

## Possessive agreement and external possessors in Kazym Khanty

**Introduction:** My talk addresses two syntactic phenomena in Kazym Khanty, further KKh, (Northern Khanty < Ob-Ugric < Uralic): possessive agreement (PAgr) with lexical possessors and possessor topicalization (PTop). Same as in Obdorsk Khanty (Nikolaeva et al. 1993), in KKh pronominal possessors trigger obligatory agreement morphology on the possessee, whereas agreement with lexical possessors is only possible if they are topics. I will focus on the syntactic restrictions on PTop and its link with PAgr. All data comes from my fieldwork in Kazym, KhMAO, Russia in March & September, 2023, and was obtained via elicitation (translation from Russian or acceptability judgements on constructed Khanty examples).

**Data:** My point of departure is that PAgr is not always accompanied by possessor movement. Agreeing possessors may stay *in-situ* (PossP) within the DP:

- (1) a. ma [tām mašaj-en jernas-(λ)] kāt puš pəš-s-εm.  
 1SG this M.-POSS.2SG dress-POSS.3SG two time wash-PST-1SG>SG  
 b. ma [mašaj-en tām jernas-\*(λ)] kāt puš pəš-s-εm.  
 ‘I’ve washed this dress of Masha’s two times.’

In (1a), the possessor appears between the demonstrative pronoun and the possessee irrespective of PAgr. However, (1b) shows that PAgr is obligatory if the possessor is located to the left of the demonstrative (possibly on the DP edge). The fact that the agreed-with possessor and its possessee can be topicalized together (ex. 2) also speaks in favor of treating them as one constituent, i.e. shows that the possessor does not have to leave the matrix DP.

- (2) [mashaj-en kinškaj-(əλ)] ma mănəm lapət χātλ λuηət-s-εm.  
 M.-POSS.2SG book-POSS.3SG 1SG last seven day read-PST-1SG>SG  
 ‘As for MASHA’S BOOK, I read it last week.’

As we have seen in (1b), PAgr is necessary for DP-bound possessor dislocation. Interestingly, clausebound PTop shows the same restriction (3):

- (3) {— Why didn’t Masha say “Hi” to you?}  
 mašaj-en muλχatλ amp-\*(əλ) maw-ən λapt-s-εm.  
 M.-POSS.2SG yesterday dog-POSS.3SG honey-LOC feed-PST-1SG>SG  
 ‘— I fed Masha’s dog with candy yesterday’. {I guess she is still angry.}

PTop is also restricted by the syntactic position of the possessee. Possessors can only be extracted if the possessee is a subject or a direct object. (4) shows the ban on PTop if the possessee is a LOC-marked instrument, (5) shows the same for a complement of a postposition and (6) for a DAT-marked recipient. Note that in (3) the dog is also a recipient, but the secundative alignment is used and the possessee *ampəλ* occupies the DO position, hence this restriction cannot be explained in terms of thematic roles.

- (4) {— Why is Petja angry?}  
 \*pet’aj-en muλχatλ keš-eλ-n ŋuχi ewət-s-εm.  
 P.-POSS.2SG yesterday knife-POSS.3SG-LOC meat cut-PST-1SG  
 Intended: ‘— I cut meat with Petja’s knife yesterday’.
- (5) {— Why isn’t your grandfather speaking to you?}  
 \*satsas-εm tońal ol χot-λ ewəlt χunta-s-εm.  
 paternal.grandfather last year house-POSS.3SG from run.away-PST-1SG

Intended: ‘— I ran away from my grandfather’s house last year’.

(6) {— Why is Petja envious?}

\*pet’aj-en      tām wanən      jaj-əλ-a      keši      mojλ-s-əm.  
P.-POSS.2SG      recently      older.brother-POSS.3SG-DAT      knife      gift-PST-1SG>SG

Intended: ‘I gave Petya’s brother a knife as a gift.’

**Analysis:** Northern Khanty is in many ways a discourse-configurational language. The distribution of passive morphology, object agreement and secundative alignment are all sensitive to the topic/focus distinction (Nikolaeva et al. 1993, Belkind 2023). In Colley & Privoznov (2020) this was modeled as a case of mixed A/A-bar agreement. Since PAgr is also highly preferred with topical possessors, I propose that the D-head in KKh has its own composite  $\phi$ /TOP-probe. It would force the possessors to only agree in person and number features with those possessors that also have a [TOP] feature. This captures another fact straight away: if some clausal [TOP] probe in the C-domain can find and attract a possessor with a [TOP] feature, then so would a probe in D before that, which derives the obligatoriness of PAgr in clausebound topicalization. Concerning the syntactic restrictions on the possessee, I propose a solution within Unlocking Theory (Branan 2018). Its main tenet is that subextraction from a phase (in our case the DP) is only possible if this phase enters into some Agree relationship first. Since the verb in KKh can only agree with the subject and the DO, the two possessee positions from which possessors can be topicalized, no additional stipulations are needed. Moreover, Nikolaeva et al. (1993) observes that object agreement on the verb is obligatory if the possessor of the DO is extracted, which is exactly what is expected under my approach. Lastly, since both DP-local and clausebound topicalization are optional and also show some interspeaker preferences, I have to assume that either probe (on D and in the C domain) may enter the derivation with a movement feature or without one. This would derive all three possible surface positions of the possessor: *in-situ*, at the left edge of the DP and at the left edge of the clause.

**Conclusions:** I have proposed an analysis of PAgr by positing a  $\phi$ /TOP-probe in D, which derives the agreement pattern and explains its connection to PTop. Then, I have used the mechanism of phase unlocking through agreement to account for syntactic restrictions on PTop. On a larger scale, the analysis adds to the typology of mixed A/A’ phenomena and provides additional support for the parallelism of DP-internal and clausal syntax (cf. Szabolcsi 1992, Aboh 2004 *inter alia*).

#### References:

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