

Contrasts in the Spanish and Korean External Possession Constructions: A Construction Grammar Approach

The well-known external possession constructions (EPCs) introduce a possessor in a position separated from the possessed item (possessum), coding it as a core grammatical element of the main predicate. The constructions are prevalent in a variety of language families including Indo-European (IE) as well as Ural-Altaic (UA) languages like Korean and Japanese (Payne & Barshi 1999, Haspelmath 1999, O'Connor 2007, Deal 2017):

- (1) a. Le toqué la nariz. (Spanish)
him.DAT touched.1SG the nose
'I touched his nose.'
- b. na-nun ku-lul kho-lul manci-ess-ta. (Korean)
I-TOP he-ACC arm-ACC pinch-PST-DECL
'I touched his nose.'

The EPCs here raise many empirical and analytic questions concerning verbal argument structure, cognitive event constancy, and language processing. In this paper, we suggest a cognitive construction grammar approach in which the EP (external possessor) is an unselected argument. It is interpreted as a possessor as a consequence of a conventional implicature (CI) licensed through tight interactions among argument composition, inheritance network of constructions, and information structure. Our analysis overcomes some persistent issues with the derivational analysis of the EPC, accounting for generalizations in the face of typological differences between IE and UA languages. It is well-tested that the external possessor (EP), even though not semantically selected by the predicate, functions as an 'affected' syntactic argument, as seen from its promotion as the subject in the passive as in (2a):

- (2) a. ku-ka pha-ul kkocip-hi-ess-ta. (Korean)
he-ACC arm-ACC pinch-PASS-PST-DECL
'He was the one whose arm was pinched.'
- b. *na-nun han ai-lul pha-ul kkocip-ess-ta. (Korean)
I-TOP a child-ACC arm-ACC pinch-PST-DECL
'(int.) I pinched a child's arm.'

In both Spanish and Korean, the EPC thus employs a special mapping in the argument realization: when the possessum is a relational noun with its own argument structure, its possessor can be realized as an additional syntactic argument of a predicate. The EPC also evokes a CI meaning such that there is an inalienable possession relation between the EP and the possessum. This CI meaning can be supported from its detachability, noncancellability, and embeddedness (Potts 2005, Horn 2013). The EP can be detached from the possessum: (1) means that 'I touched him and I touched his nose'. It is quite unnatural to cancel the inalienability of the two, as evidenced from the following Korean example:

- (3) #Mimi-lul kho-ul capass-nuntey, Momo-uy kho-i-ess-ta.
Mimi-ACC nose-ACC hold-but, Momo-GEN nose-COP-PST-DECL
'(int.) I hold Mimi's nose, but it was Momo's.'

Another evoked CI meaning is linked to the information structure: the EPC means the possessor is discourse-familiar to the interlocutors. This is evidenced from the impossibility of having the EP as an indefinite EP. Due to this CI meaning, the EP serves as a salient reference point for the states of affairs in question.

In addition to its own constructional form-function mapping relations, the EPC inherits shared properties from its macro/meso-constructions including the Possessive Construction, which has two subconstructions: the Attributive-Possessive and the Identifying Possessive. The former is irreversible and indefinite while the latter is reversible and definite (Halliday & Hasan 1985: 112):

- (4) a. Peter has a piano./*A piano is had by Peter.
- b. The piano is Peter's. vs. Peter's is the piano.

The EPC in both languages is a subtype of the Identifying Possessive, explaining some of its peculiarities.

Capturing such similarities of the EPC in Spanish and Korean, the suggested constructionist view could also address language variations between the two: the differences hinge on the formation of the constructional inheritance network: each has a slightly different family of macro and meso constructions of the EPC. For instance, Korean EPC can appear the Unergative as well as Unaccusative Intransitive Construction with a much less condition on the affectiveness. For instance, in the following unaccusative one, the foot is not an affected entity:

- (5) Mimi-ka/-uy pal-i khu-ta.
Mimi-NOM/-GEN foot-NOM big-DECL
'It is Mimi whose foot is big.'

In sum, the proposed constructionist approach allows us to resolve many remaining questions for the EPC found in typologically unrelated languages. The theoretical machinery of form-function mapping relations and inheritance network, in particular, enables us to address similarities as well as differences of the EPC in Spanish and Korean in a more feasible way than any existing analyses.

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