

OBSERVATIONS ON NON-POSSESSIVE USAGES OF PERSONAL MARKERS (POSSESSIVE SUFFIXES) IN NGANASAN

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Abstract. This paper aims at a systematic overview of the non-possessive usages of possessive (relational) suffixes in Nganasan. In the analyzed corpus, the non-anchoring usage types of the 3rd person suffix (including the direct anaphoric and situational usages), are less frequent than relational usages. The distribution of the suffixes suggests that in traditional narratives, the primary topic of the discourse tends to be marked with a deictic (2nd person) and the secondary topic with an anaphoric (3rd person) suffix. The language data also show that in Nganasan, the concept of semantic uniqueness does not suffice to explain the occurrence of the 3rd person suffix as definiteness marker, the topical status of the referent being decisive. Furthermore, predicting the (possessive vs. non-possessive) reading of the relational suffix solely by the conceptual type of the host noun is in case of some lexemes impossible and therefore, contextual information gains crucial importance.

Keywords: Nganasan, possessive suffixes, definiteness, possession, epistemic grounding

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1. Introduction

As early as in the mid 19th century, M.A. Castrén (1854: 207) described the meaning of the 3rd person suffixes (3sg) in the Samoyedic languages¹ as variable in the sense that, besides usages in which it denotes possessive relation, the suffix may replace the definite article [of article languages]. Later grammatical descriptions completed this picture attesting the function of a definiteness marker to the 2nd

1 Samoyedic is a sub-branch of the Uralic language family, comprising the daughter languages Nganasan, Enets, Nenets, Selkup as well as the extinct Kamas, and Tai-gi-Mator-Karagas. Nganasan forms, together with Enets and Nenets, the Northern Samoyedic branch, being the first idiom to have broken off from proto-Samoyedic unity (Janhunen 1998: 459).

person suffix (2SG) as well.² This feature of the Samoyedic languages is shared by other languages of the Uralic language family as the Ob-Ugric languages, Mari, Komi and Udmurt, as well as by some Altaic languages.³

In more recent grammatical descriptions of the Nganasan language (Tereščenko 1979: 94–107, Helimski 1998: 496, Wagner-Nagy 2002: 155–156) three occurrence types of possessive suffixes can be identified, that are attested the function of definiteness markers:

- (1) *lakəriáiʔ ηuə-ðu hojməgi-m-i-ʔə*
 abruptly sky-3SG dark-TRL-EP-AOR.3SG

The sky has darkened abruptly. (Tereščenko 1979: 95)

- (2) *kuə čühəgəni taa hul'iʔə təmuyku-mtu*
 after.that domestic.reindeer search-INCH-PRF3SG.S mouse-3SG

After a certain period of time, the domestic reindeer started searching for the mouse. (Wagner-Nagy 2002: 156)

- (3) *baarbə-ðuŋ hon-ti kobtuā / kobtuā-rə četuami héəniāŋku*
 master-3PL have-AOR.3SG girl.ACC / girl-2SG very beautiful.3SG

Their master has a daughter. The girl is very beautiful. (Tereščenko 1979: 95)

The above mentioned descriptions are based on a semasiological perspective and deal with the topic in rather general manner. As regarding usage type (1), Tereščenko notes that the occurrence of the 3SG suffix as definiteness marker is connected with a certain group of words, like *ηuə* ‘heaven, god, weather’, *məu* ‘earth, ground’, *kou* ‘sun’, *śürü* ‘snow, rain’, etc. (1979: 95). According to Wagner-Nagy the nominal 2SG and 3SG markers are often used in determining function; more specifically, it is the definiteness of natural phenomena that is marked by the 3SG marker, and, in narratives, both suffixes may have a determining function (2002: 156). Regarding the marker of 2SG, Helimski (1998: 496) noted that it is “often used to specify nouns as

2 For Samoyedic in general, cf. Tereščenko 1973: 217–218; for Enets cf. Siegl 2013: 63; for Nenets cf. Sebestyén 1976, Tereščenko 1966: 382; for Selkup cf. A. Kim 1986: 113ff; Kuznetsova et al. 2002: 127.

3 On the possible contact induced nature of the phenomenon between Samoyedic and Altaic languages cf. Stachowski 2010.

definite and co-referent with their predecessors in the discourse”. The use of both suffixes in the described contexts (1–3) is yet not obligatory.

The topic of non-possessive or non-prototypical usages of nominal personal suffixes received increased attention by typological research in the last decades. By combination of comparative and theoretical approaches, new insights have been gained regarding the functions and context features of nominal personal markers in general as well as for particular languages (Fraurud 2001, and Nikolaeva 2003, Gerland 2014). The non-prototypical (non-possessive) occurrences have been generally explained in terms of determination (definiteness marking function). According to the predominantly Eurocentric view applied in the theoretical literature, the approach to determine the sub-categories of definiteness was primarily based on usages of the definiteness markers in article languages.⁴ However, as Nikolaeva (2003) showed, the definiteness marking account alone cannot be explicative of all non-prototypical usages of possessive suffixes. In this paper I argue that by the assumption of different categories of epistemic grounding⁵ certain usages of personal suffixes can be captured beyond the definiteness account. Based on Nganasan language data it can be concluded that deictic and anaphoric grounding represent two different types of grounding procedures and this is the reason, why they may be applied concomitantly. When combining both procedures in one clause, the distribution of the personal markers 2SG and 3SG corresponds to the functional categories of primary and secondary topic.

Although Nganasan language data have been introduced in comparative analyses dealing with Uralic languages (Nikolaeva 2003), a more thorough analysis of the data has not yet taken place. The most recent approaches provide taxonomies based on a set of languages. Hence, the conclusion that “the possessive suffix occurs in all the uses which count as typical for a definite article” (Gerland 2014: 278) still could be scrutinized by language based studies. The purpose of this paper is thus to complete the picture on the non-prototypical uses of personal suffixes in Nganasan by analyzing language data applying some functional categories established in the literature. It aims at a more detailed description of context factors that determine the occurrence of personal markers and at a first attempt to answer the question of how variation in usage can be explained. Further aspects investigated by the liter-

4 Cf. e.g. the taxonomy provided in Hawkins 1978.

5 On the concept of grounding cf. e.g. Brisard 2002; on deictic grounding cf. Diessel 2006.

ature that have been considered in developing a taxonomy of usages include the question of grammaticalisation (Fraurud 2001, Nikolaeva 2003) as well as the typology of semantic vs. pragmatic factors of usage (Nikolaeva 2003, and, specifically, Gerland 2014).

To investigate the non-prototypical usages of nominal personal markers a corpus of 33 texts from the Nganasan language database compiled by Valentin Gusev and Maria Brykina was used (cf. Appendix). The texts include folklore genres like tales and songs as well as everyday narratives. They have been collected in the 1990ies and 2000s from 14 informants. The approach applied was eventually mainly qualitative, in that, as a result of the analysis, a typology of the different usage types can be presented (sections 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3). An automatic search was only used for determining the use of personal markers in combination with nouns denoting unique entities (cf. section 2.4).

2. Observations based on the corpus

I assume that by means of the 2nd and 3rd person suffixes different grounding processes, namely deictic and anaphoric processes are performed. Markers of the 1st and second person link their host noun (the referent) with the deictic sphere of the speech act interlocutors. In their relational function, 3rd person suffixes anchor their referent to discourse elements.⁶ Although this distinction has been questioned in the literature based on the argument of functional transposition between the deictic and anaphoric sphere (cf. e.g. Laury 2002), I consider this distinction expedient for analytical reasons and apply it as main structuring principle.

It is commonly known that some of the non-prototypical uses of the possessive suffixes are ambiguous: they can be both interpreted as possessives and as definiteness markers. If we conceive the different usages of the nominal 3sg marker as different stages of a grammaticalization process, beginning with the marking of a certain kind of relation between the host noun and another referent and ending with the marking of the definiteness of the host noun (i.e. extending them from marking discourse-old to also discourse new information), the different usage types can be arranged on a corresponding scale. For this reason, I refer

6 The potential of discursive anchoring is given by the anchoring in adnominal possessive constructions, cf. Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2002.

to the taxonomy of article usages listed in Hawkins (1978) and adopted for possessive suffixes in more recent sources (Fraurud 2001, Nikolaeva 2003, Gerland 2014) in a rearranged order. The main criterion for classification was whether the suffix serves as a means of anchoring or not. Anchoring is an inherent feature of adnominal possessive constructions which enables epistemic grounding.

Further classification criteria have been the overtness (or salience) of the linked referent (i.e. the determiner or the “possessor”) and the kind of process (anaphoric or non-anaphoric) by which the identification of the referent is rendered.

As regarding the 2SG suffix, the grounding process here is of deictic nature and the adoption of the suffix as reference tracking device is based on the conceptualization of the proximity between the discourse subject and the hearer’s (or recipient’s) attention.

Semantic criteria as the concept of uniqueness of celestial bodies and further conceptual features have also been discussed in the literature (cf. e.g. Kim 1986, Gerland 2014: 274, etc.). The language data revealed that the use of the 3SG suffix as a definiteness marker is context sensitive and semantic criteria do not represent sufficient conditions to predict it. Details will be discussed in the final section of this paper.

2.1. Non-possessive usages of the 3rd person suffix

In the studied corpus, the occurrences of the 3rd person suffix have been classified according to the criteria of whether or not the referent A of the host noun was linked with another referent B, and whether the referents are given in the discourse by previous mentioning or by world knowledge. The following types of occurrences have been accounted:

a) **Direct anchoring:** the referent of the host noun is linked with another referent that has previously been mentioned in the discourse, cf. examples (2) and (4).

- (4) *bə́ndə-ʔ sítí ńüəsij-ti-ʔ tə́ndə kobtūá-mtuŋ*
 all-PL PRON3[ACC] kiss-PRS-3PL.S DEM [ACC.SG] girl-ACC.3PL
ńüəsi-ndi-ʔ
 kiss-PRS-3PL.S

Everyone kisses her, they kiss this girl (Lit.: ‘... of theirs’). (KNT-94_kehyluu_flk.196)

This usage type represents an early stage in the assumed grammaticalisation process, as the respective constructions may be ambiguous. The number agreement between the dependent of the possessive construction (girl) and the pronominal subject of the sentence in (4) is an additional argument for an anchored reading. This usage type seems to be the most frequent one of the non-prototypical usages of the 3rd person marker.

b) **Associative anchoring** (*associative anaphoric use* in Hawkins' (1978) taxonomy): the referent of the host noun is linked with another referent not previously mentioned, but reconstructable from the discourse. In following example, it was mentioned in the left context (in sentence No 72 compared to sample sentence 91) that the scene narrated in the actual sequence takes place in a tent. Thus, as for the referent of the word 'door', which is marked with the 3rd person suffix, an anchor ('tent') can be reconstructed⁷:

- (5) *Təndə huo-nu tahariāa ŋua-ðu biāri-ʔi-ða.*
 that[GEN.SG] after-LOCADV now door- SG.3SG open-PRF-3SG.R

(The woman shivered again: “Why does my fire keep on cracking over and over again?”) Then the door [of the tent] opened. (KNT-94_kehyluu_flk.091)

c) **Non-anchoring, anaphoric**: the referent of the host noun is co-referential with another expression, and therefore, the anchored interpretation can be excluded (Hawkins' (1987) *direct anaphoric use*):

- (6) *Tə məlči-məni tahariāabə tə hori-gəliče-mə ɲinti*
 DEM[GEN] edge-LOC PART PART labaz-EMPH-1SG NEG-[PRAES]
ɲəsi, kəku-m-i-ʔə / Kəku-ti čandimid'i-ʔə tahariāa
 be.visible-CN fog-TRL-EP-PRF.3SG / fog-3SG dissolve-PRF now
maɲuna təgümü tahariāa ɲənduj-mə ɲə-ʔaa məu-ntə
 what.kind.of PART now boat-1SG one-LIM[GEN] place-LAT

7 It has to be noted that for example (5), the uniqueness approach can also be applied as suggested by Gerland (2014), with the consequence that this example would be classified as both non-anchoring and non-anaphoric.

südüä-ti toðä-btu-ra-ʔi-ðä.
 slobber-LAT.PL be.stuck-CAUS-PASS-PRF.R-3SG.R

The labaz was not even visible, fog came up. The fog cleared away, at one place the boat become stuck in the slobber. (TKF_97_djajku_flk.208/209)

In some cases, the anchored interpretation can be excluded by reason of non-agreement in number between the two referents. The host noun ‘two-headed ogre’ bears the marker of the 3SG, whereas the only referent that could be identified as anchor in this context is the pronominal referent which is marked on the verb by the dual ending.

- (7) *Tändä s'idi ʏjbuo-ʔtuä-mti koða-ʔa-gäj.*
 That-[GEN] two-[GEN] head-VBLZ.GS-PTCP.PRS-ACC.3SG kill-PRF-3DU.S
 Together they killed the two-headed ogre. (KNT-94_kehyluu_flk.056)

d) **Non-anchoring, non anaphoric** (*larger situation use* in Hawkins' taxonomy):

- (8) *kurəguj mou-ðu əm-i-ʔiä i-gə-tu*
 even earth-3SG this-EP-ADVZ be-ITER-PRS[3SG.S]
 Even the earth is like this. (KECh-08_detstvo_nar.013)

- (9) *Tə tətitrə tahariäabə d'ali-məni turiti-ti kurəguj kou-ðu*
 PART DEM-2SG now day-PROL repeat-PRS even sun-3SG
hirkadi-ʔä.
 set-PRF

While he repeated this, the day has ended and the sun has set.
 (TKF_97_djajku_flk.185)

This usage of the 3SG marker is usually considered being triggered by semantic features of the host noun. It is argued in the literature that nouns denoting referents being unique in a certain context – as are e.g. natural phenomena – often bear the third person suffix. However, as it will be shown in section 2.3, these markers never occur in certain contexts, and therefore, semantic criteria are not sufficient to explain the occurrence of 3SG.

Notably, based on the actual corpus, the immediate situational use (cf. Hawkins 1978: *press the clutch*, uttered in a car) can only be attested with some reservations for Nganasan since the possessive (anchored) reading of the suffix cannot be excluded. It has to be noted additionally that the corpus, mostly consisting of folklore texts and narratives, does not appear to be likely to cover this type of usage. The translation of following example suggests an interpretation as immediate situational use:

- (10) [...] *Təti (ənti) kubu-mtu ʔakələ-ʔ*
 [...] that sort.of skin-ACC.SG.3SG take-IMP.2SG.S
 [...] Take this skin! (KNT-94_kehyluu_flk.057)

However, further context information reveals that the skin in question belongs to an ogre, present in the scene of the narrative, that has just been killed but not skinned yet. Thus, the possessive interpretation ('Take *his* skin!') implying an anchoring strategy is also possible.

1.2. Deictic grounding by personal suffixes in Nganasan – the usage of the 1st and 2nd person suffixes

Not only the 2sg marker is attested to occur in non-possessive function but also the 1st person markers. (Some of these usages are shared with those of possessive pronominal determiners in languages that mark possessive relations with pronominal determiners within the NP.) Particularly the use of the 1st person markers is assigned in the non-possessive usages an emphatic function. The general function of personal suffixes is linking the referent with the deictic sphere of the speech act interlocutors. As it has been pointed out in the literature, the type of relation between the speech act interlocutor and the linked entity may be of a more general kind than the prototypical possessive relations, which include legal ownership, kinship relations, and part-whole relations (cf. Nikolaeva 2003, Gerland 2014). The emphatic function arises in contexts in which persons, artefacts, abstract entities, actions and intentions of speech act interlocutors that are in physical or ideal proximity with the speech act interlocutor in question, are marked by the respective personal suffix and the link between them becomes indicative of an ideal or emotional proximity. In the autobiographic narrative *School*, the narrator, after introducing the main character of

the story, Kuomaku, as her friend, refers to her consequently using the personal affix of the 1st person singular.

- (11) *ńerəbtikü? Kuə?ma?ku-mə [...] məu ńi*
 at.first Kuomaku-ACC.1SG [...] earth[GEN] ONPP[LAT]
śürü ńi nənsu-btiri-?i-đə
 snow[GEN] ONPP[LAT] get.up-CAUS-PRF.R-3SG.R

At first, Kuomaku was brought to the ground, to the snow.
 (ChND-06_school_nar.025)

- (12) *təti-rə taharīāa tundīā-ŋku-mu? ńi-hīāđi kunda-?*
 that-2SG now fox-DIM-1PL NEG-INFER-[3SG.S] fall.asleep-CN

It seems our little fox didn't sleep. (KNT-96_meudjamezi_flk.109)

In example (12), the little fox, marked with the 1st person plural marker, is the central hero of the narrative. The suffix of 1PL refers to the discourse situation and establishes mental contact between the speech act interlocutors and the subject of the narration.

In following example, the context suggests that the use of the 1st person suffix is to mark the actual relevance of the referent (big river) marked by the suffix: It denotes the goal of the action by the topical referent (the granddaughter), leaving to the riverbank. There is no indication in the discourse that the suffix would serve for identification by contrast (there is no other river mentioned) which could motivate the use of the personal affix.

- (13) *taharīāi? təti-rə təsiəđə koli-đi-si təsiəđə munu-ntu*
 now that-2SG PART fish-TRANS-INF PART speak-PRS
imid'i-ti d'a: «Ou?, miŋ-gümü-nə
 grandmother-GEN.3SG PP[ALL] PART PRON[1SG]-EMPH-1SG
əm-ni ńemi?ia-nə d'a ənti-gu-đəm.
 DEM-LOCADV big.river-GEN.1SG PP[ALL] this.same-IMP-1SG.S

He says to his grandmother: "I'm going now to the [lit.: my] river".
 (TKF_97_djajku_flk.006)

Linking discourse entities as in (14) or, the discourse itself as in (15) with the mental sphere of the relevant speech act interlocutor is

frequently performed by the 2SG marker. In example (14), the noun marked with the personal suffix denotes a group of referents present in the universe of discourse. The attention of the recipient is thus guided to these new discourse elements (in this case combined with a deixis *am Phantasma*⁸):

- (14) *əm-i-tʰə* *taharīaa* *d'erumuə-ʔ* *təʔ* *maa*
 this-EP-PL.2SG now uncommon-PL PART what

ma-ðə-ʔ *i-hü-tüŋ*
 tent-DEST-PL be-COND-3PL

What strange tents are those [Lit.: those of yours]?
 (KNT-96_meudjamezi_flk.009)

The discourse as object of the recipient's attention, namely the tale that just has been told by the speaker can as well be linked with the deictic sphere of the recipient. This is a pragma-idiomatic feature, frequently found in traditional narratives:

- (15) *bəlti* *šitəbi-rə* *d'indi-ʔə-ŋ*
 all tale-2SG hear-PRF-2SG.S

End of the tale (li.: your tale), did you hear? (KNT-94_kehyluu_flk.236)

The most specific and most frequent non-possessive use of the 2SG suffix in Nganasan is that of reference tracking. According to Helimski (1998: 496), the 2SG marker is “often used to specify nouns as definite and co-referent with their predecessors in the discourse”. (The same function is attested for Enets, a closely related language, by Siegl, termed as referential use to maintain topic prominence in narratives (2013: 63)). As the mental focus of speech act interlocutors is usually directed to topical discourse entities, the reference tracking function attested in the literature is comprehensible. The corpus data corroborated the assumption that the 2SG marker is often used in narratives for marking topic continuity. So, e.g., in the folklore narrative Djajku (TKF_97_djajku_flk.006) from the 41 occurrences of the proper name Djajku referring to the main character of the narrative, 34 were marked with 2SG in the nominative, 6 occurrences did not bear a personal marker and only one was marked with the 3rd person suffix in the

8 Cf. Bühler 1999=1934: 121ff (§8)

accusative. However, the 2SG marker was not as frequently found in colloquial narratives, and therefore, marking the most topical element of a narrative seems to be a genre-specific strategy. The fact that the 2SG suffix may combine with proper nouns as well (as e.g. in the cited case), underlines the interpretation as marker of the most topical referent, as by the proper noun the reference is unambiguous.

Frequently, different strategies of reference tracking are applied concomitantly. Demonstratives in anaphoric or discourse deictic function may as well be marked by personal markers. Thus, some referents are double marked for co-referentiality. In following example *təndi-tə* that-NOM.PL.2SG refers to the animals that are the main characters of the story, representing discourse-old information.

- (16) *tahariaa təndi-tə toli-ʔkə-siðə-ʔ ńeraʔa.*
 now that-PL.2SG steal-RES-FUT-3PL.S soon

They will soon start to steal. (KNT-96_meudjamezi_flk.082)

The conventionalized status of this discourse strategy is also shown by the fact that constructions exhibiting the 2SG marker, derived from anaphoric and proximal demonstratives like *tətirə* and *əmtirə*, have lexicalized as discourse particles. The proximal form *əmtirə* has preserved a deictic meaning, *tətirə*, being abundantly used in narratives, often functions as hesitation particle, either alone or in combination with the particle *taharia* ‘now’. Whereas *əmtirə* is still more frequently used with reference to a discourse element, the function of *tətirə* is often to maintain the attention of the recipient. In the traditional narrative Mou djamezi (KNT-96_meudjamezi_flk) 56 occurrences of the 2SG marker combined with a demonstrative stem have been counted compared to a total of 85 occurrences of personal markers of all 3 persons on nouns.⁹

In example (17), a referent is first introduced and anchored to the speaker by a referred kinship relation which is a prototypical possession relation. Consecutively, the referent is referred to with an anaphoric pronoun (*təti-*). The anaphoric expression is additionally marked with the 1st person singular suffix (*-mə*). Here, two different grounding procedures are applied concomitantly: the anaphoric reference tracking as well as indicating the continuing (topical) referent to the deictic

⁹ Occurrences in destinative constructions as well as on personal pronominal stems have not been considered.

sphere of the speaker and thus enforcing the interpretation of a co-referential expression:

- (17) *Təti-mə tahariāi? ηə? i-süə.*
 that-1SG now shaman be-PST[3SG.S]

(I had an aunt. Aunt Bazamuo. It was long, long ago.) **She** [lit. that one of mine] was a shaman. (PED-06_bathamuosmother.004)

2.3. Functional distribution of the nominal 2nd and 3rd person suffixes: marking the primary and secondary topic

Data from the text corpus showed that the distribution of the personal markers of the 2nd and 3rd person between the case forms of their host nouns is disproportionate. The 2nd person marker most frequently occurs on nominatives while the 3rd person marker is clearly more frequently used with non-nominative forms. (This holds for all usages and not only for those considered clearly non-possessive as many of the usages of the 3rd person suffix can be both interpreted as relational and definite.) Assuming that the subject position correlates with the most prominent topic of the (actual sequence of the) narrative, and that referents playing a secondary role are marked by oblique cases; this suggests that the personal markers have specialized for marking either of both topical statuses. The 2nd person suffix tends to mark the primary topic of the sentence while the 3rd person suffix marks the secondary topic. (However it has to be noted that this only holds for traditional narratives and that in other text types, different usage patterns are applied.)

- (18) ...*Djajku-rə huəða-mtu mintə-lə-si d'igə ηil'e*
 ...Djajku-2SG sack-ACC.3SG carry-INCH-INF hill[GEN] down.LATADV
hual'ürə na-nu tahariāa hualə-j bənd'e ηuñü-d'a,
 rocky.shore[GEN] PP-LOC now rock-ACCPL all-ACCPL gather-INF
mal'iə hualə i-gə-tu, tərəd'i sani-tü.
 multicoloured-PL stone-PL be-ITER-PRS-3PL.S so play-PRS

Djajku, having carried the/his sack down the hill to the rocky river-bank, gathering all (kinds of) stones, multicolored stones, so he plays. (TKF_97_djajku_flk.098)

- (19) *Əu, tahariaa təti-rə₁ təndə-mtu₂ ka'təmə-sa kirküdi-ʔə.*
 Oh now that-2SG that-ACC.SG.3SG see-INF shock-PRF-[3SG.S]
 Oh no, seeing this₂, he₁ is shocked. (KNT-96_meudjamezi_flk. 238)

2.4. Semantic and pragmatic factors as triggers for personal suffixes

Gerland (2014: 274), following Löbner (1985, 2011) distinguishes between usage types based on the criterion of whether they are triggered by pragmatic or by semantic means. She argues that in direct anaphoric and immediate situation uses the referent is pragmatically definite, whereas in larger situation uses (i.e. in those in which a single possible referent of the host noun can be identified by world knowledge¹⁰) definiteness is semantically triggered, and, to associative anaphoric uses (cf. example (9)) both criteria apply.¹¹

According to the grammatographical literature, the so-called larger situational usage i.e. occurrence in combination with celestial bodies and natural phenomena in Nganasan is optional. (cf. e.g. Tereščenko 1979: 95) Recently elicited language material collected during fieldwork in 2008 by Wagner-Nagy and Szeverényi corroborated this observation. By direct elicitation (yet aimed at triggering active and passive sentences), one of two informants produced the sentence not marking the noun *ɲuə* ‘sky’ for definiteness, while the other informant stated that both the marked and unmarked forms are grammatical. In all sentences, the word *ɲuə* was in subject position, like in example (1).

Noticeably, in all examples of this usage provided in the literature, the marked noun is in subject position, as in the “classical” example:

- (20) *məu-ðu śürü ɲilənu čii-məə*
 ground-3SG snow[GEN] under hide-PTCP.PASS[3SG]
 ‘The ground is hidden under the snow.’ (Tereščenko 1979: 95)

10 This is generally referred to as the semantic uniqueness criterion, which by obvious grounds applies to a certain group of nouns as, e.g., natural phenomena and celestial bodies.

11 By adopting identifiability as overall criterion for definiteness, all usages of 3rd person markers as definite markers can be explained. Assuming this, there is only a gradual difference between pragmatic and semantic determinants of usages. Either by situational deixis, or by encyclopaedic knowledge, the referents of the marked expressions can be regarded as part of the shared knowledge of the speech act interlocutors.

This suggests that topicality may be a crucial condition for marking the definiteness of a referent that belongs to the semantic group of (unique) natural phenomena. In example (20), two nouns belonging to this group behave differently in this respect. The noun *məu* ‘earth’ in subject position is marked, but the noun *śürü* ‘snow’, denoting a local argument, is not, although it could even suffice the context requirement of situational deixis as described by Nikolaeva. Applying Nikolaeva’s concept of secondary topic, contrasted with the primary topic (Dalrymple–Nikolaeva 2010: 125ff), I assume that in Nganasan, words belonging to the semantic group of natural phenomena tend to be marked for definiteness in primary topical position.

If the semantic/pragmatic feature of uniqueness would be solely determinant for this usage, the referents could be marked for definiteness in any syntactic position. In order to verify this, a small corpus analysis has been carried out, checking the referential usages of the nouns *biə* ‘wind’, *kicəðəə* ‘moon’, *kou* ‘sun’, *ɲuə* ‘sky, heaven’, and *śürü* ‘rain, snow’ in 178 texts from the data-base compiled by Valentin Gusev and Maria Brykina.¹²

Table 1. Distribution of definiteness markers on nouns denoting natural phenomena

Lexemes denoting natural phenomena		Syntactic role		Total	Marker
		Nominative	Oblique		
weather conditions	<i>biə</i> ‘wind’	5	5	10	∅
		3	1	4	3SG
	<i>śürü</i> ‘rain, snow’	1	12	13	∅
		–	–	–	3SG
unique natural artifacts	<i>kicəðəə</i> ‘moon’	1	4	5	∅
		–	–	–	3SG
	<i>kou</i> ‘sun’	–	13	13	∅
		4	1	5	3SG
	<i>ɲuə</i> ‘sky, heaven’	–	9	9	∅
		1	–	1	3SG

¹² Due to the polysemy of the referent *məu* ‘earth, land, place, ground’ a more detailed analysis is necessary, and therefore, the data are not discussed in this paper.

Evidence from this corpus analysis suggests that 1) there is a bigger share of forms unmarked for definiteness than marked by 3SG, and 2) beyond the semantic criterion ‘natural phenomenon’ the information status of the referent (discourse old vs. discourse new) seems to be decisive. This tendency is however only observable within the semantic subgroup of unique natural artifacts (e.g. celestial bodies). Since the sample is quite restricted and not all factors¹³ that potentially have an effect on the use of the 3SG marker could be scrutinized for the present analysis, further investigation is needed to draw a comprehensive picture of the factors determining the use of personal suffixes.

A further aspect claimed to be explicative for the use, and respectively, the interpretation of personal markers, has been discussed by Gerland (2014). She suggests that lexicalized semantic features trigger the possessive and non-possessive interpretation of the suffix. She applies the conceptual categorization by Löbner, differentiating between sortal, relational, functional, and individual nouns. Relational and functional nouns (e.g. sister, friend, and mother, pope, respectively) require the specification of an additional argument of reference and thus, according to Gerland, a possessive interpretation of the suffix is triggered (Gerland 2014: 285). Although this mechanism proved to be effective in Nganasan (cf. example (20)), there is also language data that challenges this account. There are a series of lexemes that are unspecified regarding their affinity to only one of the above-mentioned categories. Some nouns can be both sortal and individual or relational and individual. It is the context that eventually determines their (possessive or non-possessive) reading. For example, the lexemes *kobtuā* ‘daughter, girl’, *naa* ‘comrade, Nganasan’ have both a relational and an individual reading. It is only possible to discern possessive from non-possessive function by context information. In following sentence the non-possessive reading is unambiguous for two reasons: The referent has been formerly introduced as the master’s daughter, and secondly, for the speech act addressee the non-possessive (non-kinship) relation might be obvious.

- (21) *baarbā-ḍuŋ hon-ti kobtuā. kobtuā-rə četuami néñiāŋku*
 master-3PL have-AOR.3SG girl.ACC girl-2SG very beautiful.3SG
 ‘Their master has a daughter. The girl is very beautiful.’ (Tereščenko 1979: 95)

13 E.g. variation due to different idioms, diachronic change, etc.

3. Summary and conclusions

In this paper an overview of the non-possessive usages of Nganasan possessive (relational) suffixes was presented. One of the findings of the corpus analysis was that non-anchoring (direct anaphoric and situational) usage types of the 3rd person suffix are less frequent than relational usages; in most cases, the possessive (relational) reading was also possible. The distribution of the suffixes suggests that in traditional narratives, the primary topic of the discourse tends to be marked with a deictic and the secondary topic with an anaphoric suffix. This strategy seems genre specific and was far less frequently found in everyday narratives.

Table 2. Usages of the 2nd and 3rd person markers in Nganasan

	Anchoring			Non-anchoring		
	Relational ("posses- sive")	Direct anchoring	Asso- ciative anchoring	Anaphoric	Non-anaphoric (uniqueness)	
					Semantic	Pragmatic (immediate situational)
2SG	+			+ / primary topic		(+)
3SG	+	+ / second- ary topic	+	(+)	+ unique & topical	(+?)

Although a correlation between certain semantic features and the occurrence of specific personal markers can be identified, contextual information (including discourse-old vs. discourse-new status and situational parameters) seems to be decisive for the choice and the interpretation of the personal markers. Semantically uniques tend to exhibit the 3rd person suffix as definiteness marker only if they refer to discourse-old information, or if they are in primary topical position. Since Nganasan exhibits a set of nouns not unambiguously specified for conceptual type, for the interpretation of the (possessive vs. non-possessive) reading of the relational suffix combining with them needs specification by contextual information.

The present paper only presented the state of the art of a language base corpus analysis that should be extended in the future. The distribution of the nominal personal markers should be investigated in a more extended corpus, involving different text types as functional texts,

conversations, etc. Correlations with the genres, informants as well as the diachronic evolution of the different usage types (including the aspect of contact induced phenomena) should be subject of analysis, which then, again could serve as basis for the investigation of areal aspects, as suggested by Stachowski (2010). The correlation between the conceptual type of the host noun and the functions of combining personal markers seems a promising approach for Nganasan, and further conceptual types like sortal vs. individual nouns, class nouns and nouns with abstract meaning could render further insights in the non-prototypical usages of personal markers. As the personal markers are just one means of marking definiteness, and specifically, of reference tracking in Nganasan, to complete the picture, the phenomenon should be regarded within the system of complementary and concurring strategies (like use of demonstratives, choice of conjugation type and syntactic position).

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Abbreviations

ACC	–	accusative	DEST	–	destinative
ADVZ	–	adverbializer	DIM	–	diminutive
ALL	–	allative	EP	–	emphatic particle
AOR	–	aorist	FUT	–	future
CN	–	connegative	GEN	–	genitive
DEM	–	demonstrative	INCH	–	inchoative

INF	–	infinitive	PL	–	plural
INFER	–	inferential	PP	–	postposition
INTERR	–	interrogative	PRON	–	pronoun
ITER	–	iterative	PRS	–	present
LAT	–	lative	PST	–	past
LIM	–	limitative	R	–	reflexive conjugation
LOCADV	–	marker of local adverbial	RES	–	RESULTATIVE
NP	–	nominal phrase	S	–	subjective conjugation
PART	–	particle	SG	–	singular
PASS	–	passive	TRL	–	translative
PF	–	perfect	VBLZ	–	verbalizer
			VDNM	–	denominal verbalizer

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Appendix

List of texts forming the corpus:

ChND-06_keingirsyal_sng	KSM-06_sentences_eli
ChND-06_twotents_nar	KSM-06_drowning_children_nar
ChND-06_djuraki_nar	KSM-06_hotarye_flk
ChND-06_school_nar	MVL-08_chajka_sng
ChND-06_keingirsya2_sng	MVL-08_man_eyes_flk
ChND-08_life_narr	MVL-08_ojoloko_flk
ChNS-08_argishili_nar	MVL-08_orol_flk
ChNS-08_hibula_flk	MVL-08_siti-chimi_flk
ChNS-08_wife_nar	MVL-09_belka_flk
ChNS-08_ngarka_nar	PED-06_bathamuosmother_nar
KECh-08_barusi_flk	SEN-06_story_nar
KECh-08_detstvo_nar	TKF-06_dyurimy_flk
KECh-08_molnija_nar	TKF_97_djajku_flk
KES-06_childerns_song1_sng	TLN-06_babushka_nar
KES-06_childrens_song2_sng	TLN-06_name_nar
KES-06_life_nar	YaSM-08_hibula_flk
KNT-94_kehyluu_flk	YaSM-08_mosquitos_flk
KNT-96_meudjamezi_flk	

Kokkuvõte. Réka Zayzon: Tähelepanekuid isiku markerite (possessiiv-sufiksite) mitte-possessiivsete kasutuste kohta nganassaani keeles. Siinse artikli eesmärgiks on esitada süstemaatiline ülevaade (suhet väljendavate) possessiivsufiksite mitte-possessiivsetest kasutustest nganassaani keeles. Analüüsitud korpuses on 3. isiku sufiksise (sh otsetes anafoorsetes ja situatsioonilistes kasutustes) mitte-ankurdavat tüüpi kasutusi vähem kui suhet väljendavaid kasutusi. Sufiksise sagedus viitab sellele, et traditsioonilistes narratiivides tähistab esmast topikut tavaliselt deiktiline (2. isiku) ja teisest topikut anafoorne (3. isiku) sufiks. Keelematerjal näitab ka, et nganassaani keele puhul ei piisa semantilise unikaalsuse mõistest, et selgitada 3. isiku sufiksi esinemist definiitsuse markerina, vaid määrav on referendi topikaalsus. Lisaks on suhet väljendava sufiksise (possessiivse vs. mitte-possessiivse) tõlgenduse ennustamine pelgalt substantiivi mõistelise tüübi alusel mõnede leksemide puhul võimatu ja seega saab määrava tähtsuse kontekstuaalne info.

Märksõnad: nganassaani keel, possessiivsufiks, definiitsus, possessiivsus, episteemiline ankurdamine