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THREE DIFFERENT PREDICATE RELATIONSHIPS
THAT UNDERLIE SOME SURFACE STRUCTURE
POSSESSIVES IN ENGLISH

Eugene Loos

A basic hypothesis of Generative Semantics is that there is a different semantic structure underlying every surface structure that has correspondingly different meaning. The following evidence is presented in support of the argument that there are at least three different meanings to constructions in English of possessed common nouns, although this difference has in the literature sometimes been obscured by preoccupation with surface structure.

We can intuitively recognize semantic differences in the meaning of the possession in the following constructions of possessed common nouns:

- (1) my mother 'x is mother to me'
- (2) my face 'y is an aspect of me'
- (3) my canoe 'I own z'

The three different semantic relationships shown by the glosses of (1), (2) and (3) have different syntactic constraints that, although not immediately obvious in English, are related to similar but more apparent differences in some Panoan languages.

In Capanhua, ownership is shown by the possessive form of a pronoun in construction with the common noun:

- (4) heen nonti 'my canoe'
- (5) miin nonti 'your canoe'

The non-possessive form of the first and second person morphemes are he 'I' and mi 'you'.

In archaic Capanahua speech and in Amahuaca, the mother and father relationships are expressed not by a possessive pronoun but by affixing the person-marking morphemes to the noun:

- (6) hewa 'my mother' (mother-to-me)
- (7) hepa 'my father'
- (8) miwa 'your mother'
- (9) mipa 'your father'

In contemporary Capanahua the possessive form has replaced the older form:

- (10) heen mama 'my mother'
 heen papa 'my father'

Panoan languages typically permit a possessive form to be used with body parts in certain kinds of sentences:

- (11) heen bemanan 'my face'

However, a sentence 'He hit my face' with a possessive construction is ungrammatical in Capanahua (12).

- (12) * Heen bemanan ta rishquihiqui '*He hit my face'

Rather, the morpheme be- indicating 'face' as a directional or goal orientation of the verb must be affixed to the verb stem, and the pronoun must serve as direct object:

- (13) Hea ta berishquihiqui 'He hits me in the face'

(There are many such 'aspect-of' prefixes that orient the direction of the verb, but there are none that fit the categories of kinship or possession.)

In English we find both (14) and (15) to be grammatical, but there is a difference in meaning. (14) includes a sense of indifferentness or of disassociation of the speaker, but (15) indicates that the speaker was personally the target of the blow. (14) is not a transformational variant of (15):

- (14) He hit my face.
(15) He hit me in the face.

However, we cannot find the same possibilities with 'mother' and 'canoe':

- (16) * He hit me in the mother.
(17) * He hit me in the canoe.

We conclude that 'my face', 'my canoe' and 'my mother' have different semantic structures and must be represented by different predicates in the logical structure. The claim here is that the semantic structures underlying (1), (2) and (3) are part of the set of linguistic universals. If they are, it is more a question of how they are manifested in a language than whether they are found at all.