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Looking Possessor Raising in the mouth: Norwegian Possessor Raising with unergatives

Introduction A typical example of possessor raising is (1).

(1) She kissed him on the cheek

The object of the verb is the possessor of a body part noun which is the object of the locative preposition. There is a transitive verb, which gives its internal role to the object.

Possessor raising is a traditional topic in the syntax literature (Frantz 1981, Perlmutter and Postal 1983, Baker 1988, Blake 1990). The literature on the grammar of possession also contains some discussion (see for example Chappell and McGregor 1996, Heine 1997, Payne and Barshi 1999).

There is another process sometimes called possessor raising, which will here be called the dative external possessor construction. Cf. the French (2).

(2) Le médecin leur a examiné la gorge (Vergnaud and Zubizarreta 1992)
the doctor them (DATIVE) has examined the throat

In (2), the body part noun is the direct object, while the possessor is realized as a dative pronoun which is not included in the valency of the verb. The dative external possessor construction is more general than possessor raising. There are fewer restrictions on the syntax and semantics of the verb. Important to this paper is that there is no transitivity requirement, cf. the French 3.

(3) Je lui ai marché sur les pieds
I him (DATIVE) have stepped on the feet

Possessor raising, on the other hand, has always been assumed to require a transitive verb. This is not only a descriptive fact of English (as stated for example in Levin 1993) and other languages. In Relational Grammar, the transitivity requirement was crucial, because it made the rule conform to "The Relational Succession Law" (Perlmutter and Postal 1983), which says that a raised element must take the syntactic function of the element that it raises out of. The transitivity requirement was also important to Baker 1988. He proposed an analysis in which the verb governs the (underlying) possessor. This analysis presupposes that the raised noun phrase is the possessor of a transitive verb's direct object, or of an unaccusative verb's surface subject. Baker claims that "this prediction is correct across languages" (Baker 1988:274).

The Norwegian facts English does not have a productive dative external possessor construction. Even so, it has been observed that there are some archaisms that look like it, for example *Don't look a gift horse in the mouth*. Norwegian also has some fixed expressions and archaisms with this structure, as pointed out in Norwegian grammars like Western 1921 and Faarlund et al. 1997. Most examples given have non-agentive verbs and inanimate subjects.

It has never been noticed, however, that Norwegian has a productive option for what looks like possessor raising with agentive intransitive verbs, i.e. unergative verbs. Regular possessor raising with transitive verbs requires that the verb denotes some form of physical contact (see Levin 1993:71-73). Looking at unergative verbs that fit this description, and searching the web, it turns out that (what looks like) possessor raising is completely productive.

- (4) Hvis jeg har tråkket noen på tærne (..)
if I have stepped somebody on the-toes
(5) Mor (..) rusket ham i håret
mother rumbled him in the-hair
(6) Hvorfor ikke (..) klaske han/henne på rompa (..) ?
why not slap him/her on the-behind

These sentences are in a way in between the dative external possessor construction and possessor raising. Their object is not included in the regular valency of the verb, like in the dative external possessor construction, but apart from that they look just like sentences with regular possessor raising.

From a diachronic point of view, unergative possessor raising seems to represent a reinterpretation of the Old Norse dative external possessor construction.

Non-thematicity It will be proposed that the objects of the intransitive verbs are non-thematic, in the sense that they do not get a thematic role from their governing verb. (They get a role from the body part noun.) This kind of possessor raising will be called unergative possessor raising. The analysis of the objects as non-thematic implies that the possessive object is a regular, direct object, and not an oblique, indirect object.

The occurrence of non-thematic objects is explained by the fact that the governing verbs are unergative ('Burzio's generalization'). The parallel to resultatives is clear. The relevant verbs also take non-thematic objects in resultative sentences. An argument that unergative possessor raising has non-thematic objects is that they differ from regular possessor raising with transitive verbs in not having adjectival passives (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995). Compare (7) and (8).

- (7) nykysset på munnen ...
newly-kissed on the-mouth
(8)*nyklasket på baken ...
newly-slapped on the-behind

Transitive vs intransitive The line between transitive and intransitive verbs is thin. Some verbs, like *nappe* 'pluck, pull' can take a thematic object, but this object cannot normally denote a human. Even so, they can take a human object in possessor raising, cf. (9). This raising must then be unergative possessor raising, based on an intransitivized version of the verb with an oblique, as in (10).

- (9) Jeg nappet ham i barten
I pulled him in the-moustache
(10) Jeg nappet i barten hans
I pulled in the-moustache his (i.e. 'I pulled in his moustache')

Furtermore, transitive verbs that take regular possessor raising often show the conative alternation, cf. (11)-(12). When a verb like *slikke* 'lick' takes an oblique, it is syntactically identical to the intransitive verbs that take possessor raising. This means that a sentence like (13) with regular possessor raising will have a second analysis in which the object is non-thematic.

- (11) Hunden slikket hånden hans -
the-dog licked the-hand his (i.e. 'The dog licked his hand')
(12) Hunden slikket på hånden hans
the-dog licked on the-hand his (i.e. 'The dog licked on his hand')
(13) Hunden slikket ham på hånden
the-dog licked him on the-hand

LFG analysis In LFG, regular possessor raising with transitive verbs must be accounted for as structure sharing between the object of the verb and the possessor of the oblique object. The shared argument will realize both the object role of the verb and the possessor role of the body part noun. The verbs in question will be equipped with this equation

- (14) (\uparrow OBJ) = (\uparrow OBL θ OBJ POSS)

Sentences with regular and non-thematic possessor raising are very similar syntactically, except for the differences that follow from the (non)-thematicity of the object. The natural analysis is, then, that possessor raising in Norwegian does not distinguish between intransitive and transitive verbs. The equation (14) is all that is needed - it only needs to go with intransitive as well as transitive verbs.

The unergativity requirement follows automatically from the way syntactic features are assigned to thematic roles in Lexical Mapping Theory (Bresnan and Zaenen 1990, Bresnan 2001), together with the requirement that there can only be one [-r] argument in Norwegian.

The relation between regular and unergative possessor raising is strikingly similar to the relation between *equi* (i.e. "control") and raising. Treating *equi* and raising the same way was proposed in Bresnan 1982. Her classical theory of control and complementation allows structure sharing between positions with or without thematic roles, as long as the argument gets a thematic role from at least one predicate. Norwegian possessor raising gives further support to this idea.