

4. ‘Inalienable’ nominalisers across Meto

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1. Overview The Meto dialect continuum (Austronesian: West Timor) displays several characteristics typical of Central/Eastern Indonesian languages (Klamer 2002; Blust 2009), including subject marking, possessor suffixes, and a distinction between alienable and inalienable nouns. This paper investigates an understudied morphosyntactic property of these languages in the form of the idiosyncratically distributed nominal suffixes *-k*, *-ʔ*, and *-n*, which obligatorily occur on certain bound roots to create alienable nouns.

(1) Bound nominal forms across Meto (from Edwards 2021)

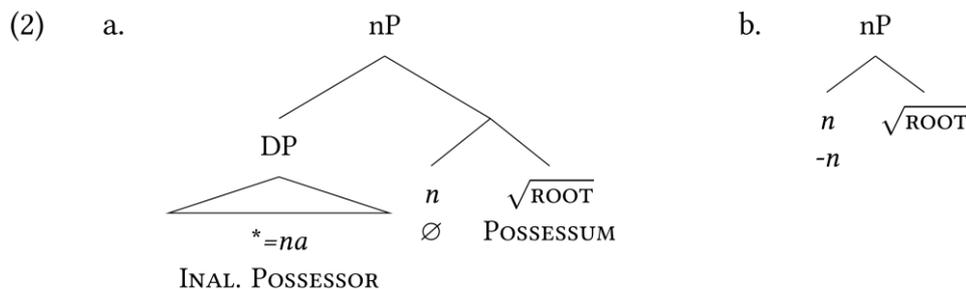
PMP **haRəzan* ‘ladder’ > *era-ʔ*, *era-k* [Amarasi] ‘stairs’, *ela-k* [Molo] ‘ladder’

PMP **rəbaq* ‘collapse’ > *refe-k* [Ro’is Amarasi], *kefa-n* [Kotos Amarasi] ‘ravine, cliff, gap’

PMP **letay* ‘above’ > *k-nete-ʔ* ‘hill’ [Kotos Amarasi], *nete-n* ‘mountain range’ [Molo]

This paper proposes that i) these suffixes originated from the diachronic Spec-Head reanalysis of inalienable possessors into *n* head categorisers; and ii) their innovation facilitated the aggressive resegmentation of etymologically **C#* nouns as the combination of a *V#* root and *-C* nominaliser, which has given rise to the illusion of synchronic subtractive morphology across a number of contexts in the Meto languages.

2. From possessor to *n* Meto inalienable possessor morphology descends from the PMP genitive enclitics (1sg **=ku* > *-k*, 2sg **=mu* > *-m*, 3sg **=na* > *-n*), which originally instantiated pronominal arguments that co-indexed both inalienable and alienable possessors. Following Alexiadou (2003); Ritter & Rosen (2010), I assume inalienable nouns allow the merger of a possessor DP into Spec, nP without needing a mediating PossP, and propose that this specifier was where these enclitics were originally merged as pronominal DPs (2a). Synchronically, several Meto nouns admit both inalienable or alienable possession as determined by semantic context; e.g. *au sisi* ‘my meat (from animals; to eat)’ vs. *au sisi-k* ‘my (own) flesh’ (cf. den Dikken 2015 on Hungarian). Given this variability in usage (and as certain nouns would have obligated 3sg/pl possessors e.g. edges, slopes), I posit that these arguments were grammaticalised into *n* head categorisers (2b) via Spec-Head reanalysis (Simpson & Wu 2002; cf. van Gelderen’s 2004 Head Preference Principle). This change was accompanied by vowel syncope and sporadic consonant reduction (1sg **=ku* > *-k/-ʔ*).



3. ‘Subtractive’ Morphology Edwards (2017, 2020) claims that Meto languages synchronically exhibit *C#* subtraction as a process which i) derives verbs from nouns (3a) and ii) is obligatory on the first element of nominal compounds (3b). I propose that these phenomena actually involve lexical items which have been reanalysed as roots + an overt *n* head (*-n/k/ʔ*), even where the final consonant is etymological (3a).

- (3) a. PMP **quzan* ‘rain’ > *uran* ‘rain’ → *na-ura* ‘(it) rains’ [Amarasi]
 b. PMP **muntay* ‘citrus tree’ > *muke-ʔ* ‘citrus’ → *muke kase-l* ‘foreign citrus’ [Amfo’an]

This resegmentation predicts the absence of these nominalisers in verbs (i.e. $\sqrt{\text{ura}} + v$ ‘to rain’). Further, independent prosodic evidence from metathesis and stress assignment (Mooney 2021; Tan 2021b) and the absence of C# deletion in verbal compounds supports analysing constructions like (3b) as $\sqrt{\text{root}} + \sqrt{\text{root}}$ compounds sharing a single categorising head (Harðarson 2017; Fenger & Harðarson 2019; Tan 2021a) whose allomorphy (here *-l*) is controlled by the final root. That these C# are synchronically segmentable is supported by the presence of *-ʔ* in several nominalising circumfixes in Amarasi (*m(a)- ... -ʔ* and *ʔ- ... -ʔ*), and the productivity of the deverbal nominaliser *-k/ʔ* in the closely-related Rote languages (Tamelan 2021).

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