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On the Origin of the Turkic Genitive Suffix

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According to the Altaic theory, the genitive suffix in Common Altaic was {*-n}. After a final vowel the suffix *-n was used, but after a final consonant a connective vowel (a rounded or unrounded narrow vowel) was inserted between the stem and the suffix. The connective vowel and the suffix *-n became *-un in Pre-Mongolian, but developed into -ıŋ /-iŋ in Turkic (Ramstedt II: 25, Poppe 1955:187).

Gerhard Doerfer has recently put forward another theory on the origin of the Turkic genitive suffix {- (n) ɪŋ}. Speaking of the two accusative suffixes in Old Turkic he states as follows: “Möglicherweise sind -əG und -ən (nach Possessiv) ursprünglich zwei verschiedene Kasus: -əG = echter Kasus des direkten Objekts (ursprünglich = dem Genitiv, vgl. *bizəŋ* ‘unser’ < *biz-ən-g*, diese Akkusativform noch fortlebend in *kül teŋin süŋü-ŋ batāmi* ‘Tiefe der Lanze’, wie ich in einem bisher unveröffentlichten (?) Artikel ausgeführt habe, angebliche ‘*süŋügin*, *süŋüglig*’ sind *süŋüŋin*, *süŋüŋlĕŋ* zu lesen—in allen anderen tt. Texten heißt es *süŋgü*, s. ED 834 f.), dagegen mag -ən ein alter Relationalis sein” (1993: 147–148).

As Erdal has recently pointed out (1991: 205) and as I have already discussed elsewhere (TDA 1994: 189), *süŋgü* in the phrase *süŋgü batımi* ‘lance-deep’ (KT E 35) is in the nominative case, because in such phrases it is a general rule for the first noun to be in the nominative case, e.g. *bir süngü turkı* ‘about the length of a lance’ (MK I 349), *bir är turumu suv* ‘water the depth of the height of a man’ (MK I 396), Trk. *diz boyu kar* ‘knee-deep snow’, etc. Besides, his statement to the effect that the Turkic word for ‘lance’ is *süŋgü* everywhere is not correct. It is *süŋgü* in Orkhon Turkic, i.e. a deverbal noun in {-G}, and this form survives in Yakut and Dolgan: Yak. *üŋü*: ‘lance, spear’, Dol. *üŋü*: *üŋü* ‘Spieß zum Erlegen wilder Rentiere beim Flußübergang’ (Stachowski 1993: 251. On the other hand, Uig., MK *süngü* (i.e. *süŋü*) and the other modern forms (Trk. *süngü*. Kzk., Nog. *süŋgi*, Tat. *söŋge*, Bşk. *höŋge*, etc.), go back to an older **süŋ-gü*, a deverbal noun in {-GU} derived from **süŋ-*. The latter survives in Yakut as *üŋ-* ‘to butt, strike with horns’.

As for Doerfer’s theory on the origin of the Turkic genitiv suffix {-ɪŋ}, I must say that it is weak phonetically, because a suffix consisting of or beginning with a consonant cannot be added to stems ending in a consonant without a connective vowel. Therefore, a construction like **biz-ən-əg* would have resulted not in *biz-ən-g* (i.e. *bizing*), but in **bizinig*; or, to be more exact, with the regular loss of its medial vowel, it would have acquired the shape **biznig*.

Thus, in my opinion, Ramstedt’s view on the origin of the Turkic genitive suffix still seems to be sound and satisfactory. But how can we explain the theory that the genitive suffix was first *-n in Turkic, but later it developed into -ıŋ after consonants and into -(n) ɪŋ after vowels? As is known, we have evidence for the sound change *ŋ > n* in the history of Turkic, but the examples for the opposite change (e.g.

-DAn > Khak. -DAŋ) are rather rare. Therefore, a change like **-n > -(n)Iŋ* in Turkic needs to be proved satisfactorily.

Ramstedt's evidence brought to support his own theory consists of the following:

1. The genitive suffix is *-nün /-nin*, etc. in Kirghiz (where the nasal /ŋ/ has been preserved regularly);

2. In Kumuk (where the nasal /ŋ/ has been preserved normally), the genitive suffix is *-nu: /-ni:*

3. In Chuvash the genitive suffix is *-ăn /-ĕn* after consonants, and *-năn /-nĕn* (dial. *-yăn/-yĕn*) after vowels (II: 25);

4. The archaic genitive in Old Turkic serves as the basic form for new case forms, e.g. OT *bizingä* (i.e. *bizin-gä*) 'zu uns', as opposed to *bizgä* 'uns' (II: 27)

Let it be stated right away that the Chuvash evidence brought by Ramstedt cannot be regarded as valid, because the nasal /ŋ/ in Chuvash developed into /n/ everywhere as it did in the Oghuz group with the exception of Turkmen.

Ramstedt's Kumuk evidence is not valid either, because the genitive suffix {-nI} is identical with the accusative suffix in this language. This means that it is the old accusative suffix {-nI} which first began to be used in Chagatay to form the genitive case also, e.g. *Afrasiyab-nı oyl-ı* 'Afrasiyab's son', etc.

Thus, from among the four pieces of evidence Ramstedt brought to support his theory only two, i.e. the first and the fourth seem to be sound and satisfactory. But this does not mean that we do not have additional evidence to support this theory.

My additional evidence for the view that the Turkic genitive suffix was {- (I)n} originally consists of the following:

1. In the Orkhon inscriptions we have two possessive constructions in which the first noun has *-(ı)n* as the genitive suffix instead of the expected *-(ı)ŋ*: *qayan-ıy-ın sab-i-n* 'the words of your kaghan' (KT S 9), *bilgä qayan-ıy-ın... ädgü eli-i-ıgä* 'to the good state of your wise kaghan' (KT E 23). In my opinion, the form *qayan-ıy-ın* in these examples is in the archaic genitive case (Tekin 1968: 127). It seems that the oldest original form of the genitive suffix was still preserved as such in Orkhon Turkic at least after the 2nd person possessive suffix. With regard to this example Doerfer states that 'Es gibt keinen Genitiv auf *-ən*' and regards the element *-ın* in this word as 'ein Casus relationalis in Akkusativform' (1993: 148). But his 'Casus relationalis' does not seem to be much different from the genitive functionally.

2. Apart from *bizingä* (<**bizin-kä*) mentioned by Ramstedt, we also have *biz(i)ntä* 'than ours, than us' in Orkhon Turkic occurring in the Tunyukuk inscription, line 40. The same ablative form *bizintä* based on the archaic genitive form **bizin* and *sizintä* 'from you' based on the archaic genitive form **sizin* also occur in M I (10,5; 33, 20). As is known, similar but newer locative-ablative and ablative forms based on the genitive forms of pronouns occur frequently in Kutadgu Bilig, e.g. *meniğdä, meniğdin, seniğdä, seniğdin, anığda, anığdin, biziğdä* etc. (cf. also Chuv. *pirĕnten* 'from us, than us' and *sirĕnten* 'from you, than you' alongside *pirten* and *sirten*).

3. In the language of the Volga Bulgarian inscriptions dating from the 14th century the archaic genitive suffix {- (I)n} occurs at least in two examples: *Ahmad aya-n ılıçı-si* 'Ahmad Aya's horse-breeder' (Tekin 1988: 64), *Armaš hi:ri Ya'qu:t-ın bälüw-i* 'the tombstone of Yakut, daughter of Armash' (Tekin 1988: 79).

4. In Kumuk where the Old Turkic phoneme /ŋ/ has been preserved regularly the genitive forms of *biz* 'we' and *siz* 'you' are *bizin* and *sizin*, respectively: *bizin at* 'our horse', *bizinki* 'ours', *sizin* 'your', *sizinki* 'yours', *bizinče* 'in our opinion', *sizinče* 'in your opinion'.

5. As is generally accepted there is no genitive in Yakut formed with a special suffix. But in this language, in the declension of possessive stems and only with the ending of the 3rd person, there occurs a genitive form in *-n* which is identical with the accusative form, e.g. *saxa tıl-i-n grammatika-ta* 'the grammar of the Yakut language', V. Radlov, *saxa tıl-i-n morfologiya-tı-n... üöreten baran...* 'W. Radloff, having studied the morphology of the Yakut language...', *SSRS Naukaların Akademiyata* 'The USSR Academy of Sciences', etc. The second example is especially important in that it contains two words in exactly identical constructions but in two different functions, i.e. *tıl-i-n* in the genitive case and *morfologiya-tı-n* in the accusative case. In the third phrase, I think we have a clearer example of the possessive construction, i.e. *Naukalar-ın Akademiyata* 'Academy of Sciences', modified by *SSRS* (cf. Chuv. *SSSR Naukäsen Akademiyě*, Alt. *SSSR Naukalarıñ Akademiyazı*, etc.).

All this leads us to assume that the suffix {-n} occurring after possessive stems formed both the genitive and accusative cases in Old Yakut and Proto-Turkic. Later on, however, with the nasalisation of /n/ in the genitive, the new form of the suffix came into being and it was thus distinguished from the accusative suffix in Late Proto-Turkic.

The nasalisation of /n/ in the genitive suffix {-In} in Turkic can be explained easily: The archaic dative forms *biziñä* 'to us' and *siziñä* 'to you', undoubtedly go back to the older and original forms **bizin-kä* and **sizin-kä*, through the intermediate forms **biziñ-gä* and **siziñ-gä*. After the nasalisation of /n/ in such forms, the new form of the genitive suffix with the preceding connective vowel must have been extracted from such forms and generalized as {-In}, e.g. *men-iñ*, *sen-iñ*, *an-iñ*, *biziñ*, *siz-iñ*, *äb-iñ*, *bäg-iñ*, etc. As for the initial /n/ in the allomorph *-nıñ* occurring after vowels, it, too, must have come into being analogically, i.e. as a result of metanalysis or syllabification, e.g. *meniñ* (*me-niñ*), *seniñ* (*se-niñ*), *anıñ* (*a-nıñ*), *qaganıñ* (*qaga-nıñ*), *qatunıñ* (*qatu-nıñ*), etc., and consequently *Bayırqu-nıñ* 'of the Bayırku'.

The nasalisation of /n/ in the ancient genitive suffix {-In} must have also occurred before the pronominal-adjectival suffix {-ki}, i.e. Trkm. *biziñki* 'ours' < **bizin-ki*, *siziñki* 'yours' < **sizin-ki*, etc., Khak. *minii* 'mine', Tuv. *me:ɣii* id. < **meniñki* < **menin-ki*, Khak. *sinii* 'yours', Tuv. *se:ɣii* id. < **seniñki* < **senin-ki*, Yak *bihigi* 'we' < **biziñi* < **bizin-ki*, etc. The Tungus pronominal-adjectival (= genitive) suffix {-ni:}, too, must have come into being as a result of similar constructions, as Ramstedt and Poppe rightly assumed: Evk. *mingi*: 'mine', Ude. *minigi* id., Ulcha *miŋgi* id., Orok *minigi* id., Nan. *miŋgi*, *mineŋgi*, *mineŋge* id., Ma. *mininge* id., Evk. *singi*: 'yours', Ev. *hingi* id., Orok. *sinigi* id., Nan. *sigi*, *sineŋgi* id., Ma. *sininge* id., etc. Such modern forms obviously go back to the older and original constructions in *-ki*, i.e. **minin-ki* and **sinin-ki*.

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