A Minimalist analysis of Uyghur genitives

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- Uyghur is a Turkic language spoken in western China and Central Asia
- Uyghur possessive constructions bear marking on both the possessor and possessed (Engsæth, Yakup, and Dwyer 2009; de Jong 2007; Tömrü 1987)

1 Syntactic and semantic properties

1.1 Morphological marking and agreement

- Morphemes:
  - “Possessor”: GEN case suffix -ning
  - “Possessed”: POSS agreement suffix, agrees with “possessor” in person & number

(1) a. mē-ning alma-m
    me GEN apple POSS.1s
    “my apple”
b. * mē-ning almī-miz
    me GEN apple POSS.1p
c. * mē-ning almī-si
    me GEN apple POSS.3s
d. mē-ning almī-lir-im
    me GEN apple PL POSS.1s
    “my apples”
e. * mē-ning almī-lir-imiz
    me GEN apple PL POSS.1p

(2) a. biz-ning almī-miz
    us GEN apple POSS.1p
    “our apple”
b. biz-ning almī-lir-imiz
    our GEN apple PL POSS.1p
    “our apples”
c. * biz-ning almī-lir-im
    our GEN apple PL POSS.1s

1.2 Semantic roles

- “Possessors” are not always really possessors (Dede 1978):

(3) a. Kinship:
Rene-ning ati-si
Rene-GEN father-POSS.3s

b. Association:
Rene-ning ders-i
Rene-GEN class-POSS.3s

c. Undergoer:
Rene-ning vapat-i
Rene-GEN death-POSS.3s

- Like sentence subjects, “possessors” are actually a syntactic notion, not a semantic one
- From now on will call them “DP-subjects”, as they are in the subject position of the DP

1.3 Distribution of DP-subjects

- DP-subject may be omitted (Tömür 1987; Dede 1978):

(4) (Mē-ning) ata-m bek ĕgiz.
(me-GEN) father-POSS.1s very tall
“My father is very tall.”

(5) (Siz-ning) kitab-ingiz qiziq-mu?
you-GEN book-POSS.2s interesting-INTER
“Is your book interesting?”

(6) a. Mehmud-ning ders-i uzun.
Mehmud-GEN class-POSS.3s long
“Mehmud’s class is long”

b. U-ning ders-i uzun.
him-GEN class-POSS.3s long
“His class is long.”

c. (Mehmud tēxi kel-mi-di.) Ders-i uzun.
Mehmud still come-NEG-PERF.3s class-POSS.3s long
“(Mehmud has not arrived yet.) His [Mehmud’s] class is long.”

- Non-genitive possessives (POSS marking but no GEN case):

(7) a. Tarim oymanliq-i
Tarim basin-POSS.3s
“the Tarim basin”

b. Azadliq yol-i
Liberartion street-POSS.3s
“Liberation Avenue”
2 Case checking and agreement marking

2.1 DP-subjects are like TP-subjects

• Uyghur has pro-drop:

(9) (Men) bûgûn tash kördûm.
   (I) today rock saw
   “Today (I) saw a rock.”

• TP-subject drop and DP-subject drop occur under similar conditions:
  – Subject not receiving focus or bringing in a new discourse element
  – Subject is 1st person, 2nd person, or 3rd person but already given in the discourse

• In both TP and DP, overt subject names the specific referent, while inflection (verbal or POSS) identifies some characteristics of the referent

• Making an analogy between DP-subjects and TP-subjects:
  – In TP, subject occupies [Spec,T] and receives [nom] case there. AGENTS are introduced by v, which also hosts verbal inflection (tense and subject-verb agreement)
  – In DP, subject should occupy [Spec,D] and receive [gen] case there. “possessor”s (the only kind of DP-subject) introduced by n, which also hosts nominal inflection (POSS and “possessor”–“possessed” agreement)

2.2 The theory in action

(10) a. Mehmud-ning ati-si
    Mehmud-GEN father-POSS.3s
    “Mehmud’s father”
b. Derivation:
- Bare NP *ata* formed, selected as complement of *n* and raises to adjoin with *n*, which will host its inflectional and φ features
- *n* introduces *Mehmud* as its specifier, to fill a c-selectional requirement ([uD]) and to get its φ features valued
- *nP* is becomes the complement of *D_{gen}* , a null D with GEN case and POSS inflectional features
- *Mehmud* raises to [Spec,D] to receive GEN case, which will be pronounced as *-ning* thanks to morphophonological interface rules
- The whole *n* complex raises to adjoin with *D* to have its inflectional features valued. POSS inflection with third-singular φ features will be pronounced as *si* on the only potential host, *ata*
- This roughly parallels the derivation of a verbal extended projection

### 2.3 Details, details

- **Why *n***?
  - Typically *n* is used for a nominal AGENT for a deverbal noun, as in *John’s examination of the patient* (Adger 2003). Uyghur lacks such nouns (there are only gerunds)
  - Just as *v* allows subject–verb agreement by hosting inflection and φ-features, so does *n* allow DP-subject–noun agreement
  - *n* introduces an external “argument” of the noun (possessor, relative, associate, undergoer, etc.), as does *v* (Kratzer 1996)

- **What is the locus of “possessive interpretation”?**
  - *D_{gen}*. *n* only facilitates agreement and introduces external argument
– In cases of DP-subject drop (6–8), there is unpronounced GEN case hosted on a phonetically null pro in [Spec,DP]

• Why must DP-subject raise to [Spec,DP]?

– Evidence comes from non-genitive possessive constructions

(11) a. * bir [partiye-ning nizamnami-si]
   one party-GEN constitution-POSS.3s
   (intended: “a [the party’s constitution]”)

b. [bir partiye]-ning nizamnami-si
   one party-GEN constitution-POSS.3s
   “[a party’s] constitution”

c. partiye-ning bir nizamnami-si
   party-GEN one constitution-POSS.3s
   “a constitution of the party’s”

(12) a. bir [partiye nizamnami-si]
   one party constitution-POSS.3s
   “a party constitution”

b. * partiye bir nizamnami-si
   party one constitution-POSS.3s
   – Assume that bir “one” is in [Spec,NumP], above nP and below DP
   – Regular genitive-possessives cannot be further modified by numbers or articles; numbers must be internal to the phrase. DP-subject has risen past NumP
   – Non-genitive possessives can be; number cannot be phrase internal. First constituent has remained in [Spec,nP]. GEN case not discharged, so no possessive interpretation

3 Handling gerunds

• Gerunds formed with nominalizer suffix genlik

• Gerund subjects bear GEN case; gerundized verbs bear agreeing POSS marking

(13) a. siz-ning alma-ni yê-gen-lik-ingiz
   you-GEN apple-ACC eat-PERF-NZR-POSS.2s
   “your eating of the apple”

b. mè-ning Nur-ni öltür-gen-lik-im
   me-GEN Nur-ACC kill-PERF-NZR-POSS.1s
   “my killing of Nur”

• Proposal:
- Gerund formed by taking a partial verbal projection and nominalizing it with *genlik* (Kratzer 1996)
- Nominalized gerund either does not include T, or T is defective (non-finite), so the agent cannot receive [nom] case
- Adopting Hornstein’s (1999) movement hypothesis, agent can move out to get gen case; on the way it stops at [Spec,nP] where it picks up the “possessor” role and triggers agreement

### 3.1 The theory in action

(14) a. \[\text{siz-ning [Nur-ni öltür-gen]-lik-ingiz]-ni bil-dim}\]
\[
\text{you-GEN Nur-ACC kill-PERF-NZR-POSS.2s-ACC know-PAST.1s}
\]
“I found out that you killed Nur.” (lit.: “I found out your killing of Nur.”)

b. \[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{siz[case:GEN]} \\
\text{D’[case:GEN]} \\
\text{n’} \\
\text{D_{gen}} \\
\text{N_P} \\
\end{array}
\]

3.2 Evidence from adverbs

- In matrix clauses, adverbs have free word order before the verb. In gerunds, they may only follow the subject:

(15) a. \[Siz tünügün Nur-ni öltür-dingiz.\]
\[
\text{you yesterday Nur-ACC kill-PAST.2s}
\]
“You killed Nur yesterday.”

b. \[Tünügün siz Nur-ni öltür-dingiz.\]
\[
\text{yesterday you Nur-ACC kill-PAST.2s}
\]
“Yesterday you killed Nur.”

(16) a. \[\text{siz-ning tünügün Nur-ni öltür-gen-lik-ingiz]-ni bil-dim}\]
\[
\text{you-GEN yesterday Nur-ACC kill-PERF-NZR-POSS.2s-ACC know-PAST.1s}
\]
“I found out that yesterday you killed Nur.”
b. *[Türügün siz-ning Nur-ni öltür-gen-likeingiz]-ni bil-dim
you-GEN yesterday Nur-ACC kill-PERF-NZR-POSS.2s-ACC know-PAST.1s
(only interpretation possible is “I found out yesterday that you killed Nur”)

• If gerund structures cause the agent to raise to [Spec,DP] while leaving the adverb stranded in the gerund, this ordering is expected

References


