Vowel Length in Seri Possessed Nouns

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The difference between long and short vowels in Seri verbs is very obvious due to conjugation patterns, but less so in nouns. As a result, an adequate analysis of Seri possessed nouns has never been presented. In fact, the difference between the second and third set of nouns included in this data squib was not fully appreciated and therefore virtually ignored in Marlett 1981. (The difference is slight enough that one might try to explain it by a phonetic rule.)

The first set of nouns (of which there are many more examples) have consonant-initial roots. In general, stress appears on the first syllable of the root. A subset of these nouns begins with j, and these conjugate somewhat differently. The second and third set of nouns display the remaining patterns which occur. Obviously the vowels with which noun roots of this class begin are extremely restricted.

As for verbs, those beginning with single a or e conjugate differently from those beginning with other vowels, including aa and ae (Marlett 1981, Marlett and Sternberger 1983, Marlett 1994). Compare the forms of the verb { -apli} lick, itápli (realis), ijóopli (distal), imíipli (proximal), with the forms of the verb { -apli} be cold, táapl (realis), jáapli (distal), máapli (proximal). With possessed nouns, however, the roots which begin with vowels conjugate essentially alike except that in one set the vowels are short and in one set the vowels are long. The question is, What is different about the underlying form of nouns and verbs that accounts for the different ways in which they conjugate?

Seri is spoken by about 700 people who live in the state of Sonora in northwestern Mexico. The data presented here were collected by Edward and Mary Moser between 1951 and the present; the citation forms of these words appear in a dictionary that is currently being prepared. The forms of the nouns used for unspecified possessor are less commonly encountered and more difficult to elicit; hence a form is not provided for all nouns.

The transcription used in this presentation of data is based on IPA conventions. Some phonetic detail is omitted.

References
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_Mexico_

The first column is the third person possessed form. The second column is the form used for an unspecified possessor. There is no form in which the root appears without an affix.

**Set 1**

1. ilít ?alít  
   head
2. illXáí  
   back of neck
3. innáíl ?ánáíl  
   skin
4. inít  
   heel
5. ipXááí ?apXááí  
   flesh
6. isít ?asít  
   earring
7. ittáaka ?atáaka  
   cheek
8. itáam ?atáam  
   mouth
9. iXáí  
   root
10. ják*?x  
    ankle
11. jáX  
    belly
12. jémän  
    face
13. jémsoí  
    venom
14. ílí  
    black louse
15. ímas  
    personal hair
16. ímoj  
    heart
17. ímt  
    breast
18. iXátx  
    tendon
19. ína  
    hair, feather
20. ínoí  
    arm
21. ínJ  
    spinal cord
22. íonom  
    hat
23. ípí  
    tongue
24. ípos  
    throat
25. ípí  
    lash (of eye)
26. ísmí  
    shoulder joint
27. ísk  
    white louse
28. ískt  
    lung
29. ísla  
    ear
30. íso  
    bag (of pelican)
31. ístx  
    leaf
32. ít  
    base
33. ítxa  
    bladder
34. ítíX  
    remains
35. íto  
    eye
36. ítx  
    buttocks
37. íX  
    liquid, water
38. íXak  
    nit
39. íXJ  
    pet
40. íjas  
    liver
41. ííJ  
    nose
42. ííp  
    tail
43. íípní  
    front of head
44. íísa  
    tonsils
45. íísaX  
    soul
46. ííst  
    egg (of fish)
47. íístoX  
    souls
48. íísk  
    front of body
49. ííltim  
    hipbone
50. íísk  
    strength
51. ííX*ní  
    placenta
52. ííXt  
    edge of flipper

The forms for first and second person possessor are usually the same as for third person possessor except that the first person form begins with í and the second person form begins with m: ?ináíl _my skin_, mináíl _your skin_. For _j_-initial roots, the first person form begins with _i_? and the second person form begins with _in_: _i?jémän _my face_, _injémän _your face_. The _í_ is epenthetic and does not appear if the preceding word ends in a vowel. The _n_ is the result of a general assimilation rule that applies to the nasal _m_ in unstressed syllables.