

Animacy split and prototypicality in Mari possessive suffix climbing

Bogáta Timár
University of Tartu
bogata@ut.ee

In my talk I present possible syntactic and semantic reasons for a phenomenon called possessive suffix climbing (PSC, previously possessive clitic climbing, cf. Kubínyi 2015) in Meadow Mari. This occurs in person marking of nominal adpositions in a possessive phrase (PP). In the regular pattern, the person is marked on the noun. However, in some cases, the possessive suffix may appear on the postposition instead of the noun, forming an irregular (PSC) agreement.

- (1) Meadow Mari
pört-em onćâlno ~ pört onćâln-em
house-PX1SG in_front_of ~ house in_front_of-PX1SG
'in front of my house' (elicited)

PSC occurs in the Permic languages as well, such as Komi (both Zyrian (2) and Permyak) and Udmurt (3).

- (2) Komi-Zyrian
jur-yd vylti ~ jur vylti-yd
head-PX2SG over ~ head over-PX2SG
'over your head' (Wiedemann 1884: 204)

- (3) Udmurt
kńiga-je ulyś ~ kńiga ulyśty-m
book-PX1SG from_under ~ book from_under-PX1SG
'from under my book' (Perevoshchikov 1962: 317)

Not all postpositions take possessive suffixes, and not all those who do exhibit PSC. In the Permic languages, PSC almost exclusively occurs with spatial postpositions and possessees that are entities owned or controlled by the possessor. Meanwhile, with temporal or causal-final postpositions, and possessees that are situations caused or experienced by the possessor, PSC is significantly less common. In Meadow Mari, PSC is less widespread, and such correlation cannot be observed (Kubínyi 2015).

My research consisted of a corpus study of literary Meadow Mari with 56,72 million tokens and follow-up interviews with native speakers to test the corpus results (Borin et al. 2012). The goal was to determine which (morpho)syntactic or semantic factors allow or prohibit PSC.

Results show that while in Meadow Mari, PSC is also more common with (though not exclusive to) spatial postpositions, the main prohibiting factor of PSC is an animate possessive. Such examples were entirely absent in the corpus, and were rejected by native speakers (4). The animacy split perseveres regardless of empathy, ie. with kinship terms, interpersonal relationships (friendships, work relations etc.), cattle and pets. This is a significant difference from Komi, where PSC is exhibited with meronyms and kinship terms (Schlachter 1960: 180ff).

- (4) Meadow Mari
üdüâr-em *vokten(e)* ~ **üdüâr* *vokten-em*
 daughter-PX1SG next_to ~ *daughter next_to-PX1SG
 'next to my daughter' (elicited)

According to Kubínyi (2015), the irregular pattern is result of reanalysis, in which constructions exhibiting PSC are regarded as representing PPs, not NPs headed by compounds. Such reanalysis is further motivated in already existing compound words (5).

- (5) Meadow Mari
pörtončâl ~ *pört ončâlno*
 housefront ~ house in_front_of
 'housefront' 'in front of the house'

Result show that other than animacy, the main factor allowing or prohibiting PSC lie the semantic properties of the possessee. Instead of a hard dividing line, the results spread out on a scale of prototypicality, with body parts and household items (gate, house, backyard etc.) being the most typical possessee exhibiting PSC.

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