

The interaction of possessive and definite noun declinations in Moksha¹

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This paper is devoted to the possessiveness and definiteness in the Moksha language (Mordvin, Finno-Ugric). There are two sets of markers possible on a noun: the definite markers and possessive markers (these are cumulative markers for case encoding as well), they form the definite and possessive declensions respectively (Kolyadenkov (ed.), 1962). These two sets of affixes are incompatible (1):

- (1) *s't' r'-n'ε-t'* *kukla-c-(*s')* / **kukla-s'*
girl-dim-DEF.SG.GEN doll-3SG.POSS.SG-(*DEF.SG[NOM]) / doll-DEF.SG[NOM]
ašč-i *oza-d* *tabur'etka-t'-(*ənc)* *lank-s*
be.situated-NPST.3SG sit-CONV.POS chair-DEF.SG.GEN-(*3SG.POSS.SG.GEN) on-in
'The doll of the girl's is sitting on the chair'.

In our research, we examine the syntactic and semantic properties of the possessive vs. definiteness affixes, their difference and the rules of their interaction. We argue that both sets have non-exhaustive interpretation (cf. Abbott, 2014). They can denote an indefinite referent within a predefined set of referents (2) (cf. partitive specificity, (Enç, 1991):

- (2) *mon'-d'əjə-n* *sa-s'-t'* *kolmə* *mon' učən'ik-ən'*
I.obl-PRON.DAT-1SG.POSS come-PST.3-PL three my student-1.SG.POSS.PL[NOM]
'Three students of mine have come to me'. (I only have three / I have more than three)

However, they differ in their interpretation within the distributional quantifiers' domain. Thus, the definite DPs have only specific and, thus, wide scope reading (3a). Possessives can have bound reading (3b):

- (3) *morkš-t'* *lank-s* *ašč -s'-t'* *mar '-t'* *i* *gruša-t.*
table-DEF.SG.GEN on-in lay-PST.3SG-PL apple-PL and pear-PL
'There are apples and pears on the table'.
- a. *εr'* *s't'ər'-n'ε-s'* *s'εv-əz'ə* *mar'-t'*
every girl-DIM-DEF.SG[NOM] take-PST.3SG.O.3SG.S apple-DEF.SG.GEN
'Every girl took the apple (all the girls took one and the same particular apple).'
- b. *εr'* *s't'ər'-n'ε-s'* *s'εv-əz'ə* *mar'-ənc*
every girl-DIM-DEF.SG[NOM] take-PST.3SG.O.3SG.S apple-3SG.POSS.SG.GEN
'Every girl took her apple (a different apple for each girl).'

Thus, the 'definite' marker specificity (cf. familiarity, discourse-linking (Pesetsky (1987)) and not with uniqueness. A possessor or a "definiteness" trigger such as demonstratives can occur overtly within a DP. A demonstrative is only compatible with definite suffixes while possessor DPs with possessive ones. Moreover, possessors and demonstratives can co-occur:

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- (4) *t'ε mon'/mon' t'ε tabur'etka-z'ə s'a-d od, čem tona-s'*
 this my/ my this chair-1SG.POSS[NOM] that-ABL new than that-DEF.SG[NOM]
 'This chair of mine is newer than that one'.

However, whenever both a demonstrative and an overt possessor DP are present, only a possessive affix is possible, as in (4). Thus, possessivity marking overrides definiteness marking in Moksha. To sum up, the main definiteness semantic property in Moksha is the familiarity (specificity, (the discourse linking of a referent in the context) but not uniqueness while the possessive affix triggers relation between two DPs. Both have non-exhaustive interpretation. The case of Moksha shows that a language can have mutually exclusive definiteness and possessivity markers while neither imposes an exhaustive interpretation, meaning that typologically exhaustivity cannot be the only reason for the complementary distribution of the two types of markers.

References

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