Disentangling own: evidence from association with focus
Giorgos Spathas, University of Stuttgart

The possessive marker own exhibits a complicated behavior that gives rise to a wide range of subtle meaning differences. Accordingly, the theoretical literature has proposed a number of different (and, for the most part, informal) characterizations of this element. In, e.g., (1), own has been argued to turn her into a reflexive possessive pronoun (Higginbotham 1985), whereas in (2) own is usually described as some sort of ‘emphatic possessive’ (Baker 1995). This paper uses (primarily) data from association with focus to disentangle the various effects that own gives rise to and argue that there are at least two distinct items; ownR, a marker of strong reflexivization, and ownIP, a marker of strong/ inalienable possession.

(1) Zelda painted her own room.       (2) Zelda’s own room is bigger than Lucie’s.

OwnR. Focused Local Reflexivizers (LR) in the scope of Focus Association Operators (FAOs) like negation in (3), license two types of alternatives; Subject Alternatives (SA, {x praised John}) and Object Alternatives (OA, {John praised x}). Spathas (2010) generates these alternatives by treating LR as a reflexivizing function (4) that contrasts with other arity reducing operations, like Passivization and Anti-Passivization (5). Similarly, focused own gives rise to SA ({x painted John’s room}) and Possessor Alternatives (PA, {John painted x’s room}) (6). We capture the alternatives in (6) by treating own as a reflexivizer that operates on the complex derived predicate \( \lambda x \lambda y. y \text{ painted } x's \text{ room} \), which is created after QR of ownR above the head introducing the external argument (7) (cf. the QR treatment of LR in Lechner 2012). Safir (1996) a.o. expresses the intuition that SA support the idea that own is an ‘intensifier’, as, e.g., (1) can be paraphrased by the use of the anti-assistive intensifier herself in (8). Spathas (2012, 2013) shows that anti-assistive intensifiers, but not reflexivizers, license SA under Conventionally Associating Operators like only (Bevaer&Clark 2008). Crucially, ownR does not license SA under only (9). Notice also that SA cannot be attributed to her own being a possessive reflexive interpreted as a designated bound variable, since focused pronouns, which do license bound variable readings, do not license SA (10).

(3) a. Zelda didn’t praise herself. Oscar praised her.       SA
    b. Zelda didn’t praise herSELF. She praised Oscar.  OA

(4) \[ \text{[herself]} = \lambda R \lambda x \lambda x. R(x)(x) \] (5) \[ \text{[PASS]} = \lambda R \lambda x \lambda y. R(x)(y) \] (b. [Anti-P] = \( \lambda R \lambda x \lambda y. R(y)(x) \)

(6) a. Zelda didn’t paint her OWN room. Oscar painted her room.       SA
    b. Zelda didn’t paint her OWN room. She painted Oscar’s room.  OA

(7) \[ [\text{[P OWN1 [P V [VP V [DP her [D [D 's t1] [NP room]]]]]}] \]

(8) Zelda painted her room herself (i.e. without help).

(9) a. Zelda only painted her OWN room. #No one else painted her room.       *SA
    b. Only Zelda only painted her room herSELF. No one else painted her room.  SA

(10) Zelda didn’t paint HER room. #Oscar painted her room.       *SA

Unlike LR, however, can license strict readings in similar environments, ownR never licenses strict readings in (11). We claim that ownR not only reflexivizes the derived predicate but in addition turns it into a Strong Reflexive relation, i.e. a necessarily reflexive relation (12) (based on the definition of Strong Reflexivity in Moulton 2005). Given (12), ownR is predicted to be redundant with complex predicates that are inherently strongly reflexive (13) and to force a self-as-other reading of ambiguous predicates (14).

(11) a. Only ZELDA painted her own room. #No one else painted Zelda’s room.
    b. *Zelda painted her own room, because Lucie did <paint Zelda’s room>.

(12) \[ \text{[ownR]} = \lambda R \lambda x \lambda e \lambda w. R(x)(e)(w) \wedge \forall y \forall z \forall e' \forall w' \wedge R(y)(z)(e')(w') = 1 \rightarrow y = z \]

(13) *Zelda lost her own mind.       (14) Zelda opened her own eyes (with her hands).

Our account predicts ownR to be subject oriented. As predicted, no SA arises when the antecedent of the pronoun is not the subject (15). Also, assuming that ownR will land to the first landing site available for compositional interpretation, we predict ownR to be strictly
local. As predicted, the choice of local vs non-local antecedent leads to distinct interpretations. In particular, only the local antecedent gives rise to SA, (16) vs. (17).

(15) Zelda's brother didn't paint her OWN room.
    #Lucie's brother/Lucie painted Zelda's room.

(16) Zelda didn't ask Lucie to paint her OWN house.
    #Oscar asked Lucie to paint Zelda's house.

(17) Zelda didn't ask Lucie to paint her OWN house.
    She asked Oscar to paint Lucie's house.

OwnIP. The entry in (12) does not cover the cases where reflexivization of a derived predicate is not possible. As in (7), we assume that in these cases too, own merges with the Possessive head 's (Safir 1996), a definite article which introduces a Possession Relation (Barker 1995, 2011) represented in (18) as a free, contextually resolved variable R. For DPs with relational nouns (Zelda's brother), we assume the entry in (19). The contribution of ownIP is to strengthen R into a necessary relation, i.e. to turn a relation R of ‘alienable possession’ into a relation of ‘inalienable possession’ (20). According to (20), the strengthening can apply regardless of the content of R. OwnIP, then, does not specify R as a relation of literal ‘possession’ (contra Nishiguchi 2008); in, e.g., (21) the relation R can be any salient relation. Similarly, ownIP cannot be taken to signal focus on the possessor (contra Nishiguchi 2008); the existence of salient alternative possessors is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to license ownIP (even though use of ownIP immediately excludes the possibility that the possessed individual can have alternative possessors.) Since possessive DPs with and without ownIP are extensionally equivalent, use of ownIP requires that the (in)alienability of R is at issue. E.g., (2) is only felicitous if we assume that Zelda is in some alienable possession relation R with some other room, e.g. Lucie’s. Similarly, the context in (22) (Zribi-Hertz 1996, (77)) does not make salient alternative possessors of John’s dog, but alternative animals (dogs among them) with which John can be in some fleeting relation. In (23), where own appears in the scope of an intensional transitive verb, the speaker does not simply express a wish to be in some possessive relation R with a room, but to be in an inalienable possession relation with a room. As in the case of ownR, we predict that use of ownIP will be degraded if the relation R is already inalienable, i.e. if the NP is a kinship term or a body-part. This prediction appears to be borne out, as long as care is taken to exclude a parse with ownR. Consider (24). In a context in which the speaker looks at the hand of the hearer and notices that it is smaller than his, (24) is degraded. In a context where the speaker and the hearer have been given pictures of hands, however, (24) is felicitous. We assume that in this case the relational noun has been detransitivized (Barker 1995), before combining with the determiner in (19). Notice that the account does not predict that the hand in (24) cannot be the speaker’s actual hand; what it predicts is that the relation R that links the speaker and the hand is not the body-part relation, but some alienable relation.