Predicative Possession Builds on Top of Attributive Possession: Evidence from Icelandic

In this talk, we argue that the syntactic expression of possession in the clause is directly related to the syntactic expression of possession DP-internally. We defend this claim in light of recent research on DP-internal possession in Icelandic, a language whose rich array of predicative possession constructions make it an ideal empirical domain for investigating this connection between the clausal and nominal realms.

1. **DP internally**, there are three basic constructions for expressing possession: Construction A involves a bare NP followed by a possessive pronoun; Construction B involves a definite-suffixed noun followed by a possessive pronoun; Construction C involves a definite-suffixed noun followed by a PP expressing the possessor. The table in (1) shows the distribution of concrete, kinship, body part, and abstract possession among these constructions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>A: NP - POSS. PRON</th>
<th>B: NP-DEF - POSS. PRON</th>
<th>C: NP-DEF - PREP - PRON</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concrete ('my book')</td>
<td># bók máin book my</td>
<td>bók-in máin book-DEF my</td>
<td>* bók-in hjá mér book-DEF at me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinship ('my sister')</td>
<td>systir máin sister my</td>
<td>* systir-in máin sister-DEF my</td>
<td>* systir-in hjá mér sister-DEF at me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body part ('my eyes')</td>
<td># augu máin eyes my</td>
<td>% augu-n máin eyes-DEF my</td>
<td>augu-n í mér eyes-DEF in me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract ('my idea')</td>
<td>hugmynd máin idea my</td>
<td>* hugmynd-in máin idea-DEF my</td>
<td>hugmynd-in hjá mér idea-DEF at me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For reasons of space, we will set aside a number of complex issues, including speaker variation for body part possession, special interpretations of concrete possession in Construction A, etc. The shaded boxes reflect the “core” cases that we will focus on.

2. For **clausal possession**, there are again three basic forms. We will focus here on two: verb *hafa* ‘have,’ and the verb *eiga* ‘have/own’. (We set aside the vera med ‘be with’ construction; see Levinson 2011 for recent discussion.) In (2) we show the distribution of *hafa* and *eiga* across the same categories of possession shown in (1). (Note that (2d) with *hafa* is grammatical, *pace* Levinson 2011; see also Irie 1997.)

(2) a. Concrete  
þeir {*hafa/eiga*} stóra bók.  
they.NOM {*have/,have*} big book.ACC  
‘They have a big book.’

b. Kinship  
þeir {*hafa/eiga*} systur.  
they.NOM {*have/,have*} sister.ACC  
‘They have a sister.’

c. Abstract  
þeir {*hafa/eiga*} ekki hugmynd.  
they.NOM {*have/,have*} not idea.ACC  
‘They have no idea.’

d. Body part  
þeir {*hafa/eiga*} augu.  
they.NOM {*have/,have*} eyes.ACC  
‘They have eyes.’

3. Despite numerous complications in the description and analysis of clausal and DP-internal possession by themselves, let alone the relationship between the two domains, the following generalizations seem to hold:

(3) **Generalization 1:** Clausal possession can be expressed with *eiga* only if DP-internal possession cannot be expressed with a PP.

(4) **Generalization 2:** Clausal possession can be expressed with *hafa* only if DP-internal possession can be expressed with a PP.

We derive these generalizations by assuming that *hafa* and *eiga* have no lexical content of their own (Ritter & Rosen 1997), but are rather light verbs that spell out little v; the choice between the two spellouts depends on the properties of the complement of v (Folli & Harley 2013), which in this case contains the possessum.

4. We assume, following much work in the literature, that there is more than one way to build possessive structures DP internally. Specifically, we assume that DP-internal possessors may
be merged as predicates of a DP-internal small clause (Option A), or as specifiers in a nominal projection (Option B); the pre-movement configurations are shown in (5) and (6).

(5) **Possessor Option A**: \[ \text{DP} \text{ [PredP POSSUSUM [Pred POSSER]]] \]

(6) **Possessor Option B**: \[ \text{DP} \text{ [P POSSER [nP n-POSSUSUM]]] \]

To build clausal possession, a DP-internal possession structure forms the complement of a light verb. *Hafa* and *eiga* are suppletive manifestations of the same transitive *v*. Which allomorph is chosen depends on the type of attributive possession structure is embedded under this *v*, as follows (suppletion notation from Bobaljik 2012):

(7) a. \( v \rightarrow \text{hafa} \text{ /___ Pred} \)
   b. \( v \rightarrow \text{eiga} \)

In other words, if *v* embeds a PredP substructure, then *hafa* results. Otherwise, we get *eiga*. As additional evidence that the presence of PredP is crucial for the selection of *hafa*, consider the fact that *hafa* can productively take small clause complements, whereas *eiga* cannot.

(8) Hann *hafði* *það upp úr henni. = \[v \text{ [he [ =hafa] [PredP it out of her]]} \]

   he NOM had it up out of her ‘He got it out of her.’

5. **Body part possession**, DP-externally, is built as in (9). The nP then moves to SpecDP, as proposed by Julien (2005). In clausal contexts, the same basic structure is built, but D is not merged, and Pred raises and incorporates into v.

(9) \[ \text{DP} \text{ D-DEF [PredP [n eyes] [PredP [IN [me]]]]} \]

(10) \[ \text{vP [PredP [v+ (=hafa) [PredP [n eyes] [PredP [IN [PRO]]]]]]} \]

At this point, the question that arises is why we fail to see the PP in clausal contexts; that is, why do we not see ‘they have blue eyes in them’? There are two possibilities: (i) P incorporates into Pred before Pred incorporates into v; this licenses Predicate Inversion (Den Dikken 2006), so the DP complement of P is moved to SpecVP, where it is spelled out; (ii) incorporation of Pred allows the raising and licensing of a null pro-predicate, as indicated (pre-movement) in (10). Either option will suffice for present purposes, although we have independent reasons to believe that (ii) is correct. A slightly modified version of this analysis extends directly to abstract possession, as in (2d). 6. For **kinship and concrete possession**, no PredP small clause can be formed DP internally, so the structure in (6) is used; see (11).

(11) \[ \text{DP} \text{ [PossP my [Poss [nP [my sister]]]]} \]

Again following Julien 2005, the possessor merges in SpecnP and moves to SpecPossP, followed by movement of nP to SpecDP (not shown). (Note that we cannot go into the distribution of the definite suffix here.) We assume that Poss introduces possessive semantics, so that the interpretation of (11) is as in (12).

(12) a. \( [\text{Poss}] = \lambda x \lambda y. \text{sister-of}(y,x) \)
   b. \( [\text{PossP}] = \lambda y. \text{sister-of}(y,\text{speaker}) \)
   c. \( [\text{DP}] = ty. \text{sister-of}(y, \text{speaker}) \)

Since kinship/concrete possession does not involve Pred DP-externally, *hafa* does not spell out v in clausal contexts. In clausal contexts, we argue that the nP merges without a DP/nP-internal possessor, though the Poss head is still merged, so the structure is as in (13).

(13) \[ \text{vP [I] [v (=eiga) [Poss [nP sister]]]} \]

Despite no possessor being merged in SpecPossP, the Poss head still introduces a possession relation semantically; this relation is saturated by the DP merged in SpecVP. The v head is a purely syntactic element in this case, and adds nothing to the interpretation. The interpretation of (13) is shown in (14).

(14) a. \( [\text{PossP}] = \lambda x \lambda y. \text{sister-of}(y,x) \)
   b. \( [v'] = \lambda x \lambda y. \text{sister-of}(y,x) \)
   c. \( [vP] = \lambda y. \text{sister-of}(y,\text{speaker}) \rightarrow \text{existential-closure} \exists y. \text{sister-of}(y, \text{speaker}) \)

7. **Conclusion.** While there are some details that will be elaborated upon in the course of the talk, the foregoing should be enough to get across the basic idea: DP-internal possessive syntax and semantics directly feeds clausal possessive syntax and semantics, and this explains Generalizations 1 and 2 in (3)-(4).