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A Theory and Typology of Possession in Ob-Yenisei Languages

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Abstract

The paper outlines the on-going study of possession in Ob-Yenisei languages. The languages of the project represent the endangered indigenous idioms belonging to diverse language families and united in the study by their areal affiliation with the posited linguistic area delimited by Ob and Yenisei river basins in Western Siberia. The analysis stems from extended original and legacy fieldwork data, and addresses the key morphosyntactic and semantic features of possession within a contemporary theoretical and methodological framework, functional-cognitive grammar. The study pursues to integrate data and analysis into modern debates regarding possession from areal Siberian, genetic Uralic and wider typological perspective.

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1. Introduction

The Ob-Yenisei language area spans the vast territory spreading from east of the Ural mountains in Western Siberia and includes various idioms of Ob-Ugric (Khanty), Samoyedic (Selkup, Enets, Nenets, Nganasan), Siberian Turkic (Chulym, Teleut, Chat) and Yeniseian (Ket) languages. In terms of the number of native speakers all the languages of the area are endangered, and in many instances bordering extinction. For these genetically diverse languages, a contiguous linguistic area is posited implying typological similarity of the member-idioms originating from local extended contact induced diffusion of features, rather than from their genetic affinity (Paasonen 1902; Hajdú 1953; Toporov 1964; Dul'zon 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971; Katz 1974; Fillipova 1980; Starostin 1982;

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Khelimskij 1982, 1985; Timonina 1986; Nadeljaev 1986; Morev & Denning 1987; Rona-Tás 1988; Terent'ev 1989; Janhunen 1989; Stachowski 1996; Künnap 1997; Georg 2000; Anderson 2004).

The project “A Theory and Typology of Possession in Ob-Yenissei Languages focuses on the research of underdescribed Siberian languages from the typological perspective, and involves a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the available data in electronic corpora format, focusing on possessive relations. This topic has never been studied comprehensively in the proposed typological and areal perspectives. The corpus-based investigation of these languages is accompanied by fieldwork methods. A comprehensive research and consistent analysis of possession is performed in a broad typological perspective. Newly collected and previously unpublished data on these languages will be employed.

The studies of the Siberian languages have fairly long history. Serious academic publications date back to the 18th-19th centuries. The first records of the Uralic languages and the preliminary linguistic analysis of these data, for example, can be found in the early accounts by Hungarian and Finish adventurers and scholars as early as the first half of the 18th century. In the second half of the 20th century the research on the Siberian languages boomed in Russia but was performed primarily within the traditions of Soviet linguistics and scholarly exchange was scarce. By the end of the 20th century Russian scholars received access to conventional theories and methods of linguistic research and renewed the analysis of the Siberian languages within modern linguistic frameworks. The research activities at Russia's research centres focusing on Siberian languages have been mostly aimed at the description of individual aspects of lexicon and grammar and are often neutral in terms of framework. The data representation and analysis often do not conform to the international conventions of annotation and analysis. Typological studies based on typological parameters elaborated for the description of unwritten languages (like the MPI Leipzig questionnaires) have been rare. Consequently, some aspects of grammars of Siberian languages still need a consistent and comprehensive analysis performed with modern theoretical and methodological rigor.

At present, documentation projects worldwide make available for typological studies data on endangered languages. Siberian languages have not been an exception; current research projects on Siberian languages are based on extensive fieldwork and create electronic text corpora and lexica of the legacy and original data. A number of recent and current projects focused on Ob-Yenissei language area (Tomsk State Pedagogical University projects on Eastern Khanty and Southern Selkup, Ket, Chulym Turkic, Teleut: <http://siblang.tspu.ru/>; EuroBABEL project on Khanty and Mansi: <http://www.babel.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/>; LangueDoc project of Moscow State University on several indigenous minority languages of Siberia including Enets and Nganasan (<http://www.philol.msu.ru/~languedoc/eng/>; and others) produce empirical foundation for modern theory-informed typological analysis. Thus, building on the available new and legacy data, the study of Possession in Ob-Yenissei languages is set against a broad typological background. It should be noted, however, that the degree of description and data availability on Ob-Yenissei idioms varies significantly; moreover, there is a correlation between the degree of description of the language and the degree of its endangerment.

The concept of the study “A Theory and Typology of Possession in Ob-Yenissei Languages” stems from the three facts: 1) there are no comprehensive descriptions of possession in lesser studied Siberian languages, the publications on possessives are sporadic; 2) there is no comprehensive typological research of the possession in the Ob-Yenissei languages outside of isolated studies (e.g. Sebestyén 1957; Kangasmaa-Minn 1984; Bartens 1991; Winkler 2003; Kozmács 2006; Honti 2008; Filchenko 2014; Potanina 2014; Wagner-Nagy 2014; Siegl 2015 *inter alia*); 3) there is no theoretically and methodologically consistent typological description of the possession in the Ob-Yenissei languages taking into consideration areal factors and language contact. Moreover, most of the available analyses on the Ob-Yenissei possessives are published in the languages of traditional Siberian scholarship – Russian, Hungarian, Finnish. Much less scholarship on Ob-Yenissei possessives is published in English and is available to wider academic community, while the existing sporadic publications rarely conform to the state-of-the-art linguistic research and modern scientific standards.

Building on the analysis of previously published literature of typologically diverse languages, including Siberian, the proposed study pursues comprehensive analysis of the domain of possession in general typological and areal perspectives, focusing on lesser-studied and more endangered Ob-Yenissei languages, including Ugric, Samoyedic, Yeniseian and Turkic languages. The research work will be performed in the cognitive-functional and grammaticalization theory framework.

The existing body of literature on possession is extensive necessitating limiting the theoretical and methodological foundation for our analysis of possessive constructions in the Ob-Yenissei languages to typologically oriented studies presenting typological parameters for the study of possession (Lehmann 1998, Croft

2003, Stassen 2005, Heine 1997, et al). Our study will use the research utility of the large-scale AUTOTYP project guided by Prof. Balthasar Bickel and Prof. Johanna Nichols, particularly the first fully implemented syntactic project – the NP database, recording formally distinct types of complex NPs for various languages (e.g. NPs constituted by genitives, by construct state marking, by possessor agreement <http://www.spw.uzh.ch/autotyp/projects/nps/nps.html>).

2. Theoretical and Methodological Background

At the first phase of the study we will provide an overview and analysis of the structural types of possessive constructions in the Ob-Yenisei languages. In his typological work W. Croft (2003) focuses on the morphosyntactic strategies that languages employ for coding possessive relations. But for his classification of cross-linguistic structural types, W. Croft utilizes the meaning of a possessive construction as the semantic relationship of ownership only, which does not provide account for the whole diversity of the semantic relationships coded by possessive strategies. W. Croft's typological work (Croft 2003) can be considered a solid foundation for starting work on the Ob-Yenisei possessives as it provides an overview of all the structural types that exist in the languages of the world: from juxtaposition (found in Ob-Ugric and Samoyedic languages) and concatenation (personal affixes in Khanty) to fusion. In our study we will rely on the grammatical properties that W. Croft (2003: 40) defines as relevant for the typological investigation of possessive constructions and the description of grammatical structures: 1) the use of additional morpheme (none, relational, indexical, linker or special form), 2) the degree of fusion of elements, 3) the order of elements.

We will then proceed to focus on the cognitive, semantic and pragmatic aspects of the study of possession in the Ob-Yenisei languages. The theoretical background for this part is to a great extent be based on B. Heine's work (1997a) in which a typological and cognitive-functional account of the domain of possession is presented. According to B. Heine (1997a), syntactically two major types of possessive constructions can be defined – predicative possession and attributive possession. Following Heine (1997a), we will describe the syntax of the predicative possession in the Ob-Yenisei languages based on their expression as 'have-constructions' or 'belong-constructions' (see also Honti 2008) and the attributive possessive constructions based on morphosyntactic strategies the languages employ (see also Croft 2003). The work of Heine (1997a) is deemed fundamental for typological research on possession as it offers a more semantically diverse classification of possessive constructions: the possessive constructions in the languages of the world seem to convey permanent possession, temporary possession, abstract possession, non-ownership possession and partitive relation. Another significant typological study of the domain of possession was performed by M. Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2003), who has shown the possessive noun phrase types dominating in the languages of Europe. In this work she focused on the formal means that the European languages employ for marking possessive relations. Since languages make use of several different possessive constructions, we will also take into consideration pragmatic salience of the elements of the possessive constructions and the information status of the referents. Following M. Koptjevskaja-Tamm, we will discuss various structural splits pertaining to possessive NPs across languages, including splits in accordance with the possessor's animacy/referentiality/topicality, and alienability splits (also see M. Haspelmath http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/conference/08_springschool/pdf/course_materials/Haspelmath_Possessives.pdf).

We will also utilize B. Heine's source schemas which is a cognitive approach to the analysis of possession: (1) the Action schema; (2) the Location schema; (3) the Accompaniment schema; (4) the Genitive schema; (5) the Goal schema; (6) the Source schema; (7) the Topic schema; and (8) the Equation schema represent the conceptual sources for possessive constructions. This approach seems to be relevant for our study as Heine (1997a) notices the correlation of the areal distribution of languages and the distribution of conceptual sources from which the possessive constructions derive: this approach will be implemented for the analysis of the Ob-Yenisei languages for the first time and can produce interesting results as these languages occupy a vast territory and demonstrate various contact-induced phenomena.

As it has been observed by the researchers in the typology of possession, the evolution of the possessive markers and, more precisely, possessive constructions can be most productively studied from the point of view of grammaticalization theory. Its primary goal here is to describe how grammatical forms and constructions arise and develop through space and time, and to explain why they are structured the way they are (Heine 1997b: 33). Consequently, the methodology employed in our treatment of possession in Ob-Yenisei languages implies that the process of grammaticalization is based on the interaction of pragmatic, semantic, morphosyntactic, and phonetic

factors. Grammaticalization is the process of evolution of lexical items into grammatical forms and from grammatical to even more grammatical forms. The process will be studied from two perspectives: synchronic and diachronic. Looking at a large number of genetically and typologically diverse languages, this approach demonstrates how certain types of grammatical phenomena are cross-linguistically predictable [Lehmann 1995, Bybee et al 1994, Dahl 1985, Hopper, Traugott 2003, inter alia].

Throughout our research program, extensive reference to unique fieldwork data is made, which originates from a set of independently funded language documentation projects of the Tomsk Department of Indigenous Languages of Siberia (<http://elar.soas.ac.uk/deposit/0164>). Within these projects a unique multimedia electronic corpora and lexica of Ob-Yenisei languages was produced with a special utility for typological studies.

3. The range of formal means of coding possession in Ob-Yenisei languages

It can be observed that Ob-Yenisei languages have very diverse inventory of constructions to code possessive relations both across genetic affiliations of the languages, and within individual language systems. Of these, the most frequently used types are the adnominal possession constructions and the existential (locative/possessive) constructions, with the possessor coded by a locational NP (Filchenko 2014; Wagner-Nagy 2014; Siegl 2015). At the lexical-morphological level, a variety of proprietive/possessive affixes are used to code salient possession (of a feature), while at the syntactic-pragmatic level, typical possessive markers are used to maintain information flow and discourse coherence, coding more topical, identifiable referents of the proposition rather than possession function per se (Filchenko 2014; Siegl 2015).

Within the adnominal possession strategy Ob-Yenisei languages widely use either the GEN case marking on the modifier (Samoyedic languages), or often the simple juxtaposition of the case-unmarked modifier (possessor) to the possessee head (Ob-Ugric). In Eastern Khanty the most frequent adnominal constructions are the ones with the overtly marked syntactic relation between the possessor and the possessee which compose a single NP: adnominal possessive constructions are head-marked (Potanina 2014). Within the project we will do the comparative analysis of morphologically marked and unmarked (juxtaposed) adnominal possessive constructions in Vasyugan Khanty. Selected examples below illustrate the formal range of coding possession relations in the Ob-Ugric language of the area, Eastern Khanty. Example (1) shows juxtaposition (*that woman clothes*).

Kh. (1) *jəŋk-juŋk-ni-nə* *ʈfu* *ni* *lopifäj* *ən-tə*
water-spirit-woman-LOC DET woman clothes put.on-PST0.3SG/SG
'The mermaid put on this woman's clothes' (Boy-005)

Another important means of coding the relationship between the modifier (possessor) and the head (possessee) is the affixation on the head (*dog-their*).

Kh. (2) *q□□i□□□□-□□□□*, *uy□□□□□□□□* *□□γ* *ä□□-□□□□*
□□γ
3PL listen-PRS.3PL bark-PRS.3SG 3PL dog-3PL/SG
'They listen: their dog is barking.' (OM2W-035)

Whenever there is a situation of nested possession, possessor modifiers branch leftwards, maintaining all the possessive relation coding (left juxtaposition, mandatory possessive affix marking inalienable possession) (*the beautiful woman husband-her head-his*).

Kh. (3) *mustəm* *ni* *qu-j-əl* *oy-əl* *toγə* *joyən-ta*
beautiful woman man-EP-3SG head-3SG away cut-INF
'The beauty's husband's head is to be cut off.' (TS-180)

Finally, the possessive relation may be not coded explicitly at all, being rather implicit and recoverable from the context as topical (*oar-his handle*).

Kh. (4) *pəγ-l* *jayənt-əkətə-γən* *ajri* *juγ* *wej* *morəmta-γən*
son-3SG row-INCH-PST0.3SG canoe tree handle break-PST0.3SG
'His son had just started rowing when his oar broke'. (F&S-013)

The second class of possessive constructions falls under the category of non-verbal / nominal predication represented by a range of existentials, including equatives, proper inclusions, attributives, locatives, and existentials proper.

Kh. (5) *nin qasi-tə əŋk-äl (wəl-wəl)*
 woman man-3PL mother-3SG be-PRS.3SG
 ‘The woman (is) those men’s mother.’ (EKHNeg_015)

These predicator constructions may be seen as covering the proprietive-possession functional domain:

Kh. (6) *jüy öyi-t-aki qu*
 3SG daughter-PL-PRD man
 ‘He is a man who had many daughters’ (LT: ‘*of-many-daughters man*’).

Possessive predications are essentially existential/locative predications, where the semantic possessor is grammatically a locative ((7) *at-her-husband there was a suit*, (8) *at-her there was not*).

Kh. (7) *timin pälto qo-pə ənt-əm, tol’ko jüy qu-j-əl-nə*
 DET coat where-Emph NEG_{EX} only 3SG man-EP-3SG-LOC
 ‘nowhere else was a suit like that, only her husband had one.’ (TS-145)

Kh. (8) *(jüy-ən) me’täli-pə ən’tim-äki-iki*
 3SG-LOC some-Emph NEG_{EX}-PRD-PRD
 ‘(She) has got nothing.’ (ST_121)

Another intransitive construction coding the existential/locative relation conceptually covering possession (possessee being located in the domain of the possessor) is the construction with the posture verbs ‘*sit, stand, lie*’.

Kh. (9) *räff-nə t’ukurä jəm in-ta qula-pärt iy-was stol-əl-nə aməs-wəl*
 old.man-LOC this.much good eat-INF more-lot eat-DER table-3SG-LOC sit-PRS.3SG
 ‘There is a lot of good food on the old man’s table.’ (TS-077)

Apart from existential possessive constructions, possession relation may also be coded by means of possession verbs (*keep, hold, own*), which may function either as matrix finite or dependent non-finite predicates.

Kh. (10) *qaq-əl əj-ni toja-γən*
 brother-3SG little-woman keep-PST0.3SG
 ‘The younger brother had a girl.’ (Girls-004)

Interestingly, the negation strategy for these possessive constructions also follows the existential negation pattern (11), rather than the standard negation pattern of the regular transitive predications (Filchenko 2013).

Kh. (11) *(jəγ-ən) öyi-t ənt’im wəl-qal*
 3PL-LOC daughter-PL NEG_{EX} be-PST1.3SG
 ‘They had no daughters’ (Predicate Possessors 1.1.6.)

Possessive markers appear to be consistently and robustly employed by the local systems (illustrated by Khanty) to signal the pragmatic status of the referents of the proposition. The correlation of syntactic flexibility and omissibility, control over reflexivization are consistently associated with the overall pragmatic prominence of the referents, their inferability, identifiability, activation through a relation of possession to an already active referent (Nikolaeva 1999; Filchenko 2014; Siegl 2015). One of the dominant, if not exclusive, device of clause subordination in Ob-Yenisei languages is the use of non-finite constructions. The non-finite forms are of three types: infinitival, participial and converbial. The Eastern Khanty non-finite relative clauses are such that the grammatical relation of the relativized nominal argument is prototypically not overtly marked (Tereshkin 1961, Gulya 1966, Filchenko 2007), which is consistent with the gap relativization strategy. In most instances these are subject-controlled embedded non-finite clauses, i.e. the S of the non-finite clause is co-referential with the S of the matrix clause. This, however, is not mandatory, and there are numerous examples of adverbial, complement and relative non-finite clauses where the S of the non-finite predicate is not co-referential with the S of the matrix clause (cf. example (12)).

Kh. (12) *quntə toy jö-m-äl-nə Al’wə kölä tñu juy-əl-nə aməs-wəl*
 when DET come-PP-3SG-LOC Alva still DET tree-3SG-LOC sit-PRS.3SG
 ‘When he (Syvsiki) got back, Alva was still up that tree of his.’ (S&A-019)

In example (12) the non-finite predicates of embedded dependent clauses can have possessive affixes co-referential with the head argument that they modify. What triggers this possessive agreement is available from the analysis of the functional-pragmatic status of the referents of propositions that correspond to the head of the embedded non-finite clause. The agreement between the head and the non-finite predicate of the embedded clause is motivated by the pragmatic properties of the referent (identifiability, activation in the interlocutors’ discourse universe). If the S/A of the embedded clause is not co-referential with the S/A of the finite matrix predicate, then

possessee; there is an extra participant, the possessor treated as an additional argument of the clause; external possession is motivated when the possessor of an object is not co-referential with the clause subject (Payne, 1999: 3-5). Languages of the area demonstrate examples whose structural and semantic features could be seen as apparently falling within the external possession domain. Analysis of many of the examples as external possession can be debated, but their discussion is still useful for better understanding of the systems.

Kh. (18) *niŋ-nä iwän sewl-əl-oy toy qayrimt-əl-tə*
 woman-LOC Ivan neck-3SG-PRL there catch-MMNT-PST0.3SG/SG
 'The woman caught Ivan by his neck.' (TS-140)

cf.

niŋ-nä iwän qayrimt-əl-tə
 woman-LOC Ivan catch-MMNT-PST0.3SG/SG
 'The woman caught Ivan.' (constructed)

According to D. Payne's generalizations for external possession constructions (EPCs) and her conclusion that not all EPCs are uniformly viewed as raising (Payne 1999: 7), Eastern Khanty example (18) is not examples of possessor raising construction but rather an external possession construction as (shown in constructed versions of these examples) there are complete predications with the affected undergoer of the action 'Ivan', licensed and governed by the argument frame of the respective predicate. The presence of the locative oblique 'his neck' just further refines the exact location at which the undergoer was affected. The possessor does not have semantic dependency on the oblique, thus there is no raising.

4. Conclusion

We define the range of formal means for coding possession and a wide functional-semantic range of linguistic expressions coding possessive and non-possessive relations in Ob-Yenissei languages. The three major domains that constitute the principal linguistic expressions of possession are predicative possession, attributive possession and other non-canonical possessive constructions which are often labeled as external possession constructions. Structurally, we distinguish two major types of possessive NPs: the ones that are head-marked by a possessive affix and those ones that are formed by mere juxtaposition of unmarked nominals. Semantically, the realm of possession can be characterized by a diverse range of relations the possessive constructions can express (alienable possession, inalienable possession, abstract possession, part-whole relations, kinship relations, etc.). The preliminary analysis shows that adnominal possessive constructions are much more polysemous than the predicative ones thus representing the focus of our study. Our hypothesis is that the domain of possession can be defined as cultural, and the typological and areal approaches to the study of possession in endangered indigenous languages is essential as these idioms belong to diverse language families and are united by their areal affiliation with the posited Ob-Yenissei linguistic area in Western Siberia.

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Text Data

ST: "Ski-tracks", 2005. Vasyugan Khanty. Recorded A. Filchenko. Tomsk archive.

TS: "Three sons", Vasyugan Khanty (Filchenko, Potanina, Tonoyan, Tretyakov, 2010).

S & A: "Syvsiki and Alvali", Vasyugan Khanty (Filchenko, Potanina, Tonoyan, Tretyakov, 2010).

Girls: "Girls", Vasyugan Khanty (Filchenko, Potanina, Tonoyan, Tretyakov, 2010).

B&M: "Bird and Mouth", Vasyugan Khanty (Filchenko, Potanina, Tonoyan, Tretyakov, 2010).

Boy: "Boy", Vasyugan Khanty (Filchenko, Potanina, Tonoyan, Kurganskaja, 2012).

OM2W: "Old man and two women" Vasyugan Khanty (Filchenko, Potanina, Tonoyan, Kurganskaja, 2012).

F&S: “Father and Son”, Vasyugan Khanty (Filchenko, Potanina, Tonoyan, Kurganskaja, 2012).
 EKHNeg: “Eastern Khanty Negation Questionnaire”, 2012, adapted and recorded A. Filchenko, S. Kovylin.
 Predicate Possessors: “Predicate Possessors Questionnaire”, 2013, Vasyugan Khanty. Recorded A. Filchenko.
 Tomsk archive.
 Abessive: “Abessive Questionnaire”, 2013, Vasyugan Khanty. Recorded A. Filchenko. Tomsk archive.

Abbreviations

ABES – abessive; ATTR – attributive; DER – derivational affix; DET – determiner; Emph – emphatic; EP – epenthetic; IMPR – imperative; INCH – inchoative; INF – infinitive; LT – literal meaning; LOC – locative; MMNT – momentative; NEG_{EX} – existential negator; NP – noun phrase; PL – plural; PP – perfective participle; PRD – predicator affix; PRS – present; PST0 – past 0 (suffixless past); S – subject of intransitive clause; SG – singular; 1 – first person; 2 – second person; 3 – third person.

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