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## An Account of Possession in Larevet

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### Abstract

This paper presents a first analysis of the Larevet language of central Malakula, Vanuatu, focusing on its possessive system. I locate the analysis within the literature on possession in the Oceanic language family broadly, seeking to understand how the synchronic system relates to both typological understandings within the family, and the possessive system reconstructed for Proto Oceanic. Drawing on a corpus of communicative and elicited language as evidence, I demonstrate that Larevet displays many features of a canonical Oceanic language, and that where changes have occurred, these align well with observations of possession in related languages of Malakula.

**Keywords:** Malakula, Larevet, Possession, Oceanic, Alienability

### 1. Introduction

The Larevet language (also referred to as Laravat, Larëvat and Larevat) is spoken in a village of the same name, on the northwestern coast of Malakula Island in Vanuatu. Unpublished data from the 2009 census puts the population of Larevet at 244.<sup>1</sup> The village is gradually transitioning to Bislama as the dominant language of communication. The community is involved in the early phases of a long-term language documentation project, and I have undertaken brief periods of field work with Larevet speakers from 2013 onwards.

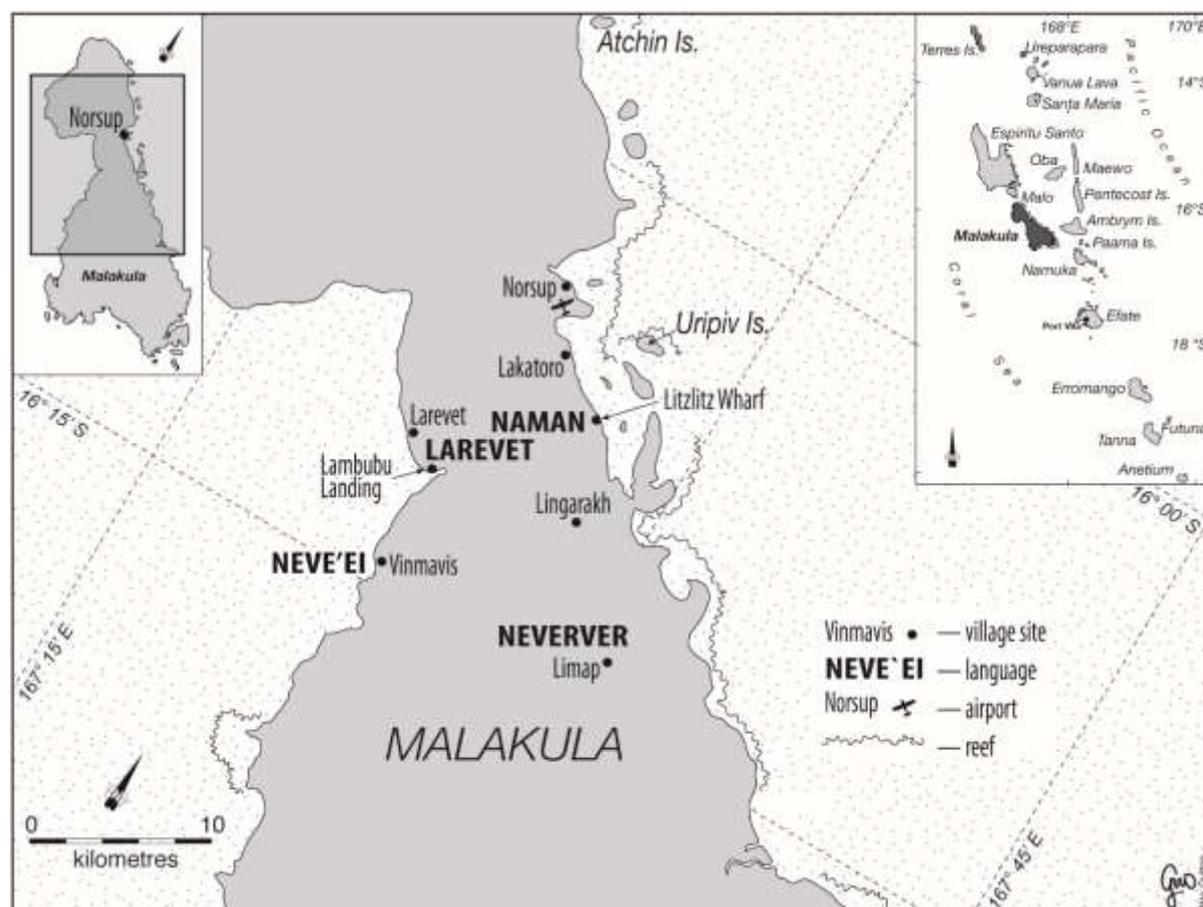
Historical linguist John Lynch has recently proposed that Larevet forms a subgroup with neighbour Neve'ei, spoken predominantly in Vinmavis village to the south, as well as the moribund Naman language spoken now in Litzlitz, and the Neverver language spoken in Lingarakh and Limap villages on the eastern coast of Malakula (Lynch 2016: 96). The four languages are classified as Central Western languages in the Western Malakula linkage. Their modern geographic locations are shown on Map 1. The languages of Malakula are thought to belong to the Central Vanuatu linkage of the Southern Oceanic branch of the Oceanic language family (Ross, Pawley & Osmond 2011: 8, 466).

Larevet has received little scholarly attention, with a small quantity of cultural vocabulary included in A. Bernard Deacon's (1934) anthropological study of Malakula. Some vocabulary also appears in Tryon's comparative work under the name Larevat (see e.g. Tryon 1976). Lynch and Crowley (2001: 83) classify the language as being "poorly known". In 2001, Crowley recorded a small amount of Larevet data with Maika Daniels, now deceased, which resulted in a word list and some provisional grammatical analysis. When my own project work began in 2013, villagers were unaware of Crowley's work with Daniels, and were delighted to view the original data, and to engage me as their community linguist. The project to date has involved annual albeit brief visits to the village, and more extended work periods with speakers in Port Vila. I have a growing corpus of over 1500 lexical items, and recorded

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics courtesy of the Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2015.

material comprising 15 texts on assorted topics and in assorted genres (Larevet Corpus). This paper represents the first published analysis of Larevet data, although mention is made in Barbour (2015a) of its standard negation construction.



Map 1. Map of Central Malakula, showing modern locations of Central Western languages.

In Section 2 of the paper, I present brief comments on the language, including observations on its phonological system, and a summary of the major word order and alignment characteristics observed in the language. In Section 3, an overview of the typological literature on possession in Oceanic is offered, focussing on parameters which are relevant to the descriptive analysis of Larevet. Section 4 presents the analysis of possession in Larevet. The paper concludes in Section 5 by placing Larevet's possessive system under a diachronic lens, and by observing the ways in which Larevet has innovated away from the system that has been reconstructed for Proto Oceanic.

## 2. An overview of Larevet

The phonological inventory of Larevet is analysed as comprising 19 consonant phonemes. Among these, there is a contrasting series of plain and prenasalised plosives at the bilabial, alveolar and velar places of articulation, with /p, t, k/ and /<sup>m</sup>b, <sup>n</sup>d, <sup>ŋ</sup>g/. The prenasalised plosives are represented orthographically as *b*, *d*, and *g*. The plain bilabial plosive /p/ is so far only attested in borrowed lexemes, while /k/ is largely restricted to grammatical particles. Prenasalisation is also present in the affricate /<sup>n</sup>dʒ/ which contrasts with /tʃ/, and the trill /<sup>n</sup>d<sup>r</sup>/

which contrasts with /r/. These phonemes are represented orthographically as *j*, *ch*, *dr* and *r*. Nasals /m, n, ŋ/ and fricatives /β, s, ɣ/ also occur at the bilabial, alveolar and velar places of articulation. The velar nasal is represented as *ng*, while the bilabial and velar fricatives are represented as *v* and *kh*. Rounding out the phoneme inventory are the contrastive approximants /l, j, w/. The phonemes /j/ (represented as *y*) and /w/ are restricted to the onsets of syllables.

The vowel inventory comprises six contrasting segments /i, e, a, ə, o, u/, with the phonemic schwa being represented orthographically as *ë*. In bound grammatical particles, the phoneme /e/ appears to alternate with [ə] (see examples (2) and (4)). Elsewhere, the contrast is more stable, with /nin/ ‘palm tree’, /nen/ ‘of’, and /nən/ ‘1. coconut, 2. run’. The inventories of consonants and vowels are presented in table format in Appendix I.

Larevet displays consistent Subject-Verb (SV) order in intransitive clauses, where the subject position can be filled by a pronominal (1) or nominal expression (2).

- (1) *Gën no-vuvar.*  
 1SG 1SG.R-be grey-haired  
 ‘I am grey-haired.’ (lvte01.027)
- (2) *Noron-khe rar re-merong.*  
 leaf-tree DEM.PL 3NSG.R-be dry  
 ‘The leaves are dry.’ (lvte01.015)

Verbs are inflected with a prefix for the person and number of the subject, and for grammatical mood. Examples presented in this paper all show the unmarked realis mood, which expresses lived realities including past and present time. The presence of subject marking on the verb means that many clauses in naturally occurring speech have an empty subject noun phrase position as in (3).

- (3) *Na-ven.*  
 1SG.R-go  
 ‘I went.’ (lvtt14.06.004)

Obliques follow the inflected verb, as illustrated in (4).

- (4) *Nevën ru rë-savsav i nawe.*  
 woman two 3NSG.R-bathe LOC river  
 ‘The two women are bathing in the river.’ (lvte01.019)

Transitive verbs display Subject-Verb-Object (AVO) order. While the verbs are inflected for the person and number of the subject, information about the object is not coded on the verb.

- (5) *Dete mokhman ar Ø-khodr detevën ar.*  
 child male DEM 3SG.R-chase adolescent.female DEM  
 ‘The boy is chasing the girl.’ (lvte02.001)

Like the S-function in example (3), example (6) demonstrates the expression of the participant with the A-function as a subject marker on the verb.

- (6) *Ne-belkhan nēkhab s-og.*  
 1SG.R-set alight fire PSM-1SG.POSS  
 ‘I lit my fire.’ (lvtt14-01.035)

The language displays evidence of Nominative-Accusative alignment in word order. Clausal participants expressing S/A functions are positioned before the verb, and participants expressing O functions are positioned after the verb. Nominative-Accusative alignment is also seen in verbal morphology, with S/A functions being coded on the verb through person/number agreement morphology, while O functions receive no such agreement marking, and simply follow the verb in nominal or pronominal form. Examples (2) and (4) through (6) display the basic Head-Modifier patterning of the language with regards to nominal morphology, where demonstratives, number morphemes, lexical modifiers, and possessors all follow their nominal heads.

### 3. Possession in the Oceanic languages

The expression of possession is described as “one of the more complex aspects of the grammar of Oceanic languages” (Lynch, Ross & Crowley, 2002: 40), and typological generalisations are well established in the literature. In particular, alienability has been identified as a semantic parameter that produces important structural consequences (see e.g. Pawley 1973: 154-166, Lynch, Ross & Crowley 2002: 40, Ross 2004: 511).

The parameter of alienability concerns the relationship between a possessed entity and its possessor. The parameter can be viewed in binary terms, where inalienable possessive relationships are understood to be characterised by necessary association, and alienable possessive relationships are characterised by contingent association (Lyons 1968: 301). Chappell and McGregor (1996), in their work on alienability, offer a summary of the two semantic types:

Whereas inalienability denotes an indissoluble connection between two entities – a permanent and inherent association between the possessor and the possessed – the complementary notion of alienability refers to a variety of rather freely made associations between two referents, that is, relationships of a less permanent and inherent type. (Chappell & McGregor 1996: 4)

The ‘necessary’ or ‘indissoluble’ inalienable relationship may derive from a physical connection, as in the parts of a larger whole. Such connections are seen in human body parts, in the parts of plants and animals, in the parts of physical constructions, and in the spatial components of entities. By extension, the products of an entity can be conceptualised as parts of

their larger whole. Inalienable relationships between possessor and possessed also derive from kinship.<sup>2</sup>

In canonical Oceanic languages, inalienable possessive relationships are encoded in a different possessive construction from alienable possessive relationships (Lynch, Ross & Crowley 2002: 41). Specifically, a ‘direct’ construction is employed for inalienable possession, where the possessed element is adjacent to its possessor, and where pronominal possessors are generally suffixed onto the nominal which expresses the possessed entity (Pawley 1973: 154-158, Lichtenberk 1985: 95).

Canonically, “all other nouns” occur in alienable possessive relationships (Lynch, Ross & Crowley 2002: 41, Ross 2004: 511), and these relationships are expressed with an ‘indirect’ construction. In addition to the expression of the possessed entity and the possessor, indirect possessive constructions involve a classifier or possessive marker<sup>3</sup> which it carries a possessor suffix (Lichtenberk 1985: 96). In many Oceanic languages, possessive markers are used to “specify more closely the nature of the PM-PR [possessum-possessor] relation” (Lichtenberk 2009: 283), identifying possessed entities as food items, drinks, or more general possessions. Some Oceanic languages have only a single possessive marker, while others have extended paradigms of possessive markers (Lichtenberk 1985: 105-108). A summary of the basic formal and functional contrasts made in canonical Oceanic possessive systems is presented in Table 1.<sup>4</sup>

Possessive Construction	Possessive Relationship
Direct possession	Inalienable
Indirect possession	Alienable
	Food
	Drink
	General

**Table 1. Canonical Possessive Systems in the Oceanic Languages**

While there is a clear structural contrast between direct and indirect possession, possessed nominals are not necessarily restricted to one possessive construction. They may enter into a variety of relationships with their possessors. This variation has been described as ‘overlap’ (Lynch 1973: 76-89, Lichtenberk 1985: 108) or ‘fluidity’ (Lichtenberk 2009: 263, Franjeh 2016: 88-89). Evidence for fluidity may be found in indirect possession, where a possessed entity can occur with as many different classifiers as are semantically appropriate. An entity may, for example, be conceptualised as a general possession on one occasion and occur with a general possessive marker. On another occasion the same entity may be conceptualised as

<sup>2</sup> Categories of inalienability are described in various works on the Oceanic languages by Pawley (1973: 154-58); Lichtenberk (1985: 104-104, 2009: 264-68), Lynch, Ross & Crowley (2002: 41), and Lichtenberk, Vaid & Chen 2011: 663).

<sup>3</sup> The term ‘possessive marker’ is used rather than ‘classifier’ in the description of Larevet, which has just one morpheme in this category, described in section 4.2.

<sup>4</sup> Malcolm Ross (2004: 511) identifies the parameters of possessor type (pronoun, common noun phrase, personal noun phrase) and specificity of possessor as being relevant to the description of Oceanic possessive systems; however neither parameter has morphological consequences in Larevet, and thus they are not discussed in this paper in detail.

drink, and occur with the drink possessive marker. Data from the Lolovoli dialect of North-east Ambae, Vanuatu, illustrates this contrast, with *wai* ‘water’ being conceptualised as an entity suitable for drinking in *me-mu wai* (CL.DRINK-2SG.POSS water) ‘your (drinking) water’, and as a general possession in *no-mu wai* (CL.GEN-2SG.POSS water) ‘your (laundry/dish) water’ (data from Hyslop 2001: 181). Fluidity may also be observed when a possessed noun occurs in either a direct or an indirect possessive construction. In Lolovoli, *wai* ‘water’ also occur in a direct construction, *wai-mu* (water-2SG.POSS) ‘your (bathing) water’ (data from Hyslop 2001: 181), which suggests a very personal use of the water, as in ‘yours and nobody else’s’. Both kinds of fluidity allow speakers to represent the relationship that entities have with their possessors in different ways.

A third structural type of possessive construction is relevant to the description of Larevet, although not a feature of canonical Oceanic languages. This involves a preposition, which is distinguished from possessive markers by its lack of a possessor suffix. Where they occur in Oceanic languages, possessive prepositions are positioned consistently between the possessed noun and the nominal expression of the possessor (Lichtenberk 1985: 96). In some Vanuatu languages, where these constructions exist alongside direct and indirect possession, they have been found to express an association between one entity that is loosely conceptualised as a ‘possessor’ and another which is conceptualised as ‘possessed’ (see e.g. Hyslop 2001: 186-196, Barbour 2012, 143-146).

#### 4. Possession in Larevet

The possessive system of Larevet displays many of the features of a canonical Oceanic language. There is a direct construction which expresses inalienable possessive relationships, described in section 4.1. There is also an indirect construction, expressing mostly alienable possessive relationships, described in section 4.2. Prepositional constructions are employed to create a possessive-like association between two entities, exemplified in section 4.3. An innovative first person singular possessor is also attested in the corpus of natural speech, and this is presented in section 4.4.

##### *4.1. Direct Possession for Inalienable Relationships*

Direct possessive constructions are employed in Larevet for the expression of inalienable possessive relationships. Such constructions reflect canonical Oceanic direct possession, in that there is a series of possessor suffixes that attach to the possessed noun. The possessor suffixes, listed in (7), are found productively for singular possessors, and distinguish between first, second and third person. A third person plural form is also attested in the data, although it is not found productively in the Larevet corpus, and the absence of almost all non-singular suffixes in Larevet is non-canonical.

- (7) Possessor suffixes
- |          |                         |
|----------|-------------------------|
| 1SG.POSS | -og [-o <sup>h</sup> g] |
| 2SG.POSS | -am                     |
| 3SG.POSS | -en                     |
| 3PL.POSS | (-)(e)r                 |

The possessor suffixes are illustrated in a direct construction with the body part *met* ‘eye’ in (8), which it is obligatorily possessed by one of the three productive possessor suffixes.

- (8) Singular Direct Possession
- |               |              |               |
|---------------|--------------|---------------|
| <i>met-og</i> | eye-1SG.POSS | ‘my eye’      |
| <i>met-am</i> | eye-2SG.POSS | ‘your eye’    |
| <i>met-en</i> | eye-3SG.POSS | ‘his/her eye’ |

Data set (8) displays forms of the singular possessor suffixes that are listed in (7). While noun stems such as *met* ‘eye’ take the suffixes *-og*, *-am*, and *-en*, other nouns pattern in a different way. Data set (9) displays the body part meaning ‘innards’, with two possible analyses of the boundary between the noun and its possessor suffix.

- (9) Suffix Vowel      Noun Vowel
- |               |               |                   |                   |
|---------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <i>nel-ög</i> | <i>nelë-g</i> | innards -1SG.POSS | ‘my innards’      |
| <i>nel-ëm</i> | <i>nelë-m</i> | innards -2SG.POSS | ‘your innards’    |
| <i>nel-ën</i> | <i>nelë-n</i> | innards -3SG.POSS | ‘his/her innards’ |

Under the Suffix Vowel analysis, the suffixes take the form *-ög*, *-ëm*, and *ën*. Such variation from the series *-og*, *-am*, and *-en* is difficult to account for. The Noun Vowel analysis treats the noun roots as being vowel-final, and the possessor suffixes as comprising only a consonant. Multiple examples of the singular possessor suffix patterns occur in the data produced by Larevet speakers both through elicitation, as well as in communicative language texts. Possessed nouns presented in (10) consistently take *-og*, *-am*, and *-en* possessor suffixes.

- (10)
- |               |                  |
|---------------|------------------|
| <i>bat-og</i> | ‘my head’        |
| <i>bat-am</i> | ‘your head’      |
| <i>bat-en</i> | ‘his/her head’   |
| <i>jël-og</i> | ‘my neck’        |
| <i>jël-am</i> | ‘your neck’      |
| <i>jël-en</i> | ‘his/her neck’   |
| <i>jës-og</i> | ‘my breast’      |
| <i>jës-am</i> | ‘your breast’    |
| <i>jës-en</i> | ‘his/her breast’ |
| <i>mëm-og</i> | ‘my tongue’      |
| <i>mëm-am</i> | ‘your tongue’    |
| <i>mëm-en</i> | ‘his/her tongue’ |

<i>nakhs-og</i>	‘my jaw’
<i>nakhs-am</i>	‘your jaw’
<i>nakhs-en</i>	‘his/her jaw’
<i>něsn-og</i>	‘my intestines’
<i>něsn-am</i>	‘your intestines’
<i>něsn-en</i>	‘his/her intestines’

Nouns presented in (11) have a stable vowel best treated as belonging to the stem, followed by the possessor suffix consonants *-g*, *-m*, and *-n*.

(11)	<i>dra-g</i>	‘my blood’
	<i>dra-m</i>	‘your blood’
	<i>dra-n</i>	‘his/her blood’
	<i>dalē-g</i>	‘my leg’
	<i>dalē-m</i>	‘your leg’
	<i>dalē-n</i>	‘his/her leg’
	<i>lěvė-g</i>	‘my tooth’
	<i>lěvė-m</i>	‘your tooth’
	<i>lěvė-n</i>	‘his/her tooth’
	<i>bongo-g</i>	‘my mouth’
	<i>bongo-m</i>	‘your mouth’
	<i>bongo-n</i>	‘his/her mouth’
	<i>dabkha-g</i>	‘my stomach’
	<i>dabkha-m</i>	‘your stomach’
	<i>dabkha-n</i>	‘his/her stomach’
	<i>ji-g</i>	‘my bone’
	<i>ji-m</i>	‘your bone’
	<i>ji-n</i>	‘his/her bone’

The data in (10) and (11) is consistent with a morphophonemic rule which deletes the suffix vowel in the environment of a preceding noun stem vowel.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Other linguists working with Malakula language data have noted similar types of vowel variation, but approach the variation in different ways. Crowley (2006a: 71-71) observes that in Naman, vowels vary even with the same lexeme. For example, a given possessum may occur with a final schwa irrespective of the possessor suffix, or it may select *o* for 1SG, *a* for 2SG, and *e* for 3SG. This leads Crowley to propose that all vowels belong to the stem, and optionally shift to /*o*, *a*, *e*/ when the possessor suffixes (*-g*, *-m*, and *-n*) are attached. Pearce (2015: 122-126) records seven paradigms of stem-final vowels in Unua for directly possessed nouns. Three display an invariant vowel, consistent with an analysis of stem-final vowels followed by a possessor suffix comprising only a consonant. One displays the /*o*, *a*, *e*/ alternation consistent with possessor suffix vowels rather

-VC<sub>possessor suffix</sub> : C / ...V<sub>possessed</sub>- \_\_\_\_

The refined paradigm of possessor suffixes is presented in (12).

- (12) Possessor suffixes
- |          |                                    |
|----------|------------------------------------|
| 1SG.POSS | -( <i>o</i> )g [-o <sup>h</sup> g] |
| 2SG.POSS | -( <i>a</i> )m                     |
| 3SG.POSS | -( <i>e</i> )n                     |

An irregular form of the first person singular suffix occurs with a small number of nouns. The prenasalised plosive -g [ᵑg] is articulated as a plain voiceless plosive [k] at the same place of articulation. Other possessor suffixes follow the regular pattern for vowel-final stems. In each instance where [k] occurs, the consonant preceding the suffix consonant is a prenasalised plosive. This may then be a form of dissimilation, with the noun stems *nebë* [ne<sup>m</sup>bə] ‘body’, *nabë* [nambə] ‘buttocks’, and *dë* [ᵑdə] ‘baby’ affecting the form of the first person singular possessor suffix. The nouns *ji* [ᵑdʒi] and *dra* [ᵑdra], which contain preceding prenasalised consonants with continuant elements [ʒ] and [r], do not trigger this dissimilation pattern.

- (13)
- |               |                    |
|---------------|--------------------|
| <i>nebë-k</i> | ‘my body’          |
| <i>nebë-m</i> | ‘your body’        |
| <i>nebë-n</i> | ‘his/her body’     |
|               |                    |
| <i>nabë-k</i> | ‘my buttocks’      |
| <i>nabë-m</i> | ‘your buttocks’    |
| <i>nabë-n</i> | ‘his/her buttocks’ |
|               |                    |
| <i>dë-k</i>   | ‘my baby’          |
| <i>dë-m</i>   | ‘your baby’        |
| <i>dë-n</i>   | ‘his/her baby’     |

The third person plural possessor suffix occurs very rarely in the corpus. It is attested with the personal noun *marvë* ‘coconut leaf mat, bedding’ as in *marvë-g* ‘my bedding’, *marvë-m* ‘your bedding’, and *marvë-r* ‘their bedding’. It is also attested with *bat* ‘head’, as in *bat-er* ‘their heads’.

Because productive possessor suffixes are limited to singular number, non-singular possessors are more typically expressed in a different construction, with a possessor pronoun rather than a suffix. The pronoun forms are identical to the independent non-singular pronouns in Larevet, which function as clausal subjects and objects. Table 2 presents the inde-

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than stem-final vowels. The remaining three paradigms are suggestive of historic vowel harmony patterns, forming sets of high or mid vowels.

pendent pronouns which serve as possessors, alongside possessor suffixes where these are available.

	SG		DU	PC	PL	
<b>1</b>			INCL	<i>garu</i>	<i>gartël</i>	<i>ga(d)r</i>
	<i>gën</i>	<i>-(o)g</i>	EXCL	<i>gomeru</i>	<i>gomomtël</i>	<i>gomom</i>
<b>2</b>	<i>gum</i>	<i>-(a)m</i>		<i>gameru</i>	<i>gamtël</i>	<i>gam</i>
<b>3</b>	<i>ai</i>	<i>-(e)n</i>		<i>aru</i>	<i>artël</i>	<i>ar(jel)</i> <i>-(e)r</i>

**Table 2. Independent pronouns and possessor suffixes in Larevet**<sup>6</sup>

When a possessor is expressed as a plural pronoun, the possessed noun carries *-(e)n* as a suffix, and the plural pronoun follows. The suffix *-(e)n* shares its form with the third person singular possessor suffix; however, it does not always reference third person, or singular number. In this usage, it is best understood as a construct suffix (see e.g. Lichtenberk 2009: 257, Lynch, Ross & Crowley 2002: 42).

(14) Direct/Construct Pronominal Possession

<i>bat-en gar</i>	‘our (incl.) heads’
<i>bat-en gameru</i>	‘your (two) heads’
<i>bat-en aru</i>	‘their (two) heads’

When the possessor is expressed in a nominal rather than pronominal form, the construct suffix *-(e)n* indexes the possessor directly on the possessed noun, and the nominal possessor follows. Third person singular examples are presented in (15).

(15) Direct/Construct Nominal Possession

<i>met-en nevën</i>	eye-3SG.POSS woman	‘the woman’s eye’
<i>bëchë-n dete</i>	placenta-3SG.POSS baby	‘the baby’s placenta’
<i>nëvëngë-n nëvsakh</i>	flower-3SG.POSS banana	‘flower of banana’
<i>nëmo-n nët</i>	feather-3SG.POSS chicken	‘feather of chicken’
<i>luw-en nëmël</i>	thorn-3SG.POSS orange	‘thorn of orange’
<i>nelë-n lar</i>	inside-3SG.POSS garden	‘inside of the garden’
<i>nebë-n mkhët</i>	body-3SG.POSS person	‘the body of a person’

The direct possessive constructions in Larevet display relationships between the possessor and the possessed which can be described as canonical inalienable relationships. In addition to body parts of humans, illustrated in examples (16) and (17), and one’s own baby (particularly during pregnancy and birth), several other categories of inalienable possession are represented in the Larevet data.

<sup>6</sup> A number of the non-singular independent pronouns, particularly paucals, are attributed to unpublished data collected by Terry Crowley. This material is included with permission of Crowley’s colleague Ray Harlow, who took responsibility for Crowley’s unpublished materials on his death in 2005, and passed them on to me on his retirement in 2010.

- (16) Internal organs, body products and markings of humans
- |                      |                                 |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>movëvë-g</i>      | ‘my bladder’                    |
| <i>mobë-m</i>        | ‘your heart’                    |
| <i>drëvë-m</i>       | ‘your flowing nasal mucus/snot’ |
| <i>nëmomo-n</i>      | ‘sweat’                         |
| <i>mi-en</i>         | ‘urine’                         |
| <i>jër-en</i>        | ‘semen’                         |
| <i>melkhamsë-m</i>   | ‘your saliva’                   |
| <i>menkha-n</i>      | ‘sore’                          |
| <i>malalë-n nlëv</i> | ‘cavity (in tooth)’             |
| <i>melëgë-g</i>      | ‘my shadow’                     |
| <i>nemimalë-g</i>    | ‘my footprints’                 |

A sub-set of body parts are formed with embedded possessive structures. The first element takes the third-person singular suffix, while the second element carries the appropriate personal possessor suffix.

- (17) Body products, organs, and markings of humans - Embedded possessives
- |                    |                 |  |
|--------------------|-----------------|--|
| <i>nëkhabu-en</i>  | <i>gëjë-n</i>   | ‘solidified nasal mucus of his/her nose’     |
| <i>bëlkhasë-n</i>  | <i>bat-og</i>   | ‘the shell of my head (my skull)’            |
| <i>bo-n</i>        | <i>dalë-m</i>   | ‘the joint of your leg (your knee)’          |
| <i>bo-n</i>        | <i>varë-g</i>   | ‘the joint of my arm (my elbow)’             |
| <i>jabr-en</i>     | <i>bat-am</i>   | ‘the hair of your head (your hair)’          |
| <i>jëbë-n</i>      | <i>varë-n</i>   | ‘the digit of his/her hand (his/her finger)’ |
| <i>malvaga-n</i>   | <i>dalë-n</i>   | ‘the nail of his/her leg (his/her toenail)’  |
| <i>nëvërkha-n</i>  | <i>bong-og</i>  | ‘the skin of my mouth (my lips)’             |
| <i>nkhavjëlë-n</i> | <i>nakhs-en</i> | ‘the grass/hair of his jaw (his beard)’      |
| <i>nëkhabl-en</i>  | <i>menkha-n</i> | ‘scar (the track/mark of a sore)’            |
| <i>nëkhabuw-en</i> | <i>gënjë-n</i>  | ‘dry mucus/snot of his nose’                 |

A small set of personal possessions are expressed directly. Examples are shown in (18).

- (18) Personal possessions of humans
- |                       |                      |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| <i>jëgë-n gomom</i>   | ‘our things/clothes’ |
| <i>nenkha-n gomom</i> | ‘our food’           |
| <i>nedr-en gomom</i>  | ‘our meal’           |
| <i>marvë-g</i>        | ‘my bedding’         |
| <i>marvë-m</i>        | ‘your bedding’       |

Kinship relations coded in the direct possessive construction involve the same-generation terms ‘brother’ and ‘sister’. Also expressed directly is the term for ‘maternal uncle’, ‘mother’ and ‘baby’ (see (13)). Maternal uncles have been documented as having a special role in the lives of their nieces and nephews in other Malakula languages (see e.g. Barbour 2015b), and the direct coding in Larevet may reflect this important social relationship.

- (19) Kin relations
- |                   |                                 |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>tukha-g</i>    | ‘my older same-sex sibling’     |
| <i>nëkharw-og</i> | ‘my younger sister (of woman)’  |
| <i>vëvënë-g</i>   | ‘my sister (of a man)’          |
| <i>marsel-og</i>  | ‘my younger brother (of a man)’ |
| <i>bën-og</i>     | ‘my maternal uncle’             |
| <i>un-en</i>      | ‘his mother’                    |

Body parts and products of fauna (20) and flora (21) are expressed in the direct construction.

- (20) Parts and products of fauna
- |                            |                      |
|----------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>nëkhandrë-n letlet</i>  | ‘eggs of ants’       |
| <i>nëkhavjëlë-n barbar</i> | ‘hair/coat of pig’   |
| <i>nëmo-n nët</i>          | ‘feather of chicken’ |
| <i>bërë-n nët</i>          | ‘comb of rooster’    |
| <i>nëkhalkhalë-n nët</i>   | ‘wattles of chicken’ |
| <i>belë-n nët</i>          | ‘spur of chicken’    |
- (21) Parts and products of flora
- |                          |                              |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>nëvërkha-n nën</i>    | ‘husk of coconut’            |
| <i>belkhasë-n nën</i>    | ‘shell of coconut’           |
| <i>naro-n nën</i>        | ‘leaf of coconut’            |
| <i>narogo-n nën</i>      | ‘bundle of coconuts’         |
| <i>jo-n nën</i>          | ‘juice of coconut’           |
| <i>bënë-n nën</i>        | ‘coconut oil’                |
| <i>nëvëngë-n nëvsakh</i> | ‘flower of banana’           |
| <i>nelanga-n nëvsakh</i> | ‘petal of banana flower’     |
| <i>negolë-n nëvsakh</i>  | ‘bunch of bananas’           |
| <i>nasë-n nëvsakh</i>    | ‘tier of bananas on a stalk’ |
| <i>lu-en nëmël</i>       | ‘thorn of orange’            |
| <i>navkha-n drav</i>     | ‘fruit/seeds of canoe tree’  |
| <i>naro-n balgo</i>      | ‘cottonwood/burao leaves’    |
| <i>devkhë-n dram</i>     | ‘yam hole’                   |
| <i>devë-n dram</i>       | ‘yam shoot’                  |
| <i>nakhëlë-n biag</i>    | ‘taro tuber’                 |

Parts of traditional constructions (22), and some spatial relationships are also expressed directly (23).

- (22) Parts of traditional constructions
- |                   |                       |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>belë-n nem</i> | ‘roof ridge of house’ |
| <i>nabë-n nem</i> | ‘back wall of house’  |

- (23) Spatial relations (internal)
- |                       |                               |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>jěj-en lar</i>     | ‘side of garden’              |
| <i>jěj-en des</i>     | ‘side of the sea’             |
| <i>nelë-n lar</i>     | ‘inside of the garden’        |
| <i>nelë-n chëbakh</i> | ‘inside the cooking pit’      |
| <i>nelë-n nem</i>     | ‘inside the house’            |
| <i>nelë-n leb</i>     | ‘inside the bush’             |
| <i>nelë-n nkhach</i>  | ‘inside the basket’           |
| <i>nelë-n bëlkhas</i> | ‘inside the dish’             |
| <i>nelë-n dele</i>    | ‘inside the truck’            |
| <i>nelë-n gënjën</i>  | ‘inside of nose (nostril)’    |
| <i>met-en nlog</i>    | ‘middle of the laplap’        |
| <i>met-en jogol</i>   | ‘middle of hibiscus (stamen)’ |

#### 4.2. Indirect Possession for Alienable relationships

An indirect construction with a suffix-taking possessive marker is attested in the Larevet Corpus. There is only a single possessive marker in the language, which takes the form *s*, and is affixed with a possessor suffix. Table 3 shows attested possessive marker-suffix combinations for Larevet, illustrating the same possessor suffixes as were found in the direct possessive construction. There are no instances of the third person plural suffix *-r* in the indirect possessor series.

Possessive Marker-Possessor Suffix	
1SG	<i>s-og</i> [s-o <sup>h</sup> g]
2SG	<i>s-am</i>
3SG	<i>s-en</i>

**Table 3. Paradigm of Indirect Possessors**

Examples in (24) show the possessed noun *nevën* ‘wife’ followed by the marker *s*, affixed with *-og*, *-am*, and *-en*.

- (24)
- |                   |                   |             |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| <i>nevën s-og</i> | wife PSM-1SG.POSS | ‘my wife’   |
| <i>nevën s-am</i> | wife PSM-2SG.POSS | ‘your wife’ |
| <i>nevën s-en</i> | wife PSM-3SG.POSS | ‘his wife’  |

While many Oceanic languages display a series of semantically based classifiers that specify the nature of the relationship between possessed entity and possessor, evidence of these classifiers has not been encountered in the Larevet corpus. Data in (25) show the single possessive marker being used for possessive relationships that we would expect to trigger distinct classifiers, if such forms existed in the language.

- (25) Food *nlog* *s-og* ‘my laplap’  
 Drink *nawe tētēn* *s-og* ‘my (cup of) tea’  
 General *nem* *s-og* ‘my house’

When a possessor is non-singular, rather than singular, the marker is inflected with the third person singular possessor suffix, and it is followed by an independent plural pronoun. As was seen with plural pronominal possessors in the direct construction, the third person singular possessor suffix is employed as a construct suffix, this time affixed to the possessive marker. The resulting construct form *s-en* signals the possessive relationship between posses-sum and possessor but does not impart information about person or number.

- (26) *mama* *s-en gomom ar* mother PSM-CST 1PL.EXCL PL ‘our mothers’  
*nēvenu* *s-en gomeru* village PSM-CST 1DU.EXCL ‘our (2) village’  
*nawe tētēn* *s-en gam* water hot PSM-CST 2PL ‘your tea’  
*nem* *s-en ar* house PSM-CST 3PL ‘their house’

A full paradigm of indirect pronominal possessors is presented in Table 4.

	PSM-SG		PSM-DU	PSM-PC	PSM-PL
<b>1</b>	<i>s-og</i>	INCL	<i>s-en garu</i>	<i>s-en gartēl</i>	<i>s-en ga(d)r</i>
		EXCL	<i>s-en gomeru</i>	<i>s-en gomomtēl</i>	<i>s-en gomom</i>
<b>2</b>	<i>s-am</i>		<i>s-en gameru</i>	<i>s-en gamtēl</i>	<i>s-en gam</i>
<b>3</b>	<i>s-en</i>		<i>s-en aru</i>	<i>s-en artēl</i>	<i>s-en ar(jel)</i>

**Table 4. Paradigm of indirect pronominal possessor forms in Larevet**<sup>7</sup>

When the possessor is a nominal, the possessed noun is followed by the construct possessive form *s-en* and the nominal possessor, as illustrated in (27).

- (27) *barbar s-en khabat* pig PSM-CST foreigner ‘cow’ (lit. ‘pig of foreigner’)  
*lar s-en vave tuen* garden PSM-CST aunt INDF ‘the garden of one aunt’  
*bēlkhas s-en M.* dish/cup PSM-CST M. ‘the dish/cup of M.’  
*nēngē s-en mar tereb* name PSM-CST man old ‘the name of the old man’  
*dreb s-en mar sokh* ground PSM-CST man that ‘the land of that man’

Indirect structures typically encode alienable relationships between possessor and possessed in canonical Oceanic languages. Larevet behaves predictably in this regard, although there are also some categories of possessive relationships that we might expect to see in direct constructions on the basis of an inalienable relationship. More clearly alienable relationships, involving categories of physical possessions, are presented in (28) to (30).

<sup>7</sup> As with the independent pronouns presented in Table 3, a number of the possessive structures presented in Table 5 are attributed to unpublished data collected by Terry Crowley. See footnote 6.

- (28) Food, places and objects involved in growing and making food
- |                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| <i>nlog s-og</i>          | ‘my laplap’   |
| <i>nëkhab s-og</i>        | ‘my (cooking) fire’                                     |
| <i>chëbakh s-og</i>       | ‘my cooking pit’  |
| <i>naron nën s-og</i>     | ‘my coconut leaf (that I use to start my cooking fire)’ |
| <i>lar s-og</i>           | ‘my garden’   |
| <i>lar s-en vave tuen</i> | ‘the garden of an aunty’                                |
- (29) Traditional physical possessions
- |                              |                     |
|------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>nem s-en ar</i>           | ‘their houses’      |
| <i>nem s-en gomom</i>        | ‘our house’         |
| <i>nem s-og tuen</i>         | ‘a house of mine’   |
| <i>nem s-en gomom ar jel</i> | ‘all of our houses’ |
| <i>nawe s-en gomom</i>       | ‘our water’         |
| <i>jët s-en gomom</i>        | ‘our belongings’    |
| <i>dreb s-og</i>             | ‘my land’           |
| <i>dreb s-en</i>             | ‘his land’          |
- (30) Modern possessions
- |                           |                              |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>barbar s-en khabat</i> | ‘pig of European (i.e. cow)’ |
| <i>nol s-en</i>           | ‘his book’                   |
| <i>skul s-en gomom</i>    | ‘our school’                 |
| <i>bel s-en gom</i>       | ‘our bell’                   |
| <i>wel s-en gomom</i>     | ‘our well’                   |
| <i>ticha s-en gomom</i>   | ‘our teacher’                |

Indirect possessive constructions are also used to express abstract possession, including names and ages of people as in (31).

- (31) Abstract possessions
- |                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| <i>nëngë s-og</i>            | ‘my name’                                    |
| <i>nëngë s-en</i>            | ‘his name’                                   |
| <i>nëngë s-en not nen</i>    | ‘the name of that place’                     |
| <i>jëkho s-og</i>            | ‘my age/years’                               |
| <i>taem s-en gom</i>         | ‘our time’                                   |
| <i>nëbëng tleb s-en Atua</i> | ‘the big/important day of God (i.e. Sunday)’ |

In Larevet, many consanguineal and affinal relationships are expressed in the indirect construction. Indirect constructions in this context could function as a signal of respect, or recognition of social hierarchy. This is supported by the indirect coding of one’s older brother, whereas all other same generation kin terms are coded directly (see (19)). There are pairs of indigenous and borrowed terms for mother and father, where the borrowed terms *tata* ‘father’ and *mama* ‘mother’ apparently derive from Bislama, as does the term *famle* ‘family’.

- (32) Consanguineal kinship relations – older and younger generations
- |                             |                            |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>batu s-og, tata s-og</i> | ‘my father’                |
| <i>tata totokh s-og</i>     | ‘my oldest paternal uncle’ |
| <i>vave s-og</i>            | ‘my paternal aunt’         |
| <i>nunu s-og, mama s-og</i> | ‘my mother’                |
| <i>mama s-en gomom ar</i>   | ‘our mothers’              |
| <i>nunu totokh s-og</i>     | ‘my oldest maternal aunt’  |
| <i>bibi s-og</i>            | ‘my maternal uncle’        |
| <i>famle s-en mokhman</i>   | ‘the man’s family’         |
| <i>mar s-en ar</i>          | ‘her people’               |
| <i>mame s-en gomom</i>      | ‘our older brother’        |
| <i>dete s-am ar</i>         | ‘your children’            |
| <i>dete s-en okh</i>        | ‘her child’                |
- (33) Affinal kinship relations
- |                                  |                                 |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>nevën s-en</i>                | ‘his wife’                      |
| <i>nevën s-en mame s-og tuen</i> | ‘the wife of a brother of mine’ |
| <i>mar tereb s-og</i>            | ‘my husband’                    |
| <i>nelakh s-og</i>               | ‘my husband’ <sup>8</sup>       |

Finally, there are examples of indirect possession where the possessor is the agent of a deverbal noun. This is somewhat unexpected, as agent-action relationships have been observed in direct possessive constructions in other Oceanic languages (Lichtenberk 1985: 104).

- (34) Deverbal nominalisations with agent as possessor
- |                                |                                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>mangarien s-en gom</i>      | ‘our work’                     |
| <i>nevangasien s-og</i>        | ‘my talk’                      |
| <i>nakhanien s-en</i>          | ‘her food’                     |
| <i>nakhanien s-en gom</i>      | ‘our food’                     |
| <i>nëvangasien s-en khabat</i> | ‘Bislama (talk of foreigners)’ |
| <i>nëvangasien s-en gomom</i>  | ‘our language’                 |
| <i>nejëmien s-og</i>           | ‘my thoughts’                  |

#### 4.3. Prepositional Possession for Associative Relationships

In the data for Larevet, prepositional possession explicitly constructs an association between the possessed entity and the possessor with the preposition *nen*. The prepositional possessive construction *lar nen nëvet* ‘garden of/containing stone’ is considered by speakers to underlie the modern place name of the village Larevet. The possessive structure is restricted to nominal possessors, although there are instances where the nominal possessor is not overtly expressed. These occur when the possessor can be understood from context. Prepositional pos-

<sup>8</sup> A. Bernard Deacon (1934: 112) provides the pairs of terms *nelak* ‘brother-in-law, ‘son-in-law’, and *nevilak* ‘sister-in-law’; however, different speakers on different occasions provided the gloss of ‘husband’ for *nelakh* in the Larevet corpus.

session is used to express a number of relationships that can only loosely be considered possessive. In most cases, a non-specific possessor appears to be involved. Examples such as *nkharev nen dram* ‘yam platform’, *bēlkhas nen nēn* ‘dish made of coconut’, and *nēvēl nen demes* ‘December, the month of spirits’ illustrate this point. There are also examples of a specific ‘possessor’, as in *mēlin nen not Larevet* ‘the chief of Larevet village’, where Larevet is a specific, although clearly non-canonical ‘possessor’ of its chief.

- (35) Association by Purpose
- |                             |                                       |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <i>naronkhe nen</i>         | ‘laplap leaves (for making laplap)’   |
| <i>narkhe nen nlog</i>      | ‘laplap leaves for laplap’            |
| <i>nēkhab nen</i>           | ‘firewood (for making laplap)’        |
| <i>not nen metērian</i>     | ‘place for sleeping’                  |
| <i>nkharev nen dram</i>     | ‘yam platform’                        |
| <i>nem nen skul</i>         | ‘school house’                        |
| <i>nakhab nen</i>           | ‘the/its fire (for drying the copra)’ |
| <i>nakhavelēs nen dalēn</i> | ‘paddles for feet (snorkling fins)’   |
- (36) Association by Role
- |                              |                          |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>mēlin nen not</i>         | ‘the chief of the place’ |
| <i>mēlin nen not Larevet</i> | ‘the chief of Larevet’   |
- (37) Association as Part
- |                    |                             |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>metel nen</i>   | ‘the/its door’              |
| <i>nat nen</i>     | ‘the/its thatch’            |
| <i>nkhe nen</i>    | ‘the/its wood (of a house)’ |
| <i>jēg nen ar</i>  | ‘the/its walls’             |
| <i>var nen nem</i> | ‘the outside of the house’  |
- (38) Association as Substance Comprising Entity
- |                           |                               |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>bēlkhas nen nēn</i>    | ‘dish made of coconut’        |
| <i>lar nen nēvet</i>      | ‘garden of/containing stones’ |
| <i>nekhēr nen nēmench</i> | ‘string of/containing fish’   |
- (39) Association as Quality or Characteristic
- |                           |                                   |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>notrodrēs nen ar</i>   | ‘the good ones of (the yams)’     |
| <i>notrosēt nen ar</i>    | ‘the bad ones of (the yams)’      |
| <i>nēvelvēlēs nen des</i> | ‘seaweed (lit. grass of the sea)’ |

In (39), the form *ar* can be analysed as a plural morpheme modifying the head of the possessive construction, in this case *notrodrēs* ‘the good one’. A similar pattern is seen in (37) with *jēg nen ar* ‘its walls’, where *ar* modifies the head *jēg* ‘wall’, when talking about building a (one) house.

Temporal associations are made between periods of time and the activities which habitually take place during those times. These name the Larevet months of the year. In most months, the associated attribute is expressed as a verb inflected with the impersonal subject index. This points to the dual function of *nen*, as genitive preposition and relative subordinator. A similar dual function has been described for *an* in Neverver (Barbour 2012: 132-35) and for *nen* in Neve'ei (Musgrave 2007: 74-76). Naman (Crowley 2006a: 75-79) uses *nen* for the same range of associative functions as Larevet, but has a distinct relativiser.

- (40) Association as activity undertaken within temporal span
- |                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| <i>nëvël nen nlang</i>       | ‘February (month of cyclones)’                   |
| <i>nëvël nen nlang miel</i>  | ‘March (month of cyclones – red sky at night)’   |
| <i>nëvël nen rëvkhas lar</i> | ‘April (month of weeding the garden)’            |
| <i>nëvël nen rëkhëkhël</i>   | ‘May (month of harvesting)’                      |
| <i>nëvël nen rarokh</i>      | ‘June (month of clearing for new gardens)’       |
| <i>nëvël nen rëjemjem</i>    | ‘July (month of climbing trees to cut branches)’ |
| <i>nëvël nen rësësël</i>     | ‘August (month of burning off garden waste)’     |
| <i>nëvël nen ralav</i>       | ‘September (month of planting)’                  |
| <i>nëvël nen ravasvas</i>    | ‘October (month of preparing stakes for shoots)’ |
| <i>nëvël nen rebëv</i>       | ‘November (month of training vines)’             |
| <i>nëvël nen demes</i>       | ‘December (month of spirits)’                    |

#### 4.4. An innovative first person singular structure

An alternative possessive structure can be formed for first person alienable possession, comprising a possessed noun head followed by the form *tenve*. Speakers apparently do not analyse *tenve* further, and it is simply translated as *blong mi* ‘my’ in Bislama. The form only occurs in natural text production. No other possessors have been attested in parallel constructions, and attempts to elicit parallel forms for second and third person singular possessors did not meet with success. The examples below represent almost the full extent of data available in the Larevet corpus.

- (41) Innovative expression of alienable relations with 1sg.poss
- |                        |                     |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>naronkhe tenve</i>  | ‘my laplap leaves’  |
| <i>nën tenve</i>       | ‘my coconut’        |
| <i>nlog tenve</i>      | ‘my laplap’         |
| <i>nevar tenve</i>     | ‘my island cabbage’ |
| <i>jëbakh tenve</i>    | ‘my cooking pit’    |
| <i>dram tenve tuen</i> | ‘a yam of mine’     |
| <i>pinat tenve</i>     | ‘my peanuts’        |
| <i>lar tenve</i>       | ‘my garden’         |
| <i>nakhaniën tenve</i> | ‘my food’           |

There is fluidity between entities expressed with *tenve* possession, and standard indirect possession for alienable relationships. *Lar s-og* ‘my garden’, *nlog s-og* ‘my laplap’, *nevar s-en gomom* ‘our island cabbage’ and *naron-khe s-og* ‘my laplap leaves’ occur in the corpus as the standard expressions of first person singular possessors in an alienable relationship. A cursory observation of the examples in (41) indicates that all involve food, or entities associated with food production and preparation. Larevet does not signal the relationship between an edible entity and its possessor with a classifier, but the evidence in (41) might suggest that this structure is an innovation that allows Larevet speakers to highlight such a relationship. *Tenve* possession would thus emphasise the relationship between a speaker and a real-world entity that plays a role in the alimentary domain.

Three further examples, listed in (42), occurred in the corpus.

- (42) *magarien tenve* ‘my work/tasks/responsibilities (of a community midwife)’  
*jët tenve ar* ‘everything of mine (growing in my garden)’  
*pepa tenve tuen* ‘a book of mine (that I am writing in)’

Again, the standard indirect construction *magarien s-en gom* ‘our school work (of children)’ also occurs in the Larevet Corpus. Collectively, evidence from (41) and (42) points to a somewhat different functional explanation of *tenve* possession. The additional data suggests that rather than an extended alimentary function, *tenve* possession is employed when an entity is within the domain of the speaker’s responsibility or control.

While speakers apparently conceptualise *tenve* in a unitary way, it is plausible to further analyse the structure, drawing on formative morphosyntactic observations of the Larevet corpus. It could be argued that *tenve* comprises a subordinator *te*, followed by a verb inflected for the first person singular realis mood. A similar morpheme *te* is found in the related Neverver language (Barbour 2012: 359) as a subordinator of utterance predicates. The structure *ne-ve* occurs in the modern Larevet corpus as the verb ‘make, do’ inflected for the first person singular realis.<sup>9</sup>

## 5. The Larevet possessive system under a diachronic lens

The possessive system found in Larevet is canonical in many respects. There is a structural distinction between direct and indirect possession. Direct constructions encode inalienable relations, while many of the relations expressed through indirect possessive constructions are alienable. A third prepositional possessive construction is employed to express relationships where the association is only loosely possessive, and which tend to encode a non-specific or otherwise non-canonical ‘possessor’.

<sup>9</sup> The semantic analysis proposed here for the Larevet *tenve* possession may remind readers of the semantic distinction found in Polynesian languages. Lichtenberk (1985: 107) observes that Polynesian languages display *a* and *o* types of possession which are distinguished “by the concept of control over the initiation of the relation on the part of the possessor”. Harlow (2001: 157-163), for example, describes possession in Māori, observing that: “the most important single idea for the discussion of the *a* and *o* categories is control. If the possessor is independent of the possessum and is in a position of dominance and control over it, then *a*-forms will be used” (2001: 158).

The singular possessor suffixes that attach directly to nouns are reflexes of a system of direct possession reconstructed for Proto Oceanic. Lichtenberk (1985) presents reconstructions for a full paradigm of possessor suffixes, contrasting first, second and third person, as well as singular and plural number. In Larevet, the paradigm has reduced to productive first, second and third person singular possessor suffixes, and a rare third person plural suffix.

	Proto Oceanic	Larevet
1SG	*- <i>gu</i>	-( <i>o</i> ) <i>g</i>
2SG	*- <i>mu</i>	-( <i>a</i> ) <i>m</i>
3SG	*- <i>ña</i>	-( <i>e</i> ) <i>n</i>
3PL	* <i>dra</i>	-( <i>e</i> ) <i>r</i>

**Table 5. Proto Oceanic and Larevet possessor suffixes**  
(Reconstructions from Lynch, Ross & Crowley 2002: 67)

All other person/number combinations are expressed with a construct suffix followed by an independent pronoun. This innovation is consistent with the observation made in Lynch, Ross and Crowley (2002: 42) that Malakula languages often display “possessive pronominal suffixes only with singular possessors” and that “plural pronominal possession is expressed instead by independent pronouns in association with the construct suffix, in the same way as nominal possession.” The use of the construct suffix for plural direct possession may well be a stage through which Larevet is passing, which sees the eventual demise of contrastive possessor suffixes for inalienable possession. Within the Central Western Malakula subgroup, the Neve’ei language allows direct/construct possession as an option for the expression of singular possessors (Musgrave 2007: 35), while in the Neverver language the construct suffix has fused to nouns, and possession of all person/number combinations involves n-final nouns followed by an independent pronoun form (Barbour 2012: 134-135).

In indirect possession, a set of possessive classifiers has been reconstructed for Proto Oceanic, including \**ka*- for food items, \**m(w)a*- for drink, and \**na*- for general possessions (Lynch, Ross & Crowley 2002: 77). Lynch (1996: 109) proposes that further general classifiers were likely in Proto Oceanic, and reconstructs \**ta*/\**sa* as another general classifier, on the basis of reflexes identified by Ross (1988) and Pawley (1973), along with his own identification of further reflexes of \**ta* and \**sa* with possessive functions. Among earliest identified reflexes of \**sa* were the Atchin and Lamap/Port Sandwich languages of Malakula (Ross 1988: 185-186). To these we can add Larevet, as well as Naman (Crowley 2006a), Malua Bay (Wessels 2013) and Nese (Crowley 2006b), V’ënen Taut (Dodd 2014), Tirax (Brotchie 2009), Uripiv (McKerras, n.d.), Unua (Pearce 2015), and Uluveu/Maskelynes (Healey 2013). In Larevet, as in several but not all of the Malekula languages cited here, the possessive classifier system has reduced to a single possessive marker which is a reflex of \**sa*.

While many possessive relationships that are coded indirectly with Larevet’s possessive marker *s* are alienable, there are two examples of indirect possessives in Larevet which are more often coded directly in canonical Oceanic languages. The first is the expression of nominalised structures, where the possessor is the agent of a deverbal noun (see data set (34)).

Agent-action relationships have been observed in direct possessive constructions in other Oceanic languages (Lichtenberk 1985: 104).

The second domain that is widely reported under direct possession is kinship. There is much cultural variation in the types of kin relations that are treated as inalienable, but a careful look at evidence from Larevet suggests there might be change in progress, towards the use of the indirect structure for kinship possession. Synchronic evidence from the Larevet Corpus presented in sections 4.1, in data set (19), and in 4.2, in data sets (32) and (33), indicate that while many kinship terms occur in the indirect construction, a subset of sibling terms, and the words for ‘baby’, ‘maternal uncle’, and ‘mother’, can be directly possessed. A. Bernard Deacon’s (1934: 111-112) anthropological study of Malakula includes a list of kin terms for Larevet (Deacon’s Laravat). His set of directly possessed kin terms corresponds well with evidence from the Larevet Corpus, although there were competing terms for ‘younger brother (of man)’, and only one of these appears to have survived.

(43) Directly possessed kinship terms

Deacon	Larevet Corpus	Gloss
<i>tugangk</i>	<i>tukha-g</i>	‘my older same-sex sibling’
<i>mar selöngk</i>	<i>marsel-og</i>	‘my younger brother (of man)’
<i>senen</i>	---	‘his younger brother’
<i>vivinungk</i>	<i>vëvënë-g</i>	‘my sister (of man)’
<i>nagaruongk</i>	<i>nëkharw-og</i>	‘my younger sister (of woman)’

Some kin terms form pairs, one of which can be coded directly while the other is coded indirectly.<sup>10</sup> The direct constructions are considered by speakers to be an older form of the language. While both forms for ‘baby’ and ‘mother’ occurred in communicative texts in the Larevet corpus, the direct forms for ‘maternal uncle’ were only produced in elicitation. The directly possessed form for ‘father’ has apparently been replaced by the indirectly possessed *batu*. This is likely to be a semantic extension of the directly possessed noun *bat* meaning ‘head’. Where the directly and indirectly possessed lexemes exist side by side, they share some phonological features; however, they are distinct morphemes, and thus are best described as synonyms.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Where there are lexemes that can be coded in multiple ways in Oceanic languages, an analysis of ‘overlap’ or ‘fluidity’ can be proposed to explain the variation. The potential for fluidity in Larevet is limited to fluidity between the direct and indirect construction. In the possessive literature, where a lexeme is analysed as displaying fluidity, it is a single morpho-phonemic unit which accepts either a possessor suffix, or a separate possessive marker carrying the possessor suffix. Examples of fluidity between construction types are presented by Lichtenberk (1985: 109) and Lichtenberk, Vaid and Chen (2011: 665-666). The Larevet corpus does not include lexemes that pattern in this way. Regarding fluidity between types of alienable possession, the possessive classifier system that has been reported in a number of other Oceanic languages is reduced to a single possessive marker in Larevet. There are thus no options available in Larevet for speakers to code different types of alienable relationships.

<sup>11</sup> Lichtenberk (1985: 126) also offers examples of pairs of synonyms, where one is possessed directly and the other indirectly. His examples from Kairiru (North New Guinea Linkage) display almost no phonological resemblance.

(44)	Deacon	Larevet Corpus	Gloss
	<i>penöm</i>	<i>bën-am</i>	‘your maternal uncle’
	<i>bimbi X</i>	<i>bibi s-am</i>	
	<i>hunnen</i>	<i>un-en</i>	‘his/her mother’
	<i>nane X</i>	<i>nunu s-en</i>	
	<i>temen</i>	---	‘his/her father’
	<i>tate X</i>	<i>batu/tata sen</i>	
	<i>ntuk</i>	<i>dë-k</i>	‘(my) baby/child’
	?	<i>dete s-og</i>	

It is not clear whether there is any significant semantic difference between synonyms when they are used in direct and indirect structures. In communicative texts, *dë* ‘baby’ is used in the context of pregnancy and childbirth, where the baby is either physically attached to the mother, or highly dependent on the mother’s care. The synonym *dete* ‘baby’ also occurs in those contexts, but is used widely to talk about one’s offspring of any age. Among other synonyms, no parallel semantic patterns have been identified. It is possible that the language is transitioning towards a system that favours indirect possession for a wider range of possessive relationships than historically, and that kinship terms are involved this transition.

The most innovative possessive structure in Larevet is the first person singular *tenve* possessor, where the possessor has control or responsibility over the possessed entity. Parallel structures have not been reported in other Malekula languages to date, nor has this kind of structure been reconstructed for Proto Oceanic.<sup>12</sup>

Larevet’s neighbours positioned historically to the south of Larevet village, and identified by Lynch (2016) as Larevet’s closest genetic relatives, share a number of the formal innovations noted for Larevet, as summarised in Table 7. These Central Western Malakula languages display reduced or non-existent sets of possessor suffixes, and only Naman and Larevet retain a reflex of the Proto Oceanic classifier system. Of the four languages, Neverver is arguably the most innovative, having abandoned the suffix and classifier system entirely, retaining only the third person singular suffix *-n* as construct suffix fused to directly possessed nouns.

Language	Naman	Larevet	Neve’ei	Neverver
Reduced Suffix Systems	1SG, 2SG, 3SG 3DU, 3PL	1SG, 2SG, 3SG 3PL	1SG, 2SG, 3SG	---
Construct Possession	<i>-n</i>	<i>-n</i>	<i>-n</i>	<i>-n</i>
Possessive Marker	<i>(khë)s-</i>	<i>s-</i>	---	---
Controlled Possession	---	<i>tenve</i>	---	---

**Table 6. Possessive Innovations in the Central Western subgroup of Western Malakula<sup>13</sup>**

<sup>12</sup> John Lynch points out that Terry Crowley (1998: 43-44) identifies a special first person singular form *nagku* ‘my’ in Erromango. This pronoun patterns differently from other possessive pronouns, occurring before the possessed noun, and there are no paradigmatically related forms for other person/number combinations. South Efate also displays an irregular form *nakte* ‘my’ which precedes the possessed noun (Thieberger 2006: 106).

<sup>13</sup> Data for Naman is from Crowley (2006a: 70, 72-75), data for Neve’ei from Musgrave (2007: 34), and data for Neverver from Barbour (2012: 135).

Further north, V'ënen Taut of the Northwestern subgroup, and Malua Bay of the Northern subgroup are more conservative than the Central Western languages, and continue to display possessive classifiers, and full paradigms of singular and non-singular possessor suffixes (see Fox (1979: 25) and Dodd (2014: 62-64) on V'ënen Taut, and Wessels (2013: 79-85) on Malua Bay). In the context of Malakula, the innovations displayed by Larevet and its immediate relatives are thus characteristic of some but not all Malakula languages.

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### Glosses not covered by the Leipzig Glossing Rules

R realis mood, NSG non-singular, PSM possessive marker, CST construct suffix, CL classifier.

### Appendix I: The Consonant and Vowel Inventories

	Bilabial		Alveolar		Velar	
	Phoneme	Letter	Phoneme	Letter	Phoneme	Letter
Plain Plosive	/p/	<i>p</i>	/t/	<i>t</i>	/k/	<i>k</i>
Prenasalised Plosive	/ <sup>m</sup> b/	<i>b</i>	/ <sup>n</sup> d/	<i>d</i>	/ <sup>ŋ</sup> g/	<i>g</i>
Fricative	/β/	<i>v</i>	/s/	<i>s</i>	/ɣ/	<i>kh</i>
Plain Affricate			/tʃ/	<i>ch</i>		
Prenasalised Affricate			/ <sup>n</sup> dʒ/	<i>j</i>		
Nasal	/m/	<i>m</i>	/n/	<i>n</i>	/ŋ/	<i>ng</i>
Plain Trill			/r/	<i>r</i>		
Prenasalised Trill			/ <sup>nd</sup> r/	<i>dr</i>		
Plain approximant			/j/	<i>y</i>	/w/	<i>w</i>
Lateral approximant			/l/	<i>l</i>		

**Table Ia. Consonant Phonemes in Larevet**

	Front	Mid	Back
High	/i/		/u/
Mid	/e/	/ə/	/o/
Low		/a/	

**Table Ib. Vowel Phonemes in Larevet**

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