Nominal Possession in Trio

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0. Introduction

Trio (a.k.a. Tiriyó, autonym Tarëno) is a member of the Cariban language family, and is spoken by ca. 1500 people in the south of Surinam and by ca. 700 in the north of Brazil. Pronominal possession marking in Trio is formed by means of personal prefixes that are affixed to nouns or to nominalized verb forms. Trio distinguishes four exponents of the category of person, namely first, dual, second and third. Number is expressed independently in the form of suffixes and can be seen as an indicator of word class. In N-N possessive constructions, the possessor precedes the possessum which is head-marked, that is, it is marked by the third person possessive prefix *i*- A possessed noun or nominal can be marked with *ti*- to indicate coreferentiality of the possessor with a subject/agent within the same clause. A possessed noun can also be marked by one of two suffixes -npë and -hpë to express non-present possession. Each of these features is dealt with in turn below.

1. Pronominal possessives: Pron - N

Pronominal possession is marked on nouns and nominalized verbs by means of the prefixes given in Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sg.</th>
<th>Pl.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>j-, ji-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 dual</td>
<td>k-, kï-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>e-, a-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>r-, 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I am grateful to the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) for providing me with funds to carry out fieldwork in Surinam from October till December 1996. In this paper the Trio examples are written orthographically. The symbol ė is phonetically realized as a schwa; i is a central high vowel; r is a flap, often with lateral release; vowel length is distinctive; o is always open; the plosives p,t,k are unaspirated; final n is realized as a velar nasal; nasals generally assimilate in the place of articulation to a following stop, i.e. np > mp. Orthographic hp is realized as a bilabial fricative. k can be realized as h; ñ is often realized as a palatal fricative. The basic word order is OVS.
The exponent dual is singular inclusive, i.e. 'you and I'. As an exponent of the
category of person it can be pluralized, then meaning plural inclusive 'we all'. As
can be seen from the above table, plurality is marked independently in suffixal
form. On the basis of this morphological characteristic we are forced to accept the
dual as a basic exponent of the category of person in the singular.

The second person prefix is ě-, even before a vowel, unless the noun begins in
a, in which case the prefix assimilates, resulting in a long aa. See examples (1a-
c):²

\[
\begin{align*}
1 & a \text{ ě-eka 'your name'} \\
   & b \text{ ě-injo 'your husband'} \\
   & c \text{ a-amoi 'your fingernail'}
\end{align*}
\]

The third person possessive marking is i- before a consonant (2a) and 0 before a
vowel (2b-d). There is, however, evidence of the presence of the third person
possessive i- before a vowel, namely when the possessed noun begins with ě,
which phonetically is realized as schwa. In all persons including the third, the
possessive prefixes cause this vowel to become fronted to a close e, compare the
examples given in (3).

\[
\begin{align*}
2 & a \text{ i-nore 'his/her tongue'} \\
   & b \text{ injo 'her husband'} \\
   & c \text{ eka 'his/her name'} \\
   & d \text{ amoi 'his/her fingernail'} \\
3 & a \text{ ěwanē 'heart'} \\
   & b \text{ j-ewanē 'my heart'} \\
   & c \text{ ě-ewanē 'your heart'} \\
   & d \text{ewanē 'his/her heart'}
\end{align*}
\]

The first person exclusive reveals two quite remarkable facts, which will lead us
to the conclusion that it does not actually belong in Table 1 at all. Of the plural
set of possessives only the first person exclusive has no suffixal plural marking.
The first person exclusive behaves formally like a third person singular. It does
not take a plural marker, neither in the nominal, that is, no plural suffix in (4),
nor in the verbal domain (5).³

² Many of the examples given in this paper were taken from Koelewijn (1984) and were checked with
informants in the field.
³ Less self-evident abbreviations are the following: AS: adjectival state; AUG: augmentative; COM:
commitative; D: dual; DES: desirative; DIR: directional; INT: interrogative; INTEN: intensifier; NF:
non-finite; NOM: nominalizer; POSTP: postposition; PRO: pronoun; SOU: source; TNS: tense
The form *ainja* is the unbound pronoun for the first person exclusive, and when used as such also never takes plural marking in contrast with the other unbound pronouns which can be pluralized with the suffix *-injamo*. The reason for this may be that the form *ainja* already ‘looks’ like a truncated plural form. Furthermore, these pronouns, even in the plural, do not seem to require plural marking on the verb, compare examples (6,7), where in (6) there is a plural subject pronoun but no plural marked on the verb, and in (7) a plural lexical subject with plural marking on the verb:

(6) tuna eni-ja-n mēe-san  
water drink-TNS-SG 3PRO-PL  
‘They are drinking water’

(7) tonoro isika-ne-to tikoro-jan  
birds steal-TNS-PL white-PL  
‘The white people stole birds’

Thus, formally *ainja* does not actually belong in Table 1 since it behaves more like a noun, as can be seen in example (4). This is a N-N construction with the unbound pronoun *ainja*, which is inherently plural, as the first noun and possessor.

The plural counterparts of the other possessive prefixes, 1\(^{st}\) dual inclusive, 2\(^{nd}\) and 3\(^{rd}\), are marked by a suffix on the possessed noun. The potential confusion as to the referent of the plural marking suffix, that is, whether it is referring to the possessor or to the possessed noun, is resolved by the use of different plural suffixes. The suffix *-kon* or its alternant *-komo* pluralizes the possessor (8). If the possessor is singular and the possessum is plural, the suffix indicating a plural

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4 Compare the forms *kēmē*, dual ‘you and I’, plural *kimē-nejamo* ‘we all’, and *ēmē* ‘you (sg.)’ *ēmē-injamo* ‘you (pl.)’. The form of the plural marking on the unbound pronouns is the same as that of the collective or set-delimiting marker that is suffixed to animate, mostly human, entities, namely *-san*, *-samo*, *-jan*, *-jamo*, meaning ‘the set of…’, for example, *tamu-san* ‘old men’; *tikoro-jan* ‘white people’.
possessum is -ton or its alternant -tomo (9); if both the possessor and the
possessum are plural, the number marking suffix is -kontokon (10).

(8)  kî-moîtî-komo  ‘our (pl) family (sg)’
(9)  ji-maja-ton  ‘my (sg) knives (pl)’
(10) kî-moîtî-kontokon  ‘our (pl) families (pl.)’

Possessive prefixes also occur on nominalized verb forms as can be seen in (11):

(11)  ji-wëe-pï-se  mana-n
       1POSS-come-NOM-DES  2.be.TNS.INT
       ‘Do you want me to come? (do you want my coming)’

There are a few instances where the first syllable of the noun is dropped when
prefixed by the possessive prefixes as shown in (12a-c). This seems to happen
when the initial syllable of the noun is wV or pV where V has the values i or i.5
One reason for the replacement of the syllable may be that both wV and pV are
first person singular subject prefixes on transitive and intransitive verbs
respectively. One exception to this is tuna ‘water’, jina ‘my water’, taken from
Leavitt (1973:19) for which I have no explanation.

(12)  a  wïwi  ‘axe’
       b  wirapa  ‘bow’
       a’  ji-wï  ‘my axe’
       b’  ë-rapa  ‘your bow’
       a”  ë-wï  ‘your axe’
       c  pïta  ‘sole of foot’
       c’  j-ïta  ‘sole of my foot’

1.1 The suffix -rï. In conjunction with possession marking, some possessed nouns,
mostly but not only kinship terms, are further affixed by the suffix -rï. There is
diachronic evidence and indeed still some synchronic evidence, also found in
other Cariban languages of the area, for example Carib (Hoff 1968), Wayana (de
goeje 1946), Apalai (Koehn and Koehn 1986), that any possessed noun, and only
that, can be followed by the suffix -rï, as in i-mama-ri ‘his mother’. Synchronically in Trio, the -rï is almost only used if the possessed noun is
followed by the postposition -ja ‘to, from, by’ (13). Thus, in this work, while
recognizing its historical status as what was probably a marker of construct case,

5 pï- as a first person singular prefix on intransitive verbs is seldom used and was only found on three
verbs in my corpus.
-ri is glossed as a linker (LNK) between a possessed noun and a postposition. While in our corpus the suffix does also occur without the postposition and has been attested on a subject/agent noun and in an equational construction, in most cases the subject/agent possessed noun does not take the suffix. The affix -ri is not inserted between a plural noun and the postposition (15). The -ri also undergoes vowel harmony becoming -ru after a noun ending in a final u (13).

While most of the occurrences of -ri in my corpus are with kinship terms, see (13,15), example (14) shows that it is not restricted to this semantic field.

(13) wi-ka-e ji-muku-ru-ja
1-say-SG 1POSS-son-LNK-POSTP
'I say to my son'

(14) eeke iranta-ri-ja tahken,
come? year-LNK-POSTP perhaps
'Maybe another year will come she said'

(15) a i-wëri-tomo-ja b tï-wëri-ri-ja
3POSS-sister-PL-POSTP own-sister-LNK-POSTP
'to his sisters' 'to his sister'

1.2 The prefix tï-. The prefix tï- is a possessive prefix meaning 'his/her own' and is used to indicate coreferentiality, that is, tï- must be used when the third person possessor is coreferential with the subject or agent of the verb in the same clause, see (16,17). The tï- marked noun or nominal is thus a direct or oblique object. Before a noun beginning in a, tï- causes the a to be dropped and the vowel of -tï assimilates to the next vowel, for example, tï-akono > tokono 'his/her brother-in-law'; tï-akëmi > tëkëmi 'his younger brother'.

(16) tï-ire-pona-pa t-ïtë-e
own-weapons-DIR-back AS-go-NF
'He went back to his weapons'

(17) tï-papa-ri-ja tïi-ka-e
own-father-LNK-POSTP AS-say-NF
'he said to his father'

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6 A similar linker -ti- is attested with a few nouns, e.g., ipi-ti-ja 'to his wife' and ehke-ti-nya 'without a hammock'. This is not a case of allomorphy, however, since their distributional characteristics differ. -ti- can co-occur with the suffix -nya 'without' and with the past marker -npë (see 3 below), whereas -ri cannot.
Since the first person plural exclusive ainja is formally third singular, it too requires ti- to mark coreferentiality of possessor and subject or agent (18).

(18) tï-jooki ainja n-enä-ja-e
    own-drink lex. 3-drink-TNS-SG
    'we drink our drink'

While coreferentiality with the subject or agent of the clause would appear to be a necessary condition for the occurrence of ti-, it does not seem to be a sufficient condition since there are some examples where the non-logophoric possessive prefix i- occurs where one would expect ti-. In the first clause in (19), the i-prefix is used despite coreferentiality.

(19) mërëme i-papa in-eu-se-wa
    but 3POSS-father 3OBJ-answer-NF-NEG
t-e-se, eikarë tï-n-punë-pï-ke i-wei-ke
    AS-be.NF REFL. own-OBJ-think-NOM-COM 3POSS-be-COM
    'he didn't answer his father because he was engaged in his own thoughts'

Also when the agent of an adjectival state verb (AS), which in Trio is generally expressed obliquely in a postpositional phrase (20), is coreferential with the possessor, the object possessum is marked with ti- (21). Thus we have here evidence that the ti- possessor is coreferential with the agent and not the subject.

(20) ariwe-imë enu t-ëne i-ja
cayman-AUG eye AS-see.NF 3-POSTP
    'he saw big cayman's eye (big cayman's eye seen by him)'

(21) irëme-pa Përëru-ja t-ërë-e tï-mahto
    then-again P.-POSTP AS-take-NF own-fire
    'then Përëru took his fire again'

2. Nominal possession N-N

Possessor-possessum type possession involving a lexical possessor noun has the form N i-N, N ii-N or N 0 N, whereby the possessor precedes the possessum. Nominal possession with these structures show head-marking, that is, the possessum is generally morphologically marked with the third person possessive prefix i- before a consonant (22). There are in fact a few examples where head-marking would seem to be optional, having as a result an unmarked juxtaposition of two nouns. However, see below for evidence that this is in fact a distinction
between possessive structures and compounding. As already stated above regarding the allomorphy of the third person possessive prefix *i-, there is zero realization of the *i- before a vowel-initial possessed noun (23). When the possessor noun ends in *i, and the possessed noun is head-marked, the vowel *i remains perceivably long even in fast speech. Furthermore, the rule stated above regarding fronting of schwa-initial possessed nouns also holds (24).

(22) pahko i-kanawa
    my.father 3POSS-boat
    ‘my father's boat’

(23) wëri 0-eka ji-wame
    woman (3POSS)-name 1-not.know
    ‘I don't know the woman’s name’

(24) tamutupë ewanë < i-ëwanë
    old.man 3POSS.heart
    ‘the old man’s heart’

That this N-N construction is actually a genitive one and that the *i- here is no longer a possessive prefix but a genitive marker is evidenced by the fact that the coreferential *ti- is not permitted on the head of an N-N construction (25) while it is permitted on the dependent (26). This further corroborates the evidence that *ti-marked possessed nouns need an agent that is coreferential, that is, -*ti requires an event.

(25) anpo nai tamutupë i-muku *tamutupë tîn-muku
    where be.3PRES old.man 3POSS-son
    ‘where is the old man’s son?’

(26) tîn-muku pokïnta-hpë apo-ro
    own-son smell-PST like-INTEN
    ‘... exactly like his own son’s smell’

Examples (27,28) illustrate complex possessive structures of the type [Possessor [possessor -possessum]]:

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7 The general word for father is papa and this can be possessed by all persons except the 1 singular where the form is pahko, e.g. ë-papa ‘your father’, but *ji-papa. Pahko is also the form of address to one's father. The same condition obtains for mother which is mama for all persons excluding the 1 person singular. Here again the form of address manko ‘my mother’ is used. In the dual and in the plural inclusive, however, the form papa is used, thus ki-papa, ki-mama ‘our (dual) father/mother’ and ki-papa-kon, ki-mama-kon ‘our (incl.) father/mother’.
(27)  te'inken nai  ki-mama-kon  i-mone
      one     be.3PRES  1D.POSS-mother-POSS.PL  3POSS-womb
     ‘our mother's womb is one (we all have the same mother)’

(28)  j-einja    i-tamu
      1POSS-hand  3POSS-leader
     ‘my thumb’

While we stated above that the possessive prefix in some cases would seem to be optional, example (28) above, where the i- cannot be omitted, shows that we are in fact not dealing with optionality. N-N juxtapositions without the possessive prefix i- on the second noun is a means of forming nominal compounds whereby the first noun of the pair has a classificatory function vis-à-vis the second noun (see Velazquez-Castillo 1996 for a similar construction in Guarani). Thus in (29b) ‘woman’ classifies the gender, that is, belonging to the class of female entities, and ‘child’ is the specified designatum. In (30a) the ‘sloth’ that is referred to is a particular sloth, that is, it is referential, whereas in (30b) ‘sloth’ refers to the set of sloths and thus is not referential. While for consonant-initial possessum nouns a clear difference can be observed between a possessive construction and a compound structure, this difference is no longer visible for vowel-initial possessum nouns where we have a zero allomorph as opposed to the absence of the prefix i-. The referentiality parameter may prove to be the distinguishing factor but due to the lack of relevant data, this problem must, for the present, remain unresolved.

(29)  a wëri i-muku  b  wëri-muku
      woman 3POSS-child  woman-child
     ‘the woman’s child’  ‘girl’

(30)  a arekore i-muku  b  arekore-muku-hpë-rëken
      sloth  3POSS-child  sloth-child-PST-only
     ‘a sloth’s baby’  ‘only a baby sloth’

It was also stated above that when the possessor noun ends in a final i (29a), there is audible length of this vowel to indicate the possessive construction. While vowel length is a distinctive feature in this language, there are additional means for distinguishing between the possessive construction and the compound structure, namely in the stress pattern. Thus (29) has the stress pattern sw:sw for the possessive construction (29a), and wwws for the compound (29b), where s stands for strong and w for weak syllable.
3. **Tense and possession**

There are in Trio two suffixes indicating non-present possession, -npë and -hpë. These are suffixed to a noun, to a nominalized verb and to a verb stem, all of which must be possessed. The two suffixes do not seem to differ in meaning since they both mark past, but they do differ in their distribution (see below). These suffixes refer to a state or event in the past. On the one hand they can refer to something as being old, in which case the possessum is attributed the quality ‘old’ (31). On the other hand, they refer to former possession, that is, again the possessum is modified by the attribute ‘former state’, for example something that was in someone’s possession but no longer is (32). When a person dies, any reference made to his person (body parts) or belongings must take past reference suffixation but in this case it is not the possessum that is being modified but the possessor. Which of the meanings is relevant is context dependent although a certain degree of ambiguity still remains, see (31).

What the two suffixes have in common, apart from their tense-marking ability, is that they can both be suffixed to non-derived nouns (31). While the two suffixes are generally in complementary distribution, some nouns can take either of the two (32). The two suffixes can be followed by plural marking morphemes for possessor plural (33) and possessum plural (34). There would seem to be no semantic restriction on the occurrence of the past markers, since they are also used with body parts and kinship terms (35). When used as such, the scope of the past suffixes is not the immediately preceding nominal, rather they refer back to the possessive prefixes, thus the reference point of the suffixes is usually the death of the possessor (cf. è-parì-\(\text{npë}\)-kon-\(\text{pona}\)-\(\text{rën}\) ‘for centuries to come up as far as your (pl.) grandchildren’; pari ‘grandchildren; pona ‘to’; \(\text{rën}\) ‘for centuries’). In (35) it is not the death of the father but of the son. Each of these suffixes is dealt with in brief below.

\[\text{(31)}\]
\[\begin{array}{ll}
\text{a} & \text{ji-kamisa-\(\text{hpë}\)} \\
& \text{1POSS-loincloth-PST} \\
& \text{‘my old loincloth’}
\end{array}\]
\[\begin{array}{ll}
\text{b} & \text{i-punu-\(\text{npë}\)} \\
& \text{3POSS-body-PST} \\
& \text{‘his body (he is dead)’}
\end{array}\]

or ‘my former loincloth’

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8 The examples in my corpus refer to “former” possession, for those with the meaning “old” I had to rely on Leavitt’s (1971, 1973) manuscripts.

9 I have, however, one attestation of the plural marker preceding the past suffix, namely, \(t\)-\(\text{okono-ton-\(\text{npë}\)}\) ‘his own brothers-in-law’.
ji-maja-\(\text{np}^\text{ê}\) or ji-maja-\(\text{hp}^\text{ê}\)
1POSS-knife-PST
‘my former knife (a knife the speaker no longer has)’\(^{10}\)

\(\text{ë-maja-\(\text{hp}^\text{ê}\)-komo-se ~ wae}\)
2POSS-knife-PST-POSS.PL-DES 1.be
‘I want your (pl.) old knife’ Leavitt (1973:20)

p-\(\text{ïre-\(\text{np}^\text{ê}\)-ton}\)
1POSS-weapon-PST-PL
‘my old (former) weapons’

irë apo tïï-ka-e i-papa-\(\text{hp}^\text{ê}\)
DEMPRO like AS-say-NF 3POSS-father-PST
‘That’s what his father said’

While it was stated above that nouns or nominalized verbs can take the past tense suffixes, in the case of \(-\text{np}^\text{ê}\), it is in fact the entire nominal domain that can be marked for tense, that is, nouns (31), free pronouns (36) and demonstrative pronouns (37). Those nouns that require a linker in some contexts also require the linker before \(-\text{np}^\text{ê}\) (38).\(^{11}\) Verbs nominalized by means of \(-\text{nV}\) and \(-\text{topo}\) (39) take the tense marker \(-\text{np}^\text{ê}\). Furthermore there is one attestation of \(-\text{np}^\text{ê}\) being suffixed to the particle \text{apo} ‘like’ in which case it would seem that the \(-\text{np}^\text{ê}\) itself carries a nominalizing function (40). This evidence would seem to beg the question as to whether \(-\text{np}^\text{ê}\) is not in fact a nominalizer, as it is tentatively (due to a lack of sufficient data) treated by Gildea (1992). Arguments against such an analysis, however, are that \(-\text{np}^\text{ê}\) is suffixed to non-derived nouns, and in the case of verbs, \(-\text{np}^\text{ê}\) requires these to be already nominalized before they can be marked with the tense suffix.

\(\text{namoro-\(\text{np}^\text{ê}\). ~ they-PST}\)
‘those people (who had been there and had left)’

\(\text{irëme ~ irë-\(\text{np}^\text{ê}\) ~ t-\(\text{ëp}^\text{ê}\)-se ~ i-ja-ne}\)
DEMPRO-PST AS-take-NF 3-POSTP-PL
‘then they took what was left, their former things’

\(^{10}\) As far as I could ascertain, the preferred past form now for non-derived nouns is \(-\text{np}^\text{ê}\), for many of my examples with \(-\text{np}^\text{ê}\) Leavitt (1972) has them with \(-\text{hp}^\text{ê}\).

\(^{11}\) See footnote 6.
The past marker -hpë does not share the scope of past-marking possibilities of its counterpart -npë. In the noun-based domain, only non-derived nouns can take -hpë (31a), that is, it cannot be suffixed to pronouns or demonstratives. In the verb-based domain, it is suffixed to a verb stem with infinitive nominalization, which, according to its lexical specification, is realized as zero or Ci where C has the values p,t,k,r, or m (41,42). Temporo-aspectual and locative marking can occur after the -hpë (42).

Furthermore, in contrast to a nominal suffixed by -npë, those marked with -hpë can stand alone as a clause (43):

4. Conclusion

This summary description of nominal possession in Trio started with a look at the possessive prefixes, showing that the dual is an exponent of the category of person, the singular status of the 1st person (plural) exclusive, the now restricted use of the suffix -ri as a possible former marker of construct case, and the use of the coreferentiality prefix ti-. We also showed how possession interacts with
tense-marking on nouns and nominalized verb forms insofar as all tensed nominals must be possessed, leaving aside for the moment borderline cases of the possession of the particle apo and the demonstrative pronouns. From a typological point of view, the fact that nouns and nominals take both person marking and tense marking, areas of grammar that are generally seen as signs of verbhood, brings us to some interesting findings regarding the noun/verb distinction in Trio. Further research must include consideration of the semantic roles such as agent, patient and experiencer roles assigned to these possessed forms, consonant with the varying degrees of subjecthood and objecthood seen above. A comparison of the distribution of the past markers -npë and -hpë and their interaction with the different nominalizers, cf. above, where -hpë can only be combined with the infinitive nominalization and as such can acquire the status of a clause, will no doubt shed light on the apparent scalar rather than discrete nature of nouns and verbs in Trio.

References