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The structures of two nominal possessive constructions in Pagu[1]

Abstract:
There are two different kinds of nominal possessive constructions in Pagu: predicative and non-predicative, illustrated by (1) and (2) below respectively.

(1) A.   *o*   *Tili to*   *una*   *awi-eya*
            NM   Tili PSR.M   3SM   POSS.3SM-father
            'Tili's father' lit. 'Tili his father'
     B.   *awi-eya*
            'his father' (where 'his' refers to Tili's)

(2) A.   *o*   *Tili*   *ma eya*   B.   *ma*   *eya*
            NM   Tili   PM father   PM   father
            'Tili's father' or 'father of Tili'   '(the) father' (of Tili)

The former is called 'predicative' because the head noun, the possessed noun *eya* 'father' behaves just like a one-place predicate (see (3)), that it is obligatorily marked by a possessive pronoun prefix *awi-* that cross-references with the possessor 'argument' *o Tili to una* 'Tili his'. When the relationship between the head and its argument has been established in the discourse the prefix and the possessed noun can stand alone (1B).

(3) A.   *o*   *Tili*   *wo-iyet*
            NM   Tili   3SM.S-laugh
            'Tili laughed.'
     B.   *wo-iyet*
            'he laughed.' (where 'he' refers to *Tili*)

Likewise, in (3) the pronoun prefix *wo-* can occur with the one-place predicate *iyet* alone (3B) when its relationship with its argument *o Tili* has been established (3A).

The latter on the other hand is 'non-predicative' because the head noun, the possessed *eya* is not marked with a pronoun prefix, rather linked with the possessor *o Tili* by the possessive marker *ma*. Similar with the previous construction, when the relationship between the two nouns is already established *ma* can occur alone with the possessed noun (3B).

In this paper I make use of the Role and Reference Grammar (RRG) framework (Van Valin and LaPolla 1997 and Van Valin 2005) in accounting for the properties of the two constructions: the markers/articles (i.e. *o*, *to* and *ma*), the possessive pronoun prefix and the possessor-possessed nouns. Each of the articles is analyzed as an 'operator': *o* is 'a noun marker' (NM) to mark that the constituent it precedes is a noun, *to* 'possessor pronoun marker' (PSR.M) to mark a pronoun to be a possessive pronoun (akin to the English 'mine', 'his', 'yours', etc.) and *ma* 'possessive marker' (PM) to mark that the noun it precedes has a possessive relationship with another noun (the possessor) either in the sentence/phrase like in (2A) or in the discourse like in (2B). On the other hand, the possessive pronoun prefix in the predicative construction is analyzed as a 'dependent argument', whereas the possessor (*o Tili to una* 'Tili his' in (1A)) is an 'independent argument'.[2] The nominal possessive construction in (1) and the sentential construction (3) behave identically, that both are marked by a pronoun prefix in the head i.e. the possessed noun and the verb respectively, (known as 'head-marking' system), that cross-references with a subject 'argument' (the possessor in the nominal construction).

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[1] Pagu is a non-Austronesian language spoken in North Halmahera, North Maluku, Indonesia. This paper is taken from one of my PhD Thesis chapters namely, "the Pagu nominal system". The thesis aims to provide a descriptive grammar of the Pagu language. It also however attempts to account for certain phenomena based on the RRG theoretical framework (one of them is the predicative nominal possessive construction as discussed in this paper).

[2] It can also stand alone when its relationship with the possessed is already known: *o Tili to una* 'Tili his (father)', *to una* 'his' ('Tili's father') but not **o Tili* (intended meaning: 'Tili's father').

References:

Van Valin R. D. Jr. and R. J. La Polla 1997. Syntax: Structure, meaning and function. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Van Valin, R. D. Jr. 2005. Exploring the syntax-semantics interface. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.