

The Structural Asymmetry between Possessors and Possessums

When the ownership between a possessor and its possessum is inalienable, Korean allows both of them to be marked with accusative case (1a). Interestingly, although the possessor *John* and the possessum *tali* 'leg' are marked with the same case, they show different syntactic behavior. First, the possessum resists syntactic extraction. The possessor is scrambled without any restriction (2a) whereas the possessum cannot be scrambled past the possessor (2b). Unlike the possessor (3a), the possessum cannot be promoted past the possessum by passive (3b). Only the possessor and not the possessum can be topicalized, as shown in (4). Second, the possessor NP can be changed into a wh-phrase (5a) while the possessum cannot (5b). Naturally, a couple of crucial questions arise: What's the nature of the extraction difference between possessors and possessum? Why can't the possessum have wh-interpretation?

I argue that the difference in (2-5) is structural and is explained by a principle on operations within the framework of the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 2001). Following Abney (1987) and others, argument nominals are in fact "DPs". I assume that possessive DPs are a form of "disguised" locative constructions (cf. Larson and Cho 1999). PP contains two arguments: a theme (*tali* 'leg') and a location (*John*) (6a). D selects PP (6b). The surface form of the possessives is derived by raising of the PP object *John* (6c). This movement is driven by the EPP feature checking. The extraction difference between the possessor and the possessum is explained by the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC) (7) (Chomsky 2001). The edge is either a specifier or an element adjoined to HP. H and its edge are accessible only up to the next strong phase, under the PIC. Hence, operations such as Move and Agree target the edge of every strong Phase, vP and CP. In addition to vP and CP, I assume DP is also a strong Phase. Elements in the Spec of D can undergo Move or Agree whereas elements in the Compl position cannot. Now, considering the PIC, look at the structure (6c). The possessor *John* is located in the Spec of D (the edge of the phase) while the possessum *tali* 'leg' is in the Compl position of D (the domain of the phase). Therefore, the possessor can undergo movement such as scrambling, passivization and topicalization (2a, 3a, and 4a). By contrast, the possessum cannot undergo these operations (2b, 3b, and 4b). The difference between (5a) and (5b) is also accounted for the PIC. In order for a wh-feature on a wh-phrase to be licensed, it should enter into Agree with the same feature on C. The possessor in the Spec of D, *nwukwulul* can agree with the wh-feature on C (5a) while the possessum in the Compl position of D *mwuessul* cannot (5b).

I show that my analysis extends beyond Korean to handle facts in Hungarian possessors. Szabolcsi (1983) observes that Hungarian possessive nominals show up either in the nominative case (9a) or in the dative case (9b). The former follow the definite determiner *az* while the latter precede the definite determiner *a*. The nominative possessor cannot be removed from the nominal (10a) while the dative possessor can (10b). Assuming that the definite determiner is D, the extraction difference is easily accounted for. Only the dative possessor which is in Spec of D can undergo movement, satisfying the PIC.

- (1) Mary-ka John-ul tali-lul cha-ess-ta.
Mary-NOM John-ACC leg-ACC kick-PAST-DECL 'Mary kicked John's leg.'
- (2) a. John-ul Mary-ka tali-lul cha-ess-ta
John-ACC Mary-NOM leg-ACC kick-PAST-DECL 'Mary kicked John's leg.'
b. *tali-lul Mary-ka John-ul cha-ess-ta.
leg-ACC Mary-NOM John-ACC kick-PAST-DECL 'Mary kicked John's leg.'
- (3) a. John-i tali-lul cha-i-ess-ta
John-NOM leg-ACC kick-PASS-PAST-DECL 'John's leg was kicked.'
b. *Tali-ka John-ul cha-i-ess-ta
Leg-NOM John-ACC kick-PASS-PAST-DECL 'John's leg was kicked'
- (4) a. John-un Mary-ka tali-lul cha-ess-ta
John-TOP Mary-NOM leg-ACC kick-PAST-DECL 'As for John, Mary kicked his leg.'
b. *tali-nun Mary-ka John-ul cha-ess-ta
leg-TOP Mary-NOM John-ACC kick-PAST-DECL 'As for the leg, Mary kicked John.'
- (5) a. Mary-ka nwukwu-lul tali-lul cha-ss-ni?
Mary-NOM who-ACC leg-ACC kick-PAST-DECL 'Whose leg did Mary kick?'
b. *Mary-ka John-ul mwuess-ul cha-ss-ni?
Mary-NOM John-ACC what-ACC kick-PAST-DECL 'Which part of John did Mary kick?'
- (6) a. [PP [NP tali] [P' [DP John] P]] b. [DP [D' [PP [NP tali] [P' [DP John] P]] D]]
c. [DP [DP John_i] [D' [PP [NP tali] [P' t_i P]] D]]
- (7) The domain of H is not accessible to operations outside HP, but only H and its edge.
- (8) [[[DP [DP John_i] [D' [PP [NP tali] [P' t_i P]] D]]].....C]
- (9) a. az én-∅ vendég-e-m b. én-nek-em a vendég-e-m
the I-NOM guest-poss-1sg I-dat-1sg the guest-poss-1sg 'my guest'
- (10) a. *Ki-∅_i ismer-té-tek [a t_i vendég-é-∅-t]?
wh-NOM know-past-2pl the guest-poss-3sg-acc 'Whose did you know guest?'
b. Ki-nek_i alsz-ik [t_i a t_i vendég-é-∅-∅]?
Who-dat sleep-3sg the guest-poss-3sg-nom 'Whose guest sleeps?'

References

- Abney, S. 1987. The English Noun Phrase in Its Sentential Aspect. Ph.D. dissertation, MIT, Cambridge, MA.
- Chomsky, N. 2001. Derivation by phase, In Kenstowiz, M. ed. *Ken Hale: A Life in Language* 1-52. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Larson, R and S. Cho. Temporal adjectives and the structure of possessive DPs. *WCCFL* 18: 299-311
- Szabolcsi, A. 1983. The possessors that ran away from home. *The Linguistic Review* 3: 89-102