

Bridging linkage in Ob-Ugric and the role of possessive suffixes

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Bridging linkage (BL, aka Bridging Constructions) is a discourse strategy used to structure coherence in narratives: the last main clause of a discourse unit (reference clause) is being recapped as a subordinate clause (bridging clause) before a new discourse unit begins in the following main clause (Guérin 2019). Two types have been mainly described:

Type I repeats the predicate of the reference clause wholly or partially indicating a “transition between preceding and following events” (Aikhenvald 2019: 457).

Northern Mansi (Ob-Ugric)

- (1) *ul'uw an'a-n joxt-əs jol xuj-as*
firewood heap-DAT come-PST[3SG] lie down-PST[3SG]
'He came to a heap of firewood and lay down.'
- xuj-ima-te akwmate:rt akw e:kwa joxt-əs*
lie-CVB-3SG once one woman come- PST[3SG]
'Lying there, a woman came.' (OUDB Northern Mansi Corpus. Text ID 1237: 60-61)

Type II summarizes anaphorically the reference clause by using generic or light verbs, often combined with a demonstrative (Guérin 2019).

Pelym Mansi (Ob-Ugric)

- (2) *poj-m-əŋ kə:p ʔi wurəmt-ow-s am palt-əm*
stern-PROPR¹ boat DEM steer-PASS-PST[3SG] 1SG to-1SG
'She steered the sterned boat towards me.'
- ʔi joxt-əm-eəŋ sjitəl tup taljk-əl wortəmtax-t-əs*
DEM come-PTCP.PST-3SG when oar top-INS lean on-PST[3SG]
'Having arrived she leaned herself on the tip of the oar.' (OUDB Pelym Mansi Corpus. Text ID 1342: 25-27)

Guérin also describes mixed types of BL I and II (Guérin 2019: 21).

Surgut Khanty (Ob-Ugric)

- (3) *pi:təŋkəli-γən o:pi-sə-γən βal-t-əγən*
little bird-DU oder sister-COLL²-DU live-PRS-3DU
'There lived a little bird and his elder sister.'
- ʔi: βal-t-in əj məte tɛ:tnə pi:təŋkəli jɛ:stə-t*
DEM live-PTCP.PRS-3DU some day little bird say-PRS[3SG]
'Living so, some day the little bird says.' (OUDB Surgut Khanty Corpus. Text ID 732: 1-2)

BL thus operates between syntax and discourse above clause level “to serve specific discourse functions” (Guérin 2019: 23) such as plot sequencing, maintaining continuity or providing accessibility for the hearer. It is a phenomenon described across languages, especially in the South Americas. The given examples however show, BL is not only existing in Ob-Ugric languages but features some particularities such as the converbial construction in Northern Mansi (cf. example 1). BL in example (3) concurrently introduces a dialogue. This usage is also

¹ PROP = Proprietary, i.e. „provided with”

² COOL = Collective, i.e. „a number of individuals acting together” (cf. Oxford English Dictionary)

described for Evenki, a Tungusic language spoken in Siberia (Grenoble 2012). Data suggest thus such a third type in Ob-Ugric, too.

The BL strategies in Ob-Ugric presented here are all non-finite subordinating clauses with possessive suffixes. The pragmatic features of possessive suffixes in Uralic languages are meanwhile well acknowledged. Yet their manifold discourse-structuring functions have been mainly described for adnominal possessive constructions. I argue that this subordinate clause construction with possessive suffix is used on purpose as a BL strategy because of the special pragmatic features of possessive suffixes both as anaphoric referential devices (encoding the role of topic) and as deictic markers of attention (indicating focus), e.g. denoting a subject shift (example 1) or singling one referent out of a group of given referents (example 3).

BL has not yet been thoroughly described for Uralic languages. In my talk I would also like to address the question whether similar BL strategies are observed in other Uralic languages or if this is a particular usage shared by (contact) languages of Siberia.

References

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