

## The use of Meadow Mari possessive suffixes in nominal ellipsis

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**Aims & claims:** This talk deals with the properties of nominal ellipsis (NPE) in Meadow Mari. I claim that NPE in Mari features a 3SG possessive suffix which I analyse as a spellout of a D head. NPE in Mari can shed light on two important questions. The descriptive one concerns the non-possessive uses of possessive suffixes in Mari, and more generally, in Uralic languages (see Fraurud 2001; Nikolaeva 2003; Gerland 2014; Simonenko 2014, among many others). The theoretical one is related to the role of partitivity and focus/contrast in the case of NPE (Sleeman 1993; Lobeck 1995; Giannakidou & Stavrou 1999; Eguren 2010; on the opposite view Saab 2008; Alexiadou & Gengel 2012; Saab & Lipták 2016).

**New empirical data:** Mari allows for NPE in linguistic (intersentential, intrasentential) contexts as well as in extralinguistic ones. The case morphology of the elided noun phrase is never absent; it appears stranded onto the (last) remnant. In addition, a 3SG possessive suffix may also appear on the remnant (1).

- (1) Nele sumka-t üstembalne, a kuštâlgâ-žo polkâšto.  
heavy bad-POSS:2SG on.table but light-POSS:3SG on.shelf  
(Context: You have one heavy and one light bag.) ‘Your heavy bag is on the table, and the/your light one is on the shelf.’

Based on novel data, I argue that ❶ the Poss suffix is licit in NPE if the remnant and the correlate are understood to belong to a set (→ part-whole relation) and the remnant is interpreted as specific in the sense of Enç (1991); ❷ inter-speaker variation observed, which is conditioned by the exact function of the suffix: it can be either partitive or definite.

Support for ❶ comes from cases in which Poss *cannot* appear. For instance, the suffix is ruled out if the antecedent clause does not contain a correlate for the remnant, thus, neither a partitive, nor a definite reading is possible. This is shown in (2): ‘green dress/one’ is not a member of the set of the referents introduced in the antecedent clause. (The ungrammaticality of (2) is independent of the form of the adjective: long (with the augment -gV-) or short.)

- (2) Context: We are shopping and I show you dresses none of which is green. I ask you: “Do you like these dresses?”

(Môlam) takšôm užar-(\*že) / užar-gâ-(\*že) kelša ôle.  
1SG.DAT generally green-POSS:3SG green-AUG-POSS:3SG appeal.PRS.3SG be.PST.3SG  
Intended: ‘Generally, I like green ones/I would prefer a green one.’

❷: the possessive suffix can be used as partitive (thus, indicating that the referent belongs to a set, cf. Enç 1991 and É. Kiss & Tánčzos 2018 for Udmurt), but some speakers allow for definite use of the suffix, too. The two uses can be told apart with the following context: ‘Mom baked pancakes. (a: partitive) She put three (of them) into the fridge and two (of them) on the table. (b: definite) Masha ate the two (from the table), and Tanya ate the three (from the fridge).’

- (3) a. Tudo kum-ât-(š)-ôm çolodil’nik-âš šândâš, a kok-ât-(š)-ôm  
3SG three-AUG-POSS:3SG-ACC fridge-ILL put.PST.3SG but two-AUG-POSS:3SG-ACC  
üstel ümbake.  
table on.top  
‘She put three (of them) into the fridge and two (of them) on the table.’ [partitive]  
b. %Maša kok-ât-š-ôm kočkân, a Taňa kum-ât-š-ôm.  
Masha two-AUG-POSS:3SG-ACC eat.PRF.3SG but Tanya three-AUG-POSS:3SG-ACC  
‘Masha ate the two (from the table), and Tanya the three (from the fridge).’ [definite]

(3a) shows that in the partitive context, the use of the possessive suffix on the numeral remnant is allowed and preferred by the speakers. Furthermore, I argue that there is no real optionality wrt the use of the suffix in this case; the variant without Poss is simply a non-partitive one (*three pancakes* vs. the partitive *three of the pancakes*), which is also felicitous in the context. Importantly, not all speakers allow for the suffix in (3b). For those who don't, the suffix is limited to partitive contexts (3a), but ungrammatical in the definite context (3b) (in the latter context, only a bare form can be used). For those who do accept (3b), however, the suffix can clearly be used as a definiteness marker and is obligatory in the context above. The wellformedness of (3b) is important for two reasons. Firstly, on the descriptive level, Simonenko (2014) has argued that the use of the possessive suffix in Mari is limited to what she calls 'group contexts' (= partitive), and that it is impossible with 'anaphoric antecedents' (= definite); notably, though, she did not discuss elliptical noun phrases. Secondly, on a more general level, one of the most often mentioned arguments against the grammaticalization of Poss into definiteness markers in Uralic is that the use of possessive suffixes has been argued to be not obligatory (see Fraurud 2001 and Gerland 2014). But in the elliptical context in (3b), Poss is obligatory for the speakers who can use the suffix as [+def].

**Analysis:** I argue that the possessive suffix used in elliptical contexts is a D head: which is required since the remnant belongs to a set and is contrasted with the other members of this set. This applies to the examples in (3); in (2), on the other hand, the suffix cannot be used as the referent does not belong a set. More generally, examples like (2) are problematic wrt to the question of whether we are dealing with NPE (to be understood as a surface anaphor) at all, given that there is no correlate in the antecedent clause (see Sleeman 1993; Panagiotidis 2002; Saab 2018). Irrespectively of the type of the nominal gap in the Mari example in (2), the use of the Poss morpheme seems to be sensitive to the contrast between the remnant and the correlate (and both are understood as belonging to a set). The role of contrast in ellipsis has been a subject of debate: it has been argued to be crucial by some authors, e.g., Giannakidou & Stavrou (1999) and Eguren (2010), but Saab & Lipták (2016) claim that non-contrastive remnants exist. The Mari data speak in favour of contrast being required in cases of ellipsis.

According to the existing proposals, possessive morphology in Mari is hosted in D and/or Poss:

(4) f-seq in Meadow/Hill Mari

- |    |                        |  |
|----|------------------------|--|
| a. | K > D > Num > N        | (McFadden 2004; Guseva & Weisser 2018) |
| b. | K > Poss > N(+Num)     | (Simonenko & Leontjev 2012)            |
| c. | K > D > Poss > Num > N | (Pleshak 2019)                         |

According to Pleshak (2019), non-possessively used possessive suffixes are base-generated in D, while possessively used 3SG might move to D (but do not necessarily do so). The crucial examples for postulating both Poss and D in the Mari functional sequence are those containing two possessive suffixes (not illustrated here; cf. Simonenko 2014; Pleshak 2019). I claim that what is spelled out on the remnant is the higher possessive suffix which sits in D. The fact that the 3SG morpheme on the remnant in (1) can appear even if the antecedent is 2SG is also indicative that we are not dealing with a genuine possessive morpheme, thus supporting the D<sup>0</sup> analysis.

**Selected references:** Fraurud, K. 2001. Possessive with extensive use: A source of definite articles? In: *Dimensions of Possession* • Gerland, D. 2014. Definitely not possessed? Possessives with non-possessive function. In: *Frames and Concept Types* • Guseva, E. & P. Weisser. 2018. Postsyntactic reordering in the Mari nominal domain – Evidence from suspended affixation. *NLLT* • Pleshak, P. 2019. Morfosintaksis imennoy gruppy v finno-ugorskix jazykah Povolzhya. MGU thesis • Saab, A. 2018. Nominal ellipses. In: *The Oxford Handbook of Ellipsis* • Simonenko, A. 2014. Microvariation in Finno-Ugric possessive markers. In: *Proceedings of NELS 43*