

## (Ir)relevant Possessors

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The relevance of a possessor to the information expressed in an utterance has been recognized as a factor in stipulating external possession (EP) constructions, where the possessor seems to be placed on the same level as the possessum (Shibatani 1974; Iordanskaja & Mel'čuk 1997; Payne & Barshi 1999). This paper proposes that some alternations between constructions which are traditionally considered as expressing NP-level internal possession (IP) can have the same motivation; hence, the semantic aspects of the external/internal possession distinction turn out to be vaguer, and this can be reflected clearly in the morphosyntax of certain constructions as well.

As a point of departure, it is taken that non-canonical possessive constructions (such as those in (1-4b)) - as opposed to canonical possessives (1-4a) - often share some common properties including referential indeterminacy, the capacity to be used in quantificational contexts, the possibility of less topical possessors etc. This fact can be captured by the "hypothesis of relevant possessor" which states that dependent nominals in such constructions are used in functions other than the pure anchoring function discussed, for example, by Keenan (1974), Langacker (1995) and Taylor (1996). In particular, this hypothesis also predicts the markedness of non-canonical possessives reflected sometimes in the complexity of their structure, unexpected word order, and/or the use of sentential devices (as opposed to NP-internal) for introducing possessors.

Moreover, the "sentential design" of non-canonical possessives may give rise to some "mixed constructions" which combine properties of external and internal possessive types (5-7); this is considered as a result of double functioning of such possessors as concerning the core proposition on the one hand, and as restricting the reference of the possessum on the other hand. Such "mixed constructions" may be argued to allow multiple analyses in the sense of Hankamer (1977) in the structural framework, or to permit some direct property analysis in some more usage-based model. The latter possibility, in fact, also provides a relation between non-canonical "actual" possessives and datives as relevant "potential" possessors (cf. examples (8-10)).

### Examples

- (1) a. *John's picture*  
b. *a picture of John*
- (2) Russian  
a. *Petina žena mozet kupit' eto.*  
Petja-Adj wife-Nom can-3Sg buy-Inf this-Acc  
'Someone, namely Petja's wife, can buy this.'  
b. *Žena Peti mozet kupit' eto.*  
wife-Nom Petja-Gen can-3Sg buy-Inf this-Acc  
'Petja's wife can buy it (because she is the wife of Petja.)
- (3) Hebrew (Borer 1999)  
a. *beit ha-mora* 'the house of the teacher'  
house:CS the-teacher  
b. *bayit Sel ha-mora* 'a house of the teacher'  
house of the-teacher

- (4) Lithuanian (Say 2002)
- a. *arbatos stiklinė* 'tea-glass'  
tea-Gen glass
- b. *stiklinė arbatos* 'a glass of tea'  
glass tea-Gen
- (5) Russian
- a. *otec soldatam* 'a servant to the Tsar, a father to soldiers'  
father-Nom soldiers-Dat
- b. *Slomalas' mašina u Peti.* 'A/the car of Petja is broken.'  
broken-3Sg car-Nom at Petja-Gen
- (6) Hungarian (Szabolcsi 1994: 199)
- Kati (nem) csak Mari-nak a kalap-já-t látta* 'Kati saw (not) only Mari's hat (but...)'  
Kati (not) only Mari-Dat the hat-Pos.3Sg-Acc saw
- (7) Warlpiri (Hale 1981: 334)
- Nama ka langa-kurra yuka-mi kurdu-kurra.* 'The ant is crawling into the child's ear.'  
ant Aux.Pres ear-All enter-NPst child-All
- (8) Imbabura Quechua (Cole 1985: 113)
- wasi-ta rura-rka-ni ñuka churi-paj* 'I made a house for my son.'  
house-Obj make-Pst-1Sg 1Sg son-Pos
- (9) Pitta-Pitta (Blake 1979: 197)
- ŋa-tu kat<sup>y</sup>u-na wat<sup>y</sup>ama-ka kiniyari-ŋa-na* a. 'I washed the clothes for the girl.'  
I-Erg clothes-Acc wash-Pst girl-Purp-Acc b. 'I washed the girl's clothes.'
- (10) Hungarian (Wunderlich, in press)
- Péter Anná-nak tartja a lámpa-já-t.* a. 'Peter holds his/her lamp for Anna.'  
Peter Anna-Dat hold the lamp-Pos.3Sg-Acc b. 'Peter holds Anna's lamp.'

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