

No Storto Effect of the English/Italian type in Northern Khanty possessives¹

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Possessive constructions are well-known to admit at least two types of interpretations (Partee 1983/2011, a.o.): (i) prototypical possessive interpretations (ownership, part-whole, etc.) and (ii) **free possessive interpretations** (unrestricted, context-dependent; FPIs). Gianluca Storto (2004; GS) has shown that FPIs observe a non-trivial constraint that I propose to call the **Storto Effect** (1), exemplified with Italian data in (2).

(1) STORTO EFFECT

FPIs are only available in definite noun phrases (NPs). (GS)

(2) [“Yesterday, Gianni and Paolo were attacked by two groups of dogs.”]

...sfortunamente **i** / **#alcuni cani di Gianni** avevano la rabbia.
unfortunately the / #some dogs of Gianni had the rabies
(adapted from GS)

Apart from GS’s work, there appears to have been no inquiry either into the reasons for the Storto Effect or into its existence in languages besides English and Italian. The primary concern of my investigation thus has been to ascertain whether the Northern Khanty possessive constructions (possessives) also exhibit the Storto Effect. This is particularly relevant because Northern Khanty has possessive suffixes (3) that are used much more extensively than Standard Average European-type possessives (Fraurud 2001; Nikolaeva 2003).

(3) KAZYM DIALECT OF NORTHERN KHANTY

năŋ kăt’-en moś-λ
you.SG cat-POSS.2SG purr-NPST[3SG]
‘Your cat is purring.’ (own fieldwork data here and below)

(Nikolaeva 2003) has demonstrated that possessives in Northern Khanty are frequently used to mark **familiar referents** that stand in a **free possessive relation**, to borrow GS’s term, to another referent. This might be due to the two referents being

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associated in the current speech setting, e. g., because of physical proximity (4), or if the two had prior interactions in a narrative (5).² In both examples, the possessive is **obligatory** and its omission triggers an **anti-uniqueness/familiarity implication** (4), similar to European definite articles (Heim 2019).

(4) [A friend is over at the speaker’s place. There’s one cup on the table.]

a. **an-en** mij-e
 cup-POSS.2SG give-IMP.SG>SG
 ‘Give me the cup.’

b. #**an** mij-a³
 cup give-IMP[SG]
 ‘#Give me a cup.’

(5) [“I found somebody’s ID in the street. I went to the town administration. Met a friend there and talked to her for some time.”]

a. **nəm** **nəpek-əm** suvet-ən χǎj-s-əm
 name paper-POSS.1SG council-LOC leave-PST-1SG>SG
 ‘[Then] I left the ID at the administration. [Let them find the owner.]’

b. #**nəm** **nəpek** [...]
 name paper [...]
 Intended: ...the ID...

Here, however, Storto Effect data are not straightforward. While there are non-definite determiners that bar FPIs as predicted (6), most determiners admit free possessives and some even require them (7).

(6) **mułsər** **an-en** mij-a
 some.EN cup-POSS.2SG give-IMP[SG]

Context 1: I ask for one of addressee’s cups ⇒ OK

Context 2: as in (4), but several cups are on the table ⇒ #Give me any cup.⁴

² Nikolaeva discussed the data of the Obdorsk dialect, while my data come from fieldwork with speakers of the Kazym dialect. Although there are significant differences between the possessives of the two dialects, Nikolaeva’s observations hold for both.

³ The presence of objective conjugation correlates with object definiteness, which has been controlled for during elicitation of this and further examples. Fuller details of conjugation choice need not concern us here.

⁴ The unmarked form *an* [cup] must be used instead.

(7) [As in (4), but several cups are on the table.]

mätta **an-#(en)** mij-e
some.PS.SG cup-POSS.2SG give-IMP.SG>SG
'Give me some cup [from these]'

One might hope that (7) in fact involves a partitive-like structure “[some.SG N-of cup-POSS.2SG]”, in which case it would not be a Storto Effect violation since *mätta* would not be a part of the free possessive-marked NP.

This hypothesis, however, makes a false prediction. In a partitive structure of this kind adding a demonstrative to *an-en* should be possible, as in the English case *one of these cups*. As (8) shows, the predicted order is ruled out. Instead, the demonstrative must be preposed and the partitive postposition *ewəlt* ‘from’ must be added.

(8) [Same as (7).]

tām mätta / ***mätta tām an-en** **ewəlt** mij-e
this some.PS.SG / some.PS.SG this cup-POSS.2SG from give-IMP.SG>SG
'Give me some cup from these.'

In the talk, I will discuss further determiners, as well as attempt to make sense of the astounding construction in (8).

Abbreviations: 1, 2, 3 — 1, 2, 3 person; IMP — imperative; LOC — locative; (N)PST — (non-)past; POSS — possessive; SG — singular; SG>SG — singular subject acting on singular object; some.PS.SG — partitive-specific singular determiner; some.EN — epistemically nonspecific determiner (Farkas, Brasoveanu 2019)

References: **Farkas, Brasoveanu (2019)**. Kinds of (Non)Specificity. *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Semantics*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118788516.sem037>; **Fraurud (2001)**. Possessives with extensive use. *Dimensions of possession*. **Heim (2019)**. Definiteness and indefiniteness. *Semantics - Noun Phrases and Verb Phrases*. **Nikolaeva (2003)**. Possessive affixes in the pragmatic structuring of the utterance: Evidence from Uralic. *International Symposium on Deictic Systems u Quantification in Languages Spoken in Europe u North u Central Asia: Collection of papers*; **Partee (1983/2011)**. Genitives – A case study. *The Handbook of Logic and Language*. Dordrecht: Elsevier. Appendix to: Janssen & Partee, Compositionality. **Storto (2004)**. Possessives in context. *Possessives and beyond: Semantics and syntax*.