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# POSSESSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN NGANASAN

A possessive noun phrase in Nganasan is composed of a possessor and a possessed. In adnominal possession constructions, the possessor always precedes the possessed. The relationship between the modifier (the possessor) and the head (the possessed noun) is encoded by possessive suffixes on the head and/or a Genitive case suffix appearing on the possessor. The structure is head final, i.e. the possessor precedes the possessed. The possessor is a noun or a pronoun. It is characteristic for possession expressed through a predicative construction that the sentence obligatorily includes a verbal predicate. This group can be further divided into sub-groups. In Nganasan appear the so-called transitive constructions (have-possessive), and a construction that is essentially based on an existential construction.

**Key words:** *Nganasan, possessive.*

## 1. Introduction

When investigating possessive constructions of a language, one has to differentiate between two main construction types, namely the so-called adnominal possessive construction and the predicative possessive construction. In this article, I will give an overview of both types.

Although a great number of researchers have studied the possessive constructions of the Uralic languages (see e.g. Kangasmaa-Minn, 1984, 1993; Bartens, 1991; Inaba, 1998; Winkler, 2003; Honti, 2007; Kozmács, 2006 etc.), we still cannot say that from a typological point of view the topic has been worked out in detail. Naturally, this will also not be possible within the framework of this article, either.

Two main points are generally discussed when regarding the typology of possession, a semantic and a formal one, namely the structure of the construction. If the construction is investigated based on its semantics, then the determining criterion is the character of the relation between possessor and possessed. With this regard, three subgroups can be established: a) inalienable possession: In this case the possessed NP is an inalienable entity of the possessor, e.g. body-part (*my head*), kinship (*my mother*) relation? b) alienable possession and temporary, i.e. transient possession.

In the inalienable possessive construction, the relation between possessor and possessed is temporally constant [+time stable], but the possessor has no control over it [-control]. This relation marks e.g. kinships and the relationship between the part and the whole. In the alienable possessive construction as well, the relation between possessor and possessed NP is temporally constant, but it can be controlled by the possessor. Therefore, it can be described as [+time stable] and [+control]. Nganasan does not formally differentiate between alienable and inalienable possessive relations. In my opinion, temporary possession is only a subgroup of alienable possession. In this type, the question is not only whether the possessor possesses something. The presumption is that in the moment of the speech act, the possessed, i.e. the object possessed by the possessor, is with the possessor. The essential information of the sentence does not refer to the fact of possession but to the location of the possessed.

The formal categorisation is based on which construction the language uses for coding possession. Based on that, the following two groups can be differentiated: predicative and adnominal possession. Both constructions can be further divided into subtypes, according to their elements and how they are coded. First I will present the Nganasan adnominal constructions and then turn to the predicative constructions.

## 2. Adnominal possession

A possessive noun phrase in Nganasan is composed of a possessor and a possessed. In adnominal possession constructions, the possessor always precedes the possessum. The relationship between the modifier (the possessor) and the head (the possessed noun) is encoded by possessive suffixes on the head and/or a Genitive case suffix appearing on the possessor. The structure is head final, i. e. the possessor precedes the possessed. The possessor is a noun or a pronoun. Following structure of the possessive noun phrase is possible:

(pronoun) –POSSESSOR noun$_{\text{Gen+ (possessive suffix))}}$ –head noun $_{\text{(case suffix) + (possessive suffix)}}$

There is no possessive pronouns comparable to English *my, your* etc. in Nganasan. Personal pronouns can function as possessive pronouns in the sentence. If the possessor is expressed by a pronoun, it can be omitted because a possessive suffix (Px) refers to it on the head noun. In this case the possessive suffix acts as construction marker. The possessed cannot be a pronoun in Nganasan. The construction looks like this:

**(pronoun) + head noun** $_{\text{(Case)}}$ Px

(1) *(mənə)*      *d'esɨ-mə*
     (1SG)      father-1SGPx
'my father' (ChND 2008)[1]

If the possessor is a noun, it must be in the Genitive case. The head noun can take a possessive suffix even in this case, but it is only optional. The possessor can also take a possessive suffix, which may refer to another possessive relation (as in sentence 2). This type belongs – depending on the construction – to the dependent-marking or to the double-marking type. The sentences below illustrate the most common construction, namely the double-marking type.

**(pronoun) – possessor noun**$_{\text{GEN+ (Px)}}$ **– head noun** $_{\text{(CASE SUFFIX) + (Px)}}$

(2) *(tənə)*   *d'esɨ-tə*         *ban-tu*          (pronoun) -POSSESSOR noun$_{\text{GEN+Px}}$–head noun$_{\text{Px}}$
     (2SG)   father-GEN.2SG$_{\text{Px}}$     dog-3SG$_{\text{Px}}$
'your father's dog' (ChND 2008)

(3) *d'ed'i*        *ban-tu*        POSSESSOR noun$_{\text{GEN}}$–head noun$_{\text{Px}}$
     father.GEN     dog-3SG$_{\text{Px}}$
'father's dog' (ChND 2008)

(4) *(mənə)* *d'esɨ-nə*           *ma-tənu-ntu*         (pronoun) –POSSESSOR
     (1SG)   father-GEN.1SG$_{\text{Px}}$    tent-LOC-OBL.3SG$_{\text{Px}}$     noun$_{\text{GEN+Px}}$–head noun$_{\text{PROL+Px}}$
'In my father's tent.' (ChND 2008)

As mentioned above, the so-called dependent-marking type can also be found in Nganasan. In this type, the possessor is in the genitive case, but the possessed NP is without possessive suffix.

(5) *ńemɨ-nə*         *səd'əə-mənu*        POSSESSOR noun$_{\text{GEN+Px}}$–head noun$_{\text{PROL}}$
mother-GEN.1SG$_{\text{Px}}$     way-PROL
'on my mother's way' (KNT 1996)

If another premodifier appears before the possessor, it must also be in the Genitive case.

(6) *hunsəi-ʔ*         *maδu-ʔ*         *ban-əʔ*
     other-GEN.PL      tent-GEN.PL      dog-PL
'the dogs of other tents' (KNT 1996)

If there is more than one possessed, this is expressed by the personal suffix. If there are two possessed entities, there is a dual marker and a personal suffix on the head. The dual marker is needed because the personal suffix in dual and plural is the same.

(7)    Number of the possessed
     *ma-mə* 'my tent' [tent-1SG]
     *ma-kəj-ńə* 'my two/both tents'       [tent-DU.1SG]
     *maδu-ńə* 'my tents [more than two]'     [tent-PL.1SG]

Possessive suffixes can also refer to the number of the possessor (dual vs. plural).

(8)    Number of the possessor
     *ma-ni* 'the tent of us two'          [tent-1DU]
     *ma-nuʔ* 'our tent'              [tent-1PL]

In Nganasan, the construction's semantics have no influence on the form of the construction. Thus, the types presented above can be used in the case of alienable as well as inalienable possession.

## 3. Predicate possession

It is characteristic for possession expressed through a predicative construction that the sentence obligatorily includes a verbal predicate. According to Stassen's typological works (2001, 2009), two sub-groups can be differentiated: so-called transitive constructions (have-possessive), and a construction that is essentially based

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[1] In the case of data from my own collection, the acronym of the informant and the year of the collection are indicated.

on an existential construction. In Nganasan appear both constructions. I present first the characteristics of the transitive construction.

### 3.1. Transitive construction

There is a transitive verb (*hon-si* 'to have') in Nganasan. In the transitive constructions the fact of possession is expressed by this verb. The verb has to agree with the grammatical subject in number and person. The possessor NP in the sentence is the grammatical subject, while the possessed NP is the sentential object, which stays obligatory in the accusative case.

(9) *mənə    kümaa        hon-di-m*
    I        knife.Acc     have-Co-1Sg
    'I have a knife.' (ChND 2008)

(10) *tənə    hon-diŋ        ŋanuə        maðə*
     you   have-Co-2Sg   really      tent-Ep.Acc
     'You have a tent.' (KTT 2008)

As the sentences above illustrates the possessed NP does not have to take on a possessive personal ending. As I already mentioned above, there is also an existential construction used for possession in Nganasan. Nevertheless, animacy does not have an effect on the selection and use of these two constructions. It is illustrated by the following example (11) where both of the possessor and the possessed entity can be characterized as being animate. In contrast, the possessed items in clauses (7) and (8) belong to the semantic category of inanimate.

(11) *nakür-ə        kuəďümu        ńuə            hon-ti*
     three-Ep.Acc   man.Acc     child.Acc    have-Co.3Sg
     '(S) he has three sons.' (KTT 2008)

(12) (*mənə*)        *ni*            *hon-di-m.*
     I           woman.Acc   have-Co-1Sg
     'I have a wife.' (ChND 2008)

As the sentences (11) and (12) illustrate an overt possessor in the sentence is not obligatory in Nganasan. The personal verbal ending refers to person. Thus, if the possessor can be referred to by a pronoun, it is usually not overt.

In the negative predicate possession sentence as negative element is the negative auxiliary (*ńi-si*) used, followed by the verb *hon-si* in the so-called connegative form. The auxiliary verb takes on the TAM-markers. This type appears exclusively in the past tense. However, this does not mean that this type of construction could not be used in the present tense; but, in negated sentences the existential constriction is much more common (See section 3.2.). The sentences below illustrate a construction in the past and present tenses.

(13) *ńuə    ńi-siə            sani-j        hon-ə-ʔ*
     child   NegAux-Pst.3Sg   toy-Pl.Acc   have-Ep-Cn
     'The child did not have any toys.' (KTT 2008)

(14) *mənə    ni            ńi-ndi-m        hon-ə-ʔ*
     1Sg    woman.Acc   NegAux-Co-1Sg   have-Ep-Cn
     'I do not have a wife.' (ChND 2008)

There is another *habeo*-like verb in Nganasan, the verb ŋuðasa 'to own, which also expresses possession. In this case as well, the possession is an NP standing in the accusative. This verb can be used to express an inalienable possessive relation. The relation between the POSSESSOR and the possessed NP is stable in time and the possessor controls the relation, i. e. [+stable time] and [+control] features can be associated with this relation. The possessor functions as the Subject, the possessed NP is the direct object in the accusative. This structure emphasizes the existence of the possessive relation. Such sentences are considerably rarer than the previous type.

(15) *mənə        səďəə-m-tiʔ            ŋuða-tu-m*
     1Sg        road-Acc-2Pl$_{Px}$    own-Co-1Sg
     'I own your road.' (Kosterkina – Helimski 1994: 102)

### 3.2. Existential construction

In this type, possession is expressed by a sentence that, regarding its structure, looks like an existential sentence. The sentential predicate is a verb, which is normally the predicate of existential sentences, i.e. a verb with the meaning 'to be', 'to exist', 'to be there.' In Nganasan only the existential verb (*təi-*) can be used in existential sentences, not the BE verb (*ij-*).

In this construction the possessor does not necessarily have a subject function in the sentence, but can also have another role. It is characteristic for a part of the Uralic languages that the possessor is marked with a locational (e.g. lative, dative, locative, adessive etc.) or genitive case. Thus, the majority of the Uralic languages belong to the so-called oblique possessive group. There are two possibilities for encoding the possessor in Nganasan: the possessor NP is construed in nominative or in locative form.

### 3.2.1. Nominative Possessive

In this construction the possessor NP is construed in nominative form, while the possessed NP has to agree in number and person with the possessor by means of a possessive personal ending. In case the possessor is referred to by a 3$^{rd}$ Person pronoun and the possessions are listed, then the pronoun does not have to be overt, since the personal ending on the possession already refers to it.

(16) *mənə     təbtə     baarbə-mə             təi-ču*
     1Sɢ     also     landlord -1Sɢ$_{Px}$             exist-Co.3Sɢ
     'I also have a landlord.' (KNT 1996: Mou_djamezi)

(17) *nɨ-tɨ             təi-sʲüə,     sʲiti     kuəďümu             ńuə-δɨ             təi-sʲüə-gəj*
     woman-3Sɢ Px     Ex-Psт.3Sɢ     two     man             child-3Sɢ$_{Px}$             Ex-Psт-3Dᴜ
     'He had a wife and two sons.' (ChND 2008)

It frequently occurs that there is no existential verb in the sentence, and the personal possessive suffix alone expresses the possessive relation.

(18) *ńenačaʔa             kəburuda-rəku     hoδür-tü*
     large             pan-Sɪᴍ             pattern-3Sɢ$_{Px}$
'It has a pattern similar to a large pan.' (KNT 1996: Meu_djamezi)

The nominative possessive sentence type can be negated by the negative existential verb *ďaŋgujsʲa* or the negative existential particle *ďaŋku*. In the present tense, generally *ďaŋku* is more common, which can only agree with the subject in number. The particle *ďaŋku* is not capable of taking on any tense or mood markers, therefore, in the past and future tenses as well as moods, only the verbal construction can be used. In the case of the negative existential verb, the latter must agree in both number and person with the sentential subject, i.e. the possession. The two sentences below clearly show that this construction cannot be regarded as a genitive possessive, since in that case the possessive suffix on the possessor would not stand in the nominative, but the NP would have to take on the genitive variant.

(19) *mənə     ďesi-mə             kümaa-δu             <u>ďaŋku</u>*
     1Sɢ     father-1Sɢ$_{Px}$             knife-3Sɢ$_{Px}$             NᴇɢEx.3Sɢ$_{Vx}$
     'My father does not have a knife.' (KTT 2008)

(20) *mənə     ńuə-mə             ďaŋguj-ču-ʔ     sani-ču*
     1Sɢ     child-1Sɢ$_{Px}$             NᴇɢEx-Co-3Pʟ     toy-Pʟ.3Sɢ$_{Px}$
     'My child does not have any toys.' (KES 2008)

(21) *mənə     ńuə-mə             ďaŋguj-sʲüə-ʔ     sańi-ʔ*
     1Sɢ     child-1Sɢ$_{Px}$             NᴇɢEx-Psт-3Pʟ     toy-Pʟ
     'My child did not have any toys.' (KTT 2008)

If the speaker wants to pose a negated question in the present tense, he or she normally uses the simple negative particle, which regularly takes the position at the beginning of the sentence (see sentence below). If the negative verb is used, it does not obligatorily start the sentence.

(22) *ďaŋku-ʔ     tənə             kola-čə*
     NᴇɢEx-Pʟ     you             fish-Pʟ.2Sɢ
     'You don't have a fish?' (TNK 2008)

The existential verb in Nganasan cannot be negated. There are example sentences, however, where the negated form of the existential verb follows the standard negative verb. Typically for this construction, the standard negative verb is always in the interrogatory mood. This sentence type does not express negation, but emphasized affirmation.

(23) *ŋəjbuə-tuə*     *təndə*     *ďaðikü?*     *ńi-ŋɨ*     *təibə-?*
     work-PtPrs     this.Gen     Pp<sub>Dat</sub>YOU     NegAux-Inter.3Sg     exist-Ep-Cn
     'That's what the workers are for!' (ChND 2008)

Apart from the negative existential verb, negation can also be expressed by means of a caritive/abessive formative suffix. In this case two structures can be differentiated. The NP with the caritive/abessive suffix can stand either with an affirmative form, or with the negative existential verb. The latter likely originates from the convergence of the nominative possessive presented above and the caritive/abessive construction. It is difficult to decide what kind of difference in meaning there is between the two constructions, some consultants no longer distinguish between the two forms.

**Noun<sub>Car</sub> + BE Verb**

The object (or even being) not possessed by the subject takes on the caritive suffix. The existential verb is conjugated accordingly and the possession is actually the adverbial complement of the sentence. The sentential subject, i.e. the possessor is unmarked.

     Possessor     Possessum     Copula
(24) *mənə*     *ńuə-gaľi /*     *kńiga-kaľi*     *i-ču-m*
     1Sg     child-Car     book-Car     be-Co-1Sg
     'I have no children /no books.' (KTT 2008)

As demonstrated by the sentence above, this construction can be used for both alienable and inalienable possession. In this sentence type the speaker does not emphasise what the possession is, but rather the present state of the possessor, namely that he or she does not have the given object at the given time. As mentioned before, in this sentence type, the possession is the adverbial complement of the sentence.

**Noun<sub>CAR</sub> + Negative Existential Verb**

In this sentence type, the possession takes on the caritive ending; however, it is not accompanied by the existential verb, but by the negative existential verb or the negative particle. The possession never takes on a possessive personal ending. The result is a doubly negated sentence without having an affirmative meaning. The negative existential verb must agree with the possession. As shown by the following example sentence, this construction can be used for expressing both alienable and inalienable possession. According to the consultants, with this sentence type the speakers emphasize that they do not own anything at all.

(25) *mənə*     *ďaŋgu-m*     *ńuə-gaľi /*     *kńiga-kaľi*
     1Sg     NegExPtcl-1SgVx     child-Car     book-Car
     'I have no children / no books.' (KTT 2008)

### 3.2.2. Locative Possessive

This type is not at all common in Nganasan, I could find only a few examples for this construction in my database. Based on the meaning of the sentences we can assume that this type is above all used for temporal possession. Furthermore, it is striking that this construction is only used in interrogative sentences.

In this construction, the possessor is expressed by a postpositional structure, since in Nganasan, personal pronouns cannot take on case suffixes. The pronoun is followed by the postpositions *nanu* 'at' or *nagətə* 'from' having the appropriate possessive personal ending. The possessive suffix refers to the sentential subject. The sentential predicate in the affirmative sentence is the existential verb, while in the negative sentence it is the negative existential verb or the negative particle. The possessed NP does not have to take on a possessive personal suffix. The negative existential verb or the particle is used for negating the construction.

(26) *tənə*     *na-nu-ntə*     *təi-ŋu*     *hoðür*
     2Sg     Pp-Adv.Loc-2Sg<sub>Px</sub>     exist-Inter.3Sg     letter
     'Do you have a letter?' (KTT 2008)

(27) *tənə*     *na-gətə*     */na-nu-ntə*     *ďaŋku (u)*     */ďaŋuj-ŋu*     *hoðür*
     2Sg     Pp-Adv.El     / Pp-Adv.Loc-2SgPx     NegExPtcl     /NegEx-Inter.3Sg     letter
     'You don't have a letter?' (KTT 2008)

### 3.2.3. Verbalization

In Nganasan, there is a verbal formative suffix (-ʔtə), which can express possession. A verb formed with this suffix expresses the meaning that the executor of the action owns the object named by the action, and that he or she possibly even executes the action with this object. If the primary word is a numeral, then the suffixed verb expresses the number of the possessor's possessions. These constructions can be replaced by constructions of the type *honsi* + possession. However, this type cannot be used for the designation of family members. Since the usage of this construction is semantically rather limited, I would only to a certain extent regard this type as being a possessive construction. Inasmuch as it is considered as being one, even then it is only capable of expressing temporal possession. This construction can be negated by the standard negation element.

(28) *kümau-ʔtə-sa*          *basu-tu*
     knife-Prop-Inf          hunt-Co.3Sg
     '(S) he hunts with a knife.' (ChND 2008)

(29) *taluə*          *ďesi-mə*          *tubiði-tə-ďiəďə*
     other.day          father-1SgPx          gun-Prop-Pst.3Sg
     'Yesterday my father had a gun with him.' (Tereshchenko 1979: 258)

Summing up, we can say that several constructions can be used in Nganasan. The most prevalent types are the nominative possessive and the *habeo* constructions. The type where the possessor is expressed by a locational NP is very rare. Verbalization is similarly scarce and of restricted use.

### Abbreviations

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Adv – adverbial | El – elative | PP – postposition |
| Acc – accusative | Ep – epenthetic vowel | Prol – prolative |
| Aux – auxiliary | Ex – existential | Prop – proprietive |
| Car – caritive | Inf – infinitive | Pst – past tense |
| Co – aorist coaffix | Inter – interrogative | Ptcl – particle |
| Cn – connegative | Loc – locative | PtPrs – present particle |
| Dat – dative | Obl – oblique case | Px – possessive suffix |
| Gen – genitive | Neg – negative marker | Sim – similative |
| Du – dual | Pl – plural | Sg – singular |

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## ПОСЕССИВНЫЕ КОНСТРУКЦИИ В НГАНАСАНСКОМ

В нганасанском языке посессивная именная группа состоит из посессора и обладаемого. В атрибутивной посессивной конструкции посессор всегда предшествует обладаемому. Отношения принадлежности между атрибутивом (посессором) и вершиной (обладаемым) кодируются посессивными аффиксами на вершине и (или) суффиксом генитива на посессоре. Посессор обычно выражен существительным или местоимением. Типичным для предикативной посессивной конструкции является то, что предложение облигаторно содержит глагольный предикат. Данные конструкции представлены несколькими подгруппами. В нганасанском языке имеются так называемые транзитивные конструкции (посессивные конструкции с глаголом «иметь») и конструкция, образованная на основе бытийной конструкции.

**Ключевые слова:** *нганасанский язык, посессивность.*

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