

The Tokcir Possessives, Adjectives, Articles and *De Facto* Grammatical "Genders"

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1.0 Introduction

This is the fourth part in a series of short essays designed for conlangers to get up to date with the NGL project and the base grammar of the Tokcir language. It is intended for newcomers to the project, or for experienced project members to use for a reference material.

The areas covered in this essay are connected by the fact that they are almost exclusively not features built into the language by original intent. Even the unique "Tokcir possessive" came about as an extension of a form that Jack Durst originally invented for his Kinship module and which subsequently got generalised to all nouns in the language. Tokcir has no genitive case and no systematic possessive was planned, so a number of complementary possessive systems were devised and used concurrently on the fly. In January 1999 there was a discussion of collecting and rationalising the existing possessives and adding a finer degree of possessive distinction; the information given in this essay comes from the result of that discussion. All the possessives given here, while being to some degree the product of evolution rather than planned creation, are nevertheless official Tokcir standard.

Grammatical "gender" was something else that arose spontaneously (although having nothing to do with sexual gender) and was noticed and codified at some point in the project. Tokcir has four noun genders. The reason why gender is addressed here in the discussion of the possessive is because the meaning of the possessive endings of the "Tokcir possessive" vary depending on the gender of the noun they are applied to - to some extent you need to know the gender of the noun being possessed (because Tokcir marks the possessed noun, not the possessor) in order to select the correct ending.

Adjectives are an afterthought to this essay added because they have not yet been addressed, can be addressed in a cursory fashion, and have some bearing on one of the forms of the possessive.

2.0 Tokcir Grammatical "Gender"

Tokcir nouns have gender, but this was not a planned feature of the language. It was a feature which was noticed as arising *de facto* from the set of derivational endings one uses to derive a noun from another part of speech. It has nothing to do with sexual gender, hence referring to it as *grammatical* gender. Tokcir has four genders:

- ar gender - "things", and default for nouns that don't fit elsewhere
- ir gender - "devices", anything of human creation used to some intent
- or gender - "persons"
- ci gender - "abstractions"

These come from the definitions of {-ar} as deriving "thing which does", {-ir} as "device which does", {-or} as "person who does" and {-ci} as something like "concept of", similar to the English suffixes "-ness" or "-hood". The first three are normally applied to verbs to "noun" them as that which does the verb, but may be applied to other parts of speech as well. See the vocabulary database for more details. Example of derivation:

tok V	-	speak, talk
tokor N	-	speaker
tokir N	-	a speaking device, possible colloquial word for "microphone"
tokar N	-	a talking thing, not a derivation you'd likely ever see
tokci N	-	speech, the phenomenon of speech
tokjan N	-	a speech, composition ({-jan} ending derives gerunds), would be -ar gender
tokcir N	-	an artificial language (SD interpretation)
tokciar N	-	a natural language (SD interpretation)

As you can see above, it is possible to stack derivational affixes. In stacking affixes, the last one gives the gender of the derived noun. In the case of noun-deriving affixes such as {-jan} which do not produce an unambiguous gender, the gender is determined, if necessary, from context.

In general, gender is an abstract concept that need not concern the average speaker and does not have to feature prominently in learning materials. It is important for the conlanger to grasp the concept of Tokcir gender, however, since it is occasionally useful in discussions, and furthermore, gender impacts on the way the special Tokcir possessive derivational affixes are interpreted.

3.0 Tokcir Adjectives

Adjectives in Tokcir can be defined as adjectives or derived by adding the ending {-i} to a word from essentially any other part of speech. Other adjective-deriving affixes with more specific functions are possible. Adjectives in Tokcir always, without exception, immediately follow the noun they describe. If we have {òl kuaj} = "a car" and {hael} = "blue", then {òl kuaj hael} is a "a blue car". Adjectives can be verbalised by adding the clitic verbal endings {-je} (to be, to have) or {-fe} (to make, to do), so {haelje} is "to be blue", e.g., {q kuaj haeljem} = "the car is blue", and {haelfe} is "to make blue", so {haelfem q kuaj} would be something like "he is painting the car blue".

4.0 Tokcir Articles

Tokcir, like English, has two articles, the definite article (like "the") and the indefinite article (like "a"). Unlike in English, it is not always obligatory to use an article. Articles may be omitted if the meaning is clear from context, but it is common to use an article regardless. From the existing corpus, it appears to be better style, especially formally and

in writing, to use the article rather than to omit it when an article can be used. Tokcir articles are very simple, like English articles. They do not decline and do not have number agreement. The articles of Tokcir are:

òl	-	a
q*	-	the

* {q} is pronounced {ku}, and can be written {ku}, but is ordinarily written {q}. The exception is sentence-initial, where it is always written {Ku}.

The grave accent on {òl} is purely a textual convention and has no real meaning other than to serve to emphasise this small word.

5.0 The Possessive Devices of the Tokcir Language

Tokcir has three possessive devices, all of which are to a degree evolutionary rather than planned, and rationalised after the fact. All have a necessary place in the language and all must be grasped in order to work in the Tokcir language. The three possessives are the pseudogenitive in {-i} or {-dasi}, the periphrastic possessive in {à}, and the Tokcir possessive affixional system. The first two are Tokcir generic forms, their potential existing in the base language, and the last amounts to a modular scheme which was accepted into the base language.

5.1 The Possessive Affix

The Tokcir possessive affix is a derivational ending that marks a noun as being possessed. It is an adaptation of a system which was originally parochial to the Kinship module and later expanded and elaborated. Notice that Tokcir marks nouns which are possessed, not the possessing noun, whose case is always the same as that of the thing possessed for the purposes of case marking. Therefore, it is nothing like a normal genitive case. It is not treated as being part of the nominal declension at all. The possessive affix agrees with the possessor in person, (as in the verbal quality of person) and inflects for alienable or inalienable possession, being the two degrees of possession (colloquially "weak" and "strong" possession) that the language marks. Because the possessive ending agrees with the possessor in person, the possessor can be dropped if understood from context. When the possessor is not dropped, the possessed thing, while serving as the nucleus of the possessive phrase and acting as a noun in terms of sentence role, is treated as an adjective and follows the noun possessed.

The basic possessive endings are:

-o	-	first person ("my/our")
-a	-	second person ("your")
-e	-	third person ("his/her/its/their")

The possessive ending is always the *last* ending applied to a noun. So it follows any

inflection for case or number that may be applied to the noun. When necessary to preserve clarity or to preserve the Tokcir legal syllable pattern, gottal stops (') may be inserted between the noun and the possessive affix, or else appended to the end of the word (this latter being the option usually preferred when possible).

There are two possessive contrasts used, alienable/inalienable (i/a) and associative/ownership (as/own). That same affix is used to make either contrast, and which contrast is being made depends on the gender of the noun to which the affix is being applied. The possessive contrast is made by using an interfix between the noun and the person agreement of the possessive affix. The interfixes are:

- 0- - alienable or associative ("weak") possession
- w- - inalienable or ownership ("strong") possession

Alienable/Inalienable Possession: Used for persons {-or}, some things {-ar} and some concepts {-ci}. Something which is inalienably possessed is something which as the name suggests is treated as integral to your very self, a tie that cannot be broken. Something which is alienably possessed is something which you can lose possession of. When applied to people, inalienable possession is used for blood relatives, and, sparingly or liberally depending on the demonstrativeness of the particular culture, for proclaiming especially strong bonds. Strictly speaking, a wife is alienable, because you can divorce your wife, but your daughter, or your ex-wife, is inalienable, because no matter what, living or dead, they're yours forever. You would always use the inalienable possessive to refer to your daughter. You would also use the inalienable possessive to refer to your adopted daughter even though the relationship is not strictly blood, for obvious reasons. You would tend to use the inalienable to refer to your wife, even though it is not grammatically true, to express the strength of the bond; you might use the alienable with strangers in referring to your wife in less demonstrative cultures, as using the inalienable possessive with people is an expression of a strong bond. You would refer to your ex-wife with the alienable possessive even though *that's* not precisely correct, out of wishful thinking. Things like parts of your body are inalienably possessed always.

Associative/Ownership Possession: Used for devices and most things. Strong possession (-w-) marking in this case specifically makes a statement of ownership. Weak possession implies having custody or control over the item in question and is more transient. If I take your car {kuaj}, you can say it is {kuajwo} - "my car" - strong possession, meaning that you *own* it, even though you are not currently in possession of it. I can say that it is {kuajo} - "my car" - weak possession, meaning that I am using it or have control over it but don't necessarily own it, I am merely associated with it for the moment.

The following table, taken from Jack Dursts explication of this system, illustrates these of weak and strong possession depending on noun gender:

Persons:(*as)		Devices:(*a)		Things:(~~)		Abstractions:(*i+own)
a	i	as	own	as	own	Always use -0-
-0-	-w-	-0-	-w-	a-0-	-w-	(as=associated, own=owned
				i-w-	-w-	a=alienable, i=inalienable)

The following table gives all the possible endings:

person/type:	a/as ("weak")	i/own ("strong")
1st person	-o	-wo
2nd person	-a	-wa
3rd person	-e	-we

If we take {kuaj} as "car", {kuajo} would be read as "my car", {kuaja} would be read as "your car", and {kuaje} could be read as "her car", ignoring for the moment that these could equally be plural. If I say {kuaje haeljem} I'm saying "her car is blue". If I want to specify Mary's car, I would say {Mari kuaje haeljem}, with the possessive following {Mari} like an adjective. that actually reads like "Mary, her car is blue". In all these cases I am implying that Mary does not have strong possession of the car.

Examples of usage:

All examples are done using the bare native Tokcir verb with no verb system applied.

"I am taking John's car."
{Mom Janac kuajmacwe u'deur.}

Note that the object is the possessed item, {kuajmacwe}. Notice that the possessive ending is applied after the case ending. Because it is out of fixed word order in this particular example, it must be marked with the accusative case. {Jan} is made to agree with it by also marking the accusative, although this could be dropped as long as {kuaj} marks the accusative. Notice that the possessive functions like an adjective in terms of sentence order - it *always* immediately follows the noun possessed.

"He took my car."
{Mem u'deur kuajwo.}

Notice that since we are using fixed word order, no case ending need be used. Note also that this sentence could also mean "he took our car", because there is no number information in the possessive ending. This is an example of possessed-dropping. If I want to make it unambiguous I mean *my* car, I can say {Mem u'deur moc kuajwo}.

"I am taking their car."
{Mom u'deur kuaje}
or, less ambiguously:
{Mom u'deur sec kuaje}

I chose in both these example to use weak ownership (associative possession) for "their car".

5.2 The Periphrastic Possessive with {à}

Tokcir can also make the possessive periphrastically (using an idiom) in the same way the English can mark possession with "of" (e.g., "The government **of** Prince Edward Island" = Prince Edward Island's government). This is, in fact, the only way to mark possession in languages such as French and Spanish (both using "de"). Tokcir uses the proposition {à}, meaning "out of, from" to mark possession in this manner. It works exactly the same as it would in English or Spanish. The only thing of note is that with regard to the alienable/inalienable distinction above, the periphrastic possessive is deliberately vague, possibly having any of the possible range of meanings. If you need to mark case, the object of the preposition {à} in this case is accusative.

So, for example, {Kanada q zelciarwe} and {q zelciar à Kanada} are both "The Government of Canada".

5.3 The Pseudogenitive in {-i} and {-dasi}

Later in the development of the language, it was noticed that a pseudogenitive use of the adjectival marker {-i} had evolved on its own in the language through the extreme productiveness of {-i}. Pseudogenitives produced in this fashion are treated exactly like adjectives. Pseudogenitive is ambiguous about the strength or weakness of the possession and is usually used in a somewhat descriptive sense, where the possessor can be summed up in a single word. An example of a pseudogenitive from a real text is {Ku Senat Kanadai'}, "The Canadian Senate" or "The Senate of Canada" or "Canada's Senate" - it is the existence of the possessive interpretations that make this a pseudo-genitive, but this only happens due to the productiveness of {-i}, the derived adjectives are still treated as adjectives and still thought of as adjectives by speakers.

Look at the ways we can say "Steve's car". We can say {Estiv kuaje} for weak possession, or {Estiv kuajwe} for strong possession. One of these would probably be preferred for a short phrase like this. We could also say {kuaj à Estiv}, although we would tend to prefer this if either the possessor or the possessed were a phrase, or if it made a better choice for the sound of the sentence, or finally we could say {kuaj Estivi}, which is like the first two only very vague - it might not even mean possession at all but might merely denote that the car is named for me, perhaps because I owned it at one time or am strongly associated with it somehow.

When the possessives were collected and codified, a final possessive form, {-dasi}, was coined. This one is a simple derivation of the pseudogenitive. The word {das} means "to hold". By saying something is {-dasi}, I'm saying that I "hold" it, either literally or figuratively. The usual reason for using {-dasi} is to imply "...but only for the moment". Because {-dasi} implies tenuous or ephemeral ownership, it is considered to strongly imply a connection to "weak" or alienable ownership.