | Y | | | Y | | | | | Y | |
| Alawa (Maran) | Y | | | Y | | | Y | | Y | |
| Gooniyandi (Bununban) | Y | | | Y | | Y | Y + PRIV | Y | Y | |
| Wambaya (West Barkley) | Y | Y | | Y | | | Y + PRIV | Y | Y | Y |

| Language | DPDT-MKD | HEAD-MKD, pronouns | HEAD-MKD, affixes | NO MRKG, part-whole | NO MRKG, apposition | CLAUSAL | Propriative | Kin specific construction | In/alineble cat | abstract attributes reported as inalienable |
|-------------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------------|---|
| OTHER PROFILES | | | | | | | | | | |
| Dhanggati (Yuin–Kuric) | ?Y | Y | | Y? | | Y (all ERG) | | | | |
| Duunjdjawa (Waka-kabic) | Y | | | | | Y | | | Y | Y |
| Lardil (Tangkic) | Y | | | | | Y | | | Y | Y |
| Nhanda (Kartu) | Y | Y | Y | | | | Y + PRIV | | N | |
| Paakantyi (Paakantyi) | Y | Y | Y | | Y | | Y | | | |
| Wirangu (Thura-Yura) | Y | Y | | unclear | Y | | Y + PRIV | | | |
| Dalabon (Gunwinyguan) | Y but optional | | Y, obligaory | NO | | Y | Y + PRIV | Y | Y | Y |
| Emmi (Daly) | | Y | | | Y | | Y | | | |
| Mangarrayi (Maran?) | Y but ?optional? | | Y obligatory | | | Y | Y + PRIV | | ? | |
| Miriwong (Jarrakan) | | Y | Y | | | | Y + PRIV | | ? | unclear |
| Murrinh Patha (Daly) | | | | | Y | | Y | | N | |
| Nakkara (Burraran?) | | | Y | | | | | | Y | Y |
| Ndjébbana (Burraran?) | | Y | Y, 7 forms | | | | | | Y | |
| Nyulnyul (Nyulnulan) | N | Y | | traces | | Y | Y + PRIV (ptcl) | | traces | Y |
| Ungarinyin (Worrوران) | Y | Y | Y | | | | Y | Y | traces | |
| Wubuy (Gunwinyguan) | Y | | Y | | | | | Y | | Y |

Languages and their sources

- Pama-nyungan family

Bilinarra, Ngumpin (Meakins & Nordlinger 2013)

Dhanggati, Yuin-Kuric (Lissarrague 2007)

Diyari, Karnic (Austin 1981)

Duunjdjawan, Waka-kabic (Kite & Wurm 2004)

Garrwa, Garrwan (Mushin 2012)

Gumbaynggir, Gumbaynggari (Eades 1979)

Kuku Yalanji, Paman? (Patz 2002)

Lardil, Tangkic (Klokeid 1976)

Muruwari, Muruwaric (Oates 1988)

Nhanda, Kartu (Blevins 2001)

Nyawaygi, Dyirbalic (Dixon 1983)

Paakantyi, Paakantyi (Hercus 1982)

Uradhi, Paman (Crowley 1983)

Wirangu, Thura-Yura (Hercus 1999)

Yankunytjatjara, Wati (Goddard 1985)

Yindjibarndi, Ngayarda (Wordick 1982)

Yukulka, Tangkic (Keen 1983)

- Non-Pama-nyunga group

Alawa (Maran) (Sharpe 1972)

Dalabon (Gunwinyguan) (own data)

Emmi (Daly) (Ford 1998)

Gooniyandi (Bununban) (McGregor 1990)

Mangarrayi (Maran?) (Merlan 1982)
 Miriwong (Jarrakan) (Kofod 1978)
 Murrinh Patha (Daly) (Walsh 1976)
 Nakkara (Burraran?) (Eather 1990)
 Ndjébbana (Burraran?) (McKay 1996)
 Nyulnyul (Nyulnulan) (McGregor 2011)
 Ungarininj (Worrوران) (Rumsey 1978)
 Wambaya (West Barkley) (Nordlinger 1998)
 Wubuy (Gunwinyguan) (Heath 1984)

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