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# Questioning the relevance of alienability in Arawak linguistics: an innovative analysis of possession in Mojeño Trinitario

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**Abstract:** This article presents an original analysis of possession in Mojeño Trinitario, an Arawak language, teasing apart the levels of lexical possessive noun classes, morphological derivation between noun classes, and adnominal possessive constructions. The three possessive noun classes (obligatorily prefixed, optionally prefixed and non-prefixable) do not exactly correspond to the three possessive noun classes of the traditional analysis of Arawak languages, as in the analysis proposed here some of the traditionally called “alienable” nouns, i.e. nouns occurring as either possessed or unpossessed, are classified as non-prefixable nouns because they need some additional derivational morphology to be prefixable. The two adnominal possessive constructions (basic, through prefixation and modification; and indirect, via a generic possessive noun) are described, and their distribution is discussed. The article then addresses the question of how the notion of “alienability contrast” could explain the phenomena described, at either the lexical or phrasal level. In the process, it offers frequency counts on how often nouns of the different possessive classes occur as possessed in discourse, and it discusses whether the three noun classes are open or closed classes. It concludes that the alienability contrast is at best only a partial explanation for the expression of possession in Mojeño Trinitario. This article ends by developing how this innovative account of possession in Mojeño Trinitario applies to other Arawak languages.

**Keywords:** adnominal possession; bound nouns; generic possessive noun; derivation; discourse frequency

## 1 Introduction

This article offers an innovative analysis of possessive noun classes and adnominal possession in Mojeño Trinitario (Arawak, Bolivia), by highlighting the role of derivational processes among noun classes. By doing so, it questions the relevance of the

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concept of “alienability” for the description of that language, and of Arawak languages more generally. These languages are regularly described as featuring an alienability contrast in their encoding of possession.

In the literature, the linguistic category of possession is taken to cover many more relations within the personal sphere of the possessor than just ownership (Creissels 2006: 143). A well-known distinction in terms of possessive relationships is that between inalienable and alienable possession. This is called the alienability contrast and is either seen as a semantic contrast or as a formal instantiation of this contrast in the lexicon or grammar of a language (Nichols 1988). On the semantic level, inalienable possession is seen as being inherent and permanent and prototypically encompasses body-part and kinship relations, while alienable possession can be temporary (Chappell and McGregor 1996: 4). On the formal level, alienability splits often show in adnominal possession.<sup>1</sup> Crosslinguistically, the adnominal possessive construction expressing inalienable possession regularly “involves a tighter structural bond between possessee and possessor” than the one expressing alienable possession (Heine 1997: 172).

This article aims to revisit the relevance of the alienability contrast for the description of Arawak languages. These languages are often reported to show the tendency observed for Amazonian languages to feature an alienability contrast at the level of noun classes (see Krasnoukhova 2011), of (adnominal) possessive constructions (van der Voort 2009) or both levels, without clearly distinguishing them (Aikhenvald 2012: 163–178). Indeed, for Arawak languages, the alienability contrast has been argued to be at work at two levels: on the lexical level, through the distinction between noun classes depending on their morphosyntactic behavior in possessive constructions, and on the phrase level, through the competition between two adnominal possessive constructions. The literature on possession in Arawak languages consists of the relevant sections of grammars (see Durand [2016] for a good overview of descriptions of individual Arawak languages), some papers specifically focused on possession in individual languages (Carvalho 2015; Castillo Ramirez 2017; Corbera Mori 2005; Freitas 2017; Lemus Serrano 2015; Michael 2012), and some synchronic and diachronic work at the family level (Aikhenvald 2012: 163–178; Payne 1987). Before getting to the core of my proposal, I present a traditional account of possession in Arawak languages, illustrated with some data from Yukuna (Lemus Serrano 2020), meant to be representative of the literature mentioned above.

As mentioned above, the literature on Arawak languages refers to both alienable and inalienable nouns and alienable and inalienable possessive constructions. I will highlight now that there is no plain correspondence between classes of nouns and

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<sup>1</sup> In adnominal possession, also called attributive possession, the possessor and the possessee are expressed within a single noun phrase, in contrast with predicative possession or external possession.

possessive constructions. On the lexical level, Arawakanists generally distinguish between a class of inalienable nouns, which obligatorily occur possessed (with a possessive person index and/or an NP for their possessor), and a class of alienable nouns, which only optionally occur possessed (with either a possessive person index and/or a possessor NP) (Aikhenvald 1999: 82). These latter roots usually need to carry a special suffix when possessed, although in some languages some of these roots do not need a suffix then. Examples (1) and (2) show an inalienable noun with a pronominal and a nominal possessor, respectively. Examples (3) and (4) show an alienable noun first unpossessed and then possessed. When possessed as in (4), it carries a suffix specific to alienable nouns, additionally to the expression of the possessor. These two noun classes perfectly illustrate the expectation that possession is encoded formally with more material for alienable nouns than for inalienable nouns since the former need an additional suffix. But in its definition of inalienable nouns, this traditional analysis overlooks the fact that some nouns that are obligatorily possessed can actually occur without a possessor, as long as they take another special suffix as in (5). This fact is not seen in the literature as a contradiction to the inalienable categorization of this class of nouns. Also, this analysis excludes from the domain of possession a third class of nouns in Arawak languages, usually described as non-possessible, on the basis that they cannot take a possessive person index, under any conditions.

- (1) Yukuna  
*na=a'jné*  
 3<sub>PL</sub>=food  
 'their food'  
 (Lemus Serrano 2020: 50)
- (2) Yukuna  
*yuwa-ná a'jné*  
 unripe-<sub>PL</sub> food  
 'children's food'  
 (Lemus Serrano 2020: 50)
- (3) Yukuna  
*wapa'ná jwa'té ri=chiri'-ch=ó*  
 blowgun with 3<sub>SG.NF</sub>=wander-PST=MID  
 'he went with the blowgun'  
 (Lemus Serrano 2020: 812)
- (4) Yukuna  
*ri=wapa'ná-re*  
 3<sub>SG.NF</sub>=blowgun-POSD  
 'my blowgun'  
 (Lemus Serrano 2020: 51)

- (5) Yukuna  
*A'jne-jí tâ ri=ikhá.*  
 food-NPOSD EMPH 3SG.NF=PRO  
 'It is food.'  
 (Lemus Serrano 2020: 51)

On the phrase level, some Arawak languages (only a few according to Aikhenvald (1999: 84), very probably more) show two adnominal possessive constructions. The basic construction, illustrated in (6), simply encodes the possessor as a person index on the possessee or as an NP juxtaposed to it (depending on the language, the person index is present or absent when the possessor is overtly expressed as a lexical item). The indirect construction, illustrated in (7), is built on the basic one, with the slot corresponding to the possessee in (6) being filled by either a generic possessive noun (translatable as 'belonging') or a generic classifier.<sup>2</sup> This basic adnominal possessive construction with the 'dummy' possessee is then specified with a lexical expression for the possessee, and together these elements constitute the indirect construction. The distinction between these two adnominal possessive constructions could be accounted for by the alienability contrast: semantically, the basic construction as in (6) can be said to encode a tighter semantic bond between possessee and possessor than the construction with an additional dummy possessee as in (7); formally, the indirect possessive construction shows more marking than the basic one.

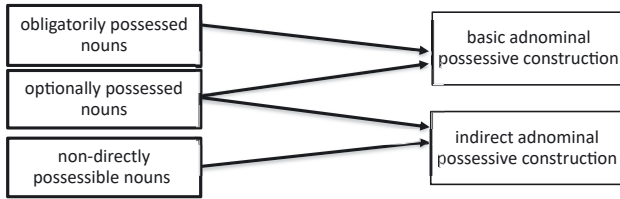
- (6) Yukuna  
*nu=aló*  
 1SG=mother  
 'my mother'  
 (Lemus Serrano 2020: 319)

- (7) Yukuna  
*ri=le'jé pají*  
 3SG.NF=GPN house  
 'his *maloca* (traditional house)'  
 (Lemus Serrano 2020: 53)

Nevertheless, we have already seen that the basic construction is not restricted to inalienable possesseees, but also functions with alienable ones as in (4). Also, while the indirect construction is presented in the literature as offering a means for so-called "non-possessible" nouns to enter a possessive construction (which is a bit of a

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2 In addition to the four languages listed in Aikhenvald (1999: 84), indirect constructions have been described for at least Baure (Danielsen 2007: 124), Yukuna (Lemus Serrano 2020: 53–54), and Paunaka (Terhart 2021: 182–185).



**Figure 1:** “Traditional” account of Arawak noun classes and possessive constructions.

contradiction), it is also attested with nouns that are possessible, as in (8) (Lemus Serrano 2020: 53).<sup>3</sup> Therefore, there is not any simple association between noun classes and adnominal possessive constructions, as summarized in Figure 1.

- (8) Yukuna  
*nu=le'jé yáwi ñáni*  
 1SG=GPN dog DIM  
 ‘my little dog’  
 (Lemus Serrano 2020: 53–54)

- (9) Yukuna  
*nu=yawi-té-na*  
 1SG=dog-POSD-PL  
 ‘my dogs’  
 (Lemus Serrano 2020: 51)

The semantic basis of the alienability contrast has regularly been used as a motivation for a difference in formal marking between two classes of nouns, or between different adnominal possessive constructions, be it in terms of iconicity (Haiman 1985: 130) or frequency (Haspelmath 2017). This article aims at re-considering the validity of “alienability” as an explanatory factor for possessive noun classes on the one hand, and possessive constructions on the other hand, in Arawak languages, through the study of a particular Arawak language, namely Mojeño Trinitario. Does the alienability contrast surface in the lexicon? If so, what does the organization of the lexicon reveal about what is considered alienable or not in this language? Does the formal difference between the two adnominal possessive constructions rate as an alienability split?

To answer these questions, I will draw a clear line between noun classes (defined by their morphosyntactic behavior in possessive constructions) and adnominal possessive constructions. This line is sometimes blurred in the literature, which sometimes

<sup>3</sup> The semantic distinction between (8) and (9) in Yukuna is actually not discussed by Lemus Serrano (2020).

seems to presuppose a strict correspondence between some noun classes and some adnominal possessive constructions. A feature of Mojeño Trinitario helps in that respect: unlike in Yukuna (see Example (2)), obligatorily possessed nouns feature possessive person prefixes even when the possessor is expressed as an NP. This systematic presence of person prefixes on obligatorily possessed nouns enables us to identify the noun classes depending not on whether they must be, can be, or cannot be possessed (i.e., enter a possessive construction), but with the more straightforward morphological criterion of whether they must, can or cannot take a person prefix.

All descriptions of Arawak languages mention the suffixes that are crucial for (all or some) so-called “alienable” nouns to be possessed. They are glossed POSD in the present work and have been exemplified with *-ne* in (4) and *-té* in (9). This article raises for the first time the question of the status of these possessive suffixes, which are crucial in most Arawak languages for so-called “alienable” nouns to be possessed. Let’s compare their traditional analysis with that of the suffixes found on obligatorily possessed nouns when these are not possessed, here glossed NPOSD and exemplified with *-jí* in (5). Most often, authors write that obligatorily possessed nouns can occur without a possessor when carrying a special suffix, without noticing the contradiction. Some authors reasonably dispel this contradiction by considering these suffixes to derive non-possessible nominal stems from obligatorily possessed roots (Danielsen 2007: 121; Michael 2012; Terhart 2021:179, for example). Similarly, it has been commonly accepted that optionally possessed noun roots enter the basic possessive construction while they systematically need a special suffix to do so (they would basically not be possessible without this suffix).

In this article, I propose that “possessive suffixes” (those glossed POSD) derive possessible nominal stems from non-possessible noun roots, mirroring the derivational account of the reverse process: the derivation of non-possessible nominal stems from obligatorily possessed roots with a NPOSD suffix mentioned above.<sup>4</sup> This results in a different categorization of noun roots into possessive noun classes. The correspondence with the previous categorization is summarized in Table 1.

Another particularity of Mojeño Trinitario is interesting: the class of optionally possessed nouns (called “alienable” in the Arawak literature) contains some nouns that can take a possessive person prefix without any other change, thus calling for a true class of optionally possessed noun roots even after the reclassification of the nouns that need a suffix in order to be possessed as non-prefixable roots.<sup>5</sup>

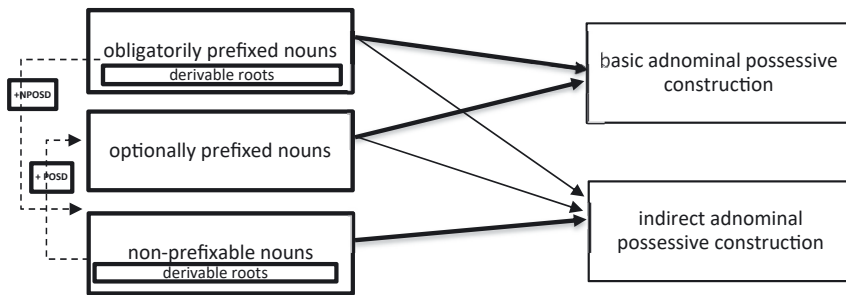
The analysis of the Mojeño Trinitario possession domain as analyzed in this article is schematized in Figure 2, where solid arrows represent the use of particular noun

4 Danielsen (2007: 123) and Terhart (2021: 181) do mention the derivation of a possessible form but do not question the fact that the underived root is therefore not possessible itself.

5 At least Paunaka also shows a class of alienable noun roots that do not need derivation to be possessed (Terhart 2021: 180).

**Table 1:** Arawak possessive noun classes: traditional account and present proposal.

Traditional possessive noun classes	Proposal for possessive noun classes	Subclasses based on derivational potential	Example from Yukuna
Inalienable	Obligatorily possessed	-NPOSD	Not illustrated <i>a'jné</i> (1) (2) (5)
Alienable	Optionally possessed		Absent in that language
Non-possessible	Not possessible with possessive person prefix	-POSD	<i>wapa'ná</i> (3) (4), <i>yáwi</i> (8) (9) <i>pají</i> (7)

**Figure 2:** Innovative account of Mojeño Trinitario noun classes and possessive constructions.

classes in possessive constructions, and dashed arrows the derivation processes among noun classes. The thinner arrows represent associations that are not frequent.

In brief, this article offers an innovative and more consistent analysis of possession in Arawak languages, with a central place given to derivational processes between noun classes. Ultimately, we will see that the semantic distinction between alienable and inalienable possession does not apply straightforwardly to either noun classes or adnominal possessive constructions, and even less so if one adopts a derivational analysis of the possessive suffixes.

Section 2 will introduce Mojeño Trinitario and its two possessive constructions: the basic and the indirect possessive constructions (the boxes to the right in Figure 2). Section 3 will present the three possessive classes of noun roots – obligatorily prefixed, optionally prefixed and non-prefixable ones (the boxes to the left in Figure 2). Section 4 will present an original analysis of the nominal suffixes that allow or disallow the combination of a noun root with a possessive person prefix: they will be analyzed as devices deriving noun roots into nominal stems of a different possessive class (the dotted arrows in Figure 2). Section 5 will then describe the distribution of



noun classes across the possessive constructions, represented by the solid arrows in Figure 2. Section 6 will argue that the notion of alienability does not clearly account for any contrast in Mojeño Trinitario, at either the lexical or phrasal level. Section 7 will briefly summarize the innovative analysis and present how it can be extended to other Arawak languages.

## 2 Adnominal possession in Mojeño Trinitario

Mojeño Trinitario (trin1274) is a Southern Arawak language spoken in the Bolivian lowlands (Gill 1957; Rose 2015b). The data on which this article is based have been collected in the field by the author since 2005. They constitute a database of 8 h of (semi)-spontaneous speech, 2 h of isolated sentences elicited with stimuli, and additionally 4900 elicited sentences (Rose 2018b).<sup>6</sup> Mojeño Trinitario is a highly agglutinating language, with a large number of suffix/enclitic slots and a few prefix slots. Lexical and grammatical morphemes display several surface forms, due to a rich system of morphophonemic rules and a pervasive process of vowel deletion (Rose 2019a). Within the few prefix slots, one finds a set of prefixes that are used to index S and A on verbs and also – most crucially for this article – the possessor on nouns. This set, called “person prefixes” in this article, encodes person, number and gender, and is presented in Table 2.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 2:** Mojeño Trinitario person prefixes.

1SG	<i>n-</i>
2SG	<i>p- ~pi-</i>
1PL	<i>v- ~vi-</i>
2PL	<i>a-</i>
3M(SG,H) speaker♂	<i>ma-</i>
3M(SG,H) speaker♀	<i>ñi-</i>
3F(SG,H)	<i>s-</i>
3PL(H)	<i>na-</i>
3NH(SG/PL)	<i>ta-</i>
3	<i>t- ~ty-</i> on verbs only
‘other’	<i>po-</i> on nouns only

<sup>6</sup> Examples of Mojeño Trinitario are followed by a code referring to my corpus. Examples extracted from texts are coded with the identification number assigned to the text and the utterance number within the text. Examples elicited as isolated sentences with the help of a stimulus are coded for the Stimulus, then a capital letter for the speaker, and the number of the utterance

<sup>7</sup> The paradigm is discussed in detail in Rose (2015a) and its genderlect feature present in the 3rd-person human singular masculine forms in Rose (2013).

Mojeño Trinitario shows two adnominal possessive constructions, which I call basic and indirect. They are represented by the boxes to the right in Figure 2. They are presented respectively in Sections 2.1 and 2.2, and highlighted in boldface in the examples when part of a full sentence. The rarely attested possibility of combining the two possessive constructions will be presented later, in Section 5.3.

## 2.1 The basic adnominal possessive construction

In the basic adnominal possessive construction, the noun for the possessee has to carry a person prefix indexing the possessor. This noun may be modified by the following noun phrase for its possessor.<sup>8</sup> This head-marked construction is summarized in Figure 3, where optional modifiers are overlooked. It is exemplified in (10).

DET *prefi*<sub>X<sub>POSSESSOR</sub></sub>-N<sub>POSSESSEE</sub> (DET N<sub>POSSESSOR</sub>)

**Figure 3:** The basic adnominal possessive construction.

- (10) *to ta-kunara'i to koje*  
 ART.NH 3NH-image ART.NH moon  
 ‘the reflection of the moon’  
 (6.017)

Very often, as in (11), the possessor is not expressed as an overt noun phrase, either because it is already given in the context and the possessive prefix on the possessee suffices to retrieve its identity, or because the possessor is first or second person.<sup>9</sup>

- (11) *esu s-ve-'o to s-ipruji*  
 3F 3F-take\_out-ACT ART.NH 3F-medicine  
 ‘She gets her remedies.’  
 (C&B\_S.070)

<sup>8</sup> Krasnoukhova (2011: 87, 2012: 97) notes that in her sample of South American languages, most possessive constructions show the order possessor-possessee, except a few languages, most of which are found in the Guaporé-Mamoré area. Note that Mojeño Trinitario, spoken in the Guaporé-Mamoré area, reinforces the latter areal tendency towards the order possessee-possessor.

<sup>9</sup> Free pronouns for possessors may co-occur with possessive prefixes but are generally not used in possessive constructions.

DET prefix<sub>POSSESSOR</sub>-ye'e N<sub>POSSESSEE</sub> (DET N<sub>POSSESSOR</sub>)

**Figure 4:** The indirect adnominal possessive construction.

## 2.2 The indirect adnominal possessive construction

The indirect adnominal possessive construction follows the pattern of the basic adnominal possessive construction (summarized in Figure 3), in that a noun carries a person prefix indexing the possessor, and may be modified by a following noun phrase for its possessor. But here the noun that carries the person prefix is systematically the generic possessive noun *-ye'e* 'belonging',<sup>10</sup> and is combined with another noun, that is semantically the possessee. The indirect adnominal possessive construction is summarized in Figure 4, where optional modifiers are overlooked.

Just like the possessee noun in the basic construction (Figure 3), the noun *-ye'e* is preceded by a determiner and carries a person prefix referring to the possessor. However, *-ye'e* does not add any particular meaning to the possessive construction. It is a dummy item coreferential with the noun that specifies semantically the identity of the possessee.

In general, the noun *-ye'e* precedes the noun expressing the possessee, and both are preceded by one determiner only, as illustrated in Example (12) where *maye'e paku* is preceded by the non-human determiner *to*.

- (12) *to ma-ye'e paku ma 'móperu*  
 ART.NH 3M-GPN dog ART.M youngster  
 'the dog of the boy (lit. the his-belonging dog of the youngster)'  
 (18.022)

The fact that the generic possessive noun *-ye'e* and the semantically more specific noun for the possessee share a single determiner excludes an analysis in terms of juxtaposition of two noun phrases: both nouns are forming the core of a noun phrase, with *-ye'e* being a head and the possessee noun a modifier.<sup>11</sup> This noun phrase then allows the embedding of a further noun phrase for the possessor.

<sup>10</sup> The noun roots preceded by a hyphen in this paper cannot stand alone but instead need to be either prefixed or used in a compound. Very rarely, a semantically more specific noun is used in the same position as *-ye'e* in this indirect adnominal possessive construction.

<sup>11</sup> A noun modifying another noun in Mojeño Trinitario is not preceded by a determiner, like *'jiro* in *ñi 'chane 'jiro* 'the man (lit. the person man)', see Rose and Van Linden (2022: 248). By contrast, a noun phrase used in apposition to another noun phrase will show a determiner, if its head noun is specific. Mojeño Trinitario determiners consist of articles, demonstratives and some uses of third-person pronouns (as the bolded *eto* in (15)).

Most frequently, the possessor noun phrase is not expressed because it is one of the speech act participants, as in (13), or because it is discourse-given, as in (14) from the *Frog story* (a rendering of a picture book about a boy and a frog [Mayer 1969]), where *ma-* refers to the main protagonist of the story.

- (13) *ta-nos=po to n-ñe'e pak-chicha*  
 3NH-stay=PFV ART.NH 1SG-GPN dog-EMP  
 ‘My poor dog stayed.’  
 (38.199)

- (14) *ene eto to ma-ye'e paku ta-woo-'o t-opn-u-ch-a*  
 and 3NH ART.NH 3M-GPN dog 3NH-want-ACT 3NH-go\_up-APPL-ACT-IRR  
*eto to t-ow-ri-ko to moposi-ono*  
 3NH ART.NH 3-live-PLURACT-ACT ART.NH bee-PL  
 ‘And his dog wanted to climb where the bees were (i.e., the bee nest).’  
 (18.026)

In addition, and extremely rarely, the possessee may not be expressed. The meaning of *-ye'e* is then either semantically vague, or interpretable in context. It may be translated as ‘thing’ or with a possessive pronoun as in (15).

- (15) *eto=rip=tse=ro eto v-ye'-on=richu viti je'e*  
 3NH=PFV=contrast=UNQ 3NH 1PL-GPN-PL=RESTR 1PL VALD  
 ‘But they (the dogs) are ours, really.’  
 (13.005)

The noun *-ye'e* is itself an obligatorily prefixed noun without a clear semantic extension beyond the meaning of expressing a relation between two entities, hence its gloss as ‘generic possessive noun’ (GPN).<sup>12</sup> It retains its nominal features: it is preceded by a determiner, takes possessive prefixes like all obligatorily prefixed nouns, and also combines with the plural marker *-ono* found on nominals (15) and the nominal irrealis suffix *-ina* (not illustrated here).

This section has presented the two Mojeño Trinitario adnominal possessive constructions, while the next section will present the three Mojeño Trinitario possessive noun classes. The distribution of the different classes of nouns in the two possessive constructions will be discussed in Section 5.

<sup>12</sup> Possessive nouns are discussed from a typological point of view in Bickel and Nichols (2013). The noun *-ye'e* has other crucial functions in Mojeño Trinitario: it has grammaticalized as the universal preposition (Rose 2019b) and also forms the basis for the denominal verb *-koy'e* ‘have’ (Rose 2018a).

### 3 Mojeño Trinitario possessive noun classes

The three classes of Mojeño Trinitario nouns are identified in this article on a morphological basis, depending on their combination with the possessive prefixes listed in Table 2, when used as the head of an NP expressing possession.<sup>13</sup> Note that the expression of possession within a Mojeño Trinitario NP necessarily involves a possessive prefix on the possessee (or the generic possessive noun), whether the possessor is co-expressed by a nominal term or not. The three Mojeño Trinitario possessive noun classes, represented by the left boxes within Figure 2, are called obligatorily prefixed, optionally prefixed, and non-prefixable. This terminology implicitly targets the possessive person prefixes, given that they are the only prefixes that a noun root can take without being derived into another part-of-speech. Sub-classes of nouns, in turn, are determined based on their derivational potential.

This section describes how these noun classes categorize noun roots. Section 4 will show how noun roots of one noun class can be derived into a stem of another noun class.

#### 3.1 Obligatorily prefixed nouns

A first class of nouns comprises those roots which must carry a possessive prefix specifying the person, gender and number of the possessor. Table 3 offers a selection of these obligatorily prefixed noun roots. The first column shows the form used with a possessive person prefix, the fourth column gives the gloss, and the last one the semantic domain.

The first subset of nouns in Table 3 are always produced with a person prefix in the texts, and in elicitation sessions, speakers could not think of them without a prefix. An example is given in (16). Other nouns use one of several formal devices to occur without a prefix, i.e. unpossessed. The second column of Table 3 gives the form of these nouns when used without a prefix, while the third highlights the device used for the prefixless form, often a suffix glossed *N<sub>POSD</sub>* as in (17). This derivation process will be dealt with in Section 4.1.

- (16)     *m-pórape*                    \**pórape*  
           1sg-older\_sibling    older\_sibling  
           ‘my older sibling’    ‘older sibling’

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<sup>13</sup> Compounds are not analyzed as expressing possession, since the modifier cannot be specific (Rose and Van linden 2022).

Table 3: Selection of obligatorily prefixed noun roots.

ROOT	DERIVED STEM	SUFFIX	GLOSS	SEMANTIC DOMAIN
<i>-pórape</i>	n/a	n/a	‘older sibling’	Kinship
<i>-chicha</i>	n/a	n/a	‘offspring’	Kinship
<i>-apiaru</i>	n/a	n/a	‘uncle’	Kinship
<i>-imse</i>	n/a	n/a	‘mother-in-law’	Kinship (affinal)
<i>-kuñara</i>	n/a	n/a	‘sister-in-law’	Kinship (affinal)
<i>-iype</i>	n/a	n/a	‘foot’	Body part
<i>-ji'u</i>	n/a	n/a	‘horn, shoulder’	Body part
<i>-poko</i>	n/a	n/a	‘leaf’	Part-whole (vegetal)
<i>-chusi</i>	n/a	n/a	‘ravine’	Part-whole (landscape)
<i>-mópeku</i>	n/a	n/a	‘below’	Spatial relation
<i>-ju'e</i>	n/a	n/a	‘interior’	Spatial relation
<i>-kuna(ra'i)</i>	n/a	n/a	‘image’	Attribute
<i>-atajiwo</i>	n/a	n/a	‘suffering’	Feeling
<i>-kane</i>	n/a	n/a	‘worm, parasite’	Fauna
<i>-ye'e</i>	n/a	n/a	‘thing, belonging’	
<i>-yeno</i>	<i>yéno-re</i>	<i>-re</i> NPOSD	‘wife’	Kinship (affinal)
<i>-chimra</i>	<i>chmora-re</i>	<i>-re</i> NPOSD	‘visit’ (NMLZ)	Social relation
<i>-miro</i>	<i>miro-re</i>	<i>-re</i> NPOSD	‘face’	Body part
<i>-chuti</i>	<i>chti-re</i>	<i>-re</i> NPOSD	‘head’	Body part
<i>-mu'i</i>	<i>mu'i-re</i>	<i>-re</i> NPOSD	‘dress’	Clothing & accessory
<i>-mui'pa'e</i>	<i>muipue-re</i>	<i>-re</i> NPOSD	‘pants’	Clothing & accessory
<i>-juma</i>	<i>jma-re</i>	<i>-re</i> NPOSD	‘illness’	Attribute
<i>-owsa</i>	<i>wósa-re</i>	<i>-re</i> NPOSD	‘village, town’ (NMLZ)	Artifact
<i>-eesa</i>	<i>résa-re</i>	<i>-re</i> NPOSD	‘beer’ (NMLZ)	Artifact
<i>-siivi</i>	<i>sviv-re</i>	<i>-re</i> NPOSD	‘flute’	Artifact
<i>-chineno</i>	<i>chneno-ko</i>	<i>-ko</i> NPOSD	‘daughter-in-law’	Kinship (affinal)
<i>-emtone</i>	<i>'motne-ko</i>	<i>-ko</i> NPOSD	‘work’	Attribute
<i>-echjiiriwo</i>	<i>'chojrri-ko-wo</i>	<i>-ko</i> NPOSD	‘language/speech’ (NMLZ)	Attribute
<i>-ésane</i>	<i>'san-ti</i>	<i>-ti</i> NPOSD	‘field’	Artifact
<i>-sawara</i>	<i>saware</i>	a → e	‘tobacco’	Flora
<i>-peno</i>	<i>peti</i>	suppletion	‘house’	Artifact

- (17) *n-yeno*    *yéno-re*  
 1SG-wife    wife-NPOSD  
 ‘my wife’    ‘wife’

In terms of semantic domains (last column of Table 3), the class of obligatorily possessed nouns exhausts all kinship terms and spatial relations, and it includes most body parts and parts of wholes, most items of clothing and personal accessories, some bodily excretions, some attributes like ‘work’, ‘charge’ and ‘language’ and a few artifacts like ‘beer’, ‘arrow’, and ‘flute’. Note the presence of two loanwords from Spanish in this class: *-kuñaru* ‘brother-in-law’ and *-kuñara* ‘sister-in-law’.

### 3.2 Optionally prefixed nouns

A second class of nouns consists of noun roots that can take a possessive person prefix but do not have to. They can also appear bare. This is illustrated by the two occurrences of *metsi* ‘pot’ in (18), first with a possessive person prefix and then prefixless. A selection of optionally prefixed nominal roots is presented in Table 4. Stems derived from non-prefixable roots behave in a similar fashion (see Section 4.2).

- (18) *t-imagi eto y-metsi, w-yukjo-mri-k=po eto*  
 3-boil 3<sub>NH</sub> 1<sub>PL</sub>-pot 1<sub>PL</sub>-pierce-CLF.group-ACT=PFV 3<sub>NH</sub>  
*to taemoropi eto to metsi*  
 ART.NH strap 3<sub>NH</sub> ART.NH pot  
 ‘Our pots were boiling, we would pass a stick through their handle’  
 (38.86)

Most roots in this class show two different forms depending on the presence or absence of a prefix, because of rhythmic syncope (Rose 2019a), such as *-pokre ~ pkure* ‘canoe’ (the underlying form of which, *pokure*, is never attested synchronically). Most invariable roots are borrowings, like *kareta* ‘cart’ (<Sp. *carreta*). It is also noteworthy that many of the optionally prefixed nouns have historically incorporated a classifier (i.e., the root never occurs without the classifier): one can recognize the classifiers *-mo* CLF.fabric in *-poomo* ‘leather’, *-pe* CLF.blade in *-esaviipe* ‘machete’, *-pa* CLF.needle in *-ijruupa* ‘spindle’ and *-ve* CLF.pointed in *enrove* ‘fishing hook’ for example.

Semantically, the optionally possessed nouns can be conceived of as referring to alienably possessed items. Most refer to artifacts that can easily change possessors. However, this class also includes one noun that refers to a body part and one to a part-whole relation, two semantic classes of nouns considered as expressing

**Table 4:** Selection of optionally prefixed nominal roots.

ROOT (PREFIXED)	ROOT (PREFIX-LESS)	GLOSS	SEMANTIC DOMAIN
<i>-yuchmo</i>	<i>yuchmo</i>	‘wall, fence’	Part-whole <sup>a</sup>
<i>-poomo</i>	<i>prumo</i>	‘skin/leather’	Body-part
<i>-siya</i>	<i>siya</i>	‘chair’	Artifact
<i>-ipruji</i>	<i>'puuji</i>	‘remedy’	Artifact
<i>-kareta</i>	<i>kareta</i>	‘cart’	Artifact
<i>-esaviipe</i>	<i>'saype</i>	‘machete’	Artifact
<i>-pokre</i>	<i>pkure</i>	‘canoe’	Artifact
<i>-ijruupa</i>	<i>juurupa</i>	‘spindle’	Artifact
<i>-enrove</i>	<i>'niive</i>	‘fishing hook’	Artifact
<i>-metsi</i>	<i>metsi</i>	‘pot’	Artifact

<sup>a</sup>I consider *-yuchmo* ‘wall, fence’ to express a part-whole relationship, because its possessor is typically a building or a piece of land, just as the following root *-poomo* ‘skin/leather’ is a body part, with its possessor being the animal or person of which the skin is a part.

inalienable relationships because they do not usually change possessors. The only body-part term in this class, *-poomo* ‘skin, leather’ is most often used of the body part taken off from an animal (leather is an important material in this cattle-farming society). Elicited data indicate that natural entities or landscape elements, animals and plants may also enter this class.

### 3.3 Non-prefixable nouns

The third class of nouns consists of roots that do not take possessive person prefixes. A selection of non-prefixable noun roots is presented in Table 5. The first column shows the bare form of a noun, the fourth column the gloss, and the last one the semantic domain. The second and third columns concern only the roots that can be derived into optionally prefixed noun stems (see Section 4.2). Additionally, stems derived from obligatorily possessed roots behave like non-prefixable nouns (see Section 4.1).

**Table 5:** Selection of non-prefixable nominal roots.

Root	Derived stem	SUFFIX	GLOSS	SEMANTIC DOMAIN
<i>'pog'e</i>			‘ground, earth’	Natural element
<i>wkugi</i>			‘tree, stick’	Flora
<i>mkure</i>			‘pumpkin’	Flora
<i>sórare</i>			‘animal’	Fauna
<i>jimo</i>			‘fish’	Fauna
<i>'resia</i>			‘church’	Artifact
<i>'moyo</i>			‘child’	Human being
<i>trinranu</i>			‘Trinitario’	Human being
<i>'avitu</i>			‘robe’	Clothing & accessory
<i>nuuku</i>			‘hole’	Part-whole
<i>prata</i>			‘money’	Artifact
<i>moto</i>			‘motorcycle’	Artifact
<i>moso</i>	<i>-moso-ra</i>	<i>-ra</i> POSD	‘employee’	Social relation
<i>'chane</i>	<i>-chane-ra</i>	<i>-ra</i> POSD	‘person/assistant’	Human/social relation
<i>añu</i>	<i>-'añu-ra</i>	<i>-ra</i> POSD	‘year/age’	Attribute
<i>sache</i>	<i>-sáche-ra</i>	<i>-ra</i> POSD	‘day/sun, day’	Attribute/natural element
<i>krutsu</i>	<i>-kuutsu-ra</i>	<i>-ra</i> POSD	‘cross’	Artifact
<i>wasu</i>	<i>-wasu-ra</i>	<i>-ra</i> POSD	‘glass’	Artifact
<i>kujpa</i>	<i>-kújpa-ra</i>	<i>-ra</i> POSD	‘manioc’	Flora
<i>wiye</i>	<i>-wíye-ra</i>	<i>-ra</i> POSD	‘ox’	Fauna
<i>waka</i>	<i>-waka-ra</i>	<i>-ra</i> POSD	‘cow’	Fauna
<i>'chene</i>	<i>-ochene-k-ra</i>	<i>-ra</i> POSD	‘path’	Artifact
<i>apija</i> (only verbalized)	<i>-apija-ne</i>	<i>-ne</i> POSD	‘last name’	Attribute
<i>kaja</i>	<i>-kája-ne</i>	<i>-ne</i> POSD	‘caja (music instr.)’	Artifact



Semantically, non-prefixable noun roots refer to elements which are not normally possessed, i.e., are not seen as necessarily participating in the sphere of some other element: many refer to inanimate entities like natural elements and flora, but some also refer to animate beings (wild animals and general terms for humans). The class nevertheless also contains some items that can be conceived as possessed, referring to animates like domesticated animals and social relations, and to inanimates like food, clothing, artifacts, part-whole relations, bodily excretions and attributes. Note that many but not all of the non-prefixable nouns that can be conceived as being possessed are borrowings from Spanish, like *'resia* 'church', *'padrino* 'godfather', *'avitu* 'robe', *'prata* 'money' or *'moto* 'motorcycle'.

This section has described the three lexical classes of Mojeño Trinitario nouns based on their morphology: obligatorily prefixed, optionally prefixed and non-prefixable. How these classes associate with the adnominal constructions will be described in Section 5, and how they can or cannot be accounted for by an alienability contrast will be discussed in Section 6, after the possible derivation among these classes is presented in the next section.

## 4 Derivation between possessive noun classes

The derivational processes among possessive noun classes are represented by the dotted arrows in Figure 2. Section 4.1 presents the derivation of non-prefixable noun stems from obligatorily prefixed noun roots, and follows an analysis already used for some Arawak languages. Section 4.2 discusses the derivation of prefixable noun stems from non-prefixable noun roots, an innovative analysis proposed in this article (on the impact of this new analysis, see Section 7).

This proposal has three advantages. First, the analysis is consistent: both POSD and NPOSD suffixes are regarded as derivational devices among noun classes, rather than just one of them. Second, this analysis in terms of derivation fits well with the fact that the derivational processes trigger changes in the valency of the nouns, i.e., whether the nouns take a possessor or not. Third, the analysis of POSD and NPOSD suffixes as derivational devices is congruent with the observation of semantic changes through derivation.

### 4.1 Derivation of non-prefixable noun stems from obligatorily prefixed noun roots

Some obligatorily prefixed nominal roots can be derived into non-prefixable stems by various formal means, listed in the third column of Table 3: by adding a

NPOSD suffix *-re*, *-ko*, or *-ti*,<sup>14</sup> via a final vowel shift in the noun *-sawara* ~ *saware* ‘tobacco’, or through suppletive forms or substantial formal changes for a few nouns. The stems derived through these means occur without a possessive person prefix, such as *mu'i-re* ‘dress’ in (19), where a potential possessor is not at issue.<sup>15</sup>

- (19) *sakmu'ipo to mu'ire*  
*s-a-k-mu'i=po to mu'i-re*  
 3F-IRR-VZ-dress=PFV ART.NH dress-NPOSD  
 ‘She will put a dress on.’  
 (29.057)

As for semantics, the sub-set of obligatorily prefixed nominal roots that can be derived into non-prefixable stems includes some affinal kin terms, body parts, clothing items and accessories, attributes and artifacts. The sub-set of obligatorily prefixed noun roots that cannot be derived into non-prefixable stems includes non-affinal kin terms, spatial configurations and parts of wholes. At least two of the derived noun stems show a meaning different from that of the root: *chti-re* ‘skull’ from *-chuti* ‘head’, and *'chojrui-ko-wo* ‘story’ (21) from *-echjiriwo* ‘language, speech’ (20). It is a common characteristic of derivation that the semantics of the derived item is not always predictable.

- (20) *n-echjiriwo*  
 1SG-language  
 ‘my language, my speech’
- (21) *to n-ye'e 'chojruiowo*  
 ART.NH 1SG-GPN story.NPOSD  
 ‘my story (of my life)’  
 (15.025)

The three most frequent derivational devices are the NPOSD suffixes *-re*, *-ko*, and *-ti*. Each one is specialized for a certain set of nouns, but this distribution is not predictable.<sup>16</sup> One can nevertheless propose a few semantic generalizations:

<sup>14</sup> The forms of the noun with or without a NPOSD suffix often differ because of the application of rhythmic syncope or because of other phonological reduction processes (Rose 2019a). All these additional changes are regular.

<sup>15</sup> There is only one example in the corpus of an obligatorily possessed noun (*pero* ‘mount animal’) that, once derived with the NPOSD suffix *-ko*, is optionally prefixed. The derived stem *peroko* has a more general meaning of ‘animal’. I take this as a case of lexicalization.

<sup>16</sup> In other Arawak languages, there is a single NPOSD suffix *-fi* or *-jVi*, often restricted to body parts (Aikhenvald 2021).

*-re* is used for clothing and accessories, and for most (derivable) body parts; affinal kinship terms are derived with either *-re* or *-ko*; most lexical nominalizations take *-ko*.

## 4.2 Derivation of optionally prefixed nominal stems from non-prefixable noun roots

The other derivation process among noun classes derives non-prefixable noun roots into prefixable nominal stems. This is essentially done with two POSD suffixes *-ra* and *-ne* (see the third column of Table 5). In (22), *-ra* makes the non-prefixable root *krutsu* ‘cross’ (from Spanish *cruz*) a prefixable form, which occurs prefixed in a basic possessive construction.

- (22) *to ma-kuutsu-ra ma v-iya*  
DET 3M-CROSS-POSD ART.M 1PL-father  
 ‘the cross of our father’  
 (25.129)

Derived prefixable stems most often occur within the basic possessive construction. However, I consider that the derived stems are optionally, rather than obligatorily, prefixed because two derived nouns occur without a possessive person prefix in my corpus, one outside of a possessive construction and the other in the indirect possessive construction (exemplified in (24)).

As for semantics, the sub-set of non-prefixable noun roots that can take a POSD suffix includes terms for a diversity of elements: animals, plants and natural elements/phenomena,<sup>17</sup> as well as terms for humans expressing (temporary) social relations (such as ‘employee’) rather than permanent identities (such as ‘man’). Some terms for human beings show a distinct meaning when derived (such as *'chane* ‘person’ and *-chanera* ‘assistant, employee, partner’), as expected for derivation processes.

Just like the NPOSD suffixes, the two POSD suffixes *-ra* and *-ne* are in complementary distribution, as they are specific for certain sub-sets of nouns. It is not feasible to motivate the distribution of the two suffixes on specific noun roots on the basis of phonological or semantic grounds in a straightforward fashion.<sup>18</sup> One can only note

<sup>17</sup> The word for ‘sun’ is polysemous when prefixless: it means either ‘sun’ or ‘day’. In its derived form, it exclusively means ‘day’, usually referring to a birthday or name day.

<sup>18</sup> In the Arawak literature, the distribution of the different POSD suffixes is often partially accounted for by the semantics of the nouns (Aikhenvald 2012: 167; Brandão 2014: 169; Haurholm-Larsen 2016: 56–57), except in Kampan languages, where only the number of syllables of the root matters (Castillo Ramirez 2017: 75; Michael 2012: 152).

that *-ra* tends to associate with nouns referring to animates (humans or animals), often with a sense of accompaniment or assistance. Both *-ra* and *-ne* are attested with borrowings, such as *waka ~ -waka-ra* ‘cow, meat’,<sup>19</sup> and *kaja ~ -kaja-ne* ‘caja (a music instrument)’. Elicitation has shown that *-ra* is particularly productive on a large variety of nouns.

Finally, the corpus shows a single example of double derivation. A non-prefixable stem *'motne-ko* ‘work’ derived with a NPOSD suffix from the obligatorily prefixed root *-emtone* ‘work’ can additionally take a POSD suffix to become prefixable. In the process, its meaning changes from ‘work’ to ‘employee’, with *-ra* expressing a social relation of assistance. In (23), the doubly-derived stem is used in the basic construction, and in (24), in the indirect possessive construction.

(23) *no n-'motne-ko-ra-no*  
ART.PL 1SG-work-NPOSD-POSD-PL  
 ‘my employees’

(24) *piti p-kojch-a komo no s-ye'-ono 'motne-ko-ra*  
2SG 2SG-SCOLD-IRR because ART.PL 3F-GPN-PL WORK-NPOSD-POSD  
*taj-ina s-jich-a*  
3NH.INDT-IRR 3F-say-IRR  
 ‘You scold her, since she does not say anything to her employees.’  
 (37.091)

The interaction of the two types of derived stems described in this section with adnominal possessive constructions is described in the next section. Section 6 will discuss how derivational processes make the picture of the expression of possession in Mojeño Trinitario more difficult to explain by the alienability contrast.

## 5 Distribution of noun classes within possessive constructions

This section details how noun stems of different classes, derived or not, are distributed across the two possessive constructions. These combinations are represented by the solid arrows in Figure 2. As obvious from the figure, there is no simple

<sup>19</sup> In its derived possessible form, only the meaning ‘cow’ is attested.

association between classes of noun stems and possessive constructions, especially if we take into consideration derivation among noun classes. At least a sub-set of each of the three classes of nouns can enter the two possessive constructions, sometimes through derivation. This section also investigates whether the two constructions express different possessive relationships, in order to examine whether the competition between the two constructions falls under the alienability contrast (to be discussed in Section 6.5).

This section starts in 5.1 with the most frequent combinations of noun roots with possessive constructions – represented by the thick arrows in Figure 2. It then addresses in 5.2 and 5.3 two exceptional cases where the same noun can enter the two constructions – represented by thin arrows in Figure 2. These last two subsections present data from Mojeño Trinitario which I know no parallel of in other Arawak languages. Lastly, the distribution of derived noun stems in possessive constructions is presented in 5.4 and 5.5. These are represented in Figure 2 by more complex pathways, following the dotted arrows to the left (derivation) and then solid arrows.

## 5.1 Regular combination of noun roots with possessive constructions

Noun roots of different classes, when non-derived, most frequently enter a specific possessive construction. Obligatorily prefixed noun roots like *-chicha* ‘offspring’ exclusively enter the basic possessive construction as in (25). Optionally prefixed noun roots like *pokre* ‘canoe’ mainly enter the basic possessive construction as in (26). Non-prefixable roots like *pog'e* ‘land’ may exclusively enter the indirect construction as in (27). What has not been checked through elicitation work is whether some non-prefixable nouns can absolutely not enter the indirect construction and are therefore strictly non-possessible.

- (25) *p-su-kro ma-chicha ma rey*  
 DEM-F-POT.LOC 3M-offspring ART.M king  
 ‘that daughter of the king’  
 (06.069)

- (26) *na-pokre*  
 3PL-canoe  
 ‘their canoe’  
 (19.174)

- (27) *to ñi-ye'e 'pog'e*  
 ART.NH 3M-GPN land  
 'his land'  
 (34.004)

## 5.2 Exceptional combination of an optionally prefixed noun root with the indirect possessive construction

It has been asserted in the preceding section that (non-derived) optionally prefixed noun roots mainly enter the basic possessive construction. This combination is not exclusive: there is one corpus example of such a noun in the indirect construction, given in (28). Since this pattern has been reproduced in elicitation with other optionally prefixed nouns, I take it as a rare but grammatical combination. In the discourse from which (28) comes, the possessee is a very atypical member of the canoe category, namely a caiman. The only hypothesis I can put forward for this example is that the possession of a “caiman canoe” might be conceived of differently from the possession of a wooden canoe.<sup>20</sup>

- (28) *ene=ji ñi-jich=ri'i ñi ñ-ich-'o=p=puka eto*  
 this\_way=RPT 3M-DO=IPFV ART.M 3M-call-ACT=PFV=DUB 3NH  
*to manje'e ñi-ye'e=ri'i pkure*  
 ART.NH PH 3M-GPN=IPFV canoe  
 'And he did so, he very likely called his canoe [to come and get him].'  
 (19.172)

## 5.3 Obligatory prefixed nouns in a doubly marked possessive construction

It has been stated in Section 2 that the two adnominal possessive constructions may combine in a single construction: in this doubly-marked possessive construction, the possessee noun takes a prefix for its possessor and is preceded by the generic possessive noun *-ye'e* that also takes a possessive prefix. This construction is analyzed as

<sup>20</sup> A reviewer made the interesting suggestion that it may be referents rather than noun roots or stems that matter in terms of possession strategy, since *pkure* 'canoe' normally enters the basic possessive construction, and *meromero* 'caiman' could, given a proper context, enter the indirect possessive construction.

a single noun phrase, given the presence of one determiner only (the demonstrative *jma* in (29)), and the absence of a prosodic break. The interpretation of this construction requires further research.

- (29) *t-kaj-koko-no j-ma na-ye'e na-ni-ru apu*  
 3-share-RECP-PL DEM-NH.PL 3PL-GPN 3PL-eat-SP.P.NZ banana  
 ‘They share their (food) bananas.’  
 (Path\_C.029)

Only obligatorily prefixed nouns are found in the doubly-marked possessive construction, which is rare: it occurs five times in the text corpus, and once in an elicited noun phrase, as in (29) and (30).

- (30) *v-ye'e t-o'i*  
 1PL-GPN 3NH-fruit  
 ‘our fruit’

The five text examples all involve lexical nominalizations (with various patientive nominalizers), in which the nominalized verb obligatorily takes a possessive prefix encoding the “subject” of the verb. In this construction, the person prefixes on the deverbal noun and on *-ye'e* are always coreferential so that there is a single possessor entity. A tentative explanation for this double marking of possession is that in the basic construction, the possessive relationship is preferably interpreted as being agentive: the referent of the person prefix on the deverbal noun, in analogy with its use on verbs, tends to be interpreted as the agent of the verbal root.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, the possessive relationship expressed in the indirect construction does not have this additional semantics. The doubly marked possessive construction would then express two types of possessive relationships simultaneously, with one of them being more “agentive” when deverbal nouns are involved.

For instance, in (29), the deverbal noun *ni-ru* ‘food’ is possessed both with a possessive person prefix and through the use of the generic possessive noun *-ye'e*. Given that this sentence was produced to describe a video clip (Vuillermet and Kopecka 2019), it is difficult to speculate what kind of special possessive relations the protagonists could have with their food. Of course, they could be conceived of as being both the eaters and the owners of the food.

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<sup>21</sup> Note that the person prefixes found on nominalizations are not always those expected on verbs, and are therefore best analyzed as possessive person prefixes. In fact, intransitive verbs normally take the third-person prefix *t-* rather than a semantically specific third-person prefix (Rose 2011).

This analysis of the doubly-marked possessive construction as encoding two different possessive relationships works as well for the single (elicited) example of doubly marked possession involving an underived nominal stem, given in (30).<sup>22</sup> In this example, the person prefix on the noun and that on *-ye'e* are not coreferential, so this construction involves two possessors. The person prefix on the noun for 'fruit' can only refer to the plant it has grown on and an owner of the 'fruit' can only be referred to through the indirect possessive construction. This elicited example is the only case not involving derivation where one clearly sees a different contribution of the two possessive constructions.

#### 5.4 Integration of derived prefixable noun stems in the basic possessive construction

We have seen that underived non-prefixable roots enter the indirect possessive construction only (5.1). However, once derived into prefixable stems, they can enter the basic possessive construction. Noticeably, most of the examples of the corpus involve borrowings, with the exception of *ochenekra* 'path' (illustrated in (33)) and the doubly-derived *'motnekora* 'employee' (seen in (23) and (24)).

Most of the time, there is no discernable meaning difference between the two possessive constructions involving the same root. For instance, the following pair of examples shows the non-prefixable noun root *wasu* 'glass' (borrowed from Spanish) in two very comparable sentences.<sup>23</sup> In (31), the basic construction builds on the prefixable form of the noun, derived with the POSD suffix *-ra*; in (32), the indirect construction builds on the non-derived form. There is no noticeable difference in meaning between the two constructions.

- (31)    *ñi-kooto-ko*    *p-jo*        *ñi-woteya*,    *to*        *ñi-wasu-ra*  
          3M-grab-ACT    DEM-NH.SG    3M-bottle    ART.NH    3M-glass-POSD  
          'He took his bottle, his glass'  
          (42.042)

<sup>22</sup> This example was elicited in a session targeting phonological alternations, where my cue was 'our fruit', and aimed at collecting a form with the obligatorily prefixed noun root *-o'i* 'fruit' and a first-person plural prefix. Because this root cannot actually combine with a prefix with a human referent, the speaker used the doubly-marked possessive construction to yield the expected meaning. As a reaction to a reviewer's question, there is no particular reason to believe that the non-human prefix is used here as a dummy possessive prefix in the absence of a possessor, although this cannot be fully excluded.

<sup>23</sup> These two sentences were uttered by the same fluent speaker in the context of the Family Problem Solving Task (San Roque et al. 2012).



- (32) *p-ñi-gia ñi-kooto-ko p-jo ñi-woteria p-jo ñi-ye'e wasu*  
 DEM-M-PROX 3M-grab-ACT DEM-NH.SG 3M-bottle DEM-NH.SG 3M-GPN glass  
 '[...] this (man) is holding his bottle, his glass.'  
 (40.163)

The two possessive constructions have been noticed to clearly encode two different possessive relationships with one non-prefixable root only, '*chene* 'path'. Within the basic possessive construction involving the derived prefixable form *-ochene-k-ra* in (33), the possessor of the path is its goal, i.e., the place to which the path leads (here, the field). Within the indirect possessive construction involving the non-prefixable form '*chene* in (34), the possessor of the path is the person who usually uses it (and was probably responsible for making it in the first place).

- (33) *s-im-'a to t-ochene-k-ra to 'san-ti*  
 3F-watch-ACT-IRR ART.NH 3NH-path-CLF.path-POSD ART.NH field-NPOSD  
 'She would see the path to (lit. of) the field.'  
 (29.018)
- (34) *ty-opno su 'seno te to s-ye'e 'chene te to s-ésane*  
 3-go\_up ART.F woman PREP.NH ART.NH 3F-GPN path PREP.NH ART.NH 3F-field  
 'The woman is going up on her path to her field.'  
 (Path\_M033)

## 5.5 Integration of derived non-prefixable noun stems in the indirect possessive construction

As stated in Section 5.1, obligatorily prefixed roots exclusively enter the basic possessive construction when underived. When derived into non-prefixable noun stems, they may either be used outside of any possessive construction as in (35) or enter the indirect possessive construction. This latter combination is attested with three deverbal nouns only, *echjiriwo* 'language' as in (21), *owsa* 'village', and *ajre* 'written document' in (36).<sup>24</sup>

- (35) *a-sam-a p-jo-ka 'chojriikowo*  
 2PL-listen-IRR DEM-NH.SG-PROX story.NPOSD  
 'Listen this story!'  
 (9.057)

<sup>24</sup> They are derived from the verbal roots *echji-ko* 'speak', *owo* 'be at, live in', and *aj(u)-cho* 'write'.

- (36) *eñi ñi 'móperu pasajeru t-jiro-me-ri-k=poo'i*  
 3M ART.M youngster passenger 3-read-CLF:fabric-PLURACT-ACT=CONC.MOT.IPFV  
*eto ñi-ye'e ajú-re-ko [...]*  
 3NH 3M-GPN write-SP.P.NZ-NPOSD  
 'The young passenger is reading his book (lit. his writing)...'  
 (AM\_F.163)

For the former, the semantic distinction from its non-derived form in (20) is not due to the construction, but rather to the derivation, since the meaning of 'story' is also attested outside of a possessive construction as in (35). In fact, there is no real difference in terms of the semantics of the possessive relationship between the two possessive constructions in (20) and (21): both are inherent possessions.

By contrast, the derivation of *ajre* 'written document' into a non-prefixable stem *ajúre-ko* does not seem to affect the lexical meaning of the noun. When the obligatorily prefixed stem *ajre* occurs in a basic possessive construction, the person indexed by the person prefix is spontaneously interpreted as the agent of 'write'; for instance, *to n-ajre* is interpreted as 'my document (that I wrote)'. In contrast, the derived non-prefixable stem *ajúre-ko* does not have this implication in an indirect possessive construction: in (36), the possessive relationship is spontaneously interpreted as ownership.<sup>25</sup>

This section has shown that there is no simple association between noun classes and possessive constructions. In particular, it has presented counterexamples to the assumption that crosslinguistically, the indirect possessive construction is used exclusively with nouns that cannot take any possessive inflectional morphology or cannot occur with a possessor (Bickel and Nichols 2013; Krasnoukhova 2012: 58). There is very little evidence for a systematic inalienable/alienable contrast when the two possessive constructions accept the same noun.

## 6 The weak relevance of the alienability contrast in Mojeño Trinitario

The literature discusses the notion of alienability either at the lexical level (noun classes) or at the syntactic one (possessive constructions). Section 5 has shown that Mojeño Trinitario data call for distinguishing lexical noun classes and possessive

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<sup>25</sup> Example (36) has been uttered as a description of a video stimulus (Boeg Thomsen and Nielsen 2020). There was no indication in the video clip of a particular relationship between the character and the book.

constructions. As a consequence, these constitute two different domains to which the notion of alienability could apply. In this section, I will first weigh the relevance of the alienability contrast for Mojeño Trinitario noun classes, tackling the issue based on several assumptions: the alienability contrast is a binary formal contrast (6.1), usually considered to be based on a semantic distinction (6.2), but possibly explainable by the frequency with which noun roots are possessed in discourse (6.3). Subsequently, I will assess the relevance of the alienability contrast for derivation among noun classes (6.4) and possessive constructions (6.5).

## 6.1 Alienability as a binary contrast

A preliminary issue in attempting to apply the alienability contrast to noun classes in Mojeño Trinitario is that this contrast is generally presented as binary, while there are three noun classes in the language, some with subclasses. It is therefore unclear what distinction the alienability contrast is supposed to explain.

The notion of alienability was initially motivated by coding differences between different classes of nouns within the syntactic domain of adnominal possession. Haspelmath expresses the most common expectation as follows: “Possessive constructions with inalienable nouns tend to show zero coding, short coding, bound coding, and/or obligatoriness, while possessive constructions with alienable nouns tend to show overt coding, long coding, free coding, and/or impossibility” (Haspelmath 2017: 218). In Mojeño Trinitario, a coding contrast in terms of the number of morphemes is found between prefixable and non-prefixable noun roots: the former require only a possessive prefix, while the latter need either derivation or the use of a generic possessive noun. This overt differential possession marking draws a boundary within semantically alienable nouns (see Section 3), in contradiction with the predictions related to the alienability contrast.

Coding differences can also be covert: the contrast is not apparent in terms of number of morphemes, but only through the obligatoriness of the possessor in discourse. This is referred to as ‘obligatory possessive inflection’ by Bickel and Nichols (2013) and as ‘inherent’ possession by Payne (1997: 105–106). In the Arawak literature (see, for example, Aikhenvald 1999: 82; Michael 2012), the alienability contrast usually distinguishes between obligatorily possessed and optionally possessed nouns, because the terms inalienable and alienable are taken as synonyms of bound and free. Indeed, among the prefixable roots, the obligatorily prefixed nouns like *-pórape* ‘older sibling’ in (16) and the optionally prefixed nouns like *metsi* ‘pot’ in (18) are equally marked for their possessor, but while *metsi* can also occur without a prefix, *-pórape* cannot. Importantly, this covert differential marking is

valid only among noun stems that can, but do not have to, be possessed. This means that this instantiation of the alienability contrast applies to a part of the possessive domain only, excluding the third class of so-called non-possessible nouns. Incidentally, we might wonder what the added value is of the terms inalienable and alienable, if they are used as synonyms of bound and free.

As a conclusion, there is definitely some arbitrariness as to which distinctions among noun classes the alienability contrast is taken to account for, especially if seen as binary. Another possibility, which steers clear from excluding or conflating noun classes, would consist in making the alienability contrast a ternary contrast itself, which would reflect the three-way lexical organization straightforwardly. Specifically, this approach implies allowing for “more alienable” and “less alienable” nouns, as does Haspelmath (2017: 213–214) with the term “super alienable” for the semantic group of nouns that rarely occur in possessive constructions (the non-prefixable nouns).

## 6.2 The alienability contrast as a semantic contrast between noun classes

The notion of alienability was originally meant to account for different semantic types of possession. Let’s now zoom in on the semantics of noun classes. The Mojeño Trinitario data only partly reflect commonly held views about the semantics of inalienable versus alienable noun classes. Heine (1997:10) presents as likely inalienable nouns those expressing the following meanings: (a) kinship roles, (b) body parts, (c) relational spatial concepts, like ‘interior’, (d) parts of other items, like ‘branch’, (e) physical and mental states, like ‘strength’, and (f) nominalizations, where the ‘possessee’ is a verbal noun, for example, ‘his singing’. The class of Mojeño Trinitario obligatorily prefixed nouns does include, as expected, kinship terms, spatial concepts, physical and mental states (subset of ‘attributes’ in my semantic categorization)<sup>26</sup> and nominalizations (see Sections 3.1 and 4.1 above). However, we have seen that body parts and parts of wholes are not only lexified as obligatorily prefixed nouns but also marginally as optionally prefixed nouns, and attributes such as ‘age’ are also found among non-prefixable roots. The classification of Mojeño Trinitario nouns therefore only partly corresponds to the expectations spelled out above.

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<sup>26</sup> My category of attributes consists of nouns expressing not only mental and physical states but also other abstract concepts such as ‘image, work, language/speech, Saint day, last name’.

Another semantic generalization made on possessive classification is that “[s]emantics is involved in that there is usually a default or open class and a specified or determinate class with a semantic common denominator shared by most but not all members of the class and also sometimes found in non-members” (Nichols and Bickel 2013). These authors explain that the specified class is the one including kinship terms, body parts, parts of wholes, spatial relations and property nouns (my “attributes”). However, with respect to the Mojeño Trinitario data, I find it difficult to consider the class of obligatorily prefixed nouns to be “specified” and “with a semantic common denominator”, as it covers a good number of semantic domains (see the last column of Table 3). This is especially striking in contrast with the optionally prefixed noun class, which is almost entirely made of artifacts and is therefore semantically homogenous and specific (see the last column of Table 4).

Similarly, the Mojeño Trinitario data do not support Nichols’s (1988: 562) assertion that “the nouns that take ‘inalienable’ possession virtually always form a closed set, often a small one, while those taking ‘alienable’ possession are an open, hence infinite, set”. Table 6 presents the relative size of the three Mojeño Trinitario noun classes and their major subclasses. It is clear that obligatorily prefixed nouns (the class usually considered as consisting of inalienably possessed entities) do not form a marginal set in the current extension Mojeño Trinitario lexicon.<sup>27</sup>

**Table 6:** Extension of noun classes and sub-classes.

	OBLIGATORILY PREFIXED	OPTIONALLY PREFIXED	NON-PREFIXABLE	TO BE CHECKED
Non-derivable	200	75	133	
Derivable	48		64	
Total	248	75	197	298

Regarding whether the classes are closed or open, the integration of borrowings and nominalizations into the noun classes must be examined.<sup>28</sup> Table 3 to Table 5 show that nouns borrowed into Mojeño Trinitario have joined all three

<sup>27</sup> The nouns included in that study are 818, and do not include proper names and non-native terms used in code mixing. The extension of obligatorily prefixed nouns has been checked, by systematically trying to elicit an unpossessed form of these nouns. By contrast, for most nouns that always occur prefixless in the texts, it has been checked whether they can take a possessive prefix. The greatest part of the nouns that remain to be classified only happen prefixless in the texts, so they are likely either optionally prefixed or non-prefixable nouns.

<sup>28</sup> Michael (2012: 165) asserts that borrowings are treated as alienably possessed nouns in the Arawak language Nanti. In a similar vein, Terhart (2021: 181) notices that many of the alienable nouns of Paunaka, another Arawak language, are borrowings.

possessive classes: *-kuñara* ‘sister-in-law’ from Spanish *cuñada* is an obligatorily prefixed noun, *kareta* ‘cart’ from Spanish *carreta* is an optionally prefixed noun, and *resia* ‘church’ from Spanish *iglesia* is a non-prefixable noun. There are only two loanwords in the class of obligatorily prefixed nouns (*-kuñara* ‘sister-in-law’ and *-kuñaru* ‘brother-in-law’), and these are not derivable into non-prefixable stems. This contrasts with the numerous non-prefixable borrowed nouns which show a deep morphological integration by being derivable into prefixable stems. However, this does not mean that the class of obligatorily possessed nouns is closed, because it actually shows a good number of deverbal nouns, thus making this class open to new items. All three classes are therefore open, which goes against Nichols’s (1988) assertion above.

### 6.3 The alienability contrast motivated by frequency of possession?

The literature on the alienability contrast discusses how this contrast should be explained. Haspelmath (2017) argues that it should be explained “by predictability due to the higher relative frequency of possessed occurrences of inalienable nouns”. To support this claim, he counts how many times six inalienable and six alienable nouns of Biblical Hebrew, Ancient Greek, and English are possessed in 20 random corpus examples. The results show that inalienable nouns occur much more often possessed than alienable nouns in speech. A major criticism one can address to this study is that none of these languages show possessive noun classes. The present study offers to undertake a similar task on the basis of a language with several possessive noun classes, namely Mojeño Trinitario. It will both serve as an assessment of one particular motivation of the crosslinguistically recurrent possessive coding split, and as an empirical tool in investigating where the major alienability split is expected to lay in that language, following that motivation.

The study targets 12 obligatorily prefixed (including six derivable ones), 6 optionally prefixed, and 12 non-prefixable noun roots (including six derivable ones). Because my corpus is small but searchable, I have counted all occurrences of these roots and classified them as possessed (i.e., within any of the two possessive constructions) or unpossessed.<sup>29</sup> The results are presented in Table 7. They only partly meet the expectations.

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<sup>29</sup> I have excluded the occurrences where these roots are used in compounds, incorporated or with a verbalizer.

**Table 7:** Share of possessed occurrences for nouns of different possessive classes.

Noun class	Semantic domain	Root	Gloss	Possessed share	Possessed percentage
Obligatorily prefixed	Kinship	<i>apiaru</i>	'uncle'	19/19	100
Obligatorily prefixed	Body part	<i>type</i>	'foot'	7/7	100
Obligatorily prefixed	Body part	<i>ji'u</i>	'horn, shoulder'	6/6	100
Obligatorily prefixed	Part-whole	<i>poko</i>	'leaf'	7/7	100
Obligatorily prefixed	Spatial relation	<i>mopeku</i>	'below'	15/15	100
Obligatorily prefixed	Configuration	<i>mutu</i>	'all'	110/110	100
Obligatorily prefixed + NPOSD	Kinship	<i>ima</i>	'husband'	11/11	100
Obligatorily prefixed + NPOSD	Body part	<i>miro</i>	'face'	4/5	80
Obligatorily prefixed + NPOSD	Clothing	<i>mui'pa'e</i>	'pants'	3/4	75
Obligatorily prefixed + NPOSD	Artifact	<i>owsa</i>	'village'	38/72	53
Obligatorily prefixed + NPOSD	Attribute	<i>emtone</i>	'work'	55/63	87
Obligatorily prefixed + NPOSD	Artifact	<i>eesa</i>	'beer'	11/23	48
Optionally prefixed	Artifact	<i>metsi</i>	'pot'	5/10	50
Optionally prefixed	Artifact	<i>pkure</i>	'canoe'	4/10	40
Optionally prefixed	Artifact	<i>'puuji</i>	'medicine'	3/36	8
Optionally prefixed	Artifact	<i>yuchmo</i>	'wall'	1/14	7
Optionally prefixed	Artifact	<i>'saype</i>	'machete'	1/8	13
Optionally prefixed	Artifact	<i>kareta</i>	'cart'	2/10	20
Non-prefixable + POSD	Social relation	<i>'chane</i>	'person'	1/269	0
Non-prefixable + POSD	Natural phenomena	<i>sache</i>	'day'	2/50	4
Non-prefixable + POSD	Flora	<i>kujpa</i>	'manioc'	0/11	0
Non-prefixable + POSD	Attribute	<i>añu</i>	'year, age'	2/37	5
Non-prefixable + POSD	Attribute	<i>apija</i>	'last name'	3/3	100
Non-prefixable + POSD	Fauna	<i>wiye</i>	'ox'	5/13	38
Non-prefixable	Natural element	<i>pog'e</i>	'earth'	4/34	12
Non-prefixable	Flora	<i>wkugi</i>	'tree, stick'	1/82	1
Non-prefixable	Fauna	<i>sórare</i>	'animal'	0/18	0
Non-prefixable	Human being	<i>moyo</i>	'child'	0/34	0
Non-prefixable	Artifact	<i>'resia</i>	'church'	4/38	11
Non-prefixable	Artifact	<i>prata</i>	'money'	2/7	22

As expected, non-derivable obligatorily prefixed nouns (first set of nouns in Table 7) always occur possessed, since they require a possessive person prefix when they are used as the head of an NP.<sup>30</sup> Derivable obligatorily prefixed nouns (second set of nouns in Table 7) generally occur possessed in discourse, most often via the

<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, when used in compounds or incorporated, some occurrences do not index a possessor.

basic possessive construction.<sup>31</sup> This proportion is naturally lower than that of other obligatorily possessed nouns, which always require a possessive person prefix. The corpus includes rather few nouns carrying a *NPOSD* suffix, and these are not frequent in texts, except for a few very frequent derived forms like *'wósa-re* 'town', *'san-ti* 'field', *tapraa-ko* 'charge' and *'résa-re* 'beer'.

As for optionally prefixed roots (third set of nouns in Table 7), two occur about equally often possessed or non-possessed, while the four remaining ones occur much more rarely possessed.

Now for the twelve non-prefixable nouns (fourth and fifth sets of nouns in Table 7), seven of them rarely or never occur possessed in the corpus, as expected. Remarkably, five other ones occur possessed as often as those optionally prefixed roots that are less often used possessed.<sup>32</sup> The derivable fauna term *wiye* 'ox' behaves similarly to the optionally prefixed nouns that are more often found possessed ('pot' and 'canoe' in Table 7).

In brief, only the class of obligatorily prefixed nouns behaves homogeneously and as expected, with member nouns being possessed at least 50 % of the time. If the frequency at which roots were found possessed were a predictor for a binary contrast (as expected for the alienability contrast), then the split between the two degrees of alienability would not correspond to the noun classes: optionally prefixed 'pot' and 'canoe', as well as the non-prefixable 'last name' should be obligatorily prefixed nouns. In the end, because these counts have shown that noun class membership in Mojeño Trinitario is not predictable from the relative frequency of possessed occurrences in discourse, it weakens Haspelmath's (2017) claims on the motivation of the alienability contrast. Consequently, the fact that this methodology did not show a clear binary or ternary frequency distribution that would match a formal contrast undermines the operability of the 'alienability contrast' in Mojeño Trinitario.

## 6.4 The alienability contrast and derivation among possessive noun classes

This section investigates how the concept of an alienability contrast fits with derivation processes between possessive noun classes. The Arawak literature is inconsistent in whether the alienability contrast applies to roots or stems: obligatorily possessed nouns are considered inalienable based on the behavior of their roots,

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<sup>31</sup> Except doubly derived nouns.

<sup>32</sup> The twelfth derivable noun, *apija* 'last name', has never been observed non-possessed: its underived form is only attested within a denominal verb form.



while so-called optionally possessed nouns are considered alienable based on the behavior of their derived stems (they are possessible only when derived with a suffix). This section aims to discuss how the notion of alienability articulates with derivation.

First, Nichols (1988: 597), in her pioneering article on alienability, explains that in some languages, some special morphological devices apply to bound nouns to enable them to stand alone as so-called ‘absolutive’ forms. She considers this process to be derivational and argues that “the existence of an absolutive does not weaken the claim that the bound nouns cannot occur without possession”. In short, she applies the alienability contrast to the root level. This line of analysis seems to be followed in most descriptions of Arawak *N<sub>POSD</sub>* suffixes, and is sometimes explicitly described as ‘derivation’ (Michael 2012: 153; Terhart 2021: 179, among others).<sup>33</sup>

In the present article, I extend Nichols’ line of analysis to the *POSD* suffixes, which make some non-prefixable roots possessible through the basic construction found throughout the Arawak family (where these roots are overwhelmingly analyzed as ‘alienable’ or ‘optionally possessed nouns’). The status of the *POSD* suffixes is unclear in current descriptions of Arawak languages. Danielsen (2007: 123) and Terhart (2021: 180–181) describe them explicitly as derivational, but – surprisingly – still consider the roots that take them as alienable but derived into inalienable stems with the *POSD* suffixes. If here too the concept of alienability applies at the root level, the roots in question are not possessible without previous derivation. This is why I propose to analyze these roots in Mojeño Trinitario as non-prefixable rather than as prefixable.

Regarding the derivational processes themselves, the coding differences seem to fit the expectations. In Haspelmath’s terminology, the *POSD* suffixes constitute an additional marker in the possession of super-alienable nouns, compared to alienable and inalienable nouns which only require a possessive person prefix. In turn, the *N<sub>POSD</sub>* suffixes constitute an additional marker in the non-possession of inalienable nouns, compared to alienable and non-possessible nouns. In brief, derivational processes among noun classes can be seen as additional coding on nouns when occurring in non-prototypical possessive contexts.

It is yet unclear how to account for why only some noun roots are derivable. Most often, the derivation does not yield different lexical meanings between the root and the derived stem. I argue that the semantics associated with the derivation processes are essentially not a matter of lexical semantics but one of semantic

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<sup>33</sup> Nichols (1988: 597) adds that in other languages, the same absolutivization function is expressed by some special inflectional morphology that indicates an unspecified third-person possessor. This is the line followed by Aikhenvald (2021) for the Arawak *N<sub>POSD</sub>* suffixes, which she calls “non-specified possessor suffix”. I reject this analysis because the Arawak *N<sub>POSD</sub>* suffixes are not part of the regular inventory of possessive indexes, which are always preposed to the noun stem.

valency. One could advance that the derivable noun roots are multi-relational, i.e., they can enter multiple relations with other entities (Durieux 1990; cited in Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm 1998).

Some obligatorily possessed nouns (body parts, clothing items, accessories and artifacts) are logically multi-relational, and could be conceived as entering different types of possessive relationship: for instance, clothes and accessories have a relation with the person that wears them, but also with the person who made them. This type of multi-relationality is not evidenced in our small corpus, where the only derivable obligatorily possessed nouns that enter both possessive constructions are deverbal nouns. As argued above in 5.3 and 5.5, the multi-relationality of deverbal nouns seems to be triggered by the ambiguity of the possessive prefix, which can be interpreted as a participant of the situation expressed by the verbal root or as indexing the possessor of the deverbal noun.

Turning now to derivable non-prefixable roots, we have observed among them only one clearly multi-relational noun, the one for ‘path’. When derived as in (33), its semantic valency increases, involving an additional “possessor”, the place to which this path leads. In sum, multi-relationality could be a semantic particularity of (some) derivable roots. On this basis, one could see the two derivation processes under study as valency-changing mechanisms manifesting this potential multi-relationality in morphosyntax.<sup>34</sup> The *POSD* suffixes increase the valency of nouns, while the *NPOSD* ones decrease it (see Queixalós 2005, 2016 for the concept of noun valency). But there seems to be no clear semantic foundation to which nouns are derivable. Interestingly, the potential for derivation does not align with the alienability contrast: non-derivable nouns are found in all three classes, and derivable nouns in both obligatorily prefixed and non-prefixable noun classes.

## 6.5 The alienability contrast and the two adnominal possessive constructions

The application of the alienability contrast at the construction level also needs to be investigated. On the formal level, the indirect construction shows more coding devices than the basic construction (because of the presence of the generic possessive noun). The two adnominal possessive constructions are therefore good candidates for embodying the supposed alienability contrast. However, on the

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<sup>34</sup> This is really a matter of potential, because obligatorily prefixed nouns derived into non-prefixable nouns are not found in the indirect possessive constructions in the texts, except in one example. Instead they are non-possessed.

semantic level, it is not the case that the basic construction only encodes inalienable possession (it is also used with the artifacts expressed by optionally prefixed nouns), even if the indirect construction can generally be associated with alienable possession (it is mainly used with non-prefixable stems, considered to be alienable).

In fact, the following pair of elicited examples shows that the distribution between the two possessive constructions does not crucially depend on the particular semantics of the possessive relationship (nor on the identity of the possessee and possessor), but primarily on noun classes. The examples involve two synonymous nouns as possessees, one native and the other borrowed from Spanish,<sup>35</sup> with the same first person possessor. The native word is an obligatorily prefixed noun and enters the basic possessive construction (37), while the loanword is a non-prefixable noun and enters the indirect construction (38).

(37) *esu n-chimra*  
 3<sub>F</sub> 1<sub>SG</sub>-visitor  
 ‘She is my visitor’

(38) *esu n-ye'e visita*  
 3<sub>F</sub> 1<sub>SG</sub>-GPN visitor  
 ‘She is my visitor’

In general, the distribution of the two constructions largely depends on the class of the noun root or the derived noun stem, as detailed in Section 5. There is little evidence for an inalienable/alienable contrast when the same noun can enter both possessive constructions. The most numerous cases of ‘competition’ between the possessive constructions can be seen as an effect of the origin of said nouns as deverbal nouns.

## 6.6 Summary on the alienability contrast in Mojeño Trinitario

To summarize the findings of this section, the alienability contrast can be applied arbitrarily to different parts of the distinctions between noun classes (6.1). The only strong case it makes is the distinction in terms of obligatoriness of inflection between obligatorily prefixed nouns and the others, aka as bound versus free nouns. It leaves the remaining differences between optionally prefixed and non-possessible nouns unexplained.

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<sup>35</sup> This word results from a nominalization (of *chimpo* ‘meet’) but is not fully analyzable synchronically.

The alienability contrast does not predict which individual nouns join which particular noun classes or sub-classes, be it based on semantics (6.2) or frequency of occurring possessed (6.3). This article indeed offers frequency counts on how often nouns of different possessive classes occur possessed in discourse (Table 7) and concludes that these would predict an alienability contrast that does not correspond to the actual distribution in the three noun classes. Another important result of this article for the typology of possession is that the “inalienable” class of nouns cannot be seen as a closed marginal class semantically more homogenous than the other classes, contrary to Nichols’s (1988) general claims (6.2). As for derivational processes among noun classes, they can be seen as differential coding for non-prototypical possessive situations.

Finally, the distinction between the two adnominal possessive constructions (syntactic level) is also evaluated as a weak instantiation of the alienability contrast (6.5), because it only partially corresponds to the semantic expectations: while the structure with most coding material (the indirect construction) only expresses alienable possession, the least coded structure (the basic construction) encodes either inalienable or alienable possession.

## 6.7 Discussion

The main theoretical problem behind the alienability contrast as an explanation for the encoding of possession is that it is unclear to which sets of linguistic objects it should *a priori* apply. This is so because the literature applies it to either noun classes or constructions, and usually presents it as binary, sometimes as ternary. This vagueness has two logical consequences. First, I consider that if this functional explanation can apply at several levels at once in a language, and if these levels do not perfectly overlap, then the “explanation” is contradictory. Second, the explanation is more likely to be considered robust if applied as an *a posteriori* explanation to a particular set of data, at a level chosen by the analyst on a language-individual basis, but this can be called methodological opportunism (Croft 2001: 30).

The vagueness of how the alienability contrast should apply has several practical consequences. On the one hand, it means that discussing this contrast in a cross-linguistic perspective is not methodologically sound, unless one systematically separates the levels of analysis, as done by Chousou-Polydouri et al. (this issue). On the other hand, at the language-individual level, it may then leave unexplained some phenomena it is supposed to cover and has a very low predictive power. One could actually wonder whether invoking the alienability contrast to “make sense” of lexical or grammatical distinctions does not actually bring confusion into language-specific analyses. Two potential effects on language-specific analyses are the following: (i) by

promoting a binary contrast, the alienability contrast makes the distinction among free forms (optionally prefixed and non-prefixable class) less salient, (ii) by merging formal and semantic considerations, it is an obstacle for a clear separation of lexicon, syntax, and semantics. For instance, “alienable” was originally a semantic concept, but is most often used to label a class of nouns, and sometimes a possessive construction. This results in many descriptions of Arawak languages presenting obvious contradictions. For example, nouns labeled as “non-possessible” (and as such distinct from “alienable” nouns) are still mentioned as entering a particular possessive construction, being hence obviously morphosyntactically possessible, and semantically alienable. At the same time, there has been until this article an apparent general resistance to labelling those roots that happen to be easily possessed only once suffixed as “non-possessible”.<sup>36</sup>

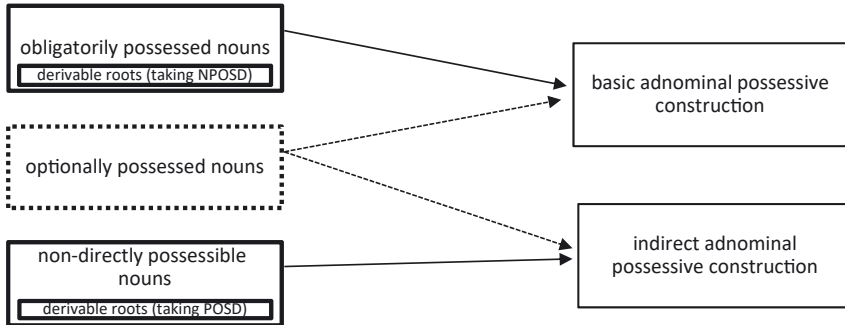
To solve the problem of the vagueness of the domain to which the alienability contrast should apply, this article advocates a strict separation of the levels of analysis, as implemented with Mojeño Trinitario data. A major methodological issue when investigating the potential of the alienability contrast as an explanation for the competition between the adnominal possessive constructions is the difficulty of teasing apart the semantic input of noun classes, the effect of the derivation processes among these, and the semantic import of the two possessive constructions, and this is, I believe, what future efforts should concentrate on.

## 7 Extending the innovative analysis to the Arawak family

This article has presented an innovative analysis of possession in an Arawak language, distinguishing the levels of lexical classes of noun roots, morphological derivation processes and syntactic constructions. It is the first to invoke derivation for two commonly made observations in Arawak linguistics, viz. the use of many obligatorily prefixed nouns as unpossessed and that of another class of nouns as either possessed or unpossessed in discourse. These latter nouns, usually considered “alienable” or “optionally possessed”, are described in this article as non-prefixable nouns, which need to be derived to enter the basic possessive construction. As a result, the three possessive noun classes of Mojeño Trinitario presented in this article do not correspond to the three possessive noun classes of the traditional analysis of Arawak languages (Figure 1).

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<sup>36</sup> By contrast, the fact that some roots that are obligatorily possessed can be derived into non-prefixable stems has never led to reconsidering these so-called “inalienable nouns” to be in fact alienable.



**Figure 5:** Innovative account of Arawak noun classes (with or without optionally possessed nouns).

The innovative analysis presented in this article can easily be extended to other Arawak languages, as sketched in Figure 5. One must only adapt the terminology for those languages, like Yukuna (see Section 1), in which a third-person possessor is not necessarily encoded by an index on prefixable nouns, but can simply be expressed as an NP. For those languages, one should use the term “obligatorily/optionally possessed” rather than “obligatorily/optionally prefixed”. Additionally, in line with Krasnoukhova (2012: 58), I recommend using the terms “non-prefixable” or “non-directly possessible” (see also Krasnoukhova [2012: 58] on this point) rather than “non-possessible” for the third class of nouns in the languages in which there is an indirect possessive construction (to avoid contradiction regarding their possessability).

The proposed derivational account of the nouns traditionally called “optionally possessed nouns” that need a suffix to be possessed now excludes these nouns from the optionally possessed class and classifies them as “non-prefixable” or “non-directly possessible” roots (see Table 1). There are two consequences for the analysis of possessive classes in Arawak languages. For languages like Mojeño Trinitario that have a class of nouns that can be possessed or not in the basic possessive construction without any derivation, an overt coding contrast will be found between non-directly possessible nouns (which require a derivational suffix to be possessed) and the others (which only take a prefix). This differs from the traditional analysis by which the coding contrast is seen between inalienable and alienable nouns in that the latter require a suffix to be possessed. For languages like Yukuna in which there is no category of nouns that are optionally possessed in the basic construction without a suffix (represented by the dotted square in Figure 5), the drastic consequence of the innovative analysis is that we are left with two possessive classes only: the obligatorily possessed one, and the non-directly possessible nouns. In that case, it seems that the alienability contrast applies efficiently to the formal and semantic opposition between these two classes.

A plausible reason for why the present proposal had not been formulated before for any Arawak language is that it leaves most Arawak languages without a class of optionally possessed noun roots as in many Arawak languages, “optionally possessed nouns” actually are non-possessible roots, since they first need to go through a derivation process to be possessible. And importantly, optionally possessed noun roots (free nouns) are generally considered to be the alienable nouns par excellence in the Amazonian literature (see, for example, van der Voort 2009: 382). One may wonder whether the well-known alienability contrast did not bias the traditional account of noun classes in Arawak studies by forcing the identification of a class of “alienable” nouns, regardless of the fact that the roots in question are not directly possessible without an additional suffix.

## Abbreviations

ACT	active
APPL	applicative
ART	article
CLF	classifier
CONC.MOT	concomitant motion
DEM	demonstrative
DET	determiner
DIM	diminutive
DUB	dubitative
EMP	empathy
F	feminine (singular)
GPN	generic possessive noun
H	human
INDT	indeterminate
IRR	irrealis
M	masculine (singular)
MID	middle
N	noun
NPOSD	non possession
NF	non-feminine
NH	non-human
PST	past
PFV	perfective
PL	plural
PLURACT	pluractional
POSD	possessed form of the noun
POT.LOC	potential location
PREP	preposition
PRO	pronoun
PROX	proximal

RECP	reciprocal
RESTR	restrictive
RPT	reportative
SG	singular
Sp	Spanish word
SP.P.NZ	specific patient nominalizer
UNQ	unquestionable
VALID	validator
VZ	verbalizer

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