

PLESHAK, POLINA

Semantics and morphosyntax of Moksha possessive constructions¹

The goal of this paper is to present an overview of possessive NPs in the Moksha language, involving the examination of their structural types and description of the factors that influence the choice of a possessive construction.

Keywords: possessive constructions, semantic relations, Moksha, animacy, referentiality.

1. Introduction

Our analysis of possessive constructions in Moksha is based on the typological work of KOPTJEVSKAJA-TAMM (2002), who defines possessive constructions as those which refer to LEGAL OWNERSHIP (*the girl's hat / the hat of the girl*), KINSHIP (*the girl's mother / the mother of the girl*) or BODY-PART relations (*the girl's hand / the hand of the girl*), but cross-linguistically can also encode many other meanings, such as MATERIAL (*a ring of gold*) or PURPOSE (*the woman dress*²). Different languages split this semantic zone in different ways. KOPTJEVSKAJA-TAMM presents the structural types of possessive NPs in the European languages and describes general tendencies of how this zone may be organized. All these issues are investigated in her project with the focus on both the typological generalizations and the specifics of each particular language.

KOPTJEVSKAJA-TAMM's research is based on more than 30 languages of Europe, including Armenian, Basque, Megrelian and even Swedish Sign Language. The data from more or less all modern Finno-Ugric languages is also presented. Although Mordvin is presented as one language and the only example that we can find is taken from Erzya-mordvin. So that there is no Moksha data in it.

The Moksha language belongs to the Mordvinic branch of the Finno-Ugric group of the Uralic language family. This research is based on our field data collected in the villages of Ljesnoje Tsibajevo and Ljesnoje Ardashevo (the Temnikov district, the Republic of Mordovia).

The only source of information about possession in Moksha is FEOKTISTOV 1963, but its main subject is the use of possessive suffixes. FEOKTISTOV lists the types of syntactical constructions that refer to possessive relations without any

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² In English this construction is not possessive.

detailed account of the semantic variation within the domain of possessiveness. In the existing grammars of the Moksha language (KOLJADĚNKOV 1954, CYGANKIN 1980) possessive constructions are not discussed in any detail. So Moksha data are not abundant in the typological papers.

There are some studies about the possessive constructions of other Finno-Ugric languages: on Erzya (RUETER 2005, 2010), on Komi (NEKRASOVA 2002), on Cheremis (KANGASMAA-MINN 1966, 1969) and on Udmurt (EDYGAROVA 2010), but these studies are concentrated on possessor marking and do not consider (except the last one) the construction as a whole and the relations between the elements of a NP. As a consequence, they do not take into account the semantic relations within a NP.

The consideration of possessive constructions as a whole is more convenient because there are some languages with possessive affixes where the marking of a Head can depend on the marking of a possessor. Moksha also belongs to this type of languages.

The first goal of this paper is to show the main types of possessive constructions in Moksha in terms of KOPTJEVSKAJA-TAMM's approach.

The second goal following from the previous one is to determine which of the peripheral relations take possessive marking in Moksha and which do not.

The paper has the following structure. Section 1 describes the range of possessive constructions available in Moksha. In Section 2 we formulate which semantic relations should be examined in our research. And outline typological generalizations proposed by KOPTJEVSKAJA-TAMM. The Section 3 is the main section where we match constructions with relations they encode. Section 4 draws conclusions.

1. The basic possessive constructions in Moksha

The Moksha language has a huge variety of NP formal types, as it is rich in marking devices. It has 3 declinations (basic, definite and possessive) and a large set of cases.

The dependent of NP can be:

1. in Genitive of the Definite or the Possessive declination³
2. in Genitive of the Basic declination
3. Unmarked

The head of NP can:

1. have a Possessive marker (be in the Possessive declination)

³ The syntactic behavior of these two types of Genitive is the same. So we will not distinguish them.

2. not to have a Possessive marker (to have a marker triggered by external syntactic context)

The basic word order in a Moksha NP is Dependent + Head.

Now we can calculate all logically possible combinations:

1. Dependent_Gen.Def/Poss + Head_Poss
2. Dependent_Gen⁴ + Head_Poss
3. Dependent + Head_Poss
4. Dependent_Gen.Def/Poss + Head
5. Dependent_Gen + Head
6. Dependent + Head

But only 5 of them are used in Moksha. Type 3, which represents the Head-marking construction, is impossible. All the other types are represented in Moksha and we can also relate them to the classification of the structural types of possessive NPs in the European languages [KOPTJEVSKAJA-TAMM 2002].

A. Double-marking:

This type has two subtypes in Moksha:

1. Dependent_Gen.Def/Poss + Head_Poss

- (1) *ćora-ŕ* *al'a-c* *kunda-j* *kaŕ-t*
 boy-DEF.SG.GENfather-3SG.POSS.SG catch-NPST.3SG fish-PL
 'The boy's father fishes.'⁵

This is the main construction that encodes possessive relations. If the Dependent is a proper name, the default choice is the other subtype of Double-marking:

2. Dependent_Gen + Head_Poss

- (2) *pet'e-ń* *d'ed'a-c* *lac* *sta-j*
 Peter-GEN mother-3SG.POSS.SG well sew-NPST.3SG
 'Peter's mother sews well.'

It does not follow from (2) that the use of the first construction would be ungrammatical here. However, native speakers prefer the Basic declination on proper names.

The possessive marker is obligatory only with 3 first direct⁶ cases: Nominative, Genitive and Dative. If the NP is in an oblique case, the first response of

⁴ Here and further Gen signifies Genitive of the Basic declination.

⁵ All examples used in this paper were generated by the native speakers and are taken from our field data.

⁶ The terminology comes from BLAKE 1994.

native speakers is always without a possessive marker. Still, possessive marking is not prohibited here (PLEŠAK 2015).

B. Dependent-marking:

4. Dependent_Gen.Def/Poss_Head

- (3) *št'ər-ńε-ś* *jařca-j* *jam-də* *ćora-ńε-t'*
 girl-DIM-DEF.SG eat-NPST.3.SG porridge-ABL boy-DIM-DEF.SG.GEN
kuću-sə
 spoon-IN
 'The girl is eating porridge with the spoon of the boy'.

It should be noted that the first three subtypes illustrated in examples (1–3) are the variants of a single type and refer to the same semantic relations. We will call this type *ćora-t' al'a-c* and it will mean the following for us:

The Dependent is in Genitive of the Definite declination if it is not a proper name and in Genitive of the Basic declination if it is a proper name.

The possessive marker is obligatory if the NP is not in an oblique case.

Some other relations that could be possessive in the languages of the world can be encoded with the next construction:

5. Dependent_Gen+Head

- (4) *ava-ń* *panar-ś* *povfta-f* *lavka-t'* *es-ə*
 woman-GEN dress-DEF.SG hang-PTCP.RES shop-DEF.SG.GEN in-IN
 'The woman dress is hanging in the shop.'

Here the Genitive is not in the Definite, but in the Basic declination, even though the dependent is a common noun. Only Definite Genitive requires possessive marking on the Head (a dependent – proper name is an exception). As regards a dependent in Indefinite Genitive, it is incompatible with the Possessive declination on the head regardless of the syntactic position of a NP.

This type will be called *ava-ń panar*.

The last type (6. Dependent + Head) looks very much like the construction called *J u x t a p o s i t i o n* in KOPTJEVSKAJA-TAMM 2002.

This type is peripheral for our research, and it is a little inhomogeneous. In one of the subtypes of Juxtaposition construction the Dependent and the Head can not have their own dependents. In the other two they can and the difference between the two last subtypes is in word order. Moreover, all of them refer to different semantic relations. Later we will provide more details on the differences between the Juxtaposition constructions.

- (5) *mon* *mol'-əń viř-∅* *ki-va*
 1sg walk forest-∅ road-PROL
 'I was walking on a wood road.'

2. Typological generalizations (for languages of Europe) and our expectations

2.1. Which relations could be possessive?

As has been mentioned above, there are plenty of meanings that can be expressed by the same construction as the core possessive relations like legal ownership or body-part. All these relations form a scale: the relations situated on the top are more frequently marked as possessive ones. Here is our list of semantic relations based on KOPTJEVSKAJA-TAMM 2002, 2003, 2004:

kinship relations (Peter's mother)
 social relations (Peter's neighbour)
 author or originator (Peter's poem)
 carrier of properties (Peter's braveness)
 group-member (Peter's class)
 legal ownership (Peter's house, the girl's hat), disposal (Peter's office)
 body-part relations (Peter's leg)
 part-whole relations (the mountain's top)
 locative (Stockholm's banks)
 temporal (Monday's performance)
 predestination (woman dress)
 species (the apple tree)
 group-membership (a kennel of wolves)
 time (the autumn flower)
 purpose (the bread knife)
 material (a golden cup)
 measure/quantity (a ship of thousand tons)
 age (a girl of 17 years)
 producer/origin/agent (sheep milk cheese)
 pseudo-partitive relations (a cup of tea, a slice of bread)

The first seven relations in boldface are the core ones (we use them to determine possessive constructions). We will check if all these core relations are expressed by the same construction in Moksha. We will also find out how the other relations behave and which of them are encoded by the same construction as the core ones.

2.2. Generalizations made in KOPTJEVSKAJA-TAMM 2002

1. The most frequent type of construction is Dependent-marking. The second one is Double-marking (for languages with possessive markers)
2. All core relations are expressed by the same construction
3. The differences between alienable and inalienable possession are marginal

4. The most important splits are animacy and referentiality ones.⁷

5. locative and temporal relations belong to the zone of cross-linguistic variation: they can be treated as possessive and as non-possessive.

We can expect that these generalizations will also hold true for Moksha.

3. Relation between semantics and construction

3.1. Double-marking construction and core relations

First of all we should say that there is only one construction that refers to core relations, or, in other words, all the core relations are encoded by the same construction. Its label in our paper is *ćora-t' al'a-c*.

Below you can observe some more examples (6–8).

(6) author

<i>jalga-žə-ń</i>	<i>mora-nzə</i>	<i>šid'əstə e'ra-št'</i>
friend-1SG.POSS.SG-GEN	song-3SG.POSS.PL	often be-PST3PL
<i>grusnaj-t'</i>		
sad-PL		

'The songs of my friend were often sad.'

(7) legal ownership

<i>kepəd'-k</i>	<i>mastər lang-stə</i>	<i>ava-t'</i>
pick_up-3.O.IMP.SG.O.S	floor on-EL	woman-DEF.SG.GEN
<i>sumka-nc</i>		
bag-3SG.POSS.SG.GEN		

'Pick the bag of the woman from the floor up.'

(8) body part

<i>šora-ńe-t'</i>	<i>sur-əc</i>	<i>šerəd'-i</i>
boy-DIM-DEF.SG.GEN	finger-3SG.POSS.SG	hurt-npst3sg

'The boy's finger hurts.'

But if we descend our list of relations, we will see that the construction *ćora-t' al'a-c* can also refer to some other relations. It is not the first response in these cases, but it is still possible as soon as one wants to emphasize the definiteness of the possessor. Below there are some examples for locative (9), temporal (10) and part-whole relations (11). So they are morpho-syntactically possessive in the Moksha language.

⁷ KOPTJEVSKAJA-TAMM is used the pair of terms „anchoring” and „non-anchoring”. We prefer more common terms „referent” and „non-referent” or „specific” and „non-specific”. Although they are not fully synonymous, it is not so crucial for our analysis.

- (9) locative
^{ok}*oš-t'* *škola-nci* *usk-št' od*
 town-DEF.SG.GEN school-3SG.POSS.SG.DAT bring-PST.3PL new
*kniga-t*⁸
 book-PL
 'They brought new books to the school of the town.'
- (10) temporal
^{ok}*šokšə-t'* *jarmanka-c* *ul'-s* *oču i*
 autumn-DEF.SG.GEN fair-3SG.POSS.SG БЫТЬ-PST.3SG big and
kože
 rich
 'The fair of (this) autumn was big and rich.'
- (11) part-whole
šuft-t' *rongə-c* *ul'-s* *ečkə* *i*
 tree-DEF.SG.GEN trunk-3SG.POSS.SG be-PST3SG thick and
tazə
strong
 'The trunk of the tree was thick and strong.'

So the construction *ćora-t' al'a-c* encodes not only relations with an animate possessor, but also those with an inanimate one. But what is in common for all these relations is the definiteness of a possessor.

If the possessor becomes indefinite in this construction, it is impossible to leave the morpho-syntactic pattern as it is, neither is it possible simply to change the declination from Definite to Basic. This construction is more complex: it is always with an indefinite pronoun. We will not discuss it in detail in this paper. We will just give an example (12) from which we can see that as soon as we have the modifier *kodama-bəd'ə*, the use of both declinations becomes possible and the possessive marker on the Head becomes obligatory. For this latter reason we will consider it to be a subtype of the main construction *ćora-t' al'a-c*.

- (12a) legal ownership
kodama-bəd'ə *ava-t'/ava-ń* *sumka-c*
 some woman-DEF.GEN/woman-GEN bag-3SG.POSS.SG
ašč-i *morkš-t'* *lang-sə*
 be_situated-PST.3.SG table-GEN.DEF.SG on-IN
 'The bag of a woman is on the table.'

⁸ „^{ok}” before all examples presented here means that the native speakers accepted an example but it was not their first response.

(12b) legal ownership

**kodama-bəd'ə* *ava-t'/ava-ń* *sumka-ś*
some woman-DEF.GEN/woman-GEN bag-DEF.SG
ašč-i *morkš-t'* *lang-sə*
 be_situated-PST.3.SG table-GEN.DEF.SG on-IN
 'The bag of a woman is on the table.'

(12c) legal ownership

**kodama-bəd'ə* *ava-t'/ava-ń* *sumka*
 some woman-DEF.GEN/woman-GEN bag
ašč-i *morkš-t'* *lang-sə*
 be_situated-PST.3.SG table-GEN.DEF.SG on-IN
 'The bag of a woman is on the table.'

3.2. Dependent-marking construction and relations with non-specific possessor

Descending further down our list we can notice that the possessors are not specific there. That is why the main construction *ćora-t' a'la-c* is impossible here. For these cases there is the second type – *ava-ń panar* – where the Dependent is in Genitive of the Basic declination and the Head does not have a possessive marker. This construction is not possessive in the narrow sense (does not encode core relations). We observe it here just because these relations can be encoded by the main possessive constructions cross-linguistically and because it is used as default to refer to LOCATIVE and TEMPORAL relations (13) that we consider to be possessive in Moksha as those described by the main possessive construction (9, 10).

(13) temporal

mon *məl'aft-sa* *pek* *kel'mə* *śokśə-ń*
 1SG remember-NPST3.O.SG.O.1SG.S very cold autumn-GEN
jarməńka-t'
 fair-DEF.SG.GEN
 'I remember the fair of a very cold autumn.'

Part-whole relations are very often expressed by this construction:

(14) part-whole

mar'-əń *ked'-ś* *ašč-i* *morkš*
 apple-GEN peel-DEF.SG be_situated-NPST.3SG table
lang-sə
 on-IN
 'The apple peel is on the table.'

The construction *ava-ń panar* is also typical of all the constructions on our list from predestination to age. Consider examples (4) and (15–16).

(15) group-membership

śtǎr-ńε-ń *gruppa-ś* *sa-ś* *vɛl'-i*
 girl-DIM-GEN group-DEF.SG come-PST.3SG village-LAT
 'The group of girls came to the village.' (vs. 'the group of boys')

(16) age

kafksǎńgǎmǎń *kizǎ-ń* *baba-ś* *aščǎ-ś*
 eighty year-gen pld_woman sit-pst.3SG
ėzǎm-ńε-t' *lang-sǎ*
 bench-DIM-DEF.SG.GEN on-in
 'The old woman of eighty years was sitting on the bench.'

The interpretation is very important here. The expression 'the group of girls' has two logically possible interpretations:

- a) there is a group of girls and not of boys and this is a characteristic of the whole group,
- b) only one part of girls and not all of them, a sort of quantitative or pseudo-partitive construction.

In (15) we have (a)-interpretation. (b)-interpretation is presented in (17).

(17) pseudo-partitive

gruppa-Ǿ *śtǎr-ńε-ś* *sa-ś* *vɛl'-i*
 group girl-DIM-DEF.SG come-PST.3SG village-LAT
 'The group of girls came to the village.'

The constructions like (17) we discuss in the section 3.3.

3.3. Juxtaposition and the periphery of the semantic zone

Some of the relations with non-specific possessor can be expressed by Juxtaposition. The Dependent is unmarked in this construction type, and the Head does not have a possessive suffix. As has already been said, there are three subtypes of Juxtaposition constructions that have different syntactic features and different semantic distribution. Consider examples (18–19). In both cases there are two nouns, the first of them does not bear any marker, the second one does not bear a possessive marker. But in (18) the possessor can be juxtaposed only with a noun which does not have dependents. In (19) the possessor (or the whole NP with the possessor and its dependents) juxtaposes to a NP which can already have dependents. These constructions encode different semantic relations. These last three types (18, 19a, 19b) will get the following labels in our system: *mar' ked'*, *mazi śel'mǎ śtǎrńε* and *stado traks* respectively. All of them have very narrow domain. *mar' ked'* encodes only species (inan) relations (18), *mazi śel'mǎ*

št'arńe encodes only quality (19a) and *stado traks* encodes only pseudo-partitive (19b) relations.

(18) species (inan)

<i>mar'-θ</i> (* <i>jakst'ar'</i>)	<i>ked'-θ</i>	<i>ašč-i</i>	<i>morkš</i>
apple-θ red	peel-θ	be situated-NPST.3SG	table
lang-sə			
on-IN			

'An apple (*red) peel is on the table.'

(19a) quality

<i>mon</i>	<i>ńej-əń</i>	<i>pek</i>	<i>mazi</i>	<i>śelma-θ</i>	<i>stir-ńe-θ</i>
1sg	see-PST.1SG	very	pretty	eye-θ	girl-DIM-θ

'I have seen a girl with very pretty eyes.'

(19b) pseudo-partitive

<i>mon</i>	<i>ńej-əń</i>	<i>stado-θ</i> (^{ok} <i>akša</i>)	<i>traks-θ</i>	<i>pakše-t'</i>
1sg	see-PST.1.SG	herd-θ	white	cow-θ field-DEF.SG.GEN
<i>ez-də</i>				
in-ABL				

'I saw a herd of (white) cows on the field.'

It might seem not so clear why we divide (19) into two subtypes, (19a) and (19b), giving them different labels. As has been said earlier, they refer to different relations. But we can also note that in *mazi śelma št'arńe* (19a) the Dependent denotes a semantical quality or the property of the head, like in *ava-ń panar*. In *stado traks* we do not have any quality. We have a sort of measure instead. Compare the minimal pair below: in (20a) we have the purpose relations where „water” is a sort of „quality” for „pail”. In (20b) it is a pseudo-partitive relation, where the Dependent is a measure and not a quality, it seems that the word order is inverse, because „pail” is the measure of „water” and not the other way round. This pseudo-partitive construction is autonomic in Moksha there is no reason to label it as possessive. It was investigated in KORNAKOVA 2014.

(20a) purpose

<i>ved'-θ</i>	<i>vedərka-ś</i>	<i>taštəm-ś</i>
water-θ	pail-DEF.SG	age-PST.3SG

'The water pail has become old.'

(20b) pseudo-partitive

<i>vedərka-θ</i>	<i>ved'-ś</i>	<i>ašč-i</i>	<i>kuhńe-sə</i>
pail-θ	water-DEF.SG	be_situated-NPST.3SG	kitchen-IN

'The pail of water is in the kitchen.'

The same difference we was presented in (15) and (17).

The differences in semantics and in word order are enough for us to divide (19) into (a) and (b).

As can be seen from the comparison of (14) and (18), some relations are encoded by both *ava-n panar* and *mar ked'* constructions. These are species relations with an inanimate Dependent. The same feature has been found in the system of Erzya (CYGANKIN 1978). It is also claimed there that the construction with an unmarked dependent (*mar ked'*) is the oldest one.

One more restriction on the use of the *mar ked'* construction is the animacy of a possessor. When the possessor is animate (even if it has species-interpretation), one can use only the *ava-n panar* type and *mar ked'* is impossible (21–22).

(21) species (anim)

?mon risava-n lomań-θ pil'gə-θ
 1SG draw-NPST1SG human-θ leg-θ
 'I am drawing a human leg.'

(22) species (anim)

*t'a-sə e'ra-v-i al'ε-θ vij-ś
 this-in live-PASS-NPST3SG man-θ strength-DEF.SG
 'Here we need the strength of a man.'

As can be seen from the examples above, even SPECIES relation cannot be encoded by *mar ked'* when the possessor is animated. And as indicated by the symbols „?” and „*” before the examples, relations in (21) are more likely to be expressed in this way than those in (22). This fact needs to be studied further but we could suppose that relations which are closer to PART-WHOLE can be expressed with *mar ked'* construction.

The whole system of Moksha possessive constructions is presented in the Table below:

	Relations	<i>št'ərńε-t'd'ed'a-c</i>	<i>ava-n panar</i>	Juxtaposition
Specific (referential) animate	kinship	+	–	–
	social relations	+	–	–
	author	+	–	–
	carrier of properties	+	–	–
	group-member	+	–	–

		legal ownership	+	–	–	
		body part	+	–	–	
		inanimate	part-whole	+	+	–
			locative	+	+	–
			temporal	+	+	–
non-specific (non-referential)	animate	predestination	–	+	–	
		species (anim)	–	+	–	
		group-membership	–	+	–	
	inanimate	time	–	+	–	
		purpose	–	+	–	
		matherial	–	+	–	
		measure/quantity	–	+	–	
		species (inan)	–	+	<i>mar' ked'</i>	
			age	–	+	ʔ ⁹
			quality	–	–	<i>mazi selmə štərñe</i>
		pseudo-partitive	–	–	<i>stado traks</i>	

Table

The table shows four borders. The first one is between body part and locative relations. All the relations above it can be encoded only by *cora-t' al'a-c*, and it marks the change of animacy of a possessor. The second border (between part-whole and predestination) indicates the change of referential status of possessor. Relations with non-referent possessor cannot be expressed by *cora-t' al'a-c*. The third border lies between measure/quantity and species. All that is above this

⁹ We cannot say precisely if this construction is possible here because of the doubts of native speakers. Some of them produce such forms, while the others prohibit them.

border cannot be expressed by any type of Juxtaposition. Each of the peripheral relations has its own construction.

4. Conclusions

We have discussed the main types of possessive constructions in the Moksha language. They can be divided into 3 big classes according to the relations they encode:

- with referent possessor
- with non-referent possessor
- peripheral relations

In the domain of referent relations there are also more detailed oppositions so that the following factors become important (PLEŠAK 2015):

- definiteness of a possessor
- proper name/ common noun
- syntactic position of a NP

The second goal was to determine which of all relations are really possessive in Moksha. The answer is that only relations with referent possessor, including locative and temporal (sometimes) are possessive. Only they can be encoded by the same construction as the core relations (moreover most of them are the core relations).

The system of possessive constructions in Moksha is quite typical of the European languages:

1. It uses Double-marking construction (as a language which has possessive suffixes)
2. All the core relations are marked by the same construction
3. It does not draw any differences between alienable and inalienable possession
4. Animacy and referentiality splits are the most important: only referential relations are possessive; only relations with referent animate possessors can be expressed with a construction that normally encodes non-referent relations; only species with an inanimate dependent can be encoded by Juxtaposition.
5. locative and temporal relations belong to the zone of variation even within Moksha: sometimes they are expressed as possessive and sometimes as non-possessive.

ABL = ablative case	PASS = passive voice
DAT = dative case	POSS = possessive declination
DEF = definite declination	PL = plural
dim = diminutive suffix	PROL = prolative case
GEN = genitive case	PST = past tense
IMP = imperative	PTCP.RES = resultative participle
IN = inessive case	S = subject (in subject-object conjugation)
LAT = lative case	SG = singular
NPST = non-past tense	
O = object (in subject-object conjugation)	

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