

The Syntax of External Possession: Its Basis in Theta-theory

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'I am an idealist. I don't know where I'm going but I'm on the way.'

Carl Sandburg

Abstract

This thesis examines the phenomenon of external possession, in which a possessor of a verb's argument is licensed syntactically as an argument of the verb. I provide a uniform account of external possession in Japanese and Korean in terms of a thematic operation.

I develop a theory of θ -role assignment which takes seriously the widely held assumption that θ -roles are purely syntactic objects and hence exist independently of the semantics associated with them. This view suggests that θ -roles can be dissociated from the semantics determined by the predicate's lexical meaning and be re-associated with distinct semantics made available during the course of a derivation. (Samek-Lodovici 2003).

In external possession, I argue that *Possessor* semantics is re-associated with a θ -role of the verb. This process is possible when the possessor is realised as a resumptive *pro* within the projection of the possessee argument, which has the consequence that the semantic representation of the possessee argument contains a variable corresponding to the possessor. The verb subsequently assigns the re-associated θ -role to the external possessor.

I show that the present theory can explain the well-known obligatory 'affected' reading of the external possessor of an object and the lack of it for the external possessor of a subject. I argue against analyses which postulate movement of the external possessor or attribute its construal to purely semantic or pragmatic inferences, as the phenomenon is more restricted than such analyses suggest.

External possessors in Japanese and Korean take on the case of their possesseees. In discussing other types of multiple nominative constructions, I demonstrate that such constructions do not necessarily involve a thematic operation. I also show that for case-licensing in these constructions, structures containing multiple specifiers as well as those with multiple copies of the licensing head are required.

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