

An initial typology of Papuan possession

This paper deals with the structural characteristics of possessive constructions in Papuan languages. While far from comprehensive, this preliminary survey provides a broad picture of the range of attributive and predicative possession strategies employed in the non-Austronesian languages of New Guinea. We adopt the typology laid out in Aikhenvald & Dixon (2012), which distinguishes the order of the possessor (PR) and possessum (PM), as well as the locus of possession, i.e., whether the possessor, the possessee, or both are morphologically marked. We also consider additional parameters identified by Krasnoukhova (2011), including the formal means of marking possession and the nature of the alienability distinction, if one exists.

Languages differ both in terms of the number of possessive constructions and in the semantic domains in which the possessive constructions are used. In Maybrat non-obligatorily possessed nouns make use of the order PM-PR and the possessor is prefixed with the possessive linker *ro-* (1). Obligatorily possessed nouns use the opposite order PR-PM, and the person and number of the possessor is indexed via a possessive prefix on the possessum (2).

- (1) *fane ro-fan*
pig POSS-Yan
'Yan's pig' (Maybrat; Dol 2007: 89)
- (2) *ara m-tis*
tree 3SG-root
'tree's root' (Maybrat; Dol 2007: 87)

In contrast, Moskona employs the same PR-PM order for both non-obligatorily (3) and obligatorily (4) possessed nouns, but the former require a possessive pronoun while the latter index the possessor via a pronominal prefix on the possessum.

- (3) *ejena ofon mamga*
woman 3SG.POSS pestle
'the woman's pestle' (Moskona; Gravelle 2012: 92)
- (4) *i-osnok i-ebirorha*
3PL-person 3PL-skull
'people's skulls' (Moskona; Gravelle 2012: 95)

Yet other Papuan languages, such as Mian, have only a single possessive construction with the order PR-PM, with no marking on either the possessor or possessum (5).

- (5) *éil=e gabáam=e*
pig=SG.MASC head=SG.NC
'a/the pig's head' (Mian; Fedden 2007: 218)

In this paper we attempt to sort this diversity of possessive strategies by providing both a geographic and geneological mapping of possessive structures and their semantics.

References

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