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

Reiko Vermeulen

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Linguistics

University College London
2005
‘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.
Acknowledgments

A great number of people have contributed to making the last four years of my life a wonderful experience. I feel privileged to have this opportunity to thank them.

First and foremost, I am immensely indebted to Ad Neeleman, my first supervisor, who has been an inspiration from even before I started my PhD. I thank Ad for his generosity in sharing his vast knowledge, for countless discussions and his unwavering support and encouragement throughout my time at UCL.

I thank Misi Brody, my second supervisor, for many stimulating discussions, which never failed to make me look at things from a different perspective.

I would also like to thank Neil Smith for introducing me to linguistics some years ago when I started my undergraduate degree with one of the most memorable courses I’ve ever had and for his continuous support ever since.

A number of people have helped me shape the ideas that are presented here. For taking the time to read parts of my work, giving me helpful comments and discussions, I would like to thank Peter Ackema, Tomohiro Fujii, Caroline Heycock, Johan Rooryck, and Neil Smith. I also wish to thank the following people for letting me discuss and explore my ideas with them: Dirk Bury, Norbert Corver, Martin Everaert, Hans van de Koot, Takashi Imai, Vieri Samek-Lodovici, Tanya Reinhart, Eric Reuland, Masayoshi Shibatani, Changyong Sim, Kriszta Szendrői, Hiroyuki Uchida, and John Whitman. I also thank the audiences at the Doctoral Workshop on Japanese Linguistics in Oxford, Trans Seminar in Syntax and Semantics at the University of Utrecht and the 28th UPenn Linguistics Colloquium for their enthusiasm and comments.

My heartfelt thanks go to all my informants for various languages I looked at during the study, in particular, Jinhee Ahn, Nesrine Al-Zahre, Ibrahim Darwish, Sun-Ho Hong, HyeKyung Kang, Hee-Soo Kim, Mana Kobuchi-Philip, Amel Kallel, Hassan Makhad, Mayouf A. Mayouf, Yoko Nakano, Oren Sadeh-Leicht, Waheed Samy, Hitoshi Shiraki, Changyong Sim, Taku Suda, Marco Tamburelli, Hiroyuki Uchida
and Bushra Zawaydeh. I wish to thank them for their readiness to help and incredible patience whenever they were inundated by my seemingly endless queries. Without their help, even a fraction of this thesis would not be here. Thank you.

I gratefully acknowledge the financial support from Marie Curie Fellowship during my visit at the University of Utrecht and from the ORS Award throughout my PhD.

On a more personal note, I feel fortunate to have grown up as a linguist at UCL. I thank everyone at the department for their part in making the completion of this thesis possible. For great times accompanied by coffees, wines and foods, I wish to thank in particular Nick Allott, Dirk Bury, Amela Čamdžić, Nicole Dehe, Vikki Janke, Ann Law, Marika Lekakou, Alex Perovic, Eirini Sanoudaki, Hitoshi Shiraki, Taku Suda, Marco Tamburelli, Nina Topintzi, Vina Tsakali, Hiroyuki Uchida and Rosa Vega-Moreno. I thank them also for their support especially in the last couple of months of my PhD.

The following people are responsible for making my stay in Utrecht a lot of fun, for which I am grateful: Peter Ackema, Anna Asbury, Amela Čamdžić, Alexis Dimitriadis, Berit Gehrke, Cem Keskin, Mana Kobuchi-Philip, Shakuntala Mahanta, Oren Sadeh-Leicht, Dimitra Papangeli, Anca Sevcenco, Kriszta Szendrői, Mai Tungseth, Mario van de Visser and Amy Wall.

Outside the world of linguistics, my thanks go to Marleen, Mary, Sabine and Tanaz. I would like to reserve a special thanks to Gareth and Kilian for their friendship and for the great time we always have together.

My warmest thanks go to my parents, who have shown me the importance of being ambitious and provided me with wonderful opportunities throughout my life, including doing this PhD, and to my brother and my grandparents for their love and encouragement. Finally, I thank Peter with love for his unfailing support and for immeasurable happiness he brings to my life by being part of it.
# Table of Contents

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1. External Possession 9
2. Licensing an External Possessor 16
3. Re-association 19
   3.1 0-role assignment 19
   3.2 Re-associating a 0-role 23
   3.3 External possession in Korean and Japanese 29
4. Case 32
   4.1 Cross-linguistic Perspective 32
   4.2 Licensing of multiple nominative and accusative phrases 33
5. Organisation of the Thesis 34

## CHAPTER 2 EXTERNAL POSSESSION IN JAPANESE

1. Introduction 37
2. A possessive *ga*-phrase is Licensed by Predication 42
   2.1 Subject-like properties of a possessive *ga*-phrase 42
   2.2 Predicate-like properties 45
3. The structure of a possessive multiple nominative construction 50
   3.1 *pro* 50
   3.2 Predication by re-association 53
4. Predictions 57
5. Alternative analyses 69
   5.1 Posessor raising approach 70
   5.2 Base-generation approach 73
   5.3 Base-generation + *pro* approach 74
6. Concluding Remarks 74
Appendix: Licensing nominative case in Japanese 76
CHAPTER 3 OTHER TYPES OF MULTIPLE NOMINATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

1 Introduction 81
2 The particle ga 87
3 Adjunct multiple nominative construction 91
  3.1 Previous analyses 91
  3.2 Ga on an adjunct is interpreted as a focus marker 93
  3.3 The structure of an adjunct multiple nominative construction 95
  3.4 Further properties of an adjunct ga-phrase 97
4 Stative constructions 105
  4.1 The categorial status of a subject ga-phrase 105
  4.2 The structure of a stative construction 109
  4.3 Properties of a subject ga-phrase 113
  4.4 An external possessor of an object 116
5 Focus Generalisation 120
  5.1 Obligatory focus of the first possessive ga-phrase 123
  5.2 Non-focus environments 124
6 Concluding Remarks 130

CHAPTER 4 EXTERNAL POSSESSION IN KOREAN

1 Introduction 132
2 The Licensing of a Possessive Accusative Phrase 136
  2.1 The presence of pro 136
  2.2 Re-association 140
  2.3 Object-hood of the external possessor and the possessee 144
3 Affectedness 151
  3.1 (The absence of) the affected reading 151
  3.2 Possible interpretations of an external possessor 156
4 Alternative Analyses 159
  4.1 Alternative approaches to licensing an accusative external possessor 159
  4.2 An alternative approach to affectedness 164
5 Concluding Remarks 165
CHAPTER 5  MULTIPLE SPECIFIERS VS. MULTIPLE HEADS

1  Introduction 167
2  The Universal Base Hypothesis 174
   2.1  The validity of the Universal Base Hypothesis 174
   2.2  Consequences of adopting the Universal Base Hypothesis 177
3  Licensing Multiple Accusative Phrases 182
   3.1  The licenser of accusative case 182
   3.2  Possessive accusative phrases 184
4  Licensing Multiple Nominative Phrases 186
   4.1  Possessive multiple nominative construction 186
   4.2  Adjunct multiple nominative construction 190
   4.3  Stative construction 191
5  Movement of Finite Verbs 196
   5.1  Remnant VP movement 197
   5.2  Alternative analyses 202
      5.2.1  Long-distance scrambling 202
      5.2.2  Coordination 204
6  Concluding Remarks 208
Appendix: Fukui & Sakai’s (2003) apparent counterexamples to Koizumi’s
   1  mo  ‘also’ 209
   2  case particles 212

CHAPTER 6  CONCLUSION

1  Summary 217
2  Cross-linguistic Variation in External Possession 219
3  Extending Re-association 225
4  Concluding Remarks 230

REFERENCES 231