On the morphosyntax of (in)alienably possessed noun phrases

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1   The difference in syntax between alienable and inalienable possession is one of direction of predication. In Den Dikken's (2006) theory of predication, predicates and their subjects are systematically related to one another in an asymmetrical syntactic structure, with one term asymmetrically c-commanding the other and a functional category (the RELATOR) establishing the relationship between the two; the predicate can either be merged in the complement position of the RELATOR (as in (1a), a 'predicate-complement structure') or as the specifier of the RELATOR (as in (1b), a 'predicate-specifier structure'), with the subject merged in the other phrasal position in the small clause.

(1)   a.   [$_{RP}$ SUBJECT [$_{R'}$ RELATOR [PREDICATE]]]
        b.   [$_{RP}$ PREDICATE [$_{R'}$ RELATOR [SUBJECT]]]

This paper's central hypothesis is that alienable possession constructions involve a predicate-complement syntax *à la* (1a) while inalienable possession constructions are built on a predicate-specifier structure of the type in (1b). In both structures in (2), the possessum is the subject of predication.

(2)   a.   [$_{RP}$ POSSESSUM [$_{R'}$ RELATOR [$_{PRED}$ POSSESSOR]]]
        b.   [$_{RP}$ [$_{PRED}$ POSSESSOR] [$_{R'}$ RELATOR [POSSESSUM]]]
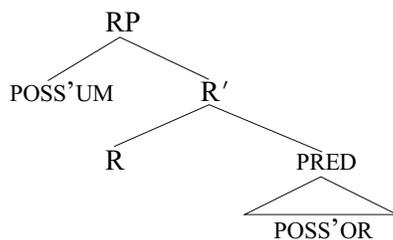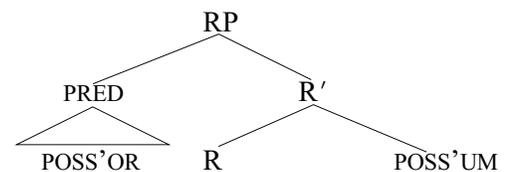
alienable possession   *inalienable possession*

2   The allomorphy of the Hungarian possessedness marker (*-a/e*, *-ja/je*) presents our prime empirical case for the analysis based on (2). Though to a large extent phonologically determined, a simple phonological account of the distribution of the *-j-* form and the *-j-*less form of Hungarian possessed nouns is not forthcoming. Most significant is the fact that there are head nouns for which the *-j-* form and the *-j-*less form alternate, with the choice of the *-j-* or *-j-*less form presenting a semantic subregularity involving (in)alienability: (3a) and (4a) denote inalienable possession while the *-j-* forms in (3b) and (4b) denote alienable possession (see Kiefer 1985, Moravcsik 2003:134).

(3)   a.   ablak-a   INALIENABLE   (4)   a.   anyag-a   INALIENABLE
        b.   ablak-*j*a   ALIENABLE   b.   anyag-*j*a   ALIENABLE
               window-POSS   fabric-POSS

Hungarian is by no means unique in making a morphological distinction between two possessive forms and to single the simpler one out for inalienable possession. Haspelmath (2008) points out that '[i]f a language has an adnominal alienability split, and one of the constructions is overtly coded while the other is zero-coded, it is always the inalienable construction that is zero-coded, while the alienable construction is overtly coded'. Data from Acholi, Blackfoot, Dogon, and Mandarin, *i.a.*, will be discussed in depth in this light. The syntax in (2) accounts for this empirical generalization.

3   There are two different ways in which alienable possession constructions can be richer than inalienable possession constructions (and sometimes these two ways combine, as in the case of Blackfoot, to be discussed in the paper): the additional material that shows up in alienably possessed noun phrases can be the surface exponent of the P-head of the predicate harboring the possessor in (2a), above, or the realization of a functional head: the RELATOR head of the possessive small clause, or a LINKER head outside it (in the sense of Den Dikken 2006). The Hungarian facts illustrate the latter. Embedding (2b) in a DP and spelling the RELATOR out as the *-j-*less possessedness marker straightforwardly delivers the surface form of Hungarian inalienably possessed noun phrases with nominative possessors, with the RELATOR being suffixed to the possessum postsyntactically: (5b). In the syntax of Hungarian alienable possession constructions, based on (2a), the predicate inverts with its subject, contingent on raising of the RELATOR to a functional head outside the small clause (the LINKER); this external functional head can itself be spelled out, as *-j-*, yielding (5a) as the output.

(5)   a. $[_{DP}\, a\, [_{FP}\, [_{PRED}\, Mari]_i\, [_{F'}\, F=\text{-}j\text{-}+\text{RELATOR}=\text{-}a\, [_{RP}\, ablak\, [_{R'}\, t_{REL}\, t_i]]]]]$ 'Mari's window'
        b. $[_{DP}\, a\, [_{RP}\, [_{PRED}\, szoba]\, [_{R'}\, \text{RELATOR}=\text{-}a\, [ablak]]]]$ 'the room's window'

4   If *-j-* is the sign of the LINKER in a Hungarian predicate inversion construction based on (2a), the structure underlying alienable possession, then why *must -j-* be used in *ap-ja* 'his/her father' and *any-ja* 'his/her mother', which are quintessential cases of *in*alienable possession with inherently relational nouns? Our account starts out from the hypothesis that the final *a* of the citation forms of the Hungarian nouns for 'father' (*apa*) and 'mother' (*anya*) is itself an inalienable possession morpheme (i.e., the lexicalization of the RELATOR in (2b)): (6) is the structure underlying *apa* and *anya* (hence *anya* means 'someone's mother'). When *apa/anya* is alienably possessed, (6) serves as the subject of (2a), with the derivation ensuing as in (5a), yielding both *-a* (lengthened to *-á*) and *-ja*: *a világ legjobb ap-á-j-a/any-á-j-a* 'the world's best father/mother'. When *apa/anya* is *in*alienably possessed, (6) is used by itself, with the possessor replacing *pro*$_{arb}$. If the inflection on the head noun remained the same, non-arbitrarily possessed *apa/anya* would be indistinguishable from the citation form. To mark the difference, *-j-* is used, by analogy. In these cases, the marker *-j-* is not a LINKER.

(6) $[_{RP}\, [_{PRED}\, pro_{arb}\text{-POSSESSOR}]\, [_{R'}\, \text{RELATOR}=\text{-}a\, [ap/any]]]$

In the Hungarian expressions for 'his/her father/mother', the specific possessor replaces the implicit arbitrary possessor that would otherwise appear with 'father' and 'mother'. But when these relational nouns are possessed by a first- or second-person possessor, we find a string of *two* possessive markers in a row, one for the inherent possessor of the relational noun (third-person *-a*) and one marking the φ-features of the first- or second-person possessor (1SG *-m*, 2SG *-d*) — *ap-á-m*, *any-á-m* 'my father/mother'. This is similar to what we find in Blackfoot possessed noun phrases with a kinship term possessum, for which Bliss (2013) notes that they can give rise to 'possessor stacking'.

5   The syntax of possessed noun phrases is illuminated forcefully by a predicational approach in which inalienable possession is assimilated to attributive modification and in which alienable possession relations can be inverted (giving rise to a LINKER) in the course of syntactic derivation.

REFERENCES   Bliss 2013, *The Blackfoot configurationality conspiracy*, Ph.D. dissertation, UBC • Den Dikken 2006, *Relators and linkers*, MIT Press • Haspelmath 2008, Syntactic universals and usage frequency, 3: Alienable vs. inalienable possessive constructions. Handout, Leipzig Spring School on Linguistic Diversity • Kiefer 1985, Natural morphology, in *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* • Moravcsik 2003, in *Noun phrase structure in the languages of Europe*.