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**Title: The Associative Construction in Abma: A Way of Showing Non-Possession**

**Keywords: Possession, Oceanic Languages**

Abma is an Oceanic language spoken by about 7,800 people on Pentecost island in Vanuatu (Lynch and Crowley 2001: 66). The system of possession in Abma is typical of Vanuatu languages in that it has both inalienable and alienable possession. The latter category has four possessive classifiers: food (*ka-*); drink (*ma-*); property (*bila-*); everything else (*no-*).

There is also a classifier, *na-*, that bears similarities to the above possessive classifiers. It wedges between what could be construed as a Possessed and Possessor NP, as in (1):

(1) **Atsi**                      **na-n**                      **um-an.**  
person                      ASSOC-3SG.POSS      work-NMZR  
“Possessed” NP                      “Possessor” NP  
‘A worker.’ [Someone who works hard for low compensation.] -EF1p45

The problem is in explaining the reason for this classifier’s existence. If *na-* is simply another indirect possession classifier, then how is it different from *no-*, for example?

In Haudricourt’s (1960) study on possessive constructions in Abma, he claims that *nan* is used between non-persons. Likewise, in Lolovoli, a similar particle expresses a relationship between two objects with a non-specific possessor (Hyslop 2001: 187), and in Fijian it demonstrates an associative relationship between indefinite nouns (Schütz 1985: 451). But this cannot account for all cases in Abma. In (2), the woman’s father is not only human, but he is a specific individual in the discourse:

(2) **Atsi**    **nong, ba**    **mwee na-n**                      **tema-n,**  
person this    COMM manner    ASSOC-3SG.POSS father-3SG.POSS  
  
**tei**    **te-gabmwa**    **ah**    **te-gabmwa.**  
PAST ADJ-bad                      REL ADJ-bad  
‘This woman, well her father had a nasty way about him.’ –T2p85/D2T45

Usage of the *na-* classifier in Abma is therefore more widely applied than it was in Haudricourt’s time, and its usage differs from similar classifiers in other Oceanic languages.

What the *na-* classifier signals is the non-possessability of the “possessed” noun; other examples will be explored in this paper.

Haudricourt, A.-G. 1960. "Note grammaticale sur la langue de Melsisi, île de Pentecôte, Nouvelles-Hébrides." *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 16 113-116.

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