

ON THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF HABITIVE  
AND IZAFET CONSTRUCTIONS IN HUNGARIAN\*

LÁSZLÓ HONTI

Dipartimento di Glottologia e Filologia Classica  
Università degli Studi di Udine  
Via Mazzini 3  
I-33100 Udine  
Italia  
litnoh@uniud.it

**Abstract:** This paper deals with two ways of expressing possessive relationships, their morphological make-up and the possible circumstances of their emergence. One of these is the habitive construction ('X has Y'), whereas the other is the attributive possessive construction ('X's Y, the Y of X'). The former is a clause, whereas the latter is a phrase. It will be argued that both types of constructions may have emerged in the Uralic languages without the contribution of any foreign influence, but as far as the retention of the latter is concerned, foreign influence may have had a role in it in Uralic languages that were engaged in intensive Uralic–Turkic linguistic contacts.

**Keywords:** possessive, izafet, habitive, language contact, case marking

In the Uralic languages, two types of constructions serve as a clause-level expression of a possessive relationship:

- (a) the possessed subject is in the nominative, while the nominal standing for the possessor has some case suffix that may be either grammatical (nominative, genitive, or dative) or else adverbial (lative, locative, or ablative); the possessed noun may or may not bear a personal possessive suffix, and the clause may or may not involve a copula; or
- (b) the possessed noun is the direct object of a verb meaning 'have'.

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These main types comprise several subtypes. Neither of these types is exclusively used in the individual Uralic languages, although one of them is usually the dominant one. The habitives of certain Finno-Ugric languages have been claimed to be related to similar constructions occurring in Indo-European languages spoken in adjoining territories.

Phrase-level possessive relationship, on the other hand, is expressed by an attributive construction in which the possessive attribute is a nominal in some grammatical or adverbial case (nominative or genitive, respectively localis), while the possessed nominal may or may not have a possessive personal suffix. The subtype in which the possessor is not a personal pronoun and the possessed noun bears a personal suffix has been referred to by several researchers, on the basis of the name of a similar construction in Turkic languages, by the technical term “izafet”. With respect to izafet constructions in some Uralic languages, some researchers suggested the possible influence of Turkic languages that are (or used to be) spoken in neighbouring areas.

1. One of the characteristic features of Uralic languages is that they tend not to make use of a verb meaning ‘have’, although such a verb is not completely unattested in them, either (it is rather generally used in Ob-Ugric).

1.1. The habitive construction most often attested in various Uralic languages is of the type exemplified by Latin *mihi liber est* ‘I have a book’ [lit. to-me book is]. That is, it involves the verb ‘be’, a nominal—mostly case-marked or followed by a postposition—standing for the possessor, and a possessed nominal that often has a possessive personal suffix attached to it. The individual languages may mark the possessor in diverse ways. In Finnic, Mordvin, Cheremis, and Samoyedic, reflexes of Proto-Uralic genitive *\*n* and/or dative *\*ń* are normally used in habitive constructions; Hungarian started to use dative *-nak/-nek* (of a lative postpositional origin) for that purpose; Finnic languages—except for Kurland Livonian—use the allative, the adessive, or the ablative as a secondary device, while the locative is used in Lappish, the adessive or the ablative in Permic, and a locative postposition in Selkup. In the Finnic–Lappish group, the possessed noun never takes possessive personal suffixes, whereas in Hungarian it always does. In the rest of the languages, both solutions are used, with one of them dominant, at most. The verb is usually overt, but its position is not fixed across languages and across constructions.

Thus, the scheme of the Uralic habitive construction is “Noun- $\emptyset$ /Gen/Adv/Postp + Noun- $\emptyset$ /Px (+ ‘is’)”.

The morphological shapes of habitive and attributive possessive constructions are interrelated as shown below in a tabular form:

	IN HABITIVE CONSTRUCTIONS	IN ATTRIBUTIVE CONSTRUCTIONS
Balto-Finnic	case markers involving <i>l</i> , genitive	genitive
Lappish	static local cases	genitive
Mordvin	genitive	genitive
Cheremis	genitive	nominative, genitive
Permic	case markers involving <i>l</i> , nominative	case markers involving <i>l</i> , nominative
Ob-Ugric	nominative, locative, postposition	nominative, locative
Hungarian	dative (> genitive)	nominative, dative (> genitive)
Northern Samoyedic	nominative, genitive	genitive
Southern Samoyedic	nominative, genitive, postposition	genitive

Note: The dative *and* genitive interpretation of Hungarian *-nak/-nek* is not uncontroversial in the literature (cf. e.g., Korompay 1991, 301–2 vs. Kiefer 2000, 577–8).

In addition to a verbal predicate and the subject (that is, the possessed noun), habitive constructions usually involve the possessor, too. Whenever the possessed noun bears a possessive personal suffix—which is commonly the case outside Balto-Finnic and Lappish—, pronominal possessors are represented by personal suffixes, hence the possessive personal pronouns need not be overt in such cases. Overt possessors are in the genitive (going back to dative) in Finnic; also in Finnic as well as in Lappish it may be the case that the possessor is in the localis and the possessed noun has no personal suffix (within this group, Kurland Livonian and Southern Lappish are exceptions in that the possessor is suffixed by *-n* in the former and by the genitive suffix in the latter); in Volgaic and Permic languages, the possessed noun does not necessarily have a personal suffix but then the possessor has to be case-marked; Ob-Ugric languages, lacking the genitive, use the nominative instead.

Examples: Finnish *minu-n on nälkä- $\emptyset$  ~ minu-lla on nälkä- $\emptyset$*  ‘I am hungry’, *minu-lla on lapsi- $\emptyset$*  ‘I have a child’, Livonian K *izā-n um tidār- $\emptyset$*

‘the man has a daughter’, Lappish N *makkár beatnagat-Ø du-s leat?* ‘what kind of dogs do you have?’, *mu-s dat gal leat buoret beatnagat-Ø* ‘I do have good dogs’, *mu-st læ manna-Ø* ‘I have a child’, Lappish S *muw*[gen] *mana-Ø* ‘I have a child’, Mordvin *eřza-n̄ ul̄i suk-azo* ‘an Erzan has a dog’, Cheremis [*nun-ân*] *ikšâwâ-št uke* ‘they have no child’, *mân-ân u kñiyä-Ø ulâ* ‘I have a new book’, Votyak [*men-am*] *n̄l-i van̄* ‘I have a daughter’, Zyryan *joma-leŋ pi-is abu* ‘the wizard has no sons’ ~ *n̄i-leŋ em kujim pi-Ø* ‘they have three sons’, Ostyak Vj *mä-Ø wâŋ-am ěntim* ~ *měn-nə wăŋ-Ø ěntim* ‘I have no money’, Kr *χuj pĕŋətnə wăŋ ut* ‘the man has money’ [‘bei dem Mann ist Geld’], Vogul TJ *näjār-Ø p̄iw-ī ālās* ‘the emperor had a son’, *p̄iw-ān āl* ‘they have a son’, TĈ *jūkā pält āwītī āls* ‘the woman had a daughter’ [‘bei der Frau war ihre Tochter’], Hungarian *lov-am van* ‘I have a horse’ [horse-my is], *az apá-nak ház-a van* ‘the father has a house’ [the father-dat house-his is] ~ *az apá-nak nincs ház-a* ‘the father has no house’ [the father-dat is-not house-his].

**1.2.** The claim that the possessor-marking function of the dative is an ancient feature is supported by the fact that in several of the Uralic languages the dative suffix \**n̄* is used in that role; note that constructions involving more recent dative suffixes are also attested. E.g., Cheremis *kuruk-lan üšək ulo* ‘the hill has a shadow’, *kuku-lan šədaŋəm βüdəlš(-at) ulo* ‘the cuckoo has a wheat sower’. In Hungarian, the situation is similar: *a hegy-nek árnyéka van* ‘the hill has a shadow’, *a kakukk-nak búzavetője van* ‘the cuckoo has a wheat sower’. The appropriateness of the dative to express a possessive relationship is also clearly demonstrated by the closest relatives of Hungarian: Ostyak and Vogul. In these languages, the dative of personal pronouns has a role in the expression of a possessive relationship if the possessed noun is in the singular—although not in habitive or attributive possessive constructions but in a predicative role (and perhaps also in that of a complement, as in the case of the Hungarian possessive pronouns *enyém* ‘mine’, *tiéd* ‘yours’, etc.):

(a) Ostyak N *манэм* ‘to me; my’: *тaмu мa шyкeм!—aнтэ, мaнэм!* ‘Это моя крошка!—Нет, моя!’.

(b) Ostyak Kaz *naŋen* ‘to you; your’, *luvel* ‘to him; his’: *tam laŋki muj naŋen muj luvel* ‘эта белка или твоя, или его’.

(c) Ostyak Kaz *mănem* ‘to me; my’, *măŋew* ‘to us; our’: *χōj püt̄ilka?* — *mănem*. — *măŋew*. ‘Whose bottle [is this]?—Mine.—Ours’.

(d) In Vogul, it is likewise the dative-lative forms of personal pronouns that figure as possessive pronouns, cf. N *ānəm* ‘me; to me; my’, *tawe* ‘him; to him; his’, *mēnmēn* ‘us; to us; our (du. 1)’, *mānaw* ‘us; to

us; our (pl. 1)’: *nēpək ānəm* ‘бумага моя’, *pisal’ tawe* ‘ружье его’, *koləḡ mēnmēn* ‘дома (дв.) наши (дв.)’, *sālit mānaw* ‘олени наши’. This construction is also illustrated by the following Southern Vogul example: TJ *ām(ān) waḡkā k,irt kāləḡ kāsəm ā sows* ‘ich hatte keine Lust, in dem Brunnen zu sterben’, ‘mir kam [eigtl. wurde] nicht meine Lust... zu sterben’. The sentence can be interpreted in two ways, depending on whether it includes a nominative or a dative pronoun: ‘I had no desire to...’ and ‘there was no desire in me to...’.

**1.3.** As the foregoing suggest, in habitive constructions of present-day Uralic languages, the possessor often bears a case suffix (originally localis), not infrequently that of the dative; dative and lative are also known in that role in some Indo-European languages, among others (similarly with respect to attributive possessive constructions). The Indo-European languages, or their proto-languages, originally lacked a verb for ‘have’; rather, they formed their habitive constructions with the dative of the possessor noun and the verb for ‘be’ (see Gamkrelidze–Ivanov 1984, 288–9, and references therein). In Latin, if the possessed noun is emphasised, the verb is some finite form of ‘be’ and the possessor is in the dative (*dativus possessivus*), e.g., *mihi liber est* ‘I have a book’; but if the possessor is made prominent, the genitive (*genitivus possessivus*) is used: *patris est domus* ‘the house belongs to the father’. According to Havers (1911, 319 and footnote), this is “*dativus sympatheticus*” that occurs both in habitive and in attributive possessive constructions in some Indo-European languages; in Sanskrit and Old Greek, it is restricted to pronouns, especially personal pronouns, but in Vulgar Latin, in Germanic, and in Balto-Slavic, it was extended to nouns, and in Romanian, Albanian, Bulgarian, and Modern Greek, the genitive and the dative became syncretised (as in the Finnic and Volgaic groups of Uralic languages). E.g., German dialectal *er ist ein Vetter zu mir, wem sein Hut* ‘wessen Hut’, German *dem Vater sein Sohn ~ des Vaters sein Sohn*, Dutch *de vader zijn zoon* ‘id.’, English *server to his master*, Old English *him on þet heafod* ‘to-him on the head (= on his head)’, French *ce livre est à moi, le cheval à mon père*, Italian *descrivere fondo a tutto l’universo* ‘to describe the essence of the whole world’, Russian *ему шесть лет, доктор ему осмотрел горло*, Latvian *kas tev ir?* ‘who/what do you have?’. Thus, the *dativus possessivus* found in Finno-Ugric languages is not unprecedented.

**1.4.** With respect to the origin of habitive and attributive possessive constructions involving dative or locative prepositional/postpositional

phrases, radically diverse views have been expressed in terms of Finno-Ugric–Indo-European contacts, listed here without comment:

(a) In the background of the Latvian and Russian constructions, some people claim there must be a Finno-Ugric substratum or adstratum, whereas others deny this; indeed, the question arose of whether the Finnic construction (Finnish *minulla on...*) is not of Russian origin to begin with.

(b) With respect to the function of the Livonian dative, perhaps some Latvian influence could be considered.

(c) Given that, in Ostyak, the locative of personal pronouns can be used to express the possessor, this probably shows the influence of Russian.

(d) A similar view has been expressed with respect to the Vogul postpositional construction.

(e) The Selkup postpositional phrase may be due to Russian influence, too; in this case, Selkup may have extended the earlier construction ‘my reindeer is’ by an item corresponding to Russian *у меня* but retained the possessive suffix as well.

(f) According to Nikolaeva (2002, 283–4), Hungarian *dativus possessivus* is the result of convergence with what she calls “European” languages; but in the same paper, she also claims that Hungarian “copied” that construction from neighbouring languages.

As far as I know, the origin of Hungarian *dativus possessivus* has been satisfactorily explained by historical linguists and, *mutatis mutandis*, this applies to events that may have taken place in long-bygone periods. Therefore, no obscure links are to be suspected with respect to the origin of the corresponding Uralic and Indo-European constructions.

The nominal bearing a locative suffix or a locative postposition may originally have served to express the whereabouts of the denotatum of the possessed noun rather than the identity of the possessor, as can still be felt e.g., in Finnish *meillä on vieraita* ‘we have guests’ ~ ‘there are guests in our place’; this suggests that such constructions may have arisen in a natural, spontaneous manner.

**2. Turning to *izafet constructions***, I have to explain very briefly what that term is meant to express since the notion is not widely known, as far as I am aware (cf. Yartseva 1990, 172). Given that the term is used for Uralic languages with reference to patterns in Turkic languages, I considered primarily definitions that interpret it in the framework of discussions of

Turkic languages. The scanty Turkological literature on the issue that I had access to, as well as references within Uralistics, suggest that an attributive possessive construction counts as an instance of izafet if the possessive relationship is marked (at least) on the possessed noun, and its marker is a possessive personal suffix, e.g., Hungarian *a ház tete-je* [the house roof-its], *a ház-nak a tete-je* [the house-dat the roof-its] ‘the roof of the house’. Hence, izafet is one of the possessive constructions, of which Uralic languages exhibit at least four. These are as follows:

(a) The possessive relationship is not morphologically marked on either part of the construction (this, then, is not izafet); often, compounds and compound-like phrases belong here, e.g., Hungarian *háztető* ‘roof of house’ [lit. house-roof]; Mordvin *utom keŋkš* ‘дверь амбара (букв.: амбар-дверь)”; Cheremis *pünžö wujə-što* ‘on top of the hill’; Votyak *škola sad* ‘школьный сад’; Zyryan *pīzan dera* ‘скатерть; салфетка’; Ostyak Vj *ni potiŋka* ‘the woman’s shoes’; Vogul *puŋk-sow* ‘scalp’; Selkup *pōt pīry* ‘высота дерева’, that is: “Noun-∅ + Noun-∅”.

(b) A possessive morpheme only occurs on the attributive constituent (this is not izafet either, since the head noun does not exhibit any mark of possessivity), e.g., Finnish *talo-n katto* ‘roof of the house’; Cheremis *kuyiž-än ədər-∅* ‘the king’s daughter’; Ostyak Tra *tāras-nə jēŋk-∅-a* ‘into (the water of) the sea’; Yurak-Samoyed *pa-ʔ hadeʔ-∅* ‘смола дерева’; Yenisey Samoyed *abā-ŋ pag-e* ‘паница моей старшей сестры’, that is: “Noun-Cx + Noun-∅”.

(c) The possessive relationship is only marked on the possessed noun, by a possessive personal suffix (this is izafet, since the morpheme expressing the relationship between the constituents is located on the head noun), e.g., Hungarian *a ház-∅ tete-je* ‘roof of the house’; Ostyak Vj *rät-∅ əy-əl* ‘head of the old man’; Vogul N *lū-∅ puŋk-e* ‘head of the horse’; Zyryan *kaŋe-∅ žugj-as* ‘in Kätchens Schlinge’, that is: “Noun-∅ + Noun-Px”.

(d) Both the attribute and the head noun exhibit morphemes expressing the possessive relationship (this is also izafet, since one of the morphemes expressing the relationship between the constituents is located on the head noun), e.g., Hungarian *a ház-nak a tete-je* ‘the roof of the house’; Cheremis *kuyižä-n ədər-žə* ‘the king’s daughter’; Votyak *kolhoz-len muzjem-ez* ‘земля колхозная’; Ostyak DN *tāras-nat wəχ-ət* ‘das Geld des Kaufmannes’; Yurak-Samoyed *ŋa-kan meŋi-da* ‘упряжные олени моего старшего брата (букв. брата-моего упряжные-его)”; Yenisey Samoyed *kedər-’ koba-da* ‘шкура дикого оленя’, that is: “Noun-Cx + Noun-Px”.

**2.1.** Bereczki (1983a, 65; 1984, 308), the author who has discussed the matter the most thoroughly, mentions Volgaic and Permic languages, as well as Hungarian, as languages that employ izafet constructions, noting that—except for Hungarian—these languages also exhibit the original Finno-Ugric construction involving no possessive personal suffixes. Simonyi (1914, 139) was furthermore aware that the same construction occurred in Vogul and in Ostyak, too. Thereby the insight of Beke (1914–1915, 21) the author who first investigated this issue, saying that izafet is known to exist (albeit not exclusively) in all Finno-Ugric languages except for Finnic and Lappish, appears to have proved correct.

**2.2.** For curiosity's sake let me add here that (of the Indo-European languages spoken in Europe) possessive phrases reminiscent of izafet constructions of Uralic and Altaic languages are not totally unfamiliar in Germanic and in Romance, either. The literature I have looked at knows of only two such groups of Indo-European languages, e.g., German *wem sein Hut* 'wessen Hut', *dem Vater sein Haus* ~ *des Vaters sein Haus* ~ Dutch *de vader zijn huis*, Italian *della mia sopravvesta il suo colore* 'the colour of my coat'. In Germanic, the phrase-initial possessor is topicalised (Ramat 1986, 587), and the possessor is (at least historically speaking) in the dative, whereas in Italian the genitive form (*della*) is used; the possessed noun is determined by a third-person possessive attributive pronoun in all three languages cited. That is, these phrases exactly match the izafet constructions of Uralic languages, with the difference that they refer back to the possessor by a possessive pronoun rather than by a possessive personal suffix.

**2.3.** The emergence of the izafet construction does not have a large literature but it includes at least three different views. Some authors claim that it is probably of Proto-Uralic origin (Hajdú 1987, 222–3, cf. Benkő 1979, 57; 1988, 24–5), others trace it back to contacts with Turkic languages, at least with respect to Volgaic and Permic languages, and Hungarian (Beke 1914–1915, 21–7; Bereczki 1983b, 214; Rédei 1980, 86), whereas Fokos (1939, 16) considers it to be a result of internal development. With respect to Samoyedic, I am unaware of attempted explanations of origin.

Ugric languages may have introduced the izafet construction due to the fact that the genitive they had inherited from Proto-Finno-Ugric had been lost and in some cases they needed to reflect the grammatical relationship in their possessive constructions, or to make the possessor more prominent by topicalising it, but it was not possible to unambigu-



ously indicate by a case marker, due to lack of genitive, that two nouns formed a possessive construction. In such cases, Ugric languages could (and can) disambiguate the syntactic relationship between the two constituents by a third-person possessive suffix attached to the possessed noun, topicalising the possessor; the use of the person marker was generalised in Hungarian e.g., (*a*) *fiú láb-a* ‘the foot of the boy’, whereas in Ob-Ugric it remained an occasional topicalising device. This may have been reinforced by the analogy of constructions involving a pronominal possessor; as Fokos (*ibid.*) pointed out, “constructions like *apám háza* ‘my father’s house’ may have been modelled after constructions like *ő háza* ‘his house’.” Beke (1914–1915, 21–7) explained the emergence of izafet constructions in these Finno-Ugric (Volgaic, Permic, Ugric) languages by an influence of Volga Turkic languages, and Berezki (1983a, 65) did the same with respect to Permic and Volgaic languages, whereas for Hungarian he thought it was possible that “it was a result of internal development.” The possessive personal suffix also emerged as an alternative in Permic and Volgaic languages. Given that its overt occurrence is obligatory in Hungarian, we can say that this language is more consistent in this kind of possessor marking than Turkic languages are. That is, Hungarian is the ideal izafet language. Another point in favour of the spontaneous development account is that not all Uralic languages have been spoken next to Turkic languages for a thousand years or so (in the case of Hungarian, such coexistence was but a moment’s episode, in a historical perspective). I think, in accordance with Fokos, Hajdú, and Benkő, that the emergence and/or retention of izafetism was underpinned by internal necessity.

An argument supporting the Turkic origin of izafet constructions in some Finno-Ugric languages is that they are unknown in Finnic and Lappish that were not in contact with Turkic languages. Thus, provided I do not accept the alleged role of Turkic influence in this respect, I have to find an answer to the question of why this construction is not attested in the westernmost languages of the family. In Finnic or Lappish, topicalisation of this kind did not occur, although it undoubtedly might have, rather—at least in Finnish—it was the possessor with a genitive suffix that acquired additional prominence. This can be explained, I think, by the fact that the genitive suffix had been retained, a necessary but not sufficient condition for izafet constructions not to occur in languages of the westernmost group. That construction is not quite generally used in other Uralic languages, either, with the sole exception of Hungarian. But

then, this is the single Uralic language that had the shortest contact of all with Turkic languages. Whether the *izafet* construction is of a Proto-Uralic origin or it emerged in the separate lives of individual languages or language groups, I would be reluctant to claim that its emergence in just these languages is due to mere chance. Indeed, intensive contacts with Turkic languages may have stimulated either the retention of original *izafet* constructions or the reinforcement of a trend of development triggered by an internal need. Thus, I do not deny the possible role of Uralic–Turkic contacts or bilingualism, yet I do not at all see it as a decisive factor. In that respect, it is also worth noting that *izafet*(-like) constructions can be found in European Indo-European languages that had no Turkic contacts whatsoever. In sum: the *izafet* construction of Uralic languages may be a result of internal changes, rather than that of an adopted foreign model.

**3.** Both habitive and *izafet* constructions may have emerged in the Uralic languages without the contribution of any foreign influence, but as far as the retention of *izafet* is concerned, foreign influence may have had a role in it in Uralic languages that were engaged in intensive Uralic–Turkic linguistic contacts.

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