

Flemish External Possession: syntactic dependence of the possessor on the possessive DP

Flemish possessive structures such as (1) have been described as an example of external possession (Haegeman 2011, Haegeman and van Koppen 2012, Haegeman and Danckaert 2013). The possessor (*Jan*) is separated from the possessee DP (*zenen velo*) by the clausal adjunct (*toen just*).

- (1) 't Is spijtig da Jan toen just zenen velo kapot was
it is unfortunate that Jan then just his bike broken was
'It's unfortunate that Jan's bike was broken just then.'

The possessor (*Jan*) is separated from the possessee DP (*zenen velo*) by the clausal adjunct (*toen just*).

External possession is defined by Payne and Barshi (1999: 3) as “[...] a semantic Possessor-possessee relation [...] expressed by coding the Possessor as a core grammatical relation of the verb and in a constituent separate from that which contains the possessee.” This definition hinges on identifying the Possessor. While in most cases the Possessor is easily identified as that element which semantically encodes the possessor of the possessee DP in question, this is not always the case. Lee-Schoenfeld (2006: 106-107) propose that for German, the superficially similar structure (2) does not involve external possession. Instead, the Possessor is encoded within the possessive DP by the possessive pronoun.

- (2) Mein Bruder hat der Mami leider ihr Auto zu Schrott gefahren
my brother has the mom (DAT) alas the car to scrap driven
'Unfortunately my brother totaled mom's car (totaled the car on mom).'

The dative argument is a mere beneficiary/maleficiary which corefers with the possessive pronoun. This coreference results in a possessor interpretation even though there is no syntactic dependence of the dative argument on the possessive DP.

This talk will argue that Flemish (1) does, even if it also makes use of a possessive pronoun within the possessive DP, encode the Possessor within the external constituent (Buelens and D'Hulster in press). Semantic arguments, c-command data and locality restrictions will show that the Possessor is dependent on the possessee DP. This conclusion shows the complexity of the external possession data (cross-linguistic differences in possessive DP types) and will lead to a tentative discussion of where Flemish External Possessors can fit in typologies of external possession such as those proposed by Deal (2010, 2013a, 2013b).

References

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