

# A/O Possession in Modern Maori

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## **1. Introduction**

Possession is a widely discussed topic in Polynesian Linguistics in part because of the complex dual system shared by most languages in the Polynesian family and retained largely unchanged until today. This possession system is represented by the notion of A/O possession: a dual possessive system with a strong semantic component, most often related as the presence or absence of control between possessor and possessee. Some linguists (Mutu, 2011) have alluded to the possibility of some levelling occurring in certain languages, but most point to a surprisingly strong retention throughout the Polynesian language family.

Despite this supposed unity throughout Polynesia, linguists are less than unified in their interpretation of this possessive system. Wilson, for example quickly dismiss the idea that the Maori and Hawaiian systems exhibit an alienable/inalienable distinction (Wilson, 1982). Others, such as Schutz (on Maori, 1995) and Du Feu (on Rapa Nui, 1996), however, describe the system in exactly those terms. Understandably, authors such as Wilson resist the label of inalienability in order to suggest the semantic complexity underpinning the system. A cycle of complexity has thus been created in the literature, and most writings on Polynesian possession focus on the precise semantic motivation behind the synchronic possessive system.

Few if any linguists, however, have considered the possessive system diachronically as a process of gradual levelling of a Proto-Polynesian possessive system that was most likely to a greater extent semantically motivated. Mutu has acknowledged levelling in Modern Maori, though they consider these forms somehow inferior or even “mistakes,” and the true extent of levelling has not been explored (Mutu, 2011). Others, such as Harlow acknowledge some dialectal variation in the possessive forms, though they still insist that the conventional A/O possession system is unchanged (Harlow, 2007). (I make a distinction here between Modern Maori, that which is spoken by native speakers and Traditional, or Academic Maori, that which is learned in school by non-

native speakers. Traditional Maori is recognizable by the Modern Maori speaker and is characterized to a certain extent by an almost hypercorrect A/O possession system.)

In this study, I consider the possession system as displayed by our correspondent, LK, and how it sheds light on the widespread levelling that has been overlooked by nearly all who have written on Maori and on Polynesian languages in general (e.g. Harlow, 2007; Bauer, 1993; Mutu, 2011). While it remains true that a certain notion of ownership has likely been passed down with remarkably few changes throughout Polynesia, it seems that Modern Maori is in the process of levelling the semantically-based A/O possession system to a simpler, grammatically-based possession system. It is possible that this levelling could be due to the influence of the English of European colonizers, but I suggest that this levelling had likely started long before European contact. In any case, it is worth noting that Modern Maori appears to be developing a possession system on its own, with discrete rules, descended from the Proto-Polynesian A/O possession system.

Note: Our data was collected during five two-hour sessions with our correspondent, LK. LK is a middle-age female who speaks Maori and English. She was raised by her grandparents in Whangarei, a largely Pakeha (European New Zealander) settlement. Having been born in a Maori settlement, Maori was her first language, having been passed down by her parents and later her grandparents, who were all fluent speakers. Isolated enough from other Pakeha during her childhood in Whangarei, LK continued to speak Maori fluently until she married another Maori-speaker from her same *hapū* ‘clan.’ Having been affiliated for some time with the Maori Studies department at the University of Auckland, LK now lives in the Auckland area, where she still speaks *te reo Maori* with her children and grandchildren. I must note that where I mention “Modern Maori,” I am referring to the speech of LK, which is hypothetically (with some evidence below in Section 13), but not necessarily similar in structure to the Maori spoken by native speakers across New Zealand.

## 2. Maori Context

Because of the tremendous influence of European settlers and subsequent revitalization efforts on the Maori language, it is worth mentioning in brief the language situation in New Zealand. Following Pakeha settlement and more or less conquering of New Zealand beginning in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Maori language has been largely ignored, discouraged, and even banned by the Pakeha government. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, the speaker base had drastically decreased to the point where it was feared that the Maori language would soon go extinct. Owing to significant efforts toward cultural revitalization and government recognition in the 70’s and 80’s, Maori was made a co-official language of New Zealand, and Maori-run *kohanga reo* ‘language nests’ and *kura kaupapa* ‘primary school’ were founded across the country. These immersion programs provided language-learning opportunities for children from preschool to high school ages. These schools, however, resulted in several unexpected effects. First, a generation gap was created, in that children spoke the language along with their elders, leaving the parent generation speechless, so to speak. Second, the nature of Maori schooling and revitalization efforts has led many linguists to fashion prescriptive grammars of the

language and to resist any sign of language change as incorrect, or even dangerous for the language's health (Arapera Ngaha, lecture on Maori Linguistics).

As such, this language background resulted in some difficulties regarding data collection. A/O possession has now become a signal of Traditional Maori spoken in *kohanga reo*. The saliency of this issue along with the high frequency of possessive markers in natural speech made it occasionally difficult to obtain natural speech data. For example, when a sentence would come to a possessive form, LK would stop mid-sentence and explain how Traditional Maori speakers would use a certain form, while Modern Maori speakers would say otherwise. Luckily, this salient difference has provided good evidence for the fact that Modern Maori has levelled a good deal since the full A/O possession system described in Traditional Maori.

### 3. Review of Previous Literature

#### 3.1 Semantic Bases

The A/O possession system, as defined by Mutu (building from the work of others, such as Harlow, 2007 and Wilson, 1982) hinges on the semantic choice between two possessive morphemes, *a* and *o*. These morphemes may be free, as shown in basic possession, or bound to other morphemes, such as the articles *te* and *ngā*, or manifested in still other morphemes such as *nō*, *nā*, *mō*, and *mā*. These morphemes are used not only in possessive phrases, but also in constructions such as the so-called Actor Emphatic construction, a type of emphatic fronting. Despite the variety in the manifestations of A- and O-Class forms, it is held that every instance of A- and O-Classes can be traced directly and synchronically back to a semantic distinction (Mutu, 2011). While Wilson manages to trace the system back to a Proto-Oceanic distinction that became a full-fledged possession system in Proto-Polynesian, he still insists that it has remained almost entirely unchanged to this day (Wilson, 1982).

A-Class	O-Class
Kin: younger generation <i>*uri</i> 'ancestor'	Kin: older generation
Spouses <i>*hoa rangatira</i> 'spouse'	Kin: same generation
Carried items	Locations
Movable items	Enclosures
	Parts of the whole
Animals (pets)	Animals (transport)
Food <i>*wai</i> 'water'	Medicine

Chart 1

The semantic distinction between the A- and O-Class has been long debated and forms the lion's share of material regarding Polynesian possession. In simplest terms, the choice between A- and O-Class can be seen as the presence or absence of control in the relationship between possessor and possessee. If the possessor controls the relationship, the possessive phrase is marked with the A-Class; if this notion of control is somehow absent, it is marked with the O-Class. Mutu stresses that this choice is dependent on the relationship between the two noun phrases (Mutu, 2011). Nevertheless, nouns are often grouped into categories of A- or O-Class preference. Chart 1 (adapted from Mutu, 2011) above shows a basic distribution of Maori noun possessives. Exceptions to the semantic groupings are marked with asterisks.

While the semantic distribution of these nouns is interesting and to a great extent represents a Proto-Polynesian notion of ownership passed down in nearly all instances to its daughter languages, extend this semantic bound to nearly every manifestation of either A- or O-Class (Wilson, 1982). As such, some forms are explained with such stretches of the imagination as "the subject owns the action" or "the subject of the relative clause owns its antecedent." Indeed, such abstract explanations come tantalizingly close to explaining Polynesian languages as described by these authors. In nearly case, however, they ignore the possibility that some of these forms are simply examples of levelling and grammaticalization. Perhaps not all manifestations of A- or O-Class are A/O-governed, thus. As the widespread levelling of Modern Maori will show below, perhaps levelling has been an ongoing process that explains not only the Maori spoken today, but also the process in Traditional Maori as well.

### 3.2 Basic Possessive Forms

As mentioned above, A/O possession appears in a number of grammatical elements. Basic possession as described by Mutu (2011) will be shown below, and further grammatical elements will be explored in greater detail in Sections 5-7 along with a comparison with Modern Maori forms.

In Traditional Maori, possessives may take one of several forms, but they are nearly always governed by a choice between A-Class and O-Class. For possession between two regular (non-pronominal) noun phrases, as in (1) and (2) below, the possessive phrase may take the form of [PP[POSSESSEE.NP][A/O][POSSESSOR.NP]], similar to the English construction 'the cat of the man.'

- |     |                           |                 |          |             |     |                            |                 |          |             |
|-----|---------------------------|-----------------|----------|-------------|-----|----------------------------|-----------------|----------|-------------|
| (1) | <i>te</i>                 | <i>mokopuna</i> | <i>a</i> | <i>Himi</i> | (2) | <i>te</i>                  | <i>mokopuna</i> | <i>o</i> | <i>Himi</i> |
|     | DET                       | grandchild      | POSS;A   | James       |     | DET                        | grandparent     | POSS;O   | James       |
|     | 'the grandchild of James' |                 |          |             |     | 'the grandparent of James' |                 |          |             |

In addition to this form, the possession morphemes may be combined with the determiner *te* to form *tō* or *tā* (*ō* and *ā* when the possessed noun is plural). With these forms, the phrase now takes the shape of [PP[DET+A/O][POSSESSOR.NP][POSSESSEE.NP]], as in (3) and (4). These phrases appear to be semantically equivalent to the above phrases.

- |     |            |             |               |     |            |             |                 |
|-----|------------|-------------|---------------|-----|------------|-------------|-----------------|
| (3) | <i>tō</i>  | <i>Himi</i> | <i>tupuna</i> | (4) | <i>tā</i>  | <i>Himi</i> | <i>mokopuna</i> |
|     | DET;POSS;O | James       | grandparent   |     | DET;POSS;A | James       | grandchild      |

'James' grandparent'

'James' grandchild'

These two possessive forms account for all the instances of possession involving regular noun phrases and also phrases involving plural pronominal possessors. When the possessor is a singular pronoun, however, it takes the form of a bound morpheme suffixed to the determiners above, resulting in phrases such as (5) and (6) below.

- |     |                  |               |     |                  |                 |
|-----|------------------|---------------|-----|------------------|-----------------|
| (5) | <i>tōku</i>      | <i>tupuna</i> | (6) | <i>tāku</i>      | <i>mokopuna</i> |
|     | SG;DET;POSS;O;1S | grandparent   |     | SG;DET;POSS;A;1S | grandchild      |
|     | 'my grandparent' |               |     | 'my grandchild'  |                 |

In addition, singular pronominal possessors may use a reduced, or “neuter form.” These forms resemble *tōku* and *tāku* above, but do not distinguish between A-Class and O-Class, as in (7) and (8). Mutu dismisses these forms as lesser, perhaps because they are less semantically rich as the A/O semantic distinction (Mutu, 2011).

- |     |                  |               |     |                  |                |
|-----|------------------|---------------|-----|------------------|----------------|
| (7) | <i>taku</i>      | <i>tupuna</i> | (8) | <i>taku</i>      | <i>mokpuna</i> |
|     | DET;POSS;NEUT;1S | grandparent   |     | DET;POSS;NEUT;1S | grandchild     |
|     | 'my grandparent' |               |     | 'my grandchild'  |                |

These four structures account for the traditional picture of basic Maori possession. For each of the forms described above, see Chart 2 below. Note that the preposed and postposed possessive forms are largely synonymous and differ only in the possessive morpheme used and the word order. Note also that the non-A/O-governed neuter forms may only be used when the possessor is a singular pronoun. Finally, note the clear remnants of A/O possession in the neuter forms, as evidenced by the long-*o* in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person forms.

	O-Class		A-Class		Neuter	
	sing.	pl.	sing.	pl.	sing.	pl.
Postposed poss.	<i>o</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>a</i>		
Preposed poss.	<i>tō</i>	<i>ō</i>	<i>tā</i>	<i>ā</i>		
Preposed + 1 <sup>st</sup> Pers.	<i>tōku</i>	<i>ōku</i>	<i>tāku</i>	<i>āku</i>	<i>taku</i>	<i>aku</i>
Preposed + 2 <sup>nd</sup> Pers.	<i>tōu</i>	<i>ōu</i>	<i>tāu</i>	<i>āu</i>	<i>tō</i>	<i>ō</i>
Preposed + 3 <sup>rd</sup> Pers.	<i>tōna</i>	<i>ōna</i>	<i>tāna</i>	<i>āna</i>	<i>tana</i>	<i>ana</i>

Chart 2

#### 4. Outline of Basic Forms

In direct comparison with Section 3.2 above, the basic possessive forms in Modern Maori show widespread levelling to the extent that the semantic distinction between A- and O-Class appears to be lost entirely from the language, though it seems to be extant as a salient cultural aspect (LK stated repeatedly that “Maori have this thing about ownership”). While basic possessive forms in Traditional Maori are restricted by A- and O-Class forms, the word order is comparatively free. In contrast, Modern Maori shows an absence of semantic choice, but a relatively strict word order based on the grammatical type of noun phrases involved in the possession.

For basic possession between two non-pronominal noun phrases, the O-Class is used with a postposed possessor, as shown in (9) below. Whereas Traditional Maori permits the preposition of the possessor noun phrase, the word order appears to be fixed in possession between two noun phrases. (Note that possessive phrases appear in bold for clarity.)

- (9) *Kei*     *roto*     ***ngā***     ***mātua***     *o*     *te*     ***kōtiro***     ***nei***  
 LOC     inside     DET;PL     parent;PL     POSS     DET;SG     girl     PROX
- i*     ***tō***     ***rāua***     ***rūma***.  
 LOC     DET;POSS     3D     room
- 'Her parents are in their room.'

Also note the second instance of possession involving the plural pronoun *rāua*. For possession involving plural pronominal possessors, the O-Class form bound to the article *te* must be used. In addition, the word order is again fixed; the pronominal possessor must be preposed as in the example above. One exception to this word order rule is the partitive genitive (possession involving an adjectival possessee) discussed below in Section 8. By contrast, Traditional Maori not only allows plural pronouns to be postposed, but also allows non-pronominal noun phrases to be preposed.

While Traditional Maori predicts the O-Class form for both of the possessive phrases in (9) above, it is soon evident that the O-Class has levelled in nearly all instances of basic possession. (10) below shows that the reversed A-Class-predicted sentence is ungrammatical.

- (10) *Ka*     *takaro*     ***ngā***     ***tamariki***     ***\*a***     *te*     ***kōtiro***     ***nei***  
 INCEP     play     DET;PL     child;PL     POSS     DET;SG     girl     PROX
- i*     ***\*tā***     ***rāua***     ***kurī***  
 LOC     DET;POSS     3D     dog
- '\*Her children played with their dogs.'

In both of these possessive phrases, the O-Class form again would be used, in contrast with Traditional Maori, which predicts A-Class forms. These examples of Modern Maori, thus, are not based on a semantic duality, but are in fact based on basic grammatical principles. Indeed, nearly all possessive phrases of the types shown above require the O-Class possessive morpheme, with sporadic exceptions, described below in Section 10.

As for possession with a singular pronominal possessor, the neuter forms shown above have levelled almost completely. As shown in (11) and (12), the form *taku* is used despite the fact that the possessed nouns *tupuna* and *mokopuna* are traditionally in the O- and A-Class, respectively.

(11) *Te ingoa o taku tupuna ko Mere*  
 DET name POSS SG;POSS;1S grandparent EMPH Mary  
 'My grandmother's name is Mary.'

(12) *Taku mokopuna tōna ingoa ko Taruō-Taha-Kapa*  
 DET;POSS;1S grandchild DET;POSS;0;3S name EMPH Taruō-Taha-Kapa  
 'My grandson's name is Taruoo-Taha Kapa.'

While Traditional Maori allows for these forms, other A/O-governed forms are permitted. In Modern Maori, however, these neuter forms constitute the only construction available for possession involving a singular pronominal possessor. Lastly, note the confusion with the noun *ingoa*, possessed with *tōna* in (12), as opposed to *tana*. This appears to be a relic form and will be discussed further in Section 10.

In addition, the paradigm of the neuter forms itself appears to have been levelled. Whereas the traditional neuter form for Second Person possessives is *tō* / *ō*, the Second Person forms in Modern Maori have now been merged with the First Person form, resulting in sentences such as (13) below.

(13) *Kei konei taku tamaiti*  
 LOC there SG;POSS;2S boy  
 'Your boy is over there.'

It is puzzling that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person form would merge with the typologically more marked 1<sup>st</sup> Person. In fact, the neuter paradigm breaks two linguistic universals in that the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Person forms are less distinct than the 3<sup>rd</sup> Person form, and also the plural forms appear to be less marked than the singular forms. Perhaps the *\*tō* form has been reanalysed as an O-Class form and dropped in favour of the more natural-sounding *taku*. Or, perhaps the form was too different from the similar *taku* and *tana* forms. This change is also murky, as the merge itself could be a general resistance to Traditional Maori A- and O-Class forms, a dissimilation as it were for politically-driven reasons.

In any case, the basic possessive forms in Modern Maori are clearly much more levelled than those in Traditional Maori. The word order of possessive phrases, however, appears to be more strict, perhaps in response to the loss of semantic information. For a summary of the Modern Maori basic possessive forms, see Chart 3 below. Note the widespread levelling in comparison with Chart 2 above, and that the forms are now much more dependent on the lexical items involved (such as singular or plural pronoun), rather than semantic relationships.

	Possessee	
Possessor	sing.	pl.
Postposed NP	<i>o</i>	<i>o</i>
Preposed Pl. Pron.	<i>tō</i>	<i>ō</i>
Preposed 1 <sup>st</sup> Pers. Sg.	<i>taku</i>	<i>aku</i>
Preposed 2 <sup>nd</sup> Pers. Sg.	<i>taku</i>	<i>aku</i>
Preposed 3 <sup>rd</sup> Pers. Sg.	<i>tana</i>	<i>ana</i>

Chart 3

## 5. Locative Genitive, or Inanimate Possession

In his rather extensive work on Polynesian possession, Wilson makes a distinction between A/O-governed possession and a so-called Locative Genitive, referring to genitives of place, either spatial or temporal. In Wilson's analysis of Hawaiian, these genitives always take the O-Class form and exist outside the level of semantic distinction. Mutu agrees with this analysis for Traditional Maori in a possession chart that asks the questions “#1: Is it a locative? ... #2: Does the possessor control the relationship?” (Mutu, 2011). For Modern Maori, this locative genitive still uses the regular *o* possessive form, as in (14) below, though it is difficult to distinguish this construction between basic noun phrase possession, because the semantic distinction does not contrast with the O-Class levelling everywhere else in the possession paradigm.

- (14) *Tōna*                    *iwi*    *kei*    *te*    *tai*    *hauauru*    *o*    *Te Wai Pounamu*  
 SG;DET;POSS;3S    tribe    LOC    DET    coast    west    POSS    South Island  
 'His iwi is on the west coast.'

In other words, Wilson draws a distinction between inanimate possession (e.g. "the center of Auckland"), which has grammaticalized the O-Class and animate possession, which is A/O-governed. While this construction may be separate in Modern Maori, it is difficult to tell, as the O-Class has been levelled to all types of basic possession. The Locative Genitive, thus, represents the first instance of grammaticalized possession accepted by Mutu, Wilson, et al. It is possible to explain this construction in terms of A/O possession by insisting that it simply always takes the O-Class form by virtue of necessarily being inanimate possession. The Locative Genitive, however, could also be taken to be a construction grammaticalized after the Proto-Polynesian theoretically fully-semantically-motivated system. In this case, it constitutes evidence for levelling of the system long before contact with Europeans, in Traditional Maori. Indeed, since this form exists in both Hawaiian and Maori, it seems possible that it was grammaticalized rather quickly, perhaps even before Proto-Polynesian began splitting off into its daughter languages. More importantly, if the latter conclusion is accepted, then further levelling may be attributed to other constructions becoming grammaticalized through Traditional Maori into Modern Maori.

## 6. Temporal Possession

Mutu describes an A/O-governed construction that combines possession with a notion of temporal ownership or belonging. These two A/O-governed morphemes are *nō* and *nā* ‘belongs to’ and *mō* and *mā* ‘(intended) for.’ In other words, the former morpheme denotes present possession, while the latter denotes future possession. Mutu presumes that all instances of these morphemes are governed by the A/O distinction much like basic possession (Mutu, 2011). Once again, however, Modern Maori has levelled the paradigm. As (15) shows below, the O-Class form of the future possession marker *mō* is nearly always used, regardless of the inherent semantic relationship. Note that Traditional Maori would usually consider *mahi* ‘work, job’ and the implied *moni* ‘money’ to be A-Class nouns. Note also the proposed pronominal possession within the same possessive phrase.

- (15) *He nui te utu mō ō rātou mahi*  
 INDEF;DET big DET pay FUT.POSS PL;DET;POSS 3PL job  
 'Their job pays lots of money. / Much money is for their job.'

Intriguingly, the present possessive form appears to have mostly levelled the A-Class form. For reasons elucidated below in Section 9, the A-Class forms appear to be used in all possessive phrases in which ownership is a question. As shown in (16) below, the form *nā* is used in order to clarify that the Maori Queen belongs to Ngāpuhi and not to anyone else.

- (16) *E whakapono ana te iwi o Ngāpuhi*  
 IRR believe CONT DET tribe POSS Ngāpuhi  
*nā rātou te Kuīni Māori*  
 PRES.POSS;A 3PL DET Queen Māori  
 'Ngāpuhi believes that the Māori Queen belongs to them.'

And so, the temporal possessive forms *mō* and *nā* demonstrate further levelling, though the forms certainly appear to be closely related to previously A/O-governed constructions due to their similar patterns of levelling to basic possession.

## 7. Actor-Emphatic Construction

Another construction frequently noted by Mutu is the so-called Actor-Emphatic construction. In these sentences, the agent of a verb is marked sentence-initially by one of the aforementioned present or future-marking possessive forms, *nā* or *mā*. (17) and (18) provide examples of Actor-Emphatic constructions below. Note that the *nā* form marks past time and *mā* marks future time (Mutu, 2011). This agrees with their general time marking, as *mō* marks future possession, as described above.

- (17) *Nā māua tō māua motokā i taraiwa*  
 PRES.POSS 1D.EXCL DET;POSS 1D.EXCL car PERF drive  
 'As for us, we drove our car.'

- (18) *Mā*        *Mere*    *tēnei*        *pukapuka*    *e*        *tuhi*  
 FUT.POSS    Mary        SG;DET;PROX    book        IRR        write  
 'As for Mary, she will write this book.'

Curiously, the Actor-Emphatic may only use the A-Class form of the possessive morpheme, even as described by Mutu, et al. This choice is explained as the result of the agent "owning the action" of the verb. As such, a possible translation of these sentences is 'It is for the man to...' Another possible explanation is that these forms have been grammaticalized and the distinction between A- and O-Class lost (or the semantic reasoning behind the A-Class choice). If one is to assume that the A/O system of possession is fully preserved in all Polynesian languages, the semantic motivation for the Actor-Emphatic and also for the Locative Genitive above would be preferred. If it is assumed that the system of possession has been in the process of levelling and grammaticalization ever since the Polynesian languages split apart, though, it seems possible that these two processes could have originally been governed by A- and O-Class, but have since become grammaticalized out of the system. Further evidence for the latter of these assumptions is that Modern Maori exhibits a complete grammaticalization of the system into various grammatical and not semantic forms.

## 8. Partitive Genitive

A construction not mentioned by Mutu, et al is the partitive genitive. The partitive genitive is described in a number of Romance languages as the selection of a part or quantity of a certain group, e.g. 'some of my friends.' For Maori, this sort of possession is marked by regular *o*-possession in the form [PP[POSSESSEE.NP][*o*][POSSESSOR.NP]], just as possession of the first type described above. Unlike the regular possessive form, however, the possessee phrase is not a noun phrase, but an adjective phrase. These adjectives appear to be restricted to quantifiers, such as *tētahi* 'some,' or to superlative adjectives, such as *mea nui* 'biggest.' In addition, the possessor may be a plural pronoun. This construction is notable for being the only instance of postposed pronominal possession, while plural pronouns most often precede their respective possessee. Examples (19) and (20) show two instances of the partitive genitive below.

- (19) *I*        *haere*    *ētahi*    *o*        *mātou*    *ki*        *tana*        *whare*  
 PERF    go        PL:some    PL;DET;POSS    3PL        LOC        SG;DET;POSS;3S    house  
 'Some of us went to his house.'
- (20) *Ko*        *ia*        *te*        *mea*        *nui*        *o*        *ērā*        *tāngata*  
 EMPH    3S        DET        thing        big        POSS    PL;DET;DIST    man;PL  
 'He is the biggest of these men.'

This construction, neglected by Mutu, et al, shows yet another instance of Maori possession unexplainable by strict A/O-governance. The form, however, does seem to

trace back to Traditional Maori. Example (21) below is taken from a text written in *te tau 1905* (adapted from Mead, et al, 1990: 95).

- (21) *ko tētahi o āā tātau mahi nui*  
 EMPH SG;some POSS;O PL;DET;POSS;A 1PL.INCL work big  
 'some of our big work'

The partitive genitive, thus, provides another example of grammaticalized possession that is based more on structural principles rather than on semantic motivations. In addition, it shows again that this grammaticalization may have started early on, before Traditional Maori was codified.

### 9. Possessor-Emphatic Constructions

As mentioned above in Section 6, some previously A/O-governed constructions appear to have levelled the A-Class forms. When first asked to produce an A-Class form, LK could only think of using them in arguments. As with sentence (16) above, Ngāpuhi is emphasizing the fact that the Maori Queen belongs to them and not to anyone else (Indeed, many Maori *iwi* 'tribes' had claimed *whakapapa* 'ancestral ownership' of Queen Te Atairangikāhu following her death). As such, it seems that A-Class forms are used in phrases where ownership is a question: clarifying, emphasizing, or exclaiming that something belongs to the possessor. Examples (22) and (23) below show examples of argumentative sentences, and (24) and (25) show further instances of ownership correction or contradiction. Note that the A-Class forms are used regardless of the semantic relationship between possessor and possessee (example (25) in particular would have a predicted O-Class form in Traditional Maori).

- (22) *Nāku te pene!*  
 PRES.POSS;A.CLASS;1S DET pen  
 'That's my pen!'
- (23) *Ehara nāku te kuri!*  
 NEG PRES.POSS;A.CLASS;1S DET dog  
 'No, that's my dog!'
- (24) *Ēnei rare māku!*  
 PL;DET;PROX lolly FUT.POSS;A.CLASS;1S  
 'Those lollies are for me.'
- (25) *Ā koutou nāku!*  
 AND?POSS;A? 2PL PRES.POSS;A.CLASS;1S  
 'You all belong to me.'

While it seems that ownership would be a question in all instances of possession, it is clear from the examples above that a special emphasis is placed on phrases that use

A-Class forms. This emphasis, thus, can be termed a Possessor-Emphatic construction. Much like the Actor-Emphatic form, the A-Class has been levelled and the semantic motivation has been lost. Unlike the previous constructions, however, the Possessor-Emphatic is still based on a semantic motivation. Perhaps this construction is a remnant of the semantic notion of ownership in A/O possession. Hypothetically, the use of A-Class forms could be a hypercorrection in instances where speakers are reminded of the concept of ownership. In any case, the levelling of A-Class forms to all possessives demonstrates that the form has in some way become grammaticalized.

Lastly, the Possessor-Emphatic construction explains the levelling with the present possessive form *nā* shown in Section 6. Understandably, possession is usually of a question when the present possessive form, glossed as ‘belongs to,’ is used. In addition, it is possible that *nā* is in the process of being grammaticalized as the present Possessor-Emphatic marker, much like the similar process it underwent in the Actor-Emphatic construction. In addition, it is possible that the O-Class form *nō* has fallen into disuse because of the lack of semantic distinction between it and basic possession. By contrast, the future possessive marker *mō* has a distinct semantic bound, as no other possessive marker denotes future time. To conclude, most possessive markers have levelled to the O-Class form, with the exception of *nā*, which exists only in the A-Class form in Actor- and Possessor-Emphatic constructions, and *mō* / *mā*, which still displays both forms, but in distinct grammatical constructions. Despite the large variety of constructions derived from possessive forms, thus, no construction retains the choice between A- and O-Class.

## 10. Exceptions

### 10.1. Relic Forms

As evidenced in some examples above, not all forms are accounted for by the set of rules for Modern Maori possession described above. Most exceptions, however, can be explained as relic forms. Given historical texts in Maori (Biggs, 1990), it seems likely that the A/O possession system existed in some form until quite recently, perhaps only several generations back. In addition, Traditional Maori continues those grammar rules today. As such, it is possible that certain phrases and forms have been passed down to Modern Maori as relic forms.

These relic forms, such as the common phrase in (26) below, appear to be limited to a handful of lexical items, which may have preserved some sense of A/O distinction simply by virtue of being in relic phrases. Words such as *tau* ‘year’ and *ingoa* ‘name’ may have preserved some distinction due to the frequency of phrases such as ‘What is his name?’ Note that *tau* here receives an overtly-marked O-Class possessive as opposed to the predicted neuter possessive.

- (26)    *E*            *iwa*            *ōna*            *tau*  
           PART    nine            PL;DET;O;3S    year  
           ‘He is nine years old.’

Other words, such as *tamaiti* ‘child’ and *mokopuna* ‘grandchild’ are, according to some, the most resilient A-Class nouns, because they form the very semantic basis for the

distinction between classes (Sally Nichols, personal communication). The A/O possession system has even been called the *tuakana-teina* system (Muru-Lanning, 2009), demonstrating the importance in generational kinship terms in the semantic motivation. As such, *tamaiti* and *mokopuna* occasionally receive A-Class forms in Modern Maori. These forms, however, are not consistent. Neuter forms and even overtly-marked O-Class forms are also possible, indicating speaker confusion, a tell-tale sign of language change in progress.

Lastly, the word *mahi* ‘work, job’ is also prone to confusion. When asked to repeat a sentence three times in a row, LK produced the following examples, (27-29). Note the confusion with both *mahi* and *tamaiti*.

(27) *I Pōneke te mahi a tō māua tamaiti*  
 LOC Wellington DET work POSS;A DET;POSS;O 1D.EXCL son  
 'Our son's work is in Wellington.'

(28) *I Pōneke te mahi a tā māua tamaiti*  
 LOC Wellington DET work POSS;A DET;POSS;A 1D.EXCL son  
 'Our son's work is in Wellington.'

(29) *I Pōneke te mahi o tō māua tamaiti*  
 LOC Wellington DET work POSS;O DET;POSS;O 1D.EXCL son  
 'Our son's work is in Wellington.'

These relic forms, thus, provide evidence for the change from A/O possession to a more levelled system because of the confusion of their forms and their apparent lexical basis.

## 10.2. Possessor Co-referents

Another exception to be mentioned briefly is the confusing situation frequently inherent in co-referential possessors. In Possessor-Emphatic constructions involving multiple possessors, there are instances of overt O-Class marking contrary to what would be expected. As (30) shows below, the same possessee receives two possessors, both with different class markings.

(30) *Māku<sub>i</sub> ōna<sub>j</sub> rare*  
 FUT.POSS;A;1S PL;DET;POSS;O;3S lolly  
 'His lollies are for me!'

The peculiar O-Class marking in *ōna* could be the result of the Possessor-Emphatic *māku*. If one is clarifying that something has a different possessor, perhaps the O-Class is used in order to contrast with the previous A-Class. The Possessor-Emphatic construction could also be more complex than first thought. Or, the *ōna* form could even be a relic form of some sort. In any case, more research would be needed to unpack these potentially confusing sentences.

## 11. Conclusion

### 11.1. Summary

All in all, it is very apparent that Modern Maori not only has a possession system independent from that outlined in Traditional Maori, but this system also provides insight into the evolution of the Proto-Polynesian possession system. While the A/O possession system has most certainly experienced significant levelling in the generations following European contact, it is evident that the formerly semantically-based system has been undergoing a gradual change to a more grammatically-based system for quite some time. The Modern Maori system thus provides an interesting comparison with the Proto-Polynesian system because of the tremendous levelling underwent to arrive at the present system. See Chart 4 below for a summary of the levelling described in the sections above. Note that the bolded forms indicate levelling, and the asterisked forms indicate uncertain or unattested forms. (Traditional Maori data adapted from Mutu, 2011 and Mead, et al, 1990.)

	Proto-A/O-Possession		Traditional Maori			Modern Maori
	A-Class	O-Class	A-Class	O-Class	Neuter	Possession
Postposed possession	a	o	a	o		<b>o</b>
Preposed poss. + Sg.	tā	too	tā	too		<b>too</b>
Preposed poss. + Pl.	ā	oo	ā	oo		<b>oo</b>
Preposed 1st Pers. + Sg.	tāku	tooku	tāku	tooku	taku	<b>taku</b>
Preposed 1st Pers. + Pl.	āku	ooku	āku	ooku	aku	<b>aku</b>
Preposed 2nd Sg. + Sg.	tāu	toou	tāu	toou	too	<b>taku</b>
Preposed 2nd Sg. + Pl.	āu	oou	āu	oou	oo	<b>aku</b>
Preposed 3rd Sg. + Sg.	tāna	toona	tāna	toona	tana	<b>tana</b>
Preposed 3rd Sg. + Pl.	āna	oona	āna	oona	ana	<b>ana</b>
Present Possessive	nā	noo	nā	noo		<b>*noo</b>
Future Possessive	mā	moo	mā	moo		<b>moo</b>
Present Actor-Emphatic	nā	*noo	<b>nā</b>	<b>nā</b>		<b>nā</b>
Future Actor-Emphatic	mā	*moo	<b>mā</b>	<b>mā</b>		<b>mā</b>
Present Poss.-Emphatic	nā	noo	nā	*noo		<b>nā</b>
Future Poss.-Emphatic	mā	moo	mā	*moo		<b>mā</b>
Partitive Genitive	*a	o	<b>o</b>	<b>o</b>		o
Locative Genitive	*a	o	<b>o</b>	<b>o</b>		<b>o</b>

Chart 4

In addition, there are further instances of forms that may historically be linked to possessive forms. For example, pronouns and proper nouns are typically preceded by a morpheme *a*, usually glossed as a name-introducing article. Perhaps this morpheme was originally a possessive marker similar to the Actor-Emphatic construction that subsequently became grammaticalized due to its frequency of appearing before pronouns and proper nouns (the nouns very capable of A-Class ownership).

As such, Maori possession has proven to be a rich topic rife with language change, but also a remarkable cross-Polynesian resiliency that provides for almost unique linguistic comparisons. Modern Maori has also proven to be more systematic than simply a series of “mistakes” and deviations from Traditional Maori. Perhaps if more research will be done on the Maori spoken by native speakers throughout New Zealand, with luck modern dialects will gain prestige, an important factor as the Maori community is in the process of revitalizing one of their most treasured *taonga*, their own language.

### 11.2. Other Dialects

One final note, I briefly interviewed a native speaker, TT, from a different *iwi*, Ngāti Whatua to compare his possession system. As (31-34) show below, the system is remarkably similar, with the one major difference being that TT has levelled the O-Class forms in place of the neuter forms that LK has levelled.

- (31) *Te mahi o tōku tama i Pōneke*  
 DET work POSS DET;POSS;1S son LOC Wellington  
 'Our son's work is in Wellington.'
- (32) *Ētahi o mātou hoa e haere ana*  
 PL;some POSS 1PL.EXCL friend PERF go CONT  
*ki tōna whare*  
 LOC DET;POSS;3S house  
 'Some of us are going to his house.'
- (33) *Nāna tērā rare!*  
 PRES.POSS;A;3S DET;DIST lolly  
 'Those lollies are for him!'
- (34) *Tō rātou mokopuna he hōiho tā rātou*  
 DET;POSS;O 3PL grandchild INDEF.DET horse DET;POSS;A 3PL  
 'Their grandchildren have some horses.'

Note the O-Class postposed possession in (31) along with the preposed O-Class form *tōku tama* (in contrast with the Traditional Maori A-Class form). In (32), the Partitive Genitive again uses O-Class marking with a postposed possessor, and there is another instance of O-Class levelling with *tōna whare*. In (33), the Possessor-Emphatic construction follows the same form as above, with an A-Class marking. And lastly, in (34), the O-Class is used with *mokopuna* as opposed to the Traditional Maori A-Class. Also, the surprising *tā* form could possibly be related to the Possessor-Emphatic construction, because the sentence is emphasizing their possession. In any case, the O-Class form is expected with *hōiho* 'horse.'

Even though TT shows a major difference with LK's speech, thus, that difference can be explained with one change, which can easily be attributed to dialectal variation. Outside of this one change, the same principles appear to hold quite well, though again, more research would be needed to say definitively.

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