

## The Semantics of Prenominal Possessives in Russian.

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This paper will discuss prenominal possessives in Russian, like those in (1):

1. a. mamIna                      podruga  
    mother.poss.F.SG friend.F.SG  
    (my) mother's friend
- b. soldatOVo                ružje  
    soldier.poss.N.SG gun.N.SG  
    the/a soldier's gun

Prenominal possessives are formed by attaching one of two suffixes *-in-* or *-ov-* to nouns as in (1). These denote animate objects: proper names (2a), kinship terms (2b), animal nouns (2c) and professions (2d) (as noted in Babyonyshev 1997):

2. a. vasina                      kniga                      c. koškina                igruška  
    vasja.poss.F.SG book.F.SG              cat.poss.F.SG toy  
    Vasja's book                                      the cat's toy
- b. papin                      telefon                      d. aktrisiko                platje  
    father.poss.M.SG telephone              actress.poss.N.SG dress  
    father's telephone                              the actress' dress

Prenominal possessives agree in gender, number and case with the head noun that always has a singular reference (Townsend 1980, Koptjevskaja-Tamm and Shmelev 1994):

3. a. papin/y                      ključ/i                      b. #roditeliny              ključ  
    father.poss.M.SG/PL keys.M.SG/PL              parents.poss.PL keys.PL  
    dad's key/s    the parents' keys

Babyonyshev (1997) discusses the puzzling property of prenominal possessives, namely that they make reference to individual, the possessor, which can be the antecedent of a deictic pronoun (4):

4. tanin<sub>i</sub>                      košelek ležal na stole. Ona<sub>i</sub> opjat ego zabyła  
    Tanya.poss.M.SG purse lay on table. She again him forgot  
    Tanya's purse was lying on the table. She left it at home again.

She analyzes prenominal possessives as determiners with a nominal base that have undergone N-to-D raising, following Longobardi 1994 in assuming that the D position is associated with reference. I argue that prenominal possessives are adjectives and not determiners. Discussion about determiners in Russian is particularly difficult because in the absence of indefinite and definite articles, there are so few clear candidates for lexical determiners. However, the following data strongly suggests that prenominal possessives in Russian are adjectival.

### A. Prenominal possessives agree with the head noun in number, gender and case:

5. a. sosedkinoj                      sobaki                      b. sosedkinu                      sobaku  
    neighbor.poss.F.SG.GEN dog.F.SG.GEN              neighbor.poss.F.SG.ACC dog.F.SG.ACC  
    the neighbor's dog                                      the neighbor's dog

### B. Examples like (1) can be either definite or indefinite (data in talk).

### C. They can permute with other adjectives – unlike quantifiers (*každyj* "every") but like 'indexical adjectives' *etot/eta/eto* "this":

6. a. mamina                      novaja rabota              d. #novaja každaja rabota  
    mom.poss.F.SG new job                      new every job  
    mom's new job
- b. novaja mamina              rabota                      e. eta novaja kniga  
    new mom.poss.F.SG job                      this new book
- f. novaja eta kniga  
    new this book
- c. každaja novaja rabota  
    every new job

#### D. They can be arguments of quantifiers (*každyj* "every")

7. *každaja mamina rabota*  
every mom.poss.F.SG job  
every mom's job

#### E. They can be sentential predicates, again unlike determiners (8a) vs. (8b):

8. a. *gosti vošli v komnatu. Eto byli petiny družja*  
guests entered in room. This were petja.poss.PL friends  
The guests entered the room. They were Petja's friends.  
b. *gosti vošli v komnatu. Eto byl \*každyj drug*  
guests entered in room. This was every friend  
The guests entered the room. This was \*every friend

Landman (2003), argues that appearing in this position is evidence that a nominal is a predicate, using the contrast between *the guests were two boys* and *#the guests were every boy* to argue that *two* and *two guests* are predicates in English, and that *two* is an adjective.

**F. Genitive of Negation.** Given that it is so difficult to identify determiners in Russian, the most important argument comes from the interaction of prenominal possessives with the genitive of negation. It is well known that in Russian verbs under negation can take arguments in Accusative or Genitive case. (Timberlake 1975, Babby 1980, Neidle 1982). Genitive NPs get non-specific/indefinite interpretation, while Accusative NPs tend to be interpreted as specific/definite. Partee and Borschev (2004), Partee (2008), Kagan (2005, 2007, 2013) and Khrizman (2014) explain this semantic contrast by arguing that NPs in genitive case are predicative expressions at type  $\langle e, t \rangle$ , while accusative NPs are arguments at type  $e$  or  $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, t \rangle$ . This makes a prediction: if prenominal possessives are determiners, they should head DPs at the argument type  $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, t \rangle$ , and should not occur in the genitive under the scope of negation. However, this is not the case. In (9a) *maminy sovety* is in the accusative and gets a specific interpretation at the argument type. It means "the pieces of advice that my mother gave me". The Genitive NP in (9b) gets a non-specific interpretation, the sentence roughly means "I did not listen to any pieces of advice that my mother gave me", as predicted by Partee (2008) and others. This strongly suggests that it cannot be an argument at type  $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, t \rangle$  since, as Partee shows, the non-specific interpretation follows from the fact that the genitive is a predicative NP. This means that the prenominal possessive is not a determiner, but an adjective which is part of the NP.

9. a. *ja ne slušala maminy sovety*  
I not listen mom.poss.PL.ACC advice.PL.ACC  
I did not listen to my mother's advice  
b. *ja ne slušala maminyx sovetov*  
I not listen mom.poss.PL.GEN advice.PL.GEN  
I did not listen to my mother's advice

As show in the talk, prenominal possessives also appear in genitive case in other positions which are argued to be predicative, e.g. the complement of *na-* and *po-* prefixed verbs (Filip 2004).

**Semantics:** Prenominal possessives are adjectival modifiers. We assume that the possessive morpheme expresses an operation, which maps individuals and a relation onto a predicate: *-in-/-ov-*:  $\lambda y \lambda R \lambda x. R(x, y)$ . This function first applies to an individual to form a prenominal possessive: *PetIN* "Petja's" –  $\lambda R \lambda x. R(x, p)$  that can straightforwardly combine with relational nouns, e.g. *mama* 'mother' to derive a predicate *Petina mama* "Petja's mother":  $\lambda R \lambda x. R(x, p)$  ( $\lambda y \lambda x. \text{MOTHER}(x, y)$ ) =  $\lambda x. \text{MOTHER}(x, p)$ . Sortal nouns undergo a meaning shift to a relational interpretation  $\lambda x. \text{CAR}(x) \rightarrow \lambda y \lambda x. \text{POSS}(x, y) \wedge \text{CAR}(x)$ . This new relational noun combines with a prenominal possessive to derive a predicate that denotes a set of cars possessed by Petja –  $\lambda R \lambda x. R(x, p)$  ( $\lambda y \lambda x. \text{POSS}(x, y) \wedge \text{CAR}(x)$ ) =  $\lambda x. \text{POSS}(x, p) \wedge \text{CAR}(x)$ . What mechanisms are used to derive argumental readings from predicates will be discussed in the talk.