Possessive constructions in Ambel:
An areal and historical perspective

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The project:

- **Aim:** to document and describe the Ambel language
- **Using** naturalistic and elicited data
- **Data** collected in Ambel-speaking villages in early 2014
- **These results** are preliminary...
  - ...but this is the first full systematic study of Ambel.
Today’s talk:

1. Language background

2. Demonstrate the typologically complex system of possessive morphology in Ambel
   - Person/number marking
   - Alienability

3. Discussion:
   - Ambel possessive constructions an areal context;
   - Other factors contributing to the development of the Ambel possessive construction.
Language background
Language background

- Around 1000 speakers

- Genetically Austronesian (South Halmahera-West New Guinea, Raja Ampat)...

- ...but heavy influence from the non-Austronesian, Papuan languages of the area.
Language background
Possessive constructions in Ambel

• How a possessive relationship is marked in Ambel depends on two factors:

1. The person and number of the possessor;

2. Whether the possessed noun is alienable or inalienable.
Person/number marking in possessive constructions

- Four-way person distinction with non-singular possessor:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person/number</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1PL.INC</td>
<td>tanin boki</td>
<td>‘our cat (including you)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1PL.EX</td>
<td>amanin boki</td>
<td>‘our cat (not including you)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2PL</td>
<td>manin boki</td>
<td>‘your (PL) cat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3PL</td>
<td>lanin boki</td>
<td>‘their cat’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Person/number marking in possessive constructions

- Four-way number distinction:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person/number</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2SG</td>
<td>nima boki</td>
<td>‘your cat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2PL</td>
<td>manin boki</td>
<td>‘your (PL) cat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2DU</td>
<td>moumanin boki</td>
<td>‘you two’s cat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2TR</td>
<td>matumanin boki</td>
<td>‘you three’s cat’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Indirect possessive marking

(1) yene naka boki pa
 1SG POSS.1SG cat DEM
  ‘my cat’

(2) Otera ne boki pa
   Wolter POSS.3SG cat DEM
   ‘Wolter’s cat’
Possessive paradigms in Ambel: *boki* ‘cat’

- **Singular:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>SG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>naka</td>
<td>boki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>nima</td>
<td>boki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>ne</td>
<td>boki</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Possessive paradigms in Ambel: *boki* ‘cat’

- **Non-singular:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>number</th>
<th>person</th>
<th>DU</th>
<th>TR</th>
<th>PL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.INC</td>
<td></td>
<td>tuta-’ni-n boki</td>
<td>tu'ta-’ni-n boki</td>
<td>ta-ni-n boki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.EXC</td>
<td></td>
<td>oma-’ni-n boki</td>
<td>atuma-’ni-n boki</td>
<td>ama-’ni-n boki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>mouma-’ni-n boki</td>
<td>matuma-’ni-n boki</td>
<td>ma-’ni-n boki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>ula-’ni-n boki</td>
<td>atula-’ni-n boki</td>
<td>la-’ni-n boki</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Inalienable vs. alienable nouns

- In some languages, a semantic distinction is made between inalienable nouns and alienable nouns.

- **Inalienable** nouns: a possessive relationship is intrinsic to the meaning.
  
  - The possessive relationship cannot easily be conceived of as being terminated.
  
  - Terms for body parts and kin relationships (e.g. ‘hand’, ‘nose’, ‘mother’, ‘son’); perhaps some culturally important items.
INALIENABLE vs. ALIENABLE nouns

- *Alienable* nouns: a possessive relationship is not intrinsic to the meaning.

  - A possessive relationship can easily be conceived of as terminating, e.g. ‘money’, ‘cat’, ‘bottle’.

- The semantic distinction between *alienable* and *inalienable* nouns is mirrored in the morphology.
INALIENABLE possessive marking

• Marked directly, by affixation on the possessed noun:

(3) yene su-k ne
1SG nose-POSS.1SG DEM
‘my nose’

(4) boki pa nyai-∅ pa
cat DEM stomach-POSS.3SG DEM
‘the cat’s stomach’
Inalienable vs. alienable nouns in Ambel

- **Singular:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person/number</th>
<th>Alienable (‘cat’)</th>
<th>Inalienable (‘nose’)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1SG</td>
<td>naka boki</td>
<td>su-k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2SG</td>
<td>nima boki</td>
<td>su-m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3SG</td>
<td>ne boki</td>
<td>su-∅</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Inalienable vs. Alienable nouns in Ambel**

- **Dual:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person/number</th>
<th>Alienable ('cat')</th>
<th>Inalienable ('nose')</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1DU.INC</td>
<td>tuta-'ni-n boki</td>
<td>tu-'su-n-i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1DU.EXC</td>
<td>oma-'ni-n boki</td>
<td>um-su-n-i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2DU</td>
<td>mouma-'ni-n boki</td>
<td>mum-su-n-i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3DU</td>
<td>ula-'ni-n boki</td>
<td>u-su-n-i</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Inalienable vs. Alienable nouns in Ambel**

- **Trial:**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Person/number</th>
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<th>Inalienable (‘nose’)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1TR.INC</td>
<td>tu'ta-ni-n boki</td>
<td>'tu-su-n-i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1TR.EXC</td>
<td>atuma-ni-n boki</td>
<td>atum-su-n-i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2TR</td>
<td>matuma-ni-n boki</td>
<td>matum-su-n-i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3TR</td>
<td>atula-ni-n boki</td>
<td>atu-su-n-i</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Inalienable vs. alienable nouns in Ambel

- **Plural:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person/number</th>
<th>Alienable (‘cat’)</th>
<th>Inalienable (‘nose’)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1PL.INC</td>
<td>ta-ni-n boki</td>
<td>su- n-i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1PL.EXC</td>
<td>ama-ni-n boki</td>
<td>am-su-n-i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2PL</td>
<td>ma-ni-n boki</td>
<td>mim-su-n-i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3PL</td>
<td>la-ni-n boki</td>
<td>su- n-i</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The linguistic area of Eastern Nusantara

- Klamer (2002); Klamer et al. (2008); Reesink (1998)
The linguistic area of Eastern Nusantara

- Characterised by:
  
  - SVO word order, prepositions
  
  - Sentence-final negation and sentence-final aspect markers
  
  - Morphological distinction between alienable and inalienable nouns ✓
  
  - Inclusive/exclusive distinction in 1st person non-singular ✓
  
  - ‘Papuan’-type person/number marking ✓
The origin of the Ambel possessive constructions

- Diffusion, yes, but...

- **Inheritance** has also played a role.
The origin of the Ambel possessive constructions

- The INCLUSIVE/EXCLUSIVE distinction: Proto-Austronesian.
The origin of the Ambel possessive constructions

- The ALIENABLE/INALIENABLE distinction:

  not Proto-Austronesian.

BUT:

- This distinction is found throughout SHWNG languages, and its sister branch, Oceanic.

- The distinction can therefore be reconstructed to Proto-Eastern Malayo-Polynesian.
The origin of the Ambel possessive constructions

• The person/number agreement is unusually complex compared with other Raja Ampat languages.

• Is Ambel more conservative than the other Raja Ampat languages for which we have data (Ma’ya and Matbat)?

  • Possibly.

• Or is this the result of influence from a now-extinct Papuan substrate? (cf. Remijsen, 2001: 104).

• Difficult to say without more data from Raja Ampat languages.
Conclusions

• Ambel is of considerable interest:
  • Nearly all person/number combinations attested in natural language are expressed in possessive constructions:
    • Four-way person distinction in non-singular numbers (1.INC, 1.EXC, 2, 3)
    • Four-way number distinction (singular, dual, trial, plural)
  • Morphological distinction between alienable and inalienable nouns
Conclusions

- These new data from Ambel provide further support for the hypothesis of a linguistic area in Eastern Nusantara.

- The possessive constructions attested in Ambel today are the result of a complex interaction of diffusion, inheritance, and possible influence from a Papuan substrate.
References


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