

Deal 2013: Possessor raising

LING 200B · Ethan Poole · 22 November 2021

1 External possession

• *Internal possession*

Generally, the expression of possessive relations involves complex DP structure:

(1) German

Tim hat das Auto **des Nachbarn** gewaschen
Tim has the car the neighbour.M.GEN washed
'Tim washed the neighbour's car'

* *External possession*¹

However, many languages allow possessors to surface EXTERNAL to possessum DPs, without any kind of possessive verb (e.g. *have*):

¹ External possession is sometimes pretheoretically (and confusingly) referred to as 'possessor raising'.

(2) German

Tim hat **dem Nachbarn** das Auto gewaschen
Tim has the neighbour.M.DAT the car washed
'Tim washed the neighbour's car'

⇒ *The puzzle*

- In (2), the bolded phrase is interpreted as the possessor of the car, but syntactically it is a dependent of the *verb*.
- For instance, the possessor bears dative case, and it does not form a constituent with the possessum:

(3) German

[**Dem/*des** **Nachbarn**] hat Tim das Auto gewaschen
the.DAT/the.GEN neighbour has Tim the car washed
'The neighbor, Tim has washed the car.'

• *Parallel with nonfinite clauses*

Possibilities for the dependency in external possession ought to mirror those applying over the edge of nonfinite TP:²

(4) a. Subject raising

[**The buffalo**] seemed [TP ____ to impress Martin]
↑

b. Control into TP

[**The buffalo**] wanted [TP PRO to impress Martin]

(5) a. Possessor raising

Tim washed [**the neighbour**]_{POSSESSOR} [DP ____ the car]
↑

b. Control into DP

Tim washed [**the neighbour**]_{AFFECTEE} [DP PRO the car]

² As Deal very carefully tiptoes around, there is an alternative analysis of control that treats it as movement (Hornstein 1999). For the arguments in this paper, whether control is movement or binding is inconsequential.

- ***The previous literature***

- In many languages—including a striking majority of European languages—, external possession is associated with a requirement of possessor AFFECTEDNESS.
- Affectedness manifests differently across languages: entails the verbal action applying to the possessor, the possessum must be inalienable, the possessor must be animate, the possessor must be alive, etc.
- In short, affectedness is a shorthand for a thematic connection to the verb.³
- This property of external possession follows straightforwardly from a control analysis: as with control into TP, control into DP involves a thematic connection to the matrix predicate.

³ In other words, affectedness is what might be traditionally called a ‘Θ-role’.

⇒ ***Deal’s (2013) argument***

External possession in Nez Perce involves raising of the possessor out of the possessum. Thus, like with nonfinite TP, we find both raising and control with DP.

2 Data

2.1 Background on Nez Perce

- Nez Perce (Nimipuutímt) is a highly endangered language spoken by about 30 elderly individuals in present-day Idaho, Washington, and Oregon.
- Nez Perce is well-known in linguistics for its rich agreement system and tripartite case system.⁴

⁴ See Deal (2010a,b) for an overview.

- ***Basic case and agreement facts***

- Intransitive subjects bear nominative.
- Transitive subjects bear ergative.
- Monotransitive objects bear ‘objective’ case (≈ accusative).
- In ditransitives, the goal bears objective, and the theme bears nominative.
- Object agreement is controlled by the DP bearing objective case.

2.2 The external-possession facts

- ❶ ***Object agreement and objective case***

The possessor bears objective case and controls object agreement (the possessum can do neither):

- (6) *pro* hi-*(nees)-hex-ne’ny-∅-e ma-may’as-na pist.
pro 3SUBJ-O.PL-see-μ-P-REM.PAST PL-child-OBJ father.NOM
 ‘He saw *the children’s* father.’

② Verbal suffix

The verb requires a special suffix *e'ni*:⁵

⁵ The suffix is subject to allomorphy and general phonological processes in the language (see fn. 13 in the paper).

- (7) a. Weet *pro* 'a-capakayk- \emptyset -a hipinwees-ne?
 Y.N *pro* 3OBJ-clean-P-REM.PAST eating.table-OBJ
 'Did you clean the table?'
 b. Weet *pro* 'a-capakayk-*(a'ny)- \emptyset -a Besi-ne hipinwees?
 Y.N *pro* 3OBJ-clean-*(μ)-P-REM.PAST Bessie-OBJ eating.table.NOM
 'Did you clean *Bessie's* table?'

③ No affectedness

There is no affectedness constraint on the possessor:

- (8) *pro* pee-x-te-ne'ny-u' Coosef-ne temikees naaqc hiisemtuks-pe.
pro 3/3-see-go- μ -PROSP Joseph-OBJ tomb.NOM one moon-LOC
 'They will go see *Joseph's* tomb next month.'

④ Not a constituent

The possessor and possessum are freely separable from one another (genitive-marked possessors do not have this property):

- (9) a. Angel-nim paa-'ya \hat{x} -na'ny- \emptyset -a Tatlo-na taaqmaat.
 Angel-ERG 3/3-find- μ -P-REM.PAST Tatlo-OBJ hat.NOM
 'Angel found *Tatlo's* hat.'
 b. Angel-nim Tatlo-na paa-'ya \hat{x} -na'ny- \emptyset -a taaqmaat.
 Angel-ERG Tatlo-OBJ 3/3-find- μ -P-REM.PAST hat.NOM
 c. Angel-nim taaqmaat paa-'ya \hat{x} -na'ny- \emptyset -a Tatlo-na.
 Angel-ERG hat.NOM 3/3-find- μ -P-REM.PAST Tatlo-OBJ

⑤ Obligatoriness

– The highest possessor amongst the IAs must be external:

- (10) a. Weet *pro* 'e-cukwe-ney'-se- \emptyset Luk-ne_i [\langle DP_{possessor_i} \rangle tiim'es]?
 Y.N *pro* 3OBJ-know- μ -IMPERF-PRES Luke-OBJ [book.NOM]
 'Do you know the book of *Luke*?'
 b. *Weet *pro* 'e-cukwe-ce- \emptyset [Luk-nim tiim'es-ne]?
 Y.N *pro* 3OBJ-know-IMPERF-PRES [Luke-GEN book-OBJ]

- (11) *pro* 'ew-'nii-yey'-se- \emptyset Angel-ne pike taaqmaat.
pro 3OBJ-give- μ -IMPERF-PRES Angel-OBJ mother.NOM hat.NOM
 a. 'I'm giving *Angel's* mother a hat.'
 b. *'I'm giving a/the mother *Angel's* hat.'

– Non-highest possessors amongst the IAs must be genitive.

– Possessors in external arguments must be genitive.

⑥ **Mixed structures**

Speakers of contemporary Nez Perce allow a mixed structure where the possessor is genitive, but the verb bears *e'ni* and the possessor controls object agreement:

- (12) a. Tewliki-nm pe-wiw-likeec-e'ny-u' 'aayat-ona 'iniit.
 tree-ERG 3/3-fall[of trees]-on.top-μ-PROSP woman-OBJ house.NOM
 'The tree is going to fall on *the woman's* house.'
- b. Tewliki-nm pe-wiw-likeec-e'ny-u' 'aayat-onm 'iniit.
 tree-ERG 3/3-fall[of trees]-on.top-μ-PROSP woman-GEN house.NOM
 'The tree is going to fall on *the woman's* house.'

3 Analysis

• **General idea**

There are not enough case-assigning heads:

- Both the possessor and the possessum need case (i.e. the Case Filter).⁶
- DPs in Nez Perce do not include any case-assigning heads.
- Thus, possessors must be assigned case in some other way.

⁶ Chomsky (1981)

* **Ingredients**

1. The verbal suffix *e'ni* is the realization of a functional head μ , which projects (somewhere) between V and *v*.
 2. μ makes no semantic contribution:
- (13) $[[\mu]] = \lambda x . x$
3. *v* assigns objective case; the DP to which it assigns objective in turn controls object agreement.
 4. μ assigns nominative case.
 5. μ moves a DP into [Spec, μ P].
 6. Genitive is assigned to a DP in [Spec, DP] at PF, overwriting any case value:

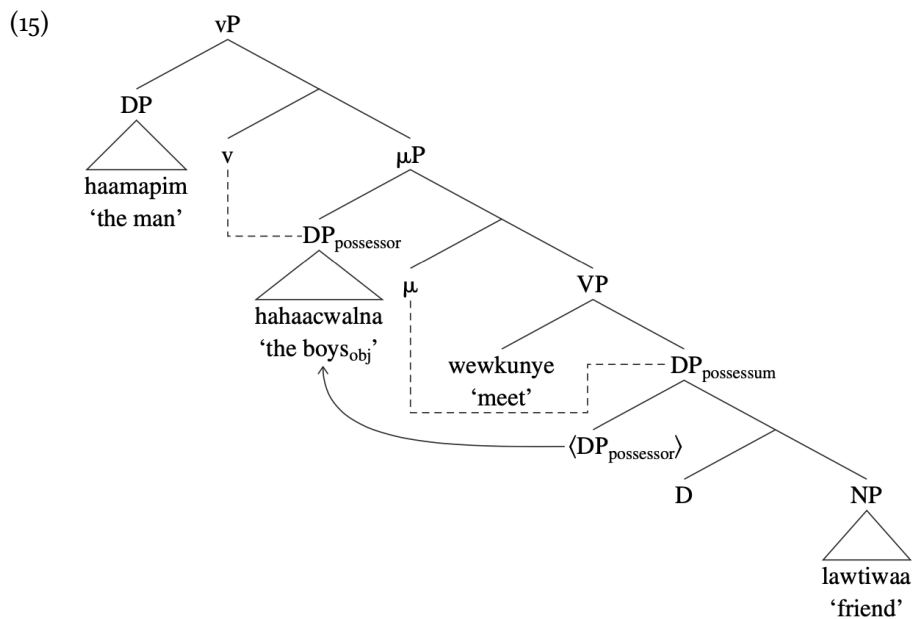
(14) $[CASE:\alpha] \rightarrow [CASE:GEN] / [DP DP:[____] [DP \dots]]$

7. The narrow syntax must attempt to resolve its case problems, i.e. with μ .⁷

⁷ In line with the general framework in Preminger (2011, 2014).

⇒ **Possessor raising**

DP_{POSSESSOR} raises to [Spec, μ P], from where it is assigned objective case by *v* (❶).
 DP_{POSSESSUM} is then assigned nominative case by μ .



• **Immediate consequences**

- Possessor raising is triggered by μ , so *e'ni* occurs (2).
- Because μ has no meaning, the possessor does not need to be affected (3).
- Because $DP_{\text{POSSESSOR}}$ raises out of $DP_{\text{POSSESSUM}}$, $DP_{\text{POSSESSOR}}$ can subsequently be moved separately (4).

• **Deriving the obligatoriness (5)**

- Possessive DPs present a case problem: there are two DPs, but v can only assign case to one of them.
- There are in principle two strategies available: insert μ or resort to default genitive.
- Under the assumption that the narrow syntax must attempt to resolve the case problem, the syntax *must* try inserting μ .

⇒ Therefore, possessor raising is obligatory whenever it can happen.

- Standard locality derives the rest:
 - ⇒ μ cannot target the EA, because the EA is in [Spec, vP], i.e. a higher position.
 - ⇒ μ must target the highest IA because of minimality.
- Whenever a possessor stays in situ, it gets genitive via (14).

• **Optional Spellout (6)**

- In contemporary Nez Perce, possessor raising to [Spec, μP] happens obligatorily—hence, *e'ni* and object agreement, irrespective of the possessor's case.
- However, at PF, either the higher copy or the lower copy can be pronounced:⁸
 - * Higher copy \rightsquigarrow objective
 - * Lower copy \rightsquigarrow genitive (via (14))

⁸ Deal shows independent evidence from Condition C in support of this analysis.

4 Discussion

* *Take-home message*

External possession comes in two varieties: control-like (e.g. German) and raising-like (e.g. Nez Perce).

• *Crosslinguistic picture*

- Deal argues that a functional head like μ is found in several other languages with possessor raising.
- Generally, in these languages though, μ is also found in ditransitives.
- This is not the case in Nez Perce, which Deal argues is because ditransitive verbs are able to assign nominative themselves, thereby removing the need to insert μ .

• *Potential problem*

- What prevents μ from being inserted in the absence of a possessive DP?⁹
- Potential solution: Assume that every case-assigning head must assign its case to some DP (i.e. the Inverse Case Filter).¹⁰

⇒ In the absence of a possessive DP, there is nothing to receive v 's case.

⁹ Sometimes the IA is nominative in Nez Perce (Deal 2010a; Woolford 2015), so maybe this is not actually a problem.

¹⁰ Bošković (2002)

• *Idioms*

Interestingly, in German, there are idioms that require external possession:

- (16) a. Sie hat **mir** den Kopf verdreht
she has me the head twisted
'She caused me having a crush on her'
- b. Sie hat **meinen** Kopf verdreht
she has my head twisted
'She twisted my head'

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