

Possessive constructions in a language contact situation: Tahitian French¹

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This study forms part of a research project on the description of French as spoken in Tahiti. Tahitian French consists of a range of features largely resulting from contact-induced change which distinguish it from standard French. This particular aspect of the research examines the influence of Tahitian patterns in forming non-standard possessive constructions in the French of Tahitians. The study proposes to determine if Tahitian French constructions are affected by the Polynesian inalienable/alienable 'o/a' possessive classification system present in Tahitian, Tahitian VSO word order as opposed to French SVO, and the differing prepositional systems. This work in progress proposes some observations on the possessive system of Tahitian French, establishing the existence of stable structures within parameters of variation. These structures often do not conform to standard French, but show adaptation, though not necessarily directly, of French structures to Tahitian patterns.

Introduction

The object of study is the variety, or continuum of varieties, of French spoken in the Society Islands of French Polynesia (a French *Pays d'Outre-mer*, formerly a *Territoire d'Outre-mer*), centred on Tahiti, which I call for convenience 'Tahitian French.' Part of the project is to address the problem of exactly what sort of language it is, so questions of contact or post-contact variety, regional variety, semi-creole, mixed language and other issues of definition and classification are still under consideration.

The first linguistic sketch of the French spoken in Tahiti was made by the missionary O'Reilly from observations in the 1950s (O'Reilly 1962). Although there has been some element of French in Tahiti from the beginning of European contact, I would suggest that Tahitian French began to expand through the population and stabilise following World War II. This stabilisation may be partly due to the return of Polynesians who had fought with French forces, but is mostly because in 1945 education across the Territory was made free and compulsory. This theoretically introduced the teaching of French to every child. However, resources were initially lacking and even today many children, especially on the outer islands, leave school early (see for example Garrigues 1999). French was considered the first language of education and was, and largely continues to be, taught as such. This was in spite of the fact that French was not the first language of the Polynesian population and the first postwar generations generally had little or no exposure to French before starting school. The installation of the CEP (nuclear testing program) and the expansion of French administration from 1960 also provided a boost in infrastructure.

The population of French Polynesia is still in the majority Polynesian, though most have at least some non-Polynesian ethnic background. The number of 'Metropolitan' (from continental France) French is relatively low, and there is a significant minority of ethnic Chinese (mostly Hakka, some Cantonese), some of whom retain their language.² Tahitian is the dominant Polynesian language and acts as a lingua franca for all the archipelagoes, though within their groups, the Paumotu, Marquesan and Austral languages are all spoken. French is, however, the official language and the vast majority of the population (95%) claims at least some knowledge of it. As an overview, we can say that we have a contact situation between essentially two languages of different families, where the dominant language is that of the implanted

minority—French—and the local language—Tahitian—is struggling somewhat to assert its identity, though it is still quite widely spoken. The contact language—Tahitian French—arose partly as a necessity of the situation and partly as a group identity function, and is now used mostly as a vernacular.

Tahitian French is very much an oral variety and draws from, on the French side, spoken French rather than the standard written language, and likewise colloquial rather than formal Tahitian. A spoken variety allows more variation than a written one, and Tahitian French permits rather more variation than the regular spoken French. A small number of Polynesians have reached the top of the prestige language scale and speak excellent standard French (and Tahitian too). Others, especially those who live on more isolated islands and the oldest generations, know very little. However, the vast majority of Tahitians are in the middle, knowing the local variety of French and having a varying command of their Polynesian language. An accusation often made is that Tahitians learn neither language adequately, many belonging to a generation where Tahitian was forbidden in schools and neglected within the family.³ Very few French not born in the Territory speak more than a few words of Tahitian.

We can speak of a scale of Tahitian French from *acrolect* to *basilect*, with the *acrolect* approaching standard spoken French and incorporating a limited range of Tahitian insertions, and the *basilect* being a less stable mix of various defining features of Tahitian French with a rather more limited vocabulary. The *basilect* is quite marginal, and many speakers can shift along the continuum according to situation and volition. *Codeswitching* also exists. The *mesolect*, consisting of the range of varieties used in everyday communication amongst Tahitians, forms the basis for my analysis of features, and while displaying more variation than usually acceptable in standard European languages, has a number of defining, stable features. This variety can be difficult to comprehend for a standard French speaker unacquainted with it, and requires a period of adjustment, though it remains a variety of French rather than a creole.

The examples of Tahitian French in this paper are taken from the field data, a corpus of recorded and observed speech in natural settings. The standard French and Tahitian examples are given for illustrative and comparative purposes. In the numbered examples, italics are used for Tahitian French (and Tahitian) while standard French remains in plain roman type.

This paper uses the orthography of the *Académie Tahitienne* (Académie Tahitienne 1986, 1999) for Tahitian: a glottal stop is represented by an apostrophe ('), and a long vowel by a macron (ˉ) above it. However, there is some variation in pronunciation, especially when particles are used in unstressed positions.

1. Possession in Tahitian

Tahitian has the Polynesian *inalienable/alienable* 'o/a' possessive distinction. In Tahitian, *inalienably* possessed items include kin, body parts, and things or processes intimately associated with the person (or other possessor). The Tahitian possessive particles are given in (1) and their employment outlined below.

- (1) *o* ('ō), *tō*, *nō*: *inalienable*, *intrinsic*, 'strong'
 a ('ā), *tā*, *nā*: *alienable*, *non-intrinsic*, 'weak'

The unmarked possessive construction is:

- (2) structure: possessed *o/a* possessor
 Tahitian: *te* *fare* *o* *te* *tāvana*
 gloss: DEFART house POSS.INAL DEFART mayor
 French free translation: la maison du maire
 English free translation: 'the mayor's house'

One's *fare* is considered *inalienable* and therefore takes *o* particles (for common nouns, the emphatic particles *nō/nā* can be used instead, for more marked possession). Note that French and Tahitian are comparable morpheme-for-morpheme

in this case, except that the French possessive particle combines with the following (masculine) article (*de + le* ⇒ *du*) (Tahitian does not mark grammatical gender).

An alternative construction with reversed word order combines the possessive particle with the article of the possessed item, *te + o/a* (the particles *tō/tā* are also used to introduce relative clauses, a function which will not be discussed here):

- (3) *tō/tā* possessor possessed
tō *te* *tāvana* *fare*
 DEF.ART.POSS.INAL DEF.ART mayor house
 la maison du maire
 'the mayor's house'

Note that French does not have an alternative construction (though English has the options 'the mayor's house' and 'the house of the mayor').

The basic predicative construction in Tahitian is non-verbal, formed with the existential *e*:

- (4) *E* possessed *tō/tā* possessor
E *fare* *tō* 'u
 EXST house POSS.INAL ISG
 J'ai une maison.
 'I have a house'

There is also a stative construction in Tahitian using the emphatic particles:

- (5) *nō/nā* possessor PREP possessed
Nō 'u *teie* *fare*.
 POSS.INAL ISG DEM house
 Cette maison est à moi.
 'This house is mine.'

The *nō/nā* particles are also used in an emphatic subject possessive construction:

- (6) 'Ua *reva* *atu* *ona* ⇒ *Nā* *na* *i* *reva* *atu*
 PAST leave away.DIR 3SG ⇒ POSS.AL 3S PREP leave away.DIR
 Il est parti ⇒ C'est lui qui est parti
 'He left' ⇒ 'It is he who left'

The *nā* has a nominalising effect, with *reva* 'to leave' filling a verb slot in the unmarked sentence, but filling a more noun-like role in the marked one, giving a meaning more closely glossed as 'the leaving was his.'

2. Possession in French

For reference, a table of French possessives is given.

Table 1: French possessives

	Adjectives	Pronouns	Disjunctives
1SG	<i>mon, ma, mes</i>	<i>mien(s), mienne(s)</i>	<i>moi</i>
2SG	<i>ton, ta, tes</i>	<i>tien(s), tienne(s)</i>	<i>toi</i>
3SG	<i>son, sa, ses</i>	<i>sien(s), sienne(s)</i>	<i>lui, elle, soi</i>
1PL	<i>notre, nos</i>	<i>nôtre(s)</i>	<i>nous</i>
2PL	<i>votre, vos</i>	<i>vôtre(s)</i>	<i>vous</i>
3PL	<i>leur(s)</i>	<i>leur(s)</i>	<i>eux, elles</i>

Possessive adjectives and pronouns take agreement for number and gender; pronouns take articles. Possessive adjectives precede the noun. The disjunctive series is not an exclusively possessive one; they are the pronouns used in prepositional and emphatic constructions. In possessive constructions, disjunctives are used following the copula *être* 'be,' with the preposition *à* 'at, to.' The patterns are briefly illustrated in the constructions below:

- (7) C'est ma maison. 'It's my house.'
 Cette maison est la mienne. 'This house is mine.'
 La maison est à moi. 'The house is mine.' (emphatic)

For verbal possession, French uses the verb *avoir* 'have.'

- (8) J'ai une maison. 'I have a house.'

3. Possession in Tahitian French

Having outlined the possessive systems of the languages in contact, we can ask what patterns the contact language, Tahitian French, has. We can examine which structures from standard French and from Tahitian contribute to Tahitian French and to what extent these constitute interference or adaptation.

3.1 Noun phrase possession

For noun phrases, Tahitian French uses standard French preposed possessives in simple singular person constructions:

- (9) *ma sœur* 'my sister'
ton briquet 'your lighter'

One hypothesis considered is that the *o/a*-system could be reflected in a choice between possessive adjective and definite article. For kin, the latter is often used:

- (10) *la sœur* 'the sister' (= my, our, her, their...)

However, use of this pattern systematically, in a way which would suggest possessive classes, has not been noted. It appears to be used only for kin, i.e. not body parts⁴ which would also be strongly inalienable, and standard French possessive adjectives (*ma, notre...*) may also be used. It may instead be a phenomenon of generalisation as the article can in fact stand for a personal pronoun of any person or number.

If the possessor is instead plural or dual,⁵ it is likely to be postposed with the disjunctive possessives (which in standard French are used in constructions using the verb *être* 'be,' not as determiners). If the possessor is specified, i.e. not a pronoun, it is also postposed, as in standard French, but the preposition is always *à*, not the standard *de*.⁶

- (11) *la maison à vous deux* 'your (DU) house' (Standard: *votre maison*)
la maison à eux 'their (PL) house' (Standard: *leur maison*)
la maison à ma sœur 'my sister's house' (Standard: *la maison de ma sœur*)

There seems to be very little use in Tahitian French of the possessive pronominal copula construction:

- (12) Cette maison est la mienne. 'This house is mine.'

The disjunctive is almost universally preferred. This right dislocation of the possessive in the form *à* + disjunctive pronoun is an extremely common structure in Tahitian French. In standard French, this only happens in emphatic structures, to reinforce the possessor or reduce ambiguity:

- (13) La maison est à elle. 'The house is hers.'
C'est sa maison à elle. 'It's her house.'

In Tahitian French (see again (11)), there is usually no preposed possessive and often the possessed noun is entirely omitted, as we shall examine further in the following section. We find, then, that in possessive noun phrase constructions there appears to be no influence from the Tahitian inalienable/alienable system. As is the case in other contact situations (e.g. Siegel 1999), this nuanced system seems to have been dropped in favour of the less complex European one in a case of simplification and adaptation of a French emphatic construction to an acceptable Tahitian structure. Tahitian French structures match word order in both a preferred Tahitian possessive structure and an oral, marked French one. If we consider the collapse of the Tahitian *o/a* inalienable/alienable distinction to the exclusive use of the alienable particles with *a* (a process also given in Siegel, and possibly a universal), we then also have a match with the French preposition *à*, allowing a compromise of both systems. We can therefore propose a Tahitian French possessive structure of *à* + disjunctive, a pattern which we shall explore further in the following section.

3.2 Verb-initial pattern

In Tahitian French, a simple statement of ownership may match the standard French construction rather than the Tahitian non-verbal one (in (4), but see also Section 4):

- (14) J'ai une maison. 'I have a house.'

If we look at predicative possessive constructions in Tahitian French, we find that Tahitian word order and prepositions contribute more influence. We see the same influence from the French disjunctive construction as presented in Section 3.1, as well as a Tahitian-type predicate-initial structure drawn from Tahitian word order (VSO, with the VP beginning with a TMA marker). There is an invariable *c'est* element (from French 'it is') (tense or aspect may be marked with past *c'était*, future *ça va*) introducing a stative construction. This avoids the need for the articles and agreements of standard French. These phrases are highly contextual, with the possessed noun often completely ellipsed.

- (15) C'est fini à moi.
it=is finish.PST.PART PREP ISG

This example has been glossed as *j'ai fini*, 'I've finished' (O'Reilly 1962:75; Pukoki 1987:212) but this strategy does not hold for other examples of the same pattern (as given below). There may be some confusion of the roles of *avoir* 'have' as a verb and as an auxiliary in the above analysis; however, this is in fact a possessive structure partly modeled on the Tahitian pattern given in (16).

- (16) 'Ua 'oti ta 'u.
PAST finish ART.POSS ISG

A more appropriate set of glosses is:

- (17) Le mien est fini. (standard French)
C'est fini, le mien. (spoken French)
'Mine's finished.'

We can see again the influence from the French dislocation structure, particularly common in spoken French, with the Tahitian French possessive *à* + disjunctive described in the previous section. Although the Tahitian French phrase *c'est fini à moi* is unacceptable in even colloquial varieties of Metropolitan French, the pronominal version *c'est fini, le mien* is a very common spoken form. We have noted above that the use of the possessive pronoun is very uncommon in Tahitian French. We can also consider the emphatic structure *c'est fini, mon travail à moi* (cf. example (13)) as a possible model, though this form is more marked and very colloquial. Additionally, as we discuss at the end of this section, the intonation of the Tahitian French structure follows an unmarked pattern rather than the marked standard French one. The Tahitian French structure would then involve ellipsis of the noun, a common feature in other Tahitian French constructions,

combined with the Tahitian French possessive construction. This Tahitian French structure suggests influence from Tahitian word order, with speakers finding spoken French structures of similar form and function, collapsing multiple structures and applying ellipsis and a reduced pronominal and possessive particle system. These reduced systems are partly drawn from Tahitian patterns and also universal simplification tendencies, such as that towards choice of strong, transparent forms.

Further examples are given below in order to illustrate the pattern more fully. As the utterances are highly contextual, the ellipsed or replaced noun is given in brackets and free translations are given.

- (18) C'est déjà chaud à moi!
 It=is already hot PREP me
 La mienne est déjà chaude (mon eau)
 C'est déjà chaud, la mienne (*colloquial*)
 'Mine's already hot' (my cooking water)
- (19) C'était électrique à toi?
 it=was electric PREP you
 C'était électrique, le tien? (ton tatouage)
 'Was yours electric?' (your tattoo: done with electric tools)

Even the tense-mood-aspect (TMA) marker (*c'est* structure) may be omitted:

- (20) Fini à lui —à l'autre
 finished PREP him —PREP the=other
 (Quand) il a fini, (c'est) à l'autre (*de jouer*).
 'When he's finished his (turn), (it's) another's.'

There is also left-dislocation, often to emphasise or distinguish the possessor (again, left-dislocation also occurs in standard French, but with the disjunctive acting as a subject emphatic, of the *moi, j'ai fini sort*, 'me, I've finished,' not as a possessive):

- (21) À lui c'est grand à lui. À lui c'est petit.
 PREP him it=is big PREP him PREP him it=is small
 Le sien, il est grand, le sien. Le sien est petit. (*son ordinateur portable*)
 'His, his is big. His is small.' (his laptop computer)
- (22) À toi c'est plus en bas le rouge.
 PREP you it=is more below the red
 Le tien a le rouge plus vers le bas. (*ton stylo*)
 'Yours has the red bit further down.' (your pen)

Prosody is quite important in interpreting these structures. Standard French patterns would tend to place pauses between the dislocated structures and the central phrase and stress the element preceding the pause, whereas Tahitian French does not treat the structures as prosodic dislocations: although a left-dislocation may be stressed, being marked, right-dislocations (of the sort in (22)) are unmarked and form part of a more constant intonation pattern. For Tahitian French, we can argue that this structure is not a dislocation but unmarked word order. Note that in (21), emphatic left dislocation can occur in addition to the unmarked structure.

3.3 Subject-initial pattern

There is also an SVO pattern. This is not a right-dislocation pattern but follows unmarked French word order, again with the Tahitian French disjunctive possessives instead of the pronominal ones which are rare in Tahitian French.

- (23) J'ai lavé à elle.
I=have washed PREP her
J'ai lavé le sien. (son linge)
'I washed hers.' (her laundry)

This structure also follows standard French emphatic patterns but ellipses the possessed noun. Standard French could have, as possessor-emphasis (see also (13)):

- (24) J'ai lavé son linge à elle. 'I washed her clothes.'

To emphasise the possessor, Tahitian French can employ left-dislocation:

- (25) À Emma, j'ai lavé lundi.
PREP Emma I=have washed Monday
Emma, j'ai lavé le sien lundi.
'Emma's I washed on Monday.'

In many cases, using this disjunctive possessive avoids either repeating or having to define the possessed object in question if it is clear from context. In the French translation of (26), having *le mien* stand for *mon briquet* is perfectly acceptable, but having it stand for *mon feu* is rather doubtful since this expression does not take the possessive in standard French. Since the Tahitian French *à moi* does not mark number or gender, it does not matter to the speaker whether she is referring to *mon briquet* (masc. sg.) or *mes allumettes* (fem. pl.) or *ma boîte d'allumettes* (fem. sg.) or other variation.

- (26) Tu as du feu? J'ai laissé à moi dans la chambre.
you have some fire I=have left PREP me in the bedroom
? Tu as du feu? J'ai laissé le mien dans ma chambre. (*mon briquet/mes allumettes*)
?'Do you have a light? I've left mine in my room.' (*my lighter/matches*)

Through this elliptical structure, the disjunctive possessive can cover a wider range of functions than the standard French. In the case in (27), what the speaker wants is a *Shell Va'a* (canoeing team) T-shirt; *Shell* could therefore be glossed as an adjective.

- (27) Je veux à Shell.
I want PREP Shell
Je veux un Shell.
'I want (one of) Shell's.'

In (28) the disjunctive could be explained either as a result of ellipsis of something like *ses paroles*, or perhaps as dislocation of the clitic pronoun (*le*), though this would make it not a possessive structure while being formally identical to it.

- (28) Je n'ai pas écouté à lui.
I NEG=have not listened PREP him
Je ne l'ai pas écouté.
'I didn't listen to him.'

Tahitian French often ellipses clitic pronouns, so (28) could be a restoration of the pronoun with a slightly emphatic nuance (recalling that *à + disjunctive* is an emphatic structure in standard French). This indicates that *à + disjunctive* is not exclusively a possessive construction in Tahitian French, as indeed it is not in standard French where it also acts as an indirect object construction. However, we shall see in the next section that some functions of *à* in standard French are replaced by other structures in Tahitian French.

4. Further possessive structures

Tahitian French speakers seem to have found a way to introduce Tahitian nuances into their possessive constructions using French prepositions in specific, stable ways differing from standard French. We have two prepositional structures drawn from the French *avec* 'with' and *pour* 'for.' These can be stative, with a *c'est* structure, or verbal, indicating acquisition or transferral of an object to a person, such as *donner avec* 'give with' to indicate current possession but not ownership; *donner pour* 'give for' to indicate acquisition of ownership. In standard French both would be covered by *donner à* 'give to.' As we have seen above, the preposition *à* already has a role in Tahitian French possessive structures. Tahitians have adapted the comparatively rich system of prepositions found in French to cover for part of the structure of French which is comparatively poor.

4.1 'Locative possession'

In standard French, *avec* functions as a preposition in expressions of instrumentality and accompaniment including, in spoken French, as a terminal adverb (*il est parti avec*, 'he left with (it/him/her)'), and is used in adverbial expressions (*avec difficulté* 'with difficulty'). It has these functions in Tahitian French as well, with the terminal being especially common. It also has some non-standard uses. Corne notes the structure *c'est avec moi* ('it's with me') to indicate "*la possession ou l'appartenance*" (Corne 1979:652) but provides no further analysis in what is only an outline of some observed phenomena. In French (or English), the following examples of such structures are indeed often glossed with a possessive verbal structure (*avoir* 'have'). However, the *avec* structure conveys not ownership but current location associated with a person: the object is in the current possession of the person indicated, 'with' him/her, but s/he does not own it. This distinction is not made by the French *avoir* (or English 'have'), and other disambiguating strategies may be used such as a possessive instead of the definite article in (29). It is often a stative structure (not requiring *donner* or other verb of possession), with the same TMA *c'est* particle found in the possessive structures above.

- (29) *C'est avec Teva le livre.*
 it=is with Teva the book
Teva a le livre (C'est Teva qui a le livre)
 'Teva has the book' ('It's Teva who has the book')

Note that the Tahitian French construction may draw from the second French equivalent, the subject-emphatic one which uses the *c'est* element. The Tahitian French construction, however, is not necessarily subject-emphatic and is not so marked. We can hypothesise a transfer from the Tahitian locative preposition *tei* (future 'ei; non-initial i):

- (30) *Tei ia Teva te puta.*
 PREPLOC PREP Teva ART book
Teva a le livre.
 'Teva has the book.'

The possessed noun, which takes the definite article and not a possessive, can be preposed or postposed to the *c'est* structure:

- (31) *L'appareil, c'est avec toi, eh?*
 the=camera it=is with you INT
Tu as l'appareil (photo), hein?
 'You have the camera, eh?'
- (32) *C'est avec toi la calculatrice? —C'est avec Manu [...]*
 it=is with you the calculator —it=is with Manu [...]
j'ai donné avec Manu.
 I=have given with Manu
Tu as la calculatrice? —C'est Manu qui l'a [...] je l'ai donnée à Manu.
 'You have the calculator?' —'Manu has it [...] I gave it to Manu.'

Note that the translations in this case can accept a possessor-emphatic structure. Again, the French emphatic/colloquial marked form more closely matches the Tahitian French form.

- (33) Les coussins j'ai avec moi [...] ils sont carrément chez moi.
 the pillows I=have with me [...] they are completely at home
 Les oreillers, je les ai [...] ils sont carrément chez moi.
 'I have the pillows [...] they're right back at my place.'

In (33), the speaker specifies that although she had the object, it was 'at home,' i.e. not on the person, indicating that the possession does not have to be strictly personally locative. The verbal structure can take *donner* 'give' as the verb, as in (32), or another verb of possession, such as *avoir* 'have' in (33).

4.2 'Recipient possession'

The *pour* 'for' structures are used when the possessor is the recipient of the possessed, i.e. ownership of the object is being transferred or acquired.

- (34) J'ai donné un cadeau pour lui.
 1SG=have give.PST.PART one present for 3SG
 Je lui ai donné un cadeau.
 'I gave a present to him.'

In Tahitian, in this case a different preposition is used: the possessive *nā/nō*.

- (35) 'Ua hōro'a atu vau i te hō'e tao'a nā na.
 PAST give away.DIR 1SG PREP DET one gift PREP 3SG
 'I gave a present to him.'

Note that, in standard French, if the recipient is not a pronoun, the disjunctive construction must be used:

- (36) J'ai donné un cadeau à Hiro. 'I gave a present to Hiro.'

The structure is most usual in its verbal form, *donner* 'give' being the most common:

- (37) Je donne seulement pour Māmā Hina.
 I give only for mother Hina
 Je les donne simplement à la mère Hina.
 'I just give them to Auntie Hina.'
- (38) (les chewing-gums) elle distribue pour ses copines.
 (the chewing gum) she distributes for her friends
 Elle distribue (les chewing-gums) entre ses copines.
 'She distributes (the chewing gum) amongst her friends.'
- (39) Prends pour toi!
 take.IMP for you
 Prends-le!
 'You have it!' ('Take it for yourself')

However, one finds utterances such as those below with the *c'est* structure:

- (40) Et toi, c'est quoi pour toi?
 and you it=is what for you

Et toi, qu'est-ce que tu veux?

'What about you, what do you want?'

- (41) C'est pas encore un gosse pour nous deux.
it=is not yet one kid for we two

Nous n'avons pas encore d'enfant (ensemble).

'We don't have a child (together) yet.'

5. Conclusions

There is more analysis of these structures to be done yet in this study, which will complement other aspects of the description of Tahitian French. The example of possessive structures demonstrates a number of phenomena found in other areas of the grammar. Tahitian word order is maintained in Tahitian French where a matching structure can be found in standard French, although these standard French models are often emphatic or marked and are drawn from the oral, colloquial French to which Tahitian-speakers are generally exposed. These structures become unmarked in Tahitian French.

Tahitian French shows a reduced pronoun and possessive particle system compared to standard French. The Tahitian inalienable/alienable *o/a* particles collapse into *à*, thus matching the standard French disjunctive possessive, which becomes an unmarked Tahitian French possessive construction. However, adaptation of further French prepositional structures (*avec* and *pour*) covers some subtleties of the Tahitian possessive system.

The work will continue in its aim to discover how language contact has resulted in Tahitian French and draw together a theory on the kind of language it is. The working hypothesis is that it is a distinct local variety of French with lexical and syntactic interference from Tahitian as a result of ongoing language contact.

Notes

1. A version of this paper was presented at the symposium *Language contact, hybrids and new varieties: emergent possessive constructions*, held at Monash University, September 2004. I would like to thank the participants for their comments and discussion. I am also grateful for the comments from two anonymous reviewers, and the discussion provided by Harold Koch and members of the Linguistics department of RSPAS, Australian National University.

2. Census statistics are available at <http://www.ispf.pf>: of the 2002 census population of 244 830, 26 662 were born in France or another overseas territory, and 4665 elsewhere. Many of the French-born are temporary residents, but on the other hand, the statistics do not show those of purely French origin born in French Polynesia. Accurate figures are not available for ethnic background.

3. Tahitian was only given status as an official language in 1980 and made compulsory in schools in 1982 after decades of policy of teaching only French as a first language. For a summary of language and teaching policy see Peltzer (1999).

4. This is interesting as standard French uses an 'inalienable' structure when talking about one's own body parts, e.g. *je me suis blessé la main*, not *ma main*, for 'I hurt my hand.' Tahitian does not have this reflexive pattern, and a mesolectal Tahitian French speaker would be likely to use the possessive adjective (*ma main*).

5. The Tahitian pronoun paradigm has singular, dual and plural persons, as well as inclusive and exclusive distinctions in the first person dual and plural. Tahitian French speakers systematically construct a dual paradigm by adding *deux* 'two' to the plural pronoun. This is not ungrammatical in standard French, but is a marked construction.

6. Note that in some varieties of regional and colloquial metropolitan French, it is not uncommon to hear *à* used in alternation with *de* in this construction.

References

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