

Deconstructing Possession

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In this talk we argue that possession is to be decomposed, not only semantically or lexically, but also syntactically, into two independently attested relations: Part-Whole and location. Relying on new data from Palestinian Arabic (urban dialect, henceforth PA), we motivate a difference in the syntactic representation of these relations. We propose a derivational link between possession at the DP level ('Mary's car') and clausal possession ('Mary has a car') which applies only to the Part-Whole relation. Since Part-Whole and location relations are distinct both within DP and in clauses, our analysis provides new evidence against thematic approaches to possession, according to which possession is a unitary notion (Den Dikken 1997, Guéron 1986, Belvin & Den Dikken 1997, Broekhuis & Cornips 1997, Postma 1993, Déchaine, Hoekstra & Rooryck 1994; Ritter & Rosen 1997).

BACKGROUND & DATA. The idea that 'inalienable' possession, which here we call Part-Whole, is somehow distinct from alienable possession, is familiar from the literature, though usually taken to be essentially semantic (most recently, Guéron (2006) for clauses, and Dowty & Barker (1990); Partee & Borschev (2003) for DP). We agree with the distinction and show that the residue of the Part-Whole relation is itself a relation, the relation of location, broadly construed. In PA, the Part-Whole relation is marked exclusively by 'la-', whereas temporary, locative relations are marked by a variety of prepositions including '√ind' in (2b) and 'ta√' in (3b). This distinction is typically obscured with human possessors cross-linguistically and also within PA, where human possessors are compatible, in principle, with all preposition types, in (1). With non-humans, however, we observe complementary distribution in (2): Part-Whole content, such as the relation between a tree and its branches, is associated exclusively with 'la-', whereas temporary location, the relation between a nest and a tree, is associated exclusively with a locative preposition. This is seen again in (3), where the choice of P⁰ determines whether the nominal denotes a part-of relation or not:

- (1) a. la-mona fiih tlat ulaad / ktaab
to-Mona FIIH three kids / book
'Mona has three kids / a book (=she wrote it).'
- b. √ind mona (fiih) tlat ulaad / ktaab
chez Mona FIIH three kids / book
'Mona has three kids / Mona has a book.'
- (2) a. la- :.š-šajara fiih √aru/ ktar
to-the-tree FIIH branches many
'The tree has many branches.'
- b. √ind :.š-šajara (fiih) √aru/ ktar
chez the-tree FIIH branches many
'Near the tree there are many branches.'
- (3) a. kaan-at [DP marrat-o la-r-ra/is]
was-3SG.F woman-his to-the-president
'There was the president's wife.'
(Construct state morphology '-o' in (3a) and agreement on ta√ in (3b) is evidence for a DP constituent)
- b. kaan-at [DP :.l-marra ta√-at :.r-ra/is]
was-3SG.F the-woman of-3SG.F the-president
'There was the president's mistress.'

The following three syntactic contrasts indicate that the distinction between these two relations is syntactic above and beyond the choice of preposition.

I. Word Order. In English (4a), and in Hebrew (4b-c), we find preverbal indefinites to be compatible only with the location relation, whereas in postverbal position both relations are possible. The same holds also in PA, in (5a-b), where the alternation correlates with choice of P⁰:

- (4) a. Ten kids were in the building vs. *Ten stories were in the building.
- b. šaloš yeladot / *šaloš komot eyn-an ba-binyan
three girls / three stories BE.NEG-3PL in.the-building
'Three girls aren't in the building.'
- c. eyn šaloš yeladot / komot ba-binyan
BE.NEG three girls / stories in.the-building
'There aren't three girls / three stories in the building.'
- (5) a. fiih tlat kutob kaan-u √ind mona
FIIH three books were-3PL chez Mona
'Three books were at Mona's.'
- b. #fiih /anf Tawil kaan la-sami
FIIH nose big was-3SG to-Sami
'Sami had a big nose.' (Alienable reading only)

II. PP-inversion is obligatory in locative constructions, in (6a-b), and optional in the Part-Whole construction, in (6c-d):

- (6) a. *kaan ktaab muhim √ind sami
was-3SG.M book important chez Sami
- b. kaan √ind sami ktaab muhim
was-3SG.M chez Sami book important

‘Sami had an important book.’

c. kaan /anf Tawil la-sami
was-3SG.M nose big to-Sami
‘Sami had a big nose.’

d. kaan la-sami /anf Tawil
was-3SG.M to-Sami nose big
‘Sami had a big nose.’

III. The distribution of *fiih*, an expletive element (further developed in the talk) also cuts between the two constructions. In the order PP-NP_{indefinite} it is obligatory on the Part-Whole construal (1a), and optional on the locative construal (1b).

These contrasts follow, we argue, if on the locative construal indefinites are underlying subjects, while indefinites in the Part-Whole relation are realized as argument-taking nouns.

ANALYSIS. Following the raising analysis of ‘have’ (Kayne 1993), we argue that the Part-Whole/inalienable relation marked by ‘la-’ at the clause level proceeds from an underlying DP, in which the ‘part’ is a functional N° and the ‘whole’ is its argument (Dowty & Barker (1990); Vergnaud & Zubizarreta (1992); see also McNally (1998) for ‘predicative’ indefinites in existentials). The location relation with the preposition ‘*√ind*’ arises from a Small Clause in which the PP is the predicate. (7) gives the ingredients we argue to be embedded under HAVE/BE in clausal possession:

(7) a. BE ...[_{DP} N° la-DP] 'Part Whole' i.e. *the branches of the tree* vs. **the nest of the tree*
b. BE ...[_{SC} DP PP] 'Location'

(7a) accounts for (4-5) directly: ‘part’ indefinites are not a subject of predication. Our proposal builds on Hornstein et al. (1995) who argue that (8a) is syntactically ambiguous: the temporary locative is a small clause predicate, in (8b), whereas a small clause associated with the Part-Whole relation has the possessor as subject, in (8c).

(8) a. There is a T-engine in my Saab
b. BE ... [_{SC} an engine [_{PP} in my Saab]] 'Temporary locative'
c. BE ... in ... [_{SC} [my Saab] [an engine]] 'Part-Whole'

The clausal approach to Part-Whole in terms of the subject-predicate structure in (8c) introduces a number of ad hoc assumptions regarding the configuration of predication, falsely predicting the grammaticality of **the tree is (the) branches*. We avoid this problem by postulating the independently attested (7a), further motivated in PA where the underlying syntax is tractable by the overtiness of the preposition.

FURTHER MOTIVATIONS. The DP analysis of Part-Whole relations is based on the following.

I. Unlike ‘la-’ PPs, a PP headed by ‘*√ind*’ is never a modifier within DP. It requires clausal syntax, the relative clause in (9). As a result (6a) is excluded and (6c) is possible.

(9) ∴.l-ktaab *(/illi) √ind mona muhim
the-book that *chez* Mona important
‘The book that is Mona’s is important.’

II. The availability of both (6c) and (6d) is attributable to PP-inversion within DP. (6d) is on a par with the inversion in the definite DPs in (10). We argue that (10) includes a single DP based on the associated morphology:

(10) a. kaan-at la-r-ra/is marrat-o b. kaan-at ta√-at ∴.r-ra/is ∴.l-marra
was-3SG.F to-the-president woman-his was-3SG.F of-3SG.F the-president the-woman
‘There was the president’s wife.’ ‘There was the president’s mistress.’

This is supported by the syntax of negation. The fact that only inverted ‘*√ind*’ can be sandwiched between the discontinuous negation morphemes *ma-š* indicates that it is higher than inverted ‘la-’, further addressed in the talk (cf. Benmamoun 2000).

(11) a. ma-√ind-o-š ktaab b. ??/* ma-l-o-š ša√ar Tawil
NEG-*chez*-3SG.M-NEG book NEG-to-3SG.M-NEG hair long
‘He doesn’t have a book.’ ‘He doesn’t have long hair.’

III. The difference in the derivations of (1a) and (1b) is explained, we claim, if the latter is an instantiation of locative inversion (cf. *under the bed is a good place to hide*), whereas the former involves possessor raising, possible because *la-mona* is an argument.