



# Properties of External Possession in Malagasy

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## Properties of *Have* in English

Relevant meanings of English *have* (Harley, 1998):

**Inalienable possession:** Possessions (bold) are inherent parts or qualities of the possessor.

- (1) a. I have **short hair**.
- b. My friend has **two brothers**.

**Alienable possession:** Possessions are not inherent to the possessor, but are within their control/determination.

- (2) a. My aunt has **a cafe**.
- b. Everyone has **a phone** these days.

**Experiencer:** Possessions are actions/events that the possessor suffers from or undergoes.

- (3) a. I had **a friend lose my book** once.
- b. The driver had **their license revoked**.

## Puzzle for Malagasy

Considering the diversity of interpretations in English *have*:

- What is the function of the different possessive constructions?
- How do these interpretations arise?

## Main claims

• Malagasy possessive predicates may be encoded in three discrete strategies to express different interpretations of the possession relation:

1. Varying the sentence's topic between the possessor and possessum.
2. Forming different types of possessive idioms.
3. Varying whether the possessor experiences or controls the possessum.

## The Malagasy Subject/Trigger

The sentence-final noun in Malagasy is called the TRIGGER. It is (Keenan, 1976):

- Obligatory definite; familiar in context.
- The only noun which may be construed as what the sentence is broadly 'about.'

## Select References

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## Three Possession Constructions

Possession is a relationship between the POSSESSOR, which controls or determines the state/position of the POSSESSUM. See (5):

- (5) a. [The cook's] [knife] is sharp  
      POSSESSOR POSSESSUM
- b. [The cook] has [a sharp knife]  
      POSSESSOR POSSESSUM

### Internal Possession Construction (IPC):

- Trigger (green throughout) is the possessum.
- Possessor (underlined) appears within the same phrase as the possessum (bold).
- Possessor attaches to the possessum.

- (6) Fotsy **ny nifi-n'ny saka**.  
white DET teeth-LNK' DET cat  
'The cat's teeth are white.'

### External Possession Construction (EPC):

- Trigger is the possessor.
- Possessor appears external to the phrase containing the possessum.
- Possessum is part of the predicate.
- No single element marks a possessive construction.

- (7) tso-**piainana ny mpampianatra**.  
simple-life DET teacher  
'The teacher has a simple life.'

### Manana-possession:

- Possessor is the Trigger, possessum is an object.
- Possession is marked with a verb (*manana*) analogous to English *have*.
- both possessor and possessum appear external to the predicate and one another.

- (8) Manana **vola betsaka ny mpandrafitra**.  
have money much DET carpenter  
'The carpenter has a lot of money.'

## Qualities of Malagasy Possession Constructions

### IPC Qualities:

- IPCs and EPCs prominently vary which of the possessor/possessum are in the Trigger position.
- The IPC (9a) would be a valid answer to a question about the keys, while EPC (9b) is an answer to a question about *me* (the possessor).

- (9) a. Very **ny lakile-ko** androany.  
lost DET keys-1sg.GEN today
- b. **Very lakile aho** androany.  
lost keys 1sg.NOM today  
'I lost my keys today.'

### EPC Qualities:

- EPCs, following Paul (2007), are analogous to English EXPERIENCER possession.
- The possessor is affected by, inherently involved with, or undergoes the quality that the predicate attributes to the possessum.
- This makes the EPC possible in cases where *manana* is nonsensical. Compare (10a) and (10b):

- (10) a. **Very vola ny mpandrafitra**.  
lost money DET carpenter  
The carpenter lost their money.
- b. \*Manana **vola very ny mpandrafitra**.  
have money lost DET carpenter  
Intended: 'The carpenter lost their money.'

### Manana-possession Qualities:

- *Manana* may encode possession either of an inherent quality or part of the possessor or not.
- When *manana*-possession is used, the possessor is not interpreted as essentially involved or affected.
- Compare (11b) and (11a). Each one is acceptable, but only in specific contexts.

- (11) a. Manana **pneu vaky aho**.  
have wheel broken 1sg.NOM  
I have broken wheels. (Context: I own a junkyard of old wheels)
- b. **Vaky pneu aho**.  
broken wheel 1sg.NOM  
I have a flat tire. (Context: I'm calling to tell my boss why I'm late)

## Malagasy Background

### Malagasy

- - is a macrolanguage of Madagascar.
- - is part of the Greater Barito linkage of the Malayo-Polynesian branch of the Austronesian family (Hammarström et al., 2020).

- (4) Areal extent of Austronesian Languages



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- - is spoken by about 18,140,080 people in all Malagasic languages (Eberhard et al., 2020).

## Formation of Idioms

Each of the constructions described may form an idiom:

- (12) a. **IPC:**  
fotsy **ny volo-ko**.  
white DET hair-1sg.GEN  
'I have a lot of problems.'  
literally: 'My hair is white.'
- b. **EPC:**  
**Lava tongotra aho**.  
long foot 1sg.NOM  
'I like to go out a lot.'  
literally: 'I am long-footed.'
- c. **Manana-possession:**  
Manana **fanahy ratsy ny zaza**.  
have spirit bad DET child  
'The child is possessed.'  
literally: 'The child has a bad spirit.'

However, even in such cases, the distinction between an affected/involved possessor and an ownership possessor is maintained. Compare (12c) with an equivalent EPC:

- (13) **Ratsy fanahy ny zaza**.  
bad spirit DET child  
'The child is mean.'

The *fanahy* in (13) is the child's own, while in (12c) this is explicitly not the case.

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