In the Erzya language there are suffixes which correlate with the personal pronouns provided that the latter are in the nominative or the genitive. The correlation is so extensive that personal suffixes correlating to the nominative personal pronouns are readily attached to predicative NPs, as well as the finite verb in predicative sentence types. Likewise, possessive suffixes correlating to genitive-form personal pronouns are added to the head of the possession NP in certain cases.

NPs in the Erzya language with genitive-form attributes can be marked with possessive suffixes or determinate/definite markers, which are in apposition to zero-marking indeterminate/indefinite. All three forms of the NP can be observed as the syntactic subject – the indeterminate form, with no marking, and the determinate and possessive forms indicated by suffixes. What makes the possessive suffix interesting is that possessive relations in Erzya are generally anaphoric, whereas the referent of a third person possessor might be located in the previous sentence or even more remotely; a possessive suffix is an adequate marker for the person of the possessor. Determinate marking, on the other hand, usually indicates contrast or topicalization and tends to require the presence of the possessor.

Possessive suffixes in Erzya indicate virtually the same thing as the genitive forms of the correlating personal pronouns. In the case of third person possession both the pronouns and the possessive suffixes can make direct reference to a genitive-form NP, a feature contrary to that of the Finnish system where the PX appears to be subordinated to the third person genitive-form pronoun. Furthermore possessive suffixes in the Erzya language are used in both possessive and habitive expressions, whereas a habitive construction would be a predication of the possessive relation.

A possessive suffix on the subject of a sentence tends to be used without an accompanying genitive-form pronoun when the possessor is obvious from the theme of the/a preceding sentence. Hence a lone PX tends to indicate a positionally more remote or by discourse more familiar referent than a personal-pronoun. A construction with the latter, on the other hand, usually entails contrast or topicalization of the focus or more prominent elements of the preceding sentence.

In the Erzya language body-parts such as ‘eyes’, ‘nose’, ‘ears’, etc. are common to the subject of sentences indicating perception. One might immediately regard these as referring to the instrument of the verb of perception. The additional usage of possessive suffixes might therefore be seen as an indication of an experiencer notion in the primary argument of a verb of perception regardless to whether that primary argument involves an actor or an instrument, see (1) and (2) below.

(1) Сельме нзэ неи+ть?
   eye/eyes+ POSS-PX3SG see + PRED-PX3PL?
   ‘Do his/her/its eyes see?’ > ‘Can he/she/it see?’

(2) Не +и?
   to-see + PRED-PX3SG?
   ‘Does he/she/it see?’

Constructions with the role instrument attributed to the primary argument of the type observed in (1) above, can be attributed a modal nuance. Such is the case of other verbs of perception, as well, regardless to whether the verb operates as an intransitive with a single argument or a transitive with two. Nevertheless, it is difficult to find a correlation between the expression of instrument and the aforementioned modal nuance.

To better assess the usage of this modal nuance it is important that we return to the meaning of the Erzya genitive, and the semantics of a statement involving a perception verb with the instrument as sub-
ject. Firstly body-parts are indicative of a meronymic relation part-to-whole, and secondly perception verbs can take primary arguments with the notion of ACTOR or INSTRUMENT.

From a meronymic viewpoint of example (3) only the INSTRUMENT as a part of the whole is involved. Hence there is no presupposition of a reaction made by the possessor. It is as though the eyes see but no other part of the person becomes involved.

(3) Сельме + изь не + изь киска + нть.
   eye/eyes + POSS-PX3SG see + PRED-PX3PL_OBJ3 dog + GEN_DET_SG?
   ‘His/her/its eyes saw the dog?’

In order to insure the presupposition of involvement of the possessor, the primary argument of the verb of perception ‘to see’ must be attributed the notion of ACTOR, see (4). Here the verbal marking alone is sufficient.

(4) Сельм + сэ + изь не + изе киска + нть.
    eye/eyes + INE+POSS-PX3SG see + PRED-PX3SG_OBJ3SG dog + GEN_DET_SG?
   ‘He/she/it saw the dog with his/her/its eyes?’

It will interesting to see whether other instances with the alternation of notions of ACTOR (possessor) versus INSTRUMENT (body-part) attributed to the primary argument also involve a modal nuance.