

## On possessed relative clauses in Kyrgyz

**Synopsis:** This paper investigates Kyrgyz (Turkic) relative clauses (RC) modifying possessed head nouns; in particular the mutual exclusiveness of genitive-marked subjects of RCs and genitive-marked possessors. The hypothesis is entertained that subjects and possessors compete for the same structural position, and discarded based on data from NPI-licensing. We see that Gen-marked subjects are structurally higher than Nom-marked subjects, but not as high as possessors. The question of the nature of Gen-assignment to subjects is taken up. All data is from fieldwork in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, in June 2017.

**The puzzle:** Kyrgyz non-subject RCs come in two varieties. In variety 1 (*Nom-RC*), the subject is marked with nominative case and there is no agreement, (1). In variety 2 (*Gen-RC*), the subject is marked with genitive case and there is possessive agreement with the subject on the head noun, (2). To my knowledge, the two constructions are in free variation.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>(1) [ajtmatəv ɖaz-ɣan] kitep<br/>         [Ajtmatov write-PCPL] book<br/>         ‘the/a book that Ajtmatov wrote’</p> | <p>(2) [ajtmatəv-dyn ɖaz-ɣan] kiteb-i<br/>         [A-GEN write-PCPL] book-3SG<br/>         ‘the/a book that Ajtmatov wrote’</p> |
|---|--|

Gen-RCs resemble possession-constructions: possessors are likewise marked with genitive, and there is possessive agreement on the head noun, (3). The semantic relation between possessor and possessee is flexible. (3) has three readings: Ajtmatov as author, owner, or topic.

- (3) ajtmatəv-dyn kiteb-i  
 A-GEN book-3SG  
 ‘Ajtmatov’s book’

We observe an asymmetry between Nom-RCs and Gen-RCs when they co-occur with possession of the head noun: Nom-RCs can have a possessor, (4), but Gen-RCs cannot, (5).

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>(4) baqyt-tyn [A ɖaz-ɣan] kiteb-i<br/>         Bakyt-GEN [A write-PCPL] book-3SG<br/>         ‘Bakyt’s book that Ajtmatov wrote’</p> | <p>(5) *B-tyn [A-dyn ɖaz-ɣan] kiteb-i<br/>         B-GEN [A-GEN write-PCPL] book-3SG<br/>         ‘Bakyt’s book that Ajtmatov wrote’</p> |
|---|--|

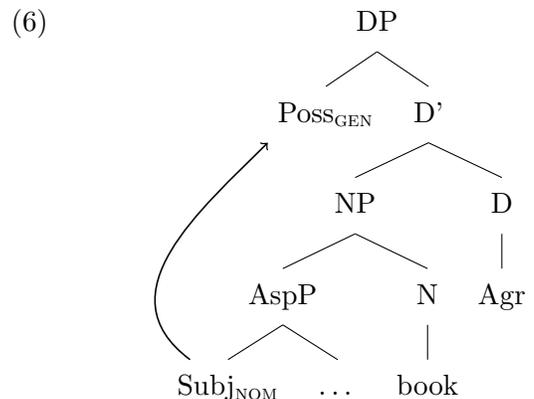
The main question to be asked in this paper is: How to derive the ungrammaticality of possessed Gen-RCs, (5)?

### Competition for a single position:

I entertain the hypothesis that Gen-RCs cannot co-occur with a possessor because the Gen-marked subject and the possessor compete for the same structural position, which can only be occupied by one NP. I.e., Gen-subjects of RCs *are* possessors of the head noun. This is illustrated in (6).

An advantage of this analysis, if correct, is that we can directly derive the assignment of Gen to the subject. It proceeds in the same way as for possessors — be that via Agree with D (Baker and Vinokurova, 2010; Gribanova, 2017; Kornfilt, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2009), or via Dependent Case Theory (Baker, 2015; Kornfilt and Preminger, 2015; Marantz, 1992), or otherwise.

However, I argue that (6) is not correct. Kornfilt, 2008 has shown that Gen-subject do not have the same scrambling properties as possessors. I add



evidence from NPI-licensing: While possessors can be NPIs licensed by verbal negation in the matrix clause, (7a), Gen-subjects of RCs cannot, (7b):

- (7) a. baqyt [ etf-kim-din kiteb-i ]-n al-ba-dy.  
 B [ **NPI**-who-GEN book-3SG ]-ACC buy-NEG-PST  
 ‘Bakyt didn’t buy anybody’s book.’  
 b. \*baqyt [ etf-kim-din oqu-yan kiteb-i ]-n al-ba-dy.  
 B [ **NPI**-who-GEN read-PCPL book-3SG ]-ACC buy-NEG-PST  
 ‘Bakyt didn’t buy the book that anyone had read.’

**An intermediate position:** There is not only a structural asymmetry between possessors and Gen-subjects, but also between Gen-subjects and Nom-subjects or RCs: While Nom-subjects can be NPIs licensed by embedded negation, (8a), Gen-subjects cannot, (8b).

- (8) a. baqyt [ etf-kim oqu-ba-yan kitep ]-ti al-dy.  
 B [ **NPI**-who read-NEG-PCPL book ]-ACC buy-PST  
 ‘Bakyt bought the book that noone had read.’  
 b. \*baqyt [ etf-kim-din oqu-ba-yan kiteb-i ]-n al-dy.  
 B [ **NPI**-who-GEN read-NEG-PCPL book-3SG ]-ACC buy-PST

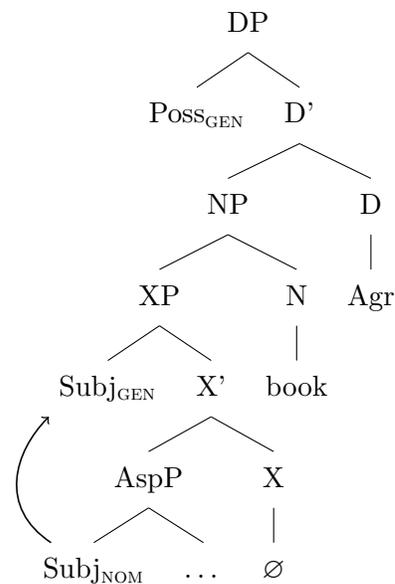
The same pattern is found in Uzbek argument clauses. Gribanova, 2017 argues that Uzbek Gen-subjects are structurally higher than Nom-subjects, and thereby not c-commanded by verbal negation at the relevant level. The same seems to hold for Kyrgyz, with the structure in (9).

**On Agr and genitive case:** How does the subject in the intermediate position receive Gen case?

Assume D-licensing (Bedell 1972; Kornfilt, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2009; Miyagawa, 1993, 2008, 2011; Ochi, 2001): Perhaps X=D in (9), and Gen is assigned via Spec-Head agreement with D. However, this D is never overt across Turkic. (Note that we expect default D to spell out as 3SG, not as zero, Kornfilt and Preminger, 2015, cf. compounds.)

Alternatively, X could be a different category, and Gen could be assigned by the high D. But if this D can reach down to Spec,XP, and X is neither D nor C (Krause, 2001; ergo not a phase head), then what blocks the high D from assigning Gen to the low subject position inside AspP?

Dependent Case Theory (Baker, 2015; Marantz, 1992) is not without problems either: Gen can’t be an unmarked case because then we expect it on multiple NPs in the same case assignment domain, contrary to cross-Turkic data. Gen also cannot be a dependent-up case because it appears with intransitives. The only remaining option is that the presence of the possessor renders the case assignment domain non-nominal — a wild stipulation.



**Conclusion:** We have seen that Nom-RCs and Gen-RCs in Kyrgyz (and related Turkic and Altaic languages; Hale, 2002) raise issues for both Head-Licensing (Chomsky, 2000, 2001) and Dependent-Case theories of case assignment. (See also Gribanova, 2017.) A precise understanding of their structure and properties is necessary to gain deeper understanding about case assignment and agreement. This paper takes a step in this direction.