

Dealing with Relevant Possessors

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1. Introduction*

One of the basics of current discussions of possessives is the opposition between adnominal “internal possession” (IP) and clause level “external possession” (EP) constructions, which are distinguished according to whether the possessor (PR) and the possessum (PM) form a single nominal constituent (IP) or not (EP).¹ In general, the semantic and pragmatic *raison d’être* of this opposition can be formulated in terms of the relevance of a PR (cf. Shibatani 1994; Iordanskaja and Mel’čuk 1995). While in IP constructions (e.g., (1)) the PR is unmarked in respect to its relevance to the information described in an utterance, in EP constructions (such as (2) or (3)) the PR is necessarily relevant.

(1) John’s wife

(2) John hit **Bill** in **the hand**.

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¹ The term “external possession” is used in various ways in the linguistic literature (cf. Payne and Barshi (eds.) 1999). In particular, it is sometimes applied to non-predicative clause level possessive constructions, which are further thought as being “intermediate” between adnominal and predicative possessives (see, e.g., Herslund and Baron 2002). Note, however, that cross-linguistically predicative possessive constructions can be based on the basis of both IP and EP (see Heine 1997 for examples).

- (3) IlKeekonyokie Maasai (Payne and Barshi 1999: 4)²
 áa-yshú en-titó
 3.S:1SG.O-be.alive SG:F-girl:NOM
 ‘My girl is alive (with presumably positive effect on me).’

Relevance is an intricate notion, though, the more so that one can recognize that it is gradual. So, for example, when the absence of information affects only the correctness of interpretation, this information may be considered less relevant than when such an absence affects the very possibility of interpretation.³ The question addressed in this paper is, then, whether this graduality is reflected in the form and behavior of possessive constructions, and whether there are any constructions intermediate between IP and EP.

In this paper I will argue for a positive answer to this question, considering a number of IP alternations that are putatively based on the PR relevance and “mixed constructions” sharing properties of IP and EP. The alternations discussed here include only those that are presumably based (mainly) on the PR relevance, thus excluding cases of definite/indefinite, lexical alienable/inalienable and similar oppositions, since they do not give rise to what Rosenbach (2003) calls “choice contexts”, i.e. contexts where the speaker is relatively free to choose between different constructions.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In Section 2 I present several assumptions about prototypical IP and EP constructions, which serve as basis for the discussion of IP alternations (Section 3) and mixed constructions (Section 4). Section 5 is devoted to possible approaches to the phenomena concerned in the paper. In Section 6 the behavior of “benefactive possessives” is dealt with in

² Throughout this paper, glosses are partly unified and simplified. Abbreviations used in glosses: ABS (absolutive), ACC (accusative), ALL (allative), ASP (aspect), DAT (dative), DEF (definite), ERG (ergative), F (femine), FUT (future), GEN (genitive), IMV (imperative), INDEF (indefinite), INF (infinitive), INTER (interrogative), LOC (locative), M (masculine), NOM (nominative), NPST (non-past), O (object), OBL (oblique), PL (plural), POS (possessive), POSCLR (possessive classifier), PR (possessor), PRES (present), PST (past), S (subject), SG (singular). Numbers denote persons. The analysis of Kanuri and Yidj examples was made by the author of the present paper on the basis of Hutchison 1981 and Dixon 1977 respectively.

³ Of course, the situation is even more complicated, since “calculating the relevance” is also related to information recoverability and topicality. Interestingly, the latter is sometimes almost identified with relevance, cf.: “the contextual RELEVANCE or TOPICALITY of a referent in the discourse, i.e. a degree to which a referent can be taken to be a center of current interest with respect to which a proposition is interpreted as constituting relevant information” (Lambrecht 1994: 54). Although this understanding of relevance also presumes its graduality, one can find that it is narrower than how the relevance is thought in this paper. The term “topicality” is used here in more technical way, namely as a general term for the positions of a nominal (and/or its referent) on the person (1,2 < 3), NP-type (pronoun < proper noun < common noun), animacy (human < non-human animate < inanimate), referentiality (definite < indefinite specific < non-specific) and individuation (singular < plural < mass < unindividualized) hierarchies.

support of the functional approach. Finally, Section 7 provides possibilities to fit the picture into current theoretical notions.

2. Background: Comparing IP and EP constructions

Let me begin with a few assumptions concerning non-syntactical properties of prototypical IP and EP constructions.⁴

First of all, I assume that prototypical IP constructions are used in order to establish the reference of a PM via its relations to a PR (Keenan 1974; Langacker 1995; Taylor 1996).⁵ This has a number of consequences. In particular, in IP constructions:

(i) The referential status of a PM tends to be specific or definite (cf. Haspelmath 1999a) or to depend on the referential status of a PR (as it has been grammaticalized in English 's-constructions).

(ii) The "internal" PR is likely to be highly topical (see fn. 3 for the understanding of topicality assumed here), since more topical individuals are better "anchors" for establishing reference. This can be grammatically constrained (cf. Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2002; 2004): for example, according to Roberts (1987: 139) the possessive marker in Amele is used only where the PR is a pronoun, a proper noun or a kinship term (4a), while in other situations the PR is juxtaposed to its PM without any marking (4b):

- (4) Amele (Roberts 1987: 85, 171)
- a. Eu **ija** **na** **Jo**
 that 1SG POS house
 'That is my house.'
- b. **Dana** **caub** **caja** ho-na
 man white woman come-PRES
 'The white man's woman is coming.'

(iii) The more topical the PR is, the more information about it is known, so it is not surprising that the range of possible "possessive relations" in the

⁴ Note that in this section I mainly discuss prototypical constructions, i.e. abstract formations based on certain tendencies that are observed cross-linguistically. For reasons of space, I only give a minimum of illustrations. Many more examples can be found in typologically-oriented studies of possessives such as Seiler 1983; Ivanov (ed.) 1989; Chappell and McGregor (eds.) 1995; Hayasi and Bhaskararao (eds.) 1997; Heine 1997; Mirto 1998; Payne and Barshi (eds.) 1999 and theoretical works like Barker 1995, not to speak of a great number of papers.

⁵ At this stage, it is useful to distinguish between determining (or establishing) the reference and restricting the reference. The first operation is intended to introduce a salient individual in the domain of discourse. The second operation only narrows the set of possible referents of an expression. (Truly, this distinction is not clear-cut. In particular, determining the reference is usually accompanied by restricting it, and the latter is used typically for determining the reference, not always successfully though.)

prototypical IP construction is quite broad and may include relations determined almost exclusively by the context (cf. Chappell and McGregor 1989; Barker 1995 among others).⁶

(iv) Given that the internal PR accepts a somewhat “technical” information role of being an “anchor”, it is itself indeterminate with respect to relevance.

The role of EP constructions is in fact quite different from that of IP. I assume that the primary function of external PRs is the contribution of some relevant information to the utterance meaning rather than establishing the PM reference. This seems to partly motivate both the differences and the similarities between IP and EP. Thus,

(i) Typically the reference of a PM in EP constructions is simply irrelevant (and this seems to be a consequence of the fact that the external PR does not act primarily as an anchor). Due to this, the prototypical PM in EP constructions is deindividualized (König and Haspelmath 1998: 536). This is reflected in that an external PM is hardly used with restrictive modifiers (cf. Chappell and McGregor 1989: 28; Vergnaud and Zubizarreta 1992: 603-604; König and Haspelmath 1998: 534-536 among others) and quite often cannot be relativized (Mirto 1998) or serve as an antecedent of a following pronoun. However, such PM should not be necessarily taken to be used predicatively (as does, for example, Mirto (1998) with respect to a certain type of EP), since there are rare instances of EP constructions where obviously referential items (such as pronouns or proper nouns) occupy the PM slot (see fn. 14).

(ii) Just as its counterpart in IP constructions, the external PR is usually highly topical (see Seiler 1983: 46; König and Haspelmath 1998: 531, 569-572; Payne and Barshi 1999: 14; Haspelmath 1999b: 113-114; Kibrik 2000: 437 among many others). But in the case of EP this seems to have a different source, namely the overall tendency for correlation between relevance and topicality.

(iii) As a rule, EP constructions are limited to certain relations. These are primarily but not (necessarily) exclusively part-whole relations, which are often described under the label of “inalienable possession” (see especially Chappell and McGregor (eds.) 1995), but this term may be misleading, since it is also used for rather different phenomena in the IP domain (Nichols 1988). The motivation assumed here is that where the possessive relation is accidental and context-dependent, one cannot expect that the “participation” of a PM in a situation will entail the “participation” – and hence relevance – of a PR. Part-whole relations are at a polar end, since they typically presuppose the “participation” of both the PM and the PR, and this favors the PR relevance.

⁶ The situation may be different in languages with head-marking possessives such as the Hebrew construct state, which although satisfies most criteria for prototypical IP constructions, usually does not allow context-dependent relations (Heller 2002). However, as is argued by Nichols (1988), head-marking possessives that are opposed to non-head-marking ones (and the opposition found in Hebrew is exactly of this kind) are usually restricted to relations derived from the PR semantics for historical reasons only.

(iv) Finally, as stated above, external PRs almost always constitute an important part of the information that an utterance conveys.

The comparison of IP and EP according to the parameters discussed above is represented in Table 1, which also shows that the opposition between them is privative rather than equipollent (cf. O'Connor 1994). Thus, IP is unmarked in what concerns both the relevance of the PR and the range of relations that can be expressed by a construction. As for the PM reference parameter, strictly speaking both constructions have positive values. Yet if we assume that the prototypical function of nouns and/or noun phrases is to refer to individuals, then the ignorance of this parameter on the part of EP might be a marked option.

	Formal properties	PM reference	PR topicality	Possible relations	PR relevance
Prototypical IP	a single constituent	determined	high	unconstrained	unmarked for relevance
Prototypical EP	separate constituents	irrelevant	high	constrained	relevant

Table 1. Prototypical IP vs. prototypical EP.

Of course, the picture just given is a partial simplification, since the constraints related to these parameters, in principle, may or may not be grammaticalized, and further, languages may exhibit instances of non-prototypical constructions. Some non-prototypical constructions are discussed in the following two sections, where we will find that the distinction between IP and EP is not so clear-cut as it could seem.

3. Possessive alternations

In quite a number of languages there are several IP constructions, some of which are more prototypical than others. In this section I suggest that “alternative” less-prototypical constructions can display certain properties of EP especially in their semantics and that this correlates with the increase of the PR relevance in such constructions.

3.1. English A good example of the alternation between a more prototypical construction and a less prototypical one is that between the Saxon genitive (*John's sister*) and prepositional *of* (*the sister of John*) constructions. Basically, the genitive construction in English exhibits various features of the prototypical IP (cf. Barker 1995; Taylor 1996). Thus, it is usually used with more topical PRs, and the referential status of the PM depends on that of the genitive PR. In addition, the genitive construction easily allows context-dependent relations.

The prepositional possessive construction is rather different. Firstly, as was shown by Deane (1987) and Rosenbach (2003) among many others, it is preferred with less topical PRs and is highly disfavored with highly topical pronominal PRs (cf. the witness of **the friend of me*). Secondly, the referential

non-specific and usually is not used with pronominal PRs⁹ but is employed as the main means of introducing complex PR phrases. However, pronominal genitives turn out to be felicitous where they function as quantificational restrictors (I owe (6) to Alexander Skobelkin)¹⁰:

- (6) Russian
 čast' menja
 part-NOM:SG 1SG:GEN
 'a part of me'

Even more remarkable are the two variants of (7) – with a possessive adjective and with a genitive phrase. Although the two utterances are roughly synonymous, with neutral intonation only the variant with the genitive construction has of the connotation that Petja's wife can buy this *because she is the wife of Petja*. Thus, here the choice of the genitive construction apparently increases the relevance of a PR.

- (7) Russian
 [Petina žena] / [Žena Peti]
 Petja's-NOM:SG:F wife-NOM:SG wife-NOM:SG Petja-GEN:SG
 možet kupit' eto
 can-3SG buy-INF this-ACC
 'Petja's wife can buy this.'

Interestingly, Russian has one more IP construction (8a) with the dative PR (see, e.g., Raxilina 2001: 204-205 and Weiss and Raxilina 2002: 194), and this construction probably reminds one of the Russian EP patterns (8b). Importantly for us, the adnominal dative construction cannot be used referentially at all. Further, when the dative PR immediately follows the PM it is normally stressed, and this may support its relevance. Against a background of the possessive alternations discussed above, all this does not seem to be just a simple coincidence but may reflect a certain tendency in the correlation between various properties.

- (8) Russian
 a. On byl otec soldatam
 3SG:M:NOM was-3SG:M father-NOM:SG soldier-DAT:PL
 'He was a father to soldiers.'

⁹ The 3rd person "possessive pronouns" *ego* 'his', *eë* 'her' and *ix* 'their' (all are neutral in respect of the PR animacy), historically genitives, are left beyond the scope of this paper, since they behave in a peculiar way.

¹⁰ Occasionally pronominal genitive PRs are also used as complements of nominalizations (cf. Babyonyshev 2004), where they presumably do not serve just as anchors for the situations described, but add a (sometimes necessary) descriptive content.

- b. Ivan slomal **mne** **ruku**
 Ivan-NOM:SG broke-3SG:M 1SG-DAT hand-ACC:SG
 ‘Ivan broke my hand.’

3.3. *Lithuanian and Kanuri* Kanuri and Lithuanian are interesting in that the more and less prototypical possessives here are different in word order only:

(9) Kanuri (Hutchison 1981: 198-199)¹¹

- a. fər(-nzə) Ali=be
 horse(-3SG.PR) Ali=POS
 ‘Ali’s horse’ (order: PM PR)
- b. Ali=be fər(-nzə)
 Ali=POS horse(-3SG.PR)
 ‘ALI’s horse’ (order: PR PM)
- c. fər-wa anyi=be fal-nza
 horse-PL these=POS one-3PL.PR
 ‘one of these horses’ (order: PR PM)

(10) Lithuanian (Say 2004)

- a. nauja maž-os mergait-ės kėdė
 new little-GEN girl-GEN chair
 ‘little girl’s new chair’ (order: PR PM)
- b. litras pien-o
 liter milk-GEN
 ‘(one) liter of milk’ (order: PM PR)

Examples (9a) and (10a) present the usual possessive constructions, while (9b-c) and (10b) are “alternative” constructions, which are marked and less frequent. As expected, it is the latter patterns that are used, for example, when the PR is emphasized (as in (9b)) or when it plays a role of a restrictor in quantificational or quasi-quantificational constructions (cf. (9c) and (10b)). Moreover, in both languages pronominal PRs seem to be highly dispreferred when used in a marked position.¹² Thus, these alternations seem to be similar to those discussed above, given the available data.

3.4. *Possessive alternations: Summary* In this section I have argued that certain alternations between IP constructions can be based on the difference in PR

¹¹ Kanuri examples are simplified at the expense of tone marking.

¹² Although pronominal PRs are usually expressed by possessive suffixes in Kanuri, free possessive pronouns can be used if the PR is emphasized (Hutchison 1981: 49). For pronominal PRs, this construction is already marked, so the use of an even more marked construction (such as that where the PR precedes the PM) turns out to be superfluous (the same situation can be observed in Hungarian as is discussed below). At the same time, almost all of Hutchison’s examples with heavy PRs show the standard construction too, which, of course, is not in line with the theory proposed here.

relevance. As shown in Table 2, however, at least the “alternative” IP constructions in English and Russian do show several properties of EP.

English	Russian	PM reference	PR topicality	Possible relations	PR relevance
genitive constructions	possessive adjectives	likely determined	higher	unconstrained	unmarked for relevance
‘of’ constructions	genitive constructions	not determined	lower	sometimes constrained	sometimes relevant

Table 2. Possessive alternations in English and in Russian.

Thus, not only can the PR relevance be expressed within noun phrases, but it can also correlate with EP properties. This point will be further supported in the next section with the mixed constructions intermediate between IP and EP.

Unfortunately, it is not easy to formulate the precise functional value of a PR in “alternative” constructions. Deane (1987) and Baron (1997) tried to account for possessive alternations (in English and Danish respectively) in terms of communicative structure, providing a theory according to which in “alternative” constructions the PM is a topic and the PR serves as a focus. It is not clear to me, however, how the PM may be a topic in such utterances as *since adjunct is a sister of N’...*, where it apparently constitutes a part of focus.¹³ Rather, the situation with possessive alternations seems to represent a nominal counterpart of the whole family of clause-level oppositions reflected by the SV/VS word order alternations in many European languages – oppositions that are often related to the thetic/categorical distinction (Sasse 1995). While this analogy calls for a more detailed investigation than what can be offered in the present paper, it may be proposed tentatively that the notion of relevance should rank high in such a study.

4. Mixed constructions

Let us assume now that the prototypes of IP and EP described in Section 2 only form the endpoints of a continuum, as it follows partly from the very fact that they are prototypes. Then there may exist apparently intermediate constructions. In this section such mixed constructions are discussed.

4.1. Russian and Hungarian Both Russian and Hungarian present certain patterns that share properties of IP and EP. Thus, Russian, in addition to the non-prototypical IP constructions discussed above, makes extensive use of various EP constructions (see Kibrik 2000, Weiss and Raxilina 2002 and various

¹³ Several readers of earlier drafts of this paper noted that the notions of topic and focus as well as the concept of relevance could be different on the noun phrase level and on the clause level. Yet in this case, I am not aware of the informational saturation of these terms, while simply proposing of analogous structural positions for topics and focuses in clause and in noun phrases does not seem to explain the semantic effects observed above.

contributions to Ivanov (ed.) 1989), only one of which I will focus here; in this construction, the PR is introduced-by the preposition *u* (roughly, ‘at’):

- (11) Russian
- a. U Petra ne lomalas’ mašina
 at Petr-GEN:SG not broke-3SG:F car-NOM:SG
 ‘No car of Petr’s has been broken.’
- b. Slomalis’ kseroks u Petra i
 broke-3PL xerox-NOM:SG at Petr-GEN:SG and
 kompjuter u Pavla
 computer-NOM:SG at Pavel-GEN:SG
 ‘A xerox of Petr’s and a computer of Pavel’s have been broken.’
- c. Slomalas’ mašina u Petra
 broke-3SG:F car-NOM:SG at Petr-GEN:SG
 ‘A car of Petr’s has been broken.’

The construction illustrated in (11a) has the main characteristics of EP: the PR and the PM do not form a constituent and the PM is referentially undetermined (thus, for example, it can be interpreted as being in the scope of negation; see Weiss and Raxilina 2002: 184¹⁴).¹⁵ Moreover, such utterances as (11a) are often understood as having the PR as topic, which provides evidence for its relevance. However, in (11b) the sequences of a PM and an *u*-marked PR are conjoined (note the plural agreement on the verb), which presumably indicates that the PM and the PR form a constituent (unlike (11a)), thus more like an IP. Finally, the pattern (11c) can be structurally assimilated either to ‘EP’ (11a) or to ‘IP’ (11b), but it seems that neither verdict would have a clear advantage over the other.

An even clearer instance of a mixed construction can be observed in Hungarian¹⁶. Here the most prototypical construction involves a PM marked with the possessive marker and/or pronominal suffix and (optionally) an unmarked PR,

¹⁴ Actually, the referential status of the PM in constructions with *u* varies widely (cf. T. Nikolaeva 1989), and in some contexts it can be even represented by a pronoun or proper noun as in *U menja Seva otlično čitaet* ‘My (lit. at me) Seva reads excellently’. This can be interpreted as a piece of evidence for that PRs need not be anchors here. On the other hand, it seems that even in this construction the PR is almost always more topical than the PM.

¹⁵ Some other characteristics are less apparent here, however. Thus, although this construction is highly preferred when the PR is highly topical and the PM is a body-part (see Iordanskaja and Mel’čuk 1995 for an extensive discussion), it has no strong restraints on either of the participants in a situation.

¹⁶ The Hungarian data is mainly from Szabolcsi 1994. It should be mentioned that later Moravcsik (2003) provided an alternative description of Hungarian possessives which does not seem to be in full accordance with Szabolcsi.

which follows the article marking the whole phrase.¹⁷ This construction is inherently specific and highly preferred when there is a free pronominal PR.

- (12) Hungarian (Szabolcsi 1994: 180)
 a te kalap-ja-i-d
 the 2SG hat-POS-PL-2SG.PR
 ‘your hats’

There is, further, another possessive construction in Hungarian, which is illustrated in (13). Here the PR is marked with the dative and precedes the article rather than follows it. This construction shares a number of properties of “alternative” constructions discussed in the previous section. In particular, it is not referentially determined (cf. (13a) and (13b)) and is disfavored with highly topical pronominal PRs (13c). Furthermore, it is the dative construction that is used with “heavy” and/or focused PRs, so one can hypothesize that this pattern is intended to introduce relevant PRs.¹⁸

- (13) Hungarian (Szabolcsi 1994: 199, 182, 188)
 a. Kati (nem) csak **Mari-nak** a **kalap-já-t** látta
 Kati not only Mari-DAT the hat-POS-ACC saw
 ‘Kati saw (not) only Mari’s hat (but...)’
 b. **Mari-nak** nem ismert-em **nővér-é-t**
 Mari-DAT not knew-1SG sister-POS-ACC
 ‘I never knew any sister of Mary.’
 c. ^{??}én-nek-em a kalap-ja-m
 1SG-DAT-1SG the hat-POS-1SG.PR
 ‘my hat’

The Hungarian dative construction is mentioned as an EP one, for example, in Haspelmath 1999b. Indeed, the dative PR is not required to be adjacent to the PM (13b), and given the wide spread of dative EP constructions in Europe (see König and Haspelmath 1998; Lamiroy and Delbecque 1998; Haspelmath 1999b; Lamiroy 2003), it could be convenient to treat it as EP. Nevertheless, Chisarik and Payne (2001) take examples similar to (13a) and (13c) to represent IP, and so does Szabolcsi (1994), who supports this view with the ability of the sequence PR-PM to be conjoined, focus-fronted (13a) and WH-fronted. Also, unlike usual EP constructions, the dative pattern in Hungarian prefers less topical PRs. The situation is therefore similar to Russian in that some

¹⁷ Szabolcsi (1994) treats the corresponding form of a PR as nominative, while Chisarik and Payne (2001) argue that in this construction the article has been reanalyzed into the genitive marker. This does not affect any of the points in this paper.

¹⁸ According to Szabolcsi (1994: 205), the communicative motivation for the use of the dative construction is to allow the PR and the PM “to participate separately in topic-focus and scope relations.” Interestingly, a very similar claim (and in fact, a very similar analysis within the government and binding framework) was made by Fowler (1987) regarding the Russian construction(s) with the preposition *u*.

construction with a relevant PR shares properties of IP and EP (although Russian has a richer inventory of possessives and a slightly different distribution of their properties); cf. Table 3.¹⁹

	Formal properties	PM reference	PR topicality	Possible relations	PR relevance
Unmarked construction	a single constituent	determined	high	unconstrained	unmarked for relevance
Dative construction	not apparent	not determined	lower	(no data)	relevant

Table 3. The Hungarian possessive constructions.

4.2. *Yidij* Most Australian languages distinguish between a standard possessive construction with a PR in dative or genitive and an “inalienable” construction where the PM (‘part’) and the PR (‘whole’) have formally the same semantic and/or grammatical role.²⁰ An example of the inalienable construction is (14), where both PR and the PM are marked as subjects.

- (14) Warlpiri (Hale 1981: 333)
- Rdaka** ka-rna yuka-mi ngulya-kurra **ngaju**
 hand PRES-1SG enter-NPST burrow-ALL 1SG
 ‘I am sticking my hand into the (goanna’s) burrow.’

Such constructions as (14) have been argued to be instances of EP (see, e.g., Hale 1981; Blake 1984; 1987: 94-99; McGregor 1999 among many others).²¹ Still, this conclusion does not hold for all Australian languages displaying this alternation, since in some of them the inalienable construction clearly did develop into an IP one. This suggests the possibility of the existence of intermediate constructions illustrated here with the case of *Yidij* (the data are from Dixon 1977).

On first view, the inalienable construction in *Yidij* looks as if it should be analyzed as EP. Semantically, it fits well into the picture outlined above for the

¹⁹ Irina Nikolaeva (2002; to appear) shows that constructions similar to the Hungarian dative possessive are found in a number of other Uralic languages. Curiously, in some of these languages (e.g., in Nenets and Cheremis) the PR in such constructions continues to be marked for genitive. This makes the situation close to the one in *Yidij* discussed below.

²⁰ Importantly, these constructions are often not in complementary distribution as regards either types of possessa or possessive relations, thus presenting the possibility of choice contexts.

²¹ In (14) this solution offers itself due to the fact that the main predicate agrees with the PR rather than with the PM, suggesting that the PR is a dependent of this predicate. But note that there do exist languages where internal PRs can control verb agreement; some examples are Tabassaran (Nakh-Daghestanian, see Kibrik and Seleznev 1982) and Jarawara (Arawá; Dixon 2000).

prototype of EP. The range of possible possessive relations is restricted (mainly) to the ‘part – whole’ relation. As a direct consequence of this we may expect that the PR is understood as an immediate participant of the event (hence its relevance) and the referentiality of the PM is at best irrelevant (as is typical for ‘parts’ in such constructions; see Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm 1998). Syntactically, the most striking argument for the EP status of the Yidjɪn inalienable construction comes from contexts showing the case-split phenomenon. Thus, certain types of verbs can govern different cases depending on the topicality of an NP: animate phrases are marked with dative (15a), while inanimate ones bear the locative case (15b). Where a “whole-part” sequence is used in this pattern, the PR and the PM may receive different case marking (15c), thus preventing us from considering inalienable constructions to show NP-internal agreement.

(15) Yidjɪn (Dixon 1977: 266-267)

- | | | | | |
|----|--|------------|-----------------|------------------|
| a. | guli | gambaŋ | bupa:nda | |
| | louse-ABS | crawl-NPST | woman-DAT | |
| | ‘A louse is crawling on a woman.’ | | | |
| b. | guli | gambaŋ | dungu: | |
| | louse-ABS | crawl-NPST | head-LOC | |
| | ‘A louse is crawling on [someone’s] head.’ | | | |
| c. | guli | gambaŋ | bupa:nda | dungu: |
| | louse-ABS | crawl-NPST | woman-DAT | head-LOC |
| | ‘A louse is crawling on a woman’s head.’ | | | |
| d. | guli | gambaŋ | bupa:nda | dungu:nda |
| | louse-ABS | crawl-NPST | woman-DAT | head-DAT |
| | ‘A louse is crawling on a woman’s head.’ | | | |
| e. | *guli | gambaŋ | bupa: | dungu: |
| | louse-ABS | crawl-NPST | woman-LOC | head-LOC |

Nonetheless, as one can see from (15d), it is sometimes possible for the PM and the PR to bear the same case, but then it is the PR that determines the case marking of the PM and not vice versa (15e). This suggests that the “whole” PR and the “part” PM still can constitute a single constituent, with the PR functioning as the head (and this is indeed the view presented in Dixon 1977: 361). However, the very same facts may receive an alternative interpretation, since the pattern (15e) cannot be expected even if we think of it as IP, because if so, the PM is expected to be referentially determined and hence more topical, which could result in the dative marking.

Further, in Yidjɪn there are no good reasons to structurally oppose genitive and inalienable constructions. Thus, they cannot be contrasted in terms of either word contiguity (Yidjɪn generally permits “discontinuous constituents”) or case marking (since a genitive PR is also marked for the case of its PM); cf. (16). It

could be proposed, therefore, that in Yidjñ the genitive construction is an instance of EP as well.²²

(16) Yidjñ (Dixon 1977: 518, 530)

- a. **mayi** bama:l **guwal** buđi:jñ
 fruit-ABS person-ERG name-ABS tell-PST
 ‘The people told the names of the fruits.’
- b. guya:la **ŋađin** guŋga:ɽ **yaba** gali:jñ
 Guyala-ABS 1SG-GEN-ABS north brother-ABS go-PST
 bulmba: murgu: ...
 camp-ALL Murgu-ALL
 ‘My brother Guyala has gone north, to a place [called] Murgu.’

Although this analysis looks plausible for many Australian languages, Yidjñ does present some difficulties for it. As Dixon (1977: 362-363) reports, the probability of the genitive marking in Yidjñ increases with the topicality of a PR, that is, highly topical animate PRs tend to be marked as PRs independently of the nature of the possessive relation.²³ While such a phenomenon looks quite strange for EP constructions, it is very common in the domain of IP (cf. Nichols 1988: 581).

So we might choose between several analyses: either (i) the genitive construction is IP and the inalienable construction is EP – but then, the latter deviates from the prototype in that it prefers less topical PRs, or (ii) both genitive and inalienable constructions are instances of EP – but then, it is not understood why they exhibit a distribution typical for IP, or (iii) the inalienable construction shares some properties of both EP and IP (and, perhaps, so does the genitive construction). The last solution correlates well with the general properties of the inalienable construction; see Table 4.

	Formal properties	PM Reference	PR topicality	Possible relations	PR relevance
Genitive construction	not apparent	(no data)	higher	unconstrained	unmarked for relevance
Inalienable construction	not apparent	presumably irrelevant	lower	constrained	presumably relevant

Table 4. Possessive constructions in Yidjñ.

²² It has been suggested, e.g., in Blake 1984: 441-442, that in such constructions the PR phrase is (syntactically) in apposition to the PM phrase (although it is not clear whether two NPs in apposition do form a higher order constituent). Anyway, the syntactic relation between the PM and the PR in examples like (16b) does seem to be weakened.

²³ Similar tendencies in the same circumstances were observed for Warrungu (also Pama-Nyungan; see Tsunoda 1997: 101-104).

4.3. *Interim summary* So far we have browsed through a variety of constructions reflecting the PR relevance and showing characteristics of both the prototypical IP and the prototypical EP. The patterns dealt with in Section 3 were nevertheless attributed as IP constructions but those described in Section 4 appeared to be more problematic from the syntactic point of view. In relation to this, three points should be made.

First, in the process of distinguishing between different constructions we relied mainly on the formal expression of the possessive relation rather than on any strict syntactic tests. Thus, one may suggest, occasionally I could overlook the need to distinguish between constructions, so that, for example, there may be two dative constructions in Hungarian, the first being IP and the second being EP – even if both may look adnominal. However, in many cases such a decision may not be well substantiated, not to speak of being uneconomical and at times highly theory-dependent. In addition, it seems useful to remember that in general, a construction is just a means of abstraction, hence there cannot be any obstacle to finding different constructions using different criteria but the same material. Yet, a construction identified broadly may give rise to conclusions that could be overlooked if one divides it into several constructions.

Second, one could claim that many of the constructions discussed above show a lower degree of PR topicality than more prototypical possessives (be they IP or EP). It is worth noting, however, that this lower topicality is neither a sufficient nor a necessary feature of such constructions. As the prepositional construction in Russian demonstrates, there do exist constructions that easily allow highly topical PRs. Furthermore, quite a number of languages have separate constructions for non-topical nominal dependents which nevertheless do not presuppose that these dependents are relevant (cf. the Amele unmarked construction in (4) above). The lower topicality of PRs in our cases is nevertheless likely to be somehow related to their relevance. A clue for this puzzle may come from the fact that less topical nominals are essentially marked as PRs. At the same time, most PRs introduced via “alternative” constructions are still topical enough, so that they are not to be used purely as reference to properties assigned to their heads. Consequently, there should be some further informational motivation to introduce these PRs.

Finally, although the PRs in many of the constructions discussed in these two sections tend to be relevant, they are often not so relevant as “classic” external PRs, which almost necessarily either play a role of topic or are actively involved in a situation. Presumably this fact is directly reflected in that these PRs are “not so external” as well.

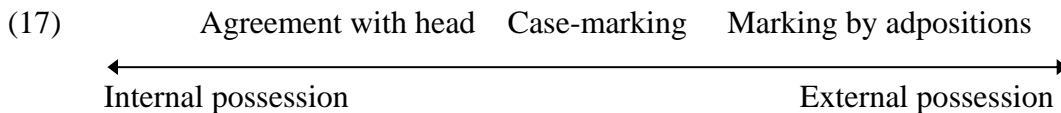
Thus, we find a family (or several families) of the constructions that occupy some place between the two possessive prototypes described in Section 2. The next section elaborates on this idea and attempts to provide an explanation for the facts observed so far.

5. Looking for explanations

The constructions touched upon in the previous section may look quite marginal for those linguists who are accustomed to the strong distinction between phrase and clause levels. Even then, we should ask ourselves why these constructions exist at all. In this section I would like to explore and compare three possible lines of explanation.

5.1. Historical explanation Since many of the properties discussed above are not necessarily related to syntactic structure, one could, in principle, provide a single IP or EP analysis both for those instances of “alternative” and mixed constructions that do respect strong syntactic distinctions. The non-prototypical properties observed for these constructions could be treated, then, as “traces” of some diachronically earlier situation. In other words, the peculiarities of these constructions, perhaps, can be explained diachronically: a construction under discussion was more or less recently reanalyzed, “jumping” from one level to another, but for the time being retains some properties of EP (if the direction of the development was from the clause level to the phrase level) or IP (in the case of the opposite direction).

In fact, it seems that the direction of such a development is usually from the clause level to the NP level (cf. König and Haspelmath 1998: 586-587). Thus, as we move from “more EP” to “more IP” constructions, the means of marking the PR become more and more specific for NPs, as is shown in (17)²⁴ illustrated with different Russian constructions in (18).²⁵



- (18) Russian
- | | | |
|--|--------------|-------------|
| a. Ninin | | dom |
| Nina-POS-NOM:SG:M | house-NOM:SG | |
| ‘Nina’s house’ (Agreement with head) | | |
| b. dom | | Niny |
| house-NOM:SG | Nina-GEN:SG | |
| ‘house of Nina’ (Case-marking) | | |
| c. dom | u | Niny |
| house-NOM:SG | at | Nina-GEN:SG |
| ‘house of Nina’s’ (Adposition-marking) | | |

²⁴ In fact, it is more likely that (17) reflects more the grammaticalized degree of semantic contiguity, and the effect mentioned here is only an indirect consequence of this.

²⁵ This works only for languages having dependent-marking in possessives. At the same time, head-marking languages often lack any IP alternations or display oppositions other than that discussed here (see fn. 6). But see Evenki data below for a different situation.

Diachronically, this picture suggests that the normal direction of level-changing reanalysis is from the clause level to NP and not vice versa, since while IP constructions enable means found among EP patterns, the opposite is not necessarily the case. Accordingly, one can imagine that the effect seen in (17) is only a trace of a particular development, so it is not strange that it correlates with other its traces (including semantic properties of a construction).

However, a few facts may provide arguments against the historical explanation:

(i) first, certain patterns (including (18b-c)) may come from the adnominal use of phrases marked with a case or an adposition rather than from clause level constructions;

(ii) second, there are a lot of languages having “alternative” possessives but no EP constructions, and this could exclude the possibility of EP to IP development there;

(iii) third, the constraints and tendencies related to the low topicality of PRs observed in some languages are not in harmony with the hypothesis that they are descendants of external PRs, which are typically highly topical.

If it is not true that all constructions that display properties of EP have developed from it, the historical explanation does not necessarily work both with the morphosyntactic gradualness of the IP/EP distinction (17) and with the presumable continuum of semantic properties in the constructions under discussion.

5.2. Multiple analyses David Gil (pers. com.; April 2002) suggested that the constituency structure of such examples as those presented in Section 4 might vary depending on which parameters for constituency we choose. This idea has much in common with Hankamer 1977, where it was suggested that some constructions could be described more completely if they were permitted to admit several analyses simultaneously. This is the case where “any one of two or more distinct analyses might be proposed, but each of them leaves some subpart of the facts unexplained which another analysis does explain” (Hankamer 1977: 583). The multiple analyses approach is not among the most widely accepted ones, but of course, the mixed constructions discussed above are prime candidates for it.

On first view, Hankamer’s theory has an interesting advantage in that not only can the possibility of these constructions be predicted, but also their typology may be elaborated. In particular, dative possessive in Hungarian and the construction with the preposition *u* in Russian would be the targets of “disjunctive multiple analyses” where while some instances of a construction allow two analyses, there are also cases where only the first analysis works and also cases where only the second applies. On the other hand, the Yidjñ inalienable construction represents an example requiring “conjunctive multiple analyses”, where different analyses cover different properties.

What the multiple analysis approach cannot account for, however, is the presence of EP properties in “alternative” constructions, since these obviously form a single phrase and hence do not allow any EP analysis. Finally, this

approach says nothing about why such mixed patterns exist, since this possibility is given *a priori*.

5.3. *Functional approach* Actually, there may be no need to base an explanation on any structural analyses. Rather, the peculiarities of the constructions discussed above can be related to their functions, which are presumably universal. It is this approach that is chosen in this paper and discussed in the rest of this section. Two semantic aspects of relevant PRs should be of interest here.

(i) First, PR phrases necessarily restrict the PM reference, even if they are incapable of establishing it (see fn. 5 for a discussion of the differences between the two operations). This can be reflected by different means, including, for instance, various anaphoric devices (such as pronominal suffixes or zero anaphora) in the PM phrase. Still, for the interpretation of a sentence with a PR to proceed in the easiest way, the restricting function of the PR is likely to be iconically reflected in the form of a sentence, be it the formal syntactic dependence of the PR on its PM or simply their juxtaposition. Note, however, that the latter can be further reanalyzed as a reflection of a strict syntactic relation.

(ii) Second, relevant PRs by definition contribute something to the proposition expressed in a sentence. Since this “relevance” contribution is not associated with PRs by default, the speaker should draw extra attention to it. This leads to the use of marked means for introducing a PR, such as

(a) a word order that is marked relative to that of the more prototypical possessive construction²⁶;

(b) (formally) more complicated constructions, i.e. constructions employing more salient grammatical means (cf. (17)); and

(c) the “shift” of a PR into the less embedded level (which is more likely to contain the relevant information), which at the extreme may lead to the extra-argumental “integration” of the PR into a clause (Shibatani 1974).

Apparently, as far as the form is concerned, the two functions turn out to be in conflict, since while the restriction of a PM requires the increase of contiguity between the PM and the PR, the relevance of the latter in practice requires its decrease. To solve the problem, a language may choose between two options.

First, one can imagine a compromise variant where neither of our functions wins at the expense of the other but both affect the form in some way. This results in constructions intermediate between IP and EP, showing some of their properties but not others. The graduality of relevance can still be reflected here, since the more relevant the PR is, the less possible this “draw result” may come – at least if a language has more established constructions for relevant PRs. At the same time, if this explanation is adequate, then we will have to accept that

²⁶ Note that the word order in “alternative” possessives is different from that in more prototypical possessives not only in Lithuanian and Kanuri but also in English and Russian (as well as in Niuean constructions discussed below). Although this generally fits into Haspelmath’s claim that (prototypical) PRs tend to precede possessa (1999a), the situation in Kanuri shows that this is not a strict rule.

the relevance of a PR *may determine not the entire syntactic structure of a construction but only some of its properties*. This point may be illustrated with an inalienable IP construction in Dutch where while the PR and the PM do form a single constituent, the PM may be deindividualized (showing properties of an EP construction) through the neutralization of number marking (Baauw 1996; König and Haspelmath 1998: 582):

- (19) Dutch (Baauw 1996)
- | | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------------|------------|-----------|-------------|------------|
| De | arts | onderzocht | de | maag | van |
| the | doctor | examined | the | stomach | of |
| de | kinderen | | | | |
| the | children | | | | |
- ‘The doctor examined the children’s stomachs (lit. stomach).’

yet, it is well expected that the new patterns will be further conventionalized, thus giving rise to new mixed constructions (which may be further reanalyzed in the direction of either IP or EP).

Second, a language may choose between constructions that are already well grammaticalized. This variant also does not exclude the reflection of the graduality of relevance in the case where several possessives exist. But importantly, it is then expected that there will be cross-linguistic variation in levels where certain components of information are placed. This in turn means that the distinction between the clause level and the phrase level is not necessarily a consequence of the semantics.

The last point is further illustrated in Section 6, which also supports the functional approach against the “multiple analysis” and historical approaches.

6. Benefactive constructions

It is a well-known fact that in many languages PRs and beneficiaries are marked in the same way (in fact, the Hungarian dative is one example). The problem is, then, whether PRs and beneficiaries can indeed be unified. The purpose of this section is to show that languages solve this problem in different ways, but at least one of the ways provides evidence for the functional approach suggested above.

6.1. Beneficiaries vs. possessors Consider the following example from Kalkatungu, a Pama-Nyungan language of Australia, where the suffix *-ku* can mark both beneficiaries and PRs:

- (20) Kalkatungu (Blake 1984: 438)
- | | | | |
|---------|-----------|------------------|----------|
| nga-thu | inytyi-mi | kalpin-ku | Utyan |
| 1SG-ERG | chop-FUT | man- <i>ku</i> | Firewood |
- a. ‘I will chop the man’s wood.’
 b. ‘I will chop the/some wood for the man.’

A natural question arising in relation to such examples is whether this is indeed a case of ambiguity or the readings (20a) and (20b) are both possible because the range of possessive relations that can be expressed in Kalkatungu is larger than that in, say, European languages.

As for (20), Blake (1984) shows that the two readings of this sentence may be considered to result from structural ambiguity. Such an approach is indeed often justified, especially where one can find good reasons to think that the possessive function of markers is secondary. Yet in some languages the direction of the evolution is opposite, i.e. it is possessive markers that acquire the benefactive function. Actually, even here, examples often make it clear that beneficiaries are not NP-internal. This holds, for instance, for a number of Oceanic languages where the possessive-benefactive syncretism is quite widespread (Song 1997; Lichtenberk 2002). (21) illustrates the use of the Kusaiean possessive classifier *la-* both in possessive and benefactive functions: note that the beneficiary phrase follows the determiner, which marks the right boundary of a theme NP:

- (21) Kusaiean (Song 1997: 33; originally Lee 1975: 262)
- | | | | | | | |
|-------------|-------|------------|-------|------------|------|------|
| Sohn | el | mole-lah | [ik | la-l | Sepe | ah] |
| John | 3SG:S | buy-ASP | [fish | POSCLR-3SG | Sepe | DET] |
| la-l | | Sru | | | | |
| POSCLR-3SG | | Sru | | | | |
- ‘John has bought Sepe’s fish for Sru.’

Similar examples come from Imbabura Quechua. Here, in spite of the existence of a separate benefactive construction, the possessive marker *-paj* is used sometimes in order to mark a beneficiary. Nevertheless, although in the possessive construction, the PR and the PM clearly form a single phrase (22a), this is not necessarily so where *-paj* is used in the benefactive function (22b)²⁷:

- (22) Imbabura Quechua (Cole 1985: 83, 113)
- a. **kan-paj wawki** jatun wasi-ta chari-n-chu
 2SG-POS brother big house-ACC have-3-INTER
 ‘Does your brother have a big house?’
- b. **wasi-ta** rura-rka-ni **ñuka churi-paj**
 house-O make-PST-1SG 1SG son-POS
 ‘I made a house for my son.’

Thus, on first view, beneficiaries and possessors should be distinguished. The following data show, however, that this is not always the case.

²⁷ The absence of possessive marking on the PR *ñuka* ‘I’ in (22b) is not related to the use of *-paj* in the function of introducing a beneficiary. In fact, Imbabura Quechua presents an infrequent example of a language where the most topical 1st person PRs tend to remain unmarked.

6.2. *Beneficiaries as possessors* The very possibility of the development of benefactive markers from possessive ones makes it possible that there exist languages where beneficiaries are expressed within NPs. Evenki presents an example. As Nedjalkov (1997: 147-148, 153-154) shows, in this language the beneficiary can be expressed as an internal PR with an indefinite accusative PM²⁸:

- (23) Evenki (Nedjalkov 1997: 147)
D'av-ja-v o:-kal
 boat-ACC:INDEF-1SG.PR make-2SG:IMV
 'Make a boat for me.'

A similar case occurs in Niuean (Oceanic), where there is an alternation between two possessive constructions with pronominal PRs (cf. (24a) and (24b)). These constructions are different, in particular, in definiteness, so the construction given in (24a) may be thought as more prototypical than that in (24b).

- (24) Niuean (Polinskaja 1995: 49)
 a. e hāku (a) Kapitiga
 ABS 1SG.PR GEN Friend
 'my friend'
 b. e kapitiga haaku
 ABS friend 1SG.PR
 'a friend of mine'

Now, as one can see from the minimal pair (25), the "alternative" construction can be used (in certain circumstances) for introducing a beneficiary. In (25b), therefore, the beneficiary is introduced within NP, contrary to what we could expect if it was a dependent of the verb.

- (25) Niuean (Polinskaja 1995: 49-50)
 a. Fia moua a au ke he **hāku** (a) **kuli**
 want find ABS 1SG PREP OBL 1SG.PR GEN dog
 'I am looking for my dog.'
 b. Fia moua a au ke he **kulii** **haaku**
 want find ABS 1SG PREP OBL dog 1SG.PR
 'I am looking for a dog for myself.'

What these data show is that beneficiaries can be expressed in the NP as well as at the clause level. Of course, this is often so also where there is a special benefactive marking and further, even "true possessives" may have the same function in some contexts (cf. Lichtenberk 2002: 442). Nevertheless, the last examples do exhibit certain peculiarities, which suggest a more general picture of benefactive marking.

²⁸ Given that this construction is restricted to direct objects, it is not surprising that this is not the only way to mark beneficiaries (see Nedjalkov 1997: 153-154).

6.3. Discussion It is apparent that the possessive-benefactive syncretism observed in many languages is not accidental. Its functional motivation is more or less obvious: in some sense, most beneficiaries may be considered “prospective possessors” (Lichtenberk 2002). At the same time, beneficiaries are necessarily relevant for the content of an utterance.

The functional explanation will then roughly go as follows. Since beneficiaries constitute relevant information, and further, are in fact participants of the situation described in an utterance, they aspire to the clause level. As prospective PRs, however, beneficiaries can be dependent on nouns, although they are not expected to be expressed by means of prototypical possessives, since (i) benefactive constructions typically assert some prospective relation, while typical IP constructions presuppose relations (see, e.g., Heine 1997: 143), and (ii) beneficiaries cannot function as anchors, since the very possessive relation in this case is prospective, i.e. not established yet. Hence it is not surprising that in both Evenki and Niuean, adnominal beneficiaries are introduced by “alternative” possessives²⁹, which, however, easily allow (or even require) highly topical pronominal PRs. The last observation fits in well with the fact that beneficiaries are usually highly topical.

The historical explanation is of no help here, since none of the “adnominal beneficiaries” seems to be already reanalyzed as being on the clause level or come from it. Moreover, apart from the semantics, there is no evidence for multiple analyses here.

7. Conclusion

In this paper I have shown how the relevance of a PR interacts with certain properties of possessive constructions. In particular, I argued that the graduality of the PR relevance may be reflected in a variation among these properties, and although it is certainly not obvious that the possessive constructions themselves can form a continuum, more correspondences between the content on the one side and the form and behavior on the other could be established. But of course, a number of correlations between different properties of a construction still await further explanations.

The relevance-based oppositions turn out to be privative in that unmarked and more prototypical IP constructions are contrasted with marked and “more EP” possessives. It is worth saying that this is certainly related to the fact that these oppositions allow choice contexts.

²⁹ Note that the opposition between indefinite and definite accusative markers in Evenki is not equipollent, since the latter is used “if the object is considered to be definite or at least it is not explicitly marked as indefinite (this is the predominant form for direct objects)” (Nedjalkov 1997: 147). The indefinite accusative possessive may therefore be thought as “alternative”, since it does retain the possibility of a choice context.

Note, however, that what is permitted in some languages may be ruled out in others. Actually, many languages seemingly have no grammatical means to express the relevance of a PR, and this is not surprising given the unmarkedness of “usual” possessives in this respect. And even languages that have such means may vary in what restrictions on the use of these means they display. Although the interaction between such restrictions and general principles of expression (like those related in § 3.3 to some functions of PRs) was left on the periphery of this paper, it is certainly of great importance for the problem of how relevance and similar categories manifest themselves in a given language. In fact, it is this interaction that may shed light on the cross-linguistic variation in the distribution of information between the phrase and clause levels (as is the case with benefactive patterns, Section 6) or on the existence of mixed constructions – two phenomena unexpected from the “universal structures” viewpoint.

Some way to elaborate this idea may be outlined. Grammars are usually thought of as systems of constraints on possible expressions, and of course, structures are just such constraints. Now, even if we think of the constraints as strict and non-violable, it is obvious that languages do not constrain everything and that (at least in fragments) some languages may have stronger constraints than others. If we take grammaticalization slightly non-traditionally to be a process giving rise to new constraints, then we can hypothesize that (certain fragments of) some languages have grammaticalized more than (corresponding fragments of) other languages and relate this to the presence or absence of certain constructions.

This was indeed suggested by Lamiroy (2003), who related the absence or degradation of the dative EP construction in certain European languages with their grammaticalization accompanied with the limiting use of dative. In other words, as Lamiroy states, the European languages with less-constrained use of dative are more likely to have a dative EP construction. The same approach is found in T. Nikolaeva 1989: 223, who underlined the correlation between the difficulties of determining constituent borders in Slavic languages with their overall system (interestingly, while discussing this, Nikolaeva was concerned with EP-like constructions).

The idea that the wider the scope of imposed constraints, the more likely the possible non-canonical (IP or mixed) possessive constructions is supported also by the data presented in this paper. Thus, as concerns languages with mixed constructions, all of them seem to display certain non-configurational properties, including less-constrained (overt) constituent structure. This is especially apparent in the case of Yidjn, but is also appropriate for Russian and Hungarian. This is not to say that these languages lack structural organization; rather, we can assume that structures there are optimal (for ease of the processing of interpretation) but optional.

Consequently, there do remain further questions concerning the interaction between the inventory of constraints and possible expressions. For instance, it may be observed (and requires deeper understanding) that (i) some constraints are more expected than others (e.g., the existence of NP as a structural

unit is more expected than the existence of VP), and (ii) some fragments of grammar are more likely to be constrained (and grammaticalized) than others.

The search for the corresponding principles and parameters seems to be an accepted (but rarely explicated) task of general typology. Nevertheless, where more concrete research domains (including that of possessives) are concerned, this work is far from complete.

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