Evaluative uses of postnominal possessives in Central Mongolian

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we analyze the expression of subjective and intersubjective stance through a particular class of possessive markers in Central Mongolian. Central Mongolian has two morphologically distinct sets of possessive pronominal markers, and while those used in prenominal position fulfill referential functions, the postnominal possessives convey additional attitudinal meanings. The most subjective form, 1SG.POSS *min'*, and the most polite form, 2SG.HON.POSS *tan'*, are primarily used to express the speaker's affective evaluation of the possessee and retain their possessive meaning. The forms that combine an intersubjective perspective with a lack of deferential politeness, 1PL.POSS *maan'* and 2SG.POSS *čin'*, may dispense with their original possessive and affective meanings and instead be used in an attempt to sponsor a common ground between the interlocutors, either cooperatively (reflecting addressee inclusion) or unilaterally (reflecting implicated higher speaker status from the use of a non-honorific form). In terms of grammaticalization, these forms hint at a cline from the subjective-evaluative 1SG/2SG.HON.POSS over intermediate 1PL.POSS to the intersubjective, partially epistemic 2SG.POSS to the purely discourse-structuring specificity marker *n'* 3POSS. The subjective forms prevail in poetic texts and the intersubjective form prevails in conversational data, while only *n'* is compatible with detached registers like law.

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1. Introduction

In Central Mongolian nominal phrases,[1] there are two sets of possessive markers, one found in phrase-initial position and the other in phrase-final position. While the former can refer to referents that are contextually given, the latter are usually restricted to anaphoric uses (Kas'janenko, 1973; Ozawa, 1974: 106—107), and the postnominal third person possessive form *n'* plays a major role in the expression of information structure and specificity (Hammar, 1983; Guntsetseg, 2016). However, while several important aspects of the use of first and second person postnominal possessive forms have been discussed in previous research (Hammar, 1983; Ševernina, 1984; Mizuno, 1993; Umetani, 2003), a systematic description of their semantic and functional differences has not previously been undertaken. Following Rybarczyk's (2015) analysis of Polish, we will identify the Postnominal Possessives as a class of overt indices of speaker attitude that, in the course of their grammaticalization, have weakened or lost their basic relational meanings. These attitudinal functions can be divided into two main types, namely the expression of the speaker's (subjective) affective stance towards referents (as in 'my cherished principle') and the solicitation of a common (intersubjective) stance towards a referent between the interlocutors (as in 'our robber').

In the following, we will in §2 provide a short introduction to some of the theoretical notions that we make use of in our analysis, notably stance. In §3, we will give an overview of the data on which our research is based, the way in which we analyzed this data, and the conventions that we employ in presenting them in this paper. Taken together, §2—§3 provide the foundation on which the analysis of our findings in §4—§6 is based. In §4, we will first discuss the distributional properties that set postnominal possessives apart from prenominal and reflexive markers of possession. In §5, the main section of this paper, we present a detailed functional account of the affective and intersubjective meanings of postnominal possessives. In §6, we take a look at how the semantic properties of postnominal possessives influence their text frequencies across different genres. In §7, the results of our analysis are systematized.

2. Defining stance

While STANCE has become a fairly recognizable term in linguistics, it is not a notion normally used in early language description, perhaps because it is commonly defined in terms of discourse:

> Stance is a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously *evaluating objects*, *positioning subjects* (self and others), and *aligning with other subjects*, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field (Du Bois, 2007: 163, italics added)

According to this definition, stance has a dimension along which an interlocutor evaluates an object, which can be anything from a thing or person to a situation or proposition or even another stance. Since neutrality itself is a mode of evaluation (Jaffe, 2009: 3) and takes place within dimensions as general as epistemology and affect, ALL STATEMENTS evaluate objects. By choosing to utter a particular evaluation, a speaker not only positions herself towards the object, but also towards the positions that other subjects hold about this object. This, in turn, means negotiating the differences between this stance and the stances previously uttered in an interaction (Du Bois and Kärkkäinen, 2012: 440—442).

Stance is most commonly defined in terms of how evaluation and alignment are established in discourse, and if stance is defined as a *public act*, it must necessarily come about in concrete communicative situations. However, this is true of meaning in general, since "sentences themselves express a determinate content only in the context of a speech act" (Recanati, 2003: 220) and even lexical meaning is merely a generalization over usage patterns. If a given morpheme in all its uses implies a certain type of affective/epistemic evaluation and a certain relative attitude of the interlocutors, it might thus be descriptively adequate to call it a stance marker even independent of its concrete instantiations.

The explicit expression of stance can give prominence either to subjectivity as a speaker's "expression of himself and his own attitudes and beliefs" (Lyons, 1982: 102) or to intersubjectivity as the speaker's expression of "his or her awareness of the addressee's attitude and beliefs" (Traugott, 2010: 33). We will apply these definitions in a strict sense, so that, for example, the speaker's expression of her emotive stance towards the addressee is treated as subjective rather than intersubjective if it does not at the same time refer to the addressee's stance towards the speaker. The expression of subjective or intersubjective notions through markers recruited from diverse word classes is well-documented, including for postverbal directional particles (Chor, 2010), complement-taking perception-cognition-utterance verbs (Thompson and Mulac, 1991; Yang and Yap, 2015), clause connectors (Feng, 2008), adverbials (Rhee, 2016; Jaakola, 2018), and demonstratives (Schapper and San Roque, 2011; Nagaya, 2014). For possessive pronouns, only pragmatically motivated evaluative uses of regular possessive pronouns seem to have been described (Rybarczyk, 2015).

3. Data, methods and conventions

This study is based on data taken from four corpora: a SPOKEN CORPUS (SC) of Khalkha Mongolian which mainly consists of casual conversational data taken from selected TV programs (60,000 words, compiled by Baasanjaviin Zoljargal & Benjamin

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[1] All evidence quoted is taken from Khalkha Mongolian, the standard language of the Mongolian state. Cursory evidence from other text materials and the native speaker competence of one of the authors, Gegentana, indicate that our findings also hold for Chakhar Mongolian and thus for all of CENTRAL MONGOLIAN. In the following, we will use the term MONGOLIAN as a shorthand for this branch. No claims are made about the other branches of CENTRAL MONGOLIC (i.e. Khorchin-Kharchin, Oirat, Buryat, Ordos, Khamnigan).