# On non-canonical (aka alienable) possession in Negidal

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So-called (in)alienable possession is described as a cross-linguistically common feature whereby two distinct kinds of possession—inherent and permanent vs. loosely associated and non-permanent—are formally distinguished in adnominal constructions (e.g. Nichols 1988, Chappell & McGregor 1996, Haspelmath 2017). This category has also been widely noted in the Tungusic languages (Boldyrev 1976; Avrorin 1959: 155-163; Novikova 1960: 145-152; Nikolaeva & Tolskaya 2001: 135-141). The Tungusic distinction is most commonly illustrated with the contrast between inherently possessed body parts on the one hand and body parts of dead animals that have entered the possession of some human on the other, with the latter being formally marked by a suffix -*ŋV* (1). Such examples appear to show that this formal opposition in possession marking is indeed one of inalienable vs. alienable possession.

However, in Negidal, a critically endangered language spoken on the Amgun' river, the so-called alienable possession suffix (which takes the form -*ŋi*) occurs in contexts that cannot be explained by any form of loose association or "socially or economically conferred ownership" (Nichols 1988: 568), such as with human referents or with the sun (2), casting doubts on an analysis in terms of alienability. Nikolaeva & Tolskaya (2001: 135-141) also point out that in Udihe the cognate suffix occurs in many more contexts than simply alienable possession. They describe the suffix as having five distinct functions, namely to mark: temporary ownership, alienable possession, an abstract associative relationship, a substitutional meaning, and predicative possession.

In contrast to such previous accounts that ascribe distinct functions to the so-called alienable suffix, we here propose a novel analysis for Negidal[1] by which it is not the suffix -*ŋi* that has particular functions. Rather, there are different contexts in which possessive marking by itself, without the addition of -*ŋi*, is needed for pragmatic or semantic purposes, such as to express a salient associative relationship between entities (3). In this novel analysis, the sole function of -*ŋi* is to flag the occurrence of non-canonical possession. We can distinguish between four major non-canonical possessive contexts that require the use of the suffix -*ŋi* in Negidal: i) with possessed body parts and wild animals referring to a hunter's catch—this signals the change of the inherent possessor and results in an interpretation of alienable possession; ii) with non-possessible objects (natural objects, people) and demonstratives occurring in an associative relationship, cf. the sun in (2), whose setting affects two women lost in the woods; iii) with possessed mass nouns (such as water, wood and food items)—in this case possession is used to single out a particular subset of a large and uncountable mass, such as water for use in one's home (4); and iv) in a possessive construction in which the possessum is dropped and where -*ŋi* marks the possessor (5). Our analysis thus allows us to unite the different contexts where -*ŋi* marks the possessum as well as the context where it marks the possessor under one single function.

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[1] We base our analysis on a corpus of annotated oral narratives recorded in the Khabarovsk Krai at different times between the 1990s and 2020 and numbering approximately 74,200 words (Pakendorf & Aralova 2017).

**Examples:**

(1) Nanai (Nichols 1988: 565-566, taken from Avrorin 1959: 157-158; glosses modified)
*naj*      *dili-ni*          *naj*      *dili-**ŋo-ni***
person    head-px.3sg       person    head-**ŋV-px.3sg**
'(the) person's head'        '(detached) head (e.g. of an animal) owned by a person'

(2) *gə*   *ŋənə-jə-ʙun*      *ŋənə-jə-ʙun*    *siʙu-**ŋi**-**ʙun***      *tik-tɕa*
dp   go-nfut-1pl.ex      go-nfut-1pl.ex   sun-**poss**-**1pl.ex**    fall-pst
'We go and go, the sun (lit. **our sun**) set. / Мы идём, идём, солнце село.'
(APN_zabludilisj: 27)

(3) ***samoxodka-ʙ***      *iltən-ə-n*      *aːtɕin*
?steamer.R-px.1sg    pass-nfut-3sg neg
{A woman is driving a boat upriver and is unsure about where to go. She has been
following a steamer, but then} 'The steamer (lit. **my steamer**) passed [the riverbend]
and disappeared. / Самоходка проехала – исчезла.' (GIK_chertovy_zuby: 21)

(4) *ineŋ-ti*      *muː-**ŋ-ŋi***          *əmə-ʙ-ŋati-s*
day-advr    water-**poss-prfl.sg**    come-val-deont-2sg
'You must bring the water (lit. **your water**) during the day. / Днем должен воду
принести.' (DIN_rite: 12)

(5) *som-**ŋi***        *kak*      *sapjan-gatɕin*
catfish.R-**poss**    like.R    morocco.leather.R-sml
'A **catfish's [skin]** is like morocco leather. / У сома как сафьян.'
(APN_DIN_rybjakozha: 27)

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