Change and variation in the possessive systems of the Vanuatu Polynesian Outliers

Catriona Malau and Amy Dewar
The University of Newcastle

Change and variation in the possessive systems of the Vanuatu Polynesian Outliers

CATRIONA MALAU AND AMY DEWAR
The University of Newcastle

Abstract

This paper looks at change and variation in possessive constructions in the three Polynesian Outliers of Vanuatu – Futuna-Aniwa, Ifira-Mele and Fakamae – comparing published descriptions which depict the languages as spoken some 40–70 years ago with recent data from the authors' corpora. The grammatical expression of possession in Futuna-Aniwa reflects some features typical of Polynesian languages, which have as a prominent characteristic a binary semantic contrast marked syntactically by forms based on the morphemes *a* and *o* (Capell, 1984; Dougherty, 1983). Documentation of Fakamae as spoken in 1958 (Capell, 1962) and Ifira-Mele as spoken in the 1970s and 80s (Clark, 1998, 2001) shows that these languages do not retain this Polynesian distinction. All three languages were documented as also having a direct suffixing construction which does not occur in Polynesian Triangle languages, and Ifira-Mele and Futuna-Aniwa both have a further construction which is only evident in a few Polynesian Outliers.

Recent data shows a reduction in the number of different types of possessive construction exhibited in the languages in comparison with earlier documentation, and there is current variation in use of constructions for Futuna-Aniwa and Ifira-Mele speakers. In Fakamae, the changes can be characterised as straightforward simplification, and it has stabilised as a language with a single possessive construction. The situation for Futuna-Aniwa and Ifira-Mele shows more complexity in the process of language change. Today's speakers sometimes mix constructions, with the original distinctions losing their value to some extent. Further, as Ifira-Mele shifts towards having one dominant construction, speakers sometimes employ more than one of the means of marking possession in a single construction. The differences in the changes in the three languages present a perspective on the pathways of change. For Fakamae, this is just simplification, but for the other two languages, with mixing of constructions, there is no clear endpoint for the changes in progress.

Summary in Bislama

Long ol lanwis blong Vanuatu, taem yumi wantem talem se wan samting hemi blong hu, i gat fulap difren wei blong transletem 'blong'. Long sam lanwis, i gat kasem naen difren wei blong talem 'blong'. I gat difren wod blong yusum sapos wanem we yu tokbaot hemi kakae o dring o famle o transpot o sam difren samting. Long Bislama hemi isi from evritaem yumi talem 'blong' nomo. Long ol lanwis blong Polynesia, i gat tu difren wei blong talem 'blong'. Sapos we wod we i minim 'blong' i bes long *a*, i minim se hu we i onem samting we oli tokbaot hemi gat kontrol ova long samting ia, be sapos i bes long *o*, i minim se i nogat kontrol ova long hem. Eksampol, sapos yu talem, 'ol storian blong ol pikinini' mo yu makem wetem *a*, i minim se ol pikinini i bin raetem o mekemap ol storian ia. Be sipos yu makem wetem *o*, i minim se ol storian ia ol i abaot ol pikinini ia.

Long Vanuatu, evri lanwis i kamaot long sem famli we oli kolem se Oceanic grup insaed long Austronesian famli. Be i gat trifala lanwis we i difren lelebet from ol bubu blong ol man we i toktok trifala lanwis ia oli bin kamaot long Polynesia. I mekem se taem yu harem trifala lanwis ia oli mo klosap long ol lanwis blong Polynesia kompea wetem ol lanwis blong Vanuatu. Trifala lanwis ia, hemia blong Futuna mo Aniwa long saot, lanwis blong Ifira mo Mele, mo wan lanwis blong Emae we oli kolem se Fakamae. Ol lanwis ia we i stap long Melanesia be i kamaot long Polynesia, long Inglis yumi kolem se Polynesian Outlier.

Long pepa ia, mifala i stap tokbaot wei blong talem 'blong' long trifala lanwis ia. Long 40 tu 70 yia ia i pas finis, i gat sam lingwis we i bin raet abaot trifala lanwis ia mo long saed blong wei blong talem 'blong', i talem se long sam wei oli olsem ol Polynesian lanwis mo long sam wei i difren. Mifala i stap lukluk long sam jens we i bin tek ples sins oli bin raet abaot ol lanwis ia mo yumi save luk se oli stap jens bakagen. Lanwis blong Fakamae i kam lelebet olsem Bislama, we i gat wan wei nomo blong talem 'blong'. Be long lanwis blong Futuna mo Aniwa wetem Ifira mo Mele, yumi save luk se wei blong toktok blong ol yangfala i no semak long wei blong toktok blong ol olfala, i minim se lanwis i stap jenis.

Keywords

1   Introduction

This paper investigates change and variation in the possessive systems of the Vanuatu Polynesian Outliers. The 15 Outliers are languages which belong to the Polynesian subgroup within Oceanic but are spoken outside the geographical area of Polynesia, in Melanesia and Micronesia; they occur as the result of back migration. Vanuatu is home to three Polynesian Outliers:[1] Futuna-Aniwa, spoken on the islands of Futuna and Aniwa in the south, and Fakamae (Emae island) and Ifira-Mele of Central Vanuatu. Figure 1 shows the locations of these three Polynesian Outliers in Vanuatu, as well as relevant Vanuatu contact languages.

---

[1] There is ongoing debate regarding subgrouping for the Polynesian Outliers. As it is not directly relevant to this paper, we do not explicitly refer to grouping of the Vanuatu Outliers but note that most recent evidence suggests that Ifira-Mele and Futuna-Aniwa group together, separate from Fakamae, which groups with Fagauvea of New Caledonia (Walworth et al., 2022).
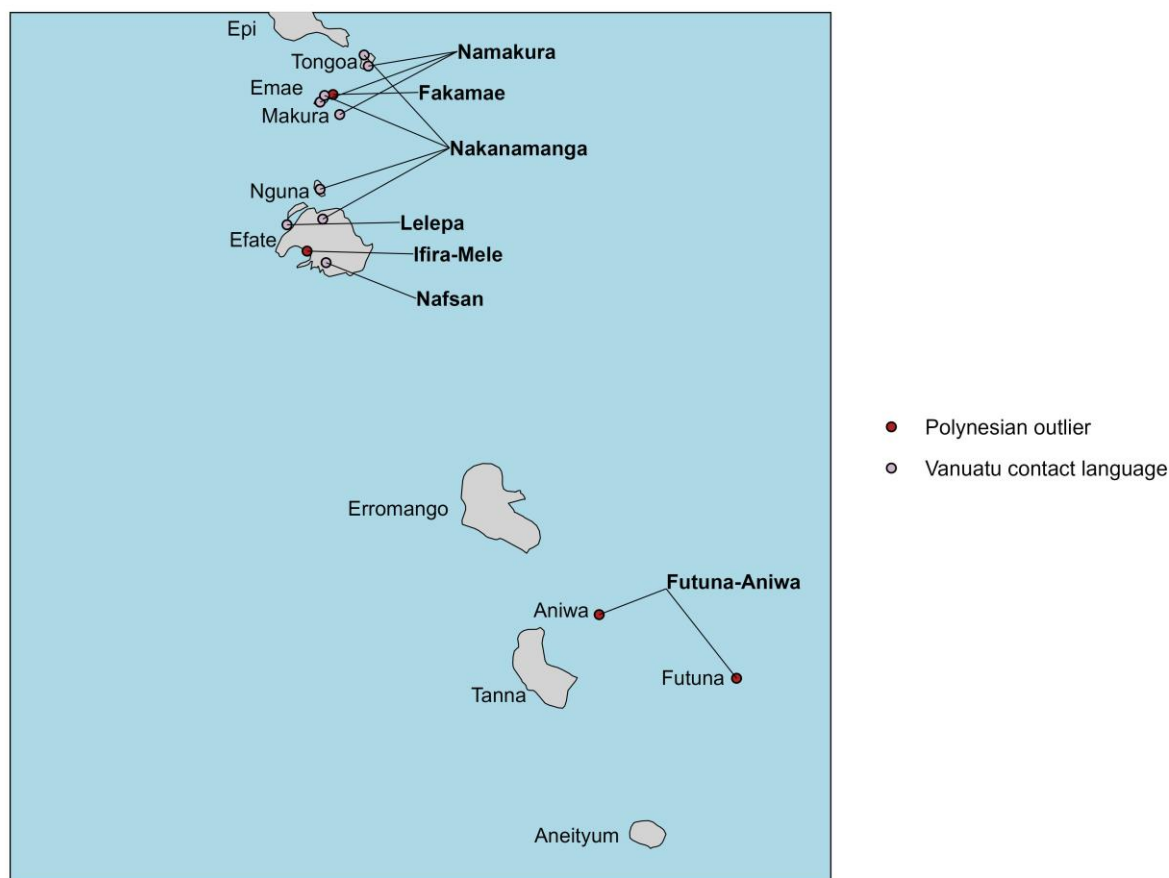
Figure 1. Map of the location of three Polynesian Outliers in Vanuatu, and relevant Vanuatu contact languages[2]

Brief grammatical sketches of each of these languages have been published, based on data collected some 40–70 years ago (Capell, 1962 [Fakamae]; Clark, 1998, 2001 [Ifira-Mele]; Capell, 1984; Dougherty, 1983 [Futuna-Aniwa]). These earlier descriptions show the similarities and differences in the possessive constructions of these languages when compared with the Polynesian Triangle languages. Recent data collected on the languages between 2017 and 2024 show how the expression of possession has continued to change.

For the most part, in terms of the morphosyntactic expression of semantic distinctions, possessive constructions in Polynesian Triangle languages exhibit a binary contrast which centres on use of the morphemes *a* and *o.* Grammatical possession in these languages is further described and exemplified in Section 3.1. The main factor relevant to this paper is that the expression of possession in Polynesian Triangle languages is relatively uniform across all of approximately 20 languages, with only minor variation exhibited in both semantic distinctions and in the morphosyntax of the constructions employing the *a/o* contrast. The Outlier languages vary in the extent to which they retain the Polynesian *a/o* contrast as a central feature of their possessive construction types, as detailed in Section 3.2.

In addition, all three Vanuatu Outliers are documented as having a construction involving suffixation of the possessed noun, which has a limited distribution in specifying a small number

---

[2] Map was created in R by Eleanor Ridge using rnaturalearthhires and sf packages.

of kin relationships. This construction occurs in several Outliers, but not in Polynesian Triangle languages. It is evident from these earlier descriptions that this construction had a very narrow distribution in Fakamae but a broader distribution in both Futuna-Aniwa and Ifira-Mele. Recent data shows that use of this construction has decreased in each of the languages (Section 8.2).

Capell (1962)'s description of Fakamae shows that the expression of possession had already simplified, with loss of the *a/o* contrast, and our data shows no significant change since then apart from further simplification, with little evidence of anything other than one general construction being used. The situation for Ifira-Mele and Futuna-Aniwa is more complex, with observable changes having taken place since the earlier descriptions. Futuna-Aniwa has one of the most complex possessive systems relative to other Polynesian languages. Our data on the language as spoken today is limited, however we chose to include Futuna-Aniwa in this discussion to give a comparative picture of all three Vanuatu Outliers. There is some evidence of reduction in the range of constructions used. Possession in Ifira-Mele is the main focus in this paper, due to the clear evidence of ongoing change. Constructions used for different lexical items by younger speakers vary from those used by older speakers. Ifira-Mele is spoken in an intensive contact situation. Clark (1986) has documented the significant earlier lexical borrowing from neighbouring non-Polynesian languages, and these borrowed terms are exclusively employed in a dominant 'general' construction. There is little evidence that any changes in usage which are now taking place are the direct result of contact, apart from possible influence from Bislama.

This paper is organised to first describe the corpora and data collection methods (Section 2), then contextualise the possessive systems of the three languages via a brief overview of possessive systems in Polynesian languages (Section 3) and the Vanuatu languages with which the Outliers are in contact (Section 4). We then present brief sociolinguistic backgrounds for each language community, highlighting the extent of language contact (Section 5). Summaries of the possessive constructions in each language are presented in Section 6. Further details on current variation and change in expression of possession in Ifira-Mele is presented in Section 7. We then focus on the changes observed since the earlier descriptions in Section 8, first looking at the extent of loss and retention of the typical Polynesian *a/o* contrast (8.1), then focussing on the semantic domain which is most impacted by the changes in expression of possession, namely that of kin relations (8.2).

2   Background on Data

This paper compares data collected by the authors over the period 2017 to 2024, reflecting current usage, with descriptions and examples from publications based on data collected in the 1970s, 1980s and earlier (Capell, 1962 [Fakamae]; Clark, 1998, 2001 [Ifira-Mele]; Capell, 1984; Dougherty, 1983 [Futuna-Aniwa]). For the most part, the data referred to in this study were not collected specifically targeting possessive constructions. The data are mostly drawn from our corpora which were created as part of a broader project on documentation and description of Fakamae and Ifira-Mele. This paper was prompted by observations that use of the different possessive construction types in Ifira-Mele has changed considerably since Clark began collecting data in the mid-1970s. Noting that minor changes have also occurred or are underway in the other two Vanuatu Outliers, we include discussion of all three languages in this paper to provide a broader comparative overview. In the following paragraphs, for each of the languages in turn, we describe data collection, the corpora, and any relevant methods.

In 2017, Malau received funding from the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (ELDP) for 'Documentation of Ifira-Mele and Fakamae, two Polynesian languages of Vanuatu.' Under this project, Malau has focussed on Ifira-Mele and Dewar on Fakamae.

Dewar began data collection on Fakamae for her BA (Honours) thesis in 2017, and her corpus (Dewar, 2020) is mostly comprised of data collected over two field trips totalling 9 months across 2018 and 2019. The analysis of Fakamae possessive constructions presented in this paper is based on data from this corpus, which was collected with a broad aim of grammatical description for a PhD thesis (Dewar, 2022). The Fakamae corpus consists of approximately 40 hours of video and audio recordings, around half of which is elicitation and the other half more naturally occurring texts from a range of genres including narratives, conversations, and expository and procedural texts.

The Ifira-Mele data referred to in this paper comes from Malau, 2018. This corpus contains 16 hours of recordings, mostly video, collected over a total of 5.5 months in 2018, 2019 and 2023. Both Malau and Clark have collected data only on the Imere dialect of Ifira-Mele. The recordings cover a range of genres, with an emphasis on expository text, speeches, and interviews. When Malau began to observe that certain grammatical, lexical, and phonological changes appeared to have taken place or were underway since Clark's data collection of the 1970s and 1980s, she chose to take a more targeted approach for some of the data collection, in the form of semi-structured interviews. The interviews aimed for a reasonably even spread across gender and age, with 23 speakers interviewed, 12 females and 11 males, the youngest speaker aged 16 and the oldest 73. The interviews covered a range of topics, targeting some aspects where language change has been observed. The interviewees were asked to: list family members and discuss relationships; talk about their life history, including schooling and work experience; describe their language use in different domains; give a route description explaining how to get to their home; label body parts, following their choice; and lastly, translate 12 sentences, which were used to target pronunciation and use of specific words. Apart from the 12 sentences, for the most part, the interviews avoided direct elicitation, and there is little elicited data in the corpus generally. Due to the emphasis on unelicited data, we do not have tokens of all the same terms in possessive constructions for all speakers. For the purposes of an assessment of current usage of possessive constructions in Imere (Section 7), interview data was supplemented with non-systematic data from the general corpus from a further 12 speakers, with an overall age range of 10 to 83 years. Speaker metadata is presented in the Appendix. While specific aspects of variation in construction use analysed in Section 7 is based only on data from those 35 speakers, the discussion as a whole is informed by the corpus, which contains close to 2,000 instances of possessive constructions.

Although the authors' overall research focus has been only on Fakamae and Ifira-Mele, we have included discussion of Futuna-Aniwa possessive constructions to give a broader picture of the grammatical expression of possession in all three Vanuatu Outliers. It should be noted that discussion of Futuna-Aniwa possession is based on limited data, and few insights can be made about changes to the grammatical expression of possession. Discussion of Futuna-Aniwa is mostly based on description of the possessive system presented in Dougherty (1983). Dougherty collected language data as part of her anthropological research on Futuna island in the 1970s. This was supplemented with around 200 examples taken from recorded folk tales (Janet Dixon Keller.[3] p. c.). To clarify some points and try to gain a picture of any changes to the possessive system that have taken place in the past 50 years, we elicited data from one speaker of the language who is resident in Australia. Data specifically targeting aspects of the possessive system were elicited from Mary Munu Hackney, a first-language speaker of the Futuna dialect, in 2024.

---

[3] Janet Dougherty now goes by the name Janet Dixon Keller.

Examples from published sources are given with the source reference including page number. For examples which come from the authors' corpora, a reference is provided in the format: Language_Date_Text abbreviation:Sentence number. This referencing reflects the consistent labelling used in the corpora, such that readers can search each corpus to retrieve the original video or audio recordings.

3   Possessive Constructions in Polynesian Languages

3.1   Possession in Polynesian Triangle languages

In Polynesian Triangle languages, the grammatical expression of possessive relationships is characterized by two contrasting markers, *a* and *o*. The choice of marker reflects semantic distinctions based on the relationship between the possessor and the possessum. This relationship has been characterized variously in descriptions of Polynesian languages as: dominant possessor (*a*) versus subordinate possessor (*o*) (Hohepa, 1967; Lynch, 1998; Pawley, 1966); active versus passive (Biggs, 1969); control over initiation of possessive relationship versus otherwise (Wilson, 1982); agentive versus partitive (Taumoefolau, 1996); and dominant versus non-dominant (Bauer, 1997). The semantic distinction shares similarities with an alienable versus inalienable distinction, which is salient amongst Oceanic languages (Lynch, Ross & Crowley, 2001). However, the notion of the possessor's level of control over the possessive relationship is generally seen as a significant feature of the *a/o* distinction, something not pertinent for languages which grammaticise an alienable-inalienable contrast. The choice of possessive marker is not wholly dependent on characteristics of the possessum noun. That is, the markers are not possessive classifiers. It is possible for some nouns to occur with either *a* or *o* depending on context. To illustrate, the minimal pairs in (1) and (2) are drawn from Southern Cook Islands Māori. The possessed entity, *tua* 'story' is the same in both examples; in the first, with *ā* as the possessive marker, the story is told by the 'possessor', and as such she controls the relationship; in the second, incorporating *ō*, the story is one which is told about the 'possessor', and as such she has no control over that relationship.

(1)   *Kua*   *meitaki*   **tāna**   *tua*

       TAM[4]   good   DET.POSS.ACAT.3SG[5]   story

       'Her story (that she told) was good.'

       (Southern Cook Islands Māori: Nicholas, 2016, p. 342)

---

[4] Abbreviations used in glosses: 1 – first person; 2 – second person; 3 – third person; ACAT – 'A-category possession'; AL - alienable; ANA - anaphoric; ART - article; CL - classifier; COM - common; CONJ - conjunction; CONT - continuous; CS - construct suffix. DEM - demonstrative; DET - determiner; DIST - distal; DU - dual; DP - direct possessive; EXCL - exclusive; GENPOSS - general possessive; IN - inalienable; INCL - inclusive; INCP - inceptive; INT - intimate; IRR - irrealis; IRS - irrealis subject; LOC - locative; LOC.P - locative possessive; NEG - negative; NMLZ - nominalisation; NOM - nominative; NR.DIST - near distal; NSG - non-singular; OBL - oblique; OCAT – 'O-category possession'; P - possessor; PART - particle; PARTPOSS - part-whole possessive; PERS - personal; PL - plural; POSS – possessive, possessor; PRED – predicate marker; PREP - preposition; PRO - pronoun; PROX - proximal; PSP - prospective; RS - realis; S - subject; SUB - subordinator; SG - singular; TAM – tense, aspect or mood; TR - transitive; V - epenthetic vowel.

[5] Authors vary in their choice of gloss for the *a/o* markers. We have not retained the original glosses in all examples, but have instead consistently used ACAT 'A-category possession' and OCAT 'O-category possession' following Nicholas (2016).

---

(2) | *Kua* | *meitaki* | ***tōna*** | *tua* |
|---|---|---|---|
| TAM | good | DET.POSS.ACAT.3SG | story |

‘Her story (the story told about her) was good.’

(Southern Cook Islands Māori, Nicholas, 2016, p. 342)

The three main constructions in which *a/o* possessive markers are found in Polynesian Triangle languages can be summarized as follows.[6] When the possessor is a nominal, either *a* or *o* precedes the possessor noun phrase, which follows the possessum noun phrase, as in (3) from Pukapukan. When the possessor is expressed pronominally, there are two possible construction types. An *a/o* particle may combine with both an article and a possessor suffix to form a possessive determiner. This form precedes the possessum, as illustrated in example (4) from Māori (also examples (1) and (2) above). This mirrors the type we label #1a-b in the summary of the Vanuatu Outlier constructions (see Table 1 in Section 6). Alternatively, an article precedes the possessum, which is then followed by a possessive form comprised of a possessor suffix attached to *a/o*, as in (5) from Tuvaluan (Table 1: type #1c-d). In terms of semantics, note that in both the Māori and Tuvaluan examples presented, the possessive marker used is *o* as the ‘possessor’ has no control over their relationship with their name or mother.

(3) | *nā* | *tala* | ***a*** | *te* | *kauliki* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ART | story | ACAT | ART | Children |

‘the children’s stories [that they wrote]’ (Pukapukan: Salisbury, 2002, p. 309)

(4) | *t-**ō**-na* | *ingoa* |
|---|---|
| DET-OCAT-3SGP | name |

‘his/her name’ (Māori: Harlow 2007, p. 143)

(5) | *te* | *maatua* | ***oo**-ku*[7] |
|---|---|---|
| ART | mother | OCAT-1SG |

‘my mother’ (Tuvaluan: Besnier, 2000, p. 403)

A significant difference in the grammatical expression of possession between Polynesian and non-Polynesian Oceanic languages is that for non-Polynesian languages, the main semantic inalienable-alienable contrast is expressed morphosyntactically through a direct-indirect distinction. That is, inalienable possession is marked directly on the possessed noun, whereas an alienable possessive relationship is marked on a possessive host, in Vanuatu languages usually a relational classifier (see section 4). In Polynesian Triangle languages, there are no constructions in which the possessor is marked directly on the possessed noun. The same is not true of all Outlier languages, as seen in the following section (3.2).

3.2   Possession in Polynesian Outlier languages

Polynesian Outlier languages vary in their retention of the *a/o* distinction as a feature of possessive constructions. The two Outliers of Micronesia, Nukuoro (Drummond, 2017) and Kapingamarangi (Wilson, 1982), retain the distinction. This is also true of the five Outliers

---

[6] For a detailed discussion of Polynesian possessive constructions, see Clark (2000).

[7] Note that in examples given from other languages, we use the orthography presented in the source, thus for example *oo* for Tuvaluan and *ō* for Māori and Southern Cook Islands Māori both represent a long vowel.

located in Solomon Islands: Sikaiana (Donner, 2020), Anuta (Feinberg, 1977), Rennell-Bellona (Elbert & Schütz, 1988), Tikopia (Firth, 1936), and Vaeakau-Taumako (Næss 2012; Næss & Hovdhaugen 2011), and the only Outlier spoken in New Caledonia, Fagauvea (Djoupa, 2013). While in some of these languages, the semantics of the *a/o* distribution aligns with the one attested in Triangle Polynesian languages, some exceptions occur. For example, in many Polynesian languages, most ascendant kin are marked with *o*, since one has little control over the familial relationship. Conversely, one's spouse and descendant kin are marked with *a*, since one does have a level of control over the initiation of these relationships. For the Outlier Anuta, Feinberg (1977, p. 20) was unable to determine the basis of choice of *a* versus *o*. He cites as examples *nopine* 'wife' taking the *o* form and *pae* 'mother' taking *a*, the opposite of what might be expected in terms of control. Those Outliers which retain a distinction also vary in their morphosyntactic structures, with some deviations from typical Polynesian languages.

The four Outlier languages of Papua New Guinea (Nukuria (Wilson, 1982), Takuu (Moyle, 2011), Nukumanu (Wilson, 1982), and Luangiua (Salmond, 1974)) have lost the *a/o* distinction, as have Fakamae and Ifira-Mele in Vanuatu. Futuna-Aniwa is the only Vanuatu Outlier that retains the distinction, and both Ifira-Mele and Futuna-Aniwa exhibit some differences not seen in Polynesian Triangle languages (see sections 6.1, 6.3).

There is a minor direct possessive construction which occurs in several Polynesian Outliers, but which is not found amongst Polynesian Triangle languages (Wilson, 1982). In these languages, a small set of kin relations are possessed via possessor suffixes attached to the kin term rather than to a possessive particle. These directly possessed kinterm constructions have been documented in Vaeakau-Taumako (Næss 2012; Næss & Hovdhaugen 2011), Rennell-Bellona (Elbert & Schütz, 1988), Fagauvea (Moyse-Faurie, 1999), and in the three Outliers of Vanuatu (Capell, 1962; Clark, 1998; Dougherty, 1983). For further details on the expression of kin possession in the Vanuatu Outliers, see Section 8.2.

4   Possession in Vanuatu Contact Languages

This section provides an overview of possessive constructions in the Vanuatu languages with which the Outliers are in contact. Imere speakers are in contact with speakers of the Efate languages Nafsan (South Efate), Nakanamanga (also known as Nguna) and Lelepa. Fakamae speakers are in regular contact with Namakura and Nakanamanga, both spoken on Emae and on neighbouring Shepherd Islands. Figure 1 shows the location of these Vanuatu contact languages. Speakers of all three languages also use Bislama in their daily lives. Futuna-Aniwa speakers are not in regular contact with speakers of any language other than Bislama. For a detailed discussion on the sociolinguistic contexts where the languages are spoken, see Section 5.

Possession in Vanuatu languages is characterised by a similar semantic contrast to that of Polynesian languages, generally labelled as alienable versus inalienable. This semantic distinction is reflected morphosyntactically via indirect and direct possessive constructions respectively (Lynch, 1998, pp. 122-123). When a direct possessive construction is used, the possessor is encoded via a suffix attached directly to the possessed noun. In contrast, with indirect possession, the possessor is marked either on a host, such as a classifier, or by a possessive preposition. Though individual details differ, these corresponding formal and semantic distinctions hold for all Indigenous Vanuatu languages with which Imere and Fakamae are in contact (i.e., languages other than Bislama).

Nakanamanga, Namakura, Nafsan, and Lelepa all encode semantically inalienable possession through possessor suffixes which attach directly to the possessed noun. Nouns

which are marked directly for possession are bound nouns, in that they cannot occur without a suffix. Nouns which are considered 'inalienable' generally belong to the same semantic categories in each of the four languages – those referring to body parts, part-whole relations, kin relations, and some other nouns with a 'vaguely inalienable' relationship to their possessors (Schütz, 1969, p. 44). Examples (6) and (7) show direct body part possession in Nakanamanga and Lelepa, respectively. As illustrated by (8), Namakura is unusual amongst Vanuatu languages in specifying kin relations through indirect rather than direct possession. This example shows both a pronominal possessor specified by a possessive pronoun following the possessed noun and a nominal possessor introduced by the genitive preposition *ani*. In Nakanamanga, some of the possessor suffixes also occur as prefixes to a small number of kin and kin-like terms, and there are some kin terms for which the same possessor suffix co-occurs in the same form as a prefix (Schütz, 1969, p. 45).

(6) *e*   *peani*   *na-p̃au-na*   *e*   *ma-sai*
     it   have   head-its   it   broken

     'It has a head that is broken.' (Nakanamanga: Schütz, 1969, p. 56)

(7) *string*   *ega=sil*   *prai*   *nar-o-go*
     line   3SG.IRR=cut   break   arm-V-1SG.DP

     'The line may cut my arm open.' (Lelepa: Lacrampe, 2009, p. 87)

(8) *na-tikit*   *ani*   *ke-lolo*   *aŋino*   *idok*   *vil*
     ART-child   of   ART-uncle   my   3SG-stay   Vila

     'My uncle's child lives in Vila.' (Namakura:[8] Sperlich, 1991, p. 204)

Nakanamanga indirect possessive constructions involve postposed prepositional phrases headed by one of two prepositions which, according to Schütz (1969, p. 41), pattern in a manner similar to Polynesian *a* and *o* in terms of the level of agency or control in relation to the possessive relationship. *Ki* is used when the possessive relationship is active and controlling (9), and *ni* for a more passive relationship (10). In terms of distribution, nouns that take a possessor suffix are also generally found to occur with *ni*. Nafsan indirect possession also involves a postposed prepositional phrase headed by *ni* 'of' (11), or a postposed possessive pronoun or noun phrase, or the form *knen* 'of it' (Thieberger, 2006, p. 127).

(9) *na-vanua*   *ki*   *na-wota*
     land   of   chief

     'land of the chief' (Nakanamanga: Schütz, 1969, p. 56)

(10) *na-vanua*   *ni*   *na-atam̃oli*
     land   of   people

     'land of the people' (Nakanamanga: Schütz, 1969, p. 56)

---

[8] Sperlich refers to the language as Namakir, however speakers prefer Namakura, and Makura rather than Makira for the island name.

(11) *i=pi*   *nawesien*   *ni*   *Atua*
      3SG.RS =be   work   of   god
      'It is God's work.' (Nafsan: Thieberger, 2006, p. 128)

In Lelepa, indirect possession involves a postposed pronoun or noun encoding the possessor. These constructions can be further divided into two sub-types, termed 'free indirect' and 'construct indirect' subtypes by Lacrampe (2009, p. 92). Free indirect types involve the use of a postposed possessive pronoun. This possessive pronoun will belong to one of two distinct possessive pronominal paradigms: general and part-whole. The general free indirect subtype corresponds to a semantic category of alienability, as in (12). Construct indirect types involve expression of the possessor by a postposed noun or pronoun, and one of two 'construct' suffixes which attach directly to the possessed noun, as in (13) (Lacrampe, 2009, pp. 104–105).

(12) *a=pat*   *psak*   *tera*   *agnem*
      1SG.S=make   clean   garden   1NSG.EXCL.GENPOSS
      'I cleaned our garden.' (Lelepa: Lacrampe, 2009, p. 97)

(13) *e=surai*   *nm̃at-a-n*   *foonu*
      3SG.S=defecate   back-V-CS.IN   turtle
      'He defecated on the turtle's back.' (Lelepa: Lacrampe, 2009, p. 103)

Namakura indirect constructions involve either marking of the possessor with a preposition, *ani* 'of' or *ni* 'of, in, from', or, the possessor can be realized simply by a postposed NP with no formal marking of the possessive relationship, as in (14).

(14) *na-mat*   *na-im*
      ART-door   ART-house
      'door of the house' (Namakura: Sperlich, 1991, p. 206)

In Bislama, all possessive relationships are expressed via the same construction, with possessors introduced by the preposition *blong* (Crowley, 2004, pp. 68-69). This prepositional phrase follows the noun expressing the possessum. There are no dedicated possessive pronouns, nor is there a distinction between direct and indirect possessive constructions and corresponding inalienable/alienable distinctions. Sentence (15) illustrates two instances of *blong*.

(15) *hem*   *i*   *sakem*   *paoda*   *long*   *hed*   *blong*   *mi*
      3SG   PRED   throw   powder   PREP   head   POSS   1SG

      long   *taem*   *blong*   *bonane*
      PREP   time   POSS   New.Year.celebrations
      'she tipped powder over my head at new year (lit. 'at the time of new year carol singing)'
      (Bislama: Crowley, 2004, p. 75)

# 5	Sociolinguistic Background, Contact and Multilingualism

All language communities in Vanuatu operate in a context of multilingualism and language contact, both historically and currently. There is considerable variation in the extent of contact for different languages, and the impact that this has had and continues to have, both on vitality and in terms of contact induced change. Clark (1986) assessed some of the lexical and structural features of Fakamae and Ifira-Mele which can be seen to have been influenced by the non-Polynesian languages with which they have been in contact. He noted that while 52% of Fakamae general vocabulary has clear Polynesian origin, the percentage is only 36% in Ifira-Mele. This percentage is likely lower today, as some of the lexical items of Polynesian origin recorded in Clark (1998) are no longer in use. Origins of Futuna-Aniwa vocabulary have not been evaluated, but a cursory assessment of examples in Dougherty (1983) indicates that the percentage of Polynesian items is significantly higher than for Fakamae. In the following sections, we summarise the sociolinguistic context for each of the Vanuatu Outliers.

## 5.1	Futuna-Aniwa sociolinguistic background

Futuna-Aniwa is named after the islands on which the language is spoken, two of the more remote islands of Vanuatu, located in the southern province, Tafea (see Figure 1). Aniwa, with an area of only 8 km^2, lies approximately 25 km from the northeastern tip of the large island of Tanna. Futuna is more remote, 72 km to the east of Tanna and 67 km southeast of Aniwa. It is a slightly larger island with an area of 11 km^2. According to the 2020 census, the population of Aniwa was 469 and Futuna 570 (Vanuatu National Statistics Office [VNSO], 2020). Inhabitants of the two islands are speakers of each of the dialects of Futuna-Aniwa. There are communities from each island who reside in Tanna and Port-Vila, along with smaller populations on other islands. It is thus difficult to be precise about the total number of speakers, but an estimate is over 1,500. The language is sometimes referred to as West Futuna-Aniwa (Dougherty 1983) to distinguish it from East Futuna, one of the two languages of Wallis and Futuna.

Residents of Futuna and Aniwa were amongst the first in Vanuatu (then New Hebrides) to be converted to Christianity by Presbyterian missionaries, starting in 1866. As such, they have a long history of contact with English, and of literacy in both English and vernacular language. According to the 2020 census, 88% of Futuna residents reported learning vernacular as their first language. Bislama is more dominant on Aniwa, with only 59% reporting vernacular as their first language. For the most part, residents of both islands are fluent speakers of the vernacular and use it as the main language of daily communication in all domains except in school. Some literacy teaching is in Futuna-Aniwa in the early years of schooling, with the medium of instruction being otherwise English. The population is also fluent in Bislama. Church services are mostly conducted in the vernacular, with Bislama being used mostly only when there are visitors from other islands in the congregation. Unlike on many islands in Vanuatu, including where Fakamae and Ifira-Mele are spoken, there is only a single Indigenous language spoken on Futuna and Aniwa. Due to the remoteness, the communities of speakers on both islands have not had regular contact with any other languages in the past and this situation is ongoing.

## 5.2	Fakamae sociolinguistic background

The Fakamae language is spoken on the south-eastern side of the island of Emae, which is part of the Shepherd Islands group in central Vanuatu (see Figure 1). Emae is 10 km long and up to 5 km wide, with a population of 880 as at 2020 (VNSO). The villages of Makatea and

Tongamea are the two main locations where the language is still spoken. As at 2018, Makatea had a population of 36, and Tongamea 113 (Dewar, 2022, p. 7). There are high levels of mobility within both villages, resulting in fluid population figures. Thirty-three Fakamae speakers were identified in Makatea at that time, and 102 in Tongamea. An estimated further 250 Fakamae speakers dwell elsewhere across Emae, Vanuatu, and around the world (Dewar, 2022, pp. 7-8).

Namakura and Nakanamanga are also spoken on Emae. In the past, Nakanamanga was the language of communication chosen by missionaries, meaning it was also the language of the church, education and healthcare, disadvantaging the Fakamae language in these domains of language use (Miller, 1981, p. 43). More recently, Namakura has become an increasing threat to Fakamae vitality, as the number of Namakura speakers has grown on the south-east side of Emae. Some areas further west of Tongamea, in which Fakamae was once the dominant language, are now Namakura dominant (Walworth et al., 2021). Bislama continues to grow in strength as a language in Fakamae speakers' repertoire. It is used in primary schools, healthcare settings, and church services. It is often used in public settings within Makatea and Tongamea and sometimes in homes within these villages as a means of facilitating non-Fakamae speaker involvement. In instances of inter-marriage (common amongst such a small speaker population), Bislama is increasingly used as a lingua franca, and in turn as a first language by children of these relationships. Fakamae remains comparatively strong in the domains of the home; however, through a complex combination of factors, it is weaker in the cultural domain, and weaker still in the social domain (for an explanation of domains as referred to here, see Landweer 2016; see Dewar, 2018 and Walworth et al., 2021 for a more detailed discussion of factors contributing to Fakamae's position, including a detailed endangerment assessment).

5.3   Ifira-Mele sociolinguistic background

The discussion in this paper is based on data from the Imere dialect of the language known in the literature as Ifira-Mele or Mele-Fila. The language has two mutually intelligible dialects which exhibit considerable differences. Ifira is spoken on the island of the same name located in Vila Bay, at its closest point only 100m from Efate mainland. The Imere dialect was originally spoken on *Imere tenuku,* 'the small island of Mele', approximately 6 km from Ifira and Port Vila, and only 350m from the Efate mainland. In 1950, the entire island population was moved due to overpopulation and lack of a fresh water supply, and a village was formed on the nearby mainland, where the population had previously maintained their gardens. Today, Imere village – Mele to outsiders – is the largest village in Vanuatu. It is difficult to estimate the number of speakers of Ifira-Mele as there has been a gradual increase in recent years of people from outside the area renting property within the village. A rough estimate is 3,500 speakers, with 1,200 on Ifira and the remainder in Mele village (François et al., 2015).

The language contact situation for Ifira-Mele is complex. Prior to European contact, the Polynesian communities from Imere and Ifira islands would have been in regular contact with the non-Polynesian communities of Efate mainland. Clark (1998) documents where lexical items are clearly seen to be of non-Polynesian origin, whether from the Lelepa or Nguna (Nakanamanga) dialects to the north, Pango (Nafsan) to the south, or of imprecise, but clearly Efate, origin.

Today, contact with non-Polynesian inhabitants of Efate occurs on a daily basis. Imere residents travel to Port Vila or other parts of Efate for work and commerce; Ni-Vanuatu from other parts of Vanuatu have settled in the village; and both Efate residents and tourists visit Imere island and beach for pleasure. Today there would be little or no influence on Imere from non-Polynesian Vanuatu languages, as communication with other Ni-Vanuatu is most

commonly in Bislama. All Imere residents are fluent in Bislama. Children continue to acquire Imere as their first language, but they hear Bislama spoken around them from the time they are born and most grow up initially bilingual.

There are two primary schools which service Mele village, one with English as the language of instruction, the other French. The level of fluency in these languages of schooling is higher than in many other areas of Vanuatu due to the more regular contact with tourists and non-Indigenous Efate residents. Imere people who receive French schooling tend to gain at least some level of proficiency in English in addition to French due to contact with English-speaking outsiders.

6   Possessive Constructions in Vanuatu Outliers

In the following sections, we summarise the possessive constructions that occur in each of the languages. The section on Futuna-Aniwa (6.1) is mostly based on Dougherty (1983), with some minor observations on current usage. The section on Fakamae (6.2) is based on Dewar's work (Dewar, 2022), with reference to usage which differs to that documented in Capell (1962). For Imere, Section 6.3 mostly summarises Clark's work (1998, 2001), and, as the current variation and change in Imere is extensive, this is covered in a separate section (7).

There is both overlap and differences in the constructions used in the three languages, with a range of distinct constructions overall. In addition, in some cases, the authors of earlier descriptions use different terms to refer to what are essentially the same constructions, making comparisons difficult. We therefore present, in Table 1, a summary of all construction types found across the three languages. Throughout the remainder of the paper, when referring to a construction type, we reference the identifier number (#) from column 1. Type 1 is the typical Polynesian *a/o* construction which we have subdivided into four variations. Where different types are combined, this is also indicated, such as #3+4. If using a label, we refer to those provided in column 2. In this column we also provide the syntactic frame for the construction. The next column provides a brief description of the construction, with at least one example from one of the languages to illustrate. The final three columns indicate the presence or absence of the constructions in Futuna-Aniwa (FA), Fakamae (FK), and Imere (IM). The use of ✓ indicates that the construction has been attested at some stage in that language, either in earlier description or current usage. It does not necessarily indicate that the construction is in current use.

Table 1. Index of possessive construction types

#	Label	Description and Example	FA	FK	IM
1a	Preposed article-based possession (*a*) ART-*a*-POSS possessum	A possessive determiner precedes the possessed noun. The possessive determiner is comprised of an article, the possessive marker *a*, and a possessive suffix. *ru-a-na pakasi* (FA) 'his two pigs'	✓	✓	✓
1b	Preposed article-based possession (*o*) ART-*o*-POSS possessum	Article-based possession with *o*. *ti-o-rea fanua* (FA) 'their land'	✓	✗	✗

#	Label	Description and Example	FA	FK	IM
1c	Postposed *a*-possession ART possessum *(ne)a*-POSS	An article precedes the possessed noun, which is followed by a possessive form comprised of possessive *(ne)a* and a possessive suffix. *ru vere a-maua* (FA) 'our_DUAL gardens_DUAL' *te=fare nea-ku* (IM) 'my house'	✓	✗	✓
1d	Postposed *o*-possession ART possessum *o*-POSS	An article precedes the possessed noun, which is followed by a possessive form comprised of possessive *o* and a possessive suffix. *ta fare o-u* (FA) 'your (sg) house'	✓	✗	✗
2	*na* possession possessum *na* POSS	The possessor follows the possessum, introduced by *na* *te=fare na Marina* (IM) 'Marina's house'	✗	✗	✓
3	Preposed inalienable possession POSS possessum	A possessive form precedes the possessed noun. The forms also indicate number of possessum. *ruoku rima* (FA) 'my two hands' *ru-ku-rima* (IM) 'my two hands'	✓	✗	✓
4	Direct suffixation possessum-POSS	Direct suffixation of nouns to mark possessor. (Only with small set of kinterms) *tama-u* 'your father' (FA)	✓	✓	✓
3+1c	Preposed inalienable possession + *a*-based	Constructions 2 and 3 combined with use of inalienable prefixes and possessor preceded by *nea*- *tuku-makupu nea-ku* (IM) 'my grandchild'	✗	✗	✓
3+4	Preposed inalienable possession + suffix	Constructions 3 and 4 combined with double marking of possessor on possessed noun. *tuku-makupu-ku* (IM) 'my grandchild'	✗	✗	✓
1+4 -i	Suppletive suffixed + *a/o*-based	1sg directly possessed noun takes part in *a/o* construction. *tata ji-a-ku* (FA) 'my father' *re-a-ku paa* (FK) 'my father'	✓	✓	✗

#	Label	Description and Example	FA	FK	IM
1+4 -ii	Fossilised suffixed + *a*-based	Fossilised 3sg directly possessed noun (*-na*) takes part in *a*-based construction. *re-a-u makupu-na* (FK) 'your grandchild' *makupu-na nea-ku* (IM) 'my grandchild'	✗	✓	✓
1+4 -iii	Fossilised suffixed + *o*-based	Fossilised 3sg directly possessed noun (*-na*) takes part in *o*-based construction. *ti-o-ku tojina-na* (FA) 'my uncle'	✓	✗	✗
5	Irregular preposed forms	Irregular preposed forms: *teku/teh, tau, tena*	✓	✗	✗

6.1 Possession in Futuna-Aniwa

The grammatical expression of possession in Vanuatu's most remote Outlier is complex, with a wider range of constructions than those attested in other Polynesian languages, including other Outliers. Table 2 summarises the five construction types as documented by Dougherty (1983).

Table 2. Futuna-Aniwa possessive construction types

#	Construction label and example	Description
1a, 1b	Preposed article-based possession ART-*a/o*-POSS possessum *ru-a-na pakasi* 'his two pigs' *ti-o-rea fanua* 'their land'	A possessive determiner precedes the possessed noun. The articles indicate the number of the possessum: singular, dual, trial or plural, or the diminutive form is used. There is a full paradigm of possessive suffixes, distinguishing inclusive and exclusive, and singular, dual, trial or plural number of the possessor.
1c, 1d	Postposed *a/o*-based possession ART possessum *a/o*-POSS *ru vere a-maua* 'our_DUAL gardens_DUAL' *ta fare o-u* 'your (sg) house'	An article precedes the possessum noun, which is followed by a possessive form. The paradigm of possessive suffixes is the same as for article-based possession.

#	Construction label and example	Description
3	Preposed inalienable possession POSS possessum *tano eigoa* 'his name' *ruoku rima* 'my two hands'	This construction is only used for singular possessors, whereby a possessive form precedes the possessed noun. The forms indicate the number of possessum: singular, dual, trial or plural. These forms are used for body part possession, part-whole relationships, a small set of kin terms, and a few intimate items. The forms of this construction type are similar to, but distinct from those of types 1b. When these nouns occur with nonsingular possessors, the *o* constructions (#1b/d) are used.
4	Direct suffixation possessum-POSS *tojina-ku* 'my uncle' *ru ve tama-u* 'your two fathers'	The possessed noun takes a possessive suffix, the same as those used in #1d, with full paradigm for singular/non-singular. When the possessum is nonsingular, it is preceded by a nonsingular article and the nonsingular marker *ve*.
5	Irregular preposed forms: *teku/teh, tau, tena* *teh tama* 'my child'	A possessive form precedes the possessed noun. This is a limited set of possessive forms which only occur with singular possessors. Capell (1958) indicates that these forms only occurred with three kin terms: *tama* 'child', *nofune* 'wife, old woman', *nuaane* 'husband, old man'.

Constructions 1a-d in Futuna-Aniwa reflect the typical constructions of Polynesian Triangle languages, characterized by a distinction between use of possessive markers *a* and *o*. Most lexical items take part in construction 1, with either *a* or *o*. Type 1a is identical in structure to the main construction used in Fakamae (6.2). The syntactic difference between types 1a/b and 1c/d lies in the order and incorporation of articles. Whereas in type 1a/b, the marking of the possessor combines with an article to form a possessive determiner, in type 1c/d, the possessed noun is preceded by an appropriate article and followed by a possessive form consisting only of *a/o* and a possessive suffix. If the possessor is nominal, type 1c/d is used, with *a/o* followed by the possessor NP, as in (16). Dougherty observes no semantic or pragmatic difference in the use of these constructions. Clark (2000, p. 260) notes that in some Polynesian languages where this variable order occurs, it reflects a definiteness distinction, but this does not appear to be the case for Futuna-Aniwa.

(16) *poruku*   *o*   *tata*
     canoe   OCAT   father
     'father's canoe' (Futuna-Aniwa: Dougherty, 1983, p. 163)

Dougherty describes the *a/o* contrast in Futuna-Aniwa in terms of temporary versus permanent states. *A*-marked possessive relationships come to an end with "a change of state such as deterioration, consumption, completion or maturation," while *o*-marked possessive relationships "are seen as diffuse or as enveloping" the possessor (Dougherty, 1983, pp. 60–61). She notes that explanations by other authors such as dominant (*a*) versus subordinate (*o*) or active (*a*) versus passive (*o*) are also appropriate in capturing the distinction. As with Polynesian Triangle languages, the choice between *a* and *o* does not reflect noun class of the possessed noun. If semantically plausible, the same lexical item can be used with either *a* or *o*, and the choice reflects a difference in the relationship. Thus, contrasting examples such as (17) and (18) exist, with the same noun, in this case *hgoro* 'song', occurring with either possessive marker. In (17), *a* is used, indicating that the named possessor has control over the relationship, that they are an active participant in singing the song, and also that the possessive relationship may no longer persist when they stop singing. In contrast, in (17) the song is about the possessor, so they are not in control of that relationship, they are a passive participant, and the relationship will endure.

(17)	*ta*	*hgoro*	*a*	*Takarogo*
	ART	song	ACAT	Takarogo

'Takarogo's song (sung by Takarogo)' (Futuna-Aniwa: Dougherty, 1983, p. 61)

(18)	*ta*	*hgoro*	*o*	*Takarogo*
	ART	song	OCAT	Takarogo

'Takarogo's song (about Takarogo)' (Futuna-Aniwa: Dougherty, 1983, p. 60)

Construction #3 is labelled 'inalienable possession' by Dougherty (1983). The same construction with similar forms is observed in Imere (Section 6.3) and in Vaeakau-Taumako, Solomon Islands (Naess, 2012), but not in Fakamae. A similar set of lexical items take part in this construction in Imere and Futuna-Aniwa, Dougherty's label reflecting its use for body parts, part-whole relations, a small number of kin terms, and a few other inalienable items. These forms are clearly derived from preposed forms, incorporating *o* rather than *a*. Although these forms precede the possessum, like type 1a-b, this is a clearly distinct construction with differences in forms and distribution.

Types 4 and 5 both have very limited distribution, occurring only with kin terms. The suffixed construction has also been observed in Fakamae and Imere, and has a narrow distribution in all three languages, but with a slightly wider distribution in Futuna-Aniwa. Dougherty documented its occurrence with six kin terms (see Table 6), with a full paradigm of possessors. The last construction type differs from all others and from constructions found in other Polynesian languages. This construction is used only with a few terms. As both these types are used when referring to kin relationships, their distribution, variation and ongoing use will be discussed in Section 8.2.

Dougherty notes that there is minor variation and overlap in the choice of construction for some lexical items, mostly kin terms. Whereas her description indicates that construction use is mostly complementary for kin – three terms can occur in both # 1 (with *a*) or #5, others in either #3 or #4 (see Table 6 in Section 8.2) – some terms can occur in more than one construction, and constructions can be combined. For example, while 'father' is one of the terms that takes part in construction #4, involving direct suffixation, and her data suggests this is the usual construction, Dougherty's corpus also includes *ti-o-na tama-na* for 'his father', and both *ti-o-ku tata* and *tata ti-a-ku* for 'my father'. Each of these three examples show double

marking of the possessor, employing different combinations of constructions #1 and #4. Two of the examples incorporate *o*, following the expected pattern in Polynesian languages, whereas one incorporates *a*. While *ti-o-na tama-na* includes the possessive suffix *-na*, both as part of the possessive determiner and directly on the possessed noun, the other two examples combine a possessive determiner with the first singular suppletive possessed form *tata.* Further, note that the variable order with the possessive determiner following the possessed noun, as in *tata ti-a-ku,* is not accounted for in Dougherty's description. Significant variation like this suggests that use of possessive constructions was not stable at the time of Dougherty's documentation some 50 years ago, hinting at change underway, although we do not have direct evidence of this.

Mary Munu Hackney (p. c.) has provided examples which suggest a reduction in the significance of the distinctions expressed by the different constructions, and a shift towards construction #1 being the primary construction. She produced *o* article-based forms for some body parts and kin terms, where the inalienable construction would be expected, and she observed that this acceptance of the same lexical items in different constructions is common today, with no perceived meaning difference. With elicitation using English, Mary initially produced all kin terms in construction #1 with a mix of use of *a* and *o* in a way that does not reflect typical Polynesian distribution. When questioned, she said that these constructions are used more commonly than the other constructions (#3, #4). For example, whereas Dougherty stated that the sibling terms *soa* and *kave* are used in construction #3, Mary produced these using construction #1 and only provided the terms in construction #3 when prompted. She agreed that use of construction #3 is more typical of older speakers. There seems to be some unexplained variation in use, which would need to be checked further with more speakers, to determine whether the language is in the process of losing distinctions.

6.2   Possession in Fakamae

The description presented here reflects the analysis of Dewar (2022). One minor change observed since Capell (1962) is explained below. Possessive constructions in Fakamae are the simplest of all the Vanuatu Outliers, with a system which is generally a simplification – both semantically and syntactically – of typical Polynesian possession, with a single construction used with pronominal possessors and one for nominal possessors. When the possessor is pronominal, a possessive determiner precedes the possessum (Type #1a in Table 1). The determiners include three morphological elements: an article, the possessive particle *a*, and a possessor suffix. This construction mirrors the typical construction found in Polynesian Triangle languages with the possessive determiner preceding the possessed noun. Unlike Futuna-Aniwa, Fakamae does not exhibit the counterpart to this construction where the possessive form follows the possessed noun and does not incorporate an article (Type #1c/d in Table 1). In the Fakamae possessive determiner, the article used indicates the number of the possessum. Four Fakamae articles can be used in this construction: *re* 'singular default'; *se* 'singular indefinite'; *a* 'plural default'; and *ga* 'plural specific.' Example (19) illustrates the Fakamae possessive determiner construction with the singular default article *re*.

(19)   *ko-koe*   *ke=*   *re*   *wor-sia*   *r-**a**-u*   *tao*
     NOM-2SG   2SG.S=   RS   spear-TR   SG-POSS-2SGP   spear
     'you throw your spear' (Fakamae_2019014_FJDT:56)

A full paradigm of possessor suffixes exists for singular, dual, and plural possessors. This paradigm is presented in Table 3, including formal variations.

Table 3. Fakamae possessor suffixes

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1INCL		*-ta*	*-tu*
		-taua[9]	*-t(a)atou*
1EXCL	*-ku*	*-ma*	*-matu*
		-maua	*-m(a)atou*
2	*-u*	*-koro*	*-koto(u)*
		-korua	
3	*-na*	*-ro*	*-(a)to(u)*
		-raua	*-r(a)ato(u)*

The forms which are used in the Fakamae pronominal possessive construction are clearly Polynesian in origin. The forms with *a* have been retained, but there are no contrasting *o* forms. Thus Fakamae – both today and as described by Capell (1962) – shows no evidence of contrasting possessive constructions based on a semantic distinction.

A form cognate with the possessive marker *o* does occur in Fakamae, however, its usage is quite restricted, and it does not directly contrast with the *a* possessive particle. The locative possessive particle *o* is used within a possessor NP modifying a head noun, where the possessor is a location associated with the head noun, as in example (20). It is also used with pronouns in possessor NPs which function metonymically rather than modifying a head noun, as in (21). Non-singular possessor referents are expressed through independent pronouns, as in this example. Singular referents are expressed via a possessor suffix which attaches directly to *o*.

(20) | *te=* | *re* | *na* | *tu* | *re* | *mauga* | ***o*** | *Sagava* | *na* |
      | 3PL.S= | RS | CONT | stand | SG | hill | LOC.P | Sangava | NR.DIST |

'they lived on the hill of Sangava' (Fakamae_2018066_DT: 4)

(21) | *re* | *ne* | *mauri* | *ai* | *ko-ia* | *e* | *se* | *na* |
      | SG | entity | live | ANA | NOM-3SG | RS | NEG | CONT |
      | *tu* | *i* | ***o*** | *taatou* | *ni* | *i* | *Vanuatu* |
      | stand | PREP | LOC.P | 1PL.INCL | PROX | PREP | Vanuatu |

'This creature, it doesn't live in our place, in Vanuatu.' (Fakamae_2018085_IKLF: 4)

In Fakamae, when the possessor is nominal rather than pronominal, the possessive particle *a* does not occur. The possessum and possessor noun phrases are simply juxtaposed, without any formal marking of the possessive relationship, as illustrated in (22).

---

[9] Each non-singular suffix has at least one longer variant. Younger speakers use only the shorter variants, and longer forms are used inconsistently by some older speakers. These longer forms appear to be largely obsolete.

(22) *e   tupu   re   mauri-aga   re   itua   mauku*
      RS   be   SG   live-NMLZ   SG   spirit   grass
      'it is the life of a grass spirit' (Fakamae_2018035_FFJ:27)

Direct possessor suffixation has been documented with only two kin terms in Fakamae: *tina-* 'mother' and *tama-* 'father' (Capell, 1962). This construction has almost completely disappeared in contemporary speech. A direct construction involving suffixes has also been documented for both Futuna-Aniwa and Imere, and there has been loss and changes to the use of these suffixed forms in each of the three languages. Further discussion is presented in Section 8.2.

There is no significant evidence of influence on Fakamae possessive constructions from the neighbouring Indigenous languages with which Fakamae is in contact. Nakanamanga and Namakura both distinguish between direct and indirect possessive constructions. Fakamae was originally documented as a language with a minor direct construction employing suffixes. However, this construction has now been largely lost, with the language retaining only a single possessive construction which shares characteristics with Polynesian languages but not with central Vanuatu languages. The only potential influence is found in constructions where the possessor is nominal rather than pronominal. In Polynesian languages, all possessive constructions exhibit formal marking, and the same is true for Imere and Futuna-Aniwa. Example (20) above illustrates a construction where the possessive relationship is indicated only through juxtaposition of the possessum and possessor NPs. Fakamae shares this construction type with Namakura, as illustrated by example (14) in Section 4.

6.3   Possession in Imere

Clark (2001, pp. 685-686) describes two main possessive constructions for Imere, and two further minor constructions with very limited distribution. The different construction types are summarised and exemplified in Table 4, using numeric codes and labels for the constructions following Table 1.

Table 4. Imere possessive construction types

#	Construction label and example	Description
1c	Postposed *a*-possession (ART) possessum *nea*-POSS *te=fare nea-ku* 'my house'	The possessum noun is followed by a possessive form comprised of possessive *nea*- and a possessive suffix. This construction only occurs with singular pronominal possessors.
2	*na* possession possessum *na* POSS *te=fare na Marina* 'Marina's house'	The possessor follows the possessum, introduced by *na*. This construction is in complementary distribution with #1c and is used when the possessor is nominal or nonsingular pronominal.

#	Construction label and example	Description
3	Prefixed inalienable possession POSS-possessum *ru-ku-rima* 'my two hands'	A possessive prefix is attached to the possessum noun. The possessive form indicates both person and number of the possessor and number of the possessum.
4	Direct suffixation Possessum-POSS *atna-na* 'her/ his mother'	Direct suffixation of nouns to mark possessor.
3+4	Preposed inalienable possession + suffix *tuku-makupu-ku* 'my grandchild'	Constructions 3 and 4 combined with double marking of possessor on possessed noun.

For consistency, in this paper we do not use Clark's labels. Clark grouped #1c and #2 together and labelled these 'general' (1998), as most lexical items occur in both these constructions, which are in complementary distribution. In #1c, with a singular possessor, a possessive suffix (first singular *-ku,* second singular *-u,* third singular *-na*) attaches to the possessive marker *ne-a,* which follows the possessum. It is clear that *ne-a* is derived from the Polynesian possessive marker *a*, plus the form *ne*.[10] Unlike in Fakamae and Futuna-Aniwa, there are no non-singular possessive suffixes. Dual and plural pronominal possessors are expressed by independent pronouns, and these, along with nominal possessors, are introduced by the possessive preposition *na* following the possessed noun. Note that while the #1c possessive forms are formally like those found in Fakamae and Futuna-Aniwa, there is a difference between the three languages in terms of order. Fakamae only has possessor forms which incorporate a determiner and precede the possessed noun. Futuna-Aniwa, like Polynesian Triangle languages, has separate possessor forms which precede and follow the possessum. Clark only documents the order with possessor following the possessum.

Construction #3 was labelled 'intimate' (1998) or 'intrinsic' (2001) by Clark based on semantics of use. The construction has the same structure, and similar forms and distribution, to the construction labelled 'inalienable' for Futuna-Aniwa (Section 6.1). It is used for words belonging to a very limited set of semantic domains: body parts, part-whole relations, a subset of kinship terms, and a very restricted set of 'intrinsic' items, such as *igoa* 'name', *goro* 'song' and *reaa* 'day (of)'. Semantically, the use of the *nea-/na* versus inalienable constructions is more akin to the alienable-inalienable distinction in neighbouring Efate languages (Lacrampe, 2009), rather than the contrast expressed by *a/o* possession in Polynesian languages.

---

[10] The origin of the *ne* component of the possessive marker is unclear. Although pronominal possession is almost always expressed with a possessive marker based on *ne-a* which follows the possessum, in a small number of examples, *ne* is replaced with one of the articles, such as singular *te=* or plural affectionate *mii=*, to form a possessive determiner that precedes the possessum. To complicate matters, there is an article *ne=* in Imere, but as this article denotes a plural non-specific referent, it is clearly distinct from *ne* which combines with *a*. Discussion of the article use adds an additional layer of complexity which is beyond the scope of this paper and thus we will focus only on general possession expressed with *ne-a* and *na*.

In contrast with the possessive suffixes employed in construction #1c, for construction #3, Clark (2001, p. 685) documented a full paradigm of possessive prefixes for singular, dual and plural possessors (Table 5). The forms of the singular possessive prefixes share similarities with but differ from the possessive suffixes. In this construction, a modified set of prefixes occur if the possessor is singular but the possessum is non-singular. These prefixes are based on *ru,* derived from the numeral *rua* 'two', plus the singular form of the prefix, but are used whether the possessum is dual or plural.

Table 5. Imere possessor prefixes (after Clark, 2001)

	Singular: SG possessum	Singular: PL possessum	Dual	Paucal	Plural
1INCL			*taa-*	*tau-*	*tafu-*
1EXCL	*tu-ku-*	*ru-ku-*	*maa-*	*mau-*	*mafu-*
2	*t-oo*	*ru-oo-*	*karu-*	*katau-*	*kafu-*
3	*t-no-*	*ru-no-*	*raa-*	*rau-*	*rafu-*

Clark (1998, 2001) states that two kin terms, *atna-* 'mother' and *tama-* 'father', employed suffixes to mark the possessor when the possessor was singular (construction #4). The suffixes employed are the same as those which attached to the possessive particle *ne-a.* According to Clark, when these terms were used with a nominal or plural possessor, the possessor followed the noun, preceded by *o.* This construction was thus evidence of a Polynesian *a/o* contrast in Imere as it was spoken 40 years ago. However, these two terms and this construction are not used today. Clark also lists three kin terms for which the possessor was indicated through both a prefix and a possessive suffix: *-tupu-* 'grandparent', *-makupu-* 'grandchild' and *-figo-*. There is also no evidence of this construction being used today. The changes and variation evident in the expression of kin possession will be discussed in detail for all three Vanuatu Outliers in Section 8.2.

Although the use of the contrasting constructions is determined on a semantic basis, there is a further significant difference in the way that possessive relationships are expressed in Imere compared to both Polynesian languages and Vanuatu languages. That is, speakers cannot choose from possible constructions to indicate differences in the possessive relationship. A single construction is used for each lexical item. Where the use of more than one construction has been documented for a single lexical item in the contemporary corpus, as discussed in the following section, this is, without exception, the result of language change and speaker variation, and not linked to the expression of semantic distinctions.

7   Current Expression of Possession in Imere

7.1   Change and variation in Imere possessive constructions

The constructions that Imere speakers use today to express possession show both clear change in comparison with the constructions used by speakers 40+ years ago, as documented by Clark (1998, 2001), and current variation which indicates that further change is underway. The current variation correlates only with age, indicating that it is likely change in progress. There is no indication of correlation with any other social factors such as gender or area of residence. The main factor is clearly generational, as data from some speakers in the study who are immediate family demonstrate that young adults are not using the same constructions as their parents and grandparents.

The changes can be summarised as a complete loss of suffixation to indicate possession for some kin (see Section 8.2 for more detail), along with a move away from use of possessive prefixes (construction #3), and towards the constructions employing *nea-* (construction #1c) and *na* (construction #2) being used to express possession for a greater proportion of lexical items. A salient feature of the changes is that as speakers shift away from using the inalienable possessive prefixes, there are instances of redundant double and even triple-marking of the possessive relationship within a single construction, combining the different constructions. At this stage, it is not possible to predict whether the shift from one construction to the other will result in complete change, and thus loss of the distinction expressed through the prefixed construction. The variation in possessive construction types used which currently occurs is complex, as there are several features of the expression of possession that are affected, and these are being realised differently with different speakers, at least to some extent. The variable features can be summarised as follows:

- two different types of double-marking of a possessive relationship are evident (Section 7.2);
- lexical items belonging to different semantic domains are shifting from construction #3 to construction #1 at different rates (Section 7.3);
- changes to the expression of kin relations, with loss of Polynesian terms, loss of suffixation (construction #4), and shift away from use of construction #3 (Section 8.2);
- some variation in rate of change depending on person and number of possessor, with evidence of within-speaker variation;
- shift away from plural marking of possessum in construction #3;
- some reanalysis of third singular prefix *(t)no-*[11] as part of the root.

Here we assess the expression of possession for those lexical items which are listed by Clark (1998, 2001) as taking part in the prefixing inalienable construction (#3), so as to evaluate the change and variation. To illustrate the extent of current variation, we coded the constructions used on a scale of 1-7, with 1 being use of construction #3 (i.e. use as described by Clark) and 7 being greatest shift away from the original, incorporating not only a change in the construction used, but also a shift from original to borrowed terms.

1. prefixed inalienable possession (#3) (23a below)
2. prefixed and postposed constructions combined (#3+#1c) (23c below)
3. prefixed and postposed constructions, triple-marking (#3+#1c+#2) (23e below)
4. postposed construction (#1c) (23b below)
5. postposed *nea-* and *na* constructions, double-marking (#1c+#2) (23d below)
6. postposed construction (#1c) + borrowing
7. postposed *nea-* and *na* constructions, double-marking (#1c+#2) + borrowing

7.2 Double (and triple!) marking in possessive constructions

In current Imere usage, there are two different ways in which some speakers, for some lexical items, employ more than one means of marking a possessive relationship within a single construction. These constructions combine aspects of the prefixing (#3) and *nea-/na* (#1c/#2) constructions, resulting in five variants occurring in the corpus. The variants are illustrated through examples (23a-e), each with the possessum *igoa* 'name' specified for a first-person

---

[11] A few older speakers produce the earlier form of the prefix, *tno-*. Most speakers today do not produce the onset cluster and throughout the rest of the paper we give *no-* to simplify discussion.

singular possessor. As documented by Clark (1998, 2001), *igoa* was a lexical item which occurred in a construction with a possessor prefix (23a).

(23a) *tuku-igoa*

      1SGP.INT-name

      'my name'

Most speakers under the age of about 30 have shifted from using the prefixed construction to the postposed construction (#1c) for this word (23b) as discussed in Section 7.3. Although the rates of shift vary, this is the case for many lexical items.

(23b) *te=igoa*   *ne-a-ku*

      ART.SG=name   POSS1-POSS2-1SGP

      'my name'

However, as speakers shift towards expressing possession for some nouns with the *nea-* construction in place of the prefixing construction, some speakers are employing both means simultaneously, with both a possessive prefix on the possessum noun, and a possessive suffix attached to *nea-*, as in (23c).

(23c) *tuku-igoa*   *ne-a-ku*

      1SGP.INT-name   POSS1-POSS2-1SGP

      'my name'

Recall, as outlined in Section 6.3, that in the postposed construction, if the possessor is singular and pronominal, a possessive suffix occurs on the possessive form *nea-* as in (23b). Whereas, if the possessor is expressed by a noun or non-singular pronoun, then it is preceded by the preposition *na*.[12] The second type of double-marking that occurs is when the possessor is a singular pronominal, yet the speaker uses *na* in addition to *nea-* marked with a suffix, as in (23d). This overspecification of the possessive relationship with the use of *na* has possibly been influenced by contact with Bislama, in which a possessive relationship is consistently marked with the preposition *blong*. It is possible that *na* is being reanalysed as a possessive marker that is required in all constructions.

(23d) *te=igoa*   *na*   *ne-a-ku*

      ART.SG=name   POSS   POSS1-POSS2-1SGP

      'my name'

The most extreme form of redundant marking of the possessor is illustrated by (23e), where the speaker retains the possessive prefix, and in addition uses both *na* and *nea-* with a possessive suffix. The use of these different constructions by different speakers for the same lexical item(s) is not associated with any differences in meanings.

---

[12] For example, *te=fare na raateu* 'their house'.

(23e) *tuku-igoa*   *na*   *ne-a-ku*

      1SGP.INT-name   POSS   POSS1-POSS2-1SGP

      'my name'

The triple-marking of possession as shown in (23e) is uncommon. In the corpus, there are only examples like this from two speakers, a 46-year-old male and a 28-year-old female, both from different areas of Imere village. Both speakers used this construction variant for several lexical items on different occasions.[13] The 28-year-old female is the youngest speaker in the corpus to use the prefixing construction with words other than body part terms. This would indicate that this overlap in marking is occurring with speakers in the middle age range, those who are starting to shift towards the postposed *nea-/na* construction, but who are less advanced in the shift away from the prefixing construction than speakers in their mid-20s and younger. The double-marked construction as in (23d), combining both strategies of postposed possession marking, is considerably more common, with speakers from the youngest to the oldest in the corpus documented using this construction to some extent. For those who use this construction, its use is variable and unpredictable and conveys no meaning difference.

To provide a snapshot of the variation exhibited, Figure 2 shows the proportion of occurrence of each of the seven construction variants for nouns, or, in the case of kin terms, relations, which Clark (1998, 2001) indicates would have originally taken part in the prefixing construction (#3). This represents 549 tokens, from 35 speakers, of body part terms, kinship terms and the word *igoa* 'name', with a singular pronominal possessor. This snapshot shows the prefixing construction being retained in 44% of occurrences, although this overstates the ongoing use of the construction, as it does not take into account the variation for age and differences related to semantic domain, which will be covered in section 7.3. The postposed construction (#1c) accounts for a further 41% of tokens, with close to half of these occurring with borrowed lexical items. Combined, the double- and triple-marked constructions thus account for a small but significant proportion of the data at close to 15%.

---

[13] The other nouns recorded with triple-marking are: *kave* 'opposite sex sibling', *koonoa* 'head', *paro* 'side', and *popo* 'heart'.
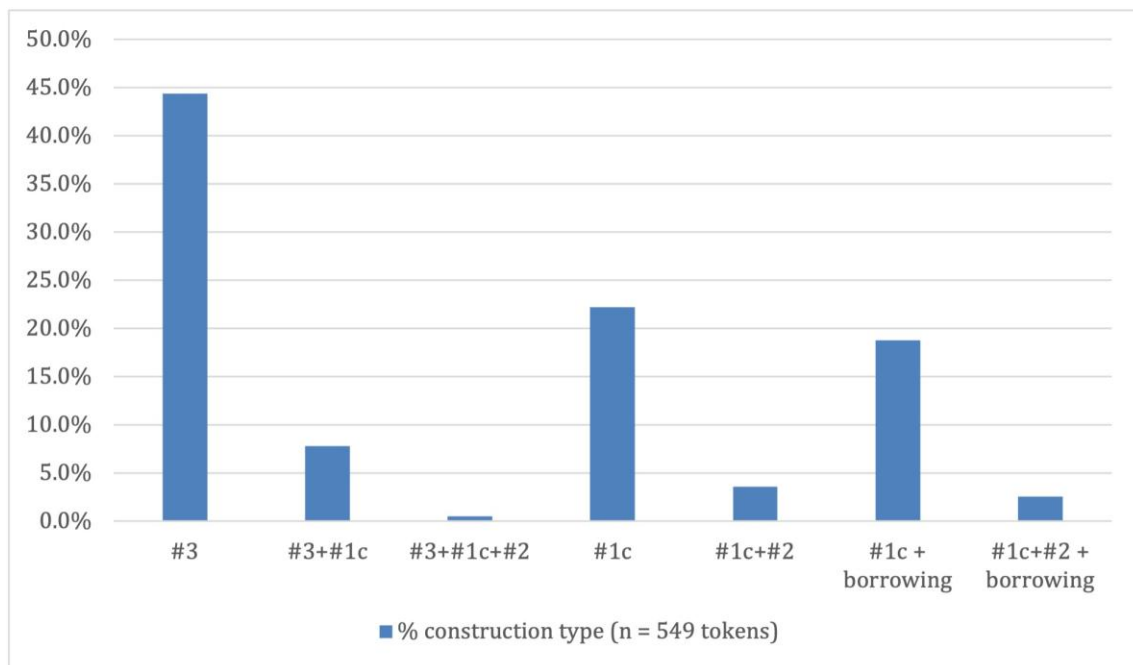
Figure 2. Proportion of construction type use for 'inalienable' nouns

7.3 Shift according to semantic domain

The extent of shift away from the prefixing construction (#3) shows some correlation with the semantic domain of lexical items, with greater retention of the construction for body parts, and a strong shift for kinship terms. This observation supports findings from other related languages in which the expression of possession for kinship terms is shifting from a direct to indirect construction. (See Lacrampe, 2009, for Lelepa, a language with which Imere speakers are in contact; Barth, 2019, for Matukar Panau, Papua New Guinea; and Meyerhoff, Barth, & Schnell, 2018 for Oceanic.) Figure 3 clearly illustrates this variation, showing the construction types used by 35 speakers for 273 tokens of body part terms, 217 tokens of kinship terms, and 59 tokens of *igoa* 'name', representing the 'other' category. Note that it was not appropriate to include a range of terms from the 'other' category as the occurrences were limited and unlikely to be representative, whereas the corpus includes unprompted use of *igoa* 'name' from many speakers represented in the corpus.
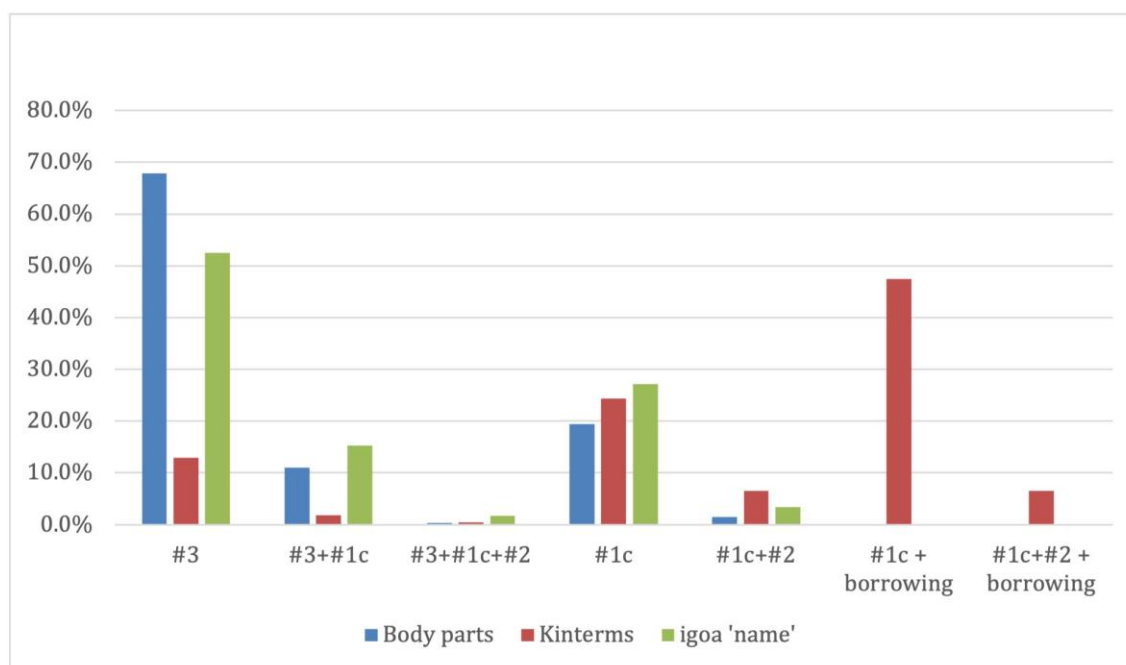
Figure 3. Construction use according to semantic domain

Figure 3 provides a general overview of possessive construction use for body parts, with 67.8% (n = 185) use of the original prefixing construction alone (#3) indicating that this is still the prevalent construction, but with a significant shift towards the postposed construction (#1c) for younger speakers. Detail within the data shows that speakers over 30 years favour the prefixing construction for body parts, with only isolated use of the postposed construction. In contrast, every speaker under 30 years used the prefixing construction for some body parts and the postposed construction for others. For example, all gave *gutu* 'mouth' in a prefixing construction, but most other terms were given in a prefixing construction by some speakers and general construction by others. Even the youngest speaker in the sample (16 years) used the prefixing construction for at least some body part terms. This suggests that the prefixing construction is still dominant for body parts, although that construction choice is unstable.

Only one tendency can be observed regarding construction choice with body parts and when the postposed construction is sometimes more common than the prefixed construction. That is when referring to those parts which humans and other animals possess more than one of. As noted in Table 4, unlike with other constructions, the possessive prefixes reference number of both the possessor and the possessum, such that *tuku-mata* means 'my eye' and *ru-ku-mata* means 'my eyes'. There is some inconsistency in construction used depending on the body part. For example, there are 18 tokens of *nifo* 'tooth, teeth' in the corpus for which the reference is clearly plural, and for only two of these are prefixes used (*ru-ku-nifo* 'my teeth'). For the other examples, number of the possessum is marked on the noun, and construction #1c with *nea* is used (*a=nifo nea-ku* 'my teeth'). In contrast, for *rima* 'hand, arm', there are 15 tokens in the corpus where the possessum is clearly plural, and with only three of these is construction #1c used (*a=rima nea-ku* 'my arms'). For the other 12 tokens, the plural prefixed forms are used (*ru-ku-rima* 'my arms').

The word *igoa* 'name' presents a neat picture of the shift away from use of the prefixing construction, towards the general construction as being simply related to age, noting that this shift has apparently preceded the shift for body part terms. For this lexical item, with a first-person singular possessor, all 10 speakers in the sample aged 60 and over retain the prefixing construction. The 10 speakers aged 24 and under used the general construction, and for the 14

speakers aged between 28 and 57 there was considerable variation in which construction was used. All speakers used the Imere term *igoa* regardless of construction. Some speakers used more than one construction type for the same word, and use of the prefixing construction is retained more when the possessor is third person rather than first person singular.

When it comes to kinship terms, the situation is complicated by the fact that there has been significant replacement of terms with words from contact languages. Figure 3 shows that only 12.9% of the tokens (n = 28) of kin terms were expressed with the original prefixing construction. In fact, 27 of these 28 tokens were either *-taina* 'same sex sibling' or *-kave* 'opposite sex sibling', with only one other term, *makupu* 'grandchild' represented. Expression of possession for all other kinship terms today is through the general or double general construction, regardless of speaker's age. See Section 8.2 for further discussion.

8   Discussion

8.1   *Loss vs retention of Polynesian a/o distinction in Vanuatu Outliers*

Capell (1962) and Clark (2000, 2001) document the lack of the Polynesian *a/o* contrast as a feature of Fakamae and Imere possessive constructions. Both languages have retained *a* as the possessive particle that combines with determiners and possessor suffixes or pronouns to form the primary possessive construction. This remains true today, as contemporary examples illustrate. In (24) and (25), the *a* particle occurs in both Fakamae and Imere with the noun 'house.'

(24)   *...ku=   re   na   nofo   r-**a**-ku   fare   i   ko*
         1SG.S=   RS   CONT   sit   SG-ACAT-1SGP   house   PREP   distant

         '...I sit at my house over there.' (Fakamae_201871_MJK:47)

(25)   *taemu   ra   avau   pilti   ani   fare   ne-**a**-ku.*
         time   DEM.DIST   1SG   build   ANA   house   POSS1-POSS2-1SGP

         'At that time, I built my house.' (Imere_2019087_FLI.061)

In Polynesian languages, 'house/ home' would occur with the *o* particle, as possessors are seen as having a passive or non-dominant relationship with their house. This is illustrated by example (26) from Futuna-Aniwa, which retains the *a/o* contrast characteristic of Polynesian languages, such that *fare* 'house' is *o* possessed. Loss of the *a/o* distinction in Fakamae has meant loss of a system in which there are contrasting constructions, the use of which is motivated by choice.

(26)   *ta   fare   **o**-maua*
         ART   house   OCAT-1DU.EXCL

         'our two's house' (Futuna-Aniwa: Dougherty, 1983, p. 66)

While a reflex of *o* occurs in Fakamae, it functions as a locative possessive article which is limited to encoding possession by a location, or possession of a location by a person (see Section 6.2). Some examples of the retention of the Polynesian *o* possessive marker in Ifira-Mele are provided by Clark (1998), as in (27) and (28). These examples suggest that the possessive *o* marker only occurred when the possessor was non-singular and with a small number of nouns: all kin terms for which possession was marked by suffixes for a singular

possessor. There is no evidence of retention of constructions like (27) and (28) in the corpus reflecting usage in 2018-2024. While not transparent synchronically, there is clear historical evidence that the possessive prefixes used in the preposed constructions in both Imere and Futuna-Aniwa are derived from preposed forms based on *o*. For example, the third-person singular prefix *tno-* reflects PPn **tona* (Clark, 2000). Despite this diachronic evidence, the contrasting prefixing and postposed constructions are so different in their morphosyntax and semantics that it would be inappropriate to treat them synchronically as a retention of the *a/o* system. Thus, both Imere and Fakamae show traces of a reflex of PPn *o (Greenhill & Clark, 2011) but have lost the *a/o* contrast as a dominant feature of the possessive system.

(27) *atna*   ***o***   *maaua*

mother   OCAT   1DU.EXCL

'our (two) mother' (Imere: Clark, 1998, p. 53)

(28) *t'=makupu*   ***o***   *maaua*

ART.SG=grandchild   OCAT   1DU.EXCL

'our (two) grandchild' (Imere: Clark, 1998, p. 35)

8.2   Change and variation in the expression of kin possession

In Polynesian Triangle languages, in which there are typically only two ways to express possessive relationships, using either *a* or *o* forms, a common pattern is that kin relations of the same and ascendant generations are specified using *o* forms, and spouses and kin of descendant generations – 'child' and 'grandchild' – are denoted using *a* forms. This is the case in Pukapukan (Salisbury, 2002), Manihiki (Olesen, 2020), Māori (Harlow, 2007), Marquesan (Cablitz, 2006), and Hawaiian (Wilson, 1982). In some cases, it is only possession of one's spouse and children that is marked with *a,* and all other relations are expressed with *o,* as in Rapa Nui (Kieviet, 2017). This distribution in use fits with explanations about control as a determinant in the choice of marker, considering there are kin relationships which we instigate, and thus have some level of active control over, and those over which we have no control.

For those Polynesian Outliers which retain a distinction between *a* and *o* possession, there tend to be fewer kin relations which are expressed with *a* rather than *o* forms. In Rennell-Bellona (Solomon Islands: Elbert & Schütz, 1988), 'possession' of one's child, and to some extent one's spouse is expressed through *a* constructions, whereas in Nukuoro (PNG: Drummond, 2017) and Fagauvea (New Caledonia: Djoupa, 2013), *tama* 'child' is the only kin term which occurs with *a* rather than *o* possessive forms. In Polynesian Outliers which have not retained an *a/o* distinction, in some cases there are no distinctions made, and therefore possession of kin is expressed in the same way for all relations, as in Takuu (PNG: Moyle, 2011). For other languages, different distinctions not exhibited in Polynesian Triangle languages are evident.

With the mix of inherited Polynesian features and changes to the possessive systems, there is considerable complexity in the expression of kin possession in the Vanuatu Outliers, with almost no similarity with Polynesian Triangle languages. Table 6 summarises the various constructions used in each of the languages, both historically and currently. The code in column 1 of Table 6 references the construction types summarised in Table 1. As seen in the table, between the three languages, there are (or have been) a total of 10 different grammatical constructions used to denote a kin relationship. Changes have taken place since earlier documentation (Capell, 1962; Clark, 1998, 2001; Dougherty, 1983; Capell, 1984), and there is

some ongoing variation today. Colour is used in the table to represent historic and current use. Red indicates terms/constructions which have been documented but are no longer in use; green indicates Polynesian terms still regularly used; blue specifies inherited Polynesian terms which are not commonly used; and purple indicates borrowed terms and the constructions they are used in.

Table 6. Constructions used for possession of kin

Code and examples	Futuna-Aniwa (FA)	Fakamae (FK)	Imere (IM)
#4 *tama-na* 'his father' (FA, FK, IM)	*tama-* 'father' *jina-* 'mother' *tupu-* 'grandparent' *tamupu-* 'grandchild' *fugo-* '♀[14] nephew, niece, child-in-law' *tojina-* 'uncle'	*tama-* 'father' *tina-* 'mother'	*tama-* 'father' *atna-* 'mother' *tai-* 'same sex sibling'
#1+4i *tata ji-a-ku* 'my father' (FA)	*tata* 'father' *muma, nana* 'mother' *pua* 'grandparent'	*paa* 'father' *nau* 'mother' *pu* 'grandparent'	
#1+4ii *na tama-na* 'his father' (FK)		*tamana* 'father' *tinana* 'mother' *tupuna* 'grandparent' *teina* 'same sex sibling' *makupuna* 'grandchild' *fugona* '♀ nephew, niece, child-in-law'	*makupu(na)* 'grandchild'
#1+4iii *ti-o-ku tojina-na* 'my uncle' (FA)	*tama-* 'father' *jina-* 'mother' *tupu-* 'grandparent' *tamupu-* 'grandchild' *fugo-* '♀ nephew, niece, child-in-law' *tojina-* 'uncle'		

---

[14] In the definitions of kin terms in Table 6, ♀specifies a female possessor and ♂ indicates a male possessor.

Code and examples	Futuna-Aniwa (FA)	Fakamae (FK)	Imere (IM)
#3 *tuku soa* 'my brother, sister' (FA, IM)	*soa* 'same sex sibling' *kave* 'op. sex sibling' *ma* '♀ sister-in-law, ♀ cross cousin' *safe* '♂ brother-in-law, ♂ cross cousin' *fakaumagaro* 'cross cousin of opposite sex' *jinahavae, mahavae* 'aunt, father's sister' *raimutu* '♂ niece, nephew'		*taina* 'same sex sibling' *kave* 'op. sex sibling' *tama* '♀ child' *tariki* '♂ child' *nuufine* 'wife' *nuaane* 'husband' *maami* 'aunt' *iraamutu* 'child of opposite sex sibling'
#3+4 *tuku-makupu-ku* 'my grandchild' (IM)			*-tupu-* 'grandparent' *-makupu-* 'grandchild' *-figo(a)-* 'parent/child-in-law'
#3+1c *tuku-makupu nea-ku* 'my grandchild' (IM)			*taina* 'same sex sibling' *kave* 'op. sex sibling' *makupu* 'grandchild'
#1b/d *ji-o-ku tagata* 'my husband' (FA)	*soa* 'same sex sibling' *kave* 'op. sex sibling' *tama* 'child' *tariki* '♂ child' *fine* 'wife' *tagata* 'husband'		*tama* 'father' *atna* 'mother'

Code and examples	Futuna-Aniwa (FA)	Fakamae (FK)	Imere (IM)
#1a/c *ti-a-na tagata* 'her husband' (FA) *re-a-na matua* 'her husband' (FK) *nuaane nea-na* 'her husband' (IM)	*tama* 'child' *fine* 'wife' *tagata* 'husband'	*lei* 'sister' *tata* 'brother' *tuagane* '♀brother' *tamatiiti* 'child' *finamatua* 'wife' *matua* 'husband' *taata* 'grandmother' *mama* 'mother' *papa* 'father' *maami* 'mother-in-law' *loloa* 'father-in-law' *raamutu* '♂ sister's child, daughter-in-law' *mateilau* 'child-in-law'	*tama* 'child' *makupu* 'grandchild' *nuufine* 'wife' *nuaane* 'husband' *tagata* 'husband' *eemama* 'father' *paapa* 'father' *tati* 'father' *eetata* 'mother' *mami* 'mother' *taatai* 'sibling' *prata* 'brother' *sista* 'sister' *taataa* 'grandfather' *eepua* 'grandmother' *maami* 'aunt' *waawa* 'uncle' *tawiana* 'in-law'
#5 *teku tama* 'my child' (FA)	*tama* 'child' *nofune* 'wife, old woman' *nuane* 'husband, old man'		

To begin with the constructions presented in the first four rows of Table 5, some Polynesian Outlier languages express possession of a small group of kin terms through direct suffixation. There is some ongoing debate regarding whether these constructions represent a retention from PPn, or result from the influence of neighbouring non-Polynesian languages, although Polynesian origin is considered more likely (for example, see Clark, 1994, pp. 118-119; Næss 2012, p. 583; Pawley 1967, pp. 262-263; Wilson, 1982). Seven terms are reconstructed for PPn as taking suffixes: *tina-na* 'mother', *tama-na* 'father', *tupu-na* 'grandparent', *makupu-na* 'grandchild', *tuaka-na* 'older same-sex sibling', and *tahi-na* 'younger same-sex sibling', *fugao-na* 'parent-/child-in-law' (Wilson, 1982; Clark, 1998). Reflexes of each of these terms except *tuaka-na* could be seen in the three Vanuatu Outliers at the time of earlier documentation, mostly suffixed. Today, there are no kin terms in Fakamae or Imere which mark possession with suffixes. In Imere, reflexes of only two of the six reconstructed terms can be seen, one *taina* 'same sex sibling' with fossilized third-singular suffix, and the other, *makupu* 'grandchild' without. When questioned, Imere speakers do not recognize the suffix-taking forms for 'mother', 'father' or 'grandparent' as Imere terms. In Fakamae, two suppletive first-singular forms and six fossilized third-singular forms occur taking part in the *a*-based possessive construction, as exemplified by (29) and (30), but none productively take suffixes. In Futuna-Aniwa the situation is different. Six kin terms were documented by Dougherty as taking possessive suffixes and can still occur as such, although in each case, this is not the preferred construction today. Like in Fakamae, in Futuna-Aniwa,

the preferred way to express possession of 'mother' and 'father' is with article-based possession and the first-singular suppletive forms.

(29) *...ka*   ***r-a-u***   ***paa***   *ma*   *r-a-u*   ***nau***
      but   SG-ACAT-2SGP   father   CONJ   SG-A-2SGP   mother

      ro=   *ko*   *musu*   *kutea*   *aku*
      1DU.S=   INCP   not.want   see   1SG.OBL

      '…but your father and mother will not want to see me'
      (Fakamae_2018093_LF: 44)

(30) *...* ***r-a-matu***   ***tamana***   *tapu...*   *a-a-matu*
      SG-ACAT-1PL.EXCLP   father   holy…   PL-ACAT-1PL.EXCLP

      tavasavasa-aga   *ki*   *a*   *to*   *koe…*
      pray-NMLZ   PREP   OBL   PRO.ART   2SG

      '…our holy father… our prayer to you…'
      (Fakamae_2018064_AC: 43-44)

Futuna-Aniwa and Imere have an alternative construction which is not seen in Fakamae. This is construction #3, labelled 'preposed inalienable possession' in Table 1. This construction also occurs in Vaeakau-Taumako of Solomon Islands, and Naess (2012) cites this as one piece of evidence to group the languages together in terms of Outlier subgrouping. There is evidence that this construction is derived from preposed *o* possessive forms. However, the semantic categories of words which are possessed using this construction differs from those marked with *o* in languages which make that distinction. The semantics are typical of inalienable rather than control-based systems. The distribution differs somewhat across the languages that use this construction. Note in the table that Clark (2001) specified three Imere kin terms which marked possession with both a suffix and one of the prefixes (#3+#4). Two of these terms, *-tupu-* 'grandparent' and *-figo-* 'parent-/child-in-law' are not known by Imere speakers today. The third, *makupu* 'grandchild' is one of the few retained Polynesian kin terms, but only two speakers, aged 79 and 83 were recorded using this term in construction #3; the rest consistently use *makupu* in the commonly used construction, #1c (or #2 if the possessor is nominal). In Imere today, the only kin terms used with prefixes are the sibling terms, *taina* 'same-sex sibling' and *kave* 'opposite-sex sibling'. These two sibling terms are still regularly used by speakers over the age of about 30. Speakers younger than 30 consistently use the Bislama borrowings *sista* 'sister' and *prata* 'brother', and older speakers also use these terms in addition to the Efate borrowing *taatai,* which for some speakers is only used for same-sex siblings, and for others is a general sibling term.

Futuna-Aniwa is the only language of the three to retain the *a/o* distinction. Documentation by Dougherty (1983) suggests that with kin terms, there was some retention of the division seen in Polynesian, with only terms for 'child', 'wife' and 'husband' being possessed in *a* constructions, and the remainder of terms not directly suffixed occurring in the inalienable construction. However, suggestions are (Mary Munu Hackney, p. c.) that the boundaries between use of *a* and *o* article-based constructions are becoming blurred. Further data would be needed to assess current usage.

In Futuna-Aniwa and Fakamae, although there has been considerable shift in the way that the different possessive constructions are used to express possession of kin, the majority of

Polynesian inherited terms have been retained, and borrowings are limited. In Futuna-Aniwa, there is now limited use of suffixing (#4) to mark possession, but the forms are retained, although used in different constructions. In Fakamae, without exception, all kin terms now take part in the single *a* possessive construction (#1a), however, there are few borrowed kin terms. The Bislama terms *mama* and *papa* are used, but mostly only as address terms, with earlier terms being the ones employed in possessive constructions.

The situation in Imere is different, with the impact of contact being starkly evident in kin terms used. Note from Table 5 that there are multiple terms recorded for most kin relations, with the only Polynesian-inherited terms consistently used today being *tama* 'child', *makupu* 'grandchild', *nuufine* 'wife', *nuaane* 'husband', and *tagata* 'husband'. For all other relations, borrowed forms are used. Note in particular the stages of borrowing and use for sibling and parent terms. At the time of documentation by Clark, he noted that *eemama* 'father' and *eetata* 'mother', borrowings from Efate languages, were the commonly used parent terms, with *tama*- and *atna*- marked as older forms. Speakers today think of *eemama* and *eetata* as the 'real' Imere terms. There are two terms used by speakers in the 30+ age group for 'father', *eemama* and the Bislama borrowing *paapa*. It is likely that *paapa* began to replace *eemama* due to homophone avoidance in relation to Bislama *mama* 'mother', which also explains the unequal distribution of terms for mother and father. Speakers aged around 30-45 prefer *paapa*, whereas speakers over about 45 use both interchangeably and give some indication that they think *eemama* is the 'correct' term. In 1975, Clark (p. c.) noted that *eemama* and *eetata* were considered childish forms. Today these are perceived as original Imere terms. They are now being replaced by English borrowings *tati* and *mami*,[15] used consistently by all speakers under 20, and to some extent by speakers under 30. The shift *tama* > *eemama* > *paapa* > *tati* apparently did not occur in parallel with *atna* > *eetata* > *mami* as *mama* was never borrowed as a term for 'mother'.

9   Conclusion

This paper has shown how the grammatical expression of possession in each of the three Polynesian Outliers of Vanuatu has undergone changes, involving reduction in the number of distinctions made since earlier documentation of the languages as they were spoken 40+ years ago. Futuna-Aniwa and Imere appear to be undergoing further changes and simplification.

Documentation of Fakamae as it was spoken in 1958 (Capell, 1962) showed no evidence of the *a/o* contrast typical of Polynesian languages. Capell noted only a small number of kinship terms which were possessed using a different construction involving suffixation. Today this construction has been completely lost, with some fossilised forms of these suffixed kin terms taking part in the single possessive construction which occurs in the language. The expression of possession in Fakamae is significantly simplified compared both to Polynesian languages and to neighbouring Vanuatu languages. Fakamae is the only one of the three Outliers which includes no formal marking of the possessive relationship when the possessor is nominal rather than pronominal. This construction is possibly borrowed from neighbouring Namakura.

---

[15] A side issue relevant to the borrowing of kinship terms is that the earlier borrowings adhere to Imere phonological word requirements, which stipulate that a minimal word consists of at least three morae, whereas the later borrowings do not. Bislama *paapa* was borrowed with first vowel lengthened. Bislama *mama* was not borrowed, and north Efate *mama* and *tata* were borrowed and used with *ee-* to comply with the minimal requirements. *ee-* is not a productive prefix in Imere but is a reflex of PPn vocative preposition *e. More recent borrowings *tati* and *mami* do not have lengthened vowels and *mami* forms a minimal pair with *maami* 'aunt'.

The situation is more complicated for Futuna-Aniwa and Imere. Both languages exhibited complex systems of possession when recorded in the 1970s and 80s. Futuna-Aniwa fully maintains the typical Polynesian *a/o* distinction, and both languages employed a few minor constructions not used in Polynesian Triangle languages. In current usage, the suffixing of kin terms has been lost from Imere, as with Fakamae, but not from Futuna-Aniwa.

Today, Imere is a language which appears to be undergoing change. Recent evidence indicates that older speakers partially retain the distinctions documented by Clark in the 1970s-80s. Younger speakers are shifting towards use of a general construction for all lexical items, with some instances of double and triple-marking of possessive relationships as part of the shift from one construction to the other. The influence of neighbouring Indigenous languages and of Bislama and English is observable in the ongoing changes within the Imere possessive system. While it seems clear that change is underway, it is unclear whether this will result in complete loss of a distinction or just a change in the semantics.

The expression of possession in Futuna-Aniwa is more complex than in other Polynesian languages. All constructions described by Dougherty (1983) are in use or at least known today, however it is apparent that the semantic contrasts expressed by the different constructions are not as strongly adhered to by speakers today. As data and observations made in this paper come from a single speaker in her 40s, further investigation is required to assess whether the possessive system is undergoing change. This paper provides a snapshot of the possessive systems of these three languages as they are used today.

Acknowledgements

References

Barth, D. (2019). Variation in Matukar Panau kinship terminology. *Asia-Pacific Language Variation, 5*(2), 138–170.

Bauer, W. (1997). *The Reed reference grammar of Maori*. Reed.

Besnier, N. (2000). *Tuvaluan*. Routledge.

Biggs, B. (1969). *Let's learn Māori: A guide to the study of the Māori language*. Reed.

Cablitz, G. H. (2006). *Marquesan: A grammar of space.* Mouton de Gruyter.

Capell, A. (1962). *The Polynesian language of Mae (Emwae), New Hebrides*. Linguistic Society of New Zealand.

Capell, A. (1984). *Futuna-Aniwa dictionary, with grammatical introduction.* Pacific Linguistics.

Clark, R. (1986). Linguistics convergence in Central Vanuatu. In P. Geraghty, L. Carrington, & S. A. Wurm (Eds.), *FOCAL II: Papers from the Fourth International Conference on Austronesian Linguistics* (pp. 333– 342). Pacific Linguistics.

Clark, R. (1994). The Polynesian Outliers as a locus of language contact. In T. Dutton & D. T. Tryon (Eds.), *Language contact and change in the Austronesian world* (pp. 109– 140). Mouton de Gruyter.

Clark, R. (1998). *A dictionary of the Mele language (atara imere), Vanuatu*. Pacific Linguistics.

Clark, R. (2000). Possessive markers in Polynesian languages. *Language Typology and Universals, 53*(3/4), 258–268.

Clark, R. (2001). Ifira-Mele. In J. Lynch, M. Ross & T. Crowley (Eds.), *The Oceanic languages* (pp. 681–693). Taylor & Francis Group.

Crowley, T. (2004). Bislama reference grammar. *Oceanic Linguistics Special Publications, 31*, 1–205

Dewar, A. (2020). *Documentation of Fakamae, a Polynesian Outlier of Vanuatu.* Endangered Languages Archive. Handle: http://hdl.handle.net/2196/00-0000-0000-0010-7A77-7

Dewar, A. (2022). *A grammar of Fakamae, a Polynesian Outlier of Vanuatu, with a study of Fakamae multilingualism* [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Newcastle]. Open Research Newcastle. https://hdl.handle.net/1959.13/1512045

Donner, W. W. (2020). *Sikaiana archives.* https://www.sikaianaarchives.com/dictionary-3/introduction-and-brief-grammar/

Djoupa, A. (2013). *Analyse syntaxique et sémantique du Fagauvea (Ouvéa, Iles Loyauté, Kanaky-Nouvelle-Calédonie)* [Doctoral dissertation, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales]. Theses.fr. https://theses.fr/2013INAL0001

Dougherty, J. W. D. (1983). *West Futuna-Aniwa: An introduction to a Polynesian Outlier language*. University of California Press.

Drummond, E. (2017). *Possession and agentivity in Nukuoro* [Bachelor's thesis, Bryn Mawr College]. TriCollege Libraries Institutional Repository. http://hdl.handle.net/10066/19101

Elbert, S. H., & Schütz, A. (1988). *Echo of a culture: A grammar of Rennell and Bellona*. Oceanic Linguistics Special Publication No. 22. University of Hawai`i Press.

Feinberg, R. (1977). *The Anutan language reconsidered: Lexicon and grammar of a Polynesian Outlier, vol. 1.* Human Relations Area Files, Inc.

Firth, R. (1936). *We, the Tikopia: A sociological study of kinship in primitive Polynesia.* Routledge.

François, A., Lacrampe, S., Franjieh, M., & Schnell, S. (Eds.). (2015). *The languages of Vanuatu: Unity and diversity*. The Australian National University.

Greenhill S. J., & Clark, R. (2011). POLLEX-Online: The Polynesian Lexicon Project Online. *Oceanic Linguistics, 50*(2), 551–559.

Harlow, R. (2007). *Māori: A linguistic introduction*. Cambridge University Press.

Hohepa, P. W. (1967). *A profile generative grammar of Maori*, volume 20. Waverly Press, Indiana University.

Kieviet, P. (2017). *A grammar of Rapa Nui* (Studies in Diversity Linguistics 12). Language Science Press.

Lacrampe, S. (2009). *Possession in Lelepa, a language of Central Vanuatu.* Unpublished Masters thesis, The University of the South Pacific.

Lichtenberk, F. (1983). Relational classifiers. *Lingua, 60*, 147–176.

Lynch, J. (1998). *Pacific Languages*. University of Hawai'i Press.

Lynch, J., Ross, M., & Crowley, T. (Eds.). (2001). *The Oceanic languages*. Taylor & Francis Group.

Malau, C. (2018). *Documentation of Ifira-Mele, a Polynesian Outlier of Vanuatu.* Endangered Languages Archive. http://hdl.handle.net/2196/00-0000-0000-0010-AB1B-8.

Marck, J. (1996). Kin terms in the Polynesian protolanguages. *Oceanic Linguistics, 35*(2), 195–257.

Meyerhoff, M., Barth, D., & Schnell, S. (2018, July 24–28). *Vanuatu languages in the Oceanic shift from direct possession* [Conference presentation]. Vanuatu Languages Conference, Port Vila, Vanuatu.

Miller, J. G. (1981). *LIVE*. Presbyterian Church of Australia.

Moyle, R. M. (2011). *Takuu grammar and dictionary: A Polynesian language of the South Pacific*. Pacific Linguistics.

Moyse-Faurie, C. (1999, January 12–16). *A syntactic approach to Faguvea (WUV)* [Conference presentation]. International Conference on Oceanic Linguistics, Niue Island, South Pacific.

Næss, Å. (2012). Structural parallels between Vaeakau-Taumako and the Vanuatu Outliers: Capell revisited. *Oceanic Linguistics, 51*(2), 567–588.

Næss, Å., & Hovdhaugen, E. (2011). *A grammar of Vaeakau-Taumako*. De Gruyter Mouton.

Nicholas, S. A. T. N. (2016). *Ko te Karāma o te Reo Māori o te Pae Tonga o Te Kuki Airani: A Grammar of Southern Cook Islands Māori* [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Auckland]. Australian Policy Online. http://hdl.handle.net/2292/32929

Olesen, A. V. (2020). *A Grammar of the Manihiki Language* [Master's thesis, The University of Newcastle]. Open Research Newcastle. https://hdl.handle.net/1959.13/1418252

Pawley, A. (1966). Polynesian languages: A subgrouping based on shared innovations in morphology. *The Journal of the Polynesian Society, 75*(1), 39–64.

Pawley, A. (1967). The relationships of the Polynesian Outlier languages. *The Journal of the Polynesian Society, 76*(3), 259–296.

Salisbury, M. C. (2002). *A grammar of Pukapukan* [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Auckland]. Pukapuka World Archive. https://pukapuka.world/archive/Pukapukan-Grammar_Web.pdf

Salmond, A. (1974). *A generative syntax of Luangiua, a Polynesian language*. Mouton.

Schütz, A. J. (1969). *Nguna grammar*. University of Hawai`i Press.

Sperlich, W. B. (1991). *Namakir: A description of a central Vanuatu language* [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Auckland]. ResearchSpace@Auckland. https://hdl.handle.net/2292/2314

Taumoefolau, M. (1996). Nominal possessive classification in Tongan. In *Oceanic studies: proceedings of the first International Conference on Oceanic Linguistics* (pp. 293–304). Pacific Linguistics.

Thieberger, N. (2006). *A grammar of South Efate: An Oceanic language of Vanuatu*. University of Hawai`i Press.

Vanuatu National Statistics Office. (2020). *National Population and Housing Census: Basic tables report*. Port Vila, Vanuatu

Walworth, M., et al. (2021). Multilingualism in Vanuatu: Four case studies. *International Journal of Bilingualism, 25*(4), 1120–1141.

Walworth, M., Hermann, A., Greenhill, S., & Gray, R. (2022, November). *Disentangling the complex history of the Polynesian Outliers* [Conference presentation].Colloque international CIRAP/UPF: *Au coeur du triangle polynésien*, Puna'auia, French Polynesia. https://hal.science/hal-03926576v1

Wilson, W. H. (1982). *Proto-Polynesian possessive marking*. Pacific Linguistics.

Appendix: Imere Speaker Metadata

Speaker	Sex	Age
Erick Matuatu	M	10
Pamela Kalterikia	F	15
Fitela Sarapera	F	16
Darren Chillia	M	17
Monica Anatu	F	17
Melina Langa	F	19
Manuel Poilapa	M	19
Mackenzie Malapa	M	20
Melissa Numalo	F	23
Leipoi Soromon	F	24
Rosana Mete	F	28
Madonna Chillia	F	30?
Tania Kaltaki	F	30
Doreen Malasikoto	F	31
Newman Netef	M	42
Filo Langa Samson	F	44
Toumararea Numalo	F	46
Kaltanu Bangalulu	M	47
Kalmalau Lapua	M	48
Penaia Samson	M	49
Philip Sarapera	M	50
Jimmy Lulu Sopuso	M	52
Siiraka Numalo	M	52
Toutoga Sampo	F	55
Anna Soromon	F	57
Kenneth Mansale	M	60
Kaloran Napaga	M	63
Pakoatau Matautava	M	68
George Kaltoi Kaloas	M	69
Leesi Peelo	F	70
Leipeau Taravaki	F	73
Kalosinu Matautaava	M	75
Leitau Manuela	F	76
Louise Sarapera	F	79
Kalmansong Taravaki	M	83