

EXPLORING ALIENABLE—INALIENABLE POSSESSIONS IN YABEN

Infak Insaswar Mayor¹, Yusuf W. Sawaki²

Universitas Papua^{1,2}

mayorinfka5@gmail.com¹, ysawaki@fulbrightmail.org²

Abstract

This article discusses structural and semantic properties of possessive constructions in Yaben, a Papuan language of Trans New Guinea spoken in the South of Bird's Head of New Guinea along the Kaibus River, South Sorong Regency. The purpose of the study is to explore alienable-inalienable possessive distinction in structural and semantic expressions in Yaben. In doing this research, the descriptive method was used, and the data were taken with an elicitation technique. The typological approach is also used as a comparative analysis between Yaben and other Papuan and Austronesian languages in the area. The finding of the study shows that the distinction between alienable and inalienable possessions is obvious at the structural and semantic levels. Two grammatical properties are used to indicate alienable and inalienable possessions, which are morphological and syntactic (phrasal) constructions. The morphological construction and noun-noun juxtaposition are used to mark inalienable nouns: kinship terms, body parts, common nouns, and associative nouns; while the possessive marker *migine* 'POSS' linking the possessor and the possessed noun functions to indicate the alienable noun: whole part relational nouns. Yaben shows a prototypical alienable-inalienable possessive distinction, as do other Papuan and Austronesian languages of Papua.

Keywords: Yaben, alienable, inalienable, morphological and phrasal possessive constructions, noun-noun juxtaposition.

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas ciri-ciri struktural dan semantik dari konstruksi posesif dalam bahasa Yaben, sebuah bahasa Papua Trans New Guinea yang dituturkan di Selatan Kepala Burung Papua Nugini di sepanjang Sungai Kaibus, Kabupaten Sorong Selatan, provinsi Papua Barat Daya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi perbedaan posesif yang tidak melekat (*alienable*) dan melekat (*inalienable*) dalam ekspresi struktural dan semantik dalam bahasa Yaben. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif dan data diambil dengan teknik elisitasi. Pendekatan tipologi juga digunakan sebagai analisis komparatif antara bahasa Yaben dan bahasa Papua dan Austronesia lainnya di wilayah Papua. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa perbedaan antara kepemilikan yang tidak melekat dan yang melekat terlihat jelas pada tingkat struktural dan semantik. Dua properti tata bahasa digunakan untuk menunjukkan kepemilikan yang dapat diasingkan dan tidak dapat dicabut, yaitu konstruksi morfologis dan sintaksis (frasa). Konstruksi morfologis dan penjajaran kata benda-kata benda digunakan untuk menandai kata benda yang melekat: istilah kekerabatan, bagian tubuh, kata benda umum, dan kata benda asosiatif. Penanda posesif *migine* 'POSS' yang menghubungkan pemilik dan kata benda yang dimiliki berfungsi untuk menunjukkan kata benda yang tidak melekat: kata benda relasional seluruh bagian. Bahasa Yaben menunjukkan perbedaan posesif yang tidak melekat dan yang melekat seperti bahasa Papua dan Austronesia lainnya di Papua.

Kata kunci: Bahasa Yaben, posesif melekat, posesif tidak melekat, konstruksi posesif morfologis dan frasa, penjajaran kata benda-kata benda.

INTRODUCTION

Possession is a universal domain and a fundamental concept in all languages, as it shows relationships. It semantically covers a wide range of expressions for possession with various kinds of linguistic properties (Heine 1997, Dixon 2010, Aikhenvald and Dixon 2013, McGregor 2009, Lichtenberk 2002, & Haspelmath 2010). While the concept of possession is found in every language, its realization varies across world's languages. Moreover, possession is somewhat a vague concept, spanning meanings from inherent or inalienable possession to more 'loose' or alienable forms, as exemplified in English.

- (1) This is **my father** (my blood/biological father).
- (2) I work as a manager in **my office** (I am employed at the office and my job is a manager).
- (3) Those are **my books** (I borrowed them from the library).

Although they differ semantically, they are expressed using the same linguistic form in English. Sentence (1) is more inherited or more inalienable, in which the kinship relation shows the tightness of possession (Payne, 1997). Sentence (2), however, is more 'loose' in the possession as it just states the relational possession between a job and its physical building. In (3), although the books belong to the library, one can express it with ownership possession as if they belong to the person.

In other languages, this concept may be expressed in different linguistic realizations. Ambai, an Austronesian language, expresses possession as in (4) and (5) (Silzer 1983: 76 & 81).

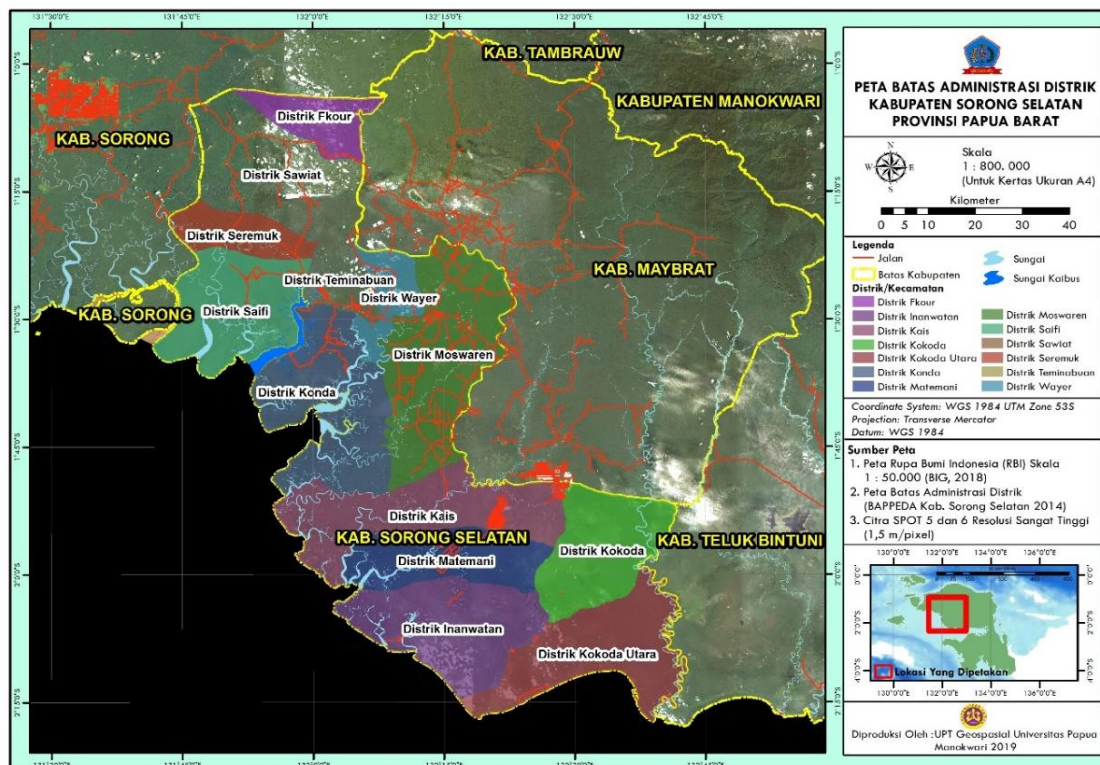
- (4) *tama-mu*
father-2SG
'your father'
- (5) *ta-ne* *munu*
1PL.INC-POSS house
'our house'

Ambai distinguishes between inherited possession and ownership, as well as relational possessions. In (4), the morphological possessive construction shows an inalienable/inherited concept of kinship relation. Sentence (5) indicates ownership/relational concept, which is more loose, so it is expressed in a syntactic construction. Burung (2018, 2023) also provides types of nouns in Wano, a Trans New Guinea language, which are categorized as alienable and inalienable nouns. Alienable nouns include common/proper nouns, concrete nouns, and abstract nouns. Inalienable nouns are nouns that include cultural items, kinship terms, body parts, and physiocognition nouns. The categorization is based on their semantic contents and structural properties that are marked on nouns.

This is to indicate that the concept of possession is universal, but it is applied in any individual language with different linguistic and semantic expressions. This paper aims to describe alienable-inalienable possession and its linguistic expressions in Yaben, a Trans New Guinea language of Papua. The paper covers both the structural and semantic explanations of different constructions found in the language. The explanations include the cross-linguistic comparison of some Papuan and Austronesian languages in Papua to understand the alienable-inalienable possessive distinction in Yaben better.

Before further discussing alienable and inalienable possessive constructions, it is better to introduce the language being studied. Yaben [ISO 639-3: knl] is an endangered and

undescribed language spoken by 1,500 native speakers. Yaben¹ is also known as Konda (see Gordon, 2005). The speakers of Yaben live in several small language communities such as Konda, Wamargege, Simora, Demen, Sisir, scattered around the swampy areas and river basins of Konda and Saifi districts, South Sorong Regency, the province of Southwest Papua (Papua Barat Daya). There are at least two dialects of Yaben: Konda and Sisir dialects. Yaben is a Papuan language belonging to the Trans-New Guinea family. It follows a subject-object-verb (SOV) word order. Unlike many other languages in the Trans-New Guinea group, Yaben exhibits reduced morphological complexity in its verbs. Specifically, its verbs do not mark tense, aspect, or mood, which is a notable departure from the typical patterns found in other Papuan languages. Instead, verb agreement in Yaben may be limited to indicating only the subject and object, though this aspect requires further detailed research. Syntactic structure governs the arrangement of other sentence elements. Notably, Yaben's possessive constructions stand out as an interesting feature of the language.



Map 1. South Sorong Regency and the Yaben speaking area

Yaben is a term the Yaben people normally use to refer to themselves, encompassing their language, culture, and identity. Neighboring groups have their own names for the Yaben: the Tehit call them Ogit or Ogut, meaning ‘people from the sea,’ while the Mugim refer to them as Yaben Origo. The Yaben community is spread across several villages in different regions, so they often specify their subgroup by appending the location, such as Yaben Konda (Yaben from Konda) or Yaben Sisir (Yaben from Sisir). Linguistically, Yaben shares 61% lexical similarity with Yahadian, a language spoken to the east. Today, the Yaben people are Christians and no longer practice their traditional religion, although they did prior to the arrival of Christianity.

Yaben is considered a small and endangered language, as it is seldom spoken by younger generations in everyday life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Let us take a closer look at the semantics of alienable and inalienable possession and how they are expressed linguistically. Possession can encompass a diverse array of relationships between two entities—the possessor and the possessed noun. Semantically, these relationships are described using various terms such as inherent, intimate, part-whole, inalienable-alienable, ownership, and possession (Heine 1997; Haspelmath 2010). Importantly, this broad concept of possession does not always correspond to what is literally understood as ‘actual possession.’ Dixon (2010) states that the range of possession includes the following.

- a. ownership;
- b. whole-part relationship;
- c. kinship relationship;
- d. an attributive of person, animal, or thing;
- e. a statement of orientation or location; and
- f. association.

Like Dixon (2010), Heine (1997) also includes relational spatial concepts such as ‘top of the house,’ ‘bottom of the ship,’ and ‘interior of the building’; physical and mental states such as ‘my strength’ and ‘his fear’ as parts of possessive expression.

Many languages, therefore, use particular grammatical properties to express such semantic concepts. English, for instance, may express this wide range of possession with a simple phrasal possessive construction as in (6), (7), (8), (9), and (10).

- (6) My book (ownership)
- (7) My father (kinship term)
- (8) My hand (body part)
- (9) My teacher (associative)
- (10) At my back (a statement of orientation/location)

In addition, English may also express possession in different kinds of grammatical strategies, such as:

- (11) John’s car ran slowly.
- (12) The door of my house was broken.
- (13) John’s strength is enormous.
- (14) The child of mine has an enormous house.

Even English can also express possession in a possessive predicate as in (15) and (16):

- (15) The book is mine.
- (16) The car belongs to us.

As different grammatical expressions may represent different semantic concept of possession like in English, many studies use different terms to represent grammatical properties of possession, for instance, possessive constructions, possessive markers, possessive structures, possessive sentences, possessive pronouns, direct and indirect possessives, alienable and inalienable constructions, and others (Lynch 1982, Lichtenberk 1985, Tan 2015). Out of these

various terms, there is a common agreement on the semantic concept of possession based on alienability. There are two contrastive terms of alienability: alienable and inalienable possessions. They are defined based on the semantic of dependency, tightness, and iconicity of the possessor and possessed noun relation (see Gebregziabher 2012, Haspelmath 2010). The alienable and inalienable are often used interchangeably for both semantic and grammatical terms.

Alienable-inalienable possessive distinction is widespread among Austronesian and Papuan languages in Papua. It also constitutes various structural properties that indicate possession. In structural properties, it is a straightforward distinction: the possessed noun cannot be separated from the possessor, which is called inalienable, while when they are separated from each other, they are alienable. The separation of the possessor and the possessed noun may be of other grammatical elements that intervene between the possessor and the possessed noun. Heine (1997) argues that inalienable possession can be expressed in the following conceptual domains:

- a. Kinship terms;
- b. Body parts;
- c. Relational spatial concepts, like ‘top’, ‘bottom’, and ‘interior’;
- d. Inherent parts of other items, like ‘branch’, and ‘handle’; and
- e. Physical and mental states, like ‘strength’ and ‘fear’.

In addition, some languages consider concepts like cultural items, such as *house*, *nets*, *spear*, and *canoe*, and sensing-based items, such as *smell*, *hear*, *feel*, and *see*, and parts whole as inalienable. The concepts vary across languages because of culturally specific expressions.

Alienable possession can include items that are not semantically specific, such as common nouns like *stone*, *tree*, *house*, and others. The structural distinction between inalienable and alienable possession is exemplified in Yali, a Trans-New Guinea language, as demonstrated in examples (17) and (18) (Sawaki 2000).

(17) *n-opase*
1SG-father
‘my father’

(18) *na-su*
1SG-net
‘my net’

Superficially, the possessive constructions in (17) and (18) look similar. Yet, they are different: (17) is inalienable, where the construction cannot be separated morphologically. The relation between the possessee *-opase* ‘father’ and the possessor *n-* ‘1SG’ is very tight. Unlike (17), the possessor-possessee relation in (18) is alienable. The possessee *su* ‘net’ can stand by itself as a lexical word and does not necessarily need the possessor *na-* ‘1SG’. The construction as in (18) is necessarily available for expressing possession in what is structurally called the possessive construction.

METHODS

This study is a descriptive linguistic investigation (Himmelmann 1998: 161–164; Tursinaliyevna 2021; Nida 1949). Descriptive linguistics involves conducting research—typically linguistic fieldwork—as an objective examination and analysis of how a language is used, either currently or historically, by its speech community. The data are collected directly from native speakers

through fieldwork, relying entirely on their knowledge of the language. According to Tursinaliyevna (2021: 5), descriptive analysis emphasizes the objective study of language structures by examining forms, functions, and usage across all linguistic levels, including phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics/pragmatics. All types of specific linguistic features—including noun phrases, verbal morphology, word order, serial verbs, relative clauses, stress and intonation patterns, and phonemes—are examined and analyzed as objectively and thoroughly as possible.

This field-work based study was conducted in Konda village, South Sorong Regency, West Papua province, for a month in 2019. The data were elicited using a sentence list of approximately 100 constructions designed to capture the topic of possessive constructions in Yaben. Additionally, a comparative typological analysis was conducted to better understand alienable and inalienable possession in Yaben by examining similar constructions in other Austronesian and Papuan languages. This typological approach focuses on shared linguistic properties related to possessive constructions and aims to provide an in-depth description. To strengthen the analysis, possessive constructions from other languages are included to clarify the distinctions and features observed in Yaben.

RESULTS DAN DISCUSSION

Possessive pronouns

Yaben expresses possessive constructions primarily through possessive pronouns. Functionally, possessive pronouns are used to express the possessor in the possessor-possession relation (see Dixon 2010). Different possessive pronouns are used to express different possessive relations in terms of person (first, second, and third) and number (singular and plural) agreements. Morphologically, the possessor has various allomorphic forms, whether they are free or bound forms. Table 1 describes different possessive pronouns in Yaben, both free and bound possessive pronouns.

Table 1. Possessive pronouns in Yaben

Person/number	Full pronouns	Abbreviated pronouns	Meaning
1SG	<i>nenggi</i>	<i>ne-/n-</i>	my
2SG	<i>egi</i>	<i>e-</i>	your
3SG	<i>minggi</i>	<i>ø-</i>	his/her
1PL	<i>nani</i>	<i>na-/n-</i>	our
2PL	<i>aji</i>	<i>aji-</i>	your
3PL	<i>mingga</i>	<i>ø-</i>	their

Note that the pronouns in Table 1 are grammatically distributed in different syntactic functions of different predicative sentences. They can be subject, object, direct object, and possessor. As possessive pronouns, they are exemplified as in (19)a, b, and (20)a, b.

- (19) a. *nenggi* *noba*
 neggin-oba
 1SG LIG-house
 ‘My house’

- b. *nenoba*
 ne-n-oba
 1SG-LIG-house
 ‘My house’
- (20) a. *nani kaka*
 1PL aunt
 ‘Our aunt’
- b. *nangkaka*
 na-ng-kaka
 1PL-LIG-aunt
 ‘Our aunt’

Sentence (19)a and b, (20)a and b describe two forms of possessors: free (a) and bound (b) pronouns that are available in the Yaben grammar to mark the possessor in the possessor-possessee relation. Note that semantically, there is no difference in meaning in using free or bound pronouns.

The structure of possessive constructions

The structure of possessive constructions in Yaben is determined by the structural relation between the possessor and the possessed noun. There are two possible structures of possessive constructions: syntactic and morphological structures.

<i>Syntactic structure:</i>
1. (NP) + POSSESSOR + POSSESSED NOUN
2. NP + POSSESSIVE MARKER/POSSESSOR +POSSESSED NOUN

Both structures can be illustrated as in (21), (22), and (23):

- (21) *aji syamuso*
 2PL sago.tree
 ‘Your (PL) sago tree’
- (22) *Agus minggi wawo*
 Agus 3SG mother
 ‘Agus’s mother’
- (23) *wio migine weri*
 tree POSS leaf
 ‘The leaf of the tree’

There are two possible syntactic structures in Yaben to indicate possessive constructions. Both are used in different functions, in which (21) is used when the possessor is a pronoun, and (22) and (23) are used when the possessor is a noun linked by the possessor/possessive marker. They form two types of phrasal possessive constructions. The second type is the morphological structure in which the possessor marker attaches directly to the possessed noun, as in (24).

<i>Morphological structure:</i>
POSSESSOR-POSSESSED NOUN
(NP/PRONOUN) POSSESSOR-POSSESSED NOUN

The morphological structures can be illustrated as in (24), (25) and (26).

- (24) *nengkaka*
 ne-ng-kaka
 1SG-LIG-aunt
 ‘My aunt’
- (25) *nengGINE* *nengkaka*
nengGINE **ne-ng-kaka**
 1SG 1SG-LIG-aunt
 ‘My aunt’
- (26) *Agus nangkaka*
 Agus na-ng-kaka
 Agus 1PL-LIG-aunt
 ‘Agus and associates’ aunt’

Sentence (25) shows an alternative structure where the possessor appears simultaneously as both a free pronoun and a bound pronoun within a possessive construction. In this structure, there is an agreement between the free pronoun or NP and the possessor marker in terms of person and number. The inclusory pronouns are a feature of a sentence, as in (26).

A possessive construction in Yaben is best described by its structural properties, specifically the syntactic structure and morphological structure of possessive constructions. The semantic concepts of alienability, dependency, tightness, and iconicity are also described within the scope of structural explanation.

Marking an NP-internal possessive construction

The syntactic structure of possessive construction in Yaben is a noun phrase (NP) possessive construction. Yaben has a pre-nominal modifier in possessive constructions, meaning the modifier, the possessor, is placed to the left of the head noun: the possessed noun. As an NP, it has its NP internal possessive structure. The possessor is the modifier, and the possessed noun is the head of NP, as in (27).

The NP internal possessive structure
MOD + NP HEAD

- (27) *mingga ayo*
 3PL uncle
 ‘Their uncle’

Mingga ‘3PL’ is the modifier of the NP, and *ayo* ‘uncle’ is the head of the NP. As for syntactic function, the phrasal possessive construction functions as an argument, i.e., subject, object, or oblique, as in (28), in which the NP possessive construction functions as the subject of the sentence.

- (28) *NP*[*mingga ayo burtegi* *Teminabuan cowome*
 3PL uncle tomorrow Teminabuan go.FUT
 ‘Their uncle will go to Teminabuan tomorrow.’

The NP possessive construction may also include an NP modifier, and it precedes the possessive marker (POSS) in the NP construction as in (29).

An NP internal possessive construction
NP MOD + POSS + NP HEAD

- (29) *Jon migin wawo*
 John POSS father
 ‘John’s father’

When a noun such as *Jon* ‘John’ in (29) is used as the modifier in the NP, it follows the second type of syntactic structure of possessive construction in which the possessor-possessed noun relation is linked by the possessive marker *migin* ‘POSS’.

In expressing a whole-part relation, the possessor and the possessed noun can take the NP structure with *migin* ‘POSS’ as in (30).

- (30) *kadera migin be*
 chair POSS leg
 ‘The leg of the chair.’

It can also be expressed by having a noun-noun juxtaposition as in (31).

- (31) *kadera be*
 chair leg
 ‘The leg of the chair.’

Both sentences (30) and (31) are not different in meaning. They express a whole-part relation in which the first noun modifies the second noun in the construction.

Agreement marking of possessive constructions

The type of morphological possessive construction in Yaben refers to a construction in which there is an agreement between the possessor and the possessed noun. The possessor agrees with the person and number features as in (32) and (33).

- (32) *nan-te*
 nan- te
 1PL-boat
 ‘Our boat’

- (33) *ebano*
 e-bano
 2SG-fish
 ‘Your fish’

In (32), the possessor *nan-* ‘1PL’ prefixes to the possessed noun *te-* ‘boat’. Semantically, the possessor is the first plural possessor attaching to the possessed noun. It is similar to sentence

(33) in which the possessor marker *e-* ‘2SG’ is the second person singular. It attaches to the possessed noun *bano* ‘fish.’

The agreement also allows a free pronoun to appear in the sentence, and it must agree with the prefixed subject attaching to the possessed noun. In (34), the free pronoun *nengine* ‘I’ agrees with the bound subject marker *ne-* ‘1SG’ on the noun *kaka* ‘aunt’. The agreement shows person and number features.

- (34) *Nenggi-ne neng-kaka*
 I-ART 1SG-aunt
 ‘My aunt’

Predicative possessive constructions

A possessive relation can be reflected in the form of a possessive predicate. In Yaben, a possessive predicate is expressed by two types of predicates, i.e., demonstrative-subject predicate and noun-subject predicate. The demonstrative-subject predicate refers to a predicate in which the subject is a demonstrative pronoun, as in (35)a, b, and (36)a, b.

- (35) a. *e-ne-nano*
 this-1SG-sister
 ‘This is my sister’
 b. *eye ne-nano*
 this 1SG-sister
 ‘This is my sister’
 (36) a. *o-ne-wawo*
 o-ne-wawo
 that-1SG-father
 ‘That is my father’
 b. *owo ne-wawo*
 that 1SG-father
 ‘That is my father’

Note that the words *eye* ‘this’ and *owo* ‘that’ are demonstrative words functioning as the subject of the predicate. They also have alternate forms: *e-* ‘this’ and *o-* ‘that’ used in a similar function as the subject of a predicate, as in (35)a and (36)a. However, in natural speech, native Yaben speakers tend to use the abbreviated forms as in (35)a and (36)a, rather than the full forms as in (35)b and (36)b.

The second type of possessive predicate is the noun-subject predicate. The noun-subject predicate is constructed with the noun in the subject position, and the head of the predicate is the possessive construction consisting of a morphological structure of the possessor, the possessive marker, and the particle, as in (37) and (38).

- (37) *aja owo ne-ne-o*
 dog that 1SG-POSS-PART
 ‘That dog is mine’

- (38) *oba eye na-ne-o*
house this 1PL-POSS-PART
‘This house is ours.’

Note that the head of the predicate *ne-ne* ‘1SG-POSS’ (37) or *na-ne* ‘1PL-POSS’ (38) reflects the possessor and the possessive marker; whereas the subject of the predicate is the noun phrase such as *aja owo* ‘that dog’ and *oba eye* ‘this house’.

The possessor and possessed noun function as subject and verb

In Yaben, a specific possessive construction on nouns has a verbal predicate function. Semantically, nouns referring to body parts can function as verbs of state. In this construction, the possessor grammatically functions as the subject, and the possessed noun functions as the verbal predicate, as in (39) and (40).

- (39) *ne esepya nenetoro suri*
ne e-sepya ne-netoro suri
1SG 2SG-see 1SG-stomach very
‘I saw you, so I am very happy’
- (40) *nesuburu beage*
ne-suburu beage
1SG-neck manner
‘I think in this way’

In (39), the pronoun subject *ne* ‘1SG’ in the first clause is the subject of the clause. While the subject *ne-* ‘1SG’ attaching to the noun *netoro* ‘stomach’ is the subject of the second clause with the verb *netoro* ‘stomach’ that semantically means “happy”. This is also true when looking at the semantic and morphosyntactic constructions in (40). In Yaben, the noun *suburu* ‘neck’, when it is prefixed by the possessor *ne-* ‘1SG’, it carries a verbal predicate meaning ‘I think’. This construction only occurs with inalienable possessive nouns.

This subject-verb relation derives from the possessor-possessed noun relation is a common feature found in languages of Papua both Austronesian and Papuan languages. In Wooi (Sawaki 2016:185, 2021) and Biak (Mofu 2008:127 and Van den Heuvel 2006:239), the same construction is also found, as in Wooi (41) and (42) and in Biak (43) and (44).

- (41) *taramuho masala pai e*
tara-mu-ho masala pa-i e
ear-2SG.PSR-HO problem DIST-SG Q
‘Did you hear the problem?’ (Lit: ‘Did you use your ear to hear the problem?’)
- (42) *hesoho royeang pi hey ne*
he-t-ho-ho royeang pi hei ne
3PL.PSR-PL.nose-HO food DEI smell PRX.NSG
‘They smelled the aroma of food’ (Lit: ‘They use their noses to smell the food’)
- (43) *nusnesna nro i*
nu-sne-s-na n-ro i
1DU.EXC-belly-NSG.AN-3PL.INAN 3.PL.INAN-LOC 3SG
‘The two of us love him.’ (Lit: ‘Our bellies are with him.’)

- (44) *skodonsna* *nasam*
 sko-don-s-na nasam
 3PC-inside-NSG.AN-3PL.INAN 3PL.INAN-hot
 ‘They are angry.’ (Lit: Their inside is hard.)

In Papuan languages, the same construction is also found in Trans New Guinea languages such as Lower Grand Valley Dani (LGVD) and Yali (see Sawaki 2007), as illustrated in (45) and (46).

- (45) *na-mouk* (LGVD, Bromley 1981:147)
 1SG-like/affection
 ‘I like (someone).’ (Lit: ‘My likeness of someone’)
- (46) *h-oluk* (Yali, Sawaki 2007)
 2SG-know
 ‘You know’ (Lit: ‘your knowledge’)

This grammatical property may be considered as a substract feature of Papuan and Austronesian languages in the New Guinea area.

Alienable and inalienable possessive distinction in Yaben

The concept of alienability is the concept in the possessive relationship that indicates the alienable and inalienable distinction (Candra and Kumar 2012). Following Lichtenberk (2009:262), the terms alienable and inalienable are qualified to either possessive constructions themselves, or classes of nouns defined by their morphosyntactic behavior in possession (i.e., whether they attract alienable or inalienable possessive constructions). Semantically, both alienable and inalienable refer to the underlying semantic relationality of the nouns. Inalienable relational nouns are nouns that conceptually imply the existence of a possessor, even if the possessor remains implicit in discourse. In other words, inalienable nouns refer to nouns that are inherently possessed. For instance, a leg implies a body as its whole; a daughter implies a mother, and others. This refers to inalienable possession. Whereas nouns that relationally show or indicate a semantic gap of possession between the possessor and the possessed noun are called alienable possession, such as my house, the book of mine, and my office, which cannot be possessed inherently.

The distinction between alienable and inalienable possessions in Yaben is obvious. Nouns classified as alienable and inalienable are tracked down following their structural properties as in Table 2.

Table 2. Alienable and inalienable nouns by the structural properties

Alienable nouns	Inalienable nouns
Whole part relational nouns	Body parts
	Kinship terms
	Associative nouns
	Common nouns

Two structural features indicate the alienable and inalienable possession distinction, i.e., the possessive marker between the possessor and the possessed noun and noun-noun juxtaposition. The alienable possession is represented by the following structure:

The structure of alienable possessive construction

POSSESSOR + POSSESSIVE MARKER + POSSESSED NOUN

The structure shows that alienable is marked by the possessive marker *migine* 'POSS' that is placed in between the possessor and the possessed noun as in (47), (48), and (49).

(47) *oba migine omoro*
 house POSS door
 'the door of the house'

(48) *kadera migine be*
 chair POSS leg
 'the leg of the chair'

(49) *wio migine weri*
 tree POSS leaf
 'the leaf of the tree'

The alienable possession only occurs with the whole part relational nouns as in (47), (48), and (49). However, in a restricted case for conversational purposes, there is an optional structure in which the whole part nouns can be structured by noun-noun juxtaposition as in (50).

(50) *wio weri*
 tree leaf
 'the leaf of the tree'

Inalienable possession, on the other hand, is represented in the following structure.

The structure of inalienable possessive construction

NP_[POSSESSOR] NP_[POSSESSED NOUN]

The possessor and the possessed noun are juxtaposed, in which the possessor immediately follows the possessed noun, as in (51)a and (53). Besides, the prefixed possessor attaches to the possessed noun in the morphological form as in (51)b and (52).

(51) a. *nani wawo*
 1PL father
 'our father'

b. *na-wawo*
 1PL-father
 'our father'

(52) *ne-ayo*
 1SG-uncle
 'my uncle'

(53) *mingga ayo*
 3PL uncle
 'their uncle'

All kinship terms are categorized as inalienable possessive nouns. Other nouns that are inalienably possessed are common nouns, associative nouns, and body parts, as in (54) and (55).

- (54) *neng-sio*
1SG-sago
'my sago'
- (55) *ne-rebu*
1SG-hand
'my hands'

When an NP functions as the possessor, the pronoun may appear together with the NP as a phrasal inclusory construction in the noun-noun juxtaposition structure, as in (56) and (57).

- (56) *Jon minggu wamo*
John 3SG mother
'John's mother'
- (57) *Agus nang-kaka*
Agus 1PL-aunt
'Agus and associates' aunt'

The alienable-inalienable distinction is also found in many languages of Papua with various grammatical features. In many Austronesian and Papuan languages in Papua, the alienable-inalienable possessive distinction is transparently marked at the structural level. There is a correlation between structural and semantic concepts of alienable and inalienable possession. For instance, Yali, a Trans New Guinea language of the Dani family, has a clear distinction between alienable and inalienable possession at the morphological level. Kinship terms like father, mother, and child, and body parts such as hand, head, and finger are inalienably possessed. The possessor-possessed noun is morphologically bound. They cannot be separated as in Table 3.

Table 3. The paradigm of inalienable possessed noun in Yali (Sawaki 2007)

Person/number	<i>-ikni</i> 'father'		<i>-unggul</i> 'head'	
1SG	<i>nikni</i>	'my father'	<i>nunggul</i>	'my head'
2SG	<i>hikni</i>	'your father'	<i>hunggul</i>	'your head'
3SG	<i>ikni</i>	'his/her father'	<i>unggul</i>	'his/her head'
1PL	<i>ninikni</i>	'our father'	<i>ninunggul</i>	'our heads'
2PL	<i>hinikni</i>	'your(pl) father'	<i>hinunggul</i>	'your(pl) heads'
3PL	<i>inikni</i>	'their father'	<i>inunggul</i>	'their heads'

Like Yali, other Papuan languages such as Lover Grand Valley Dani (Bromley 1981), Sentani (Cowan 1951), Maybrat (Dol 2007, Waren 2007) take a morphological property to indicate inalienable possession.

In contrast, the alienable possession is formed from independent words when showing possession. Yali has the following alienable construction as in Table 4.

Table 4. The paradigm of alienable possession in Yali

Person/number	<i>su</i> ‘net’		<i>pusie</i> ‘axe’	
1SG	<i>nasu</i>	‘my net’	<i>napusie</i>	‘my axe’
2SG	<i>hasu</i>	‘your net’	<i>hapusie</i>	‘your axe’
3SG	<i>asu</i>	‘his/her net’	<i>apusie</i>	‘his/her axe’
1PL	<i>ninasu</i>	‘our nets’	<i>ninapusie</i>	‘our axes’
2PL	<i>hinasu</i>	‘your(pl) nets’	<i>hinapusie</i>	‘your(pl) axes’
3PL	<i>inasu</i>	‘their nets’	<i>inapusie</i>	‘their axes’

Alienable nouns in Yali, like *su* ‘net’ and *pusie* ‘axe’, are semantically common nouns that have an independent form and meaning. Lexically, they are independent words. When they are possessed, they take the same morphological construction as the inalienable nouns, but the possessor does not behave as that of inalienable possession. The same semantic behavior of alienable possession occurs in LGVD (Bromley 1981), Wano (Burung 2018, 2023) and other Papuan languages.

Another Papuan language, Abun (Berry 1997), a West Papuan language group in the Bird’s Head of Papua, applies noun-noun juxtaposition to indicate inalienable possession as in (58) and (59).

(58) *wo kwai tik Sepenyel gwes.*

fish kwai pull Sepenyel leg

‘The Kwai fish pulled Sepenyel’s leg.’

(59) *men sorom men syim. Men sorom syim mo nu.*

1PL shake 1PL hand 1PL shake hands LOC house

‘We shook hands. We shook hands in the house.’

Nouns that can take the inalienable possessive construction, as in (58) and (59), are body parts and whole-part relational nouns. Other nouns take the alienable possessive construction. Abun may apply an alienable possession by having the possessive marker *bi* ‘POSS’ in between the possessor and the possessed noun, as in (60).

(60) *an bi nggon jam nde to.*

3sG POSS wife know NEG INCOMPL

‘His wife didn’t know yet.’

The possessive marker *bi* ‘POSS’ is semantically a marker to function to tie up the possessor and the possessed noun, which cannot be formed by noun-noun juxtaposition as that of inalienable possession.

Likewise, Wooi (Sawaki 2016), an Austronesian language of the Yapen group, also indicates that inalienable possession is marked by morphological property as in (61) and (62). However, the language has quite a complex construction at the semantic and structural levels (Sawaki 2016)ⁱⁱ. For simplicity, the alienable and inalienable terms are used to refer to Wooi examples as in (61), (62), (63), and (64).

semantic and structural properties of alienable and inalienable possession are obvious, some optional constructions occur. However, optional constructions are restricted.

As a Papuan language, Yaben reflects a common feature of alienable-inalienable possessive distinction as found in many Papuan languages such as Yali (Sawaki 2007), LGVD (Bromley 1981), Wano (Burung 2018, 2023), Sentani (Cowan 1951), Abun (Berry 1995), and others. The same distinction is also found in many Austronesian languages such as Woi, Ambai, Wandamen, Ambel, and many others; although Austronesian languages may be described differently at the structural level (see Silzer 1983, Gasser 2014, Sawaki 2016, and Arnold 2018).

NOTE

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ⁱ Yaben is the native name referring to a language and its speakers living in Konda village, along the bank of Kaibus River in South Sorong regency. Many literature such as the ethnologue of languages of the world published by SIL uses the term Konda to refer to this language and people. However, Konda is the name of the village when Yaben people live. In this village, it is not only Yaben people living there, but also there are Tehit people that have been living together with Yaben for several centuries. Thus, in the whole Skrispi, I will prefer to use the term Yaben to address the language and the people that are previously referred as Konda. Konda is also used but it refers to the village name.

ⁱⁱ In Sawaki (2016), the expressions of possession in Woi are described at the structural level so the terms used are different, which are direct and indirect possessive constructions, rather than alienable and inalienable possessions. He defines alienable and inalienable possession as the terms used in semantic level, although many (Cowan 1955, Silzer 1983, van den Heuvel 2006, Mofu 2008, van den Berg 2009 and Gasser 2014) use the terms to describe languages in the area.