

# Reconsidering inalienable possession with definite determiners in French

Johan Rooryck  
cOAlition S  
[johan.rooryck@gmail.com](mailto:johan.rooryck@gmail.com)



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## Abstract

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In many Romance and Germanic languages, definite determiners can indicate possession for a subset of nouns that have often been called nouns of ‘inalienable’ possession. This paper addresses the question of why and how the definite determiner contributes to the interpretation of ‘inalienable possession’. Following Freeze (1992) and others, I argue that ‘inalienable possession’ cannot be properly characterized as inalienable and does not involve possession. Relevant ‘inalienably possessed’ nouns are not restricted to body parts, but include a broader set of nouns that are commonly expected to be located in or on the possessor: mental or physical faculties, facial expressions, as well as articles of clothing, protection, and adornment. I argue that the relevant cases are best captured in terms of an analysis that combines a syntactic configuration for locative prepositions (RP in den Dikken’s 2006 sense) with the semantics of weak definites for the ‘inalienable’ use of the definite determiner. All observed restrictions derive from the requirement that the semantic properties of weak definites and the syntactic configuration of the RP need to be compositionally respected. Finally, I propose some ideas about how this analysis can be extended to crosslinguistic variation in German and English.

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**Keywords:** inalienable, possession, weak definite, expectedness, inferential

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## 1. Introduction

Inalienable possession is a term with multiple meanings. In the typological literature, it refers to *obligatory possession*: it refers to nouns that cannot occur without a morphological expression for the possessor (Bickel & Nichols 2013). In other linguistic traditions going back to Bally (1926), inalienable possession is used more loosely as a semantic relation of possession in which possessor and possessum are presented as inseparable, and in which the possessum cannot be transferred to someone else. Under this view, what counts as inalienable varies from language to language. In Romance languages, for instance, inalienably possessed nouns are assumed to at least include body parts and, by extension, some items of clothing (see e.g. Guéron 2006); but kinship terms are not grammatically treated as inalienable. Nichols (1988:573) already showed that the semantic definition of inalienable possession as “inborn, inherent, not conferred by purchase” is not consistent with the facts of language: Nichols notes that in a language such as Nanai, domestic animals are part of the ‘inalienable’ pattern, but kinship terms, which are clearly inseparable and untransferable, are not. Such cases can be multiplied: across languages, the class of nouns that are said to be semantically inalienable is almost never restricted to nouns indicating an untransferable or inseparable possessive relation (see Karvovskaya 2017:Ch1 for a more extensive discussion).

In this article, I would like to show that inalienability is not the relevant category to describe what is usually referred to as ‘inalienable possession via the definite determiner’ in French. As in many varieties of Romance and Germanic (see e.g. König & Haspelmath 1998; Spanoghe 1995; Lamiroy 2003) the definite determiner in French can express possession for nouns indicating body parts such as *main* ‘hand’, but not for nouns such as *livre* ‘book’. This is illustrated in (1). Indices on the possessor and the definite determiner indicate a possessive interpretation:

- (1) Marie<sub>i</sub> a=ouvert      la<sub>i</sub>      bouche/      \*le<sub>i</sub>      livre.  
 Marie opened      the      mouth/      the      book  
 ‘Marie opened her mouth/ her book.’

It has sometimes been noted that the set of ‘inalienable’ or body part nouns for which possession can be indicated by the definite determiner marginally extends to articles of clothing and the like (Bally 1926, Diffloth 1974, Guéron 2006), as in (2):<sup>1</sup>

- (2) Les policiers m<sub>i</sub>’=ont      fouillé      les<sub>i</sub> poches.  
 The policemen to me=have      searched      the pockets  
 ‘The policemen searched my pockets’

The implicit assumption for these ‘marginal’ cases seems to have been that articles of clothing can be somehow assimilated to body parts, and viewed as ‘inalienable’ items

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<sup>1</sup> For Bally (1926), the relevant set of nouns involved “the personal domain”.

by association. Nevertheless, articles of clothing and adornment are clearly transferable and separable from their owners. Such cases also show that possession via the definite determiner has nothing to do with part-whole relations or ‘integral relations’ in the sense of Hornstein, Rosen & Uriagereka (1994): there is no meaningful sense in which my pockets in (2) are presented as a part of me. Without a clear understanding of the mechanism that assimilates articles of clothing to body parts, such cases should in fact be taken to undermine the category of inalienability as a useful linguistic notion for an analysis of possession via the definite determiner.

A detailed look at such ‘marginal’ cases in § 2 shows that possession via the definite determiner not only extends to articles of clothing and adornment, but also to mental and physical states (good spirits, life, and health). Furthermore, possession via the definite determiner is not even restricted to animate possessors. More importantly, many cases show a number of curious interpretive restrictions that to my knowledge have never been observed before. The relevant generalization that covers all ‘definitely possessed’ nouns in French turns out to involve nouns whose referent can be *located* in or on their possessor. ‘Inalienable possession’ in French therefore is neither inalienable nor mereological, nor is it restricted to body parts or possession: I argue that it represents a locative relation that is particularly restricted by the semantics of weak definites.

In § 3.1, following up on a suggestion by Guéron (2006) and Le Bruyn (2014), I show that the definite determiner of ‘inalienable possession’ exhibits 9 properties of weak definites. As a result, the definite determiner in inalienable possession should be viewed as a specific instantiation of a weak definite. In §3.2, I show that the combination of the analysis of the ‘possessed’ noun as a weak definite with a strictly syntactic analysis of location can account for the particular interpretive restrictions noted in § 2. In the conclusion (§ 4), I propose some ideas on how this analysis can be extended to crosslinguistic differences with e.g. German and English.

## 2. The data

### 2.1. Four syntactic contexts

As already mentioned above, inalienable possession is expressed in French by a definite determiner introducing the possessed noun (Hatcher 1944, Kayne 1975, Guéron 1983, 1985, 2006 Herslund 1983, Vergnaud & Zubizarreta 1992, Jacob 1993, Nakamoto 2010, Le Bruyn 2014). There are four syntactic contexts that allow for this relation to be established.

The first context is that of direct construal: when the possessed ‘inalienable’ noun occurs as a direct or indirect object, the combination of the verb and the direct object must express a ‘natural bodily gesture’, as first observed by Hatcher (1944). The sentence in (3)a expresses the ‘natural gesture’ of lifting one’s hands: it involves a movement of the body. By contrast, the sentence in (3)b is ungrammatical because washing one’s hands is not a natural movement of the body in this sense: it is an action performed on one’s hands, not a movement of the body. The sentence in (3)c is out because it does not involve a noun that can be inalienably possessed.

- (3) a. Oriane<sub>i</sub> a=levé      les<sub>i</sub> mains  
       ‘Oriane lifted      her hands’

- b. Oriane<sub>i</sub> a lavé ses/ \*les<sub>i</sub> mains  
 ‘Oriane washed her hands’  
 c. Oriane<sub>i</sub> a levé le<sub>j</sub>/\*<sub>i</sub> stylo  
 ‘Oriane lifted the pen’ (NOT: Oriane lifted her own pen)

On the model of (3)a, there are various expressions as in (4), some of them collocations:

- (4) a. froncer les sourcils/le nez      b. cligner des yeux  
 frown the eyebrows/the nose      blink of.the eyes  
 ‘to raise one’s eyebrows/to sniff’      ‘to wink’  
 c. claquer des dents/doigts      d. dodeliner de la tête  
 clap of.the teeth/fingers      rock of.the head  
 ‘to shiver/to snap’      ‘to nod’  
 e. balancer/rouler les hanches /      tortiller des hanches  
 rock/roll the hips/      twist of.the hips  
 ‘to sway/wiggle one’s hips’  
 f. ouvrir les yeux/ les oreilles      g. croiser les doigts  
 open the eyes/ the ears      cross the fingers  
 ‘to open one’s eyes/ ears’      ‘cross one’s fingers’

A second syntactic context involves nonreflexive (5) and reflexive (6) dative possessors:

- (5) a. Oriane lui<sub>i</sub> a=lavé les<sub>i</sub> mains.  
 Oriane to-him/her washed the hands  
 ‘Oriane washed his/her hands.’  
 b. La<sub>i</sub> tête lui<sub>i</sub> tourne  
 the head to him/her turns  
 ‘She/ he is dizzy’
- (6) a. Oriane<sub>i</sub> s<sub>i</sub>’=est lavé les<sub>i</sub> mains.  
 Oriane<sub>i</sub> to SELF=is washed the hands  
 ‘Oriane washed her own hands.’  
 b. Théophile<sub>i</sub> s’=est musclé les<sub>i</sub> bras  
 Théophile to SELF=is muscled the arms  
 ‘Théophile muscled his arms’

Inalienably possessed construal with a dative possessor is not limited to natural gestures.

In a third syntactic context, the possessed noun occurs in a PP adjunct:

- (7) a. Oriane a frappé Jean<sub>i</sub> [PP sur l<sub>i</sub>’épaule]  
 ‘Oriane hit Jean on the shoulder’  
 b. Théophile<sub>i</sub> a=marqué un but [PP de la<sub>i</sub> tête]  
 Théophile marked a goal of the head  
 ‘Théophile scored with his head’

- c. Oriane a pris Théophile<sub>i</sub> [PP par la<sub>i</sub> main]  
 ‘Oriane took Théophile by the hand’

Finally, in a fourth syntactic context, the possessed noun is the subject of a small clause:

- (8) a. Anne<sub>i</sub> a [sc les<sub>i</sub> yeux bleus]  
 ‘Anne has blue eyes’  
 b. Oriane<sub>i</sub> a [sc la<sub>i</sub> tête dans les nuages]  
 ‘Oriane has her head in the clouds’  
 c. Théophile<sub>i</sub> est parti [sc la<sub>i</sub> tête haute]  
 Théophile is left the head high  
 ‘Théophile left with his head held high’

In all contexts, further modification of the inalienably possessed noun is not possible, unless the modifier expresses an ‘inherent’ or ‘restrictive’ property of the possessed noun (Kayne 1975, Vergnaud & Zubizarreta 1992):

- (9) a. Oriane<sub>i</sub> a levé la<sub>i</sub> main (droite/ \*charmante)  
 ‘Oriane lifted her (right/ charming) hand’  
 b. Oriane lui<sub>i</sub> a=lavé l a<sub>i</sub> main (droite/ \*charmante).  
 Oriane to-him/her washed the hands (right/ charming)  
 ‘Oriane washed his/her (right/ charming) hands.’  
 c. Oriane a pris Théophile<sub>i</sub> par la<sub>i</sub> main (droite/ \*charmante)  
 ‘Oriane took Théophile by the (right/ charming) hand’  
 d. Oriane<sub>i</sub> a la<sub>i</sub> (\*belle) tête dans les nuages  
 ‘Oriane has her (beautiful) head in the clouds’

All of these cases involve body parts, and they represent data that are well known in the literature.

## 2.2. Beyond body parts

However, other types of nouns can also figure in these contexts. They include mental and physical states such as good spirits, facial expressions, life, and health:

- (10) a. Pierre<sub>i</sub> a gardé/ perdu le<sub>i</sub> moral / le<sub>i</sub> sourire.  
 Pierre has kept/ lost the mood / the smile  
 ‘Pierre kept up/ lost his good spirits/ his smile.’  
 b. Anne s<sub>i</sub>’=est bousillé la<sub>i</sub> santé.  
 Anne to SELF=is damaged the health  
 ‘Anne damaged her health.’  
 c. Cet accident lui<sub>i</sub> a=ôté la<sub>i</sub> vie  
 that accident to-him/her has=taken away the life  
 ‘That accident cost him/her his/her life’

In addition, possession via the definite determiner is not limited to animate possessors: it extends to possession relations between an inanimate possessor and a possessed noun:

- (11) a. “Un Opinel peut être personnalisé avec un petit message ou un nom gravé sur la lame ou dans le bois”  
<https://www.latoilescoute.net/idees-cadeaux-scouts>  
 ‘An Opinel knife<sub>i</sub> can be personalized with a small message or a name engraved on the<sub>i</sub> blade or in the<sub>i</sub> wood”
- b. Cette maison<sub>i</sub> a le<sub>i</sub> toit en bon état.  
 that house has the roof in good shape  
 ‘The roof of that house is in good shape’
- c. Sabine a pris la<sub>i</sub> valise par la<sub>i</sub> poignée.  
 Sabine has taken the suitcase by the handle  
 ‘Sabine took the suitcase by the handle’

Finally, articles of clothing, personal protection, or adornment can express possession when introduced by the definite determiner. In (12) and (13), I provide examples for dative possessors, direct construal, and PP adjuncts.

- (12) a. Pierre<sub>i</sub> s<sub>i</sub>'=est sali la<sub>i</sub> chemise  
 Pierre to SELF=is dirtied the shirt  
 ‘Pierre made his shirt dirty.’
- b. Anne s<sub>i</sub>'=est troué/ déchiré le<sub>i</sub> pantalon.  
 Anne to SELF=is made hole/ torn the pants  
 ‘Anne made a hole in/ tore her pants.’
- c. En tombant, le motard<sub>i</sub> s'<sub>i</sub>=est cassé le<sub>i</sub> casque/ la<sub>i</sub> montre.  
 in falling the biker to SELF=is broken the helmet/ the watch  
 ‘When he fell, the biker broke his helmet/ his watch’
- (13) a. Ils<sub>i</sub> ont enlevé les<sub>i</sub> chaussures/ les<sub>i</sub> chaussettes/  
 they have taken off the shoes/ the socks/  
 les<sub>i</sub> sandales avant d'=entrer.  
 the sandals before of=enter  
 ‘They took off their shoes/ socks/ sandals before coming in.’
- b. Je l<sub>i</sub>'=ai attrapé par la<sub>i</sub> ceinture/ la<sub>i</sub> cravate  
 I him/her=have grabbed by the belt/ the tie  
 ‘I grabbed him by the belt/ the tie.’

The cases that involve articles of clothing and adornment show an additional restriction that was first briefly noted by Guéron (2006): the sentences in (14) are only felicitous if there is bodily contact between the possessor and the possessed item.

- (14) a. Pierre<sub>i</sub> lui<sub>j</sub> a ouvert la<sub>j</sub> chemise.  
 Pierre to him/her has opened the shirt  
 ‘Pierre<sub>i</sub> opened his<sub>j</sub>/\*<sub>i</sub> shirt.’

- b. On lui<sub>i</sub> a volé le<sub>i</sub> sac à main.  
 one to him/her has stolen the bag at hand  
 ‘They stole her handbag.’

In other words, (14)a is not felicitous in a context where the shirt belonging to the dative possessor is located on a hanger, and Pierre is opening the shirt on the hanger for the possessor. Although this context is perfectly imaginable, the sentence in (14)a cannot be used to describe it. Similarly, (14)b is only felicitous if the owner of the bag was in close proximity to it. The sentence in (14)b is not felicitous in a context where the bag was stolen during a burglary when the owner was not at home, for example. This requirement of bodily contact or close proximity accounts for the infelicity (bordering on ungrammaticality) of the sentences in (15):

- (15) a. #/\* Pierre<sub>i</sub> s<sub>i</sub>'=est lavé la<sub>i</sub> chemise.  
 Pierre to SELF=is washed the shirt  
 ‘Pierre washed his shirt.’  
 b. #/\* Anne s<sub>i</sub>'=est repassé le<sub>i</sub> pantalon.  
 Anne to=SELF ironed the pants  
 ‘Anne ironed her pants.’

The sentences in (15) are infelicitous because it is hard to imagine a context in which one washes one's shirt or irons one's pants while wearing these items at the same time. In the next section, I will further refine the observations on so-called ‘inalienable’ possession involving items of clothing and mental and physical states.

### 2.3. Further observations

#### 2.3.1. Direct construal

In § 2.1 above, I observed, in line with Hatcher (1944), that possessed body part nouns in direct construal context must express a ‘natural body gesture’ in combination with the verb that selects them. This interpretive limitation does not extend to articles of clothing:

- (16) a. Ils<sub>i</sub> ont enlevé les<sub>i</sub> chaussures/ les<sub>i</sub> chaussettes/  
 they have taken-off the shoes/ the socks/  
 les<sub>i</sub> sandales avant d'entrer.  
 the sandals before of enter  
 ‘They took off their shoes/ socks/ sandals before coming in.’  
 b. Il<sub>i</sub> a gardé la<sub>i</sub> veste malgré le soleil.  
 He has kept the jacket in spite of the sun  
 ‘He kept on his jacket despite the sun.’

These cases however show a different set of limitations on the verbs selecting the definitely possessed noun. Interestingly, sentences where clothing is taken off or kept on are fine, while cases where clothing is put on cannot be construed as possessive, even when verbs are used that typically cooccur with specific articles of clothing:

- (17) a. Pierre<sub>i</sub> a enfilé son<sub>i</sub>/ \*le<sub>i</sub> pantalon.  
 Pierre has slipped on his/ the pants  
 ‘Pierre slipped into his pants.’  
 b. Anne<sub>i</sub> a endossé sa<sub>i</sub>/\*la<sub>i</sub> veste.  
 Anne has put on back her/ the jacket  
 ‘Anne put on the jacket.’

The same applies to body parts and faculties. Loss of limbs, hair, and eyesight results in felicitous sentences, as in (18), while improvements to the body or wounds as in (19) do not:

- (18) Blaise<sub>i</sub> a perdu la<sub>i</sub> main droite/ les<sub>i</sub> cheveux/ la<sub>i</sub> vue  
 ‘Blaise lost his right hand/ hair/ eyesight’
- (19) a. Théophile<sub>i</sub> a musclé ses<sub>i</sub>/\*les<sub>i</sub> bras  
 ‘Théophile muscled his arms’  
 b. Jean a amélioré sa<sub>i</sub>/\*la<sub>i</sub> cheville  
 ‘Jean improved his ankle.’  
 c. Jean<sub>i</sub> a blessé son<sub>i</sub>/\*le<sub>i</sub> dos  
 ‘Jean hurt/ improved his back.’

By contrast, maintaining or returning to a previously existing state yields felicitous sentences:

- (20) a. Anne<sub>i</sub> a regagné la<sub>i</sub> santé  
 ‘Anne regained her health’  
 b. Pierre<sub>i</sub> a gardé/ retrouvé le<sub>i</sub> moral/ le<sub>i</sub> sourire  
 ‘Pierre kept up/ again found his good spirits/ his smile’

Many expressions and collocations involving loss of limb and taking off clothing make use of direct construal, while there are no corresponding cases where such items are improved or acquired:

- (21) a. perdre la main  
 lose the hand  
 ‘to lose one’s touch’  
 b. perdre la face  
 lose the face  
 ‘to lose face’  
 c. perdre la tête  
 lose the head  
 ‘to lose one’s head (fig.)’  
 d. perdre les pédales  
 lose the pedals  
 ‘lose control’
- (22) a. tomber la veste/ la chemise  
 drop the jacket/ the shirt  
 ‘take off one’s jacket/ shirt’  
 b. mettre sa/ \*la veste  
 put on his/ the jacket  
 ‘put on one’s jacket’

### 2.3.2. PP adjuncts

PP adjuncts reveal another semantic restriction that is not immediately obvious. ‘Inalienable’ possession is only possible in PPs that express a locative relation between



the possessed noun and the possessor. This should not be taken to mean that possession is restricted to strictly locative prepositions. In 0b, for instance, the preposition *de* ‘of’ in *de la tête* ‘with the head’ has an instrumental interpretation. However, the instrumental preposition *de* ‘with’ entails locative proximity between the possessor and the possessed noun: instruments are typically used by their agents via direct contact. So the instrumental preposition licences the relevant locative interpretation.<sup>2</sup>

- (7) a. Oriane a frappé Jean<sub>i</sub> sur l<sub>i</sub>’épaule  
 ‘Oriane hit Jean on the shoulder’  
 b. Théophile<sub>i</sub> a=marqué un but de la<sub>i</sub> tête  
 Théophile has=marked a goal of the head  
 ‘Théophile scored with his head’  
 c. Oriane a pris Théophile<sub>i</sub> par la<sub>i</sub> main  
 ‘Oriane took Théophile by the hand’

The same is true for *avec* ‘with’ and *par* ‘by’ in (23): these prepositions specify a locative relation between the possessor and the possessed noun.

- (23) a. Elle<sub>i</sub> mange avec la<sub>i</sub> main droite  
 she eats with the hand right  
 ‘She eats with her right hand.’  
 b. Je l<sub>i</sub>’ai attrapé par la<sub>i</sub> cravate  
 ‘I grabbed him by the tie.’

By contrast, if the PP containing the possessed noun is not headed by a preposition that specifies a locative relation between the possessor and the possessed noun, it is not possible to express ‘inalienable’ possession with a definite determiner. This is illustrated in (24): the preposition *pour* ‘for’ and the prepositional expression *à propos* ‘on the topic of’ do not allow for the possessive construal of the definite determiner. Note the contrast with the possessive article *sa* ‘his/her’, which shows that possessive interpretations are perfectly possible in this context, just not with the definite determiner.

- (24) a. Je l<sub>i</sub>’=ai complimenté pour sa<sub>i</sub>/\*la<sub>i</sub> cravate  
 I him=have complimented for his/ the tie  
 ‘I complimented him on his tie’  
 b. Je lui<sub>i</sub> ai parlé à propos de sa<sub>i</sub>/\*la<sub>i</sub> cravate  
 I to him have talked on subject of his/the tie  
 ‘I talked to him about his tie’

The sentences in (25) present a particularly nice minimal pair to illustrate the locative restriction. The verb *compter sur* ‘count on’ has two meanings, a literal and a figurative

<sup>2</sup> A reviewer asked why *Jean a vu la tête dans le miroir* ‘Jean saw the head in the mirror’ should not allow an external possessor reading between *Jean* and *la tête* ‘the head’: seeing something in a mirror entails proximity, but this entailment of proximity is insufficient to license external possession. These cases are excluded precisely because there is neither a preposition nor a relevant syntactic RP configuration to license the relevant location relation.

one, just like its English counterpart. When the possessive article *ses* ‘his/ her’ is used, as in (25)a, both the literal and figurative meanings are available. However, with the definite determiner, as in (25)b, only the literal meaning is available. Obviously, the literal meaning requires a strictly locative interpretation, unlike the figurative meaning.

- (25) a. La pianiste<sub>i</sub> compte sur ses<sub>i</sub> doigts  
 ‘The pianist is counting on her fingers’  
 = She is using her fingers for counting (literal meaning)  
 = She depends on her fingers (figurative meaning)
- b. La pianiste<sub>i</sub> compte sur les<sub>i</sub> doigts  
 ‘The pianist is counting on her fingers’  
 = She is using her fingers for counting (literal meaning)  
 ≠ She depends on her fingers (figurative meaning)

This minimal pair therefore confirms the observation that possession expressed by the definite determiner is only possible in PPs that express a locative relation between the possessed noun and the possessor.

However, a locative relation between the possessor and possessed noun is not enough to express ‘inalienable’ possession with the definite determiner.<sup>3</sup> In (26), the fork is located on the possessor, but the definite determiner cannot mark possession in this case. Similarly in (26), you can hit someone on the shoulder, but not on the cat, even when that cat is located on the lap of their owner.

- (26) a. Elle<sub>i</sub> mange avec sa<sub>i</sub>/\*la<sub>i</sub> fourchette.  
 she eats with her/ the fork  
 ‘She eats with her fork.’
- b. Je l<sub>i</sub>’=ai frappé sur l<sub>i</sub>’épaule/ \*le<sub>i</sub> chat.  
 I him=have hit on the shoulder/ the cat  
 ‘I hit him on the shoulder/ the cat’

The contrast between (23) and (25) shows that the locative relation between the possessor and the possessed noun has to be predictable or expected in some sense: a hand is expected or supposed to be located on a person in a way that a fork is not. Freeze (1992) uses the term “characteristically associated” in this case, although he still takes that description to mean “treated as inalienably possessed”. Note that I carefully avoid the term ‘inalienable’ here, since I have pointed out above that many alienable nouns, including articles of clothing and adornment, can function as possessed nouns via the definite determiner. Nouns like hand, shirt, tie share the property that they are supposed or expected to be located on their possessor in these contexts, and therefore “characteristically associated” in the sense of Freeze (1992). Note that this is also the case for the inanimate possessors like houses and knives in (11) above: a house can be expected to have a roof, as a knife is supposed to have a blade. ‘Expectedness’ is not a lexical property of these nouns: they acquire it through the use of the definite determiner.

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Richie Kayne for pointing this out to me.

I will be using the notion of expectedness in this context rather than Freeze's (1992) "characteristically associated". This is because expectedness has a theoretically desirable feature: it can be viewed as a value of evidentiality, more in particular of the notion of inferential on the basis of common knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Admittedly, evidentiality is commonly viewed as a property of propositions rather than of noun phrases. However, that view has increasingly been challenged. Jacques (2018) points out that the proximate/ distal distinction of demonstratives is close to the visible/ invisible evidential distinction in many languages. I propose that 'expectedness' is an evidential value of the definite determiner in the nominal domain, more in particular it is the nominal counterpart of the sentence-level notion of 'inferential on the basis of common knowledge'. The advantage of using expectedness here in its evidential sense is that no new theoretical constructs need to be introduced to describe the relevant relation between possessor and possessed, which can now be reformulated as a location relation where the locatum is expected or supposed to be located on or in the location on the basis of common knowledge.

The notion of 'expectedness' has another advantage in terms of the facts presented here/ Traditionally, 'inalienable' possession has often been associated with temporal permanence. It is easy to see why: body parts are permanent possessions of their owners. Now what is permanent is also expected, but the reverse is not true. That is borne out by the facts; shirts are not permanent possessions of their wearers, but they can characteristically be expected to be worn by them.

#### 2.4. *Summing up: restrictions and generalizations*

The findings of this section can be recapitulated as follows:

- (27) a. 'Inalienable' possession indicated by a definite determiner in French can occur in contexts of direct construal, indirect construal, PP adjuncts, and small clauses ((3) - (6)).
- b. In all contexts, possession indicated by the definite determiner is not restricted to body parts, but extends to mental or physical faculties; facial expressions; and articles of clothing, protection, and adornment ((10) - (14)).
- c. The definite determiner can only indicate possession of articles of clothing, protection, and adornment if these are in direct contact or close proximity with the possessor ((12) - (15)).
- d. Restrictions on the verb: direct construal is restricted to 'natural gestures' with body parts, but it can also include reference to loss of limbs, clothing, mental/ physical faculties, or the maintenance thereof ((16) - (22)).
- e. Possession indicated by the definite determiner is only possible in PPs that

<sup>4</sup> The evidential category of inferential often specifically marks the type of evidence available for the inference. Such evidence can be direct physical evidence (inferring the presence of an animal on the basis of seeing footprints); common knowledge (inferring the presence of mushrooms because it's the season, i.e. common knowledge), or the speaker's experience with similar situations. 'Common knowledge' evidentials are sometimes referred to as the 'Assumed' category (Barnes 1984 for Tuyuca) or the 'Factual' (Oswalt 1986 for Kashaya). Also note that in many languages common knowledge is marked by direct evidentials rather than by indirect evidentials such as the inferential. See de Haan (2001) and Kittilä 2019 for insightful discussion.

specify a locative relation between possessor and possessum ((23)-(25)).

- f. The locative relation of direct contact or close proximity is further restricted by the notion of expectedness: ties and shoulders are supposed to be located on people in a way that cats and forks are not. Expectedness is the nominal counterpart of the evidential notion of inferential on the basis of common knowledge.

The discussion above has shown that the notion of ‘inalienability’ does not correctly characterize the nouns that can express a possessive relation by means of the definite determiner. On the one hand, as shown above, items of clothing, protection, and adornment also qualify. These nouns are clearly transferable and separable from their owners.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, kinship terms imply an untransferable, inherent relation, and should qualify as inalienable. Nevertheless, they cannot be introduced by a definite determiner to express possession, as shown by the minimal contrast between (28)a and b.

- (28) a. Ellej mange avec laj main droite  
 She eats with the hand right  
 ‘She eats with her right hand.’  
 b. Ellej mange avec saj/ \*laj tante<sup>6</sup>  
 She eats with her/ the aunt  
 ‘She eats with her aunt.’

The only property that all ‘definitely possessed’ nouns seem to have in common is that their referent can be expected or supposed to be located in or on a DP that is interpreted as their possessor. This characterization applies to body parts, mental and physical states, facial expressions, as well as items of clothing, protection, and adornment. It also applies to similar relations between inanimate nouns, such as knives and their blades, or houses and their roofs. I will call this generalization the Expected Location Generalization:

- (29) *The Expected Location Generalization (TELG)*  
 Only nouns whose referent is expected or supposed to be located on or in a DP can use the definite determiner to indicate that ‘possession’ relation to the DP.

<sup>5</sup> It is in principle possible to analyze nouns referring to items of clothing, protection, and adornment in the same way as body part nouns by making them relational via an operation of type-shifting. Such an analysis would basically create two lexical entries for each of these nouns, one that is relational and one that is not. I do not think any additional insight would be gained by such an analysis, and therefore will not pursue it: systematic and arbitrary homonymy would result. More in general, I do not think that the relational nature of nouns has anything to do with possession expressed by the definite determiner, as will become clear below (also see Karvovskaya 2018:Ch1).

<sup>6</sup> Richie Kayne points out that Italian has *Ha perso la nonna* ‘(s)he lost the (=her) grandmother’, but this is due to the Italian use of the definite determiner for proper names and kinship terms (which does not extend to standard French).

In the next sections, I will develop and account for these observations. In section 3.1., I will show that ‘definitely’ possessed nouns are instances of weak definites, and comply with the 8 characteristics of weak definites described by Aguilar Guevara (2014). In section 3.2, I will provide a syntactic analysis of the data observed above, and derive the restrictions noted in (27) from the analysis proposed.

### 3. Towards an analysis

I will refrain from providing a full discussion of the various analyses of inalienable possession that have gone before. For this purpose, I refer the reader to the excellent and complete overview provided by Guéron (2006). Suffice it to say that most analyses derive ‘inalienable’ possession by postulating an anaphoric element inside the possessed phrase as a way of capturing that they are inherently relational in the sense of Barker (1995). For instance, Guéron (1985) has a PRO determiner inside the possessed noun phrase for this purpose, while Vergnaud and Zubizarreta (1992) and Hole (2012) assume that inalienable nouns have an unsaturated argument variable bound by the possessor. The suggestion that ‘inalienable’ definite determiner is a ‘weak definite’ has been made earlier by Guéron (2006) and Beyssade (2014), but the interpretation of weak definites as a TYPE rather than a TOKEN – a suggestion also made in Vergnaud & Zubizarreta (1992) – is not sufficiently precise. As will become clear in the remainder of this section, I will not assume that the possessed noun is lexically associated with an anaphoric element that is bound by the possessor, nor will I argue, as e.g. Le Bruyn (2014), that the possessed noun is inherently/ lexically relational in any way. Rather, I will propose that there is nothing possessive about inalienable possession, and that the relevant interpretations completely derive from the syntax of locative expressions, in combination with a semantic analysis of the definitely possessed noun as a weak definite in the sense of Aguilar-Guevara (2014). Throughout the discussion, I will be assuming that the properties of ‘weak definites’ in general derive from the notion of ‘expectedness’ that I have defined above in terms of evidential inferentiality on the basis of common knowledge.

#### 3.1. *The definite determiner as a weak definite*

In this section, I will argue that the definite determiner in ‘inalienable’ possession is a weak definite in the sense of Aguilar-Guevara (2014).<sup>7</sup> This analysis was first suggested by Guéron (2006) citing Poesio (1994), Carson & Sussman (2005), and Beyssade (2014), but without fully developing the argument. It was also argued by Le Bruyn (2014), and discussed for Dutch dialects by Scholten (2018). I will provide a fuller discussion of this suggestion, showing that 9 properties that are usually ascribed to weak definites invariably apply to inalienably possessed nouns as well.

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<sup>7</sup> On weak definites, see also Löbner (1985), Ojeda (1993), Birner & Ward (1994), Poesio (1994), Abbott (2000), Barker (2004), Carlson & Sussman (2005), Epstein (2002), Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts (2010), Aguilar-Guevara, Le Bruyn & Zwarts (2014).

### 3.1.1. *Non-unique reference* (see also Le Bruyn 2014, Scholten 2018)

First of all, weak definites do not refer to uniquely identifiable individuals: they may refer to more than one entity, and exactly which entity is referred to is left unspecified.

- (30) *Context.* Sabina is standing in front of three elevators waiting for any of them to come.  
*Sentence.* Sabina is waiting for the elevator. (Aguilar-Guevara 2014:15(11))

The same observation applies to ‘inalienably’ possessed nouns: in (7) a, it is left unspecified which of Jean’s shoulders was hit.

- (7) a. Oriane a frappé Jean<sub>i</sub> sur l<sub>i</sub>’épaule  
 ‘Oriane hit Jean on the shoulder’

### 3.1.2. “Sloppy” identity in elliptical contexts (cf. Scholten 2018 for Dutch dialects)

Weak definites also show ‘sloppy’ identity, as in (31):

- (31) Mateo called the doctor and Sabina did too.  
 (Mateo and Sabina could have called different doctors)  
 (Aguilar-Guevara 2014:16(15)b)

The same property can be observed for definite ‘inalienably’ possessed nouns: Oriane and Maeve have each lifted their own hands (see also Rooryck & Vanden Wyngaerd 2011).

- (32) Oriane<sub>i</sub> a levé les<sub>i</sub> mains, et Maeve aussi  
 ‘Oriane lifted her hands, and so did Maeve’

### 3.1.3. “Narrow scope” interpretation

Weak definites also have narrow scope interpretations, as in (33)a. The sentence in (33)b, with a definite ‘inalienably’ possessed noun, shows the same restriction.

- (33) a. Every soldier hit the target.  
 (Each soldier hit their own target) (Aguilar-Guevara 2014:17)  
 b. Chaque étudiant<sub>i</sub> s<sub>i</sub>’=est lavé les<sub>i</sub> mains  
 every student to SELF=is washed the hands  
 ‘Every student washed her own hands.’

### 3.1.4. *Lexical restrictions*

Aguilar-Guevara (2014) shows that there is a limited set of nouns with what she calls a ‘stereotypical’ interpretation that can occur as weak definites. The best way to test this is in ellipsis contexts with an intended reading of sloppy identity. The contrast between the (a) and (b) sentences in (34) and (35) show that the relevant noun cannot be easily replaced by a different one, even if it has a closely related reference:

- (34) a. Martha is in the hospital, and Alice is too  
 b. Martha is in # the hotel and Alice is too

- (35) a. Martha went to the beach and Alice did too.  
b. Martha went to # the lake and Alice did too.

In both cases, the more specific noun is less felicitous or marked, indicated here by the hashtag. The same observation can be made for definite ‘inalienably’ possessed nouns: a closely related, but slightly more specific body part noun, cannot simply replace the ‘inalienably’ possessed noun in (36) and (37). I have chosen these more specific nouns to illustrate the contrast because they lack the stereotypical interpretations that are the hallmark of weak definites.

- (36) a. I looked Martha in the eyes, and Alice did too  
b. I looked Martha in #the irises, and Alice did too

- (37) a. I kicked John in the teeth, and Alice did too  
b. I kicked John in #the incisors, and Alice did too

This is also the case for articles of clothing, as in (38): shoes, socks, and sandals can occur in as definitely possessed nouns, but their slightly more specific counterparts (booties, Birkenstocks, or espadrilles) are quite marked in this context.

- (38) a. Les<sub>j</sub> visiteurs ont enlevé les<sub>j</sub> chaussures/ les<sub>j</sub> chaussettes/ les<sub>j</sub> sandales  
‘The visitors have taken off their shoes/ socks/ sandals’  
b. Les<sub>j</sub> visiteurs ont enlevé # les<sub>j</sub> bottines/ les<sub>j</sub> Birkenstocks/ les<sub>j</sub> espadrilles  
‘The visitors have taken off their booties/ Birkenstocks/ espadrilles’

Note that the term ‘stereotypical’ here has to be reinterpreted in terms of expectedness in all cases: *the beach* and *the hospital* in the (a) sentences in (34) and (35) refer to the beach and the hospital that are expected, i.e. whose reference can be inferred from common knowledge in the given context. The same is true for the weak definite in *I took the bus*: it does not matter whether I took bus 53 or 19, what matters is that I took the bus whose reference can be inferred on the basis of common knowledge of public transportation. More specific counterparts are quite marked because their reference cannot easily be inferred on the basis of common knowledge.

### 3.1.5. Restrictions on modification

Aguilar-Guevara (2014:19) observes that weak definites can only be modified by adjectives that establish subclasses of objects, as shown by the contrast in (39):

- (39) a. Lola went to #the old hospital and Alice did too.  
b. Lola went to the psychiatric hospital and Alice did too.  
(cf. Aguilar-Guevara (2014:18(36-38)))

As I already noted in (9) above (repeated here), this has been a long-standing observation for ‘inalienably’ possessed nouns (Kayne 1975, Vergnaud & Zubizarreta 1992):

- (9) a. Oriane<sub>j</sub> a levé la<sub>j</sub> main (droite/ \*charmante)  
‘Oriane lifted her (right/ charming) hand’

- b. Oriane lui<sub>j</sub> a=lavé la<sub>j</sub> main (droite/ \*charmante).  
 Oriane to-him/her has=washed the hands (right/ charming)  
 ‘Oriane washed his/her (right/ charming) hands.’
- c. Oriane a pris Théophile<sub>j</sub> par la<sub>j</sub> main (droite/ \*charmante)  
 ‘Oriane took Théophile by the (right/ charming) hand’
- d. Oriane<sub>j</sub> a la<sub>j</sub> (\*belle) tête dans les nuages  
 ‘Oriane has her (beautiful) head in the clouds’

### 3.1.6 Number restrictions

Aguilar-Guevara (2014) notes that weak definites display restrictions on number. For instance, there are only a few plural examples:

- (40) a. Alice went to the mountains.  
 b. Alice watered the plants. (Aguilar-Guevara 2014:19(40))

However, it appears that it is not so much that plural examples are rare, they often acquire a different meaning. An expression like *go to the mountains* is stereotypically used as a collocation to indicate a mountain vacation, while *go to the mountain* can have the stereotypical interpretation of ‘go to a sacred mountain on a pilgrimage’. Similar observations hold for ‘inalienably’ possessed nouns: in the sentences in (41), the plural is definitely better than the singular. This can no doubt be ascribed to the collocational nature of these expressions, but that is also the case for the stereotypical uses of the weak definite in (40).

- (41) a. I kicked John in the teeth/ # the tooth, and Alice did too  
 b. John was rapped on the fingers/ \*the finger, and Alice was too

Distinct meanings between the singular and the plural, as English *go to the mountain(s)*, also exist for ‘inalienably’ possessed nouns in French. In both (42)a and b, the singular and the plural object combine with the verb to yield the literal interpretation of waking up. However, the figurative meaning of both sentences is slightly different. The sentence in (42)a means ‘to finally understand’, while (42)b has the meaning of keeping one’s eyes peeled.

- (42) a. Cela lui<sub>j</sub> a ouvert les<sub>j</sub> yeux  
 that to-him/her has opened the eyes  
 ‘That opened his/her eyes’  
 (literal: ‘wake up’/ figurative: ‘to finally understand’)
- b. Cela lui<sub>j</sub> a ouvert l<sub>j</sub>’oeil  
 that to-him/her has opened the eyes  
 ‘That made him/her wake up/ keep his eyes peeled’  
 (literal: ‘wake up’/ figurative: ‘to pay attention, check out’)

Similar considerations apply to the difference between the singular and the plural in English *look someone in the eye(s)*. *Look someone in the eye* means ‘to talk to someone in an honest way that shows no doubts, without fear or shame’, while *look someone in the eyes* is more appropriate for romantic or intimate contexts.



### 3.1.7. Meaning enrichment (stereotypical meanings)

Aguilar-Guevara (2014) notes that sentences containing weak definites have richer meanings than those denoted by their mere composition with a selecting verb. These sentences carry both a literal meaning and an enriched, ‘stereotypical’ (or ‘expected/inferred’) meaning, as in (43):

- (43) Lola went to the hospital.  
*Literal meaning:* Lola went to a hospital.  
*Enriched meaning:* Lola went to get some medical services.  
 (Aguilar-Guevara 2014:20(43))

The enriched meaning corresponds to a weak definite reading. Aguilar-Guevara (2014) notes that *hospital* receives a stereotypical meaning in this context: ‘the place where you get medical help’, or in terms of ‘expectedness’, the ‘common knowledge’ location where you can expect to get medical help.

Once again, similar cases can be found for ‘inalienably’ possessed nouns. Recall from our earlier discussion that the sentence in (44)a is only felicitous if the shirt is opened while it is worn by its owner. This could be seen as the consequence of a stereotypical reading of *shirt* as ‘an item of clothing that is worn on the body’. A similar analysis applies to (44)b: the literal meaning of this sentence does not make any mention of good or bad health, but it is clear that the stereotypical meaning of health implies good health.

- (44) a. Pierre lui<sub>j</sub>                    a ouvert            la<sub>j</sub> chemise.  
          Pierre to-him/her   has opened    the shirt  
          ‘Pierre opened his shirt.’  
          ‘Stereotypical’ meaning of *shirt*: ‘an item of clothing that can be expected to be worn on the body’
- b. Pierre<sub>j</sub>            garde la<sub>j</sub> santé  
          Pierre            keeps the health  
          ‘Pierre keeps his good health’  
          ‘Stereotypical’ meaning of *health*: ‘good health, i.e. the kind of health that one can expect on the basis of common knowledge’<sup>8</sup>

The sentence in (45) requires a slightly more complex argument. In the context that is set up, Alice has both her own hands and wears a pendant in the shape of a hand. Despite this context, the sentence *Lola took Alice by the hand* can only refer to Alice’s ‘real’ hand, referring to the stereotypical meaning of *hand*.

- (45) *Context:* Alice is wearing a pendant with a small silver hand hanging from it.  
*Sentence:* Lola took Alice<sub>j</sub> by # the<sub>j</sub> hand.  
 (OK if body part, # if silver jewelry hand)  
 ‘Stereotypical’ meaning of *hand* (which can be expected on the basis of common knowledge) ‘the body part with five fingers at the end of an arm’

<sup>8</sup> Richie Kayne (p.c.) observes that this example is reminiscent of *Is he behaving today?*, with an understood ‘well’. He suggests that it contains a silent GOOD, with a silent BAD excluded for principled reasons related to negation.

A note on the notion ‘stereotypical’ is in order here, as I believe it is not entirely adequate to describe what is going on in these cases. First of all, the notion ‘stereotypical’ has no properly defined sense in linguistics, and that makes it rather suspect as a grammatical category. I have therefore reinterpreted ‘stereotypical’ as ‘expectedness’. What Aguilar-Guevara (2014) calls stereotypical meanings are meanings that can be inferred or associated with the noun on the basis of general or common knowledge: the hospital *is supposed to be* the common-knowledge place where you get medical help, just like shirts are items of clothing that are supposed to be worn on the body.

I argue that this is what the weak definite does: it imposes a strong ‘expectedness’ condition on the identifiability of the noun it introduces, presenting that noun as the most commonly expected one in the context.<sup>9</sup> This ‘identifiability by expectedness’ is therefore also responsible for the lexical restrictions noted in section 3.1.4: in *go to the hospital*, the hospital is the commonly expected location for getting medical help. Similarly for body parts or articles of clothing, the most general noun corresponds to the most commonly expected one, which is why *kick someone in the teeth* is better than *kick someone in the incisors*. Likewise, the lack of modification observed in section 3.1.5 can be related to expectedness: if the noun is interpreted in context as strongly expected by common knowledge, it cannot at the same time be singled out as a subset by modification.<sup>10</sup>

If the notion ‘stereotypical’ derives from the evidential notion of expectedness, it should not come as a surprise that such meanings are a rich source of collocational meanings and fixed expressions, as in (46):

- (46) Lola took John to the cleaners  
*Literal meaning:* Lola took John to the people whose job it is to clean.  
*Metaphorical meaning:* Lola took advantage of John or beat him up.

The same extension can be observed for ‘inalienably’ possessed nouns, as in (47):

- (47) John<sub>i</sub> got a tap on the<sub>i</sub> shoulder  
*Literal meaning* = John was tapped on the shoulder.  
*Metaphorical meaning* = John was chosen for a special task/ laid off.

<sup>9</sup> Kayne (2019) proposes that the definite determiner in inalienable possession is a marker of type, with a hidden possessed token present in the syntactic structure, so that *The ball hit John in the ankle* is underlyingly represented as *The ball hit John in HIS TOKEN OF the ankle*. It is not clear to me whether Kayne’s type-token structure can account for the shared semantic properties of weak definites and definite possessed nouns (though see his note 15 on MEANT, EXPECTED and SUPPOSED). For now, I will assume that at least descriptively, the definite determiner indicates identifiability by expectedness/ ‘common knowledge’ in these contexts, leaving a full syntactic and semantic account of (weak) definiteness for future research.

<sup>10</sup> This redefinition of the stereotypical interpretation of the weak definite in terms of evidential ‘expectedness’ may provide a new perspective on the traditional interpretation of regular definites in terms of familiarity. While ‘expectedness’ represents an inference on the basis of common knowledge, the ‘familiarity’ interpretation of the definite determiner may well be viewed as involving an inference on the basis of the common ground of speaker and hearer. A in-depth analysis of definiteness is of course beyond the scope of this paper.

Similarly, French and Dutch have a number of expressions that involve ‘inalienably’ possessed nouns that have lost their original meaning:

- (48) a. perdre la main                      b. perdre la face  
       lose the hand                        lose the face  
       ‘to lose one’s touch’              ‘to lose face’
- c. perdre la tête                     d. perdre les pédales  
       lose the head                        lose the pedals  
       ‘to lose one’s head (fig.)’        ‘lose control’
- (49) Janj houdt hetj been            stijf            (Le Bruyn 2014)  
       Jan holds the leg                stiff  
       ‘Jan does not give in’

### 3.1.8 Non-familiar reference

Finally, Aguilar-Guevara (2014) observes that regular definites must refer to individuals already present in the common ground. The use of a definite DP *the letter* in (50)a is infelicitous because the letter was not previously introduced to the discourse and therefore not present in the common ground. The sentence in (50)b shows that weak definites need not obey this requirement: the definite DP *the newspaper* can be used without previous introduction to the discourse.

- (50) a. Laila bought a new book and a magazine. #After pondering  
       for a while what to read first, she decided to read *the letter*.  
       b. Laila bought a new book and a magazine. After pondering for a  
       while what to read first, she decided to read *the newspaper*.  
       (Aguilar-Guevara 2014:20-21(45))

In other words, weak definites introduce individuals that are not present in the common ground. Obviously, the same is true for definite ‘inalienably’ possessed nouns, which require no previous introduction in the discourse.

### 3.1.9 Co-varying interpretations

Schwarz (2014) observes that weak definites can have co-varying interpretations as in (51):

- (51) The race-car drivers tightly gripped the steering wheel.

In this example, each race car driver grips the steering wheel of their own car, and a distributive plural interpretation obtains even though the definite is singular. Schwarz (2014) points out that weak definite do not necessarily trigger co-varying interpretations, as shown in (52):

- (52) The victims were taken to the hospital.

In this example, all victims can be taken to the same local hospital. Schwarz points out that the co-varying interpretation is somehow linked to possession: the steering wheel

in (51) is the race-car drivers' steering wheel, while the hospital in (52) is not the victims' hospital.

As already observed by Vergnaud & Zubizarreta (1992:598(4)), co-varying interpretations also apply to definite 'inalienably' possessed nouns: although the definite possessed noun is singular, the stomach of every child is examined in (53)a, and each of the children lift their own hands in (53)b.<sup>11</sup>

- (53) a. Le médecin a radiographié l<sub>i</sub>'=estomac aux enfants<sub>j</sub>.  
 the doctor has X-rayed the=stomach to.the children  
 'The doctor X-rayed the children's stomachs.'  
 b. Les enfants<sub>j</sub> ont levé la<sub>j</sub> main.  
 the children have lifted the hand  
 'The children lifted their hands.'

Summing up, 9 properties of weak definites also apply to definite 'inalienably' possessed nouns. In the next section, I will combine this insight with a syntactic analysis that accounts for most of the restrictions observed in § 2.

### 3.2. 'Possession' derives from the syntax and semantics of location

In this section, I will argue that the possessive interpretation of the weak definite nouns derives from the syntax of location. I will show that all 4 syntactic contexts of 'inalienable possession' contain a (hidden or explicit) locative P. In §3.3, I will then proceed to show how this configuration allows to derive the restrictions summed up at the end of § 2 in (27).

#### 3.2.1 The syntactic configurations of 'inalienable possession'

I will follow an analysis of possession that was first proposed by Freeze (1992) and Kayne (1993). Kayne (1993) originally proposed that possessive *have* is in fact *be+P*. Possession can be expressed in two ways: either the verb *be* is accompanied by a dative Possessor and a nominative Possessum, as in Hungarian and Latin (see (54)a), or *have* is accompanied by a nominative possessor and an accusative possessum, as in English (54)b (see also Freeze 1992; Hoekstra 1994, 1995, 2004; den Dikken 1995, 2006)

- (54) Liber est mihi [Latin]  
 book.NOM is me.DAT  
 'I have a book.'

den Dikken (1995, 2006) convincingly argues that the position of Possessor and Possessum in the Kaynian D/PP should be reversed. In Den Dikken's (2006:238) analysis, the Possessum is the subject of a R(elator)P, while the Possessor is contained

<sup>11</sup> The comparison between these sentences shows that co-variation of weak definites is dependent on possession in general, and not necessarily an exclusive property of 'inalienably possessed nouns. I do not have an explanation of why individual possession entails distributivity in this way. Note that 'collective' possession does not trigger co-variation: in the sentence *Catholics in this town go to the church on Sunday*, the catholics collectively go to their own (weak definite) church.

in a dative PP predicate, as in (55).

- (55) a. \_\_\_\_\_ T BE [RP POSSESSUM REL [PP P<sub>dative</sub> POSSESSOR]]  
 b. Possessor T have<sub>BE+R+P</sub> [RP POSSESSUM R+P [PP P<sub>dative</sub> Possessor]]

Rooryck & Vanden Wyngaerd (2011) extend this analysis to Dutch simplex reflexives like *zich*, which they argue should be analyzed unaccusatively on a par with possessive constructions, as in (56):

- (56) a. Jan<sub>i</sub> bezeert zich<sub>i</sub>/zijn<sub>i</sub> voet  
 Jan hurts REFL/his foot.  
 ‘Jan hurts himself/his foot.’  
 b. \_\_\_\_\_ T [VP bezeer [RP [DP zich/zijn voet ] R [PP P [DP Jan ]]]]  
 c. Jan bezeert+R+P+T  
 [VP ~~bezeer~~+R+P [RP [DP zich/zijn voet ] R+P [PP P [DP Jan]]]]

I will now further extend this analysis to weak definite DPs in the 4 contexts detailed in § 1. For direct construal, I directly transpose the configuration in (56) to (57):

- (57) a. Oriane<sub>i</sub> lève la<sub>i</sub> main  
 ‘Oriane lifts her hand’  
 b. \_\_\_\_\_ T [VP lève [RP [DP la main ] R [PP P [DP Oriane ]]]]  
 c. Oriane lève +R+P+T  
 [VP ~~lève~~+R+P [RP [DP la main] R+P [PP P [DP Oriane]]]]

In (57), as in (56), the possessive configuration is generated in the complement of the verb *lever* ‘lift’. I propose the same analysis for indirect construal as in (58) and (59), with the indirect object generated as the possessor PP in the RP complement of the verb.<sup>12</sup>

- (58) a. Oriane lui<sub>i</sub> lave les<sub>i</sub> mains  
 Oriane to-him/her washed the hands  
 ‘Oriane washed his/her hands.’  
 b. [TP [DP Oriane] lui<sub>DAT</sub> lave-T  
 [VP [DP Ø-] ~~lave~~ [RP [DP les mains] R [PP P [DP lui<sub>DAT}</sub>]]]]

- (59) a. La<sub>i</sub> tête lui<sub>i</sub> tourne

<sup>12</sup> Christine Tellier (p.c.) rightly points out that the dative in (59) is a lexical rather than a nonlexical dative, and should therefore probably receive a different syntactic analysis from that in (58). I am not sure how to syntactically differentiate these in an RP analysis, but any syntactic configuration that relates the Possessor to the Possessum via a locative R or P would satisfy my purpose here. She also mentioned the following interesting cases:

i. Le<sub>i</sub> pantalon lui<sub>i</sub> pend \*(jusqu'aux<sub>i</sub> chevilles)  
 The pants to-him/her hang down-to-the ankles  
 ‘His pants hang down to his ankles’

the head to-him/her turns  
 ‘She/ he is dizzy’

- b. [TP [DP *la tête*]<sub>NOM</sub> *lui*<sub>DAT</sub> *tourne* [RP [DP ~~*la tête*~~] R [PP P [DP ~~*lui*~~<sub>DAT</sub>]]]]

The only difference between (58) and (59) is that in (58), the transitive verb *laver* projects an external argument *Oriane* that subsequently moves to SpecTP; while in (59), it is the possessed internal argument *la tête* ‘the head’ of unaccusative *tourner* ‘turn’ that moves to SpecTP.<sup>13</sup>

For PP complements and adjuncts as in (60), I propose an analysis in which the PP specifies a position on the body of the most local animate DP in its domain: the direct object *Jean* in (60)a, and the external argument *Théophile* in (60)b.

- (60) a. *Oriane a frappé Jean<sub>i</sub> sur l<sub>i</sub>’épaule.*  
 ‘Oriane hit Jean on the shoulder’  
 ...[<sub>v</sub>P [DP *Oriane*] <sub>v</sub> [<sub>v</sub>P [<sub>v</sub>P *frapp-* [<sub>SC</sub> [DP *Jean<sub>i</sub>]] [<sub>PP-LOC</sub> *sur l<sub>i</sub>’épaule*]]]]]]*
- b. *Théophile<sub>j</sub> a marqué un but de la<sub>j</sub> tête*  
*Théophile has marked a goal of the head*  
 ‘Théophile scored with his head’  
 ...[<sub>v</sub>P [<sub>v</sub>P [DP *Théophile<sub>j</sub>]] <sub>v</sub> [<sub>v</sub>P [*marqu-* [DP *un but*]] [<sub>PP-INSTR</sub> *de la<sub>j</sub> tête*]]]]]*

Nothing hinges on the particular analysis of PP complements and adjuncts proposed here: the point is to make sure that the PP is in a syntactic position that allows its complement DP to be analyzed in terms of a locative relation with respect to the animate DP in its domain.

Finally, the fourth and last syntactic contexts in which ‘inalienably’ possessed nouns occur are small clauses as in (61). In a sentence with *have*, as in (61)a, the subject can be generated as the Possessor in an RP that has the small clause as the Possessum in its specifier. In (61), where the small clause is an adjunct to the main clause, I propose an analysis in terms of a silent PRO possessor that is controlled by the subject of the main clause. Again, nothing crucially depends on this particular

- ii. *Laj jupe lui<sub>j</sub> tourne \*(autour des<sub>j</sub> hanches)*  
*The skirt to-her turns around of-the hips*  
 ‘Her skirt turns around her hips’

Under the analysis proposed here, these would require a syntactic structure in which an RP relating the item of clothing to the body part would be in the specifier of an RP that introduces the dative, as in (iii):

- iii. [TP [DP *la jupe*]<sub>NOM</sub> *lui*<sub>DAT</sub> *tourne*  
 [RP<sub>1</sub> [RP<sub>2</sub> [DP ~~*la jupe*~~] R [PP P-autour [DP *des hanches*]]] R [PP P [DP ~~*lui*~~<sub>DAT</sub>]]]]

<sup>13</sup> A reviewer asks why *Il<sub>i</sub> tourne la<sub>j</sub> tête* ‘He turns his head’ alternates with *Laj tête lui<sub>j</sub> tourne* ‘She/he is dizzy’ while *Elle<sub>j</sub> lève la<sub>j</sub> main* ‘she lifts the hand’ does not alternate with *\*Laj main lui<sub>j</sub> lève* ‘the hand lifts on her’. This is due to the fact that there is no real alternation: transitive *tourner* ‘turn’ means ‘change the position of’, while inaccusative *tourner* in *Laj tête lui<sub>j</sub> tourne* ‘She/he is dizzy’ has a specific figurative meaning. This is also why *Elle<sub>j</sub> tourne l<sub>i</sub>’épaule* ‘She turns her shoulder’ does not alternate with *\*L’épaule lui<sub>j</sub> tourne* ‘The shoulder turns on her’: the figurative meaning is not available for body parts other than *tête* ‘head’ and *estomac* ‘stomach’.

syntactic analysis: I just want to express the idea that the small clause adjunct has a possessor inside the adjunct that is coindexed with the main clause subject, in order to provide a uniform analysis of ‘inalienably’ possessed nouns.

- (61) a. Anne<sub>i</sub> a les<sub>i</sub> yeux bleus.  
 ‘Anne has blue eyes’  
 [TP Anne a<sub>BE+R+P+T</sub> [RP [SC [DP les yeux] [AP bleus]]] R+P [PP P [DP Anne]]]]
- b. Jean<sub>i</sub> est parti la<sub>i</sub> tête haute  
 Jean is left the head high  
 Jean left holding his head high  
 [TP Jean<sub>i</sub> est [VP parti][ RP [SC [DP la tête][AP haute]]] R+P [PP P [DP PRO<sub>i</sub>]]]]

Summarizing, the analysis of the 4 syntactic contexts with ‘inalienably’ possessed nouns shows that essentially two configurations are involved. These are presented in (62). In direct and indirect construal and in small clauses, the configuration contains a dative PP with the Possessor, as in (62)a. By contrast, in the case of PP adjuncts, the PP must contain a preposition that specifies the location of the Possessum on the Possessor, as in (62)b:

- (62) a. [[DP POSSESSUM] (...) [P-DAT [DP POSSESSOR]]] ((in)direct construal, SCs)  
 b. [[DP POSSESSOR] (...) [P-LOC [DP POSSESSUM]]] (PP-adjuncts)

In light of the observation that the preposition in PP adjuncts must always specify a location on the Possessor, I would like to redefine the Kaynian analysis of possession more broadly in terms of location, as in (63):

- (63) a. [[DP LOCATUM] (...) [P-DAT [DP LOCATION]]] ((in)direct construal, SCs)  
 b. [[DP LOCATION] (...) [P-LOC [DP]]] (PP-adjuncts)

This broader definition allows for a generalization over both configurations. If the Possessor is viewed as an animate location for the possessum, that possessum simply further specifies a location on the possessor in both cases. This is so both when the Locatum is located on the animate Location (*the hand on John*), as in (63)a; and when the animate Location is further locatively specified by the Locatum (*John, more precisely on/with the hand*), as in (63)b.

### 3.2.2. Combining the syntax of location with the semantics of weak definites

I will now show how this syntactic analysis can be combined with the semantic analysis of the definite ‘inalienable’ DP as a weak definite. In (63), the ‘weak definite’ Locatum requires a strictly stereotypical interpretation. For hands, this is their interpretation as body parts rather than jewelry (cf. the discussion of (45) above), while the stereotypical meaning of clothes and items of adornment is that they are meant for wearing rather than for hanging in the closet, in the same way that the hospital is the stereotypical place for medical treatment rather than a building with interesting architectural features.

Aguilar-Guevara (2014:98) notes that the stereotypical interpretation of the weak definite extends beyond the weak definite itself. She observes that weak definites are often combined with ‘weak verbs’, formulated in terms of her generalization 2:

- (64) “Generalization 2. Weak verbs designate activities compatible with the characteristic function of objects designated by weak nouns combining with these verbs.” (Aguilar-Guevara 2014:98)

Light verbs that combine with weak definites have a particular role and provide a particular stereotypical or collocational semantics: *take the bus* does not refer to literally taking the bus, but is rather interpreted as ‘ride the bus’. Similarly, *leave the hospital* means to ‘be discharged from the hospital’ rather than physical egress from the hospital, while *go to the shop* means ‘do the shopping’ rather than movement towards the shop.

I argue that exactly the same phenomenon is at work in contexts of ‘inalienable’ possession. More in particular, I argue that the same mechanism that provides ‘light’ verbs with a weak, stereotypical or collocational interpretation, also provides the dative P in (63)a with a strictly locative interpretation. I therefore propose that there are ‘weak prepositions’ alongside ‘weak verbs’ in the context of weak definites: the meaning of the dative is narrowed in a way that is compatible with the characteristic function of objects designated by weak nouns.

Turning to the dative in French, it should be noted that the French dative has many other meanings apart from Location: datives can function as Experiencers as in (65)a, or as Goals as in (65)b.

- (65) a. Ce livre lui plaît  
That book to-him/her pleases  
‘She/ he likes that book’  
b. Jean lui a donné un livre  
Jean to-him/her has given a book  
‘Jean gave him/her a book’

A particularly revealing contrast is presented in (66). In (66)a, the direct object is a possessive, ‘alienable’ DP, and the (applicative) dative has an interpretation of Beneficiary. In (66)b, the direct object is a weak definite ‘inalienable’ DP, and the resulting interpretation is one of possession, or, as I would propose, Location.

- (66) a. Je lui<sub>i</sub> ai lavé sa<sub>j</sub> voiture (dative as Beneficiary)  
I to-him/her washed his/her car  
‘I washed his/her car for him/her’  
b. Je lui<sub>i</sub> ai lavé les<sub>j</sub> mains (dative as Location of hands)  
I to-him/her washed the hands  
‘I washed his/her hands’

I argue that the meaning difference between (66) and (66)b is due to a process of meaning reduction that reduces the meaning of the dative from a general meaning that is compatible with Beneficiaries and Experiencers, to a restricted, stereotypical meaning of Location, a meaning that is characteristic for the located noun. This process



of meaning reduction is the same process that reduces the meaning of ‘light’ verbs that combine with weak definites to a particular stereotypical or collocational semantics (*take in take the bus, go in go to the shop*).

This process of meaning reduction from applicative dative to locative dative is not restricted to the dative. It also applies to prepositions in the context of configuration (63)b. In (67), the PP adjunct contains the preposition *by*. In this context, *by* has a very particular locative interpretation. Although *by* can have various interpretations, including ‘beside, instrument/ cause, past, during, via, degree/ amount, from’, in (67) it is reduced to its locative/ endpoint interpretation, similar to temporal *by* in *by now, by five o’clock*.<sup>14</sup>

- (67) a. She took him<sub>i</sub> by the<sub>j</sub> hand  
b. Pick up the bucket<sub>i</sub> by the<sub>j</sub> handle

I would therefore like to conclude that the interpretation of dative P as location in ‘inalienable contexts derives the TELG formulated in (29) above, as well as the observation in (27)b and c that possession indicated by the definite determiner is not restricted to body parts, and that possession of articles of clothing, protection, and adornment requires direct contact or close proximity with the possessor.

### 3.3. Deriving the restrictions on the verbs

The analysis developed above shows that the context of ‘inalienable’ possession puts very narrowly defined syntactic and semantic restrictions on relation between the weak definite DP and the animate DP. In this section, I will show that the restrictions on verbs combining with such a relation noted in (27)d derive from the fact the lexical semantics of such verbs must respect all the properties of (i) the location relation (ii) the weak definite. This requirement severely narrows down the set of verbs that yield acceptable sentences in this configuration.

I will first focus on the restriction originally noted by Hatcher (1944) that ‘inalienably’ possessed body part nouns in direct construal are limited to ‘natural gestures’, as shown by the contrast in (68)ab. Note as well that indirect construal with a dative reflexive, as in (68)c, does not have this restriction:

- (68) a. Oriane<sub>i</sub> a levé les<sub>j</sub> mains  
‘Oriane lifted her hands’  
b. Oriane<sub>i</sub> a lavé ses<sub>j</sub>/ \*les<sub>j</sub> mains  
‘Oriane washed her hands’  
c. Oriane<sub>i</sub> s’<sub>i</sub>est lavé les<sub>j</sub> mains.  
Oriane to-SELF washed the hands  
‘Oriane washed her own hands.’

The reason that direct construal as in (68)a is restricted to ‘natural gestures’, while indirect construal as in (68)c is not, has to do with the more general ban on modification of weak definites. I already observed above in (9) that weak definites resist adjectival modification (*Oriane lève les (\*belles) mains*). I would like to suggest

<sup>14</sup> Similar considerations apply to the interpretation of *par* ‘by’ in French, in the example (23)b above.

that weak definites not only resist modification by adjectives, but also modification by the verbs selecting the weak definite as a direct object.

The difference between verbs like *lever* ‘lift’ in (68)a and *laver* ‘wash’ in (68)b lies in the way the verb semantically interacts with the direct object. Verbs like *wash* in (68)b entail an incremental modification of their direct object: the hands become incrementally cleaner through the process of washing (see e.g. Dowty 1991, Rothstein 2008 for the notion of ‘incremental theme’). By contrast, verbs like *lever* ‘lift’ in (68)a do not entail an incremental modification of their direct object: the direct object in (68)a is not incrementally modified by the movement expressed by the verb. It may be manipulated and moved, but it is left intact and unchanged by the verbal action.

Verbs like *laver* ‘wash’ in (68)b that select an ‘incremental theme’ direct object therefore necessarily modify that direct object. Such modification is not compatible with the nature of ‘weak definites’, which require a prototypical interpretation that does not admit modification by either an adjective or a selecting verb. In other words, there is a clash between the unmodifiability of the weak definite on the one hand, and the inherent modification brought about by ‘incremental theme’ verbs. As a result, ‘direct construal’ with body part weak definite nouns is restricted to verbs that express a ‘natural gesture’, i.e. verbs that do not modify the weak definite direct object, like *lever* ‘lift’ in (68)a.

This analysis can now be extended to those cases that involve loss of limbs, clothing, mental/ physical faculties, or their maintenance documented in (16) to (22) above. In none of the cases that involve the loss and maintenance of mental and physical attributes do the verbs incrementally change the direct object: they are either punctual achievements (*perdre* ‘lose’, *regagner* ‘regain’, *retrouver* ‘find again’) or stative verbs (*garder* ‘keep’):

(69) Blaise<sub>i</sub> a perdu la<sub>j</sub> main droite/ les<sub>j</sub> cheveux/ la<sub>j</sub> vue  
 ‘Blaise lost his right hand/ hair/ eyesight’

(70) a. Anne<sub>i</sub> a regagné la<sub>j</sub> santé  
 ‘Anne regained her health’  
 b. Pierre<sub>i</sub> a gardé/ retrouvé le<sub>j</sub> moral/ le<sub>j</sub> sourire  
 ‘Pierre kept up/ again found his good spirits/ his smile’

The same is true for verbs that refer to undressing or keeping clothes on as in (71):

(71) a. Ils<sub>i</sub> ont enlevé les<sub>j</sub> chaussures/ les<sub>j</sub> chaussettes/  
 they have taken off the shoes/ the socks/  
 les<sub>i</sub> sandales avant d’entrer  
 the sandals before of enter  
 ‘They took off their shoes/ socks/ sandals before coming in.’  
 b. Il<sub>i</sub> a gardé la<sub>j</sub> veste malgré le soleil.  
 he has kept the jacket despite the sun  
 ‘He kept on his jacket despite the sun.’

However, this explanation does not extend to the sentences with weak definites in (72). Verbs that refer to putting on clothes do not incrementally modify their direct object. However, in these cases the sentences are ungrammatical for a different reason. Recall

that under the analysis advocated here, the weak definite starts out in a syntactic RP configuration that stipulates a (dative) location relation with the animate location/possessor. This location relation clashes with the additional location relation that the verb seeks to initiate via dressing.

- (72) a. Pierre<sub>i</sub> a enfilé son<sub>i</sub>/\*le<sub>i</sub> pantalon.  
 Pierre has slipped on his/ the pants  
 ‘Pierre slipped into his pants.’  
 b. Anne<sub>i</sub> a endossé sa<sub>i</sub>/\*la<sub>i</sub> veste.  
 Anne has put on back her/ the jacket  
 ‘Anne put on her jacket.’

In other words, the analysis adopted here actually predicts that you cannot put on clothes if they are already supposed to be on. The discussion of these at first sight unusual restrictions on ‘inalienable’ weak definites shows that they can be naturally accounted for under the assumptions adopted by the analysis proposed here.

## 4. Conclusion

### 4.1. A summary of results

The results of this analysis show that ‘inalienable possession’ with definite DPs in French is not inalienable and does not involve possession. The relevant cases are best captured in terms of an analysis that combines a syntactic configuration for locative prepositions (RP in den Dikken’s 2006 sense) with the semantics of weak definites. These locative prepositions are ‘narrowed down’ to their stereotypical interpretation, just like ‘light verbs’ selecting weak definites are more generally (Aguilar-Guevara 2014:Ch5). The relevant ‘inalienable’ weak definites are not restricted to body parts, but include a broader set of nouns that can ‘stereotypically’ be expected – i.e. inferred by common knowledge – to be located in or on the body of an animate possessor/location: mental or physical faculties, facial expressions, as well as articles of clothing, protection, and adornment (see the TELG in (29)). Further restrictions on the verbs that combine with the RP containing the location relation between possessor and possessed derive from the requirement that the properties of weak definites and those of the RP need to be compositionally respected.

### 4.2. Some speculations on crosslinguistic variation

Finally, I would like to consider possible extensions of the analysis proposed here. First of all, there seems to be crosslinguistic variation with respect to the kind of noun that can be used as a ‘weak definite’ with a ‘possessive’ interpretation. Hole (2012) discusses the German cases in (73) to (75), where the definite determiner in the locative PP complement introduces a noun that cannot in any way be viewed as ‘inalienable’ or even located on the body of the possessor (see also Wegener 1985, Draye 1996; Lee-Schoenfeld 2006, Lee-Schoenfeld & Diewald 2014). Needless to say, their French counterparts are completely ungrammatical.

- (73) Paul hat Paula<sub>i</sub> in die<sub>i</sub> Suppe gespuckt.  
 Paul has Paula.DAT in the soup spat

‘Paul spat in Paula’s soup.’ (Hole 2012)

- (74) Paula tritt Ede<sub>i</sub> in die Sonne<sub>i</sub>.  
 Paula steps Ede.DAT in the sun  
 ‘Ede is affected by Paula stepping in the sun, and the sun is related to Ede in some specific way. (Hole 2005)
- (75) Klara, die Veganerin, guckte jedem<sub>i</sub> streng [auf die<sub>i</sub> Wurst]. (Hole 2015)  
 Klara the vegan looked everyone strictly on the sausage  
 ‘Klara, the vegan, was looking at everybody’s sausage in a strict way.’

I cannot do justice to these cases in the scope of this article, but I would like to offer a speculation as to why German ‘possessive’ weak definites have a broader range of application than their French counterparts. Note that in all these cases, the possessor has dative case in German. Now recall that I have assumed that the French dative is ‘narrowed down’ in the context of weak definites to its stereotypical meaning of location. Outside of inalienable possession, the French dative can function as Beneficiary, Goal, or Experiencer. I believe it is possible that the locus of variation between French and German lies in a difference in stereotypical meaning in the context of weak definites. The stereotypical meaning of the dative in German may be somewhat broader and include locative vicinity: in all the cases discussed by Hole (2012), the soup, the sausage and the sun have to stand in some vicinity relation to the animate possessor. This notion of locative vicinity for the German dative is not as strange as it may seem at first sight, since many of the German prepositions that require a dative complement (*bei* ‘with’ *gegenüber* ‘across from’ *aus* ‘from’ *nach*, *zu* ‘towards’) express a meaning of approximate locative vicinity rather than that of a precise location. Note that in Dutch and varieties of Dutch, the counterparts of (73) to (75) are completely ungrammatical. Under the perspective adopted here, this may be related to the fact that Dutch crucially differs from German in that it no longer has an active dative in its case system. I will leave this consideration for further research.

I would also like to make a final observation about English. As shown in (76)b, English at first sight seems to lack cases of ‘inalienable’ possession in direct construal when compared to French (76)a:

- (76) a. Oriane<sub>i</sub> a levé les<sub>i</sub> mains  
 ‘Oriane lifted her hands’  
 b. Oriane<sub>i</sub> lifted her<sub>i</sub>/ \*the<sub>i</sub> hands

However, this is only partly true (see also Le Bruyn 2014). There are a number of attested cases that do allow for direct construal in English. I cite some of these in (77):

- (77) a. “Exercisers lift the right knee to the front.”  
*Exercise and Wellness for Older Adults*, Kay Van Norman  
 b. “...since everyone turned the back on us.”  
<http://www.lovecbd.org/hemp-cbd-oil-vs-charlottes-web-whats-difference/>  
 c. “...showing that these players flexed the wrist to increase racket head velocity over this period.”

<http://journals.humankinetics.com/AcuCustom/Sitename/Documents/DocumentItem/10535.pdf>

- d. “both age groups tilted the head less, with the effect being strongest in the younger group” Anne Shumway-Cook, Marjorie Woollacott, *Motor Control: Translating Research Into Clinical Practice* (2007).

Note however that all attested sentences in (77) involve a modal reading of some sort: a generic situation, an obligation, or a generalisation. I would like to speculate that there is a similarity between the ‘expectedness’ interpretation of the noun and the modal reading: the ‘expected’ definite is associated with characteristic properties, while the modal reading indicates the non-episodic nature of the event. A first approximation of these cases suggest that in English, the requirement on ‘expectedness’ applies to the entire sentence rather than just to the RP as in French. This distinction may well derive the difference between French and English. Again, it would take me too far afield to fully implement this idea, but I believe these remarks open interesting avenues for future research into the relation between so-called ‘inalienable’ possession and weak definites.

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