A possible source for definiteness: Possessor markers in Uralic[1]

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1. Introduction: background and some data

Possessive suffixes in Uralic languages

(1) Hungarian:
> *lány-a-i-nk*
> girl-POSS-PL-1PL
> 'our daughters"

- agree with the possessor in person and number
- are not restricted in their use as possessive markers, mark any kind of possession
- can co-occur with other possessive markers (e.g. case, predicative possession)
- not obligatory, but frequently used to mark possession

Definiteness marking

Strategies of definiteness marking
- free articles (4)
- bound articles: definite vs. indefinite declension (5)

(2) Hungarian:
> *a   ház-ban*
> DEF   house-INESS
> 'in the house'

(3) Mordvin:
> *kudo-so*
> house-DEF.INESS
> 'in the house'

- word order
- subject/object case-contrast
- verbal conjugation (Hungarian, Ob-Ugric, Samoyedic, Mordvin)

► Most Uralic languages lack "true" definite articles.

Possessive suffixes as definiteness markers

- in direct anaphoric use (as part of typical uses for definite articles, cf. Hawkins 1978)

(4) Northern Mansi (NoS,[2] text03.123)

> *Nājəŋxāp-n   tāl-i,   **nājəŋxāp-e***   *Samarowa-n   juwle joxt-i*
> steamboat-LAT sit.down-3SG **steamboat-3SG** Samarowa-LAT back come/arrive-3SG
> 'He gets on the steamboat, the steamboat takes him back to Samarowa.

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[2] Data from the Project „Typology of Negation in Ob-Ugric and Samoyedic languages" of the University of Vienna, henceforth NoS. Available online.

- in immediate situation use

(5) Komi (Nikolaeva 2003:7)

> *Wanta tăm* **mašinaj-en** *jowra mănəs.*
> look DEM **car-2SG** awry went.3SG
> 'Look, the car went awry.'

- in associative anaphoric use

(6) Nganasan (NoS, meu djamezi.002/3)

> *S'itəbɨ* *d'ebtu-ʔkə-ʔə-m* *d'ürɨmi͡aku* **n'im-tu** *kəhɨ* *luu*
> tale tell-RES-PF-1SG short.tale **name-3SG** partridge parka
> 'I'm telling a tale, a short tale, its name is Kehy Luu.'

> *tahariaa* **büübtar-tu** *tərəd`ɨ* *kərutətu* *mou-ntənu s'iti maʔ* *nən`d`ɨ-t3*
> now **start-3SG** such ordinary earth-LOC two tent stand-PRS
> 'Well in the beginning there are two tents simply standing on the ground.'

- with uniques

(7) Forest Nenets (NoS, shicha_ne_ngashki 056)

> *Taj ʔn'a* **xiła-ta** *ka ʔmaj*
> then **snow-3SG** fall.NARR
> 'Then, the snow fell.'

2. Grammaticalization

2.1 Grammaticalization of definite articles in Indo-European

- Greenberg (1978), stages of development:

Demonstrative →	definite article →	specific article →	noun (class) marker
stage 0	stage 1	stage 2	stage 3

- typical grammaticalization features (cf. Bybee et al. 1994, Heine & Kuteva 2002, Hopper & Traugott 1993, among others); illustrated on the basis of the grammaticalization of the German demonstrative *theser* to the definite article *ther*:
  i) morphological decategorization: *theser* occurs free, *ther* is bound within the NP
  ii) phonetic erosion: *theser* changed to the reduced form *ther,* the.MASC.NOM 'the' (nowadays: *der*)
  iii) semantic bleaching: the demonstrative *theser* losts its deictic content
  iv) obligatoriness: *der* marks all nouns which are unique, either pragmatically or semantically

- expansion of use (cf. Carlier & de Mulder 2010, Demske 2004, Ortmann 2014):

with concrete deictic expressions
       → with anaphoric expressions
              → with associative anaphoric expressions
                    → with uniques

pragmatic uniqueness	→	semantic uniqueness
requires context for unique reference		unique reference is inherent to the noun

Evolution of definite articles starts in the overlap of uses within anaphoric expressions:
    Peter saw a red car. This/The car …

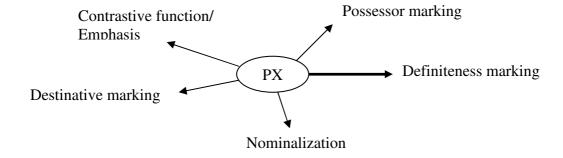2.2 Grammaticalization of definiteness markers in Uralic

- no cline/stages
- no typical grammaticalization features (at least not all)
- no obligatory use as definiteness marker
- applied in all contexts assumed as typical for definite articles

- no diachronic data available

Bisang's (2004) study on East Asian languages:
grammaticalization can take place without any co-evolution of form and meaning and without obligatoricity; "an initial source concept (…) simultaneously radiates into different directions"
    → homonymous items with different functions (Gerland 2014)

The different function of the Uralic possessive suffix:

Contrastive function/
Emphasis

Possessor marking

PX

Definiteness marking

Destinative marking

Nominalization

Fraurud (2001: 249): "Possessive suffixes may grammaticalize into def[inite articles], the process starts by an extension within associative anaphora."

Overlap of definiteness/possession: *I saw a house. The/Its roof was leaking.*

- development and function of the possessive suffix:
  possessor marking/associative anaphor
  → loss of number specification
  →loss of person specification (cf. (8))
  →no indication of argument
  →indication of definiteness

(8) Finnish (Toivonen 1998:44)
No täälläkö sinä   vielä asut emäntine-nsä?
well   here.Q   you.SG still   live   wife-3[SG]
'So, do you still live here with your wife?'

- extension of use of the possessive suffix:
  associative anaphor with inherently relational nouns
  → associative anaphor with non-inherently relational nouns
  → ?

3. Why are 3rd person possessive suffixes suitable for definiteness marking?
(outlook)

The definiteness of possession

Possessive suffix are *possessive weak definites* (cf. Barker 2000, 2004)

Barker (2000:28) 'Rules':
A possessive is definite iff its possessor is definite.
A possessive is familiar iff its possessor is familiar.

➔ Generalization: Nouns marked with the possessive suffix are definite.

The special status of the 3rd person (in Uralic and elsewhere)

"That there is a fundamental, and ineradicable, difference between first-person and second-person pronouns, on the one hand, and third-person pronouns, on the other, is a point that cannot be emphasized too strongly." (John Lyons 1977:638)

Standard person hierarchy:
1 > 2 > 3
Leads to:
- Egocentricity
- Speaker and hearer are inherently more highly accessible than 3rd parties

- 1st and 2nd person forms are inherently deictic expressions, that is, their interpretation is dependent on the properties of the extralinguistic context of the utterance in which they occur.
- For 3rd person forms the interpretation depends not on the extralinguistic but on the linguistic context of utterance.

Some reflection in Uralic
- Forms for 1st and 2nd are quite different from that for 3rd person in Nganasan, Nenets, Enets (Samoyedic): 3rd person singular pronouns stem from deictic elements, 1st and 2nd not)
- split in the verbal conjugation: 3rd person objects allow for objective verbal conjugation whereas 1st and 2nd person do not

  (9) Hungarian (Ortmann & Gerland 2014):

ö-t	*lát-od*	*engem*	*lát-sz*
3.SG-ACC	see-2SG.OBJECTIVE	1.SG	see-2SG.SUBJECTIVE
'You see him/her.'		'You see me.'	

4. Conclusion

In languages where the possessive suffixes are used both as possessor agreement marker and as definite article, the core function of the suffix seems to be to link two entities. In a possessive construction the suffix indicates the possessor and the link between possessor and possessum. In a non-possessive construction the indication of any possessor is not relevant. What remains is the function of establishing a relation, either to the discourse situation (with pragmatically unique referents) or to cultural knowledge (with semantically unique referents). This way the definite articles with possessive sources function in the same fashion as definite articles with demonstrative sources do.

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