

# Lexical relationality and the alienability distinction

A perspective from Daakaka

Kilu von Prince

ZAS Berlin

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# The gist

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

- Most of the literature on inalienability in fact describes the difference between **lexically** transitive or relational nouns and lexically intransitive or non-relational nouns, focusing on **part-whole** and **kinship** relations.

# The gist

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

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- But the alienability distinction is potentially independent from this difference, insofar as languages like Daakaka have productive ways to mark it.

# The gist

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

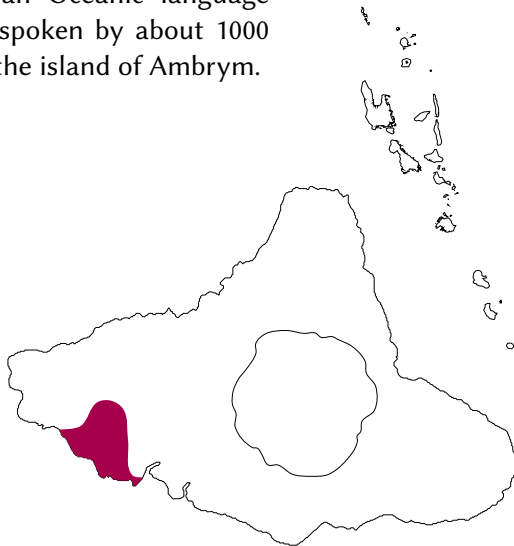
Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

- Most of the literature on inalienability in fact describes the difference between **lexically** transitive or relational nouns and lexically intransitive or non-relational nouns, focusing on **part-whole** and **kinship** relations.
- But the alienability distinction is potentially independent from this difference, insofar as languages like Daakaka have productive ways to mark it.
- By looking at non-prototypical, productively formed possessive structures, we may be able to improve our understanding of the alienability distinction and to differentiate between different theories.

# Introduction

Daakaka is an Oceanic language of Vanuatu, spoken by about 1000 speakers on the island of Ambrym.



Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

The language

Noun classes

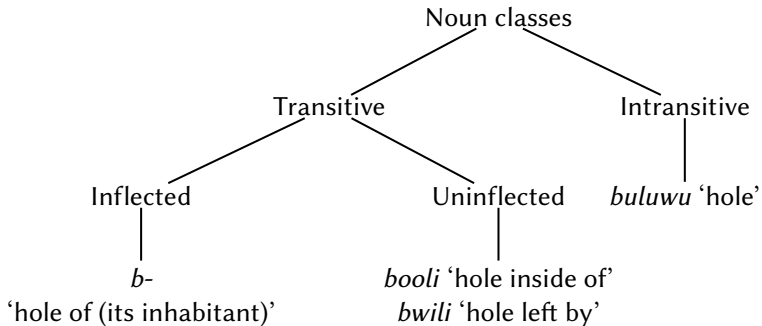
Productive structures

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

# The noun class system



Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

The language

Noun classes

Productive structures

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

# Noun classes: examples

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

The language

Noun classes

Productive structures

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

- (1) a. *b-on*      (*tomo*)  
hole.of-3s rat  
'its (the rat's) hole'

# Noun classes: examples

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

The language

Noun classes

Productive structures

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

- (1) a. *b-on*        (*tomo*)  
hole.of-3s rat  
‘its (the rat’s) hole’
- b. *booli*        *vyor*  
hole.inside stone  
‘hole inside a stone’



# Noun classes: examples

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

The language

Noun classes

Productive structures

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

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hole.of-3s rat  
‘its (the rat’s) hole’
- b. *booli*        *vyor*  
hole.inside stone  
‘hole inside a stone’
- c. *buluwu*  
hole  
‘hole, cavity’

# Productive possessive structures

Linker genitives:

- (2) a. *atuwo s-e Baeluk*  
basket CL3-LINK Baeluk  
'Baeluk's basket'
- b. *s-ok atuwo*  
CL3-1s.POSS basket  
'my basket'

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

The language

Noun classes

Productive structures

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

# Productive possessive structures

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basket CL3-LINK Baeluk  
'Baeluk's basket'

b. *s-ok atuwo*  
CL3-1s.POSS basket  
'my basket'

## Transitivization:

(3) a. *mubuo=ane tyu*  
meat=TRANS chicken  
'chicken meat'

b. *mubuo=an*  
meat=TRANS.3POSS  
'its meat'

c. *mubuo=ane nge*  
meat=TRANS 3s.POSS  
'his/her flesh'

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

The language  
Noun classes

Productive structures

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

# Structure and meaning

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

The language  
Noun classes

Productive structures

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

Linker genitives correspond to alienable possession, transitivized structures correspond to inalienable possession:

- (4) *bosi=ne vyanten en=tak*  
bone=TRANS person DEM=PROX  
'this person's bone' (body part)
- (5) *bosi ∅-e vyanten en=tak*  
bone CL1-LINK person DEM=PROX  
'this person's bone' (ownership)

# Alienability and noun class membership

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

The language  
Noun classes

Productive structures

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

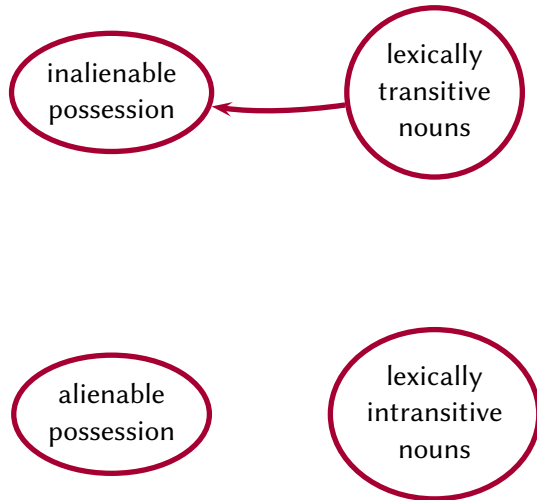
inalienable  
possession

lexically  
transitive  
nouns

alienable  
possession

lexically  
intransitive  
nouns

# Alienability and noun class membership



Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

The language

Noun classes

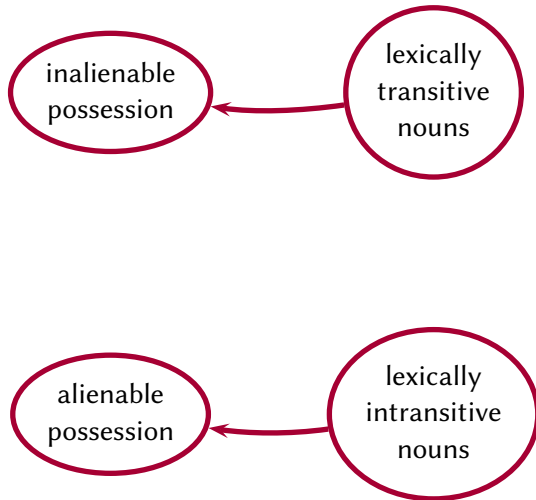
Productive structures

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

# Alienability and noun class membership



Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

The language

Noun classes

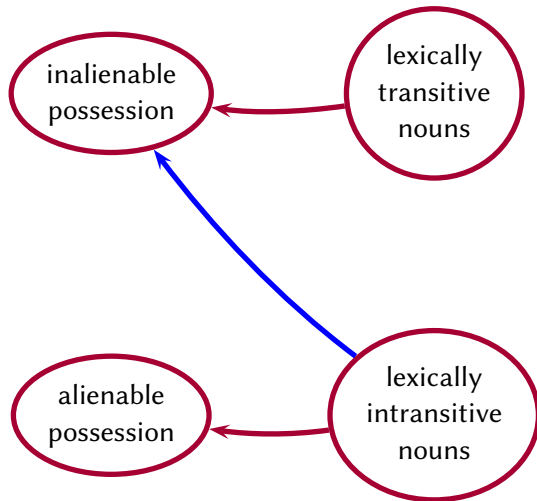
Productive structures

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

# Alienability and noun class membership



Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

The language

Noun classes

Productive structures

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy



# Haspelmath (2008)

- Haspelmath (2008) attempts to reduce the alienability distinction to an economic principle:
  - alienable nouns, which do not typically come with a possessor, form more complex possessive structures.
  - inalienable nouns, which typically come with a possessor, form less complex possessive phrases.

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

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  - alienable nouns, which do not typically come with a possessor, form more complex possessive structures.
  - inalienable nouns, which typically come with a possessor, form less complex possessive phrases.
- However, the terminology of **alienable nouns** and **inalienable nouns** suggests that alienability and inalienability are a purely lexical property of head nouns – we have seen that this is not so.

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

# Haspelmath (2008)

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

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  - inalienable nouns, which typically come with a possessor, form less complex possessive phrases.
- However, the terminology of **alienable nouns** and **inalienable nouns** suggests that alienability and inalienability are a purely lexical property of head nouns – we have seen that this is not so.
- I expect that Haspelmath’s economic principle correlates well with the lexical distinction between **transitive** and **intransitive** nouns, but is not necessarily a meaningful *explanans* for the difference between **linker genitives** and **transitivized NPs**.

# Frequencies

	Trans.	Linker	Subtotal
Lexically intransitive nouns			1985
N + NP	183	98	
pronominal	744	960	
Subtotal	927	1058	
Lexically transitive nouns			3217

- Trivially, 100% of tokens of lexically transitive nouns occur with possessors, while not all instances of lexically intransitive nouns do.

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

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- Trivially, 100% of tokens of lexically transitive nouns occur with possessors, while not all instances of lexically intransitive nouns do.
- There is a clear difference in frequencies between transitive and intransitive nouns in possessive structures (especially since transitive nouns only make up 16 % of all nouns in the lexicon)

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

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- There is a clear difference in frequencies between transitive and intransitive nouns in possessive structures (especially since transitive nouns only make up 16 % of all nouns in the lexicon)
- The difference in frequencies between linker genitives and transitive structures is only marginal.

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

# Structural complexity: lexical difference

- Lexically transitive nouns form less complex (shorter) possessive NPs than lexically intransitive nouns:

- (6) a. *b-on*  
hole.of-3s.POSS  
'it's hole'
- b. *booli*      *vyor*  
hole.inside stone  
'hole inside a stone'  
(lexically transitive head noun)
- c. *buluwu=ane map*  
hole=TRANS chestnut  
'a hollow filled with chestnuts'  
(lexically intransitive, transitivized head noun)

# Structural complexity: productive difference

- The linker genitive is slightly more complex in the sense that it involves one more morpheme (the possessive classifier).

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy



# Structural complexity: productive difference

- The linker genitive is slightly more complex in the sense that it involves one more morpheme (the possessive classifier).
- However, when we look at individual lexical items, this difference in complexity does not correlate with a difference in frequencies; e. g. *em* ‘house’ occurs 5 times in a transitivized structure, 11 times in a linker genitive.

(7) *em m-e Lui*  
house CL2-LINK Lui  
‘Lui’s house’

(8) *em=ane video*  
house=TRANS video  
‘video house, cinema’

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

# Concluding this section

- The main factor determining the structural complexity of a possessive NP is not the alienability distinction, but the noun class distinction between lexically transitive and intransitive nouns.

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

# Concluding this section

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

- The main factor determining the structural complexity of a possessive NP is not the alienability distinction, but the noun class distinction between lexically transitive and intransitive nouns.
- Haspelmath's observations on correlations between frequency and structural complexity do apply to the difference between lexically transitive and intransitive nouns.

# Concluding this section

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

- The main factor determining the structural complexity of a possessive NP is not the alienability distinction, but the noun class distinction between lexically transitive and intransitive nouns.
  - Haspelmath's observations on correlations between frequency and structural complexity do apply to the difference between lexically transitive and intransitive nouns.
  - But they do not help us understand the difference between transitivized NPs and linker genitives.
- ⇒ This latter difference cannot be reduced to a principle of economy.

# Barker & Dowty (1993) I

Barker & Dowty (1993) propose that relations encoded by relational nouns either correspond to **part-whole** proto-roles or to **kinship** relations.

They explicitly restrict their work to nouns that qualify as lexically transitive or bivalent in English. They thereby exclude relations such as the following:

---

Constitution:	the ring of gold	(17-a)
Group membership:	the bunch of grapes	(9-a)
Natural measure:	the herd of cattle	(9-b)
Partitive:	two of the men	
Affiliation:	Mr. Jones of Suffolk County	(19)
Temporal predication:	the message of yesterday	(9-c)

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Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

# Barker & Dowty (1993) II

Except for the partitive relation, all these relations are expressed in Daakaka either by lexically transitive nouns or by transitivized structures, as shown in the corresponding examples.

- (9) a. *eveli vynos*  
bundle.of coconuts  
'a bundle of coconuts'
- b. *atuwo=ne raes swa*  
basket=TRANS raes one  
'a basket of rice'
- c. *theme=ane webung en=te*  
theme=TRANS day DET=MED  
'the theme of this day'

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

# Questions

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

- How do these relations fit into our binary distinction between inalienable and alienable relations?

# Questions

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

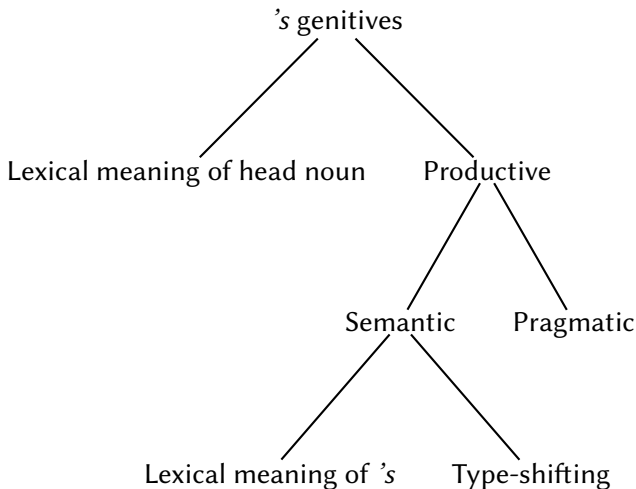
Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

- How do these relations fit into our binary distinction between inalienable and alienable relations?
- To the extent that they encode inalienable relations, is there a basic definition of inalienability that would cover both these relations and those encoded by lexically relational nouns?



# Jensen & Vikner (2003): Possession of artifacts I



Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

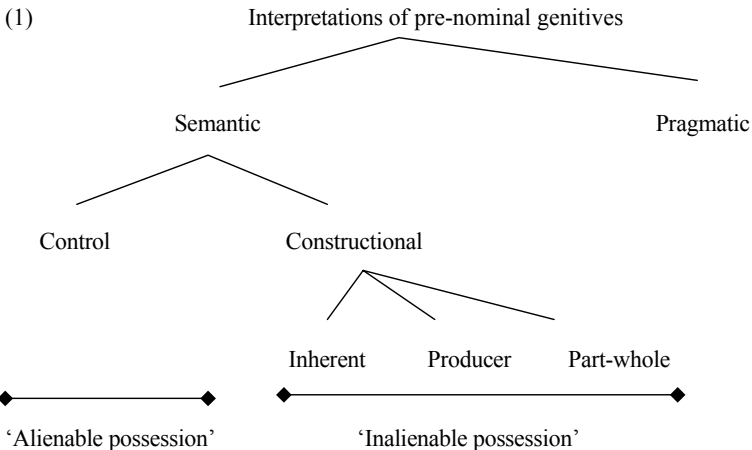
The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

# Jensen & Vikner (2003): Possession of artifacts II



Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

# Jensen & Vikner (2003): Possession of artifacts III

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

Jensen & Vikner (2003) propose that there are two productive ways the possessive relation denoted by the Saxon genitive can be established semantically:

- 1 the relation is taken to be one of the lexically encoded qualia structure – for artifacts, the qualia structure provides the following relations: inherent, producer, part-whole
- 2 the relation is control and is introduced by the genitive suffix 's itself

Relations derived from the qualia structure are said to be inalienable, while the control relation is said to be alienable

# Predictions for Daakaka I

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

- Following Jensen & Vikner's suggestion, we'd expect that
  - the default interpretation of the linker genitive is control
  - the default interpretation of transitivized NPs where the head noun is an artifact is either an inherent, producer or part-whole relation.
- The first expectation is met, although the producer interpretation is also readily available for linker genitives:

- (10) a. *em m-e Lui*  
house CL2-LINK Lui  
'Lui's house'
- b. *apyaló s-an longlong*  
boat CL3-LINK lizard  
'the boat of the lizards' (from a story)

# Predictions for Daakaka II

- The second expectation, though, is not met:
  - The producer interpretation is never available for transitivity NPs referring to artifacts.
  - Interpretations not included in the qualia structure are often the most prominent:

- (11) a. *vis=ane tes*  
bow=TRANS sea  
'harpoon' (lit. 'bow of the sea')
- b. *byar=ane ó*  
oven=TRANS coconut  
'copra oven'
- c. *syetantan=ane nye*  
grave=TRANS 1S  
'my grave'

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

# Predictions for Daakaka III

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

- d. *mees=ane vilye yen too*  
food=TRANS place in garden  
'food from the field, crops'
- e. *mees=ane padó=an*  
food=TRANS fish=NM  
'food for fishing'

# Conclusions

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

- So far, we have seen that many approaches to the alienability distinction suggest that inalienable relations are determined by the lexical content of the head noun.

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Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

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- However, as soon as we look at productively formed possessive structures, this assumption appears problematic.



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Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

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- However, as soon as we look at productively formed possessive structures, this assumption appears problematic.
- Alternatively, the different interpretations may be derived productively from differences in the syntactic and/or semantic structure of corresponding constructions → von Prince (2012)

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Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

The alienability  
distinction as  
economic principle

The list approach

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

- So far, we have seen that many approaches to the alienability distinction suggest that inalienable relations are determined by the lexical content of the head noun.
- However, as soon as we look at productively formed possessive structures, this assumption appears problematic.
- Alternatively, the different interpretations may be derived productively from differences in the syntactic and/or semantic structure of corresponding constructions → von Prince (2012)
- Also, lexical properties of the possessor NP may play a role.

# Temporal relativity

My suggestion in von Prince (2012) for a difference in semantic structure stipulates an extra temporal argument for linker genitives as opposed to transitive and transitivized NPs:

Type	Example	Semantic structure
Inflected	<i>vy=(am)</i> ‘(your) hand’	$\lambda x \lambda y. \mathbf{hand}(y)(x)$
Transitive	<i>booli (vyor)</i> ‘hole (in a stone)’	$\lambda x \lambda y. \mathbf{hole}(y), y \text{ is in } x$
Transitivized	<i>bosi=ne (Baeluk)</i> ‘(Baeluk’s) bone’	$\lambda x \lambda y. \mathbf{bone}(y), R_i(y)(x)$
Linker	<i>(bosi) e Baeluk</i> ‘Baeluk’s bone’	$\lambda x \lambda y \lambda t. R_i(x)(y)(t)$

# The appeal of the proposal

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

- The proposed difference parallels the difference between individual level predicates and stage level predicates.

# The appeal of the proposal

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

- The proposed difference parallels the difference between individual level predicates and stage level predicates.
- Instead of requiring an exhaustive list of the types of relations, the structural distinction derives different interpretations based on world-knowledge.

# The appeal of the proposal

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

- The proposed difference parallels the difference between individual level predicates and stage level predicates.
- Instead of requiring an exhaustive list of the types of relations, the structural distinction derives different interpretations based on world-knowledge.
- The morpho-syntactically more complex structure (linker genitives) is also semantically more complex.

# Ogawa (2001) I

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

Ogawa (2001) proposes that inalienably possessed nouns are like stage-level predicates and non-possessed nouns are like individual-level predicates because of the parallel between double-object constructions and secondary predicates:

- (12) a. Mary kicked John on the leg.  
b. \*Mary kicked John on the book.
- (13) a. Mary served the wine cold.  
b. \*Mary served the wine white.

## Ogawa (2001) II

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

However, I'd say the important connection between *cold* and *leg* is not that they're both stage-level predicates, but that they're both transitive, i. e.  $\lambda x \lambda y. \mathbf{leg}(x)(y)$  and  $\lambda x \lambda t. \mathbf{cold}(x)(t)$  as opposed to  $\lambda x. \mathbf{book}(x)$  and  $\lambda x. \mathbf{white}(x)$

Moreover, the parallel observed by Ogawa does not seem to fully capture the difference between alienable and inalienable relations. After all, double object constructions are not available with kinship terms:

(14)\* Mary kicked John on the mother.



# Capturing inherent qualities

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

The above definition is designed to capture the type of intrinsic qualities expressed by the following examples, that are hard to define and do form obvious categories:

- (15) a. *vyanten=ane peten=an*  
person=TRANS speak.truth=NM  
'a truthful person'

# Capturing inherent qualities

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

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- b. *daa=ne yos=an*  
speech=TRANS love=NM  
'words of love'

# Capturing inherent qualities

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

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- (15) a. *vyanten=ane peten=an*  
person=TRANS speak.truth=NM  
'a truthful person'
- b. *daa=ne yos=an*  
speech=TRANS love=NM  
'words of love'
- c. *led=ane sospen*  
lid=TRANS pot  
'the lid of the pot'

# Less obvious candidates

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

(9-b) *atuwo=ne raes swa*  
basket=TRANS raes one  
'a basket of rice'

# Less obvious candidates

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

(9-b) *atuwo=ne raes swa*  
basket=TRANS raes one  
'a basket of rice'

(9-c) *theme=ane webung en=te*  
theme=TRANS day DET=MED  
'the theme of this day'

# Prototypical possessors

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

Possessor  
prototypicality

Inanimate possessors

- (Inalienable) possessors of body parts and kinship relations are prototypically human (and always animate).

# Prototypical possessors

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

Possessor  
prototypicality

Inanimate possessors

- (Inalienable) possessors of body parts and kinship relations are prototypically human (and always animate).
- (Alienable) possessors of cars, baskets and football clubs are also prototypically human.

# Prototypical possessors

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

Possessor  
prototypicality

Inanimate possessors

- (Inalienable) possessors of body parts and kinship relations are prototypically human (and always animate).
- (Alienable) possessors of cars, baskets and football clubs are also prototypically human.
- What do inanimate possessors possess?



# Prototypical possessors

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

Possessor  
prototypicality

Inanimate possessors

- (Inalienable) possessors of body parts and kinship relations are prototypically human (and always animate).
- (Alienable) possessors of cars, baskets and football clubs are also prototypically human.
- What do inanimate possessors possess?
- Daakaka does not productively apply the alienability distinction to inanimate possessors. Is that a language-specific idiosyncrasy?  
To what extent can inanimate possessors even have alienable possessive relations?

# Possessors in Daakaka

The animacy of the possessor is largely predictable from the type of possessive construction in Daakaka.

	human/animal	plants	inanimate
inflected	+	-	-
trans. uninfl.	+	+	+
linker genitive	+	-	-
transitivized	+	+	+

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

Possessor  
prototypicality

Inanimate possessors

# Possessor prototypicality

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

Possessor  
prototypicality

Inanimate possessors

Lexical

Productive

alienable

linker  
genitives

inalienable

transitive  
nouns

transitized  
NPs

# Possessors of transitivized noun phrases I

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

Possessor  
prototypicality

Inanimate possessors

- Only about 17% of all transitivized noun phrases have a human possessor:

- (16) a. *bura=ne*      *vyanten*  
          blood=TRANS person  
          ‘human blood’
- b. *temyar=ane*    *s-ok*      *bivian*  
          demon=TRANS CL3-1S.POSS brother  
          ‘my brother’s soul’
- c. *toto=ne*      *nyosi*  
          last.born=TRANS 3PC  
          ‘the last born (of them)’

# Possessors of transitivized noun phrases II

- About the same proportion have a non-human animate possessor (mostly plants):

- (17) a. *umisyoo=ane yo-ó*  
string=TRANS leaf-coconut  
'string made from a coconut leaf'
- b. *atyo=ane barar*  
rope=TRANS pig  
'a rope for binding pigs'

- Other possessors refer to inanimate objects,...

- (18) *tulup=ane em*  
ridge=TRANS house  
'the ridge of the/a house'

# Possessors of transitivized noun phrases III

- ...places, ...

(19) *vyanten swa=ne vilye Sesivi*  
person one=TRANS place Sesivi  
'a person from Sesivi'

- ...and abstract concepts or events

(20) *seli=ane byakvi*  
way=TRANS circumcision  
'the tradition of the circumcision'

(21) *em=ane tem~temyap=an*  
house=TRANS REDUP~pray=NM  
'a house of prayer'

# Theoretical under-specificity with inanimate possessors

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

Possessor  
prototypicality

Inanimate possessors

The fact that Daakaka does not apply the alienability distinction to inanimate possessors means the data is compatible with a variety of scenarios, e. g.:

- 1 relations to inanimate possessors are never temporary

# Theoretical under-specificity with inanimate possessors

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

Possessor  
prototypicality

Inanimate possessors

The fact that Daakaka does not apply the alienability distinction to inanimate possessors means the data is compatible with a variety of scenarios, e. g.:

- 1 relations to inanimate possessors are never temporary
- 2 relations to inanimate possessors are not always permanent, but their permanence is not informative



# Theoretical under-specificity with inanimate possessors

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

Possessor  
prototypicality

Inanimate possessors

The fact that Daakaka does not apply the alienability distinction to inanimate possessors means the data is compatible with a variety of scenarios, e. g.:

- 1 relations to inanimate possessors are never temporary
- 2 relations to inanimate possessors are not always permanent, but their permanence is not informative
- 3 linker genitives are restricted to animate possessor because their semantics presuppose that their possessor argument be agentive ( $\lambda x \lambda y. \text{owns}(y)(x)$ )

# General implications

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

Possessor  
prototypicality

Inanimate possessors

The Daakaka data does not absolve us from making a choice about how we deal with non-prototypical possession and inanimate possessors:

- Does the alienability distinction apply to cases with inanimate possessors?

# General implications

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

Possessor  
prototypicality

Inanimate possessors

The Daakaka data does not absolve us from making a choice about how we deal with non-prototypical possession and inanimate possessors:

- Does the alienability distinction apply to cases with inanimate possessors?
- If not, how do they relate to other cases of possession?

# General implications

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

Possessor  
prototypicality

Inanimate possessors

The Daakaka data does not absolve us from making a choice about how we deal with non-prototypical possession and inanimate possessors:

- Does the alienability distinction apply to cases with inanimate possessors?
- If not, how do they relate to other cases of possession?
- If yes, which cases should be classified as alienable, which definition of the distinction can we apply to these cases?

Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

Introduction

Daakaka

Defining  
(in)alienability

Temporal  
relativity

Possessor  
animacy

Possessor  
prototypicality

Inanimate possessors

Thank you!

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Lexical  
relationality  
and the  
alienability  
distinction

Kilu von Prince

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