

12 *Passive and food possession in Oceanic languages*

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1 Introduction

The possessive-marking system of Proto Oceanic (POc) and its daughter languages has generated considerable debate over the years (see for example Lichtenberk 1985 and Lynch 1996). This paper is a detailed examination of one area of Oceanic possession – the marking of passive possession – which has repercussions not only for the reconstruction of the possessive system itself, but also for the way in which possessive suffixes were used in attributive and verbal constructions.¹

I will show in this paper that passive possession was marked in Proto Oceanic by direct suffixation. In doing this, however, the very widespread merger of passive with food possession also needs to be accounted for, and I will suggest a number of factors which led to certain languages making this change while other, closely related, languages did not.

2 Background

The Oceanic subgroup of Austronesian consists of around 500 languages occupying Polynesia, nearly all of Micronesia and much of Melanesia. Recent research (summarised in Lynch, Ross and Crowley forthcoming) suggests that the subgrouping of Oceanic given in Figure 1 can be justified. Following Pawley and Ross (1995), I use the term **family** to refer to an innovation-defined subgroup deriving from a split in a single homogeneous language; the term **linkage** to refer to an innovation-linked subgroup deriving from an earlier dialect network; and the term **subgroup** in talking about both families and linkages when the

¹ It is a pleasure to be able to be part of a volume honouring Tom Dutton's contributions to linguistics in the New Guinea area. I remember with fondness his period as Foundation Professor of Language and Literature at the University of Papua New Guinea, and note with special appreciation his contributions to the development of Papua New Guinean linguists and his promotion of the Bundaberg oyster.

difference between them is unimportant to the topic under discussion, or when it is not clear (as in the case of Central-Eastern Oceanic) whether the grouping is a family or a linkage.

PROTO OCEANIC

1. The Admiralty Islands family
2. The Western Oceanic linkage, comprising
 - a. The North New Guinea linkage (probably including the Sarimi/Jayapura Bay family)
 - b. The Papuan Tip linkage
 - c. The Meso-Melanesian linkage
3. The Central-Eastern Oceanic subgroup, comprising
 - a. The Southeast Solomons family
 - b. The Utupua-Vanikoro subgroup (possibly two distinct families)
 - c. The Southern Oceanic linkage (the languages of Vanuatu and New Caledonia)
 - d. The Micronesian family (including Nauruan)
 - e. The Central Pacific linkage (Fijian, Rotuman and Polynesian)
4. Unclassified – possibly first-order branches
 - a. Yapese
 - b. The Saint Matthias family

Figure 1: Probable Oceanic subgrouping

The status of Yapese and the Saint Matthias family is currently unclear: either or both **may** be first-order subgroups, or may prove instead to subgroup with the Admiralties family in some “Greater Admiralties linkage”.

The following features of Proto Oceanic possession are generally agreed:

- (a) Proto Oceanic distinguished **direct** and **indirect** possession.
- (b) In direct constructions, the possessive pronoun was suffixed to the possessed noun. Referents of nouns participating in direct constructions were more or less ‘inalienable’ – most kin terms, most body parts and parts of things, spatial relations and other items ‘closely associated’ with the possessor.
- (c) In indirect constructions, the possessive pronoun was suffixed to a **possessive marker** (or **classifier**). Referents of nouns participating in this construction were more or less ‘alienable’.
- (d) There was a small number of possessive markers. Those widely agreed upon are listed below, though there may have been a few others:
 - **ka*- marking possession as food,
 - **ma*- marking possession as drink, and
 - **na*- or **a*- (possibly also **ta*- and/or **sa*-) marking general (or neutral) possession.

There has been some debate in the literature as to whether these different possessive constructions marked **relationships** or whether they reflected a **noun-class/gender** system. The fact that POC **niuR* ‘coconut’, for example, could be possessed with **ka*- (the fruit as food), with **ma*- (the fruit as drink), and with **na*- or **a*- (the fruit used for some other

purpose, or the tree) suggests that a strict noun-class system was not operating. On the other hand, the fact that **tama*- 'father' could be possessed only in a direct construction suggests that there are some elements of noun classification involved. Pawley and Sayaba (1990:167-168) make the following comment about possessive marking in Wayan Fijian, but I believe the comment applies more generally to Oceanic as a whole:

The selection of possessive marker is not governed solely by either the semantic relation principle or the noun class principle. Possessive-marking of many nouns accords with semantic relations – but there are numerous exceptions... Furthermore, certain nouns are restricted to a single type of possessive-marking and it is difficult to find a convincing semantic basis for these restrictions... Certain nouns belong to strict and semi-arbitrary noun classes, for purposes of possessive marking, [while] others show marking consistently following semantic principles.

Interstage and modern Oceanic languages have modified the original system in a number of ways. Most of these modifications have involved either increasing or decreasing the number of possessive markers/classifiers, though in some cases – e.g. Labu (Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea), Rotuman and Polynesian – the direct/indirect distinction itself has been completely or almost completely lost. In addition, there is considerable variation from one subgroup or language to the next as to what is 'inalienable' and thus directly possessed, and what is 'alienable' and thus indirectly possessed.

3 Passive possession

This paper, however, is concerned with another complex of possessive categories which I have not yet mentioned.² These have been termed **passive**. As with other categories of Oceanic possession, it is difficult to give an unambiguous definition. However, passive possession refers to some or all of the following:

- (a) possession by the logical object of a nominalised verb (as in 'my having been hit');
- (b) possession of nouns which are not nominalisations and which refer to things done to or about the possessor (like 'my wound – which I received', or 'her song/story – sung/told about her');
- (c) possession of animate or inanimate nouns where the relationship is one which might precipitate suffering on the part of the possessor – such as 'enemy', 'club' and other weapons (to be used on the possessor), and so on; and
- (d) possession of other nouns which can be seen as being 'suffered' by the possessor – parasites, disadvantage, etc.

² Data sources are given in the Appendix. I am grateful to the following people, who supplied data on their own language: Hollingsworth Ala Ngwele and Evelyn Tavoia (West Ambae), and Rongorongo Terubea (Kiribati). I am also grateful to various colleagues for comments and/or assistance with additional data: Terry Crowley, Robert Early, Frank Lichtenberk, Bill Palmer, Ken Rehg, Malcolm Ross, and Gunter Senft.

Abbreviations used in citing language data are:

ART	article	EXC	exclusive	PASS	passive (possession)
BENEF	benefactive	GEN	general (possession)	PL	plural
CHAR	characteristic (possession)	NOM	nominaliser	POSS	possessive
DIR	directional	OBL	oblique	SG	singular

Often included in the passive category in descriptions of some Oceanic languages and in the inalienable category in descriptions of others, but probably distinguishable from both of these, is what can be referred to as **characteristic** possession. This occurs with nouns characterising either all typical possessors ('size', 'height', 'character', etc.) or certain individual possessors (like facial or behavioural characteristics of a particular individual, possession of nouns like 'boils', 'scabies', etc.).

3.1 Passive-marking strategies

The point of interest here is that Oceanic languages differ in how they mark passive/characteristic possession. There are basically four possible strategies.³ In one of these, type (b) below, passive and food possession are marked in the same way; and indeed some linguists have reconstructed POC **ka-* as the marker of both food and passive possession. One of the points I will be making in this paper is that this was probably **not** the case in Proto Oceanic. Thus in this section I will be particularly interested in comparing passive and food marking.

- (a) There is a wide range of Oceanic languages in which passive possession is marked in the same way as 'inalienable' (kin and part) possession – most commonly by a direct construction. This is found in, inter alia, Yapese, most (or all?) Central Papuan languages, a number of North New Guinea languages (like Manam), languages in both the north-west and south-east Solomons (e.g. Banoni, Kokota, Gela), many languages of north and central Vanuatu, and most Micronesian languages. Polynesian languages and Rotuman also mark passive possession in the same way as inalienable possession, though not by a direct construction. For example:

- (1) Aroma (Papuan Tip linkage):

<i>(thau) ama-ku</i>	KIN/PART – DIRECT
(I) father-1SG	
'my father'	
<i>(thau) rauparaupa-ku</i>	PASSIVE – DIRECT
(I) picture-1SG	
'my picture (depicting me)'	
<i>(thau) ya-ku yanyani</i>	FOOD – INDIRECT WITH <i>*ka-</i>
(I) POSS.FOOD-1SG food	
'my food (to eat)'	

³ There are, of course, other possible strategies for encoding the same relationship. Lewo (Southern Oceanic), for example, can express the idea of passive possession by nominalising a verb with its accompanying object suffix:

na-ila-nu-ena
 NOM-help-1SG.OBJ-NOM
 'my being helped'

I am concerned here only with strictly 'possessive' constructions.

There are also some Oceanic languages which mark passive and characteristic possession differently. I will ignore this for the moment, and at this stage concentrate on strictly **passive** possession, but will return to a discussion of characteristic possession in §3.6 below.

(*thau*) *ye-ku rauparaupa* GENERAL
 (I) POSS.GEN-1SG picture
 'my picture (which I have/took/painted)'

- (b) There is also a wide range of Oceanic languages in which passive possession is marked in a manner formally identical to that of food possession, usually with what appears to be a reflex of the food marker *ka-. Among the languages which use this strategy are Papuan Tip languages like Dobuan and Gapapaiwa, Meso-Melanesian languages like Tolai, many languages in the south-east Solomons and northern and central Vanuatu, and most Fijian dialects. For example:

- (2) Standard (Bauan) Fijian (Central Pacific linkage):

tama-mu KIN/PART – DIRECT
 father-2SG
 'your father'

ke-mu itukutuku PASSIVE – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
 POSS.PASS-2SG report
 'your report (made about you)'

ke-mu madrai FOOD – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
 POSS.FOOD-2SG bread
 'your bread (to eat)'

no-mu itukutuku GENERAL
 POSS.GEN-2SG report
 'your report (which you made)'

- (c) There are some languages in which passive possession occurs in an indirect construction, but with a marker distinct from the food or any other marker:

- (3) Iaii (Southern Oceanic linkage):

caa-n KIN/PART – DIRECT
 leg-3SG
 'his/her/its leg'

hnââ-n aat PASSIVE – SPECIAL MARKER
 POSS.PASS-3SG wound
 'his/her wound'

a-n wââ FOOD – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
 POSS.FOOD-3SG fish
 'his/her fish (to eat)'

anyi-n thaan GENERAL
 POSS.GEN-3SG chief
 'his/her chief'

- (d) Finally, there are some languages which retain both direct and food marking but which nevertheless mark passive possession in the same way as general possession.⁴

- (4) Lauan Fijian (Central Pacific linkage):

<i>drau-na</i>		KIN/PART – DIRECT
leaf-3SG		
‘its leaf’		
<i>ke-na</i>	<i>puaka</i>	FOOD – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
POSS.FOOD-3SG	pig	
‘his/her pork (pig as food)’		
<i>o-na</i>	<i>itaba</i>	PASSIVE AND GENERAL
POSS.GEN-3SG	image	
‘his/her photo – either depicting him/her, or in his/her possession’		

We face two problems in trying to reconstruct the nature of passive-possession marking in Proto Oceanic. The first is an amazing shortage of data. Many descriptions of Oceanic languages make no mention or give no examples of this category or, if they do, they use such vague phrases as “items closely associated with the possessor” which may have a variety of interpretations.

The second problem relates to the distribution of the four marking strategies outlined above. This problem is not simply one of trying to decide which of these four strategies represented the original Proto Oceanic one and then treating the other three as more recent, localised innovations. The following facts pose additional complications. Firstly, both direct possession and *ka- marking are quite widespread throughout Oceanic – both geographically and genetically – as strategies for marking passive possession. And secondly, and more importantly, there are a number of cases in which different languages belonging to the same lower-order subgroup use different strategies to mark passive possession.

3.2 Distinct passive marker

We can almost certainly eliminate type (c), a distinct passive marker, from being a candidate for Proto Oceanic status. Type (c) seems to be restricted to the Southern Melanesian family of the Southern Oceanic linkage. The Iaa examples in (3) above show a distinct passive marker in a New Caledonian language. The Southern Vanuatu languages also have a distinct passive marker, but it is not cognate with the New Caledonian forms; instead, it has developed out of the oblique preposition:

- (5) Lenakel (Southern Oceanic linkage):
- | | | |
|------------------|-------------|------------------------------|
| <i>r-am-eiua</i> | <i>la-k</i> | OBLIQUE PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE |
| 3SG-PAST-lie | OBL-1SG | |
| ‘he lied to me’ | | |

⁴ There are a number of languages which have lost the food marker altogether, and which mark food – and often passive – possession with the general marker. I am not interested in those cases here, but only in those where there has been a merger of passive and general as distinct from food.

<i>nouanage la-k</i>	PASSIVE – OBLIQUE PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE
story POSS.PASS-1SG	
'my story (the one told about me)'	
<i>nouanage taha-k</i>	GENERAL
story POSS.GEN-1SG	
'my story (which I tell)'	

Passive possession marked by a distinct passive marker, then, is quite rare in Oceanic. In addition, the markers that are found do not appear to be cognate beyond small individual subgroups – e.g. the Proto Southern Vanuatu marker **(i)ra*, **ira-* is not cognate with the Iaaï marker *hnââ-* (and similar statements could be made about markers in different New Caledonian subgroups). Thus we can not reconstruct any marker at a high level even within Southern Melanesian.

3.3 Passive marked in the same way as general

The type (d) strategy, by which passive and general are marked in the same way, differently from food, occurs randomly through some parts of the Oceanic subgroup. I instanced Lauan Fijian above in (4). Lewo also merges passive and general:

- (6) Lewo (Southern Oceanic linkage):

<i>ka-la piaki</i>	FOOD – INDIRECT WITH <i>*ka-</i>
POSS.FOOD-3PL pot	
'their cooking-pot'	
<i>sa-u vis-ena</i>	GENERAL/PASSIVE
POSS.GEN-1SG tell.story-NOM	
'my story – either told about me, or which I tell'	
<i>sa-u toutou</i>	GENERAL/PASSIVE
POSS.GEN-1SG image	
'my photo – either taken of me or which I took'	

Since we can reconstruct a passive **category** of possession for Proto Oceanic, and since the neutralisation of passive with general, or of food with general, is cross-linguistically common and not unexpected, I believe that type (d) also does not represent the Proto Oceanic situation.

3.4 Direct and **ka-* marking

The two remaining 'candidates', then, are direct possession and indirect possession with **ka-*. As I mentioned earlier, both of these marking strategies are quite widespread in Oceanic. In this section, I will discuss their distribution, while I will reconstruct the Proto Oceanic passive-marking strategy in §3.5.

3.4.1 **Western Oceanic**

Both marking strategies are found in each of the subgroups of the Western Oceanic linkage. In the North New Guinea linkage, for example, we find languages like Manam, which encodes passive possession in a direct construction, but also languages like Mangap-Mbula, which encodes it in a food construction:

(7) Manam:

údi tanóm-a-di PASSIVE – DIRECT
 banana plant-NOM-3PL.POSS
 'the planting of the bananas'

bang 'ana-di FOOD – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
 taro POSS.PASS-3PL
 'their taro (to eat)'

(8) Mangap-Mbula:

ko-ng koi bizin PASSIVE – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
 POSS.FOOD-1SG enemy PL
 'my enemies'

ko-ng pin FOOD – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
 POSS.PASS-1SG banana
 'my banana (to eat)'

In the Papuan Tip linkage, Motu exemplifies those languages which use direct constructions to mark passive possession (see also Aroma in example (1) above), while Gapapaiwa exemplifies languages which use food possession for the same purpose:

(9) Motu:

sivarai-gu PASSIVE – DIRECT
 story-1SG
 'my story – the one told about me'

a-gu aniani FOOD – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
 POSS.FOOD-1SG food
 'my food'

(10) Gapapaiwa:

ka-na gara PASSIVE – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
 POSS.PASS-3SG clothing
 'his/her clothes (to wear)'

ka-na siya FOOD – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
 POSS.FOOD-3SG meat
 'his/her meat (to eat)'

i-na gara GENERAL
 POSS.GEN-3SG clothing
 'his/her clothes (e.g. to sell at the market)'

In the Meso-Melanesian linkage, Kokota (Santa Isabel) exemplifies languages which use direct possession, and Tolai languages which use food possession:

(11) Kokota

totoyale-gu ara PASSIVE – DIRECT

picture-1SG I
'my photograph (depicting me)'

no-gu totoyale GENERAL

POSS.GEN-1SG picture
'my photograph (I own it)'

ye-gu zora ara FOOD – INDIRECT WITH *ka-

POSS.FOOD-1SG pig I
'my pork'

(12) Tolai:

a-na ram PASSIVE – INDIRECT WITH *ka-

POSS.PASS-3SG club
'its club (with which it will be killed)'

a-na vudi FOOD – INDIRECT WITH *ka-

POSS.FOOD-3SG banana
'his/her banana (to eat)'

3.4.2 Central-Eastern Oceanic

There are no data on passive possession from languages of the Utupua-Vanikoro subgroup. For three of the other four subgroups, both direct possession and *ka- marking is found. Thus in the Southeast Solomons family, for example, we find direct marking in Gela but food marking in Arosi:

(13) Gela:

na tutugu-gu PASSIVE – DIRECT

ART story-1SG
'my story – told about me'

ni-gua na tutugu GENERAL

POSS.GEN-1SG ART story
'my story – which I tell'

naya-gua na vaŋa FOOD – INDIRECT WITH *ka-

POSS.FOOD-1SG ART food
'my food'

(14) Arosi:

o'o 'a-na PASSIVE – INDIRECT WITH *ka-

spear POSS.PASS-3SG
'his/her spear – intended to kill him/her'

bwaa 'a-na FOOD – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
 taro POSS.FOOD-3SG
 'his/her taro (to eat)'

In the Southern Oceanic subgroup, West Ambae exemplifies those languages which use direct marking, and Paamese those which use food marking:

(15) West Ambae:

bolo-ŋgu PASSIVE – DIRECT
 story-1SG
 'my story – about me'

ka-ŋgu bweta FOOD – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
 POSS.FOOD-1SG taro
 'my taro (to eat)'

(16) Paamese:

ipu â-m PASSIVE – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
 loss POSS.FOOD-2SG
 'your loss/disadvantage (in playing a game)'

ani â-m FOOD – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
 green.coconut POSS.FOOD-2SG
 'your green coconut (to eat)'

In Central Pacific, direct marking is now found only in the Fijian dialects, having been totally or almost totally lost in Rotuman and the Polynesian languages. Most of the Fijian dialects have merged passive with food – the relevant Standard Fijian examples in (2) above are repeated here as (17).

(17) Standard (Bauan) Fijian:

ke-mu itukutuku PASSIVE – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
 POSS.PASS-2SG report
 'your report (made about you)'

ke-mu madrai FOOD – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
 POSS.FOOD-2SG bread
 'your bread (to eat)'

Western Fijian dialects retain normal suffixed possession for kin terms, but use prefixed direct possession for part terms. Of these dialects, Nadrogā alone uses prefixed possession for both part and passive:

(18) Nadrogā Fijian:

tama-m KIN – DIRECT, SUFFIXED
 father-2SG
 'your father'

m-mata PART – DIRECT, PREFIXED
 2SG-eye
 'your eye'

<i>qu-itaba</i>	PASSIVE – DIRECT, PREFIXED
1SG-image	
‘my photo – depicting me’	
<i>ke-qu</i> <i>doko</i>	FOOD – INDIRECT WITH * <i>ka-</i>
POSS.FOOD-1SG taro	
‘my taro (as food)’	

Paul Geraghty (pers. comm.) speculates that the change from suffixed to prefixed possession may have proceeded through an intermediate stage whereby part terms were possessed in an indirect construction using the marker *e-* (see Lynch 1997:238). Whether or not this is correct, what is clear is that Nadrogā marks part and passive in the same way, differently from food.

It is only in the Micronesian family that we appear to find just one passive-possession marking strategy – and that is direct marking:⁵

(19) Ponapean:

<i>ronge-i</i>	PASSIVE – DIRECT
news-1SG	
‘news of/about me’	
<i>ah-i</i> <i>rohng</i>	GENERAL
POSS.GEN-1SG news	
‘my news (to tell)’	

(20) Kiribati:

<i>mani-m</i>	PASSIVE – DIRECT
animal-2SG	
‘your bugs/parasites’	
<i>a-m</i> <i>man</i>	GENERAL
POSS.GEN-2SG animal	
‘your animal(s), your pet(s)’	

(21) Puluwatese:

<i>rani-y</i>	PASSIVE – DIRECT
water-1SG	
‘my water (I’m bathing in it)’	
<i>wúnúmá-y</i> <i>raan</i>	DRINK – INDIRECT WITH * <i>ma-</i>
POSS.DRINK-1SG water	
‘my water (to drink)’	

⁵ Malcolm Ross (pers. comm.) notes that, with the proliferation of classifiers in Micronesian (compared to other Oceanic subgroups), the syntax of direct possession is more pervasive, and it would thus be surprising if passive possession were not marked by a direct construction. On the other hand, the opposite view could also be taken – that given the proliferation of classifiers, it would not be surprising to find that a separate passive classifier had developed in Micronesian.

3.4.3 Other Oceanic groups

There is very little evidence available from the languages of the Admiralties family (and none at all from the Saint Matthias family) which can be brought to bear on this issue. The following Loni examples, however, suggest that at least one Admiralties language uses direct marking to encode passive possession:

(22) Loni:

<i>hɛya-n</i>	PASSIVE – DIRECT
wash-3SG	
‘the washing of it’	
<i>ana-n</i> <i>ɛnɛyan</i>	FOOD – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
POSS.FOOD-3SG food	
‘his/her food’	

Yapese, however, is a much clearer case: it quite clearly uses direct constructions to mark passive possession.⁶

(23) Yapese:

/taŋi-gu/	PASSIVE – DIRECT
song-1SG	
‘my song – sung about me’	
/ta:ŋ ro-gu/	GENERAL
song POSS.GEN-1SG	
‘my song – which I sing’	

3.5 Proto Oceanic passive marking

Until recently, most Oceanists have assumed that Proto Oceanic marked passive possession in an indirect construction with *ka-. Both Pawley (1973) and Lichtenberk (1985), for example, reconstruct POc *ka- ‘passive possession marker’, though disagreeing as to whether there were two homophonous markers (one marking food and the other passive) or whether there was a single marker of both categories.

The data presented in §3.4, however, paint a different picture. Those data are summarised in Table 1, which omits subgroups for which no information is available and ignores types (c) and (d).

⁶ Yapese morphophonemics are quite complex, and for that reason I use underlying rather than standard orthographic forms in the examples here. Note also that Yapese has no food category.

Table 1: Distribution of passive-possession marking strategies

	MARKING STRATEGIES	
	DIRECT	INDIRECT = FOOD
ADMIRALTIES	YES	?
WESTERN OCEANIC		
North New Guinea	YES	YES
Papuan Tip	YES	YES
Meso-Melanesian	YES	YES
CENTRAL-EASTERN OCEANIC		
Southeast Solomons	YES	YES
Southern Oceanic	YES	YES
Micronesian	YES	NO
Central Pacific	YES?	YES
YAPESE	YES	NO

The evidence presented above suggests a different conclusion from that reached by previous writers. Marking of passive possession by a direct construction occurs in every first-order subgroup, and in every branch of each of those first-order subgroups (with the possible exception of Central Pacific, depending on how one interprets Nadrogā prefixed possession). Marking of passive possession by the food construction does not appear to occur in every first-order subgroup (Yapese being the exception), nor does it occur in every second-order grouping (Micronesian being the exception). This would suggest that passive possession in Proto Oceanic was marked by a direct construction.

If this is the case, direct possession was replaced by an indirect construction in a wide range of languages. This is in no way unusual: the replacement of direct constructions by indirect constructions has occurred for other types of possession marking in a number of Oceanic subgroups or individual languages, and indeed it is a feature of the development of Proto Oceanic that the Proto Austronesian system of direct suffixation was replaced by indirect constructions for certain kinds of possessive relationships. This trend from direct to indirect would also suggest that my hypothesis is correct. If passive was marked by a **ka*-construction in POc, then we would have to explain why a wide range of languages replaced an indirect construction with a direct one – against the trend.

3.6 Characteristic possession

In general terms, Oceanic languages mark characteristic possession in the same way as they mark passive possession. For example, Yapese uses direct marking for both passive and characteristic possession, Standard Fijian uses **ka*- marking for both, and Nadrogā Fijian uses prefixed direct possession for both:

- (24) Yapese:
- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>/taŋi-gu/</i> | PASSIVE – DIRECT |
| song-1SG | |
| ‘my song – sung about me’ | |
| <i>/gaʔe-ŋi-gu/</i> | CHARACTERISTIC – DIRECT |
| big-STEM.FORMING.SUFFIX-1SG | |
| ‘my size’ | |
- (25) Standard (Bauan) Fijian:
- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>ke-na</i> <i>uvi</i> | FOOD – INDIRECT WITH *ka- |
| POSS.FOOD-3SG yam | |
| ‘his yam (to eat)’ | |
| <i>ke-na</i> <i>i-caqe</i> | PASSIVE – INDIRECT WITH *ka- |
| POSS.PASS-3SG NOM-kick | |
| ‘your kick (which you received)’ | |
| <i>ke-na</i> <i>levu</i> | CHARACTERISTIC – INDIRECT WITH *ka- |
| POSS.PASS-3SG big | |
| ‘his size’ | |
- (26) Nadrogā Fijian:
- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>qu-itaba</i> | PASSIVE – DIRECT, PREFIXED |
| 1SG-picture | |
| ‘my photograph, taken of me’ | |
| <i>qu-yabaki</i> | CHARACTERISTIC – DIRECT, PREFIXED |
| 1SG-age | |
| ‘my age’ | |

Because this is such a general and widespread pattern, it appears logical to assume that passive and characteristic possession were marked in the same way in Proto Oceanic – by a direct construction – and that both came to be marked by *ka- when the change to *ka- occurred. This would be strong evidence that they were in fact a single category in Proto Oceanic.

There are, however, exceptions to this generalisation, and I will cite three here. Example (6) from Lewo showed that *sa-* is the general marker which is also used in passive possession: *sa-u toutou* ‘my photo’ can be either one I took or one taken of me. The food possessive marker is *ka-*, but *ka-* also marks characteristic possession:

- (27) Lewo:
- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>ka-la</i> <i>piaki</i> | FOOD – INDIRECT WITH *ka- |
| POSS.FOOD-3PL pot | |
| ‘their cooking-pot’ | |
| <i>ka-na</i> <i>kausu</i> | CHARACTERISTIC – INDIRECT WITH *ka- |
| POSS.CHAR-3SG washer | |
| ‘its (the tap’s) washer’ | |

<i>ka-na</i>	<i>yau-ena</i>	CHARACTERISTIC – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
POSS.CHAR-3SG	sing-NOM	
'its (the ritual's) song'		

Gela, which marks passive with a direct construction, also marks characteristic possession with a food construction. Compare the following with (13):

(28) Gela:

<i>naya-gua</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>vaŋa</i>	FOOD – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
POSS.FOOD-1SG	ART	food	
'my food'			

<i>naya-gua</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>tutugu</i>	CHARACTERISTIC – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
POSS.CHAR-1SG	ART	story	
'my traditional story – one I respect about myself or my lineage, or one which tells how we got to be where we are today'			

<i>naya-gua</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>keramo</i>	CHARACTERISTIC – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
POSS.CHAR-1SG	ART	spirit	
'my ancestral spirit'			

So the Lewo and Gela data seem to indicate that, where there is a departure from the norm of passive = characteristic, that departure is in the direction of marking characteristic by a food or *ka- construction.

Kilivila, however, seems to be an exception both to the passive = characteristic norm and to the Lewo-Gela principled exception. In Kilivila, food possession is marked with *ka-, general possession by simply preposing the possessive pronoun to the noun, and passive by direct suffixation:

(29) Kilivila:

<i>ka-la</i>	<i>yena</i>	FOOD – INDIRECT WITH *ka-
POSS.FOOD-3SG	fish	
'his/her fish (to eat)'		

<i>la</i>	<i>bwala</i>	GENERAL
3SG	house	
'his/her house'		

<i>butu-gu</i>	PASSIVE – DIRECT
mocking.song-1SG	
'my mocking song (sung about me)'	

There is, however, another possessive marker *a-*, which

marks a kind of intermediate degree of possession, intermediate between intimate [i.e. direct] and more distant [i.e. food and general] possession. It is also produced referring nominally to having or being in certain states, like being hungry, thirsty, cold, sick, or abhorring something or someone. (Senft 1986:49)

Among examples given by Senft we should note the following:

(30) Kilivila:

- a-gu molu* 'my hunger, my need'
a-gu daka 'my thirst'
a-gu boku 'my cough'

Note also the following distinction between *a-* possession and general possession with the noun *tobaki* 'tobacco' (Gunter Senft, pers. comm.):

(31) Kilivila:

- a-la tobaki* 'my tobacco, that I am intending to smoke'
la tobaki 'my tobacco, that I will give away'

It may be that *a-* marks, or marks, some kind of characteristic possession distinct from passive possession.

3.7 Possessive suffixes on adjectives

The hypothesis that passive/characteristic possession was marked by a direct construction is supported by one other set of facts – the use of possessive suffixes on adjectives. There are a number of Oceanic subgroups in which this occurs, though it is not found to my knowledge in any Central-Eastern Oceanic subgroup. The following examples are from Papuan Tip languages:

(32) Duau:

- hada kehau-na*
 house new-3SG.POSS
 'a new house'

- hada kehau-di*
 house new-3PL.POSS
 'new houses'

(33) Yamalele:

- Yau kwamana siai-ku.*
 I child small-1SG.POSS
 'I was a small child.'

Ross (1988:347-350) has a fairly lengthy discussion of this aspect of Oceanic grammar, and a summary of his findings follows. This feature is found in all three subgroups of the Western Oceanic linkage, although

its distribution is inconsistent: in the Meso-Melanesian [linkage] it occurs only in Mono-Alu and Roviana, and there only in limited environments (predicatively in Roviana); in Manam it is found only with certain adjectives...only in languages of the Papuan Tip [linkage] is it an obligatory feature. (Ross 1988:350)

In the Admiralties family "there is evidence, in the form of a fossilised *-n* on some adjectives...that a reflex of POC **-ña* [3SG.POSS] may have also been attached to [Proto Admiralty] adjectives" (Ross 1988:350).

In addition, Blust (1984:165) notes that “an attributive suffix containing the common element *-na* is common in Mussau adjectives”, and this is formally identical with the third person singular possessive suffix. In other words, languages of the Saint Matthias family seem to behave in a similar fashion in this respect to Admiralties languages.

Thus the feature of possessive suffixation on adjectives can probably be reconstructed for Proto Oceanic, though it seems to have been subsequently lost in the Central-Eastern Oceanic subgroup. Now an adjective modifying a head noun can be interpreted as referring to a characteristic of that noun. As I have mentioned already, and will show in more detail below, passive and characteristic possession were probably marked in the same way. Possessive suffixation on adjectives in languages of most western subgroups supports the hypothesis that this category was marked by direct suffixation in Proto Oceanic.

4 The merger of passive and food possession

The major remaining problem – and it is a major one – is to account for why **ka-* marking is so widespread as a marker of passive possession. The problem can be outlined as follows.

- (a) It is unlikely that passive possession was marked variably in Proto Oceanic by both direct suffixation **and** by a **ka-* construction. No single modern language that we know of allows this flexibility – with the partial exception of languages like Gela and Kilivila, referred to in §3.6. Therefore, passive was marked **either** by a direct construction (in which case we have to explain the development of **ka-* marking), **or** by a **ka-* construction (in which case we have the even more difficult task of explaining why an indirect construction was replaced by a direct one, against the normal trend in Austronesian). For the reasons outlined in §3.5, I believe that the hypothesis that passive was marked in a direct construction is the stronger one, and that the development of **ka-* marking thus needs explanation.
- (b) If direct suffixation was the POc strategy for marking passive possession, then presumably that was also the strategy in any intermediate protolanguage one of whose descendants uses that strategy. This would imply, for example, the reconstructions for the Central-Eastern Oceanic subgroup as given in Figure 2. I include in that figure only those modern languages exemplified in §3.4.2, as representatives of a wider set of languages in a particular subgroup.⁷

⁷ The fact that, for example, ‘Proto Southern Oceanic’ may have been a dialect chain rather than a single relatively homogeneous language is not relevant to the argument.

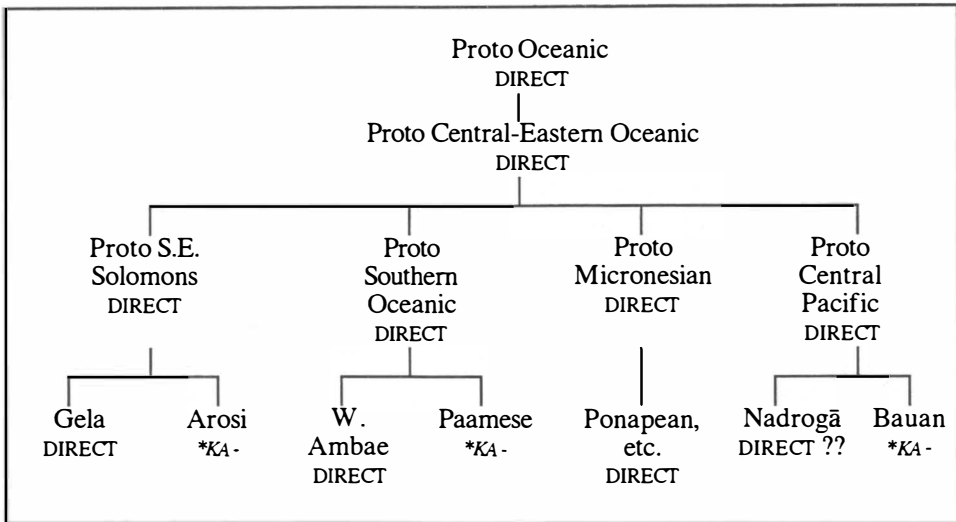


Figure 2: Central-Eastern Oceanic passive possession

- (c) Therefore, the change from direct to **ka-* marking happened not once, but many times, in the history of Oceanic. For example, because Gela retains direct marking, Proto Southeast Solomons must also have marked passive possession by a direct construction; therefore Arosi must have changed this to **ka-* marking. But languages in different subgroups of both Central-Eastern and Western Oceanic, like Paamese in Southern Oceanic and Gapapaiwa in Papuan Tip, must have also made the same change, even though other members of the subgroups of which they are members retain the original construction.

What we need to explain is **why** this is so. There are a number of factors which seem to be relevant, and I will discuss each of these in turn.

4.1 POc benefactive preposition **ka-*

Ross (1988:107-108) reconstructs a Proto Western Oceanic (PWOc) benefactive (or, better, affective) preposition **ka-* which probably took possessive pronominal suffixes. The Tiang example below (where **ka-* > *kə-*) will illustrate its use:

(34) Tiang:

Sik əmən tə buə kə-məm.
 carry DIR some betelnut BENEF-1EXC.PL
 'Bring us some betelnut.'

In Proto Meso-Melanesian, the **k* in the POc food marker **ka-* lenited to **ɣ*, and subsequently the affective preposition **ka-* was reinterpreted as a general possessive marker (Ross 1988:273-275); i.e. the sequence of changes was:

1. **ka-* food marker > **ɣa-*
2. **ka-* affective preposition > **ka-* general marker

In other Western Oceanic subgroups, this change did not take place.

Frank Lichtenberk (pers. comm.) informs me that To'aba'ita (Southeast Solomons family) has a form *'a-* “which functions, among other things, as a benefactive/recipient preposition (but not as an alimentary classifier)” and which takes possessive suffixes. This suggests that **ka-* ‘benefactive, affective’ is reconstructible for Proto Oceanic.

Given the formal similarity between POc **ka-* affective preposition and POc **ka-* food marker, and given also the fact that both took possessive suffixes, the possibility of the two forms merging is a likely one. I suggest that indeed these two merged in more than one language, as a possessive marker **ka-* marking both food possession and affective relationships – the latter taking over the role of marking passive possession from direct constructions. This multiple merger hypothesis would explain why some languages mark passive in a **ka-* construction while other, closely related, languages retain the original direct construction, **without** having to posit the change from direct to **ka-* marking as a shared innovation.

4.2 The semantics of the verb ‘eat’

A second point which seems to have some bearing on this issue concerns the semantics of the verb ‘eat’. Let me begin this discussion with a rather lengthy quote from Geraghty (1983:249-250) on Fijian:

In eat [= food] possession, the possessor eats or suffers the head nominal...The ‘suffer’ meaning has been neglected in previous descriptions, probably because it is not common; but it is important because it constitutes the middle ground between passive and eat possession, and helps explain why the two types are usually marked in the same way. It would be reasonable to consider the following as examples of passive possessed deverbal nouns:

[Standard Fijian] *kemu i-caqe* ‘your kick’ (you are kicked)
kemu i-roba ‘your slap’ (you are slapped)

were it not for the fact that they appear to be somehow related to the verb *kana* ‘eat, suffer’, as exemplified in these attested sentences:

kana i-caqe ‘suffer kicking, get kicked’
kana i-roba ‘suffer slapping, get slapped’
kana vosa ‘get told off’ (*vosa* ‘talk’)
kana uca ‘get drenched by the rain’ (*uca* ‘rain’)

I could perhaps reword (and slightly change) Geraghty’s argument as follows. One of the reasons that Fijian nouns like *madrai* ‘bread’ or *uvi* ‘yam’ are marked with *ke-* in a food construction is because they can be objects of the verb *kana*. One of the reasons why nouns like *i-caqe* ‘a kick’ or *vosa* ‘talk’ can be marked with *ke-* in a passive construction is because they can also be objects of the verb *kana*, in its meaning of ‘suffer’ rather than strictly ‘eat’.

Terry Crowley (pers. comm.) has pointed out to me that Bislama *kakae* ‘eat’ is also used in the ‘suffer’ sense: for example, *kakae bolet* (eat bullet) ‘get shot’, *kakae han* (eat hand) ‘get punched’, *kakae kalabus* (eat prison) ‘receive a prison sentence’. This may reflect substrate influence from one or a number of northern and central Vanuatu languages, though I have not yet been able to identify any such languages in which the verb meaning ‘eat’ also means ‘suffer’ (apart possibly from Paamese – see below).

An attempt to find other languages in which ‘eat’ = ‘suffer’ did not meet with a great deal of success. Tongan *kai* falls into this category. Paamese *kani* has the meanings ‘1. eat; 2.

(sore) afflict; 3. burn up, burn down; 4. get burnt'. While meaning 2 clearly involves suffering, I am not sure in this case whether the suffering relates to the meaning 'eat' or to the meanings involving 'burn'.

It is possible nevertheless that reflexes of POc **kani-a* 'eat' had, or have, the subsidiary meaning 'experience, usually negatively'; whether this has anything to do with the instrumental prepositional verb POc **(k)ani-* is another question. Because of this, **ka-*possession came to mark both food and passive.

5 Conclusion

I have suggested that passive (and characteristic) possession was marked by a direct construction in Proto Oceanic, and also suggested that Proto Oceanic had the benefactive or affective preposition **ka-*, which was formally identical to the POc food possessive marker. In a wide range of Oceanic languages, however, passive/characteristic and food possession are marked in the same way, by a reflex of **ka-*. I have suggested that this may be explained by the merger of the affective preposition and the food marker as a single marker, and that this merger took place many times in the history of Oceanic. The fact that POc **kani* 'eat' probably also meant 'experience (negatively)' may have provided further motivation for this merger.

APPENDIX

Data sources

Names without dates indicate personal communications; JL = my own field notes.

Western Oceanic languages

Aroma	JL
Banoni	Lincoln (1976)
Duau	Ross (1988)
Gapapaiwa	McGuckin (forthcoming)
Kilivila	Senft (1986); Gunter Senft
Manam	Lichtenberk (1983)
Mangap-Mbula	Bugenhagen (1985)
Motu	JL
Tiang	Ross (1988)
Tolai	Mosel (1984)
Yamalele	Ross (1988)

Central-Eastern Oceanic languages

Arosi	Capell (1971), Lynch and Horoi (forthcoming)
Fijian – Lauan	Geraghty (1983)
Fijian – Nadrogā	Geraghty (forthcoming)
Fijian – Standard (Bauan)	JL

Gela	Crowley (forthcoming)
Iaai	Ozanne-Rivierre (1976)
Kiribati	Groves, Groves and Jacobs (1985); JL
Kokota	Bill Palmer
Lenakel	Lynch (1978); JL
Lewo	Early (1994); Robert Early
Paamese	Crowley (1982)
Ponapean	Rehg (1981)
Puluwatese	Elbert (1974)
To'aba'ita	Frank Lichtenberk
Tongan	Churchward (1959)
West Ambae	JL

Other

Loniu	Hamel (1994)
Yapese	Jensen (1977)

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