

MORE PUZZLES OF PRENOMINAL AND PREDICATE POSSESSIVES

Recently the issue of semantic and syntactic ambiguity of the Possessive/Genitive Constructions (Poss/GenCs, herein) has been revived and a number of competing approaches have been put forward. On the one hand, a unified analysis of the Genitive construction has been proposed in works by Jensen and Vikner (1994) and was extended to Russian in Borschev & Partee (1999). On the other hand, the emergence of new data and a more careful analysis of the old ones has led to the opposite conclusion, namely, that a unified account of Poss/GenCs may be all but impossible to achieve (Partee 1983/1997, Trugman 1999, 2000, Partee & Borschev 2000).

The present paper is aimed at providing extensive argumentation in support of the latter approach on the basis of data from Slavic languages. Specifically, I will argue that the multiple semantic ambiguity of postnominal GenCs in Russian observed in B&P (1999) and illustrated in (1) correlates with their syntactic distinction. This syntactic distinction will be formulated within the DP-hypothesis (Szabolsci 1983, Abney 1987, among many others). Specifically, the semantic ambiguity will be anchored to the NP/DP distinction exhibited by the GenCs. This approach will also account for the existence of minimal pairs like those in (2), and the absence of minimal pairs like those in (3).

The homophonous Russian Poss/GenCs behave in a distinct way in the predicative position as well. Non-referential, or generic, Poss/GenCs seem to pair with their adjectival counterparts (see (2)) and with the 'Genitive modifier construction with obligatorily third term' (Knorina 1985) in being legitimate across the copula, (4a).¹ Referential Poss/GenCs, on the other hand, seem to be further subdivided into thematic and non-thematic types; while the former are usually barred from predicative structures (4c), the latter (4b) are grammatical similar to those in (4a). Though both genitive phrases in (4b&c) are referential only the one which is non-thematic is grammatical.² The one in (4c), which is presumably assigned an agentive ?-role by the deverbal noun, is ruled out. Therefore, it seems that the unified account of the Genitive construction proposed by J&V (1994) and extended by P&B (2000) for Russian postnominal Genitives may be too strong a claim which deserves some finessing, especially when deverbal nouns are taken into consideration. In the present paper I will propose a syntactic account to accommodate the contrast between (4a&b) and (4c).

Likewise, the claim that Russian prenominal quasi-adjectival possessives and possessive pronouns are uniformly modifiers does not hold up for the whole class of Russian nominals. Though this idea is basically correct for plain nominals as proposed in Trugman (1999, 2000) and P&B (2000), I will argue that a certain category of derived nouns invariably falsify this claim and take argumental, or thematic, possessives, as in (5).

In addition, I will investigate in which way the subject-object distinction affects the restriction on genitive arguments being realized in predicate position and thematic possessive elements—in prenominal position. Eventually a more elaborate, yet more explanatory theory of the Russian Poss/Gen Construction will emerge.

(1) sledy tigrov ((3d) from B&P 1999)

¹ Grammaticality judgments may vary among informants, yet predicative denominal adjectives and non-referential genitives in (4a) greatly improve under explicit or implied comparison, similar to English denominal adjectives (see Levy 1976).

² Possessors are analyzed here as non-thematic satellites of the head noun. The possessive interpretation is taken to originate in the Poss/GenC itself (in the sense of Partee 1983; see also Tremblay 1991, Trugman 1999).

- tracks tigers-gen
'the tracks of the tigers/ the tracks of some tigers/ the tiger tracks'
- (2) sledy tигра = tigrinye sledy
tracks tiger-gen tiger-adj tracks
- (3) sledy ètogo tигра ? (èti) tigrinye sledy
tracks this-gen tiger-gen (these) tiger-adj tracks
- (4) a. Te sledy èto ja uvidel na dorožke byli
those tracks that I saw on path were
{ tigrinye/ Ussurijskogo tигра/ bol' šogo razmera }.
of-tiger-nom/ Ussurijsk-gen tiger-gen/ large-gen size-gen
- b. Konspekt, kotoryj ja našel u Petra v
summary which I found at Peter in
sumke, byl moego brata.
bag was my-gen brother-gen
- c. *Pervyj polet èloveka v kosmos byl Gagarina
first flight man to space was Gagarin-gen
- (5) Moje postojannoje nedovol'stvo studentami
my constant displeasure students-instr

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