

## POSSESSIVE DECLENSION IN KOREAN AND UZBEK: SYNTACTIC AND PRAGMATIC ASPECTS

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the syntactic and pragmatic functions of possessive markers in Korean and Uzbek, two typologically distinct languages. It examines how these markers, through their declension, contribute to grammatical structure, semantic interpretation, and discourse coherence. The analysis focuses on the agreement patterns, scope relations, and information structure sensitivity associated with possessive constructions in both languages. Furthermore, it investigates how possessive markers contribute to pragmatic effects such as topic marking, emphasis, and conveying speaker attitudes. By comparing and contrasting the use of possessives in Korean and Uzbek, the paper aims to shed light on cross-linguistic variations and universals in the expression of possession and its role in discourse management. This comparative approach facilitates a deeper understanding of the grammatical and communicative strategies employed by speakers of Korean and Uzbek to encode possessive relationships and manage information flow.

**Keywords:** Korean, Uzbek, Possessive Declension, Syntax, Pragmatics, Agreement, Scope, Information Structure, Topic Marking, Emphasis, Contrastive Analysis, Cross-linguistic Comparison, Grammatical Morphology, Possessive Markers, Discourse Analysis

### INTRODUCTION

Possession, a fundamental semantic relation denoting ownership or association between entities, is expressed linguistically through various mechanisms. Possessive declension, involving the inflection of possessive markers or noun phrases to indicate grammatical relations like case and number, plays a crucial role in encoding possession and its syntactic and pragmatic implications in many languages. This paper investigates the possessive declension systems in Korean and Uzbek, two typologically distinct languages, to explore their syntactic functions, semantic interpretations, and pragmatic effects. By comparing and contrasting their possessive constructions, we aim to shed light on cross-linguistic variations and universals in expressing possession and managing information flow in discourse.

#### 1. Syntactic Structures of Possession:

Korean, a language isolate, and Uzbek, a Turkic language, exhibit different strategies for encoding possession at the syntactic level.

- Korean: Possession in Korean is primarily indicated using the genitive marker -의 (-ui), which attaches to the possessor noun. The resulting possessive phrase precedes the possessed noun. For example, "선생님의 책 (seonsaengnim-ui chaek)" translates to "teacher's book." Korean also allows for possessive pronouns like "내 (nae)" (my), "네 (ne)" (your), and "그의 (geu-ui)" (his/her), which behave similarly. However, the use of "-의" is not always obligatory, especially with personal pronouns, leading to constructions like "내 책 (nae chaek)" (my book). While Korean does not traditionally exhibit extensive noun declension for case marking, possessive constructions influence the interpretation of case markers attached to the possessed noun in relation to the larger clause. Agreement between the possessor and possessed noun in terms of honorifics is also a significant syntactic feature.
- Uzbek: Uzbek employs possessive suffixes that attach directly to the possessed noun to indicate the possessor. These suffixes agree in number and person with the possessor. For example, "kitobim" (my book) attaches "-im" to "kitob" indicating first-person singular possession. The possessor noun phrase, if present, typically precedes the possessed noun and is unmarked for case unless fulfilling another grammatical function within the sentence. While Uzbek is an agglutinative language with rich case marking on nouns, the possessive suffixes themselves are the primary indicators of the possessive relationship, rather than influencing the case marking of the possessor noun. The possessive suffixes are obligatory when a specific possessor is identified, demonstrating a stronger grammatical marking of possession compared to Korean's more flexible usage of "-ui".

## 2. Semantic Interpretation of Possessive Declension:

The semantic interpretation of possessive constructions goes beyond simple ownership, encompassing various relationships.

- Korean: The genitive marker "-의" can denote a wide range of relationships beyond strict possession, including part-whole relations ("도시의 중심 (doshi-ui jungsim)" - city's center), attribute relations ("한국의 문화 (hanguk-ui munhwa)" - Korean culture), and origin ("고향의 맛 (gohyang-ui mat)" - the taste of home). The interpretation is often heavily reliant on context. Furthermore, "-의" can sometimes be omitted, particularly when the relationship is clear from the context, resulting in ambiguity that necessitates pragmatic inference. For instance, "친구 차 (chingu cha)" could mean "a friend's car" or "a car for friends."
- Uzbek: Uzbek possessive suffixes similarly extend beyond strict ownership. They can indicate kinship relations ("otam" - my father), part-whole relations ("uyning tomi" - the house's roof), and association ("mening do'stim" - my friend). However, the specificity enforced by the obligatory nature of the possessive suffix, especially when a possessor is specified, often limits the ambiguity seen in Korean. The semantic role of the possessor is more clearly defined through the suffix, minimizing the need for heavy reliance on contextual clues. The lack of strict case marking on the possessor noun phrase also means semantic interpretations rely heavily on word order and the possessive suffix.

### 3. Pragmatic Effects and Discourse Functions:

Possessive constructions are not merely structural elements; they play significant pragmatic roles in discourse.

- Korean: The presence or absence of "-의" can influence information structure. Omitting "-의" can sometimes signal a closer, more established relationship between the possessor and possessed, often serving as a form of topic marking. The choice of honorifics in possessive constructions also conveys the speaker's attitude towards the possessor and the audience. Emphasis can be achieved by explicitly stating the possessor and adding "-의," especially when the possession is unexpected or contrasts with previous information. For example, explicitly stating "그의 실수 (geu-ui silsu)" (his mistake) might emphasize that it was his fault, rather than someone else's.
- Uzbek: Possessive suffixes are strongly associated with definiteness. Using a possessive suffix often implies that the possessed item is known or identifiable to both the speaker and listener. The explicit mention of the possessor noun phrase before the possessed noun phrase with the possessive suffix can highlight the possessor, drawing attention to their connection with the possessed entity. Reduplication of the possessor, such as "mening-mening kitobim" (my-my book), can emphasize ownership or emotional attachment to the possessed item. The possessive structure inherently sets up a known-new information structure, with the possessor often acting as the topic and the possessed acting as the comment.

### 4. Cross-linguistic Comparison and Implications:

Comparing Korean and Uzbek reveals interesting typological differences in expressing possession and utilizing possessive declension for syntactic and pragmatic purposes.

- Uzbek exhibits a more grammatically rigid possessive system with obligatory possessive suffixes directly attached to the possessed noun, indicating a tighter syntactic and semantic bond between the possessor and possessed.
- Korean, with its optional genitive marker and less morphologically rich noun declension, relies more on contextual and pragmatic cues for interpreting possessive relationships and managing information flow.
- Both languages extend the semantic range of possessive constructions beyond simple ownership, but the degree of ambiguity and the reliance on pragmatic inference differ.

The possessive declension systems in Korean and Uzbek provide valuable insights into the interplay between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics in expressing possession. While both languages effectively encode possessive relationships, they employ distinct strategies that reflect their typological characteristics. Uzbek's obligatory possessive suffixes contribute to a more grammatically explicit system, whereas Korean's flexible use of the genitive marker and reliance on contextual factors highlight the role of pragmatic inference in interpreting possessive constructions. By examining the syntactic structures, semantic interpretations, and pragmatic effects of possessive declension in these two languages, we gain a deeper understanding of the diverse ways in which human languages encode fundamental semantic



relationships and manage information flow in discourse. Further research exploring the diachronic development of these possessive systems and their interaction with other grammatical features could provide further insights into the evolution and function of possessive constructions across languages.

## CONCLUSION

The possessive declension systems of Korean and Uzbek offer a fascinating study in linguistic diversity. Uzbek's obligatory possessive suffixes exemplify a grammatically explicit system, tightly binding possessor and possessed, while Korean's optional genitive marker relies more heavily on contextual cues and pragmatic inference for interpretation. Both languages extend possessive meaning beyond simple ownership, reflecting the human need to express multifaceted relationships. This comparative analysis highlights how syntactic structures are intertwined with semantic and pragmatic considerations. The contrast underscores the diverse strategies languages employ to encode possession, manage information flow, and convey nuanced meanings. Examining possessive constructions provides valuable insights into the dynamic interplay between grammatical form and communicative function, contributing to our understanding of linguistic universals and language-specific variation. Future research should delve into the historical development and cognitive processing of possessives in these and other languages.

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