

## 58. Obligatory Possessive Inflection

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### 1. Bound "inalienables"

In many languages with head-marked possession (see chapter 24) some nouns obligatorily require possessive inflection and cannot be used alone. For example, the nouns illustrated in (1) and (2) from Navajo (Athabaskan; New Mexico and Arizona) and Acoma (Keresan; New Mexico) cannot stand alone and require possessive inflection.

(1) Navajo (Young and Morgan 1987: 3)

<i>-be'</i>	'milk'
<i>bi-be'</i>	'her milk'

(2) Acoma (Miller 1965: 160)

<i>-jáʒa</i>	'horn'
<i>záʒa</i>	'his horn'

These are often called *bound nouns*; here we use the more cumbersome but more precise term **obligatorily possessed nouns**. The opposition of obligatorily to optionally possessed nouns is often referred to as a distinction between “alienable” and “inalienable” possession (terminology that is also used in several other senses, one of them mentioned below).

In practical dictionaries obligatorily possessed nouns are usually cited in one or another of the possessive forms (see, for example, Young and Morgan 1987: 2–3 for discussion of which possessive form is used for which nouns in the Navajo dictionary: third person singular for kin terms, unspecified/inanimate possessor for nouns such as body parts that might belong to an animal). In scientific works they are

often cited in stem form with a hyphen (e.g. Miller 1965 for Acoma, citing the examples in (3) below). The main map shows languages for which obligatorily possessed nouns are reported.

@	1. Obligatorily possessed nouns exist	43
@	2. No obligatorily possessed nouns	201
	total	244

Note that obligatorily possessed nouns are not simply nouns that are usually or prototypically used with a possessor, like English *hand* or *sister*; they are words for which an inflectional category of possession is obligatorily present, and which cannot be self-standing. We found examples of obligatorily possessed nouns only in languages where possession is head-marked in the form of affixal morphology.

Languages with obligatorily possessed nouns often provide means of using these nouns independently without a possessor. Quite often the regular possessive inflectional paradigm includes an "indefinite" or "unspecified" possessor category 'someone's, something's', e.g. Navajo *'a-be* [UNSP-milk] 'something's milk, someone's milk, some animal's milk', which is more or less equivalent to English *milk* by itself. Other languages have derivational processes that turn obligatorily possessed nouns (or some of them) into nouns that need not be possessed, which we will call **optionally possessed nouns** (they could also be called *free*, or *self-standing*, in opposition to *bound*). An example is Acoma, illustrated in (3) below, in which 38 of the many obligatorily possessed nouns form corresponding optionally possessed nouns.

(3) Acoma (Miller 1965: 160–161)

bound stem	derived free noun	
– <i>áwíc'i</i>	<i>wíc'ini</i>	'chest'
– <i>ánásgai</i>	<i>nasgâini</i>	'head'
– <i>'áadák'a</i>	<i>háadák'ani</i>	'heel'

<i>-’ásdi’i</i>	<i>h’ aasdí’ini</i>	'foot'
<i>-jaza</i>	<i>háçani</i>	'horn'

(All of these pairs, including 'horn', involve regular morphophonemic alternation.) Commonly for derivationally produced optional possessibility, and sometimes for inflectionally produced optional possessibility, the secondary free noun can then itself be inflected for possession, producing a semantic difference that is sometimes described in the literature as an opposition of "alienable" to "inalienable" possession. Examples are in (4) and (5): the first line of each example is the "inalienable" and the third line is the "alienable".

(4) Navajo (Young and Morgan 1987: 3)

possessed:	<i>bi-be’</i>	'her milk (from her own breasts)'
unspecified possessor:	<i>a-be’</i>	'something's milk'
possessed unspecified:	<i>be-a-be’</i>	'her (store-bought) milk'

(5) Acoma (Miller 1965: 160–161)

possessed:	<i>záça</i>	'his horn' (e.g. a stag's own horn)
derived free noun:	<i>háçani</i>	'horn', 'a horn'
possessed free noun:	<i>k’aháçani</i>	'his horn' (e.g. a horn belonging to a person)

Obligatorily possessed nouns are found chiefly in the Americas, where they are very common. "Alienability" oppositions like those in (4)–(5) are reported for a number of American languages, chiefly for body-part nouns and (in our sample) only in languages with the inflectional and/or derivational means to produce optionally possessed counterparts to obligatorily possessed nouns.

## 2. Possessive nouns

The typological antithesis to obligatorily possessed nouns is nouns that cannot take the head-marked possessive inflection available in the language. There are a number of languages with such non-possessible nouns in our sample, and most of these languages have nouns conventionalized or grammatically specialized for use in apposition to the possessed noun and bearing the inflectional possessive marking which the head noun cannot bear. For instance, in Guaraní (Tupi-Guarani; Paraguay), various nouns including animal names cannot take the usual head-marked possessive inflection. In the event that possession needs to be expressed for such a noun, one or another abstract or generic noun is put in apposition to the semantically possessed non-possessible, and that abstract or generic noun is inflected for possession:

(6) Guaraní (Jensen 1998: 503)

<i>mamaz</i>	<i>r-eimaw</i>	<i>zapukaz</i>
mother	POSS.LINK-pet	chicken
'mother's chicken'		

The head noun 'chicken' is grammatically non-possessible, though as the example indicates its referent can be owned, showing that non-possessibility is a grammatical rather than a purely semantic property. The formally possessed generic noun 'pet' is a more or less conventional choice in this construction. Such nouns will be called **possessive nouns** here.

In most languages with possessive nouns, there is a small and closed set of nouns grammaticalized for such usage, and their semantics amounts to classification of possessive relations (so that possessive nouns are also referred to as **possessive classifiers**). Chichimeca-Jonaz, for instance, has a set of four possessive classifier nouns (themselves obligatorily possessed) used with non-possessibles and classifying them as food, clothing, animals, and things (Lastra de Suárez 1984: 25). A few

systems are more elaborate. For Kariri (Macro-Ge; Brazil), Rodrigues (1999: 191) describes a set of 12 generic nouns that classify possession by the origin of the possessive relationship: found, raised from seed, received as a gift, received in a regular partition of goods, etc. Panare (Carib; Venezuela) has 21 possessive classifiers which mostly reflect the shape, function, purpose, etc. of the possessed noun (Aikhenvald 2000: 128, citing Carlson and Payne 1989: 19). Maricopa (Yuman; Arizona) has a two-classifier system (in addition to two "inalienable" classes), one for animals and one for all other nouns. Luiseño (Uto-Aztecan; California) has only one classifier, used for animals, as well as obligatorily possessed nouns and nouns which may be possessed or not (Kroeber and Grace 1960: 82–83). The possessive classifier systems of the Americas almost always include a dedicated classifier for animals.

Another language which, like Guaraní, uses more or less conventionalized generic nouns for possession of non-possessibles is Washo (isolate; Nevada), which also has a derivational prefix that creates derived possessibles from other non-possessibles (Jacobsen 1964: 408, 468). Non-possessible nouns are also reported for Hixkaryana (Carib; Brazil), the Arawakan family of South America, and Tzutujil (Mayan; Guatemala) without explicit indication of whether conventionalized generic nouns can be used to make them possessible. The non-possessible nouns in all of these languages seem to be smallish, closed or specifiable classes, and they almost always include names of animals. In Kiowa (Kiowa-Tanoan; Oklahoma etc.) body-part nouns cannot take possessive marking but require their possessor to appear as an external possessor.

Appositive possessive nouns are especially well studied for the Oceanic languages (see Lichtenberk 1983b). For example, in Paamese (Vanuatu), there are four possessive nouns which classify the possessive relation as intended for drinking, intended for eating, legally constituted ownership, and use or

manipulation. That the choice is not a matter of gender or declension classification by the head noun is shown by examples like (7), in which the same head noun *ani* 'green coconut' can be used with all four possessive nouns depending on the purpose or social basis of the possession.

(7) Paamese (Crowley 1982: 60)

The interlinears 'POT[able]', 'ED[ible]', 'LEG[ally constituted ownership]', and 'MAN[ipulable]' label Crowley's four semantic types.

- a. *ani*                      *ma-k*  
coconut                  POSS.POT-1 SG.POSS  
'my green coconut' (speaker intends to drink the juice)
- b. *ani*                      *aa-k*  
coconut                  POSS.ED-1 SG.POSS  
'my green coconut' (speaker intends to eat the meat)
- c. *ani*                      *sa-k*  
coconut                  POSS.LEG-1 SG.POSS  
'my green coconut' (e.g. growing in speaker's plantation)
- d. *ani*                      *ona-k*  
coconut                  POSS.MAN-1 SG.POSS  
'my green coconut' (speaker will use it as an implement, e.g. to flatten something)

Fijian has a semantically and formally similar three-way opposition (Dixon 1988: 120ff.). Pohnpeian (Micronesia) has a large and possibly open set of possessive classifiers (Rehg 1981: 179ff. lists 21 important ones).

The inset map shows the numbers of possessive nouns in the ten languages in which we found them.

@	1. None reported	234
@	2. One	3
@	3. Two to four	4

@ 4. Five or more	3
total	244

### Values of Map 58A. Numbers of Possessive Nouns

[Map 58A about here]

(The numbers of possessives actually attested are one, three, four, 12, and 21.) Included are the possessive classifier systems like those of Paamese, Fijian, Chichimeca–Jonaz, etc. as well as the use of generic nouns with non–possessibles. Classificatory possessive noun systems are a Pacific Rim feature (exclusively so in our sample; Aikhenvald 2000: 130 mentions one African language), and are particularly well developed at the far extremes of the Pacific Rim: in the outer Pacific islands (e.g. Pohnpeian, mentioned above) and South America, especially Amazonia.

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