

On the Possessive Constructions in Finno-Ugric

The grammatical systems of many of the Finno-Ugric languages are characterized by a highly developed noun declension with a great number of differentiated case forms. On the other hand, there are languages with very few case forms, such as Ostyak. The Proto-Finno-Ugric declension supposedly consisted of six cases, three grammatical and three semantical, i. e. locational cases. The grammatical cases reflect the contrast of actor — goal and head — modifier, the locational cases maintain the three-dimensional system of direction: in, from and into. The case systems in Finno-Ugric are distinctively localistic, which is illustrated by the fact that in languages with a limited number of cases the local cases survive — at least in adverbs and postpositions — while the grammatical cases may be reduced to the mere stem form or nominative.

The declensional forms may be grouped according to various principles. In addition to the contrast grammatical — locational there exists a contrast between case forms for animate and inanimate concepts. This is discernible in the Cheremis and Southern Lappish genitive and in the local cases with a coaffix *l* occurring in Balto-Finnic, Cheremis and Permic, even though the distinction is due to separate developments in the languages concerned. The adessive, ablative and allative in Finnish include among their various occurrences the function of designating the local relations of animate nouns. In this they may be compared to the corresponding Permic cases and to the Cheremis dative and the almost obsolete ablative. One of the grammatical cases, the genitive, seems to have been originally reserved for animate concepts — but the distinction was not very important, since the genitive is missing in the entire Permic and Ugric language groups. Moreover, in Mordvin, Balto-Finnic and most of the Lappish dialects certain phonological changes have resulted in accusative and genitive assuming an identical phonemic shape in those languages. There is no consequent evidence of restrictions in the use of accusative for inanimate concepts, and this fact has influenced further towards the integration of the phonologically identical genitive as well.

The fundamental among the sentence types is the utterance based on nominal predication, the equilibrium between two nouns: *Az ég kék. Jumo ojar. Taivas on sininen.* 'The sky is blue.' Despite the presence of the copula, the Finnish sentence is to be considered a nominal predication as well as the Hungarian and Cheremis sentences. Even in the last-mentioned languages a copula must be present in utterances which do not pertain to the 3. person singular present: *Az ég kék volt. Jumo ojar ulmaš* 'The sky was blue'. *Fiatal vagy* 'You are young'. *Šongo ulam* 'I'm old'. The copula is needed to serve as

the base for mode, tense and person markers in cases other than mentioned above, but it has no bearing on the actual sentence structure. The nominal predication is always stative, because it only identifies, it does not act nor refrain from acting. It may be considered a local predication, but it represents rather a temporal than a statual locality.

The verbal predication may be stative or dynamic depending on the semantic content of the verb. In Finno-Ugric a verbal predication is identified by the grammatical forms of the noun dependents. The stative local predication is mostly based on the occurrences of the verb 'to be'. The copula may thus appear as a verb with noun categories dependent on it. An illustration of the double functions of 'to be' is to be found in the occurrences of nominal predicative vs. predicative adverbial in Finnish: *Hän on sairas* 'He is ill' (nominal predication designating quality and focusing on unchanging situation) and *Hän on sairaana* 'He is in the state of illness' (verbal predication with the emphasis on condition in the frame of an unidentified duration of time). Examples like the last-mentioned mark the border line between nominal and verbal predications, as shown by the fact that adjectives occurring as complements to 'to be' take the case suffix indicating both a statual and a temporal locality. The essive is a case form for abstract locality, but in some adverbials and postpositions it still retains its concrete overtones: *Hän on kotona* — *Hän on koulussa* — *Hän on kaupungilla* (She is home — She is at school — She is downtown). It is easy to quote parallel examples concerning the three statual local cases in Finnish, but they all have their special functions: the essive is the case designating condition, the inessive is the general case form for locality and the adessive is used to express local relations of animate concepts. They all occur as dependents of the verb 'to be' and other stative verbs. Corresponding case forms with separative or lative functions occur with the dynamic verbs. If the noun in the local case form designates an animate conception, the relation may be called possessive, and if the situation is stative, the verb in question is 'to be' or its synonyms. The result is the so-called *habeo* construction. It is to be remembered that dynamic local constructions of animate nouns stand likewise in a possessive relation to the verb: a person not only owns a thing, he might lose or receive it as well. The inherent influence of the Indo-European languages has resulted in concentrating upon the static variant of possession.

1. Different Finno-Ugric languages apply different systems for expressing the *habeo* construction — which more appropriately might be called the 'mihi est' construction. According to Wolfgang Schlachter (*Arbeiten zur Strukturbezogenen grammatik* 433) the morphological emphasis lies in the local case form, which at the same time designates the belonging together of two nouns separated by the verb copula 'to be'. This is reflected by the fact that some of the languages remain indifferent to the valence of the verb 'to be' and accordingly have the possessor noun in a grammatical case form, which only connects a noun to another noun.

1.1. The Vogul language may indicate the *habeo* construction with both the possessor and the possessed in the nominative, the latter usually followed by a person marker referring to the possessor. The mere position of the nouns is significant. The verb takes the last place in the utterance. Thus the Vogul *nejär püßi äls* might translate simply 'There was the emperor's son', but if there exists a nexus relation between the two nouns the proper translation is

'The emperor had a son.' The utterance is existential, but there is no distinction between a locational and a possessive relation. The suffix is not obligatory: *tān pa.tānt ni.nā išuō ō.ni* 'They have four daughters.' Of interest is the fact that the verb 'to be' may be missing also — in situations referring to the present time. On the other hand, the possessor noun may be represented by the mere person marker: *nēpākōln²m sāβ, šālyōlnum sāβ* 'I have paper money, I have coins' (Lieselotte Schiefer: „haben" im Wogulischen. FUF 40).

1.2. The languages which have the genitive display this case in the *habeo* construction. It is remarkable that the genitive is clearly marked — that is, the languages with a loss of the final *-n* do not show the genitive in this function. In some occasions the final *-n* may be returned, as in Livonian *tāmmēn ūm rōdā* 'He has money'. Traces of the genitive in this function are discernible also in Finnish: *Lapsen on nälkä. Lapsen tulee nälkä* 'The child is hungry (has hunger). The child gets hungry'. As seen, the genitive is a general case for the modifier without a reference to the stative or dynamic valence of the verb. The Volga-Finnic languages form their *habeo* constructions exclusively with the genitive possessor: Mordvin *eržan ulheš agorozo*; Cheremis *marin ulmaš imhāže* 'The man had a horse.' In these last-mentioned languages the person marker identifying the possessor in the noun possessed has a very important function. It is usually present with the genitive, but it may acquire syntactical significance and assume the role of the possessor, as in the Vogul example above: Mordvin *uli mazo avaksost* 'They had a pretty chicken'; Cheremis *ik ergašt ulo, ik ūdarəšt ulo* 'They have a son and a daughter'. Especially in Cheremis the genitive occurs with dynamic possessive constructions as well: *nunən šočən ūdaržō* 'A daughter was born to them'; *tənən majet jamən* 'What did you lose?' I have counted 32 intransitive and 12 transitive dynamic verbs occurring with a genitive or with a mere person marker functioning as the possessor: *ergāže šočən* 'A son was born to them.' That is understandable in a language such as Cheremis, which does not use animate nouns in local cases except secondarily with postpositions. (Cf. Eeva Kangasmaa-Minn, The syntactic distribution of the Cheremis genitive II. MSFOu 146). Robert Gauthiot remarked in 1908 (La phrase nominale en Finno-Ougrien) about the absence of the verb-copula in local and possessive sentences in Volga-Finnic. The same phenomenon is discernible also in the Permic and the Ugric groups. It should be mentioned that the Cheremis language has separate forms — or words — for the verb-copula representing singular present third person: the positive *ulo* and the negative *uke*: *tudən ūdaržō ulo, tudən ūdaržō uke* 'He has a daughter, he does not have a daughter'.

2. The possessor occurs in a local case form. This may represent a general local case form as in Lappish or a case occurring both as a general local case and as a case for animate conceptions, as in Finnic and Permic, or in a more restricted sense in Hungarian. The Hungarian dative is grammaticalized so far that it occurs both in the *habeo* construction and in a dynamic relation, comparable to the Cheremis genitive and on the other hand to the Cheremis dative.

2.1. The Lappish languages express animate relations with the same case forms as the inanimate: *Dām al'bmast leggji golbmā bardne* 'That man has three children.' Cf. *Dāt orro maeccest* 'He lives in the forest'.

2.2. The Balto-Finnic languages observe a special three-dimensional local system for the animate nouns. The case forms for animate local relations

are the 1-cases, which, however, may in certain connections be used of inanimate nouns for purely local functions: *Pojalla on isot korvat* 'The boy has big ears'; cf. the inessive *Talossa on isot ikkunat* 'The house has large windows'; however: *Rannalla on iso vene* 'There is a big boat on the shore'. The *from* and *into* cases reveal the same distinctions: *Pojalta paleltuivat korvat* 'The boy froze his ears' — *Talosta särkyivät ikkunat* 'The windows of the house were broken' — *Rannalta lähti vene* 'A boat was leaving the shore'; *Pojalle ostettiin korvalaput* 'They bought earmuffs for the boy' — *Taloon asetettiin ikkunat* 'The house was provided with windows' — *Rannalle tuli vene* 'A boat reached the shore'. Accordingly: there are special case forms in the Balto-Finnic languages for expressing local relations of animate nouns, but the use of the cases is not restricted. They may occur as general local cases for inanimate conceptions as well. The distinction is more or less lopsided. The possessive suffix has not a grammatical function in connection with the Balto-Finnic constructions — which is understandable since the possessive suffixes exist only in Finnish and Karelian and even there are becoming redundant elements. Finnish *Minulla on kirjani* translates 'I have my book', not 'I have a book.' Nor has Hungarian *könyvem van* any grammatical counterpart in Finnish.

2.3. The situation in the Permic languages is more or less analogical to the Balto-Finnic system. The *habeo* construction is not expressed only with the stative *l* cases, i. e. with the adessive as in Votyak: *adamilen kviñ piez vîlâm* 'A man had five sons', but with dynamic local cases as well: Zyrian *šetka starikiš nişse vek vide* 'The stepmother is always scolding her husband's daughter.' There are, however, examples of purely statual local use of the *l*-cases as well: Votyak *kis puwi pus poni* 'I will cut my mark in the birch.'

2.4. The Hungarian employs a dynamic case called the dative for the *habeo* construction: *A királynak szép lánya volt* 'The king had a beautiful daughter' with an obligatory person marker referring to the possessor added to the noun possessed. The dative may also occur in a lative function: *Kenyeret adok a koldusnak* 'I give bread to the beggar', and not only of animate nouns: *Délnek megyünk* 'We go towards south'. The possessive suffix may assume the grammatical role of the possessor as in the Volga-Finnic languages: *Jó lovam van* 'I have a good horse.'

3. In addition, there exists a special verb 'to have' in the Ob-Ugric languages, and the Lappish *aednât* and the Finnish *omata* come under the same category. The Lappish verb, however, is a loan from the Norwegian (*aeg*) and the Finnish verb has a very limited, literary use. The problem of the kernel sentence based on a transitive relation does not actually concern us, since we are dealing with possessive constructions, not with possessive verbs. According to Lieselotte Schiefer 'to have' in Vogul is more often expressed with a possessive verb than with a possessive construction (FUF 40, 197): *luß ðñši* 'He has a horse', and in Ostyak it is exclusively in use: *ëwi jam sox tajrl* 'The girl has fine clothes.'

4. The possessive sentences belong to the kernel sentences in the language. They may be inserted in a matrix sentence to make complicated utterances. To secure an insertion certain grammatical changes are needed. The verb 'to be' which even in possessive sentences has the function of marking the nexus line between the verbal and the nominal phrases in the utterance, falls away. The possessor occurs directly as an adjunct before the noun possessed. If the possessor stands in a grammatical case such as the nominative or the genitive,

no changes are needed to adjust it to the surface structure of the complex utterance. But if the possessor represents a local case form, which primarily suggests an adverbial to a verb, the situation becomes more complicated. The form of the possessive attribute noun differs in the different languages according to their declensional systems.

4.1. The Ob-Ugric languages represent the most straightforward type. The verbal element is dropped ('to be' or 'to have') and the noun possessed, possibly with a person marker referring to the possessor, follows: Vogul *punkanäm jörn-ëkw puŋk-kosne konsëp* 'My teeth are the comb of a Samoyede woman'; Ostyak *ašem šemjajät senk una us* 'My father's family was once very big'.

4.2. The Mordvin and the Cheremis languages apply the same method as the Ob-Ugric. The embedded possessive construction loses the verb-copula, otherwise it is comparable with the *habeo* construction: Mordvin *'ödeñ kan, ödeñ poks. pazoñ tešterenze* 'The Khan of the water, the prince of the water, the daughter of the thunder god.' As seen, the possessive suffix, i. e. a person marker referring to the possessor, is possible but not obligatory. The inanimate genitives cannot be traced back to a *habeo* construction but to an adverbial modifier in a local case. In this respect Mordvin resembles Finnish: the genitive occurring adnominally is not restricted to animate nouns.

The Cheremis system is even more transparent than the Mordvin. The embedded possessive construction retains the possessor noun in the genitive, the possessed noun may or may not include a person marker referring to the possessor: *marin imhäže* 'the man's horse'; *tudän surt(šo)* 'his house'; *šoräkän jol(žo)* 'the sheep's leg'. But if the embedded sentence represents a local utterance with a presupposed locative case of an inanimate noun, the noun concerned occurs in the nominative: *üstel jol* 'the table leg'. In an attributive position, an animate noun may occur in the nominative, but an inanimate noun does not occur in the genitive. This distinction is clearly observed in the folklore material, the present-day literary Cheremis has a fair amount of inanimate genitives.

4.3. An embedded possessive construction may retain the possessor noun in a local case form: an adverbial modifier becomes an attribute to a noun. This happens in the Permic languages and in Hungarian, which, however, may employ the nominative for possessive as well as for local relations: Votyak *söd poški pijez* 'the young one of a sand martin'; Zyrian *stariklen turunjs* 'the man's hay'; Hungarian *A nép mutatja László király lova patkóinak nyomát* 'The people show the print of the hooves of the horse of King László.' The possessive suffix has an important function in binding an originally adverbial element to a nominal head word.

4.4. The Finnish and the Lappish languages represent a more opaque type of embedding. The local case form of the possessor undergoes a transformation to a grammatical case, that is to the genitive. The genitive may also occur representing a purely statual local relation: Finnish *Pojan kirja ← Pojalla on kirja* 'The boy's book ← The boy has a book'; *Kuusen oksa ← Kuusessa on oksa* 'The twig of a spruce ← There is a twig on the spruce.' It is of interest that while a statual local relation might be represented by a construction of nominative adjunct + head as in a compound such as *tornikello* — Tornissa on kello 'A bell in a tower', an animate possessor appears always in the genitive.

Wolfgang Schlachter talks about the contrast of *Subjektivität* and *Energie* which is expressed in the *habeo* construction (op. cit. 407). Undoubtedly the

possessive constructions have a double function of connecting and localizing. Some of the languages emphasize the relation between two nouns without any special information about the quality of that relation. The relation of an animate noun to another noun is usually possessive. The best examples of this type are the Volga-Finnic languages. The Permic languages concentrate on the local aspect, although the case forms occurring in possessive connections are more or less grammaticalized (cf. Károly Rédei, *Syrjänische Chrestomathie* 75, where the adessive of T. E. Uotila is called the genitive and the ablative genitive-ablative). Finnish and Lappish adhere exclusively to the local aspect as far as indirect possessive relations are concerned, but in direct relations the function of locality is lost and the function that remains only indicates the connection between two nouns. Altogether the possessive constructions in Finno-Ugric present a versatile example of linguistic adaptability.

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