

Nominal compounds in Sakha (Yakut)

The difference between conceptual and referential possessives *

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1. Introduction

Sakha has two types of nominal (noun + noun) compounds.¹ The first involves juxtaposition, as in *ije tīl* ‘mother tongue’, while the second involves the possessive, as in *ije tīl-a* ‘the word of the mother’ (-a is a 3SG possessive suffix). Since Sakha lacks the genitive, no other strategy can be used to form noun + noun compounds. The examples above show that the same constituents can be used to form make up different types of nominal compounds, resulting in the different meanings.

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¹ Sakha, also known as Yakut, is a Turkic language spoken in Northeast Siberia. The number of speakers is approximately 450,000. The author collected Sakha linguistic data during fieldwork and also drew on corpus data, consisting of online newspaper articles.

This paper begins by showing that there are typical semantic relationships between the two components of both types of nominal compounds. The author then argues that possessive compounds have two subtypes: the conceptual possessive and the referential possessive. These subtypes display morpho-syntactic and semantic differences.

Section 2 provides an initial analysis of Sakha nominal compounds using Tsumagari's (1992) typological classification. Section 3 presents the typical semantic relationships observed in the unmarked type of nominal compound. Section 4 discusses the typical semantic relationships observed in the personal type of nominal compound. Section 5 argues that there are two personal-type subtypes and identifies semantic and morphosyntactic differences between the two subtypes. Section 6 briefly examines the range of type selections within the Turkic languages.

2. Typological background and initial illustration

Tsumagari (1992: 263) presents four types of possessive construction, based on the existence/absence of a marking on each Head (H) and Dependent (D) element (these typological concepts were coined by Nichols 1986).

Since Sakha lacks a genitive case, two theoretically possible types of possessive construction (II and IV in Table 1 above) cannot be employed. In other words, the Sakha possessive construction is either the unmarked type (neither element is marked) or the personal type (a possessive suffix is attached to the Head). Some typical examples of the two types are presented below. (In (2), *-m* is a 1SG possessive suffix and *-te* is a 3SG possessive suffix.)

(1) Unmarked type: *ulaxan žie* 'big house'; *mas žie* 'wooden house'

(2) Personal type: *min žie-m* 'my house'; *oskuola žie-te* 'schoolhouse'

Table 1. Tsumagari's (1992) types of possessive construction

I.	D	H	Unmarked type (No marking)
II.	D-gen	H	Genitive type (Dependent marking)
III.	D	H-pers	Personal type (Head marking)
IV.	D-gen	H-pers	Double marked type (Double marking)

In some cases, the selection of one of the two types is determined by the lexical property of the Dependent. Property words, such as *ulaxan* 'big', *saŋa* 'new', *üčügej* 'good', or *xara* 'black', must be the Dependent of an unmarked-type construction. By contrast, personal pronouns, such as *min* 'I' and *en* 'you (SG)', and the interrogative pronoun *kim* 'who' always appear in personal-type constructions.

The same pair of nouns may be used in different types of constructions (Table 2). The type selection only matters when both components are common nouns. The following two sections illustrate several typical semantic relationships found in both unmarked and personal construction types.²

² Note that most of the examples in Sections 3 and 4 are not considered compounds using strict morphosyntactic criteria. In order to examine typical semantic relationships, the author has made the decision not to limit the scope of consideration.

Table 2. Same pair of nouns used in different construction types

Unmarked type	Personal type
<i>ije til</i> ‘mother tongue’	<i>ije til-a</i> ‘the word of the mother’
<i>sahil saka</i> ‘fox-fur muffler’	<i>sahil saka-ta</i> ‘a fox’s (wearing) muffler’
<i>oko saas</i> ‘childhood’	<i>oko saah-a</i> ‘the age of the child’
<i>oko sirej</i> ‘baby face’	<i>oko sirej-e</i> ‘the face of the child’
<i>žaxtar biraas</i> ‘woman doctor’	<i>žaxtar biraah-a</i> ‘gynecologist’

3. Typical semantic relationships in unmarked-type constructions

This section illustrates typical semantic relationships and examples of unmarked-type constructions. Patterns frequently associated with the Dependent include human properties/characteristics, concrete things, abstract concepts, and proper names. Redundant phrases and lexicalized combinations are often associated with the unmarked type.

3.1. Human properties/characteristics

The Dependent of an unmarked-type construction may denote human properties/ characteristics, such as gender and occupation.

[Human properties/characteristics: gender]

- | | | |
|---------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| (4) uol oḡo | ‘boy’ | (‘boy’ + ‘child’) ³ |
| kīis buxatīir | ‘(brave) heroine’ | (‘girl’ + ‘hero’) |
| žaxtar bīraas | ‘lady doctor’ | (‘lady’ + ‘doctor’) |

[Human properties/characteristics: occupation]

- | | | |
|-------------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| (5) bīraas žaxtar | ‘doctor lady’ | (‘doctor’ + ‘lady’) |
| učuutal uol | ‘teacher boy’ | (‘teacher’ + ‘boy’) |
| uus oḡoñnor | ‘old blacksmith’ | (‘blacksmith’ + ‘old man’) |

[Human properties/characteristics: other]

- | | | |
|---------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| (6) sien kīis | ‘granddaughter’ | (‘grandchild’ + ‘girl’) |
| īarīhax oḡo | ‘sick child’ | (‘sickness’ + ‘child’) |
| žadaŋi kihi | ‘poor person’ | (‘poor’ + ‘person’) |
| kīis žaxtar | ‘unmarried woman’ | (‘girl’ + ‘lady’) |

3.2. Properties of concrete things

The Dependent of an unmarked-type construction may denote the properties of concrete things, such as shape, material, position, and purpose. The Dependent variable may also describe the figurative property of the Head.

[Properties of concrete things: shape]

- | | | |
|------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| (7) tammax ardax | ‘rain drop’ | (‘drop’ + ‘rain’) |
| ahīi tiis | ‘dogtooth’ | (‘fang’ + ‘tooth’) |
| örüü ütülük | ‘knit glove’ | (‘knit’ + ‘glove’) |
| bölöx sulus | ‘constellation’ | (‘group’ + ‘star’) |
| taŋalaj bilīt | ‘altocumulus’ | (‘palate’ + ‘cloud’) |

[Properties of concrete things: material]

- | | | |
|---------------|------------|---------------------|
| (8) tirii son | ‘fur coat’ | (‘fur’ + ‘coat’) |
| kumaakī xarčī | ‘bill’ | (‘paper’ + ‘money’) |

³ The Sakha word *uol* ‘boy’ also means ‘son’. It may denote a young man, perhaps up to the middle age. The same is true for *kīis* ‘girl, daughter’.

kumax arïi	‘sandbank’	(‘sand’ + ‘island’)
muus tünnük	‘ice window’	(‘ice’ + ‘window’)
buor muosta	‘earthen floor’	(‘ground’ + ‘floor’)
balik as	‘fish dish’	(‘fish’ + ‘meal’)
taas xarax	‘false eye’	(‘stone’ + ‘eye’)

[Properties of concrete things: position]

(9) is taņas	‘underwear’	(‘inside’ + ‘clothes’)
uņa ilii	‘right hand’	(‘right’ + ‘hand’)
orto tarbax	‘middle finger’	(‘middle’ + ‘finger’)
xotu dojdu	‘northern country’	(‘north’ + ‘country’)
allara xaltaha	‘lower eyelid’	(‘low’ + ‘eyelid’)
tügex xos	‘back room’	(‘bottom’ + ‘room’)
kiin kuorat	‘capital city’	(‘center’ + ‘city’)

[Properties of concrete things: purpose]

(10) maxtal suruk	‘thank-you letter’	(‘gratitude’ + ‘letter’)
tümük tıl	‘concluding remark’	(‘conclusion’ + ‘word’)
öjübül xarči	‘support fund’	(‘support’ + ‘money’)
kiirii biliet	‘entrance ticket’	(‘entrance’ + ‘ticket’)
olox sir	‘place of residence’	(‘life’ + ‘land’)
solbuk ülehit	‘replacement’	(‘change’ + ‘worker’)

[Properties of concrete things: other]

(11) itik xaja	‘holy mountain’	(‘holy’ + ‘mountain’)
simija xarči	‘counterfeit money’	(‘lie’ + ‘money’)
mas xaja	‘wooded mountain’	(‘tree’ + ‘mountain’)
kiil taba	‘wild reindeer’	(‘animal’ + ‘reindeer’)

[Properties of concrete things: figurative expressions]

(12) ot ilii	‘thin arm’	(‘grass’ + ‘hand’)
oŋo sirej	‘babyface’	(‘child’ + ‘face’)
kus sürex	‘coward’	(‘duck’ + ‘heart’)
et xarax	‘naked eye’	(‘meat’ + ‘eye’)

3.3. Properties of abstract concepts

The Dependent of unmarked-type constructions may denote the properties of abstract concepts, such as quality, position, and figurative nature.

[Properties of abstract concepts: quality]

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|------|----------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| (13) | tirex bilii | ‘basic knowledge’ | (‘foundation’ + ‘knowledge’) |
| | aan til | ‘foreword’ | (‘entrance’ + ‘word’) |
| | simiija xajkal | ‘flattery’ | (‘lie’ + ‘praise’) |
| | tiin boppuruos | ‘living problem’ | (‘breath’ + ‘problem’) |

[Properties of abstract concepts: position]

- | | | | |
|------|-------------|----------------------|------------------------------|
| (14) | tas sihiän | ‘foreign diplomacy’ | (‘outside’ + ‘relationship’) |
| | üöhe kilaas | ‘upper grade’ | (‘high’ + ‘class’) |
| | uŋa xalijii | ‘conservative swing’ | (‘right’ + ‘inclination’) |

[Properties of abstract concepts: figurative expressions]

- | | | | |
|------|-----------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| (15) | uot kihil | ‘deep red’ | (‘fire’ + ‘red’) |
| | uu čuumpu | ‘complete silence’ | (‘water’ + ‘quiet’) |
| | timir doruobuja | ‘excellent health’ | (‘iron’ + ‘health’) |

3.4. Proper names as the Dependent

The Dependent of an unmarked-type construction can be a proper name. In this case, the combination of Dependent and Head cannot be changed.

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|------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| (16) | kioto kuorat | ‘Kyoto city’ | (‘Kyoto’ + ‘city’) |
| | ölüöne örüs | ‘Lena river’ | (‘Lena’ + ‘river’) |
| | saxa omuk | ‘Sakha people’ | (‘Sakha’ + ‘people’) |
| | ganja uol | ‘Boy Ganya’ | (‘Ganya’ + ‘boy’) |
| | kiim xahiät | ‘Kyym newspaper’ | (‘Kyym’ + ‘newspaper’) |
| | saxabult firma | ‘Sakhabult company’ | (‘Sakhabult’ + ‘company’) |
| | ‘M’ buukuba | ‘letter M’ | (‘M’ + ‘letter’) |

3.5. Redundant phrases

The unmarked type makes it possible to use redundant phrases, where the Head falls within the superordinate concept of the Dependent. In this case, the Dependent referent is included within the concept of the Head. Although the resultant phrase seems semantically redundant, Sakha sometimes uses this type of combination.

(17) küöregej čiičaa‘skylark’(‘skylark’ + ‘little bird’)

sillie tial	‘snowstorm’	(‘snowstorm’ + ‘wind’)
oluñnu ij	‘February’	(‘February’ + ‘month’)
tomtor sir	‘hill’	(‘hill’ + ‘land’)
balaxan žie	‘Balagan’	(‘Balagan’ + ‘house’)
öröbül kün	‘holiday’	(‘holiday’ + ‘day’)

3.6. Unmarked-type lexicalization

Some examples of the unmarked type are lexically determined; in other words, the meaning of the compound is not the sum of its elements.

(18) xaar ebe‘owl’(‘snow’ + ‘grandmother’)

sarīi kīnat	‘bat’	(‘suede’ + ‘wing’)
erien üön	‘snake’	(‘spotted’ + ‘bug’)
is xohoon	‘content’	(‘inside’ + ‘poem’)
žie kergen	‘family’	(‘house’ + ‘spouse’)

4. Typical semantic relationships in personal-type constructions

This section presents typical semantic relationships and examples of personal-type constructions. Frequently used Dependent patterns include location and category nouns. In addition, the Dependent and Head frequently share whole-part relationships or constitute lexicalized combinations.

4.1. Location as the Dependent

The Dependent of a personal-type construction may denote the location where the Head exists or occurs.

(19) atax taṇah-a ‘shoes’ (‘foot’ + ‘clothes’)

xarax uu-ta	‘tear’	(‘eye’ + ‘water’)
sīṇaax uu-ta	‘slaver’	(‘jaw’ + ‘water’)
murun xaan-a	‘nosebleed’	(‘nose’ + ‘blood’)
beles erkin-e	‘wall of the pharynx’	(‘pharynx’ + ‘wall’)
muora kötör-ö	‘seabird’	(‘sea’ + ‘bird’)
xaja üüneejī-te	‘alpine plant’	(‘mountain’ + ‘plant’)
sir baaj-a	‘underground resource’	(‘land’ + ‘rich’)

4.2. Category as the Dependent

The Dependent in a personal-type construction may qualify the category (or, kind) of Head.

(20) balik miin-e ‘fish soup’ (‘fish’ + ‘soup’)

īnax üüt-e	‘cow milk’	(‘cow’ + ‘milk’)
īnax et-e	‘beef’	(‘cow’ + ‘meat’)
ilii üle-te	‘handwork’	(‘hand’ + ‘word’)
ardax bilīt-a	‘raincloud’	(‘rain’ + ‘cloud’)
oḵo kinige-te	‘children’s book’	(‘child’ + ‘book’)
oḵo bīraah-a	‘children’s doctor’	(‘child’ + ‘doctor’)

frukta bihaḵ-a	‘fruit knife’	(‘fruit’ + ‘knife’)
üle kün-e	‘weekday’	(‘work’ + ‘day’)

4.3. Whole-part relationship

The personal-type Dependent and Head may share a whole-part relationship.

(21) ostuol ataḵ-a ‘leg of a table’ (‘table’ + ‘foot’)

massiina tuormah-a	‘brake of a car’	(‘car’ + ‘brake’)
murun töbö-tö	‘tip of a nose’	(‘nose’ + ‘head’)
ilim xaraḵ-a	‘mesh of a net’	(‘net’ + ‘eye’)
mas tuoraak-a	‘nut’	(‘tree’ + ‘seed’)
aan tutaak-a	‘doorknob’	(‘door’ + ‘grip’)

4.4. Other relationships

There are a range of semantic relationships between the Dependent and personal types. Both concrete and abstract nouns may act as the Dependent and Head.

[Concrete thing + concrete thing]

(22) uu kötör-ö	‘water bird’	(‘water’ + ‘bird’)
kumaakī ülehit-e	‘office worker’	(‘paper’ + ‘worker’)
atax tīah-a	‘footstep’	(‘foot’ + ‘sound’)
balik sīt-a	‘smell of fish’	(‘fish’ + ‘smell’)
uu paar-a	‘water vapor’	(‘water’ + ‘vapor’)

[Concrete thing + abstract concept]

(23) mas saah-a ‘ring of a tree’ (‘tree’ + ‘ring’)

at küüh-e	‘horsepower’	(‘horse’ + ‘power’)
tirii öṅ-ö	‘flesh color’	(‘skin’ + ‘color’)
sir aat-a	‘placename’	(‘land’ + ‘name’)
uu tahīm-a	‘water level’	(‘water’ + ‘level’)
xos ien-e	‘room area’	(‘room’ + ‘size’)

[Abstract concept + concrete thing]

(24) kultuura žie-te 'cultural hall' ('culture' + 'house')

toxtobul muzika-ta	'music of rest'	('pause' + 'music')
taptal kiiim-a	'spark of love'	('love' + 'spark')
ajan kihi-te	'traveler'	('journey' + 'person')
saxa kihi-te	'a Sakha'	('Sakha' + 'person')

[Abstract concept + abstract concept]

(25) til köñül-e	'freedom of speech'	('word' + 'freedom')
saxa til-a	'Sakha language'	('Sakha' + 'language')
saña čaah-a	'part of speech'	('speech' + 'part')
üörex žil-a	'academic year'	('study' + 'year')

4.5. Personal-type lexicalization

Some examples of the personal type are lexically determined; in other words, the meaning of the compound is not the sum of the meaning of its elements.

(26) uu kiih-a 'dragonfly' ('water' + 'girl')

kiis tiñilek-e	'Arctic raspberry'	('sable' + 'paw pad')
sir simek-e	'flower'	('land' + 'ornament')
žükeebil uot-a	'aurora'	('Yukaghir' + 'fire')
sir tünnüg-e	'erudition'	('land' + 'window')
ös xohoon-o	'proverb'	('word' + 'poem')

5. Conceptual and referential possessives

This section argues that there are two personal-type subtypes: the conceptual possessive and the referential possessive. These appear to share the same form, but they have different morphosyntactic and semantic characteristics.

Table 3. Same pair of nouns used in conceptual and referential possessives

Conceptual possessive	Referential possessive
<i>oko kinige-te</i> ‘children’s book’	<i>oko kinige-te</i> ‘a book of the child’
<i>žaxtar biraah-a</i> ‘gynecologist’	<i>žaxtar biraah-a</i> ‘the doctor of the woman’
<i>balik miin-e</i> ‘fish soup’	<i>balik miin-e</i> ‘the soup of the fish’

As Table 3 illustrates, the same pair of nouns may be used in different types of possessive compound. First of all, let us quickly summarize the differences between the conceptual and referential possessive.

The Dependent of the conceptual possessive is always a bare form; in other words, it cannot take a plural or possessive suffix. It is impossible to modify the Dependent, and no other words can intervene between the two components. Semantically, the Dependent denotes a generic concept, not a particular individual. By contrast, the Dependent of the referential possessive is merely a nominative noun, which can take the plural and/or possessive suffix. It is possible to modify the Dependent. Another word can intervene between the two components. Semantically, the Dependent variable denotes a particular individual.

Personal pronouns are always referential and never appear as the Dependent of the conceptual possessive, which does not take a plural suffix. Thus, the distinction between the two subtypes matters only when the Dependent is a 3SG noun. Consequently, only the 3SG possessive suffix *-(t)e* can attach to the Head of a referential possessive.⁴

⁴ The third person singular possessive suffix *-(t)e* has eight allomorphs due to the stem-final syllable structure and the vowel harmony rule.

5.1. Characteristics of the conceptual possessive

In conceptual-possessive compounds, the Dependent noun denotes a generic concept, not a specific individual, as in *balik* ‘fish’ of (27). In addition, the Dependent noun never takes a plural or possessive suffix. One cannot insert another word between the two components of the conceptual possessive.

- (27) *balik* *miin-e*
 fish soup-POSS.3SG
 ‘fish soup’

When a conceptual possessive construction is itself the Head of another personal-type compound, a new possessive suffix replaces the original 3SG possessive suffix.

- (28) *min* *balik* *miin-im*
 1SG fish soup-POSS.1SG
 ‘my fish soup’

In (29), a 3SG possessive suffix *-e* is attached to the Head: *ilim* ‘net’. This is not the same suffix used in *balik ilim-e* ‘fish net’; rather, it has been replaced by a newly attached suffix in agreement with *ehe-m* ‘my grandfather’.

- (29) *ehe-m* *balik* *ilim-e*
 grandfather-POSS.1SG fish net-POSS.3SG
 ‘the fishnet of my grandfather’ [Stachowski and Menz 1998: 428]

A conceptual-possessive phrase may appear to depend on an unmarked-type construction. In such cases, the implication is that the conceptual possessive (e.g., *sir tinnüg-e* ‘erudition’ in (30)) and the Head are juxtaposed.

- (30) *sir* *tünnüg-e* *kihi*
 land window-POSS.3SG person
 ‘a knowledgeable person’

5.2. Characteristics of the referential possessive

In referential-possessive compounds, the Dependent noun denotes a specific individual, as in *küis* ‘girl’ of (31). The Dependent noun can take a plural and/or possessive suffix; another word can intervene between the two components of the referential possessive.

- (31) *küis* *kinige-te*
 girl book-POSS.3SG
 ‘a book of the girl’
- (32) *kürgüt-tar-üm* *saŋa* *kinige-ler*
 girl-PL-POSS.1SG new book-POSS.3PL
 ‘the new book of my daughters’

When a referential-possessive construction is itself the Head of another personal-type compound, the original 3SG possessive suffix remains and a new possessive suffix is attached to the former Dependent.

- (33) *min* *küh-üm* *kinige-te*
 1SG girl-POSS.1SG book-POSS.3SG
 ‘a book of my daughter’

If one adds a third-person noun, the 3SG possessive suffix is realized as the special allomorph *-(t)in* (*-ün* in the case of (34)), not the regular form *-(t)e*.⁵

⁵ Ebata (2020: 43) calls this special allomorph a “non-phrase-final form,” since this allomorph appears when the noun stem is not in the phrase-final position. Postpositional phrases also require the non-phrase-final form: *čüčaax üria-tün kurduk* ‘like the song of a little bird’ (*čüčaax üria-ta* ‘the song of a little bird’).

- (34) *ajta kiih-in kinige-te*
 PSN girl-POSS.3SG book-POSS.3SG
 ‘a book of the daughter of Ayta’

A referential-possessive construction cannot occur as a component of an unmarked-type construction.

5.3. Difference between the conceptual and referential possessives

The conceptual and referential possessives also differ in their ability to function as a partitive object. However, the first and second person possessives can never be used together with the Sakha partitive case suffix. Only a conceptual possessive phrase can be a partitive object, as in (35).⁶

- (35) *süge ug-u-na oŋor*
 axe handle-POSS.3SG-PART make:IMP.2SG
 ‘Make an axe handle!’

The differences between the conceptual and referential possessives are summarized in Table 4. Superficially, the two subtypes appear to be the same. However, it is clear that their morphosyntactic behavior and semantic properties differ. The conceptual possessive is more compound-like because the two components are closely tied together. By contrast, the referential possessive is more phrase-like because its components have a certain degree of morphosyntactic autonomy.⁷

⁶ In Dolgan, a language closely related to Sakha, a partitive object can take a possessive suffix of any person/number.

⁷ Related to this, Hayasi (1995) points out that the Turkish possessive compound (equivalent to Tsumagari’s (1998) personal-type classification) has phrase-like characteristics, since it can contain various elements, and these components have a certain level of syntactic autonomy.

Table 4. Differences between the conceptual and referential possessives

	Conceptual possessive	Referential possessive
Word form of D	bare form (never takes the plural or a possessive suffix)	nominative (may take the plural and/or a possessive suffix)
Meaning of D	generic concept	particular individual
Modification of D	impossible	possible
Intervening	impossible	possible
Unmarked input	possible	impossible
Personal input	possible (the possessive suffix is attached to the Head, replacing the original one)	possible (the possessive suffix is attached to the Dependent, possibly as a special allomorph)
Partitive object	possible	impossible

6. Choice of unmarked/personal type in Turkic languages

Sections 3 and 4 confirm that semantic relationships are correlated with the selection of the unmarked or personal type. Although this appears to be true for other Turkic languages, the choice pattern is not the same. Remarkable variations have been observed in language names and city names. Interestingly, Turkish, Sakha, and Tyvan reveal different patterns, as shown in Table 5. The unmarked/personal-type selection principle is language-specific.

Table 5. Language name and city name in Turkic languages

	Turkish	Sakha	Tyvan
Language	<i>Türk dil-i</i> 'the Turkish language'	<i>saxa til-a</i> 'the Sakha language'	<i>tīva dīl</i> 'the Tyvan language'
City	<i>İstanbul şehir-i</i> 'Istanbul city'	<i>žokuuskaj kuorat</i> 'Yakutsk city'	<i>kizil xooray</i> 'Kyzyl city'

7. Concluding remarks

This paper has described nominal (noun + noun) compounds in Sakha, referring to Tsumagari's (1992) typological classification. Sakha has two types of nominal compounds: the unmarked type (neither element has a marking) and the personal type (only a possessive suffix is attached to the Head). The selection of the two types is partly determined by the lexical property of the Dependent, but mostly by semantic relationships between their components.

Frequent patterns with the unmarked-type Dependent include human properties or characteristics, shape, material, position, or purpose of concrete things, quality or position of abstract concepts, and proper names. Redundant phrases and lexicalized combinations often comprise the unmarked type.

The recurrent patterns of the personal-type Dependent are location and category (kind) nouns. In addition, the Dependent and Head often share whole-part relationships. Various other relationships including lexicalized combinations form the personal type.

The personal type is further subdivided into the conceptual possessive and the referential possessive, which appear to share the same form but have different morphosyntactic and semantic characteristics. The following section provides an overview of the differences between the conceptual and referential possessive. The conceptual possessive is more compound-like be-

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cause the two components are closely tied together. By contrast, the referential possessive is more phrase-like because its components have a certain degree of morphosyntactic autonomy.

Abbreviations

IMP: imperative, PART: partitive, PL: plural, POSS: possessive, PSN: person name, SG: singular

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ABSTRACT

Nominal compounds in Sakha (Yakut)

The difference between conceptual and referential possessives

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There are two types of nominal (noun + noun) compounds in Sakha. One is the juxtaposition type such as *ije til* ‘mother tongue’; and the other is the possessive one: *ije til-a* ‘a word of the mother’ (-*a* is a 3SG possessive suffix). Since Sakha lacks the genitive, no other strategy is used for noun + noun compounds. As the above pair of examples shows, the same constituents may make up different types of nominal compounds, resulting in the difference in the meaning as a whole.

This paper first illustrates that there are typical semantic relationships between the two components of nominal compounds of both types. The author then argues that there are two subtypes of possessive compounds: conceptual possessive and referential possessive.

In conceptual possessive compounds, the modifier noun denotes a generic concept, not a specific individual, as in *balik* ‘fish’ of (1). In addition, the modifier noun never takes a plural or a possessive suffix, and one cannot insert a word between the two components of conceptual possessive.

- (1) *balik* *miin-e* ‘fish soup’
 fish soup-POSS.3SG

In contrast, the modifier noun of referential possessive describes a specific individual, and it can take a plural and/or a possessive suffix. One can add another word between the two components.

- (2) *kii's* *kinige-te* ‘a book of the daughter’
 girl book-POSS.3SG

- (3) *kirgüt-tar-ım* *saṇa* *kinige-lere* ‘a new book of my daughters’
 girl-PL-POSS.1SG new book-POSS.3PL

This paper further points out the difference between conceptual possessive and referential possessive. If a conceptual possessive compound appears as the head noun of another possessive compound, the newly added possessive suffix replaces pre-existing one. On the other hand, when a referential possessive compound appears in the same structure, the possessive suffix is simply added to the modifier, not changing the original one. It is only conceptual possessive that can be used as a partitive object.