

# Possessive Constructions in Lamaholot

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It is commonly believed that in languages of Eastern Indonesia, the possessor precedes the possessee. Thus, Himmelmann (2005: 175) divides non-Oceanic Austronesian languages into *symmetrical voice languages* (western) and *preposed possessor languages* (eastern). But this is not always the case and even within a single language (e.g., Fehan Tetun), the order may be variable (Klamer (2002: 372)). Lamaholot is such a language, where ‘teacher’s house’ is either *guru lango-nvn* ‘teacher house-3sg’ or *lango guru na’en* ‘house teacher his’. This paper presents intricate descriptions of the possessive construction in Lamaholot.

Possessors are marked either by a genitive pronoun or a suffix, and they are in complementary distribution. There are four cases to consider:

possessor	full NP possessor absent	full NP possessor present
genitive pronoun	Type A	Type C
suffix	Type B	Type D

## 1. Type A: possessor is genitive pronoun, the full NP possessor is absent.

In this type, the possessed is followed by a genitive pronoun:

- (1)      lango go’en          ‘my house’  
          oto mo’en          ‘your car’  
          mata go’en         ‘my eye’

## 2. Type B: possessor is suffix, the full NP possessor is absent.

In this type, a possessive suffix is attached to the possessed:

- (2)      lango-ke                ‘your (pl) house’  
          bapa’-kvn         ‘my father’  
          bapa’-ko         ‘your (sg) father’  
          bapa’-nvn        ‘his/her father’  
          mata-kvn         ‘my eye’  
          mata-ko         ‘your eye’

## 3. Type C: possessor is genitive pronoun, the full NP possessor is present.

- (6)      lango guru na’en    ‘the teacher’s house’  
          house teacher his  
(7)      \*lango na’en guru  
          lango guru

When the possessed noun is understood, the noun can be dropped and *guru na’en* itself can mean ‘the teachers’ (something).’

If the possessor is plural, *ra’en* is used:

- (8) lango guru ra'en 'the teachers' (pl) house(s)/faculty resident'  
house teacher their

**4. Type D: possessor is suffix, the full NP possessor is present.**

- (13) guru oto-nvn 'teacher's (sg) car'  
teacher car-3sg  
(14) guru oto-ka 'teachers' (pl) car'  
teacher car-3pl

The verbal suffix *-na* is strictly prohibited in possessive construction: \**guru oto-na* 'teacher car-3sg' is ungrammatical. The same distinction can be made by the genitive pronoun in Type C possessive construction:

- (15) oto guru na'en 'teacher's (sg) car '  
(16) oto guru ra'en 'teachers' (pl) car'

The choice of Type C and Type D seems to be a matter of focus. That is, of the two orders of possessor-possessed and possessed-possessor, whichever comes first gets focus.

- (23) go tvngv Bala lango-nvn hala'. go tvngv Lado lango-nvn.  
I see B. house-3sg not I see L. house-3sg  
'I didn't see Bala's house. I saw *Lado's* house.'  
(24) go tvngv Bala lango-nvn hala'. go niko tvngv oto (?Bala) na'en  
I see B. house-3sg not I only see car B his  
'I didn't see Bala's house. I only saw Bala's *car*.'

In the introducing part in both examples, the order is *Bala lango-nvn*. This might indicate that the possessor-possessed order (Type D) is an unmarked order.

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