

22 *Non-verbal predicative possession in Nyulnyulan languages*

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I think you have to have theory. You have to be operating within some kind of theoretical framework to ask any meaningful questions about language. Languages make sense, but only in terms of theories. But I am convinced that theoretical work makes us learn more and more about language. I think of it as programmatic. We learn to ask questions about individual languages on the basis of a theoretical framework, the two go side by side. The language is always influencing what the theory is going to say because they confront us with problems, that's how the field works. You have a theory, here are the facts. As soon as you look at the next language, you see something that is either going to force you to change the theory or, if you work hard enough, you'll see that not only does it turn out not to be an exception or something like that, but actually proves the theory. They work together like that. And we are not at the end of that process yet. (From an interview with Ken Hale, *Glott International* 2 (1996), 9/10:28.)

1. Introduction¹

One of the things I have always found impressive about Ken Hale's linguistics is the juxtaposition of, and interplay between, theory and description remarked on in the epigraph. The particular descriptive issues he has raised over the years I have found to be consistently

¹ This paper is a revision of parts of a presentation given at the International Workshop on 'Possession', Copenhagen Business School, 28–30 May 1998. I am grateful to the audience for useful comments and to Maria Koptjevskaja-Tamm, Jane Simpson, Anne-Marie Spanoghe, and especially Kari Fraurud, for enlightening discussion of a number of issues raised, and/or comments on an earlier draft. The usual disclaimers apply. My fieldwork was supported by grants from the Australian Research Council (Grants A58930745 and A59332055), the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, the National Aboriginal Languages Program, and the Max-Planck-Institut für Psycholinguistik, Nijmegen. My greatest debts are, of course, to my language teachers, Maudie Lennard and †Freddy Marker (Warrwa), and †Carmel Charles (Nyulnyul).

challenging theoretically and to be stimuli to theory-revision. Among these are: ergativity, part-whole syntax, complex sentences, free word order and phrasal discontinuity, the number concept, and the nexus between grammar and culture, to mention but a few. Because we are representatives of very different theoretical paradigms, it is only to be expected that our approaches to the problems these phenomena raise would be different and the type of theory revision they yield incommensurate. So also are our methodologies and the type of data that our respective approaches encourage us to seek in the field. Inasmuch as this should result in more comprehensive corpora, not only is theory a 'good thing' for descriptive linguists, but so also is theoretical diversity—provided it is accompanied by a commitment to revise and develop rather than merely to cobble together what is ad hoc convenient.

In this paper I explore some theoretical problems raised by a relatively small aspect of the grammars of a small family of Australian Aboriginal languages, the Nyulnyulan family (non-Pama-Nyungan, Kimberley, Western Australia).² The theory within which it is situated is Semiotic Grammar (SG) (McGregor 1997); the facts the theory is confronted with are non-verbal means of expressing predicative possession (Heine 1997:26)—clauses expressing possessive relations as their primary predicate, as in *The policeman has a ball*.

The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 outlines the range of structures deployed in the representation of predicative possession in Nyulnyulan languages and proposes that the primary formal bifurcation between verbal and non-verbal modes of expression is semantically motivated. Section 3 presents a data-oriented discussion of the syntax and (etic) semantics of the non-verbal expressions employed in representing predicative possession in Nyulnyulan languages. Following this, §4 attempts to put the facts into a coherent account and grapple with some theoretical issues they raise. One issue concerns the status of these modes of expression as distinct SIGNS (McGregor 1997) or CONSTRUCTIONS (Goldberg 1995:4). In the meantime, the neutral term *predicative possession expression* (PPX) is employed to avoid presumptions of emic significance. Section 5 winds up the paper with a brief summary.

2. Range of PPXS in Nyulnyulan languages

Scattered comments in the literature tend to suggest that the normal mode of expressing predicative possession in Australian languages is by means of non-verbal PPX constructions in which, prototypically, (i) the possessum (PM) is marked in the comitative, or (ii) the possessor (PR) occurs in the dative or genitive (e.g. Blake 1977:38–9; Dixon 1976:306). It is generally presumed that possession of a 'have' verb is unusual for an Australian language.

Both PPXs are attested in most Nyulnyulan languages. However, most languages show in addition one or two other non-verbal PPXs, as well as two or three verbal PPXs. Indeed, verbal PPXs with 'have' verbs are quite frequent in usage (McGregor, in press), perhaps

² The ten Nyulnyulan languages fall into two groups: Western (Nyulnyul, Nimanburru, Ngumbarl, Jabirjabirr, Bardi, and Jawi), spoken on the Dampier Land peninsula, and Eastern (Warrwa, Nyikina, Yawuru, and Jukun), spoken on the nearby Kimberley mainland (Stokes and McGregor forthcoming). Only three have viable speech communities: Bardi and Yawuru with about thirty each and Nyikina with maybe fifty. Except for Warrwa with one fluent speaker, for the other languages people are unable to form sentences or texts in the language (but can remember words for certain things and would have a receptive competence). The main sources of data are my own field notes (Nyulnyul and Warrwa), Stokes 1982 (Nyikina), Hosokawa 1991 and 1995 (Yawuru), Metcalfe 1975, 1979, and Aklif 1991, 1999 (Bardi), and Nekes and Worms 1953 (Bardi, Nyulnyul, Jabirjabirr, Nimanburru, Yawuru, and Nyikina).

APPLICATIVE

- (2) *ibal-en* *i-nen-aŋ* *bugiyan* *bogedjamaneman*
Ibal-in *i-n-in-ang* *bukiyan* *bukijamaniman.*
 father-ERG 3.sg.NOM-be-PRES-APP things all:kinds
 'Father has many things of all kinds.' (Nekes and Worms 1953:398) (Jabirrabirr)

COMITATIVE

- (3) *Kulurr wamba, i-nga-na* *kujarra-warri yiri* *nyin-kardiny.*
 hawk man 3.min.NOM-be-IMP two-COMIT woman this-side
 'The hawk man had two wives on this side of the river.' (Warrwa)

Non-verbal PPXs

COMITATIVE

- (4) *Yila yidaj-barri magada.* (Warrwa)
 dog long-COMIT tail
 'The dog has a long tail.'

GENITIVE

- (5) *Marra kurljiwarn-jina.* (Yawuru)
 nest bowerbird-GEN
 '(The) nest is a bowerbird's.' OR:
 '(The) nest belongs to a bowerbird.' (Hosokawa 1991:248)

OBLIQUE

- (6) *Ina bur jirr* *kujarr wamb.* (Nyulnyul)
 this camp 3.aug.OBL two man
 'This camp belongs to the two men.'

TOPIC

- (7) *budidj nimadj ambaden* (Bardi)
Budij nimaj ambadin.
 big gill rock.cod
 'Big gills has the rock-cod.' (Nekes and Worms 1953:394)

These expressions, I maintain, contrast in meaning, though sometimes in quite subtle ways. It is abundantly clear, however, that there is a semantic contrast between verbal and non-verbal PPXs. Verbal clauses represent the possessive relation as obtaining within situations that unfold in some spatio-temporal setting; the verb is not a possessive copula, but designates a stative event in which activity extends from the PR to the PM. By contrast, non-verbal clauses do not—that is to say, the possessive relation is asserted as holding independent of any ongoing situation located in time or space; the PR is not represented as being engaged in an event extending to the PM. The possessive relation is *imputed* by the speaker, rather than described as an aspect of a referent world event (McGregor 1990:291, 1996a).

Evidence in favour of this claim can be summarised as follows (see McGregor in press). Possessive relations expressed by verbal clauses usually involve PMs that are rather 'distant'

The genitive and comitative PPXs contrast not only in terms of their favourite NP order but also, as a consequence, in other more important respects. In keeping with the thematic status of the PM in the genitive PPX, it is usually high in individuation and is generally in an alienable relation to the PR, as shown by the examples above (see also Blake 1977:38–9).

3.3 Oblique PPX

As for the genitive PPX just discussed, the oblique PPX involves an NP designating the PM (usually) followed by an NP designating the PR. The difference is that in this case both NPs go unmarked. An oblique pronominal cross-referencing the PR, however, intervenes between the two NPs, serving as a type of possessive copula, and suggesting the presence of a predicate nexus. This construction is attested in Nyulnyul, Bardi and Warrwa, though I strongly suspect it was available in most, if not all, Western Nyulnyulan languages; however, that it is not attested in the fairly substantial Eastern Nyulnyulan corpora suggests that Warrwa may be the odd man out. Unfortunately, tokens are few. Examples are (6) above and (14), which again exhibit the ‘belongs to’ sense, the PM being topical and individuated.

- (14) *Bin jin bin woriny arriyangk-amb wamb.* (Nyulnyul)
 this 3.min.OBL this woman nothing-COMIT man
 ‘This belongs to the woman without a husband.’

The range of relations covered by the oblique construction is not extensive, at least in the available corpora, and seems to primarily cover prototypical alienable possessions. No examples involve inalienable possessions, or even entities held on a person’s body.

3.4 Topic PPX

Characteristic of this PPX is that it involves three nominal expressions: an NP designating the PR, a nominal designating a quality (QUAL), and an NP designating the PM. The PR is usually a human or higher-order animate; the QUAL is some salient attribute, such as a physical characteristic or quantity; and the PM is generally a part of PR’s body. These usually occur in the order PR QUAL PM, occasionally QUAL PM PR. The PR NP is sometimes ellipsed (if given), though neither of the other two items ever are. Examples (15) and (16) are illustrative.

- (15) *Wamba wanyjarri balnganjina.* (Warrwa)
 man one thigh
 ‘The man has one leg.’
- (16) *Nyoongool ambooriny jalboolyoo jirra moowarn.* (Bardi)
 old people grey.hair 3.aug.OBL hair
 ‘Old people have grey hair.’ (Aklif 1991)

Examples such as (15) might be interpreted as involving just two NPs, an initial PR followed by a PM; and indeed the two words that make up the latter putative NP occur in the normal order for Nyulnyulan languages. However, the following observations count against this analysis. First, the QUAL nominal *must* occur in the construction; there is no other environment in which an NP must show a QUAL alongside the head. Second, as (16) shows, the QUAL can be separated from the nominal designating the PM by an oblique pronominal.

As far as I can determine, an oblique pronominal can always occur in this position, without affecting the meaning expressed. This argues against treating the QUAL and following nominal as sisters in a single NP unit, since oblique pronominals in NPs may not intervene between the head nominal of an NP and a modifying nominal. Furthermore, the oblique pronominal occurs precisely in those circumstances where the possessive relation is not obvious. In most cases it is absent only when the PM takes pronominal affix cross-referencing the PR, and hence is an emic inalienable (McGregor 1995); in the few exceptions, the PM still represents what is clearly an inalienable possession semantically. In either case, the possessive relation is retrievable. By contrast, the oblique pronominal is generally employed when the nominal designating the PM is not affix-taking and is neither emically nor etically inalienable, and the possessive relation is not immediately apparent.

The range of possessive relations expressed in PPXs is not, however, restricted to parts of human or animate wholes. Example (17) shows the manifestation–entity relation, also for an inanimate PR. (Note that the PM is prefixing, in line with a remark in the previous paragraph.)

- (17) *Ginyinggi may loogal ni-yarra.* (Bardi)
 this food bad 3.sg-taste
 ‘This fruit has a bitter taste.’ (Aklif 1999:92)

In a couple of examples the PM is a more alienable possession, a kin of the PR, as for *malirr* ‘wife’ in (18); the only attribute attested is a quantity, the number of spouses maintained by the person.

- (18) *gudjar alerborindjon djen yer maler* (Nimanburru,
Kujarr (y)alirrbur-inyjun jin-yirr malirr. Nyulnyul)
 two first-ABL 3.min.OBL-3.aug.NOM wife
 ‘First he had two wives [later he got a third one].’
 (Nekes and Worms 1953:317–18)

The QUAL nominal clearly indicates a property of the PM. This property also, I submit, characterises the PR. For inalienable parts, manifestations, and bodily ‘attachments’, as in examples (15) and (16), this is obvious. Likewise in the case of the inanimate PRs in (17): the quality of bitterness attributed of the taste of the food characterises the food. An equally plausible case can be made in regard to (18): it is reasonable to suppose that the number of wives a man had might have constituted a part of his definition as a person.

3.6 Summary

The four main types of non-verbal PPXs attested in Nyulnyulan languages cover somewhat different ranges of possessive relation, in particular in terms of the ‘distance’ involved in the associative relation between the PR and the PM. Figure 1 provides graphic representation of the gross etic associative distances covered by each construction. Inter-language differences are ignored; included are not only the non-verbal predicative possession expressions but, for comparative purposes, also the two most widespread verbal ones, ‘have’ and comitative ‘be’ (see also McGregor, in press). Needless to say, there is no claim to completeness.

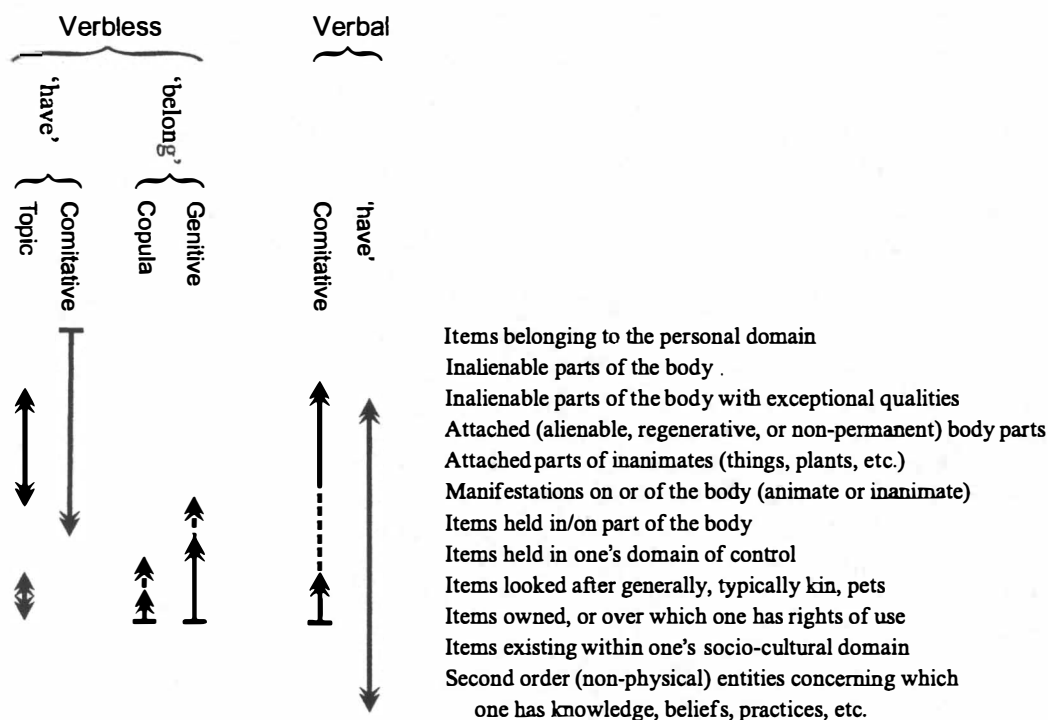


Figure 1: Types of associative relation in PPXs in Nyulnyulan languages

4. Grammar of non-verbal PPXS in Nyulnyulan languages

Three main questions are raised in this section. First, how do the various PPXs in Nyulnyulan languages relate to one another paradigmatically? Second, how should PPXs be analysed syntagmatically: what are the crucial syntagmatic relations involved? Third, are the PPXs also PPCs? Section 4.1 deals with the first question, while §4.2 addresses the second and third.

4.1 Paradigmatic relations among the PPXS

As an initial step in understanding the relations among the various PPXs in Nyulnyulan languages, I propose the syntactic paradigm shown in Table 2; PPXs in brackets are attested in only a few languages and are unlikely to be pan-Nyulnyulan. The PPXs are organised into three major groups, between which exist systematic contrasts, along two formal-functional dimensions. One is the contrast between verbal and non-verbal clauses, the formal side of the contrast between representation as situation versus relation. The other is the contrast in the 'orientation' of the possessive relation. Its formal side concerns which NP usually comes first, corresponding to which is a semantic contrast between 'have' and 'belong'.

Table 2: Initial paradigmaticisation of the Nyulnyulan PPXs

Orientation	Non-verbal; relational	Verbal; situation
'have'; PR initial	Comitative (Topic)	transitive: 'have', applicative (intransitive: Comitative)
'belong'; PM initial	Genitive (Oblique)	

Table 2 is a first pass at characterising the different PPXs. Refining it further, it is clear that comitative and topic PPXs share the feature that they are ATTRIBUTIVE: they ascribe a property to something. The genitive and oblique PPXs are IDENTIFYING: that is to say, the PM is identified as a possession of the PR (we return to this point again below). Three further features contrasts are relevant: (i) INDIVIDUATION of the PM—its status as a distinct or individuated entity, (ii) SEPARABILITY of PM from PR—the extent to which the PM and PR are represented as serving different roles in the referent world (McGregor 1985:225–6), and (iii) PR vs. PM UNMARKED THEME—that is, the usual choice of theme. As to (iii), there is evidence in Nyulnyulan languages that under certain conditions clause-initial NPs represent themes in the 'anchor point' sense suggested in McGregor (1997:291).

These features can be assigned to the various PPXs, including verbal as well as non-verbal, as shown in Table 3. The values given to the features for non-verbal PPXs should be fairly self-evident, given the discussion of the previous section, with the possible exception of the feature of separability, which is given a 'no' value for the topic PPX only—the reasons for this will become apparent in the following subsection. For the other PPXs, suffice it to remark that the PR and PM clearly serve in quite different roles grammatically and semantically, and hence are separable. The features assigned to verbal clauses are presented without argument.

Table 3: Feature specification for Nyulnyulan PPXs

	Non-verbal; relational			Verbal; situation	
	identifying	attributive		intransitive	transitive
	Genitive, oblique	Comitative	Topic	Comitative	'have', Applicative
PM individuated	Yes	No	Unmarked	No	Yes
PM and PR separable	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Unmarked theme	PM	PR	PR	PR	PR

The expanded set of features still fail to distinguish amongst all PPXs. This is partly because there is insufficient information to permit any reasonable guess as to the contrast between genitive and oblique non-verbal PPXs in the two languages—Warrwa and Nyulnyul—in which both are attested. On the other hand, the contrast between the comitative and topic EPCs appears not to be made in either Nyikina or Yawuru, in which only the former is attested. Presumably in these two languages the comitative PPX is unmarked in terms of the individuation and separability features.

4.2 Syntagmatic relations in non-verbal PPXS

I have proposed elsewhere (McGregor 1997:140ff.) that relational clauses—formally non-verbal in Nyulnyulan languages—are characterised by an inherent, essential, grammatical relation of the dependency type; no constituency relation exists at the level of the clause. If this is correct, then the four types of non-verbal PPXs involve a dependency link between the two NPs, which are *not* sister constituents of the clause. The PPXs have no constituency structure (at clause level): neither NP realises a grammatical relation within the clause structure to which it belongs. Rather, they are interrelated, representing the fact that the two referents are in an imputed relation rather than in a situation involving each as an actant.

Furthermore, granted the discussion of §4.1, non-verbal PPXs would involve a dependency relation of elaboration between the PR and PM: identification for the genitive and oblique, attribution for comitative and topic PPXs. The question then arises: where does possession fit into the picture? Is it also signified by a dependency relation between PR and PM, as suggested in McGregor (1997:151ff.)? Or is it a (possibly pragmatic) interpretation admitted in certain contexts by certain types of attributive and identifying relational clauses?

The answer to this question is not obvious and differs for different PPXs. Thus, genitive PPXs may not require identification of any additional dependency relation between the PR and PM NPs beyond identification, since the PR NP can always be expanded by a nominal designating the PM, usually using the same referential nominal as the PM NP; these two NPs are simply related by identification (McGregor 1997:152–3; Davidse 2000). Thus, example (12) is an elliptical version of ‘That dog is the woman’s dog’, and the ‘belongs’ sense arises as a contextual interpretation, not as a part of the inherent meaning signified by the PPX. I suspect that the comitative PPX may likewise involve only the attributive dependency relation at clause level. If so, genitive and comitative PPXs cannot be PPCs: they represent etically constituted subsets of ordinary identifying and attributing relational clauses.

Additional clause-level dependency relations may be involved in the other two PPXs. The oblique PPX might involve two simultaneous dependency relations, one of identification, one of possession. This possessive dependency relation might perhaps be of the extension type—roughly, the PM is an extension of the PR (McGregor 1997:152). The topic PPX, I will argue, is an external possession construction (EPC) in the sense of Payne and Barshi (1999:3):

We take core instances of *external possession* . . . to be constructions in which a semantic possessor–possessum relation is expressed by coding the possessor . . . as a core grammatical relation of the verb and in a constituent separate from that which contains the possessum . . . The PR may be expressed as subject, direct object, indirect object or dative, or as ergative or absolutive depending on the language type—but not, for example, as an oblique. That is, the PR is expressed like a direct, governed, argument of one of the three universally attested basic predicate types (intransitive, transitive, or ditransitive). In addition to being expressed as a core grammatical relation, in some languages the PR can simultaneously be expressed by a pronoun or pronominal affix internal to the NP containing the PM; but this Genitive-NP-internal coding cannot be the only expression of the PR. Furthermore, the possessor–possessum relationship cannot reside in a possessive lexical predicate such as *have*, *own* or *be located at* and the lexical verb root does not in any other way have a PR within its core argument frame. Thus, despite being coded as a core argument, the PR is not licensed by the argument frame of the verbroot itself. . .

In those languages that show it, the topic PPX fares reasonably according to these criteria: PR and PM are in distinct NPs and the possessive relation is not expressed by a lexical verb. In addition, it seems not implausible to consider the PR (and not the PM) as filling a ‘core’ grammatical relation—not of a verb, but in a clause—perhaps as ‘subject’. The fact that the PM NP usually has a pronominal item (an oblique free form or a bound affix) referring to the PR does not count against the EPC analysis, as the antepenultimate sentence of the quote indicates.

In regard to the conditions presuming the presence of a verb, the topic PPX runs into difficulties: non-verbal clauses in Nyulnyulan languages lie outside of transitivity considerations, which apply exclusively to verbal clauses. There seems, however, to be no strong motivation for excluding the topic PPX simply on these grounds.

It is widely presumed that EPCs are most likely to involve the PR in an indirect (or dative) object, direct object, or intransitive subject role; it is rare for the PR to serve as a transitive subject (Payne and Earshi 1999:9). In Australian languages such as Warlpiri and Gooniyandi showing Hale’s (1981) “favourite construction” EPC, this generalisation does not hold strongly. Unusually, Nyulnyulan languages, which also have this EPC, rarely use it when the PR is a transitive subject (McGregor 1999). On the other hand, the Nyulnyulan non-verbal EPC does not exist in Gooniyandi. Perhaps this is consistent with the notion that the unmarked or prototypical EPC involves the PR as a direct object or intransitive subject, and that whereas Gooniyandi has extended it to more active grammatical relations, Nyulnyulan languages have extended it the opposite direction, to less active ones, to logical relations.

Aside from the largely formal characteristics picked out in the above definition, there are important semantic correlations with standard Australian language verbal EPCs that I would like to highlight, adding to my case. There is a clear semantic commonality between the topic PPXs and the standard verbal EPC of (19), an instance of Hale’s “favourite construction”.

- (19) *Kinya-na kirwa ø-namana-ngayu, kanyjingana-na, (Warrwa)*
 this-ERG bad 3.min.NOM-put-1.min.ACC lightning-ERG
nimidi ngajanu.
 leg my
 ‘I got a shock from the lightning, in my leg.’ (lit. ‘Lightning made me bad my leg.’)

McGregor (1985, 1999) proposes that the major characteristic of “favourite construction” EPCs in Gooniyandi and Nyulnyulan languages (perhaps Australian languages generally) is the semantic inseparability of PM and PR. That is, the PM is particularly tightly associated with the PR in regard to the situation designated by the clause. This means that the respective roles of the PR and PM in the situation are identical on one level—what might be called the ‘case’ relation level, those relations indexed by the case markers. They bear, however, quite different roles in terms of participant (or argument) structure: only the PR bears a participant role and takes part in the direction of the activity of the clause. To put things informally:

- What is done to, by, for, (or whatever) the PR is done to, by, for the PM. As a consequence, the PM represents as it were a locus of activity for the situation.⁵

⁵ It is important to note two features of this formulation. First, the directionality is from action involving the PR to action involving the PM, not the other way around. The time-honoured approach to EPCs—beginning with ‘possessor ascension’—has it that EPCs relate to clauses in which a possessive phrase with the PM as head serves in an argument relation. This is misleading in that it implies a

Correspondingly, the following informal characterisation explicates the topic EPC:

- What is attributed of the PR is attributed of the PM; as a consequence, the PM represents a locus for the attribution of the characteristic.

Assuming that the topic PPX is indeed an EPC, I tentatively propose the (admittedly partial) analysis of its grammatical structure shown in Figure 2, which uses example (17) for illustration. In this representation the arcs represent dependency relations, labelled according to their type. The PR is linked to the QUAL by a relation of attribution, which according to McGregor (1997:143) is a dependency relation of the elaborating type; the PM is also linked to the QUAL by the same relation.

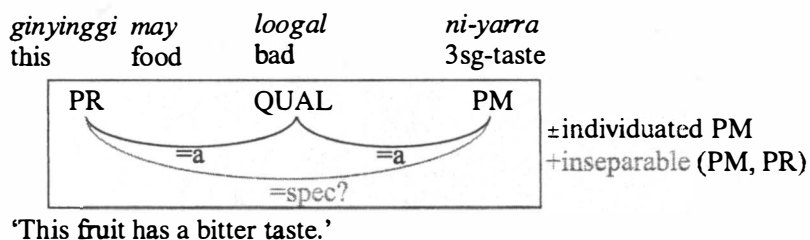


Figure 2: Grammatical relations in a topic PPX (example (17))

These two dependency relations alone clearly do not provide a complete semantic specification of the topic PPX. There is no indication of the fact that the second attributive relation is secondary to, or dependent on, the first (as per the above characterisation); nor is there indication of the possessive relation that obtains between the PR and PM. (Recall that these are not labels for anything with grammatical significance, but just for the respective etic roles of the two entities in the possessive relation.) How should these features be accounted for? This is a difficult question, without an easy answer. In Figure 2 I have tentatively added (in grey) some possibilities. One is that there is a dependency relation between the PR and PM, which may be of the elaboration type, like (but not identical with) attribution, whereby the PM specifies more precisely the locus for the attributive relation—see Chappell and McGregor (1989), McGregor (1997:182), and Heine (1997:167ff.).⁶ (Alternatively, it may be that the two attributive dependency relations are related by another dependency relation.) Another, not necessarily mutually exclusive, possibility is that at least two semantic features are simply attached to the construction itself—[±individuated PM] and [+inseparable (PM, PR)]—that are not indicated by any grammatical relation within it.

conceptualisation in which action done to or by the part is also action to or by the whole: that action extends from the PM to the PR. Rather, the significant point is that action on the PR has as its locus of application the PM. Second, it is framed in terms of situations, not truth values of propositions, as per Hale (1981)—see McGregor (1985) on some difficulties in the truth value approach.

⁶ Making allowances for differences in theoretical frameworks, Hale (1981) makes the similar suggestion that there is a predicative relation between the PR and PM in the Warlpiri EPC (see also Laughren 1992). Predicative relations as construed in formal grammar generally boil down to dependency relations in SG—both focus on inter-unit relations, rather than on the two mother–daughter relations. Such relations (though construed as evaluative and interpretative rules rather than as grammatical relations per se) play a major role indeed in Hale’s analysis of the Warlpiri EPC.

Summing up, it seems that of the four PPXs identifiable in some Nyulnyulan languages, at most two are likely to represent distinct grammatical signs or emic constructions. Possibly just one, the oblique, is a construction dedicated to the expression of predicative possession.

5. Conclusions

In this paper I have attempted to give some idea of the range of means deployed in Nyulnyulan languages to express predicative possession. These languages show a high degree of elaboration in this domain of grammar in the sense that many modes of expression are possible, indeed more than reported for other Australian languages. This elaboration, I have insisted, is not just for the sake of it. The various PPXs differ semantically from one another in ways that I have attempted to specify.

One of the most interesting features of Nyulnyulan non-verbal PPXs is the status of one of them as an EPC—a construction type that has previously been considered to be purely verbal, indeed prototypically associated with active events (Baron and Herslund in press). I have argued that the topic PPX shares at least one crucial semantic feature with ordinary verbal EPCs, namely the inseparability of the PM from the PR—the notion that both serve in a certain well-defined sense the same role or relation in the conceptual world designated. How precisely this semantic feature should be accounted for in the grammar remains a problem both for ordinary verbal EPCs and for non-verbal ones.

Puzzles remain. Important among them is the question as to whether PR serves as 'subject' of the topic PPX (cf. Li & Thompson 1981:92–5; Chappell 1995:466): whether this notion is required at all in Nyulnyulan grammar—or whether the notion of theme is adequate to account for the semantic features of the PPX. Another significant question concerns how the various other semantic features should be accounted for, whether in terms of grammatical relations (equivalently, grammatical signs) or simply as attached to the construction, as part of its constructional meaning. Finally, what range of possessive relations is possible for the topic PPX? How and why do these ranges differ from the ranges of possessive relations found in verbal EPCs (which, for instance, exclude all kin relatives)?

I hope, finally, that this paper has shown in some small way the truth of Ken Hale's contention that theory and description belong together.

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