A Lowering analysis of Dagur CASE-POSS order*

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1. Introduction

Dagur (Mongolic) represents the stem-CASE-POSS suffix order in possessive constructions (also attested in other Mongolic, Tungusic, and Uralic languages), in contrast to the typologically more common stem-POSS-CASE order in, for example, Turkic languages. The aim of this paper is to analyze the morphology and the syntax of possessive constructions in Dagur, with a focus on the exceptional CASE-POSS suffix order in the nominal domain. Based on evidence from suspended affixation, I argue that the CASE-POSS order is the result of postsyntactic lowering of K (CASE) to D (POSS). I show that Dagur suspended affixation should be analyzed as a base-generated structure, instead of ellipsis. In addition, suspended affixation involving CASE and POSS shows surprising patterns compared to the suspension of other suffixes. Based on these facts, I argue that the exceptional CASE-POSS order cannot be analyzed as the result of linear morphological operations such as metathesis. Instead, an analysis based on Lowering offers a straightforward account for the morphological pattern presented in this paper.

Dagur is an endangered northeastern Mongolic language spoken in Inner Mongolia, Sinkiang Uyghur region (Tacheng), and Heilongjiang Province of China (Janhunen 2000, "Endangered Languages Project: Dagur" n.d., Simons and Fennig 2018, Engkebatu 1988). Like other Mongolic languages, Dagur is head-final with agglutinative morphology, as demonstrated by (1).

(1) (Bi) guč -sul -tii -jee usɣul -san -bi
I friend -PL -COMIT -REFL.POSS chat -PST -1SG
'I chatted with my friends.'

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There are four mutually-intelligible dialects of Dagur: Hailar, Butkha, Tsitsikar, and Tacheng (Sinkiang), with around 50,000 speakers (Janhunen 2000). Butkha, spoken in the Morin Dawa Autonomous Banner of Hulun Buir, is the major dialect with the most speakers. The data and judgments in this paper represent the Butkha and Hailar dialects.

2. Dagur nominal domain and possessive constructions

The head noun in Dagur nominal phrases can be followed by plural suffix (PL), possessive (POSS), and CASE suffix. An example is provided below.

(2) Merden (minii) guč -sul -d -min^{j} jašγen ši -sen
Merden my friend -PL -DAT -1SG.POSS letter write -PST
'Merden wrote a letter/letters to my friends.'

Dagur possessive constructions show agreement between the prenominal possessor and the suffix following the possessum. The possessor is marked with genitive case, and the POSS suffix agrees in person and in number with the possessor. The prenominal possessor can be *pro*-dropped, but the POSS suffix is obligatory.

(3) (minii) mori -min^{j}
my horse -1SG.POSS
'My horse'

(4) *minii mori
my horse
Int. 'My horse'

When the possessive construction is marked for case, CASE suffix precedes POSS suffix, rather than following it. This order applies to all morphological cases and to all person and number combinations. Example (5) shows a possessive NP *(minii) biteγ -min^{j}* ('my book') marked with accusative case, and the accusative suffix *-ii* precedes the first person agreement suffix *-min^{j}*. Note that the reversed stem-POSS-CASE order, as in (6), is ungrammatical.

(5) Šii (minii) biteγ **-ii** **-min^{j}** uj -sen -bi
you.NOM my book **-ACC** **-1SG.POSS** look -PST -1SG
'You read my book'

(6) *Šii (minii) biteγ **-min^{j}** **-ii** uj -sen -bi
you.NOM my book **-1SG.POSS** **-ACC** look -PST -1SG

Khalkha Mongolian, which is closely related to Dagur, has a seemingly parallel construction as the Dagur possessive, where the possessive marker appears to follow case suffix.

(7) Khalkha Mongolian
Baatar nom -ig miny ush -san
Baatar book -ACC 1SG.POSS read -PST
'Baatar read my book.'

I argue that the Khalkha possessive construction in (7) is structurally different from the Dagur case, in that the Mongolian possessive *miny* is a postposed full pronoun, whereas in Dagur it is a genuine agreement marker. As shown in the examples below, in Khalkha Mongolian the possessive pronoun can either precede (8a) or follow (8b) the possessed noun. When the possessive follows the possessed noun, it surfaces as a phonologically reduced form *miny* (often regarded as a particle). Crucially, the postposed *miny* in (8b) still remains a full pronoun syntactically, because *minii* and *miny* cannot co-occur (8c). This suggests that the particle *miny*, as a pronoun, cannot be locally bound. Thus, (8c) is ungrammatical due to Condition B violation.

(8) Khalkha Mongolian

a. Baatar minii nom -ig ush -san
Baatar my book -ACC read -PST
'Baatar read my book.'

b. Baatar nom -ig miny ush -san
Baatar book -ACC 1SG.POSS read -PST

c. *Baatar minii nom -ig miny ush -san
Baatar my book -ACC miny read -PST

The parallel data from Dagur suggest that its POSS marker is a genuine agreement morpheme, instead of a postposed pronoun. As shown in the contrast between (9a) and (9b), the POSS ending *-min*^{j} is obligatory, whereas the genitive pronoun *minii* is optional. In addition, if the POSS suffix *-min*^{j} were a pronoun, a form like *minii bite*γ *-min*^{j} in (9c) is predicted to be illicit, due to Condition B violation. However, the co-occurrence of the POSS suffix and the genitive pronoun results in a fully grammatical form (9c). These facts suggests that the Dagur POSS marker is not a pronoun, but an agreement morpheme.

(9) Dagur

a. *Baatar minii biteγ -ii uj -sen
Baatar my book -ACC read -PST
'Baatar read my book.'

b. Baatar biteγ -ii -min^{j} uj -sen
Baatar book -ACC 1SG.POSS read -PST

c. Baatar minii biteγ -ii min^{j} uj -sen
Baatar my book -ACC miny read -PST

The data presented in this section suggest that Dagur POSS suffixes are genuine agreement markers instead of full pronouns. In the subsequent discussion, I will treat them as occupying D in the nominal projection.

3. Suspended affixation and postsyntactic Lowering

I propose a postsyntactic analysis of the Dagur CASE-POSS order, in which K lowers to D (Embick and Noyer 2001). Evidence from suspended affixation shows that the suffix order cannot be due to linear reordering operations such as Local Dislocation, and that Dagur suspended affixation is base-generated, instead of ellipsis.

3.1 Suspended affixation in Dagur

Suspended affixation is a group of phenomena in which one or more affixes only appear on the final conjunct, while taking scope over the entire coordinate structure. In these constructions, the final conjunct bears one or more word-final suffixes, and the non-final conjunct lacks those suffixes (Kornfilt 2012). In Dagur, coordinated structures can be formed with or without an overt coordinator, and both allow suspended affixation.

(10) seb (boloor) šeb^{j} -sul ir -sen
teacher CONJ student -PL come -PST
'teachers and students came'
*'a teacher and students came'

The structure of suspended affixation has been analyzed via two major types of approach: the first type analyzes it as morpheme ellipsis (e.g., Guseva and Weisser 2018 for Mari, Despić 2017 for suspended affixation-like phenomenon in Serbian). The second type of approach, represented by research on Turkish suspended affixation (Kornfilt 1996, Kornfilt 2012, also see Kabak 2007, Good and Yu 2005), analyzes it as coordination under a single morpheme, with all further inflection taking place on that morpheme.

(11) ellipsis analysis
[[A ~~-suffixes~~] & [B -suffixes]]

(12) base-generation analysis
[A & B] -suffixes

In the following sections, I will show that coordinate structures involving the CASE and POSS suffixes display unexpected patterns, which sheds light on the structure of Dagur nominal domain. Specifically, I will argue that a) Dagur suspended affixation is not ellipsis, and must be analyzed as a base-generated structure as in (12), and b) the CASE-POSS order cannot be due to linear morphological operations such as metathesis, and c) a Lowering analysis can account for the relevant facts regarding the interaction between the suffix order and suspended affixation.

3.2 The structure of Dagur suspended affixation

It has been noted that the CASE-POSS order is also possible in some Finno-Ugric languages such as Mari (Guseva and Weisser 2018, henceforth G&W). Based on facts on suspended affixation, G&W argue that the order is the consequence of postsyntactic metathesis that applies to linearized structures. It has been observed that many languages with suspended affixation conform to the *right edge condition*.

(13) *The right edge condition*
The elements omitted due to suspended affixation must be at the right edge of the non-final conjuncts.

Part of G&W's account involves some surprising facts on Mari suspended affixation. In (14), the judgment of the a. and b. forms is the exact opposite of what is expected under the right edge condition. Analyzing suspended affixation as ellipsis, G&W argue that this is due to the right edge suffix being elided after linearization, but crucially before the metathesis operation changes the order from POSS-CASE to CASE-POSS. Thus CASE–the right edge suffix before metathesis–can be elided.

(14)

	coordination with SA	Mari
a.	stem-CASE-POSS & stem-CASE-POSS	✓
b.	stem-CASE-POSS & stem-CASE-POSS	*

(-CASE suffix involves a subset of cases which G&W refer to as K1 or local case)

Such analysis cannot be extended to Dagur. In Dagur, suspended affixation almost uniformly observes the right edge condition. Thus, a form such as (15), in which CASE suffix is omitted while preserving the edgemost POSS suffix, is ungrammatical as expected.

(15) *Merden taxku -maan^{j} boloor ger -d -maan^{j} iči -sen
Merden school -1PL.POSS CONJ house -DAT -1PL.POSS go -PST
Int. 'Merden went to our school and our house'

However, suspending POSS while preserving CASE is also unacceptable (16), despite that such construction conforms to the right edge condition. The comparison between Mari and Dagur with respect to these two types of suspended affixation is summarized in (17).

(16) ??/*Merden taxku -d boloor ger -d -maan^{j} iči -sen
Merden school -DAT CONJ house -DAT -1PL.POSS go -PST

(17)

	coordination with SA	Mari	Dagur
a.	stem-CASE-POSS & stem-CASE-POSS	✓	*
b.	stem-CASE-POSS & stem-CASE-POSS	*	??/*

If Dagur CASE-POSS order is due to metathesis (under the assumption that suspended affixation is ellipsis), we would expect (17a) to be grammatical, contrary to fact. The generalization for Dagur seems to be that eliding either CASE or POSS is degraded or ungrammatical, which is difficult to explain if the order is derived by ellipsis and metathesis.

In the following sections, I will present empirical evidence which suggests that Dagur suspended affixation cannot be analyzed as ellipsis, but must be analyzed as a base-generated structure. Secondly, I will show that instead of metathesis, an analysis based on Lowering is on the right track. The full range of possible and impossible forms of suspended affixation in Dagur is reported in (18). As shown in this table, Dagur suspended affixation generally observes the right edge condition, except for the situations in which both CASE and POSS are involved, specifically (18j-l). In particular, in (18j), when POSS suffix–the right edge suffix–is suspended, the result is still unacceptable.

(18) *Distribution of suspended affixation in Dagur nominal conjunction*

a.	✓	N-PL & N-PL	h.	✓	N-PL-POSS & N-PL-POSS
b.	✓	N-POSS & N-POSS	i.	*	N-PL -POSS & N-PL-POSS
c.	✓	N-CASE & N-CASE	j.	??/*	N(-PL)-CASE-POSS & N(-PL)-CASE-POSS
d.	✓	N-PL-CASE & N-PL-CASE	k.	*	N(-PL)-CASE-POSS & N(-PL)-CASE-POSS
e.	✓	N-PL-CASE & N-PL-CASE	l.	✓	N(-PL)-CASE-POSS & N(-PL)-CASE-POSS
f.	*	N-PL-CASE & N-PL-CASE	m.	*	N-PL-CASE-POSS & N-PL-CASE-POSS
g.	✓	N-PL-POSS & N-PL-POSS	n.	*	N-PL-CASE-POSS & N-PL-CASE-POSS

I argue that Dagur suspended affixation cannot be analyzed as ellipsis, but must be a base-generated structure where two smaller constituents are coordinated under a single morpheme, represented in (19), with all further inflections taking place on that morpheme.

(19) $[\ XP_1\ \&\ XP_2\ ]$ -suffix$_1$ -suffix$_2$ -suffix$_3$

The first piece of evidence comes from the interaction between different types of coordinators. In Dagur *boloor* conjoins two argumental DPs (20), whereas *beitleen* conjoins two predicates (21-23), which can be NP, AP, or VP.

(20) Pii **boloor** čas
pen CONJ paper
'Pen ***and*** paper'

(21) Merden seb **beitleen** tašikui daa
Merden teacher CONJ principal
'Merden is a teacher ***and*** a principal'

(22) Ene ger engel **beitleen** geɣeeken
this room spacious CONJ bright
'This room is spacious ***and*** bright'

(23) pinguee -ii id -sen **beitleen** moil -ii (baa) id -sen -bi
apple -ACC eat -PST CONJ hackberry -ACC also eat -PST -1SG
'I ate apple ***and*** (also) ate hackberry'

Further, the 3SG.POSS marker *-in*^{j} has a special 'nominalizing' function when used with adjectives. In Dagur, APs such as *xulaan* ('red') cannot directly function as an argument (24). However, the 3S.POSS marker *-in*^{j} can attach to an AP such as *xulaan*, turning the AP into an argumental DP meaning "the red one" (25-26), with no possessive interpretation.

(24) ***xulaan** -ii id -sen -bi
red -ACC eat -PST -1SG
Int. 'I ate the red one'

(25) xulaan -in^{j}
red -3SG.POSS
'the red one'

(26) xulaan -ii -in^{j} id -sen -bi
red -ACC -3SG.POSS eat -PST -1SG
'I ate the red one'

Note that an [*Adj*-3SG.POSS & *Adj*-3SG.POSS] coordination, which conjoins two DPs like the one in (25), requires argument coordinator *boloor*, not predicate coordinator *beitleen*. This is shown in (27a) and (27b). However, as shown in (27c-27d), omitting 3SG.POSS suffix on the first conjunct requires the predicate coordinator, and is ungrammatical with the argument coordinator. When suspended affixation applies, giving rise to (27c), the meaning is changed from that of the unsuspended version (27a), and (27c) necessarily means 'I ate the one that is big and red'.

(27) [context: there are many apples on the table]

a. xiɣ -ii -in^{j} **boloor** xulaan -ii -in^{j} id -sen -bi
big -ACC -3SG.POSS CONJ red -ACC -3SG.POSS eat -PST -1SG
'I ate the big one and the red one'

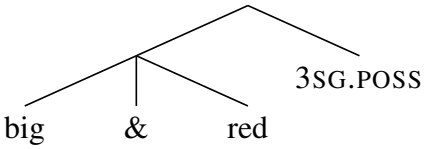
b. *xiɣ -ii -in^{j} **beitleen** xulaan -ii -in^{j} id -sen -bi

c. xiγ **beitleen** xulaan -ii -in^{j} id -sen -bi
big CONJ red -ACC -3SG.POSS eat -PST -1SG
'I ate the one that is big and red';
*'I ate the big one and the red one.'

d. *xiγ **boloor** xulaan -ii -n^{j} id -sen -bi

If suspended affixation were ellipsis, which applies at PF, the underlying structure in (27c-d) would be [big-~~3SG.POSS~~ & red-3SG.POSS], and hence would not require the predicate coordinator. However, we see the predicate coordinator is obligatory in (27c-d), which requires that the structure is underlyingly (28). This is expected under the analysis where suspeneded affixation is base-generated in Dagur.

(28)



The second piece of evidence for the base-generation analysis comes from another non-possessive function of the 3SG.POSS suffix *-in^{j}*. The suffix *-in^{j}* can attach to noun phrases which are previously mentioned in the discourse, indicating (anaphoric) definiteness, with no possessive interpretation. This is shown in (29). When the sentences (29b) and (29c) are preceded by (29a), the noun phrase *biteγ -in^{j}* in (29b) refers to the book that is previously mentioned in the discourse. As shown in (29c), without *-in^{j}*, there is no definite interpretation on the noun phrase *biteγ* 'book'.

(29) a. Udiš nek biteγ_1 au -sen -bi. ...
yesterday one book buy -PST -1SG.
'Yesterday I bought a book....

b. ...Merden [biteγ_1 -ii **-in^{j}**] uj -sen
Merden book -ACC -3S.POSS look -PST
'...Merden read the book.'

c. ...Merden biteγ uj -sen
Merden book look -PST
'...Merden read (a) book.'

Under the ellipsis analysis, we predict that [stem-POSS & stem-POSS] is allowed regardless of the meaning of POSS. Since 3SG.POSS suffix *-in^{j}* in its regular possessive meaning can be freely suspended (30), we expect that the same morpheme ellipsis process is still possible when 3SG.POSS *-in^{j}* functions as a definite marker, as in the context of (31).

(30) Inii xukur boloor mor^{j} -in^{j}
His ox CONJ horse -3S.POSS
'His ox and horse'

(31) a. Udiš **xukur$_1$** aol -d iči -sen. **Mori$_2$** hudee -d iči -sen...
yesterday ox mountain -DAT go -PST. horse grassland -DAT go -PST
'Yesterday, the ox went to the mountain. The horse went to the grassland.'

b. ...Ene udur, [**xukur$_1$ -in^{j}**, **mori$_2$** -**in^{j}**] xajir -sen
this day ox -3S.POSS horse -3S.POSS return -PST
'Today, the ox and the horse returned. '

However, for some speakers, suspending *-in^{j}* on the first conjunct in (31b) is ungrammatical, as shown in (32). Note that the same group of speakers allow suspended affixation of regular possessive suffix (30). This shows that the possibility of suspended affixation is affected by the semantics of the suffix involved. Such pattern is unexpected under the ellipsis analysis.

(32) %...Ene udur, [**xukur$_1$**, **mori$_2$** **-in^{j}**] xajir -sen
this day ox -3S.POSS horse -3S.POSS return -PST
'Today, the ox and the horse returned. '

To sum up, suspended affixation in Dagur is most adequately analyzed as a base-generated structure, instead of ellipsis. Next, I will turn to the analysis which accounts for the unexpected morpheme suspension patterns observed in (18j-l), namely, when the conjunct is followed by CASE and POSS suffixes, suspending either suffix is ungrammatical.

4. Towards an analysis

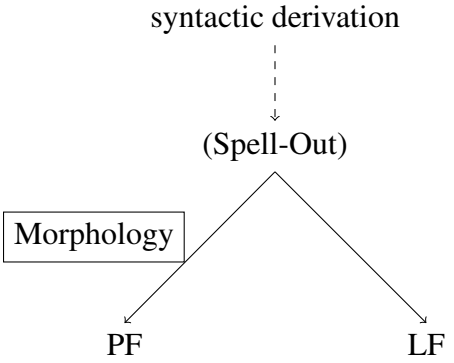
The current proposal accounts for the unexpected suspended affixation patterns in [stem-CASE-POSS & stem-CASE-POSS] coordination, repeated below:

- Suspending CASE is ungrammatical
  *stem-CASE-POSS & stem-CASE-POSS
- Suspending POSS is severely degraded/unacceptable
  ??/* stem-CASE-POSS & stem-CASE-POSS
- Suspending both is grammatical
  ✓stem -CASE-POSS & stem-CASE-POSS

In this section, I show that a Lowering analysis based on the view that Dagur suspended affixation is base-generated accounts for all these facts. I will assume a model of grammar as in (33), in which there is *late insertion* of phonological material into terminal nodes. Following Embick and Marantz (2008) and Embick and Noyer (2001), I assume that the

nodes are the primitives of syntactic derivations, and morphological operations, such as Lowering (hierarchical arrangement of morphemes) and Local Dislocation (arrangement based on liearized structures), are part of the PF component of the grammar.

(33) *The grammar*



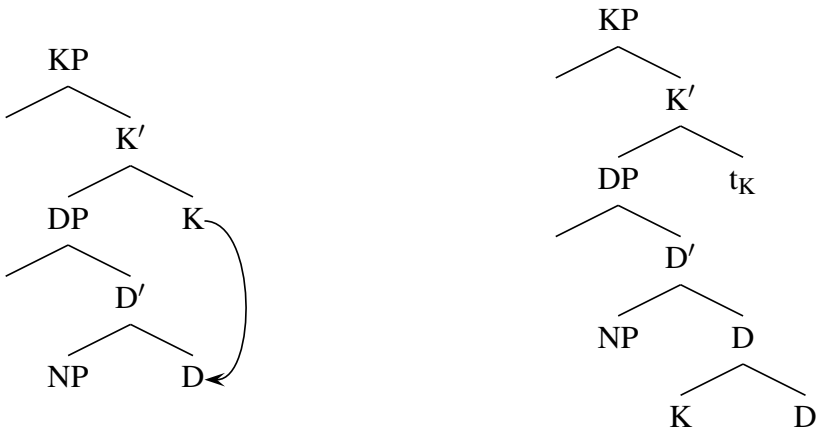
(adopted from Embick and Marantz (2008): (2))

Unlike Local Dislocation, which operates in terms of linear adjacency, Lowering operates in terms of hierarchical structure (Embick and Noyer 2001). It unites syntactic terminals which are phonologically spelled together but not joined in overt syntax: the head X^0 lowers to Y^0, the head of its complement.

(34) Lowering of X^0 to Y^0
$[_{XP}X^0 ... [_{YP} ... Y^0 ...]] \longrightarrow [_{XP} ... [_{YP} ... Y^0 + X^0 ...]]$ (Embick and Noyer 2001)

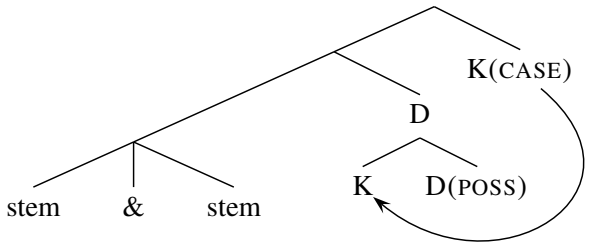
I take the POSS suffix to be located on D, and CASE suffix on K, taking DP as its complement. Based on (34), I propose a K-Lowering operation which lowers K to D postsyntactically, forming one single complex head:

(35) K-Lowering



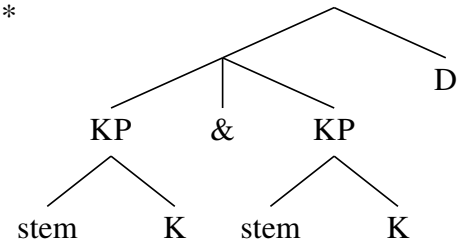
This operation accounts for the [stem & stem-CASE-POSS] coordination. Since the CASE-POSS order is derived postsyntactically by lowering K to D, the suspended affixation structure must be the one shown in (36). That is, the base-generated coordination structure conjoins two stems, with D and K located above the whole coordination. After lowering, K and D become two sub-heads conjoined under a single head, taking scope over the whole coordination.

(36)



Secondly, recall that ??/*[[stem-CASE] & [stem-CASE-POSS]] is unacceptable, despite that it conforms to the right edge condition. Since this surface form can only be derived with a construction in which DP dominates KP, and the underlying syntactic hierarchy is taken to be uniformly KP>>DP, it is correctly excluded. In other words, a coordinated structure like (37), which would give rise to the surface form ??/*[[stem-CASE] & [stem-CASE-POSS]], is not licit because it violates the language's underlying hierarchy of projections.

(37) *



In other words, the current analysis suggests that ??/*[stem-CASE] & [stem-CASE-POSS] is degraded because of the constraint on the syntactic structure, which states that KP must dominate DP. However, there are some apparent alternatives to explain its ungrammaticality. For example, one could suggest that ??/*[stem-CASE] & [stem-CASE-POSS] is illicit because the language disallows conjoining two KPs in the first place. One could also suggest that it is illicit simply due to an economy constraint that requires CASE to be elided if possible. In order to sustain the current analysis, it must be independently shown that the language allows conjoining two KPs (i.e., [stem-CASE] & [stem-CASE]). In the following sentence, coordinating KPs is grammatical.

(38) ...**seb** **-tii**, **šeb^{j}** **-tii**, **emgun** **-tii**, **kekur** **-tii** gub kudl
...teacher -COMIT, student -COMIT, woman -COMIT, child -COMIT all act
-sen
-PST
'... teachers, students, women, and children all took action' (Wuzhur 2003: 313)

In addition, the current analysis predicts that [stem-CASE] & [stem-CASE-POSS] coordination constructed based on (38) should be degraded. This prediction is borne out. The following sentence intends to give the reading in which the 1SG.POSS suffix *-min^{j}* scopes over all four conjuncts – the sentence is severely degraded. The judgment of (39) is expected under the view that Dagur nominal structure is underlyingly KP>>DP, and (39) requires a structure which violates such underlying structure, hence degraded.

(39) ??/*...seb -tii, šeb^{j} -tii, emgun -tii, kekur -tii **-min^{j}**
teacher -COMIT, student -COMIT, woman -COMIT, child -COMIT -1SG.POSS
gub kudl -sen
all act -PST
Int.'... my teachers, my students, my wife[1], and my children all took action'

In addition, the Lowering analysis predicts that suspending both CASE and POSS should be grammatical, because K and D are located above the coordinate structure. This prediction is borne out: in (40), having both CASE and POSS ending on only the final conjunct makes the sentence grammatical:

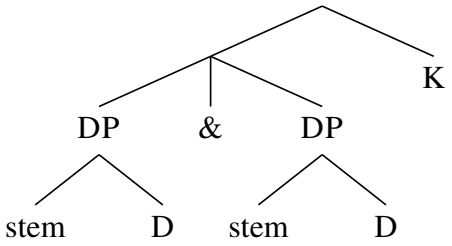
(40) ...seb, šeb^{j}, emgun, kekur **-tii** **-min^{j}** gub kudl -sen
teacher, student, woman, child -COMIT -1SG.POSS all act -PST

This directly supports the current Lowering analysis. In the conjoined structure (40), D and K are merged above the coordinated stems, and K lowers to D postsyntactically, resulting in the CASE-POSS order.

Furthermore, recall that a [stem-POSS & stem-CASE-POSS] coordination is ungrammatical in Dagur. While its ungrammaticality in Dagur is captured by the right edge condition, we still need independent explanation to account for why this form is excluded. In Dagur, coordinating two DPs is perfectly grammatical. Since [DP & DP] is a licit structure, theoretically it should be possible to conjoin two DPs under a single KP.

[1]The word *emgun* is ambiguous between the meanings 'woman' and 'wife'.

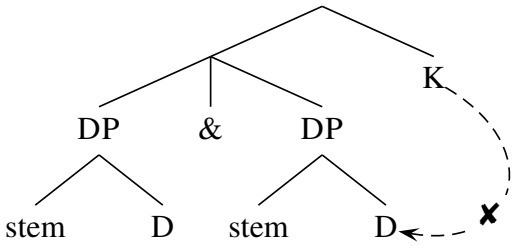
(41)



After linearization, (41) has the form [[stem-POSS] & [stem-POSS-CASE]], which is ungrammatical in Dagur. An analysis based on metathesis cannot explain why (41) does not give rise to grammatical surface forms. Assuming metathesis applies after linearization, reversing the order between POSS and CASE. The resulting order would be [[stem-POSS] & [stem-CASE-POSS]], which still an illicit structure in Dagur.

A Lowering analysis straightforwardly accounts for why despite that (41) is a possible coordinate structure, it cannot give rise to a licit surface form. While the language allows the coordination of two DPs, K cannot lower to D due to the nature of Lowering defined in (34), which specifies that a head lowers to the head of its complement. In (42) the head of K's complement is the coordinator head &, which is not a possible host for K-Lowering. Thus, the structure is ungrammatical.

(42)



5. Conclusions

This paper has examined the structure of Dagur possessive constructions and the exceptional CASE-POSS suffix order in the nominal domain. Results from testing a wide range of suspended affixation possibilities reveal that Dagur suspended affixation is base-generated, instead of the result of ellipsis. The morphological patterns and the exceptional morpheme order in Dagur possessive constructions are straightforwardly captured by the Lowering analysis presented above. By locating the source of CASE-POSS order in morphology, this account maintains that Dagur shares the same underlying syntactic structure as other languages with POSS-CASE orders, such as Turkish.

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